

‘Praying the Keeills’.

Rhythm, meaning and experience on pilgrimage journeys in the Isle of Man

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of ‘the travelling being’ through the lens of pilgrimage walks in the Isle of Man in the British Isles. Focusing on pilgrimage offers a particular spiritually-inflected perspective on the experience of travel and associated meaning-making. The pilgrimage walks studied centre on the sites of small sixth to twelfth century chapels, known as *keeills*, which are scattered across the Manx landscape, and provide a focus for ecumenical reflection and celebration of Celtic Christian heritage. Participants’ experience of two different forms of pilgrimage walks are analysed using qualitative techniques, with reference to embodied and affective experience, mobilities, rhythm, meaning-making and belief. While all participants appreciated the experiences of walking in the landscape, companionship, heritage expertise, and time-space for reflection, individual sense of ‘journey’ and experience, including a sense of the onward journey or what was ‘taken home’, was deeply inflected by the presence or absence of belief. Pilgrimage narratives offer insight to the meanings ascribed to and derived from the experience of spiritually inflected mobilities and rhythms, as well as the arrhythmia pilgrimage can represent relative to secular worldviews, and the arrhythmia non-believers may experience and negotiate when participating in pilgrimage walks.

Keywords: keeills, walking, rhythm, pilgrimage, journey

ÁGRIP

Beðið við bænhústóftir: Taktur, merking og upplifun í pílagrímsferðum á Mön

Í þessari grein er kannað hvað það þýðir að ‘vera á ferðalagi’ með því að skoða pílagrímgöngur um eyna Mön á Bretlandseyjum. Með því að beina athyglinni að pílagrímsferðum fæst sértæk trúarleg sýn á ferðareynslu og merkingu ferðalagsins. Göngurnar á Mön snúast um rústir af litum bænhúsum sem voru reist á 6. til 12. öld og ganga nafninu *keeills*. Þau finnast á víð og dreif um eyjuna og bjóða upp á trúarlega ihugun og lofgjörð til arfleifðar keltneskrar kristni. Eigindlegum rannsóknaraðferðum var beitt til að greina upplifanir þátttakenda í tvenns konar pílagrímgöngum með tilliti til hvaða áhrif þær hefðu á fólk og tilfinningar þess, og hvaða hlut hreyfing, taktur, merking og trúarleg afstada ætti í slíkum upplifunum. Þátttakendurnir nutu þess að ganga um landslagið, nutu félagsskaparins, menningararfsins og þess að hafa tíma og rúm til að hugsa, en upplifanir af ferðinni sjálfri og þau áhrif sem fólk tók með sér heim voru ákaflega lituð af trú eða efa þátttakendanna. Sögur úr pílagrímsferðum gefa innsýn inn í þá merkingu sem gefin er slíkum ferðum, sem eru af trúarlegum rótum runnar, og þá upplifun sem fæst af því að taka þátt í þeim. Einnig má lesa úr þeim sitthvað um hinn trúfandi takt sem þátttaka í pílagrímsgöngum kallar fram hjá þeim sem ekki trúa.

Lykilord: Bænhús, göngur, taktur, pílagrímsferðir, ferðalag

INTRODUCTION: PILGRIMAGE WALKS AS AN EMBODIED PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

While a pilgrimage might be described loosely as a journey to what is considered to be a sacred place and/or with a sacred intention, as will be discussed below, faith

belief is not a prerequisite for completing a pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 1992; Coleman and Eade 2004; Morinis 1992). Equally, for faith adherents, one’s whole life might be understood as a ‘sacred journey’ (Dyas 2004) and while pilgrimage in the Western Christian tradition is often represented by

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the demands and challenges of the outer physical journey, it is the simultaneous entwined inner intellectual, emotional and spiritual journey which is considered the more significant (Dyas 2004). Alain de Botton (2003) famously notes in *The Art of Travel*, most travellers expect travel to change them, without realising they have brought ‘themselves’, with all their usual emotional baggage, attitudes and values, with them. Reflective and reflexive travellers, including pilgrims, see their journeys as an opportunity to shed or transform some of the baggage which constitutes the self. Furthermore, for pilgrims, the inner journey should continue beyond the end point destination (typically a shrine) and even the return home. Indeed, life beyond the pilgrimage and knowledge taken home to one’s community was at the heart of the ideal of medieval as well as present day pilgrimage (Dyas 2004). In addition to pilgrimage-based narratives and knowledge, what was ‘taken home’ may have included souvenirs of travel and objects deemed sacred by dint of their proximity to what was ‘holy’, but ultimately the pilgrim as travelling being aspires to develop or change spiritually – and hence in their practice – as a result of their travel.

For most of us, movement and travel are everyday activities, often so taken for granted by the able-bodied that they only become apparent when they require extra effort or cost or are hampered in some way. Movement is at the heart of most people’s experience of living, and this is extrapolated by Ingold and Vergunst (2008, 2) to the act of walking: “Walking is not just what a body *does*; it is what a body *is*”. We can critique this mobility-centric view of the world while recognising that everyday movements do have their own ontology, linking past and present, in Ingold and Vergunst’s (2008) terms, each of our steps is part of our life course, indeed, at its most

reductive, each step (like each breath) takes us closer to death.

Movement can be highly significant, whether as part of quotidian ritual or practice or extraordinary event or journey, significance being attributed through the ascription of meaning. “Movement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning ...” (Cresswell 2006, 6) and where movement contributes to this meaningful shaping of *social* time and space it is described as *mobility* (Cresswell 2006); mobilities being experienced through bodies and senses, inflected by place, practice, belief, emotion and affect, but also by the constraints and agencies afforded by socio-economic, cultural and political context, as well as physical capacities. Thus any study of movement and rhythm needs to be sensitive to context and aware that rhythms can follow the beat of conformity or alterity: While everyday rhythms speak of normed, possibly regulated, activities, these are “always only ever partial and susceptible to disordering by counter rhythms and arrhythmia” (Edensor 2010, 2). Cresswell (2006, 6-7) has argued that within the study of mobilities “[i]t is the issue of meaning that remains absent from accounts of mobilities in general, and because it remains absent, important connections are not made”. The pilgrimage accounts explored here provide insight to the ways in which this particular form of mobility is practised and *ascribed* meaning, as well as ways in which participants derive meaning through their practice and experience, in this case, specifically the experience of walking – and praying.

Walking is a particular form of mobility, with its own rhythm, which can be individual or collective. Although runners, horse riders or motorcyclists would challenge any sense of a walker’s monopoly of a fusion between body, mind and wider surroundings through motion, Ingold (2004) argues that, with reflexivity, walking can synthesise

locomotion and cognition. Rebecca Solnit (2002) has described this process as “The mind at three miles an hour”: “Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains” (Solnit 2002, 13) – this is clearly pertinent to the motivations and experiences of participants on pilgrimage walks.

Given that pilgrimage studies have tended to oscillate between a focus on places with fixed shrines or the mobilities of pilgrims, the ability of rhythmanalysis “to mediate between overdrawn, static reifications of place [and] hyperbolic accounts about spaces of flows” (Edensor 2010, 18) reflects the potential for reciprocal insights between pilgrimage studies and rhythmanalysis. Within analysis of walking and rhythm, purposive walking is frequently represented as constant, rapid, task-destination focused, in contrast to more discursive walking, however, in reality, purposive, discursive and conceptual/critical walking can all be combined in a single walk (Edensor 2010, 6) – and pilgrimage, at its most reflexive, can be argued to exemplify this combination par excellence. However, this walking and rhythm cannot be separated from the context where they take place: the landscape, rural or urban. As Wylie (2007) summarises, landscape is so much more than a material topography or a view, any perspective of landscape inevitably combines its materiality and the socialised perception of that materiality; “landscape is not only something we see, it is also a way of seeing things” (Wylie 2007, 7); furthermore, it is a site of inhabitation, life, action, practice, rhythm. In pilgrimage walks, as with other forms of embodied experience of landscape, the pilgrim encounters the landscape visually and materially, engaging with it kinetically, sensually and imaginatively, both seeing and becoming part of the picture, literally and metaphorically marking and being marked by it. Whether it is through the diurnal

rhythm of sea tides, the flows of commuting traffic, or night and day; or those of seasonal shifts or annual events, landscapes are inescapably shaped by rhythms (Jones 2010). There is a constant ongoing confluence of landscape and rhythm, of which regular pilgrimage is a part; and in turn religious life and practice are often grounded in the rhythms of Sabbaths, holy days and patterns of observance. Thus both landscape and rhythm can be seen to mediate between static reified notions of place and the dynamic flows of mobilities, including those places and mobilities experienced through and shaped by pilgrimage. Equally, pilgrims’ accounts of their journey offer a rich opportunity for the exploration of the rhythms, arrhythmia, meanings and emotions in pilgrimage narratives, offering insight to the meanings of spiritually inflected mobilities and rhythms, a perspective given little attention within wider studies of mobilities and rhythms to date.

The next section outlines the significance of pilgrimage sites as visitor destinations, followed by an outline of the advent of recent pilgrimage walks in the Isle of Man and detailed analysis of participant accounts, with particular reference to outer physical and inner spiritual/ reflective journey, embodied experience, reading the landscape as life metaphor, as spiritual agent, lifecycle, rhythm and arrhythmia.

PILGRIMAGE: DESTINATION, JOURNEY AND VISITORS

Faith-inspired travel is “one of the most significant types of tourism in the world today by volume and prevalence” (Timothy and Olsen 2006, 276) and pilgrimage is an important constituent of that arena: “contemporary pilgrimages draw together the largest regular assemblages on earth” (Morinis 1992, 1). Religious pilgrimage has been experiencing what Justine Digance (2003, 143) describes as “a marked resur-

gence” around the globe in the last few decades, with numbers increasing by twenty times in post war years (Stausberg 2011) and European pilgrimage centres such as Fatima (Portugal), Santiago (Spain) and Lourdes (France) all attracting between 4-5 million visitors per year, making them “among the most powerful travel destinations of their respective countries” (Stausberg 2011, 57). In Paris, the cathedrals of Sacré Cœur and Notre Dame attracted 6 million and 13.5 million visitors per annum respectively in the 1990s (Shackley 2001); but on a global scale these numbers are dwarfed by those visiting pilgrimage sites in India and Japan (Stausberg 2011). Defining religious tourists as distinct from ‘regular’ tourism can be fraught, indeed distinctions between tourist and pilgrim have attracted much debate (see for example Turner and Turner 1978; Morinis 1992; Coleman and Eade 2004; Dyas 2004), but by comparison, there has been very limited engagement with and understanding of the “actual interface between heritage, religion and tourism” (Stausberg 2011, 11). I would add landscape to that list: analysis of pilgrimage practices large and small has much to contribute to understanding the interface of landscape, heritage, religion and tourism/travel.

Within Western Christian denominations, pilgrimage has largely been a Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic practice, indeed, Protestant pilgrimage has been described as an “apparent oxymoron” (Coleman 2004, 45), given post-Reformation opposition to pilgrimage practices which were seen as theologically redundant and widely corrupted. Yet, increasing participation in pilgrimage by Protestant Christians has been a significant part of the wider growth of contemporary pilgrimage in Europe, both in terms of numbers and destinations. These include a growing number travelling the Camino de Santiago, but also those revived in Lutheran countries such as St Olav’s Way in Norway.

This has been described in theological terms as a “quite remarkable” (Stausberg 2011, 61) promotion of pilgrimage by the Lutheran state church to sites of pre-Reformation pilgrimage, notably Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, one of the most important pre-Reformation pilgrimage sites in Europe. After 40 years of visits by Swedish pilgrims, in the 1990s the church of Norway formally undertook to promote Nidaros, working with local government, the tourism sector and local history associations, resulting in a number of pilgrimage routes e.g. from Oslo to Nidaros. In popular discourse, the new routes are framed in terms of searching for the religious roots of personal and national identities, as an exploration not only of the outer, but also of ‘inner landscapes’, part of individuals’ “biographical project” (Stausberg 2011, 62).

As Stausberg (2011, 59) notes, “[n]ew pilgrimages and pilgrimage centres keep on emerging” and my focus here is on the recent development of a small scale Christian pilgrimage in the Isle of Man, located in the centre of the British Isles in the Irish Sea. Pilgrimage walks on the Isle of Man can be seen as tapping the spiritual aspects of the island’s landscape and cultural heritage (which sit at the heart of the Island’s current niche tourist offering). While, to date, these walks are dominated by residents, they have attracted a modest number of participants from the UK, Ireland and North America, so have the potential for attracting visitors, who, regardless of self-definition, might be described as ‘tourists’ for the purposes of economic accounting.

PRAYING THE KEEILLS: PILGRIMAGE WALKS IN THE ISLE OF MAN

The Isle of Man’s faithscape has been dominated by Protestant Christianity since the seventeenth century, but in recent years it has developed a series of pilgrimage walks,

an activity more typically associated with the non-Protestant churches and with groups from the Island travelling elsewhere. The focus of emerging pilgrimage practice is on the remains of the tiny sixth to twelfth century chapels known as *keeills*, of which there are over 200 archaeological remains identified across the island, with about 35 having identifiable foundations and footings (See figure 1). A few of these structures have been used for occasional worship, e.g. an annual outdoor Roman Catholic Eucharist, informal services by Protestant churches, and visits by those interested in Celtic or alternative spirituality, but have come to greater attention within the churches and non church-going population through an event called ‘Praying the Keeills’, which sought to draw on the keeills as a ‘spiritual resource’. Praying the Keeills (PTK; often referred to more informally as ‘Keeills Week’) grew out of a bishop-led Anglican

initiative, but quickly became ecumenical, led by a voluntary group of clergy and laity. It centres on a week of walks to, and worship at, the keeills during May, and has been held annually since 2006. From the outset the programme was designed to accommodate all ages and mobilities, intending to include all who were willing to “go on a journey” (Interview, Bishop Graeme Knowles 2007). Praying The Keeills might be seen as a ‘post-modern’ take on pilgrimage. It is firmly grounded in the core shared beliefs and practices of participating denominations and located in a distinctive locale, which is linked historically and in the present day to wider regional/ global movements, but it is deliberately fluid and informal, with each day’s walk and worship freestanding; it welcomes all, focuses on individual reflection and experience, and does not require prior or complete commitment to the whole programme. It attracts mem-



Figure 1 Keeill foundations at Llag ny Killee (photo: Avril Maddrell).

bers of different churches and participants who are not affiliated to a church or any religious institution. Although it attracts visitors from outside the island, it is primarily run by locals for locals, and its eight day published programme allows people to ‘drop-in’ or ‘opt-out’, reflecting interest, other commitments and the weather, meaning that numbers attending on any given day might vary between 20 and 100.

In this paper I am drawing on data from PTK participants in May 2010 and 2011, as well as from the related June 2010 Isle of Man pilgrimage holiday, which incorporated a number of keeills (note how ‘pilgrimage holiday’ conflates ‘pilgrim’ and ‘tourist’). The latter was organised by the not-for-profit Christian holiday company *Journeying*, with one of the two leaders drawn from the PTK organising committee. Data collected was largely qualitative and included in-depth interviews with organisers/leaders, 40 research postcard responses¹, six written/photo diaries, three each from PTK and the Journeying pilgrimage walk; I also draw on my own participant observation diary. It merits note that two thirds of PTK participants were female and this was reflected in the research postcards returned and volunteer photo-diarists. However, in addition to the leaders, the Journeying holiday group was made up of three women, all of whom volunteered to keep photo-diaries, and two men, who completed research postcards at the end of the week; the latter inevitably provided much less detailed accounts of their experience, relative to the women’s photos and diaries. For myself, I grew up on the Isle of Man, and was able to draw on my knowledge of its landscape, as well as networks of family

and church, so in many ways this research was part of my own pattern of return and connection to ‘home’.

Moving and being moved: pilgrimage walks in the IOM

Pilgrimage journeys can be pursued in isolation, but are more typically a collective undertaking. This collectivity can be experienced through the shared experience of walking:

[W]alking is a profoundly social activity: that in their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others. Social relations are not enacted in situ but are paced out along the ground” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 1),

but for pilgrims there is more than this. A central aspect of pilgrims’ social relations is that of shared belief and purpose, with the rhythms of any pilgrimage being shaped by the worship or ritual as much as the demands of the topography, e.g. the pilgrimage punctuated by monastic offices or the Muslim call to prayer. The sense of equality before God and the liminoid qualities of the pilgrimage time-space led Turner and Turner (1978), based on an extensive study of Lourdes, to describe the particular social relations of pilgrim groups as *communitas*, whereby individuals are liberated from normal social status and responsibilities to create new bonds and a collective sense of belonging, as well as providing a map for the reform of post-pilgrimage society (Eade 2000). In practice, normative constraints are usually experienced and *communitas* as both free association and long-term driving force has been critiqued as romantic, but despite this, the concept has had a “powerful im-

¹ Unable to survey participants, research postcards were distributed to PTK participants on three days in 2010 and 2011; it asked for some brief indication of demographics and posed a key research question for the wider project: “What has been your experience of ‘Praying the Keeills events and has landscape played a part in that experience?” Postcards were stamped, addressed and completed on a voluntary basis.

part” on pilgrimage studies (Eade 2000, xx), perhaps because it nonetheless captures something of the shared experience and aspirations of pilgrimage.

The two following short extracts from walkers’ postcard responses illustrate a number of significant elements of these pilgrimage walks: firstly, both the visual aesthetics and challenges of the material the landscape; secondly, the significance of co-presence with others, as sources of social interaction, or knowledge and practice; and thirdly, a sense of spiritual experience/proximity to the Divine:

I have felt close to God as we have worshipped at the keeills and walked together in this beautiful island (PTK Postcard 3, 2010, female, 46–55, Methodist).

The whole experience was a very moving and spiritual one. We met wonderful people, went to spectacular places and learnt much in the process... (PTK Postcard 3, 2011, male, 36–45, Methodist).

Others referred to the pleasure in visiting new places, or seeing familiar places afresh, as well as the opportunity to “take time out” and to

escape the hustle and bustle of life and remind ourselves of the marvellous works of God’s Creation... (PTK Postcard 4 2010, female, 26–35, Methodist).

Interestingly, these comments were all reported by residents of the Island, people who had not travelled far in terms of distance, but who, nonetheless, had been ‘moved’ by their experience.

While the outward aspects of pilgrimage walks were shared by participants, inevitably, as with any group of travellers, individual experiences differed, reflecting each participant’s own contexts and positionalities. As one Journeying diarist noted:

Photo 33. Looking back to start of path to Eary Cusblin ... you need to push upward (toil) to see the view from the top (blessing) ... The pilgrim’s path ... we continue to journey, in groups or alone and although

we walk the same path, for each one the experience is unique’ (Journeying walk Photo diary, Mary, Roman Catholic, 2010).

For example, walk leaders, for whom PTK week was the culmination of months of preparation and planning, explained that when it was their turn to lead, they were unable to focus fully on their own experience when preoccupied with the practicalities and responsibilities of the walk and worship. Within the participants there was a core group who attended each day’s walk and worship, while others only participated one or two days, or could only attend evening or weekend events outside normal working hours; some attended with partners or as part of a group (e.g. the Minister’s Fellowship), others attended on their own; some were deeply embedded in the dense social networks of the Island, others knew few if any of their fellow walkers at the outset of the day. This variety and fluidity contrasted with the Journeying holiday group, who, with the exception of one leader, were all visitors to the island, and undertook an ongoing and broadly linear journey covering the length of the island over seven days, lodging, cooking and eating together along the way, allowing time and space for more sustained embodied movement, social interaction and spiritual engagement. That is, the sort of sustained journey and community more typically associated with pilgrimage. Allowing for these differences, the following discussion outlines and analyses some of the shared and varying experiences, reflections, meanings and rhythms recorded by those on pilgrimage walks in the Isle of Man.

Lifecycle, past and present

Numerous walkers reported attending Praying the Keeills each year, as part of an ongoing spiritual praxis:

This is the third year I’ve attended. I find it very inspiring. The company on the walk is great and the

worship at the keills is fantastic (PTK Postcard 2, 2010, male, 46–55, Church of England).

For one couple, participation in Keeills Week has become part of a much-anticipated annual cycle of return to the Island, which speaks of community, *communitas*, landscape and heritage:

We look forward to coming back to the Isle of Man every spring for the opportunity to meet with old friends and new acquaintances to walk the beautiful countryside and pray together in the places that were holy to our Celtic forbears so many years ago ... How wonderful to be in the countryside with all of the other pilgrims (PTK Photo Diary, Doug, 66–75, Methodist, 2010).

This quote also hints at a common observation made by many of the pilgrims, that of continuity with, or following in, the footsteps and prayers of those who built and worshipped at the keills – as Rebecca Solnit (2002, 1) notes: “roads [and footpaths] are a record of those who have gone before”.

As a historian, I ponder the sense of continuity of standing with others in a place where generations of people have stood for centuries past. They're unknowable now, except for 'Juan the priest', but it's as close as we can get. In the case of Saturday, we were seeing the hills around us as the earliest people at the keill saw them. (PTK Postcard 26, 2010, female, 66–75, Church of England [by affiliation but non-believing]).

'[photo] Time for prayer and reflection at Maughold keill site, and remember all those Christians who have prayed and worshipped here before us and those who will come in the future' (PTK Photo Diary, 2010 Alison, 26–35, Methodist).

It was a profound experience to touch with Christians from centuries ago and with Christians of a variety of denominations from the Island and afar as we prayed together (PTK Postcard 1, 2010, female, 66–75, Roman Catholic).

The sense of the old monks wandering about these British Isles is so very real to me and it makes my experience heightened (PTK Postcard 7, male, 66–75, Methodist).

Several respondents linked their experience of the pilgrimage walks to their memories of their earlier lives/selves, including three who made reference to re-living or remembering aspects of childhood experience. Two former school friends, now retired and living in England, gave very different perspectives on change in their lives. The first combined familiarity with the land due to family connection, with the novelty of visiting the keill free from the obligations, responsibilities – and charges – of her previous career as a school teacher:

As [X] is my mother's family farm I am very familiar with the territory and as a teacher 20 years ago at a Primary School nearby, it was a relief to visit the site without boards of kids! (PTK Postcard 9, 2010, female, 66–75, Church of England).

For her friend it was a poignant reminder of her youth on the Island, as well as an awareness of how her new-found faith gave her a different perspective and sense of personal change and development.

Quite a personal experience as I was revisiting places not seen for many years. Also my companions were friends from that period, so it was quite nostalgic. At that time I was not a Christian, so the new visits had an added dimension, a sense of having grown personally. (PTK Postcard 16, 2010, female, 66–75, Evangelical).

Thus, the pilgrimage walks can be identified as part of an annual calendar, individual life cycle, and the longer ebbs and flows of faith practice and place-temporality across history.

Embodied journey and journey as metaphor

[photo] Footpath – the path of life we are all travelling' (Adele, Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Quaker) (figure 2)

[Photo 26 grass labyrinth outside Peel cathedral; labyrinths have long been used as a simulacrum for



Figure 2 Footpath as metaphor for life's journey (Photo: Avril Maddrell).

pilgrimage] 'labyrinth ... life/ journeys take many twists and turns.' (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Mary, 56–64, Roman Catholic)

Having been invited simply to photograph and make note of those things which were 'significant or meaningful' on their journey, perhaps it was inevitable that, given the nature, duration and 'billing' of the Journeying pilgrimage walk, each of the three diarists on this walk recorded reflections on the nature of journeying and lessons learned from their pilgrimage walk. Their informal agape service on Sunday evening also invited reflection on the metaphors of sand (desert) and water experiences, depending on individuals' needs, and these themes of

desert and water recurred in photographs and commentaries, frequently linked to Biblical references or allusions. Two of the three noted their need for both the solitude and contemplation of the 'desert' and the reviving refreshment of 'water':

I chose both [sand and water] as I felt that they are both important elements in our Christian journeys [photo 9] Flowing stream – many Biblical references – 'the water of life', 'by the rivers of Babylon' (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Adele, 66-75, Quaker).

For one diarist on the Journeying walk who had never participated in a pilgrimage walk before, there was a strong sense of

doing something new, being at the beginning of something and being curious as to how it would unfold. For her this was not a familiar part of her faith-practice, but as the following extract illustrates, her sense of life as walking with God was deeply engrained as was her practice of reflexivity.

Beginnings – meeting the group for the first time – from N, E, S & West, Newcastle, London, Hampshire, Ireland and Canada – for a common purpose – pilgrimage on the Isle of Man.

Eating together – discussing the notion of pilgrimage ... what will our pilgrimage be like? Will it have purpose?

I would like to be inwardly refreshed on this walking week. To have time & opportunity to draw closer to God – to walk with Jesus – to be a companion along the way.

Worshipping together. We invited God to come to us, to speak to us through His word, the Bible, and to

dwell with us. (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Kate, 46–55, Evangelical Baptist)

The idea of journey was further storied through her photo diary, especially her first and last photos which acted as ‘bookends’ to frame her experience, thereby contrasting her new boots and equipment at the beginning of the journey with her worn boots and artefacts collected along the way, symbolic of both her embodied material journey and the intertwined inner spiritual experience of that journey in and through the landscape (see figure 3):

[Photo 1] ‘Boots, socks, hat, bag – clean, unused, untried on this journey ...

[Final photo] Dirty boots and socks

Walking stick, cut from holly bush in Laxey [near beginning of journey]

Favourite stone from Laxey beach Shell from Fleshwick beach. [near end of journey] (ibid.)



Figure 3 Kate’s rucksack, hat, boots etc. at the beginning and end of the Journeying pilgrimage walk. (Photo: courtesy of Kate).

Note the shell and staff, long emblematic of pilgrimage, as well as the slate stone with quartz veining in the shape of a cross, a metonym for Christ and salvation.

Embodied experience of the landscape was commonly read hermeneutically, as metaphor for life, including spiritual life. As Solnit notes, pilgrimage “takes hold of that image and makes it concrete, acts it out with the body and the imagination in a world whose geography has been spiritualised” (Solnit 2002, 50).

The changing landscape, rough paths, moorland, cliff top, meadows, valleys helped to shape my understanding of the journey in my life in the last 18 months... (Journeying Postcard 1, 2010, male, 46–55, Church of England).

Climbing higher and higher reminded me of reading Hind’s Feet on High Places by Hannah? [Hurnard] about the Christian life and overcoming obstacles, or Dante’s Divine Comedy – we keep climbing out of the mud and mire to reach the glorious summit – but to return to the earth (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Adele, 66–75, Quaker).

[Photo 4] Stile – journeys/ life have narrow places, barriers to be negotiated ... [hard going] Our walk was mainly downhill – hard going on rough ground or a stony path – it felt at times like a desert experience ... We had anticipated reaching the Millennium (Monks’) Walk and when we reached it it was a disappointment because it was so difficult.

Sometimes life is like this. Think of Brown wanting to be Prime Minister for so long – and then when he finally achieved it – he seemed to find it a struggle. (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Kate, 45–56, Evangelical Baptist).

While the informal programme for each day’s Journeying walk included times of collective worship and individual prayer and contemplation, individuals took opportunities to enhance their experience and focus (as was also observed during the PTK walks). One diarist recorded how she opted for protracted silence one day, the separation facilitating greater awareness of surroundings and self:

[after prayers on top of the mountain and 15 minutes silent walking] I enjoyed that so much I decided I wanted to spend the whole of today’s hike in silence to better appreciate my surroundings. It was magical. I walked a little apart from the others lost in my own awareness of things like the sound of the skylarks high above and the bleating of sheep and lambs all around. The walking was lovely too [photo] over springy heather and [bilberry] bushes and clumps of grass, not too steep and with terrific views to Snaefel and other hills and mountains and valleys.

For a while I did Hara walking, balancing my pole in both hands and concentrating on my belly and legs. Memories of Eckhart House. I was aware of being apart from the group, while still a member – it felt a bit lonely at times, but the silence allowed me to be one with nature and I was glad not to listen to or take part in what was often very banal chatter [the next day] I took a lot of photos today. I didn’t feel particularly spiritual or in touch with nature like I did yesterday, but I enjoyed the day very much.... (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Adele, Quaker, 66–75)

As Solnit notes,

the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or simulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it (Solnit 2002, 5–6).

If ‘flow’ is “typified by alternating self-consciousness and unreflexive states” (Edensor 2010, 14), then Adele’s account above surely epitomises ‘flow’, with its heightened sense of ‘mindfulness’ of present experience, sensitivity to the surrounding environment, awareness of links between past and present practice, alternating with less intense experiences. As the above illustrates, Adele also gave the most eloquent account of the rhythms of emotion and affect in her life, including grief, corporeal pleasure, spiritual fulfilment and reliving of childhood experiences, illustrating how emotion is associated with

and triggered by particular places and evocations (Davidson et al 2005; Maddrell 2009a; 2009b) and how “Motion and emotion ... are kinaesthetically intertwined” (Sheller 2004, 221):

[anniversary of deceased mother's birthday] A very emotional moment looking at a grave of several members of a family up at the top beside a tower built by the same man [Corrin's Tower] ...

[Photo 28] Mourne Mountains – looking across at my own country – a warm happy feeling. Also mountains represent endurance...

Great buzz walking today; first up Cronk [ny Arrey Laa] mountain. I love the buzz I get from climbing mountains, both the physical and the spiritual

[upper deck bus journey back to Douglas] Like being a child again sitting on top and admiring the wonderful views ... (Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Adele, Quaker, 66–75).

Transformation is at the heart of Christian theology, and while less explicit than the penitential pilgrimages of the medieval period, the principle of change is implicit in contemporary Christian pilgrimage and part of the ongoing rhythm of Christian faith and practice. For some this may centre on physical, mental or emotional healing, but for many believers it focuses on a closer relationship with God. One Journeying diarist was particularly sensitive to what she wanted to ‘take home’ from her pilgrimage experience. In addition to collecting artefacts along the way, recording Celtic patterns to reproduce in quilting, and being keen to keep a copy of her diary completed for this research, she also had a clear sense of what she had gained spiritually through her journey and that she wished to retain:

I took a picture looking up the hill at the ‘mountain’, remembering the evening hymn: ‘I lift my eyes to the quiet hills at the end of a busy day’. The sort of picture to use as a screensaver on my pc to bring the calm and quiet into the home and to remind me to slow down and take time out with God.’(Journeying

walk Photo diary 2010, Kate, 45-56, Evangelical Baptist)

The photo, to be used as a frequently seen screensaver on her computer, was to act not merely as a mnemonic, a prompt to memory, but also a prompt to action – or rather to reduced action and greater spiritual engagement. Her photographs were also discursively framed as a prompt to return. Many rhythms and journeys are circular and cyclical rather than linear, and engagement in and through places often prompt revisiting those places rather than a crossing off the list and moving on.

Photograph looking backwards – covered our journey yesterday Peel to Eary Cushlin – included the house.

A lovely shot – to remember the place – Niarbyl – where I would like to return and spend time to explore the beach and coast – opportunity to do all the possible walks from Eary Cushlin’

(Journeying walk Photo diary 2010, Kate, 45–56, Evangelical Baptist)

As Ingold and Vergunst (2008, 17) point out, “the long walk of life is not a unidirectional progress from start to finish”, and other visitors shared the desire to return to the Island and continue their praxis:

Now I know the location of some keeills, on future visits I will be able to add my prayers to those of previous ages.’ (PTK Postcard 16, 2010, female, 66–75, Evangelical)

Not surprisingly, residents whose lives are embedded in the locality made less reference to ‘return’, for them ‘seeing things anew’ was a more common response:

Appreciate details lost when you whizz by in a car (PTK postcard 15, 2011, male, 56–65, Church of England).

Arrhythmia and disrupting dominant rhythms

Another aspect to the mobilities and rhythms flagged in the introductory dis-

discussion is that of arrhythmia, and I would like to make two points here in relation to disrupted rhythms or being ‘out of step’. The first is to suggest that the very undertaking of pilgrimage may be seen as out of step with mainstream, largely secularised Western society; furthermore while some contemporary pilgrimage practices might appear highly regulated and commercialised, some can be seen as a counter rhythm or disruption to everyday life and the dominant rhythms of capitalist society. While not wishing to romanticise these pilgrimage walks on the Isle of Man, and recognising that participants from off the island buy ferry or plane tickets and may occupy rooms in guest houses, Praying the Keeills is non-denominational and non-commercial (and Journeying a not-for-profit company). The pilgrimage walks are led by volunteers, printing overheads are funded by donations and there is no commodification of the walks: no t-shirts or souvenirs beyond the memories of experiences, worn boots, a prayer sheet, shell or pebble picked up along the way – and photos to encapsulate that experience and one way to ‘take it home’. These walks could be marketed aggressively and commoditised, but as yet the event remains grounded in voluntarism and gifting, and the Manx tourism authorities appear reluctant to promote an explicitly religious event. Ironically the very lack of denominational label, official status, or dedicated funding, as well as reliance on a loose group of volunteers, could make the future of Praying the Keeills vulnerable.

Secondly, participant responses also illustrate a different sort of arrhythmia within the community of participants, those who share the external rhythm of the walk but keep a different internal rhythm. It is widely recognised that religious pilgrimages can attract those who avoid or even reject institutionalised religion, “because of its capacity to provide a way of dealing with individual

needs without commitment to organised traditions...” (Reader 2007, 226). Praying the Keeills walks have attracted people “who wouldn’t darken the door of church” (Interview Phil Craine 2010), and some of these participants’ experiences underscore Lund’s (2008, 98) point with regard to the San Sebastian Easter procession,

It is ... evident that although the movement performed in the procession is one in pace, rhythm and direction, particular narratives still make themselves apparent through the various ways in which people take part.”

One PTK participant’s reflection illustrated the tension she felt between her sense of participation and separation and how this was, at least in part, reconciled through her response to the Celtic prayers, which synthesised the dichotomy between her physical presence/ participation and her ‘absence’ of belief:

I attend more for the keeills than for the praying. In fact I feel something of a fraud during the prayer sessions, but I am, I hope, respectful of the sincerity of the prayers offered.... Though I don’t, can’t, respond to the religious elements of the prayers, I often respond to the sheer poetry of the words, especially the old Celtic prayers ... (Postcard 26, 2010, female, 66–75, Church of England [by affiliation but non-believing]).

As Jiron (2010, 140) notes,

The body is sensitive to the rhythms lying outside of it, the multiple and diverse rhythms that are captured by the senses, and also performs in accordance with the various rhythms and situations it faces.

For this and other respondents, their experience is part of the whole, a welcomed presence in the group, but they are walking to a different inner beat than those who walk in faith. However, they may not be alone, just as commentators have noted the permeable boundary between ‘pilgrim’ and ‘tourist’ in religious cultural centres or along pilgrimage routes, the same permeability and two-way

slippage must be recognised in relation to ‘believer’ and ‘non-believer’: for many, belief is better represented as a dynamic continuum rather than a dichotomy with a fixed divide (Maddrell 2009a). Other participants who identified themselves as believers acknowledged experiencing challenges to their faith, e.g.:

The landscape definitely played a role in the atmosphere yesterday. We were surrounded by Manannan’s mist but our hill remained clear and still, and it felt as though we alone had sunshine. A rock in the bay that kept disappearing with the waves, then appearing again reminded me that faith may be lost to me at times but is always there. (PTK Postcard 9, 2010, female, 66–75, Church of England).

Thus individual faith itself can be seen to have its own ebbs and flows, with times of more and less secure faith interleaved.

CONCLUSION

The mobility turn within the social sciences has been useful in re-examining the nature of pilgrimage, particularly the outer physical journey, as an embodied practice, walking and rhythm, what Edensor (2010, 4) describes as rhythms “folded in and through the permeable body”, and how these link to the inner spiritual/ emotional journey. Likewise, analysis of pilgrim accounts sheds light on the way in which meaning is given to particular mobilities and practices. The role of movement and rhythm can cause the walker simultaneously to separate from and still the claims of everyday life, while ‘speeding up’ or energising the body. It can facilitate the spatial and psychological separation from everyday concerns and occupations, which in turn make space for protracted fellowship and reflection. Several respondents/ interviewees referred to the juxtaposition of movement (walking), co-presence and opportunities for solitude, accessing the relative quiet of rural/coastal landscapes and inner ‘stillness’, allowing them to focus on the spiritual, as well as

the inspirational landscape. The travelling being on ecumenical pilgrimage walks in the Isle of Man has been shown to walk to a number of different rhythms, resulting from, and in, different meanings and experiences. For both believers and non-believers, the aesthetics of landscape, time-space for reflection, the value of good companions, scholarship and food, were widely appreciated. For the faith pilgrim the sense of travelling towards or closer with God was strong, as were the hermeneutics of the journey and landscape:

[Photo of keeill in St Maughold’s church yard] ‘... foundations remain in spite of time passed, and the Lord enhances by scattering daisies (as I journey I must remember to look for the enhancements big and small).’ (Journeying walk Photo diary, Mary, Roman Catholic, 2010).

In this Isle of Man case study, while some reported finding the keeills themselves numinous ‘thin places’ where they experienced a particular sense of God’s presence, far more pilgrims reported drawing close to God through the landscape, environment and worship. Pilgrimage, mobilities and rhythm analysis have much to offer each other, but understanding the meaning-making in and through pilgrimage praxis, and the long term rhythms of thought, belief and practice this may generate, require an understanding of the theology - or rejection of theology - which underpins it, as well as personal and social contexts. More such studies will provide a richer understanding of pilgrimage in different countries, faiths and denominations, as well as new and challenging perspectives on mobilities, rhythms and their meanings.

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