

Kingsmuir Crossroads to Crail

18 October 2015

The B940 runs from Cupar to Crail. A couple of years ago I walked the section of the road from Radernie to Kingsmuir, and now I planned to continue on to Crail. The Gazetteer lists four milestones, three in very good condition, and the last one missing.

Anna dropped me at the crossroads on her way to Anstruther to visit her mother. As I jumped out of the car I left the camera behind, and Anna had driven off before I realised. So I did the walk, but couldn't take any photographs.

It was 2.25 when I set off under a grey sky. With the straight road, the poorly drained verges, the stubble fields and almost leafless hedgerows it was a cheerless prospect. After some ten minutes I came upon the first patch of red, a small hawthorn bush with a solitary spray of berries tossing in the breeze. Then I began to notice rose-hips, some of them blackened, more haws, elderberries, some small blackberries and even a few bedraggled campions.

In a field ahead were what I thought at first were black cattle, but as I got closer I saw that they were more like large sheep. I'd say they were about a fifth larger than most sheep, and apparently all the same – black or dark brown coats and white faces. I wondered whether they were llamas or alpaca, both of which are said to be kept on farms around Scotland, but they didn't have the long necks. I still haven't worked out what they were.

The first milestone is at Redwells – Redwell Cottage (without an s) but Redwells Woodland. It has cursive lettering: 'Crail. 4' on the west-facing side; on the east-facing side: 'Pt Inn. 7 / Ceres. 10³/₄ / Cupar. 13¹/₂'. There is a 4 on the top of the cap – continuing the series that started on the road from Radernie to Kingsmuir that I walked in June 2013. A feature of this series of caps that I hadn't noticed before is that all the place-names are followed by a dot, even though they are not abbreviated. The Gazetteer describes this stone as in 'vg' condition, but it is now quite badly chipped, and the cap is discoloured, though still complete and legible. The stone stands quite high on the verge.

For some distance now there was woodland on the right-hand side of the road, first Redwells Woodland, managed by Scottish Woodlands Ltd, and then Troy Wood. I recognised ash, birch, rowan and possibly elm, and there were others that I didn't know. There was a good ditch between the verge and the old, overgrown stone wall, and the drainage channels were better than in the first part of the walk. On the left, gulls were rising from reddish ploughed fields. There was a distant view of the hills beyond Dundee. A buzzard flew low overhead.

Just after three o'clock I passed the entrance to the Secret Bunker. One of the notices read, 'Find out how they would have survived and you wouldn't.' The tone of resentment that this implies rather jarred on me. One can see why people might take the view that there was something unfair about the survival of a chosen few, but it hadn't really occurred to me that there was anything desirable about being among the survivors in the bunker. I think the people whose job required them to abandon their families and take refuge in the Regional Seats of Government looked on it as a ghastly duty, not a privilege.

The road continued straight for most of the way, apart from three very tight bends, before each of which was a *sharp bend* sign on which the image was almost completely effaced. The *Deer for 2 miles* and *Horse Riding* signs were perfectly legible.

Sounds of cattle snorting and lowing came from behind a high hedge on the left. The woodland on the right was thinning now; before it came to an end completely I took the opportunity to have a pee. Nailed high up on a tree was a board, whose message I tried to read, but it was illegible. To judge from newer signs round about I guess it was a warning to trespassers to keep out.

About 3.15 I came to the next milestone, again with cursive lettering, and numbered 3 on top. The distances given were consistent with the previous stone: Crail 3; Pt Inn 8; Ceres 11³/₄; Cupar 14¹/₂. There is a benchmark cut in the stone. Though slightly yellowed, this stone is in better condition than the previous one, and stands high on the verge.

The sky was lightening now, with unbroken grey cloud cover, but not the rain clouds of earlier on. At the top of a rise the woodland came to an end and the view opened up. Ahead, the sea and sky around the Isle of May were dark, but turning to my right I could see the sun shining on Berwick Law and the hills behind.

At 3.40, after a sharp right bend, I reached the third milestone, 2 miles from Crail, 9 from Peat Inn, $12\frac{3}{4}$ from Ceres and $15\frac{1}{2}$ from Cupar. The stone is slightly chipped and yellowing, so might no longer merit the *vg* condition noted in the Gazetteer. It was more overgrown with grass and weeds than the previous two stones, but still perfectly visible.

A little further on, at Toldrie, the road crosses a ditch. There's no hump in the road, so it's only the stone parapets that draw attention to the bridge. The ditch is overgrown, with no flowing water, or even standing water, to be seen. The arch of the bridge suggests that at one time the water-course was a yard or so wide. Earlier on I'd seen signs of new culverts under the road, so perhaps the water is now made to drain in a different direction. There's always work going on, changes and improvements to be made, I suppose. Although there had been stretches along the road where the drainage was good, for much of the way there were puddles in the channel that had been eroded between the verge and the metalled road.

Soon the road crosses the B9171. The modern signs indicated that I was 10 miles from Peat Inn and 16 from Cupar. So when, just after four o'clock, I reached the last milestone on the road I was puzzled that it gave the distance to Cupar as $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The other distances shown were consistent with the previous stones: Peat Inn 10 miles, Ceres $13\frac{3}{4}$, and Crail 1 mile. In fact I was surprised to see the stone there at all, because the Gazetteer marks it as missing, said to have been hit by a bomb. The cap, as in other cases where a missing stone or cap has been re-instated, has block capitals, and is marked with a B on top. The Gazetteer gives the mileages that its authors think should have appeared on the stone, and it confirms that the distance to Cupar should be $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles. This could be consistent with the mileages shown on previous stones if from this point on the road there were an alternative route to Cupar, but I can't see any that is shorter than the way back through Peat Inn.

The drone of a light aircraft overhead seemed to confirm the mild gloom of the late afternoon – oddly, because on a fine summer day the same sound confirms the feeling of peace and idyll. Through a break in the hedge on the right the Bass Rock was suddenly visible – so now I'd seen all three of the landmarks of the Forth, but all separately, never together in a single view.

On a bend the road crosses what used to be the railway line, now just part of the field, with the bridge blocked up. I was coming down now towards the coast road – I'd spotted a bus in the distance some time before. The junction with the coast road is marked by a handsome way-marker, which I photographed on an earlier occasion. It's on the outskirts of the town.

I was just walking towards the centre when I met Anna driving towards me. She had just noticed the camera on the floor of the car and was coming to find me. She suggested that we should drive back along the B940 so I could take my photographs, but it was tea-time, and I thought it would take too long. So I'll need to walk the road again some other day.