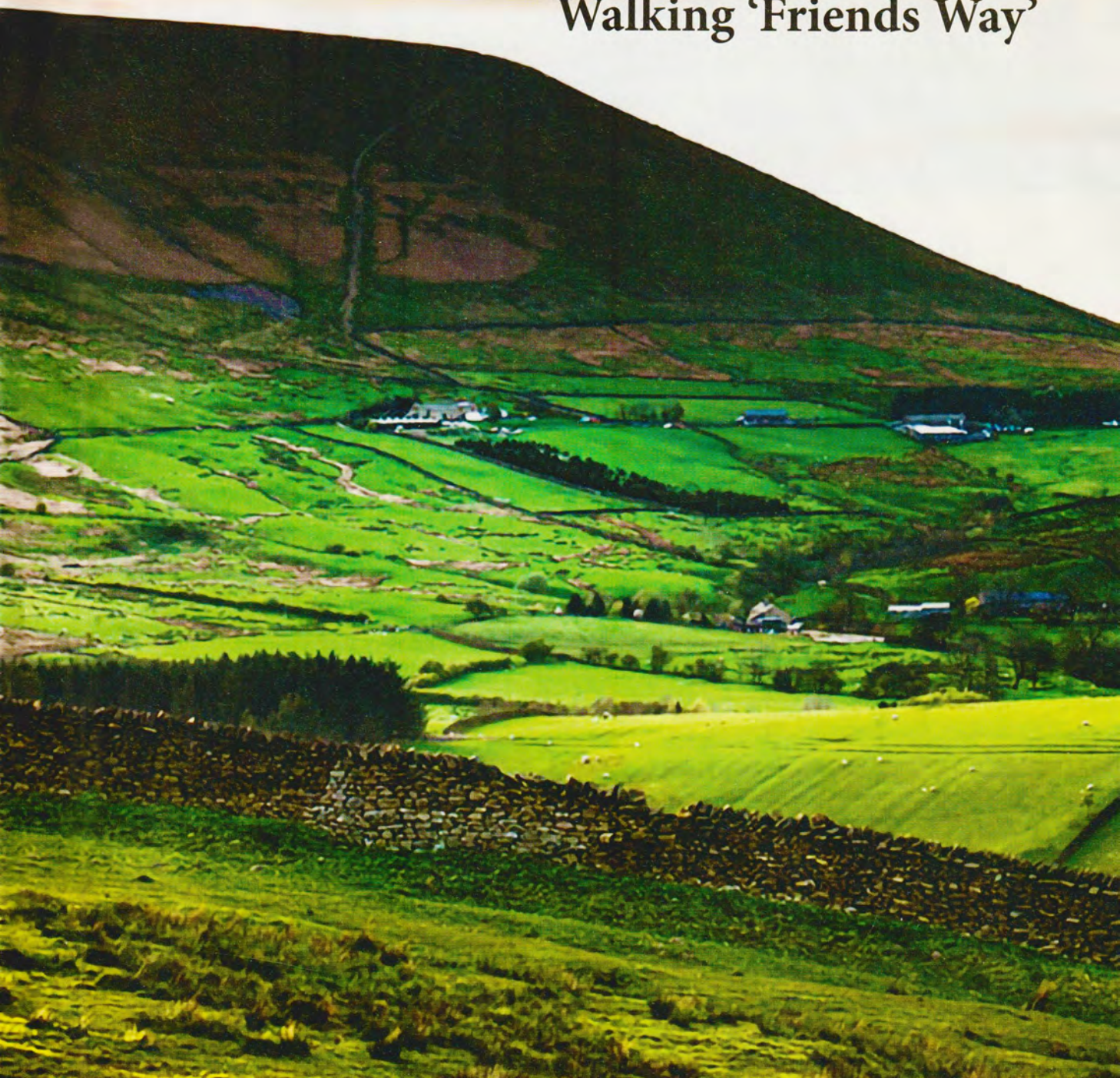


the Friend

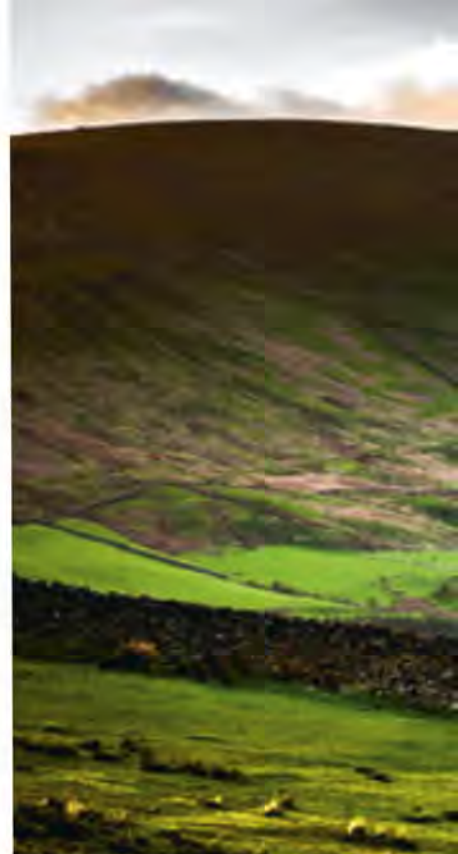
13 May 2022 | £2.00

*'We developed a route that celebrates
the outdoor spaces in which
Fox preferred to preach.'*
Walking 'Friends Way'



By the way: *Jacquetta Megarry* puts together a guidebook for Quaker walkers

'We developed a route that takes pilgrims away from steeplehouses and celebrates the outdoor spaces in which George Fox preferred to preach.'



It began with a phone call on 30 August 2019. Carole Nelson, indefatigable Quaker and owner of the Sleepy Elephant outdoor shop in Sedbergh, had somehow got hold of our number. Would we be interested in a publishing a guidebook to a route that celebrated the journey made by George Fox in 1652? I had barely heard of George Fox, had no idea if a viable route existed, and asked a great many questions.

Fairly soon it became clear that the real starting point would be a journey made by David and Anthea Boulton in 1994. Happily this was elegantly documented in their book *In Fox's Footsteps*, published in 1998. This contained some very small-scale maps of their itinerary, and a great deal of Quaker history.

Carole sent me the Boultons' book and I devoured it. I also started to read about Quakerism, and especially Jean Hatton's excellent biography *George Fox: The founder of the Quakers*. The more I read, the more certain I became that we wanted to develop this route and publish it among our list of guidebooks.

Soon afterwards, the pandemic changed everything. I was on a research hike for the Forth to Farne Way, a Scottish pilgrim route from North Berwick to Lindisfarne, using a lot of trains and improvisation from our base in Edinburgh. Meanwhile Carole had been pursuing an avenue to publication that involved a Quaker mountain guide who sounded enthusiastic at first, but his interest petered out and this turned out to be a dead end.

By December 2020, I had the idea of enlisting Martin Budgett, a long-standing friend, former headteacher and member of Mountain Rescue. Crucially, Martin lives near Kirkby Stephen, and seemed keen to develop the route and co-author the guidebook.

Meanwhile I had recruited Rachel Muers, then a professor of Theology at Leeds University, as our Quaker consultant. She was most helpful at fielding our questions and pointing us to reliable sources. We also persuaded Jocelyn Bell Burnell to write the foreword.

Once Martin had come on board, we started work in earnest. We realised that the route from Barley or Barrowford to Swarthmoor Hall was, at 135 miles, far too long for a single week, which is all that many walkers can spare. So we agreed to split the route into two at Sedbergh. Having read so much about Margaret Fell, I was convinced that her story should be told in a part two, which could cover Sedbergh to Swarthmoor.

Margaret's personal journey took her from teenage bride of Thomas Fell to the charge of Swarthmoor Hall. In 1652 she met George Fox and quickly became a Quaker convert and advocate: her social position as one of the gentry gave her access and influence to help victims of persecution. After eleven years of widowhood, she became Fox's wife and his strongest ally. Her activism made Swarthmoor Hall the northern centre of Quakerism, with Margaret its chief organiser. As Friends acknowledge, if George Fox was the founding father of Quakerism, Margaret Fell was its mother.

Margaret lived much longer than George: despite being ten years older, she survived him by more than eleven years. Her literary skills were legendary, and her *Womens Speaking Justified* can be seen as the first feminist manifesto. So we are devoting *Friends Way 2* to her personal journey and to the role of Swarthmoor Hall in the movement's history.

Meanwhile, back to *Friends Way 1* and the challenge of developing a viable route for the modern walker (someone unsupported by vehicle transport, and with only one week to devote to the walk). A dedicated few



are willing to carry sleeping and cooking equipment and camp wherever legally they can, but our market is modern pilgrims. These want a soft bed at the end of each day's walk, and they prefer to limit their daily distance to a maximum of fifteen miles, ideally less.

This led us to some simplifications of the Boultons' route. For example, we stick to the Dales Way from Hubberholme all the way to Sedbergh, eschewing Fox's detour to Bainbridge and Askrigg. Not only is the Dales Way waymarked and easy to navigate, even in adverse weather, but 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.'

'Our goal was to create a route that includes key sites on Fox's journey, which walkers could complete without cars.'

which any committed walker could complete without relying on lifts or taxis. 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 thoughtful reflections about 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.

In 1994, the Boultons walked for fifteen days. They accepted some lifts, had to interrupt their journey on occasion, 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 includes key sites on Fox's journey, but

Arguably, of course, our primary source ought to have been Fox's Journal. I was thrilled to find it available as a free download from www.friendslibrary.com. This makes it a great resource – once you have learned to search for places in their less familiar seventeenth-century spellings such as Cartmell, Lyndal, Swarthmore and Ulverstone. But the Journal was written in Fox's twilight years, several decades after these travels and published posthumously. It came 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 document their conclusions about his actual route with great care, while acknowledging the uncertainties.

We took a free hand to the route, but even our meticulously-planned alternatives were sometimes thwarted by finding a footpath impassable due to erosion or new fencing. We gladly adopted the Sedbergh Quaker Trail via Fox's Pulpit and Drawell Cottage to form a nine-mile circuit that returns to Sedbergh. Above all, we developed a route that takes pilgrims away from the steeplehouses of organised religion and celebrates the outdoor spaces in which George Fox preferred to preach.

The culmination of our work is the launch of *Friends Way 1* on 21 May in St Andrew's Church, Sedbergh. David Boulton will chair the event and we hope that many Friends will attend. We will have tea in the steeplehouse (in 1652 George preached outside St Andrew's by standing on a bench or climbing a tree (accounts differ), but we think that modern Friends may prefer protection from the weather. ●

Jacquetta Megarry is the chief executive of Rucksack Readers. Friends Way 1 is available as a (rainproof) paperback and ebook at www.rucksacs.com/books/fw1.