

## A RELATIVE DESCENT OF THE PEAK – STAGE 7

This is not intended as a walk guide

Alfie and I have reached the heart of the Derbyshire Dales on our long walk from the top to the bottom of the Peak District. We are at Bakewell now, the capital of the Peak, where the fields and stiles are home territory to us, and the scents and scenery familiar to Alfie's senses.

My sister, who has just returned from trekking in the Himalayas with husband Richard, agreed to join us. Having rambled her way over 150 or so miles and reaching an altitude of some 18,000 feet, a walk from Bakewell to Friden should prove to be a pushover!

Early one morning at the end of October we drove in separate cars to Friden where we left my car in the car park by the side of the High Peak Trail, before returning to Jackie's house at Bakewell to start our walk. The weather was not very promising with thick cloud and a forecast of rain for later in the day.

We made our way to the centre of town which was the end of my last walk, then headed off down Matlock Street, weaving our way between the shoppers and visitors - it was half term and Bakewell was packed as usual, then on past the recreation ground at the side of Haddon Road.

Just after the entrance to the Agricultural Centre, we carefully crossed the road and headed off up Intake Lane which is a wonderful track leading up to the hills. Bakewell disappeared as we gently ascended, but what should have been stunning views down the Wye Valley and across to Manners Wood opposite were lost in fog! I have certainly experienced changing weather on my travels down the Peak, from heatwave to heavy rain, thunder and lightening to fog. I might even experience some ice or snow before I reach the end of my trek – who knows!

On reaching the Bakewell-Youlgreave road, we turned left and walked to a junction, then followed the lane up to Over Haddon. Alfie thought he was going home as we headed down the village, and gave me a very strange look when we continued past our house to descend the hill into Lathkill Dale.

I was pleased to see the river flowing when we reached the lodge and old mill buildings. It's a sure sign that winter is on the way and Alfie can resume his paddles in the ford by the side of the ancient clapper bridge, where he cannot disturb dippers or waterfowl.

Jackie, Alfie and I now headed downstream on the riverside path to Conksbury and then walked up the 'quiet lane' for a short distance, before following the footpath to Raper Lodge and going up the narrow road to Youlgreave.

Youlgreave, Youlgrave or Pommy as it is affectionately known, is a traditional village which has retained its character, customs and community spirit. It's unusual nickname is said to have originated from when the village band was first established

– not being accomplished musicians in those days, their playing was a simple ‘pom, pom, pom’ to begin with until they improved.

The friendly community spirit is thanks in part to the residents continuing support, but also to the fact that there are still village shops, a post office, surgery and several pubs. Walking down a street mid morning can be a very lonely experience in many villages, but in Youlgreave it was refreshingly busy and buzzing with activity. There were council roadsweepers and maintenance crew keeping the village neat and tidy, and David the friendly postman delivering the mail in his cheerful red Postman Pat van. Many local residents were out and about either shopping, popping to the doctors down the road or simply visiting one another, and then there were walkers like us and cyclists whizzing past. Youlgreave seems to have an aura about it of being a happy and friendly place to live.



As we walked past the window of Holland’s butchers, our eyes were immediately drawn to the wonderful display of fresh pies and pastries which are locally made, and we couldn’t resist buying a couple of Holland’s Peak Pasties. Jackie and I walked a little further on the street then sat to eat them by the side of the old water tank or ‘fountain’ which is dated 1829 and was built by Youlgreave’s own water company to supply all the village, who at that time paid an annual charge of sixpence. It held 1200 gallons of water and was fed from springs rising in Bleakley Woods near Mawstone. Close by is the very quaint Thimble Hall; whilst in front of us was the attractive youth hostel building. Built in 1884, it was formerly the Co-op stores, and has retained many of the original windows and decorated signs. There is also a wonderful stone carving of a beehive close to the top of the building.

The huge pasties probably contained a week's calories but were simply delicious. The light pastry crumbled all around us and was eagerly mopped up by Alfie – he has his uses! Jackie even thought we might include pasties on our picnic walks (see forthcoming events for November and December).

After having our photo taken by Andrew the council worker, Jackie, Alfie and I headed off once again. My bum was cold from sitting on the stone step and it was beginning to rain as we merrily continued. Being about half way on our walk of 10 miles or so, it was going to be some time before we reached the car at Friden and I envisaged another testing trial of my waterproof coat.

As we walked down the hill to Bradford Dale, we went past the Village Hall which will soon be packed to the rafters for the annual pantomime. Sadly this year there will be a gap in the line-up as Mary Froggatt, a leading lady for many years, died suddenly a few weeks ago and will be sorely missed.



There were several other walkers out enjoying a stroll in Bradford Dale, even though the rain was getting heavier – we are a tough breed us hikers you know! It seemed only yesterday that Jackie and I ambled down this riverside path on our walk Across the Peak, but it was actually several months ago now and the weather was much better then.

After following the riverside path upstream, we walked up the hill from Bradford Dale and entered Middleton-by-Youlgreave, where a gaggle of geese hissed and spat at us in welcome, then turned left onto Weadow Lane, a narrow little road which winds its way through Smerrill Grange to Elton.

The existing farmhouse at Smerrill Grange dates mainly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although it is thought to incorporate medieval remains of a monastic grange. There were once larger village settlements at Gratton and Smerrill which were forcibly deserted by their inhabitants when the monastic overlords moved in. Aerial photographs clearly show the outlines and foundations of buildings on the edge of Fishpond Wood.

Just before Smerrill Grange Jackie, Alfie and I turned up a bridlepath which used to be a very old packhorse route, and has been hollowed out over the years by the passing of countless hooves and feet. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century this route was known as Weather Way and formed part of the medieval Peakway from Parwich. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was Viam de Peco leading from Pikehall down Long Dale and then on to Middleton. The path emerges into fields and pasture on Gratton Moor where there are some fabulously old drystone walls containing huge rounded boulders of volcanic limestone.

In the distance, a brightly coloured group of electricity board workers in day-glow orange jackets that could be seen for miles were struggling in the mud and rain to operate a cherry-picker crane to replace pylons – not an enjoyable job in those conditions.

We were now faced with Long Dale, which cut across in front of us. Here we turned right and followed a path on the edge of the valley which wound its way through strange-shaped and jagged rocks until we came to Bolderstone Plantation. The bottom of the valley has the most amazing flat expanse of pasture, which I have found several references to being a mad-made racetrack, created by the Romans for chariot racing. It was reputedly named King Street and ran from Derventio (Derby) through Pikehall and north to Aquae Arnemetiae (Buxton). Whether the racecourse was fanciful folly or archaeological fact I do not know, however, it was certainly a racetrack for us as we hurried along with a herd of nosey and excited cattle trotting at our heels!

Just before emerging onto the road at Friden Hollow, there is a wonderful bit of old path which has acquired some unusual features since I last walked this way. Either side of the path are two halves of a large sandstone boulder inscribed with the following: "the road up and the road down are one and the same". Strangely, some of the words are written back to front and the wrong way around and take a while to work out.

It was now a case of walking back to the car park, with a climb up the embankment by the side of the railway arch for a shortened route to the car park at the side of Friden brick works. A charter of 963 AD refers to 'Frigedene' (Friden) which means the 'valley of the goddess Frig or Freo' after whom Friday was reputedly named. The brick works were opened on this site in 1892, the position chosen because of the clay and glacially deposited silica sand found closeby. The High Peak railway line was

conveniently sited alongside and provided an alternative form of transportation to the network of main roads in the area. Many of the original brick work buildings can still be seen.

Jackie, Alfie and I were soggy and damp yet again, and my car windows misted up with condensation as we drove home, but it had actually been a very pleasant walk in many ways, and a memorable stage in my long distance hike. Whatever the elements 'throw' at me I am determined to complete my mission, and am looking forward to the next stage of the walk which will be along the trail and then across fields to Parwich.

Sally Mosley