

March Fellwalking Report Annie Clouston

Nobody could say we hadn't been warned – it was a MudFest to rival the best of Glastonburys. However, the anticipated inclement weather lasted as long as it took us to get our boots submerged in the lake that was the Demesnes Car Park at Wolsingham, and then the sun got his hat on and came out to play.

Eight of us had a delightful mud-slither of a ten miler almost all the while in view of the Wear. A conversation was had about what was so special about Weardale – love it or hate it, who could be indifferent? I think this walk would win anyone over to the charms of this under-rated valley.

Stepping out from Wolsingham we walked east on the south side the River Wear on the Weardale Way and up to Knitsley Fell trig point. A bit of a slog (“how much further is it, Bob?”) but we loafed about there with coffee and snacks, as you can see from the photo, in very pleasing sunshine. Whilst walking I mused upon my companions, and in that childish way that a product of a girls' grammar school who had a nickname would, I searched for appropriate monikers. So, trekking on that day were: The Legs, The Whippet, The Baldersdale Strider, The Golf Club, The Oracle, Di Maggio, The Pickler and Little Miss Swishy-Swashy. I think they will know who's who.

We rejoined the Weardale Way to walk to the footbridge over the river. Sitting on some tarry railway sleepers, the railway at our backs and the frisky-full river sparkling with sun-stars at our front, we had our snap. We turned back to base on the north side of the river on footpaths through fields and tracks to Mill Lane and then climbed gently to Greenwell. An old grassy track led us to the B6297 where we dived with death to get across the road to see a stone cross monument to John Dukkett, a catholic priest, who was hanged, drawn and quartered by good Christian Roundheads in 1644 (The Pickler told me that it was a badge of pride among executioners to disembowel and display the innards in front of the living victim. How splendid!). As if crying for him, the heavens opened at this point and we got a thorough soaking.

We returned to Wolsingham across the fields and eschewed the refreshment there opting for the Bradley Burn Farm Café where coffee, cake and post-walk crack was good. Many thanks to Bob for helping us love Weardale all over again.

