

# The Walk Across England

By Mark Lorenzoni

## Introduction:

Each Sunday, I'll take you over one single day of our thirteen day Coast to Coast walk across England. Cynthia and I averaged 15 miles/day throughout our 196 mile journey and my hope is that **you'll locally walk "along with us" by covering those 15 miles, not in a single day but, instead, throughout your own week, and not in England but, right here, on the beautiful paths and gravel roads of our own community.** In addition to giving you a tour of the beautiful British countryside paths we covered on foot, I'll also provide you with some walking tip lessons and offer suggestions for places to cover your personal weekly mileage right here on local soil. So, lace up your walking shoes and let's get started!

## Day #1

### St. Bees to Ennerdale Bridge

After a long but relaxing flight from Dulles to Heathrow and a much shorter one to Manchester, we hopped on a train to take us north to the tiny coastal village of St. Bees and the start of our long awaited walk across England. As our train sped along, hugging the lush green coastline of the Irish Sea, Cynthia and I felt almost giddy with excitement, as we couldn't wait to start this legendary hike. The anticipation was almost too much to bear, for we had been making preparations for almost a year but had been dreaming of the walk for twenty years. Our dear friend Linda Scandore had shared her walk adventure with us for the first time, two decades ago, after having completed the Coast to Coast ("C2C") herself. From the moment Linda told us that there was a path across England that traverses three National Parks and countless villages, she had us hooked. And now, here we were on the eve of the start of our long anticipated journey across Britain.

St. Bees turned out to be just how we had pictured and it was easy to see why it was the perfect starting point for a walk that thousands of folks come from all over the world to hike each year. An small, old picturesque village complete with a stunning 15th century Priory, a 17th century "public school" (private to us) with its very own quadrangle, lush green meadows dotted with brown cows, a tiny railway station and, of course, a winding path to the beach head that marked the start of the path across England.

Our beautiful and historic bed and breakfast, The Manor Inn, clung to the edge of one of the village's narrow cobblestone streets, where we had wonderful views of the ocean from our second floor window seat. After a slow walk around the village, a delicious pub meal of scampi and chips (fries) and a good night's sleep, we awoke rested and feeling like Christmas morning, as we could hardly wait to start our much anticipated journey. We left our main luggage at the inn for our sherpa service to transport to our next destination, laced up our boots and headed across the quiet early morning village to the meadow path that led to the sea and the start of our adventure.

Tradition says that you must start the hike by dipping one booted foot into the Irish Sea at the same time you pick up a stone from the pebbly beach and place it in your pocket. Your personal hand picked stone, which, like all of the others on this rocky beach, had been smoothed and rounded by the pounding waves of the Irish Sea, was to be with you for the entire journey and then thrown into the North Sea, upon reaching the other side of the country. We excitedly performed this ritual as we couldn't wait to get started.

And so, with our walking sticks in our hands and daypacks on our backs, we eagerly climbed up a steep and narrow, switch backed path to the top of the cliffs overlooking the ocean. Within 10 minutes the wide pebbly beach, we had just been standing on, now looked like a sliver of sand far below us and the quaint ancient village of St. Bees, was now far off in the distance, well behind us. Our journey had begun!

The first several miles took us due north along the edge of the cliffs and over lush green pastures filled with cows, separated by countless wooden turnstiles, that we carefully climbed over, and all along the way we were treated to endless stunning views of the sunlit Irish Sea that endlessly stretched to our left. We passed the white St. Bee's lighthouse, which stood out in stark contrast to the blue skies and green fields.

As we headed eastward, away from the ocean, following a moss-covered wooden Coast to Coast sign, our path took us into the heart of the county of Cumbria and the rolling foothills that would eventually bring us to the Lake District, our first national park. With temperatures now in the low sixties, skies a deep blue and the sun in our face, we comfortably snaked our way through countless dairy farms, tiny Cumbrian villages and along narrow dirt roads and paths lined by tall ancient hedgerows.

A group of fast moving Australians came up behind us around midday and, after hiking together for a few miles along lush green river lined fells, we came upon a cricket pitch complete with a spectator picnic area. This turned out to be the perfect place to have lunch, which had been thoughtfully packed by the kind folks back at our B&B earlier that morning. Our outgoing Australian friends entertained us throughout the meal with all kinds of tales from their previous hikes around the world but they seemed more used to a longer lunch break, so, anxious to get going again, we parted ways and headed back out on the path.

With our bodies nourished, we were ready to cover the final six miles of our first day's fifteen mile journey. And it's a good thing we had fueled up because that last section turned out to be the hilliest of the day. It was to be a sneak preview of the mountainous miles that lay ahead in the coming days of the Lake District.

As we approached the steepest hill of the day, we saw a line of walkers way up ahead of us in the distance following a long stone wall that lined the ascent from its base to the very top. The walkers were almost to the peak of the hill when we naively decided to make the same climb and follow them. In doing so we had violated one of the cardinal rules of the walk, which Linda and all of the guide books had warned us against: never follow the walkers ahead of you! Despite the warnings and instead of trusting our reliable compass and maps, we ignored the rule and strayed from the path and took off after them. Our self-inflicted rookie mistake would be the biggest detour of the entire walk, as we added an extra two meandering miles to our day, figuring out how to find our way back to the correct path, which actually hugged the base of the giant hill and would have avoided us not only the extra distance but also the steep climb on our already tired legs.

Coincidentally, our errant detour turned out to be a blessing, for as we crested the peak of that steep hill we paused to take a rest. Looking out to the east we could see the all the way back to the sea in the far off distance and the thirteen miles, dotted with beautiful farms and villages, we had just covered. Then turning around and looking the other way, we could see the magnificent mountains of the Lake District that lay ahead to the west. It was then that we fully understood why the Coast to Coast is called a “horizon hike”, where you are constantly seeing way out ahead of you, unlike the more famous and much longer American Appalachian Trail, which is described as more of a “canopy” walk. Cynthia and I agreed that we had learned, first hand, a valuable lesson but, at the same time, were happy we had done so, as our gaff had led us to this stunning view of the beautiful Cumbria landscape!

Shortly after finding our way back to the C2C path and with a little less than a mile to go, we left the rolling grass farm paths and began following a winding and narrow paved road, lined with tall hedgerows, which took us over several stone bridges that led us right into the tiny river village of Ennerdale Bridge and our second bed and breakfast, where our bags and a hot shower awaited us!

With a cute old 17th century low-beamed ceiling pub called The Fox and Hounds just a few hundreds yards down the lane and an equally old hotel appropriately named The Shepherds Inn right next door, we had a wonderful close-by and stress-free drinks and dinner experience. Just the ticket after a long but beautiful first day of our walk. Now to get some well earned sleep (one of the key foundations to any long distance hike) before our first miles into the Lake District.

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**Your walking TIP for the week:** Nose over toes! As you walk, try to never see your feet hit the ground in front of you. Instead, shorten your stride length by bringing your footfall under your frame. Why? Because the longer the stride the greater the chance of you striking the ground with your heel. This sends most of the shock up to your ankles, knees and hips. Shorter stride lengths affords you the luxury of hitting your arch first, which acts as a natural shock absorber. Plus, in addition to saving your joints, you’ll actually walk faster!

**Local Hidden Walking Gem venue of the week:** Historic Green Springs is the perfect local area for a walk that mirrors some of the Cumbrian scenery of the first day of Cynthia and my C2C hike. This magnificent 14,000 acre historic district lies just over the Louisa County line and features close to twenty miles of gravel roads that meander past twenty pre-Civil War farms along this beautiful enclave. Only 15 minutes from the east end of Cville. Directions: Take 64 east to Route 15 at Zions Cross Road. Then take 15 north for about two miles and look for Green Springs Road on your right. Text me for a detailed map and public parking information (962-1694).

*Mark Lorenzoni and his wife Cynthia have been running since the early seventies but they also very much enjoy walking together, as they start many of their mornings with a brisk walk around the western part of beautiful county.*