



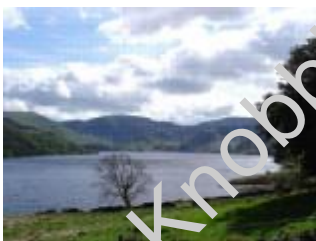
Newsletter No 24

April 2007

HILLWALKER FOUND ON THE MOON

In this Issue!

- I Wandered Lonely as a Clod!
- Snowy Epic on North Face of Penyghent
- Can Americans Really not say "Squirrel"?
- It's Official...Cumbria is Great
- 75th Anniversary of the Kinder Mass Trespass



Hawes water, near Shap



County Mayo

The perils of setting off into the hills while not on a Knobbly Stick holiday were brought sharply into focus last week when a local man (47) was found wandering in a bewildered state on the surface of the moon. Ron Thrutch (96) had set off for the summit of Helvellyn in perfect weather conditions, but the mist closed in and he became disorientated. "I don't know what happened", said Ron later. "I must have taken a wrong path. Thank goodness Neil Armstrong was there to save me. He'd only popped back for his thermos flask which he left there in 1969. And, do you know, his Bovril was still warm." So, all was well that ended well, but it could have been so very different. Mr Thrutch is 23.

What's Been Done...

In terms of walking, we've had a terrific start to the year. We had a day in January which was damp, but OK, and 3 days in Grange of variable, but pretty good, weather in February. The thing about walking at that time of year is that you can always get out, and if you get a good day, it can be out of this world, (as Mr Thrutch found out). As was proved in March with holidays in Keswick, during which we did some big hills, and in the Dales, where we had a snowy epic on Penyghent.

And we've had a day on St Sunday Crag near Ullswater, but we're no wiser as to who St Sunday might have been. Still, he (or she) has a grand hill to be remembered by. Thanks to those of you who proudly hold certificates of their achievements on these holidays—we certainly enjoyed every day's walking we did.

We've also been quite busy sorting out self-guided holidays for those of you who prefer to do things that way. Remember that if you tell us what you want, we'll do our best to fix it up for you—it could be a well-known route like the Dales Way or we can discuss any other requirements with you. We think that we are the only company offering tailor-made, "design-your-own", self-guided packages. So, if this kind of thing appeals—all the freedom of the walking without the hassle of the organizing—do get in touch and we'd be delighted to have a chat with you about it.

The Dales Way is, by the way, a cracking walk. The first time we walked it, it greatly exceeded our expectations. We have thought about running it as a guided holiday, but we'd need a minimum number to make it viable so, if you're interested... The same applies to other linear trails. How about the Lakes part of the Coast to Coast? Or the Cumbria Way? Four or five days of superb walking with ever-changing scenery and never-changing jokes.

Plastic Fantastic

There was a story in our local paper last week about a Cumbrian tourist attraction that is concerned about the effect that the early spring / global warming / Steve McClaren is having on the flowers of the Lake District. The warm weather has meant, among other things, that the daffodils have bloomed earlier than usual and so there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth about what the poor visitors will do when they arrive in the Lakes expecting to see daffs, but there aren't any. In a creditable show of lateral thinking, the managers of this particular attraction have spent a small fortune on plastic daffodils that they are now busily "planting". See the lengths that we'll go to in Knobbly Stick Land to keep people happy.

We understand that 300 million gallons of Quink have been ordered to make Windermere and Ullswater look blue, an array of dazzling floodlights is being erected across Cumbria to give the impression of incessant sunshine and all small animals—voles, otters, squirrels, tiny children etc—are being kitted out in fake wool to make them look like little lambs. Aah! And, if you see any giant hedgehogs that look like Mrs Tiggywinkle, or if Peter Rabbit asks you for money, then you've probably had too much local beer—which is really only water but

GREEN ISSUES GO RED

At Knobbly Stick, we have always tried to be as green as possible; after all, we depend on the preservation of wide-open spaces and their wildlife, and we don't want the countryside covered in rubbish when we show it to visitors. We do this in several ways—sometimes the quite trivial—picking up plastic bags and bottles we find lying about, or even, at times, rescuing the odd animal (usually sheep) in difficulties.

This year, as you probably know, we have given Knobbly Stickers the chance to contribute, with the cost of their holiday, to footpath repair, and we are matching every contribution made. We take the view that, since our activities inevitably contribute to footpath erosion, we should do something to help alleviate the problem.

Last week we were also involved in a fact finding seminar on the red squirrel, Britain's native squirrel, which is under threat because of the introduction, in 1876, of the imported grey squirrel. The grey and the red cannot co-habitate, principally because the grey carries squirrel pox, which is a disease they can survive, like a cold to us, but which is fatal to the red in nearly all cases. The Tourism & Conservation Partnership, with whom we are pleased to work, and the Forestry Commission, are helping to set up reserves for the red squirrel. Apparently, they stand a better chance of long-term survival in conifer woodland than in our native deciduous trees.

Knobbly Stickers who come to the north of England will be doing their bit, without going out of their way, by reporting squirrel sightings that

we will log and send on. Don't worry, you won't have to carry a clipboard and pencil around with you—we'll do all the hard work!

The other result of the afternoon's activities is that we have been educated on signs to look out for when squirrels are about—eaten pine cones and what their dreys (nests) look like—so we should have a better chance of seeing these delightful animals on our wanderings.

One thing is certain, there are not the numbers of red squirrels that there used to be, but the experts who spoke to us were very optimistic that they were going to be able to protect the species. If you would like more information about red squirrels, please contact us, or visit the red squirrel pages at www.forestry.gov.uk

GATE LEANING HITS THE NATIONAL PRESS!

Those of you who have been on a Knobbly Stick holiday (and if you haven't, why not?) will know that your guides are pleased to pass on their expertise at gate leaning, and its more extreme and dangerous derivative, bridge leaning.

Up to now, we had always assumed this to be a fairly narrow field of interest, which had yet, for some reason beyond us, to capture the public imagination. It was therefore with some excitement that we found an article in the Guardian a few weeks back entitled "Tom Hodgkinson has turned idle moments into an art form".

In it, the said Mr H explains his predilection for leaning on gates. It must be said that some of his advice is, in our opinion, imperfect—he mentions, for example, talking to passers by, which could make for a dangerous distraction.

Remember, one moment's loss of concentration, and your arm could slip, and you could chin yourself on the top of a gate. This is one of the reasons why you should never use a mobile phone whilst gate leaning (the other reason is that you'll look a prat, but we'll let that pass...)

On the upside, he does mention the

joy of pondering, although, once again, he misses out that it should ideally be pointless pondering, with a vacant sort of slack-jawed expression on your face. There are other refinements you can add, like chewing on a blade of grass, but these can only come with experience.

For more information on this topic, book yourself on one of our holidays and let Pete or John give you a master class. If you show enough aptitude, you could move on to bridge leaning, but you must be aware that some never advance this far.

And talking of the Guardian, that newspaper carried an editorial on 23 January this year entitled "In Praise of Cumbria". We reproduce here (without permission) some of this piece.

"It might seem specious to praise Cumbria. Who doesn't? Who hasn't? A county which embraces the Lake District and has references in its CV from Wordsworth, Coleridge and Ruskin can surely sit back and preen. And it seems many Cumbrians are doing that, with a survey yesterday finding 9 in 10 are satisfied with where they live. So what if it has just been named Britain's best place for nature lovers by BBC Wildlife Magazine? Was there any real competition? Maybe not. But it is worth polishing the sheen of this award for it draws attention to the quieter parts of Cumbria [such as] the wild sea cliffs near St Bees or the hauntingly empty plateau between Kirkby Stephen and Shap. Some of the best of the county's 104 nature reserves are in these lonely places. A scarcely discernible smudge on the windblown grass at Black Dub marks the line of the Roman road to Scotland, which until the 18th century took the role of the M6".

So there you go...it's official. Cumbria's grand. (Thank you Guardian).

What's to Come...

On page 1, we talked about what we've done so far this year, but we're sure you're all dying to know what we have in store over the next few weeks and months. We did circularise (is that a word?) a number of enquirers and regulars a week or two ago with a list of holidays which have people booked on them, but which also have vacancies, so we hope you don't mind if we publicise that list again. Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin...

Lake District:

Ullswater: 4 walking days / 5 nights at the Glenridding Hotel for £555. The lake where Willie Wordsworth saw his (not plastic) daffodils and Donald Campbell broke the world water speed record (not in the Ullswater Steamer). Some big hills (Helvellyn, St Sunday Crag) and some little hills (Keldas, Gowbarrow). Brilliant!

Holidays starting on 15 April and 17 June.

Keswick: 4 walking days / 5 nights at the award-winning Highfield Hotel for £599. One of Britain's great mountain towns, Keswick is perfectly placed for an exploration of some of Lakeland's finest scenery—Borrowdale, Newlands, Skiddaw Forest, Thirlmere and the red squirrels of Whinlatter.

Holidays starting on 29 April, 22 July and 5 August

Eastern Lakes (Shap): weekend break from 11 to 13 of May. Two days walking and 2 nights at the Greyhound for £215. Some "away from it all" walking in wild valleys like Sleddale and Swindale, and some more typical Lakeland countryside around Haweswater with the hills of Harter Fell and High Street. Golden eagles (if we're very lucky), grouse and red deer.

Grasmere: 4 walking days / 5 nights at the Red Lion in this famous Lake District village. £580. The home of Wordsworth, Sarah Nelson's gingerbread and Sam Read's bookshop, voted best independent book retailer of the year (2006) by Times readers.

Holiday starting 24 June.

Hill Walking the Easy Way (Grange over Sands): 3 walking days / 4 nights at the splendid Netherwood Hotel for £519. Worth every penny to be looked after in great surroundings, to dine well and to get some excellent and varied walking on Lakeland's southern fringe.

Holiday starting on 30 July.

Yorkshire Dales:

Three Peaks Country: 3 walking days / 4 nights at the Austwick Traddock for £449. Another superbly comfortable hotel with a country house atmosphere and a menu of locally sourced (where possible) organic food. The walking's pretty good as well, with all the 3 Peaks (Wharfedale, Ingleborough and Pen-y-ghent) within easy reach. But there's also lots of fairly easy walking, still with spectacular views and loads of interesting things to see.

Holidays starting on 8 July and 19 August.

Settle—Carlisle Railway Walk: 4 walking days / 5 nights for £555. We walk through the same landscape as this most scenic stretch of one of Britain's most famous rail lines (from Settle to Kirkby Stephen). We link the stations so we walk out and get a train back each day.

Holidays starting on 10 June (at the Austwick Traddock) and on 12 August (at the Falcon Manor, Settle).

Ireland:

County Mayo: 6 diddly-eye days / 7 nights at the Hotel Newport for £895. Some amazing scenery quite unlike anywhere else we run holidays, Ireland's holiest mountain, a fine 18th century town, bird life and a black drink well known throughout the world. You never know, we might even get some walking done as well.

Holiday starting 26 May.

And, not forgetting...

The Great Knobbly Stick 5th Birthday Bash from 18 May at the Glenridding Hotel. We are genuinely touched and delighted that so many of you have booked to come on this "extended weekend" break, or have expressed regret that you can't make it. Numbers have exceeded our expectations but, so long as the hotel can find room for you, we're more than happy to have you along.

Also, Coming Soon...

County Mayo: one week starting on 8 September.

Ullswater: starting 16 September

Keswick: starting 23 September

Railway Walk: starting 18 November

Walking the Easy Way: starting 2 December.

We know that most people like to join an existing group and, on all the above holidays, you can be sure of doing just that.

Book soon...time may be shorter than you think.

Did you know...

The ancestral home of the late HRH Princess Grace of Monaco is near Newport, the base for our Ireland holidays? No? Neither did we.

New Feature...Mo's Monthly Moan

We at Knobbly Stick Publishing are always pleased to welcome new features to this Newsletter. Jane's Fashion Tipshas become a firm favourite with our reader (Mrs Trellis), but Jane is still sulking after the Phantom Hat fiasco (see Issue 23).

So we're pleased and relieved that we have another valuable contribution to modern life to share with you. This is Mo's Monthly Moan, and here we go.

I'll tell you something shall I? Do us a column they said. We'll call it "Mo's Monthly Moan", so I said OK and then looked back at their so-called newsletters. Does it come out every month? No, it bloomin' well doesn't. I mean, how can you have a good old moan every month, when the thing only comes out every 3 or 4 months. Ridiculous. As if I haven't got enough to do without dreaming up moans that are never going to get published. So, that's my first moan...people saying things

they don't mean. They do though, don't they though? "Leave it with us. We'll sort it out", they say. And do they? Do they flip. And that's another thing. Call centres. Why do they say "Your call is important to us" when it obviously isn't? And who chooses the music they play while you're put on hold? At least Knobbly Stick don't do that, but I bet it's only because they haven't worked out how to do it yet. And I'll tell you something else shall I... sorry Mo, you've run out of space (Ed).

Access For All—the Mass Trespass

While Knobbly Stick is busy getting ready to celebrate its 5th Birthday, Easter sees the 75th Anniversary of one of the most momentous events in the battle for access to our uplands for recreation for all.

So far as we aware, there has never been a serious access problem in the Lake District. Early tourists were tolerated with a sort of bemusement and hill walkers were left to get on with what the locals appeared to regard as a harmless eccentricity. And things in the Lakes have remained pretty much the same for the last couple of hundred years. The recent CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way) Act has opened up some new land in the Lakes, but not very much, as most of the high, unenclosed land was accessible anyway.

But it was not always like this in other places. It seems almost incredible to us now, but back in the 1930's the Peak District—roughly the area between Manchester and Sheffield—was barred to walkers by the landowners who "needed" the land for grouse shooting.

Easter weekend 1932 saw the Lancashire branch of the British Workers' Sports Federation set off from Old Glossop for a walk on Bleaklow (2060ft). They had invited some colleagues from the London area to accompany them and were turned back by a group of gamekeepers who "abused and threatened" them. Not unnaturally, they weren't too pleased about this and concluded that, if enough walkers turned out at the same time, no amount of bullying could keep them all off the moor. A mass trespass was arranged for 24 April 1932, and ramblers from all over Britain turned up for an attempt on Kinder Scout, the highest of the Peak moorlands. Despite a scuffle with a group of gamekeepers part of the way up the hill, most of the walkers got to the Promised Land of the top. Six people were arrested and 5 subsequently found guilty of "unlawful assembly" and sentenced to prison terms of between 2 and 6 months. The jury apparently consisted of "two brigadier generals, three colonels, two majors, three captains, two aldermen and 11 country gentlemen."

This example of British justice provoked a huge wave of public sympathy. A few weeks later, 10,000 ramblers turned up at Winnats Pass, near Castleton (Derbyshire) for an access rally but it took a further 17 years for the National Parks to be created and access made that bit easier.

Much remained to be done, however, and it was not until the CROW Act was finally implemented in 2005 that further big tracts of land were opened up.

Much to his credit, the 11th Duke of Devonshire, Andrew, publicly apologised for the "great wrong" done in 1932.

For people like your Knobbly Stick guides, who are used to walking in an area where access has never been much of an issue, it is hard to believe that such events took place so relatively recently. Rest assured that we'll be raising a glass or two at our birthday bash to those determined souls who did more than their bit to bring some fairness to Britain's great outdoors. Cheers!

Those early activists were people who clearly recognised the health-giving potential of a good walk. There was a big piece in our paper the other day about all the health and fitness advantages of walking, but we've mentioned this before, and we're not sure you want to read what two old codgers like us have to say about it. We could, instead, quote Joan Bakewell, once a TV star, and now a lady "of a certain age" who regards walking as an essential part of her "programme" for keeping creaking limbs supple and active. Ms Bakewell says that, as you get older, you need more exercise, not less, so as to get oxygen into the body and to keep the circulation going. She also says that there is nothing better than walking to "quieten an uneasy spirit and to set squabbles into perspective." So, be told. You know it makes sense. Come for a walk with Knobbly Stick, and the world will seem a better place...well, maybe.