

MID NORTHUMBERLAND RURAL CHURCHES

Theme: *Time to do stuff I don't normally have chance to do*

Day 1



My sabbatical began on Monday 15th May with a road trip. I travelled from Northumberland

across the country to Pembrokeshire. It was a beautiful day and I saw some iconic things on the way. There are two things which stood out to me. Firstly, as I travelled along the M62 to Manchester, I passed under the footbridge which carries the Pennine Way.



As I travelled on and down into Wales I drove through the foothills of Snowdonia and got a fantastic view of some of the hills which lay just to the north of me.

From here the road wound on until I arrived at a little place just north of Haverfordwest, the house was called Plumstone

and the Yurt that you can see in the foreground was where I would spend the next 5 nights.



The purpose of the journey was to do four days walking along the Pembrokeshire coastal path from Milford Haven through to St David's. I missed out a section in the middle so which gives us a reason to go back to Plumstone again.

It was important to me that this walk was the first thing that I did during my sabbatical. It was a very clear mark that my sabbatical had begun and it also made a break between what



I normally do and what I wanted to do with the three months that lay ahead of me.

Day 2

So, on the second day I set out to walk from Dale to Milford Haven. Dale is a lovely little seaside village with quite a wide



bay and as I walked from here towards Milford Haven then the industrialisa

tion of the port town began to encroach into the countryside.



I had to walk this way as there were two estuaries to cross on my route and I had three hours either side of low tide to cross them

and they were closer to Dale than Milford haven. It also worked out well with the bus to get me back from the end of the days walk.

Day 3





On the second day of walking I went back to Dale again and walked round the headland there and back to the car again. I saw some odd things like this hat. Even walking this direction,

away from the industry, there were still reminders. The tankers coming and going and the view of the oil refinery just across the bay.



Each day I would stop in a little bay and do morning

prayer from the Northumbria community, I'd have my coffee and a welshcake which were made by the son of our friends and then set back off on my way.



This trip was also an opportunity to visit places I'd been as a child too, here's a little bungalow on the footpath down to Marlow's Sands, a

beautiful stretch of wonderful sand where we used to play as kids.

Day 4

More of the same, sea and cliffs! I began just above Little Haven and then walked through to Newgale sands



where our friends have a static caravan at which I left my car.

All these little places, Little Haven, Broad Haven, Newgale are places that we visited when I was a child and Julia and I also had a holiday in Pembrokeshire about 20 years ago and it was lovely to go back to them again. I'd forgotten how beautiful this coastline is too. I also spent a bit of my working life in Pembrokeshire too, working on the power station and also the Texaco refinery down there too.



Day 5



Probably the longest stretch of the walk was from Newgale round the coast to St David's. Once again, it's

more cliffs and sea, though it did make the navigation really easy!

There were a number of things which I reflected on as I walked through the wonderful scenery. The power of nature was evident all around as the waves crashed on the shore, as I watched the wind carry a guy who was parascending and how the earth had curled and bent the rocks over the millennia.



I was also amazed by the majesty of God as it is

displayed in creation, from the grand vistas through to the

My Sabbatical



tiny caterpillars and amazing homes they'd built. I'm also always in awe of how nature finds away to thrive with the beautiful flowers growing out of a rock!

The walk was a pilgrimage too and the sense of achievement when I walked into St David's Cathedral was wonderful to feel. I even walked further than I anticipated on the last day so I could walk inland past a little chapel at St Non's Head.



Camp Together



It was so nice to begin my time with such a lovely experience. I then returned to Northumberland and got ready for the next thing which I was involved with, Camp Together at Causey Park. This was a camp at which over 1000 young people and leaders from across the North East came together. There were activities on site for them to do and we simply needed to be there to feed them and in case they needed anything. It will be forever known as the Bread camp because it felt like we were drowning in bread!

D of E

Then hot on the heels of Camp Together came the D of E expeditions. I went and saw of William to do his Silver

Expedition and then I got ready to supervise the groups who were doing their Bronze Expeditions.

Normally, because of needing to work Sundays I can only be on weekend camps for the Saturday but whilst



I was on Sabbatical I was able to be there all weekend. It's amazing to see how the young people have grown and developed through the course of their D of E experience. They've learn how to be self sufficient, how to find their way around the countryside, learn how to problem solve and they've also begun to develop good team working skills too.

So, after getting the practical experience of supervising an expedition I then went on to complete my supervisor and assessor training for D of E along with qualifying as a D of E Leader so I'm now able to deliver the D of E programme to the Explorer Scouts that I work with on a Wednesday evening.

Mental Health First Aid

And working with these young people has made me aware of the challenges which they face. Many of which are the same as we all faced when we grew up and some of them are very different too with the rise of social media and an always on culture that we live in. So to try to help me understand and spot issues I took a Mental Health First Aid course. On the course we talked about all sorts of things which can impact our mental health and ways in which we can also help folk to develop good habits and strategies to enable us all to thrive. So I'm now a Mental Health First Aider which really means that I have an awareness of signs and symptoms and can then sign post folk to help them to get help.

Joseph was 18!

Then creeping up on me, like a stealthy fox upon a chicken, came Joseph's 18th birthday. He wanted to do the Go Ape



Treetop challenge at Grizzdale Forrest as his treat. So we headed across to the lakes and had a lovely weekend there. That was his first treat, he also went out for a meal with friends and did Airbox bounce with another friend. After all you are only 18 once!

In ministry weekends off are very precious as I'm "allowed" 6 Sundays a year plus two as training Sundays. So being able to go away for weekends with the family is a real treat and we did quite a bit of that over the course of my sabbatical with a visit to Derbyshire to help my Mum and Dad celebrate their 50th Wedding anniversary

Lathe

Lots of stuff so far. And when I wasn't doing anything else I took some time to clean up and refurbish a metal working lathe. So it's all original however I've added a modern start / stop switch with an emergency stop feature.



I find that there is something really satisfying watching a lathe as it works a piece of metal!

Mighty Hike Training and Walk

As I've thought about my sabbatical and reflected on the experiences that I've had then I've realised



that a lot of what I have done has pushed me out of my comfort zone and I haven't been sure whether I could do it or not.



I wasn't sure I could do a 9 hour drive to Pembrokeshire, but I did. 40 miles along the coast over 4 consecutive days was also a challenge for which I'd done some training to ensure I had miles in my legs! But the biggest challenge was the mighty hike. We walked 26 miles in 10 hours! For this

we trained quite hard and did longer and longer walks. But the longest training walk we did was only 17 miles, so it was still a bit of a gamble as to whether we could do the 26. However we did it! It was an amazing experience and it would be great to do it again. We raised £1281 for Macmillan Cancer Support so thank you to everyone who supported us.

Explorer Summer Camp

And finally, before we headed off to France on Holiday, Charlotte and myself took 11 Young people to the Lake District for 6 days. We had a lovely time, I made 2 sick with

my driving and we climbed hills, saw the Barbie Movie and did other activities too.



There is something really special about seeing young people come into their own and also seeing their different personalities comes out too. We had some who were so outgoing they gate crashed a birthday party which was happening on the site and had a great time. Others would wake early and be cooking breakfast when I got up, I'm not an early riser unless I

have to be.

What I take away

So much of what I did on my sabbatical needed me to trust that



it would be ok and if it wasn't then we'd be able to sort it out. Some of it was about learning to be part of a team, some of it was about having faith. Most of it was about making memories and gaining the sense of achievement.