

The challenge

Jack's mobile phone rang. It was his friend Mitchell.

'Where are you?' asked Mitchell.

'I'm at Pem's.'

'Is he standing on his head again?'

Jack looked at his grandfather. Pem's head was down on the floor. His legs were up the wall.

'Yes.'

Mitchell laughed. He knew Jack's grandfather well. Pem was nearly seventy but he was not an 'old man'. He ran a mile every morning and rode his bicycle to the shops. And every day he stood on his head for ten minutes.

'Do you want to meet me at Pem's?' asked Jack. 'We can go to the computer shop from here.'

Mitchell answered but Jack couldn't hear him well.

'I can't hear you,' Jack shouted.

His phone made a noise. Then it went dead.

'I've lost him,' said Jack.

He quickly sent a text message to Mitchell: *Meet at Pem's?*

Mitchell sent a text back to him: *C U in 20.*

'Mitchell will be here in twenty minutes,' Jack said to Pem. 'We're going to buy a new computer game – *Roman Wars.*'

Pem brought his feet to the ground and slowly stood up.

'You two boys!' he said. 'You're always sending a text or sitting in front of the computer.'

Jack sent another text to Mitchell: *Pem is complaining about us again.*

‘You don’t know much about the real world,’ complained Pem. ‘You only know about computer games and mobile phones. You can’t live without them.’

A text came back from Mitchell: *Computers again?*

‘I’ve walked for miles up and down this country with only a map to follow,’ said Pem. ‘I didn’t need modern technology. But young people today can’t live without it.’

Jack sent: *We can’t live without modern technology.*

Mitchell answered: *Yes, we can.*

Jack showed Mitchell’s answer to Pem.

‘Tell him “No, you can’t”,’ said Pem. ‘In this modern world everybody wants to be safe all the time. You can’t leave your house without sending a text or asking Google for help.’

Jack sent the text, and Mitchell sent back: *Yes, we can.*

‘Prove it,’ said Pem.

Jack sent: *Prove it.*

Mitchell sent back: *Tell P to give us a challenge and we’ll do it – without technology.*

Jack laughed and showed the text to his grandfather.

‘A challenge,’ Pem said. ‘What a good idea!’

‘Mitchell’s only joking, Pem.’

But Pem didn’t listen. ‘You’ve got spring holidays soon, haven’t you? You can go then.’

‘Go where?’ said Jack.

But his grandfather didn’t answer. He went to an old desk in the corner of the room. On top of it were lots of books and old maps.

‘Now, let’s see,’ he said. ‘You need a really good challenge.’

He looked at one map. Then he looked at another one. ‘Yes!’ he said. ‘Come and look, Jack.’

He opened a map and put it on the desk.





‘You can “walk the wall”,’ said Pem with a smile.

‘What?’ said Jack.

‘Hadrian’s Wall. Look.’ Pem pointed at the map. ‘You can follow Hadrian’s Wall from east to west – all the way across the country.’

Jack looked at the map. ‘Hadrian’s Wall. We learned about it at school. The Roman army built it, didn’t they?’

‘Yes. In the year 122, Hadrian was the Roman emperor. People from the north attacked the Romans in the south. Hadrian wanted to stop them. So his men built a big, long wall. It was nearly ten feet wide and twenty feet high. A lot of it is gone now, but some of it is still there. And there are good ruins to see here and here.’ Pem pointed to two places on the map. ‘Chesters and Housesteads were Roman forts.’

Mitchell arrived and came in the back door.

‘Ah, Mitchell! You wanted a challenge,’ said Pem. ‘Here it is!’ He showed the map to Mitchell.

‘What’s this? Hadrian’s Wall?’ said Mitchell.

‘He wants us to walk all the way along the wall, from start to finish,’ said Jack.

‘That’s the challenge,’ smiled Pem.

‘What?’ said Mitchell. ‘But I was only joking!’

‘Oh. Can’t you do it?’ asked Pem.

‘We *can*,’ said Mitchell. ‘We can do it easily. But we don’t *want* to do it.’

‘Oh,’ said Pem. ‘Oh. I see. Yes. I understand. You’re scared.’ He put the map down. ‘Yes, maybe you’re right. Maybe it’s dangerous. You’re not very strong.’

‘Hey!’ said Jack.

‘I can walk all day!’ said Mitchell.

‘But you don’t walk very much at home,’ said Pem. ‘Maybe you can’t do it.’

‘Yes, we can,’ said Jack quickly. ‘We’ll prove it to you, won’t we, Mitchell?’

‘Oh yes, it’ll be easy,’ said Mitchell. ‘Easy. We’ll just follow this path.’ He pointed at a line on the map.

‘So...you’ll do it?’ asked Pem.

‘We’ll do it,’ said the boys.

‘Without technology?’

‘Without technology.’

Jack looked at the map again. He smiled at Mitchell. ‘We’re going to “walk the wall”,’ he said. Then he said to Pem, ‘How long is it?’

‘Seventy-three miles,’ said Pem. ‘You’ll have to walk for eight days.’ He hit Mitchell on the back. ‘Easy!’

