

MY COAST TO COAST EXPERIENCE – JUNE 2008

I started writing this, two days after finishing our Coast to Coast Walk – coming back to the real world has delayed me finishing it as quickly as I would have hoped. I have to say it was a real adventure and great fun and I want to thank my friends Richard Poole (RAP) and Richard Williams (RKW) for an excellent walk.

For some real time experiences of the journey we blogged as we walked look at:

<http://www.octagontech.com/category/coast-to-coast/>

What follows here are a series of notes about my experience, some made during the walk and others thoughts after the event. They will cover such things as,

- Advice
- Equipment
- Routes
- Food and Drink
- And other stuff

Hopefully if you are planning or thinking about doing the walk, this will be of some help to you.

THE ROUTE

For a number of years I have had a copy of the classic Wainwright book, "A Coast to Coast Walk" – and the first thing everyone should remember is in the title – it is a coast to coast walk not "The" coast to coast walk. Read the book Wainwright explains his idea.

Early on in the planning (summer 2007), myself and the two friends I was going with sat down and looked at the Wainwright book and decided on our nightly stops and then RAP booked suitable accommodation as near to these as he could manage. This set our crude route and timetable.

This needed refining, so over the Christmas holiday 2007 I sat down with Wainwright's original book, a copy of The Coast to Coast Walk by Martin Wainwright and a route I had downloaded from the internet and loaded that into Memory Map as the starting point for our route.

What's Memory Map – look here www.memory-map.co.uk.

It was then a relatively easy job to alter and adapt the route I had downloaded to match our stop overs and to include things we wanted to do. Using a PC and Memory-Map I was also able to produce several versions of a number of days so the team could sit down and decide the routes we wanted to follow. Interestingly enough the day that had the most versions and was the last leg to be finalised was the last day – and then we actually changed our minds on whilst walking and walked a different way!

Two further things we used Memory-Map for

- We all carried Windows Mobile PDAs which run Memory-Map and will display the route and we had GPS receivers coupled to these so we had an accurate indicator as to where we were. We could also revise our routes whilst walking.
- We also used Memory-Map to print out route cards and strip maps for each days walking (one set each).

POINTS TO NOTE ON THE ROUTE

On **Day 1** we took the well marked path to the left before climbing to Sillathwaite, which avoided having to climb up and over the hill. It also brought us out on the road right by the Standing Stones so we did not miss them.

SAFETY WARNING – DAY 1 As you are walking down into Ennerdale Bridge as you go from the open moorland, over the cattle grid onto the walled in lane (NGR NY062145), look carefully on the left just after the cattle grid, there is a gap that leads to an off road path that will take you safely down this busy narrow road.

We included Helvellyn on **Day 3** – which included standing on the summit in a raging gale, 4°C and zero visibility looking for Swirral Edge – fortunately the cloud broke enough for us to find the way down (the OS Map GPS was invaluable then). We were pleased we did this even though it was hard work and very poor walking conditions – but not as bad as those were we to face getting up to Tann Hill Inn.

Day 4 we took a detour on the well marked path to the summit Rest Dodd – it gave us a great view back over the way we had come across the high fells, it was a good place to stop for lunch and whilst there we saw a small herd of deer cross the Coast to Coast path below us. The descent was alongside the prominent wall seen from the summit and that rejoined our path to Robin Hood's Bay!

Day 6 to Tan Hill Inn was a real challenge because of the bad weather that set in about halfway to Nine Standards Rigg and stayed with us for the rest of the day (75mph winds, enough to stop you in your tracks or blow

you over if you are not careful and horizontal rain that did not let up). You should note that the route to Nine Standards Rigg is good but on leaving there, erosion to the path is very severe until you reach the track at NGR NY836027 – with muddy streams to cross and equally muddy paths, made worse if it has been raining! Proceeding from there to Ravenseat there are several streams that need fording – gaiters are a good idea. Beyond Ravenseat before climbing Pryclose Gutter there is another substantial ford to cross. Day 6 without the rain can be a very wet day if you fall in! (In defence of the Met Office they had issued a severe weather warning for the day but we still had our schedule to keep.)

Because of all the rain there had been on **Day 7** we walked down the road, through West Stonedale to the marked track/path that took us through to the Swaledale Valley – this kept our feet dry by not having to navigate the swollen becks along the Pennine Way which was the way we had planned to walk. (We had a beautiful sunny day on Day 7 which included a cream tea in Gunnerside.)

We also shortened the route from Ingleby Cross to Chop Gate, on **Day 10**, taking a very direct route, to take account of some issues being experienced by some team members and to avoid more bad weather – the extra half days rest was appreciated by all team members (we were on holiday – it was great to have lunch, a beer (several), read the magazines we had brought with us and a laze around).

Day 12 - we chose to take a shorter route to Robin Hood's Bay from Glaisdale than shown in the book – and when it came to the final day we shortened that still further.

We also crossed two moors, Watendlath Fell (**Day 3**) and Fylingdales Moor (**Day 12**), on the map footpaths were marked but in reality they were indistinct or non-existent - the rolling map display on the PDA and careful map reading saved the day. Having got across Watendlath Fell we then had trouble with the path off the fell and through Harrop Tarn Wood.

A CUP OF TEA ON THE ROUTE – PLACES WE TRIED

By the nature of the walk they are few and far between - but there are some oasis as you travel.

Honister Pass - having dropped down towards to Slate Mine there is a cafe in the visitor centre - they are not to bothered when you walk in dripping wet and they serve mugs of tea. When we got there, there were many other walkers sheltering in there from the downpour outside.

Gunnerside - if you have muddy boots when you get to this cafe they ask you take them off and care is needed if you are dripping wet (we were there on a beautiful sunny day). However the cream tea with homemade jam and scones is excellent - and if you have room try the date and banana tea loaf as well (I had both). All served with huge amounts of tea.

On the last day we stopped for Yorkshire Curd Tarts and more tea at the Railway Station Cafe on the platform at **Grosmont Station**. As we were there on a Saturday there were steam trains going through the station that morning.

And when we got to **Robin Hood's Bay**, we were there before our families who wanted to see us finish - so to pass the time we had another Cream Tea in the cafe at the top of the hill on left, just before you drop down to wet your feet in the sea.

OTHER TEA SHOPS WE SAW

There was a Tea Room sign posted along the path just after Marrick – it needed a short detour to reach it.

Teas were advertised at Ravenseat but that was Day 7, and it was raining, and shut.

There was a Tea Shop in the centre of Orton – but it looked a bit posh – it may not welcome walkers but if you try it let me know.

MEMORY-MAP AND OUR ROUTE

I have the GPX file of the route we used available for download at www.clivecatton.co.uk – look in the side bar for the Downloads Page.

EQUIPMENT

In no particular order but here are some of the things I took which I really recommend.

RUCKSACK

Use a good rucksack, about 25l worked for me. If it is too big, it flops around when empty and too small then you cannot carry enough water when (if) it gets hot. I used a Lowe Pro Rover AW – a camera backpack which I have used as my walking and travelling day pack since I got it a couple of years back. The padded bottom section carries the things I need only occasionally, including lunch and a sit mat, the more used items go in the top. The well designed shoulder straps and the vented back (made for carrying a heavy camera load) makes for a very comfortable wear on even the longest of days. The large hip belt distributes the weight well and also holds a drinks bottle holster and another Lowe Pro case for my camera – both within easy reach. The tripod holder on the back, when up, holds my water bladder and the drinking tube comes through several loops which hold it on place on the shoulder strap. It also has an integral waterproof cover and side mesh pockets for snacks etc.

SIT MAT

This is a very useful bit of kit when you want to sit down but the ground, grass, rock, seat etc is wet. It is a concertina piece of closed cell mat. When open it is about 32cms by 27cms and when closed 8cm by 27cm and weighs next to nothing. It is also useful when the rock you sit on is rough as it protects your trousers from damage. Don't leave home without one.

ZIP-LOCK POLYTHENE BAGS

I packed a bundle of these in my luggage and used several to keep things dry in my rucksack, first aid kit, wallet, PDA bits, jumper etc. I took some 25x20 cms but I am going to get some larger ones to take walking in the future as they were so useful.

WATER BLADDER

I used a 1.5l Camelback which fits nicely into the pocket on my pack – putting the drinking tube just where I need it. During the practice walks I had a smaller, cheaper bladder but it started to leak - so if you get one make sure it is robust enough for the job. I have had no problems with the Camelback. Easy to fill even in the smallest sinks used in B&B en-suites.

I think a “drink on the go” system is a must to keep you well hydrated (even on those rainy days) without having to fish a drinks bottle out of your pack. Points to note;

- I only ever put water in it – this way it is easier to keep clean and hygienic
- When you stop do not let the bite valve drop in the dirt – this happened to RKW one day. I always tried to remember to tuck my valve up under a strap to keep it clean.
- YOU DRINK A LOT OF WATER – I filled and drank mine on most of the 15mile plus days

SUN CREAM, SUN BLOCK, LIP SALVE

I used “factor 50” sun cream every day, even when it was raining. I put it on each morning - I was taking no chances with the sun, I walked once all day in the sun, it was windy and I got badly burnt, no hat and no sun cream, I'll never do that again. I had a high factor sun block stick, in my rucksack, for noses etc but I did not need it.

I had lip slave, based on bees wax and slightly minted which I used constantly as my lips dried out quickly whilst walking.

CLOTHING

BOOTS

I had to buy a new pair the weekend before we left – not a good idea but my previous pair broke. I bought a pair of Vindicator MID GTX boots by The North Face. A lighter boot than I had planned to do the walk in but extremely comfortable, although little low in the ankle which meant many stops to empty stones and debris from the boots. Under normal circumstances they were waterproof – but on two of the days they were overwhelmed by the conditions (see notes on the weather) but even full of water they protected my feet and I suffered no blisters or even rubbed areas. They were also very easy to dry out over night.

I did take gortex gaiters – bought because the boots were low cut, I wore them one day and they helped keep my feet dry whilst crossing a wet upland fell, however I like to walk in shorts and really hate waterproof leggings so the very heavy rain later in the day ran down my legs and then got into my boots that way. I did not bother with them again.

GOOD SOCKS

Whatever brand you choose get good ones and several pairs and expect to wash them through whenever you get a chance. I had used Bridgedale socks during the practice walks, but they were less comfortable after several washes and quite expensive. So I then tried Black own brand socks – Pro Hiker. Proved themselves on the walk – I'd recommend them.

CRAGHOPPERS

I had three pieces of clothing from Craghoppers

A pair of 3 way zip-off trousers and a pair of 2 way zip-off trousers. Long trousers when you need them or shorts for walking in. They have zippered pockets to keep things safe and a really useful cargo pocket, on the thigh, to shove things in whilst on the go (my waterproof jacket went in there, especially useful on those days where I kept taking it on and off as the weather “flip flopped”). Made from easy-dry material for when they get wet, or you wash them. I had the 2 way pair in the luggage for wearing in the evening as long trousers and the 3 way ones I wore as shorts for the walking (I wore shorts for all the walking whatever the weather – my preference).

I made a late purchase of a Nosquito Long Sleeved Shirt – check the specification at Craghoppers. I wish I had bought two and alternated them – but it was easy to wash the one I had and get it dry overnight. I wore it most days whilst walking. It was comfortable under my rain coat and when the weather was warmer. I discovered after a day or two wearing it, that there is a zippered security pocket in the left chest pocket.

ROHAN EXPEDITION VEST

For its pockets when I was walking (for all those bits, Blackberry, PDA/GPS, sweets, sunglasses etc) I wore a Rohan Expedition Vest. I kept my iPod in one of the inside chest pockets and pulled the earphones out through the hole that was provided for the drinking tube, this kept the earphones under control. Again with lots of secure zippered pockets nothing was lost.

WARM CLOTHES

We undertook our walk during the last two weeks June, hoping for good weather and we did have some really nice days. However we also had some really bad weather, wet and cold, especially cold on the high fells and moors. I needed my fleece gloves and hat and would not dream of setting out on a high walk, even in the summer, without them.

I also carried a Mountain Equipment lightweight (but extremely warm) jumper, packs up small and weighed little. Unfortunately a couple of times when I really needed to wear it, it was raining so hard that I did not want to get it out of the pack or take my waterproofs off. So I just walked quicker to warm myself up. (Note - this was the only warm body layer I took with me and it was a perfect choice.)

SUN HAT

Take one and wear it – I have a floppy, white cricket hat. Get one with a wide brim to keep the sun off your head, face and ears.

TECHNOLOGY

I work with computers so I have a PDA and Blackberry that I carry all the time so I was not going to go on the walk without them.

DELL X51V PDA WITH GPS RECEIVER – ALL KEPT IN AN AQUAPAC

This PDA is very well specified and I use all its capability. I kept my diary and notes on it, browsing the web at wifi hotspots, I played videos and mp3s on it for entertainment, it was my book reader each night and for those relaxing moments when I took a break on the walk. Oh yes and it was an essential aid to the navigation – using Memory-Map and the GPS receiver. Both the PDA and GPS unit were carried in a sealed waterproof Aquapac – so they could be used in the worse weather – but I always carried them in this waterproof bag whatever the weather – as when carried in the chest pocket on the Rohan vest the case got wet with sweat (hot work even in the rain walking the Coast to Coast).

MEMORY-MAP

As explained above this was a great piece of software to have. We used it to create our routes on the PC before leaving. We created two strip maps of the route a West and East section and printed out our daily maps and route cards – in a slightly larger scale (1:37500) so we could see the detail easily.

I have the Pocket PC version loaded on my PDA and had a bluetooth GPS receiver connected so we have an indication as to where we were. However it should be noted that especially in the Lake District we had times when the shortage of good fixes on the satellites gave us very inaccurate fix on our location. ***So make sure you can map read before setting out on any challenge and never rely solely on GPS.***

IPOD NANO

There is only so much you can talk about, with your friends whilst walking, so the iPod was useful entertainment on the move. (I know many people would say you should enjoy the quiet – well I did the quiet and I enjoyed my iPod and talking with my friends.) I filled my 8gig player with audio plays, podcast stories, various programmes and music. *My top tip for finishing the day at a good pace is to make sure you have a selection of music with a fast beat to listen to as your legs start to slow – it really helps to give you that lift.* For protection I carried the iPod in a Crumpler pp45 case.

BLACKBERRY

I have a Blackberry Curve which I used (when there was a signal – which wasn't often when in the Lakes) to update the walk blog at www.octagontech.com. But the most useful thing was the good camera that comes with the Curve – because of the weather I did not carry my Canon camera every day so then I used the camera phone which produces acceptable images. It was also much quicker to get the camera phone out of my vest pocket than the camera from its protective case.

CANON POWERSHOT S2 – IN A LOWEPRO D-RES 30AW

Even with the weather I still managed to take nearly six hundred shots on this camera. It is a well specified, bridge camera. The case was good protection but when really bad weather was forecast I sent the camera on in my case to the next B&B – consequently I also forgot to take it with me on one of the fine days because it was still in the case! So when I undertake my next long distance walk I am going to take a compact digital camera with me that I can carry in my pocket so it is always ready to use – something like a Nikon Coolpix P60. And I am going to have a 100% waterproof case for it.

CHARGING

Top of the list of things I had to remember to do each night was charge everything. The PDA and the GPS unit had to be charged every night. The Blackberry probably every two or three days and I charged the iPod three times and the camera batteries once. The only items that shared a charger was the GPS unit and the Blackberry.

IMPROVEMENTS

Next walk I am going to rationalise my hi-tech equipment. I'd like to have something like an HTC Touch Pro, a PDA camera phone with a built in GPS and large storage capability. I'd use non-rechargeable batteries for the camera – saving a charger there – and have a smaller camera (like a Nikon P60). Then if I use a charger with a USB socket and all I need then is the lead for the iPod and the lead for the PDA/phone.

FOOD AND DRINK

We experimented a lot during our practice walks with the food and drink.

SIS – SCIENCE IN SPORT

I carried a bottle of the SIS GO Electrolyte, carbohydrate with electrolytes drink everyday – and a spare sachet which I could dilute if I needed it.

At the end of each day we used the SIS Rego Recovery drink – this was excellent.

I carried an SIS GO-BAR as stand-by food and had to use it on the day when we walked to Tan Hill and the weather was so bad it was not possible to do more than eat a bar and drink water (although I did have my tea that day!). I also had another bar on a day when I just did not fancy anything else at lunchtime but knew I needed the energy.

I carried, as spare food, and used on the long days the SIS GO-GEL Isotonic Energy Gel sachets.

All of these items, I believe contributed to our successful completion of the walk

OATCAKES AND FISH

I wanted to avoid wheat in my lunches and snacks so I chose oatcakes - supplied in convenient small packs - and small tins of “Weightwatchers” fish or John West crab spread. I read that wheat is slow to be digested especially when eaten when exercising and fat requires water to be digested - and this information influenced my lunch and snack choices.

One brand of oatcakes it is worth looking out for is Nairn, they make cheese flavoured ones which I liked but the sweet fruit with spice and the ginger versions were very popular with all three of us as snack food. These biscuits are supplied in pocket sized packs, four per box which make them very convenient to carry.

FOOD BOREDOM

This set in about halfway through the walk, there was also the fact that it seemed more trouble than it was worth to spread the fish on the biscuits. So lunches then consisted of snack bars, dried fruit - and cold sausages with tomato ketchup! The sausages were from breakfast, I took a plastic bag down to breakfast with me for the sausages and most places use sauce sachets and I took those with me for lunch. (I had packed a supply of sandwich bags for putting my lunch in each day and subsequently to deal with the litter from lunch.)

The next long walk I do I think I will predominately use cereal and snack bars for lunch. I'd take sweet Nairn Oat Cakes and a supply of poly bags for the sausages!

HOT DRINK

Every day - even when on Nine Standards Rigg in the raging gale I made a hot drink. Again supplies from the accommodation came in useful for this, as I was able to take milk cartons from the room for use at lunch. I had a choice of drink as it is easy to carry a tea bag and a packet of coffee and choose which, when I came to make it.

Top tip - take a small flask, dump the small attached mug and take a full sized mug (I have a titanium mug, from MSR, which weighs very little but is expensive). A hot drink is a great boost part way through the day, especially if the weather is against you.

KENDAL MINT CAKE

I carried bits of this broken up in a small tin – it is something I like to snack on whilst walking but only in small bits not the large bars

SESAME SNAPS

Small sweet biscuits, four in a pack – one of my favourite snacks for walking, easy to push into the quick access pockets on my backpack for a quick snack.

CONCLUSION

So there are my thoughts and experiences – for more see the blogs.

Whilst walking you become very focused on the task in hand – I was not even worried about work, when I could not get a phone a signal, the next stretch of the footpath was my only concern. I like travelling on my own – however I do recommend undertaking your Coast to Coast with friends. They help get you over the problems you may encounter and also gives you someone to share the good and bad (wet!) moments with.

So enjoyed I it – and completed it.

Would I do it again – the simple answer is yes.

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