

WALKING THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

In the summer of 2018, Dr Frances Moore, our Hon. Training Adviser, told us that her 21 year-old grandson, Piaras, was proposing to do a 1000 mile sponsored walk during the long summer university vacation. The funds raised were to be for TWC's support of the CII Course organised by ADAPT.

Piaras's entry on his *My Donate* page read :

On the 9th July, I am setting out on a 1000 mile walk down the Ireland's west coast in aid of the Asia-Pacific disabled children's charity, ADAPT. I hope to be joined along the way by one or two friends but much of it will be a solo adventure.

Together with my tent and robust pair of boots, I shall be trekking down Ireland's 'Wild Atlantic Way', from Malin Head to Mizen Head, north to south. What has motivated me to get off the sofa and out from in front of the World Cup is the inspiring work that ADAPT do, which comes partly through their funding from The Woman's Council (TWC).

Piaras achieved his goal, and here is his account.

Walk Report

Now, I should probably begin by explaining exactly why I chose to walk 1000 miles for ADAPT. There were two reasons for this. The first was that it sounded suitably dramatic. Dramatic enough to get people to open their wallets for a charity that almost none had heard of beforehand and was not, for the majority, operating anywhere near their country.

The second, more fundamental reason, was that I didn't actually think 1000 miles was a very long way before I started. The only high-profile person I knew beforehand to have walked that distance for charity was Sir Ian Botham. As a 21-year-old, I saw 'Beefy' as a slightly overweight middle-aged man, who trundles along on Sky Cricket Commentary telling Jimmy Anderson to bowl fuller and reminiscing about how good Viv Richards was. Naturally, being youthful, I forgot that in the 80's he was a bit fitter than he is now. Thus, I took my first steps on what I thought would be a pleasant wee stroll, expecting a few quick weeks of elongated dog walks, full Irish Breakfasts and copious pints of Guinness. I quite literally expected it to be a walk in the park.

Within the first 10 miles, I had been entirely disabused of this notion. I have discovered since the walk, when I walk the dogs I only walk about 4 miles maximum, at a very leisurely pace. After walking 10 miles south from Ireland's most northerly point, Malin Head, down hard roads at a good pace, I had no fewer than 5 blisters. I had been brought down to earth at with a palpable thud.

Now while Day 1 was a little bit shocking, partly due to the fresh blisters, partly due to the inability to find an open pub, and Day 2 was painful, Day 3 was the worst. Day 3's are always the worst. Your body is now screaming and you've had time to fully appreciate exactly what you've undertaken and what that means for your wellbeing. During the walk there were quite a lot of 'Day 3s' but none quite compared the original Day 3. On Days 1 and 2, we'd covered 30 miles total, having started in the evening on day 1. I was already blistered and broken, and had spent the last two nights in a tent, one in a cattle field, one on a beach. The day had begun with a breakfast of tinned baked beans cooked in the can in water in a mess tin, for which I lauded myself as a culinary genius. Things went downhill very quickly from there. By the end of the day, having walked 22 miles, I had to crawl into Letterkenny, where we had booked a hostel. To add to the pain, England then proceeded to get knocked out of the World Cup that evening. Close of play on Day 3 was the low point.

However, enough of the pain stories. Although the blisters continued for the next 3 weeks, they fade in your memory next to the beauty of Ireland's west coastline and the generosity of its people. People let us stay in their houses, made us breakfasts and generally entertained us. However, there was one amusing if embarrassing moment when this generosity was tested. To my exceptionally great surprise, in the 6 weeks before my arrival, Ireland had had a drought. Honestly, I would have thought hell would freeze before that happened. But it had happened, hosepipe bans and all, probably the first in Irish history. Now, many of the houses on Ireland's west coast only use rain water tanks. While staying in a house in Donegal, my friend Jack, who accompanied me for the first two weeks, accidentally left a tap on all night and proceeded to empty the entire house of water. This caused something of an incident. Thankfully, the gods intervened and quickly sent the first storm in over a month – which we then had to walk 35 miles through in an act of penitence for our foolishness, all the while the tanks were being refilled. Crisis averted.

Anyway, over the 47 days of the walk, there were countless moments of kindness from everyone. From free meals and free pints to free beds, sometimes all at once. There were enough people who showed exceptional kindness to fill an hour of thank you's but I really must thank my little brother who accompanied me for three weeks, kept me company walking for much of that time and made some really good food. Also, my parents who came out for the last week and helped me get across the line.

Finally, a massive thank you to everyone who has donated. I believe donations on the page are currently at over £10000, which is amazing. I'm exceptionally proud to have been a part of something that will change the lives of many of the most vulnerable children on the planet for the better.

I also now appreciate how far a mile is !

