

FROM THE SHELTERED LANES OF DEVON TO CO. DURHAM AND BACK IN FOUR DAYS



Lunch-time: the M.G. takes a rest amidst the broom, gorse and heather near Whitchurch.

FROM Devon to County Durham for a week-end may seem a far cry. Nevertheless, since it afforded an opportunity for seeing our son, engaged in forestry in the North, and we had four clear days at our disposal, it was decided that the distance need not deter us. Accordingly, one Thursday morning as dawn was beginning to appear in the sky, a small green car might have been seen stealing quietly into the main road not far from Cullompton, nose pointed northwards and side lights switched on. Rendezvous with son—the Kings Head, Barnard Castle, Yorkshire.

It was a glorious sunrise as the car sped through the peaceful Somerset countryside, and side lights were soon dispensed with Bristol was scarcely yet awake, but at Gloucester there were more signs of life, and a brief halt was made to obtain a daily paper. Then, beyond Newent, a quiet spot was found for a meal. It is surprising how good a flask of hot tea tastes, with nearly 100 miles covered before breakfast. From Tenbury, a few miles farther on, a diversion was made to climb Clee Hill (1,249ft) at the highest part of the road, the view obtained of the distant Radnor Hills and Clan Forest being sufficient reward for the climb, which included two quite intriguing hairpin bends through the woods near the top.

Lunch Stop

From Ludlow a fast run followed, through lovely scenery, to Church Stretton and Shrewsbury. The streets of the latter town were crowded, needing careful navigation, and there was much to see. At this stage, however, one's companion's eyes began to droop, owing to the early hour at which she had arisen, and it is to be feared that she saw but little of this very attractive and beautifully situated old town. A very short drowse, however, sufficed to restore her usual alertness. About this time a stop for lunch seemed indicated, and an ideal place for a picnic meal was found on a heath near Whitchurch, where the car could be parked well away from the main road amidst a wide expanse of broom, gorse and heather. A small bunch of the heather served to remind us of the occasion, and remained attached to the front bumper until our return to Devon.

On again through Warrington, hidden in a heavy rain squall, to Preston, where all was sunny again and the city unexpectedly gay with a profusion of green and gold bunting. Pavements were lined with spectators,

apparently awaiting a procession, while the sound of music filled the air. All to do with the "Northern Guild," so we gathered from numerous direction signs, but, as Southerners, we had not the remotest idea of what it was all about. It was evident, however, that Preston was *en fête*, and rarely has one seen such a mass of colourful decorations, or so attractively set out; one drove for miles under literally thousands of small pennants stretched closely together across the city's streets. Leaving the gaiety of Preston behind, we were soon driving through the more soberly attired streets of Lancaster, whence A683 took us to Kirkby Lonsdale and on by the valley of the Lune to the narrow paved streets of Sedburgh. Then, at last, we felt we had come to the North—the real North!

The scenery changed. It became more open, and wilder, with the Westmorland fells, rising to over two thousand feet, in front of us. The road at first kept close by the river, tree-shaded and with the water splashing down over its rocky

TO THE NORTH

bed to form deep pools, ideal for bathing on a warm sum-

By

"LONGSHIPS"

mer's day. It being a decidedly cool autumn evening, we were, however, not tempted to leave the snug atmosphere of the car—it was enough to look! Climbing gradually upwards, the road came out on to the open moor by Harter Fell (1,712 ft) after which followed the long descent into Kirby Stephen—to give the town its local pronunciation, although spelt as "Kirkby."

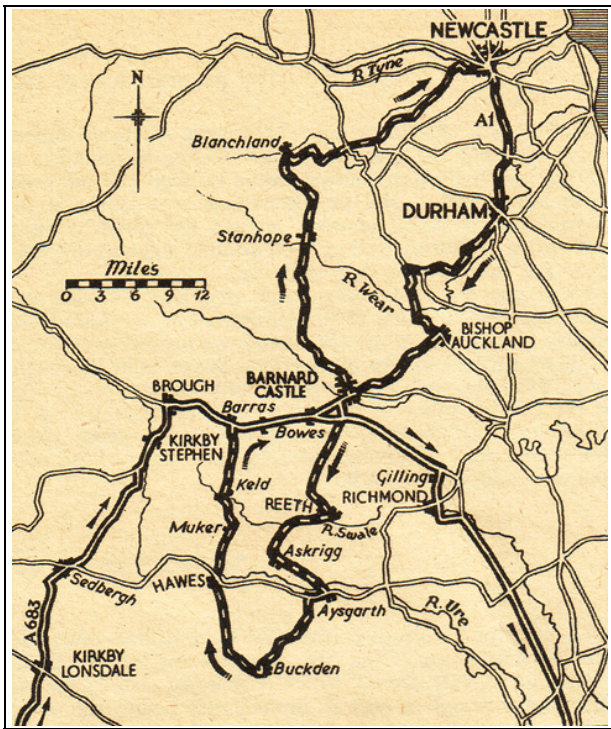
Barnard Castle was almost within sight, over Bowes Moor, and about half an hour later we entered the town by the narrow County Bridge, which spans the Tees below the ruined walls of the old castle. So narrow is the bridge, and with blind approaches, that the traffic signals on each side are a boon. Then, in second gear, with a crisply sounding exhaust, we climbed the steep main street to the King's Head, passing on the way our son, who also, by chance, had chosen that exact moment to arrive. It was, undoubtedly, an "occasion," and was suitably celebrated at dinner. Then, comfortably fired after our day's run, to bed.

The two days following we were free to roam wheresoever we listed. The weather remained fine, and there was a feeling of freshness in the northern air that acted as a tonic after the softer and less invigorating climate of the West Country. We were off early, therefore, and our first day was spent exploring the Yorkshire fells and dales, choosing as far as possible the lesser known mountain roads. Glorious vistas of the far-reaching Pennines were obtained, alternating with steep descents into peaceful cultivated valleys, where the road would keep company with some crystal clear mountain stream, passing remote little hamlets with their clean, grey, stone-built cottages, until, eventually, we came to Wharfedale.

Northern Kindliness

At Reeth, south of Barnard Castle, in Swaledale, a kindly Yorkshire woman made coffee for us. Hot, it was, and delicious! As we sipped it by the window, in the bright sunshine, we looked out over the busy village street, observing the brisk walk of the people as they went about their various affairs, in and out of the shops, while, up the hill, a little knot of countryfolk could be seen by the village green awaiting the bus to Kirkby Stephen.

Crossing over the river, about midway between Reeth and



Muker, we found a narrow and little-used road, rough and grass-covered in places, which struck southwards over the fells to Askrigg. It was a long pull and steep at times, but full of interest, with the wild scenery of the fells all round, the road climbing to 1,755ft by "The Fleak"—the name given to the highest point on the moor. Thence followed a quick descent, between typical Yorkshire stone walls—or "dykes," as they are called in the north, to the pleasant little township of Askrigg, in Wensleydale. Continuing down the valley, keeping on the north side of the river, we came to Aysgarth, noted for its falls and picturesque tree-shaded bridge spanning the River Ure. The falls on the present occasion were somewhat disappointing, the river being low.

From Aysgarth a very narrow and twisty road, by Thoraby, follows the river upwards through the green pastures and entrancing scenery of Bishop Dale. The ascent is gradual at first, but later there is a stiffish climb, needing the use of the gears, up to the open moor below Buckden Pike (2,302ft), a vantage point from which a really magnificent view of Wharfedale is obtained. Wharfedale is certainly one of the loveliest of the Yorkshire dales. To anyone coming from the south of England its spaciousness, perhaps, makes the greatest appeal, as well as the winding road by the river, passing Hubberhole with its low-built ancient church of Saxon origin, the solidly made grey walls of which blend perfectly with the surroundings.

Holy Well?

A little farther on, at Yockenthwaite, the river is particularly beautiful; while seen through the trees, on the opposite bank, is a low arched structure of ancient appearance, which, were it in Cornwall, one would say at once was a Holy Well. A young girl, swinging lightly down the valley despite the knapsack she carried, stopped with a smile and, her voice betraying a trace of Yorkshire accent, said she believed there was a Holy Well somewhere along by the river, so perhaps our surmise was correct. That a saintly recluse should have chosen the site would not be surprising.

Continuing by the river, the road presently, a little beyond Deepdale, takes a more northerly direction, climbing upwards by Oughtershaw Beck to Fleet Moss, whence it descends again over the green slopes of Wether Fell into the village of Hawes. It is a good climb, an altitude of 1,852ft being attained, but possibly is more severe and continuous coming in the opposite direction, from Hawes. At the summit (owing to its steepness the immediate drop in the road

was not visible) the sound of a car, revving in low gear was heard approaching, and as it topped the brow no wonder the engine note had sounded familiar; it was a "brother"—another 1¼-litre M.G. We, metaphorically, dipped ensigns in passing, and as we proceeded, each on his lawful occasions, the moor felt less lonely for the meeting.

From Hawes over the Buttertubs Pass to Muker, seeing on this occasion the noted "swallow holes," which on a previous visit had been completely obliterated by rain and mist—so thick that we had passed them without knowing. Fantastically worn pinnacles of limestone, with precipitous funnel-shaped holes between them, disappear into the black depths of the earth. Fascinating, but rather uncanny.

Muker was left by the Kirky Stephen road (B6270), but after passing the little hamlet of Keld, some three miles from Muker, we decided to strike away northwards over the fells by West Stonesdale to Tan Hill and Barras, which would effect a saving of several miles on our journey homewards to Barnard Castle. The road, as shown on the map, was a very secondary one, unclassified, but this it was thought might add to the interest, and a notice encountered at the turning off to West Stonesdale certainly seemed to confirm our ideas. We did not stop to read the whole of it, but the words VERY STEEP HILL stood out conspicuously, while equal prominence was given to the fact that there were, also, ACUTE BENDS—two of them. A brief glance ahead showed the road zig-zagging upwards through the trees, and left no doubt that it was a hill—to be treated with respect. The M.G., however, was in good fettle, and in low gear, with the engine revving hard, "went to it." A successful climb was made, albeit with some skidding around the bends, about which the notice was perfectly correct—they were acute!

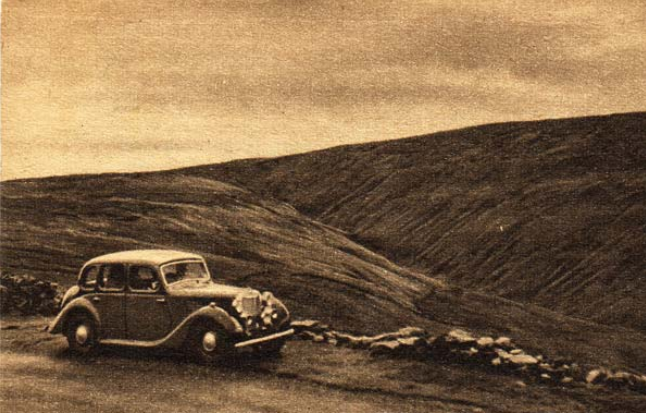
Bleak Country

Beyond Tan Hill the road was desolate in the extreme, with no sign of life anywhere, dark clouds coming up from the west, full of rain, as dusk approached. A lurid red streak across the sky below the inky storm clouds, outlining the distant mountains, made the scene dramatic. Even more dramatic was the fact that the petrol gauge indicated that if we did not meet with a garage quite soon, the prospect was grim. Barras, however, was reached, and a little later, along A66, a petrol station hove in sight. We should see our dinner, after all!

The following morning (with a full tank) the M.G. headed

Askrigg, in Wensleydale, was approached by a steep descent between typical Yorkshire stone walls, or "dykes".





1,852ft up, the road between Wharfedale and Hawes runs through some magnificent scenery

TO THE NORTH continued

northwards for Newcastle, over the Durham moors by Stanhope and Blanchland. On the high ground the variegated pattern of sunshine and shadow, seen stretching away over the moors into the farthest distance, made an unforgettable picture. Dark patches, of a greenness resembling jade, alternated with hillsides lit by the sun where the colouring changed to the palest gold: overhead the white clouds drifted slowly across the sky, leaving spaces of the clearest blue between. The keen photographer, bent on recording the scene, demanded a halt, but, with chilled fingers and eyes astream, was glad to regain the warmth of the car; it was, he found, colder outside than in!

Blanchland, or "Whiteland," is picturesquely situated in the wooded valley of the Derwent, some twenty miles distant from Newcastle. It is, of course, in Northumberland. The village owes its name to the monks of the old monastery founded there in 1175, whose white robes—of the order of St Norbert—caused them to be known as "the white canons." Of the old abbey, only the gate-house with its massive archway, and a part of the original refectory, now remain. The former at the present time serves as the village post office, while the refectory has been converted, not inappropriately, into an inn—the Lord Crewe Arms. Lord Crewe, it may be said, was bishop of Durham and became lord of the manor after the Dissolution. The village is centred around the remains of the abbey, which, with the church beyond, form an attractive setting to the old square or market-place, and, as could be observed, it was evidently a favourite subject for artists.

To enter Newcastle over the Swalwell Bridge and along Scotswood Road, is not perhaps the best way of approaching the city, even though one does catch a glimpse of the famous Elswick works, the birthplace of many of England's ships of war. It is not a salubrious thoroughfare, however, and one is

Hubberholme, an isolated village in Wharfedale, has a well known church. The medieval rood loft is one of the few surviving examples in Yorkshire.



glad to reach the impressive Newcastle Central Station, where formerly the graceful green-coloured locomotives of the old North Eastern Railway could be seen and admired. *Tempora mutantur*, and the trains that now arrive at the Central are composed of stock painted the garish crimson and cream of British Railways—a strange sight to one who knew the Newcastle in days gone by.

Newcastle is undoubtedly a fine city, with its wide and well-kept streets, while to the feminine eye, we found, the display of fashions in the shop windows proved irresistible. Grainger Street and Northumberland Street, busy thoroughfares, thronged with people on a Saturday afternoon, and, as the lady member of our little party exclaimed, "It is all so clean! If Newcastle is supposed to be a grimy place, full of coal dust, it certainly *isn't*—I won't have it said so!" She was indignant about it!

Leaving for the south by the new Tyne Bridge, one gains the best impression of the city. From it one looks over the river—the "Coaly Tyne," which is spanned also by the old High Level bridge as well as, immediately below, the swing bridge. Beyond, as a background, are to be seen the rugged walls of the old castle keep and, silhouetted against the sky, the beautifully proportioned steeple of St. Nicholas' cathedral, erected in the fifteenth century. As seen from the bridge, in the light of the late afternoon sun, the city, with its river, makes an impressive picture.

From the Tyne a magnificent dual-carriageway (A1) runs south to Durham, along which the M.G. proceeded at a rate of knots that afforded her crew every satisfaction, Barnard Castle being reached in excellent time for the forty-odd miles.

On the Sunday, the son returned to his beloved forests in the Wilds of Galloway, while the M.G. headed southwards again to Devon. A1 was followed as far as Doncaster, after which we struck off through Sheffield and down the centre of England to Warwick. At Moreton-in-the-Marsh a certain well-known hostelry had roast duck on the menu, and we fell for it, afterwards continuing contentedly through Cirencester to Bath. Here the M.G. was once more on familiar ground, and, with the head lights showing the way, we were soon home. The mileage from Barnard Castle was almost exactly the same as that recorded by the speedometer on the outward journey, via the West Coast, the difference being two miles only.

And on the Monday, the M.G. was back in her sheltered Devon lanes—by Plymtree and Kentibear and Willand, where the air was mild and the sun still full of warmth, so that one could drive with the windows open. The Pennines seemed very remote. But we had been—and were glad of it!

Originally published in the Autocar, 5 June 1953.

The 15th century gatehouse at Blanchland, in Northumberland, is now used as the village post office

