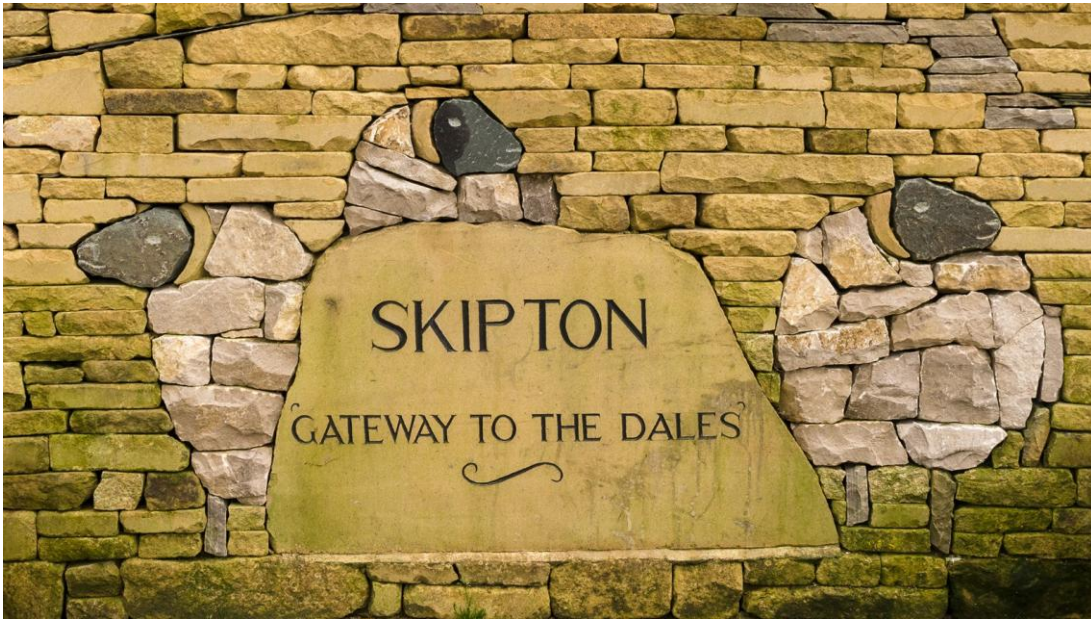


April Update
Hi folks,

Having been up to Skipton to the national AGM at the beginning of March I thought it was about time I reported back on it. We went up the night before and joined the Chairman/sec. of Cheshire whom we have met before for a bar meal. He was on the verge of merging the branch with Derbyshire when they couldn't get a treasurer but then Ray Stockall (national Chairman whom some of you met at the Wallathon last year) managed to persuade his daughter to take on the role. Cheshire branch seems to have a new lease of life now and Jack has stood for and become a new member of the Trustee board. The branch does not seem to have such a varied programme of sites as we do but they do a lot of shows and demonstrations. This is part of what makes the AGM interesting – finding out how other branches operate.

The hotel was very pleasant and even had its own pool and sauna although we only managed to make use of it on one night. It was a short walk from Skipton along the canal.



On Saturday we had a very pleasant wander around this lively little market town before a guided tour of the castle. The guide told us about Lady Ann Clifford who owned the castle during a 3 yr. siege in the civil war and then restored it afterwards. She returned to the castle and ordered the wagons of stone that were being removed to turn around and return the stone, then she made an agreement with Cromwell that she could restore the walls as long as they were only half the original thickness so that they would not be so strong and that the roof would not be flat so it could not be used as a base for firing from. She sounded a very redoubtable lady but we'd never heard of her before.



The AGM itself was the usual very brief affair because there were no votes required. Only 4 candidates had stood for trustees and there were 4 vacancies. Despite his best efforts Ray has remained chairman.

There was, however, a very interesting report from Linda Clarkson, the education and training co-ordinator.

She gave a quick outline of the 8 new bursary trainees, chosen from 73 applicants. They were from a wide variety of backgrounds – an ex-teacher, someone who had an archaeology degree but couldn't get work, who ended up doing house clearances, someone with a degree who'd ended up working in Costa, someone who'd been selling Porsches for a living. They all passed level 1 back in October and are working with professional wallers, ready to take level 2 in May. They also receive training in business management, Health & Safety and Emergency First Aid.

She also reported on the Pendle Hill Project – a Heritage Lottery funded landscape project where DSWA has been contracted to deliver 1000m. of dry stone wall repairs and 4000m of hedge laying. They have employed a project manager and during each of the 3 years there will be beginner and level 1 courses.

The Princes Countryside Fund has made funds available for 20 young people from rural backgrounds to undertake a 10 day training project and take level 1.

2 new national posts have been created – a training officer and a development officer. The development officer is actually one of the first batch of bursary trainees – Tracy Cumberbatch who went off to Australia for a year and has now returned.

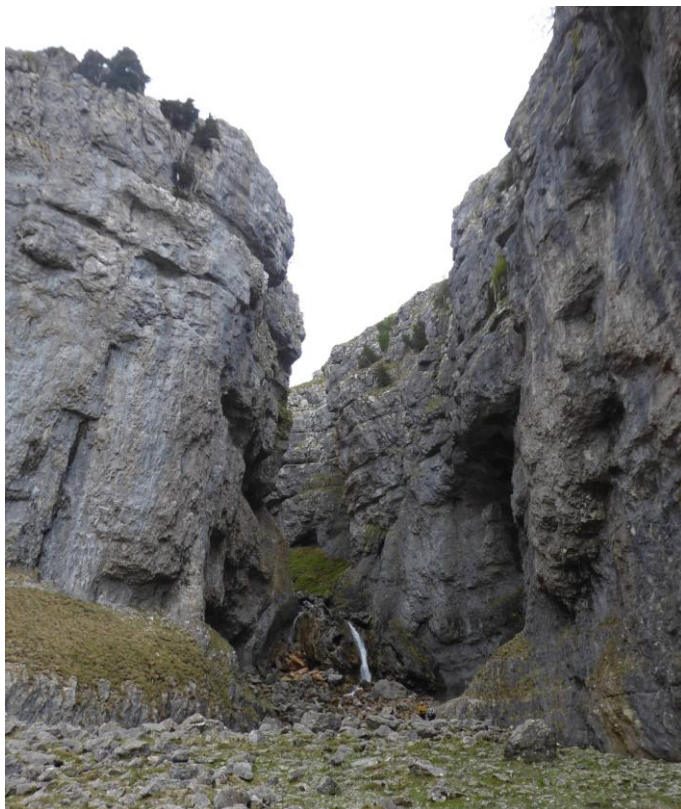
Other news from the AGM is that Lydia Noble has started a branch specifically for young professionals. Although they are hoping they may become part of their local branches it was felt a good idea to give young professionals their own branch where they will have a discussion forum and probably more in common with each other. There is also an idea to have some regional meetings later this year where branches can meet up to discuss what has gone well and pick each other's brains for ideas and ways of working.

We did not enter the branch of the year competition again this year and it was a bit disappointing to find that neither S. Yorks (not far away!) nor Cumbria who won large branch were present to collect their awards.

We had a very interesting talk about the building of the Leeds/Liverpool canal. It was started at Skipton in 1771 and in 10mths 12.5 miles was built towards Leeds. In the next 12 mths only 3 miles was achieved because of the number of locks that had to be built. The speaker also highlighted some of the responsibilities of the Canal Trust throughout the country; there are some 1800 locks and 4,000 bridges, 900 of which carry roads. When they were built they only had to carry 24 tons but with the large lorries on the roads today they have to carry 44 tons. This presents huge challenges in maintaining them. There are over 2000 miles of canals and towpaths and 54 tunnels and the Trust gets very little funding (£50 million out of £200 million needed).

The following day we went with a couple of members of the host branch (Otley and Yorks. Dales) on a very pleasant and interesting walk to Janet's Foss (a picturesque waterfall),





Gordale Scar



and Malham Cove



which has a limestone pavement at the top.



Again it was a bit disappointing that we were the only visitors to go but it was very nice to meet the members of another branch and we had a very good pub lunch in a dog-friendly pub.

We followed up with a week visiting Martin's brother and a stay in a holiday cottage in Grassington where we did plenty of walks and horrendous stiles which had gates on the top sprung like a catapult.



We saw a lime kiln near Pateley Bridge which had a flue about 30 yds long built into the hillside from dry stone and ending at a chimney



This was on our way to a public 'installation' made from huge chunks of limestone into sort of spiral features which took you to a viewing platform with views over the highest quarry in Europe.



In Gargrave we walked along the canal and came across this tile installation which was built on good old DSW lines and a rather elegant feature wall.



The weather was a bit cold and we had one very wet day. There was rather a sense of déjà vu as we set off home – through a blizzard where the snow was settling on the road as we drove across the bottom end of the Pennines before we reached the motorway. However, it cleared after that.