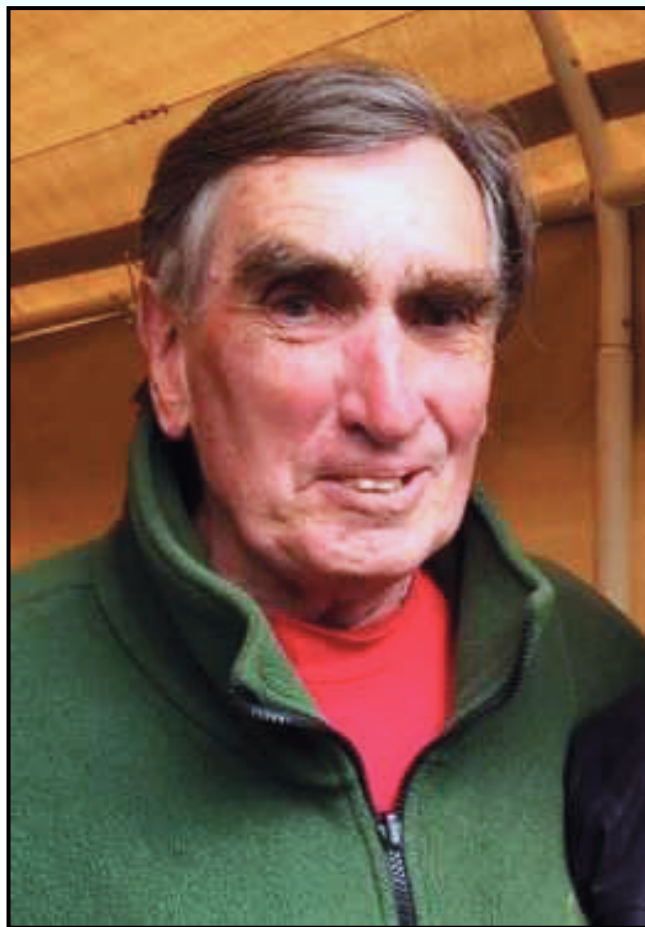


# ***LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION — Kent Group***

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

# ***NEWSLETTER***



**Brian Buttifant, Life President of Kent LDWA**  
Photo by Sarah Turner

**Number 102**



**April 2017**

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

**Pictures from the 2017 Sevenoaks Circular**  
*Photos taken by Peter Jull, Sarah Turner and Bryan Clarke*



## **SOCIAL WALLS PROGRAMME: APRIL TO AUGUST 2017**

### **Sun 9th April Anywhere But Elham 2**

21ml. 8.30am Meet Elham Square. (GR TR177438). Map Exp 138 hopefully a pub stop at Bossingham. C: Neal O'Rourke

### **Thur 13th April Another Alkham Alternative**

Figure-of-eight, joint walk with White Cliffs Ramblers – 15ml. 9.30am. Meet in car park behind former George & Dragon pub, Temple Ewell (GR TR287443). Map Ex- 138, lunch stop at The Fox, Temple Ewell. C: Graham Smith

### **Fri 14th April A South Downs Way Loop**

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 visits Firle Beacon before rejoining the 20ml route. C: Graham Smith

### **Sun 23rd Apr 2017 Sevenoaks to Tonbridge (linear)**

20ml. 09.45 Sevenoaks station. Start GR TQ522552, Finish GR TQ589465. Starting from Sevenoaks 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.C: Dave Strachan

### **Sat 29th Apr 2017 The Four Pits 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). C: Graham Smith

### **Sun 21st May 2017 Bash from Battle**

21ml. 08.30 Meet Car Park. (GR TQ765163). Map Exp 124 Pub stop Telham. C: Neal O'Rourke

### **Sun 4th Jun 2017 Heart of the Weald Marshals Walk**

26ml. (GR TQ640317). For details contact Neil . C: Neil Higham

### **Sun 11th Jun 2017 Summer in Sussex**

23ml. 9.00 Rye railway station c.p. £1.50 charge. (GR TQ919205). Rye to Hastings & return. Lunch stop at Hastings . C: Mike Pursey

### **Sat 17th Jun 2017 Elham Valley Way**

22.5ml. 8.30 Hythe Public Library. (GR TR161345). Walk from the coast to Canterbury: through woodlands, secret byways and unspoilt villages. Finish about 7pm for bus back to Hythe. C: Graham Smith

### **Sun 2nd Jul 2017 Heart of the Weald**

Challenge Event - 26, 20 or 15ml. in 9.5hrs (8hrs for 15). All to finish by 6pm. From Commemoration Hall, High Street, Wadhurst TN5 6AP (GR TQ641317). One of three High Weald walks offered by Kent Group, this year from Wadhurst. Little used footpaths of the High Weald provide an undulating course and scenic views. C: Neil Higham

### **Sat 15th July Summer French Challenge**

c23ml. 05.50 latest (tbc) Meet at Castle Hill, Dover (TR 323415), to arrange cars. Take the 06.40 (tbc) P&O Ferries sailing from Dover to Calais, then a short drive to Coquelles. (GR TR323415). A circular walk in the Nord Pas de Calais visiting the viewpoints of Mont de Couple and Cap Blanc Nez. C: Graham Smith

### **Sat 22nd Jul 2017 The Arsenal Way (dubbed the 'Boring Boring Way' by Julie Welch).**

20ml. 10 Meet, Woolwich Arsenal DLR. Start GR TQ437788, Finish GR TQ312857. A walk with an Arsenal theme, using parts of the Capital Ring, finish Emirates Stadium (several tube/train links). Visit to nearby Wetherspoons for refreshment at end. (Joint with London). C: Julie Welch

### **Sun 30th Jul 2017 Darent Valley Summer Explorer**

22ml. 9.25 Otford station. (GR TQ532594). A circular exploration of the fascinating Darent valley. Lunch in Shoreham (choice of pubs). Joint with London. C: Lonica Vanclay

### **Sat 5th Aug 2017 Bluewater to Otford (LINEAR)**

23ml. 10.00 Greenhithe station. Start GR TQ585748, Finish GR TQ532594. Follow Thames Path to and then Darent Valley. Lunch in Horton Kirby either packed lunch or pub. Possible coffee break/Ice cream in Dartford and afternoon break in N.T Centre. Finish Otford station. Joint with London. C: Neil Cook

### **Sun 13th Aug 2017 Cream Tea Walk**

21ml. 09.00 Meet Boughton Malherbe Church. Park in field opposite. (GR TQ882495). Hopefully pub stop. C: Neal O'Rourke

### **Thur Aug 24 Fish and Chip Walk (LINEAR - part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival)**

10.25 miles, meet 5.15pm at Walmer railway station (GR TR363503) and walk to Dover via the White Cliffs. Fish and chips in Dover and return (at your own expense) by train or bus. C: Graham Smith

### **Sat 26th Aug 2017 White Cliffs Challenge**

Challenge Event - 32 or 18ml. in 12 or 8hr (all to finish by 20.30). From St Margaret's Hall, St Margaret's at Cliffe just outside Dover (GR TR358446). Part of White Cliffs Walking Festival - new route. Maps: LR179, Exp 138, 150. Route descriptions will be available before the day of the event from the Kent Group. More details on Kent website.

### **Sun 27th August Alkham Adventure (part of White Cliffs Walking Festival).**

Figure-of-eight, joint walk with White Cliffs Ramblers – 15ml. 9.30am Meet in car park behind former George & Dragon pub, Temple Ewell (GR TR287443). Map Ex- 138, lunch stop at The Fox, Temple Ewell. C: Graham Smith

### **Mon 28th The 4gotten Pits Walk (part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival).**

23ml. 09.00 Meet by Lydden Bell. (GR TR260545). Not the Four Pits anytime challenge but a route linking the 4 collieries that never achieved commercial production. They are Stonehall at Lydden, Guilford at Coldred, Hammill near Eastry and Wingham. Pub lunch stop. C: Peter Jull

## KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman/newsletter editor – Graham Smith

Secretary – Stephanie le Men

Treasurer/walks secretary – Peter Jull,

Membership secretary – Neil Higham

Website - Michael Headley

Equipment – Sarah Turner,

Members

Phil Butler, Joy Davies, Nick Dockree, Neal O'Rourke, Mike Pursey,

Life President – Brian Buttifant,

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.



**Brian, Neil and Graham**



**Peter**



**Stephanie**

## NEW COMMITTEE – BRIAN LIFE PRESIDENT, CHAIRMAN GRAHAM, SECRETARY STEPHANIE AND TREASURER PETER

It's all change on the Kent Group committee, with Brian Buttifant standing down as chairman at the AGM in January and Graham Smith taking over from him.

Brian, who has just turned 80, has been a marvellous servant and ambassador for Kent Group, and it is excellent that he will remain on the committee. He has been chairman since 2002 and has been involved with Kent Group since we started in 1974. He was our group's first permanent secretary, and served in that role for 11 years. Brian takes a particular interest in Hundreds, having completed 15 of them, and each year organises a Kent checkpoint wherever the Hundred is being held. To recognise what he has done for Kent Group, he was made a life president at the AGM. The accolade is richly deserved. Graham, who retired as a local newspaper editor last year, joined the Kent Group committee in 2005. He has edited our newsletter since 2007 and had been secretary since 2011. He also chairs the group organising next year's Cinque Ports 100. Stephanie has been a committee member since 2009 and is secretary of the Cinque Ports 100 organising group.

Peter, who joined the committee last year as social walks secretary, is a former bank manager – which makes him ideal to take on the job of running our group's finances!

He takes over from Neil Higham, who had done the job for ... well, since most of us can remember really. Neil is to take over as membership secretary from Roger Dean, who is leaving Kent to move to Dorset with his wife Roz.

Neil and Roger have put in excellent and stalwart service to Kent Group of the LDWA over many years, and it is tremendous that Neil is remaining on the committee. We do, of course, wish Roger and Roz all the very best in Dorset.

And it is a very welcome return to the committee, after an absence of several years, for Neal O'Rourke, who has done an absolutely first class job organising checkpoints on next year's Cinque Ports 100.

The full committee, with contact details, is above. We are sure all Kent Group members wish Graham, Stephanie, Peter, Neil and Brian all the very best as they carry on their work for Kent Group.

## NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS: SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR

Just before this newsletter went to press, our Sevenoaks Circular was held, and as usual it was a great success, with 189 starters, including 23 people who entered on the day. Of these, 93 started the 30-mile route, 44 started the 20-mile route and 52 started the 15-miler. We only had four people retiring, which meant 185 people got round.

We were trialling the PACER tracking system, being used throughout the LDWA on several events and which will be used on next year's Cinque Ports 100. Michael Headley said: "PACER seems to have performed well."

One happy customer, Chris Williamson, said: "A very big thank you to all those involved in organising this event. Easy to follow directions, victuals on the way round and good company. It doesn't get better than that."

More details about the 2018 Sevenoaks Circular will appear in the next newsletter.

## HEART OF THE WEALD

As reported in the last newsletter, 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 on June 4. As usual, it will be based at the Commemoration Hall at Wadhurst, with distances of 26, 20 and 15 miles. Neil is going to need plenty of marshals, so please contact him (if you haven't already).

## WHITE CLIFFS CHALLENGE

This year's WCC will be on Saturday August 26, again as part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival (see article below), and will again be based at St Margaret's Village Hall.

The distances will be 32 miles and 18 miles. Both routes will be a 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.

## KSS TRIPLE CHALLENGE

This year's leg of the KSS – 50-mile walks to be done in successive years - 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.

Last year's KSS leg was the Sussex Stride, and next year it will be our White Cliffs Challenge (which, despite our hosting the Cinque Ports 100, is going ahead, as the event will be in August and will follow the same route it has before, with the same venue – St Margaret's village hall – and the same checkpoints).

## NORTH YORK MOORS 100

This year's North York Moors 100 will be based at Malton, and we are doing a checkpoint at Wombleton Hall (17 miles – CP3, open 1.10pm-5.30pm). 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, the 2020 Hundred will be the Y 100 Sir Fynwy, organised by South Wales Group and based in Monmouthshire, and it was recently announced that the 2021 Hundred will be the Trans Pennine 100, based in Yorkshire and organised by Vermuyden Group. We will be organising checkpoints on all these events, as usual.

And in the meantime, we've got ...



**Duke of York's Royal Military school**

## CINQUE PORTS 100

Plans are coming along for our Hundred next year, and we are very grateful to everyone who has responded to requests to help. And if anyone has not yet put their name down on the list of helpers, then please contact Graham Smith (details above). The route has been subjected to a fairly rigorous risk assessment, which has been carried out by Roger Dean, with some help from Peter Jull. As this newsletter went to press, four possible problem areas were being looked at – at Brookland, New Romney, Capel and near Sandwich. These may require changes to the route, as walker safety is obviously paramount. There have been some issues with footpaths, which have been reported to Kent County Council, which is responsible for paths, and we have been assured by Graham Rusling, KCC's public rights of way and access manager, and Andrew Hutchinson, the authority's East Kent public rights of way manager, that work on Cinque Ports 100 paths will receive priority.

We have now decided to start the actual walk on Hastings seafront. We are using the excellent Sussex Coast College, to which walkers will be transported by bus from the event HQ, the Duke of York's Royal Military School, just outside Dover. We will have welcoming speeches from Admiral the Lord Boyce, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and the Mayor of Hastings, in the college's atrium. Then walkers will follow our life president, Brian Buttifant, through the pedestrian precinct to the seafront – and at 10am they will be told to go!

Checkpoints have been visited and facilities checked by CP coordinator Neal O'Rourke, and catering managers Joy Davies and Jan O'Rourke are working out menus and ways of getting them to the checkpoints. One checkpoint remains to be staffed,

but this is in hand.

Dover HQ coordinator is Sarah Turner, with David Thornton as her deputy. We are now drawing up a rota of people who will be working at the Duke of York's school, with what jobs they will be doing and what shifts they will be asked to do.

Transport manager Peter Jull is assembling a team making arrangements to get walkers bussed to Hastings and all other transport requirements.

There has been much interest in the Cinque Ports 100 from LDWA members across the country, and national chairwoman and former Hundreds coordinator Gail Elrick expects the event will be fully subscribed. An excellent flyer to promote the event – designed by Michael Headley, and giving a rough overview of it, with photographs – was very well received at the national AGM, held at Horwood House Hotel in Buckinghamshire in March.

The event website. [www.ldwa.org.uk/2018Hundred](http://www.ldwa.org.uk/2018Hundred), goes live in June, with entries open in October.

So we're counting down ...



### WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL

Plans are being made for the fourth annual White Cliffs Walking Festival, which takes place between August 24-30 this year and which, of course, includes our White Cliffs Challenge on August 26.

Organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers (to which some members of Kent LDWA belong), the seven day festival will feature 43 walks.

Graham Smith is on the festival's organising committee, and it is planned to have three successive days of longer walks (i.e. of 15 miles or more) starting with the WCC. On Sunday, August 27, Graham will be leading an Alkham Adventure, a 15-mile figure-of-eight walk from Temple Ewell.

And on Monday August 28, Peter Jull will be leading his excellent 23-mile 4gotten Pits Walk, visiting the sites of four Kent coal mines which never went into commercial production - Stonehall at Lydden, Guilford at Coldred, Hammill near Eastry and Wingham. This walk, which ends by going through the delightful Lydden Valley, complements Graham's 40-mile Four Pits Walk (an Anytime Challenge), which is on our social walks programme (see above), visiting the sites of the Chislet, Betteshanger, Tilmanstone and Snowdown pits which **did** go into commercial production.

That will be three longish walks in three successive days, so let's hope they attract a few LDWA members.

Graham is also putting on his 10-mile Fish and Chips Walk on the evening of the festival's opening day, Thursday August 24, but is changing the route slightly this year. This walk involves walking to Dover via clifftop route and getting there with the seafront's lights sparkling, before having fish and chips and returning to Deal by public transport.

The other walks are all shorter ones. Some of the festival's other walks are being repeated due to popular demand – such as the White Cliffs Coastal Trail, taking place over three days - but there will also be several new ones. These will include the Royal Marines Heritage Trail, a 2.5-mile walk visiting 24 parts of Deal and Walmer associated with the Royal Marines. The Royal Marines left Deal in 1996 after having a presence in the town for more than 300 years.

Another new walk will be one taking some of the hills above Folkestone, and there is going to be a short walk for disabled people and their carers.

The festival's walks programme is now being finalised, which will go on a leaflet which will be available in June and on the festival's website [www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk](http://www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk)

A total of 1,104 people went on the festival walks in 2016, a figure it is hoped will be beaten this year.

### TP4449 – LITTLE OUSE (TL 61719 89787) By Bryan Clarke

Near Ely, Trig Point 4449 in Norfolk at -1 metre is the lowest in Great Britain. Having visited the highest Trig Point on Ben Nevis some 35 years ago with both sons I had a fancy to complete the double at some time and staying with one of my sons, Keith who lives near Cambridge, for Christmas, on 23 December 2016, the subject came up. The other Grandfather and his wife Sylvia were also there, down from Scotland. Next thing it was agreed to make an expedition to Little Ouse and do it!

The other son, Rob, who had been with Keith and I to Ben Nevis was not available. However, Grand-daughter Becca and Sylvia had visited the Ben Nevis TP in the summer of 2016 and were keen to also do the double.

The four of us set off by car for an around 50 minute journey to Little Ouse with no little trepidation on my part as I had a severe sciatica problem. A quick glance at a map gave me the hope that I could walk the few hundred metres and survive the pain that would ensue. Parking the car at Little Ouse we set off along the river bank towards the TP which did not appear to be as close as I had thought. Later with more careful examination of the map it was more like one kilometre each way in

distance. Before halfway to the TP I was suffering badly and Becca and Sylvia had forged ahead while Keith stayed with me as I stopped and staggered along. I think he thought I might reel off the levee and end up in the river or even go the other way down into the adjacent field or ditch. One way would be wet but the other way was a lot longer down as in fen country the river is 15 metres or more higher than the surrounding land.

At last Keith and I reached the others and the TP, and photographs were taken. I was feeling quite rough and the prospect of the walk back to the car was not a good one! We set off and again I was slow and had to stop very often to make a recovery. I repeated the walkers' motto to myself several times to give me incentive: "The pain will continue until morale improves".

Well we got back and I was just about completely clapped out. A two kilometre walk had taken over an hour. I collapsed into the car and was glad to get back to Keith's house to crash on to a settee where I stayed for the afternoon and seem to have made a good recovery. The usual question was asked, "Did you take your pain killers?". My usual answer, "Forgot".

So after 35 years or so Keith and I had completed the 'highest and lowest double' and Becca and Sylvia had completed theirs in the same calendar year.

See [trigpointing.uk](http://trigpointing.uk) for information about getting another excuse for a walk!



#### **AVERIL HELPING US TO FIND THE WAY**

A campaign to help walkers improve rights of way by taking action themselves has been launched by the Ramblers' Kent public rights of way manager and Kent LDWA member Averil Brice.

Averil announced the campaign, FINDING THE WAY, at the Ramblers' Kent Area annual general meeting, held at Kemsing in January.

Averil, who is also secretary of the White Cliffs Ramblers, wants to encourage walkers to get involved by helping on footpath work themselves in any way possible, including financially.

Her initiative involves getting permission from land owners to get work done; getting plenty of volunteers, including parish observers, to identify work; and training more working parties to do the work or pay to use contractors.

This would be in partnership with Kent County Council, as people cannot go out and do work off their own backs, as this can lead to complicated legal issues and could put The Ramblers and/or KCC at risk of litigation.

She said: "For people to use rights of way, they need to be attractive.

"One of the most off-putting features of any right of way are stiles, which can be rotten, wobbly, broken or too high.

"They are a huge deterrent to dog walkers with heavy dogs, walkers with varying degrees of disability and walk leaders with groups. The majority opt for an alternative route, so the route becomes overgrown.

"There are 8273 known stiles in Kent. Not all need work, but many could be done away with and others repaired, improved or replaced with a metal gate or self closing gate."

Averil's campaign could involve people donating money themselves to get work done, such as raising funds to replace a stile with a self-closing gate, which costs £135.

Averil says: “Local authorities are under huge pressure today to cut costs, and they are trying desperately to preserve vital front line services like schools.

“So any donations people can make could be a great help, and the campaign may involve some form of crowd funding.”

She adds: “This initiative would be popular with every walker in the community, and an attraction for new walkers and health groups.

“Kent could become a shining example for others to follow.”

Anyone wishing to get involved with Averil’s FINDING THE WAY campaign is asked to email her.

### **DOVER IS ‘WALKING CAPITAL OF THE SOUTH EAST’**

Dover is the walking capital of the South East coast – that was the message as the town launched its getting Walkers Are Welcome status.

Dover became a Walkers Are Welcome town last year, joining a national network of towns which are required to meet strict criteria.

This includes demonstrating how local people and visitors are offered excellent walking opportunities within their areas; ensuring footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained, improved and well signposted; contributing to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies; promoting the health benefits of walking; and encouraging the use of public transport. Getting the status was launched at a reception held at the Dover Town Council offices, attended by scores of people from various walking groups in the area, including Kent LDWA chairman Graham Smith and treasurer Peter Jull.

Former town mayor Pam Brivio, Dover's WAW group coordinator, said: “We have worked hard for Dover to get Walkers Are Welcome status.

“It really puts Dover on the walking map, and it means that Dover is the walking capital of the South East coast.”

Graham also spoke at the launch, and outlined plans for next year’s Cinque Ports 100. He said: “There will be 500 walkers, coming from all over the country, and about the same number of family and friends - all spending money in the local economy.”

Another speaker was Bev Cussans, who is leading the White Cliffs Ramblers team organising this year's White Cliffs Walking Festival.

She said the festival would have “walks for everyone”. She said: “There will be beach adventures, an ice cream walk, a smugglers walk, historical walks, nature trail walks, challenging walks and a three-day coastal trail.

“The walks are not only fun – they are healthy too.”

At the WAW launch, the town's Walkers Are Welcome website, [doverwalkersarewelcome.co.uk](http://doverwalkersarewelcome.co.uk) was unveiled, with links to walking groups, hotels and guest houses, transport, and restaurants and other licensed premises in the Dover area.



### **ALKHAM ALTERNATIVES: November 20 By Peter Jull**

Dawn broke to 100mph winds in the Channel. By the time 13 gathered at the Kearsney start angry Angus had blown the forecast rains away. That there never was a religious abbey there explained three, four, five times, the first climb of the day

began, 300ft up to and into Whitfield Hill nature reserve and before halfway the field is split into the puffing and the striding. Coming down the other side ended in a steep slippery bank where MH eschewed the use of feet and tried rolling on the road for a yard or two. A lesser climb topped out on near Whitfield after 150ft for some level respite then NDW descent. Climbing again firstly through Dover's cemeteries, another 300ft and we felt the first unsheltered breath of Angus across Burgoyne Heights. Down through Broadleas led to elevenses at Bleriot's memorial, previously unknown to most. A mere 100ft up to get round the castle before dropping down into Dover. Climbing the Western Heights from the north is 200ft but concentrated into some steep steps. Dropping down into the moat of the Drop Redoubt to reveal another little known sight turned out to be smoky with volunteers burning off encroaching vegetation. Exiting through the defensive defile rejoins the more familiar NDW before descending down into Maxton.

Crossing the lower slopes of Stepping Down feels more than the measured 50ft before down again into Elms Vale. The way out is a steady 250ft up to Whinless Down where the back end briefly loses the front of the field. Philippa looks finished off and once in valley again chooses the more level road route back to Kearsney. The rest tackle the 275ft up to Coombe Down the last half of which is worse than 1:3 in parts. The descent to Crabble is more gentle then level back to Kearsney Abbey grounds for picnic and Temple Ewell for the pub. The fantastic Mr & Mrs Fox serve lunches quickly but it's standing room only for the drinkers.

Sarah drops out to catch up on storm disturbed sleep before night work so there's 11 on the 300ft climb to the top of Temple Ewell nature reserve, a mere 1:4 at most. Through the reserve & down into Lydden is followed by the most strenuous climb of the day. Despite the recent rain mud has been sparse until this 150ft of heavily poached field. Down into a coombe the next 150ft up to Ewell Minnis is so much easier. Down into Alkham is by an alternative to the notorious WCC used steps. The alternative way out is up the south side 250ft with good long views down the valley. At the road a van is stranded in a flooded corner obstructing our path. A route description would say beware eroded gullies, which were in the process of being further eroded by water draining from the flood.

Out of the woods there are more good long valley views before re-entering the woods, within which there are a last couple of hundred feet to climb. But twilight is upon us and a path that is obvious in daylight is worryingly obscure causing a delaying detour when a field fence is mistaken for the target garden fences. So it's by torchlight the steep descent is made back into and across the park to finish. By now it's snowing in the North but here its calm benign autumnal walking weather. Map measured 18 miles but GPSs say 20+ although agree, with minor climbs, ascent exceeded 3300ft.

#### **ANOTHER CHRISTMAS CRUISE AROUND CALAIS: December 10 By Graham Smith**

Sixteen of us booked to go on our latest December French walk, but only 13 made it. Mike Pursey had to cry off two days previously due to the cold/flu bug that seemed to afflict half the British population at that time of year, and two members of the White Cliffs Ramblers – Margaret Milsted-Williamson and John Copplestone, didn't get to Dover docks in time. We had booked on the 0825 ferry out, which means checking in at 0720. The P&O staff let us have 10 minutes but no more than that, and as Margaret and John hadn't shown by then, we had to go. Margaret and John travelled from the Sittingbourne area, and they missed us by five minutes – but they did do a walk in the Dover area, so their day wasn't wasted.

But we remaining 13 had a pleasant crossing on the P&O ship Pride of Canterbury, and on arrival in Calais, took our usual route through the town to Coquelles. We had a quick stop for at the Auchan hypermarket for refreshments and the toilet and then set off – minus Martin Matthews, who was still queuing in Auchan. The rest of us had moved on, believing he had gone on ahead of us. It later became apparent that he had not done so, so Michael Headley and Sarah Turner went back to Auchan to locate him while the rest of us walked on. Martin located, we moved on to Cap Blanc-Nez, which in good conditions is a fine viewpoint. Unfortunately, on that day we had a lot of low cloud so we couldn't see much at all. We dropped down to have our lunch and our first bier de noel (Christmas beer – which is popular in France) and then moved on to the village of Peuplinques and then back to Coquelles, where we did some Christmas shopping at Auchan and had another beer. Then we headed off along the side of the main road into Calais to view what is always the highlight of this trip – the town's Christmas lights. They were as spectacular as usual, and after taking photographs we had a meal in a town centre restaurant (having been turned away from the first one at which we inquired). Then it was the normal route back to the port to check in for the return ferry – and where leader Graham Smith was informed that his passport had expired the previous month (well, how often DO people check their passports?). Luckily, the Customs officials let him continue, and we had a pleasant crossing on the Spirit of Britain.

It was, as usual, a very good day, and many thanks to Beds, Bucks and Northants members Dave Findel-Hawkins (the LDWA's national events coordinator) and his partner Merrian Lancaster for coming down and joining us. They said they were only there for the beer (and that bier de noel is good).

See the back page of this newsletter for photographs.

Our next walk in France will be the Summer French Challenge on Saturday, July 15. See details in social walks programme above.

#### **(WET) NEW YEAR ON THE SOUTH DOWNS: January 1 By Graham Smith**

Myself and six other Kent LDWA members, plus one from Sussex, had a wet start to 2017 on my New Year's Day 20-miler from Eastbourne. Rain, some of it heavy, had been forecast for most of the week, and to be honest, I was pleasantly surprised that so many people made it to Eastbourne to turn out at 9am (what a hardy lot we are in the LDWA).

Luckily the rain didn't really start until we had got past the Seven Sisters - but when it did, it came down hard and we all got soaked. As it was so wet, we decided not to have our usual stop for elevenses on the Cuckmere Valley, instead opting for the wet weather alternative of the South Downs Way route via Exceat (with its green telephone box) and Litlington. In fact, we didn't have a mid-morning stop at all, deciding instead to go straight to Alfriston for lunch. We had a drink in the warm and cosy Market Inn, before starting again. Although the rain was now not so hard as it had been, the wet stuff was still coming down, so we decided against taking the usual route of Wilmington Hill and went for the slightly shorter one of the South Downs Way, which was still very pleasant. After the final climb from Jevington, we were in cruise control, as the going back

to Eastbourne was flat and we know the route so well from having done it so often.

So we cracked on, and got back to Eastbourne at 4pm, earlier than usual. Despite the rain, it had been a good day and even in those conditions, walking on those South Downs is like walking on a green carpet.

And (most importantly), I was able to get to Maidstone just after kick-off to see Dover Athletic win the Kent Vanarama National League derby 4-1. Well done to everyone who came on the New Year's Day walk, and my particular thanks go to David Thornton who loaned me his towel and some dry socks so I could go to football reasonably dry!

### **THE SUMMERHOUSE SAUNTER: January 22 By Graham Smith**

Summerhouse Hill, between Newington and Etchinghill, is a little gem of a hill. At 486ft, it sits underneath its big brother, Tolsford Hill (600ft), but offers excellent views, a nice steepish climb, and a decent little ridge. The problem is, walkers aren't allowed to go up Summerhouse Hill without the prior permission of the Ministry of Defence, which owns it, and claims it is used by the Army for navigation exercises – though I have yet to find anyone who has actually seen any soldiers on Summerhouse Hill. There are not even any signs there saying it is MoD land.

In 2000, when the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (better known as CROW) came into force, the Ramblers were led to believe that Summerhouse Hill was Open Access land, which means it can be walked without having to follow defined footpaths (of which there are a few on Summerhouse Hill anyway). It later transpired that the CROW Act did not apply to Summerhouse Hill, but the Ramblers felt that there should be some form of access, as it's a very nice hill which has been walked for generations. So a meeting was held at the Hythe Ranges, attended by the local MoD top brass, to broker some kind of access deal. The Ramblers pointed out that there could be no safety issue with Summerhouse Hill, as nobody had ever seen any evidence of any military activity there. The MoD top brass actually liked this, saying the reason nobody had seen any soldiers there was because they would have been wearing camouflage, so they wouldn't have been seen anyway! Believe that if you will.

Eventually, and reluctantly, the MoD top brass did concede some access arrangements for Summerhouse Hill, but severe restrictions were put on them. These were that the MoD would need prior warning in order to give permission, that there could be no more than four visits a year, that there could be no more than six people per visit, and that walkers would not be allowed to stop on the summit and would have to keep walking. By general consent, these restrictions were a bit silly, and have just been ignored, which is what 14 LDWA members and a dog did on January 22.

There were other hills, apart from Summerhouse Hill, on the walk, with some pretty stiff climbs. Starting at Lympe Village Hall, I took a route which initially followed the Saxon Shore Way to Pedlinge, then crossed Brockhill Country Park to Saltwood, where we went by the castle to our first climb – shown on the OS map as Oak Banks but which Mike Pursey, a local man who lives in Hythe, says is Ossy Bank. It was a pretty stiff climb, and after everyone had got their breath back, we crossed a field, followed a road and then crossed another field to Summerhouse Hill. Unfortunately there was quite a bit of cloud around, so we didn't get the excellent views I have often had. But everyone made it to the top without too much trouble. Michael Headley said we should have had a Kent LDWA banner to unfurl on the top, a commendable idea. Then we went down the ridge to cross another field for our next climb – Tolsford Hill, which made it a Three Peaks Walk (I suppose that's what I could have called it but I preferred the alliteration of Summerhouse Saunter).

After that we followed the delightful North Downs Way high level route to Farthing Common, before dropping down to Cobb's Hill, and our lunch stop of the Tiger Inn, Stowting. Here – and I still don't know how we did this as I have followed that route scores of times – but somehow Mike Pursey and I went wrong. Before Cobb's Hill I had had to pull behind for a comfort stop, so when I caught up, I was at the back of the group. Mike and I got talking/digressing, and instead of following the road straight to the pub, we took a right turn which must have added a good half a mile to our walk and meant we approached the pub from completely the other direction. Unfortunately, we took two other walkers and the dog with us. It was most embarrassing to explain what had happened to the others when we got to the pub, particularly as Eve Richards said she was about to send out a search party for us!

After lunch there were no more climbs, and we took a low level route which followed meadows, lanes and passed by a little reservoir to Sellindge. Then it was along Haringe Lane to take a path – which a few weeks previously had been impenetrable due to dense vegetation but had been cleared by Ramblers volunteers working with Kent County Council – to Court-at-Street. In steadily increasing sunshine, we followed the road back to Lympe.

Peter Jull's GPS said we had done 18.1 miles but Dave Strachan's made it 19.2. Whatever then actual mileage, we had all been up Summerhouse Hill. And we hadn't seen any soldiers (ah, but we wouldn't would we? They would have been in camouflage!).



### **KENT PEAKS – CANTERBURY: February 5 By Peter Jull**

It was consensually declared that compared to homes it was surprisingly chilly, exposed on the top of Wye Downs, while we

gathered then waited while the railway gates in the village below showed no regard for the haste needed by one BMW driver who made our number a gratifying 20.

The chill abated as soon as we descended into the lee of the scarp down steep and winding slippery steps. From the bottom it was east for a few fields and more before what goes down must come up but by the gentler slope of a sheep field. Back on the crest the breeze was back and Mike H peeled off back to domestic commitments while the rest found shelter in more downs and ups across ubiquitous dry valleys before following one for miles, almost to lunch at Petham. Comparing apps and GPSs in the Chequers divulged a disconcerting degree of deviation in the data displayed. Needing a steep up to get the post pause blood warming again it was instead a steep down and gentle up portending the less pronounced downs and ups of the afternoon. A long road section gently climbed to the target of the day defined only by a line on the map and pond hidden in the hedge. Underwhelming was the best accolade accorded the highest point in Canterbury's district! Continuing up into Ashford there were a mere three more dry valley to go down into and up out before the end was in sight and Neal & Jan peeled off to walk the extra 5 miles home they'd also walked to the start. Despite the sky being gloomily overcast all day the route was appreciatively acclaimed attractive.

**KENT PEAKS –  
DARTFORD,  
GRAVESHAM,  
MEDWAY AND  
TOBRIDGE:  
February 26 By  
Peter Jull**

A late start was made later when a forgotten map had to be fetched from a car. Only that event was unlucky for 13. Down, down & down the NDW followed by up



steep field, up steep steps, up steep path was deliberate. A largely level transit to high point one where trespass had been prevented on reconnaissance by a motor bike scrambling event, getting lost while checking for a repeat of which had caused the late start.

Wending a way on woodland walks, aided by GPS navigation, found the trig point on Tonbridge & Malling. The M20 and A20 recrossed the road and the road drone began to subside at 3.3mph moving average, a speed not recently achieved on a Kent walk. Regathering after a Green Man lunch, under a tree on the small green at Longfield Hill, and the high point in Dartford was done. A long valley bottom arable field might have been a strenuous slog given the season, but as elsewhere, was fairly firm underfoot, drying undoubtedly aided by the wind, much stronger now than in the morning.

Instead we slogged out of three steep valleys to rejoin the NDW near Holly Hill. Its track is the Gravesham/Medway, and where Medway turns off, the high point is a trackside lump. After mere minutes in Medway, it was wooded to the end and in sight of cars, where the high point in Gravesham and last high point – and highest of the day, at 808ft – was found on a bank by the car park entrance.



**ETHIOPIA : SIMIEN MOUNTAINS TREK By Dianne Marsden**

My 65th birthday present to myself was to book a trekking trip to Ethiopia. I have a very long held fascination for this part of Africa, which goes back to my childhood, for me Ethiopia was romantically associated with Sunday School Stories of The Queen of Sheba and The Lion of Judah. As a young woman looking for offbeat heroines and female tales of adventuresome travel, I discovered Dervla Murphy's travel book *In Ethiopia with a Mule*. Many years later the beautiful landscapes, the art, architecture, and the cultural history of Ethiopia, were brought alive for me through the excellent BBC series *Lost Kingdoms of Africa* presented by Gus Casely-Hayford.

More recently my curiosity was piqued by articles about travelling in Ethiopia, which appeared in the travel sections of various national newspapers. I was finally sold on by the idea of trip to Ethiopia after conversations with a fellow East Kent

Rambler, who had spent time travelling and walking in Northern Ethiopia a few years ago.

If I was to experience the wonders of the larger than life landscapes of The Simien Highlands I was going to have to walk! Walking is what the villagers do. They walk to find grazing, to church, to market, to clinics. Until the 19th century wheels were unknown in the highlands, they still are in most places. No barrows, no carts; just legs and mule-backs and the very occasional sighting of a NGO 4x4. I had no choice; it had to be a trekking trip with full tilt wild camping. A challenging chance to escape the feather-bed comforts of home.

The trips I researched were all graded at the tougher end of challenging, and described as strenuous, with several days spent close to or above 4,000 metres. On some days walking was for 10-12 hours. The ascent of Mount Ras Dashen, at 4,543 metres the highest mountain in Ethiopia and one of Africa's principal mountain massifs, involved a 1,300 metre ascent and descent in one day. I wasn't daunted, after all, a few months before I had joined the LDWA and had two social walks and The White Cliffs Challenge under my belt.

The direct flight from Heathrow to Addis Ababa only takes seven hours, but on entering the airport terminal I was at a gateway to another world. The walls displayed huge hoardings of Lucy - the three million year old hominin found in the Hadar Region of Ethiopia – an impactful reminder of this mystical country's primordial roots. The people we encountered were tall, thin, elegant, gracious and welcoming – and these epithets equally applied to government officials. Many were dressed in customary white cotton clothing with bands of yellow, green and red, the colours of Ethiopia, yellow symbolising hope, green for land and red for blood. Entry formalities were quickly and politely completed, despite the process involving the use of carbon copy books, lots of writing out by hand and triplicate entries.

We were greeted by our indomitable guide Susie, a sexagenarian, who had spent many years living in Ethiopia, and our trekking leader Messi. We were then whisked away to our hotel. This grand old Colonial Style rambling building was mostly constructed from teak, with big open verandas overlooking splendid gardens. My group of fellow intrepid travellers numbered twelve, mostly solo and from Australia. The women all seemed to be called Susan, which caused confusion, but also gives a clue to the age profile of the group. I was much relieved that I did not appear to be the oldest in the group, although I was rather unsettled by the extremely fit looking forty-something folk from Down Under.

Day one was a Cook's Tour of Addis, providing us with the opportunity to see where Haile Selassie's remains now lie, and also more curiously, to see the burial place of Sylvia Pankhurst. She was a great friend of Haile Selassie who named her an honorary Ethiopian. When she died she received a full state funeral. We also experienced our first culinary adventure, an occasion to literally dip our fingers into local cuisine at a traditional Ethiopian restaurant. Plates, bowls and cutlery are replaced by *injera*, a giant pancake which is made from a gluten free, highly nutritious grain called teff. Most of us didn't realise that the large dirty grey rolled up napkin with a foam rubber texture that was positioned in front of our water glasses was our injera. It is unrolled, and *wat*, a spicy stew of meat or vegetables is dolloped on top. You rip up the injera and wrap it around the wat dollops and consume. Or you can tear the injera into shreds and dip it into spicy pastes. Top stuff for coeliacs apparently, but not a dining experience I have bothered to replicate back in the UK.

An early morning flight from Addis Ababa to the legendary city of Gondar gave us spectacular views of The Ethiopian Plateau, which is crisscrossed with deep gorges. Our hotel, built from red earth brick in an ethnic style, was magnificently located on a hill top overlooking the town, which in former times was the capital of Ethiopia. The Gondar of yester-year is an amazing World Heritage Site, containing numerous castles and palaces. The fabled castles and a monastery with a sensational angelic ceiling were as impressive as their guide book's glowing descriptions; but for me another memorable sight was the sight of some 50 or more manacled prisoners squatting outside the courthouse awaiting transportation to jail, and guarded by soldiers with AK 47s. I still wonder about what fate had in store for these violators.

Before heading back to the hotel to luxuriate and savour the comforts of our four star billet, we drove into the town centre to an Italian built piazza; where we all purchased traditional locally made scarves. These proved to be invaluable in the coming days. Not only did they provide sun protection, but also when worn Carmen Miranda style provided the perfect cover up for unwashed bad-trekking hair.

Day Three started at 6am with a kit check, followed by a buffet breakfast feast – injera optional – and a 7.30am departure. Ahead of us lay a 105 kilometre road journey to the small town of Debark, the nearest town to the Simien National Park and the start of our trek. The scenery en route was stunning. There were miles of rugged grey blue hills, splashed with expanses of bright yellow daisies and vivid orange torch lilies. The eucalypt tree-lined road had almost no motor traffic, but our progress was often slow as we constantly dodged herds of livestock, and random processions of people. Most of who were attired in a rag bag assortment of dusty clothes often enhanced by many coloured buttons, and vaguely reminiscent of the outfits of cockney pearly kings and queens. The colour, bottle green, was seemingly de rigueur as were jelly sandals.

Whilst our guides organised our equipment and mules for the trek we had time to savour local organic coffee, honey and bread. The honey had a consistency and appearance of thick peanut butter and was delicious. Most of us placed an order for bags of locally produced organic coffee with an enterprising dude sporting an unmissable brilliant yellow and crimson outfit. He was as good as his word and our bags of coffee were awaiting us on our return ten days later.

There was a short drive to the starting point for our trek, where we assembled along with 20 mules, two camp cooks, two more guides, a camp leader, one loo digger/keeper of all things sanitary, two guards armed with AK 47s, six multi-tasking camp crew, plus an ambulance mule and an ambulance muleteer.

We set off in the early afternoon sun. My diary entry for that day records that the soft grey green countryside was gobsmackingly beautiful. The boulder strewn landscape was dotted with juniper tree groves, the trees were often festooned with a delicate grey moss, which hung like lace from the branches. The air was fragrant with the aroma of wild thyme, wild mint, and the carpets of tiny yellow daisies. We had our first encounter with large troops of Gelada Baboons who paid us absolutely no attention. There were numerous sightings of circling kites, and rather scary looking chicken sized black and white headed ravens. Four hours later we arrived at our camp. Our tents had been erected, and the mess tent was operational, where we were treated to a splendid high tea with a choice of freshly brewed Ethiopian coffee, herbal teas, black tea, hot chocolate, popcorn, raisins, sugar coated peanuts and roasted barley.

Most unfortunately this idyllic start was followed by a wretchedly traumatic night and day for me. I awoke in the night in response to call of nature, the armed guards had positioned themselves very near my tent, and so I wandered off into the pitch dark and low cloud in what I felt was the general direction of the camp latrine. Within minutes I had fallen into a large pit, I didn't even want to use my torch to see what else was in that pit. Suffice it to say, that it was a deep very bumpy bottomed pit. I couldn't climb out of it, and it was higher than my extended arm. I put my torch into red flashing distress mode and called very loudly for help for what seemed like an aeon. No help was forthcoming. I decided that somebody might respond to screaming. I was truly hoarse before the armed guides and Messi, the trek leader, rescued me, by now a vomiting, shivering, deeply mortified wreck.

I spent the next day on Solomon the Ambulance Mule; the first and only person in our group to do so. A wooden saddle gives an extremely firm ride, and clinging onto the pommel, while the mule precariously negotiates tracks hardly a foot wide along precipitous mountain edges, all under the increasingly strong African sun, is not an ordeal I ever wish to repeat. My options were grim. From now on there would be no roads in the vicinity. I either had to get a grip, or be transported by mule back to Debark where I would have to await the return of the group. I chose to get a grip, and quickly.

My fortitude was well rewarded by a spectacular day's walking. The Simiens are a fantastic array of grey blue ruggedness overlooking miles of volcanic chaos. They are simply magnificent. From then on the landscapes were ever wondrously stunning. The walking was often beyond strenuous, much of it more in the gruelling and tortuous categories, not so much because of the terrain, which was steep, rocky and hazardous in many places, but because of the altitude – 4,200 metres – every step at this height is a major exertion. Once we dropped down to the mid 3000 metre level I could immediately feel the energy flowing into my body.

The ascent of Ras Dashen - the roof of Ethiopia - began with tent tea at 3.30am and a 4am start in pitch dark and heavy rain, steadily ascending slippery, muddy, rock strewn paths. Daybreak brought little respite, it was cold, windy and very damp, but we were rewarded with dramatic mountain scenery and a landscape dotted with giant lobelias many of which were in flower. The final climb to the peak involved much tricky rock scrambling. The scramblers' mantra, keep focused, keep three points of contact, look for footholds and handholds, was something I had not put into practice for many years. I was grateful that we had several very experienced rock climbers in the group who provided excellent guidance. All of the group made it to the summit – 4,534 metres- and claimed our prize: golden Toblerones.

We arrived back at base camp some five hours later where the sun was shining and the camp staff had formed a welcoming party. This involved much chanting, singing, clapping and strenuous jumping dances all of which required our active participation, much to the amusement and entertainment of a large crowd of onlookers from a local village. A hot bath would have been heaven but I made do with a few celebratory beers!

The day of the ascent of Ras Dashen was our only wet day. We continually enjoyed beautiful blue sky days, and because we were trekking a few weeks after the winter rains had finished the landscape was verdant and splashed with the brilliant colours of many varieties of wild flowers. Pathways were often shaded by stands of euphorbia and eucalypt trees, and planted either side with lavender. The farmers were busy in the fields using sickles to cut ripe barley. Harvest time is a happy time for the farmers. There was lots of singing and chanting from those working in the fields, especially when walking the donkeys in a circle as they threshed the grain.

The mountain trails are dotted with small villages of mud walled buildings. On entering a village we would be given celebrity status. We were greeted by children shouting 'salaam' and wanting to shake our hands and have their photographs taken. A handshake from a *faranji* would invariably result in squeals of laughter. In most of the villages there was an enterprising woman who had set up a coffee shop. We would be invited into a mud walled hut with a pitch dark smoke filled interior. Around the walls the mud would be banked up to provide seating, sometimes there would be woven blankets or hides for extra comfort. Coffee beans were roasted in a large metal skillet on a stove made from a converted cooking oil tin, with faggots of wood sticks providing fuel. Once roasted the beans were then ground and brewed. The coffee was always delicious, with a mellow nutty flavour, and served black in tiny little espresso size cups. Invariably the coffee would be served with injera. Not the grey spongy stuff we had in Addis, but a far superior light white version. Whilst the *faranji* took coffee our guides would imbibe frothy hooch brewed from fermented barley.

Seeing the everyday life of local people was often a humbling experience. We visited a local school, constructed from mud and corrugated tin. The children came in shifts. The classrooms were windowless and dark, with a few posters on the walls. The children sat on benches in rows, and learned by rote chanting. There were no pens, pencils, paper or chalk. Although each child appeared to have a very well thumbed small English text book with some pages for writing notes. An unforgettable encounter on one of our trails, was coming across two little boys aged about six, who were sitting with their mother. She was selling jewellery and woven baskets. The boys waved rather dog eared exercise book at us and then shyly began singing the English alphabet while their mother looked on proudly. Equally unforgettable were the groups of waifs we came across miles from anywhere who spent months living in the hills tending livestock. They had to fend for themselves, their parents stayed in the villages. For the most part they were barefoot and dressed in rags.

I took the opportunity to add an extension to my trek which enabled me to visit the unique rock churches of Lalibela. The churches are cut from the rock and hewn downwards, so sit below the surface. The churches are often painted with images of saints and biblical events. Each church has a resident priest who was happy to put on richly embroidered vestments and pose for a photo with his crosses and ancient bibles. We visited on a Sunday when seemingly the whole town had donned white robes and flocked to church.

Before leaving Lalibela our tour guide took us to a large local market, where he found for us, the very obviously stoned chat sellers. I sampled a leaf, much to the amusement of the vendors, it was extremely bitter and so awful tasting that I spat it out way too soon to get a hit.

Would I go trekking again? I have to say I am not sure. I am not a great fan of sleeping under canvas and long drop loos. But teahouses in Nepal sound okay to me. Maybe that could be my present to myself for my next significant birthday.

For more of Dianne's fabulous photos from her trip, see the inside back cover of the newsletter.



## HIKING THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON – THE RWENZORI KARANGURA MOUNTAIN by Jim Briggs

Growing up in the 50s, we were fed with the stories of the great explorers of Africa and particularly with how remote the very centre of the continent is. The most mystical of these places being what is still sometimes known as the Mountains of the Moon – a name given to them by the Ancient Greek geographer, Ptolemy. These snowcapped mountains, which lie on the borders of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, remained a mystery until as late as 1889, when Henry Morton Stanley saw the peaks and one of his team climbed one of the smaller peaks. The highest peaks were only climbed in 1906 by an Italian expedition led by the Duke of Abruzzi. This has left the legacy that many of the peaks have Italian names with Margherita at 5109m (16,672ft) being the highest and the third highest in Africa. The first attempt to traverse the range was only completed in 1975 by a team of Polish climbers. I am not sure why but I have always been fascinated by the stories of the Mountains of Moon and after glimpsing them for the first time when running aid projects in Uganda for the Commonwealth in the early 80s, I had this ambition to climb up one.

I partly retired in April last year, so I had set my ambition on doing a long vacation. I would climb Kilimanjaro ... just because it is the highest place you can walk up and take Sheila, my wife, on a tour of the best places in Uganda ... Sneaking in a day climb up one of the Rwenzoris.

So a week after climbing Kilimanjaro and enjoying the delights of high altitude walking amid the crowds (apparently 50,000 people climb Kili each year... each with about ten porters.... the various camps on the way up to the summit are really crowded), I set off for a proper hike. I left Sheila at a fantastic hotel called Kyaninga Lodge at Fort Portal ... I think the architect must have been an Elven refugee from the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Sheila spent part of the day on a walking tour of local villages ... charming them all ... one young girl thought she must be a queen.

I set off in the Land Cruiser to pick up my guide, who turned out to be Rose, a young lady. She explained that providing I was OK, we would climb Mount Karangura – a 3019m peak that rises about 1500m over the Rift Valley and was one of the first peaks of the Rwenzori. The route would initially take us along a major path that led to a pass between the mountains and was a short cut between two large villages. We would then turn left and head across to the peak and then drop back to another village where the Land Cruiser would RDZ.

We first headed up a track through the cultivated areas. Uganda is one of the most fertile countries on earth and this part of Uganda just grows anything and everything... See how many things you can see in the photo... corn, bananas, sugar cane, coffee, potatoes, various root crops... everything just grows all year round – it rains regularly, Their only problem is marketing all this – with no tarmac roads out of the area the price they get locally is very low.

After a tough climb in warmish weather, we reached the Ranger station, which also had the local primary school on its site. At first glance it looked fairly neat until you notice that it has wooden sticks in the windows instead of glass. The buildings in the background are an aid funded study centre for children visiting the park. At the Ranger station, we signed in and picked up Brian our Ranger who was there to protect us for the day (and ensure we obeyed the rules... he was very particular about dropping litter – grumbling that he has to climb back up the mountain and pick it up!). It was sad to notice in the visitor's book that I was the first person to write in the book for two months.



The expedition team complete, we continued up through the cultivated areas – although the land is wonderfully fertile... there is no flat land... everything is at 45° ... just climbing up to tend your field is tough. I had to use my sticks to drag myself up the slopes. There were a few goats and the odd cow on the way, the latter terrified Brian. He said they were far more dangerous than the wild animals. Yes the hut is a family home.

The hike continued to the edge of the forest, where unusually there was a nice field of garden peas, complete with a scarecrow that clearly did not impress Brian. The peas were a risky crop to cultivate next to the park boundary – many of the monkeys and baboons cause damage to crops and the normal barrier crop is tea. Contrary to what we saw as children at London Zoo and on the PG tips adverts ... absolutely no wild animal has mastered the art of making a good cup of tea. So a belt of tea bushes discourages them from venturing further.

From there on, we were in the Virunga National Park and continuing to head up on a well-worn trail. A mile or so in and up we met a gang of local youths and Brian stopped teasing Rose, switched to his suspicious policeman role and wanted to check what they were doing. All appeared innocent and they carried on and we continued up to a nice picnic spot, with tables and benches. We then turned off the main path to head up the summit. The path was narrower now and as we headed higher, the vegetation slowly changed. I was surprised to find that we switched to areas of dense bamboo. I must admit that I did not know that bamboo was native to Africa. I always associated it with Asia. Right at the summit the vegetation switched again to

large heathers. The path was generally well looked after but at one point a tree had fallen across the path and Brian had to thrash a new path through the undergrowth... swinging his AK47 by the barrel to beat down the brush. Corporal Adam, the trainer at our local gym, assures me that the British Army does not train our soldiers to treat their rifles like this. I did not have time to even ask him to check that the safety catch was on and preferably the weapon unloaded.

As we approached the summit, Rose suggested that we run the last 400 metres... which she proceeded to do... my legs were just not going to do anything much at that point. I think Brian was glad of an excuse to hang back... The photo is Rose celebrating that she got there first. We had a very ample lunch at the summit... the hotel had packed enough in my bag to feed all three of us and I had carried it all the way up.



And just to prove I did get there!

From the summit, we could just make out the distant and higher peaks of the Rwenzoris:

We then had to get down ... but not the gradual 45° ascent ... we just went straight down the mountain side on slopes that seemed almost vertical – Rose of course just ran down them and grabbed hold of branches to slow herself down. Brian had to take it steadier to avoid tripping over his AK47. The views across the Albertine basin (Rift Valley) were stupendous – it seemed like we were dropping off a cliff edge. ... actually we were ...

The photos do not do justice to how steep the path was...

Eventually we dropped down to a village that was clinging to the side of the mountain, where we respectfully skirted around a funeral that was taking place.

We made it back to the Land Cruiser and a plentiful supply of iced water from the coolbox! I had texted Robert my driver using my satellite tracker to get plenty of cold beers in – unfortunately, he arrived at the RDZ spot early and his phone was not working there. The cold water was really welcome though.

We dropped off Brian where we started and left him to climb back up to the Ranger Station and dropped Rose in Fort Portal. I think I then deserved my beer.

The whole hike was a climb of around 1500m (5000ft – so Ben Nevis and change) but only just over 8 miles... including stops for snacks, lunch, photos and some lengthy philosophical debate on careers/politics etc. We took 9 hours. Temperature was pretty pleasant – low 20s most of the time and almost no insects and luckily no rain. It is a great hike but may be not for civilians ...

I think the real Rwenzori trek to the summit of Margherita must be something special – but that would have taken a week... may be someday.

Rose works for Karabole Tours & Safaris in Fort Portal, Uganda – [rosebitekerezo@gmail.com](mailto:rosebitekerezo@gmail.com). Karabole built and maintained the trail. A permit to walk in the National Park must also be paid - \$30 but this also gives you the company of a ranger. I must admit Rose and Brian were absolutely delightful company and great fun to climb a mountain with.



## COMEDY CORNER

### HOW DO COURT STENOGRAPHERS KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE?

These are from a book called Disorder in the Court and are things people actually said in court, word for word, taken down and published by court reporters that had the torment of staying calm while the exchanges were taking place

ATTORNEY: What gear were you in at the moment of the impact?

WITNESS: Gucci sweats and Reeboks.

ATTORNEY: Are you sexually active?

WITNESS: No, I just lie there.

ATTORNEY: What is your date of birth?

WITNESS: July 18th.

ATTORNEY: What year?

WITNESS: Every year.

ATTORNEY: How old is your son, the one living with you?

WITNESS: Thirty-eight or thirty-five, I can't remember which.

ATTORNEY: How long has he lived with you?

WITNESS: Forty-five years.

ATTORNEY: Now doctor isn't it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn't know about it until the next morning?

WITNESS: Did you actually pass the bar exam?

ATTORNEY: The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he?

WITNESS: He's 20, very close to your IQ.

ATTORNEY: So the date of conception (of the baby) was August 8th?

WITNESS: Yes.

ATTORNEY: And what were you doing at that time?

WITNESS: Getting laid!

ATTORNEY: She had three children, right?

WITNESS: Yes.

ATTORNEY: How many were boys?

WITNESS: None.

ATTORNEY: Were there any girls?

WITNESS: Your Honor, I need a different attorney. Can I get a new attorney?

ATTORNEY: How was your first marriage terminated?

WITNESS: By death.

ATTORNEY: And by whose death was it terminated?

WITNESS: Take a guess

ATTORNEY: Can you describe the individual?

WITNESS: He was about medium height and had a beard.

ATTORNEY: Was this a male or a female?

WITNESS: Unless the circus was in town I'm going with male.

ATTORNEY: Is your appearance here this morning pursuant to a deposition notice which I sent to your attorney?

WITNESS: No, this is how I dress when I go to work.

ATTORNEY: Doctor, how many of your autopsies have you performed on dead people?

WITNESS: All of them. The live ones put up too much of a fight.

ATTORNEY: ALL of your responses MUST be oral, OK? What school did you attend?

WITNESS: Oral.

ATTORNEY: Are you qualified to give a urine sample?

WITNESS: Are you qualified to ask that question?

ATTORNEY: Do you recall the time that you examined the body?

WITNESS: The autopsy started around 8:30 pm.

ATTORNEY: And Mr. Denton was dead at the time?

WITNESS: If not, he was by the time I finished.

ATTORNEY: Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?

WITNESS: No.

ATTORNEY: Did you check for blood pressure?

WITNESS: No.



### AND FINALLY ...

The photo above was taken at our annual Christmas lunch, held at Chart Hills Golf Club in Biddenden. Arrangements have not yet been confirmed for this year's family dinner, but it is likely to be at the same venue, with Sunday December 3 provisionally earmarked. Details, plus the booking form, will appear in the next newsletter.

And, who is this handsome young man in the photo below? It's none other than our life president Brian Buttifant! The photo was sent in by Andrew Melling, who unfortunately can't put a date on it. Perhaps someone else can?

Nice moustache, Brian!



More of Dianne Marsden's photos on her Simien Mountains Trek  
see story above



**Photos from The Christmas Cruise Around Calais, and the spectacular Calais Christmas lights. Photos by David Findel-Hawkins and Sarah Turner.**

