

Lindores to Cupar **23 May 2015**

I had to be at Claire's house in Cupar by about midday, so I took the Newburgh bus from St Andrews at 7.20, getting off in Lindores beside the Collessie road at 7.50. I was the only passenger, and the only stops we made were at Petheram Bridge, where someone hailed us thinking we would be going to Leuchars, and at Parbroath, where we waited a minute or so to let the timetable catch up with us. I sat on the driver's side, so didn't see any of the milestones from the bus – they are all on the left going from Cupar. 'A quiet ride,' I said to the driver as I got off. He smiled happily. It's hard to justify having a private chauffeur for one non-paying pensioner, and I dare say there is someone at the Council or at Stagecoach who is drawing up plans for rationalisation. But the buses go between St Andrews and Newburgh by a number of different routes, providing a web of connections, and perhaps this initial run is necessary to set the whole thing going each day.

It was a bright morning, almost cloudless, but although there was not much of a wind it didn't feel particularly warm. Already there were horse-boxes making their way to the Fife Show, and these were to be a feature of the morning. There were a few horse-charabancs, but most of them were for just one or two beasts and most of the drivers were women, often with children in the front, not always wearing seat-belts. Lindores was full of bird-song. It seems a prosperous little settlement. Three house-names that caught my eye were Hunter's Moon, Walnut Den and Bellevue Cottage.

The milestone is at the edge of the village, beside the speed-limit sign. It shows 2¼ miles to Newburgh, 14 to Perth and 8 to Cupar. The lettering is in capitals, with a larger initial letter, and with Newburgh contracted to N'burgh. On the other side of the wall is boggy ground and what I thought were self-seeded willow trees.

The footpath ends here and for most of the walk I was to find myself going up and down onto the verge. Fortunately most of the traffic was going towards Cupar. For most of the way, too, there were drains in the road, many of them of fairly recent date, I would say. Every so often the drains ceased and there were run-off channels, sometimes, though not always, in places where the ground beyond the hedge was below the level of the road. Some of these channels were well maintained and some were not. Where the drainage was poor the consequence was plain to see: potholes and patches, and a deep channel between the tarmac and the verge. On the whole the verge was easy enough to walk along, not too muddy, and usually not too high.

Not far from Lindores is the ruined steading of Inchrye, all that remains of the Gothic revival Inchrye Abbey. There is a fine young tree growing out of the tower. The view as I walked on was lovely. The ploughed field beside the road was a dark chocolate colour. The furrows were smooth, shallow undulations, and very straight, as though the ground had been moulded rather than cut. I don't know what the process is, nor whether it is one that meets with ecological approval, but it makes an impressive sight. There were swallows swooping over the field as I stood admiring it. A black cat crossed the road, and in the distance I thought I saw another, but it turned out to be a pheasant patrolling the boundary between a stretch of rough ground and a meadow of new grass. Ahead was Dunbog Hill, gently sloping, with a wooded hollow and wide patches of gorse.

Gorse was all around, making the fields and hillsides more dramatic than the hedgerows. There were stretches of beech hedge, both green and copper, and some hawthorn and bramble, not yet in flower, but for much of the way there was just a wall. In a couple of places there was a hedging-plant I didn't recognise. Its blossom was coming into bud, looking a bit like elder, but purplish-pinkish, and the umbels were perhaps a bit smaller than elderflower. Occasionally there were wild-rose bushes with wizened hips from last year. In the verge there were a lot of dandelions and nettle flowers, and here and there bluebells, campions, alcanet and a white flower I wasn't able to identify. My photographs of flowers weren't clear enough to make later identification easy.

There was birdsong all along the way, with a background of skylarks that seemed to be with me all the time until I was coming into Cupar. There were swallows now and then, and a couple of anxious oyster-catchers, and wagtails and chaffinches, and others that I didn't recognise. A

buzzard circled overhead – I'd seen it earlier from the bus, sitting on a post. A long-dead badger lay beside the road.

At Blinkbonny there's a house set amongst trees, a vision of the human and the natural in harmony that always suggests stability and security. The solid house with established timber seems emblematic of a vanished age of solid values and established order. It's a visual cliché, a piece of costume drama. If you were lying awake on a stormy night, the wind in the trees would sound a different note, a menacing note. Our view of the past is made up of clichés, which muffle the horror and make us feel comfortable with where we have come from. That peaceful sight of the gentleman's house set among trees – the ordered society of which it is such a potent emblem was based on terror and violence, on the gallows and the convict ship, on war and empire.

Further on from the house there is a ruined doocot beside the road, surrounded by a small group of cattle of different breeds, and then, on a bend, is the Blinkbonny milestone, seven miles from Cupar. The cap is damaged, but it's still possible to see that the lettering is different from the Lindores stone. The initial capital isn't enlarged, and Newburgh is contracted to NEWBRGH. Behind the stone is another lovely view of Dunbog Hill, which my photograph does not do justice to.

The footpath reappears briefly on the approaches to Dunbog Primary School with its solar powered warning lights. I stopped for a few minutes to admire a chestnut mare and a black foal which were roaming the field side by side, now approaching out of curiosity, now shying away. The Hopetoun monument on Lindifferon Hill was visible ahead. As you get closer to the hill, the monument drops from sight.

The map shows the next milestone just beyond the turning to Johnston and Johnstonfield. The Gazetteer notes that it is no longer extant, and says it was at Dunbog Hall. This must refer to the Village Hall beside the School.¹ Just a few yards up the Johnston track are the remains of a railway bridge. The Newburgh and North Fife Railway ran from Newburgh to join the Ladybank to Dundee line before the Tay Bridge, with stations at Lindores, Luthrie, Kilmany and St Fort. Opened in 1909, and incorporated in the LNER in 1923, it was never profitable, and closed to passengers in 1951, and altogether in 1964.² The embankments at Johnston have been levelled and the land ploughed up.

The barley in the fields, though still green, had reached pretty well its full height. As always nowadays, the crop was thick with no mangy patches such as one saw up until a few years ago. The same is true of the wheat, which is as yet less far advanced. Some of the fields have a strip left uncultivated at the edge, either for ecological reasons or to provide passage for tractors and machinery.

Just past Balmeadie (where I stopped to watch water flowing in a ditch at right angles to the road) there is a wooded patch. I was quite glad of the shade. On the verge there was a newly painted white post, four or five feet high, with no obvious use or explanation. It was just opposite the entrance to a drive which had a notice saying, 'Private, no through road'. I assume this was the way up to Aytounhill House, a Victorian (Queen Ann Style) country house.

Beside Ayton Smithy (the premises of a construction firm called Ayton Smiddy Ltd: 'Steel frame buildings built by hand') is a crossroads with Norman's Law to the north and Collairnie Castle to the south. The map shows a chapel to the north of the road, but I saw no sign of it. Nor did I see Collairnie. A little further on there was a ditch beside the road with running water. Horses watched as I made a note of the drainage details.

1 I assumed that Dunbog Hall was a big house, so that is what I was looking for. I didn't notice the village hall among the buildings beside the school, but the RCAHMS record for Dunbog Hall makes it clear that this is what is meant. It says that there is a milestone with benchmark there. See http://canmoremapping.rcahms.gov.uk/index.php?action=do_advanced&idnumlink=306220 (accessed 25 May 2015).

2 *Railscot website*, http://www.railbrit.co.uk/Newburgh_and_North_Fife_Railway/index.php (accessed 25 May 2015).

The milestone, which the Canmore website says was 600 metres SE of Ayton, has been removed. A photograph of the cap was taken (by Edwina Proudfoot, it seems) in the 1990s.³

I was now approaching Parbroath, with a lovely gorse-covered hillside to the right, and what I thought might be the summit of East Lomond showing in the distance. I could look down towards the main road (A92) from Edinburgh to Dundee, which seemed busier than usual. As always, I had to check with the signs to see which way was Dundee and which way Edinburgh. I don't know why this always seems so confusing. I searched all four directions to try to find the milestone, but either it's not there or I missed it. I don't think I noticed a lay-by after the crossroads on the south side of the A913, which is where the Canmore website locates the stone. It was inspected in 2009, and was as described in the Gazetteer, skew and without a cap.⁴ I asked the man who runs the mobile refreshment stall beside the crossroads, and he had never seen it – but as it had no cap it would not have been obviously recognisable.

It was getting warm, and it was hard work climbing the hill away from Parbroath. The large black flies which had been pestering me all the morning were now worse than ever, landing on my face and neck – annoying but harmless. I stumbled upon the next milestone (which is not marked on the OS map) by accident. It is set back from the road, below the level of the verge, and almost hidden by long grass and weeds. As the Gazetteer notes, it is rusty, but the lettering is clear enough, in the same style as at Blinkbonny. The Gazetteer describes it as being located at Moonzie Church, but I saw no sign of the Church, which must be just on the far side of the hill to the north of the road. Neither could I see the Hopetoun monument, although it must have been close by, to the south.

The turning to Moonzie is some way further on, almost at Kilmaron. There is a beech hedge here and behind it a deep ditch running along the edge of the field. The verge is steep and I had to climb up to keep safe on the tight bends. As always seems to be the case on these walks, the traffic was heaviest on the sharpest bends. I could intermittently hear the loudspeaker from the Fife Show.

The Kilmaron milestone is on a corner, almost as well hidden as the previous one. The lettering is the same as at Blinkbonny and Moonzie. Opposite is the beginning of the footpath that continues into Cupar, and also the well-maintained wall that we have so often noticed when driving out of Cupar this way. It presumably dates back to the early nineteenth century when Kilmaron Castle was built – like Inchrye Abbey a notable piece of Gothic revival architecture, and like Inchrye, now demolished.

This turned out to be my last milestone of the day. There is another, unpainted and without a cap, on the Balgarvie Road, before the start of the built-up area, but I missed it. There were queues of cars and trucks waiting to get into the Show car-park, and I was on the wrong side of the road. I should have turned back to have a better look, but it was almost twelve o'clock, when I was due at Claire's house, and I was quite tired after four hours in the sun. I'll go back another time. All I found to photograph here were two yellow signs, for 'light horses' and 'heavy horses'.

Despite the disappointing haul of milestones it had been a good walk.

³ See <http://canmore.org.uk/site/306219/ayton-smithy> (accessed 25 May 2015).

⁴ See <http://canmore.org.uk/event/875971> (accessed 25 May 2015).