

‘Mallett’s book is a fun read – at once a history lesson, travelogue, love letter to cycling, autobiography and motivational manual, with some perhaps unintended but endearingly hilarious lines such as “tarmac is the same all over the world”.’

The Guardian

‘Highly entertaining . . . Much of the joy of Mallett’s memoir is his unselfconscious tone.’

The Mail on Sunday

‘A riveting read, full of love and laughter.’

S Magazine/Sunday Express

‘I am reading and loving and being both amused and moved by Timmy Mallett’s *Utterly Brilliant!*’

Gyles Brandreth

‘A vivid, beautifully written and often moving book, skilfully dovetailing memoir, history, art and a cycling pilgrimage across Europe into a unique and uplifting whole. If you think you know who Timmy Mallett is, you’re in for a rewarding surprise!’

Professor Brian Cox

‘A beautiful, life-affirming book. It shows Timmy in a new light and demonstrates his talents and astonishing versatility.’

Wendy Craig

‘There are not many people who would put themselves through this much to achieve their dream. Timmy has always aimed for the summit and, most importantly, always remembers to smile and take time to reflect along the way.’

Chris Evans

‘Funny, fascinating and insightful, just like Timmy himself. A must read for anyone who likes an adventure.’

Yvette Fielding

‘This is a journey brimming with love and laughter that’s also deeply moving. Timmy’s glass isn’t just half full, it’s positively overflowing!’

Lorraine Kelly

‘Timmy Mallett, I still have my WAC PAC and all its contents! You’re the kind of hero who has probably influenced me more than I realize. What a lovely man!’

Keith Lemon

‘Absolutely compelling . . . full of intriguing reminiscences . . . Timmy is jovial, entertaining and palpably genuine.’

Nick Owen

‘The world is a dark and confusing place to be right now, but there are still times that make a person glad to be in it. Timmy’s journey throughout this book is one of them.’

The Secret Footballer

‘I loved this book. It’s absolutely delightful. An adventure told in a uniquely Timmy way, full of humour and charm.’

Michaela Strachan, from the Foreword

Timmy Mallett is a popular English TV presenter, broadcaster, entertainer, artist and cyclist. Curiosity and wonder at the world are his inspiration.

The illustrations throughout this book are all by Timmy. The pen-and-ink line drawings reflect the places, people and issues covered in each chapter. Paintings include watercolour and acrylic pieces he produced on location throughout the cycling Camino and oil paintings completed in the Mallett studio from sketches and images made along the journey.

You can see more of his artwork and purchase prints at <www.mallettpalette.co.uk> or follow the art links from <www.timmymallett.co.uk>.

This Camino is a personal adventure inspired by Timmy's older Down's syndrome brother, Martin. Each day was marked with Martin Mallett name tags as a reminder of his example to reach your potential, and their location is revealed in the maps on the endpapers. Use the key on pages ix–xii to find every secret place.

There are more photos from Timmy's Camino at <www.timmymallett.co.uk/camino>. If you find one of Martin's name tags, please leave it there and tell Timmy!

Twitter @TimmyMallett

Facebook @TheTimmyMallett

Instagram @Timmy.Mallett

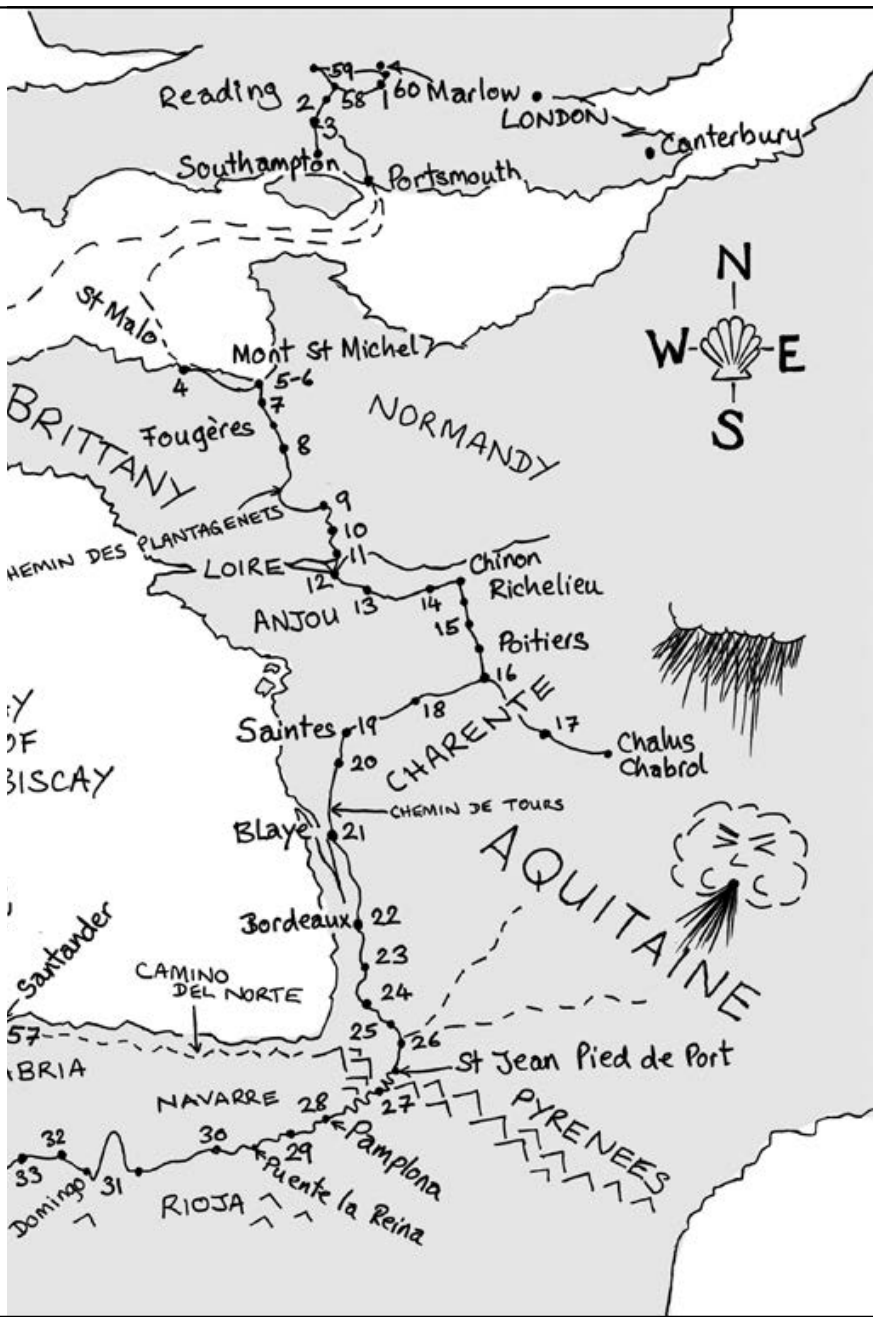
Strava @ Timmy Mallett

Martin Mallett
Name tags.
For key see pages
xi-xiv.



Mallett CAMINO DE SANTIAIGO







**TIMMY
MALLET**

Utterly Brilliant!

spck

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Contents

Key to the map	xi
Foreword by Michaela Strachan	xv
Prologue	1
1 An ominous beginning	5
2 Hand me a reason for this madness	16
3 Brexit and the Camino	26
4 Ancestral hero	37
5 The Way of the Plantagenets	49
6 Noire Loire	61
7 Eleanor of Aquitaine	74
8 Twin town	86
9 When an Australian asks for your address	98
10 Be kind to yourself	111
11 Life is what happens while you are busy making plans	126
12 Reach your potential!	142
13 Hill of Forgiveness	157
14 Maps and apps and which way now?	170
15 The rain in Spain falls mainly on . . .	181
16 Who let the dogs out?	194
17 The Iron Cross	207
18 The Winter Camino	217
19 Santiago de Compostela	227
20 The end of the world	237
21 The long and winding road	248

22	The puncture	261
23	As I stepped out one sunny morning . . .	275
24	<i>Titanic</i>	288
25	England, my Lionheart	301
	Postscript	313
	Copyright acknowledgements	319

Key to the map

The map locations are listed in the table on the following pages. Each place has its GPS and what3words link.

If you ever come across one of the Martin Mallett name tags I left at each of these locations, I'd love to know (please leave it there!). what3words is the simplest way to talk about location. Every three-metre square in the world has been given a three-word address. Now you can refer to any precise location using just three dictionary words. For example, in Chapter 6 I left a name tag in the castle gate at Angers, which can be found at the three-word address, [///itself.tickets.removed](#).

Use the free what3words app to search for the other three-word addresses I encountered along my journey. Simply download the free app via the QR code below or use [what3words.com](#) to get started.



Key to the map

Location number	Description	GPS co-ordinates	what3words address
1	Broken chain on Blackamoor lane, Maidenhead	51.529287, -0.714604	///wage.coins.cover
2	War memorial @ Axford	51.1855000, -1.1283056	///improvise.stutter.broad
3	Bishop's Palace @ Winchester	51.058851, -1.310727	///replayed.belly.hikes
4	St Malo fence post	48.6842500, -1.9637222	///finely.mature.confident
5	In town wall <i>Maison du pèlerin</i> @ Mont St Michel	48.6366944, -1.5104722	///errands.whereas.watched
6	Under statue Église Saint-Pierre @ Mont St Michel	48.6361667, -1.5100833	///shipyards.scraped. damaging
7	Chapel, Église Notre-Dame @ Pontorson	48.5546389, -1.5104444	///grouchy.economy.awaken
8	Churchyard Église @ Montautour	48.2044167, -1.1474722	///albatross.oxidation. supplemental
9	Le Rideau Mine B & B @ Lion d'Angers	47.640610, -0.688628	///scuffled. incidentally.forget
10	Église Saint-Martin @ Grez-Neuville	47.6030000, -0.6876389	///incarnation. reworking.infancy
11	Castle gate @ Angers	47.4703889, -0.5590833	///itself.tickets.removed
12	Rock @ Béhuard	47.379963, -0.643676	///customs.untimely. hogwash
13	Vineyard @ Grézillé	47.3189444, -0.3374722	///bleach.fondest.sightsee
14	Next to Eleanor @ Fontevraud Abbey	47.1815000, 0.0518333	///decreasing. flunked.reinstate
15	Waymarker @ Signy	46.7517222, 0.3277222	///harden.programmers. monitored
16	Église Saint-André @ St Benoit	46.549427, 0.341123	///storage.punk.clash
17	Grosbot @ Champagne-Mouton	46.008435, 0.405134	///behinds.luncheon. earphones
18	St Hilaire Church @ Melle	46.2199722, -0.1496111	///tidiness.misused. eradicate
19	St Eutrope Church crypt @ Saintes	45.7434722, -0.6413333	///signal.guardian.park
20	Pilgrim shelter @ St Léger	45.6169444, -0.5758333	///bendable. screeched.hugely

Key to the map

Location number	Description	GPS co-ordinates	what3words address
21	Vineyard on Rue Sainte-Luce @ Blaye	45.1153611, -0.6488889	///defiance. scorecards.easiest
22	St James statue, Basilique Saint-Seurin @ Bordeaux	44.8432500, -0.5856944	///progress.land.daisy
23	Pilgrim statue outside @ old church Moustey	44.3599722, -0.7612778	///declares.swooshed.scoped
24	Pilgrim auberge @ Lesperon	43.9693611, -1.0930278	///chimpanzee. cranky.storming
25	Route de Cazordite @ Cagnotte	43.6177500, -1.0685833	///bedrock. monarchies.defer
26	Croix de Galcetabaru @ D933 Gamarthe	43.210855, -1.137330	///pumping.huskily.pitches
27	Ermita de San Salvador @ top of the pass Roncesvalles	43.0202222, -1.3241944	///minty.aboriginal.pieced
28	Side altar, Church of St Nicholas @ Pamplona	42.815706, -1.644814	///runways.salt.incomes
29	Memorial post, statues @ Alto del Perdon	42.735762, -1.742681	///director.coldly.crisp
30	Wine fountain @ Monastery Santa Maria de Irache	42.650871, -2.043526	///contestants.poach.lisping
31	Behind altarpiece, Church of La Asunción @ Navarrete	42.4296389, -2.5612500	///turkey.unhook.purchases
32	Ruin of church of Valdefuentes @ Villafranca opposite rest area on N120	42.364183, -3.369738	///medicines. comforter.rusted
33	Choir stalls @ Burgos Cathedral	42.3408056, -3.7043889	///tiling.toast.blur
34	Wall opposite Albergue Juan de Yepes @ Hontanas	42.312761, -4.042950	///packets.billowing.garlics
35	Under St James statue, Church of St Martin @ Frómista	42.2666944, -4.4069167	///lawyers.resurface.sags
36	Arch of San Benito @ Sahagún	42.3710000, -5.0335833	///deliveries.radical.repute
37	Bridge wall @ Hospital de Órbigo	42.4640556, -5.8786111	///point.homily.ribcage
38	Tree by cross of Santo Toribio @ Astorga	42.454099, -5.999821	///cocktail.scuttle.quota
39	Rood screen gap @ Astorga Cathedral	42.4578889, -6.0568889	///beanpole.plop.giraffe
40	Iron cross	42.4888333, -6.3614167	///hesitation.ample.inked

Key to the map

Location number	Description	GPS co-ordinates	what3words address
41	Bench on the Camino de Invierno above river Sil reservoir	42.4143333, -6.8351111	///murmured.thrill.granite
42	Fountain on LU617 near O Eivedo	42.5485000, -7.5856944	///beefed.flinching.trivia
43	Round bellrope of Church of San Salvador @ Vilasante	42.5825833, -7.6316111	///overall.coffeehouse. decode
44	Wayside stone memorial @ Chantada	42.6160556, -7.7788611	///shuts.quells.restless
45	Santiago Cathedral @ left of grille before tomb of St James	42.880642, -8.544311	///jingles.vision.refrain
46	Lighthouse Finisterre opposite iron boot	42.881772, -9.271963	///contraband. horseback.foots
47	In wall in front of Muxia Chapel	43.112094, -9.219960	///amaze.blipped.stardust
48	Cypress trees @ pilgrim statues Mont Gosso, Santiago	42.8846667, -8.4943056	///spanner.hefty. supermarkets
49	Tree by Chapel of Carmen @ Melide	42.9137222, -8.0188333	///mastery.examples.sieving
50	Tree by the Chapel of San Román de Retorta	42.9555000, -7.7376111	///whiling.pies.spoof
51	Lintel of workman's hut @ stream by water trough, Fonsagrada	43.158818, -6.991575	///overpay.lovable.custodial
52	On the lookout @ dam	43.236403, -6.843092	///glittering.direct.butting
53	Bike puncture on the AS14 on the way to Montefurado, Asturias	43.260423, -6.707127	///conceive.ammonia. nimbly
54	Oviedo Cathedral @ gold side altarpiece	43.3626111, -5.8431667	///supreme.pots.upstairs
55	Bend on AS331 @ Camino sign in wall	43.4040278, -5.6274444	///boats.oppose.walking
56	Chapel of Cantu on Camino @ Colombres	43.374647, -4.530864	///explode.instance.dilutes
57	Fountain @ Santander Cathedral	43.4613611, -3.8074167	///wrong.bikers.mute
58	Barton's Mill @ Old Basing	51.272946, -1.053359	///vision.oiled.stored
59	Pilgrim Chapel, St James Church @ Reading	51.457040, -0.965355	///broom.dating.lamps
60	Behind lectern @ Holy Trinity Church Cookham	51.561370, -0.707223	///phones.fleet.tight

Foreword

Full of warmth and wit, facts and fun, thought provoking and thoughtful, entertaining and a tad eccentric . . . am I talking about the book or about Timmy? Well, both actually.

Timmy and I have known each other since 1986, when I joined the presenting team of the Saturday morning kids' programme, the *Wide Awake Club*. We instantly clicked. I loved his sense of humour, his passionate interest in everything, his unique talent as an entertainer and his enviable gift as an artist. He was fiercely determined, always up for a challenge and ever so slightly bonkers! So when Timmy told me he was planning to cycle the Camino de Santiago from his home in Berkshire – an extraordinary 3,500-kilometre journey there and back – on his own, and painting along the way, I wasn't too surprised. The last time I did a bike ride with Timmy was in 1987; we filmed the *Wide Awake Club* team doing the London to Brighton cycle ride, a mere 89 km. Timmy's Camino is only, well, 28 times that distance and Timmy is at least 32 years older! Could he really complete the challenge?

I never doubted it.

Once Timmy makes a plan, he sees it through to the end, no matter what the obstacles. He made it to Santiago de Compostela and this fantastic book tells the tale of his adventure. *Utterly Brilliant: My life's journey* is a feel-good read. It cleverly interweaves Timmy's challenging two-month cycle ride with the history of the Camino, told in his unique and captivating way. It includes hugely enjoyable anecdotes from Timmy's past; the

Foreword

inspiration for and the intriguing stories behind his numerous paintings; and the heart-warming reason why ‘reaching your potential’ means so much to him.

Timmy, what a journey your life has been. And what an undertaking the Camino turned out to be. I laughed at the stories I thought I knew, but clearly didn’t know fully. I cried at the endearing way you talk about your brother Martin, and I pondered the lessons we can all learn from making the most of each journey and not just heading blindly to our destination.

I loved this book. It’s absolutely delightful. An adventure told in a uniquely Timmy way, full of humour and charm. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Michaela Strachan, friend and TV presenter

Prologue

Once upon a time, something went missing . . .

It's a warm Friday evening at the beginning of August, and the world has gone away on holiday. Those friends of mine who are still here are heading to the pub after five-a-side football. 'Join us at the pub for a beer, Timmy, and tell us about your Camino . . .'

The light is fading as I cycle over the causeway through the village. I may spend the night on the trampoline in the garden tonight and fall asleep watching the satellites and shooting stars.

It's really quiet at the pub, hardly a soul around. A couple of cars in the car park. Nobody at the bar. We head into the garden with our pints and it's a great hour or so putting the world to rights, talking nonsense till they want to close up. The football season starts tomorrow – son Billy is going to Barnsley v Oxford away, and there's Gateshead at home for Maidenhead. I look around at my friends and count myself lucky to have such great pals. Friends are really special. They laugh at your jokes, they share your adventures, they rejoice at your successes and commiserate with you in your disappointments. They encourage you, they give you a sense of perspective, occasionally they even buy you a beer. We call to each other as we head to the car park. 'See you over the weekend, tennis next week, have a good holiday, enjoy the night on the trampoline . . .'

My bike isn't there. A very nice Giant Explore 1, black with green trims, Timmeee E-bike with disc brakes, pannier racks, stand, blue saddle, battery and serial number EACA2631, with around 4,700 kilometres on the clock, has gone.

I chained it up by the wall in the well-lit parking area. Has someone moved it? Anyone seen something . . . ? There's only one way into the car park under the single arch. My friends head off in different directions looking for the bike, or a suspicious vehicle.

My heart sinks. I can't believe it. You know that moment when you feel it's just a dream? Hope it's just a dream, or a bad joke gone wrong? But deep down, don't go there, because you know something you love really has been taken. Why do we have such ownership of things? Why does it feel like a bereavement? I know – it's just a bike.

Just a bike that for some reason has become my very best friend and reliable, dependable companion on the adventure of a lifetime. Cycling the Camino de Santiago, a thousand-year-old ancient pilgrimage route across Europe, from home – alone.

I've done plenty of big things. Really big things. I've been number one in the charts around the world with a million seller, 'Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini'; I've had hit TV programmes that are loved by generations, like the *Wide Awake Club* and *Wacaday*; I've got the biggest, funniest, most recognised prop ever – the giant foam Mallett's Mallet; I've hosted the loudest, fastest pop radio shows – *Timmy on the Tranny*; I've headlined packed, sell-out pantomime and theatre dates, run my own Brilliant TV production company, performed in stadiums and at the Royal Variety Performance, met stars and royalty; and I'm a collected fine artist with paintings on show across the world. And yet the biggest thing I've ever done I did for personal reasons, solo across Europe, inspired

Prologue

by someone very dear, to reach my potential, on a bicycle – the bicycle that has been nicked from my local pub while I laughed and chatted with my friends.



It's a grey, damp, drizzly day with a cold wind, in the middle of an emotionally unsettling March, and Mrs Mallett wakes up, turns to me and says, 'All right, Malley, this is it. How are you feeling?'

A big long sigh and I rub my tummy, something I seem to do to comfort myself, and roll out of that lovely warm bed, thinking, *It's going to be the middle of May before I enjoy these sheets again.*

I don't have to do it.

It's my choice.

I put my things out on the chair last night. I like the feeling of

preparation; it means I haven't got to worry this morning about what to wear. Anyway, it's not as if there's a lot of options . . . Over the next two months I'm cycling with a couple of changes of clothes and some extra layers for the freezing cold days – like today. It promises to get up to an almost balmy 9 or 10 degrees Celsius, so I'm wearing padded longs, knee-length shorts with lots of pockets, merino undershirt, green lycra vest, two pairs of socks (warm, thin, knee-length socks and over the top a pair of clashing coloured ankle socks in case I get cold); I've got my neck buff, cycle jumper and the high-vis, map-of-Europe top last worn on my TV show *Wacaday* in 1990 and found in the collection of 'Wow! I wonder when I'll ever wear that again?' tops. I love it, it looks great, and with a map on my chest there's a chance I might not get lost. I've also got on a Christchurch College Oxford tie, gifted to me by the porters in the lodge when I met the Bishop of Oxford for a 'Good luck – you are going to need it' blessing last month. The blessing was in the stunning surroundings of Christchurch quad, and worked as far as the city boundary. When I reached Oxford United football ground I got a puncture. Hmmm. United's press officer, Chris Williams, was delighted and laughed. 'It's always exciting when you plan something, Timmy!'

That Christchurch tie is going to get heavier and heavier as I pin badges to it all along the way. I've made a typically nutty Timmy decision to wear it every day. Cyclists don't wear ties; and I haven't worn one since the last funeral I went to. Oh, hang on, that was two days ago, over 500 miles away, in Aberdeen: my older brother Martin, who with Down's syndrome and language and learning difficulties had lived 64 filled years, died last week. 'Ma bubba' Martin has always been the inspiration for my Camino – to reach my potential, as he did, with all the challenges he faced every day. Now it feels even more important.

I can't let him down. I'm carrying my brother's memory and his courage, and I'm determined to live each day with his example in my heart. Martin always wore a tie and was the best-dressed Mallett in all our family. I've decided to follow his example and dress for the occasion.

The occasion is to cycle alone, from home, across three European countries to Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain and back again, painting the adventure as I go.

I've always made a Mallett statement through the things I've worn. Colour has always been key in my fashion sense. One Thursday night I saw Trevor Horn of the Buggles on *Top of the Pops* singing 'Video Killed the Radio Star'. He was wearing bright red glasses and I was immediately struck by them. I've worn specs since the age of seven and when I saw Trevor's on TV I went straight into town and had my own pair made. The optician understood what I wanted from the photo I showed him and his lab created them – the first in my collection of fabulous glasses. I began with that blood-red pair, then had bright blue, followed by a pink fluorescent pair that came from the optician's chuck-out drawer, where they keep frames they can't get rid of until Mallett walks in. During *Wacaday* I came across a company in London that manufactured custom designs, and so began the great collection of several hundred pairs I have today. The only downside is that my prescription has changed over the years and trying to read through lenses that are three decades old can be a little tricky.

Next up after the red specs was the multicoloured hair. Red, emerald, yellow and purple. 'He's quite safe really,' Mum explained to the neighbours when I visited. On *Wacaday* I made my dress sense part of the uniform for Wideawakers. One leg of your shorts rolled up; two caps – twin peaks; odd socks.

Let's make a statement. One day I may even get around to

having the colours match. At least I'll be seen on the bike and that's got to be a good thing, surely?

I linger over my favourite breakfast – a poached egg, baked beans and mushrooms, and toast thick with my homemade Mallett marmalade – contemplating what is about to unfold.

Son Billy the Gardener is working nearby. 'Are you sure you don't want to change your mind? Oxford are at home to Peterborough on Saturday and Maidenhead are playing Barrow. How can you miss all those matches? What if we make the playoffs?'

'I've got the notebook packed for predictions,' I tell him. There are 28 of us each week that predict the scores for every match in Oxford United's league and Maidenhead United's game. Winner at the end of the season gets glory. Billy gives me a withering, compassionate smile that says: 'You won't be able to keep that up every week.' Just you wait.

Friends turn up to watch me pack the bike. Terry, in lycra, to pedal the first couple of miles or so, and Andy, in his suit, on the way to work.

'Hi, Andy. What was number one on the day you got married?' I greet him the same way every time and we both know the answer.

'You were, Timmy, with "Itsy Bitsy"! And what was number one when you Malletts were married?'

'I was, Andy, with "Itsy Bitsy"!'

All great adventures begin with a single footstep, or a push on the pedals and a turn of the wheels on my Giant Timmee Explore 1 touring E-bike. It's quite a sight to see how the bike is loaded each day. I'm methodical and try to close my ears to any passing comments as I attach the two red waterproof panniers on either side of the rack with their sewn-on fluorescent painted scallop shells.

‘Spectacles, testicles, phone and Mallett!’ I say every morning as I pack up all I need. ‘Have you got a puncture repair kit? Will you remember which side of the road to cycle on?’ Then the waterproof dry bag with A3-size artboards and my bag of essential acrylic colours and brushes goes over the top, with a backpack that will act as my day bag, including watercolour pads and paints and the wet weather poncho on top of that. It’s all held in place by a bungee cargo net. On the handlebars is a bar bag in which I keep my sketchbook, diary, maps, spare phone, pilgrim passport and snacks, as well as my stone from home, good luck letters and sunglasses. (Wonder if I’ll get to wear them anytime?) And a roll of the all-important Martin Mallett name tags, that I don’t know yet will come to mark my journey.

I’ve also got a medical emergency kit with plasters and paracetamol under the saddle.

The panniers weigh nine kilos, the painting things another seven kilos, charger and day bag add another five; and then there’s me. That’s a total of over 90 kilos on this bicycle. Ride safely, Mr Mallett. Don’t come home dead.

We get out Mrs Mallett’s bike and our little group sets off through the village to Holy Trinity Church, where I’m surprised to find ten people waiting in the drizzle to send me on my way and looking forward to getting a cuppa after I’ve left (so make it quick, Timmy). Nick the Vic wants to say a little prayer for me. ‘I can do better than the bishop!’ he begins. ‘Be your guide at the crossroads, strength in your weariness, defence against dangers, shelter on the way, a comforter in discouragements and firmness in your intentions.’ Nothing about being a help with any bike issues. I go off singing ‘It’s a long way to Santiago . . .’, detour around people on the path past the yew trees and swing out through the gravestones.

There are four of us for the first mile: Mrs Mallett, Terry (videoing us), Stevie my companion for three days, to make sure I get safely to France, and me at the front with the wind in my face as we cross the wild and lovely common and ride along to Boulter's Lock on the River Thames in Maidenhead. Everyone knows how I like to stop at every opportunity and here's a chance to see the new footbridge, the swans and the instructions in English, Polish and Romanian: 'Please don't jump in the river'. Stevie has a little gift for me, a hip flask engraved 'Timmy – Home to Santiago 2018 *Buen Viaje*'. We've been friends for 30 years, since he was my cameraman on *Wacaday* at TV-am. You can imagine the sort of wacky nonsense he is used to seeing. Originally from the sparkling city of Dundee, Stevie's married to Lorraine Kelly on the telly, we play five-a-side football together with the Wanderers and we are part of a group of bike pals who like to go exploring on two wheels. 'I'll come with you for the first few days and keep an eye on you,' he says. Half a mile later my chain snaps. Fat lot of good, that blessing from the vicar! Both bishop and priest's blessings lasted only as far as the parish boundary.

Statistics say that you are most likely to have an accident within five miles of home. The drizzle is coming down and I've done barely a mile of my adventure. I'm standing by the bike with a broken chain, not quite sure what to do. Mrs Mallett offers to go home and get the car and bike rack, just in case. Terry helpfully takes photos as I stand forlorn on the roadside and make a call to Paul at Flat Harry's Cyclery.

'How are you getting on?' he asks.

I tell him.

Howls of laughter down the phone. 'OK, give me a few minutes.' And God bless him, he's my Good Samaritan and drives out to fit a new link in the chain.

Ian the photographer from the paper turns up too, grinning delightedly. What a scoop! Mallett looking pathetic with a broken chain and going nowhere. Tony Prince, radio's Royal Ruler, likewise says, 'What a great story for my show!'

I'm not a lot of help here. I had a very good lesson on how to fix a chain only last week from mobile bike man Rich. But embarrassingly I keep quiet and watch as someone else puts it together with ease. 'That should do you,' says Paul, which doesn't really sound as reassuring as it might do.

'What do you mean – should?' Oh no, that's something else to worry about. I've been given stern words by my family. 'Keep off main roads. Don't do anything foolish, look after yourself and be aware of your surroundings . . .'

I've recently been filming a fun segment for *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* and there were a bunch of household names gathered to do their part. Over lunch in the green room, the subject of my cycling the Camino cropped up. Gloria Hunniford, Alan Shearer, Noel Edmonds, Chris Moyles, Gareth Malone, Judy Murray . . . they looked at me in amazement and offered genuine messages of support and encouragement. The idea of raising awareness on reaching your potential started to resonate. A couple of people suggested my adventure would make a great TV series, but I'm not disappointed that there aren't TV cameras following me. This is a personal journey to be shared only with those who choose to follow it. Right now, I know TV would have loved it. Talk about a dramatic start.

Messages have come from lots of friends. Like Professor Brian Cox, one of my original Timmy helpers on the radio, whom I've known since he was 17. His happy smiling support is very welcome. Bear Grylls, the adventurer, knows what it takes to look after yourself; actress Wendy Craig is aware of the importance of being prepared to have a go, and offers to come along

and sit on the panniers! My great friend, Michaela Strachan, reminds me how we rode the London to Brighton cycle ride over 30 years ago and that this will be tougher. Hmmm, I remember that day and how I was knocked off my bike and got a buckled wheel. She also offers this advice: 'Go with a smile on your face and love in your heart . . .' Nothing about a poncho for the rain, and a spare chain.

We've arranged to say farewell to home at the local paper next to the football ground, and an hour or so later than expected, they give us a cup of tea and wave me off. Mrs Mallett and I have a rather public kiss goodbye – the sort all long-married couples would recognise. Lips crushed, bodies turning already halfway ready to head to the shops – or Santiago. We plan to meet in France in ten days' time. The day is rushing away and there are nearly 40 miles to ride to Basingstoke.

Stevie and I still manage to find some funny photo opportunities, at the old ford and on the flooded shortcut that is really just a muddy track leading to an even muddier lake. And we get a shot outside El Camino's restaurant in Crowthorne – a fitting name for my Camino adventure.

I'm new to following the dotted-line route on my GPS, but I know the route . . . I think. Just in case, I've brought my trusty old Ordnance Survey map of the area. But I don't expect to find the Roman road under water, deluged by the Beast from the East, which has brought widespread snow and blizzards, heavy rain, floods and unusually utterly low temperatures across Britain and northern Europe. This means a diversion. And the map isn't quite up to date, so I ditch it with disdain. The young woman in the garden centre café runs out to hand it to me. 'No thanks, I don't really need it.' Mistake, Mallett. Should have kept hold of the thing . . .

It ought to be an easy ride, but it's an absolute stinker. My

sense of direction seems to have evaporated; I don't trust my technology, I haven't got a map, and I can't picture where we are and how to find a nice safe cycle track. Somehow we get ourselves stuck on the fast and furious A30, after taking a turn the wrong way down a one-way road and rightly getting honked at. I've already broken my promise to friends and family not to ride on any main roads. My route on the Strava app looks as though we have no idea where we are going. Er, we don't. We take a detour through the woods along a footpath that quickly sinks into ankle-deep mud. By late afternoon I'm feeling anxious and annoyed. This isn't supposed to be such a difficult day. I planned a simple easy ride and I'm beginning to think the whole trip is madness. Maybe I'm affected by the enormity of what I'm trying to do; maybe the weight of expectation; maybe the grief. As Stevie reassuringly points out, 'Good job I'm with you; you are all over the place . . .' Perhaps it will be better tomorrow? I don't know. I'm sure I'm overloaded, and the saddle is uncomfortable. Why on earth am I attempting this? Surely it would make more sense to call it off now and go home?

Then I remember . . .

This is not a jolly jaunt.

It's not a holiday.

It's a pilgrimage with a purpose.

To reach my potential.

To make the most of every day.

To smile.

I'm staying the night with my cousin, Katy Cuz, and her lovely noisy family. 'It's Timmy in the toilet!' they cry. 'Bring the bike in, Cuz. Ah! No, don't. Where have you been? It's covered in mud. You're covered in mud. You're just a muddy mess!' I hose the bike, and thick clumps of glutinous cack swirl around my feet. I need a bath, and afterwards hand wash

my things – something I will do every night for the next two months.

They all look at me in delighted horror. Mud, mess, Mallett. They seem to go together. It's been an eventful first day. Like most beginnings when you think you're prepared but really you aren't.



Some days are memorable. Like the first day at school. Shirt and tie that Mum tied, which ended up around the back of my neck. Shorts, long grey socks and a blazer that had been big brother Paul's, so it was far too large. The three silver buttons looked brilliant and with my hands in the pockets I looked taller. Best of all, with the blazer open I could flick the jacket out from side to side and it made me look as if I was running faster. I whizzed around the playground and ran into my best friend Jeremy, because I was looking behind at the blazer to see how fast I was going. I fell over and started crying. The teacher came over to see what had happened. 'I didn't do anything!' said my best friend. I got a sticking plaster and it looked good. At three o'clock the infants came out and I had to wait 15 minutes for Paul and the juniors to finish so we could walk home together. Some big boys came out and said, 'You're too small to go to school. Bet you're only three!'

'I'm five, blockhead!'

Paul arrived and we met Mum. 'How was school?' she asked. 'Jeremy blobbed me, I fell over and got a plaster and I told the big boys I was five, blockhead!' It was a good first school day.

I'm glad the olden days have gone. They might make a nice story about growing up, but it's a whole lot better now. And there's colour too . . .

'Are you sure about this, Cuz? It's not like a *Wacaday* trip,' says Katy.

TV *Wacaday* trips are usually good fun – stressful, a bit, for the director: ‘Have we got all the shots? Have we been fair and funny?’ My job is to carry a range of colourful clothes that clash, lots of different shaped bright specs and the big Mallett’s Mallet in its special bag marked ‘Top Secret’, and think of as many fun gags as we can stick into each story. The hardest part is long days in the minibus, wondering if I’ll be accepted by the locals when I start dressing up and acting like Timmy Mallett. This Camino is not the same sort of trip . . . I think.

The pizza this evening is the best ever. We talk quietly about Martin, and how this journey really started in the far north-east of Scotland at his funeral a couple of days ago. Earlier, in the eulogy, we heard how Martin would unusually bless the parish priest. Mostly, we ask other people for encouragement. How often do we offer it? Brother Martin had some impressive gifts.

There had been the little task of boxing up his belongings: photo albums, CDs, cufflinks – things that we keep to remind ourselves of who we are and where we fit into our families and friends. I was glad that big brother Paul had sorted through Martin’s clothes – his collection of smart ties and shirt-sleeve holders; the suits and braces. There was a bundle of Martin Mallett name tags, the things that Mum sews into your clothes so you don’t lose them at school. ‘Do you want these?’ asked Paul and an idea started forming. I put them in my things to take on the Camino. I wondered if I could use them somehow to record the journey.

Katy and I put a name tag on the star in the little collection of memories on her kitchen shelf. It’s a handy reminder of why on earth I am attempting such a trip.