

Mammoth sponsored walk to raise Iona cash

WALKING anywhere has been a challenge for Bob Thomas in recent years – but he’s planning to pace 75 miles between Fareham and London.

Bob, a Reader from St John’s, Locks Heath, has an arthritic knee. But he wants to raise money for the Iona Community in Scotland. He’ll walk between St Columba Church in Fareham and St Columba Church in central London, in a week this June. He’ll walk for several miles each day with four other friends, aiming to raise £5,000.

Bob is a member of the Iona Community, which includes both those living in the abbey on the tiny island of Iona, and a dispersed community around the world who share its emphasis on justice and peace. The community aims to raise £2.7m to make the ancient abbey more accessible for visitors, especially those with mobility issues. It was rebuilt from ruins in the 1930s and now welcomes thousands of pilgrims from around the world, but its accommodation needs fully modernising.

“A friend suggested to me that there must be easier ways for someone with a mobility issue to raise some money,” said Bob. “But in a way, that’s exactly the point!”

“The Iona appeal is about making the abbey more accessible to those with restricted mobility,



Bob Thomas (left) is raising money to restore Iona Abbey

maintaining its original purpose of hospitality. The bedrooms and dining room are reached by ancient stone staircases, and the toilets and bathrooms aren’t

suitable for those with disabilities. It’s not very warm in winter, and so it’s hard for the community to be really welcoming. There have been piecemeal repairs since the 1930s, but it’s no longer fit for purpose.

“They have already raised £1.4m, so have started to install lifts and level floors. Phase 2 will involve doing away with the bunk beds, and improving the heating, which will allow the abbey to extend its opening hours into the winter.

“Plenty of people from our diocese, including me, have been spiritually refreshed by trips to Iona, or by meeting members of

the community elsewhere. This will make visits even more inclusive.”

His eight-day hike will start on June 3 at St Columba Church in Fareham, immediately after the morning service. The group will arrive at St Columba Church of Scotland Church in Knightsbridge on June 10, St Columba’s Day.

It is thought the Christian faith was first brought to Britain by an Irish monk now known as St Columba, who established a monastery on Iona in 563AD. The original wooden buildings were replaced by a stone abbey in the 13th century, which fell into ruins after the Reformation. The Rev George MacLeod rebuilt it in the 1930s and opened it again to pilgrims from all Christian denominations in 1938.

To book Bob to speak in your church or sponsor him for his walk, contact him via <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/BobThomas3>