

~ The Tudong ~

never again until next time

by Ajahn Sucitto

Ajahn Sucitto recently marked his 60th year by undertaking a two-month walking pilgrimage through the English countryside. He took his bowl, robes, a pack and some waterproof gear ... and mainly relied upon spontaneous offerings of food as his journey progressed. He offers an account of his wandering here.

LORD JESUS CHRIST, WALK WITH SUCITTO ON HIS WAY TO GLOUCESTER; be beside him; clear the way before him ...'

I was being prayed over, with touching sincerity, by a man I'd encountered in a shopping mall in Frome, Somerset. We had struck up an acquaintance as I was being politely asked to move on by the local police. As is becoming the case in towns throughout Britain, the mall was the property of a developer who had let out lots to various retailers. Although this concentrates the focus for the average shopper, it also means that the whole area is technically 'private' property, and any undesirable parties (i.e. those who aren't shopping) can be evicted from the premises. We were both deemed undesirable: my friend had been looking for a place to hold an open-air prayer meeting to pray for peace; whereas I had been standing in silence 'eyes downcast and with bowl well-covered' making myself available for almsfood. Hence we had to move.

The almsfood was to provide me with the food for

this day's walk. I was heading towards Bath, the Cotswolds, Stroud, Gloucester and the Welsh borders. It was the next stage of the two-month walk across southern England that was to be my 60th birthday present to myself – a chance to simplify and focus on living in faith. In this, my sense of the source of benevolence wasn't Jesus, or Buddha, but the human heart. Call it Christ-consciousness, Buddha-nature, or faith, but the sandwich and



small savoury pasty that my Christian acquaintance had just offered along with his blessings were its indisputable manifestation.

For me, 'faith' is good and special enough. The main intent of this walk was to live in that; to walk solo across my native land without food or a means of obtaining it except the spontaneous generosity of people who didn't know me. Furthermore it was a 'tudong', an 'austere practice' of carrying enough gear to stay reasonably warm, dry and clean, but with otherwise nothing much.

A twist in this was the fact that carrying such gear as the damp, cool spring of Britain requires, amounted to quite some weight. So a further challenge for me in my 60th year was carrying some 15kg on my back uphill and along muddy footpaths. As I found on the first rainy day out of Cittaviveka, it's easy enough at first, but after a few hours ... and after trudging up the clay-covered slopes of the Hampshire Hangers ... and after discovering that the cap of my water bottle had loosened and soaked my fleece jacket to a heavy dripping mass ... walking the talk is another thing.

At the end of that first day my legs and back were so stiff that I could only get my tiny tent up bow-legged and bent-double, to then slump into it with my feet sticking out until I could summon the energy to negotiate getting my boots off. A 'Never Again' sign lit up in my brain ... only to be replaced the next morning by others: namely the dawn light filtering through the tent wall, the chorus of birdsong, and the luxurious reflection that there was no fixed time to do anything, no one to be responsible to, and no project to look into other than that of brewing some tea, breaking camp and putting one step in front of the next. 'Must do more of this!' chirps the mind on those dewy mornings, 'This is why the Buddha wanted us to go forth.'

And so in due course, I'd get the pack on my back, step out of the woodland where I'd spent the night and move steadily onwards, letting the body dictate the pace.