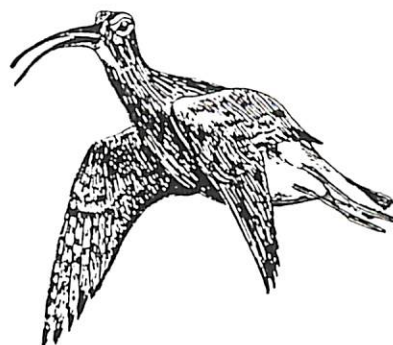


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FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES

On an Ascent of Wild Boar Fell
7.5.2003.



Trespassers: Roy, Trevor, Bill.

Weather: We kept our eyes on the western sky,
which went from blue to grey, then back to blew.
The forecast was for rain sweeping in.

With Trevor as duty chauffeur, we managed to avoid the school buses on the Lawkland stretch, then made rapid progress, via Ingleton and Hawes, to the head of Mallerstang. Waterfalls singing. Marsh marigolds gleaming. Curlew drawling. Contralto voices of yows mingle with the soprano laments of young lambs. One or two daffodils stand forlornly on a roadside bank.

Parking the car at Aisgill means that we will clip 1,000 ft off the climb to our chosen summit. There seemed to be a dozen walkers on the felltop. When they did not move, we presumed we were looking at cairns, alias stone men. Later we saw three men silhouetted on the skyline and presumed they had arrived in the only other car parked in the area.

We set off at a brisk step, with Wild Boar Fell and Mallerstang Edge a pattern of sunshine and shadow. Just beyond the posh new houses, we swing to the left, intent on opening a gate we have habitually used at the start of favourite route to the fell. We try not to notice the sign marked "Private".

A melodic cry from a car parked at the entrance to the nearby farm is from a young woman, wife of the farmer, who wants to ensure we understand the meaning of "Private". Bill manages to tuck some vital information into one sentence and mentions that he is an old friend of her father-in-law, whom he once photographed when the family lived at Aisgill as he drove a quad bike, with Hannah Haukswell as a pillion passenger. The young lady's manner softens and permission to proceed is given, though "Mr Wainwright once asked if he could use that route; we said yes, and next news it had featured in one of his books. Drove of people came along."

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Our path, recently overspread with grit, led to the vicinity of the Settle-Carlisle railway and soon we were using a gate under one of the arches of Aisgill viaduct. We were now on the fellside, which was in a soggy state, with abundant rush-bobs. Mallerstang Edge, its precipitous cliffs in shadow, dominated the view. No trains were seen as we walked in close company with the railway.

The landscape sweetened a little as we enjoyed our spell of trespassing and gained the limestone, this being indicated by fenced off swallow-holes and outcropping limestone. The area was heavily sheep-cropped, but a few violets and daisies managed to survive. We climbed steadily to the ridge and, settling in the lee of a drystone wall, had our first stop for refreshment.

Now the way was up, up, up to the summit plateau of Wild Boar Fell. We had a distant view of Whernside, normally the highlight of a long ridge and now standing out sharp, clear and steep – a mountain in its own right. Pipits chirriped. Skylarks warbled. From among a ruck of dark boulders came the cool, clear voice of a ring ouzel.

On Wild Boar Fell we inevitably thought of – wild boar. Bill thought that no self-respecting wild swine would be found at such an elevation. The name sounded too romantic to be ancient. When Bill asked Raistrick about it, he said it might be tied up with the romance associated with Pendragon Castle, as the home of King Arthur's dad. Bill, meeting the vicar of Kirkby Stephen, was shown inside the church safe – where reposed what was claimed to be a boar's tusk.

We trespassers ignored the distant trig point, highest point on the hill, and went along the escarpment to where the ground was a sculpture park – lots of cairns and an imposing windbreak, made of slabs of millstone grit. A stile had been set in a fence of posts and wire. Now we struck across the plateau, following a faint track, with Bill looking out (expectantly but disappointedly) for some of the gee-whiz Pennine birds, such as dunlin and – hope against hope – dotterel. The grass was bleached white. The many tarns were dark and lifeless.

So we stood at the summit, 2,324 ft., with a comprehensive view of the Howgills and other familiar northern fells. Also Ravenstonedale, where one of Bill's old pals, Edward Jeffrey, artist, had his studio. In view from the edge of the plateau was Uldale, home of the grandly-named Helga Frankland, brother of Raven Frankland (who once owned Pendragon Castle) and daughter of Edward Frankland, who wrote a novel about a crime committed in – days of the Norse settlement! In the absence of a

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police force, there was ding-dong battle between two families. (Those were the days when trespassing might end in death).

We descended from Wild Boar Fell and began to climb Swarth Fell, stopping in the lee of a wall for our main snack. A census by Bill revealed the main contents of the food containers: Roy – Tomato and Drake and Masefield pork pie; Trevor – Ham with Branston pickle; Bill – Tuna, mixed with mayonaisse and layered with Red Leicester cheese.

We slogged to the top of the fell and regained a good view of the head of Mallerstang with its wall pattern like a web, linking a line of little white-faced fellside farmhouses and their darker barns. Swarth Fell was conquered. Roy gave the height as 2,235 ft and mentioned that the last of the trio to be tackled on our eight-mile walk would be Swarth Fell Pike, at 2,125 ft. Attaining the cairn meant scrambling over a wire fence (in preference to a dicey stile). After being tormented by a chill wind, we began our final stretch in the lee of the fell, where the temperature was equatorial. Trevor reported seeing a coal train, heading south. Roy found a bank spangled with tormentil, his favourite fellside flower.

We happy trespassers were then called to the bar – of the Moorcock. The main topic was whisky. None was imbibed. Bill was the only one who disliked whisky, saying that to him it tasted like paraffin! Shocked expressions on the faces of others in the bar. What happened after that Bill cannot say. He was snoozing on a back seat of Trevor's car.

