





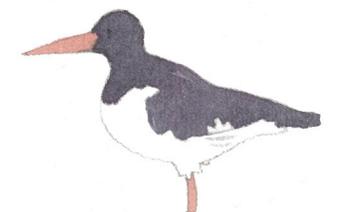
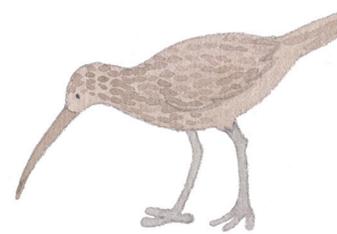
## THE BEGINNING

Ten years ago I read a book about a man and a dog walking the South West Coast Path. I put it down having read the last page and thought “I would love to do that”. The idea quickly gathered dust as I became swept up in that thing called ‘real life’. Struggling to make ends meet as I worked hard to make a living as an artist whilst remaining determined to be a success.

Then, years later, I reread that book which had inspired me so and decided that I would no longer daydream about it - I would make my coastal adventure a reality. After all, I had fulfilled my lifelong dream to paint all day and be paid for the privilege and now I was looking for a new source of inspiration for a big up-coming show. Suddenly it dawned on me that this was the perfect opportunity to fulfil a dream which had remained with me for a decade. At that moment, a walk along the coast path seemed less a dream and more something of a necessity.

What if I was to walk the coast path painting and sketching as I went? Think of the inspiration, the ideas that would flow from an experience like that! Another reason I was so enthusiastic to embark upon this walk was that I had spent most of my life living near the sea and it was very much in my blood. I was a keen fisherwoman and kayaker and when I wasn't in my studio I was either on or by the sea so spending so much time so close to the water would bring me great joy. I was also an avid walker and thought I could easily accomplish the twelve to twenty miles a day needed to complete the walk.

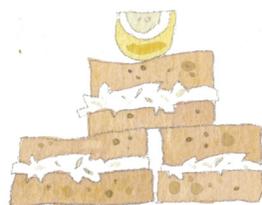
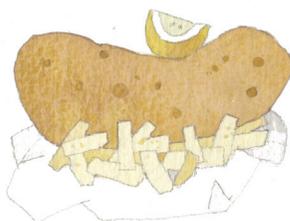
Very tentatively, I allowed the idea of doing the walk grow in my mind, however I was not without doubts. Questions assailed me: how would I go about it? Would I go on my own or with another person or Jess my dog? Where would I stay? Would I camp? What about B&Bs? Would they take dogs? How much would it cost? What about luggage? All questions which needed answering before I could walk a step. It was time to hit the internet...





## THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

The South West Coast Path stretches unbroken for six hundred and thirty miles from Minehead in North Devon to Poole in Dorset. It began life as a route for local coastguards to patrol the coast, looking for smugglers and contraband, enabling them to peer down into hidden coves and secluded bays. This was certainly no Sunday afternoon stroll - the combined ascents and descents add up to the equivalent of climbing Mount Everest four times! It also provides a huge boost to local economies of the area and is estimated to bring in three hundred million pounds annually with nearly thirty percent of people coming to the West Country lured by the path. Add to that the wildlife and flora, the ever changing landscape and dramatic scenery, cream teas and pasties, pints of beer and crab sandwiches and it's easy to see the path's charm and appeal. It offered a whole world on my doorstep just waiting for me to walk along it.

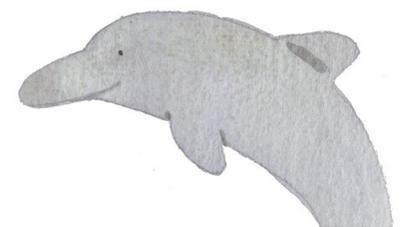
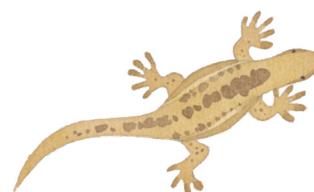
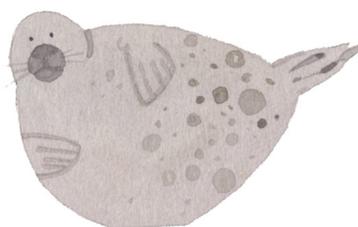




## THE SIDEKICK

I definitely needed a companion to join me on this adventure and had a dubious choice of two - my husband Jack and dog Jess. I thought about asking my husband for about three seconds and then dismissed the idea with a chuckle. Unlike me, my husband has a proper job and was not in the position to take seven weeks off in order to mooch along the coast path. More importantly he views walking as a total waste of time and effort. The ideal choice would be Jess, my seven stone Rhodesian Ridgeback. I had done a lot of research into the breed before getting Jess as I had wanted a dog that would enjoy long walks in the great outdoors. Lithe and sporty looking, she was bred for endurance and stamina - handy when hunting lions - and she has a calm self-assurance that would be a comfort if the going got tough.

So, the perfect sidekick you might say but no, Jess is an anomaly. Where most dogs would become infused with joy at the mention of a walk, Jess will invariably raise a lazy eyebrow and let out a sigh of despair or merely turn her back on me and slope off to her bed. Jess' whole day revolves around sleep. She will sleep for hours and hours while the world goes on around her, I often grumble that she is sleeping her life away. Despite knowing her lack of enthusiasm for any kind of exercise and also at a loss as to who else I could ask to accompany me, I decided she would be perfect and signed her up there and then - ready and willing... or not!



## THE PLAN

After an age spent on the internet I hatched a plan: whilst Jess and I walked the path carrying only my painting gear in a backpack, a luggage transfer company would deliver our suitcases to the B&Bs we would stay at along the way. To make life easier, everything was arranged by a wonderful local walking company who took care of all the details from booking dog-friendly accommodation to sending maps to help me plan my route. Since I wanted to spend time soaking up inspiration, sketching and painting, I decided to leave in September as I hoped the weather would still be warm but the hordes of tourists would have returned home and the B&Bs would be more likely to accept a one night booking. Before setting out, I had a very strong image of what the walk would be like and it mainly involved quite a lot of ambling with plenty of stops for fishing, reading sketching, painting and refreshments, the sun would shine and all would be fun and laughter. This was the walk in my imagination and it is lucky that I was so optimistically delusional because if I had had an inkling of the reality, I would have cancelled the trip and returned to the safer occupation of reading about other people's adventures rather than embarking on one of my own!

## PACKING

My usual walking gear was trainers and jeans, fine for a daily dog walk but most unsuitable for serious hiking. I had learnt this from my hours perusing various walking websites, so it seemed it was time to dip a tentative toe into the world of outdoor fashion... Standing in the wide entrance of my local outdoor activity emporium my mind boggled at the sheer range of things for sale: coats, hats, tents, torches, freeze dried food, sticks, water bottles, whistles... it went on and on! Nervously I stepped into this mayhem, grabbed the arm of an unsuspecting assistant and asked him to help me make sense of it all...

Two hours later and very much lighter of purse, I stepped back into the light already an addict. I had eagerly followed the assistant around as he explained what I would need and why, my eyes wide like a kid in a sweet shop. I bought waterproof trousers that turned into shorts, water bottles without the bad-for-you plastics, socks that let your feet breathe, a backpack that let your back breathe, and a small, orange whistle that was as loud as a plane taking off. The mantra seemed to be 'layers, layers layers' - so it seemed paramount that I brought vests made of a special material that cooled you down, then t-shirts, shirts, fleece tops, and finally a light weight waterproof coat. The icing on the cake was my new boots, just trying them on had transformed me from a leisure walker into a serious hiker, I really looked the part with my thick socks and red laces; this girl was not messing around! This girl was on a mission...

Once home I held an impromptu fashion show for a bemused Jack. All the fabrics felt so different from normal clothes - they were lighter, comfier and all seemed to have the added benefit of being able to repel water. I also regaled him with a new word I had learnt - "wicking" or "self-wicking". I insisted on explaining to him that that meant the fabric would actually pull sweat away from your body keeping you super cool. Instead of the gasps of amazement I was expecting, he shrugged and left the room, leaving me prancing and preening in my new clothes. Keen to get into the swing of things, I started wearing my kit on my daily walks with Jess and began the very important task of breaking in my new boots. This was essential if I wanted to avoid blisters once we got going.

Not yet ready to hang up my purse strings, I now embarked on buying one or two other things. First suitcases - one for me and a much larger one for Jess, whose travel essentials included her enormous bed, food and treats. Next on the shopping list was a five piece fishing rod (with thoughts of catching a monster bass) and finally a very smart blue waterproof coat for Jess, this was essential if I was going to keep her happy, she hated the rain and I had a feeling we would be seeing plenty of it. With a month to go before we left I started packing. First my new wardrobe, then watercolours, watercolour paper, pencils, sketchbooks, reading books (x3), travel rod, lures, line, hooks, a selection of energy bars, boot cleaning kit, first aid kit, maps, travel books, MP3 player and optimistically, sun cream. Over the next month I packed and repacked until I was sure I had covered every eventuality, then it was just a matter of counting down to the big day...

THE WALK

