

The 7th annual IRFF - UK Pilgrimage!

United Kingdom, 29. April – 1. May 2017



By Ashley Crosthwaite

Our walk this year took place on 29th, 30th April and 1st May. This year 2017 we decided to raise £4000 and to give half the money raised to Destiny Junior School towards much needed new classrooms and a library. (Destiny school was built by IRFF volunteers during 2009-10 and currently has about 120 pupils and 10 staff; it is located in the village community of Kibiri, Uganda.) The other half of whatever we are able to raise will support a small team of WAIT volunteers who are travelling in July to work with young people along with other NGO's in the Philippines in their HIV/AIDS prevention capacity and highlighting and exploring ways of preventing sex trafficking.



Thanks to our perennial transport co-ordinator Simon Rosselli the five 1st day pilgrims arrived in the early morning at St. Swithun's cathedral, Winchester to start our walk with a prayer of dedication for the children in Africa and the Philippines. The 1st part of the journey leads along the ancient



Pilgrims' way through the meandering wetlands surrounding the river Itchen, a nature reserve. Along the way we saw deer and many kinds of animals, fish and birds and stopped at several churches to reflect on our task. We were joined by a seasoned pilgrim, Steven Gough, Russel's brother, for part of the walk and had our lunch together in the open air. Later in the day we met a kindly retired general in Bishops Sutton who invited us round for tea in his beautiful garden; we were so grateful for the unexpected hospitality as we were all quite tired as we neared the end of the day! Thank you to the Redheads.



We decided to keep walking in the evening through the hill country and were rewarded by the first sights of skylarks and their songs. We stayed in a bunk room at the Mulberry, an Inn on the Pilgrims' Way in Farnham.

Day 2 began with an interfaith meeting outside Farnham railway station from where we set off 40 strong on the 2nd leg of our journey. Many thanks to the families and friends who joined us, and thanks also to all those who raised sponsorship money! The Sunday walk was as always memorable for the camaraderie and the beauty of the country; towards the end of the walk we had our traditional silent walk, a time of reflection and communion with nature as we walked through the hills and the bluebell woods. Everyone enjoyed the lunch of chips and lemonade in the garden of the 'Good Intent', an inn that has stood for centuries in service to travellers along the Pilgrims' way. Reluctantly it was time to part with many who were heading home while 15 of us needed to set off into the forest in time to set up

camp. Thanks to Marshall and Susan for bringing down the tents and supplies for the wild camping experience; it meant we only had to carry the heavy equipment a few miles! For the 3rd year in succession we found our campsite untouched and quickly everyone got to work setting up the tents, collecting firewood, building the fire etc. all of which accompanied by gentle rain. It was a great bonding experience, an adventure for us all, greatly enhanced by Achan's mind bending riddles! It started to rain harder late in the night but by then everyone was ready for sleep.

Early in the morning it was almost miraculous that after some heavy rain in the night the sun rose into a clear blue sky and the dawn chorus like a symphony woke the sleepers, also the embers were coaxed back to life for a cup of tea before setting off. We stood and prayed in a circle round the fire, reflecting on the meaning of our

pilgrimage and learnt about creating a dome of invisibility (!) and how to leave a campsite without leaving a trace. In the end, our walk we decided was really about love for all of nature, as well as all people.

We set off towards the river Wey in glorious sunshine and had our traditional farewells at the footbridge beneath St. Catherine's chapel. 11 pilgrims walked the 3rd day through the hill country towards Dorking, communing with horses, rabbits and mice, stopping at St. Martha's Church on the hill, also having chips again at Newlands corner as rain and a cold wind blew, all part of the experience! Many thanks to Tony and Hildegard and Adza for support with making sure all the volunteers reached home safely.

We especially want to thank everyone who either walked part or all of the way and all who were able to give a donation, thank you again.

In conclusion, I want to mention 2 things: first the fact that several of the children at Destiny school were fasting as well as all the school community who prayed, both Christians and Muslims, for the success of the pilgrimage; if only all the world could follow the example of these humblest of children and their teachers.

Secondly, we would like to appeal to one and all that you can still [donate](#) to the causes mentioned above and remind you that IRFF UK is proud of its record that 100% of all donations go directly for the most needy in the world who we serve as we are a small NGO run by unpaid volunteers and over the last 10 years have been able to cover all expenses ourselves and through the help of Gift-Aid, a UK scheme whereby donations by taxpayers are complimented by government.

