

Trevor

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LOOKIN' FOR T'OWD MAN  
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*The Seekers:* Cyril, Roy, Trevor, Peter (Cyril's brother), Bill.

*Objects:* To visit the summits of half a dozen 2,000 footers and enable Roy to attain 66 peaks in 66 days.

*Cyril's weather forecast:* Bright periods to develop in the morning. Becoming hazy, then cloudy.

*Actuality:* As above, but for haze read mist. From the cloud came forth light rain that soaked us on the last weary plod along the Walna Scar road to the car.

BILL DELIVERED the Settle contingent to Roy at Lawkland. As duty chauffeur, he drove us to Coniston. He played a recording of yesterday's item on Radio Leeds when Cyril and he were interviewed regarding their 1,000<sup>th</sup> joint mountain climb. As a recent convert to the finer points of computing, Roy had discovered it was four miles shorter to go via Ambleside than Greenodd. And that the time it would take was 1 hour 26 minutes. Perhaps.

A large tractor and trailer governed the speed of commuters heading for town. We parted company with him when we turned for Clappersgate. Bill mentioned that Mrs Dutton's granny lived at the big-hoose, which formerly had a wooden bridge spanning the road and leading to an extension of the garden.

At Skelwith we saw a garden brimming over with blooming azelias and rhodies. As we approached Coniston, we admired birch woods in which the trees stood a foot deep in new grass. Hillsides glowed with flowering gorse. Blackthorn blossom was thick enough to be taken for snow. Californian poppies (yellow) festooned the roadside. In the fields were herdwick sheep with coal-black lambs. The Old Man of Coniston was cloud-capped.

We gained 750 ft by motoring up the Walna Scar road to a point where Trevor awaited us. The road was narrow, winding, steep. Happily, we had the tarmac to ourselves. Our walk began at 9-45. We trudged along the road to where a quarry road led to the heights and, at the bottom, a large chunk of slate had a white arrow on it and the words "Path to Old Man". We climbed steadily, between expanses of bracken, most of which was unfolding, each frond having a curved top, like a

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bishop's crozier. Meadow pipits descended, singing, in shuttlecock flight, wings and tails held stiffly outwards. We saw the full length of Coniston, which was gunmetal grey under cloud.

Where the ground was spangled by tormentil, the path bifurcated. Roy suggested we go left, on what was the scenic route. More steady tramping, interspersed with stops to view Coniston Water and the fells. We overtook a black slug that was moving steadily uphill (and doubtless would take a year or two to reach the summit, hibernating in winter). More slugs were seen. One had curled up, as though for a nap.

We moved confidently, along the wrong path. The famous scenic view was no more. The Old Man had a hood of cloud. Higher up we felt a wind with an edge to it like a knife. Then, joyfully, we were at the summit, paying homage to a cairn that is immense and on a gigantic foundation, with steps leading up to the cairn. A lesser black-backed gull was perched on the trig point. Clouds played hide and seek around the striated crags of Dow. Before we moved off, we enjoyed a view of Low Water as sunlight made it sparkle.

Then it was on to Brim Fell (its cairn a neat cone), with an ankle-cracking descent over rough grass and slabs of grey, lichened rock to the path leading up to the head of Dow Crag. A ring ouzel oboed its single note (as Norman Nicholson might have written). The head of the Crag was mist-shrouded. The mist cleared to allow us a view as we surmounted the final mass of boulders.

Getting up was chancy. Descending was a job for a contortionist which we effected without incident. We slithered into a grassy area between massive boulders, with a view downwards to the tarn and the lower slopes of the Old Man (the head of the fell was the playground of wind and mist).

A survey of sandwiches revealed: Bill – bacon and lettuce, courtesy of Booths supermarket. Trevor- Lancashire Cheddar, obtained from Greenodd. Cyril and Peter – Ham rolls, prepared in the same Giggleswick kitchen, Cyril's having a dab of mustard. Roy – Liver pate. The rest of the expedition was a slog over rough terrain to Brown Pike, Roy's 66<sup>th</sup>, and on to the Walna Scar road, which we crossed (passing on to grassland) to bag Walna Scar and White Maiden. Skylarks sing in the mist.

We returned to the Walna Scar road, which looked as though it was used as a model when the rocky road to Dublin was made. Mile after mile, we trudged, rarely putting our feet down horizontally, using the grass verge where possible, and all the time

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feeling like blotting paper as a fine rain descended. The most sensible member of the party was Peter, who unfurled an umbrella and, reaching the cars first, became voluntary gate-keeper, open and closing the gate to traffic, which ranged from private cars to quarry lorries bearing slabs of slate to the dressing yard.

After three miles of unmetalled track, it was a delight to be sitting in vehicles and making our way down to Coniston on tarmac. We successfully made a right turn at a blind corner and resisted the blandishments of a fish and chip shop. Trevor (with Bill as co-pilot) led the way to Blea Brows and the holiday home owned by the daughter-in-law and son of Doris and Trevor, who were in residence for the week. Doris provided us with toasted teacakes, butter and black cherries<sup>jam</sup>. Also tea<sub>3</sub> made to a satisfying Yorkshire strength.

We then strode down to the lake, under an archway of branches holding fresh green leaves, with blobs of colour on rhodies and boulders lagged with moss. The path ended at the private family beach, where we gazed over Coniston Water, calm but rain-spattered. A glorious end to a most satisfying day.

**DETAILS: Compiled by Roy. Coniston Old Man – 2,631 ft. Brim Fell – 2611. Dow Crag – 2,555. Brown Pike – 2,237. Walna Scar – 2,035. White Maiden – 2,000. Distance covered – 9 ¼ miles.**

