

## Largoward, Peat Inn, Pitscottie, Cupar

22 October 2015

It was a bright, windy day, so windy that I thought twice about going out. I took the bus to Largoward, or at least I intended to get off at Largoward, but mistakenly stopped the bus at Higham Toll. This gave me about a mile and a half along the main road (A915) to get to the starting point of my planned walk. I passed the way-markers at Higham Toll, and the Lathones milestone, not to mention the handsome GRVI post box.

The plan was to follow the B941 from Largoward to Peat Inn, with two milestones, and then the B940 from Peat Inn to Cupar, with seven milestones listed, two of which are described as missing. Completing this route would mean I had, in three instalments, walked the B940 from Crail to Cupar.

I got off the bus at 10.50 and reached Largoward at 11.10. The village hall, erected in 1906 by public subscription, is an imposing building, drably roughcast, and with what must be the original doors in brown wood and glass panes. Various notices outside suggest that it is still well used – with dances, exercise classes (Boogie Bounce) and the Sunday School – and this impression is more than confirmed by the hall's website.

The main road crosses the B941 at the west end of the village, and there's a milestone just to the south of the cross-roads. The Gazetteer says the cap is missing, but it has since been re-instated, and as usual in such cases the lettering is block capitals rather than cursive. It shows the distances to Col'h (Colinsburgh, 3 miles), Kil'r (Kilconquhar, 4 miles) and Elie ( $5\frac{5}{8}$  miles); Cupar ( $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles), Ceres ( $5\frac{3}{4}$  miles) and St. And's ( $8\frac{1}{4}$  miles). There is a dot following each place-name except St And's, a detail that I have only just started noticing.

I wondered how the order of the places on the cap was decided. On the Elie side it's straightforward, the nearest comes first and the furthest last, but on the other side some other system seems to operate. Cupar comes first, perhaps because it's more important than Ceres, while St Andrews is last because there would not have been room to fit it in higher up.

There is a more important question about the route to St Andrews. The Gazetteer says there is a milestone in Largoward on the A915, but it's not marked on the map, and I didn't see it. According to the Gazetteer this other stone shows 7 miles to St Andrews, which is consistent with the 6 miles from Lathones. The  $8\frac{1}{4}$  miles shown on the stone on the B941 must be the distance if you go through Peat Inn and turn off for St Andrews at Crossgates.

After photographing the milestone I walked back towards the crossroads and the Staghead Inn, where I thought of getting a cup of coffee, but it looked closed. The road then climbs up out of the village. There was a harvested field on the left and I stopped to watch what was going on. The straw had been left by the harvester in neat rows and now a machine was going up and down sucking it all up. I was soon rewarded by seeing the machine open up to regurgitate a large bale, which rolled away until it came to rest beside one of its fellows. I wonder what has happened to combine harvesters, the sort that you used to see doing the baling up as well as everything else. Clearly the principle of division of labour applies to machines as well as people.

Other things I noted before leaving Largoward were Di Gilpin's knitting studio, with an 'Open Studio' notice; and a lane going off to the right with a sign saying 'Single track road, No passing places'. The road goes roughly north-west – it would be the same for the whole walk, sometimes more westerly, sometimes more northerly. The wind was coming from (I guess) a bit north of west, so I had it either full in my face or on my left cheek.

I was still climbing. Close to the village the road was well drained, but higher up there were puddles beside the road, just soaking into the verge, with no drainage channels, so that the channels beside the metalled road were becoming deeper and more eroded. The fields on the right showed a range of farming activity, with cattle and sheep, a stubble field and wind turbines. In the

bright sunshine it could have been an illustration from a Ladybird book, except that there wouldn't have been turbines in the 1970s.

Reaching the top of the rise I looked back to see Berwick Law in the haze. The road ahead slopes down for some thirty yards or so. At the top was a flood warning sign, although by now it was quite dry. Down in the dip there were signs of recent drainage works, and I wondered whether the flood sign dated from earlier times or whether flooding had occurred despite the new drains.

The road climbs again, and on the rise, just past South Bowhill Farm, is the next milestone showing distances a mile closer to Cupar, Ceres and St Andrews, and a mile further from Colinsburgh, Kilconquhar and Elie. Unlike some of the re-instated caps, therefore, the one at Largoward was correct, or at least consistent with the others in the sequence.

A track on the right had a sign announcing Hawkswood House, Luxury Accommodation. The Hawkswood House website reveals that it's a five-bedroom property available for holiday lettings. Two nights in November would cost £1,000. The advertising is directed at the golf market, while admitting that there are other things to do in Fife. On the other side of the road was Falfield Bank, a large modern building. The Falfield Bank Estate provides game shooting and rents out property. I was looking for somewhere to get off the road for a pee at this point, and so became aware how securely the gates onto the Estate's property were locked.

About midday I reached the high point of the road, a bit over 200 metres, before starting the descent into Peat Inn. Outside the Inn I had to squeeze past a lorry making deliveries from a firm called Wild Tastes. The Peat Inn milestone is opposite the Inn and beside the junction with the B940, Cupar to Crail Road.

In Peat Inn as in Largoward I was struck by the large number of solar panels on roofs, which as I was coming from the south I could hardly fail to see. But there were also reminders of old-fashioned energy consumption. At one point I had to stand well aside while a large oil tanker, with another tank in tow, made its way round a tight corner, and a little later I passed a sign marking a gas pipeline.

Beyond the village is Crossgates, not a cross-roads, but the junction with the minor road to Strathkinness and St Andrews. The name is preserved in the name of the cottage where the road forks. If I had done my preparation better, I'd have remembered that I needed to go up this road for half a mile or so to find the milestone at Blackwalls which I missed out when I walked from Guardbridge to Drumcarrow last year.

After Crossgates, going past the track to Greigston House, the road is almost due west. The wind was stronger than ever, and full in my face. Once or twice, as I stepped up onto the verge to avoid traffic, I felt in danger of losing my balance and being blown over. It was hard to keep still to take my photos.

The next two milestones are listed as missing in the Gazetteer, and are not marked on the map. The first missing stone was at Bankhead; I took a photograph of where it might have been. There is a wide verge and ditch here, and it's possible that the stone fell victim to the drainage works. The fields to the right (the north) slope downwards, and there are one or two handsome houses to be seen, such as West Mains.

Coming down from Bankhead there was brief shelter provided by trees on the left, but then after another turn in the road it came at me as strong as ever. Here the verge and ditch are no longer as wide and well constructed as around Bankhead.

I was now coming into Baldinnie. *The Place-Names of Fife* (volume 2) gives a list of farm-names containing *Baldinnie* of which I saw three from the road, Baldinnie Farm, Over Baldinnie and Percy Baldinnie. *PNF* doesn't explain *Percy* so I suppose it's a personal name, but wonder how far back it goes, and who Percy was. Baldinnie Farm had an extensive collection of machinery, some of it very big – it had the feel of a dinosaur park. The village also has a VR post-box set in the wall of what now looks like a private house, but was perhaps once the post office.

On the outskirts of the village there's a turning off to Ceres, and then a house very aptly called Fourwinds. There's a faded mural showing people battling with wind-turbines and the slogan, 'We still say no to Ceres wind farm.' I'd seen some tattered posters with the same message earlier on. I believe the campaign was successful, the Ceres wind-farm proposal being thrown out some years ago. When I looked it up on the web I found references to a proposed wind farm, with almost 200 turbines, in Ceres near Adelaide, Australia, with protests from indigenous people that it was a misuse of their ancestral land.

The road went mainly downhill now, and the wind was less strong. A buzzard flew low over the fields. I realised that I had seen and heard hardly birds of any sort during the walk. A few little ones in the hedges, and the usual pigeons and crows, though even they were not in large numbers. Perhaps the wind was keeping them indoors. As it was after half-past one I went up a little lane to find a sheltered spot to eat my lunch.

At Kinninmonth there's a bridge over the Wilkieston Burn, and a footpath to Ladeddie, 2.5km away. In a corner of a field there was a small group of belted Galloways. The OS map and *PNF* both spell the name *Kinninmonth* but the farm sign has *Kininmonth*. The list of historic forms in *PNF* shows that sometimes the first element (from the Gaelic *ceann*) had a double *n*, sometimes a single *n*. I suppose the argument for preferring the double-*n* form would be either that *ceann* has double *n*, or that there is a missing consonant at the beginning of the second element (which *PNF* suggests is the Gaelic *fionn+monadh*). The farm sign consists of large cut-out letters mounted between two posts, so there may have been practical, or even financial, reasons for favouring the shorter form.

At 2 o'clock, just past Kinninmonth, I found the next milestone – found it with difficulty as it is overgrown with grass and weeds. It is in cursive lettering, and shows the following distances: Cupar 3½ miles, Osnabh. (Osnaburgh) 3¾, Newport 11½; Pt. Inn 3, Kilr. 9, Elie 10⅝.

The Pitscottie crossroads is not far from Kinninmonth. The large restaurant and delicatessen at the crossroads looked as though it had closed down; it's at least the second attempt to open something of the sort on those premises. But the small tea-shop at what used to be the petrol station was open, so I went in for a cup of coffee. It's called White Chimneys, although I couldn't see any chimneys, white or otherwise.

The road to Dairsie (Osnaburgh) and on to Newport forks up north through Dura Den, while the main road to Cupar goes off to the west. The milestone at Easter Pitscottie is the last of the sequence coming away from Cupar, so it's only half a mile from the Kinninmonth stone, and is on the left hand side of the road, although the map shows it on the right. It has cursive lettering giving the following distances: Cupar 3 miles, Newbrh. (Newburgh) 13½; St Ans. 6½, Kilconr. 9½.

As you come up out of Pitscottie you can see the tops of the trees of Dura Den on the right. The grass in the field between the road and the Den had been cut and was waiting for the baling machine to pick it up. While I was looking at the neat rows of cut grass, which were being picked over by a couple of crows, the Fife Library van went past.

I stopped to photograph the gateway to what I guess is Dura House, although there was no sign. It's an impressive, broad gateway with a lodge beside it. The gate-posts and other columns at the corners of the walls are all surmounted with a conical cap. Even the little posts marking the edge of the road have their pointed caps. I tried to take a photo including as many as I could, but it was difficult to get them lined up. This motif is taken from the house itself, which, according to old photographs that I found on the web, has several round towers with conical roofs.

The road between Pitscottie and Cupar is busy, and I was often forced onto the verge, which was quite narrow on the right hand side, so sometimes I went over to the left where it was broader and easier for walking. It was still quite high up and although the wind was lighter now it was full in my face. The Hopetoun monument was straight ahead in the hazy distance. Then there was a more exposed stretch, where the wind seemed as strong as ever. Cupar lay ahead, and I could see the line of the main St Andrews road and the railway.

The milestone beside Cairngreen Wood was half hidden by grasses and willow herb. It's in cursive lettering and gives distances from Cupar, Newburgh, St Andrews and Kilconquhar consistent with the Easter Pitscottie stone. I noticed a dot after *Cupar* here; I had missed it at Easter Pitscottie, although I see from the photo that there is one there too.

I stopped for a minute or two to watch a tractor ploughing, turning over the yellowish grey stubble to reveal the brown soil. A beautiful, evocative sight. How tempted I am to write *the good rich soil!* And why shouldn't I? Because that myth of the good earth, which was so potent in my childhood, has been discredited over the years. We were so firmly committed to the myth, so convinced by the harvest festival picture of the world, that we could almost see the goodness and richness in the brownness. But now we know too much about the dangers of certain methods of ploughing (not that I'd recognise the good kind from the bad) and far too much about what is added to the soil to make it better and richer. We've always known, but have drawn a sentimental veil over the knowledge, that farming does terrible things to the people employed in it; now we know that it does terrible things to the earth as well. We need it, but find it hard to love it as we used to. And yet I stop to watch the ploughing – from too great a distance to see the man or woman in the cab, so it is just a tractor ploughing. It is a lovely sight.

I was getting closer to Cupar now, going past Balass Farm (*PNF* is unsure about the second element, suggesting Gaelic *eas*, referring to a waterfall or rapids on the River Eden) and reaching my last milestone at Tarvit Home Farm, one mile from Cupar. The Gazetteer notes the cap as missing, but it has been re-instated. It has block-capital lettering (with large initials) and gives distances consistent with the others in the sequence.

From now on there was a footpath, so I made quicker progress, although I stopped to look over the railway bridge, and to photograph the sign showing that Cupar is a Fairtrade Town, and is twinned with Sainte-Ménéhould, and then a particularly irritating notice about dogs: 'Dogs must be controlled in this area! If you see a dog straying, acting aggressively, or out of owners control please contact Fife Council Dog Warden service on 03451 550022.' I shouldn't be irritated by something that is so obviously for the public good, but I am. Perhaps the call to citizens to be on the look-out for law-breakers is the result of the twinning with Ste-Ménéhould, whose most famous inhabitant is Citoyen Drouet, who recognised Louis XVI on the flight to Varennes, and pursued him and brought him back to Paris. How odd that our sympathies are always with the one who is running away, even when it's a king and his pursuer is a gallant revolutionary post-master.

I reached the centre of Cupar with just a few minutes to wait before catching a bust back to St Andrews. In many ways this had been the best of all my milestone walks to date. It was dry underfoot, the wind was invigorating, the sun brilliant and, except towards late afternoon as a few clouds gathered, surprisingly warm; the hazy views over the wide expanse of Fife were stupendous; and I picked up a lot of milestones.