

# The Walk Across England

## Day 12

### Blakey Ridge to Egton Bridge

We left the historic Lion Inn at Blakey Ridge and began the 12th and, sadly, second to last day of our walk across England with a mile long trek on a paved road that followed the contour along the highest ridge of the North York Moors. We were immediately met with a brisk, early-morning wind, which only added to the ambiance of heading back into the starkly beautiful heathered paths of the remote moors.

Despite the stiff early morning wind, today's walk promised to be the easiest of our journey, with only twelve flat miles to cover along a gentle descent off the peak ridge of the moors into the quaint river village of Egton Bridge. Within a mile of walking along the quiet road, we rejoined the C2C dirt footpath path and headed east across the next moor.

It was yet another sunny, cloudless day and the deep blue skies, that towered over the now endlessly flat horizon, served as a stunning backdrop to the rich colored sea of purple and pink heather. Cynthia and I simply could not believe how lucky we continued to be with the weather. We had been warned about how much it rained and how cold it was in Northern England and had packed accordingly for our thirteen day journey but, other than the heavy rains of the third day back in the Lake District, our long walk had been both warm and dry. As we walked across the moors, dressed as if we were hiking in Virginia on an early summer day, we marveled at the boundless sight of heather, sparkling in the sun.

We were also in awe of the incredible number of pheasants that flew up out of the low lying thicket along the side of the path. Every fifty meters, we startled yet another one of these large beautiful birds from their hiding place along the narrow path. I lost count after a while, as seemingly hundreds of these brightly colored birds furiously flapped their wings as they took flight farther out into the heather refuge.

After several miles of soft surface solitude walking among the pheasants, we came upon a paved country road, where we noted the first sign of civilization since leaving the inn earlier in the day. A long line of green Land Rover jeeps were parked along the side of the quiet road and off in the distance, at the start of a narrow gravel road, stood a tall man topped with a classic British chappy hat. Patiently sitting at his heels were three magnificent labrador retrievers. Cynthia looked at me with a "What's this about?" and as we drew closer to the man, our question was quickly answered.

Seems that we had stumbled right into the middle of the start of a Saturday morning pheasant hunt and just up ahead were dozens of folks, all with orange flags in their hands, standing in place, outstretched well apart in a straight line, for as far as we could see, on either side of the road. As the well dressed country gent, in his knee-high wellington boots, explained, it was the start of pheasant hunting season and all of these folks were from the neighboring villages. They had volunteered to chase the birds out of hiding, for the hunters, who were hidden behind well camouflaged stone-walled bunkers, just up ahead. In a kind manner, he asked us if we wouldn't mind slowing down to walk behind him, so as to stay well out of the hunter's gunfire.

Thanks to the slightly downhill terrain and the kind smooth surface, we had been enjoying clipping along at our fastest pace of the entire walk but, after digesting what was about to happen straight ahead on our path, we quickly agreed to slow down to a snail's pace and to follow safely behind our new found country shepherd.

Well, it's a good thing we complied, for just then the tall chap, who had been talking on his walkie talkie, presumably to the hunters up ahead, signalled to all of his neighbors to "start". They immediately began shouting and waving their bright colored flags against the heather. Dozens and dozens of birds suddenly started emerging out of hiding and flying into the sky. That's when the gunshots began. For what seemed like an eternity, as the long line of heather beaters marched eastward, a continuous streak of gunshots rang out into the once quiet morning air. Birds were dropping from the blue skies in droves. Then, as quickly as it all started, the gunshots ended, with a walkie talkie call, from our tall chappy friend, back to the hunters. He then whistled to the dogs and off they ran, darting in among the heather to retrieve the fallen birds, which they obediently carried back to the hunters, who now stood out above their sheltered stone bunkers.

After bidding farewell to the hunting party, with our hearts still aflutter from all the excitement, we carried on along the narrow gravel road which followed the Glaisdale Rigg down into the tiny village of Glaisdale. We came upon the beautiful 17th century Beggar's Bridge and, hungry from our exciting morning walk along the Glaisdale Moor, decided to have our lunch sitting at the base of this famous stone arched bridge.

After our late lunch, Cynthia and I walked the last few miles, through a beech lined forest and down a narrow hedgerow lined lane, into the picturesque river village of Egton Bridge. The guide book called it one of the most beautiful villages of the entire C2C Walk and we had to agree. Nestled along the winding banks of the River Esk, the tiny village featured countless stately stone homes surrounded by gorgeous walled gardens bordered by, of all things, towering redwoods. The village was so quaint, that we observed many of the residents riding on horseback along the stone-walled lanes. But the wooded hamlet's trademark centerpiece was the series of elevated stepping stones that bridged the tributaries of the Esk, that splintered as it flowed through the village.

And, in keeping with the beauty of this magical Venice-like village, our B&B was also one of the most beautiful of all the many wonderful inns we had been treated to at the end of our daily walks. The Old Mill, a magnificent Georgian slate roofed stone mansion, nestled along a narrow lane along the Esk, was the perfect ending to yet another memorable day.

Tomorrow would be our last day of this amazing journey and, for the first time, I went to bed feeling unsettled, as I realized just how much I didn't want it to end. The walk had truly been the trip of a lifetime, shared with my very best friend of the past forty years. I finally fell asleep, praying for an endless walk to the cliffs of the North Sea...

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HIDDEN GEM of the WEEK: Even though it's a bit of a drive from Charlottesville, the beautiful walk along the cascading mountain stream to the towering waterfalls of White Oak Canyon makes the trip to this Madison County gem, totally worth the trip. The one mile walk to the first falls gently meanders along the rushing water but getting to the second magnificent falls is much more challenging but still very accessible, even for this 65 year old rambler. I'd highly recommend day hikers (Oboz or Merrells are excellent) and it wouldn't hurt to bring along your walking sticks too. For a map to this beautiful walk text me at 434-962-1694.