

On the trail of Wainwright

Derek Cockell walks a new long-distance trail



When Alfred Wainwright devised his Coast to Coast Walk he hoped that it would inspire other walkers to create their own long-distance walking routes. He put it like this: “I want to encourage in others the ambition to devise with the aid of maps their own cross-country marathons and not be merely followers of other people’s routes...” (*A Coast to Coast Walk Introduction*).

Of course, most walkers are quite content to follow in the footsteps of others and David and Heather Pitt spent many years doing just that by completing an annual long-distance walk.

But for these admirers of Wainwright, the seed that had been sown finally bore fruit after years of planning and contemplating: a 247-mile re-creation of Wainwright’s 1938 Pennine Journey. With the assistance of members of The Wainwright Society, the book was finally published in 2010.

The success of the book encouraged David and Heather to devise another walking route,

the *Howgills and Limestone Trail*, this time based on two of Wainwright’s lesser-known works, *Walks on the Howgill Fells* and *Walks in Limestone Country*; both of which will be re-published as revised second editions during 2014.

It’s not hard to imagine Alfred Wainwright devising this seventy-six-mile walk itinerary himself, with the beginning and end in two of his favourite Pennine towns, Kirkby Stephen and Settle and, in between, a delightful ramble through some of the most splendid scenery on offer in this corner of England.

There is nowhere quite like the Howgill Fells, described by Wainwright as ‘sleek and smooth, looking, from a distance, like velvet curtains in sunlight, like silken drapes at sunset; they are steep-sided but gently domed, and beautiful in a way that few hilly areas are.’ (*The Howgill Fells*).

However, the quiet beauty of the Howgills is but a curtain-raiser to the spectacular lime-

stone landscapes of the Dales, the highlights of the walk here being the Ingleton waterfalls walk and ascents of two of the Three Peaks: Ingleborough and Pen-y-Ghent.

The transition occurs between Sedbergh and Barbon, with the traverse of Middleton Fell, a sprawling upland moorland covering some five-and-a-half square miles of territory beyond the western boundary of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Under plans to extend the boundaries of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the subject of a Public Enquiry in June 2013, the whole area of Middleton Fell would be brought into an expanded national park.

Middleton Fell is no place to be when the clag is down to your bootlaces or the rain is coming down in stair-rods. Navigation can be tricky, with a maze of paths across the lower moorland slopes, but in benign conditions it is a fellwalker's delight, with just the sheep and curlews for company. Most likely you will have the place to yourself as you climb to the 2000-foot summit of the fell, named Calf Top, where fine views may be enjoyed on a clear day. Wainwright said of Middleton Fell: 'The area is wild and little visited, but affords excellent walking on unenclosed sheep pastures.' (*Westmorland Heritage*).

From Calf Top there is a glorious walk along a gently descending two-and-a-half-mile grassy ridge that ends at Eskholme Pike where a descent is made to the attractive village of Barbon.

The views from the tops into the steep-sided valley of Barbondale more than compensate for the effort of the climb. Ahead lie the delights of limestone country and, a short distance from Barbon, the transition is complete



Left, Bowerdale. Above, pictured at Calf Top, with Bedlington terrier Beattie, are Alison Cockell, Heather and David Pitt and James Trevelyan

when walkers may stare (from a safe distance) into the dark recesses of the fearsome pot-hole, the Bull Pot of the Witches, before descending into the limestone gorge of Ease Gill.

For devotees of long-distance walking, this route has much to commend it. Seven days of varied landscapes, with sections of exciting hill climbing combined with gentle meandering through charming valleys, makes this a walk that will linger long in the memory. And if, on arriving at Settle, your appetite for hill-walking has not been assuaged, there is always the prospect of the return to Kirkby Stephen utilising the route of the Pennine Journey, making this a round trip of 134 miles! ■

The book, A Pennine Journey from Settle to Hadrian's Wall in Wainwright's Footsteps, edited by David Pitt, is £13.99, hardback, ISBN 9780711230835 published by www.franceslincoln.com.

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