

The Coast to Coast Walk Across England

Day #4

Grasmere to Patterdale

September 13, 2019

With the heavy rains of Tropical Storm Gabriel long gone, we awoke to a gorgeous blue sky and our coolest morning thus far. At forty seven degrees and undetectable humidity, the crisp valley air felt invigorating, as the sun cast distinct, welcoming shadows from towering oaks across deep green fields along our first mile out of the beautiful village of Grasmere.

This was to be our shortest distance day thus far, with only 10 miles ahead of us, but by all indications it was to be another glorious day of steep climbing in the Lake District, this time 2000 feet up to the Grisedale Pass and Tarn and then over into the next heavenly valley to the village of Patterdale along the banks of the famous Ulswater.

As we followed the ascending trail eastward out of Grasmere, despite the gorgeous sunrise at our backs, we were still reminded of Gabriel, as we stepped over and through countless swollen streams rushing down the mountainside, across our upward path.

The narrow mountain path began as a gradual climb that followed an endless stone-wall, which hugged our right shoulder but immediately to our left was a sharp, precipitous drop off to a mountain stream far, far below. And all the way down to the stream, the mountainside was covered with a carpet of tall ferns dotted with hundreds of grazing sheep.

I kept commenting to Cynthia about the beautiful lichen covered ancient stone walls we had encountered throughout our walk and I wondered aloud about who had originally built them centuries ago and, just as important, who maintained them so meticulously today?

We also had been seeing thousands of sheep wandering loose all around us over the first three days of our walk, especially way up high along the mountain ridges, well beyond the confines of these stone walls. We were in awe of how they clung to the sides of the steep razor thin rocky ledges but we also wondered who in the heck they all belonged to. Despite the wildness of seeing them wandering freely all over this magnificent National Park, we knew that someone had to be taking care of them, as they all had a splotch of colored paint-marking on their hind ends.

And suddenly, as if someone had overheard us pondering the mystery of sheep ownership and wall maintenance, an unusually long-haired lone sheep suddenly appeared, sprinting at a breakneck rate straight down towards us on the same single track path. The panicked sheep showed no sign of veering off the narrow path or slowing down, as it came hurtling towards us. So, like a game of chicken, we jumped aside at the last moment to let it fly by. Cynthia looked over at me with a startled look on her face and asked "What the heck was that all about?" but before I could reply, our answer came flying down the path in the form of four herding sheepdogs and a young shepherd running, as if in a race, trailing right behind them.

He stopped to ask us if we'd seen his long haired sheep and then told us, between panting breaths, that "I've been trying to catch her all summer so as to give her a haircut! She is the most stubbornly elusive of all the sheep I've ever owned!" And just as quick as he appeared, he left us with a kick of his trail shoes and a "Well, I must be off before she gets too far out ahead of me". As he sped off down the path, back towards Grasmere, he left the both of us with a smile on our faces at this small slice of local farming life.

After saying goodbye to our running shepherd friend, the wall lined path began to get steeper and steeper, due to the fact that the last section of our 2000 foot climb to the Grisedale Tarn, had not a single switch back. It was yet another straight up stair-stepping climb over ancient oversized stones and even though my day pack (which only carried my lunch, water bottle and maps) was light, the angle at which we were climbing was so steep that I felt as if I was being tipped backwards with each cautious step, like being on a ladder at too steep a pitch. With our trusty walking sticks digging in and with Cynthia, once again encouraging me from behind, I was able to pull myself upwards.

Despite the cool temperatures, I found myself sweating from the climb but it was all worth it, for as we crested the top of the steps, there lay before us, the shimmering site of Grisedale Tarn, a beautiful mountain lake nestled within the shadow of two magnificent green Craggs towering above it. The full panoramic view of the gorgeous Grasmere valley behind us and the beautiful pastoral green valley that lay ahead, was simply stunning! I once again found myself repeating a word to Cynthia that was becoming our mantra: "Breathtaking!" I felt like each day we were being visually treated to some of the most beautiful scenery on earth.

Glen Ridding was well worth the extra mile and half of hiking beyond tiny Patterdale (the usual village destination but overbooked this night), as it was easily the most picturesque village of the walk thus far. With a wide mountain river flowing through the center of the village green, down into the stunningly beautiful Ullswater (Norse for 'Water with a Bend') and with stone cottages, quaint restaurants and tiny shops on either side of the rushing stream, this idyllic village looked straight out of "The Sound of Music". From our bed and breakfast second story window, which hung over the rushing stream below, we could see the magnificent lake, dotted with colorful sailboats, surrounded by those lush towering mountains.

Somewhere out there, along that beautiful mountain range to our east, was tomorrow's twenty mile path, which was to be our longest and last day walking through the magical Lake District before heading into the Yorkshire Dales National Park. As I drifted off to sleep, with the calming sounds of the mountain stream floating up through our open window, I knew I was going to be sad to say goodbye but, at the same time, excited for what lay ahead...

TIP of the WEEK: Cynthia and I averaged 15 miles/day on our C2C Walk Across England and my goal, for you, is to have each of you virtually simulate that same walk by personally logging your own 15 miles, right here in beautiful Central Virginia, not daily but throughout the week. Any walking is good for you, especially during this unprecedented era of sitting, but most research now tells us that daily walking is the most beneficial path to our long term health. I tell all of my athletes to think of it more as a lifestyle, than an exercise program. A daily walk of two miles and one weekend jaunt of three miles will get you your 15 miles and, ultimately, a healthier mindset and body. And remember: walk fast enough to sweat but not to the point of panting!

RECOMMENDED READ: One of my local athletes, Philip Lorish, after listening to me recount our walk, surprised me with a thoughtful gift of a copy of “The Shepherd’s Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape” by James Rebanks . This wonderful account of generational sheep farmers takes place in the same mountain and valley places along the Lake District paths we walked. Cynthia and I enjoyed the book so much that we now regularly follow Reebanks on social media under James Rebanks@herdyshpherd1

HIDDEN LOCAL HIKING GEM of the WEEK: The Ragged Mountain Reservoir is a wonderful walking and kayaking resource only two miles from the heart of UVa. This magnificent 980 acre preserve, which in some ways reminds me of the paths along Ullswater in the Lake District, features almost seven miles of smooth, soft surfaced trails that loop the beautiful lake-like reservoir and, thanks to the City and County, is open for our public use. For more information go: Ragged Mountain Natural Area.

Mark and Cynthia Lorenzoni have...(same by line)