

Ilkley - Thursday 20th October 2022

Walk eight of the autumn series was supposed to be 23 miles long but as you will see later we decided to cut it short!!! - We were heading to Ilkley the best place to live in the UK in 2022 according to the Sunday Times. I guess they had not visited Idle before they announced the winner!!! Nevertheless seven walkers descended on the village prepared for whatever the day threw at them. It was not a promising start weather wise as we gathered in the early morning drizzle but ever the optimists we set out towards Thackley and quickly descended to the river Aire at Buck Wood. Following the north bank of the river east towards the village of Esholt, picking up Cunliffe Lane we had Hollings Hall in our sights. Having negotiated the golf course we headed towards Hawksworth Quarry and if it was not for the mist and rain, we would have seen the old High Royds Hospital, now an upmarket housing complex, in the valley below!!! It was here that the drizzle turned into persistent rain and we donned our wet weather gear. Chris also produced an umbrella – obviously a yellow card offence. His position as club secretary was also brought into question!!! His response was that he was a fighter not a quitter. At this point in time Prime minister Liz Truss had not yet resigned but she did do the honourable thing later in the day, the question on our minds was would Chris do the same!!! On reaching the quarry boundary on Odda Hill, we dropped down to Northcroft and followed the track to Reva Reservoir.

We then headed onto Hawksworth Moor from Intake Gate and on Reaching the ‘Great Skirtful of Stones’ we stopped for our midmorning cuppa. With Walks secretary Julia making a welcome appearance on the Thursday walk, (her first since the Railway Children walk back in July), and with Chairman Ralph and committee member Karen also present, Walk leader Kevin took the opportunity to question umbrella carrying Chris’s position!!! He proposed Trevor as the new secretary but failed to get a seconder!!! After our wet stop we dropped down into the Wharfe Valley over Burley Moor. The walk so far had been a gentle amble in the Aire Valley along the river through tame and pretty countryside of fields and woodlands before becoming progressively wilder and more remote as we headed into the Wharfe Valley. Picturesque villages, hamlets and farmsteads gave way to windswept moorland, once the haunt of wolves and wild boar, some 1,000 years ago when the landscape was forested, the moorland at the head of the Valley is now bleak and predominantly treeless, the occasional line of grouse butts distinguishable among the heather. This used to be serious shooting country — for pheasant as well as grouse — a pastime that many in the area relied on to make a living – it can be lonely country, too, but the landscape is soul-stirringly majestic, not least the vast and windswept moor.

We soon reached the ‘Little Skirtful of Stones’ and could see the welcoming sight of Ilkley spread out before us in the valley below. Continuing the descent, we headed towards Backstone Beck, and followed the at times rocky path down to Ilkley Tarn. On reaching the footbridge over the beck, we took the opportunity to see a second of Simon Armitage’s Stanza Stones, this time Beck. Having seen Dew on the first walk of the series back in September - Beck is not the most accessible but worth the effort. If you want to know how wet it was the photograph taken at the stone gives a clear picture!!!

From the tarn, it was a quick descent into the centre of Ilkley and our well-earned lunch stop at La Stazione Caffè. Coffees/Teas and Toasties seemed to be the popular choice today.

It was also pleasing that by chance we met Ilkley resident and fellow walker Isby in the café, although he could not be enticed to join us on the walk back to Idle – obviously a dry weather walker!!! A little dryer and refreshed, we left the relative warmth of the café and headed back onto the moors via Mill Ghyll, which has undergone extensive improvements this year and is worth a visit. Passing White Wells, (there were no takers for the cold water plunge, although wild water swimmer Madeleine showed an interest!!!), it was slow going on the climb to the top of Ilkley Crag, but we all made it and we followed the flagged Dales High Way to the twelve Apostle's stone circle. Heading over Bingley Moor we dropped down Spy Hill to Dick Hudson's. We then had to negotiate the field where both Sara and Trevor were bitten by a horse on last year's walk. Although there were horses in the field, they showed little interest in us today – phew!!! Despite being bitten last year Trevor has not shown any signs of developing a super power, although he does now eat quite a lot of Hay!!! It was here that the decision to cut the walk short was taken and instead of heading over Shipley Glen and Baildon Crag, we headed to Acrehowe. This was a large stone cross on the moor, that was erected sometime between the 12th and 14th century, it is believed that it was an old burial ground from earlier centuries and once discovered the church consecrated the site and erected the cross. It was destroyed by fire in 1854, believed to be an act of vandalism on the instruction of the landowner by one of her workers. We had our afternoon stop at the sight of the cross before we headed into Baildon town centre.

We were now on the last leg of the day's walk, leaving Baildon, via Hallcliffe, we soon reached Baildon Station and dropped down to Buck Woods at Thackley via Roundwood Road and Buck Lane. There was then just the short climb back to Idle village, GPS's checked and 20 miles agreed - most were showing 20.5 miles. I will not provide my usual close, 'the end of another cracking Thursday walk' It was an excellent walk but it rained all day and the phrase 'drowned rats' comes to mind. Although this did not seem to deter the Thursday drinkers, who still headed to the White Bear - I guess no beer garden this week, just three wet souls huddled in the corner or maybe there was a crackling fire to sit in front of?

Next week sees us on walk nine of the autumn series, this time heading to Otley Chevin, via Bingley and Menston. On the return leg, we will be able to visit St Oswald's church in Guiseley, where Patrick & Maria Bronte, (the parents of the famous Bronte sisters), were married in December 1812 - Lunch will be at the Cornerstone community café in Menston.