**Ruby Doo**

Nice to see so many here. I got an email from Terry on Monday night saying that she, Gill, Mary and Sarah had just finished their last Ruby Doo meeting and could I write something about the 40 years of BBN? Oh, and keep it short as well. So here goes

I was struggling where to start but I guess the obvious place is 4th September 1983 when 6 people turned up at Woburn to join Chris Meredith on his 25 miles walk. From the Magnificent 7 to the current 943 members (493 Primary and 450 Associate) the group has evolved from taking its first fledgling steps to a well-established and well-regarded group within the association. Life begins at 40 years and I think we’ve done alright so far!

In the room are many people who’ve been on or are currently on the committee and also those who’ve organised challenge events and are currently organising challenge events. This is new to some such as Roy Carter, Chris Burns & Nick Emery so there is a wealth of experience to call on. Many thanks to you all for what you’ve done previously and for those who are currently serving.

One person I would like to single out is the BBN Queen Gill Bunker who joined the group shortly after its formation and has been the backbone ever since. Without her steady presence the group would not have been as successful as it is and I’d personally like to thank her for all of her efforts. As with our sadly departed monarch Gill has seen it all, done it all and watched several chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers come and go. Despite her denials I’m sure at my 1st committee meeting she said I couldn’t speak for the 1st year!

From those early days we gained a lot of experience of how to do things on challenge events by assisting Essex Herts on hosting The Chiltern Kanter (then organised by Brian Graves) and also helping on their checkpoint on the 1985 Yorkshire Dales 100. I still have nightmares about that event due to eating nothing but jam sandwiches at each checkpoint.

It was also on that 100 I met the then BBN Chairman Chris Goodman along with Roy Presland, John Richardson and John Nickerson. They all finished what was regarded at the time the hardest 100.

From sharing a checkpoint in 1985 making butties, some 20 years later BBN was one of the 4 groups that organised the 2005 Chiltern Landmarks 100. I can still see the picture of the group wearing their Vicar of Dibley dog collars at the Weston Turville checkpoint.

Ref challenge events, we went solo in 1986 when Janet and Roy Presland organised the group’s first ever standalone event the Nene Valley Kanter from Thrapston and it was their 25th Wedding Anniversary 2 days after. That’s dedication for you!

5 years after that in 1991 John Nickerson came along with the first running of the Shillington Shuffle where people came to appreciate the beauties of November Bedfordshire mud. After 10 years of that John replaced it with the Steppingley Step. The Shillington Shuffle was then revived along with a new event, the Sundon Saunter organised by Dave Sedgley, and these 3 walks have now morphed into the SS Triple Challenge under Dave Findel Hawkins and Merrian Lancaster with assistance from Dave and Lynn Yorston.

My first Shillington Shuffle was in 1993 and after the amount of food I’d had on the way around I thought this group might be a good thing to get involved in. It was also there that I learnt the importance of taking a thermos flask with me on a walk. Flasks are very useful for keeping hot things hot and cold things cold which is why mine had 2 cups of tea and a choc ice!

It wasn’t just challenge walks that we gained experience in. I believe the structure of the social walks programme was set shortly after the group’s formation. I’ve walked with a few groups such as Essex Herts, London and Thames Valley. Dave and Merrian have walked with a lot more! For me our group’s format of weekend and Thursday walks is ideal.

A steady pace, a morning and afternoon stop (or as Steve Clark would say “Tea Break”) and a lunch break which might be in a pub or not! At the end of a walk, we want our new members to return. I of our former Social Walk Secretaries Dee Brockway can appreciate the work that goes into our walks programme

In 1993 Gill’s mum Sybil stepped down from organising the BBN half of the Chiltern Kanter and Derek Jacob (aka Jake took over) and in 1997 Essex Herts decided they wanted to organise their own event, the 14 Greens Kanter, and thus BBN were on their own.

For the 1999 Kanter the outstanding memory is of pushing cars off Ivinghoe Village Green, churning up the grass & causing a mud bath. Thus, not wanting to upset Ivinghoe Parish Council any more Jake relocated to the Red Cross Hall at Tring in 2001….. shortly before the Foot and Mouth Outbreak

Peter Bearne was another late convert to the LDWA (via a present from his daughter) and after completing the Invicta 100 in Kent in 1992 organised The Rutland Venture in 1999 which ran for several years.

To celebrate the forthcoming millennium Martin Lawson and I put on the unique one-off Holy Hobble in 2000 and I remember DFH finishing the event at something like 930 in the evening with Merrian waiting for him. I thought he’s good at this! For me it is still a vivid memory approaching the church at Earls Barton in the distance across the Northamptonshire countryside.

Chris Meredith was awarded the OBE for services to the community in 2001 so he got his due reward

We’ve also had 20th, 25th, 30th celebrations and these have covered walking the Aylesbury Ring, The Milton Keynes Boundary Walk and this year the Northampton Round. On our 25th Anniversary we held the 2nd unique one- off Holy Hobble which again gave walkers the chance to discover the various Church architecture spanning 1000 years in our counties. For 2008 we held a 25th Anniversary party at Newton Longueville Village Hall. The recent picture in the Strider of that event showed all Thames Valley members. For some reason no photos were taken of the sultry French seductress Madame Norma. To which some people might say thank goodness. But I don’t listen to them.

As well as gaining so much from the countryside we’ve put something back in with our installation of kissing gates in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and the initial installation of benches on the Greensand Ridge footpath. These are now being replaced. Maybe for our 50th anniversary they could be updated with USB charging points?

Our group’s geographical area covers the 3 counties of Beds Bucks Northants. A lot of the social walks and challenge events have been located around the geographical centre of the group but Dave and Lynn Yorston along with Mike and Sandra Hyland have for many years provided a southern counterweight. This has allowed us to visit the Chilterns by either organising AGMs or their very successful Wendover Gap walks from Prestwood. Dave exactly how many cars can you get into Prestwood Village Hall car park or alleyway? (The answer is 142.)

Due to parking problems they decided to organise a new event called the Pick and Mix with various routes from Great Missenden (visiting Roald Dahl’s grave on one of the routes) but now moved to Wendover due to HS2. These have been a great success in attracting entrants, encouraging newcomers nervous about walking to dip their toes in the long-distance scene and enabling family members such as Ian Sage’s granddaughter Polly to get a certificate and a badge! Finally, you don’t need many marshals and it’s still the only walk where I’ve experienced 4 seasons in one day and Mike Hyland who was marshalling wearing a hi vis vest was stopped by the police asking him what he was doing

From BBN Dave, Lynn, Nigel Schofield and I were also involved in the 2012 Games 100 along with 4 other groups (appropriately 5 groups for the 5 Olympic Rings). Dave & Lynn organised the Marshals’ walk along with merchandise and checkpoints. I also remember at BBN’s checkpoint the number of people who learnt the correct way to make a wrap under Lynn’s tutelage.

We’ve not just thrown ourselves into the body of the LDWA but we’ve also gone abroad to take part in organised walking events in Belgium, Ireland and Denmark. They are carnivals with a walk attached. Fingers crossed that Adrian Moody’s partner Carol Jones completed her 25th 4 days Marches in Nijmegen in the Netherlands this week.

In groups such as ours due to the physical challenge it can bring a closeness amongst members and as a result several relationships have formed. There have also been tragedies with a loss of partner due to illness, age or accidents and I hope the bonds formed in this group have enabled the people affected to rely on other members friendships to help with these difficult times. Just remember that you never walk alone.

We live in a digital age transformed totally from the nominal £1 per year group membership for a black and white newsletter 3 times per year to the weekly Tuesday news with colour photos and Gill’s jokes. These have acquired a fame of their own which have spread widely via the e-post to the rest of the LDWA. The communication is enhanced by the creation of the BBN Facebook page some years ago by Daniel Jamin who I’m pleased to see has joined us along with Therese back from their time in La Belle France

Continuing with the French theme the saying “An army marches on its’ stomach” is attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte. Similarly, walkers cannot walk without sustenance and this was demonstrated on the recent EBB 100 when Mary Knight managed to save the day with bringing her own supplies to supplement the quantities provided by the organisers. She and her husband Dennis have also provided the food for the 50th LDWA anniversary and our 40th anniversary events. So many thanks.

All these technological innovations are much to be applauded but the aim of the group is to go for a walk. It cannot thrive without the enthusiasm of relatively recent members like Alan Leadbetter who within 18 months of joining the LDWA organised his first challenge event From Here to There and Back and then replaced that with The Hannington Hike. As Nigel said during his term as Chairman paraphrasing JFK “Ask not what your group can do for you but what you can do for your group”.

You’ll be pleased to know that’s all from me. So, I’d just like to propose a toast to absent friends and to the next 40 years.

**Norman**