

# ONE FOR THE ROAD

(a taster)



*being a poetic account of a  
hitch-hiking & wild camping pilgrimage  
around sacred places  
and public houses  
of the British Isles*

Stephen Hancock



[www.pigandink.com](http://www.pigandink.com)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Several summers ago I set off on a hitch-hiking and wild camping pilgrimage around sacred places and public houses of the British Isles.

And several times in the intervening years I've tried writing up the adventure in travelogue form. For a long while I thought the challenge was to develop a prose style I was happy with. I sweated a lot of ink. Because switching from poetry to prose was like learning a totally different instrument – or even a whole different form of music.

But then I woke up one morning this May and went "F\*\*\* it – my prose is pretty good now, but fundamentally I'm a village poet." It was both a shocking and liberating epiphany.

I obediently placed a quarter of a million words upon the creative compost heap. Yikes.

A few days later the following hypothesis arose: what if, on my pilgrimage, the seeds of poems were planted in the places I visited? And what if my task now is to revisit those places, and harvest those poems?

I recently visited Dartmoor to road test this hypothesis, and three of the poems I discovered there are included herein.

And so, this summer-autumn I am setting sail (in my car, with a tent), following my hitching foot prints and thumb prints – in order to meet and reap whatever poems are awaiting me in these places. And in the autumn-winter I will put them all together into a self-published book, which I'll then take on tour.

I've included several old poems ("Saint Sid of Corby" & "The Realm of the Beggar King" & "Hobo poet") in this little taster, three from the original journey, the three from my recent Dartmoor excursion, and a few haikus to boot.

I hope the little collection below gives you a flavour of what I'm up to.

Enjoy,

One Love,  
Stephen

July 2024

## Saint Sid of Corby

Just east of Northampton  
(by the Lumbertubs roundabout on the A43)  
you pull over for me and my outstretched thumb

I lug my rucksack up into your cab  
and climb up and over and in  
with almost childish excitement  
(for lifts from lorries are nowadays so rare)

Five minutes into the journey  
as if on an angel's nod or wink  
you quickly cross-fade our conversation  
over to that Deeper Stuff we wayfarers are always hungry for  
and I feel that hitch-hiking glow  
in my hitch-hiker's heart  
at the meeting of two instantly comfortable strangers

"See that, Stephen," you say  
pointing to the army of hairs on your forearm  
now standing to attention as one

"That tells me something important is happening in here right now"

You drop me off just outside Corby  
but as I climb down  
you call me back up

"Stephen," you say  
"If ever you find yourself  
standing on the edge of something  
you know you've got to do  
but are dithering about doing it  
just think of Sid  
right behind you, mate  
giving you a mighty royal kick up the arse"

Ah, Sid, many times over the years  
I've remembered you and your words  
(and blessed you and all that you love)  
but until today  
I've never dared redeem that promise that you made

but my dithering soul sure needs a mighty royal kick right now

Ah, good Sid  
wherever you are  
by the hairs on your arm  
and the hairs on my arse  
let your sweet boot swing, my friend  
let your sweet boot swing



“To be on the road  
is to be home again.”

St. Columba

### No mud, no lotus

*Everyone knows we need to have mud for lotuses to grow.  
The mud doesn't smell so good, but the lotus flower smells very good.  
If you don't have mud, the lotus won't manifest.  
You can't grow lotus flowers on marble.  
Without mud, there can be no lotus.*

Thich Nhat Hanh  
No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering



At the foot of the waterfall  
I told Archie of my plans  
to go on a hitch-hiking pilgrimage  
around some of Britain's

sacred sites and holy places

Archie paused for a moment  
and then simply added:  
“And pubs!”

We both grinned in agreement  
and a cool misty waterfall breeze  
passed between us  
and through us  
and on its merry way

And then Archie proceeded to climb the waterfall  
(because that’s the sort of thing that Archie does)

And thus the seed for this journey was planted:  
A hitch-hiking and wild camping pilgrimage  
around sacred places  
*and* public houses  
of the British Isles

The sacred and the profane  
The temple and the church and the pub  
Spirit and spirits and beer  
The lotus *and* the mud



## Eve of pilgrimage excitement

It’s one of those exquisitely fresh and sunny mid-mornings in May  
with more than a hint of summer in the edible blue sky  
and I’m sitting on the back of my brother’s mid-life Harley  
as we rumble through Beckenham

bound south for the never-ending charms  
of the M25

The sun's beaming directly into my be-goggled eyes  
and I can feel eve-of-pilgrimage excitement  
percolating through my hobo veins and brain  
like a triple espresso  
laced with a generous tippie of rum

Places names roll on by  
forming a sort of poetry in motion  
within my pillion mind:

*Beckenham, West Wickham*  
*Addington, Forest Dale*  
*Selsdon, Sanderstead*  
*Harnsey Green...*

We snake down a surprisingly rural backroute  
occasionally ambushed by wafts of hawthorn's sweet and spunky scent  
before sliproading onto  
the ouroboric London Orbital

Along arterial motorways and then vascular A-roads we cruise  
occasionally riding through  
shadow-dappled tunnels of luminous green  
before squeezing through the capillaries of Marlborough town  
with its oh-so-familiar privileged public schoolboys  
and their privileged public schoolboy stride

*... Marlborough, Manaton*  
*Fyfield, West Overton...*

Turning right onto the West Kennet Avenue  
we pass between two guardian megaliths  
overtake a woman on a mobility scooter  
(who's hurtling along at an impressive rate of knots)  
and then for a few hundred yards we sail alongside  
the ancient avenue of paired standing stones

Ah  
you can sense Avebury approaching before you reach it  
just like you can sense the sea  
before you actually glimpse it

And then there she blows!  
The southern entrance to quite probably  
the largest megalithic stone circle  
in the whole wide world

The sacrilegious road carries us through the outer henge  
and over the inner ditch  
and into the giant stone circle  
which once contained two inner stone circles  
which once encircled  
(so the old man in the old Antiques Shop once told me)  
a megalithic phallus and a megalithic vulva

Penetrating circles within circles within circles  
we coast into the car park of the Red Lion  
which proudly (and quite rightly) proclaims itself to be  
“the only pub in the world inside a stone circle”

The early summer starting point  
and  
(all goes well)  
the late summer finishing point  
of this hare-and-tortoise-brained  
pilgrimage  
adventure



if these stones could speak  
oh the stories they would tell  
once upon a time

## Windmill Hill

Much later  
as dusk cross-fades into blue-black night  
I follow a meandering path through darkening meadows overflowing with  
thousands upon thousands of buttercups  
and dandelion clocks tightly wound and fit to burst

and then  
slowly she rises upon the horizon  
a gentle swelling of land  
with three visible mounds on top  
and a Venus-tipped crescent moon  
setting directly above her:

### Windmill Hill

I pitch my tent atop one of the mounds  
improvise some barefoot evening prayers of gratitude  
and then raise my hip flask of single malt  
to the slender, waxing moon

Whisky gently glugs through the night air  
and spills into the earth below  
"To the ancestors!"  
I declare out loud  
just so that they know that this one's for them

Dad used to baulk at this alcoholic ceremony of mine  
"That's a waste of good whisky, Stevie-boy," he'd say

"I hope you appreciate it now," I whisper  
pouring him an extra, gratuitous glug

Then I neck a slug of the old fire water myself  
and follow its course down my gullet  
until it hits my stomach  
where it explodes into a fiery whisky-cloud  
which rapidly blooms through my body and being and brain



Overhead The Plough is now furrowing the night  
and the Milky Way has come out to dance  
and another planet is rising from the east  
– Jupiter, perhaps?

Ah

I suddenly feel pleasantly knackered  
and quietly blessed to boot  
(which sure ain't a bad way to end any day)

I climb inside my faithful tent  
zip shut both its doors  
caterpillar down into my old sleeping bag lover  
and soon dissolve into  
dreamy Windmill Hilltop slumber...



## Kings and Queens of Avebury

During the war, he said  
we lived like kings and queens  
upon the land

The fields were full  
the hedgerows ripe with berries  
the rabbits fat  
and easy to catch

And an endless summer  
barely scathed by war  
bloomed and blossomed within my mind

He was a proper English pagan  
gent he was:  
courteous  
mischievous  
kind



the longest journey  
begins with a single thumb  
begging for a lift



## Venford Reservoir (Bosh! Mix)

Three rather plump Dartmoor lambs  
possessed by the local reservoir sprites  
(or perhaps the surplus energy of the season)  
are racing and chasing around the car park at dusk  
head-butting and bum-butting  
and lamb-leaping and lamb-jumping  
with such uncontainable and boistrous delight  
that my heart can't help but smile

They all suddenly stop

And look at one another

as if temporarily overwhelmed  
by playful possibility and hormonal wonder

(or maybe they're playing tag  
but have forgotten which one of them's "it"?)

Bosh!

a head-butt instantly rekindles the game  
racing and chasing around the car park  
like three rather plump Dartmoor lambs  
possessed by the local reservoir sprites  
and the surplus  
joy  
of the season



## Scorhill

*“The true miracle is not walking on water  
or walking in air,  
but simply walking on this earth.”*

Thich Nhat Hanh

(i)

Lying on my back  
on the middle of Teign-e-ver clapper bridge  
under this vast and open Dartmoor sky  
surrounded by these vast and rising hills  
a slighty dizzying, almost timeless peace arises

(ii)

Lowering my body  
through the Tolmen stone  
above the gently chuckling Teign  
I imagine my life as a thread  
now for ever stitched into  
this particular tapestry  
and trinity  
of earth and rock and river

(iii)

I feel so profoundly at home  
lying down at the centre  
of these Scorhill stones

When

(inevitably)

I pop my crocs and cease  
pray, bury me here  
beneath a barrel of beer  
and I'll happily rot in peace

(iv)

One of the local wild cows  
is now grooving and grinding its body  
up and down and all around  
one of the sturdy  
triangular stones

a glimpse of neopagan, neolithic  
bovine itch-scratch-blis



unzipping my tent  
a dozen bullocks greet me  
sweet scent of their breath



## Wistman's Wood

Come to Wistman's Wood  
of an evening  
in late May or early June  
when the sun is still travelling bright  
above the darkening flanks of Beardown Hill

when the robin and chaffinch and the wren  
are weaving their evening taunts and tunes  
through the slowly dampening, evening air

and sit upon a nearby rock

and gaze a while

upon and through these  
backlit, sunlit, tangled trees  
branches wrapped with rich and mossy cloth  
and draped with silver-green wisps and tails of lichen

and let your body rest a while

and be gently charmed by this  
ancient, oaken, emerald wonder

and yet  
if you linger a little while longer  
(and as the sun begins its descent down under)  
perhaps you'll also sense  
within Wistman's warp and weft  
an ancient sadness too

a glimpse of this land, perhaps  
before the first Mesolithic axe  
began our brutal, human claim

no wonder the medicine here is so strong

for this is a place to remember  
long-forgotten songs



beneath this old oak  
a rat pauses by my feet  
a meeting of eyes

## Pilgrim's progress

Just put one foot  
in front of the other

Leave all fancy  
angelic-apparition-beatific-vision-instant-bolt-of-enlightenment  
hopes and plans and dreams behind

Instead  
pray constantly  
that sore twinge  
on the bottom of your big toe  
doesn't rub itself into a blister

Trust the path before you  
and if you believe in God  
trust God  
otherwise  
trust your legs

Trust the path  
trust your knees  
trust your feet  
trust your toes  
trust your soles

No fancy pants  
no fancy plans  
just one pilgrim foot  
in front of the other pilgrim foot  
and then that one in front of the other

And when you ease into your wayfarer's bed  
at the end of another well-trod day  
let your aching salty faithful body  
softly open  
its pilgrim belly  
and to the snoring rafters raise  
exhausted hymns of gratitude  
and silent songs of praise



## The Realm of the Beggar King

When there are no keys in your pocket  
and no cares on your mind  
When you don't know the day  
and you don't know the time  
When the sun's your only compass  
and the moon's your only lover  
When the stars are your ceiling  
or a yew tree is your cover  
When you envy no creature  
except the bird on the wing  
Then you know you're at the helm  
of that liminal realm:  
the realm of the beggar  
king

When your sweat smells of vinegar  
and your underwear smells of cheese  
When there are outbreaks of mutiny  
among the regiments of your knees  
When that blister on your sole  
begins to slip and to slide  
When you've been standing three hours or more  
but still ain't got a ride  
When your belly begins to growl  
and your boots begin to ring  
Then you know you're at the helm  
of that liminal realm:  
the realm of the beggar  
king

When you're in a foreign land  
yet feel totally at home  
When the sunlight on the mountainside  
thrills you to the bone  
When that complete stranger at the wheel  
feels as easy as a friend  
When you've pitched your tent on a western shore  
and don't want the day to end  
When the dawn chorus wakes you up  
and makes you want to sing  
Then you know you're at the helm  
of that liminal realm:  
the realm of the beggar  
king



When some boy racer's just given you the finger  
or some snotty brats have given you the thumb  
When you're tempted to hurl curses back  
When your faith in life's gone numb  
When you daydream of past glories  
and fear you've lost the knack  
When you wonder why you keep on doing this shit  
but there ain't no turning back  
When all the spiritual tomes you've ever read  
no longer mean a thing  
Then you know you're at the helm  
of that liminal realm:  
the realm of the beggar  
king

When you're in the middle of nowhere  
yet in the scheme of things  
When the hobo angels by your side  
are pulling all the strings  
When you've remembered the rules of thumb  
and life is but a game  
When that vehicle on the horizon  
is calling out your name  
When that old red Porsche has just pulled over  
or that family of four has squeezed you in  
Then you know you're at the helm  
of that liminal realm:  
the realm of the beggar  
king



## Hobo poet

Hobo poet worships the spirits of the hedge  
a dry ditch makes the perfect bed  
he does not judge the weeds  
but sometimes envies the nimble excitement of the bees

Hobo poet knows the long loneliness  
drinks from forgotten springs and wells  
pleasures himself amid the hawthorn  
cries blue moon tears on the shoulder of a stoical oak

Hobo poet feels at ease  
in the strangest of places  
wakes up besides a silent sea  
breathes in life's airs and graces

Hobo poet pockets abandoned words

Hobo poet silently skirts any fearful town  
lest the townsfolk accuse him of stealing their dreams  
and put him in the stocks  
as a warning to their children

Hobo poet dares the young boy with the faraway gaze  
to join him on an adventure

Hobo poet remembers and then forgets he smells  
would give all he owns to touch a pretty woman's pretty skin

Hobo poet dries his socks upon the brambles  
and rubs his fingers between his toes  
till the raw gaps peel and gleam

Hobo poet bimbles  
as aimlessly as a lazy cloud  
and when he is sure that nobody can hear him  
sings bashfully to God

Hobo poet leaves his hobo mark  
on the lintel of every kindness

Hobo poet knows not to argue with ghosts

Hobo poet often dreams of home

Wakes

Moves on



If you'd like to follow me on my journey:

[stephen77hancock@hotmail.com](mailto:stephen77hancock@hotmail.com)

Facebook: [Stephen Hancock / Pig & Ink](#)

[www.pigandink.com](http://www.pigandink.com)