

WYRESDALE ROUND JUNE 11th June 2006



The start and finish outside Abbeystead Church

The round of the Wyresdale skyline bogs has been talked about for a few years but was only recently completed by Andy Verden in December 2005. Since then Stewart Forsyth and Richard Davies have completed it on a claggy day in May 2006 .

The original idea was to start and finish at Quernmore and Scorton Post Offices. I had decided that there was no place in fell running for such pillars of commercialism! A round based on Abbeystead Church was much more uplifting for the soul - and would negate the need to cadge a lift back to Quernmore from a reluctant spouse!

During the winter of 2005/2006 I had recced a route crossing Wyresdale that began at Abbeystead Church and went south up onto Harrisend Fell. From here it followed the main skyline route to Clougha before descending back across the fields to Abbeystead Church. Although here was no clear path from Clough to Jubilee Tower tussocks going downhill were not too bad an option at the end of a round, and the route across the fields seemed a good alternative to any nasty tarmac. By going in winter Andy had been able to enjoy the real treats of Bowland such as body consuming bogs.

I finally decided that I would have a go on the day after I had missed doing Ennerdale in the heat. Perhaps a solo sunny summer round would be possible? But what about all those obstacles? Nettles in the fields, the dazzle of sunlight on cotton grass candles, the sun crevassed peat, the curlews that ignored noise abatement orders, and most worrying of all the fact that I might finish the round with a sun tan - it would be obvious that I had not spent the weekend indoors map fondling.

I set off from Abbeystead Church at 7.10 am. It was already hot as I pursued a hare the size of a stallion across the fields to Swainshead Hall Farm. It was early so I enjoyed a bit of trespassing around Swainshead Hall Farm and picked up the track to Lane Head where a deer undulated off over the fence on the fell boundary.

Up on Harrisend Fell someone had mown a strip through the heather. The umbilical path stretched ahead into the equatorial heart of Bowland and the Amazonian heather! Then at Grizedale Head the fun stopped .There was no path or trod and for the next mile it was the usual Bowland inebriated stumble over tussock and porcupine quilled burnt heather.

Up on White Moss the fence line bringing in the crowds from Fiendsdale Head veered in from the south. It was too early for much traffic and I plodded on alone. At Hawthornthwaite the trig point still towered above the peat, not yet toppled. The running here was easy and on grass, until descending through rocks to the fence line, and the feint trod to Holdron Moss. The Moss today was a sun dried shadow of its winter parent. No knee deep submersions and meandering detours past peaty pools. But it still seemed to stretch on forever. The sheep were conspicuously absent and the trods that I had used before were consumed by bilberry and cotton grass. I think that English Nature have tried to divert walkers away from the blanket bogs and together with the reduction in the sheep stock, the trods had become overgrown. I did not have the skills to plough on regardless –The ‘Tridimas Tractor’ technique! So it was a stumbling walk again on another section which looks easy on the map but drags on – even on a sunny day.

I dropped down to the Trough ready for food and water. I ate half the rice pudding and the rest went in a plastic bag for later. All my water bottles were filled up and I drank the rest. I was ready to go but the disappearing trods cut in again and I could only climb slowly to the trig point on Whins Brow. At least from here on it would be all motorway running – by Bowland standards. Those expecting a plethora of road kill from now on however will be disappointed – best to carry your own food!

The run to Brennand Tarn, with its two families of Canada Geese and goslings was a delight. Then on to the crenulated crag of Millers House where I disturbed newly fledged grouse chicks and finally crested Brennand Great Hill. On previous occasions this has resembled a set from Hitchcock's 'The Birds'. Today it was a muted shadow of its former self. Last year I had met someone flying Harris hawks to discourage the gulls and stop them eating the grouse eggs. It had obviously worked. A few gulls coasted over Woodyards on heat wilted wings, picking over the bleached tree stump bones in the sun cracked bogs.

At the fence junction I turned east to Wolfhole Crag and its trig – the only real out and back on the round. Then it was the long plod, over heaps of wind brushed peat dust, to Grey Crag and Ward's Stone. This is a long section and does seem to go on for ever. In the heat today it certainly seemed to have stretched horizons.

Once on the summit plateau I bagged the two trigs and descended at a brisk pace over Cabin Flats. I still puzzle how Andy Walmsley and I went wrong here in the dark of a February night in 2002 and the subsequent rescue by Ian Roberts and Leigh Warburton. Still there was no sign of human activity – was this to be the inaugural no-mates Wyresdale Round? Unfortunately on Clougha I met two walkers and descended off and across to a gate in the fence line ahead. A bit of a false dawn this - there was no trod beyond it so I dropped right to the edge of the sedge. The sheep should have put a trod in here? No chance - the sheep here are obviously bewildered and have failed to provide any decent trods - they need a good hefting! So I stumbled on, meandering through the sedge and tussock - at least it was all down hill - and into the seething car park at Jubilee Tower where the legless public were enjoying the views out of their car windows.

Here I picked up another water bottle and headed across the road and down to West Field House farm. A left turn here leads onto a track which is better than going through the front garden of Lee Tenements. Then a left turn put me back on the footpath and down across a cow hoof-cratered field now baked hard in the sun - good ankle wrenching terrain. At Meeting House Farm I turned sharp right to cross the western footbridge – I had reccied this last year and confused the two footbridges that lead south out of here. Then it was nearly over - head for the trees and then down along the fence and across the fields. I could see the pine tress of the Vicarage now and as I ploughed through the buttercup parasoled field a wave of elation washed over me. I had got round despite all my doubts about my post BG attempt fitness and the heat. Another route had been added to the Bowland catalogue and I had had a brilliant day out on the fells. There was even applause from the squeaking Peewit's whose house I had probably just destroyed! You can't beat a first completion on such a magic day with minimal human contact - given the Bowland Bog aroma probably not a bad thing! Happy Days – it doesn't get better than this!

Time: 6 hours 38 minutes

Duncan Elliott June 2006