

May 2013: Pilgrimage blog, Chris Potter.

BASINGWERK TO LLANASA

Light rain overnight and the wind has dropped. My legs feeling reluctant to get started, a familiar feeling after first day of pilgrimage. Remember a Frenchman telling us on our first day on the Camino just outside Le Puy - "The first day is difficult, and the next is nothing like as easy!"

Yesterday 25 of us gathered at Basingwerk Abbey for our short starting out liturgy, reminding ourselves of the Saints who first set out across Wales some 1500 years ago. The mural made by excluded school children under the guidance of ceramic sculptor Neil Dalrymple looks magnificent, with lots of quirky characters popping up Breughel-like as the children threaded their own narrative journey along the pilgrimage route from Basingwerk to Bardsey.

We made our way up Greenfield Valley, past the industrial heritage sites and through scruffy sheds and garages to emerge on the road near Winifride's well, primroses and speedwell mixed in with the daffodils on the bank across the road. Cutting up through the Holway, over the main road and up towards Pantasaph, stopping from time to time to climb stiles and look back across to the Wirral and the solid brown tower of Liverpool Cathedral. Sunlight picking out the sandy edge of Lancashire disappearing into the mist further north.

A chilly and speedy lunch at Pantasaph, the wind quite sharp and biting, but pilgrims content sitting on benches in the lee of the churchyard wall. Shortly after we set off again we were joined by Pdraig Ward who will be meeting us again at Aberdaron to receive the pilgrim staff as he returns with it to St Asaph Cathedral, promoting the Hungry for Change Campaign on the way in advance of the G8 summit in June. He was bubbling with excitement, his first pilgrimage and overjoyed to be walking with us. What is it about pilgrimage that makes it so much more than a long distance walk? The companionship? The conversation and stories? The sense of being covered by prayer? Whatever it is, each time we have made this journey those of faith and those on the fringes of faith have found it profoundly moving.

From Llanasa to the Garreg tower from where the estuary and Lancashire coast seemed even closer. To the west we could see clouds of dust streaming in the wind, which we later found to be the result of a farmer raking a huge field in preparation for sowing. The surface was fine dust and tons of the stuff must have been whipped away by the wind. The result of cropping again and again with the

same produce. Lesson for the church? Pilgrimage always seems to speak to me in parables....

Getting quite chilly as we descended to Llanasa across wonderful broad meadow having caught my trousers on a bit of barbed wire on a stile we used to avoid some cattle. Pretty village tucked in the valley. We arranged transport for the following day and headed home. Later had lovely meal with recently retired John and Meryl who had come to see us off at Basingwerk and hope to join us on the Lleyn in ten days.

LLANASA TO TREMEIRCHION

Stuart was waiting for in the church in Llanasa at 9.30. A group of walkers from a Llanasa walking group were there as well and had decided to join us for half the day. We were each given a small stone as we came in and gathered in the chancel for prayers. Stuart told us about the east window which had been saved from Basingwerk Abbey at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, very beautiful medieval glass. Stuart invited us to place our stones on the floor in front of the altar and spoke of the stones and earth we would walk over as pilgrims. Then he produced an offertory dish covered in a white cloth which he removed to reveal around thirty small, freshly baked bread rolls which he gave to each of us - food for the journey, physical and spiritual.

A steady climb out of Llanasa heading almost due south towards Axton and then south west towards the Gop and views westwards out to the Great Orme and south along the Clwydians. A quick coffee break while I tried to work out how to tweet the link to this blog. A steep descent to Trelawnyd and into the churchyard to see the impressive and ancient stone cross. From the sublime Just round the corner a sign on the farm gate - BEWARE HORMONAL TURKEY.

I found I could hardly remember this next stage of the Pilgrims' Way south of Trelawnyd. Some muddy and cow trodden bits as well as glimpses of cowslips, wood sorrel, marsh marigolds (which I haven't seen for many years) and celandine. At one point I spotted a budding chestnut sapling twig in a hedgerow that looked like a Celtic cross. Photo came out blurry though. We found a sheltered bank to stop for lunch; the wind was still sharp and you quickly cool down once you stop. The buzzard circling and mewing over our heads was obviously anxious for us to move on. Maybe she had a nest nearby. Some lambs who were playing tag and dare suddenly noticed us and came boldly to within, ooooh, 50 yards of us.

Over the A55 and across a vast field of daffodils, one of several possible grown for bulbs as most of them were nearly over. Not

quite what Wordsworth had in mind, but quite impressive with some bare oaks spread out against the sky, spindly black fingers spread out over a yellow windswept lake. From there a steady climb again up and over a shoulder of the Clwydians where the A55 cuts through. Always amazed by the view from here, just above St Beuno's Jesuit retreat house. To the east you can just make out the Lancashire Pennines in the distance, while to the west, across from the actions Vale of Clwyd, over the Hiraethog and out to Snowdon, and, edging out behind the bulk of the Great Orme, Anglesey. No wonder Gerard Manley Hopkins was so inspired by 'this world of Wales'. He must have come often to this very spot.

At the stile where we begin to cut diagonally down towards St Beuno's there are two hawthorns where Howard Holdsworth, who was with us two years ago on our first pilgrimage here, insisted on resting to take in the view. Sadly Howard died suddenly last year before he could join us again. We thought we should call the place Howard's hawthorns. I had known Howard since we were fifteen - a great loss of a poet and an adventurer.

38 stiles today!

TREMEIRCHION TO ST ASAPH

5th May, the feast of St Asaph and a great gathering at Tremeirchion for the 11.15 Eucharist. I had been invited to preach, which I did in walking gear - the gaiters were the only archdeaonly reference in my attire, but they were blue Goretex and not black leather as preferred by earlier holders of my post.

When the doors were opened after the service you could hardly see past the porch the sun was so bright. 30 or so folk from St Asaph were waiting, some already settled down by the churchyard wall and spreading out a picnic. Tea, coffee and cake in abundance had been provided by the congregation to supplement our packed lunches. Their hospitality and welcome was very much appreciated and revived that deep sense of gratitude that has grown on us through past pilgrimages, learning how to receive when you have nothing much that you can offer in return at that time.

We were a thoroughly mixed bunch, 60 of us all told and straddling several generations with two babies carried all the way to St Asaph. The youngest amongst us (apart from the babies) were a bit like the lambs we saw yesterday, running ahead and keeping their independence except when they weren't sure of the way.

It's a great image of the church on the move, folk walking at different speeds and yet catching up with each other from time to time to check things out, making sure no-one gets left behind and yet always moving on.

In the sermon I mentioned a stile we had seen the day before just a couple of fields away from Tremeirchion church. It was beautifully

made from oak, sturdy and of strong proportions. In fact it was one of the best maintained stiles we had seen that day (38 altogether). The only thing was, the fence either side of it had long been removed to make a larger, more manageable field. It had become a perfectly maintained relic - life had left it behind. The church on the move, as the bishop mentioned later in his address at the Cathedral, seems a much better metaphor than a redundant stile.

ST ASAPH TO LLANSANNAN

Wonderful opening ceremony for Year of Pilgrimage in Cathedral yesterday thanks to Kate Johnson's informal and moving liturgy. Over 200 people came and followed a pilgrimage around the Cathedral and were given pilgrim scallop shells and a pilgrim passport to take away.

Around 20 of us met again this morning in St Asaph where Val Rowlands led us in our simple morning pilgrim service and where we collected the pilgrim staff to take with us to Bardsey.

From the Cathedral the route is all on minor roads to Bont Newydd. We had tried to negotiate a path through the Cefn Estate but there was no way they would consider an open-to-all footpath. In fact in some places they make their welcome explicit with signs that say WARNING - KEEP OUT. HIGH VELOCITY RIFLES IN USE! But even the road walking was good, the hedgerows just budding, housemartins flitting around after midges, little orchids growing by the roadside, bluebells starting in the woods, hawthorn fizzing white in the sun.

Stopped in Cefn church for a moment or two. Perched on a rock, we used to be able to see it from the Deanery in St Asaph, a pretty, well proportioned Victorian estate chapel. A couple of minutes from there we reached the Neuadd Owen where a local group had gathered to hear about local saints and wells and undertake a short pilgrimage to the nearby St Mary's well. They gave us a cup of tea and we looked longingly at the cakes that they were obviously keeping for when they returned from the well. But they were not for us.....

After Bont Newydd the path diverts from the road and took us steeply up the side of a hill through a wood and out into open farmland above Llanefydd. After climbing through several fields offering panoramic views across the Vale of Clwyd and back along the journey we have made over the last three days. We stopped for lunch at a crossroads about midway between Llanefydd and Cefn Berain, the same place we had lunch on the previous two years. We stretched out on the wide and warm grass verges and enjoyed the sun, probably for the first time this year.

Somewhat anxious about Sue, a woman from Llay who camped out at the Cathedral and wants to come with us to Aberdaron. She is by

no means young, and is pushing a pram loaded with her tent, clothing and food. She is a very slow walker and it took her four hours to get to Cefn, just over three miles away. It seems she will be meeting up with us in Llansannan tomorrow morning and will not be persuaded that this really isn't a path where she can take the pram.

There were stunning views across to Snowdonia - Moel Siabod, Tryfan, the Glyders and Snowdon all looming over the Denbigh Moors and looking almost within reach. Again, sparkling hedgerow and field flowers, like stars - Compostela/Field of Stars - and trees of all kinds coming into bud, the dark red wound of a broken off alder branch, the snow bound sheep's rack picked bare by crows a reminder that at other times this beautiful countryside can become cruel.

Crossing and re crossing the Aled, sparkling silver-greys and blues threading across the valley. Steep banks heavy with wild garlic and, under the trees a carpet of bluebells waiting to break into colour in the next few days. A final stretch along a bridle path led out into Llansannan and some young men sitting in the sun outside the pub enjoying a holiday pint or two. We couldn't resist and those cold lagers were the best ever.

LLANSANNAN TO LLANGERNYW

This was really a summer's day. It was still registering 24 degrees at 6.00pm when we got to Llangernyw. Started out at Llansannan and Clare led our morning service:

O God, you summon the day to dawn,
You teach the morning to waken the earth.
Great is your name,
Great is your love.

Iona liturgy is just perfect for this journey. St Sannan's peaceful and cool before setting off up the hill and into the sun. We found out that Sue, with the pram, had been taken in by Katie from Llansannan (Katie joined us on the first pilgrimage). When pressed as to what she wanted to do, Sue said she'd like to go home and have a bath and Saint Katie took her back home to Llay where she lived.

Harder to get started this morning, muscles grumbling about yesterday, but the sun and the warmth of the day drew us on - and upwards. There's been quite a lot of upwards today and the steep climb from Llansannan up to the moors was exhausting even though the path we took was stunningly beautiful. Alongside the Aled those wonderful little welsh oaks clung to the valley sides, their branches twisting and jagged against the sky like electricity sparking in a Faraday experiment. We walked to the sound of the woodland

stream the flow spilling over a rock ledge, filling a pool sparkling and dappled by the spring sun.

After a long climb with the sun getting hotter all the time, we reached Katie's farm where she met us with a freshly boiled kettle and coffee. A brief and welcome respite before heading across the moor and down to Gwytherin. This is the first year we have made that part of the journey in sunshine. The last two years we have crossed over to Gwytherin in pouring rain, arriving soaked and dripping at the old church in Gwytherin, now owned by photographer Alison Goulbourne. Today we could sit out and rest in the sun and enjoy Alison's hospitality - and her coffee and fruit juice in that ancient churchyard with its centuries old yew trees.

I seem to get more reflective the more physically challenging the walking becomes. With four days of the pilgrimage behind us I'm beginning to feel a reluctance in my body that takes some effort to overcome. I become more aware of the rhythm of walking, of how I am breathing and of the weight of the pack on my back. And there's something in all this about the physical and spiritual wear and tear that accumulates unnoticed in everyday life. I am reminded of the need for rest, for supportive company, of stopping for sustenance, physical and spiritual, to sustain me for the continuing journey. And I relish the banter, the warm jesting and teasing that lightens the effort needed to complete the day's journey. It's great to walk in such warm and encouraging company. I'm looking forward to tomorrow, Llangernyw to Eglwysbach.

LLANGERNYW TO EGLWYSBACH

Rather unwilling to get out of bed this morning! Weather forecast not ideal, but after yesterday's taste of summer we can't really complain. But we did...

It started raining shortly after leaving Llangernyw where the warden had made the church so beautifully warm that we were a little reluctant to leave after our morning liturgy. A perfect quiet space to have a few minutes to reflect and to take delight in what we had experienced so far and in anticipation of the day ahead.

Yesterday was the first time we had walked that section from Llansannan to Llangernyw via Gwytherin with having our heads down, deep inside our jacket hoods against the rain. We were able to see parts of the landscape that we hadn't noticed before, even more so with the trees still bare. There was one gully where the golden moss-covered branches of a tangle of oaks had been caught by the sun and shone luminously against the far hillside. A gift that can only be glimpsed in early spring.

Heavy, low hanging cloud seriously limited our outlook today as we made our way up and across the fields, heading towards the B5113, the Llanrwst/Colwyn Bay road. The rain brings out all the rural smells from the fresh milky coconut of dazzling banks of gorse to the acrid ammonia where sheep congregate to feed. With the rain and wind driving up from the south-west we trudged along minor roads past the ugly debris of forestry clearance, jumping onto the verges when a sheep transporter truck came by straddling the single-track road. We must have looked a mad bunch, out in that weather, and we somehow fell into a terrific pace, probably trying to make as much headway as we could since there was no point dawdling. After a while it got a bit much and we settled into a more measured gait, not quite so exhausting!

Many more bluebells and primroses flourishing along the lane that leads to the kennels and cattery on the western slope of Mynydd Esgair-Ebrill. The wild garlic is fully in flower here as well. Chorus of dogs greeted us as we went through the yard at Bryn-Gwian and followed the path down past the duck pond. A couple of years ago we walked past, dripping wet, and saw a duck sheltering from the rain inside the duck house on the little island in the middle of the pond. What she thought of us one can only imagine. Nice weather for the nutters?

We were obviously going to arrive in Eglwysbach much earlier than we anticipated, so I phoned Roy, the churchwarden who was going to greet us at the church, to let him know. We arrived around 1.15, having dried off a bit in the wind. Dramatic views had opened up to the west, Snowdonia peaks shrouded in cloud but with swathes of sunlight picking out the lower shoulders and cwms and glancing off the water in the Conwy estuary which was at full tide.

For some a spiritual retreat conjures up the image of a silent convent, or a hushed library with leather bound books, dust motes spinning slowly in sunlight as you write up your journal. Not for me. The sheer physicality of a walking pilgrimage, taking and receiving what comes, weather or hospitality, turns it all into an extraordinary blessing. It is grace-filled, this gift of loss of control. Open to the elements, open even to pain and discomfort, the aperture through which joy can enter is steadily widened. Teilhard de Chardin once wrote that "we are not physical creatures having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual creatures having a physical experience." That just about sums up pilgrimage, and life, for me.

A fairly steep descent on tarmac brought us to Eglwysbach and the welcome sight of the public toilets. If ever you see a petition to keep open the public toilets anywhere you happen to be visiting, sign it! On to the church where the hospitality of the parishioners was heartwarming as well as body warming. Sandwiches and cakes -

such cakes! The Bakewell Tart had to be experienced to be believed. You just had to be there! We abandoned any thought of drawing on our own supplies and eventually left feeling very well looked after. We'll meet them tomorrow morning, Ascension Day, for communion at 9.00. I wonder if they'll have any of those cakes left.....

EGLWYSBACH TO PENMAENMAWR

Ascension Day. We met at 9.00am at St Martin's in Eglwysbach for their Ascension Day Eucharist. Rev'd Sarah Hildreth was leading the service and gave us a very warm welcome and an excellent homily in which, by some skilful footwork, she nimbly wove together Pilgrimage, Alex Ferguson and the Ascension of Christ into a coherent and engaging address. It had begun to rain more heavily by the time we were ready to leave the church so we donned full weather gear and set out over the hill to cross the Conwy at Tal y Cafn and then up towards Rowen. Steady rain all the way, but the hedgerows and woods were loving it, blossom and bud emerging all around. A couple of fields before the village a cherry tree in full bloom was jostling for attention next to a slender birch with a froth of tender green, almost like smoke whispering through its branches. Lovely.

Dripping wet, we stopped off at Capel Rowen which is beautifully maintained and with superb interpretation boards recounting its history. We had our coffee and chocolate bars there and warmed up a little out of the wind. Bracing ourselves, we set off on the footpath across the fields behind the village before cutting up through Parc Mawr and onto Graig Celynin. The track rises steeply through the woods and resembles a stream bed, which is what it probably becomes any time there's consistent rain like today. It's an exhausting climb that requires several breath catching stops. I became aware of the slightly sweet, lung cleansing antiseptic scent of the pines, possibly from recent wind damage releasing sap from the wounds. The path was littered with new hawthorn and sycamore leaves and blossom torn from the trees by the severity of the wind and rain.

Leaving the wood, the ancient track winds up to the open moor, closely hemmed in by high drystone walls on either side. It has the feel of a track that has been used for centuries. As it levels out you can see the roof of the old church of Llangelynin, a single cell building dating from the C13th., though with origins possibly stretching back to the C6th. The church sits in the middle of a small churchyard which is contained by a high stone wall. In the south western corner there is an ancient well, in turn sheltered by stone walls. Entering the porch, you are greeted with sign that reads: This is a house of God. Visitors are requested not to scribble anywhere. Stepping inside out of the rain it almost felt warm, though within a few minutes we had cooled down again. We ate our sandwiches and

drank our coffee, once again feeling the welcome of the place, a haven in the storm. We have become accustomed to using a simple liturgy here, including singing Bunyan's hymn, which I had prepared for our first pilgrimage three years ago. In this tiny church, with the wind moaning over the roof and the sun just breaking through, our prayers seem to merge in with all those other prayers that have been offered over the years and that seem to seep out of the stonework. It is worth the journey and the effort to get up here - it is one of those 'thin' places, where the boundary between earth and heaven is palpably diaphanous. I'm always reluctant to move on from there, but we had another four or five miles to go to get to Penmaenmawr where we had left the cars.

We now head over the moors, fully exposed to the weather. Last year we could hardly see the person in front, but although extremely windy and with sharp gusts of rain, at least visibility was reasonably good. Stopping at one point to look back over the estuary and towards Deganwy, it almost looked as if it was shrouded in smog. Then Mike said that it was a low, fat rainbow. I thought he was talking about a new yoghurt flavour, but no, it was really a low, fat rainbow lying across the estuary and tinting the town below it. Reaching the ridge where our path meets the North Wales Coast Path, we turned right over a stile and began to drop steeply towards Penmaenmawr. As the path emerged from a shallow gully, the town and the coast suddenly appeared below us. A little further on we came to a magnificent stand of beech trees which were just coming into leaf, the foliage luminescent green in the slanting sun. Below them and to the right, a copse of small Welsh oaks was struggling into bud, just the beginnings of a hint of colour. The view through the trees and along the coast would have competed well as one of those 1930's railway posters. The rain had eased off by the time we got to the cars. Not too long a day, 9 miles, but strenuous enough battling against the wind and rain on the climb to Llangelynin.

PENMAENMAWR TO ABERGWYNGREGYN

For some reason I found today exhausting. It was raining as we gathered in Penmaenmawr before starting out and didn't look much as if it would let up any time soon. Apart from the A55, there's no way to leave Penmaenmawr except by going up, as generations of quarrymen must have done in the past. Trudging up the side of the mountain to the Coast Path, it becomes apparent just how resilient the workers must have been. Day after day, under the watchful eye of the works clock set high up on the mountainside, they would have sweated up to the quarry, worked for goodness knows how many hours before heading back down home for a few hours before starting out all over again.

Fortunately for us the rain thinned out and with several stops to catch our breath (and admire the view of course which was pretty spectacular, a word I would never have associated with Penmaenmawr before today) we reached the level Coast Path and struck out for Llanfairfechain. The rain may have dropped but the wind certainly hadn't and it was hard work battling against it full in the face. From the top above Pen it was about three miles to Llanfairfechain. Several times we stopped while we caught up with each other, and if anyone tried to speak all I could see was their lips moving and all I heard was the wind howling past my hooded top. Things improved as we dropped towards Llanfairfechain. We approached one particular farm rather cautiously as the bridle path goes through the yard and the first year we came two dogs tried to attack us quite viciously and succeeded in biting one of the group. Fortunately this time there was only one smiley looking sheepdog that didn't look as if it would threaten anything.

The sun came out as soon as we left the bridle path so we demanded a coffee break relieved to be out of the wind. A little further on we walked past a house where they had planted a small but delightfully rich wildflower meadow, where several varieties of spring flowers were flourishing well. The trouble with going down is you just know you will have to pay for it later, but later was after a more extended stop for lunch on a grassy verge overlooking Llanfairfechain, with views over to Penmon Point and Puffin Island. We could just see the roofs of some of the quirky Arts and Crafts house on an estate built round 1905. They all have individual features and I think the whole estate is now listed. A better approach than last year when the road down from the mountain to the town was a running river.

It 's always difficult to get going again after sitting down for half an hour or so, and every muscle seemed to be aching as we squeezed through the ancient rusty kissing gate and into the fields below the mountain. The path took us steeply up to a gate in a high stone wall, beyond which lay Moel-Ganol and further still the Carneddau. Just through the gate a heavily pregnant white mountain pony was grazing with a very new chestnut and white foal near her. When they saw us the foal ran to the mare, mistaking her for its mother. The real mother was a little way off, contentedly grazing. The foal tried to nuzzle the other mare which lashed out at the confused youngster, who kept on trying and kept on being rebuffed. It soon started to whimper quite loudly whereupon there was a loud responding whinny from just over the hill and immediately the pounding of hooves as a chestnut and white stallion came rushing to sort things out. He severely chastised the pregnant mare for mistreating the young one and rounded on the real mother for ignoring her baby. They quickly fell in line and trooped off some distance away and resumed normal marital harmony. We must have

counted around forty ponies altogether, which is encouraging after the reports of a few hundred being killed in the snow up here a few weeks ago.

I'm beginning to get used to the Diocesan pilgrim staff, a knobbly stem of holly with a scallop shell attached with a thin leather thong and a curved spike of horn set near the top. I'm not sure what that is for, but it could serve as a thumb grip I suppose. I'm used to a pair of more ergonomically designed walking poles and this is harder to use. It's a bit like taking on a new rôle or job, it doesn't quite fit at first. There's also the knowledge that, like the job, I'll be handing it on eventually so I'd better not get too attached to it. I'm still not sure why it's been such a wearisome day for me. I know it's been quite hard work, but it's a bit like getting to late Tuesday afternoon in a week that's already been full on with another three days of intense meetings to deal with before Friday. Some weeks are like that, and sometimes pilgrimage is like that too and you just get on with it.

On coming down again towards the car park below the falls at Abergwyngregyn I was confused by a large group of trees down near the river. They looked bleached and skeletal and I thought they must have been killed off in the winter. When we got nearer I saw that they were Ash trees and there was just a hint of new growth at the tips of their branches. I have never been convinced by that old saying, 'oak before ash, in for a splash: ash before oak, in for a soak'. In my experience the oak always comes out before the ash and it has no bearing on the quality of summer we have, especially last summer.

We finally made the car park just as it started to rain again. All things considered we got off quite lightly. Tomorrow we shall head up to the falls themselves, and judging from the river it should be in full spate.

ABERGWYNGREGYN TO BANGOR

Raining again at Abergwyngregyn! Set off hoping to find somewhere for our morning prayers. I walked right past it, but Mike called me back to the round oak hut by the track to the falls. About 3 meters diameter and 2m high inside, it was barrelled up to waist height with staves and openings up to the eaves. The roof was made from woven oak, cleft slivers interlapped and quite waterproof. It was perfect and the ten of us fitted inside quite neatly. For that moment it was, in Jim Cotter's words, one of 'the places of prayer where your Spirit caresses in the summer breeze and thunders through the winter storms.' Rather more of the latter in our case, but it was a great place and way to start our day's pilgrimage.

Within minutes of walking we came across several twitchers with some very heavy duty twitching equipment. The excitement was all about a pied fly-catcher which had been spotted in the woods. We left them to it and continued up the track to the falls, which after all the rain were in full spate. Still patches of snow up on the mountainside, but none where we were thankfully. Crossing over to the other side of the valley we stepped over several small streams, tiny tributaries to Afon Rhaeadr-Fawr which was thundering down below. Each seemed to have its own music or rather conversation. Chortling and bubbling, each in its own water hewn gully, they made up a chorus of happy sounding babbling, like individual conversations between people heading for some larger venue. A bit, I guess, like everyone heading to the cup-final today, chattering as they went with the larger roar of the crowd already in the stadium ahead.

The little straggly hawthorns up near the falls had little clumps of fresh green leaves like candy floss caught up on a stick. They looked like trees in a Hokusai print especially with the waterfall as a backdrop.

Back round the head of the valley and picking up the path parallel with the coast, the wind got up again and it became a bit more of a challenge heading into it. We met up with some of the members of Capel Berea Newydd who had arranged to join with us as part of their celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the building of their chapel. The original was in the middle of a proposed new roundabout and they negotiated the building of a £3/4 million new chapel which they share with three other congregations now. We met up with the rest of their group, 17 altogether, at the footbridge over Afon Ogwen.

Around 12.30 we were looking around for somewhere sheltered to have lunch and we found a small gully with a stream at the bottom of and, perching on the steep banks, we unwrapped our sandwiches. We had about 15 minutes grace before the rain we saw sweeping over Anglesey hit us, only it wasn't rain, it was hail. Sounds of rapid zipping up of walking jackets and backpacks as we scrambled back on to the track. It didn't last long though, and behind it clear skies and, unbelievably, sunshine. We had two more bouts of hail before we got to Bangor.

It was great to see the Pilgrims' Way stickers still up on signposts from two years ago, and we followed them down to the city, reaching it via Porth Penrhyn. Sue Jones, the Dean of Bangor met us at the Cathedral and had prepared a short bilingual service for us which we held outside in the sunshine as they were still rehearsing for this evening's concert inside. Staying with Sue tonight.

BANGOR TO LLANBERIS

After a very comfortable night in the Deanery and a jovial meal with Leslie Francis in Abergwynnregin the night before I went over to the cathedral to join Sue for the 8.30 Eucharist. There were ten of us in the chancel and I was introduced to a 91 year old member of the Diocesan Ramblers Association who had just returned from three days hiking on Long Mynd in Shropshire. I felt slightly put in my place!

Jenny returned from taking the car to Llanberis with the others ready for our service at 9.30 which we held in the side chapel with Nia Williams joining us, fully chasubled ready for the 9.45 parish Eucharist. Ron Williams joined us today together with John Roberts and Toni from the Flintshire ramblers. Also three others with three Labradors which kept barking with excitement rather to close to where the other service was taking place.

Through Bangor out towards the west and cutting up towards Bangor mountain on a footpath that wound through the back of a trading estate and on to a minor road. We followed this for a short while before picking up the Lôn Las Ogwen cycle path which follows the old railway track though woodland carpeted blue and white with bluebells and garlic. We walked south east towards Tregarth before turning west and heading uphill above Rhiwlas. It had started raining as we left Bangor and continued steadily throughout the day with no respite.

It was great having John Roberts with us. Although few of us had been on this route out of Bangor towards Llanberis, John took a special delight in every aspect of it which encouraged me to think of something other than how wet I was getting. As the path took us through the middle of a wood we passed a group of buildings that must once have been a small water mill. The leat was clearly visible where a stream had been diverted by cutting through rock. Someone was evidently doing it up: I hope they'll be able to at least generate power from the stream if not grind corn.

We stopped for lunch at a place where the path cut up through a forestry plantation, the trees nearly meeting overhead and providing some small protection from the rain. It was pretty cold and wet, but good to eat something, drink coffee and have some chocolate. Heavy calories, but at least it felt warming.

On and up out to the open moorland and the cry of a cuckoo from below, quite distinct. I don't who it was suggested that we might be the real cuckoos to be out in this weather. Had we been planning a day on the hills, and had we looked at the forecast in advance we would never have come out on a day like this, probably gone shopping or something instead. But, as they say, we've started, so

we'll continue and just take what comes, and certainly plenty came at us today. Amazed and pleased that so many of the little Celtic cross stickers are still in place. It didn't help Sue and Peter though who lost sight of the rest of us who ploughed on in the rain, heads down, intent on reaching tea as quickly as possible. I wasn't a good moment and Mike took some time going back to find them. The rest of us waited in a bus shelter that happened to be just five minutes from the cottage that Stuart Elliot and his wife Helen had recently bought. Stuart had posted a comment to my blog in which he invited us to stop off for tea and cakes. He came up to meet us accompanied by his daughters Chloe and Becca and since the others had now caught up with us, they led us down to the old quarry workers cottage which they had started renovating. There was, thankfully, a glowing fire and a table full of cakes and tea which restored us wonderfully. Thank you Helen!

We set off down through the woods towards Llanberis, the two girls skipping ahead of us like gazelles, the rest picking our way down in a vaguely geriatric manner. The woods were a tangle of oak branches, not yet in bud, but with a thick cushioned layer of new bilberry growth underneath, bright, bright green and springy with little holly bushes poking through every now and then. A real rain forest, the mosses clinging to the oak branches glowing like a green polarised Man Ray photograph, the lake looking slate grey in the valley below.

The rain had stopped temporarily, only to start just as we emerged from the woods at the valley floor and with the cars practically in sight. Jenny and I staying in the Victoria Hotel. Lovely hot bath and a chance to dry our things.

LLANBERIS TO PENYGROES

I haven't slept so long or so well in ages! After a good, if institutional, meal at the Victoria, I tried to log on to the wi-fi again and failed, so by 9.45 we were in bed and slept through until 7.00, with the rain battering the window. Not again, we thought, and had breakfast etc and got ready to meet the others at the church. Many thanks to Eurwyn of Anglesey Walking Holidays for arranging our transport to the start of the walk each day. couldn't have done without him. It still looked fairly ominous while we said our morning prayers, but, as it turned out, we had every reason to be pretty well grunted for most of the day. The sun shone, albeit with a strong, cold wind off the Irish Sea as we climbed up onto the moors above Llanberis. I remembered one particular steel gate that practically sang in the wind, soft, low tones like a Welsh didgeridoo. A little further on we took advantage of the shelter offered by a small forestry plantation up on Cefn-Du to have coffee and chocolate out of the wind. Just as we were getting ready to move on, Peter

appeared from behind a stone wall and Jenny asked if it was now vacant. "Yes" he said, "it's immaculate; it has hot water and fresh towels!"

A little further on, above Waunfawr, the track rounded a corner revealing superb views over Caernarfon and Anglesey, with Dinas Dinlle curving out almost, it seemed, touching Newborough sands. Then on down to Waunfawr. It was great having Roland from Caerwys with us again. He had known this area well since he was boy and was full of information about the area. He told us of the squatters who settled Waunfawr, claiming plots of land and building homes there, people who both worked the land and the quarries. He pointed out a string of dark caves on a mountainside, like a huge bracelet of jet beads flung down the side of the hill. These were small copper mines working a narrow seam apparently. I'd never have noticed them let alone known what they were.

We lunched at Waunfawr station in the sunshine and in some comfort on the station benches. No trains were due until Tuesday apparently so it was quite OK for some of our group to dangle their feet over the side of the platform. Suddenly noticed that all the red jackets were sitting together on one bench and all the blue jackets on the other - unplanned, but we could see it could lead to some kind of competitive team sport at some stage.

Steep climb out of Waunfawr up the old miners track and over some rusty iron ladders they used to get over a few high walls. Out of the woods and up on open land we passed through an old settlement at Ty'n y Graig, a few tumbled down stone buildings scattered around some large rocks that broke through the ground and were obviously too big to move. It had been inhabited in that bleak place up until the 1920's. Just over the hill from there is the cottage that S4C used to film a reality TV series about a family living up there as if in the 1870's. Nice new roof.

From there we continued across the open moor skirting Moel Tryfan and with views across the Mynydd Mawr, which locals call the elephant mountain. It really does look like an elephant with a high, angled crown of its head, a curve down and then up to a full, rounded rear end. Scree falls mark out the ears and the trunk curves away in front, a low tree covered curving ridge. On to Fron past a frighteningly deep quarry pit filled with green water. The path followed the edge of the pit with a fence to stop you toppling in. It started raining with driving rain that stung our faces as we left Fron and gradually made our way downhill towards Penygroes. Just as we entered to town we noticed a Jolly Roger flag fluttering in a back garden - "Ah, the Pirates of Penygroes!" said Mike. Arrived at the cars at 2 minutes to 5.00 just as the cleaning lady was closing the loos at the car park. It was exactly the same last year and, as

before, we managed to persuade her to wait a few more minutes. As posted in an earlier blog - sign that petition to keep the public loos open!

Retired Canon Edmund Plaxton (very active and chair of the local Ramblers) met us and led to his home where he and Rachel, neither of whom we had met before, had offered to put us up for the night in their cottage in Fron. Lovely evening meal this evening with other guests Val and Martin. Val has done many sections of the Camino de Santiago. Martin prefers trains and volunteers on the Welsh Highland Railway. A lovely evening to end a superb day's pilgrimage.

PENYGROES TO TREFOR

Looked out of the window first thing - comparatively blue skies! Rachel was busy preparing porridge and toast while Edmund and Jenny and I got everything together for the day's walk to Trefor. It was going to be far easier terrain than the last few days and it looked as if the weather was going to be kind at last. The news warned that severe weather was spreading across the country, but it didn't seem as if it would affect us at all. Having dashed into the Coop to get some crisps and chocolate bars to supplement the egg sandwiches that Rachel had very kindly prepared for us we drove to Trefor to the beach car park where the others were waiting for us with Peter Hewlett of Edge of Wales Walks, who is going to be our early morning taxi from now on. Edmund was joining us today, together with Val who was with us last night and due to go on the Camino from St Jean Pied de Port to Burgos in a couple of weeks time.

We set off from the car park in Penygroes, across to the cycle track which we followed north for a couple of hundred yards before turning towards the coast and taking the footpath across the fields. There's so much gorse and broom at this time of year. yellow seems the dominant colour at times and the scent is wonderful. We once tried to make wine from gorse flowers. We got severely prickled for little reward as far as I recall. Best to enjoy them as they are. My great aunt used to say "Love is out of season when gorse is out of bloom." Well, it is spring.... There's one particular field we cross that's dotted with flowering gorse and that has a low stone wall to the left of the path. The first year we came we sat there in the sun drinking coffee and looking out over Yr Eifl, our great challenge first thing tomorrow. Not quite warm enough to linger there today though.

The footpath led on to a road for a short while before we followed the path to the right, down across Afon Llyfni on a little bridge beside a converted water mill. Just across the river the path enters what seems like part of an old drovers' road, a wide strip of grass between two stone walls and rows of trees. There must have been a ford across the river by the mill at one time. Now a narrow strip of muddy field, it leads on to a lane and up through a farm yard, Lleuar Fawr. Last year we disturbed a black horse that had been grazing there and it suddenly took off and thundered past us back down towards the river. I just managed a blurry photo of it as it sped past. More lanes and hedgerows thick with spring flowers and lots of conversation today. It must be because we didn't have to battle with the wind and rain it gave us more chance to talk. Several of us have a fairly wicked sense of humour so there's a fair amount of teasing and banter, as well as reminiscing, recalling mutual friends, speculating about the state of the church and wondering where pilgrimage fits in with it all. It's amazing how the miles go when you are nattering away, and quite often you realise you haven't been noticing the road and scenery at all. Each one of us who have done

it before will say from time to time that we just don't remember going through that bit or stopping off there simply because we had been engrossed in conversation. Ducking through the little lych gate into St Beuno's churchyard at Clynnog Fawr, Hywel Griffiths, the churchwarden, began to ring the bells for our arrival. It was a lovely welcome. It quite takes your breath away coming onto the church. It is such a large open and airy space, uncluttered and welcoming. It has been a pilgrimage church for centuries and at one time a hospital for pilgrims heading down the Lleyn Peninsular to Ynys Enlli, Bardsey Island. The presbytery and chancel are of warm, mellowed oak and sitting in the misericord stalls you can easily imagine vespers being chanted, daily prayers for the pilgrims and for the community. In July the Revd. Lloyd Jones will be licensed as priest in charge. He has come with a passion for pilgrimage and practical experience from his time at Llantwit Major, a very ancient Christian site which has been transformed through his ministry there. Hywel had prepared the little side chapel for us to have our service in, and we sat there in silence absorbing that sense of peace and prayer that only comes from generations of the faithful having worshiped here. Prayers for pilgrims, prayers for the journey, prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of wonder at the beauty of God's earth. And then out came the sandwiches and crisps - even pilgrims have to keep their strength up!

A little further along the road we were delighted to see that St Beuno's well had been restored and was fully accessible. Last year Meg had managed to scramble over the gate and through the undergrowth to get near it, but now we all gathered inside and fished out two chocolate bar wrappers and an old battery which were adding nothing to the ambience of the place. We thought to put up a sign reading KEEP WELL CLEAR. You can take that whichever way you like.

The last stretch along towards Trefor led up briefly through the Cwm-gwared plantation, a bit of forestry with a silent, needle padded pathway through it with plentiful cushions of springy looking wood sorrel in flower either side of the track. Then across some fields and the A499 and down to the shore for about three quarters of a mile across the somewhat rocky beach and to the car park. Jenny and I then set off to find my hat, the one that I had worn on the Camino and which I had dropped somewhere on the last stretch. I went looking one way and Jenny another, and she found it by the side of the road. Meanwhile I picked up Jenny's neck scarf which had fallen out of the car where we had stopped earlier. Quid pro quo... Now sitting in a luxurious mobile home at Penrallt Campsite, Susan Fogarty and Pete Wilkinson's holiday business. They have nearly completed their first Pilgrim Pod, which we were expecting to be sleeping in. Given the weather, we are somewhat relieved to have the accommodation we are now enjoying with shower, kitchen and all mod cons, as well as being wonderfully quiet. Last year Susan greeted us at Aberdaron and led us on an RS Thomas pilgrimage

round St Hywyn's church. When we arrived just now Pete greeted us with hands covered in clay, explaining that he had just noticed the Martins arriving and wanted to build them some nests on the side of the house! I thought they tended to do that themselves! He's lovely and will be walking with us tomorrow. Off now to join the others for an evening meal at the Lion in Tudweiliog.

TREFOR TO TUDWEILIOG

The were 11 of us starting from Trefor this morning, including Sue Fogarty from Penrallt campsite where Jenny and I are staying. The sight of Yr Eifl looming over the town is quite daunting, to say the least. The chiselled face of the quarry workings and the spoil from it look like an enormous ziggurat, the lair of some mythical beast towering above us. It is distinctly hard work ascending the bwlch and I needed several stops to admire the view across to Anglesey and the Menai Strait. Once at the top the panorama is spectacular and becomes even more so as we descend the other side and look along the length of the Lleyn, seeing the coast on either side with the sweeping beaches below Nefyn particularly striking.

Far below us the restored village of Nant Gwytheren looks tiny and near it what looks like a deserted farmstead set on the middle of a random patchwork of fields, drystone walls the cross stitching fixing the pieces together. Beautiful sunny day with strong wind off Cardigan Bay, the best weather we have enjoyed so far with clear views all along the coast. Heading down towards Pistyll we crossed several fields full of frisky bullocks and heifers which bucked and kicked and came and looked quizzically at us before dashing off round the field again.

Through a series of kissing gates, their bi-tonal donkey bray creaking each time one of us went through became really quite musical.

Pistyll was again the sanctuary we have come to expect. We ate our sandwiches in the sunshine - Meg and Roger had come in Molly to greet us and offer tea. We went inside for our service, adjusting our eyes in the diminished light until all the greenery and foliage inside became clearer. That wonderful sweet fragrance of hay strewn thickly on the floor, giving off its scent each time it was trodden on. The quiet touched us again, a sense of inherent holiness, the pulpit fall - I CHOSE YOU - that made such an impression on Berni two years ago. Peter led our short service and we were reluctant to move away after the Celtic blessing. Awed.

On to Nefyn crossing back over the road and climbing again, though not so far, steep steps up and over speckled granite spoil and down

a narrow passage between hedgerows into Nefyn. We turned off onto the cliff top path, sound of the surf with us all the way now, breathing, sighing, the soft cracklings of pebbles drawn back by the undertow as well as the sudden snarl of a trainer jet off RAF Valley. Met up with John and Meryl Thelwell at Morfa Nefyn who stayed with us for the rest of the day. Primroses clinging to the cliff, dripping over the edge. A little crop of purple thrift next to them. Walking past a startlingly bright gorse bush taking up your whole line of vision, as bright as a huge pile of freshly cooked sweet corn. Three seals in a small bay, disappearing and emerging nose up, looking at us. Oyster catchers skimming the rocks on the beach. The sand at Porth Towyn immaculate after the tide. Sunlight nacreous on the waves.

Short blog today as we walked 15 miles and have only just had time to get to the pub for supper and only chance of wi-fi, but a special gift on the way to the Lion - a hare sitting in the road, ears up, black tips. Hops to the verge as we draw near, crouching, ears back, pretending not to be there. We came alongside, a metre away and watched her for about half a minute before she jumped up and with that extraordinary acceleration they have, shot off up the road and through the hedge. Lovely! A fitting end to a superb day. I fell nothing but gratitude (and a bit stiff from the 15 miles we covered).

TUDEILIOG TO ABERDARON

We woke on this the final day of our journey to Aberdaron before the Bardsey crossing listening to the sound of rain spattering on the windows. It has been our second night in the aptly named 'Dorchester' static caravan on Penrallt campsite, courtesy of Susan Fogarty and Pete Wilkinson. The previous evening Pete had been ferrying his daughter when he saw a young man with a large backpack walking near Tudweiliog. On impulse, and to his daughter's acute embarrassment (Daaad!), Pete stopped and asked if asked the man if he was a pilgrim. 'I suppose I am' was the reply and Pete invited Will to stay in the pilgrim pod for no charge. It turned out that Will had completed a second degree in International Relations and was taking a gap year in which he had walked the Camino from St Jean to Santiago and found he couldn't stop. So from his home in Barry he started to walk round Wales, along Offa's Dyke and now the coast path. So we were delighted that he was one of the 17 who walked today from Tudweiliog to Aberdaron. The rain we heard proved to be the last, even though there was an ominous black cloud to the west when we set off for the Lion to have breakfast. At 9.30 we all gathered at St Cwyfan's, Tudweiliog, where we were greeted by Ven. Andrew Jones who led us in our morning service. He started by welcoming us and passing on a few anecdotes about pilgrimage. The difference between a tourist and a pilgrim, he said, was that a tourist passes through the places she

visits and a pilgrim allows the places to pass through her. We were told another version on the Camino: a tourist demands and a pilgrim is grateful, and at the end of another exhausting day we knew exactly what that meant. The sun was shining and pretty well all the heavy weather gear had to be packed away. We had to take it with us because you can never be sure that the weather will remain benign all day, but as it happened it just improved, as the pinkness of my upper arms bears witness.

Walking along the coast path is delightful almost anytime, but today it has been glorious, the sea calm and shimmering in the sun, the waves gently rolling onto the beaches below us and breaking in a sigh. This has been the year of gold: first the fields of daffodils, then the celandine, marsh marigolds, dandelions, buttercups, king cups, and, predominantly and magnificently, the gorse which has been a blaze of hot colour glowing against a dark and threatening sky or, today, almost shouting in bright delight against the blue.

After an hour's walking we turned aside to Penrallt campsite to see the brand new pilgrim pod that Will had slept in and to have our photograph taken as pilgrims admiring it. A lovely structure, an upturned hull with larch shingles and Douglas fir framing. The builder had cleverly framed the door with yew shingles and two panels of yew in the doors. Pine floors and roof lining inside made a wonderful cell for retreat or contemplation, let alone welcome shelter. Quite delightful.

Photographs and comfort stop over we set off again at a very leisurely pace, stopping far too often to enjoy the views back along the coast or the flowers by the side of the path. I can't ever remember seeing so many primroses which seem to thrive on the exposed cliff edges, carpets of them rolling down towards the sea. You certainly get well exercised on the coast path with all the dropping down yet another gully and scrambling up the other side again up steep steps cut into the clay and held by oak boards. We followed some cow footprints up one particularly steep flight, wondering just how on earth it had managed the ascent. We had aimed to get as far as Porth Colman before settling down for lunch, but we found a sunny and sheltered spot on Traeth Penllech at the foot of one of those steep climbs up the cliff, so we spread ourselves out on the rocks and had lunch. It has been pointed out that I have mentioned chocolate quite a lot in this blog so I won't mention it here....

Duncan Cameron had introduced a game where he declared he had taken up a new job, describe it, and then deliver a suitably absurd punch line. This became quite contagious and seemed to suit the somewhat hysterical mood that had been developing as the journey went on. Stung by hail, buffeted by strong winds, soaked by incessant rain, the light relief of this wonderful sunny day made us a bit scatty. That, and the fact that this was the last leg of the journey. It is a long walk, around 14 miles, and after the 15 miles we walked yesterday we were travelling at a slower pace.

Arriving at Porth Oer, Whistling Sands, we strained to see whether the cafe at the far end was open, and when we saw that it was, the squeaking of our boots on the sand became more pronounced as our pace picked up on anticipation of the tea and ice-cream awaiting us. Roger, Meg, Pat and Glyn were waiting there for us and Meg recommended the crême brûlée ice-cream which proved to be delicious. Actually, I think plain vanilla would have been equally as good considering our desperation! Another hour and a half and we arrived in Aberdaron and made our way to St Hywyn's where the vicar, Susan Blagden was waiting for us with scones and butter and jam and cups of tea. We set about it all as if we hadn't seen food for weeks. We then had the little arriving liturgy I had prepared and sat in silence after it before collecting our things and heading off to the various places we were staying. 17 of us met for supper at the Ship in Aberdaron for excellent food and wonderful, bubbling conversation. And it seems that Colin the boatman thinks there's a 70% chance of a crossing to Bardsey.

TO YNYS ENLLI

The sun was shining, even warm, when we gathered outside St Hywyn's for our starting out liturgy. Pdraig Ward and his wife Diane had arrived in time to join us here. Pdraig is going to take the pilgrim staff back along the Pilgrim Way to St. Asaph over the next two weeks, promoting the Hungry for Change campaign on the way. We had ordered two boat crossings to Bardsey and the first was to leave at 10.30. It could carry 12 at a time and the second boatload would be for some who wanted to come across to the island but who hadn't been able to join us for much of the rest of the pilgrimage. We made our way on the cliff top path to Porth Meuddwy where Colin was preparing the boat on the slipway, Roger waiting for us standing by the rocks, the sea lapping gently near his feet.

We'd quite warmed up on the cliff path but put our waterproofs on for the crossing which, although calm, can sometimes bring showers of spray across the deck. It only takes about twenty minutes to cross but Colin, at least third generation ferryman, remembers tales of crossing under sail which took far longer and were considerably more risky. The powerful twin engines on his boat easily overcome the pull of the cross currents that surge between the island and the headland. Waiting for us on the quay was a four-wheel drive buggy ready to take Meg and Glyn up to the ruins of the old abbey. Henry VIII even got this far with his destructive dissolution.

Onshore, we set off up the 'salt lane', as RS Thomas described it, boots crunching on the pebbles and staff clacking step by step. First stop was at the farm where Jo served us coffee and runs a little shop. I had a package of booklets to deliver to her from Susan Blagden, the vicar of Aberdaron. Jenny and I had heard Jo's voice via Skype at a meeting in Bangor about pilgrimage. Now we had the

chance to meet her and her husband Steve in person. Last year we met their goats when I found one of them staring me in the face, rather too close for comfort, when I opened my eyes after a short snooze in the sun.

We had arranged to hold a eucharist at 12.30 in the chapel so that those on the second boat could come as well. Peter Wykes was presiding and there must have been at least 24 of us as some who were not in our group but happened to be on the island anyway asked if they could join us. Something quite special about each of the times we have made our communion there. Peter reminded us that although the island had the reputation of being the burial place of 20,000 saints, it was primarily thought of as a place of resurrection, a place to be reborn. We had a slice of Susan Blagden's home-made bread, a small bottle of red wine bought from the pub last night and a thermos top for a chalice. Quiet, reflective and intimate, it was a sanctifying of our pilgrimage, a drawing together of all we had shared over the last two weeks.

A strange coincidence: there was couple who came to the Eucharist called Tony and Jane, who were from the Bedfordshire border and who often come to Aberdaron. They had wandered down to Porth Meuddwy on the off chance of being able to get across to the island. They hadn't planned it. They recognised Roger and Meg and then the rest of us. They had met us last year when we did the pilgrimage in July. They had seen a poster about the pilgrimage in the hotel where they were staying and happened to be having tea at the cafe at Porth Oer when we came across the beach with the same objective. They asked if we were the pilgrims they had been reading about and were delighted when we said we were. So it was rather amazing that they happened to coincide with us since we have come in May rather than July as last time.

It always seems such a short time to spend on the island before the boat has to return to the mainland. We went to the Oratory having been told that that a new icon had been placed there. It was a painting of John of Dalyatha who had lived in NW Iraq in the 8th century. The icon was painted in memory of Sister Helen Mary SLG, an Anglican hermit nun who lived on the island in the second half of the last century. Inscribed around the outer edge of the frame are words from a letter of the saint that he wrote to 'one weary and vexed in the service of your Lord' - 'Lay your head on the knees of your Lord and find refreshment. Recline on his great and inhale the spirit of life.'

The seal colony was alive with loud moaning conversation, as if they had lots to complain about, though it didn't look like it much. Several were just lolling about on their backs in the shallows, their flipper tails wagging as if fanning themselves to keep cool, or just to

look cool and relaxed. Returning on the boat Colin took us slowly round the cliff face to show us the colonies of guillemots and razorbills, shearwaters and puffins, the latter darting around the boat, little wings working frantically.

It has been an inspiring day. The tranquility of the island with its deep quietness draws you away from all the little anxieties and mental busyness that usually predominate. My body, by now really quite tired, my muscles aching and longing for a rest, seems to recover in the surface softness of the island. It's in the way that the low walls are covered in grass, making them like extended natural recliners, or the lovely close cropped sward leading up to the chapel, soft and untarmaced, a welcoming green carpet rolled out especially for tired feet to walk on. The whole place seems to say, Come in, take your shoes off, sit down and unwind.

Well, that's it. It seems like a lot longer than two weeks that we've been travelling together. Maybe it has been. There's been so much planning, so many people have contributed to it and made it a worthwhile thing to do. Special thanks go to Mike Costello, our walking guide who led us so gently and graciously, understanding pilgrimage and its different pace. He has a keen eye for an image and his photographs capture the essence of our journey. Thank you Mike! Sadly he couldn't come across to the island today and we missed him. Back in Aberdaron we sat around having tea and cakes, sitting out on the sun, reluctant to admit that this stage of our journey had come to an end and that we all had to return to whatever it is we do for the rest of the time. But perhaps it will be different and, in the words of TS Eliot from Little Gidding - 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.'