

Newport Outdoor Group (YHA)



Editors

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Web Site

<http://walk.to/nogs>

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Get The Outdoor Habit!

Saint Cuthberts Way in May by Stella Goodreid & friends!

Sat 12th May

Well we were all looking forward to getting away with the group for different reasons. Some looked forward to a healthy walking holiday; others wanted the chance to explore an unknown area; some longed for the challenge of the 62 mile trail, carrying their belongings on their back. Nine of us set off sharing 3 cars: Brian T., Dave F., Dawn, Jackie and Norman, Lesley, Chris, Dai and Stella.

On the way up, most stopped off at Tebay to browse around the organic farm shop. I chuckled at the names of some of their produce such as Stinking Bishop (cheese) and Beef Growler meat pies! Lesley, Brian and Stella chose to stretch their legs near Ullswater in the Lake District, taking in the 70 foot waterfall at Aira Force and seeing how much Wordsworth poetry they could remember from school days (not much!)

We all spent the first night at the spacious and very well run New Lanark Youth Hostel, arriving around 5pm. (We stayed here as Melrose hostel had been full and unable to accommodate us.) This former cotton mill was funded by Robert Owen, a social pioneer who believed in social justice and pleasant living/ working conditions for all his employees. Set beside the river, on the banks of the Clyde, it made a lovely setting for an evening walk before dinner. Wooden seats carved with flowers, fish and birds lined the way, and at the end of the stroll there was a pretty waterfall to enjoy. After this we all enjoyed a hearty meal in good old Weatherspoon's, washed down by green beer (really!) named rather appropriately, 'The Rites of Spring'.

Sun 13th

Quickly nipped round taking photos of this very comfortable hostel and surrounding mill buildings before labeling our luggage with ID ready for the bag transfer service some of us were having.

Drove over to Melrose, the starting point for the walk which turned out to be 52 miles away, not 25 miles as the YHA staff had told Dave. Were they numerically dyslexic? In terms of convenience it would have been easier to be hostelling at the starting point of the walk. However, we all agreed that it was nice to have an extra hostel thrown into the trip for good measure, particularly one as comfortable as New Lanark. Jackie even suggested it would be a pleasant location for a New Year trip.

Having dropped off our bags with the bag transfer company, we parked the cars in Melrose and so began our 62 mile walk. And how was the weather? Wet, wet, wet!

Fortunately, it was only like this for the first day. Opinions on the subject varied enormously. Comments ranged from Dai's "The entire day's walk seemed to take place in a Tupperware box, grey and washed out", to Jackie's "Fantastic", Brian's "I actually enjoyed it, must be the masochist in me," and Dawn's "I enjoyed the stomp around in the rain with an extremely large rucksac" (and it was! What was in there Dawn?)

We began the walk at 11am by climbing the Eildon Hills, a range of 3 mountains near Melrose, and passing through the saddle between two of them.

During the week we were able to see how far we had walked by using these 3 distinctive mountains as a landmark, taking pride in the fact that they were gradually becoming more distant!

At lunchtime, we took solace from the rain in an empty cattle market that we happened upon, and there we munched sandwiches amongst the stalls, squeezing out our soaking wet hats and generally dripping all over the floor. After passing through Boswell we followed the banks of the River Tweed before continuing along the Roman Dere Street, and onto the banks of the River Teviot. Passed the monument to a maiden, who for the sake of her lover, fought the English, and when attacked continued to fight them with her stumps! Bri, Dave and Dai put on a bit of a pace as their B&B was an extra 4 miles away in Crailing Old School. Meanwhile, Normy and the girls made it to Ancrum where we discovered to our horror that our B&B was not actually in the village but that we had passed it a few miles back! Just managed to make it to the Cross Keys pub in Ancrum (to complete our 14-15 miles) where a real fire and a good meal, not to mention a few rejuvenating stretches and feet rubs, revived our flagging spirits. Asked the landlady to arrange a taxi for us and were escorted, singing Welsh songs, to the B&B of Mrs. Anderson, at Mid Herriotsfield. A sprightly welcome awaited us as we removed our boots thick with mud. She then proposed that if we removed our trousers she would have them washed and dry by the morning! We knew she was serious when she told us she had been on a day's training about how to provide a good service to walkers. Enjoyed hot showers and baths in her

comfortable home and slept like logs. Meanwhile, the boys were over in their place petting a lurcher called Reiver, that Dai had particularly taken to. The lurcher can be described as, "Friendly, fit and not an ounce of fat." (which is how he likes his women.)



Monday 14th

Everyone enjoyed a full cooked breakfast setting them up for the day and thankfully the weather had now turned dry with the sun shining at intervals. By now the walk had been nicknamed the 'Poor Man's Holiday Fellowship,' a cheaper version, with less choice but equally as enjoyable as a HF trip. Began the 4 mile jaunt starting from Mrs. Anderson's back garden towards the boy's B and B, via the wobbly Monteviot Bridge. Finally, the team were reunited. Dai had been kipping in the grass and dreaming about the big hairy lurcher ! Apart from the occasional low flying aircraft that shot past with ear splitting noise, it was a lovely day's walking with spring flowers and pleasant views.

At lunchtime we sat in the fields, trying to piece together what we knew about St Cuthbert and his story. We knew he had been a monk called to Lindisfarne, who travelled Northumbria sharing the Gospel, and had been appointed Bishop. 12 years after he died, his coffin was opened and his body found to be perfectly intact, prompting folks to call him a saint. But we weren't so sure how this all fitted in with the route we were taking.

We made our way past whole fields of glorious yellow rape, taking in the remains of Cessford Castle, towards the small peaceful village of Morebattle where some managed a pint in the temple Hall. Meanwhile Stella wandered thro the ancient church reading comments in the visitor's book from overseas visitors tracing ancestors who had lived/married here many generations before. Chuckled at one gravestone's inscription: "Gone Poaching Haig!"

Picked up by the minibus and taken to our next residence, the Youth Hostel at Kirk Yetholm, formerly the village school house and a place that diligently follows St Cuthbert's monastic lifestyle, with heating in just one room! However there was a warm welcome from the very pleasant new warden Vicky, who hailed from Tenby no less, and until 3 weeks ago had been teaching swimming in Cardiff! Read up a bit on the history of this little place, just one mile over the border into Scotland. A refuge for gypsies for over 400 yrs, many had settled and intermarried, living in the little cottages around. In 1898 the village green had been the site of the coronation of their King, Faa Blythe, who had lived in the Gypsy Palace, a humble little abode just up the road and situated near the end of the famous Pennine Way. We ended the evening with a strapping meal in the Borders pub.

Stel thought the smoked haddock stuffed with leek ribbons in a rich mustard sauce topped with cheese was to be recommended! Norman enjoyed the liver and bacon! (I would have killed to have liver and bacon – Ed!)

Tues 15th

Taken by our own private minibus (could get used to this!) back to Morebattle, as this was on the proper trail. From here we trekked through our first bit of wilderness along the fringe of the Cheviots, and over the highest point on the whole walk at Wideopen Hill (362 m.) This was also the half way point in terms of distance. Only had to cover 7 miles today, so plenty of time to lounge in the sun at the viewpoints, basking like turtles on a rock! But surely the best part of today was coming across 2 or 3 families of assorted

Photo: N. Roberts



piglets in a field, many of them spotted like little dalmations! Snuffling around they briefly poked their pink shiny snouts up to look at us before settling down in 2 groups to suckle, all in a row and all in unison. The one poor sow had 9 to feed (and any other stragglers who tried it on for a free feed!) Watching them like this was such a wonderful moment Norman even videoed it. Chris said it was the highlight of the week for her. Saw plenty of other wildlife too. Stel saw a deer running wild on a hill in the distance for the first time ever. Others noticed the pheasants, horses, birds of prey, mallards and various breeds of sheep, some with huge curling horns. And in every field there seemed to be rabbits racing off as we arrived. Everyone mesmerised by a little chaffinch churping his heart out in the tree above, and unbothered by us all looking up at him. Chatted with the farmer's wife along the way who showed us her unusual breed of pigs 'large blacks' with ears like bat wings! Brian bought some fresh eggs from one farm ready for a rip roaring NOG hostel breakfast.

Today Norm noticed the first incorrectly positioned signpost (generally the signage has been excellent.) As the walk finished early today we were able to enjoy refreshment sat in the strong sun at the Plough in Town Yetholm (just up the road from Kirk Yetholm) where Dave talked sport with a Scottish rugby fan. Stel found the post office. You had to walk into someone's house, past the coat stand to find the lady seated in a kiosk in a downstairs room. (Felt like stepping back in time!) When we got back to the hostel, the lovely warden had bought some Borders Tart for us to try. It reminded me of bread pudding on a layer of pastry. Another gastronomic delight in the Borders pub beside the village green.

Wed 16th

A day off walking today, and some felt they needed it. Travelled on a service bus belonging to a local company into the nearby small smart town of Kelso. Down south they have 'white van man'. Up here they have 'white bus man' – all the buses here are white, whichever company they belong to and they are marked with the minimum of identification. Dai said he was not really surprised at their penchant for anonymity considering their ropery condition, counting 5 attempts for the driver to put it in reverse! Meanwhile, others were noticing the dark features of some of the locals, a legacy it would seem from the fascinating gypsy history in these parts.



A pleasant day looking around the quiet town of Kelso, inspecting its abbey remains, some wandering up to the gates and grounds of Floors Castle or strolling along the banks of the River Tweed. Norm and Jackie enjoyed the birdlife there: for all you bird buffs there were oystercatchers, mallards, swallows, herons and swans. Here was a history trail related to the theme of Sir Walter Scott who attended school, had his first work published and spent time with friends in this town. Enjoyed coffee in a local café where we returned for a late lunch. Compared shopping. Brian picked up waterproof cover for his rucsac. Dawn said she didn't buy much, as she would have to carry it!

In the evening we had a nice invite from Vicky the warden to share a meal of home-cooked soup with her. We picked up some bread and deserts at the shops and spent a lovely evening eating together and chatting to a few Australians, also staying at the hostel. This is what hostelling is all about.

Thurs 17th

Back to walking today, a goodly slog this time, heading for Wooler in Northumberland. 13 miles of wilderness, crossing over the border into England, about a mile from Kirk Yetholm. It did not go unnoticed by some that the first St Cuthberts Way marker over the border in England was lying flat on the ground! A little light rain so we decided to seat ourselves in a small wood to eat our lunch. Abundant wildlife, especially rabbits. At last, after a little deception in the form of a dogleg final 2 miles, we arrived in sleepy pleasant Wooler. The Terrace Café was usefully situated at the bottom of Ramsey Lane (the end of the walk) where we all had a well earned cuppa to round off the day's walking.

Trudged off to Wooler Hostel, a little gem built as accommodation for the land army girls in 1940. Pleased as always to see our bags had arrived, this time with the addition of a welcome package sellotaped to the top from Vicky, the warden at Kirk Yetholm: a box of mint chocolates!! The world should be full of more people like her! Welcomed in by the friendly Geordie warden, Mick, from Newcastle, who later cooked some nice dinner for some of us at a bargain price. Norm, Jackie and Bri went into town for a bumper serving of fish and chips.

Later everyone went down to enjoy the Black Bull's 'Secret Kingdom' beer whilst Stel wandered around the village taking photos of its little foibles like Hamish Dunn's Curios! Interested to read a bit of history on the street board -how our trail corresponded loosely to the route taken by the Lindisfarne monks, fleeing during the 8th century Viking Raids, with Cuthbert's remains and the beautifully crafted Lindisfarne Gospels, on their way down to Durham. And on a lesser point, Dave wants it announced at this point that he was in bed before Brian!

Friday 18th

Today as Dai put it, our feet were "lent wings by the anticipation of a mission accomplished" Now seriously approaching Lindisfarne! Walked to Fenwick, the weather blowy and brisk at times, gales forecast for tonight. Hope we are in bed by the time they hit. The terrain was varied. Enjoyed the little wood tight with upright trees which we passed through to arrive at our lunch stop: St Cuthbert's cave. This is a huge outcrop of rock where the monks had spent a night.

We had our first sighting of the Holy island, which was purely magical. Not due to arrive there till tomorrow.

Today we could see the long thin strip of creamy sand stretching out to the island in the distance surrounded by rich blue water. It looked so idyllic. On the news this week we had heard of a family who had ignored the warning signs about the tides and ended up needing helicopter rescue from the road that links the island with the mainland. Turned out he was deputy head of police in Manchester.

Arrived at Fenwick from where we were taken to our B&B accommodation at nearby Lowick. And the name of the pub in which we stayed? The Black Bull (a popular name around here!) We settled comfortably into our rooms, a little candle burning in each one. Enjoyed a time of chill out, prior to an aperitif in the bar and dinner in the restaurant part (not far to go being just down a flight of stairs!) After dinner, the final one for Norm and Jackie who have to leave tomorrow, we went round the table, each person recalling their favourite part of the trip.

Sat 19th

Awoke to what sounded like a raging storm outside, only to discover blue skies and sunshine, but an almost gale force wind! After a cooked breakfast at the pub we were driven back to Fenwick for the final leg all eager to reach the Holy island. The winds had not yet died down. On the way we had to cross a railway line, calling the signalman first with the phone alongside the line. The signalman spoke back in a strong Geordie accent saying "Stop where you are. Don't anyone cross. There's a train due in 10 seconds!!" Called out to Dai, who was about to step foot on the line. Suddenly, the quiet country air was shattered as the train thundered past, seeming to come from nowhere.

On we went, finally reaching the 4 mile causeway that leads to the island, the winds still gusting fiercely, so that it was hard to stand up or get the camera out for photos. Good job it was a tailwind blowing us along in the right direction, or we might never have reached our destination. Anyway, the road seemed endless though we were glad not to be trudging across wet sand as the monks had done fleeing the Viking raids. Arriving on the island there was definitely a special feel, perhaps something you get on small, sparsely inhabited islands. Dai described it as "magical". Tourists milled around, relaxed and happy. Thankfully the wind was no longer blasting us as we posed for a group photo in front of St Aiden's statue, the monk who built the monastery here in AD 635, some 30 yrs before Cuthbert was made bishop.

After this, Nogs went to explore the island in various contingents, some enjoying a pork pie lunch, some buying a few gifts and Brian and Lesley visiting the castle refurbished at the turn of the last century. Chris Dai and Dawn bought 'I've done St Cuthbert's Way' t shirts. There was a pleasant atmosphere generally, with tourists enjoying their wander around the Abbey and St Mary's church, in which stands the very impressive life sized elm carving of six monks carrying Cuthbert's body. Enjoyed the stain glass windows depicting Gospel tales, with, (quite appropriately) sea and boats in the background. Stel went into the Lindisfarne centre, a museum explaining the history of the Lindisfarne Gospels. Experienced the marvelous interactive computer exhibit, 'turning the pages,' which allows you to turn and inspect the pages as you touch the screen."

Then it was time to leave, if we were to beat the tides. We met up with our minibus driver who took us from the island (all feeling sad to leave) back to the very start of the walk, where it all started a week ago. Six days walking, and yet such a short time to drive it in a vehicle.

We all agreed it had been a wonderful trip (Brian's first with the group), and that we would like to return to these parts to walk again.



Photo: N. Roberts