

Walking the Borders Abbeys Way, 2017

By Christine McNaughton



My friend, and regular walking companion, Marjorie have, over the past few years, walked several long-distance routes. For 2017 we decided on The Borders Abbeys Way, a 68 mile-long route linking the abbey towns in the Scottish Borders.

We decided to make Melrose our base for the week so booked into a hotel along with my husband John and several friends.

L to R: John & Christine McNaughton & Marjorie at Melrose Abbey.

The Temple of the Muses.

Day 1: On the first day we drove up to Melrose in the morning, and after registering at the hotel, we made our way to Melrose.



The Abbey was founded in 1136 by the monks of the Cistercian Order at the request of David I of Scotland and several Scottish Kings are buried there. In 1921 a lead container believed to hold the embalmed heart of Robert the Bruce was found under the Chapter House. From here we would walk the six miles to Dryburgh Abbey. John walked with us on this section, and after going along the ancient Priors Walk (a route used by the masons during the building of the Abbey) we reached the Rhymer's Stone. This marks the place where the Eildon Tree once stood, and where Thomas Rhymer is said to have met the Queen of Fairies and delivered prophecies in the 13th century. A few miles on we made a small detour to see the Temple of the Muses. This circular neo-classical "temple" is dedicated to James Thompson (1700-1748) poet, and was erected by David Stuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan.



Dryburgh Abbey.

Dryburgh Abbey stands on the banks of the River Tweed and was founded in 1150 in an agreement between Hugh de Morville, Constable of Scotland, and the Premonstratensian Canons of Alnwick Abbey in Northumberland. It was laid waste and restored several times before being finally destroyed in 1544. Sir Walter Scott and Field Marshal Douglas Haig, the 1st Earl Haig, are buried in the

grounds. A short walk took us to the small village of Clintmains where we caught the local bus back to Melrose.

Day 2: Clintmains to Kelso 12 miles.

View of the River Tweed & the Eldon Hills.

Our plan for the week was to drive to the end of each stage, leave John and the car there, and for Marjorie and I to catch the bus back to the start. Sticking to this plan she and I headed back to Clintmains. The Way on this section follows lovely woodland tracks before reaching the banks of the River Tweed. After a mile of riverside walking we reached “Old Dalcove” the site of a medieval tower house which was



“brent, rased and caste downe” by the Earl of Hertford in 1545. As we proceeded along the road from here we had good views of the Tweed, Eildon Hills, Waterloo Monument on Peniel Heugh, and Smailholm Tower. These are all sites with their own fascinating history and we would visit them at a later date.



L to R: Marjorie & Christine having lunch.

We stopped at the church in the small settlement of Makerstoun where we ate our sandwiches in the grounds in the rain. Onward the Way was pleasant fairly easy walking with some ascents and descents along ancient highways and byways. On reaching the outskirts of Kelso we passed the racecourse (opened in 1822) which

has been voted the friendliest racecourse in Britain. We passed the imposing gateway of the



entrance to Floors Castle - the largest inhabited castle in Scotland and home to the 10th Duke of Roxburghe. It was built in 1721 by William Adam.

Another short walk along the river took us to the Abbey and the end of Day Two. John had planned to do some short walks and sightseeing in Kelso but had got extremely wet in a thunderstorm.

The walk along the Tweed River view.

Day 3: Kelso to Jedburgh 13½ miles.

Kelso Abbey.

We drove to Jedburgh, and Marjorie and I bussed back to Kelso. The Abbey was founded by Tironesian monks from Selkirk around 1128 and at one time was the largest of the Border Abbeys. Kelso was very-wealthy and this coupled with its proximity to the English border meant that the Abbey was a natural target for marauding English armies. Little remains of the Abbey today, except the impressive west end of the Romanesque church with its unusual transepts and central tower.



The meeting of the ways.

Although today's walk was long, much of it was along the river bank and a long stretch of disused railway track. As we left Kelso we crossed the rivers Tweed and Teviot. Where these two rivers meet the Junction Pool is formed –one of the best (and most expensive) places for catching salmon. We passed the remains of Roxburgh Castle, once one of the most important strongholds in Scotland,

founded by David I. Because of its position it frequently changed hands between the English and Scots finally being destroyed in 1417. Along this stretch of the river we saw many different birds – mallards, moorhens, swans, oystercatchers, and herons. After three

Roxburgh Viaduct.

kilometres we left the river for a short way to pass through a farm and under the Roxburgh Viaduct before returning to the river for another mile before climbing up to reach the old railway. This we followed for about three miles before returning to, and crossing, the river.

Shortly after this we reached Dere Street. This old Roman road was built by Agricola around 80BC, and originally ran from York in England

to Perth in Scotland. Dere Street here was a clear track running straight uphill for 800 metres



and both the Borders Abbeys Way and St. Cuthbert's Way (another long-distance walk) meet on this section. We were soon nearing Jedburgh and were met by John who walked the final mile to the Abbey with us.



Dere Street.

John had a most interesting day in Jedburgh – visiting the Abbey, Mary Queen of Scots' House, The Gaol, and the Capon Tree (an ancient oak more

than 500 years old and one of the last surviving remnants of the Ancient Forest of Jed).

Day 4: Jedburgh to Denholm 8 miles.

Jedburgh Abbey.

Jedburgh Abbey founded in 1138 by David I occupies a commanding position overlooking Jed Water. The 12th century abbey church is one of Scotland's most outstanding medieval buildings. The walk today was one of the highest and the path went uphill almost from leaving the Abbey. Many of the tracks were lined with gorse bushes



which were in bloom and their perfume (like coconut) filled the air in the slight breeze that was blowing. We continued climbing until we were just below the summit of Black Law at



Christine at the highest point of the walk.

1100 ft. Here we stopped for our sandwiches and to admire the extensive views. Once on the move again the route was very undulating through fields and forestry. When passing through the small settlement of Bedrule, we met two fellow walkers and on talking to them we discovered that they were from America and doing the Borders Abbeys Way the opposite way. Soon

we were approaching The Loaning when a sudden shower of rain occurred. We spotted a figure trying to shelter in the hedgerow, and discovered it was John. He had spent the day walking and looking round Denholm before coming to meet us. A walk of one kilometre down the Loaning took us into Denholm and the car.

Day 5: Denholm to Hawick 6 miles.

The attractive village of Denholm is centred on its large Green and Monument to John Leyden, poet and oriental scholar. Born in 1775 he exhibited an amazing facility for languages and eventually mastered or had knowledge of several dozen. He spent part of his life in the Far East and died in far distant Batavia in 1811. Denholm was also the birthplace of Sir James Murray (1837-1915) who became editor of The New English Dictionary.

Lunch on the Stile.

This was to be a special day as Marjorie and I were going to be joined by John and Sheila (87 years young) who was staying with us in Melrose. We four used to walk with the Penrith Ramblers every Wednesday until age and illness over took them. We drove to Hawick and caught the bus to Denholm. It was a generally a level walk along road and river. There were wild flowers in abundance along



the wayside verges so making the walk very pleasant, although there were many stiles along the way. Stiles are found all over Britain as a means to get over or through any boundary fence or wall in fields or footpaths. There are many kinds of stiles, ladder, step or wall and many variations of these. We were soon into Hawick and a fellow walker suggested a tea shop as a good place for refreshments. We didn't take much persuading to stop.

Hawick has two statues - The Horse Statue and The Hornshole Monument celebrating important event in Hawick's history.

Day 6: Hawick to Selkirk 12miles.

This was a long, high walk on what was to be one of the hottest days of the year. Almost immediately the road started to climb out of Hawick, but although there were some short descents, they were immediately followed by longer steeper ascents, until descending to Salenside we decided to sit on a convenient stile to eat our sandwiches. After eating we



joined the Thief Road another ancient byway which took us across a golf course and on into Wollrig. We continued up a minor road until we reached the highest point at 1105ft at Hartwoodmyres Forest. More walking on undulating paths through the forest and then along the road followed until we met John who escorted us into Selkirk. John had found many interesting places to visit in Selkirk.

Gorse lined 'Thief Road'.

Day 7: Selkirk to Melrose 10miles.

The Kirk O' The Forest.

This was the last section today, so Marjorie and I caught the bus to Selkirk leaving John to explore Melrose. The weather was still very hot and, as the route took us up over Selkirk Hill, we were soon perspiring. We passed on route The Kirk o' the Forest, the remains of Selkirk's Old Parish Church. According to local tradition it was in the original parish church



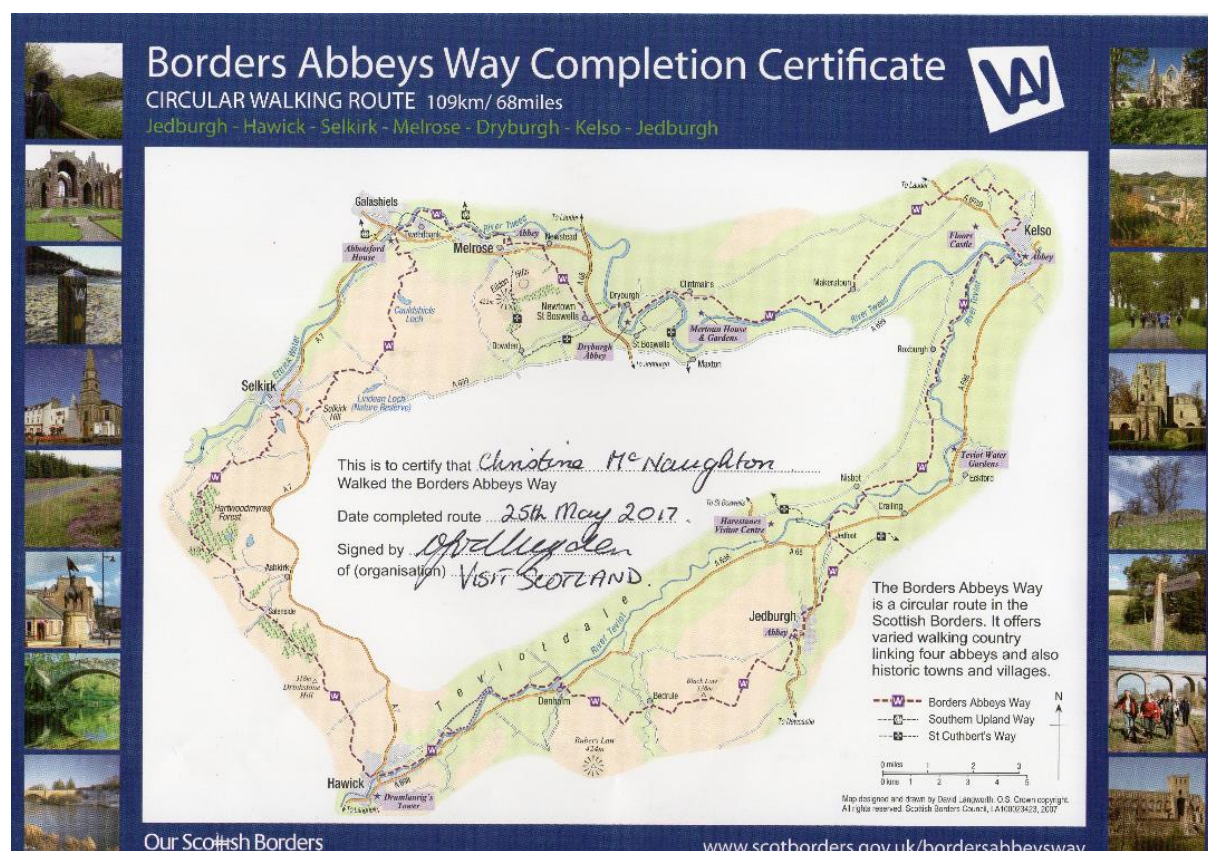
that William Wallace was named Guardian of Scotland in 1297 in the aftermath of his victory in The Battle of Stirling Bridge. Selkirk Hill is now a haven for wildlife and flowers, but at one time was part of the ancient Ettrick Forest. Around 1113 David 1 granted land in the area to the monks from Tiron in Normandy so that they might build an Abbey here. The abbey was short lived and was relocated to Kelso around 1128 when the monks complained that the land at Selkirk was not suitable.

Much of today's walk was along an old drove road. These ancient ways are found over much of Scotland and Northern England and were used by the "drovers" moving livestock, perhaps for a hundred miles or more to one of the big markets. We followed this road for quite a few miles up over Whitelaw Kips and Faldonside Moor, the highest point of today's walk at 1000ft and our lunch stop. We then descended to Cauldshields Loch. Here we made our one and only mistake of the whole walk. The path round the edge of the loch was still under water from recent heavy rain and we missed the way marker, so missed the route but we were soon put right by a young couple out walking so we didn't go too far "off piste". Soon we were approaching Abbotsford House home of Sir Walter Scott. From here it was a three mile walk along the river to Melrose where John met us to walk the final half mile back to the Abbey.

During the walk we had collected "stamps" at the Abbeys or Tourist Information Centres to prove we had done the walk, and so, on the journey home, we went back to Kelso to get the last stamp and we were presented with a certificate to say we had completed the walk.

This year, 2018, John, Marjorie and I returned to Melrose and revisited the abbeys, exploring them more closely. We also climbed Eildon Mid Hill, the highest of the three peaks, climbed up Peniel Heugh to the Waterloo Monument which was built to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo. We also visited Floors Castle and Gardens and Abbotsford House and Gardens.

Smailholm Tower and Hermitage Castle also have history going back many centuries and were mighty strongholds during the era of The Border Rievers when lawlessness prevailed.



Certificate received by Christine McNaughton for completion of the Borders Abbeys Way walk.