

Jakartass Anthology of Favourite Walks



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I Walk To Find Myself

They tried to persuade me not to cross
the curious hills, finally, shrugging,
called me foolish, stubborn.
That's how it is, I said. I'm going
where my pig is headed.

These words, found on a greetings card, are the preface to the diary I started to keep when I set off on my worldly travels back in 1971. That was when I quit teaching in order to hitchhike through Europe, allowing happenstance to determine my destination.

One lift was to the **Malataverne Festival** held in a disused quarry far off the beaten track and billed as the French Woodstock. Getting away was simple: you queued up at a table and found someone who would offer you a lift. Mine was a Parisian family, the Du Pasquiers who were headed for their weekend holiday retreat in Le Verdier in the Cevennes, a region of the Massif Central mountains towards the south of France.

The area was described by the 19th-century French historian Jules Michelet as offering "*nothing but rock, razor-sharp shale. You feel the struggle of man, his stubborn and prodigious labour in the face of nature.*"



The family told me that their retreat was where Robert Louis Stevenson's donkey Modestine died. That's as maybe, because in his book *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), RLS describes his sadness at having to sell her because she was no longer fit for further travel.

To get away from this very remote hideaway, I decided to walk into St. Jean du Gard where R.L.S. ended his long walk and probably sold Modestine.

It was a beautiful day, a blue sky and I began to feel calm and contented as never before. The road was empty of traffic. I was alone and felt free to sing *The Happy Wanderer*—something I never do in company.

Some kilometres along the way, I rounded a bend and saw a man standing beside his *deux-chevaux*, the a-typical cheap French car of the time, and he was singing too. We sang to each other for a few minutes, smiling all the time, until I took my leave.

A short while later, rounding a bend I came across a row of three-storied houses which faced across the valley. An old lady with a mongrel dog came up to me and said she seen me a few miles back. As no vehicles had passed me that morning, I figured that she'd been somewhere up on the mountainside.

She asked if I was hungry, to which I replied that I wasn't, but had "much thirst". We entered the cool front room, she knocked on an inner door, and Monsieur le Maire came out and insisted that water tasted much better with the wine produced from his small vineyard. It did, and even mixed 50/50 was far stronger than any wine I'd previously tasted.

So, with many thanks for this unexpected hospitality, I set off once again with heightened spirits, followed by an arthritic dog. Along the way I fed my hunger with ripe cherries picked from the orchards alongside the road, and stopped to paint this amazing view.



View - Les Bocquelles 1.6.71.

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Yes, I remember that walk of forty years ago with almost total recall. I remember others too: the teenage rambles through the countryside of Kent, Surrey and Sussex, the counties south of London, and later the hikes across the Mountains of Mourne and Galway in Ireland (where I encountered the gun-runners of the IRA heading into Ulster). Later still, I explored the hills of the Yorkshire Dales and the Cumbrian Fells in northern England,

So how come I can't recall much of the flights which have since taken me round the world and that I only have a dim recollection of the many long-distance bus journeys my long frame has had to endure?

One hundred years ago, before globalisation and the accessibility of world travel, the eager traveller would have committed him/herself to a lengthy and often eye-opening journey which would have involved numerous boat voyages, horse-back rides, steam trains and coaches, depending on the destination. This meant that the journey was a very important part of the whole experience, and this importance was not taken lightly.

Until the advent of the internal combustion engine and air travel, horse-drawn conveyances and shank's pony determined routes, which generally

followed the contours of the land. In the UK and much of Europe, one can be fairly confident that others have trodden the same paths. Two thousand years ago, the Roman invaders paved ancient pathways; some of which are still in use today, although motorists are most unlikely to think of the significance.

It is in walking for the sake of it that we truly discover ourselves: leaving a little brain space for potentially dangerous footfalls, we cleanse our minds of the commonplace and put them in synch with our bodies and the history of the landscape. We become whole beings.

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Great Country Walks in the UK

Ennerdale Water



This is where Bill Clinton said that he first proposed to Hilary Rodham.

"We were on the shoreline of this wonderful little lake, Lake Ennerdale. I asked her to marry me."

Lake Ennerdale is more usually known as Ennerdale Water, and is the most westerly lake in the Lake District, something of a poor relation to Lakes Windermere, and Buttermere, and Coniston Water.

The photo brings back memories for me too. From mid 1976 to late 1979 I lived with Son No.1 and his mother in the neighbouring village of Frizington, West Cumbria. We could walk through a disused iron ore mine, a fruitful source of flowers and berries to make our home-brewed wine, and reach Ennerdale Bridge, a small village on the eastern edge of the 'lake'.

It was in the back garden of one of the two pubs, the Fox and Hounds, that I broke both my elbows ... but that's a tale to tell over a few Bintangs. And no, I hadn't even sipped a drop: it was while waiting for the first round to be brought out that my accident happened.



Where we waited for the first round

What I chiefly remember are the delightful walks that could be taken in all weathers around Ennerdale Water's horseshoe. The lake virtually dried out in the 1976 heatwave. Looking down we could see traces of buildings which had once stood where water usually lapped. What was life like back then before it became a reservoir for the villages which sprang up to house the incoming miners?

I've also walked round it at night, in the depths of a winter snow storm. It wasn't my choice, but somewhat akin to life as an expat here, those of us who'd moved into the area as social workers, community organisers and teachers were regarded as 'offcomers' by the 'indigenous' locals. Our social life was therefore somewhat limited to colleagues and others in our network.

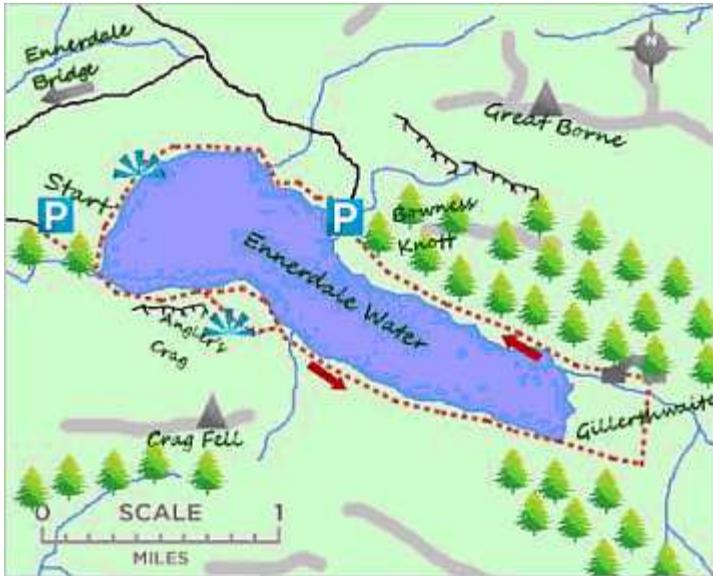
Late that evening, there was a rap on the front door and in walked Mike. He was beside himself because he'd found out that his wife, and mother of their two young children, had been having an affair with the deputy leader of the local umbrella organisation of community projects. "Why Brian?" was his constant cry, to which there was no rational explanation.

To get rid of his pent up rage, said Mike, he just had to walk the Ennerdale horseshoe and that he wanted me to tag along as his watchdog. I really had no choice in the matter; it was possibly the one wise decision he made that evening, although in that weather I'd have preferred to chug a few Federation ales with him in the local Working Mens' Club.

I could barely keep up with him and he'd sometimes disappear as a flurry of snow came between us. At such moments I could follow the plaintive wail of "Why Brian, why him?". I now have no recollection of the end of that hike: I was probably asleep on my feet.

In its time, Ennerdale Water has witnessed the cycle of human lives. Hilary didn't say "yes" to Bill that day, but Mike most definitely said "No!"

And Ennerdale Water is now being '**returned to nature**'



Great UK Country Walks ... with Pubs



I've not been on any of the twenty country walks listed by the Guardian with a pub somewhere en route, but there are some I remember fondly.

Lake District, north-west England

From mid-1976 to the end of 1979, I lived in West Cumbria, the flattish coastal plain to the west of the area known as the Lake District. These lakes nestle among England's highest mountains, which are miniscule compared

to the Himalayas, and offer great walking along the ridges.



View from the **Shepherds Arms, Ennerdale Bridge**



Fox & Hounds, Ennerdale Bridge

When I lived in West Cumbria, I travelled around on a CZ trails bike to get to various start and finish points on walking days.

Wasdale Head Inn



The Wasdale Head Inn was a welcome sight, both before and especially after climbing the Great Gable or Scafell Pike, and not just because it had draft Theakston's Old Peculiar.



Eastbourne, Sussex

My father's father (Grandad) lived just outside Eastbourne on the south coast of England. Great walking was to be had on the chalky South Downs and once, just once, we three generations of men walked up to the top of Beachy Head from the town below ...



... gazed at this classic view ...





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A Trek in the Himalayas in a restricted area' behind Leh which curves into the Sabu Valley, a distance of approx. 40kms, and climbing up to c.16,000ft.

The prime motivator was John, an American I originally met in Srinagar discoursing with Mohan and Prem on natural healing. John has been wandering through Ladakh, Zanskar, north India, Pakistan and Tibet for nearly three years. His visas are dodgy, but he merely wants to experience those people whose cultures are being threatened by the nationalism of the major powers. He's been arrested ten times – as a spy!

His appearance, as near the indigenous as westernised woollen worsted will allow, gives the lie to that. My gear for trekking – Indian army boots, Swiss army knife and USA army shell bearer trousers – could conceivably be construed as spy equipment by uneducated Indian soldiers.

Dave, an archetypical hippy in appearance, yet, at 32, is too young to have been part of that culture. But he wouldn't share in the water melon I took along for the first evening's meal on the basis that it would be good for our blood which would be carrying less oxygen at the height we were at.

He said that the melon could have been injected with contaminated water. His repast of baby cereal and artificially coloured and flavoured instant noodles didn't help though; he gradually weakened and was sick, while I grew in strength, even though I was burdened with the weight of the melon weight!

Valerie, from Blackpool, is based in Leh for four months as a rep for the Kashmir Himalayan Expeditions company, She started slowly but found her own pace and was steady throughout.

The first day, I discovered the limits of my stamina. John is acclimatised, able to ascend scree slopes and to traverse tilting, rocking boulders as if on a city sidewalk. A meal of **tsampa** (barley flour, milk powder, walnuts and dried apricots melded with water) gave the impetus needed to reach the evening camp in a pass shared with **yaks**.



These semi-domesticated cows with long shaggy coats graze together, climbing ever higher as the short summer moves the sparse vegetation up the mountain slopes. As we slowly surveyed our surroundings in the morning we discovered that yaks also have communal toilet areas. And we'd been sleeping in one!

The second day took us up to the snow line because John wanted to get up to a possible pass overlooking the **Nubra Valley**.



Nubra Valley

Our ridge walk took us to within 1,000 ft but, with nightfall approaching, we were forced to descend to the valley floor to find a dry camping place. Dave lagged behind listening to the BBC World Service on his short-wave radio! Personally, I was quite grateful to be away from the immediacy of 'home news' because without it everyday experiences are intensified.

Using my poncho supported by my trusty walking stick as a tent for my head, and with my sleeping bag enclosed in a very large plastic sack, I slept sheltered from the flurries of snow. I still woke up wet though from internal condensation. It was a fitful sleep as I occasionally jerked awake to gasp a lungful of air. I was either feeling claustrophobic in my improvised shelter or at that altitude I was suffering from the lack of my usual oxygen ration.

I woke up at six and saw three shepherds striding up the other side of the valley, so I woke John and Val. John leapt into his boots and breakfastless rushed after them to discover where the Digar Pass was. It was difficult to find out from his illicit stock of US army maps. It had been on a smugglers' trail, but with Chinese incursions into Ladakh this was, and still is, a restricted area, with an Indian army encampment some 10 kms on the other side of the pass. It is served, we noticed, with an electricity supply from Sabu on the Tikse to Leh road.

Val and I left John seeking his trails and set off at eight down the valley; Dave was still asleep in his tent. Marmots and lizards were our only companions until we reached the head of the cultivated section of the valley. We did see one lone soldier tracking upwards on the other side of the snow fed river, but he seemed perplexed at seeing us and apparently more nervous of us than we of him.

A herd of grazing goats were shepherded by a Ladhaki couple.

"Jullay, jullay, one pen."

A little while later, we met an old man with a walking stick identical to mine except his had mellowed with age. I refused the proffered exchange as mine would accumulate memories, assuming I got it back through UK customs.

The heat rose as we descended. We passed a primary school whose pupils seemed unused to the sight of western trekkers, unlike the older children we met later.

"Jullay, jullay, one pen, one rupee, one photo."

Ah, the shame of acquisitiveness we tourists and travellers have inflicted on such gentle, self-contained people.

At the lower elevation of the valley floor, the heat of the sun was greater. Val and I had consumed nearly all our water and were quite exhausted.. We thought there would be a small shop or tea stall, but there wasn't. We wandered through narrow bouldered alleys between semi-derelict houses and *chortens* (stupas) until we reached a more prosperous series of houses and met a western-dressed man.



We followed him to his house, a newly built palatial home indicative of the prosperity of the valley, which he shared with two brothers, one a monk. We were offered shade and, more importantly, milk tea and biscuits.

This sustenance was just sufficient to get us along the desert road to the junction with the Tikse - Leh road. A lift in a passing truck and we were back in Leh in time for a jug of tea, a hot water wash and a hearty meal at the Potala.

June 1985

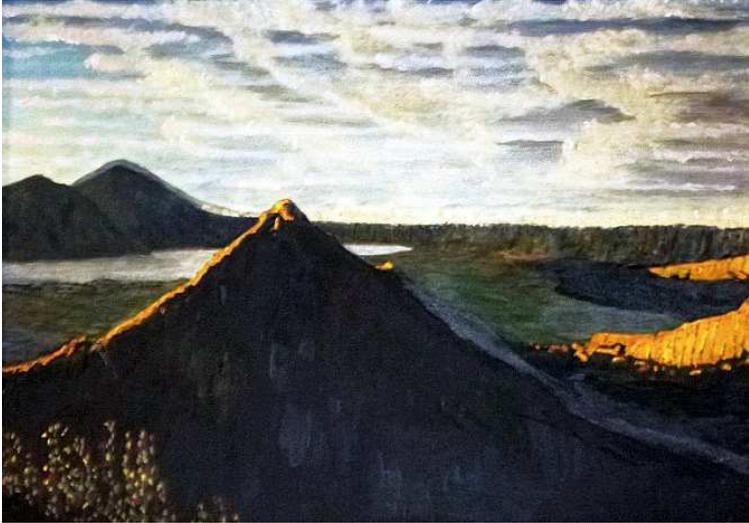
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Indonesia

We Jakartans don't have easy access to quiet rural byways. When strolling through the weekend retreats of the tea plantations of Puncak or along the southern coast around Pelabuhan Ratu, you may well meet your neighbours, and you won't learn much about yourself or the cultures which have shaped the land. For that you have to go further afield.

Some folk, with more puff than I have left, aim higher and scramble up volcanoes. Dan Quinn, co-creator of Indonesia's **Gunung Bagging website** and recently of this parish, says: "*Being on a mountain top can be a transcendental experience; what better way to temporarily forget the time, day, year, epoch in which you live? The trivialities which comprise much of everyday life can be viewed with some perspective and you almost always return home afterwards feeling illuminated in some small way.*"

Or, as **Aldous Huxley** said more pithily, "*My father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing.*"



Gunung Batur 1988

Although I have climbed volcanoes and undertaken treks through jungles, I now prefer to wander in comparative comfort.. which these places offer.

Central Java

The vast Dieng Plateau, the caldera of an ancient collapsed volcano can provide days spent hiking through the spectacular landscapes and exploring the mineral lakes, although be careful not to inhale the noxious fumes occasionally emitted. The plateau is also dotted with the ruins of seventh century Hindu temples. **It is said** it that former dictator Suharto came here to pray for enlightenment.



Central Sulawesi

There are many splendid walks to be found in **Tana Toraja**, South Sulawesi. The landscape is a mixture of mountains, jungle and farmlands.



West Sumatra

Bukittinggi is a comfortable base for a walking holiday. Walk the 15 kms of Ngarai Sianok below the town, with fruit bats hanging from the tree tops on the ridge.



Catch public transport to Harau Valley; if you climb to the top there are deep bat caves to explore and you may even spot tiger droppings as I did a few years back.



'Entrance' to Harau Valley

For a laid-back couple of nights, backtrack to **Lake Maninjau** which is reached down a steep road with 47 switchbacks. There is little traffic along the lakeside road, so it's ideal for a gentle stroll or bike ride.

