

England, New Year 2013



December 27, 2012 to February 12, 2013

Bob and Molly Hillery

As we have for the past two years, we once again spent Christmas at home in Mason and then flew to England for the New Year and for a six week stay at our nephew's apartment in Yorkshire.

We left home in a snow storm, saw over a foot of snow fall while in England and returned home in February for another six weeks of winter! However, we did enjoy our stay in Ilkley and saw many of our family and friends as well as hosting Molly's brother Robert for a week in Yorkshire.

The wintry weather didn't change our plans significantly and the snow on the hills added a different dimension to my walks. Our routine still included almost daily visits to the local shops and, of course, some very good meals at the excellent restaurants in and around Ilkley.

We are already looking forward to New Year 2014!

England, December 2012

Wednesday December 26

Following our early surprise Christmas with the visit by Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha two weeks ago and our gift exchange and meal with the Shepards on Christmas Day, we are now on our first flying trip since Molly's surgery in September. After the requisite three months of "no flying" we are on our way to England for the New Year and into February.

However, the journey even at this stage (we are still in Cincinnati airport as I write) has been anything but uneventful. A severe storm system has been working its way from the southwest for the past couple of days and predictions for the greater Cincinnati area and for the eastern seaboard have steadily worsened to the point where blizzard warnings are out for regions in southwest Ohio. So, as early as last night, we decided to rent a car to the airport rather than have Elizabeth or Chip make the two-way trip as planned. We also decided to make the journey in the morning hours despite the fact that our scheduled departure was not until 4pm. All forecasts seemed to suggest that things would get worse during the day so we felt an early start was appropriate.

At 8 o'clock we looked out at a thin coating of ice and freezing rain coming down at quite a pace so things had started as the meteorologist had predicted. What they hadn't predicted, however (although we were half-anticipating) was a call from Delta to inform us that our first flight (Cincinnati to New York) had already been canceled and we had been re-booked via Boston. This had us arriving in London close to our original plan but necessitated a very close connection in Boston – exactly where the storm was headed. But we knew we had to get to the airport no matter what so we left home before nine to pick up the car. Fortunately the car rental office is only a few miles away so the drive there was not too traumatic. The return, when Molly was driving her car, was worse but we both made it back to the condo safely.

At this point there seemed to be a slight let-up in the precipitation so we decided to pack everything in the rental car and start for the airport, planning to stop for breakfast at our usual Bob Evans. It was slow-going along the county roads but traffic was light so we made it to Bob Evans safely – only to find that they were closed due to a power outage! So, it was on to the expressway with the plan to eat a little closer to the airport. By now the snow (it was now all snow) was falling heavily but two lanes of I-75 were OK for slow driving. However, as predicted accurately by the forecast models, by the time we crossed into Hamilton County there was minimal coverage on the ground and the precipitation had almost stopped. So we chose to eat at the Sharonville Bob Evans.

The rest of the drive through Cincinnati was on wet roads and there was visibly less and less coverage even on grassy areas as we went through the city. It was only on the final few miles as we climbed to the airport that it began to snow again and we were thankful to drop off the car and get inside.



Then, as we checked in, we were told that the flight to Boston had been delayed (which would have us miss the onward connection) and we were now re-routed via Minneapolis. This included a later start from Cincinnati (5pm), a three hour layover in Minneapolis and a noontime arrival in Heathrow on Thursday. This would still allow us to meet with Molly's brother for dinner as planned and – if all goes as scheduled – the new itinerary appears to be at least as good as our initial one. As we sit in the Delta Sky Club lounge, the snow still is coming down at quite a rate and plowing of runways and taxiways is not really keeping up the pace! We are not there yet!

The flight to Minneapolis did indeed leave on time and, even with the slight delay for de-icing, we were in very cold (10F) Minnesota as scheduled. We had quite a walk to the terminal for the next flight but still had plenty of time for a relaxing meal in one of the restaurants in the airport. It didn't seem very long before we were on the flight to London and getting ready to sleep on our "flat beds". These are much more comfortable than Delta's

usual Business Elite seats and we both slept quite well, especially as neither of us took time out for dinner and breakfast.

Thursday December 28

We arrived at Heathrow about an hour ahead of schedule around 11am. The airport was very quiet and we soon had passed through Immigration and retrieved our luggage and were on our way to the Underground station. The Piccadilly line took us directly from our terminal, through the center of London, and to Kings Cross/St Pancras. It was about an hour journey with over twenty stops along the way but a very convenient and efficient way to reach our hotel which is integral with the modernized St Pancras station, now the starting point for all Eurostar trains.

We were checked in and unpacked by about 1:30 and then went for a light lunch at a Starbucks we had passed in the labyrinth below the stations. We then showered and took a nap before meeting Molly's brother Robert for a pre-dinner drink in the main hotel reception lounge. This was followed by a very pleasant meal in the Sir Gilbert Scott restaurant and a final night cap in the lounge before Robert left us about 10:30.

The restaurant was named after the original architect of the station and hotel, both built as the "flagship" for the Midland Railway in the mid-1800s. The original hotel had 300 rooms but only five bathrooms (with nine baths!) – so, while it was the latest and best at the time, it was soon surpassed by other hotels with the more desirable en-suite facilities. By the 1920s both the hotel and station had lost a lot of their earlier charm and custom and the hotel in particular was in decline.

After the War there was a push towards demolition of the whole complex in favor of the more modern concrete and glass structures so popular in the fifties and sixties. It was not until a member of Harold Wilson's cabinet managed to get the building identified as a Grade 1 Listing that the cathedral-like brick external features were assured of being preserved. This still left the question of what to do with the beautiful inside rooms as by now the hotel was out of business. After a period as British Rail offices, the place was abandoned and remained empty for over twenty years.

Finally in the late nineties, the buildings were purchased by a consortium and renovation began. The work took over ten years but in May of 2011, the hotel re-opened under the ownership of Marriott and has gained a well-deserved reputation as a place to stay and be seen in London. In addition, of course, the reception for the hotel is less than a hundred yards from the Eurostar platforms in the station so European travelers in both directions have a very pleasant and convenient place to stay.



Lobby and Grand Staircase in the Hotel St Pancras



The Exterior of the Hotel and the modern St Pancras (Eurostar) Station

Following our brief stay and breakfast in the Chambers Room (the “Concierge Lounge” at this Marriott) we packed and dragged our suitcases to King’s Cross station for our 11am train to York. It was raining but we were able to spend all but a few hundred feet in the cover of the underground shopping areas so we arrived at the station without donning rain gear.

The train to York left on time, suffered a slight delay near Doncaster but arrived in York only a few minutes late. Meal service (free in First Class) was somewhat curtailed due to “staff shortages” but coffee and cookies was all that we needed after our full English breakfast. The Hertz office is right at the station (Platform 2) so we were soon able to get our car, despite a mix-up that I had created in the booking process. All we could get (other than a small SUV) was an automatic VW Passat so we took that with the possibility of changing after January 1 if we were inclined. Unlike experiences in Manchester, the Hertz agent here was extremely helpful and friendly and found us a good deal despite my mistake.

We were in Ilkley (still raining) by 4pm and immediately sought out our Caffè Nero for the first of what we assume will be many visits over the next seven weeks. We then drove up the hill, checked in to Wells House and rested and cleaned up before going to dinner at Piccolino. We watched a little TV before retiring around 10pm.

Saturday December 29

We woke around 8:30 and went to Caffè Nero for breakfast before doing our first big shop at Tesco. It was another rainy and dreary day but we had no further plans until dinner time after returning with the groceries and supplies. We did call Keith and Zena to finalize arrangements for New Year’s Eve and also talked to Dorothy and David before they left for their short break to Scotland.

This afternoon we did a little more shopping, paid another visit to Caffè Nero, caught up on paperwork, took a nap and generally relaxed until dinner at 7:45 at Monkman’s. As usual this was an excellent meal and we felt very welcome as both host and hostess made a fuss on our return after six months!

Sunday December 30

We had breakfast in the flat and left for church about 10:15. Again, many of the parishioners and the Vicar welcomed us back as old friends and it was nice to participate in a High Church service.

After church we had a light lunch at Caffè Nero and then returned to the flat on a still wet afternoon. About 3pm the weather cleared a little (the heavy rain stopped but the wind was still blowing a gale) so I decided on a short walk. I went up Wells Road to Queens Road and then found my way down to the main Skipton Road and then to the river bank. The Wharfe was very high and running swiftly as I walked beside it for about a half mile before turning up Brook Street into town. I took the longer (Cowpasture – Crossbeck) roads home and got back just as it started to rain in earnest again. The walk was one I had done many times in the past and it covers almost exactly three miles and takes about an hour.



A Bright Spell

We stayed home for dinner and watched TV until about 10 when we retired.

Monday December 31

It was after 9:30 before we were ready to go into town for breakfast and do some more shopping. It was still cool, breezy and damp, although we missed the worst of the rain in the 1 ½ hours we were gone. By the time we were settled in the flat again it was raining heavily and the clouds were coming down to obscure the view across the valley. Apparently the weather has been like this for weeks (some say months) and there has been widespread flooding throughout Britain. However, the latest forecast we have seen suggests that the New Year will start out a little better, so tomorrow may be more amenable for a longer walk.

Once again, however, there was a brief dry spell later in the afternoon and I did manage to complete the same walk that I had done yesterday before it got dark. Thus I ended the year with a total of 1138 miles under my belt (plus another 57 of what I have called "Casual Walking" – city walks, strolls with Molly during her recuperation, etc).

Keith and Zena arrived a little before 7pm. They had decided against walking home on New Year's Day as they had in the past as Keith is still suffering with a lingering cough, so we didn't make the drive over to Eldwick to pick them up. In fact, Keith drove to the restaurant and Zena drove us home after midnight so that I could "enjoy a drink".



The evening at the Farsyde was very pleasant again, although the single musician (with electronic augmentation) seemed even louder than last year and our table was much closer to the action. This made it a little difficult to carry on a conversation at times although we did manage to catch up on the happenings of both families over the past six months. The meal was very good as usual and spread out over about four hours before we all sang Auld Lang Syne on the stroke of twelve. We left shortly after midnight and enjoyed our New Year toast in the comfort of the flat before retiring about 1am.

Tuesday January 1, 2013



It was after nine before any of us emerged and close to ten before we were all gathered for a light breakfast in the flat. Keith and Zena left a little before mid-day on what appeared to be a much brighter day than anyone here had experienced in quite a while.

I thought this looked like an ideal day for a walk on the Moor so I soon got changed into walking togs and prepared to experience some “real walking” after a prolonged absence. Unfortunately the weather suddenly turned worse and there were several quite heavy showers before I actually ventured forth.

***Brighter—but still not
exactly sunny!***

I set off up Keighley Road in a drizzle and I was surprised at how difficult the first $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of climbing was and I am afraid my pace was pretty slow. As I reached the less steep parts towards Keighley Gate, however, I was able to pick up the pace despite a now heavy shower which seemed to be a mixture of rain and sleet. This had tapered off by the time I reached the gate and set off east towards the Top of the Moor with a very stiff breeze at my back. The going was now relatively easy as this section had been paved in 2010 so I was at the Ordnance Survey marker at 402 meters in about an hour.

I was surprised to see that the paving continued easterly from the cairn so, rather than turn round and retrace my steps as planned, I decided to see just how far the paving had been extended. In fact the path was stone flags all the way to the “Main route” across the Moor (to Dick Hudson’s) and for quite a long way north from the intersection towards White Wells. It was only a stretch of about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile just above the very steep climb above White Wells that remains unpaved – and of course it was extremely muddy following the weeks of rain. I – and literally hundreds of others out walking – made it down the slippery slope and the precipitous “steps” and eventually emerged on the pathway that took me to White Wells (open and doing a great business) and then down the gentle slope back to the apartment.

My GPS battery died after about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles so I don’t have an exact distance covered but my best estimate based on what I did measure, a look at the map and previous experience of this walk suggest a total of about five miles in about two hours.

After I changed, Molly and I went to Caffe Nero (another place doing a land office business) and pick up a couple of essentials before spending the rest of the day and evening at home.

Wednesday January 2

After breakfast at home I left for Bradford by train to meet Vanda for coffee. Unfortunately a “dickey” boiler and needed parts got in the way and we were unable to meet. However I had a train ride and a quick walk around the center of Bradford on a cool and windy morning.

On returning to Ilkley, Molly and I went for coffee at Caffe Nero and then stayed home for the rest of the day. The weather stayed cool and quite windy but there were only very occasional light showers, although heavier rain seemed to be a threat at all times throughout the day.

Thursday January 3

We had breakfast at Caffe Nero and shortly afterwards left for Harrogate. There we spent our M&S gift certificates from Dorothy and David and then had coffee at Starbucks. By this time it was around 1:30 so we walked to the Harrogate Theater where we were to see the pantomime “Jack and the Beanstalk”. Of course we could almost have written the script and certainly knew the most important lines but it was $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours of easy-to-take fun. Just watching – and listening to – the under ten audience was worth the price of admission.

It was dark when we emerged at 4:30 and we drove back to Ilkley through a steady drizzle. We made reservations at Bistrot Pierre for 7:30 and enjoyed a good meal there before retiring around 10pm.

Friday January 4

It was another misty and dreary morning as we got up late and had breakfast in the flat. I then took a drive to the other side of Ilkley Moor and took a short walk before returning early afternoon to the flat. Molly and I had coffee at Caffe Nero around three and then stayed home until Joanne and Robert came to pick us up for dinner at Monkmans.

We had a very good meal and an equally pleasant chat and before we knew it it was after 10pm and time for our guests to start their trip home. Three hours went very quickly for us; we hope that they felt the same.

Saturday January 5

We had breakfast (late) at Caffè Nero and then did some shopping at Boyes and Booths. We rarely visit the latter but we found everything we needed and were home before noon.

I went for a walk this afternoon; the weather today was probably as good as we have seen so far – no rain and reasonably mild (50F) – so my walk past White Wells and to the top of the Moor was very pleasant, especially now that the main path is paved. The paving stones (averaging 3 by 2 feet, with some being at least six feet long) form a very solid surface compared with the very muddy surrounding area but I don't want to give the impression that it is just like walking on the streets around Mason. The pavers are rough cut, sometimes partly covered with what appears to be asphalt (perhaps suggesting an earlier usage) and are laid well but by no means as a suburban sidewalk. So, it stays to look where you are walking and avoid the protrusions that are often seen, such as thick (one inch or more) diameter iron bars – again perhaps an indication of the previous use of the stone. In any event, the walking is pleasant and the path is a significant feat of strength and perhaps some ingenious engineering to lay such a base on this steep and undulating moorland.

We stayed home for the rest of the day and had dinner in the apartment before watching TV in the evening. Unfortunately, Molly has a cold now also (I brought mine with me) so we are both sniffing and feeling a little under the weather.

Monday January 7

We had breakfast at Caffè Nero and then I drove to Bingley for a walk on the canal past the three and five rise locks and as far as Crossflatts. I then walked back into Bingley via the main road until I took the footpath near the river as far as Myrtle Park and back to the car. Molly and I went for a coffee when I got back to Ilkley and then stayed in again for the rest of the day, dining in the apartment.

A splash of color for the dining table

A representative of the management association at Wells House came in the late afternoon to take a look at some water stains we have recently noticed and to give us a run-down on the state of affairs with ongoing roof issues in the complex. He told us he would "get on it" and we could expect to hear something soon. The good news is that the management assumes the cost of our internal decoration.



Tuesday January 8

Another cool and damp day in which we had breakfast again at Caffè Nero, stayed home much of the rest of the day and I went for a walk (about five miles) around Ilkley as it was turning dark. We ate at home once again.

Wednesday January 9

It was quite sunny and bright as we got up but very suddenly the moors and the valley were covered in mist. It was still misty but promised to be better later so, after breakfast at home, I decided to walk over Keighley Road to either Keighley or Bingley and return via train or bus. The mist lifted some as I climbed to Keighley Gate and there were some sunny patches but it seemed to generally stay dull in the Aire Valley.



It was a good deal colder than it had been, however, and the high temperature didn't get much above 40F. I managed to stay warm with my exercise and felt pretty good at my first decision point – left for Bingley, straight on for Riddlesden and Keighley. I decided to go along Street Lane to East Morton and then on the canal bank towards Bingley. It was a very pleasant walk and there were lots of people walking and cycling on the canal bank between Crossflatts and Bingley. I got the impression that most were just getting from “A” to “B” and not “out for a walk/ride” as I was.



I still felt fine at Bingley so I continued on to Saltaire and then to Shipley where I literally had to run to catch the train to Ilkley – rather than wait 30 minutes for the next one. I was back at the apartment by 2:30 and Molly and I went for our usual afternoon coffee before relaxing until dinner time.

We had an excellent meal at Martha and Vincent. There was only one other couple dining but it was nice to be remembered by the manager who came and chatted for a while about the Holiday Season, which had apparently been very good for them.

The Leeds-Liverpool Canal near Keighley

Thursday January 10

It was a very cold morning (right on freezing) and there was thick fog again as we drove down to town for a “fry up” at the Bistrot Pierre. The meal was quite good and not overly expensive and it was a change from Caffè Nero. We didn't spend any additional time in town and were glad to get back to the warmth of the apartment.

Friday January 11

We had breakfast at home and around 10:30 the first of the roofers came to inspect the water stains in the bedroom. He simply measured the distance that the stains were from the window and then went outside on the roof and, presumably, tried to determine the source. We were told that the second roofer (the one who deals with slate!) would be here early afternoon so we took advantage of the interlude to take a walk (Bob) and do a little shopping (Molly). Molly walked down into Ilkley while I walked up the moor as far as the Swastika Stone. It was cold but relatively bright and not at all unpleasant for walking. It so happened that we both arrived home about the same time but it was not until almost 2:30 that our second contractor appeared. Again he was in the apartment for all of five minutes, took his measurements and left.

Molly and I then drove to Caffè Nero for our afternoon coffee and “baby fix” and then returned home for the balance of the day and evening.

Saturday January 12

We drove to Skipton for breakfast at the Caffè Nero there followed by about an hour in the market and shops. It was a very cold (just above freezing) but bright morning and we were tempted into buying several items that look like they might keep us warm! We then drove back to Ilkley via Keighley and the Moor Road and had another coffee before returning to the flat.

Tonight we are meeting Dorothy and David and Geoff and Christine at Ridding Park for dinner. This is a change from earlier plans (Bistrot Pierre in Harrogate) but we have always enjoyed meals at Ridding Park and it will be a good time to catch up on everyone's life as we haven't seen any of them for about six months.

The meal was good and we had time for a long chat while taking coffee in the lounge. It was after 10pm when we left Ridding Park and almost eleven by the time we were in bed. The temperature was just below freezing and an overnight snow was predicted.

Sunday January 13

We woke up very late (almost ten) to a bright and sunny morning. We chose not to go to church because we were running so late and Molly is still coughing quite violently, especially in a morning.

The weather was too nice to miss a chance for a walk and it looked now as though it would be clear all day, although dire predictions of snow are still in the forecast. Nevertheless I set off up Keighley Road under a beautiful sunny sky and passed many walkers and bikers on the way up to Keighley Gate.



From there I followed the road down to Riddlesden, having decided to head for Keighley rather than Silsden. The Keighley to Ilkley bus runs only hourly on Sundays so I was mindful of the times it left both Keighley and Silsden and concluded that I would “just miss” the two o’clock hour bus in Silsden.

So I continued down via Riddlesden and the Worth Valley into Keighley where I had ample time for a coffee before the 3:10 bus to Ilkley. The skies were now overcast but it was still dry, although the bus driver turned on his windshield wipers a couple of times as we came over Cringles and through Addingham. The roads were dry as I got off the bus in Ilkley but about half way up Wells Road I saw the first snowflake – which had turned into a genuine snow shower by the time I got home about 4pm.

The River Worth at Keighley

We watched the weather for the next couple of hours trying to decide whether a meal in Ilkley would be possible; certainly we were anticipating that going out on Monday evening might not be possible if the forecast was anywhere close to accurate. The roads appeared to be clear so we went for another nice meal at Piccolino around 7:30 and were home by nine.



Monday January 14

We awoke to a snow covering both the trees and the moorland and right across the Wharfe Valley. The roads appeared to be relatively clear and indeed we had an easy drive into Ilkley for breakfast around ten. It did start to snow very heavily, however, and Wells Road was covered over by the time we were returning and it continued to snow heavily for a couple of hours or more.



However, in the early afternoon, the snow stopped falling and the sun came out to give us some glorious views in all directions. I decided on a walk to the Cow and Calf Rocks via the roads and got some good pictures of the snow in the valley, on top of the rocks and across the Moor. It was much colder on top and there was a chilling breeze but it was nice to be out in the sun for a while. It didn’t last long, however, and it was overcast again by the time I had completed the walk.





Winter comes to Ilkley Moor



We stayed home for the rest of the day and ate in tonight.

Tuesday January 15

We once again had breakfast at Caffè Nero and did some shopping. In the afternoon I went for a walk along the northern crest of the Moor as far as the road that leads to Silsden. The weather was bright and sunny and the 4-5 inches of snow on the tops made for a beautiful scene and a very pleasant walk.



A beautiful day for a walk: the stream near Keighley Road and my path across the moor

I was a little concerned about the very steep descent to the road at the end of the moor but I managed to negotiate it very slowly and made it to the road and then a bridle path to the main Silsden Road near Cringles. The bridle path was perhaps one of the most difficult stretches as it was snow covered icy patches (that soon gave way to water) or deep mud. I managed to get my boots well and truly wet and muddy and even managed to get my socks wet.



Some tough walking, beautiful views and, finally, a clear road

I arrived at the main road just in time for the bus to Ilkley so I was home and dry by about 4:30. Tonight we went to Bistro Saigon for dinner.

Wednesday January 16



It was very foggy this morning - once more eating breakfast in town – and we were a little concerned about Keith and Zena driving to pick us up later to drive to the theater in Leeds. I spoke with Keith mid-morning and at that time it was clear in Eldwick but we agreed to check again later in the afternoon.

Molly and I had a good late lunch at home as we knew we wouldn't have time for dinner this evening and then we just stayed home and waited to talk to Keith. He called at 4pm and said that the forecast was for heavy fog in Leeds so we decided to each travel by train and meet at the station. This we did, arriving about 6pm and got a taxi to the West Yorkshire Playhouse where Keith and Zena had bought us tickets to see "The Wind in the Willows". We had time for a drink before the show started and – as far as I was concerned – this was the best part of the evening. Other than the excellent use of sets, I could find nothing to amuse or interest me in the play. However the others seemed to enjoy it and it was nice to be out with them again, despite the very cold weather.

We each got trains home from Leeds around ten so we were home about 10:45.

A good morning to stay home

Thursday January 17

It was still foggy this morning as I left to drive to Bingley to meet Vanda for coffee in The Loft. Again it was nowhere near as thick in the Aire Valley although it was still very much overcast and cold. We spent a couple of hours catching up and then I drove back over the Moor Road where the trees were beautifully coated with frost and snow and the moorland still had a relatively thick blanket of snow. More is forecast for the weekend!

Indeed there was a very light dusting as I took my late afternoon walk around Ilkley and it continued periodically throughout the evening. There was nothing much on the roads by bedtime (we stayed home) but the non-road areas had been given a fresh whitening.

Friday January 18

After breakfast at home I started another walk over the top past Keighley Gate towards Keighley. It was overcast and bitterly cold – especially on top where there was a significant wind – but I was fine as long as I kept moving. I proved this in a couple of places on the steep downward stretch just after Keighley Gate on the area of paved road. First I came across a BMW which was skidding in place with an elderly gentleman at the wheel and (I think) his two twenty-year-old grandchildren outside, with the boy attempting to push. He looked at me with a “could you help” plea but it was plain that the operation was just too dangerous. No sooner had I suggested this to him than the car started sliding backwards and the boy had to make a hasty sideways retreat.

The driver made a valiant attempt to get going again and actually got some traction for a few yards but then he started sliding out of control. He did two complete 360 degree turns downhill and at one point it looked as though he might actually be headed in the right direction under power. But this didn’t last and he slid into the deeper snow at the side of the road and that was the end of their journey.

The younger man was attempting to contact the AA (probably a long wait I suspect on a day when they had probably received hundreds of calls) but there was nothing I could do except continue my walk. I knew of a farm house about a mile further down the hill and thought I might try and get them some help there.

About 200 yards further on I passed another, much smaller car, coming up the hill. The forty-ish driver seemed to be making relatively good progress but she was not yet at the steepest point. I watched from the safety of the grass as she smiled and drove by and then I turned round to watch her progress. It wasn’t much further! She stopped the car (or it decided to stop) at a rakish angle across the road and she got out and started to walk down to me as I walked back up the hill towards the car. It was clear from her dress (almost “business casual” that she wasn’t expecting any difficult roads and she informed me that she was simply following her Sat Nav (GPS) to Ilkley.

Since the road is shown on the map and indeed it is a road of sorts all the way, this wasn’t perhaps too surprising but when she asked if she would be better to turn around and try an alternative route I quickly said Yes. Even if she had made it to the top (very doubtful) the road going down into Ilkley is unpaved with concrete water diverters at regular intervals and good only for high clearance four wheel vehicles. She rather skillfully turned the car round and thanked me for my help (!) and seemed to drive safely and relatively quickly down the hill to more civilized (and better gritted) roads. She also offered me a lift and seemed quite surprised when I told her that I was actually out in this weather for a walk!

The rest of the walk to Keighley was quite uneventful and I arrived there in time to have a leisurely coffee before taking the bus back to Ilkley. I arrived back at the flat soon after 3pm. It was starting to snow a little as I walked up Wells Road and by the time we left for our dinner appointment at the Farsyde, the roads were covered over again. We had a very nice meal once again in a somewhat quiet restaurant. I think even those that were there were keeping one eye on the weather as the snow continued throughout the evening. The main road through Ilkley was clear as was Brook Street but once we turned on to Wells Road we were driving on snow covered pavement. It was touch and go as to whether or not we would make it but fortunately we were able to get to the two way stretch of Wells Road just after the gritter had come down so we managed a little more traction – and equally important, no-one else was coming down the hill! We breathed a sigh of relief as we pulled into Brodrick Drive and parked in the garage.

Saturday January 19

The snow had stopped by morning but there was probably an additional two inches on the ground, although Wells Road had been fully cleared. We had breakfast at home and then I decided on a walk to the other side of the valley near Middleton. I walked via Ben Rhydding to Leeds Road and crossed the river at this point. I walked back towards Ilkley for about a quarter of a mile and then turned north up Carters Lane which climbed steadily to Middleton. From here I was walking west along a ridge overlooking Ilkley and I could just make out Wells House against the white backdrop of Ilkley Moor.

It was still cold – around freezing – but the roads and many of the sidewalks (where they existed) were cleared and easy for walking. The road eventually turned south and I arrived in Ilkley at the old stone bridge (at the eastern end of the Dales Way) from where it was an easy walk back to the flat. The park near the river, and indeed a bit of sloping ground (of which Ilkley has an abundance), was packed with families using their sleds, probably for the first time in two years because there was essentially no snow here last season. Many of the better “rides” had been denuded of snow and kids were sledding on muddy grass but no-one seemed to mind.

In total I walked just short of six miles and enjoyed the change in scenery from the other side of the valley. Obviously it was very relaxing because I immediately fell asleep for 1 ½ hours after getting home. I woke up in time for Molly and I to go into town for coffee, however, before returning to the flat as it went dark about 4pm.

We decided to eat out yet again and had an excellent meal at Martha and Vincent.

Sunday January 20

Today was a dreary, dull and lazy day at home bracketed by breakfast at Caffè Nero and dinner at Bistrot Pierre.

Monday January 21

There had been a few more inches of snow overnight and it was still snowing as we got up and ate breakfast at home. Wells Road had not been touched

by any snow removal equipment (in fact it was primarily being used as a sled run) so venturing out in the car was not an option. It continued to snow lightly but I eventually made up my mind to walk over the top once more, this time headed for Bingley rather than Keighley.



Local Roads provided good sled runs!



A lot of snow!

Despite the continuing light snow and a cold wind on top, it was a very pleasant walk and I saw some quite dramatic snow drifts and deep accumulations on several roads. In fact, it wasn't until I reached East Morton that the roads appeared to have been treated; even then traffic was moving rather gingerly. Many local schools had been closed so the transport of choice was the sled and every slope seemed to have dozens, if not hundreds, of kids (and adults) making the best of an extra day away from school or work.

The deep snow and icy patches made walking slow and a little treacherous at times but once I reached the canal bank the going was much easier. I have noted before that the canal bank is well used by walkers and cyclists (not many of the latter today) and so the snow was well padded down and provided a smooth and relatively easy surface on which to walk.



The canal towpath was flat but care was still needed to avoid an icy dip

I had tea and a teacake at The Loft in Bingley and then caught the train back to Ilkley where Molly and I stayed home for the rest of the day. Wells Road was still essentially untreated!



A popular sled run near Bingley..... and Wells Road near the apartment

Tuesday January 22

It was a much brighter morning and the sun came out as I left on my walk. We had eaten breakfast at home (still not sure about Wells Road) and then I walked to the station and caught the train to Guiseley. From here I walked down Old Hollins Hill through Esholt ("Emmerdale") and then across to Baildon. It was very sunny which made it feel warm as I walked and I eventually abandoned both hat and gloves. From Baildon I walked down to Saltaire from where I returned to Ilkley via train. As yesterday, I covered a total of about seven miles so I am ahead of goal so far for January.

***The footpath is
there once you
climb the wall***



Molly and I drove to Caffè Nero for a late afternoon drink and then returned to the flat until dinner time. We decided to try the Craven Heifer in Addingham which has recently re-opened after an extensive makeover. We had eaten there a number of times before it closed down perhaps a year or so ago but it re-opened with great fanfare late last summer with a chef who had been runner up in a TV competition. Unfortunately he left shortly thereafter but the pub has remained open and received some good reviews so we thought it worth a try – or be surprised!

It turned out that we were very surprised as the entire place was in darkness when we got to Addingham and the pub's parking area had not been ploughed or gritted. Obviously they weren't open which made us wonder why they had taken our reservation only a couple of hours earlier. It wasn't until I thought about it later in the evening that I realized that I must have picked the phone number for another Craven Heifer!

So, what to do? We decided to go over the top to Silsden and try Stefano's, a small Italian restaurant that we have enjoyed a few times in the past. They were able to give us their last table for two (so much for this recession) and we had a very pleasant evening in true leisurely Italian style – complete with limoncello and grappa to finish,

Wednesday January 23

We had arranged to meet my cousin Roy for lunch in Kirkby Lonsdale today so we left Ilkley after a light breakfast at Caffè Nero. The weather was dry but still cold and there were the occasional flakes of snow but in general it was an easy one hour drive to Kirkby. There was noticeably less snow as we went further west – except on the high peaks – and there really wasn't any by the time we reached Kirkby Lonsdale. Roy said that he had had more than this in Lindal but clearly there was far less on the western side of the Pennines than in Ilkley.

We had a very leisurely (almost three hours) lunch in very pleasant surroundings at the Sun Inn. I had stayed here for a few nights in 2010 when I was doing my Dales Way walks and the pub was still very inviting – and packed! We caught up on each other's activities since we had last met in July and only left when our parking time had expired.

We returned to Ilkley and got back soon after dark and just had a light snack instead of another meal.

Thursday January 24

Molly had a hairdresser appointment at 11:15 so we had a Caffè Nero breakfast and then did a Tesco shop. I then drove back to the flat with the groceries while Molly went to her appointment. I put the stuff in the flat, got changed and walked down the hill to get the noon Skipton bus. I left town just as Molly was walking back to get her bus up the hill.

I took the bus as far as Draughton, a few miles beyond Addingham and started on my walk, via country lanes, towards Silsden. The route more or less paralleled the main Addingham-Silsden Road but was a lot less heavily trafficked. It was another nice walk and I got some good views of Ilkley Moor and the Wharfe Valley from a different perspective. I was feeling fine as I got to Silsden so I walked another mile or more to Steeton where I got the bus back to Ilkley. The weather had stayed dry all day and it didn't feel as cold as it has the past several days, probably because there was no wind at all.

About 5:30 Geoff and Christine came to the flat for pre-dinner drinks and snacks and also to look at a large map of the USA to begin planning a trip that they hope to make this coming summer. We spent about an hour going over possibilities and came up with a tentative plan that would take us from Denver to Salt Lake City and then via the Canyons to Las Vegas before heading to the coast to drive up to San Francisco. We also had a very good meal at Monkman's before Geoff and Christine headed home.

Friday January 25

We had breakfast again at Caffè Nero and it was near noon before I set off again for another walk. There had been no more snow and it was relatively bright, although a few flurries were forecast and indeed I did see a few as I took the bus from Ilkley to Silsden. From Silsden I walked along the canal bank as far as Crossflatts and then via the road to Bingley where I got the train home. It was a fairly hard walk on packed snow and ice (although flat, of course) and I had covered over 8 miles by the time I got back to the flat around 4:30. We stayed home for the rest of the evening and it started to snow again around nine.

Saturday January 26

We woke up to a sunny morning and a fresh covering of snow, which we found was actually about four inches deep when we ventured out. We were scheduled to meet a former barista from Caffè Nero (Jodie) and her new baby Alice, born on December 27. She lives in Haworth but texted to say that the roads weren't bad so she thought she and her partner Paul could make it. Hence we were obliged to attempt Wells Road.





The drive down was a little treacherous but I was able to take it very slowly and found a parking space near the bottom of Wells Promenade so we were in Caffè Nero before Jodie, Paul and Alice arrived. We spent a very pleasant hour with them – Alice is a beautiful baby – and then said our farewells until May.

For the drive back we decided not to attempt Wells Road but rather to take Cowpasture which had been ploughed and gritted. It was fine until we made the turn onto Crossbeck at which point the snow was packed and icy with not a sign of any treatment. We made it only a few hundred feet before the car started sliding so I backed down to Cowpasture, went down to the bottom to turn round and found a place to park it just below Crossbeck. My intent was to go out late in the day in the hope that some work had been done and retrieve the car. Otherwise, it will stay there until tomorrow when a big thaw and heavy rain is forecast.

Our only issue is that Dorothy and David are coming to Ilkley for dinner with us tonight. They should have a relatively easy drive on main roads but we are not sure what our status will be. We may have to use taxis.

As it turned out the thaw was very rapid and I was not only able to retrieve the car by mid-afternoon but we had an easy drive to and from the restaurant so we were able to enjoy a very nice three hour meal with Dorothy and David.

Sunday January 27

We woke to a bright morning and virtually no snow anywhere in sight! It is amazing that we have gone from being stuck in four inches of snow (on top of much more packed snow and ice) only yesterday to perfectly clear roads and only a few white patches, even on the highest portions of the moors. Hence our drive for a light breakfast at Caffè Nero was no problem, although it felt very cold as there was stiff wind blowing. The danger now, of course, is flooding after such a rapid thaw. Wells Road into town is already more like a river than a roadway.



An amazing overnight

Transformation: no snow

It brightened up even more in the afternoon so I went for a four mile walk to the river (very fast flowing and swollen) and back via Ben Rhydding. In the evening Molly and I had another good, two hour meal at Piccolino.

Monday January 28

We had breakfast once again at Caffè Nero and then left to drive to Sheffield to meet with one of Molly's school friends, Val, and her husband Les. There had been little contact except Christmas cards between Molly and Val since High School so it was a fifty four year reunion with not a lot of history shared in the meantime.

We arrived at Meadowhall a little before noon and met Val and Les outside Café Rouge as arranged (actually they spotted us from behind as we were walking towards the restaurant) and spent three hours with them over a long lunch. Obviously Molly and Val did most of the talking and reminiscing but Les and I got along well and I think all four of us enjoyed the visit. We made the accepted promises to do it again sometime – but I really believe we will.

We drove home in rainy conditions and arrived at the flat just as a strong storm (complete with thunder and lightning) passed through Ilkley. It didn't last long but there was more rain and strong winds forecast for the rest of the day and tomorrow.

Having had a big lunch we stayed home for a very light dinner and watched some TV.



Tuesday January 29

It was a bright and mild morning as Molly and I had breakfast in town and then did a little shopping. I went for a walk up to Keighley Gate and then west along the ridge for about a half mile and returned via Cowper's Cross. It was actually quite cool on top with a stiff breeze blowing and there were still a few remnants of last week's snow. The one mile round trip over the moorland paths was quite hard as I was walking in muddy water or deep snow but the rest of the walk was easy on the road. I walked about 4 miles.



A few reminders of last week's snows!

On returning, I got changed and then Molly and I drove down to the station to meet her brother, Robert, who was coming to stay with us for a week from his home in London. He arrived on time at 2pm and we immediately went for coffee before driving back to the flat for the rest of the afternoon.

Tonight we dined at Kashmiri Aroma – a first for this trip – and then watched a little TV (including the Richard Dimbleby Lecture by Bill Gates which was very good) before retiring about 11:30.

Wednesday January 30

We were up before nine and had breakfast in the flat before starting out on a drive to Skipton and the Dales. It was a relatively mild (45F) day and as we left it was quite sunny, although there was a very strong wind as had been forecast. Unfortunately, by the time we reached Skipton it was already threatening rain and our time strolling through the (very small) market was cut short for a warming cup of coffee. We did manage to walk along a portion of the canal bank and up the High Street but it felt very cold so we soon left town and headed for Grassington.



Skipton was cold but we put on a brave front

Grassington was certainly no warmer and there were still periods of light rain but the wind just howled around every corner. We had taken our book of self-guided walks for various Dales towns and followed the one for Grassington – for a while. Basically we went up to the top of the village and back and, while we saw several of the points of interest, we were soon looking for somewhere warm for a light lunch.



Guided tour of Grassington.



Pay attention, Robert.

Following that break we stayed in the car all the way home but took a long route back via Pateley Bridge, Fewston and Otley so we did at least see a little of the Dales. Occasional breaks in the clouds provided a little better views across Nidderdale but generally we didn't get the vistas that this part of the country has to offer.

We arrived home soon after 3pm and spent the rest of the day and evening at home.

Thursday January 31

We all went for breakfast at Caffè Nero and then I went for a walk. I had intended to do a walk from Bingley but by the time I reached Saltaire I had had enough of the traffic so I decided to park there and set off along the canal bank towards Bingley. After only a half mile or so the bank was closed to pedestrians due to what appeared to be major engineering works and an alternative route had been posted which took the route along the river bank. (The River Aire and the Leeds-Liverpool canal are close and parallel at this point, although at somewhat different levels. In fact the work was being done on the viaduct section of the canal that crosses the river here).

The path on the river side was unpaved and little more than a muddy track a few feet from the water but it was a pleasant change versus the canal bank and was through quite dense woodland. It was less than a mile before the "Detour" ended and I was once again on the canal at the Dowley Gap locks. Judging by the equipment at this spot I suspect that it was in fact the lock gates that were being repaired or replaced and this required draining a section of the canal "downstream". A couple of crude coffer dams had been built and water was being pumped out of the canal basin.

Rather than continue on to Bingley town center as I had planned and with the detour having used up more of the time on my parking in Saltaire, I decided to walk back to the car via what had been the old main road in an area where I had lived in my early teens. However, it wasn't long before I saw a Public Footpath sign that was pointing in the general direction that I wanted to go but was obviously sticking to the lower ground near the river rather than following the road up hill. This seemed like a more interesting option which I chose and indeed it was a very pleasant area to be walking through but – not surprising after all the rain and snow – was extremely muddy. I was often in the oozing black stuff to the top of my boots and beyond but I was now committed to this route. I made a mental note to repeat it sometime during the drier months of the year.

It really was a trip down memory lane as I eventually recognized the path as one that Keith and I had followed many times in our youth as we walked along the river bank and behind the grounds of the (then) very imposing Bankfield Hotel. We must have spent dozens of hours just playing in this area (if that's the right word for two fourteen year olds – it certainly is the word we used then) and thoroughly enjoyed the time: a time without iPhones, MP3s, GPS units and, I would guess, not even a watch between us. We simply went home when we had had enough, felt hungry or it went dark! Wonderful memories.

Eventually this muddy path passed behind the house where I used to live, crossed "my" street and entered the local cemetery, from where it was an easy walk back to the main road and another twenty minutes got me back to the car. I had rushed it a little (another reason to repeat sometime) but was able to retrieve my car before my time ran out.

I then drove back to Ilkley, arriving at the flat just minutes before Molly and Robert returned from their outing to town where they had done a little shopping and sightseeing and had enjoyed a lunch at Bettys – a must do for any visitor to Ilkley (or any of a handful of locations where the restaurants exist) at least once during their time here.

In the evening we had a dinner reservation at Monkman's, one of our favorites in town. The meal and service were as good as always although I confess that I was neither very good company nor enjoyed it as I should because I had rather suddenly started with a fever. In fact, as soon as we got back home I made myself a "Hot Toddy" which is my home remedy cure for colds, chills, fevers and the like – and got a good night's sleep.

Friday February 1

I woke feeling considerably better than I had the previous evening so after breakfast we left for our planned day out in York. We left about ten and an hour later we had parked in one of the several Park and Ride lots on the perimeter of town and were on the bus that dropped us off a couple of hundred yards from the imposing west face of the Minster with its two huge towers. We spent the best part of an hour in the cathedral with Molly as our guide and then strolled the ancient streets to the Mansion House, along the Shambles and eventually to the Jorvik Center. Here we took the tram-like tour through the extensive excavations of the old Viking settlement in which many of the buildings of the time have been constructed on the actual excavated bases and where several very life-like figures re-enact the trades, skills and ordinary lifestyle of 1000 years ago. It is extremely well presented and made all the more interesting with the knowledge that in fact "you are there" traversing the ground on which that piece of the city's history actually took place.



York Minster





The Mansion House (and a startled visitor) and The Shambles



We also stopped in one of York's many tearooms for a light lunch and eventually (around four) made our way back to the bus and then the car for the drive home.

By this time of the day I was beginning to feel much like I had 24 hours earlier and was pleased that we were staying home for dinner, shortly after which I retired with another Hot Toddy!

Saturday February 2

This morning was one of clear blue, cloudless skies in all directions and the views across the valley and to the Moors were at their best. We drove into town for breakfast and then took a longer drive home to take in the views at several locations (mostly from the car because it was cold and windy despite the bright sun). We came via Burley in Wharfedale to catch the views towards Otley, Almscliffe Crag (near Huby) and Middleton Moor and actually got out of the car for a few minutes at the Cow and Calf Rocks. We ended up part way up Keighley Road from where we could see right across the Wharfe Valley, as far west as Addingham and as far east as the villages near Otley. We were also right on the northern edge of the open moorland and so were at last on Ilkley Moor B'atnat.

We spent the rest of the day at home – despite the continuing clear skies and bright sunshine – as I was still nursing the remnants (I hoped) of my fever and staying indoors seemed a logical thing to do. We did however venture out for an excellent meal at Emporio Italia, one of our favorite Italian restaurants and one which has the ambiance and flair of so many we have enjoyed in Italy itself.

Sunday February 3

It was wet, windy and quite misty for most of the morning so we ate at home and skipped visits to church. In the late morning it stopped raining and actually was quite bright for a while but was still extremely windy, so (we presumed, not having ventured out) would feel cold despite a moderate temperature in the mid-forties. Despite this, around 1pm, Robert and I decided to take a little walk "on the moor". We walked from the flat down Wells Road just a quarter of a mile and then followed a paved path to the small tarn, perhaps another third of a mile further. A path took us all around the tarn and back to retrace our steps down the hill. However, before we reached the road again there was marked path (not paved) that headed towards White Wells across the open moorland.

It was about a half mile, fairly tough climb along this path – often muddy and often with running water rushing past our boots – to reach White Wells.

Here we caught our breath, admired the views (nowhere near as clear as those yesterday but not covered in cloud or rain) and spent a few minutes in the bath house where visitors over the last two hundred years have taken the waters – apparently the same water (literally) for bathing and drinking. Although the water has been found to contain no special minerals nor to have any other curative value, this was one of a number of places that put Ilkley on the map and through the Victorian era and as late as the 1920s, White Wells baths were still being taken.

From White Wells it was an easy walk down to the apartment where we concluded our 1.6 mile bracing and very pleasant walk. We rewarded ourselves, and Molly, with coffee in town and then stayed home for the rest of the day and evening.

Monday February 4

We had breakfast at Caffe Nero and then drove directly to Ripon to visit the cathedral and do at least some of the self-guided town walk. The temperature was in the upper 30s and there was a very strong wind blowing which brought the occasional rain shower so we were pleased to make the cathedral our first stop after walking only about a quarter of a mile.

We spent 1 ½ hours in the cathedral and found it a very impressive structure, although nothing comparable to York Minster in either size or internal decoration.



Ripon Cathedral decorated for the 2012 Jubilee

(Those are The Queen's racing colors)

On leaving we dashed into the first tearoom we came across and had a light lunch and another warm 45 minutes and even after that none of us felt like fighting the bitterly cold wind, not to mention the rain and sleet, so we went back to the car and started home. We drove back via Harrogate to show Robert a little of this town and then returned to the flat about 3pm. We relaxed until 7:30 at which time we left for dinner at Bistrot Pierre and another good meal and chat.

Later that evening we were watching the local weather forecast and there were some very wintry pictures from the hills near Sheffield and much more snow predicted for the region for Tuesday. This was of concern because we were due to visit Molly's other brother in Sheffield tomorrow.....

Tuesday February 5

We awoke to a covering of snow and occasional squalls (almost whiteout conditions) interspersed with periods of sunshine and blue skies. However, after listening to the predictions again and calling Elizabeth in Sheffield (where the heavier falls were and where it was predicted to continue all day) we concluded that it would be safer to stay in Ilkley and catch up with Richard and Elizabeth in May. So, that decided, we started a relaxing day at home.

The snow continued off and on all day so we became more and more convinced we had made the right decision. However, around 3pm Robert and I decided to brave the elements and go for a walk around Ilkley. We did one of the walks that I often take – down via Queens Road to the river and back up Cowpasture Road – and covered just over three miles. The snow that we had started out in changed to sleet and then rain before we were finished and it had almost stopped precipitating by the time we got back; a little damp but at least we got some exercise.

Tonight we took Robert to the Farsyde for his final dinner in Ilkley for this trip. We all enjoyed it and it gave us one last evening for a pleasant chat.

Wednesday February 6

The snow had completely gone by the time we got up and had breakfast at home. Around 10:30, we drove Robert to the station for his train to Leeds and then on to London and said our farewells after a very enjoyable week. I particularly found his company amusing and interesting and we had some extended debates about the state of the world (and how we might solve everything!)

Molly and I did a little shopping and had a coffee before returning to the apartment. It was a beautiful sunny day so I looked at the maps and chose a walk. This time I walked down to the river and followed the Dales Way to Addingham where I crossed the river and climbed a little way to Nesfield. From there it was gradual downhill walk back to Ilkley with the only tough bit being the climb back to the apartment. I thoroughly enjoyed the 7 ½ miles.



Yorkshire at its best



Nice gesture

At 6:45 we drove to East Morton to meet Keith and Zena at the Busfeild Arms where we enjoyed a good pub meal and another pleasant evening. It was almost 10pm before we left for home.

Thursday February 7

Again it was a clear morning although the temperature was still only just above freezing. We had breakfast at Caffè Nero and then I set off on my walk. Molly walked down to Ilkley a little after I left and did some shopping before returning on the bus.

For my walk I took the bus to Silsden and then followed the roads east paralleling the canal bank and the valley but climbing very steeply until I reached the flatter section about a mile from the Ilkley Road. The distance from Silsden was about a mile longer than I had anticipated so I had covered about 4 ½ (hard) miles before turning up the road that leads to Keighley Gate. This too is very steep in places so I was quite warm and tired by the time I started the downhill stretch (1 ½ miles) to home. It was nice to have the final section of the walk all downhill – the reason I did it this way round – but I am not convinced that it was any easier overall.

Tonight we met Dorothy and David and Geoff and Christine at the Square and Compass for dinner. This pub has been in North Rigton since well before I lived a mile away in Huby when a college student but I have never been in it. It has had a mixed reputation over the years but the current new ownership has had good reviews.

Indeed it turned out to have a good menu and very good service so we all had an enjoyable evening. It was once again after ten by the time we left to drive home.

Friday February 8 (Molly's Birthday)

Despite the forecast of some snow, it was very bright and sunny with little wind as we had breakfast at Caffè Nero. Just before noon I left for a walk and Molly did her usual walk into Ilkley to do some shopping before returning on the bus.

I took the bus to Silsden again but this time I walked first to Steeton and then climbed (very steeply) from the main Skipton Road to a road parallel which I then took towards Keighley. The views across the Aire Valley to Ilkley Moor and beyond were spectacular and, despite a little breeze on top, the walk was very pleasant. I eventually came to Keighley Tarn (now called Redcar Tarn for some reason) and recalled ice skating there when I live in Utley – so before I was about 12 years old. The tarn then had been somewhat of a recreation area and today seems to be a duck and bird sanctuary, as well as a very pleasant place to sit and look across the valley or take a walk. A path has been built all around the small body of water ("Just over three times around equals one mile").



Steeton (Top Left); Snow still on the hills; Keighley Tarn—just as in my youth

I walked around it and then continued downhill now towards Keighley. I followed the map to some degree but also followed my instinct based on my time in the area almost 60 years ago. To my surprise I ended up on the main Keighley Road in Utley, right at the primary school that I had attended. From there I got the bus back to Ilkley.

Tonight Molly and I went to the Burlington Room at the Devonshire Arms in Bolton Abbey to celebrate her birthday. We had been once before and thoroughly enjoyed the tasting menu so I had made a promise to take her there again as a birthday treat. Once again we had the seven course tasting menu, which by the time you added the munchies with pre-dinner drink, the amuse bouche and the optional cheese course (which we both declined) made it the ten courses that we had remembered from last time. The meal and service were excellent and with drinks before and coffee afterwards, both in the lounge, the entire evening (three hours) was a great experience.



Saturday February 9

We had breakfast at home on a dull but dry morning – still no sign of the snow that is threatened for this part of Britain for the weekend. Later in the morning Molly did her usual trek into town to take some re-cycling to the bins on the square as well as a little shopping and I took a three mile walk to the Swastika Stone and back. There was a little light drizzle on the way but the rest of the afternoon was dry and quite mild. We had a mid-afternoon coffee and a late (9pm) dinner at The Farsyde.

Sunday February 10

We had breakfast at home on another cold and dreary morning. However, on a whim, we decided to drive over to Harrogate for a light lunch and a last browse through the shops. It was cold and damp so we didn't linger but at least we had a run out and were back in time for a final dinner at Piccolino for this trip.

Monday February 11

Today was our day to get the final washing done and clean the flat before our departure. Actually we had done quite a bit of preparation yesterday so it was mainly sheets washing, packing and a final clean round. I even managed a walk around Ilkley while things were drying. We left about 1pm and drove via the M62 to Manchester and made one stop for coffee at the Brighthouse Services. We were checked into the airport Marriott before 4pm and we had our usual farewell dinner at the Plough and Flail pub.

Tuesday February 12

We checked out and had the usual trauma returning the car but our flight to Atlanta was on time and uneventful as was the onward flight to Cincinnati. My bag did not come on the final leg, however, so we had a slight delay while we filed the paperwork and were promised a Wednesday morning delivery (It happened!). Elizabeth was at the airport to greet us and drive us home so we were settled back in the condo about 8pm after another great trip to England.

