

My 'Halo' Walk

Whenever I go for a local walk I try to open my eyes to nature, to see its beauty rather than its familiarity. I moved to this scenic valley in 1985, and I don't recall meeting anyone else who lives here because it is beautiful. They are here because they were born here, or they came here because it is cheap, or to be near a workplace. Most would be happy to leave for somewhere more fashionable, more wealthy or more respectable.

It is especially pleasant at this time of year, mid October, known as the “Little Summer” or “St Luke's Summer” (or by Russians as “The Peasant Women's Summer”).

The hardest part of this walk is getting started. The climb from the house up Spring Lane to the level of the church is the stiffest part of the whole walk. This does have the advantage that you know it's going to get easier, although it is uphill all the way to the Halo.



There is a very brief level respite before we head up again, this time a stairway up to Higher Lane.



We are in a glacial valley that cuts through layers of hard gritstone. Higher Lane takes us up to Top O' Slate, onto the main slab, the pre-glacial ground level. This is still quite steep, but the last of our climbing, although another 50m or so of glacial moraine remains above us, separating Haslingden valley from Rawtenstall



This lane soon leaves the town behind, or should I say, below. Technically the road ends at this junction. While Higher Lane continues forwards as a dirt-track byway, the surfaced road does a sharp right uphill, now technically a public footpath, to Top O' Slate.

Higher Lane pre-dates the town. It lies on a 13th century path from Haslingden to Whalley Abbey when Haslingden was no more than a stone marking the junction in the paths. St James Church Haslingden, the ancestor of the current church (just below the bottom of Higher Lane), was built at that junction.



Now I feel a bit like I just completed a cardiac stress test, but this is the top. The artwork here, The Halo, is locally known as the “flying saucer”. It is illuminated by night, using power stored from a small wind turbine on this windy hilltop. As I walked up today a dog-walker warned me that there was a fierce easterly wind at the top, even though it was quite imperceptible in the sheltered lane on in lee of the hill. She was right, it was strong enough to be striking weird ghostly aeolian tones from the structure.



When I first came here this hilltop was a former landfill being mainly used by dirt-bike enthusiasts. More recently it has been renovated as a twee little park, complete with this artistic structure.

Also up here, at the side of the moraine (visible behind the Halo's generator) is a large field that was a horse racecourse in the 18th century, in the 1980's it was briefly used as a moto-cross track. A part of this area is now used for a model aircraft flying club.

From here there are good views of the surrounding town and countryside. Haslingden itself can be seen nestling in the valley below, although today it is a bit misty with a low cloud not quite lifted.



We got the top of the hill, but that is by no means the end of the walk. Here the footpath meets another byway, Watery Lane, an old drover's path. It's name is not imaginative. I tried to walk this route before the renovation and abandoned it due to the mud coming over my boots. That is no longer a problem, it is firm if uneven and slippery underfoot. We've left the tarmac surfaced road, and the lane starts out looking like a regular farm track with dry intentions.



But as we descend the hill it gets wetter and wetter until it eventually divides into a split-level path, a narrow high dry path for the drovers, and a wider paved stream-bed for the livestock. Around this point the lane rejoins the continuation of Higher Lane that we left on the other side of the hill. I skated spectacularly crossing this ford, and narrowly avoided a dunking



I'm trying to imagine driving a horse-drawn coach or cart up this lane. It must have been near impossible without a lot of manhandling. Livestock is another matter, as I learned when I encountered a solitary cow on the road, just about filling it. Fortunately when it saw me coming, it promptly headed back to the gap in the fence through which it had presumably come.



The urban world intrudes again as they lane comes out on a road. Oddly this road isn't marked on any of the pathway maps in the park area, but I know it well, it is the road to the municipal dump, or Household Waste Recycling Centre as we are now supposed to call it. This is the town's currently active landfill. Part of the landfill has recently been landscaped with trees planted, a little exploring the woods yields a not entirely rewarding view of the dump. However it is only half a mile or so from here to walk home along the roads, and downhill all the way.

