

PENNINE WAY (Part four)

It's a funny thing pain, as in childbirth it can be excruciating but quickly forgotten. I have just completed the Pennine Way in eight and a half days, and for the last five I was in pain from blistered and sore feet. Yet as I write, the memory is fading, a smug, self-satisfied feeling is taking over.

According to Wainwright, the Pennine way is 270 miles long and has been completed in quick time by three other club members. William Scott started it off, back in 1990. It seems to have been a bit of a club event, with members meeting up with him along the way to run sections with him. Derek Dent also supported him in a mobile home. He took eight and a half days to complete the Way. Afterwards he said it was easy!

Next came Keith Hall. He did the first two days on his own after which Derek and his mobile double bed supported him. Again club members rallied round and met up with him. He set out with the aim of beating William's time and did so by a day.

The only other member I know of that has done the Way is Glyn Sawford who did it in style. He ran with a mate and was supported by a beautiful young masseuse and cook who massaged his feet and fed him bacon sarnies every few miles. No wonder he only took five days, he was always in a hurry to get to his next foot rubbing session!

I talked of doing it in seven days and think I could have achieved it if Derek had been able to support me, but on this occasion Frances had first call on his body. We had arranged to do it earlier in the year but when the day arrived I was poorly and had to call it off. I was doing it to celebrate my sixtieth birthday and was keen to fit it in this year, so I decided to go solo. It's the simple things that catch you out isn't it.



Raring to go!

I forgot to harden my feet off and also decided to wear trainers. Oh and I left the first map and my compass in Derek's car boot when he dropped me off at Edale for the start. Luckily I had reccied Kinder several times with Frank Makin. We only planned to do it once, but got lost. Shades of one man and his bog. (Ask Bernard). Frank, Derek and I had given Bleaklow the once over so I wasn't too worried. It proved to be a doddle. I leave Edale at nine fifteen and am lying on my back in the wood at Crowden by ten to two. I don't delay too long as I started after a night shift and was falling asleep. Black Hill used to be a nightmare, but slabs have been laid across the worse bit and so again it was easy. This is going too well and I begin to feel nervous, with good reason as it turns out. At Wessenden Res. I am sure I should cross, but the little yellow arrow points straight on. Perhaps I cross at a res. lower down. Wrong! Anyway, I finish up on the road below Standedge at six thirty soaked to the skin, glasses misted up, trying to get the bottle up to pass a pub and press on to the M62. I fail! My son gave me lodgings that night and returned me to the car park at Standedge at six forty-five the next morning. The purist will say that I should have gone back to the res., but I am sure I did several times the previous evening! 26miles.

I had a compass by now. A lad came in the pub and spoke to me because he was a runner too (I had shorts on) and was going to sleep in the car park before taking over a leg on a Pennine Way charity walk. I told him my story about the map and compass and he, while I was chatting to a caravan salesman, disappeared only to return with a compass, which he gave to me. Apparently he had found it along with several other items lying beside a path. After making sure he had had a good look for the body, I gratefully accepted. Now I was on the next map, so I was toolled up. I enjoyed Saturday. M62, Stoodly Pike, Calder Valley, the bridge over the canal was closed and the diversion sign pointed off towards Hebden Bridge, which I didn't want to visit again. So a bit of tightbridge walking and I was away on up the hill to Blackshaw Head and Colden (beware of the golden water on the way). I lunched on lamb shank at the Packhorse Inn. Refreshed I headed up into Bronti country only getting a little lost going down to Ponden Hall. Onwards to Lothersdale and a pint whilst I wait for my son. He insisted on meeting me again, but I wished he hadn't as I felt like going on. 34 miles=61 miles.

Sunday was my highest mileage day, and until I was beguiled by the café owner at Horton in Ribblesdale, I enjoyed it. The weather was lovely, and until I got beyond Malham Tarn, the going underfoot was good. I breakfasted on beans on toast in Gargrave at a bikers café, which made me think of Derek Frank, Dave and Bernard and Wednesday mornings. I was managing to run, (I use the term loosely), and was a happy little bunny. Even when I had to pass twenty or so geriatric

walkers twice! Before Malham I had raced them to a stile, as I didn't want to be held up by them. I then proceeded to cross several other stiles and a bridge and finished up on the road. Wrong! A bridge too far! Looking back I could see the walkers enjoying their stroll along the riverbank. A passing farmer gave me a smile and suggested I wade across the river, as it wasn't too deep. As it saved time, I did. Luckily the walkers were too busy oiling their joints to notice me as I passed again.



High Cup

Coming off Fountains Fell is when my feet started playing up. The descent from Pen-y-Ghent didn't help either. I sat in the café contemplating finishing for the day when the owner volunteered the information that the path up to Hawes was good, so I decided to press on. Its fifteen miles and apart from a mile or so of tarmac on the top and a few boggy fields down to the pot holes, it was all loose stone. This really did for my feet. I staggered into the YHA at ten thirty and collapsed into bed. After showering and dressing my feet. 46 miles=107 miles

Monday. I burst the blisters I had missed last night, dress them and set off. No mist on Great Shunner Fell, as there was when I reccied it, so an easy morning up to Thwaite where I had breakfast/ lunch. Stopped again at Tan hill where they had no electricity. No electricity, no pumps, no pumps no water. A couple sat outside hear me chuntering about no water and give me two litres! Another act of kindness. This is where I get teed off. I mis-read a sign and took it to mean that the official route is closed and so I do the Bowes alternative. I have a first here, up to my waist in peat bog, twice! I finally rejoin the official route at nine thirty at the end of a lane in Baldersdale. The lane ends in a farmyard. Feeling very low I enter and ask a young lad if they do B/B. Geronimo! His mum won't let me in her posh bit but offers me their camping barn. Air bed, clean sleeping bag, kettle and weatabix for the morning, all for £9-50. It doesn't get any better than this! There is even a wood burning stove, but I am too tired to bother. My feet are a real concern now. 27 miles (+ Bowes)=134 miles.

Tuesday, it is a real struggle to get going but eventually the painkillers kick in and I get away to Middleton-in-Teesdale, not a trip I wish to repeat. I dive into a sports shop and swap my trainers for boots and new socks. The Pharmacist round the corner winced at the sight of my feet and suggested I lie down for a few days with my feet in the air! He didn't mention the dark room, but I am sure he was thinking it. Suitably depressed I ask directions to the nearest hotel, but then decide that if I am to complete in a good time I must get closer to Dufton, so I press on to the hotel at High Force, six miles further on. It's closed but a sign says use the intercom. "Can I have a room please?" An incredulous voice replies, "you haven't booked, have you, don't you know it's the shooting season? Unless you book you won't get a room this time of the year." "But we don't shoot grouse in Nottingham so how was I to know?" "You should have booked, wait there". She knocked me down and then picked me up again. She took me to the shop where the lady that looks after it was just cashing up for the day and she did B/B. for £15 I had a lounge to myself with a coal/wood fire to toast my feet against all evening and an early breakfast. Cheaper than the hotel and a lot more cosy. It lifted my spirits again. 12 miles+146 miles

More painkillers and I set off for Cauldron Snout. I remain in good spirits as the boots are definitely kinder to my feet. Beyond Caldrons Snout, which is quite a sight, Wainwright mentions a crossing over Maize Beck being marked by cairns on both sides. I am beginning to fairly accurately measure the time I should take between two points and am sure I have gone too far when I spot a walker on the other side, so I cross over and scramble up the hill to the path just as Norman arrives. He didn't see any cairns either, so I feel better. Norman is an interesting character. I haven't met anyone to talk to all week, so I dip my bread in. He is also travelling across the ground faster than I, so I try to keep up, which gets me into Dufton at least half an hour earlier than I would have done. He has been walking from Lands End and is heading up to the other end, stopping off in the Borders, where he lives. He is sleeping out every night and seems to know every barn, church porch and dis-used building in the country. I am not sure he is the genuine article but I don't care. He takes my picture in front of High Cup and I buy him lunch and a drink in Dufton. He disappears to the public loo to do whatever and I set off for Garrigill. He passes me as I am looking at my feet and I tell him to press on although he offered to stay with me. He is sleeping in Greg's Hut and presumably needs to stake his claim. He asks for my address at this stage so that he can send me a postcard when he finishes his walk. Why do I feel like I have just been added to his list of free accommodation? More painkillers and I start to make progress again. I have another low moment on Great Dun Fell. Four blokes are just getting in a van. It's six-o'clock and I

still have Little Dun Fell, Cross Fell and seven miles down into Garrigill. "Ask them for a lift" says this voice in my head. "no" "go on" "no no" "go on go on" "no no no!". Anyway it passes and I press on. I needed to speed up, so I played a little mind game with myself. I started singing out loud "hurt me hurt me hurt me" to the tune of Hit Me With Your Rhythm Sticks. Daft I know but it worked, I was at Greg's Hut by seven thirty. I stopped long enough to say hello to Norman and pressed on, reaching the Post Office just in time to get a room. Next door for a drink and salted peanuts and then to bed. 33 miles=179 miles

They rise early for the papers and I was away for seven. A coast to coast cyclist gave me a fresh supply of painkillers, so that was handy. The morning was pleasant but uneventful apart from being swamped by hundreds of sheep being rounded up by a demented farmer on a quad bike. He seemed to think it was my fault his sheep would not go where he wanted them! A nice morning was followed by a wet afternoon and by the time I got to Hadrians Wall I really wasn't interested, sorry Keith! All I wanted was to see the sign for Twice Brewed. Anyway, after what seemed like an eternity, there it was. I forgot to mention it earlier, but I managed to lose my compass again and I was asking in the pub if the YHA sold them. A lady came over to me shortly after, when I had established that I couldn't buy one, and gave me hers! She lives in Attenborough and said she felt connected to me and couldn't let me cross the Cheviots without one. There are some lovely people about. 28 miles=207 miles

I wanted to stay in the hotel in Byrness on Friday, so another early start. The pub owner's mother left me weetabix out and a slice of cake wrapped in clingfilm for later. It's half a mile back up to the wall and by the time I get there I am moving well. I was glad to see Rapishaw Gap and to leave the ups and downs of the wall behind me. Into the forest. Why is it so muddy? I thought trees soaked up the water. Had a chat with a couple of sheep farmers at Shitlington Hall, how did it get that name, who said sheep prices were going back up again, so that's nice. Terrific fish and chips in Bellingham while I wait for the Pharmacy to open and then press on in good spirits until the Keilder Forest. It doesn't look like the map, there ain't no trees where they should be. I manage to lose my way shortly after entering it, and after several wanders in various directions, I find a track going east west. I want to go north but beggars can't be choosers, so I decide to go west. Eventually this brings me to a lovely glade with what turns out to be a maintained hut set in the middle. The sun is shining through the window as I enter and see everything to make a man comfy. I hear that voice again but resist. It's on the map, Blackburnhead. If I had turned right on my track I would have quickly hit the Pennine Way, such is life. I now make another error of judgement. It's getting late so I decide not to retrace my footsteps but follow a track north. I finish up at a picnic spot, just one hill away from Byrness, and this

is where I come unstuck again. Every track I follow up the hill is a dead end or doubles back. Looking east I can see lights and when it gets dark head towards them. The hills all around me were also alive with lights flashing on and off rather like giant fireflies, but I never saw a soul. I eventually reach the houses and knock on a door and ask. The answer is no but the chap that answered offered to run me up to the Hotel, a mile up the road. I give in to the voice. Another kindness. I am shown to my room by the landlady, who insists on bringing me my drinks and a sandwich, so that I can relax! Bliss. 34 miles=241 miles

Breakfast and away for eight. Only twenty-eight miles to go so can afford a lie in! Uneventful day, why have the sections with the worst reputations been my easiest?



The Schil

I didn't understand the diversion to the Roman ruins, I know we should be interested but the outline of a building etched into the country side leaves me cold. I pass a group that is walking a section with a leader. He is definitely not impressed with the way I am dressed. I left my wet weather gear in the pub on my first evening and so I have been using a binliner ever since when it rained, or threatened to. I was wearing it when he passed by tutting. I hadn't shaved for a week, so I don't suppose that helped! I chose the high level approach to Kirk Yetholm to finish in a bit of style. Pity the crowds had long gone. Wainwright's pint no longer exists, the landlord of the pub did offer me a half but, as he rang for a taxi, I refused. I should have stayed there but thought I could get a late train south, so I paid £28 for a taxi to the station only to find I was an hour late. So much for my lie in! I stayed B/B across from the station and eventually got home at three thirty on Sunday. Today is Friday and I am still in my pyjamas! Mary does spoil me. 29ish miles=270 miles,

Pain, what pain?

Tony Barry

Ps, To those of you who may say I strayed a little from the true path, just remember I did the Bowes alternative.