

7 – 9 Mile Walking Group - Barnard Castle/Cotherstone Circular – Report by Peter Singer

On a pleasantly warm and sunny solstice day, seventeen of us gathered expectantly at Scar Top for a 7.5 mile, classic Teesdale circular walk from Barnard Castle to Cotherstone and back, following the Teesdale Way along both sides of the river. It was great to welcome a number of new members to the group, as well as many of the usual suspects. This was the fourth walk that the leader had recce'd, with the previous three having been discounted because of problems with either vertiginous terrain or an implacably threatening bull, so there was a sense of relief that we actually had a walk to undertake. The leader warned that the walk, like life, had its ups and downs, but all would be well if we stuck to the right path. The group felt that it was too early in the morning for cod-philosophy, so with no more ado we struck out to cross what had originally been St John's Bridge over Percy Beck, passing the site of the former bandstand and out along the wooded and shady riverside path. This was good walking, although care was needed in places to avoid exposed tree roots and rocks. At the "wishing stones" those who managed to go through the gap between the stones, without touching either of them, were able to make a wish, albeit with no guarantee of fulfilment. Having climbed steeply up Tees Bank, we rounded West Holme Farm, quietly skirting some lovely, new calves and distant (and fortunately docile) cows, through meadows and back down through woods, with a splendid view across the river to a former mill, before crossing two bridges to reach Cotherstone. A pretty spot known as the Hagg, by the confluence of the Balder and the Tees, made a good place for our lunch and a deer was spotted briefly as we set off again on the return leg up the steep steps on Hallgarth Hill, leading to the site of Cotherstone Castle. We paused for a moment at the lonely grave of Abraham Hilton, a local philanthropist who founded a number of charities and reflected that, as he had lived to the age of 87 (a good age in 1902), philanthropy must be good for you, although perhaps being wealthy may also have had something to do with it. The remainder of the walk followed the river back towards Barney, punctuated by the songs of chiff chaffs and wrens, with a hare glimpsed bounding across a meadow, on through Towler Hill plantation and farm and passing the remains of the Tees Railway viaduct (1861), before crossing the Silver Bridge (1898) and back to Scar Top for ice-creams all round. The walk, which some of us had not done for several years, was very enjoyable, with varied terrain, good views and quite a few points of interest – and the weather was kind. Thanks to Judith, we also added the term "sneezing gate" (as opposed to "kissing gate") to the lexicon of rambling. Bless you!

Looking across the Tees with Cotherstone mill opposite



The next walk will be on July 19. This exhilarating 8 mile walk will go from Middleton in Teesdale to the heights of Monks Moor (565m) and return through Hudeshope. Please contact Nicky Grace if you are interested in coming along nickygrace729@gmail.com

The August walk will be on Wednesday 16 August.