

Stefan's Journey *...and in his footsteps*

Two odysseys over 30,000 miles
and through 31 countries



A Polish airman's WW2 escape
retraced by his son, 80 years on

A film by Adrian Żółkowski-O'dell

On 6th September 1939, Stefan Żółkowski set off with a group of 25 fellow officers on a 9,000-mile journey from Poland to Britain which lasted 10 months, passing through South-Eastern Europe, the Middle East, France and North Africa. The Polish Air Force had been dispersed and disbanded following the invasion by Germany on 1st September that year (the start of WW II) and the escapees' objective was to flee Poland and find sanctuary, first in France and then in Britain to take on the fight against the Nazi oppressors.

Using their wits to stay alive and avoid detection and often living in grim conditions, they travelled on trains, by foot, commandeered-buses and aboard freighters, trawlers, passenger-liners and coal ships. They arrived in Glasgow on 15th July 1940 before being moved on to Blackpool for eventual re-distribution and integration within Polish Air Force squadrons allied to the RAF. Stefan reached Norfolk where he remained until his death in 2003, aged 94.



In September 2019 and eighty years to the day of Stefan's departure from Warsaw, his son Adrian (Żółkowski)-O'dell accompanied by his wife Jane set off to retrace his father's footsteps. They followed Stefan's detailed diary through specific cities, towns, villages and locations in twenty countries using some of the modes of transport taken all those years ago. Although they were not subjected to any of the hardships faced by his father during their two-month journey, it allowed them the opportunity to experience and understand the cultures and landscapes through which those brave individuals had passed.

“Stefan's Journey... and in his footsteps” documents both odysseys, one separated from the other by eight decades and a changed world.