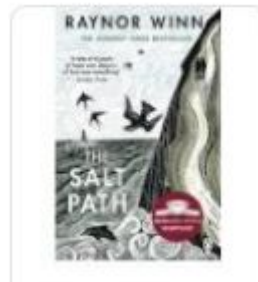


Raynor Winn *The Salt Path*



Alix

I read this book in two stages half of it a few months ago when it was recommended to me and then stopped as had other books to read and resumed this month.

I quite enjoyed it and was impressed by the married couple Ray and Moth (never did find out why he was called that!!). They seemed to have a real strength to decide to walk the 630 mile South West Coastal Path from Somerset to Dorset via Devon and Cornwall. Moth had been diagnosed with a terminal degenerative brain disease CBD which appeared to be slow progressing as he has already had it for 6 years.

Moth and Ray had lived in Wales and brought up their two children and then lost all their money in an investment scheme which was run by a lifelong friend. The Scheme failed and after many court battles they lost all their money and their home.

After packing a few goods and their camping equipment they set off on their long walk. They had a very small amount of money weekly and had to live mainly on noodles and the occasional pasty or treat and begged hot water from cafes along the route. How they stood the conditions especially as Moth was not well is hard to believe. They got filthy dirty and seemed to have most of their baths in the sea and washing their clothes infrequently. They did have the occasional respite like a stolen night at a campsite where they were able to have a shower and not be detected and to leave early morning.

They met people along the way who were also wild camping and they became friends. They also were offered a roof over their heads in exchange for doing jobs on a friends farm but they missed the wild free life.

Moth did not die and it seemed that they had got their lives back on track. Moth was going to start a University Course and Ray continued with long distance walking and also wrote the book. There is a sequel to this book called "The Wild Silence" when they are offered a house in Cornwall where they live with their dog.

Not sure whether I will read it yet.

Angela

This book promised to be an interesting true life account of disaster, difficulty, struggle and the great outdoors, and as far as that went it delivered. I found myself wanting to know what was going to happen next and what difficulties Winn and her partner might find during their travels along the 630 mile coastal path from Minehead to Poole. In that respect it was a real page turner and obviously many agree, given that it spent nearly two years on *The Sunday Times* bestsellers list. However, I felt that the actual writing was disappointingly prosaic, the descriptions seemed to simply follow one event with another and I can't say that I felt personally touched by the atmosphere of nature and the weather although they were obviously major factors. Also, some of the points about the couple's circumstances seemed laboured and repetitive at times and I felt maybe

some of the appeal of the book leans towards the voyeuristic. I suppose the writing's inelegance is not a surprise given that this was Winn's first book. But anyway I have her second book *The Wild Silence* and will definitely be reading that in the future.

Ann

This is a story of a couple who lose their home through trusting the financial advice of a friend and their subsequent struggle to survive. They learn on top of this disaster that Moth, Ray's partner of 32 years, had been diagnosed with a terminal illness CBD (corticobasal degeneration) a rare degenerative brain disease. First thought for me was that Ray had a screw loose, as she then decides they should walk the 630 miles of the South West Coast Path, sleeping wild, even though their doctor had advised that Moth should not do undue exercise! Although you might imagine from this decision that Ray had decided to kill Moth off quickly, you realise she must have been in denial, an emotion with which I am all too familiar and understood their need to escape to that better life somewhere, rather in the manner of Agatha Christie, when she mysteriously disappeared to Harrogate when her husband left her for his secretary.

I was enamoured with their adventures, their amazing persistence against extreme odds, lack of money, lack of food, extreme fatigue, the weather; but passion sustained them. I loved their descriptions of nature and the wildness of it all. I was reminded of many happy holidays in Cornwall and noted they passed the recent current G7 Summit location at Carbis Bay Hotel, near St. Ives. I realise from their day to day existence, as demonstrated by our last book, ("Where the Crawdads Sing") that I needn't eat as much as I do to stay alive and healthy!

It was a lovely book. I was there enjoying their adventures and gasping at their extraordinary capacity to suffer and work unbelievably hard to survive. The only mystery is, did Moth really have this dreaded disease and was the doctor's diagnosis correct? Of course, miracles do happen, and Moth survived the workload of a very fit man. Mind over matter perhaps and a happy ending.

Anna

I very much enjoyed this book, even if at times I felt buffeted by the wind and tide, so vivid were the descriptions! On the front of my paperback edition is a quote from The Sunday Times, which can hardly be bettered: "A tale of triumph: of hope over despair; of love over everything". In addition to describing the long walk which Raynor and her husband undertook, the book also tells us of her personal journey from furious refusal to accept the loss of their home and of her husband's terrible diagnosis, to eventual acceptance, and a moving joint decision to mingle both their ashes so that they can be together again in the end.

The hard struggle to complete the walk - with Moth's health changing as they go, never enough money, often hardly anything to eat, their equipment inadequate - is enlivened by the people they meet: soothsayers, fellow backpackers, Australian grass strimmers, and people who become life-long friends. They also meet plenty of folk who put Raynor's back up: I should think she could be quite prickly in person! Beware box-tickers, boastful charity walkers, and jobsworths! Moth's quiet determination and unfailing courtesy balances Raynor's need to push on and keep her demons at bay - until she finally becomes reconciled to their situation.

There are some truly beautiful descriptions of the country they passed through, in all its moods.

One feels such relief when they are offered a home to rent while Moth commences his studies. I think the fact that there is such a happy ending, makes it possible for Raynor to write the story: it would have been just too painful to have endured all that, and still have a dying husband, no roof, and no way ahead.

I don't think I'll be tackling the South-West Coast path any time soon!

Chris

Ray and Moth find themselves homeless at the age of 50 after putting their lives into restoring a rundown farm and farmhouse in Wales. Let down by a close friend when his investment advice forced them into court, and then Moth is diagnosed with a brain disease, they lose everything; they decide to walk the 630 miles coastal path between Minehead and Poole, as there is nothing else they can do? What! really? I found that a really exasperating decision to take, with no further plan in their heads - no mention of medical consultation, or with their two children (only that they were at university and received a phone to keep in touch!). Also seemingly no plan to find new housing. Anyway, setting that aside, the story proceeds vividly describing the joys and pain endured, the kindness and the lack of kindness they meet. The descriptions of the flora and fauna, the sea and the land, and the British weather features prominently! Their love for each other and their solid relationship sustains them even though they are frequently hungry, exhausted and literally penniless. (A personal irritation for me was quite often spending the little money they had on sweets and pasties! Didn't they know how cheap vegetables are?) However, they persevered but had to accept Moth's worsening health and the book closes with successfully gaining a place on a university course and an offer of a cheap rented home on the coast. (If only that was the outcome for most homeless people.) As this was based in a real life story, I wondered how Moth got on, so yes this book did engage me and I enjoyed reading it.

Doreen

I read *The Salt Path* just after it was published in paperback. I think I was initially attracted to the art on the book's covers and I also thought the factual content would offer a book club choice that was different from those books which had previously been recommended.

I have never been wild camping or back packing and have only briefly visited Devon and Cornwall so I am unfamiliar with the coastal path. That said, I enjoyed reading about the long trek undertaken by Moth and Raynor Winn. Their decision to even attempt the walk was so courageous— illness and lack of funds would have daunted many a brave soul long before reaching a mile beyond Minehead. If Moth ever complained, that was never recorded but I can imagine the agony he must have felt as his body was pushed from one extreme to the other. Raynor experienced a different sort of pain—that of impending loss but she grew to realise that human relationships and the appreciation of the natural world far outweighed the importance of possessions. She was constantly reminded of the stigma of being homeless and of the catastrophic chain of events that led to that predicament. All I need to say is that, 'There but for the grace of God, go I'.

My favourite part of the book was when Moth and Raynor returned to the coastal path after spending the Winter inland far away from the sea. I could almost feel the salt wind and the cry of the gulls as the spirits were lifted and I actually felt bereft when the journey reached its final destination.

I recently reread *The Salt Path* and I enjoyed it more the second time around. I now look forward to reading the next book by Raynor Winn named *The Wild Silence*.

Jean

This is an unusual book about which I have mixed feelings. If one feels depressed to begin with, reading Raynor Winn's account of walking the South West coast Path from Minehead, in Somerset, through North Devon, Cornwall and South Devon to Poole in Dorset, via Land's End, a 630-mile walk, doesn't exactly cheer one up!

It was a 'double whammy' for Raynor and husband, Moth, when, not only were they going to lose their Welsh farm, where they had brought up their two children, but Moth was told that he had a degenerative brain disease. The bailiffs' arrived -and they were homeless.

It seemed to be a drastic solution to attempt this walk, and their daughter thought that they were crazy.

They experienced wild camping, swimming in the sea, as a means of keeping clean, and they lived on pasties and fudge.

However, they learnt to hope again and felt at one with the elements.

There is humour in Raynor's story, but I wasn't particularly keen on reading all the sordid details.

Also, I have an aversion to the f-word in novels.

The early part of the journey, from Somerset down through North Devon, brought back memories of my student days when, with friends, I went hostelling, and walked the same paths. I recall carrying a heavy rucksack and, even at age twenty, I felt totally exhausted at times. We were often tempted to hitch lifts!

At last, Raynor and Moth find a roof over their heads and it appears that Moth's health has also improved.

Somehow, being at one with Nature has enabled them to feel liberated and to find some kind of future in their lives.

What stands out is the close bond between Raynor and Moth, a bond denied to many people.

The both have faith in the future. Moth even plans a degree course that he may never complete.

There is a message here for all of us. We need to believe in the future, especially in this time of Covid.

The characters they meet along the way are brought to life. Life is a journey, when we all meet people who just pass by, whilst others remain with us and become part of our lives.

In contrast to several novels that I have read recently, when there has been too much dialogue, in

'The Salt Path', descriptive passages dominate, many of which are both lyrical and evocative.

Raynor and Moth possess tenacity in abundance. It's a quality to be admired and one that we'd probably all wish to possess.

Summing up, 'The Salt Path' is a 'good read' and one which, despite some reservations, I can highly recommend.

Margaret

A truly inspiring read taking us from Raynor and Moth losing their home due to a bad investment and learning of Moth's life threatening illness,

Walking seemed to them to be the only way to move on, putting everything else behind them.

Raynor described the wonderful things that they came across along the South West Coast Path such as wild life and scenery as well as the dreadful hardships that they had to endure. They never knew when they would have enough money to buy food although their diet appeared to be most unhealthy; eating pasties, ice creams, fudge bars and noodles and they didn't even have the comfort of decent camping equipment. Yet, the walking seemed as if it was putting Moth's illness into remission even though he was certainly suffering as he carried the heavy rucksack on his back.

I found that I was absorbed in the story of their trek and kept on reading avidly to see what happened to them in the end, even though their decision under the circumstances seemed to be most foolhardy.

She has written a follow up book which I *might* read some time.

I believe that Moth died in 2020 and that Raynor died as recently as 16th April 2021 but to find more details means going onto Facebook.

Sharon

I found this book to be quite a light read and finished it very quickly. I was interested to find out how their lives panned out after receiving two life-changing pieces of news.

Obviously, I felt enormous sympathy for their plight but found it hard to like these people!

The account of the progress of their walk and the places visited on the way was fairly interesting, though a lot of it consisted of weather – well we are British. They seem to have been quite unprepared, though I understand the need to travel light. Their diet of mainly noodles and fudge, supplemented by whatever they could scrounge and the odd bag of chips also seemed unwise.

I did feel annoyed that they seemed to think it fine to climb over fences into campsites,

use the facilities and leave without paying. Equally, sitting in cafes without ordering anything (free hot water) seems reprehensible to me. There was even a bit of casual shoplifting. They were also outraged at one point when somebody wanted to charge them for water. They seemed to have no concept that, particularly in a part of the country where people rely on visitors and seasonal work, other people have to work hard to make a living. Basically, most people were kind to them and they could not have survived without the kindness of strangers and friends. They even managed to get a flat out of somebody they met.

There was nothing heroic about what they did and could have signed on, looked for work and waited to be allocated a council property, as most people would have done. I hope they have many years together and continue to enjoy walking but I have no desire to read about it any more.

Stephanie

This is a remarkable story of how a couple responded to unexpected adversity in their lives - and what adversity! The couple involved, Ray and her husband Moth, had brought up their now grown-up children on an idyllic small holding in Wales which they owned along with the house and all the animals. At some stage they had invested a considerable sum in an investment scheme run by a lifelong friend; however the investment scheme failed and they became liable for the incurred debts. After years of court proceedings, the bailiffs arrived and took all their assets including the house, animals and small holding. A monumental betrayal of a friendship. Simultaneous with these procedures they were informed that Moth had an incurable illness and was terminally ill. So they were left with nothing and no prospects of life improving. At this stage whilst almost everyone else would have given up our wonderful couple decided to walk the South West coast path – all 630 miles. They had just basic camping gear and a very small weekly income. The tale that ensues is hugely poignant, a remarkable example of resilience in the most severe of circumstances and highlights just how judgemental many of us are. There are many lessons we all could learn from this book, it is a tale well worth telling.

However, whilst I was very moved by their plight and how they coped, I found the writing really difficult. I love the West Country and particularly the coast line with its rocky shores and (often) raging seas. I love all the wild life (except perhaps the swarms of scavenging seagulls). I also was interested in how anyone could cope emotionally with such adversity. Little such detail was included, instead I felt that the book was more like a repetitive diary detailing the endless night spent camping in gorse bushes and eating noodles. Finally there some relief at the end as Moth set out to start his university course and Ray, who Ray, who had clearly adjusted to her new life, seemed at peace with herself and the world.

Overall I found it really hard reading in spite of the power of the story.

William

Upon reflection I think this volume has been the most difficult for me to compose a review.

For reasons of unfortunate circumstance the author and her seriously ill husband had embarked on completing the great coastal walk.

It must have been commenced with great trepidation but it wasn't until its closing stages when they reached Plymouth and their juxtaposition with its posse of urban rough sleepers were they exposed to any significant vulnerability and this element of their story was the most cogent in my appreciation

When I had finished reading the book I was left with great admiration

for the fortitude and endeavour of its two heroes but it also raised a number of significant and unresolved issues.

At what period in the sequence of events was the decision taken that their quest could spawn a book and were the necessary materials included in their knapsack?

When were the written notes catalogued and maintained and the subsequent refined text composed? I have been attempting to assess how the author was able to recall or record the huge degree of detail that is captured from their pilgrimage. Was there collaboration in its composition as has been alleged in some reviews?

Perhaps I am being insensitive to the plight of our heroes but I wondered why they would embark on such a journey when it was described as being: 'shipwrecked from life with no safe haven to return to, floating through fog on a raft of despair with no notion of where we would come ashore, or if there would be a shore at all'.

A whole page is devoted to eaves-dropping the conversation between two old ladies eating fish and chips whilst attempting to ward off acquisitive seagulls is somehow captured in its totality - or is this poetic licence?

Similarly: 'Bending at the knees he reached out towards the valley and then drew in something invisible, some essence of what I don't know'.

'Over and over, cloaking himself in the unknown. Each step had its own resonance, its moment of power or failure. Needs slipped away as the winds chided the water and the gulls guided us forward'.

Inspiring words - but were these lines written during the walk or after? I am afraid I started to question the whole ethos of the book and its creation.

Life is extremely fragile and there is a deep paradox behind their quest for salvation with the creeping shadow of their future taking shape. The only positive note being that the two intrepid walkers finished their journey in better health than they started.

Will it inspire others? Surely there are better ways for overcoming adversity and their direction of travel does not follow the argument. Personally I don't think many others in the author's circumstances would attempt the trek. I certainly wouldn't.

There are some impressive and cogent tracts of literature based upon the author's circumstances - is it a good read - do we believe it all happened in the way it is recorded?

I am afraid this jury is still out.... but whatever makes you homeless, you still deserve help....