

Appendix 1 Officer reports

Chair

Thank you all for coming along to our AGM or if not here in person, for reading this report.

2023 was another positive year for the Essex & Herts LDWA group. As is always the case, some months were more active than others, so rather than go through everything that took place during the course of the year I have decided to concentrate on a few features from the past twelve months.

*** First of all I'd like to single out our Challenge Walk programme.

We ran four highly successful challenge events during 2023 and you will be hearing more about them later. These events covered distances from 15.2 miles to 53 miles thus offering a range of options for people to challenge themselves against. For those completing their first fifteen miler it was doubtlessly a great sense of achievement as it was also for those completing their first fifty. We attracted men and women, walkers and runners of all ages and from all over the country. A good number of people were entering their first LDWA challenge and many who were not members rushed home to join the LDWA. We know this because they told us so.

We had a total of 704 entrants to our challenges in 2023 and the majority successfully completed their chosen route. The feedback was, as is always the case, overwhelmingly positive. Small observations on how we could improve things were gratefully received and listened to. That's all down to our wonderful organisers, marshals and catering crew who continue to deliver the goods. I extend thanks to you all and particularly to those who helped out for the first time. I hope you enjoyed the experience and will come again.

At this point I would particularly like to thank three very special groups of people -

Peter and Georgie Hogg who hung up their 'organisers' hobbling boots' for the final time after running hobbles, strollers, staggers and 3 Forest Ways over a very large number of years.

Jean and Bill Bowers who returned from an absence from running the Blackwater Marathon to launch it successfully again - although not before a potential last minute show-stopper threatened to scupper their plans. Successfully circumvented of course!

And not forgetting Peter Tremain, who as well as contributing hugely to the 2023 Shotley Peninsula route continues to find yet more new footpaths for Stansted Stagger. I gather Keith Warman from Kent Group (Peter's new pen pal) is offering input to future events to ensure no path goes un-staggered.

*** I'd also like to briefly mention our social walk and weekend away programme. I mentioned last year that we were in a year of emergence from the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. 2023 saw us regain a regular rhythm of both weekend and weekday social walks with some interesting new formats - led by both experienced and enthusiastic new walk leaders.

Our weekend away in Yorkshire was another sell out event - and the word is spreading, as walk secretaries from other groups have been enquiring about how we run them and why they are so good. We continue to attract a blend of weekenders from our own and other LDWA groups. Notwithstanding an injury on our holiday this year, it's the professionalism with which it was managed and the aftercare provided on which we should dwell.

*** It's time to move on for a few of our committee members and our accounts examiner. I wish them all well whether in reverting to foot soldier duties or moving to greater things. Equally I extend a big welcome to those stepping up to replace them - it will be refreshing to have some fresh and enthusiastic faces bringing along new ideas, especially with our Golden Anniversary coming along very soon in 2025.

Happy Walking! Gill Struthers

Secretary and Membership Secretary's report

Committee meetings: Since our last AGM the Committee have met four times, including another 'walk and talk' meeting on an extremely hot day in June. Thanks are due to Brian Martin for taking and distributing the notes from our committee meetings and to Gill and Rob for their hospitality for the meetings held at their house. All the notes from these meetings are available to view on our website, and a reminder that any member is welcome to come along to our meetings as an observer.

Monthly updates: I continue to send out the monthly and mid-month updates to all Essex and Herts members (primary and associate) who have chosen to accept emails. While these are mainly a reminder for upcoming social walks and challenge walks, I also pass on any walking or countryside related news that may be of interest to members, and any updates from the NEC. Contributions to the updates are always welcome.

Correspondence: I correspond with the NEC and other local groups as necessary, with the rest of the committee between meetings, and deal with enquiries from members and potential members. I also submitted a successful bid to the Finish Line Fund for a portable Defibrillator.

Membership: our total membership figure as of this Thursday was 1118, made up of 658 Primary members and 460 Associate members. Last year's equivalent figures were 1054, 615 and 439. Ginny continues to welcome new members with an email which directs them to our monthly updates and social media sites.

Internet and social media

Website: I try to ensure it is attractive, easy to navigate and kept up to date and accurate.

Facebook: Our account is managed by Deb, while Ginny and I are also administrators. There are currently 390 members, and it is mainly used for thanks and pictures of challenge and social walks, but also other walking activities.

X: (Twitter) not so popular now, but it is still a useful way of keeping in touch with other walking groups and organisations. We have 300 followers.

WhatsApp group: 42 members. Again, it is mainly used to post pictures from social walks and events and other walking exploits, plus a bit of friendly banter.

Jackie Burnett & Ginny Powell

Social Walks Secretary's Report 3rd February 2024

My second year in this role has been equally enjoyable but at the same time rather challenging at times. The highlight for me being our Weekend Away to Malhamdale in March 2023. Memorable for several reasons:-

It was the first Away Weekend that I have organised, with the change from an autumn trip, to one in the spring. Longer daylight hours, allowing long walks.

Fabulous joint walks with both the North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire LDWA groups – huge thanks to Lynn Hathaway, Julia and Ralph Warman, for all their support.

2 great walks lead by our very own Mike Wheatley and Peter Tremain.

My walk to Malham cove, we all got back in one piece!

My first quiz nights for the group, which seemed to go down well, especially the map symbol round!

One of my photographs from Lynn's Saturday walk, won the Membership Card Photo Competition, for 2024. So please treasure this year's membership card!

Sadly, 2 hours after the photo was taken, we had a major incident. When the lovely Dolores had an accident, breaking her ankle. A massive thank you to Lynn and her team, for their quick thinking and actions.

They immediately phoned the emergency services, using what3words, so the Airedale paramedics and Upper Wharfedale Rescue team could locate us. They were really quick to arrive and dealt brilliantly with the emergency, giving Dolores superb care. As did the staff at Airedale Hospital, where she stayed for 3 weeks, followed by long months of exercises, and hospital appointments back at home. Dolores worked very hard to regain her fitness and she is now back out walking, although understandably cautious when it comes to wet slippery grass! Me too, after that!

I learnt a huge amount from that incident. One of the main things being a review of the kit I take in my own rucksack. Instead of thinking how can I lighten my kit? I think what would be useful if we have another accident? I now always carry an orange survival bag, as the ones donated by walkers at the scene, were crucial in helping keep Dolores warm and dry. They were much stronger than the foil blankets, which ripped easily in the wind. I now pop extra buffs, tops, gloves etc in my rucksack, just in case. Having the completed Walk Register, Risk Assessment and a blank Accident form with me, helped speed up the process of reporting the accident to the LDWA. Enabling Dolores to make a claim on the LDWA insurance.

Now for some social walk stats, since and including our last AGM, we have held:-

A total of 38 Social walks covering approximately 678.7 miles, with 521 participants, giving an average of 13.7 walkers, and 17.9 miles per event (including weekend, midweek and marshals walks).

Compared with last year's stats, there were a similar number of midweek walks, but overall 9 less social walks during the year. Possibly a reaction to post pandemic freedom, the previous year.

Once again, on everyone's behalf, I would like to say a massive 'thank you', to our amazing walk leaders. Your contribution is invaluable. Thank you, to those leaders who have already booked in a date to lead a walk this year. If you haven't got round to it yet, there are still lots of dates available. I have the calendar list with me, if you want to bag a date. If you haven't led a social walk yourself, how about taking up the challenge? There are lots of very experienced leaders within our group, who would be pleased to mentor/ advise those wishing to do this for the first time. Links to helpful information and forms, can be found at the top of the 'Available Walk Dates' page.

Well that's all from me. Fingers crossed that this year's Away Weekend to Bannau Brycheiniog (ban-aye bruch-ay-nee-go / Brecon Beacons) goes smoothly, for the intrepid 32 people who have signed up!

Lizzie Bridge.

Challenge Event Reports

Blackwater Marathon 2023 Report

The Blackwater Marathon was held on Saturday 21 October 2023 starting from the Maldon Rugby Club H.Q. in Heybridge.

There were 147 entries, 125 of whom started – 96 on the Marathon route and 29 on the 18 mile route. There was only one retirement. Everybody finished by 17-06, 24 minutes before the closing time of 17-30.

The Blackwater Marathon had originally been planned to start from Heybridge Primary School. They cancelled our booking, giving no reason, 4 weeks before the event. Fortunately we managed to book the Maldon Rugby club house and car park in Heybridge which meant we didn't have to change any of the checkpoint bookings and only had to alter the route description at the start and finish. Maldon Rugby Club, who had junior matches on the day, was most obliging and thanks to the flexibility of The Essex & Herts LDWA marshals we were able to work round any problems.

The route used was similar to that used for 2019 event with different checkpoints at Tollesbury and Tolleshunt Major.

We had many compliments about the hospitality at the checkpoints and start/finish, the route and the weather. There had been heavy rainfall prior to the event but on the day it was sunny and dry. The event

Marshals were largely the same as those who worked on the 2019 event. We wish to thank all the Marshals for making this a good day out for participants.

Jean and Bill Bowers

Stansted Stagger

2024

This year's Stansted Stagger on 7th January I believe was a complete success - there were many positive and kind comments after the event – for the record I would like to thank Jackie, Elaine, Maggie, Richard, Brian and Rob for their help leading up to the event, as well as everyone that was part of that brilliant team on the day. Fortunately, the previous weeks flooding had cleared sufficiently to use the planned route, and after last year's biblical weather, we were back to our usual fine January day for the Stagger.

We had 192 entries 152 started 149 finished.

2025

Sunday 5th January

Venue: St John's Church Hall, Stansted Mountfichet is booked.

The possible route I'm looking at now goes south, then east, via Hallingbury, Thorley, with a Checkpoint at Little Hadham VH. Return via Upwick, Farnham, and Hazel End.

Marshals' Walk poss. 12th November 2024.

Essex Walker 2024

From Galleywood Heritage Centre, Galleywood Common.

Two routes 27 and 17 miles. Entry on Sientries Entries so far 89 57 long 32 short

Venue and checkpoints Downham VH (for both routes), and South Hanningfield VH (long) are all booked, with extra drink stop on long route in West Hanningfield. (all three sites have a defibrillator)

Rob, Gill, Ginny, and Heidi have been out this week to check the 1st draft of the route description on the long route. Both route descriptions are ready for the Marshals' walk on the 10th March. Volunteers needed.

Golden 50 Anniversary 50 mile Challenge Event

I have made an enquiry earlier this week and taken note of the dates that Manuden Community Centre is available in July and August. (Price is £35 an hour including kitchen, capacity 200.

Also Looking at several other venues close to the Essex and Herts border which would be more accessible.

Herts Hobble – end of an era

The Herts Hobble of June 23 was the end of a very enjoyable 20+ years of organising this event. Like all events over the last number of years it went through several transitions of Pacer, Covid, blocked paths, more detailed risk assessment but to name a few, however the show went on. Fortunately, possible disasters were averted well in advance and overall most events went off without disruption – all down to the excellent teamwork of our checkpointers and anticipating anything that was likely to go wrong.

The Hobble has been a success for several reasons, but mainly with the support of members of the Group. Over the years the Hobble has been a victim of its own success by selling out rapidly and then entrants either forgetting to turn up, injury or whatever the reason several no-shows, however this is something all events suffer.

Happy to hear that, although it is the end of an era for us, it survives with Richard and no doubt Jackie at the helm.

Best wishes for the future Georgie and Peter Hogg

Shotley Peninsula 50

The Shotley Peninsula 50 mile challenge event took place over the weekend of 12th/13th August 2023.

Of an expected 196 entrants, 169 started the event and 138 successfully completed the course. The weather was excellent for walking and we received a large number of compliments about the route, the checkpoints, the refreshments and of course the friendly and helpful marshals.

Here were a few learning points which were discussed at our debriefing meeting which are always welcome as they help us make improvements for future events. Picking out a couple of positives, the figure of eight route worked well and our new blade flags attracted a few passers by to enquire about us - and leave with leaflets and application forms to join the LDWA!

Forming a committee to run the event was also successful as it enabled the organisers to share the burden and responsibility, as was appointing checkpoint managers to organise their own checkpoints and refreshments.

We experienced a couple of minor injuries (one requiring a visit to hospital) which were dealt with and recorded and carefully followed up.

Our thanks to the wonderful marshalling team, including our friends from Norfolk and Suffolk LDWA who ran two checkpoints for us. Thanks also to our sweepers and a particular thank you to the HQ catering and checking in team who worked very long shifts and had to juggle an evening meal stop with breakfast and carefully monitor those who were only half way and those who were finishing!

We would also like to thank Brian Adcock for not only the route but his wealth of local knowledge which yet again proved invaluable.

Gill and Rob Struthers