

THE PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

The York Minster Walkers are undertaking a Pilgrimage of Thanksgiving marking completion of the restoration of the East Front of York Minster. They are retracing their footsteps 11 years after they undertook a Sponsorship pilgrimage which raised in excess of £14,000 for the restoration work. This time, as a mark of thanksgiving and witness, the parishes and benefices through which the pilgrims walk have the opportunity to use the event to raise funds for their individual needs.

The route follows that devised by the late Leslie Stanbridge, a former Archdeacon of York, founder of the York Minster Walking Group and a keen countryman and authority on Yorkshire churches, and author of the 'Whitby Way' which can be purchased for £5.50 from the Minster Shop

Day 1 Sunday 6th May Whitby Abbey to Glaisdale

Twenty four pilgrims gathered in warm sunshine outside St Hilda's Abbey in Whitby at the start of their 66 mile pilgrimage over 6 days to York Minster.

They gathered in the open air outside St Mary's Church for a short service of prayer and blessing conducted by the Rev Mark Russell Smith.

With the bells of St Mary's ringing to encourage the pilgrims on their way the walkers descended the steps to Whitby town, with a short delay whilst the swing bridge was closed to allow a boat to pass up stream

Today's walk followed the course of the River Esk through Eskdale to Glaisdale with the opportunity to replenish water supplies at Sleights before crossing the A169 and following the path to the St Oswalds retreat centre where a picnic was enjoyed in dapple sunshine on a grassy bank.

Broadly following the course of the North York Moors Railway the walk progressed close to the River Esk, past Newbiggin Hall and fields of golden Rape Seed to Egton Bridge where the pilgrims crossed the river on the stepping stones. From there on to Beggars Bridge for a photo call before completing the 11 mile up a gruelling gradient to St Thomas the Apostle Church where the pilgrimage concluded for the day

Day 2. Glaisdale to Rosedale Abbey

Day 2 started at St Thomas the Apostle Parish Church Glaisdale with a quiet service of prayer, reflection and blessing led by Rev Canon Dr Chris Collingwood.

Twenty six pilgrims emerged into the bright sunshine. Another blisteringly hot day following a route from the lush green valley of Glaisdale to the vast expanse of moorland at Glaisdale Rigg and beyond. Across Glaisdale Moor with a stop for lunch at a vantage point, with fine panoramic views. With a gentle breeze, with skylarks in the sky and to the bubbling sound of curlews the pilgrims crossed the moor treading on the slabs believed to have been laid by medieval monks who made their way from the abbeys in the Yorkshire Dales to St Hilda's at Whitby

Moorland gave way to meadows, with fields of bleating new born lambs, in the long and gradual descent on a hot afternoon to complete the 11 miles to Rosedale Abbey

Following the tradition of penitent pilgrims, the two youngest walkers, - who will be back at school tomorrow, - walked all eleven miles barefoot showing no signs of blisters or the exhaustion felt by some of their elders.

Day 3 Rosedale Abbey to Kirkby Moorside

An eventful day when, with apologies to John Bunyan, pilgrims resisted the temptation of a lift by car to avoid a very steep climb and they entered the Valley of Gloom and Despondency when they found that the route ahead had been closed. However, in the spirit of Bunyan's Christian, good overcame evil and the 'Road Closed' sign was waived for them by skillful negotiation on the part of their leader!

As previously the day started with a short service of prayer and blessing in the Abbey Church by Father Bill , Priest in Charge of the Benefice including St Mary and St Laurence Rosedale Abbey and St Mary Lastingham, through which we were to walk later in the day. He recounted the history of the early English Saints including St Cedd and St Chad, early monastic pilgrims themselves. A monastery was founded in Lastingham by St Cedd in AD 654 and his believed burial spot is marked by a lit candle in the Saxon Crypt at Lastingham.

After the steep climb up 'Rosedale Chimney' the pilgrims traversed Spaunton Moor, passing Ana Cross before stopping for lunch on the grassy bank outside Lastingham Grange where they were serenaded by the first cuckoo of spring who was heard but not seen. There was a short delay here whilst negotiations were opened and satisfactorily

concluded over opening the right way between Hutton le Hole and Ravenswick which had been temporarily closed for the redevelopment of Ravenswick Hall

From Lavingham, and the resting place of St Cedd, to Hutton le Hole for an Ice cream stop and then , ignoring the 'route closed sign' and with appreciation to the Site Manager for his consent they passed through all the civil engineering work on their way to their destination for the night, Kirkby Moorside. Another 9 miles concluded.

Day 4. Kirkby Moorside to Helmsley

Away from the hustle and bustle of Market Day in Kirkby Moorside the pilgrims found peace in the tranquility of All Saints Parish Church where they joined the regular Wednesday worshippers for a Celebration of the Eucharist (BCP) led by the Rev Christine who blessed the walkers on their way.

Again it was a warm and sunny day walking over the gentle terrain of the Hambleton Hills along lanes with banks of wild flowers and trees adorned with blossom. We stopped in quiet Kirkdale to visit St Gregory Minster, with its Anglo Saxon carved transcript which translates that 'Orm the son of Gamal bought St Gregorius Minster when it was all broken and fallen and he has let it make new from the ground...in Edward's days the King and Tosti's days th Earl' (That is circa 1060 AD.) No doubt pilgrims had passed this place before Orm's rebuild of almost 1,000 years ago. It has been a place of mission since and in the 21st Century it remains a church of tranquility and worship in a secluded and beautiful place.

Thence on to Nawton where, just outside the village, we stopped for refreshment before proceeding through Pockley, with its thatched cottages and on to Helmsley, our destination for the day.

Day 5. **Ascension Day.** Helmsley to Coxwold

A short Service for Ascension Day was conducted in the Lady Chapel of All Saints Church Helmsley by the Rev Michael Cross. The pilgrims gave a fine unaccompanied rendering of "Hail the Day that sees Him rise" received the Blessing and set off, down the lime tree avenue of the churchyard, to join the Cleveland Way, the ancient footpath from Helmsley to Rievaulx Abbey. After a brief stop there for refreshment they proceeded to Bow Bridge following the path through Ashberry Wood, and round Ashberry Hill with fine views over the river Rye to Rievaulx Abbey. Lunch was taken on the bridge and

surrounding grassy bank at Ashberry Farm.

A climb up Claythwaite Rigg , to Scawton Moor and across the busy A170 . Then on through the Byland Wood Plantation on Wass Moor before passing the modern Stanbrook Abbey (housing the nuns of the Order of St Benedict) before descending - in single file with 'high vis' vests down Wass Bank. From Wass, across the fields, to our next ruined abbey, Byland.

On then toward 'Oldstead' and over the fields to reach our destination, Coxwold.

Seventeen pilgrims completed the eleven miles from Helmsley. Today was a day of contrast to the earlier days of the pilgrimage. It was still bright and sunny but much cooler and after the exposed moorland of days two and three, much of today's walk was through woodland.

Day 6. Coxwold to Huby

The gathering point for the start of today's walk to Huby was St Michael's Church Coxwold with its distinctive octagonal tower. A short service of prayer followed by a blessing was conducted by the Rector, the Revd. Liz Hassall, the modern day successor to the Revd Laurence Sterne (d 1768) author of Tristram Shandy

A short break allowed us to explore the church, which due to the narrowness of the chancel has an unusual communion rail which extends down its length in order to leave room on either side for the enormous and ostentatious Fauconberg tombs.

A climb up to Beacon Banks where we waited in vain for others to join us and then to Oulston where, eleven years ago the village hall was opened for us specially to shelter from heavy rain. No rain this time but a pleasant day but with a sneaky cold wind.

Then to Crayke, the last significant hill before our final destination tomorrow in York. 'The History of Crayke Castle', available within the church (50p), explains that Crayke and three miles around it was given to St Cuthbert by King Egfrid (d 685) in VII Century and St Cuthbert is said to have founded a monastery there. In later years the Bishops of Durham, who inherited Crayke, had a residence there and the parish remained part of County Durham until the mid XIX century

After lunch in the churchyard the pilgrims descended the hill and made their way, on welcome flat ground, to Huby. Another 9 miles accomplished.

Final Day. Huby to York

We gathered in the grounds of the only church in Huby, the Methodist Chapel, for a short service of prayer and blessing led by Canon Michael, who joined the pilgrims for the final leg of their walk to York.

Another fine and sunny day, the pilgrims, whose number had been swollen for the final leg, now reached the great plain of York. No more hills of any significance!

Lunch on the village green at Skelton and a visit to the compact St Giles' church, the original having been built around or before 1247 when Archbishop de Gray confirmed a donation to the chapel by Robert Haget, Treasurer of York Minster. This small building was substantially 'restored' in the C19th and work has recently been completed on the restoration of the ornately detailed south entrance.

More walkers joined us here and we made our way to the Museum Gardens in York and then to the Minster to join many others who had walked, cycled and made their respective pilgrimages from Whitby, Filey and Hull. Tea and cakes awaited us in the Minster.

Time then to reflect on the experiences of the past week. Times of companionship, times of solitude, times of fun, times of anxiety, and times of prayer. Sore limbs and blistered feet and much time to wonder at the beauty God's Creation. Then, sitting beneath the magnificent East Window - the work of John Thornton so lovingly and painstakingly restored over the past ten years - time for shared thanksgiving at Choral Evensong.

Thanks be to God.