

Remembering Alfred Wainwright

Chris Butterfield enjoys a nostalgic day following in AW's footsteps

THWACK! Wainwright was suddenly thrown forward, almost dropping his freshly lit tobacco pipe as the vehicle came to an abrupt stop.

“Oops” blurted Eric nervously, while checking to see if Wainwright was okay. “I think the tracks are broken, so we will have to navigate the rest of this bog by foot”.

It’s been 30 years since Wainwright passed and my thoughts focus on the wonderful legacy he left behind: *The Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells*. We can keep his memory alive and honour his remarkable achievements by following in his footsteps and exploring the places he once loved.

In his later years he disapproved of many changes to the area. Cars and coaches were becoming more commonplace as people flocked to the Lakeland towns. Car parks and caravan sites were spreading like a virus throughout the valleys. I often wonder how he would have viewed the world today, with the advent of mobile devices and social media. Many of us yearn for days gone by when life seemed simpler and the summers were warmer.

Remembering the past was the focus of a day planned by Richard Else and myself: a walk to Haystacks to celebrate the 35th anniversary of AW’s final climb to the summit in 1985. It was also a poignant day of reflection for Richard, Producer of the original BBC Wainwright TV series, as all the memories from that cold wet day came flooding back.



Alfred Wainwright at Haystacks

My wife Priscilla and I met Richard and his wife Margaret at Honister Slate Mine. The bright summer morning and still air were a far cry from the weather conditions everyone faced over three decades earlier. Richard was in a nostalgic mood and brought with him the exact same Nikon camera and zoom lens he used on the original journey.

We followed the disused tramway path to Dubs Quarry, near the foot of Haystacks. As we started to climb, Richard remembered the original ascent with Betty and the crew in a Land Rover. They took the old mine road to the quarry, where they disembarked and carried the equipment the rest of the way. AW and Eric Robson followed behind in a hired tracked vehicle which came complete with a driver. Richard recalls looking behind and seeing this noisy monstrosity slowly bumping its way up the road behind them, with its



distinguished passengers just holding on for dear life. Still, it was the only vehicle they could acquire to get AW as close as possible to the foot of Haystacks.

After an hour or so, we approached the bothy at Dubs Quarry. Richard identified this as the place they disembarked from the Land Rover, and hoped AW, in the tracked vehicle, would be able to continue closer to Haystacks. Between Dubs Quarry and Black Beck Tarn, one of the tracks detached from the vehicle and it came to a complete stop. AW and Eric had to walk a little bit further after all.

After a short climb, the four of us finally reached Innominate Tarn where we had lunch, bathed in glorious sunshine. The water level had dropped considerably, making it difficult to identify where AW had been filmed. Priscilla and Margaret headed for the summit, while Richard and I remained by the tarn. We used screenshots from the film to aid us, and after a couple of hours we identified all locations. It was a very surreal moment finding the very

same solitary stone that AW had sat on alone, deep in his thoughts, while being filmed from a distance.

Although I'd climbed Haystacks several times before, it wasn't until I explored it thoroughly with Richard that I appreciated AW's love for this fell, and why he chose the Tarn as his final resting place. It is such an unassuming fell. AW described it as "a shaggy terrier in the company of foxhounds", and he was right. There is so much to explore on this craggy plateau, and you will always find something new.

It was a great honour for Priscilla and myself to accompany Richard and his wife on this special day, remembering a Lakeland legend who enhanced the lives of millions by bringing the fells to life and making them accessible to all through nothing more than pen and ink, love and devotion. ■

Chris Butterfield is a Wainwright aficionado and archivist. Visit his website www.alfredwainwright.co.uk or search for 'Alfred Wainwright Books & Memorabilia' on Facebook.