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LADY ANNE'S PILLAR

*A walk on the Yorkshire-Cumbria border by
Cyril, Roy and Bill. 3.4.2002*

Weather: Sunny, misty, light easterly wind. Blue sky. We might count the few fluffy white clouds that drifted slowly westwards.

No more than six drops of rain. Nine miles covered in rather less than six hours.

THERE GOES A CAR
WITH EXACTLY THE SAME
NUMBER AS OURS



We parked at Aisgill, being just inside Yorkshire (a few yards from the CUMBRIA sign). Curlews drawling. Lapwing in floppy flight. Flock of white geese doing nothing in particular. We crossed the Settle-Carlisle railway by a substantial bridge and walked within hearing of Hell Gill Beck which, lower down, was making a spectacular, white-water descent from a lip of limestone. The next bridge spanned the infant Eden (we would eventually have our snack at Eden Springs).

Hell Gill House had been converted into a holiday home, the main door looking as though it had been bought at a Do-it-Yourself supermarket. Bill recalled that in the old days it had at one side an enormous peat-house, the peat being used as winter fuel.

Beyond, we were treading limestone. A gate gave access to the old highway, now grassed over, which Lady Anne Clifford (and many others) used when travelling from Wensleydale into Mallerstang and Edenvale. The importance of the highway was indicated by the substantial bridge crossing the deep, mossy ravine of Hell Gill. We turned left and then right, to follow a faint track up the fellside on our way to Mallerstang Edge. To the east, the skyline was broken by several cairns and the feature on Hugh's Seat known as Lady's Pillar.

At what Bob Swallow would call a bifurcation, we went left, then returned to take the right-hand track. The other had led us to a stretch of mossland which Roy probed and found to have a boot-swamping depth. Along the track, from a flock of hill sheep he

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had been foddering, came Chris Alderson, latterly of Aisgill Farm and now living in partial retirement at Kirkby Stephen. Chris was riding a quad (four-wheeled vehicle with balloon tyres) with a ten-year-old dog named Sam as pillion rider. (Bill last saw Chris when Hannah Hawkswell, daleswoman and television personality, was visiting a flower festival at St Mary's Church, Mallerstang. She had been invited to tea and when Chris arrived to have a chat with her he offered her a lift on his quad so that she might see his prized hill sheep.

Naturally, we discussed the weather. There had been a good deal of rain early in the year. The mosscrop (early stage in the development of cotton-grass, providing a luscious early bite for sheep) had been heavy. He had a dog that detested riding pillion and soon reached a stage at which "it was difficult to get it off." We passed a flock of 200 contented Swaledales on our way to The Edge. Meadow pipits were courting, flitting about the sky. Skylarks warbled.

Ahead was Mallerstang Edge – a range of cliffs standing knee-deep in scree on a sweep of fellside 2,000 ft high. (Bill recalled becks being blown back on themselves by a gale and the clouds of moisture giving the impression of smoke). We donned our windproof coats. Bill recalled talking to the headmaster of the little school at Aisgill who said the school had the largest playground in the country. When Bill queried this, the headmaster's sweeping hand indicated the vast fellside. Across the trough-like valley was the mass of Wild Boar Fell, blue-grey in the mist. A cairn stood in the area known as Raven's Nest. (No ravens were to be seen nor were their gruff voices heard). Another skylark rose into the stiff breeze, and we marvelled at how it found the energy to hang in the air like a helicopter and also sing.

Three small cairns at the lip of the Edge were said by Roy to be visible from the dale road. As we approached our first highspot, the lonesome whistle of a golden plover was heard. Two birds rose from a soggy area where they may have been feeding; they sped off, fast and low, on slender angled wings. The summit cairn was imposing (a smaller cairn, just beyond being just posing). We were on classic "white grund", an area where the dominant vegetation was bleached *Nardus stricta*, contrasting with "black grund", which is peat and heather. Our arrival was marked by a vocal skylark and two purple-capped rambles who had come up (steeply) from Outhgill and recalled with a shudder yesterday's excursion to Baugh Fell. Mist obscured the features on Knoutberry Haw.

Roy announced we would go on to High Seat (2328 ft), which we did, reaching the lowest point in clarty Steddale Mouth. Cyril and Bill stood proudly beside a cairn, only to be told it was not the summit. We walked on to another cairn. Again, Roy shook his head. He led the way across tously ground to where there was a group of

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stones that only just reared themselves above the ground. This, claimed Roy, was the summit of High Seat. We now returned to Mallerstang Edge and turned towards our next major fell, which was Hugh's Seat.

Roy led us along a faint path towards Gregory Bank and a cairn which proved to be well-masoned, about 10 ft high and three feet wide. We eventually concluded, having seen several well-made cairns, that they had been important markers along the county boundary, now marked for a mile or two by a post and wire-netting fence. This was "black" country. The piping of golden plover proved that some life existed here.

At the next cairn, we were able to use the long fence as a guide to Hugh's Seat (2257 ft). Here we were mindful of two famous owners of the Manor of Mallerstang – Hugh de Morville and Lady Anne Clifford. Here the fence had a gate and made a sharp turn. We followed a faint path to see Lady's Pillar, originally erected by AP, otherwise known as Lady Anne Clifford, in 1664. On another stone FHL had restored it in 1890. A delighted Roy said he had visited the pillar several times without noticing the dates or being aware of its significance. It was 1 p.m., so we had our snack meal in an area known as Eden Springs. The ground was relatively dry. In fact, the River Eden rises on Blackfell Moss, below Hugh's Seat and flows over a stony bed close to the county boundary to Hell Gill.

We now followed the fence towards our next objective, Sails. Away to the east was Great Shunner Fell. In a splodgy area two golden plover and two red grouse were disturbed and flew off. Bill found a couple of moulted red grouse feathers. At this stage, Bill ran out of paper on which to record events of the day. He began to use the wrapper of a Club biscuit, handed to him by Cyril. We covered the undulating, moist ground between Hugh's Seat and Sails in 36 minutes. Then, as Roy observed, we could descend in a straight line to Hell Gill, where we would close our fell-walking circuit. Another big, well-made cairn stood on Outer Pike.

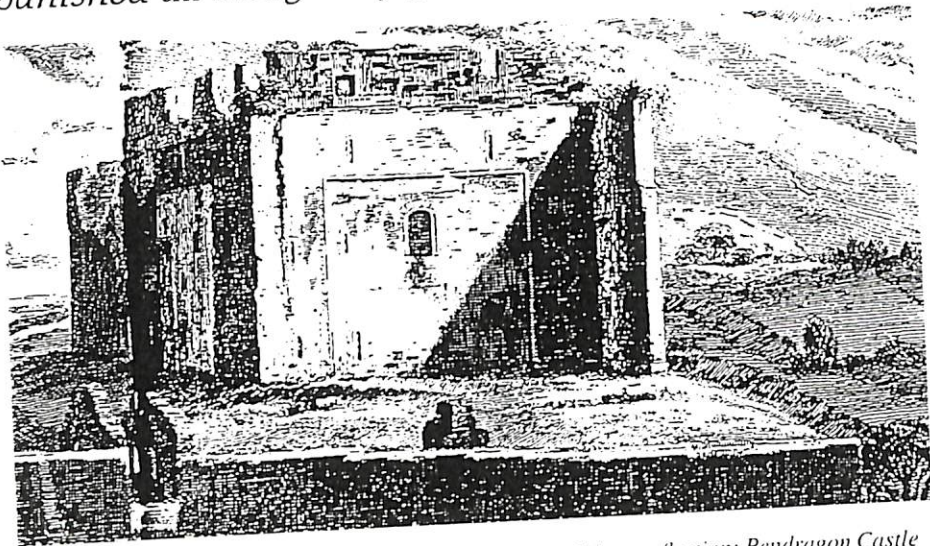
The ground vegetation was draggly until we located tracks left by a quad. We passed a redundant crow trap and at Hell Gill we stared between moss-lagged cliffs to where, sixty feet below ground level, water was coursing well out of sight of the sun. The ash trees had black buds. The bridge spans a ten-foot gap where Dick Turpin is said to have leapt on the back of his trusty steed – an unlikely event.

ADMIT IT, WE'RE LOST!



Black Yuletide of the Murderous Knights

W R Mitchell recalls the time when royal politics banished all thoughts of goodwill



Scene of bitter reflection: Pendragon Castle

At Christmas, in the year 1170, Hugh de Morville, who held lands in Westmorland, did not have peace and goodwill in his heart. As snow changed the contours of the northern hills, and the hardy dalesfolk made merry as best they could in those straitened times, de Morville and three other knights were far to the south, plotting the murder of Thomas à Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Henry II wanted to be rid of a troublesome priest, Hugh, along with William de Tracy, Richard le Bret and Reginald FitzUrse, obliged on December 29. What matter that each of them was known to their victim? Or that when he was chancellor they had paid homage to him on bended knee?

Conflict between king and archbishop had festered for several years, the king aiming to

keep the Church subordinate to the State and the archbishop equally determined to give precedence to the Church. The troublesome archbishop had his goods confiscated. The revenues of his see were sequestered. In the end, he had to leave the country.

Becket returned after an exile in France that lasted six years. In 1170, the four knights and their followers travelled from Normandy to Canterbury, making their way towards the city on the morning of 29 December. There was an acrimonious dispute between them and the prelate that ended with a particularly violent death to a man who must have long expected to die for his beliefs.

The murder of such a celebrated figure in the Church sent a shiver through Christendom.

Those concerned, including de Morville, were excommunicated by the Pope. Becket's shrine drew an unceasing stream of pilgrims. The archbishop had been revered in the north country; a fragment of stained glass at Horton-in-Ribblesdale, which is said to represent the mitred head of Thomas à Becket, may have originally been at Jervaulx Abbey, which is in Wensleydale.

Sir Hugh de Morville comes to mind whenever I walk or drive through majestic Mallerstang, where fellsides sweep up from the dale for 2,000ft and where, in wild weather, you might see waterfalls being blown back on themselves.



Stronghold of old: the castle ruins today

Pendragon Castle, which today stands like a large hollow tooth on a gum of green beside the river, was one of the strongholds of de Morville. Another stood at Brough. Each was restored by a descendant, Lady Anne Clifford, and each was used as a quarry after her death. An old tale insists that Uther Pendragon, the father of King Arthur, made an unsuccessful bid to re-route the river round the stronghold.

Hugh de Morville did not strike any of the blows that felled and killed the prelate. He stood guard while others did the deed. His guilty conscience is said to have been pricked on successive visits to Pendragon Castle

when the sky line and some crags just beyond Wild Boar Fell came to represent by their form the recumbent head and mitre of the archbishop.

A link with Sir Hugh de Morville is provided by the name Hugh Seat, which was given to a little-known fell, one of the highspots of Mallerstang Edge. It was first called Hugh Morville's Hill, which the 17th-century poet, Michael Drayton, in a long topographical work called 'Polyolbion', rendered as "Husseat Morvil hill".

Lady Anne Clifford arranged for a commemorative stone to be raised on Hugh Seat. It was known as the Lady's Pillar, though having been several times restored it is now just a bulky cairn. Hugh Seat (2,257ft) rises from the clarty terrain of Black Fell Moss, in an area which also sees the beginnings of the rivers Ure and Swale.

Water oozing through the rush-bobs finds its way into secluded Red Gill and, augmented by a strong feeder beck emanating to the south of Hugh Seat, is known as Hell Gill Beck. In Mallerstang, the watercourse becomes the River Eden.

We do not know a great deal about the de Morvilles. Hugh's family took its name from a French hamlet in the Contentin. His father, also named Hugh, had campaigned in Scotland and became its Constable. The son switched his loyalty in 1158 from David, King of Scotland, to Henry II. He then set about trying to wrest Westmorland – the land west of the moors – from the Scots. At that time, what is now the Lake District was part of Strathclyde.

After the murder, Hugh made peace with Rome after making a pilgrimage to the Holy City and visiting the Holy Land on a crusade. In the north country, he had continued to act as a justice until, the uproar caused by the murder showing little sign of abating, the king regretfully relieved him of his official duties. The Crown came into possession of his land and property. His descendants regained the estates when Robert de Veteripont, a nephew of Hugh de Morville, was granted the Barony of Westmorland by King John.

