

Bilsborrow and Lancaster Canal

Highly Anticipated and Eagerly Awaited, a walk Much Prepared and Triple Recced, providing plenty of opportunity for 'leaders who lunch', perhaps a guide book to be written? A footbridge not found, farmers gates locked and tied up and 100 Holstein Friesian pedigree cows in the fields, leading to sleepless nights and a trip down Idiots Lane, but obstacles are there to be overcome, and **this u3a Walking Group** is not easily denied, so here we are gathered in a small picturesque canal-side village which has grown from Guys Eating Establishment, since 1980 a pizza restaurant of much renown, remembered by me for the model train chugging around the rafters and the chefs making pizzas in ovens on open display, and following a short history lesson, as is the u3a way, we set off on the tow path on this bright and clear day, ducks a plenty, narrow boats of many colours moored on the opposite bank, did we just step into an episode of Rosie and Jim?



Photo by Graham

A Handsome Heron a-hunting, perched between towpath and canal, rigid in its concentration, baby ducklings swimming around the canal oblivious to the danger they are in, saved perhaps by **this u3a Walking Group**, the predator taking umbrage at the intrusion, flapping in an ungainly fashion as it sweeps downstream, then Barton Grange Garden Centre and Farm Shop, in 1963 the first Garden Centre in the North West, another success story now relocated and expanded to include a Flower Bowl Entertainment Centre where they will be more than happy to take even more of your hard-earned Pension.

Over the busy A6, careful not to lose a life and across the West Coast Main Line using the old metal railway footbridge then following the river Brock upstream, memories of an earlier walk – waterproofs well tested that day. Now ignoring Idiots Lane we head to the location of the old Matshead Paper Mill and when we seem to have lost the path, we are rescued by the King, soon to be abdicating South with his Queen, and they will be missed Royally by **this u3a Walking Group**. And then to the main obstacle of the day, the famous metal gates, bolted and tied up with string. A small piece of fence surrounded by nettles tries to impersonate a stile, but badly, so rope skills learnt in the Scouts and Guides are required and the Gates are no barrier to the perseverance of **this u3a Walking Group**. Some of the Friesian's are spectators in an adjacent field, what do they make of **this u3a Walking Group**, I hesitate to think, then as we make our way through the farm and the cow shed, more Friesians lined up, pressing up against the fencing, jostling for position, chickens clucking, running, pecking, the farmer working, children playing. Over the M6 Motorway bridge, In 1958 Harold MacMillan opened this first ever stretch of Motorway, 2 lanes in each direction, a hedge was the central reservation. Now 4 lanes and still not enough.

Back to the village, Owd Nells traditional canal-side Tavern, outside seating like a pavement café, families enjoying the summer sunshine, children here for the Bubble and Beach, schools out for summer says Alice Cooper, lunch-time is in full swing. The indoor option where the wasps annoy you in smaller numbers, low slung beamed ceilings, flagged stone floors, a hearty meal and a drink is in order for **this u3a Walking Group**.

Mike