

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION — Kent Group

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

NEWSLETTER



**Kent LDWA member Eve Richards has completed her walk
around the entire coast of England and Wales - see story inside**

Number 101



December 2016

www.ldwa.org.uk/kent

Pictures from the White Cliffs 2016
Photos taken by Sarah Turner



SOCIAL WALKS PROGRAMME DECEMBER 2016 TO APRIL 2017

Sat Dec 10 Christmas Cruise around Calais - Group Walk - c14ml. 07.20 by P&O Desk, Dover Eastern Docks for 8.25am sailing. (GR TR331417). A circular walk in the Nord Pas de Calais visiting Cap Blanc Nez, with time for some Christmas shopping in the Auchan hypermarket. Return 2145 local time - 2045 British time. Please ring leader Graham Smith for more details –(P&O reservations number is 08716 646464).

Wed Dec 28 Post Christmas Sevenoaks Stroll - Group Walk - c18ml. 09.00 Meet at Shipbourne church on A227. Park in road opp church. (GR TQ592522). Pub lunch stop. L: Dave Sheldrake

Sun Jan 1 New Year on the South Downs Again - Group Walk - c20ml. 09.00 Meet at Eastbourne, W end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, park nr school on left. (GR TV600972). Lunch stop at Alfriston. L: Graham Smith

Fri Jan 20 Winter Night Walk - A Night on the Terrace - Group Walk - c17ml. 21.30 for 22.30 start Meet at The Bell p.h. Kemsing. (GR TQ556587). Parking 50 yds away at village hall c.p. Map Expl 147. L: Dave Sheldrake

Sun Jan 22 Summerhouse Saunter Group Walk - 18.5ml. 09.00 Meet at Lympne village hall (park at end away from hall). (GR TR121349). Lunch stop at Stowting. L: Graham Smith

Sun Jan 29 Pre-AGM walk – c7ml. Starting at 10am from Harrietsham Village Hall, followed by lunch and meeting which starts at 2pm (see story below).

Sun Feb 5 Kent Peaks – Canterbury - Group Walk - 18ml. 09.00 Wye National Nature Reserve c.p. Coldharbour Lane. (GR TR079453). A series of walks visiting the highest point in each of Kent's council areas. 1/8. Pub lunch Petham. L: Peter Jull

Sun Feb 26 Kent Peaks - Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Tonbridge - Group Walk - 20.5ml. 9.00 Trosley Country Park c.p. (P&D) or free on nearby roads. Check closing time is 6pm or later (GR TQ634611). A series of walks visiting the highest point in each on Kent's council areas 2/8. Pub lunch Longfield. L: Peter Jull

Sun Mar 5 Sevenoaks Circular Marshals' Walk Group Walk - For details contact Brian Buttifant

Sun Mar 19 Sevenoaks Circular - Challenge Event - 30, 20 or 15ml. all to finish by 18:00. From The New School at West Heath in Sevenoaks. Check website for latest information (GR TQ526529). Route on the Greensand Ridge and North Downs in West Kent on fms and lanes. Start: 30ml 08.00, 20/15ml 10.00. Postal entry on form downloadable from the website or from the event secretary Roger Dean (details below).

Sat Mar 25 Four Counties Walk - Group Walk - 20ml. 9.00 Park in centre of Dormansland near pub with toilets close by. (GR TQ404423). Following parts of the Sussex and Tandridge border paths, Eden valley, Kent water with lunch in Cowden. Bring a torch. L: Jerome Ripp

Sun Mar 26 Romp to Ripple - Group walk – 18 ml. 9.30 Meet in St Margaret's village car park (GR TR 358445). Pub stop. L: Graham Smith

Sun Apr 9 Anywhere But Elham 2 - Group Walk - 21ml. 8.30 Meet Elham Square. (GR TR177438). Map Exp 138 hopefully a pub stop at Bossingham. L: Neal O'Rourke

Fri Apr 14 A South Downs Way Loop Group Walk - 26 or 20ml. 09.00 Meet in Eastbourne at western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, park nr school on left. (GR TV600972). 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. L: Graham Smith - 26ml, Joy Davies – 20ml

Sun Apr 23 Sevenoaks to Tonbridge (linear) - Group Walk - 20ml. 09.45 Sevenoaks station. Start GR TQ522552, Finish GR TQ589465. Starting from Sevenoaks railway station taking in the delights of Knole Park and onwards towards Borough Green, passing through some lovely countryside on way to Tonbridge where we will finish at Tonbridge Castle. Pub Lunch (details TBC) Dave Strachan

Sat Apr 29 The Four Pits Walk - Group Walk - 40ml. 08.00 Meet by the bridge over the River Stour at Fordwich. (GR TR179598). Maps: Exp 150,138. A circular walk taking 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). L: Graham Smith

Sun May 21 Bash from Battle - Group Walk - 21ml. 08.30 Meet Car Park. (GR TQ765163). Map Exp 124 Pub stop Telham. L: Neal O'Rourke

KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman - Brian Buttifant -

Secretary/newsletter editor - Graham Smith,

Treasurer - Neil Higham

Walks secretary - Peter Jull -

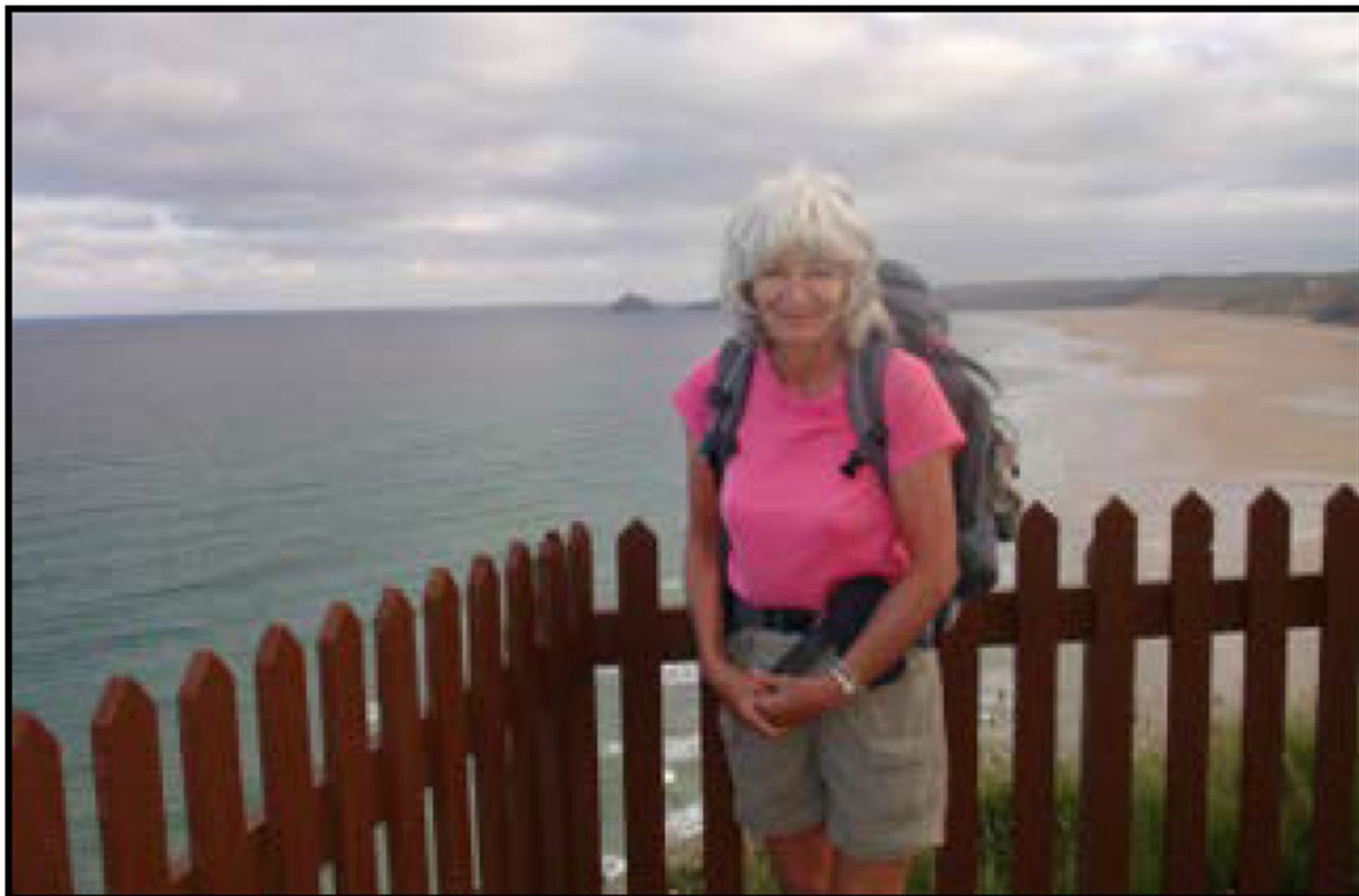
Equipment – Sarah Turner -

Membership secretary - Roger Dean,

Webmaster - Michael Headley -

Members Phil Butler, Joy Davies, Nick Dockree, Stephanie le Men, Mike Pursey

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.



Eve at Perranporth in Cornwall during her epic coastal trek

COVER STORY – OUR EVE COMPLETES HER COASTAL WALK

Kent LDWA member Eve Richards has just finished walking the entire coastline of England and Wales, a trek which took her eight years and involved walking almost 3,000 miles.

Eve, who lives in Walmer and has been a member of the LDWA for four years, finally completed the coastal hike when she walked from Southwold in Suffolk to Tilbury Docks during the summer.

Eve says: “I have always loved the coast and I wanted to discover the coast near where we were living, so I started walking out from Walmer.

“I started to walk further afield, using buses to get me to where I was starting from and to get me back. I was really enjoying it, so I thought I should extend the walk and make it an England and Wales coastal path walk.

“I didn’t really plan it. It just happened, and I have enjoyed it so much.”

Completing the walk has meant Eve has been away once or twice a year, usually walking for eight or nine days at a time and averaging between 12 and 22 miles a day, staying in guest houses or youth hostels.

She says: “My favourite parts were at opposite ends of England - the South West Coast Path (which runs from Poole in Dorset to Minehead in Somerset) and Tyne and Wear. The scenery in both these areas is just fantastic.

“The walk has allowed me to see what a wonderful coast we’ve got in our country. It also allowed me to meet some lovely people”.

Eve’s only mishap came in Wales, when she sprained an ankle. She went home to recover, but returned after four months to finish that particular section of the route.

Eve says she would not have been able to complete her walk without the support of husband Jock. She says: “Jock never minded when I went off for several days to do my walks. He’s been fantastic.”

Now Eve is considering walking the coast of Scotland. She says: “I might start that next year, but I probably wouldn’t do all of it. There are some bits where there are no proper footpaths and it’s a bit wild, so I don’t really fancy that.”

Well done Eve – we’re proud of you.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – CHAIRMAN BRIAN STANDING DOWN

The annual general meeting of Kent Group of the LDWA will be on January 29, at Harrietsham village hall, and it will be our most significant AGM for several years, as Brian Buttifant will be standing down as chairman.

Brian has been involved with Kent Group of the LDWA more or less since we started in 1974. He has been chairman since 2002, taking over from Paul Hatcher. He was the group's first permanent secretary, and served in that role for 11 years. He takes a particular interest in Hundreds, having completed 15 of them, and each year organises the Kent Group checkpoint on the Hundred.

There will also be vacancies for the positions of secretary and treasurer. Nominaton forms are enclosed with this newsletter. So please fill in the form and send it to secretary Graham. It must be received two weeks before the AGM – January 14 2017.

The AGM is also your chance to have your say about our group, so please come along and make your voice heard.

The group exists for its members, and we need as much input as possible.

The meeting starts at 2pm, and there will be a seven mile walk, led by Michael Headley, beforehand, starting at 10am. There will also be a pre-AGM meal, starting at 1pm. So please fill in the form which is with this newsletter, and send it to membership secretary Roger Dean to let him know if you are coming.

KENT LDWA SURVEY – THANKS FOR LETTING US HAVE YOUR VIEWS

Lots of Kent LDWA members filled in the questionnaire, giving views about all aspects of the group – including lengths of group social walks, how often members want to go on social walks, what type of social walks are preferred, and whether Kent Group meets members' expectations.

We are grateful to them all, and Cliff Huggett has won a £25 Go Outdoors voucher, as his questionnaire was the first to be drawn from all those received by Peter Jull, who coordinated the responses.

Peter says that although it would have been good to have had a few more responses, the answers were very useful. He reported the findings to the last meeting of the committee.

The findings showed a clear preference for shorter walks (i.e. walks under 20 miles), with most respondents looking for a group walk once or twice a month. There seems to be a demand for more Saturday walks, and it appears week-day walks would be popular. So, if you would like to lead a social walk on a Saturday or midweek, then please contact Peter (details above).

Evening or night walks seem to be the least popular walk types but still had a 30% like rate. Fast walks were more popular than slow walks, and linear walks with public transport were more popular than linear walks with car share. Most respondents seemed happy with Kent Group, and emails is the preferred method of contact.

And many members offered their services for checkpoint duty on our challenge walks – so many thanks. Your offers of help will be gratefully received (and we are, of course, going to need as much help as we can possibly get on the Cinque Ports 100 in 2018).

Many thanks to Peter for carrying out the survey.

NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS

SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR Next year's Sevenoaks Circular will be at the same venue, West Heath School, with distances again 30, 20 and 15 miles. The date is Sunday March 19, with the marshals' walk Sunday March 5. Once again, £1 from each entry fee will be donated to the school. So pretty soon, Brian will be making his usual appeal for marshals.

Next year's Sevenoaks Circular will see us using a new tally card system, about which were informed in October by Dave Morgan, the LDWA's national 100s coordinator. This will be part of a phased introduction of the new national PACER event management system on our events before the Cinque Ports 100 in 2018. Michael Headley worked on PACER when it was used at the Founders Challenge on October 8.

HEART OF THE WEALD Organiser Neal Higham has decided to bring the date of our Weald challenge walk forward a week from its normal slot of the second Sunday in July. It will be held on July 2, with the marshals' walk provisionally set for on June 4.

As usual, the event will be based at Wadhurst, with distances 26, 20 and 15 miles. More details in the next newsletter.

WHITE CLIFFS CHALLENGE Next year's WCC will be on Saturday August 26, again as part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival, and will again be based at St Margaret's Village Hall.

The distances will be 32 miles and 18 miles. Both routes will be different route to this year's, the longer one including the lovely Warren at Folkestone and two visits to Dover's Western Heights. There will be no indoor checkpoints. The marshals' walk will be on August 6.

Sadly, plans to revamp the 30-plus mile version of the WCC to make it a linear walk, linking the white cliffs of Thanet with the white cliffs of Dover and transporting walkers by bus to the start point – as happens with the Dorset Duddle - have had to be shelved for cost reasons. But a 33.5-mile walk – from Palm Bay on the Thanet coast to Capel – may be going on a social walks programme as a linear walk at some stage.

KSS TRIPLE CHALLENGE

The number of people who have completed the KSS Triple Challenge of 50-mile walks (the Sussex Stride, the Surrey Tops and the White Cliffs Challenge in successive years) is now exactly 100.

When they completed the Sussex Stride in September, four walkers – Andrew Boulden, Chris Pitt, Francis Thomason and Dave Whitehead – earned Gold Awards for nine successive KSS completions. They deserve medals – which they are going to get, specially produced to mark their achievement! Congratulations to them all.

There are also now 13 Silver Awards for six successive KSS completions.

On the Sussex Stride, we organised our usual checkpoint at East Dean (see story below).

Next year's leg of the KSS will be the Surrey Tops, which takes place on September 23-24, with the marshals' walk on September 2-3.

As usual, we will be organising a checkpoint, and this is likely to be the first checkpoint, at Elstead (16 miles). More details in the next newsletter.

NORTH YORK MOORS 100

On next year's North York Moors 100 in 2017, which will be based at Malton, we are doing a checkpoint at Wombledon Hall (17 miles – CP3, open 1.10pm-5.30pm). Chairman Brian Buttifant is, as usual, organising our checkpoint, so if anyone can help, please offer your services to Brian, whose contact details are above.

As this is an early checkpoint, it is likely to be very busy. Brian is arranging with Paul Hatcher, our former chairman who lives in Cumbria, for some additional help from members of Cumbria Group. And the event organisers will be giving us some more help.

The 2019 Hundred is the Hadrian's 100, organised by Northumbria Group, and it has just been announced that the 2020 Hundred will be the Y 100 Sir Fynwy, organised by South Wales Group and based in Monmouthshire. We will, as usual, be organising checkpoints. But in the meantime we've got ...



The East Sussex countryside near Winchelsea on one of the Cinque Ports 100 walkouts



THE CINQUE PORTS 100

Plans for our big event in 2018 are coming along, and below is a summary of what has been happening since members received our last newsletter.

ROUTE

The series of social walks along the route has been completed, with various issues identified, which are being dealt with.

Roger Dean is in the process of walking the entire route for the purposes of doing a risk

assessment. Any recommendations Roger makes will be taken on board. Roger is also visiting all the checkpoints for risk assessment purposes.

BUDGET

Neil Higham is in the process of completing the budget for the event, which will be submitted to the NEC for approval by January.

HELPERS NEEDED

Organising group chairman Graham Smith has sent out a bulk email to Kent LDWA members, asking for people to help on the event. This has produced a very good response, and a list of helpers who can then be allocated to various tasks is being compiled.

Many thanks to everyone who responded and offered their services.

As this newsletter went to press, personnel for all the checkpoints apart from one (at Sandwich) had been confirmed. This remaining one should be filled early in the new year.

SOUVENIR MAP

A Cinque Ports 100 souvenir map is to be produced, along the lines of the one produced for the Games 100 – which proved so popular, it just about sold out. The map will be produced by Harveys Maps, which produced the one for the Games 100. As has been said before – and will be said again! - this is a huge event for us, and if anyone is willing to help (in any way – and for as long or as short a time as possible), can they please contact Graham Smith, chairman of the organising group (details above).

More details about the Cinque Ports 100 in the next newsletter.

KENT GROUP IS GETTING BUFFED UP

Thanks to our equipment officer Sarah Turner, buffs – small scarves which serve a variety of useful purposes - are now available, in Kent Group colours and with our logo, for £8.99 (including postage and VAT). They look very smart and will be extremely distinctive when worn on events.

To order yours, go to <http://www.giraffeuk.com/club-shop>. There is a link on the LDWA Kent website.

Says Sarah: “Be bright, be red, be LDWA Kent.

“Just visit the website and go to the area where you can buy the single buffs. Then click on the Kent LDWA red buff, pay the money and voila – it arrives in the post.

“Go on – you know you want to.”



KENT LDWA MEMBER'S ENCOUNTER WITH GRIZZLY BEAR

Mike Pursey had a lucky escape with a grizzly bear when he went to visit his sister and brother-in-law, Sylvia and George Powell, in the Canadian city of Vancouver in October.

In an email to secretary Graham Smith, Mike wrote: 'The weather has not been too good - rain most days – but I managed to get some walking in on local trails.

'Early on I did the PoCo Trail. It's a 25km semi-wild trail that encircles Port Coquitlam. It's fairly flat and easy walking on dirt/tarmac tracks.

'A little later, Sylvia drove me up to Minnekhada Park, a few miles north of here, which is a wild area with many trails.

Having walked for about half an hour on a narrow trail and not seen a soul, I spotted a bear on the trail a short distance ahead of me. Without a second thought, I stopped and went back the way I'd come. He followed me for a bit but seemed to lose interest (not much meat there!). When I got round a bend, out of sight, I legged it!"

Mike – we're all glad you lived to tell the tale, mate.

ISLE OF WIGHT COASTAL WALK

Does anyone fancy doing the Isle of Wight Coastal Path – 72 miles – in one go? Graham Smith is liaising with Jill Green and Jim Catchpole, who live on the Isle of Wight, to get a group of Kent members together to do the walk over the weekend of April 22-23.

The idea is to travel down to the Isle of Wight on Friday April 21, do the walk over the following two days, and then return to Kent. If anyone is interested, please contact Graham (details above). We would start the walk at about 7am on the Saturday, and Jill and Jim have kindly offered to provide back-up.



Clockwise, starting top left: Peter Jull and Joy Davies above Dover Harbour at the end of the Fish and Chip Walk; the view over the harbour at dusk; the start of the walk near Ringwould; and Sue McKinnell by the Payday at the Colliery statue at Aylesham on the Three Pits Walk

WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL THE MOST SUCCESSFUL YET

The White Cliffs Walking Festival, held in August produced a record number of walkers, with 1,102 people going on the festival's walks.

This included the 102 walkers on our White Cliffs Challenge (54 on the 32-mile route, 48 on the 15-miler, with only one retirement - from a walker who bravely battled on for 24 miles before finally succumbing to blisters).

This made it the most successful festival in the three years of the event, which is organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers, the south Kent branch of The Ramblers, to which some members of Kent LDWA belong.

The 39 walks ranged from history or special interest walks of one or two miles to our White Cliffs Challenge, and included two walks led by Graham Smith – the 10-mile Fish and Chip Walk from Walmer to Dover and the Three Pits Walk, an 18-miler visiting the sites of the Kent coal mines of Betteshanger, Snowdown and Tilmanstone.

Other festival walks included part of the North Downs Way National Trail from Dover to Shepherdswell, a Deal Smugglers Walk and walk at Sandwich which took in a climb up St Peter's church tower.

White Cliffs Ramblers chairman Margaret Lubbock said: "This third White Cliffs Walking Festival has been the biggest and best so far, aided of by the splendid weather over the August Bank Holiday.

"Many happy people from Kent, UK and indeed abroad had a most enjoyable few days with the preparations behind the scene paying dividends in the smooth running of the festival.

"Hopefully we will have more of the same next year."

Plans are now been made for next year's White Cliffs Walking Festival, which has been scheduled for August 24-30. It is likely to feature about 40 walks, including the White Cliffs Challenge, of course (see story above) and Peter Jull's 22-mile 4Gotten Pits Walk, which visits the sites of the four Kent coal mines that never achieved commercial production: Stonehall at Lydden, Guilford at Coldred, Hammill near Eastry and Wingham.

More details about the walking festival in the next newsletter.

THE ARSENAL WAY

As a few members of Kent Group (including our newsletter editor) are fans of Arsenal Football Club, there are plans for members of Kent and London groups to combine some time next summer to walk an Arsenal Way.

It would be a linear walk of about 22 miles, starting at Woolwich Common, where the club was started in 1886, crossing the River Thames via the Woolwich Tunnel, and going through Docklands to North London to visit the club's former home of Highbury – and ending up at the magnificent Emirates Stadium. Return to Woolwich would be by public transport. No doubt

we would visit a pub for a meal and a pint before returning to Kent (there is a very nice Wetherspoons pub fairly close to the Emirates stadium). A substantial part of the route follows the Capital Ring long distance trail, and some of it would be along part of the route through London used on the Games 100 in 2012.

The person behind the Arsenal Trail is none other than Julie Welch, Strider editor and one of the keenest supporters around of Arsenal's arch North London rivals, Tottenham Hotspur. Julie has created a similar walk visiting various landmarks associated with Spurs, called the 'The Spurs Way.' She says the Arsenal Way should really be called the 'Boring Boring Way' – a remark our newsletter editor has treated with the contempt it deserves.

As this newsletter was being printed, Julie – who belongs to London Group – was trying to get the Arsenal Way put on London's social walks programme. The walk will be on a Saturday, and as it will be in summer, it will not be during the football season. We should have a date for the next newsletter and it will, of course, go on the website.

But if anyone is interested at this early stage, perhaps they could contact Graham Smith (details above).



Left: Averil and Steve Brice strimming a path on the White Cliffs Challenge near Betteshanger. Right: Kent LDWA stalwart Len Wilson clears a path at Dover with Nigel and Bev Cussans of the White Cliffs Ramblers

PATH CLEARING VOLUNTEERS HELP MAKE FESTIVAL A SUCCESS

Volunteers went out clearing footpaths to get them ready for this year's White Cliffs Walking Festival.

The festival's walks use public rights of way which can become overgrown with vegetation, and sometimes impassable, at this time of year.

Averil Brice, a Kent LDWA member who is also the White Cliffs Ramblers secretary and The Ramblers' Kent public rights of way manager, organises teams of volunteers who go out clearing paths, working with the county council, which is responsible for footpaths.

Averil, who started the work in 2013, has a team of 40 volunteers who can be called on.

Teams went out clearing paths in the Betteshanger/Northbourne and Elvington areas and in the St Radigunds area of Dover. All these paths were used on walking festival walks, and included six stretches of the White Cliffs Challenge, one stretch being cleared the day before the event.

The path clearance team included Len Wilson, a stalwart of Kent LDWA who is now in his early 80s and whose walks nowadays are usually with the White Cliffs Ramblers.

Averil said: "With the approach of the White Cliffs Walking Festival, it is always a very busy time of year for vegetation clearance. We wanted our special visitors to have the best possible walking experience.

"This year was exceptional. The wet weather and warm conditions resulted in a massive growth of vegetation. Many wonderful footpaths and bridleways have almost disappeared from view, becoming impossible to use. Battling your way through head height nettles and brambles is unpleasant and off-putting."

WATER WALKS IN NORTH KENT

The LDWA's London Group is organising a series of River Thames walks next September, two of them in Kent.

It is part of the Silk River 2017 festival, in which London Group is a partner. The festival is being put together by Kinetika, an arts organisation based in Purfleet run by Ali Pretty, a London LDWA member who many Kent members may know. The aim of the festival is to bring together communities on the Thames and on the Hooghly, in West Bengal, India.

A key feature of both ends of the festival is to transport silk scrolls along each river, on foot or by boat, and London LDWA is organising the Thames walks from Kew to the end of the estuary.

Gordon Parker, from London Group, says: "Most walks will be in London, some will be in Essex. We will spend two days in Dartford and Gravesend on Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st September.

"None of the walks will be long by LDWA standards as the plan will be to get local communities involved in the places the walks might visit – they won't all be riverside strolls.

"However, we would be delighted if Kent members of the LDWA could be involved. We are contacting Essex & Herts LDWA in a similar way."

Each walk ends at or near a railway station but the exact points are yet to be confirmed. Draft outline of walks is as follows:-

Friday September 15 – Kew Gardens, Putney Bridge riverside path: six miles.
 Saturday 16 – Blackfriars (South Bank), Tower Bridge, Wapping: 6.5 miles.
 Sunday 17 – Greenwich, Woolwich: 8.5 miles.
 Monday 18 – Barking (Abbey Park), Rainham (in Essex – not Kent): 10 miles.
 Tuesday 19 – Rainham (Essex), Purfleet: five miles.
 Wednesday 20 – Purfleet, Dartford: five miles.
 Thursday 21 – Dartford, Gravesend: five miles.
 Friday 22 – by ferry to Tilbury: five miles.
 Saturday 23 – Tilbury ferry to East Tilbury: five miles.
 Sunday 24 – Southend and Shoeburyness: 10 miles.
 For more details about the project, go to Silk River 2017.



QUESTIONS FROM KENT – WHERE? September 4

By Peter Jull

Perhaps a larger group than the 10 who participated would have compounded the challenges, of a negative nature, to which the walk succumbed. Post recce cultivation had disguised some cross field directions, contributing to some missed turnings and too many extra miles. A swearsy farmer stopped us using what looked like a signed official footpath diversion and made us use yet more hard to open gates to add to the scratchy and wobbly stiles climbed elsewhere. And then the planned lunch pub wasn't open.

The afternoon could only get better and paths were clearer, gates fewer and stiles mostly easier. When reaching The Bull at Linton everyone gathered at the door without direction and without any formal agreement trooped inside.

Commendations to Helen, not just for spotting the additional observational element of the walk first, but for the eyesight to see it from so far away. Overcast skies, benevolent temperatures and a gentle breeze were ideal walking conditions and saved the day.



QUESTIONS FROM KENT – WHO? October 16

By Peter Jull

Without dates confusion we might have been 28 but the walk had been done for London two weeks earlier. Our version featured 15 including three newbies and a Londoner.

With station toilets locked, the first trees over the footbridge rear exit were soon well watered. Less water fell on us than forecast and the weather improved throughout the day but the early treat of a field full of pygmy goats was diminished by most sheltering indoors. The harder ones were still declared cute. Not long after, even with a total lack of ascent, we were getting warm enough for a strip stop.

After elevenses on the edge of Smarden the Beult flood plain finally gave way to gentle lumps past Bethersden. Unadvertised extra distance due to missing footpaths meant lunch was late by Pluckley station. Mention of 15 potential customers scared the Dering Arms chef into declining any more orders so we picnicked comfortably warm on their outside benches. Anticipating a 6pm finish, two chose to train back to Headcorn. Post lunch the only big climb of the day was up to the Greensand ridge. Passing signs to Grafty Green, O'Rourkes and Rex reckoned they knew where Who would be. A turn away via a little used approach path deceived them another observational challenge target might be feasible until the last minute when the Who'd a Thought It hotel finally hove into view. Back on the flat back to Headcorn preferences were expressed, as London had, that afternoon hills were favoured over morning flats and in the end the station was reached nearer 5.30, half an hour faster than London managed.

THE SUSSEX STRIDE: I DID IT MY WAY

By Graham Smith

I have probably bored a few people by telling them how much I love the Sussex Stride. It's my favourite event and it takes place in one of my favourite areas – the South Downs. I do like 50-mile events because although you are doing a very long walk, for most LDWA members is not so long that you have to walk right through the night, as most of us have to on a 100k walk.

The Sussex Stride, of course, is part of the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge of 50-mile events, and several months ago I signed up to marshal at our checkpoint, East Dean, at 28.6 miles. My plan then was to do the marshals' walk, which was on September 10-11 – but that was before the football fixture list came out, when Dover Athletic (another of the loves of my life) were scheduled to play Forest Green Rovers at home on the Saturday. And as it happened, Dover won 4-3, with two fabulous goals in what was a really great game, so I made the right decision (sorry, I digress ...)

But I was determined to do the Sussex Stride, and my first plan was to go down to Sussex and do it solo a week before the event, which was on September 24-25. Unfortunately, on the day I had planned, there was non-stop rain, some of it very heavy – so, at the risk of sounding like a fair weather walker, I gave that one a miss. So I decided to do it immediately after we had closed our checkpoint. East Dean is a long drive from Deal, where I live, and it seemed practical to make one journey rather than two.

So for the event itself, our checkpoint seemed to function pretty well, despite having two late withdrawals. Chairman Brian Buttifant and myself were on check-in, Joy Davies, her friend Audrey West and Jane Macefield – who had been loaned to us by Sussex Group – did the catering, and we also had Neil Higham (who had only been asked to come on the morning of the event by Brian) helping out doing everything else, more or less.

I had provisions with me to do the walk self-supported, and I decided to stop at the various checkpoints en route, even if these would have closed by the time I got there. So at 9.30 on a warm September night, I set off from East Dean – and after less than a mile I made my first mistake. I got onto a wide, open area and should have taken a compass bearing which would have brought me to the hamlet of Crowlink. Foolishly I didn't, as I was confident I knew the route. Before long I realised I had gone off route, so I retraced my steps, and in doing so I went even more off route. But I could hear the sea on the distance, so I knew that I was heading roughly where I wanted to go. So I just followed my ears and arrived at the Seven Sisters, then turned right and made careful progress along them, making sure I was a good few yards from the cliff edge. Yes, it was a little bit hairy, but it was interesting!

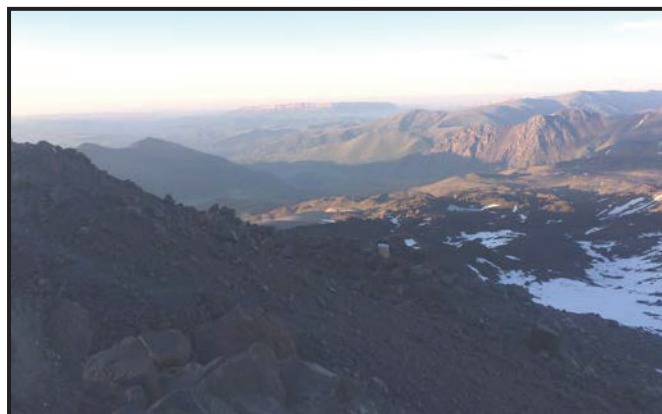
I was on my way, and thoroughly enjoying it. It was a lovely night. Those people who criticise night walking have probably never done a walk on a starry night on the South Downs, where the chalk helps guide you on your way. I arrived at the checkpoint of Litlington just as it was closing, to be met by Anthony Mitchell from Sussex Group with a cheery: "Here's Graham – doing one of his specials!" I moved on over ground that was familiar to me through doing so many Good Friday walks there, and met Anthony again at the next checkpoint, Norton. I was starting to feel tired here, so I had a little rest. Then I moved on and got up to the South Downs ridge with nice night views away to the lights of Lewes. Coming down from the ridge, I took a wrong turning and had to follow my torch down the hillside to pick up the South Downs Way near the River Ouse, and then as I approached the next checkpoint, Southease, I started to feel pretty tired (well, our East Dean checkpoint had been open for more than six hours and I hadn't had any sleep). It must have been between 3-4am, and I suddenly realised I wasn't doing the actual event so there was no time constraint, and if I wanted to have a kip (like Peter Jull does on Hundreds), why not? There's a very nice little church at Southease, and the porch door was open, although the church itself was locked. So I put on my fleece, lay down on the floor and shut my eyes. I don't know if I actually slept, but I certainly dozed, probably for a good two hours. Then I had a quick splash under the water tap (put there for South Downs Way walkers) in the hamlet, and set off again. At first it was brilliant. This part of the walk had been re-routed, and I was thoroughly enjoying it. As I was striding along the South Downs Way near Rodmell, I was rewarded with a magnificent South Downs sunrise which was just fantastic.

Shortly after this, the route leaves the SDW, and here I had more misfortune. I must have mis-read the route description, and instead of ending up at Rottingdean (where, of course, the event is based, at Longhill School) I ended up at Saltdean. I plodded on to the seafront road where I turned right for Rottingdean. I had probably gone a good two miles out of my way,

but I was feeling fine, it was now light, and my feet were OK. I went past Longhill School, and then got back on to the South Downs, following the SDW to cross the A27 and then, after a fairly long climb, leaving the SDW and passing the fabulous viewpoint of Blackcap. From here it was a descent to the lovely town of Lewes, and then more familiar and very pleasant paths uphill past the golf course and over the downs to Glynde. I had my lunch stop in the sunshine at Firle and then pressed on, having the steepest climb of the walk getting onto the ridge again. It was now a bit blowy, so I was a bit windswept as I strode along and down to Alfriston. Another stop at a village that is so familiar, and then off again on the last leg of seven miles. The route took me on to the SDW, which is very pleasant and easy going. Then a drop down to Jevington before getting back to the ridge and picking up the SDW before the turn-off to East Dean (and what lovely sight that signpost, saying 'East Dean – 2 miles' was!) Those last two miles were very nice, with typically extensive South Downs views. I got back at 5.30pm. Yes, I was very tired, and it hadn't been a conventional way to do the Sussex Stride, but I was very glad I had done it. I was very glad to discover that I didn't have one blister, which doesn't happen very often these days.

* On the event itself 137 people started and there were 17 retirements. Several Kent members completed it including: Andrew Boulden (12 hours 47 mins); Peter Johnson (13.58); Neil and Jan O'Rourke (14.24); Roger Dean (15.10); Michael Headley (15.37); Jim Catpole/Jill Green (16.31); Don Newman (17.18); and Ed Barnes (18.47). Apologies for any omissions.

And next year's leg of the KSS is the Surrey Tops – see story above.



**Left: Sarah and friend Tracie on the ascent;
Right: the fantastic view from the summit. More of Sarah's stunning photos are on the back page**

REMINISCING RUSSIA

By Sarah Turner

I like big mountains. With that in mind I embarked on a trip to The Motherland this June to attempt a summit on the European 'Seven Summit' Mount Elbrus at 5,642 metres (conversion to feet - x 3 approx), and in the words of Wikipedia....'the tenth most prominent peak in the world. A dormant volcano, Elbrus forms part of the Caucasus Mountains in Southern Russia, near the border with Georgia. So there we have it - easy eh? Each continent has a summit, of which we know there are seven. Two I've already bagged: Aconcagua in South America (Feb 2013) and Kilimanjaro, Africa (Jan 2015) so I was aiming for my third, and I report that yes, it was a success.

So now I have three of the 'biggies'. I've one more in my sight, in perhaps a year or two which will take me to Alaska (think Denali) but in the interim I've already paid my deposit for a trip to Mera Peak for next Oct, another biggie in Nepal, and I've never been. But I digress. Let's get back to Russia. With all biggies, you have altitude and a certain amount of attitude. They're big, demanding, take your breath away, make you ill and harden you up. The mountains rule - they have their own rules - and you are just a minion willing her to let you tread her sides and enjoy (hopefully) the amazing views that are up high, and the experience en route. It's not all about the summit, and for sure, when embarking on a hill, or mountain, not only do you have to have the strength to get up, but you gotta have it in you to get back down, usually tired aka exhausted. '360 Expeditions' were the company of choice this year, having found them at the Outdoor Travel Show at Earls Court back in 2015. I was warmed by their attitude, ethics and trip dossier so I plunged again into the heady heights of training, kit planning and getting time off work to make this happen. I also dragged another veteran into the altitude limelight, and Tracie from Norfolk (another flat country bumpkin) agreed to pursue this journey. We both had a training weekend (think new year) in the Lake District where we encountered wind, rain, snow, sleet and sun to give us some memorable hill days and get the legs pumping.

From flat Kent and Norfolk we made the lungs work and even got ourselves some views. After that we were left to our own devices as distance and work got in the way of training together, so with me waiting for my new employers to actually employ me, I had the time to walk most of the North Downs (100 miles of 160) during my 'wait', as well as embark on as many LDWA Kent walks I could before future work stripped me of my freedom. Our guide, Rolfe Oostra, is more than fab. He's an internationally renowned mountain guide, climber, kayaker, husband, dad and friend of Ran Fiennes, with many many summits achieved. We are talking about the big 8,000 metres peak, but I'll let you Google him for his posterity. He knows how to motivate a team, encourage you to push on and moreover he's a laugh. Many nights we all shared laughing the evening away high up in our tents or mountain facilities while the weather outside did its thing, mainly good. The trip was basically around ten days with our flight in with Aeroflot, (I was watching the crew avidly with my new airline knowledge) and their reputation has much succeeded their previous, back in the '80s. I felt safe.

Transferring through Moscow airport to get to our second internal flight wasn't easy, but was achieved and eventually we landed at Mineralnye Vody airport somewhere down south. We were a group of six; myself, Tracie and Nigel (Brits), Kim from New Zealand, Bryant from South Africa and Belinda from Oz. We all gelled (of sorts) and during the first few days got to know one another and attempted to bond. Bonding is key on a mountain: you share a tent (or not if you want to push up the price to be solo); share the mess tent; share tips on where is good to pee when there are no ablutions and generally watch out for one another.

So, there it was, we were in Russia, we had landed to the news of Brexit, and we were on our way to meeting Rolfe in situ with our Russian guides. Our plan was to traverse from one side of the mountain range to the other, with Elbrus our summit goal in the middle. This contrasts with what many mountain companies offer, ie go up and down from the summit the same way, usually using snow cats to carry you up as far as possible, saving you time and energy, but ultimately at a risk of altitude sickness. What attracted me to this route was 'it is hard' and you get to see varied Russian valley scenery from both sides of the mountain range - The Motherland didn't disappoint. After a day's drive to the start of the trek we were amazed by beautiful green pastures, rolling hills akin to the British hills that we are all so familiar with. Fields of colourful yellow flowers not dissimilar to our buttercups welcomed us before the first camp at the foot of the mountain range. You could have been in the UK. No snow yet.

After two days of self-carrying my kit and team ancillaries in backpacks probably weighing close to 20 kg, (to which both Kim and Tracie also took up the challenge – why pay for porters when you've your own body?), we arrived to the high camp which was on the foot of the glacier. This is it: the next stage is crampons, ice axes and lots of snow. After snuggling in to our two man tents which were in situ among the huge boulders, and thankfully on flat earth, we were rewarded by fabulous views of Elbrus, and the way ahead. Daunting, no. This is why we were here.

The next couple of days we were training, ascending high up the slopes in our crampons with ice axes, trying not to snag your trousers with the points, and descending again in order so that our bodies can adapt to the altitude. Nobody wants to get HAPE or HACE. Any form of oedema can be fatal and one of the most effective methods for acclimatisation is climb high, sleep low, then re-ascend the next day.

Having gotten our skills cracked, gotten the legs and body in high octane motion, taken in some great views and having had a bit of cold mountain wind throwing her might against us, it was time to make the summit attempt.

Food is always first rate on mountains if you are not a fussy eater. I am not. The chefs didn't disappoint and although we ate a lot of stew and soup, you supplement this with extra snacks you yourself bring from the UK: chocolate, M&S Percy Pigs, Haribo, you name it. Food is fuel. We are not talking about a stroll in the park here; this is a 2300/midnight dinner, having taken the afternoon to rest/nap/chillax, followed by kit on, wrap up – it's all about layers – and you're out of the door around 0100/0200 into the night roped up to one another. When it's clear it's magical as the stars are your stage, your audience and your fortitude.

It's not natural to be pushing yourself physically during the early hours, but at least with the darkness you do not get the 'oh my gosh how far have I got to go' syndrome as you can't see too much ahead by torchlight or starlight - we didn't have a full moon either. After a very very slow start Rolfe upped the pace slightly where the first cracks in the team appeared. Belinda was bringing up the rear with Nigel, and both were struggling. After giving them their own guide and gradually becoming separated from them, the rest of us pushed on, up, up, slowly, slowly, trying to regulate your breath in the thin air; querying why your stomach is giving you jip, (altitude gives you wind by the way); moments of "Phew, why is my breathing laboured and erratic? Do yogic breaths Sarah, in, out, in out, get yourself into a rhythm and stick to it". Feeling the altitude and accepting it is controlling you is difficult: it can knock you for six and you are there in it – you must deal with it. It's mental. You can't just walk away, after all, you're part of a team, you've got to be strong; strong for you, strong for your crew. Hang in there, this is what you've trained for.

Up, up, into the night, all roped up, torch lights shining like little ants.....bloody hell, this is relentless, and then as predicted, and as we knew, the weather came in. We had to get to the saddle pretty darn quick and due to our slow start we were behind schedule. The wind was picking up speed which then materialised into a white out – boom. This is not good. This is mountain weather. This is real. We'd lost Belinda and Nigel as they had to turn back and descend back to the rocky camp as they were struggling too much, so it was myself, Tracie, Brent, Kim and Stefano. We all stopped, we rested and the guides got out their GPSs. Rolfe checked on the team: Brent was tiring rapidly, Kim wasn't far behind. Stefano was strong but wasn't eating, Tracie and I were in good shape and began to give pep talks and encouragement. I remember telling Stefano to get out the Italian sweets he had in his jacket for fuel...he didn't want to but I wanted some, so it was with mountain forcefulness that we shared his local delicacy. Altitude takes away your appetite. Some cannot eat, some can. But you must stoke the fire within you.

After a rest, we marched on, slowly, slowly. You couldn't see a thing. A complete white out. Brent was on his last knees struggling, but we had to keep moving, get to the saddle and then over out of the white out. I had a feeling the summit wasn't going to be doable; we were running out of time and the team were tired. However, luck was on our side and we had arrived at the saddle earlier than they had predicted. The Russian guides looked confused (!), this is their territory...? The summit, which we couldn't see at all, wasn't going to be ours at this hour. At one point Rolfe came up to Tracie and I and said if we wanted we could go up for a summit attempt; I was flagging. I said "Rolfe, I can't make that decision". That was it, he knew I was nearly done. We'd just been through some super difficult weather. It was cold, biting and all our mental and physical energy was nearly spent. How long had we been on our feet for now?

On descending to the other side, to a mountain hut where we were to reconvene I wavered, I thought the path would be easy. I looked to my right through the misty white out and saw the mountain drop off whereby I said to myself "Get a grip girl! Get that ice axe in. There's no way you want to self arrest going down that slope". I was tired – I was knackered. The time was around 0700, I don't recall. All you could think of was just get me to somewhere where we could rest, eat and sleep, which is what Rolfe did. This is the life of the mountain. We couldn't summit; our small team had been challenged. The

weather had been super bad and we looked a sorry sight but not defeated. But what next?

But out of a blip, comes persistence and strength. After a rehashed plan we had a bed for the night; had been given amazing food and we were ready to do another summit night (Take Two). Much fun was had that afternoon after we had rested, mainly playing cards with a lot of laughter. We took stock of the day and gave ourselves a pat on the back for attempt number one. Brent was hugely humble to our mountain: she was much harder than he had expected. But we were going to summit, and when Belinda and Nigel joined us after having a road move from the valley camp to our new hut some 3000/3500 metres above sea level, we were formed once again for another push.

The summit was glorious and the views over the Caucasus Mountains sublime. How do you explain the euphoria of summiting a 'biggie'.... well I always shed a tear (or a hundred). The final 500 metres where you can see the summit, where you can see success, always gets me. The release of tension, the feeling of weightlessness as you conquer your goal is hard to pen down. Stephano let out a floodgate: aged 73, what an amazing achievement for an Italian who, albeit stubborn, was never going to let his age defeat the mountain. Tracie and I gazed at one another and knew what the other was thinking: Elbrus was a hard slog, but we'd done it. Kim, Nigel and Bryant were euphoric, and our guide, Rolfe, was singing all our praises and was equivalent to a jelly bean on, well jelly beans! He has so much passion for others who give it their all to be on top. Such a marvellous bloke. As for Belinda, she wasn't far behind us, as on our descent we crossed paths with her, making for the summit. We knew she'd be tearful with joy, for her journey was also personal and she was fighting the mountain with all her might. Bravo.

We'd had another early start – of course you get no lie-ins: we are on a mountain. After the usual few hours of sleep we were awoken around midnight with our bellies craving fuel for the journey. A quick forage and we were then geared up ready for our challenge. The energy in the group was formidable: we knew even then that success was at our fingertips. This was it. We'd had a snow cat booked to take us from the hut up to the point where we had been snow cat'd down the day prior, (some 500 metres), and from there it was only another 1000 metres of ascent. The stars were twinkling away in the murky depths of the sky, our torches forming another ant line as we slowly and surely moved step by step upwards. Dawn was then chasing, breaking behind us, that faint glimmer of an orange glow bringing a new positive day. Spirits were soaring, cameras were out taking pics, smiles were abundant and we knew. We knew it was going to happen. Such a contrast to the day prior. With daylight up, the sun warming the cold fleshy parts of your face that were exposed from the layers that we adorned, we were at the saddle where yesterday we had had to descend from, but today we were going up. Up to the left – to follow those ant like troops who were in front. It didn't look far, just a few 'x' metres up..... distance is deceiving. I couldn't believe that we were about an hour away from the summit. The months of waiting and training were soon to be over: all those LDWA long walks were paying off. The legs and body were sturdy, the energy topped up like a Duracell battery: only the chesty cough was materialising again due to me not always having the buff (did I mention buff?) over my mouth 100% of the time (I manage about 70%). Each one of us was in the zone, and in our mental aura: digging deep and breathing, digging deep and breathing. One step, ice axe, one step, ice axe and you're there. The summit. All 360 degrees were views far reaching off into The Motherland. Sometimes there are no words to express. Contemplation beholds. Thank you Russia for the journey. Fab!



Views from the John Muir Way – from top left, going clockwise: Croy Hill near Kilsyth; the railway bridge over the Firth of Forth; Arthur's Seat; and North Berwick Law, where a whalebone marks the summit

THE JOHN MUIR WAY

By Graham Smith

The John Muir Way is a 133-mile coast to coast route across Scotland created in memory of the man who came to be known as the father of the United States national parks. John Muir (1838-1914) was a traveller, mountaineer, wilderness dweller and prolific writer who left Scotland for the US aged 11. Among his many achievements were helping to create four US national parks. The John Muir Way – not to be confused with the 215-mile John Muir Trail in California - visits places associated with the man, and ends at Dunbar on the east coast, where he was born.

It is a fairly flat walk but it does have some high points, like Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh (how many cities in the world can boast a proper hill in the city centre?), and North Berwick Law, a delightful little hill just outside North Berwick.

It was to be the fourth time I had walked across Scotland coast to coast, following two completions of the superb Southern Upland Way, in 2003 and 2013, and a coast to coast crossing planned and walked with Mike Pursey in 1991. When planning the project, I noticed the route went close to the Campsie Fells, so I thought I would have a day off to explore them. I also fancied carrying on from Dunbar and walking down the Berwickshire coast to Berwick, a fine town which has changed hands between England and Scotland several times over the centuries, and which has excellent transport links. So I contacted Ian Sinclair, secretary of the LDWA's Central & Lowlands Group, who was very helpful in giving me some good advice about the Berwickshire Coast Path. I covered a good 200 miles in the 10 days I was walking, I had good autumnal weather (some rain but only light, and occasional drizzle) and I had met some very nice people.

October 14 - Helensburgh to Balloch (nine miles).

Walking nine miles meant I walked well below myself, but I had a few taxing days ahead of me, and it was good to be out on the trail. I dipped my shoes in the Firth of Clyde to signify the start of a coast to coast walk, and then set off, following the John Muir Way signs.

Initially it was roads out of Helensburgh, then a cycle path by the A818, and a forest track which wound up to Gouk Hill (908 feet) for a delightful little detour, with great views over Loch Lomond. Then there was some lovely open walking, with fine views to the left, down to Alexandria, and then to Balloch. Arriving at 12.30.

October 15 – Balloch to Haughhead, via Lennoxton (23 miles, plus some extras).

A good day, and I felt absolutely fine, having done a good 25-26 miles.

I was walking at about 8.45, and there was light rain, so I had my waterproofs on. It was very pleasant going through Balloch Park, with its castle. There were minor roads to the start of what the John Muir Way guide book described as the 'unofficial option' which I am very glad I took. Initially this involved some tedious forest tracks before finally emerging into the open with good views over Burncrooks Reservoir. Here the 'unofficial option' had obviously been changed since the guide book was published, as the waymark signs seemed to bear no resemblance to the directions in the guide book. At one point I was a bit concerned – particularly as the light rain had turned to drizzle for some while, and I was pretty wet – but I pressed on and followed the signs (which were plentiful, and very good) and before long, what was on the ground tallied with what was in the guide book.

There were nice paths to Strathblane, and fine views of the Campsie Fells, and the route then followed a former railway track towards Lennoxton.

October 16 – The Campsie Fells: or rather a Campsie Fell (16 miles approx).

A day off, when I had a very pleasant time exploring a small part of the Campsie Fells. I took a zig-zag path recommended by Doug Campbell – who runs Finglen House, the guest house where I was staying, with his lovely wife Sabrina – to a car park, walked for a couple of miles along the B822 and then turned off on a good path which led to Holehead (720 feet). I had planned to go across the Campsies to Earl's Seat – which did look a very nice hill – but the weather then started to change, with light rain and (more ominously) low clouds which would have made navigation difficult and would have prevented views. So I turned round and went back the way I had come.

October 17 – Haughhead to Auchinstarry (9 miles).

Another short day, but quite a nice one. I knew as soon as I drew the curtains in my room at Finglen House, and saw it was overcast outside, that I would not be doing a high level walk over the Campsies, as I had hoped.

I walked in the rain for just about the entire walk, but it was light rain and only sometimes became drizzle. Most of the walk, to be honest, was a bit boring, with the Strathkelvin Railway Path, followed by the Forth & Clyde Canal towpath. But it was straightforward and, of course, made for rapid progress. At Twechar I initially went straight on along the cycle path, missing the footpath. But I soon rectified myself, and I was very glad I did, as those last three miles were easily the best part of the walk. The route went up to the Antonine Wall (built by the Romans across what is now the central belt of Scotland) and it was very interesting to walk in the footsteps of the Romans on a nice, grassy path. Also there were some views – the rain precluded extensive views, but they were views nevertheless. So I was happy (but wet!) when I arrived at my hotel.

October 18 – Auchinstarry to Linlithgow (23 miles).

A good day in terms of mileage, albeit with some slightly tedious walking. I was walking at about 8.30, and it was very nice to get back on the Roman Antonine Walkway and go up Croy Hill (482 feet). Then there was some fairly mundane walking, which did make for good progress, along the towpath of the Forth & Clyde Canal.

After that it was road walking to Bonnybridge, then more walking in the footsteps of the Romans at Rough Castle Roman Fort. Shortly after that the Way went by the amazing Falkirk Wheel (a rotating boat lift connecting Forth & Clyde Canal with the Union Canal), then into the outskirts of Falkirk itself, and then some nice paths to the Union Canal. It was easy going and there were some stunning views over to the hills on the left, and the Avon Aqueduct (which carries the Union Canal over the River Avon) is very impressive – I had never walked over anything like it.

Just after that, it was the River Avon Heritage Trail, which is very pleasant, which led into the delightful town of Linlithgow.

October 19 – Linlithgow to Edinburgh (33 miles).

I was moving at 8am, and the route took me to the Firth of Forth and a pretty long stretch along the coast. There were very nice views across the Firth to those fantastic Scottish hills, and good views ahead of the three amazing bridges (the railway bridge and two road bridges, one still under construction) over the Firth.

I got to South Queensferry, where I had an early lunch, at noon. Then it was more pleasant coastal and woodland walking, before the route entered the outskirts of Edinburgh. The route went up Corstorphine Hill (531 feet), and offered very good views across Edinburgh, but I almost lost my way coming down. Then the route went away from the city centre to the Slateford Aqueduct, which is certainly impressive. Then it was the Union Canal to Lochrin Basin, and I then decided to leave the John Muir Way in order to find my way to the youth hostel, where I was booked for the night.

October 20 – Edinburgh to North Berwick (28 miles).

I was up at 7, had breakfast, checked out of the youth hostel and found Arthur's Seat (822 feet), which was fabulous, offering wonderful views. It was the highlight of the walk, and I am very glad I made the effort to do it. It was then a cycleway and a former railway track out of Edinburgh. The walking was easy and a bit mundane to Prestonpans, and I had an early lunch. I then had 16.5 miles to do, and the walking did improve. It was easy and very pleasant going past Seton Sands, and Aberlady and Gullane seemed very nice villages. The coast was flat but still very nice, with extensive views. I got to North Berwick at 5.20, where I stayed in a very cosy camping cabin at the Gilsland Caravan Park, a little way out of town but close to the town's hill of North Berwick Law.

October 21 – North Berwick to Dunbar (15 miles, plus some extra to the hotel).

North Berwick Law (614 feet) is a very nice hill, with extensive views. It was not as good as Arthur's Seat, but it was one of the highlights of the walk. After that it was pleasant field edge paths, tracks and woodland walks to East Linton, from where it was very pleasant walking, via riverside paths, meadows and then alongside Hedderwick Sands to the John Muir Country Park. The tide was out so I crossed Bellhaven Bay to take the clifftop path to Dunbar, making a brief stop at a bay to dip both shoes in the North Sea to signify another coast to coast crossing of Scotland. I got to John Muir's birthplace at 2.30, and got to the hotel, Pine Marten, at 3pm.

October 22 – Dunbar to Coldingham (23 miles).

A very good day, probably the best day's walking of the whole trip (despite a few miles of road walking). I needed to check into my B&B at Coldingham by 5pm, and I didn't want to take chances, so I was walking before 8am. The coast path – which is a John Muir Way Link to the Southern Upland Way, which ends at Cockburnspath – was very nice, and it was good to follow a map rather than follow the step-by-step directions in the John Muir Way guide.

I covered the 11 miles to Cockburnspath quicker than I thought I would, and got there just after 11am. It was good to follow the Southern Upland Way for a little while, and I decided not to take the coast path to St Abb's Head down to Coldingham. I don't know the paths and I wasn't at all sure I would get here by 5pm if I did take it. So I took the A1107, and it really wasn't too bad. In fact, as road walking goes, it was OK. For a start, a large part of it is a designated cycleway, there were nice views on both sides – typical Borders scenery – and there were a few points of interest. I arrived at the very nice village of Coldingham at 3.30.

October 23 – Coldingham to Berwick (16 miles).

I was walking at 8.40, and decided to take the road into Eyemouth. There was little traffic about on Sunday morning, and I made rapid progress. I picked up the Berwickshire Coast Path at Eyemouth, and it was fine coastal walking, with fabulous, wild clifftops. The path went down to Burnmouth, then up again to resume the coast. The stretch of the Berwickshire Coastal Path to Berwick was not as good as the stretch from Eyemouth to Burnmouth, but still very enjoyable. It was sad to pass the Scotland border but I do, of course, plan to be back in June with Mike Pursey. I kept going to Berwick and arrived just after 1pm. As always, Berwick is very nice. I had a quick, cheap curry and a pint of lager, then headed to the station.

As Jill Green says, every walk is an adventure, and this was a very good adventure.

* I used the John Muir Way route guide, published by Rucksack Readers, for my trip. It is waterproof and costs £11.99. I found it excellent. And I must say that the whole path is very well waymarked.



Left - John and Martin on their Kent coast to coast walk; Right - John at Whitstable

COAST TO COAST – KENT STYLE (THE HUMAN TALE)

By John and Martin Grace

The phone rings, “Dad, it’s Martin, I’ve got Friday off. Shall we do that Kent coast to coast walk you have talked about?” I reply, “Don’t be daft, it’s forecast heavy rain.” Martin replies, “It’ll probably be dry all day. They always get it wrong” I say “OK. That’s just over 30 miles, let’s see how we go.”

This was not the famous 192 mile Coast to Coast route across the Lake District, Pennines and the North York Moors, but our very own Kent coast to coast route, from Hythe to Whitstable. So at 6am on the Friday (June 17) morning, we set off from Hythe seafront, aiming for the Elham Valley Way, just north of Hythe. Light rain was falling but maybe that was just early morning drizzle – I wished! Before long we were in countryside above Hythe. Lush and green.

The drizzle stopped and we went along the footpath beside the Sene Valley Golf Club, now about 6.30am. Because of the low cloud and trees on either side, it was quite dark. Suddenly, a man appeared, dressed in camouflage and carrying a rifle with telescopic sights. We froze. He said, “I thought I could hear you.” Did I detect a slight American accent? (I think I was wrong). Thoughts of mass killers raced through my mind. It didn’t help when his next utterance was, “I’ve killed six already” Neither of us spoke, just staring at his rifle. I became worried for my son, a tall man with a large head – a sniper’s dream. “Rabbits” he then said, and suddenly we started breathing again, even trying to grin. We left on good terms, and then, CRACK, a shot rang out. Another victim for the sniper.

Following the well waymarked Elham Valley Way, the varied scenery of woods, hills and open grassland was a joy. We passed Etchinghill and onto the village of Lyminge. By now the weather forecast god was laughing at us – it was right. The rain came down and full waterproofs came on. However Martin had decided to wear trendy knee length shorts, more suitable for a holiday in Spain, together with his waterproof jacket - more about his shorts later.

Despite the rain, our spirits were not dampened, although everything else was, either through rain or sweat. Martin pushes the pace above 3mph as he regularly checks his super-duper smartphone, reporting on time, distance, speed, altitude, and probably sniper alerts as well.

The rain is steady but not torrential, but that is to come. Passing the quintessential Kent village of Elham, the path is straightforward, and we begin to see the odd dog walker and pass the customary “Good morning” One stops to talk to us. “How far are you going?” he asks. We say, “Probably to Whitstable?” He laughs out loud and carries on his way. Maybe this friendly encounter pleased the gods as it stopped raining, and the ‘sniper’ did not appear to be stalking us although we probably wouldn’t have noticed.

We crossed the Elham Valley road, and back onto the Way, up the hill and into Covert Wood. Pleasant walking and slightly downhill. “At the bottom we get to a place called Jumping Down. When we get up the hill the other side, I say I think it will be time to have a short rest. At the top of Jumping Down is a bench where we sit and take in the views and have a sandwich, and water. I then utter the fateful words, “I think we are going to miss the worst of the rain. All that thunder seems to be passing us by.” Within a minute of setting off again, thunderstorms arrived, the rain was torrential. It was if the angels had just emptied their bath water over us. We trudged on west of Barham, splashing our way along the tracks. Thunder was all around. Our waterproofs stopped most of the rain but couldn’t prevent some dampness creeping inside. By this time Martin’s trendy shorts had changed colour from a light tan to a dark brown colour, his legs splashed with mud.

But spirits were high. We had covered around 16 miles and Canterbury didn’t seem that far away, only another 6 miles in the pouring rain. As we carried on towards Bridge, Martin was walking in front. I noticed foam running down his legs. “Martin, what is running down your legs?” I exclaim. “Too much washing powder left in the shorts I reckon. I will have a word with the wife when I get back,” he says. Obviously my teachings of a no-blame culture have not worked. At least it’s cleaning the mud splatters off his legs.

We travel though flooded lanes and flooded tracks still undeterred, knowing Canterbury looms ahead, where we discuss stopping there and catching the bus back to Hythe. Through the lovely villages of Bishopsbourne and Patricbourne, where the Elham Valley Way joins the North Downs Way, and on to Canterbury, arriving about 2pm. The rain has stopped, thank goodness.

Among the throngs of shoppers, French school children, workers out for their lunch break, shoplifters, beggars, students and sightseers (in no particular order) we rest our weary and wet bodies on a bench and eat another sandwich, a bit of fruit, and drink some water. I wonder why people are looking at us a bit funny. Anyone would think we didn’t fit in!

Martin explains we have walked just over 22 miles, walking at 2.9 mph. He probably mentioned some other statistics but my mind wasn’t computing too well. The chocolate bar seemed more interesting. Our legs are aching but neither of us feel the need to write a last will and testament – just yet.

I look up at the sky and say to Martin, “It looks clear to the north towards Whitstable. It’s only another 8 miles, why don’t we go for it?” Martin rolled his eyes, smiled and says “OK, but my battery on my smartphone won’t last that long, so we won’t have all the statistics.” Another blessing I thought.

So off we went again, through the busy shopping area of Canterbury, circumnavigating great crowds of French school children, street vendors and tourists who seem to be just standing in our way on purpose. Don’t they realise we are on a mission! If only the sniper was here, he would have cleared the crowds for us.

We were walking quite a bit slower now. Our legs had stiffened up while having a snack in the metropolis. But they loosened up. But before the super-duper smartphone died, Martin managed a last statistic that we were walking a 2.6 mph now.

Thank goodness I had my walking poles, they helped a lot. North of Canterbury we link up with the Crab and Winkle Way, which more or less follows a disused railway line. It’s a very simple path to follow, also used by cyclists. Easy walking now, still mainly in countryside, but the well made paths make me feel it’s too man-made for my liking. Give me mud, tree stumps and wet grass any day!

Although aching a little, I feel OK. Martin explains he knows he has blisters and his ankles are aching. The pace slows, but

only slightly. But we keep on going. There is little to describe really. The paths are wide and mainly straight, the rain keeps away although we can still hear thunder around Canterbury.

On the way, there are regular signs telling us how far it is to Whitstable. This proves unhelpful as each mile feels like two. I try to keep the conversation going but Martin is a little unresponsive now. I think he is in a little pain. He is more used to running and this walking is clearly using different muscles. Witty banter has disappeared now. I give him encouragement and say "Not long to go now," as he replies "This is not funny now. This is doing my head in!" But a few minutes later we arrive at our destination, Whitstable harbour. Whitstable is one of my favourite Kent towns, it has a character all of its own. I reward Martin with an ice cream with a flake, I am so good to him! We savour our ice creams and then off to catch the bus back to Canterbury, then another back to Folkestone.

On the bus journeys, we sat apart to allow us to stretch our weary legs. But as the bus fills up with passengers, I noticed that other passengers preferred to stand than sit next to either of us. I wonder why? But one person decides to sit next to Martin but gets up and finds another seat after two stops.

And so we arrive back at Folkestone. Ann is waiting to pick us up and take us to Hythe to pick up Martin's car. The 30 metre walk from the bus to Ann's car proves torturous. Our legs have stiffened up having been in such confined seats on the buses. We walk as if we have legs made of 4 by 2.

The car is collected and we both get to our homes, a hot bath and a cup of tea beckoning.

The next day I text Martin, "How are you today?" Martin replies, "You want to see my blisters! But I'm OK."

We meet up on the Sunday, Father's Day. We laugh so much about our adventure, what we experienced in mind and body.

Gone were the aches and pains, and all that was left was a great day out.

Would we do it again? Don't be silly.

Seriously, this walk is a great experience. The Elham Valley is so scenic, so beautiful in a countryside type of way. What is needed is to do it in two sections, say from Hythe to Barham, then Barham to Whitstable.

So there we have it, our own Coast to Coast – Kent style.

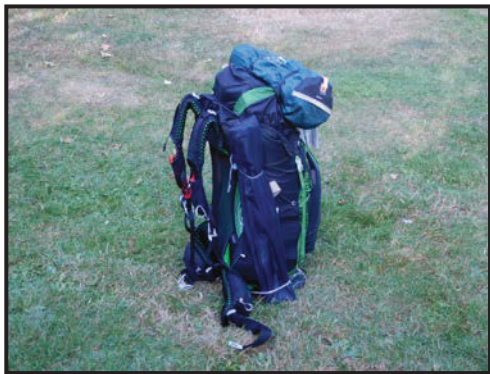


Views from the Thames River Path – from top left, clockwise: the source of the River Thames; Cleeve Lock: a floating wedding reception near Cookham; and Shepperton Ferry

THE THAMES RIVER PATH

By Andrew Melling

My last solo backpacking trip had been in 1973 so I dusted off my skills with a short walk on the Kennet and Avon Canal Path in April. Surviving a drenching first day, a freezing second night, and a scorching 22 mile third day, I was ready for a greater commitment.



In mid-July, I was on the train to Kemble, near Cirencester and about 1.6 miles from the source of the Thames. The Tavern, next to the station, has a camping field and, despite some unforecast rain as I was being shown where to pitch, I was soon set up. Lunch in the pub left me time to walk to the source which was dry, as it mostly is except in winter. Four miles forward along the official path took me to a spot where I could conveniently start my first full day. The path left the road beside a ditch which soon became a stream but then got lost among about six miles of Cotswold Water Park, relieved only by the very pretty village of Ashton Keynes. Then it was Cricklade for lunch. An aspect of this walk compared, say, to walking in Czechia, is the daily opportunity afforded for a pub lunch. Leaving Cricklade, passing under the A419, I am alongside a proper wide river. My camp site is on the river bank, just not my side of the river, and I must walk

past it to Castle Eaton Bridge and back on roads for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (to be retraced in the morning).

At Castle Eaton, the river loops north but the path doesn't and I get only glimpses of water over 4.5 miles of farmland bringing me to the busy A361. It is Sunday but there is still a lot of fast moving traffic and I have to keep to the road for over a mile. The guides, and a notice on a stile, strongly advise avoiding the road walk by getting a bus (Mon to Sat only) or a taxi. I ignore this advice and find a perfectly adequate verge for the full length. On leaving the road, I am soon back on the river bank and in a vast public open space which the people of Lechlade are making good use of. It seems a pretty town but it is too early for lunch so I spurn The Rose Revived and, soon, the Trout Inn, miss the turn for the pub at Kelmscott and arrive for a late lunch at The Swan Hotel, Radcot, with its large riverside garden. I have walked maybe 12 miles today with less than 5 to go so I can afford a long, leisurely Sunday lunch (I am on holiday!). Camp is at Rushey Lock and I have the site to myself. There is a dedicated washing up place but no shower. I walk 20 mins to The Trout Inn at Tadpole Bridge (not to be confused with the Trout Inn near Lechlade) for a relaxing pint on a bench overlooking the river.

Next day, the river is wide and peaceful, the weather is fine and, when I meet a fence, there is a well-maintained gate. There are very few stiles on the whole trail and I am grateful not to have to climb over with a full pack. Again, I cover most of the day's route before stopping for lunch at the Ferryman Inn, Bablock Hythe. It is Monday, the chef's day off, and there are no sandwiches, only packets of nibbles. I have two packets and a glass of water before my ale as it has got very hot. Although the ferry ramps either side of the river appear to have been used recently, there is no sign of any ferry but I don't need to cross here. Next to the pub is a mobile home park so I have a turgid two mile diversion from the river bank but then it is only two more miles to my campsite at Eynsham Lock. The site is prettily located on an island but I have to cross the lock gates for the facilities. These are unisex in one large room with a large shower operated by token costing £3.20. They are for the use of boaters as well as campers but neither the lock nor the camp site is crowded. The pub is a short walk past a toll booth manned by two persons collecting five pence from each passing car! Back on site, it is just as hot as it was at lunchtime. The other campers include a couple in a small boat. The man has strung a hammock between two trees and settles down in it. Despite the heat, I get to sleep ready for an early start next morning.

I am away at 8am but one of the other campers has already left. I have 20 miles to cover today and it is already hot (it was reported to be the hottest day of the year). The river goes north east, then south east. In my map booklet I am going left to right, then top to bottom, under the A34 and I pass yet another Trout Inn. Another pub a mile on is still too early for lunch and I press on to Oxford where I catch up with the boaters for the third time. I tell them they will get nowhere if they keep stopping but they are hoping for a coffee shop. They express surprise at my pace. My booklet has taken me to the bottom of page 26 to resume at the top of page 29. I cross the river over the A420 (Osney Bridge) and it's all a bit suburban for my taste, cul-de-sacs coming down to the path. A sign proclaims the towpath and prohibits anything that might be useful for towing. I have my eye on the pub by the lock at Sandford-on-Thames for lunch. I pass a pub which can't be the one I'm looking for because it's too soon, isn't it? I press on but seem to be walking a long time with no pub in view and it is getting hotter. A railway bridge provides welcome shade and I have a long rest and a drink of water. I summon the energy to continue and quite soon find myself in a kind of pleasance with happy children and an open air pool, passing abbey ruins and signs that tell me, gosh, I am as far as Abingdon: 15 miles before lunch in this heat!

Outside the pub, a bus stop announces buses to Clifton Hampden, my destination. Tempting. Inside, I have a pint of tap water with ice and lemon to prepare the way for my pint of ale, then the same again with something and salad which I eat in a shady courtyard. Eventually, I move from the shade into full sun and it is like getting out of an air-conditioned car in the desert. Bus it is. At the camp site, I unpack my tent and then need a ten minute lie down and a drink of water. I spread the components on the ground but then need another ten minutes. Perhaps I have overdone it. Once I am set up, I have a nap in the shade. It is never **not** hot all day. Cooking a hot meal is unattractive. Advance booking at the Barley Mow is recommended but they find a space for me and I settle down to a delicious roasted pear salad with a (very) chilled bottle of white wine. I am comfortable again.

A corollary of my long day is a short day to follow, not needing an early start. I stick to the path, not deviating into Dorchester, for the path is pleasant and the river broad. Shillingford suits for lunch but the pub is closed and there is not another marked until Wallingford. At the delightful grassy Shillingford Wharf, I stop for a cereal bar which will have to do, I suppose. The path does not cross Shillingford Bridge but at the other end is a hotel and I try my luck to find a bar, snacks and a terrace with wonderful views of the river. The path re-joins the river bank, having diverted through the village, and crosses the river at Benson Lock. I enjoy the locks. They are so well kept, there is often a prettily decorated boat passing through and sometimes there is ice cream. I spent a weekend at Bridge Villa Campsite, Wallingford, in a caravan with my wife in 1998 but I don't recognise it now. It is only mid-afternoon so I have time to find a cash point and a supermarket. I have booked two nights at Bridge Villa because my next day's walk is to Reading where there is no convenient camp site. An advantage is

that I will have a day's walking carrying only a daypack.

So the next day is easy and pleasant, apart from the stretch of A329 through Moulsholme. Cleeve Lock makes a pretty picture and crossing the bridge from Streatley to Goring brings back memories of a Valentine's break years ago. One of the advantages of a riverside path should be that it is level but, three miles after Goring, the path leaves the bank and rises steeply for a mile to reach the B471 before descending to Whitchurch. I am glad I didn't have to do it with my full pack. The first pub says it is open but is clearly undergoing refurbishment so I go on to the Ferryboat Inn – not by the river but with a small courtyard (did I mention that it is very hot today?) After lunch, I cross a toll bridge returning to the right bank and a broad meadow with cattle slaking their thirst. Then there is an urban stretch at Tilehurst followed by a large public open space on the approach to Reading from where I get a bus back to Wallingford.

After the return bus ride next morning I am soon away from Reading's bustle to Sonning and the start of numerous school and college boathouses with coaches bawling their instructions over the waters. Also there are islands and grand properties, both hotels and private houses. At the next lock I lose the river again as the path cuts across and past Lower Shiplake station, on to another lock and soon mingling with Henley strollers. The Angel on the Bridge has a nice terrace over the water for lunch but I remember the old Red Lion and a Valentine's break even longer ago. Beyond the town, preparations are in hand for the regatta and the river is divided into lanes, like a watery car park. It is only five or six miles to my intended camp at Hurley. They don't take bookings for a single night so, as advised, I had phoned ahead and left a message. The lady says there is absolutely no way they can fit me in but a man finds a way, although I have to pay the same as a family in a caravan. Today is Friday and it is hot so the fish and chip van is welcome. Avoiding the long queue, for the moment, I walk 20 minutes to the nearest pub for a bottle of wine. The queue is just as long on my return and, by the time I am served, the wine is not as chilled as I should have liked. No matter.

There are more pleasure boats on the river now, and more grand houses. The path switches to the left bank at Temple Lock and back again at Bourne End. At Cookham, there is a short diversion through a churchyard. The wedding guests are leaving and the bride is being photographed in the shade of the trees. The Ferry Inn has a nice riverside terrace and, in a while, a pleasure boat passes with the wedding party aboard, the bride still in her finery. They pass me again, up and down, and I pass them at Maidenhead taking on supplies. This is a nice diversion for me as I am back in suburbia, including a stretch along the A4094. Soon, though, I am at Amerden Caravan & Camping Park. "No need to book, just turn up. We can always squeeze in another backpacker." True to their word, they squeezed in a large Korean family group, almost as my back was turned. A great facility was a kitchen for backpackers with a fridge so, supplied by a not so near Tesco (lift back with one of the site staff), I was able to ensure that my wine was properly chilled. The air was still warm at 9pm for some late photography.

Next stop, Windsor and Eton. Opposite The Home Park, the route is forced on to the left bank and I am envious of the peaceful empty space opposite while walking along the B470 on the edge of Datchet. Suburbia is inescapable but there are views of Frogmore House and the Magna Carta Memorial. Then it is town proper as I find my typical riverside pub in Staines. There is quite a lot of Staines but the path keeps to the river and I can pretend. Camp tonight is with the Camping and Caravanning Club at Chertsey. The club manages to carve a haven of countryside out of the most urban of settings. My pitch is in what they call backpackers alley and my neighbours include a Dutchman who needs to cycle to Felixstowe to get a ferry home the day after next. My next day's walk should get me to Kew, where there is nowhere to camp, so I am staying two nights at Chertsey.

I set off at a good pace (with just my day pack) and am at Shepperton Lock by 9am. I have lunched in the Ferryman at Bablock Hythe, the Ferryboat at Whitchurch and the Ferry Inn at Maidenhead; and every little settlement has had its Ferry Lane, Road or Street. But here by Shepperton Lock is the only ferry that must be taken to follow the path. As promised, it runs on request, and for £2 I am soon on the other side. The path here takes on a different character and I sometimes can't see the river for the thickness of the trees and shrubs. But the morning is hot so the shade is welcome. Walton has a futuristic bridge to pass under but the real attraction this morning is Hampton Court Palace. A gentleman tells me what a lovely walk this is: to skirt Hampton Court Park and get a bus back from Kingston. He is clearly dubious at my plan to have lunch in Richmond. Teddington Lock is on a different scale from other locks I have passed – almost industrial. I prefer the views of Eel Pie Island and Ham House. The pub by Richmond Bridge is quaint. It has a small courtyard on the riverside and, round the corner, an entrance high up on stone steps for when the courtyard is inundated. After lunch, there is Isleworth church and Syon House on the other bank and Kew Gardens on my side. Of course, the river has been tidal since Teddington Lock and the tide is out lending the scene a forlorn look. I reach Kew Bridge early enough to make it worthwhile continuing round the bend and, as I approach Barnes Bridge, I see The Shard on the skyline. This is the only time I see the beginning and end of a day's walk in one view. The train journey is long and circuitous, getting as far west as Virginia Water before turning east again for Chertsey. As we go through Staines I feel nostalgic: this will be my last night in the tent.

Back at Barnes Bridge next morning, I have left plenty of time to get to London Bridge. Since Teddington, it has been possible to walk on either side of the river but I don't know what the attraction would be of walking on the left bank. What little open space exists is mostly on the right bank. Putney Bridge to Vauxhall Bridge is relieved only by the mile through Battersea Park from constant diversions away from the bank on to busy, noisy roads around the construction sites of Nine Elms and the power station. It will all be lovely, one day. Passing under Westminster Bridge I am overwhelmed by the throng. There must be more people between the river and County Hall than I saw in the whole first week of my walk. The South Bank is familiar and I even have time to pop in to the National to collect a ticket I have bought for next week. After lunch at the reliable (and riverside) Founders Arms, I am on a train home from London Bridge well before rush hour. East of Tower Bridge there are enticing alleys leading through buildings to the water's edge or, at low tide, a beach. There are some interesting presentations of Victorian philanthropists but too often the path takes to the streets. There is still some interest at the City Farm and Greenland Dock but a long detour at Deptford before the Cutty Sark and the Naval College. Round the corner, building work diverts me on to the Blackwall Tunnel approach road which I have seen quite enough of. There is work to be done at the Thames Barrier Park. I am sure a way could be found to keep the path (sometimes now

signed as the extension) closer to the bank. There is a bit of a clamber round the Woolwich Ferry terminal but the Royal Arsenal area is a pleasure and the Dial Arch a nice place for lunch (but no river view).

On the home stretch, now, the river regains its rural character with a pleasant path and views of low Essex hills. Erith (and my bus home) is just around the corner and in the distance is the Queen Elizabeth Bridge. I have completed the Thames River Walk: a neat way to mark my 69th birthday!

Epilogue Five weeks later I am back at Clifton Hampden to walk my missing link. The buses I had hoped to use have all been withdrawn but the direct path to Abingdon only takes me 1hr 20min (even though I have another hot day). I get to the left bank of the river a mile before Abingdon lock and when I get there I realise that five weeks ago my brains must have been fried. If, instead of following the Abbey Stream, I had crossed the lock with the main path, I would have passed a sign saying 'Abingdon ½ mile'! After a solid morning's sightseeing, and lunch at The Nags Head on the Bridge (fine views of the river), I set off along the river path back to Clifton Hampden. Once out of Abingdon, it is not the most attractive stretch. Previous generations have improved navigation by cutting across the most tiresome loops and the path follows these cuts. Sometimes, as at Culham, there is an alternative path along the old river and I try that now with views of backwaters and fishing lakes. I am back to my tent in 2hrs 20mins but I am not carrying full pack, it is not a heat wave and I have not walked 15 miles already. I made the right decision five weeks ago.

Technical notes My tent is a Wild Country Zephyros 1 weighing just 1.57 kg; I sleep on an amazing Therm-a-rest inflatable mattress weighing just 310g with a packed bulk of 1 litre; my Vango stove packs away to 145 x 145 x 48mm weighing 210g (very efficient with a folding aluminium windshield); and the lot goes into an Osprey Exos 48L pack weighing 1.05kg. With all that weight saving, I was able to strap an aluminium folding stool to my pack – such a boon in putting shoes on and off when you have *my* knees!

I was lent the official National Trail Guide and the National Trail Companion which were useful for planning but a bit weighty. In April, Cicerone published a new edition of Leigh Hatts' Walking the Thames Path with an Ordnance Survey-based 1:25,000 route map booklet (available separately). The guide follows the route upstream but the booklet starts at the source which is more logical and suited me. It is genuinely pocketable but had two drawbacks: the route is highlighted in brown and detail is sometimes obscured; to accommodate bends in the river, not all pages are aligned north/south so sometimes I was walking top to bottom of the page, sometimes bottom to top, sometimes right to left and sometimes left to right. This confused me more than once, notably on the long hot stretch past Oxford to Abingdon. Geographers' A-Z have a map booklet also based on the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 mapping. Their highlighting is in yellow and the move from one page to the next is generally more obvious but the extension from the Thames Barrier to Erith is not covered and, at 24cm by 13.5cm, it is not so easy to pocket. I also had Harvey's strip map which would have been invaluable in wet weather as it is printed on polyethylene. Unfortunately, the scale is 1:60,000 which is often not good enough, even following a river.



COMEDY CORNER with Neal O'Rourke

WHY MEN ARE NEVER DEPRESSED:

Men are just happier people.

What do you expect from such simple creatures?

Your last name stays put.

The garage is all yours.

Wedding plans take care of themselves.

Chocolate is just another snack.

You can never be pregnant.

You can wear a white T-shirt to a water park.

You can wear NO shirt to a water park.

Car mechanics tell you the truth.

The world is your urinal.

You never have to drive to another petrol station loo because this one is just too icky.

You don't have to stop and think of which way to turn a nut on a bolt.

Same work, more pay.

Wrinkles add character.

Wedding dress £5000. Top hat and tails rental £100.

People never stare at your chest when you're talking to them.

New shoes don't cut, blister, or mangle your feet.

One mood all the time.

Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat.

A five-day holiday requires only one small bag.

You can open all your own jars.

If someone forgets to invite you, he or she can still be your friend.

Your underwear is £4.99 for a three-pack.

Three pairs of shoes are more than enough.

Everything on your face stays its original colour.
The same hairstyle lasts for years, even decades.
You only have to shave your face and neck.
You can play with toys all your life.
One wallet and one pair of shoes - one colour for all seasons.
You can wear shorts no matter how your legs look!
You can 'do' your nails with a pocket knife.
You have freedom of choice concerning growing a moustache.

MONEY

A man will pay £2 for a £1 item he needs. A woman will pay £1 for a £2 item that she doesn't need but it's on sale.

BATHROOMS

A man has five items in his bathroom: toothbrush and toothpaste, razor, soap, and towel. The average number of items in the typical woman's bathroom is 337. A man would not be able to identify more than 20 of these items.

ARGUMENTS

A woman has the last word in any argument. Anything a man says after that is the beginning of a new argument.

FUTURE

A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband. A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

MARRIAGE

A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't. A man marries a woman expecting that she won't change, but she does.

DRESSING UP

A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the bins, answer the phone, read a book, and get the mail. A man will dress up for weddings and funerals.

NATURAL

Men wake up as good-looking as they went to bed. Women somehow deteriorate during the night.

OFFSPRING

Ah, children. A woman knows all about her children. She knows about dentist appointments and romances, best friends, favourite foods, secret fears and hopes and dreams.

A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house.

THE LAST WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Well, we are very near the end of 2016, and it's been another very good year for Kent Group of the Long Distance Walkers Association. Once again, we have organised three highly successful walking events, we have a thriving social walks programme (Peter Jull, who took over as social walks secretary from Mike Pursey earlier this year, is building on Mike's excellent work), and we had a very efficient checkpoint at the Dorset 100 in May. Also, plans for the Cinque Ports 100 in 2018 are coming on well, although no one is underestimating the amount of work yet to do – apologies for sounding like a broken record on that one. And thanks to Stephanie le Men and Sarah Turner, we are using social media as a method of attracting and retaining new members. Our group is going from strength to strength.

This time next year, in fact in two months' time, we will have a new group chairman, as Brian Buttifant is standing down after 15 years in the role. Brian is one of the LDWA's absolute stalwarts. He has been involved with Kent Group since we started, he has completed 15 Hundreds and every year, with typical enthusiasm, he organises our checkpoint at the Hundred, wherever in the country it is. It was Brian who got me seconded onto the committee in 2005, when we started the White Cliffs Challenge as an annual event (so he's got a lot to answer for there!) As secretary and as an event organiser, I have found Brian a fantastic source of help, advice and encouragement, and I am so glad he has agreed to the request to lead the walkers out at the start of the Cinque Ports 100 in 2018. There are plans for Brian to remain on the committee after he stands down at our AGM – come along to our AGM to find out more.

There has also been some sad news to report this year. In March we lost one of the LDWA's true legends in Ernie Bishop - one of the finest walkers we have ever had in Kent Group, whose walking achievements were quite extraordinary - and in May we lost Conrad Power, a great friend of Kent Group who lived in Hastings and who had offered to help us on our Cinque Ports 100. I wrote obituaries for Ernie and Conrad for Strider, and I felt quite honoured to do so.

From a personal point of view, it has been a very significant year. I retired from my job as editor of the East Kent Mercury, where I had spent 18 very happy and fulfilling years, in April. I loved my job, but I have had cancer twice in recent years, as I think many Kent LDWA members know. Both cancers were detected early, the operations went well and I made full recoveries, so I have been very, very lucky. But when that happens to you, it does make you realise there is more to life than having a wonderful job, which is why I took the decision to retire. It did take me a good few months to adjust to my new way of life, as initially I missed my job and my former team enormously. But I have just about adjusted now, and it is good to have more time to spend on LDWA and Ramblers work (including path clearing, which I have found very enjoyable and rewarding). I have to say that it is also good to take life at a slightly slower pace than I did when I was working, and it is good to be able to spend a bit more time doing what in the LDWA we all love doing anyway – walking.

As always, editing this newsletter is a labour of love, and thanks to everyone who has sent in contributions this year. There wouldn't be a Kent newsletter if it wasn't for you. And thanks as always, of course, to our wonderful Bryan Clarke for getting the newsletter printed and distributed.

Wishing you all a fabulous Christmas and lots of happy walking in the new year.

Graham Smith

Photos from the Andredsweald on July 10

by Eric Rolfe



More of Sarah Turner's stunning photos taken on her Mount Elbrus trip
– see story inside

