



body knew how to walk. So the wisest way was to check the map now and then, and then just come back into the body moving along a step at a time. You can't help but get somewhere that way. This is pretty much lesson one of walking meditation, but with the stakes raised the lesson etches itself more deeply. And most important, one learns more about working with the organizing mind rather than being controlled by it.

Another basic meditation lesson that was intensified was that of meeting painful feeling. For most of every day, the overall bodily feeling was unpleasant: blistered feet, twingeing legs, aching back, general strain. On top of which one might add the cold of rain steadily wicking itself through the gaps in my waterproof. Yet each day it was truly joyful to be free of encumbrance, of multi-tasking, and of the complexities of community life. Placing the two feeling domains together made it possible to let each painful jab flow through and not compound suffering out of it. After a while, pain became 'that thing there.' It was rather like living next to a noisy neighbour or a street full of traffic. You live beside it, and not in it. And it's really worthwhile to find one's home outside of feeling.

The last major learning for me was working with aspects of self-consciousness. I don't actually like being on show; I'd much sooner go my own way quietly and be invisible. Yet, walking with shaven head and wearing robes is bound to attract some attention. And of course for that vital almsround, it has to. So I developed a standard of resting in kindness and letting the image of a monk quietly standing speak for itself; nothing to prove, nothing to defend, may all beings be well. It's about the only way one can stand in a shopping street twenty-three hours and a day's walk after the last meal without getting agitated. And it's a great exercise for self-consciousness. After a while, it became more the norm: just rest in kindness, whatever other people (or even nervous cattle) are doing. For this moment that's all you need do; beings will act in accordance with their kamma.

Much of the time, the responses that came my way were friendly, even awed: 'Are you a *real* monk?' I met

no abusive or unkind speech although on one or two occasions teenagers, some worse for a few drinks, started out with teasing remarks. But met unwaveringly, even this melted into respect and requests for handshakes and photographs with their mobile phones. Truly the sign of a samana is a blessing.

'The first fifty miles are the worst' someone had counselled, and so it was. By the end of the walk, I had teamed up with Kittisaro, a long-standing friend, and was marching along, even carrying some of his load, with confidence and vigour. The invitations and offerings were coming so thick and fast it took time and planning to fit them in. Through Somerset and Devon, the land rolled and the June weather was perfect.

And so the walk concluded, at Gaia House in time for the Vipassana Teachers' Conference. There we talked about Dhamma and how to effectively bring it across in this day and age. For me that was a major reason for doing my walk – to encourage other monks and nuns to be less monastic and do more wandering. Although others may know more about Buddhism and be more skilled in teaching, the role of the samana, their particular opportunity, has to be in walking the Dhamma gently into society. Personally, the reward is in seeing the 'never again' soften and melt to the point where I feel eager to keep investigating that reflex. What ever comes 'again', anyway? ॐ

