

A Solo Walk Across Africa

by Fran Sandham

PRESS CUTTINGS



Critically acclaimed author and former Rough Guides editor Fran Sandham walked across Africa solo from the Atlantic on Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar, a journey of well over three thousand miles – the first time on record anyone has crossed Africa by this route solo entirely on foot.

His book 'Traversa: A solo walk across Africa' is the account of this remarkable journey, and has achieved rave reviews and very wide press coverage in the UK and abroad.

A very experienced public speaker, he is currently giving public talks across the UK.

www.traversa.co.uk

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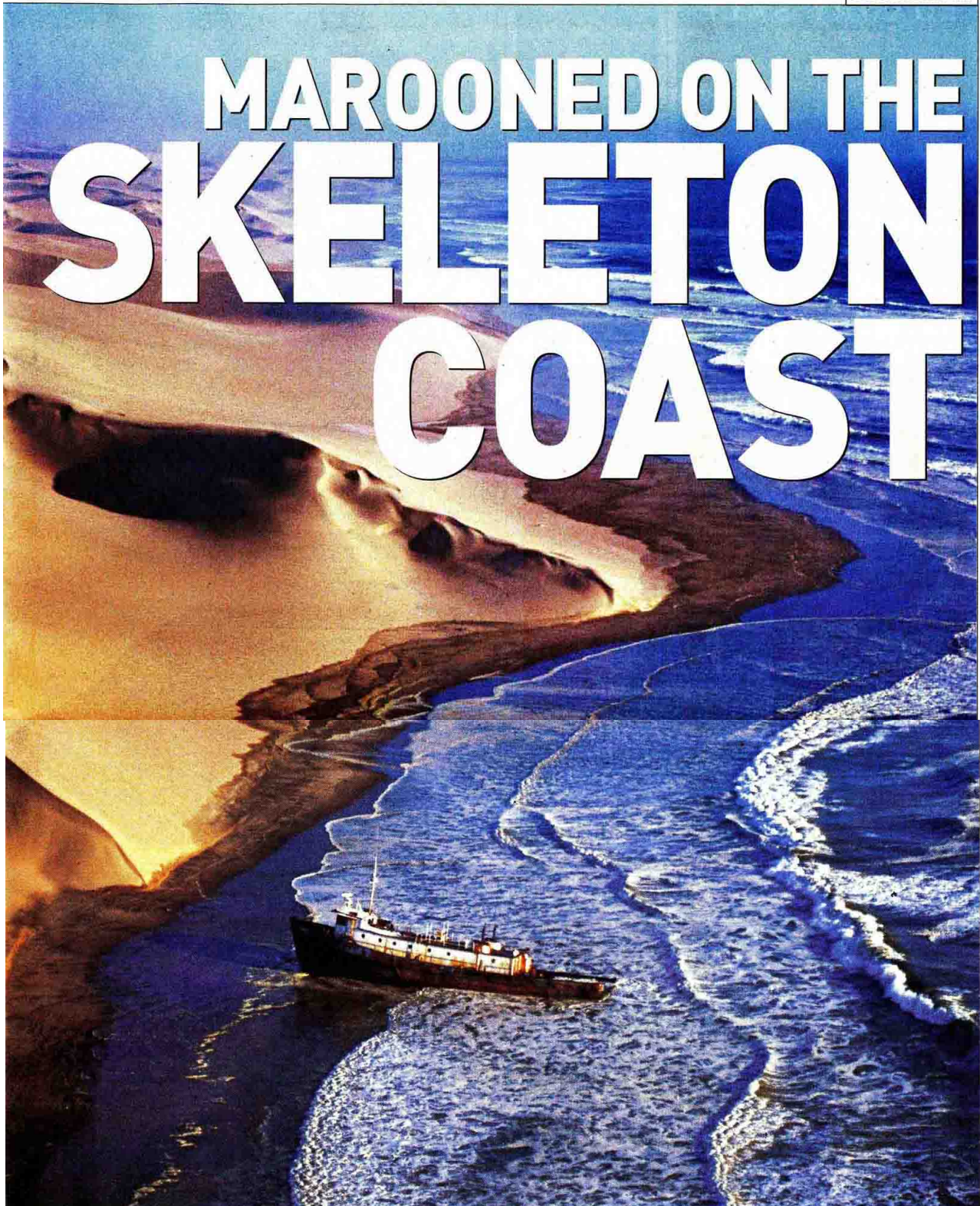
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THE SUNDAY TIMES

THE SUNDAY TIMES · JANUARY 27, 2008

NAMIBIA 11



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JANUARY 27, 2008 · THE SUNDAY TIMES



On a mission to cross Africa on foot, Fran Sandham could have started somewhere easy, like Cape Town or Zanzibar. But he didn't. He chose the Namib Desert, graveyard of explorers, home of the ravenous hyena. Silly man...

¶When a heavy sea fog rests on these uncouth and rugged surfaces... a place fitter to represent the infernal regions could scarcely be found in searching the world around, be found. A shudder, amounting almost to fear, came over me when its frightful desolation first suddenly broke upon my view. Death, I exclaimed, would be preferable to banishment in such a country. ¶

— Charles J Andersson, 19th-century explorer

The accounts of early explorers on Namibia's Skeleton Coast dwelt more on its extraordinary bleakness than on its undeniable beauty. This is understandable, as in places it resembles the surface of the moon. Over the centuries, this coastline's dangerous crosscurrents and impenetrable fogs have combined with treacherous sandbanks, shoals and reefs to create a graveyard for ships. Some early visitors never left; after scrambling ashore, shipwreck survivors found their relief at reaching dry land short-lived, and many had caused to wish they had drowned at sea rather than face the horrors of a long-drawn-out death from thirst on the loneliest coast in the world.

"Here for nothing in the world is there even the smallest gain for our masters... there is only sand, rock and storm," wrote the captain of a passing Dutch ship, the *Bode*. In this he was mistaken: Namibia is now one of the world's largest producers of diamonds. Sailors shipwrecked on the Skeleton Coast often stumbled across alluvial diamonds lying at their feet; then they died of thirst, carrying unimaginable wealth in their pockets.

Of all the cruel deaths on this coast, one episode strikes me as particularly poignant. In 1945, a slate was found buried in the sand beside 12 headless adult skeletons and that of a young child. Scratched on the slate was the date 1860 and the following message: "I am proceeding to a river 60 miles north, and should anyone find this and follow me, God will help him." I suspect he was trying to reach the Ugab River; if he ever got that far, he would almost certainly have found the riverbed completely dry.

But with a name like the "Skeleton Coast", how could I not start my own journey across Africa there?

My friend Hagen gives me a lift up the coast to the point where I start the big trek. As he drives away, heading back towards Swakopmund, I think of all the reasons why I should be accompanying him and of all the unpleasant things that might happen to me if I don't. It's like a mental video fast-forwarding to all the really nasty bits. For a few moments, I consider chasing after his car; in the soft sand I could catch up with him before he picks up speed, then pretend I've forgotten something important back in town. But as soon as he's gone, I become more philosophical. Here I am and here I'll stay, unless I do something about it. I set out alone into the Namib Desert.

I see no one for the rest of the first day on the coast. I follow a dry riverbed down to the ocean, where I take off my boots and cool my feet in the Atlantic. The water is remarkably cold considering it's lapping against hot desert sand. I start south down the coast towards Swakopmund, the best part of a week's trek away if all goes well — the equivalent of walking from London to Bristol.

A couple of hours of hard work bring a huge surge of relief. I can actually do this. Until now, I didn't know if I could get along at all, hour after hour, carrying this weight across a soft and sloping beach. But it's possible, even if lugging a bloody great rucksack across crumbling sand is a far cry from carrying the shopping home from Sainsbury's. I'm grateful I invested in some trekking poles — after less than an hour of using them on the Namibian coast they become indispensable for the rest of the entire walk across Africa, and I feel almost naked on the few occasions I try walking without them.

I take things fairly easy for the first day. I couldn't go fast even if I wanted to; this mode of travel doesn't lend itself to sudden bursts of speed. At the same time, I can't drag my heels, as my water supply won't last much beyond two days in the desert. And if I break an ankle, I'm in serious trouble. But at least I'm unlikely to get lost, with the ocean right next to me. Two jackals appear, less than a hundred metres away. They look friendly enough, gambolling like lambs and obviously the best of pals. The black-backed jackals on the Namib coast are timid creatures, feeding mainly on insects. I see the first of many snakes on the trip; unlike the more animated varieties I later



¶Two jackals appear. They look friendly enough, obviously the best of pals¶

encounter inland, this small fellow is as dead and dry as biltong, and even the jackals have turned up their snouts at it. I continue down the beach for the rest of the afternoon, the coastline desolate and the ocean dazzling with reflected sunlight. I stop and gaze out into the Atlantic. There's something almost scary about watching the sea like this when you're in a desert and the only person for miles around.

While some people insist canned music has no place out in nature, I'm already glad I brought a Walkman, and won't lose any sleep if it is one of the more overt trappings of civilisation. Some explorers took a musical instrument with them, even if they couldn't play it, and one or two even took wind-up phonographs. I listen to Eleanor Rigby by the Beatles, just the strings arrangement, cold and unsettling, and watch the sea as though hypnotised. There is no land for thousands of miles; the Benguela Current races inland, cold and urgent, all the way from South Georgia. If I searched for months, I could find no music more suited to this moment and this empty place, not even Fingal's Cave.

Evening approaches with surprising suddenness. The ocean is very beautiful as the sun dies, the current sweeping ashore like molten silver. In the twilight it's easy to picture shipwrecked sailors struggling ashore, clutching at sludgy wet sand, retching salt water, convinced they're almost safe — then leaving their bones to bleach for ever under the burning desert sun. There seems little point in pitching my tent; the evening is mild and I can't be bothered. Although tired, I feel fine, physically and mentally, and tonight I could sleep on the proverbial clothesline. I unroll my sleeping mat and hide my boots inside my rucksack, in case hyenas mistake them for food.

The clouds inland look almost English, straight out of HE Bates; those out to sea are more spectacular, the kind favoured by artists depicting momentous biblical events or illustrating the covers of Wilbur Smith books. The clouds only a few miles inland have travelled right across Africa to get here, all the way from the Indian Ocean, which seems like an omen — I am, after all, heading in that general direction. Thousands of miles and long, exhausting months away, if I ever get that far.

Then true darkness falls. The horizon far inland leaps closer as lightning flickers across the desert sky; the heavens plunge into blackness again, and the night stirs with the low growl of thunder. This could form the perfect setting for a western, the scene where the cattle start thinking along the lines of a good stampede. There's something delightful about the sound of a distant electrical storm when you know it won't reach you. After all, I know it won't reach you. After all, even so, this thunder is loud, considering it's many miles away.

I wake in the middle of the night to find myself getting splattered by big drops of water falling from the sky. This bears every resemblance to rain. If technically it's not rain, then it's near enough to make no difference — I'm English, for God's sake, I should know. Whatever it is, after being drenched for half an hour, I've had enough and start to pack my gear; I may as well carry on walking in the dark rather than sit here miserable. As soon as I've crammed all my soggy gear back in my rucksack, this ersatz rain stops abruptly, as though some invisible hand has turned off a giant water sprinkler in the sky directly above my head. Sceptical, I go back to sleep.

Later, back in Swakopmund, people still insist this phenomenon is not rain, but condensed spray from the sea. I'm not entirely convinced; a month later it does rain briefly in Walvis Bay, real rain, universally acknowledged as such. So why not here as well?

In the morning I find myself surrounded by hyena prints. Surely they were here when I stopped last night in the dark? The hyenas along Namibia's coastline are known as the *strandwolf* ("beach wolf"). Smaller than their East African counterparts, their thick coats actually make them look bigger; shy and rarely aggressive, they still possess immensely powerful jaws capable of crunching large bones like Japanese rice crackers. They don't normally hunt big animals, preferring to feast on insects and birds and the occasional putrid seal.

But at least my boots are still present and correct, with no obvious teeth marks...

■ Extracted from *Traversa: A Solo Walk across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean*, by Fran Sandham, published by Duckworth at £16.99. To buy it for the reduced price of £15.29, with free p&p in the UK, call *The Sunday Times BooksFirst* on 0870 165 8585



Peter Johnson/Corbis. Inset: Natmap.com

I left the rat race behind for Africa

GREAT ADVENTURE: Fran Sandham, who left Britain behind to trek across Africa



A new year's resolution changed the life of Merseyside man Fran Sandham who decided to walk across Africa. Tony Barrett reports.

AS everyone knows, New Year's Eve is traditionally a time for life-changing decisions and resolutions... which are usually forgotten about the very next day.

But at one boozy Hogmanay party, Wirral man Fran Sandham came up with an idea he stuck to, and it really did change his life.

Recalls Fran: "I was at this party and I wasn't really enjoying myself. I looked back on the year that had just been and the one to come and I just decided I wanted to do something totally different so I wouldn't end up thinking the very same thing next year.

"All of a sudden and completely out of the blue, I came up with the idea to walk across Africa.

"Don't ask me where it came from because I don't think I could tell you. It certainly wasn't something I'd been thinking of beforehand.

"All I knew was I was tired of the rat race."

Fran, a former Woodchurch high school pupil who grew up in Thingwall, has always been fascinated with Africa, ever since a stay at a Wirral children's hospital as a six-year-old.

He says: "When I was a child I had a problem with my left hip and I had to go into hospital for a few days.

"While I was there I soon got bored like all kids do and I was looking for things to keep me occupied. I picked up a Tarzan comic and read it from cover to cover and I was immediately hooked.

"From that point on I developed a fascination with Africa which has never left me and I ended up having a great interest in explorers like Dr Livingstone and Stanley.

"I suppose it's this interest which fired my desire to trek across the continent

After consulting his atlas and looking at the ideal places to start and finish, Fran, 43, decided to begin his walk at the wonderfully named Skeleton Coast in Namibia before walking 3,000 miles to the Indian Ocean, near Zanzibar.

From the moment he left the UK behind, Fran knew he was doing the right thing. "I had this overwhelming feeling of relief as soon as I left the country," he says.

"It was a feeling which never left me on the flight to Africa and when I arrived there it was still just as strong."

His journey took him from Namibia to Bagamoyo, near Zanzibar, via Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania. It is a route which Fran believes no one else has ever taken by foot.

But at times it was far from easy. "I suppose my darkest moment came when I was trekking across the desert," he recalls.

"The temperature of the sand was as high as 70 degrees Celsius in places and I was carrying an 80lb rucksack so I quickly became really tired and dehydrated.

"I sat down and I think I was sat there for around an hour-and-a-half and the thought I kept having was 'I just can't carry on'.

"But in the end I managed to get myself back together and remember exactly why I had embarked on the trip in the first place and I soon got myself back on my feet."

In the face of such trying conditions, Fran employed what he described as "a bit of lateral thinking":

"I decided to buy a donkey from one of the locals because I thought it would make things easier if I had something to carry my rucksack," he says.

"The donkey already had a name when I bought it—it was called Tsondab, which, when translated into English, means 'where you get stuck'.

"I was soon to discover that it was one of the most aptly named animals you could ever come across because for around two and a half months we hardly moved.

"I tried to train him but he kept running off and in the end I gave up and I bought a mule.

"But the mule was too strong so I had to give up on that as well and within 20 minutes I had gone further than I had in the previous two and a half months!"

Despite the trials and tribulations, the battles to train donkeys and mules, the almost incessant heat and the constant blisters, Fran managed to achieve his objective of walking across Africa...

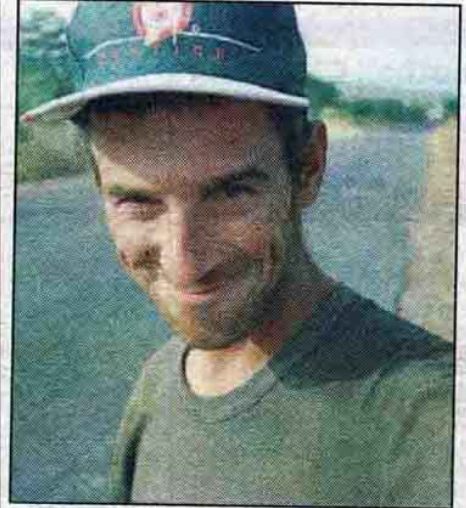
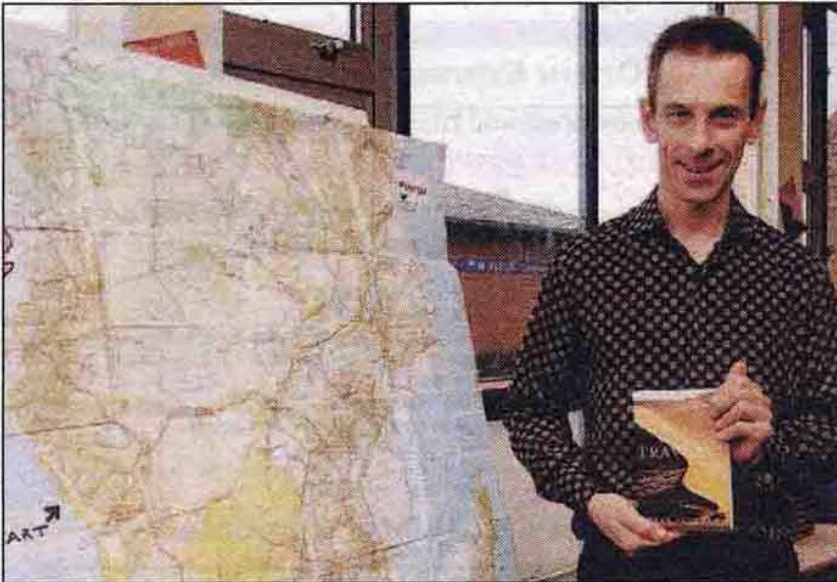
Now he has chronicled his epic tale in a newly published book, Traversa, which traces his entire journey from start to finish.

"The idea was always to write a book," he says. "Now I just hope people have as much fun reading it as I did writing it."

Traversa, published by Duckworth, is available in all good book shops and at www.amazon.co.uk, priced £16.99.

the standard

African adventure inspires generation



Fran Sandham with his book (left) and (above) during his 3,000 mile trek across Africa. (Mh201108D)

AN EXPLORER who walked 3,000 miles across Africa fuelled the imaginations of wannabe travellers during a talk at a Chester library.

Fran Sandham made the solo journey from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean in Zanzibar completely unsupported and entirely on foot.

The former *Rough Guides* editor, who bravely walked through lion-inhabited terrain, has written a book, *Traversa*, about his experiences and is touring the country to promote it.

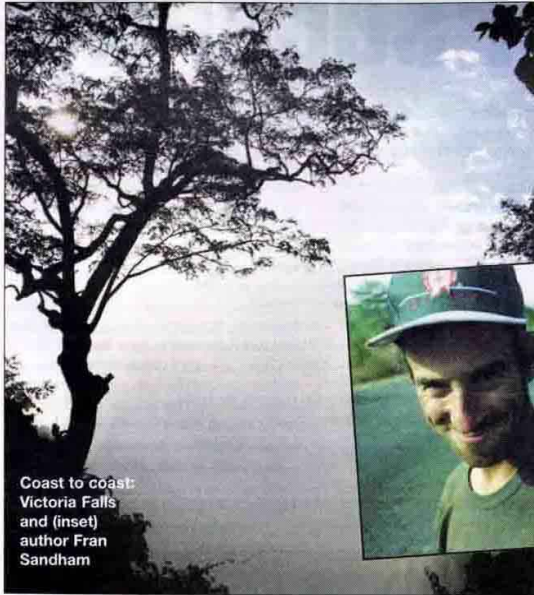
As part of the tour, he visited Bishops' High School library, Vaughans Lane, Boughton Heath, to talk about the journey and inspired a group of sixth form stu-

dents. Librarian Ann Nossiter said: "It went really well and people had loads of questions for him because he was the first person to walk solo and unsupported across Africa.

"We had a group of sixth formers attend the talk who are all studying geography."

For more information about Fran or details about the book visit www.traversa.co.uk.

Heroes push to the limit



Coast to coast: Victoria Falls and (inset) author Fran Sandham

By **JOHN HYDE**
john.hyde@archant.co.uk

HAVING walked thousands of miles across Africa's harshest terrain, you'd have thought Fran Sandham might have been happy to reach the end.

But the Poplar man, who had travelled from coast to coast across the continent, couldn't bring himself to finish. "Most people you'd expect to run into the sea and jump for joy, but I didn't really feel like that," he said. "I'd been so fixated on it as my goal for the past year that I was quite reluctant about

ending the journey and coming home."

Ten years on, and with a critically-acclaimed book under his belt, Fran is in reflective mood when he looks back at his epic adventure.

The trip itself had started with a drunken New Year's Eve resolution, which suddenly began to take shape the following day.

"I thought when I woke up the next morning the thought would have passed, but it was quite opposite," he explained.

"Then I just saved every penny I made from my job in a book shop to save for the trip – in many ways that year was harder than the trek itself."

And so, at the age of 32 and armed with only a walking stick, basic provisions and a notebook, he set off from Namibia in south-west Africa, travelling diagonally towards Zanzibar on the east coast.

Along the way, he walked through deserts and passed by waterfalls, all the time greeted with a mixture of admiration and bewilderment by locals.

"The friendliness and hospitality of the people was quite mind-blowing," he said.

"I didn't think people would be so interested but virtually everywhere they were delighted for me."

Despite his reluctance,

Fran did eventually come home, and set about the task of going through his notes to produce a book.

Filled with stunning photos and amazing adventures, there are also plenty of laughs, not least the time when Fran enlist the help of a donkey to carry water through the desert.

"That was an absolute fiasco. We made it one mile in two and a half months – we'd have taken nine centuries if we'd carried on at that rate so I gave the donkey to a local farmer."

● "Traversa: A solo walk across Africa" by Fran Sandham is now available from all good bookshops.



NewStatesman

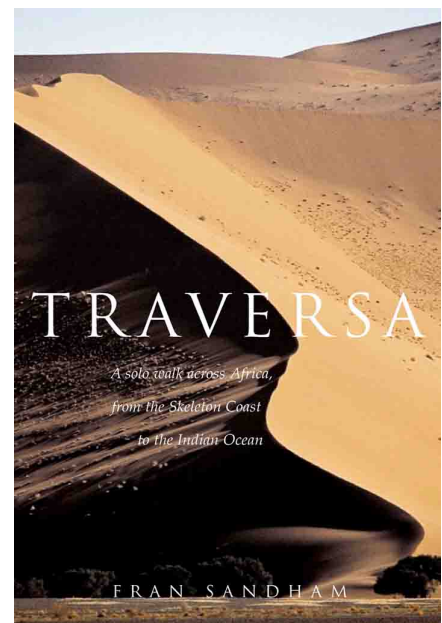
Continental drifter

by Jonathan Gharraie

"Traversa" is the name given to the unforgiving ocean-to-ocean trek across Africa. It is normally undertaken by those with a lust for riches and renown or by hopeless naïfs with something to prove. Fran Sandham would probably admit that he belongs more to the latter group. Starting from the inhospitable terrain of Namibia's Skeleton Coast, he haphazardly wends his way towards the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar, risking encounters with lions and bandits and acquiring suppurating blisters, giardiasis and malaria.

Sandham proves to be genial company, approaching the trials of the open road with self-deprecating humour. Less winning are the lapses into laddish banter, but at least you'll know not to try the local brew down Lusaka way: with perverse relish, our hero describes the innocuously titled beer, "shake shake", which comes with "small brown chewy bits floating in its murk".

For the most part, the book is warm and entertaining. Sandham nimbly weaves anecdotes about his illustrious predecessors, notably Livingstone and Stanley, into the story and sensitively recounts the turbulent histories of the lands he travels through. Above all, it is his enthusiasm for adventure and the variety of human life that makes Traversa so memorable.

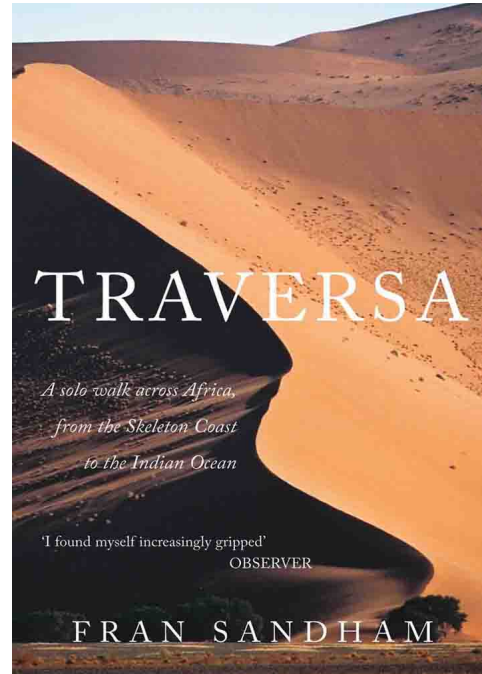


The New York Times

Review of 'Traversa'

by JOSHUA HAMMER

An ordeal of a different sort awaits Fran Sandham in *TRAVERSA: A Solo Walk Across Africa* From the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean (Duckworth Overlook, \$25). Inspired by the 19th-century Scottish missionary David Livingstone, Sandham leaves his draughty London flat and his job at a West End bookshop and embarks on an open-ended journey on foot from the Namibian desert to Tanzania. Along the way, he collapses from heat exhaustion, runs out of plasters to soothe his agonizing blisters, swats away clouds of tsetse flies and endures the constant stares of astonished locals. At first annoyed by the attention, Sandham begins to look at himself through African eyes: "Here I am, a white guy, plodding along with an enormous pack, my trekking poles giving me the appearance of skiing down the road, the bandanna wrapped around my head making me look like something from 'The Pirates of Penzance.' Sometimes I forget I look rather singular." Sandham's self-deprecation and affectionate attitude toward the people he encounters lift this book high above the vast pile of African-adventure travelogues.



Fran takes a hike — across Africa!

Trek took
12 months

By MATT HURST

HE was lying in a Birkenhead hospital bed with a hip problem when Thingwall-born Fran Sandham reached for the copy of *Tarzan* that first inspired him to walk across Africa.

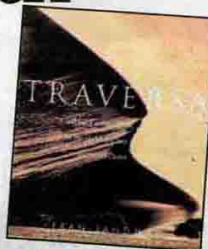
Twenty years later he made it, and there was no film crew following him, no medics in attendance and no back up vehicle in case the going got too tough.

Fran just packed his bags, made his way to Namibia's Skeleton Coast and walked thousands of miles across one of the most hostile environments on earth, to Dar es Salaam and the Indian Ocean.

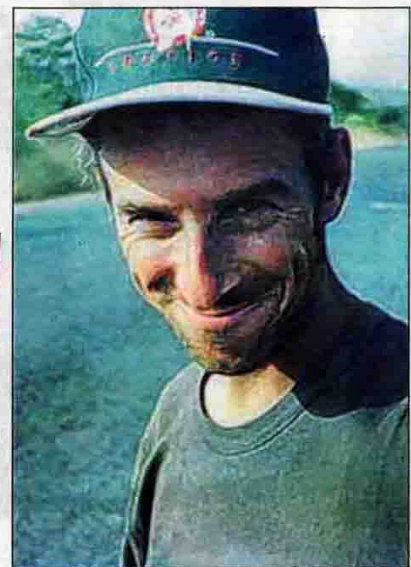
The 42-year-old former *Rough Guide* editor told the *News*: "The idea suddenly came to me at a New Year's Eve party and I thought, I'm



● Fran reaches the Indian Ocean and the end of his epic trip
Code NA



● Traversa - A solo walk across Africa by Fran Sandham
Code NA



● Former Woodchurch High pupil Fran Sandham on the road in Africa
Code NA

fed up with commuting and I want to go on a big adventure, so I thought I'd walk across Africa.

"It wasn't like I sobered up the next day and thought, that's not a very good idea, all the next year I was completely focused on it."

Fran estimated a 12-month time frame for walking through Namibia to Zambia and north through Malawi to the east coast of Tanzania.

Along the way, he traversed bandit country, dodged

hungry lions, struggled with a workshy donkey and suffered blisters as a matter of routine.

And now he's published a book of his experiences, entitled *Traversa - A solo walk across Africa*.

The former Woodchurch High pupil said the most daunting part was walking through the West Caprivi Game Reserve in north east Namibia where he had been told "a few people had been eaten by lions recently".

Understandably, he was "quite relieved" to reach the other side.

Ironically, his most frustrating moment came when he bought a donkey to help carry his 80lb backpack.

Fran said: "It wasn't to be, the donkey was too weak, I was just going round in circles."

"So I thought I'd get a mule which is much stronger, but he was too strong and it was quite frightening."

"I'd spent two months going

nowhere and throwing good money after bad, so I went back to plan A and carried the bag myself."

And now he's back living in Brighton, where the far more leisurely prospect of delivering inspirational talks to lux-

ury cruise line passengers awaits.

He said: "Maybe there'll be some mileage in that."

● *Traversa - A solo walk across Africa* by Fran Sandham is priced £16.99 and available from all good bookshops.

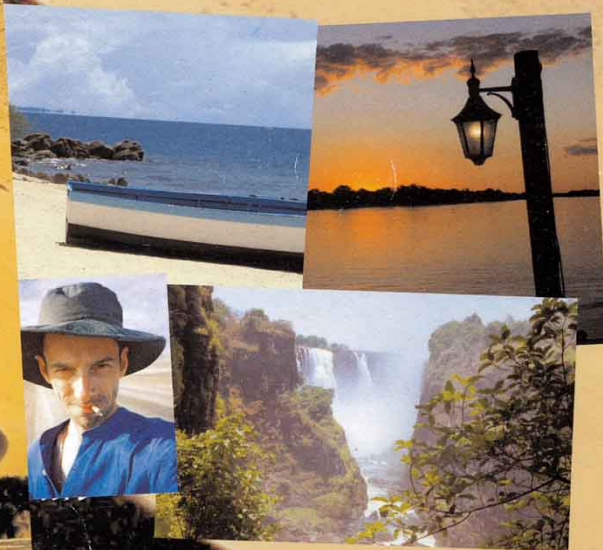
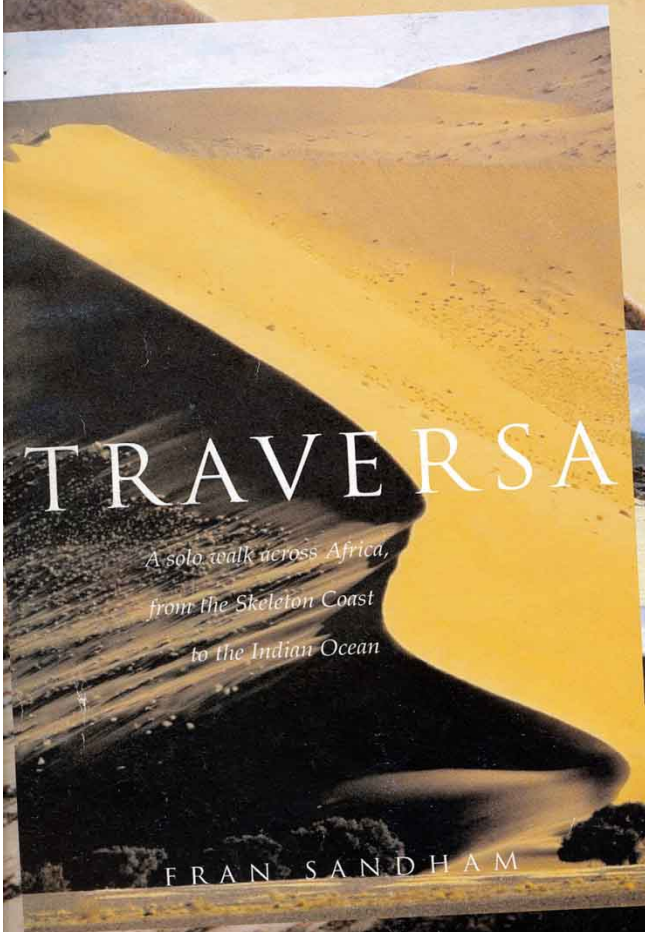
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TRAVERSA

A Solo Walk Across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean
Fran Sandham

The incredible story of the hardships and hilarity ex-bookseller and Rough Guides editor Fran Sandham experienced, on his epic 3,000-mile walk across Africa. Inspired by the great explorers Sandham waved goodbye to the daily grind to undertake an extraordinary adventure, and see for himself whether any trace of the Africa of the Victorian era exists in the Africa of today.



❖ Author publicity ❖ Serial Sale ❖ Targeted proof mailing

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Traversa Africa

Fran Sandham recounts his walk across the continent - a feat known as the Traversa. 30 minutes

Last on
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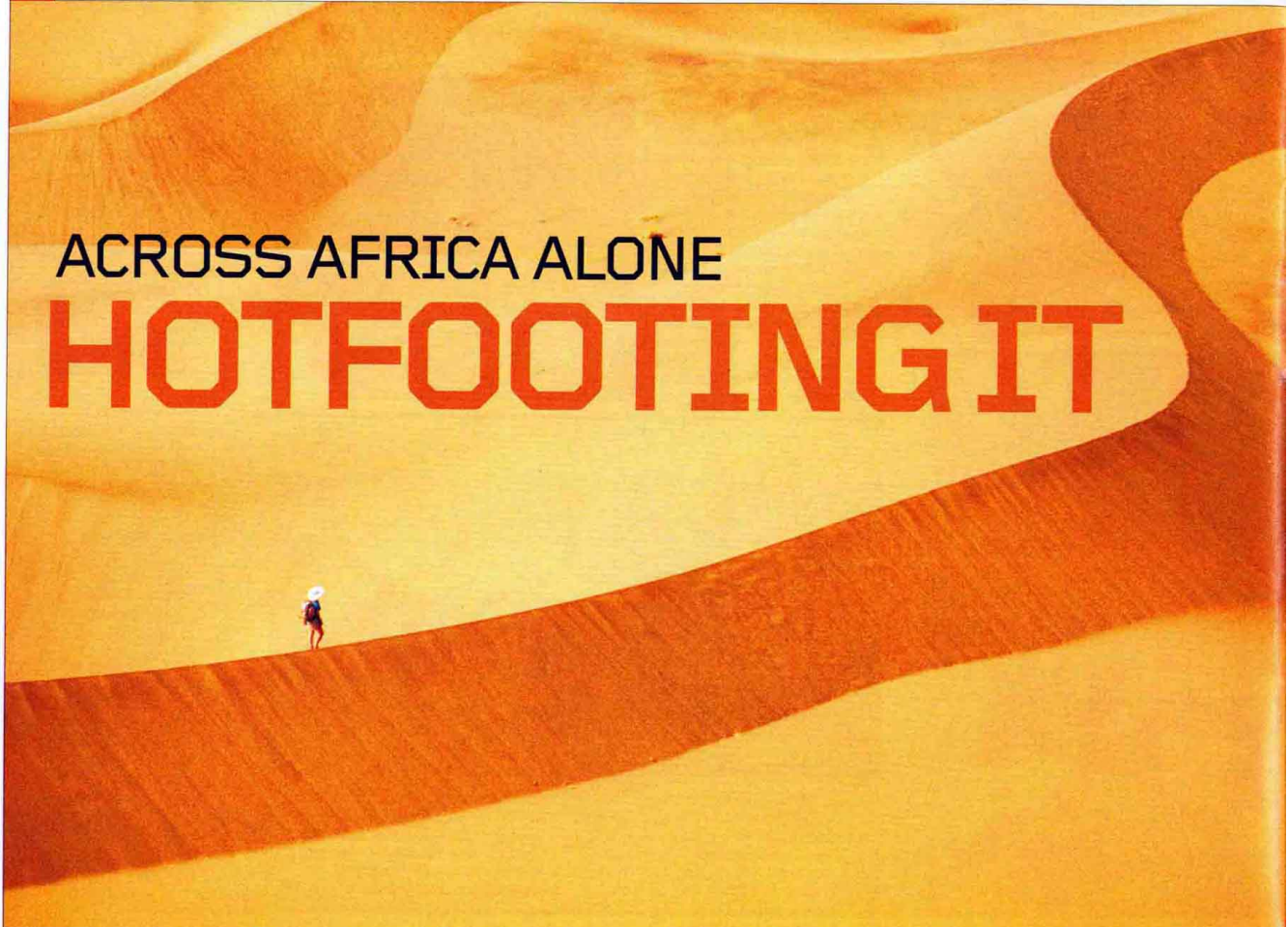
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32 ADVENTURE AFRICA



ACROSS AFRICA ALONE HOTFOOTING IT

Trekking 3,000 miles across a continent was never going to be easy but, after a year of dodging lions and bandits, Fran Sandham finally completed his epic walk across Africa



When Fran Sandham first stood alone in the sizzling desert of Namibia's Skeleton Coast, with an 80lb rucksack clinging to his sweat-soaked back, his previously suppressed trepidation at what lay ahead suddenly consumed him. Standing in the endless expanse of sand dunes, which were littered with the bleached bones of whales and the rusting, skeletal remains of shipwrecks, he realised that his dream – to walk alone and unsupported from the west coast of Africa to the east – had manifested itself into a stark and terrifying reality.

"I felt like a condemned criminal being prepared for execution," he said, recalling the first few moments of an adventure that, over the next 12 months, would see him travel 3,000 miles on foot through the heart of

Africa, from the Atlantic coast of Namibia to the Tanzanian shores of the Indian Ocean.

"It all started at a terrible New Year's Eve party," explains the 43-year-old Brighton-based Sandham, who was living in Wimbledon and working in a bookshop when he first hatched the plan. "Some people give up smoking as a resolution so I thought: 'Why not walk across Africa?' I was really bored. And drunk. I needed a big adventure."

Given that Sandham had a childhood fascination with the African adventures of the tree-dwelling, loinclothed comic book hero Tarzan – before upgrading his literary interests to works chronicling the great Victorian explorers Dr David Livingstone and Sir Henry Morton Stanley – the Dark Continent was an obvious choice of destination for his 'big adventure'.

"The degree of danger in Africa today isn't like that of Victorian times, when these gentlemen were taking

their lives into their own hands and hacking through virgin forests with machetes," he says. "I did, after all, have a map. And, when I found a road, I used it. Still, if you want to travel across Africa on foot, there are risks involved. But that's the nature of adventure, isn't it?"

When Sandham jettied to Africa, he knew where he wanted to start (the Skeleton Coast, Namibia) and finish (Bagamoyo, in Tanzania), but he hadn't planned what he refers to as "the bit in between". That aside, he could not have chosen a more hostile location to begin his odyssey. The Skeleton Coast, an arid area of Namibian desert that borders the Atlantic Ocean, is named after the eerie profusion of bones from animals that have perished in its forbidding environment – 16th-century Portuguese sailors referred to the region as "The Gates of Hell".

"When I began, I was nervous and quite naive," he told *Sport*. "But it was strange. That first night alone in the desert, completely by myself, I was euphoric."

The blistering heat soon wilted Sandham's spirits. After 270 kilometres of slogging inland through the desert, he gave up – albeit only for an hour. "I thought if I carried on, I would die," he admits. "But I reached a

 WEBLINK www.traversa.co.uk

Sandham faced a seemingly insurmountable trek across the barren land of the Namib Desert

AFRICA ON FOOT A SURVIVAL GUIDE

WATER

"Water was critical – some days I drank up to 11 litres, and my throat still felt dry. I took a water purifier, but it was impossible to purify everything I drank. I contracted giardiasis, which gave me diarrhoea – it wasn't pleasant, but I thought if it wasn't killing the locals then it wouldn't kill me."

FOOD

"Maize porridge was my main staple food, though I often bought rice and vegetables, meat stew, curried beef or goat mutton from the locals. In truth, I ate mainly rubbish – chocolate, crisps, biscuits, ice lollies, peanut butter, doughnuts and Coke. I needed the energy."

KIT

"I carried a tent, sleeping bag, raincover, water purifier, books, paper, knife, medical kit, trainers, maps, towel, lots of water and a raincoat. I also had malaria tablets, walking poles and a Walkman with about 20 separate compilations."

ANIMALS

"Animals were a threat, but attacks are rare. There are some unpleasant stories about hyenas, so I definitely didn't want to hear any growling or see their eyes staring at me in the night. I went through lion territory, too, but I stayed in the tent during the hunting hours of night and early morning."

BANDITS

"I was warned about bandits, but how does one spot a bandit? They don't wear special costumes. I think I was safer by myself than I would have been in a group, as I was arriving unexpectedly and leaving before anyone knew about me. Plus I had trekking poles, which a lot of people seemed to think were weapons. The kids called me 'ninja'."

Traversa: A solo walk across Africa from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean by Fran Sandham, published by Duckworth, is out now, priced £16.99. See www.traversa.co.uk



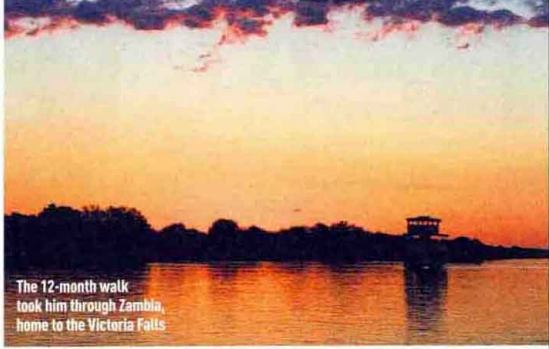
FAST FACTS



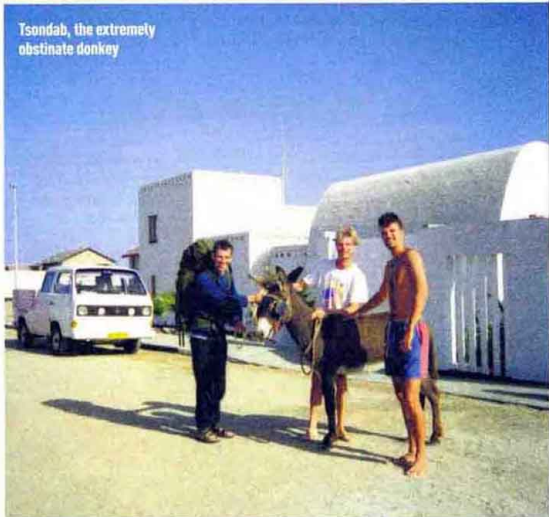
FRAN SANDHAM
Age 43
Lives Brighton
Previous occupations After spells in the voluntary sector and as a bookseller, Fran worked as an editor for Rough Guides



esport ONLINE
To see more pictures of Fran's walk across Africa, go to www.myfreesport.co.uk



The 12-month walk took him through Zambia, home to the Victoria Falls



Tsondab, the extremely obstinate donkey

little town, sat in the shade, drank a little water and did some lateral thinking. Unfortunately, that led me to the donkey fiasco."

This comical episode saw him blowing a large chunk of his budget on an obstinate donkey called Tsondab, which translates, literally, as 'where you get stuck'. The donkey was supposed to make his life easier by carrying his gear, but after two and a half months of attempting to train the intransigent rudiment, he had travelled just a single kilometre. "It was supposed to be Plan B, but after 10 weeks I realised Plan A was better," he says. "So I started walking."

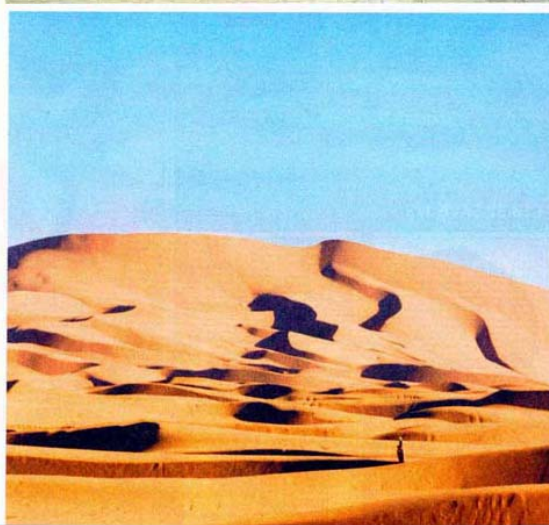
To reach Zambia, landlocked in the heart of Africa, Sandham travelled through the West Caprivi Game Reserve in northeast Namibia. The reserve is inhabited by hippos, buffaloes, hyenas and lions. One night, hearing guttural growls outside his tent, his blood turned cold. "I was worried because a warden had told me that a few people had been eaten by lions quite recently," he explains. This included an attack on a roadworker of whom nothing but his scalp remained as evidence. "Obviously the dangers of lion attacks can be exaggerated, but people do get eaten."

His passage continued through the highlands of Zambia – which he found "surprisingly easy" – and into Malawi. Hiking around the sun-baked shores of Lake Malawi, he once drank nine litres of water without urinating once. Then, after almost a year of trudging through deserts, savannah, highlands and jungle, Sandham arrived in the old Arabic coastal town of Bagamoyo, in Tanzania. Twelve months on from dipping his feet in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Africa, he was able to put down his pack and swim in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, having walked across the entire continent of Africa.

Over the course of his 12-month expedition Sandham lost three and a half stone in weight, was cramped up with giardiasis – a water-borne disease that causes explosive diarrhoea – and suffered from blisters "the size of golfballs". He also contracted malaria, but did so, somewhat conveniently, the day after completing his epic trip.

"I was remarkably lucky," he says. "I didn't plan much on the trip, as I wanted it to be a genuine adventure. But I planned that bit just perfectly."

MARK BAILEY



The Daily Telegraph

BOOKS

Dune roamin' – the riddle of the sands

James Owen enjoys two accounts of the desert's enduring attraction to Britons

Lost Oasis by Robert Twigger (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £16.99)
Traversa by Fran Sandham (Duckworth, £16.99)

As far as I know, no one has ever determined what it is about the desert that has drawn to it generation after generation of Britons, from Doughty to Lawrence to Thesiger. These two books, however, demonstrate that its fascination and the spirit of those earlier adventurers endure, with an accompanying measure of English eccentricity.

A decade ago, Robert Twigger wrote *Angry White Pajamas*, a slightly alarming account of a year spent as a human punch-bag at an aikido school in Japan. Twigger has since moved to Cairo and *Lost Oasis* understandably reads rather like an attempt to justify a substantial upheaval in family life, brought on not least by the money worries familiar to most writers.

He gains some entertaining insights into the Egyptian mentality, stimulating because the modern city is not written about much by travellers, but the book's subtitle, *In Search of Paradise*, reveals that his real interest lies in the sands beyond. In particular, he becomes obsessed by finding a fabled oasis for which Laszlo Almásy, the Hungarian explorer who was the inspiration for *The English Patient*, the 1992 novel by Michael Ondaatje, was also searching.

Twigger is no Thesiger, for that age is past and his writing aims for



True grit: a camel train makes its way across the Sahara, a source of inspiration for many adventurers

directness rather than grandeur. At times his bitterness and refusal to be amiable rather grate, but there is still something admirable about his wanting to live "the right kind of life", even if his explorations end in a soon-abandoned walk into the desert towing water in a glorified shopping trolley. His consolation is the spiritual nourishment that the immensity of the desert provides. Amid the frantic struggles of city life, this is the real lost oasis.

Fran Sandham, formerly an editor at Rough Guides, is another who has had enough of the urban rat race. *Traversa* is a still more classical account of one man's

struggle to test himself against Nature, in this case by walking 3,000 miles alone across Africa from Namibia's arid Skeleton Coast to Zanzibar on the Indian Ocean.

Sandham is nothing if not bloody-minded: day after punishing day he walks 25 miles or more across sand and savannah in blistering heat, notwithstanding a dodgy hip and knee and 90 pounds of supplies on his back. Pretty soon he, too, ends up trying to push a trolley, although this proves about as successful as his attempts to press into service a syphilitic donkey.

Like Livingstone and Stanley,

with whose travels he leavens his own, Sandham has to contend with threats from disease and marauding lions, although cute American tourists are a purely modern hazard.

His decision to write in the present tense is the book's one weakness, not so much lending it immediacy as making it read too often like the casually written diary as which it began life.

Yet his pluck is appealing, as is the maturity of anyone who can dedicate two years to such a task and then question whether he has merely treated Africa as a playground. I hope we shall hear more of his travels.



THE SCOTSMAN

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

Latter-day Livingstone

How one man was inspired by his Victorian heroes (and Tarzan) to walk across Africa

BY GABY SOUTAR

INSPIRATION CAN STRIKE AT unexpected times. For 42-year-old Liverpoolian, Fran Sandham, it was at a dreadful New Year party 11 years ago. Feeling bored with the daily grind of his job as a bookseller, he suddenly thought, "I know, I'll walk across Africa."

It wasn't a completely arbitrary, shandy-fuelled idea. Sandham had been fascinated by the continent since reading comics when he was a little boy.

"When I was six years old I was in hospital for a while with a bad leg. It was a really miserable time, until I found a Tarzan comic. Ever since then I've been crazy about Africa. Then, as I got older, I became interested in the African explorers, and saw it as one of the most exotic and adventurous places in the world."

And so, aged 31, soon after that eureka moment at the party, he took a walk. No ordinary jaunt, but a 3,000 mile solo stroll across the African continent, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean, through Namibia, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania. Sandham has now documented his epic journey in a book, *Traversa*.

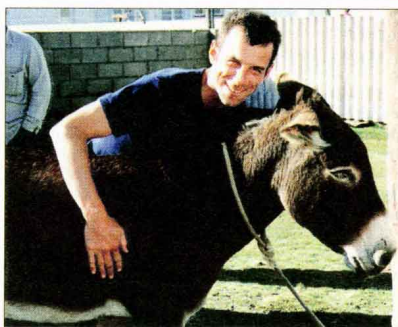
"It's not conventional travel writing at all," he says. "It's more about the experience I had, rather than trying to discover the soul of modern Africa. It's a very personal story."

The book describes his skirmishes with dangerous wildlife (including giant cockroaches), his encounters with oddball characters along the way and even an unconventional friendship with a donkey named Where You Get Stuck – an animal that accompanied Sandham on one leg of his journey.

"I do miss my donkey, but at least he had his 15 minutes of fame. He even got on the front pages of the local papers. However, he didn't share my enthusiasm for the journey across Africa – he had different priorities, and it turned out he wasn't well with some kind of donkey venereal disease. In the end, I left him on a nice farm, to live out his days happily."

This and many other stories are interwoven with tales from the original journeys taken by Sandham's Victorian explorer heroes, including David Livingstone, Sir Henry Morton Stanley and Sir Francis Galton.

"Obviously a lot of these explorers weren't the most altruistic people in



the world, but I'm just interested in that sense of adventure," he says.

"The more I delved into Livingstone's character and his writings, the more I realised he was a lot less dour than he looked. His accounts are so witty. He had a remarkable sense of fun and I was going quite near many places in Africa that he went to, so he became a character in my story."

Fran Sandham on the Tanzanian coast, main; with his donkey, named Where You Get Stuck, above

Sandham made sure not to take exactly the same route as earlier explorers, however. With just an £80 rucksack on his back, he chose his own path across the continent.

He was careful to keep a diary so he could write about the trip when he got back to London, but it wasn't easy –

not least because ten years ago it was tricky to find internet access in even the biggest cities, so he couldn't report back to base when he stopped off in Lake Malawi or Victoria Falls. "I was

keeping these minuscule notes, in tiny writing, as I was going. I tucked them into my money belt. Then I would post home photocopies to friends whenever I could. Obviously, trying to decipher them at the other end, when I got home, after the notes had half-dissolved, was a nightmare."

When he returned to the UK, he found he'd contracted malaria. He had also lost a lot of weight – going from 12

stone to eight and a half. The physical toll was not what bothered him, however. It was the realisation of the enormity of the task he'd taken on.

"Writing the book was much more difficult than walking across Africa. I'd never compare myself to Livingstone, but he did say he'd rather cross Africa overland again than write his book. I agree."

Despite this, after a couple of years of editing and eight years searching for a publisher for *Traversa*, Sandham has caught the travel bug again. "I haven't been away for two years now," says Sandham. "It's the longest I haven't been abroad, so I'm itching to get off somewhere again. I'm thinking the next book might be on Tibet." **SM**

■ *Traversa* by Fran Sandham is published in hardback by Gerald Duckworth Publishing, priced £16.99. For more details, visit www.traversa.co.uk

Author to tell of his great feat



by **Bev Creagh**

WRITER Fran Sandham is good at bouncing back.

If he hadn't had this trampoline-like ability, his first acclaimed travelogue would never have graced international book shelves.

Nor would he be discussing it at Luton Central Library this evening.

That's because Traversa was rejected by no less than 40 publishers before Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd decided to run with it.

Now readers can enjoy the engaging account of his 3,000 mile trek from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to Zanzibar.

The adventure took place after Fran, 44 – a former Rough Guide editor who lives in south east London – decided he wanted to change his predictable life.

"The only reason I chose the Skeleton Coast and Zanzibar was because they both sounded so exotic," he explained.

It took him a year to save the £2,000 he reckoned he'd need. He admits he had little previous experience of long distance walking, let alone

attempting a cross-Continental marathon.

He said: "People all over – black, white, whatever – were so friendly. I think they liked the idea I was doing it on my own. They told me to beware of bandits but I didn't run into any."

His most unnerving moment came when he was crossing West Caprivi Game Reserve. Rangers warned him several people had been eaten by lions but he lived to tell the tale. He brought back two mementos – a dose of malaria and a massive Maasai shield bought in Nairobi.

Fran believed it would make a good book because it wasn't traditional travel writing.

For him, the highlight was right at the beginning. "It was that feeling of freedom, of wide open spaces, of starting a big adventure," he said.

He says the moral of his story is not to be crushed by rejection.

>> Fran Sandham will be discussing Traversa at Luton Central Library this evening at 7.30pm. For more information, call 01582 547418 or visit the website www.traversa.co.uk



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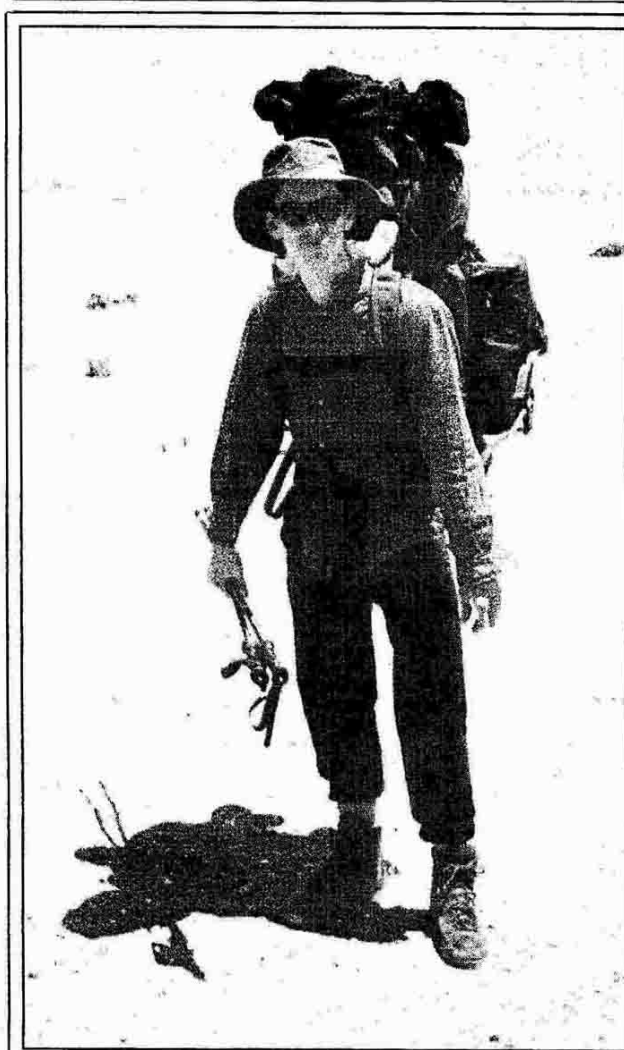
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TUESDAY JULY 29 2008 **READING EVENING POST**



TRAVERSA – Explorer Fran Sandham will be in Reading tomorrow

Hear incredible tales of African adventure

A MAN who walked 3,000 miles across Africa will be reliving his memories of the epic journey to an audience in Reading this week.

It was at a New Year's Eve party a decade ago that Fran Sandham, 42, decided he would not spend the next year doing the same old things.

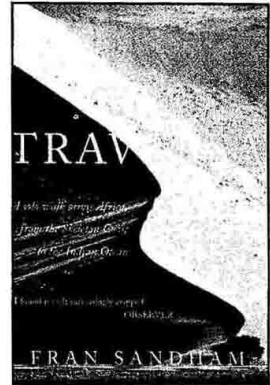
So he made the resolution to trek across Africa – a continent he had been fascinated with since childhood.

Mr Sandham, who hails from the Wirral, told the *Evening Post*: "It was just the real desire to go on an adventure. The New Year's party just seemed really predictable so I made the resolution.

"I thought I would have gone off the idea the following morning, but I didn't. I did, however, realise that I hadn't got any money or experience so it took a year of scrimping and saving before I could actually start the trip. I lived frugally and it became a fixation really."

A keen traveller, Mr Sandham crossed Africa from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar – the first time anyone had done it completely on foot and entirely alone.

Despite embarking on the trip alone, Mr Sandham was joined in Namibia for two months of his year-long trip by



a donkey, which he mistakenly thought would help him carry his gear on his travels.

But he said: "The donkey was hard work. It wasn't even well. It had this embarrassing donkey venereal disease so it didn't share my enthusiasm for walking across Africa."

Ten years after his trip, Mr Sandham is touring the UK promoting his book – *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa* from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean.

He will be talking about his book from 7pm at Reading Central Library tomorrow.

The event is free, but to book your place, call (0118) 901 5950, email info@readinglibraries.org.uk or collect tickets from the library.

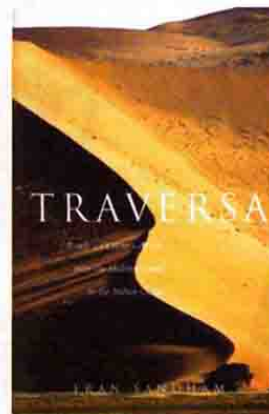
TRAVERSA ▲▲▲▲▲

Edited by: Fran Sandham

Publisher: Duckworth

£16.99 Hardback

This is real old school adventure in the form of a solo walk across Africa, coast to coast, echoing the traversa of Victorian times. Fran Sandham gives up everything to pursue his dream of walking across Africa, checking out en route whether the Africa of yesteryear, as visited by the likes of Livingstone, Stanley et al, still exists in pockets of halted time. Combined with the trials and tribulations of the author himself, is information and reflections on those explorers of the past. Great stuff.



Irish Examiner



WELL WORN PATH: Fran Sandham is not afraid to address the fatigue of the Western tourist and the self-indulgent nature of escapist fantasy which casts Africa as an exotic playground.



Pól Ó Conghaile talks to Fran Sandham about his epic 3,000-mile solo trek across Africa and the ensuing journey of writing an account of his travels.

IS THERE anywhere on earth left to explore? Any truly original adventure left to have? By now, this beleaguered planet has been jogged around and rowed across. Its tallest mountain was conquered this year alone by the first Welsh woman and the oldest man to do so and by a climber who wore shorts to 24,278 feet. Bereft of terrestrial challenges, in 2009, Virgin Galactic will launch the first of its spacelines. Would the Creans, Thesigers and Livingstones of lore applaud, or be appalled?

From an Irish perspective, the year's end sees Pat Falvey taking the tricolour to the South Pole, Hugh Bergin circling Africa by motorbike and Ian McKeever having completed the Seven Summits challenge in record time. All will return, or already have, to an increasingly indifferent public. In order to fire the 21st-century imagination, it seems, one has to travel by llama, eat only foods beginning with the letter "F", or discover a third Pole.

Step forth Fran Sandham. Step after step, in fact — the 42-year-old Liverpoolian has just published Traversa, his account of a 3,000-mile solo trek across Africa. From Skeleton Coast to Indian Ocean, the journey provides an inevitable complement of wild animals, giant cockroaches, tragicomic donkeys, madcap humans, UXO (unexploded ordnance) and giardiasis. But really, what is the point?

"It wasn't one of these journeys of self-discovery," the author replies, speaking by phone from southern Britain (since his expedition, Sandham — originally a book-seller — has spent several years working for Rough Guides). "I think it's a bit more tongue-in-cheek than that. It was basically just a desire to go on a big adventure."

He has been hooked on Africa ever since reading Tarzan as a six-year-old, it transpires. By the time he realised the comic "was complete rubbish", he'd gotten into Victorian explorers. The eureka moment came on New Year's Eve, some 11 years ago. "I was at this awful party in South London, looking forward to the year ahead, and it all seemed very predictable... I could see what was going to happen and wanted to take a step way beyond that."

And thus begins what, despite his friendly protestations, bears all the hallmarks of a classic tale of self-discovery. Man rails at the approach of middle-age. Man drops himself in a completely alien environment ("Africa seemed the complete opposite of the life I was leading in London," he writes). And man returns, in theory at least, somewhat the wiser for his travails.

The high point comes close to the beginning of his adventure, as Sandham sets

out on a night-train from Windhoek to the Skeleton Coast. "That sense of excitement and anticipation was mind-blowing," he recalls. "People often assume you end these journeys in euphoria, but I was quite sad to end it. I didn't feel like running around the beach screaming."

As expected, of course, there follows enough curious encounters with animals and people to fill both National Geographic and the Fortean Times. Braiding tales of heroes like Grogan, Stanley and Livingstone throughout his diaries, the byways of Namibia, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania slowly unfold.

"You worry about things like lions and snakes and all the rest of it, but by far the biggest danger in travelling like that is actually drunken drivers," he says. "Particularly towards the end of the month when people get their wage packets and go on the sauce. That's a bigger hazard than lions."

The progress is slow but steady, bloated with macro- and micro-adventure. Like

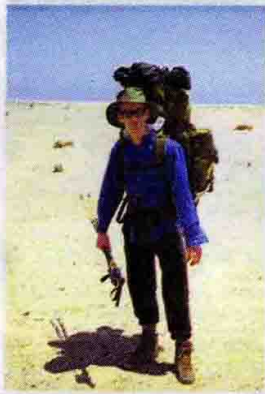
Paul Theroux in Dark Star Safari, for instance, Sandham contracts an ominous "heavy cold" within tantalising reach of the finishing line, before malaria clamps him like a vice. He encounters some issues with banditry, but it is a tortuous rucksack and petulant (not to mention sphyllitic) donkey that give most jip.

"People didn't know what to make of me... a lot of the local guys seemed to think that because of the way I was travelling, I must be some kind of tough guy!"

The low point comes early too, halfway across the Namib desert. "I was carrying about 80lbs in very high temperatures, and I thought — this is going to kill me. The thought of carrying on in that way for months ahead was so heartbreaking that I just thought, I can't do this, this is too much. I did actually give up... But there is a little town in the middle of the desert, and I stopped in the shade, and after about an hour I felt a bit more philosophical."

Ultimately, of course, Sandham reaches the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar — malarial, three-and-a-half stone lighter and proud as punch. And by then, of course, as is the way with these things, he realises the true challenge has only just begun. "Walking across Africa was the easy bit," he says drily, outlining the subsequent eight-year battle to finish and publish Traversa (echoes of Livingstone here too — the explorer famously said he would rather cross Africa again than write about it).

Ultimately, what's of most value about Sandham's account is his willingness to accept that his journey is essentially — as a reviewer for The Observer put it — one of "pointlessness and vanity". In many ways, he writes, the whole thing was "an ex-



LONG HAUL: Clockwise from top, Fran Sandham ill and exhausted at Caprivi; at the Malawian Border; Caught in a tropical downpour at Lake Malawi; and trekking through the Skeleton Coast; below, Sandham arrives at the Indian Ocean at the end of his travels.

tremely self-indulgent episode, literally an escape".

Quite openly, he struggles with the quicksand-like tradition of Westerners who set out to pitch themselves against an exotic and naively reductionist landscape. From Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Ltd*, it takes a deft hand to pull such ventures off without veering into dodgy (to put it mildly) stereotype and, much as Sandham would like to posit his journey as an uncomplicated, Boy's Own adventure, he has too much affection for Africa to pay it that disservice.

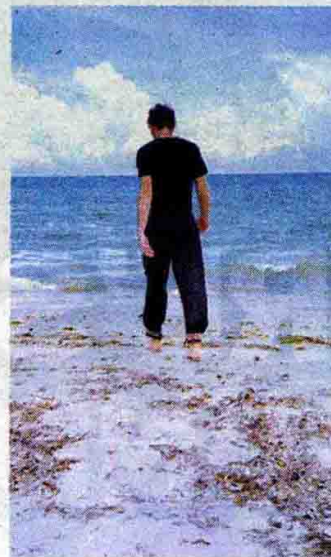
"I was questioning that during the journey," he says. "It's a tricky one because if you go far enough down the road of those fears or concerns then you wouldn't go at all... this is a personal and quite a self-indulgent thing, but I did feel like I was working so hard that I had, in a strange kind of way, almost earned my right to be there."

In comparison to the ways most tourists experience Africa (gated resorts, managed safaris, bungee-jumping at Victoria Falls etc) he plainly sees his "back to basics" journey as, in its own way, a pure one. "I wasn't exploiting anyone or taking anything from people." His carbon footprint was minimal, and virtually all the Africans he met, he says, were "genuinely delighted" to hear what he was doing. "It's almost as if I was providing entertainment!"

The whole question of tourism in the developing world is a sticky one, of course, something he readily concedes. "Particularly when you're interested in the history of Africa, and the history of Europeans going into Africa, these are very questionable is-

sues. It's difficult to answer when people suggest there's an element of using these sorts of places as some sort of playground."

Sandham comes across as well-meaning, someone who genuinely cares about these things, though in another conversation, I'm sure he'd hit back more harshly. As he writes in the book, "I've often thought, 'Can't adventure speak for it-



self?" I imagine that every time a mountaineer climbs a difficult peak the one question they emphatically won't hear from fellow climbers is: 'Why did you do it?'" Ultimately, "the journey was what it was, no more and no less, and it was enough". And even now, a decade later, he remains disarmingly thrilled to have completed it.

"Walking across a continent, it's such a traditional way of travelling, that I don't consider it gimmicky at all... I was just more interested in walking in the way that people have done for centuries."

And whatever about the broader contexts for his mammoth traverse, be they Victorian explorers or adrenaline junkies, at least Traversa brings these conflicts to our attention. Vanity? Pointlessness? A simple personal challenge?

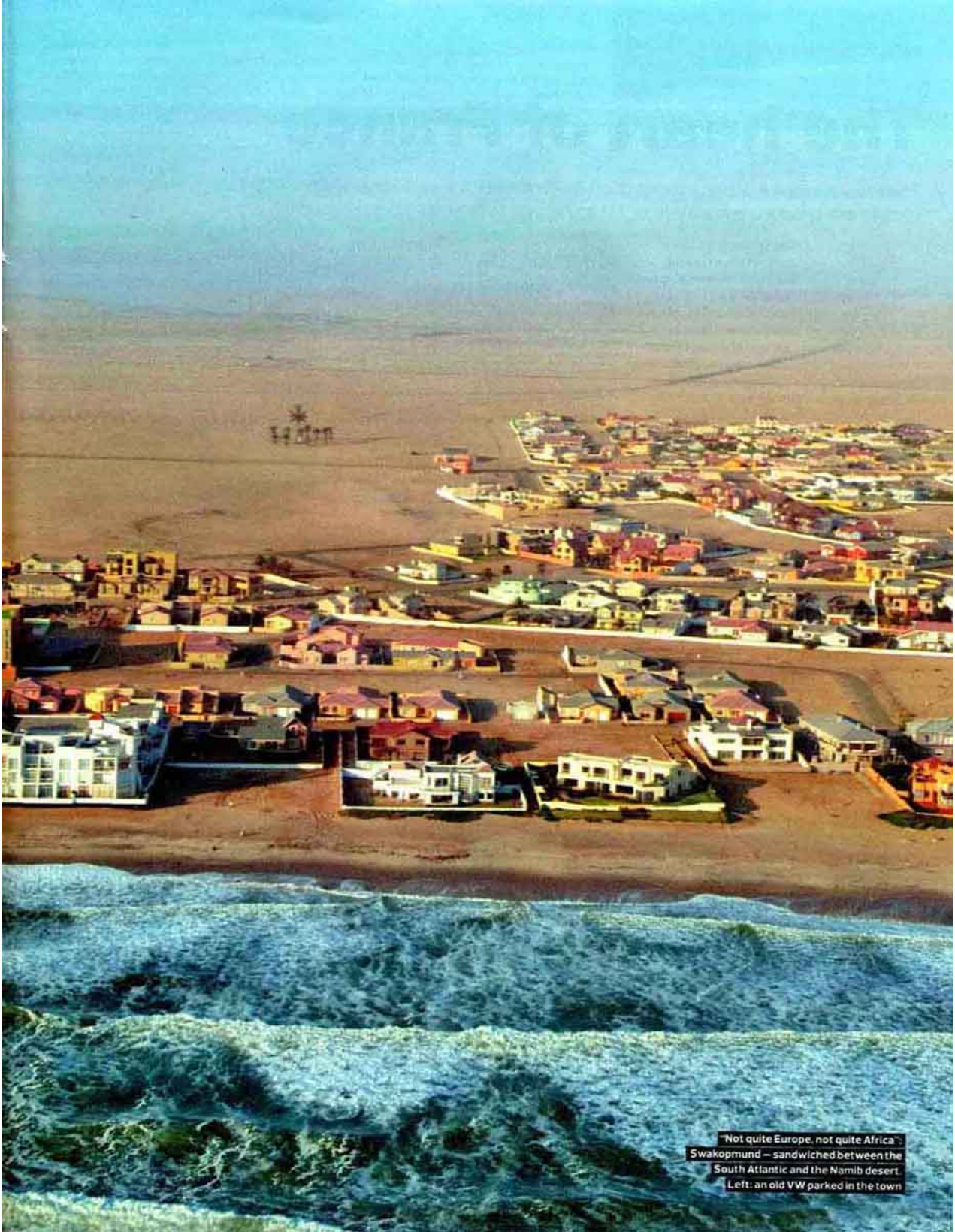
As adventurers hop, skip and jump around the world in multi-badged jump suits, this one is at least pared-down and honest.

So to the big question. In the end, did Sandham get the perspective he was after? "I felt more fulfilled. I had more confidence, I guess. It felt good to do something which not everybody could do," he says. "To be on that long, linear journey where life is so much simpler than back home... I've never been that certain before or since."

Traversa, by Fran Sandham, is published by Duckworth Overlook at around €23.99.



The Observer



"Not quite Europe, not quite Africa":
Swakopmund – sandwiched between the
South Atlantic and the Namib desert.
Left: an old VW parked in the town



The prisoner of Skeleton Coast

Swakopmund, Namibia, is the unlikely successor to Portmeirion as the setting for the remake of classic 60s TV series *The Prisoner*. But what's it like to actually get stuck there?

Words **FRAN SANDHAM**

HOW TO GET THERE

You can take the train, bus or fly from the capital, Windhoek, but the best option is to visit as part of a self-drive tour of Namibia. Roads are often unsurfaced but you don't need a 4x4. Expert Africa (020 8232 9777; expertafrica.com) offers an 11-day itinerary, including time in Swakopmund, staying at a variety of small guesthouses and farms, from £1,782 including flights, car hire and accommodation.

At 5am, after 10 hours creaking and groaning across interminable dry scrub savannah and then pure desert, the night train from Windhoek finally reaches Swakopmund. I haven't slept for two days – only three days ago I was still at work in London. The train conductor mistakes my haggard expression for dissatisfaction with the train service. "Sorry, we had a flat tyre!" he jokes.

Stepping off the train into the empty streets, it's hard to get my bearings. I'm so tired it takes me several minutes to identify a curiously irritating tapping sound, rather like a woodpecker following me around – my teeth chattering. I'd been warned about the cold down here on the coast, but it feels bizarre. Am I really in Africa?

The surroundings are stranger still. Swakopmund is sandwiched between the cold breakers of the South Atlantic and the burning heat of the world's oldest desert, but rather than a wild, remote, frontier town,

it feels more like a rather genteel European seaside resort. Fog creeps around the corners, rolling in from the sea. The buildings which loom from the mist are whitewashed and half-timbered, looking like mock-Tudor southern England. There are twee ornamental lawns, a pier, candy-striped lighthouse and several pretty churches. When I find a hotel, the receptionist is an elderly German lady, and the young black Ovambo porter is called Gerhardt. It's not quite Europe, not quite Africa, a peculiar other world, marooned in the desert.

All of which makes it the perfect setting for the remake of *The Prisoner*, the cult 1960s TV series that follows Patrick McGoohan trying to escape from "The Village", a place that is half fantasy perfection, half sinister prison. The new version stars Ian McKellen and Jim Caviezel and has many of the weird hallmarks of the original, including the evil giant balloons that chase would-be escapees; however, the location has moved from Portmeirion, the Italianate holiday village in north Wales, to Swakopmund, a town just as surreal as anything in the show.

Much of its strangeness is a product of the town's German heritage. Namibia was a German colony from 1884 to 1915, but strong links continued long after that, and while there are reminders of this throughout the country, nowhere is the German influence more readily visible than in Swakopmund. Today, many of the streets have German names (though Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse has been renamed Sam Nujoma Avenue after Namibia's first president). German bakeries on every corner serve their customers *Brötchen* and pumpernickel, the town's brewery makes beer to strict German standards and you can find



ALAMY



DEAL OF THE WEEK

Carrier (0161 491 7660; carrier.co.uk) is offering a "sing for your supper" deal, saving £840, to the luxury **Six Senses Soneva Fushi** resort in the Maldives. In return for five hours' volunteer work a day for five days, you get five extra nights free – making the 10-night trip cost £1,870, including flights and private transfers.



The Swakopmund Hotel, housed in the former railway station. Below: Ian McKellen in the remake of *The Prisoner*



more varieties of *wurst* than probably exist in Germany. Some of the bars wouldn't look out of place in Bavaria, with wood-panelling, roaring fires and maps of the fatherland on the wall. Beside the half-timbered buildings, others are painted in bright pastels, and styles range from the "rustic" colonial of early structures to the full-blown elegance of neo-baroque national monuments such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Beyond Swakopmund's colonial architecture, twee souvenir shops and carefully tended residential gardens there's always a sense of the vast African landscape outside, eerily beautiful, harsh and unforgiving, especially to the north, on the aptly named Skeleton Coast.

The filmmakers used the dunes to lend visual grandeur to Caviezel's attempts at escape, but in reality they are helping draw growing numbers of tourists who come to quadbike through the desert. When Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt moved to the town for several months for the birth of her daughter Shiloh, Pitt spent much of his time ripping round the sands on a quad.

I went to Swakopmund to start a solo walk across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean, but things didn't begin well. In fact, true to the spirit of *The Prisoner*, I got stuck there for more than three months, my efforts to leave repeatedly thwarted. The coastal chill had done little to prepare me for rocketing temperatures inland; after four days on foot in the Namib Desert I was back in town to buy a donkey to carry my gear and water. This plan backfired,

dissolving into fiasco when I bought a desert donkey called "Tsondab" (in the Nama language "Where you get stuck"). In 10 weeks together we'd covered literally less than one mile of the journey across Africa.

During this period, one Swakopmund landmark in particular came to symbolise my enforced sojourn on the coast: the "Martin Luther" – the unluckiest steam tractor in history, abandoned just outside town. Imported by the German authorities in 1896 to replace ox-wagon transport, it proved so utterly inefficient that it took three months to clunk its way a mere 20 miles up the coast. At Swakopmund it broke down completely, and remains there to this day, earning its nickname after someone remembered the words of Martin Luther: "Here I stand, God help me, I cannot do otherwise."

And yet I look back on that time on



Beyond Swakopmund's colonial architecture and carefully tended gardens there's always a sense of the vast African landscape outside

THE ORIGINAL VISITING PORTMEIRION

Seeing the set of the original 1967 show is rather easier. It was filmed at Portmeirion in north Wales, a holiday village built between 1925 and 1975 and designed to resemble a resort on the Italian Riviera. Guests stay in a waterside hotel, a hilltop castle, or individual rooms in the buildings that make up the village. Prices start at £170 per night for a double room including breakfast (01766 770 000; portmeirion-village.com).

Visit guardian.co.uk/travel for more advice and travel suggestions

the Namibian coast with perhaps the most fondness of the entire journey across Africa – the absurdity of it all delights me. If you are going to get stuck somewhere, Swakopmund is a very nice place for it to happen.

Where to stay The Swakopmund Hotel (00 264 64 410 5200; swakopmundhotel.co.za), housed in the ornate former station built in 1901, is the most upmarket address, and features prominently in the *Prisoner* remake. It's not cheap, though: doubles with breakfast cost from N\$2,950 (£260). For a taste of traditional, German-influenced Swakopmund, try the Hansa Hotel (00 264 64 414 200; hansahotel.com.na; doubles with breakfast from N\$1,820/£160) or the Hotel Eberwein (00 264 64 414 450; eberwein.com.na; doubles from N\$960/£85). At the other end of the spectrum is the Stiltz (00 264 64 400 771; thestiltz.in.na; doubles from N\$1,290/£114), a collection of nine thatched bungalows close to the beach at the southern end of town.

What to do Whether quadbiking over the dunes, sky-diving above them or surfing down them, adrenaline sports are big here. Desert Explorers (00 264 64 406 096; swakop.com/adv/) can arrange all these, and more gentle activities such as horse riding and ballooning. Scenic flights are popular, and several operators in town offer flights over the Skeleton Coast or to the dunes of Sossusvlei. The beach can be windy here, but you can easily spend a day or two strolling along the seafront and stopping off at the bars and cafés.

Where to eat Swakopmund has the best food scene in Namibia outside the capital, but restaurants get busy, so you should book. Grapevine (00 264 64 404 770; Libertina Amathila Avenue) is a romantic spot with gourmet food. For something more relaxed head for the Tug (00 264 64 402 356; Strand Street), an old tug boat pulled on to the seafront and converted into a restaurant. German bakeries are found on most streets, with Café Anton (1 Bismarck Street) perhaps the most famous. ■ Fran Sandham is the author of *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa* (Duckworth, £10.89). *The Prisoner* is on ITV 1 at 9pm on Saturdays

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Fran Sandham
The man who walked solo across Africa, courtesy of Namibia Tourist Board

Be inspired, amused and filled with wanderlust as explorers, travel personalities and writers recount tales of journeys, bravery and adventure.

Peterson's book of the week...

TRAVERSA, Fran Sandham (Duckworth Overlook £16.99 h/b).

I was intrigued by this book as my former colleague David Carnduff undertook a charity walk through Namibia several years ago, and although brief and enjoyable, he found the conditions at times quite inhospitable.

Here though, Fran undertook a solo walk across Africa from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean — daunting with a group, but unimaginable unaccompanied.

His is a funny and engaging account of this incredible journey — photographed along the way — a journey of some 3,000

Really Frantastic journey

Reviews by Stewart Peterson

miles in some of the world's harshest conditions.

Inspired by the great explorers (and the author's journey must put him a few notches up on the pedestal towards becoming a great, having left the city life for this extraordinary adventure) to see for himself whether any trace of the Africa of Victorian times exists in the Africa of today.

Starting his journey on

Namibia's Skeleton Coast, he has a hangover, an 80lb rucksack and little idea of the travails that lie ahead.

From here he walks across the oldest desert in the world, through a game reserve notorious for lion attacks, bandits and unexploded landmines, via the majestic Victoria Falls, the shores of Lake Malawi and Tanzania, finally completing his journey in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

Along the way he befriends a syphilitic donkey called 'Where You get Stuck', risks muggings and potentially

much worse sleeping beneath the the African stars; encounters all manner of creatures from scorpions and snakes to tsetse flies and voracious mosquitoes.

He also discovers all the pains and challenges that arise when embarking on a feat of such vast proportion.

Interwoven with his experiences are tales of battles and conquests, cannibalism and madness from the original expeditions of Livingstone, Stanley and Grogan.



and look out for...

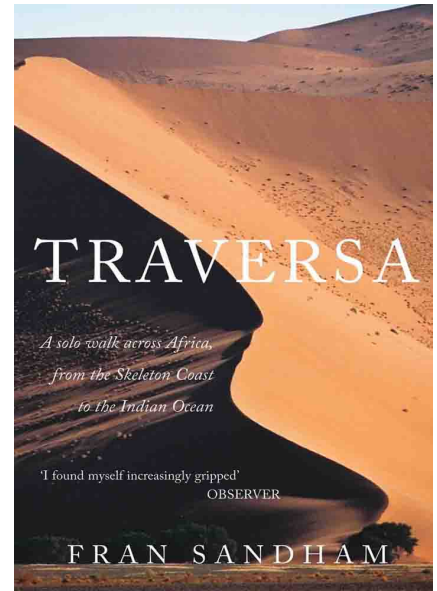
THE IRISH TIMES

Laurence Mackin reviews *Traversa*, Fran Sandham, Duckworth Overlook, £8.99

The “traversa” is something of a hard-core explorer’s rite of passage, the crossing of a continent on foot. Fran Sandham is somewhat less than hard-core when he decides to go on foot from the Skeleton Coast of Namibia through Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania to Zanzibar.

He leaves behind a rain-sodden London to venture through the wilds of a continent with just his own bloody-mindedness and the advice of previous explorers, especially David Livingstone, for company.

Sandham is all too aware of his failings, together with his daily battles with his punishingly heavy pack and a refusal to give up cigarettes and alcohol, makes for an authentic tale of self-discovery in the rawest of African surroundings. His dogged determination is enormously impressive, and his encounters with people and animals (most prominent of which is the devil in donkey form) put this near the top of the pile of African travelogues – and make it one for walkers everywhere.



A new year decision saw a man and a donkey stuck in frazzling heat

Fran's desert resolution



WALKING: On the Great Eastern Road in Zambia

By Helen Clarke

AS FAR as new year's resolutions go, Fran Sandham's was one of the more adventurous.

On December 31, 11 years ago, the Surbiton writer made his first-ever resolution – and changed his life forever.

"I was at a terrible party and felt stuck in a rut, I didn't know what to do with my life," he told the *Informer*.

"I'd never made a new year's resolution before but I decided there and then that I wanted to walk across Africa.

"I don't know where the idea came from. I'd been backpacking but I'd never done anything like this before."

After a year of scraping cash together by working in a bookshop, Fran set off on the solo 3,000-mile trek across Africa.

This year marks a decade since his trip and his book, *Traversa*, which chronicles his journey, has received rave reviews.

"I think it's because it's written in a different style to most travel books. It's honest and it's a true account of what happened when I was over there.

"It's great to have such flattering reviews, if only because I've finally got the last laugh.

"It took me a long time to get a publisher. I received about 40 rejection letters!"

Fran, 44, set off from Namibia's Skeleton Coast, and soon realised that the soaring heat would be too much

for him. "So I bought a donkey," he said.

"I thought it would be able to carry my things for me, making the journey quicker. But we managed to travel less than a mile in the two and a half months I had him.

"Ironically the donkey was called Tsondab, which means 'where you get stuck'.

"There were a few hairy moments along the way. Keeping a lookout for lions was always at the front of my mind, but it was a really wonderful journey.

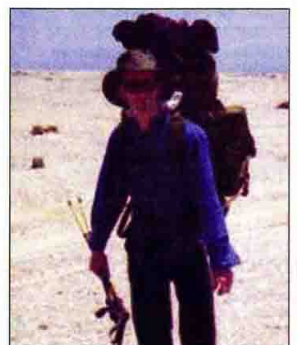
"I'd always intended to write a book about my experiences and at first I was writing pages and pages every day, but I soon realised if I carried on I'd need to get a wheelbarrow to carry the pages around. So in the end I was left with a few pages of soggy, papier-mâché notes.

"I survived a year out there and had always been worried about catching malaria. Luckily I managed to avoid it, until the day after I finished the trek. I had a very spaced out journey home!"

Fran now works as a freelance editor and gives talks about Africa. He plans to write his next book about Victorian explorers.

"But I wouldn't say no to making such a big new year's resolution again – well, maybe not quite so big!"

Traversa is out now. For more information visit www.traversa.co.uk



DESERT ODYSSEY: Top, Fran Sandham loaded up for his trek and above, one of the many people he met along the way



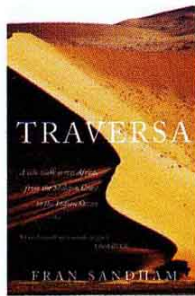


TRAVERSA

A Solo Walk Across Africa

Fran Sandham

New in Paperback



A thoroughly uplifting account of an epic journey across Africa starting from just about the most difficult place possible – the Namib desert. Sandham writes with wit and a gentle self-deprecating humour and his extraordinary enthusiasm for his mission appears unabated even in the most trying of circumstances. It

was the accounts of Victorian explorers borrowed from the bookshop where he worked that inspired Sandham’s journey, so perhaps this book will have a similar effect on you. *Duckworth 288pp Pb.*

APP290 **£8.99**



● Fran Sandham

Book into trekker’s tales out of Africa

TREKKER Fran Sandham crossed Africa, dodging lions, poachers, and robbers, before writing a gripping account of his travels.

The intrepid 43-year-old explorer, from Crystal Palace, London, will appear at Romford’s Central Library, Main Road, on Thursday, June 26, at 7.30pm to share his experiences.

Fran is riding the crest of a literary wave, after his book, *Traversa*, was nominated for the National Book Critics’ Circle’s best non-fiction title.

Penned 10 years ago, writer Fran spends much of his time now doing press interviews, after it took him a decade to get the book published.

It has recently been serialised in the *Sunday Times*.

Traversa tells the tale of Fran’s solo, 3,000-mile, trek from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar.

Instead of a sensible start point of busy areas like Cape Town or Zanzibar, he decided to kickstart his adventure from the desolate, searing, Namib Desert.

Highlights in the book include his paranoid fear of being attacked by a lion at every turn on the African savannah.

He also tells a hilarious tale about his disastrous purchase of a donkey to guide him.

Fran reveals: “It was called *Tsondab*, which means ‘Where You Get Stuck’ in Namibian. I walked with it for 10 weeks and we only covered a couple of miles because it took me in circles.”

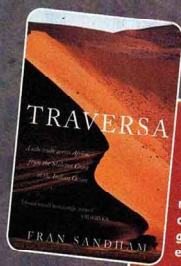
He appears in the library as part of the National Year of Reading’s Reading Escapes theme.

Tickets are £4. For more information contact the library on 01708 432389.

For more about Fran Sandham, and to read extracts of his book, visit www.traversa.co.uk

Holiday Reads

Perfect books for packing or armchair travelling...



Fran Sandham’s *TRAVERSA* recounts his intrepid adventures as he takes a long and solitary walk across Africa, from The Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean. Despite this being a solo voyage, readers really get to come along for the ride, and will find Fran excellent company. As a one-man show Sandham knows there’s no escape route or opt out clause, and he embarks on his adventure with all the gusto of Livingstone and Stanley – although with considerably less possessions on his back. A likable and skilled raconteur, Sandham brings his daring odyssey to life with verve, style and passion. (Duckworth, € 12).

FINANCIAL TIMES

Against the mules

Fran Sandham reveals how his solo trek across Africa got off to a false start

Walking across Africa solo without any kind of support is a serious undertaking. The dangers, obstacles and difficulties include lions, snakes, scorpions, land mines, tropical diseases, heat, exhaustion, drunken drivers and bandits.

I'd given all these matters careful thought before setting out but the biggest single obstacle was one I'd never anticipated. For 10 weeks my whole expedition turned into a ghastly moral parable of wasted time, squandered money and unrealistic schemes aimed at making my life easier.

Starting on Namibia's Skeleton Coast, I left the coastal breeze behind, the midday temperatures in the Namib Desert soaring - the surface temperature of the sand can reach 70°C. Carrying an 80lb rucksack through this heat proved so demoralising that I abandoned the trek temporarily.

The situation was serious and required lateral thinking. The problem was the weight I was carrying. A flash of insight produced the answer: if I bought a donkey, it could carry the gear. I'd do the walking and we'd be a great team.

Along the Kuiseb River Valley, a local trader sold me a small, mournful-looking creature called Tsondab (in the Nama language, it means Where You Get Stuck) after the notoriously muddy Tsondab River, where donkeys often get bogged down). In hindsight, the donkey's name should have aroused my suspicions.

I should have taken him on approval only.

As a trial run, I took him for a 20-mile walk through the desert. We crossed the dry Swakop River bed without a problem despite worries that Tsondab would prove true to his name and we'd flounder in the glutinous mud beneath. At first he was on his best behaviour, trotting along briskly across the vast empty gravel flats. An hour later our roles reversed and I was virtually dragging him along every step. Then he suddenly switched to full gallop and charged off into the desert like a racehorse.

After three hours, I abandoned the chase and plodded back to the coast alone, crossing a seemingly endless sea of light-apricot dunes, sinking up to my ankles at every step. Back on the coast I had to rehire the local guys who'd sold me the donkey. They tracked him in the desert and returned him to me long after midnight, much to general merriment.

After Tsondab's failed escape attempt we made some small progress over the next few weeks as I trained him for his big adventure. Our daily walks around the outskirts of the small coastal town of Walvis Bay made us minor celebrities, especially after we appeared on the front page of the local paper under the headline, Tsondab is a naughty boy!

But when finally we set out inland, disaster struck. After covering less than one mile, Tsondab was ready to collapse and I realised that if

I took him heavily laden into the desert he'd die. Fortunately a Good Samaritan-farmer took pity on our plight and offered Tsondab food and shelter. Several days later, I learnt from a vet that Tsondab had caught an equine venereal disease.

"Man, you need a mule for your journey," the farmer told me. "Mules are half-donkey and half-horse: they're stronger and tougher than either."

This sounded like the way forward. I bought a dark chestnut mule called Marieke, several times the size of the diminutive Tsondab. But the sheer strength of the creature unnerved me: when tethering a mule to a tree you have to choose the tree carefully or the mule will run off with the tree. They can also kill you easily with a well-

placed kick. This may sound unmanly, I told the farmer, but I find mules scary. "Man, I've worked with mules all my life and they still frighten me!" he replied.

Then in a bizarre act of misplaced generosity the farmer presented me with a second mule. This new addition to the team, Lucifer, was completely untamed, jet black and evil-looking.

By this stage of my solo walk across Africa I was the owner of one donkey and two mules, and getting nowhere. My mule-training programme was failing utterly. A pack animal was meant to make my journey easier but the whole expedition was spiralling out of control.

I went into denial. Clutching at straws, I bought a donkey cart for the mules to pull. Terrified of the moment

when I would have to set off with these creatures, I spent two weeks giving it a highly artistic paint-job, in the process creating the most beautiful donkey cart in Namibia. I was putting the cart before the horse, literally.

Finally, I accepted the inevitable: in two-and-a-half months with the animals, we'd covered only one mile. If I were to cross Africa on foot, this whole charade with animals had to end, immediately.

A return to Plan A - carrying all my gear myself - now seemed wonderfully simple. I jettisoned every item of kit I could possibly live without and the farmer kindly gave the three animals a home. I carried on alone, the relief so palpable I found myself singing "Morning has broken".

I realised the moral of the story. I'd been my own worst enemy. The very appeal of walking across Africa had been to do something exceptionally difficult.

During the lengthy fiasco with pack animals, all my attempts to find the easy option had broken every ground rule of the expedition and left me with nothing except the knowledge that there aren't any shortcuts on journeys like this. But I did eventually cross Africa on foot solo - exactly as I had planned it in the first place.

Fran Sandham's account of his journey, 'Traversa', is published by Duckworth, £16.99



A tight rein is kept on Fran Sandham's mule Marieke

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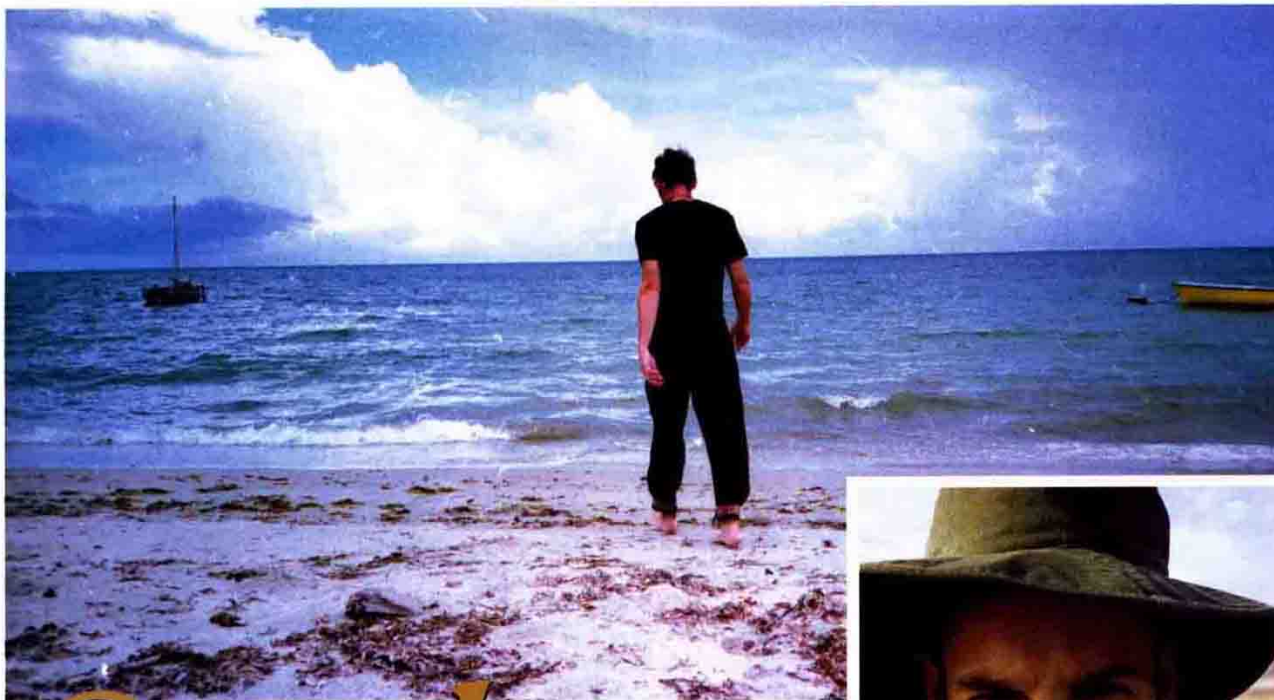
British TV
triumph
at home
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MAY 2009

Interview: Fran Sandham
author of Traversa

PROFILE



Sand man

FLEMMICH WEBB meets Fran Sandham, the first person ever to trek solo and on foot from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar

For someone who has walked 3,000 miles across Africa carrying an 80lb backpack, Fran Sandham is a surprisingly slight man. We meet in a pub, where he orders an orange juice. "I'm on the wagon," he explains. "I'm a couple of months into a raw food diet." It's not what I was expecting. Even though his epic journey was 10 years ago, the book about his travels, *Traversa*, is peppered with references to eating junk food and drinking generous amounts of the local firewater.

But then Fran seems to relish challenging people's expectations. After years of being rejected by publishers, the hardback came out last year and was serialised in *The Sunday Times*, and the paperback comes out this summer. "I think publishers have this

idea of what travel writing is or should be about," he says. "They are expecting these descriptions of the soul of modern Africa and the wonderful landscape. *Traversa* is so different. It's not conventional travel writing at all."

It certainly isn't. The trip was conceived one New Year's Eve in south London. "I was at a really dreadful party in Colliers Wood, thinking about the year ahead and it just seemed so predictable," he says. "So I made a resolution to walk across Africa by myself." But whereas most people would wake up with a hangover and dismiss the idea as a drunken whim, Fran, living in Morden at the time, scrimped and saved working at a bookshop to raise the £3,000 he needed for the trip. A year later, he was

standing on the Skeleton Coast watching as his drinking buddy of the past few days drove off across the desert, leaving him alone with his absurdly heavy rucksack. What followed next was eight months of walking, sleeping in ditches and numerous adventures across Africa, including a futile attempt to train a donkey to carry his pack.

Fran grew up in the Wirral, Liverpool and first became interested in adventure when recuperating from a leg injury he had when he was six years old. "I was given a copy of a Tarzan comic and was absolutely hooked. It was so different to where I was and seemed like the ultimate escape," he recalls.

After studying English literature at Salford University, he moved to Morden. During this time he began to develop

PROFILE



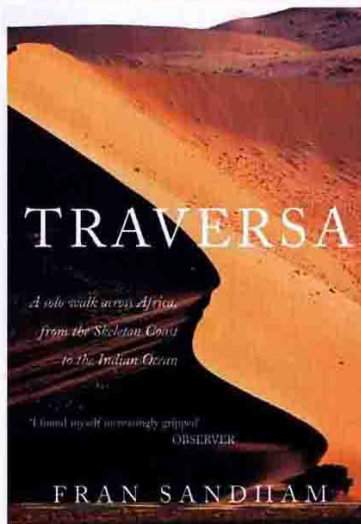
a reputation as a walker. Not in the sense of a Sunday stroll around Hyde Park, more like long staggers back across London from late-night parties. Soon, to save money for his trip, he was walking everywhere.

But now he works as a freelance book editor from home – a shared flat in Gipsy Hill – he has less and less time to indulge in his passion. “A few weeks ago I thought: ‘I don’t really walk anywhere now, I’ll walk to Bromley and back’. By the time I got back I was so exhausted I was nearly crying. I walked all the way across Africa and now I can’t even walk 10 miles.” He has been trying to get out more recently, and often walks to Dulwich Woods, “one of the nicest woodlands in London”.

Fran loves the capital (he had a stint in Brighton recently but didn’t feel at home there). “I can’t imagine living anywhere else in England,” he says. “Virtually all my adult life has been spent here. All my experiences and history are here.”

It almost sounds like he’s settled here but one gets the sense that he is still restless. He describes his love of the view from Gipsy Hill, as if that peek out of the city towards the horizon sets his imagination free. He hasn’t been abroad for three years but has plans to go away for three months next year, once the promotional work for the book calms down, to write an historical volume about Victorian travellers in Tibet.

“I’ll probably go to Thailand to work on the book. I feel at home there, and love



the people and the food. I’m not a beach person, so I’ll spend most of my time in Bangkok in an apartment watching too much cable TV. It’s one of my favourite cities even though it’s really polluted and busy.”

Fran says he is single, so does his doggedness and determination make it hard for him to form relationships with people? “I find it easy to let people into my life but with other creative people there can be a clash, and they are the ones I am drawn to,” he says. “If there is any degree of artistic ambition, egos can get in the way and that can cause friction.”

In some ways, the trip across Africa didn’t help: “I changed but not necessarily for the better. On the positive side I became more self-reliant, but I also became less patient

the year ahead seemed predictable, so I made a resolution to walk across Africa

when I got back because I was so used to being my own boss. I had little money but the freedom to go where I wanted. It was a real privilege.”

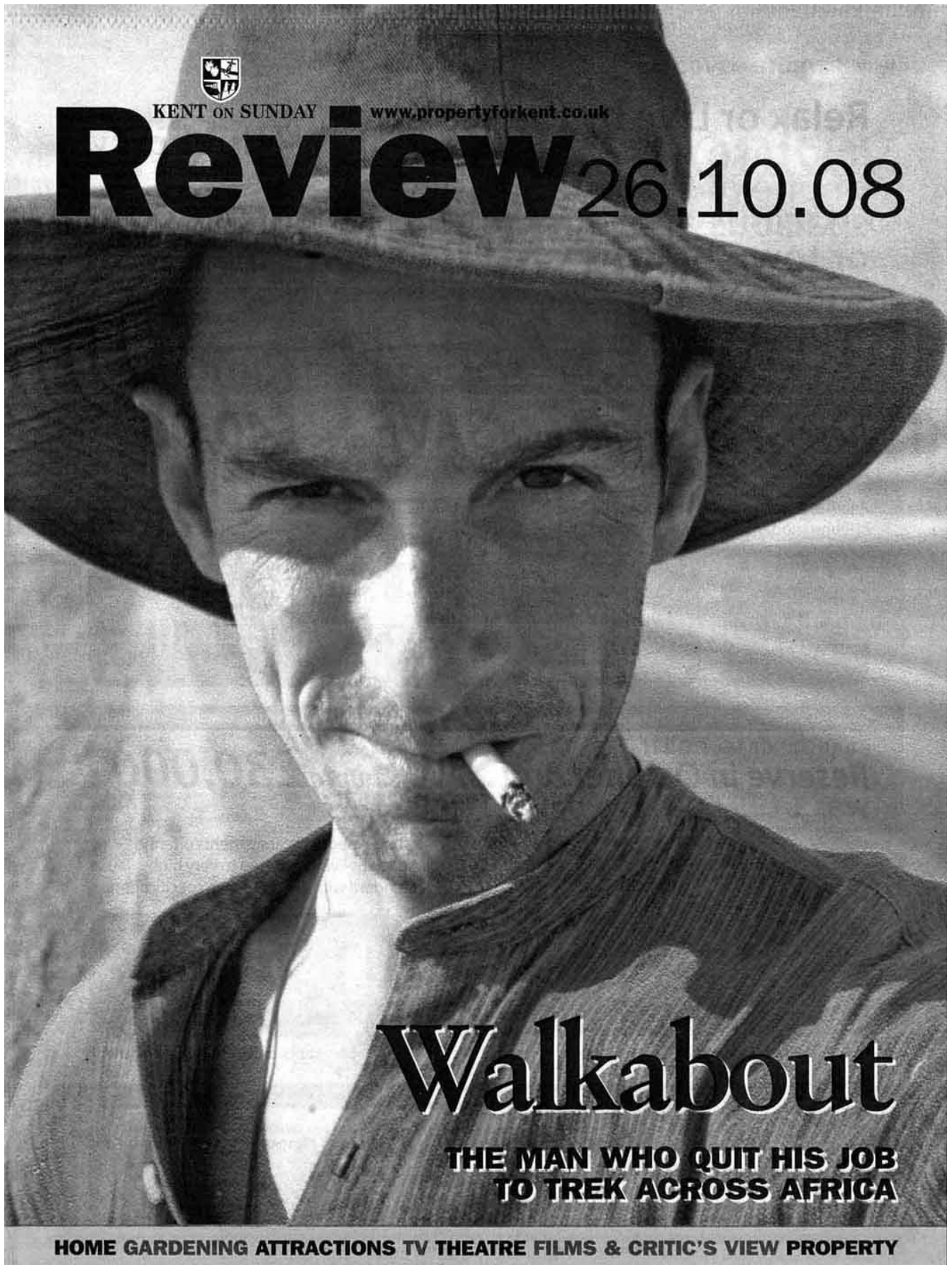
Throughout the interview, when he thinks he might be coming across as taking himself too seriously, Fran does a good line in self-deprecation. But the twinkle in his eye and the self-mocking tone he occasionally adopts doesn’t hide the fact that deep down he’s a pretty tough character.


“If you approach something with enough determination, you can see it through,” he says. “Getting the book done and sorting out the publicity has taken far more effort than the trip itself. But if I hadn’t walked across Africa I don’t think I would have been able to apply the determination needed to get *Traversa* published.”

And with that he walked off... but only as far as the bus stop. ●

www.traversa.co.uk

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 Fine print... visit us online for news on Fran's upcoming readings and events.




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One man and his donkey

KENT ON SUNDAY

• REVIEW •

BY JANE CONNOLLY

WHEN intrepid traveller Fran Sandham set out to walk across Africa, his big adventure was nearly halted before it began – by a donkey.

The four-legged friend was supposed to relieve him of his heavy pack and make the year-long journey easier, but his new travelling companion turned out to be more of a hindrance than a help.

"I was held up by this really bad donkey," Sandham said. "In two and a half months we covered less than a mile. He didn't share my enthusiasm for walking across Africa."

When Sandham, now 44, began his remarkable solo voyage from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the shores of the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar, he found his backpack was more of a burden than he had expected. While still in Namibia he hit on the bright idea of recruiting a donkey to take the strain, but the locals appeared to have seen him coming.

"The donkey's name was Tson dab, which in the local language means 'where you get stuck,'" Sandham said. "I bought him from the local guys. That's the name he had before I bought him and I called him a few things while I had him."

After spending more than two months trying to convince Tson dab to travel, it was discovered that he was suffering from the donkey equivalent of venereal disease. So Sandham left him in the capable hands of a farmer and was forced to hoof it the rest of the way.

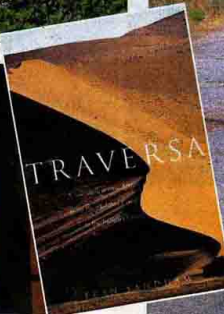
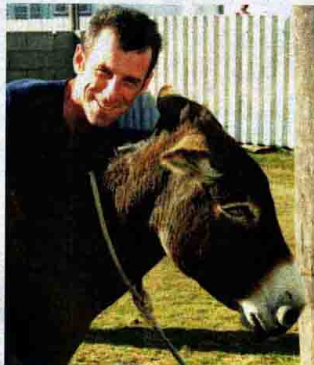
"He was quite a famous donkey for a while, as we were in all the local papers," Sandham said. "The idea was he was going to carry the gear and I would walk, but he didn't go for it. I got the donkey idea when I was halfway across the desert carrying an 80lb pack in high temperatures. I thought 'this is going to kill me', but it was such a disaster with the donkey I realised I could only rely on myself."

Sandham tells the fascinating story of his epic 2,000-mile journey in his book *Traversa*, which was first published last year. Tomorrow, the former Rough Guide editor will be visiting two Kent bookshops to sign copies and talk about his adventure of a lifetime.

It all began with a New Year's Eve party in London back in 1995 and the prospect of another unremarkable year.

"I was at this dreadful party and I thought, 'next year looks really predictable, so I'm going to do something,'" he said. "I

Fran Sandham went for a walk – across Africa



ITCHY FEET: Fran Sandham believes you can find adventure anywhere if you look hard enough – just leave the donkey at home

was working in book shops at the time and it took a year of scrimping and saving to fund the trip. The whole thing was done on a serious budget, but I'm quite surprised I didn't falter during the planning. It was just a fixation."

In 1997, Sandham finally set out on the journey which he had correctly predicted would take 12 months, with or without Tson dab's 'help'. Setting out to cross the continent completely alone would be a daunting prospect for any traveller, but Sandham did not feel unduly frightened.

"There are dangers but in some places, in Africa particularly, the dangers are exaggerated," he said. "A lot of dreadful things happen, but dreadful things happen at home. The people were all lovely. I did a lot of reading up before I went, but I had been really interested in Africa since I was a young kid. It was partly because of the explorers and Livingstone in particular, because he was well-known for crossing Africa."

During his travels in the 1800s, Dr David

Livingstone famously suffered – and survived – a lion attack. Unwelcome attention from big cats worried Sandham more than any dangers posed by people, a concern dealt with in an extract from the book which can be found on his website.

"A stretch of north east Namibia called Caprivi was the only place I felt anxious, because a few people had been killed quite recently," he said. "A few game wardens told me not to go to a certain bit, but I got ill and had to rest up in that particular part of the park. I was worried, thinking 'do I go out of the tent?'"

When he finally took the last steps onto the sands of Zanzibar's coast, Sandham had mixed feelings as he faced a return to normality.

"I was wrecked at the end, even though I was really fit when I went," he said. "I got malaria the day after I finished, which was perfect timing really. The end of the journey was a bit of a blur. People think you'll be euphoric at the end. I wanted to finish because I was knackered, but I was quite

reflective. After the year of planning, there wasn't as much focus once it was done."

Sandham has continued to travel extensively, visiting more than 40 countries. An attempted walk back to England from Southeast Asia had to be cut short when he experienced problems with his leg, but further adventure is on the cards. He is now working as a freelance writer, public speaker and editor and hopes to write a book about explorers in the future.

So would he have liked to have been at Livingstone's side back then, discovering new worlds?

"On balance, yes, but it's very easy to look back to some golden age when things were adventurous," he said. "You can still find adventure if you look hard enough."

• *Fran Sandham will be at Coldharbour Library in Northfleet at 2pm. To book a place call 01474 534787. He will be at Dartford Library at 7pm. To book call 0845 8247200. Find out more about Traversa online at www.traversa.co.uk.*

Mail Online

I'm just going for a walk I may be some time: Why one man crossed a continent on foot

By CLAIRE BATES

What possesses a man to quit his job and sell his flat to take an epic solo walk across Africa?



Fran Sandham, 42, insists he was not struck by divine inspiration or experiencing an early midlife crisis, he just wanted a change.

"People ask me whether there was any grand plan behind my decision to cross a continent, but there wasn't really," Fran tells me.

"It wasn't for charity or any philosophical ideal it was just something I wanted to do for myself – something totally opposite to working and commuting in London."

Sleeping rough in the wilderness and with just two walking poles for protection, Fran's journey through southern Africa couldn't have been further removed from his life in the capital. But it was a time when he first felt "totally free."

"I realised I wasn't beholden to anyone. I had the time and money to go anywhere – it was so liberating," he said.

Then in his early thirties, Fran had been working for "peanuts" in various London book shops. He spent his hours of commuting reading and dreaming about the great British Victorian explorers who first dared to cross 'the dark continent'.

"Crossing an entire continent from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean seemed to have such integrity. The journey even has its 'own name – the Traversa," he said

Then in his early thirties, Fran had been working for "peanuts" in various London book shops. He spent his hours of commuting reading and dreaming about the great British Victorian explorers who first dared to cross 'the dark continent'.

"Crossing an entire continent from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean seemed to have such integrity. The journey even has its 'own name – the Traversa," he said.

"I reassured myself that any hardships I would encounter on my trip would never be as terrifying as what explorers like Livingstone faced."

Fran decided to start his marathon walk along the exotic sounding skeleton coast of Namibia. He would then travel through Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania – a distance of 3,000 miles and allocated a year and £3,000 for his trip.

Like his explorer heroes Fran was venturing into the unknown.

"I had never travelled in that region before but I had read heaps of books," Fran said. "Though many of the places I ended up weren't on any tourist trail," he added wryly.

However, Fran's Traversa didn't get off to the best of starts. His journey began with a hangover after an encounter with a friendly German backpacker and too many beers. Under the harsh Namibian sun, Fran soon



realised he was carrying far too much weight. "I left England in such a hurry that I ended up taking everything I could possibly need," Fran said.

"My pack weighed 100 pounds and I soon had to start dumping items and giving things away en route. One of the first things to go was my mini-stove as I realised I could get by without cooking food. By the time I had crossed half of the Namib Desert I was carrying about 60 pounds."

Fran made good progress across the stark landscape travelling up to 35 miles a day – until calamity struck in the form of a stubborn donkey. "I decided to buy a pack animal to make the journey easier," Fran explained.



"So I bought a donkey and a cart and tried to train him but it was like one of Aesop's fables – I just created more problems for myself by trying to take the easier path.

"The donkey was called Tsondab, which literally means Where You Get Stuck. I was soon to discover how aptly named he was.

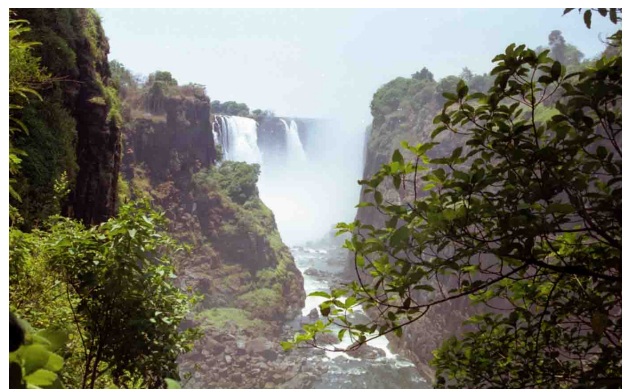
"Tsondab was not very enthusiastic about my journey. We went round and round in circles for weeks and weeks. I don't know why I didn't just give up. I think there was a degree of bloody-mindedness as by this time I'd invested so much effort and a third of my travelling money on that animal.



"Eventually I admitted defeat and gave the donkey to a nice farm. I travelled further in the next 20 minutes than I had done in two and a half months!" So Fran carried on mile after mile, sometimes staying in cheap hostels, but mostly pitching a tent by the side of the road. Despite his exposure to the elements Fran was not worried about travelling alone.

"I think it would have been more dangerous to travel by more conventional means, as part of a tourist group," he said. "I would arrive somewhere completely unannounced and unexpected. By the time locals had worked out who I was and what I was doing I was two miles down the road.

"I also had trekking poles and a massive back pack so would-be thieves were more wary of me. Some of the children used to call me 'ninja'!"



Despite meeting a few oddball characters on his journey Fran said he enjoyed warm hospitality from the local people along his route. "It sounds like a cliché but they were genuinely interested in what I was doing," Fran said. "In fact all the attention became draining after a while. In Malawi, villages often ran into each other and I would be followed from place to place by crowds of noisy children."

Fran's journey had its inevitable ups and downs. He suffered diarrhoea for most of the trip after contracting giardiasis from contaminated water.



"I gave up for about an hour halfway across the Namib Desert," he admitted. "The temperature could reach 50 Celsius and it was the thought of carrying on week after week, month after month with that weight on my back that was heartbreaking.

"I thought 'I'm going to have to do something else.' That was a really depressing moment. But I stopped, rested and decided it hadn't been hard enough to give up so soon.

"It's funny. I get quite nostalgic about Namibia, more so than anywhere else I visited. I liked the wide open spaces and desolate coastline."

A highlight of Fran's trip was the spectacular Victoria Falls in Zambia but for a surprising reason.

"The falls were a sheer natural spectacle," Fran said. "But when I reached them I hadn't eaten for a week. So the best moment was actually reaching a supermarket and stuffing my face with cream cakes! I've learnt that food tastes very different when you're hungry."

Despite losing almost a third of his body weight, Fran was reluctant to finish his arduous journey. "I was 12 stone when I started and 8½ stone by the end. I looked like a scarecrow but felt like I could carry on forever," he said.

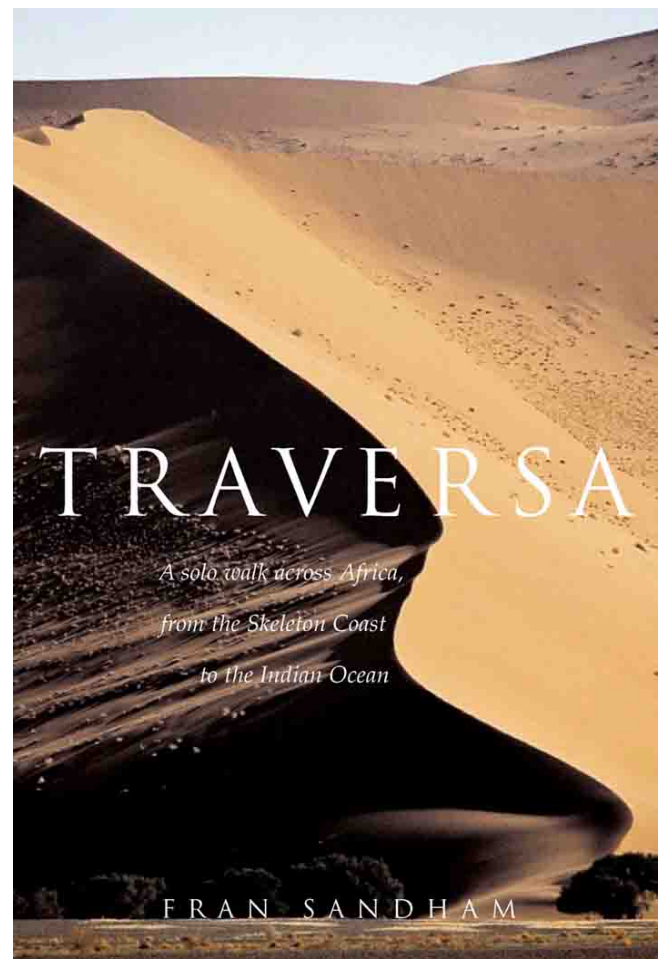
"I was definitely dreading the end of the line. I had been so focussed on the trip and knew that when it finished it would be back to reality. "But then I came down with malaria literally the day after I reached the Tanzanian coastline. All I could worry about was being ill and I was surrounded by people making lots of fuss over me."

"After I had recovered from malaria I started to decipher pages of tiny notes that I had photocopied and posted home over the year. It took me 12 months to write a rough draft and I've been polishing it ever since.

"It's the 10th anniversary of my trip to Africa this year so it's quite fitting that my book Traversa has just hit the shops.

"Looking back I can see how I learnt a great deal of self-reliance planning and seeing the trip through. It was a long and difficult journey and I'm so proud that I achieved it.

"I love travelling and have considered new expeditions since, but I've never quite attempted another one!"



Traversa by Fran Sandham was published by Duckworth in October 2007 and is available in all good bookshops

The Argus, Thursday, October 25, 2007

NEWS

Tales of disease and donkeys on Africa trek

by RACHEL WAREING

IT has to rate as one of the most ambitious new year's resolutions ever made.

While most people settle for exercising more or learning a language, Fran Sandham set the bar a bit higher.

One drunk and depressing New Year's Eve in south London, he decided to abandon his life as a bookseller and cross Africa on foot, alone and on a route never before attempted.

Amazingly, he managed it – though not without a few scrapes along the way.

Now the 42-year-old, from Seven Dials in Brighton, has published a witty account of his year-long trek from the Skeleton Coast of Namibia to the Indian Ocean.

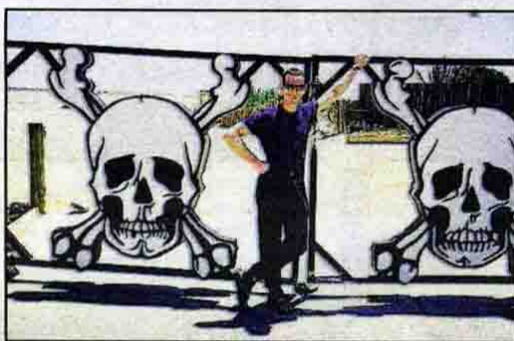
He said the seed for the journey was sown when he was just six years old and had his first glimpse of Africa in the pages of a Tarzan comic.

Though he soon realised Tarzan bore little resemblance to reality, he went on to develop a fascination with the exploits of Victorian explorers such as Stanley and Livingstone and decided to follow in their footsteps.

Mr Sandham, a former Rough Guides editor, said: "When I made the decision to go I half-expected I'd wake up the next morning and change my mind but I still wanted to do it."

"I spent the next year scrimping and saving."

"I ended up living on toast and porridge and



WARM WELCOME: Author Fran on the road



DISASTER: Fran didn't have much luck with donkeys

saved pennies by walking everywhere.

"It was quite a miserable time but eventually I managed to save enough to enable me to live like a tramp."

A year later he set off across the desert, his only aid a pair of walking poles, which quickly became his most essential piece of kit.

For the first few days everything went fine but after 270 kilometres he buckled under the weight of his enormous backpack and the intense desert heat and his journey came to a halt.

He was on the verge of

quitting but decided to find another way to transport his possessions on the 3,000-mile journey and bought a donkey.

He said: "The idea was that he would carry my bag and I would walk alongside. He was called Tsondab, which means 'the place where you get stuck', which turned out to be quite apt."

"He was a bit of a disaster really as he was quite a useless pack animal and so I ended up leaving him in a sanctuary."

"It turned out later he had the donkey form of syphilis, poor thing."

A second attempt to

find an animal companion – this time an enormous and terrifying "devil mule" – also failed so after weeks of stalling Mr Sandham set off alone again.

For most of the trip he slept rough or in a small tent he carried with him, even camping overnight in a lion-infested game reserve.

Yet he discovered that what seemed like a highly perilous trip was actually quite safe – though he did come down with malaria the day after he finished the journey.

He said: "I very rarely felt as if I was in any danger."

"People did warn me about bandits and muggings but I think perhaps I was safer travelling independently than if I were on a backpacker bus because I always arrived unexpectedly."

"I got a really warm welcome from everyone I met and encountered great generosity from people who had very little themselves."

"They seemed to take delight in what I was doing. I think they found the sight of me striding along with my hiking poles quite entertaining."

When he arrived home Mr Sandham set about trying to find a publisher for his book – but found that a harder challenge than the journey itself.

It has been ten years since he set off but his book, Traversa, finally came out this month.

It is available priced £16.99 from Duckworth Overlook.

rachel.wareing@theargus.co.uk

TREKKING OUT OF AFRICA

Journalist
FRAN SANDHAM
follows in the
footsteps of
Livingstone
to try to
rediscover
secrets of
the explorers





SPLENDOUR: The Victoria Falls (above left) create a sense of grandeur and Dr Livingstone (top right) looks on



STRIDER: Fran finds trekking can get tough in the wet

CURIOS: Village kids are perplexed by the Brits

key was too weak to survive the trek into the desert."

It slowed the adventurer to a crawl. In two-and-a-half months, Fran managed less than a mile.

It was then he decided to carry the 60lbs of baggage from his rucksack himself and give the donkey away to a farmer he was passing.

FRAN took off for Africa inspired by the tales of Dr Livingstone and other Victorian explorers, despite being unable to find sponsorship for his adventure.

But, like Dr Livingstone, the intrepid wan-

derer kept going when the going got tough.

"I often found it difficult to stop, even when I had to rest," he recalls.

"Whenever I stopped in 'backpacker' towns for a few days, I grew restless very quickly. I had to get back on the road."

He kept notes of his trip in his money belt during the journey, on which he has based his book.

The route took him along Namibia's

Caprivi Strip close to the Angola border, across the Zambezi River passing the impressive Victoria Falls to Lusaka, the

Zambian capital, then along Lake Malawi and across Tanzania to finish near Dar es Salaam.

That's when he started worrying about something rather different — what he would do once he returned home to East London.



Life would seem dull after such adventure, having spent nearly a year in Africa.

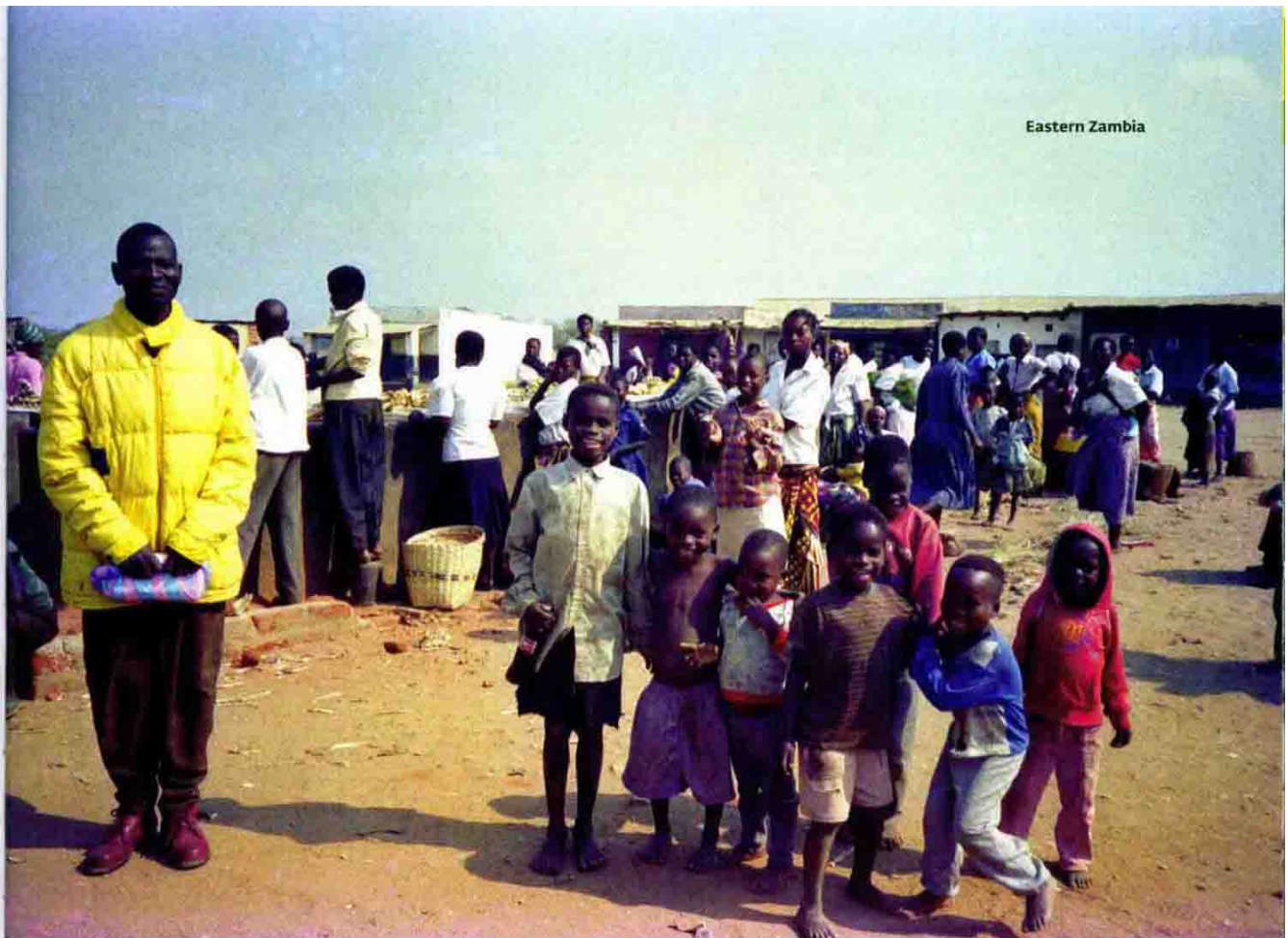
But those thoughts took a backseat when he caught malaria the day after reaching the Indian Ocean.

"It was all a haze from then on," he says. "I remember very little about returning to London, besides going to the Royal London Hospital a few times for treatment."

Fran now divides his time between public speaking and promoting his book.

● *Traversa, A Solo Walk Across Africa, Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean*, by Fran Sandham, published by Duckworth at £16.99.

Photographs by Stuart Morton.



Afro beat

Tired of predictable English life and inspired by African adventure stories from his childhood, **Fran Sandham** escaped his Brighton-to-London commute by walking across Africa, from Namibia to Zanzibar. **Gareth Buckell** meets the author.

Sandham describes his journey in *Traversa*, a title that refers to the Victorian explorers' obsession with crossing Africa from coast to coast. As a goal, it comes close to rivalling Dr Livingstone's quest to discover the source of the Nile. The book is an engaging and often hilariously self-aware account of a 21st century traversa. While he knows his journey doesn't have the world-changing ramifications of Livingstone's or Dr Stanley's, his will to meet his self-imposed challenge was more important than his purpose.

What remains of Livingstone's Africa?

"In a sense, I wasn't going to investigate what remains of Livingstone's Africa, more of his sense of adventure – my goal was romantic and very naïve. There was overlap with their missions, especially Livingstone's, but I wanted to make my own journey."

What did you discover?

"It wasn't a voyage of discovery: I was rather tongue-in-cheek as my idea was so over-the-top – I just thought, 'How can I take this seriously?' But I discovered just how self-reliant I could be, and it's reassuring to think how I planned and saw through such a long and difficult journey."

Do you think that Africa still remains a mystery for Europeans?

"I find it curious how Africa retains this 'other' sense in Western minds – I'm surprised at how hard some Westerners find it hard to get beyond mythology to the realities of African life. But Africa and Africans are portrayed very negatively in the news – it's all war, famines etc – there's very few positive images of Africa and Africans. It's difficult to get beyond what influenced you as a child. There are other reasons – it was the last continent to be explored. Before Livingstone, Westerners had no idea what was there, and with malaria and other dangers it remained hard for Westerners to get into Africa, and that idea hasn't entirely disappeared."

Do you think the areas you visited will ever become popular holiday destinations?

Lots of African places have become popular these last ten years. Seeing my pictures of Victoria Falls, my mother said, "Not many people have seen that!" But it's at least half a million a year! The Falls don't give any sense of Livingstone's Africa, though, with so many people bungee-jumping off Zambezi Bridge. Lake Malawi and Zanzibar are very popular with backpackers, too. Again, Namibia surprised me with the number of German visitors, many with families – I didn't realise there were still so many ties.

Was one motivation for Traversa to escape boredom?

It's naïve and escapist, yes, but I thought I'd feel more alive in a distant land doing something adventurous. And I did! What seems dangerous to us is part of African life, but some things we take for granted would appal them. I saw many snakes and usually they're no problem – but if I'd seen a snake in England I'd have run around screaming.

You express ambivalence about the "quasi-celebrity" some Africans accorded you – but how do you feel about Traversa making you famous here?

I've been on numerous radio shows recently – it's interesting. It's not a trip I've just returned from, so I'm relieved it's newsworthy. I'm doing American interviews in mid-February – I'm intrigued by the US reaction as it's a very English book. The narrator's character is very important, so it will be fascinating to see how they respond to me personally.

After such a journey – what's next?

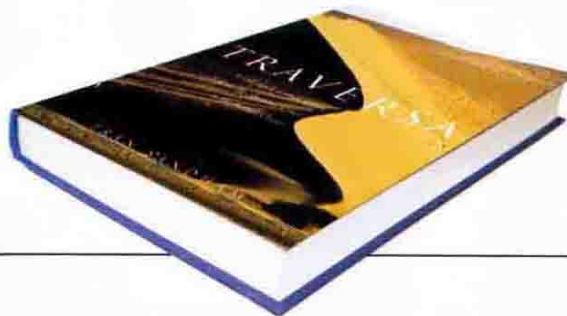
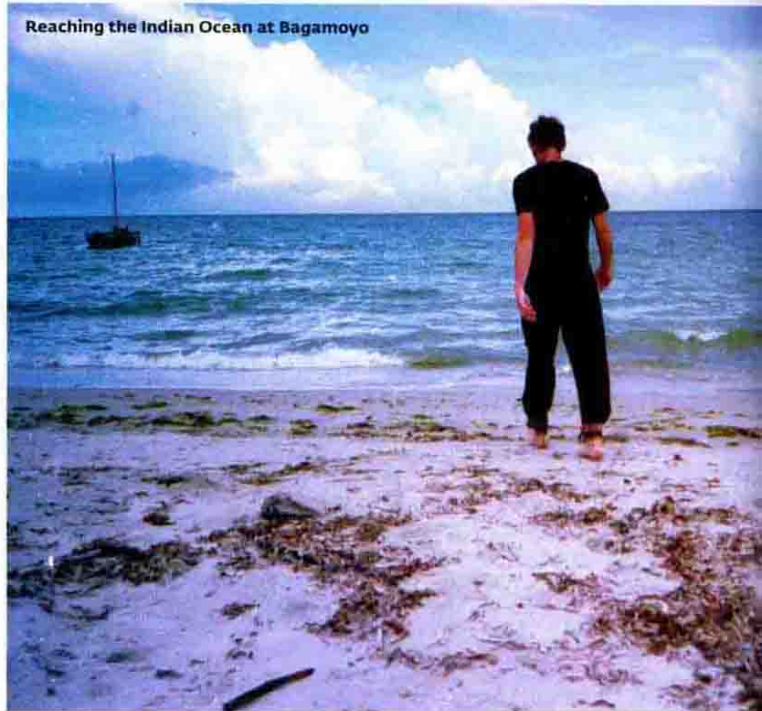
I'm trying to concentrate on writing, but promoting *Traversa* has taken up all my time! A cruise liner has asked me to share my journey, so I'll be doing that. There's another book planned on Tibet – I'm sick of writing about myself, though, so that will be about someone else. I've not left Britain for a couple of years now – I realised last week that my passport had expired!

***Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa, From the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean*, is published by Duckworth and available from amazon.com for £16.99 (hardback)**

The Skeleton Coast



Reaching the Indian Ocean at Bagamoyo



An African adventure

Emma Pinch meets a modern day explorer who has published a book of his travels

AS FRAN SANDHAM expertly arranged his hardbacks into a pyramid-shaped pile, he looked out on to the grey London street and sighed.

One day, he promised himself, he would be writing books, not stacking them. His would be stuffed with adventure, blazing sunshine and dangerous, unfamiliar landscapes.

It's a Boy's Own fantasy that most people have had at one time or another, but one that is gradually displaced by the weight of work, family, mortgages and bills.

But bookshop worker Fran, who grew up in Thingwall, Wirral, is one of the tiny minority to untangle themselves from the rat-race and follow his dream.

This month sees the publication of his book, *Traversa*, humorously chronicling his 3,000-mile solo trek across the vast breadth of Africa.

After deciding he'd do it, at the age of 30, his first step was finding a route rough enough to offer the reader a steady supply of dangerous thrills.

"When I was about six, I was in hospital for two months and Tarzan became my hero. I liked reading about the African explorers, like Stanley and Livingstone," says Fran.

"It left an impression that Africa was the most dangerous and adventurous place to go."

His first nerve-testing challenge was raising the £2,000 necessary to fund his adventure.

"The pay in book shops isn't that great and I spent a year and a half living on carrots, walking miles to work to save money on buses, and not going out, every penny going to the light at the end of the tunnel," he recalls.

Finally, on February 21, 1997, he flew to Namibia, armed with his cooker, malaria tablets, map and compass, tools and trusty Walkman for company.

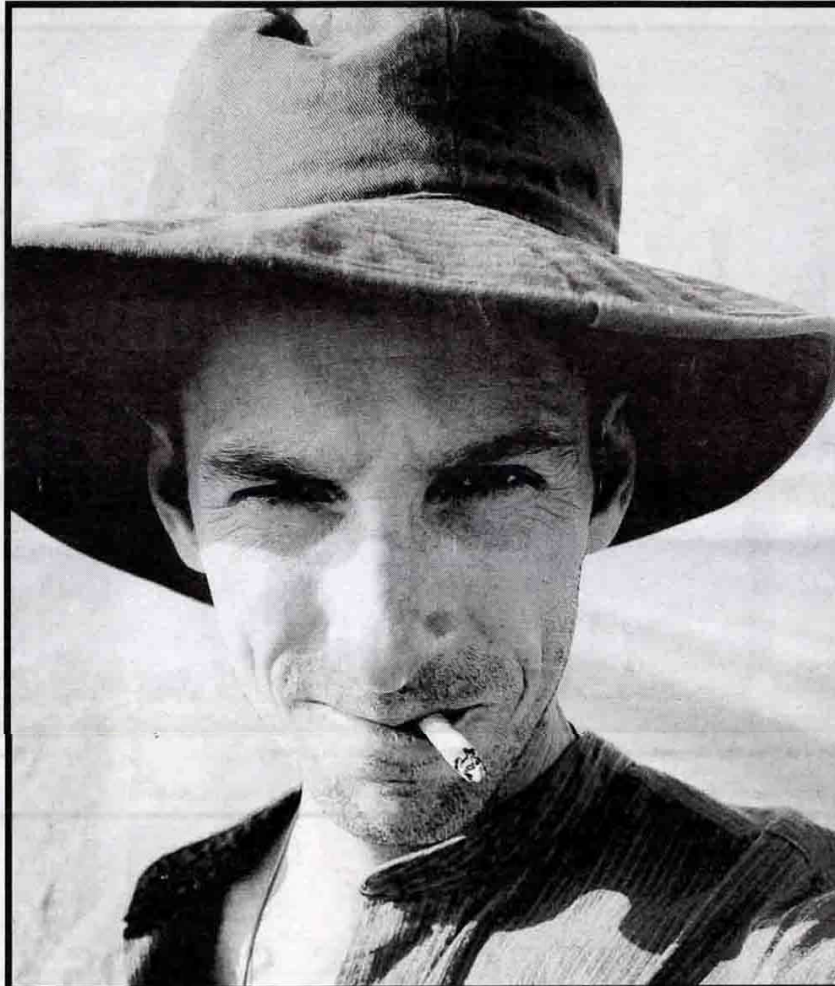
The first leg of his epic took him along the 150-mile Skeleton Coast.

It was a great place to start – relatively cool and filled with the breath-taking sights beloved of BBC nature programmers.

"The coast was very, very beautiful," he says.

"On the first night when sunset was approaching, the sea was like molten silver, rushing in from the Falklands across the Atlantic."

But 20 miles inland, the vista dramatically changed. The shimmering African heat



Fran Sandham swapped working in a bookshop for a solo trek across Africa and lived to tell the tale

A sensational exit

"SIPPING a cold beer in a lodge bar on the banks of the Kavango, I reflect that getting killed by a lion would certainly prove a sensational exit from this world. And an extremely

uncomfortable one. Statistically the chances of getting eaten by a lion in Africa are pretty low. "Yet someone has to get eaten once in a while for such statistics to exist.

While preparing to cross the game reserve on foot, I have to remind myself repeatedly that most accidents happen at home; though not, admittedly, accidents involving lions..."

gradually became skin-searing. Fran was carrying 80lbs of kit over 60 miles of desert, where surface temperatures boiled at 70°C.

"It was like walking in a furnace," he says. "I had ditched every part of my kit I could, including the cooker and fuel I'd brought, but I couldn't ditch the 12 litres of water.

"It was the only time I thought, 'this is going to kill me.'" So in Topnaars, Namibia, he bought a donkey from traders in

a village to carry his gear, while he walked alongside.

"It was the biggest expenditure of my whole trip," he says ruefully.

"I couldn't get him to do anything. I spent two and a half months with him and we covered less than one mile a day.

"When I left it with people in another village, the relief was just wonderful. I found he had syphilis and his name actually meant 'where you get stuck' in the local language, which suited him perfectly"



Fran trekked through some of the loneliest parts of Africa

Fran's coast-to-coast expedition spanned Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania to the edge of the Indian Ocean.

Walking up to 30 miles per day in unforgiving conditions left its mark on his health.

The six-footer's weight plummeted from 12 stones to eight and a half.

"Because I was going east every day with the sun on my left, my left arm and face was really dark and my right side was not.

"I ate a pale sort of polenta

made of maize which I'd buy from vendors in villages, a huge dollop of that with a bit of vegetable stew or pumpkin leaves, or occasionally meat – quite often goat, I got a real taste for that.

"Chickens were quite tough old birds, covered in scar tissue." Although some of the countries had strings of populous towns and villages, he spent long periods alone.

"The white Afrikaans in West Africa like the rugged action man mentality, so they were delighted with what I was doing. The women felt sorry for me because of how thin I was and wanted to feed me.

"I've always been quite good with my own company. In fact after a week of being in a backpacker spot, like the Victoria Falls, it would be such relief being by myself again.

"People think walking all day would be monotonous, but I had 20 tape compilations and the Beatles anthology to listen to, and I swapped paperbacks whenever I could.

"Blisters were the size of golf balls and I had a ceremony at the end of the day to burst them all. They'd leave a wet patch on the floor of the tent the size of a dinner plate."

Hairiest moments came while crossing the West Capriva Game Reserve in the north of Namibia, next to Angola, where there were unexploded land mines on land bordering the road, a legacy from a 10-year bush war. Wardens there also warned of "lion incidents".

"The last night I spent in the game reserve I heard this growling in the middle of the night," recalls Fran.

"I thought I would be terrified, but I was more curious than anything else.

"I even thought of sticking my head out, but I knew that most of the time with lions, unlike grizzlies or polar bears, they won't come into a tent so I talked myself out of it."

He finished his monumental trek in December 1997.

"People think you finish arduous journeys by running and screaming like someone who has passed the audition for X-Factor," he says.

"I felt proud, but because I was so fixated for so long on my journey, I felt – not sad, but I knew that life would not be simple again. Knowing I would have to go back to England with all the things people fuss about that seemed so unimportant over there.

He scribbled notes throughout the journey then started the soul destroying slog to get his book published.

But after his walk, anything seemed possible.

"Getting the book published took more stamina than completing the walk," he jokes.

"Afterwards, I had a bit more faith in myself, that I could do something so audacious. It's something I'm proud of and still am.

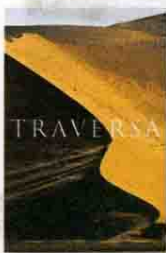
"I had to give up my job and flat and come back, money exhausted, but it was still worth being bold enough to take the risk."

■ TRAVERSA by Fran Sandham is published by Duckworth, priced £16.99

lifestyle

A solo walk across Africa

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LIEZL MACLEAN

IT'S a boy's own fantasy that most people have had at one time or another, but one that is gradually displaced by the weight of work, family, mortgages and bills. But bookshop worker Fran, who grew up in Thingwall,

Wirral, is one of the tiny minorities to untangle themselves from the rat-race and follow his dream. He decided to abandon his life as a bookseller to cross Africa on foot.

Recalls Fran: "I was at this New Year's party and I wasn't really enjoying myself. I looked back on the year that had just been and the one to come and I just decided I wanted to do something totally different so I wouldn't end up thinking the very same thing next year.

"All of a sudden and completely out of the blue, I came up with the idea to walk across

Africa. Don't ask me where it came from because I don't think I could tell you. It certainly wasn't something I'd been thinking of beforehand. All I knew was I was tired of the rat race."

Now the 42-year-old, has published a witty account, *Traversa: A solo walk across Africa*, of his year-long trek from the Skeleton Coast of Namibia to the Indian Ocean - the first time on record anyone has crossed Africa solo entirely on foot by this route (solo apart from a disastrous donkey).

On February 21 1997, he flew to Namibia, armed with his cooker, malaria tablets, map and compass, tools and trusty Walkman for company. For the first few days everything went fine, but after 270 kilometres he buckled under the weight of his enormous backpack and the intense desert heat, and his journey came to a halt.

He was on the point of quitting (fortunately only an hour) but decided to find another way to transport his possessions on the 3,000 mile journey. "It was like walking in a furnace. I had ditched every part of my kit I could, including the cooker and fuel I'd brought, but I couldn't ditch the 12 litres of water," he says.

So in Topnaars, Namibia, he bought a donkey from traders in a village to carry his gear, while he walked alongside. "It was the biggest expenditure of my whole trip," he says ruefully.

"I couldn't get him to do anything. He was useless as a pack animal. In two and a half months together we covered only one kilometre. When I left it with people in another village, the relief was just wonderful. I found he had syphilis (the poor boy) and his name actually meant 'where you get stuck' in the local language, which suited him perfectly."

"So during this time I also got myself a gigantic mule, which was a scary monster. At one point the mule completely destroyed a farmer's bakkie with her hooves - the vehicle was a complete right-off, and I was worried she'd treat me in the same way.

So after ten weeks of going round in circles with useless pack animals I cut my losses and carried on by myself, carrying my own gear again - which is what I should have stayed with all along," he says.

For most of the trip he slept rough or in a small tent he carried with him in a backpack, even camping overnight in a lion-infested game reserve. "People think walking all day would be monotonous, but I had 20 tape compilations and



the Beatles anthology to listen to, and I swapped paperbackbacks whenever I could.

"The only times I actually felt lonely were after I'd stopped for a few days to rest and recuperate - after a few nights of partying till four in the morning I found that I felt more at home out in the bush with a clear sense of purpose," he says.

The journey took best part of a year (although that includes the two and a half months getting nowhere with the donkey).

"Blisters were the size of golf balls and I had a ceremony at the end of the day to burst them all. They'd leave a wet patch on the floor of the tent the size of a dinner plate," he exclaims.

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"Getting the book published took more stamina than completing the walk," he jokes.

Traversa is available priced £16.99 from Duckworth Overlook.

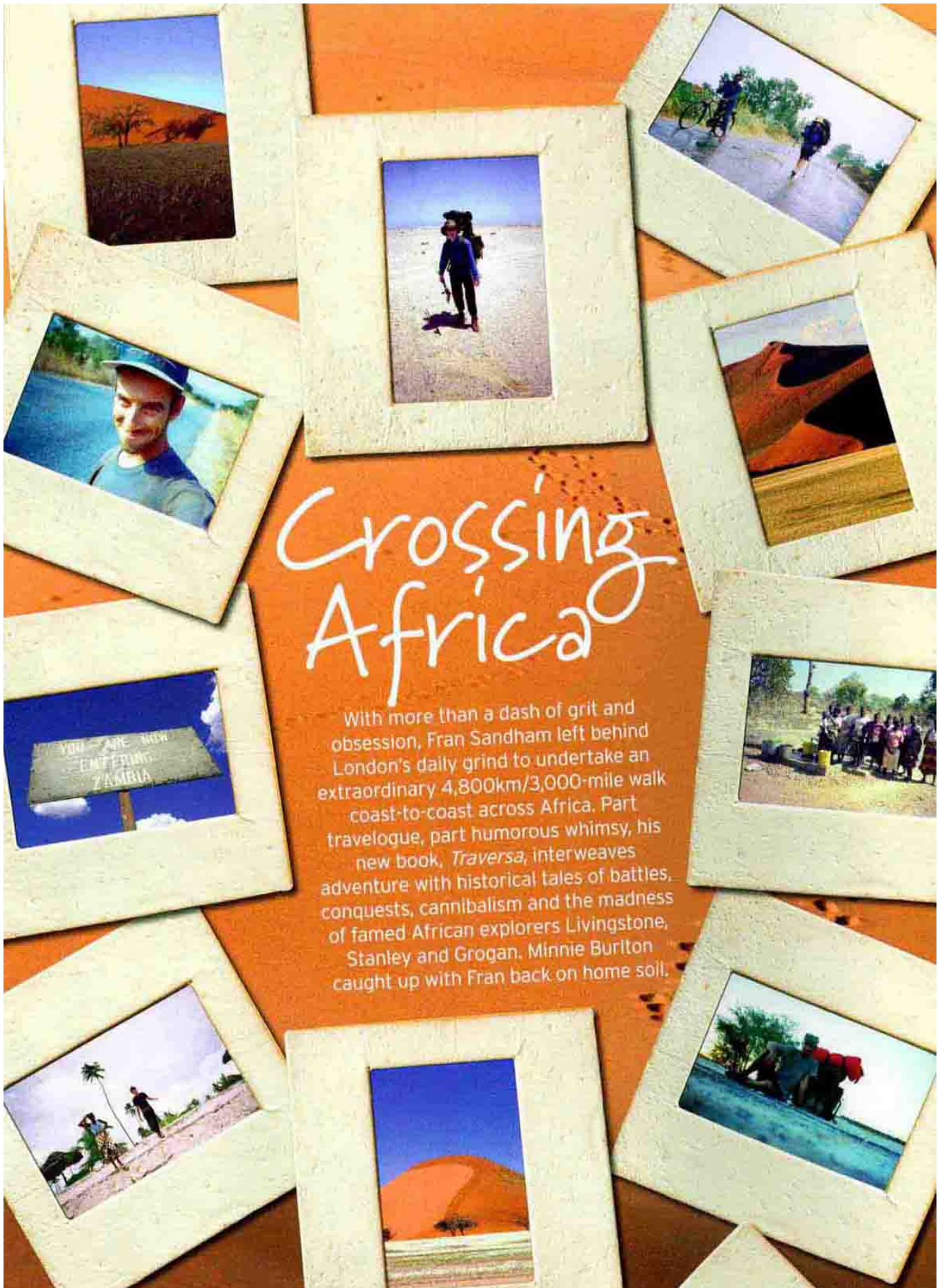
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Crossing Africa

With more than a dash of grit and obsession, Fran Sandham left behind London's daily grind to undertake an extraordinary 4,800km/3,000-mile walk coast-to-coast across Africa. Part travelogue, part humorous whimsy, his new book, *Traversa*, interweaves adventure with historical tales of battles, conquests, cannibalism and the madness of famed African explorers Livingstone, Stanley and Grogan. Minnie Burlton caught up with Fran back on home soil.

FRAN SANDHAM INTERVIEW

Walking across Africa sounds like sheer madness... what made you do it? My fascination with legendary Victorian explorers like Henry Stanley, Dr David Livingstone, Ewart Scott Grogan and Francis Galton. I developed an obsessive urge to see if anything remained of the Africa experienced by them. I was convinced that I could best find this out by sharing at least some of their hardships on my own modern-day 'traversa'. This dubious notion first crystallised in the decision to go when I was at an awful New Year's Eve party. The image of crossing Africa on foot held an immediate appeal, the effects of eight pints banishing any logistical concerns.

So, not too much forethought then? I decided to walk every step from one coast of Africa to the other, completely alone – no back-up, no support team, no one making arrangements for me, no one to carry my gear, no sponsors, no funding, no film crew, no fuss, no cheering crowds and no strings attached. Above all it had to be on a one-way ticket, with no safety nets, no get-out clauses and nothing to fall back on. My plan was simple: all or nothing. I'd worked in charity fundraising for years and know full well how hard you have to work to squeeze a single penny out of anyone. That kind of deal would make my African trip no longer my own. I'd have to justify everything I did, which was the last thing I wanted.

"I jettisoned my walking boots as I found them too heavy. Primarily, I wore sandals and got them resoled in the markets with various bits of conveyer belt, rubber and seatbelt."

How did you choose your route? Although I wanted to visit some of the areas passed through by the great explorers, I decided from the outset to avoid following in the footsteps of any particular individual. Instead, there seemed enormous appeal in doing something that no one had ever done before. My route developed as I went, changing from day to day. So apart from saying it was going to go west coast to east coast, nothing else was definite.

What about money? It took me over a year of undignified and soul-destroying scrimping and saving to squirrel away barely enough money to live like a tramp when I finally got to Africa. I had no savings, no property, nothing to sell. The pay in the bookshop where I worked would barely support a fasting saint, let alone finance an African expedition. It was goodbye to smoking, drinking, chocolate biscuits, decent coffee, buying books and just about anything else that made life worth living. But in all that time of living on toast, porridge and raw carrots, wearing a coat in the flat to keep warm and walking miles to save pennies in bus fares, the idea of crossing Africa on foot lost none of its appeal.

You (obviously) have a book full of anecdotes. Some of the most memorable? I worried about crossing the West Caprivi Game Reserve on foot, so I visited Rundu's Nature Conservation Office to get some up-to-date information. "Be careful over the last 40km," the officer told me. "Lions recently killed a road worker, leaving only a soggy scalp." My worst moment was when I first set off and realised what I'd let myself in for. By that time I was in the middle of the Namib Desert, carrying an enormous pack, panting like an old dog in the midday heat and feeling decidedly foolish. Also, blisters are something I'd badly underestimated. Whenever I peeled off a plaster it tore off a big strip of skin with it: I quickly discovered that I could swear continuously for several minutes without repetition.

What did you pack for such a long trip on foot? I've always been terrible at travelling light. I was in a complete panic until the night before I left. I took far too many clothes. My tent was hovering around the 3-kilo mark. My ceramic water filter was good quality but hefty. My sleeping bag was much heavier than it should have been. In terms of rucksack size, it's a truism that if you have a big rucksack you'll fill it. With a 100-litre pack I was asking for trouble. But the weight quickly went down to 55lbs. I jettisoned my walking boots as I found them too heavy. Primarily, I wore sandals and got them resoled in the markets with various bits of conveyer belt, rubber and seatbelt. For a

bit of luxury I took a few paperbacks and if I travelled through anywhere with a book exchange I made the most of it. The best piece of kit I took was my pair of trekking poles. I wasn't sure if I would use them but within 15 minutes I was hooked. I felt totally naked without them.

Had the landscape changed from when your hero explorers were there? In their time there would have been far more wildlife and more wilderness. Today, the number of game has vastly decreased and a large proportion is in game parks. The paths and roads are now far more numerous and more defined, which makes moving around so much easier. In the time of the explorers almost everyone would have been living off the land, but today the human population has increased dramatically and this is no longer the case.

Reaching the Indian Ocean must have been cathartic. Finishing wasn't like winning *X-Factor*. I didn't jump around screaming. I felt pleased to finish. I sat wallowing in the warm sea up to my neck thinking, "I'm glad I'm not famous". There was no one to welcome me, yet I was happy.

ADVENTURE TRAVEL NEWS AND VIEWS



FRAN SANDHAM

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

FRAN SANDHAM MEETS THE LOCALS DURING HIS SOLO WALK FROM NAMIBIA'S SKELETON COAST TO THE INDIAN OCEAN NEAR ZANZIBAR



"NINJA! NINJA!"

Outside a large village near Ntchisi, in the middle of Malawi, I am surrounded by a crowd of more than a hundred screaming children. The cry of

"Ninja!" has spread like wildfire, drawing more kids tumbling out of their school – ignoring the teachers' protests – to investigate this strange apparition outside their village.

The mood is friendly and excited, so I assume a ninja is regarded locally as a good thing, a welcome visitor. After long months on the road, personally I think I look more like a tramp than a ninja, but the mistake on the children's part is understandable – my appearance, to local eyes, is rather curious.

My huge army pack isn't something these kids see every day in their village, and they might well assume my trekking poles are some kind of weapon, like Matabele fighting sticks. In the rain, my nylon rucksack cover makes me look as though I'm wearing a big black cape, like a cartoon character looming out of the African mist.

I've been pursued and howled at by African kids for months now, at almost

every village I've passed on my walk across Africa. Almost always the mood is friendly, and so often I'm reminded of just how much children enjoy themselves.

Often when I'm dead-beat, after walking 20 or 30 miles with a heavy pack already that day, the attention can be draining. And yet so many times, even when I'm feeling at my worst, the kids here can be so energised and enthusiastic that they really do wipe the snarl off your face.

Occasionally, however, the mood is less certain. At one tiny village in eastern Zambia, the usual crowd of children came running out to meet me. From the doorway of her hut, a stern-looking old lady called out something to the kids, obviously about me. The effect of her words was instantaneous – the kids fled in total panic, screaming like banshees and waving their arms in the air, tripping over themselves in a race to get as far away from me as possible.

I'd love to know exactly what this lady said about me, but the door of her hut slammed shut.

I thought it best to move on swiftly. Ninjas not welcome there.



Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa by Fran Sandham is published by Duckworth, priced £16.99.

Paperback account of an African adventure

AT 31 Fran Sandham decided he was fed up of the predictability of life in London and wanted a big adventure. His solution? To endure a year of Spartan living – no holidays, no nights out with friends, no chocolate biscuits – so he could save enough money to fund a solo journey across Africa.

Aged 32, the former book-seller at Hampstead Waterstone's arrived on Namibia's Skeleton Coast, the place 16th-century Portuguese sailors dubbed *As Areias do Inferno* – The Sands of Hell. His final destination lay 3,000 miles to the east, on Zanzibar's Indian Ocean coast.

"Even now, the moment that stands out most clearly in my memory was the way I felt on that first day. I'd been planning it all for so long and the sense of freedom I felt being there, the anticipation, it was like being a child on Christmas Eve. I was euphoric."

In Victorian times, the over-land crossing of Africa had been known as *The Traversa*. Sandham's own *Traversa* is not simply an account of his ramble across the continent. It's also an intriguing insight into the lives and motivations of these Victorian travellers.

Each chapter is prefaced with a quote from their diaries and memoirs: Livingstone's vivid account of being attacked by a lion; Thomas Baines's terse note on how to avoid dying of thirst in the desert (slit open the stomach of the nearest camel); Stanley's morbid assertion of 1874 – "Now that I am face to face with inhospitable Africa there is something, it seems to me, which grinds out all hope of return".

Sandham tells anecdotes of their experiences alongside his own encounters. The personal is balanced by tales of historic events and colourful facts.

The mix makes for a gloriously quirky piece of travel writing. It may not inspire you to follow in his footsteps, but it will make you laugh and maybe develop a healthy respect for those unsung heroes of Victorian travel: the porters and the pack animals.

□ *Traversa* is out now in paperback, published by Duckworth, price £8.99. To find out more about the trip, visit www.traversa.co.uk.

Author Interview

A Walk Across Africa

Inspired by Victorian explorers such as Livingstone, Fran Sandham decided to set out on a journey across Africa - on foot! Travelling from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean, he humorously details these experiences in his book *Traversa*, out in paperback this month. Booktime caught up with him to discover what it was really like.



Traversa is getting wide critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, so how come it took you several years even to get it published in the first place?

Yes, it's ironic to get all this praise from reviewers left, right and centre when a

whole lot of publishers initially turned it down flat! It's the same book, after all - no one has waved a magic wand over it. I think *Traversa* got even more initial rejection slips than *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and Dr. Seuss did. I suspect one reason is that *Traversa* isn't really conventional travel writing at all, it doesn't fit into the normal travel writing template - it's such a personal, even idiosyncratic account. I'd always envisaged it as travel writing for people who don't normally read travel writing - it was written as the kind of book I'd like to read myself, and I'm far more interested in humour and adventure and personal viewpoint than in endless descriptions of tropical sunsets or the usual accounts of stereotypical locals and dodgy toilets abroad. I wanted the story to have a more universal appeal than that of more conventional travelogues, if that's not totally pretentious. So it's a relief now, albeit belatedly, to hear reviewers saying the book's like a breath of fresh air...

Your epic journey took you on foot across Africa from West to East. What is it about the African continent in particular that appeals to you, and why did you choose to cross it in this manner?

I'd been fascinated by Africa since I was a young child - it always seemed to me the most adventurous place in the world. Plus I had a long-standing interest in the explorers. For me, walking across the continent solo felt a lot more adventurous than taking the bus!

"At last - intrepid dispatches from a traveller refreshingly aware of his own folly. Sandham is a likeable and self-deprecating narrator, and I found myself increasingly gripped."

Observer

You've travelled extensively around the world. How did this trip compare to others?

I only realised just how difficult walking across Africa was when I tried to do the same sort of thing again the following year, walking back to England from the eastern tip of Southeast Asia, which I reckoned would have taken me a couple of years. Unfortunately I lasted only a week this second time (I had a bad leg, honest...)

Did the journey across Africa take a lot of planning?

The advance planning I did was fairly good overall. The only total fiasco was enlisting the help of a donkey (and then a mule) to carry my gear - in two and a half months with the donkey and mule we covered less than one mile...

"A classical account of one man's struggle to test himself against Nature ... His pluck is appealing ... I hope we shall hear more of his travels."

Daily Telegraph

What do you think of travellers such as Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman, who had the benefits of motorbikes and a support team?!

However anyone else wants to travel is fine with me! After all, I wouldn't expect everyone to walk across a continent, just as I wouldn't fancy one of those rather gimmicky journeys a few travel writers seem to go in for these days, like pogoing along the route of some sacred pilgrimage...

You're currently doing a lot of speaking engagements about *Traversa* - how are they going?

Very well indeed - or at least no rotten tomatoes have been thrown yet. I'm really pleased at the level of interest so far from all kinds of groups and organisations, everything from libraries and reading groups to travel companies and local government. I've been



giving talks on the walk across Africa and the book, and in some cases on travel writing itself; understandably, some organisations see the walk across Africa as more of an inspirational/motivational thing. I'm also doing lots of radio interviews, and I'm booked to give a few lectures on luxury cruises, providing they don't expect me to wear a brightly coloured corporate blazer...

Are you planning any more trips (and books!) in the future?

I've just renewed my passport, and have a couple of book projects in the pipeline. As soon as all this promotion-related work for *Traversa* is over, it will be a relief to get on with some writing full-time again!

What would be your advice to anyone planning a similar trip?

Avoid donkeys. Avoid mules. Above all, avoid getting a donkey and a mule at the same time...

For more details of *Traversa* and for news on public talks/radio interviews, etc, visit www.traversa.co.uk



WIN!

To win a signed copy of *Traversa*

just answer this question:

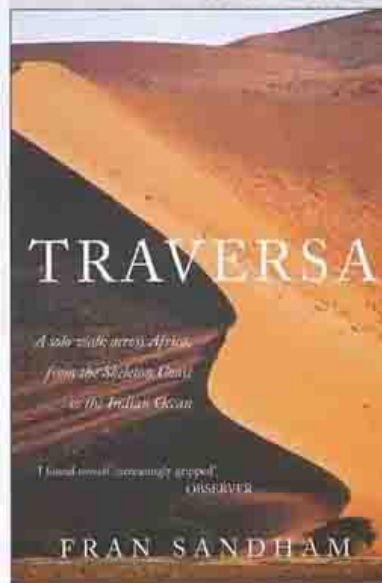
Who was the man who found African explorer David Livingstone in 1851, and supposedly greeted him with the words 'Dr Livingstone, I presume'?

For details of how to enter, see page 5.

Book Details

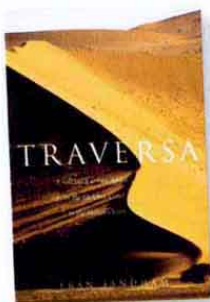
Traversa by Fran Sandham

PB • Duckworth • £8.99 • 9780715637678



Zambia

The joys of Chibuku



Traversa is published by Duckworth, £16.99 hardback

Fran Sandham recently replaced the daily rigours of London living with life on the road in Africa. In his new book *Traversa* he walks you through each entertaining step of his epic 3000-mile trek from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean. Follow him in this exclusive and enlightening excerpt from Victoria Falls to Lusaka.

I leave Livingstone after nearly two weeks' rest, salving my conscience by telling myself I bloody well earned it. As if to punish me for recent slacking, the midday heat is now oppressive, the flies maddening. Despite all the bad press the country often receives, the vast majority of Zambians are amazingly friendly and welcoming. While a few individuals here do show a certain weakness for plunder, and would jump at the chance of stealing everything short of your underpants, only a small percentage of the population actually wants to beat your bloody head in. Most folks back in England – even wealthy people or those living at odds with society – rarely experience anything like the temptation staring many Africans in the face. And this happens every time Africans see a foreign visitor loaded with expensive gear they could well live without. Inevitably, far more fuss is made about travellers getting robbed than of their excellent chances of keeping most of their belongings until they get home. Little attention is paid to the fact that so many desperately poor people in Africa wouldn't dream of stealing from a stranger, however

Little attention is paid to the fact that so many desperately poor people in Africa wouldn't dream of stealing from a stranger, however obvious their comparative wealth

stupidly or insensitively some foreigners behave, and however obvious their comparative wealth. To many Africans, even some of the poorest, stealing is as unthinkable as giving your grandmother a good punch. And in some African countries the penalties for theft are harsh; shouting "Thief!" in the street may well result in a medieval-style hue and cry, and if bystanders catch the robber there's a good chance he'll get beaten to death.

So far I've avoided serious trouble of any kind, but walking alone I know I'm taking risks. Camping alone here is always potentially dangerous, particularly doing it night after night, often by necessity in places I shouldn't be. It would be less of a problem if I could always pitch my tent far from human settlement, but this is becoming increasingly difficult without making huge detours. Even

so, two factors work to my advantage. I always arrive at places unannounced, so potential thieves don't know when I'll turn up (as they do with people getting off the tourist buses) and consequently have less time to think up ways of fleecing me; and many of the locals I meet are so surprised to see a white man walking alone like this that they assume I must be some kind of tough guy. My trekking poles help bolster this image: no one here has seen anything like them before, and some people assume they're a weapon, like Matabele fighting sticks. Later I'm mistaken for a ninja.

Overall, the vast majority of people here want to help me rather than cause me problems. I'm constantly surprised in Zambia how rarely people overcharge me, which would never have been the case had I just stepped off an overland truck. It's only in the touristy places that I get ripped off. Everywhere else, I find myself treated not so differently from the locals, or even like one of them – one bunch of young men cooking beside the road invite me to share their dinner, even though clearly they're already living on short rations. Shopkeepers in villages and small towns often give me small gifts of food and milk when they learn of the nature of my trip.

Part of the appeal for me of travelling in this way is the very hardship and the problems it creates. Travelling in a comfortable vehicle sets you apart from the local people; the hardship of walking means at least one barrier is lowered. It's easy to be self-righteous, but I don't want to follow the example of rich tourists shielding themselves from every reality. Obviously when the rich tourists in question are being kind to me – as indeed they often are – I take a more charitable view of them. It's easy to make judgements when you're too short of money to have much choice in the matter. But even that's only comparative. Back in England I may be a poor man; but a poor man in England and a poor man in Africa are not the same thing. At times like this it all gets very politically correct...

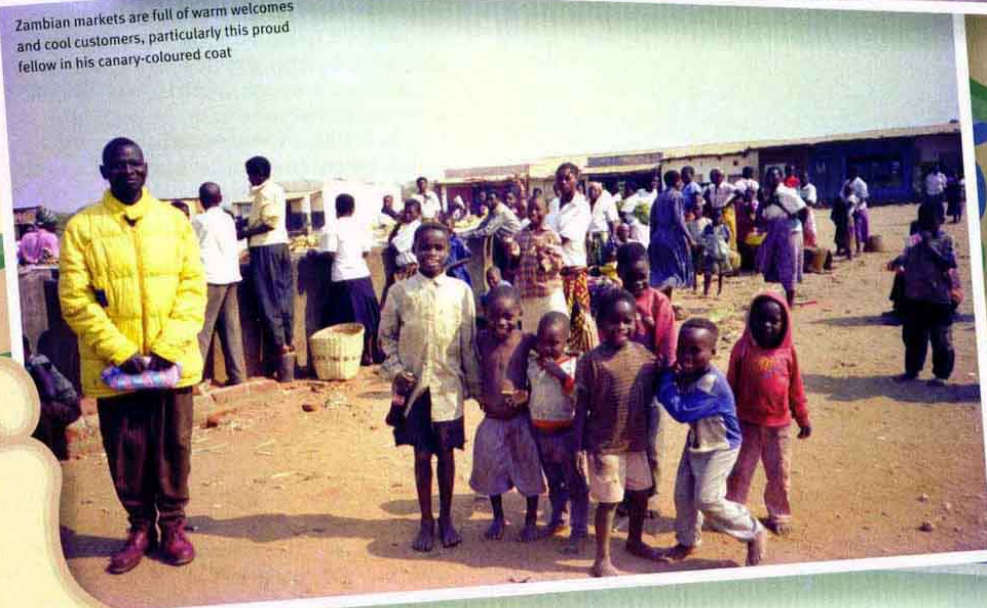
'I will try!' claims a sign outside a hut, advertising the services of a traditional African doctor. Local schools in this part of Zambia usually have signs outside proclaiming their excellence: 'We lead, others follow'; 'Knowledge pursued [sic] is knowledge attained.' For me, the most endearing of these mission statements is the humblest: 'Trying to do the best for everybody.' *Zambian* >>

Walking across Africa is not all sand and sun, dodging puddles in potholes and bulging blisters is all part of the process

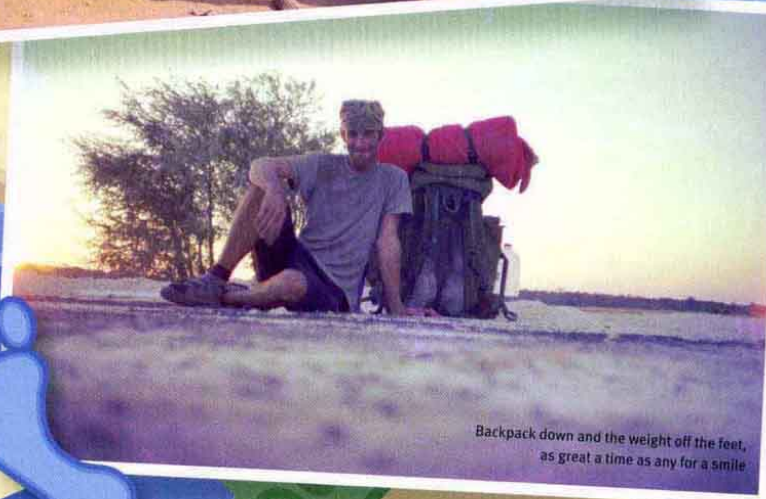


FRAN SANDHAM / TRAVERSA

Zambian markets are full of warm welcomes and cool customers, particularly this proud fellow in his canary-coloured coat



FRAN SANDHAM / TRAVERSA



Backpack down and the weight off the feet, as great a time as any for a smile

FRAN SANDHAM / TRAVERSA

REVIEWS / BOO



Traversa
By Fran Sandham, Duckworth £11.89 from Amazon

Traversa is an honest and hugely amusing account of a man who decided to leave the daily grind of London and undertake an epic walk across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast in Namibia to Tanzania and the Indian Ocean. What makes Sandham's adventure all the more extraordinary is the fact that he walked it alone – without a backup support team, big name sponsors or a film crew in tow. In his witty, fast-paced book, Sandham describes his trials and tribulations, hilarious mishaps and encounters with memorably bizarre characters, while at the same time giving fascinating insight into the history of the great Victorian explorers of the "dark continent". *Traversa* describes his brushes with lions and snakes, land mines and bandits, his two-month battle with a syphilitic donkey, malaria, cockroaches the size of mice and the everyday troubles that arise when walking across Africa. Sandham's love for Africa is contagious as he makes you feel like you are right there with him, experiencing every step of this brave journey.

The Observer

[TRAVEL]

One man's heroic waste of time

At last – intrepid dispatches from a traveller refreshingly aware of his own folly

TOM ROBBINS

Traversa

Fran Sandham

Duckworth Overlook £16.99, pp288

THE WORLD'S adventurers have come up against their toughest obstacle yet – the lack of anywhere left to explore. With the globe pretty much already taken care of, today's would-be Thesigers and Livingstones can no longer return home to wow their readers with tales of newly discovered lands.

Instead, they invent increasingly convoluted and contrived challenges for themselves – skateboarding across America, hosting dinner

parties up Everest, pogoing the Inca Trail... At any one time, there are several hundred self-styled eccentrics engaged in wacky challenges around the world, blogging furiously as they go. They come home several years later to find that nothing's changed except they can no longer afford a house and have to move back in with their parents, their dogsleds and crampons abandoned in the spare room.

Fran Sandham has set himself the task of walking across Africa, from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to Bagamoyo in Tanzania. His book has eight pages of photos in the middle charting the journey: here's Fran setting off, here's lots of desert, here's Fran looking tired, here's Fran looking happy walking into the sea. All suspense thus removed, it's a

big ask for readers to be so fascinated in one man's walking holiday that they'll stay with it for 270 pages of blisters and heatstroke. And yet he is a likeable and self-deprecating narrator, and I found myself increasingly gripped. Crucially, Sandham bravely acknowledges the pointlessness and vanity of his endeavour in a way that would have made Thesiger blanch. By the end I was getting a real vicarious thrill – not from the hammed-up threats from scorpions or restless natives, but from the author sharing his terror that actually the whole year-long, sweat-drenched, escapade had been a complete waste of time.

To order *Traversa* for £15.99 with free UK postage and packaging, go to observer.co.uk/bookshop or call 0870 836 0885

A new year decision saw a man and a donkey stuck in frazzling heat

Fran's desert resolution

By Helen Clarke



WALKING: On the Great Eastern Road in Zambia

AS FAR as new year's resolutions go, Fran Sandham's was one of the more adventurous.

On December 31, 11 years ago, the Surbiton writer made his first-ever resolution – and changed his life forever.

"I was at a terrible party and felt stuck in a rut, I didn't know what to do with my life," he told the *Informer*.

"I'd never made a new year's resolution before but I decided there and then that I wanted to walk across Africa.

"I don't know where the idea came from. I'd been backpacking but I'd never done anything like this before."

After a year of scraping cash together by working in a bookshop, Fran set off on the solo 3,000-mile trek across Africa.

This year marks a decade since his trip and his book, *Traversa*, which chronicles his journey, has received rave reviews.

"I think it's because it's written in a different style to most travel books. It's honest and it's a true account of what happened when I was over there.

"It's great to have such flattering reviews, if only because I've finally got the last laugh.

"It took me a long time to get a publisher. I received about 40 rejection letters!"

Fran, 44, set off from Namibia's Skeleton Coast, and soon realised that the soaring heat would be too much

for him. "So I bought a donkey," he said.

"I thought it would be able to carry my things for me, making the journey quicker. But we managed to travel less than a mile in the two and a half months I had him.

"Ironically the donkey was called Tsondab, which means 'where you get stuck'.

"There were a few hairy moments along the way. Keeping a lookout for lions was always at the front of my mind, but it was a really wonderful journey.

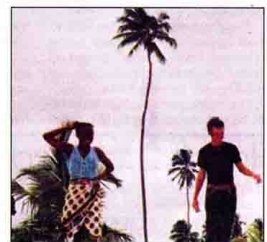
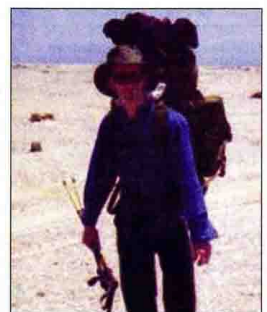
"I'd always intended to write a book about my experiences and at first I was writing pages and pages every day, but I soon realised if I carried on I'd need to get a wheelbarrow to carry the pages around. So in the end I was left with a few pages of soggy, papier-mâché notes.

"I survived a year out there and had always been worried about catching malaria. Luckily I managed to avoid it, until the day after I finished the trek. I had a very spaced out journey home!"

Fran now works as a freelance editor and gives talks about Africa. He plans to write his next book about Victorian explorers.

"But I wouldn't say no to making such a big new year's resolution again – well, maybe not quite so big!"

Traversa is out now. For more information visit www.traversa.co.uk



DESERT ODYSSEY: Top, Fran Sandham loaded up for his trek and above, one of the many people he met along the way

South London Books

Musing about books.

Wednesday, 22 April 2015

Across Africa by Foot

Often when I've left a job the parting gifts provided by colleagues serve to indicate that while you may well have spent a long time in proximity with these people, they haven't really worked out who you are. It was thus with some real pleasure, after almost a year in the library of a financial institution I was seen off with a copy of Fran Sandham's "Traversa", the sort of gift that carried with it a sense that real thought had gone into it, and which was very much appreciated.

The central premise of a lone walk from West to East coasts of Africa in the footprints of Stanley and Livingstone carries with it a certain quantity of baggage. One anticipates reading of an earnest, driven and somehow unattainable person undertaking a feat of endurance and adventure that few of us could aspire to.

There's a time and a place for intimidating tales like that. I've read and loved Paddy Leigh Fermor, Rebecca West, and Adrian Seligman and felt a little bit in awe of what they've achieved. Similarly there's a time and place for "Traversa".

Walking across Africa, as "Traversa" makes clear, is not something to be undertaken lightly. Okay it's not the journey into the unknown experienced by Livingstone, but mentions of places such as Katima Mulilo in the Caprivi Strip and a brief mention in the first chapter when Sandham plans his route recall the long conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the late 1990s and early 21st century, sometime referred to as Africa's Great War. Sandham's periodic concerns about landmines remind the reader that not so long ago this undertaking would be undertaken only by lunatics.

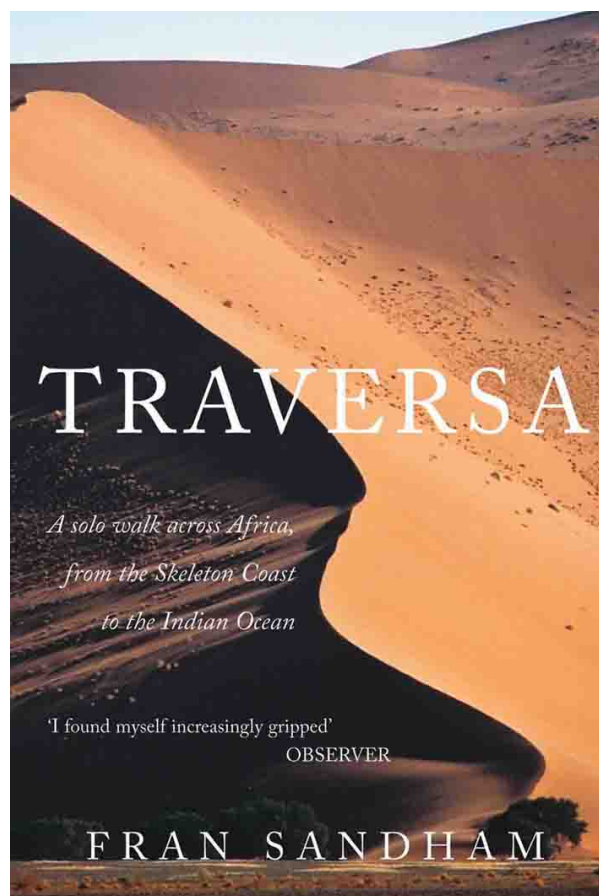
"Traversa" is imbued with a rich sense of humour; featuring sclerotic Afrikaners, recalcitrant donkeys, and amorous backpackers. "Traversa" reassures the less intrepid that epic adventure is not beyond us. Indeed there is some genuinely useful advice for those of us who are not quite as ruggedly capable as a Ranulph Fiennes..

Any journey like this will reveal that Africa is not affluent, and that concepts of poverty and hardship that we apply in the developed world have a completely different meaning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sandham doesn't make this the focus of his work, but makes clear that there is little romance to poverty, and the reality of existence can be nasty, brutish, and short. There is also the challenge that a lot of tourism doesn't necessarily help, and the reality that motivations for some, in particular an older American with "a keen eye for young girls" encountered by Lake Malawi, may not be the most wholesome.

Works like these are inherently autobiographical, as much about the author as the journey; in this light there is often a temptation to see them as voyages of personal discovery, in the process

witnessing the author undergoing some form of catharsis of self realisation or crisis. Sandham, for that all his motivations for his traverse stem from a dissatisfaction with a life defined by commuting from Wimbledon to Waterloo, escapes this. Fleeting moments of wistful introspection – perhaps best encapsulated by an encounter with a beautiful girl in Livingstone which ends with him walking her to a bus stop and knowing he will never see her again – serve to illustrate, but not define the work. Reading "Traversa" is not an insight into a troubled soul, it is much more akin to a genial friend's recollections.

It's not a long book, and like many such works, the real pleasure is in the early game, when there's more discovery to be had, but it's a highly enjoyable read that bears taking some time over. You have fun reading it, and by the end of the process you feel edified. I'm not sure you can really ask for much more from a book?



yourlocalguardian.co.uk November 29, 2007

Bout of Africa: Fran's walk across continent

by DIANA PILKINGTON

dpilkington@london.newsquest.co.uk



Long walk: Fran walked 3,000 miles across Africa

A man who left Wimbledon to walk 3,000 miles across Africa has written a book to coincide with the 10th anniversary of his return.

Fran Sandham, now 42, was the first person to cross the continent solo entirely on foot by his chosen route – which took him from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar.

The former Kingston Road resident said: “One New Year’s Eve I was at a party in South Wimbledon and I made a resolution to go on a big adventure. I’d always been massively interested in Africa ever since I read Tarzan at the age of six. So I started a year of scrimping, living on porridge, toast and raw carrots, and never lost the dream completely.”

Turning his dream into a reality, Mr Sandham left his job in a book shop and set off on his year-long journey – alone, apart from a brief period with a donkey, which proved too weak to carry his 80lb luggage.

Walking up to 35 miles a day for about six days each week, he dropped from 12st to just 8.5st and got through six pairs of shoes.

He battled constant blisters, a bout of malaria and the horrendous diarrhoea brought on by giardiasis.

The illness forced him to sprint out of his tent in the middle of 20 miles of lion-filled game park, where a few hapless travellers had once been devoured by hungry felines.

“After a nearby lion had stopped growling I had no choice but to jump out. I decided to take my chances,” Mr Sandham said.

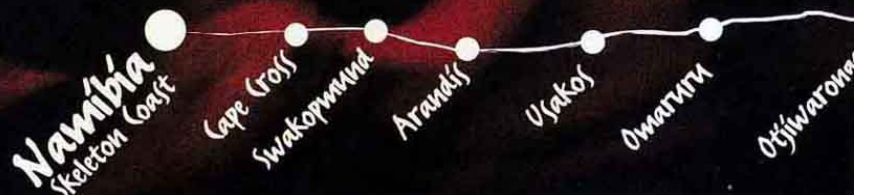
With little access to the internet, he kept notes on scraps of paper which he stored in his money belt.

These formed the basis for his new book, *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa*, which recounts what he found to be an extremely worthwhile experience.

He said: “It was tough, but I had to bear in mind that no one was forcing me to do this. You had to keep a sense of humour. Being so focused made life so simple. I had to deal with getting ill, being exposed, and an element of danger, but my basic needs became much more simple.”

Blazing a trail

In this *Holland Herald* exclusive, Fran Sandham tells the tale of his epic solo walk across Africa, from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar



Namibia
Skeleton Coast

Cape Cross

Swakopmund

Arandis

Usakos

Omahuru

Otiwarona



Fran Sandham starting out on the Skeleton Coast

The decision to walk across Africa solo came to me one freezing cold New Year's Eve in London. It was a sort of resolution to do something completely different with my life. Fed up with working in a London bookshop and commuting in London crowds, I wanted some real adventure for once, to live for a while a life very different to the one I'd experienced for years in London – a life with more risk, more excitement and also some fierce heat instead of the dreary chill of winter.

I wanted to go on a really big adventure – almost a quest – to cross a continent alone and entirely on foot. I wanted no support team, no film crew or back-up – in many ways the journey was my way of striving for freedom. I had to be my own boss throughout, with the freedom to please myself, to go where I wanted at a pace that suited me, for once, rather than others. And the journey had to be across Africa.

I had been fascinated by Africa since I was a young child in hospital reading a *Tarzan* comic. The realities in Africa, of course, are nothing like those portrayed in trashy comics, but I had retained an image of Africa as a hugely adventurous continent – hot, exotic, even dangerous. Plus, I had always been fascinated by the accounts of the great African explorers,

particularly Dr David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley – often highly questionable individuals but, whatever is said about them, their lives certainly weren't dull.

Coast-to-coast

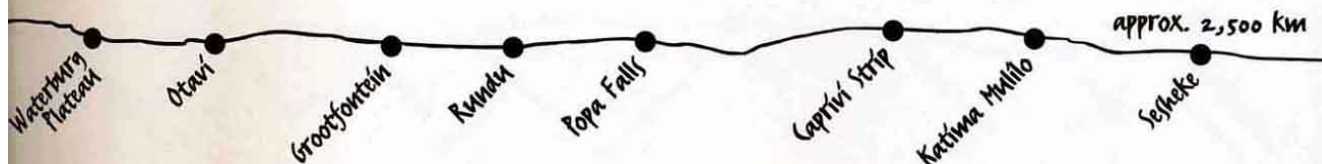
Since my own journey was to be a big adventure, it had to start somewhere memorable, and Namibia's Skeleton Coast seemed just the right place. Over the centuries this waterless coastline has acquired notoriety as a dangerous and desolate place, a veritable graveyard of wrecked ships and doomed sailors ever since Europeans first started arriving here in the 15th century. In purely practical terms, though, the Skeleton Coast proved a good place to start, for one simple reason – the temperatures along the coast are much lower than those even a short distance inland.

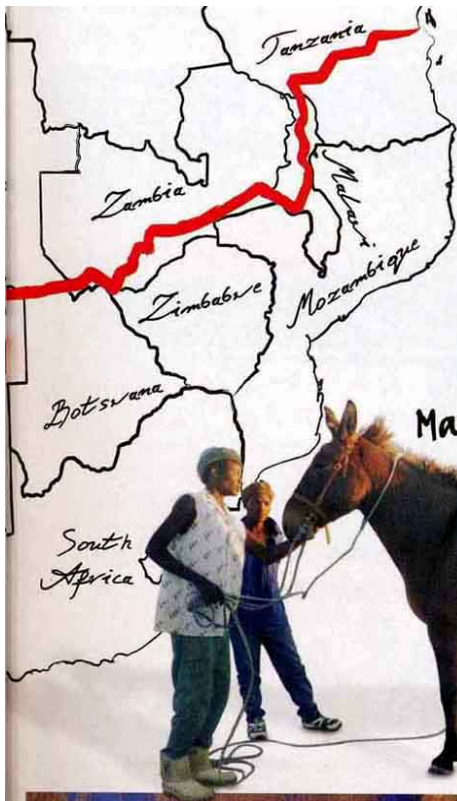
Before I set off I was expecting blistering heat from the outset; but when I start to walk I discover instead that the cooling ocean breeze is marvellous. The ocean

itself is surprisingly cold for an African desert coast – the powerful current sweeping ashore has travelled thousands of miles from South Georgia, which explains the huge population of Cape fur seals.

From the outset I realise I'm carrying too much weight, much of it useless equipment. On the great expeditions, >

“I wanted to go on a really big adventure – almost a quest – to cross a continent alone and entirely on foot”





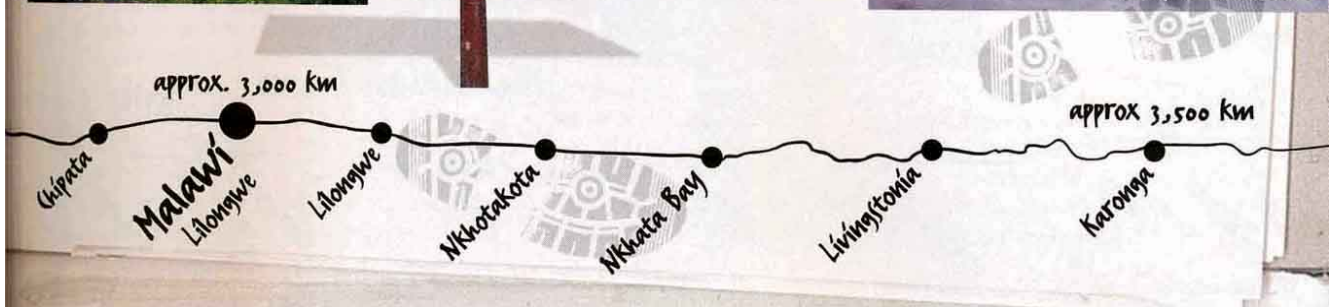
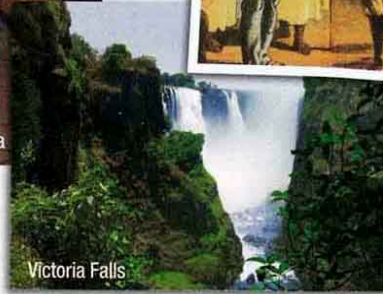
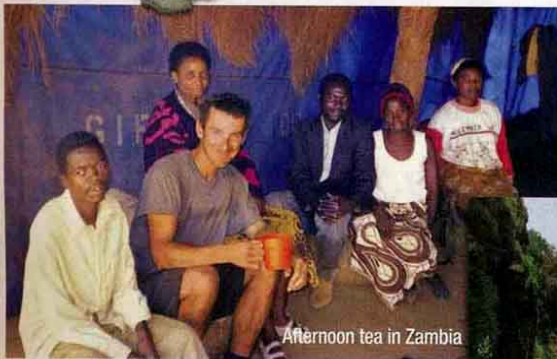
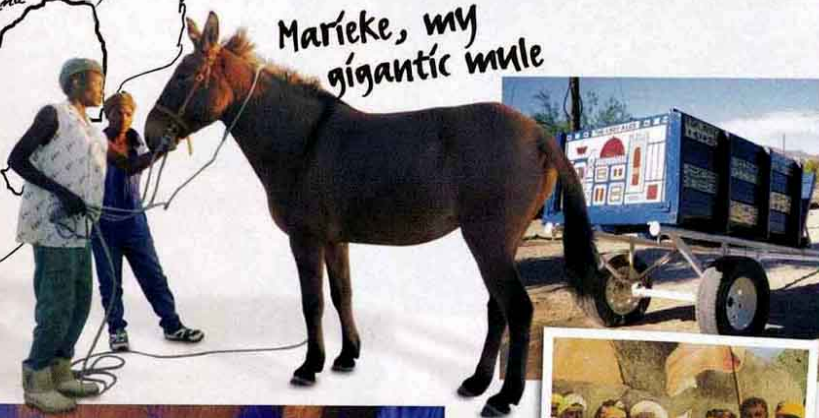
The traversa

The inaccessibility of the African interior made it one of the last regions to be explored by Europeans. For some explorers the crossing of Africa overland became a goal to equal the discovery of the source of the Nile. This overland crossing was called "the traversa".

The explorer generally associated with the first traversa was Dr David Livingstone, who in the 1850s crossed Africa from the Angolan coast to Mozambique. Unfortunately for Livingstone, he was not the first – as happened so often with the European explorers, he'd been beaten to it on a more local level. Two Portuguese Africans, Pedro João Baptista and Amaro José, had in fact made the crossing 40 years earlier – and it took them nine years to do it.

The greatest African journey in history was the 999-day traversa (1874-1877) of the Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who crossed Africa from Zanzibar to the mouth of the Congo. En route Stanley proved himself the greatest explorer of his age, but at a terrible price – over half the expedition's original 228 members lost their lives. And when Stanley finally reached the Atlantic, white-haired and starving, he received further unwelcome news: his American fiancée had married someone else.

Marieke, my gigantic mule



You call this hot?

The temperatures in the Namib Desert can reach the high 40s at midday, when the surface temperature of the sand can reach 70°C. Desert heat affects people differently from the humid tropical heat of the East African coast. In the desert, the nights are often bitterly cold – uncomfortable enough in itself, but at least after a day in fierce temperatures your body can re-establish its equilibrium more readily than when you're sweltering 24 hours a day.

The days here can be really tough. "My God! You think it's hot now?" says one local to me on the hottest day I've ever experienced: "You should have been here last week!" At one point a farmer shows me a flattened Coke bottle that has, over time, literally melted under the furnace-like Namib sun. I know exactly how it feels.

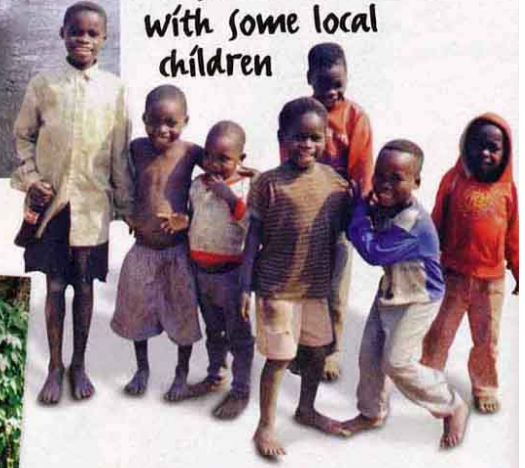


Near Livingstonia Plateau, Malawi



An African sunset

Eastern Zambia with some local children



Final fantasy

I ended the journey on the east coast of Africa in Zanzibar, the traditional starting point for many of the great Victorian expeditions. When Henry Morton Stanley set out from here on his 1874-1877 traversa, the heat was so oppressive that even his favourite dog Castor dropped dead from heat apoplexy. Stanley recorded: "The fervour of the dazzling sun grows overpowering ... The ranks become broken and disordered; stragglers are many; the men complain of the terrible heat; the dogs pant in agony ... [the men] are lying prostrate on the ground, exclaiming against the heat, and crying out for water, bewailing their folly in leaving Zanzibar ..."



Livingstone



Bagamoyo

Reaching the Indian Ocean

approx. 3,500 km

approx. 5,000

Tanzania
Mtwara

Makambako

Irinyo

Kilosa

Morogoro

Bagamoyo

TRAVEL AFRICA

Livingstone, who named them after his queen. Livingstone's descriptions of the falls are among the best known of all his writings: "Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight ... The morning sun gilds these columns of watery smoke with all the glowing colours of double and treble rainbows ..."

One of the worst problems encountered throughout the journey is that of blisters. I'd expected that after a few weeks my feet would toughen up like cured leather, but unfortunately they never do – at the end of particularly bad days I have to burst blisters the size of golf balls. Although you can't cross a continent on foot without getting a few blisters, walking 50 kilometres a day generates a lot of friction and heat in your socks, so lots of blisters is one of many things you just have to accept on this kind of gruelling journey.

Staggering heat

A year-long journey like this can't involve constant walking every single day, and at times I simply have to stop. I remain for ten days on the shores of Lake Malawi to rest and recuperate, in the process getting totally out of condition. Back on the road, I ascend towards the cooler Nyika Plateau above, and en route the heat is staggering, the work of carrying a heavy pack up steep hillsides exhausting. I sweat more than I've ever done before or since – rivulets of perspiration stream down my face and drip off the end of my nose, and my clothes are sodden. In this one day between breakfast and late afternoon I drink nearly nine litres of water without urinating, which previously I wouldn't have thought humanly possible.

The cool highlands of southwest Tanzania come as a welcome relief, and the walking becomes easier without high temperatures to contend with. However, as I near the east coast of Tanzania the heat becomes truly oppressive again, with the tropical humidity of the Indian Ocean. By midday on the penultimate day of the journey, I'm well on the way to mild heatstroke and my vision is becoming distorted. I stop beside a stream and urgently start pouring handfuls of water over the back of my neck – I'm so dizzy by this stage that I nearly fall headfirst into the stream, which would at least have cooled me down. The heat here would pose few problems if I could sit in the shade with a cold beer, but that's just not possible. So I continue with

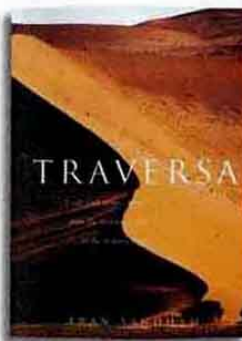
all the weight and the sun beating down on me. I'm convinced that had I started the journey here instead of on the cooler south-west coast I would have given up during the first few days.

The final countdown

When I finally reach the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar the day is overcast and cool with a soft drizzle descending, and far removed from the sweltering heat of recent weeks. I feel a real sense of quiet triumph and resolution, but I'm glad there are no cheering crowds to welcome me, no journalists; in fact, no one at all. I find I have no desire to run around the beach whooping or breaking open bottles of champagne – the moment of ending the journey is more personal than that. And the toughness of the journey has taken its toll. I'd set off from the Skeleton Coast lean, fit and strong, but after walking anything up to 55 kilometres a day with a heavy pack for months, I've reached the east coast exhausted. My weight has dropped from 75 kilograms to less than 55 and, after worrying about it for so long, I finally come down with malaria the day after I finish the walk.

But in spite of all the hardships of crossing Africa on foot, in many ways I'm so sorry that the journey ended. Life was simpler on a long and difficult linear journey across an entire continent, and I know that, back home in London, life will never be so clear-cut again. And I feel I have been very privileged to be able to be make this journey. ☺

"The heat here would pose few problems if I could sit in the shade with a cold beer"



Fran Sandham is the author of *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa From the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean*, published by Duckworth/Overlook. Available from www.amazon.com

The Daily Telegraph

COMPANION VOLUME

Fran Sandham recommends *Missionary Travels* by David Livingstone

A bestseller in its time, Livingstone's account of his early travels in Africa details his relentless desire to advance to unknown territories, culminating in the feat that brought him world fame: his epic crossing of the continent between 1853 and 1856.

Wry humour gives the book freshness and vitality. Livingstone's affection and respect for Africans make a welcome change from the bombast and gung-ho heroics of many Victorian accounts, and his acute powers of observation bring to life a vast swathe of Africa as no European writer had done before.

Some of Livingstone's best-known passages are here: his lyrical description of Victoria Falls – "scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their

flight" – and his account of his gruesome mauling by a lion. More offbeat episodes include local speculation that Livingstone wore a wig, and Chief Shinte's cure for malaria: drink plenty of mead ("I suspect he liked the cure pretty well, although he had no fever"). There are also moving references to long-forgotten tragedies such the drowning of an only child in a deep Kalahari well and the grief of his aged father.

Above all, the book's appeal for me lies in the timeless humour of a traveller's encounters with local eccentrics, pompous officials, heroes, healers, madmen, musicians, rogues and charlatans – the same characters you'll meet today.

♣ Fran Sandham (below) is the author of *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa* (Duckworth, £8.99; see www.traversa.co.uk).

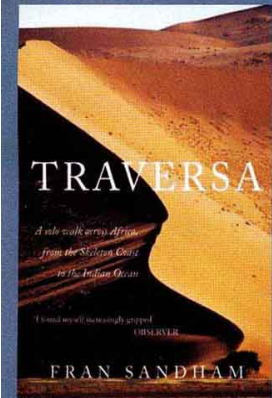
♣ Various editions of *Missionary Travels* are available through online bookshops. A version can also be downloaded without charge from Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org/etext/1039



my favourite book.

What's the most inspiring travel-related book you have read? Be it strictly travel literature, non-fiction or even a novel, what makes it such a great read and how has it inspired your own travels? If you'd like to share your favourite book with our readers, email your 250-word review to alex@realtravelmag.com, remembering to put 'My Favourite Book' in the subject line.

This month, Adam Millward reviews Fran Sandham's *Traversa*.



Traversa

Fran Sandham
£8.99/Duckworth/Overlook

A 3,000-mile trek across Africa – or traversa – whilst living on a shoestring might not appeal to everyone. But for Fran Sandham it was a means of escape from dreary London life.

Although paying his respects to past trekking masters such as Livingstone and Stanley, Sandham is more than keen to forge his own path from east to west across the continent. This is something he achieves with mixed success and, given the extent to which they are mentioned, it sometimes feels as if this book is following in their footsteps. Still, this does nothing to detract from an epic journey.

Starting on the barren Skeleton Coast of Namibia and ending on the more temperate shores of Tanzania, Sandham faces all number of problems, some foreseen and others not. If you're a fan of the TV show *Man vs. Wild*, then this book will appeal – though, unlike Bear Grills, this author didn't even have a cameraman to keep him company!

Highlights for me include the saga with Tsondab the Donkey (whose name, portentously, translates to Where You Get Stuck) and the terror of camping in lion territory. Most heart-warming of all is the welcome reception he receives throughout his trip. If I were to find any fault with this book, it would be that the journey's write-up feels a little top-heavy, with the ending striking me as a little rushed, but if anything, this is yet another compliment to the author; in other words, I didn't want the adventure to end!

Overall, this is a gripping read, one which unashamedly refuses to beat about the bush. It will leave you wincing, laughing, moved and inspired, not only by the extremes of Africa and the limits of human endurance, but most of all by the kindness of strangers.

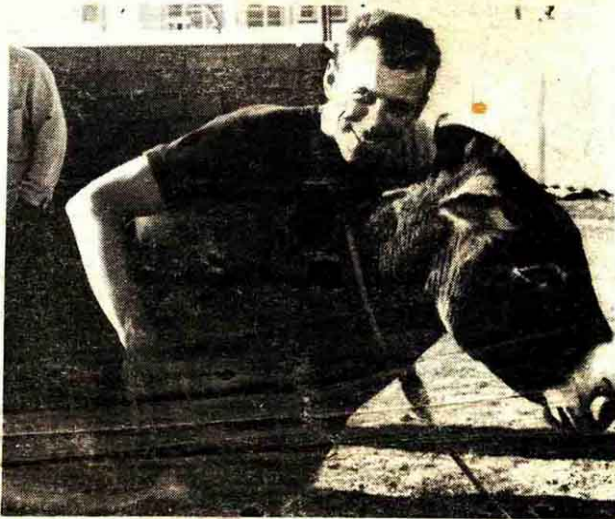
Adam Millward

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Crossing Africa In The Company Of His Donkey



..... Photos by Christo Swart
 Hot-footing it latitudinally across Africa - from the Skeleton Coast to Zanzibar or at least to Zululand - was the dream of 32-year-old Fran Sandham of London. So a few weeks ago he decided to start walking down the coast from the Ugab River mouth to Swakopmund and on to Walvis Bay and then from Walvis Bay inland.

Fran takes up the story himself: "After about 250 km I was getting fed-up carrying 40 kilos of food and belongings for 49km a day through the desert so buying a donkey to carry the gear seemed an interesting option.

"So I've been spending the last couple of weeks in

Walvis Bay buying the donkey and getting it equipped. At the same time I have found out that you have to fill in a lot of forms to take a Namibian donkey

CONTINUED ON
NEXT PAGE

President Is To Open Benefit Programme

President Sam Nujoma will officially launch the Benguela Environment Fisheries Interaction

Donkey Tsondab A Naughty Boy

CONTINUED FROM
FRONT PAGE



over the border into South Africa.

"Well, here we are as you can see in the picture, me with my donkey in the new Backpackers Lodge in 6th Street in Walvis Bay. Me and my donkey were their first customers!

"The donkey's name is "Tsondab" which I believe in Nama means

"Where You Get Stuck!" This is possibly not the best omen for the trip.

"Actually his full name is Tsondab Marengo Sigdi the Marengo part being the name of Napoleon's famous horse and Sigdi is a Zulu praise name meaning 1000.

"Unfortunately Tsondab is rather a naughty boy. On the first day we met he ran off into the desert and I had to get some local guys to track him at night, which took some doing. He won't eat carrots or fruit or most things donkey's are supposed to like. But he enjoys eating tree branches and books!

"Of course he's now getting a bit used to the fancy life in Walvis Bay and I'm a bit worried he may go on strike when he learns he's got to do an honest day's work through the desert for a change.

"I'm still not sure whether I will still have to carry the donkey on my shoulders as well as all the gear, or not!

"Namibia has certainly been a very nice surprise for me - it's not too well known in England. Most people here are amazingly friendly and helpful and lots of people stopped for me in the desert and offered cool drinks and beers, food and advice - ranging from the useful to the unprintable.

"I aim to leave Walvis Bay shortly and take the main road, through to Solitaire and then into the Namib-Naukluft Park.

"So if anyone reading this passes us that way and sees a man and a donkey with their tongues hanging out - some spare water or such would be most appreciated -thanks!"

Moddelling & Charm School

The following moddelling course will be offered in Walvis Bay and Swakopmund:

- * Basics
- * Advance
- * Progressive
- * *Deportment and Beauty*

Boys and Girls between 6 - 19 years old. Classes will be offered by experienced and well trained persons.

Contact: Myjanka
Tel. 064-207504 (w) or 064-461394 (h)

Vacancies exist for Security personnel at the coast (Walvis Bay and Swakopmund).



“AND I WOULD WALK 500 MILES”

Meet the inspirational long-distance heroes who just keep on walking.

FEATURES

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JASON LEWIS circumnavigated the globe on two feet, two wheels and rollerblades!

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TOM ISAACS walked Britain's coastline, despite suffering from Parkinson's disease.

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IT'S NO JOKE for the comedian walking from Bristol to the Edinburgh Festival.

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LAND'S END-TO-JOHN O' GROATS walkers show you don't need to be a superhero to walk the toe-to-top of Britain.

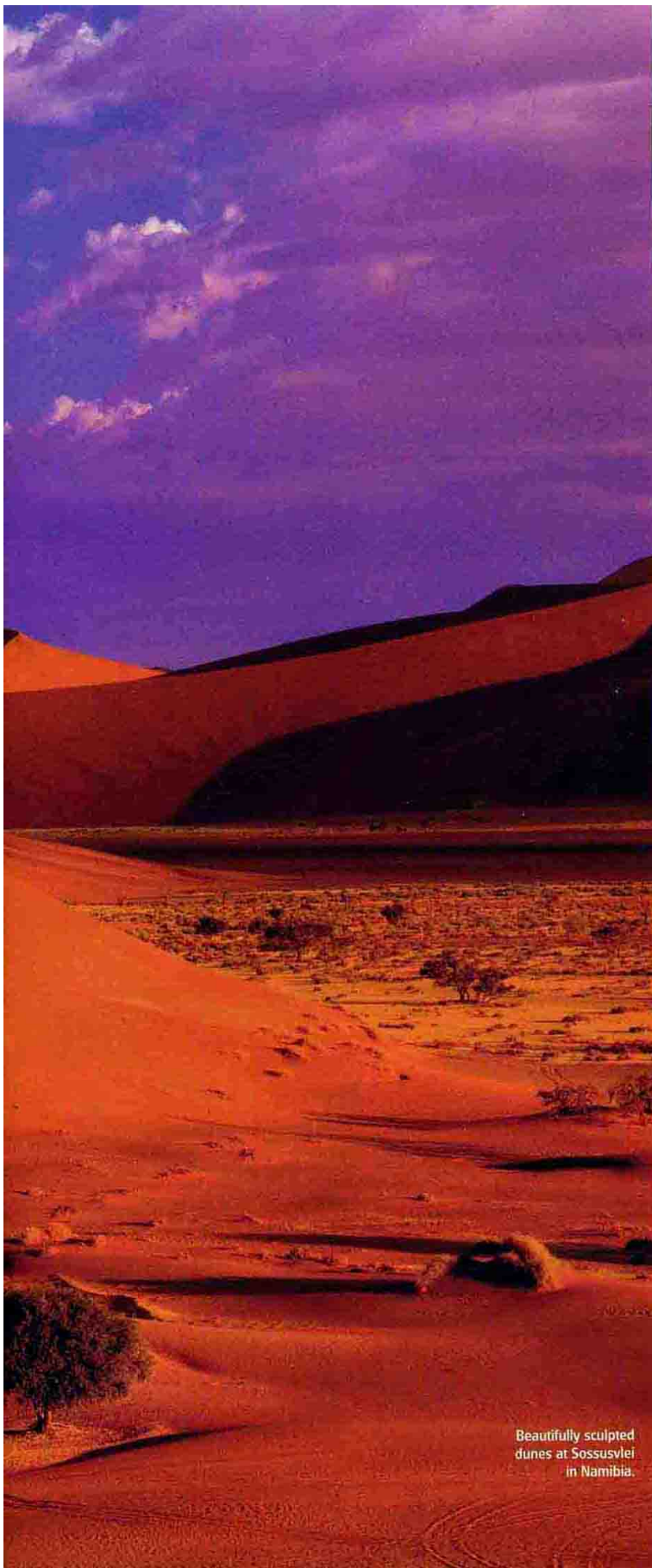
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FRAN SANDHAM crossed Africa on foot, with only an unruly donkey for company.

WALKABOUT AFRICA

AFRICAN SAFARI

Fran Sandham crosses Africa alone and on foot, walking coast-to-coast from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar.



Beautifully sculpted dunes at Sossusvlei in Namibia.

TOM WATKINS/ALAMY

In a remote village in Eastern Zambia – having covered over half of the 3,000-mile journey across Africa – I get my first tsetse fly bite. It’s like a hot needle being sunk into my arm. I swat the unwelcome creature away in annoyance – they can cause lethal sleeping sickness – but as I do so it strikes me just how lucky I’ve been so far on this walk across Africa. Despite the risks of the journey I’ve come all this way so far with so few real problems – illness, injury, physical danger, whatever. It’s at this point that I realise walking solo across a continent like Africa is in fact much easier than I’d ever expected. Sure, it’s gruelling, challenging, difficult – but after all, this is largely why I’m doing it in the first place. The hardships were always going to be part of the big adventure.

The idea of walking across a continent has always appealed to me, despite the obvious difficulties. If you have the time and the commitment you can do these things, but in manageable stages, one step at a time – a cliché, of course, but literally true in this case.

Curiously, one of the real highlights of the entire journey for me comes right at the very beginning, on my first arrival on Namibia’s Skeleton Coast. This beautiful and desolate coastline has been treacherous to ships over the centuries, and it’s not entirely forgiving to hikers either – you need to plan in advance where your water is coming from!

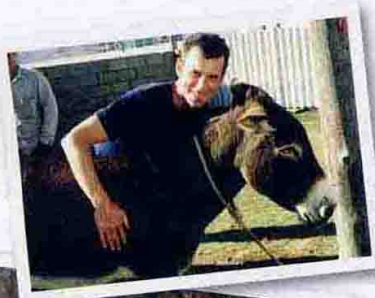
But for me it’s not so much the natural beauty and emptiness of the place, at twilight watching the cold Atlantic current sweep ashore like molten silver, all the way from South Georgia and Tristan da Cunha. Rather, it’s the sheer sense of anticipation and excitement of being right at the start of a very long and adventurous journey on foot, the thought that I can go anywhere I please on my own two feet as long as my strength holds out and meagre funds last. Rather than putting me off, at this point the sheer sense of scale and distance in Africa thrills me. The fact that there are thousands of miles ahead to cover on foot seems a positive thing, not a cause for despair.

Early on, practicalities become very evident. I realise I’ve brought far too much gear. But the one thing I value the most are trekking poles – after less than 10 minutes of using them on the coast they become totally indispensable for the entire journey. And I never use my stove once.

I cross Namibia diagonally, from the waterless desert on the coast to the lush ➤

WALKABOUT AFRICA

“North-east Namibia, however, proves one of the more difficult stretches of the journey. I cross a 120-mile stretch of game reserve where, unfortunately, a few people have been eaten quite recently by lions.”



► tropical wetlands of Caprivi in the north-east. Travelling on foot like this – even when you’re covering up to 30 miles a day – the scenery and climate changes only slowly, though there are notable exceptions. In Namibia one of these is the Waterberg Plateau, a 30-mile long sandstone outcrop rising 160yds above the surrounding dry scrub savannah, looking very much like Conan Doyle’s ‘Lost World’ – there’s an abundance of wildlife and big game on the plateau, and some fantastic marked hiking trails and wilderness routes for every level.

For me, much of Namibia is characterised by the sense of peace and vast open space – for such a huge country, the human population here is tiny. North-east Namibia, however, proves one of the more difficult stretches of the journey. I cross a 120-mile stretch of game reserve where, unfortunately, a few people have been eaten quite recently by lions. At this stage I’m ill with giardiasis, which leads to awkward moments in my tent on the last night with lions audible outside, and a compelling need

to leave my tent at regular intervals. I reach the far side of the park ill and exhausted, though very pleased that this section of the walk is over.

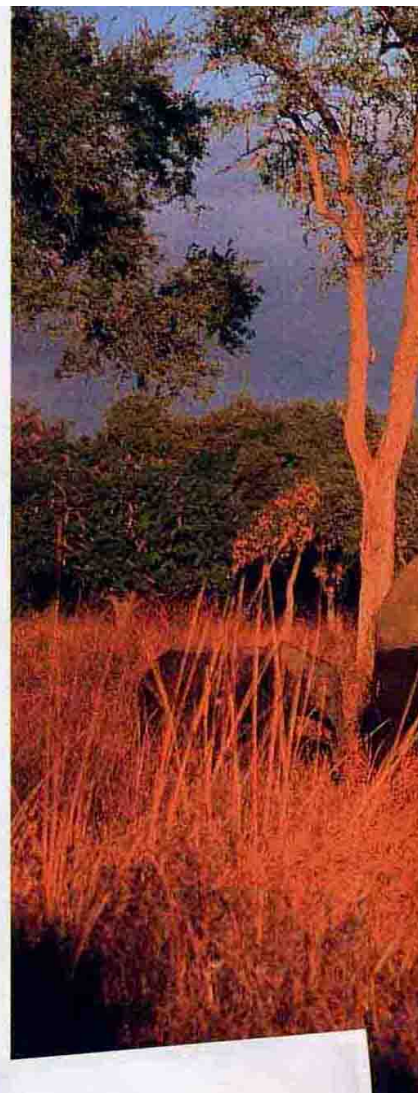
But by the time I cross the Zambezi into Zambia I feel that the journey is coasting along nicely. I’ve learnt a lot by now – I’m carrying much less weight, which was always the biggest problem in the early stages of the journey. It’s almost as though the walking itself is nothing, it’s carrying the weight that is the problem (at one stage in Namibia I even bought a useless donkey to use as a pack animal, which resulted in a 10-week fiasco in which we covered virtually no ground at all). But in Zambia the rhythm of the walk has taken over, it’s no longer such a struggle.

It’s not all plain sailing, though. I’m surprised to still have so many problems with blisters – I thought that after weeks on the road my feet would toughen up, but unfortunately they never do. It seems you can’t walk across a continent without getting blisters – sometimes you have to put up and shut up.

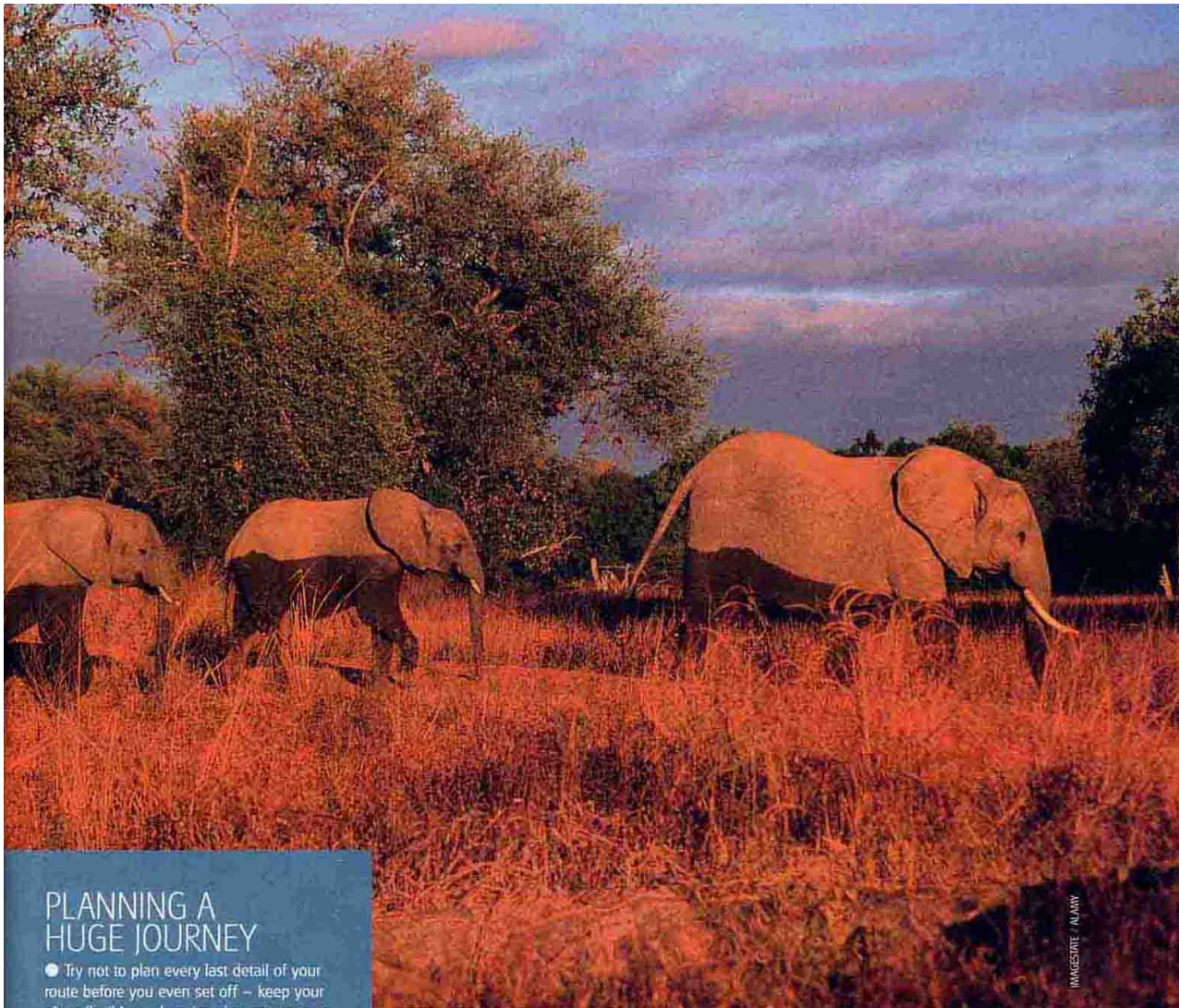
The highlight of Zambia for me has to be Victoria Falls – the fact that it’s now visited by vast numbers of tourists can’t take away its natural grandeur as one of the seven natural wonders of the world. Over a mile wide, it’s earned its local name, Mosi-oa-Tunya, ‘The Smoke that Thunders’, with a huge cloud of mist ascending hundreds of yards into the air from the immense body of water crashing over a sheer cliff, audible from 10 miles away.

In Malawi, the third country I cross on foot, for much of the time I follow the western shore of Lake Malawi northwards. The area is rich in history, both local and from the great Victorian explorers like David Livingstone, which was always part of the appeal for me coming to Africa in the first place. And as in so many African countries, the hospitality and kindness of the local people towards a lone walker is quite astonishing.

For a comparatively small country Malawi has a very dense population, and even off the beaten track here you’re rarely far from people. But heat is more of a



TOP LEFT: Buying a donkey seemed like a good idea at the time. ABOVE: “Fancy a race, mate?” A local challenges Fran with pedal power. MAIN PICTURE: Elephants in the wild – just one of the magnificent sights you can expect to see.



PLANNING A HUGE JOURNEY

- Try not to plan every last detail of your route before you even set off – keep your plans flexible to changing circumstances as you go, and you'll get more out of the journey.
- Be realistic about your fitness. Yes, you'll get fit on the journey – but if you're used to a sedentary life and then suddenly start trying to walk 25 miles a day with a heavy pack, you'll run into problems.
- Avoid pack animals like the plague unless you really know what you're doing!
- Guidebooks – some people feel the need to ignore them, but I've always found them infinitely useful. Just don't take everything they say as set in stone – actively seek out local advice, too.
- Take health issues seriously, and be prepared for emergencies, but don't be paranoid – after all, people live in these countries and generally get by OK.
- If you have to scrimp and save to go on your journey, remember that time is more important than money to travel in a worthwhile way.
- Try and let go of stuff at home – there's no point spoiling your journey worrying about things back at home that you can't influence while you're away, it's better to concentrate on the experience of the journey.
- Fran Sandham's solo walk across Africa is described in his book 'Traversa' (published by Duckworth), £8.99, ISBN-10: 0715637673.

problem here – after the comparative cool of the Zambian plateau the lake shore is hot and sultry, and walking with a heavy pack here suddenly becomes much harder work. Travelling on foot here from one tiny fishing village to the next feels a world apart from the vast open spaces of Namibia.

Leaving the heat of Lake Malawi I move into the much cooler uplands of south-west Tanzania. This region is, for me, one of the most agreeable places for hiking in Africa, yet so many Western visitors rush past it in their hurry to get south to the backpacker scene on Lake Malawi or east to Zanzibar.

Heavy rainfall and rich volcanic soils have created lush green hillsides, valleys and forests with waterfalls and crater lakes – there's something almost European about the landscape here, almost like the hills of Transylvania, and for me several parts of upland Tanzania seem to hold some of the melancholic allure of the Scottish Highlands. By this stage of the journey the rainy season has arrived, so I spend each

afternoon completely sodden. Towards the east coast the temperatures rocket once again, and it's harder work than ever carrying a heavy pack 25 miles a day or more in this tropical humidity. Largely due to this, the last push to the Indian Ocean is tough – I'm very tired by this stage. But as the journey enters its final week, I find myself slowing down, with a growing reluctance to end the walk. It's been my fixation, my goal, for the entire year the journey itself takes, but I know that as soon as I reach the East Coast, all this will end. And I think: what will I do now?

So when finally I walk into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean at Bagamoyo, I don't feel at all like running around the beach screaming and whooping. It's a much more private moment than that – reflective rather than ecstatic. I'm proud of what I've done and achieved, but I know that when I return home, life will never be so simple again as it was on the road, walking across Africa solo from coast-to-coast. ■

IMAGES: ALAMY

African adventurer

By **SIMON HAYES**

SOME PEOPLE find the walk from the tube station to the office taxing enough, so spare a thought for a man who decided to walk across Africa on his own.

Fran Sandham, 42, who lived in Poplar for 10 years, undertook the epic trek across the dark continent in 1997 and has just published a book about his experiences.

He said: "I thought it would be the sort of thing that people would love to publish but no-one wanted to for a long time. Clearly they didn't recognise genius."

The 4,000 mile odyssey took him from

Namibia's Skeleton Coast to Bagamoyo in Tanzania and lasted a total of 11 months.

After all that time and distance, not to mention blisters, you would have thought he'd have been pleased to finish. But Fran admitted the end came as a bit of an anti-climax.

"I realised my *raison d'être* had gone," he said. "Instead of being elated I ended up feeling quite reflective about it.

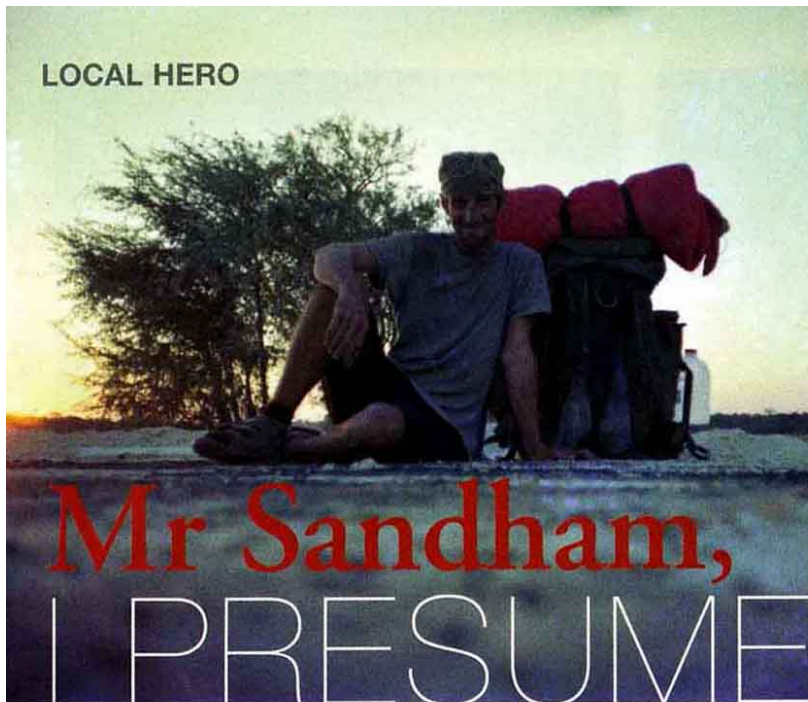
"Then I fell ill with malaria the day after I finished. That was brilliant timing as if it had happened before it would have stopped me finishing."

Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa is available in bookshops and at www.amazon.co.uk.

simon.hayes@wharf.co.uk



LOCAL HERO



Mr Sandham, I PRESUME

A modern-day explorer talks to **ANGELA CLERKIN** about beautiful sunsets and buying a stubborn donkey

Inspired by Dr Livingstone's explorations of Africa, Fran Sandham decided to take a pioneering walk more than 3,000 miles across Africa from Namibia through Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi to Tanzania.

I was at a dreadful party in south London on New Year's Eve in 1996...

As it neared midnight I thought about the year ahead and it all seemed to be a bit predictable. I decided I would go on a big adventure – to cross Africa on a route that had never been previously achieved on foot. In the cold light of day I still wanted to go but realised I didn't have much experience or money. I spent the next year scrimping and saving while working in a bookshop.

I was hooked on Africa at the age of six after reading a Tarzan comic...

Africa seemed like the most adventurous, exotic place. When I was older I became very interested in the Victorian explorers such as Dr Livingstone and Stanley. They both did the Traversa like myself but took different routes – I wanted to do a totally new journey.

I arrived on the Skeleton coast, and there was no-one around for miles and miles...

I will always remember that first night looking out to sea and the beautiful sunset. I thought this is where it all starts. I'm my own boss. Away from it all. I felt a great sense of freedom.

I was delayed by a donkey for two and a half months...

Quite near the beginning of the journey when I was walking across the – Namib desert in over 40-degree heat, and carrying a rucksack weighing more than 80lbs, I seriously thought about giving up. However I came up with plan B which was to buy a donkey and have it carry my load. The donkey was called Tsondab – which literally means 'where you get stuck'. The animal was very stubborn and would refuse to walk or went round in circles. Two and a half months later I found I had travelled less than a mile! In the end I left the donkey with a farmer and went back to plan A – and in the next

20 minutes I had covered more ground than I had in the past couple of months.

I travelled to places where not many westerners have been...

My walk didn't take me along the usual sightseeing routes and so local people would come up to me. The people I met were very welcoming and I realised how lucky I was that there was usually someone in every village who could speak English. I would eat what the local people ate, such as maize porridge and sometimes a fish stew.

I was so hungry I ate 20 cream cakes in a row...

I ran out of food for a few days when I crossed from Namibia to Zambia. The banks wouldn't accept dollars or sterling and so I wasn't able to buy food. It was really hard, and for the next few days I walked fast until I found a town that accepted my currency. I went straight into a supermarket, and cream cakes were the nearest things to hand – I stuffed my face before I even got to the till. When I started the walk I weighed 12 stone but when I reached the end I was only eight and a half.

When I got back I moved to Deptford...

I love living near the river and the rich cultural mix of the south-east London. I really enjoy walking in Greenwich Park and running across Blackheath.

Traversa by Fran Sandham is published by Duckworth.

www.traversa.co.uk ●

Adventure

Wandering sole

Fran Sandham recently walked across Africa - starting out from Namibia's Skeleton Coast. In this extract from his new book *Traversa* we find him tired and with sore feet as he enters the country's Caprivi Strip.

Although many of the people I meet on this trip assume I'm reasonably brave, in fact I'm scared of most things, including dinosaurs. The truth is I'm worried about crossing the West Caprivi Game Reserve on foot, so I visit Rundu's Nature Conservation Office to get some up-to-date information on lion attacks. The staff here are extremely helpful; we consult a map of the park, which covers an entire wall. 'You will have to be careful over the last forty kilometres - all the reported lion incidents have been in that area,' the officer tells me. I never realized before how sinister the word 'incident' can sound.

Statistically, the chances of getting eaten by a lion in Africa are pretty low. Yet someone has to get eaten once in a while for such statistics to exist. I have to remind myself repeatedly that most accidents happen at home - though not, admittedly, accidents involving lions.

Leaving Rundu, I head east towards the Caprivi Strip. Once known as 'The Devil's Finger', this panhandle-shaped stretch of land once formed part of the German colony. It derives its un-African name from the even more un-African name of the nineteenth-century German chancellor, General Count Georg Leo von Caprivi di Caprara di Montecuccoli, thankfully shortened. Germany acquired the territory from the British in 1890 in exchange for Heligoland and Zanzibar, and were delighted with this strategically important link through the British colonies to German East Africa. In the First World War, however, it became the very first German territory to fall to the British. At the outbreak of hostilities, the unsuspecting German governor was dining with an equally unsuspecting British official from Rhodesia, the two men on the best of terms. The meal ended on a sour note when the British official's aide passed

"Local people often travel by means of mekoro - dugout canoes skilfully propelled by long poles. 'He who digs his pole too deep will be stuck forever,' runs a local proverb"



Mokoro at dawn in Caprivi

RICHARD DU TOIT GETTY IMAGES

him a letter announcing the start of the war – he immediately arrested the German governor and annexed the Caprivi Strip back to the British crown, all within the time it took to serve the brandy and cigars to the remaining diners.

I trek through the bushland along the Kavango, looking vaguely trainspotterish with my compass hanging on a string around my neck. This stretch of river resembles the Thames below Richmond Hill; even the trees look similar from a distance. Although heavily vegetated, with green fields and dense woodlands of teak, much of the Caprivi Strip is covered with Kalahari sand. The whole area was once a desert, but now it's the most fertile region in Namibia. Caprivi is so lush I find it hard to imagine it's part of the same country as the Namib Desert. So much of Namibia is arid: the country has enormous problems with water shortage, countless adverts proclaiming water as 'our most precious resource'.

Yet here in the north of the country the Okavango system alone has more water in it than all the rivers in South Africa put together. And when the region floods, it really floods – the vast Caprivi swamps are sometimes known as Namibia's 'water country'. Local people often travel by means of mokoro – dugout canoes skilfully propelled by long poles. 'He who digs his pole too deep will be stuck forever,' runs a local proverb.

My progress through the sand slows to a weary plod; as if to taunt me a flock of tiny black birds repeatedly whizz past at breathtaking speed, back and forth over my head, like miniature Red Arrows. I head back towards the main road and immediately make much better progress. By necessity I've become something of an expert on walking surfaces, judging which offer the firmest footing, which prove kinder to your feet, and above all which allow the least expenditure of energy. ►►



Caprivi's namesake, General Count Georg Leo von Caprivi di Caprara di Montecuccoli, thankfully shortened.

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Adventure



Rough gravel roads tend to tear sandals to ribbons; in some ways they're worse than walking through the bush, especially when the road is a mixture of loose sand and sharp stones. Carrying a heavy pack, I sink up to my ankles in the sand while the sharp stones hurt my feet through my sandals.

A well-to-do black family stops and presents me with a can of ice-cold 7UP, which right now tastes more like the elixir of life. Later some less affluent locals fill my water bottle from the innards of their car, a gift just as welcome – although I suspect this last offering has something to do with my coming down with giardiasis later. The heat meanwhile turns my reading candles into wax bananas.


Before the entrance to the game reserve I stop for a day's rest. I want to get moving through the West Caprivi Game Reserve as quickly as possible, rather than sitting around here worrying about lions up ahead, and I'm half-tempted to carry straight on. But I've just walked 200 kilometres from Rundu without a break to get here, and the road through the game reserve itself is the same distance again. It would be foolish to set out immediately when I'm already worn out; the lions can wait another day for their dinner.

I pitch my tent in the campsite beside Popa Falls. 'Popa' translates rather redundantly as 'it is here' – although you could say that about most places with some degree of confidence. The Kavango River is over one kilometre wide at this point, although the falls themselves are little more than rapids, and fail to entice the hordes of visitors away from the spectacular Victoria Falls downstream. But it's a peaceful place, surrounded by forests of jackal berry and buffalo thorn; the noise of the river tumbling over the cascades is lovely in this heat, with plenty of shade around the thatched wooden bungalows. If this were Europe I'd be swimming by now – but there are too many crocodiles and hippos to make this a viable option, not to mention the bilharzia.

Instead I sit in a lodge bar a couple of kilometres downriver from Popa Falls, watching two crocodiles who in turn are showing a keen interest in a family of hippos. But the latter can look after themselves; hippos may appear to be peaceable creatures most

of the time, but they kill more people than any other animal in Africa. Anyone reckless enough to place themselves between a hippo and its young – or even just the water – is likely to see it transformed into a three-ton engine of destruction, and a charging hippo can flatten most living things. They're denser than water, so they can waddle on the floor of a lake or river with their lungs full of air; since they can manage this, I can't understand how they can also float to swim, but they've obviously worked it out somewhere down the evolutionary line. Despite their size and weight they can also tiptoe through a campsite at night without snagging a single guyline.

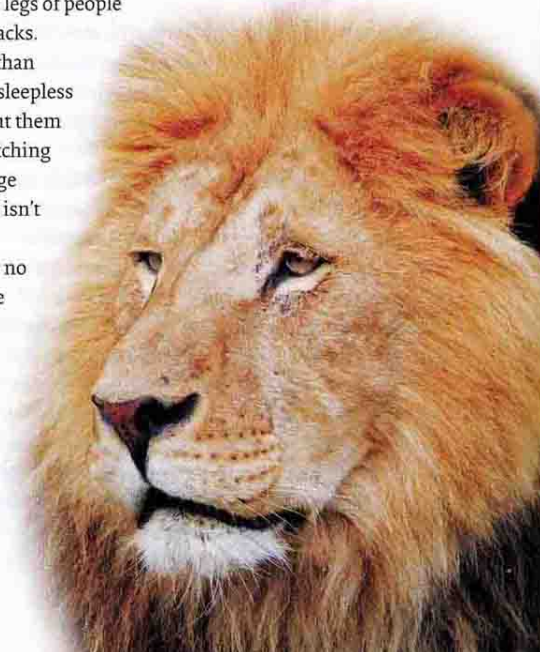
Although Namibian law prohibits local people from trapping hippos in this area, it still goes on, the temptation of so much free meat inevitably proving irresistible. Livingstone was often impressed by the courage of hippopotamus hunters, especially the Makombwe on the Luangwa River. Often a wounded hippo would attack the hunter's canoe and crunch it with its great jaws 'as easily as a pig would a bunch of asparagus'. To escape with their lives the natives would swim frantically for the shore, keeping underwater while the angry hippo searched for them on the surface. 'We have no sport, except perhaps Indian tiger shooting, requiring the courage and coolness this enterprise demands,' Livingstone wrote. The moment the hippo's blood is shed into the water 'all the crocodiles below are immediately drawn up stream by the scent, and are ready to act the part of thieves in a London crowd, or worse'. He often saw 'frightful gashes' on the legs of people who had survived hippo attacks.

But it's the lions rather than hippos that are causing me sleepless nights, and my anxiety about them is getting worse. Sitting watching hippos in a comfortable lodge with a cold beer in my hand isn't helping me cross the game reserve in one piece. Rest or no rest, I've run out of plausible delaying tactics, and I simply have to get moving without any further stalling. Crossing the bridge over the Kavango River, I pass a police checkpoint then start the long trek through  the game reserve.

CLOCKWISE: Exhausted after reaching Namibia's Caprivi Strip. Children at Caprivi craft stall. Popa Falls. Caprivi carvings.

"If this were Europe I'd be swimming by now – but there are too many crocodiles and hippos to make this a viable option"

■ *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean*, by Fran Sandham, is published by Duckworth





"It's a peaceful place, surrounded by forests of jackal berry and buffalo thorn; the noise of the river tumbling over the cascades is lovely in this heat"



Growling lions and a dopey donkey were just some of the colourful characters encountered by writer Fran Sandham during his epic trek across Africa. MATT WATTS reports

Walking back to happiness

There comes a time in any great journey when travellers ask themselves if it is all worth it.

For Gipsy Hill resident Fran Sandham it happened camping in the middle of an African game reserve when, suffering from chronic diarrhoea, he could not relieve himself because there were lions circling his tent.

"It wasn't my happiest moment," he says. "But I just waited a few hours for the growls to go away before I finally made it outside - and yes, it was quite a relief when it was all over."

The sticky situation was just one of many that made up Fran's historic journey on foot across Africa, when he became the first man to make the 3,000 mile route alone.

His incredible year-and-a-half trip is now the subject of a critically acclaimed travel book, *Traversa*.

But despite all his great challenges and experiences, the Colby Road resident says his greatest endeavour actually ended up as being getting the book published - a feat which has taken him 10 years.

"I was turned down by more than 40 publishers before it was finally accepted," he explains. "I'm pretty sure that's some kind of record."

Fran, who worked as an editor for Rough Guides after the trip, says it is now laughable the publishing took so long considering the glowing critical acclaim the book has since received.

The light-hearted novel traces Fran's journey starting in 1997 from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar, passing through



Young admirers: Some children Fran met in Caprici, in Namibia

Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania.

His journey - inspired by the great African explorers such as Dr Livingstone - crossed every type of terrain, through snow, desert, jungle and swamp.

Yet despite the gruelling physical battle the journey represented - Fran's weight plummeted to just eight-and-a-half stone by the end - he seems happier not dwelling on the magnitude of his achievement, but focusing on the amusing tales his trip

threw up.

"It took me two-and-a-half months to travel one mile because I had an extremely unhelpful donkey that just went round in circles," he laughs.

"I should of course have known there might be a problem when I bought it," he explains. "The donkey's name was Tündab, meaning 'Where did you get stuck?'"

The tale of the lion and the uncompromising toilet situation obviously has a comic element, but Fran explains it was actually the most

frightening moment of his trip.

"I had to trek 200km through the reserve where people had been eaten by lions," he says. "That was pretty scary."

The added addition of hundreds of unexploded landmines, as well as rumours of Unita soldiers from Angola poaching in the park, were not much help to Fran either.

The advice from locals was that if he got into trouble with anyone he should pretend to be a witchdoctor, which clearly did not act as much comfort.

Interestingly despite all the incredible experiences and coming through the whole trip unscathed, Fran sees the very first day when he arrived in Africa as the most euphoric moment of his trip.

He had previously been miserable working in a bookshop.

"I felt completely free, that I had nothing holding me back, that I could do anything," he remembers.

In contrast, Fran hardly recalls the sensation of finishing the trip. "It's all hazy now," he explains.

"I was diagnosed with malaria the day after I finished and everything, including coming home, is a bit of a blur."

Anyone who opens the book will see his other memories are still quite clear.

Traversa, by Fran Sandham, is published by Duckworth Overlook and is available now.



Traveller's tales: Fran is the first man to cross Africa by this route alone and on foot



Life's a beach: The Skeleton Coast, where Fran's epic journey began

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OPTIMA

MAGAZINE
05 JULY 2008 no. 398

Inside:
Walking Across Africa



DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY TO OVER 42,000 HOMES IN S.HERTFORDSHIRE & N.MIDDLESEX

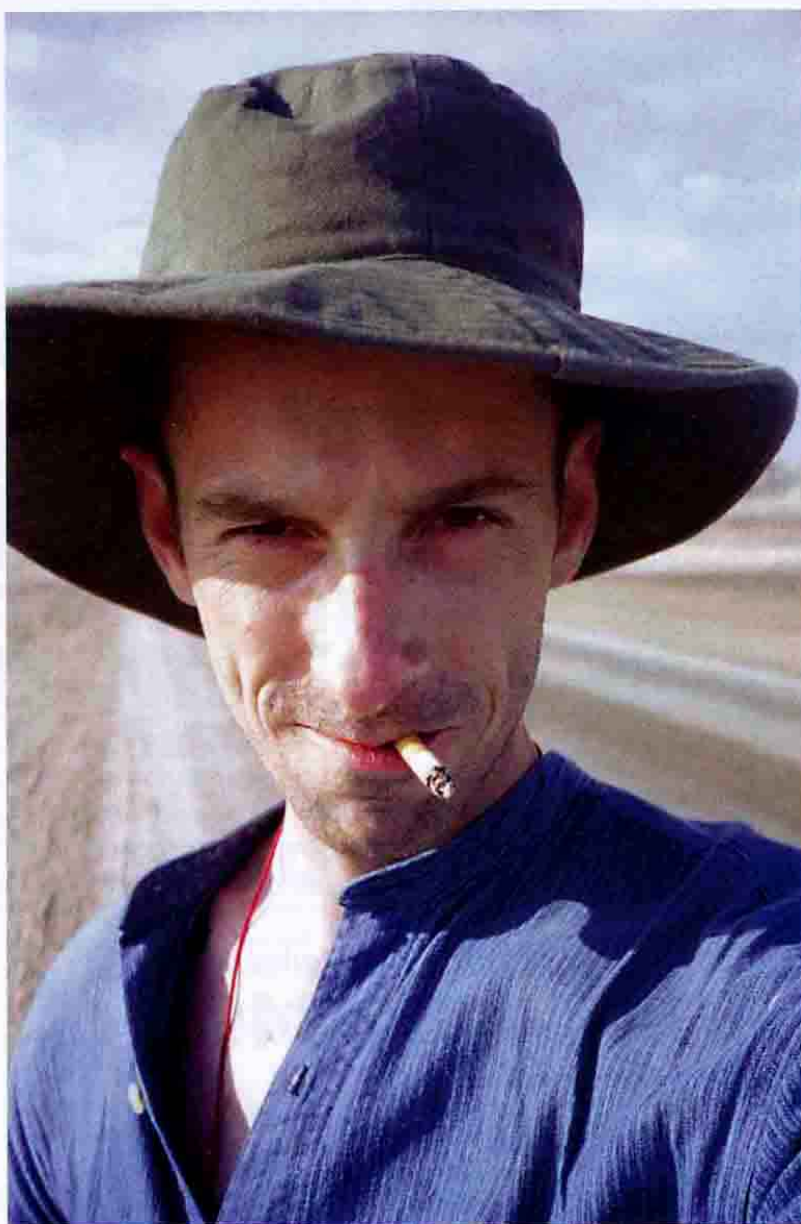
Ever made a ridiculous New Year's Resolution? Woken up next morning, shrugged your shoulders and forgotten it? Jill Glenn meets Fran Sandham, whose idea – to cross Africa, alone, on foot – wouldn't go away.

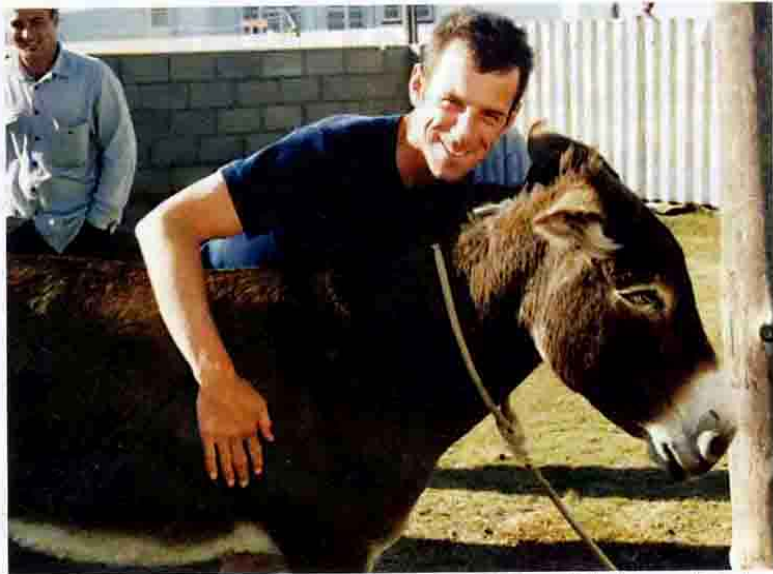
best foot forward

As New Year's Resolutions go, "I think I'll walk across Africa" must rank fairly high on a list of intentions-least-likely-to-be-realised. Fran Sandham doesn't make plans lightly though, and when he woke the next morning to find that he could not only remember the party and how he got home (on foot, as it happens), but also the mad idea he'd conceived in the middle of it, he couldn't shake off the conviction that he might just have hit upon the goal he didn't know he was looking for.

And so began 12 months of scrimping and saving, living on toast and porridge, and walking everywhere – not so much for the fitness training (although clearly it helped!) but for the opportunity to save a few pounds here and there towards his Africa Fund. He could have looked for sponsorship, of course, or sold the idea to a reality television show, and set off with a support team and a brace of cameras in tow. It wouldn't have been *his* journey, though, and doing it on his terms was very much part of the plan. Solo it would be.

Not that there really was much of a plan. He didn't quite stick a pin on the map to pick out Namibia and Tanzania as beginning and end – but it wasn't really much more technical than that. Sandham is a words man, seduced by the romance of names and ideas. "After all," as he says, "how could you resist starting a journey at





Fran Sandham with Tsondab, the donkey whose inclusion in the journey didn't quite go according to plan...

somewhere called the Skeleton Coast?" And equally, how could he resist the lure of the Spice Island of Zanzibar as an exotic destination?

Traversa, Sandham's memoir of the crossing, newly published in paperback, is a wickedly funny read. His dry sense of humour and sharp observational skills bring his bizarre experiences to life; his wit and obvious intelligence make it an engaging and thought-provoking account. He's refreshingly honest about the fact that he's there by choice; he doesn't grumble about his hardships (or when he does, acknowledges he's no business to) and keeps a level head about him. He needs it.

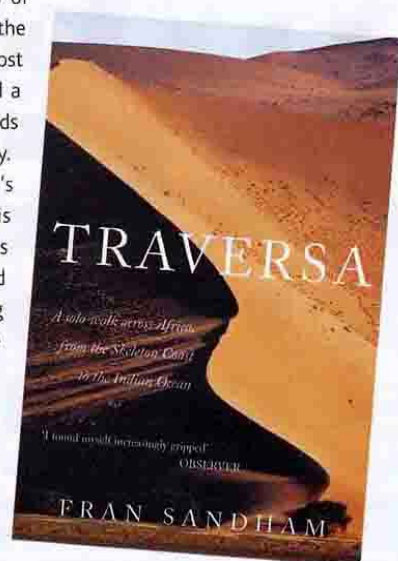
Evidently Sandham makes it from one side of Africa to the other; it's hardly giving away the plot of *Traversa* to reveal that. The point for him, though, was the journey, not the destination – and the point for us as readers is to marvel, to understand and to laugh. This is a highly amusing book by an amusing and energetic man. He's full of energy; as he stands and talks he's half-bouncing on his toes, as if any minute he might suddenly conceive of another continent to cross, and rush off to begin. I wonder how he sat still for long enough to write.

It has required nearly as much determination to pursue his idea of publishing an account of his trip as it did to cross Africa in the first place. His big adventure didn't grab the imaginations of publishers for a long time – it's ten years since Sandham dabbled his toes in the Indian Ocean, and then flew home: ill, broke and clutching a sheaf of minuscule notes, stuffed into plastic money bags, which had all but dissolved over the course of 3,000 miles, and needed to be painfully reworked into something resembling a narrative. In the last decade he's written the book, trawled it from publisher to publisher (there

must be some out there who are kicking themselves now) and watched the hardback, which came out in October last year, win praise and plaudits both sides of the Atlantic. It must feel like a vindication. It's also led to some interesting opportunities – his next trip abroad is to lecture on a luxury cruise in the Indian Ocean, which, he suspects, "may have its compensations".

You might expect, from such an expedition, that Sandham was always keen on walking. Not so, he avers, or "not unless there was a real purpose to it". He was, however, always keen on Africa, on the idea of Africa, and this journey enabled him to combine purpose with a childhood passion. Walking kept him connected to the weather, the people, the land. The rhythm of the journey – despite the draughts of restorative alcohol and the cigarettes – was almost spiritual. He developed a self-reliance that stands him in good stead today.

In conversation he's prone to dismiss his focus, his drive, as bloody-mindedness and natural insanity. Reading *Traversa* there are times, many times, when you can't help agreeing with his description of himself. I'm glad he did it though. And I'm glad I don't have to. ■



TRAVERSA: A SOLO WALK ACROSS AFRICA



Local children would follow Fran from village to village

Fran Sandham decided to walk 3000 miles across Africa from one coast to the other, completely alone: no backup, no support team, no one to carry his gear, no sponsors, no funding, and no strings attached.

Although many people I meet on this journey assume I'm reasonably brave, in fact I'm scared of most things, including dinosaurs. The truth is I'm worried about crossing the West Caprivi Game Reserve on foot, so I visit Rundu's Nature Conservation Office to

get some up-to-date information on lion attacks. The staff here are extremely helpful: we consult a map of the park, which covers an entire wall.

'You will have to be careful over the last forty kilometres

- all the reported lion incidents have been in that area,' the officer tells me. I never realized before how sinister the word 'incident' can sound. Lions recently killed a road worker in the reserve, leaving only a soggy scalp for his colleagues to bury.

Equally unwelcome is the prospect of unexploded landmines in the game reserve, a legacy of the bush war. I'll have to stay close to the road and be bloody careful about wandering around in the undergrowth. The guy also warns me of former UNITA soldiers out poaching in the park, still armed to the teeth; at night they cross from the Angolan side of the Kavango River, taking any spoils back with them.

'For safety you should camp on the south side of the road through the game reserve,' he tells me. 'And if you get into trouble with the locals you should pretend to be a witch doctor. Man, you think I'm joking? I tell you, even today some of the local people are still that superstitious.' I'm not entirely convinced by this - and even if it's true, I didn't come to Africa to cure

people of their spiritual ailments or raise the dead.

But the big cats are causing me the most anxiety. It doesn't pay to act too cavalier in one's attitude towards lions - enough people have died over the years through doing exactly that. I'm still not sure what I'll do if I meet a lion along the road. I could always try the springbok ploy of making balletic leaps in the air to show I'm fit, healthy and hard to catch. Springbok leaps of this nature are known as 'pronking'; but how do you pronk with a heavy rucksack? I can hardly compete on equal terms: lions themselves are excellent jumpers, and when charging can easily leap twelve metres in their final bound. Quite apart from its teeth and claws, a lion can deliver a blow with its paw of sufficient force to break the neck of a fully grown buffalo.

Some people advise me that if I'm attacked I should distract the lion by sticking my arm in its mouth; as soon as the lion gives its full attention to my arm between its teeth I should stab it behind the shoulder. Resistance to the



At the Malawian border, where Fran's mistaken for a boxer

bitter end is recommended, as lions occasionally turn away or release their prey. This sounds wonderfully straightforward in theory, without the lion in question crunching my arm to splinters.

Other people insist passive behaviour is the key to surviving a lion attack: apparently the laid-back approach spares the body stress without encouraging the lion to further unpleasantness. Either way, one factor may work in my favour – like most wild predators, lions haven't yet realized that humans can't smell properly. So if I pay attention to the wind I'll have at least some idea from which direction an attack might come – downwind.

Sipping a cold beer in a lodge bar on the banks of the Kavango, I reflect that getting killed by a lion would certainly prove a sensational exit from this world – and an extremely uncomfortable one.

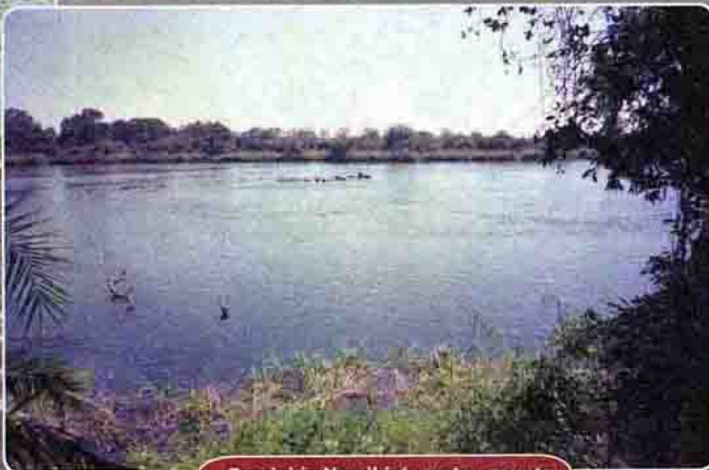
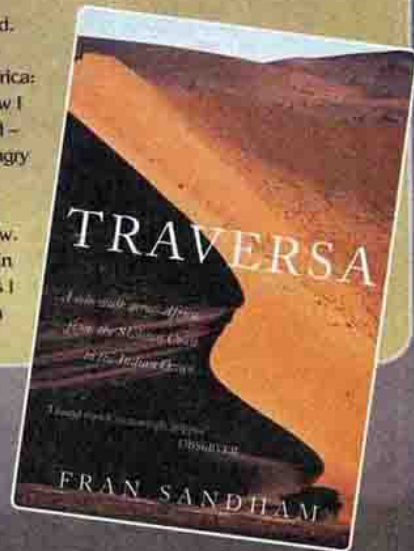
Lions usually hunt at night to frighten and confuse their prey, to me a deeply unsettling image. But I should be reasonably safe asleep inside my tent. Many hunters have considered lions far more dangerous during storms, when their usual laziness vanishes: having no fear of thunder and lightning, they hunt aggressively while the storm disturbs their quarry. Thankfully the weather forecast for the next few days is good.

There's a significant difference between myself and most visitors to Africa: for purely practical reasons, right now I don't actually wish to see a lion at all – especially without knowing if it's hungry or not until it sinks its teeth into me.

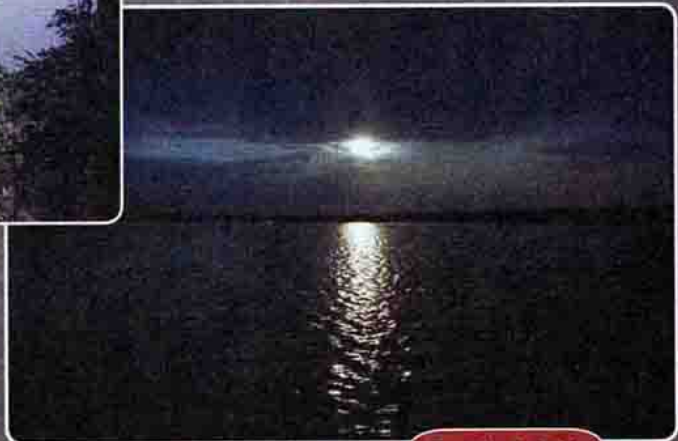
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foot, I have to remind myself that most accidents happen at home – though not, admittedly, accidents involving lions ...

Extract from TRAVERSA: A SOLO WALK ACROSS AFRICA by Fran Sandham, £13.99 (Duckworth 2008).



Caprivi is Namibia's water country

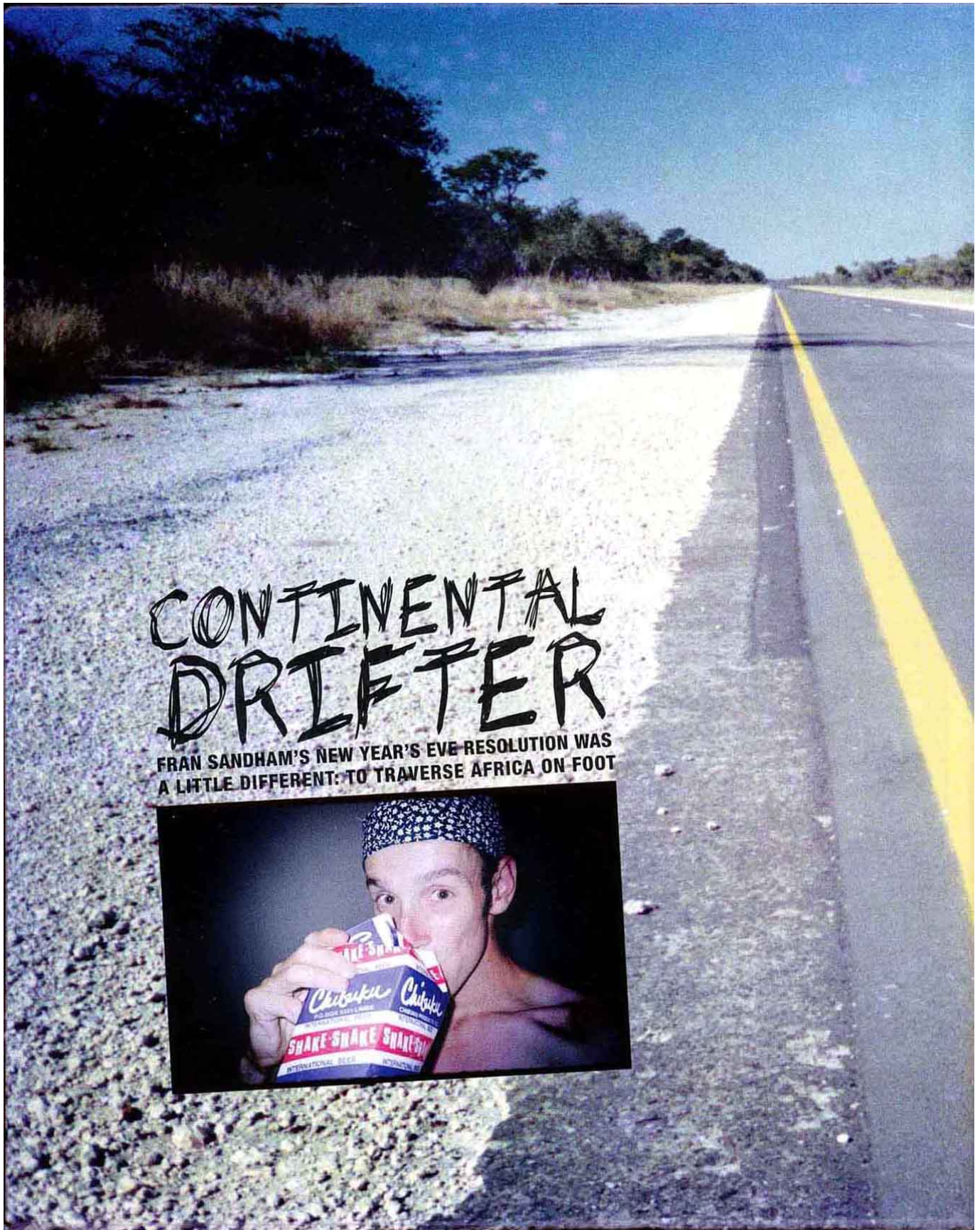


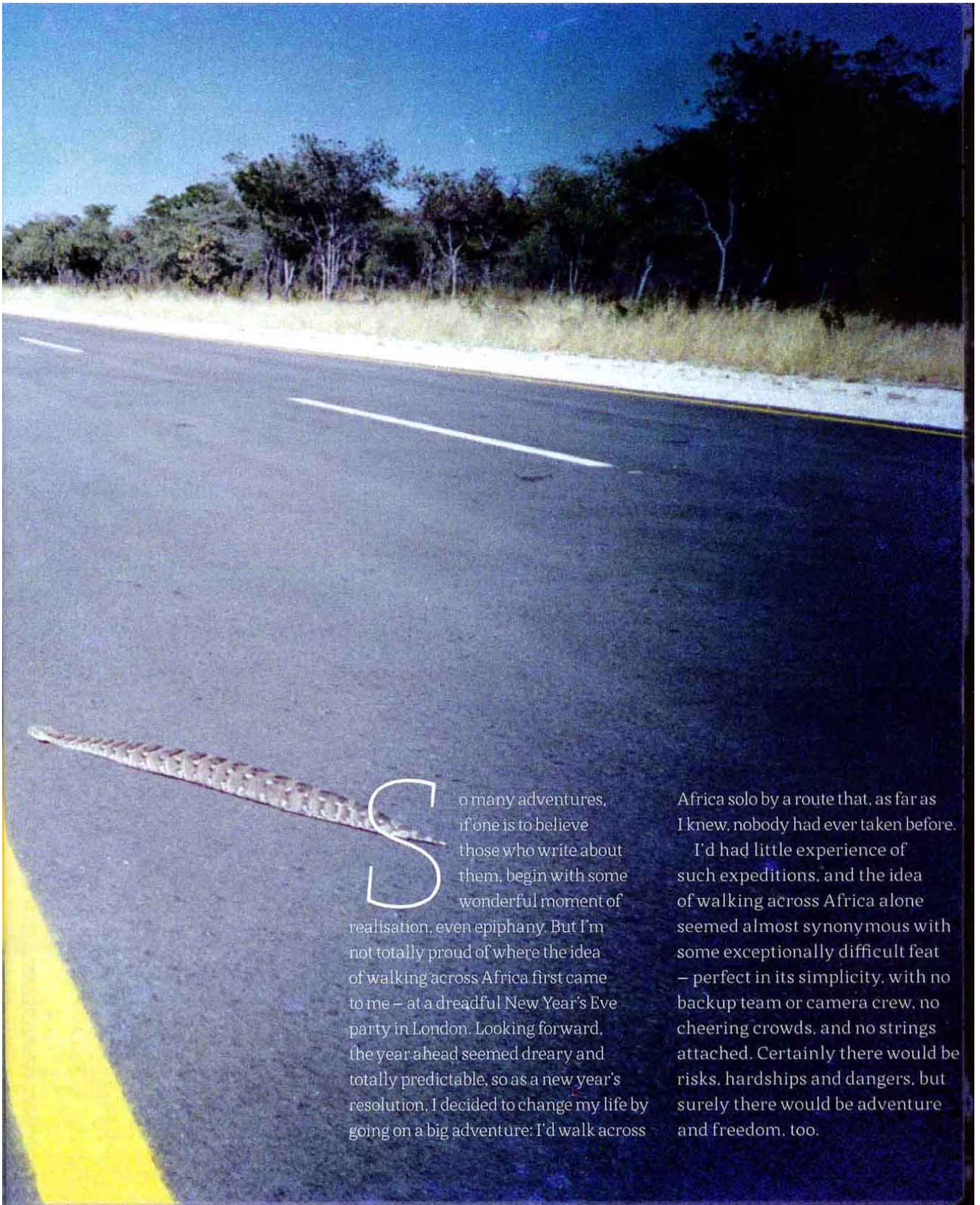
Caprivi at night

About the author

Fran Sandham was an editor at Rough Guides for several years, and worked in bookselling and in the voluntary sector before that. He has travelled in over forty countries. He now lives in London, and divides his time between freelance writing, editing and public speaking. www.traversa.co.uk







So many adventures, if one is to believe those who write about them, begin with some wonderful moment of realisation, even epiphany. But I'm not totally proud of where the idea of walking across Africa first came to me – at a dreadful New Year's Eve party in London. Looking forward, the year ahead seemed dreary and totally predictable, so as a new year's resolution, I decided to change my life by going on a big adventure: I'd walk across

Africa solo by a route that, as far as I knew, nobody had ever taken before.

I'd had little experience of such expeditions, and the idea of walking across Africa alone seemed almost synonymous with some exceptionally difficult feat – perfect in its simplicity, with no backup team or camera crew, no cheering crowds, and no strings attached. Certainly there would be risks, hardships and dangers, but surely there would be adventure and freedom, too.

TRAVERSA AFRICA

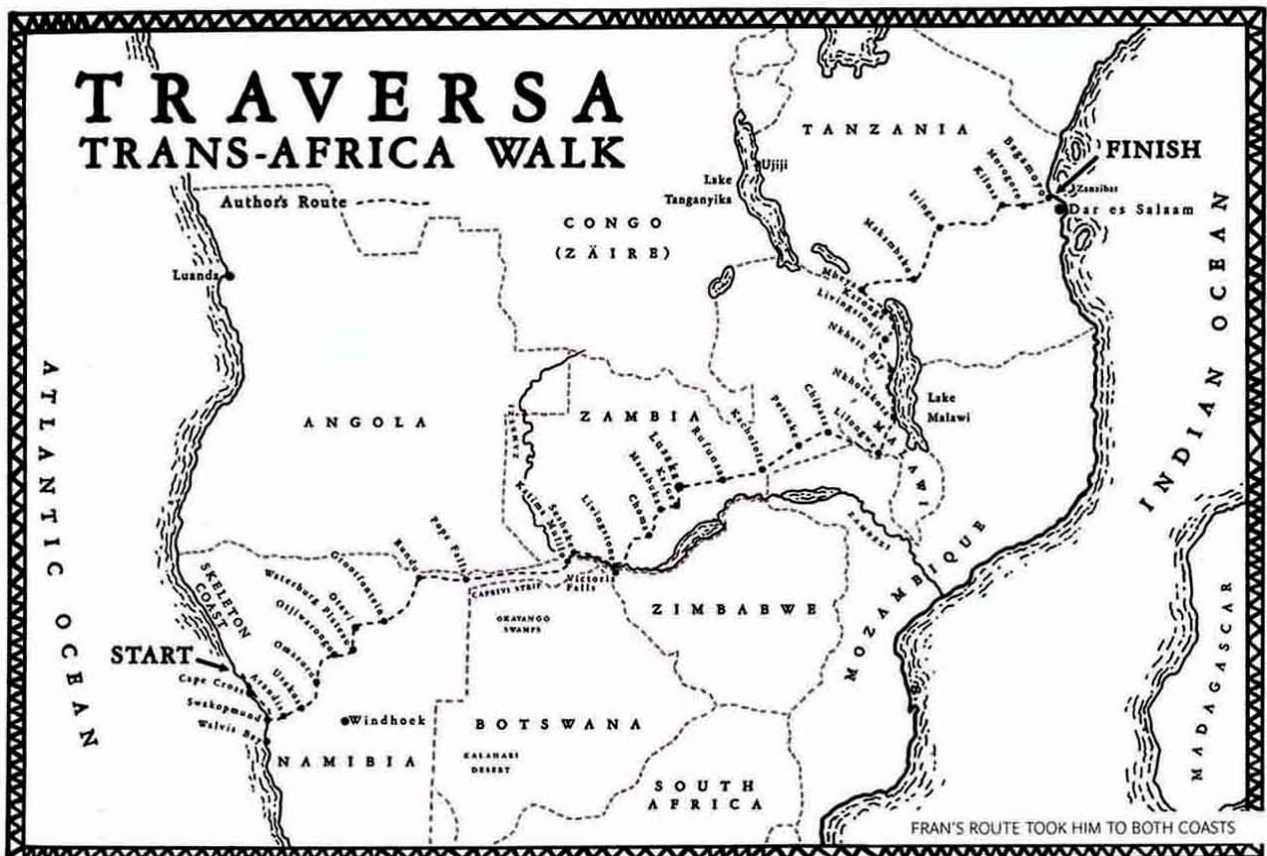
After making the decision to go, unfortunately it wasn't a case of jumping on the next flight to Africa, as I was flat broke at the time. So it took more than a year of the most undignified scrimping and saving to scrape together enough money to get to Africa. But in all that year I never lost the idea of this adventure – I saw Africa as the light at the end of the tunnel, the complete opposite of the life I'd been leading in London. I've never been so certain about anything before or since.

So why Africa? I'd been fascinated by the so-called 'Dark Continent' since I was a small child, when I read a *Tarzan* comic as a six-year-old in hospital. From that moment,

Africa had always seemed to me the most exciting, adventurous place in the world. As I grew up I realised that *Tarzan* was a load of rubbish, and Africa, in reality, was nothing like anything portrayed in a comic. Instead, I became fascinated by the Victorian explorers, men like Dr David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley, both of whom crossed Africa from coast to coast. In general, the Victorian explorers were a questionable bunch – but I was never so much interested in them from the perspective of colonial history. Instead, I was intrigued by them as highly unusual individuals travelling in what, for them, was an alien environment – why did they put

themselves through all the dangers and hardships they faced, what was driving them to risk their lives and health in this way?

I started my own journey on Namibia's Skeleton Coast, which sounded like the most exotic place in the world. Not, admittedly, the easiest place from which to start a walk across Africa – there's no water and very few people there, and the surface temperature of the sand can reach 75°C at midday. The first Europeans to arrive here, Portuguese explorers in the 15th century, called it *As Areias do Inferno* ('The Sands of Hell'). But even with a name like the 'Skeleton Coast', I simply had to start the journey from there.



off my face. Anyone who can remain unsmiling in the face of a huge swarm of children is made of sterner stuff than me.

There was only occasion on the where I almost gave up. Setting off inland from the Skeleton Coast, I got halfway across the Namib Desert and decided that carrying a 45kg pack in rocketing temperatures was going to kill me. My solution proved a disaster. I bought a donkey to carry my gear, and the entire journey then spiralled into a fiasco: in two and a half months with the donkey we covered less than one mile together. The donkey's name was 'Tsondab', which in the local Nama language translates as 'Where You Get Stuck', and no donkey was ever more aptly named. Since the donkey was clearly not up to the job, I upgraded to a mule. Unfortunately, the mule I acquired was completely untamed – on the very first day she kicked a farmer's pickup truck to pieces. After nearly three months of this foolishness I set off again, minus the pack animals, a sadder and wiser man, but the relief was phenomenal. I'd been trying to make my life easier, to bend the rules without actually cheating, but clearly there could be no shortcuts on this journey across Africa.

One of the real highlights had to be Victoria Falls, on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe. The sheer size and spectacle of the falls – one of the seven natural wonders of the world, over a mile wide and twice the size of Niagara – was such that it didn't bother me that hordes of Western visitors were bungee jumping off a bridge and doing all these adrenaline sports in which I

had no interest. Its local name, *Mosi-oa-Tunya*, translates as 'The Smoke That Thunders' – so named because of the gigantic pillar of mist rising above the falls, and they're clearly audible from miles away. Dr Livingstone, wrote famously: 'Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.'

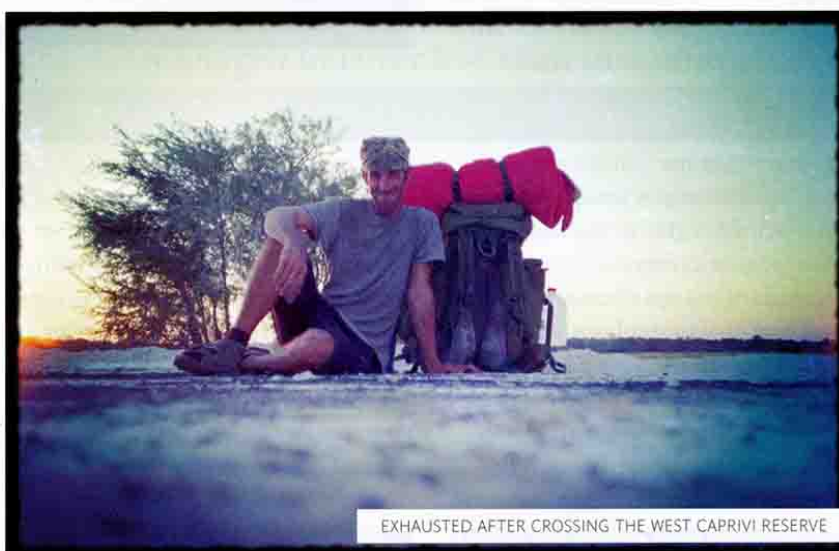
As weeks on the road turned into months, the rhythm of the journey itself gradually took over, sometimes to an almost spiritual extent. I'm not a religious man, but I could understand for the first time how the idea of a pilgrimage – a long and difficult linear journey with a clear goal in mind – has played such a significant role in many faiths.

While it's difficult to choose the most memorable moment from the entire journey, I'd have to pick the very first evening, on the desolate Skeleton Coast with no one for miles around. I remember looking out into

the Atlantic while the cold Benguela current swept inland like molten silver – at that point the sense of sheer freedom and being on the eve of a big adventure was almost intoxicating.

But the end of journey took me by surprise. For many travellers and adventurers it seems almost mandatory to end a long difficult journey in a mood of euphoria, running along the beach cheering and hollering. I felt very differently – the end was much more private and reflective, almost melancholic. Despite all the hardships, I didn't want the journey to end, and I knew life wouldn't be as simple back in England. One thing you can say about walking 25 or 30 miles a day with a heavy pack: you can sleep very soundly at night, and I knew I'd never be able to sleep so soundly back in England. After walking across Africa, life back at home would never feel quite the same again. ■

Fran Sandham is the author of Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa, which is published by Duckworth. You can read more at www.traversa.co.uk



EXHAUSTED AFTER CROSSING THE WEST CAPRIVI RESERVE

books

A long way across

TRAVERSA

A Walk Across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean

FRAN SANDHAM

★★★★

WHEN it comes to adding to the grand tradition of African exploration, Fran Sandham would be the first to admit that his contribution is decidedly modest.

But then, when you are following in the footsteps of such renowned explorers as Livingstone, Stanley and Grogan, you have some pretty hard acts to follow. Sandham, however, refuses to allow their exploits to overshadow this record of his trek from Namibia on Africa's western coast to Zanzibar in the east. Instead, he embraces them happily. The result is a warm, humorous, and distinctly individual account of a remarkable adventure.

The motives that prompted him to take on the challenge remain obscure, even to himself. It was just something he had to do; which is why, almost to his own surprise, he finds himself on Namibia's Skeleton Coast ready to begin his 3,000-mile adventure. It is not an auspicious start. Realising he has brought far too much gear to carry he decides he needs help, and plunges himself into an increasingly-fraught series of adventures involving an intractable donkey and a homicidal mule. Three months later, when he is no nearer the other side of the continent, sanity finally prevails. "I'll carry on alone, taking only what I can carry myself," he says belatedly, "which is how I'd



originally planned things all along." From the outset Sandham is more than willing to take diversions, historical and geographical, as the mood takes him. It's an idiosyncratic approach, and typical of Sandham, but one that is hugely rewarding to the reader. As he treks through Namibia, for example, we learn of the appalling policy of genocide waged by the ruling colonial power, Germany, against the indigenous Hereros at the start of the 20th century. Other meanderings down the byways of history recall Livingstone's many adventures, including the time he dramatically escaped death after being mauled by a lion.

Book
of
the
week

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Sandham, too, worries about lions – as well he might, when camping alone in the middle of a game park.

He's lucky, though; most of his close encounters are with creatures of the creepy-crawly type.

When he finally reaches the Indian Ocean, Sandham has experienced an Africa far different from the one Livingstone would have recognised. Instead of hacking his way through

jungle, Sandham finds roads to trudge along; rather than living off the land, there are shops, bars and hostels.

But some things are unchanged. Sounds and scents familiar to Livingstone are also experienced by Sandham as he lies awake in the bush at night or travels through clusters of impoverished humanity.

Sandham made no great scientific or geographic discoveries during his expedition.

But, as this enjoyable book proves, he did find out quite a lot about himself.

DUCKWORTH OVERLOOK, £16.99

Lifestyle **books**

TRAVERSA

David Gennard reviews *Traversa*, the inspirational book that tells of one Wirral man's heroic walk across Africa

What is it that makes *Traversa* such a good read?

Well, it's one of those real-life stories that just happens include all the ingredients that make a great story.

We have a compelling protagonist in the shape of Fran Sandham. A man on a journey, both mentally and physically. But there is also a fearsome antagonist that our hero must overcome. A foe that will test him to his limits, providing many obstacles that will put his life in danger and prevent him from trying to reach his goal. This foe is not simply one man or one beast, it's not even a country but an entire continent, Africa.

In the beginning we get the exposition. Fran sets up the story, cutting a disheartened figure who is extremely fed up with the status quo of modern city life and all the unfulfilled dreams that go with it. This is where

the first inciting incident takes place. It's New Year's Eve – a seminal moment of making new plans for everyone and the point where the hero of our story, encouraged ever so slightly by drunken bravado, realises that it's now or never.

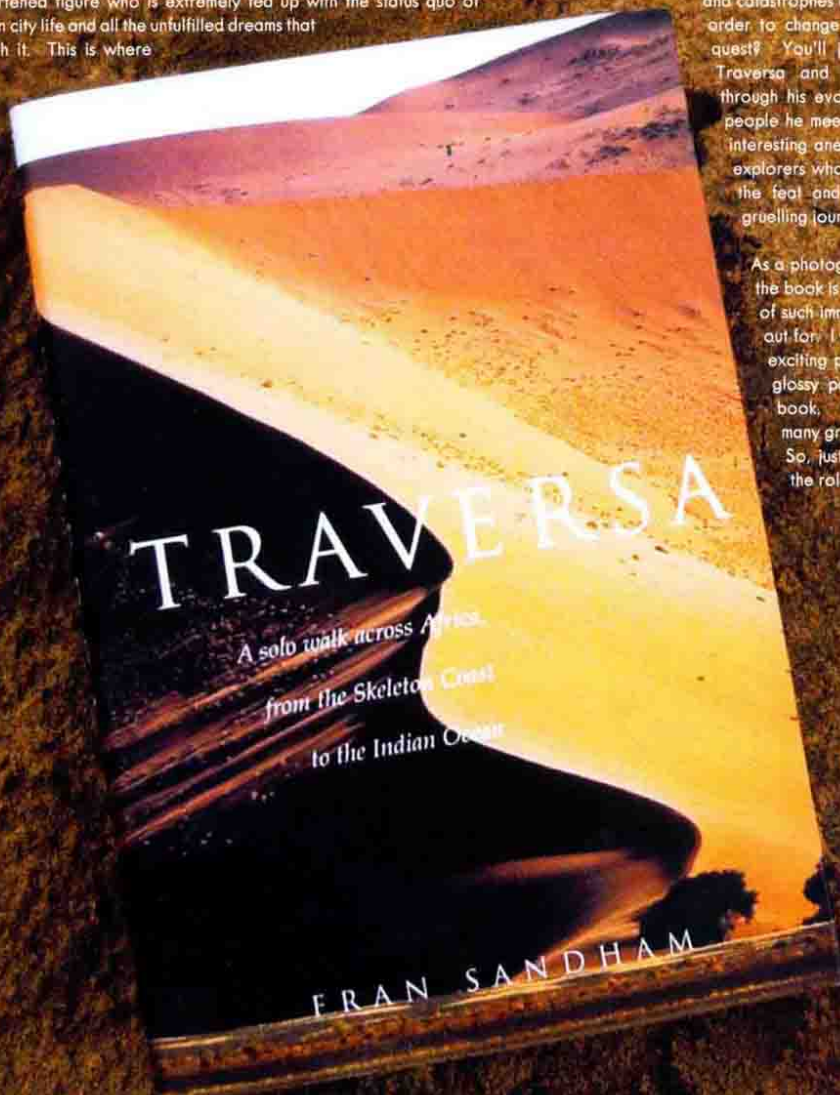
A lifelong obsession of the classical explorers of the 'Dark Continent' and a want to recreate their adventurous journeys fuels Fran on his quest to cross the breadth of Africa.

Fran's proposal to travel from the skeleton coast and the Atlantic in the west, all the way to Zanzibar in the east and the Indian Ocean, may seem a journey that's not too difficult in modern times. But what makes this journey so daring is that he proposes to do it alone and, even more incredibly, on foot!

So does he make it? Overcoming the crisis and catastrophes every hero must conquer in order to change and thus progress on his quest? You'll just have to join Fran in *Traversa* and experience the journey through his evocative descriptions of the people he meets and places he sees. The interesting anecdotes of the inspirational explorers who inspired him to undertake the feat and the comical tales of his gruelling journey.

As a photographer, my only gripe with the book is a lack of photos that a trip of such immense proportions is crying out for. I was hoping for hundreds of exciting photos to spill out from the glossy pages at the centre of the book. Still, Fran's words evoke many great images.

So, just let your imagination take the role of the developer...



Testimonials from public talks



The Times London Destinations Travel Show, Earls Court

'Fran Sandham has a superb discernment for the detail of what makes people listening to him be interested, amused and thoroughly entertained – an excellent talk and a great evening.'
John Lake, BARBICAN CENTRE, CITY OF LONDON

'Fran gave a great, riveting lecture and the audience was spellbound. He is a wonderful communicator and really knows how to tell a story and hold everyone's attention. There was not a sound in the whole room while he was speaking: we could have listened to him all night, and we will certainly be asking him back in the near future.'
Kerri Fox, Head of Sixth Form, WYCOMBE ABBEY SCHOOL

'An excellent and entertaining speaker – people were very impressed. Fran grabbed the attention of our audience and left us with a unique and lasting impression of his travels across Africa.'
Norbert Wurm, DELOITTE AND TOUCHE, LONDON

'What a brilliant talk! Fran is warm and witty and an all-round entertaining speaker who captivated the audience with tales of his trek across Africa. Inspirational as well as informative and very, very amusing! A very successful and enjoyable event.'
Janette Fleming, HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

'Fran's talk to the Society definitely "hit the spot" with all the members.'
Rod Allman, Lecture Secretary, MANCHESTER GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

'What a splendid talk you gave us at Maldon U3A today – probably the most exciting we have ever had! It was great!'
Judith Johnston, Secretary, MALDON U3A

'Fran's talk for us at the Times London Destinations Travel Show at Earls Court was very entertaining and humorous. Fran is an engaging speaker who is full of energy – I highly recommend going to one of his talks.'
Karen Black, NAMIBIA TOURISM

'Fran Sandham gave us a brilliant insight into the dangers, sights, and practical problems of completing a walk across Africa. His talk covered a lot, history, wildlife, issues with pack animals and so on, and his storytelling ability kept the audience of Year 11 students enthralled. A very enjoyable session.'
Trevor Allen, Head of Sixth Form, LEICESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'A fantastic adventure and inspirational story, told with great humour.'
Ian Chandler, THE OUTDOORS SHOW, LONDON EXCEL

'One of our members described your talk as the best presentation he had ever seen, and there were several others that expressed similar sentiments.'
Ray Knowle, Speakers Secretary, PADDOCK WOOD U3A

'Fran's talk was highly entertaining, extremely informative and kept our group fascinated throughout. I'd recommend him to anyone looking for an experienced and highly professional speaker.'
Rachael Thornton, WESTCLIFF-ON-SEA W.I.

'A brilliant talk – Fran Sandham was amazing in his delivery of his story of trekking solo across Africa. All parents and students in the room were spellbound by the account of his adventures and I would have no hesitation in recommending Fran to other schools or organisations.'
Annie Hughes, Development Director, GORDON'S SCHOOL, SURREY



Queen's Theatre, Hexham

'Fran gave us a fresh perspective on the solo trek with a lively, informative and entertaining examination of motivation as well as process in this mammoth undertaking – a highly recommended, enjoyable lecture.'

Sue Chambers, President, HULL LITERARY & PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

'Thank you so much for your inspiring talk last night. It was a massive hit with the kids – they really did love it – lots of feedback flying this morning.'

Owen Moelwyn-Hughes, Head of Politics, KINGS SCHOOL, CANTERBURY

'What a superb talk you gave us, I had so many of our members telling me how much they had enjoyed all you had to say – it meant we ended our year on a mighty high. A big thank you again for a splendid afternoon and also for a fascinating read.'

Meg Alun-Jones, Programme Secretary, CROSBY U3A

'Super talk – thank you – it obviously went down well and that was a big turn out for us.'

Tessa Gayford, Chair, CAMELOT U3A

'Fran is a gripping speaker and I was quickly drawn into his story. To have adolescents sitting absolutely rapt is a gift that many speakers cannot claim; Fran can: the lads were fascinated by his account of African travel at the sharp end. His talk was vivid and packed with sensory detail to bring it all home to the listener. It was the kind of talk that one comes back to time and again in the days afterwards.'

Andrew Grimshaw, English Dept, BEDFORD SCHOOL

'Thank you so much for such an inspiring talk this morning. I think you could tell by the applause and the interest at the end asking questions and coming to speak to you on a one to one that it was much appreciated. I even heard a couple of seventy-year-olds saying that they would love to do something like that.'

Jeni Davies, Speaker Secretary, CHESTER U3A

You really did enchant us with your story of the walk across Africa and we really would like you to come again some time.'

Shirley McConnell, Speakers Secretary, ROMILEY U3A

'Thank you for your amazing talk today, everybody really enjoyed it and we had a good turn out as well.'

Hanna Bastiaansen, CHESTER GLOBETROTTERS

'Thank you for coming to give us such a well-received talk – I will certainly have no hesitation in recommending you to anyone looking for an engaging and professional speaker.'

Margaret Harkup, Speakers Secretary, MAIDSTONE U3A

'Thanks for the lovely talk about your walk – everyone enjoyed it very much.'

Hilary Hough, Speakers' Secretary, WOKINGHAM U3A

'We greatly enjoyed your talk. The feedback from the members was very appreciative – in fact some said it was the best talk that they had been to. Give yourself a gold star!'

Connie Doody, Speaker Secretary, WALSALL U3A

'I have had many reports of how much your talk was enjoyed – thank you so much for an interesting and entertaining presentation.'

Margaret Croft, Speakers Secretary, RODING VALLEY U3A

'Everyone enjoyed your talk, filled with interesting stories and humour.'

Karen Mace, Co-Speakers and Events, The WIGS, COLCHESTER

'Thanks for the lecture – we all very much enjoyed and it would be great to have you along again at Ashville at some point in the future.'

Gary Kurczij, Head of English and Gifted and Talented Enrichment Co-ordinator, ASHVILLE COLLEGE, HARROGATE

'A very big thanks for a truly interesting and entertaining talk. The feedback has been most positive.'

Pat Murfet, Speaker Secretary, KEYWORTH U3A

'Thanks again for an illuminating and humorous talk yesterday. We hope to see you again in the future.'

Jeremy Waters, Chairman, GOUDHURST U3A

'Thank you for your enthralling description of your amazing feat. The feedback has been very good, and I'll certainly be recommending you to other societies.'

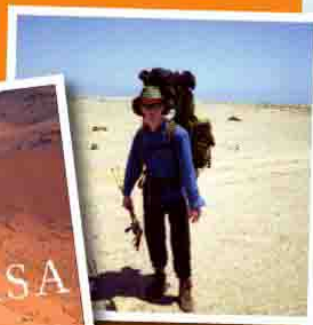
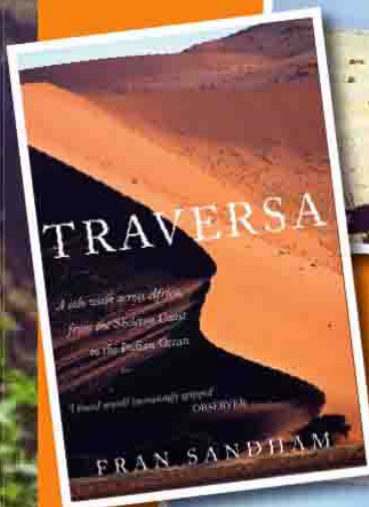
Tony Ord, Chairman, CHESTER LECTURE SOCIETY

'Thank you for another very interesting lecture last Wednesday. You certainly could not have packed-in more information into an hour's talk! I'm sure that most of the audience were (like me) almost totally ignorant of the lead-up to the encounter between Stanley and Livingstone, so you gave us an "educational" lecture in the best sense – both informative and interesting.'

John Beynon, Chairman, RETIRED MEMBERS SURREY

TRAVERSA

A solo walk across Africa



'A lively and engaging speaker whose journey on foot across Africa needs to be heard to be believed'

BBC London

Fran Sandham will be giving an illustrated talk

at the new Netherton Library on Thursday 17th November 2011 2.00 - 3.00pm.

A limited number of free tickets are available - please contact Netherton Library to reserve a ticket. Tel: 0151 525 0607

your Library *Softon*

Sefton Council 

'Thank you very much for your very interesting, informative and amusing talk at our monthly meeting. It was fascinating to hear about your epic journey across Africa and you don't need me tell you that you are a natural as a speaker. You could hear a pin drop as you took us through the journey. It is always a feather in my cap, as Speakers' Secretary, when a speaker holds everyone's attention and the feedback already has been very good.'

Joy Harding, Speakers' Secretary, SHENFIELD U3A

'It was a pleasure meeting you last Wednesday, and your talk went down very well with our members.'

Geraldine Sperritt, Speakers Secretary, NORTH WILTSHIRE U3A

'Good to meet you, people really liked your talk.'

Alison Mallalieu, Speaker Secretary, DENE VALLEY U3A

'Everyone I meet is enthusing about your brilliant talk on Monday. Thank you so much.'

Pauline O'Brien, Speakers Secretary, BOURNE U3A

'Your talk was very well received yesterday.'

Jan Warrender, Speakers Secretary, ABERGAVENNY U3A

'Thank you for a brilliant talk yesterday.'

Nick White, Speaker Secretary, SEVENOAKS U3A

'Thank you again for the wonderful talk you gave our members this morning – you had us all enthralled.'

Sue Tranter, Speakers Secretary, SARUM U3A

'We have received lots of very positive comments about last night's talk so thanks very much for agreeing to come over and do it.'

Jean Mugaseth, RADCLIFFE ON TRENT WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

'A very interesting talk – Fran Sandham was a very good speaker.'

June Byrne, Speaker Secretary, DUNSTABLE U3A

'Many thanks for your thoroughly enjoyable talk on Tuesday. As you will have already gathered, it was very well received by our members, and hopefully we will be able to see you again in the future.'

Margaret Hunt, Speaker Secretary, CLITHEROE U3A

'Many thanks for your excellent and very entertaining talk.'

Elizabeth Formstone, Speaker secretary, TEESDALE U3A

'Your talk was very much appreciated by all who were there. It was mind-boggling what you achieved and also very interesting and amusing, and we enjoyed it very much.'

Elizabeth Dobie, Speakers Secretary, YORK U3A

'Excellent Talk, many thanks.'

David Silver, Chairman, ARUN EAST U3A

'Fran's lecture on Livingstone and Stanley was a veritable tour de force, shedding light on the story from so many different perspectives, but with a marvellous lightness of touch. Everyone was gripped from start to finish.'

Graham Bartram, LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE U3A



Lecturing on cruise ship MV Discovery, Seychelles

'Many thanks for the talk – the pupils really enjoyed it and there was a lot of positive feedback.'
Andrew Dobson, Head of English, EXETER SCHOOL

'Your talk on your walk across Africa was very well received by our members'
John Beynon, RMS SURREY

'We much enjoyed Fran's talk about his walk across Africa.'
Peter Hunt, Speakers Secretary, SOUTH SOLIHULL U3A

'Thank you for the interesting talk you gave to our members last week.'
Valerie Davis, Speakers Secretary, WARMINSTER U3A

'A brilliant, entertaining talk well received by all. Thank you for giving us such a treat.'
Peter Martin, Chairman, BATH U3A

'Fran's talk went down really well last Thursday and there was a lot of positive feedback.'
Gillian Thomas, Speakers Secretary, GORING-ON-THAMES U3A

'Fran's lecture was so inspiring that the Sixth Form students were captivated from start to finish – this was a wise investment of 60 minutes for the students.'
Emma Kemp-Gee, Deputy Head VI, ROYAL ALEXANDRA AND ALBERT SCHOOL

'Thank you for coming on Monday – I taught the L6 immediately afterwards, and I had to ditch my planned lesson because they were talking about it so much!'

Dr Ross Barrand, Head of 6th Form, KINGSTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'Thank you so much for such an interesting and entertaining talk, obviously appreciated by all those who attended.' Judith Hill, Speakers Secretary, ASH U3A

'Your talk was very well received yesterday.'

Jan Warrender, Speakers Secretary, ABERGAVENNY U3A

'We all enjoyed your lively and fascinating talk – one of our members thought it was the best talk we had had!'

Jenny Ford, Speakers Secretary, DORKING U3A

'Thank you for a brilliant talk yesterday.'

Nick White, Speaker Secretary, SEVENOAKS U3A

'One of the best speakers we've had at the St Helens U3A. Our members were enthralled. So good we are inviting him back next year!'

Pauline Hobson, Speakers Secretary, ST HELENS U3A

'Thanks for the talk, it was great – I will certainly be contacting you again.'

Brenda Galley, Speakers Secretary, WALTHAM FOREST U3A

'Thank you for the wonderful talk we heard yesterday. The whole hour was very informative and the audience were genuinely interested in your travels across Africa. Many people commented afterwards about how they had enjoyed it.'

Sue Stanley, Speakers Secretary, HUCKNALL U3A

'Fran's talk was very well received and quite a few members spoke to me afterwards about how much they enjoyed the morning.'

Norman Ross, Speakers Secretary, WELLS U3A

'Fran's highly entertaining talk about his solo trip across Africa was so much enjoyed by the 150+ audience at Medway U3A. We would definitely book him again for one of the other talks he offers.'

Julia Hawkins, Speaker Organiser, MEDWAY U3A

'Thanks for another wonderful talk. It was so interesting and I have been inundated with appreciative comments from members.'

Jean Hart, Speakers Secretary, BROXBORNE U3A

'The girls really enjoyed Fran's talk.'

Ellie Perkins, Head of Careers, CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

'A very interesting talk to our group – many people came up to me and thanked me for the choice of speaker.'

Peter B Neale Speakers Organiser, DOWNHAM MARKET U3A

'Thank you once again for entertaining the group with the fascinating account of your journey across Africa. There have been many appreciative comments and enquiries such as, "Does he speak about anything else?"'

Tony Scammels, Speakers Secretary, WEST WILTS U3A



Fran Sandham 805

Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean

2pm / Festival Room 2, Christ Church / £7.50

As editor of Rough Guides, Fran Sandham has already travelled through more than 40 countries. Traversa tells his story, when inspired by the legendary crossings of the great explorers, he left the daily grind of London to undertake an extraordinary adventure, walking 3,000 miles across an entire continent from Namibia to Zanzibar. A classic account of one man's struggle to test himself against nature, the book is both uplifting and thoroughly engaging.

Sponsored by Cox & Kings

'Fran's talk was very appreciated by the students, he very quickly engaged their attention, and informed and entertained them. Good comments from them afterwards.'

Ken Humphreys, WELLS CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

'Many thanks for your wonderful talk. I have received so many favourable comments about how interesting it was. It was a pleasure to meet you and I hope we will be able to welcome you back again one day.'

Linda Griffiths, Speakers Secretary, HULLBRIDGE U3A

'I loved Fran's talk and won't hesitate to suggest him for other events.'

Lisa Dowdeswell, THE SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

'Fran's talk at Haslemere U3A was a great success - he probably guessed that by the applause, and he deserves to do very well.'

Pam Pullen, Speaker Secretary, HASLEMERE U3A

'Thank you so much for giving us such an interesting talk this morning. The audience response and the feedback showed how much people enjoyed it. Your anecdotes and pictures gave an insight into what must have been an incredible journey - what a storyteller!'

Jeni Davies, Speaker Secretary, AYLESBURY VALE U3A

'Thank you once again for a very interesting talk.'

Lisa Lancett, Head of Fifth Form, BROMSGROVE SCHOOL

'An excellent and very interesting talk - I am sure Fran was left in no doubt of how well he was received by the interest and response from our members.'

John Baldwin, Speakers Secretary, BOXMOOR PROBUS

'Thanks again for the talk on Friday; the students thoroughly enjoyed it!'

Steve McQuitty, Head of Upper College, CHELTENHAM COLLEGE

'Fran's talk really added to our academic enrichment programme, with pupils engaged with an interesting and informative speaker. We will certainly be using him again in the future, and I would recommend that other schools do too.'

Christopher Graham, Head of Middle School, ROYAL HOSPITAL SCHOOL, IPSWICH

'We had so many people come up afterwards saying how much they had enjoyed Fran's talk and humour! An excellent talk.'

Jan Merchant, Speakers Secretary, NORTON RADSTOCK U3A

'Fran's talk was much appreciated by a good turn out.'

Graham Edmonds, Speakers Secretary, TOWCESTER U3A

'Thanks so much for the talk today, it was really interesting and very different than I think most of us imagined. I have already had several messages to say how much people enjoyed it'.

Maggie Evans, Speakers Secretary, ASTON CLINTON U3A

'Fran's presentation was very well received by our staff and students. It is always rewarding for students to hear about different experiences and to be challenged in their way of thinking. Fran's talk certainly did that, and has generated much discussion around the sixth form.'

Sarah Steadman, Co-Director, BRAINTREE SIXTH FORM

'An excellent talk – hearing about your journey and experiences across Africa was fascinating, your audience was captivated. It was a pleasure to meet you.'

Estelle McAllister, Speakers Secretary, BASILDON AND BILLERICAY U3A

'One sentence could not do Fran's style, content and presentation justice – it was brilliant.'

Stephen Andrews, Speaker Secretary, DORRIDGE U3A

'We much enjoyed Fran's talk, and it was quite a contrast to talks which we have enjoyed before.'

Rosemary Dane, FOUR SEASONS LUNCHEON CLUB

'Southport Probus Club was delighted by the illustrated talk 'Traversa' in which Fran Sandham vividly described his epic solo walk across Africa.'

David Radcliffe, SOUTHPORT PROBUS CLUB

'We thoroughly enjoyed hearing about Fran's solo trek across Africa – an incredible thing to do by any yardstick. All the students and staff who attended his lecture thoroughly enjoyed it, and there has been a buzz of conversation since.'

Michael Day, Head of Geography, THE HABERDASHERS' ASKE'S BOYS' SCHOOL

'A big thank you for the talk – the feedback was very positive, and I believe it wasn't just the presentation but also your personality and humour that impressed.'

Dave Stevens, Meetings Organiser, CARLISLE U3A

'Thank you for your talk yesterday, what an amazing journey, our members enjoyed it very much. I didn't notice anybody going to sleep so you must be good.'

Yvonne Smith, Speaker Secretary, SPELTHORNE U3A

'Fran's talk really was fascinating. All of us felt inspired to believe that each of us is capable of doing anything if we put our minds to it – a really useful lesson for all of us in school, be we students or teachers.'

Kate Cheetham, Assistant Head 6th Form, ALDERLEY EDGE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



wilderness LECTURES

2010 / 2011

WINTER PROGRAMME

*A series of audio/visual presentations
in Bristol whose theme is worldwide adventure,
travel and exploration.*

*Our lecturers are all widely travelled explorers,
mountaineers and well known adventurers.*

Held at

**The Chemistry Lecture Theatre
University of Bristol**

6. Fran Sandham

Synopsis: Critically acclaimed author and public speaker Fran Sandham took on the challenge of a lifetime, by walking across Africa solo (or at least solo apart from a disastrous donkey), from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar: no backup, no support team, no one to carry his gear, no sponsors, no film crew, no journalists, no fuss, no cheering crowds, and no strings attached. Above all, it had to be on a one-way ticket: no safety nets, no get-out clauses and nothing to fall back on ...

Profile: Fran Sandham was an editor at Rough Guides for several years, and worked in bookselling and in the voluntary sector before that. He has travelled in over fifty countries. He now divides his time between freelance writing and public speaking. He has written for many newspapers, magazines and travel publications including the Sunday Times, the Daily Telegraph, the Observer, Traveller Magazine, Adventure Travel, Travel Africa and Country Walking.



www.traversa.co.uk

'The whole talk was very well received by the entire audience, who were genuinely impressed by the very idea of such an adventure. I can fully recommend Fran Sandham's talk to any group or audience.'

John Johnson, WALLINGFORD THAMESIDE U3A

'Fran gave a very entertaining account of his journey across Africa.'

Jean Hatch, FORMBY U3A

'The staff and students really enjoyed your talk. Lots of praise. Thank you!'

Sally Bradley, Classics/English, KING HENRY VIII SCHOOL, COVENTRY

'Thank you very much for your interesting talk yesterday.'

Rosemary Williams, Speaker Secretary, WESTON TURVILLE U3A

'Thank you for an excellent talk today.'

Jenny McGregor, Speakers Secretary, BISHOPS STORTFORD U3A

We enjoyed your talk and it went down very well with the audience.'

Paul Blackford, Speakers Secretary, NORTH NORFOLK U3A

'Your talk went down very well and lots of people said how much they enjoyed it.'

Jean Birks, Speaker Secretary, BEDFORD U3A

'Thank you for the excellent talk which was very well received by our U3A members.'

Joe Abbott, Speaker Secretary, BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH U3A

'A most entertaining and informative talk, very well received.'

George Gatcum, Speakers Secretary, HIGH WYCOMBE U3A

'Your talk was well received and members found the story of your walk across Africa very interesting.'

Nicole Tertsakian, Speakers Secretary, WEALD U3A

'The boys were fascinated by what Fran had to say.'

Andrew Wilkinson, Senior Tutor, HAMPTON SCHOOL

'Thank you, and how much we enjoyed your talk.'

Tess Powell, Speakers Secretary, HAMMERSMITH U3A

'Thank you for the lecture night, it was a very interesting topic and based on the reactions was a very successful event.'

Iwan Kyffin, RYDAL PENHROS SCHOOL, COLWYN BAY

'I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Fran speak - he was inspiring, informative, entertaining and energetic.'

Debbie Brake, Head of Year 13, SIR THOMAS RICH'S SCHOOL, GLOUCESTER

'Everyone really enjoyed the talk, I have had some very positive comments!'

Linda Davitt, Speaker Secretary, NORTHAMPTON U3A

'A very big thank you for the really excellent talk you gave. It proved to be extremely popular with the members of the Group and I heard many positive comments.'

Malcolm Barker, PRINCES RISBOROUGH U3A TRAVEL GROUP



Oxford Literary Festival, Oxford University

'I have had very positive feedback from various sources about your presentation today – thank you so much for coming and entertaining / educating the membership so well.'

Gill Baynes, Speaker Secretary, LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE U3A

'Fran gave us a very interesting talk about his great adventure walking across Africa, with humour and excitement all the way through it. It prompted many questions, which he was very happy to answer.'

John Beaty, Vice Chairman, WORKSOP U3A

'Comments on your talk have been very positive, with everyone I have spoken to saying how much they enjoyed it, i.e., the story and the pictures of the journey, and your enthusiasm and humour in the telling of it.'

Peter Ireland, Speakers Secretary, CHEW VALLEY U3A

'Fran Sandham's talk was a fascinating Boy's Own story, professionally told with wry humour.'
Peter Brooks, Speaker Secretary, EASINGWOLD U3A

'Many thanks for the brilliant talk. We all enjoyed it greatly and would recommend you to any group seeking a fascinating and amusing talk.'
Carolyn Williams, Programme Secretary, FARINGDON U3A

'Thanks for coming along to visit us; you were well received.'
Nick Hampton, Speaker Organiser, BEARSTED U3A

'I've had good feedback about your talk.'
Celia Toone, Speakers Secretary, DARTFORD U3A

'Fran's absorbing account about his walk across Africa gripped the imagination of our sixth formers who thoroughly enjoyed the humour and general madness of the whole adventure.'
Helen Wiltshire, Assistant Headteacher, KING EDWARD VI GRAMMAR SCHOOL, CHELMSFORD

'People said how much they enjoyed Fran's talk – we'd like to book him again for next year!' Sue Lamberton, Speakers Secretary, MALVERN U3A

'Simply to say how much all our members enjoyed your talk – "Found it fascinating!" was one comment! – so thank you so much.'
Frances Fallows, MARKET HARBOROUGH BUSINESS LADIES LUNCHEON CLUB

'Fran is a great communicator and managed to explain his own, very personal view of travel and also give a real feel of the people he met. I'd certainly recommend his talks to other U3As.'
Katharine Pottinger, Speakers Secretary, SOUTH LAKES U3A

'We all enjoyed your talk.'
Penny Evans, HENLEY U3A

'A very interesting talk – we always appreciate it when a speaker delivers a lecture with such enthusiasm and it is especially appreciated when a speaker has a real "in depth" knowledge of a particular subject.'
Celia Rust, Programme Secretary, GUILDFORD TRAVEL CLUB

'Fran Sandham is an exceptional, entertaining and enthusiastic speaker who provided a fascinating commentary to his 3000-mile solo trek across Africa. An hour was just not long enough.'
Pat Broadhurst, OSWESTRY U3A

'A huge thank you on behalf of all our members for such a superb talk.'
Jean Dadge, Speakers Secretary, MARKET HARBOROUGH U3A

'Fran's talk was very well received by our members, I heard some very favourable comments, such as 'not your usual travel log', 'a very eloquent speaker' and 'I would like to have heard more.'
Jackie Pitcher, Speaker Secretary, SOUTHWELL U3A

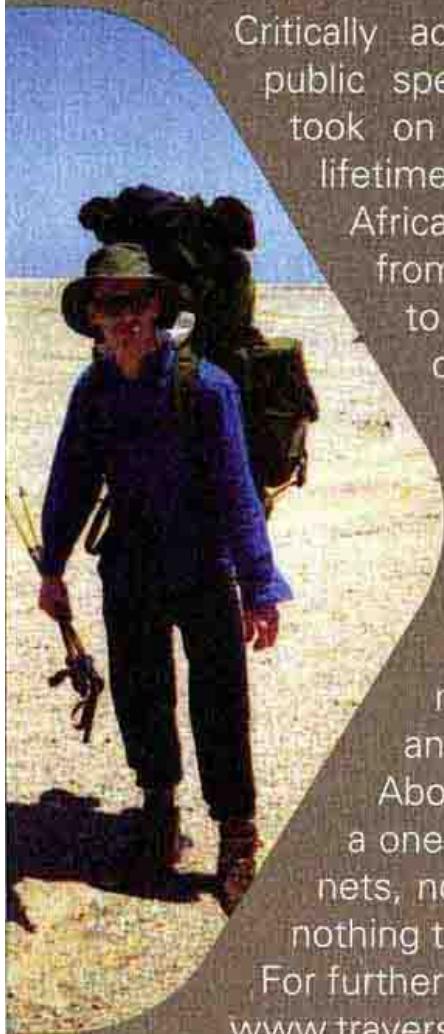
'Fran's talk was a great success – many members said how much they enjoyed it, and it was one of the best turnouts we have had in our three years' existence, due in no small measure to the topic.'
Michael Cohn, Speaker Secretary, CHESS VALLEY U3A

Illustrated Talk

Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa

Presented By Fran Sandham

Wednesday 17 November



Critically acclaimed author and public speaker Fran Sandham took on the challenge of a lifetime, by walking across Africa from coast to coast, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean, completely alone with no backup, no support team, no one to carry his gear, no sponsors, no film crew, no journalists, no fuss, no cheering crowds, and no strings attached. Above all, it had to be on a one-way ticket: no safety nets, no get-out clauses and nothing to fall back on.

For further details see
www.traversa.co.uk

Winding Wheel

Start Time: 7:30pm

Tickets: £5.70 and £4.30 (Concs.)



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Box Office 01246 345222 www.chesterfieldv

'An adventurer with a capital A, Fran Sandham told us his fabulous story of how he walked across Africa completely alone with no support other than the company of a very troubled donkey. What a great afternoon we all had thanks to Fran.'

Ann C, FETCHAM U3A

'Fran's talk was well received by the members of the U3A – everyone enjoyed it very much and I am sure we would enjoy his other talks.'

Pam Caines, CALDICOT U3A

'We found Fran's talk amusing and inspiring and are full of admiration for his grit and determination.'

Jenny Wooley, NESTON CRICKET CLUB

'I speak on behalf of all our members in saying how much we enjoyed travelling across Africa with Fran.'

Maureen Huntley, Speakers Secretary, RAYLEIGH U3A

'Fran's talk was interesting, entertaining and very well received.'

Juliet Hale, Speaker Secretary, CHORLEYWOOD U3A

'A very interesting talk on Dr Livingstone.'

Sheila Wilder, Speakers Secretary, WELWYN-HATFIELD U3A

'Many thanks for a really interesting talk – it was very well received and we have had lots of positive feedback.'

Sue Allum, Speaker Secretary, CHESHUNT U3A.

'An excellent presentation – feedback has all been very positive.'

Jan Bearman-Brown, Speaker Secretary, PETERBOROUGH U3A

'The girls enjoyed Fran's talk and found it funny as well.'

Helen Forbes, Head of Sixth Form, FRANCIS HOLLAND SCHOOL, NW1

'Fran Sandham's talk was interesting and insightful – about Africa and endurance – and it opened the students' eyes to different cultures.'

Coco Stevenson, Head of Sixth Form/Classics, SOUTH HAMPSTEAD HIGH SCHOOL

'Thank you for a thoroughly entertaining evening – it was greatly enjoyed by all who attended. Comments included: "A great speaker, very entertaining, informative and amusing at the same time"; "a great way to experience a truly amazing journey in comfort with a howling gale outside".'

Eddy Hornby, STOCKPORT LIBRARIES

'An excellent talk, one which was much enjoyed by the students and by me.'

Tim Borton, Head of Sixth Form, BISHOP'S STORTFORD COLLEGE

'Thank you for your recent talk at the University which everyone enjoyed so much.'

Lynda Baguley, CHESTER UNIVERSITY

'Fran Sandham is an exceptional, entertaining and enthusiastic speaker, and we listened enthralled to his entertaining commentary about his 3000-mile trek across Africa.'

Pat Broadhurst, OSWESTRY U3A

'Such an interesting and well presented account of Fran's truly epic and at times difficult journey.'

Ella Glasper, Speaker Secretary, CHARNWOOD U3A



Hammersmith Libraries

'Fran Sandham has a unique story of courage and foolhardiness to tell and his presentation was a fascinating account of his experiences.'

Roger Watkins, Speakers Secretary, HOWDEN U3A

'We thoroughly enjoyed Fran's talk - it was very informative and quite fascinating, and hats off to him for such an achievement!'

Teresa Pigney, Speaker Secretary, LEA VALLEY U3A

'A most informative and entertaining talk on Fran's solo walk across Africa - we had a record attendance and it was a very successful meeting.'

Valerie Conniff, Speakers Secretary, MONMOUTH U3A

'A big thank you once again for the talk you gave to South Bucks U3A group about your epic walk across Africa. The talk was fascinating and amusing and certainly enjoyed by all our members!'

Chris le Blond, Speakers Secretary, SOUTH BUCKS U3A

'Fran is a great communicator and managed to explain his own, very personal view of travel and also give a real feel of the people he met. I'd certainly recommend his talks to other U3As.'

Katharine Pottinger, Speakers Secretary, SOUTH LAKES U3A

'Merton U3A clearly enjoyed Fran's talk about his remarkable journey across Africa. One member commented that they felt as though they had actually been on the amazing trip by the time Fran finished his lively talk.'

Laurie Prescott, Speaker Secretary, MERTON U3A

'All our U3A members thoroughly enjoyed Fran's talk, especially as it was not just a travel log loved the details of the problems on the way! In fact, people kept coming up to me at other meetings saying they had very much enjoyed the talk.'

Margaret Gavin, Speaker Secretary, GOSPORT U3A

'An extremely entertaining talk – I can't remember at previous talks having so many of our members asking questions after the meeting which showed their interest.'

Jenny Coad, Speakers Secretary, HUNTINGDON U3A

'Many thanks for giving us such an interesting talk – our members were very impressed at your fortitude and good humour in undertaking this incredible journey.'

Joan Armstrong, Speakers Secretary, BROMLEY U3A

'Enjoyed by all our U3A members, this was an interesting, well presented and amusing talk about an amazing journey.' Janet Lewis, Speaker Secretary, WREXHAM U3A

'An excellent talk – I have heard from a number of members advising how much they enjoyed it.'

Howard Jones, Speaker Secretary, STAMFORD U3A

'We found Fran's talk very interesting and admired his tenacity in completing the challenge.'

Judith Wright, BURTON JOYCE U3A

'A delightful talk, so well received by Broxbourne U3A members; informative and interesting; an epic tale of stamina, determination and self belief told with enthusiasm and humour.'

Jean Hart, Speakers Secretary, BROXBOURNE U3A

'A really energising talk which had us all enthralled.'

Sandie Fillingham, SUTTON HIGH SCHOOL

'The audience really enjoyed Fran's descriptions of past explorers who had travelled Africa and was very entertained with Fran's escapades with donkeys and mules. The hour passed very quickly!

Melanie Graaf, BOLTON LIBRARIES AND MUSEUM

'An excellent illustrated talk about Fran Sandham's epic walk across Africa – a very enjoyable and interesting presentation.'

Michael Ross, Speaker Secretary, DACORUM U3A

'A very successful lecture.'

Mike Nichol, Chairman, CHESTER SOCIETY OF THIRTEEN

'We thought the talk was excellent! It was well structured with interesting personal anecdotes, visuals and humour.'

Glynis Madden, BRIDGNORTH FESTIVAL

'It was a pleasure to meet Fran and to hear his engaging talk about his travels across Africa.'

Carolyn Nurse, Chairman, HAYWARDS HEATH U3A

'All those listened to Fran over the course of the day were enthused by his energy and passion for his subject. Austin Friars St Monica's School was delighted to have Fran visit the school and deliver such an inspiring talk.'

Joanna Agnew, Head of English, AUSTIN FRIARS ST MONICA'S SCHOOL

Open

Saffron Walden U3A

Meetings

The talk for the next Open Meeting on 18 February 2019 is 'A Solo Walk Across Africa' by Fran Sandham

Lecturer and freelance author Fran Sandham was an editor at Rough Guides for several years, and worked in bookselling and in the voluntary sector before that. He

has travelled in over fifty countries and now lives in London and Wirral dividing his time between writing, public speaking and travel.

He has written for many newspapers, magazines and travel publications including The Sunday Times,

NBC News, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, The Financial Times, inflight magazines for KLM and

Gulf Air, Adventure Travel, Traveller Magazine, Travel Africa and Country Walking.

Of his African journey, Fran says:

'The idea of crossing Africa on foot

seemed already firmly established in many people's minds as some exceptionally difficult feat. And yet how many people had actually done it? I decided to walk every step of the way from one coast of Africa to the other, completely alone, no back-up, no support team, no one to

make arrangements for me, no one to carry my gear, no sponsors and no funding'.



Meet Fran Sandham and hear his fascinating story on Monday 18 February, 2:15pm at the Bowling Club

'Such a wonderful account of Fran's trek across Africa – informative, entertaining and very well received by our members.'

Sandy Pizzey, Speakers Secretary, WELWYN HATFIELD U3A

'Fran's talk was fascinating and well received. We had lots of positive feedback from the public, e.g., "an excellent talk, very enjoyable".'

Carol Maplesden, Specialist Librarian, CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER LIBRARIES

'Fran's talk was entertaining, fast-paced and held the attention of the students throughout. It subtly encouraged the 6th formers to follow their dreams.'

Joanna Winstanley, Continuing Education Programme Co-ordinator, WOLDINGHAM SCHOOL

'We were treated to a very interesting and extremely witty talk – we all hugely enjoyed it and the evening went by far too quickly.'

Kate Mastin-Lee, GSA & Lecture Programme Coordinator, ST MARY'S SCHOOL, CALNE

'A very sincere thank you for coming to speak to the Ryedale U3A – it really was great to hear of your adventures.'

Betty Pope, Speakers Secretary, RYEDALE U3A

'We thought your talk was excellent – informative, entertaining and quite inspiring, and pitched perfectly at the U6 cohort.'

James Wilson, Enrichment Programme, STOCKPORT GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'Thank you so much for your contribution to our festival! Everyone was impressed and astonished that you took the whole thing so calmly!' Carole Nelson, SEDBERGH FESTIVAL OF BOOKS & DRAMA

'A most enjoyable and interesting talk – I am sure we would all appreciate another visit.'

Sue Fewster, Speaker Secretary, FURNESS U3A

'Many thanks for coming to speak to our students last week. It fitted in well with what we were trying to achieve and caught the imagination of many (staff included!).'

Liz Evans, Assistant Headteacher, HAYDON BRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

'Such a wonderful talk – Fran enthralled his audience with his entertaining and frank delivery.'

Angus Pearson, Head of Sixth Form, ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL, TWICKENHAM

'Fascinating ...the audience were really engaged in the talk. A lovely way to escape a grey October afternoon!'

Judith Adam, OFF THE SHELF LITERARY FESTIVAL, SHEFFIELD

'Fran gave us a really good talk and it's always a good sign when there are so many questions. He did a great job and kept us entertained for the whole 45 minutes – we'd have been quite happy to let him carry on with his tale for another hour!'

GLOBETROTTERS CLUB, LONDON

'Thank you for an engaging, humorous and cautionary talk on your travels across Africa – we were delighted that you were able to bring it to us in such clear and vivid manner.'

Steve Maxwell, TAL FESTIVAL

'Our members were very impressed with Fran's talk – we had our best ever attendance with over 220 members, which for January in the middle of winter was excellent!'

Trish Miller, Speaker Secretary, ST ALBANS U3A



North Tyneside Libraries

'Fran's talk combined all the elements one could wish for. Informative, entertaining and amusing in turn it was extremely well received by our appreciative members.'

Graeme Bell, Speaker Secretary, BURY ST EDMUNDS U3A

'Everyone who was there thoroughly enjoyed hearing about Fran's experiences.'

Gaynor Baveystock, Principal Librarian, SLOUGH CENTRAL LIBRARY

'We were delighted to have such an accomplished travel writer visit us. The feedback from attendees was very positive, and everyone very much enjoyed their time with Fran.'

Gordon Lundie, Executive Member for Culture, WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

'Fran's two talks were really entertaining – thoroughly enjoyable and very interesting.'

S.W. Lythgoe, Reader-in-Residence, WIGAN LEISURE AND CULTURE TRUST

'Fran's talk at the Academy was really fantastic – the best author event we have ever had. It was great for our students to hear him speak with such passion about being determined to do something and following it through.'

Sue Connell, Learning Resources Manager, CITY ACADEMY, HACKNEY

'A fascinating account of Fran's solo walk across Africa. Fran engaged well with his audience who asked many questions.'

Sarah Coyne, Reader Development Officer, SALFORD LIBRARIES

'The boys really enjoyed Fran's talk and were talking excitedly about it at their next lesson.'

George Phillipson, Head of English, CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL

'Thank you again for the lecture last Friday – it was great to listen to your talk.'

Jo Woolley, Head of Geography, DULWICH COLLEGE

'A wonderfully entertaining and inspiring talk – such a good start to the term!'

Emma McKendrick, Headmistress, DOWNE HOUSE SCHOOL, BERKSHIRE

'We had great feedback for Fran's talk, including: "Fran Sandham is superb!" "Tremendously enjoyable"; "An excellent talk – light-hearted and full of facts"; "Very interesting talk and very amusing"; "Thoroughly enjoyable and well researched"; "A very interesting and informative speaker"; "A very clear, well-illustrated presentation"; "An excellent speaker".'

Ruth Walton, Librarian, WHITLEY BAY LIBRARY

'Fran wove together an epic yarn with humour, humanity and truth – when he talked about his adventures, you couldn't help but feel inspired to take a step out of the bindings of everyday life yourself ...'

Gerard Lewis, Senior Library Manager, LONDON BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

'I really enjoyed Fran's talk and the audience did too. A great event.'

Marion Judson/Sharon Houghton, SCARBOROUGH LITERATURE FESTIVAL

'The audience were delighted by Fran's informative, funny and fascinating talk at Portsmouth Central Library. The talk was enhanced by some stunning photographs of his journey across Africa.'

Clare Forsyth, Reader Development Librarian, PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

'Fran Sandham's talk about his solo travels across Africa enthralled an audience of secondary school students: highly entertaining, informative and often very witty, this was the sort of talk which inspires pupils. I'd be very happy to recommend him to other schools.'

Dr Charlotte Goddard, ST MARY'S SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE

'Fran Sandham's talk was extremely interesting and went down very well with the pupils.'

Allan McKeown, Head of Sixth Form, ARNOLD SCHOOL, BLACKPOOL

'Fran Sandham's talk was fascinating. This was not a standard travelogue account of his walk across Africa but rather an account of his inner journey throughout the walk. As a result, he inspired at least one member of the audience to consider making his own grand adventure.'

Janet Hill, Reader Development Librarian, WATFORD AND THREE RIVERS DISTRICT LIBRARIES

'A fascinating account of Fran's solo walk across Africa. Fran engaged well with his audience who asked many questions and were eager to hear more about his adventures. A highly successful event.'

Sarah Coyne, Reader Development Officer, SALFORD LIBRARIES

'Fran is a pleasure to work with – his witty and engaging talk generated more enthusiastic audience questions at the end than I've seen for a long, long time. There was 100% positive feedback from our readers.'

Mike Allport, Reader Development Manager, SOUTHWARK LIBRARIES

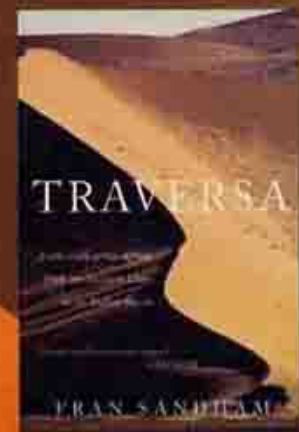
Come and meet

Fran Sandham

bestselling author of

TRAVERSA

a solo walk across Africa



Stratford Library

Saturday 15th November 2.30pm

Tickets £4.00

Available from Stratford Library 01789 292209



'Fran Sandham's talk inspired and entertained us at our annual staff development day. His presentation was witty and engaging, with a purposeful context of setting and achieving objectives. His account of his adventures warmed us up nicely for some of the drier business of the day, and also resulted in resolutions to go on walking holidays from at least two of my colleagues!'

Niall McGowan, Regeneration Manager, LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

'Such an interesting and witty talk, the feedback forms confirm what was obvious at the time, everyone had an excellent evening – we've had many very positive and glowing comments back. I was impressed with Fran's delivery – he engaged and entertained all the audience; his talk was amusing, informative and entertaining on a number of levels, and I can safely say a great success! And the cakes were good ...!'

Anna Shaw/Vivienne King, BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

'Fran's talk was informative, amusing and everyone really enjoyed it. We received lots of positive feedback from the audience, including: "Brilliant. A very entertaining speaker"; "Thought-provoking, interesting and entertaining"; "Very well presented"; "Fascinating and very entertaining"; and "Quite excellent".'

Madeleine Bentley, Senior Development Librarian, READING CENTRAL LIBRARY

'Fran's talk was entertaining, unusual and enjoyable, and clearly struck a chord with our audience. This helped us hit our target of attracting more men to our talks, (almost a third of the audience) and of attracting younger people to our events. The feedback from the audience at the end of the talk was very positive and people enjoyed the talk and Fran's personality as a speaker. Comments included: "witty anecdotes"; "I enjoyed the storytelling"; "jovial personality of speaker". Almost all the people who filled out evaluation forms said that they felt that they had learnt something new on the evening.'

Jane Brierley, NOTTINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY

'I had several positive feedbacks about you, and I will be very happy to recommend you.'

Jamie Gaskin, Speaker Secretary, SOUTHPORT U3A

'The pupils enjoyed Fran's traveller's tales, which were laced with amusing stories and wry asides, bringing the whole African experience alive on a cold and wet February evening in Dorset!'

Hugo Mieville, Head of Sixth Form, MILTON ABBEY SCHOOL, DORSET

'Thank you for a very personal talk.'

ACKWORTH SCHOOL, PONTEFRACT

'Fran's talk was extremely entertaining, amusing and informative.'

Deborah Wallis, Cultural services, CORNWALL COUNCIL

'Fran impressed with his enthusiasm for talking about his travels – his talks were extremely well received and he has already received a number of invitations for return visits.'

Jane Mathieson, TIME TO READ

'A hugely enjoyable talk about an extraordinary adventure which was both fun and enlightening. Highly recommended.'

Alexandra Dukes, Community Librarian, CAERPHILLY LIBRARIES

'Everyone thoroughly enjoyed Fran's talk, and are still talking about it in Capel St Mary. I was so engrossed in Fran's talk, and I was very impressed with his ability to speak with only a few headings written down on paper. A very enjoyable evening.'

Elisabeth Harrison, Service Development Librarian, SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL



Deloitte and Touche, London

'Fran Sandham gave a fascinating account of his trek across Africa and the event went down extremely well with the audience. A highly successful and enjoyable event.'

Barry Tsirtou, Learning Support Librarian, MARYLEBONE LIBRARY

'Thank you for your excellent lecture – we very much enjoyed your very interesting and informative talk.'

Derek Oldham, Lecture Secretary, NORWICH U3A

'Fran Sandham enthralled the audience.'

Linda Davies, Reader Development Manager, EALING LIBRARIES

'Such an interesting and informative talk.'

Leslie Sutton, DANSON FESTIVAL, BEXLEY

'This talk left our audience wanting more of what was an amazing journey. We shall, I hope, see Fran again.'

Tim Layfield, Speaker Arranger, CHILTERN U3A

'Fran's talk was much appreciated – I had some very good feedback. How refreshing to walk in his footsteps across Africa, enjoying his enthusiastic delivery, laced always with humour.'

Sylvia Latham, Speaker Secretary, CRICKHOWELL U3A

'Fran Sandham fuelled the imaginations of wannabe travellers during his talk.'

Hayley Maguire, CHESTER EVENING LEADER

'Such an entertaining talk ... we were really pleased to get such a good audience and they clearly all enjoyed themselves. Audience comments included: "Refreshing, motivating and inspiring!"; "Extremely enjoyable – a wonderful, humorous speaker"; "A charming and charismatic speaker"; "Well presented – a natural speaker"; "Very interesting and amusing"; "Thoroughly enjoyed it – very entertaining"; "Excellent! Fran is a very entertaining speaker with a lovely personality!" "Well presented and interesting and Mr Sandham has an engaging personality"; "Fascinating speaker, totally entertaining and very factual and true of Africa!" "Thought-provoking".'

Ruth Walton, NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

'The audience enjoyed an engaging account of blisters, raging heat and extreme cold, and heard about the African continent's most cussed donkey. Written comments left on the night included: "An excellent talk, giving a flavour of a truly epic odyssey. More please!"; "Fascinating"; "A really enjoyable talk, inspiring as well as interesting. Perfect!" Fran is very personable and a pleasure to work with. I would happily engage him again as a speaker in the future.'

Alan Morrison, Events Organiser, LEWISHAM LIBRARY SERVICE

'Fran Sandham is an amusing and energetic man. He's full of energy; as he stands and talks he's half-bouncing on his toes, as if any minute he might suddenly conceive of another continent to cross, and rush off to begin. I wonder how he sat still for long enough to write ...'

Jill Glenn, OPTIMA

'The two sessions Fran did for us were great – really interesting, and enjoyed by all.'

Vandra Hemmings, Reader Development & Promotions Manager, KENT LIBRARIES

'Fran Sandham was an engaging speaker and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.'

Chris Smith, TAMESIDE MBC

'A great talk!'

Liz Sheppard, Library Manager, WOOTTON LIBRARY

'Had really good feedback on Fran's talk!'

Ann Buckley, Speakers Secretary, HUYTON U3A

'Fran Sandham's talk was really interesting and humorous.'

Marinella Sinagoga, Culture and Learning, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIBRARY SERVICE

'What an amazing journey, genuinely inspiring! Fran presents it all in an engaging and thoroughly amusing manner. Totally recommended.'

Simon Graham, manager, INTREPID TRAVEL (LONDON)

'A thoroughly enjoyable, well thought out talk which entertained an audience aged from 16–76, who asked many questions and left talking about what a good experience they'd had.'

Sheila Houldin, Reader Development Officer, CHESHIRE LIBRARIES

Thank you so much for such an interesting talk, I had many comments from the members who said they had found it interesting and inspiring.'

Gretel Allen, Speaker Secretary, CHINNOR U3A

'Your talk on your walk across Africa was very well received by our members.'

John Beynon, Chairman, RETIRED MEMBERS SOCIETY SURREY

'Thank you very much for your excellent talk. We enjoyed it very much and I have many letters of thanks both from our own members and members of other U3As.'

Doug Jones, Speaker Secretary, PORTHCAWL U3A

'I was torn between watching the audience response and looking at Fran as he spoke – people were clearly enjoying the talk and there were lots of questions at the end. Feedback from the audience included: "Very entertaining and humorous and descriptive adventures of his trek across Africa"; "A very enjoyable evening – amusing and informative"; "Much appreciated, a very lively talk which held my interest"; "Really enjoyable".'

Debby Wale, Reader Development Librarian, OCTOBER FESTIVAL, HAMMERSMITH

<p>Fran Sandham Ains Centre, Devizes Road Tel 01793 614837 8pm • 12 May • £6 (£5)</p>  <p>Wednesday</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">talks • readings • workshops • discussions • writers • thinkers • speakers</p>  <p>FRAN SANDHAM – on a solo walk across Africa!</p> <p>No backup, no support team, no one to carry his gear, no sponsors, no film crew, no journalists, no cheering crowds, no safety nets, no get out clauses, no fuss but maybe a little bother, acclaimed author and speaker Fran Sandham took on the challenge of a lifetime: he walked across Africa!</p> <p>Hear his story, first-hand, straight from the walker's mouth, and illustrated!</p> <p>'High above the vast pile of African-adventure travelogues.' <i>New York Times</i></p> <p>Wednesday 12 May • For all ticket information see venue details in side panels</p>
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'Fran was excellent. Very interesting subject and he is obviously enthusiastic about it. He also answered lots of questions at the end and gave well thought out answers. Funny and modest. He spoke for an hour and a half and we thought it was just an hour. The audience enjoyed it very much.'

Sue Stone, Reading Co-ordinator, KNOWSLEY LIBRARIES

'The pupils and parents have told me how much they enjoyed your talk last night.'

David Boatman, Head of Sixth Form, FRAMLINGHAM COLLEGE

'Fran Sandham's talk on his solo walk across Africa was full of amusing anecdotes and fascinating insights into this extreme undertaking. The audience was enraptured by Fran's experiences and the feedback we have received has been that they all found his talk fascinating.'

Mark Williams, Promotions Manager, CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIBRARIES

'An entertaining evening, good for attracting a range of customers new to the library – thoroughly recommended! Comments (all rated it as good or excellent) included: "Fran – really funny bloke" and "The evening was brilliant".'

Victoria Law, Reading and Learning Manager, WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD LIBRARIES

'Thank you so much for your talk – it was quite an epic journey that you undertook!'

Lynda Milne, COLCHESTER ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'The members certainly enjoyed your talk on Stanley and Livingstone – I got lots of very positive feedback.'

Pauline Hewitson, Speaker Secretary, ELY U3A

'Many thanks for your visit and talk yesterday. We all had an excellent afternoon.'

Brenda Stevenson, Speakers Secretary, STOURBRIDGE U3A

'Fran was very easy to work with and eager to promote the event himself in addition to our own publicity. Some of the comments we had: "Interesting and humorous"; "Informative"; "Lovely evening. Really enjoyed hearing all about Fran's adventures".'

Nicky Dunne, Librarian, ROMFORD CENTRAL LIBRARY

'Fran's talk last night was great and very much enjoyed by the audience – I could tell by all the questions that the audience were obviously inspired to learn more about his epic walk.'

Val Larkin, Librarian, BOSTALL LIBRARY

'Fran took us on a fearless, lively and entertaining walk across a continent, sharing images of the landscape and of the people he met, reminding us that perhaps we could all spend more time enjoying the journey, and less time worrying about the destination.'

Felicity Beaumont, Reader Services Librarian, LEOMINSTER LIBRARY

'Many thanks for your informative, inspiring and humorous talk yesterday. Judging from the comments people made to me afterwards, I feel sure that many members would be keen to hear you speak again.'

Paul Griffin, Speaker Secretary, GOUDHURST U3A

'A very big thanks for a truly interesting and entertaining talk. The feedback has been most positive and I shall certainly pass your name on to other societies.'

Pat Murfet, Speaker Secretary, KEYWORTH U3A

'Many thanks for a very interesting and amusing talk about your walk across Africa. The Probus Club's members greatly enjoyed listening to you.'

Les Blake, Speaker Secretary, HAVERING PROBUS CLUB

'Excellent ... one of the best – if not the best – events we've held.'

Lynda Finney, Librarian, STANDISH LIBRARY, WIGAN

'An informative and interesting talk.'

Thomas Walton, Deputy Headmaster, KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

'Fran's lively and amusing account of his journey across Africa brightened up the gloom of an English winter evening.'

Nick Garrod, NORTHAMPTON CENTRAL LIBRARY

'Your talk on Stanley and Livingstone was just amazing and much appreciated – thank you so much.'

Tess Powell, Speaker Secretary, HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM U3A

'A fascinating, humorous and heartwarming account of an incredible adventure across Africa.'

Susie Barnes, Speaker Secretary, BUSHEY U3A

'I have had lots of feedback regarding your talk on Stanley and Livingstone, and all of it good. Result!!'

Lesley Cartwright, Speakers Secretary, St NEOTS U3A

'A fascinating talk – a real insight into this most extraordinary feat.'

Ann Nossiter, Librarian, BISHOPS HIGH LIBRARY, CHESTER

Thank you for such a wonderful talk this afternoon what an experience you had! Judging from the comments during refreshments it was certainly very well received.'

Jean Olsson, Speaker Secretary, SHIPSTON ON STOUR U3A

'Thank you so much for coming to speak to us yesterday – I have received good reports already!'

Esther Richard, Speakers Secretary, RADLETT U3A

'It was a pleasure to meet you and your talk was excellent. Everybody I have spoken to said how much they enjoyed it. You made it sound like a huge adventure, which of course it was. You also made it all so funny, which is why everyone enjoyed it. I will certainly recommend your talk to others.'

Cynthia Cooper, Speaker Secretary, WOOLMER FOREST U3A



3.30 pm
An African Odyssey with Fran Sandham

VENUE: Scarborough Library Concert Hall RUNNINGTIME: 60 minutes PRICE: £4



A must for intrepid trekkers or armchair travellers! Critically acclaimed author and former Rough Guides editor **Fran Sandham** will talk about his gruelling solo walk across Africa. Without backup, he travelled 3000 miles on foot from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean. His book *Traversa: A solo walk across Africa* is the account of this remarkable journey.



'Thank you for your talk on Stanley and Livingstone. Everybody who I spoke to afterwards found it very interesting, and we had a very good attendance.'

Margaret Walton, Speaker Secretary WOKINGHAM U3A

'I heard some excellent feedback on your talk from the members.'

Mu Gurbutt, Speakers Secretary, BECCLES U3A

'Sorry to have missed your talk for our U3A last month – I've had such excellent reports of it! Everyone would like to hear you speak again.'

Jan Christmas, Speakers Secretary, LOUTH U3A

'Thank you so much for visiting the school and inspiring our pupils and parents yesterday. It was a pleasure to hear your extraordinary story.'

Mike Seaton, Headmaster, HUDDERSFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'Thank you very much for yesterday's excellent talk. All our U3A members thoroughly enjoyed hearing about your amazing walk across Africa.'

Ursula Randall, Speaker Secretary, BROOMFIELD U3A

'Thank you so much for providing such an interesting and entertaining evening.'

David Chappell, Speaker Secretary, BATH AND BRISTOL CSMA

'Thank you for your most interesting talk, given with great panache.'

Esther Jones, Speaker Secretary, PETERSFIELD U3A

'I heard very good reports of your talk.'

Gill Stanley, Speakers Secretary, ALCESTER U3A

'It was lovely to meet you and thank you so much for such a great talk.'

Michael Awdry, Head of Sixth Form, BEECHWOOD SACRED HEART SCHOOL

'Many, many thanks for giving us such an interesting, enjoyable talk.'

Bernice Adcock, Speaker Secretary, SPALDING U3A

'Thanks for a great talk, let me know if we can host you again.'

Neil Whiskerd, Head of Lower Sixth Form, MILLFIELD SCHOOL

'What an amazing story and inspirational talk.'

Isobel Salt, Speakers Secretary, Ashby U3A

'Thanks a lot, Fran, we all enjoyed the talk.'

David Hughes, Speaker Secretary, BURY ST EDMUNDS PROBUS CLUB ONE

'A most enjoyable, entertaining and informative talk – the feedback was overwhelmingly positive from everyone who attended.'

Lynne Button, Speaker Secretary, MILTON KEYNES U3A

'Thank you for your very interesting talk – from feedback I have had so far our members were certainly fascinated with your experience.'

Helen Beck, Speaker Secretary, PEMBURY U3A

'Many thanks for the talk yesterday. It went down well. Will pass your contact and recommendation to other groups locally.'

Geoff Gilchrist, Speaker Secretary, NESTON PROBUS CLUB

'Thank you so much for an exhilarating and entertaining talk on Stanley and Livingstone, which was enjoyed by everyone. The feedback has been excellent!'

Linda Evans, Speaker Secretary, WALSALL U3A

'Your talk yesterday was well received by our members.'

John Smith, Speakers Secretary, WENDOVER U3A

'Your presentation was very well received, with many favourable comments from people present. It was an entertaining and informative talk and appreciated by all.'

Sue and Dave Wright, COVENTRY U3A

'A big thank you – your audience was most complimentary and thoroughly enjoyed your presentation. I could tell they were interested because they normally start muttering about their cup of tea at about 14.45, but you got them going beyond 3 o'clock.'

Peter Villalard, Speaker Secretary, ANDOVER U3A



Kent Libraries

'We all very much enjoyed hearing about your extraordinary adventure walking across Africa. Our afternoon walks will never be quite the same again.'
Dave Green, Speaker Secretary, STUBBINGTON U3A

'We've had really good feedback about how much people enjoyed your talk at Ross U3A.'
Hilary Rowe, Speaker Secretary, ROSS U3A

'Your talks were excellent and very inspiring – I will definitely keep you in mind for the future.'
Janine Bruneau, MFL Teacher & Head of PSHE & Citizenship, ST TERESA'S SCHOOL, EFFINGHAM

'I really enjoyed your talk yesterday as did other members I have spoken to.'
Peter Wilcox, Speakers Secretary, WEST KIRBY PROBUS CLUB

'We all greatly enjoyed your talk at our U3A last Tuesday, and probably could have listened to you for much longer! Thank you very much.'
Susan Wyatt, Acting Secretary, NEW MILLS & DISTRICT U3A

'I have had some very positive feedback from the students I have spoken to who particularly liked your donkey story!'
Mrs. J. Ilogu, Head of Careers and Employability, COLSTON'S SCHOOL, BRISTOL

'Thank you so much for coming along to our U3A and giving us your talk about your walk across Africa, I am sure everyone was amazed at your fortitude and bravery in doing it!!'
Margaret Shinkfield, BEDALE U3A

'Everyone thoroughly enjoyed your witty, interesting and thought-provoking talk.'
Jill Wilson, Speaker Secretary, PERSHORE U3A

'Fran's talk was a great success.'
Chris Routh, LEIGHTON PARK SCHOOL

'A big thank you for such an interesting talk. Members were quite animated and amazed at your feat of courage and endurance. As always with an excellent presentation there are more questions than time allows.'
Molly Ward, Speaker Secretary, EDENBRIDGE U3A

'Thank you for a great talk today, went down very well with members.'
John Owen, Speaker Secretary, ASHINGDON U3A

'Thank you for your talk. We all enjoyed it.'
Mary Hamilton, Speakers Secretary, EAST GRINSTEAD U3A

'Your talk was enjoyed by those present – one lady mentioned that she has a tendency to "nod off" after lunch and you had been so interesting she remained awake!'
David Cheetham, Speakers Secretary, SKELMERSDALE U3A

'As I am sure you realised, your talk on Stanley and Livingstone was massively well received this afternoon! It was informative, fascinating, illuminating and delivered with pace and wit.'
Jill Wilson, Speakers Secretary, PERSHORE U3A

'Thanks for an entertaining hour. I've been attending/organising these talks for three years now and that was the largest audience I've seen.'
Malcolm Ellis, Speaker Secretary, FARNHAM U3A

'Thank you for your inspirational talk to the Salisbury U3A. The timing was perfect. Your humour, outlook on life and ability to involve your audience in your adventures was so uplifting!'
Pamela Munson, Speaker Secretary, SALISBURY U3A


'Thanks for the great lecture. Our students found your journey very interesting.'
Kevin Dickey, Sixth-form lecture programme, SHIPLAKE COLLEGE

'The meeting was well attended and the talk from Fran Sandham enjoyed by the audience. The amount of research he had done about the meeting of Dr Livingstone and Henry Stanley was incredible and very well presented.'
Tony Gray, Chairman, BOURNE U3A

'We enjoyed your talk yesterday – makes our walking groups pale into insignificance!'
Neil Hunt, ARNOLD U3A


'I heard many favourable comments on your talk last week and look forward to meeting you again in the future.'
Fred Airey, Speaker Secretary, WARRINGTON U3A

Everyone enjoyed your talk on your incredible journey, very entertaining and informative. I will certainly pass your details on to other U3A groups and keep you in mind for future bookings.'
Jean Bradshaw, Speaker Secretary, ALFORD U3A



THAME
ARTS & LITERATURE
FESTIVAL

Sunday 27th June




Fran Sandham

“A Solo Trek across Africa.”

A former Rough Guides editor, Fran took on the challenge of a lifetime by walking an incredible 3,000 miles alone, coast to coast across Africa: no backup, no support team, no one to carry his gear, no sponsors, no film crew, journalists or cheering crowds. His critically acclaimed book, *Traversa: A solo walk across Africa*, captures this experience. “*This is the first time in history anyone has crossed Africa solo entirely on foot by this route, from Namibia’s Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean at Zanzibar* – at least solo apart from a disastrous donkey”...

Following his fantastic adventure, Fran was invited by John McCarthy to talk about it on BBC Radio 4’s Excess Baggage programme. A natural storyteller with a big taste for adventure, Fran’s talk is a must for all you aspiring intrepid travellers.



TR AVERS A
TRANS- AFRICA WALK

Venue : Players Theatre
4.00pm

£5.00

‘Thank you for the entertaining and very interesting talk you gave – lots of people told me how much they enjoyed it.’

Janet Head, NORTH WALSHAM U3A

‘I heard good things from colleagues about your talk on your huge African undertaking.’

Stephen Rathbone, Academic Director, RADLEY COLLEGE

‘I have received very positive comments about your talk. People have told me that it was very entertaining, interesting and really well presented. All in all, it was an excellent morning. Thank you very much.’

Meg Hudson, Speaker Secretary, OLDHAM U3A

'We all enjoyed your talk yesterday. I think you probably saw the African people at their best.'
Jean Myhill, Speakers Secretary, MAIDENHEAD U3A

'Your talk was very well received'.
Paul Wakeling, Speakers Secretary, HARPENDEN PROBUS SECUNDUS CLUB

'Widney U3A members present left feeling they had experienced the conditions of the explorers' expeditions. Thank you. Fran.'
SOLIHULL WIDNEY U3A

'Thank you for giving us that splendid talk, which everybody much enjoyed.'
Jonathan Farley, Secretary, ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS PROBUS CLUB

'Lots enjoyed your talk today.'
Theresa Rogers, Speakers Secretary, HEATONS & REDDISH U3A

'Thank you once again for your talk on Stanley and Livingstone yesterday, I had a lot of very positive feedback.'
Lynn Brinkworth, Speakers Secretary, BALSALL COMMON U3A

'Thanks for a second brilliant talk.'
Dave Chappell, BATH AND BRISTOL CSMA

'Thank you so much for your talk today. It was very well received by our members, lots and lots of positive feedback.'
Pat Kelly, Speaker Secretary, DUNMOW U3A

'Thanks again Fran for providing such an informative talk.'
Ruth Ainley, Head, READ SCHOOL

'Thank you very much Fran for another excellent talk. We all enjoyed it very much. We look forward to your next exploration of Africa, whether in person or through research.'
Caroline Lewis, Speaker Secretary, ABERGAVENNY U3A

'As you will have gathered, we much enjoyed your talk.'
Martin Farr, President, MILFORD PROBUS CLUB


'Thank you so much for coming all the way to sunny Bridgend to talk to our U3A – everyone thoroughly enjoyed your talk.'
Mary Poland, Speaker Secretary, BRIDGEND U3A


'Thank you for giving us your talk, we all enjoyed it'
Maggie Hewson, Speakers Secretary, CHARD AND ILMINSTER U3A

'Thank you once again for your talk yesterday, I had a lot of very positive feedback.'
Lynn Brinkworth, Speakers Secretary, BALSALL COMMON U3A

'Many thanks for your very interesting talk yesterday. The feedback I got back was extremely positive.'
Pete Aldersley, Speaker Secretary, BNB U3A

'Fran's talk was very entertaining, and the relaxed atmosphere made it easy for the audience to ask lots of questions afterwards. Everyone who attended really enjoyed it'.
Jan Dawson, Librarian, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON LIBRARY


middlesbrough literary festival - 1st-30th June 09




Fran Sandham A Solo Walk Across Africa

Central Reference Library
7-9pm
Entry: £3

Fran Sandham walked across Africa solo, from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar, a 3,000-mile trek taking nearly a year. Join Fran in the Reference Library as he talks about his remarkable journey.

Fran Sandham was an editor at Rough Guides for several years, and worked in bookselling and in the voluntary sector before that. He has travelled in over forty countries. He now lives in London, and divides his time between freelance writing, editing and public speaking.



'I would like to thank you very much indeed for the excellent talk you gave us this morning. It was really superb; very interesting and entertaining. I certainly heard a lot of very positive feedback from audience members. All in all, it was a thoroughly enjoyable morning.'

Alyson Lehninger, Speaker Secretary, SKIDDAW U3A

'Many thanks for your interesting and entertaining talk yesterday.'

Sue Billing-Sly, Speakers Secretary, LUDLOW U3A

'Thank you so much for your presentation yesterday. We will certainly keep your information on file and pass it on to other U3As.'

Miranda Nash, Speakers Secretary, AYLSHAM & DISTRICT U3A

'Your talk was very well received and I'm looking forward to reading the book!'

Brian Hinners, Speakers Secretary, SOAR VALLEY U3A

'We very much enjoyed your talk on Monday; thanks for making the journey to see us.'

Janet Barclay, Speakers Secretary, RIPON U3A

'We are very grateful to you for delivering such an entertaining and interesting talk. I was very impressed with your enthusiasm and style of presenting, and have to say that it was one of the most professional talks we have had.'

Pauline Ridgwell, Speaker Secretary, REDBOURN U3A

'A huge thank you for entertaining us with your insightful talk at this year's Ladies Autumn Lunch. Your talk was fascinating and enjoyed by everyone on the day so we can't thank you enough!' Charlotte Howard, Events Fundraiser, ST ROCCO'S HOSPICE, WARRINGTON

'I have had loads of very positive feedback about your talk.' John Charlewood, Speaker Secretary, ODIHAM U3A

'Your latest talk was a great success with our members.' Pam Kinson, Speaker Secretary, HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM U3A

'Thanks for your excellent talk to our U3A – it really was outstanding, and the comments that I have received so far bear that out.' Roland Higgins, Speaker Secretary, TADLEY U3A

'We all enjoyed your talk – really interesting and with some funny points in there too!' Matt Dickens, Head of English, HARVEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL, FOLKESTONE

'We found Fran's talk very interesting and amusing.' Sally Roberts, RUGBY U3A

'Thanks again for your visit and talk.' Michael Motteram, Head of Sixth Form, SHAFTESBURY SCHOOL

'Thank you so much for your inspirational talk.' Mandy Davis, Director, 3FOR

'Thank you very much for coming to talk to our group today. Your talk was very well received. Much appreciated.' David Braybrook, Speaker Secretary, ALTON PROBUS CLUB

'The feedback from the students was very positive, they really enjoyed it.' Louise Howard, Sixth Form Administrator, READING BLUE COAT SCHOOL

'Fran's talk was most entertaining.' ASHBY DE LA ZOUCH U3A

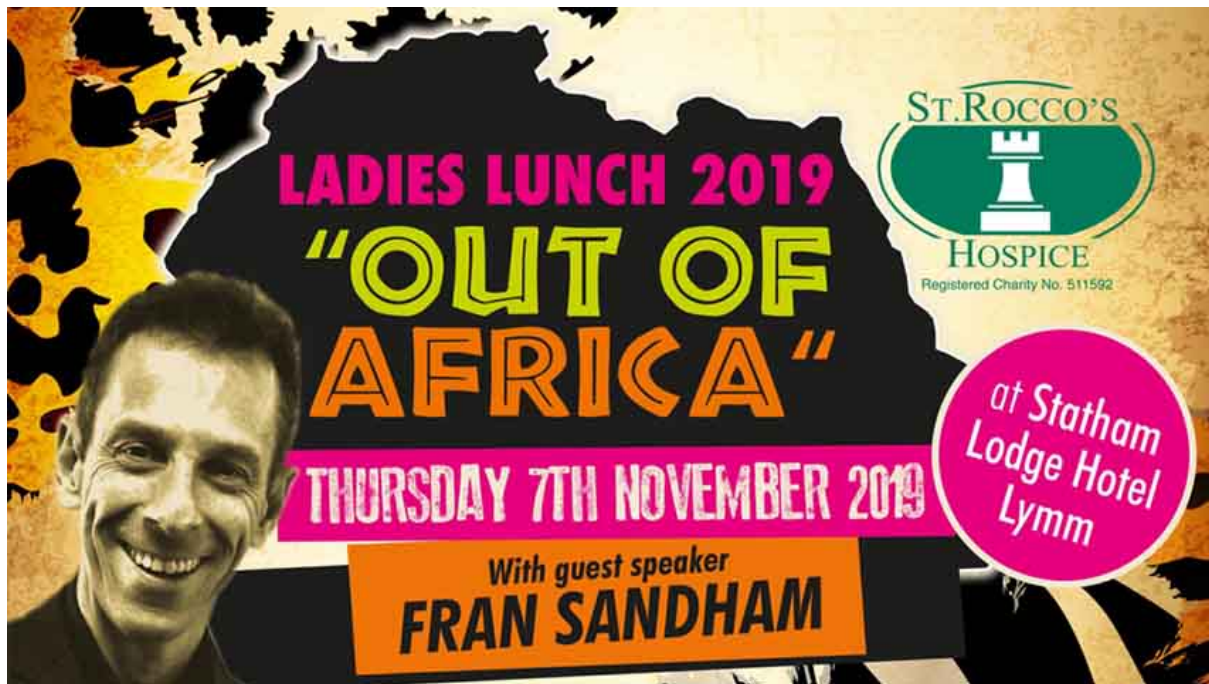
'Thank you for giving a very interesting talk' Martin Alexander, Speakers Secretary, HITCHIN U3A

'Thanks so much for coming to speak to our U3A – we really enjoyed your talk and I've had good feedback.' Helen Wyton, LLANDRINDOD U3A

'An excellent talk – a fascinating insight into what must have been an epic journey.' Rowena Gomersall, Library Manager, CHESHIRE LIBRARIES

'I have received a good number of very favourable comments from students and staff alike about Fran's talk – it was a really enlivening and convivial evening.' Andrew Nunn, Head of Sixth Form, DUKE OF YORK'S ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

'Fran's talk about his epic walk across Africa was well received by an appreciative audience. He was witty, engaging, and inspiring – he gave us a real feel of what he experienced, and was refreshingly modest about his achievement.' Andrew Walker, Development Librarian, ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL



'Your talk was well received, judging both from the comments heard during tea and by the overall high attendance.'

Bernard Lardner, Speakers Secretary, ELMBRIDGE U3A

'Thank you for the wonderful "Exploring Africa" presentation that you delivered over the two days. The event was a huge success; your presence made a significant contribution to this. Many of the staff, students and visitors who attended your sessions have been very complimentary and wanted you to know how much they enjoyed your amazing experiences.'

Riffat Wall, Principal, URMSTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

'An excellent talk – a fascinating insight into what must have been an epic journey.'

Rowena Gomersall, Library Manager, CHESHIRE LIBRARIES

'An impressive talk on Stanley and Livingstone, both detailed and entertaining.'

BURY ST EDMUNDS U3A

'Thank you, Fran, for your entertaining and interesting talk yesterday. It was good to meet you and we will keep you on our list of speakers.'

Vivienne Waterer, Speaker Secretary, BALSALL COMMON U3A

'Thanks for everything. You were great.'

Ann Speed, Speakers Secretary, WANSTEAD AND WOODFORD U3A

'THANK YOU SO MUCH for your presentation this morning recounting your many tales of your Big Adventure. You kept us all fascinated, and I will certainly recommend your talk to other U3As.'

Sheena Lesniowski, Speaker Secretary CHELTENHAM U3A

'A big thank you for your most entertaining talk. You probably gathered that our larger than normal audience of members was enthralled by your presence there and thoroughly enjoyed listening to you recalling so eloquently your adventures in Africa.'

Sue Langley, Chairman, WYRE FOREST & DISTRICT U3A

'Thanks for your superb presentation today. Lots of people made very positive comments, such as: "The talk was both informative and highly entertaining".'

Mike West, LANCHESTER ASSOCIATION, COVENTRY

'Thank you very much for talking to the Yateley and district U3A last Thursday. I'm delighted to say that I had lots of a positive feedback from the membership who thought your talk was very interesting and your self-challenge unusual.'

Linda Norman, Speaker secretary, YATELY U3A

'Thank for your talk on Stanley and Livingstone this afternoon. It was very interesting and very well received by your audience.'

Val Foley, Speaker Secretary, RAYLEIGH U3A

'Your mixture of very amusing if sometimes painful anecdotes with the practicalities of such a strenuous journey was very popular with our members yesterday. Thank you again for a very enjoyable presentation.'

Jackie Little, Speaker Secretary, WEST OXFORD U3A

'We very much enjoyed your talk and I will keep the details of your other talks for future consideration.'

Pam Benson, Speaker Secretary, WARSASH U3A

'Thank you so much for your very interesting talk about Stanley and Livingstone. Several members have told me how much they enjoyed your talk & how little they all knew about Stanley – what a character. Just a couple of the comments: "What an enthusiastic speaker!"; "Fantastic talk"; "That was a super talk Fran Sandham gave – so informative & interesting – he's a very engaging speaker."'

Sue Mayne, Speaker Secretary, MARLOW U3A

'Thank you so much for a wonderful illustrated talk on Stanley and Livingstone.'

Jim Dwyer, Chair, SAFFRON WALDEN U3A

'Thank you so much for your talk today. Everyone enjoyed it enormously.'

Michael Astrop, Speaker Secretary, TODOMORDEN U3A

'Thank you for a brilliant talk on Stanley and Livingstone yesterday. Not only did I thoroughly enjoy it, but everyone I spoke to after our meeting was full of praise for your talk.'

Glynis Evans, Chair, LEA VALLEY U3A

'I thoroughly enjoyed your talk on Stanley and Livingstone yesterday.'

Carol White, Speaker Secretary, RADCLIFFE ON TRENT U3A

'Thanks so much for your talk on Stanley and Livingstone yesterday. It was most fascinating and the feedback was very positive.'

Brian Hidders, Speaker secretary, SOAR VALLEY U3A

'Thanks for your very interesting and informative talk on Stanley and Livingstone.'

Pippa Holliday, Chair, BECCLES U3A

'Thank you for a very interesting and engaging talk, as many of our members who were there yesterday have said to me already. It was good to hear someone who's been there, done it, and got the T shirt. I bet there are lots of other yarns you could tell us about if time was on your side.'

Peter Bowers, Speaker Secretary, HOCKLEY & HAWKWELL U3A

'Thank you so much for coming along to speak to us today, your talk was interesting, informative, entertaining and very professionally delivered – I've had many appreciative comments already. I would be interested to hear of any other talks you can offer!'
Pamela Ball, Speaker Secretary, AUGHTON & ORMSKIRK U3A

'Our U3A members really enjoyed your talk and are still talking about it. Even members who did not attend have been telling me about the glowing reports they have heard and asking if we have booked you for next year.'
Janis Sweeney, Speaker Secretary, WIGAN U3A

'I've received many positive comments about your talk. Please accept my thanks on behalf of Kibworth u3a for entertaining and informing our members so well.'
John Freeland, Speaker Secretary, KIBWORTH U3A

'Thank you, Fran for your engaging talk on Friday. Judging by the buzz at coffee time I can safely say that you were a great success. You are definitely on the list of repeat speakers.'
Ruth Leydon, Speaker Secretary, SOLIHULL WIDNEY U3A

'Many thanks for an excellent talk on Stanley and Livingstone yesterday, I am sure that it was enjoyed by everyone.'
Bob Mansell, Speaker Secretary, DORRIDGE U3A

'Everyone enjoyed your talk on Stanley and Livingstone very much.'
Carol Wrate, Speaker Secretary, MEDWAY U3A

'Fran gave us the fascinating history of two famous 19th century pioneers, Dr Livingstone, who was looking for the source of the Nile, and Henry Morton Stanley, who was looking for Dr Livingstone. It was a very exciting tale, told with much enthusiasm and humour.'
SOUTHPORT U3A

'Your talk on Stanley and Livingstone was very much enjoyed. I could see people were very engaged, and I, for one, learnt a lot about those two characters.'
Rosemary Woodward-Court, Speaker Secretary, PRINCES RISBOROUGH U3A

'Many thanks for an excellent talk.'
John Haigh, Speaker Secretary, LYMINGTON U3A

'Thank you for a really interesting talk which our members very much enjoyed. I heard lots of positive comments afterwards, and we had record attendance since Covid!'
Janice Whiting, Speaker Secretary, WHEATHAMPSTEAD U3A

'Your presentation yesterday was very much enjoyed – I hope we may see you again.'
Derek Carpenter, Speaker Secretary, MALLING U3A

'Thank you for an entertaining and well-received talk yesterday.'
Chris Steward, Chair, WANSTEAD & WOODFORD U3A

'Your talk was very well received by the U3A members. Thank you so much.'
Cindy Willoughby, Speaker Secretary, HEART OF ENGLAND U3A

'Thank you for your enlightening, amusing and interesting talk and presentation on your travels across Africa, with its trials and tribulations. What an achievement! It was nicely supported by endearing images of the people and places you encountered.'
John Sutton, Chair & Programme Secretary, THAME & DISTRICT U3A

'Thank you for your talk. I found it absorbing, interesting and full of information I'd had no idea about! Feedback from other listeners was very enthusiastic also.'

Anne Parkes, Speaker Secretary, TOWCESTER U3A

'Your talk this morning on Stanley and Livingstone was very impressive, not just because of your very comprehensive research, but your presentation and illustrations were of real and NEW interest to many of us listening. Many folks commented to me how much they enjoyed your talk, and I have even received two emails which has not happened before and I have been in this role for three years now. So, well done.'

Lesley Waller, Speakers Secretary, SARUM U3A

'Your talk went down well and I personally know more about Livingstone and Stanley than I did before.'

Trudy Donachie, Speaker Secretary, PEMBURY U3A

'Your talk was great and most interesting. Many thanks for a very entertaining afternoon.'

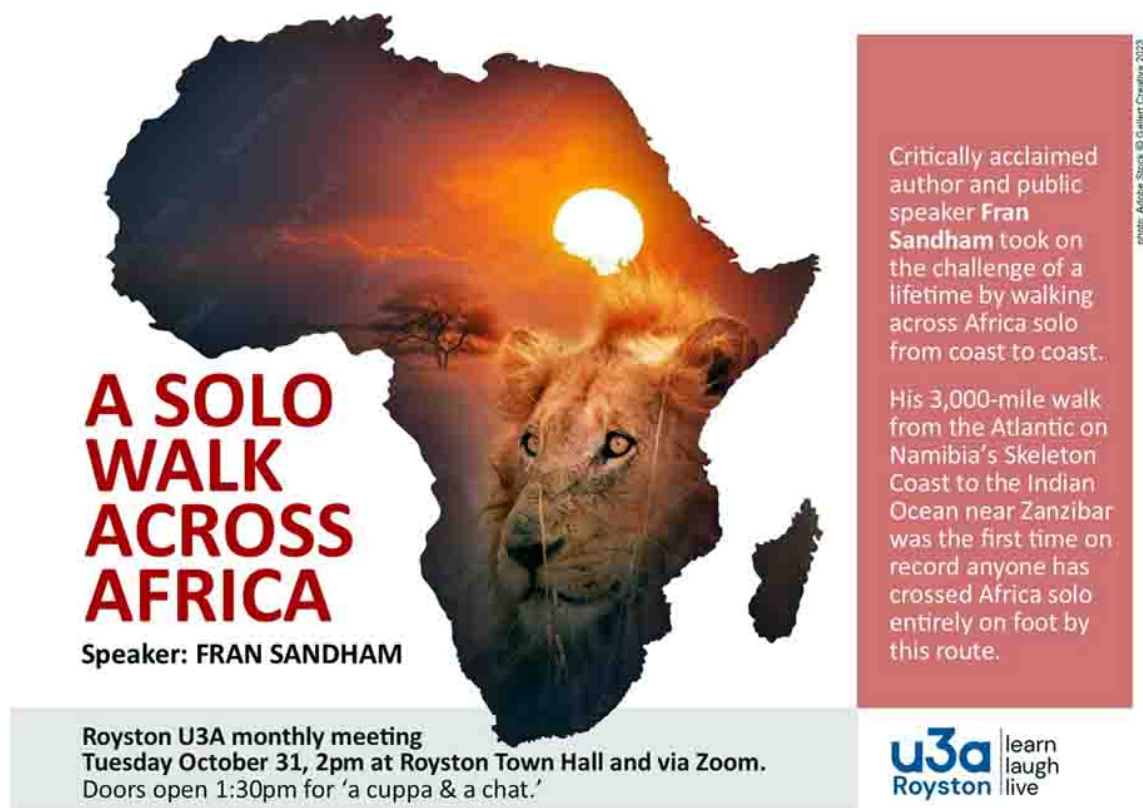
John Cardwell, Speaker Secretary, RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A

'Thanks on behalf of the Tonbridge U3A for a most interesting and informative presentation about your solo walk across Africa. Your presentation was well received by our members and recent feedback was extremely positive. A truly awesome adventure.'

Chris Jarman, Speaker Team, TONBRIDGE U3A

'Have had some resounding praise for your talk from people there. Thanks so much.'

Sandy Boden, Chair, BROMLEY U3A



A SOLO WALK ACROSS AFRICA
Speaker: **FRAN SANDHAM**

Critically acclaimed author and public speaker **Fran Sandham** took on the challenge of a lifetime by walking across Africa solo from coast to coast. His 3,000-mile walk from the Atlantic on Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean near Zanzibar was the first time on record anyone has crossed Africa solo entirely on foot by this route.

Royston U3A monthly meeting
Tuesday October 31, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom.
Doors open 1:30pm for 'a cuppa & a chat.'

u3a | learn
Royston | laugh
live

Photo: Adobe Stock © Gallert Creative 2022

'It was an absolute pleasure having you to speak to us, and I will definitely pass on your details. The group was so impressed with the talk so am sure that they'll love to have you again.'

Patsy Stone, Speaker Secretary, SOLIHULL CENTRAL U3A

'Many thanks for your entertaining and informative talk to us yesterday, which had an enthusiastic reception from our members. I have had many complimentary comments from people who were there.'

Frank Cross, Speaker Secretary, BOOKHAM U3A

'Thanks for a very interesting talk today. I thought you might like to know that several of our members said that they had enjoyed it, and were amazed at your courage and perseverance. We also enjoyed your humorous stories!'

Carol Morgan, Speaker Secretary, BRACKNELL FOREST U3A

'Thanks for a most interesting and entertaining talk.'

Tony Bourne, SHOREHAM AND SOUTHWICK U3A

'Thank you, Fran, that was an excellent talk. I shall keep your details for the future.'

Theresa Byles, Speaker secretary, MALDON U3A

'We all really enjoyed your talk & your style of delivery. Do you talk on any other subjects?'

Diane Fitton, SOUTHPORT U3A

'Thank you so much for your very interesting and entertaining talk. I have had some great feedback; our members thoroughly enjoyed your presentation.'

Kathryn Shaw, Speakers Secretary, POTTERS BAR U3A

'Thank you again for your talk – I have forwarded your details on to the person who will be arranging speakers for next year.'

Elisabeth Deith, Speaker Secretary, GREATER THAME U3A

'Your talk was excellent and I had lots of good comments from our members, We will see you again some time, I'm sure. I shall also pass on your details to other U3As.'

Dennis Neighbour, Speaker Secretary, GRAVESEND U3A

'Your talk was most interesting and very well received.'

Tim Matthews, Speakers Secretary, EMS VALLEY U3A

'You made a great hit with our members who thoroughly enjoyed your talk and were marvelling at your bravery afterwards over their coffee.'

Mady Inglearn, Speakers Secretary, HOUNSLOW U3A

'Thank you for the memorable talk you gave to Halewood U3A yesterday. It was a wonderful achievement to walk solo across Africa and you gave an interesting and informative talk with humorous moments, the events with the donkey in particular. The members were held throughout and gave very positive feedback.'

Liz Owen, Speaker Secretary, HALEWOOD U3A

'Thank you very much again for a very interesting and well-delivered talk this afternoon; I have had some very good feedback. I hope you will be able to visit us again before too long.'

Nicky Neill, Programme Secretary, EVESHAM AND DISTRICT U3A

'Many thanks for your excellent talk yesterday. We had a record turnout and many very extremely favourable comments.'

Pam Davidoff, ARUN EAST U3A

'We really appreciated you coming to talk to us. Lots of members mentioned they'd enjoyed themselves, and I had this email yesterday: "I wanted to thank you for today's uplifting talk on crossing Africa on foot. There is so much hatred, building of walls and barbed wire fences, land mines that we are now familiar with that it seemed an age of lost innocence to hear him recount his travels with optimism and humour. Made a deep impression."'

Hilary Melton-Butcher, Speaker Secretary, EASTBOURNE MEADS U3A

'It was so good to hear your lecture – there have been lots of positive comments – both to me and others of the Committee – and all of those members I have spoken with have told me they felt that they had really learned a lot and very much enjoyed hearing about your journey. Thank you again for a really fab talk.'

Gill Moroney, Speaker Secretary, TARPORLEY U3A

'Thanks again for an interesting and entertaining talk.'

Julie Stocks, Speakers Secretary, WITHAM U3A (LINCOLNSHIRE)

'Your talk to us previously was very interesting and we would like to hear another one from you.'

Paul Weller, Speakers Secretary, KENILWORTH U3A

Thank you so much for your interesting talk this afternoon.'

Catriona Sheen, EASTBOURNE & WEALDEN U3A

'Many thanks again for the talk. The audience was mesmerised.'

Averil MacDonald, Speaker Secretary, MONMOUTH U3A

'Thank you so much for speaking to our u3a group. I know from the many comments I have received, that everyone really enjoyed hearing you speak, and it was great to meet you.'

Christine Balance, Speaker Secretary, LYMM & THELWALL U3A

'Many thanks for a very interesting talk, there were quite a few guests who came for your talk and that is unusual.'

Carol White, Speaker Secretary, RADCLIFFE ON TRENT U3A

'Thank you for yesterday's amazing talk, certainly one of the best I have attended, and so do you have any other talks that we could book you for?'

Ron Muriel, Speaker Secretary, GORING GAP U3A

'Many thanks for a great talk today.'

Jerry England, WATFORD PARK U3A

'It was a brilliant talk, and much appreciated – as you could tell by the length of the applause at the end.'

Ian Reid, Speaker Secretary, TEESDALE U3A

'Thanks Fran – good talk. I am sure an invitation to return will be forthcoming.'

Chris Forse, Chairman, WARWICK U3A

'Thanks very much Fran for a thoroughly entertaining, interesting and humorous talk, I am certain that the memory of your donkey will stay with us for a long time. As the U3A talks organiser it is always pleasing to have audience members come up to me to say thank you for organising an enjoyable talk, which was certainly the case after your talk. I look forward to seeing you again before to long for another of your talks.'

Rae Cross, Programme Secretary, AMBLESIDE & DISTRICT U3A

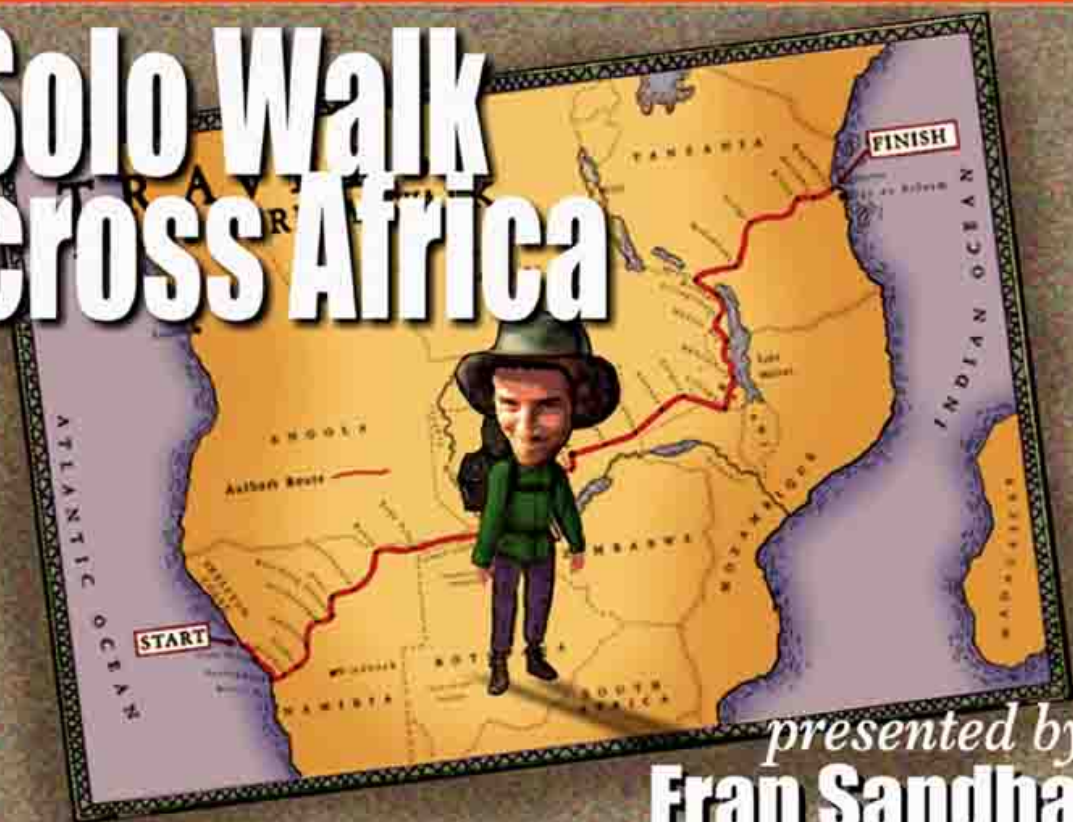
The
AGM
will be held
at this meeting

u3a Todmorden

MONTHLY MEMBERS' MEETING AT TODMORDEN LEARNING
CENTRE AND COMMUNITY HUB, ('TOD COLLEGE')

COVERING THE UPPER CALDER VALLEY & SURROUNDING AREAS

Solo Walk Across Africa



presented by
Fran Sandham

U3A provides educational, leisure and social activities for
people no longer in full employment.
For full eligibility please see our web site at www.u3atod.org.uk
or contact membership@u3atod.org.uk

THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 1.30PM

'Many thanks for your talk last week. It was an amazing achievement walking across Africa solo.'
Linda Starkey, Programme Secretary, WALLASEY U3A

'A very good talk on Stanley and Livingstone – I have had some very good comments.'
Jenny Butlin, Speaker Secretary, MARKET HARBOROUGH U3A

'Fran's talk went down well.'
Helena Selby, Speaker Secretary, ASHFIELD U3A

'Those of us present for your talk really enjoyed it, and in due course I would like to book you again.'
Annette Thompson, Speaker Secretary, RIDGEWAY U3A

'Liphook recently had the pleasure of listening to a lecture by Fran Sandham on his solo walk across Africa; factual, together with being amusing, Fran kept his audience attention throughout. A very interesting lecture.'
Hazel Williams, Speaker Secretary, LIPHOOK U3A

'Very many thanks for your presentation
You did not disappoint.'
Doreen Thomas, Chair, CROSBY U3A

'I enjoyed your talk, and I think the thing which impressed me was the weight loss which showed how gruelling it was. The feedback I got this week from members was that they enjoyed it too.'
Barbara Richardson, Speaker Secretary, MARLOW U3A

'Fran's talk on Dr Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley was vividly illustrated in both words and pictures, and presented much interesting background of the lead-up to their famous meeting in Africa.'
SOUTH SOLIHULL U3A

'Thanks for the enjoyable talk'
Winifred Conway, Speaker Secretary, BOLTON U3A

'I have to say that your talk was so well received today that I will have no problems in recommending you to any other U3A' groups.'
Collette Bentley, Speaker Secretary, SUDBURY U3A

'Thanks for a most interesting and entertaining talk this afternoon. It is a shame that so many of our members were away today – they missed a treat!'
Marilyn Pratt, ABERGAVENNY U3A

'Thank you for an excellent talk. Our members were delighted with it, and I am sure that we will be inviting you back in the near future.'
Vic Martin, Programme Secretary, WARE U3A

'Thanks very much for coming to give us what was a most interesting and informative talk about your trans-Africa walk – which I suspect is something that most of us could not begin to contemplate. It was a splendid adventure and the feedback from our members who were present was very positive, with everyone saying that they thoroughly enjoyed the talk.'
David Hubbard, Speaker Secretary, UPPER NENE VILLAGES U3A

'Your beautifully illustrated and lively account of your experiences and adventures, while walking across Africa, thoroughly entertained Preston and District U3A members on the occasion of our 5th Birthday.'
Derek Pluck, Additional Events Organiser, PRESTON U3A

'Thank you again for the wonderful talk you gave our members this morning. You had us all enthralled with your descriptions of mutinous donkeys, photo-bombing children and the warmth and hospitality of the villagers you met along the way. Definitely a huge undertaking and not one for the faint-hearted! Judging by the enthusiastic applause at the end, I'm sure the audience enjoyed your presentation as much as I did.'

Sue Tranter, Speaker Secretary, SARUM U3A

'Great talk on Stanley and Livingstone'

John Johnson, Speaker Secretary, WALLINGFORD U3A

'Fran's tales about Stanley and Livingstone were fascinating.'

ASHBY U3A

'Thank you for your most interesting talk you gave to us last month. You covered a lot of ground and I for one learnt a lot!'

Carole Scott, BISHOPS STORTFORD U3A

For more testimonials please visit www.traversa.co.uk

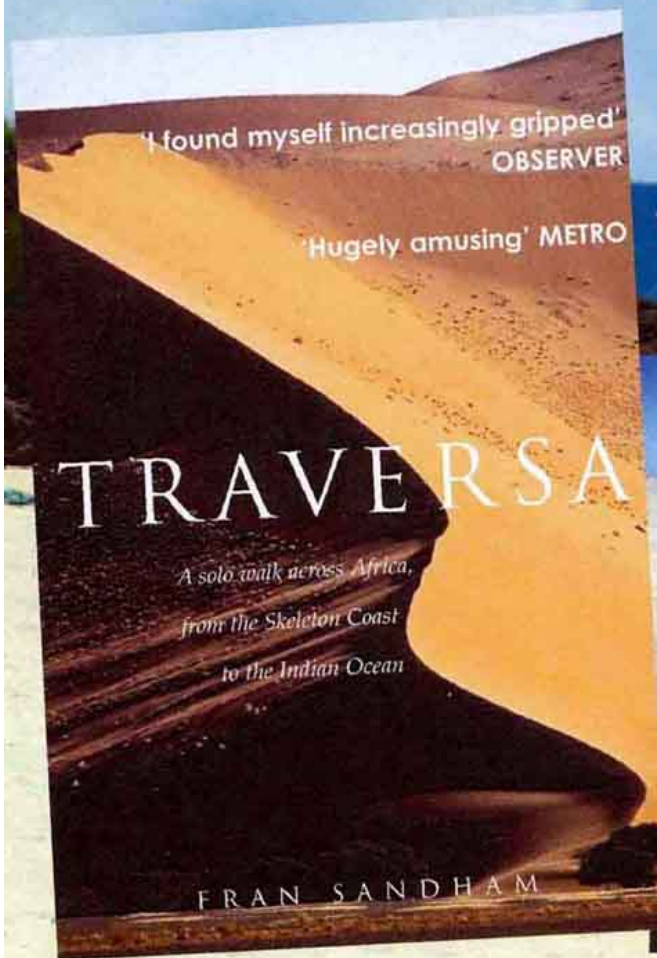
TRAVERSA

A Solo Walk Across Africa, from the Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean

Fran Sandham

Inspired by the great explorers, Fran Sandham left behind the daily grind of London to undertake an extraordinary adventure.

Traversa is the funny and engaging story of his epic 3,000-mile solo walk across an entire continent ...



www.traversa.co.uk

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