

THE NEXT INSTALLMENT OF STAN AND PAM'S TRAVELS ON THE SOUTH WEST WAY

Day 8. From Ladram Bay it was about 2½ miles to Sidmouth. Strenuous climb - 500ft. Wonderful views. Had lunch in a hayfield which was usually biscuits and cheese. We carried a small camping stove. Our luxury was skimmed milk carried in a vacuum flask. Otherwise whole milk produced butter and whey joggling about in the haversack. Dropping down to Sidmouth it started to rain. We decided to call on John & Margaret Messervy who lived for a number of years at Noddon. We spent the rest of the day with them and were invited to stay the night. (I did offer to put the tent up in the garden but I think John was worried about his lawn.)

John and Astra, their dog, walked a short way with us the next morning. From about here, landslips occur. Whole chunks of land have slipped, some into the sea, forming undercliffs mostly inaccessible, becoming undisturbed nature reserves. Through Branscombe, a very attractive village, on to Beer passing through Hooken landslip and on to Axmouth where we camped for the night by the river. We were greeted with another cup of tea by the couple in the trailer tent who had moved. They said they were pleased and surprised we had survived, so far.

From Axmouth we walked through the famous Dowlands landslip to Lyme Regis. Fortunately a fine day. The path is very narrow and twists & turns and climbs through the nearest thing to a virgin forest, with no escape routes, for 5 miles. About 100 species of birds have been identified including nightingales.

It became quite dark in places. (Pam was already finding the whole experience quite scary. We heard what sounded like something heavy crashing through the undergrowth. I didn't help by saying it may be a pack of hounds. It was in fact four marines in full kit.) It took about 2½ hours to get through to Lyme Regis, then along the beach to Charmouth. Lots of fossil hunters on the beach as there had been a landslide.

The next day we climbed Golden Cap - 612 ft. The highest point along the south coast. The views were amazing. Start Point to Portland Bill. (We met a man who told us he climbed up regularly, was 72 and told Pam she had good legs for walking. She was not too pleased!) So on to West Bay and the start of Chesil Beach. Walking alongside of a golf course we found four golf balls. Stan threw them on a green, confusing for the golfers. (Sorry golfers, I will never live that down. I was only trying to help.)

The going was hard behind Chesil Beach and the shingle had covered the path. There was nowhere to camp. We walked for 12 hours and in desperation walked inland and found a lovely spot overlooking Abbotsbury Swannery. Overrun with rabbits. Two foxes almost joined us eating our dehydrated meal. We were awakened at 4am by a cock pheasant and from the tent we could see the swans through the mist.

From here we were diverted away from the beach as Terns were nesting. Round the Fleet, (shallow lakes similar to Slapton.) on to Weymouth. We sat on the beach surrounded by rubbish, Radio 1 and a bingo hall. Quite a culture shock. A thunderstorm found us taking cover in a promenade shelter (where we "brewed up" much to everyone's amusement and entertainment.) Camping near the lost village of Ringstead. We walked on to Lulworth Cove. We relaxed here, whilst we arranged transport round the tank ranges, watching a yacht slowly beating its way out of the Cove. (The range is a nature reserve. The wildlife seems to just ignore the tanks.)

We found the path again near the "dead village of Tyneham" (taken over by the army in 1943)
The next day we would be entering oil country with its nodding donkeys and wet oily mud.