

Written by Ade Grant on 25th June, 2017

Thank you to all who sponsored me or wished me well for the Louise Smalley Walk. Here is my walk diary which I have had to serialise because Facebook doesn't support uploading files and also I don't really know what I'm doing.

Louise Smalley Walk. Ladybower to Whitwell

Pre- walk Prep.

Get up 01:30 Oh my God it's early.

Apply Petroleum Jelly to the parts even Heineken can't reach.

Apply sun cream.

Apply 2nd skin to areas of feet that always suffer.

Breakfast - Coffee, Yoghurt, apricot, flax seed, cashews.

Check weather forecast – get waterproof!

Send friends a “Ring greased and ready for action” text message (more on this later).

Leave house as quietly as possible. Walk to pub for 2.30 am. Check in and receive walk number. Meet friends from previous walks and chew the fat.

Buses arrive a bit later than planned so we arrive at Ladybower late.

4.09 Minutes silence to remember absent friends.

4.10 We're off! 80+ walkers heading off into the wilderness.

Let me introduce my walking companions. First, Gary Spencer. Proof positive of the paucity of male talent in Whitwell, this fool is my daughter's Godfather.

2nd Duncan Shaw, a tall lean intellectual who lets himself down a bit with his hobbies – naked darts.

We had a cunning plan to avoid having to read any walk instructions by either following the author of the walk, Paul Wood, or the LSW supremo Joe Mason. Sadly Paul was walking too fast and Joe was walking too slow....best laid plans.

Gary twisted his knee playing badminton earlier this year, which slowed him

down to a sensible pace. Dunc, although a walk virgin, had done loads of training and was probably the fittest of the three of us but foolishly ignored our advice to travel light and lugged a water laden rucksack round with him.

It was just less than 9 miles to the first checkpoint, most of it tough walking especially for Gary with a dodgy knee. Still, we passed quite a few people including an old football buddy of mine, Steve Darby also on his first walk, also carrying a heavy rucksack. I suggested he dumped it at checkpoint 1.

After about 6 miles, my left Achilles started to get sore, a bit worrying given I had 35 miles still to go! Also around this point, it became obvious that I would have to navigate. I started to read the walk instructions out aloud to share the responsibility for getting lost! About a mile further on, we caught up with about 10 people because they weren't reading the walk instructions and had all got lost. I became the pied piper of Hamlyn for some (briefly) and for others for the next 20 odd miles.

My choice of footwear was called into question near Strines Reservoir when my web topped £10 Aldi running shoes came off second best to an unavoidable peaty quagmire. Still, I guess the water cooled my feet.

At 6:39, I received a text from a mate, Mark Jackson, who it turned out used his mobile as an alarm clock. He didn't appreciate my 2.23 "Ring greased and ready for action" text. Whoops.

Checkpoint 1 was a welcome sight.

Bacon sandwich (sorry veggies, vegans, pescatarians, fruitarians etc) tea, pineapple and chocolate bar. Over the next 5 miles, the three of us would become eight when other walkers either, didn't want to navigate, couldn't or didn't trust those who were. Three more Whitwell lads, an autistic lad called Tom who had faithfully walked every year since his group were the recipients of the walk proceeds 14 years ago and his ever patient carer who hailed from Shirebrook. We remained an eight until the final checkpoint.

Checkpoint 2 at Ringinglow was a welcome sight.

Bacon sandwich (sorry veggies, vegans, pescatarians, fruitarians etc) tea, pineapple and chocolate bar.

From Ringinglow to Totley, the first 2-3 miles walking was less than pleasant. A heavily rutted Roman road that was followed by a steep descent on a rock

strewn narrow and occasionally boggy path. Gary suffered over this bit. Bizarrely by the time I reached Totley, my Achilles problem subsided.

Checkpoint 3 at Totley was a welcome sight.

No bacon sandwich (veggies, vegans, pescatarians, fruitarians etc) you are past the worst. They only provide hot food at the first 2 checkpoints. Cheese sandwich, tea, banana and chocolate bar. It's posh around here. I explained to Dunc (him not being local) that Sheffield was arranged in such a way that the wealthy lived in the West (upwind of the steel works) and the poor lived in the East, (downwind).

Somewhere between Totley and Coal Aston, we passed the half way point of the walk. I play a psychological trick on myself here which goes like this. "If you can get to half way before noon, you just have a normal day's walking ahead of you." I think we achieved this milestone around 11.00.

The change from wild and remote to urban fringe/rural caused an issue for our autistic friend Tom, who it transpired, was terrified of dogs as his brother had been bitten on a paper round in his childhood. From a navigation point of view, more care was needed because none of us knew this bit and the frequent changes of terrain and footpaths meant we had to be careful not to get lost.

Checkpoint 4 at Coal Aston was a welcome sight.

24 miles down. Flap jack, more flapjack, pineapple and more flapjack, cup of tea and chocolate bar. Change of footwear. Bye bye Aldi Trainers, Hello Teva sandals and socks.

The expected relief of a change of footwear lasted for about half a mile. From then on, the general pounding pain and soreness returned. Oh well.

The next section of the walk is one of my favourite bits as eventually it goes through "The Moss", a wooded valley that brings you out at Eckington Church (Checkpoint 5). We all looked forward to getting to Eckington. The other lads from Whitwell had walked the last 11 miles from there back to Whitwell last Tuesday, so we were confident we could dispense with the walk instructions.

Checkpoint 5 at Eckington was a welcome sight.

30 miles down. Tom had his brother waiting for him. The Whitwell lads all had a footwear change. One of them, Luke had been struggling with very sore feet. I had a Philadelphia sandwich, pineapple tea and chocolate bar.

Gary came to the realisation that his dodgy knee was more than up to the task

of getting him home and part way through the next section shot off like a blue-arsed fly. Dunc and I tried to keep up, which hurt. When asked why the sudden increase in pace, Gary said "I thought I'd try and chivvy everyone along". "It's not working. Everyone's Knackered!" was my response. Dunc started complaining about chaffing in a rather sensitive area. He thought Gary had been winding him up about applying Vaseline. I referred him to the text I sent earlier.

The section from Eckington to Killamarsh took in the edge of Rother Valley Country Park, my former place of work. I shared memories with the 3 Whitwell Lads who were all keen fisherman but not especially keen to pay up when as a Park Ranger, one of my duties was to extort money from them. My left foot was now hurting a lot. Underneath and on top in front of my ankle. One of the Whitwell lads, Luke, was struggling with both feet and he and his mate Kelky were starting to drop off a bit.

We caught the good folk of Checkpoint 6 on the hop. They had got bored and gone for a walk. On spotting us, they quickly turned tail and scurried off with all speed to make it back in time to serve us.

Checkpoint 6 at the Angel was a welcome sight.

Cup of tea, bun, flapjack, bun chocolate bar.

After a steep climb up to and under the motorway along the route of the disused Worksop to Chesterfield canal (the flight of locks now posh houses with ponds) we encountered the bane of all June walkers, an old seed rape field. What in May would have been a metre wide path is in June a torture chamber for tired limbs as inevitably, the rape collapses under the weight of its seed pods. Still I have walked through worse. Luke and Kelky were dropping back again and the ever irritating Mr Spencer and Mr Pickering were powering on ahead. The increasingly shorter Dunc and myself were in midfield. I was starting to get concerned for Dunc, who I felt was starting to suffer from lugging the heavy rucksack for the last 33 miles. We made Harthill, checkpoint 7 knowing we had less than six miles left.

Checkpoint 7 was a welcome sight.

Homemade cake, cup of tea, homemade cake, chocolate bar, pineapple. Luke and Kelky came in about 5 minutes after us.

We left together. The weather had been becoming increasingly good for none walkers and bad for walkers – warmer, sunnier, less windy and as we climbed out of Harthill, the heat was most definitely on. Dunc continued his descent towards average height; I stopped limping, as by this point, my right foot was hurting as much as my left. Mr Spencer and Mr Pickering powered irritatingly on. We had been warned about an impassable oil seed rape field and had been advised to use a farm lane instead. On nearing the farm, a farm labourer insisted the path had been cleared. We ignored him and carried on.

Fortunately as it turned out – he lied. The farmers between Harthill and Whitwell have a reputation for not maintaining paths very well and the current incumbents were carrying on the proud tradition. Expletives were heard.

As we neared the final checkpoint Kath and Poppy came to meet us, my daughter hurtling towards me at an alarming pace. I did my best to brace for impact. Tom, who had a photographic memory gesticulated furiously in the direction of Whitwell. He was alarmed that the route, via Van Dykes and Clowne, actually took you further from the finish line.

Checkpoint 8 Van Dykes was a welcome sight.

Tea, flapjack, orange, melon, chocolate bar. Poppy was delighted to see a TA from her school on the checkpoint, even more so when she was offered squash and chocolate.

For reasons unknown to me, we left the final checkpoint in our original groups, us first, then Tom and his ever patient carer, then the Whitwell lads.

2.62 miles of pain between us and a pint.

We made it in just under 14 hours receiving a warm round of applause from the gathered throng – walkers, family, supporters. Dunc nearly collapsed through I think a combination of exhaustion and low blood sugar. I was OK until a couple of hours later. Having had a bath, I had a big shivering fit and needed fluids and fleeces to get my core temperature up again.

Further readjusting of the fluid balance was enjoyed by many on Sunday Afternoon at the Royal Oak pub, where much bol__ x was talked.

Post Script

Kelky, who had walked with us for most of the 41 miles went back out later and walked a further 11 miles to help his girlfriend and her walk buddies get to the finish!

First Walkers back 13:30

We got back 18:07

Last walkers back 22:00

82 started

71 Finished.