

10: ODDS AND SODS

These spots were accumulated during various short trips around Wales, England and Scotland. Most of them are in less well-known places but some (e.g. Three Cliffs Bay and Lulworth Cove) are spots with less well-known views of famous 'beauty spots'. Later on there's a list of my favourite hikes plus a few book reviews.

52: Birders' Hut, Whiteford Burrows, Gower

This trail was a surprise for me, preferring as I do to go up things, rather than keeping to flat country. In fact, I considered cutting it out on my journey round the coast path of the Gower Peninsula from Gowerton to the Mumbles. However, I was persuaded to include the Burrows by the advice of a woman whose b&b I was staying at in Llangennith. Excellent advice, for this nature reserve yielded two spots during a wonderful morning's walk round its 7k perimeter.



Photo 1451: Map for spots 52 and 53 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

I suggest you more or less follow the coast path going west from Llanmadoc but you could go the other way if you prefer walking along Whiteford Sands first. However, I think the views are better if you go from east to west.

From the village, take the path by the pub across The Goose, a marshy area that's part of the much larger marsh that extends past Landimore and Llanrhidian along the southern shore of the Loughor Estuary to the road and rail bridges at Loughor. When you reach the

trees, turn right at the T-junction and follow the path between the dunes and the marsh. There's a choice of paths, probably dictated by wanting to keep your boots dry.

On reaching the trees of Berges Island, I recommend you follow the path into the trees, rather than keeping to the straight track on their edge. This is a beautifully constructed path of great charm and changing terrain that weaves amongst the dunes and trees. The path emerges by a nature reserve board, where I encountered some salt-marsh ponies.

Turn right here towards a clump of trees to the south-east and follow the path to a birdwatchers' hide by the estuary shore. From near the hide there are extensive views over vast mudflats and rivulets, amongst which I felt quite alone and out-of-place:

South – back over Landimore Marsh to the wooded ridge of Tor Grove and the village of Llanmadoc

South-East – across Great Pill inlet to Llanrhidian Marsh, Weobley Castle and Llanrhidian Village

East – across the muddy expanse of Llanrhidian Sands to the north coast of the Gower Peninsula, the towns of Crofty and Pen-clawdd and the bridges at Loughor

North-East – across the estuary to Llanelli

North – immediately before you is a tiny, sandy beach, backed by flat stones that reminded me of Chesil Beach in Dorset; behind that spits of sand pointing east into the mudflats, with Burry Port on the northern shore of the estuary

North-West – the trees and dunes of Berges Island

West – the trees and dunes of Whiteford Burrows

South-West – across the dunes to Hills Tor and the north-west coast of the Gower; and inland over The Goose to Llanmadoc Hill with its row of prehistoric cairns

This spot had a disconcerting effect upon me – never before had I felt so marooned amidst an alien landscape of mud, sand and sky. However, the views more than made up for my discomfort.

53: Last Dune, Whiteford Burrows, Gower

Make your way back to the nature reserve board. Be aware that the shore-line changes a lot with the tides around here, so that a map may not be your best guide. The second spot lies just to the north of the board on top of the tallest and furthest north of the large dunes. From here, there is a different perspective on much of what you saw from the birders' hide:

South – over the trees of Berges Island and The Goose towards Llanmadoc

South-East – past a clump of trees over the mudflats to Llanrhidian Marsh, Weobley Castle and Llanrhidian Village

East – over the spits of sand and the mudflats to the narrowing Loughor Estuary

North-East – over yet more sand and mud to Llanelli

North – over Burry Inlet to Burry Port on the northern shore of the estuary

North-West – an old iron lighthouse stands forlorn and abandoned on a mud-bank; beyond it, Pembrey and Pendine Sands stretch for miles on either side of the Towy Estuary

West – over pools and lakes in the foreground and beyond Carmarthen Bay, the South Wales coast wiggles its way from Pendine to St Govan's Head, 46k distant

South-West – over Whiteford Sands, past Hills Tor, to Broughton Bay and Burry Holms at the north-western tip of the Gower, an inviting sweep of coast-line,

backed, as before, by the graceful curves of Llanmadoc Hill

Near and far, there's beauty all around: dunes, trees, mudflats, coastline, sea and sky.

Two minor problems: getting up the dune may not be so easy because of the soft sand. It may not be good for the ecology of the dune but the easiest way up is where the grass is thickest. And be careful if you sit down on a tussock of grass – I fell over backwards down the dune because there was nothing behind the tussock.

The rest of the trail offers the choice of a long beach walk along Whiteford Sands, or a meandering walk amongst the dunes behind the beach. You need to make your choice early unless you are a strong sand scrambler because I found it impossible to get up from the beach to the dunes until I was two-thirds the way along, by which time I was thoroughly bored with 2k of beach-walking. If you want to return to the Llanmadoc starting point, you need to look for a path through the clumps of trees towards Cwm Ivy and Llanmadoc Church. Otherwise, the coast path round Broughton and Rhossili beckons and is a superb walk.

54: Three Cliffs Bay, Gower

You may be wondering why I'm including such a well-known 'beauty spot' as Three Cliffs Bay as one of my spots. Well, I've excluded the even better-known Rhossili Down and Beach on the grounds that it's too easy to get to (you can drive almost up to the best view from the fort at Old Castle) and too well-known (voted recently by readers of a walking magazine as the best beach in Britain). If you're interested, two good views of it from less accessible places can be found at Burry Holms to the north and at the northernmost peak on Rhossili Down.



Photo 1848(Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

I intended to exclude Three Cliffs Bay on the same grounds: you can drive to Penmaen on the A4118 and down a side road to within a short stroll of the viewpoints from which most of the postcards are photographed (Photo 1381) – and it was chosen as one of 'Britain's Best

Views' by viewers of a recent TV programme. However, I found a more out-of-the-way spot from which I consider the best view is to be had and which does not feature on any of the postcards I have seen. It also has more of an all-round view than the usual vantage points to the north.



Photo 1381: Three Cliffs Bay from the north-west (copyright National Trust Images/ Joe Cornish, www.nationaltrustimages.org.uk)

To reach it, you can come from any of three directions: along the coast path and from the east past Shire Combe; from inland – there is one path from Pennard Castle and several from Southgate; or you can climb up from the stepping stones at the back of the bay, following the coast path from the west (just be ready for a short but murderous stumble through very soft sand at the start of the climb). The spot is on a bluff about halfway along the east side of the bay. There are various bluffs to choose from but one has a view that includes almost all the bay and the valley behind:

South-West – looking down the promontory which culminates in the Three Cliffs, standing sentry over the bay; the Pennard River runs directly underneath you on its tortuous way to the sea and manages one final curl around the Three Cliffs; beyond the entrance to the bay, the promontory ending in Oxwich Point fills the horizon

West – over the sandy bay to a spur of dunes and the western slopes on the far side

North-West – over the majestic swirls of the river through the sands of the estuary to the northern slopes behind the bay, dotted with (very valuable) shacks and summer-houses

North and North-East – the broad estuary of Pennard Pill narrows to enter a valley that heads off inland past Pennard Castle

East – Pennard Burrows, an inviting expanse of dunes

South-East – the coast path wends its way past the Three Cliffs and along the coast towards Shire Combe

A photo taken from here would not do the view justice for you could not get more than a fifth of it in. This is probably the easiest of my spots to reach if you want to try out my taste in beauty.

Incidentally, on the same holiday as I visited the Gower, I also walked the South Pembrokeshire Coast Path from Pembroke Dock to Amroth, miles and miles of very beautiful coast-line that didn't happen to include one of these special spots.

55: Lulworth Cove, Dorset

Lulworth Cove is another well-known beauty spot with easy access, so you might expect me to exclude it: most visitors park at its western side where the village is situated with its shops and restaurants, stroll up the western arm of the cove, peer over into Stair Hole with its crumpled rock formations, pop down to the beach and climb the concrete path over the hill to Durdle Door, another crowded beauty spot a mile to the west.



Photo 1849: Map for spots 55 and 56(Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

To my mind, though, the most attractive views of the cove are from its eastern side, which is not so easy to reach. You set off from by the beach and ascend a really steep path through thickets to emerge at the top of the cliffs overlooking the cove from the north. The climb is worth it for this view alone but go on round to the east side, descending a steep flight of steps, and you soon hit a spot on Pepler's Point, just before the end of the eastern arm of the cove, from where you see:

South-West – the eroded tip of the eastern arm of the cove; through the entrance to the cove, Portland Bill appears surprisingly close (it's actually 14k away)

West – the western arm of Lulworth Cove slopes down to the village, behind which is a wood and the path over the hill to Durdle Door; small boats are dotted around

the waters and the cliffs you have just climbed rise steeply to the north-west
(Photo 1561)

North-West – the northern cliffs rear up almost vertically; at their base, landslips look like the scratchings of some huge sea monster trying to emerge from the deep

North – the eastern arm of the cove and the steep path you have just descended from the heights of Bindon Hill

North-East – Bindon Hill runs away to the east

East – a small coastal plain leads towards Mupe

South-East and South – the English Channel



Photo 1561: Lulworth Cove from near Pepler's Point (copyright: J.Salmon Ltd,www.jsalmon.co.uk)

Because they are so shallow, the waters of the cove show varied shades of blue and green and, although Stair Hole cannot be seen, other crumpled rocks complete the picture. Try to visit in the morning when the sun is in the east, lighting up the whole scene. Also, if you can, come on a day when the Lulworth Range is open because there is a truly memorable walk from here to Kimmeridge, which includes two of my favourite spots, described next.

56: Mupe, Dorset

Unfortunately for us, the army has bagged for itself what I consider the most beautiful stretch of coast-line in England. Fortunately for us, the Lulworth Range is open to the public most weekends, around public holidays and for the whole of August. The exact times can be found on the internet. We are allowed to walk along the coast path between yellow marker posts and also inland on designated paths. It's also possible to drive to the deserted village of Tyneham, abandoned in the early 1940's to make way for the army. There you can wander

round the village and visit exhibitions in the restored school, church and farm buildings. The village was clearly a very beautiful place to live and still maintains a haunting beauty today.

The obvious way to reach Mupe, if you are not walking the coast path from the east, is from Lulworth Cove. It's a 1k stroll from Pepler's Point (see previous spot) along a fairly flat cliff path, with Bindon Hill rising to the north and pasture land between it and the cliffs. You could also enter the Range at the entrance above Lulworth Cove and work your way along Bindon Hill before descending on a track that leads south-east to Mupe – this may be the more scenic route but I can't vouch for it because I took the cliff path.

At Mupe, you can choose from a wealth of vantage points but my favourite is near the tip of the promontory between Mupe Bay and Mupe Rocks, above where the picnic tables are. This view hit all the spots for me:

South-West – over a crumple in the cliffs to Portland Bill

West – the coast to Lulworth Cove, still visible

North-West – Bindon Hill runs away to the west

North – the hollow to the east of Mupe Bay curves gracefully upwards to the huge cliffs to the north of the bay, alabaster-white in the sun

North-East – across Mupe Bay, along the cliff-face to the beach at Arish Mell, behind which the elegantly curling shape of a tank track somewhat incongruously announces the military presence (Photo 1562)



Photo 1562: Arish Mell, Flower's Barrow and Worbarrow Tout from Mupe Cliffs (photo: Michael J Allen, copyright: Delpool Picture Library)

East – the previous view extends all the way along the coast to StAldhelm's Head (12k); the shapely curves of the cliffs from Mupe via ArishMell and Flower's Barrow to Worbarrow Tout (don't you just love thosenames?) delight the eye; Flower's Barrow is a massive hill-fort, whose rampartscan be made out atop

the cliffs behind Worbarrow Bay; behind the rocky peninsula of Worbarrow Tout, you can see the valley where the village of Tyneham lies; and beyond the Tout, Gad Cliff rises up to the twin peaks of Tyneham Cap; with the sun shining on the white cliffs, I cannot think of any coastal scene more beautiful South-East to South – Mupe Rocks jut out to sea in a line from west to east, like a giant sawfish just breaking the surface; beyond, the English Channel

All the postcards are of Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door. I have seen one postcard of this view but it is taken from the cliffs above Mupe Bay and does not quite do it justice. You have to go there yourself and find the spot I am describing.

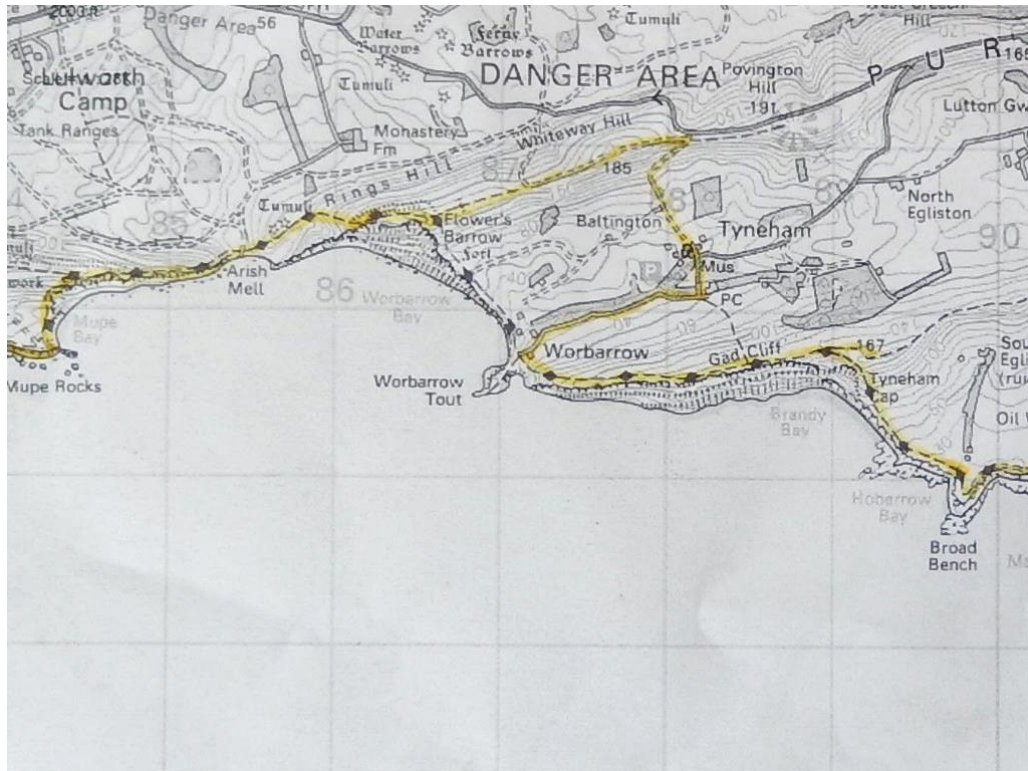


Photo 1875: Map for spots 56& 57 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

57: Tyneham Cap, Dorset

Just where the eastern view from Mupe becomes indistinct, there is another stupendous spot, a few minutes off the coast path. This is Tyneham Cap and it shows you the rest of the coast enclosed by the Lulworth Range and more. It's a toss-up for me between this and Mupe as to which is the better view. You can reach it via the coast path, either from Worbarrow or from Kimmeridge Bay; or you can approach from inland by following the path along the ridge from Kimmeridge Village.

Tyneham Cap consists of two breast-like hills – the better view is from the higher of the two, slightly nearer to the coast path:

South-West – Portland Bill is still there, now 20k distant

West – the view I have just extolled from Mupe, now seen from the opposite

direction, with Gad Cliff jutting out like the prow of a ship and Brandy Bay beneath; while still beautiful, the view is not as excellent from this end, possibly because of the difference in height and angle between the two spots

North-West – the village of Tyneham in its valley with Whiteway Hill behind

North – the upper Tyneham Valley with Povington Hill behind

North-East – the valley around the village of Steeple rises to the long ridge of the Purbeck Hills, stretching away to Corfe Castle

East – the extension of the Tyneham Cap ridge leads to the village of Kimmeridge and continues south-east over Smedmore Hill to Swyre Head

South-East – in between this ridge and the coast lies the most exquisite, idyllic picture of English countryside – pasture land slopes gracefully from the ridge down to the shore at Broad Bench and Kimmeridge Bay; beyond Kimmeridge Bay, three little hills adorn the space between the cliffs behind Kimmeridge Ledges and the ridge leading to Swyre Head; the promontory of Broad Bench is especially beautiful from this angle; in the distance, St Aldhelm's Head is now much clearer than from Mupe

South – the English Channel

All around, another unforgettable vista, well worth the effort.



Photo 1876: Map for spot 57 and beyond (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

If you are continuing along the coast path beyond Kimmeridge Bay, please check beforehand whether it is open. When I was there in April 2013, the stretch from there to Egmont Point had been closed for several months due to many erosions on and around the path.

58: Langdon Beck, Upper Teesdale, Durham

There are two ways to reach this spot using public transport – you can take a bus to Middleton in Teesdale or to St John's Chapel in Weardale. From Middleton, you can follow the Pennine Way up Teesdale: this route is flatter, off-road and passes Low Force and High Force, two waterfalls of which the former is the more scenic and the latter the more forceful and famous. From St John's Chapel, you follow a road over Harthope Moor: this route is shorter (8k as opposed to 13k), has the better views and is the one I shall describe.

The road starts from the centre of St John's Chapel and gradually ascends the side of the East Grain valley until it reaches an area of quarries near the summit at 627m. From here, there are extensive views over both Weardale and Teesdale with some big beasts of the Pennines, namely Cross Fell and Great Dun Fell, off to the west. Unfortunately, you can't see both views at the same time as the summit is quite flat. Above Teesdale, on a plateau, part of Cow Green Reservoir can be seen, while the farms and houses of Upper Teesdale are indistinct on the valley floor.

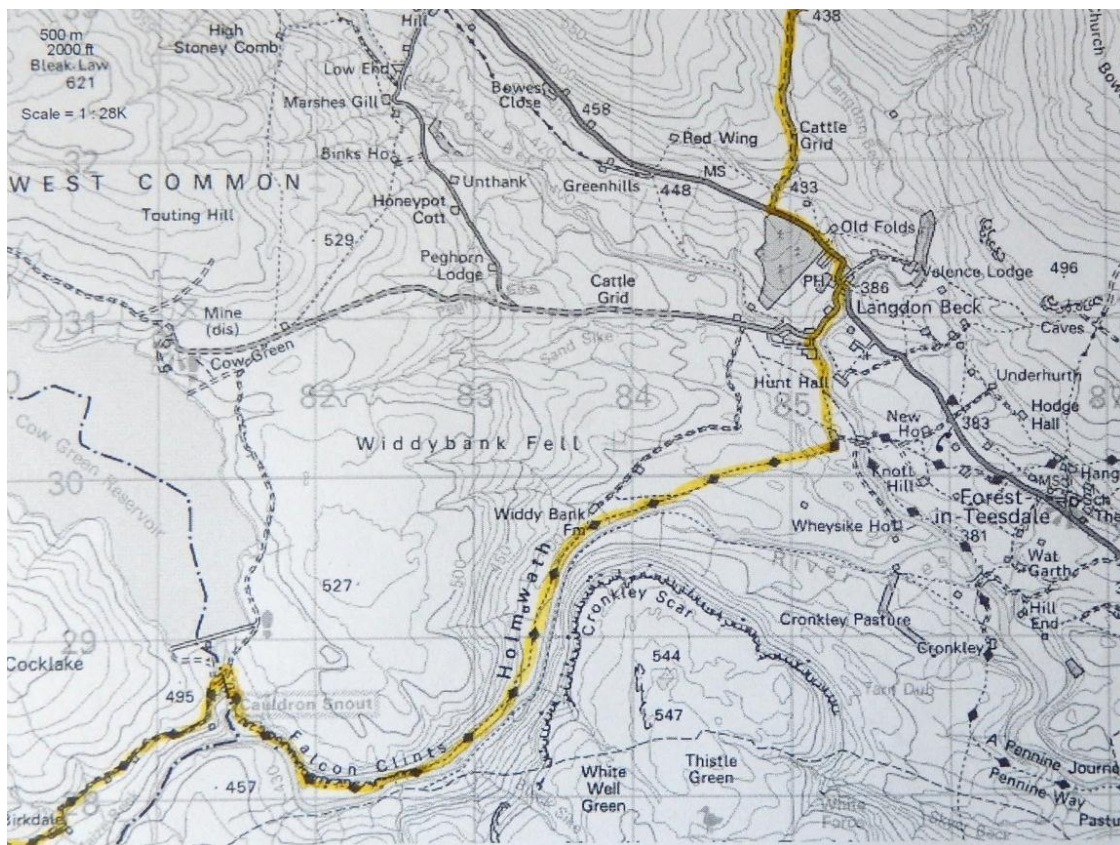


Photo 1854 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

As you descend, the view gets better and better, until, somewhat incongruously and unexpectedly, you hit the best spot at a cattle grid just above the village of Langdon Beck – by now, the details of Upper Teesdale can be seen more clearly, whilst you are still high enough to enjoy views over the surrounding fells:

South-East and South –the inhabited part of Upper Teesdale is laid out before you beneath the graceful curves of the green hills and pastures to the east of Langdon Beck; on this particular evening, the sun was on the area and the

mainly white buildings stood out appealingly; conifer plantations provide contrast in an otherwise sparse landscape and accentuate the slope of the valley South-West – the frown of Cronkley Scar forbids progress but, between it and Widdybank Fell, the Tees makes its entrance through the narrow defile of Holmwath (great names, aren't they?)

West – Harwood Beck is below you with fells rolling away towards Cross Fell in the distance – I'm not sure if Cross Fell is still visible from here because clouds had come down in that area

North – Langdon Beck trickles down from Langdon Common, with the road crossing a bridge and climbing up the way you have come

I liked this view so much that I came back early the next morning: because the sun wasn't shining, it wasn't so immediately appealing but still beautiful. I joined the Pennine Way through Holmwath, past Cauldron Snout, High Cup Nick and Cross Fell to Garrigill but have to report that nothing matched this view. In particular, High Cup Nick was a disappointment – the immediate surroundings are dramatic, as you peer down High Cup Gill but the famous view over to the Lake District is too distant to inspire and is anyway of the southern and less interesting fells. The most engaging spots were the villages of Dufton and Garrigill with their village greens, village shops and village pubs, two of the most picturesque villages in England, I'd say.

59: Llyn-y-Fan-Fawr, Mynydd Ddu, Brecon Beacons National Park, Powys

Here's a brilliant trail, incorporating many good viewpoints and one extra-special one. It begins in Dyfed near the village of Llandeusant and ends in Powys in the Glyntawe valley, crossing a mountain ridge that beats Pen-y-Fan in my view but because it's less accessible is less well-known.

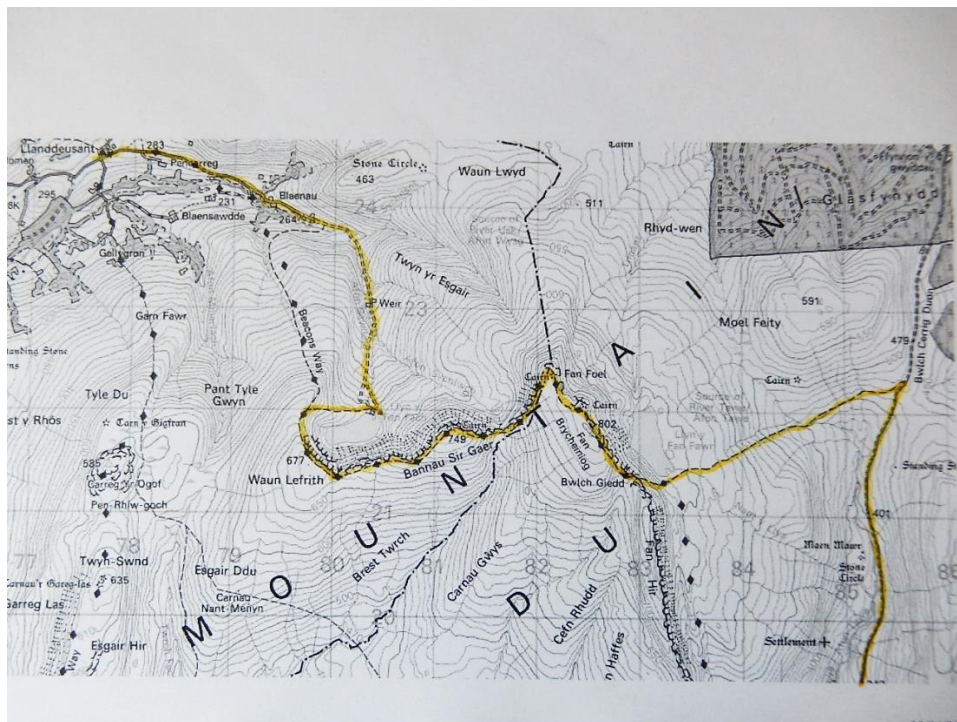


Photo 1855 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

Head east from Llandeusant and turn south up the Swaddle valley past old iron workings and lush grass featuring hollyhocks (or are they foxgloves?), marram grass, nettles, thistles – and lots of sheep. The stream itself tumbles down a gentle slope over moss-covered rocks. At the top of the valley, you come up to Llyn-y-Fan-Fach, an old Welsh Water reservoir no longer in use. It's situated in a somewhat severe and forbidding semi-circle of steep rock faces which form the western end of the ridge you will be climbing. On a sunny day, I expect it would be attractive, particularly on a summer's morning when the sun would shine into the cwm from the north-east. On my day, however, the clouds were still on the mountain-tops and the sun was hidden (Photo 1563).



Photo 1563: Llyn-y-Fan-Fach from the ridge to the east (copyright: Dave Newbould, www.origins-photography.co.uk)

From the lake, there's a visible path to the west, heading up to the beginning of the ridge. Once up, you can enjoy good views over Llyn-y-Fan-Fach along the ridge and over the plain to the north-east, where the much larger Usk Reservoir can be seen. The walk along the ridge is a nice up-and-down affair, with path construction in progress when I was there – I had to leave a note telling the path-builders that many of their steps were too high for people like me so we would by-pass them, thus defeating the object of the exercise.

The best view on the ridge is at Fan Foel towards the eastern end (Photo 1564). This peak sticks out to the north of the ridge and affords good views in all directions, even to the south where rolling hills lead down towards the South Wales coast, just visible in the distance. As I surveyed the scene (and the map), I noticed how many 'Fans' there are around: Fan Foel, Fan Brycheiniog, Fan Gyhirich, Fan Fraith, Fan Llia, Fan Dringarth, Fan Fawr, Fan Frynych, Fan Nedd, Fan Hir, Pen-y-Fan, White Fan Man, Cardiff City Fan, Swansea City Fan.....Now the Welsh for hill is 'moel' and the Welsh for mountain is 'mynydd'. What,

then, does 'fan' mean? From the map, it appears that all the peaks over 600m are 'Fans' and that those under 600m are 'Moels'; also that all the 'Fans' are within a small area of the Brecon Beacons National Park. So I concluded that 'Fan' must be the local word for mountain (such are the musings of a solitary walker).

After Fan Foel, it's a few minutes to the highest point on the ridge, Fan Brycheiniog, but the view from there is not so good. There is, however, a useful shelter if the weather cuts up rough and a view of Llyn-y-Fan-Fawr below. Instead of returning to Llandeusant as most guide books suggest, I recommend you follow the path to the south-east that descends the mountain-side by an attractive, newly-constructed path with views over the lake.

Just before you level out with the lake, there's a mossy rock that provides a welcome seat from which to survey a magnificent panorama. It's just the right height to sit on and at just the right elevation to view the lake at its best – in fact, it hits the spot in every way:



Photo 1564: the ridge from Fan Foel (copyright: Dave Newbould, www.origins-photography.co.uk)

- North-West – the escarpments of Fan Foel and Fan Brycheiniog rear up steeply
- North – Llyn-y-Fan-Fawr shimmers on its shelf between the ridge and the countryside below; beyond the lake, are rolling hills around the Usk and Towy valleys
- North-East – the Cray and Senni valleys wind down to Sennybridge
- North-East – the Cray and Senni valleys wind down to Sennybridge
- East – the twin table-top peaks of Pen-y-Fan and Corn Du preside over the Usk valley that stretches down to Brecon; between Pen-y-Fan and your seat is a series of minor Fans, six in all, aligned in a gentle curve; in the middle distance, the Tawe valley (Glyntawe) begins its journey to the coast at Swansea (Abertawe)
- South – the slope of yet another Fan, Fan Hir, which is actually another ridge 4k long going down to Glyntawe
- West – the path just descended

The view is wide-ranging, just as it was from the ridge, but you have the striking beauty of Llyn-y-Fan-Fawr in front of you to make it exceptional (Photo1565).

You can also see a choice of routes ahead, one leading to BwlchCarrigDuon, a pass from the Tawe valley to the Usk valley, the other, less obvious, down Nant-y-Llyn to the stone circle at MaenMawr. The Tawe River in fact rises just below you, running east for a few kilometres before turning south. I took the path to the Bwlch and it was clear that this terrain would be very boggy in winter or in rainy weather so bear that in mind (I visited in the heat-wave of July 2013).

Just before the Bwlch, there are some mini-waterfalls and pools which provide a pleasant resting place and from which there's a great view back to Fans Foel and Brycheiniog. At the Bwlch, you can choose whether to head north towards Trecastle and the A40 or south down Glyntawe to the A4067. I went south and the first stretch of the valley is amidst lovely scenery on a road that slopes downhill just the right amount for easy walking. After meeting the A4067, however, things become rather tedious if you have to walk to Abercraf, as I did, for somewhere to stay – in the end I cadged a lift.



Photo 1565: Llyn-y-Fan-Fawr looking to Fan Brycheiniog and Fan Foel (copyright: Dave Newbould, www.origins-photography.co.uk)

129: Hatterrall Ridge, Vale of Ewyas, Brecon Beacons National Park, Gwent

I heard about the Vale of Ewyas from a radio programme in which a farmer and the organiser discussed a small festival that is held there. They both extolled the beauty of the valley, particularly emphasising its spiritual quality. I don't know about that myself: the only spiritual qualities I could detect were a ruined monastery and two chapels (at Capel-y-ffin), a

ruined priory (at Llanthony) and a wonky church (at Cwmyoy). If you would like to read more about the background of the valley, I suggest you consult Walk 43 in “Walk Britain: Great Views” by The Ramblers, 2009, which claims that this is the prettiest of all Welsh valleys and also describes a walk around the upper part of the valley, including a great view from above Capel-y-ffin.

However, the radio programme was enough to persuade me to book in for a week over Christmas 2015 at the Half Moon Inn in Llanthony. The whole valley stretches from LlanvihangelCrucorny to the Gospel Pass, 17k to the north-west as the crow flies. The main points of reference are Cwmyoy village and church, 4k into the valley; Llanthony village and priory, a further 5.5k along; and Capel-y-ffin village, another 5k up the valley (Photo 3340 for map).

The Vale of Ewyas is the last valley of the Black Mountains section of the Brecon Beacons National Park before the mountains end and you reach the border with England. If you don't have your own transport, LlanvihangelCrucorny is as far as you can go with public transport (bus X4 from Abergavenny or Hereford).

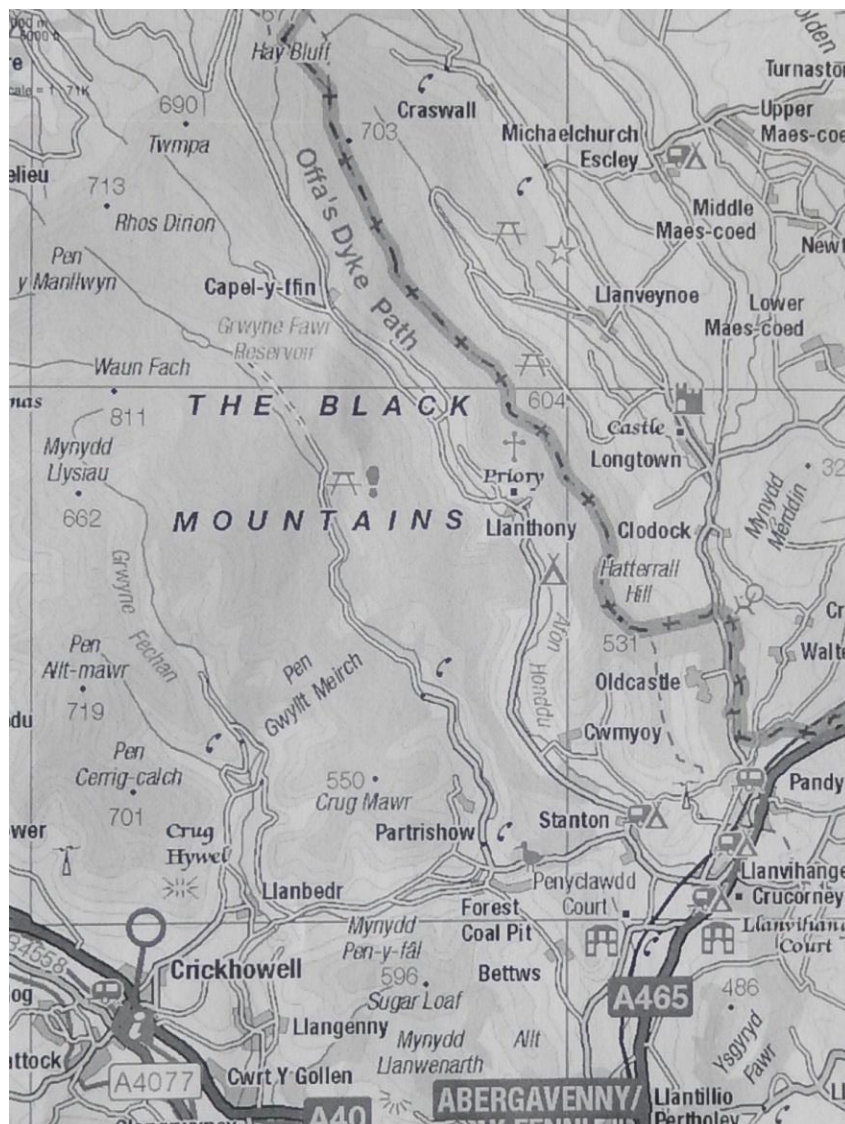


Photo 3340: map of Vale of Ewyas and surrounding area (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

From Llanthony, there are two pleasant walks up and down the valley. One is to Capel-y-ffin, where you can get near to the privately-owned monastery ruins – take the left fork at the village until you see an archway on your left (Photo 3238).



Photo 3238: archway leading to “monks’ path” Photo 3237: the path crosses the stream

Beyond the arch is a path which I imagined was the old monks’ pathway to the monastery (Photo 3237). Follow the path until you reach a post with a pink notice stating “no public access here” right by the ruins. On the way, you get a view of the ruins next to the more modern former monastery buildings (Photo 3231).



Photo 3231: ruins to the left, white modern buildings to the right

Try to take a break at the Church of St Mary in Capel-y-ffin village, a delightful little chapel surrounded by a semi-circle of eight ancient yew trees. I sheltered from a rain shower and had my lunch there – a heater obligingly switched itself on as I entered. My pew was dated 1783 and I loved the font-cover, whose handle was a carved mouse. Don’t be stingy – make a donation as you leave for the privilege of having an open church as a sanctuary.

The other walk is down the valley through Llanthony Wood to Cwmyoy, with nice views down the valley to Skirrid Hill (YsgyrydFawr on OS maps), just beyond LlanvihangelCrucorny (Photo 3263). At Cwmyoy, there is another little church, this one remarkable for the fact that it is standing at all: land-slips have distorted its walls, roof and tower to an extraordinary degree (Photos 3271, 3275).



Photo 3263: looking down the Vale of Ewyas from Llanthony Wood to the Skirrid; Cwmyoy is below the protruding bump on the left



Photo 3271: chancel of Cwmyoy Church, showing the distortion



Photo3275: Cwmyoy Church with Llanthony Wood behind

So much for location and background....now to the trails. If you want to be ‘spiritual’, you could describe them as two lopsided wings of an angel based at Llanthony Priory – or you could say they both go up a ridge to a spot with a great view, then along the ridge and down (Photo 3425).

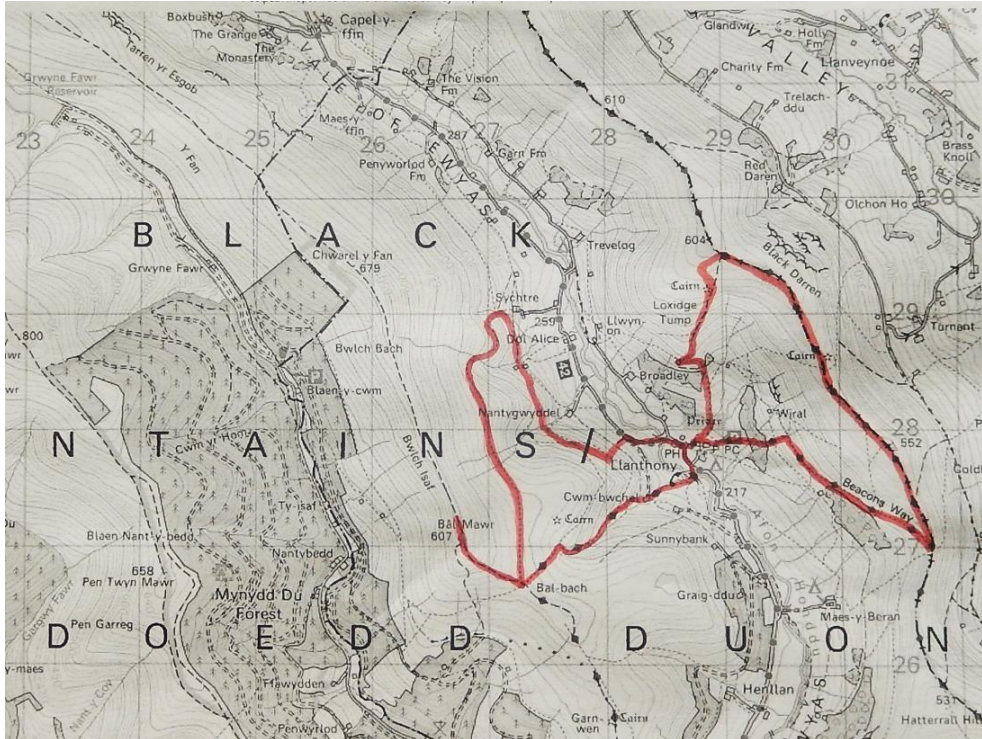


Photo 3425: map showing ‘angel’s wings’ and Capel-y-ffin with its monastery and the Vision Farm, top left (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

From the Half Moon Inn, take the path to the left of Llanthony Priory, signposted ‘Hatterrall Ridge’, through a wood and onto the open hillside. The path you want goes straight up the hillside at this point and then turns right, on the level for a while before traversing up the hillside for about 1k. On the way up, you get great views down and up the valley (Photos 3247, 3250).



Photo 3247: looking down the Vale of Ewyas to Sugar Loaf



Photo 3250: looking up the Vale of Ewyas to Llanthony

You come out at a slight dip in the ridge, marked ‘Grouse Butts’ on maps (the ridge has four of these but apparently they are no longer in use). This is my favourite spot on the trail: you have the surprise of an extensive view over England in front of you (the spot lies on the border between Wales and England), while you have the ridge to your left and right, and views up and down the valley behind you:

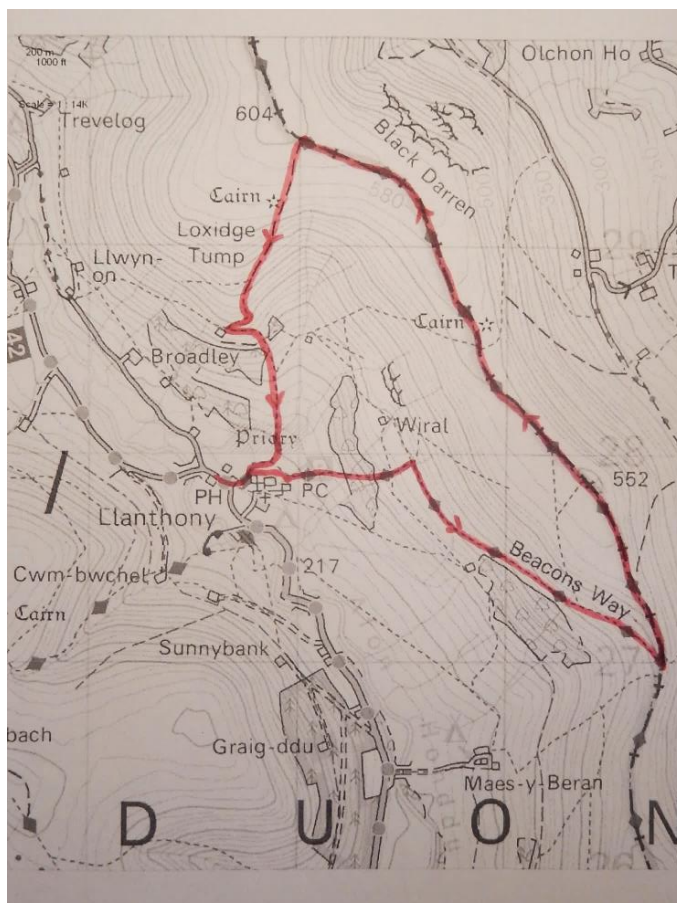


Photo 3398: Hatterrall Ridge trail (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

East – over the patchwork quilt of English fields to the distant Malvern Hills and even the Cotswolds on a clear day
North-East – down to the village of Longtown and the Monnow Valley, with the Clee Hills on the horizon
North – across the descending east slope of Hatterrall Ridge to the point where the Olchon Valley splits off to the left of the Monnow Valley
North-West – along the ridge to a trig pillar about 1k away; the ridge continues into the distance; below the ridge, you can still see much of the middle part of the Vale of Ewyas
West – across the Vale to Cwm Bwchal, Bal Bach and Bal Mawr, a side valley, a pass and a mountain respectively; in the clouds I could just discern the outline of Waun Fach, the highest of the Black Mountains
South-West – down the Vale of Ewyas to Crug Mawr and the distinctive shape of Sugar Loaf Hill (Pen-y-fal), a popular hiking destination
South – along the ridge to Hatterrall Hill about 1k away

Not only are there great views in all directions, you also find comfy banks to sit on (I'm guessing these are the grouse butts formerly used for blasting birds out of the sky).

Now follow the path north-west along the ridge (it is part of the Offa's Dyke National Trail). About here, I encountered a herd of wild ponies who obligingly posed and cantered for me (Photo 3257). As you go further, views open up into the Olchon Valley to your right. Beyond the Olchon you can see the Black Hill which gave its name to the Bruce Chatwin novel (Photo 3259), although the farm Chatwin describes was based on the Vision Farm in the upper Vale of Ewyas (see map Photo 3425, two pages back).



Photo 3257: wild ponies on Hatterrall Ridge



Photo 3259: the Black Hill (with the sun shining on it so not so black)

Continue along the ridge for about 3k, past the trig pillar, and past several cairns and piles of stones, until you reach a large cairn with a stone sign pointing left to a path for Llanthony. If you go right off this path for about 30m, you get a good view of the upper Vale of Ewyas, previously hidden by the ridge you are standing on (Photo 3332).



Photo 3332: upper part of Vale of Ewyas from Hatterrall Ridge

Follow the path south down the slope towards your starting point, which soon becomes visible (Photo 3261). However, near as it seems, you still have a steep and tricky path to negotiate. When I came down, there was a really heavy shower and the path was very muddy and slippery. The descent took me an hour and a half: I was just congratulating myself on not falling over when I slipped just before the final gate and covered my left side in orange mud - hubris and instant nemesis.



Photo 3261: middle part of the Vale of Ewyas – the Half Moon Inn is right centre

130: Bal Mawr, Vale of Ewyas, Brecon Beacons National Park, Gwent



Photo 3402: Bal Mawr trail (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

From the Half Moon Inn again, take the road south to Llanthony village green at the bottom of the drive to the Priory. Follow the sign ahead for the footbridge and Bal Bach. Turn right after the footbridge and make your way up Cwm Bwchel, still following signs for Bal Bach. Stop every once in a while to take in the view of Hatterrall Ridge and Llanthony Priory behind you (Photos 3286, 3349).



Photo 3286: Hatterrall Ridge and Llanthony Priory from Cwm Bwchel



Photo 3349: close-up of Llanthony Priory from Cwm Bwchel

Although steep in places, the path is do-able even in muddy conditions. You emerge onto moorland. Keep going until you reach the cross-paths at Bal Bach, where you are rewarded with views into Grwyne Fawr Valley and further afield to Skirrid Hill, Sugar Loaf and Waun Fach; however, all these views improve as you climb the obvious path to the summit of Bal Mawr (Photo 3313).



Photo 3313: the Skirrid (left) and Sugar Loaf (right) from near the top of Bal Mawr

Just past the summit pillar, you can spy out the narrow ridge of Bwlch Isaf (Photo 3290) and decide if you want to continue in that direction. I decided against it because the clouds were coming down and my host at the Half Moon Inn had told me that the ridge broadens out so much at Bwlch Bach that you can't see much of the valleys on either side (the best ridge-walking around here, according to the map, would be along the Offa's Dyke Path to Hay Bluff and then along to Twmpa and down Darren Lwyd to Capel-y-ffin but that was out of my range – see map at Photo 3340 near the start of Spot 129).



Photo 3290: Bwlch Isaf and Bwlch Bach from near the top of Bal Mawr

Instead, I returned to the summit and found the best all-around view within 10m of the summit pillar:

South – over the green fields and dark forest of the lower part of the GrwyneFawr Valley to Sugar Loaf

South-West to North-West – various views of the Grwyne Fawr Valley, mainly dominated by the dark Mynydd Du Forest but interspersed with a few green fields; to the north-west, Waun Fach Mountain

North – the ridge of Bwlch Isaf and Bwlch Bach

North-East – over the heather you can just see the Hatterrall Ridge

East – past the green sward around the summit pillar, you can see rather more of the Hatterrall Ridge

South-East – over various intervening hills rises the distinctive shape of the Skirrid

Unfortunately, the only available seats were up against the summit pillar or on a small pile of stones and neither looked too comfortable.

Return to Bal Bach and turn sharp left just before you reach the cross-paths onto a path heading due north across the hillside. Follow this for about 2k with views of the Vale of Ewyas to your right. When you come to a pretty spot where two streams meet by a ruined building (Photo 3314), the path turns right and heads downhill towards Sychtre Farm. On the way there is a pleasant view down the Vale towards Llanthony (Photo 3315).



Photo 3314: meeting of two streams

About 200m before Sychtre, the path bends to the right towards Nant-y-carnau and you can join a path that is sign-posted 'Llanthony' and runs along the hillside above Nantygwyddel. But be warned: this path is very muddy and you may prefer to follow one of the signs to the 'Valley Road' and keep dry on the tarmac. Being obstinate, I sloshed and squelched along the sludgy path until a sign by Gunter's Farm directed me to Llanthony. The clue is on the map: there is a spring half-way down this path and I found myself wading through ankle-deep mud as I stumbled down the steep stream-bed beyond the spring.



Photo 3315: view down the Vale of Ewyas, Hatterrall Ridge to the left

In fact, if you study the OS map, you will be astounded at the number of springs all along the Vale of Ewyas, when compared to other valleys in the area. So, wherever you are walking in the Vale, be prepared for plenty of mud and puddles. But don't let that put you off visiting this lovely "valley less trodden" – just try to visit after a spell of dry weather.

158: Portpatrick Coast, Rhinns of Galloway

I had a week to fill in between the Tour de France and the Olympics (I do like to watch a lot of summer sport on TV in the afternoons after creating this website in the mornings). I thought, "Where have I not been in the UK?" The answer was Galloway, the Rhinns in particular – the hammerhead shark bit just to the west of Stranraer. So I booked up a week's stay in Stranraer, the hub for buses in the area. I planned six walks from the map but ended up doing different excursions in all but one case when I found out more about the terrain. Out of the six, there are two trails I deem worthy of inclusion here plus a couple of rather special gardens. I was thinking, "I've just been to the Dolomites so there's going to be nothing worth including as a trail-less-trodden in this corner of Scotland that looks rather like many rolling-hills counties of England". However, my first walk produced four spots I am happy to include, although they do evince a totally different kind of beauty from the Dolomites.

The bus to Portpatrick drops you at the harbour, from where the ferries to Ireland used to operate. Make your way round to the north end of the harbour where you'll find a notice-board advertising the start of the Southern Upland Way National Trail, which my trail follows for its first 5k. You may say, therefore, that this is a trail well-trodden but, judging by the footfall on the path, not so many people come this way so I'm claiming it as a trail-less-trodden.

To start off with, you climb the cliff beneath a large hotel from where you get a good view of Portpatrick Harbour (Photo 5786).

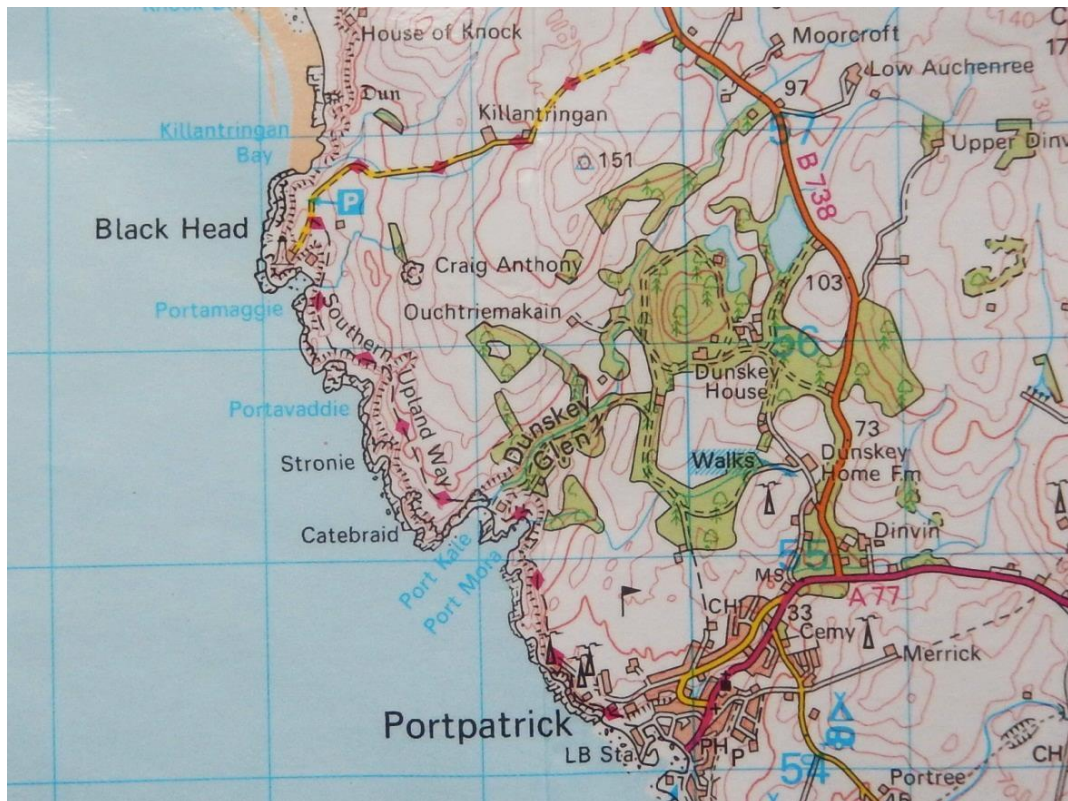


Photo 5995: map of Portpatrick coast (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)



Photo 5786: Portpatrick Harbour

Then the path goes between sea-cliffs and a golf course as Portpatrick recedes from view (Photo 5788). As the golf course comes to an end, two bays come into view, Port Mora and Port Kale (Photo 5789). These are separated by a small headland. As you climb down to Port Mora, the path passes jutting rocks above the green and beige of the beach (Photo 5791).



Photo 5788: taken mainly for the fine display of thistles – to show that this is Scotland



Photo 5789: first view of Port Mora and Port Kale Photo 5791: Port Mora

Rounding the bay, you climb a steep section onto the headland (Photo 5812). Here I found two very different spots within 20m of each other:

“Platform to the Left of the Headland”

Veering to the left, you reach a platform from where you get a full view of Port Mora (Photo 5796), the mound of the headland and the flat area seaward of the mound. Port Kale is visible over the green part of this flat area, as is the sea over the rocks which terminate the headland. Out to sea, the dim shapes of the Northern Ireland coast can be seen, more or less clear depending on the weather – I tried and failed to see the Mountains of Mourne. I would dub this the more ‘masculine’ of my two spots in that it offers an overview of the area and stands out in the elements (I am reminded of those shots in TV travel programmes of the male presenter standing alone on a cliff-top; Neil Oliver, Nick Crane take a bow).



Photo 5812: the headland – first spot to the left, second spot to the right Photo 5796: Port Mora from the headland

If you move to the centre of the headland amidst luxuriant grasses and shrubs, you come to my second spot, slightly lower and more sheltered than the first:

“Green Patch in the Centre of the Headland”

From here, only the entrance to Port Mora is visible, while the waters of Port Kale are not visible at all. You are surrounded by a lovely mixture of grasses and shrubs with rocks hiding the two bays and a strip of ferns leading up to the mound of the headland (Photos 5804, 5807). Close up, many of the shrubs have little yellow and purple flowers (Photo 5809). I dub this spot more ‘feminine’ because it’s more enclosed, sheltered and soft than the first and its immediate surroundings are more important. I hasten to add that I don’t attribute ‘masculine’ and feminine’ qualities to the male and female of our species in any simplistic way.



Photo 5804: view inland

Photo 5809: close-up of a few flowers

Leaving the headland, you pass more rocks as you circumvent Port Kale (Photo 5813). On its far side, you have to find your way between enormous rocks before climbing steep, rope-assisted steps to the top of the cliff. On your way, there are more fine views over Port Kale, the headland and Port Mora (Photo 5816).



Photo 5813: Port Kale



Photo 5816: Port Kale, the headland and Port Mora

Now the character of the rest of the trail changes completely: you are now traversing gentle grassy slopes that lead down to the water's edge with the occasional headland thrown in for variety (Photo 5818). The path goes up and down and round and about, with the lighthouse in view most of the way. I loved it and have chosen two spots amidst the most scenic parts:



Photo 5818: the rest of the trail with Killantringan Lighthouse in the distance

“Above Portavaddie”

About halfway between Port Kale and the lighthouse lies the bay of Portavaddie. The path comes down from crossing an upland plateau to reach a point directly above Portavaddie. Ahead is a rocky promontory with a black stripe along its middle with the path heading behind it towards the lighthouse. The terrain is invitingly green and undulating (Photos 5822, 5823). It's the lie of the land that makes the spot so attractive.



Photo 5822: black-striped promontory



Photo 5823: the trail ahead

10 – 15 minutes further on you arrive at another bay, Portamaggie, just beneath the lighthouse (Photo 5826). At the tip of the bay, the trail heads inland up a ridge, where my next spot is located:



Photo 5826: across Portamaggie to Killantringan Lighthouse

“Ridge opposite Killantringan Lighthouse”

Sitting on top of the ridge, you can enjoy good views in all directions: back along the trail, down into Portamaggie, across the back of Portamaggie to the lighthouse, ahead to Killantringan Bay and the coast to Cranberry Point (Photo 5832) and inland to Craig Anthony. Northern Ireland is still out to sea, while to the north you can just make out the Mull of Kintyre with ships entering and exiting the Firth of Clyde. This is the spot with the most varied scenery of the whole trail and a good place to take a break while deciding which way to return.



Photo 5832: along the coast to Killantringan Bay and Cranberry Point

Here is where my trail ends. You can choose whether to retrace your steps or do what I did and continue along the Southern Upland Way to the B738. Here I turned right for about 1k before entering the grounds of Dunskey House through a pillared gate just past the lake. If you turn off this track just opposite a parking place, you can find a bench from which to view the tranquillity of Top Loch (Photo 5835).



Photo 5835: Top Loch from the bench

When I reached the far end of the track near Dunskey House, I found out that the road is “Private – reserved for fishermen” but there was no indication of this at the gate by the road. In fact, a fisherman and two ground-staff were not at all bothered by my presence.

There's a lovely tea-room at Dunskey House which doesn't require paying the entry fee to the gardens. What's lovely about it is the mural on all four walls, depicting the woodland walks you can enjoy for free. The artist must have had extraordinary patience to daub the thousands of leaves that are a central feature of the design, even though they were done with a pad and not a brush.

I took the track south-east towards the B738 but just before the road there is a path on the right signed 'Glen Walks' which you can follow down to another track. Cross over the track following the sign to Portpatrick. This track comes out by a bus stop on the A77 where you can wait for your bus or return to Portpatrick, another 1k down the road.

159: Mull of Galloway

Again I thought this trail wouldn't be up to much. I envisaged a flat, rather boring coastal walk ending in the usual lighthouse at the end of a promontory. Wrong again. It was a terrific, varied and rather tough trail, ending in a spectacularly beautiful Mull, much better than the Mull of Kintyre, though without the Paul McCartney song to boost its credentials. The trail is part of the Mull of Galloway Trail from Stranraer (leaflet available). Although the Mull itself is well-visited (car park, café etc.), the trail to get there is decidedly less-trodden.



Photo 4849 (36): map of trail (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

A bus will take you to Drummore, whose harbour hardly seems to be used (Photo 5837). The main point of interest for me was a display of ‘guys’ (as in Guy Fawkes), except some were obviously female, outside some of the local houses (Photos 5898, 5838). On enquiry, this turned out to be a competition with a £50 prize for the best-looking.



Photo 5837: Drummore Harbour



Photos 5898 & 5838: maybe the weirdest, not the best-looking

Take the road from the end of the harbour, first east, then south. Parts of the shore have attractive displays of wild and cultivated flowers (Photo 5840).



Photo 5840: red poppies with Cailiness Point behind

The road turns into a track and then into a path which soon turns the corner of Cailiness Point to reveal your first view of the Mull of Galloway across the grey beach of Maryport Bay (Photo 5850). The path is now bordered by more wild flowers (Photos 5846, 5847).



Photo 5850: the Mull of Galloway across Maryport Bay



Photo 5846: harebells and marram grass



Photo 5847: little yellow flowers

Later, near Maryport, the beach turns sandy and the flowers white (Photo 5855).



Photo 5855: the Mull of Galloway from Maryport

After Maryport, the trail gets harder as it climbs up and down cliffs. In places, you have to fight your way through a jungle of huge ferns and in other places the path underfoot is obscured by vegetation so that you can't see where you're putting your feet on cliff-top paths. Definitely a trail-less-trodden. However, the compensations are many – more wild flowers (Photos 5856, 5861), varied terrain and ever-changing views (Photos 5863, 5864).



Photo 5856: never seen this one before



Photo 5861: harebells

When at last you reach East Tarbet (Photo 5865), you turn east for the final ascent to the Mull. Here you have three choices: take the road as it gently winds its way up to the car park; take the Mull of Galloway Trail which “climbs back up to the seaward side of a fence and continues along the top of a slope to reach a wall”; or do what I did and continue round the rocks by the shore to find a sheep path which traverses half-way up the slope (Photo 5866). At several points, you can clamber up to the Mull of Galloway Trail (Photo 5867). I did so after about 15 minutes and then went along the top of the slope to a gate into a field of cows and then up to the café.



Photo 5863: looking back along the trail



Photo 5864: the Mull from just before East Tarbet



Photo 5865: East Tarbet



Photo 5866: looking back along the route of the sheep trail to East Tarbet



Photo 5867: looking back along the trail to Cailiness Point from the cliff-top

After a break in the café, which has a cliff-top terrace, you'll want to explore the Mull. This is easy to do courtesy of a circular walk with an extension to Lagvag Point, the very tip of the Mull. On the way, you get a terrific view of Gaillie Craig with the café perched on top (Photo 5869). Passing the lighthouse, you are pointed towards a 'cairn viewpoint' with a recognition dial, which is a lovely spot with benches. However, there's a better spot for views about 40m to the east on top of a hillock where a flagpole used to be:

“Flagpole Hillock by the Lighthouse”

From here you can see just about everything there is to see: the Machars Peninsula across Luce Bay, the Isle of Man (Photo 5875), the end of the South Rhinns Peninsula and, obviously, your immediate surroundings on the Mull. In the far distance, you can see the whale-back of Cairnsmore of Fleet over by Newton Stewart and even the Cumbrian Fells on the clearest of days.



Photo 5869: Gaillie Craig with the café on top

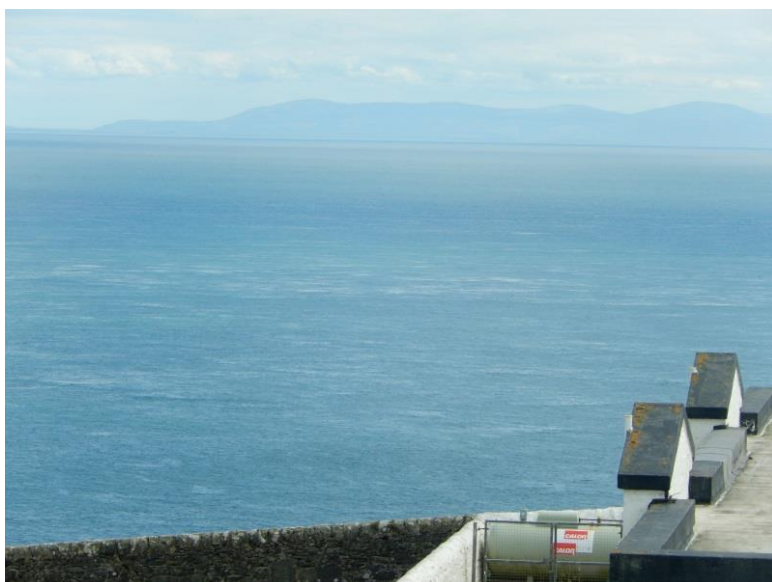


Photo 5874: the Isle of Man with a bit of the lighthouse (close-up)

By this time, I was knackered so I stuck out my thumb at the exit to the car park and soon scored a lift back to the bus-stop at Drummole. The only snag with this was that it deprived me of what looks like the best view of the Mull from the cliffs south of Kennedy's Cairn (Photo 4852).

I spent the next four days doing rather less inspiring walks but just want to mention two gardens I visited. Normally I don't like gardens – too formal, too arranged, too neat for my taste – but I make an exception for these two: Castle Kennedy and Glenwhan. Though they are definitely arranged, they each have a special quality that appealed to me – and they are within a few miles of each other in this somewhat overlooked corner of Scotland. They both owe that special quality to some first-rate landscaping (not Capability Brown-style), Castle Kennedy with the emphasis on trees and vistas, Glenwhan with the emphasis on trees, shrubs and flowers. Both are well worth the £5.50 admission charge.



Photo 4852 (36): postcard of the Mull of Galloway (copyright: Paul Guy/ Stirling Gallery, www.vkguy.co.uk / www.stirlinggallery.co.uk)

Castle Kennedy Gardens were laid out in the early 19th century on a virtual island between two large lochs and feature avenues of trees, ‘sculptured landforms’ and designated viewpoints (Photos 5911, 5927, 5931, 5935, 5937). There is also a walled garden for lovers of shrubs and flowers in a more formal setting (Photo 5941, 5938).



Photo 5911: Lochinch Castle across White Loch



Photo 5927: 'Giant's Grave' from Mount Marlborough with Black Loch



Photo 5931: Black Loch and Mount Marlborough from 'Dancing Green'



Photo 5935: Monkey Puzzle Avenue



Photo 5937: the Round Pond



Photo 5941: the Walled Garden with the ruin of Castle Kennedy behind
 Photo 5938: a fairly typical bed in the Walled Garden



On the way to Glenwhan Gardens, I saw this beautifully-shaped lake in a field (Photo 5955) and these harebells clustering round the base of a tree (Photo 5992)



Photo 5955: lake in a field



Photo 5992: more harebells - I must like them

Glenwhan Gardens were started in 1979, “hewn from a hillside covered in bracken and gorse. Two lakes were made by damming up bogs to provide a rich habitat for rare species” (excerpt from publicity leaflet). I also came across this quote in a souvenir book: “Don’t make it look like the Chelsea Flower Show” and they have certainly succeeded, as I hope you can tell from my photos (Photos 5957 - 5980).







168: The Lea Valley Walk

On my way back from the Spanish Pyrenees, I noticed a sign near Luton Airport for the Lea Valley Walk. I had not heard of this before, even though I live nearby in North London. Always on the look-out for a new trail, I followed up this clue and found that it goes from the source at Leagrave, just north of Luton, to Limehouse where the Lea spills into the Thames between the Shard and Canary Wharf.

I decided to do it in 9 easy stages but going from the Thames to the source – I prefer to walk rivers from mouth to source rather than the more usual source to mouth. I expect there are deep psychological reasons for this but the ostensible ones are:

1. Unless the river runs northwards (e.g. the River Eden in Cumbria), you have the sun at your back or side, which is good for views and photos.
2. I find it more interesting to see how a river decreases rather than how it expands.
3. It is the less trodden direction and I enjoy reading my guide-book backwards.

I had done this recently with the Thames Path to great personal satisfaction but have not featured this trail on this website as it is definitely not a trail-less-trodden. However, I've adjudged the Lea Valley Walk to qualify for inclusion as a trail-less-trodden because:

1. I hadn't heard of it.
2. There's only one guide-book for it.
3. I met no-one else on the trail who was also doing it from end-to-end (whereas I'd met several people so doing on the Thames Path) – update: just met an old guy on a bus in Hatfield who had done the trail twice, once in each direction.
4. I enjoy writing up these trails, so any excuse...

The guide-book in question is Leigh Hatts, *The Lea Valley Walk*, Cicerone, 2001, 2007 and 2015. I used the 2nd Edition from 2007 so perhaps the 2015 version is more accurate where there are changes to the route. This particularly applies to the stage from Hertford to Hatfield, as you will see later. In general, I found this guide useful only for route-finding at difficult points – most of the trail is really easy to follow with trail signs featuring a swan at choice points. I found Hatts really irritating with his emphasis on tedious historical detail and his pronounced genuflection to churches, stately homes and the aristocracy. However, the maps are good and the directions to and from rail stations useful on occasion. In the 2007 edition he splits the trail into 15 stages, the shortest being 2k and the longest 13k. My assumption is that this is to enable the walker to pick and choose the length of his or her stages as each stage in the book begins and ends near a rail station – a good idea from my point of view since I never know how far I'm going to feel like walking on any particular day. The 2015 edition splits the trail into 9 stages which may or may not coincide with mine.

This write-up will feature very little in the way of words, as there's not much to say about the trail itself, and a lot in the way of photos. On each stage I took up to 80 photos and whittled them down to 18 or so to show friends online, sometimes more. So there's a bank of about 200 photos on my camera, from which I've chosen the best and the most interesting to show here. I've named the stages so you know roughly where you are along the trail. Most of the trail to Hertford follows the Lee Navigation rather than the River Lea (no, I don't know why they are spelt differently).

I completed the trail in November and December 2016 by taking day trips from my flat in Kentish Town. You will notice the season change from mid-Autumn to Winter as I go further

along the trail. As usual, I won't be giving directions (or maps) except where I have deviated from the official trail on my stage 6 from Hertford to Hatfield.

Stage 1: Limehouse to Clapton (8k)

Fairly obviously, this first stage is in built-up areas. It follows the dead-straight Limehouse Cut as far as Bow Lock and then passes the Olympic Park and Hackney Marshes.



Photo 7322: the Shard looking west from the end of the Lee Navigation at 7am

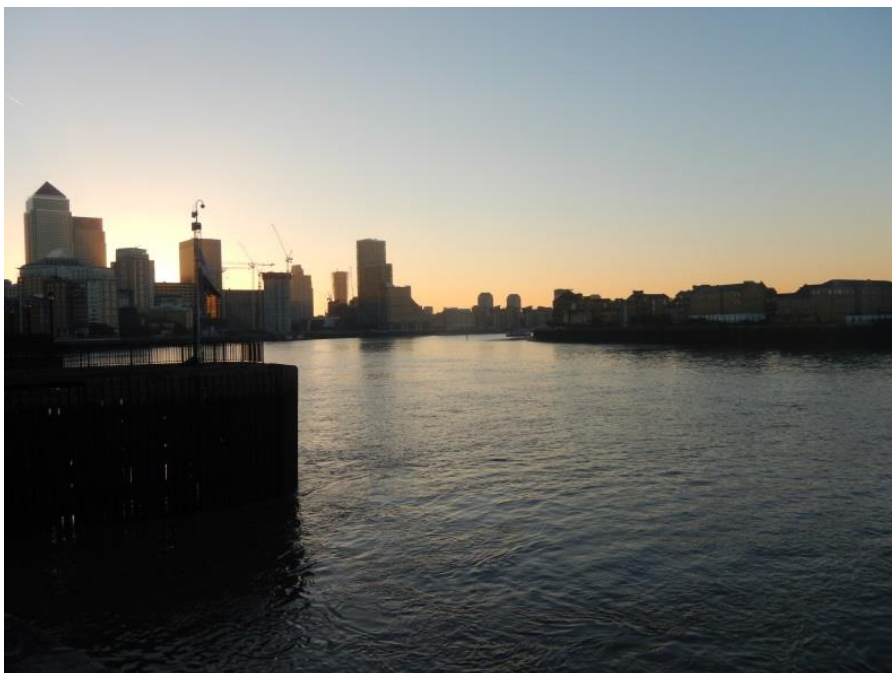


Photo 7319: Canary Wharf looking east from the end of the Lee Navigation at 7am



Photo 7328: the Limehouse Cut, covered in green algae



Photo 7330: flats in Bow



Photo 7336: various colourful designs

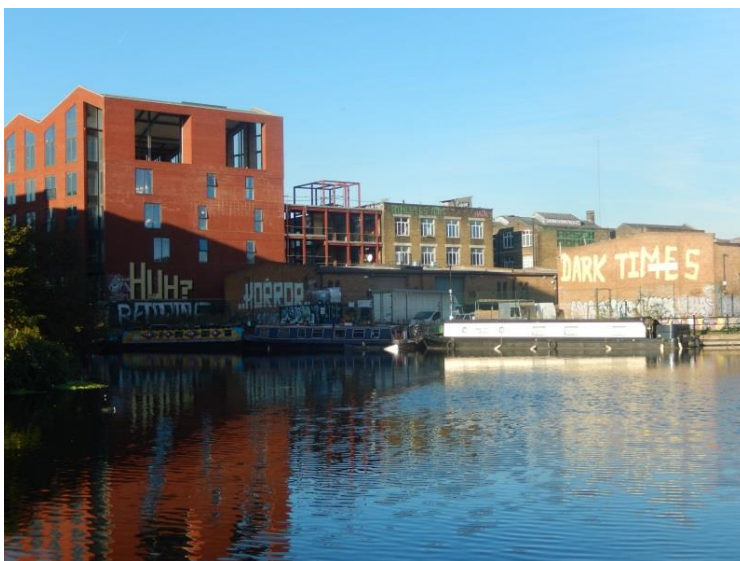


Photo 7337: graffiti near Stratford



Photo 7340: Olympic Stadium & Helter-Skelter



Photo 7347: a walkway by Hackney Marshes

Stage 2: Clapton to Ponders End (10k)

This stage begins a long trek beside a succession of huge reservoirs to the east. However, their waters are not visible, only their enclosing banks. To the west there is a mixture of residential and industrial buildings with one park (Springfield), a few recreation grounds and a golf course (at the Pickett's Lock Centre).



Photo 7353: a rainbow Union Jack on a barge



Photo 7366: just beyond Lea Bridge at 7.30am



Photo 7369: early morning opposite Walthamstow Marsh



Photo 7386: approaching Tottenham Hale

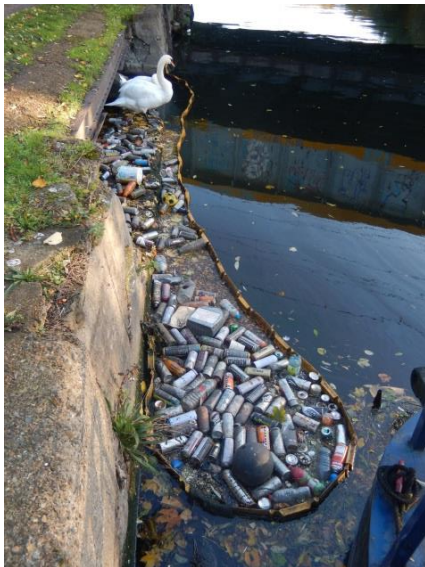


Photo 7391: the two swans seemed happy with the garbage but I wasn't



Photo 7393: these swans came in to land just as I was lining up the heron



Photo 7399



Photo 7416: the River Lea, a stone's throw from the Lee Navigation



Photo7430: under the Lee Valley Viaduct



Photo 7449: the bridge is for a pipe



Photo 7453: the wharf at Ponders End

Stage 3: Ponders End to Cheshunt (7k)

The long succession of reservoirs to the west continues as far as Enfield, accompanied by a lengthy string of pylons. To the east are more buildings, followed by two marshes (Rammy and Cheshunt). After Enfield, the west bank, too, becomes more countryfied around Waltham Abbey with Waltham Marsh appearing just before Cheshunt.



Photo 7487: the bank of King George's Reservoir to the right



Photo 7495



Photo 7501: the leaves are falling



Photo 7506: that's the M25 at Waltham Abbey

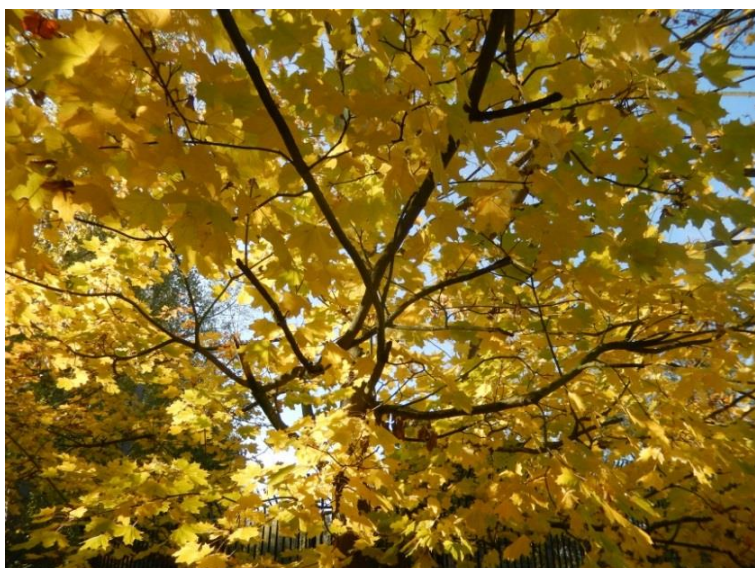


Photo 7525: my favourite Autumn photo



Photo 7518



Photo 7532



Photo 7533: this barge was turning round at Waltham Common Lock

Stage 4: Cheshunt to Rye House (10k)

There is water on both sides for much of the way, in the form of lakes rather than reservoirs. The lakes are not always visible but can be glimpsed fairly frequently through trees.

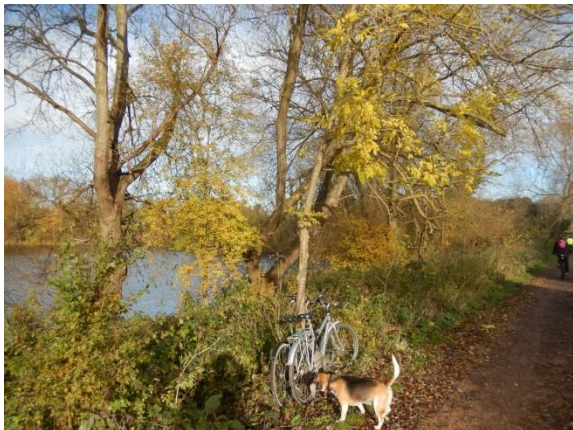


Photo 7547: by a lake near Cheshunt



Photo 7546: many of the barges have creative names



Photo 7574: this was the only pill-box I saw (there were lots on the Thames Path) – must have been defending the munitions factory at Enfield





Photo 7607: Dobbs Weir



Photo 7608: view east from the bridge at Dobbs Weir



Photo 7625: the Rye House pub – those windows date from 1600, transferred later from a house in Cheshunt



Photo 7623: near Rye House – that's a karting track beyond the fence

Stage 5: Rye House to Hertford (9k)

Now we see the last of the lakes for a while and the trail becomes genuinely rural, apart from passing through Ware and Hertford. It reminded me very much of the rural stretches of the Thames Path. The Lee Navigation channel ends at Hertford so the rest of the river is not navigable. A bus goes from the Castle to Hertford North Station.



Photo 7647: this barge won the prize for best garden



Photo 7655



Photo 7662: one of the last lakes at Amwell Quarry Nature Reserve



Photo 7674: another pretty barge
– the woman was sawing wood when I asked to take the photo



Photo 7698: there are 10 gazebos in Ware – these are the three best



Photo 7703



Photos 7710 & 7720: two terrific graffiti under the A10 bridge



Photos 7730 & 7745: the same house from opposite and looking east from a bridge at Hertford

Stage 6: Hertford to Hatfield (11k)

This is the stage where I deviated from the official trail. Leigh Hatts' guide (2007 version) sends the walker round the houses – literally – by following a disused railway as far as the A414 beyond Letty Green and then shooting off north-west through the suburbs of Welwyn Garden City before returning to the A414 just before Hatfield. Nowhere is this route any where near the River Lea: it is not even in the same valley. Feeling dissatisfied with this, I checked out the latest official route online. This goes along the same disused railway but then turns south at the A414 to join the Lea at Essendonbury Farm. I was unhappy with this route, too, so I decided to go my own way, as marked on the map (Photo 7824). This turned out to be the original trail, abandoned, I assume, because it involves 2.5k of road walking along the B158 between Water Hall Farm and Essendonbury Farm. I expect this would be deemed too dangerous for an official trail so the route was changed. The main virtue of this route is that it is at least in the Lea Valley and in sight of the river for most of the way. I solved the problem of the road-walking by catching a bus (no.314 @ 10.11, 12.11 and 14.11 Monday – Friday, other times available). There's also a bus from Mill Green to Hatfield Station.

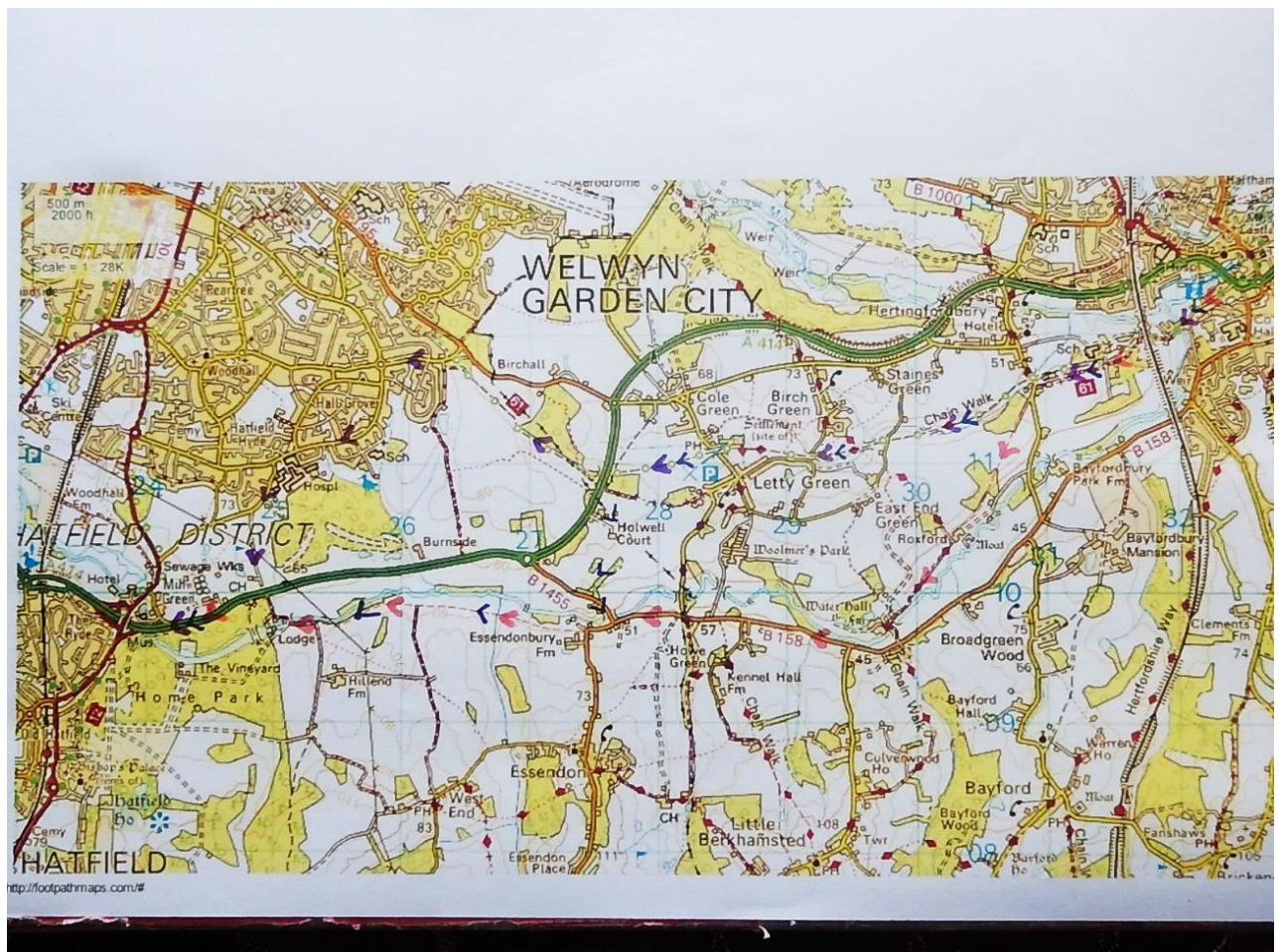


Photo 7867: red arrows = my route, blue = 2016 online, purple = Hatts 2007; (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842); sorry, I can't get it any clearer.



Photo 7779: the disused railway line Photo 7784: to prove I was on the original trail near Roxford – the swan is the symbol of the Lea Valley Walk



Photo 7790: it was the last day of November –this is an iced-over puddle
Photo 7792: further proof that I had found the original trail just past Essendonbury Farm
three of those holes are screws (I think the others are bullet holes!)



Photo 7795: I tried to get all creative with the frost as there wasn't much else to photograph



Photos 7799 & 7802: the same tree



Photo 7804: the trail at last runs beside the Lea to the north of Hillend Farm – you can see it's no longer navigable



Photos 7806 & 7807: the Lea a bit further on



Photo 7811: this is the Lea spilling out of Home Park which surrounds Hatfield House

Stage 7: Hatfield to Harpenden (13k)

The longest stage of the trail, which looks on the map as if it will be mainly in sight of the river but in fact isn't for most of the way. The longest stretches of contact are near the beginning through Stanborough Park and near the end as you approach Batford. Otherwise, it's brief contact mostly around bridges and fords, and occasional glimpses through trees. Having said that, it's a varied stage, including a country park with lake, a country house with lake and golf course, woods, fields, a country town and a former railway track. There's a bus from near Batford to Harpenden Station.



Photo 7893: the trail runs between a lake at Stanborough and the River Lea to the left



Photo 7917: Lemsford, reputedly ‘the prettiest village in England’ (said Queen Elizabeth I)



Photo 7919: Bocket Hall golf course Photo 7922: Bocket Hall + artificial lake and bridge



Photo 7927: The swan again – the original symbol of the Lea Valley Walk – not many left now



Photo 7929: the Lea at Waterend Ford



Photo 7932: Waterend Farm – doesn't look much like a farm because it was built for the Countess of Marlborough



Photo 7933: path to the right of the fence



Photo 7940: Wheathampstead High Street



Photo 7945: for 1.5k between Wheathampstead and Leasey Bridge the trail runs above the Lea



Photo 7957: the Lea near Batford Mill as dusk closes in (all my ducks in a row at last)

Stage 8: Harpenden to Luton (10k)

Rather a boring stage when compared to the rest: mainly along a disused railway line with not too many views of the River Lea. When you reach Luton Parkway Station, I recommend you take the old route in Hatts, 2007, which goes straight to St Mary's Church via Gypsy Lane and Windmill Road, because it is quicker and more interesting (you actually see a bit of the Lea). The new route goes along below the embankment of the main road to Luton Airport and then turns right down boring back streets before reaching the town centre. I didn't walk the old route so I'm assuming it's still passable.



Photo 7961: another swan symbol by a branch of the Lea at Harpenden



Photo 7965: a bit further along in Harpenden



Photo 7970: the Lea Valley just before East Hyde

Photo 7972: “a remarkable Romanesque-style church” (Hatts) at East Hyde

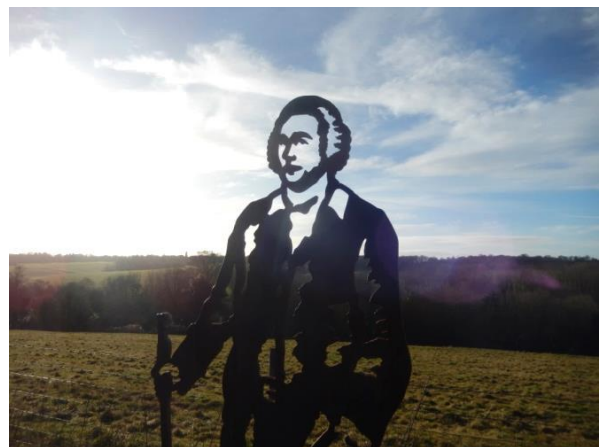


Photo 7978: a nice bit of the old railway line

Photo 7981: Capability Brown surveying his handiwork at Luton Hoo over the valley

Stage 9: Luton to Leagrave (7.5k, including side-trip to the source)

This last stage is one of the best from my point of view – second only to Stage 5. Looking at the map, I thought it would be suburban all the way but in fact it is largely green and close to the river. Suburban houses are usually at a distance as you will see from my photos: there are only two stretches – at the start and along Riddy Lane – where you are walking along suburban streets. Not only that but the stretch around Limbury Bridge is likely to show up some surprising wildlife – in my case, a heron and an egret fishing in the shallow waters of the infant River Lea. Finally, you arrive at the source, called the Five Springs, which must be prolific because within 100m the River Lea is 4m wide and flowing freely.



Photo 8000: the Lea as it emerges on the north side of Luton Town Centre



Photo 8007: the Lea feeds into a lake in Wardown Park – this is the northern end from a bridge



Photo 8009: the far end of the same lake



Photo 8020: the Lea then goes through woods..

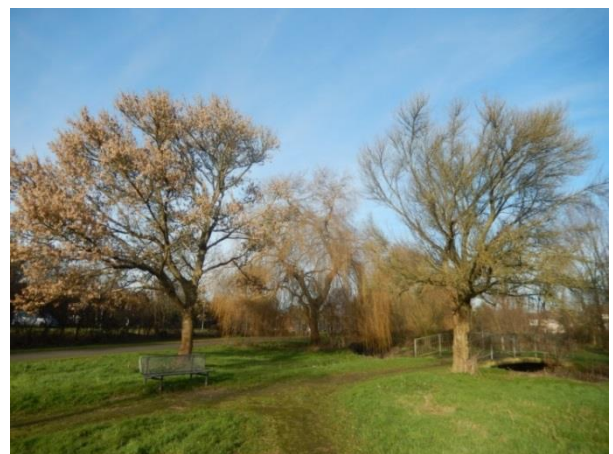


Photo 8021: ..before coming out to grassland



Photo 8031: this is the start of the stretch where wildlife may be seen near Limbury



Photo 8033: a heron stalking its lunch



Photo 8041: an egret in action



Photo 8044: the egret standing still



Photo 8046: the Lea about 500m from its source



Photo 8055: the Lea 100m from its source

Thus ends a most satisfying trail; I hope my photos whet your appetite for an easy trail that would be a joy at any time of the year, particularly if you want a quick escape from London. London always surprises me with the amount of greenery there is to enjoy: you could also try the London Loop and the Capital Ring which both take advantage of London's many green spaces.



Photo 8047: Five Springs, the source of the Lea

192: Gun Hill, near Burnham Overy Staithe, Norfolk

I'm doing the Norfolk Coast Path – a trail-well-trodden so not featured on this website – in easy stages on day-trips from London because the B&Bs in this area (dubbed Chelsea-by-the-sea) are so ridiculously expensive. While walking my 2nd stage, I spotted a spot from the path about 2k short of Burnham Overy Staithe (Photo 1346).



Photo 1346: taken from the corner left centre in Photo 1454 (my spot is on the horizon)

I was so taken with this spot that I resolved to explore it instead of doing the 3rd stage of the coast path and two weeks later the weather and my legs were both right. Photo 1454 shows the coast path and the spot around the entrance to Burnham Harbour, between the dunes of Scolt Head Island and Gun Hill (I think the OS has put 'Burnham Harbour' in the wrong place – there's no harbour on the sand-bank).



Photo 1454 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

I am also putting up a map of the area around Gun Hill so that you know what I'm talking about in the text (Photo 1459).



Photo 1459 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

Setting off at 6.45 from Kings Cross Station, I arrived at Burnham Overy Staithe on the Coasthopper bus from Kings Lynn at 9.45. From the bus stop, turn down East Harbour Way to the harbour and turn right to climb onto the sea-wall and the coast path (Photo 1393).



Photo 1393: you can just see Gun Hill in the distance in the direction the path is pointing

Here's a couple more shots of Gun Hill from the coast path (Photos 1394, 1395).



Photo 1394: this is a close-up



Photo 1395: this isn't a close-up

As you approach the shore, you realise just how big some of these dunes are (Photo 1401).



Photo 1401: the big one is at least 15m high

When you reach the dunes, the coast path turns right, either just before the dunes or along the beach. Follow the duck-boards towards the sign-post on the skyline from where you can size up the situation at my first spot:

“By the Coast Path Sign-post on the Dune above the Beach”

Ahead lies the sand-bank seen on the map – when I was there, the tide was in so there was just a pretty sand-bar (Photo 1402); to your right is one of the loveliest beaches in Britain (Photo 1410), while to your left is the rest of the beach (Photo 1405); all along the watchtower (I don't know why, it just seems to make sense to me) is a wavy line of dunes; and, of course, the endless Norfolk sky is all around.



Photo 1402: sand-bar and walkers turning right along the beach



Photo 1410: beach with more of the sand-bar, almost forming a lagoon



Photo 1405: rest of the beach with Scolt Head Island in the distance

While most other people were turning right towards Holkham along the coast path, I turned left along the beach, which is why I feel justified in claiming this as a trail-less-trodden. You could choose to go along the dunes from here but I kept that pleasure for the return journey (if you choose the dunes, there is easier access to them from 100m or so back along the duck-boards). I moseyed along the firm strip of sand about 10m from the breaking waves, taking several photos of which these are the best (Photos 1412, 1413).



Photo 1412



Photo 1413

As I approached the point of the Gun Hill spit, I tried to capture some of the magic I had perceived from the coast path in Photo 1454 above (Photos 1415, 1417 & 1419) but the breaking waves were missing because they were happening further out to sea (see later Photo 1435).



Photo 1415: across the harbour mouth to the dunes of Scolt Head Island



Photo 1417: ditto from further along



Photo 1419: ditto from the point

Then I turned the corner to come at Gun Hill from the landward side (the dunes hereabouts looked impassable for me). I immediately got two good photos of the sand, the sky and Gun Hill – I can't decide between them so include them both (Photos 1421, 1422).



Photo 1421



Photo 1422

5 minutes later, I approached Gun Hill itself (Photo 1424) with a strange contraption nearby (Photo 1425).



Photo 1424: Gun Hill



Photo 1425: I think it's a birders' hide

Gun Hill is quite large (at least 10m) but it's really just a dune with a blackberry bush on top:

“Top of Gun Hill”

As predicted, the views, even from such a meagre height, are stupendous: first, from my perspective, is the view of the harbour mouth (Photo 1435), with the breaking waves now included; then, moving anti-clockwise, you can see over the inner harbour to Burnham Overy Staithe; next you get the creeks and bogs of Overy Marshes, with the trees and church of Holkham Park in the distance; followed by the ridge of dunes leading behind the shore-line to the wooded strip of Holkham Meals, through which the coast path eventually runs on its way to Wells-next-the-sea; lastly, of course, there is the beach with waves breaking all along it (Photo 1433). I was so glad I had made the effort to get here.



Photo 1435: Burnham Harbour mouth (those are my footprints in the sand)



Photo 1433: beach with breaking waves, looking more or less east

You can see clearly that the return route along the dunes from here is a piece of cake – alternatively, there is a route back on the inland side of the dunes, although I can't see why you would want to do that. This stroll is a sheer delight, as most ridge walks are, even though the ridge is only about 10m high. My delight was not marred by this strange apparition: a rabbit apparently caught in mid-flight across a prickly bush and dying there – either that or somebody placed it there (Photo 1439). One last look along the dunes to Gun Hill and the harbour mouth (Photo 1442) and my work was done.



Photo 1439: rabbit caught in a bush



Photo 1442: Gun Hill and the harbour mouth

You rejoin the duckboards you arrived on by another huge dune (Photo 1445).



Photo 1445: the path goes in front of the dune

The return journey was freezing – literally, if you take into account the wind-chill factor. I got my hands out of my gloves long enough to take a few more photos (1446, 1447 & 1451).



Photo 1446: ponds and bog near the harbour



Photo 1447: Overy Marshes



Photo 1451: Burnham Overy Staithe

The whole trail from Burnham Overy Staithe bus stop and back again is about 6k – it took me 3 hours but you could do it in much less time unless, like me, you are in your dotage. If you're doing the Norfolk Coast Path, please make the time to turn off the path for an hour to explore this lovely area around Gun Hill. I was really chuffed to find that my hunch about its loveliness from a distance was borne out by my visit – that's not always the case: on this website you only get to hear about those hunches that pay off (about 1 in 3 bite the dust and are never heard of again).

This trail is very different from the other trails on this website which are almost all in hilly terrain but equally beautiful as I hope you will agree; so for that reason I am putting it in my 'pantheon of heavenly hikes', located towards the end of this 'Odds & Sods' section. I doubt very much that there will be two better spots anywhere on the Norfolk Coast Path.

234: Isle of Portland

So why is this a trail-less-trodden? Well, the South-West Coast Path bypasses it on my map from 1999 and I certainly bypassed it when I did the South-West Coast Path, taking the short-cut via the Hardy Monument, Upwey and Osmington. Nowadays, the Coast Path is waymarked around the Isle of Portland with the acorn logo of the South-West Coast Path. Anyway, my guess is that most SW Coasters give it a miss because it's a 20k detour from Wyke Regis; and, anyway again, any excuse will do to write up another trail-less-trodden....



Photo 7449: map from 1999; (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

My advice is to catch the No. 1 bus from Weymouth or Wyke Regis and get off at the Verne Yeates Roundabout, unless you want to do a boring 4k walk from Wyke Regis alongside Chesil Beach and climb the hill through Fortuneswell.

From the roundabout, head west into the Sculpture Park and find your way over to the coast path. When I was there in February 2019, two sections of the coast path were closed (the second unnecessarily) so you get plenty of time in the Sculpture Park, which is an old quarry dotted with a lot of mediocre sculptures (Photos 7359, 7360, 7366, 7367).



Photo 7359: path through the Sculpture Park

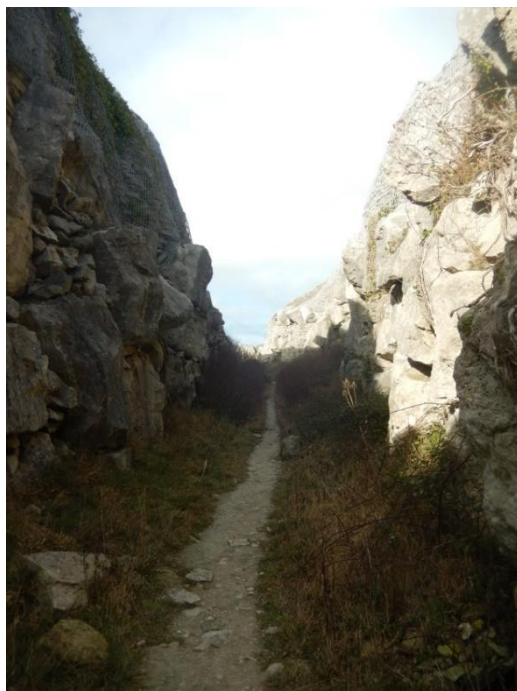


Photo 7360: approaching the coast path



Photo 7366: a side-path in the Sculpture Park



Photo 7367: some of the sculptures which have been arranged around a stone circle

The coast path affords a great view back to Chesil Beach and Weymouth (Photo 7361) and some interesting views ahead (Photos 7364, 7370, 7371).



Photo 7361: over West Bay to Chesil Beach and over Portland Harbour to Weymouth



Photo 7364: the first closed section of the coast path



Photo 7370: dressed stones from the quarry have been used to make an arch



Photo 7371: to the left is a cave

Then comes an exhilarating stretch from Clay Ope to Blacknor where the cliffs become more dramatic (Photos 7374, 7376).



Photo 7374: retrospect to Portland Harbour (close-up)



Photo 7376: Portland Harbour from further along

Once you pass the houses of Weston, there's a flatter, grassy stretch along the cliffs to Southwell Business Park (Photos 7378, 7381).



Photo 7378: the buildings on the horizon are Southwell Business Park



Photo 7381: the grassy stretch and Southwell Business Park

Then you descend gradually to the three lighthouses around Portland Bill, only one of which is still used as a lighthouse (one is a bird observatory). The tip of Portland Bill reminded me of Land's End with a vast car-park and a restaurant/shop but without the tat that all but spoils Land's End (Photos 7383, 7387, 7391). I was there on a windy day so the famously choppy waters just off the Bill were on display along with a rather strange concrete marker right at the end of the land (Photo 7397). Once I had turned round, the photos got better as I didn't have to contend with the sun (Photo 7399).



Photo 7383: Portland Bill from by Southwell Business Park



Photo 7387: descending to Portland Bill



Photo 7391: car-park & lovely sky



Photo 7397: sky, strange marker and choppy waters



Photo 7399: from near the marker back to the lighthouse

After a pot of tea and a surreptitious sandwich in the Lobster Pot Restaurant, I was pleasantly surprised by the coast path along to Freshwater Bay, which allowed me to take some much better quality photos on a variety of terrains (Photos 7400 – 7426).



Across Weymouth Bay to the cliffs towards Lulworth (the sea is not photoshopped!)



Taken at the same time as the previous photo but in a different direction





Close-up from previous photo



Beach huts (but no beach – a couple of guys were surfing)





Close-up of previous photo



There were several of these hoists



Another one to the cliffs on the other side of Weymouth Bay



One of the disused quarries along the way



The hoist for loading the rocks



Some of the abandoned rocks



A quarry



Freshwater Bay and the end of the coast path for me (the path goes up by the house)

On the way, I stopped and chatted with a local resident who told me that these quarries along the east coast of the Isle of Portland were disused because local opinion objected to their being restarted on amenity grounds – people valued the walk that I have just shown you. However, other quarries are still being used in the centre of the Isle, including some tunnels. As you would expect, most of the buildings on Portland are made out of the famous stone (see later photos).

The coast path joins the road above Freshwater Bay and goes down to Church Ope Cove about ½ k further along (Photo 7427) but I stayed on the road to catch a bus at Easton. It's possible to follow the coast path round to the Young Offender Institution where you have to come up to proceed via Portland Prison to Portland Castle but I'd had enough.



Photo 7427: the coast path going towards Church Ope Cove

The rest of the trail is through the houses of Easton and my photos show various examples of the use of Portland Stone (Photos 7431 – 7439).



The notice says “From a small quarry on this site Best Portland Whitbed Stone was taken exclusively to make the London Cenotaph”.



I can't think why anyone would want to cream-wash over the stone



Church buildings in Easton Square



Also in Easton Square



Clock tower in Easton Square Gardens

I was told by a friend that Portland is grim but with great views. I beg to differ: if you follow the coast path, it's anything but grim, unless you count evidence of quarrying as 'grim'. I hope my photos back up my opinion that this is a varied and rewarding trail-more-or-less-trodden.

241: Audley End to Newport

I had got bored with countryside day walks from London in the Chilterns and suchlike so I had gravitated to river, canal and coastal day trips. So this trail was an unexpected surprise. I'd heard of Audley End but wasn't quite sure what it was so I took a punt on a walk from Audley End Station to Newport Station via Audley End House. It turned out rather well – hence its inclusion here. I also thought it was about time I had a representative of the inland English countryside on this website.



Photo 4854 (36); Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842

Turn left from the station approach to cross the railway and pass a church and a bunch of houses, one of which has a spectacular thatched roof (Photo 7806), until you reach a T-junction where you turn right on the Saffron Trail and climb up a short incline (Photo 7808). At the top, you are greeted by a track across a flat expanse of farmland (Photo 7809).



Photo 7806: thatched cottage



Photo 7808: on the road to nowhere



Photo 7809: this is what nowhere looks like in my world

At the corner of the wood, you turn right on a path through the wood. I made a mistake and took the path alongside the wood and was rewarded by these two photos near the bridge (Photos 7810, 7811). Realising my mistake, I cut down through the wood to rejoin the other path by a lower bridge. This takes you alongside another two woods down to a road, the B1383. The road via Brand Hill is private so you are sent north to the first right turn for Audley End House, most of it alongside a wall (Photo 7813).



Photo 7810: a massive log on the path



Photo 7811: an unexpected pill-box



Photo 7813: don't ask me why



Photo 7816: Audley End Stables + pill-box

An elegant bridge takes you across the River Cam to Audley End House which provides several photo-opportunities (Photos 7816, 7818 & 7821). I preferred the stables to the main house – when I asked an official what it was, he told me and said, “I wouldn’t mind living in the stables”, to which I had to agree.



Photo 7818: Audley End House



Photo 7821: the Stables – note the two swans taking off

Just past the entrance to the House, you turn right on a private road through a double row of estate cottages (Photo 7822). I took a break on a bench here with this view into the trees (Photo 7826).



Photo 7822: rows of cottages



Photo 7826: cars, pines and blossom

You then bisect the cottages, many of which have pretty doorways (Photos 7827, 7828 & 7830). You are now on the Harcamlow Way (Photo 7831). I had noticed this Way on maps and noted that it seemed to go round in circles – that turns out to be because it does go round in a circle: from Harlow to Cambridge and back again. This trail follows the Way to Newport Station.



Photo 7827: two rows of cottages



Photo 7828: cottage doorway



Photo 7830: the cottages in retrospect



Photo 7831: sign for the Harcamlow Way



Photo 7834: pretty log by the path

The trail now crosses a road into a field. After about 400m, you are signed into a wood (Photo 7833) alongside a stream. I found this path really pretty (Photos 7835, 7836) and it continues after crossing another road (Photos 7837, 7839).



Photo 7833: sign into the wood



Photo 7835: pretty spring path



Photo 7836: path by the stream



Photo 7837: everything covered in ivy



Photo 7839: a pool

After another 200m or so, you emerge into more open country (Photo 7842) where you have a choice: you can go right on a higher path or left on a path by the stream or ditch (depending on the time of year) (Photo 7844).



Photo 7842: open country + higher path



Photo 7844: path by the ditch

At a corner of the wood in Photo 7844, you turn right with a nice view ahead (Photo 7846) that you now walk into. Soon a stream/ditch leaves you on the left (Photo 7847).



Photo 7846: view ahead



Photo 7847: Fulfen Slade leaving the path

Here I feel I should apologize for the poor contrast on my camera – the day was actually very bright but the sun ahead meant that the ground often looks too dark. One photo turned out well, however, when I was going for a layered effect of the browns, greens, yellows and blues (Photo 7848). By the way, one of the streams that left the path rejoices in the name of ‘Fulfen Slade’ which appealed to me no end.

You now ascend a hill by a hedge with another stream/ditch curving away to its source in Howe Wood, weaving a lovely pattern as it goes (Photo 7851). At the top of the hill, you turn left towards yet another wood (Photos 7852, 7854 & 7855) which was a place of beauty and rest for me – I found a shapely log to sit on and had a late lunch with pretty views all around (Photos 7856, 7859 & 7860).



Photo 7848



Photo 7851



Photo 7852: approaching the next wood



Photo 7854: entrance to the wood



Photo 7855: bluebells in the wood



Photo 7856: shapely log



Photo 7859: from the log



Photo 7860: bluebells behind the log

You emerge from the wood onto a downhill slope that leads to the next tributary of the Cam, Debden Water (Photo 7861).



Photo 7861: path down to Debden Water

A right and left turn brings you to a field with a steepish hill ahead through the last wood of the trail (Photo 7864). After the wood, you are even given a bit of a ‘holloway’ to enjoy, especially if you are a fan of Robert Macfarlane (Photo 7866).



Photo 7864: path leading to steepish hill



Photo 7866: a bit of a ‘holloway’

The short holloway brings you out at a road which you cross and turn right towards Newport (Photo 7868), passing an incongruous modern house which nevertheless works for me in its setting (Photo 7870). Then it’s a short descent to Newport Station (Photo 7873).



Photo 7868: going towards Newport

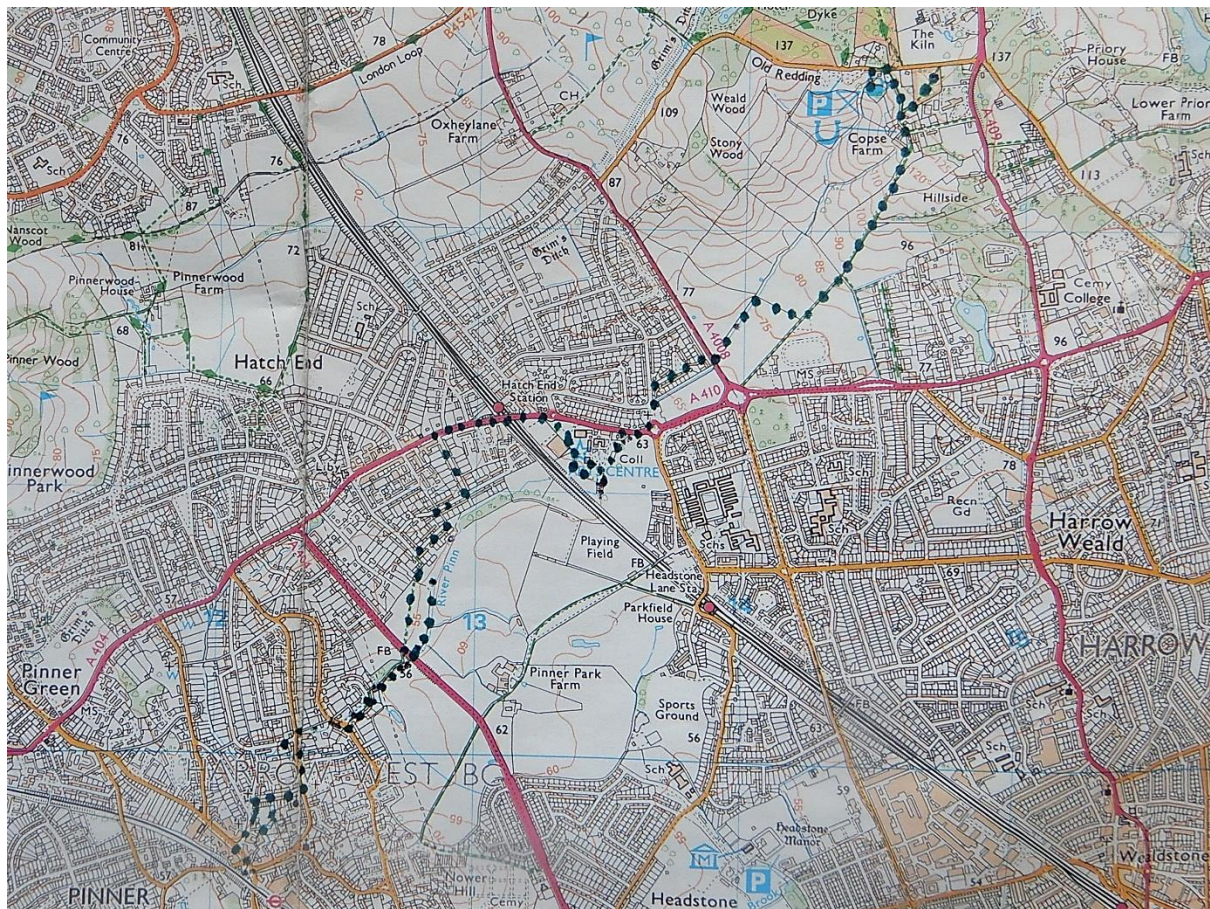


Photo 7870: modern house

This whole trail felt like it was my lucky day: a leisurely stroll in quintessentially English spring countryside with just the right amount of gentle ups and downs and ever-changing views of interest. To top it all, when I arrived at Newport Station, I asked someone if he knew of a pub nearby for a pint and he said, “Would a lager do?” and produced a tinny from his ice-bag (he was Australian). Don’t you just love those Aussies?

305: River Pinn

When studying the map to find the source of the Yeading Brook (Trail 304), I noticed that the River Pinn rises nearby, a couple of k to the north at Old Redding. It flows south-west past Hatch End, Pinner, Eastcote, Ruislip, Ickenham, Hillingdon, Uxbridge, Cowley and Yiewsley to West Drayton, where it merges with the Frays River and goes south to the Thames. From Pinner onwards, the Pinn is more or less followed by the ‘Celandine Route’ (details online) which I chose as my next trail. However, I wanted to do it from the source, a stretch not covered by the Celandine Route; so I’m including this as a ‘trail-less-trodden’. It makes a decent preamble to the Celandine Route.



1234: OS Explorer Map 173, London North, 2006; (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842); my trail is marked with green dots.

Old Redding is a road that passes through the southern part of Harrow Weald Common, well-known from my childhood when I used to go cycling up and down the mounds in the woods. My trail starts at the first footpath on the left from the eastern end of Old Redding, accessible by the 258 bus. This was in April 2021 so the leaves were coming out, the grass was green and the bluebells were in flower (4299). This lovely path takes you to the access road for Copse Farm where you turn right if you want to see the source of the Pinn – otherwise, turn left. You find the source by going round the Case Is Altered pub and going down a path to its right, technically in the pub grounds, I suppose. Veering away from the beer garden and

delving into the undergrowth, I found what I take to be the source of the Pinn (4300), a damp patch with a couple of stones suggesting that it may have been more obviously marked once upon a time.



4299: verdant path



4300: the source of the Pinn?

Retrace your steps to the Copse Farm access road and continue past the farm and downhill (4301). The Pinn is 200m to your right but the farmer asks you to keep to the path. Normally the path would bring you out to a roundabout but the way was blocked half-way down by construction works, so I turned right and went through a gap in the hedgerow to the Pinn (4303), now off the farmland.



4301: view from just below Copse Farm



4303: the infant Pinn at the bottom of the hill

You can follow the infant Pinn to a main road which the Pinn undercuts in a culvert (4304) and flows behind gardens to another culvert near the next roundabout (4305). You have to leave the river for this short stretch by turning right and going between houses and along a close (The Lawns). You pick up the Pinn again by turning right towards Hatch End and taking the first left into a Harrow Council Amenity Area (4310). Here the Pinn emerges from under the road into a specially-hewn ditch, graced with the name 'New River Pinn' (the original line of the river went under the Arts Complex). It passes lawns (4311) before disappearing round the back of a Montessori Nursery School, where it can't be followed (4312).



4304: culvert under the main road



4305: culvert under the roundabout



4310: map of the 'New River Pinn' at the Harrow Council Amenity Area

You have to retreat past the garden of the school (4313) and turn left between the swimming pool and the school into a green open space where you can see the old route of the Pinn on your left and the New Pinn meanders through a pleasant wetland area (4316) before disappearing again under a railway line. You, on the other hand, have to find your way out onto the main road and turn left past Hatch End Station.



4311: the Pinn passing lawns



4312: the Pinn disappears



4313: retreating past the Montessori garden



4316: the 'wetland area'

I took the first decent road on the left after the bridge (Anselm Road) to try and pick up the Pinn. However, there's no way out down there so you have to turn right along Park View, go left on a path between houses and right along Woodridings Avenue, at the end of which there's a path signed for George 5th Avenue. This brings you out above the Pinn but if there are no animals in the field, you can go down the slope and walk beside the stream (4317/18).



4317: Pinn on the left



4318: looking into the Pinn

Yet another culvert – a bigger one this time (4319) - takes the Pinn under the avenue while you have to cross the avenue higher up and go down to a footbridge (4320, 4321).



4319: culvert under George 5th Avenue



4320: from the footbridge towards the culvert



4321: from the footbridge downstream



4322: path by the river

Now follows the prettiest stretch of this trail: instead of following the straight main path for the next 200m, you can turn right and walk along the river bank (4322, 4323).

All too soon you come to another culvert which takes the Pinn into a neat housing estate (4325). You can follow it along Moss Close until it becomes natural again, despite a few dumped bin bags (4326).

4323: also by the river





4325: Pinn in the neat housing estate



4326: Pinn 'au naturel' again

Turn right at the road (Moss Lane) to see the Pinn flow briefly alongside the road (4327) before turning left (4328). You can take a path between houses to Paine's Lane. Here you can either turn left and first right along Leighton Avenue into Avenue Road (which I did) or go ahead into Barrow Point Avenue and first left along Avenue Road. The Pinn goes behind the houses in the middle of these two routes but, according to a map I saw later, may touch Avenue Road before going under Leighton Avenue (4336).



4327: the Pinn by Moss Lane

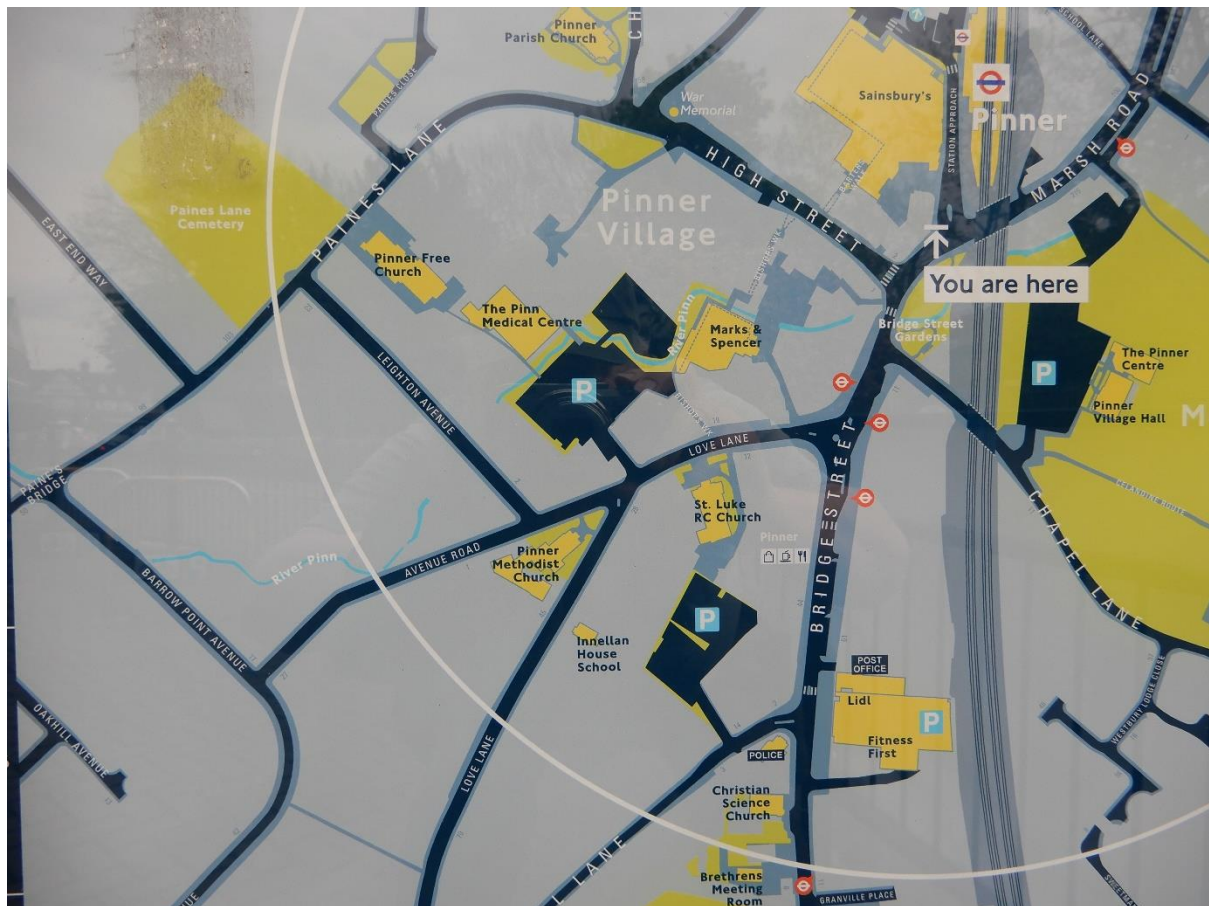


4328: the Pinn turning left with the path extreme right

Avenue Road joins Love Lane where there's a car-park to your left and you can see the Pinn pass the Pinn Medical Centre (4330) and Marks & Spencer. Unless you want to enter M&S, you can take a ginnel back to Love Lane and go along to Bridge Street where a left turn brings you to Bridge Street Gardens and the Pinn. A little exploration shows you the Pinn entering a double culvert under the Metropolitan Line (4332).



4330: at the Medical Centre



4336: map in Pinner High Street showing the course of the Pinn in detail



Here endeth my trail – the Celandine Route starts at nearby Pinner Station, passes Bridge Street Gardens and turns left along Chapel Lane. I can recommend it to you, mainly because initially it spends most of its time beside the Pinn on a green corridor through the suburbs. I almost forgot that I was in the middle of ‘Metroland’, sold between the World Wars as desirable housing for the aspirational middle classes (including my parents!).

4332: the Pinn goes under the railway

However, after Ickenham, the trail is not so great – for three reasons: first, the signage after Swakeleys and across Western Avenue is non-existent and the route is actually blocked off by a fence when you try to leave Western Avenue; second, the route spends only about half its time by the Pinn, the rest being through boring suburban streets; and third, the route doesn’t end at the Pinn’s confluence with the Fray’s River but at the Grand Union Canal, which the Pinn goes under. The Pinn then goes through woodland, turning left by an open space until it meets the Fray’s River at the south end of said open space. I got there by crossing the Grand Union Canal on a hump-back footbridge and diving into the woodland on

the left, emerging down a steep bank into the open space – a mini-trail-less-trodden! You could also access the confluence by going down Trout Road and along Wraysbury Drive to the end but that wouldn't be so much fun.

Still, after all that, I can definitely recommend my little preamble to the Celandine Route for the enjoyment of tracing its route from the countryside around Old Redding, through many culverts, to the comparative metropolis of Pinner High Street.

323: The New River Walk

This is a quick shout for a little-known trail in Greater London that kept me entertained in January and February 2022. I saw the trail from Theobald's Grove to Broxbourne on an OS map (green lozenges). On the walk, I came across a notice telling me that the trail actually goes as far as Islington (not marked on the map I was using) and extends to Ware in Hertfordshire, 40k in all; so, of course, I had to do the whole thing, with the help of online maps.

Every notice on the trail and every description online starts like this: "The New River is neither new nor a river". To quote further: "It is an aqueduct built from 1609 – 1613..... to bring freshwater from Hertfordshire springs to The City". It's amazing what those guys achieved in four years with, presumably, only picks and shovels.

The trail follows the channel (not a canal, as it's not navigable) consistently in the northern sections but has to resort to parks and semi-detached-lined streets for most of the time in the south.

I did the trail from south to north so as to have the prevailing wind and the sun at my back – the latter is better for photos of the path ahead. The trail also has the advantage of passing close to many rail stations: firstly, on the Great Northern from Moorgate to Enfield Chase; secondly, on the Overground from Turkey Street to Cheshunt; and thirdly, on the Great Anglia from Cheshunt to Hertford East.

It's not the most photogenic trail I've ever trodden so I'm not going to present a section-by-section account but rather to show you some of the better photos to give you an idea of what the trail offers. Note that in winter a few paths can be very muddy. The official website claims that the trail is waymarked throughout but this is not strictly true, especially in the south where it weaves its way through suburban back streets. Also, some of the signs are pointing the wrong way, either by mistake or because of vandalism; so I recommend downloading online maps of the route and keeping your wits about you.....



5925: the black line is the trail; from AA Road Atlas 2002, copyright AA Developments Ltd



5872: the New River Head today



5872: the destination as it was - from a board at the site – or in my case, the beginning



5876: a brief piece of channel in Islington – plus an old ‘watchhut’



5879: near Canonbury Station



5881: in Clissold Park



5883: West Reservoir at Woodberry Down



5884: 'The Steps' at the West Reservoir



5886: in Hornsey



5892: in Palmers Green (many stretches like this)



5894: in Winchmore Hill – several of these loading contraptions along the way



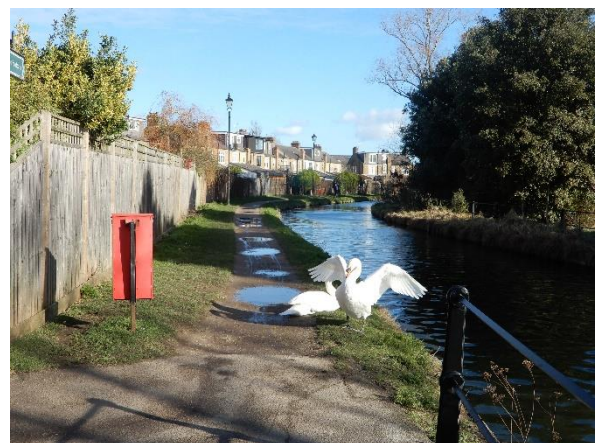
5896: part of the 'Enfield Loop'



5899: at Enfield Chase



5901: in Enfield Town



5903: lots of swans, geese and ducks on the channel



5906: still in Enfield



5908: the end of the Docwra Aqueduct over the Turkey Brook



5910: lots of these maps along the way



5914: on the aqueduct over the M25



5918: spring blush near Theobald's Farm – those branches had been lopped and placed in the channel where they were still growing



5838: a community college in Cheshunt



5846: under the A10



5852: at Broxbourne



5855: Broxbourne Station



5860: at St Margarets



5928: at Great Amwell



5929: ditto



5931: approaching Ware



5932: chimney just past Ware



5932: the 'White House' and notice (wire fences prevented crossing the railway line on the route of the New River Walk – but there's a way round to the left)



5938: the A10 and the King's Meads Nature Reserve



5939: mural on a pillar of the A10 (not fanciful because I did see a flash of kingfisher flying over the channel)



5942: after the detour, this is the last stretch of the New River

5943: New Gauge Intake which appears to be the end of my trail and the beginning of the New River where it receives water from the River Lea



5944: final shot of the River Lea on the way to Hertford East Station with a few rays of sunshine breaking through

MY PANTHEON OF ‘MOST HEAVENLY HIKES’

These are not in order of preference – it was hard enough whittling the list down to 58 – so I have listed them chronologically. I chose them for both the quality of the trail and of the spots encountered:

1. Saligo Bay and Dun Bheolain, Islay, Spots 5 & 6, Inner Hebrides
2. Bealach Clithe, Eigg, Spot 12, Inner Hebrides
3. Gortnalughoge Bay and Melmore Head, Rosguill, County Donegal, Spots 22 & 23, Ireland
4. Fimmvorduhals, Spots 33, 34 & 35, Iceland 1
5. Selafossar and Fossariefri, Vestdalur, Seydisfjordur, Spots 38 & 39, Iceland 1
6. Tjornuvik, Tjornuviksstakur and Sjeyndir Bay, Streymoy, Spots 42, 43 & 44, Faroe Islands
7. Vikarskard Pass, Saksun and Tjornuviksskard Pass, Streymoy, Spots 46, 47 & 48, Faroe Islands
8. Lulworth Cove, Mupe and Tyneham Cap, Dorset, Spots 55, 56 & 57, Odds & Sods
9. Fannarakhytta, Jotunheimen, Spot 79, Norway
10. By Fluaa Cascade and Storvatnet, Innerdalen, Spots 80 & 81, Norway
11. Djupfjordheia, Munkebu, Lofoten, Spot 83, Norway
12. Roren, Yttersand, Lofoten, Spot 86, Norway
13. Lingcove Bridge and Scar Lathing, Upper Eskdale, Spots 96 & 97, Eskdale
14. Efra-Grjotdalsvarp, Borgarfjorthureystri, Spot 116, Iceland 2
15. Fremrihnaukar, Near Nyrthrihnaukar, Kristinartindar Cove and Glama, Skaftafell, Spots 120, 121, 122 & 123, Iceland 2
16. Bec de Rocas and Lago Boe, Trail 150, The Dolomites
17. Monte Averau, Trail 151, The Dolomites
18. Vall de Ratera, Trail 163, Spanish Pyrenees
19. Camin dera Montanheta, Trail 165, Spanish Pyrenees
20. Circ de Colomers, Trail 166, Spanish Pyrenees
21. Boca da Corrida to Faja Escura, Trail 172, Madeira
22. Meyes, Trail 177, Valle d’Aosta
23. Dusseldorferhutte, Trail 183, Stelvio National Park
24. Goldseeweg, Trail 185, Stelvio National Park
25. Dosso Tresero, Trail 186, Stelvio National Park
26. Lago della Manzina, Trail 191, Stelvio National Park
27. Gun Hill, Norfolk, Trail 192, Odds & Sods
28. Le Sentier des Douaniers, Trail 206, Corsica
29. Campagneda and Prabello, Trail 212, Macugnaga and Valmalenco
30. Sentiero Glaciologico, Trail 214, Macugnaga and Valmalenco
31. Carate-Brianza to Marinelli, Trail 216, Macugnaga and Valmalenco
32. Behind Rifugio Savoia, Trail 218, Nivolet
33. Lakes Rossett and Leita, Trail 219, Nivolet
34. Basei, Trail 221, Nivolet
35. Lake Grande di Viso to Lake Alpetto, Trail 228, Monviso
36. Vallehermoso – Epina, Trail 237, La Gomera and La Palma
37. Pen-lon to Coedwig Niwbwrch, Trail 244, Anglesey Coastal Path
38. Trearddur Bay to Holyhead, Trail 249, Anglesey Coastal Path
39. Vogel, Trail 258, The Slovenian Alps

40. Sleme, Trail 263, The Slovenian Alps
41. Vallee de Pouey Aspe, Trail 270, Gavarnie
42. Pointe de Pern, Trail 287, Ouessant, Raz and Camaret
43. Pointe du Raz, Trail 290, Ouessant, Raz and Camaret
44. Pointe de Pen Hir, Trail 292, Ouessant, Raz and Camaret
45. Velke Hincovo pleso, Trail 298, The Slovakian High Tatras
46. Towards Larath Mor and up Craig Varr, Trail 309, Scottish South-East Highlands
47. Baile Mhic an Daill, Trail 317, Around Dingle Bay, Ireland
48. An Dun Mor, Trail 318, Around Dingle Bay, Ireland
49. Cill Ghallagain (Kilgalligan) Loop, Trail 334, Mullet Peninsula and Achill Island
50. Justadheia, Trail 343, Lofoten and Vesteralen
51. Vikan and Sorleia, Trail 348, Lofoten and Vesteralen
52. Hovden, Trail 349, Lofoten and Vesteralen
53. Nonstind, Trail 350, Lofoten and Vesteralen
54. Lac du Lauzon, Trail 352, The French Alps (Les Ecrins)
55. Vallon de la Lavey, Trails 360/361, The French Alps (Les Ecrins)
56. Sentier des Crevasses, Trail 362, The French Alps (Les Ecrins)
57. Lielpe, Trail 367, Ticino
58. Lago di Tom, Trail 372, Ticino

BOOK REVIEWS

UNCONSCIOUS GREED – WE ARE ALL GUILTY NOW

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, Allen Lane, 2014. 566pp.

I am fed up with reading climate-change books – and I’ve only read four. I’m reading the fifth at the moment: George Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It: Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*, Bloomsbury, 2014, 260pp. I’m fed up already because they are so clearly speaking only to the converted. At least Naomi Klein is adding something to the debate – documenting how capitalism is inextricably bound up with and responsible for climate-change. For my money, she does a really good job of this, if you are willing to grant that Russia and China are now capitalist, too. She is particularly good on free-market fundamentalism and the underlying ideology that assumes our right to exploit the earth as a resource for our own convenience, which she labels ‘extractivism’.

But then I am predisposed to agree with all this because I am a green sympathiser, has plenty of money, used to be a revolutionary socialist and feminist and still calls himself spiritual and anti-materialistic. I also tend to be mean, self-righteous and puritanical, which helps.

What about the unconverted, the vast majority? They will not read this book. If they do, they will dismiss it as left-wing propaganda. George Marshall shows how we interpret climate-change information through our pre-existing biases and frameworks. And I’m sure the rest of his book will continue to lay out at least forty convincing reasons why most people find it easy to ignore climate-change. For instance, a particularly telling chapter I have just read

explores the pervading silence around the topic of climate-change – even liberal professionals don't want to discuss it at their dinner parties.

So will these books make any difference, except perhaps at the margins of the intellectual undecided? George Marshall is a 'climate-change communicator' so his book may help his colleagues to brush up their communications. Naomi Klein is more of a political activist so she offers political solutions. She dismisses technological solutions in three quite amusing chapters under the heading 'Magical Thinking'. She is particularly scathing about my favourite bogey-man, Richard Branson.

Then she goes on to espouse the 'mass-movement from below' solution, describing under the title 'Blockadia' various campaigns that have sprung up world-wide in the last twenty years against extractivist activities: in Greece, Britain, the Arctic, Inner Mongolia, Nigeria, Ecuador, Canada and the USA. She is especially keen on the resistance to two pipelines being proposed to transport Tar Sands oil from Alberta to Texas and from Alberta to British Columbia because this involves indigenous tribes: and indigenous tribes can claim Indigenous Rights over their land and have a countervailing ideology. Klein quotes Arundhati Roy:

"The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination – an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfilment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of our past, but who may really be the guides to our future." (p.291)

Of course, the Indigenous Rights are disputed by big business and governments but have been upheld in some courts and, for Klein, offer, with grass-roots support, the best hope of progress against climate-change. She then lays out the arguments for 'climate debt' whereby the developed world should accept its responsibility for creating climate change up till now and help the rest of the world financially to develop in a more climate-friendly way. Finally, she contrasts the ideology of extractivism with the 'right to regenerate' in what I find her most powerful and personal chapter.

While researching the book, Klein was trying to get pregnant but failed, despite the usual medical interventions (drugs and IVF in her case). But then she chose to step out of the stressful 'fertility factory' and allowed herself to relax with the help of a naturopath and a move to rural British Columbia. She eventually conceived and gave birth. She draws a parallel between her experiences and the shift in perspective needed to prevent climate-change:

"I started to learn that protecting and valuing the earth's ingenious systems of reproducing life and the fertility of all its inhabitants, may lie at the centre of the shift in worldview that must take place if we are to move beyond extractivism. A worldview based on regeneration and renewal rather than domination and depletion." (p.424)

So I applaud all this (as you would expect) but I return to my earlier question: will it make any difference except at the margins of the intellectual undecided? The climate-change accepters will accept her arguments and the deniers will deny them. And the rest (the vast majority) will go about their lives as usual, doing a bit of recycling because the council provides the bins. However, as Klein is clear about, the only viable solution is a whole shift of perspective, part of which is for people in the 'developed' world (developed only in the narrow GDP sense) to be willing to accept a decline in their levels of consumption. Apparently, 40% of carbon emissions are down to household energy – my guess is that another 40% is down to the production of consumer goodies like food, buildings, cars, TVs and other technology, while the rest is down to travel and transport (the exact details aren't important).

Who in our society is going to give up this unconscious greed? We in the developed world are all guilty of this; unconscious because we accept it as part of normal life, greedy because we are devouring too many of the world's resources and the poorest and least powerful nations are suffering and will suffer most from climate-change. Even Klein herself admits that she ate up the air-miles in researching her book (as do most of the climate-change elite in going about their campaigning).

In my day (the '80s), the therapy world used to talk a lot about 'taking responsibility' – I don't know if this notion is still fashionable – but wouldn't it be great if all of us climate-change accepters walked the walk, as well as talking the talk? How many of us are prepared to forgo our cars, our foreign holidays, our upgradings, our creature comforts? Or even some of them? People like me who advocate reducing our consumption are criticized as 'wanting to take us back to the Stone Age', a pathetic slur which justifies continuing to consume as if there's no tomorrow. Or we are dismissed as self-righteous prigs, another easy way to avoid the issue.

Instead, those of us who accept the reality of climate-change need to do what is necessary in our own lives and shrug off these criticisms. Calculations show that we each need to reduce our carbon footprint by 75% to reach our fair and equal share of global carbon emissions. We need to use only public transport; we need to stop upgrading and replacing all our gadgets; we need to turn the heating down to 18C at the most; we need to give up our ridiculous addictions to fashion and logos and buy far fewer clothes – preferably from charity shops; we need to stop travelling the world in search of the next resort or the next thrill, often invading and exploiting the local culture; we need to make sure our savings are not invested in climate-changing stocks and shares; and we need to start giving 10% or more of our incomes to prevent climate-change adversely affecting the poorest people in the world. To me, this is not hair-shirt preaching – this is the reality of climate-change in the world we are supposed to share.

Are we willing to acknowledge our unconscious greed and take responsibility for it or will we confine our empathy to our family, friends and clients? If enough of us did take such responsibility in our daily lives, we might be taken seriously by the unconverted and get the ball rolling in the developed world where the change needs to happen.

(published in *Self & Society – An International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, Vol.44, No.1, April 2016)

P.S. (August 2020) This extract from Erling Kagge, *Walking, One Step at a Time*, Penguin, 2020, p.90, backs up my point that consumption is at the root the climate crisis:

“In the Stone Age, an adult human being went through 4,000 calories per day in order to cover the energy required to eat, to make tools and clothing and to walk. Today, an average human being living in a rich country consumes, directly or indirectly, 228,000 calories a day, on goods such as food, clothing, communication and transport.”

P.P.S. (November 2020) TV programme on Channel 4 informs me that our use of technology (computers, tablets, smart-phones) is responsible for as many carbon emissions as our use of aeroplanes (2% of all emissions). I don't know if this includes the emissions created in the production of the technology and of the aeroplanes, which is what I was referring to in my review above. The programme was talking about the emissions involved in creating, storing and sending emails, images and especially videos.

JOY OF BEING

Frederic Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, Verso, 2015 (translated by John Howe)

Frederic Gros has done a typical Gallic job on walking, combining his own ideas about walking with accounts of what walking meant to various philosophers. His own ideas hardly amount to a philosophy of walking, perhaps 'notes towards a philosophy of walking' but worthwhile, nevertheless. These ideas are couched in the usual continental language that we Brits (this one, anyway) find hard to swallow. For instance, if you like this quote from p.187, I think you'll like this book:

"Walking reminds us constantly of our finiteness: bodies heavy with unmannerly needs, nailed to the definitive ground. Walking doesn't mean raising yourself, it doesn't mean getting the better of gravity, or letting speed and height delude you on your mortal condition; it means reconciling yourself to it through that exposure to the mass of the ground, the fragility of the body, the slow, remorseless sinking movement. Walking means precisely resigning yourself to being an ambulant, forward-leaning body. But the really astonishing thing is how that slow resignation, that immense lassitude give us the joy of being. Of being no more than that, of course, but in utter bliss. Our leaden bodies fall back to earth at every step, as if to take root there again. Walking is an invitation to die standing up."

Who would have thought it? Certainly not me.

By and large, the chapters that feature his own musings on walking are the best: chapters with titles such as 'Walking is Not a Sport', 'Freedoms', 'Slowness', 'Solitudes', 'Silences', 'Eternities', 'Energy', 'Regeneration and Presence', 'Strolls', 'Gravity', and 'Repetition'. You can see where he's going with titles such as these and I approve of everything he says.

For me, the chapters on individual philosophers and their relation to walking are not so good, rather pedantic (pun intended) in many cases. For instance, the chapter on Rimbaud entitled 'The Passion for Escape' is little more than a potted biography, detailing how whenever possible he escaped from the boredom of provincial life by walking somewhere else. Similarly, the chapter on Nietzsche is mainly biographical with a short excursion into how walking helps a writer such as Nietzsche to compose his writings. However, there are also good chapters on philosophers - I particularly liked the one on Thoreau where Gros shows how walking was central to Thoreau's writings:

(for Thoreau)... "Walking is setting oneself apart: at the edge of those who work, at the edge of high-speed roads, at the edge of the producers of profit and poverty, exploiters, labourers, and at the edge of those serious people who always have something better to do than receive the pale gentleness of a winter sun or the freshness of a spring breeze." (p.94)

I also liked his chapter on Rousseau where he charts the changing significance of walking in Rousseau's life from the early walks of youthful expectation through his mature years discovering the natural man to his later years where "walking is no longer undertaken to fuel invention, but exactly for nothing: just to connect with the movement of the sinking sun, to echo with slow tread the cadence of the minutes, hours, days." (p.78)

In my experience, there is a sequential contradiction at the heart of walking. At first, walking amplifies thought and feeling (rather like meditation, of which for me walking is an example) so that whatever is uppermost comes vividly to the surface; then, what lies deeper begins to appear until finally all such thoughts and feelings reduce in intensity and disappear into nothingness. Gros clearly favours the nothingness of walking - nothing except the sensations of one's body and one's surroundings. Yet, in order to have a book, he needs to explore the somethingness of his philosophers. Unfortunately, this does not make a philosophy of walking but rather a pot-pourri of thought hurdles to be jumped on the way to the essential nothingness of walking where all the convolutions of philosophy disappear - at least for this walker!

(published in *Self and Society, An International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 43 No.3 September 2015)

TAKE A HIKE: THE TRAIL AS THERAPY

Cheryl Strayed, *Wild: A Journey from Lost to Found*, Atlantic Books, paperback, 2015.

I have done a lot of hiking and quite a bit of psychotherapy and I much prefer the former to the latter as a way of dealing with any unhappiness in my life. This book shows why.

Cheryl begins with a short resume of the mess she got herself into: absent father, beloved mother dying young, break-up of the remaining family, deceitful one-night stands, heroin abuse, divorce from a much-loved husband – unresolved issues you might say. So she decides to hike part of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) from Southern California to the Oregon/Washington border over three months:

“It was a world I’d never been to..... one I’d staggered to in sorrow and confusion and fear and hope. A world I thought would both make me into the woman I knew I could become and turn me back into the girl I’d once been.” (p.4)

Her struggles with cold, heat, dehydration, hunger, an outsize back-pack and blisters from the chafing of boots and back-pack are both painful and hilarious to read. Here is her account of how all this affected her:

“I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable. These realizations about my physical, material life couldn’t help but spill over into the emotional and spiritual realm. That my complicated life could be made so simple was astounding. It had begun to occur to me that perhaps it was okay that I hadn’t spent my days on the trail pondering the sorrows of my life, that perhaps by being forced to focus on my physical suffering some of my emotional suffering would fade away. By the end of that second week, I realized that since I’d begun my hike, I hadn’t shed a single tear.” (p.92)

Not only that; she was also alive to the healing power of her surroundings:

“Walking along a path I carved myself.....was the opposite of using heroin. The trigger I’d pulled in stepping into the snow made me more alive to my senses than ever. Uncertain as I was as I pushed forward, I felt right in my pushing, as if the effort itself meant something. That perhaps being amidst the undesecrated beauty of the wilderness meant I too could be undesecrated, regardless of the regrettable things I’d done to others or myself or the regrettable things that had been done to me. Of all the things I’d been skeptical about, I didn’t feel skeptical about this: the wilderness had a clarity that included me.” (p.143)

And how about this for a spot of spontaneous therapy:

“It amazed me every time.....Of all the wild things, (my father’s) failure to love me the way he should have had always been the wildest thing of all. But on that night as I gazed out over the darkening land fifty-some nights out on the PCT, it occurred to me that I didn’t have to be amazed by him anymore. There were so many other amazing things in this world. They opened up inside of me like a river..... I laughed with the joy of it, and the next moment I was crying my first tears on the PCT..... (*not because I was happy or sad*).....I was crying because I was full. Of those fifty-some hard days on the trail and of the 9,760 days that had come before them too.....I felt fierce and humble and gathered up inside, like I was safe in this world too.” (p.233)

You might think that these moments could have happened without the rigours of the trail, perhaps in psychotherapy, but, from my own experience, I don’t think so. Nothing like that occurred during my times in psychotherapy but plenty of similar healing realisations have occurred for me while hiking. I don’t suppose this would be so for everybody and I’m sure that hiking won’t be putting psychotherapists out of business any time soon but I do want to push hiking as a valid and effective alternative to psychotherapy for those with the guts and inclination to try it.

Don’t run away with the idea that this book is all sturm and drang. Most of it is an accurate and entertaining account of life on a long-distance trail: the people and animals Cheryl meets, the vagaries of the trail, the diversions to avoid impassable snow-fields and to have a brief taste of civilisation but most of all the privations and obstacles overcome. Every word of it rings true from my own 31-day hike around the South-West Coast Path in England and numerous shorter hikes since then.

However, I have deliberately included the long quotes from her book as they give the flavour of her “journey from lost to found” better than any precis of mine. I’ll end with another quote that again resonates with my own experience of healing and meditation in the wild. Cheryl has reached Crater Lake in Oregon which lies in the caldera of an extinct volcano:

“This was once a mountain that stood nearly 12,000 feet tall and then had its heart removed. This was once a wasteland of lava and pumice and ash. This was once an empty bowl that took hundreds of years to fill. But, hard as I tried, I couldn’t see them in my mind’s eye. Not the mountain or the wasteland or the empty bowl. They simply were not there anymore. There was only the stillness and the silence of that water: what a mountain and a wasteland and an empty bowl turned into after the healing began.” (p.273)

(published in *Self and Society, An International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2016 ; also published on Taylor and Francis Online, www.tandfonline.com)

HOW THE RICH GET AWAY WITH IT

George Monbiot, *How did we get into this mess? Politics, equality, nature*, London Verso, 2016.

“Oh dear! Another great book that nobody apart from the already-converted will read”. That was my reaction on reading the Introduction to this collection of short articles. If you are a Guardian reader, you will probably have read most of them already; if you are not, then you may be in for a surprise. Having read two of his previous books (*Heat*, 2006, and *Feral*, 2013), I had George Monbiot down as an environmental campaigner whose big issues are global warming and rewilding. However, I learn from this book that his concerns are much wider than that, as implied by the subtitle. He is a fierce opponent of the neoliberal consensus that has dominated Western politics for the last four decades and of the self-serving elite that dominates our domestic politics.

In a way, that is all that really needs to be said. If you are of the same persuasion, you will agree with and enjoy this book. If you are not, you will probably not read it but if you do, it will infuriate you. But that would be too short a review, so I will pad it out with some more observations...

The refreshing thing about Monbiot’s approach is that he backs up his opinions with evidence; or rather, his opinions appear to be formed on the basis of evidence, often evidence that is conveniently ignored by those in power and those of a neo-liberal persuasion.

One of his favourite tactics is to expose a conspiracy of silence about crucial issues that would challenge the consensus accepted by most politicians and media outlets: for instance, the fact that we subsidize landowners through the public provision of roads, utilities and other services leading to increases in the value of their land. The landowners do nothing and yet the people who are derided as skivers and shirkers, sponging off the state, are those on benefits. The answer? A land-value tax which is so far off the agenda as to be unheard of (Chapter 50).

Another favourite tactic is to turn the received wisdom on its head. My example here is population growth: such luminaries as David Attenborough call for its restriction on a global scale because they claim the planet cannot cope with the harmful emissions it creates. Yet, on closer inspection, the problem looks very different. Most of the CO₂ emissions are made in the developed Westernized Nations where population growth is slow, so the problem here is growth in consumption, not in population. The countries with the fastest population growth have the lowest emissions – and much of

these emissions is due to exports to the West, e.g. oil in Nigeria. So the major culprit is our addiction to consumption, led by the super-rich with their super-yachts and their heated swimming pools: “It’s time we had the guts to name the problem. It’s not sex; it’s money. It’s not the poor; it’s the rich” (p. 107).

This illustrates another feature of Monbiot’s articles: he has a telling turn of phrase. Here are a few I particularly liked:-

- “Man was born free and he is everywhere in chain stores” (p.25) (a take-off of the Communist Manifesto)
- “Britain is being shagged by sheep but hardly anyone dares say so” (p.120) (where he discusses the erosion and flooding caused by sheep grazing)
- “Is your boss possessed of judgement, vision and management skills superior to those of anyone else in the firm, or did he or she get there through bluff, bullshit and bullying?” (p.189)

Perhaps my favourite aspect of Monbiot’s work is that he puts his money where his mouth is: when discussing how politicians and journalists often act in the interests of the powerful, he suggests that all journalists should follow the lead of MPs and publish a register of their interests, i.e. where they get their money from. So Monbiot does just that – see www.Monbiot.com/registryofinterests where he gives month-by-month accounts of his income plus an explanation of his expenses. Would that everyone had to publish their tax affairs, as in Norway.

The only serious omission from this book (last entry in August 2015) is Monbiot’s stance on Europe and Brexit. For that, you can go to his website and look under ‘globalisation’, where he comes out in favour of the EU as the ‘lesser evil’ (the alternative being greater subservience to the USA). This is the only point where I disagree with him – by leaving the EU, we at least have a chance to extricate ourselves from all the evils of the EU that Monbiot lists and resist the blandishments of Trump and American capital. However, on every other opinion he expresses I am with him. Surprisingly, the main thing I take away from this collection of articles is not the impending doom of climate change, but the many ways in which we allow the rich to get away with it while they harm the rest of the planet.

(published in *Self and Society, An International Journal for Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 45, No. 1, April 2017)

P.S. (July 2020) While the rich are the worst climate change creators, it’s too easy to let ourselves off the hook by concentrating our bile upon them. The fact is that we are all responsible with our consumer addictions to gadgets and upgrades, fast fashion, long-distance travel, cosmetic home improvements, cars and all forms of consumer tat, much of it supporting terrible regimes like China and thereby exporting our CO2 emissions to them. See my review of Naomi Klein above for more details on this.

P.P.S. (September 2020) Just seen this article in the ‘i’ newspaper for 21/9/20, headline “Richest 1% ‘emit double carbon’ of poorest 50%”. Oxfam research shows that the richest 1% accounted for 15% of global emissions between 1990 and 2015, while the poorest half of humanity was responsible for just 7%, thus adding figures to prove Monbiot’s point above.

WHAT'S WITH ALL THE WORDS ?

Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, Penguin, 2016.

This will be a short review as I have but one, fundamental, point to make – that this book is based upon a wrong premise.

First, however, I want to acknowledge that I am envious of Robert Macfarlane: he is a Fellow of a Cambridge college, something I aspired to but never achieved, and his books on walking all get published and favourably reviewed (not least the one I am reviewing here), whereas my efforts have been turned down by publishers – hence this website.

The premise of the book is that without naming aspects of the natural world, we shall not be able to appreciate these aspects in all their subtlety and glory, especially since many of these words are in danger of dying out. Such words are the ‘landmarks’ of the title. Macfarlane quotes John Stilgoe’s ‘Shallow Water Dictionary’ (2004) with approval:

“*Visit* and *vision* stand related. To visit means to see, not to talk, but to take notice, to take note, to actively engage the eye..... Landscape – or seascape – that lacks vocabulary cannot be seen, cannot be accurately, usefully visited.” (p.382)

This is obviously not true. I do not need to have words to enable me to appreciate what is out there in nature. I have read some of the glossaries of nature-words in ‘Landmarks’ and there is not one word where I have missed the phenomenon it describes because I do not know a word for it. That is a big reason why I walk a lot – to notice and enjoy the subtleties of nature. However, for me, it is a distraction to be naming everything I come across. It does not add to my enjoyment of bird-life to be referring to the Observer Book of Birds all the time. Naming is only useful if we want to communicate our experience to someone who wasn’t there. Even then, I prefer to take a photo and send that, despite missing out on smell, touch, taste and hearing.

So, for me, the glossaries that are such an important part of ‘Landmarks’ are a waste of time and effort. From the response Macfarlane received to his request for nature-words from around the U.K., many people disagree with me and good luck to them for wishing to preserve these words for posterity.

If Macfarlane had spent more time meditating (and he has clearly spent some) and less time building his ‘word-hoard’, he would understand better what I am saying. Meditation encourages us to appreciate the ‘thing-in-itself’ without the need or the desire to name it.

As for the rest of ‘Landmarks’, apart from the glossaries, Macfarlane provides thumb-nail sketches of his encounters with some of his favourite nature-writers: Nan Shepherd, Roger Deakin, J.A.Baker, Richard Skelton, Barry Lopez, Peter Davidson, Jacquetta Hawkes, John Muir and Deb Wilenski. I really enjoyed reading about those authors I had not already come across: in particular, I shall seek out Nan Shepherd’s ‘The Living Mountain’ (1977) about the Cairngorms and Jacquetta Hawkes’s ‘A Land’ (1951) about the geology and archaeology of Britain.

So if you would like to read about some great nature-writers (including Macfarlane himself), this is a good introduction; and if you want to name “a sheep that has fallen onto its back and can’t get up because of the weight of its fleece” (*riggwelter*), this is a veritable treasure-trove of interesting information – but please don’t claim that we can’t appreciate nature fully without preserving these glossaries.

A WILD AND POETIC LIFE ?

Tomas Espedal, *Tramp: or the Art of Living a Wild and Poetic Life*, Seagull Books, 2022 (originally published in Norwegian, 2006).

Don't be fooled by the subtitle of this book: Espedal is not a tramp and he doesn't lead a wild and poetic life - in fact it's not that much different from mine, i.e. he stays at home most of the time and sets off on occasional trips in his native country and abroad. He drinks and smokes a lot, writes while he is on his trips, sometimes sleeps outside and enjoys the solitude, hardly a wild and poetic life. Like most books I read, this is a massive disappointment: you always think from the blurb that the author is going to impart some great new insight but it doesn't happen. It would be OK if the writing was good (I'm thinking of Colin Thubron here) but Espedal's is nothing special – although it may have suffered in translation. As promised on the blurb, he mentions Kant, Hazlitt, Thoreau, Rimbaud, Whitman, Giacometti and Stevenson but doesn't say much about them (read Gros, *The Philosophy of Walking*, also reviewed here, if you want to read what philosophers have to say about walking). So, I'm warning you off this book, unless you are interested in the autobiographical account of a Norwegian walker trying but failing to live a wild and poetic life. As usual, beware of subtitles and blurbs, which are designed mainly to sell the book. Unfortunately, I didn't heed my own advice.

MY FAVOURITE TRAVEL WRITER

Colin Thubron, *In Siberia*, Penguin, 2000.

It's about time I reviewed one of his books. This one shows him at his best. Sometimes I find he pays too much attention for my liking to ancient buildings but in this one, written almost a decade after the fall of the old Soviet Union and before Putin came to power, he paints a believable picture of what was wrong with that terrible regime. He travels around the vastness of Siberia by public transport so that he meets and gets to know all sorts of people, whose lives he describes vividly and insightfully. He seems to have a great facility for making these connections in the most unlikely of circumstances.

However, what I like most about his books is the quality of his writing. Even when I'm not so much interested in what he has to say – as in some of his other books – I still enjoy his turn of phrase and his illuminating descriptions. Here he is describing a throat-singer in Yakutsk:

“At first her lament sounded odd to me. The notes travelled in long lines of steel, without tremolo, which would then suddenly, tragically, break. They sounded like some unknown instrument. Sergei (her husband) had his eyes closed too. This was, after all, other than art: it was an expression of lost nation, a little holy. The song elicited a lonely spareness in her. She had entered the shrine of her voice.” (p.259).

Marvellous. I know of no other travel writer who could do this. If you haven't read any Thubron, please do. There's no one to touch him, as far as I'm concerned, either for the way he goes about his travels or the way he writes about them.

MY FAVOURITE CLIMATE BOOK

Assaad Razzouk, “Saving the Planet Without the Bullshit: What they don’t tell you about the climate crisis”, Atlantic Books, 2022.

For once, this book lives up to its promise. His 28 chapters cover almost all the main topics in an informed but readable way, nailing the excuses put forward by the climate deniers, for instance that renewables also harm the planet because of mining rare metals and the energy required to produce windmills, solar panels and electric cars. He also debunks carbon offsetting, so-called green bonds and ESG (environmental, social and governance claims by business); but his main target is Big Oil, Gas and Coal, summarised in his final paragraph:

“Individual action such as not using plastic or not eating meat can play a role in motivating others, and it has a feel-good factor attached that matters. It is not, however, going to get us where we need to go. We must resist oil, gas and coal companies trying to shift the burden for solving the climate crisis to individuals. Instead, we must compel them to assume their immensely larger responsibility”.

This can only be done with government action and lawsuits, he claims, with several examples. This approach is necessary but individual action is also required, not just to make us feel good but to reduce the need for CO₂ and methane emissions in the first place – it’s not that difficult to reduce one’s carbon footprint to a level that doesn’t fuck up the planet (see my review of Naomi Klein’s book above). Otherwise, we can fall into the trap of Johnson’s ‘cake-ism’, the idea that we can go on consuming as we are because we will fix things with renewables and technology. Apart from that important reservation, I’m on board with everything in his book. For me, it’s better that Greta Thunberg’s “The Climate Book”, which covers even more topics but is more technical and a much harder read and will probably only be read by the already converted. I’d like to think this book will reach a wider audience.

