



Brown Rigg Life - The Hikes



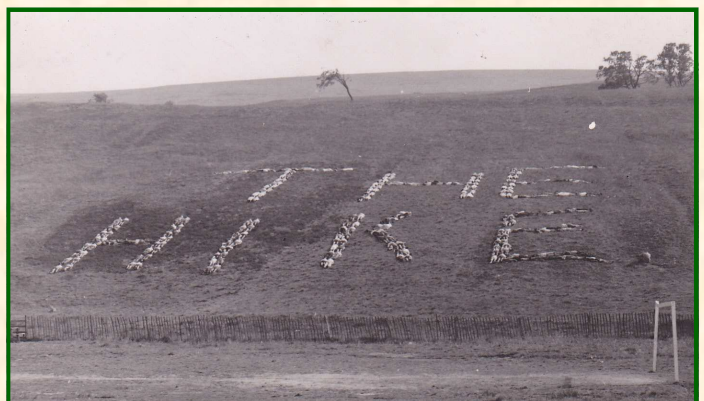
One aspect of Brown Rigg life that is ingrained indelibly in former pupils' minds is the compulsory Sunday afternoon hikes, when after lunch, the entire school was sent out to march around the lanes and byways of the surrounding countryside, an activity that took place regardless of weather conditions.

The pupils were formed into teams of 6 or 8, taking various names to identify themselves. Amongst them were 'The Cavaliers', the 'Happy Wanderers', the unusually named 'Adamant' and a team of Hadrian girls known as the 'Blister Sisters'. The teams earned points not only for the number of miles they covered but also for their turn-out and appearance. It was not unusual for a team to parade in matching (almost) outfits.

The hikes introduced the Brown Rigg pupils to the area around Brown Rigg, and there will have been very few roads, lanes and indeed footpaths, that weren't tramped along on these Sunday afternoon forays. One of the favourite walks was to the quaintly named 'Grassy Bridge', the old stone bridge over the River Rede. This had the added attraction of the opportunity to forage in the river for freshwater mussels which the children all believed contained pearls of great value!

Another regular destination was Lee Hall, the scene of the infamous 'Long pack' legend. This walk had several variations but normally included going as far as Houxy Bank Top and returning via Ealingham Farm. It included some pretty steep inclines and there were always some tired legs after completing this route. The more adventurous attempted longer journeys such as to Roses Bower or Stonehaugh. These involved a fair bit of tramping over the fells which was extremely hard going, especially if the weather had been wet.

Unquestionably the "piece de resistance" of all the walks was the legendary 'Round the Bridges', a circuit of almost 10 miles which involved a trek up the North Tyne valley to Tarsset and back following the river for most of the way. It took its title from the numerous bridges that the route crossed, varying from the steep hump-backed stone structure over the Chirdon Burn near 'The Birks', the two metal structures (now replaced with plain concrete edifices), one crossing the River North Tyne and the other over the Tarsset Burn and the bridge over the old Border Counties Railway line at Tarsset and Charlton village, not forgetting the mighty Telford constructed bridge at Bellingham itself. This hike was a real challenge and was very prone to the practice of 'route cutting' although there were often teachers stationed at strategic points to catch out any of the culprits.



Despite the physical exertion, not to mention blisters, the hikes were generally enjoyed as they gave pupils the opportunity to wander freely all over the surrounding area, generally without supervision, to enjoy the scenery and wildlife of the beautiful Northumbrian countryside. Certainly many former Brown Rigg pupils look back on them with great fondness and they are a constant topic of conversation at the biennial get-together.

