

The biggest and strongest man in these parts...

This week we complete our 'Week's Holiday in the Forest of Dean' with a trip from The Speech House to The Buckstone, a journey described as unsurpassed in the whole of England for beauty and interest

HIGH MEADOW – NEWLAND – THE FOREST – AND HOME

A MAGNIFICENT one day's trip – and one which we believe cannot be surpassed for variety of beauty and interest in the same space of time, in the whole of England – may be made from Speech House (or even from Gloucester, or Bristol) as follows:

Leaving Speech House Road at 9.47, we book for Lydbrook Junction. (The same train may be taken from Bristol at 6.45; or we may leave Gloucester at 7.15 GWR). Arriving at the Junction, we leave the train and proceed on foot to Symonds Yat over the Coldwell Rocks.

If we have written to the Landlord of the Royal Hotel at Symonds Yat the day before, saying how many we are in party, we may have a boat ready to take us down to Slaughter – about 1½ miles towards Monmouth. We shall want something to eat; and then say we are ready to go on board at a quarter to one. We sail down the most striking of all the gorges on the Wye: with the sublime and beautiful towers of rock and wood on either side of us. Just as we start, we take a good look at the meadow yonder, high above the woods, a little on the left, looking down-stream. It is the Double View at Staunton; and on the hill just to the right of it is the Buckstone. In 15 minutes we land, and under the guidance of our boatman we climb the ladder-stairs (quite easy for ladies) to the mouth of the Lady Park Cavern, and are conducted through its mysterious recesses, and back again to daylight.

We are now only 1½ miles from the far-famed Double View at Staunton – and our cave-guide will give us full details for finding our way up the woodland path that will bring us out at the Double View. It is a steep path – for there are no views, either single or double, over any large landscape without getting up on high ground – and on reaching the goal we must rest awhile. It now wants, say a quarter to three. We sit under these trees for a quarter of an hour; looking back at the Yat and the Great Doward. The river Wye turns back round the base of this hill like a < thus giving the "Double View" we are looking at. On our left is the Little Doward. Away yonder beyond the Yat, with that distinctive gap between the trees on it, is what the natives here call "Coppa Dood."

About a mile and a half in front of us, along the high ridge above "the Devil's Ditch" in the Hadnock Woods ending opposite the Little Doward (on the left of the <) there is a rock named from the animals that make it their haunt, the BADGERS' ROCK. Further on, and on the edge of the cliff opposite the LEYS, is a point called the HEARKENING STONE, from which it is said the slightest sound from the other side of the Wye can be heard. The local tradition seems to assign this rock as a look-out for poachers, whence the Crown keepers could watch and listen to their movements when deer-stealing.

Now we are rested, and ready for the ascent to the BUCKSTONE.

Instead of following the main path, which would bring us to the Coleford end of Staunton, we go through a wicket on our right (i.e. with our back turned on the Yat). This runs across a grass meadow to a short lane, at the bottom of which we are in the village. We turn to the right, and go on to the last house: opposite which is the road to the famous rock. The view, even from here – at the base of the hill – is lovely beyond picturing.

On our right is a remarkably shaped rock, locally called THE TOAD'S MOUTH. It is said to have been the place of execution (by beheading) in pre-historic times – a hollow space for the head and neck of the victim being still clearly seen.

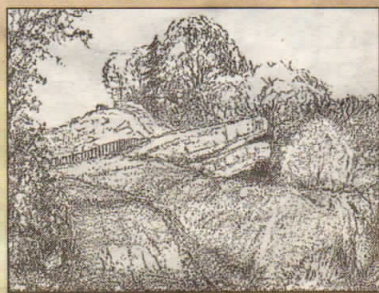
As we pass through the wicket, a few yards up the bank, we note a double-gabled house, with a well-kept lawn and garden on our left. We are on the High Meadow Estate belonging to the Crown. Skirting the wall all the way to the top, we are on a grand outcrop of the Old Red Conglomerate.

"Cockle-stone we do call it; some do call it

Pudding-stone.

They pebbles in it is white Jacks; it do run right across England."

We may also notice the smoothening and scouring of the surface rocks, apparently by glacial action. The effect is similar to what



THE TOAD'S MOUTH ROCK.

may be seen in Switzerland and certain parts of North Wales.

On the way up the Meend we are shown, on the other side of the valley, by the side of the road leading down to Redbrook, a cliff of rocks of Mountain Limestone, on which a castle was said to have stood, the stones of the walls having been carried off for building within the memory of persons still living: and in a green field, about 300 yards from the Castle Rock, in a notch of Tillis wood, the remains of three redoubts, whence the guns of the Roundheads pounded it to ruins. Gorse grows amongst the boulders of conglomerate on the steep Meend side. At the foot of the Meend a cottage is pointed out, the three fir trees in front of which were planted by a deceased local celebrity, George Woodley.

"He was the biggest and strongest man in all these parts, and was coachman to George III. His calf was as big round as a man's body; his shoulders as wide as the coach box; he was a proper handsome man, and so powerful he could pull a hogshet a cider off a dry, hold it on uz knee, and drink out a the bung-hole. Ah! They don't show such faits a strength now-a-days!"

We come to a gate: on the other side of it is the BUCKSTONE, a mass of Old Red Conglomerate. There are five deodara cedars on our left as we enter the enclosure, and another standing solitary a few yards beyond. The best view of the stone is from the farther side of this tree. Its greatest length on top is 19 feet and breadth is 13 feet, the entire circumference 57 feet, its height 12 feet. The north side measures 17 feet, the south 12 feet, the eastern (or rather south-eastern) 19 feet and south-west 9 feet. The point on which it stands is about 2 feet in diameter. The slab on which it rests measures on the north 14 feet 9 inches, south 14 feet, south-east 12 feet, south-west 21 feet 5 inches. The old man from the village who has strolled up with us rocks it with very little effort by putting his shoulder under the N.E. angle. We observe that the neck at the point of contact with the slab on which it rests is in a very bad way, and shows signs of cracking and crushing, and crumbling during the oscillations – "Some day when a mob of them excursionists is all a rockin' of him together violent, he'll come down." We believe he will, and go thundering down the steep towards the Monmouth Road. (This actually occurred not long after. The Buckstone has, however, been replaced in its original position, but is no longer a rocking stone).

The Deputy Surveyor has had an avenue cut through the wood, nearly in line with our standpoint, in order to give a view of the stone from the Monmouth Road below. A footpath leads through it down to the Monmouth Road. It is rather steep, but the scenery during the descent is very beautiful.

If the visitor wishes to go down to MONMOUTH from the Buckstone by another route, he may descend as far as the first cottage, presently mentioned, keeping right round the garden wall, when he will find a path running along a charming gorge in the woods. In a few minutes he will come down on the Monmouth road, near the "Broad stone." Going a little further, to where the turnpike road makes a sharp bend, near a small house, he must turn up past the latter, and then keep round to the right, along a path that enters the wood. It is impossible to miss, and it takes us



down to Monmouth in an hour.

Of the panorama from the Buckstone it is impossible to convey a full idea. Somersetshire – the Welsh mountains – and away in the far north the Clee Hills near Ludlow, the Long Mynd Hills by Church

Stretton, in Shropshire, and the Malverns in Worcestershire and Herefordshire, are visible here on cloudless and non-misty days. The life-giving air, we are breathing tell us, even were there no such landscape to do so, that we are on the crown of a mountain – while the plants at our feet tell it also –

heather and whortleberry, and many other denizens of the high moorlands. Near the Buckstone are several other large stones, one of which is supposed to have been an altar for the offering of human sacrifices.

It is now half past four; and as we have had a good half-hour here, we will go down to Coleford. On the road, on our left, after leaving Staunton, we note a large upright stone just inside the hedge. It is called the Long Stone (Welsh, *Maen hir*). There are many similar stones in Wales and Cornwall. They were used as the mustering places for the men serving in the army, undoubtedly from long before the Roman invasion. The local tradition here is, that if this stone be pricked with a pin exactly at midnight, it bleeds. It is no use trying it however, if the astronomical time is not hit: for without this we shall only realise the meaning of the old proverb, that "One might as well try to get blood out of a stone!"

From the Buckstone to Coleford Station we can walk easily in 65 minutes; but as the train does not go till 6.00, we may briefly inspect the interesting old church at Staunton on our way. The view from the Tower amply rewards us for the not very difficult climb over the bells. It embraces a wonderful expanse of forest and mountain scenery, similar to that from the Buckstone but with the additional charm of the picturesque village of Staunton in the immediate foreground. If we order from the Angel a dog-cart to meet us at Staunton, the charge is we believe 2s. 6d: at any rate it used to be! Or another and good route is: to order the said trap to meet us at Redbrook, and drive thence to Coleford past High Meadow and Newland.

To get to Redbrook from the Buckstone, we come back through the gate by the Deodaras, and skirt the continuation of the wall by which we came up; only now going down the other side of the hill. In 300 yards we pass by a genteel cottage; and from here we see two other cottages below. There is a clearing in the wood to the right of these, close to which is a keeper's lodge (scarcely yet visible), with a dark spruce fir by it. Going down to the lower cottage, we turn in past it, and make for the lodge, beyond which a path to the right runs down through the wood to Redbrook. The one on the left leads to Cherry Orchard. Half-an-hour will take us to the Redbrook station from Buckstone.

By Redbrook Station we are on the main road down the Wye Valley from Monmouth (2½ miles) to Chepstow. Close to the Railway Bridge a road leads up a steep valley to Cherry Orchard Farm and Newland. The Newland Oak can be seen on our right in an open field just before entering Newland.

But there is a much more pleasant and nearer way of walking from Redbrook to Newland.

Start by the Tin Works up a beautiful valley past two fish-ponds – the outlet of the second forms a beautiful waterfall. About a mile from Redbrook, near the second pond, climb the steep hill on your left, Newland will then be seen close at hand below.

The distance by road is 2 miles. This more interesting route is 1½ miles.

Cherry Orchard Farm, 396 ft above the sea, is a fine homestead, through which the railway once ran between the buildings, crossing the road on the level. On all sides are wild cherry trees of the full size of ordinary beeches, say 50 feet high. A quarter of a mile brings us to cross roads. The onward main road runs via The Scowles to Crossways Gate, but the rough land which we will take bends back to the right and passes under the back walls of High Meadow Farm. We stroll through the Farmyard, out into the rough lane again, and down into the straggling village of Whitecliff. The castle-like buildings of an immense blast-furnace and iron-works, now silent, speak of declining prosperity.

Whitecliff and Coleford straggle towards each other, and just about where they meet we get off the Mountain Limestone on to the Millstone Grit, and continue upon the latter till we turn off out of Newland Street up on our right to the Coleford Railway Station, where we are again on the Coal.

Still another way – and it is preferable if our time will not admit of going to Redbrook – is to get a rest and some bread and cheese at the Inn next to the Blacksmith's, in Staunton; and then walk through the wood (keeping the upper road when it divides to HIGH MEADOW).

To do this we come down a road to a point in the Valley where the rail from Redbrook crossed the road, close by Cherry Orchard. Straight opposite us, as we descend, there is a path at this railway crossing, up a meadow; following it, and turning sharply back to the left on reaching the top, we find ourselves in the field formerly the site of High Meadow House. The line of the terrace, with the grass-covered ruins of the foundations, form a large mound, standing on which we have a view not easily described: for the sight is equalled in beauty by but few in the kingdom.

Woodland and meadow meet the eye in every variety of rise and fall; the village of Newland half buried in foliage a little below us on the one hand while through a gap across the Wye Valley, which is only a mile off –

"...the broken landscape, by degrees
Ascending, roughens into rigid hills,
O'er which the Cambrian mountains,
like far clouds

That skirt the blue horizon, dusky rise."

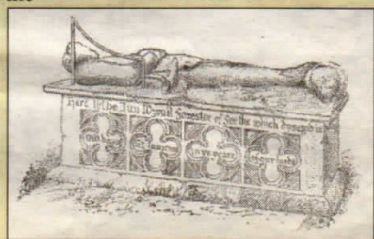
The mansion on whose ruins we stand was built about the time of Charles II. An old woman, living at Staunton, named Nelly Bessex, 83 years of age, well remembered the mansion, and its being pulled down. An old man in the village recollected, when a boy, about the year 1813, seeing the stone carted away by Lord Gage to build Braceland House, a mile NE of the Double View at Staunton, as the crow flies.

An older house stood on the same site before this, belonging to the Hall family, from whom Viscount Gage was descended; and the barn on our left probably formed part of the manor farm of this period.

And now we must get home. As we cross the fields to Coleford (this path is only about a mile from HIGH MEADOW), we take our leave of the reader, trusting he may come again into the district to which we have introduced him; for even if he has been to all the places we have told of, there are yet others, and many others, which sheer want of space has made it impossible to mention, and which, nevertheless, are worthy of a visit. Coleford, as the name implies, is a hollow in the hills, in which several roads converge (Cyll = hollow: *fodd* = road). Rising, on the railway, out of this hollow, to the crest of the "Meend" above Milkwall, we ride down a grand and very beautiful mountain-pass to Parkend, along the edge of cliffs and quarries, with woods

high above us, and woods below; and it is not without regret that we find ourselves so soon in the valley – and back at our Inn – or away over the Severn Bridge at sunset – at the

End of our holiday in the Forest of Dean



TOMB OF JUNKIN WYRRAL, BOW-BEARER TO KING HENRY VI, AT NEWLAND, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY W. HARDING WARNER.