

The Walk Across England

Day 11

Osmotherley to Blakey Ridge

With 150 miles already behind us, the 11th day of our Coast to Coast (C2C) walk would take us into the last quarter of our journey across England and what a day it was to be. Cynthia and I woke up feeling surprisingly rested after our long twenty five mile walk, from the day before, into the quaint village of Osmotherley. And it's a good thing we felt refreshed, as today's "shorter" twenty mile journey into the heart of the North York Moors National Park was going to be, according to our trusty guidebook, one of the most grueling of the entire walk. For starters, the opening 14 miles had no less than six separate mountain peaks to not only climb up but, just as challenging, six separate steep rocky descents to navigate back down.

Within minutes of leaving our favorite village, we were already climbing. First, on a narrow paved lane, lined by stone cottages, partially hidden behind tall privets, leading out of the hamlet and then, just a short distance later, on to a dirt path up along a farm pasture that steeply led us to one of the west end entrances to the National Park. Despite the early morning mist, which told us it was going to be another warm day, as soon as we reached the top of our first climb of the day, our eyes were treated to a gorgeous view, for miles out in front us lay a carpet of rolling purple and pink tinged heather. And winding its way through this magical sight, was our narrow dirt path, like a giant serpent guiding the way.

For the next challenging thirteen miles, we climbed up and over a series of peaks, all connected by a different named moor and each punctuated by stunning views of dense fields of stunning colors. One heather carpeted moor after another, all with a unique name, like Scarth Wood Moor, Cringle Moor and Urra Moor, led us over these steep climbs. And it's no wonder, after seeing this endless sea of colored beauty, that this massive National Park full of moors, is said to feature "the world's largest expanse" of heather.

Despite the roller coaster nature of today's walk, our series of steep ascents and descents were made easier thanks to an endless path of massive stones that had been meticulously laid down long ago, by some kind hearted souls, to guide travelers from straying onto the heather and damaging its delicate fabric and, maybe not as intentional but just as important, to ease the stress on our joints. No other time, along our long journey, were our walking sticks more useful and valued, for they gave us four legs to rely upon as we navigated the uneven and massive lichen covered stone steps down to each valley leading to the next moor.

After cresting the sixth and final peak of the day, our legs were treated to a six mile reprieve along a very flat crushed cinder road. Once a thriving railway bed transporting iron out of the rich mines from deep below Farndale Moor, the narrow road now served as a pleasant route to Blakey Ridge and the ancient Lion Inn, our final destination of the day.

Once we had been on the old railway road for a few miles, Cynthia and I noted that for the first time all day, we could not see a single soul ahead of or behind us. It was our most wide open horizon of the entire walk, as we could see the flat soft surfaced road, literally, for miles ahead of us, snaking its way through a seemingly endless carpet of heather, drenched in sunlight from the blue skies above. All we could hear was the sound of pheasants talking to one another among the heather and the crunch of our boots on the cindered road. As we soaked in the calm silence, we both felt enveloped by a complete and total sense of peacefulness. One of our personal goals of our C2C walk was to “get away” and each day we felt like we were accomplishing just that but the deep solitude of this tranquil setting, completely void of anything man-made, felt like we had been transported back to an England long ago.

And to add to the magical feel of this time travel moment, we suddenly saw, way off in the distance, up high on the ridge, the silhouette of the Lion Inn, a 500 year old stone building, framed by the outstretched rays of the setting sun. It felt like we were witnessing a scene straight out of the pages of a Daphne Du Maurier or Emily Bronte novel, as today’s long twenty mile walk was drawing to an end in one of the most isolated settings of our entire journey thus far.

Of all the wonderful pubs we had been treated to over the first ten days of our walk, without a doubt, the Lion Inn was our single favorite. With low beamed ceilings and large stone fireplaces in every tiny room, this beautiful 16th century inn enhanced our feeling of time travel. Thanks to its classic pub ambiance, thirst quenching ale, delicious food and the fact there wasn’t a single other building for miles around, it made perfect sense why the Lion was packed. It was as if the entire population of Blakey Ridge had come to this ancient place of gathering for a pint and a meal and, despite our wonderful long afternoon of peaceful solitude, the crowded pub was a most welcome sight for two tired, hungry and thirsty C2C walkers. While enjoying our scrumptious Indian curry dinner, Cynthia and I recounted the highlights of today’s beautiful twenty mile walk, while looking ahead to the shorter but equally scenic journey through the heathered moors that awaited us tomorrow. How lucky can one get?!

WALKING TIP of THE WEEK: The safest and most efficient way to stretch, is to ease into your walk by deliberately going slower. This allows tight and vulnerable soft tissue areas, like your Achilles, hamstring, plantar fascia and calves, to gently warm up. After about five minutes of this intentional slow walking, you may then begin to pick up to your normal, brisker walking pace. Save the static stretching for after your walk.

HIDDEN GEM of the WEEK: The finely trimmed grass paths of the beautiful new McIntire Botanical Garden is one of the most peaceful places to walk in our city. This labyrinth of rolling grass paths, meandering among towering old oaks, may be accessed either by parking along Melbourne Road near the intersection of the John Warner Parkway or, my personal preference for a longer walk, by parking at CHS and walking over the footbridge near the tennis courts, through McIntire Park and then across the new footbridge over the railroad tracks.