

The Walk Across England Day 10 Richmond to Osmotherley

The tenth day of our journey across England was to be our longest, as the twenty-five mile leg would take us from the eastern edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park to the western fringes of its sister park, the North York Moors. We were delighted that our B&B host was serving breakfast extra early, for we were anxious to get started with our forty kilometer day. Despite it being billed as the flattest stretch of the Coast to Coast walk, it was still going to be our longest day on our feet.

Even after getting off the busy road leading out of Richmond and well onto our C2C path along the River Swale, we could still look back and see the magnificent Castle off in the distance, towering high above the village in the early morning mist.

Most of this long day was spent either walking through long spanses of gently rolling farm fields or along narrow, winding flat lanes that led us from one tiny village to another. Many of these farming villages, all with neat names like Danby Wiske and Bolton-on-Swale, were so small that the only significant objects that defined them, other than a cluster of quaint homes, a few stone barns and an ancient church, were an old wooden bench sitting next to a classic red telephone booth in the middle of the tiny village green. We noted that these iconic red booths had become relics, now void of their phones due to the popularity of cellphones. Instead, each booth now neatly housed a defibrillator, which was reassuring to us folks walking through such a remote part of northern England.

Thanks to the consistently even surfaces of pavement and hard packed paths through farm fields, we were able to quicken the pace and fold up our walking sticks. We love our stabilizing sticks but admittedly not having to hold them, for the first time since we started, felt luxurious.

The endless skies were as blue as they had been the entire way and, because our walk was totally out in the open along these expansive tracts of farmlands, the rising sun was now soaking our faces as we headed east. We always checked the weather forecast before leaving our B&B each morning and we had wisely dressed in shorts and short sleeve shirts for we knew it was going to be our hottest day of the walk. Thank goodness we did, because the temperatures steadily rose into the seventies and, as much as we were sweating, we knew that our 60 ounces of water and electrolytes, which had been more than adequate enough for each of the first nine days of the walk, was going to be woefully shy on this unseasonably warm Northern England day.

We came upon a small petrol station in one of the villages about 15 miles into the walk and they kindly let us top off our bottles but, as the sun continued to beat down on us, we quickly depleted it over the next several miles.

But experiencing thirst like no other time in my life wasn't going to be the toughest challenge of the day, for the biggest risk of our entire walk was waiting for us just a few miles down this seemingly quiet and safe narrow country lane!

The one overriding thing we had been warned about for this long stage was the notorious highway crossing. Unlike the three other major North/South super highways, we had already traversed over the first 125 miles of the walk, the A19 had not a single tunnel or overpass footbridge within miles of the C2C's path. This meant that we were going to have to run across a highway the size of I95. The thought simply terrified us. The closer we got, the more I repeated my doubts to Cynthia that I just couldn't believe that, despite what the guidebook had said and the maps clearly showed, we were going to have to dangerously cross this mega-motorway.

Our peaceful walk was no longer quiet, for we could now hear the sounds of the zooming highway traffic getting closer and closer and as our hedgerow lined lane made one last turn it suddenly merged right onto this daunting highway. Ugh! Sadly, the guidebook and map had been right, for there, before our bugged-out eyes, was the most frightening sight of our entire challenging walk: Four lanes, separated by a thin grassy median, of 75 mile/hour lorry and auto rush hour traffic and no way over or under it!

Our thirst suddenly disappeared, as our priorities shifted to watching a seemingly endless parade of vehicles go flying by us. I felt like I was staring at the end of my life. I turned to Cynthia and, for the second time on our long walk, uttered the weak surrendered words "let's call a taxi". She just laughed and said let's be patient, wait for a break, lock arms and take it one side at a time. So, clinging to each other for dear life and, above all else, remembering we were in England so as to look to our right at the north moving traffic, we waited for several minutes until we saw a safe path across the sea of flying metal. After sprinting, with arms locked, to the median and climbing over the guard rail, we now looked to our left at the oncoming south bound traffic and did the same. We collectively let out a huge sigh of relief as we safely reached the other side and could feel my heart pounding every bit as loud and fast as it does when I'm finishing faster

And, as if by an act from the heavens, there was an entrance to a National Trust historic property waiting for us, literally, on the other side of the highway, which meant water was now within reach. The Mount Grace Priory, a magnificent fourteen century stone abbey, which had once housed Catherine of Aragon, was situated on a wooded knoll surrounded by beautiful gardens but what interested us more was the museum cafe, where an ample supply of cool bottled water awaited us.

After refueling at our oasis from the heavens, we felt energized and ready to cover the last few miles of our long day, which took us up over a wooded path above the abbey and through several pastures into the quaint hamlet village of Osmotherley. This lovely old village, full of beautiful honey colored stone homes with clay tiled roofs, quaint old pubs and a stunning 15th century church surrounded by ancient tombstones, was one of the most beautiful sleep-overs of our entire walk and the ambiance of this magical village was enhanced even more by the late afternoon shadows cast by the setting sun. And to top it off, we had a scrumptious dinner of sea bass with gorgonzola and squash risotto, at the Golden Lion, a classic old pub on the village square. What a picture perfect way to punctuate our longest day.

Needless to say, we fell fast asleep back at our cozy bed and breakfast but not before mapping out tomorrow's shorter but much steeper twenty mile walk, which would bring us into the heart of those famous purple heather carpeted rolling hills of the North York Moors. We could hardly wait.

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WALKING TIP of the WEEK: Besides increased calorie burn and a boost to your cardiovascular engines, one of the key benefits of a brisk daily walk, is an enhanced core. The faster you walk, the harder you're working and, ultimately, strengthening your mid-section. This can lead to a better sense of balance, one of the keys to long term mobility. So, a fast walk, where you fully utilize your arms and torso, besides benefitting you aerobically, also serves as a subtle way to build core strength and balance.

HIDDEN WALKING GEM of the WEEK: Cynthia and I covered an average of fifteen miles/day along our Coast to Coast walk and one of the many beautiful places you can get in some of your weekly miles, are the endless paths of the Shenandoah National Park. Many of the hikes, that originate along the many miles of our neighbor park, are full of steep ascents but one of the flatter and shorter walks is Calf Mountain. Less than three total miles, this gentle out and back climb, brings you to a beautiful, wide open grassy meadow with stunning views of the rolling Blue Ridge Mountains to your east and south. Before turning around to head back, you walk another half mile through a canopied tunnel of an abandoned and overgrown apple orchard, to the wooded summit overlooking Jarman's Gap. This gentle walk is also one of the closest to town, as it's the first park-and-hike area you come to on the right side on your drive north along Skyline Drive. Once you park, head along the dirt path up through the grassy meadow path on the right side of the road. It is well marked from there. I have a lifetime auto pass to all of our National Parks, which can be purchased, for a very reasonable fee, at the entrance. Text me at 434-962-1694 for a map to this beautiful walk in the mountains.