How do you say trade? [1]

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Mark Boyle set off from Bristol a month ago on a planned two-and-a-half year trek to Ghandi?s birthplace in India. Nothing unusual in that most would think, but when you set off with only a backpack (filled with a knife, a bandage, t-shirts, sandals and sunscreen) and no money or credit cards then it?s taking a turn for the weird. But as a member of the Freeconomy movement [3] Mr Boyle wanted to prove his faith in humanity and get to India on the simple idea of trading his skills for either food or shelter. He got as far as Calais before quitting [4] this week.

The main reason for his failure was that he couldn?t converse with the natives. He lacked one of the most fundamental skills needed for trade to take place and thus he had no choice but to return home. Whilst I?m sure that Mr Boyle has plenty to offer in the way of tradable skills, if he cannot communicate with others in the marketplace there is no way for him to sell himself. The failure to communicate sufficiently engenders distrust, it makes people fearful, as in this case, the French of Calais believed Mr Boyle to be either a ?freeloader or an asylum seeker?.

This is a barrier that is partly broken down through the use of money. Money conveys priceless information to the other party in the exchange, it can insure them against any loss they may incur and ultimately it puts people at ease. To be able to trade across borders we need more than basic skills and a heart full of good intentions, as Mr Boyle?s failure has proven.

His idea of a world without money is possible. As amply demonstrated by Kyle MacDonald [5], who swapped switched and traded up from a paperclip to a house within a year. He had things that people wanted, and he was able to communicate with them. In the competitive world that we now live in Mr Boyle?s journey to India may well take him a lot longer than two-and-a-half years, especially as there are plenty of other people out there who can do similar work and not inhibit trade through their own moral

grandstanding.

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