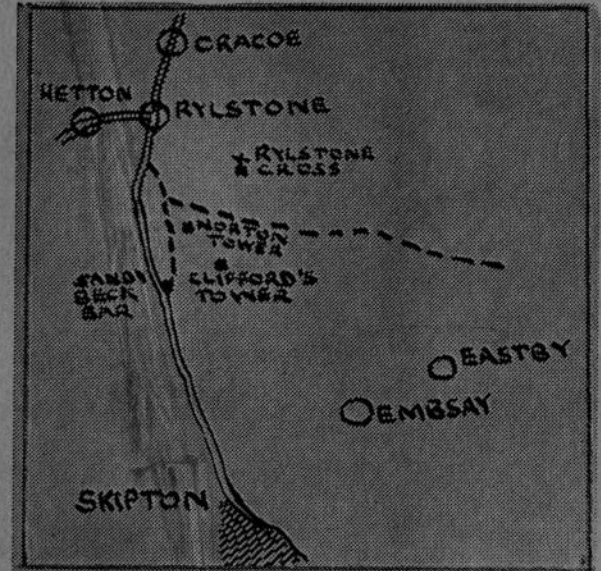


ROAMING AROUND
RYLSTONE CROSS



The Ramblers' Association

suggest some things to look for

1970

A memento for my
dear friend Dave
from Richard 3 July 2013

Foreword

By ARTHUR RAISTRICK

Past President of the Ramblers' Association
and President of its West Riding area.



THERE are two ways of admiring and enjoying the countryside — you can stand and stare from some good view point, enjoy a view from your car as you pass by, and generally appreciate the scenery. To get the fullest possible measure of enjoyment, however, you will have to learn to know the countryside in detail, to explore both the obvious scenery and the less obvious features of interest. There are the evidences of many centuries of interesting history, of what people have done and of how they have lived, and if you can hunt out these things and study them, you will find yourself growing near to understanding more of life in the dales both now and in the past.

Footpaths will take us to many of these places of special interest and to use them we must walk. On the wide moorlands which form the greatest acreage of the dales, there is an abundance of such interest, and all the joy of birds, beasts and plants to be observed as well. On these moorland tops you need to be free to roam in a wider way than even the best footpath can provide — you need "access." It is possible, under provisions of the Countryside Act 1968, for County Councils to promote access agreements with landowners, in the way Richard Harland has described in this pamphlet for Barden Moor. There is also what is called "de facto access," the freedom to roam over uncultivated areas which is granted by individual landowners, dependent entirely on the good behaviour and care for the countryside of all who take advantage of this. The Country Code of behaviour devised by the Countryside Commission, is a code which everyone using the countryside should know and use, and not to know it or not to observe it should be a matter of shame.

The Ramblers' Association was formed and exists to secure the rights of access for the public at large, to protect footpaths, to teach and help people to get greater enjoyment out of the countryside, and to promote understanding and respect between owners and users of the land. Without this mutual respect and consideration no access will survive and the public will be restricted

more and more to the roads. That will be our most serious loss — loss of a whole world of interest and pleasure, and the estrangement of those who work on the land and whose forebears through two thousand years of labour have made much of the charm of the landscape we enjoy. Fields, farms and villages have been made out of the waste and wild. The patterns of hedges and walls, roads, footpaths and plantations have been made by country folk. The farmer makes his living and serves the whole community through his careful and skilled use of the land. Respect his work and property and make him the friend of those who come to enjoy and care for the countryside with understanding and consideration.

THE COUNTRY CODE

- Guard against all risks of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep dogs under proper control
- Keep to the paths across farm land
- Avoid damaging fences, hedges and walls
- Leave no litter
- Safeguard water supplies
- Protect wild life, wild plants and trees
- Go carefully on country roads
- Respect the life of the countryside.

With that code in hand and in mind, we wish you good rambling.

ARTHUR RAISTRICK

Roaming around Rylstone Cross



AROUND Rylstone Cross and Waterford Gill there lies a wealth of interest and beauty. It is a place to explore and get to know, where the past lives and the present exhilarates. And it is all within four miles of Skipton.

The visitor should wear stout shoes or preferably boots. He must avoid all risk of being caught in mist or darkness on the moor top. Bright green moss conceals deep bogs which are highly dangerous.

The 2½ inch Ordnance sheet SD 95 covers this area. The National Grid Reference (NGR) is stated in these notes when it may help.

THE TURNPIKE ROAD.

The approach by bus or car is on the Grassington road from Skipton. The metal-faced milestones describe it as the Skipton to Cracoe road. This is because, when it was improved as a turnpike road in the 1850s, it joined at Cracoe corner a considerably older turnpike road from Gargrave to Grassington.

Quarter Sessions (as predecessors to the County Council) erected these milestones after disturnpiking the road. The parish boundary stones were put up by the East Staincliffe Highway Board, probably between 1865 and 1878. The direction stones at road junctions are probably also the work of the Highway Board, which handed over to the newly-formed Skipton Rural District Council in 1895.

Two miles beyond the last house on the hill out of Skipton, just over a 1900 railway bridge, there stands on the right an empty toll-house known as Sandy Beck Bar, where the bus will stop and cars may park (NGR SD 974556).

THE COACH ROAD.

The lane forking right behind the tollhouse is the road used until the turnpike road was made. It is sometimes called the coach road, because it was for a time one of the principal roads to Scotland via Kettlewell and Wensleydale. The half-mile straight length of modern road was built by the turnpike trustees.

The coach road makes an attractive two-mile walk from Sandy Beck Bar to Rylstone: do not be deterred by the short wet length beyond the second gate. Crookrise Wood, Waterford Gill, Norton Tower, Rylstone Cross and Hall Fell lie on the right. The road keeps practically on the level all the way. Old kerbstones can be seen on some lengths.

From the Rylstone end, the coach road leaves the turnpike road 500 yards towards Skipton from the village pond. Starting as a lane between old fields, the road opens out at a sheep wash-fold, now disused. This stands on the left with gathering pens, and stones grooved for a sluice. Close by is a tiny stone bridge and an attractive double culvert of large stones.

SCALE HOUSE.

Between the coach road and the turnpike road stands the hamlet of Scale House, with a mansion and farm. The name shows that it was a Norse settlement on the fringe of the Anglian township of Rylstone.

The 17th century part of the mansion was the home of George Watkinson and his two brothers, who became Quakers in the earliest days of the Society of Friends in 1652 or 1653. Richard Scostrop, their neighbour in the hamlet, was a persecutor of Friends, but became convinced of "The Truth," was imprisoned for his Quaker faith in Chester gaol, and died on his missionary travels beyond the seas.

George Fox came three times, and for a period Scale House and Skipton were found to be the most convenient central meeting place for the young Society. In 1660 the first Yearly Meeting was held here, but subsequently London was preferred.

The mansion achieved its imposing Italianate style by extensive building in the middle of last century, the towers being finally added in 1866.

BRONZE AGE BARROW.

A barrow of the Bronze Age (NGR SD 971568) stands only a few yards from the turnpike road, beside the drive to Scale Hill farm. This was one of 230 barrows excavated by Canon Greenwell prior to 1877. He found a coffin, formed of the trunk of an oak tree split in two and then hollowed out. The body had been covered in a woollen fabric from head to foot and a fragment of this may be seen, with a piece of the coffin, in the Craven Museum at Skipton. There is no older cloth in England.

NORTON TOWER — NGR SD 976570.

Only the four corners of the Tower stand, but one contains the foot of a circular staircase formerly leading to an upper floor. Richard Norton of Conyers owned the Rylstone estate and spent his summers at Rylstone Hall. He probably built the tower some time after 1500 as a retreat either for, or from, his seven daughters and eleven sons. The family took part in the Rising of the North in 1569, for which Richard was exiled and his brother and a son were executed.

A bank and ditch enclose the hill on which the tower stands, about 60 acres altogether, and part of this may be seen alongside the coach road at the foot of the hill.

On the level ground beside the tower there are mounds, ditches and cairns. Some were built as rabbit warrens. Others mark where "the youthful Nortons met to practice games and archery," as Wordsworth surmised in his imaginative epic poem "The White Doe of Rylstone."

BARDEN MOOR.

The visitor may by now be tempted onto the moor top.

Barden Moor is the name for the block of moorland between Wharfedale and Airedale. Westwards on the far side of Wharfedale stands Barden Fell, with Simon's Seat as its best known feature. Not surprisingly, the names of Barden Moor and Barden Fell are often confused.

Barden Moor supports common grazing for sheep, shared among numerous freeholders and divided by boundary stones between the six surrounding parishes. These are Embsay-with-Eastby, Barden, Burnsall, Thorpe, Cracoe and Rylstone, and each gives its name to its own portion of the Moor.

The boundary between Embsay Moor and Rylstone Fell runs up Waterford Gill and then north-east to the Upper Barden reservoir. Parish boundaries are always interesting to follow. No wonder beating the bounds was a popular event! One can often discover why the boundary runs the way it does. Many of the boundary stones on Barden Moor are lettered in 18th century style, and with cobblers' hebble and drawer-lining paper a collection of rubbings can be made. Choose a still day when the paper does not blow.

THE BRIDLEWAY.

This runs through the centre of Barden Moor. It forms a section of the track that was followed on foot and on horseback by Augustinian lay brothers travelling between Bolton Priory and their grange at Malham. The same journey can still be made with scarcely more than a mile of road travel.

The length over Barden Moor was used by the Nortons of Rylstone Hall. It was also the route (as some would like to think) of a white doe which, after the dissolution of Bolton Priory in 1539, went each week from Rylstone to stand in the churchyard during service time at the Priory Church.

There was, over a century ago, a considerable trade in coal from the small pits on the Moor. These are most numerous on Thorpe Fell and Burnsall Fell, but there are a few around the bridleway. The deep-sunk tracks up the fellside above the coach road are the ways to and from the coalpits, partly worn by sledges like the tracks from the stone quarries to be described below. The coal was sold around the farms. It was also burnt at a tiler's which worked with local clay in the fields below Norton Tower.

On the Moor, the Rylstone end of the bridleway is very wet, particularly where it crosses Black Sike. The best route is marked by stakes. Except in drought or frost, only the well-shod walker can hope to go dry-shod here.

RYLSTONE CROSS — NGR SD 983576.

The quickest way to Rylstone Cross is along the coach road from Rylstone, and up the bridleway. Near the end of the first field beyond the sheep wash-fold, the official bridleway turns off through a walled-up gateway opposite the trees. It may be more convenient to use the gate nearer the wash-fold.

The bridleway passes on either side of the plantation on the hill slope in which a cast-iron plate records that it was "Planted 1888." Beyond the plantation aim for a peeled stake marking a gate in the top wall. From there an easy path leads to the summit between Rylstone Cross and Waterford Gill, and a short cut goes nearly straight to the Cross.

The old stone pillar carries a wooden cross which is periodically renewed. Some maps describe it as a "Stone Man," which simply means a standing stone.

VIEW FROM RYLSTONE CROSS.

The view embraces Pendle Hill (15½ miles), Ingleborough (18½ miles) and the fells around Malhamdale and Upper Wharfedale. Closer at hand is the fertile Vale of Rylstone with its three villages of Cracoe, Hetton and Rylstone itself.

Imagine a line from the Cross to Rylstone church. Practically the whole of the land to the right, about 150 acres, formed the private demesne of the Hall at the time of the Nortons. The great amphitheatre of the fell side, still called Hall Fell, was pasture. On the slope just below the Cross, and passing behind Crutching Close Laithe, can be seen part of the bank and ditches which bounded the demesne. This length probably enclosed the deer park. Nearer the village were arable fields, today marked by the rig-and-furrow of the ploughing strips. The Hall itself stood almost under the modern agricultural building beside the church. Nearby were extensive fishponds, now dry.

On the left of the demesne lay the open arable fields of the villagers interspersed with a few private closes. The mediaeval system can still be mapped on the ground by studying the rig-and-furrow, the old lanes and the cattle drift ways. The view from the Cross gives a general idea of the lay-out.

WATERFORD GILL AND ITS BECK.

SOMETIMES called Waterfall Gill, there is one high waterfall just above the moor wall, and many cataracts. It gashes the fell side, and drains a great sweep of moorland. Black Sike, running across the bridleway, is its main tributary.

Several other streams also rise on Barden Moor in a complex drainage pattern. The principal ones are Moor Beck feeding Embsay reservoir, Rams Gill Beck running through Eastby Yethersgill Beck feeding the Barden reservoirs, and Gill Beck which joins the Wharfe above Barden Bridge.

The beck in Waterford Gill forms the headwaters of Ellerbeck which runs through the Castle Woods at Skipton. Sandy Beck joins it just below the foot of the gill. Here, early in 1914, the Skipton R.D.C. resolved to build a smallpox hospital. An amenity battle was at once launched to find a better site, but the outcome still remained uncertain when the war intervened.

Hollies are among the attractive variety of trees in the gill.

CLIFFORD'S TOWER — NGR SD 984565.

South of Waterford Gill stood a small building on the brow of the hill. The root of its wall can still be seen, with a fragment of coursed masonry on one side. Doubtless it had to do with deer hunting by the Cliffords of Skipton Castle in Crookrise woods. There was hunting rivalry between the Cliffords and the Nortons and Clifford's Tower commands a view of the Norton territory.

THE QUARRIES.

A quarter of a mile south-east of Clifford's Tower, where an old sledge road emerges from the wood onto the moor, the crag was quarried for freestone. The masons wedged off the rock with plug and feather, the marks of which can be seen. Below the crag are loading platforms and sledge ways. A half-finished stone trough can be found, and ashlar blocks roughed out with a mason's pick. Fifty yards onto the moor lies a broken piece of grooved millstone.

Further still on the moor, both north-east towards Watkinson Well, and south-east as far as Deer Gallows, lie a number of small disused quarries, each with its features of interest. It is clear from the worked stones lying around that each specialised in some particular product. Searching for these quarries and their connecting roads peoples the moor in imagination with quarrymen of the past.

The summit of Harts Hill, where several of the quarries are, offers a fine view over Airedale.

THE SPRINGS OR "WELLS."

On the moor top the map marks a number of springs, two of them with names. To visit them makes a good walk over rough country, but do not get bogged!

Watkinson Well at NGR SD 992565 is a reminder of the Watkinsons of Scale House. It has a high yield and feeds an area of rivulets and mosses which can be safely crossed only when frozen.

Boiling Well at NGR SD 988571 lies beside the bridleway, and tends to flow over it, forming a wide area of wet and dangerous moor.

Another set of springs rises on the slopes of Hall Fell below the Cross. One of these supplies Rylstone, so do not disturb any of them. This is the earliest known piped supply to any Craven village, dating from soon after 1830

OTHER THINGS.

For anyone able to sketch or photograph, the queer shapes of the rock outcrops are worth studying. A worthwhile task would be to compile an indicator naming the hills visible from the Cross. Obviously the visitor with botanical or other special knowledge will find his own interests.

THE RIGHT OF ACCESS.

The public have wandered hereabouts for generations by the friendly tolerance of land owners and occupiers; except only on the moor top which is preserved for grouse shooting. Yet no more than two paths are marked on the first issue of the County Council's definitive map of public paths. These are the coach road and the bridleway.

Not one of the special features mentioned in these notes can be reached by keeping to those paths. This exemplifies the truth that freedom to roam over mountains, moors and fells, without keeping to paths, is essential for getting to know the country. For 40 years the Ramblers' Association have led the negotiations to win that freedom in places where it is denied. In July, 1936, having notified the head keeper in advance, the Association led a party of several hundred people over Barden Moor to assert their claim. In 1949 the claim was given a legal basis by Act of Parliament. The Act enables county councils to secure for the public a right to roam by means of an access order or an access agreement.

Following interim arrangements, the West Riding County Council concluded an access agreement for Barden Moor in 1968. Since January, 1970, this has extended to several square miles of the moor. The only area temporarily excluded is a central band stretching eastwards from Rylstone Cross, bounded on the south by the bridleway, and that area will itself be opened up in January 1974.

On the access area, the public may now walk freely. Hall Fell, the moorland portion of Waterford Gill, and the moor from Crookrise top to Embsay Crag, are all included. Certain portions may be closed for a few days in the year when notices of grouse shooting are posted. No dogs are allowed at any time off the path, and there are byelaws for good behaviour.

The 1968 access agreement is a landmark in the history of Barden Moor. But it is fair to acknowledge that, on nearly all other fell land, owners and occupiers already allow free access to responsible and well-behaved walkers. The agreement is an important event because access has previously been conspicuously denied on Barden Moor.

Richard Karsland