

# England

## May-July, 2013



*Bob and Molly Hillery*

*This was our annual summer “Pilgrimage” to England, during which we spent nine weeks in the country, mostly at the flat in Ilkley. Molly had a five day reunion with her siblings and an additional ten days with her sister in Worcestershire, while Bob spent those first two weeks alone on Ilkley. We both enjoyed a four day visit to the Lake District about the middle of the stay and we managed to see virtually all our relatives and friends during the trip.*

*The stay in Ilkley followed what has become a typical daily routine in our “home away from home”. Molly walked down the half mile steep hill into town to do shopping and other errands while I usually went for a walk or, in the better weather, a bike ride. We both went for an afternoon coffee most days after our times apart and, of course, we enjoyed the several very good restaurants in the town and its environs.*

*The weather during the first few weeks was generally cool and quite often wet, but by mid-June we enjoyed some dryer days and, late in the trip, a genuine heat-wave, with blue skies and temperatures in the low eighties! The locals had been keen to get a touch of summer but were “complaining” about the oppressive heat after a couple of warm days. We viewed it as a nice precursor for the weather we expected to have when we got home.*

*The time seemed to pass very quickly and, once again, we really enjoyed the flexibility that the flat gave us; simply relaxing, enjoying the beautiful scenery, walking and cycling, and the proximity to most of our friends and family. It really is a wonderful way to spend two months away from home!*

# *England, May– July 2013*

## **Tuesday May 7**

We left home shortly before 1:30pm and drove to Elizabeth's house. She was driving us to the airport and we were leaving our car for their use during our two month visit to England.

We arrived at the airport around 2:30 and so had time for a Starbuck's coffee and snack before our 4:15 flight to Atlanta. This flight was on time and we were in Atlanta (mid-sixties and sunny, just as Cincinnati) and at the International Terminal by about 6pm. This left us about 1 1/2 hours in the Sky Club Lounge before we began our overnight flight to Manchester. This flight left at 8:25 (quite a bit later than the usual departure) and we were on our way to England.

I had the dinner and Molly just had the appetizers and then we both got several hours' sleep, despite a bumpy patch shortly after eating. The rest of the flight was smooth and it didn't seem long before we were over Ireland and heading for the descent into Manchester.

## **Wednesday May 8**

We landed about 45 minutes ahead of schedule and we were soon through Immigration and Customs (no lost or delayed bags) and even getting the rental car did not prove as taxing as it usually does in Manchester. So, by 10:15 we were on our way to Fran's home near Worcester. There was the threat of showers but for the most part the weather was cloudy but bright and there were even some clear patches of blue sky from time to time. With just one stop for a light breakfast, we arrived at Fran's about 12:30 and met Alan. Fran was out on a singing "gig".

I felt quite wide awake so I decided to simply turn round and head back north and see if I could get to the flat in Ilkley.

There was a GPS in the rental car which guided me via the M42 and M1 and through Leeds. This last bit through the city and its suburbs was the usual stop and go traffic but I still reached Ilkley in just about 3 hours. So, after an overnight flight, I drove almost 300 miles in a total of about six hours, including stops.



The apartment was just as I had remembered and the skies were now quite sunny such that I was immediately treated to some very nice views of Ilkley Moor and the Cow and Calf Rocks. I soon had everything unpacked and the electronics working or on charge so by 6pm I was up-to-date and wondering what, if anything, to do for dinner and the rest of the evening. I made a quick call to let Molly know that I had arrived safely and sent an e-mail to Elizabeth and Christopher to let them know that we were settled in our respective abodes in the UK. Around six, I decided to go for a short walk around Ilkley so, despite a week preparing for and actually traveling to England, I have managed to maintain my exercise regimen and am up-to-date on my walking. Hopefully that—and my biking (which is way behind schedule) - will continue while I am in Yorkshire.

I decided to eat a light meal at home but when I came to begin the washing up, I found that we once again had no hot water. The Baxi service shop was already closed so I had to wait until Thursday morning to place a call.

## **Thursday May 9**

I was up soon after 7am and called Baxi right as they opened at eight. The first person I talked to could promise nothing better than Monday for a visit so I tried someone else and had to settle for Saturday—earlier if they would get a cancellation. We'll see!

I had breakfast at Caffè Nero and then drove to Halford's in Keighley to take another look at pannier racks for my bike but was not convinced that any would work satisfactorily. I plan to actually ride the bike to a shop sometime and see what can be arranged. In the early afternoon, the clouds had rolled in and there was a little drizzle but I decided to cycle down into Ilkley



to JD Cycles to see what they had and then perhaps go further to the Halfords in Guiseley if necessary. The JD Cycles web site didn't appear to have much in the way of bike accessories so I wasn't too hopeful but, indeed, they had a seat stem rack and a detachable bag which seemed to fit the bill without being too difficult to install. It was more expensive than I wanted (but was priced similarly to one I had seen in Halfords) and the assistant was very helpful and actually fixed it to the bike for me. By now the rain was coming down a little more heavily but I thought I would take a short ride anyway. I had come prepared in waterproofs and several layers (it was only in the forties now that the sun had gone in) so I cycled out of town, crossed the river and went as far as Otley. I came back on the main road via Burley as the rain just increased in intensity but my major concern was that I would experience a problem with the bike—puncture, etc. I had left the flat with only the things that I could squeeze into my jacket pocket (wallet, phone, keys) and so had no room for spare tubes or tools. I suppose now that I had the cycle bag I could (should?) have gone back up the hill and got the essential equipment but I really didn't feel like climbing Cowpasture Road twice in one afternoon.

As it turned out nothing went wrong and I arrived home safely—and very wet—about 3pm after a 14 mile ride. I had no sooner stripped off all my wet clothes than the phone rang. It was Rachel the decorator who wanted to come and evaluate the water damage to the two rooms in the flat that had occurred during our January stay here. She was at the front door and wanted to come up immediately so I opened the house door and quickly donned some clothes while she was coming up in the elevator to our flat door. She spent about 10 minutes in the apartment, took a few pictures and left without setting a date for actually coming back to do the painting. She did ask if we had any of the wall colors left so I called Geoff and he was kind enough to say he would contact the decorator that he had hired and see if he could get the name and brand of the paint.

By now, I was ready for an afternoon break so, despite a continuing rain, I walked to Caffè Nero for coffee and a cookie. On returning to the flat, I did a little work on the computer and about 7pm I walked downtown again for dinner at Bistrot Pierre. I enjoyed a very good steak and fries, two pints of Ilkley's finest bitter and an espresso before (slowly) walking back up the hill on what was now a dry—if cloudy—evening. I got home shortly before 9pm, completed my diary and went to bed. .

### **Friday May 10**

It was another cool and overcast morning with a threat of rain. There were no calls from the boiler people so I drove into Ilkley for breakfast and then spent a lazy morning. The rain came later in the morning and by 11 it seemed to be settling in much as it had yesterday. So I took a nap! I was awakened about 3pm by a call from the boiler repair man. The call came on the land line (despite my having asked them to call the mobile) and was outside the "Before 10am" window. Fortunately I was home and he said he would be at the flat in 30-40 minutes so I was pleased he would get here today. Besides, in addition to having no hot water in the taps, the apartment was beginning to feel quite cool and in need of a little heating—despite this being the middle of May.

So, after a celebratory hot bath I walked into Ilkley and had a good dinner at Piccolino's and then walked back, watched a little TV and then retired.



*Mother's Day flowers for Molly from the Shepards*





I should mention that I had another caller today: this was a lady from a local florist who came with a beautiful bouquet for Molly as a gift for Mother's Day (in the US) from Elizabeth and family. It's a pity that they will probably be past their best by the time Molly arrives in Ilkley but I sent a number of photographs so she could appreciate them as they are now and promised to try to keep them alive until she joins me here.

### **Saturday May 11**

It was after nine before I awoke and it was once again cool and there was a continuing threat of rain. I walked to Tesco, shopped for a few staples, and then had my usual light breakfast at Caffè Nero. After walking back up the hill—and having no boiler repair man to wait for—I decided on a walk over the moors. I dressed much as I had in January with waterproof outer layer; by now there was a steady drizzle.

As I (very) slowly climbed Keighley Road and covered the 1 1/2 miles to Keighley Gate, the rain got stronger and stronger such that it was stinging against my face, fanned by a strong southerly wind. I needed my hat for additional warmth but did manage to go without the gloves. The rain continued on the easier south side of the Moor and as I approached Riddlesden it essentially stopped and I began to dry out. I followed the Airedale Walkway along the River Worth into the center of Keighley where it was actually partly sunny. I had time for a Costa coffee before getting the bus back to Ilkley.

As I walked back up Wells Road, I could hear a brass band playing at the bandstand in The Grove and was tempted to go and sit and listen for a while. However, more rain started so I just kept on walking back to the flat.

It was now a little after 3pm and I had a dinner appointment with Geoff, Christine, Dorothy and David at the Smith's Arms in Beckwithshaw. I watched some rugby and some of the FA Cup Final ("my" team Manchester City eventually lost despite being heavy favorites) and then got ready for dinner.

We had a very pleasant 2 1/2 hours at the pub, although my meal was not that good. I was compensated with a free bottle of wine which will find good use in the days ahead. By now it was a beautiful clear evening but there was a strong wind and when we left the pub, everyone just wanted to rush directly to their cars to get out of the biting wind. I was home and in bed by 11:30.

### **Sunday May 12**

It was after nine again before I got up and, although it wasn't raining and there was some sun around, it was still less than 50F as I ate my breakfast at home. I left for church a little before 10:30 and was greeted as an old friend by several parishioners and the vicar. I drove to Harrogate afterwards and bought myself a blazer from M&S and then drove back via Blubberhouses and Addingham. It was still cold and drizzly when I got back so hadn't much enthusiasm for a walk right away. In fact, I didn't go for a walk at all! I slept for a couple of hours, watched a little TV and then went down to Ilkley to try the new Aagrah Indian restaurant which opened to good reviews in March. It is one of a national chain and has an excellent reputation and I suppose locals were wondering how it would do so close to Kashmiri Aroma which has a good following and has been well established here (just on the edge of town) for a good number of years.

I arrived at Aagrah without a reservation just after 7pm and had about a 15 minute wait for a table. The restaurant seats 100 and at this time on Sunday—and when I left at 8:30—most of the tables were occupied. The food and service were as good as Kashmiri and the ambiance was considerably nicer so it would appear that Aagrah will do well. How it will affect Kashmiri's business is difficult to tell as Indian food seems to be very popular, particularly in this part of Yorkshire where authenticity can be pretty much guaranteed.

I got home before 9pm, watched a little more TV and then went to bed—feeling a little guilty that I had not walked at all today but rationalizing that a day off was good and that I would make a determined effort tomorrow whatever the weather.

### **Monday May 13**

It was another cool and blustery day with rain forecast throughout—although there were occasional bits of sunshine. My early morning coffee didn't do it for me so I drove over to The Loft in Bingley for a bacon sandwich—designed as a precursor for a walk on the canal bank. However, it was absolutely pouring down so I drove back to Ilkley and looked at my maps for somewhere to go if the rain let up for a while.

Soon after 1pm I left Ilkley, just after a heavy downpour had almost made me turn round, and drove about 25 minutes to the Swinsty-Fewston reservoirs. These two reservoirs are essentially contiguous with the spillway from Fewston flowing directly into Swinsty only a few feet lower. There is a car park and facilities where the two bodies of water meet and both have well-made footpaths all around the lakes.



I had just put on my boots and waterproof jacket when a hailstorm came through the area so I sheltered in the car for a few more minutes. The whole day had been like this – heavy showers one minute, sunshine afterwards – so I expected to get wet at some point during my walk. I started walking east around Swinsty reservoir in bright sunshine, although there was still a very cold wind blowing. The surrounding countryside was beautiful with large areas of bluebells in the heavily wooded areas and, of course, the lake and the grassland provided a colorful contrast. The pathway was firm crushed rock and there were dozens of benches and other markers in honor of people who had walked and loved this valley over the years.



*A lovely  
walk  
around  
Swinsty and  
Fewston  
Reservoirs*





Both Swinsty and Fewston reservoirs are each about three miles around and both are very popular with walkers of all types – fully kitted out in boots and gear or just out for a stroll and walking the dog. Swinsty is perhaps a somewhat prettier walk but both have some very beautiful views and both are essentially at water level and flat. The path around Fewston has a few short but steep rises but neither presents a real challenge and are probably wheelchair friendly most of the way.

Most of the walk was in bright sunshine but there were two showers along the way. The first was another hailstorm which fortunately occurred while I was sheltered under trees which hung over the path. The second was a heavy rain shower which lasted long enough to give me a good soaking but I had mostly dried out by the time I got back to my car as the sun came out again for the final half mile.

I thoroughly enjoyed the walk around both lakes and saw quite a lot of wild life – ducks, swans, water hens, birds, squirrels and even a couple of deer. It took me a little less than 2 ½ hours to cover the 6 ½ mile round trip. I drove home and spent the rest of the day in the flat – a two hour nap, a home-cooked meal and some TV watching – before retiring about 11:30.

### **Tuesday May 14**

It was raining very heavily as I got up so I decided to drive down to Caffè Nero for breakfast. I sat for quite some time watching people come in dripping wet and others rushing past outside, fighting their umbrellas in a strong wind. I left during a brief respite and went to Barclays Bank to see if I could open a checking account, which I thought might make things a little simpler for us during our lengthy stays in Ilkley. I had previously contacted the Yorkshire Bank from home and had been told that they could only accept accounts from those with a permanent UK address, but I thought that an international bank like Barclays might be less parochial. Not so.

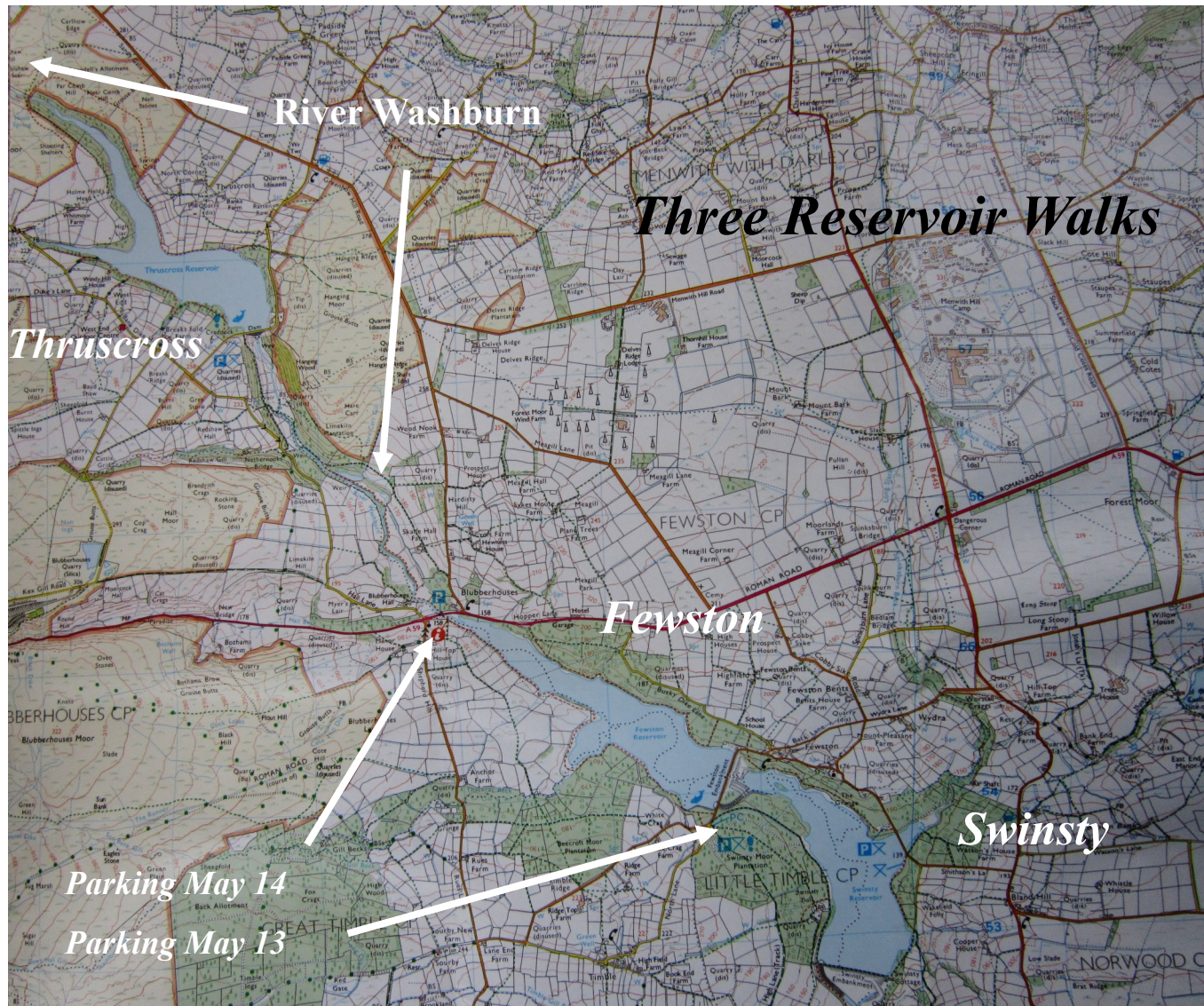
The teller, with the aid of someone in the back who I could see but not hear, informed me that I must have a permanent address here but, in any case, they couldn't possibly do anything today as there was no manager on duty! I was given the telephone number of their International Department and even offered a phone in the lobby that I could use, but I chose to make the call when I got back to the flat for a little more privacy.

The call and an attempt to open an account on line were as effective as my visit to the bank. Indeed, Barclays does have the facility for non-UK residents to open an account provided they maintain a 5000 GBP balance and pay a monthly service charge of 10 GBP. Even with the very modest interest rates being offered today, I figured that it would cost me almost 200 GBP (\$300+) per year for the privilege of writing a few checks to others in the UK and having an “on site” account from which to withdraw cash. I concluded that using an ATM to access my money deposited in Ohio was the better way!

I concluded also that the weather was going to be much the same as it had been yesterday – heavy showers, lots of cloud and some “bright spells”. Walking around the two reservoirs yesterday had proved very pleasant under those conditions so I decided to try yet a third reservoir, Thruscross, in the same chain as Fewston and Swinsty. I drove to the western end of Fewston Lake at Blubberhouses where there is a large car park for walkers and from where I could head further northwest to amble around Thruscross. A quick look at the map suggested that it might be a slightly longer walk than the one I had done yesterday but, since it followed a river and then circled the reservoir, I deduced that it would be mostly on similar flat terrain.

Back to “Map Reading 101”. Those orange lines on British Ordnance Survey maps really are there for a purpose and the numbers and spacing DO provide important information on the degree of difficulty!





It started out as I had expected as I followed the River Washburn for 1 ¼ miles on a muddy but, for the most part, flat path. There was the occasional rise as the path left the river from time to time but it was generally easy walking right up to the dam wall of the reservoir – a huge concrete wall that must be nearly 200 feet high. Obviously, to get to the path that goes around the reservoir, I had to climb those 200 feet; this was accomplished via a very steep path-cum-staircase of muddy soil that





seemed to rise as steeply as the dam wall itself. Once on top, however, I was on a road that crossed the eastern end of the lake and I thought that my stroll would now follow yesterday's pattern.

## *Thrucross Dam*

Wrong again. After crossing the dam (level!) the road rose steeply for a quarter mile until the water was between 50 and 100 feet below me and partially blocked from view by a dense conifer forest. A pathway soon left the road, turning left into those trees, and I quickly descended almost back to water level. Now the stroll really would begin, I thought, as the pathway was now mostly crushed stone much like those around Swinsty Lake. I could see right across the water to what appeared to be paths along the opposite bank but there were two rather long fingers of water that had to be walked around before I was headed for home.



Pretty soon I was walking along the eastern edge of the first long finger but the path abruptly ended at another cove that lined the lake.



Now I really looked at the map – and saw that my stroll around this finger of the lake took me up another 150 feet to open moorland much like that of Ilkley Moor. And, like Ilkley Moor, there were grouse butts, unmarked fences and large boggy areas and a rather indistinct path through it all. I was now completely out of sight of the lake and didn't see water again for another  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile when I approached the northern inflow of the River Washburn 200 feet below me down another muddy stair-case-type path.

### *Steeper than it looks to the river here*



### *The River Washburn as it enters Thruscross Reservoir*



It was a tough walk down to cross the stream and then an equally tough climb up the other side. (I have concluded that which is worse - up or down – is simply a function of which you happen to be doing at the time). By now I was once again almost 200 feet above the reservoir and the path to circle the smaller finger of water stayed at this level and crossed several fields before a choice was available. The map indicated a path that followed the edge of the reservoir, presumably at water level, or an alternative that followed a country road directly back to Blubberhouses. By now I was sufficiently proficient at map reading that I could see that the path left the water's edge in several places to navigate inlets and I could see that a number of these would involve steep climbs much like the ones I had already experienced. The decision was easy.

I followed the road (out of sight of the lake but I already knew what it looked like) and, although it too had a few steep climbs and descents, it was a solid surface on which to walk. This route would bypass the dam and the return walk along the River Washburn but after five miles of relatively tough walking I was happy to leave that for another day. My decision was under-



scored as the correct one when it started to rain once again (I had come through a brief hailstorm earlier) so the quickest path to the car was the one I now needed. It was still a three mile walk along this road and I had covered over eight miles by the time the car park came into view. So, the walk today was “a little longer” than the one yesterday as I had guessed but it was a much more arduous task and I was gone for just a little over four hours. It was a pleasure to take off the boots and heavy jacket and relax on the drive back to Ilkley.

When I got back home and had changed out of wet clothes once again, I did a little Googling on the area I had walked and was interested in the following Wikipedia entry as Molly and I have enjoyed all of Peter Robinson’s books, including the one “set” at Thruscross.

*Thruscross Reservoir is the northernmost of four reservoirs in the Washburn Valley, lying north of Otley and west of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, England. Thruscross was completed in 1966, much later than the other three reservoirs (Fewston, Swinsty and Lindley Wood) which date back to the nineteenth century.*

*The construction of the reservoir flooded the village of West End, which was already largely derelict following the decline of the flax industry. The remains of a flax mill can be seen at the edge of the reservoir, and more of the village has been revealed at times of drought.*

*In the novel “In a Dry Season” by the English-born crime writer Peter Robinson, the fictional village of Hobb's End, flooded by the creation of the Thornfield Reservoir, is exposed during a drought, leading to the discovery of a body. The geography described by Robinson indicates that he based the location of Hobb's End on the village of West End. The small bridge over the Washburn becomes the 'Fairy Bridge' and the flax mill is mentioned explicitly.*

I then promptly fell asleep for a couple of hours before getting ready to go to Martha and Vincent for a very good meal. Once again, it was nice to be greeted as a “regular” by the proprietor who remembered that we lived in America and asked when Molly would be in Ilkley. After dinner, I watched TV for a while and then retired about 11:30.

### **Wednesday May 15**

The weather was a little different today as I got up and prepared to go shopping and have breakfast in town. The rain was now a steady, continuous heavy shower with no apparent breaks in the clouds and no patches of blue sky. It was a rain that steadily soaked you and made the already low temperature feel even colder. Still aching a little from yesterday’s walk I thought it might be a good time for a rest day!

I did my shopping at Tesco and then walked to Caffè Nero where I lingered over my Americano and pastry before returning to the flat to spend a little time on the computer. I caught up on paperwork and my journal and, about 2:30, the weather seemed to improve. It stopped raining, the clouds were not as dark and there was a hint of some brightness so I decided on a walk around Ilkley, taking in an afternoon cup of coffee along the route. It turned out I covered just over three miles so I didn’t fall behind in my goal even on my day of rest. I finished the day with a meal at home and watched some football on TV before having an early night.

### **Thursday May 16**

I was up soon after 7am on perhaps the nicest morning so far in my visit. It was still a little cool (mid-forties) but I felt as

though I should do something with the day so I had a light breakfast at home and then started thinking about a bike ride. All the weather forecasts were predicting rain – perhaps heavy – later in the day so I was a little hesitant about going too far. As a result of my dithering, it was after ten before I decided on anything. I thought I would walk into Ilkley for a coffee and take a real outdoor check on conditions. It was certainly pleasant enough in the bright sunshine to walk down the hill without a jacket, although I was wearing a thick sweater. Once I arrived at Caffè Nero I was in line with a cyclist (perhaps in his mid-fifties) who was just completing a 40 mile run and said that it felt warm and there was no wind to speak of. I was determined to get out just as soon as I had finished my coffee.

But this is England! Within five minutes of settling down with our coffees, umbrellas started popping up everywhere on the street outside and soon we were watching a torrential downpour. I sat it out (as did my new friend) for a while but took a chance on what seemed to be a break to walk back up the hill. Predictably the break wasn't very long lasting and I got soaked in the 10 minute walk back to the apartment. If I had waited another 15 minutes I might have missed the worst as the sun was already out again by the time I had dried off. However, my desire for a bike ride had changed as dramatically as had the weather. I decided to stay in and conduct a little telephone business with my bank in Ohio once it was late enough for them to be open. I had initiated a transaction before leaving home but things didn't seem to be moving so I wanted to speak with them directly if possible. In stark contrast with my experience with Barclays a few days ago, the agent at GE Financial was very helpful and it seems things are indeed moving with the transfer to my bank.

I tried to get a booking for dinner at the Farsyde but they didn't respond to my voicemail message so I went instead to Bistro Saigon and had a very pleasant meal.

### **Friday May 17**

I drove to Caffè Nero for breakfast and then came home to look at the maps and decide on a walk or a bike ride. Late morning I settled on the latter and got into my cycling clothes and loaded my new bike bag. I had intended to go to Pool via the "back road" and return on the main road but I actually went a little further, riding through Weeton and Huby before coming home via Otley and Pool. It was still quite cool except during the brief periods of sunshine but the wind wasn't too strong and it stayed dry so I enjoyed the ride.

I stopped for a coffee in Ilkley (before the final ascent to the flat) and compared notes with one of the baristas (Adam) who has recently taken up cycling. I had done just short of 30 miles which seemed to impress him favorably because, as he said, "I only do about 40 myself". I suppose he was saying "not bad for an old man".

When I got home I called Monkmans to reserve a table for dinner but couldn't get in before nine. As Joelle said, however, when she asked what time I wanted (8 or 8:30) "Zis is only 'alf an hour later and you can come early and 'ave a drink in ze bar". I thought that was a good idea so I booked in for nine, which gave me lots of time for a nap and to finish a few chores. Actually I got a call later to say that there had been a cancellation so I was able to dine at 8:30 after all. Once again it was nice to be welcomed back like an old friend, this time with a glass of wine on the house and another very good meal.

### **Saturday May 18**

This morning was one of those times when the rain just looked set in for the day and, although it wasn't necessarily very heavy, it was a good soaker; one in which you really didn't want to spend much time. I did venture out for breakfast but didn't linger in town. I toyed with the idea of going to Otley Show (the longest running agricultural show in the country – over 200 years) but the thought of plodding around a muddy field getting wetter by the minute didn't have much appeal. I decided that this might be a good day to do some washing and see how the weather changed as the day progressed and perhaps venture out later.

I watched some of the England vs New Zealand cricket test match (it wasn't raining in London where the game was being played at Lords) and actually got quite into it despite cricket being one of the most boring (and strangest) games to watch. I think I was intrigued more by the commentary (which, unlike in virtually every other televised game) was minimal and there were long periods where absolutely nothing was said and one could just watch the action (!) on the field.

In the middle of the afternoon it appeared from my third floor vantage point that the rain had stopped so I thought I would at least get out of the house and walk for a while. I ended up walking about 4 ½ miles around Ilkley, stopping once again for a coffee en route. As I walked through the park along the river side it was amazing to see the number of families enjoying the

swings and roundabouts or just kicking a ball around. It was as though everyone had had the same feelings that I had – let's get out of the house for an hour even though it's not exactly warm and sunny but at least we won't get wet.

I tried several likely places for dinner but couldn't get in anywhere before 9 pm so I ended up calling a small Indian restaurant, Panache, where Molly and I had enjoyed several good meals in the past. I was able to get a table for 7:45 so I took advantage of it and was seated right away when I got there. It looked as though only a few tables were occupied when I started my meal but people kept coming in and tables were re-set and filled as soon as a party left. Also, the place must be bigger than it looks as several large parties were seated in an area behind me and all the tables I could see were filled. I concluded that either I had been very lucky to get a table or that the clientele here like to eat quite late. In any event, it was a very good meal and I was pleased that I had thought to call.

### **Sunday May 19**

This was probably the "calmest" start to a day since I had arrived in Ilkley as far as the weather was concerned and the forecast was for temperatures to reach the mid-sixties with sunny skies. With our flat's outdoor thermometer barely reaching 50F at nine and with still overcast skies I had some difficulty imaging the summer-like predictions but nevertheless concluded that I should take advantage of it rather than go to church.

I spent a little time checking bus and train times (much more restricted services on Sundays) as I wanted to walk from Skipton along the canal bank as far as Silsden and thought I would go to my start by bus and likewise return from Silsden. However, there is NO service between Ilkley and Skipton on Sundays and the Silsden to Ilkley service is reduced to hourly so I re-grouped and settled on driving to Silsden and using the train to get back there after walking TO Skipton. So, I drove to Caffè Nero where the young staff assured me that it was going to be a beautiful summer day. I had dressed somewhat accordingly but still had my waterproof jacket for its large pockets – as well as some security against the weather.

I parked at Silsden railway station soon after 10am and started my walk towards Skipton. The first part took me along the northern bank of the River Aire along a path that would lead to the canal at a number of points along the route. The path through fields was quite muddy in places but the going was easy and very pleasant so I stuck with the river as far as I could before turning up a short hill to get to the canal bank in the charming village of Kildwick.



**Kildwick:**

**A church**

**A pub**

**A few  
homes.**

**What more  
do you  
need?**

When I had lived in Keighley (60 years ago!) I must have walked, cycled or (been) driven through Kildwick dozens of times and I don't recall the word "charming" being associated with the place at that time. Kildwick was Kildwick – a place between Keighley and Skipton. Is it that the place has changed significantly (the old stone buildings and narrow streets would suggest



not) or is it that age and/or separation are pre-requisites for us to appreciate the beauty and interest in places that once were so familiar – and of little significance?

Whatever the reason, I now thought Kildwick was a lovely little village and was particularly impressed with the fact that the posted route to the canal bank took me up a half dozen steps through someone's garden. It was a stretch of no more than fifteen feet but, without the tiny posted notice, would easily have been missed as a public right of way as it literally formed a path between a house and the owner's well-kept garden. Only in England, I thought.

By now the predictions of a warm day were becoming reality and I soon took off my jacket as I walked the towpath along the canal bank. This was sometimes a solid path but more often it was simply a muddy track lining the south side of the waterway.



***Above: The canal with its calm waters and old mills***

***Left: Four ducklings; there were actually eight,***

***Apparently unaccompanied by an adult.***

***Below: A major docking and refurbishment spot.***



A very active waterway. I passed or was passed by many narrow boats as I headed towards Skipton. Several appeared to be owner operated but many were obviously daily (or longer) rentals that families and groups had chartered for some quiet and slow time on the water. I wondered about the necessary “qualifications” for renting these craft as the lack of boat experience was obvious in many of the groups, especially as they maneuvered to dock temporarily while a swing bridge was opened or closed by other crew members.



There are many roads and footpaths that cross the canal on this stretch of water and each has a hand (sometimes power) operated bridge which the boat crew has to open and close, hopefully fairly efficiently so as not to hold up road traffic for too long – although I suspect that local residents know of and use alternatives routes, particularly on summer weekends when the amateurs are out in force. The system seems to work rather well, however, and each boat must come with a key that unlocks the bridge and, in some cases, unlocks the power to open some of the heavier crossings.



*This boat reminded me of someone.....*

I took a short break to watch one of these bridge sequences in detail as I sat on a bench next to a small but impressive memorial to seven Polish airmen killed near here when their RAF plane crashed on a training mission in 1943. The most experienced of the flyers had been married only three weeks before the fatal crash and his widow (who later re-married) was traced by a couple of local Englishmen and was at the dedication of the memorial many years later.



*Time for a drink.*

*I chose Caffe Nero!*

From the memorial it was about 2 ½ miles further to Skipton but rather than go directly into town I followed the canal through the very busy area where a spur is used as a major mooring site and a tourist boat docking and crossed the canal

at yet another of the swing bridges. From here it was a short walk to the top end of the main street near the castle and then I was at my destination, Caffe Nero Skipton! I had coffee and a snack and checked my train timetable for trains back to Silsden and found that there was one in about half an hour. I had walked over eight miles by now so I was ready for the rest and then the relatively short walk to the station.

Silsden was only two stations down the line (eight minutes) and then it was a five minute walk back to the car park where I changed out of my boots and headed over the hill to Ilkley. By now it really was in the mid-sixties and the sky was clear blue so when I saw that there was a performance in progress at the bandstand on The Grove in Ilkley, I couldn't resist parking for a while and listening to the flute sextet while enjoying an ice cream cone. Although I was now back in the land of the aged and infirm that seem to frequent these free concerts (although to be fair many young families sit and listen also) I don't think anyone watching me get up from my seat and "walk" back to my car would have believed that I had just finished almost nine miles on my feet. Or maybe they would!

A late afternoon nap while my walking gear were washing finished my active day and also saw an end to the best of the weather. Clouds had rolled in while I slept and, although it was still bright and there were a few blue patches, I couldn't help but wonder what tomorrow might bring. But today had been thoroughly enjoyable and I was rewarded by another pleasant meal at Piccolino.



## Monday May 20

Today had originally been forecast to repeat how yesterday had turned out so I planned on a bike ride. In order to maintain my walking regimen, however, I started the day with a walk via Queens Road to downtown (for Caffè Nero breakfast), returning via Cowpasture for a total of two miles. I then donned my cycling gear and set off for Grassington. The temperature as I started (around 11am) was in the low fifties but I felt quite cool as the first mile of this route is downhill and is covered with virtually no turn of the pedal.

I soon warmed up, however, as I rode on the narrow road north of the river to Nesfield and then to Beamsley before reaching the main Harrogate Road. I had to climb this steep (and busy) road for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile before turning right on another narrow road with views of the Bolton Abbey Estate to my left. This road continued through Storith and then made a steep drop almost to river level (with a ford thrown in for good measure) and then an equally steep climb up for some gorgeous views of the Dales. There was one long stretch that finally forced me off the bike – probably for no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile but it still feels a big defeat when you have to push the bike.



## A fine example of a Bluebell Wood

From there to Burnsall it was an easy ride downhill to the point where I crossed the river. At this favorite spot there were already hundreds of people enjoying picnics and the two outdoor cafes and it was tempting to stop and join them but I convinced myself to go the additional five miles or so to Grassington where I knew of several tea

rooms for lunch.

I arrived in Grassington after 18 miles and over two hours of what I thought was difficult riding and it was nice to sit in the Cobblestone Café and order my tea and sandwich. I didn't even mind when the waitress told me there was a backup in the kitchen (Grassington was also very busy) and I would have a 15 minute wait for my bacon butty. The cashier commented on how warm it was today (it was probably a humid 60F by this time) and I had to agree that I had been generally warm enough during my ride.

I left Grassington and chose the main road to Skipton for my return. This road is somewhat busier than the one I had used to get here – and there are a surprising number of large trucks as quarries line the route – but it doesn't have the steep climbs and descents. It

## *Still a nice day on the way home*





is what the guide books would call “undulating”, frequent ups and downs but none with high gradients. At least it would feel that way in a car; on a bike, even this was challenging at times. However, it didn’t seem to take long to reach the ring road around Skipton, which I followed for about two miles before turning onto the Leeds Road.

Now it was a steady climb for two miles to Draughton, after which I was rewarded with probably four miles when only the occasional touch of the pedal was necessary to keep me going at 25 (sometimes 30) miles per hour. This fast road by-passed the village of Addingham and pretty soon I saw the “Welcome to Ilkley” sign and I was essentially home. A couple more short rises, then negotiating The Grove (better than in a car but still not easy with parking all along one side a narrow street) and the final assault of Cowpasture. Despite tired legs I made it to Crossbeck and across before a few more stands on the pedals brought me the remaining few hundred yards up Wells Road and home to Wells House. I had covered 38 miles and it had taken me over 3 ¾ hours but I felt that I had accomplished something and had met the goal set for the day.

I spent the rest of the day at home – two hours napping, washing all my cycling clothes, fixing a meal and watching TV before retiring at 11pm.

## **Tuesday May 21**

I had breakfast at home on a gloomy morning with a threat of showers for later. Since it was supposed to turn much colder and get very windy on Wednesday, I decided that I should get a walk in while it was still relatively warm.

I dressed in my walking gear (boots and waterproof jacket just in case) and went a long way round for a coffee before leaving town by bus. I don’t know whether I was simply postponing the trek or waiting for the skies to lift a little. In any event, I left Ilkley on the Leeds bus at 10:55 – and it immediately started to rain! It wasn’t very heavy and it had essentially stopped by the time I reached Bramhope, about 10 miles by road from Ilkley. My intent was to walk back towards Ilkley but not all the way; I would get a train or bus at a convenient spot. The route I was following was part of the Dales Way Link, joining Leeds to the Dales Way proper which starts in Ilkley and which I had completed about 2/3 of its 84 mile length almost three years ago. Actually I had done this particular walk that same summer, although there are many slightly different alternatives as paths meander through woodland areas and across farmland. From the lovely village of Bramhope (a ritzy bedroom community for Leeds) it was initially a slight climb to reach the Chevin Forest Park which is described on the Leeds City website as follows:

Chevin Forest Park Local Nature Reserve is located in the Wharfe Valley and overlooks the market town of Otley. The reserve consists of north-facing escarpment, which has a mixed cover of woodland, meadow and heathland and covers an area of some 180 hectares. Massive outcrops of millstone grit dominate the crest of the escarpment, which rises steeply to a height of 280m above sea level, and offers magnificent views of the Wharfe Valley.

The whole park was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1989 in recognition of its wealth of wildlife including nationally and regionally rare plant and animal species. A variety of wildlife habitats can be found there, including woodland, scrub heathland, grassland, still and running water and rocky millstone grit outcrops.

The Chevin also contains a nationally important geological feature on the White House side of the escarpment called Great Dib Wood. This has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as it is the only place the Otley Shell Bed – a package of thin mudstones and limestones containing extremely well-preserved marine fossils – is exposed.

The park is well served by footpaths and bridleways, some of which form parts of the Dales Way Link and the Ebor Way. All the routes are steep in places and can be muddy in wet conditions, so some caution is needed. However, East Chevin Quarry and Surprise View car parks provide good starting points to explore the park.

Of course I had not taken advantage of driving to one of the car parks mentioned so by the time I reached the highest point (The Surprise View) I was already a little tired and very warm. The rain had not started up again and the day was now decidedly brighter and at times very sunny. I sat at The Surprise for a few minutes and had a snack I had brought along and took in the tremendous views from this close to 1000 feet high vantage point. An information board gave a lot of information about the geology of the area and the latest ice age (which melted only 10,000 years ago across the Wharfe Valley) and also stated that on a (very) clear day, York Minster could be seen from here. That’s about 25 miles away as the crow flies.

## Surprise View



My walk continued in a generally downward direction from this point as I focused on reaching the village of Menston where I knew I could get a train back to Ilkley. The trek was by no means over, however, and I had to negotiate several fields, tracks and minor roads as I zig-zagged down into the valley. The map showed many public footpaths and there were many signs on the route indicating public rights of way – but I had some difficulty matching one with the other. I really must do something about my map-reading skills or pay closer attention once I have a “fix”.

I had estimated that the walk would be between four and five miles but by the time I dragged across the bridge at Menston railway station I had completed over six miles. In addition, I had another two miles under my belt from the strolling to coffee and around Ilkley before catching the bus – and of course I still had the final half mile up the hill to home after the short train ride. The 10 minutes sit down on the train and a 20 minute rest with coffee in Ilkley fortified me for the final Wells Road climb but my feet were hurting by the time I got to Wells House after covering almost nine miles. It had been a very interesting and picturesque walk, however, and I felt justified in taking my late afternoon nap. I made a reservation at The Farsyde for 8pm so I had a few hours to rest and recuperate before driving down for a very good meal.

### Wednesday May 22

I walked into Ilkley for breakfast and then decided on an easy walk along the canal bank between Skipton and Gargrave. I checked bus times between the two and found that the service was hourly in each direction so I chose to take the bus TO Gargrave and then walk back to Skipton on the grounds that there would be more to do in the latter while waiting if necessary. So, on a mild (low fifties) but still overcast morning I drove from Ilkley to Skipton and parked in the long term car park quite close to the bus station.

I had about a 15 minute wait for the 11:45 bus and then it was only about another 15 minutes en route, so I was ready to start the walk back soon after noon. The canal runs almost through the middle of Gargrave so I was on the bank in no time and headed south. I had gone today without my rain jacket and with a minimum of extras (no map, forgot the camera, one small water bottle) so I was not only able to stride out but was also hoping that the threatened showers would hold off for a while. In fact, the weather improved as I walked and I was generally plenty warm enough, although the northerly winds did pick up as predicted.

There were very few walkers but quite a number of water craft on the canal so I passed a considerable number of people. Several of the boats were day trips from Skipton packed with elderly tourists enjoying the leisurely pace on a sunny day. The bank was a grassy path in most places but was generally not very muddy although there were a surprising number of ruts in the surface so footing wasn't always the best. The walk was extremely pleasant, however, and for the most part far enough from any roads that all I could see was farmland and the near distant hills of the Yorkshire Dales.

By the time I was on the outskirts of Skipton it was warm (almost 70F I guessed) so, as I had plenty of time on the meter, I decided to spend a little more time in the town. I had lunch at Bizzie Lizzies, a locally famous fish and chip restaurant and then spent some time wandering through the market on the High Street. I also had my afternoon coffee at the Caffè Nero before driving back to Ilkley. Even then I didn't go straight to the flat but went up past the Cow and Calf rocks and stopped at an overlook there to admire the hills across the Wharf Valley. Finally, around 5pm, I went home and spent the rest of the day there. The large lunch had satisfied me so I made no plans to go out for dinner but snacked a



little while doing some washing and tidying up in the flat. Tomorrow I go to Worcester to pick up Molly so I thought that I had better make the place tidy for our return here on Saturday.

*A great view of the Cow and Calf Rocks from the flat on a beautiful evening*

#### **Thursday May 23**

It was only 38F when I got up and donned my walking clothes for a brief walk around Ilkley, stopping at Caffè Nero for breakfast of course. It was sunny at times but I also felt a few drops of rain but the main feature of the weather was a biting cold northerly wind. Nevertheless I covered 3.7 miles and arrived home by 11, leaving me time to pack and get on my way by about noon.

With just one quick stop I was at Fran's by 3:30 and Molly and I set off essentially right away to continue to Bristol. We arrived there and checked in the hotel soon after 5pm. We walked to a local Piccolino for dinner and then retired around ten.

*While I was alone in Ilkley, Molly had spent time with her sister, Frances, and had also attended the annual sibling reunion. Unfortunately, Richard had called off at the last minute as he wasn't feeling very well so it was just Fran, Molly and Robert who spent the five days at Oak House in Warwickshire.*



*Fran and Robert relaxing at Oak House*





### *Banbury Cross and a beautiful day at the lake on the Oak House Estate*

*Their stay there consisted primarily of re-living their childhood but they also took a few driving trips out to see various sights in the area. They had a thwarted visit to a battle site (because it still is an MOD facility and therefore off-limits) and spent a day in the town of Banbury – famous for its cross and a statue of a lady on a white horse.*

*They took some short walks around the Oak House grounds and watched the Knightcote Model Boat Club sailing their models on the pond on the estate. They ate at home for the most part but did go out for dinner one evening and enjoyed a very good meal at the Butcher's Arms.*

*After Robert left for home in London, Fran and Molly returned to Besford and did some walking and several shopping trips during the remaining week that Molly was there. They went to a concert by a six person Zulu group from South Africa who sang and played drums and also attended a performance by a local Silver Band. Fran and Molly spent some time in other local villages and towns, Fran taught Molly how to crochet and the rest of the time was spent in and around the grounds of the Besford Estate.*





*All three (Fran, Alan and Molly) had a day out in the nearby cathedral city of Worcester. They appeared to have had a great time together, although the weather had been cool much as I had experienced in Ilkley.*



***Worcester City Hall and Tudor streets***

**Friday May 24**



We had breakfast in the Concierge Lounge and then walked about ten minutes to pick up the Hop on/Hop off bus for our day in Bristol. Despite the cold we sat on the top deck of the open top bus and admired the many old and beautiful buildings in the city center and along the area of the old docks.

***The old dock-land area of Bristol***



Bristol is about six miles up the river from the Severn Channel but had been a very significant port and huge part of the slave trade “triangle” in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Goods from Bristol’s manufacturing plants (textiles, munitions, etc) were traded for slaves in West Africa who were then taken to the West Indies and bartered for sugar. Consequently Bristol became the center of the sugar refining and processing trade in England and it is only recently that that aspect of its business base has ceased.



***Brunel’s Engineering:  
Temple Meads Railway Station  
The SS Great Britain  
The Clifton Suspension Bridge***



The bus climbed its way to the “village” of Clifton (now incorporated into Bristol but retaining a rural feel and still surrounded by the very big green spaces of The Downs) where we took our first stop. The immediate order of business was



to get warmed through over a coffee and then we walked to and across the suspension bridge over the River Avon. This bridge had been designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel whose ship (The SS Great Britain) and Temple Meads Railway Station we had also passed and which form three of many innovations of this prolific engineer. It was extremely windy and we could see the bridge swaying several inches as we stood at the support ready to walk across. Although we didn't get much of a moving sensation while we were actually on the bridge (with its 300 feet drop to the river below) we both felt as though we were light-headed and perhaps a little motion sick after walking across in both directions.





Back on the bus we took it right back downtown and then walked to the spectacular cathedral before challenging the wind and a brief rain shower on the walk back to the hotel. We made it just in time, as a tremendous rainstorm, with very high winds, came through the area as we were enjoying our afternoon coffee in the hotel Starbucks. We hoped that things would calm a little before our 10 minute walk to dinner tonight.



## *Central Bristol and The Cathedral*

Indeed the weather did improve significantly and it turned into a cool but pleasant evening. It was just over a ten minute walk to the Glass Boat restaurant where we met Penny and Stephen Parsons whom we have known since the early nineties when Stephen and I worked out a licensing arrangement between his company and GE. We have remained very friendly over the years and see them whenever we can when we are in England, although this was the first time in three years. It was a very good meal and an equally pleasant chat and the three hours we spent together went very quickly.