

Why doesn't the Friends Way follow in Fox's footsteps?

George Fox's 1652 journey was our starting-point, but we do not claim to follow his footsteps. Including all the places that he visited over his many journeys would not be feasible. Anyway, 21st century recreational walkers seek a route that has manageable distances between suitable overnight options. We wanted to afford walkers time for spiritual reflection, to ponder the changes since Fox's time and to appreciate how important Fox's legacy has been to the modern era.

Because many walkers can spare only one week at a time, we have split the distance from Barley to Swarthmoor Hall into two week-long walks with Sedbergh as the pivotal break point. In the first book we focus on George Fox's life and travels, and in the next upon Margaret Fell Fox's journey from mistress of Swarthmoor to organiser of the Quakers.

Fox's *Journal* was written several decades after his travels and published posthumously in several versions edited by different hands. Distorted by the long lens of hindsight, and perhaps telescoping several journeys made in different years, his precise itinerary is unclear in many places. The Boultons' book *In Fox's Footsteps* documents their conclusions about his actual route while acknowledging the uncertainties.

They dismiss Susan Bell's published contention that Fox had his vision on Pen-y-ghent not Pendle Hill; they note that his post-Pendle alehouse may have been in Downham, Sawley or Grindleton; and they show that he visited various places but not in 1652. They follow Fox on a major detour north from Hubberholme to Bainbridge and Askrigg, only to come south again on Cam High Road. Then they take the Dales Way back north to Cowgill – only to leave it to pursue a route through Garsdale and north into Grisedale before arriving in Sedbergh.

We have simplified this route drastically, sticking to the Dales Way from Hubberholme all the way to Sedbergh. Not only is it waymarked and easy to navigate safely even in adverse weather – it is also well-supported by the same B&Bs, pubs and cafés that serve the Dales Way. As the Boultons themselves say "Historical authenticity is all very well, but it has its limits."

The Boultons walked for fifteen days spread over May/June 1994, they accepted lifts and mostly stayed with friends. Without local connections and vehicle support, their journey would have been impossible even then. Our goal was to create a route that included key sites on Fox's journey, but that any committed walker could complete without relying on lifts. We had to research where B&Bs and sources of food were located in 2021 – and also to guess at their likely future survival post-Covid.

The Boultons' book was our inspiration, and it is full of thought-provoking reflections on why Fox's message is still relevant today. Practical logistics have made us pursue a somewhat different path, but with the deepest respect for their pioneering work.

Reference

In Fox's Footsteps David and Anthea Boulton (1998) Dales Historical Monographs 0-9511578-2-5 out of print but available while stocks last from the Sleepy Elephant, 41 Main Street, Sedbergh, LA10 5BL, UK (tel 01539 621 770). Price (excluding p&p) £11.95.