

15th October 2020

Ups

“Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day’s journey take the whole day long?

From morn to night, my friend.”

Christina Rossetti, Up-Hill

When I walked *The West Highland Way* with my daughter Kathryn, we were well prepared for a week of difficult walking. We planned the 90+ miles from Milngavie near Glasgow to Fort William in the western highlands in stages over seven days. It was hard work, but the conclusion gave us a wonderful sense of achievement. I’d walked *The Ways* some years before, so I knew the hardest parts: Conic Hill by Loch Lomond on Day 2; the Black Mount round Rannoch Moor on Day 5; the Devil’s Staircase in Glencoe on Day 6. But I was *not* prepared for the start of the final day!

The track took us out of Kinlochleven, up a steep, rutted hill-track, before we joined the final stretch into Glen Nevis and on to Fort William. Half way up the hill – in the rain; with sore feet and tired legs; eaten alive by midges – I heard myself repeat Christina Rossetti’s plea: “Does the road wind up-hill *all* the way?” and cursed the response: “Yes, to the very end.”

The quotation came back to me yesterday when I listened to a news report of new localised Covid-19 restrictions affecting the people of Liverpool. One man who’d lost his job during the first lockdown, interviewed in his car, almost in tears, said, “You go up, and you go down again. You go up, and you go down again. Whatever’s next?”

The trek through the Covid-19 pandemic is, for him, a daily slog, never feeling he’s getting anywhere, barely surviving. My heart went out to him, and the thousands who will be feeling the same. I have no clever words. The road has to go up-hill all the way. The day’s journey will last ... the whole day long. “From morning till night, my friend.” Maybe another day will offer a walk that’s easier, or maybe it’ll be more of the same. But, hang in there, brother. Hang in there! There *are* people who understand your pain. And one of them is right here.

A prayer for today

God of my journey, on my trek through life, the road is hard; the climbs are steep.

Help me to survive today. From morn till night, be with me. Amen

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