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The Practicalities of Pilgrimage

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Abstract: *The Canterbury Tales* is one of the best-known and most accessible accounts of late medieval pilgrimage for modern English readers.[1] Although Chaucer's poem is fictional, it alludes to some realistic aspects of travel during the period, such as the description of the characters' equipment, their use of hostels, and the speed at which they travel.[2] However, most of the poem dwells on the relationships between the fictional pilgrims and their storytelling contests. It provides little concrete information about the everyday aspects of medieval travel. This is representative of most medieval literature on pilgrimage, which is far more focused on the spiritual and literary representation of these journeys. This paper will describe an experimental archeology project that was undertaken with the goal of understanding the day-to-day aspects of medieval travel. This re-creation provided important viewpoints and data on the practicalities and difficulties of 14th-century travel and pilgrimage. Though the historical gear used during the re-creation proved effective, carrying food and supplies and camping outdoors added difficulty that made clear the need for a network of inns, hostels, and social customs to support these journeys.

Introduction

The Canterbury Tales is one of the best-known and most accessible accounts of late medieval pilgrimage for modern English readers.[3] Although Chaucer's poem is fictional, it alludes to some realistic aspects of travel during the period, such as the description of the characters' equipment, their use of hostels, and the speed at which they travel.[4] However, most of the poem dwells on the relationships between the fictional pilgrims and their storytelling contests. It provides little concrete information about the everyday aspects of medieval travel. This is representative of most medieval literature on pilgrimage, which is far more focused on the spiritual and literary

[1] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London; Hambledon and London, 2000) XI.
[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex; New York: Penguin Books, 1977)4.
[3] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London; Hambledon and London, 2000) XI.
[4] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex; New York: Penguin Books, 1977)4.

representation of these journeys. Reading the pilgrimage literature of the 14th century raises many questions. How many miles did these pilgrims travel each day? What supplies did they carry for the journey? Is it difficult to travel the country with a sword or bow as several characters do, and why were these weapons favored? What was the lived experience of travel in the 14th century like? There are many accounts of medieval pilgrimage, both fictional and otherwise, yet the answers to many of the aforementioned questions remain vague. If we wish for a deeper understanding of the lived practice of pilgrimage, we must look again at our sources and turn to other methods of gaining knowledge. This paper will describe an experimental archeology project that was undertaken with the goal of answering these questions through replicating some of the practices of late medieval pilgrimages with a focus on practicalities such as baggage, footwear, and armament. The qualitative and quantitative findings, along with historical sources and methods from this project will be shared. This re-creation provided important viewpoints and data on the practicalities and difficulties of 14th-century travel and pilgrimage. Though the historical gear used during the re-creation proved effective, carrying food and supplies and camping outside added difficulty that made clear the need for a network of inns, hostels, and social customs to support these journeys.

Sources

This project focuses on English pilgrimage to Christian shrines in the 14th and 15th centuries. Therefore, medieval English texts from this period were the primary sources used for the project, although texts outside the period or geographic region were relied upon when sources from 14th and 15th century England could not be relied upon. These sources have a reciprocal relationship in experimental archeology. The texts inform the experiment, guiding authentic re-creation, whilst the experiment informs the interpretation of the sources. They are used to gather specific information about the practicalities of pilgrimage and travel that is essential for faithful re-creation. Of equal importance is that these sources provide further context in which to view the project as a whole. Below, I list three different sources that serve as examples for those used in this project: a literary source, a pilgrimage narrative, and a travel guide. Each source had individual merit within the re-creation.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*[5], though literary, provides some insight into the perception and practicalities of pilgrimage during the time period. . Details such as the garments and armament of the pilgrims, along with their leisurely rate of travel, 15 miles a day on horseback, were important for framing my own re-creation. The dynamics and attitudes towards pilgrimage represented in the text are interesting when considering the larger context around this kind of travel. The emphasis on storytelling proved essential for the analysis of my project. Illustrated manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* were important visual sources regarding the representation of a pilgrim's gear.

[5] Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*.

The Book of Margery Kempe[6] is an early 14th-century text dictated by the woman it is named after, the mystic and prolific pilgrim Margery Kempe. Like most medieval authors, Kempe is largely concerned with spiritual discussion and provides little practical information. Most of the practical information found in the book pertained to the difficulty of pilgrimage, such as the dangers of the road and the dynamics between groups of pilgrims.

The Itineraries of William Wey[7] is the travel narrative and pilgrimage guide of the 15th-century bishop William Wey and was the most helpful source for this project. The bishop traveled across Europe, speaking of what he saw and providing practical advice for pilgrims on where to go, what to bring, and how to pay for the pilgrimage . His suggested supply lists were instrumental to this project.

My project also drew from a variety of secondary sources and scholarship. Though much academic work has focused on the meaning and social context of pilgrimage, several books and articles also proved very useful in providing information and pointing towards useful primary sources on the practical matters related to pilgrimage. These included Jean Verdon's *Travel in the Middle Ages*[8] and Diana Webb's *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*[9], alongside the work of scholars such as Dee Dyas[10] and Francis Davey[11].To figure out what specific items were required for the re-creation, I relied on secondary works such as *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant*[12], *Record of the Medieval Sword*[13], and *Stepping Through Time*[14], along with manuscript images in books like *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler.*[15]

Methods

This re-creation consisted of a five-day journey undertaken by four volunteers, including the author, using medieval travel equipment. Participants traveled on foot each day and camped outdoors in the evening. The medieval travel used in the project, included period shoes, baggage, food, arms, "cloak tents," and clothing. There was some variation in gear, which will be described in detail later in this paper. Volunteers were interviewed using a set list of questions at the end of each day. The questions elicited both qualitative information, asking for the volunteers' descriptions of their experience, as well as quantitative data, asking them to rank certain pieces of equipment on a difficulty scale of one to ten. A limited number of people were willing to participate in a lengthy experiment and so volunteers were recruited from the University of Minnesota History Club,

[6] Margery Kempeee, *The Book of Margery Kempeee*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1985).
[7] William Way, trans. Francis Davey, *The Itineraries of William Wey*, Illustrated edition (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2010).
[8] Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages,* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).
[9] Webb, *Pilgrimage*.
[10] Dee Dyas, *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage: Christianity, Holy Places and Sensory Experience*, Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travel and Tourism (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2021).
[11] Davey Francis, *Richard of Lincoln : A Medieval Doctor Travels to Jerusalem* (Exeter: Azure Publications, 2013).
[12] Sarah Thursfield, *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments, 1100-1480*, 2nd edition, revised and expanded. (Costume & Fashion Press/QSM, 2015).
[13] Ewart Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*, Reprint edition (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991).
[14] Olaf Goubitz, *Stepping through Time: Archaeological Footwear from Prehistoric Times until 1800* (Zwolle [Netherlands]: Stichting Promotie Archeologie, 2001).
[15] Herbert Schmidt and Rolf Fabricius Warming, *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler* (Bregenz: sofa-books, 2022).

The Center for Blade Arts and the authors family.

Due to the constraints of finances and time, the re-creation was completed on a section of the Superior Hiking Trail in northern Minnesota instead of one of the still-existing pilgrimage routes in Europe. The trail is 250 miles of track along the coast of Lake Superior, though my project did not cover the entirety of its length. In his late 13th century work, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, Philippe de Beaumanoir categorized the five kinds of medieval roads. The Superior Hiking Trail is a "Sentier" path as it is less than 1.2 meters wide.[16] This was the smallest kind of medieval road, and most pilgrims could have expected a broader path. Luckily, no carts needed to pass upon it, so it was not too great an obstacle. In general, the trail was very suitable for the completion of the project. Its length and changing terrain allowed for a feeling of progression, which was important for the re-creation. The relative isolation of the trail and its designation as an area for hunting allowed us to carry replica weapons without interference from locals or law enforcement. Along the trail were first-come, first-serve campsites where participants could spend the night and continue hiking the next day. The availability of shared campsites on this trail was a particular benefit for this re-creation. A pilgrim was certain to meet all sorts of people while staying in inns and hostels on the road. The fact that participants needed to share campsites along the Superior Trail replicated this experience to a certain extent, by bringing participants into contact with a variety of strangers along the journey. The section of the trail used for the re-creation was far more mountainous than initially expected, as it consisted of steep rocky switchbacks in and out of wooded river gorges. Due to this unforeseen challenge, the participants' pace was limited to around seven miles a day.

The mileage of medieval pilgrims varied wildly, as well as the terrain that they crossed. There are records of some individuals such as John Paston covering as many as 22 miles a day on foot while on pilgrimage.[17] Most pilgrims did not walk at such an aggressive pace, with the average speed being two to three miles per hour.[18] In the *Canterbury Tales*, the pilgrims are represented as having covered 15 miles in a day while on horseback. Most pilgrimages consisted of an overnight journey, but the total distance could vary from a few days to years of travel.[19] The sort of terrain pilgrims could cover could be equally diverse, from the rolling hills and open fields of England to the mountains of the Alps and the deserts of the Outremer. Once again, due to time and budget, my pilgrimage consisted of a shorter journey, only five days of travel, which is roughly equivalent to a pilgrimage taken to a local shrine. As noted earlier, the route for this re-creation crossed a variety of terrains, from rocky switch-backing river gorges and dense forests to grassy roadsides and the pebble beaches of Lake Superior. Given the nature of the terrain available for this re-creation, the pace of our participants was likely closer to that of pilgrimages across the mountains of Snowdonia

[16] Philippe de Beaumanoir, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis,* cited in Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003)25.

[17] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage,* 223.
[18] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage,* 222.
[19] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage,* XII.

or the Pennines in Britain than the pilgrimages of southern England.

It is important to note that while our re-creation provided data about pilgrimages on foot, many pilgrimages were completed on the backs of horses or mules. A second project involving such mounts would reveal additional information about the practicalities of that sort of travel. That said, it was not uncommon for pilgrims to travel by foot. The poorest members of society often could not afford any other means, and occasionally the road conditions may have prevented the use of mounts.[20]Walking also increased the penitential nature of the pilgrimage and could be essential for achieving its spiritual end.[21]

Each evening, participants camped at one of the trail hiking campsites along the Superior Hiking Trail. Most pilgrims would not have camped out in the open in this fashion, instead staying at hostels and inns or being put up in the homes of locals.[22] While less common, it was not unheard of for people to sleep out in the open, and some experienced travelers considered it an important skill. For example, one 15th-century poet remarked, "Whoever has not slept in wind and rain / he is not a worthy companion."[23] Given the lack of medieval hostels, inns, and homes on the Lake Superior hiking trail, camping out of doors represented a more faithful re-creation experience with related chores and material realities, for example, gathering firewood and water, cooking over a fire, and sleeping on the ground This experience also allowed participants to preserve focus on the time period rather than facing the distraction of the amenities available in modern hotels.

Another important aspect of the medieval pilgrimage was storytelling. The most famous example is, naturally, the Canterbury Tales, but storytelling also appears in all sorts of pilgrimage literature. For example, Margery Kempe escapes some of her worst predicaments along her pilgrimage by telling stories.[24] The stories she tells are also noted as a way to recognize her as an experienced pilgrim. To emulate this important practice, each volunteer pilgrim told one story a day during the re-creation.

Results[25]

The rest of this paper will be dedicated to the results of the project and my conclusions based on them. The results will be divided by topic,

In the next section of this paper, historical equipment included in the re-creation will be described along with a discussion of why each piece of equipment was important to understanding the practice of 14th-century travel and what sources were used in choosing them. I will go on to give a synopsis of the equipment's performance and what was learned over the course of the journey.

[20] Jean Verdon, *Travel,*30.
[21] Dee Dyas, *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage,*30.
[22] Jean Verdon, *Travel,*97.
[23] Jean Verdon, *Travel,*117.
[24] Kempeee, *The Book of Margery Kempeee*,136.
[25] One of the participants injured his knee while on the journey and had to depart early. Though this may have impacted the results of the project, they were still able to complete several days of travel, and adjustments were made to make sure that they had experience with all of the gear and as much data was collected as possible. Their injury is a datapoint within itself, attesting to the rigors of 14th-century travel on foot.

This will be a summary of the results. If you are interested in hearing from the volunteers individually their interviews have been video documented and posted on the YouTube channel The Minnesota Medievalist.[26]

Footwear

Footwear was one of the most important pieces of equipment for this re-creation. Though some pilgrims traveled without shoes to increase the discomfort and, in turn, the spirituality of their pilgrimage, most would have worn the best traveling shoes they had available. The average Medieval shoe was soft-soled and made of leather, very different from the shoes of the modern era.[27] The shoes purchased for this re-creation were from Boots by Bohemond, a company that creates period-accurate shoes for reenactment. These shoes were based on a 14th-century example from Olaf Goubitz's *Stepping Through Time*.[28]

One of the most unexpected results of the project was the success of the medieval footwear on the trail. I expected the soft-sold medieval shoes to make walking far more difficult, but in fact, on natural surfaces, the shoes performed surprisingly well. Their soft-soled nature allowed for a better grip on dirt, rocks, and roots. Most notably, there were no blisters acquired by any of the volunteers over the course of the journey when participants have acquired many blisters during previous projects using modern footwear. Medieval people spent the majority of their time outdoors and so it is logical that their shoes were built for this kind of terrain. That being said, the journey was not without some foot-related hardships. Walking could be somewhat painful on parts of the trail that were crisscrossed by innumerable hard roots or many large, sharp rocks. One volunteer also had a seam rip on his shoe during the last day of travel, though this did not cause too much of an inconvenience and could have been easily repaired. It is important to note that those who suffered the most from medieval footwear were those who were least used to wearing it or walking barefoot. Medieval people would have been far more accustomed to this than any of the participants in this study and, therefore, would have been even more comfortable in these shoes.

Clothing/Tents

Due to a lack of funding, there was some variation in clothing from volunteer to volunteer. Some participants wore full 14th-century undergarments, hose, tunic, and doublet, while others wore clothing from later centuries or had to mix period-appropriate clothing with modern gear. What was constant was that every volunteer was provided with a circle cloak, a common form of medieval garment ubiquitous in the period and beyond that could be worn around the shoulders.[29] These cloaks were accompanied by a stick and stakes, which could be used to turn the cloak

[26] "The Minnesota Medievalist," YouTube, accessed May 16, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuD0LbzaD7arvKTaKr91Ilg.

[27] One volunteer did walk barefoot for a time and did not find it overly difficult. That being said, he swiftly redonned his shoes upon reaching rockier terrain.

[28] Olaf Goubitz, *Stepping through Time,*28.

[29] Sarah Thursfeild. *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments, 1100-1480*. 2nd edition, Revised and Expanded. Costume & Fashion Press/QSM, 2015.

into an impromptu version of the medieval cone tent, a small, simple form of shelter.[30]

The main result related to this piece of equipment is that it worked better as a cloak than as a tent. Due to the cramped nature and discomfort of sleeping in the cloak tent, participants ceased to use them as tents and would sleep on the ground or against trees wrapped in the cloak after the first night. The journey was relatively rain-free, and use may have been different if this had not been the case. In that situation, the advantage of the tent would have greatly increased. What was made clear during the re-creation was the importance and versatility of the cloak. This garment served as clothing, a blanket, a tarp, and a tent. For something so relatively simple to make, it is easy to see why such a piece of clothing was popular for thousands of years. The cloak would be essential gear for any 14th-century traveler.

Though most of the volunteers did not have access to full reenactment-grade 14th-century clothing, the author did. One important learning moment from the experience of traveling in medieval clothes was an understanding of the system of undergarments that medieval fashion operated within. Washing clothes during this period was time-consuming and potentially damaging to the garment. Because of this, for the most part, only undergarments were washed, and then infrequently.[31] Over the course of the project, the author came to understand how this system works, having two linen shirts available on the trip, which were worn under a doublet or tunic. After becoming drenched in sweat from the day's travel, the first shirt could be hung out to dry on a tree overnight while the other was donned for the evening. Even though this shirt was not washed, it was still refreshing to have a change of dry clothes at the end of the day. This was important for understanding how premodern people felt clean in an era of limited clothing and washing capability, particularly during the rigors of travel.

Baggage

In a project concerned with the practicalities of medieval travel, it was important for baggage to be period accurate. The kind of baggage available directly impacted the experience of travel and pilgrimage during the period. Because of this, we used what is known as a sausage bag. Sausage bags are large leather sacks with one strap to be swung over the shoulder and a drawstring for closure at the top. The use of these bags is well attested by manuscript evidence.[32] They seem to have been a common means of carrying equipment on a personal level. Each volunteer also had a canvas sack, which would be slung over the shoulder on the stick used as a tent pole, and various small bags that could be hung from the waist to store odds and ends. Almost all medieval people would have carried similar purses that served the same purpose.[33]

[30] Susan, Snyder. *Past Tents: The Way We Camped*. Vol. no. 51. Berkeley, Calif: Bancroft Library, University of California, 2006.
[31] Sarah Thursfeild. *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments, 1100-1480*. 2nd edition, Revised and Expanded. Costume & Fashion Press/QSM, 2015.
[32] Goubitz, *Purses in Pieces,* 79.
[33] Goubitz, *Purses in Pieces,* 5.

Participants agreed that the greatest challenge of the journey by far was carrying the baggage. Though the sausage bags worked well enough, they were not nearly as efficient in distributing weight as a modern backpack. Though the burden decreased each day as we ate through our food supplies, and thus had less bulk and weight to carry, it was still significant and quite wearying over the course of many miles. Most 14th-century pilgrims would not have had to carry such weight, having access to saddlebags or buying most of their supplies along the way. It is important to note how not having this support made the journey and any spiritual contemplation far more difficult.

Arms

During the medieval era, pilgrimage and travel were risky. The constant concern about bandits camping in woods along the road is present in many of the sources discussing travel.[34] Moreover, these fears were not unfounded, and we have many accounts of individuals robbed while on pilgrimage.[35] Pilgrims took precautions to stay safe, including traveling in groups and going armed on their pilgrimages. Even if their weapons were not used, merely the threat that they could be was a great comfort. This is illustrated by the tale of Platter, a fifteen-year-old traveler on his journey from Basel to Montpellier. While staying in a remote inn, he felt the unfriendly gaze of several shady individuals who, after staring at him and his companions' weapons for some time, decided to leave them be.[36] The presence of weapons on pilgrimage is well attested, but the weapons that 14th-century pilgrimages brought with them were not the same as those they brought to war. Within our texts, two weapons are most associated with the English pilgrim of the 14th century: the long bow and the sword and buckler. This project was designed to address the question of whether these weapons were brought on pilgrimage due to the ease of their travel or for other societal or economic reasons. To answer this question, four weapon sets were carried during this re-creation, two associated with pilgrimage and two associated with war.

At the end of each day, volunteers were asked to rank the difficulty of traveling with the weapon they were carrying on a scale of one to ten. At the end of the project, they were asked to rank the weapons from easiest to hardest (1st through 4th). The charts below show the results of the re-creation.

As you can see, opinions about the challenge of various arms varied widely amongst participants. It is clear that personal preference and circumstance greatly affected which weapon the individual volunteer considered the easiest to carry. In addition, all volunteers agreed that the weapons paled in difficulty when compared to the weight of carrying baggage and food. Still, there was much to be learned about the experience of carrying the individual weapons, which will be discussed below.

The Longbow

The longbow was a weapon of war, but its presence on English pilgrimages is well-attested. It appears in the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* as one of the many weapons

[34] Webb, *Pilgrimage,*222.
[35] Dee Dyas, *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage,*171.
[36] Jean Verdon, *Travel,*114.

carried by the yeoman.[37] It is also noted in *The Book of Margery Kempe* that her English companions carry long bows with them during their pilgrimage for protection.[38] For the re-creation, participants carried a replica bowstave along with its string and a quiver of arrows.

Carrying the bowstave itself was not a difficult task. The bow was relatively light and could be easily rested upon the shoulder. Where the difficulty emerged was in managing the quiver and bow string. Our quiver was low-quality, and there were several instances of arrows falling out of it before we made some adjustments. The bowstring was also a difficulty, and more than once, we had to retrace our steps to find it after it had been dropped along the trail. The main question of the long bow as a traveling weapon was not the difficulty of carrying it but if one would have been able to string it fast enough to use it against an attacker along the road. A question for another project.

The Sword and Buckler

The sword and buckler are the other weapon set most commonly associated with pilgrims and travelers of the 14th century. This set consists of a one-handed sword and a small shield worn together on a belt. Both the Yeoman and the Miller are noted as carrying a sword and buckler in the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, and the portraits in the Ellesmere manuscript depict even more pilgrims so armed.[39] Its presence as a traveler's weapon is also well attested in manuscript images of the time, where it is often seen on the hip of people departing for journeys.[40] The first surviving European sword-fighting manuscript is a treatise on fighting with the sword and buckler. It is important to note that the manuscript does not depict knights or other soldiers using the weapon set only monks and women.[41] Though there is much debate over the purpose of this manuscript, it is interesting that the figures it depicts using the sword and buckler are traditionally noncombatants, which may allude to its use as a weapon for self-defense as well as a piece of battlefield kit. For this re-creation, participants carried a replica of a 14th-century arming sword[42] produced by Arms and Armor, along with a replica of a wooden buckler made by Historical European Martial Arts scholar Sam Storkpost based on an example in *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler.*[43]

I was particularly interested in the sword and buckler because it is the most commonly referenced traveler's weapon for the time period. The benefit of a buckler is that the small shield provides significantly increased protection for relatively little additional weight. This played out more or less as expected, with the buckler easily hanging from a strap around the scabbard or the handle of the sword. One of the most interesting experiences took place while strapping the configuration. A volunteer who had no knowledge of how to wear a sword and buckler was given the sword in its scabbard, the

[37] Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*,6.
[38] Kempeee, *The Book of Margery Kempeee*,79.
[39] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*,6.The Ellesmere Manuscript, Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, MS EL 26 C 9
[40] Schmidt and Warming, *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler*,53.
[41] Jeffrey L. Forgeng, ed., *The Medieval Art of Swordsmanship: Royal Armouries MS I.33*, Illustrated edition (Leeds: Royal Armouries, 2018).
[42] Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*.
[43] Schmidt and Warming, *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler*,50.

buckler, and a strap and, within three minutes, had recreated the three most common strappings seen in visual sources. This includes strapping the buckler around the scabbard, strapping it on the handle of the sword, and sliding the buckler up the scabbard through its handle.[44] This was particularly fascinating as it demonstrated how these were the most intuitive methods of wearing this weapon set and, hence, were the most popular during the period.

The Long Sword

Though Medieval people did not explicitly categorize weapons as for war or self-defense, the long sword is a more specialized tool with a decidedly military application.[45] This longer, two-handed sword became popular in the 14th century.[46] Though it can be difficult to tell due to the imprecise nature of medieval terminology, the long sword does not seem to be associated with pilgrimage and travel in the same way that the sword and buckler are and so serves as a counterpoint to it. The long sword that we carried with us for our journey was a replica of a find from the 1350s produced by Arms and Armor.[47]

The long sword was relatively easy to carry and weighed even less than the combined sword and buckler. The difficulty associated with this weapon was its tendency to swing and catch on things. This issue could be fixed by placing a hand on the sword. However, when both hands were occupied, the long sword could become rather cumbersome and a nuisance.

The Lance

The lance or spear has been a ubiquitous weapon of war for nearly all of human history.[48] Though spears could serve many purposes, the one we chose was explicitly a war lance. It was around ten feet long and could be used either while on foot or on horseback. The version used for our re-creation was capped with a rubber head for legal reasons, though the weight difference would not have been too significant. The lance is not associated with pilgrims or travelers but is very prominent in depictions of war.[49]

The lance was by far the largest weapon we carried. It could be quite cumbersome when navigating particularly dense patches of forest. That said, it did not get tangled as much as originally expected, and the longer it was carried, the easier it became as one learned to balance it properly on the shoulder or use it as a walking stick on steep parts of the trail. This utility extended broadly beyond a mere weapon or walking stick, and participants found themselves using it for many purposes over the course of the journey.

Food

Since participants did not have access to the inns and hostels that most medieval travelers would have relied upon for their sustenance

[44] Schmidt and Warming, *The Medieval and Renaissance Buckler*,.
[45] Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*.
[46] Oakeshott, R. Ewart. *The Sword in the Age of Chivalry.* (New York: Praeger, 1965).
[47] Ewart Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*, Reprint edition (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991).
[48] Charles Boutell. *Arms and Armor in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. M.P. Lacombe. (Combined Books, 1996).
[49] Martin Dougherty. *The Medieval Warrior: Weapons, Technology and Fighting Techniques AD 1000-1500.* (Amber Books, 2008).

along the journey, volunteer pilgrims needed to carry their own food. Luckily, William Way provides a surprisingly detailed list of foods to carry while on a pilgrimage, including bread, cheese, eggs, fruit, wine, bacon, and various spices.[50] He also recommends bringing several live chickens for fresh eggs. Although unable to bring along live chickens on the re-creation, all the food included on the journey would have been accessible to medieval pilgrims. Breakfast consisted of oatmeal with cinnamon, lunch included bread, cheese, sausage, and an apple, while for dinner, freeze-dried grain-based stews represented meals purchased at inns or from locals. This was supplemented by dried meat and fruit, along with root vegetables. Water was accessed via the many streams that crossed the trail and Lake Superior itself. To safely take advantage of this natural resource, water filters had to be included amongst our gear.

Participants ate well throughout the re-creation and never truly went hungry. The main difficulty was transporting our food and the tools necessary to prepare it. Again, this is a difficulty that most pilgrims would have been able to avoid by staying at inns and hostels along the way. The necessity of carrying our own food greatly increased the difficulty of the journey.

Miscellaneous

William Wey was a vital source for this section of the project, providing important information on the odds and ends necessary to complete a pilgrimage. He notes the importance of bringing pots and pans, and the re-creation was true to this advice.[51] A kettle and several small bowls and cups were brought to prepare and eat our food, which needed to be carried alongside the rest of our baggage. Wey also instructs the traveler to ensure they are well prepared with bedding. Each participant had a simple mat and a single pillow, which were carried in sacks over our shoulders. Cloaks were used for blankets. Several modern pieces of equipment were required for safety reasons and data collection. These included cell phones with associated batteries and filters to ensure water was safe for drinking.

The miscellaneous equipment necessary for the journey added to the burden, but overall, participants managed this relatively well.

Storytelling

Story telling was a crucial part of pilgrimage. The benefit of storytelling to travel is clear: it provides entertainment and a way to make the long hours of walking pass quicker. It was particularly interesting to observe the way in which stories permeated the journey, even when they were not shared as part of the designated story-sharing section of the day. The volunteers were constantly framing the re-creation in terms of the stories familiar to them, much as medieval people would have framed their journeys in the context of saint's lives and the tales from the Bible. Though these stories were not the same, our associations having changed over the last 600 years, they served much the same purpose: giving the journey a context, model, and sense of purpose and binding the travelers together into a shared understanding of what it means to travel. For pilgrimage, stories and storytelling were far more than a mere means of entertainment, but a

[50] Wey, *The Itineraries*,5.

[51] Wey, *The Itineraries*,5.

mindset through which travel and adventure were viewed by participants, both in the past and present.

Conclusion

The results of this project were wide-ranging and varied, yet some important conclusions can be drawn from them. Though the gear available to 14th century pilgrims was hearty and effective, an in-depth infrastructure was necessary to make pilgrimage and travel viable for most people. In the 14th century, pilgrims would have had a plethora of options when it came to places to spend the night and acquire new supplies. These included hostels, inns, monasteries, and common homes. Participants felt the lack of these supports keenly along the journey. Though there was little consensus amongst the volunteers about many parts of the project, all agreed that the most difficult part of the re-creation was carrying the necessary food and supplies. The difficulty of this task reduced our pace and impeded any feeling of reflection or relaxation. Our journey was a short one, and many pilgrimages lasted for weeks, months, or years, over which these difficulties would have become far more pronounced. With this in mind, it is easy to understand the medieval Christian practice of allowing any traveler one night's rest and a meal, as well as the necessity of hostels and inns for supporting pilgrimages.[52]

Surprisingly, it was not the equipment that made the 14th-century pilgrims' journey difficult. The gear performed well, proving to be hardy and handy. The comfort and practicality of 14th-century shoes, clothing, and cloaks were notable. In a period with limited material culture, when compared to our own, practicality and versatility were essential, and this is evident in the objects they produced. Though adjusting to this gear did present difficulties (the poor performance of our cloak-made tents, for example), this would have been lessened by the greater familiarity 14th-century travelers had with their use.

Regarding arms, though the study's quantitative data is inconclusive, there was much to be learned qualitatively. In general, it seems that though the weapons associated with pilgrimage had a slight edge over their military counterparts regarding ease of carry, personal preference and personal experience had a large role in determining the outcome. This opens up an interesting question: why are the sword and buckler and long bow associated with pilgrims in 14th-century sources if not for their ease of travel? For this, we must look to more traditional history. One answer is economical; the sword and buckler were cheaper weapons and associated with lower-class characters, while the longbow was less expensive than the steel longsword, which required quality steel and a skilled blacksmith to make.[53] Another is social; it is important to consider the innumerable laws and customs regulating weapon carrying in 14th century England and the effect this might have on those who are traveling through many counties and townships.[54] Carrying a sword may have been viewed as self-defense, while a polearm like a spear was a weapon of war, giving pause to those you might meet along the road

[52] Jean Verdon, *Travel,*109.
[53] Oakeshott, *Records of the Medieval Sword*.
[54] Public Record Office. *Calendar of Close Rolls Richard II: Volume 5 - 1392-1396*. TannerRitchie Publishing, n.d.

and perhaps sending a dangerous message. On the other hand, the long bow may have found its way into the English pilgrim's baggage simply because it was what they knew how to use. In the latter half of the 14th century, it was the law of England that each and every man between the ages of sixteen and sixty had to practice with his longbow every Sunday and on holidays.[55] It is only reasonable to assume that the pilgrim would have brought with them the weapon with which they were most comfortable.

Finally, though this project was primarily focused on the practicalities of pilgrimage, it is also important to address its spiritual and social nature. Though participants did not have the opportunity to visit any holy sites, the journey had a spiritual aspect, nonetheless. In her book Pilgrimage in Medieval England, Diana Webb discusses the centrality of nature for many pilgrimage sites.[56] This was felt keenly by participants during this journey. Whether it was the view of Lake Superior, rivers cutting their way through the Sawtooth Mountains, the stars, and moon at night, or mist shrouding the famous Tombolo Island, there were many times when the group stopped to appreciate the majesty and beauty of the nature that surrounded them. This gave a spiritual element to the journey, even if it was not the same as that which medieval pilgrims would have felt. This sentiment is perhaps best expressed in the following traveler's saying, "Red night and white morning / are the joy of the pilgrim."[57] Nature is often the greatest joy of the traveler. Despite the difficulties of the trail, there was still a great deal of reflection, often taking place as participants lay awake at night, weary from the day's journey.

A central appeal of the medieval pilgrimage was the social aspect, the opportunity to meet new people and grow closer to those already in your life. Like many medieval pilgrimages my traveling companions were drawn from my social network, friends' family and colleagues, many of whom had a shared passion for history. The journey deepened the relationships between the volunteers who participated in it, and by the end, participants felt that they knew everyone better. I learned much more about some of the volunteers in those five days than I had over the rest of our acquaintance, which has spanned years. Though these results are not objective or definitive, they are important to consider in studying 14th-century pilgrimage and both how and why premodern people undertook these difficult and often dangerous journeys. Pilgrimage had much the same appeal to the people in the past as it did for many of the volunteers that accompanied me on this re-creation. Medieval Pilgrims wished to deepen their spiritual connection to God, see new places and meet new people, tell stories, and have an adventure. These desires were deep, and their society provided the equipment and logistical support necessary for them to be fulfilled.

Difficulty Scores

[55] John France, "The English Longbow, War, and Administration," in *Journal of Medieval Military History: Volume XV: Strategies*, ed. Leif Inge Ree Petersen and Manuel Rojas Gabriel, vol. 15 (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 215–26.
[56] Webb, *Pilgrimage,*142.
[57] Verdon, *Travel*,118.

Volunteer	Sword&Buckler	Long Bow	Long Sword	Lance
A	2	1	2.5	4.5
B	3	7	4	4
C	3	2	5	3
D	6	6	4	7

Final Rankings (Easiest to Hardest)

Volunteer	Sword&Buckler	Long Bow	Long Sword	Lance
A	2nd	1st	3rd	4th
B	1st	4th	2nd	3rd
C	2nd	1st	4th	3rd
D	2nd	4th	1st	3rd

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