

# Today's Journey

## **CROMFORD CANAL, WAKEBRIDGE and CRICH**

Wrapping up warm, well, taking gloves and hat, we head off to catch the little bus that will take us over Starkholmes to Cromford Wharf.

It arrives on time at Matlock Green and apart from two old ladies who soon get off we have it to ourselves for the ten minute or less journey.

As we get to the top of Starkholmes the sun is casting shadows and the fields respond by sending out previously unseen shapes, well defined sharp clear shapes. Like the old lead mines resembling a group of mini volcano's above the fields of Matlock Bath.

Matlock Bath in the valley below catches the eye, looking as if it is enjoying itself on this not so warm Winters day. The cable cars hang still across the main road as the Heights of Abraham look stark and uninviting, it's tree covered side denuded of leaves.

In front of us, to our right, usually hidden by foliage sits the hamlet of Willersley. Well off the beaten track, how many vehicles have driven passed the opening to this tiny place? So small it's doubtful if it would make it into the conversation of most folk from Cromford or Matlock. Most people would not know of its existence.

"Willersley, oh that's the big house across the river" they would say.

Even so, we, after driving past the mud covered lane to Woodseats Farm do the same to Willersley.

The driver negotiates the bends towards the bottom of the Starkholmes Road and swings his bus onto Cromford Bridge trying hard not to emulate the horse that flew over it once. Well not exactly flew, that would have been Pegasus, but jumped the wall into the river. There is only room for one piece of traffic on this bridge and anything oncoming has to wait.

Today we win. We go over the hump of the bridge with its one pavement side and make our way to the door to alight at "Cromford Docks".

Wheatcrofts barges moored here once. The old buildings still stand and are being put to good use with a cafe and bookstore combined. Across the other side of the canal is an entrance from some garden or other, that actually would have opened onto the canal.

A case of "do drop in".

There's a flotilla of ducks that as a man, or should that be duck, suddenly turn and head towards us, about fifty bills all hoping to be filled. I have about fifty bills waiting to be paid and tell them I need the bread, sorry.

Cromford Meadows hosts no rugby match today and the sheep have been brought in to keep down the grass. Between the rugby pitch and the hillside runs the railway line. When travelling to Derby by train it offers a grandstand view of the sports that take place regularly on the Meadows, even so, you never see a penalty scored, a try made or a wicket fall. Beyond the railway line the hillside is dotted with the odd farm and houses which from here look like something out of Lilliput.

The sky is a lovely pale blue, and by keeping up a brisk walk you can keep warm. The sheep nibbling the Meadow have brought their own coats.

After half an hour we arrive at High Peak Junction. Once workshops, they now house among other things a sweet and gift shop, drinking facilities and video room showing film of the Cromford and High Peak Railway. Outside are picnic tables where you can sit and watch the canal run by. Inside is a nice warm coal fire which is behind the counter and off limits to cold and weary travellers.

Patricia asks for two chocolate drinks, which you get from a machine, the type where you put a cup under a spout and hey presto down comes the drink. She has already told the woman she once forgot to put the cup there on one of these type of machines.

"Yes it's easily done" said the woman. I prevented it being twice by whipping a cup under the pipe just before the chocolate flowed.

We sit outside and watch the ducks, mallard little grebe and moorhen. Someone throws a handful of bread into the canal. The two ducks sat on the bank simply drop off the edge into the water.

Some other ducks however have a fair whack to travel. Now I ask you, why do they swim, when they can fly. Their necks strain and eyes bulge and in spite of each push they see the bread diminishing rapidly.

The Moorhen are no better, they are on the side doing a fast walk before one of them decides he had better run, a quick spurt is all he manages, but wisely he takes off and flies, but only for a foot or so to land on the canal where from there he will attempt to beat the mallard to the spoil. He hasn't an earthly chance, this hen doesn't even have webbed feet, but a claw. It's like trying to use a paddle with holes in it and he moves in a zig zag direction as if trying to climb a steep sided hill.

Across the way we see the outline of Bow Wood. This is an ancient wood, being mentioned in documents of the 13th century. The shape is one that looks exactly like the outline of a bow. Could this have been how it got its name. From such things are myths and legends borne, and possibly facts as well.

We carry on our journey suitably refreshed and are met by a woman who obviously had trouble converting centigrade to Fahrenheit or missed the

bus to Lanzarote. She looks positively frozen and I wonder how far she will get before she gets wrapped in foil. Suddenly there is a double groan, we spin round to be confronted by two mountain bikers who have forgotten to equip themselves with a bell and resorted to a low droning noise to warn people of their approach. We let them pass, either that or we end up in the water. Not long after we see a family of happy children and an even happier parent. So happy is he that he jumps into the air, clicks his heels together and makes a perfect landing that scores a six point one on the Richter scale. A slight deviation would have seen his score fall as he would have ended up in the canal. As we pass I ask him if he would like to do it one more time for the camera. I have hopes of a winning entry on "You've been framed", but he declines.

As we approach Leashaw we come to a tunnel. Not long, but long enough for it to be dark once inside. I tell Patricia about the way the boatmen would walk there vessel by lying down and putting their feet on the walls of the tunnel. She already knows of this procedure, that it is to help get the canoe through the tunnel.

Don't you think the blokes head would drop into the water if he laid across a canoe I ask.

It is now so cold that the canal also starts to freeze but that doesn't stop the little grebe who dive underwater having competitions as to who can hold their breath longest. They also surface in the most unexpected places seemingly miles away from where they went down.

The little bridge at Leashaw comes into view and we leave the path alongside the clear and crystal waters of Cromford Canal.

We climb the steps, that have been worn down in the middle by constant use, and which seem to have been built for people with size three boots on the end of stiltwalker legs. You almost have to take a run at the first step to get on the tiny platform and then tip toe fast the rest of the run for fear of slipping back.

Leashaw Bridge is the size of a matchbox, a wonderful stone built affair with shiny clumps of ivy hanging over the sides. Leashaw Farm is another stone built affair, with a chimney pot trying to catch up the one at the Pump House we have recently gone by. The farms well manicured grass verges and painted white stones outside the farm buildings now indicating that it has moved on to become something else.

The canal below the bridge, once transporting coal, timber and corn among other things has also moved on, but I can't help thinking about the barges on a day like today. I had seen earlier a picture of an icebreaker, something normally associated with the Arctic Circle, but this one was much smaller. It was used to break the ice on the canal and this canal is freezing over. It is not alone, and we have an empathy with the men who carried the materials with which to keep warm but couldn't build

a fire.

We walk up the lane with Holloway village set on the hillside to our left and on our right fields and woods.

We cross the road that runs between Holloway and the bridge over the Derwent at Whatstandwell, and to confirm where we are a yellow sign says Leashaw Farm and to confirm how wrong I may be, it displays a picture of a sheep as well.

We cross the road and enter into a wood, in which stands a cottage, made of gingerbread, in the window is a shiny red apple and an axe outside the wood shed. Well it should have, it does in all the best stories but a bungalow in the middle of a wood, well near its edge is the best I can do. There's an extension on the back and I think I can just make out the words S.White above the door. There are rocks strewn all over the wood, no doubt quarried by seven little men many years ago.

The path through the wood is covered with rusty brown leaves like the natural worlds equivalent of a red carpet, inviting all to walk this way and appreciate the creativity.

Branches hang across the path making a bridge for many a squirrel to use at will. The bracken is still bright green in places, although most had died back to a crunchy brown and the yellow Winters sun set in a fresh blue sky flashes like a disco light through the branches as we walk by.

We climb up through the wood to finally emerge onto a beautiful sun laden field that dips and rises again to leave a ridge and make you wonder what is over the other side. This field must have been a good sledging run. It probably still is.

Patricia calls out to me to watch where I walk as "it's a bit boggy".

A slight understatement as a trough in the field is constantly overflowing and I basically have to ford a stream. Mission accomplished we make our through the stile onto the road near Wakebridge.

Patricia suddenly calls out "look a double decker bus going across the top of a hill".

The cream coloured "Sheffields last tram" was doing one of it's many runs that day at the Crich Tramway Museum .

Wakebridge is a tiny hamlet with its elongated farm set back a field or two with old tractors and caravans in the surrounding fields.

As insignificant as it may seem Wakebridge is mentioned in many early documents of the 1300's. At a later date, 1506 **James POULL** son of Ralf of Waykbrug Gent. is apprenticed to **John BREVERER** a citizen and draper of London. The Indenture was witnessed by none other than **Thomas KNEESWORTH** the Mayor of London..

The **POLE** family held Wakebridge for several hundred years. In 1756 an agreement was made whereby **Thomas WHIELDON** took out a 21 lease on the farm after the decease of **John POLE**.

In 1829 **Gervase SPENDLOVE** was a farmer at Wakebridge.

A dip and a turn in the road takes us by the remaining few houses that

make up Wakebridge. In 1574 an Anthony HASLAM is recorded as living at Wakebridge. There's a nice large fronted gabled old house in this area, behind which lies a rising field with outcrops of rock all edged by a triangular shaped wood. To the left of the dip a lane leads to old lead mines.

We carry on up the road towards Crich, the red brick ended terrace houses of Cliffside on our left, Oxhay Wood on our right, and where a long wooden fenced lane leads to Coddington Farm.

Across the road an old metal milestone tells us we are nineteen miles from Nottm, five miles from Ripley and four from Cromfd. Here the pavement we have been walking on disappears for a quarter of a mile. Over the wall are allotments minus the gardeners. Behind in the distance are the hills above Cromford and beyond.

Cliff Inn, its name portrayed in gold on a black board above the entrance and on a hanging sign displaying a white faced cliff on a shield which gives the impression we are in Dover. It is a three storey building made of stone, two stone chimneys either end of the roof, its seven windows each holding sixteen smaller panes and a small stone porch above the door making it reassuringly Derbyshire.

We pause a moment just above the Inn at Carr Lane. Carr Lane is a long road that passes through Coddington where Hindersitch Lane leads to Crich Carr and Whatstandwell. We take however a route via a path over the fields at the back of the houses to Crich.

We arrive at the "shopping centre" with its chip shop closed. Here are buildings that look like the City Hall from Back to The Future. There's a mini supermarket, a newsagent and a shop full of old things, new things, fascinating things that you could spend all day in. It was also a warm shop and as the day had got definitely colder it was a good place to stop. Across the road ,behind a metal railed wall the ladies of Crich were having their hair done. Allsops bakers were still open and had we time I could have sat and enjoyed a cream cake or two. Patricia being coeliac would have had to give hers up. As it was we had a bus to catch.

The road here amazes me. It's wide, very wide, with a car park in the middle, four or five stone troughs and cars come at it from four different roads. The ladies of Crich are wasting a fortune having their hair done, there's enough going on here to make your hair stand on end or curl for free. Maybe they just wanted to sit under a hot dryer.

Finally the bus arrives and we use a blow torch on the purse to get out our fare. Settled at last on warm seats as opposed to metal poles we head off back to Matlock. At the top of the hill and in the entrance to the Museum the last tram from Sheffield is still at it. It is not the only tram we have seen today. I have carried one in my rucksack all the time. The No 45 Red and White tram to the Docks via St Marys is on the front of the OS 119 Landranger map we carry.

Just past the Cliff Inn the bus grinds to a halt.

Suddenly a large wicker basket is flung along the floor, a long rod attached to Dave follows.

"I thought your werna comin " said the driver.

I wondered where he were comin' from.

"Thas not bin fishin in this"

"Ah tha canna beat a bit o' fresh air" said Dave as his breath poured out smoke and steam. "Bin down be pond". From ten o'clock that morning. He was sporting a plum coloured woolly hat that he tucked behind his ears so that his ears stuck out. His ears were either aglow or were red raw.

"Tha must be mad" said the driver. I agreed.

Dave undeterred then revealed his secret weapon. Under his coat he said he had " wun o them body warmers, I gorra from wuk"

"Dis catch owt then"

"Ah, I got five graylin".

I made that about four fifths of a fish an hour.

Dave got off at Holloway but not before saying tomorrow he would be back, complete with line and wicker basket.

As we rode on into Matlock the bright ball of fire in the sky gradually sank behind the hills, giving a red tinge to the trees and like Dave, tomorrow it would be back.