

## **IN THE BEGINNING...**

24 October 2012 9:09PM

*This afternoon Nel and I were walking along the Severn, through water meadows and cider apple orchards. The humans were, as usual, chewin the fat while the dogs chewed the wind fall...*

*-It must be your birthday soon*

*-Hmmm. Hadn't given it a thought. Dyou know, it's almost two years now...Incredible...*

*-Yes, it must be. What date was it?*

*-November sometime*

*-We could work it out from the archives*

*-Two years of inconsequential conversation*

*-SPLOTHER!*

*-Yes. Splother...and we're still friends!*

# Cotswold Walk

## Episode 1

FF

### Chipping Campden

#### Eight Paws and Four Feet.

(Nel, Sally, FF & Bo's'n take to the hills)

This sunny afternoon we drove to Chipping Campden to set off from the Market Hall in the High Street on the first stage of our latest project. (To walk the 102 miles from C' Campden to Bath, in stages. (And since we are doing each bit there and back, we reckon that'll be 204 miles in all, give or take.)

SO. We parked in the out-of-town Carpark, and with walking boots on, off we set. It was ten to three, the church bells were clanging wildly, and rather like Alice who saw a White Rabbit scurrying by, worried about his ears and whiskers, FF gawped and pointed. LOOK Nel! A FASCINATOR!!! And sure enough, tottering towards the church on heels that prevented proper progress, was a dandy red fascinator, perched aloft, and clearly heading for a pew at the back. LATE.

The walkers shambled past a lot of locals, sight seers and well-wishers who had turned out for the show. FF inquired of an elderly couple whose spaniel Bo's'n was sniffing at whose was the wedding

OH! It's the [Haines family](#), said the woman. Biggest sprouts growers in Europe added the man with obvious pride to be associated with such agricultural royalty. We left them to it.

We proceed along the High Street. (Glanced in an estate agent's window. Was there really nothing under £950K? Clearly my divorce settlement has ruled out any chance of moving here.) And out of town.

A long climb now, past some beautiful [Arts and Crafts houses](#) - if I ever won the lottery! (which I don't do anyway, so I suppose I've got almost as much chance of winning as Nel, who always does...) and we are up on Dover's Hill with it's very [strange tradition!](#) And here are some pictures of shin-kicking contests, etc. London2012. You missed something!

High above the Vale of Evesham we fell into two separate conversation with other walkers, obviously members of the English Setter fan club, who spotted Sally. As far as Bo's'n was concerned, they just confirmed what nasty dogs Setters can be sometimes...

A mile or so more and it was time to turn and retrace our steps.

Back at the church the wedding guests had departed, and the ground was littered with rose petals, (real ones) and...Brussels' sprouts!!!

Tonight for starters I am having *Choux de Bruxelles au beurre* - courtesy of the Haines family! I wish them well.

29 September 2012

## Episode 2

### Nell

#### Martin's Copse to Fish Hill

We left Gloucester in glorious sunshine but I actually put an umbrella in the car in case of rain. As we drive FF asks me if we are going past the Pansy Place - I ignore the double entendre and say yes - they are selling trays of 15 plants for £4.00 - just what Fishie wants for his pots. We spend an agreeable twenty minutes selecting some pretty dark red violas.

Arriving at the very superior Fish Hill Picnic site, the sky is still a cerulean blue with innocuous fluffy white clouds. As we trek off across Corswold farmland stubble - with Sally on her best behaviour...Bo's'un is always obedient., we note signs asking us to keep our dogs under control

Suddenly Sal takes off and we hear the alarm calls of Pheasant.....her manners and recall go out the window...I manage to collar her and then stop her going off again with a rugby tackle - so it's a lead walk for her today. Three minutes later we are passed by a young lad on a quad bike with pheasant feed on board - phew I say that was close - I envisage a red face and embarrassment as my dog was definitely not under control.

It's a gentle stroll to Martin's Copse along One Mile Drive - we are discussing time and tide - actually tide and time. I had remarked to FF on our last walk that if the ice caps melted we would probably be under water in Gloucester. He has been on line and was very reassuring -

'We'll be ok - we will just be on the water front.' '

Oh goodie' I say 'our property prices will go up' -

'Well if you wait for about 1300 years' he says 'and I think our victoria terraces will no longer be there!!'

At Martin's Copse we turn back -and discuss the concept of time sparked by my observance that Sally knows when we are going for a long walk and eyes me up when it's only a short one.

My feeling is that the cosmos has discovered time but the earth has invented time - FF thinks that it's all the fault of the railways. And we discuss the mystery of the speed that time passed being very variable depending if you are having a good time! Ever been in the pub and suddenly several hours have passed without you noticing?

I glance up at the sky and see dark and looming clouds that have magically appeared in a few minutes. It starts to rain and where is the umbrella - and rain it did - the icy horizontal type blown by a stiff breeze. Sally is wimping at the end of her lead and

even Bo's'un isn't very happy. We squelch back to the car divest ourselves of wet coats -

'I should have taken the umbrella' I say -

'It would probably have been blown inside out' says FF

So we cut short our last bit of the walk to Broadway Tower and drive home with the heater on full blast - The sky magically clears and is again blue with little friendly clouds....ah well that's the Cotswold Edge for you.

4 October 2012

## Episode 3

FF

### Fish Hill to Broadway

Rattling good start, unable to maintain the pace, but made it through - so EPT will be **Stage Three of the Cotswold Way...** which happened on Saturday.

I must admit I hadn't really wanted to go, having kept an eye all morning on the rainfall sequence on the Met Office website. The weather map showed a nasty patch of red, pink and dark blue, with some white in it, developing right over Broadway by 4p.m.

But Nel' would have none of it, muttered something about us not being that precious, and set about coaxing Sally into the back of the car with a bit of overcooked chicken. (Sally, much to Bo's'n's disapproval, responds best to bribery.) And so, at shortly after 10' clock, off we set.

Conversation on the hour's drive to Broadway was pretty inconsequential. We weren't putting the world to political right, but were just watching the gathering darkness over the crests of the [Malvern Hills](#), and wondering how long it'd take to make it's way across the Vale of Evesham and up the Cotswold edge... But for the time being at least, we were happily (?) driving through late summer - the trees in the Vale haven't started to turn yet, and then, as we climbed Fish Hill we were back into autumn colours.

Today's walk took us past [Broadway Tower](#) An extraordinary looking edifice. William Morris woz 'ere. But where wasn't he in these parts? He crops up all over. The Tower has a "William Morris room", but we passed on the £5-50 entrance fee to inspect it, and ploughed on down a long series of interconnecting pastures (dogs on leads - too many sheep about, and we could hear, drifting up on the wind, the loudspeaker commentaries of some sporting event that the Sal and Bo's'n might best be kept out of , ) to Broadway.

[Broadway is seriously posh](#). It lies at the foot of the escarpment, it is the destination of coach excursions laid on for tourists from Stratford-upon-Avon, it holds horse trials...which bring in the punters, and happened to be taking place that afternoon, (which explained the loudspeakers we could hear.) On Saturday Broadway was heaving.

Many people have an eye for the Cotswold vernacular; but I have an eye for charity shops, and there, nestling between one of the many fine art galleries and one of the several five-star eateries on the High Street (starters started at £13, Mains from £30.) was a charity worth looking in. (I am attempting to get 15 copies of a book I

read at the van this summer - which is my personal "book of the year" to give at Christmas. I am currently up to 12, so should make it.

Promised Nel' I wouldn't be more than a couple of mins, left her holding the dogs, and forced my way into the tiny crowded shop...

I'm elbowing my way to the bookshelves in the far corner, "excuse me, can I get past please?" I said to a woman pulling clothes off a rack. She turned and faced me...

...flickers of recognition...

"ROSE!!!!!"

"COLIN!!!!!"

And then, together, "What are *you* doing here?"

We had met as volunteer parent helpers at Swindon Young Musicians when our own kids were in the Nursery Group and become Good Friends and then Lost Friends. How many years was it? And what are all yours doing now? And how are you enjoying retirement? And Oh, you're not in Cricklade any more then. And What book is it you're looking for? And what's so special about it? And... And... And...

Eventually we borrowed a pen from the cash desk, Rose wrote my e-mail address on the price ticket on the top she was buying, and I left the shop glowing...to rejoin a perished Nel'... (As far as I was aware I had been no more than the promised couple of mins. I think Nel thought it was probably closer to twenty...but then, on our last walk we had discussed the Nature of Time and our varying perceptions of it. So I'm sure Nel will forgive me... In Time.) And I do hope Rose doesn't lose that price ticket!

We carried on down the High Street to find where the Cotswold Way leaves the town on its way to Winchcombe, and work out our starting point for the next stage of the walk, then turned to make our way back to the car.

Next came a hard lesson in physics. What comes down, must go up. The climb back to the tower had us both red in the face and gasping for breath. The dogs, of course just took it in their stride...

And so, happily home with another little stitch put into our adventure.

Getting close to Gloucester the road was covered in water. "They must have had some rain here, this afternoon" said Nel.

Hmmm I thought. Never put all your faith in the Met Office. But said nothing.

15 October 2012

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## Episode 4

Nell

### Broadway to near Stanton

#### *These Boots Are Made for Walking*

FF picked me and Sally up at lunchtime on Sunday for another go at the Cotswold Way. We had almost driven out of Gloucester when I discovered I had left my boots at home. 'It's ok' I say 'I can do the walk in my slipon shoes'. 'Oh no' says FF very firmly and in his teacher voice says 'We're going back to get them.'

We go towards Broadway in improving weather and discuss the Police Elections and decide that

- a) We still have no real idea about the issues
- b) That it's probably a stealth move masquerading as democracy encouraging more draconian criminal punishment - the general public are always pretty conservative over these matters

We park in a very posh car park (there were loos with an attendant and drinking bowls for the dogs). Squelching down into Broadway Valley, I go very quiet and in a small voice say 'I'm glad we went back for my boots'. FF smirked but refrained from any sarcastic remarks.

As we went up the otherside we turned and looked towards an invisible Broadway Tower. The clouds were drifting down like smoke then through the woods up onto a small plateau. Sally disappeared off - partridge of course - thanks to the good fences she came back pretty quickly but spent most of the rest of the walk on the lead.

Through a farm yard and then a gentle slope upwards with glimpses of the sweep of land between the Cotswolds and the Lullsley and Malvern Hills. At the top is a large and imposing mansion - we both agree that it must be bitterly cold up there in the Winter - not to our taste at all. The path is beautifully maintained with strong pig wire fences either side. FF reckoned that there must have been grants for the work.

We come out at Shenberrow - a large iron age settlement and fort - I will look this up on my return and onwards past beautiful isolated holiday cottages. We knew from the contour lines on the map that there was a pretty steep drop down into Stanton but when we got there it was pretty breath taking. We stood hovering at the top.

'I think we should tackle this from Stanton on the next walk' says FF. 'What a good idea, we'll be fresh but it's not as bad as the Wyisil way through the Forest' I hazard. 'Hurumph' say FF.

We turn back retracing our steps with the sun breaking through and turning



everything gold. We slide down into Broadway Valley and I remember that there was a sports shop closing down sale in Gloucester and they have lots of walking equipment at knock down prices. 'I think I'll go and have a look for new boots something with a bit more ankle support and some wet weather trousers and some thermals' I say warming to the shopping opportunity. 'Well there's a change of tune' says FF 'and you wanted to do the walk in your slippers'

OK ok ok - you were right and I was wrong.....These boots are made for walking!

6 November 2012

## Episode 5

FF

### Stanton backwards to Shenberrow Buildings

Last week we covered the three miles or so from Broadway to the “buildings” – a pair of old farm cottages now used for holiday lets by the looks - and drew to a halt peering into the abyss. A very steep descent to Stanton, a mere mile and a quarter away, lay before us... But it felt a step too far...

So, Remembrance Sunday found us driving to Stanton (1) and pulling into the little paddock provided by the Parish Council for walkers to park their cars (free of charge) rather than cluttering up the village. I squeezed into the only available space close to the hedge and started lacing up me boots.

Mind that, said Nel, indicating a pile of dog shit close to the tailgate, left there by some irresponsible dog owner...

We got the dogs out and set off up the village street, following the Cotswold Way signs towards the hills. Gently at first, but soon the path got steeper and the going tougher

Blimey, Nel. This reminds me of a mountain on the West Coast of Ireland - can't remember what it was called (2) - but people climb it on a pilgrimage – St Patrick – some of 'em do it barefoot apparently... (3)

We carry on up. The contour lines on our map had merged into a thick brown band.

There's gonna be a lot of climbs like this you know...but we gotta do 'em all. Can't miss 'em out. A pilgrimage to St Pedant. Sounds a bit like a Celtic saint...

And so, with every step in honour of St Pedant, we huffed and puffed our way to the top. Here we were at one Iron Age camp, gazing across to the Malverns where we knew there to be another. Did they communicate, we wondered. Lit beacons, perhaps... We pondered Ancient Mysteries for a while, then turned round and marched back down again in no time at all...

We called in at the church, dogs hitched to an old iron boot scraper by the porch and told to “stay” and “wait”. Admired the stained glass, the font and the lectern, left our mark - a trace of our passing through - in the visitors' book – then in the fading light made our way down the main street – all the Farrow and Ball colours on the front doors and drain pipes now appearing as one shade of sludge – and back to the car.

Flung my rucksack on the ground and started unlacing my boots, Nel was sorting out

the dogs... Then I remembered... Whew, no. I hadn't. That was lucky... But somebody had.

Nel, I think you need to check yer boots...No,that one's all right. What about the other one?

Oh Go-od. You got a carrier bag?

There are some things – Mountains in Ireland, a Sunday climb up the Cotswold edge - that are best *not* done barefoot.

Bloody dog owners.

External Links:

**[STANTON](#)**

**[CROAGH PATRICK VISITORS CENTRE](#)**

**[CROAGH PATRICK](#)**

## Episode 6

### Nell

#### Stanton to Wood Stanway

We arrived at the handy little car park in Stanton, carefully avoiding the doggy misdemeanour from last time and get booted up.

We walk through the charming village that although a bit clean, polished and prosperous for our taste, boasted lovely vernacular buildings. Out into the country side, slipping and sliding up a gentle slope – I should have brought my stick I remark gloomily as my boots yet again lose traction...of course those with four paw drive have no problems.

Oh I say look 'Baa Baa Blacksheep' – and there was a herd of the blackest sheep you could ever wish so see. A quick trawl through the net makes me think they are Welsh Blacks.(1) For some reason they unnerve **FF** who walks on muttering words like 'against nature' and 'just not right they should be white' and 'unnatural'.

'Well' I say 'it must have been a pretty awful family to have that many black sheep' **FF** treats this remark with the contempt it deserves.

This is much easier walking as we are following the contour lines, we enter eighteen century parkland with magnificent specimen trees clad in their Autumn colours and stop for a few moments to take in the view and on to a tiny lane and past the boundary wall of Stanway Hall. To our right is a thatched wooden building -'Oh look – an Anglo Saxon longhouse' but no it's a rather posh cricket pavilion and according to the guide book was provided by J M Barrie. A little further on was a matching tennis pavilion – now that's really impressive or perhaps a little pretentious.

We go past the church and then we stop our jaws have dropped – there is the most impressive gateway I have ever seen. It has pillars and scrolls and every decorative device you can think of and is topped off with scallop shells. (2)

We pass the restored water mill and through the remains of an old orchard. Then go through sheep meadows to Wood Stanway and up the hill to find a good parking place for our next excursion.

We turn back and as we walk through the meadows I look closely at the undulating ground – obviously the results of the activity of man but they don't look like the results of mediaeval strip farming – possibly the remains of orchards.....They were apparent on the cricket pitch too.....hmm probably giving the home side an advantage.

We walk on, and over the fields comes the whistle of a steam train – it's the

Toddington line running to Cheltenham Race Course. We look to our left and see the steam and smoke rising above the trees. We are both immediately transported to our childhoods.

A brief stop at Stanway church saw us wandering round the church yard to discover a wall inset with all sorts of bits of masonry salvaged from the church, although some may have been Roman. There was even what looked like a stone sarcophagus there – very strange. We didn't manage to find the War Memorial with the Eric Gill inscriptions but maybe another day in the summer will see a return visit.

Back to the car – it had been a perfect autumn day - the dogs and humans were muddy but happy and all were enthusiastic about the next section.

### **Welsh Mountain Sheep**

### **Stanway House**

## Episode 7

FF

### Stanway to Beckbury Camp

Boots?

Lead?

Map?

Treats?

Stick?

I've learnt that it's as well to go through a check list with Nel now, before we set off... Then I add:

Dog?

It's a cold grey day - winter definitely on us - as we drive out of Gloucester, turning right at a roundabout instead of left.

Errr. Are you going the right way? says Nel.

Fuck it! No I'm not!

Nel' directs me successfully along an alternative route to the M5 (Touché!)... and the splotter begins.

It's been a funny time in the Caff. The previous day there was the Larkin clue (and that poem of his), and today we were supposed to come up with a source of misery...

So it's not long then before we are talking about our own parents, and trading dark secrets... All the way to Stanway...

I have a new toy in my rucksack - a digital camera, **PP** suggests, would be better than Googled images. She is right, of course. Purchased only last week, (setting it up was a GREAT Source of Misery), today's hike is its first outing. Nel, who has trained in photography, has always resisted bringing her equipment - A walk with a camera, she says, is a walk ruined.

I smooth the way by saying we could go back to the end of our last walk and snap a pic of the sarcophagus embedded so bizarrely in the churchyard wall, that she had described in her last report... And we could see if we can locate the Eric Gill war

memorial in Stanway that we had not been able to find... (In the churchyard I can't help thinking Nel might be right, as I fiddle with the settings and then have to start all over again, but they are my very first pics.)

Then we drive on to Wood Stanway, a tiny hamlet at the foot of the Edge, to pick up on the next leg...

As we get the dogs out of the car a pheasant, bang on cue, rattles it's rusty voice box at us. Sally's ears go up, and she's ready to make a dash for it. So both dogs are kept on leads as we take to the hills. And climb, and climb, and GP's take note, CLIMB. All the way up to a place where Pinky Dickins (who so loved this spot) has been resurrected as a convenient bench for us to sit on and draw breath... and admire the view. Thanks, Pinky.

The rest of the walk, another mile or so, all more or less on the flat, and in fading light, took us past a barn set on staddle stones, the remains of dry stone sheep pens, and what was left of another Iron Age camp. (Only a section of the outer earth bank was left. *Jerrybuilt*, said Nel, emphasising the first syllable and picking up on another recent clue).

We each find a secluded spot, (Coorr...That's better...) munch a conference pear, and, since the path drops steeply here towards Hailes Abbey, think this is a good place to turn around...

So back to the car we sloshed (the hillside was *oozing* with springs) and while our parents had occupied our talk on the outward journey, our grown up off-spring - oh what a source of great pride and extreme misery they can be - occupied the homeward splotter.

Kids. Parents. It's a generational thing. Innit.

1 December 2012

## Episode 8

### Nell

#### Hailes Abbey to Cromwell's Seat

It was a glorious day and I was glad when FF turned up to drag me away from floor laying. Sally gave him a very cautious welcome but then she is getting wheel spin on the new floor.

After FF's remarks last time, I did the checks....map, boots, stick, dog etc. We drove with FF filling me in about the Keswick experience, making me very jealous and parked outside Hailes Abbey. Now we tackle the steep walk back to Beckbury Camp and the mysterious monument.

Up the track between the woods and the fruit orchards with Sally roving freely and Bo's 'un his usual well behaved self. The fruit trees, mainly apple, were in the process of being pollarded, a method of reinvigorating them and increasing yield. A few Pheasant yells ensured that Sally was back on her lead as the woods on our left were firmly marked **Private** and I didn't feel like apologising to irate gamekeepers.

Over a stile and through sheep meadows – 'Well' I say 'I thought this was supposed to be steep'.....FF raises his eyes to the scarp ahead. We discuss the hoax call to the hospital where Kate was being treated....now I have no truck with Royalty but not only has that piece of mischief ended in a suicide - bad enough in its self but the results will echo with both parents and child for a long time.

The undulating fields were dotted with patches of reeds – 'Oh of course' I shout 'springs'. Just below the edge was a definite saucer shaped dip that looked like the remains of a pond...possibly the water source for the Camp. Up a very steep slope – well it was nearly vertical - 'this will get the heart beat and breathing up' says FF so much for the doctor's opinion.

We come to the top and stand next to what I now know is Cromwell's Seat admiring the misty landscape across the lush Vale of Evesham with Winchcombe in the distance. We retrace our steps and as we are nearing the final track, two partridge break cover and for the remainder of the walk I have an excited and trembling dog on the end of the lead. We lean against the gates of Hailes Abbey (closed), contemplating the dissolution of the monasteries. Turning back to the car I spot a small bird with a white patch on the back of its neck...now FF is a better ornithologist than I – he identified it as a Robin that had either lost feathers or had a close encounter and the feathers had grown back white.

We drive home via Winchcombe and pay a visit to the wonderful pottery....we wander round, reading about the history and development of the works and picking up and putting down beautifully crafted pieces. For those who remember, the pottery supplied Cranks (the London Vegetarian restaurant of the sixties with their



crockery). 'We must go I cry - my credit card is burning a hole in my pocket!'

On my return home a little surfing on the web discovers that the Monument next to Beckbury camp is called [Cromwell's Seat](#) and the copse of beeches Cromwell's Clump. That's Thomas not Oliver and from there he is supposed to have overseen the dismantling of Hailes Abbey. FF and I rather doubt this as we couldn't see the place from that vantage....

**12 December, 2012**

## Episode 9

FF

### Hailes Abbey to Winchcombe

..so I got wires to hang my sheers, said Nel

FF drove on wondering why Nel should be storing her hedge cutters like that. Perhaps it would help stop the blades rusting if the shed was a bit damp

But I shalln't be putting them up just yet...

OOoohhh. Your NETS! Said Fish.

That's right, said Nel. Sheers.

Arrive Hailes Abbey. The robin from last time landed a couple of feet from the open car door.

Not white feathers, said Fish, getting a closer look. Quite a bald patch. Poor thing. And pulled his woolly hat down harder over his. In sympathy. Brrrrrr!

The path took us close to the perimeter of the abbey ruins. Cromwell had clearly done a very thorough job. And the zoom on the new camera was put to the test. Hmmm. Not bad. But in the faffin about, I must have dropped a glove, and only realised it when the cold really started biting. Oh well. One glove, and one hand in pocket.

We trudged on, more or less on level ground - no big climbs today – thankful for the freezing conditions. (Every stile and gate we encountered stood in thick ice. A few degrees higher and we'd have been up to our knees in mud and water.)

Suddenly two large boisterous, dogs appear in the field to our left. Distant unanswered whistles and calls of despairing owner. Dogs take no heed but go about their snuffling business.

English setters, said Nel. Typical. That's what Sally should look like, she said, looking at their well groomed haircuts and Sal's curly mop.

But not behave like, we agreed. No. Definitely not...

We get to Winchcombe. A complete jumble of architectural styles – Elizabethan timber framed with overhanging upper floors, solid Jacobean town houses, 18th century coaching inns, and a terrace of exotic Victorian alms houses. A busy, unassuming working town. It gets the thumbs up...

...until Nel spots a sign hanging outside a building near the church:

WINCHCOMBE CONSERVATIVE WORKING MENS CLUB.

Now that takes some thinking about...

On the way back, a pheasant squawks and flies up. Sally is off like a shot.

Unfortunately the bird was in someone's garden...but she did respond to Nel's calling...sort of.

The wind had changed and the ice around the gates was beginning to melt, and Fishy didn't find his glove.

Corrr. This cold weather...!

I got a whole load of root vegetables at the market yesterday and made them into a chunky soup. And leek and onion. Shall add some fried mince to it, said Fish, feeling hungry.

Well I'm having some real comfort food. I got some frozen peas, mashed potatoes and a packet of fish fingers. With tartare sauce, said Nel.

Sounds good. Can I come to your house for dinner?

## Episode 10

Nell

### Winchcombe to Belas Knap

FF and my diaries have coincided this week so we are doing a big chunk of the Way.

Off we go and FF asks me if there's a quicker way to Winchcombe – yes I say and we plunge down a maze of lanes and finally up a very steep hill to the B4632 – 'Phew' say FF 'That was interesting'.

We park just over the bridge outside the Sudley Castle. I go a bit quiet and shoot out of the car....well who has left their walking boots at home AGAIN. It's not such a disaster as I am wearing boots but the treads are pathetic. FF notices but remains silent on the matter...'I think I'd better leave them in your car' I say.....

It's much easier walking than we expected some of it along a well maintained private lane. Up through a meadow with a herd of beautiful young thoroughbreds – yearlings I would guess.

Through the woods and along the scarp we come to **Belas Knap**.

It's a really impressive long barrow. I think there was an ancient god called Bela so it's possibly named after that.

Now I do something very silly...eyeing up the stout walls around the Knap I let Sally off the lead. She's off like a greyhound – down into the woods.....We hear pheasants calling and my heart sinks.....20 minutes later, I send Bo's'un to find her – he sets off purposefully and I follow – yes there is Sally, tongue hanging out, having had a wonderful time. I get back to FF – 'Well I knew you had got her' he says 'I could hear you telling her off.

It starts to shower and looking over the Valley towards Sudley, we see a beautiful rainbow....a definite photo opportunity. (See below)

I confide to FF that I thought I was going to have to come back and tour all the Farms asking if they had found an English setter.....and what Mr E would have said.....

Back to the horse meadow – Bo's'un greets the yearling leaning over the gate with a gentle kiss and so back to Winchcombe. (Below)

Winchcombe Church is graced with superb exterior carvings – we tour round looking and then go inside...there is a redoubtable matron sitting on a pew – FF says the gargoyles are magnificent .....she replies a bit acerbically – they are grotesques – not gargoyles...that puts us in our place.

## Episode 11

FF

### Leg(s) 11

#### Backwards to Belas...

Had been wondering how to manage the next stage – a long steep haul from Belas Knap to Cleeve Hill, and daylight hours are few this time of year. But then spotted a tiny lane on the map that led to a track that would break it half way for us.

Nel's expert map reading got us there... As I change into my boots, Nel' lets out a wail.

I've done it AGAIN!!!

What?

My boots! I've left them indoors!

Oh fuckin hell Nell. How d'you manage that?

(I had spotted her boots in the chaos of the building work and floor laying and placed them *right* by the street door so there was *no* chance of them getting forgotten...)

I don't KNOOOWW she said. I saw them there, and I just stepped over them!!!!

Today we just shrug. Oh well, *rien à faire*. But after the holidays Nel's boots will be granted Permanent Residency, and will live on the floor behind the driver's seat of my car...

I lace up and we get going.

Today we are approaching Belas Knap from the opposite direction, so it's up hill nearly all the way, following the edge of a long stretch of beech woods. High to our left the sky is breaking through winter trees, down below to our right the stream that brought power to Postlip Mills rushes rainfilled down the valley..

The dogs are happy. Sally is on pheasant alert the whole way, Bo's'n doing his usual trick of forging too far ahead and having to be called back the whole time. Now *there's* a photo opportunity!

The map tells us that the woods are called Breakheart Plantation. Apt enough, given how steep it is. And I think I can see a broken heart in the roots of a beech tree... Or am I letting my imagination wander? Pictures in the fire and all that.

At the top, and out of the woods, we're on the open Wolds. Cold and windy and gazed at by sheep, we do another mile on fairly even ground, remembering a time when the ploughed fields in these parts would have been host to whole flocks of lapwing. Not any more. Not since Rachel Carson wrote *The Silent Spring*... And so, in brooding mood, once more to Belas Knap, where we do a circuit of the enclosure. Sally is secure on her lead to avoid any repetition of our last visit here – the lapwings have gone, but there's no shortage of pheasants to go chasing after! Bo's'n finds a bit of old marrow bone which he'd like to bring home, but since we are at the site of an ancient burial chamber I don't want to risk it and he reluctantly leaves the bone behind.

The way back to the car is downhill all the way... downhill through talk of Newtown shootings, downhill through talk of trying to make sense of it and not managing to, and downhill to Christmas...and the need to get to ASDA for a supply of pains au chocolat for Mr E.

Driving home we see something to decorate the QCC snug with, but decide to leave it growing, and take a photo instead.

It comes with love and season's greetings to all our readers,

from **Nel'** and **Sal'**, **FF** and **Bo's'n**.

## Episode 12

### Nell

#### Corndean Lane to Cleeve Golf Club

FF arrives for dog walking and as I open the door I pick up my boots and thrust them at him.....they can stay in YOUR CAR from now on..... and so I gather up Sally and maps and we set off.

'It looks as if we may have a window in the weather' I remark...'hurmph' says FF. We find the tiny lane that takes us to our starting point and boot up. Stir crazy Sally leaps away and I eye up the dense woodland and call her back and put her on the lead.

We walk down a steep slope ankle deep in mud and I am grateful that I did remember my boots. The tinkling stream that we have followed from Belas Knapp is now a respectable brook and we cross the bridge while both the dogs paddle through. Perched on the rail of the bridge are very expensive looking spectacles....oh dear someone is going to be cross.

Up through grass land and a farm with beef cattle in sheds and they look very happy to be out of the drizzle. We turn left just before we get to the beautiful and impressive Postlip Hall with attendant Tithe Barn. We sneakily peek through the slats of a gate and can't understand why everything looks a bit shabby and run down – but more of that later.

Round the corner and we come across a spring neatly engineered to provide drinking water for the ponies.

On to Cleeve Common – it's blowing pretty hard by now but still only drizzling. We pass a large bench carved out of one tree trunk – 'Go and sit on it so I can take a picture' urges FF. 'No way' I say 'it's wet and I don't have waterproofs on'. It's safe enough to let Sally run free now and we climb along the contour lines with both Bo's'un and Sally enjoying themselves but the humans are of a slightly different opinion but then we don't have genetically engineered fur coats. The next bench that bears the inscription 'Andy enjoyed this view' but all we see is mist and mizzle blowing across the Valley – but you can't win them all.

On to the public car park outside the rather posh golf club house and we turn back. As we leave the cattle yards we find that it's not such a 'silent spring' – there is a parliament of rooks and tiding of magpies in the field and chaffinches, tits and other small birds in an old elder tree waiting for their free meal when the cattle get fed.

Sally and Bo's'un oblige by posing for us on the big log bench. (It's much nicer as the wind is coming to our backs and we notice things that we missed on the way out....like the cemetery on the horizon and the disused quarries.

During the steep climb through the woods – we meet a couple of other walkers – who tell us we are the first people they’ve met today and so back to the car.

I hit the web as soon as I get home and discover that Postlip Hall is no longer an upper class residence with race horses but home to eight or so families who have good green aspirations.

Look Here. And that explains everything!

[Postlip Hall](#)



## Episode 13

FF

*When gorse is out of bloom, love is out of season.*

### Cleeve Hill, 1083ft

A Sunday afternoon between Christmas and New Year gets 'em out. People have had their fill of mince pies and telly and need some fresh air. And where better than Cleeve Common for a family outing? The busy car park at the foot of the hill was a mêlée of youngsters trying out new bikes, teenage girls in moon boots, little scampering dogs glad to run free. Few will make it to the top...

...but Nel and I brace ourselves for the climb...

The Common is a strange place – the highest point on the Cotswold Way, it is a mixture of old quarries, patches of gorse, and a golf course whose greens and bunkers blend with the lumps and bumps left by human activity across millennia. In a weird collision of Ancient and Modern, golfers play shots through the Iron Age hill fort at the summit. And Bo's'n has to go on the lead, just in case he decides to retrieve one of the balls.

At this time of year the Common is not looking its best. It is tired, with large areas covered in last season's spent grasses. Today it is pretty bleak, *extremely* cold, and windswept, and the interest lies not so much in the Common itself, but what you can see *from* it.

Stunning is a word I hate, especially when applied to items for sale on eBay, but the views from the hilltop, over Cheltenham in one direction, and back to Winchcombe in the other, were...well...stunning.

But we have to struggle on, hit full in the face by a force I-can't-imagine-what gale, because this is a particularly long stretch, with few access roads from which we can resume next time. Far down below we can see Cheltenham racecourse. Up here we have reached a sort of natural gulley that passes through Prestbury Hill nature reserve, where the going is soft. Extremely soft. And one of *our* horses slips and falls. Fortunately unhurt, just a bit muddy, it picked itself up and was able to continue. But by the time we reached the far end of the reserve we think enough is enough and decide to call it a day... After all, we're not in training for the SAS, and besides, we've now got to do the whole thing in reverse...

But the wind helps us along, and it's mostly down hill. The light is fading, the setting sun is making an effort to break through, and the sky has become quite turneresque. So I try a facetious snapshot to capture it...Hmmm. Think I need more

practice.

You know, if I had some Southern Comfort at home, Nel, I think I'd be opening the bottle when I get home... but I've got a bit of coconut sponge I bought in the Co-op in their reduced section the other day. Should still be all right...with a mug of tea.

Ah! says Nel, I've got something in the Sac Magique when we get to the car park...

Not some of that brandy sponge cream thing you made.

Nope.

Some chocolate coated Bonios? I suggest, hopefully.

Nope...

Back in the car Nel sets about slicing up a couple of conference pears, and opens a packet of dolcelatte which she cuts into cubes...

One of my favourite combinations. Discovered by chance. Bought it as a Christmas treat for myself, she says, but always best if you share it.

Wonderful. Knocks the spots off bread and marmalade with a bit of Cheddar any day, thinks I.

The rain starts to fall as we pull away from Cleeve Hill, but who cares? Up there on the hillside the gorse is in bloom. And love can be pear shaped and cheesy.

30-12-'12

**A very Happy New Year to all who walk with us.**

**xx FF, Nel, Sally & Bo's'n xx**

## Episode 14

Nell

### Ham Road to Prestbury Reservoir

It's Wednesday and I'm still feeling a little jaded after our 12th night lunch party. 'Well I haven't had time to do the crossword today', I say as FF arrives at my door, 'but I've printed it off so we can have a go while we walk'. 'Great' says FF – 'Hurmph' say the dogs.

We navigate ourselves to a typical flat Cotswold plateau via Ham lane and park up. The sky is a blue 18d above our heads - 'Arch' shouts FF – but all along the scarp mist is gathering. 'Well I'm glad we are not in 5d' says FF – 'You mean Los Angeles – it's smog there'. It is easy walking at the moment and FF stops to photograph 1a cattle and sheep – 'oh you mean those buff ones over there' I say.

We come out onto a lane and pass a Farmer who is repairing the walls – we stop, chat and admire his work. He tells us how the walls are constructed but says that if he uses new stone it gets pinched....poor for 4d ...all that work wasted - bad for morale. Is there a branch of 10d in Cheltenham I wonder? Suddenly FF says 'I have the answer to 7a – it's York – as in York stone'.

On down the lane and we bump into another photographer just as entranced by the weather as we are and we turn left past a spinney. Now we are amazed – every few feet there are threatening keep off signs, CCTV, an electric fence and big metal gates.....hmmm maybe the land belongs to someone famous....Madonna perhaps?.....

The mist swirls about us and the dogs become ghosts of themselves. On and up past the disused quarries now keeping disaffected youth off the streets as they are used for motor bike scrambling.....'I've got 13d' I shriek – 'it's teddy boy'.

Friendly horse riders warn us not to get lost in the mist and we thank them. The next bit of the walk is conducted in a very 17a manner by me. 'Why are you so tongue tied' asks FF – 'well it's a bit like the WW1 – and I'm about to go arse over tip' – I reply 'and Sally keeps disappearing into the gorse'. FF tells me that his Uncle was wounded at the Somme so he's obviously got the right genes as he canters through the mud.

We get to Prestbury Nature Reserve and turn back. In one of the high meadows there are a group of horses and ponies including two stunning Icelandics that, with their hogged manes, could have stepped right from ancient 23a. We walk in and out of mist and sunshine and admire the shrouded landscape, beautiful trees and the gentle curve of a stone wall built to accommodate a venerable beech.

'That was a lovely walk I remark' – soul food – 'and the crossword was 8a but the

11a is that we'll have to finish it at home'.

The dogs remain silent on this point and FF gives a snort.

## Episode 15

FF

### Ham Rd to Pegglesworth

The psychopathology of internet trolls and cybergeists was the subject of the day as we drove out of Glos, through the centre of Cheltenham, and up to Ham Rd for the next stage. Conversation was intense and perhaps not appropriate for this blog...

But then, no more than two yards into our walk we saw that the Crossword Gods had left a very clear message to the trolls (1) and planted it right by the path! Perhaps, said Fishy, taking out his camera while Nel' and Sal' waited patiently, perhaps we *do* have God on our side... We'll see.

As crows fly today's walk was not a great distance, but as walkers walk and land plummets down and then rises up to new and even greater altitudes it was bloody miles and bloody hard work. And of course, had to be done twice. There. And back.

But the reward was simply being out of doors on a beautiful day and spotting the very first hazel (5) catkins of the new season. It felt that Spring really can't be far off.

So, following the steep drop along the outside barrier of Dowdeswell Woods, (where dogs *can* run free), with sunlight filtering through, and almost enjoying the ache in our limbs as we hauled our way up the other side of the valley, we made it into Lineover Woods. Woods that have been there for a thousand years and where some trees are over seven centuries old... ..

... ..Back at the car.

Une pomme, Ma Pomme? said Fishie, producing a couple of russets from his anorak pocket.

Just what I need, said Nel, producing from her sac magique a printed version of the crossword for us to sit and do before the drive home.

Without the FF method to help us along we managed to misspell... bazzouki and not get 9 down.

5 down's a funny clue, said Nel'. "Don't know?" What do you suppose that means? Hmmm. Not sure.

No. Me neither, said Nel.

We left it blank.

PS Here [is a link](#) to the crossword we did in the car:

## Episode 16

### Nell

**Pegglesworth to Minotaur Barn** featuring quick crossword no 1,3321

We grab a window in the weather and drive out to Pegglesworth - 'Did you have much luck with the crossword?' I ask. 'Yes' says FF. 'Well I'm still thinking' say I.

A quick walk through woods brings us out near a farm that seems to specialise in russet coloured animals – Tamworth pigs with litter and a fine herd of very curious beef cattle.

We walk along the scarp and I glance back to find we are being followed by said cattle....no problem for me - I'm a farm girl but both Sally and FF are a bit unnerved. I finally shoo them away and we continue on. The landscape is looking magnificent and we stop to look down on Cheltenham – that grand old lady who fluffs her skirts along the edge.

Through a gate and I notice hawthorn berries against the blue sky – 'Old year's berries in the new year's sunshine' remarks FF. We start to hear gunfire – it's coming from the shooting school – Sally is quivering on her lead with anticipation and I explain to FF how you can tell the different guns from the reports.

On towards Severn Springs down a path covered in rubbish and unmentionables from a large lay by. Over a main road and up a lane until we get to Minotaur Barn and we turn back. We pass a large derelict cold unit advertising Wessex Dairies - fresh milk - in peeling paint. FF photographs and I lean on a gate looking at the landscape vaguely thinking that the woodland would need to be thinned in five years or so.

As we walk back through the woods I notice some very neatly dug holes filled with dead branches....'what on earth are those' I say – 'Heffalump traps' chortles FF. 'Oh yes of course' I reply feeling slightly stupid.

So back to the car – I'm still puzzling over the last few clues of the cross word and ask FF for the solutions – of course he knows....huh...

## Episode 17

FF

### Seven Springs to Leckhampton

(It's Sunday and we are in **SPEEDY**-mode...)

The Wolds are knee-deep in snow, so I think twice before taking the tiny lane up to Minotaur Barn. To avoid getting stuck, we think it's best to park in the mucky lay-by back at Seven Springs and walk that stretch a second time...

-Reckon I can get my boots on inside the car, Nel'? I'm gonna try.  
-Course you can. You'd be surprised what you can do...in a mini.  
(MMmmm. Wistful thoughts, then dirty guffaws from us both...)  
-Come on. Let's get goin.

Fishie sees lovely photo opportunities everywhere and is keen to get some "snow-on-twigs" and "snow-on-the-hills" and "snow-on-the-dry-stone-walls" Winter Wonderland shots...

Just one thing...he's forgotten the bloody camera. Nel' laughs. Fishie feels gutted.

So I can't take a picture of the sign on the gate with a confusing mechanism. Lift latch and push open. Nel' cracks it in one, Fish baffled by multi-tasking looks on in admiration.

And I can't capture for Nel' the "OOOoooooh! LoooooK! Christmas Card!" moments we keep having.

And most disappointing of all was not being able to photograph The Devil's Chimney... [There'll be plenty on Google](#), but it's not the same...

We crunch on through the snow. What bird was that we could hear? Rook? A crow? Actually it sounded like a raven...Could be.

Sunday afternooners are out aplenty – dogs, sledges, serious photographers standing behind tripods, and snowballers. Nel' loses her footing and goes lurching down an icy slope and ends up clutched safely to a hunky manly chest. FF who had gone on ahead, missed all this, but clearly it made Nel's day, since she kept referring to it (or should that be rubbing it in?) all the way back to the car...

### Number 17.5 Seven Springs to Leckhampton (21st Jan 13)

It's early Monday morning, and I am in **QUICK** mode...

Fishie and Bo's'n park up at the lay-by, and the two of them walk the whole thing again...

The sign on the gate, a couple of Christmas cards, proof that it probably WAS a raven we heard yesterday, (Hmmm, not a bad zoom,) and of course, the Chimney.

All dun an dusted (including the crossword) and back indoors by 12.

(But SSssshhhhhh! Don't tell Nel'.)

20th Jan 13



## Episode 18

### Nell

#### Leckhampton Hill to Crickley Hill

FF now feels well enough to tackle more of the Way. Luckily we are close to home, so park up on Leckhampton Hill. FF cheerfully photos me pulling on my boots! We set off in glorious spring weather.

We pass a house built on the ridge in carefully chosen materials and set with great care in the landscape. We sigh with pleasure and discuss how much it would cost and agree neither of us could afford anything like that.

On down an unmade road and I spot the first lambs we've seen this season. FF stops to photograph and when he catches up says 'I've got some Aaah photos.'

'No, you've got some Baaah photos' and we dissolve into giggles. FF then pelts me with horse jokes.....so we are both silly for a 'bit' and that's another horse joke.

We passed up a tiny lane with a lovely yew hedge on one side and Leylandii on the other....FF asks me if I know about U and Non U gardening – 'What's that?' I enquire

'Well Yew is considered U in the gardening world and conifers are certainly not Yew. We then bat various plants around and decide which is which – Nancy Mitford would not have been impressed

We are now coming into familiar territory – Crickley Hill is a regular tramping ground but we are taking an unfamiliar route. I turn and see Bo's'n make a spectacular leap over a gate – Sally's unimpressed but then she is a four paws on the ground dog.

The Crickley Hill Beeches are magnificent and English Nature has planted replacements for the future. Beeches are a familiar sight all over the Cotswolds and most are protected. Past a boundary oak – another tree set in wall built to accommodate it.

The Vale of Gloucester is in silvery mist, sparkling with reflected sunlight - The Forest of Dean, May Hill and The Malverns are invisible and Gloucester itself a ghostly presence.

.We intend to take it easy for the first couple of walks, so at the Crickley Hill car park we turn back and as usual notice things we missed on the way out.

The good weather of the past few days has brought out snowdrops. My equine radar picks up horses grazing and I remark there must be a large livery stable nearby. 'What exactly is livery?' asks FF and I explain that people who have no land or are short of time, board their horses at stables and there are various levels of

care. 'You mean like garaging a car' he says. I'm a bit shocked but, taking into consideration his urban upbringing, agree.

As we pull up the final slope, we are surprised by an enclave of 50's and 60's houses nestling under the hill in true hobbit fashion.

And so home happy and making plans for the next trip. 'Done the crossword?' I ask –'Yeh' says FF 'easy especially 1a'. 'Hurumph it was a pain' I say, 'trouble both down and across.'

## Episode 19

FF

### Barrow Wake to Barrow Wake to Barrow Wake

**Mr Kelly** pointed out in January that our progress averaged 2 miles per walk. Yes, and no. We are doing the trail each way, so you must count 4 miles. But there are other considerations. In the early days we had over an hour's drive to our starting points – and an hour's drive home, of course. This was using up our walking time, because each outing is time limited and has to be fitted around Mr E. The access points on the map have to be taken into consideration too. It is often tempting to push on, but we know that time, and daylight hours at this time of year, would be against us.

Thursday's walk was a mere 5 miles in total, it is not for the 11 across, nor for the 16 downs,

and I dedicate it, and all its nervous energy, to **PK...**

We drive the four or five miles from home to Barrow Wake, an extremely busy and locally notorious picnic site (1), panoramic view point and beauty spot. It is steeped in history and heritage (2). And today there is the usual line of cars and dodgy white transit vans parked up there, and we tack ours on the end...

The occupants of various vehicles eye us up and realise that we're *not* trade, as we open the tail gate and get Sally and Bo's'n on their leads. We eye the occupants of the various vehicles back, pretty sure that they *are* trade, but we leave them to it and set off towards Crickley Hill (3). Only a mile or so, but most of it is shared with the A417, and there's a very busy roundabout to negotiate too. We gulp in lungfuls of carbon monoxide and make a dash for it.

From Crickley (4) we can look back towards the car park at Barrow Wake. Zoom. Click. It's a bitingly cold day, enough to freeze the...no, let's not go there...and there's nothing interesting or compromising to be caught on camera. Just a line of cars...

We now hike back. Renegotiate the roundabout. The driver of an artic truck takes pity, brakes, and waves us across. We scurry. Soon we're back at Barrow Wakes for a second time. We now push on for a mile and a half of woodland walk, call a halt where the path emerges on Birdlip Hill. A handy little place to set off on the next major leg.

And so back to Barrow Wake for the THIRD time today! God. We're becoming regulars! Third time lucky you say?

Sorry to disappoint, but we couldn't hang about... a trip to ASDA was in order.

Care to join us **Peter?** (5).

#### **LINKS**

- 1. OFFICIAL 'DOGGING' AREA**
- 2. NATIONAL TRUST REVAMPS 'DOGGING' AREA**
- 3. GLOUCESTERSHIRE**
- 4. CRICKLEY HILL COUNTRY PARK**

## Episode 20

### Nell

#### Birdlip to Cooper's Hill

It's a cloudy and misty day as we drive up Birdlip and park in a handy little niche. We know that this walk is through woods – all the way - so FF makes sure that I've got Sally on the lead. As we descend in to the valley Sally quivers and we hear pheasants calling.

We walk on splodgering about the recent modding and decide that if we want to comment on the subject, we could do it privately by email.

The buds on the deciduous trees are swelling and tender ransom shoots have appeared – 'Yum' says FF 'ransom soup', 'yum' say I 'cream cheese flavoured with ransoms' and we continue in silent anticipation for a while.

As we round a corner we discover a decaying corrugated shed – it's a found sculpture... It's certainly very beautiful.

I have a vague recollection that there is a good stream somewhere near – we find it and the dogs have a drink. I'm planning a picnic with the French Mob and Theo to do some dam building in May. I ask FF if Theo could come on the next short walk to see the Roman Villa (further down in the valley) and check out the stream for his approval.

We make it to the car park under Cooper's Hill and turn back. FF pauses and takes a shot over the valley and we quietly congratulate ourselves on how far we've walked in the last week. The usual happens and I notice an amazing old wall capped with ferns and moss (missed on the outward trip) – nature is a better gardener than either of us. The conifers are standing sentinel and loom out of the mist. We hear pheasants calling again and I suddenly know the reason why.

At the bottom of the meadow are bright blue pheasant feeders – I've heard rumours that the gamekeepers on this patch are a bit trigger happy so in spite of a trembling and excited dog – there is no off the lead for Sally. Bo's'n of course has a different problem – he has scavenged goodness knows what – FF's prognosis – There'll be trouble at both ends later....

And so home – 'Crossword?' I say (we know each other so well we talk in short hand) – 'Good' he says – 'Me too' I say.

## Episode 21

FF

### Cooper's Hill to Painswick Beacon on the Crossword Way

For **36BitBughunter** and **LondonBBG** (who maybe have the T-shirts?)

Clocks in Ffishie's house used to run five minutes fast. Buses got caught, the start of films rarely missed. The clocks still do, but life in retirement has become less urgent...

I call for Nel, babbling apologies. No question of pork pies (or porkies in true cockney,) she only has to go on line to find out that at 12:02 I'd screwed up posting a Youtube clip of Arthur Askey singing about a Sergeant-Major to **LondonBBG**. That should have gone to **MisspellA**, and something about the origin of the word saboteur to London instead.

Today the talk runs deep and earthy. I think it must be something to do with kicking off at the foot of Cooper's Hill where, come Spring Bank Holiday, locals risk life and limb (no cliché) [in pursuit of a Double Gloucester](#). A lame version of Pamplona in July, [but at least it's only cheese](#).

We climb. And at the top of Cooper's we stand and get our breath back.

Oh! How d'you get on at the hospital this morning?

Been discharged. Don't want to see me again.

Oh great!

Well I told the consultant I was still a bit sore...

Yes?

So he had me on the couch and poked around a bit.

Oooh...

No! It was all right! Still got a bit of "healing tissue" he called it...

Which will get better?

Well he seemed to think so...honestly Nel, the things you have to say to get someone to stick their finger up yer bum...

For the next couple of hours we are tunnelling through woodland. The ground is still covered in last year's leaves. There's a chill dampness in the air and the signs of Spring we saw on the previous stretch have not reached these parts. It could be November. This afternoon the tree forms appear quite sinister...smashed, broken, gnarled. We are wandering through the abode of trolls...

Extremely good film I saw at the Guildhall last night.

Oh yes. What was it?

Tu seras mon fils.

Oh that's right. You enjoyed it, did you? What was it about?

I gave Nel a long-winded and yes...*tedious*...account of the plot without spoiling the ending.

But that's not what it was about. It was "about" the toxic relationships between the rich owner of a prestigious St Emilion vineyard and his son...and his terminally ill steward...and their respective wives...and the steward's son... It was about raw hatred, anger, jealousy and vengeance...

The sort of stuff you find in a lot of families really?

Well certainly in mine, Nel. I knew what it was like to be the less favoured son - fuckin awful. Anyway – it could have been set anywhere because the themes were universal...but this was awash with wine. The dialogue swam sometimes brutal, sometimes as poetic as the stuff they write on the labels before you get to the bit about may be drunk with roast meats, or simply enjoyed on its own...The sort of film you need to watch more than once. Horribly macabre. I shall get the DVD.

And did you go home and open a bottle afterwards?

Actually, Nel, I have to say that I did... [I had to](#).

**The Crossword Way** (as we've dubbed it) took us past a notice about fly-tipping. I recall the hot potato of the day in the QCC when fly-tipping was the answer to one of the clues. We inspect the detritus strewn across the ground alongside. A duvet, a man's luminous safety jacket, some women's underwear, a lot of lager cans, and a packet of filters for rollies. Don't care whatcha say, that ain't no fly-tippin.

And so on and up to the trig point on Painswick Beacon, (the best preserved hill fort - triple earth banks,) where on a clear day you can see for miles, but not today.

A couple of hundred yards beyond and we get to the point where the Crossword Way crosses the Wysis way...a sense of déjà vu? No. Not at all. We really *have* been there and done that!

Posted 11 March 2013 12:16am

## Episode 22

Nell

### Painswick Beacon to Painswick

#### *Dedicated to the London Gathering*

I jump into FF's car clutching a crisp, pristine copy of the Guardian. 'I haven't started the crossword yet' I gasp – 'I thought we could do it on the walk'. We look at the rain – well it's not heavy and FF has planned a long trek. This is the closest point to home only four and a half miles from base.

Up to Painswick Beacon we go - past a quarry with lovely landscaping softening the excavations – FF and I itch to plant it up – I envisage banks of grassy millefleurs. We discover that the stone from this quarry has not only contributed to Gloucester Cathedral but to Westminster Abbey. FF sends a text to Misspell to wish everyone a good time at the London Gathering - it's probably pique - they are warm and dry in the British Museum, we are getting damper by the minute.

The rain gradually increases and I have trouble with running ink as I struggle to fill in clues and switch to pencil. This section is mostly road walking to the disgust of both dogs.

We drop down in to the pretty village of Painswick. 'I bet there are good charity shops here – lots of rich people and that you'll want to stop' I remark to FF. 'No no' he says 'we'll carry straight on' until he spots a copy of Easter Parade (Judy Garland and Fred Astaire) in the window of a very posh emporium. 'Ha' I shout 'Told you'. I wait outside with the dogs and fill in another couple of clues. The paper is now a bit soggy. FF is secretly addicted to kitsch so he emerges with a silly grin on his face.

We dutifully admire the oldest post office in Britain and then to the Church. Like all Cotswold Churches, it's pretty impressive and surrounded by magnificent clipped yews.....shades of the Lewes gathering. You are not supposed to be able to count them but apparently there are just over 100. It rains some more. The point of my pencil breaks and in disgust I stuff the disintegrating paper into my pocket with the crossword unfinished.

We take it in turns to do a quick tour of the church and inspect a magnificent Victorian model ship (Drake's Bonaventure) and I learn that the ship is an ancient symbol for the early Christian Church. FF digs into his murky memory and says 'I knew that' and we both remember the great stained glass at Winchcombe

Out to discover the heavens have opened – we agree to curtail our plans and squelch back to the car sodden and dispirited.



Postscript – we are now at the end of our next walk and discover an imposing entrance to the churchyard made of timbers from the old belfry and with decorated plaster (1901–2) and nestled in the grass verge the most beautiful miniature cyclamens glowing like jewels. I WANT SOME FOR MY GARDEN!

## Episode 23

*Here is how our **18 DOWN** journey stood, a week ago today.*

*A week can be a long time, and I have only just found the words to write about it because, **Deelfi**, this one and the celandines, are for you.*

### A St Patrick's Day Ramble along The Crossword Way

Sometimes it feels that we are adrift. We wander, amble, happy to splotter along, from nowhere in particular to nowhere in particular; but now and again the route pulls us up at *somewhere* in particular... and it's a big event. Broadway, Winchcombe... Painswick. (The name bears a warning...) We dig, often just turning over the surface, sometimes very deep, and in our own time move on.

Arrivals... departures...each has a very different feel. Joy in one, more than a touch of sorrow in the other.

Today Painswick is in bright sunshine. There's a welcoming car park - it's free on Sundays. But today we turn our back on the town, the church with its hundred odd yews, and leave. There's a valley to cross, a steep descent...a bridge...and then a hard climb.

When's Easter, Nel'? Is it next weekend?  
No, the one after. End of March.  
What are we today then? Must be, what, the 16th?  
Errr – no-o-o...  
Dah! Of course!

Nothing unusual, not knowing what day it is, but today Time and Place are irrelevant... Then I remember [The Irish Closet](#). We've got one in the Caff now! And we laugh.

In the middle of nowhere in particular is a marker stone. We are 47 miles from the start, 55 from the finish. Now what in St Patrick's name is the point of that? Neither here nor there you might say. In a fraction of a second the camera blinks twice.

From the far side we look back across the valley... We look back on Painswick. And far off can pick out the sharpness of its steeple. (Another photograph for the Memorybox.)

Then Nel' spots the very first celandines, and the tiny flowers give us courage...

24 March 2013

## Episode 24

FF & Nell

### Half way where?

Dear Nel',

We're actually half way there! But then I wonder, half way where?

We know that at some point between Haresfield Beacon and the far end of Standish Woods we must have passed the spot that is exactly mid-way. But where it was we'll never know? And does it matter anyway?

I suppose I imagined it would be nice to pause and look back with satisfaction and disbelief over the 51 (102) miles along the Cotswold edge that we've covered so far, (and be faced with daunting views along the escarpment of what may lie ahead.) I suppose I imagined too, that it might be cause for special celebration – like a birthday with a nought on it, or crossing the Equator. But it didn't happen...and we ambled and splothered and wandered on... with the dogs happily snuffling through the woods, unaware of any significance this outing might hold.

So what do you reckon this walk's about, Nel'? For me it's become a lot more than the physical challenge I had in mind when we started off. That one day I'd be able to look at a map of England and tell my grandchildren that I'd walked all that, from there to there...

Yes, it might well have started off as a fitness thingy, and even though I feel thankful every time I tie up my bootlaces that we can both still do this "at our age", I know that these walks have come to be much more about "other stuff".

Other stuff indeed... I look back at the me that fell to earth in Gloucester, January 2011. Down on me uppers, financially and emotionally, after a tooth-and-claw divorce. Bitter, sad, depressed and completely washed up. Me and Bo's'n, facing the world and a new life. Together... I look back at the helplessness and hopelessness of that time...and how I went on line and snapped and snarled at the crossword bloggers because they got their grammar wrong or fucked up an accent on a foreign word. I upset people. Then the QCC got formed, and people were charitable enough to allow me to spit into the sawdust on the snug floor...

And you were charitable enough to let me howl and rant in real life (not that the Caff ain't real) on our first tentative dogwalks together, absorb some of my rage and listen to more on our next and next and next outing...

That was then. And look at us now.

I think subconsciously (?) I suggested the Cotswold Way because it's a longer term

commitment. And because it needs a lightness of touch, and a degree of good humour to get us through it... And damn it all Nel', your companionship has helped me rediscover those things ... and much and more besides.

So, to be able to share my recovery with you and with all the people that walk with us in the Caff gives me truly good feelings.

The journey's not over, and the best thing is... We're only half way... Where...?

With love from Col' & B'.

Dear Col',

As you say we are halfway through our tramp along the Cotswold Way and it feels good to look back on our experiences together.

We met when I was in a difficult place. I had realised that my life partner, beloved companion and heart's desire would never be the man he once was. Apart from his physical problems, he was dealing with frustration and depression. I was angry, resentful and I regret to say somewhat unsympathetic.

Then there was that momentous meeting at the bus stop – It was one of those times when you instinctively recognise a kindred spirit. I think we were both a little taken aback and I know we were cautious.

Bo's'n and Sally had no such hesitation and were grateful for the increasing number of outings. I had pleasure introducing you to the locality and the many walks. Out of this came a desire for purpose and we made our first foray from the Wye to the Isis....and what a sense of achievement at the end.

The QCC was there in the background encouraging us and I began to develop my moribund writing skills. It was a friendly environment to try out my tentative efforts. The comments, spats and fusses, the music and poetry and the open handed support and sympathy from the QCC made me feel as if I was not on my own.

My temper improved and I became a much nicer person to live with. I no longer felt trapped and, after I installed an emergency call out system, felt a lot more comfortable leaving home. So we walked and talked and laughed and moaned that our feet hurt and that we were getting old. We bought pansies for your garden and visited churches and met interesting and eccentric people.

Slowly we introduced each other to our children and they approved of our expeditions and on occasions joined us. We swapped information about the best places to buy supplies and special offers not to be missed – we bought dog food together – it was cheaper in bulk. You helped when I needed a second pair of hands. We discussed theatre, books and films, badgered each other into joining protests and signing petitions. I found that my political will was returning.

So now we are half way through the Way – thank you for being such a companion and the brother I always wished for. It is rare that you find a relationship where you can truly say anything and know it will not be misinterpreted. If in some measure I have returned the support and affection you have shown me I am a happy person.

Love

## Episode 25

### Nell

#### Randwick to Ebley

We know we have some tricky navigation to get to our start place – my map reading is not brilliant so we nearly make our target but end up one road lower than expected. We park in the tiny lane, boot up and start the steep climb to Standish Woods. It feels a little strange standing looking over the Stroud Valley and knowing where the path goes. We've stood here many times and the route has always seemed mysterious and alluring before.

Back down and through rich farmland. Bo's'n and Sally discover a great watering hole and, right next door, inspect a hollow tree with thoughts of a holiday home. What more could you want? – a country cottage next to a pub! I look at the deeply ploughed fields and think that any archaeology would have been well and truly lost. A neat little bridge takes us over the railway and we stroll through posh playing fields belonging to Wycliffe College. FF spots a very rude notice that has been modified by an anonymous humourist. We shake our heads at the sort of mentality that could bang children up in boarding school so young.

Now I've loved industrial architecture since living around Wolverhampton and Stafford. The Stroudwater Canal does not disappoint – graceful, well maintained water and beautiful buildings. 'Hmm' I say to FF – 'I've not walked this canal – we could fit it around our longer walks – Stroud's not really that far'. 'Good idea' says FF.

We arrive at the small car park and resist with ease the blandishments of the greasy spoon van and turn for home.

## Episode 26

Colin

### Ebley – Selsley circular

Five deep valleys converge on Stroud, fast streams flow down some of them, canals thread through others. At Ebley we are on the edge of **Elizabeth David** country and we try to make contact because it would be nice, we thought, to have extra company on this stretch of The Way. Besides, there could be the chance of posh CAKE.

Unfortunately the plan didn't come off, so **Elizabeth David**, Episode 26 is for you...

It's an early start from the kebab stall parked just off the A419, and the walk along the canal path towards Ebley Mill feels strange. It's all on a level! A weak sun is shining, and ducks are a-dabbling – well actually, they are engaged in some quite ferocious mating and seem to come close to drowning...

...we leave them to it and climb half way up the next bit of escarpment, past a farmyard where sheep have been brought in to shelter from the coldest March on record, and on to Selsley Church (1), famous for its William Morris stained glass...

Sally and Bo's'n get hitched to boot scrapers each side of the door and we enter.

Wow!

Not just Morris – there are windows by Burne-Jones, Philip Webb, Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. It's a Pre-Raphaelite Arts & Crafts feast. Nel' buys a guide book and we pick our way slowly round the church. Then we get postcards and push open the door into the sunshine...

(...Oh you *have* been good dogs we tell them guiltily. They'd been waiting without protest for what? 45 minutes?)

We start a steep climb to the top of Selsley Common.

But the visit to the church has brought back memories and I chunter on about several visits to Kelmscott Manor (2), to the Morris Museum in Walthamstow (3), and to the big Morris exhibition at the V&A some years ago. I talk wistfully about having Morris wallpapers and Morris curtains (à

la Sanderson's) back in the 70's, about all my Morris books including the V&A Catalogue, lost to post-marital scramblings, and about my – yes – *original* Morris & Co (4) ceramic bowl, salvaged from the fight. If it ever went on the Antiques Roadshow they would have to value it not in pounds but in Solicitors' Letters. Today

I am struck by the absurdity of it and I shrug. Huh. They're only things, Nel'. Only things...

From the top of the common, what a prospect of Stroud! A snap, and a brisk walk down hill.

17 April 2013

1. Selsely Church: <http://allsaintsselsley.org.uk/>
2. Kelmscott Manor: <http://www.kelmscottmanor.org.uk/home>
3. Walthamstow:  
<http://www.wmgallery.org.uk/collection/themes/highlights/>
4. Morris & Co: <http://www.william-morris.co.uk/>



## Episode 27

### Nell

#### Middleyard to Coaley Peak

We cheerfully found our way to the jumping off point – a tiny lane - and FF parked the car in the smallest place possible – we didn't want to inconvenience anyone.

Off we went through the expected beech woods only to be startled by some handsome pigs – a gloucester old spot and, to my delight, a saddleback – we farmed these back in the 50s and they are lovely, gentle and TASTY animals. I'm thinking that most of Great Britain would have looked like these woods and been inhabited by deer and pigs in the Stone Age....it gives a little perspective.

A petrol aroma makes its presence felt – and then the roar of engines – it is Easter Sunday and yes there is motor cycle racing. It takes me back to my teens when I was a bit of a petrol head (oh guilty secrets).

Some runners pass us and one stops – 'that's an English Setter' 'Yes' I say and it turns out he's American and they had one. His running companions get a little irritated – they are here for running – not the landscape glimpsed through the trees or esoteric dog talk.

And we reach Coaley Peak – where we were a year ago and thinking of this project – FF's lovely daughter took the photos that you see at the beginning of wanderings.

Coaley Peak is busy, it is Sunday. A beautiful chestnut dog bounces up to Sally and Bo's'un – we discover he's an 18 month old French Mastiff. He is enormous – Secretly I would not like his feed bill. He's one of those outgoing, hello sort. His owners are the same. 'That's an English Setter' his owner says. 'Yes' I say 'but don't get one if you want obedience, you are better off with Chester'.

We walk back through the woods and a couple with an enthusiastic young pointer stop – 'That's an English Setter' – 'Yes she is' I reply and we talk about her sad life before she came to me. A little further on we met a lady with a feisty terrier – quite prepared to take on Sally (a wimp) and Bo's'un (an alpha if ever I've seen one). 'Oh that's an English Setter' – well it's been a Setter recognition day – I-spy points to been gained here.

Now the bit you have all been waiting for – we get back to the car – FF has noticed some blue periwinkles and set off to gather a few roots for his garden. I sit in the car slightly embarrassed. I've been round many gardens with people ripping bits off plants saying – 'they won't mind – I'm a gardener'. FF excuses himself saying that the bits he garnered were on public property and he hadn't noticed the gate and house name. I forgive him of course.

And finally we are ready to leave – We had parked with the nose of the car in a patch of brambles, FF backs -I hear crackling noises and think – oh it's only the brambles pulling out. FF continued gently reversing – THEN – suddenly the front bumper pulls away from the body. Now the cars I knew in my youth allowed you to pull off the bumper that was that – this disaster saw no licence plate,wrecked electrics and lights – don't go there. We get out and look at the damage and the big bank that we had unwittingly parked against. 'Well I've got AA' I say – 'They'll never find us' says FF. A local guy passes and doesn't look surprised – 'Need any help?' 'No we're ok' we assure him.

We manhandle the bumper into the car and re-arrange the dogs and slowly process home. 'Well I have been thinking about a new car' remarks FF. 'I'll run you round the car sales people' I say – great. Nothing like vicarious shopping....so it's arranged.....

## Episode 28

FF

### Coaley Peak to under Cam Long Down

**3d 3d 3d!** The Crossword Gods are tellin us something!

It was pretty galling to arrive at Coaley Peak in Nel's wagon. We had intended to recreate some of the pics that appear at the very start of our Wanderings page – all taken at Coaley Peak nearly a year ago. But as Rabbie (Burns) said, The best laid plans of mice and men gang oft agley. Today it underlined the fact that my car had been written off by a blackberry bush a few miles back.

At Coaley I tried to get Bo's'n to pose for us on the Panoramic Indicator thingy. But he clearly remembered once skittering and falling off its shiny surface and today was definitely not playing ball. So we set off – down through a long, quarried stretch, now reclaimed by nature... I wonder, said Nel', if you baked a hedgehog that had been living among all these ransoms it would be auto-flavoured with garlic. We muse upon this. Like salt marsh lamb possibly. After a lot of surprisingly challenging ups and downs we arrive at **Hetty Pegler's Tump** (See You Tube below). What a name for a long barrow, and a folk group! A suitable place to stop and head back, but we look at the time...still quite early.

Fine weather has brought out the Sunday walkers, The Way is surprisingly busy, and we feel spurred on. It's clear this is gonna be a Big One...

...and so we 3 downed and 3 downed until we met our 5 down

One hour later...Cam Long Down stands as a separate geological feature and The Way crosses it. So, we descend to near sea-level, and then have to climb to the top of the down, stride across it and drop again to near sea-level on the other side – heading towards Dursley. The view from the top is, of course stunning. It takes in the little town and there is a ghost to be laid. The former Mrs FF now lives here, and from the hilltop I am able to locate the very house... I share my thoughts with Nel', iron out a crease, and we 3 down...

We lose the way when we are distracted by **half a dozen muntjacs**. The dogs want to give chase but we distract them and walk on fast... We must have covered a mile or so before we realised our mistake. We should have chased the deer!

But it's now time to head back. The gorgeous spring Sunday had enticed us to bite off more than we could chew. Never had it been so blissful to prise off our boots back at the wagon.

We'll pay for this tomorrow, said Nel'.

I know. But it was a bloody good hike, wasn't it?

(PS Hope you joined in the dancin at the Tump, and if you scroll down on the muntjacs there's SPLOTHER of a completely different order!!!)

MUNTJACS

## Episode 29

Nell

### Cam Down to Dursley Town

We knew this would be a short one and for once I'm very glad - my feet are still hurting. No problems with my box on wheels except it's bigger than FF's old car and parking's a problem.

We walk over rolling meadows and (sigh) Sally hears pheasant calling so it's back on the lead for her. We pass a pretentious Victorian pile and discover redwoods planted along their back drive— now that's confidence – planting trees that will still be here in a 1,000 years . The spring flowers are shyly making appearances. We find ground ivy – 'yippee' I say violets soon – I'm crap on birds but good on flowers. A day or so later I discover the first white violets along the Sharpness Canal.

We duck down into **Dursley** - a lovely little town – lots of local independent shops and with the claim to fame that **Pedersen** the inventor of the Rolls Royce of Bikes lived there.

Now you may remember FF's congenital attraction to Charity Shops – Dursley is brilliant. Progress slows to a crawl and the dogs sigh – call this a walk they snuffle. The last one in the Silver Street is just about the most wonderful, well organized second hand book shop I've ever seen. They yield up books and ceramics to FF determined onslaught.

The sign post for the way is a little confusing but a friendly local directs us and we tell him about the project and give him one of Preah's handy little cards. A lovely FREE car park gives us our next start point and so we head for home.

13 May, 2013

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## Episode 30

FF

### The Battles of Stinchcombe Hill

It's cold, and it's wet. And I am secretly pleased to be walking away from Dursley. From now on it's new ground all the way to Bath... (still nearly 40 (80) miles to go.)

On Stinchcombe Hill (more hard climbing) we get route marched along the perimeter of a golf course - little did we realise we were walking through another war zone and risking life, limbs and ear lobes by the looks!!! (1.)

Today there are no fine views to the Black Mountains of Wales that our handbook promised. And then we saw a very welcoming sign...

(They must have known we were coming!)

## Episode 31

### Nell

#### North Nibley back to Stinchcombe Hill

Driving to North Nibley FF spots a Garden Centre –‘That looks good’ he comments ‘Can we call in on our way back?’ Well you know me and shopping. We park up and admire both the day and the Village (Charming and Cotswoldy but not a tourist trap) and head down a lane with happy bouncy dogs.

It seems that we have taken our eyes off the flora for a day or two and we spot the first Ransoms and Bluebells. Over the meadows towards the woods and we stop to see if the Oak or the Ash are in leaf yet as the old rhyme says

Oak before Ash in for a splash  
Ash before Oak in for a soak

FF has a slightly different version and somehow we don’t really believe it. The woodland edge is in its prime – banks of primroses and tiny white and blue violets. A heart pounding climb takes us up to the top of Stinchcombe Hill. We carefully avoid violent golfers and rest up for a few minutes.

We turn back and make our way down discussing The Taming of the Shrew - FF had seen a performance the day before.

As we plod up the tiny lane to Nibley we pause, lean on an old gate and admire a tumbledown barn – FF sees a photo opportunity – I see a renovation project – well you never know the Euro Millions might cough up.

And so home – the Garden Centre proved disappointing just bedding plants so no spending. I remark to FF that I AM definitely getting new boots and will be claiming his birthday present in the near future but more of that in a later episode.

29 May, 2013

## Episode 32

FF

(Pt 1)

**Piss-up – Brewery – Organise – Couldn't – In a. (Innit.)**

Today's real red letter an it's gonna be good cos we're taking **NW** n **PP** up onto The Way to leave their footprints on it – innit.

Well, that's the plan, it sounds like a good one, and we set off in two cars – **FF**, **Nick** and **Bo's'n** in one, **Nel'**, **PP** and **Sally** in another. The weather for late April is not in our favour. It's cold, windy, overcast, and there's a feel of winter and spats of rain....

The haul up the gulley from North Nibley is hard work, the bank on one side has collapsed in a landslip and old beech trees are hanging on by their root hairs... ..

But the monument at the top is very grand, a 19th century tribute to **WILLIAM TYNDALE**, a local man born in 1484 and burned at the stake for heresy in 1536... He had printed the first complete translation of the Bible into English. (Should we, we wondered, be splodgering in Chapters and Verses?)

Now, because of other commitments we'd arranged that **ElizabethDavid** who was keen to join the walking party would drive from Stroud to Wotton-under-Edge, park there and walk back along The Way towards us. Once we'd met up we would all turn round and walk back to our starting point in North Nibley together.

Sounds like another good plan. But you know what they say about plans - even the best laid ones of mice and men – ganging oft agley.

So we hiked on, expecting at any moment to meet **ED** coming in the other direction. And on...and on...until... fun and laughter began to fade, and we started to sense that something was going wrong. We reached the top of the hill coming out of Wotton and waited a good half hour for **ED** to appear... But in vain.

The schedule was a tight one. We're an hour's drive plus a good hour's walk from Gloucester. **Nel'** reckoned that **Mr E** would need seeing to, said she felt concerned, and decided to turn back and head for home...

**FF** said he would go down into Wotton (a very steep drop) to search for **ElizabethDavid**, who by this time had made phone contact but mentioned having difficulty finding the way...

So our two Precious and Special Guests were abandoned on a miserably cold and

exposed hilltop...there to wait...and...unfortunately...to wait... and wait ... (to be continued...)

(It was fine FF, NW taught me the poem "*They Fuck you up your mum and dad*" while we waited) by Phillip Larking. [HERE](#) is the poem. (Ed.)

### **32 (Pt 2) Wotton-under-Edge**

**Rrrinnng-rrrinnggg...**this is the voicemail service for...

Oh hi **ElizabethDavid**! It's **FriedFish**. Just to let you know we've got to the beacon just above Wotton. We'll wait here for you to arrive, rather than come right down into the town. We'd only have to climb back out again. See you soon I hope...

**Rrrinnng-rrrinnggg...**

Hello **Ffishie**. I've just arrived in Wotton and I've got your message. Bit of trouble finding the Cotswold Way but think I've found it all right  
Well we're waiting at the top of the hill as you walk towards Stroud. See you soon!  
Yes, see you soon.

Wait-wait. Wait-wait...

**Rrrinnng-rrrinnggg...**

Hello **Ffishie**...

Hello **ElizabethDavid**. Where are you?

Walking out of Wotton. Bit of trouble finding the path but I'm on it now.

Great. I'll just coming down into town. Meet you soon...

**Text-text, text-text.**

How shll I recgnis u?

**Txt-txt, txt-txt**

Brown hat red gaiters

(Thinks...Thank God it's not the other way round!)

**Txt-txt, txt-txt**

Black dog.

(I hit Wotton. No sign of **ED**. Oh shit.)

**Rrrinnng- rrrinnng**

Where are you?

Climbing the hill. Just past a distinctive looking white house with black timber framing.

Errr- I haven't noticed that

Have you passed through the graveyard?

No



By a river?

Let me look at my map... RIVER!!!??? Right. I think I can see where you are. Turn round and head back into town. I'll meet you in the middle of town. On the High Street. Where all the shops are. OK? See you in a bit.

OK. 'Bye

(Ohhhh Fuck!)

**FF** meanwhile heads down the High Street, through the churchyard, along the river, and has just turned round in despair to go back into town when a voice...

"Col'!!!"

I turn. Brown hat, red gaiters...PPhewwww!

It is *still* another 1/2 hour to **PP** and **NW** on the hill on the other side of town. We find them huddled, taking shelter part way down – half perished and about to let off distress signals...

Introductions are made, and we head back towards N Nibley, as planned, but minus Nel'.

### **Piss up in Wotton-under-Edge. 32, Part 3**

When you tell someone that you'll be walking from the direction of Stroud towards Wotton, and all they have to do is drive to Wotton and walk back towards Stroud and Hey presto! We shall surely meet, it is as well to check the road map first.

There are TWO roads from Stroud into Wotton – and they enter one at each end of Gloucester Street. So depending upon which road you come by, you stand a good chance of walking in the wrong direction once you start following the Cotswold Way signs...

Et viola.

Poor **ElizabethDavid**. I am so, so, sorry for putting you through what I did. And to show the world and **Nick** and **PP** and the **QCC** what a nightmare we had trying to hook up in a little town, population of a couple of thousand, I went back there on Monday of this week (3rd June) and snapped these..... (I hope!)

PS. Only in Wotton are the signposts so 17acrossedly challenging - but at least they brighten up the town

## Episode 33

### Nell

#### Wotton to Wortley

As we drive to Wooton, FF recounts the saga of Elizabeth David and comments – ‘I think I know the way now’. We park up near the Church and set off – only to be side tracked by said church. Inside was a MAGNIFICENT organ originally presented by the King George 1 to St Martins in the Field and played by Handel. There is an accompanying charming piece of doggerel. Some wonderful Victorian stained glass completes the visit and we emerge to an enthusiastic welcome from two anxious dogs.

And then we take a wrong turn.....detailed consultation of both guide book and OS map gradually solve the problem. We walk on – ah this is the direction ED took and here is the half timbered cottage – poor ED he walked quite a way in the wrong direction and we nearly made the same mistake.

We finally make the plateau and saunter past a small water tower. Suddenly two fit young men appear, all kitted out with walking equipment and those two stick walking systems, steam past us at an astounding rate of knots. FF and I look at each other – then at the wonderful view across the Severn Estuary – do they ever stop and stare – we consider and think possibly not.

FF admires nature’s gardening and we ruefully realize that we’ll never manage the lovely combinations she does. The Pheasants are calling so Sally remains firmly on her lead. On through the typical Cotswold beech woods and I go very quiet –

‘Um ‘ I start ‘Maybe we should think about going back now’.

‘Why’ asks FF

‘Well have you seen the contour lines.....’ I remark tentatively

We have already pulled up two very steep climbs and I’m feeling my age. Reluctantly FF agrees – We will be fresh, enthusiastic and prepared to tackle the challenge next time. Back at the car I spot the lovely Ann Bearpacker Alms Houses – On the end gable was a dedication and notice that the Alms Houses were for five elderly women who must be church attendees. Well, just for Women, that seems a bit unfair. We walk up to the second row and thank goodness find an inscription offering the houses to five elderly men. So no co-habitation then but I mull over the proximity of both rows.....plenty of scope then – I have visions of spry elderlies skipping from house to house. The Alms houses have been renovated and are still used for their original purpose – how good is that after nearly 100 years.

And so home – I’m looking forward to my new boots – my feet are sore.

### ST. MARY'S CHURCH

June 10, 2013

## Episode 34

FF

### Back from Wortley, then on to Alderley

Mrs Estaugh was one of those teachers you never forget. I was eight and she seemed like eighty – and in your year with Mrs Estaugh you learned joined up writing, the rest of your times tables up to 12, and lots of poetry by heart. “Oh to be in England now that April’s there... Earth has not anything to show more fair... Beautiful soup, so rich and green, waiting in a hot tureen!”

Mrs Estaugh also had her sayings. “Just because you’ve read it in the newspaper, or you’ve read it in a book, DOESN’T MAKE IT TRUE!” is one that has stuck with me...

Today we start with half a mile or so of unfinished business, and the steep climb out of Wortley up a gulley scoured to bare limestone, takes us to the spot from which we’d turned back last time.

It’s early summer, the best day we’ve had this year, and the gulley is overhung with harts’ tongues and red campion.

Here’s something I read in a book:

The June grass, amongst which I stood, was taller than I was, and I wept. I had never been so close to grass before. It towered above me and all around me, each blade tattooed with tiger-skins of sunlight. (Cider with Rosie, Laurie Lee.)

I could feel the truth in it. Could this be what Mrs Estaugh meant?

The second part of our walk takes us on to Alderley, a tiny hamlet comprising a handful of stone cottages, a church and a couple of buildings of some significance. I read what our guidebook (The Official National Trail Guide, published 2007, revised and updated 2010) has to say. Sounds interesting, so we decide to spend time in Alderley rather than press on.

Here is the guidebook:

The church that comes into view has a curious quirk: presumably unable to afford a vaulted ceiling, an elaborate fan vault has been painted on to create a *trompe-l’œil* effect. The Elizabethan mansion, now a school, seems almost overwhelmed by its massive chimneys, while the elegant eighteenth century house tucks everything away behind a parapet.

From the churchyard I photograph the Elizabethan mansion, which had once been Rose Hill School, (Baden Powell among its alumni.) But the school closed in 2009, and the buildings now stand empty.

In the church I sprawled along a pew and pointed my camera at the faux vaulting. I squinted hard and long. It was extremely well done. Indeed, much as we might screw our eyes up, (Nel' and I are both at it now,) it was impossible to believe that it wasn't real. But actually... it *wasn't* real. Not real *trompe-l'œil*, that is... It was real vaulting! The ceiling had undergone a make-over in 1992, and the guidebook hadn't caught up with this... (Oh, and by the way, the school next door was built 1859-1863 and is NEO-Elizabethan.)

I hear the voice of my old teacher. Just because you've read it in a book DOESN'T MAKE IT TRUE!

Mrs Estaugh, I salute you.

(If seeing *is* believing, and I'm not trying to trompe your eye, the pics below won't prove a thing.)

## Episode 35

### Nell

#### Alderley to the Somerset Monument

We leave the idyllic village of Alderley after repopulating it (giggling) with a rehab unit, affordable housing, a women's refuge. I think it's sour grapes on our part as we could never afford to live there. This was confirmed when FF checked the property prices - the cheapest labourer's cottage was £800,000.

It's a beautiful day and we are up high so it's cool and it's a bit of a stroll in the park along the contour lines. Lower Kilcott – not quite so chocolate box as Alderley - has us discussing a weather vane. I say it's a foxhound – FF says it's a Labrador.....well you make your minds up! FF has spotted a wonderful cottage garden and is rather envious.

We've made good time so we push on splodgering as usual about nothing much and arrive at the Somerset Monument. It is quite a sight – the designer has managed to cram just about every architectural genre in there with not much of an eye for the result. I look at the dates and announce with certainty that Sir Robert would have fought at Waterloo – and then have major doubts – but FF consults the guide book and tells me I'm right.....for once.

And so back – taking time to lean on a gate and contemplate the landscape in full summer regalia. The dogs are telling us that they are a bit tired, I am grateful for my new COMFORTABLE boots and there will be ransom flavoured cream cheese for tea.

18 June, 2013

## Episode 36

FF

### Somerset Monument to Horton. (Round 1)

The wipers were full on as we drove down the A38 and turned up into the wolds beyond Wotton.

D'you think this is a good idea, Nel?  
If this was Just a Minute Nel' would've been done for hesitation...

I mean. D'you think we should just turn back?  
That's further hesitation, Nel'!

Well the dogs are enjoying the ride...  
(Deviation?)

I reckon we press on, get to the Monument and reassess. The rainfall sequence on the Met Office site did say it would do this, about 1 o'clock, and then stay clear til 4. (It was 12-45, and the prospect of a soakin did not appeal)

Well at least it's getting the dead badger off your wheels, said Nel. (I had run over a rotting carcass a few days earlier – it had exploded with a pop, and sent foul smelling meat up into the wheel arch and onto the chassis... the stench was beyond the capabilities of the little scented cardboard tree as the fan wafted it round the car)

FF hesitates to laugh out loud and Nel' wins the round.

### Episode 36 (Round 2)

By the time we reached the monument the rain had more or less stopped, so we decided to go for it and Sally celebrated by making a dash into a rape field – high, acid yellow and VAST. Sally could not be seen, and Nel' looked slightly concerned as she stood at the corner of the field calling... (repetition?).

But she did come back, sooner than expected, and we pressed on.  
In the rough at the edge of the field a flower-photo-opportunity. Columbines. Or do you call them Aquilegias? A case of the Yew or Non-Yew of gardening. The common name refers to its dovelike appearance, the posher one to the flower's eagle talons. Grannies' Bonnets is always an option – though I doubt that even gets onto the Yew radar.

A bean field next. As far as eyes can see! Suspect the growers have no idea how many make five. But at least they're not Brussels' sprouts, said Nel', remembering the autumn wedding in Chipping Campden last year. (A definite repetition.)

And then a field smoking with freshly spread manure. Ahhh! This Cityboi now understands the aptness of the French word for it – le fumier – and gets his camera out. (Further deviation.)

FF wins this round with bonus points for camera work.

18 Jun 2013

### **Episode 36 (Final round)**

The high spot of the walk was not reaching Horton, mooching round the church of St James the Elder, peering over the wall of Horton Court (NT – but closed), nor spotting the lovely little Palladian style house on a hill.

No. The winners of this week's contest aaare... Caa-arl and ZONAAAAHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhh!.

## Episode 37

Nell

### Horton to Old Sodbury

Well it was about time we kick started the Cotswold Way walks again after the summer. We park at Horton – Oh bugger say FF I’ve left the camera at home...Ha Ha I tease – this time it’s not my boots. However he has his phone and makes a call to the unofficial Lakes Gathering to wish them bon appétite

The dogs are bouncing about enthusiastically - I’m so unfit I moan – buck up says FF.

The landscape as usual is impeccable – trees are gently taking on autumn colours and Sally is the same colour as the faded grasses. Apart from a steep drop out of Horton, it’s pretty easy walking until we get to Little Sodbury. We come onto a track with two houses either side, the right with some noisy pug dogs and as FF glances to his left he stops amazed – look he says – it’s a statue of Welsh Granny.....among a variety of garden ornaments of a humorous nature there is one of a redoubtable old lady knitting.....damn says FF and I’ve left my camera behind.

After a little road work we turn into an orchard alive with teenage pheasants – Sally is rigid with excitement. The birds have been feeding on windfalls and are so gorged they can’t move and stand there gazing stupidly at the dogs. A stiff climb brings us to the best preserved [Iron Age fort](#) on the Cotswold Way. We walk on to [Old Sodbury](#) where we get entangled with a wedding party outside the church – they all in their best and FF and I looking extremely scruffy. We ease out way out and drop down to the village.

‘Oh look’ I say ‘The Dog Inn’ - ‘Don’t you mean the doggin’ say FF and we both snigger and check out our next starting point before turning back.

We puff back up to the Church -‘you know it’s been a year to the day since we started this walk says’ FF ‘with a wedding as well – remember the Brussels sprouts...and the fascinators’ We contemplate our achievements.

And so we retrace our steps, past the farm next to the fort where the wedding reception is in full flow and the pheasant orchard where Sally did a beautiful set - ears pricked and one paw in the air. Past the noisy pugs – FF and I agree that we do not like the breed and finally with relief on my part to the car.

FF dealt bravely with the fluctuating phone signal and we chatted to the Lakes gathering. We did sort of suggest that they should have an official one but time will tell.

And yes I ached the next day!

October 8, 2013



## Episode 38

FF

### Old Sodbury to Tormarton

Yes, well. Last time I forgot the camera, and missed some brilliant opportunities. Welsh Granny as a garden ornament, adolescent pheasants struttin their stuff in an orchard, a churchyardful of fascinators and a pub called The Dog Inn (snigger.)

So here is a walk when what you snap is not entirely what you want...

We drove to Old Sodbury putting Gloucester, if not the world to right and feelin miffed about **THIS** article, swerved past The Dog about openin time, but we had better things to do, for The End Is Nigh! Just over 16 miles to go as The Way zigzags, (much less as crows fly.)

An uphill haul - nice pastures, nice views, nice sunshine. A lane with a couple of dry-stone wallers at work. We stop, admire, chat, and Nel' compliments them on their skills – the wall they were building, as a boundary for Dodington Park, at 6 ft high, broad based, tapering, and crowned with uprights, was as neat as any skirting board.

The way markers direct us onto the Estate, and we take a path across perfect parkland. Under foot a top quality Axminster, not a blade of shag pile out of place. The decorators are in, though, and we see their renovations. Recently planted substantial trees line the avenue that is the tradesmen's entrance. New copses alongside those set out by Capability Brown. An ornamental canal under restoration. Beyond we get a peasant's view of The Big House. Just a glimpse at the end of a manicured drive of clipped box, and mostly hidden by an arboretum. We see nothing of the lakes which our map tells us lie beyond.

The path climbs...through the pheasantry. And Sally takes off. Nel' takes off after Sally. And Bo's'n takes off after Nel'.

OMFG!!!!

All three were experiencing their own psychotic breakdown, as Setter went in search of birds, Elephant trumpeted and gave chase, and Lab followed on thinking to talk sense into both.

Hopeless.

But the room was furnished with **STAG**  
And in the far corner, a good two furlongs off, stood not some ornate credenza but a 3-times larger than life Landseer-like sculpture of a fully antlered STAG, the sight of which brought Setter to her senses, Elephant into I'm-happy-to-ruin-an-expensive-

OS-map-on-a-fuckin-good-larrapin'-when-I-get-hold-of-you-madam mode (but I didn't see that!), and Lab back to its owner.

WHEW!

We left the crazy world of Dodington Park, saw some encouraging sign posts, had to haul a reluctant setter over some dog-unfriendly stiles, and on our way back gathered some parasol mushrooms for tea. Nice.

That evening, Nel' did some homework and e-mailed me a link that showed that the **DODINGTON ESTATE** was being resurrected by the crumbs from our tables, and the fluff from our belly buttons. Ahhhh! Now it makes sense!

**Where there's muck there's brass, eh?**

October 22, 2013

## Episode 39

### Nell

#### Tormarton to Gorse Lane

The phone goes – it's FF – 'we have a window' he says – 'what' I mumble – 'Its fine tomorrow' he says slightly exasperated – 'oh you mean it should be good to walk – excellent – pick me up at half ten so we can make an early start'

We like the drive, it's an opportunity to splodger about nothing much and settle into each other's company. As we park outside Tormarton close to the M4 – I spy PHEASANTS my heart sinks and rightly so. Sally is quivering on the end of her lead and towing me along. Bo's'n of course is the proper well behaved gun dog....I wish – maybe perhaps - my next dog will be.....

We walk in silence, the noise from the motorway is excruciating – we wonder how the local residents survive the constant roar. It's pretty uninspiring landscape, large fields of industrially cultivated land. Standing alone at the edge of one field are two portaloes. Why? one asks.

We cross the A46 and walk towards the Junction 18 picnic site – 'Do you know what this is famous for?' FF asks – 'No' I say. 'Well this is where [RON DAVIES](#)' career in politics finally came to an end. Badger watching. Allegedly.' we glance to our right and there's a single man in his car with the engine running – we glance to our left at the really well trodden woodland...

We turn off a lane and walk past the dry stone walls of [DYRHAM PARK](#) – FF looks up and we see [CROWS MOBBING A SMALL HAWK](#). We stop to admire the [strip lynchets](#) – some of the best I've seen yet and I notice peeking above the skyline 21st century pylons. This land has been settled for millennia.

Dyrham does not disappoint - a pretty village with a stately pile at its centre. We stop, consult time and map – it's only 2.15 pm so we challenge each other.....we could manage to get to this road.....off we head. Half way there FF turns around and we have been joined by a teenage yellow Labrador ('retrievers are golden – labs are yellow' FF tells me crossly). The puppy refuses to GO HOME and gaily joins us, promptly falling in love with both Bo's'n and FF. Sally looks grumpily down her nose at her (jealousy is a terrible thing!)

We struggle up the Dyrham Wood hill and just before we emerge I notice a box on a pole. Nosy as ever I open it and inside is a waterproof box with a note book and pens. People have left their comments and of course we have to add ours. 'You know you are nellietheelphant' says FF – 'No I'm not' I reply. He's right of course and I've never noticed.

We reach our objective. We turn back past Sands Farm where an anxious owner is calling his Labrador. Back along Field Lane where we spot a very expensive wig at the side of the road. We have seen many odd pieces of clothing on our walks but this must be a first. Maybe it's a murder clue and we will be called to give evidence – we look at each other and say 'Naah' in unison. Back to noise of the M4 and a lively discussion about merits of pylons versus windmills (a thing we disagree about). I'm towed past pheasant heaven and gratefully we make it to the car.

I confess my feet are hurting a bit in spite of the good boots but then FF admits the same....so home to cups of tea and sustenance.

Here I hope are some photos

She crosses her fingers and hopes everything will post OK!

## Episode 40

FF

### Gorse Lane to Lansdowne

An early start. I check the gas (off), the lights (all off), and my pockets (mobile, hankie, dog poo bags). Street door (locked), then a long drive and a long walk.

One of those needs-must-be-done walks, a tack-in-the-102-miles-that-is-the-Cotswold-Way walks that will bring us in sight of the finishing post. Drudgery? Well, that's what we thought, as we zigzagged across the OS map, had to cross the full-on A46 four times and the A420 twice. Blimey. We could be here 'til midnight waitin for a gap in the traffic, (right...after this one... 1, 2, 3 GO!)

Eventually, after a couple of fields farmed on industrial scale, we're back in the familiar countryside we love. Rolling arable and dairy. Hills, steep valleys, and hey! What a turn up! In the middle of nowhere, a plant nursery specialising in unusual plants! Enticed, we spend a happy ¼ of an hour deciding what we'd like to buy. Salvia Phyllis's Fancy has caught my eye...

...but it's onwards and downwards until we have to cross a brook (marked ford on the map) with no bridge or stepping stones. Nel' grasps a branch and straddles the water like Tarzan. Ffyshie, more like Jane, clutches a dangling vine, falls in, gets a bootful and needs rescuing. Sod this for a game of soldiers.

The hill ahead looks daunting, but must be done. A dead person has thoughtfully bequeathed a bench at the top of the rise, and we flop to regain breath. Only another ½ mile or so to our objective – the flat, open space that on 5th July 1643 was the site of the battle of Lansdown. The information boards that tell a sorry tale. But first we have to pass a living wall of beef and burgers with testicles the size of rugby balls. Done without incident. Whew!

The Grenville Monument, today's target, does not provide the hoped for seat for lunch, so we traipse back to the bench at the top of the rise for a picnic. Nel' has made chicken, and egg sandwiches. Now which one first? Over lunch Ffyshie reveals his plan to call in at the nursery on the way back for a Phyllis's fancy. Nel' is doubtful, FF, with a headful of romantic ideas of 19th century plant collectors who brought back specimens from China and S America was scornful.

But shortly after the re-crossing of the brook he felt a sudden emptiness in his pocket.

(- I've lost my wallet.

- When did you last have it?

- I'm not sure. I remember checking to see how much money I had.

- When was that?

- I don't know.)

So, not a penny between us, Phyllis had to stay there, and the trudge back was full of worrying about bank cards, applying for new bus pass etc. Bah!

It was almost dark when we reached the car. Dog tired, but we couldn't help feeling just a bit proud of our achievement...An hour's drive and we're home...Lights off. Gas off. Hankie and mobile in pocket. And wallet. There. On the table.

Now for one of the Post Scripts to Tuesday's walk.

Before we drove to Weston, Nel and I went and found the specialist plant nursery that was set deep in a valley about 1/2 a mile down a steep muddy track, with the intention of treating ourselves to one of the Phyllis's Fancies that I'd hankered over. But when we got there all the plants had all been taken off sale - their flowering period had ended with the first frost and the growers had taken secateurs to them.

Help yourselves said the nursery woman. You can have what you want. Take two. Look. These are nice ones, here. I have a whole load of new cuttings that I'm growing on for next year, and if *you* don't have them they'll end up on the compost heap, and I hate to see that happen.

Well, we didn't need twice telling, and I came away with a couple of gift plants, (an heir and a spare, like.) So as EPT, [I OFFER THE SPARE.](#)

November 18, 2013

## Episode 41

### Nell

#### Lansdown to Weston

The journey from Gloucester had all the hallmarks of a 1930's surreal film - something with sets designed by Picasso or Dali. As we left there was a gentleman walking down the street with a dining chair on his head - peering through the back support like an ineffective Ned Kelly. Across the Cotswold plateau a kestrel was caught by a rogue gust of wind and did a victory roll much to its surprise and against all flight dynamics. Later I spotted a well dressed woman standing up to her knees in scrub in the middle of nowhere just staring.....

Walking started well - it was a beautiful day and as we emerged from woodland the Severn Vale was laid out before us. It was pretty easy but I had enough sense to keep my mouth shut. Onwards and a sharp turn left to see a beautiful Georgian house nestled in the valley - 'Wouldn't mind that gaff' I remark and we both went silent.

We skirt the golf course a much friendlier place than Stinchcombe and notice well worked stone in the dry wall - 'I think that must be Roman' says FF - 'Maybe' I remark 'but it might be Georgian leftovers' we walk on pondering. Through a gate with a faded picture of dead dogs and sheep and threatening notices - both dogs are firmly on the lead.

'We should be walking through the last iron age fort on the Cotswolds' says FF and we glance to our right and see the earthworks and to our left tumuli and enclosures....We get to the view point at Prospect Hill and my heart sinks - I remember the map and realise it's all down hill to Weston...very down hill - I still can't make up my mind if down hill being towed by an enthusiastic setter is better than uphill and panting.

We make it to Weston and sit in the playing fields eating lunch (OK if you really want to know Ham and Mustard and Tuna Mayonnaise) gazing at the outskirts of Bath. The dogs are offered a pair of apple cores - scoffed by Bo's'n, rejected by Sally.

And so back - noticing as usual things we missed before - a touching memorial to Sarah Louise Gray (we both have gruesome and sordid ideas about that one). The farm land is worked by an ecologically minded proprietor who according to the sign is also a poet....and attached to a gate is a verse encouraging us not to disturb the pheasants - it's truly awful - FF says 'He's a bit of a wag with the doggerel' and we get a bit silly for a few minutes.

And so back to the car checking out the iron age fort - it's quite a good one and the masonry which was Roman. The light is fading and it's been a long walk - 'That' says FF authoritatively 'was our last Country Walk - It's urban from now on!'

So we are nearly there.....

Oh and Sarah Louise Gray died of an undiagnosed heart complaint while riding her beloved horse in 1995.....

20 November, 2013



## Episode 42

Nell & FF

### Weston into Bath

#### SPOILER AHEAD

Hope people read Nell's piece yesterday, because here is what we did on Tuesday.

#### THE COTSWOLD WAY

29-9-2012 - 19-11-2013

#### THE END

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**The Cotswold Way** is a long distance walking Trail that runs between the market town of Chipping Campden in the north and the city of Bath in the south.

The Trail is 102 miles (164 km) long, and runs for most of its length on the Cotswold escarpment. It passes through many picturesque villages and close to a significant number of historic sites, for example the Roman heritage at Bath, the Neolithic burial chamber at Belas Knap, Sudeley Castle near Winchcombe, Hailes Abbey and many beautiful churches and historic houses.

The Cotswold Way has existed as a promoted long distance walk for over 30 years. Following many years of lobbying by the Ramblers Association and others, its special qualities have been recognised and in 1998 the government approved its development as a National Trail. The Cotswold Way was formally launched as a National Trail in May 2007. This designation is a very special one and there are only a few other Trails in England with this special grading. Information about the others can be found on the main National Trail web site <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold/index.asp?PageId=1>