

Two Sponsored Walks – One Day.

When Chris came to me and said that he wanted to organise and complete a Sponsored Walk in aid of the British Heart Foundation because of the way they had helped me in my life I was really happy to help him and partake in the Sponsored Walk myself.

For those that don't know, Chris has been volunteering at the BHF shop on Lord Street for some time and wanted to organise the Sponsored Walk as part of his work towards the Boys' Brigade Queen's Badge. His initial thoughts were to walk from Church to the shop on Lord Street and back but I felt that we needed a bit more of a challenge, and so the walk from Church to Formby and back, via the BHF shops in Formby and Southport, started taking shape.

After sorting the route and a few weeks of relative stress-free organising; me, Chris and my dog Coco met on the Church Car Park on the 30th of May at 8am and set off down Radnor Drive towards the old Sea Cop. Knowing we had 26 miles ahead of us, and conscious not to set off too fast, the initial pace was steady as we headed across Hesketh Golf Course to Hesketh Road and the beach.

After stopping at the newly formed "Lost and Found" tree at the top of Hesketh Road, a shrine to all things that shouldn't be on the beach, we headed west towards the pier.

After a short stop at the pier, to collect a donation from a very generous passer-by and have a drink and some chocolate, we went passed Weld Road Roundabout and across the Ainsdale Sand Dunes to the Lido.

With the temperature rising and the sand zapping our strength, we rested at the Lido and took the opportunity for a brief comfort break before walking passed Pontins, across some more sand dunes, skirted the outskirts of Formby golf course before ending up at the Fishermen's Path from Freshfield to the beach. Cutting through the pine woods and joining the beach just before the Squirrel Reserve Car Park, we walked along the beach until we reached Formby point and our "destination".

The 2 miles into Formby were very warm and sunny as we made our way down Elbow Lane with the Methodist Church on the right before turning into Formby town centre and the meeting point at Formby BHF shop. Waiting for us at the shop were Kay, Karen (and Tess the dog), Reece, Reece's mum Lisa, her partner Chris and John Howard a photographer from JDH Photography in Formby. John had given up his time, free of charge, to come and take some photos outside the BHF shop (see the photo on the front cover). John is currently running a fundraising event, where he has agreed to donate 100% of the money he makes from Portrait sittings between now and the 10th of June to the BHF (John can be contacted on 07944 966 711 if you are interested in booking a sitting).

After a quick bite to eat, we set off, with our new recruits, to Freshfield station and then walked alongside the railway, through the pinewoods and passed Reece's school, Shoreside, to Ainsdale station. Then we began the long trek (it doesn't seem that far when you are driving) down Liverpool Road, Waterloo Road and Lord Street to the BHF shop where we were welcomed with a cheer and a round of applause by Chris's special guests - David Lonsdale (of Heartbeat fame), Southport MP John Pugh, Chris's mum and dad (and friends), Jayne Barton, Steph, Elena, Sam, Caitlin and Sarah.

After a few photos and interviews with Ollie Cowan from the Champion and the presentation of the cheque for £900 to the shop, Chris decided to accept a lift from his mum and dad as the 24 miles had taken its toll on his feet. Kay, Karen, Reece, Lisa and Chris also made their way back to Church in cars and on the bus while me and Coco (and unbeknown to me, Jayne) walked the last 2 miles back to Church for tea and cakes supplied by Kirsty.

After a drink and cake we left the Church exhausted but happy to have finished the walk and raise nearly £1,000 for a charity that has helped me and many millions of other people live an active life despite the problems caused by Heart Disease.

On behalf of Chris and myself, I'd like to thank you for all your support.

Mike Owen, Chris Purcell and Coco the Dog.

P.S. I also finished another Sponsored Walk on May the 30th. Since the beginning of June 2014, I've been using an app on my phone to monitor how many miles I've been walking with Coco and set myself a target of completing 3,000 in a year. I started off the year relatively slowly (as I recovered from some heart problems in April/May 2014) but as the longer days arrived in 2015 I was averaging 12 miles of walking a day and thanks to the 26 mile walk for the BHF I passed my target just before the year had elapsed.

As 2015 had been designated by Darren Wright as a year of fundraising for Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research, I decided to set up a Just Giving page to raise money during my walk. My initial target was £100 but by the end of the year I'd raise a grand total of £465 for this very worthwhile charity.