

Victory at Last!

Tuesday 19th June 2012, 6.32p.m.
Kirk Yetholm:
we'd done it! A record of sorts had been set for the Pennine Way, the whole chain from Edale to the Scottish borders - it had taken 26 years.

Killer Bogs

This had not been the plan. Back in 1986 we were young, we were fit, we were indestructible. The challenge of running the length of the Way was irresistible. Seasoned marathon runners both, climbing the gentle valley of Grindsbrook we were full of youthful over-confidence that lasted all of four days. That's how long it took to 'die' in the Eden valley after 160 miles, worn down by bogs, rain, some dubious map reading and simple fatigue, or as an elderly friend expressed it, 'tired with a capital K.'

The bogs were the killer. Evil black sumps swallowed trainers and originally white socks, leaving knotted thighs resembling a pair of fishnet tights. As day succeeded day, we arrived later at youth hostels and left earlier, yet still the Way stretched endlessly northwards, mileage distressingly high.

Bogs punctuated the entire route, most succulent(sic) in Derbyshire, but it was those high in the upper Tees valley that finished us, where dented red military notices assured us that even if the bogs didn't claim us, the bullets and bombs



surely would. The descent of a dusk-shrouded High Cup Nick was the finale; next day came retreat back to the dry flatlands of our native Milton Keynes. Pennine Way? Not in our worst nightmares.

40 Shades of Green

But June 2012, newly retired, the dream awoke - to complete the journey, albeit at a more leisurely pace.

The portents were not promising. Rising early at Dufton, winds whipped across the slopes of Cross Fell driving the rain against our hoods with the rattle of an automatic gun-stapler. The summit was a white-out followed by a long and winding trapeze down the Corpse Road. Thereafter, Hadrian's Wall rode the crest of the Whin Sill like a roller coaster before the Kielder Forest wrapped us in its clammy embrace, complete with resident midges.

Then the final day, 25 miles up into the Cheviots, across Windy Gyle and The Schil with their seemingly global views. No rain, few bogs and, at last, sunshine, bathing the Lammermuir Hills in what the old Irish song called 'forty shades of green.' Rarely can a pseudo-record have been so fulfilling.

The victory, ultimately, was ours!

Bob Forster