

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION — Kent Group

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

NEWSLETTER



John Gilbert pictured on the White Cliffs Challenge. Three weeks after the WCC, John completed the Red Rose 50, his first 50-mile walk, thus achieving his qualifier for the Cinque Ports 100.

Photo Gavin Trevelyan

Number 104

December 2017



These pictures were taken by Sarah Turner on the annual Summer French Challenge on July 15. Report and more photos inside.



SOCIAL WALKS PROGRAMME DECEMBER 2017 TO APRIL 2018

Group gatherings are held on the 1st Monday in each month (except if a Bank Holiday when postponed to the 2nd Monday) at the Rose and Crown, Wrotham, GR612592. Offers to lead future walks to Peter Jull please, details below.

Please check Kent group website for any late changes to the details below

Sat Dec 9 Christmas Cruise around Calais

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 9pm local time (approx.) - 8pm British time. Ring P&O reservations 08716 646464 for foot passenger day return. Don't forget your passport! Please ring Graham for confirmation of times. **C:** Graham Smith

Thu Dec 28 Post Christmas Sevenoaks Stroll

c18ml. 09.00 Meet at lay-by in road opposite Shipbourne church off A227. (GR TQ593522). Pub lunch stop. **C:** Dave Sheldrake

Mon Jan 1 New Year in Sussex

23ml. 09.00 Rye railway station c.p. £1.50 charge. (GR TQ919205). Rye to Hastings & return. Lunch stop at Hastings. Bring torch. **C:** Mike Pursey

Fri Jan 12 Coldrum Night Walk

c17ml. 21.30 for 22.30 The George, Trottiscliffe. (GR TQ641599). Map: Exp 148. **C:** Dave Sheldrake

Sun Jan 14 Lakeside 18

18ml. 09.30 Sholden New Road, Deal. (GR TR356526). Lunch Shepherdsweil Green. **C:** Richard Frost

Sun Feb 4 Eve's Alkham Valley

16ml. 09.00 Alkham recreation ground car park. (GR TR256423). Lunch stop: Kearsney Abbey cafe. **C:** Eve Richards

Sun Feb 11 Option C

17ml. 09.15 Higham Railway Station (8:09 from Charing Cross or 8:25 from St. Pancras). (GR TQ715726). Last chance to walk the footpaths that will be obliterated by the new lower Thames crossing Option C. Picnic lunch. No pubs 'til mid afternoon. Joint with London. **C:** Peter Jull

Sun Feb 18 Benendenweald

16ml. 09.00 Benenden church. (GR TQ808326). Park considerably in approach roads. Pub lunch Hawkhurst. **C:** Peter Jull

Thur Feb 22 Lovely Lydden Valley

15ml (figure-of-eight). 09.30 Kearsney Abbey (GR TQ287438). Meet in car park near café. **C:** Graham Smith.

Fri Feb 23 History in the landscape.

13ml. 09.30 Rye railway station. (GR TQ919205). Via Icklesham and Winchelsea. Pub lunch. **C:** Nick Cunliffe.

Sun Mar 4 Sevenoaks Circular Marshals' Walk

For details contact. **C:** Brian Buttifant

Sun Mar 11 Lewes Loop

c18ml. 09.00 Meet at Lewes rlwy stn. (GR TQ417098). A circular route on the South Downs. Pub lunch. **C:** Graham Smith

Sun Mar 18 Sevenoaks Circular

See Events Diary in Strider.

Sun Mar 25 Cobham – Where Mr Pickwick walks with Mr Tupman

19ml. 09.00 Sole Street railway station CP (08.04 from Victoria arrives 08.55). (GR TQ656676). Lunch stop at Cobham – choice of three pubs. **C:** Steve Russell

Sat Apr 21 Dianne's Alkham Valley

18ml. 09.00 Kearsney Abbey, CT16 3DZ . Meet in CP near Café. (GR TR287438). Alkham valley with some steep hills. Pub lunch Jackdaw at Denton. Booking recommended for food. **C:** Dianne Marsden.

KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

Chairman/newsletter editor – Graham Smith,

Secretary – Stephanie le Men,

Treasurer/walks secretary – Peter Jull,

Membership secretary – Neil Higham

Equipment – Sarah Turner,

Website - Michael Headley,

Life president – Brian Buttifant,

Members

Phyl Butler. Joy Davies, Nick Dockree, Neal O'Rourke, Mike Pursey -

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT OUR AGM

The annual general meeting of Kent Group of the LDWA will be on Sunday January 28, at Harrietsham Village Hall. The present members of the committee are shown above. A nomination form is enclosed with this newsletter and any member may, with his or her consent, be proposed and seconded for the positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer or as a committee member.

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 buffet lunch, starting at 1pm. So please fill in the form which is with this newsletter, and send it to membership secretary Neil Higham to let him know if you are coming. Neil's address is 164 Holland Road, Oxted, Surrey, RH8 9BQ, or it can be scanned and emailed to him at neil.higham1@tesco.net. It must be received by January 22.

Mike Granatt, Kent controller of RAYNET – the national network of amateur radio enthusiasts used by the LDWA on Hundreds – has kindly agreed to attend our AGM. He will be giving a short talk on the work of RAYNET and will answer questions afterwards.

NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS

Sevenoaks Circular

Our first challenge event of the year is on Sunday March 18 and will, as usual, be based at West Heath School. The event will use the same routes (30, 20 and 15 miles) as this year. We are going to need marshals, so please contact Brian Buttifant (details above). The marshals' walk will be on March 4.

Walk With The Smugglers

Next year's Weald challenge walk will be on Sunday July 8, and will be based at Goudhurst. Distances will be 26, 20 and 15 miles. As this newsletter went to press, a date had not been set for the marshals' walk.

White Cliffs Challenge.

This is going to be on Sunday August 26, and next year it will be the 52-mile WCC as it's our turn to host the Kent leg of the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge of 50-mile walks. There will also be an 18-mile version of the walk, and as usual the event will be part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival.

Next year's WCC will be based at a new venue – Deal Town FC's ground, in Charles Road, Deal. This is not far from Deal and Betteshanger Rugby Club, the venue when we last held the 52-mile walk in 2015, so this will involve minimal changes to the route.

It is a very nice venue (just as well, considering we are hosting the Cinque Ports 100 in May!), which we have been able to secure for a very reasonable fee. It has a good clubhouse which we will use for check-in, plenty of car parking, showers and even a room used by visiting directors, which we will be able to use as a room where walkers can get some sleep before driving home.

The marshals' walk will be on August 4.

NORTH DOWNS 100 MILER by Brian Buttifant

Over the first weekend of August, Centurion Running staged the North Downs 100-miler, starting from Farnham at 0600 on the Saturday and following the North Downs Way to finish within 30 hours at the Julie Rose Stadium in Ashford.

As a NDW warden for many years, this really interested me, as in previous years I have walked up onto the Downs to see the action above Kemsing, the 55 mile point.

This year, having got stitches in my hand, I thought it wise to ask my wife Brenda to take me to checkpoints to see the runners.

We first went to Knockholt Village Hall, where competitors were able to use their forwarded bag of spares and could pick up their pacers for sections of the route. The first man (the eventual winner) came in at 1326. Heavy rain, thunder and lightning for an hour made the Downs very slippery (running is probably better than walking – less contact with the ground). Then we moved onto the checkpoint at Wrotham, 60 miles. While Brenda was reading in the car, I spent the time encouraging runners. Their supporters

supply a lot of their dietary needs, as not much is available – mainly snacky food.

On our way home we saw runners coming off the Downs, among them was LDWA man Ken Fancett.

At home I followed progress on my tablet and was in touch with Michael Headley, who saw the first finishers at the Julie Rose Stadium. Ken finished in a very creditable time of 22 hours 13 (he was 21st) and Peter Johnson finished in 28 hours 30. This followed a 100-mile run from Bath to Paddington a week before. Oh to be ultra-fit – like our Stephanie.



WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL THE MOST SUCCESSFUL EVER

This year's White Cliffs Walking Festival, which included our White Cliffs Challenge, produced a record number of walkers.

The total number of 1251 walkers on the 43 walks beat last year's figure of 1106, and the organisers - the White Cliffs Ramblers, to which several members of Kent LDWA belong - put this down to the fine Bank Holiday weather, although there was rain on the last day. The walk which attracted most participants was our WCC, with 80 walkers entering the 32-mile walk and 35 on the 18-miler.

Bev Cussans, who chairs the festival's organising group, said: "We had six glorious days of sunshine and one day of rain.

"Sun or rain, we had wonderful, interesting and informative walks and happy walkers.

"And the success of the festival was down to the very hard work and support from members of the organising committee throughout the year."

Walks in the seven-day festival included special interest or historic ones such as the Royal Marines Heritage Trail in Deal - which was put on twice - the six-mile Tour of Ramparts, Bastions and Batteries of Dover Castle, three White Cliffs Coastal Trails and a 2.5-mile Carers' Stroll – for people with disabilities and their carers – from the Rising Sun pub at Kingsdown.

The event was opened in a ceremony on Walmer Green by Kate Ashbrook, general secretary of outdoors access campaign group the Open Spaces Society, who said it enabled walkers to enjoy "some of the best countryside in Britain."

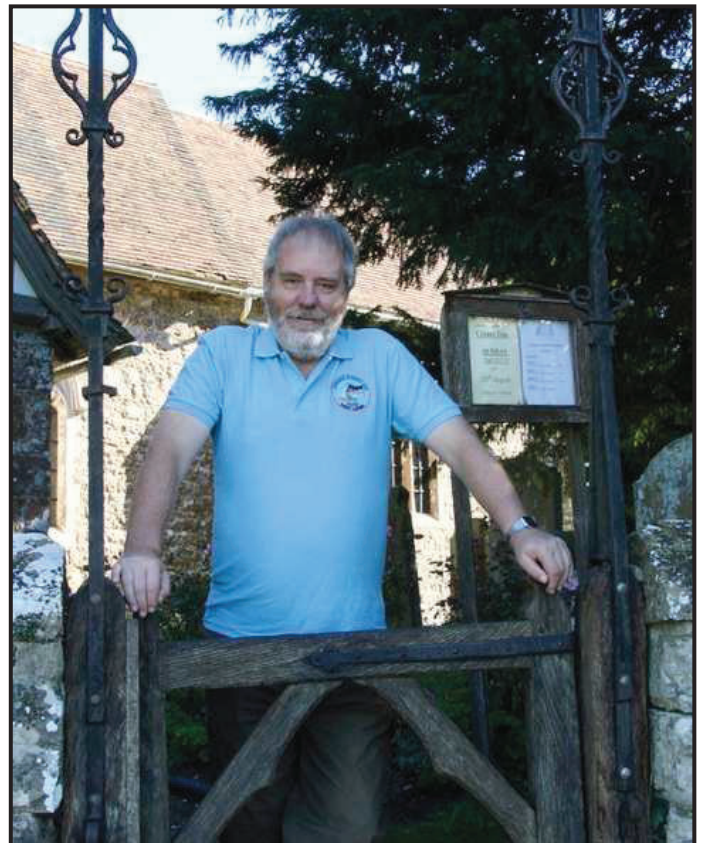
The 2018 White Cliffs Walking Festival will be held between Thursday August 23 until Wednesday August 29. It will, of course, include our White Cliffs Challenge on Sunday August 26 (see story above).

FUTURE HUNDREDS

Kent Group will be providing a checkpoint at the Hadrian's Hundred in 2019. This will be at Watersmeeting Farm, a remote location near Cross Fell and Cow Green Reservoir, and is after 69.2 miles.

We have offered to run a checkpoint on the Sir Fynwy 100 in 2020, and this is likely to be close to the breakfast stop. As this newsletter was being printed, we were waiting to hear from the organisers which location this would be.

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



**Peter Jull and Sarah Turner
model the male and female polo shirts which will be
available for the Cinque Ports 100.**

THE CINQUE PORTS 100

Since the last newsletter was sent out, lots of things have happened – the most important one being that entries have been open since October 9. As this newsletter was being printed, the number of entries had topped 400 and it was looking unlikely we would hit 500 by November 24, which would have triggered a ballot. If that turns out to be the case, it would be a relief, as there has never been a ballot for an LDWA Hundred, and few people want one anyway, as organisers do not want to disappoint anyone by telling them they will not be able to take part in the event. Entries close on April 16. Entries for the marshals' walk – over the weekend of May 5-7 – had passed 40.

The event's website – www.ldwa.org.uk/2018Hundred - went live in the summer, and everyone agrees that Michael Headley has done a highly impressive and professional job with it. It is being updated daily. One feature of the website is a video made by Peter Jull. The video – with a commentary by one Sarah Turner (clearly a woman of many talents!) – is as impressive as the website. The organising group has now been joined by John Elrick, who is the coordinator for the event HQ, the Duke of York's Royal Military School. John, husband of national chairwoman Gail Elrick, is very experienced in walking and helping to organise Hundreds, so he is proving a big asset to the group. As this newsletter went to press, he had already arranged two visits to the school, and there will be many more.

The route has been finalised, and huge credit here goes to Mike Pursey, who has spent so much time walking it and committing it to paper for the route description. Neal O'Rourke has been helping Mike with checking the route and the route description. It is anticipated, of course, that there will be minor tweaks of the route almost until the event itself. We have received excellent cooperation from Kent County Council's public rights of way department, with the county footpaths manager and the East Kent manager promising that any work on footpaths being used on the route will be given priority. If any Kent members would like to walk the route, or part of it, then Mike or Neal can supply a route description, but please understand that it will not be final one. The souvenir map, being produced for us by map specialist Harveys, was being checked as this newsletter went to press. Apart from showing the route – to a scale of 1:50,000 – it also has photographs of 32 points of interest, a background article about the Cinque Ports by Ian Russell, Registrar of the Cinque Ports, and a background article about the Cinque Ports 100 by Kent Group chairman Graham Smith. It will cost £10, plus postage and packing, and is due to be sent out to walkers requesting it at the end of January.

As previously reported, walkers will be transported by bus from the Dover HQ to Sussex Coast College in Hastings, where they will be addressed by the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Admiral the Lord Boyce, in the college's Atrium. They will then move out of the college to the seafront, where the walk will start at 10am and they will be led for the first 100 yards by our Life-President, Brian Buttifant.

Andrew Boulden – a Kent LDWA member of many years standing who has completed several Hundreds – has kindly agreed to lead the team of sweepers, which will also include another Kent stalwart and veteran of several Hundreds, Keith Warman.

We have had a very good response to the various requests made to Kent Group members to help on the event. If anyone who has not yet contacted us would like to help, then please get in touch with Graham, Neal, Joy, Michael or Peter (all details are above). So there's about five months to go, and we're counting down ...

PROJECT TO FIND THE LOST PATHS OF KENT

Work is under way on a project to find lost pathways in Kent.

LOST WAYS is a national initiative from the Ramblers, and is the response to legislation which sets out that if a path has not been recorded or is not in the process of being put on the definitive map by 2026, then it will be lost.

Kent coordinator is Neville Machin, who has reviewed most of the Kent definitive maps and identified around 300 "anomalies" that merit further investigation. He held a meeting of volunteers in early September and will send each of them a dossier relating to one "anomaly" for investigation.

He says: "We have all walked on a path which seems to go nowhere, doesn't connect to where we think it should; it's on the ground but not on the map - these are potentially LOST WAYS if we don't get them recorded."

Neville says that the success of the project depends entirely on volunteers doing the field and research work – in effect becoming Ramblers detectives.

He says: "There are a variety of volunteer roles from which to choose and you can choose any combination at any time. "LWR - Lost ways Records Research Volunteer; searching old records in support of a claim. Much of this can be done online.

"LWF - Lost Ways Field Research Volunteer; visit candidate route locations, photographing what is on the ground and recording anecdotal evidence from local residents.

"LWV - Lost Ways Route Volunteer; this combines the above roles so that you do all the work for that route.

"LOST WAYS will only work if you VOLUNTEER."

Once a case is reported to Kent County Council, the authority will take on the task of researching all the historical data it holds relating to the potential path. Anyone wishing to be a volunteer for the project is asked to telephone Neville on 01322 864277 or email him on nevillelostwayskentramblers@btinternet.com

KL & BQ go to the Isle of Wight

By Sarah Turner (aka Blister Queen/tortoise)
featuring Michael Headley (Kent Lad/hare)
& Bob



During a blooming August week off we trotted to the IOW
The 60, no 65, um 70 mile coastal trail was the goal in our sights,
With the tortoise leashing the hare for a leisurely holiday plod
It had all the promise of a Turner Adventure Escapade, oh & don't forget Bob!

From Pompey to Ryde the Wight ferry was our 'pea green boat'
And luck behold we glimpsed the glorious naval Queen Liz in her port,
For 20 mins sea-time we bobbed about our grandiose vessel
Admiring all coastal views, we were most certainly in fine fettle!

Jim Catchpole to greet us - imminent cheers & bellows
...for his most learned and loved Kent LDWA Fellows!



Post brews & chatter quay-side we made for Cowes with buoyant bounds
With 8 sunny miles to cover NW, alas marred by tarmac we sadly had to pound,
Whilst the coastal path design has plans to change afoot....
Let's hope those landowners adopt the greener future ideas to root!

Another surprise at Cowes most grand, dashing Jill Green with ditties aplenty
Over brews supped in rickety B&B, seconded with a slap-up meal 'fit for the gentry',
.... the night thus continued with LDWA updates, stories and banter
All were smiles and laughter on the first night of this IOW canter!

Cowes to Totland Bay was our second jaunt with Jim playing host - eager to stay!
His guided tours with enchanted prose and history were definitely ... 'words of the day'
Alas three crab sandwiches for lunch were deemed a charge too grand....
For when BQ came to pay she proffered violently "how much!!!" as loud as a massed Marine
Band!

Jim departed at Yarmouth - farewells exchanged and received
The team strode on to 'YHA T Bay' where the purple heather is abundant in degrees!



Day 3 the long-haul from Totland to Ventnor, the exact mileage unknown
The 'back of the Wight' opens out to views where birds & gulls have flown,
But first was Alum Bay with its colours so stripy and bright,
And KL got dragged to the sand shop with much aplomb fright!

Shopping indeed on a long-distance jaunt...?
BQ would not say 'No' to this opportune tourist haunt,
Sand bottles were bought in super quick time
So much so KL was all smiles, and was frankly quite fine!



Onto the Needles where the views were amazingly *Fab*
The weather and landscape were the best that really could be had,
Upwards to Tennyson Downs the grass was soft, bouncy and green
Then some haste was made for distance where funnily enough, KL was most keen!



IOW band of LDWA souls were met on the back trail
Where the rain had started to fall alas for a while,
Greetings and cheers of 'hello' & 'wrong way around' were spluttered
Aha! We are smart cos the sun is yonder o'er there we most cheerily muttered!



The miles that ensued up/down the numerous Chines were hearty
With the comfort of our B&B up the hill, where now for our celebratory 25 mile party?
Great pub grub and ale were consumed with passion & glory
Where we had to plan our finale, and for me - it's time to end my little story!

Day 4 has piers n lifts, with sandy shores galore that fall to the east
Where Jill strides us to Shanklin for a 'you've done well' farewell treat feast,
At the cafe the local scones & tea are served most tip-top
The latter indeed quoted Jill, must be in a tea pot!



Elevenes in belly it was time to finish our circuit
In 4 chilled out days it was certainly worth it,
Culver Down, Bembridge to Seaview & Ryde sands
With views to Pompey, oh yes that indeed is the mainland!

KL and BQ what a team you both were
Circumambulatory anticlockwise you achieved with vigour,
Ryde, Cowes, Totland Bay, Ventnor, Sandown to Ryde
Enjoying all the pleasures of the Wight with cheery Kentish Pride!



LAGOON PROBLEM ON SAXON SHORE WAY

Part of the Saxon Shore Way, running along the eastern side of Oare Creek (footpath ZF1), near Faversham, is currently at the centre of a planning dispute. It appears that the footpath was obliterated some decades ago, following gravel work in the area and as a result the footpath, as marked on the OS map, crosses a small lagoon. Merrillyn Thomas, a keen walker who lives in the area, contacted the LDWA as she felt Kent members would be interested - although we are not, of course, a campaigning organisation.

Merrilyn says: "Obviously walkers cannot swim across the lagoon and this is a mistake which has never been corrected.

"Walkers and local residents, myself included, have assumed for years that the track running along the side of the creek is the footpath. The sign points that way and there is no alternative because the track is bounded on one side by the creek and on the other by fencing, preventing access to the lagoons. It also appears that proper legal action to obtain approval to destroy the original footpath was not taken at the time.

"This issue has come to light because a waste recycling plant was established a few hundred yards or so along the track and a planning application is in the process of being submitted to double the size of this plant. As a result, the single-lane track/footpath is now used by HGVs (articulated lorries, double-decker skip lorries pulling trailers) accessing the recycling plant and the amount of traffic could increase enormously. There are officially 80 vehicles using the track every day at the moment - in practice, more. This is a very dangerous situation."

This track/footpath is signposted as being a part of the Saxon Shore Way and is also an integral part of Natural England's plans for the England long-distance coastal path in this area. Local residents have started the Oare Environmental Protection Group to campaign against the expansion of the waste recycling plant.

Merrilyn add: "The general feeling is that for a number of reasons this is the wrong place for a plant like this of any size. Not only should it not be expanded, it should not be there in the first place. There is the conflict with this important footpath and also the site is adjacent to a bird reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest."

There is more information at <https://www.facebook.com/uproare/>



Left: Mike, Graham and Rex enjoy some frites (chips) on the Summer French Challenge: Right: the toposcope on Mont de Couple. Photos by Sarah Turner.

SUMMER FRENCH CHALLENGE 2017 by Graham Smith

This year's annual Summer French Challenge became a Four Peaks of France walk on July 15. There were six of us this year - Melissa Butcher, who had come down from London; Michael Headley; Mike Pursey; Rex Stickland; Sarah Turner; and yours truly.

We must have been doing our summer walks in France for more than 20 years now, but us regulars never seem to tire of them. We have converted the walk from walking from Boulogne to Calais (which itself was converted from the 40-mile Dover-Folkestone and then Boulogne-Calais), to a circular walk of about 21 miles, taking cars and leaving them in the car park at Auchan hypermarket at Coquelles. And we always seem to make the route slightly different to that of the previous year.

This year we took two cars, Melissa and Rex coming with me and Michael and Sarah going with Mike, and after a pleasant breakfast on P&O's Spirit of Britain, we drove to Auchan, parked the cars - and we were off.

We took our usual route through Coquelles to pick up GR 128, diverting to the village of Peuplingues and then taking the road to Haute Escalles. Here we had our usual photo call at the bus stop before taking a nice track before turning left to our first peak, Mont de Sombre. Then we dropped down to the village of Hervelinghen for our first beer and some frites (chips) before heading



for our next peak, Mont de Couple. Then we followed our usual route to the coast and Wissant, where we had another beer, and then we had some beach bashing before getting back onto the clifftop path which we followed to peak number 3, Cap Blanc-Nez. Sadly, the days when we could take the short, sharp but direct route to the top are long gone, as the authorities have now closed that route, instead directing walkers around a circuitous zig-zag path to the top, where you turn left to get to the monument to the Dover Patrol. After that we crossed the road and went up our fourth and last peak Mont d'Hubert, and then followed our usual tracks back to Coquelles. Here we did a bit of shopping in Auchan and then had a decent meal in the hypermarket's restaurant before getting back in the cars and heading for the ferry terminal at Calais, where we had a nice sailing back to Dover on the *Pride of Canterbury*. We certainly hadn't had the best of weather, as it had been bit squally after we had reached Cap Blanc-Nez. But we had had a good day. Our next French outing is the annual Christmas Cruise Around Calais on December 9 (see social walks programme above).

**Jill and Jim and other walkers wait for the start of the
4Gotten Pits Walk.**

FOUR HAPPY, HOT AUGUST DAYS IN KENT

by Jill Green

Sarah and Graham invited us to stay with them so we could take part in three of the events during the White Cliffs Walking Festival.

On the way to Deal, on Friday August 25, Jim and I did our own walk from Wye. With our map we planned an 11-mile route. It was hot and we didn't want to be worn out for the White Cliffs Challenge the next day. The church at Wye has beautiful tapestry on the benches, all depicting local life. The countryside was so pretty. The Crown in the Downs above Wye showed up well. Towards the end of the walk we got a bag of plums from an overhanging tree, and we probably ate too many. Just after we remarked that we hadn't seen anyone, two ladies came along with nine dogs.

On our arrival in Deal we had a wonderful greeting, not only from Sarah and Graham, but also from the dogs Mary, Callum, Fen and Tumble – Mo the cat was indifferent. The two dagus (small creatures very similar to guinea pigs) have their own room, as does their owner Jessica (Graham and Sarah's daughter), who now lives back home.

On Saturday we arrived at St Margaret's-at-Cliffe in good time for the 8.30 start of the White Cliffs Challenge. There was a 12-hour time limit, so we could be relaxed about the checkpoint cut-off times. The route along the coast was good, with the iconic views we love to see. We met a man doing a survey of the use of the Coast Path. I was tempted to answer his questions, but he understood we were on a timed event. Others must have spoken to him, but it was disappointing for him to see so many of us pass by. We also came across an archaeological dig on a Roman villa. I would have loved to find out more about that.

When we got to Folkestone, Sarah Turner showed us her book of photos from a holiday walking the Isle of Wight Coast Path in 1980. I was really interested that they were on Shanklin Pier, which blew down in the great 1987 storm. I could see they were able to climb up the cliffs at Alum Bay to collect the coloured sands – not allowed now as it is too dangerous. This stop gave us a nice rest – just as well as it was now very hot, and we suffered as we toiled up from The Warren. I suppose I should have counted those steps. Jim was very good waiting for me. He never says "Can you go a little faster?" He knows I'm going as fast as I can.

Then, somehow, I got in front and we went a bit wrong. Four runners followed me. I was all for going back to the spot where I had taken a wrong fork, that's my rule. But with Jim's GPS we went round, so I didn't see the high security fence of the Immigration Centre. It was great to see Stephanie, Neal and Jan again. Those meringue nests, with cream and strawberries, were wonderful. I really wanted to ask for another one.

We were at the last drinks stop, at 28 miles, when we saw Peter. How nice, I thought, he has come out to meet us – but with a stern face he told me it was ten past six and the checkpoint closed at six. However, there was plenty of water and cheerful faces. We did finish with nearly an hour to spare, so glad of the extra time allocation because of the ascents and the heat.

Next day we really enjoyed the figure-of-eight walk from Kearsney Abbey, perfect for us after the day before. Twenty-four people, including two children and plus two dogs, all completed the morning nine-mile loop. This was well led by Graham, who adjusted his pace for the mixed abilities. One of the highlights for me was the Autumn Ladies Tresses – a small orchid which twists round the stem like hair – in the unimproved grassland. As always, I enjoy a walk in new places, especially when it is in beautiful countryside, as this was.

The last of our four walks was the 4Gotten Pits, led by Peter Jull. This was a long walk. We started at 9am and it took nine and three-quarter hours. Peter gave the 21 walkers several drink stops in the shade. We had more than an hour at lunchtime (we had packed lunches provided by Sarah).

It was Bank Holiday Monday, and those enjoying a pub meal took more than an hour. The four pits were Stonehall, Guilford, Hammill and Wingham – not much at these places because they never went into full production. Graham was the back marker. He really was needed as two people, who were at the back of the walk, had to give up (a man, Chris, and his nephew, Tyler, who had bad blisters). Our wonderful Sarah came out to rescue them – so good she was able to do this, as she had been one of the judges at



a dog show. She brought out extra water – well, she would, as she is used to looking after dogs!

Well, that was it for us – four great days out walking in Kent. We know there will be lots of people enjoying walking in Kent next May!



Walkers – including Neal O'Rourke, who the previous day (and night!) completed the 50-mile Surrey Tops - on the Maidstone Peaks walk.

KENT PEAKS – MAIDSTONE: SEPTEMBER 24 by Peter Jull

An unintentional clash with the end of the Surrey Tops inevitably diminished numbers with several usual suspects Topping it the day before or marshalling. So it was seven (mostly Kent) that set out from Aylesford but including Topser Neal who had finished his 50 miles after midnight, been home and slept - and was back for more!

Fields of vines had vineyard owner Rex inspecting trellising methods, varieties and tastes and then relating his findings. Ascending the North Downs scarp was the stiffest climb of the day but the top was not the target Maidstone council highpoint. The Bell in Bredhurst was a Tardis but we chose the garden for lunch. The day, betwixt equinox and equilux, was definitely more summer than autumn, ideal walking weather. Dip slope valleys were downed and upped before playing real life Frogger across the A249. On reconnaissance, approaching from the unadvertised side, a figure in combat gear, mask and with long gun had been disconcertingly encountered in the woods. Apocalypse's organiser asked us to wait while 80 such airsoft combatants finished returning to base then escorted us along the bridlepath through their woods. In White Horse Wood Country Park the group were dragged away from the trigpointed and toposcoped viewpoint to gain a few more feet and reach a much less spectacular wooded glade but with bench for photograph. Target achieved it was downhill, steeply at first, back to the start. More vineyards on the run in had Rex salivating again. Commendations to Aylesford Parish Council for well maintained public conveniences conveniently placed.

*Not only did Neal complete this 21 mile walk, having had 3.5 hours sleep after the 50-mile Surrey Tops, on the Friday he walked 25 miles from Hastings to Tenterden on the Cinque Ports 100 route, and on the Thursday he walked out his Royal Stroll, which is 21 miles. So that's 107 miles in four days. Well done, Neal – you're an example to us all.



Walkers, including Don the dog, on the Tunbridge Wells Peaks walk.

KENT PEAKS – TUNBRIDGE WELLS: OCTOBER 8 by Peter Jull

It was not the walking dead but walking from the dead as 18, a good mix of Kent, Sussex and Surrey members and two newbies, plus Don the dog, set out from Kent & Sussex Cemetery under better than forecast skies. Soon it was nearly dead walkers as we congregated in the entrance to Tunbridge Wells Rugby Club, the highest point in the Tunbridge Wells council area, as players drove in for a match.

Evidential photographs showed it was out of town and out of Kent into Sussex. The morning was mostly Tunbridge Wells Circular link path and then a link to the Wealdway before diverging into Hartfield for lunch. The Anchor gave the impression of being caught on the hop when we arrived as they opened the doors and with Sunday roast £23.95! Several abandoned the

pub and went to the war memorial benches and tea room down the road. That it was called Pooh Corner was an indicator of what was to come next: Poohsticks Bridge. The Poohsticks challenge - Kent v Sussex v Surrey - was a result in that order. Turning back east, away from the tourists, the afternoon was more Wealdway, High Weald Landscape Trail and Tunbridge Wells Circular, with unpromoted links in between.

A divergence through Broadwater Warren Nature Reserve allowed a longer view of Erridge Rocks. Rejoining the Tunbridge Wells Circular led back to the finish after 23 miles and before 6pm.



Kent members by the high points in the Dover and Shepway areas – all right, they are underwhelming tops, but the walks were good!

KENT PEAKS – DOVER AND SHEPWAY: OCTOBER 15 by Peter Jull

Hurricane Ophelia was pushing summer back to us so it was under blue skies that 11 gathered at the end of the M20. Climbing Castle Hill from the start wasn't one of the two steep hills warned about even though we scaled the highest ramparts.

From there it was down to Holy Well, then up Sugarloaf Hill, often driven past but never climbed by all except local Bob - 160ft @ 40% gradient had several resorting to hand assistance and even redoubtable Michael pausing to admire the view (taking a breather). He and Graham did have 27 Founders miles in their legs from the day before though. Everyone stripped to one layer, it was down the other side then 290ft up Creteway Down but at *only* 25% gradient. Halfway up, leader's foot missed a path edge precipice hidden by vegetation which scratchily stopped a 4ft and somewhat bloodying fall. Along the NDW atop the ridge and across the council boundary a little trespassing into a farmer's field got to the trig point, highest point in Dover: except the mapped trig point was no longer there! A quick photo and back to the path to turn north. It was a trepidatious transit past Tumble Tye, much slurried and poached by the farm's dairy cows, but still dewy grass soon cleaned off obnoxious shoe accretions. Down and up to elevenses with views over Alkham Valley just crossed. More dry valleys and there at the bottom of one was Denton's Jackdaw for lunch. Climbing up the other side, Ophelia's peripheral winds appeared to be arriving, prematurely bringing with them clouds and a distant ethereal threat of mist. But the sun stayed out and we had a less ascenty afternoon. An unfindable gap in trees between Hawkinge cemetery and the adjacent field delayed arrival at the second high point of the day, now back in Shepway - a field edge near Paddlesworth. A second evidential photograph and from there it was not far back to the NDW and back down Castle Hill to the cars.



The peaks of Ashford and Swale areas.

KENT PEAKS – ASHFORD AND SWALE: OCTOBER 22 by Peter Jull

The 18 who left Charing station were soon 16 when it became clear that for a newbie intent on fitness improvement it was a step up too far from Sheerness sea wall, especially when the route started up the steep scarp of the North Downs.

With an LDWA group in full flow gently downhill the other side, speed was also going to be a problem and with a kindly word that an intermediate challenge might be more suitable, he and companion were left with a map to explore at their own pace. The morning was pheasant country with birds frequently flushing from pathside.

A flock of fledglings herded in front for a field edge furlong. Despite the Hurricane Brian associated heavy and blustery

showers of the previous day, the fields were pleasingly unmuddy. Children were monopolising the swings and picnickers also eschewed the seesaw in favour of the sit-height playground wall. The adjacent Alma at Painter's Forstal was full and the roast beef sold out, but sitting in a sheltered garden corner was comfortable enough and food served commendably quickly but the landlord did bemoan the lack of notice of so many ordering coffees.

The lengthy ladies loo queue completed, the afternoon route turned back south, and being exposed to air movement increased from breeze to wind, it was in your face chilling. But that soon abated and clouds diminished, revealing the sun and in sheltering woods layers were lost. The rustle of feet through autumnal leaves became so constant as to almost be an irritant. The high point in Swale's council area is spectacularly underwhelming, being a roadside hedge corner, before continuing the gentle climb into Ashford borough. Photography to attest our passing, and it was but half a mile to Ashford's high point - only a few feet higher and in the middle of a fairly flat field. It was unremarkable, redeemed by a nascent view but the setting sun required the requisite photographs to exclude it. That view became more spectacular as the descent gradient steepened, revealing Charing laid out below. But a lame knee was lagging and left limping across the racecourse while the leading lot were led though the village back paths before the leader returned for the chivalrous Londoners waiting for their laggard. All five were still in good time for the 5:50 train home.



Three photos from David's Cotswold Way adventure.

A COTSWOLD WAY by David Thornton

Having completed The Ridgeway back in February this year, which was my first National Trail, it was with some mild but immediate addiction that I booked to do The Cotswold Way in late April.

Traditionally the route starts at the picturesque Cotswold town of Chipping Campden and finishes in the Spa town of Bath. However, I chose to walk it back to front, for two reasons. Firstly, I guessed I might catch a bit more of the prevailing weather walking north west as opposed to south east, and secondly I didn't fancy fighting my way through the masses of tourists and romancing couples once I reached Bath on a Saturday afternoon, which is when I planned to finish.

So, having caught my train to Bath on Wednesday morning, arriving at exactly midday, I set off to my first stop, 20 miles

down the road at Old Sodbury. The weather that day and in fact throughout the four day hike was excellent. Crystal clear skies, light breeze and dry underfoot, made for perfect walking conditions.

Whenever I go for a walk, especially when I'm on my own, whether it's just maybe a simple 15-20 mile route I've marked out locally or a named trail like this, I always get that moment about an hour or so in when perhaps I'm in an elevated position. I'll stop, look around, take everything in and feel a tingle of excitement run through me, at the thought of the day ahead and the relative adventure it always brings. I'll take photos in my mind at that moment and throughout the walk, photos that I can still clearly recall, providing memories that always put a smile on my face.

That first day was so clear, I could see across the valley all the way into Bristol and the Welsh hills beyond even giving me a glimpse of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and of course both Severn Bridges.

The second day was my longest, 33 miles which took me as far as Painswick, via Wotton-Under-Edge, Dursley and Stroud. A long day, starting at 8am and lasting 12 hours. I was pretty tired at the end of that. I slept well that night.

My progress was slowed down slightly when I came upon a lady in her later years, who was walking the route the other way. She



was on her own, having split from her group and had clearly taken a tumble, resulting in a nasty graze on her knee. She was most grateful when I stopped to see if I could patch her up, christening my miniature first aid kit in the process. We got chatting and it transpired she was walking the route over a nine day period, so of course when I divulged that I was doing it in just over three days, she reacted saying “Goodness me, you must be jolly fit”. This was met with a puff of the cheeks and a slightly embarrassed shrug of the shoulders, bearing in mind at that precise moment I had both hands attached to her left leg! Anyway, shortly after she trudged off in good shape as did I having done my good deed for the day.

The third day was a slightly shorter, 27 miles, taking me as far as Winchcombe. This took me via Crickley Hill, which I regularly pass when I travel along the A417 between Swindon and Gloucester. I like the fact that I can now drive along that road and look around and say “I’ve walked that bit and I’ve been up there and looked down on me in this car”.

The third day also took me around some panoramic views of Cheltenham Race Course. Taking in that view, I imagined how brilliant it must be to be on top of that hill, as I am sure lots do, looking down at the course, watching the horses race and listening to the packed stands on Cheltenham Gold Cup day.

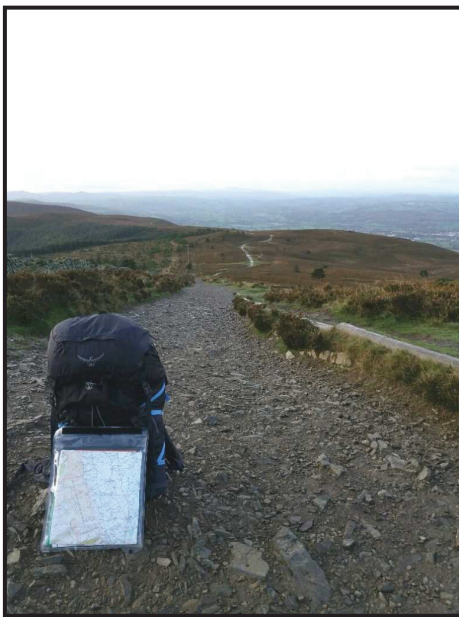
Saturday, 18 miles and my fourth and last day, took me through the lovely Cotswold town of Broadway. Being another clear and sunny day, there were lots of people, including families with young children taking on their own challenge of walking up to the Broadway Tower. When I got to the top I stopped for an early lunch, knowing I only had a couple of hours to get to Chipping Camden.

At the top, I met, what I can only describe ‘back in the day’ as a yuppie family, with two young children. Stood in their designer skinny jeans and T-shirts, they were clearly intrigued by my slightly serious looking attire and back pack. So we got talking for a short period, while the children fought over a large packet of Haribo fizzy chews.

It quickly became apparent that they hadn’t walked the hill and instead had parked the car near the summit and taken a short glory walk to the top. The wife was flabbergasted when I explained where I had walked from and going to. After a slight pause for thought, she piped up “That’s amazing. Darling, we should try something like that. Just think of the weight loss”.

There were so many ways I could have responded, but refrained from doing so. Instead, I just smiled, rolled my eyes, got packed up and set off, but not before accepting a couple of fizzy cola bottles which the children had grudgingly offered.

I finally arrived in Chipping Campden at 2pm on the Saturday. A bus journey to Moreton-in-Marsh, a train journey back to West Malling via London and I was home by 7pm, just about the right time for a very large and well earned gin and tonic. Perfect!



The photos show parts of the stunning scenery on David’s Offa’s Dyke walk.



AN OFFA’S DYKE TRAIL: October 4-12 by David Thornton

I was 50 this year. I wanted to mark the occasion by way of doing something different. To be able to look back some time down the line and say “Yes, that’s what I did for my 50th”.

Among our walking circles, choosing to do the Offa’s Dyke National Trail, by way of celebrating one’s 50th birthday, isn’t such a ridiculous thing to consider, in fact almost verging on normal..... for the non-walking fraternity, however, made up of my family, close friends, workmates and even some interested customers, it was met with a range of emotions, from mild inquisitiveness, to a deeply furrowed brow and in the more extreme cases, utter incredulity. Similar, but not quite as severe

reaction, as when I announced my entry to my first and still only 100 mile event. Aren’t they always slightly amusing passages of conversation?

So, mind made up and all planning done, on Wednesday October 4 at 5.30am, I set off to West Malling Station, to catch my various trains to eventually arrive in Chepstow at 10.30am. I was immediately greeted by a welcome, albeit slightly misleading Station Classy Café. When the lady behind the counter asked me if I was doing the Offa's Dyke (she'd obviously met plenty of us) she immediately glanced down at the counter and announced "You'll be needing a piece of this homemade flapjack then". I only wanted a coffee as I had of course packed food for the day, but when confronted with a choice of own brand hob nobs or homemade flapjack, there was only going to be one winner.

Whenever I buy flapjack, it's done with such high expectations and yet so often the experience is disappointing. There will be hundreds of people up and down the land right now, carefully following a flapjack recipe, right up to but excluding the vital instruction that says 'Place in pre-heated oven, gas mark 7 or 180 degrees for 35-40 minutes'. I'm sure at this point too many people get distracted, forget to place in the oven and instead walk away leaving the mixture to just go "off" in the tray, come back a few hours later, decant it and cut it into portions. So much flapjack is served up in this way and it just isn't appetizing. I was relieved therefore to discover that there were no such issues with flapjack from the Classy Café, which I ate sat outside, for a short while, while studying my map and contemplating the day ahead.

Afterwards, like a good boy, I took my empty disposable coffee cup back in, and with two further pieces of crunchy flapjack safely stashed away in my rucksack, alongside my now relegated hob nobs, I left the Classy Café and was finally on my way.

Having spent an hour or so weaving my way out of Chepstow, I came across my first obstacle. For one who has a particular dislike for wasps, verging on a phobia, to be confronted by an extremely active hornets' nest is particularly unpleasant. These things were huge and they were buzzing about everywhere. To make matters worse I was on a very narrow enclosed path, with no way of taking a wide berth and to track back was a long way. So I stepped back, put a long sleeve top on, a cap, put my head down and ran down that path like Forest Gump....and like Forrest Gump I just kept on running!

The rest of the day passed away without further event, mainly walking through the forests that flank the River Wye, until I reached my first overnight stop in the small village of Redbrook, once renowned as the world's largest manufacturer of quality tinplate back in the mid 1800s. Here I stayed at a B&B run by Margery and Arthur Evans, along with their giant pet Poodle called Roland. Day two passed quietly, further along the Wye Valley to an overnight stay at a bunkhouse in Pandy. Nothing spectacular as you would expect, but the food in the pub downstairs was exceptional and I managed to get back to the room in time to watch England secure their place in next year's World Cup Finals in Russia. So that's my entertainment for next summer sorted...or torture depending on which way you look at it.

Day three was met with much excitement. Not only did this take me across the plateau of the Black Mountains to Hay-on Wye, but the weather forecast was glorious. Once on top, apart from the spectacular views offered by the crystal clear skies, I was struck by the absence of any sound. No cars, no trains, nor planes. Even the sheep and birds were silent and with no breeze to speak of it really was quite inspiring. My day was a relatively short 18 miles, so I was able to spend much time stopping and taking in the whole vista on regular occasions. If I never have the opportunity to walk that stretch again, I dare say I could never have picked a better day on which to do so.

When I dropped down into Hay-on-Wye, apparently the location for the highest number of second hand book shops in any one town in the world, I checked into the Old Black Lion. With a very long day ahead of me on Saturday I was anxious to get a good night's sleep. So you can imagine my dejection, when, while checking in at the bar, I glanced across the restaurant and clapped eyes on a full jazz band set and rather large amplifiers. The fact that I'm not overly keen on jazz wasn't the issue. With a 7am start looming, the young lady at the check-in apologetically explained that these boys were going to be cranking out their noise, right under my room, until 11.30pm....and they did.

Up at 6am on day 4, having bought breakfast supplies the night before, I was away at bang on 7am as planned, just before any daylight was appearing. Most walkers go from Hay-on Wye to Kington, stay overnight and then walk onto Knighton. But I calculated that I could skip Kington and go all the way. I must confess that when I reached Kington at 12.30pm having completed 14 miles on some tough terrain, I was slightly dejected when I saw an Offa's Dyke waymark informing me that I had another 14 miles to go to Knighton on an equally tough track. I did eventually make it into Knighton just before 6pm and was welcomed by a fantastic B&B run by Mr and Mrs Lockhard-White, who made the most ridiculously tasty marmalade. With a later start on the Sunday I slept like a log on that Saturday night.

Knowing that I had planned a really long stint on the Saturday, I strategically planned a shorter 18 mile stretch into Montgomery for the Sunday. However, as we all know, mileage isn't everything and I was to regret not paying closer attention to the vital information clearly provided by my OS Explorer map. You see, while the previous four days were certainly taxing, what you had were steep hills, longish plateaus, steep descents and longish valleys and so on and so forth. The Shropshire Hills between Knighton and Montgomery, partly referred to as the Clun AONB, were similar, but neither the plateaus nor the valleys were longish, so there was never any respite. In fact they were non-existent and with the hills extremely severe in parts, I can honestly say that the 18 miles on Sunday were significantly tougher than the 28 miles done the previous day. Why on earth King Offa felt the need to build a huge dyke in some of these parts I do not know. Quite frankly, if I was a Welshman 1200 years ago, hell-bent



on entering Mercia uninvited, by the time I'd reached the top of some of those hills, the last thing I'd have been fit for was a scrap with a well rested and probably well fed Englishman. However, clearly our Mr Offa was a belt and braces man, and the Dyke was built along this entire stretch

When I eventually crawled into Montgomery, staying at a fabulous old coaching inn called the Dragon Hotel, the first thing I did when I got to my room, after putting the kettle on of course, was to fully lay out and re-examine my OS map for the day. What I was to discover was a dense sea of orange contour lines. I can't believe I so flippantly dismissed that vital detail and an important lesson was learned.

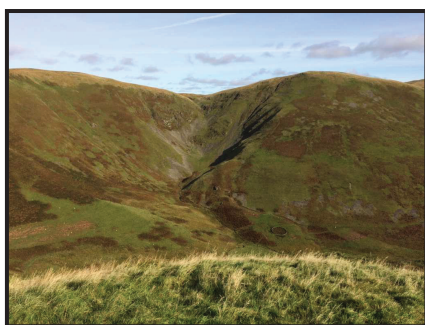
Fortunately day six was indeed very flat and very welcome, taking me past Welshpool and along a good stretch of the River Severn and the now disused Montgomery Canal. Ironically, it was the day of the whole trek on which I felt at my most tired, caused probably by a mixture of sunshine, plain terrain and the previous day's exploits. I stayed at the Bradford Arms in Llanmynech, much remembered for its quirky decor as well as the eccentric owner and his wife, Bob and Kathy Hedley

My next day was to take me 24 miles into Llangollen. I think October is great time of year to be walking, with decent enough length of days and good temperatures. However, with wet fallen leaves covering slippery rocks and tree roots, the really steep and wooded section coming out of Llanmynech for 3-4 miles was extremely treacherous at times and having to carry a heavy pack there were a good number of occasions when I thought I was going to take a bad tumble, especially on the downhill sections. Luckily I managed to stay on two feet, but only just. On this particular day I was really looking forward to walking over the Pontcysyllte Aquaduct, which is about four miles outside Llangollen. I last travelled over there on a canal boat on a family holiday back in 1981, so it brought back some great memories walking over that.

The weekend before I set off, I was running through the list of overnight stays with my neighbour while flicking through his AA Road atlas, which showed the Offa's Dyke route in rough detail. Being of Welsh ancestry, he was interested in those locations. When I eventually got to Llangollen on the map, he looked up, smiled and said "Dave, I should warn you, it always rains in Llangollen". Having had near perfect weather throughout the previous seven days, how he must have laughed when I texted him to say it was chucking it down the morning I woke up on day eight. And it didn't stop all the way to my next overnight stay in Ruthin. On the plus side, the heavy rain did give me a chance to christen one of my most recent investments. A Rab super double skinned, (nothing is getting through this, but you can breathe out of it as much as you like) waterproof top. I deliberately use the word investment, because quite frankly, for the price I paid for it (I was perspiring at the critical moment when the money was exchanged) I'd almost expect to be able to do a few lengths down my local swimming baths and remain dry on the inside! It is with much relief that I can report that it kept me completely dry and for someone who has tolerated, for the last three years, a cheap rain top, which has been about as effective as a tailored potato sack, it made a very pleasant change.

Day nine, my last day, was arguably the best of the lot. Apart from the excitement and anticipation of reaching my end goal, despite having developed some fluid under my right knee cap late on day eight, which was really painful, the route took me over the Clwydian Range. Buoyed by near perfect weather once again, the views were amazing for pretty much the whole of the 22 miles into Prestatyn. A good indication that the weather was so good, was the regular passing of amateur photographers walking in the opposite direction, taking their opportunity whilst it was available.

I skipped into Prestatyn (ignoring the pain in my knee) at around 4pm. Trains all booked in advance and with no irritating driver or platform guard strikes being called, I arrived back in West Mall at 10.45pm. A quite brilliant and exhilarating nine days. One thing is certain, I shan't forget what I did to mark my 50th birthday!



Clockwise, from the top: the Devil's Beef Tub; the view from Chalk Rig Edge; the view from Almagill Hill; Solway Firth – the end of the walk.

THE ANNANDALE WAY by Graham Smith

Over the Friday-Saturday-Sunday of October 6-7-8 I took an overnight train to Carlisle to walk the Annandale Way, a very pleasant 56-mile long distance path in Southern Scotland. It had fascinated me because it links two towns with which I am fairly familiar, Moffat and Annan. In recent years, when Mike Pursey and I have had our hillwalking trips to the Scottish Highlands, on the way up we have usually stayed at Annan, which is about seven miles over the border. And on the way back we have usually stayed at Moffat

– a delightful town which has Walkers Are Welcome status. So a walk linking these two towns had much appeal.

Opened in 2009, the Annandale Way follows the valley of the River Annan to the Solway Firth, passing through some very

attractive scenery. Although it could certainly not be described as a hilly walk, it does have hills, and very enjoyable they are too. So on Thursday October 6, I got the overnight train from Euston, arriving at Carlisle at 5.20am. There is a very good bus service in this part of the country, and after a chilly wait at the bus station, I got a bus to Dumfries and then another to Moffat. It was great to be in Moffat again, and after buying my lunch in the town's excellent bakery, I was off.

The first part of the walk – 14 miles – is a loop from Moffat to take in the Devil's Beef Tub, a huge and quite spectacular steep-sided hollow. It was a good day's walking, and it was great to be in the Southern Uplands, although it was a bit wet underfoot. But the sun was out, it was dry, and I got some really good views. Devil's Beef Tub is very impressive, and leads to the 1568ft Annanhead Hill, which in turn leads to Chalk Rig Edge, the 1640ft summit of which is the highest point on the walk. The views, in that early autumn sunshine, were stunning.

I would have enjoyed the hillwalking more if A) it had not been so boggy underfoot, B) I had not felt so weary through losing a night's sleep, and C) I had not had a slight cold coming on. The route left the hills just before 2651ft Hart Fell, a really good hill which I went up with Mike Pursey a few years ago. If I had not been feeling so cream knackered and coldy, I would have gone up it again, as the weather was so fine. Maybe I will next time I am in that delightful part of Scotland.

So I decided against revisiting Hart Fell and kept on the Annandale Way, taking good paths off the hills, followed by about three miles of road walking, to rejoin the outward stretch of the day's walk to get back to Moffat, where I had booked a B&B.

The second day – 18.5 miles from Moffat to Lochmaben – was not, in all honesty, the best day's walking I have ever had in Scotland, as it was generally quite rural and involved quite a few muddy fields. After Moffat the route soon joined up with the Southern Upland Way, which it followed to the Crooked Road leading up to the hillside. It was a bit overcast (I've had a few mornings like that in Moffat!) but it was not actually raining.

The going got a bit boggy over the moor (and much more boggy later) but it was generally pretty good. I was making good time and walking on some good paths and tracks, although it was too overcast for extensive views.

But it was often boggy – sometimes very boggy – underfoot. I came a cropper near Blackburn (no, not that one!) when I bog-hopped around some sheep pens and then carried straight on off-route through more thick mud, instead of reading the guide book properly and turning left on the other side of a fence. So I went back to where I had gone wrong, worked out my mistake, and carried on.

Despite the mud, there were also some good tracks and decent minor roads, and I arrived at Lochmaben, where I had booked a room at the Crown Inn, at 3.15pm.

The last day – Lochmaben to the Solway Firth – is 25.5 miles. The guide book recommends this stretch is split into two walks – but hey, I'm a member of the LDWA, and 25.5 miles is a normal day's walk. Besides, and more importantly, I needed to reach Annan before 6pm to get the bus to Carlisle, where I had a B&B booked and a train to get the following day.

I was away before 8am, and the first mile took me past Castle Loch – on a lovely woodland path – and then to the ruins of Lochmaben Castle. There were then good paths, tracks and minor roads to the Georgian mansion of Rammerscales House, followed by the 712ft Almagill Hill. Going up was a bit boggy, but steady. The sun was out, and the summit offered great views, stretching across to the Solway Firth. It was the highlight of the walk for me.

After that there were more good paths and tracks – which were a bit boggy in places – and more good minor roads, followed by a pleasant riverside stretch to Hoddum Bridge. The next few miles were along the riverside to Annan and were very pleasant, the route crossing the river a couple of times. It was good to reach Annan but I pressed on through the town to reach the end of the Way at Newbiebarns. Walking along the banks of the Solway Firth was excellent, with extensive views – including Criffel, a 1,736ft hill which Mike Pursey and I walked up a couple of years ago. Then it was back to Annan and the bus to Carlisle.

I used the Annandale Way rain-proof guide book, produced by Rucksack Readers and costing £12.99. It has very good route descriptions, detailed mapping, information on Annandale's history and wildlife, fine photographs and information on the transport links for the walk, which are excellent. It also details the 19.5 mile alternative branch of the Way which avoids Lochmaben and goes to the much larger town of Lockerbie.

COMEDY CORNER with Neal O'Rourke

One morning three Glesga lads and three Cockney blokes were in a ticket queue at Glasgow Central train station heading to Euston for a Scotland - England International at Wembley.

The three Cockneys each bought a ticket and watched as the three Glaswegians bought just one ticket between them.

"How are the three of you going to travel on one ticket?" asked one of the Cockneys. "Ye huv tae watch and learn" answered one of the boys from the North.

When the six travellers boarded the train, the three Londoners sat down, but the three Northerners crammed into a toilet together and closed the door.

Shortly after the train set off, the conductor came around to collect tickets. He knocked on the toilet door and said, "Tickets please." The door opened just a crack and a single arm emerged with a ticket in hand. The conductor took it and moved on into the next car.

The Southerners saw this happen and agreed it was quite a clever idea. Indeed, so clever that they decided to do the same thing on the return trip and save themselves some money.

That evening after the game, when they all got to Euston, the Cockney blokes bought a single ticket for the return trip, while to

their astonishment, the three Glasga lads didn't even buy one ticket.

"How are you going to travel without a ticket?" asked one of the perplexed Cockneys. "Och, ye huv gotty watch and learn", answered one of the Glaswegians.

When they boarded the train the three Cockneys crammed themselves into a toilet and the three Glesga lads crammed themselves into another toilet.

Shortly after the train began to move, one of the Glaswegians left their toilet and walked over to the Cockney's toilet. He knocked on the door and said "Ticket please".

There's just no way on God's green earth to explain Scottish ingenuity!

A lady called Agnes was always having parties and it was the place to be.

One afternoon she rang for her maid and on her arrival she explained: "I just have realised I am clean out of toilet paper and my reputation is going to be ruined."

At this the maid said: "Stop worrying. As I use lots of dress patterns in my spare time, how about if I cut some of them up into small neat squares and hang them in the loo on a pretty string? I am sure no one will notice,"

At this Agnes said: "You will do that for me?" "Of course," said the maid.

Whereby all the guests arrived and sat down for the dinner, having a starter, main course and sweet.

The men went to the smoking room and the ladies off to their room where two of them were chatting.

One said: "You know, Agnes thinks of everything. You come in and the room is decorated as well as the table.

"And it does not stop there. I went to the loo earlier even the toilet paper has got back and front on it!"

THE LAST WORD FROM THE EDITOR Graham Smith

Well, what a year it has been for Kent Group of the LDWA – and what a 2018 we have in prospect. Once again, we have organised three highly successful walking events, our social walks appear to be attracting more walkers – from throughout the county, and often beyond – and we organised another highly successful checkpoint on this year's Hundred, in North Yorkshire.

It has been a year of change in Kent LDWA. Brian Buttifant stood down as chairman and was made a Kent LDWA Life President, Stephanie le Men became secretary, Peter Jull replaced Neil Higham as treasurer, and Roger Dean handed over to Neil as membership secretary.

Brian was replaced as chairman by yours truly, and I must say how much an honour it is to have been asked to take on the role.

Kent LDWA has been a huge part of my life for 22 years, and as chairman I am extremely proud of all that our group achieves.

And most importantly, there seem to be good people coming through who are already proving big assets to our group.

It has been a very significant year for me personally. Apart from becoming Kent LDWA chairman, I am also editor of Strider. I have to say that I love editing Strider, and I really enjoy having contact with the fantastic LDWA groups in order to get their news and pictures into the LDWA's magazine. I was a newspaper editor for 23 years, the last 18 of them with the East Kent Mercury, from which I retired in April last year, and editing Strider often feels like it has taken me out of retirement. It is a privilege to edit Strider, and I am trying to carry on the wonderful work of my predecessors, most recently Ken Falconer and Julie Welch. I am trying not to let Strider interfere with my Kent LDWA work, although sometimes that is easier said than done!

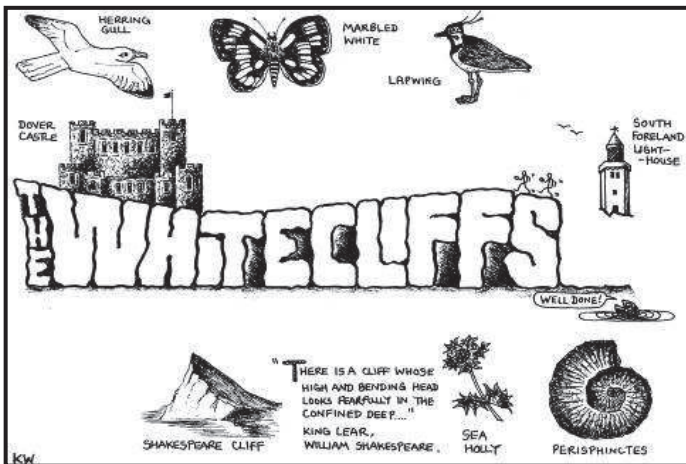
Next year, of course, we are hosting the Cinque Ports 100, and plans have progressed very well this year. As group chairman, I have found it absolutely fascinating – and also immensely satisfying – to see how the whole project has developed, with all the members of the organising group carrying out their own roles so efficiently. One of the aspects of the Hundred that has given me most pleasure is to see how the route of the Cinque Ports 100 has evolved, with various people chipping in with amendments and suggestions to improve it. The chipping in has been made to my good friend Mike Pursey, who is the event's route coordinator – and what a painstaking, and patient, job he has done. We have created a Hundred route to be proud of, and a significant part of that is down to Mike.

This year my own walking has been affected by a condition called Plantar Fasciitis, a nagging and constant pain in the heels which for me must have been caused by the thousands of miles I have walked since I started serious walking 37 years ago. It first started bothering me when I walked round the Isle of Wight, as a training walk for the Hundred, in April. Helen Franklin, a fairly new Kent member who is a former chiropodist, told me she felt my problem was Plantar Fasciitis, and she advised I sought medical advice. This I did, and after a few sessions with a very good physiotherapist in Deal called Steve Comfort, I was referred to my doctor with a recommendation that I have cortisone injections. I have now had cortisone injections in both my heels. The injections seem (at the moment!) to be working, and in recent weeks it has felt quite liberating to walk without that constant nagging pain. Despite my Strider responsibilities, I still get huge pleasure from editing our newsletter. Many thanks to everyone who has sent me articles, photos (and also some jokes!) during the year, and particular thanks to the wonderful Bryan Clarke for printing it and for getting it distributed to our members. Please keep your articles and photos coming, as there wouldn't be a newsletter if it wasn't for you.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Christmas, and lots of great walking in 2018.

Walkers on the White Cliffs Challenge on August 26

Photos by Gavin Trevelyan



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