

Landlines

by Raynor Winn

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On the Cape Wrath Trail, one of the iconic hiking routes Raynor Winn recounts walking in *Landlines*

IN *LANDLINES* Raynor Winn – author of the 2019 bestseller *The Salt Path* – and her husband Moth set out on the longest journey of their lives: a thousand-mile trek south from Sheigra beach in Sutherland to their home in Cornwall.

Moth is suffering from corticobasal degeneration (CBD), a form of Parkinsonism. His condition improved when the couple lost their home and were forced into hiking the South West Coast Path – the backdrop for *The Salt Path* – and the Laugavegur trek in Iceland, as recounted in *The Wild Silence* (2021). Faced with a deterioration in his health through the Covid pandemic, the couple grasp for a new adventure against which to pit their hopes and test their limits.

There's an obvious appeal in this story for readers of *The Great Outdoors*, as it covers a lot of miles that will be intimately familiar. The Cape Wrath Trail, West Highland Way, Pennine Way and Offa's

Dyke Path all feature here, and Winn's vivid descriptions of life on the trail will ring true to anyone who has tackled these routes.

Winn and Moth set off on their epic journey in May 2021, in the shadow of the pandemic – and Covid's grim influence is palpable in the shuttered communities, nervous publicans and hostile hoteliers the couple meet en route. No committed hiker could fail to recall the confinement of lockdown, the way our horizons were reduced to our near abroad. We will sympathise with Winn's "palpable sense of deep need" for "big skies and open country".

When she and Moth find their way back into that open country, Winn's descriptive prowess carries the reader right back to the trail. Compared with *The Wild Silence* – where I detected a certain hesitancy in some of her descriptions – *Landlines* marks a return to the confident and arresting

storytelling that made *The Salt Path* so utterly compelling.

The Salt Path was as much about homelessness as it was about hiking, and Winn again shows her willingness to indulge in polemic in *Landlines*. Issues ranging from the climate crisis to Brexit, homelessness, trespass reform and food security are covered seriously; but Winn is a storyteller first and never hectors her readers.

At its heart, Winn's writing conveys the earnest wish that more of us would head out into the world to enjoy footpaths and hills, and all the pains, comedy, challenges and glories they can offer. If you can get through *Landlines* without reaching for your map and compass, you cannot be paying attention. This is an outstanding book and will sit well alongside *The Salt Path* as a classic of the genre.

Andy Wasley