

FIVE RIDE INTO PENNINE ADVENTURE

GILLY PAYTON

It was some six months since the gang last met up and then only for the day at the Annual Endurance Dinner in November. The last adventure was last summer hols in France at Compiègne for the Europeans so everyone was bubbling with excitement at the next real opportunity for fun together.

Taking the Pennine Bridleway Trials through Derbyshire and the Peak District.

We all met at Arbor Low in Derbyshire for the start of our ride. Arriving on Monday, Heather and Bilbo arrived first to be quickly joined by Sue's Golar in a big flashy horse transporter's lorry. Thankfully Nicola and Dicks Farm had room for him to park and exit. Heather turned the boys out onto a lush paddock together putting Bilbo's spare and very old NZ onto Golar, giving him the appearance of a refugee! But it worked and kept him dry in the ensuing downpour. Polo and Pilgrim arrived soon after, we decided despite the fact none of the other horses had met before we all got on so why shouldn't they, and anyway there was so much grass...so out they went. After an initial we'll canter over and just take a look at each other, oh no we won't we'll just veer off over here and take a look from a distance...within minutes they were all "propping up the bar" exchanging tales so we stopped off to the farmhouse for tea with lots of home made cake...oh yummiie.

Once Sue arrived we sorted out the calf pens stables and brought the horses in, walked over and checked out the Arbor Low Henge, a most impressive circle of stones within a large bank and ditch once an ancient meeting place, before a delicious supper in front of the log fire, with wine thrown in, yes this was our kind of hols.

Next morning we turned the horses out while we mucked out and had breakfast, loaded up and boxed down to the start of the Pennine bridleway at Hartington Station, you could have ridden from the farm and picked up the trail at Parsley Hay where there is a large shop which hires bikes, sells all sorts of useful gear as well as refreshments for users on the trail but we wanted to start at the very beginning !!

Our trusty backup in the shape of Des and Ben (black lab) had everything sorted and took picnic and spare gear in the trailer to the lunch meet at Chee Dale. The ride from Arbor Low to Rushop Hall is 30km oh easy peasy for us endurance folk !! Well, we walked the first few miles, and gossiped some more, just to get the horses used to each other and the idea this was not a race.....all advanced horses it could have been difficult but they were as chilled as us in the glorious sunshine and besotted by the magnificent views. Looking at the map it looks like someone has spilt the tea on it, so many contour lines and so close together...err dur brain that means steep hills. Bilbo at nearly 30 and last minute sub for Swallow soon decided he was fit willing and more than able and decided he was a canter horse and that is what he would do, so set about finding every bit of grass he could find and bowling on, regardless of how uneven, he just found his balance, truly the wonder horse as befitted his new nickname. Everyone settled into a rhythm and soon arrived at

Chee Dale to meet Des for lunch, not having found the parking on the map Des had found a good spot by Cottage Farm at Blackwell. It never ceased to amaze us that Des found so many good spots with the trailer on the back on these steep narrow lanes.

By now it was really hot so drinks all round and break for the horses really welcome.

Soon it was time to be up and away again down into the steep valley of Chee Dale across a very narrow bridge but some thirty feet long, only a few feet above over the noisy, the babbling river Wye, yes exciting is one way to describe it, absolutely beautiful spot is another. Up the other side on hair pin bends, at the canter if you don't mind Bilbo !! don't look down if you suffer from vertigo either.

Passing thought the peaks with stone walled paddocks and lambs, into leafy glades and open pasture it is English countryside at its best. We finally arrived at Rushop Hall late afternoon, having passed one couple on horses going in the opposite direction to stay at Arbor Low, a handful of walkers and bikers all day.

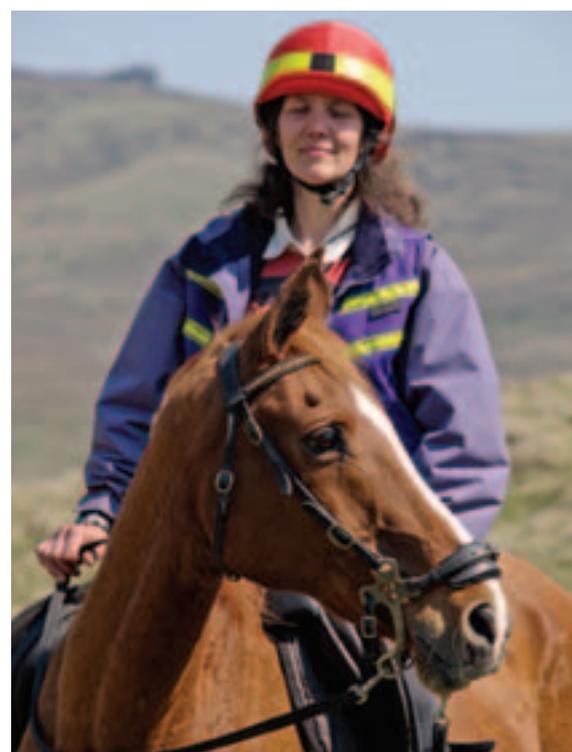
Rushop Hall is a lovely old Georgian House cleverly restored by Jan and Neil Allcock, the stables were in a new block within a huge barn and again large paddock alongside the alpaca's for the boys. Off they went out for a graze and spin before coming in overnight. Pilgrim impressed everyone by coming to call at the canter when it was time to come in, however, by the end of the week this had declined to a walk and finally a disinterested if you want me, come and get me so at home did he feel with his pals. Sigh!

Rushop is unadulterated luxury, again wonderful food and good company.

Next day off to Rocks Farm 21 km away, in the company of Countryside Agency Photographer Mike. This section is very hilly and more difficult going than the previous day. The views are just stunning and although some of the cobbled "steps" looked difficult and very steep the horses all managed them incredibly well and took them in their stride. Stopping with Mike for photo shoots made slow going and our average on this section to Hayfield was under 4kph. Polo, another last minute sub for Ella, was showing signs of soreness in his back when we stopped for lunch and met up with Trails Officer Christine Turner on her horse.

We sadly decided to take him, with Pilgrim for company, the rest of the journey to Rocks Farm in the trailer whilst Sue, Christine and Heather rode the final few miles.

Rocks Farm is half way up a hill overlooking the whole region to the south east of Glossop in the High Peaks. Our host, Rachael Dennett is an EGB member and has several different loops of varying length that can be ridden from the farm. Again good stables and paddock available for the horses with warm welcome and home cooking. We sat outside with a glass of wine and ate ice creams at teatime, whilst admiring the view. How lucky were we, from here we boxed up north of Rochdale to join the Mary Towneley Loop at Watergrove Reservoir to continue our journey up the Pennine Bridleway not to be confused with the Pennine Way.. That, as they say, is



another story, look out for Sally and Polo's encounter with a newborn lamb and Heather's polybag slosh bottle.....

My recommendations if doing again would be to ride north, take a rest day and possible shorter loop from Rocks Farm and ride back again, with possibly another rest day at Rushop or Arbor Low and visit Chatsworth and Bakewell, both of which are more than worthy of a visit and ride the Mary Towneley Loop another time. It was far more arduous for the horses than we had realised doing it all continuously, especially with the heat and less fit horses would definitely need the break. However, if you were only doing a three day ride it is eminently possible. The Pennine Trails group will move your gear between them for you, provide feed, grooming kit etc so it is possible to do alone and without back up.

As a fittening ride/training it would be hard to beat, in fact Rushop Hall livery is full in winter with eventers all getting fit on the hills for the coming season, food for thought. It was a fantastic holiday, good training and thoroughly enjoyable, definitely would go back and excellent value for money.

Further information:

www.penninebridlewaytrails.co.uk