

The Trek

I waken. A brief sprinkling of Dartmoor rain upon my cheeks as I rise for breakfast. Oats again. The water trough, granite, mottled.

Everyone is here already, I look skyward, slate-grey, I smell the rain yet to fall, inevitable.

He ropes us together, our team, like so many other times and I steel myself for the day ahead; our clattering, cacophonous, canal-bound course.

Attached, then to our careworn carts, pathfinder ponies trudging an ancient trail, we are the dayshift. I will never forget the time we did the overnight from Moretonhampstead.

The bossy two-legs gather like busy ants, loading the slabs, mossy and speckled.

A shout, a crack and we move forward, walking through treacle up the first incline, shanks already screaming to match the squealing chatter of the cart wheels.

Our group footfall random, percussive before we settle to a stately trudge and the trees beside us stand proud, erect, tall, a beechy, oaken tunnel as I wonder if one day writers will walk this path and think of us.

On the higher side I see a block, inscribed. Is that 5 miles to go or 5 miles travelled I muse wearily.

Now we are on the downhill run, I know this, I have been here before. Two-legs at my side talks to me, English I think, but I don't speak two-legs, so I just nod, grimace and plough forward.

Through the trees I see a misty, blurred sky, a blast of icy wind brings Dartmoor style horizontal rain, it stings my flanks as two-legs urges us forward, the wheels start to slip and slide on our gnarly path.

As quickly as it came, the rain stops. Tiny shafts of sunlight inch their way through the trees to touch us and then we are in the open.

The sun glints on the water below as if to say, 'nearly home, nearly home'