

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting June 2019

A Solo Walk Across Africa - Fran Sandham

Report by Clive Barrett

The Chairman Roger Malvern welcomed everyone and introduced the speaker Fran Sandham whose talk was entitled “ A Solo Walk Across Africa”. The speaker had previously spoken to U3A members about the explorers Livingston and Stanley whom he admired, and his book “Traversa “ was available at the meeting. Obviously walking from one side of Africa to the other is a long hike, and near the end a local asked “ Why didn't you take the bus?”. Even at a young age he was fascinated with Africa, and prior to his adventure he worked in a book shop to raise funds. The lecture proved inspirational to the U3A audience, with humour at times, and a good use of the power point presentation.

The speaker, who with an air of excitement moved from west to east started on the so called treacherous Skeleton Coast ending in a slave town in Zanzibar. He averaged 26 miles per day, passing through Lusaka, capital of Zambia, and in Malawi he got lost in dense woods. Fran had no fitness training before the adventure except running down the Skeleton Coast before the trek. Along the journey he lost about three stone in weight, and looked as if he had walked across Africa at the finish!!!! He got to meet some venomous snakes, and lions in Mabibia, near a game reserve. Among the other threats were the chances of getting malaria, which at least Fran didn't get the until the end, also drunken drivers, road rage, and of course on a personal note--- blisters.

Of the local people he met the men regarded him as a hero, and the women mothered him. As well as a huge 100lbs in weight rucksack, walking sticks, he also wore a bandanna around his head and of course carried waterproofs. The entire distance of 3,500 miles took the best part of a year, and he only once thought of giving up when he was in the arid desert, but then he reached a small town. It was at this time that he was thinking of getting a carrying aid. . Thought of a trolley, then a donkey, but this proved a lost cause mainly because of the animal's behaviour and temperament----ultimately he ran off!!!! Then Fran got a demented mule, built “a donkey cart”, but after all these experiments he went back to basics of carrying his own gear. The speaker's power presentation brought out because of water the lush pastures, particularly the size and spectacle of Victoria Falls, Zambesi, and Lake Malawi. He found most officials very friendly and helpful rather than encountering corruption. Near the end of the journey in Zanzibar the rainy season had started, Fran got very hot and suffered heat stroke.

Reaching the end of the marathon hike caught him by surprise, he had a private reflective time, realised life wouldn't be as simple as before, and slept very soundly due to being so tired. His book “Traversa” has been heard of in China, and the summing up of his walk across Africa is detailed in the book. Fran Sandham was then pleased to answer questions from the very attentive audience. These included “ How long did it take you to settle back into normal life?”, what was the local food like, and what sort of footwear was used?. Were you not tempted to call a taxi, or catch a lift and go home? The Chairman Roger Malvern thanked the speaker and commented on Fran's confidence in setting off on such a walk, and relying on local support. Following the lecture the Chairman gave the in house announcements, including the forthcoming Charabanc trip to Bath, he announced that the Film group were having the summer off returning in September, plus a trip to

the National Arboretum Memorial in Staffordshire in October.

Next month on Monday July 8 at the Metropole Hotel at 10—30am the lecture is entitled “Conspiracy Theories” by the speakers Mark Watkins and Wilma Hayes.