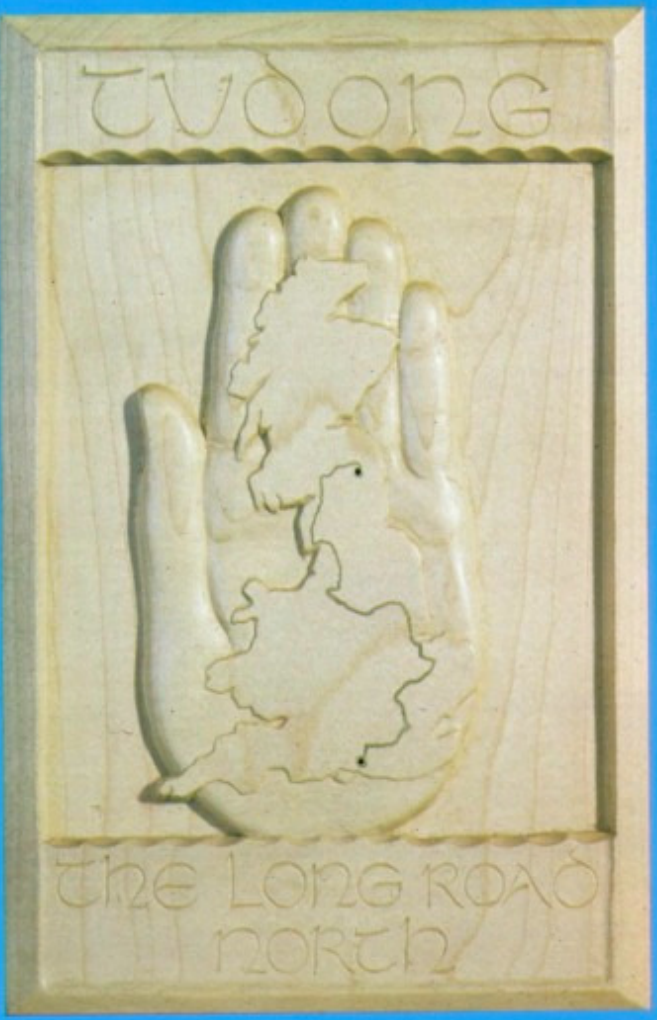
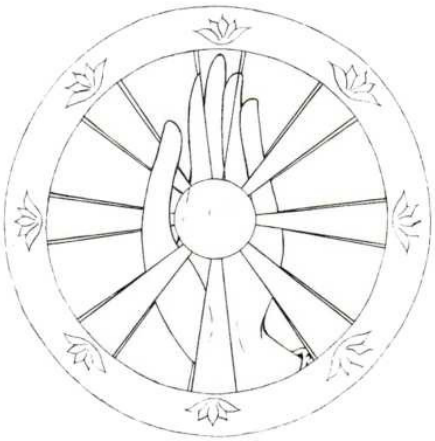


Bhikkhu Amaro

TUDONG

THE LONG ROAD NORTH

TUDONG



THE LONG ROAD NORTH

Bhikkhu Amaro

For my parents

Chithurst Forest Monastery
Petersfield
Hants.
GU31 5EU

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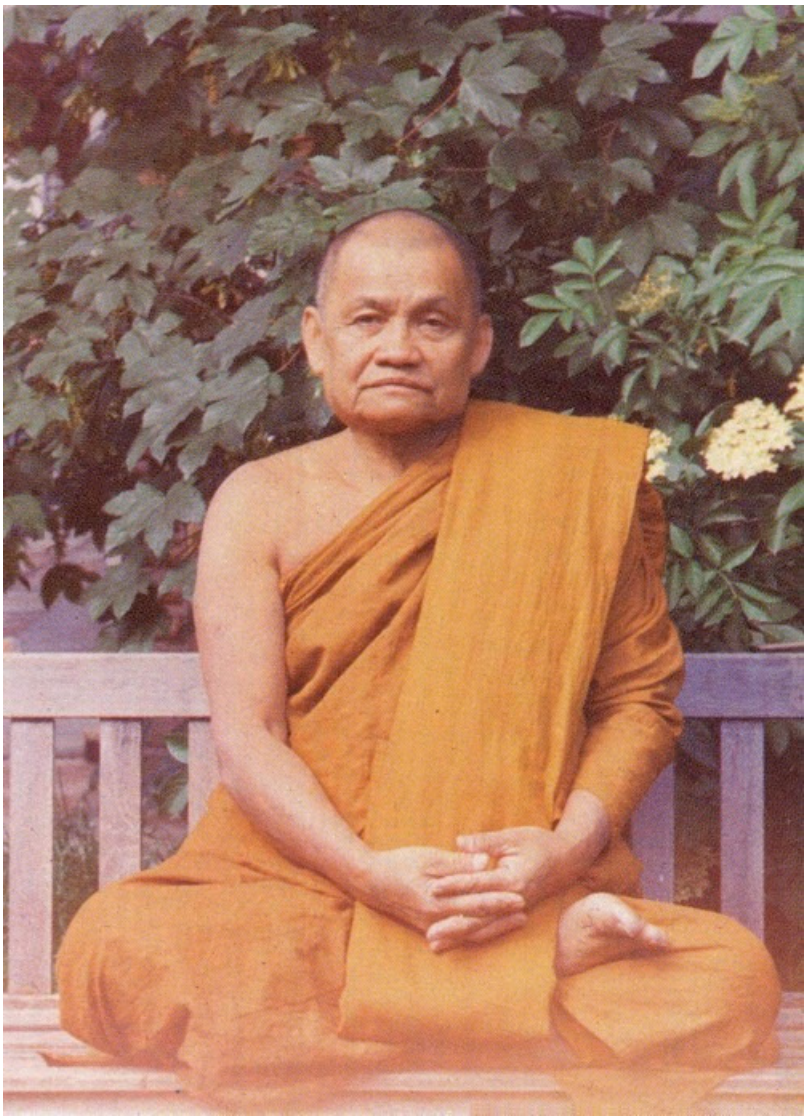
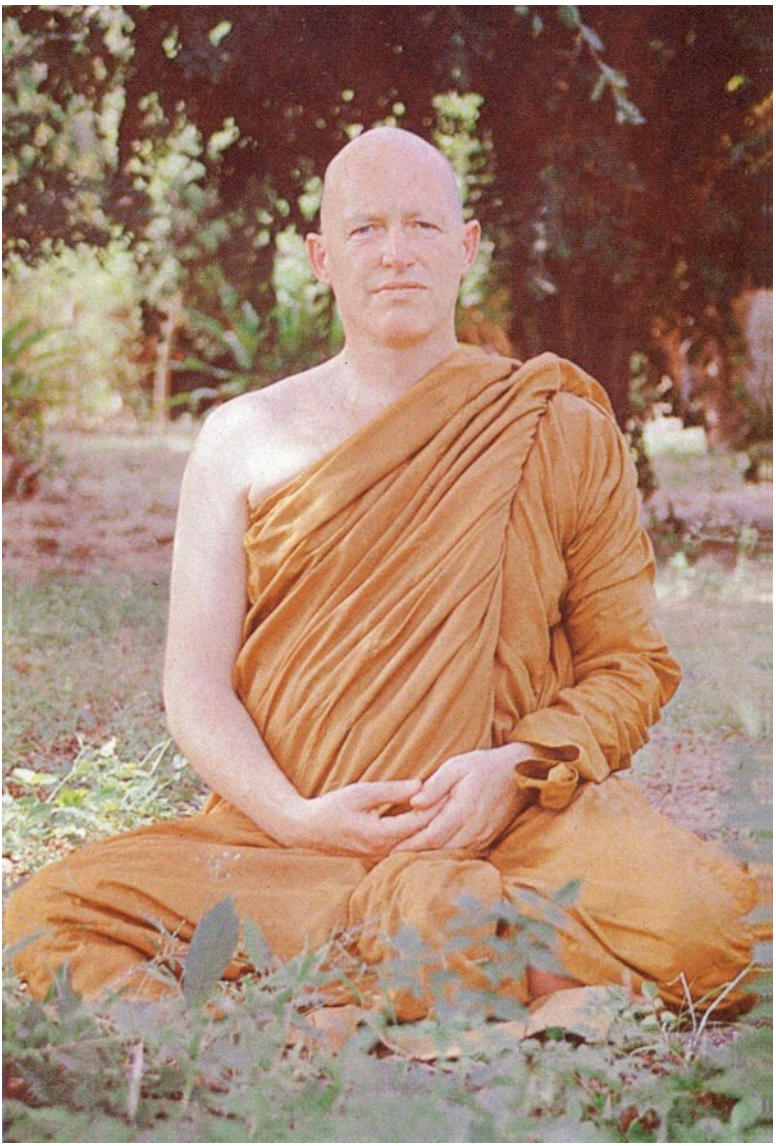


The Ven. Ajahn Chah

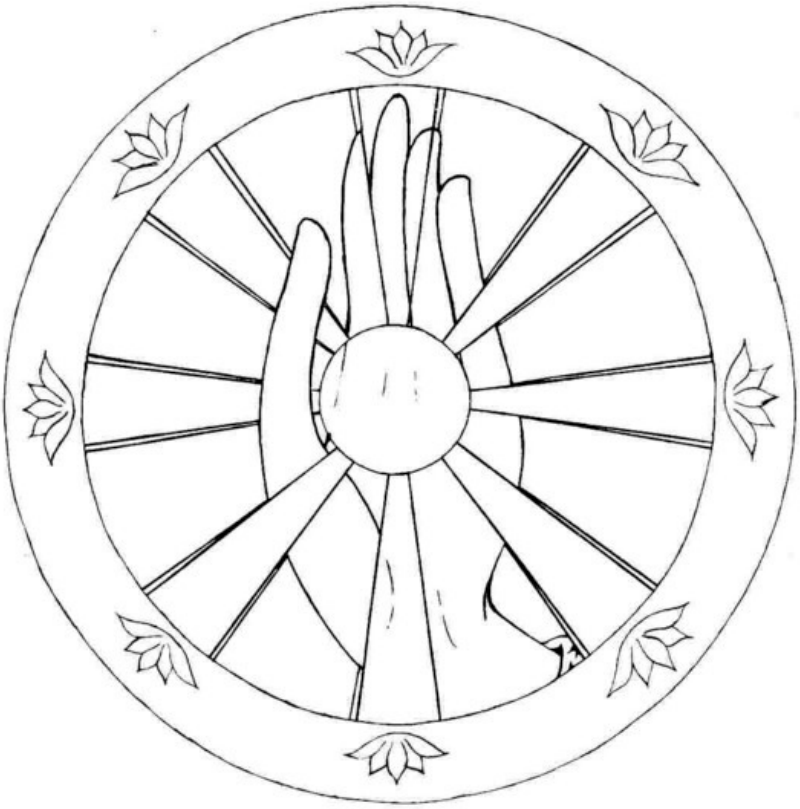


The Ven. Ajahn Sumedho

Nick Scott and Ven. Amaro

If you can find a trustworthy
companion
With whom to walk, both virtuous
and steadfast,
Then walk with him, content and
mindfully,
Overcoming any threat of danger.

Majjhima Nikāya 128.7



Introduction

'Tudong' is a Thai derivative of the Pali word 'dhutanga' translating literally as 'means of shaking off'; it is used to refer to the austere or ascetic practices allowed by the Buddha for his disciples. These practices are thirteen in number and include, for example: eating only one meal a day, eating all your food together in your alms-bowl, never lying down, only wearing robes made from scraps of thrown-away cloth, taking the shade of a tree as your only shelter. These practices are seen as a 'means of shaking off' since austerity of lifestyle, when rightly applied, can be greatly conducive to the development of wisdom and insight – that is, the shaking off of one's delusions.

The word 'tudong' is also used to refer to those monks who adhere closely to the monastic discipline and whose practice of the Buddha's teachings is based on meditation and the cultivation of these 'dhutangas'. Both the monastic discipline and the additional constraints of the dhutanga practices are tools used to help contain the mind. This containment is achieved as they prevent or make clear the tendencies of the mind to 'flow out'; that is, absorb into the likes and dislikes which accompany the sensory world. With the habitual attachment to all that is liked or disliked thus constrained, a harmonious, simple and joyous life led with full awareness is made possible. The monastic discipline, the vinaya, is intricate and extensive but, in essence, it offers precepts to control all possible avenues of 'outflow'; in its details it is extremely wide ranging, however, the following principles provide a reasonable summary:

Complete harmlessness towards any living being – plant, animal or human.

Refraining from the use of any form of intoxicant.

Complete chastity – to refrain from all sexual activity and from any physical contact with members of the opposite sex.

Complete poverty – one may not possess, accept or handle money.

Mendicancy – one may not store or beg for food but must live on what is freely offered, into the hands or alms-bowl, between dawn and noon of that day. No food is eaten after noon.

One is prohibited from teaching others unless specifically requested to do so.

The final use of the word 'tudong' is to describe the journeying undertaken for weeks, months or even years by such 'tudong' monks. Usually dwelling in forests, caves or burning grounds (but always within reach of a village as an alms-resort), tudong monks use the hardships and quietude of a life in the wilds as tools for both deepening their understanding and to make the teachings available to the public at large. Most of the great meditation masters in Thailand spent many years on tudong, and the fruits which this life-style can bear are plain to see in the wisdom, compassion and power of their teaching.

The Ven. Ajahn Chah, shortly after his higher ordination, decided to take on the life of a tudong bhikkhu. For nearly twenty years he wandered through Thailand and Laos, visiting various teachers and practising on his own. Eventually he was invited to stay in a forest near the village of his birth and, over the years, the monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong grew up around him. People would come both to ask for his advice about their problems, and to train under him as monks and nuns. In the mid-sixties Ven. Sumedho, then a newly-ordained bhikkhu, paid a visit to the Monastery; he was in search of a good teacher and proper training in the monastic discipline. He decided to stay and the following ten years were spent, living under Ajahn Chah's guidance, at various forest monasteries in Thailand.

As time went by other westerners arrived and in 1975 a branch monastery for the western Sangha (called Wat Pah Nanachat), was

set up with Ajahn Sumedho at its head. This was one among over forty monasteries under the direction of Ajahn Chah but was unique in Thailand in being populated almost entirely by foreigners. In 1977 Ven. Ajahn Chah and Ven. Ajahn Sumedho were invited to visit London by the English Sangha Trust: an organization set up some twenty years before to aid the establishment of a native Sangha in this country. The Trust was in possession of a small house in the north of London and, on his return to Thailand, Ven. Ajahn Chah invited Ven. Sumedho to remain there and make the Buddha's teachings available to those who were interested. The flexibility of the tradition permitted the wearing of additional clothing in cold weather and adaptation of minor customs to a western environment; Ven. Sumedho, assisted by other monks who had come to join him, taught meditation every morning and evening. Retreats were also held at the Buddhist Centre at Oaken Holt, Oxford, and talks were given to groups throughout Britain.

It soon became apparent that a vihāra in central London was not suitable for training forest monks, and fortuitously, in the summer of 1978, a benefactor offered 108 acres of forest land, known as Hammer Wood, in a beautiful region of West Sussex. However, it was still necessary for the Trust to find a suitable residence for the Sangha, so that when Chithurst House, less than half a mile away from the forest, came up for sale in 1979, with its extensive outbuildings and 22 acres of land, the Trust sold the Hampstead Vihāra and purchased immediately. In this venture it was assisted by the Ārāma Fund, established in 1974 for this very type of purpose; another benefactor purchased a small cottage adjacent to Hammer Wood as a residence for nuns. In 1981 planning consent was given for the houses and forest to be used as a monastery, and an ordination precinct (sīma) was established. On the 21st of June 1981, the first branch monastery, the Harnharn Vihāra, was opened in Northumberland; the Sangha residing there being supported by a group known as Magga Bhāvaka.

Life at these monasteries is similar to that at all the others under Ajahn Chah's direction – promoting a simple way of living with a

strong moral code of conduct in a natural setting. In this lifestyle the community abides contemplating body and mind, and developing inner harmony through mindfulness. So, the Sangha acts as a source of guidance and reflection for lay people by its living presence as well as by its verbal teachings.

It was in early 1978, whilst I was wandering in South-East Asia, that I stumbled upon Wat Pah Nanachat and it was this simplicity and purity of the bhikkhu's life-style that struck me more than anything else. I had finished school and university and had no doubts about the limits of the intellect in encompassing and expressing the truths of our existence. Although it was not immediately apparent I was hungry for Truth and was also rapidly becoming weary of the intoxication which was required to blot out this hunger, even for a while. One paradisical beach after another (through Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand), served only to accentuate the inability of environment alone to liberate. The ripening of world-weariness and my arrival at the monastery seemed to synchronize perfectly and so, once there, I never left. The doors of deathlessness, of liberating wisdom, were open – there was no need to deliberate, so I walked in.

A few months after my ordination as a bhikkhu in 1979 my father suffered a severe heart-attack and consequently I returned to England. I stayed with my family for the first few weeks, until my father had recovered, and then went to join the community at Chithurst. The next few years, as a junior bhikkhu, found me mostly in the rôle of working on the house, which needed extensive repairs, and generally keeping in the background. A bhikkhu is not expected to teach or give guidance until he reaches 'majority', at the end of five years' monastic training; even then the duties he is given are decided upon at the discretion of the abbot. Usually, after this period, giving public talks, leading retreats and increased responsibilities within the monastery accrue to one more and more.

During these early years at Chithurst there was much work to be done and not a lot of personal space: one was simply expected to surrender to the needs of the community and no thought could seriously be given to personal ventures. Talk of going on tudong in

Thailand and the possibilities of it in England would occasionally crop up – at this time, however, all such suggestions and inclinations were given short shrift by the Ajahn. This was not the time for restless bhikkhus to wander off, fulfilling some personal ambition.

Things changed though and after the first few years, even the Ajahn would bring the subject up occasionally.

"It would be nice to go on tudong, wouldn't it? You could probably walk all the way to Harnham – I'd like to myself, before this body gets too old."

There were now more people, there was more time and the major work on the house had been completed. The idea of tudong in Britain was thus no longer just an overflow of fantasy and restlessness – it was now a genuine possibility, appropriate to both the Sangha and the Buddhist lay-community alike.

In the spring of 1982 we received a postcard from Ven. Viradhammo, then resident at Harnham Vihāra. It was posted from Lindisfarne, where he had arrived at the end of a brief tudong walk. Accompanied by a lay-supporter (Nick Scott), he had walked and climbed over fell and moor, sleeping in lambing sheds and receiving food in the homes of various of the layman's friends en route. It was a small but significant beginning – you can keep warm enough, you can sleep rough, you can get fed. When Ajahn Sumedho subsequently invited Ven. Sucitto to spend the Vassa at Golden Square, near Honiton in Devon, he consented to his returning on foot to Chithurst in October. This he did, accompanied by one of the postulants (Tony Way), and arrived safe and sound after a walk of thirteen days.*

Tudong in Britain had begun.

The idea of requesting permission to walk to Harnham had arisen quite often in my mind. I was reaching the requisite monastic age of five years, I had been at Chithurst a long time and besides, I had been working really hard . . . I resisted the impetus to follow such thoughts when they first arose; however, the right moment for them

**An account of this journey appears in 'The Middle Way', May '83 – Vol. 58, No. 1, under the title of 'Walking Dhutanga in Britain'.*

eventually arrived: Ven. Viradhammo and Ven. Sucitto were both at Chithurst for the Kathina in 1982 and I found myself inquiring eagerly about their walks. Before I knew it the truth was out.

"Actually I, er, I was thinking of asking the Ajahn if I could walk to Harnham." (Blush.)

"Sure – great idea. Why don't you go ask him?"

Riding this wave of enthusiasm, at the first opportunity, I found my feet carrying me to the Ajahn's room. After chatting for a while the conversation reached a pause . . .

"Do you think a walk from here to Harnharn would be a good idea, Tan Ajahn?"

"Yes – that would be great. A very good thing."

"Could I volunteer my services?"

He smiled a warm but non-committal smile, and there was silence.

After a while he spoke. "Yes, that would be very good."

Still not quite sure if there was approval or if I had over-stepped the mark, I let things be. As it turned out, that moment was the last volitional act on my part needed for the walk to come about.

It was not long before word of the journey got around the monastery and soon Ven. Sucitto asked me for an outline of the route for the newsletter. I knew that there were a number of standing invitations from various groups around the country; I looked at the map and took a deep breath – it was certainly not the straightest line between Sussex and Northumberland. I looked at the map, the distribution of the towns and at first the thought came, "Well, I suppose I will just have to leave a few people out." I looked at the map; looked around the room.

"Wait a minute – does one *have* to walk in a straight line? Why not include everyone . . . what else is there to do?"

This thought seemed to be of the grander heart, to resonate Brahmā Sahampati's plea, and so I decided to follow it. I gave Ven. Sucitto my list: Chithurst; Farnham; London; St. Albans; Bedford; Swaffham; Doncaster; Manchester; Ulverston; Hexham; Harnham. This he included in the Chithurst newsletter, together with my name

and the invitation to contact me should anyone be interested in helping on the way. The principle of dāna, of generosity, is the lifeblood of the Sangha – we cannot go where we are not invited and are totally dependent on alms for our support. Thus I knew that the walk could only happen if there were enough people in England willing to help and wishing to have the Sangha's company. If there was not enough support the journey could not succeed; to undertake such a venture had to be an act of faith – I simply had to trust that the value of the Sangha to society would attract all that was needed to keep going.

Over the months, between November 1982 and when we set out the following May, a number of offers of assistance were made to me. Nick Scott, who had accompanied Ven. Viradhammo on his walk, wrote as soon as he heard the news – offering to come with me if it was convenient and appropriate. Invitations to stay for a night, have a meal, a cup of tea; Tilford, Hitchin, Wisbech, Yorkshire, Cumbria; the map began to fill up. At the time we came to leave there were about two dozen calls on our list; by the end, however, we had met up with, or visited, over fifty sets of people or Buddhist groups.

Following Ven. Viradhammo's initial walk someone had donated a fine set of hiking equipment to Harnham. It was offered for my use but at first I was loath to accept it. My ascetic and traditionalist feelings were strong and I wanted to see if it could be done with the basic and conventional bhikkhu gear: alms-bowl; sandals; three robes, and an absolute minimum besides. Once again I decided to resist the impetus of all this; better, I reflected, to wait and see how things turned out. Nick came on a visit that winter, bringing all of the equipment with him. We discussed our plans and at first he thought that I was completely crazy.

"No boots, no sleeping-bag, no pack?!?"

He explained how essential all these were and was quite concerned about my views. The next day, however, as I was returning from my alms-round, I saw him digging in the garden.

"Nick."

"Yes, bhante."

"What we were talking about yesterday – I decided you were right."

"That's a coincidence, bhante – I just decided you were right!"

Eventually, having tested all the possibilities, we both left Chithurst carrying good ruck-sacks. We each had a foam mat, a sleeping bag, some warm clothing and a waterproof. A cheap but sturdy nylon tent had recently been donated to Chithurst and this was to be our shelter for much of the way. My original outer robe was big, woollen and very thick, so I requested a smaller, cotton one instead. On my feet were sandals which I had made with the guidance of Ven. Subbato (formerly a shoemaker by trade); Nick had proper walking-boots and some track-shoes for the roads. As a last-minute addition I took an umbrella, which turned out to be very useful. Nick took a billy-can for tea-brewing and a plastic tub for carrying food, which doubled as his alms-bowl. The bowl I carried was a clay one which had been made by Ven. Viradhammo and Pete Hazell, a potter near Harnham. It had been offered to Ajahn Sumedho and he had begun to make a cover for it. He realized, however, with all the travelling he did, that it would probably be too fragile to survive; consequently he was thinking of giving it away.

"Would you like this bowl?" he asked, knowing that I needed to change mine.

"Yes, Tan Ajahn", I replied, somewhat surprised, "thank you – thank you very much."

There was still a bit more work on the cover to be done so, for a while, he kept the bowl in his room. As it turned out, with the pressure of engagements at this time, his days were filled to the point where he had to get up at three a.m. one morning to complete it in time for me to take it on the walk. Eventually it was finished and given to me on the day that Nick and I departed. I almost felt as though I had been entrusted with the Holy Grail – could I carry it to the North without breaking it?

Often, before we left, the question of money would occur to me and I wondered about the best way to handle it. My yearnings were to set out penniless but, on reflection, it did not feel right to foist my

ideals on Nick. "Just leave it up to him – there's no harm in him bringing something if he wants to." As it turned out, with the little cash he had and the last-minute donations from folk at Chithurst, he was carrying about seventeen pounds when we left. During the walk I left the finances completely up to him but he would always ask for approval before he bought something.

On the evening when the journey ended, after sorting out our things, Nick came up to me and smiled.

"Bhante."

"Yes."

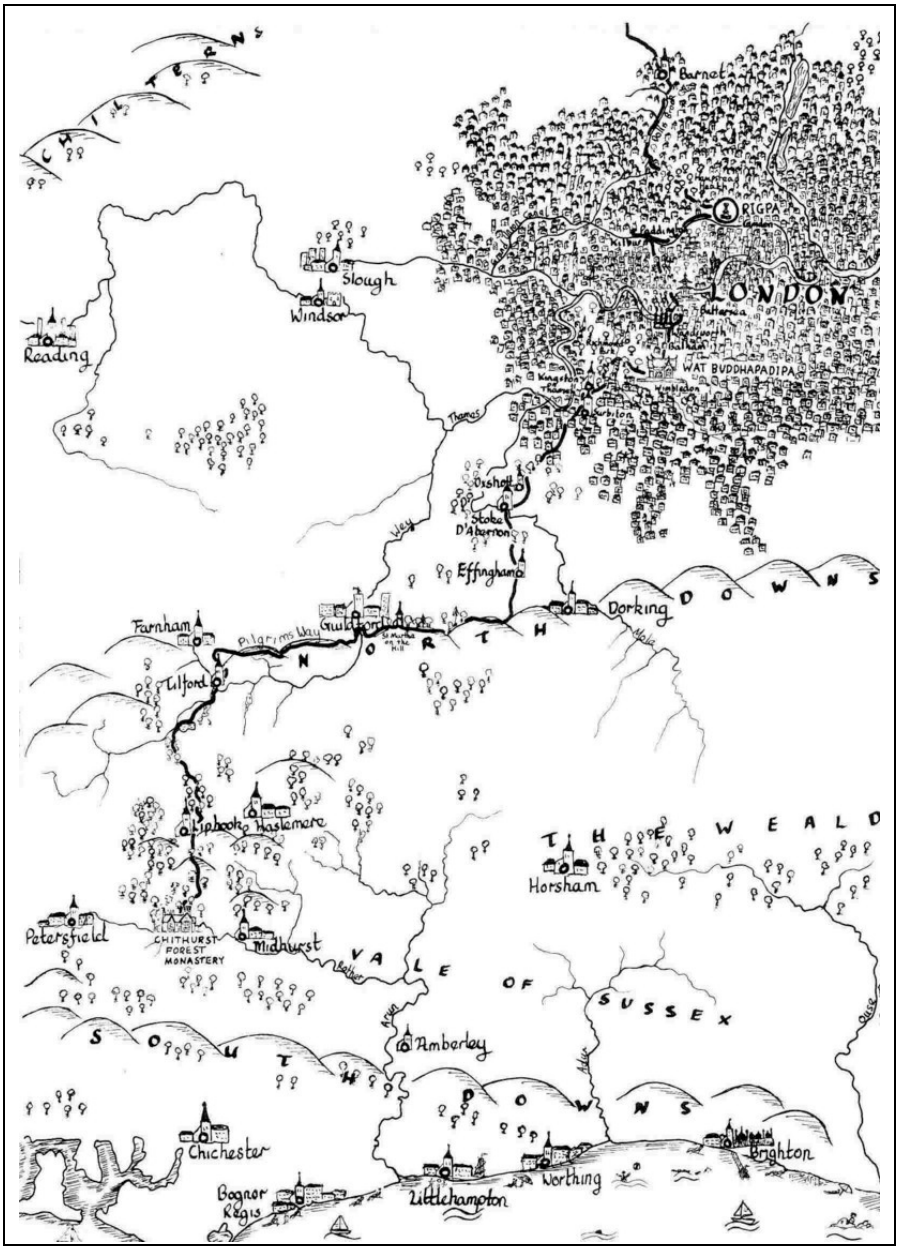
"Including the price of the stamps we did not use, I have exactly seventeen pounds."

In a strange way this seemed to sum the whole journey up. We had put forth the effort and completed the walk, yet on a material plane there was nothing that had been gained or lost; only our geographical position had changed a little. In the same way, on the inward journey, the change is simply one of position, of viewpoint, rather than accumulating, gaining or losing anything. The spiritual journey is, in essence, from distraction to awakening, and also from the personal to the universal. It is reflected in the emergence from the protection of a monastery, into a life of taking the monastery with you as you go; after the necessary years of shelter and nurturing, the time arrives to step out and test your wings. In this 'going forth' the heart opens and self-concern is realized as the shadow of concern for the welfare of all – "What can I gain from my practice, my efforts?" is replaced by, "What can I offer?"

A wise man once said that, in reality, nothing is ever lacking and nothing is in excess; when our actions are geared solely to awakening it is realized how exquisitely true this is. We get just what we need in life – no more, no less – and whatever we offer we will receive. This journey arose out of, and was sustained by, the good-heartedness of people; it was a gift and an offering, a flawless interchange of mutual support, with no remainder.

"Walk bhikkhus, on tour, for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and men"

Mahavagga I-20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Petersfield
CHITHURST PRIEST MONASTERY
Midhurst
Rother
VALE OF SUSSEX
Arun
Amberley
SOUTH
DOWNS
Chichester
Bognor Regis
Littlehampton
Worthing
Brighton

Daily Recollection

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

I vow and dedicate this walk and this life to be of benefit to all beings; not to be a quest for fame or identity but an offering of peace for the good of all: remembering that this is not mine but a sharing, and a possibility, born from the generosity of the heart.

May any puñña, any goodness, which arises from this effort truly benefit all beings, especially my teachers: the Ven. Ajahn Chah, the Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, and my living antecedents: my parents and my grandmother. May they all be blessed and free from suffering as long as life lasts.

May all beings be at peace.

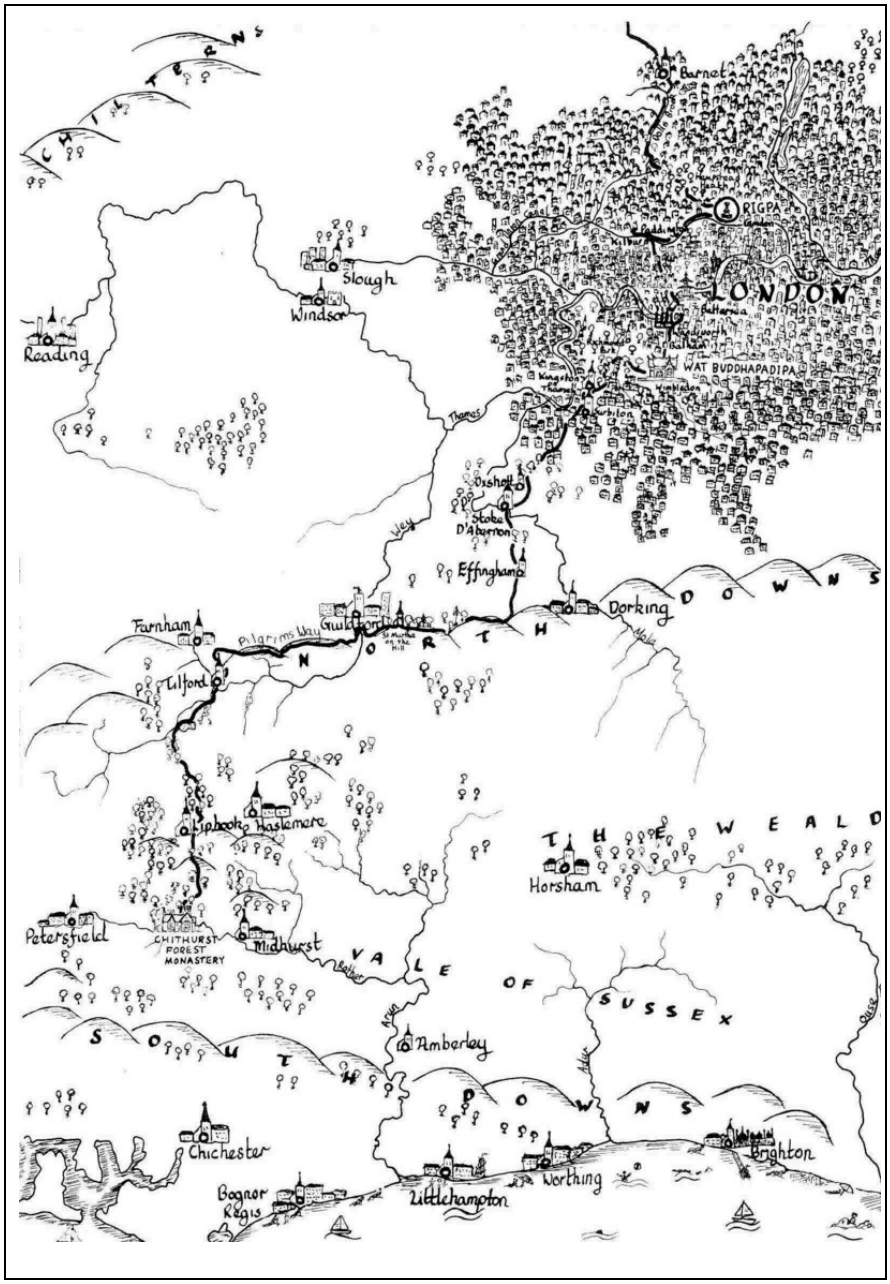
Evaṁ

Part 1

Chithurst
to
Lakenheath Warren

"In actual fact there is nobody going anywhere.
There are just conditions changing"

Ajahn Sumedho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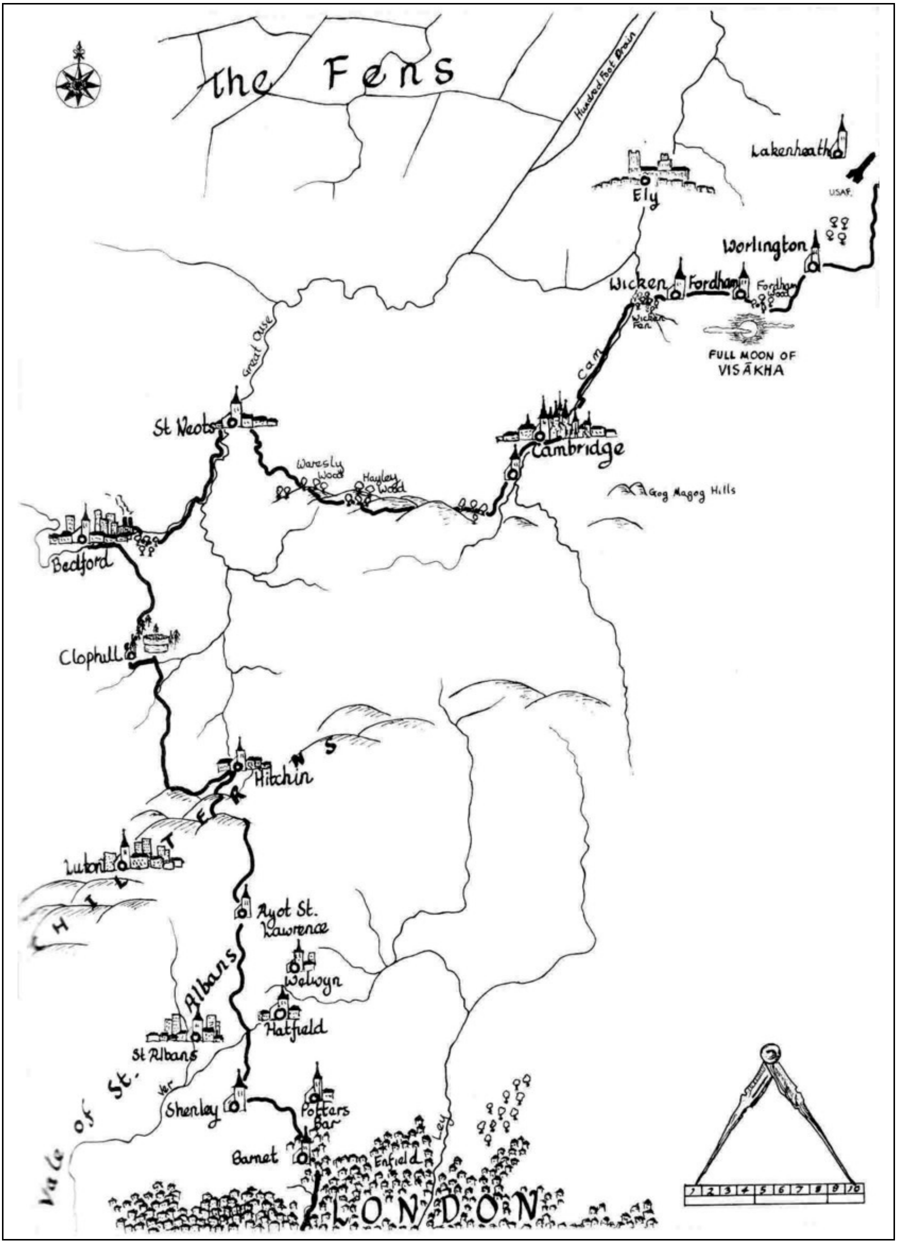
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FULL MOON OF VISĀKHA
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Cam
St Neots
Cambridge
Waresly Wood
Hayley Wood
Gog Magog Hills
Bedford
Clophill
Hitchin
CHILTERNS
Luton
Ayot St. Lawrence
Welwyn
Hatfield
St Albans
Vale of St. Albans
Ver
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Potters Bar
Barnet
Enfield
Ley
LONDON
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

t is now the morning of the third day, Nick is trying to get a fire started, it rained heavily last night so the damp twigs are difficult to burn.

We are in a little wood south of Guildford, not far from where the A3 goes over the Hog's Back. The road is a constant roar in the distance. These first few days have been truly beautiful: leaving Chithurst in the rain, it poured most of the day. The land we passed through was almost all woodland; oak and young beeches began to glow when finally the sun appeared. Nick gave me a fine waterproof before we left so I find walking in the rain as lovely as in the sun; just as having the refuge of Dhamma in the rain of conditions, great joy arises in the heart.

I try to use the Ajahn's phrase, about no-one going anywhere, as a constant reflection.

Who is walking?

Where is there to get to?

Who does this walk belong to?

Who does this mind belong to?

Talking yesterday with Sri about how to live with paradox. To be attached as a good mother to her child, to be detached as a good Buddhist. The appearance of a journey but going nowhere.

Noy Thomson gave us a fine welcome when we arrived at her house in Tilford; Tew Bunnag and his wife Fizz were there too. We talked about meeting each other later on: Tew in Wisbech, Noy in the Lake District. It is such a comforting reflection that we have. As long as you are going somewhere you are living in the desire to get there and the fear of not making it: you feel a twinge in your knee, your arm goes dead, your shoe begins to rub; EEEEEEEEEK! goes the mind. Dying into every step, seeking no future, life is painless.

We camped our first night under a great beech in the Land of Nod. The young green of the new leaves quivered in an amazing flickering dance, the evening sun and spring wind, the earth and the old tree. It must seem funny to see, in the space of one night (which is just one exhalation to a tree), these little pink critters come bustling up, clump down against the trunk, leap up, run around, tent, fire, tea, sleep, up, fire, tea, tent down and zip off again, all in the time it takes for a breath to leave your lungs. A lady who dropped in at Noy's house later on told us that the Land of Nod was a dangerous place; nasty people with sawn-off shotguns roaming in the woods. It felt like Tusita Heaven – or like, when I took my pack off, the bliss of release that the Buddha found when he put his burden down under the Bo tree.

We have arrived in London and are staying the night at my sister's flat in Balham.

We had a fine walk along the North Downs Way, having joined it as it passed by Sri and Tony's house. The sun shone and people gave us little smiles of affection and approval – latter day pilgrims treading the old way. We crossed the river south of Guildford and passed by a small rivulet. A notice nearby said that in the past it was used by pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, a verse went with it:

My downward flow
Your upward path
Are fixed by law divine
My task is to refresh your soul
Yours to discover mine

I set about trying to use 'what is the soul of the stream?' as a kōan but by this time I was getting a bit fed up with asking myself questions. It had become a matter of only remembering to arouse the question, the thought; the being was being forgotten. It was not long before I felt it peter out.

The experience of life as a lone being arises from the activity of the senses. Fed by ignorance, the activity of the senses creates the feeling of separateness. Remembering and recognizing that experience is simply sense-consciousness, this flicks the mind into emptiness. The touch of Ven. Kittisāro's māla beads against my chest, the thud of my feet, throw the senses into transparency.

We headed east until we reached a village called Westcott, just before Dorking. After Nick had gone down to make some telephone calls we headed up the slope to the top of the North Downs. We had been high up on St. Martha's Hill that morning, a great cone just to the east of Guildford. On its summit sits the only church in England

dedicated to this lady. Apparently, after her master's crucifixion, she went to France and became famous there for subduing a dragon near the town of Aix. We looked around the church for a while and chatted with the warden.

"Ninety-five percent visibility today", he assured us – and he could easily have been right. We could clearly see Chanctonbury Ring perched on the Downs, maybe forty miles away to our south. We sat on the hillside and dined on the picnic which Sri had packed and offered to us, at her house, on the previous day.

That night, above Westcott, we slept in a shed in an abandoned woodyard-cum-rubbish-dump. The night was as clear as the day had been and, as we went to sleep, we could see a few stars shining very brightly.

The next day, when we woke, it was raining and the skies were heavy. It poured all morning and we tramped through sludgy paths, thick woods and great swards of sewagey mud. Next moment though, there we were, plonked down in a Stoke D'Abernon pâtisserie; a neat little world of gâteaux, cream horns, apple turnovers, home-made bread and little golden chairs with red velvet seats. As I sat there pondering the scene the rain stopped and Nick returned from the shops. He bought a few of the things which they had on sale and got chatting with the lady behind the counter. She was from Midhurst, near the Chithurst monastery, and was very interested in our walk. When Nick asked if it would be O.K. for us to eat there, with food bought elsewhere along with our bread and turn-overs, she said she was sure that it would be all right. She had to consult Doris, the manageress, though and sadly we did not meet with her approval. Bowing to this rebuff, we finished our tea, gathered up our packs and waved them goodbye as we left. We headed out of town with our bag of provisions (paid for with some dāna offered to Nick by Aminah Kulyanond, at Chithurst, just before we left), and repaired to a nearby hill. There we sat and ate in peace, looking out over the sprouting land before us.

More images came by: arriving in London by an old dirt road that runs over Telegraph Hill, down into Claygate and onwards. I washed

the black and smelly gunk from my feet at a stand-pipe in a local graveyard and arrived almost sparkling at Khun Rumpie's house in Kingston. Waves of shining people washed in and out: lovely conversation and gasps of admiration festooned the day. We walked on a processional pindabaht to the nearby house of Khun Vanee and received five carrier-bags-full of alms-food. Back at Rumpie's, unloaded and arranged, it seemed as though a mountain range surrounded us. To cap it all Prachern and his wife Wantana, some other Thai friends, managed to look in and made some offerings of their own before we ate.

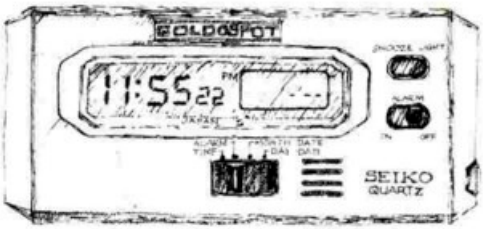
Unchecked generosity like this is truly the flowering of the Buddha's dispensation in the world – how wonderful and lovely it is. The pārami of the Buddha comes to fruit and, as you witness the unwinding of this timeless pattern, the mind is filled with the most precious and heavenly images. That afternoon in Richmond Park, walking in the Isabella Plantation, I felt like the Buddha in Tusita Heaven – behind me a train of devatās, love and devotion over-flowing. I sat on a tree-trunk and talked with the people sitting on the grass around me. Children stared and cameras clicked. The group of us beneath the tree: the eyes of the world skim over us but the place of true refuge is intangible, untouched and completely clear. Saying our farewells and waving, finally we turned around and left.

At the Wimbledon Temple the Venerables Phra Khru Palāt and Mahā Manop gave us a fine greeting; we talked long and did the evening chanting together. It was good to be with bhikkhus again and my Thai is getting well exercised; they tried to persuade us to stay at the Temple but we had to decline as we had already arranged to go and stay with my sister. So, another 'farewell', a 'hello', and here we are in Balham.

I have not seen my sister for quite a time and there has been much news to exchange between us. She works for the Foreign Office now – doing exactly what I do not know – but before this new job began she took a six-week trip around the world. For much of the evening my attention flicked between our conversation and her

photo albums – bright pictures of sunlit people and Himalayan ranges. All the talk is over now and everyone is in bed; it has been a long day and the liquid crystal digits of my clock tell me that it is nearly midnight.

It has been a long day; time to put things down and let it end.



In Kingston with Khun Vanee and friends

After talking with us all morning and giving us a splendid meal Katie, my sister, had to rush off to a wedding. We said goodbye and parted company; then Nick and I set off for Oriana's house in Kilburn. Zig-zagging our way north-westwards through the town, Nick said, "Bhante?"

"Yes."

"We will be passing by Mudita's restaurant in Fulham, should we pop in for a cup of tea?"

"That sounds like a jolly good idea."

Arriving at the Busabong unannounced, they were surprised to see us; Mudita had been right in the thick of organizing a Thai boxing tournament which was to take place that night. When she appeared it looked as though she had been tied up in knots; we talked together and, after a couple of hours, she was untangled and happy again. She said that she had been on the verge of ringing Chithurst as she was going frantic and that we had appeared just at the right moment. Later her boxing team turned up and we sat together for a while: I did a little chant for them to help them on their way, they were all a bit nervous of the big night. I told them the chanting ensured that their fights would all go perfectly – whether they won or lost. This raised a smile and, as it turned out, that night they were all victorious.

We left in the late afternoon and headed north, the Saturday night vibration was beginning to soak into the air; you could feel the preta-energy of the 'good-time' take over as the afternoon shoppers faded out. We managed to make it to the house before things got too raucous, I reflected on the fear which I felt at times like that and how a peaceful house seems such a refuge. Sweet people and pleasant talk late into the night; life at its smooth and easiest. It is certainly a test

to walk through the heavy areas (Kilburn, Camden Town), but the inclination to emptiness and acceptance is an unassailable refuge. When you are truly with any situation, cutting through habitual responses, even Camden Town is the Pure Land – lotus blossoms beneath my feet, surrounded by Buddhas.

A man called Charlie Gilbert stopped us for a rap. Telling me of his life, his heart and feelings. An old cockney, he said, "Travellin' ain't about miles and time but the people that you're wiv. . . always listen to people." Gnarled old Charlie: he had been a thief, a boxer, a traveller; he did not have much more than the clothes he stood up in and the determination to look on life as a comedy. "You gotta larf" he grinned, " 'cos this world's so piggin' miserable." I liked him but I felt myself pulling away and trying to get on, get moving on to the next place. No time to lose.

A very rainy morning was spent with Oriana, Hartley and their children, Oriana's sister Pascal was there also. Talking, sitting, watching the rain and looking at family life; after the meal they walked with us part of the way along the canal which was taking us to Camden. Through Little Venice, Maida Vale and Regent's Park in the green; we emerged at Camden Lock and suddenly found ourselves in the thick of the Sunday afternoon trendies market. It seemed a very different show when I wandered around there on week-ends, six or seven years ago.

We received a warm welcome at Rigpa and spent a couple of nights there. Family and friends of Nick came and visited, offered dāna and sat with us; on Monday he picked up some shopping for the trip while I went for a visit to Colin and Ray's flat near Primrose Hill. This was the place where the Hampstead Buddhist Group usually met and they had invited us to drop by as we passed through London. A lady called Berry came by at tea-time and we had a good talk together. Back at Rigpa the nightly practice sessions in the music studio across the yard provided a strange backdrop for the evening sittings. The bands walk by and look in as we look out, all gaping at each other's appearance, amazed at the world we live in.

After an early meal, cooked for us by a young Italian man called Mauro, we said goodbye to Rigpa and headed off again – out across Hampstead Heath and along its northern promontory to bring us to the Finchley Road via Beechwood Avenue. Number fifteen of this street was the house where my mother grew up and also the place where my grandparents lived until a few years ago. When my grandfather died, aged ninety-five, my grandmother moved to Sussex. I talked about them with Nick a lot that day: how my grandfather had been such a saintly man and how my grandmother now lay so helpless, passing her days almost comatose in a nursing home south of Chichester.

After crossing the Finchley Road, past a paddock of Highland Cattle, we eventually reached the long green finger which pokes into the city, from way out north-west beyond Barnet. We followed the Dollis Brook up out of town and now find ourselves encamped by

the lake in Wrotham Park. It is raining slightly and you can hear the road to Potters Bar roaring nearby. Everything is going well. The aches wander around our bodies and we are even quite content to live with the mid-afternoon gripes. It hardly seems possible that London is behind us already.

"Feelings of apprehension about a bhikkhu walking through the friendless streets of Kilburn dispersed as the front door opened to the sight of Tan Amaro and Nick. For a few hours, calm and caring filled our lives – subtly leaving light and a smile in our hearts."

Hartley, Oriana, Eleanor and Oliver

Tudong is certainly a good teacher: as soon as you are drawn into the journey as a material thing you become struck with the pain of always having to get on to the next place, got to crack on, get up and go. The true journey, from distraction to awakening, steals all the tension and dukkha from whatever is happening in the senses. Being so much, so obviously, on a physical journey makes the distinction crystal clear: the urge to move, nowhere to go. Sunshine, the open road, going nowhere.

We walked from our lakeside camp feeling somewhat drained from all the bustle of London. We did not have far to go that morning, just to a rendezvous with Paul Dolby and Peter Da Costa in Shenley, a few miles down the road. We arrived, sat down in the porchway of the church and had a breather; Nick took his clock out – nine thirty exactly – we looked up and there was Paul, rounding the corner, his hand held up in greeting. Shortly afterwards Peter appeared and we all went off in Paul's car to find a picnic spot.

It was overcast but quite bright as we organized the seating arrangements and the food. Paul, a chef in a St. Albans hotel, had prepared a great feast; napkins, table-cloths – avec du tous. In the monastic life, food – the one meal of the day – takes on a peculiar importance. It is the primary medium of support given by the laity to the Sangha: people like to make sure that the Sangha is well looked after and offering food is the most immediate means of ensuring this. Also, because we are celibate, penniless renunciates, the meal is generally the biggest thing which happens in the realm of the senses throughout the day. Whether one likes food, dislikes it or is indifferent, the meal-time always seems to be a major event.

As Paul began to offer the dishes it started to rain but, as can be the way with hungry people and food, we were not deterred. With no

immediate shelter obvious and convincing ourselves it would soon pass over, we gave the blessing and began to eat. It poured. The heaviest rain we had seen so far sluiced down upon us, merciless. We sheltered beneath umbrellas and waterproofs, little puddles of rainwater formed in our bowls, in the food and in our gear. The single-minded interest in eating began to fade as we filled up and, about three-quarters of the way through the meal, Nick remembered a barn which we had passed on our way to the picnic spot. He began to look uneasy but said nothing. He had covered most of the gear but was soon up, exploring the possibilities of a dry place.

"So it's raining", I thought, "we'll dry off sooner or later." I carried on eating, determined not to be moved by the whole affair. The rain poured on, beating onto our brollies and pattering into our pasties. Eventually, gut satisfied, we found the rain fading out, we upped sticks and removed ourselves to the barn which Nick had

found. Amazingly it was abandoned, with a good roof and a thick layer of dry hay on the floor; we laid out our wet things and made ourselves comfy. Safe in the dry Nick then finished his meal, dining on a large bowl of rice and vegetables which Peter had brought, made by some friends in Watford. We sat and watched the rain, which had gained strength again, drank coffee and talked.

All this rain is bringing us a mass of greenery, everywhere we go the country is thick, wet, lush and beautiful – tall banks of shining green and deep, deep mud. Peter joined us for the day's walk and we set off towards Ayot St. Lawrence; the footpaths are so muddy I am finding it hard to keep up with Nick, sliding about in my sandals and scouting for the driest patches. It is easier once your feet are completely wet and muddy as you do not care so much, but until then there always seems to be a compulsion to find the driest way.

The rest of the day turned out quite sunny and, walking mostly on small roads, we set a brisk pace. As we passed some houses near St. Albans we were invited into the home of a lady called Josephine. She had spotted me walking down the street and had thought that I might be her long-lost cousin Jeffrey who is with the Hare Krishna movement. Although good-hearted she was very eccentric and I felt a bit wary and uneasy. My English reserve and fear of the unknown rose well to the fore; after a while of being there, however, the fear died and we had a lovely time. She offered us tea and we had a good talk, I did not say much, listening mostly to her and Nick. At one point she set about guessing our ages, looking at the wrinkles around our eyes. She got both Nick and Peter's right to within a year or two and then came over and stood in front of me. Lowering her head to my level and staring into my face.

"Seventeen! But you can't be – how old are you?"

"Twenty-six. I meditate a lot." I replied a little nervously.

After tea we said goodbye and got back on the road again. It was a fine afternoon. We left Peter in Wheathampstead and camped for the night a mile or so south of Ayot St. Lawrence. Nick found a meadow surrounded by woods, a soft green square; in front of us a

beautiful evening sky, sheltering nearly half a moon, sat shining over a wall of larches that linked arms at the field's edge.

Happiness at the end of the day: Peter had helped to carry our packs, we had met the remarkable Josephine, picnicked in the rain and now we sat, caped against the midges, well-sheltered underneath the moon.

Evaṁ.

The next morning we set off early, needing to make more than ten miles before the meal-time. We had arranged to visit Phyllis Turner in Hitchin and again we walked along small roads to avoid the mud. We passed through Ayot and walked by the house where George Bernard Shaw spent his last years. Also the place where that sagacious Irishman fell out of his final tree.

Setting a good pace we bowled into town (going nowhere), crossing over the butt end of the Chilterns; gentle, rolling, woody hills, with prosperous farms of geese and goats, guinea-fowl and ducks. Apart from one shower the sun shone brightly; very happy, we found our way through the town and were met by Phyllis on the street. A neat, bright lady from a bygone age, she welcomed us into her home grandly. Nick had to let her know about the time factor* and the size of our normal meals and she swiftly adapted. We ate at the table with her and her brother Norman, they did not seem to mind the mountain of bread and butter which Nick had prepared; quiet and peaceful we dined together happily.

We spent a long afternoon with them, chatting, looking at slides and having our picture taken in the garden; long talks of India and the East, Sikkim, the Karmapa and the Darjeeling Railway. We bathed and dried out our gear; Nick, to his great embarrassment, let my sandals get burned by the fire and strangely I found that I did not

Time factor – The bhikkhu-sangha follows the precept of not taking food after midday (this is regarded as being at twelve noon in the winter and at one p.m. when the clocks are changed to British Summer Time). This is a renunciate practice which is helpful in several ways: it conduces to a simplicity of life-style; food is taken at the beginning of the day, when it is most needed; it helps one to be easy to support; one's head is clearer through the evening and the night; finally, one is hindered from taking refuge in food at will.

care at all. They are still usable; however, as Noy Thomson had given us some money for boots, we decided to buy some for me in Cambridge. When I was making the sandals I did my best to consider them as dead already and I seem to remember visualising their destruction several times.

Having two days to reach Bedford and the Jacksons we decided to head west into the hills again to spend the night. We climbed up onto Deacon Hill and spent a long time looking out over the countryside. Incredible the views, stretching into all directions: great yellow patches of oil-seed rape worked into the green on this little bloop of hills, dropping into the flat lands of the North – we can see for miles and miles. I keep remembering that the Sixth Patriarch, as he wandered in the mountains of China, would stop and gaze, linger when the views were such as this. We do not seem to be sitting much these days but still, constantly, I hear waves of the mind's silence appearing from amidst the jungle of thoughts and images; it seems to be enough, in fact right now, how could it be otherwise?

We found a broad ledge up on the hillside, maybe some old earthwork, so we pitched our tent on it. Nick started a fire to keep the midges away and we sat together for a while, it is the half moon and we have seen our first oxlips. Sitting by the fire, a warm clear night; I had the thought, "This must be about as fine as human existence can get". Great peace, we turned in late and had some tea this morning; as I have been writing Nick has been preparing the meal, at last both my hunger and the diary will be satisfied. Evaṁ.

"It was the 19th May, 1983, and for weeks, the weather had been atrocious; it had been cold with terrific gales, snow, sleet and heavy rain with, admittedly, a few sunny intervals. I had been looking forward to welcoming two exceptional guests for lunch, the Venerable Bhikkhu Amaro and his travelling companion Nick Scott. They were on a Dhutanga from Chithurst Monastery to the Harnham Vihāra in Northumberland. I knew that the order of the day would be plenty of hot water for baths and a roaring fire in the lounge. In a brief dry interval, I met them along the Bedford Road nearly obscured by their baggage, very cheerful and mud-spattered. The first request was for a bowl of hot water so that the Venerable Amaro could wash his feet. So there he sat in the kitchen after removing his sodden sandals. Nick, in the meantime was busy unloading equally sodden gear, stringing it up in the garage, hanging it along the drier in the Outhouse and putting it round the radiator in the hall! I was amused to look in the lounge later to see the fireplace festooned with steaming articles, sandals, socks, boots, etc., etc!

I had baked a large loaf which I had intended to present to them afterwards along with other stores. Nick looked at it and asked "Where's the butter and jam?" and before my astonished eyes proceeded to cut up the whole loaf into doorstep slices, spread them thickly with butter and jam and take the whole lot into lunch! I had not realized how hungry two young men could be!

After refreshing baths and a happy lunch, we retired to the lounge and chatted round the fire until everything had dried. A sunny interval gave us the opportunity to walk round the garden and take some photographs. Then it was time to prepare for departure. With gear once more piled high and more photographs at the gate, we said goodbye to our delightful guests. It had been a very amusing and memorable day."

Phyllis Turner, April, 1984

As a botanist, Nick has been having a great time with all of the different plants which we have been meeting on our travels. After we left our campsite on Deacon Hill he led us along the ridge; there was such a plenitude of different flowers there that he ended up losing the way, taking us south for a while. Once we had spotted our mistake we soon changed our course though, and righted ourselves again. Since the mud had been so bad we were keeping more to the minor roads but still using the occasional footpath. We were on a clay soil and the few stretches of mud that we went through made my sandals very hard to use; my feet slipped around inside them and could gain little traction on the path. I was also having some trouble with the backstrap on one of them, this I managed to fix up with some string but the need for some better footwear was obvious. I went barefoot for a while and the cracks in my heels were becoming very sore.

During that afternoon we found ourselves drawing closer and closer to a large round object in the country south-east of Bedford. Nick had chosen a route along local lanes and footpaths and, as we approached, it became increasingly clear that our intended path was going to take us right through the middle of this thing. It resembled a wedding-cake the size of a football stadium: round, silver and circled with spires. However, nothing to suggest the presence of such a thing was to be found on the map. As we approached, it loomed more and more ominously over us. We turned up a farm track, now realizing that it was indeed sitting right over our path and found (somewhat to our relief), the following notice:

"Ministry of Defence (Air)
Restricted Area –
Trespassers will be arrested
and may be prosecuted."

We turned around and retraced our steps, taking an alternative route through Clophill village and up a track past a ruined church. A man whom we met there said that the great silver object was an American air-base called Chicksands Priory, a radio-telescope so powerful that it could pick up any signal broadcast in the world. We shuddered a little and agreed that we had made a good decision to turn back. To try and insist on one's rights to a footpath through such a temple of fear would guarantee disaster. The man said the old church was often used for black magic rituals but it certainly felt more pleasant to be there than close to the secret air-base.

I am beginning to appreciate and enjoy the repetitious actions of this life: walking, stopping for a rest, a sip of water, little chats with Nick about nothing very much; arriving at houses, walking through towns, sitting in woods, pitching the tent, gathering our things and leaving a camp behind. Like the life in a monastery, once used to the changes in the backdrop, the scene becomes only a sign for awakening, a signal to free the mind. That day we pressed on towards Bedford and camped in a wood just to the north of a village called Haynes; it was dusk when we arrived and we sat for a long time.

It was a misty morning, we came down from the small ridge we had been on and followed the flat meandering road into town. Nick's tendency is to always go for the pleasant paths whereas my conservative nature usually sounds a note of uneasiness when confronted with 'Private Land' or 'No Right of Way'. Consequently we did not use the old railway line but kept to the road until we met the Great Ouse. This we followed, through the crowds of week-end river people, all the way into town; after a little direction-seeking we found the Jackson's house.

The Jacksons being paragons of efficiency and good-heartedness, we had all our dirty washing done (delivered to us the next day in St. Neots), were supplied with everything we needed in the way of equipment and medicines and were finally driven into town – to a camping shop where we purchased some boots for my ailing feet. As the boots were the last in the shop of that make, the salesman very

kindly offered them to us at a substantially reduced price, they fitted perfectly. Clean, dry, fed and re-equipped, we were dropped at the edge of town and so we set off down the river. We followed along the bank, tromping through lush vegetation and mud; my mind, still out of recent habit in my feet, kept being amazed at the warm sturdy sensation I was feeling and noticing how the mud was not so daunting anymore. We camped by the river half-way between Bedford and St. Neots; Nick and I leaned on the fence beside our tent and looked over at each other, a warm feeling of complete peace as the rain fell on us.

Nothing to do.

Nowhere to go.

"The old goat-footed balloon-man whistles far and weee."

A morning's walk along the river brought us into St. Neots, we found the house of Ven. Sucitto's mother quite easily and she was very pleased to see us. Her life is a bit lonely these days so she enjoyed taking care of us very much. She gave us a grand meal and we spent the afternoon writing letters, poring over maps, talking at length about nothing very much and laughing a lot together. While at the Jackson's they had passed on to me three large stamped envelopes, each of which contained three large blank sheets of paper – a gentle hint from Chithurst. I had been intending to write for a while and I found there was a lot to say – several hours went by as the mind shuttled between chatting with Win, sipping my tea and turning the journey into a letter.

With all our things dried out again we packed up and left quite late in the day. We headed south-east and camped for the night just beside Waresly Wood, a nature reserve that Nick knew of and was very keen to visit. There was a strange beauty to the place; it seemed to emanate a feeling of life buzzing in its fullness, a great rich happiness. That evening the moon was bright and we sat for a long time.

The walk into Cambridge was longer than we had expected. After picnicking in Hayley Wood (another nature reserve – described by Nick as, "a sea of mud with plants growing in it"), we

walked clay-ball footed and sore-toed for about fifteen miles; coming off a ridge south of Haslingfield, walking up through Grantchester and along the meadow-paths into town. We arrived at about eight o'clock and were greeted at the door by Daniel Jones, our host. The ecclesiastical heritage of the city still lingers strongly in its streets: as we walked along, a tangible air of reverence came from the people whom we passed. Conversations halted and folk stood politely to one side; even as we crossed in front of the pavilion on Parker's Piece, between a group of cricketers and their game, the air hushed and allowed a monk and his companion to pass in peace.

Later on an old friend of Nick's came round to see us and I spent a quiet evening – my head and heart in conversation and my feet, at last relieved, deep in a mustard bath.

It is Visākha day. The time we spent in Cambridge has left us very drained and we slept quite late this morning. We camped last night by Wicken Fen and have spent a couple of hours this morning pottering around, looking at the local inhabitants. It is one of the last patches of 'natural' fen-land in existence, most of the surrounding countryside having been drained for agriculture. In actual fact, although it is a fine example of the old fen eco-system, it is now so much higher than the fields round about that water has to be pumped in continually to keep it alive. We wandered around, looked at the information bills and kept our eyes open for rarities.

Tired, hungry and footsore; I hear my mind going, "But I don't want to be *bothered* – it's all so *painful*". Soon the mood changes and life is cosy once again – sitting by the river with a full belly, "What a relief – it's all perfect after all". As soon as I find myself taking comfort to be dukkha-nirodha I know I am in for a rough ride: it becomes clear that to endure and cut through the obvious pains and pleasures of a trip like this is the only way to real freedom.

We met a lot of people in Cambridge: Daniel shares the house with a fellow called Dave (with whom he once comprised two-fifths of the 'Pembroke Left'), and two women, one of whom works in a refuge for battered wives. The house was at the end of a terrace in the Kite, an old working-class area of town. I spent almost the whole two days that we were there sitting on the sofa of Daniel's room mending my gear and talking to people. Jill Court came round on Tuesday morning and I also had a long talk with Dave. It was a peaceful afternoon also – Nick went out to do some shopping and bought another load of postcards; I looked at some of Daniel's books, cleaned my boots and chatted with whoever came by. Carole Winter

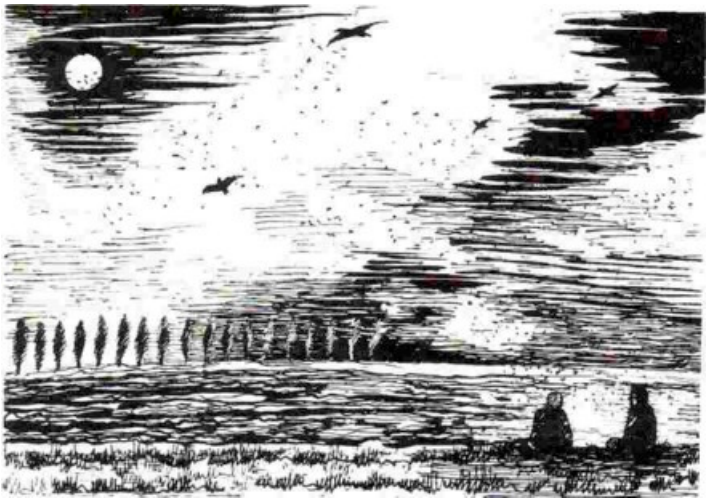
At Phyllis Turner's house in Hitchin

and Ollie Cooper dropped in and, after they left, another old university friend of Nick's appeared. By this time it was getting late so he decided to take up the offer of a room at the house of his friend, in order to leave me in peace.

Daniel's room was a well-ordered crowd of pictures, posters, books and assorted objects; he took great care of us and made sure we had all we needed; never having had any bhikkhus to stay before, he did a very good job. It has not rained for three days now and Wednesday morning found the sun shining brightly in a clear sky. As there were a lot of us we decided to eat on the lawn behind the house.

People at the 'Co-op' supermarket next door looked down periodically at the scene, faces would appear at the windows and then vanish as we looked up. A strange and magic ritual, a monk's meal; sitting on the grass with freshly shaven head, a coven of friends and the faithful, gathered together for a day.

We left Cambridge following the river north-eastwards, most of the way our path ran along the top of the dyke through lush grass and cow-parsley; we stopped for frequent rests and the occasional chocolate bar. Nick had been up until about two thirty with his friends and we were both a bit weary; by the time we got to Wicken Fen the sun was falling behind the trees. We sat by the river for a while; eventually Nick decided to put the tent up before he dozed off and fell into the water. I agreed that it was a good idea. The martins were enjoying their evening feast of midges and an almost-full moon was hanging in the eastern sky. We said good-night to this great flat land and were soon asleep.



This area was once a butterfly's paradise, even the Swallowtail used to thrive here; its source of food, the fragile milk-parsley, has nearly died out though and now the species is extinct in Britain. The intrusion of the proliferating and profiteering mind can disturb nature's balances so easily.

We packed up and left the swans and swifts of Wicken Fen at about three thirty in the afternoon. We realized as we were walking that, as Parkinson's Law points out, even though we had the shortest distance yet to cover in a day, we were going to be late: number of excuses for delay expanding according to the time allotted to make the distance. We had arranged to rendezvous with Carole Winter, Jill Court and David Cowie in Fordham village, to spend Visākha night in a nearby wood. It is the tradition in some Buddhist countries (especially in the forest monasteries of North-East Thailand), to celebrate observance days and the major festivals by sitting up all night in the monastery, listening to Dhamma talks and meditating. The big festivals generally fall on full-moon days and mark significant events of the Buddha's life. Sitting up all night is a practice that is used to strengthen one's resolve, to train one to arouse energy and to allow a long close look at the changing and fluid nature of the mind.

That day, unfortunately, only Carole was able to make it and we found her waiting patiently in her car at the edge of the village. We went into the wood and Nick sought out a good spot for us to spend the night. As we sat down and arranged our things the skies began to clear; soon the heavy grey cloud, which had been with us all day, was gone and blue sky filled in between the tree-tops. Nick started a fire to keep the midges at bay and soon we were happily sitting, listening to the bell-ringers practising in the local church. We were on a small path beside a brook surrounded by ash and willow trees; our floor was soft grass and little purple spear-like plants called bugles.

After we made some tea we sat until midnight when I did a little chanting; I forgot the words of the Karanīya-Mettā Sutta about half of the way through but broke off and completed the pūjā with a couple of other chants. We sat and talked some more, Carole leaving at about two o'clock as she had to be nursing the next day. Nick escorted her back to the car, leaving me alone in the wood.

"Don't let the bogey-men get you, bhante", she said as she departed. A wave or two of apprehension passed through in their absence but I found a smile coming to my face as I imagined a cold, heavy hand gripping my shoulder or a beast rising from the mire. A warm feeling of sleepy peace came over me instead and after a while Nick returned and we sat. A little later we had another drink, watching the sky begin to lighten; time passed and the next thing we knew it was four o'clock and broad daylight. Nick left me to tend the fire and went for a walk round the woods. As I moved the logs about, prodding in the embers, I contemplated the night – it had been nothing very much at all. We had been there, time had gone by, but nothing really seemed to happen. I wondered if it had been the same for the Buddha on that Visākha night of his enlightenment: he arrived at the place, sat down beneath the tree and before long the night had passed away – it was dawn and he was enlightened, awakened. He realized that he was indeed a Buddha.

"So this is all there is to it – things arise and pass away – really nothing very much at all."

Carole had brought us the food for our meal when she came out to meet us so we decided to eat early, deeming it a simpler way of doing things. As he was putting the food together it struck Nick that there might not be enough, so he salvaged some leftovers from the previous day. After it was all prepared and in my bowl he unexpectedly found two large containers of rice and salad, so all of that went in too. Blinded once again by the old food demon, I ate it all (waste not, want not); the karmic result of this was terrible indigestion and a sleepiness which knocked me out until we arrived at Paul Hendrick's house on the following day.

We had only six miles to go between Fordham Wood and

Worlington so we walked slowly, with frequent long rests, and camped in a clearing about a mile short of the village. I slept from two p.m. until nine in the evening, Nick made a fire by which I sat for a couple of hours before turning in again. The next morning he got me up and we were on the road within half an hour, arriving at Paul's quite early; he was very pleased to see us and we spent the morning talking and taking baths. The weather was rainy so we ate indoors, listening to the sound of the jets in the local air-show. Paul is such a light and happy man, so into Dhamma, that I felt my mood consciously elevate. As we left and he walked down the road with us I realized that I had fallen into something of a rut in recent days: getting caught up in places and schedules and worrying about the pain in my feet. As I began to put more effort into using the walk for awakening, turning to emptiness, I felt a smile appearing for the doubts and anxieties, feelings of inadequacy. Once a few miles of long straight lanes had passed beneath my feet the clouds had cleared. If you let your eyes close, drifting off the path is inevitable.

We have moved from the great flatness of the Fens into the country of the Brecklands; low undulating sandy heaths where Nick has been finding a mass of interesting plants. In the ancient past these parts were heavily wooded but early man's excessive deforestation leached the soil. A few thousand years of these poor conditions now make it a unique environment and many rare species abide here. As Nick pointed out, however, it does not take long before even the Breckland is ordinary: like oxlips, tudong or anything else, the exciting becomes the mundane and only the unconditioned mind can recognise the perfect joy in that.

When we are walking through the country, all through England, if you turn your ear there always seems to be a lark singing nearby as endless and omnipresent as the shining of your true nature. Always it is there – listen – reminding you of the total joy and emptiness of it all. Even the death and sadness one sees: the squashed animals on the road; the spent beer cans and tubs of Colonel Sanders'; the frightened lady in Stoke D'Abernon and lonely old 'Mum' who asked, out of the blue –

"Do you know of the poem that goes:
'She walked through the fields wearing her gloves,
Fat white woman that nobody loves.'?"

– It almost made me cry, the beauty and sadness of it. How difficult our lives seem and how perfect, in true reality, we are.

(end of the first book)

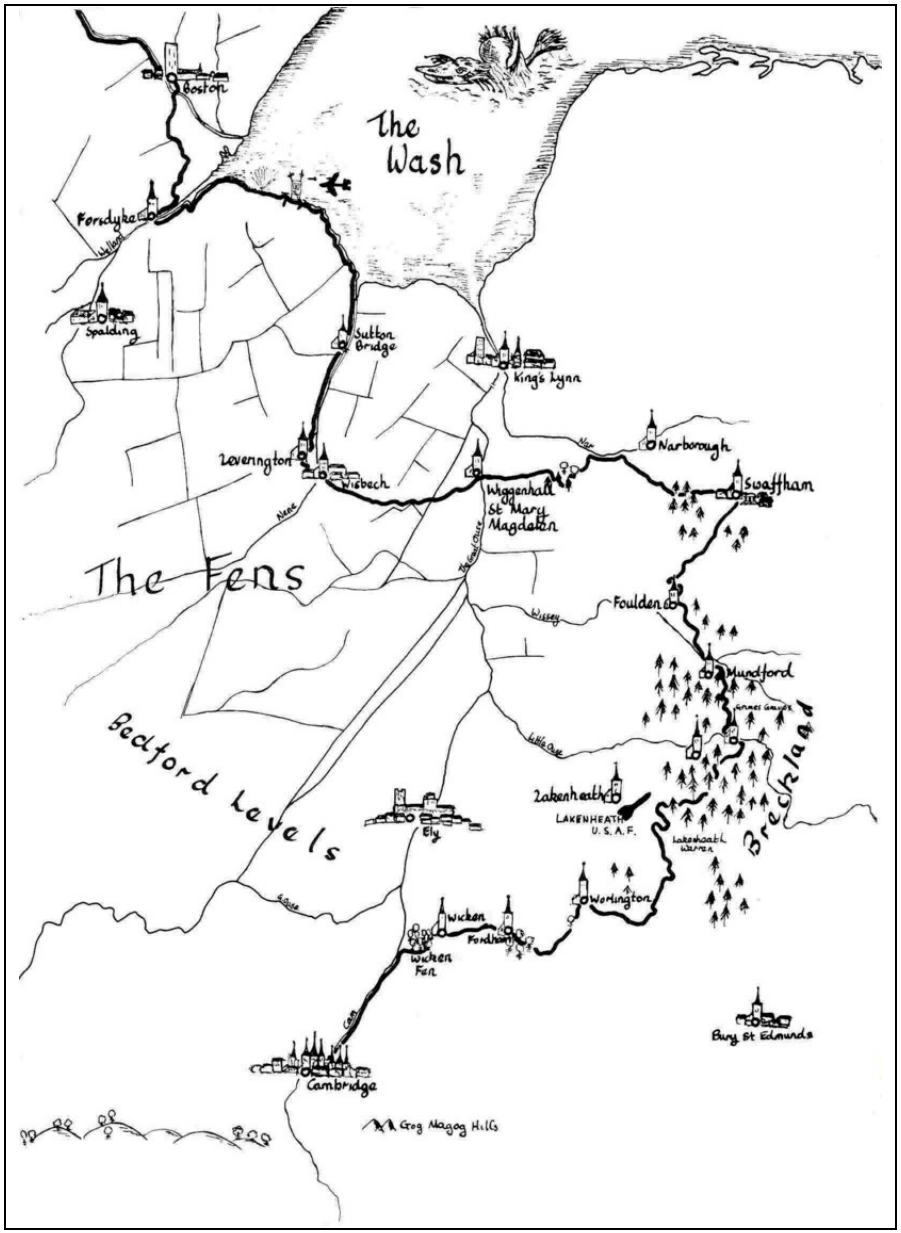
Part 2

Lakenheath Warren
to
Lothersdale

—To a lady seen from the train—

O why do you walk through the fields
in gloves
Missing so much and so much ?
O fat white woman whom nobody loves
Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
When the grass is as soft as the breast of
doves
And shivering-sweet to the touch ?
O why do you walk through the fields in
gloves
Missing so much and so much ?

Frances Cornford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Wisbech
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Nar
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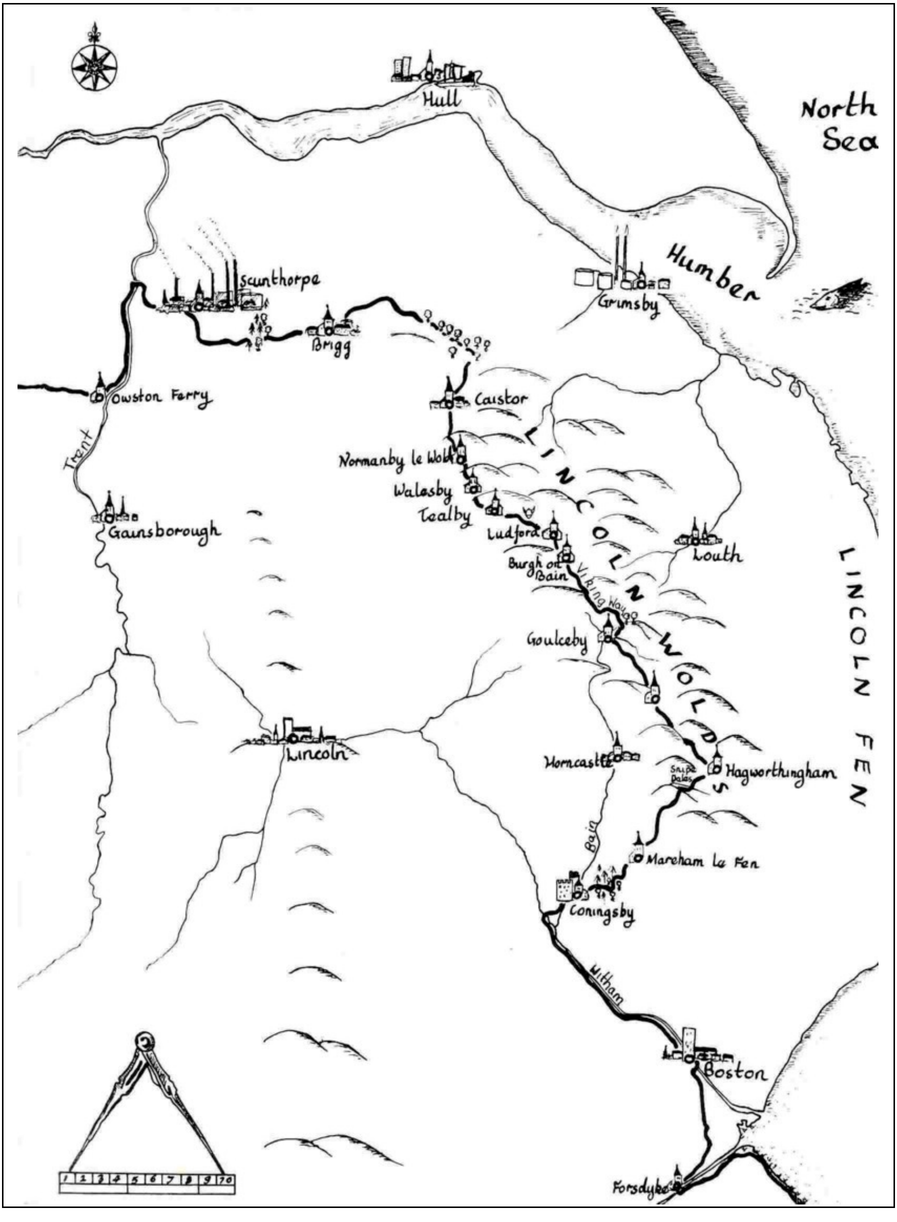
Swaffham
The Fens
Nene
Ouse
Wissey
Foulden
Mundford
Little Ouse
Bedford Levels
Ely
Lakenheath
LAKENHEATH U.S.A.F.
Brecklands
Lakenheath Warren
Welnetham
Wicken
Fordham
Wicken Fen
Cam
Cambridge
Bury St Edmunds
Grog Magog Hills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Ludford
Louth
Burgh on Bain
Viking Way
LINCOLN WOLDS
LINCOLN FEN
Goulceby
Lincoln
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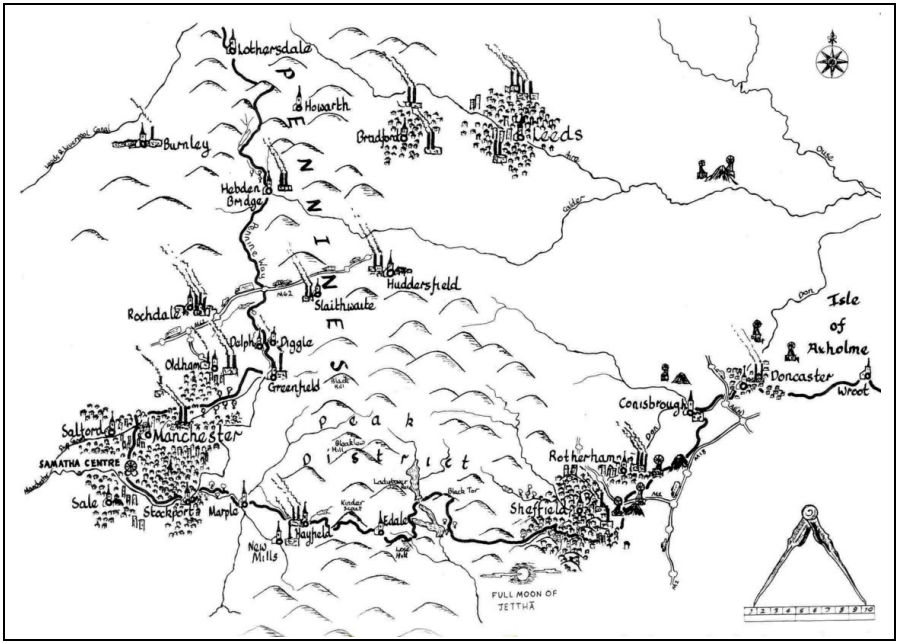

Lothersdale
Howarth
Burnley
Bradford
Leeds
Hebden Bridge
Huddersfield
Slaithwaite
Rochdale
Ripponden
Piggie
Oldham
Greenfield
Isle of Axholme
Doncaster
Wroot
Conisbrough
Salford
Manchester
SAMATHA CENTRE
Peak District
Rotherham
Sheffield
Sale
Stockport
Marple
Hayfield
Edale
New Mills
FULL MOON OF TETTHĀ

The morning that I wrote the last entry in the diary, Nick had been off to look around Lakenheath Air-base and meet up with Paul Hendrick, who had prepared our meal and was to bring it out to us. After finishing the writing I sat in the tent . . . and I sat in the tent . . . and I sat: eleven o'clock came around – no sign of anyone. Trying to avoid proliferating about what might be happening, I clipped my fingernails and mended some holes in my robe. Different possibilities would pop into my mind: Nick distracted by flowers; aiming to arrive late – very unlikely; gone shopping with Paul; Paul did not show up; Nick arrested for trespassing whilst in search of rare plants: the mind doing its best to fill up the unknown with the known, to no avail. At twelve I sat again but restless energy soon had me up and doing some walking meditation. After a while I began to suggest to myself the worst kind of uncertainties: maybe Nick would not return and I would be left alone, never knowing what had happened; looking at it that way made it seem inconsequential to be worried at all and things began to look quite pleasant. I simply did not know; struggling implied all sorts of horrors but really looking at the situation, what could possibly be wrong with it?

"Is Nick Scott your true nature?" I asked myself.

"Are you really incomplete if he is not about?"

Padding up and down laughing at myself, the sun came out and it all felt very good; even so my eyes still darted continually around the common, eager for a sight of anyone. Suddenly from amid the trees Nick appeared.

"It seems we are fasting today, bhante."

Paul had not appeared at the meeting place and, after waiting

until twelve thirty, Nick had decided to return to the campsite. With nothing else for it we packed our gear, which had dried out well in the sun, and set off across the Breckland towards Thetford Forest. Once again there was a mass of interesting plants around; Nick would often wander away into the heath or stay behind to investigate some small specimen – wild sedums, sorrel or sedge. Having dined modestly, on spirulina tablets and some honey which we had, we travelled at a gentle pace, aiming to conserve energy. We found that through the day we felt little different than had we had a normal-sized meal. The lanes were long and broad, through tall gentle pine-woods, and walking was a steady beat. I have begun to use the 'Buddho' mantra quite a lot and have found it a good reminder, with so much plain walking the mind remains very composed. The sun shone and overhead the old bombers of the local air-show gave us a frequent fly-past.

We camped that night near the Little Ouse in a hollow of alders couched amongst the pines; by this time I was quite weary and sat immobile as Nick gathered wood, lit the fire and put the tent up, he having found himself quite energetic. We sat by the fire until quite late, brewed some tea and watched the evening come over us, the mist rose from the river and the colour washed out of the day.

I woke the next morning to the sound of a deer barking fiercely at Nick, who was sat on the edge of the hollow, after a while it scooted away leaving the two of us to sit in the early quiet by a little anti-midge fire. We had arranged to meet Carole again that morning so we soon packed up and headed for the appointed spot. As we walked and were waiting we kept meeting up with people dressed in dull green, carrying telescopes, treading quietly and purposefully about the area. Nick assured me that they were what are known as 'twitchers' – people who have heard of the sighting of some rare bird and are keen to spot it for themselves. Like the other outdoor people we have met (horse-riders, canoeists, cyclists, runners and bikers), they are seekers of freedom like ourselves. It always feels a strange meeting though, like two galaxies passing through each other: there is our universe and yours and we pass by, sharing a nod or a smile but checking our values to see that they are still safely packed.

Carole arrived right on time and was relieved that she too had not missed us. She had been to Paul's house and now had some notes from him and the remainder of the meal which he had made for us. He had sent us each a small Buddha-rūpa and a letter: he wrote that he had made a strange picture, zooming up and down the lane where he was trying to find us in his little car. Intermittently he would screech to a halt and leap out, running into the woods in his white shirt and trousers calling – "Bhante, Bhante; Nicki, Nicki." Fear of arrest, the possibility of committal and the arrival of the clock at twelve thirty sent him home, where, following the only sensible course of action left, he dined on the meal himself.

He was very apologetic but he, as we, recognized that it had not really mattered very much. He knew that we would both be quite content; sometimes this is just the way things go.

Carole walked with us that day from Santon Downham up to Foulden; we took a winding route through the woods, the weather was warm and we had a lovely time. Nowadays, the rain having stopped and the sun come out, the place of mud in the hassle department has been taken over by bugs – Thetford Forest starring sheep ticks as its main feature. The continually changing object of annoyance, as it goes from mud to mind to midges, from him to me to it, is a fine reminder; things are never perfect but they are always good enough.

Carole's parents came out to Foulden and picked her up at the end of the day. Nick and I pressed on for a mile or two, finding a good campsite on the common. To Nick's delight it turned out to be yet another botanical paradise: milkworts, twayblades, adder's-tongues and water-violets (to name a few), were all around us. After a little difficulty we got a fire going and sat until late. In the morning we had a straight run along the lanes into Swaffham. This area is spread with wide fields bordered by Scots pine, greens and greys undulating gently in the early mist. Joy in the space of walking, where arrival and destination? Good to be here on yet another country lane – somewhere in England on the way to see someone. Appearance of a journey, an image; sore feet tromping steadily along and now, here in Nanda's flat, time and faces melting, merging happily.

Just before we reached Swaffham, Carole's parents caught up with us in their car. They had been sent on a mission to warn us about the ticks; apparently sixteen of them had latched onto Carole during the walk and it was only afterwards that she had found them. She was very concerned that we be rid of any which might have attached themselves to us; thanking them kindly for the warning and quite touched by their concern, we determined to have a thorough search once we got to Nanda's.

When we arrived and Nanda saw us, she flung her tiny arms aloft in greeting. She is the elfin archetype of a little old lady – soft-natured, white-haired and beaming. With more than eighty years behind her she had met the Sangha and been ordained by Ajahn Sumedho as an honorary nun. This day we shared a meal and a

glorious time together: pottering through Swaffham's gardens having long and interesting talks. Later on, once in the bath, I found a lone tick on my right leg. These little mites dig into your skin and then lock themselves in place. At first they are the size of a pin-head and you cannot feel them at all; after a few days of ingesting your blood, however, they have grown to be as big as a pea and their presence is extremely painful. It is hard to remove them without killing them so, after anaesthetizing it with witch-hazel, I carefully dug it out; plus its mandibles' worth of flesh. I feared for a while that it had not survived the operation and was very happy when I saw it coming to; unfortunately, as I was showing it to Nick, it hopped down onto the carpet.

Somewhere, tucked alone under a good tuft, I suspect it is sleeping now, having slightly woozy sheep-tick dreams and gathering its strength for another day.

I write this sitting in a spacious, white upper room of Chapter House near Wisbech. When we were at Noy Thomson's in Tilford, Tew Bunnag invited us to join him and his students for the last day of this retreat and we arrived here last night. They are all pleased to see us and are looking after us very well.

Our time with Sister Nanda was packed with exciting little trifles: talks and visits, gardens and flowers and a stream of 'allowables' which came our way at unerringly frequent intervals; sweets and chocolates heaped, daintily, on little dishes for our delight. As there were other people sleeping in neighbouring flats we did no morning chanting but simply met and sat. After tea we talked for a long time; each of us intermittently writing a postcard, preparing the food or popping off to take care of some little task. Our conversations took us into the late morning and carried on after the meal, Nanda's tales of her life in Sri Lanka, how it is with Nick and I, Switzerland and Chithurst; talking, rambling ever on, never seeming to go in any particular direction but warmed and illuminated by peaceful light and happiness. If ever there was a devatā in the world, Nanda, in the company of bhikkhus, is the one.

In the afternoon Nanda's daughter-in-law drove us to a nearby village to visit some friends, Lyn and Pelham Bird. They were a noble old couple living in a beautiful house and through their garden ran the River Nar. They asked us many questions about the walk and our

**Allowables – The Buddha allowed bhikkhus to use certain things, outside of the dawn/noon time limit, for tonic or medicinal purposes. These include: sugar, honey, vegetable oil, tea, coffee and fruit juice, which are in quite common usage. Other items such as plain chocolate (milk is considered to be 'food', thus anything containing it is not allowable), may be used in moderation to counteract fatigue and illness – or in Sister Nanda's case, to allow an old lady, living by herself, the joy of offering her guests a special treat.*

lives; we spoke a long time, dawdling in pleasant boulevards of thought and view, insight and inner feeling. They were pleased to have Nick there since, as we walked around the garden, they were able to ask him all about their plants – the wild flowers and the trees they loved.

We arrived back at Nanda's flat only minutes after Mr. Green, Carole Winter's father, had drawn up; due to spend the evening with him and his wife, we switched cars and were driven off to their home in Saham Toney. Mrs. Green was very pleased to see us and, shortly after we arrived, she put on the video tape of Ajahn Sumedho's T.V. appearance in a programme called 'Partly Satirical Broadcast'. It had been a series of interviews and documentaries concerning the current political parties and their alternatives in Britain. This had been a special surprise for Nanda, but she was not very pleased with it and said, "It did not give him enough of a chance to explain everything."

We spent the evening talking with the Greens; Mrs. has become quite a devoted Buddhist in recent months and Mr., although not too sympathetic, was very kind and friendly. Once again our conversation wandered here and there; although the words so often seem inconsequential in such chat, they seem to serve as a way for people to be together – an excuse to share some time and space in friendliness, meeting together and letting the light shine a little.

The next morning began with a terrific thunderstorm, lightning flashing all around the town and rain gushing on the roof in rivers; after a couple of hours it was all but finished and left us with a quiet and well-washed day. We spent our time looking at old photographs and getting our things ready for our departure; Nanda prepared another banquet for us and, as a special 'treat', she bought us fish and chips; given a choice we tend to encourage people to offer vegetarian food but our training as mendicants is to accept with a grateful heart whatever is presented sincerely to us. She is so kind and generous, one has to practically hold her down to stop her from running about bringing things; she gave me a beautiful mother-of-pearl shell to put on my shrine. After the meal her son came round and we had a good chat together; Nanda seems to have spent most of her life in the company of and caring for, men whom life has wounded: her father, her husband, her son. She lives as

a small light dissolving the darkness that has invaded, truly a great blessing in the world.

At about three o'clock we departed, the rain had cleared and, after one final shower, it was a warm bright afternoon. We tromped down a long green lane filled with rain-soaked cow-parsley and may-blossom, it felt good to be outside again. We followed the lane westward through lush farmland; watching sunlight sparkling on the rivulet running down the path, it seemed just like the lark-song:

a thing so clear and beautiful, there is nothing you can say or think – it dances past the naming mind, glittering a smile and daring you to create. We put our packs down for a rest at the edge of a huge wheat field and sat for a while in the sun. After a moment a man came up to us and said hello. He was a truck-driver who made a run every week from Nottingham down through East Anglia and on Thursdays he would park in the wood by this wheat field to spend the night. He had never met other people at this spot before and was delighted to see us. We talked a long time about life and religion; he was a good man and very kindly offered to donate his sandwiches to us but, being well-supplied with food and not wishing him to go without, we declined the offer. We stayed a while together, exchanging Dhamma and enjoying the warm afternoon.

We pressed on through the long Norfolk lanes until we reached the River Nar which we followed for a while. After a painful stretch through half a mile of thick nettles, we arrived at the wood where we had chosen to camp for the night. We found a sandy hollow of young oak and birches within the pine plantation and were soon sitting by a fire. The night was wild and dark with high winds, spits of rain. I began to think of Norfolk witches: "This is just the place they would hold a sabbat". Dark forces, lurking malice – the mind began to run. How to meet fear? How to meet evil, black wizardry and demons? A warm feeling welled within as I reflected on all this; taking refuge in true wisdom – lokuttara paññā – the ultimate white magic.

The following day broke fine and clear, we walked through the woodlands for a while and stopped for our meal just before the village of Watlington. After we crossed the Great Ouse the land became completely flat; miles and miles of lush, humble farms, deep ditches and vast skies. It was a long hot walk, following lanes and farm-tracks all the way to Wisbech; our circular horizon was broken only by occasional trees and houses and the slight green ridge which we had come from in the East. We do not talk very much these days and the walking through such countryside is very peaceful, like North-East Thailand the land is vast, open and unexciting.

We arrived at Chapter House at about eight o'clock last night and were warmly met by Fizz, Tew Bunnag's wife. Sitting in the kitchen we talked and drank tea; happiness, with my feet thrumming gently in the warm relief of a mustard bath. Later on Tew appeared, the evening sitting having finished, and we talked together for a while. He is very glad to have us join the retreat and many of the people are eager to meet us. This morning we joined them for their first sitting of the day; soon I will go down to give a talk and answer questions. It is bright and sunny again, another perfect day.

"It is something rare indeed, for me, to have a visit from a bhikkhu, and it was a real joy to be able to offer the shelter of my little flat to Ven. Amaro and Nick, as they passed by, on their long and winding path to Harnham.

They stayed three days to rest and relax – three days of spiritual blessing, great peace and happiness for myself, and the limited space of my small dwelling didn't seem to present any problems for their comfort, I am glad to say.

I listened with much interest to the story of their journey and was delighted to learn that they had been well-cared-for by the friends they came across en route.

We went for just one outing to Lyn and Pelham Bird who live in a neighbouring village and who had sent us a kind welcome. That afternoon was fine and sunny, and lovely to wander amongst the flowers and by the banks of the river that runs through their beautiful garden; but I think the animated discussion on Buddhism, punctuated by much good humour, that took place round the table at tea-time, was the highlight of the visit for Ven. Amaro. One could see how much he loved to expound the wonderful ancient teachings of the Dhamma!

Lyn presented us with a most delicious coffee cake she had made especially for our meal the next day.

I was much impressed by the quiet endurance and cheerful happiness with which Ven. Amaro and Nick had encountered all their experiences and found nothing lacking!

When it was time for them to 'go forth' once more, I walked with them across the town to see them off.

I had some sad moments as I watched them walking away from me and gradually disappearing into the distance.

However, it is ever thus, in this life, whoever comes must go! – even the best of friends.

Ven. Amaro and Nick – Farewell!"

Sister Nanda

I talked with the people on the retreat for quite a time that morning, most of them knew little about monastic life so I was able to answer many questions. At eleven o'clock they all went off for a T'ai Chi session except for one old man who stayed behind to talk. A strangely bright person tangled in all kinds of doubt, I did my best to stay empty and be patient, it was plain that there was little I could say. Doubt is never truly resolved in words, so I just sat there, soaking up his world. The next day he thanked me for spending time with him, not for what was said but for listening, he looked several shades brighter and I told him it was good – listening to people is much harder than talking to them.

Tew and the others set to work in the garden in the afternoon; still hot and sunny, I sat on the garden seat and had a long talk with a man who had been at the Manjushri Institute and with a Rajneesh group. Later on the others came round and sat with us, asking more questions about practice and use of meditation. It was a good talk and we were there for a couple of hours, only the arrival of cold and rain eventually sending us indoors. Carole Winter came by for a visit and to bring us some waterproofer for the tent, she told us of the tangle with the ticks and we chatted together for a while. That evening Tew asked me to lead the meeting so I did a little chanting, unfortunately I forgot the words again but was able to break off and start anew without upsetting things too much.

Everyone on the retreat was preparing to leave the next day, Tew and his family went mid-morning as did most of the others; he was very appreciative of our visit and, although he has recently drifted away from Chapter House somewhat, he seemed keen to use it more and invite bhikkhus to lead retreats there. After he left I was thinking, and realized that I felt like some kind of wandering

enzyme; everywhere we go people begin to talk of setting up retreats and monasteries and of visiting Chithurst and Harnham. I spent the afternoon mending my sandals and talking with Mike and Linda, the caretakers of the house. Nick passed his day digging in the garden and getting the last of his cards and letters written. Things were quiet again and we sat for a long time together in the evening. We ate early the next day and left around noon. With my sandals newly patched and waxed, it felt good to be clicking along the road again. It was a sunny day and people greeted us cheerfully as we passed by.

Even though we walked all day on country lanes and on a good straight path beside the River Nene, I was finding it very hard to concentrate. That familiar gnawing angst of 'something's wrong' hung ever in the background and, on reflection, I put it down to be the karmic result of having had a long lie-in that morning. Despite the sun, the waving river-banks of soft grass, I felt persistently wretched; patience and a lot of sitting, I decided, would be the best cure. We reached the sea-wall at the mouth of the river that evening, sitting in the last of the day's sun we sheltered from the wind; warm but blasting inland from the sea. It was after ten o'clock and still twilight when we turned in, the first stars had appeared and there were no clouds; I got up from my sitting mat, stuffed my hands into the pockets of my foam-filled waistcoat, stretched my back and looked around.

"Yup", I thought, straightening my knees, blinking at the stars and evening sky, "despite a nameless discontent, blabbering aimless streams of thought, a clutch of painful gnawing doubts, everything is just as it should be."

By the next dawn the wind had dropped so we sat on top of the sea-wall and watched the early sun; up on top a long time the sky was clear and soon the air felt quite warm again. I find it continually amazing now to realize that this world is just a shadow or a gesture of the Unborn; I look around, look at myself – it is so convincing, seems so real, so important, yet always in the background there is the silent balm, the endless song of life's true nature: the real real, calling from afar, reminding you – "not so, not so".

We walked all day along the sea-wall of the Wash, an earth embankment dividing the sea and salt-marsh in the north from the farmland to the south. In the morning as we ate our meal, the local nazgûl, jet fighter planes, roared continually overhead; circling around the area they accompanied us all day. When I heard we would be walking by the marshes of the Wash I had imagined bleak empty stretches of boggy grass, lonely, silent but for the occasional cry of sea-birds; as we continued the planes came lower and louder until we found ourselves walking beside a firing range which occupied several miles of the marsh and where the planes were having target practice. We could see the dust kicked up by their bullets and the smoke rising from their bombs. It was a hot sunny day and we strode along, quite tickled by the strangeness of the scene; we could see people in the observation-towers looking at us and wondered if they thought we were Russian spies. Having bumped into several Ministry of Defence places on our travels I thought, "Maybe they've got a file going on us"; some of the air-force people waved and smiled as they drove by, happily we returned the greeting. It is good to know that people engaged in such different occupations can get along.

We pitched our tent on the sea-wall and had a windy night, neither of us slept well for the noisy flapping of the tent. As we lay there I was convinced that I could hear the sound of a horse grazing just outside, and my curiosity kept me half awake. Large sections of the wall are being rebuilt so, as we set off the next day, we walked past the early shift on the earth-movers; caterpillar tractors, huge bucket-and-crane machines; the men smiled cheerily and said good morning as we went by, a look of amused astonishment on their faces. Walkers of any sort seem to be a rare sight in these parts so we two must be quite a picture. It was hot and sunny again but with a fine

breeze so we managed to keep quite cool. In the early afternoon we left the sea-wall and headed into Boston along the lanes.

From miles away we had been able to pin-point the town by its huge tower which dominates the skyline. It is known affectionately by the locals as 'The Boston Stump' and is supposed to be the tallest church in England. At first it was pale, shadowy and indistinct but as the day passed and we drew closer, its image became clearer and more solid. Eventually we arrived and made our way to the centre. It seemed like an old market town which had been swelled by modern industry. Sitting on the River Witham, the few winding streets and the great church tower are now surrounded by a spray of small factories and housing estates. Almost oblivious to the passers-by I sat beneath 'The Stump' while Nick did some shopping, appreciating the coolness after the heat of the day's walk; after he returned and had made a few phone calls we were able to sketch out our route for the next few days. Ron Lamont was unable to see us in Lincoln so we decided to head straight up the Wolds to Brigg where Daniel Mariau had invited us; we have more than a week to reach him so we will be able to go at quite a gentle pace. It has been very pleasant these last few days: having nowhere, conventionally, to get to, no appointments; only stops for water or food supplies creating our schedule. Without pressure of time or destination there is a lot of ease in walking; padding along the sea-wall, the road and the river bank, it is quite easy to be peaceful.

We camped beside the river that night a few miles north-west of Boston; at one time the Witham must have meandered all around these low flat fields, nowadays it follows a strong broad band, channelled into straight stretches with tall embankments on either side, there are cattle most of the way along and they have made good paths. We pitched the tent on a flat patch below the bank and climbed back up on top, there was a beautiful sunset and while we sat an otter floated by looking at us; later on we could hear it upstream, splashing about as it fished.

The next morning we carried on for a few miles along the river and chose a good spot on the embankment to have our meal. At this

time Nick had been getting low on funds and was experimenting with cheap ways of keeping us nourished; our food was thus basic and very simple to prepare. Having been struck by the sight of a pint tub of cheap natural yoghurt in a Boston shop, Nick had thought what a nice change it would make for us. Our custom was for him to prepare the food, put it in my bowl and then afterwards offer it to me. He poured in half of the yoghurt and then, having divided a large brown loaf into two equal chunks, placed one of these in there too; around the sides were lumps of carrot and a number of ginger biscuits. With it all arranged he offered it to me and gratefully I accepted – a noble square Sumeru, standing in a thick white sea.

At first all went well but after a while of breaking the bread, dunking it and conveying it to my mouth, yoghurt seemed to have got everywhere. With my robe falling off into the food and up to my wrists with white gunk and breadcrumbs, I looked helplessly around for some solution to my predicament. Nick looked up from his Tupperware alms-bowl a little apologetic –

"I'm sorry, bhante – I should have thought . . ."

"No problem", I reassured him with a smile, I think there are some tissues in my pack."

After it was over and we were all cleaned up, we sat and I watched the otter at work again: bobbing to the surface with a large silvery mouthful and then disappearing from our view. It was a very quiet river, we saw only a couple of boats all day and met no one until the path reached Chapel Hill.

It was later than we expected when we arrived in Tattershall and we were pretty tired; we took a footpath which led through the village, past Coningsby, to the small oakwood where we camped the night. Like Waresly Wood there was the lovely feeling to it of old age and multiplicity of life; there was also a horde of mosquitoes and midges so we found an airy spot and lit a fire. It was the new moon that night and, as Nick and I had already shared the tent for the allowable limit of three nights*, I decided to sleep out by the fire. On

**The allowable limit of three nights – A bhikkhu is not permitted to share the same dwelling place with a layman for more than three consecutive nights. This training rule was laid down to help promote privacy and an appropriate separateness between Sangha and laity.*

my ground-sheet, covered by my robes and the waterproofs, I bedded down; it was late and I fell asleep instantly. There was no rain in the night and I awoke feeling great, it was four o'clock (which I had not seen for a while), already bright and the air was ringing with birdsong. I got the fire going and did some exercises; after a while Nick emerged from the tent and we sat together, warm by the fire in the morning sun, light and air, slowly waking up.

We have left the Fens far behind us and are now sitting, well fed, on top of Hoe Hill, an old mound near the Bluestone Ridge. Around us the Lincoln Wolds lie folded in gentle green rumples, the barley is billowing in the wind and the sun is shining brightly. It is hard to imagine that the world could be any more beautiful than this. It was only a few hours ago, however, that we were chased from our campsite by hordes of hungry midges, the skies were lowering, the wind cold and rain was threatening to fall. It was only a short while before that that the same valley seemed like paradise . . . it only goes to show.

We left the wood near Coningsby later than we thought and walked into Mareham-le-Fen for supplies, we could see the hills beginning to our left and were quite struck by them after so long in flat country. After Nick had found the village shop we pressed on, I was extremely hungry after the long walk we had had the day before and found myself becoming quite uptight as we walked on and on and on.

"Why don't we just sit down and EAT? Find a beauty spot later, Nick. It's terrible karma to keep a bhikkhu so hungry like this" – my thoughts bubbled on – "This is RIDICULOUS!"

Eventually Nick picked up my mood and we carried on just until we reached a nearby wood, finally coming to a halt under a beech tree on the verge. He had been planning to go another three miles, to where our route met a good footpath but was happy we had stopped when we found out the time. I took the clock out of my pack and looked at it – 12:16 – I had reckoned it much earlier. That same morning, for once, I had dismissed my desire to look at the time; "What do you need to know the time for? Let go. Stay with the timeless for a change." Knowing that it was four o'clock when I got

up lent the impression that we had ages before we need think about stopping for the meal.

Once we had got over our initial surprise Nick managed to put the food together in a matter of minutes; we were both able to eat quite calmly and I only had half an apple left by the time the midday limit arrived at one o'clock. It had been cloudy that morning and, by this time, it had got quite cold and windy. We walked on until we reached the footpath and found it to be a broad, well-used track, before long the wind dropped again and the humid atmosphere returned. We sat down to take a rest in the long grass of the verge. I was so tired and it was so comfy it seemed a little snooze would be just the thing, just this once; I wrapped myself up in my robe, stretched out my legs and thought aaaaahhh.

I awoke to the sound of breaking wood and found Nick getting a fire started for some afternoon tea, we had never made any at that time before but as we both seemed so tired it sounded like a very good idea; it was past five o'clock and I had slept a long time. Refreshed but still weary we headed on for Snipe Dales, a nature reserve just south-west of the village of Hagworthingham. On the way Nick stopped by a house to ask for some water and got into conversation with the people there; I sat on my pack at the roadside and, after a while, Nick returned smiling broadly, carrying goat's milk, tea, sugar and eggs as well as the water he had gone for. He told me they had given us all this, so I went over and said hello. We chatted about the walk and the English countryside, Nick was able to help them out by identifying some trees in their garden and we parted company in good spirits. We walked through the nature reserve and pitched our tent on a hilltop just beyond the eastern edge. By the woods there were hordes of midges, so we opted for being wind-blown but unbitten.

It was cold and rainy the next morning, there was a stiff breeze and the skies were heavy. As I sat on the hilltop I could feel the effect again of trying to fill up the unknown with the known, as on the day before: waiting to see if there was a shop in the village; waiting to see when Nick was going to stop walking; now waiting to see where Nick

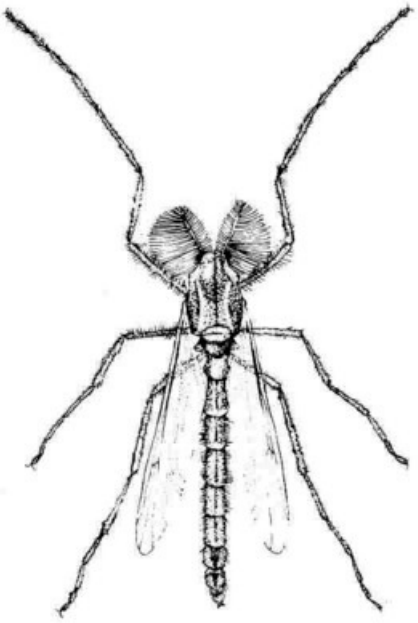
had gone having disappeared so early. "Has he missed the time again? Will there be a village shop?" – You can feel a whimpering compulsion to *know*, to have things spelled out, safe and certain; yet there is that which intuits that uncertainty about the world is the realistic view and that the 'known' is little more than a fragile convention: a structure which is functional and valid for a while but definitely not worth taking refuge in. Letting go, renunciation of conventions, is the learning to be at ease in boundless emptiness.

Alone that morning I contemplated our perceptions: our problems, feelings, pains and hang-ups; all the things which happen in a life. Whether the cause is habitual attachments, the state of the weather, the planets, the government or just plain human ignorance, these things can only reach so far into the mind and then they cease. Like reaching the end of the world, they step off into a great nothingness.

We ate in the tent that day as it was raining and we decided that we would not move until the morrow. We had shifted camp down the hill to be near the stream in the valley bottom and had a good fire going to keep the midges at bay. I spent the afternoon mending some things and Nick went off to explore the nature reserve. We brewed up some tea early in the evening and sat, looking around the dale; it was a beautiful spot with willows and alders lining the stream. A patch of may-blossom and ash trees was half-way up the slope and blue streaks of sky flashed occasionally in the running cloud. So alone and quiet – it was hard to believe that this little valley had once witnessed the horrors of warfare. In this place though, a few hundred years ago, Cavalier had met Roundhead and many were slain in the battle.

As twilight came that evening the midge presence increased until we retreated up the hill, into the peace of the wind. We sat until late and then headed down the thistly slope in the dark. The night was quite black now but for a far-off road and the distant lights of Skegness. There were still a few midges in the tent when we returned but I managed to wrap myself up and, protected from their hungry bites, I fell asleep quite happily. At five a.m. I was awoken from a

dream about orchids and a golden mango by their tickly bites all around my head. There were droves of them so I went back up the hill for refuge, on the top I found Nick fast asleep as he had fled there in the night; after sitting for a while it began to rain, Nick awoke and we returned together to pack up. Trying to keep cool amidst a flurry of midge-bites we got our things organized and left, heading north-east for the Viking Way.



As the sun broke out we arrived on this hilltop and we have been enjoying the warmth ever since. The acres of barley or somesuch are still rippling in the wind and, for the moment, all is right with the world.

The last three days have been something of a mixed bag: a jumble of sunny ambling, picnics, campfires, an irate farmer; rolling through gentle valleys, windy hills, meadow churches; stopping to sit and rising to walk. Fears and worries, warmth and light, peace and agitation: one and all in the sky together like the sun and clouds.

The afternoon that we left Hoe Hill we joined a path called 'The Viking Way' which wanders north-south through the Lincoln Wolds, we have stayed with or nearby it ever since then. Like the North Downs Way it is an official long-distance path but, predictably, the marker for it is a little Viking's head with a two-horned helmet thus:  this fellow we have named 'Sven' and we have enjoyed his company for this part of the trip. As we have been aiming to reach Brigg on Thursday we have been able to go at a very gentle pace, often stopping to sit and take in the surroundings.

That first evening we found an abandoned farm near a small nature reserve called 'Red Hill', it was very broken down but the barn had a good roof so we decided to spend the night there. I am always a bit nervous of "appearance of irate farmer with shotgun"; whenever we spend the night camping in the corner of some farm or in such places as this I tend to get the jitters. Neither that night, however, nor the following morning did anyone appear and after we had eaten we ambled on.

It was another hot day and the countryside was beautiful. As we approached Ludford Woods, where we had planned to stop, we could almost hear the Sirens' song of the midges, calling out for us to join them amongst the trees; it was wet and humid with dense undergrowth and dark. We declined the invitation and carried on, finding a large barn off the road short before the village; it seemed a good

place so we decided to stop there. We lit a fire under the huge lean-to as it had begun to rain and, despite ever more present fears of 'the farmer' and the sound of a shotgun nearby, no-one appeared. The next morning we were clearing up to go and, as I rounded the corner of the barn bearing two dead logs from the fire, my eyes fell upon a small flock of sheep and a farm-lad, clad in a blue boiler-suit, hands in pockets, strolling along beside them. He did not see me and I quickly turned around; I scurried through the barn to see Nick (who was in the middle of his yoga routine), and told him what was up, my heart pounding furiously. I started to pack and suddenly realized that I was completely terrified; "This is ridiculous", I thought, so I paused for a few moments and stopped, slightly amazed at the intensity of my fear of being caught. The lad looked like the most amiable fellow in the world and, as it turned out, a few minutes later he drove off and we never saw him again.

Later that morning, whilst Nick and I were sitting at a crossroads, a policeman pulled up in his car and said hello, he made conversation with us, asking our names and where we were from. Thinking that he was just curious about us I was quite surprised when he asked for our dates of birth as well, as we were talking I felt quite at ease and we chatted happily away. Afterwards Nick told me that they would be checking up on us (having had some experience of his name being taken in the teenage days of his south coast jaunts with his young pals Tombstone and Weasel). They would look to see if we had a record or if anything suspicious had happened in the district "like a barn burning down". "Oh dear", I thought, trying hard to convince myself that we had been really thorough in putting the fire out; imagining the Lincolnshire Constabulary appearing at Chithurst with a warrant, or arresting us in an ambush further up the Viking Way.

Later on we sat on a windy hilltop, with the trees and all the land around blown wildly and buffeted; we ate our meal in a sheltered corner and I reflected on the doubt: you do not know exactly what is going on, as whence the wind comes and whither it will go you cannot say – all that is certain is that the wind is blowing; that

whatever will happen, will happen. What can you do but find a sheltered spot where there is some peace amidst the winds?

Bright and breezy the afternoon; we pressed on through Tealby and Walesby and stopped for a while in the old wayfarers church up on the hilltop. Silence hovered – greeting us as we walked in, blessing us as we sat, unmoved in parting as we left; it was still windy outside and heavier clouds were coming from the south-west. As we crossed over Lincoln's highest ridge we were rained upon but our path took us down into a sheltered valley and soon the weather cleared. We camped and, after making tea, sat until quite late. A crescent moon had appeared by then, together with a star. I watched as they sank behind the hill leaving the night alone to be lit by a few pale constellations. It was midnight and, feeling very clear and peaceful with the fading of the day's traumas, I went happily to sleep.

Curiously it was the following morning, after all the doubts, fears and worries seemed to have vanished, that 'irate farmer' (but without shotgun), eventually appeared. For once we were camped right on a public footpath and were, I (incorrectly) thought, completely 'legal'. He came at about eight o'clock, pulling up in his Land-Rover in the field across the stream. Immediately he started

shouting at us, bawling loud abuse and furiously brandishing his crook; "Aha", I thought, "Buddha as wrathful deity". As I felt we were there quite rightfully it was not difficult to be calm with him. He came over to us very angry but after talking for a while he saw that we had meant no harm and were very sorry to have caused offence. Nick spoke very kindly to him and I was amazed to see his mood dissolve as rapidly as it did, he even became quite calm and quiet as they talked about the land and the running of his farm.

"They're always like that", said Nick afterwards, "come on all irate but are really friendly underneath. Their farm is the dearest thing to them, it's their life, so it's understandable they feel put out when someone just moves in – sets up like they own the place." The thing he was most upset about was the fire, which was embarrassingly and unnecessarily big; we explained that it was all dead wood we had picked up and that we had tried to do no damage to his farm. When we parted company he was quite friendly but I still felt a bit guilty about the fire; having followed the Viking rather than the Buddha way in my wood-gathering exploits. I had not been very mindful of either what we really needed or the respect due to the land as someone's private property. I realized that we should be more sensitive and careful, especially about fires, and not go about things in such a heedless way as we have done on occasions up to now.

It is good to see that when you wander off the track it only takes a while before the karma ripens and you get to taste the fruit. Guilt and remorse for being selfish, intrusive and clumsy; doubts about being pārājika for taking firewood; all the angst which comes from having lost your path. All this feeling is exactly what makes us resolve to do better in the future: to keep to the path since to struggle in the rough is both painful and exhausting. Hiri-ottappa, moral sensitivity, guardian and protector of the world.

We carried on down the valley where we had met the farmer, following the Viking Way into a little Roman town called Caistor. Nick bought the food for the next couple of days while I waited at the church; I could hear the sounds of the local schoolchildren coming out for their morning break, the calls and squeaks of teenage years running on for a while until the time was over. When Nick reappeared we left the town behind and ate our meal on a nearby hilltop, we sat looking out over the beginnings of the industrial belt emerging to our north and west. We spent the day following the western edge of the Wolds almost until they petered out completely; still walking through rich farmland we continued to see old places left to crumble here and there, often nearby there would be a sparkling new dream-home. It seems that these farmers are very rich and with great political power; they can build, pull down, and control the land with little restriction in these parts. One time Nick stopped for water at a small bungalow, the old man there said the owner of the estate had a hundred thousand acres: six farms in Lincolnshire and a sugar plantation in Barbados. Another day, as we walked beside a huge field of young cabbages, we saw a few men hoeing carefully between the plants. We stopped by the first man, leathery and weathered, and Nick opened up the conversation:

"Nice to see people still doing things by hand."

"It's the way y got ta do it if y want good cabbages", he replied a little startled by our presence.

"Did you each come on your own tractor?" asked Nick, indicating the five large and very spiffy new machines (most with some expensive-looking piece of equipment attached), parked on the track beside the field.

"Aye – we all live on different parts of the estate. We're on

piece-work for this job."

Maybe £100,000 worth of vehicles to bring five men to hoe some cabbages – these farms are *very* prosperous. Nick gave the 'Ultimate Ponderosa Award' to a new bungalow we passed that afternoon: it had huge picture windows, a landscaped garden and an old decorated street lamp standing on an island in the fish-pond.

Our path took us through a long thin wood at the end of the day and finally brought us to a perfect campsite. After the fracas of that morning I was very wary of camping intrusively, but the place we found was at the edge of the wood, beside a broad public track and with several fireplaces from the burnt off-cuts of the local woodsmen. It made me feel very happy, a perfect place, as though it had been put there especially for us; we spent a long night and morning there, finally packing up to leave about midday. We kept to small roads and tracks most of the way into Brigg, arriving at Daniel Mariau's house after only three hours of walking. The feeling of the land has changed now; the pastures of the South with their chirruping woods are well behind us and the presence of the industry of the North is all around, the voices and faces of the people are quite different and there is a sense of strength and harshness.

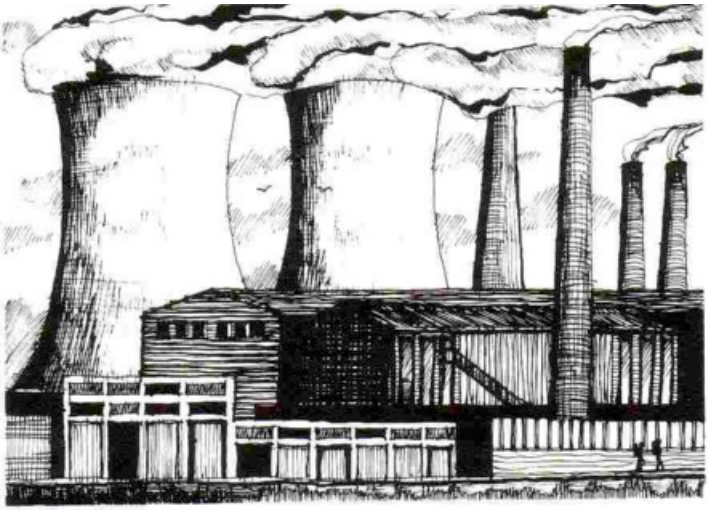
Daniel and Vivienne welcomed us warmly into their home, a large house on a main street of the village, used until recently by the 'Poor Clares'. We spent the afternoon, evening and sat late into the night talking and taking phone calls. Nick and I disappeared in turns for a long overdue and welcome bath (the last one I had was in Wisbech). It seemed as though a flood of arrangements and plans had been forming around us as we wandered up from Norfolk, our arrival in Brigg had opened the gates and to our surprise we found ourselves suddenly surrounded by water. By the next morning, however, we had things well sorted out – what we needed to do in Doncaster, our route there and the route to Manchester. The Doncaster group had been very efficient and it seemed that everything was well arranged for us.

Vivienne had to go to work quite early but Daniel was free to stay, we talked on for much of the morning; he is a lecturer in Indian

Philosophy at Hull University so I found myself asking many questions about religious academia, Buddhist history and a host of other subjects. One does not often meet scholars with such a knowledge so, delighted, our conversations rambled everywhichway: talking of the walk, our lives, the evolution of the Sangha, the state of the nation and the rise of the computer age. I suspect that we could have gone on for days but it was soon time to leave; after the meal, which was beautifully offered, we gathered our belongings and departed. It was mid-afternoon and we had a long way to go. Just before we left Daniel asked if there was anything we needed for the road; Nick suggested that we could do with a bar of Bournville chocolate or some Kendal Mint Cake, as we had a long walk ahead, and maybe some cocoa for the evenings. When he returned from the shops Daniel presented us with a kilogram of chocolate bars and four large tins of cocoa; slightly stunned but very impressed by this gesture of generosity, we accepted only two of the tins (there's renunciation for you) and packed the rest away.

From Brigg there were only two bridges over the River Trent within twenty miles of us and the closer of them was a motorway. Nick felt inclined to take this but, since a motorway is illegal for pedestrians, eventually I decided it would be wrong. This meant we had to walk a further four miles north and through the edges of Scunthorpe rather than through the open country. Nick bowed to this choice without a murmur and I was glad – the noble way may not always be the most direct but every step of it is in the peace of innocence.

It was not a pleasant feeling walking through the town – I kept remembering a book or a film I had seen somewhere called 'Fear is a City'; there was fear and heaviness there, young hard-worn people and the air of factories. We crossed the river and walked southwards along the bank until little more than the half moon was lighting our way. Thoroughly but pleasantly exhausted we put down our packs, pitched our tent by the river and were soon stretched out peacefully asleep.



Now that we are well into the journey I have found I think very little in terms of getting anywhere: we have walked north, south, east and west; fast and slow; have had to rush, had to wait and have taken a host of small detours, often for very little reason. All of this combines together in the walk and helps dissolve any idea of progress or a goal. At any one time we are somewhere aiming to be somewhere else but the very physical nature of our day's activities, the variety of places, moods and weathers we have been through, always return one to – "Well, here we are". The memory of our departure from Chithurst and the fantasy of our arrival at Harnham occasionally flicker by; remote mirages, unconvincing, with their irrelevance so clear they fade almost as soon as they arise.

Our camp beside the Trent was just below West Butterwick, we had only five or six miles to go to Windy Ridge so we walked at a fairly gentle pace. The morning was misty and grey, but, as we went along, the air began to warm, the sun gathered strength and it was not long before it was bright and clear. As we walked through a village called Owston Ferry a man greeted us at his gate, he had seen us taking a nearby footpath through a cornfield. In a slightly prophetic tone he spoke.

"You are travelling an ancient path."

"Yes indeed", said I, responding to the theatrical flavour of the moment. We talked about our walk and the place which we were heading to that morning. He knew the area well and had come out to meet us; glad to see the old footpaths being used and being a keen rambler himself. After a little more talk we said goodbye, turned back to the road and carried on. We found Windy Ridge without too much trouble, arriving there a few minutes before Jenny Jaques and her family. It was her parents' farm which we were on and, as it was

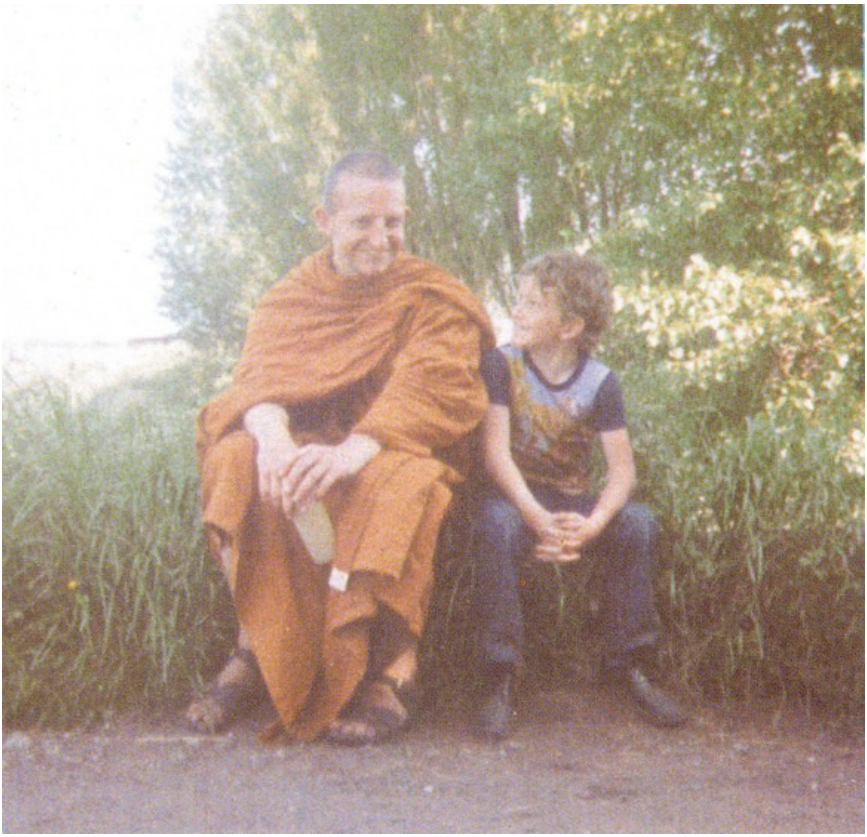
conveniently placed between Doncaster and the Trent, we had arranged to meet there for a picnic. Jenny was also keen for her parents to meet a Buddhist monk to see that we are actually all right. There were Nick and I, Jenny and Dave, her children Marianne and Kristian together with their young friend Andrew, gathered in the sunshine for the meal. It was the first time that she had offered dāna to bhikkhus and she had put a lot of effort into getting everything right, she had had trial runs to see if some of the dishes would come out and had gathered special recipes from her friends.

Jenny and the children were keen to walk so Dave took the car, with most of our luggage, back to Doncaster and left the six of us behind. It was a beautiful afternoon and the children did very well with the lengthy hike. We went mostly by farm tracks and small roads; braving mosquito infested turbary woods, hot sun, bees tangled in hair and other small adventures. On the way Kristian found the walking a bit difficult, as I went along beside him we had a chat –

"How are you doing, Kristian?"

"It's a bit hard, bhunty. I'm not tired: it's just m' legs that want to stop."

We arrived in the village of Wroot at about tea-time. Jenny had some friends, Harry and June, who lived in the village so we called by and were warmly welcomed in; for the next hour or so we sat in the kitchen drinking tea and talking. Occasionally the children would dash in bright-eyed, clutching a proud bunch of goose-feathers or other treasures, then dash off again to some other adventure or go to watch the television. We still had quite a long way to go, so we rang Dave and he came to meet us, picking the children up at the edge of the village. Nick, Jenny and I carried on and followed the river the rest of the way into Cantley, a new suburb at the south-eastern corner of Doncaster. It was quite late when we arrived but we sat up talking for a long time, after a hot walk it was very peaceful sitting on the big cushions amongst the greenery of the front room. On the wall opposite me was a dark photo of palm-trees and a setting sun; as I let the road-pounding of the last few days fade out I felt myself peacefully merging and dissolving, glimmering like that Spanish sun setting slowly into the night.



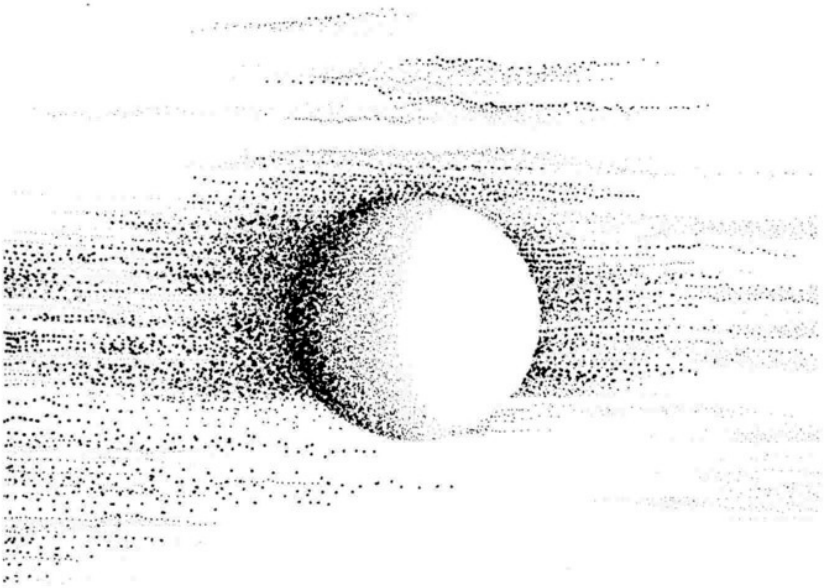
On the road into Doncaster, with Andrew

Dāna had been arranged for the following day at the Oldfield's house a few miles away in central Doncaster. Dave offered to take our packs over in the car so we walked pindabaht through the town and arrived at about ten thirty. There were quite a few people who had come round to visit us; once we had all gathered there were more than a dozen for the meal so we ate outside on the lawn. As the day went by more people appeared and we spent a long afternoon, talking, drinking tea and enjoying the sun. John from Hatfield, Martin and Bill from Sheffield, Marstan from Grimsby and David and Choco Major from Rotherham; all had come from way outside town and it was inspiring to see them having made such an effort to come and visit us. Jacqui Oldfield had asked David Major (who is something of a woodcarver), if he could make up a block of sorts for the Doncaster group's Buddha-rūpa to sit upon. He brought his offering that evening and had worked hard to finish it in time; it was a version in wood of the cover design of the new pūjā-book from Chithurst, beautifully carved with the paint only just dry. It felt good that our arrival had been the occasion for so much warmth and friendliness between these people; after the chanting and meditation we stayed up until late, finally turning in at nearly midnight.

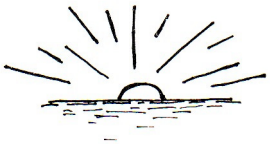
The next day was very quiet, I did not leave the house and spoke very little, catching up with the diary and writing a letter to Ajahn Sumedho. Jenny showed up in the evening to join us for the pūjā and meditation; she had been cooking and planning for her dāna the following day, we could see that she was keen to do everything right so we did our best to placate her fears of failure. I spent the next morning writing postcards until Dave arrived at ten to pick us up, Jenny was again delighted when we appeared at her house and welcomed us in warmly. The children were all at school but she had invited some friends around so there were several of us there for the meal: their old friend Forbsey and Angela from up the road with her little boy whose name was also David. The grey sky of the morning cleared in the early afternoon so by about two o'clock we had moved from the front room to the lawn; spending the rest of the day there. Other friends came by: Win and Steve, the next-door

neighbours; an old student friend called Pete; Angela's husband Ken, and finally the children, who returned from school at four and finished off what remained of the dāna. It was a long afternoon, we had many good exchanges and all seemed to have a bright and peaceful time. Jenny was very pleased with it all and Forbsey drove us back to the Oldfield's when finally the afternoon was done.

That evening Phil Purser dropped by to pay his respects but as he had bronchitis he felt it better not to stay; it was very quiet with only a few phone calls to be made, organizing the rest of our journey to Manchester. Vernon was on the early shift at the colliery the next day, so we said our goodbyes that night. It was the summer solstice and a good day to mark the middle of our trip.



"Only those who can see the invisible can do the impossible."



We left Doncaster, heading south-west down the river, in the roasting heat of the first day of summer; the path took us by power-stations, coal-pits, metal towers and blackened chimneys looming in the hot skyline of the town. It was not long though before we were in countryside again and we stopped frequently to rest when we found a spot of shade in the woodland along the river. We took a railway bridge across the Don when we reached Conisbrough and climbed up through its streets to the castle which dominates the town. A refuge long past its best – Vernon told us it had been the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott, when he lived nearby, to write his famous novel *Ivanhoe*. A gleaming white citadel ringed around by the crumbled remains of an outer wall. We sat on the rim of the the old moat and rested for a while, enjoying ice-lollies and looking up at the great white edifice shining in the blue. We followed the winding streets and terraces out of the town and took a path southwards into farm-land. Nick spotted a scrubby patch good for a campsite near the M18 so we headed over there and downed our packs. It was airy and there were no midges so we did not bother with a fire. It was a fine evening, still very warm, and we could see clouds of pollen blowing off the fields across the way. I was very tired after our spell with all the good folk of Doncaster so I had an early night and woke the next day well rested.

We did not have far to go to reach Rotherham but we packed up and left early to give ourselves plenty of time. It was warm but overcast that morning and we had a pleasant walk; through lanes and footpaths, into suburbs, arriving at David and Chōco's house at ten. Shortly after we sat down they presented us each with a wooden spoon which David himself had carved. He had had the idea after seeing us at the Oldfield's and had spent the last few days working hard to make them, taking them to the factory where he worked to finish them during breaks in his job. On mine was carved a water-dragon and on Nick's there was a tiger, to represent, respectively, the spiritual and the material. On the backs were our names with a footprint (mine the right, Nick's the left) and 'Chithurst – Harnham 1983'.

Some friends of David's came in the morning and joined us for the day; we sat talking for most of the afternoon, soaking up their world and telling of the stories and the lessons learnt on our walk. Later in the day I had another repairing session on my sandals to bring them back to roadworthiness. They are still in good form, despite much patching and restitching, but I have to keep a close eye on them for wear and tear. They could easily give out if I did not bother to look after them – in this way they are a good example of a vehicle.

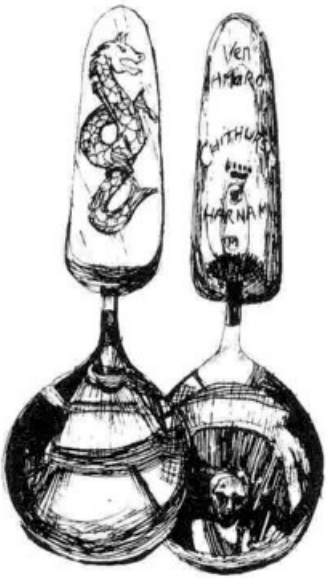
We met their son Lawrence briefly and spent the rest of our time talking of this and that, looking at David's carvings and drinking cups of tea. We left at midday, after eating together, and set off down the River Rother towards Sheffield. We came into the outskirts through a blackened coal-cum-gasworks. Just like between Scylla and Charybdis, our path took us through the gap which divided the works from the wire-mesh wrapped around a rail-yard.

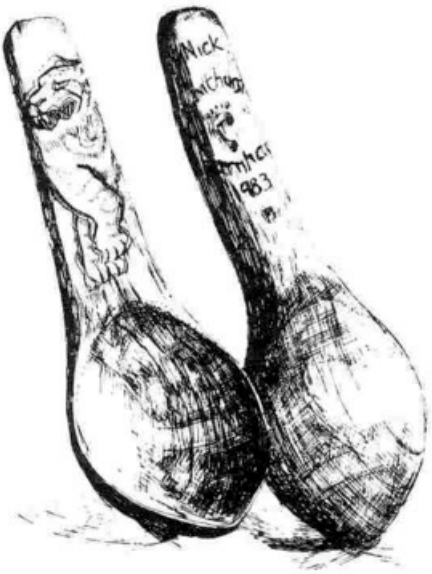
The appearance of the city itself came as a great surprise: as we came up from the railway, through the golf-park, over the hill, we saw a green mass of trees and tangled streets covering the steep and misty countryside. As we walked we found ourselves following a thin green line which took a curve through the south-east corner of the city. Along streams and over hills we came upon gorgeous views: rolling expanses of parkland, clusters of houses, tower-blocks, broad streets and terraces; all of these spread through the valleys and

shaded in the haze of afternoon. We were amazed. In my mind Sheffield had been classed as an "odious black lump, somewhere up north" – and there we were, sitting in the mottled hills, delighting in the beauty of the view.

As we were making our way across one park a young fellow came up and asked if we were lost; he had spotted us from a passing bus, seen us going back on our tracks and wanted to help out if he could. He guided us through the town to our destination, asking us questions all the way; he was quite knowledgable and seemed to have read a lot about Buddha-Dhamma. We had a good talk and, when we arrived at Martin Killalla's house, he joined us for a cup of tea. After a while he left and we spent a quiet evening talking with Martin and his wife Val. They were completely new to monastic form and also had many questions. When we had met Martin a few days before in the Oldfield's garden it had been the first time that he had ever seen a bhikkhu, it was also his first contact with the Doncaster Buddhist Group. When he heard we would be walking near Sheffield his immediate response was to invite us to his home.

It is a good feeling to tell people about our life, the great joy in simply doing things the way we do them; they seemed to understand all we said very well and I was struck by how wonderful it is, that you can walk into the house of almost complete strangers and be so close and at peace together. I woke early the next day and listened in snatches to the dawn chorus, sat for a while and then took up my pen for the diary.





"Anticipation arose well in advance of the event; at some point the estimated date became definite and plans became as concrete as they ever can be. The Walk was a source of inspiration to everyone, and so many were eager to meet the travellers. Having been met and vetted at the eastern borders of South Yorkshire by Jenny, Dave and family; they were allowed to enter the county, and were duly fed, escorted and accommodated in Cantley. On Sunday, Jenny directed the walkers through Doncaster to our house, where they were to stay for several days. No undue honour was to be assumed by this longish stay; but rather a pressing necessity, as the walkers' sleeping-bags were by now in need of dry-cleaning, and this would take a few days – a clear case of a group of people profiting from the loathsomeness of the body. Other great launderings went on at this time, but these will not be dwelt on!

We held "Open House" on Sunday the 19th, to which numerous visitors came from far and near. A sunny day; dāna on the lawn, followed by a leisurely afternoon of Walkers' Tales; culminated in a cool evening's chanting, sitting, teaching and tea. The next two days involved much planning and looking at maps; phoning and arranging far ahead into the distant hills, as well as mundane concerns like finding the right size of brass nails for mending sandals.

Wednesday saw their departure for such unsung places as Denaby and Conisbrough on the way to Sheffield.

The travellers were received in Rotherham by the Majors and in Sheffield by the Killallas. Both families have now gone forth and north in their own way (the Majors to Nunnykirk near Harnham, the Killallas to North-East Scotland), and hopefully to happier conditions.

For many the Walk had afforded their first encounter with a Bhikkhu, and the sight of the Robe had left many a blessing. Martin Killalla saw Ven. Amaro and Nick safely out of the county, and they left South Yorkshire for the heights of the Peak District.

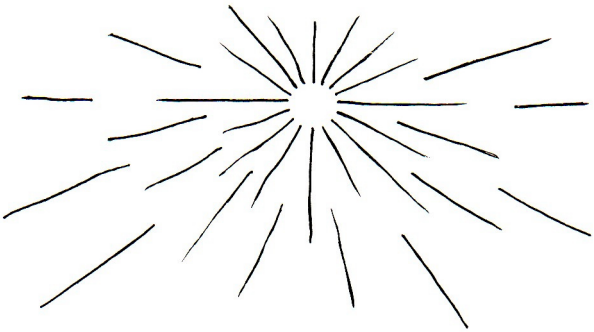
The Fourth Truth is The Way. It openeth wide
Plain for all feet to tread, easy and near,
The Noble Eightfold Path; it goeth straight
To peace and refuge. Hear! – – –

Strong limbs may dare the rugged road which storms,
Soaring and perilous, the mountain's breast;
The weak must wind from slower ledge to ledge,
With many a place of rest.

So is the Eightfold Path which brings to peace;
By lower or by upper heights it goes.
The firm soul hastes, the feeble tarries. All
Will reach the sunlit snows.

(The Light of Asia – *Sir Edwin Arnold)"*

The Oldfields



We ate the meal quite early; little Hannah, Martin and Val's one-year-old, woke up from her morning sleep so the five of us walked together to the edge of the city. We followed a stream through a nearby park which ran all the way up to the moors, saying goodbye to Val and Hannah at about half way; parkland was on both sides of us and we hardly saw any more of the town.

As we walked along the pathway, through the neat lawns and flowerbeds, we passed a young man with a burly dog straining on its lead. Nick stared down at the panting beast and his curiosity was aroused.

"What an incredibly ugly dog!" he proclaimed. "What is it?"

"It's a bull terrier", the young man replied, "they are supposed to look like this."

Conversation having begun, the two of them chatted on as we walked along. At some earlier point on the walk Nick and I had been talking about the different worlds we live in: how one can be skilled or expert or even famous in one field, yet unknowing or unknown outside of that. I mentioned how surprised we had all been in our family when we began to realize that my father had become an internationally famous journalist and judge of dog shows, and yet, within the home, he was just the same as when he had been a farmer. I suppose it must have sounded to Nick like a boast when I told him you could mention my father's name to any dog-breeder and they would know him. We sat down to rest on a park bench and he decided to put me to the test …

"Tan Amaro's father is a dog man. He says you are bound to have heard of him."

"Oh? What's his name?"

"Tom Horner."

"Tom Horner! *The* bull terrier man! Well fancy that – of course I've heard of him. Fancy meeting Tom Horner's son in the local park"

I suspect Nick was considerably humbled by this response. It is true that most dog-breeders have heard of my father but to pick a bull terrier owner was unlucky. This is the breed in which my father is most expert; he has bred them, shown them and has written a well-respected book about them.

We sat and chatted together for a while and at last parted company, the young man still shaking his head with incredulity at our meeting.

"You were right, bhante", said Nick, "I am very impressed."

I managed to restrain any self-satisfied remarks and, smiling quietly, we carried on down the path out of the city.

Martin, Nick and I headed out together across the moorlands and a very dry raised peat-bog, to bring us to the edge of the Peak District. The weather was still warm and hazy, the hills around us faded into blue mist; deep valleys sunk, steep and rocky inclines, miles and miles of dry-stone wall and everywhere hill-sheep scurrying away with their lambs as we pass by. The area is a national park and very popular with ramblers, climbers and sundry outdoor types like ourselves. For the first time on our journey we have begun to meet people who look something like us – walking somewhere purposefully bearing packs. For much of the afternoon we followed a rocky edge, enjoying an easy walk over the well-worn black stones of the area. There were big boulders and large masses of the rock all about, it is of a type called 'millstone grit' and strewn in various places were millstones which had been carved out of it. With the arrival of the mechanised era, I suppose that one day there was simply no more need for them and, as they were so heavy, they were left to lie just where they were and go back to the earth.

After a while we dropped into a valley, tromping through the heather to the top of a small ridge. We stopped for a rest and, as it was not too windy, decided to camp there for the night. Martin had arranged to meet his wife nearby so he left us and disappeared down

the far side of the hill. A little while later he reappeared unexpectedly, together with his family to say a final farewell; after staying only a short time they left again as Hannah's bedtime was approaching. We had had a fine day together: Martin had carried our packs for a while, and the move into this new countryside was lovely. The enormity of the landscape left the mind quite silent; an ocean of vast hills swallowing into the mist.

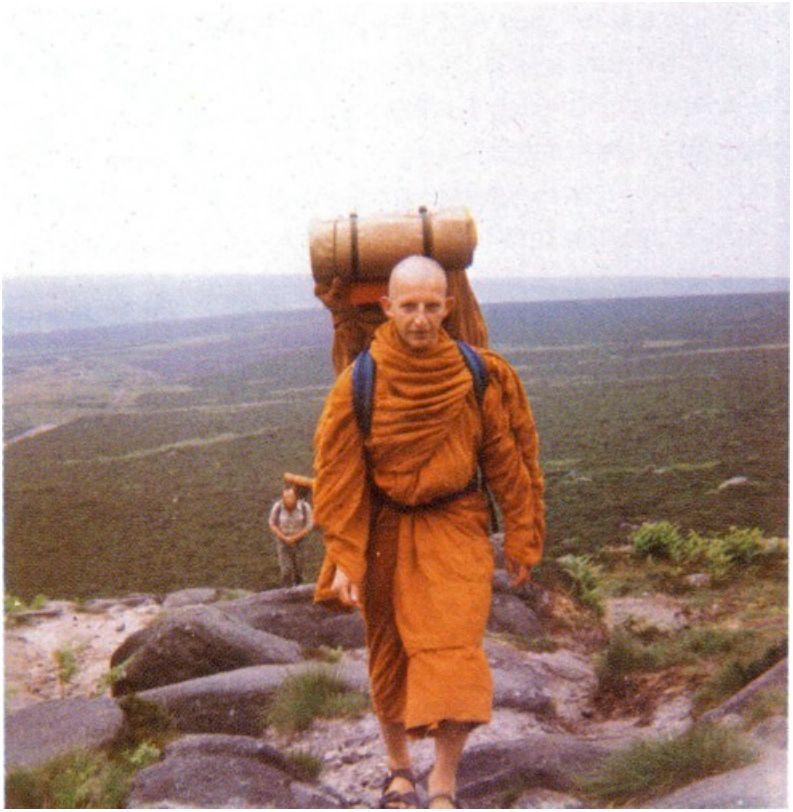
We put a small fire together from the dead wood around us and made some cocoa: it was a peaceful night and the air was warm and still. The next morning we carried on along the ridge to our rendezvous with David Wharton. He had just finished his exams at Durham University and had written to ask if he could join us for a couple of days. Nick and I spotted him waiting at the appointed place as we clambered down the steeps from the ridge, stumbling and scrambling through the little oaks and birches, sliding in between the tussocks. It was overcast and looking rainy but, after meeting, we headed up the other side of the valley and settled on a flat spot for our picnic; David had brought us food for the next two days. As he and Nick were preparing it the rain began; looking at the sky we decided that optimism would not be wise (see pages 29 and 30), so we repaired to an open shed next to a nearby inn. It turned out that we had moved just in time: as we began to eat, the rain came with a vengeance, soaking the road and the cyclists passing just in front of us.

The rain stopped after the heavy shower and, although it stayed cloudy with a stiff breeze all day, that was the last of the wet. We spent the day stomping through the hills and passed around the northern end of the Ladybower Reservoir. We crossed Derwent Dale and went up the other side of the valley. As we came past Hagg Farm Hostel I changed out of my waterproof (which I had worn diligently all day in expectation of rain) and donned my robe again. We had passed many people that day in the hills but it seemed that only once I had gone back to my true colours did anyone want to talk to us. As we took the lane past the dam we chatted with an old fellow who had been a walker for years. He rapped with Nick a long while about the local area and showed us a picture of Derwent village

church-spire as it protruded from the waters when the valley was first flooded. As we said our goodbyes and were parting we began to talk about my being a Buddhist monk; he had been wanting to mention it all along but, probably because of his English reserve, had talked about everything else until it was time to go. He was a spiritualist and had strong feelings about religion and doctrines. We had a good talk together – I was able to tell him a little bit about the Buddhist faith and he was very sympathetic. We finally parted about half an hour later, happy to have met and spent some time together; he wished us well and we set off up the hill to find a campsite.

We found some shelter behind a dry-stone wall up above Lockerbrook Farm and passed a cold and windy night there. We spotted a few breaks of blue in amongst the clouds racing above us and by the following morning it was quite clear. For the first time in these parts we could see a long way. We walked down into the valley and up the other side until we reached the brink of Edale, by this time the sun was breaking through more and more often and we were lucky to have a warm clear spell for our meal. We sheltered from the wind in the lee of a wall and sat in peace looking out over the dale towards Lose Hill; the air was clear and we could see for miles. As we had a lot of time to spare we decided to take the scenic route: up over Lose Hill, along the ridge and down again into Edale village. We set off and, after a great tortuous tromp through the steep meadows to the top, we could see the whole of the Peak District spread about us. Disappearing into the far distance: hills and villages, trains and factories, long green dales and a pair of hang-gliders floating in the air above the ridge.

Mountain tops are great places for meditating but you can't live there so we headed down the well-used track into Edale for supplies. The village is at the beginning of the Pennine Way and so is thickly populated with campers and the hiking set. The area is very carefully looked after and the use of land for camping is restricted. We headed out into open country to the north of the village and found a place to spend the night, well up in a secluded valley beside a stream which ran off Kinder Scout. It was quite late



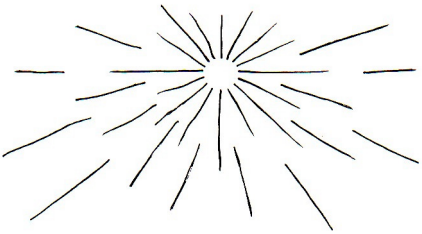
In the Peak District

The view from Kinder Scout

when we pitched the tents and we watched the sky as it cleared, by twilight there were no clouds and we looked forward to a fine day to cross the last of the big hills.

By the next morning things had changed and all my hopes of basking in sunshine on top of Kinder Scout (whose continually foul weather is legendary) were dashed. The day broke with heavy cloud which descended to meet us as we climbed the hill. Following the track called Jacob's Ladder we walked into the whiteness and soon were soaking wet. We decided to go straight over the pass and thus avoid the summit. We resolved that it was much wiser to be buddhas than world conquerors – it was very wet and windy, visibility was less than twenty yards and the top of the hill was a trackless plateau of peat-bog – the obvious thing was to go through it as directly as possible and take a path straight down the other side. As we crossed over the pass I suddenly realized that in a way I had got my wish after all, but the "sunlight of wisdom" does not need a cloudless day to shine.

The weather remained gloomy for quite a time: we came down out of the cloud but the drizzle continued until after we had parted company with David, just after Hayfield village. He had to get back to Chesterfield for the evening so Nick and I branched off northwest, aiming ourselves at Manchester. We left the wet behind us for a while and found a good place to camp quite early in the afternoon. Nick asked a farmer if we could pitch our tent in his field and we have spent a quiet afternoon here, the rain has been returning in more frequent bursts but it is quite warm and we are well sheltered – what with our trusty tent and the Triple Gem what better protection could there be?



We went up to the farmhouse before we left on the following day; both to say goodbye and to collect some milk which we had been offered. Unfortunately the farmer had been up late and was still fast asleep in bed, his cows queuing patiently at the dairy. We left our thanks with his young son and set off down the road. As we were walking through the lanes towards Stockport his wife drove past, taking the children to school; we looked up and saw them go by, waving excitedly from the windows. It had been the event of the week for them, having "a munk 'n' 'is mate" camp in their field; they had been very happy to have us and had treated us well. One of the local ladies had seen our tent through the hedge and had gone to tell the family.

"There are two strange men in your field, y'know, probably the ones who raped and murdered that girl in the caves over at Castleton the other day." The family would not have it though and the farmer reassured us with a big smile.

"We sent 'er packin'. Told 'er it was a munk 'n' that we knew you was alright."

The weather had been really filthy early that morning, low cloud, wind and rain but by the time we were walking it had dried up and left an endless stream of grey cloud crossing the sky high above us. Coming into the built-up areas through a park we joined a canal which ran into the city. We followed the towpath past locks and beneath a railway; surrounded by peaceful greenery and tall trees we carried on until the waterway disappeared into a tunnel. We picked a path through the woodland covering the banks of the River Goit, following it down until we emerged on the lane leading to Chadkirk Farm. As we walked down the road a motorcycle approached us, a large grin appearing from beneath the visor. We had arranged to

meet Steve North from the Samatha Centre with our meal for the day near this spot so I presumed that it was him. My eyes flicked over the motorbike and the man – no pack + no panier ⇨ no food. What! Allowing such thoughts to pass I decided there must be a good explanation.

"Good morning, bhante, there are a few people from the Samatha Centre to meet you, just up the road."

We decided to go to a nearby picnic site for the meal so our friend on the bike zoomed off to inform the others; a few minutes later, to our amazement, three or four cars appeared and spilled their contents of food, children and smiling people at the entrance to the place. Out came primus stoves, thermoses of coffee, pots of curry, packets of bread, bowls of fruit, salads and a host of greetings. Manchester had come to meet us. There were about a dozen people altogether; we spread out our groundsheets and before too long we were all sitting, the food offered and shared, enjoying the blessings of good companionship and life as children of the Buddha.

After we had eaten it was not long before many of the people had to go but four of the men stayed behind and we chatted together for a while – taking it in turns to dissuade the local cattle from intruding on our party. Rod and Paul, two of those remaining, decided to walk with Nick and me across the town. After a while the four of us set off, heading towards the Mersey River which we planned to follow all the way to Chorlton. The weather stayed good during the afternoon and we took it in turns to carry the packs. One of the regulars of the Samatha group had a wholefood restaurant in town, this lay on our route so we stopped for a while for refreshments. Unfortunately the lady, Marion, was not there but we managed to say hello to her later in the evening. After another couple of hours of walking we met up again with our motorcyclist friend Adrian. He was a photographer for a local paper and had asked permission that morning to take pictures of us. We had arranged to meet him and a reporter on our way along the river, we stopped at the picnic-table where he was waiting and, before long, an hour of talking and photographing had passed. Finally leaving the river we picked our way through the floral

evening streets of Chorlton; Steve North was waiting for us when we arrived. He took us to our room, we eased our boots off and cooled slowly over a cup of tea. I went down to pay my respects to the Ven. Ānanda Maitreya, a Buddhist scholar of international renown and formerly one of the supreme patriarchs in Sri Lanka. He has been a great source of guidance in matters of Dhamma and Vinaya at Chithurst and had been staying at the Samatha Centre for the last couple of weeks. I told him about the walk and he was highly delighted with it all; I bowed to him saying it felt very good to be there – I had been apart from other bhikkhus since South London six weeks before.

Many people of the centre came that evening, filling the meditation hall; we listened to their chanting (very impressive), and Ven. Ānanda Maitreya guided a short mettā meditation. Once the formal meeting was over we repaired to the back hall for questions and answers, Bhante carefully explained many different points and by the end had unravelled many tangles. The next day was a long series of little jobs being done: people bringing odds and ends for us, running errands, poring over maps, bringing tea, whisking away our washing and the empty cups. Nick and I had a long talk with Ven. Ānanda Maitreya, we showed him our route through England so far and the way we hoped to go. He was very impressed with the whole thing and told us that he had already written to a newspaper in Sri Lanka, telling them about the walk and the practice of tudong in Britain.

"It is truly a great thing, a grand thing that you are doing. Both of you are earning much merit."

"That is the least of our considerations, bhante."

"Yes yes yes", he replied, smiling and gently wagging his head. "Now tell me: how long will the journey be from one end to the other? I told the newspaper about two hundred miles. Is that correct?"

"Actually it will be nearer to eight hundred, bhante. Probably a little bit more."

"Eight hundred miles!" he gasped; adding an uncharacteristic,

"my lord!"

After having dāna together the car for him arrived and he returned to London. Sunny and restful afternoon, I sat in the armchair of our room re-stitching the seams of my sanghāti and occasionally staring into space. They had asked if I would lead the meeting and give a talk that night; everything went smoothly and about thirty people came along. The questions and answers carried on past ten o'clock, Lance Cousins and Steve North staying on until it was gone one.

Niah Richards had organized dāna for the next day and through the morning she and others came and talked with me. We had long exchanges about emptiness and form, limitation and freedom and the expansion of consciousness beyond habitual confines. There was a general coming and going of people but most disappeared after the dāna was over. Nick and I were packed up and gone by about midday.

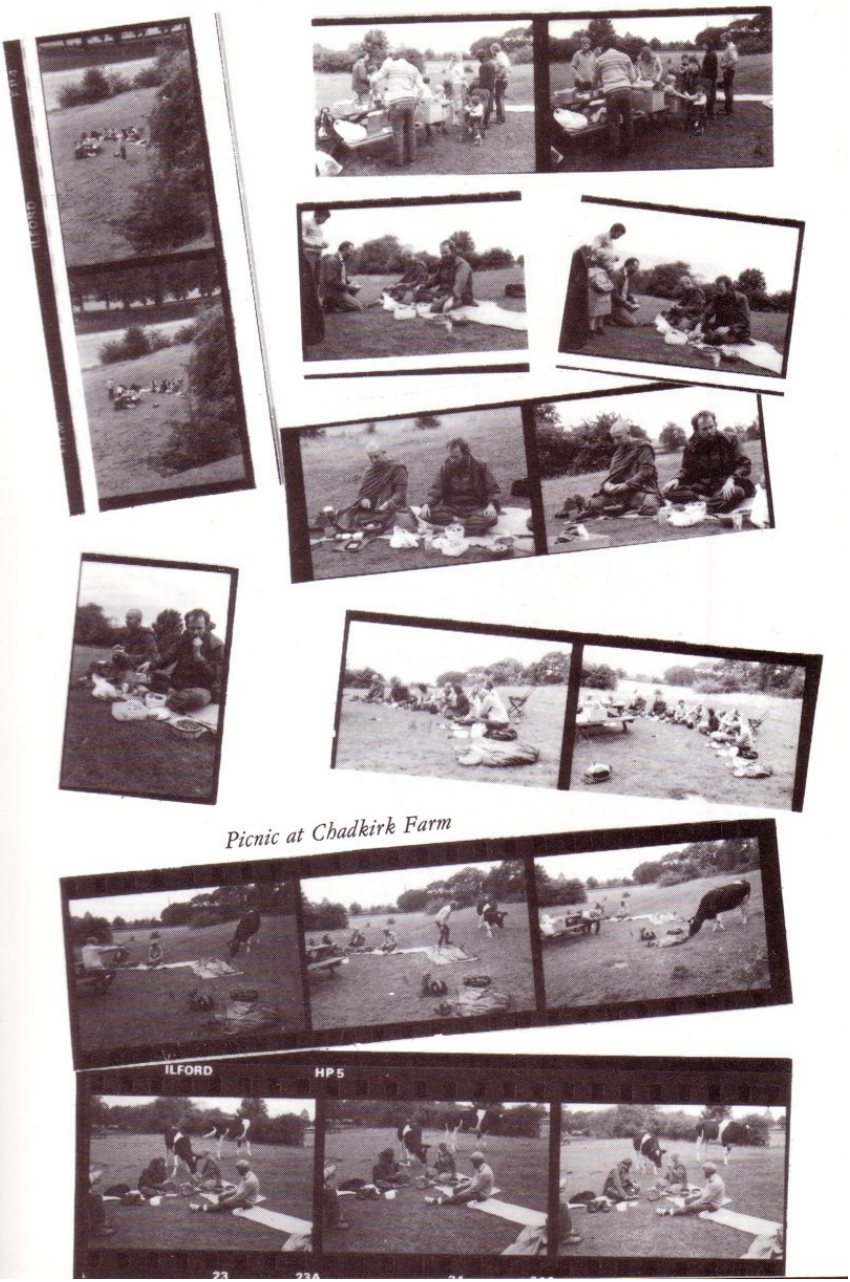
Our walk through the city was something I had slightly dreaded; I had prepared myself to be kicked to pieces and never leave the place alive but after all the spreading of Dhamma, together with the mountain of good wishes and blessings we were carrying, in the end it all went very well. Contained and keeping an even pace, I determined to hold wisdom as my refuge rather than the absence of immediate threat. Our route took us through the inner city, a mass of broken and dismal streets, through Old Trafford and the docklands stuck between Salford and central Manchester. We crossed the black and bubbling ship canal, passed through the lanes of towerblock estates and finally entered the genteel Jewish confines of the borough where Carol Batton lived. As we walked through the town you could see that people simply react to the sight of you out of their conditioning: little children go, "Wow", slightly larger ones say, "What are you?" "Are you nuns?" "Are you Spanish?" "Are you a Egypt man?"

"That skin'ead's wearing strange clothes."

"It's Jesus."

"Jesus."

Groups of teenage girls tend to laugh, giggling as you go by.



Picnic at Chadkirk Farm

"I hope they don't presume we are not interested in that second chocolate cake."

The interview with 'The Reporter'

At the Samatha Centre

The Ven. Ānanda Maitreya

A monk's travels

LAST WEEK a shaven-headed figure clad in ochre coloured robes with a rucksack on his back was spotted resting by the picnic area at the end of Ford Lane, Didsbury on the Mersey Valley.

Amaro Bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk from the Forest monastery in Chithurst, West Sussex, was en route to Chorlton and had been following the river from Cheshire where he'd spent the previous night.

His walk, or "Tudong", a custom not dissimilar to that practised by the Franciscans in Britain in early Christian times, began seven weeks ago in West Sussex, and will end at the beginning of August at a monastery in Harnham, Northumberland.

Although Tudong is an intrinsic part of the Buddhist tradition in Thailand, Amaro is one of the first monks in Britain to actually put it into practice.

He became a Buddhist monk after a chance visit to a monastery in Thailand six years ago, and he returned to England 18 months later.

"Before it was like being a duck in a desert, he told *The Reporter*, "but the monastery was like a pool to me."

The ten monks and six nuns who live at Chithurst live a similar existence to the Forest monks of Thailand. The day begins at 4 am with meditation and after morning tea a group go an alms round.

"Most of the food we get is actually brought to the monastery from the local community," said Amaro. "They look after us well. If they didn't want us to be there we would go, as one of the Buddha's teachings is not to stay in a place if there is no willing support from the lay people."

The community at Chithurst only eat once a day before midday, a practice Amaro observed on his walk. "If people offer food after midday we keep it until the next day."

Because it is a Buddhist ruling for a monk not to carry food or money overnight a lay companion Nick Scott has travelled with Amaro on the walk.

The importance of Tudong is not simply for the wanderer's own spiritual wellbeing but as Amaro explained "to affect those we meet on the way. The walk strings people together and it is a two way thing. The lay people give us material support and we give them spiritual support."

● *Not the Himalayas but Ford Lane, Didsbury last week—Amaro Bhikkhu stops for his daily meal with Nick Scott. (picture by Adrian Gibson)*

After an hour's rest drinking tea and talking, Amaro and his companion were ready to make tracks to The Samatha Centre in Chorlton, where they had been invited to stay for two days.

And as they put on their backpacks and walked across the bridge I realised that the hour I'd just spent was a chance discovery that would not be forgotten in a hurry.

Bernadette Moore.

"Will you look at the state of that!"

Older boys bellow insults, incomprehensible, unfamiliar, from passing cars, across the street.

A pair of punks said, "Hi", and a couple of old men smiled warmly.

The pattern of all attention simply comes out of our conditioning; by being resolute in non-contention with the effects you have on people, you can walk through it quite untouched. It was all very peaceful, I could feel the habitual reaction of fear to threat and derision fading, evaporating as we walked; illuminated from the inside by offering peace.

The last two days have been brilliantly hot and sunny. Nick and I are sheltering from the midday heat in the shade of a small thorn tree. In front of us the surface of a small reservoir is rippling in the threads of whatever thin breeze is stirring today. We are high in the Pennines of West Yorkshire, slowly drawing away from the industrial cities and old mill towns which are squeezed into these narrow valleys. The last week has been so filled with people and movement that it has been hard to keep the diary up to date. I would say, "Well, when we get to so-and-so's there's bound to be an hour or so before the meal, or at least after everyone has gone to bed." But the time never seemed to appear. Always someone to talk to, somewhere to get to; by the time the days ended all that I could do would be to sit a while and empty out before sleepiness took over completely.

We reached Carol's house in North Manchester in good time that evening, she welcomed us in and seemed to be much less worried about all the things that could go wrong than she had been when she invited us. Nick and I were tired but peaceful when we arrived and our evening followed suit. After tea and a clean-up the three of us sat together in the front room; I raised enough energy to mend more of the broken seams on my robe, Nick continued his eternal sock-darning and Carol, not wishing to be left out of the handicrafts, carried on with some macrame which she had begun earlier. Simple and quiet, a nothing-very-much evening we all needed. The following morning, well soothed after the rigours of central Manchester, we spent the time talking with Carol. Nigel West appeared at about ten with a contribution for the meal and more than a kilogram of Bournville chocolate to help us on our way. They only had a few small bars at the first shop, he explained, so he

bought them all; he decided that this was not enough, so he found another place and got some more.

As we had a fair distance to go we set off early in the afternoon and headed almost due east to Greenfield, a small satellite town of Manchester on the edge of the Pennines. Our path took us through parks and streets, housing estates of fear-soaked boxes; over streams and meadows; down a canyon of wrecked cars, broken glass; through another kaleidoscope of calls and questions, giggles and amazed faces, to bring us to the edges of the city. After a long climb we sat our sweaty bodies down on top of Hartshead Pike; a white stone tower there looks out over the whole of Greater Manchester, spread in its long broad valley; but for the hills and the sky, man-made as far as the eye can see. How many people are born and die as the eye sweeps from one edge to the other?

We sat and gazed for a long while, cooling off in the wind and saying goodbye. Not far from Greenfield now, we crossed another ridge and were there, following a broad council-made track through the valley and up into the centre of the village. As we walked down the main street and neared our destination a stranger, coming towards us on the street, made añjali.

"I'm Dave, Jean Johnson's husband. It's the house where the white car is parked."

Ushered in and made welcome in yet another home, Nick and I drank tea and talked with them well into the night; enjoying friendliness and the cool quietude after a long hot walk. It is wonderful how people continuously treat us so well and do everything just right for us. It seems so everywhere we go: somehow the right balance is found, each part of each day flowing effortlessly into the next. Nick and I shared the upper room of the house for our stay. I spent most of the following morning there, catching up on the diary and occasionally flicking my eyes over the bookshelves: 'The Bell-Jar'; 'The Waste-Land'; 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' Hmmm, strongly reminiscent of my university days; Dave and Jean were both at York and seemed to have arrived at interest in Dhamma practice via a route similar to my own.

Nick made most of our phone calls that morning: I talked with Nunie (Noy Thomson's sister) and her husband Geoff who were on a short visit from Thailand. We had arranged to meet them on the walk but it turned out that they would not be able to make it. We chatted for a good while, as they would soon be going back to the East. A few minutes after my return to the attic, Nick came up again.

"Tan Sucitto would like to talk to you."

We exchanged greetings and the news from our respective ends of the operation, after a while he said, "Would you like to talk to Tan Ajahn?" They, with Tan Tiradhammo, had been driven up to Harnham by Mudita and were spending a week there, the purpose of the trip being to consecrate the new shrine room and have a quiet celebration of American Independence Day. It was good to talk to the Ajahn, I told him how we were getting on and how the walk had been. He said that we had left a trail of inspired people behind us and that everyone was very happy about it all. Things were flourishing at Chithurst: three new nuns and four anagarikas would be taking ordination at the end of July and two weeks later four dasasīlamāta and three bhikku ordinations would take place. It seemed that a new monastery would have to be found to contain us all. Leaving me with the final exhortation to "walk on", he said goodbye.

That day Jackie and her husband Les, also from the Samatha Centre, joined us for the meal and brought us food for the journey. Before, through and after the meal we all talked and there were many questions. I tried to express and explain the teaching thoroughly and it seemed, by the time we left, that all loose ends were tied. As we were about to go Dave asked if we would bless their Buddha-rūpas for them. This we agreed to, so Nick rounded up the requisite green sprig, bowl of water, candle and thread; all the necessary ingredients for the ceremony. It all went very well and for five boisterous children, the boys (Tom, Bobby, Joshie, Matthew and little Neil) were most restrained – sitting still and being quite obedient. I sprinkled the water all around and tied threads on everyone, including Nick.

Dave came with us part of the way when we left, guiding us up the river as far as Delph. He promised, as we parted, that they would

visit us in Northumberland when they could. We headed further up into the hills and left behind the sunny Sunday afternoon crowds upon the river bank.

Exhausted again, we pitched our tent in the hills between two reservoirs and sat up top until the midges passed. We did not have far to go the next day for our meeting with Mudita.

We had arranged to meet on the south slip-road, junction 22 of the M62 and, as we rounded the hill by the radio-mast, we could see her distinctive white car, a Mercedes-Benz estate, parked exactly where we expected. The day was brilliantly clear and sunny, it looked as though our meeting was not only at last going to happen but that it was also being smiled upon. After two attempts to join us had been stalled (in Lincolnshire and the Peak District), finally things had clicked for her.

As we came down the hill we saw Mudita emerge from her car and walk towards us. Suddenly there was a shout from our left and there was Abby, bounding through the heather, waving his arms and calling. Abraham is a London-born West-Indian and the star of Mudita's Thai-boxing team. He had never been on fells before and was amazed when his feet would land in the little streamlets hidden underneath the heather.

"I got me feet wet!" He grinned, slightly out of breath but pleased after his search around the hill to find us. Delighted to meet up at last, they paid their respects, then we all bundled into the car and drove back up to the hill-top. There was much news from Chithurst and Harnham, we spent the whole time talking about the monasteries and her prospective trip to the States. She explained how the plans had fallen through before but insisted that this one meeting was making up for it; she had brought a vast quantity of food, all specially prepared, we had found each other with ease and the day was glorious. It was the fourth of July and up on the hill-top the air was clear for miles.

Mudita's generosity is almost legendary: when she had been packing up to leave Harnham that morning someone had seen the piles of food containers – loaded with Thai cuisine – which she had been putting together for us.

"Is all that just for the two of them!?"

"They are walking – they need a lot of strength."

"They couldn't possibly eat that much! Why not leave some of it here for us?"

What she eventually brought was lavish enough, it was hard to believe there was still more she had left behind. A little later on, once Nick and I had left them, he told me she had offered us "a ridiculously large" amount of money.

"I took the liberty of only accepting enough to get us to Manjushri, bhante. Was that all right?"

"Fine by me," I replied, smiling to myself – some people are just so incredibly good-hearted.

The place where we had chosen to eat was just beside the Pennine Way, which we planned to follow northwards for a day or two. We saw many hikers going by as we sat there so, after talk and much photographing, we joined the troop and set off. Even though the path has the reputation of being the toughest walk in England the going was very easy – lots of ups and downs but a well-worn track and very dry after all the summer heat. We were heading for Hebden Bridge where we had heard there was a place for monks from the Manjushri Institute to stay. The path took us to the brink of the valley and to the Stoodley Pike Peace Monument, a grey stone obelisk standing high and looking over the vast ranges of hill country. Built at the time of the Napoleonic wars as a celebration of peace when Paris fell, it continues now as a silent reminder for all of us who come after. When we reached it, we saw that somehow a sheep had found its way up onto the balcony around the pinnacle of the monument. As our mitzva for the day the two of us got up there and, after a little struggle, we managed to help it back to the ground again. It had been very frightened while it was trapped up there but as soon as it was free, it bleated, began to eat and its lamb (temporarily protected by another ewe) came running up to join it once again. When we were up on the balcony we saw, on the side of the spire, a large peace sign ☮, which a graffito had painted. Underneath

it was written 'Trips not Cruises', we were a mile down the hill and almost in town by the time I got the joke.

It turned out that the bhikkhu way-place in Hebden Bridge was a myth, there were some supporters of the Manjushri institute living there but no open invitation for monks. Hot and sticky in the valley, although it was evening by now, we headed up into the hills again; tromping along through farm-tracks, out into the open. It was getting dark and we were beginning to notice more and more abandoned farm buildings around. As there was a lot more climbing to do before we would be able to find a good place to pitch the tent, we opted to spend the night in an old farmhouse. It was long since unoccupied and in use as a hay-barn, half-way up the hill. We clambered through the hay-bales to the first storey and sank, completely worn out, to the floor. How good to be stationary, cool and midgeless. We remained immobile, slumped on our packs, until some energy arrived; we sat a while and it was nearly midnight when we turned in.

A clear bright morning ran in through the empty window and shook me from my sleep. It was looking to be hot again so we decided, as before, to walk early and late, taking a long break at midday. We followed the Pennine Way up into the hills and found a good spot, in the shade of a thorn tree by a reservoir. While we were eating, and all through the afternoon as I strove to bring the diary up to date, a stream of walkers passed us by, maybe even a dozen every hour. I do not know what people think when they see us: we are obviously somewhat different from the crowd, travelling the same road but on another wavelength – treading to the beat of the Deathless Drum. After six hours under the tree and with the diary still incomplete, we decided it was time to move on. As we walked I found myself with a bad attack of the 'getting somewheres', which I had not seen since before we got to London. It was quite funny to see the mind figuring out what fraction of the journey we had done (eight-thirteenths), how much we had to go and all along knowing there is no-one going anywhere at all. Sunshine, cool breeze, good path, good boots, doing what you most want to in the world, but the

The picnic with Mudita and Abraham

untamed mind is always keen to be concerned with something, someone or somewhere else.

Through the lands of Wuthering Heights and down into the valley, we carried on up the next hill to camp up in the breeze. Finding a midge-ridden marsh and no breeze on top, however, we kept going until we reached another abandoned farmhouse. We cleared ourselves a space amidst the rubble and broken glass and settled in, thankful to the farmer and the house-builders for the use of a shelter for the night.

It was not the dawn light which woke me today but the sound of a sheep, rubbing its horns on the doorway; being the vast majority of the locals that we meet, one becomes quite fond of them – it was good to be roused by such a homely sound. Hot again – we set out early and aimed for Lothersdale to buy food; off the Pennine Way the paths across this lumpy country are very steep and hummocked; we had a good tramp over the hills and were quite sticky by the time we reached the village. As we arrived, Lothersdale Post Office suddenly seemed to be the meeting place of a great assortment of beings: people and dogs, cars and trucks, comings and goings.

"Excuse me sir, why are you wearing that costume?" inquired a polite young Japanese man.

"Because I am a Buddhist monk."

"Oh, so am I, I am a Buddhist."

Another man pointed to some trout in the village stream, swimming lazily in the heat. "Lotta fish 'ere," he said.

The local dogs introduced themselves, a little girl with an ice-lolly stared and Nick appeared with a huge box brimming with provisions.

"The lady in the shop just got back from Thailand, she recognized you at once. I had to tell her all about the walk."

After the burst of activity was over we took the road to the farm half-way up the hill. In the fields we went a bit astray and were bellowed at by the young farmer as we crossed through his hay.

"OI! You bloody fools – can't you see that's a crop!" He had been turning a freshly-mown field nearby and was suddenly irate and

stomping through the grass towards us. As he approached us I realized the only thing to do was to let my mind go empty – he stopped shouting, turned around and went back to his tractor. We saw him again later and we apologised to each other.

"Sorry I shouted like that, I just saw red."

"Sorry we went through your crop, we should have known better." We helped his tractor through the gate and parted happily.

Now we are sat beside this wall and, after a week or so behind, the diary is finally up to date. A sigh of relief; after being adrift, here we are at last.

"Tudong, just the word to me is a very powerful word. I have always wanted to follow anyone when I hear they are doing a tudong, but being a woman, it's always a bit complicated. I personally hope situations may be more flexible. When I heard that Tan Amaro was going to walk from Chithurst to Harnham with Nick Scott, I really wanted to join them – part of the way anyway. I was given permission to do so by Tan Ajahn Sumedho, somehow I was very lucky.

It was a very pleasant surprise, and an auspicious day for us, because we were having a Thai Boxing Tournament on the day when Tan Amaro and Nick turned up at the Busabong unexpectedly; the boxers were just about to do the meditation before leaving for the tournament, and I was personally wishing I had got more than one pair of hands and legs. Tan Amaro arrived with a big smile, and I felt well, I must have done a little bit of good sometime, somewhere for him to be here at just the right moment! His unexpected visit and his smile really cooled me down.

It may sound silly to some people, but I had made an 'Adhitthāna' (a determination) that I must meet Tan Amaro at somepoint during his walk before I go to Los Angeles. After many hectic, strange and stretched arrangements we (Abby and I) found ourselves waiting for them on the M62! Abby was looking left, I was looking to the right; an hour later, after a little bit of doubt – "Are we in the right place?" – *Tan Amaro and Nick came walking up to us right on the road straight ahead. It was such a beautiful day, maybe a little windy, but the sun was shining and I felt very good, full of joy. We found a nice spot, laid out the food, offered to him and talked for nearly one and a half hours, then he and Nick left.*

I learnt one thing from Tan Amaro, and I will always remember it; I thought I am the only person who thinks this way, but Tan Amaro has explained it.

'Mudita' he said, 'it's very nice to go into the unknown because it teaches us not to expect anything, and there there is so much space for our minds!'"

Mudita

Walking in the dales, on the Pennine Way and around has been good for meeting other travellers. Most of the time, conversation only begins when we ask for water or arrive at our destination; here, amongst so many other walkers, I am often taken to be simply strangely dressed and people talk to us quite freely. There is always a camaraderie between members of the same group and interest in how you are doing. Being so obviously hikers we are part of the family and people are very open with us.

A few days ago we met a couple of young Germans; we nodded and smiled as we passed them and they passed us as the day went by. As Nick and I were resting on a hill-top they came to a halt at a cairn ten yards behind us. Moved by a sudden wave of generosity and friendship I broke in half one of the large chocolate bars Nigel had given us and took it with me to where they were sitting. As I approached, one of them looked up.

"Would you like some chocolate?" I asked, proffering the gold-wrapped lump.

"Thank you, just one piece."

"No, it's all for you, please."

"That's too much."

"Please take it, I have another kilo in my pack, we have plenty."

"Are you eating just chocolate???" the other one asked, looking up somewhat amazed.

"No, it's just that someone in Manchester gave us a lot to take with us. I thought you might like some."

Still slightly bewildered but quite happily they accepted the gift and, as they passed us by later on; one of them held out a little bag.

"Would you like a fig? They are very good – Türkisch." Gratefully we accepted and waved goodbye as they left, strange how joyous such a simple exchange can be.

A little later in the day, as we followed a broad track between some reservoirs above Rochdale, we saw a man with a tripod photographing the valley; now brilliant and hazy in the afternoon heat. It was plain that he was keen to meet us and, as we went by, he introduced himself. We stood together for a long while, listening to his gentle Orkney accent and telling him all about our walk. Before we parted he took some photographs and promised to send us copies. He was a truly gentle man and it had obviously meant a lot to him to meet us.

Another touching gesture made that day was the gift of some ice-cubes from a lady in Hebden Bridge: having just climbed a steep, long, cobbled lane, the two of us rested on a low stone wall, sitting there very hot and sweaty. After a while Nick went to ask for water at a house, the lady took the bottles in but was gone for a long time. When she returned she explained that she had been trying to break up ice-cubes to put in the water.

"The big-necked one was quite easy but the other one gave me a lot of trouble."

Eventually she had given up, filled a margarine tub with ice and offered that to us instead. Very grateful, we drank many mugs of the delicious liquid – cool Yorkshire water like nectar in a hot and dusty throat.

It had been roasting all day and that evening, after long, hot and humid hours, the sun mellowed to a glimmering orange fire. It rested for a moment as a red balloon bulging on the hill-crest; lingering long before it disappeared, gently and as if for ever, beneath the blue slumber of the hills.

"The bower of sleep is a double-edged sword",
A golden cord. Quiet,
We pick our way along parks and watersides:
Canals and rivers, under trees, finally through floral boroughs,
Polite streets, to bring us here.
And, insofaras separated I exist,
I feel the point of all projection worn away –
A smooth stone smooth
At the bottom of a stream.

Sh-sh-sh-shadows,
Shawdo, shadow of the unborn.
A smooth stone dissolving in the bottom of a stream.

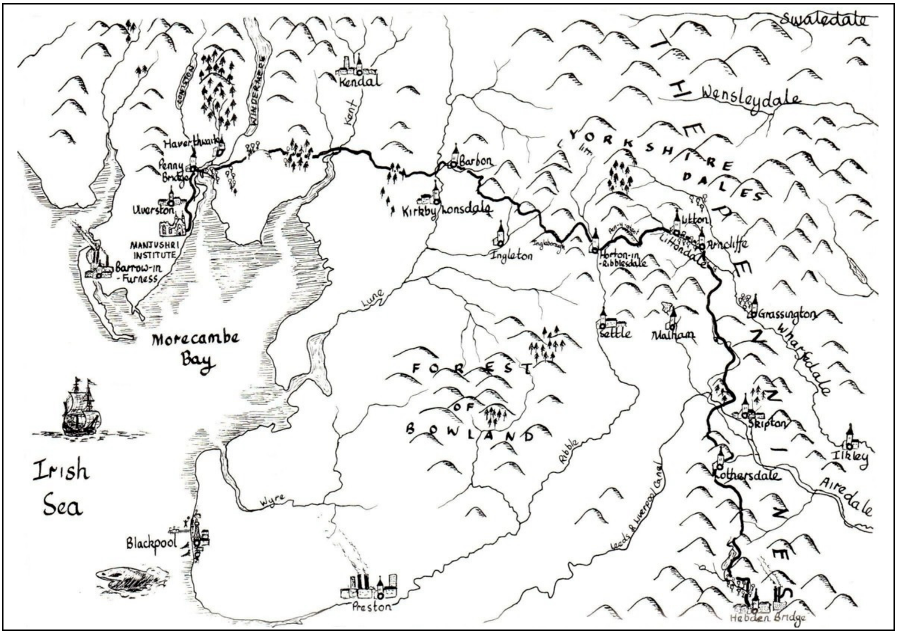
Cultivating; rotating, but in the heart of silence;
A dog-like mind tends to bark louder when it's chained,
Behind windows, when it's reined;
Smart old silence, emptiness, a sea –
Less the friend of absence than of light,
Transparency.

(end of the second book)

Part 3
Lothersdale
to
Ulverston

"How am I supposed to know what I think until I hear what I say !?!"

Anon.


Swaledate
Wensleydale
THE PENNINES
YORKSHIRE DALES
Kendal
CONISTON
WINDERMERE
Kent
Haverthwaite
Penny Bridge
Ulverston
MANJUSHRI INSTITUTE
Barrow-in-Furness
Barbon
Kirkby Lonsdale
Ingleton
Ingleborough
Pen-y-ghent
Horton-in-Ribblesdale
Littondale
Litton
Arncliffe
Grassington
Wharfedale
Settle
Malham
Morecambe Bay
Lune
FOREST OF BOWLAND
Ribble
Skipton
Ilkley
Cowling
Lothersdale
Airedale
Leeds & Liverpool Canal
Irish Sea
Wyre
Blackpool
Preston
Hebden Bridge

s we were stopped on the hillside overlooking Lothersdale the weather seemed to change on us, the wind picked up, clouds came over and there were a few light showers. It looked as though it was settling in and the two young farmers in the fields below were working hard to get their hay baled. It did not stay for long though. The air was still and humid by the time we set off again, remaining that way all the rest of the day; the walking in it hot and sticky.

After a while we dropped down off the hills and, passing through the richer lowland farms, walked along a disused railway line in the valley bottom, side-by-side with the river and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Down in the valley it was hot and there was not a breath of wind; we decided to camp high for the night and aimed for the distant point of Flasby Fell, looming hazy and dark to the north of us. "Maybe, with a bit of luck, there is an inch of air astir up there." We crossed the canal, the knot of roads and railway, and began the long climb. Once again what we had estimated to be an easy day turned into one long and sweaty; our boots finally coming off at twilight. It felt very good to have endured through it though, carrying on until the very end was reached. As it turned out, even on such a high and open hill, there was only the slightest of breezes. These parts must be another story in winter but right now the air just seems to hover, still and heavy, too hot by far to move. Some rain came in the night but, by daybreak, what wind there had been had gone. The valley below us was filled with mist and only the tops of the far ridges were visible. I would have felt like the half-sketched figure of a Chinese landscape in such a scene, had the image not been marred by the fact that I was scurrying busily about, gathering all our bits to be on the move, hurrying away from the midges.

We crossed over the hilltop and decided to take a level-ish path to Winterburn Reservoir, where we planned to eat. Down along the valley edge the morning was cooler, the sun not having penetrated the mist, and we found it this way for most of the day. It was actually just a pleasantly warm July day but if you wanted to walk through it heavy-laden you were going to sweat. We stopped for the meal on the edge of the reservoir and laid our wet things out on an old stone wall. My robes were clammy from several days perspiration and our socks were soaked from the grass. A few hours in the sun and wind and things were much fresher. It was a lovely day; it kept reminding me that there is nothing inherently wrong with the world, it is just a matter of what you do in it: if you choose to walk you get hot, can you really blame the weather for your discomfort?

Later in the afternoon we followed the lane up from the reservoir to a local call-box beside the central farm of the valley. We needed to phone some people in Leeds who were coming to meet us, as well as the Manjushri Institute to arrange our stay. After the phone calls we saw an old farmer coming up the track towards us, hobbling along gently on two walking-sticks. Being English we soon got around to talking of the weather.

"A bit hot," we said.

"Aye – expect it is, if y' walkin'."

So gentle and old, he could hardly hear or see; he had spent his life farming this valley and was obviously enjoying the slow fading of his years. We talked a long time together and, when he smiled, he reminded me of my old Jewish grandfather: so ancient, had worked so hard; when something tickled him you could see an impish spring-like grin run through him and you felt yourself melt away inside.

We followed the white lane up into the hills which make the western bank of Wharfedale. The whole area seems to be made of limestone, long pale grey crags with boulders strewn through well-grazed fields. Once up in a high valley out of the day's heat we sat for a long time listening to the plovers and the worried bleating of a lost lamb. When it finally found the answer it was waiting for it rushed across the pasture and lovingly latched on to mum; it is quite haunting how human their cry is, "ma, ma, *maaa!*" – aching for the security of mother.

Late in the evening, leaning on a rock, I heard the soft thunder of galloping feet coming from behind me. I opened my eyes and saw it was a fox, sauntering at speed across the field; only six feet from my shoulder. It glanced, as it went, from side to side but half-concerned; unaware of my presence there, thinking it was alone. A little while later I saw the local shepherd, rounding up the flock with his dog. Having been tending his sheep and checking over a sick cow, which was also in the field, his first question to me was, "Are you all right?" Barefooted and wrapped in a robe I suppose I looked a little invalided. We talked for a while and I assured him I was fine; he gladly gave us permission to camp in the field but had to get on and attend to his sheep again. It was late by now: Nick and I had watched the sun setting and we sat for a long time before sleep.

The next morning broke still, warm and misty, the sun rose a pale orange over the crags and we set out early to allow ourselves a good length of time to reach Arncliffe for supplies. The whole of these hillsides are covered with small wild flowers: thyme, flax and a multitude of others, the turf is thin and seems like a green sheet thrown over a heap of rocks. Rabbits bound out from unseen corners

as we go by and there is a great feeling of lightness. Down in the valley bottom ash trees are scattered singly and in small groves; small plants poke out from the cracked rocks. We took the path through Kilnsey Crags down into Littondale and followed the small lane beside the river, it was Friday morning and the only traffic was an occasional car running down the parallel road on the other side of the valley. Along the lane there was a feeling of great freshness, peace and beauty; time seemed to evaporate and suddenly we were in Arncliffe. Nick bought the food for the day at the village shop and we posted some of our unwanted belongings on to Harnham: the last part of the diary, excess maps, socks, etc. Once we had finished our business in the village we set off up a well-used path through the dale. There were quite a few other walkers about and, to my surprise, as a young couple passed us by the woman saw me, bowed her head and made añjali. I said hello but we did not stop to converse. A few paces further on Nick caught up with me again.

"Did that woman just pay respects to you, bhante?"

"Yes she did."

Both of us were slightly surprised – not what one would have expected in the wilds of Yorkshire. We clambered up the hill to avoid the curiosity of the local cows and eventually ate our meal in peace. After we had finished Nick went off to explore the local flora and found a lot of interesting things; these included the bird's-eye primrose, a very rare plant, which he had not expected to find in these parts. The whole valley seems to be a botanical treasure-house and Nick has been enjoying it all enormously, it has been a long time since his flower books were last out and I think he appreciates the opportunity now to see so much.

The afternoon continued hot and humid; we sweated, clegg and fly-chased, through the valley. The river bottom was dry and the thought of the windy tops of Pen-y-ghent was very inviting. We stopped by Litton village, where the path up the valley-side began, and Nick went off to fill our water-bottles. I sat on my pack in a farm gateway and waited. Much time passed, he seemed to have been gone for an age and I assumed that he had got into conversation with the

farmer in the nearby house. About twenty minutes later he rounded the corner and, looking up, I thought, "What, no water-bottles? No water-bottles, no pack??"

"We have been invited for tea, bhante," he said, smiling a cheesy smile. Having gone in search of orange juice as well as water he had sought out the local post office. For once he was disinclined to get into a chat with anyone, hoping to get the stuff and get over Pen-y-ghent as soon as possible. Nature has a way of putting the brakes on for us whenever we get too caught up in the impetus of our plans: the postmistress was very interested in where Nick was going, what he was doing and soon they were deep in conversation. Once he had started to tell her about the walk she called her husband to come and meet him too. After enough time just talking about it all the husband suggested that Nick go and fetch me and we have some tea together. That seemed like a good idea so in a little while there we were in the garden of Litton Post Office, sipping tea, talking of monastic life and enjoying the summer afternoon. All three of them there, Janet, her husband Geoffrey and Gordon, a young guest of theirs, were all very interested in religion and, as it turned out, it was very fortunate that we had appeared when we did. Young Gordon, son of a high-powered journalist colleague of Geoffrey, had come up for a short break from London. He had been receiving help for the last year and had spent most of this time being looked after away from his family; only seventeen, he had recently reached a crisis point and had been having a lot of problems. He had many questions about Christianity and religious forms, God and the Holy Spirit; we talked with him and all of them for what seemed a long, long time. Hours disappeared; we carried on until it was late and our conversation drew to a final close. They invited us to stay the night and for a meal on the following day but, as we had already arranged to meet some people and needed to leave early in the morning, we had to turn the offer of the meal down. Janet and Geoffrey were quite inspired by the whole thing and it is likely that they will visit the monasteries before too long. I told them about other people we knew in a predicament like Gordon's, they felt sure he would want to visit Chithurst soon and that just to go there now and then would do him a lot of good.

After they were all gone Nick and I sat in the dark of the living room, not sleepy – the air was still electric from the inspiration of our talk. Phrases and thoughts from our conversation flickered through, the night was quiet and eventually we found ourselves asleep. With the morning I awoke from a long and lovely dream about Ajahn Chah; he was laughing uproariously in the midst of frantic people, mussing Nick's hair and talking kindly to us. As he now is in Thailand – his body paralysed, speechless, spoon-fed and chair-bound – just seeing his face, so loving and good, made a golden day's beginning. Andrew, one of Janet's sons, arose early and made some tea. Janet, although she had said she would not be getting up, talked with us a little and joined us for a cup before we left.

Andrew came with us as far as the path up to Pen-y-ghent and, being an agricultural botany student, had a great time with Nick, talking and being instructed about the local plants. In amongst the limestone pavements, on the borders of the lane, many rare and interesting things were growing. When we had been at the house, Geoffrey had shown us a book about this valley, written by a vicar of Litton in the last century. Amongst other things, in it was told the story of the lady's slipper orchid: this delicate flower of rare beauty once graced the area in large numbers but, even by the time the old book was written, the poor thing had been collected almost to extinction. The villain of the piece, apparently, was the then professor of botany at Edinburgh University; he had offered "a guinea a root" to those who undertook to collect specimens for him. This was indeed a princely sum for those days and very hard for the locals to resist. This flower is now the rarest plant in Britain and the last remaining site where it grows in the wild is a secret known only to the few. Each year a dozen flowers arise from the fragile root-system and are fenced and guarded twenty-four hours a day. It is said, though, that a Litton farmer knows of another place where the orchid grows; tucked away in some nook of the dale, unbeknownst to the world.

Although in the mist of such a botanistic dream-land, Andrew was unfamiliar with much that was there – his college was in Wales and the land in those parts held a very different variety of plant; Nick thus took great delight and was in his element explaining about it all.

We crossed the southern spur of Pen-y-ghent and took the well-worn path down into Horton-in-Ribblesdale. That morning we were to meet Alan Tweedie and Sarah Brimelow, a young couple coming out from Leeds. We waited a long time at the churchyard but they did not show. At one point, when Nick was off doing some shopping, I heard a motorcycle pull up in front of me. Opening my eyes I saw a man removing his helmet and gloves, he looked over and smiled at me.

"Are you going far?"

"No, only Ingleborough today, but I am on my way to Northumberland."

"Oh, I've been meaning to visit that place – whereabouts is the monastery?"

"Near Belsay, north of Newcastle."

"Do you have to bring bed and bedding or can you just turn up?"

The conversation carried on in this vein for a while, it was obvious that he knew all about the Sangha and did not find it in the least bit strange to meet a bhikkhu in Horton. Eventually he popped into the churchyard to give a message to one of the men scything the grass, climbed onto his bike, wished me well for the day and rode off. What with this meeting, the lady in Arnciiffe and the 'Great Happening at Litton Post Office', it seems that this small patch of England has great affinities with the Dhammadhātu. Furthermore, the welcome we have received at South House Farm, where we are now camped, has too been remarkable: originally we planned to eat near here then climb straight over Ingleborough, but the lateness of Alan and Sarah's arrival and the imminence of a thunderstorm brought us back. The farmer said we could eat where we liked, camp where we liked, leave the car overnight, and has been generally delighted to have us around.

Now, after such a gentle day, I am sitting by, a small fire. Pen-y-ghent is a dusty blue whale snoozing in the distance; the others are off walking somewhere on the farm. The air is still misty, there is a cool breeze and the midges are hovering just far enough away to keep me happy.

Evaṁ.

This article was written by Janet Taylor for BBC Radio Woman's Hour. The programme editors were interested but not enough so to broadcast it.

"The close-cropped head and orange robe of the Buddhist monk made quite a sensation in our remote Yorkshire dale. Nobody living in this quiet place had ever before seen such a figure wandering up the track to Pen-y-Ghent, although four hundred years ago other religious, the Cistercian monks from Fountains Abbey, would have caused less comment. They regularly walked through this way to their grange in the neighbouring dale. In 1983, though, this figure could not have been expected. As the cars passed him, "What on earth was that?" was one astonished reaction. "Hey, did you see that?" was another. "One of them monk things sitting by the road! Cross-legged – he must have been praying or something!" And as a local commuter went down in the early morning, "He's a long way from Tibet" was his wry reaction.

We had heard nothing about all this when the monk's heavily-laden companion arrived at our small post office. He looked like any other of the dusty walkers who come in to have their water bottles filled and chat about their route. In this case, when we learned that he was walking from Sussex to Northumberland, the conversation developed, and when we heard about the monk, left sitting by the empty river, the whole thing became irresistible, and they were invited in for tea and talk. Hot and grimy in the sweltering weather, they seemed pleased to sit in the garden and drink endless cups of tea, and happy to answer all our questions. These were numerous as it is not often we have visitors from such a completely different world and we made the most of the opportunity.

Gradually a picture of his life emerged. He had trained in Thailand, he explained, and he and the other monks in England follow the non-scholastic and wandering tradition of that country. They are totally dependent on the community to support them, and they never handle money. All the gifts that they receive must be in kind. The emphasis is on owning nothing but the robe and the alms bowl. Nick, his lay companion, had started this journey two months ago with just £17. We assumed that this could hardly have lasted very long, and mostly they were dependent on the groups all over the country who had offered a meal and accommodation for a night. At other times they had their tent. They

could not accept the flap-jack that we offered with the tea, as their single meal of the day has to be taken before noon, and after that perhaps just the odd piece of mint-cake, taken for energy, is acceptable.

I had only the haziest idea of the ways of Buddhism, and it was fascinating to compare its monastic life with that of the Anglican contemplative nuns with whom I am often in contact. In Sussex, the monastic day is divided between communal chanting and meditation and the manual work which, in their case, is the gradual rebuilding of the derelict house they took over some years ago, and the management of their woodland. Work on the house can proceed only if the necessary materials have been provided by their support groups. Every morning there is the alms round, a practice which in Thailand is vital for survival. It is not difficult to visualise the monk wandering through the forest there with his alms bowl ready for gifts of rice and vegetables, but the exercise must have looked more than odd around the streets of North London, where they were first established in England. The abbot insisted they keep up the practice, though, and his faith in the value of keeping to the tradition was justified one morning on Hampstead Heath when a surprised jogger stopped to ask them about their life. This chance meeting led to several visits and the eventual gift to the monks of a hundred acres of woodland in Sussex. Not many alms rounds in England have such a spectacular result. Normally they are simply a time for talk with anyone who wants to stop them as they wander about: if invited they will go into local houses and drink tea.

There is always the waiting to be asked. A monastery will not be set up unless a group of people invite the monks to come and undertake to support them. Nick explained that he and some others organised this in Northumberland. At first, the small lay group had to make sure that there was always enough food for each day, but as local people came to value the monks' presence and realised that they themselves were welcome to come and go, to join them in the meditations or help with the work, or just to talk to the monks about anything at all, they too began bringing gifts of food. Now they are strong enough to have two more monks and our new friend, a senior monk, was on his way to help with its running, as the abbot finds more and more demands on his time for giving talks and visiting in the area.

Was he sad, I asked, to be leaving his home in Sussex? I was thinking of the mother and the sisters in the convent that I know in their warm family group. No, he said, he would meet them again if their paths happened to cross, and

a monk should never be attached to any particular place: he was always a temporary lodger wherever he happened to be.

It was time then to inquire about names. How should I introduce him, I asked our monk friend, when our sons came home? His religious name was Amaro, be explained prefixed by the title Tan, and yes, it had a meaning which was "deathless". "We all have incredibly inspiring names," he said with a slightly ironic smile as he retired for a bath. We hurried to cook a meal and eat it, as their abstinence could not be practiced by us, and I hoped that the food smells would not disturb their quiet sipping of fruit juice in the other room.

When we were replete the conversation resumed. Tan Amaro brought out his alms bowl from the rucksack and we passed it round. Nothing could be put in it then, at this late stage in the day, as the monk could accept food for just one day: nothing should be stored even for the following 24 hours. Nor could they accept breakfast in the morning, just a cup of tea, and anyway their meal was assured. The group who were bringing it were like many others joining them for a small part of the walk. As well as the groups who expected them, there were many chance meetings and conversations that had happened. It was amazing, they said, how many people had stopped to talk to them as they sat in a town square or by a road-side, intrigued no doubt by the incongruity of the circumstances and impressed, one supposed, by the dedication and the discipline. For those, there would be the unhurried talk and the explanation, if it was invited, of what it was all about. It occurred to me that for many people this could have been their first and only meeting with a religious, Christian or otherwise, and that perhaps this quiet and relaxed man, making no attempt to proselytise but simply ready to answer questions, may have communicated something of the quality of religion which the Christian clergyman in his church would not have the opportunity to do. Certainly my fairly uncommitted 21-year-old son was clearly very impressed by the simplicity and the discipline.

Hearing about Tan Amaro's way with religion was a totally new experience for me, and raised many questions to be pondered after they had gone. It had been interesting, for instance, to hear Nick explain that before he became involved with Buddhism, Christianity had never made any sense to him, that words like "revelation" and "redemption" had been meaningless. Now, having followed the Buddhist teaching of going down into the self and exploring the latent wisdom and insight that is in all of us, he understood much more of what

Christianity was about. Was there an analogy here with what we try to do in modern education: to start with the child's own personal experience and gradually, from that, lead outwards into understanding wider areas? Ideas and concepts are much more accessible if they are related to something which we know "in our bones" to be real. Is it possible that Buddhism provides a way into an understanding of religion simply because it starts with this concentrated contemplation of the self, the small part of the cosmos that we all as individuals know best of all?

Perhaps our institutionalised Western Church has something to learn from the patience and relaxation of the Eastern way with religion, just as our police force got out of touch with the people as they drove around in their panda cars, is there a case for Christian clergy to get out more "on the beat", as it were, learning from Tan Amaro's practice of wandering, of simply being about in the places where people are? The Church worries about its lack of contact with the great mass of people for whom church services seem inaccessible and irrelevant, and we try various ways of bridging the gap: modernising the language of worship, even jazzing the services with guitars and other high jinks, mounting missions of preaching and teaching at holiday sea-sides, using the media for expounding the faith. Perhaps we try too hard, in our busy Western way, hoping that our good organisation and strenuous efforts will produce results. Is there not something to be learned from the quiet and relaxed way of sitting or wandering about, not assaulting the populace with words, but ready to talk if invited? At least one of Christ's important conversations happened in this way when he was simply sitting by a well in Samaria (St. John, chapter 4).

The woman's response then came from a deeply-felt need, which institutional religion had not answered. The same is true today. Church attendance is a minority activity, "boring" to the many who still, however, seek the blessing of religion at the really important events of life like birth, marriage and death. There is, as the recently retired Archbishop of York pointed out, a great "consciousness of God" among the many who never go to church. Of the 10,000 letters a year that he received "the vast bulk of them are not from church members and they are not about church matters. But God often comes into them." There must be hunger and often pain with which a casual but perceptive wanderer could get in touch. What was impressive about Tan Amaro was his lack of self-consciousness: there was no sense of "mission" or "witness" on his journey. His

purpose was just to get to his new monastery in Northumberland and he was relaxed and unhurried on the way, sensitive, too, and quick to perceive that a young visitor we had staying with us at the time had complicated problems. There was a freedom and a peace about him as they set off into the early morning, accompanied this time by our son for half the way: Tan Amaro ready as before to let things happen, or not happen, as he went off on his wandering. I think we must visit him in his monastery and see for ourselves how it works."

* * *

"As I walked through the heathland of life, I saw that others were in great burning misery. But I ignored them and went on searching for my own inner tranquillity. What a lonely garden this would be were I to find it this way."

Gordon

Alan had taken six hours the previous night to drive down from Edinburgh through thick fog. He and Sarah had been sorting out what to cook over the telephone throughout the week and, even though it was two a.m. when he had arrived in Leeds, they were both up early the next morning to finish off the preparations. In a sense they were complete strangers to me, so I was very touched and inspired by all the care and effort which had gone into this meeting. It seems that all it takes to bring such an occasion about is a common faith in, and recognition of, that which is truly good.

It appeared that it only wanted to rain enough to turn us back and spend a peaceful afternoon together in the farmer's field. As we had a day in hand we decided to stay on and move later, crossing Ingleborough whenever the weather was best. As it turned out, the following morning was mistier than ever; Alan and Sarah were very tired, thus we opted to eat first and climb later. They had brought enough food for two days for all of us so we enjoyed another dāna together, setting off to climb the hill shortly afterwards. One of the reasons we had chosen to go that way was because of a fine outcrop of limestone pavement which occurred on the farm. Nick had been keen to see it as there were many rare plants which grew in that kind of rock formation. The freedom of the farm which we had been given was an unexpected bonus. When we left, Nick gave the farmer's wife the bunch of carnations which Alan and Sarah had brought for us; her first reaction was:

"Oh, it's such a shame you can't take them with you."

But she ended up accepting them happily. They had been very good to us and we promised to send them a postcard, when we arrived at Harnham, to assure them that we had got there safely.

It was still quite misty in the afternoon but there was a bit of a

Below Ingleborough

breeze, so our walk was not too sweltering. Alan had offered to carry my pack to the top of the hill so, walking very light, I had an easy climb. It was not far to the hill, and once on the main track we met many other walkers. We stopped frequently for long rests and spent much time looking out and soaking up the views; these shifted and changed as the mist moved in the valleys all around us. From the top we occasionally saw familiar, distant outlines but for the main part it seemed as though we sat on an island in the middle of a white sea. People passed by, appearing from all directions, sweating, dressed for heat, and with a look of conquest about them. After a little while together with us at the top, Alan and Sarah said farewell and headed back to their car. They had planned to have a meal with Sarah's parents in Leeds that night and needed to leave the farm by five o'clock in order to arrive in time.

Nick and I donned our packs and headed down the steep western side of the hill. After a short time we cut away from the main track and found a good place to stop, in amongst the boulders of yet another limestone pavement. As there is a big layer of it in this area you tend to find matching outcrops of it on opposite sides of the hills. The one on this side of Ingleborough seemed much wider and there were great expanses of smooth white rock. They are called pavements because the erosion by water in the cracks of the limestone splits the rocks into great rectangular chunks. Flat and separated by deep fissures known as grikes, it is in these grikes that the plants peculiar to the terrain grow.

It was still quite early when we arrived, there was a warm breeze carrying the thick mauve scent of wild thyme up through the valley, the evening light and the soft turf to sit upon made it a perfect picture. We sat for a long time before Nick went off to explore the pavement and make a couple of calls from a telephone box, just visible down below on the road. I took the opportunity to write a batch of postcards to the family and the faithful, easily gathering inspiration from an occasional glance over the valley of Twistleton. Pretty views and summer evenings make a poor refuge, however; as soon as the wind dropped a mass of midges appeared and were, in no time, swarming all around me – oh well. Happiness is a fickle friend,

no more than freedom from midges; freedom from suffering is another story.

As we had spent three nights sharing the same space I opted to sleep out; the windy afternoon had cleared the air and I woke, soon after dawn, to an empty sky and grass-heads wagging over me. It was a very midgy morning, I sat on the rocks and wrapped my robes all around me. Even though one feels compassion for the little creatures' hunger, it is at times like this I am very grateful that the form of the Buddha's enlightenment is in the realization of our limitations: he did not sit out in the open but beneath the Bodhi tree; he used just a reasonable amount of shelter from the harshness of the world. Such a precedent reminds us that it is not in conquering the world, but in recognizing the real that genuine liberation lies.

Nick had managed to buy enough food the previous evening from the local inn to make up a meal for the day. An old friend of his, Sue Lunn-Rockliffe, was unable to meet us as had been arranged. We thus deleted Ingleton from our route and headed straight across the hills into the next valley. The morning was very hot and we were dripping with sweat by the time we arrived at our stop. We found a rock ledge in the meadows of the eastern side of the valley and had our meal sitting in the sun, the midges being less voracious in the heat. In the afternoon an occasional breeze came by and, finding a good shady spot under some ash trees where the local bugs seemed quite gentle, I spent many hours just sitting there. There was nothing for me to do, it was the quietest time I had spent in weeks. Five hours alone, nothing to be written, mended or discussed; how lovely just to sit there and let go. No more real than anything else one does but certainly refreshing to the mind.

It was six o'clock by the time we moved on, the day had lost most of its heat and I found my feet flying up the first hill, taking me bright-eyed and breathless to the top. We followed the ridge along, past gloriously gaping and florid pot-holes, over moorland and through miles of heather and squidgy moss. Eventually, having crossed the topmost prong of Lancashire, in a small craggy valley of scalloped limestone, with steep banks and small rowans sprouting overhead, we decided to camp for the night.

We have come down from the moors and are suddenly back amongst small farms and country lanes; packed now with dog-roses, fox-gloves, honey-suckle and swarming flies – high summer is definitely with us. Last night the two of us slept out by an old canal after the sweatiest spell so far; soggy robe for a pillow at the end of a long day.

We had both rested well in our little camp up above the craggy valley, the sky was already clear by early morning so we set off promptly to reach Barbon before it got too hot. That little valley was the border with Cumbria, so once across it, with a last stretch of moorland, we descended for a couple of hours and were soon in amongst the gentle hills and woodlands of the coastal area. Following a small river valley down into the village, I waited in the shade while Nick went to do some shopping. An old farmer came by and said good morning, we had a long chat together and he said to drop in any time I was near Barbon again. He was a sweet old fellow, he met Nick in the shop also, so he heard some more about our walk. I asked a question about the village, he tried to remember the answer but it just would not appear.

"Can't do anythin' about, can you? Old age. You just can't remember things so well. Got arthritis too," he said smiling.

"Well if you were sixteen you would have good reason to complain."

"I'm not doin' so bad though – if I live 'til next April I'll be eighty. If y' take it easy, go a bit steady, y'll live to a good age. If y're satisfied y'll 'ave a good life. Only them as wants to be rich is never satisfied."

The lanes took us further down into the valley and we stopped for our meal at the water's edge after fording the River Lune. Under

the dense greenery of an old sycamore we spent the day; watching some stoats at play on a fallen tree and the splashes of salmon as they leapt up to catch the passing insects. We did our washing in the river and laid our things out to dry over the hot, smooth rocks beside the water. Nick went for a bathe down at the deeper stretch but I did not join him, having had a good wash that morning, up in the limestone scoops of our little valley in the moors.

The walk from the Lune to this canal bank was hot and sticky; wet and smelly, we were like magnets for the flies – for long stretches there were clouds of them, buzzing frantically about our heads. Whenever we stopped and cooled off they would diminish, and whenever the sweat began to flow again they would increase: what a sweet and simple equation for our existence. At one point we were climbing a long hill past a dairy farm. From behind us we heard the farmer's voice:

"'Ow far 'ave y' come?"

We talked a little about our walk as we went along, he climbing the hill behind us with his dogs. He told us there was a small reservoir over the other side which we could visit if we liked.

"People are not supposed to go there wi'out permission, but I give y' permission. It ain't ma place but I'm supposed to look after it," he smiled, nut-brown and bright-eyed. We said goodbye as he turned into a field about half-way up the hill. So hot and sweaty by the time we reached the top, Nick and I found ourselves almost irresistibly drawn to the lake. Before we knew it we were swimming there, with long happy strokes in the cool of the water; watching later the darts and dodges of electric, needle-blue dragon-flies as we sat drying off in the sun.

The evening that we arrived at the old canal we passed through a village called Endmoor, which mostly consisted of new houses clustered around an A-road. I sat on my pack whilst Nick went to ask for water. I was waiting on the pavement of the main street and a small group of teen-aged girls went by, talking loudly amongst themselves. I looked at the ground and heard only bursts of their conversation; I could not figure out if I was being derided or ignored, being unacquainted with present-day jargon. When a small stone skidded past me, having been thrown from their direction, I guessed that it must have been abuse. I had been prepared for this kind of thing in the big cities, but meeting it here, in the Cumbrian hills, had taken me by surprise. I was slightly amazed and ruffled by the situation but let it pass; they carried on walking up the street. Nick returned with the water-bottles and we sat a while on the pavement talking. Still somewhat on edge, I found myself buying into the whole feeling – hurrying up the hill as some village lads came by, calling out to us loudly from their moped. We tromped up the hill and heard them shouting, "There's bulls in that field", and suchlike, up from the street below. By the time we reached the top I was astounded at how frightened I had become, we saw two of the boys circle around the hill to the farmyard we were aiming for. I thought, "Oh no, oh no."

We sat for a rest on the hillside and I looked down there below, I realized that it was only fear creating the situation. I recalled the bhikshus in America who had faced Hell's Angels and drunken loggers on their bowing pilgrimages. You realize that it is just the habitual grasping of conditions which makes things seem a problem, whatever you need to meet you will meet and liberation is just a matter of acceptance. This is how things are, how could they be otherwise? On reflection, even on a gross physical level, it was obvious that two teenagers on a moped were not going to be much of

a threat. As it was, we walked down the hill and past the farm without a sign of them; as the evening and the next day wore on I saw the fear demon, which I had carelessly fed, fade once more into oblivion.

Another of the good teachers of this time has been the bugs: high summer in England is a huge festival for the many-legged. Everywhere nowadays, wherever you move, there are always insects and little creatures to be taken into account: if they like to bite, there is the dissuading of them; if they like to land on you, wander in your ears, crawl on your mat, fly into your mouth, land in your drink, or walk precariously on the parapet of your alms-bowl – you have to watch out for and take care of them. Having to be careful and patient with that which is most irritating; having to respect the hunger of a midge; having to give up your convenience to make way for another being – these are all great teachers of humility. Everyone gets hungry, no-one wants to be disturbed; why am I more important than you?

It is a good reminder that the earth is a shared concern and that our training is to disrupt the lives of others as little as possible. One recognizes that with the birth of a physical body, without a doubt it will be an agent for the death of others. When we walk through the long grass, on the paths and moorlands, countless moths and little bugs fly up; you find their crumpled bodies in your socks, between your toes. How else could it be? Walking in the world you are bound to do some damage, however hard you try to be gentle. Our reflection though is that we walk for peace; at least we are not starting any wars. For every handful of little beings we disturb, countless millions are untouched by our passing.

We left the canal bank, following lanes and footpaths, and headed off to the west. By mid-morning it was *very* hot and the subject of the weather was being discussed all through the village of Levens. People on the street were speculating as to how long it would last; how they loved it, how they hated it. We crossed the flat plain of the estuary, and for a while it felt as though we were back in the fens again: suddenly the hills were gone and here were level roads, deep ditches and even low-flying fighters to complete the scene. It was not long before the great bulk of Whitbarrow was looming more and more clearly in the misty air, however, and soon we were climbing again. We stopped for our meal on a broad footpath on the lower slopes of the hill and stayed there, quite alone, for the remainder of the day. Quiet, sitting in the leafy shade, our sweat and dew-soaked things out drying in the sun.

> "Now that want and hate are done away with,
> Attending to the moment, here I sit
> In the shade of spreading leaves – and all is well."

A little later Nick went up the hill to explore and found a spring from which to fill our water-bottles. From the top, he said, there was a good view over the haze of Morecambe Bay and over all the towns and hills around us. We carried on westwards through the gentle valleys and hillsides, woodlands of the area; frequently we stopped for rests to let the flies subside, put more fluid in and let the sweat dry off. Crossing through one farm we forded a small river and met the farmer on the other side. We chatted together for a while about our walk and how we had been doing. It seemed as though he would have liked us to stay on his farm but, as we had only walked for an hour since the meal, we felt the need to press on. As it happened we still did not go as far as we had expected. After a stiff climb through some

woodland we sat to rest at the top and drank the last of our water. Nick decided to refill at a nearby farm and returned a while later bottle-less.

"We've been invited for tea, bhante."

It turned out that the old farmer, Mr. Parkin, had spotted Nick going by the window and, mistaking him for Chris Bonnington the famous mountaineer, had called out loudly in surprise. Nick had knocked at the door and the farmer and his wife, after chatting with him for a while, had invited the two of us for tea. Being a bit of a wag the old farmer was a little concerned that he might not be able to resist teasing me, however he did very well and managed to restrain himself. We had a fine time with them, talking of our journey and the old farming days. His talk and questions were remarkably like those of the old man in Barbon.

"How did it all change so fast?"

"People always seem to be so discontent."

"Her and I are eighty-three, we aren't goin' to be around much longer, why be miserable?"

It was good to be together and hard to tear ourselves away from all the words of friendliness and hospitality. Their country ways had warmed us. Their kitchen was old and mellow, with its big range and well-worn comfy chairs. They had been there for fifty years and their lives seemed completely merged with this room and the farm. As we finally left the house, from inside we heard the farmer's voice.

"Smashin' – that were really great."

We had made some more friends and had left behind a small trace of the Buddha's pollen to ripen in their lives. By this time the evening shadows were lengthening so we climbed the next hill above the farm and decided to look for a place to stop for the night. Our feet carried us over high pastures and through boggy patches of the hilltops, taking us onto the heights behind Grange-over-Sands. There was a good breeze and we could see for miles all around; as the night drew in the lights of the bay appeared and the crescent of a new moon hung in the southern sky. We sat until late, letting go of the day and watching the moon turn orange, dissolving at last in a swamp of cloud lying on the horizon.

Having both slept out again, because of the heat, we woke early and set off after sitting for a short while. The mist was thick and the hills around us had vanished in the white. We dropped over the wall of our field and clambered down the steep hillside to the main road beneath us. Down in the valley the air was thick and our progress slow, our energy sapped by the atmosphere – hot and humid even by early morning. We did not have far to go but the country was quite rough; it was later than we had reckoned when we passed through Haverthwaite.

This area has many fine plants: on the morning's journey we found marsh-orchids and bog-ashphodels in profusion on the hilltops and Nick discovered a nature reserve close by the river where we stopped for our meal. As we were sitting in the shade by the water a little man came up and said hello to us. He was the bailiff and looking after the river was his job. He sat down with us and we talked together for quite a while. He asked about the Manjushri Institute (where we were going), how the place worked and the different Buddhist traditions. He had been there before with his children but had only seen around the grounds. He was keen to learn more about the place and was impressed by the usefulness of such a centre.

The old men around these parts really love to talk – being friendly, gaffing about old times and the way things are seems to be their province. A little later in the afternoon we met another old fellow and stood for ages chatting together on the pavement by the coast road. Hearing of his life, the local tales (how his brother had seen the one German prisoner who managed to escape in the war, skulking along the railway tracks, making his way to the coast), telling us of the paths we could take and a whole lot more besides. It was quite a sad situation though – I found that I wanted to get on and could feel this reflected in his wanting to get through: the more my ear closed and I wanted to get away, the stronger his efforts to penetrate. All this wanting led to little peace of mind and we ended up having to prise ourselves apart. Oh well.

Down by the sea there was a good breeze so at first the afternoon was cooler than we had known for a long time. We followed the old railway line down the headland and, after a long sweaty tramp, arrived on the beach below Conishead Priory, home of the Manjushri Institute. Nick was quite exhausted, sore-footed and hot so he asked if he might go for a swim; shedding most of his garments he plunged into the sea and returned smiling, cooler and refreshed. After sitting there for a little while we made our way through the small woodland up to the main house. As we emerged from the trees the towering, pinnacled building loomed above us. Block upon block, wings, turrets and curling towers stood stacked up high before us. We swung the great front door open as the gong for pūjā filled the air. Evening light streamed through the kaleidoscope of stained glass windows and, down the long broad corridor before us, Western Tibetan monks and nuns scurried about, getting ready for chanting.

One of the novices had time to show us to our rooms, leaving us to bathe and unwind for a couple of hours before other members of the Sangha came to see us. It turned out that it was the birthday of Geshe-la, the principal teacher at the institute, and so they had held a special ceremony of offering that evening. It felt good to have arrived on such an auspicious day and the greeting we received from the community was very touching: offering us the small trays of

Buddha-pūjā, which had been placed on the shrine for that evening. We talked for a while over tea and arranged a few things about our stay before retiring for the night.

During the day, when we were sitting by the river, Nick mentioned that there had been a message from Manjushri that we were to call Harnham when we arrived. Both of us found the idea coming into our minds that we were going to be asked to hurry up and get to Northumberland as soon as possible. Nothing was said between us but, as I sat after the meal, I heard the familiar whispers of Māra, patterns of speculation and projection, running around in the mind. "When he says this, I shall say that" – practising lines for the scenario. As wisdom was telling me not to buy into this, I promptly brought up the 'worst' possibilities for the situation. I had not realized how attached I had become to the idea of how the walk would end and how upsetting any other alternative would be. I sat there, reflecting on the journey, the Journey and the priorities of monastic life. Of course, you just do what your teachers ask and you let go of what you want – if I was told to get on a bus and arrive at Harnham the next day, that would be absolutely fine. After a while of cutting off ideas about the walk in this way, I found the panic beginning to abate and, by the time I was due to make the call, I felt almost at ease about it all. As it was, predictably, we had only been asked to ring in order to allay the rumours of us needing to arrive at Harnham early.

"Just whenever, venerable. However long it takes is O.K."

Thus Ajahn Ānando's voice assured us. There had been some comment misunderstood earlier on, he had really not been concerned about the time at all. I must confess, even though I was prepared to do anything, I felt quite relieved that things were going to carry on as we had planned. It was a good lesson in seeing how attachment to ideas of the future secretly crystallize and solidify; you forget that anything can happen at any time – that plans are only "flowers in air" and that death comes without warning.

We spent the day talking with the monks, nuns and lay-people of the community: sat here in this fine room they have given us,

passing long and peaceful hours, talking of Chithurst and monastic forms, the walk, the precepts, family life and how to deal with everything. They invited me to give a talk in the Gompa that evening. As at the Samatha Centre, there were thirty or forty people there for the occasion: I spoke about tudong and our pilgrimage through England. There were many good questions and a joyous sense of fellowship.

After the talk some of the nuns came by and spent the remainder of the evening with us; asking about the structure of the precepts, levels of ordination and many other points of discipline. There is a very good feeling here and, although the Sangha is quite young, a lot of heart has obviously gone into the place. Smiling friendly faces, the massive, slightly ramshackled building, and a host of colourful images are ever present. People are doing everything possible to make our visit comfortable and we are being given much respect. It is very good to be here.

Space,
Vast and beautiful,
Thunders in the silence;
Peace.

Out beyond the stars and black
What lies?
The limits of my human eyes;
Mirages, the tricks of light,
Shimmer, flicker, undulate.

Wind blows
Below the stars,
Silver leaves do not resist;
Wind blows – they move
And when it rests – they still.

*

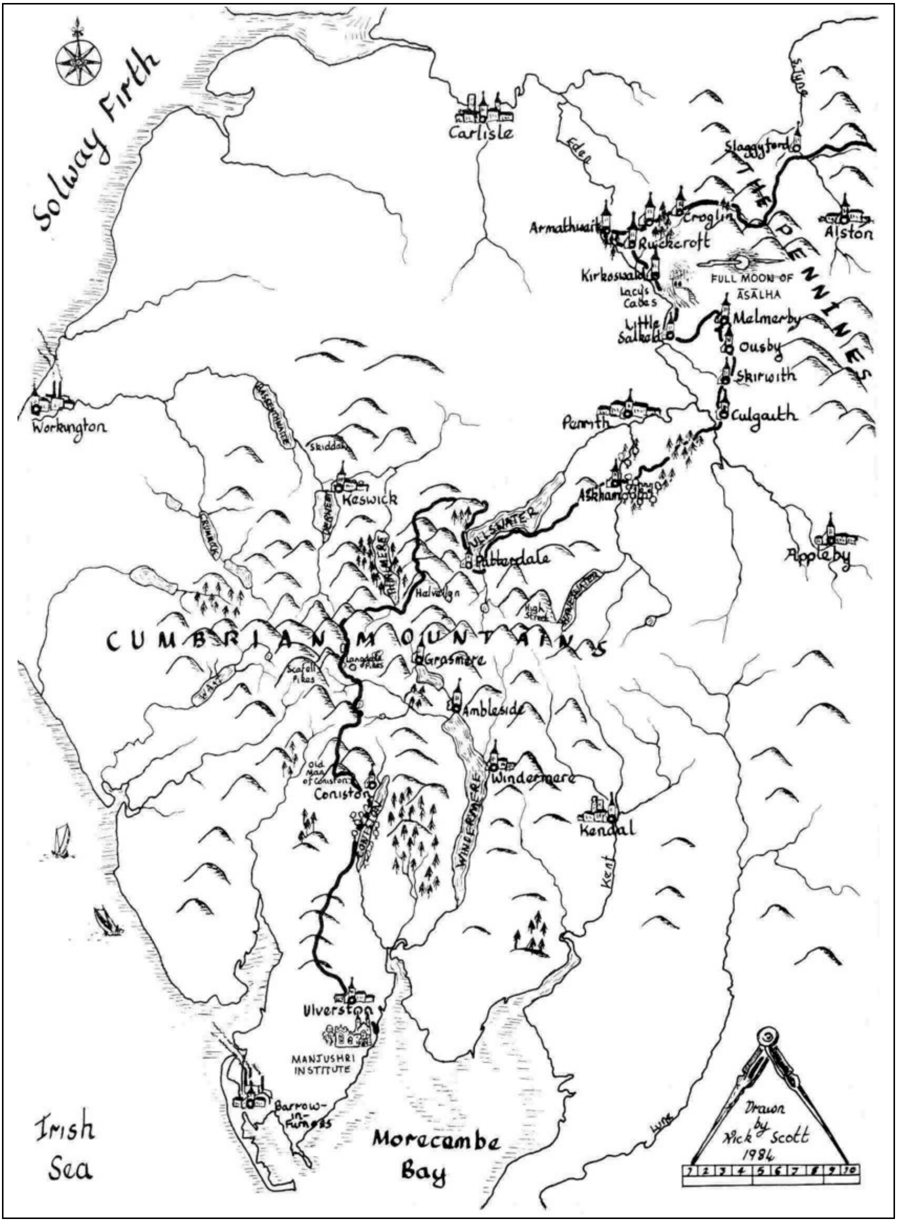
(end of the third book)

Part 4

Ulverston
to
Harnham

"Close your eyes and you will see clearly
Cease to listen and you will hear truth
Be silent and your heart will sing
Seek no contacts and you will find union
Be still and you will move forward on the
tide of the spirit
Be gentle and you will need no strength
Be patient and you will achieve all things
Be humble and you will remain entire"

Taoist Reflection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Carlisle
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Slaggyford
THE PENNINES
Alston
Croglin
Armathwaite
Ruckcroft
Kirkoswald
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Lacy's Caves
Little Salkeld
Malmerby
Ousby
Skirwith
Culgaith
Penrith
Workington
Skiddaw
Keswick
Ullswater
Askham
Thirlmere
Patterdale
Appleby
Helvellyn
High Street
CUMBRIAN MOUNTAINS
Langdale Pikes
Grasmere
Scafell Pikes
Ambleside
Old Man of Coniston
Coniston
Windermere
Kendal
Kent
Ulverston
MANJUSHRI INSTITUTE
Barrow-in-Furness
Irish Sea
Morecambe Bay
Lune
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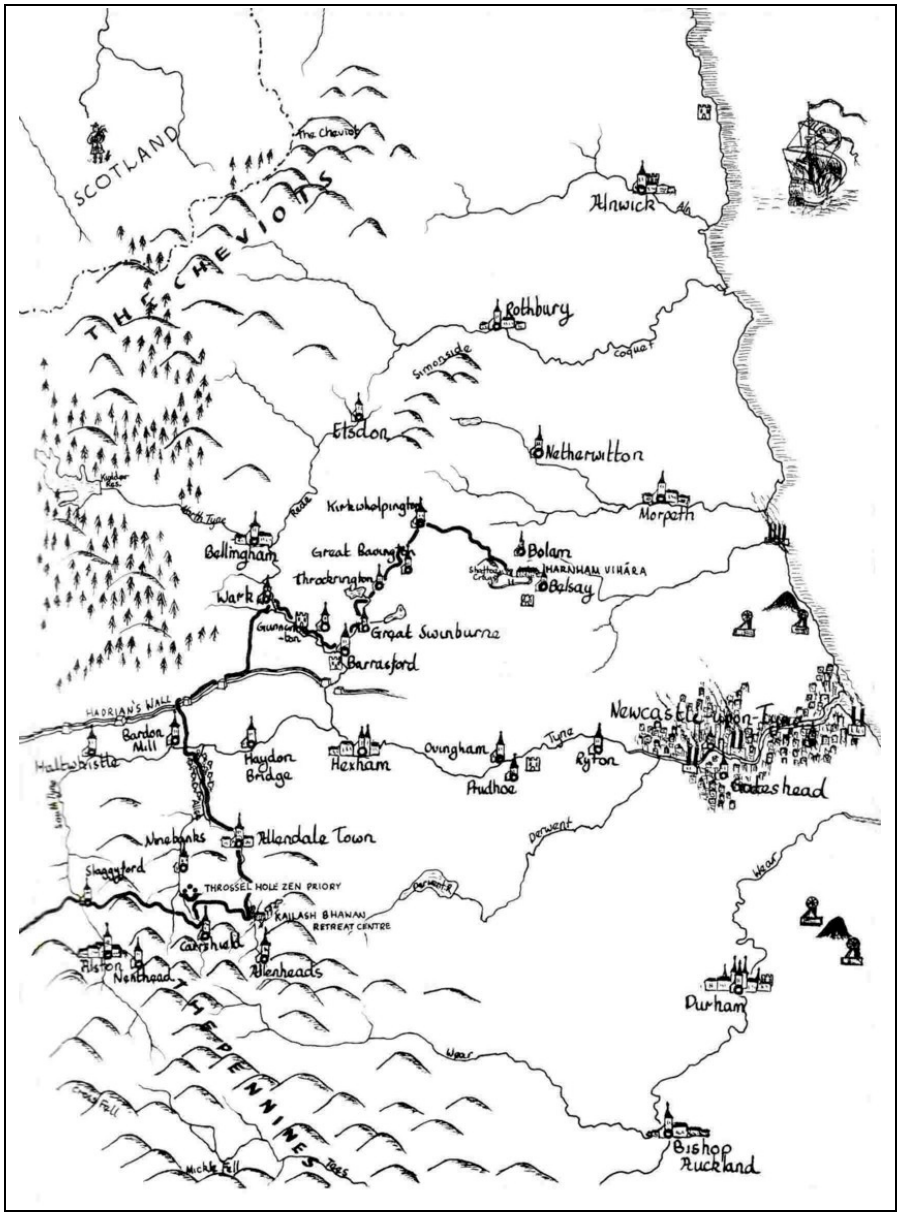

SCOTLAND
The Cheviots
THE CHEVIOTS
Alnwick
Rothbury
Coquet
Simonside
Etsdon
Netherwitton
Morpeth
Kirkwhelpington
Bellingham
Great Bavington
Throckington
Bolam
NARAHAM VIHĀRA
Belsay
Wark
Great Swinburne
Barrasford
HADRIAN'S WALL
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne
Gateshead
Bardon Mill
Haydon Bridge
Hexham
Ovingham
Prudhoe
Ryton
Wall
Bristle
Allendale Town
Nnebanks
Slaggyford
THROSSEL HOLE ZEN PRIORY
KAILASH BHAVAN RETREAT CENTRE
Carrshield
Allenheads
Alston
Nenthead
Derwent
Wear
Durham
PENNINES
Cross Fell
Bishop Auckland

till tired from the activity of the last few days, I have been nodding gently, as we sit here, on the banks of a small tarn up in the Cumbrian mountains. Noy and Lydia have left to return to their cottage for supper and, apart from the hills and the sheep, we are quite alone.

Our time at the Manjushri Institute was spent in almost incessant conversation. All through the afternoon of the first day people came by to see us; there were a few familiar faces from Chithurst and Wisbech and many, many new ones. A couple of the community members spent most of the time with us – first Karen and then Sue from Manchester. We sat in our upper room, drinking tea and letting the conversation roam; we carried on until it was time for me to give my talk in the Dharma hall. I had not had enough time to consider what to say let alone be worried about it, so I went in, began with 'Namo' and carried on until I got to 'evaṁ'. There was much enthusiasm for it all; the inspiration and interest arising from our visit was becoming clear and it was not until quite late that we turned in.

The next day followed a similar pattern: I spent some time in the morning writing the diary and talking with Liba, a Czechoslovakian girl, who had stayed at Chithurst and was now living at Manjushri. She told us how difficult things were in her own country for someone who wishes to be a Buddhist. The only books available on the subject were those loosely related, so she had had to glean what she could from Asian philosophy and history texts. For people to meet as a Buddhist group was not allowable, so those interested had to be called a yoga or meditation society. These were considered passable because of their non-religious qualities, of exercise, in the former, and the psychotherapeutic value of the latter. Once you have overstayed your exit permit from the country, for holiday or study, if you

go back, you go back to prison. Liba had been out well past this limit and was now seeking refugee status in Britain. Her only real interest was in practice of the Buddha-dharma and the job she now had, working in Manjushri's kitchens, was like being in paradise for her.

After the meal some people joined us for tea but we soon had to part as an appointment had been arranged at one o'clock with Geshe Kelsang. Our meeting with him was a long and joyous occasion; it seemed as though there was an endless number of things to talk about and our conversation flowed like mountain rivers – clear water running in a thousand hidden crannies. It was lovely to share some time with him, he was very happy to see us and was delighted by the idea of our walk. His command of English was not too good and at first he did not realize that we had walked from Chithurst. When it became clear to him how we had been travelling he was quite astounded.

"What!" he exclaimed, "using feet?!?"

We told him of the recent developments at Chithurst and Harnham and swopped our news of mutual friends. During our talk he gave us a small wooden stūpa and some incense as gifts; we spent about an hour and a half together – it could have been all afternoon if we had not had to excuse ourselves and disappear to keep our appointment with Sister Rosa for tea.

An old friend of Phyllis Turner (whom we had visited in Hitchin), she had come up and handed me a couple of envelopes at the beginning of my talk. Phyllis had sent up some photographs from the time of our visit, together with a very sweet letter. We had chatted with Rosa afterwards and she had invited us to pay her a call the next day. Once we had left Geshe-la we went to meet her in the library and then repaired to her cottage for tea. For a time we sat and talked in the happy jumble of a sitting-room which occupied most of the ground floor of the house. Surrounded by images of the Buddha and luminaries of the Tibetan tradition, thangkas she had embroidered, pictures, books and a thousand undefined oddments, we sat sipping China tea and talking.

In the late afternoon we were expecting Noy and her friend

Lydia to arrive. After we left the quadrangle of cottages where Rosa lived, we turned out onto the main drive. We took a few steps into the open and saw Noy emerge, waving to us from the doorway of her car. She and Lydia had pulled up that minute after a long hot drive and they were very happy to see us. We chatted a while together on the lawn and arranged things for the next day. It seemed that all their plans for supporting us during the next week were going to work out; it had hardly seemed possible, when we had talked about it ten weeks before at the beginning of the walk, but there we were all arrived and sitting happily together on the grass. When we had first talked about it, at their house in Tilford, the idea was that Noy and her husband Garry (a vice-president of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain) would visit the Lake District, stay in nearby hotels as we walked through the area, and offer dāna each day to us. As Garry was an enthusiastic walker and Noy keen to look after the cooking, it seemed to be a perfect arrangement. Unfortunately, Garry had not been able to make it, due to other commitments, but Noy had invited her friend Lydia Lee to come along instead. It was a unique chance for a Dhamma-holiday and a week out in the country.

After they left we went upstairs; I plunked myself in the armchair and watched my eyes staring vacantly into space. I had been talking non-stop for six hours and was left with only a faint grin and the joyous hum of emptiness that lingers after the sharing of Dhamma. I noticed that a small tray of flowers and fruits had appeared – one of the Sangha had apparently come to see us but, finding us absent, had left the offerings and gone.

After a little while there was a knock at the door and, to my surprise, Niah's face appeared. Nick had bumped into her in the corridor and she had asked if she could come and see us; we had met a few weeks before in Manchester and she had not expected to find us here as well. She had come up for the week-end to visit her friend Sue, one of the people we had chatted with the day before. We talked a little while before she said goodbye, leaving Nick and me alone. I still had a few jobs to do that day, so I took my boots and sandals off to do the repairs and tucked myself into a remote corner of the shrubbery. The presence

of a Theravāda bhikkhu seems to be like a magnet in a pin factory here and it was not long before I was engaged in yet another long and inspired conversation. This time with a goateed man called Mike, who had found me sitting there. He had come from much the same direction as I in his search for freedom and I could easily understand the questions which he had. Our talk cut good and deep and it did not seem to matter that it was twilight by the time my jobs were done. All that remains at the end of such a day is a gentle weariness and the joy of having given. Nick and I sat up until late, finally letting the day die when the moon had set – and my heart said that I had had enough.

I woke quite early the next day and sat for a while before we went to the morning Manjushri pūjā. It was our last day and we had invited the Sangha to meet with us and ask any questions which they had. After the pūjā about half a dozen of them came up and I spent the next few hours talking about meditation practice, why I became a bhikkhu, and the structure of our lives. It felt right to put a lot of energy into communication with the Sangha as they are mostly young and all seemed keen to grow closer to us. It is clear that the unity of the Sangha, in all its traditions, is the most important factor for proper growth of the Dhamma in these times. One finds that in the meetings with all these different Buddhist groups the urge is to give oneself completely. Recharged by a week or so in the countryside, by the quietude and formal practice, you find you really put your heart into being with people when you meet. When the need is there you do your best to simply offer people everything you can.

Life seemed quite hard for the Sangha at Manjushri as there are many compromises of traditional monastic form which they must make. The most difficult thing is that they have to find funds to support themselves at the monastery. This partly derives from the traditional set-up in Tibet – where a sanghin's family or a benefactor would undertake to support them – and partly from the lack of a sizeable community of Tibetan lay-people in this country. The consequence of this is that not only must the Sangha be closely involved with money, but they must also be able to guarantee some form of income. This can be a problem; some people have sponsors

The Ven. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

or are paid for work they do around the monastery, others, however, can only find work in the town or even have to sign on for Social Security payments – this is not an ideal situation. For the Theravāda Sangha the tradition of living directly on alms is still strong and there are large numbers of Thai, Singhalese and Burmese people spread throughout Britain; thus, for us, this problem never arises. Another difficulty for them is the fact that the majority of the community are lay-people (68 out of 80), and that the Sangha can change into lay-clothes for work or visiting town. This results in the Sangha/laity delineation becoming unclear and thus the full spiritual power of the Buddha's lineage remains untapped. In this environment it must be hard to develop any genuine sense of renunciation – there is so much still tying one to the world.

Noy and Lydia appeared that morning at about ten thirty, just as the monks and nuns were leaving. Two of them, Martin and Youka, offered to show us around the buildings, so our small party set off for a short tour. Noy and Lydia had brought lots of food with them that day and so invited Martin to join us for the meal. The weather was still good so we sat at the edge of the lawn and spent the next hour or two together. Noy gave us news of events at Chithurst and Ash House and how hot it had been down south. She and Nick sorted out the plans for the week, poring over a heap of maps; Lydia and I talked together and with the others who had come around to join us. Carelessly we let time slip by and Marianna, one of the nuns, came over from the main house with the gift of a food parcel from Geshe-la. We were late for our appointment to say goodbye and he thought we might have gone. We scooted over and apologised but he did not seem to mind. We stayed with him only a short while, paid our respects and left.

It took us a while to get all our things together that afternoon. It was about four o'clock before all the farewells had been said and we were setting off again. As we tramped, exhausted and empty, down the drive towards Ulverston, it seemed an age ago that we had arrived, and lifetimes, at least, since I had seen a road roll away beneath my feet. As I sat on a bench in town, Nick went to make

some telephone calls. I closed my eyes – so tired; focussing occasionally on the quiet buzzing of silence and the fall into fragmented streams, odd little thoughts, drifting away . . .

"Oi!"

A shout came from a nearby car, just pulled up at the junction. The face of a young skinhead poked out of the window, scarcely more hair on his scalp than on mine.

"Yer fallin' asleep mate."

"It's been a long night", I replied; jerked from my reverie and not quite sure why I had said it. The others in the car smiled as they drove off and I waved thankfully to them. I was utterly drained.

We walked a little way out of town and up into the hills which look out over Morecambe Bay. With numerous rests and refreshments, and a raucous bellow from a passing motorbike ("another garbled message from the Buddha", quoth Nick), we finally made it to a heathery hillside and decided to stop for the night. Inadvertently Nick had planned our route on Noy's map and then had returned it to her; consequently we had to guess the position of our destination for the next day. It felt pleasantly adventurous, sleeping just off the edge of our map. We turned in while it was still light, our attempts at sitting meditation having rapidly dissolved into a fog of sleepiness and nodding. We slept out but were roused by rain in the early hours. It was only a small shower but enough to tell us that the weather was on the change. In the morning light we were amazed at the clarity of the air: after two weeks of haze and mist, now we could see for miles. Hills, long left behind and forgotten, suddenly reappeared on the horizon, and we could see the industrial towers lining the coast, way away to the south. The horizon of the Irish Sea magically appeared and the Old Man of Coniston stood out clear in the north – a silent greeting for the new day. From nowhere the Cumbrian mountains were all about us – their straggly crags spread in all directions – and there we were.

According to Nick's guesswork we were not far from the tarn where we were to meet Noy and Lydia; we crossed a couple of hills and saw what we were sure was the place. We were quite early and it

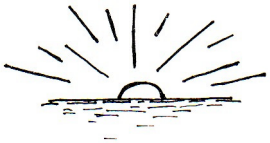
was a couple of hours before they arrived; but arrive they did and our day has been spent happily together. It is very good to be with them and to have a chance to spend some time in this countryside. They have both been looking forward to this for a long, long time so it is good that it is working out so well.

Earlier today Noy remarked how delighted she had been when I told her that essentially there is nothing wrong with pleasure: that the feeling of pleasure arising from good action was one of the benefits of the religious life. As we were walking along Lydia spoke –

"I was just thinking how pleasurable it is to be alive in this time, in this place – do you think that's wrong?"

Out of nowhere I heard myself reply, "Finding true happiness in the world is an art, not a sin."

Cultivating the art of finding silence in the midst of sound. Sitting by this tarn at the end of the day, watching this pen move across the pages: motion but stasis, silence but sound, darkness but light.



It had taken me a long time to write the diary that evening so I went up to the top of the pass above the tarn to stretch my legs. I stood watching the sunset and the rising of the half moon as the evening crept into the valley. I turned back and, as I strolled down the hill, I saw two men talking with Nick; my first thought was "bailiffs" but, deciding that they were more likely to be buddhas, I carried on down the hill and joined them. It turned out that they were both local people, metalworkers from around Barrow and Ulverston; good, straight-hearted men. They chatted about life in the area and asked us about our walk and the Buddhist religion. It is quite extraordinary the number of people we meet who say they have no particular faith, but follow the code of not doing to anyone anything they would not like to have done to themselves. A simple rule and, coming from the heart, easily enough to free us. It was dusk when our talk ended and, as they turned to leave, one of them stopped, reached into his shirt pocket and thrust a five pound note into my hand.

"Something to help you along with your journey."

Turning again, they waved and walked off over the pass. I looked down at the piece of paper in my hand and then over to Nick.

"Amazing."

As the evening closed in small drifts of mist skidded over the surface of the tarn, seemingly exhaled by the banks; silence fell and we left the night to the moon and the glistening stars.

I was still very tired from all the activity of the last few days and slept late; I was woken at last by the heat of the sun as it rose above the eastern ridge of the tarn. I poked my head out of the tent and saw that the air was clear and the sky empty. I emerged, and, walking around in the pure morning and all the happiness of the previous days, I smiled over to Nick.

"What a place – amazing, perfect!"

"Not quite so amazing, bhante, I've cut my foot."

He had winged himself on a protruding tent peg early that morning and had lifted a flap of skin on the sole of his right foot. It did not seem too bad, so we decided to carry on as planned and slow up if it became too painful. By the time we had come down from the tarn to the edge of Coniston Water it was pretty sore, but rocky descents being the worst terrain for such wounds, he found it was not too painful on the level. We took the footpath along the lakeside through a couple of miles of woodland. Eventually we reached a string of campsites where we took a track up the steep slope into Bowmanstead village. Having misjudged our distances somewhat, we were a little late, but, as we walked up to our rendezvous spot at the church, there was Lydia coming down the road towards us. Noy appeared in the car a few minutes later so, the party complete, we took them to the edge of a small wood we had found and arranged all the things for the dāna. The day was hot; we sat at the edge of the shade amongst the few chickens that roamed in the wood and beside a large bank of crimson rose-bay willow-herb. In front of us a steady stream of summer-clad campers and day-trippers flowed in both directions along the broad track which ran down to the lake. After we had eaten we sat and talked long hours: Lydia had many questions. It was good to explain things to someone who had very little acquaintance with Buddhist terminology and teaching. Being Jewish she also told us many facts about Judaism which were helpful and interesting to hear.

As they had shopping to do that afternoon we parted company and Nick and I set off together up The Old Man of Coniston: a tall, stately peak which happened to lie on the route to our next rendezvous. The path was steep, broad and very stony. Nick found it a bit punishing for his foot but, as there was no alternative, we carried on the slow sweaty climb until we reached the top – breathing hard and drying off swiftly in the wind. Down below lay Morecambe Bay and, spread out all around, ragged peaks ranged off into the haze. The land to the east was covered with a charcoal mass and it seemed to be raining heavily there. As the wind was coming from the south, however, it passed us by and we stayed in the clear. It was quite

late by this time and only two others came to the top while we were there. They had been climbing on the crags to our west and were taking a stroll before their descent to the town. We chatted for a little while but it was not long before we set off in our opposite directions – Nick and I following the ridge from the Old Man northwards. As we walked, the air to the west cleared, so we stopped at the cairn on the last peak before we would drop down, sat and had a good look. The shadowy figure of the Isle of Man, which we had speculated on before, was now quite clear; we could see the south-westernmost tip of Scotland as it jutted out into the sea, and, in between the two, the distant shape of the hills of Northern Ireland. We sat a long time taking it all in – the vastness of the scene and the fathomless age of these rough old mountains. Millions upon millions of years, rain and snow, sun and wind, have beaten them into a huge and awesome mass. Steep valleys and rocky peaks; long ridges where, until the sheep and the climbers came, only the swifts and ravens were to be found – swooping in fearless parabolae, gathering their evening feed, or floating on black wings amongst the crags.

It was a steep descent, treading from rock to rock, into the valley where we planned to stay the night. Nick's foot was very bad and he had to stop and rest it part of the way down. It was soft and mossy in the valley bottom and soggy everywhere. We found a flat spot to pitch the tent and, after a long breather, it was up. The midges were bad but we have learned their ways well: they only rise up if you disturb the ground or trees which they are on. If you tread gently or sit upon a rock you can remain unknown to them. The sky had cleared by late evening but the night was not too cold; clouds came over and in the morning there was only a little dew. After a night's rest Nick's foot felt much better and the descent through the hills to our meeting place was quite pleasant. Even though we were going downhill it was a hot and sweaty morning, once again the air was thick and close. We were early for Noy and Lydia so we went around the tarn to a small promontory where we sat and awaited their arrival.

The pattern of the previous days repeated itself; they arrived safe and sound and we spent the meal happily in the shade of an old pine, down at the water's edge. Conversation rolled along for a while, but, as the ladies were to walk with us that day, in mid-afternoon we set off – aiming to climb up Stickle Ghyll, a nearby stream which ran from Stickle Tarn, high in the hills above. I do not think that Lydia had ever had such an active holiday as this, and she certainly had had little experience of walking in this type of country. She was determined not to be a 'weed' though, and, even when she twisted her ankle and was quite uncomfortable, she was insistent that she carry on and stay with us. Like young Kristian on our walk into Doncaster, it was very good to see how being with a bhikkhu could help somebody in this way. To do that which they could not do, not to prove anything but simply out of resolution not to submit to habit. She and Noy came up the ghyll as far as they were able, having to return for dinner at their farmhouse hotel in Watermillock. I was very impressed as Lydia was also extremely afraid of heights. She was obviously making a grand effort that day but I half suspected that we would not see her on the morrow. We watched them go down until they were past the difficult stretch of steep rocks and were able to take the track down to the bottom.

It was still quite a climb up to the tarn where we had intended to take them, so it was fortunate that they had turned back when they did. We found out later that Lydia had had severe pains in her injured leg and had waited at the hotel at the base of the track while Noy went back for the car. It would have been a long walk for her but fortunately she was given a lift to where it was parked and so was able to be back with Lydia quite soon. Things continued to go well for them – they arrived back at their farmhouse just in time for supper and, when Lydia rang her husband (an orthopaedic surgeon) for advice about her ankle she was assured that nothing serious was wrong.

Nick and I sat up by Stickle Tarn watching the rock climbers on the dark grey faces hanging over the water. There were some tents around and it seemed as though people would come up and camp there, to stay and have a few days climbing. We puffed our way to the top of the ridge, high above Stickle, and clambered up a rocky outcrop. We could see the next little tarn, which was our destination, far away below us. We decided to sit up on the heights for a while; the evening was clear and there before us lay peak after peak, disappearing into the east. Sitting on a rock in the evening wind – there is something so good about mountains: you are so alone, so far away. "Ten thousand feet above the gnashing of the world."

Down below us we could see a small pup-tent beside the water; after we went down and said hello we found out that it was a man from Newcastle.

He asked us where we were going.

"We're on our way to Northumberland."

"On foot? That's a fair stretch."

"A fair stretch! We're nearly there! We started in Sussex."

He was quite speechless for a moment but soon began to ask more about us; we told him of the journey so far, how we live on alms, invitations, and the mendicant spirit of the Sangha. He was up for a night to test his new tent and had been spending a few days in the area, before he went back to his home in Kent. We saw him again in the morning and shared some chocolate together: he wished us well for the journey before we said goodbye. At times there had been

an awed look on his face, as though he was deeply struck by something and felt very lucky to have met us.

It had been a fine night and calm, so I slept out to keep the three night rule. I woke early, the air was clear and way below us a thin skim of mist was just visible, hanging over Coniston Water. It looked the perfect day for walking but, as we climbed around the ridge to meet our path, we saw the clouds rapidly appearing; swelling up from below us in the valleys. Soon only the mountain tops were visible; with all the lowland completely obscured it was just like the view from an aeroplane – there we were high in the sun with a solid bank of opal white beneath us. It was not long before it was all around us though, and for a short time we were very lost. Off the path and with poor visibility, Nick was finding the task of map-reading more and more difficult. We kept climbing to try and keep the view and to our great good fortune found that the clouds only reached to the ridge top, dispersing along its line ahead of us. After a few false starts, and my confident declaration that such and such a path felt like the right one, we found that we had overshot our turning way back and, had we followed my nose, would have ended up miles from our destination. The sun was scattering the clouds quite rapidly now and it was not long before Nick had us pinpointed. We dropped down a steep stream bed into a long glacial valley and walked down to the road below.

The morning sunshine and the relief of certainty after having been lost were warming as we tromped along the path – great hummocks, swampy tarns and flickering silver streamlets appearing from the banks – the happiness of things turning out all right. We came up beside the main road and saw Noy standing on a stile, waving to us, silhouetted on the skyline. We decided to have our meal in the meadow beside the road; it was quite late by now, so, even though we seemed to be on a hikers' crossroads and so near the traffic, for us it was the perfect place. Noy and Lydia's new farmhouse was a great success, even better than that of Peter and Rita in Broughton-in-Furness and their hotel in Grasmere, they had had a splendid evening and were raring to go for our last walk together.

As we had been coming down Nick had been getting a bit depressed about his foot; it was very painful now, and, what with being late and getting lost, he had been ready to tell them we wanted to stop for the day. The waves of inspiration and enthusiasm from the ladies, however, were enough to change his mind and he dropped the idea without saying a word. I was very impressed.

The climb up the stream was neither as steep nor as precipitous as that up Stickle Ghyll and, with frequent pauses, we all made it quite happily to the top. It was a blisteringly hot day, no clouds at all, but with a cool and steady breeze. Completely happy, feeling blessed to have made it, the four of us arrived at the tarn. Filled with a warm peace as I sat there, I thought what a fine and strange crew we must seem:- two middle-aged ladies: one in white, perched neatly on a rock; the other, small and oriental, struck with the majesty of the great tarn, its glowing hills, the azure sky, slowly weaving through a T'ai Chi sequence, down at the edge of the water; a tall red-bearded man, stretched on the turf after a swim; and the orangey-brown pyramidal form of a Buddhist monk, contemplating the Wonderful.

After the ladies had left us I too went in for a swim; quite a few days had passed since my last wash and it felt good to be wet and refreshed again. After a nod to any aquatics who had been disturbed by our passing, I followed Nick up the hill to the Helvellyn ridge. It was quite late and no people were to be seen. On the climb to the top I felt like Christ on his way, carrying his cross up to Calvary – weight, heat and dust-dry stony path. Nick miraculously managed to collect water from a small springlet on the way up and, before too long, we were enjoying the broad run of the path which runs almost level to Helvellyn peak. It felt as if we walked in the sky, there were steep drops on either side and the path ran like a ribbon; hazy blue, heaving ranks of mountains lay spread out to our left and right.

As we climbed the last incline to the peak I thought, "There's bound to be no-one on Scafell Pike at this time of the evening so we will be the highest people in England, wow!" As it turned out, even if it had been so, being the highest person in England was a short-lived and pretty mundane attainment. Within twenty minutes five other people had appeared and more were on their way. Oh well.

The haze of the day had settled just below us. All around the mountains were muffled in thick mauve with only the peak of Skiddaw poking out. The line seemed to solidify as we walked along, the darkness of the haze and the crimson and gold of the sunset drew together into a dense interface. From the hilltop above where we planned to stop we watched the descent of the sun – squashed oval and then drawn pearlike as it crossed the line, finally disappearing behind the coastline of Stranraer. The bands of colour remained unmoving – as the ends drew in, short flushes of violet and green appeared, rays launched from the departed sun like a great wheel pivoting beneath the horizon. All of this flickering in the silvery sshh-h-h h h of the mind, silent and unmoving. A wondrous sunset it was.

Because it was so calm and clear on top we kept the tent flaps open. Eventually Nick had to leave and sleep outside as he was so hot – not something you would have expected at two and a half thousand feet in England. The next day the weather was still good. The path for the run down to our final meeting with Noy and Lydia was straight and simple, over the last hummocks of the ridge and then down a long spur to meet the road at the bottom. Nick had chosen the spot well. Noy met us right on time and drove us down to Ullswater. The ladies had wanted to swim, as they had not yet had the chance, so the lakeside seemed the perfect place for our picnic. We found a good secluded corner in some shade and enjoyed a quiet meal together. They wanted to leave for Harnham quite early in the afternoon so, after their swim, we were soon packed up and ready to leave. Originally Noy was to take us back to where we were picked up; since then, however, she had contacted her son Koy (who was doing botanical field work near Penrith) and had arranged for us to visit him at his cottage. Our plans thus altered, we said our goodbyes to Lydia, and Noy drove us around to the bottom end of the lake. It was not a long walk to where we have now stopped – down among some silver birches and dry spongy moss, perched a few yards from the water.

"When Noy first asked me to join her for a week in Cumbria to provide lunch each day for a monk and his student companion, I had agreed before she had finished phrasing the invitation. Enthusiasm turned to alarm when I understood that my friend proposed to strike out across country to meet the travellers, leaving me to bring the food and equipment by car.

Now, my little motor, admirable in every other respect, has no talent for orienteering. Turn its nose in the direction of home along familiar routes and it will make its way unerringly; set it adrift on the switchback roads of an alien terrain, and the odds on our meeting up with the rest of the party are long indeed.

Happily, the plan was scrapped before it and we could be put to the test; and by superior mapcraft on the part of Noy and Nick, we arrived each day at the agreed place and at the hour appointed. (On only one occasion did we have to wait for the gentlemen who, abandoning science for instinct, turned left instead of right and lost themselves for a time.)

My clearest memories are of the matchless beauty of the country that contained us, the kindness of its people, and the good humour and delicacy of my three companions. Early in our association, when it seemed that this superannuated female might not be up to the march, Tan Amaro, with exquisite tact, called a halt, on the grounds that he was too tired to carry on.

Northern hospitality can be daunting. At the farmhouse where we were to spend two nights, we were confronted by a dinner, monumental in kind, that made no concession to the hour (early) or the weather (blisteringly hot). With the best will in the world, we were unable to do justice to the four courses, and our hostess's disappointment in us bordered on disgust.

The situation was retrieved when we had explained our purpose in coming to the Lakes. Such was the goodwill generated by the local Buddhist community that, not only were we forgiven our poor performance, but upon asking if we could take our breakfast for Venerable Amaro and Nick, the farmer insisted on giving us fresh eggs and bacon to be cooked at the picnic spot; he refused to allow the walkers to eat the cold eggs we were preparing to offer them.

Our days took on a satisfying rhythm. We learned to barricade the car against intrusion, not by brigands but by inquisitive hens, who enjoyed an occasional spin. We had to exercise ingenuity in warding off the helpful efforts of the scion of the household. He was as intrigued as the farmyard fowls, but less impressed with our cooking methods or the end products. "I doant like t' look o' that" was his frequent observation.

"Why doant y'eat me Mam's luvly cooking?" We did. Poor Bhante and Nick had to make do with ours. Sheep and silence. Silence and sheep.

A strong contrast was provided by Grasmere, where Wordsworth would have opened his eyes a bit at what has become of his old stamping ground. But even the tourist traps cannot efface the beauty of the place. In the evening we paid a nostalgic visit to the hotel where Noy's parents had stayed, years before. Had it changed? At least the wooden landing stage along which we walked down to the water was the same. Wasn't it?

As the days passed we were aware of an increased feeling of well-being; of health and serenity. During the hours of conversation, sometimes profound, often amusing, usually interesting, we learned many things (such as what plants like having their feet wet, so that we could, if we chose, avoid doing likewise). Better than the talk were the silences, resonant and restorative.

At Ullswater we said goodbye to Bhante and Nick and made our way to the Northern fastness of Harnham, where we were made most welcome; but that is another story.

Our journey ended, as it had begun, in a monastery. For two middle-aged housewives the adventure was over."

Lydia Lee

Late into the evening it was still hot so Nick decided to sleep out; it had been a bit harrowing for him trying to get through to Koy Thomson on the local pub telephone and it was twilight when he had returned. We decided to put the tent up anyway, as it looked as though it could rain, and it was not much later that he joined me there. Peals of thunder and lightning flashes were beginning all around and it seemed as though we were in for some heavy weather. As it turned out the thunderstorms missed us and we escaped with a few short showers. By the time we were packed and ready to go, early the next day, the air was warm and the tent was almost dry.

We followed the long roller-coaster of a path, on the eastern shore of the lake, for a couple of hours before we stopped to eat. We left the track and went down to the waterside, finding ourselves a quiet corner around the rocks from some anglers. During the meal there were a few spatterings of rain; Nick passed me my brolly which I found, when I opened it was now completely defunct – it had lost its point a while back and was now beyond repair. Fortunately the rain soon faded out and the rest of the morning was warm and dry. We set off again about mid-day, taking the lakeside path as far as Howtown, a small village whose name made me think of e. e. cummings ("anyone lived in a pretty how town with up so floating many bells down). Snatches of his poems accompanied me for much of the day, flickering with thoughts of an old friend and other times I had known.

We left the lakes and their swimmers, sailors, fishers and floaters behind; bidding a fond farewell, we set out across Askham Fell. Suddenly we were away from the great craggy slopes and the rocky paths, the mountains had ended now; instead, wide gentle undulations, acres and acres of heather and bracken and, underfoot, a soft peaty track to follow. It took us a couple of hours to cross the moor, it was overcast, with a good wind and was very comfy walking. Down in the

valley things began to warm up again; we stopped by the River Lowther to rest, consult the maps and cool off. Down from the path, at the water's edge, an untouched patch of river: thick with life, sprouting green, reedy, blue-bell flowered, six-legged, winged and walking; thick moss and undergrowth hanging from the rocks and the banks. We sat and drank Ribena, staring round; watching sunlight on the rock and the dashing of bugs, in crazy circles, on the skin of slow waters at the edge.

As this area was densely populated and farmed we decided to take the route south of Penrith up to our next destination near Melmerby. Many months before, when I had been visiting Noy Thomson's house in Surrey, her son Koy happened to be there and we got talking about the walk.

"I will probably be going up through your part of the country."

"But you won't be coming anywhere near where I live, will you? Which way are you going."

"Up through the Lake District, through Alston to Northumberland."

"Alston is where I am! You must come by if you can."

What with Koy's uncertain work schedules, the wiggliness and indefinite nature of the route, plus the fact that I might not even get that far, we left it as a loose agreement. By the time we left Ullswater, however, it had solidified to a date, a time and a place.

We left the river and, passing by Lowther Castle, spent the rest of the afternoon following country lanes. These took us through rich farmland, small villages and finally to a large wood of conifers where we planned to spend the night. We pitched our tent under a pair of oak trees, standing alone in a large clearing. It was a lovely peaceful spot – quiet, soft and still after a long day's walk; the rains which had threatened never came. The two of us sat quietly on the path by a fire and I mended the large hole which had appeared in my robe that afternoon as I sat down for a rest by the road. The daily rivers of sweat down my back had taken their toll and the poor cotton stitches across my rear-end had finally given up in despair. Thankfully the Buddha's wisdom extends even to such mundanities:

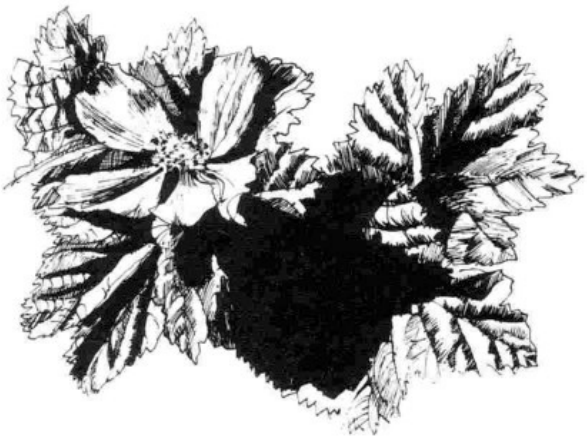
one of the few things a bhikkhu has to take on his travels is a needle and thread.

We still had a lot of walking to do before we reached Koy's so we aimed for an early start the next day. Unfortunately our day's exertions and the sawdust underfelt of our tent that night, combined to see us wake up late, at six fifteen. With scarcely time for an 'oh well', we were packed up and moving off again. It was a straightforward run into Melmerby. Keeping to the country lanes we passed through Culgaith, Skirwith and Ousby, and had it not been for a minor detour when we took a wrong turning, we would have arrived at Koy's place right on time. It was Sunday morning, the air was fresh and few cars were about. Koy was not in when we appeared, having driven out to look for us, but it was not long before he returned and we were all together.

His place had been loaned to him by another botanist who worked in Grange-over-Sands. It was a good sized croft which had recently been done up, a beautiful place indeed. One big, white, beamed room for the kitchen, sitting and dining; a long porch; two bedrooms, and a bathroom tacked on the side. During the meal, Karen, an Australian friend of Koy's who was staying in the district, came by and spent the afternoon with us. After we had all had a long talk I went off to have a bath and shave my head, I was very grubby and hairy from the last week or so on the road. I felt a few pounds lighter and considerably refreshed once all the scrubbing and scraping had been done.

In the mid-afternoon Koy took us all in the Land-Rover to visit the research station on the moors where he works. It was a twenty-mile drive and it took us way, way up into the high country again. We drove by old lead mines and demolished houses, once used by miners during their long stays up here, far away from their families. The field station was the only building left standing and it did not look as if it would last for long. It had been unoccupied for the last two years and soon, I suspected, the cloud-covered moor would have its way and reduce it to moss and rubble. We parked at the house and Koy took us out to visit some of the plants he is working on. A third-year Ph. D. student, he had become very

disheartened and negative about his work; having been given a project based on what looked like a false premise, little of the study had provided much satisfaction. He said it had all felt really bad until he realized that the moor did not care a tinker's toss about his thesis on the cloud-berry; whether it worked or not, the moor would simply carry on as it had done for millenia before. From that point on, everything had been all right.



It began to rain just as I was waxing philosophical on this point so, deciding that the moor cared as much for my wise words as it did for Koy's Ph. D., we headed back to the house, clambered into the van, and returned to Melmerby. Karen stayed for quite a while with us, asking much about our life, talking politics at length with Nick and Koy, until it was time for her to go. She was very happy to have met us and said she would try and pay Harnham a visit on her travels. After she left, Nick made a few telephone calls, Koy ate some supper and I did my washing. All this completed, we made some tea and, as it was the full moon day, settled in for an all-night sitting. It was about half past ten. As we sat, we heard the rain begin and then start to thunder on the roof; both Nick and I were thinking, "Glad we're not up on Skiddaw after all".

By midnight, however, it had cleared, and, since it was Āsālhā Pūjā, the day when we celebrate the anniversary of the Buddha's first teaching, I chanted the Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta – 'The Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth' – with the light of the full moon shining through the window behind us. I was a little croaky from lack of practice but happy to have tried.

After the chanting Koy retired, having to drive to London in the Land Rover the next day. Nick and I soldiered sleepily on, calling a close at four o'clock when dawn finally came. After we had rested a while, we spent a quiet morning; I sat on the sofa crossing my legs, stretching them out, doing some sewing and staring off into space. Koy asked if he could cook for us again, even though Nick had offered, so the two of us had a very easy time. We did not intend to go very far in the afternoon, so we waited until Koy was all packed up and ready to go before we left. We had been wondering where to stay, since we had a day in hand, and he suggested some caves by the River Eden. They sounded too good to be true, but here we are, in Lacy's Caves overlooking the river; dry and cool, with flat sandy floors and several doorways to sit in. It is now mid-afternoon. We have been well-sheltered from the rain all day and all night; sitting, eating, writing, watching the river swirling underneath us. Dry again after a little dousing in yesterday's showers, the sun is beginning to appear.

While we were at the caves a few people came by through the day; they chatted a bit, "Lovely place you've got here", looked around, looked delighted, and moved on. The caves were hand-carved in the eighteenth century as a folly for the big house across the river; hewn into their present shape out of a soft red sandstone outcrop. There were four interconnecting chambers – three of which had entrances to the outside – the fourth led off from one of the others and only had a small window out to the river. This room we called the chapel. The doorways and the window were all similarly arched in an ecclesiastical style, and the window of the chapel, where I slept, made a perfect setting for my small Buddha-rūpa.  This had been given to me by Sam the Steelman, just before the walk began at Chithurst; a pocket-size shrine which by now I had sat in a great variety of places.

That evening was spent quietly, sitting out front under the overhanging trees. Nick put a small fire together for making tea; the river flowed by and it was almost dark when we left the outside and went to our rooms. Sitting in the chapel I thought, "This place is bound to be haunted". I had memories of Ajahn Chah being attacked by demonic forces; there could be strange figures, malevolent, lurking, waiting to strike, in amongst these very shadows. Thoughts of ghostly demons and the way our masters have handled them came by: fear and radiant happiness, waltzing in perfect time, wove around me. At last all that was left was a warm peace and the gentle roaring of silence. I bowed six times and went to sleep.

The next morning we left quite early to arrive at the Holden's in good time. The path followed the river bank through muddy springs, woods and cow-pastures, taking us out eventually on the road leading to Kirkoswald. We stopped at the general store in the village

to pick up a few things and found, to our surprise, that the shopkeeper had been in Sri Lanka for many years and had recognized me at once as a bhikkhu. We chatted a while outside the shop and he wished us well for the journey.

It was only a mile or two from there that we saw two children running down the lane on the hill beside us and, when we reached the turning, we smiled over to them.

"I'm Darren Holden and this is my sister Jannelle, Alex Holden is my dad – we came to find you."

We followed the two of them up the hill, Nick making friends and chatting with them as we walked. The little hamlet of Ruckcroft where they lived was only on the hilltop, it was not long before we were in their front room, drinking orange squash and cooling off. We talked with Jenny and the children for a time – Alex arrived a little later, having returned from a trip to Carlisle where he had been to pick up a new leg. All morning we sat talking, hearing Alex and Jenny's story and telling ours.

They were people of great faith. Alex's principal teacher had been the accident, which had occurred ten years before when they were living in Australia. He had been working on a tunnelling operation and it was his job to set the charges in the rock face. After everyone had left the site he would walk down, work alone, and then walk back. On the night the accident took place he had had intense premonitions of danger and so he had decided that he would not go. It was one a.m. – suddenly he found himself getting up, shaving, putting on fresh clothes and heading off down towards the tunnel.

He walked down the rail tracks to the rock face – methodically, in their holes, he set the charges. As he worked, behind him he heard a rumble. A loose wagon was rolling down the incline, someone had forgotten to fix the brake. He spun around to look for some crevice in which to shelter. Unfortunately it had been one of his best jobs – the tunnel's end was completely smooth. The only thing to do was to try and use the space around the on-rushing train – there was little more than six inches on either side but maybe fifteen on top. He jumped and the world fell in.

Blackness and moisture. He stood up, fell over – stood up again fell over. He groped around, found the torch on his helmet, and shone it down – one leg where once there had been two. Patiently he lay there in the dark. He remembered an old miner's trick, picked up a stone and began to tap on a water-pipe. Trapped there and injured – inky blackness. Suddenly, in the midst of horror, there was peace – rock, hand, but no self. The universe's changing face, the original face – one heart. No separateness, no suffering, no limitation.

A few days later, as he lay in hospital, he saw his friend Jock lingering nervously outside the ward. It was he who had forgotten to put on the brake and he had been on a week-long bender since the crash. He was plainly terrified but Alex called to him, then told him absolutely straight.

"You're not going to believe this Jock, but I want to thank you – it's all right – I really can't thank you enough.

"I saw something down there that I had never seen before, never realized, never suspected.

"Jock, it's O.K. – I really don't mind."

Jock could not handle it though, whether thanked or criticised. He stayed on for a while but, after a week or two, he left the works and was gone.

The initial impact of Alex's experience was enormous but it faded and he had to endure many years of depression. He could not turn back though, and eventually, it flowered in him as great strength and insight.

"The need for Truth was a matter of life and death, it was that simple. I knew I could not rest until I understood."

His wife Jenny had been with him through all of this and now the two of them were living here in Ruckcroft with three children, a garden packed with fruit, flowers, vegetables, some chickens and a goat. Alex now passed most of his days building an extension to house his family and make a place for his great-aunt and great-uncle to live. He gave us a guided tour of the building site, as we walked around he complained about his leg.

"Trouble with these things", he said, giving his plastic ankle a

knock, "is that they keep breaking". He followed this with his favourite joke. "They make them for cripples, y'know."

That morning the seven of us ate together, spending the rest of the day talking . . . sitting in the sun, looking out over the vale of Eden, the distant lakeland hills . . . strange weather, sticky but windy . . . children playing in the garden . . . endless good talk which carried on . . . and on . . . into the evening . . . . . eventually friends and people of the local Buddhist group began to arrive. By nine o'clock all those expected had appeared – Alex and Jenny, Steve, Cathleen and Jeremy. We had only heard of this group when we received their invitation in Doncaster. Several of them had been associated with the Manchester and Sale Buddhist groups, and it had been Dave and Jean of Greenfield who let them know of our journey. They were a really fine group, small but meeting regularly for the last seven years. They asked good questions and seemed to understand all that was said. We sat a while together before I invited more questions, and it was quite late by the time it was just Nick, myself and the Holdens. The night was dark and starry, the dew cold, as I walked out to the tent. I sat a long time, energised by the people and the evening; concerned about some things and loving others. Like a voice deep inside me I heard the words:

"You will be amazed at what will happen. Everything is exactly as it should be." I pinned the tent flaps open, lay down and was soon asleep.

The main point of my concern had been Nick arranging for an old friend of his, Micheline, to walk and camp with us during the following week. It is not really proper for a bhikkhu to travel in a woman's company like this and, as he had been arranging it that evening, it was plain that I did not like the idea. Alex had spotted this and had mentioned it during our talk, asking if we ever conflicted. Ajahn Sumedho had given permission for Mudita to go with us through Lincolnshire and to camp nearby if it was necessary; however, he had only agreed to this after much pleading on her part and because he knew her desire to help was very great. To find Nick now arranging a similar thing, and to be told that Virginia, Nancy

and Helen had been invited to walk and camp with us at the week-end too – well, I was not pleased at all. But there was the voice:

"Wait and see, you will be amazed at how things turn out."

In the morning Nick rang Virginia. She said she could not walk with us at the weekend and that Nancy and Helen could not make it either. She was still happy to meet us with a meal on Saturday but the camping was off. It was true, I was amazed; now it only remains to be seen what will happen with Micheline next week.

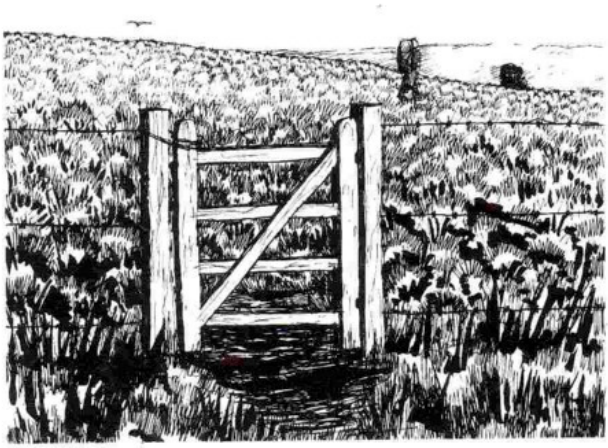
That morning I telephoned Ajahn Ānando about our plans to see him at the Allendale retreat house and he gave me the shocking news of the explosion at Chithurst. Apparently towards the end of the ordination of the three new nuns and four anagarikas, Sam Ford's car had blown up. Hannah Renshaw, Colin and Jane's two year old, had been inside and, although her father managed to pull her out, she had been very badly burned. There was a doctor at the monastery at the time and he had been able to help. It was stunning news, and all through the morning on our walk to Armathwaite, thoughts about Chithurst and speculations on what was happening went through my mind. One gets so used to the continual mounting of auspicious and wonderful events, flowering and growth, as though one's life is charmed, then suddenly King Yama carries someone off right in the midst of the big day. It had been Ajahn Sumedho's birthday, two of the new nuns had been waiting for several years for their ordination and many people had come to be there. You forget that death is always close at hand.

The two Holden boys, Stephen and Darren, walked to Armathwaite and waited on the bridge with us until Mo Robbley arrived. When she appeared the boys said goodbye and left us to find a picnic spot by the river. Her son Ravi and her new baby Aidan were with her; they had come down from their little place north of Brampton as it had been too far off our route to visit. I do not know if it was the news from Chithurst, Mo's quiet nature, or just my tiredness – but we hardly seemed to speak at all. We sat by the water, under the trees, grey sky, cool; I had to search for conversation, things to say and talk of . . . nothing wanted to appear. It was a very quiet day.

An hour or so after we finished eating, Mo and her boys left, needing to run some errands for the farm. Nick went into the village to shop and make a few telephone calls: arranging our visit to Tom and Cath McGoldrick's, and to leave a message at Harnham. When he got back he told me that Hannah had died early that morning. Sudden and unexpected death makes much of our lives seem so petty, a cold trump which outplays any card we hold. I contemplated death through the day, as we walked up out of the valley to the edge of the fells over Croglin; contemplating death, the suffering of separation and the only thing to do – recognize the fact and abide beyond it. As we sat on the hillside, wrapped up for a grey windy evening, I chanted 'Aniccā vata sankhārā' and 'Aciraṁ vatayaṁ kāyo', not quite sure if I got it right; little, and maybe not quite right, but good enough – truly warmed by the heart which listens.

A night's sleep and a grey morning is with us. Nick has been busy collecting water, brewing tea, waxing boots and preparing food just like the morning on the hills outside Hitchin, ten days into our journey: ten days from the end the same again.

After the meal we carried on up the valley and took a path to the top of the fell where there was a small gate in the fence marking the county boundary between Cumbria and Northumberland. Nick had to grapple with the wire latching it for a few minutes but eventually we won through, there was a definite feeling of entering on the final leg: only one more county to cross. Even though movement and destinations are just conventional realities, conditions changing, there is a certain happiness which arises as you near your goal. We were glad indeed to have arrived. Not usually so emotional, Nick knelt down, plucked a handful of heather and kissed it.



We did not have far to go before we were descending again, following a tributary of the South Tyne down into the main valley. It was a craggy, rock-strewn river bed we followed, and, finding a good spot with wood and shelter to camp in, we decided to stay up there

for the night. The sky had looked threatening all day so it seemed best to stop and get the tent up as soon as possible. As it turned out, a few hours later, the sky cleared and the sun shone brightly – barely a drop of rain had fallen. We had a long, quiet evening, sitting by a small fire and mending our gear. We set out quite early the next day as the wind had dropped and the midges were hungry. We followed the path which ran down the valley edge, meeting the main road just south of Slaggyford. The sky was still clear, so I found myself sitting by the river in the sun as Nick went into the village to make some calls.

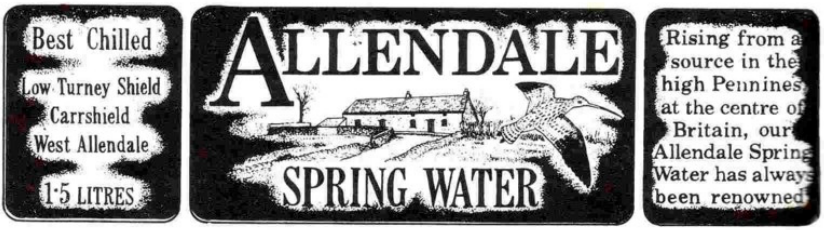
Although they came from opposite directions, Virginia and Nancy managed to arrive at exactly the same moment; Nancy on a push-bike with front basket and paniers loaded with food. It was not long before we were in the midst of a flood of news and greetings. Being one of the main supporters of Harnham, Virginia had lots to tell about all the comings and goings: the visit of Ajahn Sumedho, the trip to Lindisfarne and her long walk in the Himalayas. She and Nancy had both prepared a lot of food and were plainly delighted to have the chance to meet up with us. Things were quite busy at the monastery, with the impending bhikkhu ordinations at Chithurst, the retreat at Allendale and the arrival of David and Choco of Rotherham to stay for a couple of weeks. Virginia had had to do a lot of helping out with all of this and so could only walk a little way that day. It was quite well into the afternoon before we set off, the four of us and Nan, Virginia's dog. It was an easy walk, in the shade of old sycamores, up through the main valley a short way. After a while we took a track up through the fields of a side valley and followed the stream to the edge of the moors. After a long rest and a chat the women left us. We crossed over the fell, passing by the ominous lines of shooting boxes marked in large white numbers: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9. It felt very sad to think that, within a week or so, after the 'glorious twelfth', this wide and lonely place would be filled with armed men, terrified birds and ear-splitting explosive death.

We crossed the main road over the moor at its highest point and followed the edge of a small pine plantation until we reached the

path that would take us into the next valley. Unlike the newer paths over the moors this was a broad, stone-filled track and was very easy walking. It is interesting that as soon as you no longer have to carefully watch every step for ruts and boggy patches, holes and tussocks; as soon as the walking is straightforward, the mind will almost immediately conjure up other images to be concerned with – yesterdays and tomorrows . . . whys and wherefores . . . shoulds and shouldn'ts . . . Then, as soon as the going becomes difficult, concern immediately returns to the path.

The track took us down into the farmlands of the West Allen. From the hillside we could see the white buildings of Throssel Hole Priory and the small farm, a little to the right, where Tom and Cath McGoldrick and family lived. As we were not due to arrive until the next morning we decided to camp up in one of the small valleys off the main river. It was quite late by the time we arrived at a good spot, the midges were massing so we quickly gathered some fallen wood nearby and started a fire. High above there must have been a big wind, great clouds poured over the glowing hills before us and made a spectacular sunset. We sat by the fire until quite late, we put the tent up before the light disappeared and finally went to sleep when the moonless night arrived. The next morning we climbed the hill a little way to meet a farm track which would take us round to the fields opposite Tom and Cath's. It was very easy walking, the weather was dry and we did not have far to go. We left the path and crossed the river on a badly flood-damaged foot-bridge; much of the vegetation had been recently washed out and the stone walls had also taken quite a pasting. There had been a massive thunderstorm over the valley two weeks before and a flood had ripped everything out along the river bed. The handrails of the bridge were buckled right over and wrapped in strands of the dead grass which had been carried along by the water. We came up to the farm from the riverside; past the chicken coop, through a horde of ducks, geese and bantam chicks then into the warm and glorious jumble of the house. Tom and Cath were very pleased to see us, and their children, Michael and Helen, bounced excitedly around as we talked. Somehow there had

been a hitch along the line and Virginia had not been able to drop off the extra food from the day before as had been planned. So Nick and Cath slipped off for a while and busied themselves putting a meal together in the kitchen. We spent the day in their sitting room talking and drinking tea, looking around the room and at the photographs of the place as it had been when they moved in eight years ago. An old tumbledown farmhouse of the seventeenth century, they had repaired and rebuilt it with many, many hours of hard work. The end result was now a lovely hand-built home. However, it had cost so much in the way of materials and Tom, having refused to take money from the Social Security, was so poor that they had been on the brink of selling it in order to repay the bank. Understandably they were very keen to stay and were embarking on a project to sell water from their spring as a small business to help fund their survival at the farm.



When it was time to go, the whole troop of us went up the road to Throssel Hole Priory as it was only a few hundred yards away. Tom and Cath had been looking after a goose for the monks and so stopped for a chat at the monastery for a while. Nick and I were welcomed in and given tea as soon as we arrived. Reverend Chu Shin,

the guest-master, showed us around and found a place for us to keep our things. We met the Prior, Reverend Master Daishin, and a few of the others, talking for a while before the evening meeting began at seven twenty-five. They run a pretty tight ship here and there is a lot of form, ritual and etiquette to fit in with. It was a very good feeling, being with them all; sitting, listening to the chanting in the zendo and talking with the monks afterwards. We are sleeping in the zendo along with the novices and lay-people, so we had to be in, with lights out, by ten o'clock. I think it must have been the first 'bedtime' I have had since my early teens. I lay awake a long time, sleeping lightly for short stretches, and, not being allowed to rise before the bell at six, lay obediently in my place until it was time to move. Their morning session is much longer than the evening one, with several devotional chants, including one for Kanzeon (Avalokiteshvara), the Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, the succession of the Patriarchs and several others. I am enjoying the clarity of their forms and the crispness of their lifestyle here; it is a good exercise to step along with a different dance for a while.

That afternoon at Throssel Hole most of the Sangha came and had tea with us. Now seemingly used to each other's presence and ways, our talk was fluid and we were all much more at ease. Then, and after the evening pūjā, we talked long and happily – pieces of monastic form, how we do this, how we do that, our histories and present state; assorted scraps from our memories. The feeling of warmth and brotherhood was clear and strong by the time the evening ended; we carried on long after 'lights out' in the zendo. Nick and I crept in after we had said goodnight to the others and it was not long before we were asleep.

After the six o'clock leap into action (you have fifteen minutes to get up, wash, go to the toilet*, get properly robed and be sitting on your mat before the Prior comes into the zendo), and the glorious inspiration of the morning pūjā, Nick and I packed our things and said our final goodbyes. Somewhere along the line I had mentioned that my umbrella had died the death and, when we were having this last tea, Master Daishin presented me with his old one. He explained that the point had been bent during a difference of opinion with an escalator in the days when he was a commuter in Tunbridge Wells. I was quite touched by this gesture and gratefully accepted it; unfortunately we did not have much time to spare, so we said a brief farewell and disappeared.

Being in quite a high valley it was not far from the monastery up the hill to the top of the fell. We followed the ridge to the south, bog-tromping and kicking through the heather until it was time to drop down into the East Allen valley, just opposite the village of Spartylea. We took the main road the last part of the way and arrived at Kailash Bhawan right on time. This was a large old house which its owner, Ravinder Vij, lent out to various spiritual groups. At this time Ajahn Ānando was leading a ten-day retreat there and we had arrived on about the fourth day.

**Of which, in that era, there was only one; many more have been added now, in 2010.*

Pat Marshall and Simon Stillwell were working in the kitchen and greeted us at the door when we arrived; we sat quietly and rested over a cup of tea, waiting until the morning sitting was finished. As we were taking our packs upstairs we met Ajahn Ānando in the corridor, smiling joyously we said hello to each other. We went into his room and spent the next while exchanging news, telling tales of the walk and how things had been since we were last at Chithurst; also he passed on a bar of chocolate, a letter and some pens which Sister Nanda had left for me when she had visited Harnham with Ajahn Sumedho. After the meal things continued in much the same vein: Nick, myself, Ajahn Ānando and Anagarika Christopher carrying on happily together; the pleasure of life in being with the known and loved. We excused ourselves from the walking and sitting meditations in the early afternoon as we had things to sort out and repair. Once that was done though, we joined the others and sat from four until five. The retreat was now well under way and all the people seemed to be quite happy – it was good to sit with them and be in such a peaceful atmosphere. During the evening meeting Ajahn Ānando invited me to give a talk so I said a little bit, running into a dead end and resorting to the familiar Dhamma-talk bolt-hole of "any questions?" after about a quarter of an hour. As it was, it all went very well: Nick and I talked at length, until the questions ran out, right on cue, at half past nine. All the people seemed interested and happy to hear about our time on the road; it was a joy to be with them.

After a miso nightcap we were all up and about early the next day since, just as at Chithurst and Harnham, the morning chanting began at five o'clock. It was peculiar to be chanting with others again and, although the evening session had gone without a hitch, now my mind frequently went blank. We had to abandon the 'Ratanattaya', after a shaky beginning, and ended up going straight into 'Iminā puñña kammena' – oh well, no blame. The sitting was long and peaceful; Nick and I had to aim for an early start so we packed, drank some tea with Ajahn Ānando and Christopher, "See you on Sunday", then left.

We had arranged to meet Nick's parents that day. It was quite convenient for them since they were going to Hexham; it was a long drive from their house to where we were but, as Nick's father played in a jazz band in those parts each week, it was an ideal time to meet up. As we had quite a distance to go over the next day or so we had arranged to meet them about eight miles down the river. The first part was a long stomp along the main road as far as Allendale town. We stopped for a break; and then, taking a footpath down to the riverbank, followed a winding woody course until we emerged on an old railway line which took us to our destination: the main road just above the beginning of the Allen Banks. It was not a long wait before they appeared – Bert and Dot – smiling broadly from a battered Ford; and it seemed a finger-snap between our hellos and our sitting down, mats and baskets, in a meadow below the road; organising the food and chatting excitedly together. It was very good that we had had the chance to meet up. They had only recently moved into the area, Nick having renovated and extended their cottage while living in it over the last few years. It is always good to help your parents and include yourselves in each other's lives. To have them help and join in the walk with us was delightful for everyone; I think we all appreciated it.

The four of us followed the path through the dense and dark green woodland beside the river as far as Plankey Mill. Nick and his father took pictures of us as we walked over the small suspension bridge. There were dozens of other tourists about, many giving us that intrigued and startled look which has become so familiar to us. We sat on the far bank talking until it was time to part; "See you on Sunday", we said and then goodbye.

Clear, warm and windy the afternoon, we carried on up the valley until we reached the South Tyne. By now the corn (rich, dark and green in Sussex) was a thick, dusty yellow and being harvested – almost three months it has been. The summer flowers are starting to tire and the afternoon heat has lost its sting, long gone the primroses and spring rain of our departure. Up from the valley bottom, up into the fells, ridge after ridge, we slowly climbed until topping the final

At Plankey Mill with Nick's parents

slope we arrived at Hadrian's Wall. Down to our south the Allen Valleys, Cross Fell and the farmlands of Northumbria spread out. A warm wind blasted from the west, carrying away the threat of rain. Now quite tired, we trudged along the wall, heading down to a distant hut we had spotted by a lough.

Skirt the water, peek through the window – great, a perfect spot. Good roof . . . dry floor . . . a disused fishing-club shed – a shelter from the wind and a lakeside vihāra for the night – sādhu. Quite exhausted, we shared a chocolate bar and sat until the nods overtook us.

The next day we rose to a clear and windy dawn. Out on the lake, the surface whipped into ripples, the geese and gulls, noble swans, bobbed, dipping, long-loose-necked, out for their morning feed.

Still with several miles to go before reaching Pete the Potter's, we only had time for a short sitting before we were off again. It was a good tromp over rough farmland almost all the way. Down from the ridge of Hadrian's Wall, across to Ravensheugh Crags and then the path, steeply sloped, down the valley from High to Low Moralee – the home of Pete and Jenny Hazell and their children: Seth, Kate, Jo and Luke. We arrived in good time and have spent a fine day together. Pete was the maker of the alms-bowl which I was given by Ajahn Sumedho just before the walk. When he glazed it he had intended it to come out an even matt black; something went wrong, however, and it emerged a beautiful mottled chestnut – probably one of those accidents the Japanese would take centuries to perfect. I was happy to be able to show it to him, unscathed after all this way; people are always extra-mindful when they wash it.

It has been a quiet day. We have had good talks; spending time together, visiting the kiln and sitting in the silence of the house.

"My first ten-day meditation retreat was a very interesting experience, as only a few weeks prior to it, I had never even heard of Buddhism. I suppose I was expecting some kind of group holiday, with perhaps a bit of sitting practice now and then – I packed my sun-tan oil, my knitting, some books and thought what an ideal opportunity it would be to catch up on my letter writing.

I was in for a shock. The bell at 4:00 a. m. was the first of many. I took several days to adjust, but eventually, by about day five I began to experience some calm and inner peace; a glimpse of real tranquillity. I was just getting the hang of it, when Thursday arrived. That was the day the milkman came to collect his money and the telephone rang at the same time. This was the most my mind had dealt with in ages.

It was also the day that Tan Amaro and Nick Scott visited us.

In they bustled, full of energy and exciting news. Throughout the day there was much activity in Ajahn Ānando's room, with tea and 'allowables'. Hitherto-frowned-upon talking was going on, with frequent bursts of laughter . . . didn't these people know there was a retreat going on out here?

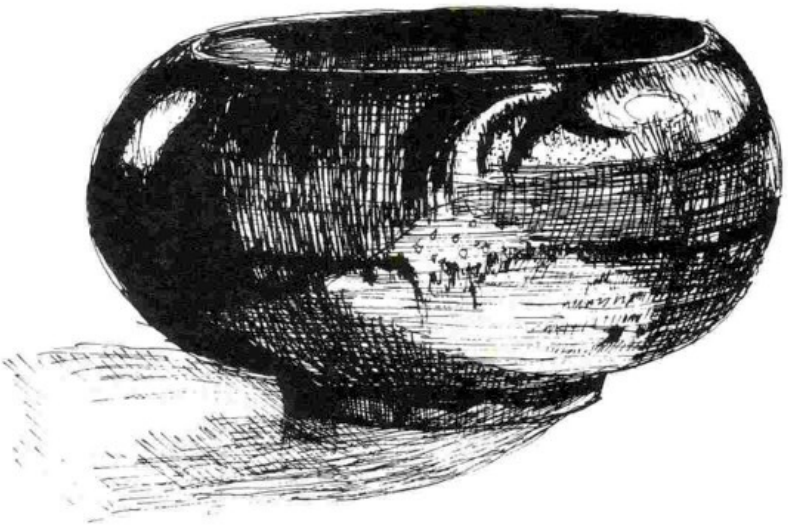
I noticed this indignation arising in my mind and then the feeling of pride I attached to my own considerable efforts. I'd like to be able to say that I realised them for the impermanent conditions they undoubtedly were, but I was a being of very little wisdom then and at that stage in my practice I'm sure I probably identified with these conditions and claimed them as my own.

That evening the talk about their adventures provided more fuel for my busy mind and for days afterwards, in my formal meditation practice, my mind would take me out on the road with this extraordinary pair of men.

I survived the ten days and returned to Harnham just before Tan Amaro and Nick Scott. Their arrival was a special time for us all. An ending – of a journey through the country for them and a journey through my mind for me; and a beginning – of a new life at Harnham for Tan Amaro, and a new way of thinking for me.

Everything changes and everything stays the same."

Katie



Nick spent much of the evening embroiled in a game with the children, joining us when it was all over and it was time for them to go to bed. We talked together until late, explaining our way of life, the reasons for Dhamma-practice, and telling the story of the walk. Pete and Jenny are a fine couple and a good complement for each other: she a tall, elfin, quiet soul; he earthy, solidly rough-hewn, no-nonsense and powerful. We finally retired at midnight, I sat for a while before sleeping in their T.V. room which I had been given for the night; it was calm and clear and the shape of the Big Dipper could half be seen, framed in the window above my rūpa.

I woke early the next day and sat until I heard the sounds of the others filtering through the house. Pete and a couple of the children soon appeared; we talked over tea as the young ones ate their cereals, played ball and climbed all over their father. We were aiming to leave quite early as Nick wanted to help Rachel (at our next stop) to prepare the meal; it turned out though that it was past eight when our bags were packed and our boots were heading out the door. We did not have far to go that morning and, once we had gone down through the wood to the stream, our path was clear and level all the way. We followed the brook below Low Moralee eastwards until we met the North Tyne just south of Wark; a footpath took us up to the bridge where we crossed the river and sat down for a rest. We decided it would be a good time for Nick to do the last of our shopping, so he nipped back into the village and picked up some matches and some stamps. I had written the final postcard of the journey to my parents and was keen to send it that day. After he had returned and we were setting off, a car pulled up beside us on the lane; the man sitting

behind the wheel made añjali and called out to us. It was George Brown, a friend of some of the Newcastle Group, on his way to Scotland on some wool business. A worker at the Tyneside Free Press, he was well known to many of the people we had recently met. He had heard from Ven. Sucitto that we were to be in the area and had had a dinner date with Pete and Jenny rearranged to allow them to have us for the day. It was nice to meet in such an unexpected way. He had to be getting on so we said goodbye, exchanging waves and smiles with his daughters through the back window as they drove away.

(We heard later through Nick and Zoë Owen that someone else passing over Wark bridge had recognized us. A young man called Guy had spotted us sitting there, and, his mentioning this to Zoë had helped her to guess that we were on our way. They had no telephone and the message from us, via the next-door neighbours, had been quite incomprehensible. When they talked with Guy however, they put two and two together and realized Nick and I would soon be with them.)

Bright sun with a cool breeze. We followed the lanes until we met an old railway line: now a track of grass and flowers; we tromped speedily along, rose-bay willow-herb, thistles, bell-flowers, and a thousand waist-high coloured heads, fences, stiles, steep banks, deep grass; feet flying through the dewy mass.

It hardly seemed a moment, since we joined the old track, before we were cutting off it, dropping down through a raspberry bush and onto Richard and Rachel's back lawn. A disused schoolhouse which they moved into a year ago, much work is still to be done. The place is in need of a lot of renovation and, at the time we visited, there were several others there to help them with the work. We sat and talked as they all said hello:- Richard and Rachel; her twin Sarah and elder sister Kate, visiting for a month from America; Sarah's boyfriend Christian; Kate's daughter Vanessa; and finally Kate the Shepherdess. People arrived and departed, popping in and out, and slowly all the ice was broken; through the meal and the after-dinner chat, everything became relaxed and easy. We sat and talked a long while before moving into action on the worksite and clearing up in the living

room. The afternoon passed swiftly and the three sisters went off to shop in Hexham, expecting to return by five. Nick and I decided to wait and say goodbye to them before we left, but by six o'clock they had not appeared so, "farewell", and we were off again. It was only an hour's walk to Nick and Zoë's but we did not want to arrive too late as we were only due to drop in for a brief visit. We crossed the fields behind the quarry that sat beside the schoolhouse, crossing and climbing to the top – a spot called Gunnerton Nick. Sitting up there in the bright air of the afternoon we could see clearly all around: eyes following the Tyne Valley, patches of woodland, farms, houses and the small villages which lay within our vision. Although it looked quite densely populated, Nick pointed out that beyond the hills there was only moorland; empty of everything but heather, moss, cranberries and grouse. We pressed on across the fields and, after taking a path down through some woods, over a bridge and up along the other side, we found ourselves in a small cluster of estate workers' cottages. We were now in the grounds of the abandoned stately home of Squire Riddle, known locally as 'The Castle'.

Seeing smoke from the chimney and arriving to an open door we expected to find Nick and Zoë home: the fire was banked and the dogs were in, but the people were nowhere to be seen. We asked the neighbours and were told that they had taken off half an hour before, saying they were going to be out for the evening. We decided to wait until eight thirty in case they had only gone for a walk. We sat in the dining room. Time passed – but they did not appear. Having the next day free anyway, we reckoned that the best idea would be to camp nearby, just off the estate, and pop round in the morning. We figured that their children being away with Granny, they were out with friends for the evening. We back-tracked a short way after we left the cottage and followed the edge of the wood along the stream, until we reached a bridge lower down. We crossed over and found a flat patch beside the water, screened from the upper part of the field by a small hillock. In front of us lay a last filament of the wood and up above, a dark blue August sky. It was a quiet spot to mark the ending of the day; we sat until twilight, free from midges in cool air, even so close to water.

Erecting the tent in the dimness – barefoot between the thistles – me clambering into my bag, protected from the night; soon peacefully asleep, yet waking moments later to my alarm and a sliver of moon in the early morning sky. Nick did not stir as I bustled out from the tent, and there was no sound from him as I sat nearby, listening in turn to the sound of the stream, flurries of thought and the quicksilver hush of the mind.

Looking groggy he emerged an hour or two later, he had had a bad night and had only fallen asleep at two a.m., he had not heard me get up at all and was feeling not too good. We decided to wait a while before we left the stream; after sitting for a time he felt much better so we upped sticks, said goodbye and returned to Nick and Zoë's. We met Nick Owen and the two dogs, Macnoe and Bumper, as we came up the lane to the cottage. Welcomed in and sat down over tea in the dining room, we were introduced and began to unravel the crossed wires of the previous day.

They had received a garbled message from the next-door neighbours whom Nick had rung a little while before. That, combined with their friend Guy spotting us on Wark Bridge, led them to suspect we were on our way. Zoë had even cooked a pan of rice for us which was still on the stove. They had never met a monk before and I was quite impressed by how at ease and unphased they were; the atmosphere was good and we seemed to fit in without the slightest trouble. The following day, Nick Owen's mother was due to bring the children back from Wales, so it seemed a good idea that we stay and help to tidy up the house – Zoë on hoovering, the two Nicks on cleaning, varnishing doors etc., and myself polishing the silver and the brass. Halfway through the morning Nick (my companion) started putting the meal together and before too long the four of us were out in the garden, enjoying a picnic in the sun. After we had eaten and cleared up, we moved to the shady patches on the north side of the house. The sun by now was roasting hot and the dogs lay panting, collapsed beside us beneath the trees.

Peppermint tea and long, after-dinner talk carried on as we shifted to keep in the cool. After a while we returned indoors for

another burst of housework but our enthusiasm waned after an hour or two. We returned to the garden and sat down beside the fishpond. This Nick had stocked from a nearby burn and was full of minnows, pond-skaters, water-boatmen, water-weed, yellow flag and especially starred two goldfish: Carrots and Normous (who was). Once tea was over, the four of us, with Macnoe, Bumper and a neighbour's dog Lady, set off up the lane for Colt Crag Reservoir; Nick and I left the others behind just before the A68. There was not far to go to our resting place for the night.

Half a mile from the road on the southern shore, we found a good flat space and an abandoned house beside the path. We downed our packs and sat on top of the small cliffs. We looked out over the water: waves driven in the evening wind, sitting under the pines, watching the sporadic splashing of those annoying fishes who have always vanished by the time you look for them. I closed my eyes and, after a while, a huge splash was heard; Nick hit the water, down beneath the cliffs – kerrspish-pash-sshwoosh. He came up bristling and refreshed. A fisherman rowed across from the other shore and the evening sun settled over the lake, it disappeared behind a cloudbank just above a spinney in the north-west. After a sitting and a sleep I awoke to see the sun rising; a furnace into scarlet gold, barely watchable, spraying colour across the water: fat patches of shimmering pink, outrageous orange and crimson burning clouds – dawn of the last day. I half-expected a heavenly choir to start up and complete the scene; but for the wind, though, there was only silence. Anyway the sky, its dramatic flurry over, soon calmed to a sedate yellow-grey and became cloud-filled and simple once again.

We had about six miles to go that morning and although our route was straightforward and easy, I felt grumpy and unsettled. I realized that it was probably the result of being without sugar for a while. With no 'allowables' on us we were making the last part of the walk without that extra charge. Having seen the tetchiness which comes with sugar's cold-turkey, I did my best not to act on any irritation I felt. Being with only one other of course Nick became the villain. "Hopeless, selfish, bum, bumbling – then he did this, then he did that", a familiar tune – but it takes a lot of care not to become entangled in it. I had realized before that, as long as you fail to see people as perfect, they will irritate you; however, it takes a lot of careful footwork to remain free when such a mood comes to visit. As it was the road rolled away under our feet. I sat by St Aidan's Church in Throckrington, griping at Nick, waiting for him to reappear after visiting the graveyard plants – "Come on Nick, this is RIDICULOUS" – a car came by, packed with five young men who looked as though they were on their way to shoot something. The driver hesitated as he saw me at the roadside: as they drove by I smiled weakly and was given a V-sign by the boy in the back seat nearest me. Right on cue, like a flag saying, "How ugly is aversion?" A mirror, and not a pretty sight. It did not take long for the negativity to evaporate after that.

Negativity and the situations you blame for your suffering always seem to find a way of dissolving if you are patient. The annoyance over the women supposed to be travelling with us had been a big one; that had finally resolved itself, not only by Virginia and Nancy coming just a short way with us, but also, as Nick's friend Micheline had rung us at Throssel Hole Priory and said that she too could not make it. Her mother was not able to return to Ireland without her help and so she had had to go with her instead. Not only was the molehill not a mountain but it had not lasted long as a molehill either.

The two of us burned along a tiny lane, over the cattle-grids, and into the neat and pretty village of Kirkwhelpington. John Rowland and his wife Olwen were to be our last stop on the walk. Their house, named 'Wit's End', was in the centre of the village; a long stone

bungalow with, as in the other houses we have visited hereabouts, a large, light living room and an air of children and well-being. We were welcomed in and given tea, chatting with Ollie and her new baby Carrie while John got the meal going in the kitchen. Monastery regulars, they had had monks to visit several times in the past and, like Pete and Jenny, Richard and Rachel and Nick and Zoë, they were all old friends of Nick.

We ate indoors, the four of us, making for the garden in the afternoon as by then the sun was bright and cheering. We talked long about the walk and John and Ollie's history: he, long and lean from California, and she a red-haired Geordie. We told them that they would have a prime position in history as the last house on the walk and should come up with some really profound statement I could quote them on. John hummed and hawed a minute or two. Eventually he plumped for: "How about some more tea before you go?"

Sitting in the sun, beside his patent shuggie-boat swing, watching the free-range guinea pigs pattering on the grass – sun, breeze, good people – one last cup of tea – "Happy trails" – and we were gone; out of the village, along the stream, through the woods and down to mix with the Sunday afternooners at Wallington Hall; across the fields (excusing ourselves to a large white bull, snoozing in the heat across our path), up the slope into Shaftoe Crags and, from the top, our first sight of Harnham; looking just the same as every other house around: out there, grey stone, green trees; all about the land lay spread – green fields, gold fields, distant chimneys, small clouds mixing with the smoke from burning stubble – but there it was, Harnham.

"Shall we?"

"Let's."

We took the path down the hill and detoured past an old cave, famed for having had Bonnie Prince Charlie spend the night in it during his flight from England. As we clambered over the rocks we saw a young woman seated in the cave mouth with a young man about to take her photograph. Nick said hello to them and we began to chat. We told them we were almost at the end of a long walk; they

were interested in our tale and we talked for a while together. The young woman's face had a slightly amazed look on it; she explained that five minutes before, she had, for no apparent reason, been thinking of a visit she once paid to Green Gulch Farm, a Zen Buddhist centre in America. Obviously struck deeply by this coincidence, they said they would like to visit the monastery some time.

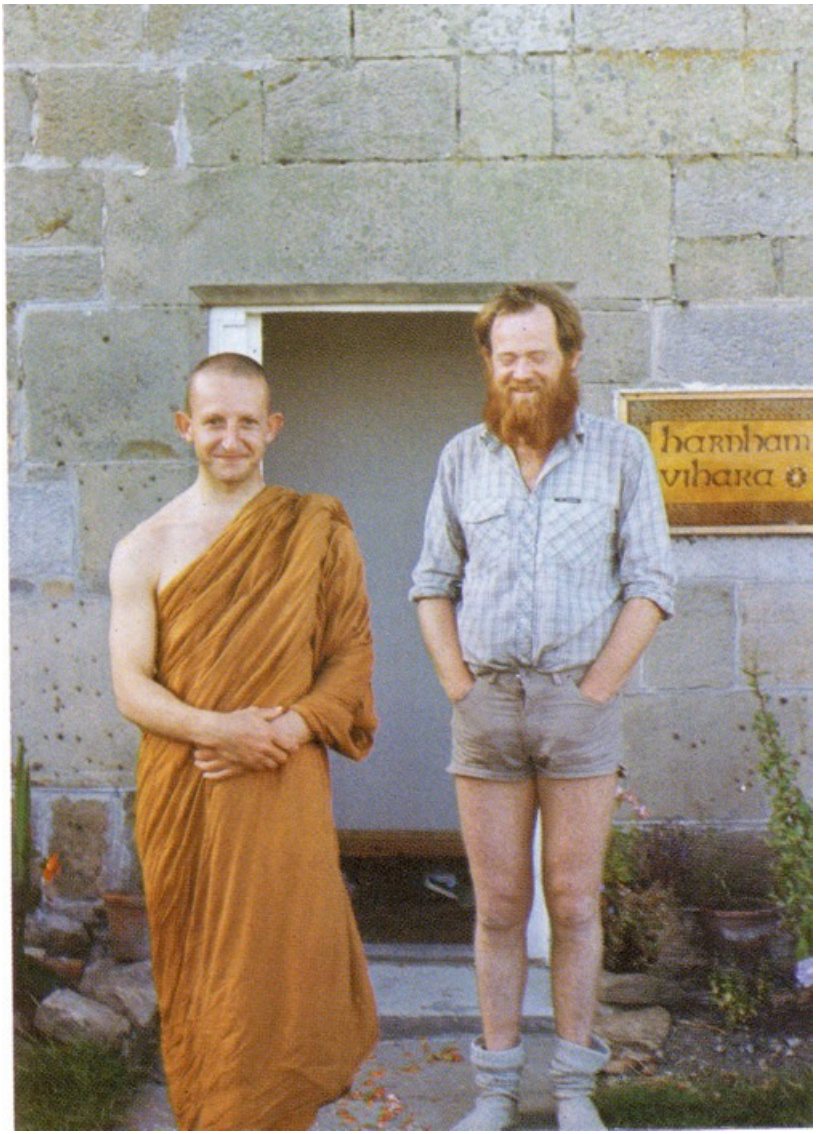
"Always welcome", we said, and, waving goodbye, set off on the very last leg.

Through bracken along the hillside, down the slope; one step at a time; up onto Farmer Wake's land: image of arrival. Nick dropped behind as we topped the hill; down we go to the gate. Hook and chain – through the gate – onto the drive, here we are: arrival. Climbing up the final hill – David's head above the grass, bobs up to our left; seeing us a moment later he leaps, hand-clapping around the corner. Our little crowd is there: Dave and Jenny from Doncaster, a crew from the retreat, Marianne and Kristian, Virginia, Nancy, Jeanne, the children; all the others across the grass; hooped garlands arch above us, petals strewn beneath our feet: arrival – image of arrival – arrival.

"Welcome, Venerable", a glittering smile shining from Ajahn Ānando. Stoop – unbuckle my sandals – my pack is taken; into the shrine room – radiant, white – before the Buddha-rūpa. Bell-ringer, ringing done, Tan Thānavaro holds my māla beads; fix my robe; bow – the Buddha, bow – the bhikkhus; set the rosary round the shrine; smiling faces –

"We made it"

Evaṁ


harnham
vihara

Humid swirling, distant hills,
The day that Hannah Renshaw died.
Locked in talk, intense and tight,
Disquiet, shadows quivering.
Half-discerned, a gentle sound
Carillons in the turbid air;
From nowhere dances wee Janelle,
"Merrily"
Skipping, joyously and unconcerned,
"merrily"
Through the joists, amid the bricks and building blocks.
"life is"
Glimpsed from the corner of an eye and ear,
"but"
Carefully, delicately, on scaffolding she treads.

"a dream".

Skip, clapping, skip, clap, skip, clap, skipping.

"Merrily, merrily, life is but a dream"

*

(end of the fourth book)

A final word

As with all the other aspects of the walk, the writing and publication of this diary could come about only because people wanted it to happen.

Originally I had intended to keep no record, allowing the journey to be a brief flash, soon over and forgotten. As word got around that I would be going, however, people began to ask:

"Will you be keeping a diary, bhante?"

"Are you going to record all this?"

"Oh you must keep a diary, venerable."

People in and around Chithurst had been very much inspired by the book 'Three Steps, One Bow', a journal written by Bhikshu Heng Ju and Bhikshu Heng Yo during their eleven-hundred-mile pilgrimage up the west coast of America; Heng Ju bowing to the ground every third step of the way.

"Their teacher told them to keep a diary to help share the merit of their walk."

Always ready to surrender the personal for the sake of common benefit, it became increasingly clear that a diary was not necessarily a selfish thing, it might even be helpful to a lot of people. Having had an inclination towards a literary career in my younger days, I was wary of writing just as an indulgence; however, when there is a true need, the soil fertile and the seed good, planting and cultivation can be selfless. People really wanted me to do this, so keep a diary I did. For the first few weeks, as the reader may have noticed, entries were sparse and lacking in detail. As time went by though I warmed to the task and there were eventually many hours consumed with writing.

Once the journey was over, it was clear that the diary was not going to be of much use if it never did more than occupy the four

battered exercise books in which I had written it. It needed to be typed out, and Dr. and Mrs. Gilmour, Ven. Subbato's parents, offered a box of paper for this to be done. I started to type and, one phase following naturally another, the different elements of the book began to appear. The walk was a shared concern, not just the project of an individual, and so too this book grew as the result of the hard work and generosity of many:

Sujāta helped out with the typing of the first draft of the manuscript and also contributed the elegant and flawless calligraphy.

The illustrations were all crafted by Nancy Sloane Stanley's fine hand; the maps were drawn, in their unique detail, by Nick Scott and later edited for this web-edition by Vernon and Jacqui Oldfield.

The cover is a photographic reproduction of the wooden bindings carved by David Major for a single presentation copy; this volume was hand-bound by Vernon Oldfield, Jacqui Oldfield sewed an ochre-coloured pouch to contain it, and these were subsequently offered to my parents.

Richard Park, Arthur Pewsey and Richard Hopkins carried out all the photocopying which was needed.

David Babski did the typesetting; the final collation and assembly of the book being carried out with the help of Eric Taylor, George Brown, Chris Devine and the staff of the Tyneside Free Press.

The photographs were taken by various of the people we were with, and donated to us once copies had been made.

For the editing of the manuscript I am indebted to Lynne and Barrie Drayton, Nick Scott (who reminded me of many things which I had overlooked, forgotten or dismissed), but most of all to Venerable Sucitto. Without his careful attention and advice the text would have remained rather like a raw potato – fresh from the earth but mud-caked and indigestible. With his guidance the potato was washed, scrubbed, cooked and became at last suitable for human consumption. Below I include a letter he wrote to me after being given a copy of the original manuscript. I had asked for any observations or suggestions he might have concerning it. I choose to print it here not just for the elegance of his prose but more as an example of how the Sangha, and the efforts of its members, come to perfection by mutual admonition and support.

Sunday
mid-March

Venerable —

I am writing this from Mike Constantine's house in a new estate on the outskirts of Northampton. I am here via Harlow and Bedford on one of those teaching tours. This is a morning break while the others are off cooking and I have some time. The newsletter is written, due to complete art and graphic additions on Wednesday, print when I get back from Shrewsbury; owing to a brief gap and some presence of mind I brought your Tudong diary with me and read part two, partly before the Harlow dāna, partly this morning. The first part I read, if my memory serves me well, when I had an abcess on the molar nerve in November, in Chithurst, on my back.

I am writing to comment. This is something that sets an eddy moving in the mind because one has to assume a relative standard, which is a moot point. Such reflections that I can afford are coming from the surface of my mind, a lacquer of habits verbal and emotional, a veneer of literary study, a varnish of conditioning. How valid that reflection is is another reflection, because the mind just swallows it all as suchness and perfect, how-could-it-be-otherwise?

However, this is shirking the request and copping out of the conditioned.

Something does bother the lacquer of my mind about this book. Given that it is a diary, and reeking of the pleasant carefree unshaven ardour of the tudong bhikkhu, it is still sloppy in embarrassing and unnecessary places, grammar, syntax, length of sentence, missed out explanations, cumbersome poetic drunkenness and orgies of saññā. It is admittedly something that comes into the shaky realms of taste; not that there is need to judge a person's verbal conditioning, however, much impresses me as verbal overspill, late-night punching the keys and not thinking. Perhaps, with justification, you don't want to mould it, just let

it spring out and look after itself. Just let it be perfect, shaggy, exalted, with the occasional burp. Very much a model of the Venerable himself, and loveable to boot.

However if you do want to bring it up, dress it, polish its shoes and make it serviceable, a more patient and parental attitude is needed. In my view, this would make it more valuable and acceptable for the well-being of the manyfolk. Compassionate – and that entails dull uninspiring work. Quite a bit that I could see if I wished to engage critical faculties. Something in me would like to help because it is a fine young book; something in me says, "I've got my own kids to look after" – something in me feels so inspired and happy with the whole saññā of the road, the story of foot, fell and star, that it just brushes aside the critical mind as petty and despoiling the magnificence of the walk.

If you're interested and have time, I could offer to pencil in (and out) some basic verbal errors, spellings, misuse of words; and suggest some omissions and additions.

Let us hope the time comes around when we could look at it together.

My best wishes,

Sucitto

* * * *

Fortunately it was possible for Ven. Sucitto and myself to spend quite some time working together on the manuscript. I am deeply grateful to him for his skill and diligence, and for his admirable tolerance towards my idiosyncracies. The essence of the potato remains unchanged, but with his help it has become enriched and certainly more palatable for the manyfolk.

It is part of our tradition that all our literature is for free distribution, thus the costs of printing had to be met by donations. These came from the general public and also from the legacy of Madeleine Goldsmith, my grandmother, who died in March of 1984. It was largely this inheritance which enabled the book to be published in its original sturdy and colourful form.

At the end of all these acknowledgements I cannot but mention Nick Scott once again; not only for his indomitable enthusiasm and kindnesses too numerous to mention, but for without him this would have been another story.

To him and to all those who have helped, I offer my anumodanā.

If there is anything in this book which has caused offence: doctrinal, grammatical or otherwise, accordingly I ask for forgiveness. If there is anything contained herein which is of benefit, then please do not consider me its source.

The ending of the book has now come so I bow, gratefully and in reverence, to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha; may all beings find final peace in this, the ultimate, eternal, healing Truth.

Evaṁ

Glossary

Accents – Vowels written with a line over them, e.g., ā ī ō ū are long: 'ā' as in 'f*a*ther', 'ī' as in 'mach*i*ne', 'ō' as in 'm*o*re', 'ū' as in 'r*u*de', 'ñ' is pronounced as the 'ny' in 'c*a*nyon', 'ṁ' like the 'ng' in 'ha*ng*'.
(Unless otherwise stated all the words listed below are from the Pali language.)

Ajahn – A Thai adaptation of the Pali word 'ācariya', meaning 'teacher'. It is also often used in Thailand as an epithet for a senior or teaching monastic, or an academic such as a professor, occasionally becoming their regular form of address, e.g., Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho.

Anagārika (m), **Anagārikā** (f) – Literally, 'homeless one'. A white-robed postulant monk or nun who lives according to the Eight Precepts:
1. Refraining from taking the life of any living thing.
2. Refraining from taking that which is not given.
3. Refraining from all forms of sexual activity.
4. Refraining from false or abusive speech.
5. Refraining from the use of drink and drugs for intoxication.
6. Refraining from taking food after midday.
7. Refraining from singing, dancing, listening to music, visiting shows, using garlands, scents, cosmetics or any form of adornment.
8. Refraining from the use of a luxurious sleeping place.

Aniccā vata sankhārā and **Aciraṁ vatayaṁ kāyo** are the first lines of two separate chants, recited when someone has died.

Aniccā vata sankhārā	All things truly they are transient
Uppāda vayadhammino	With the nature to arise and cease.
Uppajjitvā nirujjanti	Having arisen, then they pass away;
Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho	In their passing, true happiness and peace.
Aciraṁ vatayaṁ kāyo	Not long, alas, and it will lie,
Pathaviṁ adhisessati	This body here, upon the earth.
Chuddho apetaviññāno	Rejected, void of consciousness
Niratthaṁva kalingaraṁ	And useless as a rotten log.

Añjali – Reverential salutation. The traditional Eastern gesture of respect and greeting. It is made by raising the hand, palms together, to the chest and bowing the head slightly.

Anumodanā – Blessings; rejoicing in the good which has been done.

Avalokiteshvara – Literally, 'The One Who Contemplates the Sounds of the World'. A being devoted to the realization of Buddhahood who is of a greatly compassionate nature. In China Avalokiteshvara is known as Kuan Shih Yin or Kuan Yin, in Tibet as Chenrezig.

Bhante – 'Venerable sir'.

Bhikkhu (Sanskrit: **Bhikshu**) – A Buddhist monk; literally, one who lives on alms.

Bo or **Bodhi tree** – The tree under which the Buddha sat on the night of his enlightenment. Generically a *ficus religiosa*.

Brahmā Sahampati's plea – The time is shortly after the Buddha's enlightenment:
Now while the Blessed One was alone in retreat this thought arose in him: "This Law that I have attained to is profound and hard to see, hard to discover; it is the most peaceful and superior goal of all, not attainable by mere ratiocination, subtle, for the wise to experience. But this generation relies on attachment, relishes attachment, delights in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, that is to say, Specific Conditionality, Dependent Arising. And it is hard to see this truth, that is to say, the stilling of all formations, relinquishment of the chains of existence, exhaustion of craving, fading of lust, cessation, Nibbāna. And if I taught the Law others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me." Thereupon there came to him spontaneously these stanzas, never heard before:

"Enough of teaching of the Law
That even I found hard to reach;
For it will never be perceived
By those who live in lust and hate.
Men dyed in lust, and whom a cloud
Of darkness laps, will never see
What goes against the stream, is subtle,
Deep and hard to see, abstruse."

Considering thus, his mind favoured inaction and not teaching the Law.

Then it occurred to Brahmā Sahampati, who became aware in his mind of the thought in the Blessed One's mind, "The world will be lost, the world will be utterly lost; for the mind of the Perfect One, accomplished and fully enlightened, favours inaction and not teaching the Law."

Then as soon as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, Brahmā Sahampati vanished in the Brahma world and appeared before the Blessed One. He arranged his robe on one shoulder, and putting his right knee to the ground and raising his hands palms together towards the Blessed One, he said, "Lord, let the Blessed One teach the Law. Let the Sublime One teach the Law. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are wasting through not hearing the Law. Some of them will gain final knowledge of the Law."

When Brahmā Sahampati had said this he said further:

"In Magadha there has appeared till now
Impure law thought out by men still stained:
Open the Deathless Gateway: let them hear
The Law the Immaculate has found.

Ascend, O Sage, the tower of the Law;
And, just as one sees all the folk around
Who stands upon a solid pile of rock,
Survey, O Sorrowless All-seeing Sage,
This human breed engulfed in sorrowing
That Birth has at its mercy and Old Age.
Arise, O Hero, Victor, Knowledge-bringer,
Free From All Debt, and wander in the world.
Proclaim the Law; for some,
O Blessed One, will understand."

The Blessed One listened to Brahmā Sahampati's pleading. Out of compassion for beings he surveyed the world with the eye of an Enlightened One. Just as in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without coming up out of it, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water's surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water come right up out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it, so too he saw beings with little dust on their eyes and with much dust on their eyes, with keen faculties and dull faculties, with good qualities and bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear in the other world and blame as well. When he had seen, he replied:

"Wide open are the portals of the Deathless.
Let those who hear show faith. If I was minded
To tell not the Law sublime I know,
'Twas that I saw vexation in the telling."

Then Brahmā Sahampati thought: "I have made it possible for the Law to be taught by the Blessed One". And after he had paid homage to him, keeping him on his right, he vanished at once. (Mahavagga I, Bhikkhu Ñānamoli trans.)

Buddha pūjā – A symbolic offering, usually of food placed on the shrine-table during a ceremony.

Buddha-rūpa – A Buddha statue.

Dāna – Literally, 'generosity' or 'offering'. In common usage it mostly refers to the offering of alms-food, alms-food itself or a financial donation. Generosity is held in such high regard and the cultivation of it so fundamental to the practice of the Buddha's teaching, that it is found to permeate throughout the society of all Buddhist countries. For example, in virtually any part of Thailand, a monk can go out on his morning alms-round and he will receive enough food to last him for the day. It is recognized in the Buddhist world that to give is both a joy and an honour and, as the laity gives freely of its material support, so the Sangha provides spiritual support in return. This spiritual support is given both in demonstrating by example the benefits of a virtuous life, and also by the active exposition of the teaching. Since the blessings of wisdom and the awakened mind are realized only because of the freedom which such generosity provides, so, in return, once Truth is recognized and life is lived simply as a response to it, the only course open is to give freely of the understanding which one has. This mutual support is the fruition of faithful practice of the Buddha's teaching.

Dasasīlamāta – A brown-robed Buddhist nun who has taken on the lifestyle of mendicancy in the form of the Ten Precepts, i.e., the anagārikā precepts plus the additional precept of refraining from the use of money. They also use a more refined code of conduct to encourage sensitivity towards other beings and limitations on their personal needs. Since the time of that first ordination in 1983 the community of Ten Precept nuns associated with Chithurst Monastery, and later Amaravati, have been known by the title of 'Sīladharā' – 'those who cherish and uphold virtue'.

Devatā or **Deva** – A celestial being or deity, one who lives in heavenly realms.

Dhamma (Sanskrit: **Dharma**) – Law or truth: this is both in the sense of the laws of nature and as the teachings of the Buddha. In the wider sense both of these refer to the Ultimate Truth which, by its nature, defies the bounds of language. In the scriptures the Dhamma is often described as having the following qualities: it is to be realized here and now; it is timeless; it invites investigation; it is to be experienced by oneself; it is found within each wise person for themselves.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta – 'The Discourse on Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Truth'. Following Brahmā Sahampati's plea, this was the first discourse of the Buddha after his enlightenment; it was to his five disciples on the full-moon night of July (Āsālhā Pūjā) in the deer park near Benares. This event is celebrated each year by the recitation of the sutta on this night.

Dhammadhātu – Most often this word is used with 'dhamma' in the sense of 'mental object'. In the context of the narrative, however, it means element or body of Truth.

Dukkha – Suffering, separateness, anguish, discontent, in fact any sense of unsatisfactoriness at all; mental, physical or emotional, coarse or refined.

Dukkha-nirodha – The cessation of suffering.

Evaṁ – 'Thus'. 'Thus it is'. The traditional form of signifying completion.

Gompa – The Tibetan word for the central teaching and meditation hall of a monastery.

Karmapa – His Holiness The 16th Karmapa Lama, head of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, recently deceased.

Karmic, from the Sanskrit **'karma'** (Pali: **'kamma'**) – Literally this word means 'action'. It is used regularly in written and spoken English nowadays but is taken to mean more the result of an action than strictly 'action' itself.

Kathina – The ceremony of offering cloth and other requisites to the Sangha after the three-month 'Rains Retreat'. Often a time when many disciples of a single teacher gather.

King Yama – In both Buddhist and Hindu cosmology he is the 'Lord of the Dead', ruler of the Underworld.

Kōan (Japanese, from the Chinese 'kung an'; literally, 'public record'.) – A fundamental paradox. A problem or question for which no logical answer will suffice. 'Holding a kōan' is a meditation practice designed to make clear the limitations of the intellect; bursting the bubbles of conceptualisation and awakening the mind to the true nature of things.

Māla beads – Recitation-beads or rosary.

Mantra – A vocally or mentally repeated syllable, word, phrase or passage of significance. The repetition of a mantra is used to focus the attention and guard the mind from straying thoughts and sensory influences.

Māra – 'The Evil One', the 'tempter' of Buddhist cosmology. He is lord of illusion and opponent of transcendent wisdom.

Mettā – Most commonly translated as 'loving-kindness', but refers more properly to peaceful coexistence. It is a non-contention with all things, a universal kindness to both lovable and unlovable alike.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa – 'Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One'. This is the customary salutation to the Buddha at the beginning of all texts, devotional chants and formal talks in the Theravāda tradition.

Nazgûl (also called the **Black Riders** or **Ringwraiths**) – The menacing lieutenants of Sauron, the Dark Lord, in J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy, 'The Lord of the Rings'.

Pali – An ancient Indian vernacular, the scriptural language of the Theravāda (or Southern) Buddhist School.

Pārājika – Literally, 'defeat'. The first four precepts of the bhikkhu's discipline are called the pārājika training rules. The breaking of these precepts brings about the cessation of one's life as a bhikkhu (i. e. you have been defeated by greed, hatred and delusion). The four are:

1. Refraining from all forms of sexual intercourse.
2. Refraining from stealing.
3. Refraining from committing or encouraging murder or suicide.
4. Refraining from laying false claim to supernormal powers.

Pārami – And alternative Pali form of 'pāramitā', also used in Thai, meaning literally, 'perfections' or 'virtues'. In common usage it means more the accumulated store of, or ease of access to, such qualities. One who is gifted or meets with much good fortune is ajudged as one who has a lot of pārami.

In the Theravāda tradition the pāramitā are reckoned ten in number:

Generosity, morality, renunciation, intelligence or wisdom, energy, patient endurance, honesty, resolution, loving-kindness or non-contention, equanimity.

Pindabaht – The Thai form of 'pindapāta', meaning either the morning alms-round or alms-food itself.

Preta (Sanskrit; Pali: '**peta**') – A hungry ghost, that is to say, a being of the lower realms of existence whose craving is insatiable. In traditional cosmology pretas are characterised as creatures of incessant hunger with a mouth the size of a pinhole.

Pūjā – Literally, 'worship'. Often it is used to refer to devotional chanting.

Puñña – Blessings or benefit arising from living in accordance with the Truth.

Pure Land – In the Mahāyāna, or Northern Buddhist, tradition the Pure Land is the Western Paradise presided over by Amitabha Buddha; the Land of Ultimate Bliss. It is a realm of great richness and beauty, of saintly beings, where pain and sorrow are unknown. It corresponds to the higher Brahma Realms in Theravāda cosmology.

Rigpa – The centre and fellowship headed by Lama Sogyal Rimpoche. The name derives from a reform movement in Tibet, founded to help bring the different Buddhist schools together.

Sādhu – 'It is well'. A traditional expression of approval.

Sangha – The community of those who practise the Buddha's teaching, or, more specifically, those who have been ordained and taken on the lifestyle of mendicancy.

Sanghāti – A bhikkhu has only three robes:

The lower – Antaravāsaka, also known as the waist-cloth or, in Thai, sabong.

The upper – Uttarāsanga, worn covering the body from the neck to the shins. In Thai this is called the jeewon.

The outer – Sanghāti, of similar dimensions to the upper robe but is two layers thick for warmth in cold weather.

Other clothing, additional to these three, can be used according to climatic conditions.

Saññā – Memory, perception or ideation.

Sixth Patriarch – Hui Neng (or Wei Lang) was the sixth patriarch of the Ch'an Buddhist School in China. He lived in the T'ang Dynasty, some thirteen hundred years ago; his words are recorded in 'The Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra'.

Stūpa – A reliquary, usually round or conical but of any size from an inch or two to several hundred feet. When Geshe-la handed this one to me he said, "This is an object of the Buddha's mind."

Sumeru (also called **Meru** or **Sineru**) – The sacred mountain and axis of the world in Buddhist cosmology. It is enormously high, surrounded by water and seven concentric mountain ranges.

T'ai Chi (also called **T'ai Chi Chuan**) – A Chinese form of physical and mental training. The practice takes the form of a sequence of slow, graceful, well-balanced movements, executed with a calm and concentrated mind.

Thangka – A Tibetan decorated wall-hanging. Usually thangkas bear symbolic pictures of the Buddha or the great disciples; they often form the centre-piece of a shrine.

The Land of Nod – An area in Surrey, just south of Frensham Ponds.

Triple Gem (also known as the **Three Refuges**) – Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha: these refer not only to Gotama Buddha, his teaching and disciples, but also to the qualities within an individual which correspond to these, that is to say: wisdom and compassion; the true nature of existence; and virtuous and harmonious abiding. One who takes refuge in the Triple Gem lives in the safety of the unshakable heart.

Tusita Heaven – 'The Heaven of the Contented'. One of the realms of sensory bliss in Buddhist cosmology.

Vassa – Technically the Indian rainy season (July to November); however, the word is more commonly used to refer to the three-month 'Rains Retreat' which occurs at this time and is obligatory for the Theravāda Sangha.

Vihāra – A monastic residence, usually quite small.

Visākha day (also known as **Wesak**) – This is the full-moon day of May. It was on this day, in the appropriate years of the Buddha's life, that his birth, enlightenment and final passing away occurred.

Zendo – The central meditation hall of a Zen monastery.