

Fame

A funny thing happened to me recently. I discovered I was famous. Or maybe it was infamous. I went to a couple of events, neither of which had anything to do with walking, and was recognised by people I don't think I know.

The first one was when I went to a chess match in wildest Worcestershire. That's not giving much away as most of Worcestershire seems to be wild, and the countryside isn't much better either. Anyway, at this chess match I happened to be wearing a LDWA sweatshirt. My opponent sat down and noticed this and said he was a member as well. I won't embarrass him by telling you his name (because he lost). Anyway when he discovered my name, he said "You're Back marker aren't you". Now I am always nervous about admitting this until I know what the questioner wants. However on this occasion, and LDWA events when my friend Jack goes around telling everybody, there is no escape. I do like your articles he said. Oh what a splendid fellow you are I thought, even if you are in the opposition. Given that a couple of other people said it at the Christmas lunch I reckon my readership must have doubled and is now approaching double figures. On that basis I may have to ask the editor for a pay rise. On the other hand, the two at the lunch could have just been after a drink.

The second occasion happened quite soon afterwards when I was at a wedding reception. A young lady (well younger than me anyway) came up and said "You're Roger Edwards aren't you". As darling Morticia was next to me, I couldn't very well deny it. "You don't remember me do you" the young lady said. Again I had to admit it, which didn't please her too much. She wouldn't tell me her name but as a clue she said we used to go walking together with the Peak Outdoor Folk forty years ago. Now those of you who do know me will know that I have difficulty remembering forty minutes ago never mind forty years. Eventually I had to ask a mutual friend who she was. And even after he told me, I still couldn't remember her. Although I could remember her husband. As Morticia was still with me, this may have been a diplomatic loss of memory on my part.

And then there was another incident, although this was a couple of years ago. I was driving up to Scotland overnight with a friend for a days walking. We stopped at Carlisle services at three o'clock in the morning for a cup of coffee etc. As we were about to return to the car, I felt a tap on the shoulder. I turned around and saw somebody I vaguely recognised. "I owe you three pounds" he said and gave me the said sum. He did owe me three pounds and being an honest fellow I expected him to pay sometime, but not at 3am at Carlisle services. Now after that we had a lousy days walking. My friend thought it was because of the rotten typically Scottish weather and the fact that we were knackered from the drive. I put it down to the fact I had to carry all that extra weight from the 3 pound coins that I hadn't bargained for.

Talking of extra weight, since I was ill and not been capable of doing a lot of walking, I have put on a fair bit of weight. On a recent walk with my friend Concrete Bob, when we stopped for lunch he took a photo of me tucking into a large Cornish pasty. He has since started circulating this photo, claiming this is what is making me put on weight, not the lack of walking. But I deny it. I eat Cornish Pasties a) because I am a Cornishman and like to support the Cornish industries b) because I like them and c) well I do have this figure to maintain.

Later on, on the same walk, I saw a couple with definitely miss-matched figures jogging along the Millers Dale Trail. I didn't know them but they did stand out. He was 6 feet plus, she was five feet minus. He was seventeen stone plus, she was seven stone minus, thin as a rake. And when I say they were jogging, they were probably going as fast as I ever did in my racing heyday, if anybody can ever remember when that was. It just goes to show that it takes all sorts. Not the liquorice ones either although I wouldn't mind the odd box or two of them right now.

There you now have all the details of my claim to fame. Probably more like 15 seconds worth rather than the 15 minutes we are all supposed to be due sometime, but anything is better than nothing.

Infuriating

One of the many names that Morticia calls me is “infuriating”. Amongst the others are charming, witty, and handsome. In my dreams anyway. The reason she says that I am infuriating is because I tend to navigate by walk points. Some people navigate by pubs, some navigate by railway stations, Morticia navigates by luck and guesswork, and I navigate by walk points.

For example on a recent drive to Backobe Yond we started out by passing Mow Cop, the start of the Staffordshire Way. You then drop down to Rudyard lake, the well-known watering hole on the Kipling Kaper, on past the Roaches, famous as part of the route of the White Peak 100 and the Moorlands Marathon. On to Buxton, start of the White Peak 100 and down to Bakobe Yond, past the start (or finish if you are going the other way) of the Monsal Trail. Now all of these things I point out to Morticia, and she says it is infuriating, claiming that I just do it to annoy her. Well to be honest, that is not true. I do it to everybody, not just her and probably everybody else gets annoyed as well, but they are just too polite to tell me.

And don't think it is just the local area I do it in. Last year we were on “holiday” in Torquay. We don't have proper holidays in this family, we just go away and work at something different. On our day off we caught the train to Okehampton, so naturally I had to show Morticia where the Dartmoor 100 went. Then we went up to Meldon Viaduct and I told her that the 100 went underneath. This is where old age took over. I climbed down to the bottom of the viaduct, but then couldn't find or couldn't remember where the 100 had gone. So a little plea from me. If you have a copy of the Dartmoor 100 route description, either paper or electronic, could you please send me a copy. Then I can try and find it again. In the same vein, we go to Perth / Perthshire twice a year on business and have a short break. Now I didn't know the exact route of the Heart of Scotland 100 but I did know where the checkpoints were and kept infuriating Morticia by pointing that this town or that village was going to have one.

Now you may think I am a bit of an anorak when it comes to walking routes, but it is not true. I just have a bit of knowledge and I like to show it off every now and then to anyone who is daft enough to listen. Most people have learnt by now to change the topic of conversation quickly, but I am still able to wind dearest Morticia up every now and then. One advantage of knowing all these routes is that I never really get lost. I mean really lost. There are occasions when I am not where I should be, but know enough of the area to work out an approximate direction to head in to get me back on course.

There was an instance a few years ago when I was doing the Wellington Boot for the third time. At one point the route description said “on reaching main road turn left”. Having done the walk twice before you would have thought that I would know what I was doing. Wrong! For some reason my senile brain decided to turn right. Unfortunately the next couple of instructions in the description could be made to work on the way I had gone so I finished up well off course. I did know that the proper route did a sort of semi-circle at that point and headed off to re-join the main route a bit further along from where I had left it. So I only did an extra mile instead of an extra two miles. And I reached the next checkpoint just before the sweep team were going to call out Air/Sea Rescue, the Coastguards, Mountain Rescue and the Police to try and find me. Actually they were sat there having a cup of tea wondering where has that silly blighter got to now. They didn't appear to be bothered in the slightest.

Not that I make a habit of appearing after the sweep team I hasten to add. One other time I recall was on the Otter 40 in the Peak District when I was walking with a couple of friends. Morticia met us at Castleton,

about halfway with a change of clothes for me. We set off up Cave Dale, a long grind for the likes of me. We were nearly at the top when I realised that I had left my tally in the shirt I had changed. I turned round, rushed back down passing the sweepers on the way up. Fortunately I found Morticia, retrieved my tally and set off again. This time the sweep new what the silly old blighter was doing so they hadn't even bothered to wait for me, although my two companions had. We eventually caught up with and passed the sweepers and a couple of other walkers about a mile from the finish. So all was well in the end.

Anytime 100's

I went up to Perthshire to help out on a couple of checkpoints on the Heart of Scotland 100. Several of my friends / acquaintances (yes I do have some) went up for a few days before and after the event. Apart from organizing and helping, they walked the route in their own time. The subject was broached whilst I was there about "Anytime 100's". This is a topic I brought up a while ago but it eventually fizzled out but now seems to be a good time to bring it up again.

Now I have taken part in 100's successfully and unsuccessfully in the past. However, since my illness a few years ago, walking 100 miles in one go is beyond me. Even to do one over five or seven days is probably beyond me. The spirit is willing but the body is definitely weak. I keep thinking (hoping) there are other people like me. People who would like to walk the 100 route, but in their own time. Not only just the current one either, but any 100 that has been done in the past. Now that all the 100 route descriptions are on the LDWA website, there is no reason why you can't do the 1980 or the 1990 100 if that is what takes your fancy.

Currently I go out once a week with my brother, a veteran of the Pennine Way and other assorted walks. We are walking the route of the 1988 White Peak 100, each week doing the next bit of the route to the following check point. By the time you read this we hope to have completed the route. Then we have decided to start on another one, but we haven't decided which one yet. Now as only 10% of LDWA members take part in the 100 each year, perhaps we might encourage the other 90% to do a 100, even if it is an "Anytime 100".

The LDWA may think about splashing out and awarding anybody who does five "Anytime 100's" a special badge. We keep records of all those who have completed the Munroes, the Wainwrights, the National Trails and the 100's, and no doubt several other things that I have already forgotten about, so why not keep a record of all those who complete an "Anytime 100". Of course there would have to be some qualification rules, but it should not be too difficult a task to work them out.

One thing myself and my brother have learnt on the walk is that you have to be adaptable. Route descriptions soon become out of date. I was responsible for the 1998 Route Description and know of a few parts of that you have to change for one reason or another. Trying to walk a route twenty years later does pose the odd problem because some of the features have changed. Simple things like the white gate that is now a red gate are easy to handle. A dirty great cow shed built across what was the route is a little bit harder to overcome. The footpath had long since been diverted but when you are blindly following the route description you don't notice these things until it is too late. Turn left at the Crown and Anchor is also confusing when the pub is now called The Welcome Inn. But it does makes life exciting doesn't it.

Some route descriptions have also included sections on private property, the access to which was granted specifically for the event. These would need to be navigated around, another reason why you have to be adaptable. We have also found that on a couple of occasions it was safer to take a slightly longer footpath route rather than follow a road section in the original description.

One interesting problem we had right at the beginning. We knew that the walk HQ was in a particular school. The problem we had was that the route instructions said follow the signs from the school to the start. Needless to say after twenty plus years the signs were not still there, so we had a little problem working out where the start actually was but we sorted it out eventually. I have to say that I would have expected the usual efficiency of LDWA officials to have made sure the signs were removed within twenty hours never mind twenty years.

Conversely, there have been a couple of places where we expected the route description to be out of date but it wasn't. At one point the route description stated that you should pass to the left of a derelict building. We thought that the derelict building might either have gone altogether or that it might now be a 6 bed roomed mansion. But no, what was a derelict building in 1988 was still a derelict building twenty years later. In another place it said turn on to footpath by broken fingerpost. Well what was a broken fingerpost in 1988 was still a broken fingerpost which definitely did not look as if it had ever been repaired.

Even if you don't fancy walking the whole of an old 100 route, looking at the route descriptions on the web site could give you some ideas for future shorter walks of your own. Just remember that you may have to do some creative route finding to make them work.

Home Thoughts From Abroad

I am told that walking and generally exploring our countryside has never been as popular as it is today. Yet almost every time I pick up a walking magazine there is some article extolling the virtues of walking in the Alps or New Zealand or Southern Patagonia. Even Strider has been known to do it on occasions. Why can't we have a few more on the glories of Britain.

I know there are various places in the Lake District, Snowdonia, Dovedale and the Wye Valley, to name but a few, that attract visitors by the thousand and that is what generally makes me avoid them. I am not really anti-social (don't listen to those people who say I am) but I do like a bit of peace and tranquillity when I go walking. And there are lots of places in this country where I can find peace and wonderful scenery and no crowds without going foreign. Places like the Borders, Dartmoor, the Long Mynd and the North York Moors can provide miles of walks with only the odd kindred soul to be seen, as long as you avoid the touristy bits.

Just recently I was out on a walk that part was in the aforementioned Dovedale. In the four miles before Dovedale we saw four other walkers. In the two miles in Dovedale we saw a couple of hundred other walkers, even managing to pass some of them unusually for me. In the last four miles we only saw one other walker, and I think she was just out walking her dog. Guess which part(s) of the walk I preferred.

Now I would love to find other lesser known attractions and explore them. But I need some help from the magazines to point me in the right direction. I do suppose the problem is that it could lead to a catch-22 type situation. If the magazines publicise a place so that I and countless others can visit it, then it will no longer be the peaceful tranquil place that I want to go to. You can't win can you.

At least my preference for walking long distance paths instead of peak-bagging does get me to some different and quite often wonderful places. If it hadn't been for the Cleveland Way, there are parts of the North York Moors I would never even have dreamt of visiting. The same applies to some of the "lesser"

paths. The West Mendip Way for instance may not be as strenuous or have the same grandeur as the uplands of Northern England or Scotland or Wales, but it is a very pleasant walk through a pleasant part of the country (if you ignore the crossing of the M5). Not having the time (or finances) to take 2 or 3 or 4 weeks off at one go, I found the West Mendip Way very suitable for a weekend walking.

The same can be said about doing different challenge walks. Some people go back and do the same walks year after year, which of course is what the organisers want. They need a hard core that they can rely on to turn up to make it worth while running an event and then the one-offers are the icing on the cake. When I was able to do the challenge walks, I used to fit into both categories. There were 2 or 3 certain walks that I would try to do every year, but the rest of the challenge walks I did as a one-off. Do it this year, go somewhere else next year. This gave me the chance to see different parts of the country. Sometimes it was even different parts of the same part of the country. In my time I have done quite a few in the Yorkshire Dales that seem to criss-cross each other or even utilise the same bit of route in places. I can sincerely say congratulations and well done to somebody who has completed all twenty runnings of the wonderfully organised Bedale Bumble or whatever, but sorry it is not my cup of tea and I would like to see somewhere different next year.

That has probably lost me a few more friends amongst event organisers. So the number I now have left can probably be counted on the fingers of one foot. Though there are those of you who know my propensity for falling over who will probably query the fact that I have one foot. They seem to think I don't have any feet at all judging by the amount of time I have spent on my knees and backside on some walks.

Anyway, my own feeling is that you can't beat the beauty, peace and tranquillity of the British countryside for some good walking. Besides, where in South Patagonia would you find a good old British pub for a lunchtime or end of walk pint? So next you time to jet off to the Himalayas or wherever, just think what you are leaving behind. Apart from the 29000 feet of climbing, you can get it all in this country.

Sayings

Have you ever wondered about the way well known phrases and sayings apply to walking? No, I hear you say. Well let me enlighten you then.

The one that nearly always comes to mind in my case originated from one or other of our less well esteemed Prime Ministers. The phrase in question is No Gain Without Pain. I know that in its original context it had nothing to do with walking, or even physical pain. I am sure that I am not alone in thinking that I have had a lot of pain from walking, but I am not quite sure where the gain is, or was. I am quite looking forward to somebody inventing No Pain Without Gain. Even better to my way of thinking would be No Pain Full Stop.

Another saying that doesn't really have anything to do with walking is Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder. This is usually in the context of reminiscing about walks you did twenty years ago and how wonderful they were. The reality probably was that you got lost several times, it poured with rain all day, but you had a wonderful time in the pub afterwards. The walking equivalent for this saying is something like Absence Makes The Pain Grow Dimmer. How often have you had a wretched day, staggered into the finish of an event totally knackered and said the most famous words in walking history- NEVER AGAIN. And how often have twelve months later been back on the start line of the same event, raring to go. With most of the walkers I know, I would think there is a large percentage of them have at one time or another gone back to an event having said Never Again. Never Say Never Again is what I say. Good title for a film or book there I would imagine.

What Goes Up Must Come Down. Now there is a saying that is true for walkers, at least for those of you who go peak-bagging. Once you have gone to the top, you can only go down. Knowing how much I like climbing, it is actually the opposite that sometimes fills me with dread. What Goes Down Must Go Back Up Again. It is not the descent into the valley that worries me, though I do know some people that don't like it. For me it is the thought that having reached the valley floor, you then have to climb up out the other side. Oh horror!

Now no doubt most of you know how good I am at tripping up, falling over and generally making myself look idiotic. Pride Goes Before A Fall. Except that in my case it is not pride, more likely clumsiness or occasionally not paying attention by admiring the scenery instead of looking where I was going. The usual reply to the one person who is not laughing their heads and asks if I am OK is that yes I am OK, only my pride is hurt. Well to be honest, I have fallen over so often that I can't imagine that I have any pride left. Still, it does keep the rest of the group amused, that is on the few occasions when I am still walking with the group and not been left behind.

Following Like Sheep. A phenomenon which we have all come across at one time or another. It usually takes the form of a walker striding out across the moors, obviously knows where he is going. A group following a little way behind, not sure where they are, but as the chap in front seems to know where he is going we will follow him. Three miles later you discover that he is not on the same challenge event as you and you should have turned off two miles ago. That should teach you to keep an eye on the route description but it never does. Reminds me of a slightly comical situation I came across a few years ago. I was on top of Ingleborough (yes I do go up hills occasionally) and I discovered there were two different challenge walks going over Ingleborough that day. Both had a checkpoint next to the trig point and it was terribly confusing as nobody seemed to know which checkpoint they had to go to. Worse still, nobody seemed to know which pack to follow after they left the checkpoint. I thought it was fun.

And how about Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining. We all know better than that don't we. More likely Every Cloud Has A Black Lining, and that black lining is just about to tip it down right where you are walking. Everywhere else bathed in glorious sunshine and you are stuck in the middle of a tropical downpour. At least until you have managed to get your waterproof out of your rucksack, then it stops.

There are a few common or garden sayings that can be modified to apply to walking. No doubt you can think of many more that will fit as well.

So keep on walking and may all your walks be long ones.

Downpours

Thoughts of torrential downpours like those that we got last month are enough to send all but the most dedicated (insane) walkers scurrying back to bed. But I had arranged to meet little brother and do a few miles along the Pennine Way, so I crawled along, got ready and set off, hoping the weather would improve. At least by the time we met up at Torside it had stopped raining, temporarily.

We set off, crossed the Woodhead road, passed above Crowden Youth Hostel and started climbing. We had decided that if the weather was too bad, we would just do an easy walk around the reservoirs, but it seemed alright when we set off. We had noticed in passing that the reservoirs all looked half full (or half empty depending on your point of view).

The route description we were following was full of nasty swear words starting with the letter A, such as ascend, ascent, ascending. The only descending seemed to be the shivers going down my spine, so perhaps

we should have stuck to going around the reservoirs anyway. But we didn't and soon after passing the Youth Hostel it started raining again. And again. And again. And then it started raining even harder.

We came to the conclusion on the walk that enough rain fell on us in the next couple of hours to have filled the reservoirs twice over. Streams that were normally three inches wide and two inches deep were suddenly three feet wide and two feet deep. Crossing them became similar to trying to wade across Niagara Falls, but more difficult. I hear you ask, why didn't we give up, turn back, go a different way. Answer, because we were dedicated professionals, we don't like to be beaten. The route description said go this way, so we were going this way come hell or high water, or both on this particular day. Alternatively the answer is because we were insane.

For those of you who know the Pennine Way after Torside, there is not a shred of cover anywhere. No hiding place, so we just got wetter and wetter. Eventually we crossed the top and started back down to the car park. Funnily enough there didn't seem to be any more water in the reservoirs than when we had passed them earlier in the day. In fact I was inclined to believe there was more water in my rucksack than there was in the reservoirs. We didn't see many people that day. The car park was empty when we set off and it was empty when we got back. You would have thought that there would be some other people out having fun that day but there wasn't.

Also that wasn't the end of my trials and tribulations for the day. Not by a long chalk. When I got home, damp, soggy, muddied but unusually not bloodied, Morticia took one look at me and asked why did I want to go out on a day like this. I must be mad she said, and I couldn't readily disagree with that. I had been this mad when she married me, so she knew what she was letting herself in for. On and on she went, she wouldn't let me forget it. I couldn't disagree with her on this either, but only because I couldn't get a word in edgeways. If you were to ask me which is more dangerous, walking across Niagara Falls or arguing with Morticia, I would have to plump for arguing with Morticia. Some people have lived to tell the tale after Niagara Falls.

And still my troubles didn't end there. Although I was wearing waterproofs there is only so much water a waterproof can take and my waterproof had taken more than the allotted amount. Later that evening I extracted a sodden wallet from my sodden waterproof. Then from my sodden wallet I extracted some sodden banknotes. Unfortunately the dye had run in my sodden wallet and stained all my sodden banknotes a deep reddy browny colour. So I had to take them to my bank to change them.

Some of you may know, when banknotes are taken around in security cases, the cases will spray the notes with a red dye if the cases are tampered with. And what colour were my banknotes? Suffice to say that the bank eventually changed them for me but only after I was given the third degree by what seemed to be KGB trained agents.

All this hassle and aggro just because I decided to go walking on a bad weather day. I used to say those people who only went walking on nice days were wimps. Given the torture I went through on this walk, maybe they are sensible. I did think seriously about joining them but decided I was too old to change the habits of a lifetime, so I will remain insane.

So keep walking, enjoy them and may all your walks be long ones. And don't forget your wellington boots on days like this one was.

Plans

I recently went out for a walk with my brother, Phil, and his wife Jill, and my friend from the chess club, Bill. Started to make me feel ill, especially when they mention the dreaded “h” word – hill. But I managed to keep going by sheer Will power.

Now I like going walking with Bill. He is a faster walker than me, but he is almost blind and so cannot go rushing off as he needs me to show him the way. Not like a lot of walkers I know who would dash ahead, have a 10 minute rest whilst I caught up and then dash off again as soon as I had, not allowing me a rest. Bill even stays with me when there are plenty of other people around. We recently went out with Concrete Bob, Stormer Norma and a few members of the local rambling club. Bill said he was grateful I was wearing my Plymouth Argyle hat that day so he could see where I was and catch up with me after crossing a stile or something like that.

Another walk I went on with Bill recently became an exercise in how many different plans we could have in one day. Plan A was to park in a public car park and do a circular walk along a bit of old railway track recently opened as a footpath, returning along a parallel river valley. Plan A was scuppered by the County Council digging up the main road and blocking access to the car park. So we, or to be more precise – I, hastily devised Plan B. This involved going to a different car park and walking alongside the river to join the original route part way around.

This turned out fine for the first bit, we reached the car park and parked up with no problem, then set out along the river. We saw however that the river was in full spate after recent heavy rain. This was a little worrying for our walk along the river valley, which was basically the river, the footpath and cliffs either side. So Plan B became Plan C as we decided to do the route in reverse direction so we would find out what the valley was like near the beginning of the walk instead of at the end. Well when we got there, the river valley turned out to be the river with cliffs either side, the footpath being somewhere under the river.

So Plan C became Plan D as we climbed out the valley did a two mile diversion along the top before dropping down to our original car park. By now it was early afternoon on a dull December day. We had eventually reached the start of our original walk. One hour later, when we were about two-thirds of the way along this new section of railway track, I suddenly had a horrible thought. The car park that I had parked in was one of those that the council locked at dusk. And it was now getting towards dusk.

Plan D suddenly became Plan E and a mad dash was made via a totally unplanned route back to the car park, hoping that the council man would be late. On the way we were working out what Plan F would be if we got to the car park and it was locked. Fortunately we didn't need it as the council man arrived at the same time as we did and went off to empty the ticket machine whilst we got changed. So we abandoned Plan F, instigated Plan G and went off to a local café for a warming cup of coffee.

Now if you go back thirty or forty years, as I do, you were supposed to tell somebody responsible where you were going, in case of trouble. That rule would have been well and truly broken on this walk. These days of course you have a mobile phone to call for help if you get into trouble. That is what Plan F would have been. Or it would have been if somebody had remembered to charge their phone the previous night. But I didn't know that at the time and would have been left with inventing another plan or two. I was told by Bill that it was a sign of senility catching up with me, but he is wrong on that point. Senility galloped past me a long time ago.

So keep walking, enjoy them and may all your walks be long ones.

Coast to Coast

Currently I go out once a week with my brother, a veteran of the Pennine Way and other assorted walks. We are walking the route of the 1998 White Peak 100, each week doing the next bit of the route to the following check point. My brother and his wife walked the Pennine Way over a period of 10 years, although they did lose a year to the dreaded foot and mouth epidemic in the middle. When they had finished the Pennine Way, he suggested to his better half that they could try the Coast to Coast. No Way (or words to that effect) was the reply, which is why he and I started on our Anytime 100 routine and we are now on our third.

The original and most famous of the Coast to Coast is a 200-ish mile walk devised by Alfred Wainwright, from St. Bees Head to Robin Hoods Bay to be covered in about 14 days. I seem to recall that Wainwright stated that he did not intend people to necessarily stick to these daily stages, or even to his route. Possibly because some of his route wasn't on public rights of way at the time. This has led to people designing their own routes and recently I have met a few people who were doing their own Coast to Coasts, some interesting, some not. And I have also found a ridiculous one that I thought even I could do.

I will start with the ridiculous one, probably not fit for proper LDWA members, only dreamers like me. I was on holiday with darling Morticia and we decided to visit Flamborough. It was a lousy day and when we got to the car park by the lighthouse we decided we weren't going to get out of the car. Then Morticia decided she wanted an ice cream so one of us had to get out. No prizes for guessing who. Anyway, whilst we were driving along we went past a point where there was a sign pointing left saying Footpath - Coast 1 mile, and there was a sign pointing to the right saying Footpath - Coast 2 miles. I thought now there is a Coast to Coast walk that even I could do.

On a recent event I was talking to a couple of people from Devon and Cornwall group who said they were going to do a 25 mile Coast to Coast walk in Cornwall. Only this was from the Bristol Channel to the English Channel and back, via Redruth I think. Now I have to admit that despite being born in Cornwall, I had no idea that you could get from one coast to another and back in such a short distance, other than around Lands End and the Lizard. Shameful I call it, I should be stripped of my Cornish citizenship and publicly flogged. Come to think of it you could probably invent another "ridiculous" coast to coast walk on the Lizard.

A couple of friends of mine from Bristol who are long distance walkers, but not members of the LDWA despite my best efforts, decided to do their own version of the Coast to Coast. They went from Lands End to Lowestoft. I don't know their route but do know they used the South West Coast Path and the Ridgeway. They also stayed outside of the M25. I think in the end they did about 350 miles. Given Wainwright's statement that he did not intend people to stick rigidly to his route, this one is probably the only one he would have approved of.

I also thought there should be a Scottish Coast to Coast, so I did a search on the internet and found 5 of them. However none of them seemed official, more walking tours arranged by various companies who made their own choice of routes. Interestingly one of them was from east to west, everyone else, including Wainwright, goes from west to east. Something to do with the prevailing wind I am told. The east to west was from Perth to Fort William. Amongst the others were Oban to St. Andrews and Applecross to Bonar Bridge. If you want to know where the last 2 are you will have to look them up, but the description of it sounded wild and tough.

Being an old man of somewhat unsound mind and character, I have this recollection from my youth sometime in the 60's or 70's that there was another coast to coast craze around then. This involved going from the west coast to the east coast of America. I thought some of the people doing funny coast to coasts in this country were a bit daft but deciding to do the American one makes them, and me, seem totally normal. One of the few times I could ever make that claim.

So keep on walking, enjoy your own coast to coasts, and may all your walks be long ones.

Stress

Now as a lot of you may know, other than walking my great passion is playing chess. Chess in England is run by the English Chess Federation and there are equivalent organisations for Scotland and Wales. The President of the ECF was a television personality who was a chess player. Although the president was nominally a figurehead role with a few duties attached to it, our incumbent started to have delusions of grandeur and started to do a lot of things that upset many people amongst the rank and file.

So it was decided to put in a candidate against him at the AGM. Being the mug that I am, I allowed myself to be nominated as that candidate. Not that I expected to win, but hopefully to gain enough votes to remind the figurehead that he should tone his actions down a bit. So far so good. Then as more and more people started to support me, the figurehead started to get worried and there was a vague possibility that he might actually lose. So to save face (we think) he withdrew stating that with forthcoming commitments he would no longer be able to devote enough time to it.

So that was it you would think, I would become the new president. Don't you believe it. There then started a smear campaign with people starting to say how useless I was and that I wasn't fit to be president. Somebody pointed to a mistake I had made in 1988 saying that anybody doing that wasn't competent to be president. Another person referred to a fiasco in 2001 that I was supposedly responsible for. Actually I wasn't responsible for the fiasco, I was responsible for trying to sort it out and failing. As part of this campaign, delegates were being asked not to vote for me but to vote for "None of the above". It all became very stressful. Very stressful.

What has all this got to do with walking you may ask. Not a lot I would say, especially as far as stress is concerned. When I am out walking I don't have to worry about who is going to stab me in the back, usually because nobody is behind me to see my back. All I have to worry about on my walks is "Where am I?" or "How do I get back to the car from here?". Of course there was a recent walk that was a bit stressful when it took longer than expected and we thought we may not get back to the car park before it was locked up. But it didn't worry us that much, we all had our bus passes with us.

Of course I always find reading route descriptions stressful, especially the bits that say ASCEND, or UPHILL. When I used to do 100's I used to get worried looking at checkpoint closing times and thinking I haven't got enough time to do that section. Usually on the event itself I was too exhausted to worry about things like that, it was more likely "will I ever find the next checkpoint".

Since I had to give up proper long distance walking, I have helped out occasionally at checkpoints and with event organisation. One thing that is noticeable at these events is that participants seem to be a lot more pleasant. When leaving a checkpoint nearly everybody who is still on their feet says "thank you" for helping out and looking after them.

This is almost unheard of in the chess world. Even when somebody like my acquaintance Gerald gets lost and turns up 2 hours after the checkpoint closing time, there is still somebody there to greet him and make him a cup of tea. In my time, I have spent a great many hours on challenge walks with sweep teams. Almost invariably they will try and help, to coax you along to the next checkpoint. Though there was one time when I was sweeping at about 75 miles on a 100, the last walker objected to being told that they needed to go a bit quicker to reach the next checkpoint before it closed. Fortunately, or otherwise, she retired at the checkpoint. Fortunate for me as I didn't have the heart to throw her out for being out of time.

I also recall a story on the Dartmoor 100 when a walker had to retire when his companion was taken to hospital with hyperthermia. When she was released they went to finish. The organiser then allocated a sweeper to him, drove him to where they had retired and let him walk back to the finish from there with the sweeper. I seem to think that he still managed to finish before I did, but that is not the point.

Given that the ECF and the LDWA are of similar size as regards number of members, there does seem to be a lot less bickering in the LDWA, but I have never stood for office in the LDWA, so it may be a false impression. I would like to finish by saying THANK YOU to all LDWA members for being mostly nice to me and helping to restore my faith in humanity.

Protests

A few years ago I was walking one of my own routes in the Peak District when I came across a group of campers putting up tents across the footpath. Daft place to put up their tents I thought. Whilst it cannot be said to have been all that far from civilisation, it was certainly a good way away from running water and other amenities. It was also right on the edge of a disused quarry.

When I reached their campsite I discovered they weren't your usual LDWA or Boy Scout type campers. They were environmental protestors who had heard that planning permission had been given to some firm to re-open the quarry and they were protesting about pollution, noise, dust, affect on the environment, spoiling the scenery, etc., etc. I wished them luck and continued on my weary way.

Now I have to admit that I was never a wholehearted supporter of protests such as this. If somebody wants to do some quarrying, then it would probably bring quite a few much needed jobs into the area. This always seemed to me to be much more important than not spoiling one of my walking routes. After all, the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors have more than enough walks in them to last me my lifetime, I can always go somewhere else to walk if somebody has "spoil" my area with a quarry or a mobile phone mast or something else.

However it was brought home to me in a different way a couple of years later that maybe I should do something about it. I was attending an exhibition at Perth (Scotland, not Australia). One of my customers told me that he ran, maybe still runs, a Bed and Breakfast guest house in the middle of nowhere, Dunblane being the nearest place of civilisation. He relied heavily on walkers and tourists for his business. Then they went and built a dirty great wind farm, not quite on his doorstep but filling the view from his lounge window. There were protests at the time, mainly from nimby's, but these were overruled/ignored and the wind farm was built. The upshot of this was that it ruined the scenic beauty of the area so that all the walkers and tourists went somewhere else, as I would have done. So my customer's business slumped, so he couldn't spend as much with me, so my business slumped and so on. It may not mean much in the terms of the global economy but it did bring it home on a personal level.

Of course in walking terms the most famous protest of all was the 1932 Kinder Mass Protest. The protest saw groups of ramblers "invade" the moors on Kinder Scout and have a series of scuffles or pitched battles with the local gamekeepers, depending on which account you read.

The walkers were angry at being denied access to the moorland and the campaign eventually led to the creation of National Parks in England and Wales in the fifties. The mass trespass, on 24 April 1932, saw two groups of walkers set off from the Derbyshire villages of Hayfield and Edale to traverse the mountain. There were confrontations with gamekeepers employed by the Duke of Devonshire and five ramblers were later

jailed for their part in the protest. There is plaque commemorating the event in the car park near the Kinder reservoir dam.

We have recently passed a significant anniversary of the trespass and many events were organised to celebrate it, including a gathering of hundreds or thousands of ramblers to recreate the famous protest. I don't know if the present Duke of Devonshire attended, interesting thought that I will leave you to find out for yourselves. But it does go to prove that some protests are worthwhile from a walking perspective. I wonder if a similar situation were to arise now, how much support would it receive from the LDWA or the Ramblers Association. The only protests I seem to get involved with these days usually comes from walk leaders. Something along the lines of Hurry up, we want to finish the walk before it goes dark, or perhaps you can substitute, before the pub closes.

Just in case you are wondering what happened to the original protestors at the start of the article, they stayed for several years, but eventually an agreement was reached with the quarrying company that allowed the company to quarry somewhere else that nobody cared about and withdraw their planning application for this particular quarry. So these protestors were successful as well and it didn't take them 20 years to achieve their goal. But they didn't have a world war to contend with either.

Categories

I usually go out walking each week with some friends. We have been frequently compared to the 3 "gentlemen" in Last Of The Summer Wine, Compo, Clegg and Foggy. I tend to be cast as Foggy but I don't know why. Still I suppose it is better than being cast as Compo, or even Norah Batty.



More recently we have sometimes been compared to the trio of pensionable hikers in a book called *The Hike* by Don Shaw. Don Shaw is known to my brother's better half as she worked in the post office in the village where he lives.

The Hike is all about some of the walks they do and the interesting characters that they meet. It all takes place in the Peak District, more specifically mostly in the White Peak. Now that is my/our local and normal walking area. But on the walks I take them on Phil and Bill will tell you that we hardly ever meet anybody, never mind anybody interesting. My excuse was that I go walking to get away from people, not to go where everybody is going. But once when I came up with that excuse I received the reply that the only person I tried to get away from was Morticia.

So we started to categorize the walks. Given that rock climbers have their categories for how difficult a climb is, mountaineers have categories such as Munros or Nuttalls or a dozen other different categories to define the shape and size of each peak, we decided to invent a system to categorize each walk we do. So a Category 0 walk was, quite logically for us, a walk when we didn't meet a single other walker. Category 1 was for 1-5 other walkers, Category 2 was for 6-15 and so on.

So having decided on the size of the category, we then thought we should decide who got counted. After much debate, it was decided that we would only include people who we thought were proper walkers. No joggers, cyclists, horse riders and especially, no dog-walkers. Not that it made a great deal of difference on some of our walks.

But there are border line cases. There was the time when I managed to arrange three successive Category 0 walks. On the fourth walk we were well on the way to another Category 0 when we met a party of about 30 schoolchildren with a couple of teachers on a geography field trip. So for the rest of the walk there was a discussion as to whether they should count. Bill and Phil trying to demolish my record said they should. As leader of the walk I insisted that they shouldn't as they weren't proper walkers. We can't remember who won the argument but I am certain that I did.

Also playing havoc with the categories at certain times of the year are occasionally the dozens of schoolchildren you meet doing their Duke of Edinburgh Awards hike. Are they proper walkers or aren't they? Do they count or don't they? I think I have mentioned in the past some of the discussions we have had about Duke of Edinburgh participants. We could never decide who was more insane, them for carrying large 30 pound packs whilst walking, or us for not bothering with tents and other paraphernalia and walking through the night. I think we win hands down.

Another problem we came up with was whether we should have sub-categories, or perhaps sub-divide walks. This came about on another walk we did. We started from Rowsley, went over to Haddon Hall (not via the A6), then towards Youlgreave. We didn't meet a single walker on this stretch. However, we then went up Lathkill Dale and passed/were passed by about 500 walkers. Then from Monyash to High Low I would like to say we didn't meet another walker but we did actually meet one so it wouldn't have been a Category 0 walk anyway. But Category 51 did seem to be a bit of a harsh rating for that particular walk.

Also the time of year will have some bearing on the category. Doing a "popular" walk midweek in midwinter will almost certainly give a different rating than if we did it on a fine summer's day during half-term. Conversely though, a category 0 or 1 walk on a fine summer's day will probably still be a Category 0 or 1 walk midweek in midwinter. I blame fair weather walkers (not LDWA members of course) for ruining our categorisations in summer. Distance may also have some effect on the category, but as most of our walks tend to be the same length it probably does not affect us as much as it would some other people.

National Parks

There are 16 members of the National Parks family, at least I think there are. Maths was never my strong point, as can be testified by anyone who has seen me using the piece of elastic I am reputed to use when measuring distances on a map. The National Parks are areas of beautiful countryside mostly but not entirely in the more hilly/mountainous areas of the UK. They are areas of countryside that everyone can visit and enjoy, although of course some are more popular than others.

To me that is a problem. As I think I have mentioned occasionally over the past few years, I go walking to get away from people, not to go where everybody else goes. The problem is that National Parks encourage people to visit them, I would guess that in a lot of them tourism provides a sizeable chunk of their income. It does seem to me that a lot of effort is now going into producing more facilities to encourage more visitors, possibly to the detriment of the local community. So the more visitors to a place, then the less enjoyment I get from it.

The less charitable of my two friends would say that as I am an anti-social grumpy old so-and-so I don't enjoy anything anyway. The more charitable of the two would leave out the word grumpy. Anyway, for whatever reason, I tend to avoid too many visits to the Lake District and Snowdonia. Mind you, my feelings about climbing mountains could also be a factor there.

The Peak District, which is my local park, can also be very busy in places. But you may remember from a recent article that I can usually find places to go walking that nobody else seems to know about or want to go. I assume that the same will apply to all the other parks as well, but you do need local knowledge to know the quiet places.

By the early 1930s public interest in the countryside, together with a vast improvement in public transport, was generating increasing friction between ramblers seeking access to the countryside and landowners. Major demonstrations, such as the mass trespass of Kinder Scout, led several voluntary bodies to take up the cause of public access. Events were delayed by WWII but the National Parks act was passed in 1949 and there has been a growing number since then.

Overall I would suggest that the National Parks are a good thing, encouraging more people to get into the countryside, but there are drawbacks even if you ignore my dislike of crowds. The biggest drawback to my mind is the damage to the ecology. Too many people traipsing over Kinder Scout, Hadrian's Wall and numerous other places have caused erosion and many paths are now being strengthened by using flagstones, which can be somewhat unsightly. It also can have a detrimental effect on the local vegetation and wildlife.

Another unforeseen drawback is congestion around the more well-known places. When most of the parks were set up people travelled to them by public transport. These days they all have their own cars and when they all want to go to the same place at the same time for some local event, the narrow roads/lanes in the National Parks can't cope. As an indirect result of this there does seem to be a lot more litter around than there used to be in my younger days, although this may be me remembering the past through rose-tinted spectacles.

As each National Park Authority tries to add extra facilities, they may inadvertently be causing extra hassle for some of its regular users. Returning to the subject of my age, I am old enough to remember trains running on the Monsal, Tissington and High Peak Trails and have indeed travelled on trains over parts of them all. On closure they were converted to trails for horse-riders, cyclists and walkers, a very good idea at the time. But in recent years they have all had cycle hire centres set up and the cyclists have taken over and a lot (not all) have a total disregard for the rules. These days you don't see many walkers on them and horse-riders are non-existent. Even when you get off the Trails you can often be harassed by mountain bikers. No doubt you can all think of similar examples in your own Parks.

To repeat an earlier statement I made, overall I think that National Parks are a good thing, but mainly for the general public and not for those who just want a quiet day out in the countryside. So my advice in that case is to look for a walk outside of the National Parks. Unless you are looking to bag a few more 2000 footers, in which case you are stuck with finding walks inside them.



Route exploring for the Camel Teign 100 on the edge of Dartmoor with Jack and Vera from Staffs Group.

Leaders

A couple of incidents that have happened on recent walks brings to mind the question “How much faith should you have in the walk leader?”. Now if you are in an area that you are not very familiar with, on a walk being lead by a person you don’t know, then you will have to have 100% faith in the leader, at least until proved otherwise. But if you know the area and/or know the leader then you can alter the percentage accordingly. But if you alter it to 0%, it then begs the question “What are you doing on this walk anyway?”.

The first incident that caused me to doubt the leaders ability was one I did a few months ago. It was one led by my friend (soon to be ex-friend when he reads this) Concrete Bob. This was to be a linear walk, so the

first part was to catch a bus to a point 6 or 8 miles away. When we got off the bus, virtually his first words were “I think we go this way”. Not the best comment to inspire confidence in his followers. A bit later we reached a point where the path was blocked, Concrete Bob’s comment was “Oh it has been for years, we will have to find a way round”. Confidence drops a bit more. Further on we reach a section that is 6 feet deep in nettles with no visible “safe” way through. Confidence level in the leader reaches rock bottom.

As I have known Concrete Bob for 50+ years, it didn’t worry me, especially as I knew the area quite well anyway. In actual fact, it was useful as it provided me with a lot of point-scoring opportunities to make up for the ones I had given him over the years.

Another incident that I was told about, but didn’t involve me, was a friend of mine (yes I do have more than one) who went on one of these guided walks that you see advertised every so often. Now Dave is an experienced walker/mountaineer, having done umpteen Munros and all that sort of stuff. But earlier in the year he was on holiday in a place he didn’t know when he saw one of these guided walks publicized. So he decided to go on it. It wasn’t particularly difficult by his or our standards, it was just something to do. So he turned up along with a few other people and they set off. The leader seemed to know where he was going, but every so often stopped to consult his map, and then carried on.

Eventually they came to a refreshment stop and Dave got chatting to the leader. He asked if he could have a look at the map to see where they had been and where they were going. At which point the leader admitted to Dave that he couldn’t show him the route as he had the wrong map with him. However, he did know the route implicitly and the only reason that he occasionally stopped to look at the map was to inspire confidence in the walkers to make them believe he knew what he was doing. Which he probably did but it was a bit of a con really. They did all get back safely but we will never know if they did the walk they were supposed to.

On another occasion recently there was a walk when the leader obviously didn’t know what he was doing. Unfortunately on that day the leader was me. I blame the fact that I am not used to being at the front of a walk, only the back. On the Camel Teign 100, I was helping out at Ashburton checkpoint, but we didn’t open until 2 o’clock on Sunday morning. So on Saturday myself and a couple of friends decided to go for a walk. The route description said the route went close to our camp site so we decided to follow the route into Ashburton just to see where the walkers would go. This we did, with only a couple of minor hiccups, found the checkpoint and chatted up the caretaker and everything was jolly.

We then followed the route for another couple of miles before finding a different way back to the camp site. Finding may not be the correct word, as the leader (me) didn’t seem to have a clue and we finished up hacking our way through the tropical rainforest, well Dartmoor woodland but it didn’t seem to be that much different, until we got back to the campsite. To add insult to injury, we later discovered that the route description had been changed and the walk didn’t go close to the campsite any more. It actually went through it and avoided a lot of what we had done on the Saturday morning. So a totally useless leader that day and my advice to you, if you know him, would be not to let him anywhere near the front of any of your walks.

Computers

Many years ago (about 55 to be precise), when I had to earn an honest living, I worked as a programmer in the computer industry, which I spent about 40 years of my life doing. In those early days whenever you wrote a new program or system, you could expect a visit from the local union rep. “These are my men you are replacing, or It is my members you are putting out of work” was the general gist of their complaints. Actually it never usually worked like that, because their jobs were easier/quicker the bosses found more work for them which hadn’t been done before because they never had enough time, and then these new jobs were computerised, etc, etc, etc.

Now what has all this got to do with walking you may ask. A good question. Now most of you will know, a lot of my involvement with walking these days is helping out on challenge walks, some local and usually on the 100 as well. Now most of you will know I am next to useless at most things. It is not true that I am totally useless at all things, this is just a malicious rumour put around by my darling wife Morticia. However, I seem to have found myself a little niche in doing checking in and timekeeping. Reasonably good at it as well, even if I do say so myself. Modesty was never one of my stronger suits.

I have noticed a trend in the last couple of years that more events are starting to use computers for the timekeeping, results checking, certificate printing. This is on top of the normal jobs such as entries and accounts.

Oh the ignominy of it, me being replaced by a computer. Now any fool can press a button on a computer so I am becoming redundant at checkpoints. Where can I go that my talent for accuracy is needed, where my neat(ish) handwriting is required for producing the certificates. It is all going to be done by computer.

Mind you, when I remember my halcyon days sat on top of Ecton Hill on the Moorlands Marathon, I defy any member of the LDWA to get a computer working up there and keep it working for 10 hours, especially on the wet days. So maybe I am not totally redundant after all. There will still be a need for nutters like me to go where sane computers fear to tread.

I have been asked recently about what version of software I have on my computer. Is it a certain version or later, because a walk in 18 months time will require that version. Now there were a few problems there. A) I did not have the right version of the software, but that probably would not matter as it is quite likely there will have been at least 2 new versions of the software by then. B) I may not be alive in 18 months time, as some of you people like me will know the first thing you do each morning is to check to see if you are still breathing, if you are then you get up. Finally C) even if I am still around in 18 months, will I want to do it?

Still it is nice to know that they are obviously expecting me to be around. Reminds me of another organisation I belong to for which I have a life membership. My membership card says that my membership expires in August 2025, I wonder what do they know that I don't?

But back to the computers. I do wonder where it will all end, will the next thing be for a computer to take over the Backmarker column? There may be a few of you (alright, most of you) who think that will probably be an improvement. Get something sensible written for a change instead of my Ramblings of the last 20 years. Well I am warning you now, I will not go without a fight. This peasant is revolting (very revolting according to Morticia). If anybody wants to join me, I shall start a Peasants Revolt. Oh, I gather it has already been done. I will have to think of something else.

I think it is a symptom of the modern world that they get the priorities wrong. I am told that a person can earn more these days designing computer games than I could earn computerising British Steel (in relative terms). Given what happened to British Steel, then that is probably justified, but you get the gist. So with computers threatening to take over, do I fight back? Or do I retire gracefully and watch England play cricket on the tele. Oh dear, we are playing Australia, I think fighting back may be a more rewarding pastime.

Old Age Catching Up

Whilst chatting with my friend Concrete Bob recently, we were reminiscing about characters we had known years ago. One who came to mind was a chap I walked a bit of 2 or 3 hundreds with. He was a postman from Wales (but I don't hold either of those things against him) but I never knew his full name, he was just known

as Morgan the Post. What made him memorable (apart from his non-stop chat) was the fact the he travelled to and from events by National Express coach. Now I believe he must have been really keen to do that.

I recently went on a coach trip with about 40 other LDWA members and relatives for a few days walking holiday. I realise that I am 20 years older than when I knew Morgan the Post, but at the end of that trip I was as stiff as a board. I don't know how Morgan managed it. However I might still be around 20 years later, but it does seem to me that a lot of other people from those days are still around as well. I don't have any facts or figures to prove or disprove it, only a gut feeling, but I do get the impression that the average age of LDWA members is going up. Also the average age of participants on challenge events seems to be going up as well. Or perhaps my memory is just failing me.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not trying to get rid of the oldies, after all I am nearly one myself (my version, Morticia's is somewhat different). But I do believe that more should be done to encourage the younger generation to join the LDWA. By younger generation I mean people who haven't yet started to collect their pension. It could be that there are hundreds or thousands of "younger generation" members and I just don't happen to see them. So if you are one of these, come out and show your face on events, let me know that you really do exist. During recent school holiday's I was walking along a local touristy route in Derbyshire and there did seem to be a lot of parents dragging their kids along on a walk. Judging by the looks on their faces, neither the parents nor the kids were enjoying it. So whatever we do to encourage them must in a positive manner, not "Do this or else" mode.

Going back to the coach trip I had to endure recently, on that trip we did have a break in the coach journey for a short ferry crossing. Myself and Morticia headed for the café on the ferry and just happened to sit down opposite two people wearing LDWA sweatshirts. Because of that we got chatting and it turned out the young lady was Jill Green, who was another of the "characters" reminisced about as I had walked about 30 miles (before being left behind) of the South Downs Way with her and a friend on an event many years ago. Jill is also the only person (although I stand to be corrected on this) who has written more articles for Strider than I have, so we had something else in common as well. I am sure many of you old stagers will remember her very interesting Countryside articles. One of the walks organised on this coach trip found four Black Adders next to the path. I wasn't on that walk but I am sure they would have provided an interesting bit for Jill to have written about.

One thing I have noticed in my advancing years is "Global Warming". Years ago when we did winter walks, there was a lot of snow-walking, and not just at high level. These days the winter walks seem to include a lot of mud walking, at least for me. In fact on one short walk I led recently there was a complaint from a couple of walkers that there wasn't enough mud and I had ruined my reputation. I had let them down. But it has introduced me to a few new sports, like bog snorkling, pole bending and mud wrestling.

As quite a few of you will know, I have a reputation for not being able to stay on my feet (drunk or sober). These days when I come a cropper, it seems more to be on or in a swampy boggy morass. In the good(?) old days in was either a frozen or baked solid piece of earth I came into contact with. Hence my new found interest in bog snorkling. Along the same lines is the pole-bending. For many years I always used a wooden pole, then I picked up a couple of these new fangled metal retractable walking / skiing poles. Within six months I had managed to bend one by getting it stuck in a large muddy gluepot and trying to extract it. The second one then got bent within a couple of weeks by a fellow walker getting stuck in the mud and falling over on to it and bending it. Practising his mud wrestling no doubt. So I had 2 new-ish ski poles that weren't straight anymore and definitely weren't retractable. Needless to say, I have returned to my 20 year old sturdy wooden pole. No problems with that.



Lunch near the Roaches with the new Plymouth Argyle hat.

1988 White Peak 100

My brother and his wife had just completed the Pennine Way. It had taken them 10 years to do it. It would have been 9 but they lost a year because of the foot and mouth crisis a few years ago. So Pip was looking out for a new challenge. How about doing the Coast to Coast he suggested. No way, or something similar, was the reply he got from the missus.

So we joined forces and decided to walk the route of the 1988 White Peak 100. Not in 48 hours as those brave souls did then. We were going to be much more civilized about it. Basically we would do one walk a week, going from checkpoint to checkpoint. Our plan of campaign was quite simple, we would meet up at the finish point of a days walk, drive one car to the start, walk to the finish and then drive the other car back to the start. Probably frowned on by the Green Brigade, but it worked for us.

All this was made possible by the LDWA posting on the website all the route descriptions from previous 100's, so we were able to download the appropriate one. As we had both been involved in the 1998 White Peak 100, we decided to go for the 1988 Route which had new bits for both of us. We realised that there would be changes but reckoned we could work our way around them.

It was a blazing hot day when we started the walk. We got to the headquarters for the walk in 1988 without any problems, which was a good start. Then we immediately hit a snag, the route description saying “Follow the signs from the headquarters to the start”. In the intervening 22 years the signs had disappeared. By referencing a known point we were able to convince ourselves where we thought the start was. Then the route description said to cross a field heading to the left of a derelict building. No chance we thought, after 20 years it would either have been demolished or converted into luxury flats. Wrong, it was still a derelict building. A bit further on, the route description took us through the middle of the farm, but sometime in the intervening years, the right of way had been diverted around the farm. At another point, the route description referenced a broken fingerpost. 20 years later it was still broken. Life moves slowly in the Peak District.

On another day, the weather was dull, the big hill was at the start, and what a hill. Never mind the Marquis de Sade, the biggest sadist I know was the man who invented hills. Fortunately there followed a fairly flat bit so I had got my breath back by the time we reached a dirty great cowshed which had been built across the path in the intervening years. We were directed on to the new path by the farmer, who seemed to be a little fed up with walkers trying to get into his cowshed.

Whilst doing the 100, we came across a phenomena that would occur several times. Immediately after stopping for lunch it would start to rain. On the first occasion, we had a quick lunch and started walking again. Lo and behold, after a couple of hundred yards we passed a bus shelter with a bench in it. There were several road sections on the walk which weren't very pleasant. If anybody else is thinking of doing 100's, always look to see if there is an alternative footpath which may be slightly longer but safer than roadwalking. Also, avoid the touristy bits if possible. We had trouble on our walk with Lathkill Dale, which we did during half-term holidays and Chatsworth House.

Apparently we had chosen to do this stretch a couple of days before the Chatsworth Country Fair and everybody was setting up. It was very busy, I dread to think what it would have been like at the Fair itself. After that we passed the checkpoint at Baslow, and then we had that dreaded A word again – ASCEND. There were 774 feet of climbing on the next section. What it didn't say was that it was all in one go up to Baslow Edge. And I had forgotten to refill my oxygen tank before I started. There was a lot of ups and downs after that, over Mam Tor and Shining Tor and the Roaches.

Having chosen the hottest day of the year to start the walk, we chose the coldest day of the year to finish it. We set off from Upper Hulme with a smattering of snow around but the hundreds/thousands of puddles we came across were all frozen solid. We had to make a small diversion on the climb, the original route had been on a “permissive” track which is no-longer permitted. However an alternative footpath is available, although the going is not as easy. The Mermaid had been a restaurant/pub at the time of the 100 but nowadays is self-catering holiday apartments. No chance of a pint any more. From the Mermaid it was 4 miles straight along the road to Warslow and the finish at the school. Not the most inspiring section for the casual walker but probably a boon on the 100 for people like who were desperately trying to put one foot in front of another during the second night.

But we had finally finished. Walking time was 47 hours but if you allow time for stops at checkpoints we would have been well outside the time limit of the event. But as it was an anytime event for us, we didn't have a limit. And we enjoyed it, or most of it, or some of it. It started a trend for us, the following year we did the 1974 100 route and the year after we conquered 1998.



Roger & Philip at the start of a days walk on the WP100.

Rain, Rain, Rain

I wandered lonely as a cloud

A famous line from a famous poem written by William Wordsworth in 1804(-ish). I just wish the sentiment was true today. Whenever I go walking, the cloud does not seem very lonely because it has brought all of its friends along. And its friends seem to be glad as they spend a lot of time crying with tears of happiness. To mere mortals like me, this just appears to be another damp, soggy, rainy day. But the clouds are really happy about it.

You ask anybody who has come on my walks like Concrete Bob, Stormer Norma, Scots Bill or Little Dave. They will tell you my walks are famous for the amount of rain that falls on them. They will also tell you I can devise some wonderful routes. At least they would be wonderful if you were going bog-snorkling or white-water rafting, but were not terribly suitable for hiking around. It has been mentioned that if Mr. Wordsworth had been around today, or I had been around then, and we had gone walking together, then that wonderful poem would probably never have been written.

For those of you with long memories, you may remember a previous article I wrote about a walk during the Crowden Cloudburst. That was the day we went over Black Hill and Holme Moss. Now Holme Moss is near

Holmfirth, home of the Last of the Summer Wine gang. In a lot of episodes you see Foggy, Compo and Cleggy walking across the moors, also Howard and Marina trying to do something other than walking. But watching those programs the sun always seems to shine on Holmfirth. Why is it they never seem to be out on days such as the Crowden Cloudburst? Perhaps it is just me being unlucky with the weather, again.

But to return to William Wordsworth's poem. He lived in the Lake District. The Lake District is full of lakes, which are full of water, and that water has to come from somewhere. The only place it can come from is the rivers and the rivers need to be filled by the rain. There may be one or two more intermediate steps, but you get the drift. All of which ties in with what I know about the Lake District. I can remember one year back in the eighties when I took the family camping near Windermere. As you entered the camp site where we were staying, the first sign you saw read "No Refunds for Early Departures due to Weather Conditions". Not something to fill you with enthusiasm for your forthcoming holiday. I suppose it also begs the question, did William Wordsworth really go wandering, or did he just dream it?

The poem continues

That floats on high o'er vales and hills

Again Mr. Wordsworth appears to be luckier than me. On most of my visits to the Lake District the hills have been in the clouds, not under them. The same can probably be said about Scotland and Snowdonia as well. I show no favouritism as to into which area I disperse my talents. On the occasions we do have a drought somewhere, I offer to take my raindance or walking itinerary to the affected area, but so far nobody has taken me up on it.

Over the years I have seen a few television programs on walking, mainly from Eric Robson and Julia Bradbury. But they seem to have had their fair share of mucky/yucky days. Not as many as I would have done, but enough for a normal person. Even Wainwright has said that on occasions he has had to seek shelter from inclement weather. So it still begs the question, did William Wordsworth really go wandering, or did he just dream it? In the light of my personal experiences, I think I can only conclude that he wrote this wonderful poem from his dreaming, not from his rambling experiences. And perhaps it was written in Utopia rather than the Lake District, but that does not detract from it. It is still a wonderful poem.

From all these comments, I don't want anybody to get the wrong idea. I do not have any grudge against the Lake District, or the Peak District, or anywhere else. It rains wherever I go. But conversely I will not accept the blame for the bad weather on the Valleys 100. It was raining in that area long before I got there, although I may admit to bringing more with me to help it on its way.

On our weekly walks, we have wide ranging subjects of discussions. Sometimes it is about simple things like "Where the devil are we?", or "How do we get back to the car from here?". On other occasions we raise the tone of conversation and discuss favourite books or films or music. It keeps life interesting and helps to while away the miles. But possibly more on that in the future.

Computers

Many years ago (about 55 to be precise), when I had to earn an honest living, I worked as a programmer in the computer industry, which I spent about 40 years of my life doing. In those early days whenever you wrote a new program or system, you could expect a visit from the local union rep. "These are my men you are replacing, or It is my members you are putting out of work" was the general gist of their complaints. Actually it never usually worked like that, because their jobs were easier/quicker the bosses found more

work for them which hadn't been done before because they never had enough time, and then these new jobs were computerised, etc, etc, etc.

Now what has all this got to do with walking you may ask. A good question. Now most of you will know, a lot of my involvement with walking these days is helping out on challenge walks, some local and usually on the 100 as well. Now most of you will know I am next to useless at most things. It is not true that I am totally useless at all things, this is just a malicious rumour put around by my darling wife Morticia. However, I seem to have found myself a little niche in doing checking in and timekeeping. Reasonably good at it as well, even if I do say so myself. Modesty was never one of my stronger suits.

I have noticed a trend in the last couple of years that more events are starting to use computers for the timekeeping, results checking, certificate printing. This is on top of the normal jobs such as entries and accounts.

Oh the ignominy of it, me being replaced by a computer. Now any fool can press a button on a computer so I am becoming redundant at checkpoints. Where can I go that my talent for accuracy is needed, where my neat(ish) handwriting is required for producing the certificates. It is all going to be done by computer.

Mind you, when I remember my halcyon days sat on top of Ecton Hill on the Moorlands Marathon, I defy any member of the LDWA to get a computer working up there and keep it working for 10 hours, especially on the wet days. So maybe I am not totally redundant after all. There will still be a need for nutters like me to go where sane computers fear to tread.

I have been asked recently about what version of software I have on my computer. Is it a certain version or later, because a walk in 18 months time will require that version. Now there were a few problems there. A) I did not have the right version of the software, but that probably would not matter as it is quite likely there will have been at least 2 new versions of the software by then. B) I may not be alive in 18 months time, as some of you people like me will know the first thing you do each morning is to check to see if you are still breathing, if you are then you get up. Finally C) even if I am still around in 18 months, will I want to do it?

Still it is nice to know that they are obviously expecting me to be around. Reminds me of another organisation I belong to for which I have a life membership. My membership card says that my membership expires in August 2025, I wonder what do they know that I don't?

But back to the computers. I do wonder where it will all end, will the next thing be for a computer to take over the Backmarker column? There may be a few of you (alright, most of you) who think that will probably be an improvement. Get something sensible written for a change instead of my Ramblings of the last 20 years. Well I am warning you now, I will not go without a fight. This peasant is revolting (very revolting according to Morticia). If anybody wants to join me, I shall start a Peasants Revolt. Oh, I gather it has already been done. I will have to think of something else.

I think it is a symptom of the modern world that they get the priorities wrong. I am told that a person can earn more these days designing computer games than I could earn computerising British Steel (in relative terms). Given what happened to British Steel, then that is probably justified, but you get the gist. So with computers threatening to take over, do I fight back? Or do I retire gracefully and watch England play cricket on the tele. Oh dear, we are playing Australia, I think fighting back may be a more rewarding pastime.

Old Age Catching Up

Whilst chatting with my friend Concrete Bob recently, we were reminiscing about characters we had known years ago. One who came to mind was a chap I walked a bit of 2 or 3 hundreds with. He was a postman from

Wales (but I don't hold either of those things against him) but I never knew his full name, he was just known as Morgan the Post. What made him memorable (apart from his non-stop chat) was the fact he travelled to and from events by National Express coach. Now I believe he must have been really keen to do that.

I recently went on a coach trip with about 40 other LDWA members and relatives for a few days walking holiday. I realise that I am 20 years older than when I knew Morgan the Post, but at the end of that trip I was as stiff as a board. I don't know how Morgan managed it. However I might still be around 20 years later, but it does seem to me that a lot of other people from those days are still around as well. I don't have any facts or figures to prove or disprove it, only a gut feeling, but I do get the impression that the average age of LDWA members is going up. Also the average age of participants on challenge events seems to be going up as well. Or perhaps my memory is just failing me.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not trying to get rid of the oldies, after all I am nearly one myself (my version, Morticia's is somewhat different). But I do believe that more should be done to encourage the younger generation to join the LDWA. By younger generation I mean people who haven't yet started to collect their pension. It could be that there are hundreds or thousands of "younger generation" members and I just don't happen to see them. So if you are one of these, come out and show your face on events, let me know that you really do exist. During recent school holiday's I was walking along a local touristy route in Derbyshire and there did seem to be a lot of parents dragging their kids along on a walk. Judging by the looks on their faces, neither the parents nor the kids were enjoying it. So whatever we do to encourage them must in a positive manner, not "Do this or else" mode.

Going back to the coach trip I had to endure recently, on that trip we did have a break in the coach journey for a short ferry crossing. Myself and Morticia headed for the café on the ferry and just happened to sit down opposite two people wearing LDWA sweatshirts. Because of that we got chatting and it turned out the young lady was Jill Green, who was another of the "characters" reminisced about as I had walked about 30 miles (before being left behind) of the South Downs Way with her and a friend on an event many years ago. Jill is also the only person (although I stand to be corrected on this) who has written more articles for Strider than I have, so we had something else in common as well. I am sure many of you old stagers will remember her very interesting Countryside articles. One of the walks organised on this coach trip found four Black Adders next to the path. I wasn't on that walk but I am sure they would have provided an interesting bit for Jill to have written about.

One thing I have noticed in my advancing years is "Global Warming". Years ago when we did winter walks, there was a lot of snow-walking, and not just at high level. These days the winter walks seem to include a lot of mud walking, at least for me. In fact on one short walk I led recently there was a complaint from a couple of walkers that there wasn't enough mud and I had ruined my reputation. I had let them down. But it has introduced me to a few new sports, like bog snorkling, pole bending and mud wrestling.

As quite a few of you will know, I have a reputation for not being able to stay on my feet (drunk or sober). These days when I come a cropper, it seems more to be on or in a swampy boggy morass. In the good(?) old days it was either a frozen or baked solid piece of earth I came into contact with. Hence my new found interest in bog snorkling. Along the same lines is the pole-bending. For many years I always used a wooden pole, then I picked up a couple of these new fangled metal retractable walking / skiing poles. Within six months I had managed to bend one by getting it stuck in a large muddy gluepot and trying to extract it. The second one then got bent within a couple of weeks by a fellow walker getting stuck in the mud and falling over on to it and bending it. Practising his mud wrestling no doubt. So I had 2 new-ish ski poles that weren't straight anymore and definitely weren't retractable. Needless to say, I have returned to my 20 year old sturdy wooden pole. No problems with that.

Boring?

As the old song says: One time a long time ago on a mountain in Well it doesn't actually matter where the mountain is or was, if I had to negatively descend it then I would not have been a happy bunny. Don't get me wrong, I love mountains and think they are wonderful, they have magnificent scenery which I can sit and admire all day, just as long as I don't have to walk up them. In fact on some walks I can claim to have been in the mountains longer than anybody else, usually because they have done the walk a lot quicker than me.

So when I go walking, I try to stick to the flattish ones. I enjoy walking things like the old railway lines or trudging along canal towpaths. I have even contemplated emigrating to East Anglia or Lincolnshire (or should that be South Humberside). It has been commented "How boring" on occasions in the letter columns of this excellent magazine. But I quite enjoy it and don't find it at all boring. Everybody to their own taste is what I say. If you want to knacker yourself by climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in the same day/week/month, then go ahead and enjoy yourself (if you can) but don't ask me to come with you.

But I have now discovered a really boring walk that I will bore you by telling you about it. This year I was persuaded by my darling wife Morticia to take a holiday. For those of you who know her, replace the word "persuaded" by "told". We (She) decided we would go on a cruise. Where to doesn't matter, it would probably have been the same wherever we had gone. So we set off on this luxurious liner. For keen fitness fanatics it had a gym and several swimming pools. For keen walkers and joggers it had a promenade deck, which helpfully had a sign saying 1 lap = 0.3 miles. Now given all the fattening foods I was going to eat, I thought I had better do some walking to avoid putting on too much weight. So off I set. After 4 laps I was starting to get a little bored, after all there was no scenery to look at, only miles and miles of empty sea. After 8 laps I was hoping Morticia would turn up to take me off to a needlework class or something similar. No luck there, so by the time I had completed 12 laps I was thinking of giving up and after 15 laps I did give up. Now I declare that those four and a half miles were the most boring I have ever walked. I did some more promenading on later days, but rationed myself to 4 or 5 laps at a time.

What it did do was to increase my admiration for all long distance track athletes. I think it is great that people like Mo Farah can run around a track 25 times without becoming totally bored. At least I had things like deckchairs and lifeboats to provide me with a bit of variety. Plus the fact that there was a 24 hour food service available whenever I decided to stop. Mo has to deal with funny people thrusting microphones up his nose when he stops.

Some years ago I had a couple of spells of working in Lincoln and did some walking in that general area. As I alluded to earlier, the topography of the area was fairly flat and there was not a lot of scenery to be seen. But did I get bored, not a bit. As I was having to rely on a 1:50,000 map instead of my usual 1:25,000, I was spending more time than usual working out which way to go. And I always had a couple of thoughts at the back of my mind to stop me getting bored. Thoughts such as "Where the hell am I?" and "How the devil do I get back to the car from here?". The fact that I am still here boring you means that I did successfully overcome those minor problems.

I do remember one occasion when a different problem arose. According to the map, there was a footpath crossing a field which then became a track, heading back in the general direction of where I had parked the car. It saved an extra couple of miles following the lane around to the other side of the farm, so I took it. I had just got on to the track bit when the farmer passed me and stopped me. Apparently the track was not a right of way. Some fifty years before, there had been a brickworks in what was now the field and the footpath had been for workers to get to the brickworks. That had long since closed but the footpath was still a footpath which now ended in the middle of a field. The farmer seemed quite used to idiots like me walking down his track and said I could carry on, but make sure I closed all the gates after me. Quite nice compared to some but he could have offered me a lift.

Healthy Service

I can't talk for the whole country, but virtually every time I pick up a local newspaper there seems to be some sort of crisis in a local-ish hospital. It could be over-spending, under-funding, too many patients, too few patients. You think of a problem, one of our local hospitals will be having a crisis with it.

Just recently on one of our regular Tuesday walks, I was out on a walk over Chinley Churn with Concrete Bob and Blind Bill. Bill is not actually blind, just severely visually handicapped so we help to guide him (when we can keep up with him). On this occasion we were walking up a lane when we came to a gate with a stile beside at a slightly higher level. Bill crossed the stile but misjudged the step down. This caused him to stumble across the lane and collide with the bank on the other side. He had a very sore shoulder as a result. We continued for another half-a-mile, but Bill was obviously in pain so we decided to abandon the walk. Bob rang Stormer Norma (Mrs. Bob) and got her to bring the car to a suitable place near where we were. I fashioned a kind of sling for Bill from my trusty Plymouth Argyle scarf and we made our way to the meeting point. We decided that Bill should go to hospital as a precaution, but the nearest one was in the wrong direction and didn't have a good reputation. So I decided to take Bill to the nearest hospital to where he lived which was slightly further away. However, when we got there we were told that they did not do x-rays on a Tuesday as it was the operators day off. So we had to go on somewhere else and eventually discovered that Bill had a broken collar bone. This is now almost better and Bill has started walking again, but as walk leader I have to plan walks that avoid stiles.

There was a similar problem a couple of years back. Myself and the chap I was with had done about 15 miles across the Derbyshire Dales, negotiating everything they could throw at us, when we got to the village of Youlgreave (or Youlgrave depending on which sign you see). Walking down the street with no problems to be seen my companion tripped over the kerb, put his hands out to save himself and finished up with 2 broken and 1 dislocated finger. A local who had seen it rushed over to help and told us the local GP surgery was only 100 yards along the road, so we went there. But the receptionist couldn't/wouldn't help. They offered my companion some paracetamol for the pain but we would have to go to hospital for treatment, I think Derby (20 miles away) was mentioned, but not absolutely certain. Now the car (fortunately mine) was parked five miles away at Bakewell with no means of getting there other than walking. Fortunately, the kindly local who had helped us earlier offered to take us for which we were very grateful and we eventually finished up at our local walk in centre (which was about 25 miles away from where we were).

Talking of Chinley Churn, another incident in that area comes to mind. Many years ago I was doing the Bullock Smithy on a very hot day. I obviously got everything wrong that day and was pulled out by checkpoint staff suffering from heatstroke or sunstroke or something like that. Quite correctly, I didn't have the energy to argue. They thought I should go to hospital just to make sure, so they rang for an ambulance. Just remember we were on the foothills of Kinder Scout in the wilds of Derbyshire, the checkpoint got through to the Liverpool ambulance centre! After some explaining, Liverpool said they would pass it on and eventually an ambulance arrived. After several hours in hospital and several pints of orange squash later, I was deemed fit to be allowed to go home, as long as I didn't drive. So darling Morticia had to collect me, and made me suffer even more.

Another incident happened on a 100 in the north-east some years ago. One and a half miles into the walk, a walker collapsed just in front of me and a couple of colleagues. I was the only one whose mobile phone got a signal, so the others gave artificial respiration whilst I dealt with the phone. I tried ringing the walk emergency number but nobody answered it, they probably assumed nobody would get into trouble after half an hour of a forty-eight hour walk. So I rang 999 and did my best trying to tell them where we were when I didn't know properly myself. Eventually we managed it and 20 minutes later a paramedic on a motorcycle turned up followed 10 minutes later by an ambulance.

And the moral of these stories? Always take care when you are out walking, even on the good days, because help may not be as near as you think it is. I would like to point out that I think the medical staff in the NHS are wonderful, but the admin/organizational side is mostly rubbish. It has been for years and probably will be for many years to come, long after I am gone.

Checkpointing

Many years ago when I was into walking hundreds, around the turn of the century, I came across a couple of distressing incidents on a hundred. They made me think (yes I can, I am not brainless as some people may tell you) that now seemed to be a good time to stop doing them. So the following year I “volunteered” to help out with my local group checkpoint instead of walking the 100. They decided I was useless at most things, so they put me on checking in. Lo and behold, I turned out to be quite good at it, so I have been doing it ever since, apart from a couple of times when I had my strokes.

The local group thought so much of me that they couldn't wait for me to come back, so when I did they made me sign an undertaking in blood (mine) that in future if I were to have another stroke, it would not be at the time of the hundred. In the early days, I also used to go and visit other checkpoints. I always reckoned it was a toss-up between Devon and Cornwall or Staffordshire as to who provided the best checkpoint. These days I don't know as I don't get around to other checkpoints as I used to.

I do remember one year, I think it was on the Cleveland 100, there was a checkpoint manned by a Yorkshire(?) group and they were all dressed up as Bunny Girls. Good as Devon and Cornwall or Staffordshire might be, they never stayed in my memory as that one did. A suggestion for next year maybe.

When thinking about it, a lot have things have changed. Possibly some for the better, and possibly some for the worse. On thing that has definitely improved is the standard of the buildings used for checkpoints. Twenty years ago, it was quite common to have checkpoints in marquees or tents, that seems to be getting rarer these days. I even remember spending 24 hours in a barn with no barn door to close. Again at that time it was not rare but unusual to see a walker with a walking pole, these days nearly everybody has one or quite often two poles. I will refrain from adding the joke line about having 2 Finns as well, because discounting South Wales and Kent and Yorkshire and Scotland there haven't been that many wet hundreds recently that I can remember.

A change I have come across is to computerize the administration, on challenge events as well as hundreds. This has been around for years, we did it on the White Peak 100 but only for general admin. Now it seems that is being used for checking-in at checkpoints as well as at the finish. I don't know how many systems there are out there but I guess there are quite a few. However I haven't yet come across a system that is robust enough to stand up to the strain placed on it by hundreds of walkers doing silly things at some ungodly hour of the day. For those of you who don't know my background, I spent 45+ years from 1960 in the computer industry developing and testing systems and software. Whilst I may be somewhat out of date with Windows, Linux, Modzilla and whatever else, I still know how to test a system to destruction and I still know what customers (in this case, me) want. With the systems I have seen, I would use them (I have to), but would always keep a backup handwritten copy. But there are still some checkpoints where there is no mobile phone link or internet connection, you have to. In fact, on top of Ecton Hill where I have spent many a lonely hour there is no power supply either and my laptop battery will not last for ten hours.

One disturbing trend I have noticed in recent years is the number of non-entrants that seem to walking the events. There have always been supporters going around looking after their loved ones, mostly well-behaved but sometimes the occasional nuisance can cause a bit of hassle. But we live with that and put up with it. What I am referring to is the people who come in to the check point saying “I am not an entrant I am just

walking with Joe Bloggs”, probably carrying Joe Bloggs’ rucksack. Then they sit down and scoff a whole lot of food that they didn’t pay for. Apart from that, if they are doing the whole walk, then between them they are probably doing the LDWA out of several hundred pounds of entry fees. And if they are really helping Joe Bloggs, then possibly Joe Bloggs could get disqualified for receiving outside assistance. It depends how far you want to go. I do remember many years ago when participating in a Yorkshire event (not LDWA or a hundred) being threatened with disqualification for suggesting to my companion that we called in at the next pub for some refreshment.

There was another gentleman on a recent hundred with no tally who claimed he had sent his entry off and had paid but that the organisers had cocked-up his entry and he was not on the list. Being a cynical sceptical old fogey, I didn’t believe him. I could quite believe an entry could have been cocked-up, but for the organisers to have let him carry on without any documentation, that I didn’t believe. I am guessing it would probably invalidate the LDWA/Hundred insurance policy.

Busriding

Recently I watched on television a program about a bus ride from Richmond to Ingleton in North Yorkshire, across the Dales. I was interested because that was where my love of walking and the countryside was nurtured. I wanted to see how many places I recognised. It turned out to be a bus with an inside and outside camera attached and it was just chunks of the film from these cameras with no commentary, which was slightly disappointing.

When I say I watched it, you can take that in its loosest possible sense. I actually recorded it because Morticia didn’t think much of it, and then watched it in 10/15 minute chunks when Morticia wasn’t watching. Morticia has recently had a hip replacement and is currently walking with the aid of sticks. And when she has the sticks, she is lethal with them and her aim is deadly. So I try my best not to upset her, which is why I watched the program when she wasn’t around. However I cannot say she is not lethal without the sticks. She is, but not so much.

As an example, she runs a disabled club on a Thursday night so must have the car that evening. I am allowed to go walking on a Thursday, but I must be home by 6.00pm on pain of death or worse. Death I can cope with, it is the worse that worries me.

You may remember a few years ago I used to go walking with my brother. We used to meet up at the end point of the walk, leave one car there and take the other car to the start and then walk to the end. You get the picture. He had a knee operation a couple of years ago so nowadays can’t walk very far compared to then.

So I have started using the bus. I even use the bus on some of my Tuesday walks. This allows me to include a few linear walks instead of the usual circular ones. One lesson I learned early on was the catch the bus first and then walk back to the car. On one of the early bus-walks I did, I parked the car in the middle of nowhere, walked several hours/miles to the closest town and missed the bus back by a few minutes, so I had to wait a couple of hours until the next one. It was a good job I wasn’t going to catch the last one (the one I did catch was the last one) as I would have had another walk of several miles/hours back to the car. So ever since then I have done the bus-ride first.

Except on one occasion recently. I had been out with my brother (in his car), done a shortish walk to bag a trig-point near Woodhead which we had finished by ten o’clock. He was then carrying on northwards to do other things, whilst I had to find my own way home. This was done by catching a bus to Sheffield, bus to Bakewell, bus to Buxton, bus to Stoke, then bus home. But there are easier ways you may say. Of course there are, well quicker anyway. But being a Cornishman (ancestors of the Scots whom we taught everything

about short arms and deep pockets), I did the journey for nothing with my oap bus pass. It took about six hours on a nice day through very pleasant countryside, which I new from my walks. It also gave me one or two ideas of walks I could try in the days or months or years to come. Whether they ever come to fruition is a different matter, but the ideas are there.

Which is an advantage of using the bus, even in one direction. It allows me to think about, or plan, or do, walks in areas where I would never think of doing a walk in normal circumstances. I can park the car in or near civilisation and catch the bus to the middle of nowhere and walk back to civilisation. If I took the car to the middle of nowhere, with no civilisation nearby, then I would have to make sure I was self-sufficient for the day to do a circular walk. And I am not as good at organising myself these days as I used to be, so there are degrees of self-sufficiency.

Mind you, I wouldn't recommend six hours on the bus for everyone. From what I have seen, 6 hours on buses in London would probably get you from North Woolwich to South Woolwich. It would be quicker to walk. For those of you who think you are gifted enough, you can walk on water from one to the other. For the rest of us mere mortals, we can use the tunnel and beat the bus hands down.

Rambling

As some of you will know, in the columns I have written over the last 20 or so years (somebody will probably be able to tell you exactly how many if you really want to know) one of my hobby horses has been to get groups / members to look after new members by not frightening them away. Hands up all of you who have read every single one of the articles. If 2 of you have, then I have just appointed you secretary and treasurer of my fan club. Congratulations. Anyway, recently I have come across a new angle on this topic.

I was doing my stint as a marshal at one of my local groups challenge walks when I overheard a couple of walkers discussing their own group. They had just completed a 25 mile challenge walk in 7 hours and still looked fresh. The gist of the conversation was that they wanted the old fogeys in their group who did the long group walks somewhat slowly, or only did the shorter group walks, to leave the LDWA and join the Ramblers instead.

Now these walkers (racers) weren't known to me and I assume they are not members of my local group. Now if they were to have their way, a lot of groups would struggle to organise their challenge walks. If you kick out the old fogeys like me, who would organize the challenge walks, man the checkpoints, chase around looking for lost/injured walkers, etc. (Not wishing to claim all the credit, I admit I don't do all of those things). If they wanted challenge walks, then our two young (under 60) walkers would have to give up doing some of them to help out with the organisation. And I can't see local groups wanting to get rid of their veterans of 10 or 20 or 30 100's. Not politically sound. But revolution may be in the air, so watch out.

Come to think of it, doing my 20 miles in 12-14 hours, which is as much as I can manage these days, means that I would probably be one of the ones told to join the Ramblers. Then somebody else would have to become Backmarker. Every cloud has a silver lining, so maybe I should join the revolutionaries.

Another suggestion I have heard come up recently is that a mobile phone should be a compulsory piece of kit on challenge walks. Whilst I would agree that it is useful to have one, I cannot see why it should be mandatory. I have seen the adverts in the past where mobile phone companies claim to cover 90% of the country, but I would guess that this is 90% of the population, not 90% of the area, although some areas will be better than others.

Where I go walking in the Pennines and the Peak District, reception is poor at the best of times. Those of you with long memories may remember that for about 10 years I did a check point on top of a hill on the Leek Moors Marathon. There was never a signal up there with my supplier, or the supplier of the phone I borrowed on one occasion. Those of you with even longer memories may remember one of my earlier articles when I recounted my trials and tribulations in the Yorkshire Dales when my darling Morticia was late and my phone kept telling me “NO SIGNAL” so we couldn’t get in touch with each other. Another place I had trouble with was Dorset on the Dorset 100. No mobile signal, no mobile broadband signal either. Even the public telephone kiosk seemed to have been converted into a book swap site. Forty eight hours with next to no contact with the outside world, BLISS. So whilst I agree a mobile phone is a useful / recommended piece of kit, it is not yet in a position where it can be made compulsory.

Returning to the Ramblers / Long Distance walkers theme, one thing that has intrigued me over the years, and to which I have found no definitive answer, is what does constitute a long distance walk. I don’t think it can be defined. You could say it must be a walk of 20 miles or more, but then does that include, for example, the Pennine Way or Coast to Coast or LEJOG. I have met a number of walkers who have done one or more of these at a rate of 10 or 12 miles a day. Do they count as Long Distance Walkers. Then I have done a few walks in my time in Snowdonia and the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands where a 6 mile walk is a hell of a lot harder than a 25 mile walk on the Thames Path, for instance. So what is a long distance walk and what is a long distance walker? If you were to ask all the members of the LDWA, I suspect you may get a thousand different answers.

Railways

Some time ago I went on a holiday to Scarborough organized in conjunction with my local LDWA group. As it was in the area that years 100 was going to be held a couple of people used it to recce parts of the route. I am not as fit or healthy as I was 30 years ago (hence my Backmarker claim), so I don’t do the 100 anymore. I just help out at the checkpoints, or get in the way at the checkpoints if you listen to some people. So I used the week to indulge in a couple of walking passions that I have.

One is collecting a few miles here and there of national trails. The other is that I am an old railway fanatic, true whichever way you take it. I am an “old” railway fanatic and I am an “old railway” fanatic. Now I can already hear some of you saying “How boring”. I have to admit it is occasionally boring, but isn’t any walking boring occasionally. I find slogging up 300 feet of mountain in 3 hours boring (or even impossible), other people may not. Mind you, I didn’t in 1953. As a young man it was always my dream to be the first to climb Mount Everest. But then some chap from the colonies called Edmund Hillary did it and ruined my dream. I wonder if he ever knew how much anguish he caused to many young lads like me. It was after that that I decided I didn’t like climbing hills anyway.

To come back to the “boring” bit, I did a walk on one of the days along the coast path so that I could tick off another 6 miles of the Cleveland Way (only about 18 miles still to do). At one point I came to a little headland. To the north of me you could see the sea. To the east of me you could see the sea. To the south of me you could see the sea. To the west of me you could see, no you are wrong because you couldn’t see the sea, you could see a dirty great field of Rapeseed. If that wasn’t boring it was certainly uninteresting to me. But everybody is entitled to their own opinion, even if it is the wrong one. The other problem I found was that whilst it was a coastal path, it didn’t get very near the sea, well maybe as the seagull flies it did, but vertically it was quite a way off. Which meant there were a lot of ups and downs, and you all know there is part of ups and downs that I don’t like. The “ups” bit.

On another day I went out with a fellow railway enthusiast. Well if she wasn’t when we started she must have been by the end because she lived to tell the tale. We walked the old railway line from Ravenscar on

the old Whitby to Scarborough line. It was about 12 miles with 600 feet of descent and 50 feet of negative descent. This suited me just fine, in fact why can't all walks be like that. It was very pleasant if you discounted the weather. Stretches of moorland, sections through narrow valleys, a stroll through lush woodland, even a bit through a housing estate that had been built over the old trackbed. Very enjoyable for me.

About halfway through the walk we came across the delightful old buildings of Cloughton station which had been converted into a lovely tea-room. This gave us a good excuse to stop and indulge ourselves with a toasted teacake. A bit further on we stopped and had a chat with a local walking his dog. The conversation centred around how you pronounce Cloughton, I seem to remember it was something like Clow-ton. Towards the end we walked through a large cemetery. I think this was deliberately put there for people who had walked too far so they could just topple into any empty grave they could find. But I didn't need it and all-in-all it was a pleasant day's stroll.

Walking old railway lines does have its drawbacks as well. If you don't like out and back walks then you will have to find a tougher less direct route to get back. Or you could just wait for the next train and catch that back. Another drawback to walking old railways has started to emerge in the last few years. Originally they were used by walkers, horse-riders and a few cyclists who all co-habited the trails in a friendly manner. In my area and no doubt many others as well, in recent years there has been an explosion of cycle-hire centres on the trails. This has led to an explosion in the number of cyclists using them. But most of these cyclists do not seem to be the type that would peacefully co-exist with any other users. They are the BMW drivers of the railway trails, they think they own them, and woe betide you if you don't get out of their way. So if your local railway trails have cycle-hire centres, I would certainly advise avoiding them at weekends and during school holidays. Christmas Day you would probably be OK.

Challenge

It was a cold, wet, miserable day. I was cold, wet and very miserable. And very muddy as I had done my usual trick of falling over several times during the day (and that was whilst I was sober). I walked through the door to be greeted by my beautiful ever-loving wife Morticia with her customary greeting – “What do you want to go out on a day like this for? You must be mad”. The reply of course is something along the lines of “To have a nice peaceful day by myself”. Well, in my dreams it is, I would never actually say it to her face. I am not that brave or that mad. Being a Cornishman (exiled) I do admit to being mad, after all it is hereditary in all Cornishmen, but I am not mad enough to argue with Morticia. I wait for her to tell me what my opinion is and then I tell her what my opinion is.

But it does beg the question, why do people go walking? I know why I started. In 1950 something, I was coerced/volunteered to make up the numbers in a team challenge event when one of the members pulled out with appendicitis. I still marvel at the lengths some people go to to get out of walks. Most inconsiderate of him but as I cycled 6 miles every day on my paper round I was deemed to be fit and suitable as a replacement. So over 3 days we conquered Ingleborough, Whernside, Pen-y-Ghent, Buckden Pike, Great Whernside and Little Whernside. About a month afterwards, when I had recovered, I decided I had enjoyed it and have been walking more or less ever since. I did miss a few years in the middle when Morticia made me take up marathon running instead so I could collect sponsorship for her Special Needs Club. I even pushed my son John around a few of them in a wheelchair. But I gave them up as being too easy and went back to walking. I then took up doing 100's, but they were a step too far for me. About 50,000 steps too far actually, so I gave them up as well and returned to normality. Or whatever passes for normality in the LDWA community.

As I grew older, the challenge became not how far could I go, but just to go out and enjoy myself come rain/wind/hell and high water etc, and I have seen plenty of them. I had a fairly stressful job at the time so it was a wonderful feeling to realise when I was in the middle of nowhere that all I had to worry about was “Where the devil am I?” and “How the heck do I get back to the car from here?”. Nice and relaxing, although getting back to the car has occasionally caused a few panics when the car is in a car park that gets locked at dusk and it is still 3 miles away. All good fun so they tell me.

I have long assumed everybody has their own reasons for going walking. It may just be a simple case of getting/keeping fit. It may be that they wish to enjoy the wonderful scenery in this country, especially the bits that can't be seen from a car. But there are walkers around who need to set themselves a challenge. No doubt most of you have climbed to the top of a mountain and met the guy who insists on telling you he has only 234 more Munros to do or he now has less than 100 Wainwrights to conquer. I have even come across a few walkers whose challenge is to do 2 Challenge Walks every weekend. I have met people who “collect” Trig Points, or are aiming to complete 10 National Trails. Everybody has their own challenges, real or imaginary, attainable or daft, does it matter. Even just to get to the pub at the end of the walk could be someone's challenge. Well good luck to them, all of them, but it is not my scene. Once maybe, but not anymore. But life would be boring if everybody did the same thing. So whatever takes your fancy, do it and enjoy it.

These days I make up my own challenges. How about a quick jaunt around Ladybower Reservoir, or a stroll along the Tissington and High Peak Trails. I haven't found a good way to get from Cromford to Ashbourne on that one, so any suggestions? A few years ago there was another challenge that foolishly took my fancy. It was an easy one so Concrete Bob and Stormer Norma told me. Not too far from me in the Derbyshire Dales is Parkhouse Hill, a reasonably small pinnacle of about 1230 feet with about 425 feet of climbing. From bottom to top is probably only about a quarter of a mile of walking, so it is a bit of a steep negative descent. It always used to be on private property, so not many people did climb it officially, but then a concessionary path was opened up it. Concrete Bob convinced me it would be simple, so I decided to climb it. The only simple thing was me for believing what I was told. I did make it to the top, and I did make it down again (not by the quick route either). So having made it up and down I can honestly say I wasn't scared, I was absolutely terrified. The moral of this story is Yes, I can make up my own challenges, but I must make them realistic so that I can enjoy them, afterwards if not at the time. I expect there will be other walkers with similar tastes to me, but not many.



Concrete Bob and myself at the summit of Parkhouse.

Conversations

When you go out on a ramble or trek with a group of people do you know what to talk about whilst you are walking. If you are out on a Group Social walk with 20 or more other walkers, it doesn't really matter as you will nearly always find somebody who will chat to you and listen to you. If you are on a Challenge walk, then in all probability you will not talk too much with your fellow participants as you will be more concerned with finding the right route and beating last years time. And maybe also finishing in front of Jack for the first time in many years.

But if you go walking with the same group of four or five people every week for twenty years, it becomes difficult to find new or different topics of conversation to while away the hours on a walk. Of course there will always be some news item that can be debated and five different solutions found in the first hour of the walk. But what about the next five hours?

My motley crew consists of 2 retired teachers (1 Sciences 1 English), 2 retired railwaymen (not sure what they did, but they probably weren't sure either). We have 3 interested in football (Aberdeen, Manchester United and Plymouth Argyle). Three of us are chess players, 1 keen photographer, so the list goes on. But we do seem to come up with topics that we can all join in with our tuppence worth at any time.

Of course the favourite topic is regularly the competence of the leader. Does he really know where he is going? Will we be back before dark? Worse still, will we be back before the pubs close? Etc, etc, etc. As the incompetent leader I can claim that I have never lost a member of my party. Well I could claim it but it wouldn't be strictly accurate as I have lost somebody on a couple of occasions, but I have always found them again. Then there was the occasion when one of the others led a walk. We began with a bus ride from the finish to the start and when we got off the bus, the leader uttered those immortal words – "I think we go this way". Did not inspire confidence.

Leaving aside those minor irritations like not knowing where you were, politics and politicians are always a good bet to produce a lively debate. We have a dedicated member of the Labour party, one dedicated follower of UKIP and 3 of us whose allegiances change from week to week depending on who we are having a dig at, all in fun of course. And there are times in these conversations when you are not quite sure who is the Labour and UKIP supporters. The boundaries seem to get a little blurred.

We have also been known to come up with quirky little tables to classify the walks we do. We have one that categorises the number of other proper walkers we meet, we have one that categorises the amount of mud on the route. The top category here is a route that would qualify to be used as a course for the World Bog Snorkling Championships. I have managed to find a few of them in my time, much to my compatriot's displeasure.

Another topic that crops up regularly is the excuses people use. Not in general life, but the excuses used by our group for not going on a walk. I did once think about putting them altogether and publishing a book "999 Excuses for NOT Walking", or something like that. We had all the usual ones, too hot, too cold, too wet. But then they started to get a bit more inventive – car trouble (including wife wants the car), hospital/doctor/dentist/vet appointment, walk is too tough, walk is not tough enough, went to wrong meeting place. The best excuses so far for not going on a walk have been choir practice and need to stay supple for dancing lessons. A fair number of you from my era may remember the famous Catch-22. Well I have invented the soon to be famous Excuse-999 – I can't be bothered. I think that a lot of excuses used could be covered by this one. No doubt you all have heard bizarre excuses for not going walking. Maybe I will get around to documenting them sometime.

There are also the normal sights/sounds/events that you come across on any walk that can stimulate conversation, or maybe boredom. Is that a Magenta 5-petalled Daisy, or was that a Lesser Blue-Throated Midge Eater that just flew overhead. Or, I wonder what that old derelict mill we just passed was used for. I assume everybody knows of my interest in old railways (by the way I am not one of the retired railwaymen referred to earlier) but I do admit to occasionally boring people with my interest. I have met one person who is worse than me, but I won't name and shame him.

Now the fact that all of us keep coming on these walks I think is testament to the enjoyment, even entertainment, that they get from the conversations on the day, if not from the routes I take them on.

R.I.P.

It has been decided by the Editor that he has too much material for the Strider, so something has to go and I have been elected. I don't know what the new material is, it might be more pictures of non-descript groups of people stood outside non-descript buildings in non-descript parts of the country (I hope not, there are too many of them already), or it could be articles by Harry Potter on how to walk on water (so you can take the short route across Lake Windermere), or perhaps a series of articles on how to minimize what you carry and still get through the kit checks (just like some runners who seem to carry virtually nothing and get away with it). I don't know what will follow but I wait with bated breath.

For your information (if you are interested), there have been 66 articles, starting in 1995. I have missed submitting 2 in that period whilst I was recovering from my strokes and 3 of the articles were heavily edited so they bore varying degrees of my original content. Anyway that makes just under 50% of all Striders have a Backmarker article. Not a bad record even if I do say it myself. There were also 3 unpublished articles, but they were more event reports (in Backmarker style) rather than Backmarker ones. They were thought to be too long for event reports so weren't included.

I hope you have all enjoyed at least some of the articles. There was once a more famous person than me who said you can't please all of the people all of the time. So I hope I have pleased some of my readers some of the time. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for all the nice comments you have made when our paths crossed on walks. I would also like to say thank you to all the people who did or said daft things on events which gave me the inspiration for the articles. I still have 3 part-written articles based on various happenings, but they probably won't get finished now luckily for the culprits who inspired them.

Anyway, enough of my burbling, so R.I.P. Backmarker and Keep Walking even if I don't keep writing.



Three wrecks on a winter walk.



Backmarker with an unusual view of Monsal viaduct.

PS Just to let you in on a secret, those of you who keep asking my better half “Is your name REALLY Morticia?” her name really is M-----.