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## GREAT SHUNNER FELL

A ten-mile slog in a heat wave.

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*Sloggers:* Roy, Cyril, Trevor, David (minus Popsie), Bill

*Weather:* Cyril's forecast was fine and warm. But for a light breeze in high places, we would have been broiled like chickens. Walkers who stayed at Hawes last night reported there had been thunder and lightning.



*Duty chauffeur* – Roy, who on the previous day, in a quest for more 2,000 footers towards his target of 222 drove up to the Keswick area and covered 19 ½ fell-miles, leaving himself with 53 assorted peaks to ascend. David, Fiona and Popsie recently walked to and from Feizor – before breakfast.

At Hardraw, Cyril – as catering officer – produces coffee and cake (an offering from Margaret). Bill watches the swifts that are uttering thin squeals as they go roof-hopping. Meanwhile, David traces the hatched green line on the map from Hardraw to the summit of Great Shunner at 2,340 ft. For five miles the toes of our boots would be tilting upwards.

We have a steady climb of 1,700 ft. For a short time, we are sheltered from the sun under a canopy of leaves; then the lane broadens on the open fellside. We are on a typical accommodation road of the Enclosure period – wide, with grass verges, with patches of ling in full bloom.

A gate gives us access to the open fell. For a time, we are in a greenish landscape, populated by two yows and their single lambs. Two men who are resting and map-scrutinising turn out to be Hollanders, traversing selected parts of the Pennine Way with two companions, as a complex two-car job. The eldest, aged 62, says he is “almost a grandfather” – a cue for Bill to record his more advanced age, then stagger our new

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friends by mentioning the age of Cyril. After our experience of Double Dutch, we see they are of the straight-necked variety. They forge ahead of us and are soon out of sight.

Bill recalls a <sup>N</sup> ascent of the fell with Bob S<sup>W</sup>allow when the mid-slopes were a peaty quagmire. Distinctly clarty. Now – after a long dry spell – we encounter expanses of snuff-dry, cracked peat. The rough vegetation is crunchy underfoot. Darting above one of the two remaining pools is a dragonfly – Nature's helicopter – vividly-toned, three and a-half inch long.

Patches of cotton-grass [a sedge] have fluffy white seed-heads. Strange indentations on rocks – like an impression of large nutmeg-graters – are considered by Bill to be impressions from a fossilised tree. He'd seen summat o' t'sooart afore.

More interesting to him was a hen grouse with three well-grown young that were partly hidden by coarse vegetation. She was "giving the show away" by her churring calls. Bill closed the distance between himself and the grouse as they gained the top of a peat hag. Eventually, he was able to use his video camera to good effect, some sequences being of the head and neck of the hen bird, the throat of which was continually quivering as though trying to loose heat. The young birds leapt from the edge of the peat-hag and scuttered away, the hen bird following. Our last sight of her was as she perched defiantly on a cairn beside the track.

The long ridge enfolded in sections of bare peat, sunbaked rocks and coarse grass. We were now following a track consisting of large flags which, to judge by some recently delivered, had been brought to this lonely spot by helicopter. In due course, the summit of Great Shunner Fell was revealed, being marked by a windbreak, somewhat smaller than that on Ingleborough but (unusually) incorporating an Ordnance Survey trig-point. Roy revealed that our five-mile slog (with rests for drinks) had been accomplished in 2 hrs 47 mins.

Bill undertook the usual survey of sandwiches. He himself has tuna and mayonaisse (which in the event, he did not eat, concentrating on drinks and a small tin of assorted fruits, eaten with the help of a spoon that Freda had thoughtfully included in the same plastic bag. Cyril had Edam cheese, Trevor confessed to sardines in lettuce and cucumber. David's choice was corned beef and haslet. Roy had "rolls with tomatoes that were prize-winners at Austwick Show."

Of entomological interest was the profusion of flies and wasps on and flying over the topstones of the windbreak. Bill succeeded in filming a wasp in close up. It was a single wasp that twisted and turned and twitched its feelers as though it had ingested too much pesticide. Topical note. On the return to the dale, cries of alarm attracted Trevor and Bill

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to a hillock a fair way off on which was a hen grouse (our grouse), possibly sounding an alarm to its young. We left her in peace. The five of us continued our slow, at times

knee-jerking descent over loose stones and grassy verges. Thistles were sending next year's crop of seed into the hot wind. After de-booting at Hardraw, we made for the nearest waterhole, in this case the Green Dragon.

