

0860/29/11

NATIONAL THURSDAY, 26 APRIL
QUALIFICATIONS 1.00 PM – 1.50 PM
2012

ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
General Level
Reading
Text

Read carefully the passage overleaf. It will help if you read it twice. When you have done so, answer the questions. Use the spaces provided in the Question/Answer booklet.





THREE MEN AND A DOG

You don't need to lug a tent on a long-distance walk in the Lakes. Kevin Rushby and his two sons discover barn camping on a rite of passage hike with their young hound.

- 1 It's so easy when they're puppies. You stroll down the street and they come home exhausted. People stop and have conversations.
- 2 "Aren't you gorgeous?" (That can be disappointing, of course: it's the dog who is being addressed, not you). Then they get bigger. They want proper walks. They want sticks thrown. We got a mongrel terrier pup from a rescue centre. And when Wilf reached full size, I started looking to take him for a decent walk in deep countryside—a rite of passage for a young hound, somewhere beyond the realm of the dreaded poo bin. There were two teenage sons too, Con and Niall, and they seemed surprisingly enthusiastic—there's one tip for getting your kids to walk: buy or borrow a dog.
- 3 The Lake District seemed a good choice—plenty of wonderful walking there—but with snow on the way I didn't fancy camping. Instead, I booked us into a couple of barns. There's a whole slew of them across the Lakes, offering varying degrees of comfort from downright basic to . . . well, let's call it cosily austere. Nevertheless, they did seem to offer a cushier alternative to tents.
- 4 Our hotel in Keswick was willing to take a dog for a night in one of their dog-friendly rooms, so we planned on a comfortable start followed by three days of walking in a great horseshoe around the southern extremities of Borrowdale.
- 5 I have this fond vision of dogs in hotels and pubs. It's an affable labrador-type creature laid out under the table, snoozing. At the hotel, Wilf isn't like that. He runs riot. He loves hotels. He loves the way people drop crisps in the bar. He sneaks into a neighbour's room and sniffs their luggage for food. Curiously, they laugh indulgently and say things like, "You're a lovable chap, aren't you?" A dog's life doesn't seem so bad, really. Wilf soon settles down on his dedicated luxury bed and sleeps like a baby. I spend the night half-awake, stirring at every doggy snort, worrying that he'll get up and cock his leg on the four-poster. Mercifully that doesn't happen.

- 6 At first light, we set out. Winter walking means every hour of daylight is precious. We soon leave Keswick behind and climb steadily on to the ridge of High Seat. The weather forecast is for snow showers, but all we get is mist and cloud and occasional tantalising glimpses of Derwent Water below. On Bleaberry Fell, Wilf disappears for 10 minutes and I fear he will return with one of the black grouse that are chuckling at us from afar (not a sheep, we took the precaution of stock-training him before the trip, and anyway he would look silly as he's only knee-height to a ewe). He eventually reappears, grouseless, bounding across clumps of heather as if he's on springs.
- 7 We eat our lunch looking down at Watendlath, perhaps the most idyllic of Lakeland settings. Then we march down to Rosthwaite in Borrowdale and search out our first barn.
- 8 The barn is a beautiful old stone Cumbrian longhouse set on the side of a meadow close to Stonethwaite Beck. Downstairs is a kitchen with microwave, kettle and trestle tables; upstairs is a room with foam mattresses. Sadly there are no straw bales or lambs bleating in cribs: it's all very well-swept.
- 9 We sleep pretty well. Next morning we bemoan the recent, and permanent, closure of the shop in Rosthwaite—breakfast and lunch will finish all our food supplies.
- 10 The walk up to Dale Fell takes our minds off this logistical problem: first with all the old slate-mine workings, a fascinating bit of industrial history, then with marvellous views as we hit the ridge, heading west. Far away to our right, across a pack of fells, disappearing in mist, is the Solway Firth; to our left, Morecambe Bay with its wind farms.
- 11 By the time we drop down into the village of Buttermere, we are tired but happy. It's been a great day's walk. Wilf must have once again done 40 miles to our 10. We are ready to sample either of the two pubs. Our hopes, however, are dashed: both are shut. Recent floods in Cumbria have caused such a dearth of customers that midweek closures have come into force. Cragg Barn is 100 yards up the lane and looks cold. There are snow clouds overhead. Inside is a kitchen—sink and table—then an upstairs sleeping room with foam mattresses wrapped in industrial black plastic. No heating. This is definitely the spartan end of the camping barn experience, and the only food we have is a can of tripe and turkey in gravy, which Wilf refuses to share.
- 12 There is no mobile coverage so we find a phone box and ring for a taxi. Twenty quid to get back to Keswick for fish and chips; then 20 more to return. If you choose your barn for its proximity to a pub I recommend checking opening times.
- 13 The final day, and it's the big one. Snow clouds are hovering over Whiteless Breast, our first fell. The views are brief and brilliant: a few seconds of long vistas across sunlight dappled sea to the Isle of Man, swiftly gone. Wilf goes up the slope at top speed and disappears into the cloud, snapping wildly at the first snow flurries of his short life; flurries that are thickening into a white out. We reach the top of Whiteless Pike. I wonder if anyone ever called Mountain Rescue because their dog got lost. At that moment he reappears, only to pursue a snowflake down a steep slope then—horror—over the edge. We all stop.

- 14 “Is that a cliff?” asks Con. With visibility at a few metres, it’s impossible to tell. The steep grassy bank is slick with ice and snow. I take a couple of tentative steps down. It would be very easy to lose control and slide.
- 15 At that moment, Wilf scrabbles back over the brink, looking a bit shaken. He bounds back to us, but stays close after that.
- 16 Conditions are now quite testing. A rising cold wind is driving icy snow into our faces. We push on. This was definitely the rite of passage I had wanted for all my young hounds, but would I be up to it myself? Good trips always have that moment of uncertainty: should we go on? Is it safe?
- 17 One last challenge is rerouting due to a bridge being washed away, then we are on the path into Keswick where we meet a fellow walker and dog expert who looks Wilf up and down.
- 18 “Aren’t you gorgeous? You’re a fell terrier, aren’t you?”
- 19 Wilf seemed to prick up his ears. He was a breed. He was meant to be. We have covered 30 miles and climbed 7,500 feet, but he had done in excess of 100 miles, and, I reckon, scaled a Mount Everest in height. He trotted into Keswick with his tail up, an acknowledged fell terrier. The rest of us were perky also, but in a less demonstrative way. The rite of passage had worked. We were fell terriers, too.

Adapted from an article in
“Saturday Guardian”

[END OF PASSAGE]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photograph and adapted text is from the article “Three Men and a Dog”, by Kevin Rushby, taken from *The Saturday Guardian Travel Section*, 23 January 2010. © Guardian News & Media Ltd 2010.