

3rd October 2025

Walking

**"Walking has been one of the constellations
in the starry sky of human culture."**

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A history of walking*

Planning a funeral with a family, I had this request from a grandson. "We were wondering ... You see, grandad was a great walker. He did most of the Munros. Never at home of a weekend. So we were wondering if we could put his walking boots on top of the coffin." "Indeed you can!" I replied. "And would you like his rucksack and his walking pole too?" "No," he smiled, "the boots will be enough. After all, they did all the work."

In his book, *Walking Is Not a Sport: A philosophy of walking*, a Frenchman, Frédéric Gros, (in a translation by John Howe) says this:

Walking is the best way to go more slowly than any other method that has ever been found. To walk, you need to start with two legs. The rest is optional. If you want to go faster, then don't walk, do something else: drive, slide or fly ... And when you are walking, there is only one sort of performance that counts: the brilliance of the sky, the splendour of the landscape. Walking is not a sport.

How many folk do you see who're looking at the ground when they walk, as if keeping their head down will make them get to their destination quicker and with more purpose? And these days, look around you and clock all the people who're looking at their mobile phones while they're walking. No! Sorry! *Don't* look around you at the people on their mobile phones. Just look around you! Just *look*! Take in the brilliance of the sky; be amazed at the splendour of the landscape – even in our city streets; see things above you and around you that you haven't noticed before; and in the country, appreciate the hills, lochs and glens – like an old hill walker did.

Walking *isn't* a sport. Walking can be a philosophy, a way of life, a joy and a pleasure, "one of the constellations in the starry sky of human culture." And, of course, if the ability to walk is no longer available to you for whatever reason, can we not still enjoy the pleasure of any other of the myriads of constellations that might be around us?

Walking boots on top of a coffin at the Crematorium? Aye, though I reckon any old pair of walking shoes – or even a trusty walking-stick – would have done the job just as well.

A prayer for today

"Walk my paths", God says. "And appreciate the journey as you go."