

I woke at 5:30am and since I was all packed, I decided to leave Reigate by 6am driving for the first significant journey on my own in my new all electric car. I was headed to Dorset where two of my three children together with their families had arrived at the house we were renting, the day before. I planned to stop en route at Winchester to re-charge and to arrive at my destination before the household (which included three young children) had finished breakfast. The families were staying for the first three or four days of my stay before the four and five-year-old children needed to be back in their respective schools, whereas I intended to stay the week and walk to Durdle Door on the first day that I was left on my own. I knew the other days would be filled with happy memories building sand castles on the beach, kayaking, swimming and dozing.

And so, it was on the first Thursday after the second Corona-virus lock-down travel ban had been lifted, I woke and planned my dream-walk over a light breakfast. This was not going to be a strenuous long-distance hike through the sweat of the day; it was to be a gentle albeit steep, walk admiring the coastal views. My objective what was to drive to Lulworth Cove and thence walk to Durdle Door take some photos on the way and return. The weather looked good, warm with sunny spells, a steady breeze and not too hot. I packed my rucksack lightly with my water-bottle, an apple, a snack and my jersey, set the Satnav on the car and at 9:20am drove off silently into the countryside.

Arriving in the ample Lulworth carpark I had found a spot and before I had time to get out, my phone rang; it was already low on battery and I had no charger with me, but it lasted for the call duration. My daughter was feeling guilty for telling her four-year-old's teacher that morning that she had kept him from school for two days because he had a cold, when the truth was, she had felt the first family break in months took precedence over school. Now she wondered if she should just confess; but then was she wondering if this was just because it would help her feel better or would it help the situation? I tried to be ambivalent with her; clearly confession would break some of the teacher's trust in her, but could also help her to be straight next time, and truth was usually the best course of action. It brought back my own memories of similar dilemmas, but we left it at that. I got out the car donned my backpack and set off towards the first hill my mind filled with thoughts of social distancing and keeping my hands clean on gates and styles. It was only much later on my return journey that I remembered I hadn't thought to pay the car park!

The path wasn't too busy and I tried to pass or stand on the windward site of others, and take one or two breaks while taking a photograph of the view. I was fairly fit, nevertheless a couple of parties of much younger people easily overtook me. But I was content and enjoyed my pace. The sun was shining the breeze was pleasant and the wild flowers and insects buzzing.

It was not long before I reached the highest point and began the slow descent. As I came nearer, I noticed a small fleet of kayaks negating the rocks outcrops in the bay prior to the Door. I could now see the whole of that bay and noted the steep sides down from the bridge between the Door and the coastal path. I hadn't been there for over thirty years and had forgotten there was the bridge linking the two bays either side of the Door. Last time I came it was with my three young children and as we came into the bay, I had noted a nude sunbather quickly covering herself. There were no sunbathers today only the kayakers: but I wondered why one would sunbath naked in full view of the albeit distant coastal path. Back then we didn't have a kayak but we had a small leaky rubber dingy and the children and I were determined for adventure, so I swam and they paddled from the first to the second bay through the Door. They did well despite the waves and having done it once they wanted to do it again.

I came to the steps down to the bay that the Door opens on to. The steps hadn't been there some thirty years previous and I noticed that in the meantime stone steps had been built and fallen in, only to be replaced by the current timber ones. I recalled there were no steps when I last visited because I remember the family having to climb up the steep bank and particularly my then five-year-old son struggling to carry a large white prized cobble stone up the bank which he wanted to take home and refusing to discard it. Half way up I took pity on him and put it in my rucksack.

Now I had the problem of descending the steps while maintaining social distancing at least for my own sake. But grin and bear it, I got onto the beach and savoured walking the shingle and finding a perch in the cliff base where I could eat my snack and admire the waves breaking through the Door and the ships standing anchor out to sea. After a while more people descended and I decided to make my return trip but as I got up the kayak flotillas arrived and came though the door in dribs and drabs which was a nice serendipity for me. I stayed longer taking a number of photos, before picking my moment to climb back up the coastal path and head back to Lulworth Cove.

I was enjoying the relaxing and bracing day until I came in sight of the Cove and car park and remembered I hadn't bought a ticket. Well, I surmised I would either have to pay a fine or buy a ticket now. Arriving at the car I found no fine, so I decided I would investigate the ticket machine only to find it was one of those for which you need to pay by phone. Well, my phone had now died and so I decided there was nothing I could do and counted myself fortunate not to have to pay a fine, and I left the Cove and headed back to my holiday home. And I decided to join the National Trust.

The next day my daughter phoned, she hadn't said anything to my grandson's teacher the day before, but when he came home from school, she had asked him if he had talked to the teacher. "Yes," he said, "she asked me if I was feeling better and I said that I had not been sick but I enjoyed a nice time at the beach!" She then told me that she had now confessed to the teacher and apologised and promised to be always straight up front in future. I felt that was a happy outcome for all and we were all the wiser and stronger for our holiday!

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