

# The Recorder of Middlesbrough's Great River Tees Walk

A journey along the River Tees from source to sea

One walkers view by Steve Lennon



I set off from home early on Saturday morning to meet the rest of the team in Appleby at 9.30am. The signs were not good. It had been raining all night; the river Caldew had burst its banks just outside the village of Millhouse. Water was pouring over the top of the embankment and several houses were flooded.

The minibus, on loan from Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services, was on time and after brief introductions we were transported to the start of our journey, which was to be the radar station at the top of Cross Fell. The gate to the service road which is normally open was locked, which meant that we started out on a steep uphill walk in driving rain with the wind so strong against us that at times it was difficult to stand up.

I had thought it was going to be all downhill! Following the Pennine Way for a while with my head deep down inside my hood some doubt began to creep in. I wasn't sure that I was going to cope with 5 days and 75 miles of this. Fortunately, there was more shelter on the east side of the hill and with some excellent navigation on the part of the Judge and a little help from the GPS we located the source of the Tees and set out on our journey proper.



The first two days walking were amazing. The stream soon became a river enlarged by the recent rain. We walked across grouse moors that were floating on water, forded swollen streams then passed Cow Green reservoir which was full to the brim and overflowing. We climbed down the side of Cauldron Snout, now in full force and a spectacular sight, then on along the valley where the path was submerged in places to supper and our first nights rest at the Langdon Beck Inn.

On the second day we were joined by fifty walkers from the Middlesbrough Law Courts, who accompanied us on our route past High Force and Low Force for a picnic by the river before leaving us at Middleton-in-Teesdale to plod on along the disused railway track to the Rose and Crown at Romaldu Kirk. No sleeping in tents for the esteemed Judge and High Sheriffs past and present!

From here on the going became easier along footpaths and the river bank. We stopped off at Thorpe, visiting the home of a past High Sheriff of Durham for lunch, and then at the end of our afternoon walk stayed overnight at Selaby Hall as guests of one of our fellow walkers Harry Vane, the present High Sheriff, and his wife Kate. Hot baths for all were followed by dinner and a good night's sleep between crisp sheets. Thence, the following day, onward along the river pausing briefly to smell and taste the sulphurous spring water of Gainsford Spa, one of the ancient, healing and holy wells of County Durham. See the link below.

<http://people.bath.ac.uk/liskmj/living-spring/sourcearchive/fs7/fs7lh1.htm#11>



The river led us out into rolling countryside as we approached Darlington, eventually crossing underneath the busy A1M and A66 before an early finish and afternoon tea in the gardens of Clow Beck House, listening to the birds singing.

During our final day's walking the weather was hot and humid, with sunny intervals and frequent showers. The going was muddy and slippery. The river bank was overgrown and in places the ploughed land of the adjoining fields reached right up to the footpath in an effort by the owners to squeeze out that little bit extra from their land in hard times. On several occasions we fell into the furrow, prostrating ourselves in the corn. The team was visibly flagging, a little ragged with some limping from blisters but spurred on by the fact that the end was in sight. Finally we arrived in Yarm and into Safeway's car park where transport was waiting. Shoppers stopped and stared at this curious group of bedraggled but happy men of the road. A somewhat ignominious end to our walk, but we were glad to get our boots off.



The following day we completed our journey by boat. We sailed from Yarm down the river to Stockton and through the lock at the Tees Barrage, out toward the South Gare where the river meets the sea and our journey's end. There was no sign of James Cook. We had arranged to meet her but she was stranded in thick fog in Blyth. Nevertheless we received a warm welcome from the Mayor of Middlesbrough who was waiting on the South Wharf to greet us.



The sting in the tail was the weather again. A major thunderstorm - was it a super cell? - and flash flooding meant that the Tyne Tunnel was closed and the Tyne Bridge blocked with traffic. I couldn't get back to my car which I had left at Royal Quays Marina the previous week. So, I had one last night away - an emergency stop in Sunderland. By Friday night I was glad to be home once again in Caldbeck.

The walk was a worthwhile undertaking in its own right. For me, it meant a week in the fresh air away from the pressures of work and family life, good company and fellowship from the team of walkers and spectacular scenery en-route.

Others joined us for single days, completing individual legs of the walk, and several people provided us with refreshments and lunches along the way. The hospitality was generous and the goodwill and encouragement welcome. It became apparent to me that there is an extended community along the length of the river, all connected by it. I returned to work at the Trust with a great sense of achievement, feeling refreshed with spirits uplifted. The expedition generated welcome publicity for Ocean Youth Trust North, with the Judge conducting radio interviews over breakfast and press releases being picked up by media across the north-east. Networking took place and links were forged.



Our thanks are due to Peter Fox for all the planning and effort that he put into the realisation of his idea of a fundraising retirement walk along the River Tees from source to sea and for inspiring us all to take part. Thanks are due also to the team of walkers who undertook the whole length of the journey and all the others who took part in various ways.

More than anything we are grateful to our sponsors who donated the massive sum of **fourteen thousand pounds**.

The money raised will be used to subsidise the voyages of deserving young people from in and around the Teesside area. Without the generosity of all involved they would not otherwise be able to experience the Challenge of the Sea through an inspirational and sometimes life changing voyage onboard James Cook.