



## 630 Miles: The South West Coast Path

On 20<sup>th</sup> August, Chris Dowse from St Serf's set off from Minehead in Somerset to walk the 630 miles of the South West Coast Path, the longest of the UK's

National Trails. He was aiming to raise money and awareness for both Prostate Cancer UK and the Rotary Foundation's End Polio Now campaign, and decided that a good target would be £5750, representing 5p for each foot of ascent on the path – 115,000 feet of ascent altogether, which is four times the height of Everest!

He carried helium balloons attached to his rucksack and wore t-shirts with Prostate Cancer and Polio slogans. The balloons were a great success! He was stopped countless times by people who wondered what he was doing (quite often whether it was his birthday) and was able to tell them what he was hoping to achieve. Later in the walk he was recognised by people who had seen him previously! It was striking that Chris met many people whose lives had been touched by prostate cancer: some, like Chris, had had prostate cancer themselves, or had a relative or friend with the disease. One or two people had had polio, which is now endemic in only three countries: if it can be eliminated from these through vaccination programmes, then the world will be polio-free.



I dropped Chris off at the start of each day's walk and picked him up at the end, sometimes walking towards him for a mile or two. We stayed in self-catering cottages, each about halfway along each week's walk. There was much of interest along the way: the reminders of devastating floods in Lynmouth, Boscastle and Crackington Haven; the importance of the fishing industry: the relics of tin and copper mining which made Cornwall as industrialised as the Midlands and the North in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; the memorials to shipwrecks

and to the 749 American servicemen killed in Lyme Bay when they were attacked during rehearsals for the D-day landings; the Jurassic Coast of

East Devon and Dorset; the lighthouses; the Lizard; Land's End. And a modern contrast between the luxury yachts and the homeless on the waterfront in Plymouth.

As well as all this, we saw many friends, some who live in the South West, and some who came to walk for a day or two with Chris, including a couple from Lincolnshire who stayed with us for four days and one friend who came all the way from Hampshire and who had the second worst day's walking of the whole trip, a foggy, drizzly 14 miles of slippery boulders! On the whole, though, the weather was perfect – some wind, but little rain apart from the day when Chris was so wet at the end that his pockets were full of water ...

We also visited Rotary Clubs along the way and were given a warm welcome. At the Rotary Club of St Austell Bay, we met Mr Kelly, of Italian descent, with an Irish name, who makes the eponymous Cornish ice-cream!

For the last week, some of our family came down to Dorset from Comrie to walk with Chris and to celebrate his 70th birthday, which was on October 17th, the last day of the walk. Two of our grand-children, aged 9 and 8, and their father, walked seven miles of the penultimate day and the six and a half miles of the last day with Grandpa. The rain started as they reached the car park at the end of the South West Coast Path at Poole Harbour, where we all celebrated with bubbles, a cake and a picnic in the wet. Nobody really minded!

Having finished on the planned day, and having negotiated 230 bridges, 880 gates, 436 stiles and 30,000 steps up and down, as well as 13 ferries across river estuaries, and seen 4,000 Coast Path signs, you would think that Chris would have been glad to stop. He actually spent the last week feeling sorry that it was coming to an end – after nine weeks, it had become something of a way of life.



What he is pleased about, and humbled by, is the amount of money he has been able to raise through the generosity of many people, here in Strathearn, on the path itself and throughout the country. The amount now stands at £13,186 including gift aid, so that £6,510 goes to each charity.

The Gates Foundation puts in £2 to every £1 raised for polio eradication, which means that 49,000 children will be vaccinated.

Chris is already planning the next walk – this time just for his own amusement. He's thinking about a walk South to North through the Outer Hebrides ...

Chris Dowse aka Mrs Chris