

Nina & Ken do Wainwright's Coast-to-Coast Walk, July 1977

(as recalled in 2020)

Setting the Scene

Wainwright's C2C route from St Bees on the west coast to Robin Hood's Bay on the east coast was only 4 year's old. We met very few going our way. Our route was similar to the published route except that we chose a high-level route in the western Lake District.

We had "state-of-the-wallet" gear. The rucksacks with their external aluminium-frames did not even have a waist belt. We had Black's "Tromso" down sleeping bags – our luxury item that cost £35 each. The tent was a Mariott Packlite ridge tent. It was flimsy, not completely watertight but was not fortunately tested by the weather. Our boots may have been by Hawkins. We cooked on a heavy Camping Gaz stove. Never heard of walking poles. The photos were taken on 35mm film.

Early July 1977 was dry and very hot at times. We may have had some cloud and a few drops of rain in the second week.

Day 1: St Bees to Ennerdale Bridge

An overnight at St Bees campsite was followed by the first of many bright summer days. At the camp site there three young (Yorkshire?) men who were also starting on the C2C. We said goodbye to the coast early on at St, Bees Head and wandered through the coastal plain via such places as Cleator Moor to enter the Lake District at Ennerdale Bridge. A farm campsite with free range fowl was our stop for the night.



Nina at St. Bees



Ken en-route to St. Bees Head

Day 2: Ennerdale Bridge to Ruddy Gill

Ennerdale has trees - lots of them. We skirted Ennerdale Water on the south and followed the River Liza past Gillerthwaite Youth Hostel and even more trees. We emerged from the forest to see Black Sail Hostel (not for us this time, but we had a magical stay there with our boys several years later). At this point Wainwright wanted us to go down to Borrowdale via Honister pass but we chose to stay

high over Windy gap to Sty Head and followed the path past Sprinkling Tarn to the top of Ruddy Gill. There was just enough space for tent beside the stream. What a stunning view with Great End on one side and other peaks all around.



Ruddy Gill pitch



It was only day 2 but already we were doing laundry and those sleeping bags had to get an airing.

Day 3: Ruddy Gill to Easedale Tarn with a diversion

The weather was fine and the highest mountain in England was within reach. So, breaking camp early in the morning we headed for the summit of Scafell Pike. We made our way down to Angle Tarn. Our route took in Stake Pass, High Raise and Sergeant Man. Following Blea Rigg and past Belle Knotts we arrived at our overnight camp beside Easedale Tarn. It was a Monday but we met so few people that it felt like we had the whole place to ourselves



On Scafell Pike

Day 4: Easedale Tarn to Angle Tarn (the other one)

The weather was fine. The tarn was inviting and we had our cosies. What a start to the day.



Getting in (or out?)



Drying off and the daily washing line

Suitably refreshed we headed down to Grasmere for provisions and breakfast. "Excuse me sir" came from a portly middle-aged man with an American accent. "What's the highest mountain around here? I wanna climb it". We pointed him to Hellvellyn. I wondered whether he would make it to the top.

The advertising slogan of the time was "Drinka, pinta, milka day". Doing so in 60 seconds flat outside the shop was not a good idea - it had consequences.

It was getting warmer as we ascended to Grisedale Tarn but didn't fancy a second swim. It was before the days when suntan lotion was widely used and we were suffering from sunburn when we arrived in Patterdale Village. I can't remember why we decided on calamine lotion but we bought a bottle, plastered ourselves and donated the remaining half bottle to other walkers. Then it was up to Angle Tarn for our overnight camp



Arrival at Grisedale Tarn (this morning's laundry drying as we went)

Day 5: Angle Tarn via Shap to Lyvennet Beck

After our morning bath we were in for another very hot day. We made our way up Kidsty Pike and down the ridge to the western side of Haweswater. We had a lunch stop beside one of the tributary streams for welcome refreshment in the heat of the day. We were carrying cheese and immersed it in the stream to keep it cool.



On top of Kidsty Pike



Lunch spot (note the knotted handkerchief headgear)

After the dam we headed to Shap Abbey. It was hard to get going again after looking around and having a rest from the heat. We were hot, tired and getting slower. Maybe we should look for a B&B when we got to Shap?

We walked the High Street looking for possible places to stay and stumbled on the Fish and Chip shop not long before its closing time. In we went. The proprietor could only be described as a crone. She had little conversation but those fish and chips, bread and butter and gallons of tea were a feast. We were good for another couple of hours walking.

As we exited Shap we came to a Y-junction, hesitated and took out the map. A gentleman was sunning himself in his front garden at the junction. His arm extended pointing right, we waved, not a word was said.

We were getting into limestone country where water can be scarce. After crossing the M6 and passing some quarry workings we arrived late in the evening to camp near a trickle of water called Lyvennet Beck



Shap Abbey

Day 6: Lyvennet Beck to Kirkby Stephen

No chance of a bath or even a foot paddle in the beck. It was going to be a hot day for a change. Tree cover as in Sherwood Forest would have been nice but all we found was the grave of Robin Hood – a man whose many parts have been buried in many parts. Surely Bonnie Prince Charlie must have come this way as well but no sign of him.

We did pass one lake, Sunbiggin Tarn but didn't fancy a dip in the "unattractive large reedy pond" as Wainwright describes it. So on we went. The limestone was dry and so were our throats. It was time for a lunch stop but no shade was available. Then we spotted it – a movement in the ground and a bubbling noise. An oasis, a spring and cool at that! We rigged up our flysheet to provide shade. Nothing tasted sweeter than those cups of iced Adam's Ale.

Burial mounds, stake holes and remains of ancient villages – this limestone plateau had them all as we made our way to Kirkby Stephen. "Anywhere round here we can camp?" we asked. "Yes, up on the Common" was the helpful reply. Which is what we did.



Robin Hood's Grave



Sunbiggin Tarn

Day 7: Kirkby Stephen to Muker (in Swaledale)

We started with a short section of road walking before heading southeast across the fells to the high point of Nine Standards Rigg. As well as being at a fine viewpoint we were at the walk's watershed. From then on all water flowed into the North Sea. A very pleasant downhill section via Ney Gill and Whitsun Dale brought us to Keld in Swaledale. As Wainwright points out Keld is the halfway point of the walk and is also on the Pennine Way. Keld can boast several local waterfalls but its Youth Hostel closed many years ago. A short walk down the dale a little off Wainwright's route is the small village of Muker with a pub and a small campsite where we spent the night.



Nine Standards Rigg (there were nine, we counted them to make sure)



There are CLOUDS in the sky

A word about Food and Drink

We passed through a village on many of the days. Our rules were: (a) stock up with food enough to get us to the next village, (b) have a meal, light or substantial if it was the right time of day and most importantly (c) NEVER PASS A TEA SHOP WITHOUT GOING IN.

Our standard food carry consisted of muesli and dried milk for breakfast. Ryvita topped with jam, honey or cheese for lunch. Camp evening meals featured SMASH powdered mash potato and something called TVP (textured vegetable protein) which tasted as bad as it sounds unless combined with flavourings. We even had a tin-opener and carried tinned food for a half-day or so. Apart from tea and coffee we had some orange juice powder (possibly by Kelloggs?) and Bovril cubes from which we made a rather salty drink.

Haute cuisine it was not.

Day 8: Muker to Reeth

The reward for passing half way was a short relaxing day of only 9 miles down Swaledale. The route did not follow Wainwright's higher level tracks. Instead we followed paths beside or just north of the river. We met a father and his 11-year old son who were also doing the C2C.

The first section followed the Swale to Gunnerside. Just to the north of there is an area that was extensively mined for lead. The onward route led from there via Healaugh to Reeth. It was hay time and they had been making it while the sun shone. Drystone walls were everywhere. Each field had a squeeze stile entry and exit and coloured with yellow stubble except for a green-grass strip following the line of the footpath. The larger fields often had a stone barn tucked in one corner.

We made for the Reeth campsite where we met another couple doing the C2C. We had a pleasant evening although the night was punctuated by a piercing scream coming from their tent. One of them confessed to having nightmares. (We met this couple purely by chance the following year when we were doing the Offas Dyke Path in the opposite direction to them)



Gunnerside



Above the Swale

[Day 9: Reeth to Danby Wiske via Richmond and Catterick](#)

The day started well with a scenic walk on paths west and north of the Swale. A priory, a stately home, an old inn and pleasant woodland beneath a precipice all provided interest before we reached Richmond which we explored a little. There we again met the father and son. We thought they might have been over-ambitious but the lad seemed cheerful enough. The three Yorkshire lads who shared our St. Bees campsite also put in an appearance.

To the east is the Vale of Mowbray which is just north of the Vale of York. They both have the same characteristic. They are flat. Wainwright warned us. Best to get it over with as quickly as possible but it does involve ROAD WALKING, lots of it.

Out of Richmond we followed the Swale crossing the A1 and over Catterick Bridge. From there it was almost all tarmac through Bolton-on-Swale and Streetlam to Danby Wiske. Our feet and the rest of us were getting very tired and we wanted a place to camp. Leaving Danby Wiske we crossed the railway and spotted a small roadside copse bordering a stream. We climbed the fence and tucked ourselves out of sight in our one stealth camp of the trip. However the cows that we thought were safely on the other side of the stream had no trouble crossing it and paying us a visit.

Day 10: Danby Wiske to Swainby

We sneaked back on the road for more of the flatlands but with fewer stretches of road walking. A gentle unexciting day as we headed generally northeast to Ingleby Cross. We continued going northeast to the small village of Swainby. Swainby had a pub and they let us camp on their lawn.

Day 11: Swainby to the Lion Inn at Blakey

Time to get excited again. We were about to go on the North York Moors. Evocative names – Scugdale, Live Moor, Carlton Bank, Cringle Moor, Cold Moor and Hasty Bank brought back memories of a 4am. start on the Lyke Wake Walk a few years earlier with bobbing headtorches for the first hour or so. Urra Moor was followed by Farndale Moor and the route on the old railway track. Three figures loomed up behind us. The Yorkshire lads told us of their adventures since Richmond. There was a lot of mention of Old Speckled Hen, a beer made locally in Theakstones Brewery. We agreed to meet up again at the pub and they sped on. The Inn is close to the old Blakey junction. On arrival there was no sign of any tents but we pitched on the moor about 100m from the pub and then made our entrance. The lads were already ensconced and we joined them for a convivial evening before they decided to pitch their tents in the dark.

Day 12: Blakey to the Coast

We knew we had two more days to get to Robin Hood's Bay and so the plan was to stop somewhere when we had done over half the distance. We left early and headed north and east past Rosedale Head and Danby High Moor. Next up was Great Fryup Head which reminded us that we hadn't had much for breakfast. We crossed Glaisdale Moor to the town of the same name. As we entered the town a sign said TEA SHOP and it had just opened. The tea room was upstairs and had been recently opened as a venture by a couple with whom we had a long chat and a second breakfast. We promised to recommend them to our friends. Feeling satisfied we strolled along the High Street and in the middle of town was a sign. We reminded ourselves of rule (c) and in we went for a tea chaser. Not as good as the first tea shop but fine. Time to go before it got too late. Imagine our consternation when at the far end of the town there was .. yes, you've guessed it .. Well, rules are rules and must be obeyed. We certainly did not suffer from dehydration that day. We did wonder whether the new couple at the first tea shop had done their market research thoroughly.

We followed the River Esk into Grosmont where the North York Moors Steam Railway goes southwards to Pickering. We were disappointed not to find an open tea shop there. After crossing Sleights Moor we approached the hamlet of Little Beck and followed the course of the beck southwards. By now it was getting into early evening and we had hoped to wild camp among the trees beside the beck but everywhere was steep. We pressed on looking for somewhere suitable. No luck and so three hours later we entered Seaview caravan park at Hawsker after a long and tiring day.

Day 13: On to Robin Hood's Bay

A fine scenic stroll a few miles down the coast brought us to journey's end. We speculated that Robin Hood must have gone in the opposite direction to us and met his fate before completing the walk. A cuppa, a bus to Scarborough and train to Manchester saw us home later that day.



Journey's End



Robin Hood's Bay

(We think we only had 24 shots on the camera film and had to save some for the finish)