

## Dairsie to Forgan

Friday 6 April 2012

On Thursday evening the local weather forecast promised a largely dry day on Friday, so I decided to walk the Dairsie to Forgan section of the road linking the ferries of Pettycur on the Forth and Newport on the Tay. In the morning the weather was damp and the forecast less promising, but I was reluctant to change my plans. I took the bus to Dairsie and set off from there at 11 o'clock, turning left at the roundabout onto the road to Balmullo. It was cold, but not raining.

The milestone on the St Andrews road (A91) is marked on the Landranger map, but not the one on the Balmullo and Newport road (A914); perhaps the mapmakers thought that the one *MS* would serve for both. This is the first time I've found a stone that isn't marked on the map.

The stone is of what I take to be the older design, using a cast-iron facing fixed to a single large stone or solid stone construction, showing a single list of places, with no indication of direction. Along the rim at the top is the maker's mark: *Alexr Russell, Kirkcaldy Foundry, 1824*. This is the same type as the two stones on the A91 between Dairsie and Cupar, and like them it gives distances to Pettycur (25 miles), New Inn (12 miles), Cupar (3 miles) and Newport (8 miles). The order in which the places are listed may have been enough to indicate that the first three (descending order of distance) were in one direction, and the fourth, being out of sequence, was in the other. The six other stones along the road all have the same design with the same four places.

The road soon goes over the Moonzie Burn, and I stopped to look at the water (not particularly full, despite recent rain) and to admire the ash buds. There was a footpath to walk on, quite muddy, and covered with beech mast and twigs. There was also a great deal of litter, plastic bottles, plastic bags, carry-out containers, all presumably jettisoned from passing cars, as well as bits of metal and broken hub-caps. There were some odder items, such as a stainless steel spoon, and several gloves of different sorts. There was not much traffic, but some big lorries, and these were usually followed by a tail of cars.

The road passes the entrance to Pittormie Castle, with substantial gates, a warning to keep out, and a surveillance camera. A little further on the castle is to be seen, looking very smart after its Scottish Heritage renovation. Apparently it is the main home of the Eden Club, an ultra-exclusive club, one requirement for membership being that you should already be a member of another private club.

The road also passes the Pittormie farm shop, with raspberry fields opposite. Another commercial enterprise on the road is the Thai Teak shop, beside the turning to Logie.

After Thai Teak, the footpath gives out and I had to walk on the verge, a bit damp and often uneven. It made slow going which, together with the time I spent photographing Pittormie, meant it took half an hour between the first and second stones. At sharp bends the verge always seems to get narrower, or disappear altogether—perhaps in order to allow a few inches extra width for traffic.

This was the pleasantest part of the walk, with skylarks singing, and the sun shining on my back, although there were black clouds ahead. There were two notable industrial landmarks, the Balmullo quarry on the left, and the Guardbridge paper-mill on the right—no longer working, and with its chimney cut down to a mere stump. The turning to Hayston was marked with a fine iron-work horse, which in my photograph looks as though it is a giant in silhouette on the hillside.

The third milestone (Newport 6 miles) is just before Balmullo. There was a footpath through the village, of course, so I made better progress, although stopping to admire the view of Guardbridge, the estuary, St Andrews and Kingask. The last bungalow but one on the main street has a spectacular garden.

The footpath ends at the end of the 30mph limit. The road widens around the turning to the quarry and there are notices about heavy plant crossing. For a hundred yards or so beyond the turn-off there is a footpath laid with shingle from the quarry. The view ahead widens as you come down out

of Balmullo. There was the sound of a buzzard over the fields on the left, and again a sharp bend with no verge. I waited for a large lorry to go past.

Just before the fourth milestone (5 miles from Newport) there is a post marking a gas pipeline, and a warning that the gas company should be contacted before any excavations are undertaken. There were twisted hawthorn trees, the giant remains of a hedge, just coming into leaf.

When I reached the footpath that goes off via Southfields and the cemetery towards Leuchars I had to decide whether to follow it down to join the Leuchars to St Michaels road. The point of the detour would have been to get a photograph of the milestone beside Leuchars Castle, the only one between Guardbridge and St Michaels. I decided not to take it, but to go straight ahead into St Michaels, passing another footpath to Leuchars (the Coffin Road), crossing the Motray Water and going under a low railway bridge. There was a view to the north of snow-covered, or at least snow-sprinkled, hills. It was now spitting with rain

St Michaels itself is a jungle of signs of all sorts, including a direction stone where the Tayport road forks off to the right from the main road to Newport (and the Tay Bridge). The stone doesn't give distances, but as well as showing which fork to take for the various places, it indicates whether they are to the left or right of the road, or whether the road passes right through them. Some of the places listed, such as Bogton and Ninewells, I could not locate on the Landranger OS map, but they are given in *The Place-names of Fife*. Bogton is quite a way to the left of the road, in Kilmany parish.

By the time I got to the next stone (4 miles from Newport, just before the turning off to Wormit) it was raining quite hard, and the traffic was heavier, so walking wasn't pleasant. Moving on I passed an extensive field of rape on the left, and some other crop on the right, just green shoots pushing through. There was then a bit of rough ground, set-aside, I suppose.

The next stone is in Pickletillem, 3 miles from Newport. This is a dismal place, in the rain, and with the inn now obviously shut up. Perhaps it couldn't compete with the facilities at Drumoig, which I passed a few minutes later, and which is itself looking pretty run-down.

You pass a sign on the road saying you are coming into Forgan, although the Landranger map doesn't mark it and there doesn't seem to be a settlement, so I suppose the sign marks the parish boundary. I passed two churches, one perched on a hill with a striking spindly spire, and another (not all that old, and apparently closed) beside the road, but I don't know which, if either, was Forgan Parish church. One advantage was that there was now a footpath, which continued until the end of the walk.

The map indicates that the last mile marker (2 miles from Newport) is a mile post, but in fact it was a stone like the others. I spent a bit of time wondering whether there was a post, but didn't find anything. It was raining quite hard now, so I was pleased to reach the bus-stop just before the Forgan roundabout.

I sat on the wall eating my sandwiches. Twice while I was waiting for the bus passing cars hooted at me. I can see why drivers might have been annoyed while I was blundering along the narrow verge, but I was only hooted once during my walk. It was while I was gazing at something in the field and the driver might reasonably have thought I needed a warning. On the whole drivers were very considerate. On the busy road after St Michaels there was nothing much they could do, but on the quieter road they would move out as they passed me.

The walk from Dairsie, just over six miles, had taken three and a half hours, slow going due to the difficulty of walking on verges, and the occasional need to stand back in the face of on-coming traffic. It probably doesn't sound a very attractive way of spending a damp Friday, but I did enjoy it, even if I can't exactly say why. A couple of times I reached the stones sooner than expected, and stumbling on them in this way was definitely enjoyable, particularly when they are set well back in the undergrowth. And there is something oddly satisfying about walking the roads that we usually rush along in a bus or car.