



This extract from a Climbers' Club Journal contains only articles/photographs where the copyright now belongs to the Climbers' Club.

It is provided in electronic form for your personal use and cannot be used for commercial profit without seeking permission from the Climbers' Club.

© Copyright 2010

## CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of the CLIMBERS' CLUB JOURNAL.

DEAR SIR,

WASTDALE HEAD.

The early nomenclature of Wastdale Head seems to be a subject of interest to many of your readers to judge by the enormous number of letters which it has brought me. As it is impossible to answer them all, perhaps you will kindly allow me space to deal shortly with some of the questions raised. First as to certain names about which little comment was given because they lie rather outside our immediate subject.

*Aldeneston* is the modern Alston, and *Gerardegile*, I presume, the modern Garrigill.

*Bothecastre* would be Bewcastle, said to represent Buethcastle.

*Tritebeck* (as one of my correspondents rightly argues) is Troutbeck, but the brilliant chain of conjecture with which he adorns it is less satisfactory since this Troutbeck is on the railway between Keswick and Penrith, and not the one near Ambleside.

Several questions are asked about "heved"; it is simply an early form of the word "head," and is applied to the dip in the skyline, formed by the uppermost extremity of a side valley. It is convertible with "capud" (late Latin) of the same meaning.

*Le*, which appears in many of the names, is simply Norman-French for "the," exactly as in Chester-*le*-Street, Chapel-*le*-Frith. At *Punfald* there stood probably a manorial pound. "Fald" represents the modern "fold," and the whole word is probably represented in the surname "Penfold."

"Castok" I can only suppose to have been a "fallen oak" tree, though oaks living or dead are a rarity anywhere near Wastdale Head; we find "Castree" not many miles away, which seems to support this view, and though we might divide the word Ca-stok, and we have Graystoke in the county, that termination is rather rare in this part of England.

One correspondent is puzzled by *Delherter Grene*. It should really be spelt "del Herter Grene." The first syllable being the Norman-French for "of the," as in the surname Delisle. Another inquires what a "brandreth" is, and how it could be applied to a hill, and by what steps I suggest that it may have been developed out of Bradscarth. To take the questions in reverse order: assuming that Gillercomb Head was called Bradscarth, either because it was "broad" or because it was used by or belonged to a man called Brad, or even Brand, the name would after a time attach to the neighbouring fell as well as to the pass. As an instance of this tendency take the name Pillar Fell. A stranger hearing it for the first time would imagine that it got its name from being shaped like a pillar, whereas the full meaning of Pillar Fell is "the fell near the rock which is shaped like a pillar." If the pass then went out of use the name might survive for the fell when it was no longer wanted for the pass. This is a common process in hill names, and it is quite usual to find hills bearing names descriptive of something in the valley below which once bore that name, but has since changed it for another. For instance, Honister Crag is probably named from a "saeter" or chalet of a long forgotten person named Honi, so that it is really a concise expression for "the crag near the farm of Honi." But as time went on and people ceased to see any sense in Branscarth, and as they could see sense in a word not very unlike it, namely Brandreth, they would make the necessary change and give us the present form of name. We cannot assert that all this actually happened, but we can say without hesitation that every step in the process can be proved over and over again by what has happened in other cases. It is

the more likely in this case because the word was not unfrequently applied to hill and other landmarks, especially where three boundaries meet, the reason being that in such cases it was the practice to erect three stones together, and these stones resembled the three feet of a common "brandreth," which was a kind of trivet, an iron frame meant to give a steady support over or beside a fire. In the old days, before coal could be brought up the dales, peat or wood was the common fuel, and as it was burnt on the open hearthstone, cooking could hardly be carried on without the help of a brandreth. Now it is seldom seen and the word is less frequently employed.

On the other hand, the record may be correct in writing Bradstarth. If so, we may possibly find an explanation in the word *storth*, which appears in several local names; but the reputed meaning, "battlefield," is, to say the least, not particularly suitable here.

The greatest difficulty of the record, and perhaps the most interesting question, namely, the course of the boundary between Windy Yatt and Kirkfell, only two or three suggestions have reached me. One correspondent points to the fine deep gill just east of Blacksail, and suggests that it may be the Wrengill of which we are in search. It is so far suitable in that it (or rather the continuation of it—Bayscar Slack) runs out onto the ridge of Kirkfell, near the little tarns, but unfortunately that depression in the ridge is already accounted for, being identical with Illgillhead, and we want one a good bit to the west of that. A possible solution is offered by another writer. He assumes that Wrengill is in the S.W. flank of Kirkfell, that Rough Crag is what we now call Mosedale Crag, about  $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile S.E. of Gatherstone Head, which he accepts for Geldramshowe.

In this way a bee line would be made from Windy Yatt to Gatherstone Head, it would then turn S.E. on a level as far as Mosedale Crags, and thence turn straight up the steep hillside for about 1500 feet to join the ridge of Kirkfell about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile N.W. of the summit. The chief objection to this is that

Mosedale Crags are rather insignificant, and the gill E. of them is not of a very decided character, but at least it may be admitted that by this assumption many of the difficulties which beset other solutions are avoided. Three members ask how Geldramshowe could ever become Gatherstone. The change certainly seems startling at first sight, but analogy shews that it is not impossible. We do not know anything about the original Geldram. He may have been buried here or he may have used the mound to mark the boundary of his property. In either case a large stone was commonly placed on the top, and we find instances where such a mound is described indifferently as Soandso's How or Soandso's Stone, and, in some cases, we find both together as in *Steastonhow*, either description being equally good. It would, therefore, not surprise us in the least to find Geldram's How called Geldramstone, and seeing that D before R is almost convertible with TH (as we see in such cases as Bouderdale *alias* Boutherdale and Gundram *alias* Gunthram) and that M before S frequently becomes N we get as a result Gelthran, which, after the disappearance of the particular stone, may have seemed to the shepherds like a participle; by merely dropping the L they could jump to a very familiar word "Gethran," the old participle of "gather," and the whole change would be accomplished. But it must be remembered that though all these steps are scientifically possible, they are not proved to have been taken in this instance. Names give useful hints, but the real foundation for an argument as to the course of the boundary must be topographical. Several of my correspondents have offered suggestions which would be excellent if this had been a case where rich agricultural land was being divided, but it must be borne in mind in this part of Cumberland, except for a little wood and some little cultivation in the valley bottom, the land was at that time absolutely unproductive, and the real basis of the division was hunting. With this as the main object in view great importance would be attached to the passes frequented by the deer. Here the mediæval sportsman would be posted, armed with his crossbow,

while his men below in the valley drove the deer in his direction. Hence when the boundary, as it often does, quits the skyline, which is the most natural division, it may have done so in order to give exclusive possession of an important pass.

Lastly, one careful reader remarks, "*se coal for ballast*," is printed in italics, and nevertheless is followed by no note. The inconsistency cannot be denied, but the italics were only intended to call attention to the striking contrast between the ancient and modern views about Whitehaven coal.

The word "hey," or "hay," about which some questions are asked, has rather a Scandinavian look. In Southern Norway the word "hei," or "heia," is of frequent occurrence, *e.g.*, Storheia, Dunseval Heia, Elgeheia, Lidheia (all in the neighbourhood of the Fyrisvand), and appears to describe the barren rocky portion of a mountain above what would be called in Switzerland the "alp," in Norway the "fjeld" and in Cumberland the "fell."

W. P. H.-S.

