Being Westerners, and not living within a Buddhist culture however, this practice of alms-round can feel quite uneasy at first. Having been brought up with ideas about being independent and self-sufficient; pulling your own weight; not being a drain on the society and all that, and with most of us coming from a rather middle-class background, to actually stand there with our bowls, defenceless, open to whatever … can feel quite embarrassing at first. It’s not so easy to learn to be fully open and to ‘receive’ whole-heartedly and unconditionally. But it helps us remember again, in quite a sobering way, what we are doing as Buddhist nuns and what the commitment to this form actually means. Then, in receiving such positive response from people generally, a deep ease arises.

For me, and I think for all of us, these alms-rounds were the high points of our walk. It’s so powerful to receive people’s generosity in this way (especially in Western countries) – such a touching and poignant reflection in that simple interaction for both giver and receiver, and a deep and strong sign in the psyche of the path and fruit of the religious life.

The feelings of gratitude and blessing that can well up within one in those moments are ‘other-worldly’ and feel quite transformative. Memories of those who offered us hospitality in various forms would often come to mind at later times bringing again warm feelings of gratitude and a deep sincere well-wishing towards them. And one knows that they will also feel happiness as a result of their unconditional giving. And when recounting these acts of generosity to others, one sees a kind of ‘magic’ still working as people are both amazed and gladdened to hear that it is possible to live this way, that there are generous, kind and sincere people everywhere.

It was about five days after we set out that we first went for alms, in a place called Walingford. The weather was freezing and we had stayed over night in a redundant church (with permission). We walked into the centre of town and stood silently with our bowls. The first person to stop and offer nourishment actually recognized us as nuns from Chithurst and Amaravati where he had visited a few times.

The weather seemed to be getting colder all morning. After having received ample food, with blue fingers and chattering teeth we walked briskly back to a park we had passed earlier to eat our lunch. Then it started to
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吃著，因快到下午一點了；過了一點，我們便不能再吃固體的食物了。

用完餐，經過一間小洗衣店；那天早上我們正開玩笑說，衣服需要好好洗一下了。目前看來這還不是太離譜的主意。

尤其可以坐在溫暖的烘乾機旁。問題是衣服都穿在身上，怎麼洗？還好，洗衣店的女人很善解人意，我們便穿著雨衣，讓衣服洗個乾淨。我們都記得Walingford對我們多好！

大約走了十天才到一個叫Avebury的小村莊。它以古老的stone-circles，在考古價值上很出名，但很難找到露營的地方。後來才發現Lord Avebury是佛教徒。那天寒雨的晚上，我們各處找宿處，在黑暗中至少有兩次經過他龐大的住處。

第二天也下寒雨，我們在暴風雨中前進，還好傍晚時太陽出來了，把我們身上的衣曬乾了。無論遇到多大的雨，我們都會想辦法，在天黑前把衣服弄乾。

那夜很難找到宿處，在暴風雨中我們看到一座穀倉，便問一個婦人那穀倉屬誰，以便得到主人的許可。她指著一個牧人的住所，那時暴風雨即將來臨，我們趕緊快步走向穀倉。天上出現美麗的雙虹蜺，我們認爲是好兆頭，到了穀倉，好像進入天堂一般，那裏有溫暖的乾草，像樣的頂蓋和四壁，而且沒有牛隻在那裏；今晚保證有一個乾的遮護的睡眠了。

當雨小一點時，我們其中兩人便出發到牧人的住處要求許可，半途遇到剛剛那個婦人，便問她是否見到牧人的住所，那時暴風雨即將來臨，我們趕緊快步走向穀倉。天上出現美麗的雙虹蜺，我們認為是好兆頭，到了穀倉，好像進入天堂一般，那裏有溫暖的乾草，像樣的頂蓋和四壁，而且沒有牛隻在那裏；今晚保證有一個乾的遮護的睡眠了。

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天太冷了，我們便不能吃固體的食物了。我們用完餐，經過一間小洗衣店；那天早上我們正開玩笑說，衣服需要好好洗一下了。目前看來這還不是太離譜的主意，尤其可以坐在溫暖的烘乾機旁。問題是衣服都穿在身上，怎麼洗？還好，洗衣店的女人很善解人意，我們便穿著雨衣，讓衣服洗個乾淨。我們都記得Walingford對我們多好！

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有用有趣味的事：雨中偶然經過古老的新港，這種地方是可遇而不可求的，就像迷路時絆了一跤，爬起來忽然發現sleet and snow on us. We continued to eat however, as it was nearly one o’clock (after which time we could no longer take solid food) – our priorities were clear!

Afterwards we walked by a launderette, and having joked all morning about the possibility of somehow getting our clothes washed (which by this time were in good need of such), it seemed now to be not such a crazy idea after all, as it also offered the opportunity to sit against a warm dryer for an hour or so to thaw out and digest lunch. Problem was, we were wearing all our clothes! But with the kind understanding of the woman there and the help of our trusty raincoats, the operation was successful. We all remember Walingford as being good to us.

It took us about ten days to reach Avebury, a tiny little village of great fame for its ancient stone-circles and other archaeological formations. But it should be known that it’s not such a great place to find somewhere to camp! That was one of the more difficult nights we had. We later found out that Lord Avebury is a Buddhist, and we believe we actually walked by his large estate at least twice that dark, rainy, cold evening looking for somewhere to stop.

The following day and evening was rather wet too. We got caught in some storms while walking and our rain gear was beginning to flag. But fortunately the sun came out and dried us in the late afternoon. Despite the amount of rain we had, we actually always managed to dry out before the day’s end. That evening we were having some trouble finding a suitable place to stay – we had been looking for a barn to take shelter in as the storms were still brewing around us. We headed towards some farm buildings in the distance and stopped to ask a woman in her garden about who might be the owner of this hay barn down the road, as we wished to ask for permission to stay there overnight. She pointed us to the cowherd’s place. We walked briskly, directly to the barn as the storm was beginning to break, and in the sky appeared a fantastically brilliant double rainbow... we thought it a good omen indeed. It felt like heaven to reach the barn and see that there was hay (ie.warmth), a decent roof with walls, and no cows!... the promise of a protected, dry night’s sleep.

When the rain lessened a little, two of us set out to ask for permission to stay in the barn when we were met by the woman we had stopped to talk to earlier. She said she couldn’t bear to think of us there for the night and she and her husband (plus two young boys) invited us to stay with them. They said later that they couldn’t quite believe their eyes when they first saw us, four Buddhist nuns on the road, (actually, we looked more like Franciscans in our long, dark brown, hooded rain coats.) They had a spare attic room and were very hospitable to us indeed. They weren’t particularly religious, just very kind people and very happy to offer support.

It was lovely to walk through some very old and interesting villages on route – those that you would never set out to see deliberately or even know were there but for the fact of accidentally stumbling on them whilst lost and trying to make sense of some twenty year old map of non-existent country footpaths. 'Twas lucky we never really had to be anywhere! As we
的，或是看一张二十年前的老地图，想要找出已不再存在的小径一样。我们很幸运，没有特定的行程，当我们越往南方漫游，当地的生活步调越慢，人也更友善，常常很好奇地和我们谈话，想知道我们是誰，做什么的。

大约走了两个月，我们在Frome休息了两天，恢复疲劳，很不错，当地的僧侣招待我们。过了一星期，经过一座寺院时，又休息了两天，便开始向Dartmoor出发；Dartmoor那地方很美，我没法形容那神奇的风景，各式各样的巨石点缀在苍翠中，映著广阔无垠的天空，给人一种威力和神秘的感觉。马、羊悠然自在；清泉潺潺流入小溪和弯曲的河中，森林有几处是稀稀疏疏的，地上多沼泽。如果天气潮湿，会变得很危险。幸运地，这次我们碰到的是晴天。

我们停留在Dartmoor住了三天，两夜宿於朋友的好住处，另一天在外露营。那早我们生了火，正坐着喝热茶，忽然从雾气蒙蒙的原野中出现了一队骑兵，约四十人，全副武装，揹著背囊，臂下有机关枪；领队粗声地催促著他们赶路。他们看起来很可憐，穿着硬邦邦的黑皮靴跑著，很惊奇地发现了我们，就像特大号的女童军似的。他们为避開泥沼，必須从我們身旁经过；有些兵很羡慕地看著我們輕松的格調，熱乎乎的茶；有些很感興趣地看著我們阿兵哥似的睡袋，还未收拾呢！

「离她们远一点！」那上司喊著。我們静静地看着他們走遠消失。當這番騷動过后，我們四人不禁相视而笑。

大约二十分钟后另一队步兵又出现了。我们还没有移动，再次看着同样的景象。这是‘take-two’的Monty Python skit？
seemed a little more chirpy though, and in better humour…

“Good morning ladies, that’s a cosy little scene you have there!”...they all looked quite interested as they ran by.

“How long have you been out?”...I asked.

“This is our fourth day, we’re on our eighty-ninth mile.”

Hmmm, pretty impressive... we were certainly taking things a little easier at about ten to twelve miles a day! Strange to think that people think our lives are too tough, but they do this voluntarily as well! Not long after, a third troop charged over the hill but headed off in a different direction, and we knew it was time then for us to head off as well.

We walked on for several days towards the coast, then from Dartmouth took the blustery, coastal walk to Torcross. We spent our last ‘out-doors’ night at the far, secluded end of Slapton Sands beach. You might remember the history of this place... where the allied troops had their practice runs for D-Day. This turned into a tragedy actually. Two ships wrecked and many lives lost in some bungled operations. All villages for miles around had been evacuated so they could do these operations in secret.

Anyway, we staggered up the far end of this pebbly beach at dusk, exhausted (me at least), to find our own privacy near a rocky niche. It felt nice to be there: clear weather, no worries about private property, having a camp-fire or making noise, and finding the sand quite comfortable...(at last, completely level ground!); to fall asleep and wake to the sound of crashing waves at the shore some fifty yards away. We didn’t rouse early that morning, we only had a few miles to walk to Joanne’s father’s place in time for lunch, so we took our time over breakfast and enjoyed the solitude and relaxed atmosphere for a while.

At around eight-thirty some people started trudging up the beach towards us. Typical British we thought, with wind breaks under arm, not a great beach day but the sun was up and it was the beginning of a long weekend. But why make such an effort to trudge all the way up this pebbly end, there was plenty of beach, about five miles of it?

Soon more people were turning up, then as one rather weighty man and his wife who settled in just a few yards from us undressed, completely, we began to realise what was so attractve about this part of the beach. It wasn’t us. When this man began to strut up and down proudly airing his naked glory right in front us we knew it was time to go. It felt quite ridiculous at the time to wrap ourselves up over both shoulders in dark robes, don packs, and covered from neck to toe walk back past all these ‘nature-loving’ bods! A few days later we arrived at our destination, in Totnes, where Ajahn Siripanna was due to give a public talk at a Buddhist college/community called Sharpham. After the talk, we were given a lift back to the monastery to begin the process of settling in and settling down. There was one monk who waited for our arrival to ceremoniously hand over the Relics and left a day or two afterwards, the other monks had left earlier.  

(Continued on page 35)