

Ian West. Newsletter 4.

From a hotel in Eype.

I got up this morning having slept like a log in my four poster bed. I looked out of the window to see a beautiful sight of green lush vegetation, bushes and trees. Normally in winter these are covered in fine drizzle and mist but this was not a normal day. With the sun shining, very little cloud formation and the sea a flat calm, I knew I was going to encounter a great day. Having had a beautiful breakfast I went to my room to put all my gear on, which doesn't take me long now as I have a good routine. As I closed the door I had one more glance at the beautiful room, and thought to myself, how very nice. I went to see the managers Kev and Glenys and I thanked them for a lovely stay. He asked me if it was OK to take some photos of me for his web page. I gladly agreed, after all I was looked after in the hotel and the cost was covered by someone else. He took three or four photos and I thanked them once again and off I went to start my Jurassic coastal walk. What an exciting day lay ahead for me.

I looked in the distance and I could see hills that stood proud as they have done for hundreds of years. What an exciting prospect to walk up the hills as many walkers have done in the past. I have seen and I have witnessed the sight off the coast many times from the sea having been in the Royal Navy for 31 years but not from the landside. As I walked along the path, I was gathering my thoughts (at this stage I would like to share one of my navy stories which is similar to walking up these steep hills or cliffs).

I was remembering, when in 1977 during my Naval service, I was lucky enough to get posted to HMS Rooke, which was moored at a naval base in Gibraltar. Some people will know and will have visited Gibraltar and you will know what it is like, so I will apologise to them for this story. The rock of Gibraltar is a beautiful sight either from the air or from the sea with steep cliffs either side and a cable car running up one side of the cliff face. You can imagine what the top is like. When you get there (you can't be afraid of heights), you are greeted with spectacular views. From one side of the cliff you get the full force of the wind coming up from the sheer drop of the cliff face and the full glory of the Mediterranean Sea with shipping dotted around the area like little floating blocks. In contrast, on the other side of the rock, are small dwellings that stand proud overlooking the harbour and the surrounding area.

On the other side of the body of water, that lies between the rock and the land, is one long winding road from the top to the bottom leading into a busy town. Cars are allowed on the rock and to the dockyard which has been a part of Gibraltar for many years. So that gives you an insight into what Gibraltar is like if you have not visited or read about it.

When a Royal Navy ship arrives in Gibraltar there is a true Naval tradition. A race up the rock from the start in the dockyard to the top of the rock where the cable car arrives. It is always on a Saturday morning at 0930 after the lads have had a good run ashore in town the night before (I will leave that to your imagination). The race is well organised with the local authorities and the police being involved and the area is cordoned off for a period of about 30 minutes until the runners clear the road onto a path which is well and truly the start of the climb. It is always well supported by locals and holiday makers visiting the island. So being a part of Rooke a number of runners were invited to take part, so I was happy to enter my name. You can train running up the rock, but very few do so as it takes a lot of stress on your whole body particularly your legs. Most sailors had a great night ashore in town. Having plenty to drink and eating the associated food (Kebabs or Chinese) you can imagine what laid ahead the next day (I will leave that to your imagination).

With all the runners at the start and all the stretching having taken place, the whistle was blown and the runners set off like greyhounds to get away from the pack. I had already decided I would go at a steady pace. After about 800 yards of flat road I then started the first hill which looked gentle with only a slight incline. One more turn and then bang it hit me, the first steep climb confronted me and it took very little imagination to realise what lay ahead. Even at this earlier stage runners were falling by the way side, with effects from the night before taking their toll (I will leave that to your imagination). I passed some runners, not one but loads of them feeling the same effect of the night before. I got further away from them smiling to myself. I slowly made my way past the runners. I turned a bend and I felt wonderful only to be greeted by another steep and unforgiving path. I got a brief rest when I came to St Michael's cave

which is a very big tourist attraction with thousands of visitors each year. (They come by taxis or organised small coaches that are good enough to withstand the climb). It is a large cave which has been hollowed out over thousands of years, and has been transformed into a concert hall inside the rock. The military bands play there to raise money for charities as well as other types of music concerts. The acoustics are well and truly fabulous ( look on YouTube you will be amazed). 'Fabalasy wonderful inside'.

After turning that corner there was yet another steep climb and another even steeper that greeted me. Having passed loads and loads of runners I didn't know how many were in front of me, but I had a target in my sight, one loan runner. I decided to push myself and slowly I caught him and passed him. For a little while he had some energy to stay with me but gradually he slowed down and shouted for me to go on and do it. I came to a flat piece so I put on a spurt for about 50 yards, with some people at the side encouraging me to go faster so I did. Only to be greeted with a slight incline to the finish, I raced to the line only to see the ribbon across the path. Oh my God I was first, I couldn't believe it. After having a quick drink I was told I had done it in just over 19 mins.

The record was held by a civilian some years back and he did it in 17 mins. That must have been a brilliant race. Out of 100 or so runners I won, what a brilliant feeling. 1997 I had a second stint in HMS Rooke and once again I was invited to race and low and behold some 20 years later I came in 2nd at 22 mins, I thought what an achievement for me and what wonderful memories of that experience. (*Just be glad I wasn't racing you Ian. LOL. Graham*).

So with this story the hills that I saw didn't phase me at all. With the first hill I approached I took it steady, my pace slowed to small steps to prevent my muscles burning in my legs, which happens when the stress on your legs tighten on such steep climbs. My breathing started to speed up but I gathered my senses and slowed it down to deep long breaths to prevent my lungs from bursting. I got into a steady rhythm which was very comfortable. After 20 minutes and two, three, four, five paces I reached the summit with very little pain. I stood on the top and as I turned 360 degrees the views that greeted me were unbelievable. A fantastic view of the Jurassic coast and it looked spectacular. The sea was in one of its good moods and there was a steady breeze and a little cloud, I took some fabulous photos, what a wonderful feeling I encountered. Having spent 5 minutes or so on top I started to walk down the steep slope ensuring that I didn't slip because there had been a couple of bad days of rain which made it slippery and difficult to keep upright. I breathed a sigh of relief as I reached the bottom intact.

After no more than 20mins I again started to climb. The second climb didn't look as difficult to start with but it soon became more intense. As I walked further up I met two people, passing them I said "Gooday to you both and what a brills day" pausing I then asked them if they were local and they replied "Yes we are from Brokenhurst". I exchanged a conversation with them, very interesting; they said they try to come at least once a week if it's possible. I thought they looked about 68ish, politely I asked their age and the reply was, "I'm 84 my wife is 82", I couldn't believe it. "Sir and madam it's my pleasure to meet you both". They replied likewise, I told them my name and what I was doing. They told me their names were Paul and Ursula. I told them that it was a pleasure to meet them, thanked them and off I went. The sun was shining and it was warm, even on the top there was very little wind. I glanced around again to look around me and what a wonderful coast line we have. I made my way down, once again putting stress on my muscles through concentrating not too slip. On coming to the bottom I met some young people and I asked them "Are you going to the top?" The reply was "Yes". Once again I broke into conversation, it's hot up there and there's very little wind. I saw no evidence of water so I said "Here's a bottle of water" which they gladly accepted. I gave them my name and I explained what I was doing. They told me they were Chris and Martha and they were both from London on a two day break. I asked them their age and they told me 30yrs and 28yrs. I told them the reason I asked their age is because there is a man and wife walking up the other side of the hill who are aged 84yrs and 82yrs. What a contrast of ages and how great to see young people as well as us old ones. I also said how lucky we are with such beauty on our own shore and that we don't have to go abroad all the time. Explore what we have at our own back door. Many people take it for granted a lot of the time. Once again we exchanged goodbyes and I enjoyed the rest of the day. Off we went on our own separate ways.

So most of the day ran the same way meeting people and looking at the views, I even took a photo of cracks that have started to split the land and I am sure in time they will give way to the elements and fall into the sea. So when I arrived at the BNB for the night and sorted out my gear I then relaxed to reflect on my great day. To sum it up in one sentence, it was 'fabalas' and a most enjoyable experience. Tomorrow another exciting day looms,

Thank You.