

A HISTORY OF ST PETER'S WAY IN A DAY

My copy of the St. Peter's Way guide by Fred Matthews and Harry Bitten (both of the West Essex Ramblers) is dated May 1990 and is the 3rd edition.

When the guide was in the draft stage Fred approached the late LDWA member and subsequent Chairman of Essex and Herts LDWA group, Tom Lyons, and asked him to walk out the route using the draft notes. Essex footpaths were hard to find in those days and often overgrown and consequently Tom found it slow going but he eventually made it to the finish.

In 1989 Mick Doyle, a Brentwood rambler and sometime Essex & Herts LDWA member, was asked by the Brentwood group to lead a longer walk. He replied that he would lead St. Peter's Way though he knew nothing about the walk and had only heard it mentioned. Subsequently six walkers set out and four completed the walk. They were Mick Doyle, the late Norman Skinner (prolific writer of Essex walks books), and current Essex & Herts members Ron Brown and Tim Alcock.

My first walk of the route was in 1998 when the leader was again Mick Doyle. When I arrived at Chipping Ongar it was to find that Mick, Hannah and Keith Brown were waiting there having already walked overnight from the chapel at Bradwell and looking to complete 90 miles.

Mick Doyle led every year until 1998 except for 1992 when he was injured and when John Beamish took the lead. In 1999 John Beamish again took the lead but the event wasn't advertised and he was joined only by Alan Seager.

In 2000 John Mountain was asked to take over the event but the Chelmer and Blackwater rambler group refused to give the normal 3rd party insurance cover. An approach was made to the Essex and Herts LDWA group. Renate Romer, the secretary at the time, did not hesitate to endorse the 45 miles event but not the shorter distances which had been walked by the ramblers. From that date the event has been an LDWA event run by Essex and Herts group.

Mick Doyle led the walk nine times in the early years. Mick Lane, Anita Stamp's brother, has led it for the last ten years. John Beamish, Alan Seagar and John Mountain have led on other occasions.

In 1998 when I walked for the first time, breakfast and afternoon tea was provided by Ron Brown and his late wife Hilary. I cannot say when Ron and Hilary retired from the job but it was probably 2005. Since 2006 Anita Stamp has been in charge of catering assisted by John Mountain. Anita also introduced the coach back Chipping Ongar at the finish of the walk. Before that the organiser had to call on friends and acquaintances to lift people back to Ongar in their cars. 2015 was the 27th time the event had been held.

John Mountain