

Kettlewell Scarecrow Festival – Thursday 17th August 2023

Rather than my usual local start, often from Idle, I had to travel today, to Upper Wharfedale, but the scarecrow festival in Kettlewell, is always worth the effort. Departing home a little after 7.30am, I allowed myself plenty of time to drive out of the city into the Dales, for a later than usual start time of 9.00am. I was the first to arrive, with Trevor - my car share buddy, a little before 8.30am and over the next half hour, a group of ten walkers had assembled, including Kerry, our guest walker from the Merseyside group, all looking forward to today's exciting adventure!!!

After all the rain earlier in the month, we departed Conistone on a promising, albeit overcast morning, taking the track up Scot Gate Lane skirting Wassa Hill, heading out to Conistone Pie. As we left, I spied a solitary magpie, watching us from the trees, what was it trying to tell us? – We were about find out!!!

Conistone Pie provides excellent views across Kilnsey showground, with the famous 'Kilnsey Crag' as a backdrop. The plan was to follow the Dalesway, along Swineber scar to Highgate Leys Lane, before dropping down to Scargill House - a Christian retreat and conference centre. We were not pushed for time today and I decided to take opportunities to pause, not only to take in the vistas across the dales, but also the sounds and smells of the countryside and the hue of the pink and yellow, wildflowers in the hedgerows and on the grass verges. We were also lucky to see two wild deer cross our path. Despite this meandering pace, we still reached our destination of Kettlewell a little before 11.00am. We decided to head straight to the village hall for an early lunch. Although it was designated as lunch, scones and homemade cakes were proving too difficult to resist, although Roger, being a man of the people had brought his own meat pie with him!!! Lunch consumed, we headed out to join the throng of tourists on the streets of Kettlewell.

Being in the middle of the long school, summer holiday, the village was busy with families, trail maps in hand, walking from scarecrow to scarecrow and we were keen to join them. Trail maps purchased we headed out on the 3km trail, the theme this year being a 100 years of the BBC. Trevor had appeared a little nervous all morning and as the judges were coming around, I saw him sat by the front gate of one of the cottages. I was surprised when I saw the head judge pin a rosette on him and on closer inspection, I saw the rosette said first prize!!! I asked him his secret and being a child of the 1960's he just said, 'Hay it's in my jeans'!!!

On completion of the trail, we reassembled by the village bus shelter, Ralph was bragging that he was the first walker home on the trail and had beaten the Walk Leader - Kevin. He did though admit after repeated questioning that he had run bits, he said if he hadn't he would have 'lost face' by being beaten by a group of seven year old girls!!! We headed out of the village, leaving our newly made friends – the scarecrows – behind, before commencing the steady climb, through Knipe Wood to Hawkswick,

It was slow going following a meandering path, as we headed towards the summit of the hill but the views were well worth the effort and what goes up must come down and we enjoyed a more rapid descent into the hamlet of Hawkswick, where we picked up the river Skirfare, which was still flowing with some force after Mondays rain, before following it back towards Kilnsey. We headed up to the path at the foot of the crag and were able to chat to the

numerous climbers, who were preparing to tackle the rather difficult looking overhang. I was keen to join them and undertake a spot of free climbing but I had responsibility for the group, so we headed back down to the road, undertaking the tricky crossing of the roadside beck. Which we all managed to negotiate, avoiding getting wet, except Trevor, who was caught in some 'friendly fire' by Roger!!!

Heading for an early finish, a little before 3.00pm, we decided to take an afternoon stop and struck out towards the Café by the Lake at Kilnsey Park Estate, for coffee and teas. As we approached the café, situated towards the rear of the estate, there was a much welcome, cooling breeze blowing over the lake and I could feel the wind in my hair and the spray on my face - just what I was looking for on this warm and sunny afternoon. Refreshed, we headed back to our cars on Conistone Bridge, arriving a little after 3.30pm. GPS's checked and 11 miles agreed.

This completes my summer programme of Thursday walks. If you have attended them all you will have, walked back to 1940 in Haworth, ridden on the iconic Flying Scotsman, viewed a year in Normandy at the Hockney gallery, in Salts mill and had lunch by the lake, in the glorious sunshine at the impressive East Riddlesden Hall, as well as completing today's scarecrow trail - and who can forget the infamous Saltaire Brewery walk!!! Well obviously Ralph & Julia, who rumour has it slept off the effects of the drink, crashed out on the public benches in Roberts Park – it's usually the old age pensioners complaining about drunken teenagers in the park but not on this occasion!!!

However, we do not have long to wait for the next Thursday walk, the first of my autumn walks, is on the 21st September - the autumn equinox, which is the first day of astronomical autumn. It is titled the Railway Walk. Lunch will be at Robertson's Farm Shop in Northowram. The plan is, dare I say, to have a drink in The Railway at the end of the walk. The resident beer is Timothy Taylors Landlord, with two guest beers also being available on tap.