

# ***LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION – Kent Group***

**Aim: to further the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking**

# ***NEWSLETTER***



**Judy Rickwood, Jan O'Rourke and Mike Pursey on the 100k Wealden Waters, which marked our 40th anniversary, on July 26-27. Photo by Eric Rolfe**

***KENT GROUP'S CINQUE PORTS HUNDRED SET FOR 2018  
— STORY INSIDE***



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**[www.ldwakent.org.uk](http://www.ldwakent.org.uk)**



**Pictures from the White Cliffs Challenge on August 23, all taken by Tony Bristow.  
One of them shows Dover and Deal MP Charlie Elphicke—who started the event—  
with Secretary Graham Smith**



## KENT GROUP SOCIAL WALKS DECEMBER 2014 TO APRIL 2015

**Sun Dec 7 Christmas Lunch** - Preceded by a walk of c7ml. starting 09.30am.

**Sat Dec 13 Christmas Cruise around Calais** - c14ml. A circular walk in the Nord Pas de Calais visiting Cap Blanc Nez. Meet 7.30am by P&O Desk, Dover Eastern Docks for 8.25am sailing (return 9.45pm local time – 8.45pm British time). Ring P&O reservations 08716 646464 for foot passenger day return. Alternatively, crossing as car (ferry) passengers may be planned. Don't forget your passport! **Please ring Graham** for means of travel and confirmation of times. **L:** Graham Smith

**Mon Dec 29 Post Christmas Sevenoaks Stroll** - c17 ml. meet 08.45 for 09.00 start at Shipbourne church on A227 GR TQ592522 Map: Exp 147. Park in road opposite church. Pub lunch stop. **L:** Dave Sheldrake.

**Thu Jan 1 New Year on the South Downs Again** - c20ml. Meet 09.00 in Eastbourne at western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, GR TV600972. Map: Exp 123. Park near school on left. Lunch stop at Alfriston. **L:** Graham Smith.

**Fri Jan 9 Coldrum Night Walk** - c.17mls. Meet 9.30pm for 10.30pm start at The George PH, Trottiscliffe. GR TQ641599 Map: Exp 148. **L:** Dave Sheldrake.

**Sun Jan 18 North Downs Way: Wye to Canterbury** - 15.5ml. Meet 09.00 in Wye public c.p. GR TR053468 Maps: Exp 137, 150. Probable pub lunch stop. **L:** Dave Jones.

**Sun Jan 25 Kent Group AGM** - Preceded by a walk of c7ml.

**Sun Feb 1 Peter's Ancestral Trails No.1** - 17.5ml. Meet 09.00 at Hollingbourne rlwy stn GR TQ834550 Map: Exp 148. Circular walk linking places associated with Peter's genealogical research, but really an excuse to visit villages in the North Downs that haven't appeared in a recent itinerary. This time it's Thurnham, Bicknor and Wormshill. Pub lunch in Bredgar. **L:** Peter Jull.

**Sun Mar 1 Shakey Hand** - 21.5ml. Meet 09.00 at Herne Common GR TR174651 Map: Exp 150. Park off Falcon Close. Elliptical walk reaching onto the Isle of Thanet. Pub lunch stop. **L:** Peter Jull

**Sun Mar 8 Sevenoaks Circular Marshals' Walk** - For details contact Brian Buttifant

**Sun Mar 15 Fairlight Frolic** - c19ml. Meet 09.00 in c.p. at top of Hastings Country Park GR TQ858118 Map: Exp124. Poss pub stop at Udimore. If you wish to partake, please contact leader nearer the day. **L:** Neal O'Rourke.

**Sun Mar 22 Sevenoaks Circular Main Event** - See Events List

**Fri Apr 3 (Good Friday) A South Downs Way Loop** - c26/20ml. Meet 09.00 in Eastbourne at western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, GR TQ600972 Map: Exp 123. Park near school on left. The 20ml is a circular route on the South Downs via Beachy Head, the Seven Sisters and the Cuckmere valley; return on the South Downs Way. The 26ml is the same but with the addition of Firle Beacon and Willingdon Hill. Lunch stop at Alfriston. **Ls:** (26ml) Graham Smith (20ml) Joy Davies

**Sat Apr 11 The Four Pits** - c40ml. Meet 08.00 by the bridge over the River Stour at Fordwich GR TR179598 Maps: Exp 150,138. A circular walk taking in the sites of the former Kent Pits of Chislet, Betteshanger, Tilmanstone and Snowdown (this is an Anytime Challenge and certificates are available for completions, and badges can be obtained for £2). Various stops en route. Likely to be a late finish so bring a torch (or more appropriately miner's lamp!). **L:** Graham Smith

**Sun Apr 26 On and Off the Marsh** - 18ml. Meet 09.30 at Hamstreet Nature Reserve c.p. GR TR003337 Map: Exp 125 (from A2070, TL at Xrds in village, then 1st L). Four changes of landscape between Low Weald and Romney Marsh. Outstanding bluebell display near end, season permitting. Pub lunch in Bilsington. **L:** Peter Jull

## **KENT GROUP COMMITTEE**

Chairman - Brian Buttifant,  
Secretary/newsletter editor - Graham Smith,  
Treasurer/membership secretary - Neil Higham  
Walks secretary - Mike Pursey,  
Webmaster - Michael Headley  
Members  
Phil Butler  
Joy Davies  
Roger Dean  
Nick Dockree  
Stephanie le Men

PUB meetings are held on the first Monday of each month (except if that coincides with a bank holiday, when they are postponed to the second Monday) at the Rose & Crown, Wrotham. Meetings commence at 8.30pm. All welcome.

## **IT'S THE CINQUE PORTS HUNDRED IN 2018**

THE LDWA'S National Committee has awarded the 2018 Hundred to Kent Group, which means the Cinque Ports Hundred is due to take place over the bank holiday weekend of May 26-27-28 that year, with the marshals walk over the bank holiday weekend of May 5-6-7.

This is wonderful news for Kent Group, the result of an initial application made four years ago, when we made a bid to host the Hundred in 2016. On that occasion, members will recall, the National Committee decided to award the Hundred to Dorset Group, which had never organised a Hundred before. This will be the fourth time we will have hosted a Hundred, following the Pilgrims Hundred in 1982, the Invicta Hundred in 1992 and the Millennium Hundred in 2000.

The event will be based at the Duke of York's Royal Military School, just outside Dover. The route will be a semi linear one, with walkers being bussed out to Hastings (as this newsletter was being printed, we were having talks with a school in Hastings – thanks to Jane Dicker, who lives in the town) to start the event there. Mike Pursey, with some help from Graham, has worked out the route. This will follow coast and countryside, with walkers visiting all the Cinque Ports (Hastings, New Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich) plus the Cinque Port Ancient Towns of Winchelsea and Rye, and the Cinque Port Limbs of Tenterden, Lydd, Folkestone and Deal. At Sandwich the route will turn back to Dover. The breakfast stop will be Brockhill Performing Arts College at Saltwood, near Hythe (and set in the delightful Brockhill Country Park), at approximately 58 miles.

Graham Smith has agreed to be event manager of the Cinque Ports Hundred, and he has recruited several Kent Group members to the organising group, who all have different responsibilities for various aspects of the event. Mike Pursey has agreed to be route coordinator, Phil Butler will be looking after entries, Stephanie le Men will be the organising group secretary, Neil Higham is treasurer, Neil Higham and Roger Dean are doing checkpoint coordination, Gordon Harker and Joy Davies are looking after catering, and Michael Headley will be looking after all things internet. Another group member is John Goodwin, who is a Dover town councillor and former Deputy Mayor of Dover. John is in the process of contacting the various Cinque Ports town councils to ask for their assistance with the project. It is hoped that some of the checkpoints can be at the town halls. Peter Jull and Sarah Turner are also on the group.

So that's the organising group, but this is obviously a massive project for Kent Group, and we are going to need assistance from every – and we do mean every – Kent Group member in order for it to be the success we are confident it will be. There are going to be lots (and lots) of jobs to do, so anyone wishing to help in any way is asked to contact Graham now.

Neighbouring Sussex Group has agreed to help us with the Sussex part of the event, and there is going to be assistance from the LDWA National Committee's 100s coordinator Gail Elrick (who, sadly, intends to stand down from the role at the next AGM). There will obviously be help from several other groups.

Further news of how the project is progressing will appear in the newsletter and on the website. But just to repeat, we're going to need everyone's help. All offers will be gratefully received by Graham.

### **Historical footnote**

The Cinque Ports is an association of maritime towns and villages in Kent and other parts of the South East. In the centuries before the Tudor Kings of England first developed a standing navy, the men and ships of the Cinque Ports provided a fleet to meet the military and transportation needs of their Royal masters.

The old Norman French word for five, cinque, is pronounced “sink” rather than “sank” in this corner of England!

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE RUNNING (OR WALKING) OF OUR GROUP**

OUR AGM will be on Sunday January 25 and will again be held at Lenham Village Hall. Michael Headley will be leading a short walk before the meeting, as he has for the past three years, and a free meal will be provided for everyone attending. The walk will start at 10am, leaving lots of time for us all to socialise and enjoy our meal before the meeting, which starts at 2pm.



We want to know the views of you, our members. So please feel free to let committee members know how you feel about the group before or after the AGM. Are our social walks too fast, or too slow? Or are they too long, or too short? Are there enough of them? What about our family dinner? We tried a new venue this year, so did you like it? Or not? Would you like to see other social events for the group? Do you have any views about the Cinque Ports Hundred we are organising in 2018? We want to know your views, so please don't be shy about contacting us. Feel free to contact our secretary Graham Smith, whose details are above.

Nomination slips for the committee are with this newsletter.

## **NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS**

### **Sevenoaks Circular**

NEXT year's Sevenoaks Circular be based at a new venue – West Heath School, a mile out of Sevenoaks, as organiser Brian Buttifant has not been able to get a suitable date from the rugby club (members will remember that this year's Sevenoaks Circular clashed with the South Downs Marathon, organised by Sussex Group, a clash which meant numbers were down on both events). The date is March 22, which means the event is back to its usual slot. The route will largely be the same as for the past three years and there will again be three routes – of 30, 20 and 15 miles. The marshals walk is provisionally set for March 8.

### **Walk With The Smugglers**

FOLLOWING this year's special Wealden Waters 100k walk to mark our 40th birthday, in 2015 we return to our normal Weald challenge walk, and next year we will be back to the Walk With The Smugglers, based at Goudhurst.

This will be on July 12, with the marshals' walk provisionally set for June 21. Distances will be 26, 20 and 15 miles.

### **White Cliffs Challenge**

NEXT year's White Cliffs Challenge will again be the Kent leg of the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge of 50-mile walks (comes round soon, doesn't it?). The date will be the bank holiday weekend of August 30-31, to tie in with the White Cliffs Walking Festival (see separate story below) and the event will be at Deal and Betteshanger Rugby Club, as it was in 2012. Distances will be 53 miles and 18 miles. The marshals' walk is likely to be 3-4 weeks before the event, with the date not yet set.

## **FACEBOOK**

THANKS to Stephanie le Men, Kent Group of the LDWA is now on Facebook. The page can be used for – well, whatever we want it to be used for. It can be viewed at the following location. Committee members were very impressed with what Stephanie has done, and we are sure other members will be.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/LDWA-Kent-Group/1496269853971092>

## **ENTRIES ONLINE**

FOR a year or so, members of the committee have been debating whether we should go over to a system of handling entries online for our three challenge events. Roger Dean was asked to investigate, which he did, with the recommendation that we use the SIE system which is being used for an increasing number of LDWA events, including the Hundred. Initially, we are going to use the SIE system for dealing with entries for next year's Sevenoaks Circular. If this is successful – and there is no reason to believe it won't be – then the SIE system will be rolled out for our other two challenge events, the Weald walk (which next year will be the Walk With The Smugglers) and the White Cliffs Challenge.

## **RED ROSE HUNDRED**

NEXT year's Hundred takes place in Lancashire over the bank holiday weekend of May 23-25, and as usual, we have agreed to organise a checkpoint on the event. This will be at Dunsop Bridge (60.5 miles). Brian Buttifant is coordinating checkpoint arrangements, so please contact Brian if you would like to help out. We have also agreed to organise a checkpoint on the 2016 Hundred, in Dorset. This will be at Evershott (49 miles).

## **WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL**

SOME Kent Group members, who also belong to the White Cliffs Ramblers, were involved with the White Cliffs Walking Festival, which grew out of the Deal Walking Festival. With more than 1,000 people going on the festival's 32 walks (including four LDWA walks), the festival was huge success. The week-long festival is becoming an annual event, which next year will be held between Thursday August 27-Wednesday September 2, and will include our White Cliffs Challenge on

August 30-31. The article below appeared in the East Kent Mercury on August 28, and is reprinted with permission of the Mercury's editor.

Kate Ashbrook, the Ramblers' national president, made a plea for Dover to join Deal in becoming a Walkers Are Welcome town when she helped open the White Cliffs Walking Festival.

The festival, organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers – who celebrate their 25th anniversary this year – resulted in 1,005 people going on the festival's 32 walks, all in the Dover-Deal area.

The festival was opened, in a ceremony on Dover seafront, by Miss Ashbrook, Dover Mayor Pam Brivio – who is a member of the White Cliffs Ramblers - and Dover and Deal MP Charlie Elphicke. Also there were Deal Mayor Deryck Murray, district council chairman Sue Nicholas and Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate Clair Hawkins, who belongs to the White Cliffs Ramblers.

Deal became the first town in the South of England to get Walkers Are Welcome status, where towns are encouraged to be attractive destinations for walkers with good quality walks, in 2009.

Miss Ashbrook - who is also national patron of the Walkers Are Welcome network - said: "Walkers Are Welcome has grown at an astonishing pace, and Deal has set a fine example.

"As the first Walkers Are Welcome Town in the South, it has shown the value of walking to the local economy and it offers a warm welcome to walkers. I do hope that Dover will soon follow suit."



**Left: Walkers on the White Cliffs on one of the first festival walks.**

**Right: Graham Smith leads his evening walk to Dover which ended with fish and chips.**

*Photos by Rob Riddle*

The opening ceremony was followed by a choice of two 5-6 mile walks– either taking a bus to Capel and walking back along the cliffs, or a walk taking in some of Dover's attractions including the Bleriot memorial.

Before going on the walk from Capel, Miss Ashbrook paid tribute to the "energetic" White Cliffs Ramblers for "inspiring and organising" the week-long walking festival.

She said: "This festival enables residents and visitors to enjoy the splendid and varied countryside of this corner of Kent.

"But the hard-won public paths and access need continual care and maintenance and the group both keeps up the pressure on Kent County Council and helps it by providing working parties to clear the paths.

"In these cash-strapped times, councillors and businesses must recognise the economic and health benefits of walking. To cut the funding for public paths is to literally shoot ourselves in the foot."

Cllr Brivio, who went on the Bleriot walk, hopes that a working party can now be set up to get Walkers Are Welcome status for Dover.

She said: "Walking is good for people's health and it is very good for a town's economy."

The walking festival, which has now become an annual event, included history, heritage and special interest walks of a few miles, 10-12 mile rambles and the 32-mile White Cliffs Challenge, organised by the Long Distance Walkers Association, which followed a route from St Margaret's village hall and took in the white cliffs.



FOOTNOTE: A group, led by Dover town councillor and Kent LDWA member John Goodwin, has been set up to bid for Walkers Are Welcome status for Dover. Hopefully there will be more news about this in the next newsletter.

## **SURREY TOPS 2014**

THIS year's Surrey Tops was, of course, the latest leg of the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge of 50-mile walks. Nine Kent Group members took part and they all completed the event (thus giving anyone who needs it a qualifier for the Red Rose 100).

Kent Group members completing the walk and times:

Peter Johnson – 12 hours 42 mins.

Christophe Delogne/Stephanie le Men – 13.25.

Dave Sheldrake – 16.07.

Michael Headley/Jan O'Rourke – 16.16.

June Wong – 16.44.

Don Newman – 17.29.

Alan Stewart – 18.34.

Unfortunately the date of the Surrey Tops marshals' walk – August 23 - clashed with our White Cliffs Challenge, so no Kent Group members could take part. But we did still manage (with help from a couple of Surrey Group members) to do the first checkpoint, at Elstead, after 12 miles. Those on the checkpoint were Brian Buttifant, Phil Butler, Joy Davies, Mary Shillito and Graham Smith.

## **A LENHAM QUIRK by Keith Warman**

One day in times past, I was planning future walking routes and was studying the Lenham area on OS Explorer Sheet 137, Ashford. My eye was drawn to an unusual public footpath on the western edge of the village. The footpath in question is in the vicinity of Lenham Storage's enormous depot and warehousing complex, which is shown as an area of large buildings at grid reference TQ 890.520.

Close observation will show the public footpath leaving Ham Lane just north of the railway line at grid reference TQ 888.520, then going eastwards through the depot complex. From the village end, the footpath starts from the edge of a housing estate at grid reference TQ 892.520 and heads westwards through the complex. The puzzle was that these two rights of way did not meet on the map - there seemed to be a 'gap' of about 150 yards and I was intrigued to see why this was.

One day last year, Shirlie and I decided to try and solve this conundrum whilst in the area. We started at the Ham Lane end and walked eastwards on the waymarked path between busy warehouses. There were plenty of signs warning us to beware of moving vehicles, however, the path was delineated between two yellow lines when crossing an open area. At one place, the path passed through a building! At the point where the footpath 'ends' on the map, the yellow lines and waymarks led us northwards, with forklift trucks beeping around us, to the point where the footpath 'starts' once again. From here, still heading eastwards, the yellow lines guided us across a car park. A couple of cars were parked overhanging the lines and we were astonished to see that each one had a sticker on its windscreen from the management advising the drivers that, should they park over the line of the footpath in the future, then disciplinary action would follow! If only all landowners and occupiers were as vigilant...

A Lenham Quirk indeed.

## **MILLENNIUM 100 PART 4: NIGHT WALK FROM WYE by Graham Smith**

FOUR of us turned up at the Tickled Trout pub in Wye just before 8pm on Friday October 4 for what may have been Kent Group's first autumn night walk.

Our winter night walk is, of course, a regular feature of our programme, and for the last two years I have put on a summer night walk (this year attended by only three of us, which became two when we lost Richard Frost after three miles – or did Richard lose us?) But I can't recall an autumn night walk before. It was also the fourth part of our revisiting the route of the 2000 Hundred, a series of walks put on by Peter Jull. For various reasons, I had not been able to go on the other three. So I didn't want to miss this one – and I was not disappointed. I have to say it was one of the most enjoyable night walks I have ever done, certainly helped by balmy weather which was more like an August night than an October one. It was a shame there were only four of us on it – Peter, Bob Field, myself and a lady from London called Alison, who had to leave us at Chilham to take a train back to London.

The weather was exceptionally warm and the night was clear, with the stars out. The route initially followed fields from Wye before we crossed the A28, shortly after which we picked up the North Downs Way, which we followed for a very pleasant three miles all the way to Chilham. We had now done just over five miles, and we had a stop in the White Horse pub. After

that we followed lanes and field paths to Denge Wood. Here I remembered my first ever night walk – the marshals' walk on the first White Cliffs Challenge, the 100k event put on in 1997. I remember walking with someone called Mal White and getting horribly lost in Denge Wood. We floundered around for what seemed like ages and eventually met up with another couple of people who were similarly lost. We all then floundered around before eventually – and I seem to recall this was far more to do with luck than judgement – getting back on the correct route and getting to the next checkpoint, which I believe was in the Chartham area. I said then I would never do another night walk (I guess many of us have said something like that at one time or another). For the record, my next night walk was on my first Sussex Stride two years later. That was a lovely night, with stars and the moon lighting up those South Downs – which showed me that night walks can be very enjoyable.

Anyway, back to the 2014 night walk. Denge Wood did not disappoint, because we followed a path which deteriorated and then disappeared. We came to an open area and couldn't find a path across a broad track that the route description said we were looking for. We went one way without success, then headed the opposite way – and found our path and the broad track in a few yards. When we reached Crundale, we had done more than 12 of our 16 miles. Despite the problem in Denge Wood – which hadn't taken us long to sort out – it had been a lovely night, with the moon and the stars out.

With about four miles to go, we thought it would be pretty easy. Sadly, we were mistaken. A little while after leaving Crundale, we had some more trouble in another wood. We couldn't find a stile which the route description said was there, so we wandered around the wood for a while before getting onto a broad track and following it in roughly the direction we wanted.

We were very close to the downs above Wye but unfortunately we were confronted with another problem – low night fog, and lots of it, which obviously made visibility and navigation difficult. We followed a path which then seemed to run out. We could hear what sounded like something agricultural and we decided to head in that direction. Eventually we came out near the extensive grounds of Wye college, by a building. The building was fenced off, so we found a faint path and followed that to a minor road – which took us back into Wye. The time was then about 2.30am.

The walk had certainly been an adventure (as Jill Green says, all walks are adventures) but it had been most enjoyable. And the route description had, more or less, stood the test of time – which I suppose is what we would expect from a route description written by one Keith Warman.

#### **PAT WILSON 1917-2014 by Brian Buttifant**

MEMBERS who are also Ramblers' members may have read that Pat died earlier this year. She was the founder of Meopham and District Footpath Society and footpath secretary of the RA, and president at the time of the death of the former secretary. She was a great campaigner in the preservation of our Kentish public rights of way. At least two other of our members were asked to investigate footpath problems. My involvement was in the 1980s, when the MoD bought two farms (nearly 800 acres) in the lovely and much-walked Luddesdown Valley, near Meopham in west Kent, where the North Downs Way and Wealdway pass through. They were to be used for mine laying practice, which was similar to the plains of north Germany. Pat Wilson soon got onto this and an inquiry was arranged. As secretary of Kent Group, I was asked to give evidence of use of walkers who would be walking at day and night. Most inquiries are held in the day but she arranged for evening sessions, to allow for more evidence to be given. At the end of the hearing, we – the walking public – won the day and the MoD plans were abandoned. Now the walker can see a bold finger post on the edge of what is known as the 'Bowling Alley' giving Pat's name and dates, but no mention of her achievement – which we all can now benefit from and enjoy.

#### **ANOTHER WALK IN BELGIUM by Graham Smith**

ON July 19-20 Nicola Foad, Michael Headley and myself travelled to Belgium to walk the 100k Les Marcheurs de la police de Binche. The walk, which I did four years ago, is based in Binche, over in the west of the country and not far from the border with France.

It was the fourth 100k or 110k walk in Belgium I had entered. Challenge walks of 100k in Belgium are quite different to 100k walks over here. For a start, there is no route description. Instead you follow the route via either green/yellow or orange arrows – and with a 100k walk, there must be thousands of them. It is very hard to miss them (even at night), so it is obviously very hard to get lost (although I suspect some people have). Also, big challenge walks in Belgium start in the evening, with this one starting at 9pm. Personally, I like this, as you start by walking into the night, it means you are likely to finish at around teatime the following day, rather than in the early hours of the morning on a 100k walk over here where you start at 10am. And that way you can get a good night's sleep and have all the following day to do ... well, whatever it is you do on a day you're not walking.

Challenge walks in Belgium do have checkpoints, which are called controle, and they tend to appear more frequently than checkpoints on our 100k or 100 mile walks. There were 14 controles on Les Marcheurs de la police de Binche, which is on average one every seven kilometres. Personally I never carry too much liquid with me because of the weight, and on July 19-20 it was very hot and humid, and I found myself dehydrating quickly, so I was very glad we never had to walk too far to the next controle.



So they are the main differences with Belgian 100k walks. As for Belgian challenge walkers, they are pretty much the same as us – people who just love walking, and who enjoy the challenge of a major walk. You get the fast ones who set off straight away and want to get round as quickly as possible, and you get the plodders (like me – certainly these days) who want to do the walk at their own pace and to enjoy it while they are doing so. You also get the characters, who love the walk and who love talking about the walk, just as there are plenty of LDWA characters.

Nicola, Michael and myself caught the Eurostar train to Brussels and then got another train to Binche. We checked in, had something to eat and drink – and then we were off at 9pm, with a good couple of hundred others. The first half of the route was almost entirely on roads, which made for rapid progress. It was at night – and we were treated to a delightful Belgian sunset – so with no paths to use in the dark, navigation was easy, in fact with the arrows, it was more or less done for us. Even at night it was pretty hot and humid, so I found myself very grateful to get to the controles where I could take water or cola on board. It was also quite pleasant walking, visiting nice little villages. Also, of course, it was very flat.

About halfway through, the route changed, and we found ourselves walking on riverside paths, woodland tracks and occasionally across fields. We were also treated to a sunrise as spectacular as the sunset we had enjoyed a few hours before. When the sun was up it was, of course, very hot, with the temperature approaching 30C degrees. I found I was so grateful for the woodland tracks, which offered shelter from the scorching sun – and luckily there were lots of woodland tracks. I also found myself walking in whatever shade I could find, even shade just cast by a wall.

There were two controles at the town of Thuin, which was the largest place the walk visited. Part of the town has been built on a hill, and the town's first controle was at its cultural centre. By the time we got to the second controle at Thuin, we had done 73k, with three controles to go. Certainly the heat was getting to me – as it was to everyone else – but my feet and legs



**Left: Michael, Nicola and Graham just before setting off.**



**Right: Marc van Holsbeke, from the Belgian town of Ghent, with Nicola and Graham on the final few kilometres.**

felt fine. So we plodded on, and there was the bonus at the last controle, with cold beer on offer. It was a very nice boost. After that we kept plodding and Nicola and I got back to Binche at around 5pm, Michael having already arrived.

Due to the exceptionally hot weather, it had been a demanding walk, but nevertheless an enjoyable one. Having done it twice now, at the moment I am not sure if I would do it again. However, while doing that one I was told about a 50k walk in the Ghent-Bruges area. Apparently you are given 10 hours to do it, but you follow arrows and the route is mainly on minor roads, so it shouldn't be difficult. I will try to get details and put something in the next newsletter, to see if anyone fancies going over to do it.

## **DIARY OF A COMMON MAN – THE VALLEYS HUNDRED: May 24-26**

**By Keith Warman**

A MEANDERING exploration of the South Wales valleys was the offering for this year's Hundred, starting and finishing at Pontypool. Apart from doing the Caerphilly Summits Challenge in 1993, this promised to be a voyage of discovery for me. Little did I know just what a rocky voyage I was letting myself in for.

From Pontypool, the route traversed lonely moors south-westwards, dropping only to cross the Ebbw, Rhymney and Taff valleys before meeting the Rhondda valley. More moorland, then a change in direction to north-east, to cross the Clydach, Taff, Rhymney and Sirhowy valleys to Tredegar. It then followed the Ebbw valley ridges, swept over Coity Mountain, crossed the Afon valley and circled around the northern slopes of Blorenge mountain before heading southwards back to

Pontypool. We had 16 checkpoints and seven self-clipper points to locate and the total ascent and descent of 15,361 feet to overcome. It was a fabulous route which, I am sure, surprised many people's perceptions of South Wales's former industrial landscape. We saw downtrodden civilisation and social deprivation but, upon lifting our eyes up to the wonderful mountains and valley sides, we could be excused for thinking we were striding through the Yorkshire Dales, the Dark Peak or Northumberland. Most of the heavy industry has now vanished and I recall crossing just two landscaped coal spoil heaps. There is now a train of thought to preserve some of the spoil heaps as they stand – in the name of industrial heritage – something unthinkable a generation ago!

The weather forecast was dire, with heavy rain predicted for the whole weekend. Both Thursday and Friday before the event were awash with torrential rain, so we had little fear of sun-baked hard surfaces or of dust being blown in our eyes. As it turned out, the weather, which was to become the dominant factor, made this one of the toughest Hundreds held.

Taking the marshals' and main events together, there were 13 starters from Kent Group. Eight (three on the marshals' walk and five on the main event) were fortunate enough to finish. My commiserations to those who had to retire and congratulations to all who completed the challenge.

At the start . . . received a drenching getting to the registration hall. I'm not keen walking in my cagoule and positively dislike wearing waterproof trousers – I had no choice if I was to try and stay relatively dry and comfortable. Much of the usual banter was missing and an air of trepidation hung over the hall. Standing in the relentless rain at the start, I felt very sorry for the organisers having to contend with the one thing beyond their control.

1 mile . . . Through a housing estate, said goodbye to Shirlie and followed the peloton up a steep tarmac track into the low mist.

2 miles . . . Sloshed across a cattle grid under water to the 'bucket drop' (the token given to me at registration was dropped into a bucket swimming with other tokens to signify that I had started). Looked ahead to see sodden legs disappearing uphill into the clouds.

3 miles . . . With about 30 yards' visibility and in eerie silence, I trudged steadily up a muddy gully gouged through the hillside. Surprised to pass a radio mast which appeared from nowhere.

4 miles . . . The track across open moorland was one sinuous bog, snaking to what seemed like the edge of the world. Passed trig point at 1,548 feet. Caught up George Foot, who promptly announced, "I'm stopping for a slash Keith, no-one will see me in these conditions – ha ha!" I doubt if anyone did.

6 miles . . . I was very grateful for my March recce, in glorious sunshine, across these confusing moors of Mynydd Maen. Today, there was little chance of dry feet. Constantly tacking left and right, trying to avoid the worse bits of mire, proved to be a pointless exercise. The rain was incessant and the visibility parlous. I kept pinching myself to check if I was dreaming. I wasn't and realised that I could have another 45 hours like this. George trotted past.

7 miles . . . The approach to Twmbarlwm, an Iron Age hill fort, usually gave commanding views all around. Alas, not today. The cloud parted for a few moments to reveal a string of walkers leaving the summit ridge. Seconds later, the cloud swallowed them again.

8 miles . . . After a steep descent, first down a grassy hillside then through foot-tripping, root-ridden woodland, I slunk into checkpoint 1 at Cwm Carn Forest Drive. Islwyn Ramblers were bravely supporting us in drenched tents as the rain plummeted in stair-roads. A few dazed walkers here. 1:00 pm.

9 miles . . . A tarmac towpath gave a brief respite from the mud and, after Crosskeys, I crossed the swirling grey lava-flow of the Ebbw River. This was the longest section, being an unforgiving 9.70 miles to the unpronounceable Maesycwmmmer.

12 miles . . . Slow going on really tricky narrow and ascending paths through the Sirhowy Valley Country Park. Runners starting to overtake me. Fell over but no damage done (to either wayside or Warman).

14 miles . . . Joined the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk on clear tracks, more level now across Mynydd y Grug Common – it was difficult to look anywhere but where your feet were hopefully going to land. Plush mud and deep puddles dominated.

17 miles . . . Reached the road on the descent to Maesycwmmmer to be confronted by an unannounced outdoor checkpoint. What miserable conditions for the poor marshals. Just after this and as the rain eased, I waded across a wide, swampy hollow. The irony of it was not lost on me – I knew this was coming, so had donned large plastic bags on my feet, "just to keep them dry." The effort was wasted as waist downwards I was wet through.

18 miles . . . I was startled to see so many folk at checkpoint 2 in Maesycwmmmer Village Hall. Brian Buttifant and Avril Stapleton were helping the Bath Beat Team and I was delighted to meet two chums from last year's Hundred, Angela and Tony Walton. They invited me to join them and Chris Seddon from Merseystride Group and, as we left the hall, the heavens opened once again. 4:32 pm.

20 miles . . . Climbed out of the Rhymney valley from Ystrad Mynach and the Waltons were pulling ahead. Chris and I couldn't keep up with them. The cloud had dispersed slightly to give improved visibility of 100 yards.



21 miles . . . A gradual ascent to the trig point on Mynydd Eglwysilan. I was struggling to keep up with Chris so I told her to go on. I suddenly realised how few of my usual Hundred chums I had seen. Mind you, it was difficult to see anyone or anything in these conditions.

23 miles . . . Following a high-level moorland traverse, I turned off a wet stony track and headed on a bearing across featureless tussocky terrain to the next trig point on Cefn Eglwysilan. Looking down to my left I saw the village of Senghenydd. The hairs on the back of my neck shivered, for here in 1913 was the UK's worst mining disaster when an underground explosion claimed 440 lives.

25 miles . . . While descending into the Taff valley, I slid and fell over again. Self-clipper A was safely bagged before the respite of a tarmac path through an urban park.

26 miles . . . I slithered into the organised chaos of checkpoint 3, Trallwn Community Centre on the outskirts of Pontypridd. Heart of England Group was busy doing great work. Space was tight but eventually I propped myself up on the stage. 7:40 pm and about one hour behind my schedule. Decided to change into my spare dry socks – not a pleasant task as my laces were interred in coagulating mud.

27 miles . . . In teeming rain, crossed the surging River Taff and began climbing through a nicely landscaped spoil heap. Thanks to my fresh socks, my feet had stayed dry for all of...err...11 minutes. Overtaken by an event runner who asked, rather curiously, “Are you ready for this?” Where had he been for the past 10 hours?

28 miles . . . A tricky, steep descent down a narrow, muddy path into the Rhondda valley. Then one mile up a lane to self-clipper B where, in the gloaming gloom, I torched up.

30 miles . . . A splendid moorland section over closely-cropped grass. A dozen or so torches were weaving uphill ahead of me. Another runner caught me up and I asked him if the red rear light on my rucksack was working. “Oh yes,” he said, “I thought I was following someone on a bike!” “I don’t think a bike would get anywhere in these conditions,” I replied.

32 miles . . . Following a tricky woodland section, I reached the tented checkpoint 4 in the car park of the isolated Brynffynon Hotel in Llanwonno. This was the furthest west on the route, but it didn’t quite feel like I had ‘turned for home’ just yet. 11:11 pm. Beds, Bucks & Northants looked after me well, and I enjoyed spirited banter with Martin Lawson, David Findel-Hawkins and Dave Yorston. As I left, Dave shrieked, “Keith, did you know you’ve got a flashing red a\*\*e!” Great stuff.

33 miles . . . Having safely passed through a surprise woodland kit-check, caught up Chris Seddon again. She was walking with Julie Brownhill from Staffordshire.

35 miles . . . Julie led us quietly through the sleeping village of Ynysybwl. (Oh dear! I do hope I’ve pronounced that correctly.) We barely glanced at the river rushing down the main street.

37 miles . . . After a cycle path, more woodland and then streets of terraced houses, we reached Northumbria Group’s checkpoint 5 in the Moriah Hall, Abercynon. Estate agents would have described this as ‘cosy’ and it was sardine-full of walkers licking their wounds. 1:16 am. I was aware, for the first time, just how many people were retiring, including several here awaiting the body wagon. Eva Bowes was doing sterling marshalling work. She said that her husband Albert, aiming for his 20th. completion, was not far ahead of me.

39 miles . . . Suitably refreshed, our merry threesome meandered under a railway, over the tumultuous River Taff, along tracks of old railways and across fields.

42 miles . . . Difficulty in getting traction on mucky, boggy paths, ascending slightly. Fell over for the third time. This section was a real trial. Found self-clipper C, dangling from a kissing gate.

43 miles . . . Still raining! Feeling rather weary, I slumped into checkpoint 6, the Community Centre at Gelligaer. Members of Essex & Herts were doing their best to cheer walkers up, but the atmosphere was subdued. Dave and Sue Wingrove’s encouragement was gratefully received, but I began to doubt whether I would finish. 4:33 am.

45 miles . . . The three of us were joined by brother and sister Stephen Blackshaw and Vivien Pike. I wouldn’t describe it as ‘in first light’ but, when you did have the opportunity to take your eyes off the ground and shield them from the rain, it was definitely a lighter grey to the east. After pleasant pastoral fields we were grateful for the flagging to, “follow path as it meanders gently uphill, becoming indistinct (!) at times, as it crosses very rough ground and after 900 yds arrive at stony track.” It was one morass of viscous bog and our spirits were certainly flagging too. Near the top, a wonderful moment. Thirty yards to my right was Stephen with Viv a few yards behind him. Suddenly, Viv shouted for help as she sank into a bog up to her knees. Stephen turned to assist and, peering at his wailing sister, he looked across at me and called out, “Have you got a gun? That’s the polite thing to ask in these situations, isn’t it?” The fact that it was one hundred years since the outbreak of World War One was very poignant. Viv took the comment in good humour.

47 miles . . . My four companions had pulled ahead on the steep descent to checkpoint 7, Deri Community Hall. This was a very low point for me and the cheerful welcome from Kent and Bristol & West Groups did not assuage my mental turmoil. I was certain that I would retire, but I wanted to get to the next checkpoint (52 miles) to ensure I had a qualifier for next year’s Hundred. Accordingly, I asked my fellow travellers to leave without me as I did not wish to delay them, but they insisted that we stay together. 6:32 am and two hours behind my schedule.

50 miles . . . The familiar pattern on the route was here again: leave checkpoint, climb out of valley, upland traverse, then drop to checkpoint in valley. Filthy forest rides and flooded moorland tracks, no less clean, led us to self-clipper D welded to a modern steel sculpture at 1,320 feet, overlooking the upper Rhymney valley. The five of us agreed that we would soon be timed out, believing we would have spent four and a half hours to cover the 5.70 miles to checkpoint 8. We were all confused as, in reality, it was two and a half hours. Such were the travails of our attrition.

52 miles . . . Checkpoint 8, run by Wessex Group, in the beautiful St. Aiden's Church at Bute Town, was a quiet oasis. 9:06 am. I told the others that I was likely to retire here, but did not formally do so, and they shuffled off. I telephoned Shirlie, who was waiting for me at the next checkpoint, and explained the situation. She immediately drove to Bute Town and somehow persuaded me to continue. In fact, she insisted on walking with me to Tredegar.

54 miles . . . Managed to temporarily lose Shirlie on the descent from Rhymney Hill and, heavens above, it was trying to stop raining.

56 miles . . . Through the serene gardens of Bedwellty House to checkpoint 9A, the baggage stop run by North Yorkshire Group. A quick but awkward change into dry clothes helped me feel more comfortable. 11:52 am.

57 miles . . . We left for the short trip to checkpoint 9B, the breakfast stop at Georgetown Community Centre run by East Lancashire Group. 12:38 pm and I arrived just seven minutes inside closing time. Shirlie found a kindly soul to take her back to her car and I had some hasty sustenance.

59 miles . . . Felt much better now and was glad that Shirlie had cajoled me into carrying on. The gentle and glorious ascent of Cefn Manmoel was abruptly stopped when the heavens opened. The high wind and driving rain across the top were severely testing, but my resolve was undiminished. I recalled Neil Higham once telling me that, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." I didn't exactly feel tough, but his words spurred me on.

61 miles . . . Found self-clipper E then promptly fell over on a slithering descent into a mud-infested gully. I don't recall ever having fallen over so many times.

63 miles . . . Arrived at checkpoint 10, Pen-y-fan Pond, and the rain eased as Shirlie greeted me. 3:35 pm. Marches Group here in sodden tents. I was now one hour inside time, but I knew the difficulties which lay ahead. Shirlie goaded me on.

65 miles . . . A very steep descent into the Ebbw valley, then a gradual climb up a forestry track through Coed Big wood. Near the top, I caught up Mike Pursey, Alan Stewart and Elaine Oddie.

68 miles . . . Under threatening skies, I slogged along the ridge of Mynydd Carn-y-cefn. Spied a few more people ahead.

69 miles . . . Caught up Chris Seddon, who was quite surprised to see me. Julie was just ahead. We decided we would try and stay together through the second night.

70 miles . . . Shirlie and Keith Bailey met us just before checkpoint 11 at Nantyglo Senior Citizens' Hall. Not yet qualifying as senior citizens, we wondered if we might have to play nicely outside and make do with a packet of crisps and a bottle of fizzy pop. 7:06 pm. Staffordshire Group here but, alas, no oatcakes this year. Chris, Julie and I left in good spirits although we didn't think we'd make checkpoint 12 in daylight.

73 miles . . . Rough and saturated tracks led up to the waterlogged whaleback of Coity Mountain. We followed a straight line for two and a half miles, passing the highest point on the route at 1,837 feet.

77 miles . . . Having safely left the highest ground, it started to rain heavily upon us. "Oh good," I thought, "that will help settle the dust a bit." From somewhere, darkness descended. Another spoil heap, followed by a tricky traverse of lethal, narrow wooden planks clinging to a valley side, then up through squelching woodland to self-clipper F.

79 miles . . . Under the streetlights of Abersychan and then onto a gently ascending old railway track. I told Chris and Julie that, after all I'd been through, I was determined to make the finish. They agreed and said that we couldn't afford to dally at the checkpoints. It stopped raining as we left the track and enjoyed (!) a steep, rocky descent through trees.

80 miles . . . Met Shirlie at checkpoint 12, Cwmavon Village Hall. 11:38 pm. The mood among the walkers was somewhat solemn, despite Cornwall & Devon's marshals oozing sympathy and encouragement. After a brief stop, Stephen Blackshaw and Viv Pike joined us as we departed.

81 miles . . . A very steep climb onto moorland saw Stephen and Viv fall behind, but we really had to push on to avoid being timed out.

83 miles . . . Just to keep us alert, more succulent bogs to wade through on our way to, "Follow faint but clear path that becomes very broad for 2.1 miles as it gently ascends Mynydd y Garn-fawr..." This was the most depressingly shoe-sucking, slithering section I can remember on any Hundred – a seemingly never-ending thrash across a featureless upland quagmire. The radio masts we were aiming for were invisible until, eventually, we crashed into their perimeter fencing.

84 miles . . . At 1,550 feet, the tented checkpoint 13 at Keeper's Pond, run by Thames Valley Group, offered a brief respite but we had no time to sit and cogitate. 2:07 am. Shirlie urged us away onto another tough section to Llanellen.

86 miles . . . Rough tracks to self-clipper G, followed by a beautiful path contouring around the northern slopes of Blorengie with the lights of Abergavenny way below us.

88 miles . . . A couple of steep, energy-sapping climbs, then we started the drop into the Usk valley. A late diversion, due to a flooded bridge, plunged us down a mud slide between trees. Fell over yet again and, much to my embarrassment, had to ask the ladies to pull me back up. First light gradually emerged and, with the dawn chorus (in Welsh of course), our battered brains absorbed the tranquil serenity.

90 miles . . . Guided by Shirlie, we staggered into checkpoint 14 in Llanellen Village Hall, run by London Group. Dave Williams was marshalling and was his usual sparky self, but I regretted that our forlorn weariness could not match his *joie de vivre*. 4:43 am. We ate and drank well here and had the finish on our minds.

91 miles . . . Suitably refreshed, we climbed onto the bank of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, whose welcome towpath we then sleepwalked along for four miles in, wait for it, morning sunshine! Not yet having had my customary 39 winks on the event, I was feeling a tad tired and we agreed to rest awhile on a bench by Goytre Wharf. The peaceful, scenic surroundings and colourful boats were difficult to leave but, hey, we had a Hundred to finish.

95 miles . . . Along thickly-hedged lanes to checkpoint 15, the Goytre Scout Hut at Penperlleni. 7:08 am. The Irregulars were preparing to close down. We didn't hang around. The sun still shone as Shirlie led us out along the lane to conquer our final five miles.

97 miles . . . The sting in the tail. Just after The Star Inn at Mamhilad, we were faced with a climb of 500 feet up a very steep, ancient sunken track overhung with sepulchral trees. Still surviving were the rounded and worn stones – as laid by the Romans – which were extremely slippery, thanks to the lively stream crashing downhill into us. In a surreal moment of great relief, we finally popped out into daylight at the top.

98 miles . . . Mike Childs and Deirdre Flegg were among the Dorset Group's marshals at the final checkpoint, number 16, in the Folly Tower car park. 8:40 am. I was now so hot and wanted to remove my over-trousers (which I'd had on since the start). As well as layers of South Wales mud, they had acquired a stubborn streak and decided not to go past my shoes – which I certainly didn't want to remove at this late stage – so on they stayed.

100 miles . . . Our threesome had grown to seven as we descended into Pontypool. Tony Rowley met us and led us up the road to the finish. A (now) stress-free Shirlie warmly greeted us at the gate. Such incredible relief. 9:49 am and just inside the time limit – phew! We had the most wonderful welcome as we checked in, probably the best I've ever known, and I was quite emotional with the realisation of our achievement. Chris, Julie and I congratulated and thanked each other. The subdued air among walkers at many of the checkpoints now gave way to unbridled joy. What an extremely physical and mental test we had overcome.

My grateful thanks go to South Wales Group, all marshals, helpers and friends for their hard work in such adversity, especially those working outdoors. Finally, and not least, I thank Shirlie for her encouragement and, without whom, I would surely have retired at Bute Town. What 'pleasure' these damned Hundreds bring to so many people – now where are those maps of Lancashire?

## BUEN CAMINO

Thoughtfully scripted and penned by Sarah Turner, wannabe Adventurista, Nov 2014



IN order to walk 'The Way' you have to get use to this extremely frequently, consistent but friendly phrase as you strike foot to earth over hard ground, soft ground, grass, concrete, Roman Road and sandy trails for the entire length of your pilgrimage/walk/hike – you decide your definition.

So it occurred on Sep 20 2014 in North Spain that I spent 20 days on the The Way of St James (also known as Camino Frances), starting my journey from Burgos in the region of Castilla y Leon, and ending up in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia totalling some well earned 497.7 kms. If you were to begin at the beginning from St Jean Pied de Port in France, you would clock up some 784.9 kms to Santiago, taking in a particularly hilly section of the Pyrenees; now I ask, who's up for joining me in completing the first 1/3rd next year? I've got a plan.....!



What to expect? Companionship, good weather (I must have been blessed), fabulous Spanish vino y pinchos (wine and tapas to you and I) and the enjoyment of the well trodden path. What more could an LDWA newbie want! Shoes that do not rub would be a start, more on those later!

So from Burgos I hopped, skipped and hobbled through some beautiful Spanish inland scenery, alongside an abundance of sun flowers sadly bobbing downwards as their season was at an end but still alive, with the bulging sun blooming marvellously, bringing some colour to this English white skin that occasionally also got tinged by the post walk vino sessions - very keeping in with our local Kent gatherings mid walk luncheon stop!

The Meseta – the plateau - was the first step directly out of Burgos; an easy plod through scenery that reminded me of Patagonia, South America - the meseta being the Spanish equivalent of our farmlands. Flat, endless looking hot dry plains with occasional trees, giving minimal shade, and a tractor casually ploughing the fields in the distance. In fact the whole 480 kms I trod was fairly flat with only one substantial hilly section at the end of my hike, such is this part of 'The Way'.



Sociable - you are never really alone either; sharing the path with the occasional sheep & their shepherd, cows and many fellow pelegrinos; it was rare indeed to be totally solo, but nevertheless you could certainly lose yourself in your thoughts, and if you weren't paying attention then you would lose your Way.

The signage is extremely good – no map or compass needed - all you have to look for are the arrows, and/or the 'Shell' if you're in a built up area. But you have to be observant. That casual in-depth discussion with a fellow comrade could have you going off in the completely wrong direction, before being casually reminded by a fellow walker. Did I really.....?

You will never tire of the early morning sunrises – such beauty this part of northern Spain greets us pilgrims with - leaving mostly around 0630-0730, and later in my journey

sometimes as late as 0820 due to the north European morning darkness, accompanied by the full bodied rising orange sun popping up over the horizon, always behind you (a good reminder that you're going in the correct direction). With the sun on your back and the Way ahead, off we plodded, torches flashing ahead of you like ants in the distance confirming that yes, you are going the correct way.



The departure time dictated your day; it depends on how far you wanted to walk and if you thought you'd get a bed for the evening. Accommodation – albergues – are a plenty, however, for the number of personnel en route it's amazing that there are enough beds for everyone. Luckily I never had to walk further than I wanted to rest, but for some late arrivals in the early evening, another couple of kms was required, so a little light planning is necessary. Aside from a little planning, your daily schedule went something like this, every day, (unless you took a rest day) until the end.....what could be more perfect...

....Sleep, awake, wash, walk, eat, walk, drink, walk, rinse clothes, eat and drink more, sleep zzzz (or maybe not sleep – depending on whether you use ear plugs or not).

Snoring – now there's a topic you can get extremely well versed in; you just never know what sound you will get to hear next – how can people make such .... sounds! It would be helpful to come armed with around 50+ army boots to launch across the dormitory - all part of the fun of the albergues; young 'n' old folk mixed together; male & female; snorers, coughers, sleep talkers...you get them all. If you don't want to mingle with the masses then there are always the posher versions of albergues to stay in, so if €5 is just too cheap, pay an extra €5+ and you're up there in the Hilton! The Camino caters for all.





Blisters! Feet...how we batter them. For you 100 competitors out there then you are well aware how bad your feet get, and the feeling that you've got to get back on them and carry on walking. Although I was only doing 13 miles average a day this is not so bad, but every day! Our shoes are just not accustomed to this continuous form of shoe torture.....my reliable Merinos saw me through

until I got blisters on the balls of my foot, where I have never gotten blisters before. Not pleasantly happy by this I decided in Leon (city with a variety of shops/chemists/and outdoor shops) to purchase some new North Face Hedgehog shoes....New! Horror, no that cannot be possible – in the middle of a walk! Yes I did. To detrimental effect yes, but a solution was found after initially bounding along, to initially accepting the hot spot, to getting a bit irritable by the injury, to actually taking the once loveable Hedgehogs off and walking two days in my evening shoes – Vivobarefoot plastic sandals. I was now leaping with joy – no more heel rubbing, thus no more pain. Pain – to which I would not resolve with paracetamol as morphine would have been more appropriate, such was the terror. At one point I stood still and thought “this is it – it’s the end. What have I done?” (Yes I did leave said Merinos behind to find a friend in the albergue in Leon – why would I want to carry another 1kg? Weight is of issue). But a spark of inspiration and sheer panic told me to get out my ‘plastics’ and get cracking. Heaven on earth indeed. Fellow pelegrinos did make a few comments, more out of curiosity, but to me it was like walking on freshly mown grass.....aaaaahhhh. Aside, many other pilgrims were wearing their sandals after going through a similar episode as I had done. Whatever suits will get you through. Adapt, overcome and be comfortable.

However, upon approaching the ‘hilly stage’ of my sojourn I realised that I needed a firmer footing, and ultimately my feet were going to ‘have to’ go back into the Hedgehogs, ouch. But ‘bing’ such is The Way that the idea came to me. Why on earth didn’t I take out the inner soles and try walking without them.....sure enough, this solution proved invaluable and I was able to leap and bound up, across, then down to the finish with no further inroads of a blister in sight.

How much did I spend in the local chemists – I should have bought shares! Then when knowing that you need more supplies whilst you’re currently transiting through small, villages, ahem panic sets in....fun times!

Weight/donning your back pack – no more than 40 litres is required. Just stuff it all in. Peregrinos do hang stuff off the back; jingle jangle ‘stuff’ was littered around their Camino Shells and good luck charms. Each to their own but military precision was required by myself and it if didn’t go in, it wasn’t going to, until the wearing plastic shoes scenario where I had to dangle my prized Hedgehogs outside – my penance for buying new shoes, no space left in 40 litre bag.

Food – realistically during the day you survive the Camino with bread, wine and tortilla. It’s as easy as that! In the evenings a good Pilgrims Menu will set you back around €10 (which included 1/3 bottle of house red) and was very good value indeed. There were some unplanned events like a two hour picnic lunch, (which yes, included wine), that was provided by two Swedes whom I happened across. I then bumped into Michael and Jans again, along with Canadian Ed one afternoon whereupon we supped a few beers by the river at Molinaseca, that materialised into a dip into said ‘very cold river’. A blissful way to ease warm, hot feet. And how can I not mention pulpa, octopus served in Galicia – it’s the best I have ever eaten.



In a spit ‘n’ sawdust restaurant in Melide, accompanied by Bob, another Canadian pal whom I always ended up meeting and drinking with since meeting up in Foncebadon, with 144 miles to go, (not that you plan to meet, but such is The Way, you end up bumping into the same folk randomly in the towns/villages), Bob was encouraged by my “we must taste the octopus cos it’s famous here” spiel, so we trotted into the above restaurant and got served - initially with wine, which you drink from little bowls, followed by a huge platter of freshly cooked octopus and plain boiled potatoes. Absolutely fabulous, and in true Bob fashion we had more wine....(there’s a pattern here). Then I walked Don – an Idaho chap whom Bob had walked with before, and our trio was finalised. 60 miles left to push and it was with these two lovely 60+ year old chaps that I made my



way into Santiago de Compostela on the Oct 9 2014; extremely happy and content, despite having been absolutely rained on, like no other rain has done before in my outdoor pursuits, the day before final arrival day!

Galicia is known for its rainfall and she surely did us proud. It was the only time that I donned the bright yellow poncho (which surely weighed 1 kg in itself, purchased from the albergue in Burgos – a must-have apparently). Everything, yes everything, except my backpack, got wet. And when the rain wasn't hard enough nature decided to throw in a gust of wind for good measure.....it was laughable. Don and I did laugh! So much so the high spirits continued until we arrived to our albergue just outside of Santiago, where it was still raining cats 'n' dogs (x100). So it was decided that due to the wet conditions we would do a combined clothes wash (rare indeed) – no washing powder for this machine, no, just a dollop, or two, of Don's Man Shower Gel! "Just a bit more" I added. For the first time in 20 days my clothes got a proper wash.....man style. I smelt oh so lovely!

To conclude this epic tale, here are the towns and villages that I retired in, drank wine in and put my weary feet down for the evening, accompanied, of course, by the snores and grunts of fellow Peregrinos; where laughter, moans 'n' groans gently flowed throughout the dormitories and hallways; where friendships were made and perhaps lost(?), indeed where clothing, socks & odds 'n' ends were mislaid or forgotten, but it didn't matter because it's The Way, and there can be no other way.

Burgos, Hontanas, Boadilla, Carrion, Ledigos, Hermanillos, Mansilla, Leon, Villavante, Murias de Rechivaldo, Foncebadon, Ponferrada, Villafranca, O'Cebreiro, Triacastela, Barbadelo, Gonzar, Melide, Salceda, Monte Gozo & finally Santiago.

### **BATTLE OF BRITAIN WALK: SEPTEMBER 28 by Peter Jull**

The shortest walk on our programme for a while attracted the largest participation for a while. Short it might be but flat it wasn't, with a stiff climb out of Alkham to the south. Remembrances of super squelchy past passings of Tumble Tye Farm were punctuated by bang bang off to the right – a pigeon fluttered to earth. Angling down, across and up the shallower end of the Alkham Valley still deserved a drink on a warm and sunny day. Through and beyond Hawkinge village, through and beyond Hawkinge cemetery, we had somewhere unseen crossed the built over Battle of Britain airfield and the pilot's favoured watering hole, Paddlesworth's Cat & Custard Pot, was soon in sight ready for a early lunch. Well fed and refreshed, it was the time and place to turn for home. Pillars Woods and then the larger Reinden Wood hiding more Battle of Britain remnants. Down into one of the more visually delightful hidden dry valleys followed by the last climb of the day up to the often audibly undelightful Great Evenden but for once the intimidatory barking dogs are not running loose. Instead we get cavalcades of numbered off-road bikes on their own cross country event passing by, courteously. The last few fields and the best view of the Alkham Valley comes into sight step by step as we descend back into the village from the west.

### **MUCH MORE THAN A WALK IN THE PARK By Don Newman**

That's what the T-shirt said, and it turned out to be very true. I felt slightly out of my comfort zone as I sat in the Hathersage Memorial Hall on a Friday evening in August, contemplating the 56-mile Peak District Challenge. I can't remember how I found out about this event, but it wasn't in Strider, and I didn't recognize anyone in the hall. The organisers, Wilderness Development, have their own distinct un-LDWA like event format. Instead of a route description, we had a booklet of OS map extracts, showing the checkpoints and arrows indicating the suggested route. The LDWA call this a Kanter, but we don't do many of them. Chatting to people who had done the event before, I learned that there were no under-cover checkpoints. I had not visited the Peak District since the White Peak 100 in 1998, and I had not had a chance to recce any of the route. The event was to start at 9pm, and it already dark and raining.

Apart from all that, everything was fine! This was my 5th 50+ mile event in 2014, and I'd completed the horrendous Valleys Hundred, so I was confident that I could handle this. There were several possible woodland paths to the first CP, all unfamiliar to me, so I planned to stick with the crowd. After that the route looked more obvious. Unfortunately there was no crowd, as we were timed out of the hall at 1 minute intervals. I could see two torches ahead of me, and hurried to keep up with them. Inevitably they split and headed in different directions. The one I chose to follow went round a corner, and when I reached that point they were out of sight. Not a good start. OK, time to stop being lazy, and do my own navigating. I found



myself on a road, and followed it the CP, meeting other walkers emerging from different directions. We then faced a steep rocky climb up onto Stanage Edge, and wide tracks to the next CP.

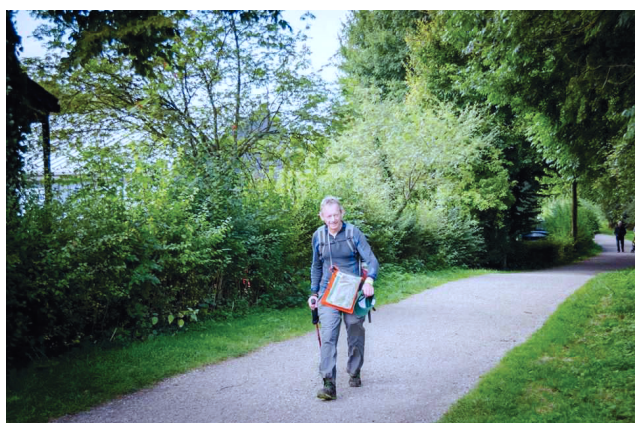
The wind and rain were now distinctly unpleasant. After the Valleys 100, I had resolved to replace numerous items of kit which proved unable to repel many hours of continuous rain. Here I was three months later wearing and carrying the same kit! Conversation was difficult, as we trudged along, heads down, splashing through quagmires and slipping on wet rocks. Relief came at CP2, where two cheerful young girls



dispensed food, drink, sympathy and encouragement from the back of a car at the side of the A57.

The next section was easier, and the next easier still as we walked around Ladybower Reservoir on a broad track. Then the fun started. I found myself alone as I ascended in the dark from the reservoir, on a moorland path. In the discomfort of wind and rain, I didn't study the map carefully enough. Where I should have veered left, I continued, and found myself scrambling down among large rocks, looking for a path. I couldn't see a path, nor anything else in front of me, so I scrambled back up hastily. I related this to Will, the cheerful event organizer, much later. He smiled, and advised me to go online and take a look at Alport Castles. The rocks are big gritstone blocks, which look like castle battlements. Below them is a sheer drop! As Wikipedia relates, 'The rock faces and cliffs are unstable and unsuitable for climbing and scrambling'. Oh well, it's all in a night's walk.

Back at the top, two torches approached. The young lady knew the area, and had in fact helped to organize the previous year's event. She said that the way down was by a narrow footpath, not easily found from the top. While her companion and I, being perfect gentlemen, cowered well away from the edge, avoiding the worst of the wind and rain, this intrepid lady walked the edge, and eventually found the path. She was shivering as we descended out of the weather, and we stopped as she put on extra layers. I never learned her name, but I owe her a drink. Without her, we would have been up there, getting colder and wetter, for the rest of the night.



Dawn was breaking as we descended the slippery winding path, into the valley. We needed to cross the swiftly flowing River Alport via a footbridge, but we couldn't find it. We wasted time walking back up the hilly river banks, eventually returning to find the bridge, in daylight, near the point where we had first descended.

In daylight, the weather improved, and I began to enjoy the walk, and appreciate the scenery. My young companions had sped away and left me, although I caught up with them later. The route descended into Edale, then steeply up to Hollins Cross, and down into Castleton. The last two CPs had just been clipper points, with no water supply, so I was glad to reach the cheerful Castleton checkpointers, set up beneath a large oak tree. They had also been up all night, doing a great job. Heading

south along the Limestone Way, the route became busier, as I mingled with walkers who had started out this morning. The shorter distances had far more walkers, some in fancy dress, including apparently, a brass band playing as they walked. Hopefully a significant amount of money was raised for the event's chosen charity, SALVE International, which helps homeless children living on the streets in Uganda.

I eventually reached the CP at Millersdale Station, long abandoned by trains, but packed with day trippers and their cars, on what was now a sunny afternoon. The route now followed the old railway line, for several easy miles to Bakewell Station. The line has been re-surfaced, and the long tunnels are lit, to facilitate throngs of cyclists, walkers, and families with their buggies. The scene resembled a seaside promenade, and I felt out of place in my dishevelled state, among all the well dressed tourists and lycra-clad athletes.

The view of the river at Monsal Head was superb, and more good scenery followed, as I left the trail, and headed across fields to the grounds of Chatsworth House. Here there were thousands more tourists, at the busy Country Fair. Our event armband ensured access



without payment. The smell of hot food, and the sight of a beer tent, tempted me to stop, but I forced myself to hurry along the footpath towards the finish, and the promised hot meal. Another huge climb, open moorland, and more rain had to be endured, but I eventually found myself back at the hall, enjoying delicious baked potato with curry.

Overall it was a challenging but enjoyable event. Having completed events all over England and Wales, I found myself wondering why I hadn't been to the beautiful Peak District for so many years. The dates for 2015 are September 18-19, and I plan to be there.



## 500k CHARITY WALK

CLIFFORD HOY, who is a member of Surrey Group, is planning a huge circular walk, of approximately 500k, using various trails including the North Downs Way and South Downs Way and Downs Link, to raise some funds for his daughter's baby-loss charity For the Love of Harley. Clifford is at the logistical planning stage at the moment but is aiming to start around mid-April next year. If anyone is interested in helping, or perhaps joining Clifford on part – or parts – of the walk, please let him know and he will be in touch. Clifford can be contacted via the websites [www.fortheloveofharley.org.uk](http://www.fortheloveofharley.org.uk) & <http://goo.gl/guUgFc>

## COMEDY CORNER - Bless the Australians and their sense of humour.

These were posted on an Australian tourism website, and the answers are the actual responses by the website officials, who obviously have a great sense of humor (not to mention a low tolerance threshold for cretins!)

Q: *Does it ever get windy in Australia? I have never seen it rain on TV, how do the plants grow? (UK)*

A: We import all plants fully grown, and then just sit around watching them die.

Q: *Will I be able to see kangaroos in the street? (USA)*

A: Depends how much you've been drinking.

Q: *I want to walk from Perth to Sydney - can I follow the railroad tracks? (Sweden)*

A: Sure, it's only three thousand miles. Take lots of water.

Q: *Are there any ATMs (cash machines) in Australia? Can you send me a list of them in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Hervey Bay? (UK)*

A: What did your last slave die of?

Q: *Can you give me some information about hippo racing in Australia? (USA)*

A: Af-ri-ca is the big triangle shaped continent south of Europe.

Aust-ra-lia is that big island in the middle of the Pacific which does not ...

Oh, forget it. Sure, the hippo racing is every Tuesday night in Kings Cross. Come naked.

Q: *Which direction is North in Australia? (USA)*

A: Face south, and then turn 180 degrees. Contact us when you get here and we'll send the rest of the directions.

Q: *Can I bring cutlery into Australia? (UK)*

A: Why? Just use your fingers like we do.

Q: *Can you send me the Vienna Boys' Choir schedule? (USA)*

A: Aus-tri-a is that quaint little country bordering Ger-man-y, which is ...

Oh, forget it. Sure, the Vienna Boys Choir plays every Tuesday night in Kings Cross, straight after the hippo races. Come naked.

Q: *Can I wear high heels in Australia? (UK)*

A: You are a British politician, right?

Q: *Are there supermarkets in Sydney and is milk available all year round? (Germany)*

A: No, we are a peaceful civilization of vegan hunter/gatherers. Milk is illegal.

Q: *Please send a list of all doctors in Australia who can Dispense rattlesnake serum. (USA)*

A: Rattlesnakes live in A-mer-ica, which is where YOU come from. All Australian snakes are perfectly harmless, can be safely handled, and make good pets.

Q: *I have a question about a famous animal in Australia, but I forget its name. It's a kind of bear and lives in trees. (USA)*

A: It's called a Drop Bear. They are so called because they drop out of gum trees and eat the brains of anyone walking underneath them. You can scare them off by spraying yourself with human urine before you go out walking.

Q: *I have developed a new product that is the fountain of youth. Can you tell me where I can sell it in Australia? (USA)*

A: Anywhere significant numbers of Americans gather.

Q: *Do you celebrate Christmas in Australia? (France)*

A: Only at Christmas.

Q: *Will I be able to speak English most places I go? (USA)*

A: Yes, but you'll have to learn it first.

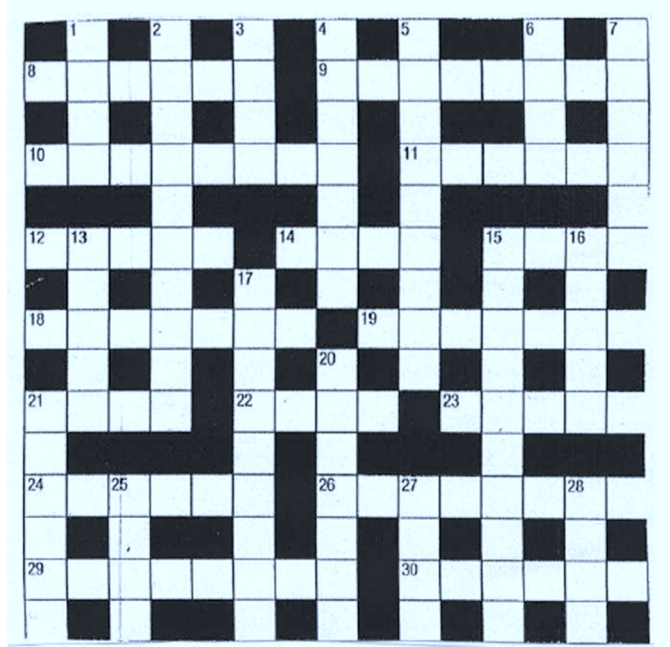
## A FINALCROSSWORD compiled by Shirley Higgins

### ACROSS

8. Familiar like Goathurst (6)
9. Former attitude outside old city (8)
10. Tiny, everything in weird stems (8)
11. What to say when your picture is taken, goat perhaps (6)
12. Someone famous, could be Venus (1,4)
14. Seed might come before bag or after board (4)
15. Limits for head gear. (4)
18. Take in air for the bear confused (7)
19. Don't blow your own instrument (7)
21. Walk through water Virginia (4)
22. Excursion, whistle stop perhaps (4)
23. Large meal served quickly about end of June (5)
24. Poise to lob map unusually (6)
26. Moving slowly on hands and knees (8)
29. Withdraw from, empty, scramble (8)
30. Wagered on a boat (6)

### DOWN

1. Create shape (4)
2. Unite fuse (10)
3. Bounced in for a single time (4)
4. Annoys, might be dead (7)
5. Origin of earthquake, weird pie at middle (9)
6. River takes top off dwelling (4)
7. Flat ground in Somerset (6)
13. Strangely Ray is in Asia (5)
15. Sausage from North Lancashire (10)



16. Could be stud or button (5)
17. Madly we hit crosspiece, it's a tree (9)
20. Dog who stumbles? (7)
21. Small carnivore or sly person (6)
25. Large amount to put on board (4)
27. Start of a long plod steeply (4)
28. Require a massage we hear (4)

## THE LAST WORD - FROM THE EDITOR

WELL, here we are nearing the end of another year, and what a year it's been for Kent Group of the Long Distance Walkers Association. In fact it's hard to imagine a better 40th anniversary year for us.

In June we had a delightful 40th anniversary barbecue, held at the Staplehurst home of Roger and Linda Munn, enjoyed by 70 members and friends in nice summer weather. Then at the end of July we had the return of the Wealden Waters 100k walk – our first overnight challenge walk, which we discontinued in 2003. We had a fine turnout of walkers (and some runners) on the event, and members from a few other groups helped Roger Dean and his team organise it. Judging by the post-event comments, the whole event was a huge success. So full credit to Roger and everyone else involved.

The Wealden Waters was closely followed by the White Cliffs Challenge, this year held as part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival for the first time. This event was another big success, probably with a record turnout for the shorter version of the walk (i.e. 32 miles), so it benefited from being part of the festival. We have also had Peter Jull's two series of social walks going over the routes of the Invicta and Millennium Hundreds. Sadly, I haven't been able to go on all these walks, but I have thoroughly enjoyed those I did go on.

Then at the end of October, we got the best news of all – the National Committee has awarded us the 2018 Hundred. Personally, I am highly excited by this, although I don't mind admitting I don't have too much of an idea of what is involved as I've never been involved in helping to organise a Hundred before!

We have waited a few years to get this news, as we originally bid to stage the 2016 Hundred, but lost out to Dorset Group – who, unlike us, had never organised a Hundred before. But the Cinque Ports Hundred is taking place in 2018. The route is going to be a bit flatter than some Hundreds (certainly flatter than this year's!) but it will be full of interest and variety, visiting the Weald, some delightfully fascinating Cinque Port towns and a stretch of our world famous White Cliffs. The venue – the Duke of York's Royal Military School, just outside Dover – is a lovely place, with acres of space to accommodate 500 walkers plus friends and family and the organisers, and it is to be hoped that we will be able to use some Cinque Port town halls or council offices as checkpoints. Obviously it's going to be a huge task and we are going to need the help of just about every Kent Group member.

Plans for the Cinque Ports Hundred are progressing well, and I am hoping that in 12 months' time they will be pretty advanced.

But that's three and a bit years away. There's a lot to look forward to next year. We've got our Sevenoaks Circular, back to its normal March slot (albeit in a new venue) so that it won't clash with Sussex Group's South Downs Marathon as it did this year. Our Weald challenge event is the Walk With The Smugglers, and in August it's our turn for the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge of 50-mile events, with our 53-mile White Cliffs Challenge. We have also got our usual full programme of social walks, which will include a few trips to neighbouring Sussex (as I always say, the South Downs are the closest we've got to proper hills in the South East).

And several of us will be involved with the Red Rose Hundred, as either walkers or marshals. I've entered the marshals' walk, and apart from some brief Lancastrian interludes on the Pennine Way (which I've walked twice – sorry if that sounds like boasting, although I'm sure some people would offer me commiserations for walking it twice!), I've never walked in Lancashire, so I'm really looking forward to it.

Finally, a big and sincere thanks to everyone who helps with this newsletter – to those of you who have sent me articles and pictures (and the stories and photos from Don Newman and Sarah Turner in this one show what a well travelled lot we are in Kent Group), to Bryan Clarke for doing such a first class job printing it, and to those of you who help get it distributed. Please keep your articles and photos coming – but please, try not to send articles of more than 2,000 words, better still aim for 1,500. It's just that space in the newsletter is limited, and I'm afraid we don't have the funds (do we, Neil?) to pay for the extra postage incurred with huge newsletters (although the special April newsletter, marking our 40th birthday, was an exception).

Wishing everyone a very merry Christmas – and I look forward to seeing you on a walk soon.

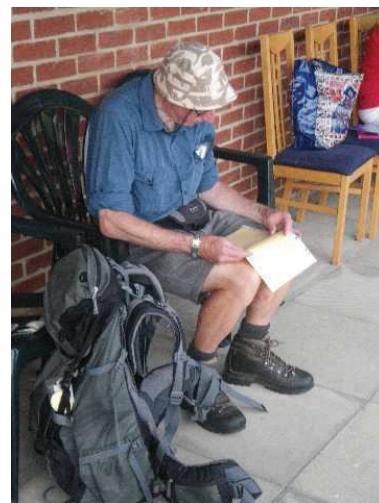


**Pictures taken on our 40th Anniversary Wealden Waters 100k Walk held on 26-27 July**  
*Photos by Eric Rolfe*





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