

THE ADVENTURES OF DOUG HAMILTON-COX ON HIS LITTLE "STROLL" (A MERE 127 MILES BY GOOGLE) - BRIDFORD TO WOOTTON BASSETT IN AID OF HELP FOR HEROES.

As most of you will know my walk from Dartmoor to Wootton Bassett was successfully completed on September 8th 2009.

My sincere thanks to everyone who helped me reach the fantastic sum of £12,500, to the Branch for donating the proceeds of the Auction, an amazing £700 and to the generous successful bidders. Thanks also to Mareth Troop contingent who supported me so generously as well as other individual contributions from Dave Bishop, Simon Crowley and Tony Hayward (whom I caught twice, once being a chance meeting in Bristol City centre when he thought he was having a quiet day out with his family!)

As anyone who knew me in the R.E's can testify, (especially officers), I was not a good soldier. Hear ! Hear!! Quiet at the back!! The fact is, I couldn't wait for demob. But I am sure many will agree with me that after a few years getting the army out of our systems, we came to realise what a good grounding in life it gave us. I credit this background with giving me the determination to achieve what I set out to do. I'd now like to give you a brief account of my stroll.

I set off from my home in Bridford with my backup team in close attendance (Sue in our Citroen C4) who never let me out of her sight - but only because she can't read a map. We were given a rousing send off by half the village which was very heart warming. Day 1 and 2 took me through Exeter and Cullompton with Bridford villagers arriving to give moral support and help with collections. Then on through Uffculme to the Devon-Somerset border; all pretty uneventful.

On reaching Wellington on Day 3 I was met by the Mayor, daughter Debs and family, Brian ? British Legion Standard Bearer, a squad car with two of our finest and a troop of army cadets to escort me through the town and help with the collections. Despite being a very small town with only one road junction which had traffic lights and Pelican crossings, the young police woman pulled her car across the road with lights flashing, put the light on red and gave us free passage. She remarked to my daughter, " I've always wanted to do that and anyone who says power isn't a turn on is lying!". (Is that right Dave?)

On to Taunton, where we were met and assisted by Debs and family, another family from Bridford and Gordon, a Gulf War Veteran, who walked alongside me and kindly gave Sue and I accommodation for the night, for which we were very grateful.

Bridgewater proved interesting after a fashion when, much to the disgust of their customers, my request to collect in a Wetherspoons' pub was refused. But as I left the pub many of their patrons contributed. Gordon, my son and my son-in-law accompanied me on the walk from Taunton to Bridgewater and we were met by my other daughter, Jo and grandchildren.

In Burnham-on-Sea we were met by police and Coast guards, once again refused permission to collect in Wetherspoons and this time, I was physically removed from the pub when I didn't leave quickly enough due to many customers stopping me to donate and express their disgust with the management. On to Weston-Super-Mare where I was met and accompanied by my very bouncy niece, Fiona, Debs' in-laws, the Mayor and helpers and police officers complete with squad car. On arrival I answered the call of nature, entering a Public Toilet carrying my placard and collecting bucket, "You won't collect much in there," remarked the younger P.C. "He will if George Michael's in

there,” retorted his sergeant!! We continued along the sea front and got invited into Somerset House (a brand new British Legion Hotel/Convalescent Home) for tea and biscuits. We also picked up a Burma Star holder named Dick Whittington, who was so taken with Fiona he decided to accompany us and assist in the collections. As a 90yrs+ veteran I think Fiona proved to be a bit too bouncy for him, so we called up a squad car and returned a very tired but happy Dick to his hotel. I don’t know if it was the presence of the Mayor but the manager of Wetherspoons welcomed us in on this occasion and we raised quite a bit. And so on to Nailsea in torrential rain. I was escorted in by two P.C’s who took it in turns to walk with me, I’m not sure if they were used to walking. A good night out with my brother and his family in Nailsea followed, and the next night I played snooker with one of my brothers and old friends at Long Ashton British Legion.

Bristol, Ah Bristol! We were met by Lt. Danielle Threader and her delightful troop of R.E. cadets to walk with me from Ashton Gate to the city centre. What a happy bunch of kids. After spending the day helping me collect over £1000, they had to leave because they were desperate for a fag and can’t smoke in uniform. I was also met and assisted by my daughter, grandchildren and my niece. Bristol was also the venue for a pleasant surprise encounter with Tony Hayward and family, what a small world. A couple of incidents in Bristol reinforced my already strong views about the decency of the majority of young people in this country. Firstly, while walking alone through a series of underpasses near Bristol City Football ground, I found myself confronted by a trio of teenage boys. On reading my placard the youngest one wanted to know, “Wots that all about then?” I explained it all, where I was walking, what I was collecting for etc. He seemed very impressed with the distance I was walking and the charity, “for the soldiers innit?” He promptly thrust his hand in his pocket , came out with a handful of coins and put them in my bucket. His young mate followed suit. Their companion, a rather surly looking lad aged about 17 pushing a motor bike, thrust said bike towards the younger boy announcing “Ere, old this” and proceeded to emulate his mates by dipping in his pocket for several pounds and with a cheery “Well done mate” tossed them in my bucket.

The second incident happened in the town centre. I had just passed a Big Issue seller barely glancing in his direction when I got the shout ““Ang on mate”. I walked over and was very moved when he took out several pound coins from his bag to donate to “a very worthy cause”. I hadn’t gone more than a few yards when feeling a bit choked I thought, “ I’m not having this, he needs this money himself”, so I borrowed £5 from my niece and went back and gave it to him, expressing my gratitude for his generosity. “Oh, bloody hell you’re making me feel guilty now,” he said, again dipping into his bag for a couple of quid. “Now bugger off or we’ll be here all day exchanging money.” A Good Day.

The next day was a long hard lonely slog to Chippenham, only broken up by the people who stopped, and in some cases turned round and came back, to donate - just some of the very many people who did this throughout the journey. I was met and accompanied by my ex- matelot brother as I walked through Chippenham and Calne, where the collecting was assisted by Wootton Bassett Rotary Club.

On the last day, together with my brother Brian who was still with me, I was invited into R.A.F. Lynham to meet and greet and raise more money. I was then joined on the walk to Wootton Bassett by two R.A.F. lads, and a little later two R.A.F. lasses, and my son with two other Bridford villagers and then a squad car to escort us through a narrow stretch of road. We arrived at Wootton Bassett to a great reception from many residents, the Town Cryer and the Rotary club president, another brother and several newspaper reporters.

In the evening we were wined and dined by a local Rotarian and business partners Brian and Dolly Pickering who very kindly gave us accommodation for the night at their lovely home and capped off

their extraordinary generosity by presenting us with a very large cheque. Their benevolence was all the more amazing when you take into account we had just met them for the first time. This heartwarming adventure was rounded off the next day when we were entertained for lunch by Wootton Bassett Rotary Club at the local golf club owned by Eddie Shah (that's where he disappeared to). We then went through the usual ritual of accepting even more cheques, bringing the total monies raised in Wootton Bassett alone to a staggering £1500.

Feeling very humble we began to wend our weary but happy way back to Devon and being the bone idle sapper I always, I hitched a lift with Sue. At the risk of becoming boring, I have now decided to walk to Selly Oak Hospital (Birmingham) next May, to coincide with our annual 11 Squadron reunion as it will save the bus fares.

Regards and thanks to all.