

At such moments of doubt and indecision come the really great surprises on a walking tour. Below us, we saw the grey, steel ribbon of a railway emerging out of a tunnel and reached it in time to see the London-Glasgow "Thames-Clyde" express go thundering by.

So we discovered Ribblesdale, which, if it is a village, has the biggest village green in the world—hundreds of acres of bare moorland—and the most scattered population in Britain.

Ribblesdale, to be precise, consists of a quarry, a railway station and an inn. There are reputed to be "cottages at the back" but, after a half-mile walk up the road, all you can see of them is a wisp of smoke rising from some chimneys in a distant fold of Whernside.

To Joseph Coates, landlord of this lonely hostelry, we applied for hospitality—and not in vain. He is the supplier of all human needs in this part of the world. His inn is also the petrol station, the grocer's shop, the sweet shop for children, the post office, the shepherds' club—and, of course, it is a farm as well.

Though his wife was away on holiday, he summoned his young daughter—young enough to go out to play with children who appeared magically from nowhere



—who rolled up her sleeves and cooked us a magnificent, four-course dinner in the Yorkshire style without turning a hair.

That night, the centuries rolled away for us. We were back in the England of the story books. We watched the children of the high moors racing like deer in the evening glow.

When they had gone to bed, we sat with the shepherds and farmers—ruddy, weather-beaten men—in the lamp-light, and heard the slow chuckles of the Yorkshire dalesmen as they talked to one another about selling back to Scotland, at a good profit, the young sheep they had bought as lambs the season before.

And, as we carried our candles to bed, we saw the dark, promising shape of the breakfast ham, slumped heavily on its hook. We did not need to count sheep.

TO-MORROW: On to Sedbergh