

Part 2: The Northwest

Getting About

The Dales Non-Stop

Retreat at Green Acres

The Lake District

Getting About

On The Road Again

Time to move on, I'm sorry to say. In three days, we did a lot – took a walking tour of York, visited Yorkminster and the National Train Museum (fabulous), learned about the Romans, Vikings and chocolate, toured the North York Moors, passed through the little village of Great Ayton where Captain James Cook was raised, visited Whitby on the coast, and rode a steam train from Whitby to Pickering.

The Options

It's easy enough to get about in England— discount airlines, trains everywhere, rental cars and (I know this will sound odd to Canadians) walking. We've tried the

discount airlines and we've tried the trains. They do get you there but attempting photography en route is a lost cause. I'm a photographer, you see, so being able to take photos of discernible objects which do not resemble the inside of a dryer mid-cycle is important to me (Brits: we colonials use dryers to render our clothes wearable

after a wash). As an added bonus, one's undies never fall off the over-the-stove drying rack into the soup pot.

Why Bother

I've noticed that once you're in a country you must find a way to get about. One could just stay at the airport, I suppose, but my thought is that plane spotting would have limited appeal by Day 3. Apart from that and awkward sleeping arrangements, the airport could have real merit -- for those on a fixed income and for Scots, like me.

There is plenty to do in airports beyond plane-spotting. You can go for a cruise on the people-movers (one way only), make involved product inquiries at the duty-free shops (time is on your side), plug in your razor and curling iron at the corridor outlets (no charge) and learn your choice of foreign languages in the seating areas.

I have not run this idea past Randi, but I am fairly certain that her vision of foreign travel is a notch or two beyond the concept of ‘airport-as-destination’ and involves moving about occasionally. And that notion brings me in a roundabout way to the topic of this epistle — getting about in England.

Freedom Road

Renting a car has distinct advantages. With a car, one has full command of the itinerary. I can stop at will to take shots, giving Randi time to calculate the hours

remaining to bra removal.

Thirty-nine percent of Americans aside, ‘freedom’ is not spelled T-R-U-M-P, it is spelled H-E-R-T-Z. At least that was my theory.

You might have noticed that I did not speak to walking. It’s because we can’t. Colonials, by and large, are not taught to walk. We can shuffle with an odd sort of gait, (more like a duck than a stately Canada Goose), just far enough to sit in or on some form of conveyance. Brits, on the other hand, walk. In their cities, only an idiot would drive a car. In the country, only an idiot would drive a car.

Who actually drives all those cars, though, is a bit of a mystery. Tourists, I suppose, including us. We rented a car. No more airports and train stations. We were heading for a great adventure, flitting hither and yon as the spirit called. Serendipity was our companion now. She sat right next to Garmin on the dashboard,

sporting a wry smile and a twinkle in her eye.

Wherever one lives in Britain, the roads are narrow (more on that to come), the cars fast and the traffic thick. People walk to the shops, to work, to the cricket pitch, to the pub and slither home. That's it.

The Rental

On our last day in York, we made our way to the Hertz lot. Getting there was routine — 40 minutes to find it, 10 minutes to get the car. The 40 minute bit was merely irritating; the 10 minute bit was bizarre. When I opened the driver's side door, you would not believe what I saw. Nothing. There was no steering wheel. I returned to the office. "Look, I'm impressed that self-steering vehicles have gone mainstream in Britain, but I believe I ordered a car with a steering wheel."

"You'll find it on the right side, sir."

That was annoying. "If it was on the right side, I would have found it on the left. However, I did not. I'd like a car with the wheel on the left please, which IS the right side."

"Not certain I'm following your logic, sir, but that is the car we have available for you. Actually, you will find that all 253 million British cars are the same, sir. Wheel on the right."

"Remarkable. And not one Brit thought to make inquiries at the factories? There is something seriously wrong there."

"Yes sir, have a nice day. By the way, do drive on the left."

"On the left!! On the left! I'd be dead in a minute."

"I'm afraid you might be if you don't sir. That's how we do it here."

"Ridiculous," I grumbled.

“STAY LEFT!!,” screams Randi as we left the lot. Ah yes, momentary lapse. Shift to second. “Where’s the stick?”

Day 1

Day 1 of the Great Road Adventure was, shall we say, interesting. Randi might describe it with a tad more zeal. “Oh God!” was commonly heard; “look out!” was equally popular. In this way, we lurched (standard shift) and staggered our way through the Yorkshire dales to Liz’s house, our friend in Kendal, on the edge of the Lake District.

Fortuitously, our friend Garmin joined us for the drive. She is English, thirty something, confident, elegant and smart as a whip. I really don’t know what we would have done without her. I am not demeaning your navigational talents in the slightest Sweetie, but one must admit, Garmin was a life-saver.

Tucked inside the little screen on our windshield, (uh, windscreen) Garmin gave us moment by moment directions: “In 500 feet, enter the roundabout on your left and take the third exit to Mulberry Lane.” Or “Stay in either of the two right lanes and in 100 feet take Exit 23 to Gone By Road.... Recalculating...” Well, she wasn’t perfect. And those dirt roads through the forest were somewhat unsettling, but, in the end, they did get us to where we wanted to go.

At the roundabouts, things got tense. Were you with us, you might have heard something like this:

“Keep going, keep going. NO! That’s the second exit! We want the THIRD exit!”

“Bloody hell.”

“Recalculating. Continue on this road for 9 miles, then turn right.” Unspoken: You are about to tour three

counties, eleven villages at 20 miles per hour and experience the exhilaration of 23 roundabouts. Enjoy. Oh, and cancel your accommodation for this evening.

Yes, corrections could be lengthy affairs, yet dear Garmina, unlike her fleshy companions, never uttered an angry word. After the sixth foul up, your average navigator would have popped a blood vessel: “You bloody idiot, you’ve done it again! What did I tell you the last time? LISTEN. Now we’re in the royal soup. We can’t turn round ’til the next county!” No, Garmina -- patient, calm, understanding Garmina -- was the digital equivalent of Buddha.

You might have picked up that after a few roundabouts, we concluded that driving in England was a two-person affair: one to steer (me) and one to navigate (Randi). The steering bit went so-so. Remember the intelligence tests in primary school

where you were given an object, then had to identify its mirror image? Let’s just say that my response likely led to my new home at the back of the class, next to a boy who hummed. The point being, (is there really a point to all this?), Randi was indispensable, counting down the distances to the next heart-pounding roundabout, giving comforting feedback such as “Good job, honey, you missed him completely” and so on.

Barelies

As with most folks, I love to observe people. After a half century of doing just that, I have arrived at the conclusion that when it comes to getting from A to B in a vehicle, there are two kinds of people.

The first group, whom I call ‘Barelies’ provide barely enough information to survive the journey. A Barely will typically indicate a change of direction by saying, “Turn

left.” On the surface, this seems entirely appropriate (assuming it was left that you wanted to go). However, and herein lies the rub: that is only half the required instruction. The missing information is “in 400 feet.”

The omission of this key piece of information usually proves to be a mere inconvenience. The travelers may find themselves in the wrong county at dusk and spend the night by the roadside huddled or more accurately, interlocked in their rented Morris Minor. However, the omission can result in grievous mishap. If the navigator says "Turn left" (full stop) where there is no road to the left, well, one can see that there is an immediate problem. Furthermore, a Barely is also prone to saying ‘left’ when he or she means ‘right’ and vice-versa. This of course, gets awkward, particularly at roundabouts and when you find yourself in Wales and your Gaelic is not up to snuff.

There is one other thing. And this is important. A Barely uses the English language loosely. Compass directions have no meaning to a Barely. He or she prefers less precise terms like “over there,” “turn at the building,” “look at that!,” “Oh my God,” and the perennial favourite “Watch out!”

Tights

Like all things in the universe, Barely has an opposite -- ‘Tights.’ Tights walks erect with a noble air, confident that his or her highly rational mind will resolve all problems. However, when rationality falls by the wayside, when Barely and Tights are completely lost – the roads have changed, Garmina takes a coffee break or a detour appears -- Tights does an odd thing: he or she loses it. Any artifact of rationality is tossed to the wind. Tights crazy glues his or her mind to the last failed option, argues that it is indeed correct, then proceeds, even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

As a psychology major, I studied Tights. More precisely, I studied rat behaviour, which we all know parallels human behaviour closely.

I recall one experiment in which four separated feeding stations were positioned in front of a rat. However, there was a tricky bit. There usually is in life. To get to a feeding station, the rat had to jump from a starting platform to one of the four platforms where the feeding stations were located. He could not access a subsequent feeding station without returning to the starting platform first. Thus, jumping to a given platform/feeding station represented a discrete choice. Initially, any station the rat chose to explore provided food (a reward).

When the rat 'got' the situation, the conditions were changed. Three of the four stations were randomly

locked. Furthermore, when the rat chose a locked station the platform gave way and he fell into a pit (punishment). Eventually, he discovered the unlocked feeding station. Then, every time he jumped, he chose that station and successfully fed.

Again, the conditions were changed. All four stations were locked. What do you suppose the rat did next? He continued to jump to the last station that provided food, receiving punishment each time -- not five or ten times, but for hours on end. He appeared to have developed a fixed mind set which ignored his experience (locked station and punishment). When he jumped, he was operating from a 'wing and a prayer.'

This is Tights to a tee. When repeated attempts to find the correct route fail, Tights fixates on one option and insists it is the correct one. Further, Tights refuses to seek out untried sources of information such as asking

the way from a local, a technique happily and effectively utilized by Barelies. For the record, none of this describes myself. Just ask my wife...ah, she just stepped out to make an inquiry.

The Roads

Thoroughfares, called carriageways in Britain, vary in nature, notably in width. The term 'carriageways,' of course, goes back to the days of horse and carriage. For me, it conjures up a scene of upper class Victorian England. Horse drawn carriages jiggle along a gravel road to the sound of clapping hooves. The occupants, dressed to the nines, are waving and greeting friends passing by. The man in one carriage stands and calls out "Good day, how aw you?", then gives a slight bow and a sweep of his hat. As the carriages move apart, he shouts a proposal: "High tea at the Blethering Place? Good show!" Ah, how times have changed....

At the other end of road choices and several notches below the carriageway is the 'Lane.' The lane is narrow – very narrow and remarkably common in England. It was originally designed for small people on foot. Passing another traveller required one to turn sideways. In Canada, we call them trails. Here's a curious fact: the waltz was invented on English lanes.

The lane is guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of 'right-siders.' You see, all too often, lanes, with just enough room for little Perky, are two-way. Perky was our peppy bright blue Vauxhall. I'm certain that bright blue is the colour reserved for foreigners driving rental cars in the UK. To locals it says "Foreigner on the loose. Stand clear." That suited me. Perky, it turned out, is not considered a compact car in England, but a full sized sedan.

Moreover, these typically two-way lanes with room for

one vehicle come complete and without exception with two constant companions -- the stiff and silent Prickly Hedge on one side and the equally reserved Stone Wall on the other – always there, never the first to engage, yet always at the ready to do so.

If one chooses to cast fate to the wind and use a lane, one had best have a neck that flexes like a giraffe and the nerve of a high steel worker -- for driving in reverse.

Tip 1:

Keep all body parts you hold near and dear inside the vehicle at all times.

Tip 2:

Should you meet an oncoming car and are obliged to back up through multiple blind corners, bear in mind that English drivers are fast. Very fast. As you shift into reverse (this is

where being Catholic is a huge bonus), begin your Hail Marys. Don't know them and didn't bring any? Ah, what a shame.

And so it went. We drove for twelve days. I must say it was brilliant. A handful of locals we... uh, bumped into along the highways and byways of England...all right, six or eight, but no more... might hold a different opinion, but really, I think they were just being picky.



The Lake District

The Yorkshire Dales

It was Day 5. We were off to our friend Liz's house on the other side of the Yorkshire Dales. Like Little Red Riding Hoods, wide-eyed and high-spirited, we stuffed our bags and bodies into Perky, our four-wheeled puppy, and off we went, lurching along to grandma's house as I got reacquainted with gears.

It was overcast, perfect weather to draw in the spirit of this special region of Yorkshire. We took the highway west to the edge of the dales, then turned north into the hills. This would be an outstanding day with plenty of time to soak up the dales' iconic landscapes and take pictures. I had savoured this day for a long time.

Ah, but you know what's coming, don't you? That did

not happen. The sleepy days of James Herriot's Yorkshire Dales were long gone. The roads had not changed. They were still post-war narrow, flanked almost to the tarmac by Prickly Hedge and Stone Wall. There are no shoulders, no pullouts; we could make no stops and I took no pictures. And there were cars, plenty of them, piling up behind, streaking by in both directions. When they passed, some turned their head to the side to size up the under-performing driver of the offending vehicle. What they saw was a timid-looking man, wide-eyed man with a funny hat, leaning into the wheel and clutching it with a death grip. They surely cursed.

The drive was excruciating bar this: the landscapes: patchwork quilts of emerald green and ancient stone wall surrounds. Here and there, clusters of trees added mass and balance to the composition and more to the point, offered shelter to the sheep on cold winter days.

On that day in early September, though, the sheep grazed carefree across the rolling hills, until on the far side of the valley, they were reduced to dots of white.

There, the ridge slipped in and out of the mist and beyond that ridge was another and then another, each a faded look alike of the one before it. Over it all was a soft, luminous light that left an edge on everything it touched. No, the day was not all that I'd hoped, but it is etched in my memory, the land and its people bookmarked for another time. Green Acres

Garmina found it with the help of directions from friend Liz, who lives there. Green Acres, the name given to Liz's cottage, is tucked in a corner of the little stone village of Natland near Kendal, Cumbria. Perhaps a few hundred people live there. Cumbria is the county to the west of Yorkshire and lies in the northwest corner of England. Liz is a retired fisheries biologist and planner. She and I attended the School of Planning at

the University of British Columbia in the 1970s. Along with Randi and two other friends, we shared a house together. That was a long time ago, yet the three of us picked right up where we left off and spent a wonderful two days together.

Liz is full of life, Scots by upbringing, English by circumstance. She is lithe, an avid walker, prone to boisterous outbursts to make a point or laugh. Liz loves to laugh. And she loves to socialize, so she and Randi chatted at length at the kitchen table while I, in my usual fashion, headed solo to the garden with my camera.

Green Acres is a one-story 1950s white stucco cottage. It is thoroughly English. Rooms are small by our standard, filled with an eclectic assortment of furniture, books, photo albums, framed pictures of

family and knick-knacks, all precious items with memories attached, each carefully chosen. Doors are everywhere, perhaps to restrict the heat to occupied rooms on cold days or perhaps because that's the way it's always done in England.

The small kitchen has a bright red enamel range, an AGA look-alike I was told, that is many times more efficient. The AGA is a traditional fixture in British homes since the blind Nobel Prize-winning Swedish Physicist Gustaf Dalén invented it in 1922 to make cooking easier for his wife. Made of cast iron, the smallest AGA has two gas-fired ovens and a gas hob (range-top). AGA owners are quick to extol (read defend) its virtues, pointing to its capacity to replace a clothes dryer, electric kettle, space heater and toaster. Critics call it an energy hog. A standard non-AGA gas range uses only 2.6% of the AGA's consumption. In other words, the AGA consumes 38 times the energy

of the standard range. That's almost as much gas in a week as the standard range uses in nine months.

AGAs are much like Donald Trump. You love them or you hate them; they fire up predictably and belch waste unreservedly; and regrettably, they rarely die. Many AGAs operate for over 50 years. In 2009, the Daily Telegraph ran a competition to find the oldest AGA still in use. There were thousands of entries but none older than the 1932 model owned by the Hett family of Sussex.

Imagine how many AGA ranges like the Hett's are still dutifully cooking away in tens of thousands of row houses across Britain, burning up vast and unnecessary quantities of natural gas and spewing untold thousands of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere.



Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria



Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria

In fairness though, while Brits walk everywhere, this writer and all his North American compatriots are driving cars to any destination farther afield than 100 metres -- with the same result times 100,000.

In a thousand years time, the human species might have all but disappeared. Yet I can readily imagine the Hett family in their little Sussex cottage. I see them now – Hettie Hett, Pott Hett and their six little children. It's a cold winter's day. They're gathered in the kitchen, their hands raised to catch the heat from their 1932 AGA range. Hettie speaks... "I'm just so thankful our AGA burns anything."

"Yeah, like my year's pot supply."

"Well the wood shed is empty. What's a girl to do, honey bunny?"

"What's a bunny?"

"A Pott Hett who doesn't store wood for the winter."

Next to and above Liz's range is a clothes drying rack, common to North American homes until after World War II, but seen today in North America only in museum re-creations . If you're over seventy, you'll be familiar with this contrivance. The rack consists of five or so wood bars in a rectangular wood frame. Attached to its four corners is a cord harness that runs through a pulley on the ceiling, then ties off on a cleat mounted to the wall near the range. Wet clothes are hung over the bars and the entirety is hoisted to the ceiling close to the range where hot air works its magic at no additional cost.

However, some folks, I gather, have discovered a lamentable drawback to this drying method. Items have been known to fall off the rack onto the floor next to the range. This is precisely where the cat hangs out. Cats are experts at maximizing their comfort and life doesn't get any better than curling up next to the

range. Well, that's not entirely true. When an item falls off the drying rack into the cat's bed, life instantly shifts from good to exquisite. The upshot is that things placed on the rack to dry can simply disappear. Or parts of an item can disappear. For some diabolical reason, the parts that do disappear are invariably the parts which one treasures the most – the crotches of undies and the breast pockets of bras.

The bathroom lights are operated with a pull-cord attached to the ceiling. The shower is 'on-demand.' You turn it on by pushing a button on a white control box near the showerhead, then stand in the tub that is raised up from the floor to accommodate the plumbing. In the winter, the bath towels are dried on a heated chrome rack mounted to the wall. In the summer, they dry on the line with the rest of the laundry. Tumble dryers, it seems, are only for the rich and foolish.

The garden is, not surprisingly, an English garden. It has numerous stone-edged flowerbeds, a small lawn with a proportional shade tree, a lounge chair and table, a fish pond with no fish, a greenhouse, a woodshed and just enough gravel drive to park four Mini-Minors or one Dodge Ram 1500 pickup (if you could find one).

English gardens are decidedly un-North American. They ramble, they have no particular symmetry (short of gardens attached to castles), they are stuffed with plants that wander this way and that. All of which, I believe, is by intention. English gardens are designed to appear like an accident of nature, and, in part, I'm certain they are. That is, the gardener creates a basic design and then invites nature to participate, allowing the whole to evolve as a partnership.

Staying at Liz's was a reminder that change is not compulsory. It is a choice. It is a reminder too, that all

that is new is not always better. Brits and Europeans generally seem happy with that notion; they prefer the old to the new. For that I am exceedingly grateful, for had they been more like us, there would be nothing left to see – no ancient villages, no magnificent landscapes.

The English live their history. Every day they see it, move through it, feel it. Many can visit the house their ancestors lived in, loved in, died in. History and roots, I'm thinking, are not abstract thoughts in this land, but part and parcel of one's very being. How fortunate is that?



Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria



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Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria

The Lake District

On the second day of our stay with Liz we climbed aboard a mini-bus with fifteen odd others to tour the Lake District. The Lake District is a region of the County of Cumbria. It is also a national park. Tourism has a long history here, beginning in the late 1700s. As early as 1724, Daniel Defoe described it as “the wildest, most barren and frightful of any that I have passed over in England.”

In 1774 Father Thomas West published “A Guide to the Lakes” which led to visits by Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge. Wordsworth was so taken he moved

there. Indeed, you can visit his house and as you gaze at his writing desk, ponder why he got all that talent and you didn't. Once the poets had done their thing, the tourists did theirs. The wealthy arrived first.

My great grandfather William Spriggs, a clothier from Worcester, took walking holidays here in the mid 1800s, capturing the landscapes with pen and ink. Later came his children and their children, including my mother. Her parents honeymooned there, bringing with them an entourage of friends and family (see the images). Today, the tourists arrive, not in horse-drawn conveyances, six to a carriage; they come in buses, sixty at a time.

This was our second bus tour, possibly our last. Don't get me wrong; they did a good job, taking us places we would not otherwise have seen and telling us much along the way. Yet it's rushed and canned and

according to their schedule, not ours. Taking pictures was almost a lost cause. The tour included a sedate boat ride on Derwentwater in a vintage 1920s varnished wood cruiser. The boat was beautiful; the ride was boring; the landscapes were stunning. It is a moody, magical, entirely unique land. And the light! We must return.



Honister Pass, Lake District



The Lake District, Cumbria



Derwentwater, Lake District,



Lake District, Cumbria,

Hester

In 1781, two individuals lived but houses apart in London. Both were young. The woman had no knowledge of the man, yet the man was well aware of her. Indeed, he loved her. She though, was married and a Quaker. The situation was an agony for him but there was nothing to be done. Two years later, aged 32, she died. Not a word had passed between them. The man's name was Charles Lamb, the poet and essayist of the Romantic Age. Her name was Hester Savory. She was my 3rd great grandmother.

Charles was heartbroken when he heard the news of Hester's death, and wrote a poem about her. He called it 'Hester, published in 1818 in 'Works.'

*WHEN maidens such as Hester die
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try
With vain endeavour.*

*A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed
And her together.*

*A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate,
That flush'd her spirit:*

*I know not by what name beside
I shall it call: if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied,
She did inherit.*

Her parents held the Quaker rule,

*Which doth the human feeling cool;
But she was train'd in Nature's school;
Nature had blest her.*

*A waking eye, a prying mind;
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind;
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind;
Ye could not Hester.*

*My sprightly neighbour! gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
Some summer morning—*

*When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that would not go away,
A sweet forewarning?*

Charles had a difficult life. He had a profound stutter which, despite his bright mind, prevented him from pursuing a university degree, where eloquence was a

requirement. He left school at 14. His parents died early, leaving himself and his sister Mary to find work and care for the other children. His mother died at the hands of Mary, who, during an attack of insanity, stabbed her through the heart. For the rest of her life, Mary had yearly bouts of insanity requiring stays in a sanitarium. Charles worked as a clerk until his retirement.

His leisure hours were spent writing essays and poems along with Mary, with whom he did most everything. As well, he and Mary socialized with the great poets and essayists of the day, who were much drawn to the Lamb's affable natures. His close friend, with whom he went to school, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The bunch of them, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge and occasionally Charles spent a good deal of time in the Lake District, where Wordsworth and Coleridge had homes. Their poetry did much to bring

the beauty of the Lake District to the public's attention,
triggering the beginnings of tourism in the area.

Hester Savory (1751-1783)

Relation: 3rd great grandmother



Charles Lamb (1775-1834)



Friends and family, Lake District, Cumbria, 1898



The Spriggs honeymoon entourage in the Lake District, Cumbria, 1898



The Spriggs honeymoon entourage in the Lake District, Cumbria,