



# South Africa, here I come! Mike's odyssey goes on

By Mike Coles

**In the unlikely event of being asked how long it would take to walk from East Finchley to Gabon, in Africa, at just under 10 km per day, interestingly, I could answer, having just done it – three years and four months. I haven't done the actual walk, of course, but have done the miles in local streets and parks.**

Let me explain. During the original Covid lockdown in March 2020 when we had to stay home, I looked around for ways to keep fit (and sane). We were allowed out for one hour a day for exercise so I thought I would walk locally, plot my cumulative progress on Google maps and head south, virtually, to Marseilles in the south of France.

and then south to Gibraltar, which I reached on Christmas Day 2020. On Boxing Day 2020 I crossed to Tangiers to Morocco and continued south.

## West Africa

Nearly a year later, on 10 December 2021, without missing a day, I arrived in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, having walked down the sparsely



*Count the miles: A map of Mike's route shows he has reached central Africa*

10 km per day seemed a good target, although it took a bit more than an hour. I found a back route that took me through Cherry Tree Wood and around Highgate Wood a couple of times which involved little contact with other people. This was a time of uncertainty when every passing jogger, if they got too close, seemed like a potential death sentence.

The days passed, the daily walking continued and I reached Marseilles on 18 July 2020. Covid was still a problem, so I decided to keep walking south into Spain, through Barcelona,

populated west coast of Africa. In January 2022 I was in The Gambia.

Nearly another year went by and I arrived in Abidjan, capital of the Ivory Coast on 5 October last year. I completed 1,000 days just before Christmas 2022 and in January I crossed the Benin/Nigeria border, and on to the Nigerian capital Lagos. On 10 July, my 1,201<sup>st</sup> day, I reached Gabon where the luxurious Hotel Esperance in Cocobeach awaited me!

During the worst of the Covid days it was fun checking on TripAdvisor what it was like



*One step at a time: Mike Coles walking through woodland on his three-year virtual trek.*

locally at the places I (virtually) passed through: fascinating through Europe, but not much information going down the

west coast of Africa.

What now? There seems to be no good reason to stop, so South Africa here I come!



*Bed for the night: Hotel Esperance in Cocobeach*



*Crossing point: Mike 'jumped on a ferry' in Gibraltar to cross the Mediterranean*

## Mike recommends walking

On a serious note, if your triathlon and hang-gliding days are over and the gym is not for you, why not try walking. It's highly rated by doctors for your health and wellbeing. Even half an hour a day is very good for you, and you can do as much as you feel like, and there are always lots of interesting things you come across locally!

From The Archer archives...

By Jane Marsh

10 years ago:

August 2013

We reported on a public meeting held in East Finchley Library to oppose plans to close the Crown Post Office on Viceroy Parade. The meeting was organised by the Union of Communication Workers and attended by Simon Berman, senior stakeholder manager for the Post Office, who emphasised the annual losses incurred by the Crown Office network. A heated discussion took place, followed by a unanimous vote to oppose the closure and associated plans to find a franchise partner to host the service. Eventually of course the Post Office was closed and the service incorporated into the UOE Store on the opposite side of the High Road.

15 years ago:

August 2008

Yet more ambitious plans emerged for redevelopment of the now demolished pavilion in Cherry Tree Wood. By 2008, the pavilion had already stood derelict for many years and several schemes were mooted for its restoration but, despite some work eventually starting, all came to nothing. It was not until February 2020 that the building was demolished and the site has now been grassed over.

23 years ago:

August 2000

Children from local schools and organisations, including Christ's College and Finchley Children's Music Group, took part in celebrations marking the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. Over 160 local children joined the cavalcade in Central London depicting events of the previous 100 years, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and ethnic mix found in the capital.

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