

Greenmount – February 2012

On Wednesday 1st February Mike, Frank and I met at the Old School just after 9 a.m. for another tour of the West Pennine Moors. As we passed Frank's house en route to Redisher Wood, I prevailed upon him for the loan of a woolly hat and Mike went one better with a request for both hat and gloves. It was a fine, sunny morning but bitterly cold, which is just as well (see later).

Our route took us through the woods and up past Simon's Lodge, onto the ridge. We followed the path to join Moorbottom Road and that round to the track leading up to the maggot farm, which, happily, we avoided, by veering off to the left, to creep up on Bull Hill from the rear. The long, flat stretch of moorland we had to cross to do this is made up of peat and to say it was waterlogged is an understatement. It was fortunate that it was frozen, although, by the time we had reached it, we had climbed above the snow-line and the combination of snow, the uneven terrain and a strong, oncoming wind made the going difficult.

Having climbed, once more, up to Bull Hill we followed the path to the right, on to Pilgrim's Cross, Harcles Hill and Peel Tower, where I remarked this was a long way round to reach this point. We took the main trail downhill from there and eventually emerged on the main road, having covered the distance from Bull Hill in just 67 minutes, which we followed to Holcombe Brook and back home.

Following a quick change, we all met up in the Bull's Head for lunch about 1 p.m., returning home about 4:30 p.m., no doubt my having consumed as many calories as I had lost.

On Thursday 2nd February, I had intended to wire up the extension telephone and network connections in the Old School. I didn't make it because I could not find any information on how to wire a BT extension cable to an RJ45 (computer network) socket on the wall. I resolved to work this out at home before attempting to install the double RJ45 outlet. That seemed like a good idea.

Instead, I helped Jenny prepare for her Beaver sessions this week. It was not as interesting as wiring the socket but it was easier – just.

Friday 3rd February was the usual shopping day with a morning delivery from Abel and Cole. This week, we had decided to try their organic sirloin steak, amongst other items and, while most of their produce is good, the steak looked quite fatty and well marbled. We would have ordered fillet steak but they didn't have any. To our surprise, Tesco Prestwich did and we bought some from there.

My beef (if you will pardon the pun) with Tesco (or, at least, one of them) is not that their organic meat is poor quality or particularly expensive, it's that they don't stock a lot of it and their supply is unpredictable.

On Saturday 4th February we all went to York for the day. Rachel had ordered a present for one of her colleagues who was getting married the following week and, since it was extremely fragile, we had to collect it. The plan was also to go shopping but it was very cold

and, while we were having lunch, it started to snow. After lunch, we decided to head back home, which is just as well, as the snow was coming down faster and thicker and we had to cross the Pennines. The roads were bad and much of the traffic was single file most of the way.

I couldn't believe the stupidity of most drivers. Then, again... There were some driving without any lights on and most too close to the vehicle in front, without any chance of being able to stop in an emergency before hitting the preceding vehicle on the very slippery surface. In such conditions, breaks are useless and one has to rely on changing down the gears to use engine braking, an art sadly lost on modern drivers.

One chap in a BMW alongside me on the M62 did, in fact, discover the effect of using his brakes and, fortunately, managed to regain control of his vehicle quite quickly after losing the back end in my direction. BMWs are well known for their lack of rear end traction in poor weather conditions, which leads me to wonder why so many people buy them, especially given their extortionate price. Not only would I not drive one but I avoid travelling parallel to them on motorways whenever possible.

The motorway roundabout at the M62/M60/M66 junction (18) was almost impossible. There was so much snow that the lane markings were invisible and traffic was sliding about all over the place. BMWs wouldn't have stood a chance. How I managed the right turn up the M66 without incident is beyond me, as are most things.

The worst part was to come, driving up Brandlesholme Road. Most people have no idea how to drive in snow and would insist on stopping on inclines, from which they had difficulty in restarting. For the most part, I managed to keep moving, although very slowly and only had to stop on uphill stretches twice, the second time giving rise to some concern as the front wheels kept moving round faster than the car was moving.

Having arrived home, I had to clear the drive of snow before reversing the car down it and we subsequently made the rapid and wise decision to have tea at the Bull's Head. At least we could walk there and back. It was busier than I had expected, with many local residents seemingly in the same frame of mind.

On Sunday 5th February, I spent the day clearing the fresh snow from the drive and all the snow from the road at the front of the drive which I use to reverse the car down the drive. I also cleared two tracks on the road for the wheels to join those cleared along the road by others. I finished about four p.m. after clearing the snow from the path round the house and part of the patio. In fact I was finished in just about every sense of the word.

I was thinking of joining the village hiking group on Monday 6th February, the plan being to be at the Old School for 8:30 a.m. with a packed lunch. I awoke to the alarm at 7 a.m. and my back convinced me I was going nowhere. I managed to crawl out of bed at 8:30 and, after breakfast, managed to stay upright enough to wash the pots. Feeling a little more mobile, I emptied and cleaned the recycling bins, cleaned and laid the fire and generally pottered round before sitting down to lunch, by which time Jenny had gone out with Rachel.

The milder temperatures and warm sunshine was melting the snow quite quickly and I

reflected that my efforts on the previous day were largely a waste of time. Such is life.

I spent the afternoon tidying up my vast collection of films on the computer.

Tuesday 7th February was time to do all the preparation for the Beaver meetings this week, especially since Jenny had a Leaders' meeting in the evening.

Jenny went to Yoga in the afternoon while I discovered another leak on the boiler. To be more accurate, it was not actually another leak. It was one of the leaks the British Gas engineer was supposed to have fixed the last time he was here, a few weeks ago.

I immediately logged an engineering visit with BG for Thursday morning. I would have logged one for the next day had any been available.

It was fortunate that there was a large waste bin underneath the boiler that was now doubling as a reservoir. Replacing this with a spare bowl I have in the sink, not yet plumbed in (it's a long story), in the garage, I managed to empty the water down one of the surface drains at the back and retrieve the soggy rubbish, tipping this into the general waste bin, so I could put the large, empty bin back in collection position.

I thought I'd investigate the leak. There was a slim chance I might succeed where BG had failed. I took off the boiler cover and found the joint from which water was leaking. I even found a spanner to fit the nut. Unfortunately, there wasn't room to insert the spanner to tighten the nut and I gave up, deciding to leave the major boiler dismantling job to the BG engineer since that's what I pay for. After all, the boiler was still working, so we had hot water and heating, even without the log fire.

I prepared the log fire anyway. Better safe than sorry. Burning that overrides the central heating thermostat and keeps the heating off, saving money, especially since my wood is (so far this winter) free, except when it is so cold that the frost sensor in the garage overrides everything, including my bank balance and turns the heating on to keep the garage warm, which prevents the pipes freezing up.

On Wednesday 8th, I was back at the dentist, since I had a problem with my new filling, which had lasted about a week. The result of this emergency appointment was a temporary filling, without drilling (the kind I like) and an appointment for a proper resolution to the extreme sensitivity a couple of months hence.

On the return journey, we delivered the latest copy of the village newsletter to unsuspecting residents on the streets designated for our attention.

The temporary filling lasted until the 9th. I decided to put up with the discomfort until it could be dealt with properly. This being a Thursday, I put my dental problem at the back of my mouth to the back of my mind and went to the Old School for our usual maintenance session. I finally installed the dual network point on the wall in the upstairs room, the intention being to connect a telephone extension to one socket and a surveillance camera to the other. I made the cable connections to the socket, not that this will serve any useful purpose until the other ends are installed.

Mike and I had a brief lunch in the Bull's Head before I returned home, weary but happy.

Friday 10th was our usual grocery shopping day.

Saturday 11th to Monday 13th we spent mostly at the Old School, testing and pricing electrical equipment for the Jumble Sale, which started promptly at 4 p.m. on the Monday. Many of the items donated were faulty and ended up in my car for dumping at the local refuse disposal facility in Bury, the result of the week-end's labours being takings significantly down on last year and a boot crammed full of rubbish.

On Tuesday 14th, Mike phoned and asked me if I would collect some plant pots for the Old School from a lady who wanted to donate them but did not have the transport to do so. I said I didn't either because it was full of rubbish. Mike offered to go to the tip with me and collect the plant pots on the way back.

All went well until we arrived to collect the plant pots. The plant pots weren't plant pots at all. They were a roll of carpet and two girls' bikes. Apparently, the plant pots weren't ready, whatever that means.

Anyway, the bikes and the carpet, for which we were grateful, were stored in the Old School cellar ready for the next Jumble Sale in April.

On Wednesday 15th, I took Jenny to a medical centre in Radcliffe for one of those regular screening procedures for women. It was a nice, new, big building, which looked expensive to build and run, with hardly anyone, including staff, inside and no car parking facility, next to a public car park that was full. At least the car park was free. I parked on the road a short walk away, which was also free. Such is the new NHS.

On the way back, I called at B&Q in Bury for some paint for the Old School for the following day.

On returning, I was asked to go on the weekly walk with Mike and Frank and, since they started late, it was more of a stroll than a walk, with lunch in the Bull's Head afterwards. I had not had a good night, coughing and spluttering and I ached quite a bit, so, thinking I might be starting with a touch of 'flu, I declined.

I was right. I had another bad night and stayed in and kept warm on Thursday 16th, giving the weekly Old School Maintenance team a miss and putting my own maintenance first.

On Thursday night, I had a bit of a brainwave, which isn't bad for somebody who is aching all over, completely congested and coughing for England. I went to bed with three crushed garlic cloves in a dish. These were not for eating. The idea was that I might be able to breathe if I stuck the dish under my nose. This worked quite well, although the picture of me propped up in bed with a dish of garlic under my chin is not one to endear the opposite sex. Neither was the smell. The dish eventually found itself on the bedside table, in close proximity and, apart from a couple of brief awakenings, or coughing breaks, I had a fairly restful night.

I still felt rough on the morning of Friday 17th, my condition meeting with little sympathy and no relent from the 40-mile round trip to Unicorn and Tesco in Bury for groceries. The world almost came to an end at Unicorn. Their card machines were not operating and we had to resort to cash. Fortunately, there was a cash machine in the wall outside and I made sure I got to it before it ran out of the folding stuff. I later managed a brief walk into Bury market for a few bits while Jenny went into Tesco.

Not wishing to waste the £10 for my Barn Dance Ticket on Saturday 18th, I mustered enough strength and beer to sustain me on a chair in a corner of the room while the rest of the party of which I was a part (or, more precisely, given my infectious infliction, from which I was apart) got up to dance for most of the evening. Jenny, not surprisingly, managed to find a willing partner.

Sunday 19th was such a nice day, Jenny and I decided to go for a walk and we ended up climbing up Holcombe Hill. I thought the fresh air would do us both good. How wrong can you be? My cough was no better and Jenny's legs, which only work going downhill, like most bits as one gets older, gave her a lot of discomfort overnight. I tried to explain that tackling hills in the upwards direction was something that required practice with increasing frequency if one wishes to avoid the painful consequences. Jenny was not convinced.

Monday 20th saw little improvement in my condition and a trip to Ramsbottom in the rain didn't help.

On Tuesday 21st it was time to start the preparations for the Beaver sessions again and by lunchtime, we had compiled the Parent Rota for each of the two sessions and sent one E-mail. Jenny disappeared off to Yoga while I washed the pots. I'll leave you to guess which of us benefitted more, physically and therapeutically, from our respective exercise. My reward was yet another restless night.

My condition did not improve through Wednesday 22nd or Thursday 23rd and I missed out on lunch at the Bull's Head with Mike and Frank. Alistair was encouraged to act as my substitute for the last round of drinks, although he could hardly be mistaken for me, being taller than I am wide.

By Friday 24th, I was more conscious of events. Who could mistake a memorable trip to Chorlton and the inside of a Tesco store?

On Friday evening, we went to the Waggon and Horses at Hawkshaw for a meal with Mike, Lorna, Frank and Gwen. It turned into quite a romantic (or, alternatively, dark) event during the main course as the lights went out and we had to resort to candles for a good hour, the effect of which meant no beer (electric pumps) and only cold deserts (no microwave oven). Obviously the world had ended for the second time in a week. The point I made that the human race, in all its 2 million years of existence, has only had electricity for just over the last hundred years, made little impact. Whoever said "Necessity is the mother of invention" was living in the past. (Think about it).

On Saturday 25th, making an effort to rise above my infliction, we did some tidying and

cleaning. The chemicals from the lavender polish spray, glass cleaner and wood polish and the dust from cleaning out the stove did wonders for my condition. Apart from that, my sensitive tooth was becoming unbearable and was not improved by the Chicken Madras curry for tea. Even two bottles of beer didn't help. I did have a better night, though.

On Sunday 26th, I cut some more logs for the fire. That was warm work. After lunch, I emptied the recycling bins and then settled down for a well-earned rest to nurse my tooth. Having treated the latter by rubbing Sensodyne toothpaste on it for the last couple of days, it did seem to be showing some improvement. It was either that or the bottle of wine and several kilos of garlic I had with my venison for tea.

Incidentally, I haven't mentioned my unmentionable soreness in the rear nether regions recently. That's because I have been trying to get to the bottom (pardon the pun) of the problem. I think I may have found the solution. First, we've switched back to drinking Highland Spring bottled water and to keeping it in the fridge, as recommended. Second, at the first sign of any irritation, the offending parts get washed with unscented soap and warm water containing a small amount of Dettol disinfectant. I shall continue to monitor the situation with the aid of a mirror and a certain degree of contortion.

On Monday 27th, I was wishing I hadn't been so energetic the previous day. My nasal congestion, catarrh, cough and breathlessness were back with a vengeance and persisted through to the 29th and beyond, but that's another story. Suffice it to say I missed the village meeting, a meeting of the newly formed Jubilee Committee that is planning the summer fun day and, leaving the best until last, yet another lunch at the Bull's Head.