

Daniella Turbin, 'A Place to Return To' – Scripts of Audio Recordings

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'Setting Off (part 1)'

Day 1: Essington to Stafford

Route: Essington – Featherstone – Penkridge – Acton Trussell – Stafford

County: West Midlands, Staffordshire

Distance: 30.54km

Maps: OS Explorer 219 & 244

Start: Wolverhampton

Finish: Stafford

I had planned to set off from my home in Essington on a Monday morning, but I felt pretty nervous about the journey and wanted to make sure that I had said a proper goodbye to my family. I delayed leaving by a day even though I was all packed. I then spent most of the day tating with my rucksack and visiting family, but (mostly) waiting for Tuesday to arrive. When today did come around, I was ready to go.

A couple of days before I set off, I had been talking to another walking artist. She too had been on a multi-day long distance walk and reminded me that people in Britain were 'generally friendly' and that 'it was a choice to go on this walk'. I felt as though her words would be a source a comfort when things become a bit more challenging. I left home apprehending the person that I might 'become' at the end of the journey.

One of the reasons for delaying my departure was probably because it felt as though I was saying goodbye to my grandad, he is bed bound and has been for a couple of years. As I didn't plan on returning home for the next twelve months it felt as though this was the final goodbye. However, there was also a part of me that felt as though I had said goodbye a long time ago, dementia is a nasty disease.

I walked from Essington and towards Moseley along the dismantled railway line, which connects Ashmore Park and the Underhill estate. I wasn't too far from the Wood Hayes estate where my other Nan and Grandad live. Since lockdown my other Grandads memory has also started to deteriorate, and I wondered if this had been escalated by having to stay home during the many months of the UK lockdowns. Before then Grandad had been a regular walker and would often follow this route, he mostly stays at home now except for the occasional walk he might take with Dad. Every now and then, I also go for a walk with Grandad. We start at his home on the Wood Hayes estate and then climb up Bushbury Hill before circling back around to his house. He enjoyed telling us stories about his childhood and growing up.

Just before leaving I called up Nan to say goodbye, she said that she didn't want to remind Grandad that I was going because he gets worried. Nan is in a lot of pain now too but she still maintains an immaculate household and keeps going with the washing, cooking, and housework.

I left *The Monarchs Way* which connects Moseley and Coven Heath, and then followed the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal north towards Penkridge. The road signs for Penkridge reminded me of my other Grandad once again. As a bird keeper he would come to Penkridge market every week to buy and sell poultry.

'The Way is based on the lengthy route taken by King Charles II during his escape after defeat by Cromwell in the final battle of the Civil Wars at Worcester in 1651, when for six weeks the 21-year-old was hotly pursued by Parliamentary troops. It takes in Boscobel (the Royal Oak Tree), Stratford upon Avon, the Cotswolds, Mendips and the South Coast from Charmouth to Shoreham. There are many historic buildings, features of interest and antiquity, with connections to numerous other long distance routes' Extract from the LDWA.org.uk

As I came off the canal along the Graveley Way a huge black rain cloud appeared overhead. I was feeling hopeful that it might just 'blow over', but it didn't. I pulled out my plastic purple poncho from my rucksack and threw it over my head and bag, I then covered in the thorn bush like a tortoise. The rain came down, heavy. I hadn't got the hang of taking shelter from the rain yet and when I arrived into Penkrige I decided to stop off for a break at the BP garage. I went into Greggs and had their pasty and soup deal and as there was a Costa next door I blew my daily budget on a coffee. If I was going to complete the journey I needed to stick to the budget.

One of the things that I was really nervous about was wild camping, and so to put my mind at ease I booked into a hotel for my first night (this wasn't something that I could do every night). As I came into Stafford I arrived with lots of questions, but mostly in relation to the most basic of human needs. Where would I be sleeping each night? Where could I find food? And how far would I be able to walk each day?

When I got to the hotel, I felt dehydrated. I hadn't been drinking enough and hadn't yet figured out a way to get to my water bottle without having to take my bag off. The camelbak I had ordered from GoOutdoors hadn't arrived and so, whilst I had saved a bit of weight by carrying two empty plastic water-to-go bottles (which meant that I could get water from just about anywhere) and massively reduced the weight of carrying water each day, my bag still felt heavy.

Before setting off I had planned every piece of equipment down to the number of pencils, film reels and maps, so I didn't feel as though I could take anything out, however the walk still felt as though it was a bit of a slog. A quick Google tells me that your bag should be no more than twenty per cent of your body weight, turns out I was over by a stone.

Distance: 30.54km **Total:** 30.54km

'Setting Off (part 2)'

Day 7: Shrewsbury to Leebotwood

Route: Shrewsbury – Bayston Hill – Condover – Dorrington – Leebotwood

County: Shropshire

Distance: 23.27km

Maps: OS Explorer 241 & 217

Start: Shrewsbury

Finish: Leebotwood

For the past three nights I have stayed in three different hotels in Shrewsbury, The Shrewsbury Hotel, The Old Bell and The Bull Inn. As I hadn't walked this weekend, I thought that my legs would be fresh and it wouldn't take too long to settle back into a rhythm. Oh, how I was wrong. I thought that two days would have been enough for my muscles to have repaired themselves, and to comfortably walk through the Shropshire Hills. I even spoke to my Dad (just after taking advantage of not carrying a bag and jogging across English Bridge) about there being 'good' pain and 'bad' pain. Turns out I was mistaken this wasn't that good kind of muscle tingling pain, this was a big old painful knot in my left hand shoulder blade. Maybe I was a bit hasty in my thinking that I would have gained the upper body strength to carry this huge bag within the space of a week.

As I was well rested, this did mean that I left the hotel in 'good' time this morning, just before seven. I left Shrewsbury via Kingsland Bridge and joined *The Shropshire Way*.

The Shropshire Way Main Route is a long distance path of some 200 miles, covering not only the wonderful Shropshire Hills in the South but also some of the historic towns and unique natural features in the North of the county. Extract from Shropshireway.org.uk

I headed south along the *The Shropshire Way* towards Bayston Hill and passing through Meole Brace. I wasn't enjoying this at all, my bag just felt heavy. On the approach to Bayston Hill, I took a public footpath which connects Pulley Farm and Bayston Hill. As I was coming to the end of the path an elderly man crossed my path, he could probably sense that most of my energy was focussed on putting one foot in front of the other, and so instead of stopping to chat he offered some kind words 'Phew, that bag is quite a weight, stop and take a rest at the kissing gate'.

I didn't rest at the kissing gate, but when I got on the road I took a right hand turn and came to One Stop shop, there was a bench outside which I took advantage of, and felt a little bit better. I was struggling to find gratitude today.

At Lyth Hill Country Park, the contours on the map shows a gradual incline. The Shropshire Hills began to open out in front of me and I could see The Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge. Something in the disgruntled way that I felt today began to shift (but not for long). I had planned to get to Little Stretton, just south of Church Stretton by the end of the day. However, I had only gone four or so miles this morning, and the day was a struggle, I knew that I couldn't walk that far today.

If I wasn't going to get to Church Stretton today, I at least wanted to get to Leebotwood. A quick Google search told me there was a campsite at Church Farm. I tucked into two snickers and a banana to give me that much needed energy boost, but that was short lived. At Dorrington I came to a memorial park, slumped on a bench and ate an entire Soreen malt loaf (this didn't make me feel any better). With a fibrous fruity lump in my stomach I then trudged out of Dorrington along

the A49. I then doubled back and stopped off at Dorrington Village Stores, in an attempt to rectify my gluttony I picked up some (healthy) supplies for tea, a 'hearty, vibrant and flavoursome three bean salad' and a tin of sardines for breakfast.

Not particularly wanting to walk along the A Roads I took the public footpath behind the Village Stores, crossed a railway line and followed the back roads from Dorrington through to Longnor. I passed by a Müller farm, and the cows looked just as shiny as they did on the adverts. To get to Leebotwood I took a right hand turn at Iza's Wood and passed a small memorial wood which was planted as a gift in 1965.

At Leebotwood I came to The Pound Inn pub and ordered an americano coffee. Whilst sipping on my coffee and eating lotus biscuits, I didn't do my usual nightly admin tasks (ie. uploading routes and planning tomorrow) but instead googled 'long distance hiking trolley', there were a lot of options from pull along four wheelers through to 'hipster' hands free travel cart. Sticking to the lowlands and road walking felt preferable right now.

When the barmaid came back over I asked directions for the local campsite, she proceeded to tell me that there was one much closer than the one (only half a kilometre up the road) at Church Farm this was music to my ears. 'As it happens' she went on to say 'there is one next door, it's an adults only site'.

I called my sister and told her about my day. She then insisted on driving all the way from Ludlow to the campsite with a kebab and chips. I told her about my plans to get a trolley, but she didn't think this was a good idea and forced me to downsize. She confiscated all the items deemed 'unessential', this included sandals, a woolly hat, walking poles, kneeling mat, a side bag, a phone case, thermals, winter trousers and waterproofing spray.

I spoke to my friend Selina after Bec had left, and went through my reasons for doing the walk. One main reason was to engage with the landscape not zoom through it, so perhaps by not turning the day into a torture fest and not reaching Little Stretton tonight wasn't such a 'bad' thing.

Distance: 23.27km Total: 127.35km

'A National Park'

Day 56: Machynlleth to Dolgellau

Route: Machynlleth – Corris – Aberllefenni - Dolgellau

County: Powys, Gwynedd

Distance: 28.04km

Maps: OS Explorer OL23

Start: Machynlleth

Finish: Dolgellau

I'd packed up my tent just in the nick of time this morning, as I was starting to roll up my sleeping bag and tent it started spitting. There was a great big fire pit and shelter in the centre of the campsite where I put my bags, and then put on my waterproof rain gear. I left the campsite along the A489 to Machynlleth, and I felt so good this morning I could almost sing. I had had a delicious breakfast of coffee, a crusty olive roll, an avocado and a tin of sardines. It seems as though porridge doesn't really get my day off to a good start like other foods (even though a lot of walkers swear by it). At Machynlleth I stopped at Co-op to buy some supplies for today's walk.

I left Machynlleth across the new bridge being built across the Afon Dyfi, a billboard on the edge of the site has outlined the measures that the company is taking to 'care' for the local landscape, and what they have managed to uncover during the construction of a new bridge these include 'bats' and 'otters'. I crossed the old Machynlleth bridge and followed the Snowdonia Way into the National Park.

The Snowdonia Way is a 94mile long distance walking trail which goes through the whole of the National Park. There are two variants, the first is a low level walk which follows valley tracks, hillside paths, and old rights of way (this is the route I have chosen) and the second a high level option.

'The Snowdonia Way is described as 'the best way to get to know this part of the world. You'll see the most famous sights from the great northern cliffs of Cadair Idris, to the pass of Aberglaslyn, the Ogwen Valley and Aber Falls'. Extract from LDWA.org.uk

The stretch from Machynlleth to Corris was mostly road walking, and I didn't really feel as though there was a lot to photograph aside from common woodland ferns, plants and mosses. However, coming into the National Park the landscape felt so remarkably green especially when I think back to the dry cracking soil of the coastal path just a couple of days ago. That day was so warm and dry and yet when I sat outside my tent on the campsite, Snowdonia National Park was still covered in a dark rain cloud.

On my approach to Corris I passed a walker he had begun his days walk at Dolgellau and had planned to make it to Aberystwyth by the end of the day (that was practically my weeks walk) He was raising money to support motor neurons disease. He asked 'You going over Cadair?' as I had already decided not to go I was still intrigued and asked 'How long does it take?' to which he said 'about four or five hours'.

My Ordnance Survey map was folded into its uniform rectangular sections and to keep myself entertained I tried to memorise the names of the hills which sat closest to the path I was following; 'Myndd Glandulas, Mynydd Fron-felen, Myndd Abercorris, Mynydd Braich Goch, Myndd Hafotty,

Mynydd Cambergi, Myndd Gwerngraig'.

At Corris I came to a small community shop, they sold bits of everything including a lighter. I then stopped for lunch in a bus shelter, and it stopped raining. But not for long, when I left Corris it started again. I followed the way through to Aberliefenni, as as the rain got heavier my optimism started to wean. I checked Google to see if the rain would stop.

At Aberllefenni I passed through huge tips of slate and blue cottages. The rain was coming down heavy as I made my way along the Old Turnpike Road, and I met a farmer. He stopped to quiz me about my walk from the warmth of his Land Rover, as he was doing so the pulp creases on my map was starting to disintegrate, and in spite of trying to keep it dry inside my 'waterproof' coat, every time the paper rubbed against the gortex of my jacket the town of Dollgelau started to erase itself.

I started to grow despondent and wrapped up my map in a plastic carrier bag and packed my camera into the top of my rucksack, I then walked as quickly as possible along cycle route 8 to the campsite in Dolgellau.

I was drenched. I got changed, showered and put my wet clothes into the campsite tumble driers. I then spent the rest of the evening hiding inside my tent. The rain didn't seem as though it would let out. How did other walkers manage to get drenched, and keep on going day after day. I didn't do my usual nightly admin tonight, but instead tried to go to sleep. I didn't sleep well either, and in the middle of the night, the circling winds caused my tent to collapse. I had to do a midnight run and put all the pegs back in.

When I did fall asleep I had a dream that I left my tent set up on the campsite and gone home. I was sat with my family in the living room and my Uncle turned to me and said 'what happened to that excitement that you had at the start of the journey?'

Distance: 28.04km **Total:** 1028.5km

'Public Conveniences'

Day 65: Gwalchmai to Trearddur

Route: Gwalchmai – Llanfaelog – Rhosneigr - Trearddur

County: Gwynedd

Distance: 28.90km

Maps: OS Explorer 262

Start: Gwalchmai

Finish: Trearddur

Today's walk felt as though it was overshadowed by the torrential rain. Is there a way to enjoy the rain?

Today I walked from from Gwalchmai to Trearddur on the Holy Island. How is it possible that I could go from 'celebrating my body for its strength' this morning through to feeling like an 'old tramp' this evening.

I've been having problems with my bladder, and this means that when I had to go, I had to go. Stopping quickly often caught me off guard and today it caused me to have an 'accident'. When I got to the public toilets at Trearddur I was too late! I reached the toilet in time, but couldn't unbutton my shorts quick enough and ended up peeing right down my leg soaking my pants, shorts and the inside of my boots.

I continued down the high street and stopped at the Spar. This is where I got talking to Brenda she is part of the Ramblers Association, and is one of thousands of volunteers who is working hard to ensure Britain is accessible to walkers. She has been working with the Holy Island Ramblers to ensure there is a clear and 'accessible' network of public footpath which runs through the middle of Holy Island starting at Garreg Fawr in the south-east and finishing at South Stack Cliffs in the north-west.

Leaving the Spar at Trearddur the sky suddenly turned dark, and it started to rain, that kind of fine rain that just gets you soaked. I put on my 'waterproof coat' and covered my bag with the rain cover and headed in the direction of 'Valley of the Rocks' campsite. On my way from Trearddur I was met with sympathy from cyclists, and other walking groups. A lady approached me with her dog, 'have you got far to go?' to which I replied 'about half an hour or so' I was keen to keep moving.

When I got to reception on the campsite I was wet right through. My bag and coat just weren't waterproof. I was keen to pitch my tent, and dry off but stood waiting for a good half hour for the receptionist. When I did eventually pay for a pitch, the receptionist gave me pitch '18'. By this point, the rain was now torrential. I really wasn't looking forward to going back outside, and reached an even lower low when I spent (too long) walking up and down the campsite on the search for pitch numbers. I was cold, and wet and unable to find any of these so-called 'numbers', and so I just decided to put up my tent on a hill. I crawled into my sleeping bag, ate my pasta pot, tried to dry off my camera and called Bec. I then reconciled myself in the fact that the good thing to come out of the torrential rain is that it was probably heavy enough to wash the wee off the rim of my boots.

Dotted around the campsite were signs with rules inside the toilets were noticeboards which read; 'no washing clothes in the showers or sinks, anybody caught doing this will be kicked off the site'.

As the campsite was cheaper than my daily budget I left the sogginess of my tent and decided to treat myself to a hot chocolate at the campsite pub this cost me £2.50.

Distance: 28.9km **Total:** 1212.68km

'Rest Day'

Day 67: Holyhead

Route: Trearddur – Holyhead - Trearddur

County: Gwynedd

Distance: 18.10km

Maps: OS Explorer 262

Start: Trearddur

Finish: Trearddur

I was going to be having a chat with Michal Iwanowski today, after seeing his exhibition 'Go Home Polish' in Aberystwyth I had sent him an email and asked if he might be up for walking together. Unfortunately, he was busy but he had said he would like to have chat.

Today I had planned a circular walk which starts at Valley of the Rocks campsite, and follows the road north-west to connect with the Anglesey Coastal path at Porth Dafarach. I was then going to follow the coastal path right the way around to Holyhead Mountain through South Staff Cliffs Nature Reserve. The signal was sketchy, and because I don't like to stop walking once I have started I was hoping that Michal wouldn't call until later.

This was the first time on this walk that I had done a longer distance walk without my heavy rucksack, and I felt weightless walking through South Stacks. I kept having on having to stop myself from running and walking too quickly. With this lightness, I was able to crouch down at will and inspect the thick, rubbery stems of cliff vegetation (such as thrift, sea campion, bird's foot trefoil and kidney vetch) which felt more akin to astroturf than the delicate bladed plants further inland. On the walk so far, I had mostly stuck to lower level walking and valleys, because of the weight of my rucksack and to trying to stick to a time schedule. Therefore walking through South Stack Nature Reserve today felt like a treat.

As I came to the RSPB carpark for Ellins Tower the public footpaths and roads grew busier. Ellins Tower is a strikingly white Victorian building that looks like a castle, and was 'a gift from husband to wife'. This is a hot spot for painters, long-limbed climbers, and bird watchers who come here to watch in awe the thousands of puffins, guillemots and kittiwake which I was told by an RSPB member of staff had left just three weeks ago. The birds nest in their thousands on the tiny bits of rock which sits loose from the mainland.

I pulled out my phone to check for signal, and see if Michal responded to my message. No signal. A RSPB member came over and said 'hello' he was originally from Stafford but had moved up just a few years ago. He told me about the work of the RSPB and asked if I would like to join, I told him I was on a pretty tight budget but signed up anyway. The RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) is a charitable organisation which works to 'promote conservation and protection of birds and the wider environment through public awareness campaigns, petitions, and through the operation of nature reserves throughout the UK'. Here at South stacks the RSPB have been involved in preserving rare flowers like the South Stack Fleawort which only grows here on Holy Island, breeding seabirds including the chough (for which there are only one hundred pairs in the whole of Wales) and six or so pairs here, and conserving insects such as the silver studded blue butterfly.

After visiting the gift shop to find out more information about the RSPB, I began my walk up South Stacks walking with haste and hopping down the stairs.

On my way up to Holyhead Mountain I met a couple who were on a driving tour of Britain. They were stopping at what they considered to be the most scenic spots; Norwich, the Lake District and Cornwall. I took their photograph for social media, before we exchanged stories. And then the lady proceeded to take my photograph. Since coming to Ellins Tower the paths have grown busy, and this has made it much more difficult to find a spot off the track to go for a quick wee.

Dropping down into Holyhead I passed funfairs, and passed a house, all the downstairs windows were open and sitting in the window were three white cages of birds, whistling. As I rounded the corner, onto the high street I passed a sad looking young girl, she was being cuddled by a lady 'You take care of yourself now, won't you?' she said to the little girl in that familiar kind of tone of a holiday goodbye. When at that age, the time in-between now and the next school holidays feels inconceivable.

Debating whether to go for a coffee or not, I went down to the Arts Centre to see if they had any contemporary exhibitions, but only had a local exhibition. I popped into the coffee shop, 'No hot meals today due to staff shortage'. A teenage girl served me. I said can I have the £1.40 coffee with steamed milk please, she misheard me and made me a brew mixing together the cold milk, tea bag and hot water with a steaming wand.

Just as I was leaving Holyhead, on a bench on the A5154 Michal called to have a chat.

Distance: 18.1km Total: 1230.78km

'The Seaside'

Day 90: Preston to Blackpool

Route: Preston – Clifton – Freckleton – Warton – Lytham St Annes - Blackpool

County: Lancashire

Distance: 41.94km

Maps: OS Explorer 286

Start: Preston

Finish: Blackpool

It wasn't until I got to Freckleton and had turned off the radio that I finally began to come to terms with the fact that I had made another booking to stay two nights in Blackpool. If money and budgeting weren't such a priority I'm sure that it wouldn't have got to me as bad as it did. I had been so careful up until this past couple of weeks, and had been camping for weeks on end. Since coming back into England I felt as though I had started to splurge. In my head I tried to find ways to justify my additional expenditure.

I know that in time the decision to book another room wouldn't be so bad, but right now, it did not sit comfortably with me. I was agonising over my decision to spend money on a room, when the money probably would have been better spent on some outdoor equipment (such as an umbrella). I left Stoneycroft campsite along the A582, and stopped to scrawl into my notebook 'accept decision' only to find myself on booking.com five minutes later and a few more paces up putting in a request for a 'free cancellation'. This made me feel better, and enjoyed the walk through to Albert Edward Dock, the A Roads were lined with an abundance of plums in dark purples, yellows and red (they were so plump and juicy).

At Edwards Docks there is a retail park with a McDonalds and Morrisons. I stopped off for a coffee at McDonalds (again something only a couple of weeks ago I had considered to be a luxury) and flicked to booking.com my cancellation had been 'declined' and my feeling of contentedness was short lived. At the other end of the car park there was a white lighthouse, this was Morrisons supermarket where I picked up a tin of mackerel in korma to supplement the left-over tinned vegetables for yesterday's dinner.

I took the Blackpool Road and Preston New Road into Freckleton and I tried to distract my anxious thoughts with this morning's episode of BBC Woman's Hour, the presenter announced that the days are now shorter and we are now waking up in the dark. I penned down the number '3204 045 093' pin code '0249' from booking.com and tried to phone the helpline to see if I could cancel my booking (to no avail). On the Preston New Road a cheerful BT guy asked where I was going and said 'how cool' it was what I was doing.

At Freckleton I ate my lunch, and then joined the Lancashire Coastal Path and managed to stomp out the days frustrations along marshy footpaths which circle Warton aerodrome. The land has been moulded by the weight of herds of cattle, but has been made navigable by the farmer with old railway sleepers.

The Lancashire coastline has a variety of landscapes from the distinctive limestone scenery of Arnside and Silverdale, saltmarshes and agricultural land and the seaside resorts of Morecambe, Blackpool and the Fylde coast. There are major river estuaries of the Lune, Wyre and Ribble with much birdlife. There is evidence of past industries based on iron, salt and limestone, alongside the

modern businesses of British Aerospace, Nuclear Electric, British Gas and ICI and busy harbours at Fleetwood, Heysham and Glasson Dock and views of Morecambe Bay, the Bowland Fells and the Lake District. Extract from LDWA.org.uk

At Lytham I stopped for another coffee at McDonalds and then planned a stopping point for dinner at Lytham St Annes. I was starting to feel good, until a little boy asked his Dad 'is it a man or lady?' and another visitor who was waiting outside Lytham windmill stood gawping at me. I felt as though I was becoming short tempered and less sociable, the repetition of having to say 'hello' and explaining your story over and over has started draining me. The man standing outside Lytham Lighthouse probably didn't realise he was staring with his mouth wide open, but I had had enough and I decided to stare back. I didn't recognise this blunt and confrontational part of myself.

When I left Granny's Bay and arrived at St Annes, I was tempted by the fast food restaurants but I didn't like that feeling of pressure when you walk into a fast food shop and the assistant asks (before you have even had time to look up at the menu) 'what can I get you?'. So I went to Sainsburys instead.

At the end of the walk I usually start to flag and my energy levels start to wean, my senses usually feel depleted and I struggle to find a photograph. But not in Blackpool, the flashing lights, glitter ball, joke shops and bingo halls felt like an instant sugar rush which left me feeling over-stimulated and not really knowing which way to look.

Distance: 41.94km **Total:** 1759.48km

'Another National Park'

Day 100: Keswick to Penrith

Route: Keswick – Threlkeld – Penruddock - Penrith

County: Cumbria

Distance: 33.14km

Maps: OS Explorer OL4 & OL5

Start: Keswick

Finish: Penrith

Like me Geoff is an early bird, and when I woke up I could hear him downstairs. He was making a shopping list, because in a couple of weeks a group of his friends from his Antarctica expedition days were coming to visit and his partner Lynn was going to be doing all the cooking. I had spent the evening with Geoff and Lynn and we continued our conversation about long distance walking, running and adventuring (before I arrived Geoff had told me to be prepared for 'all the questions'). I guess that he too was used to answering the questions that people ask regarding the 'whys' and 'hows' of an adventure. We also got on to talking about the tradition of letter writing and the future of the 'physical' archive.

After a breakfast of toasted home-made bread and marmalade, I took a photo with Geoff and Lynn for Instagram and said goodbye.

From Keswick I crossed the bridge on Station Road and followed the old railway line from Keswick to Beckes. This line once started at Cockermouth in the west of the Lake District and finished in Penrith in the East, and at one time transported passengers and minerals from Cockermouth to Penrith. The line was official closed in 1966, and sections of the track have been redeveloped into recreational paths and new roads, there are also plans to use sections for modern railway links.

In spite of feeling pretty joyful from my time in the Lake District, I still felt somewhat distracted today. I turned on BBC Sounds to listen to the live coverage of Queen Elizabeth II death and the preparations that were taking place for the coronation of King Charles III.

Heading into Penrith, the (Saddleback) or Blencathra mountain range overlooks Keswick and represents the end of my journeying through the Lake District. The 'main' fell of Blencathra is bookended by Blease Fell on the left and Scales Fell on the right, and these three fells form the Blencathra range, and were the last of the Lake District fells to wish me a 'happy plodding'.

Tonight I had found a caravan site in Penrith called Thacka Lea Campsite. When I got to Guardhouse Bridge just off the River Glendermackin I followed the public footpath through to Stoneraise and then did a lot of road walking through to Penrith. I followed the roads through to Troutbeck, Motherby, Newbiggin and then onto Penrith. When I arrived the flags were flying at half mast.

Distance: 33.14km **Total:** 1956.42km

'Border'

Day 103: Carlisle to Annan

Route: Carlisle – Rockcliffe – Gretna – Eastriggs - Annan

County: Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway

Distance: 33.49km

Maps: OS Explorer 315, 323 & 322

Start: Carlisle

Finish: Annan

A part of me was quite glad to be leaving Carlisle City Hostel, what I had hoped would be a restful night and a day exploring Carlisle hadn't really happened. I just hadn't slept well the night before last, and sharing a room with other people (especially if they snore) wasn't the most pleasant experience, and now I felt disgruntled. After spending the day pottering around Carlisle all that I wanted to do last night was to sit and read my book. However, the lady in the bunk opposite me (who was staying here whilst she worked in the city) came in from work and started chatting, and if she wasn't chatting to me she was talking on her phone.

It felt so cold this morning, that I started to consider how my routine might need to change. As day light hours start to get shorter, and the temperature starts to drop perhaps the mornings won't be warm enough and light enough to sit and write any more, and it might be easier to start walking earlier in the day and write at the end of the day.

From Carlisle I continued to follow National Cycle Route 7 to Annan, through the towns of Cargo, Rockcliffe, Gretna and Eastriggs. When I left Carlisle, I briefly followed the River Eden, and crossed the River Esk and River Sark. A lot of the days walking was quite flat road walking (with lots of cars) but the redeeming factor was the view of the Cumbrian mountains on my left.

Just before Gretna Green I crossed the River Sark (which divides England and Scotland) and passed a big brown sign which read 'Scotland Welcomes You'. On the Ordnance Survey Map, to the south of the River Esk there are green dashes, these familiar markings represent public footpaths and up until now I felt comfortable on these paths because I knew I had a right to be there. Whereas, now in Scotland there are no green dashes but rather, I have the 'right' to roam more freely. This made me feel cautious and a bit uneasy.

When I arrived at Gretna rather than my eating my usual lunch of salted mackerel I treated myself to a celebratory lunch from Gretna Bakery, a pie, a toffee crisp bar and a sugary tea. When I left Gretna, a local told me that I was taking the long route, I should be travelling along the Annan Road. In any case I continued to follow cycle route 7 through Eastriggs and into Annan.

Distance: 33.49km **Total:** 2027.68km

'National Trail'

Day 141: Fort William to Clunes

Route: Fort William – Corpach – Gairloch – Bunarkaig - Clunes

County: Highland

Distance: 24.40km

Maps: OS Explorer 392, 399 & 400

Start: Fort William

Finish: Clunes

My plan to continue north after Fort William has changed, originally I was going to follow the coast of Scotland through to Mallaig and John O'Groats. However, now that I was (quite) behind schedule and didn't feel as though I had enough experience to go wondering off into the Highlands at this time of year, I had changed my plan and was now going to follow the Great Glen Way which starts at Fort William and goes through to Inverness. This felt like a sensible compromise and walkthehighlands.co.uk describes the Great Glen Way as a walking trail which offers 'a good introduction to the highlands and to long distance walking'.

The Great Glen Way connects the east and west coast of Scotland from Fort William through to Inverness and 'follows the major natural fault line of the Great Glen which divides Scotland from coast to coast', 'The Way runs along the complete lengths of Loch Lochy, Loch Oich and the forests above Loch Ness, as well as along the towpath of the Caledonian Canal'.

Once I had left Fort William I didn't expect to see a food store until I arrived at Fort Augustus in two days' time. Therefore, when I met a man called David at Ben Nevis Youth Hostel this morning I was glad when he offered me a lift back into Fort William, as this saved me three kilometres and meant that I could stock up on food from Morrisons for the next two days. After Fort William, I headed into Corpach and joined the coach loads of tourists who had come to Banavie to walk up Neptunes staircase (the longest staircase Loch in Scotland) and admire the views of Ben Nevis. This was the first opportunity that I had got to see Ben Nevis from a distance, and I wanted to 'take it in'.

At Corpach I also met another couple who were walking the Great Glen Way, they were walking faster than me (because of the rain) and hoped to arrive in Inverness by Friday. As I wasn't booked onto a campsite or youth hostel, I had a plan to reach Clunes Forest and find a spot to wild camp this evening, and as is the way when I'm wild camping I felt as though I wasn't in a rush today, and so, instead I took the time to appreciate the lung lichens and jellied mosses (which sluggishly attached themselves to my rucksack).

I had originally planned to find a wild camping spot at Glas-Dhoire, however when I entered the Clunes Forest I passed a forest school and found a spot with notices that welcomed wild campers but reminded them to leave 'no trace'.

Distance: 24.4km **Total:** 2763.35km

'Grey'

Day 164: St Cyrus to Braehead

Route: St Cyrus – Montrose – Ferryden – Lunan - Braehead

County: Aberdeenshire, Angus

Distance: 20.05km

Maps: OS Explorer 382

Start: St Cyrus

Finish: Braehead

This week has felt like carnage, from last minute booking of hotels (taking huge chunks from the project budget) through to not reaching the end goal at the end of each day (and subsequently each week). I started the day feeling quite optimistic and waited for my bus at Hillside just after seven o'clock, it was a few minutes late because of road works but I arrived in Montrose on time to catch the connecting bus. When I got off the bus at Montrose I popped into a local stationary shop to replace the ball point pen I lost when I was walking yesterday. The next bus was the X7 to Aberdeen, it didn't arrive. 'It's okay' I tell myself 'what will be will be'. It's hard to stay calm and not get stressed about the fact that today was going to be a big walk on the back of a wild camp.

Whilst waiting for the bus (and one Greggs coffee later) I was desperate for the loo and popped into Nickel and Dime to see if I could use the staff loo, but the sales assistant said there wasn't one. When the bus came it was just after nine, and it dropped me off by the public conveniences at St Cyrus (but they were closed). I was so desperate I contemplated going behind the block, but this was just a bit too open. There was a cafe across the road where I stuck my head in and asked 'can I borrow the loo' 'you can't borrow it, but you can use it' said Karen. When I went to purchase a rocky road she said it was on the house.

The weather started off absolutely beautiful, and the flooded fields were bathed in sunlight. It took around two hours to walk from St Cyrus to Montrose (the same time I had spent travelling and waiting for buses). When I got to Montrose I passed a street cleaner who commented on the dark clouds that were suddenly approaching 'it will turn around 13.00'. With no set destination in mind tonight and a black cloud lingering on the horizon this made leaving Tesco (after a very sugary cup of tea) difficult. When I did eventually leave Tesco it was after half past one, and as I walked to Ferryden the clouds grew more intense.

At Ferryden the gales started again, and the rain followed. With each step I repeated the mantra 'the wind will dry out the rain, the wind will dry out the rain, the wind will dry out the rain'. My sister text me 'how is camp?' how could she not know that just made me feel guilty when I haven't been able to camp this week. I put up my brolly which was a fools errand, and then to complete the look I started to waddle along the back roads desperate to find a spot out of the storms to relieve myself. I wanted my sister to say that it was okay that I had booked a hotel, but she responded with 'ohh!' and I called up and complained 'why do you always do that, don't you know it makes me feel guilty', to which she hung up.

As the MET Office had forecast, the winds and the showers stopped at four, but I was chilled to the bone. Cold had seeped through my skin up to my elbows. I booked a hotel in Arbroath and then caught the bus. Is this a sign of winter and am I actually going to camp. It feels as though there is a fine line between optimism and realism. Walking in the rain is fine if I know I have a destination in mind and shelter each night.

I felt anxious this evening and contacted the Arts Council to see if the budget that I had been allocated to could be used to stay in a hotel each week. I also booked accommodation for the next couple of nights, and considered other ways of finding somewhere to stay such as in village halls, churches and community centres.

I was worried and it took this anxiety to email the Arts Council, I nervously pressed 'send'.

Distance: 20.05km **Total:** 3245.7km

'God's County'

Day 199: Saltburn-by-Sea to Runswick Bay

Route: Saltburn-By-The-Sea – Skelton – Brotton – Loftus – Staithes – Hinderwell – Runswick Bay

County: North Yorkshire

Distance: 27.63km

Maps: OS Explorer 306, OL27

Start: Saltburn-by-Sea

Finish: Runswick Bay

I was feeling a little bit flat this morning, I'm not sure if it was because I had just spent the last evening in a room of my own in front of the tele, or the fact that the BBC had just said this was the most miserable day of the year. It was Dad's birthday so I gave him a quick call after leaving my Air BnB. On the way out of the house I was staying at a lady had fallen over, it was still dark and I put my arms around her and pulled her up. It was chilly this morning and she had a stream of dew running down from her nose.

I'd planned to take the coastal path to 'save' a bit of time. However, it was cold and the winds felt bitter. When I got to the junction at Skelton Beck I took a right hand turn instead of a left. I then followed the beck underneath the railway bridge. Last night I hadn't done my usual route planning, and had left it until an hour or so before going to bed. The O/S maps are filled with public footpaths and so whilst I had a rough idea of the route that I wanted to take it was nice to choose my route as I went along.

In the first section of the walk the winds coming from the east were pretty brutal, this combined with sleet. With the option of inland and outland walking, I was able to take Cleveland Street walk. The hedges offered me some protection from the elements. On the route I met another man who said I was just as mad as he was. I'm not sure whether it is because I have heard Yorkshire being called 'the friendliest' county, but since arriving into Yorkshire I have been met with nothing but smiles and warmth. People are keen to know where you are going, or to offer you a helping hand.

When I got to Staithes it felt to me like a little Italian village hidden inside the cove. A lot of the shops were closed, and when I asked a local 'why this was?' he replied that 'there wasn't much point in opening, it's that time of year, and people probably won't come out in this weather'. The cold had got to my hands and fingers, so I decided to thaw out in Dottys Cafe. You couldn't see through the glass, but I gave the door a push and went into a cosy (almost empty) tea room. A group of adults were sitting at a table by the counter and asked me to join them. I decided to sit on my own in the back room.

After leaving Staithes I followed the Cleveland Way. This is where I learned my biggest lesson. I followed the Bay, hoping to rejoin the coastal path through hob holes, there was a stream through the cliffs, but no marker for the coastal path. It was unusually well marked so I turned back and continued to follow the sands. A man and his dog were following along behind me, every now and again. I heard him call out, but I continued going. He gave a final call out 'are you lost?' to which (and in my stubbornness) I replied that I was okay. But as it turns out, I had missed the path even though the Ordnance Survey app had said there was a public footpath somewhere around here.

It looked as though it was on the top of the cliff, as so I decided to climb and scampering through knee high plants, bracken and mosses I climbed along the edge of the cliff hoping that when I got

to the top a clear path might emerge, perhaps even some walkers. It didn't. It was just lots of dried up ferns and thorns. I didn't want to turn back, so I continued. As I ploughed forwards the ferns began to untangle the laces on my boots. I couldn't be bothered to stop and tie them, it was getting on for four o'clock, I didn't know how much daylight there would be, and if the tide came in there was no chance of backtracking. When the ferns turned to thick thorns I accepted defeat, and turned back. I put my phone into the pocket of my rucksack, and descended down the edge of the shaley cliffs on my bottom.

Scolding myself for not being humble enough to ask for help, but in equal parts this experience had given me that feeling that this sense of 'risk' and adventure was something that had been lacking up until now.

Distance: 27.64km **Total:** 4040.34km

'Fens and Sluices'

Day 231: Skegness to Wrangle

Route: Skegness – Gibraltar Point – Wainfleet All Saints – Wainfleet St Mary – Friskney - Wrangle

County: Lincolnshire

Distance: 30.31km

Maps: OS Explorer 274 & 261

Start: Skegness

Finish: Wrangle

On my Ordnance Survey maps I had plotted two routes, the first one would have taken me back into Skegness and then out again following the road into Wainfleet All Saints, the second route took me down to Gibraltar Point and then what I would have hoped to do was follow the coast and turn inland at Friskney or Wrangle. The second option would be the most direct in theory, however, there weren't really any public footpaths on the map. This hadn't been a problem on the way down from Mablethorpe to Skegness, I guess I thought that the England Coastal Path isn't always marked on maps. When I left Homestar Guest House, I let my feet decide where to go and I headed towards Gibraltar Point.

At Gibraltar Point I came to a visitor centre and a sluice, on my map it looked as though there were a couple of ways to cross the sluice (although they were probably trespassing). I followed the muds and waters around to a house, I felt too disheartened at the thought of having to walk four kilometres back to Skegness, and so I decided to try jumping over some silver spikey railing. These were relatively easy to get over, but the gate on the other side of the bridge was closed. I tried clambering around the edge of gate (hopelessly) and then turned back.

I was greeted by the watchful eyes of an elderly lady carrying a pair of binoculars she said 'I didn't want to call 911 Darling'. She went on to explain how she used to let other coastal walkers over the fence but it had been blocked off now. And so, I didn't really have any choice but to find an alternative route, and followed the drains to Croft Ho, and the roads to Wainfleet All Saints.

At Wainfleet All Saints I stopped for a picnic of mackerel and a bagel with some ready salted crisps. I then followed the public footpaths through freshly ploughed farmers' fields which connected the villages of Wainfleet, Friskney and Wrangle. At Wrangle I decided to call it a day (and then caught the bus back to Skegness (a possible mistake).

I checked my emails and had received an offer for a bed for Thursday night. In spite of sending lots of messages through couchsurfing.com I haven't really heard a lot back, and I'm concerned that the negative review from my host in Barnstaple has put people off. I spent the rest of the evening planning my accommodation for the next few nights, it would be too easy to worry about expenses and not much use. What is done, is done (or at least that's what I tell myself).

Distance: 30.31km **Total:** 4738.89km

'Steeple Chase'

Day 235: Sleaford to Lincoln

Route: Sleaford – Ruskington – Dorrington – Digby – Rowston – Scopwick – Blankney – Metherringham – Dunston – Potterhanworth – Branston – Lincoln

County: Lincolnshire

Distance: 37.08km

Maps: OS Explorer 272

Start: Sleaford

Finish: Lincoln

What is it that comes to you in the early hours of the morning.

For me it is drawing, the only thing is I haven't drawn in a year. Can I still draw?

After a cosy night's sleep I had a delicious breakfast of a three egg omelette with sausage and mushroom (delicious) and some toast. I left feeling nourished and full. Youngsters were on their way to school, donning what I would consider a posher school uniform of checked tartan skirts and blazers.

I was going to be taking the public footpath through Northfield Farm. However this was closed off and there were new homes being developed. After passing McDonalds on the A17 roundabout I could see walkers in the distance, a new green cycle space had been created which wasn't listed on my map.

I'm not sure where the thought came from, but I got to thinking about charity. I am somebody that never donates much charity, and it is really selfish. Every last penny I have is pretty much spent on myself, looking back perhaps the types of food that I do eat is a little bit bougie, perhaps I could eat cheaper (and then give the rest of my daily budget to charity) I'm not sure if it was because today is the start of Lent, or because (as usual) my budget was dwindling to a flat rate of between £5 and £7 a day. Anyway, I find it quite exciting exploring the possibility of supposed limits.

At Ruskington I popped into the local co-op, to commemorate Lent I wanted to buy some pre-packaged, ready cooked pancakes. In hindsight, I'm not sure that this buying of pre-packaged pancakes is actually in the true spirit of Lent and from what I remember Lent is a time of year for getting rid of the surplus (kind of like cleaning out the cupboards for the next season). Therefore, I probably should be eating the last of my couscous and my bag of wonky nuts. It got me to thinking though, what did I want to do this Lent.

When I left the co-op, I joined the 'Spires and Steeples Trail. I crossed paths with another walker, he went on to say that he did eight to twelve miles on a daily basis. The spires and steeples trails was one that he was familiar with, and he advised me of a bull field that I probably should avoid at Dorrington.

From Lincoln running south to Sleaford the Spires & Steeples route across North Kesteven was put together to make it easier for visitors and residents to find their way from village to village to discover their artistic and historical treasures. The name refers to the Spires of churches being the landmarks to which visitors make their way and to the rural sport of Steeple chasing. North Kesteven does not have a wealth of dramatic scenery, cliffs and mountains, but it does have a rich

history and heritage, stories that are part of the fabric of Lincolnshire and intertwined with the character of its landscape, flat fens and heath, reflecting open, changing skies. Extract from LDWA.org.uk

It felt fitting to be following this particular trail at the start of Lent, but it did get me thinking about Christianity. As a not so Christian country any more, and a landscape dominated by churches. Isn't it funny that we still follow traditions such as Shrove Tuesday, and Easter and Christmas, yet how much thought do we give to the true meaning of these occasions, outside of buying batter mix and flour at Tesco.

Distance: 37.08km **Total:** 4827.78km

'Pilgrim'

Day 263: Ipswich to Colchester

Route: Ipswich – Capel St Mary – East Bergholt – Dedham – Colchester

County: Suffolk, Essex

Distance: 32.92km

Maps: OS Explorer 197, 196 & 184

Start: Ipswich

Finish: Colchester

This morning I woke up and I was deliberating, should I or shouldn't I go home for Easter. The first option is to go home, the second is to go and spend it with Selina and her family. Like I said to Juliet this morning, once you step out of the door you are a different person.

Juliet gave me some of her delicious homemade quiche for the journey, and I picked up a tin of beans from Sainsburys.

Today's journey took me through the beautiful villages of Capel St Marys, East Bergholt and Dedham. Wooden framed beautiful coloured buildings and all I could think of was pink, pink, pink (pink window displays in independent libraries) pink houses and pink blossom.

At Dedham I passed an Old Edwardian tea room, I glanced in at the hard boiled sweets knowing that immediately it was probably out of my price range. Even the coop had a wooden sign with gold lettering above which read 'the posh co-op'. I wondered how much an orange juice would cost, and as it turned out, it was no more than your usual co-op. Usually I would have been keen to make progress, but instead I decided to step into Dedham Parish Church, I took a look around there was a book on the table 'Forgiven' by John Chester. It asked for a donation of a £1.00.

A lady came into the church, and asked me about my journey. She had come to lay flowers on the grave of her boyfriend Del. As it turned out he was the owner of the Edwardian Coffee Shop across the road, we chatted and she asked if I had enough money for food. I said that I did, but, when she left the toilet she insisted on giving me £10.00 for a cup of tea and cake. I half considered skipping the tea and saving the money for later, but that just didn't sit right. I popped in for a takeaway cupper, and went back to pick up Tim Chesters book 'Forgiven'.

I then left Dedham and headed into Colchester. This evening I was staying with Hannah and Matt Stageman. I was slightly nervous at first, as I had kind of approached them and hinted at an invitation for the night. All was good though, I felt completely at ease with Hannah and Matt, probably because Hannah was an artist, and Matt a curator, artist, academic and tutor. Their home was filled with art books (I could spend the day getting lost in their books) on the dining table was a book about discovering Sebald. Last night, we had delicious fish pie, with mini egg cake then Hannah showed me her studio in the garden.

Her work has a walking element too. She had photo collages, etchings, drawings, postcards and books. To be honest Hannah and Matt felt like the kind of couple I could sit talking to for hours (and one of their favourite artists is also Tacita Dean).

Distance: 32.92km **Total:** 5505.81km

'Local Advice'

Day 334: Penzance

Route: Penzance - Newlyn

County: Cornwall

Distance: 6.68km

Maps: OS Explorer 102

Start: Penzance

Finish: Penzance

I got up nice and early (well, the usual time) to do some writing and the morning stuff. I went to sit in the youth hostel, but struggled to find my train of thought with people going to and from the dining room and kitchen. Eventually I gave in, as a man had plonked himself on a bench at the top, I just had that feeling he wanted to start a conversation. I tried to pack away quickly and efficiently and head back to the tent, but he started talking (and scrambled egg kept on flying out of his mouth), 'I want to find out more about what you are doing later'.

Back at the tent, I plotted my route for tomorrow. I wanted to walk to Land's End but it didn't seem as though I'd have the time if I was going to get back home by mid July. So, instead I planned a one day walk from Penzance straight across the St Ives.

In Penzance there is a house and gardens called Penlee. I popped into the house and the lady on the counter said that the tickets were £7.00 unless you were under 25. There was an exhibition showed works by a school of painters based in Lanorna, an area just south of Penzance, it seemed a shame not to be going that way. As I continued to explore the exhibition on the second floor I could hear youngsters singing a song about jelly fish to the tune of three blind mice.

I was going to get some chips to keep my hunger pangs at bay, but after passing Lavenders Bakery and seeing that the pasties were a whole lot cheaper I decided to go for a cheese and onion one. I then popped into 'The End of the World' bookshop and selected a book called Invisible Borders edited by Linda Clearly. It was £10.00 and I couldn't really justify that. A girl outside the art school pointed me in the direction of St Johns Hall where I went to see if they had a copy, they didn't.

After lunch I walked along the seafront to Newlyn. As Newlyn Art Gallery was going through a changeover, there wasn't really a big exhibition at the moment, and so I sat on the sea wall overlooking St Michaels Mount. I finished reading 'Undercurrents' whilst deliberating over my plotted route to St Ives. Having spent the morning at Penlee House, seeing the paintings and local artefacts, and talking to a gallery assistant he was adamant that Cape Cornwall was superior to Land's End and said 'Land's End is a fairground, go to Cape Cornwall'. And so, I decided that I should take the diversion to Lanorna, and plotted a two day walk to St Ives instead.

Distance: 6.68km **Total:** 6829.26km

'The Salt Path'

Day 343: Tintagel to Lynstone

Route: Tintagel – Boscastle – Crackington Haven – Widemouth Bay - Lynstone

County: Cornwall

Distance: 30.48km

Maps: OS Explorer 111

Start: Tintagel

Finish: Lynstone

I don't really have a lot to say about today. I set off nice and early (I've been enjoying getting an early start recently) and followed the roads into Boscastle. Aside from the bits that I have read in 'The Salt Path' by Raynor Winn, I didn't really know a whole lot about the landscape I was walking through. Raynor Winn and her husband follow the South West Coast Path using the cicerone walking guidebook which is written by Paddy Dhillion. For this particular section of the walk, Paddy, who is walking in the opposite direction to me walks from Bude to Boscastle in a day, to which Winn calls him 'super human'.

'The South West Coast Path is a 630 mile (1,014 km) journey along the coastline of England's southwest peninsula. Running from Minehead in Somerset to Poole in Dorset, this England's National Trails has a wealth of stunning natural scenery, sea views, pretty ports and historic county towns. The Path has won numerous awards and offers a truly unique experience: this is walking at its most challenging and most rewarding.' Extract from Nationaltrail.co.uk

On my way out of Boscastle I stopped off at NISA Local (even though I had just had breakfast) and bought a few items it came to a whopping £13.00 something. I sat and drank (what I later found out was a very expensive coffee) and ate a flapjack.

I then left Boscastle along the B3263 and joined the public footpath, hoping to connect with the South West Coast path. However, there were a handful of calves on the path, and so I back tracked and took the road around the field. This was becoming a bit of a theme for the day and I ended up crossing several cow fields. As the day started to unfold I started to feel more confident, and protected myself using my umbrella. Rather than avoiding the cow fields I felt as though I was confidently striding at the side of the cows by the end of the day.

There is something about being on the coastal path which feels different to the kind of walking that I have been used to up until now. Yes, it's gruelling and it has its ups and downs but you are rewarded with the views. Your body feels so much more engaged in walking, and that that's all you think about. The notes in my notepad have become much more sparse, and I no longer feel as hungry.

My boots are well worn in now and the foam is showing, as the rubber has worn out on the soles, I'm pretty sure I have hit rubber inside the boot too, my Primark t-shirt is also losing its elasticity and has holes on the right hand should where it has been rubbing against my rucksack.

Distance: 28.82km **Total:** 7026.85km

'Home Run (part 1)'

Day 354: Fiddington to Highbridge

Route: Fiddington – Chilton Trinity – Pawlett – Huntspill – Highbridge

County: Somerset

Distance: 28.4km

Maps: OS Explorer 140

Start: Fiddington

Finish: Highbridge

I set off just before 08.00 this morning, today was supposed to be around a seven hour walk, but somehow it turned into an eleven hour. I'm not quite sure why, maybe I just walked slowly? Perhaps it was taking the 'wrong way out of the caravan park? Or even that I stopped to call up campsites (for what could have been an hour) in Cannington. Today it rained all day, and when I got to Bridgwater it just got heavier!

I took the connecting backroads to Cannington, and on my way through I picked up some Pink Lady apples and brewed myself a coffee in the bus stop. An elderly man stood waiting for the bus and said he thought that he could smell something. I then started phoning around the campsites, the cheapest that I could find was £17.00, and the owner would not lower her price, desperate for somewhere to stay I booked a pitch.

I was running 'behind' schedule and so didn't go into the centre of Bridgwater, but instead to the out of town retail park. I picked up some food from Sainsburys, and toiletries (including some germaline) from the gigantic Superdrug. I then sat on the floor outside Sainsburys and brewed a coffee on my burner, a family walked past eating ice creams and called out 'I could do with one of those'.

It took a while to leave this massive retail complex. I then followed the coastal path along the River Parrett, passing a Premier Inn and Ibis. How nice it would be to be in a warm and cosy bed tonight. I exited onto the A39 and decide to pop into McDonalds to buy (another) sugary cup of tea to lift my spirits. I then followed the A38 to Huntspill and had to stopped in a pretty exposed entrance to have a pee (cars are travelling past too quickly to notice me, I hope).

I tried to walk the public footpaths to Westhill Farm, but could not find the bridge to cross Brents Ryhme. I stopped for another pee (and Tunnocks chocolate bar) and something bit my bum, it bled (thank goodness for that germaline).

In spite of it raining all day today, I felt as though I was in good spirits. Today I even walked through a fields of cattle and horses, and that grappling sense of fear that I felt at the start of the walk had dissipated. I also thought back to the wet nights of camping in Snowdonia last year, which at the time felt like a nightmare and left me frantically searching for a hostel. In spite of the weather, it felt as though something had shifted. When it starts to rain I often think about the Glaswegian lady that I met in the laundry room and her words were 'it can't rain forever'.

Distance: 28.4km **Total:** 7239.49km

'Home Run (part 2)'

Day 366: Bearly to Solihull

Route: Bearly – Wootton Wawen – Henley-in-Arden – Hockley Heath - Solihull

County: West Midlands

Distance: 23.67km

Maps: OS Explorer 140

Start: Bearly Cross

Finish: Solihull

Up until this point I guess I had just been plodding along, looking forward to getting home, to my own bed, to a studio, to not having to think about where I was going to sleep each night. I had been so deeply grounded in each and every day and trying not to get ahead of myself.

When I got to the M42 something changed, I saw the signs for Birmingham and a wave of excitement came over me. I started taking selfies to send to Mom and Bec, crossing the M42 had never felt so good! (and then I realised I still had the ability to step outside of this emotion, and I calmed myself down). How is it, that in spite of almost achieving something quite monumental, it still felt as though it wasn't enough. I'm not sure how I will feel at the end of the walk tomorrow.

I phoned Mom and Dad to wish them a nice holiday, and Dad told me that his friend brother Al will be around at six in the evening to water the flowers, so if I was home by then could I give him the sausage from out of the fridge.

Distance: 23.67km **Total:** 7574.74km