

## May 28-31 1999 Dufton YH

Collecting the highest ...

Nine of the Section gathered at Dufton YH with the anticipation of a varied weekend with a combination of on and off-road cycling and walking.

Sheila had scheduled Saturday as an off-road day and the first stage was to bag the highest surfaced road in England: a climb of 2000ft to the radar station 2900ft above sea level on the top of Great Dunn Fell. A pity that half of the climb was in the cloud base as the road climbed up a very scenic valley. However we had not been at the top for long when the cloud lifted giving wonderful views over the upper Tees valley.

Unfortunately Keith had some mechanical problems on the climb and we had to mount (or descend) a rescue party as he was carrying some of our lunch! It turned out that his rear gear mechanism had given up the battle for life and he wisely decided that his only option was to limp back to Dufton on a single gear. Ray kindly offered to accompany him: not that he was in any way influenced by the prospect of a wallow through the peat bogs of the Pennine Way.

As it happened the wettest parts of the Pennine Way over to Cross Fell had been slabbed with huge flat rocks to protect the environment from rampant erosion. With care and confidence it was possible to ride most of the path with short scrambles through boulder fields to the tops of Little Dunn Fell and Cross Fell respectively. On a wettish descent to the Corpse Road we met a couple of mountain bikers who had a very ambitious schedule ahead of them.

The Corpse Road turned out to be a wonderful rocky track which was both scenic and comfortably rideable for 5-miles from a Greg's Hut to Garrigill. A few miles later up a rugged valley saw us at Hartside Café sampling tea and cakes at the highest café in the country, around 1800ft above sea level.

A fast descent to Melmerby and scorch through the lanes at the foot of the fells took us back to Dufton ready for one of Terry's legendary garlic feasts.

Sunday dawned fine and we prepared ourselves for a road day. We started with a pleasant ride through lowland lanes to coffee in Kirby Stephen before starting the climb to Tan Hill - the highest pub in the country at 1758 ft. We climbed into a strengthening icy wind and by the time we reached Tan Hill it was difficult to believe that we had been in shirt sleeves in Kirby Stephen.

Tan Hill is right on the border of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the scenery became noticeably greener and more attractive as we descended into Keld. A pleasant climb up Birk Dale was rewarded with a wild swoop back into Kirby Stephen for tea. After a run back to Dufton we found that Keith had done all the preparation for the meal so that minimal effort was required before we were all tucking in to another four course extravaganza.

Sheila had a revolutionary idea for Monday - we would walk across the hills without bikes! Some boots and rucksacks miraculously appeared, in other cases trainers and plastic bags were sported, but did we care?

We took a track from near the hostel heading towards High Cup Nick - at one stage some 8 or 9 year old children were driving quad bikes, which looked great fun but rather noisy and hazardous. However they seemed to be pretty competent operators and we left them to the watchful eyes of their parents.

The first view from the south of the hanging glacial valley of High Cup Nick is spectacular, but when approaching from Cauldron Snout in the North it is even more of a surprise.

The original plan was to return the way we had come, but in view of the good weather we did the only thing possible... we sat down for lunch and a brew up.

A walk along the top of the southern scarp slope took us to some old mine workings and a track directly into Dufton. The few remainders of the mining activity were sufficient to show that life must have been grindingly hard for the miners and their efforts have not enhanced the landscape. However, once through the mines the scenery improved and we had a very pleasant walk back to Dufton for a pot of tea before the journey back to Coventry.

Most people were unusually stiff when back at work on Tuesday morning, but everyone agreed that we had had a most enjoyable, varied weekend and thanks must go to Sheila for organising the weekend.