HELLO HAWES, NORTH YORKSHIRE 2008

Saturday 14th June

Our first visit to Yorkshire was a gift from our son Dan, his wife Paula and their daughter of almost 5 months, Willow. Our daughter Rachel was also able to join us for five days, so it was a rare family get-together and eagerly anticipated.

The anticipation must have worked well, as we were ready to leave home at a creditable 07:50, with no hitches, no panic and not even anything left behind. The first part of the journey continued smoothly and we met Dan, Paula and Willow at Tamworth Services, junction 10 on the M42, at around midday. We'd been forced to change our route because there was a scheduled lorry go-slow on the M6, in which we could well have become embroiled and embroilment was most definitely not part of the holiday plan.

Alan and Willow are reacquainted at Tamworth Services

Willow surveyed the scene serenely as we ate lunch (she'd just had hers) but she still seemed interested in our sandwiches. We stayed at Tamworth for about an hour, enabling Dan and Alan to continue driving feeling refreshed. There were a few localised rain showers and the journey was tedious, but I always enjoy seeing different place names. Then the sight of a pub called *The Yorkshire Maid* and an old-fashioned *North Riding Constabulary* sign alerted me to the fact that we had arrived in Yorkshire, whereupon all tedium evaporated on the spot.

My first impressions of North Yorkshire were good – its wide-open skies with fluffy clouds; the dales with their peaks, ridges and escarpments; the many criss-crossing dry stone walls and barns; pretty cottages; undulating roads; interesting signs to interesting places. Yes, the feeling was definitely good!

We drove through Hawes and on to our accommodation, a modernised old stone farmhouse, very spacious and comfortable. Meat hooks in the ceiling, however, led us to believe that the 'house' we were staying in was just the kitchen part of the whole farmhouse complex. Willow was avidly looking all around her, as Willow does. If she had a head like an owl (with fewer feathers) she'd be happy.

The old Yorkshire stone house

The setting of the house was inspiring, with a good view from every window of fields, trees, hills, peaks and the sky. The green land right in front of the house was awash with buttercups – it was so pretty, it was almost like a yellow alpine meadow. The back of the house had a small garden with a few flowers, backing on to another hill and peak in the distance.

Buttercups, buttercups

Alan drove Dan and me into Hawes to buy provisions from the Spar shop, which was small but adequate. Hawes looks to be a very appealing and popular little village, with lots of people out and about on a Saturday afternoon in June.

Back at the house, Paula prepared a pizza-type topping on ciabatta bread and some fresh pasta, which was very enjoyable. Then it was time for evening pursuits, such as dish washing, Willow bathing, sitting and talking. Everyone was very tired, including Willow, so we all went upstairs for an early night.

Sunday 15th June

It's most definitely colder up in these northern parts, because last night we had to switch on the storage heaters. However, the bed is very big and cosy and I loved being able to wake in the morning and sit up to see a Yorkshire peak on top of a Yorkshire hill, rising in the Yorkshire distance.

There began to be rather a lot of clouds gathering on the peak, but we still decided to go for a walk, since the Teletext weather forecast was 'partly cloudy'. Willow had apparently been wakeful during the night and Dan reckoned that he and Paula had probably managed about 4.5 hours' sleep each. Babies!

However, after a drive along and up some steep, undulating roads, we embarked on our walk in high spirits, in an ever upwards direction to Wether Fell. A quite common alternative spelling seems to be Weatherfell, which is pleasing in a meteorological sense, although Wether Fell actually makes more geographical sense. Whether it's Wether Fell or whether it's Weatherfell, it was upwards.

Over where we were heading, there were some fairly heavy grey clouds, but they seemed reasonably benign. All the same, it was surprisingly chilly for June and Alan said his hands had become slightly too cold for comfort.

Alan, an old dry-stone wall and a sheep

The path we were taking up to the top of Wether Fell was an old straight Roman road and it allowed us some wonderful views of the rolling dales and the sun partly shining on the valley below. Willow was being carried by Paula in the papoose, dressed in her yeti suit. It appeared she was slightly underwhelmed with the walk, as she proceeded to fall fast asleep.

As we continued to walk, a few drops of moisture began to fall, but we carried on upwards because we were tantalisingly close to the furthermost point of the walk. However, our destination lived up to the meteorological spelling of its name and the weather really started to fall. We decided it would be wise to backtrack to the car, which was a wise decision, as our trousers had become significantly wet, with real North Yorkshire rain.

Paula, Dan and a baby yeti

We returned as quickly as we could to the car and then the house, one of the main reasons for the speed being the need to keep Willow as dry as possible. I'm sure Dan wouldn't have minded becoming extremely wet, although I'm not quite as sure about the rest of us. Once at the house, we changed clothes and dried off, after which a sandwich lunch was most welcome. Dan and Paula were feeling very tired, so stayed behind to rest (as much as you can rest with Willow) while Alan and I walked into Hawes.

This took all of five minutes. The centre was surprisingly crowded, as a number of bikers had arrived en masse. Everyone was very friendly in and around the shops and I noted with interest the Yorkshire accent, although I disappointingly didn't hear an *Ee by gum!* or *'appen*. However, I positively felt I was in Yorkshire when I saw a building named Herriot's and with fond memories of *All Creatures Great and Small*, was forced to be really touristy and take a photo.

After calling in at ye olde Spar shoppe, we decided to walk on up t'road to the Wensleydale Creamery. I hadn't actually realised that we were in Wensleydale, home of the famous cheese, so this was a bonus. In fact, I found out later that from Wether Fell, there would have been wide-ranging views over Wensleydale, if only the Wether Fell weather hadn't fallen. I'll stop that now.

There was a thriving, well-stocked gift shop attached to the Creamery that also sold flavoured ice cream. Naturally, we had to sample some of this in order to really experience the holiday feeling. Alan chose ginger, while I chose caramel with butterscotch and I'm happy to say that the ice cream fulfilled its mission very flavoursomely.

All was quiet back at the house when we arrived there and Paula had even made a vegetable stew, which was both flavoursome and wholesome – thank you, Paula. This was followed by strawberries and a quiet evening, except for keeping Willow amused until her bath time, of course. It was clear she loves bath time, if the way she splashes and makes a lot of happy baby noises is anything to go by. Tonight was no exception, as we dried ourselves for the second time that day.

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Willow checks the alphabet is correct on her toy

Monday 16th June

A sunny and bright morning greeted us, or maybe we greeted the morning. Alan and I were due to drive to Lancaster in Lancashire to meet Rachel from the train, while Dan, Paula and Willow were going to visit a viaduct, an easy walk away.

Amazingly, we were all set to leave at sometime past 9 and off we went along the scenic road with fields full of buttercups and the green dales either side, criss-crossed by dry stone walls and dotted with dry stone barns, with the road undulating in between. I was loving the scenery, it was so wild and free.

We actually arrived in Lancaster one and a half hours before Rachel's train was scheduled to arrive. My first impression as I emerged from the car in the long-stay car park was that it was cold, more like a late September day in the south-west. Alan found his bearings (I don't think I have any of those) and we walked into the town centre. It was a pleasant, mostly pedestrianised place, with a light and airy modern feel combined with an interesting historical background.

We took advantage of the modern aspect first and enjoyed a cappuccino and a shared muffin in Caffè Nero. Then we went looking around the shops (still the modern aspect) as Alan was in search of some elusive size 6.5 men's walking sandals. A pair of them, to be precise. He also popped into a camera shop for a quick chat, being *so* much more of a shopper than I am.

It eventually became time to meet Rachel and so we walked up past the castle (the historical aspect). Alan noticed there was barbed wire along the top of the walls, which he presumed was to stop people climbing up the walls.

The train station was small and friendly, but it had several large coaches waiting outside. When Rachel's train arrived, we found out why – due to 'problems' the train was terminating at Lancaster and all passengers had to continue on the coaches. So we met Rachel amid a great throng of people and took some time exiting the station. Once we'd walked to the car park and put Rachel's case in the boot, however, we were free to walk around with her.

After a quick lunch in a rather crowded Marks & Spencer, we then spent a pleasant hour or more walking around, looking for various items. The shopping centre is fairly small, but with a definite good feel to its cobbled streets (the historical aspect). Interestingly, the cobbles themselves were larger than the cobbles in Plymouth, which may or may not be a localised tradition.

After we'd taken our few purchases back to the car, we headed for the castle. It was quite big but extremely well-preserved. As we were marching boldly up to the entrance, though, Rachel wondered if it was shut, as the heavy, big black door was closed. If so, this was bad luck, as all three of us love a good castle.

Then, still striding onwards and upwards, we saw a woman knock on the door, which was opened by a prison officer. Lancaster Castle appeared to be Lancaster HM Prison! This was odd, as prior internet searching had said it was open to the public daily and when we later found a leaflet in Tourist Information, that too said it was open, so maybe there are specified times? (NB: The castle served as a prison until March 2011.)

Slightly mystified, we returned once more to the car park and drove back along the scenic road, with only one slight detour into a small, pretty village by mistake. As we left Lancashire and once again entered North Yorkshire, Rachel said that her first sight of the dales and peaks reminded her of someone's first sighting of them in a Jane Austen novel, which was a very literary response.

Alan wanted to stop at a viaduct we'd passed on the way. I'm fully aware that viaducts and aqueducts are feats of brilliant engineering, but I find I'm still unable to appreciate them much and am afraid to say I even find them a bit on the boring side. Still, we went for a short walk, which turned out to be a rather breezy, chilly short walk along a path. A train happened to come conveniently across the top of the viaduct, which was good for Alan's photographic purposes.

The scenic drive continued until we reached the house. All was quiet, but that didn't last for long, as Willow was fretful. The rest of the day was spent in the usual late afternoon to evening pursuits of eating, dish washing, Willow bathing and watching some TV. As we went to bed, it was still a little light and the moon was rising from behind the peak we can see from our bedroom window.

Tuesday 17th June

Once the morning tasks, including keeping Willow amused, had been completed, Daniel suggested we all set off from the house on a short walk. It was dry, but rather windy as we traversed through fields with masses upon masses of buttercups. In fact, traversing through fields of buttercups on a dry but rather windy morning definitely refreshed the spirits, not to mention people (us).

Another notable feature of this walk was the particular type of stile we had to climb up and pass through fairly frequently, so as to cross from field to field. They were made of solid stone and were in no way large enough for people of a certain width to pass through. We also came across a number of ramshackle dry-stone barns that looked as if they had originally been very well constructed to withstand the North Yorkshire weather. The ubiquitous and rather lovely dry-stone walls were also a sight in perfect keeping with the wild, natural landscape.

Dan consults the map

Dan still consults the map

I was surprised to realise we were walking along a part of the Pennine Way. For some reason I kept being surprised by how far north we were, as well as how much cooler it was in these northern parts compared to down south in Cornwall.

The sheep and cows we came across looked quite similar, though, but some sheep we saw during the holiday appeared unshorn and therefore rather scruffy. The shorn ones looked much prettier. At one point on our walk, a farmer came along with some cows. "They won't touch you," he said comfortingly, as they came up close and personal and rather comparatively large to us.

Dan's short walk went on and on, until it dawned on me that yes, it was indeed one of Dan's 'short' walks, which meant it was at least a medium walk. We stopped for two cereal bar breaks and to me, that isn't exactly a short walk – but it was a very good walk and I enjoyed it, especially with all those buttercups.

The latter part of the walk was near a river, close to a waterfall, but sadly the waterfall was rather short of water and therefore quite unremarkable. After emerging into more fields, we suddenly entered a housing area and were soon in the centre of Hawes, where a market was in progress. Some fresh fish was purchased, along with a home-made ginger cake from the baker's shop and a few more bits and pieces from the exceptionally handy Spar shop.

It was then back to the house for a late lunch of sandwiches, crisps and salad, although Willow was happy with milk and some apple and banana baby food. Upon discussion of what to do with the rest of the afternoon, Dan and Paula decided to stay at the house with Willow, while Alan, Rachel and I walked the short distance into Hawes. It was very cloudy, but fortunately didn't rain.

Alan bought a hat and a pair of gloves from an outdoor shop, so was very pleased. We then walked to the Wensleydale Creamery to show Rachel the gift shop (to where we shall be returning before we depart). On this occasion, however, I was the only one to indulge in an ice cream. To be honest, though, it was simply pleasant to be out and about, making the most of the day.

We walked back to the house for a fish stir-fry made with the tasty fish from the market. Then the evening proceeded along its normal course, with the usual delightful task of amusing Willow, who seems to find feet of great interest. We later all watched a DVD together – *Hot Fuzz*, which was mad and amusing. As we prepared for bed, the sky over the peak visible from our bedroom window was very cloudy and more than a little moody.

Willow delicately tests Grandad's sock for freshness

Wednesday 18th June

The day started at 07:00 and was a bit overcast, but there was no heavy rain and wind like the forecast said. Therefore, five people and a baby left the house at 10 and headed for Bolton Castle, about half an hour's drive away. The distant peaks were hidden in low grey cloud, but gradually a small patch of blue sky began to show. The roads were fairly undulating and narrow, although not as narrow as West Country lanes, with a few villages en route.

It had begun to drizzle with rain a little when we arrived at Bolton Castle, near the innovatively named village of Castle Bolton, as it happened. It was a big, impressive building, built in the 14th century and oozing with history in a way that only castles do. The entrance wasn't clearly marked, but Alan marched up some stone steps and opened a big door at the top. Fortunately, it *was* the castle entrance and not another prison.

Rachel and Alan consider the mistakes of a past life

Bolton Castle began its life as a crenellated manor house, built by Richard, 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton, between 1379 and 1399. Remarkably, the castle is still owned by the Scrope family and is a good example of a quadrangular castle. Mary Queen of Scots had been held prisoner in the castle from July 1568 until January 1569, when she had been moved to Tutbury in Staffordshire.

It was cold inside the castle and not a little forbidding, with the rain dripping a little on us in places such as the courtyard. Like so many English castles, it had been slighted in the English Civil War, although much of it survived.

As we wandered around looking at the relics, it was made quite atmospheric by some chanting monks' music in the background. I'm not sure if monks had any particular association with the castle, but if I ever return, I shall make it my business to check out the history properly beforehand!

We all took our time walking around the different parts of the castle, climbing up and down a number of stone steps. One part of the castle was definitely more of a ruin than the other, more furnished part. After looking at the view from the top, we then descended into the tea room below and enjoyed a coffee break, complete with some home-made cakes. Willow was good the whole time, looking all around her with great interest and a variety of different expressions as usual. I'd really love to know what she's thinking:

'What kind of strange place is this?'

After driving back to the house, we had scrambled eggs on toast for lunch, then deliberated about the afternoon. Dan looked on the map and found a likely looking place amid the Dales with a tea room. However, Paula was tired and Dan said he was happy to stay behind. So, it was just Alan, Rachel and me venturing out in the afternoon rain – yes, real rain by then!

It was a dramatic road, the sort Dan would have enjoyed, with great swathes of hillsides, rifts, peaks and valley beds far below. Sadly, the view was obscured by the rain, but it was still quite a ride and reminded me a little of northern Italy.

We arrived at the very tiny village of Muker, which seemed to be a handful of houses, a shop, a pub and a tea room (in somebody's house). As we stopped, it absolutely poured with rain, so we sat in the car and waited until it lessened before venturing into a stranger's front room for a cream tea. The strangers were very welcoming, though, just the right mix of friendly without being over-friendly. The cream tea was really good too and this is praise indeed from someone who has known Devonshire and Cornish cream teas almost from birth.

It had stopped raining by the time we left, but there was nothing else we really wanted to do at Muker, so we headed back to the house. As we drove into Hawes, Alan wondered if we should stop at the Spar shop, but due to some confusion and misjudgement, the three of us later ended up walking into Hawes in the increasingly heavy rain. Alan was not particularly amused and I found out my walking shoes had given me a big blister. Still, the mission was accomplished successfully and we were soon sloshing and dripping our way back to the house.

The evening was relaxing, thanks to a tuna and pasta bake made by Dan and Paula, plus wine. This was followed by a rather hilarious interlude when Rachel and I gave Willow her nightly bath. She's such a wriggler:

"Mummy, they've got me!"

Dan, Paula and Willow then departed to bed, while Alan, Rachel and I ate holiday chocolate and watched a programme about a British woman who lived for a month with a tribe in Panama. And so to bed on a grey, rainy, Yorkshire night.

Thursday 19th June

The rain had stopped, but it was quite cloudy. However, as the forecast was for sun, we continued undeterred with our plans for a trip to Goathland in the Esk Valley, where *Heartbeat* is filmed – or Aidensfield to *Heartbeat* devotees.

We were all ready to leave at 09:20 and started the rather long journey, driving for over two hours past some interesting villages and the town of Thirsk, which had the first supermarket (Tesco) we'd seen all week. An interesting landscape feature we passed en route was called the Hole of Horcum. Rachel and I thought it looked like a meteor crash site, but on reading Dan's account of his and Paula's North Yorkshire walk in 2006, I see it's actually caused by the action of springs. I don't think meteors have springs. Disappointing.

The car park at Goathland was decidedly crowded, with several coach loads, so clearly Aidensfield is a popular tourist attraction. The plan was to walk to a place called Grosmont, where we would catch the steam train back to Goathland.

It was very windy indeed and the first thing that struck me was that Goathland is full of freely wandering sheep, who seem to have a predilection for pooing on the pavements. Perhaps it should be called Sheephland? It all somehow added to the atmosphere, though, which seemed a carefree acknowledgement of times past, when life seemed far simpler. Yes, I know I sound incredibly old, but I'm actually only talking about the 1960s…

We started our walk to Grosmont in green surroundings, mostly close by a river and less windy once on the path. We stopped to eat a sandwich lunch along the way and when we continued, I was surprised to see a couple of cows in what looked like someone's garden. Upon perusal of Dan's writings, he also saw "cows with pointy horns", but his cows are sitting down and mine are standing up!

Very pointy horns

Willow seemed to enjoy the sights as we walked along and several women seemed to enjoy the sight of Willow, stopping to coo in her direction. She just looked at them with her grey eyes and accepted the adulation. There were lots of trees on the walk and many steps, up and down. It seemed quite a long walk, but the latter part of it was on a well-defined broad path – the Rail Trail, in fact. As we neared our destination two hours or so after starting out, the Rail part of the Trail was apparent, a veritable dream come true for steam train enthusiasts.

On arrival at Grosmont, the station itself was kitted out in the way an old-style station would have been, although with the addition of a modern café selling modern snacks. We gratefully took time out to sit down and rest with some refreshments, waiting for the next train. Rachel remarked that the length of our walk today had been just about right and I agreed, as any longer and it would have turned into one of Daniel's 'short' walks.

A train enthusiast's paradise

The steam train arrived and we joined the slightly mad rush to embark. People going to Goathland were restricted to the end three carriages, which meant a further distance to jostle along the platform, but we all found seats, with Alan, Dan and Willow in one place and the rest of us in another. It was about a 15-minute journey, which seemed too short, but it was very pleasant and relaxing.

We disembarked at windy Goathland and wandered along to see the Aidensfield sights, namely the Aidensfield Arms, the phone box on the village green in front of the general store and Scripp's garage complete with old cars of the era.

The price of petrol these days…

I'm sure there were lots of other places we missed, but the others were tired and politely bored. Also, it was a reasonably long way back. It was also very crowded, as I found out when I tried to go into Scripp's garage, dual-tasking as a gift shop. It was a bit difficult to take good photos, but I did manage a few.

The Aidensfield Arms

The drive back was tiring, especially for the drivers (Alan and Dan). The two cars made their way back separately, as Willow was apparently crying a lot soon after we left, so Dan and Paula stopped to feed her, while we carried on.

We did, in fact, stop later at Thirsk for petrol and a drink, as well as a quick saunter around Tesco for some bits and pieces of food, although all we really wanted to do was get back to the house in order to relax. The weather had been fine all day, if not really windy, but as we approached Hawes, the rain clouds looked heavy and threatening.

Tea was the remains of last night's pasta bake plus carrots, followed by some strawberries. The rain did come, but it passed over fairly quickly and the evening was reasonably sunny. Alan and Rachel attempted to bath Willow, but she was tired and cried, instead of the usual smiling and splashing. From the kitchen window, Dan and I noticed two rabbits in the back garden. There's quite a lot of wildlife in the field behind us and probably in the field in front of us, too.

Dan, Paula and Willow went up the generously proportioned staircase between 8 and 9, while Alan, Rachel and I stayed up till 10 – wow! Last day tomorrow.

Friday 20th June

Time seems to have passed so quickly. Today was another day of white and grey clouds, but there was a fair amount of blue sky in the mix. Willow had been very wakeful in the night and Rachel had woken with a sore throat, but we had a relaxed breakfast of croissants and pain au chocolat from the Thirsk Tesco. It was then time to get ready, but ready for what? That was the trouble really, we couldn't arrive at any real decision.

However, by about 11:30, Dan, Paula and Willow had opted for a walk into Hawes, while Alan, Rachel and I had opted for a visit to Richmond, which was a promising sounding Georgian market town with the bonus of a castle.

We drove along some very pretty roads for about 45 minutes, found the long-stay car park and walked the short distance into the town square. There was a sudden shower of rain, so we took the opportunity to take shelter in The King's Head, the nearest likely-looking pub. Despite its rather boring and common name, it was a little upmarket, if the comfy chairs and the price of food were anything to go by. We enjoyed ourselves in the comfy chairs, though, with a welcome drink and a cheese wrap with salad each.

By the time we ventured outside again, it was sunny. Richmond Castle was very close by, so we eagerly headed up the hill for a visit. The castle had been built in the years following the Norman Conquest, on a rocky promontory above the river Swale and its claim to fame is being the best-preserved early Norman castle in England. As well as the castle itself, we took some time perusing an interesting exhibition of its history, from the 11th century to when conscientious objectors were incarcerated there in the First World War.

There was even a lovely little garden we came across and since Rachel was suffering a little with her sore throat, we sat by ourselves in the peaceful garden for a while. We'd been surprised that there hadn't been many people in the castle at all, although to be honest, that added to the pleasure of the visit.

A ruinous part with a pretty bit of wall

An unexpected, peaceful garden

Upon leaving, we discovered from the lady in the castle shop *why* there had been a lack of visitors. She explained that the Second Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment had been given the freedom of Richmond and were shortly due to parade through the town with their bayonets. They were celebrating their return from a 6-month tour in Afghanistan, where two members of their regiment had unfortunately been killed.

Alan attempted to hurry back to the car park to avoid a possible traffic hold-up, but as we approached the car park, we could hear the unmistakeable and rousing sound of the band. Then they were there, right beside where we were standing. There were lots of them marching down the road, creating a very evocative and impressive sight. I was sure members of their families must have been there somewhere and imagined how proud they must be feeling. I was secretly pleased that we'd been caught up in the parade.

Given the freedom of Richmond

A little while later, we returned to the car and drove back to Hawes along a road that was very green and leafy. To my delight, we were then on the same road we'd travelled on Wednesday to Muker and back, but this time the view of the stunning scenery wasn't almost totally obliterated by rain.

After arriving at the house, Alan and I nipped out to the Wensleydale Creamery to buy some souvenirs, before returning for a triple birthday celebration. Dan's, Paula's and Rachel's birthdays are within ten days of each other, so as we were all together for once, it seemed a good idea to celebrate with birthday cake and a session of present opening.

This passed an enjoyable hour or so. Willow was very intrigued by everything, especially the lit candles on the cake and the wrapping paper. She seemed quite excited and was blowing raspberries, smiling and wriggling for Britain.

Spaghetti bolognaise was the dish of the day, then it was winding-down time. Alan and Rachel successfully gave Willow her bath and we passed the evening quietly watching television and doing puzzles. We were too tired to pack…

Saturday 21st June

Going home day! It was also Dan's actual birthday and although it seemed odd to have to leave and not spend the day with him, it had been lovely to spend a week in Hawes together. Willow was in a particularly delightful, smiling mood this morning, which made it extra hard to leave. We were taking Rachel home to Bristol on our way back to Saltash, so the partings were slightly staggered.

We were ready to leave at just before 10:00 and the long journey began. I was really sorry to leave the North Yorkshire roads behind, with their individual, pretty and often remote villages, amid all the rolling green countryside. Apart from a slight detour on to the M6 toll road by mistake (rectified rather magnificently by Rachel and her map reading skills, but still costing us £3.50 to leave the toll road) our journey was tedious but safe and we arrived home with Hawes and North Yorkshire merely a memory.

I really enjoyed our brief foray into the dales, villages and castles of North Yorkshire, through the buttercup fields, the Rail Trail and the intriguing sounding place names. There seem to be so many places we would have liked to visit that I'd love to come back – but next time I'm taking a good supply of warm clothing!