

Rusland Winter Picnic, December 2000

A clear, bright and crisp winter morning. Still and quiet, the snow lay a good 5 inches flat fall, drifting against the stone walls, the edges of the stones picked out in high relief by the frost before the sun reached them.

We met in the village, some 12 of us, with as many dogs, and set off across the un-trodden tracks in the sunshine. From Oxen Park to High Ickenthwaite, then left past Joe's farm and the line of yews, and steadily uphill beside the beck and on up onto Bethacar Moor, the dogs joyful, playing, rolling, snuffling along snow-tunnels. Across the beck and along between the walls, looking down on the Rusland Valley. Then the descent by Linsty Hall woods, branches edged with snow and twigs dripping now with the sun's heat, we reached Force Forge and crossed the beck by the narrow wooden bridge. Through the woods and down to Rusland Reading Rooms to meet others walking from different directions, all with a good appetite for the winter picnic: mulled wine, soup, sausages and biscuits kindly served by those of us foregoing the walk, on the old card tables decorated with Christmas paper. Dogs all tied up in rows outside with the boots, patiently waiting in case someone should remember that a bit of sausage would be quite nice.



As the light began to fade, I set off back along the darkening lanes with my dog, Rona. We took the track up behind Dane's Howe, and Rona, tired, but with her spirits high at the prospect of home and supper, ran ahead, leaping through the snow. She stopped on the horizon by the old oak, and sat, waiting for me to catch up. She and the tree, looking in opposite directions, with the pink and blue sky behind.

We walked on towards the village, the fading sky gradually revealing pin-prick stars and the rosy glow descending behind the silhouettes of the village houses. Home and the fireside (and supper!) after a perfect day.