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Subject: Adamswalk - week 11 check in

Dear sponsors and supporters of my hike North

Without doubt, week eleven of this hike has been the hardest since I started. I've walked 162 miles and traversed the remote North West of Scotland. Two days in particular – the walks to and from Dundonnell – must rank amongst the hardest I've ever done in my life. Both over 20 miles, and covering remote pathless mountain passes, miles from anywhere and out of all human contact. Quite scary, when I stopped to think what I was doing, and very lonely. And Saturday's walk, at over 31 miles, was the longest single day of the hike, as well. I was hugely relieved to have survived the week, and with only 2 days left to go, I feel I am on the home straight.

I've been keeping an eye on the landscape as I've trekked – in the few moments when I'm not watching where I'm putting my feet, that is, and noticed that Spring is well and truly turning into summer, even here in the remote North East. The trees are in full leaf – there's none of the wintry leaflessness of March, when I started. And the lambs, which were enchanting gambolling carefree bundles of pristine white wool a few weeks ago, and now turning into sheep and adopting the less appealing features of their parents. But this week I was rewarded with my first sighting of "real" wildlife – a pine marten, which rushed across my path a couple of days ago, just outside Lairg. It was the size of a cat, the shape of a squirrel, and dark brown in colour – they are quite rare, and I felt lucky to have seen it.

When you start an adventure like this, you have a certain set of expectations in your mind about what you will encounter along the way. Sometimes you're right – for example I expected the walk to be hard work and it has been, and sometimes you're wrong. I expected that I might encounter grumpy landowners or concerned farmers making my way difficult, but I haven't. In fact everyone I met has been friendly and helpful. But some, quite random, things you notice along the way simply hadn't occurred to you before, and take you by surprise.

One of the first things I noticed once I had set off is just how many slugs there are in this country. They are everywhere – on the roads, in the grass, on the tent, in the rucksack. They are hugely diverse in size and colour and although I could never grow to like them, I don't find them as repulsive as I used to. In fact I have got quite adept at despatching them from places they're not supposed to be. They have been my constant companions from the south of Cornwall to the north of Caithness and are truly an adaptable, omnipresent species.

Along the walk, I've taken photographs to record the trip and I've been surprised just how difficult it is to take one without having an electricity pylon of some size or shape in view. Even in the remotest parts of Scotland, it was hard to find a scene which didn't include, somewhere in sight, these ubiquitous elements of our landscape. I don't know if anyone has ever plotted where they all go, but if they did I think the country would probably look like an insect trapped in a giant web of electrical conductors. When you're in a car or an office, you just take electricity for granted and it's only when you spend a long time in the countryside that you realise there is a huge infrastructure out there delivering it all the places it needs to be.

In complete contrast to slugs and electricity poles, which are both everywhere, are police cars, which are surprisingly absent. When your office is in Central London, you get used to hearing them screeching about all the time, and you get the impression that the country must be in the grip of a lawless crime-wave. But on my walk, I could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of police cars I've seen and in fact when I saw one yesterday I realised it was the first since Glasgow. Drones of criminals are not at large, it seems, in the vast majority of the country.

Another odd thing which has surprised me is just how actively our forests are being managed. I've had to walk through quite a lot of forestry commission plantations and almost every single one is subject to "forestry operations" at the moment – i.e. trees are being chopped down. I hadn't realised just how many forests there actually were and when I counted the rings on the trees that had been felled, they all seemed to be 30 to 40 years old. I can only imagine that there must have been some sort of tax break in the 1970s which encouraged all this planting, which is all maturing now.

And finally, something I noticed which, as an urbanite, took me by surprise, is just how the country is full of smells. Whenever you get outside the towns and cities, there is always some sort of odour in the air. Wales, for example, smells of farmyards and cows, whereas most of Cumbria smells of sheep. Scotland, at the moment at least, is pervaded by the scent of bog myrtle. And the forests that I've walked through – when not subject to "operations" that is, have their own smells, Spruce smells like scented candles, pine smells of – well, pine, and birch has a resinous appl-ey smell all of its own. So next time you go outside in the country sniff the air and see if you can work out where you are, just from the smell.

Now I've only got 2 days to go. Tomorrow I hike to John O'Groats, but this isn't the end of my walk, as on Tuesday I walk to the most Northerly point of the UK – Dunnet Head. So I'm saving my euphoria for a little while yet. And my wife and elder son are coming up to meeting me – so I'm very much looking forward to joining up with the family again. Finally, I've now raised nesarly £8,000 for the Scouts – so if you know anyone who you think might like to sponsor me, it's not too late! Just point them in the direction of <http://www.justgiving.com/Adamswalk2014>

Remember you can follow me on Twitter @adamswalk2014, or read my daily blog at <http://adamswalk.com/blog/> or you can follow my progress in real-time from my GPS tracker at [http://www.viewranger.com/buddybeacon/v2/?&bb\[\]=wyada3@btconnect.com;1928#userbar_top](http://www.viewranger.com/buddybeacon/v2/?&bb[]=wyada3@btconnect.com;1928#userbar_top)

I hope you enjoy your Monday – and spare a moment to think of me slogging the final few miles of this long march!

Cheers

Adam