

## THE TAN HILL WALK

BY E. W. COURTENAY

Early in 1952 I mentioned to some friends in the Club the idea of a hundred-mile hill walk, to take place sometime during the Jubilee year. To my surprise they appeared very keen; in fact one of them, after I had told him over the 'phone of the plan, found when arriving home from the telephone kiosk that in his excitement he had carried off, with some other of his books, the telephone directory. These friends were soon enquiring for details of the route. After many possible walks had been thought of, hardly any of which seemed satisfactory, Fred Heardman, to whom I had mentioned the idea, came forward with the grand suggestion of a walk linking the two highest inns in England—Tan Hill in north Yorkshire and the Cat and Fiddle in Cheshire.

Fred's suggested pub-crawl seemed to be exactly the type of walk required; it would go completely along the Pennines, where we were used to doing our week-end walks, and, with the exception of one or two very small sections, the route would lie mostly over rough moorland country. After purchasing a  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch Ordnance map of northern England, we soon got down to deciding exactly the route we were going to take. We realised by now that the walk would be somewhat longer than one hundred miles and therefore we wanted to make it as least artificial as possible, but at the same time cover country interesting for the hill walker.

It was finally decided that from Tan Hill we would go along to Hawes in Wensleydale by way of the upper Swale, Great Shunner Fell, and Hearne Beck. This first fourteen or so miles appeared from the map to be quite straightforward, but the next section, from Wensleydale to, say, the Aire gap, required a little thinking about. From Hawes we could go several ways; we could, for instance, follow the main watershed of the Pennine over Dodd Fell, Peny-y-Ghent, and Fountains Fell to Malham. This way, however, would not be very direct, it would be all in the limestone country, and it would also involve a wide crossing of the flat and pastoral area between the Ribble and the Aire. Instead, we decided to follow the high ground on the east side of the Wharfe, first by

crossing Wether Fell from Hawes to Marsett near Semer Water, and then continuing to Grassington over Kidstones Moss, Buckden Pike, Tor Mere Top and Great Whernside. At Grassington we could cross the Wharfe, carry on over Rylstone Fell, and eventually drop down into Skipton.

From Skipton the next objective was Todmorden; and once there we should be back on our home ground with a clear route down to Edale that we reckoned we knew quite well. We therefore decided from Skipton to climb over to Cowling via Lothersdale, though the route appeared from the map to be through uninteresting country which would probably involve some road walking. From Cowling we should soon be back on the moors—Keighley Moor, the Wolf Stones, Boulsworth Hill, and Jackson's Ridge down to Widdop Reservoir—whence a cross-country route would take us to Todmorden. Leaving Todmorden we should pick up the Old Hebden Bridge to Edale route at the White House and carry on along Blackstone Edge and Buckstones Moss to Marsden, then by way of Black Hill, Bleaklow and Kinder Scout to Edale.

The last section from Edale to the Cat and Fiddle is, I must admit, a little artificial; but it would be very easy going, and by the time we'd reached Edale that was what we'd be wanting. The route would go by way of Chapel Gate and Castle Naze to Combs, then across the top of Long Hill and Burbage to the old road above the Goyt, to finish at the Cat and Fiddle.

The total distance by this route worked out at approximately 120 miles, the net ascent being about 19,450 feet.

With all details of the proposed route settled, the next business, and probably the most important, was to arrange an approximate time schedule for the whole walk. I estimated that the total time required, including stops for food, would be between 48 and 50 hours. This would involve two nights out and I wasn't sure whether we could manage it, for I had never before heard of anyone doing a hill walk covering that length of time. I knew from an ordinary night-walk such as the Colne-Rowsley that one begins to feel a little sleepy by 2 o'clock on the first morning, so I was afraid to think what I should feel like at that time on the second morning of this walk, after having been walking all the previous day and night. The only thing to do was to give it a trial, and hope that we should not drop to sleep in our tracks.

I also knew from previous walks that we could get a very late meal in the evening at Blake Lea, Marsden. It was therefore decided to have a late supper there on the second day and fix the other meals from that basic point. Working back, we should thus require to leave Tan Hill about 2 p.m., have supper in Hawes, walk through the first night to have early breakfast in Grassington on the second day, lunch at Cowling, have tea at Todmorden, and so to the late supper in Marsden. Working forward, we should breakfast on the third day in Edale, lunch at Combs, and finish at the Cat and Fiddle about 6 p.m.

Those who proposed to take part in the walk were Philip Brockbank, Vin Desmond, Neil Mather, Frank Williamson, and myself. The party would have included John Harvey, but we were robbed of his very pleasant company by his tragic death in Scotland. Frank Williamson should have been on his class Z call-up, but decided to come with us when he was failed as medically unfit.

Transport to Tan Hill was the next problem. One could go to Kirkby Stephen by rail, then walk to the Inn and stay the night ready to set off next day, but this would be costly, besides being a little impracticable. Then Roy Horsman and Bill Pickstone came to our aid by putting their cars at our disposal, themselves to act as chauffeurs. They undertook to run us straight from Manchester to Tan Hill on the first day of the walk, and pick us up two days later at the Cat and Fiddle and run us back home. I don't think the walk would have been possible without these transport arrangements and we all appreciated very much this fine offer of help.

With transport all fixed and the proposed route thoroughly mapped-out, it was now necessary to do a little reconnaissance. There are those who think that on a walk of this nature a reconnaissance of the unknown sections is not necessary, and that you should go straight out and do the walk without it. But you are then liable to waste much time route-finding, and we, being limited to time, could not afford to lose any of it by getting lost through insufficient knowledge of the country. The sections that require rehearsal are not so much those over the open moors, but those through towns and villages and cultivated country, where much time can be consumed finding suitable routes to take one quickly back to the open fells with as little road-walking as possible. A

reconnaissance is also needed to enable an estimate to be made of the times of arrival at places where meals had to be booked in advance.

Each member of the party went over one or more sections of the route during the winter. Neil and Vin were the first to go up to Tan Hill itself. This was with Roy Horsman, during March. They did the crossing from the Inn to Hawes under appalling conditions of pouring rain, thick mist, and melting snow.

A few weeks later Philip and I took the 4 a.m. Saturday train to Garsdale, where we breakfasted. We then caught a bus to Hawes, to explore the way over to Semer Water and, farther on, to Buckden Pike and Great Wherside. Eventually, after spending what seemed to be hours climbing over countless limestone walls on the slopes of Great Wherside, we reached Grassington and by devious bus and train connections arrived back in Manchester at midnight.

Early in April three of us—Philip, Vin, and myself—tried out the first night section of the walk. We left Tan Hill around 3 p.m. on the Saturday, having been driven up there by Bill Pickstone, and reached Hawes without any trouble. Whilst we were at the local supper-bar, however, rain began to fall. We set off into the night, and as we gradually climbed higher the rain turned to snow. On reaching the Buckden-Aysgarth road in near blizzard conditions the party split up, Philip, with foot trouble, carrying on by the valley roads whilst Vin and I went on over the tops.

Grassington, where we met again, was a very dead sort of village at 7 on that wet cold Sunday morning. The three of us huddled together in a doorway in the market square and gazed intently over the roof tops at the chimneys, for the first sign of smoke to show that somebody was up and cooking. At last smoke curled up from one of the chimneys; I knocked at the door and very soon we were sitting down to breakfast. After we had finished it we asked the very sympathetic and hospitable lady of the house if she could manage a 6.30 breakfast on the first morning of the walk itself and were fortunate enough to fix this important halt before departing for home by bus.

Neil later explored the tricky sections from Skipton to Cowling and Todmorden. On another occasion Frank and I checked the route from Grassington to Skipton, by way of Rylstone Fell.



Grange Bridge

*C. D. Milner*



The time-table for the walk was now sorted out so that we could book meals at definite times. Gradually everything was arranged. The date was fixed for the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Whit-week, 5th—7th June. We could now only wait for the start.

The Thursday dawned wet and cloudy; but by the time we had been conveyed to Tan Hill, the weather was beginning to change, and prospects of good conditions for the walk were hopeful. After we had all had a pot of tea, whilst being doubtfully eyed by the landlady, who by this time had heard of our proposed exploit, our chauffeurs and Hirst junior took a few photographs; they made sure to get not only us but also the name of the Inn on their pictures, as proof that we really had started there. At a few minutes to 3 p.m. we set off.

The weather being now gloriously fine, the view on reaching the summit of Great Shunner Fell was exceptionally good, with the Lake District fells showing up clearly; we were surrounded by hills as far as the eye could see. Very soon we were hurrying down alongside Hearn Beck towards Hardraw, to reach Hawes in time for our evening meal at 7.20.

The lights of this small Wensleydale town were soon left behind as we climbed over the ridge to Bardale, where darkness and a slight mist gave to the sleepy hamlets of Marsett and Stalling Busk, a mile up the valley from Semer Water, a ghostly aspect in keeping with the legends of this lonely lake. A light drizzle had already started before we took first breakfast on the Buckden road. With the night now much darker we used our torches on the tussocky going of the long steep slope of Buckden Pike. Great Whernside is also a steep pull from this northern side but we were on the top for the dawn. The rain stopped with the coming of daylight and Wharfedale was filled with low-lying mist being gradually dispersed by the emerging sun. The first 36 miles to Grassington had been carried out according to schedule.

After breakfast, in ideal conditions of bright sunshine and a cool breeze, we crossed the Wharfe and followed the rocky edges of Rylstone Fell towards Skipton. Unfortunately we gradually discovered that the time allowed for this and the next stretch had been cut too fine, and although we walked reasonably fast we were nearly an hour behind schedule when we sat down at 2 p.m. for our

lunch in Cowling. Bill Pickstone met us here to see how we were progressing. On hearing of our bad time-keeping he saved the day by offering to motor round first to Todmorden and then to Marsden, to inform the people preparing meals for us that we should arrive somewhat later than the times arranged.

We left Cowling to follow Neil's route over Wolf Stones. Then came some very rough going to Boulsworth Hill—the long tramp the length of Jackson's Ridge—finally descending to Widdop Reservoir, where we had a break for a few minutes for tea at the waterman's cottage. Leaving Mystery Buttress behind us we took a quick cross-country route and were soon dropping down, late on the Friday evening, into Todmorden. We had now covered about 70 miles—the length of a Colne-Rowsley walk: the fight for the last 50 miles was now to begin.

The meal in Todmorden had been ordered at the Youth Hostel at Mankinholes. Mrs Archer, the Warden, had received Bill's message of our late coming and had prepared for us a fine meal; this included a salad dish. Quite naturally there was cucumber in the salad, and for some unknown reason I ate it, not thinking at the time that it might be hard to digest after so much walking. It was to make me suffer for the next 24 hours. With some of us changed to plimsolls, although nobody yet had developed any really sore feet, we set off at 10.15 into our second night, wondering how we should feel by the time the next morning had arrived.

The route along the reservoir to the White House is not particularly interesting at the best of times, and it was only through the cucumber's beginning to take its effect that I kept awake. On reaching the White House about midnight we stopped for a minute or so to eat some chocolate before tackling Blackstone Edge. We still thought we were walking at a reasonable pace, whereas in fact we were walking fairly slowly. The moon by this time was very low in the heavens directly in front of us. By dazzling our eyes and casting strange shadows it made us lose our sense of depth and distance; consequently, being sleepy, we had to go very carefully to avoid stumbling down groughs. I was now walking in a sort of trance and had the feeling that there were many other people doing the walk besides ourselves. Neil had an impression that we were walking to some town on the south coast of England.



By the time we had crossed Buckstones Moss we were really suffering, others with sore feet, I with indigestion. Philip was the fittest here ; the lack of sleep didn't seem to affect him a great deal. After stumbling down the track towards Marsden, about three hours behind schedule, we arrived at Blake Lea at 3.30 a.m., to find to our surprise that Mrs Walker was still up, and that our meal was ready even down to the milk pudding that had been ordered. Mrs Walker did a magnificent job for us, and though by then we had got beyond appreciating it, we did so later.

The meal over, we snoozed awhile in our chairs, but soon got down to the job of doctoring each other's feet, some of which were now very sore. Philip and Vin left a little before the rest of us, for we were still wasting time bandaging ; we eventually set out just before 5.30 a.m. Having by now all changed into plim-solls, we decided to try and step it out a little on this last day, which had already dawned bright and clear. Frank, Neil, and I had one more attack of sleepiness going up the Wessenden, but that was to prove the last ; quite soon we were across Black Hill and on the Holmfirth road, eager to get to Bleaklow and our hundredth mile.

Near the George we again met Bill, who regretfully informed us that Philip had had to fall out, owing to suspected trouble with the arches of his feet. This must have been quite a blow after coming all that way. He had covered about 92 miles.

The three of us stopped for pints of tea at the George and then crossed the Woodhead reservoir and carried on up Stable Clough, whilst Bill and Philip went round to Edale in the car, hoping to see us arrive. The cucumber effect of the previous night returned to me on the way up the clough, making me slow down to a very steady plod. On the descent of Upper North Grain Neil's knee began to give trouble ; it gradually became worse as we went down the Snake road and by the time we had climbed up to Seal Stones on the short crossing he was in much pain. Here on the southern edge of Kinder above Grindsbrook, with over a hundred miles of rough moorland behind us and Edale at our feet, we realised that it would now soon be all over, with the last section nothing more than a footpath walk.

Fred Heardman was quite overwhelmed when we reached the Nag's Head, having given us up altogether until first Bill and

Philip and then Vin had arrived and told him that we were coming on very soon. As Neil's knee had not improved, he decided he would have to fall out here ; this was bad luck indeed, so near the finish. He had however the satisfaction of having covered over a hundred miles. Fred and Mrs Heardman had prepared a marvellous breakfast for us and we were now enjoying it—in the middle of the afternoon. Vin had carried on alone, for he was beginning to stiffen up when he waited about too long and wanted to make sure that one at least of the party got through. I was not too certain of the paths from Edale to Combs and would have had to do most of it on roads had not Philip come forward with the grand offer to start off walking again to pilot us over to Combs village. It was arranged that he should be picked up here by Alfred Williamson, who had kindly motored out to assist in transporting us home after the walk.

Leaving Edale we climbed up over the track to Chapel Gate, I feeling greatly refreshed after the meal at the Nag's, with my digestive troubles cleared completely. Philip had the route well planned ; soon we were passing under Castle Naze and descending to the village.

After a light meal, Frank and I set out on the last stretch, whilst Philip and Alfred went round to the Cat and Fiddle by car. On reaching the top of Long Hill, near White Hall, we could at last see our goal on the distant skyline. With dusk falling on our third night out, we descended to the old railway track in the Goyt valley in high spirits. It was quite dark when we reached the old road at the top of the Goyt, with only a mile separating us from the finish. As we walked up the road we were met by our guardian angel, Bill Pickstone, and other Rucksackers who had come out to meet us ; they brought the good news that Vin had arrived an hour and a half earlier. By 10.30 p.m. we had all arrived and were congratulating each other on the success, regretting only that Philip and Neil were out of it. Vin's time from Inn to Inn was 54 hrs 10 mins ; Frank and myself had taken 55 hrs 40 mins.

The Jubilee walk and all its planning and preparation had proved to be well worth while, every bit of it ; but thank goodness a Jubilee only comes once in fifty years !