

SisterAct Weekend in Castleton

(March 2008 by Suz)

The first weekend in February saw 22 intrepid SisterActers heading to the Peak District for a weekend of walking and other strenuous and not-so-strenuous fun. The weather forecast promised snow and during the drive up on Friday night we ran into a few flurries - just enough to make Castleton look very picturesque by moonlight. After checking in at the youth hostel we all met up in a pub which was a short stroll/stagger away for a few drinks.

There were quite a few bleary eyes at breakfast on Saturday morning – some blamed the Friday night beers and some their roommates' snoring and the unfamiliarity of YHA bunk beds. The breakfast buffet was a great chance to fill-yer-boots and fill your pockets – muesli, yogurt, bacon and black pudding for the brave, washed down with lots of coffee. We all met up at 10.00, ready to walk. Castleton is surrounded by hills on all sides so almost immediately we were climbing upwards – quite a shock for those of us used to walking in East Anglia. There were a few inches of snow on the ground – enough for some of us to attempt to make snowballs – but the sky was a beautiful blue and the sun was shining: perfect walking weather.

We made our way up the largest hill in the area, Mam Tor, and then along a ridge which took us up several peaks and gave us fantastic views of the valleys. We were fortified along the way by flasks of tea or coffee carried by the super-organised and especially by capfuls of M.'s magic port. It tasted so much better at altitude – even at 11.00 in the morning! On our way up we passed some people sledging down the hill and wished we'd nicked some trays from the hostel. Just when the going was getting a bit tough, all sorts of fascinating SisterAct revelations emerged which proved a real incentive to keep up with the pace – and the story! The summit of Mam Tor felt like the top of the world – with a great view and more port.

Coming down the hill we entertained ourselves with spectacular skids and falls as we got tired; those with walking poles stayed mud-free and smug. Our aim was to make it back to Castleton in time to watch the England v. Wales Six Nations rugby match and we did it with an hour to spare. With an entire posse of SisterActers in the small-town pub, there was no chance of being the only gay in the village but with almost everyone there wearing an England shirt, a certain SisterActer (and current Woman of the Year) was in danger of being the only Welsh in the village. In fact Mizza roped in support from Scottish, Irish and South African women and managed to make enough noise to drown out the English majority – particularly during the second half when the Welsh took the lead. As the final whistle blew on a historic Welsh victory, it seemed like a good idea to make a sharp exit and celebrate elsewhere. If we hadn't walked so much or drunk so much, we would have carried a hoarse Mizza out on our shoulders in triumph!

The events of the rest of Saturday evening are a bit of a blur. Things definitely took a turn for the butch at one point with an arm wrestling competition... Ahem. Let's just say Castleton won't forget SisterAct in a hurry and if *those* photos ever emerge, J. will pay good money to destroy them! Everyone slept much more soundly on Saturday night – it's a good job the

youth hostel breakfast was worth getting up for. By Sunday morning most of the snow had disappeared and there was even more sunshine. Most of the group chose to visit one of the caves just outside the town with its spectacular stalagmites and stalactites while a few hardy souls did another walk. Most of us rounded off the weekend by checking out another of Castleton's fine pubs for Sunday lunch. After all that walking, we could justify any amount of eating and drinking!

All in all, it was a really excellent weekend. The whole thing was superbly organised by Debs – the accommodation, food, walks and even the weather were all planned perfectly. It was great to get away to a place with *hills*, and above all it was a fantastic chance to spend some time with old and new friends. I can't wait for the return visit in September...