

*A Holiday Diary*

# LAKES BREAK

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RICHARD BELL



Car Bells & Derwentwater  
Lakeside Cafe





*April*

# LAKES BREAK

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I'm full of enthusiasm for drawing because:

- a) I've started a new Pink Pig sketchbook (A5 portrait, Amelie watercolour paper)
- b) It's so good to be back in the Lake District
- c) It feels as if, at last, spring is really here to stay

With this publication I'm trying something new; I've been trying to get around to publishing an e-book for years but it's taken a short break in the Lake District and the latest version of Apple's Pages - which makes the process a whole lot simpler - to get me started.

I've been drawing mainly from cafés, so nothing new there, but how could I resist the view of Newby Moor from the Goat Gap Café near and of Derwentwater from the Lakeside Café?

We spent most of our days walking so I managed only half a dozen sketches but I made efforts in the evening to write up a few notes about the day.

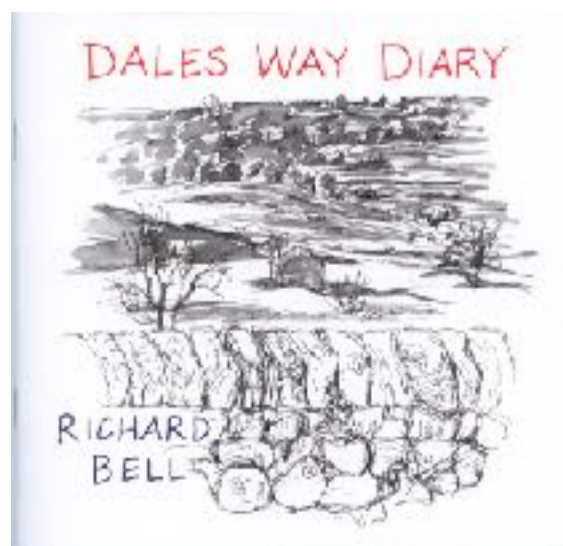
*Wednesday 25 April*

# DALES WAY



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IT WAS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, fourteen years ago in 2004, that we walked **The Dales Way** from Ilkley to Bowness-on-Windermere. The gorse was in full bloom, as it is today, so, as we walked down the slopes towards Windermere, the air was laced with the coconut fragrance of its yellow blossom.



There's so much blossom about: blackthorn in hedgerows; magnolia and flowering cherry in gardens. On higher ground, where winter lingered longest, some of the roadside daffodils are still looking fresh.

The main street down into Bowness makes an appearance in the *Peter Rabbit* movie, which is still showing here at the Royalty Cinema. I found the scene which featured a hardware store so convincing that I assumed that I'd seen it here on previous visits but walking past that particular spot this afternoon, I realise that there never was a store there: it was conjured up by some clever editing, a bit of CGI and perhaps a spot of set dressing.

The mute swans by the steamer pier must be the most photographed birds in the Lake District. They obligingly stand there, looking suitably regal, if somewhat self-conscious, as parties of tourists gather round them, a family from India then an enthusiastic group from Japan.

A lesser black-backed gull perches on the flag pole by the jetty. Two gulls dispute over the right to perch on the roof of the bridge of the ferry, *The Swan*, which is preparing to sail off.

On the journey here, we saw our first swallows: one perching on a wire, the others flying across the road at about the same height; there was a stiff, cool breeze, blowing in shower clouds from the west but when the sun got through it was surprising how soon it warmed up.

As usual, my two landscapes today were quickly sketched from cafes, from the Goat Gap Cafe near Ingleton at midday then from Lewis's Coffee Shop by the landing stage in Bowness this afternoon.

I always feel guilty if I linger at a cafe table too long so, with limited time, I've pared down my pen-and-wash technique to the bare essentials.

With sketching, I realise that producing **something** is always better than not ever trying and producing nothing. When it comes to recording my impressions, a hurriedly drawn attempts at the whole scene is better than the disconnected fragments that might result from being too meticulous and never having the time to finish each sketch.

I draw in pen, from top left to bottom right, to avoid smudging wet ink, then add the watercolour, lightest washes first, again going mainly top to bottom, left to right of the drawing for similar reasons.

The watercolour dries so quickly that, even within the brief time available, I get a chance to add some darker areas with a second wash - such as the darker trees.

My go-to colour have been French ultramarine and yellow ochre, with small touches of various yellows, green and browns.

I went for the lightest of washes of yellow, or alternatively yellow ochre, for the sunlit stratocumulus then French ultramarine mixed with a little yellow ochre for the shady sides of the clouds.

However would I manage without yellow ochre?!

Thursday 26 April

# PETRA



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Petra is a working cocker spaniel (although she doesn't *actually* work), here on her holidays from Berkshire (yes, really, I'm not making this up) with friends, while her owners move house. She's a dog who doesn't like being on her own but luckily she'll happily set off in the company of other people.

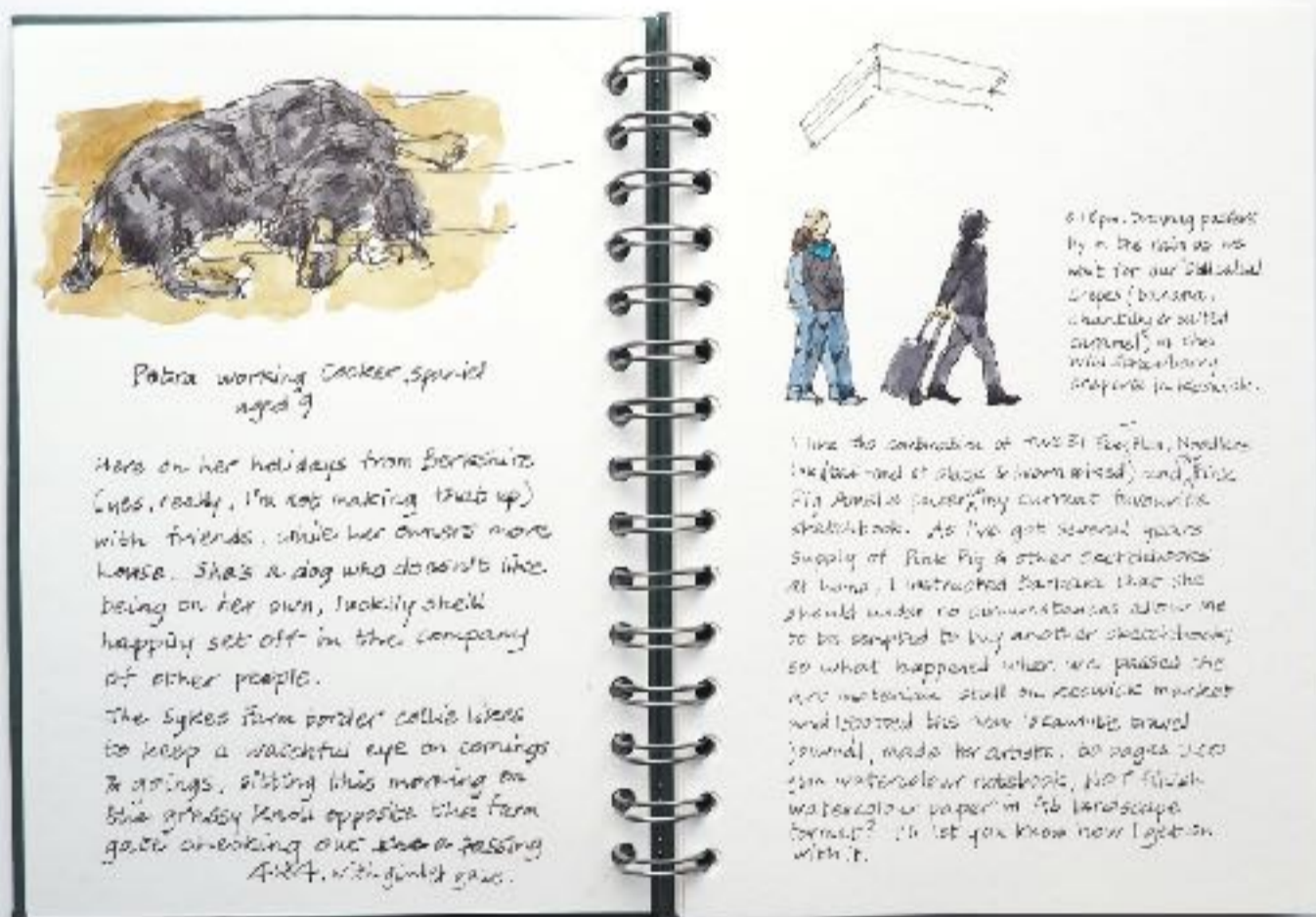
The Sykes Farm border collie, here at Buttermere, likes to keep a watchful eye on comings and goings, sitting this morning on the grassy knoll opposite the farm gate, checking out a passing 4x4 with gimlet gaze.

## PINK PIG V. SEAWHITE



3.15 pm: Drawing passers by in the rain as we wait for our Oh La La! crepes (banana, chantilly and salted caramel) in the Wild Strawberry Creperie in Keswick.

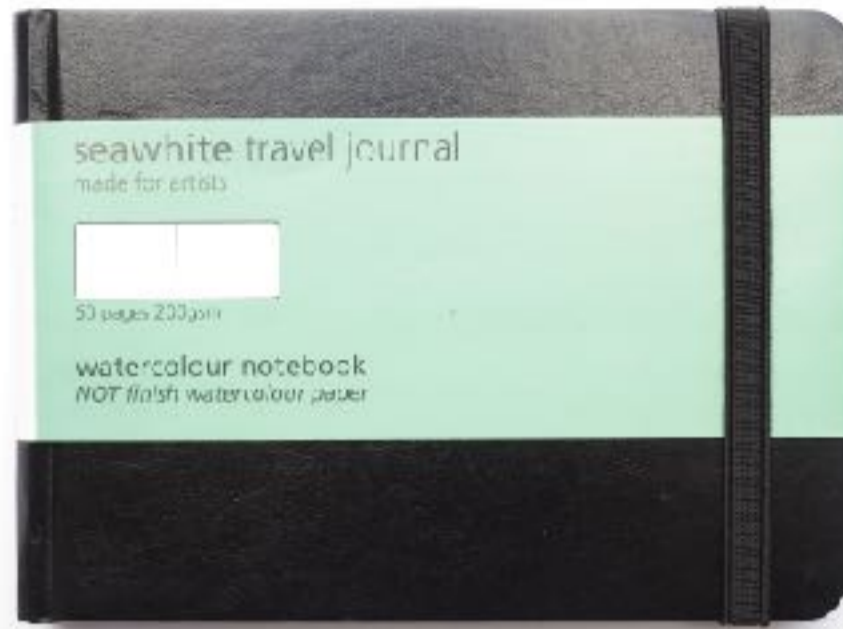
I like the combination of TWSBI Eco T pen, Noodler's Ink (my own mix of black and brown) and the Pink Pig Amelie watercolour paper in my current favourite sketchbook.



As I've got several year's supply of Pink Pig and other sketchbooks at home, I instructed Barbara that she should on no account allow me to be tempted to buy another sketchbook; so what happened when we passed the art materials stall on Keswick market and I spotted the new 'seawhite travel journal, made for artists, 60 pages 200 gsm watercolour notebook, NOT finish watercolour paper' in A6 landscape format?

... I'll let you know how I get on with it

It's the perfect fit for my A6 art bay, as the lack of a spiral binding and the elastic retaining band should make it easy to pack away. Despite the lack of spiral binding, the binding does allow you to open the book flat, which makes scanning drawings a lot easier. It includes a ribbon bookmark and expandable inner pocket.





Buttermere

# LEAVING THE HILLS



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As we walk along the far side of Buttermere, the towering crag with its head in the low cloud reminds me of the Victorian painting of highland cattle in Glencoe '*Leaving the Hills*' and coming '*Down to the Stream*', reproduced on the mirror that hangs above our fireplace.



About a century ago, this mirror was passed on to my Grandma and Grandad by a friend or relative. Grandma noticed how it fascinated me as a child and left it to me in her will.

As I thought about the mirror, Barbara started spotting cattle droppings (which resembled pony droppings rather than regular cow pats) and soon we saw a small group of Highland cattle walking along the path towards us. This is National Trust land so their presence will be part of a controlled grazing plan to manage the habitat. In the past, hills were sometimes overgrazed, so herd sizes have been reduced.



We see a single cormorant flying across the lake and later a drake mallard and that's about it for Buttermere water birds but a pair of meadow pipits hop along the turf at the edge of a pasture at the top end of the lake, next to a sheep that is looking so relaxed that it would be at home reclining on a chaise longue. A wren flits not a cavity beneath the rocky debris at the water's edge.



Comb Beck and Grey Crag, Buttermere.

## RAVENS OF THE NEULANDS VALLEY



When we stop to photograph the roadside gorze in the Newlands Valley, with Skiddaw in the distance beyond, we immediately hear the honking of ravens, high above us by the fell-top crags. They dive at each other as they set out across the valley. After a few minutes, two of them return, so they're probably a resident pair, defending their territory.

We're feeling lucky, so, when we arrive in Keswick, we take a look through the peepholes in the fence around the bird-feeding station in the hope of spotting a red squirrel. No squirrels, but in compensation, we get to see a male siskin so closely that I get a reasonable photograph of it with my little Olympus Tough.

At the Cumbria River Trust in Keswick we learn about an ambitious project by United Utilities to install a major pipeline to take water from Thirlmere to West Cumbria. They're tunnelling under a hill as the river bank downstream from Keswick - the original preferred route - got washed away in floods.

The access for heavy plant and the scars of trenches through pastures and the gashes through drystone walls are currently glaringly obvious. Hopefully by 2020, when the scheme is scheduled for completion, the scars should be starting to heal.

Friday, 27 April

# LOST ON MIGRATION



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The male osprey is still on his own at the eyrie in the dead tree at the top end of Bassenthwaite Lake. The latest that the female has ever returned was on the 24th, so there's some concern that she's been lost on migration, but there's still a chance that she could turn up at any time.

Meanwhile, two immature females have been turning up but not showing any signs of settling.

The male makes the nest look more enticing by arranging a piece of bark, which is as big as he is, in the centre of the nest, pecking at the edge of it.

Three stock doves have gathered on the tree stump that serves as a bird table at the RSPB Osprey Viewpoint. It's only a year ago next month that a friend pointed out a stock dove to me in the woods at Middleton. Now I wonder why the species had previously never registered with me. If I'd seen them, did I think that I'd seen an odd-looking wood pigeon or town pigeon? Or have they recently started increasing in numbers and become more obvious.

On the trunk of a conifer at the Dodd Wood car park, by the Old Saw Mill Tearooms, it appears that a pair of blue tits have taken over a bat box, hovering at the bottom of it, then squeezing through the slit.

## Derwentwater



On our afternoon walk, along the shores of Derwentwater in the footsteps of Ruskin (and his nanny: this excursion was his first memory of an event in his life) to Friar's Crag, three military Chinooks fly overhead and up and over Walla Crag then, following the same flightpath, two single rota helicopters.

They seem to cause a bit of a commotion amongst a small group of barnacle geese that have joined the Canadas on the lake but the barnacles regularly erupt into continuous cacophony, so it's difficult to tell.



In damper woodland, wood sorrel hangs its head - its closed white flowers - amongst its folded-back bright green leaves. On a slightly drier bank, beneath the trees on the lake

shore, wood anemone is still in flower, as is lesser celandine. Ferns are unfurling their fronds.

We're pleased to see that there are tadpoles in a shallow ditch by the path through a marshy lakeside wood where we'd seen the frogs gathering in March. It had looked as if it might prove to be a temporary pool.

I could fill a sketchbook with drawings of the mosses, lichens and wild flowers in the wood. I photograph what I think must be dog lichen, growing on a log. Along the edge of the path, there's a lush growth of bright green moss which is dripping with spore capsules, each almost the size of a match head.



Friday 27 April

# HOME ON THE RANGE



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From our table in the Brewer's Fayre Restaurant at Cockermouth, I can see almost the whole extent of the cattle pastures on the slope opposite. At breakfast-time this morning the whole herd paraded down the edge of the field in single file but that's as far as simple follow-the-herd mentality extended.

I've read that it's been discovered that cows form bonds of friendship with other cows in the herd. The pattern of movement, as little knots became detached from the main herd, seems to reflect a social structure of discrete buddy groups.

While several fields appeared from a distance to be uniform carpets of green, other had distinct character: downslope there were more trees while one of the upper pastures appeared badly drained with clumps of rushes. Some of the brown cows seemed to settle on the rushy patch while the core group of black cattle were more likely to gravitate to the tree-studded pastures on the lower slopes.

At times the various groups - almost the whole herd - got together as if by some prearranged signal. I couldn't spot what the reason was - such as the farmer arriving with feed. After a short get-together, they'd disperse again.

In the top corner there's a small rounded hill, probably a drumlin. I never saw any of the cattle grazing its turf but it seemed to have some significance as several of the herd made their way down its slopes, one after the other; perhaps it's some sort of outlying territorial marker to explore occasionally.

I imagine that it's hard-wired into the psyche of cattle that to survive they have to be thoroughly familiar with their home range.

## COCKSHOTT POINT



11.45 a.m., 28 April: On our journey home, I don't get to finish this drawing across Wyke Bay, Windermere, from Cockshott Point, because it's too warm, 65°F, 18°C, in the shade, to sit there on the bench.

2 p.m.: We break our journey at Goat Gap again, where I draw the barn at Newby Hall, ewes with their lambs and a bough of flowering cherry.

