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EDALE – CROWDEN

‘The cockpit of the battle for access’

It was a low-key beginning to the walk, which despite all the build-up felt appropriate now that the moment of departure had finally arrived. There was no great fanfare, no speeches, just a buzz of nervy anticipation at the prospect ahead and an eagerness to get away. I went through what would become the familiar routine of shouldering my pack, checking that nothing had been left behind and confirming which direction to set off in, then waving goodbye to anyone who happened to be standing nearby and looking in my direction. In this case it was my wife, since she had driven me to Edale.

I posed for a few photos by the smart new Pennine Way wall plaque and carved oak gate, which shows the route in a central panel. Both were specially installed in April 2015 by the Peak District National Park Ranger Service as part of the Pennine Way’s 50th anniversary. Across the lane stood the Old Nags Head, a handsome and historic pub, long associated with both the trail and the rambling movement generally. So, too, is the aptly named Rambler Inn just down the road, once called the Church Hotel and also popular with Pennine Wayfarers. But 9.30 in the morning is too early to be in a pub, even if it happens to be open, and I had a long way to walk.

The weather seemed rather muted, too, with the leaden skies of north Derbyshire making for a grey and rather silent Edale valley. After leaving the village and crossing a couple of fields, I reached the top of a short slope and paused to take stock. I recall two thoughts quite clearly. First, after all the preparation and planning, I was actually walking the Pennine Way – it had begun, it was for real! Forget all the chatter, just get on and walk the damn thing. The second was that it wasn’t raining. If this sounds pessimistic, it was largely because the forecast for the day was poor and I had set off in a heavy waterproof coat. But now, having plodded uphill, I was hot, so I peeled off an outer layer and immediately felt fresher and more alive to my surroundings.

I confidently resumed my stride across the hillside towards the head of the valley. I could really tackle just about anything now, I told myself. Within half an hour, it was raining.

To take my mind off the weather, I mused as I walked: why, I wondered, does the Pennine Way begin (or end) at Edale? Why not start it at nearby Castleton, larger and more accessible and overlooked by the shapely dome of Mam Tor? Or at a point further south in the limestone uplands of the Peak District, where arguably the Pennines as a continuous body of high ground (it's not really a proper chain of hills) really finish, eventually tapering off into the Trent valley? Over the years, Ashbourne, Leek and even Dovedale have been suggested as alternative start/finish points.

However, unlike Castleton or Ashbourne, where the streets tend to be thronged by tourists, Edale's clientele is dominated by more adventurous and hard-nosed outdoor types. Ever since Edale station was opened over a century ago, trains from Manchester and Sheffield have routinely disgorged crowds of ramblers every Saturday and Sunday; and long before the Pennine Way was opened, this otherwise small and unassuming village was where you headed if you were serious about walking in the Peak District.

Looking around the narrow valley, hemmed in by crags and ridges, it was also clear that Edale is where the really high stuff begins. It signals the start of the Dark Peak, named after the underlying millstone grit that forms the lofty moorlands covering the northern half of the national park. It's a sombre landscape of largely horizontal lines, bare and unpopulated, most of it above the 1500ft mark and with a peat overlay that can create boggy and uncompromising conditions. But rather than geology, I suspect that the Pennine Way's departure point owes more to the historical issue of public access, and in particular to the celebrated hill that loomed above me now – Kinder Scout.

It is hard for today's generation of walkers, including Pennine Way users like myself, to appreciate that within living memory you simply weren't allowed on over 50 square miles of Kinder Scout and Bleaklow (the next major moorland to the north). In the early decades of the last century, it was reckoned to be the largest area of privately owned land

in England from which the general public were completely excluded. A small army of gamekeepers made sure, sometimes robustly, that it was kept that way, so that the heather moors remained the grouse-shooting preserve of the rich owners and their guests. Open access, national trails, definitive maps of public rights of way – there was none of this for ramblers back in the 1930s. The uplands had been effectively privatised following the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries, so that much of the high Pennines was acquired by a handful of wealthy owners who curtailed public access. As workers began to pour out of the burgeoning industrial cities either side of the Pennines every weekend looking for open-air recreation, the sense of injustice grew and ramblers became more militant. Nowhere in the Peak District embodied this sense of public exclusion more than Kinder Scout. Speaking many years after the Pennine Way was eventually opened, its creator, Tom Stephenson, described Kinder Scout as 'the cockpit of the battle for access' and, for him, the trail simply had to start here.

Indeed, if there's a hill in the South Pennines that matches the pre-eminence of the Pennine Way, then it's probably Kinder Scout. Like the Pennine Way, it has a distinctive character and a reputation all of its own, even a spiritual pull for some people. It isn't just that it's high (2000ft), but it also feels seriously big. The summit plateau stretches almost 15 square miles and is made up of giant mounds or waves of dark chocolate-coloured peat, known as hags, and patches of bog and rough vegetation. Dotted about are weirdly shaped tors and it is fringed by precipitous rock edges. On Kinder Scout, you know you're on something high and expansive that commands respect; but you also know that the Pennine Way goes across it.

Despite the unpromising weather, I made good progress along well-walked tracks to the head of the valley and within the hour I was puffing up a steep, stone-pitched pathway known as Jacob's Ladder, which was once a well-used packhorse route. It seemed to rise vertically above me onto the broad south-western flank of Kinder Scout and, although I knew the path quite well, I could tell that I hadn't walked it carrying a full backpack before. I paused at the top, gasping for breath, as the mist and rain enveloped me.

Visibility was down to just a few feet and it was cold, wet and hostile. And this was early July. I carefully followed the path past the trig point on Kinder Low and along the rocky edge of the summit plateau to Kinder Downfall. A couple of fellrunners appeared momentarily out of the gloom, then were instantly swallowed up by it once again. Soon I reached the Downfall, a narrow chasm where the Kinder river gurgles over a rocky shelf, tumbling down the steep rocky hillside far below. In really fierce conditions, the wind is funnelled up this defile and can blast the water high into the air in vertical plumes of spray; and in exceptionally cold winter conditions, the water freezes over the rocks in a white waterfall, providing ice climbing for the seriously intrepid.

When the Pennine Way was officially opened in 1965, the route from Edale to Kinder Downfall was not along the valley to Jacob's Ladder and around the outer edge of Kinder Scout, as it is now, but directly up the hillside and then across its boggy and featureless centre. From Edale village, walkers headed straight up the steep slopes of Grindsbrook Clough beyond the Old Nags Head – a 1750ft rocky scramble beside a lively stream. Just minutes from the start, this must have been a baptism of fire for most long-distance walkers carrying a full pack. If they managed it without mishap, the next challenge was negotiating the bog. There are plenty of hair-raising stories of walkers not just sinking into the oozing peat but getting totally disorientated by the myriad peat hags, especially when the weather closed in. And this was just the opening challenge on day 1 of the Pennine Way. It was as if it had been deliberately designed to weed out the ill-prepared and uncommitted. One experienced Pennine Way walker described this first stage to me as 'a real granny stopper'.

Even in the mist I had glimpsed patches of erosion around Kinder Low; but although the boots of Pennine Way walkers had certainly churned up the bare peat since the early days and the route across the middle had progressively worsened, Kinder Scout's environmental problems are much more complex. Ironically, the same hills that the factory workers from the early 20th century fought so hard to access bear the scars of 150 years of atmospheric pollution, as the toxic smoke from Manchester's coal-fired textile industry blew across the high ground of the Peak District and left a devastating legacy in the form of

acid rain and heavy metals. It killed off most of the sphagnum moss that once covered the peat and acted like a giant protective sponge, and any remaining vegetation was further ravaged by the unchecked grazing of sheep and periodic fires. Ramblers' boots simply compounded the problem. The water table dropped, the bare peat dried out and either blew away or was carried off by water, and an ecological disaster unfolded. The most badly damaged peat had the same acidity as lemon juice and almost nothing was able to grow on it.

Writer and long-distance walker John Hillaby, who came through here on the Pennine Way in the 1960s, famously referred to the eroded top of Kinder Scout as an example of 'land at the end of its tether'. In his book *Journey Through Britain*, he described how all life had been drained out or burnt off, and how any green covering had all but disappeared so that just the exposed banks of dark-brown peat remained. 'Manure is the analogy that comes most readily to mind,' he observed. 'The top of Kinder Scout looks as if it's entirely covered in the droppings of dinosaurs.'

Although some professed to enjoy the so-called sport of 'bog trotting', the worsening conditions on the summit meant that the Jacob's Ladder path around Kinder's western edge, first identified as a wet-weather alternative, eventually became the officially recommended route. At the time, and when the new National Trail Guide that appeared in 1990 showed only the Jacob's Ladder route, there were protests from the Ramblers' Association and the Pennine Way Council, who claimed that the Countryside Commission was not following correct procedures for varying the route of a national trail and that both routes should still be shown. However, back in 1951, the year the Pennine Way was designated and over a decade before it was formally opened, the Sheffield and Peak District branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England held a Local Pennine Way Conference at Edale, where some speakers registered their unease that a waymarked path could be routed across the middle of Kinder Scout in the first place. Might it not compromise the mountain's wild spirit, some asked, or lead novice ramblers into difficulties?

In the end, of course, the Pennine Way did indeed go up Grindsbrook Clough and across the centre of Kinder Scout, without

signposts or a prominent line of cairns; and despite it being switched to Jacob's Ladder, the original route is still a public right of way (and it's all designated open access land anyway) so you can still walk it if you choose. But, as I tried to shelter from the gusting rain to check the map, shivering slightly despite several layers of clothing, I couldn't help but think that the bigger challenge for the novice Pennine Way walker is simply getting over Kinder Scout in the first place.

There were some other ramblers dotted about the Downfall, huddling in slender rock crevices munching soggy sandwiches and looking stoical. I decided to power on through the murk and get off the summit. At the far north-western tip of Kinder Scout, the path descended steeply to Ashop Head and, all of a sudden, I dropped below the cloud line, the rain stopped and at last I could see. Below me, the Pennine Way veered right at Mill Hill on a long, slabbed path across Featherbed Moss. To the left, a path came up a small side valley called William Clough, on its way from distant Hayfield. It was along here, on Sunday 24 April 1932, that a group of ramblers answered a blast on a whistle by leaving the established right of way to scramble up the slopes in defiance of a line of gamekeepers. It was to become one of the most celebrated moments in the history of the outdoor access movement and, looking back now, was inextricably linked to the ensuing long fight to create the Pennine Way.

The story of the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass has been told many times and there's no need to repeat it in great detail here, except to underline how completely Kinder Scout was out of bounds to the general public. Access was restricted to a handful of relatively short and hard-won public rights of way, all of which kept off the really high ground. The actual trespass itself was relatively brief and by all accounts the group from Hayfield didn't actually get to the very top of Kinder Scout, but it was nevertheless a highly symbolic act. They met up with a contingent who had come over from Sheffield, probably around 400 strong in total, and both groups soon returned their separate ways. In fact, many of the established ramblers' federations didn't support the trespass, amid claims that the organisers, the left-wing British Workers' Sports Federation, were hijacking the campaign for their own political ends. One or two leading ramblers even felt that the wider battle for

access would actually be put back by their actions. Despite this, the event made lurid newspaper headlines, not so much because of the trespass itself but due to the harsh reprisals that followed. Following arrests, five ramblers were found guilty on charges of occasioning bodily harm and incitement to cause a riotous assembly, and were sentenced to jail for terms ranging from two to six months. It added to the sense of injustice and galvanised public opinion further. A few weeks later, up to 10,000 ramblers took part in a rally in the Winnats Pass, in the Peak District near Castleton, to call for greater public access.

Although the campaigners might not have seen eye to eye over the Kinder Scout event, with some at the time suggesting that the trespass itself would soon be forgotten, it was in fact one of a series of rallies and protests that were steadily growing in number and intensity as people objected to the denial of basic public access. As far back as 1826, a court case at Flixton, near Manchester, had been fought over the closure of local paths. It led to the formation of the Manchester Association for the Preservation of Ancient Public Footpaths, which later became the Peak & Northern Footpaths Society, whose familiar and reassuring dark-green signposts still guide ramblers across the Pennines to this day. (In fact, there are a number of these signposts on this opening stage of the Pennine Way, perhaps most helpfully a low post at a path junction on Mill Hill indicating the direction of the Pennine Way to the Snake Pass Inn and Bleaklow.) Seventy years later, in 1896 there was a celebrated trespass on Winter Hill, in the West Pennine Moors above Bolton, when local people protested against the landowner's decision to close off a well-used public right of way.

At first glance, this fight for the freedom of the open moors might seem a little disconnected from the Pennine Way, which was opened over three decades after the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass took place; but the genesis of Britain's first long-distance path lies in the struggle for the right to walk in the hills – a struggle that defined the modern access movement and ultimately secured the freedoms that we now enjoy today. It's no coincidence that the Pennine Way begins in Britain's first national park, the Peak District, created by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, which also, of course, paved the way for long-distance paths. A little over 50 years later, the Peak

District was also where the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 was officially rolled out, extending a right of open access to mapped mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land and opening up further significant areas of the Pennines. Indeed, in the Peak District National Park alone, it more than doubled the amount of accessible open country to over 200 square miles. As I began to learn on my journey northwards, the Pennine Way's story is about far more than a simple path.

I trotted along the straight and seemingly unending line of paving stones across Featherbed Moss with something akin to renewed vigour. Looking back, I could just make out the impressive rocky battlements of Kinder's upper northern face. Once they disappeared from sight into the mist, I plodded on and, after what seemed like ages, finally reached the top of the Snake Pass, where the trail crosses the A57. It's a featureless and rather forlorn place. I took some photos, mainly I think just to record the fact that I had got there.

The Snake Pass has itself played a part in the great Pennine Way adventure, albeit rather a sorry one. There are tales of miserable, limping walkers throwing in the towel when they reach the A57, less than ten miles from the start at Edale, and wearily trudging the two and a half miles down the road to the Snake Pass Inn, or even west to Glossop. Others use the location to jettison unwanted items. A national park ranger told me that they regularly find what they believe is the detritus from Pennine Way walkers dumped by the side of the road. Apparently the most commonly found items are lightweight tents and tins of baked beans.

Over the years, the rangers have quite frequently had to come to the aid of Pennine Way walkers in difficulties. Until he retired in 2002, Gordon Miller was a national park ranger for over three decades and for much of that time covered Kinder Scout and the start of the Pennine Way from his home at Edale. He and three other volunteer rangers walked the entire path in 1966, but after that most of his work was spent assisting fellow walkers, since he also helped out with the local mountain rescue team. After completing my Pennine Way walk, I met up with him in the Old Nags Head at Edale and he remembered

a particular episode. 'One day we had a call that a Pennine Way chap had fallen over some rocks and was hurt. We went up to find that his backpack was so huge and so heavy, piled high above his head with all kinds of stuff, that when he stopped to peer over some rocks he literally toppled over as his centre of gravity shifted and he lost control. He fell some way and was quite badly hurt, with broken bones, but we got him down OK. However, it took two of us to carry his pack down the hill because it was so heavy.'

Gordon (who during his 34 years at the national park was affectionately known as 'Gordon the Warden') also recalled some of the other bizarre sights witnessed at the start of the Pennine Way during the early days of the trail. Brenda Smith, former landlady of the Church Hotel (now the Rambler Inn), told him about the Japanese gentleman who set off to walk the Pennine Way in the late 1960s with a donkey – to the understandable bemusement of local people. Although no one knows exactly what happened, apparently he returned three days later, tied up his beast at Edale and set off again to walk the path, but this time on his own.

'In the early 1970s, there was also an enterprising reporter from the *Daily Express* who declared he was going to complete the Pennine Way on horseback,' remembered Gordon. 'He took the Jacob's Ladder route but found it hard work and at the end of the day had only reached Kinder Low. He camped below the summit, but unfortunately his horse bolted during the night and after that he packed it all in.'

Perhaps the strangest sight, from the early 1970s, was a man that Gordon encountered walking down Grindsbrook Clough who said he was finishing his Pennine Way walk from north to south tossing a caber the whole way. 'He was wearing a kilt but had a proper rucksack and boots,' recalled Gordon. 'He seemed entirely normal and rational, except for the fact that every few strides he was heaving a small telegraph pole in front of him and said he had been doing that all the way from Scotland.'

Beyond the Snake Pass is Bleaklow, a huge, lofty morass of wet and inhospitable moorland that is every bit as inviting as its name. Dutchman Gerard de Waal, writing about his Pennine Way walk in the

1980s, describes Bleaklow as an 'indeterminate wilderness of peatbogs' and tells of how he and his companion frequently became submerged up to their waists. For such an unpleasant and presumably hair-raising experience, his description of how they extricated themselves is remarkably composed and matter of fact. 'When it happened – it is always unexpected – we kept calm. We found, by experimenting, that you should not try to withdraw one leg at a time because the full body weight applied on the other leg will make you sink further. Another real danger is that suction will remove your boot, leaving you in a terrible predicament. The practical answer was to bend our bodies forward until they were supported by the ground. And, like members of the Amphibia, we then crawled out of the peat inch by inch, leaving the burbling ooze to settle.'

I shuddered at the thought of immersion, to any depth, in this cold black quagmire, but luckily conditions have improved since then. Still, Bleaklow's upper slopes were wreathed in dark and threatening clouds and the omens were not good that afternoon. The long and winding path made its way over a sandy depression and up into the mist, then it started raining again. There was absolutely nothing to see – no views, no wildlife, no people. Bleaklow Head looked like something out of a 1970s horror film; if a lumbering creature had emerged from behind a rock or jumped out of a swampy hole, I wouldn't have been surprised. The summit was marked by a pile of stones with a long pole crudely sticking out of its top, as though someone had been hastily buried on a battlefield. I think it was more by luck than by judgement that I found my way off the top of the hill. I bumped into a father and his dejected-looking son, who were also trying to escape, and as we exchanged pleasantries it began to really bucket down. When the austere grey shapes of Longdendale emerged from the gloom below, I was relieved. Day 1 on the Pennine Way wasn't meant to be like this, but at least it was almost over.

A couple of hours later, in dry clothes and with a hot cup of tea clasped in my hands, I sat chatting to my B&B hosts at the Old House above Rhodeswood Reservoir. With the closure of Crowden Youth Hostel to individuals a few years ago (group bookings only now), their establishment is one of the few options left for Pennine Way walkers

looking for a roof over their head in this sparsely populated valley. For 17 years, Joanne and her husband James have run a mix of guest house, bunkhouse and café rolled into one, with Pennine Way walkers making up 90 per cent of their overnight customers. So, bearing in mind that they're at the end of most people's first day from Edale, what state are most walkers in when they cross their threshold? Do they get many people wanting to give up? 'Yes, there's some that tell us they've had enough,' replied James. 'They say "I can't do another 260 miles of that", but I tell them you've walked 15 miles from Edale today, then it's 12 miles to Standedge tomorrow – take it each day at a time, it gets much easier!' He paused for a moment and lowered his voice. 'Of course it doesn't, really, but you have to encourage them.'

Even for those that have reached Crowden without mishap, the end of day 1 is a time for reappraising your kit list, as James knows only too well. 'The weight of your pack is absolutely vital and people tend to set off carrying far too much. We have literally bin bags full of gear that walkers have left here, including tents, sleeping bags, clothes, camping stoves – you name it. I make them put their names on the bags and say if they don't come back and claim them by the end of the year they're all going to the charity shops in Glossop.'

Then there are those walkers who, to put it mildly, have drastically underestimated the Pennine Way. 'There was the American man who set off from Edale in patent leather shoes. He made it as far as the Snake Pass but chartered a taxi the rest of the way to us,' said James. 'Another Pennine Way walker who was booked in for the night rang me on his mobile and said he was lost. I asked him to describe the view, what he could see, so I could try and work out where he was. He said he couldn't see anything because he was in a wood. I was a bit puzzled, but I supposed he was already down among the trees of Longdendale. It turned out he had got completely disorientated on Bleaklow and had ended up walking in the opposite direction back into the Ashop valley. He still made it to us, mind you, and carried on the next morning.'

Of course, plenty of Pennine Way walkers have no problems on the opening day – Kinder Scout and Bleaklow in favourable conditions offer invigorating walking – and indeed, some particularly fit and

determined individuals stride on well beyond Crowden. But, James confided, what really riles him are the walkers who have an unrealistic expectation of the Pennine Way and complain that the trail is not properly maintained. 'They imagine the Pennine Way is a clearly defined, well-walked trail and so they moan when they find there aren't signposts all over Bleaklow showing them where to go. They seem to expect a surfaced path the whole length, so they won't get lost. One party who got lost blamed it on the fact that the trail of orange peel they were following just stopped in the middle of the moor. Lots of people don't seem to be able to read a map properly or use a compass, even though they're often carrying them!'

James looked ruefully out of the window at the late afternoon drizzle and shook his head. 'They read some online diary of a bloke who's yomped it over from Edale in five hours and then are surprised when it takes them over eight and they're utterly exhausted.'

My conversation with James was given added poignancy by the arrival of two other Pennine Way guests that night. They traipsed in wearily and wetly some time after 7pm, having taken the best part of nine hours to cover the 15 miles from Edale. Both in their 60s and evidently ill-equipped for a long-distance walk, the two men had got lost on Bleaklow and had walked half way to Glossop before working out where they were.

Later on, in the pub at Padfield, I gently tried to coax more of their story out of them. How, for instance, had they been navigating? It turned out that one had been using a mapping program on a small hand-held electronic device. Some sort of GPS? No, just a free download from a website; but the rain had got into it and apparently the thing hadn't loaded properly anyway. What about a guidebook? Surely they had a Pennine Way guidebook between them? The second man fished a small, rather soggy hardback volume out of his pocket and passed it to me. It was Wainwright's *Pennine Way Companion*, the once popular if somewhat idiosyncratic guide to the trail written by the famous fellwanderer just three years after the trail was officially opened. Since the 1990s, the book had been revised several times to take account of route changes, new paved sections and so on. I flicked to the front to check which of the

recent versions they were using and was astounded to see that it was an original copy, published in 1968. They had been navigating using out-of-date maps and an uncorrected route description that was almost as old as me. I didn't see them at breakfast the next day and learnt later that they had given up that morning.

It is very easy to chuckle at people who set out in the wrong footwear, or to disapprove of those who can't use a compass properly and who get hopelessly lost on the moors, but at some point or other most of us have been out of our comfort zone in the great outdoors. Arguably, the only way to achieve and develop as an individual is to push yourself to the very edge and test the limit of your ability. For me, it's summed up by a slogan that used to adorn the front cover of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers magazine: 'The man who never was lost, never went very far'.

Of the many Pennine Way guidebooks and articles I dipped into before I embarked on my own walk, one of the most thought-provoking was a short piece by Dr A Smith and Mr M Imrie in the 1985 *Pennine Way Booking Bureau* booklet, published by the Youth Hostels Association (YHA). The two men had successfully completed the Pennine Way in 1984, but both were interested in the effect that it had on their bodies and minds, even though one was already a marathon runner. The back story lay partly in the fact that YHA wardens along the Pennine Way were concerned about the number of walkers who didn't complete the trail because they were fundamentally ill-equipped and ill-prepared. At the time, it was claimed that around a third of walkers attempting the Pennine Way, or at least a third of those staying in youth hostels, gave up, a figure that showed no sign of improving. (A report by the Pennine Way Management Project in 1991 went even further: 'Unsubstantiated opinion suggests a drop-out rate of 70 per cent at the end of the second day, around Standedge to Mankinholes, this massive defeat being the result of exertions on the first two most strenuous and demanding days of the entire expedition.')

In their fascinating and thoughtful article, called 'How to complete the Pennine Way', the two scientists said that amid all the advice on what boots or equipment a prospective Pennine Way walker needed, there was virtually nothing on the main reason for walkers giving

up – 'body chemistry'. The article explained how the first few days on the Pennine Way prove an enormous shock to the system for most people. 'The normal store of muscle glycogen and free blood sugar is used up, giving rise to hypoglycaemia (shortage of blood sugar),' they explained. They went on say that despite the consumption of sweets and energy bars the body will start to access its fat store, but unless you are a regular athlete this turning of fat into sucrose will be a slow and inefficient process to start with. 'You will feel hungry, tired and depressed due to a low blood sugar level. The conversion of food into mechanical energy is inefficient, the majority turning into heat. The body then counters heat by sweating. Sweat is a mixture of water and body salts, mainly sodium chloride. Loss of body liquids and salts can result in partial dehydration leaving you weak and shaking. Most of the essential B vitamins are water-soluble and excessive sweating can result in a temporary deficiency. Such deficiencies will result in a reduced efficiency in converting fat into energy as well as producing depression, irritability, diarrhoea, etc.'

The authors suggested a number of ways to counter these problems, including taking vitamin B supplements, using salt on your food and taking a supply of ripe oranges for liquid and sucrose/energy (but not too many as they can act as a laxative!). And there were four additional tips: take a companion; avoid thinking of the days ahead and concentrate on tonight's objective; pack a good pair of trainers so you can switch from your boots on drier ground or if blisters develop; and use Vaseline on sore patches on your feet in conjunction with stretchy plasters.

The article was written over 30 years ago but the message is still relevant: walking 268 miles in less than three weeks across rough ground in all weathers is an extreme and in most cases unique challenge to the human body, so it pays to do more than simply program the GPS and buy a decent pair of boots by way of preparation.

Mike Imrie went on to walk the Pennine Way a dozen times and for a decade was membership secretary of the Pennine Way Association, so it's fair to say he knows a thing or two about the art of completing a long-distance challenge on foot. He wrote an equally interesting follow-up article (called 'Health Revisited'), this time for the Pennine Way Association's newsletter in spring 1995, in which he looked at how

to achieve the right balance of vitamins and minerals in a long-distance walker's body (in particular, B vitamin complex and vitamin C). As befits a nuclear scientist, it was typically well researched and extremely comprehensive and is worth tracking down to read in full.

However, for northbound walkers contemplating day 2, he and Dr Smith had some crumbs of comfort. They suggest that if you set off from Edale and make it as far as Malham, then your body will have largely adapted to the new regime and you should have overcome any initial problems. And they offer this concluding observation: 'If you complete the walk despite suffering you will be twice the person you were. If you give up you will be diminished. Good luck!'