

# The Walk Across England

## Day 9

### Reeth to Richmond

The ninth leg of our journey across England began with yet another delicious early morning full English breakfast and a last minute map survey of our route for the day. Today's scheduled eleven mile walk would take us all the way across the eastern end of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, into the bustling market village of Richmond, the largest of all the many villages of the Coast to Coast walk.

As we walked across the now quiet village of Reeth and headed back to join the C2C path along the River Swale, Cynthia and I agreed that not only had our breakfast been the best of the walk thus far but our B&B, the Ivy Cottage, which overlooked the large village green, had been one of our favorites too.

After just a few short miles of walking on the grass path along the banks of the Swale, we came to yet another one of the many forks we encountered on a daily basis. England's countryside is covered in an endless network of thousands of miles of public walking paths and, like an intricate spider web all weaved together, these public trails vary in length from short ones linking day walkers to neighboring villages to much longer ones, like our track, that bridged two coasts. And, at any given moment, your solitary designated path can suddenly split into a maze of subtle directions, bringing great confusion to through-walkers like Cynthia and I. And like the countless times this had happened before, we took the wrong path.

After quickly realizing our mistake, thanks to our trusty maps and guide book, we turned back to pick up the correct fork. And, as we merged back onto our original path, we came upon Marica, our Dutch friend from the bogs. It was if we were meant to take the slight detour, as she asked if we minded her joining us. Are you kidding?! We would love her company again, especially since she had not only safely guided us through those treacherous peat bogs a few days ago but also had just instinctively taken the right path. Three sets of eyes would now be better than two!

Within minutes, our path took us away from the Swale and into a thick canopy of trees, where we climbed a steep and seemingly endless set of large stone stairs to the ruins of an ancient abbey. The 375 sturdy stairs, appropriately called 'the Nuns' Steps', had supposedly been placed there, hundreds of years ago, by the nuns, as a safe walkway to the priory. And we could see why, as this 500 foot climb would prove to be our steepest of the day!

We spent the next nine miles with Marica, walking through farmyards, over rolling pastures, along narrow lanes through tiny villages and around countless farm field gates. We stopped to eat our sack lunch, once again thoughtfully prepared by our kind hosts at the previous B&B, on an old lichen covered bench within the grounds of a small old church and its ancient tombstones. After lunch we opened the old wooden door and went inside to explore St. Edmund the Martyr. Who wouldn't want to take a peek inside a church with such a cool name?! Turns out, as we read on plaque inside the church, that St. Edmund was a Saxon king, who was killed by the Danes in the year 870. Despite the small size of the ancient stone church, the interior was stunning. Church exploring, thanks to all of them having unlocked doors, had become a regular and fun part of our walking routine and this one was a beauty.

Another neat aspect of our daily walks were the stunning wide open vistas that were constantly in front of us. And, for me, one of my favorite "views", came towards the end of each day, when we'd see our destination village pop up in our line of sight, way out ahead of us, sometimes miles away. Today was the best village view thus far because, thanks to Richmond's larger size and the fact that we were approaching it from up high, we could see it down below the rolling green pastures, way off in the distance with its castle and church towers distinctly rising up above the rooflines of its stone houses.

When designing his walk across England, one of Wainwright's main goals was to avoid urban areas, but even though Richmond wasn't a true 'city', this large market town felt so much more crowded and less peaceful compared with many of the quaint one pub villages we had stayed in over the first 115 miles of our journey. Despite the bustling feel, after bidding farewell to Marica, we thoroughly enjoyed exploring the labyrinth of steep narrow cobblestone streets that always kept us within eyesight of the Richmond Castle, a classic 11th century moated keep, that was the city's towering centerpiece.

Thankfully, our beautiful B&B, the Old Brewery House, was nestled in a quiet square well away from the crowded town center. So, after getting over what felt like a mini shock of being around so many people and autos for the first time since dropping off our car at the Dulles airport eleven days ago, we were able to recharge our batteries to get ready for the long 25.5 mile section that lay ahead tomorrow. Many Coast-to-Coasters use Richmond as a resting place to take a day off to do some shopping and town exploring but we were glad that we had chosen to keep going straight through. Cynthia aptly summed up our collective thoughts, while we sat having a pint in one of the crowded pubs in the town center: "I can't wait to get back out on our quiet path again tomorrow!"

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**TIP of THE WEEK:** The single most important item in keeping you, as a walker, comfortable and safe, are your shoes! Selecting the correct shoe for your specific gait, foot shape and surface you'll be walking on, is a process to be taken seriously. Determining how much support or cushioning your specific foot mechanics require will be at the core of your selection. Running shoes are actually the best walking shoes, unless you're hiking on extremely uneven terrain, in which case, trail running shoes or hiking boots would be more protective. And remember: shoes last 400 miles of exercise, not counting the times you "hang out" in them.

**HIDDEN GEM of THE WEEK:** One of the closest and most beautiful walking venues to town and yet one of the best kept secrets, are the peaceful public paths at Foxhaven Farm. Located just a quarter of a mile along Reservoir Road, just beyond the Fontaine Research Park and the 29 bypass, this seemingly endless maze of grass and dirt paths takes you through beautiful fields and over hilly woods, leading you to magnificent panoramic views of Birdwood and the Ragged Mountain reservoir. A kind gift from the late Jane Heyward, an avid hiker and gardener, the Foxhaven trails are now owned and meticulously maintained by the UVa Foundation and are open to the public. Parking is available on the immediate left side as you turn off Reservoir Road and drive through the two old stone columns. For a map to the trails text me at 434-962-1694.

*Mark and Cynthia Lorenzoni completed their 200 mile thirteen day Walk Across England last September. They now start each day with an early morning brisk walk along the beautiful paths and roads of Central Virginia and invite you to do the same.*