

TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE

(Part II)



By Brian Patrick Duggan

In our last issue, FD told the sad tales of Charles Lummis and William Brotherton's treks and introduced Diane Avery and Aaron Huey. Here are the lessons they learned, and tips from a veterinarian for those who dream of wandering.

THE BRITISH NOMAD: "WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES"

Resting during the winter in Saskatchewan, Diane Avery wrote an article about her adventures for a Saluki magazine. Durak ate something that made him sick enough to need a vet, and recovered slowly. When February came, Diane was off again, but on a new compass heading. Rather than ride the unforgiving Trans-Canada over the Kananaskis Range into British Columbia, she entered the U.S. at Sweet Grass, Montana.

Roaming freely on the American range was wonderful for the dogs, and they were welcomed in cabins and cow camps. Diane always tried to repay hospitality with a gift—usually a found cow skull or jawbone she painted with an image of herself and the Salukis. Sometimes she sold them, the money enabling her to buy two pack horses.

In the mountains of western Wyoming, one of the pack horses fell on the trail and had to be euthanized. Team Avery trekked through Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. In September 1991, Vale, Oregon, on the old Oregon Trail, she met a friendly rancher who needed help with her livestock. Diane knew it was the right time and place—and stopped.

MEANWHILE, AARON AND COSMO ...

East of the Salton Sea on a bone-dry, 70-mile trail bordering an active bombing range, a friend took Cosmo and the cart around by car because of the heat. In western New Mexico, at the Very Large Array, their water bladder was frozen during the day. In the heat of the Southwest, they hiked through the night. In Quartzsite, Arizona, Aaron realized that Cosmo was losing weight and her diet needed help. A feed-store owner solved the problem by shipping canned dog food to them all along the road. Aaron existed on beef jerky, cheeseburgers, Pepsi, and king-size Snickers.

Highways are not designed for carts and dogs. Aaron once walked backwards through a narrow tunnel, pulling the cart to watch for cars and protect Cosmo. There were rough shoulders, steep grades, blind curves, and malicious



Top: Avery's Thabiya and Durak on the lookout

Bottom: Hilker and the Salukis on a roadside break

Opposite: Dr. Jim Quinley's Dex and Max on the Italy Pass, Ansel Adams Wilderness area, California.

drivers. Semi-trucks and cars deliberately came within inches of hitting them despite outstretched flashing lights. Called a vagrant, Aaron endured bone-weary exhaustion, crushing doubt, and loneliness. But for all that, there was "the magic of the walk"—people stopping to meet Cosmo and talk to Aaron—even in the fearful months after 9/11.

Most people understood this was a unique journey and offered money, food, drugs (declined), beer (welcome!), and Bibles. Locals warned him about crime, bad roads, and coyote attacks. They slept in their tent, strangers' homes, firehouses, a refrigerator box, a mortuary, under church

porticos, and twice in unoccupied jail cells. They were each other's pillows and Aaron played with Cosmo every day. If conditions were bad for Cosmo or Blue Comet, Aaron would allow a good Samaritan to take them to a rendezvous. No matter how tired or sore, Aaron never cheated a mile. Every night he thanked Cosmo for her day's work.

Incredible things happened in the American Ocean. Aaron went to a prom, hung with frat boys, outran a lightning storm, and placed second in a hog-calling contest. A succession of grandmothers adopted him. Aaron's dad met him in Hobart, Oklahoma. A hundred miles later, the Blue Comet was stolen and returned. In Red Hill, New Mexico, Cosmo soiled the mayor's office where they were spending the night (the three-dog mayor was understanding). In Quemado, Navajo friends sang their tribal 'dog song' for Cosmo.

Aaron absorbed himself in each day's walk, meditating on life—never looking far ahead and never staying more than four days in one place. In Bloomington, an internal crisis came when he realized he was only 780 miles away from the end. Aaron's journal entries stopped as he obsessed with walking back into "the known."

At Coney Island, he ended the odyssey at the Atlantic's edge on June 25.

He and Cosmo had traveled 3,349 miles in 154 days. Oddly, Aaron felt no profound sense of relief—but was mightily glad to celebrate with friends, music, and Bloody Marys.

Advice from a

Jim Quinley, DVM, has taken his dogs on California wilderness hikes for 15 years. His longest trek was six days and 60 miles—but he also does day hikes of 17 to 20 miles with Max, an athletic Golden Retriever/Labrador Retriever mix.

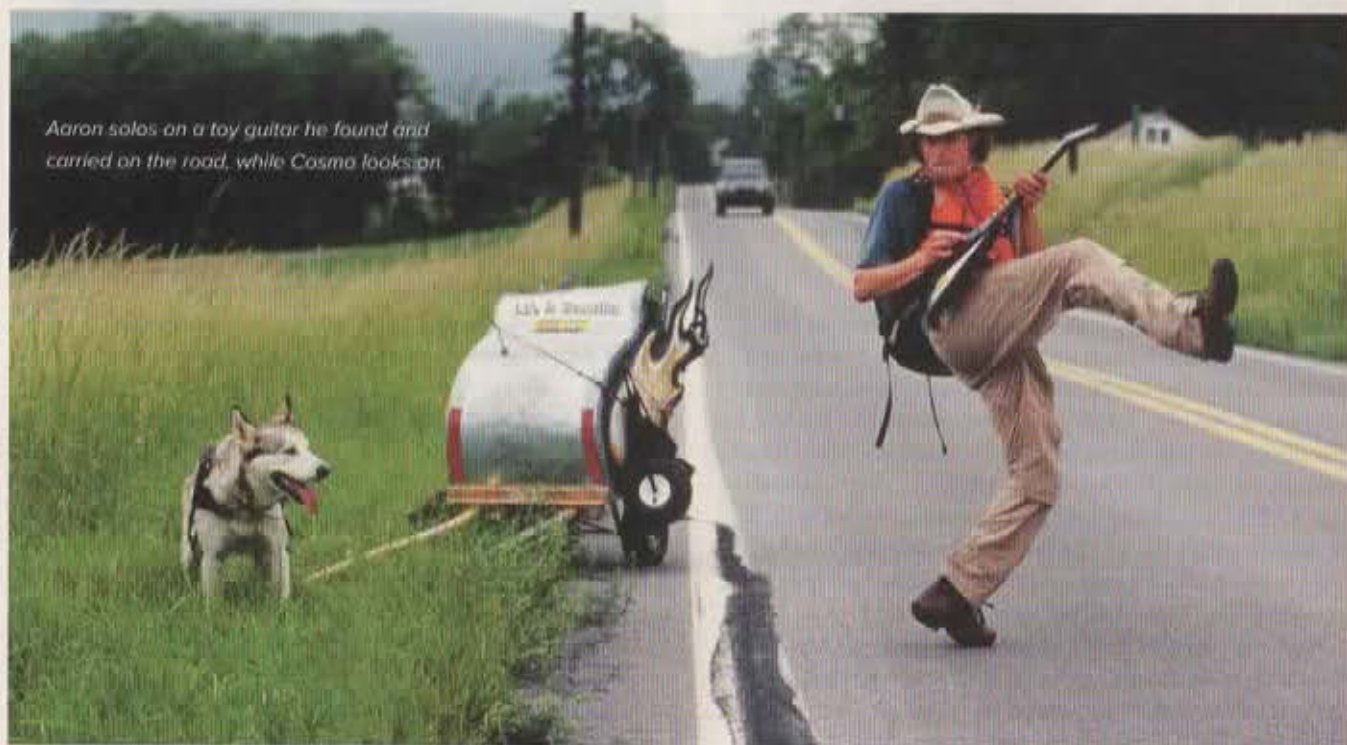
"It's a lot like hiking with kids," he tells FD, "but it's worth taking your dogs."

He offers this advice for anyone planning a long hike with canine companions.

How to prepare:

- Have a plan for the trek and potential emergencies.
- Get both of you in shape. Longer and longer walks are good, but your dog won't see the point of repetitive stair climbing!
- About a week ahead, transition from their regular food to high-performance or puppy kibble (lots of calories), so that the volume stays the same on the trail.
- Dogs can carry 20 percent of their body weight in doggy "saddle bags." (Quinley usually packs 15 percent so his dogs don't work too hard.) Practice and train with the loaded gear.
- Recall training is fun and valuable—in addition to the basic good citizenship of obedience work.
- Consider snake-aversion training for rattlesnake country.

Aaron solos on a toy guitar he found and carried on the road, while Cosmo looks on.



Wilderness-Trekking Vet



■ Vaccinations must be current and your dog should be microchipped (Wi-Fi tracking tags don't usually work in back country).

What to take:

- Satellite communicator for status texts and emergency messages.
- I.D. tags and collar (bright colors for better visibility).

- Flashing bike lights (front and back) if you are walking on roads.
- Lightweight leashes, collapsible food and water bowls.
- Booties for rough trails (e.g., volcanic rock, flint). Bring a spare set in case one comes off.
- Regular meds (bring extra)
- Insulated sleeping mat.
- First-aid kit for people and dogs with bandage materials, disinfectant, tweezers, and other supplies.
- An insulated, packable waterproof coat.

What to watch for:

- Signs of fatigue. Stopping to rest is always good.
- Raw or injured paws. Check their feet every halt.
- Injuries, ticks, foxtails, and thorns. Do a regular body/fur check at every halt. Remember your dog can't tell you if he is hurting.
- Overheating.

Is there a dog that shouldn't trek?

If the dog is fit and enjoys himself, any dog can hike. Dr. Quinley has seen Dachshunds on hikes—although a couple of miles would probably be their limit.

LESSONS FROM THE ROAD

The Southwest affected Charles Lummis profoundly. He would become an author, ethnographer, Indian rights activist, and city librarian. Lummis had other dogs but never forgot "... dear Shadow... more like a brother than a dog, in our long and lonely walk together," as he wrote in *A Tramp Across the Continent*, his chronicle of his journey.

Diane Avery is a professional goat cheese consultant in Twin Falls, Idaho, and has just one Saluki now—Hannibal. On the road, she always told school children, "If you have a dream, it doesn't matter if you have money or not, you can find a way—so go do it." And she did.

On the road, Aaron Huey was safe with Cosmo and said, "I couldn't have walked without her." The journey transformed his perspective on life. No obstacle would ever stand in his way again. He takes photographic assignments from *National Geographic*, and tells neglected human stories. Cosmo went to live with Aaron's mother and he regularly

visited Cosmo until she died. Aaron now lives in Seattle with his wife, children, and their dog, Suki, a 15-year-old Labrador Retriever mix.

Both Diane and Aaron learned to stop worrying about what they could not control and be open to opportunities. People were interested in their journeys and, being a little envious, always wanted to help somehow. Nothing on the road was certain for them except difficulty, the exceptional generosity of strangers—and something interesting around the next bend. **FD**

My heartfelt thanks to Aaron Huey, Diane Avery, and my good friend Dr. Jim Quinley for talking to me about their marvelous journeys and dogs.

Brian Patrick Duggan is the "Dogs in Our World" series editor for McEland Publishers, and the award-winning author of *Saluki: The Desert Hound* and the English Travelers Who Brought It to the West. He is currently writing the history of General and Mrs. Custer's life with dogs on the frontier.