



# The Cumbria Way

IN MEMORY OF PAUL FLETCHER

Christopher Pilkington | BookofPilx | 09/01/2020

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## Introduction

I would like to personally introduce you to the Cumbria Way from North to South, Carlisle to Ulverston over 3 days, dedicated to our good friend Paul Fletcher.

In the first section of this report I will be describing my journey across the Cumbria Way, pointing out different situations we faced and experiences which I will never forget. Talking about how and when to use your mind in different places, a test of physical and mental strength. To follow is a personal statement on the journey and the story of the pebble which I took with me. Supported leading up to the challenge and after the challenge where the Helping Hand Charity, Mountain Fuel and Lancashire Mind which I will also be talking about. To conclude is an overview of how I got through it, experiences, what I have got out of it, mental health awareness and how we approach different situations and how to balance out your life.

## The Cumbria Way

### **Day 1 – Carlisle to Keswick**

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November, I finished work at 0100 hours, bed at 0300 hours and had to be up for 0600 for the train from Preston to Carlisle with my good friend Dave Hesketh at 0703 to arrive at 0815 to start the hike. Anxious and nervous, about to do something which I had never done before. A challenge more gruelling than I thought, it was never going to be easy in winter.

The first leg we followed the River Caldew six miles to Dalston, good butty, good brew and good pork pie, this is a perfect start, passing Carlisle Cathedral and flat trail paths all along

this section. We passed Rose Castle and A Bishops Palace, crossed Bell Bridge at Welton, and headed towards Caldbeck. Weather spot on, a glorious day.

We arrive at Caldbeck, sixteen miles in, good stomp, a good tearoom called the Old Smithy Inn, amazing cake, had a brew and a cheeky whiskey. Halfway to Keswick, the hardest part of the day was still to come. From here we set off through farms and fields which took us to the start of the first climb of the day up to High Pike which was four miles from the village. At this point the wind picked up, temperature dropped, and we were open to all elements and even got sunset at the top. The descent took us to Lingey Hut where we took shelter and prepared for the next section leading through the valleys towards Keswick. Head torches on, fresh hat and gloves and change of coat, whiskey and away we went.

From here we descended to join the River Caldew again and headed through the valleys in pitch black only being able to see where our head torches were shining and headed towards Skiddaw House. We didn't stop here due to time and didn't want to stay still at this point, we needed to keep moving. Both of us are feeling it by now, still a long way to go, twenty-seven miles in with six to go. O'reet Dave... Yes Chris...

This next section was a test of mental and physical strength, side by side keeping each other going, encouragement, heads held high, a situation which both of us have never been in before. Together with my experience on the fells and David's experience from the Army we stayed strong. We followed the hilly track through the valley alongside of Lonscale fell which brought us out of the valley and finally seen the lights of Keswick in the distance.

When we reached the road leading into the village, both of us felt fatigued, looking at each other exhausted and all we could do was smile at each other and no words needed. We approached the river with Denton House on the opposite side in site, but the bridge was half a mile right and Dave suggested getting a taxi or walking across the river, the longest mile yet, but we cracked on and crawled to the accommodation. When we got here our heads were tired and couldn't figure out how to work the pass code on the door. I rang the lady who left us the information asking for help as we couldn't get in, low and behold all we had to do was place our hand over it and it lit up. Flippin' heck Dave... shut up Chris... We arrived at 2200 hours, stripped off, showered, unpacked to repack in the morning and assessed our condition and chatted about how we felt and expressed our feelings about the day. Night lad.

13.5 hours, 32.34 miles, and 3183 feet of elevation gain. Solid day, mentally and physically challenging, 8 hours in daylight, 5.5 hours in darkness, this was a challenge, never said it was going to be easy at this time of the year. Day one complete, feet in bits and physically drained.



## Day 2 – Keswick to Coniston

Good morning Dave, morning Chris... Woke up early, the first step out of bed was a test and would you believe it I healed overnight and woke up brand new looking forward to a big breakfast. Dave on the other hand had to head back to Preston after achieving a massive day. I couldn't have imagined yesterday without him. Today I hike alone, 29 miles to Coniston, set off at 0930 hours in the rain.

I started the day walking through Keswick passing the markets where Paul Tierney finished all the Wainwright's in record time. This inspired me for the day ahead thinking of what we can all achieve. Joss Naylor, Steve Birkinshaw and Nikki Spinks, Rupert Bonington and Sir Chris Bonington all my inspiration of the mountains. This is one of the most beautiful places in the UK and a privilege for it to be a part of the challenge. Here is where I stocked up on Kendal Mint Cake and get a cheeky Costa coffee. Big day.

I followed the road out of Keswick then turned left on a path which took me to the most spectacular, breath-taking part of my challenge where I joined the Derwent Water circular walk trail path. As I got south of the water, I found a perfect brew spot out of the rain having a moment to myself taking in the most amazing views across the water from Manesty Wood. Moments like this are hard to come by.

Next place I passed was Stonethwaite, then turning off the path which took me through the valley heading up to Stake Pass. I enjoyed this section as it was a cheeky uphill with a nice elevation, took time to reflect, I was getting soaked but head strong and loving every minute. The only people I had seen since Keswick was four ladies in the valley, soaked and hiking towards me, morning... morning... morning... morning... and that was it, no more, just me and the sheep.

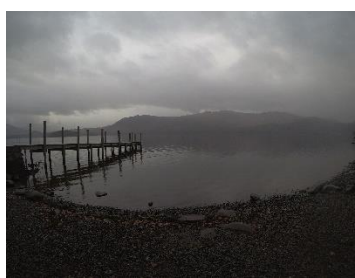
As I hiked to the ascent up Stake Beck, the waterfall was flowing rapidly with the rain, steep climb into the mist and I enjoyed going up this, still wondering why I was functioning like I hadn't done anything and impressed with my ability to keep my pace after this many miles up hill. While descending the other side to the valley I passed Pike of Stickle and Loft Crag before reaching Old Dungeon Ghyll, New Dungeon Ghyll and Stickle Barn where I had a pint of Ullswater blonde and a portion of sweet potato fries with lots of salt on. 10 miles to go till I reach Coniston.

I set off from here at 1630 hours and it was getting dark but knew this section as I reced it the week before with my family so was confident with navigating. Head torch on, waterproofs off as it had stopped raining, hyper, full of energy, the pint and chips worked perfectly. In my head this next bit was going to be easy and I would be at Coniston in no time but as I reached Chapel Stile the heavens opened, and the rain got heavier and heavier and nowhere to shelter so I cracked on. Skins waterproof and can only get wet so much, it will stop soon. Passing through Elterwater and by Skelwith Bridge the paths where good so kept a good pace. There were places to shelter here but decided to keep moving, I should have stopped to put my waterproofs back on.

5 miles to go and I was heading to Tarn Hows, just me, my head torch, fields of sheep that I was talking too, o'reet sheep, I was getting tired but finding the situation funny and making the most of it. Reaching Tarn Hows, I had a minute next to the tarn and I prepared myself for the last few miles. From here it was fields and muddy paths with heavy rain and just wanted to get to my accommodation as fast as I could. My direction took me the wrong way, I went off track and had to climb a steep section to get me back on track, I wasn't thinking straight, stopped for a minute and had a word with myself and kept mentally focused on which direction I needed to be heading. The rain at this point was not enjoyable, proper soaked and no leaves on the trees to keep me sheltered. Still smiling.

Finally finding Coniston, I followed the road to my accommodation for the night at Holly How YHA where I arrived shaking and couldn't think straight, signed in, went to my room, stripped off and stood in the shower for half an hour before sorting my bag out and deciding what top bunk I wanted to stay on in my dorm. Beer time and chill downstairs in the hostel on the settee in the hallway checking in with my family and friends to say I had made it and that I was ok. Next step was mentally preparing myself for the climb to get on the top bunk in my dorm room. End of day 2. Night.

10.5 hours hike, 7 hours daylight, 3.5 hours darkness, 29.7 miles and 3800 feet of elevation gain. One day to go, feeling good and some sort of relief.



### Day 3 – Coniston to Ulverston

Good morning Coniston and roommates rise and shine. Woke up fresh and mentally positive and about to go downstairs for a big breakfast and lots of strong coffee. Still no

blisters or aches, happy days. Today meant a lot to me as I was joined by family and friends. My family support me in everything I do, and they made sure they were with me for this final day. The feeling of relief, to see them and to hug them made my body go weak and showed no emotions at this point which I thought I would. This is when I knew I had a job to do and a challenge to complete.

We set off at 1000 hours, me, my dad and my girlfriend. My mum and sister drove to Ulverston to set off walking to meet us a few miles from the finish. The first part of the walk which took us on the trail path heading south by the water of Coniston for about 5 miles was beautiful. A fast start to the day, fresh legs, heads and no rain. Behind us in the distance was the Old Man of Coniston and Dow Crag covered in cloud. Love this place. As we reached the south of the water, we followed the trail and passed Beacon Tarn where I have never been before with perfect rolling hills all the way.

The next section was through fields, roads and the odd trail path. We passed through Gawthwaite and Broughton Beck where I was met by Barry, Finn and Lola the dog. With two miles to go I was met by my sister and mum who had parked in Ulverston and did an out and back to see me, they had fun on the way trying to find the signposts and stiles leading to where we were all heading.

I've not gone into too much detail about this day as my mind was set on completing my challenge with people I love and when I get back to Penwortham, everyone will be waiting for me. My mind was wandering and taking in the last few miles of my journey which almost didn't feel real. My dad knew his way so I didn't have to think as much as recent days and knew we would be back for 1700 hours. The final few meters I had a surprise greeting by my cousin Ste and daughters Phoebe and Molly who made me posters as a gift which I will always cherish. A perfect end to the Cumbria Way.

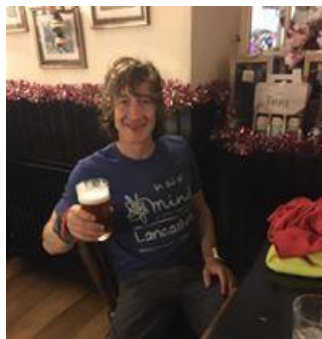


Sitting there at the monument I held my head in my hands in relief but still not kicked in what I had done, no emotions, a dreamy feeling, everyone there to hug me and congratulate me gazing into the sky, just wanting that pint. I had a leveller with my family on the way home before seeing all my friends at the pub in Penwortham. To be around the ones I love I got time to soak up the pint or two and let it all sink in.

I enter the pub and there they are, my friends with their kids all there to congratulate me, a moment never to forget. This hike meant a lot to me and my friends, they support me all

the way whatever I do and come to support my races and all my fundraising events I do for local organisations. My family, friends and girlfriend stayed by my side on the last day and spoke to them all the way through my challenge checking in to make sure I'm ok and it's good to hear their voices and encouragement. This, food and water work well, good for the mind and legs.

7 hours, 16.42 miles and 2070 feet elevation gain. All together hiking for 37 hours, 78.34 miles and 9200 feet elevation gain over three days I have come out with no blisters, strong legs and strong mind. Challenge complete.



## Personal Statement

Some people must walk a mile, and some must hike, some must do marathons, some do ultras, some just go for the views and scenery, some just go for a butty and a brew. Among the mist of it all, no matter where you go, no matter what's on your mind, get lost with the nature and surroundings, moments like this will never be forgotten and good for the mind. This releases everything inside me, it's been a pleasure to walk through the most beautiful places in the world, shame half of it was in the dark but the feeling of being there surrounded by these fells day or night is a feeling I have never experienced in such a situation, I am glad to of shared it with my good friend Dave.

The start from Carlisle in my opinion seems the better way, especially with trail paths following the river to Caldbeck. A perfect start, plus it was easier for planning which is the reason I chose this way to begin with. This challenge has worked and from the moment I wanted to do it, the planning of it, the hike, to the finish I enjoyed every minute of it. I tested my ability to plan, to navigate, to focus, to use my mind and physical ability when needed with help from my friends and family.

Leading up to the event was emotional as I was doing it for Paul. The more I planned the more I thought of him. This was better than being at a loose end, being on nights at work, not seeing anyone all week was hard. Having a phone call from Dave saying he wanted to

do it, changed my mind set. Everything prepared I was ready to go, everything I had planned was about to begin. Started the planning low and began the challenge on a high. What will be will be.

During the event I was on a proper high, the lows just turned into, get on with it. Near the end of the day the only thing I was thinking was beer, shower and get warm, all highs. The hardest part of the challenge was still to come. When I finished, I didn't feel like I had finished, most of it was a blur at this stage. The day after I went for Sunday dinner and did nothing for the rest of the day. The next day I went to see Paul at the cemetery with the 'Pebble' that I had carried with me. This is the point I emotionally broke, my heart and body just sank. A challenge which worked in more ways than one, more than I imagined.

The week after, being on nights at work and not seeing anyone I just had myself to keep going. I didn't know at this point how I would feel but was on a proper low. Nothing to think about, nothing to plan, sat at home with no music or tele on thinking about what I had just done. An emotional, low week and didn't know what was up with me. The following week I put pen to paper and started this report. Mentally stronger and inspired myself in what I have just achieved. I have learnt that if you put a lot of time, effort and preparation into what you do, mentally and physically ready, you can't plan the highs and lows of your journey, you just have to role with it.

Over the 12 months I have gone from half marathon trail races and a couple of fell races, debated a marathon but gone straight into ultra-running. Best thing I have ever done, mentally and physically. For me the fells, the mountains, the scenery just makes it for me no matter how far I must go. My mental strength gets tested, every day is a learning day, i.e. health, planning, fuel supplements, food and water, preparation is key as you can be in the mountains for a long time with weather changing rapidly, and you always need to think and keep a strong mind. This is always a challenge, always be prepared. Ultras aren't just for one day, it's the feeling leading up to them, during and after them.

Since I started trail running, I have met some fantastic individuals who I run and hike with and who I keep in touch with. The events I do are the Lakeland Trails, the Lap of Windermere, Howler, Brathay half, Pendle Way and Cumbria Way which are mostly in the Lake District. This is a place where I love and where I can get lost and test my limits while having fun and staying safe on my way.

The way I deal with things is hike or run up and around a mountain as far as I can go fully prepared to take my mind off things. This is my release which I use. This is the best prescription you can take, fresh air, outdoors, fitness, health and hills. You must do things in life to balance it out, make sure situations don't get weighted on one side which makes you tip over the edge and suddenly too heavy to pick back up. Think about your position, take 1000 steps back if you need to or shout for help. Just make that decision.



## The Journey of the Pebble

The pebble is from Pebble Art, they are trying to make people smile by painting pebbles and putting them in places for strangers to find. This is supported by the Mental Health Mile where I got this Pebble. This now will be in my pocket all the way and pictures of it in different locations, then placed with Paul where he rests.

The hike through the Lake District on the Cumbria Way is for our good friend Paul Fletcher, a fantastic dad and very much-loved man. I never went with Paul to the fells but always like taking my friends and family when available to experience what I do when I'm there and the views you get lost with. I use the fells to exercise, to free my mind, to get away from everything and I leave it all behind me. This is a family place as we have always been into hiking and camping from a young age thanks to my parents. The fells have a lot of memories of mine and therefore I have taken the pebble which represents Paul, so he was by our side all the way.

*From Paul's family, "The family have wished to raise as much money as we can for Lancashire Mind charity in order to highlight the awareness of male suicide in our region. Paul's untimely death has caught us all totally off guard and unprepared, he was always happy, had a wicked sense of humour, very much loved and adored and was such a ray of sunshine in our lives. We had no idea of how he was feeling and because of this we would like to encourage the fact that help is out there and to have the ability to speak about these feelings." JL*

The day before I ran The Lap of Windermere ultra I posted this on Facebook, *"Having known Paul and his family since I was most probably in nappies, from the days of Vernon's football club where my dad introduced me to all of the lads and their families. Looking up to Paul with all his jokes, break dancing skills, banter and overall love for everyone. Our friendship grew over the years where we have played for Penwortham Hill Rovers, mountain bike weekends away, camping trips, Magaluf and Ibiza, and more, all of us drank together and always laughed. Love us lot and always will. He will be missed by all, never a moment without a smile on his face, walking down the street with Buddy his dog saying morning or o'reet to everyone who walked by. A community figure at its finest." CP*

Paul is an inspiration who will keep us all going in life and never stop chasing our dreams and focus on the good things in life and concentrate on those who are there for us, who need us and those who care.

"The hardest walk is walking alone, but it's also the walk that makes you stronger."



## **Helping Hand, Mountain Fuel and Lancashire Mind**

### **Helping Hand Charity – Leyland Trucks**

Helping me on my journey I was supported by Helping Hand Charity at Leyland Trucks who made my challenge easier for me all looking in the same direction focusing on Mental Health Awareness. Being on the committee of the Helping Hand Charity means a lot to me. My fundraising outside my full-time job inspires me to keep going. I visit my local organisations regularly, host events for them and make sure the community get involved. This year I have got welcomed into the committee and look forward the calendar of 2020 and getting more involved. We have a fantastic team and together, getting people involved, volunteering and organising, we help each other to make things possible for everyone else.

To end the year, I have been voted Fundraiser of the Year 2019 which means so much to me, it's not just the award but it's the support I get throughout the year from everyone.

Here is a statement from Helping Hand Chairman – Matt Kersey.

*“Chris has done a fantastic job in challenging himself, supporting others and constantly raising awareness of mental health. This is something that the charity wants to focus on in 2020 and I am pleased to have Chris on board. He is an inspiration, finding ways to deal with things whilst being selfless and always wanting to help others. Leyland Trucks Helping Hand is about helping many different causes, in the local area, and supporting charities that are important to the employees of Leyland Trucks. Focusing on mental health in the local area is exactly the right direction for the charity and I can't wait to see the results of 2020. Chris was awarded fundraiser of the year for 2019, voted for by the employees of Leyland Trucks, and this was fully deserved – just reading this report makes you realise the strength he has to continue helping others. On top of this he continues to raise awareness of such an important topic, something that everyone will have to deal with at some point in their life. Well done Chris!”*  
MK

### **Mountain Fuel – Peak Performance Nutrition**

Mountain Fuel have looked after me, the fuel that I use from them helped fatigue and kept my body and mind moving. I use the Xtreme Energy fuel (electrolytes, muscle fatigue), the

Feel-Good Bar for energy, Sports Jelly (caffeine, carbs electrolytes) and must include my own preparation (butty and porkpie). Together me and Rupert focus on Mental Health Awareness and look in the same direction and it's been a pleasure to get in contact with this individual who can't do enough for everyone.

Here is statement from Rupert Bonington - Mountain Fuel:

*"Mental health is complex and affects us all. Whether it be a personal battle or seeing loved ones, friends or acquaintances struggle and in the extremes and darkest moments, lose a life.*

*There are many types of mental health problems and it's also possible to have more than one mental health disorder. Some are caused by chemical imbalances, some by dealing with traumatic events, some as a result of alcohol/drug misuse, some inherited and some as a side effect to other conditions. Life is a roller coaster, filled with highs and lows, tough times and good, everyone takes this ride from the moment they are born. Whether you are privileged or poor, in good health or not, able bodied or have a disability - we all have life experiences, some good, some bad.*

*Mental health has no age limit, gender, wealth or health bounds, there are no rules. Some of us cope, some don't, some need motivating, some need a firm hand, some need TLC, some need counselling and some need medication.*

*Over recent years I've sadly seen several friends' and people from our community lose their battles with mental health. It's shocking and devastating to those that are left behind and the only solace to them is that their loved one is now at peace and no longer having to fight those demons. I think one of the issues with mental health is the guilt, you don't want to burden a loved one or a friend with your feelings. You may feel that others are suffering far more than you so you don't want to share your burden. You may feel embarrassed, you could be the strong one of your family group or friends. You may not want to admit to yourself you are struggling.*

*Many of us have been there, you feel insular, a numbness where you feel in a dark place, it's hard to take on board any positive comments. However, there are other extremes associated with mental health; being impulsive, manic and ecstatic, trying to compensate for the lows. But taking that first step to talk really helps, it could be a loved one, a friend or even a work colleague. Each positive, small step you take breaks down those feelings and slowly you feel stronger, you feel ready to take that conscious step to a positive outlook, accepting what you have and appreciate the life you live.*

*For some, you may need more help, it could be a combination of medication and/or services through your doctor along with mental health charities for counselling can provide professional support. But again, this is a personal step, one that can only be done when you are ready to commit to help but one small step at a time can lead you out of the darkness.*

*Mountain Fuel work in the sports industry and many people we know (including myself) use activity to help them with their mental health, health and well-being. Being active helps release positive endorphins, it can encourage you to be social, fit and healthy and we would encourage people to be active. However, there are areas if you do struggle with mental health or know someone who does that you should be aware of. We'll refer to the following as runners, but this applies to any activity. Try not to put too much emphasis on one particular event or goal, have several goals across your lifestyle, these don't need to be solely running related.*

*If a running friend starts dropping out of social/training runs be aware, a coffee and a chat could be just what they need. Don't allow training to take away the pleasure of running. If it becomes a chore, it's not fun. If you run for fun, you enjoy the whole experience more and are far more fulfilled after your event. Unless you are an elite athlete chasing a podium, time or placing is irrelevant, feeling good about your run and how much you enjoy the experience, atmosphere and occasion gives you far greater memories.*

*After a big event or challenge, be prepared for a dip, a down or a lack of motivation. This is normal, so embrace the change, enjoy the rest, another focus and when you're ready get back on it and enjoy the journey again..." RB*

## **Lancashire Mind**

Fundraising and supporting for Lancashire Mind along the way over the Cumbria Way I am including them in my events in 2020 raising more awareness reaching more people and getting more people involved.

*"We are Lancashire Mind; our vision is Mental Wellbeing for all our mission is to revolutionize attitudes, challenge perceptions and alter provision. We believe that prevention is the solution to reducing the occurrence of mental health conditions; that everyone can achieve good mental wellbeing; and that resilience is the key to sustaining it. Our work helps people in Lancashire to be aware of, value and take care of their mental health.*

*We work in partnership with other organizations and campaign locally to make your mental wellbeing a priority. We believe that people experiencing a mental health condition can play an equal and active role in society and that negative perceptions of mental health should be challenged." Lancashire Mind Website.*

You must all appreciate that we all work for a lot of hours a week and sometimes the best person to talk to is stood right next to you. The person who you never talk too can be the easiest to talk too at times. I express my feelings to my family, friends, work and most probably every person I know, knows all about me. It's best to let it out and be there for one another. We must look out for each other and the people around you that you work with and make sure they are ok, don't give them a hard time and if they need someone to talk to be there them. Everyone has a bad day; we are only human.

Mental Health Awareness is something we must all get involved in and make it a habit in life and need not to think about it.

## Conclusion and Reflection

I did the Cumbria Way, fundraising for Lancashire Mind, supported by family and friends, the Helping Hand Charity and by Mountain Fuel. I used my knowledge and planning to create a challenging adventure across the Lake District with use of GPX files from WalkLakes website used on my Garmin 920xt, map and compass. Staying in hostels on the route over three days I have done something which I have never done before, and never been in situations like this and that I had to face. I used a tracker which I got from Open Tracking so everyone could track me over the three days.

A journey never to be forgotten in more ways than one. The 'Pebble', the support, the feeling of hiking 80 miles, freeing the mind, time to think, time to prepare, encouragement, inspirations, fells, sounds of nature, and the feeling of being absolutely drained at the end of each day makes it all worth doing. I can't explain the feeling I get from getting lost in the mountains.

This is my medication, I will stand on a mountain for hours, I will run a distance over fells, I will get lost if I need to, I will have a brew and butty in the most picturesque place, I will blog, I will take pictures and make videos making memories, I do this because it makes me happy.

The Cumbria Way has been a pleasure, especially with Dave getting involved on the first day and joined by family and friends on the last day. No blisters or aches, I think I have got off lightly, but using mind over matter, getting through situations where I had to switch my mind in several places near the end of the days, I have come out of this stronger mentally and have taken a lot out of this so it's worked. Everyone looking into 2020, make a difference, be an inspiration to yourself and inspire others to achieve their goals.

A big thank you to everyone who has followed me, supported me and who donated on my journey for Paul. So far, I have raised £300, with Paul's family and friends raising awareness as well, our community and local organisations have raised an incredible £18,000 for Lancashire Mind.

Hope you have enjoyed the journey. For more information, pictures and links, please see the references below.

The beginning.....

## References

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Mental Health Mile - Leg It Lancaster - <https://www.facebook.com/TeamGoddard/>

Pebble Art - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/129841407533478/>

Denton House, Keswick accommodation - <http://dentonhouse-keswick.co.uk/>

Holly How YHA, Coniston - <https://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-coniston-holly-how>



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