

NORTHERN HILLS

The GMC's Merseyside location, like many similar areas in the northwest of England, is superbly situated for access to the main hill areas: not only are North Wales and the Lakes within easy reach but the whole of the Pennines are easily available. This chapter covers some favourite GMC locations.

In the early days a popular GMC centre for the Dales was Horton-in Ribblesdale in the Three Peaks Country and the favourite activity was doing the Three Peaks of Yorkshire Walk over Pen-y-Ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough and a good day on the hill by any standards. The earliest campsite was at the back of the Golden Lion before it became someone's outdoor pursuits centre (thankfully, it is now the Golden Lion again). The site that really sticks in the memory from those early days, though, was the one in the field running up to the back of the Crown Hotel at the north end of the village (no longer a campsite).

Although sensible pursuits such the Three Peaks Walk, and some caving and rock-climbing, were well represented, these weekends are best remembered for a succession of amusing incidents and rather too much drinking among the young and slightly anarchic membership. In the pub, the Bridge School (yes, really) would be in full session with Heather's brother Chris, Kenny Clowes, Les Fowles and someone else frowning over the cards and presumably getting drunker by the minute. The standard of play must have been woeful come closing time, if not well before that.

The stick-throwing incident was always worth retelling at dinner parties: one afternoon on the campsite, the admirable Heather Read/Huxley threw a large stick for her faithful labrador, Kim. Although Heather had many qualities, the accurate throwing of sticks was not one of them: the stick left her hand in a totally unintended direction, confusing the dog completely and smacking full on into the mouth of some poor girl standing on the campsite talking to her boyfriend. "Oh, I'm most terribly sorry" cried Heather, polite as ever. The girl, her humour not improved by the sight of her boyfriend lying on the ground convulsed in hysterical laughter, picked the bits of wood from her mouth and said, with the utmost venom, "Yer daft cow!". There were a number of other incidents:

"One night, taking advantage of the fine weather, a session of "The Dance of the Flaming Arseholes" took place (As you may have gathered, this was, fortunately, not a family campsite). The Dance consisted of rolling up a number of pages from a "big newspaper - say the Times or Guardian-between one's legs; someone else would then set fire to the end of the paper and one then had to run as far as possible before the flames became uncomfortable. In practice, of course, most people either fell over or the paper fell out from in between their legs".

With John Beamer around, there was never any lack of entertainment:

"The following morning there occurred the finest atrocity ever perpetrated by John Beamer (JB). (Definition of an atrocity: causing discomfort and/or embarrassment to one or more of one's friends so as to provide amusement and/or entertainment for JB and those friends not currently being targeted.) John and June Hall were still festering in their tent but had let Sheba, their yellow labrador bitch, out onto the campsite. Sheba had unfortunately strayed into an adjacent field containing some cows and was currently doing a sort of backstroke in a vast cow-pat some two feet in diameter. JB had spied Sheba and an evil grin crossed his features.

He said to the various members hanging around: 'Watch this! Hall! John Hall!' he shouted over towards John and June's tent 'Call your dog! She's upsetting the cows!'

'Sheba!!!!' shouted Hall 'Come here at once!'. Now Sheba was a well-trained dog and did as she was bid. We watched, fascinated, as she shot into the tent There was a silence of perhaps a tenth of a second and then loud screams and shouts of 'You Bastards!!!'. I fear the inside of the tent was not a pretty sight. We looked at JB, his face alight with fulfilment. We knew that the Master regarded this as his finest work to date".

"I know you!" said the very Yorkshire warden to Mal Lamb. "I've paid my deposit!", Mal replied. In the late eighties, Mal had discovered the Flying Horseshoe Hotel at Clapham Station off the A65:

"It was a lovely old pub with a camping and caravan site attached and, back in those restrictive licensing days, had some pretty funny closing times. The collective GMC heart instinctively warmed to the place. Apart from the excellent ale, it featured other intriguing things like female wrestling; it was also handy for the Three Peaks and, for the scrawping (caving) types, Gaping Ghyll, descending on the winch provided by the Craven and Bradford Pothole Clubs. This was an incredible experience and can be compared to being lowered to the bottom of a 380 ft demijohn."

One time, Mal Lamb and John Huxley set out to do the Three Peaks as a training walk for the 14 Peaks in Snowdonia later in the year:

"We bombed up Pen -y-Ghent and swept down towards the dreaded drumlin country with its evil bogs and long diversions. In one of the dips we discussed the optimum route across. 'From memory,' I said, 'That bit across the middle is actually a lot better than it looks.' Chippy (one of several nicknames) adopted his macho expression. 'We'll just piss over it!' he snarled and strode purposefully forward. After about a yard most of his lower half suddenly vanished, stopping him in his tracks and sending me into hysterical laughter. 'Give me a hand!' he demanded. I could hardly speak; I ignored him. 'I'm serious!' he bawled plaintively. Still crying with laughter, I dragged him out. We took a long diversion round to the left and hurried on to Ribbles Head and up onto Whernside. Then down to the Hill Inn where the Chop (who didn't believe in lunchtime drinking) sank a few pints of Theakstons. We floated up Ingleborough and walked briskly down to Horton and the waiting car. Half an hour later, we were in the homely embrace of the Flying Horseshoe after another memorable day in the Three Peaks country."

August, 1993, and a number of members received an unusual invitation in the morning post. It was from Vony Gwilym, a former GMC Club Secretary. The invitation was to her 40th birthday celebrations in Austwick the following February, when the Three Peaks would be done over two days and champagne would be drunk on each peak. It sounded good but Von, the Three Peaks in February? The RSVP's, though, were answered with alacrity by Jan Coates, the McEneany's, Sue & Neil, Les Fowles, John Huxley and Bill Sutherland. There were snowdrifts, thick mist and some generally rather dodgy weather, but Whernside and Ingleborough, via the Hill Inn, of course, were ascended on the Saturday and champagne was duly drunk. Following a convivial dinner that night, they drank more champagne on a rain-lashed Pen-y-Ghent on the Sunday. It was an excellent way to mark one's fortieth.



Nuala Mulholland, Mike McEneaney, Pete Maher, Christine Davies, Les Fowles, Pete Chreseson and Dave Gray on Pen-y-Ghent



Ronnie Harvey and new acquired dog, Megan
Also on Pen-y-Ghent

The Old Mill at Settle has also been a GMC base: this excellent self-catering establishment stands just up the road to Horton. From it we have done walks across to Malham and an unusual circular walk called the "Elgar Way". Also a number of pleasant weekends have been spent at the Dagley family's place north of Horton.

Another famous walk in the Dales was the mighty Fellsman Hike, an overnight epic more than twice the length of the Three Peaks Walk and with twice the ascent. This annual challenge, which was run by the Keighley District Service Unit, crossed the evocatively-named Langstrothdale Chase from east to west, from Grassington to Ingleton, giving the exhausted walkers the minor problem of having to do Wharfedale and Ingleborough to finish. Needless to say there was quite a drop-out rate at around the forty-mile mark. In 1968, presumably to address this problem, the direction was reversed and the walk has since then started at Ingleton. The number of finishers doubled as a result, meaning that about half those who started the Hike managed to get to the end. In 1967, the Hike was billed as 50 miles and 10,750 feet of ascent; in 1968, the first west-east year, 50 miles and 10,000 feet, so a saving there! By 1972, the last year that I personally was involved, the figures had increased to 52 miles and 11,000 feet but I believe the Hike is now over 60 miles and an unimaginable number of feet.

The Hike began at lunchtime on the Saturday and went through the night, when there was a requirement to form into groups of six until dawn. Not being in a group resulted in instant disqualification. The event was highly organised with frequent checkpoints connected by radio. At the valley checkpoints, transport awaited those for whom it had all become a bit too much. There were about 400 starters, most of whom just wanted to finish the bloody thing as opposed to racing it. The top fell runners vanished into the distance in the first half-hour.

The GMC first attempted this marathon in 1967, one of our earliest meets in fact. There were no finishers that year. We got as far as Dent station, about half-way. How we would have fared on Wharfedale and Ingleborough if we had got that far was never put to the test. 1968 saw a number of successes: Roger Hughes finished in the excellent time of 22 hours and 28 minutes while John Huxley took a more leisurely 26 hours and 2 minutes. "Twas a gradely walk. Well done", it said on the wonderful plastic disk on which the walk was depicted, and which was clipped by Keighley DSU staff each time you passed through a checkpoint. Others also finished, either in this year or in 1969, including Fred Heywood and Maurice Ewing. Hilary Pinches finished in 1969, the year of the snow, taking an epic 28 hours or so to get to Grassington. The sheer time taken seems to make it even more of an achievement! Apologies to anyone who has been missed-it all seems a long time ago. The GMC's final presence on the Fellsman was in 1972 when Les Fowles and John Huxley, supported by Bruce Jensen, had another go at it. They didn't finish but did a creditable 39 miles to Cow Pasture at Cray, the end of the night section for them, before dropping out with exhaustion and sore limbs.

Even though much of the detail has been forgotten, the names of the checkpoints are very evocative: Gragareth, Dent Station, Blea Moor, Great Knoutberry, Snaizelholme Fell, Fleet Moss, Middle Tongue, Park Rash....and the mist, the rain, the wind, the darkness, the torchlights bobbing across the hill, the gearchecks, the tiredness, the vow never to return!

The North York Moors are hardly part of the Pennines, but it is convenient to mention them in this chapter. Another favourite of the GMC in the early days was the Lyke Wake Walk, following an old corpse route across the Moors. This is another overnight epic, 10 miles shorter than the Fellsman and with nothing like the same amount of ascent but nevertheless a

worthwhile outing. It starts at Osmotherley on the west side of the North York Moors and finishes at Ravenscar on the east coast of England. As dawn broke one would see the "golf balls" of Fylingdales Early Warning Station in the distance; they stayed with you all day.

A report from the first GMC magazine in September 1973 said:

"The Lyke Wake spectre made a return appearance and was answered by a west-east crossing by five members on April 14th in good conditions, B. Machin and M. McEneaney supported, with the assistance of the ladies after the night section':

The Chief Dirger duly sent coffin badges and certificates of completion, the latter offering "condolences on your crossing".

"Edale: southernmost outpost of Real Walking in England; in the Nag's Head, after a hard day's peat-bashing on Kinder, were Anne Harnden (The Iron Butterfly), Mike McEneaney and me. With us, the company into which we had fallen: a highly amusing old drunk who lived in a caravan nearby and a very intense hill-walking Yorkshireman. The old drunk regaled us with tales of his ingenuity with methods of relieving himself without getting out of bed while the Yorkshireman was trying to get Anne to understand the intensity of the relationship between humans and hills".

They had an excellent night and in due course headed for the campsite, many pints adrift. As they arrived at the tent, an old lady appeared, apparently searching for her grand-daughter. After searching the campsite she had found a lad who assured her that her grand-daughter was fine and was over at, say, Castleton.

"Gallantly, I offered to escort the old lady home to her cottage down towards the station. How on earth the conversation went is hard to imagine but I saw her home safely and, head held high, hurried back to the tent where Mike and the whisky were waiting. We had a dram or two, agreed that it had been a most entertaining evening, and both turned in towards the tent. In doing so, one or both of us knocked over the candle that was burning at the entrance and we then had a little problem in that the front of the tent was on fire. A hurried dousing took place and, quite exhausted, we lay down to sleep on either side of the Iron Butterfly, who hadn't noticed a thing. I was just drifting off to sleep when Mike started to snore, as only he can. I stood it for a while but finally said in a loud whisper 'Mike! Will you stop bloody snoring!' His reply was devastating and very much in keeping with the events of the evening: 'It's Anne, you fool!'"

Other camping meets that come to mind are at Hawes in Wensleydale, in Dovedale, at Garrigill (for Cross Fell etc.) and, of course Dent, where the Conder Farm campsite has long been a favourite location. Virtually in the centre of Dent, it offers easy access to the fells and, of course, to the Sun Inn and the George & Dragon. Apart from being yet another Three Peaks centre, there are numerous excellent walks from here, notably the 18-mile classic to Chapel-le-Dale via the old drove road and Whernside, returning via Great Wold (shown on some maps as an alternative Dales Way).

The proximity of the Pennines to our home base means that the southern section of them gives numerous day-trip opportunities. These have been to places like Winter Hill, the Forest of Bowland, Pendle Hill, Shuttlingsloe, the Gritstone Trail and many others.

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