

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

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

# ***NEWSLETTER***



Sarah Turner by Turner Way in Margate.  
No, Turner Way wasn't named after our Sarah -  
the name is because of its proximity to the Turner Gallery.

**Number 110**



**December 2019**

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



These photos were taken by Eric Rolfe on the Andredsweald Circuit,  
based at Forest Row, on July 14.





## KENT SOCIAL WALKS: DECEMBER-APRIL

*Social Walks Organiser:* Peter Jull

*W:* [www.ldwa.org.uk/kent](http://www.ldwa.org.uk/kent) Please check Kent group website for any late changes to the details below

### **Sun Dec 1 The Leybourne Chase**

20ml. 09.00 Meet on Oxley Shaw Lane alongside Leybourne School. (GR TQ691590). Circular route around the footpaths of Leybourne, West Malling, Addington & Birling. Pub lunch in Addington. **C:** David Thornton,

### **Thu Dec 5 Cinque Ports 100 Revisited: Walk 4 – Dymchurch to Folkestone**

14.8ml. 10.35 Meet Folkestone Bus Station, Bouverie Square. (GR TR226359). (park in Castle Hill Avenue, Bouverie Road West, Jointon Road or Earls Avenue - leave time to walk to bus station). Linear - bus leaves Folkestone Bus Station 9.53am, arrives Dymchurch 10.32am.

**C:** Graham Smith

### **Sat Dec 14 Christmas Cruise around Calais**

C15-16ml. Meet 0830 By P&O Desk, Dover Eastern Docks for 0955 sailing (changed from 0925). Allow plenty of time to find a parking space. (GR TR331417). A circular walk in the Nord Pas de Calais visiting Cap Blanc Nez, with time to see the spectacular Calais Christmas lights. Return 2055 local time - 1955 British time. Ring P&O reservations 08716 646464 for foot passenger day return (should be £16). Don't forget your passport! Please ring Graham for confirmation of times. **C:** Graham Smith

### **Fri Dec 27 Post Christmas Sevenoaks Stroll**

c17ml. 09.00 Meet at Shipbourne. (GR TQ592522). Starting in road opposite church, parking in layby. Pub stop in Sevenoaks. Map: Exp 147.

**C:** Dave Sheldrake

### **Wed Jan 1 New Year in Sussex**

23ml. 09.00 Rye railway station c.p. £1.50 charge. (GR TQ919205). Rye to Hastings and return. Lunch stop at Hastings. Bring torch.

**C:** Graham Smith

### **Thu Jan 9 Cinque Ports 100 Revisited: Walk 5 – Folkestone to Deal**

19ml. 09.30 Meet Walmer Railway Station (GR TR364503), off road parking nearby. Linear, train leaves Walmer 9.34am, arrives Folkestone 9.59am **C:** Graham Smith

### **Fri Jan 10 A Night on the Terrace**

17ml. 22.30 Meet at The Bell p.h. Kemsing. (GR TQ556587). Parking 50 yards away at village hall c.p. 21.30 for 22.30 Map Expl 147.

**C:** Dave Sheldrake

### **Sun Jan 12 Winterhurst**

17.5ml. 09.00 Meet at Ashurst Station. (GR TQ507388). Circular route from Ashurst, through Speldhurst and pub stop in Penshurst. Train from Victoria arriving at 08.58. **C:** David Thornton,

### **Sun Feb 2 Summerhouse Stroll**

19ml. 09.00 Lympne village hall - park at end away from hall. (GR TR121349). Lunch stop at Stowting. **C:** Graham Smith

### **Sun Feb 9 Cinque Ports 100 Revisited: Walk 6 - Deal to Dover**

21ml. 09.00 Meet Walmer Railway Station (GR TR364503), off road parking nearby. Linear walk to Dover via Sandwich and take train back to Walmer. **C:** Graham Smith

### **Sun Feb 23 Break for the Border – Oxted**

20ml. 08.45 Meet on west side of Oxted station. (GR TQ393529). The first in a series of walks which start outside but always within 5 miles of the Kent border. Circular route with a pub stop at Chelsham. Train currently set to arrive from Victoria at 08.30. **C:** David Thornton,

### **Sun Mar 1 Loop from Lewes**

18ml. 09.20 Meet at Lewes rlwy stn. (GR TQ417098). A circular route on the South Downs. Lunch stop at Southease. **C:** Graham Smith

### **Sun Mar 8 Sevenoaks Circular marshals' walk**

Please contact organiser David Thornton for details – contact details below.

### **Sun Mar 15 HHH 8 and 9**

20ml. 09.00 Ulcombe Recreation Ground. (GR TQ848486). Pub lunch. **C:** Peter Jull

### **Sun Mar 22 45th Sevenoaks Circular Walk**

See Events Diary in Strider.

### **Sun Mar 29 From Hill to Mount then Downe to the Bottom and back**

23ml. 08.30 Meet alongside recreation ground in Crockenhill. (GR TQ505676). Circular route with pub stop in Downe. Train from Victoria arriving in Swanley at 08:00 which is 20 mins from start. **C:** David Thornton,

### **Good Friday Apr 10 A South Downs Loop**

26/20ml. 09.00 Meet in Eastbourne at western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs wa 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 Apr 12 Alliteration H Hartley, Harvel & Hawley**

21.5ml. 09.35 Farningham Road station, South Darenth. (GR TQ555692). Pub lunch stop. **C:** Peter Jull

## **KENT GROUP COMMITTEE**

Chairman/newsletter editor – Graham Smith,

Secretary – Stephanie Le Men

Treasurer/walks secretary – Peter Jull,

Membership/data protection secretary – Neil Higham,

Life President – Brian Buttifant,

Members

Don Arthurs, Joy Davies, Nick Dockree, Helen Franklin, David Thornton, Andy Clark

Sarah Turner while not on the Kent committee, is group equipment officer.

Michael Headley maintains our excellent website.

Group gatherings are held on the first Monday in each month (except if a Bank Holiday when postponed to the second Monday) at the Rose & Crown, Wrotham, GR TQ612592.

## **JILL GREEN TO BE GUEST SPEAKER AT OUR AGM**

THE annual general meeting of Kent Group of the LDWA will be on Sunday January 26, at Harrietsham Village Hall – and Jill Green will be our guest speaker.

Jill, as just about every member of the LDWA knows, is one of our association's legends, whose walking achievements include completing 27 Hundreds and all the National Trails. Jill will be talking to us about her walking life.

The AGM is also your chance to have your say about our group and about the LDWA in general, so please come along and make your voice heard. The group exists for its members, and we need as much input as possible. The address of the hall is Church Road, Harrietsham, Maidstone, ME17 1AP. 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, which will again be provided by 'the magnificent' Joy Davies.

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. A nomination form is enclosed with this newsletter.

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. It can be scanned and emailed to him. It must be received by January 20.

## **NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS**

### **Sevenoaks Circular**

AS previously reported, this will be on Sunday March 22, following the same excellent 30, 20 and 15 mile routes as it did this year, and based at the same venue – West Heath School. The marshals' walk will be on Sunday March 8. If anyone wishes to marshal on the event and/or do the marshals' walk, please contact organiser David Thornton (details above).

David and co-organiser David Sheldrake are looking at the event using a new route in 2021.

### **Weald challenge walk**

THIS year's Weald challenge walk – the Andredsweald, held on July 14 – was highly successful, with 109 starters and only two retirements. Based at Forest Row, all three routes (15, 20 and 26 miles) went through Five Hundred Acre Wood and then past a memorial to AA Milne, creator of Winnie the Pooh. A full report of the Andredsweald is in the current Strider, and a page of pictures from the event is on the inside front cover of this newsletter. Organiser Neil Higham can rightly claim much credit for the event being so popular.

As this newsletter was being put together, Neil was planning a new summer High Weald event which would be based at Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells. Full details, including date, venue, distances - and an appeal for marshals! – will appear in the next newsletter, with details of how to enter in the April Strider.

### **White Cliffs Challenge**

THIS year's White Cliffs Challenge, on August 24, had a total of 112 starters, who had to cope with sweltering temperatures which soared to 30 degrees. Distances were 32 and 18 miles and there were 18 retirements, all on the longer route. A full report of the WCC is in the current Strider, and there is a page of pictures from the event on the back page of this newsletter.

Next year's WCC will be on Saturday August 29, and will again be based at St Margaret's Village Hall. Routes will be 30 and 18 miles and will be similar to those used this year, the longer one going over Whinless Down in Dover, one of the best viewpoints in the area.

As usual, the event will be part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival (see story below). More details will appear in the next newsletter.

## **PLATINUM AWARDS FOR FOUR KSS COMPLETIONS**

ANDREW Boulden, Chris Pitt, Francis Thomason and David Whitehead have become the first four walkers to earn Platinum awards (pictured right) for four successive completions of the KSS (Kent Surrey Sussex) Triple Challenge.

The four have received special paperweights to mark their achievements, which were posted after the Sussex Stride on September 21-22.

The KSS Triple Challenge is three 50-mile walks – the Sussex Stride, the Surrey Tops





and Kent's White Cliffs Challenge – which must be completed in successive years. Bronze awards are given for one completion round, Silver awards for two, Gold for Three and Platinum for four.

After the Sussex Stride, Ian Hull earned a Gold award; Alzbeta Benn, Anthony Gardner and Rachael Messenger earned Silver ones; and Jeff Campbell, Marshall Elliott, Helen Franklin, Raymond Hickman, Steve Russell and James Smith received Bronze awards.

Next year's leg of the KSS will be the Surrey Tops, scheduled for September 19-20. As usual, we will be doing a checkpoint – more details in the next newsletter. And in 2021, it will again be the turn of our White Cliffs Challenge.

The year after that – 2022 – will be the 50th anniversary of the LDWA. Working with our friends in Surrey and Sussex groups, we are planning a special KSS - a 50k Surrey Tops, Sussex Stride and White Cliffs Challenge, to be completed in successive weeks. More details will appear in future newsletters.

#### **SUGGESTION FOR A HELLFIRE HUNDRED By Peter Jull**

A WHILE ago there was some online discussion about the lack of groups coming forward to run the annual 100, and if it was to continue, whether a commercial organiser would have to be involved with the extra cost to participants that would entail. I know I'm in a small minority but I didn't find organising the Cinque Ports 100 particularly onerous and enjoyed being on the "inside". So I set my mind to contemplating stepping into the breach.

My favourite 100 (and first) remains the Camel-Teign linear and with Kent's hilliest hills being around Dover and Sevenoaks a linear route connecting the two was first choice. Darwin Academy at Biggin Hill was the nearest suitable venue to Sevenoaks' hills without finishing through a significant urban area. A starting point with easy direct and safe access to open country was harder to identify. Walmer Castle became the first choice with a rear exit quickly leading up onto Hawkshill. With a weakness for alliterative names, Hellfire Hundred came to mind after the Hellfire Corner name Dover acquired during the last war and then Hellfire Hills Hundred as it started over Hawkshill and finished at Biggin Hill with many more hills in between.

In the meantime other groups have come forward for 2022 and 2023 so the urgency has receded somewhat. The NEC is aware of the level of willingness to have the 100 in Kent again, probably in 2024.

Darwin Academy hosts a cycling event of a similar scale and nature to a 100 annually and the assistant head is an LDWA member. Walmer Castle needs a bit more working on but there are a couple of other locations on the edge of Deal that could substitute. Bored between shop customers, a route was devised after exploring many permutations of possibilities between village halls, particularly in the east. Breakfast would be at The Lenham School if they're amenable. There's even a route description from start to breakfast (I was really bored) and partially beyond.

If a start/breakfast/finish and suitable interim checkpoints cannot be secured there's a reserve route (I was really bored!). Circular starting at Cobham Hall School with breakfast at Ardingly agricultural showground. Passing Piglet's house, Pooh Bridge and The Enchanted Place in Ashdown Forest, Hunnypot Hundred alliterates nicely. Realising that multi-day agricultural showgrounds have all the facilities a 100 needs in spades, Detling and Ardingly are frustratingly just too far apart.

If walks entitled HHH or HPH start appearing in the social walks program that's just a walks organiser planning ahead to fill a gap in the program if needed. Expressions of enthusiasm for joining in the enterprise (or reservations about the idea) would all be welcome. Please telephone or email me – my contact details are above.

#### **CHECKPOINT ON NEXT YEAR'S HUNDRED**

THE Kent checkpoint on the 2020 Y100 Sir Fynwy (pronounced Fun-We) will be at Treadam (pronounced Tre-adam), 70 miles. This will be an indoor checkpoint – a converted barn but properly done up, with heating etc. The spot is near part of the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail. The CP is scheduled to open at 05.15 on the Sunday, closing time uncertain but probably around 21.00. So if anyone is happy to help on the checkpoint, please contact Brian Buttifant (contact details above).

#### **RECORD NUMBERS ON WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL**

THIS year's White Cliffs Walking Festival produced a record number of 1255 attendances on its 42 walks.

The festival, held between August 22-28, was organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers, who are celebrating their 30th anniversary this year, with assistance from Kent LDWA. The attendance figure beat the previous record, set last year when there were 1202 attendances on the walks.

Organisers put the record attendances down to the scorching temperatures during the festival, which reached 30 degrees on two days. With sufficient sun cream and water, the walkers still enjoyed themselves.

The festival was opened, in a ceremony at Deal Memorial Bandstand on Walmer Green, by Kate Ashbrook, vice-president and chair of The Ramblers.

Kate said: "It is a joy to open the sixth White Cliffs Walking Festival, which is set to be a huge success thanks to the efforts of Ramblers volunteers.

"During the week the public will enjoy the magnificent walks on our local paths, which are well maintained thanks to Kent County Council working with The Ramblers.

"This festival demonstrates not only the popularity of walking but also its importance at a time when we have never been more aware of the health benefits of keeping active, and the need for sustainable forms of transport.

"You can count on The Ramblers to protect our paths for all to enjoy."

The festival's 42 walks ranged from those of one mile, themed on the history of Dover, to our own White Cliffs Challenge (see story above).

One of the most popular walks was Jane's Footsteps, which included a tour of Goodnestone House, often visited by Jane Austen. More than 40 walkers went on this walk, which included readings from Austen novels.

It was the sixth walking festival organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers. Neil Fraser, chairman of the festival's organising group, said: "Hundreds of hours of volunteer time were required in the planning, organising and operating the festival.

"Without their goodwill, skills, determination and sense of humour, the festival would never have transformed from an idea to such a successful annual event."

Plans are now being made for the 2020 festival scheduled for August 27-September 1.



**Above: Jim and Sheila, and their garden.**

#### **JIM'S GARDEN A FINALIST IN DESIGN AWARDS**

KENT LDWA members will be pleased to know that the garden of Jim and Sheila Briggs has been selected as a finalist in the Society of Garden Designers Awards for 2020. The finalists were announced at the beginning of October, with the winners announced at the society's dinner on January 31.

The awards are judged by professional garden judges, who visited Jim and Sheila's Rainham home to view their lovely garden. Said Jim: "This was the result of two rounds - the long list of entries was cut down to a shortlist that would be visited. This was done in July. Then the shortlist was worked on to produce the judges' view of the finalists.

"We are in for two possible prizes:

"1. The best designed garden judged by the professional judges. They came in early September.

"2. A people's choice of which is the best. Voting closed for this at the end of October.

"Strictly speaking the garden and garden designer gets the award. We just have to pay for the garden (and maintain it ... we just shifted 1200kg of bags of top dressing in the rain!). Marian Boswall of Staplehurst designed the garden with our input."

Jim added: "The garden is always open to LDWA walkers! We can test the big pizza oven out at the end of a hike some time?"

Good luck, Jim and Sheila – and it would be great to take you up on offer!

#### **ALLEZ!**

THERE is still time for people wishing to go on the annual Kent LDWA Christmas Cruise Around Calais, on Saturday December 14.

We meet at 0830 by the P&O Desk, Dover Eastern Docks, for the 0955 sailing (changed from the usual 0925 sailing). Allow plenty of time to find a parking space. We return 2055 local time - 1955 British time. A return ticket for these times should be £16. Ring P&O reservations on 08716 646464 for a foot passenger day return, or book online.

This is a 15-16-mile circular walk in the Nord Pas de Calais, visiting the fine viewpoint of Cap Blanc Nez. We will probably take a bus from the ferry terminal to Calais town centre, so we can do the walk and have time for some Christmas shopping in the Auchan hypermarket, see the spectacular Calais Christmas lights, and to have a meal in a Calais restaurant before getting the ferry back. Don't forget your passport!

For more details, contact leader Graham Smith

**DIARY DATE:** The annual Kent Summer French Challenge will be on Saturday July 4 2020. This event, which Graham Smith has been putting on for at least 20 years, starts with an early morning ferry crossing from Dover to Calais with breakfast taken on the boat. We then drive to the Auchan hypermarket where there's an opportunity to collect provisions if not already packed in your rucksack, before heading out on a walk of about 22 miles through the Pas de Calais countryside, including the excellent viewpoint of Mont de Couple, and along stunning sections of the coast, including Cap Blanc Nez. Packed lunch, beer and ice cream stops are traditionally taken along the way before we return to our cars late afternoon. There is then time for a spot of shopping and a some "top class French nosh" in a Calais restaurant – as Sarah Turner would say! - before taking an evening crossing back to Dover. Full details will appear in the next newsletter and on the Kent LDWA website.

#### **WENDY'S NAME GOES ON THE TRIG TROPHY**

AS reported in the last newsletter, Wendy Thurrell completed the Hadrian Hvndred marshals' walk in May - in a typically super-fast time of 29 hours 15 minutes. This was the 10th Hundred for Wendy, who left Kent a few years ago to move to Cumbria. Wendy's name has now been engraved on the Trig Trophy, which carries the names of all Kent LDWA members who have completed 10 Hundreds. The trophy was donated to us by Kent member Jane Dicker, in memory of her late partner, Keith. Well done, Wendy!

#### **ANDY JOINS THE COMMITTEE**

ANDY Clark has agreed to fill the vacancy on the Kent LDWA committee. Andy, who lives in Dartford, has proved of great help on our challenge events over the last 12 months, and his Walk Reports, which he publishes on Facebook after challenge walks and social walks, are becoming quite legendary. Andy's contact details are above. Welcome, Andy!



## **PROMOTING KENT'S NAMED WALKS By Robert Peel**

PROGRESS with this project, which aims to transform the condition, promotion and interpretation of Kent's exceptional endowment of long-distance and other named walks, is slow but steady.

Much of our effort in recent months has been devoted to producing a new guide to the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and improving the waymarking of the route. As the TWCW will not fill a book, we plan to include a Tunbridge Wells town trail and some of a series of walks starting from Cranbrook in the east of the borough that were previously promoted under the banner 'Walks through Time'. We have been very pleased with the support we have received from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the Kent High Weald Partnership and East Sussex County Council. With luck we may be able to advise a publication date early next year.

High on our list for another guide is the Saxon Shore Way. This is a longer term project as there are more than 150 miles to walk and document. An early issue has arisen on the section of the walk near Cliffe Fort where there are signs indicating that the route past the fort is closed due to path erosion. Most people miss the signs, especially if walking eastward, and have no trouble negotiating the route; but perhaps it can be tricky at high tide. Works are planned that will restore the route to a high standard as part of the creation of the England Coast Path.

In the last Kent newsletter, I reported closure of part of the Wealdway where it goes through a tunnel under the A21 south west of Tonbridge. Highways England had said that they were going to replace the dangerous tunnel during October and November 2019 but this hasn't happened. The work is now scheduled for the weekend of January 10 2020 or, if the weather is bad that weekend, one of the following two weekends.

There is also a bridge problem on the Eden Valley Walk where it passes through the Hever Castle estate. The path has long crossed an estate drive by a wooden footbridge but this has become unsafe and has had to be removed. There is a diversion in place but this was spoiled initially by a locked gate across the diversion and then by confusing signage which we are trying to get improved. We understand that the Hever Castle estate has applied for an order to make the current temporary diversion permanent and so obviate the need to replace the attractive but expensive footbridge. The application will join a long queue and so is not likely to be considered for around three years.



**From left: Andrew; where he was staying; and his leg in plaster.**

## **A LITTLE GREEK TRAGEDY By Andrew Melling**

IT was a complex holiday but, eventually, I got to Milos and enjoyed 12 days seeing this beautiful Greek island.

It should have been 14. My last trip was on the bus to the beautiful, quiet bay of Provatas. I set myself up on the beach, enjoyed a dip in the sea and was dry again for lunch in the beach café.

That was nice. Then I descended back to the beach down a wooden stairway. The last step was not close to the ground but not what I would call a jump. As my right foot made contact with the beach there was a loud crack, my leg collapsed beneath me and I was flat on the ground in great pain. Beach goers and café staff were by me immediately. One offered to call for an ambulance but that was going to take ages so a taxi was called instead. The staff commandeered a wooden sunbed as a stretcher and carried me up the slope to the road. Someone fetched my stuff from the beach so I could load it in my backpack. The café girls smiled sweetly – everyone has a part to play – and then I was on my way to the Milos Health Centre. X-rays, leg swathed in bandage (so much that I joked with the doctor whether the centre had any left). All the time the doctor was asking me questions and testing my vision, which I soon realised was to ensure I had no neurological damage.

The MHC contacted the owners of my room who brought my luggage with (most) of my stuff. They fussed over me but, when they left, I repacked my cases to find they had overlooked two drawers. They brought (most) of the rest to me at the port. In the meantime, the MHC had arranged a ferry back to Piraeus and I had a cold 4 hour crossing (ending 12.30 am) on a stretcher on the deck, drawing sympathetic smiles from other passengers.

MHC had also arranged an ambulance to the port and an ambulance from the ferry, all covered by my EHIC (for how much longer?) I was expecting to go to a hospital in Athens but I discovered later that it was Piraeus General Hospital. I was seen quite quickly by a doctor who ordered two more x-rays then advised an MRI scan before deciding on an operation. This is where the system started to let me down. The health service doesn't do MRI scans: I would have to arrange, and pay for, my own. I wanted to arrange this now or at least have details of providers, and to contact my insurers, but the doctor said best leave it to the morning and he would arrange a bed for me. I was wheeled further down the corridor and left. After some time, I happened to see the doctor again. He got me onto a bed (I think he had forgotten) and I was able to plug in my phone charger.

A few hours in a decent bed made a difference but the insurers wanted a medical report before authorising an MRI scan (250 euros). The doctor had gone off duty and there was no replacement as the hospital didn't open seven days a week. When I tried to walk, my leg collapsed and I was told firmly to stay seated. An English speaking junior doctor said, twice, he would get a doctor to see me but nothing happened. Now there were no English speakers left until lunchtime when an English speaking lady helped me, found somewhere to get the scan and arranged a taxi. At Evagelismos Hospital, a doctor asked me what I was doing there – I

should be somewhere else. He was to sort something out for me and left me in a corridor for a few minutes, but then he had an emergency to deal with. Phone conversation with my insurers was made difficult by a Greek lady, on a trolley like mine, expressing discontent with her situation at full volume. Overcoming this, they arranged an ambulance to collect me and, as they arrived, a second doctor spoke to me and was able to provide the required report. The ambulance took me to the (private) Mediterraneo Hospital. I was seen immediately and, after the usual preliminaries, I was given the MRI scan. I couldn't believe how long it took but at 8.00 pm I was in a nice room and given dinner.

An operation was scheduled for early next morning and I could take in no food or water after midnight. Next morning, first step was to have my leg shaved top to bottom (or foot to bottom!). The op was completed quickly and I awoke in bed about 1½ hours after being given the general anaesthetic. Next morning, I had my first little walk on a zimmer with another in the afternoon and again on Tuesday morning and afternoon. I was fitted with a leg clamp.

All this time, I had been exchanging WhatsApp messages with my daughter Julie who, with her husband Aidan, flew to Athens that day. I have never been so pleased to see a person as I was to see Julie, even though I was now getting first class medical care and frequent visits from a range of young nurses (all with good English).

I had a home flight booked with Aegean on the Tuesday but since I bought my ticket in February they had added a zero to the price. Julie and Aidan had flown Ryanair. Our return flights to Stansted with Ryanair were at 0700 on Wednesday and the surgeon confirmed I was fit to leave hospital at 0330. The insurers arranged transport to the airport, which arrived promptly, and we were soon in the hands of the airport's own special assistance team. The guy had reasonable English, provided me with a special wheelchair, and guided us smoothly through baggage check, passport control and security to the boarding gate. The officer looked at my leg and said we couldn't board: I needed three seats for my leg and there were only two spare! Our guardian reversed all the procedures and collected our luggage (which wasn't the problem we feared it might be) and we reacquainted ourselves with airport seating.

The insurers found a flight with EasyJet (including three seats for me) but it was the next day, at 2110, to Gatwick. They would arrange onward transport to Stansted, where Julie and Aidan had left their car. We accepted but opted to be taken straight to Hadleigh (where Julie and Aidan live) because it would be so late. They also booked us in to a Holiday Inn (with a specially adapted room for me) where the three of us could relax and catch up on a lot of lost sleep.

We enjoyed lunch, dinner, breakfast and lunch and I was allowed to keep my room until 2pm. Bizarrely, the hotel had received the insurer's confirmation that they would pay for J&A's room but not mine so I had pay and claim back. (Before credit cards, did we all take wads of cash abroad for problems like this?)

At the airport, all went smoothly and the cabin crew could not have been more helpful. At Gatwick, we had to wait ages for a special wheelchair to be brought before completing the usual formalities and then found there was no transport waiting for us. We had to find, and pay for, our own, wide enough for me to stretch my leg fully across the seats. Hadleigh at 4am. It could be a year before my leg returns to full function and I shall certainly not be back home in Bexley this year. In the meantime, my daughter Sue is running a weekly courier service between Herne Bay, Bexley and Hadleigh and my son Tony has accepted responsibility for my house.

**Kent LDWA members will be pleased to know that Andrew, who is one of the longest serving members in the group (his membership number is 85), is making a good recovery, but is still wearing a leg brace. While he is regaining his fitness, he would love to hear from any of his many friends in the group. We look forward to seeing you on a walk soon, Andrew. Latest news is that Andrew is now back at his home address.**



**The Kent LDWA party in France.**

#### **SUMMER FRENCH CHALLENGE: July 6 By Graham Smith**

WE had another delightful day on the annual Summer French Challenge. I must have been leading a walk in France of some description for at least 25 years now, and it never seems to disappoint. We started, of course, several years ago with the Channel Cliffs Challenge, meeting at the then Dover Hoverport at 5am, walking to Folkestone, taking the SeaCat to Boulogne and then walking along the coast to Calais: a total of about 40 miles. But those walks came to a halt when the SeaCats stopped operating. Then, for a few years, we would take the ferry to Calais, then a train to Boulogne, and just walk back along the coast. But then P&O Ferries started making it a bit more difficult by putting restrictions on the times by which foot passengers could travel – so those walks came to a halt as well.

Then we hit on the idea (and I think it was Eric Rolfe who actually suggested it) for the current format: take cars over to Calais, drive to Coquelles, leaving the vehicles at the Auchan hypermarket, doing the walk, doing some shopping at Auchan and then having a meal in Calais before getting the ferry back.

So that's the formula we've followed for the last few years, and it seems to work well, and its popularity seems to be spreading. Last year we had four members of Essex & Herts LDWA join us, and this year we had two friends from Beds, Bucks Northants Group: Dee and Phil Brockway.

So there were nine of us, and we took the 7.25am ferry to Calais, having breakfast on board (a few of us did that in the Club class, as we had paid a supplement which included champagne – and very nice it was too!) Then we drove to Coquelles from Calais, parked the cars at Auchan and followed our usual route through the village to pick up the good track which took us to the village of Peuplingues. Then we followed the road (by far the worst bit of the walk) to Escalles, where the four newbies on the French



challenge – Dee and Phil, Ray Martin and Marie Kelly – posed for a photo in the small bus shelter there (see picture above): something of a tradition on this walk.

We then walked towards Mont de Couple. Marie, who had not walked that distance before and had not had much to eat so she was suffering in the heat, decided to stop, making her way to the nearby village of Wissant and getting a bus to Calais. The remaining eight pressed on to Mont de Couple – which at 164m (524ft) is a great viewpoint, offering a fine panorama over the Nord Pas de Calais area – and had our lunch by the toposcope. Then we walked on to Wissant, where we had a beer (or two!). Sadly, Sarah decided to stop here, as she was carrying an ankle injury which was nagging her. She got a bus (costing just one Euro) to Calais, and arranged to meet us for a meal later.

So then there were seven of us. We then had what for me is always the best part of the walk – a couple of miles along the lovely firm sandy beach, which myself and a couple of others chose to do barefoot so we could have a refreshing paddle. Then it was up onto the cliffs before a long, laborious ascent of Cap Blanc Nez – at 134m (439ft) another great spot, offering fine views across the Channel to the White Cliffs. After a quick stop by the memorial to the Dover Patrol, we descended and followed good, straight tracks back to Coquelles, where we did some shopping before driving to Calais. We met Sarah at the Au Dieux Forneau restaurant for an excellent meal – as she said, it was ‘top fab French nosh’ – which we had asked to be served swiftly, as we had our 9.55pm ferry to catch. The restaurant staff said they would do their best, and they certainly did. We were all very impressed.

So then it was a short drive to the ferry terminal for crossing back to Blighty and the end of another fine French adventure. We have already had inquiries about next year’s Summer French Challenge (one of them from a certain David Morgan from South Wales) which has been set for Saturday July 4.



#### **BOUGH BEECH BRISK June 30 By David Thornton**

BEING the first walk I led for the group, I felt it would be nice to put a small piece together to remember the day ... and quite an eventful day it turned out to be. Needless to say, I was little apprehensive. Would I oversleep? Would the weather be kind? Would I remember the route? Would anyone turn up? The latter surely the greatest fear for any leader of a social walk, particularly when it’s your first.

So I arrived super early at Hildenborough Railway Station, to make sure I was set, organised and ready to go, well before the planned 9am start. Feeling rather peckish and thirsty, I jumped out of my car, went round the back, opened the boot ... no rucksack. NO RUCK SACK! A text followed shortly after from my daughter “Dad, is this rucksack loaded with your breakfast, lunch, water and walking gear meant to be on the sofa??” Luckily, I had at least remembered my walking boots and map, so a complete disaster was averted. I marched towards the railway platform and proceeded to relieve the vending machine of most of its supply of KitKats, set to constitute my diet for the day!

Thirteen walkers turned up - not an omen, I hoped. There were representatives from Kent, London, Surrey and Sussex groups, along with Chris, who was a first timer, so a really good spread of people. Absent of rucksack and so feeling a little under dressed for the occasion, off we set, with Geoff from Sussex kindly carrying some of his additional water for me and Michael Headley carrying my map. The morning route took us through the lovely village of Leigh, past Hall Place, then Charcott, before a group photo was then taken when we reached Bough Beech Reservoir. Shortly after Bough Beech village and in a show of unwavering solidarity towards our Walks Secretary, Peter Jull, I chose a wrong turning, which was very quickly corrected by a sharp u-turn. You should have been there, Peter. You would have been proud of me. I did it for you. Regrettably, it meant that my unblemished record lasted all of three hours and seven minutes.

The next hurdle was lunch stop at the Four Elms Inn at Four Elms. I had recced this route three times, with the third one only the week before, during which I had warned the pub that a “number” of people may be requiring refreshments on the day, but that

quantities were difficult to predict. I fatally didn't phone the same pub the day before to remind them of that conversation. As a result we were met by a landlord who, judging by his below par attitude towards us, had evidently got out of bed the wrong side that morning, exacerbated by the fact that two members of his staff hadn't managed to get out of bed at all! There was no food available, or if it was available it couldn't be made and certainly wasn't on offer to us, not even a sandwich ... on a day when I forgot my rucksack. I should have bought more KitKats! Pawan Nandrajog and Cliff Gray kindly offered to walk half a mile down the road to a garden centre to buy something for those of us that needed food, which was much appreciated. Meanwhile, at the pub we enjoyed a drink and the company of Brian and Brenda Buttifant. It's always a lovely bonus to see them. We then headed off for our shorter afternoon stint, which skirted the northern end of the reservoir back towards Hildenborough, via Bore Place, which is a local educational farm. It was while walking through Bore Place that we seemed to acquire a brown Labrador. "It's OK" piped up Michael Headley "I'm sure the dog is local and knows what it's doing" Indeed it did, as half a mile later it seemed that the dog was determined to join our group for the remainder of the afternoon. Having stopped to phone the number on the collar, without success, followed by further chin rubbing, I decided to escort the dog back to Bore Place, by means of brisk jog, there and back, before continuing with my duty of navigating the group back to Hildenborough station. So capped off a day which I hope everyone enjoyed as much as I did. It genuinely was a privilege for me to lead a group of walkers like that and I look forward to putting on many more social walks for the Kent group in the future.



Two pictures from the Snowdonia adventure – see inside back cover for more.

## **GREAT WALK IN WALES (OR HOW THE WELSH 3,000s BECAME THE THREE PEAKS WALK FOR TWO AND THE TWO PEAKS WALK FOR FIVE)**

OH well, the best laid plans ...

Earlier this year, I started organising a Kent trip to Snowdonia to have a go at the Welsh 3,000s challenge – a very, very tough walk which involves going up all the mountains in Wales of more than 3,000 feet (all in Snowdonia, of course). This was a challenge I completed with Mike Pursey back in 2001, and I was keen to do it again.

The Welsh 3,000s challenge involves something like 14,000 feet of ascent (depending on the route taken), with three major climbs and 12 not so major ones to ascend all the mountains. The mountains are:

Snowdon - Crib Goch (3028 ft), Garnedd Ugain (3494 ft) Snowdon (3559 ft).

Glyderau - Elidir Fawr (3031 ft), Y Garn (3106 ft), Glyder Fawr (3284 ft), Glyder Fach (3261 ft), Tryfan (3011 ft).

Carneddau - Pen yr Ole Wen (3208 ft), Carnedd Dafydd (3425 ft), Carnedd Llewelyn (3490 ft), Yr Elen (3156 ft), Foel Grach (3202 ft), Carnedd Gwennllian (3038 ft), Foel-fras (3090 ft).

I reckoned some of my Kent LDWA colleagues would be keen on the challenge, so I put a story in the December newsletter, asking if anyone was interested, and I had a very good response, with nine members from the group signing up. There was also interest from a few members of South Wales LDWA.

So the date was set for July 20, and I booked a mini-bus to take us from our base, Bethesda, to the start at Pen-y-Pass, at 5am, with people making their own accommodation arrangements. David Morgan and Jason Winney from South Wales, who were familiar with some of the route, were very helpful, advising us to go over Crib Goch – which is a knife-edge ridge – first for safety reasons. Helen Franklin had been able to make a GPS version of the route.

So, come the night of July 19, we were ready. David Morgan had pulled out for personal reasons, but Jason was there, with Kent LDWA members Helen, Dave Sheldrake, Dave Thornton, Stephanie Le Men, Marshall Elliott, Alzbeta – usually known as Bet - Benn, Jenny Austin, Courtney Harris and yours truly.

But what we hadn't factored in was the weather. The forecast was for rain in the morning which would clear, so we were aware that we might have to forget going over Crib Goch in the rain, but we were confident that we would be able to complete the rest of the walk. So we all went to our various beds on the Friday night – and that was when the heavy rain started. It was so heavy it meant most of us had difficulty sleeping, and poor Jason didn't get any sleep. When my alarm – aka Dave Sheldrake saying "Graham, are you awake?" – sounded at 3.50am the following morning, I had already received a text from Jason, saying he had not slept at all, so he was pulling out.

When we got up, the rain had actually stopped, and it was still dry when we met the mini-bus at 5.30am to be taken to Pen-y-Pass. But it started again just as we started our ascent of Snowdon, via the Pyg Track, and it was heavy and persistent, making Crib Goch, and nearby Garnedd Ugain, out of the question. Of course, it wasn't long before we were in cloud, with little visibility. By the time we got to the summit ridge, visibility was just a few yards – and I couldn't even see which end of the summit ridge the actual top was. We were all very, very wet, cold, and a bit miserable.



Dave Sheldrake, who is reasonably familiar with Snowdon, was a great help here, navigating us to the summit and then off it. Despite one false mistake when we took an incorrect path to descend, he soon navigated us to the Llanberis Path for our descent. As we headed down, we got out of the cloud and the rain lifted, although there was no sign of any sun. The Llanberis Path was very pleasant, and when we got to the bottom, I asked what people wanted to do, as the weather forecast said the rain would clear at 11am-noon, although there were still likely to be some showers. Jenny and Courtney felt they had had enough, so they decided to stop and make their own way back to the hostel where they were staying – and nobody could blame them. But everyone else was for carrying on, putting our trust in the weather forecast.

Well, in the light of the next events, that probably wasn't too wise, but of course it is easy to be wise in hindsight. So we remaining seven moved on for the ascent of the next big hill - Elidir Fawr (which, with its sweeping views across to Anglesey, was my favourite of them all when I had last done this walk). The problem was, although the rain had eased and it was generally dry, we still had to contend with low cloud – and that, of course, makes navigation so difficult when hill walking, because you just can't see where you are going. We took what we thought was the correct route up Elidir Fawr, but it wasn't long before we appeared to run out of path. We had obviously missed the main path, and it looked like we were going to have to drag ourselves up the steep, very boggy hillside to the ridge connecting Elidir Fawr with the next major hill, Y Garn. Progress was laborious, difficult and very slow. When we were about 50 yards from the ridge, we decided to stop for lunch – and that's where we also decided to call it a day, figuring there was no way we would complete the rest of the hills in the daylight hours.

So, after our lunch, we ploughed on up that steep, boggy hillside to reach that connecting ridge – which happened to be very pleasant. Stephanie and Marshall made a slight diversion to the sub top of Foel-Goch, later joining us to reach Y Garn. As Marshall, said it was a three peaks walk for him and Stephanie (and a two peaks walk for the rest of us). It was dry by then, but there was still plenty of cloud on the summit of Y Garn, so we couldn't see anything.

We descended to the small pond of Llyn Cwn, and then made our main descent off the mountains. This was via the Devil's Kitchen route, a long, rocky and very steep path which involves great care. As we descended, the weather was improving all the time (not that anybody wanted to carry on with our planned walk) and by the time we reached the delightful pond of Llyn Idwal at the bottom, the sun was out and we were enjoying by far the best conditions of the day. We then had a short descent to Llyn Ogwen, where we met Marshall's wife Susan, his daughter Sophie, and lovely border collie Meg. Susan had provided tea and coffee, fruit pies and bananas for us, for which we were very grateful.

So we had still had a great day on the hills in Snowdonia, albeit not the walk we had planned. To be honest, it was a mistake to put so much faith in the weather forecast – but we had all come a long way, and we wanted to complete what is a classic trek. We should probably have abandoned plans to do the whole walk right at the start, and opted instead for a Plan B. But that's hindsight, isn't it?

But those wonderful Welsh mountains won't go away, and as Helen suggested, it is probably better to walk up all 15 peaks in three separate walks, so they can be enjoyed properly. So that may be a Kent LDWA project for next year. Watch this space.



Pictures from David Thornton's South Downs Way walk.

#### **SOUTH DOWNS WAY April 19-22 By David Thornton**

SOME months after I joined the LDWA in January 2015, I stumbled across a documentary on BBC4 entitled 'South Downs: England's Mountains Green'. It is narrated by a gentleman called Peter Owen-Jones, who moved from Cambridgeshire to the foot of the South Downs in 2005 to become Parish Priest of Glynde, West Firle and Beddingham. I have watched it on a number of occasions since, always resulting in an urge to put on my boots, grab a map, walk and explore. It took another two years until, in February 2017, I finally bashed down any remaining barriers before completing The Ridgeway, my first National Trail, and now here I was in April 2019, attempting my tenth, the South Downs Way.

Peter Owen-Jones took the journey from east to west, so I decided to do the same, but not for this reason alone. The Kent Group have an annual social walk on Good Friday going from the very foot of the South Downs Way where it starts in Eastbourne, so I decided it would be a nice idea to join the group that morning, enjoy half a social walk and then march on west after our stop at Firle Beacon. The weather that day and throughout the four day journey was amazing, possibly the best I've ever had, as we all walked along the iconic Seven Sisters, before turning inland along the Cuckmere Valley and then west again towards Firle Beacon.

There, we all stopped for a spot of lunch, before I bid farewell, as the group returned east towards Alfriston and eventually back to Eastbourne.

It's strange how, when you start walking alone, you suddenly became very much more aware of everything around you. The almost endless outstanding views, the swathes of other people out enjoying themselves on the day, with those acknowledged nods of the head and an "afternoon" to go with it. And then there were the skylarks, constantly performing their merry tune, often so high up you can never make them out, but always cheerful on the ear. Having dropped down into the Ouse Valley to Southease, before climbing back up to the main ridge, some of which I recognised from our Lewes Loop social walk, I eventually headed down to my first stop, the Newmarket Inn, about three miles outside Lewes, and right on the path itself. It was a perfect location and a comfortable enough overnight stay. It had been an early start and a hot day and it was no wonder, after 23 miles, that I crashed out on the bed at 8.30pm and woke up at 4am, fully clothed, lights on and TV still flickering away!

The temperature on Saturday was set to reach 25 degrees, with clear blue skies and a gentle easterly breeze. For about 10 miles I slowly climbed up to Ditchling Beacon and then onto Devil's Dyke as I skirted Brighton and Hove. During this time I was quite taken aback by the sheer volume of people out and about. Granted it was the Easter weekend and the weather was glorious, but nevertheless, I have never seen so many people, either walking or cycling or simply taking a stroll up to either of these outstanding viewing points, before settling on the grass for a picnic and/or a well earned nap. This Saturday I travelled 25 miles, until I eventually took a steep drop down a mile and a half off the path, into Storrington for an overnight stay at the White Horse. Being the Easter weekend, accommodation throughout the walk was difficult to locate and was rather expensive, despite the fact that I planned everything many weeks in advance. There were, of course, the options of camping or youth hostelling, the former of which I prefer not to do and the youth hostels were never quite located where I needed them in order to complete the 100 miles in four days, despite being quite plentiful. However, whilst a little pricey, the White Horse was very pleasant.

Day three was my longest at 30 miles, with an additional three miles to get me back on and then off the main path. I don't mind the high mileage, but what I do really dislike is having to rush. Very occasionally, in the past I have been in a position where I've needed to walk faster than I would like, sometimes even jog in parts and it completely quashes any enjoyment you might have got from your day. Therefore, I left Storrington at 5.45 that very chilly Sunday morning, for a very steep walk up to the path, before heading onwards west. Being such a crisp and clear start, after five miles I had the pleasure of some amazing views down into Amberley and the river Arun, with Amberley castle on my right and far reaching views towards Arundel on my left along with its castle too. I happened to stop at the top of the hill before dropping down, to have a chat with a small group of cyclists who had camped on the top and were just waking up to these same views. I learned that these guys were just about to start their fourth and last day, having already cycled from Winchester to Eastbourne and were now heading back ... 200 miles in four days!! And I thought we were a bit bonkers in the LDWA! Anyway, after some additional idle chit chat, whilst staring out across the mist down below in the valley, the general consensus among us all was that it really doesn't get much better.

The temperature reached 27 degrees on that Sunday, so I was glad to get at least 12 miles done before the early morning chill was brushed aside by the heat of the day. One of the issues with the South Downs Way when it opened in 1972 was that there is little or no natural drinking water to access. However, it is clear that the patrons of this trail have recognised this and have therefore had the foresight to install mains drinking water taps at fairly regular intervals, which, on weekends like this, were much appreciated and absolutely essential. Not only this, but they also advertise the mileage to the next tap both east and west, so you know exactly where your next watering hole will be. Without these, I dare say the South Downs Way would be rather more difficult to complete during the warm summer months. As I worked my way towards Beacon Hill, skirting South Harting and Buriton and then through the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, I had a final climb up Butser Hill, before eventually dropping down for a very nice overnight stay at the Rising Sun in Clanfield.

With just 21 miles to do on my last day, I was up and out on the trail by 7am, in the hope I could catch an earlier train back to Eastbourne that afternoon. You would think that having walked what many would consider to be the signature section of the South Downs Way up to this point, that the rest might be a little dull. The Meon Valley section, which I walked through for the first time when I did the Wayfarers Way back in January, is anything but dull. It is just beautiful rolling countryside, as you go through the lovely village of Exton and onwards into Winchester, the final destination. From here I caught the south coast train back changing at Eastleigh, Fareham and Brighton before eventually arriving at Eastbourne, where I'd left my car on the Friday morning.

The company I work for today, selling fork lift trucks, I joined in 1988. Back then they gave me a patch which included East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire. For nearly 32 years I have travelled on the A22, A23, A24, A27, A29, A32, A3, M3 and A272, driving through, along, up, over and even under the South Downs, always looking around in slight wonderment at everything surrounding me. You should have seen the smile my face when I travelled down to Bognor Regis to see one of my customers the week after Easter, looking around in the knowledge that I've finally been up there looking down. It was an overwhelming feeling of fulfilment. The South Downs Way, England's Mountains Green ... a wonderful four days of sunshine, scenery and skylarks.

**Right: the Payday at Snowdown Colliery statue in Aylesham, and the party by the Waiting Miner statue at Betteshanger.**





**THE THREE PITS WALK (or how a walk looking at some of Kent's industrial heritage became a tour of Northbourne church): August 26 By Graham Smith**

TAKING place on the Monday of the hottest August bank holiday weekend on record, and with temperatures soaring to 27-28 degrees, it soon became apparent that most of the 21 people who started this walk were not very interested in visiting the sites of three of the Kent coal mines. It was hot-hot-hot, and they wanted to finish (some of them didn't).

This was a White Cliffs Walking Festival walk, which attracts a mixture of ramblers wanting a longer walk than they may be used to, and Kent LDWA regulars. For these joint walks, I always adjust my pace accordingly.

When we set off from Northbourne village car park, it was 9.30am, and the sun was not yet fully up. And quite a bit of the first few miles of the walk are in some shade anyway, so all of us were fairly comfortable as we passed the site of our first pit, Tilmanstone. But then we had a couple of miles along the road to visit the site of Snowdown pit. There were no trees to shade us, the sun was getting stronger, and when we reached the fascinating Payday at Snowdown Colliery statue in Aylesham, some of us were really feeling the heat. So when we reached the lunch stop at Goodnestone (11 miles in), four people told me they did not wish to continue, and I didn't blame them. I had foreseen something like this might happen, so I had arranged with Dale Moorhouse to meet us there to drive anyone who had had enough back to Northbourne. The four included Rosie Hall, who had agreed to be back marker.

So, refreshed after an hour at the Fitzwalter Arms, we remaining 17 plodded on, with Stuart Goodsell taking over back marker duties. There is very little shade on the route between Goodnestone and Eastry, and by the time we reached the latter, another walker said he had had enough. So I telephoned Dale, who drove to Eastry to pick him up. Most of the rest of us went into the Five Bells - a very good walker friendly pub - for more beers, some of us having ice creams as well (the plan had been to buy ice creams at a village shop, but both of these were closed).

And then there were 16, so we plodded on to Finglesham to cross the Deal-Sandwich A258 Road to see the Waiting Miner statue. I gave my usual spiel about the statue (how it started life in Yorkshire, before moving to Richborough Power Station and then Dover seafront before being moved to the site of Betteshanger, the last Kent pit to close), but people were not interested (most of them had heard it before anyway). They wanted to get back to the cars at Northbourne, which were now a mile away.

So after the usual photocall, we were off, passing the former pit village of Betteshanger - where the Kent Miners Festival (and how appropriate it was that the Three Pits Walk should be held on that day) was being held. Unfortunately, all we saw were the tents being packed up outside Betteshanger Social Club.

Soon we were back at Northbourne - and had a very nice surprise. The Northbourne church wardens had had a church open day, with tea and cake available in a bungalow in the churchyard. I had been contacted before the walk to ask if walkers would like to have tea and cake at the end of the walk, and of course I said yes. But I did not realise the good church wardens would wait more than an hour longer than I had predicted for the weary walkers to return. But they had waited, and not only supplied us with much needed tea and cake, one of the wardens, Brian Semple, offered to give those of us who were interested a tour of the church tower. Five of us took Brian up on his kind offer and we were able to see the church bells at close hand, and to admire the excellent views from the church balcony. Now that doesn't happen at the end of every walk!

Well done for completing the walk in such hot conditions, everyone. And sincere thanks to Dale for transporting those who had had enough back to Northbourne, and to Brian and the other church wardens for their kindness and hospitality.



**Pictures from Geoff's Coast to Coast trip.**

**COAST TO COAST WALK (devised by Alfred Wainwright)**

**By Geoff Thorpe**

SEVEN of us completed this classic walk, on a trip organised by HF Holidays, in July. We were: Ugar - a marathon runner; his wife Cloudia - a GP; Jo - a fit walker; Alison - who talked throughout; Giles - my walking partner of 23 years; Jim; our leader who had walked the C to C innumerable times but not for 12 years and had forgotten a lot of it; and myself.

**Day 1: St Bees Bay to Ennerdale Bridge:**

It started with a paddle in the Irish Sea for photographs, then a cliff top walk to Sandwith. Open farmland followed this with a lunchtime break at Stanley.

Afterwards we continued along a disused railway line to Cleator. Then our first hiccup. The route through the forest at Dent was closed by barbed wire due to logging. This meant a 2.5 mile detour to pass Flat Fell and enter the Nannycatch valley to the Shepherds Arms for beer, food and sleep.

**Day 2: Ennerdale Bridge to Seatoller:**

9am start to Ennerdale Water. There were quite a few rock falls along the southern shore, resulting in scrambling up and down to circumvent fallen rocks and boulders. At the end of the lake an amazing field of orchids! We decided to walk through the forest on

the main route avoiding Red Pike and Haystacks (hills where Wainwright's ashes are scattered) and had lunch at the Black Sail Hut youth hostel. Sufficiently refreshed, we had our first very steep climb – more than 1,200 feet to Grey Notts. This is a fascinating area with slate mine workings everywhere and a visitors centre at Honister Pass (tea and ice creams). A quick descent down Hause Valley to the pick-up point at Seatoller car park.

#### **Day 3: Seatoller to Grasmere:**

Leaving the car park, we followed the River Derwent which was great fun in one part, holding onto chains around a rocky cliff face! The next village was Rosthwaite, before a long climb up the ridge below High Raise (2,500ft.) From here the group headed east to Calf Crag and Helm Crag, descending to a hotel at Grasmere at the day's end.

#### **Day 4: Grasmere to Patterdale:**

Leaving the village, we gently warmed up on country lanes and then climbed Grisedale Tarn (1,800ft.) We all felt good at this point and decided to climb an extra 1,000 ft over St Sunday Crag (2,650ft) This ended in a very steep descent to Patterdale (pole required) Again, I like the way that we finished at a hostelry every day!

#### **Day 5: Patterdale to Shap:**

After breakfast, a long climb from Patterdale to The Knott (2,450ft) and then onto Kidsty Pike (2560 ft) before a pleasant descent to Haweswater. On the map this looked an easy walk along the northern shore of the lake, but it was constantly bumpy and rocky, nothing flat, making it a tough walk. We were now out of the Lake District and into the Dales. It was a little flatter as we headed east. We enjoyed looking around the abbey at Shap before our pick-up in Shap High Street.

#### **Day 6: Shap to Kirkby Stephen:**

A long day of 22 miles crossing the M6 and onto the moorland region of the Dales with compass readings required. We skirted Orton and into Sunbiggin before crossing a lot of fells to reach the disused railway line, viaduct and pack horse bridge at Smardale for a late lunch. This spot was so picturesque! One more push across Smardale Fell to our B & B in Kirkby Stephen. Here, we had all our washing laundered, dried and folded for a fiver!

#### **Day 7: Kirkby Stephen to Keld:**

After breakfast, a steady climb through stone quarries to the famous Nine Standards at 2,165ft. This monument of nine pillars was useful in protecting us from very strong winds before descending through the peat bogs to Ravenseat. The route notes said to allow 3-4 hours for this, but it was so dry, it took half an hour - it was like walking on a mattress! Then came my biggest disappointment of the trip; Ravenseat was deserted, no Amanda Owen or her family or cream teas! At this point HF Holidays, our organisers, have invested £15,000 in repairing the next section to Stonesdale. So down into Keld, the halfway point and a consoling pint.

#### **Day 8: Keld to Reeth:**

The day of the lead mines. I had no idea there were so many! Most of the day we walked through spoil heaps and mining ruins, climbing steeply up and down through becks and gills across the moors to the sheep and cattle farms of Reeth. A beautiful village built around a large rectangular village green.

#### **Day 9: Reeth to Richmond:**

Along the River Swale to Marrick Priory to climb to Marske, followed by a descent and climb onto the Applegarth Ridge. We met, yet again, groups of students on the Duke of Edinburgh Award. It was so encouraging to see these young people out using the C to C trail to get their awards. After the ridge and descent, it was into Richmond. This old medieval town is built around a huge square, making it one of the most delightful towns in the UK.

#### **Day 10: Richmond to Danby Wiske:**

The group spent the day walking along the Swale river valley and under the A1 to Bolton-on-Swale church. Here we made our own tea and coffee, helped ourselves to biscuits, plus use of the toilets, all for a donation in the box. This happened several times on our route, which shows that people think of us walkers as an honest bunch. We continued on our way across rural flat farmland to Danby Wiske. Here, at 3pm, the pub was closed but other walkers said we hadn't missed much as the landlord was a bit grumpy.

#### **Day 11: Danby Wiske to Carlton Bank:**

The days were getting hotter and hotter, 27 degrees but I wouldn't carry any more than two litres because of the weight. We stopped at the Inn in Ingleby Arncliffe to top up on fluids. Then on to the Cleveland Way. The next section involved three very hard climbs and descents in the heat of the day, to our collection point at Carlton Bank. I found this the hardest day.

#### **Day 12: Carlton Bank to Little Blakey:**

We climbed and descended the Cleveland Hills to Garfit Gap where we encountered a difficult scramble up a rock face. People with a full pack said it was near impossible. After this, we followed the disused mining railway line from Bloworth Crossing to Little Blakey (this section of six miles is the most uninspiring).

#### **Day 13: Little Blakey to Grosmont:**

We were confident now. The walk started at a height of 1,300ft and continued at this contour across Glaisdale Moor to the village, but it was unheard of to walk across the North York Moors at 28 degrees with no wind or shade. Exhausted, we all lay stretched out under an oak tree during lunchtime, then down the hill for cold drinks at Glaisdale Post Office. The afternoon was a lot better with shade along the River Esk valley to Grosmont. A wonderful spot to stop, watching the steam trains of the North York Moors Railway.

#### **Day 14: Grosmont to Robin Hood's Bay:**

It was actually raining! But soon stopped. Up across Sleights Moor to Little Beck and south along the wooded valley of May Beck. Swinging north east, we crossed Sneaton Low Moor which is renowned for being a deep swamp, but it was just muddy! A final piece of compass work followed to cross Greystone Hill down to Hawsker and the caravan park cafe for afternoon tea. Refreshed, it was the cliff top walk into Robin Hood's Bay and North Sea Beach. The tide was out, so it was a walk to the sea for a paddle and throwing our Irish Sea pebbles into the water. Back to the quayside Inn to sign the C to C register at the trail's end.

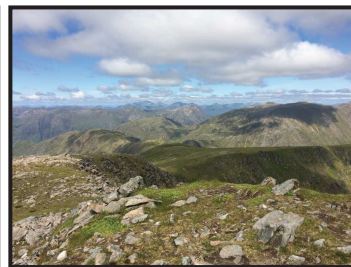
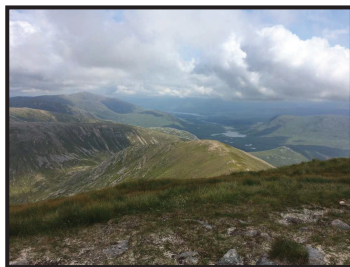
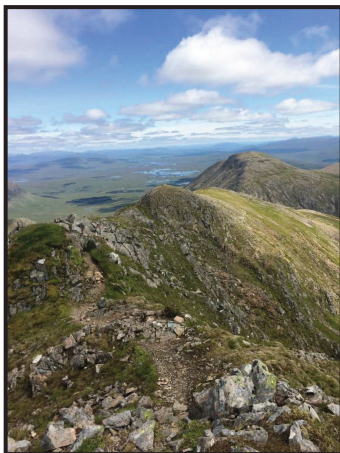
I did the walk primarily to celebrate my 76th birthday and to raise funds for Ellenor, the Gravesend hospice for babies and toddlers. Ellenor supported my family (Nicola my daughter and husband Damian), during the nine weeks of my granddaughter Catherine's short life. Catherine died of the genetic disorder Edwards Syndrome. My walk was able to raise £2,300.

The average ascent was about 2,000ft per day, i.e. 28,000ft in total. So it's like walking to the top of Everest and back in 200 miles.



The C to C is not a National Trail (few signposts); people come from North America, Australasia, all over Europe and the Far East - they think it **is** a National Trail!

Thanks to LDWA training, my feet were as good at the end as at the start and I got told off - 'Slow it down its a team effort!'. I had some brilliant breakfasts - Whitby kippers and poached eggs!



**Pictures from Graham's Scotland trip in July.**

### **POSTCARD FROM SCOTLAND By Graham Smith**

THIS year's annual hillwalking trip north of the border was a fairly short one again – a week, with just six days' walking, but it was still very enjoyable, and I managed to climb five Munros. I haven't done an accurate count for a long while but I know I have got about 40 to go until I have done all 283 – so there are a fair few still to do.

My base this year was Glencoe, from where I planned to climb some of the hills in adjacent Glen Etive, and I also planned to climb the only Munro in Glencoe I hadn't been up and the highest of them all in that area - Bidean nam Bian (3773ft) and its neighbouring Stob Coire Sgreamhach (3517ft). More of that later.

On Wednesday July 10 I left home just after 8am and crossed the border into Scotland at 4.30pm. I usually stop at Annan, a few miles from the border, but as I was making good time, I drove on to Moffat – about 30 miles from the border – and stayed in the excellent Camping and Caravan Club site, where I have stayed many times before. The next day I drove on to Glencoe, getting there at lunchtime, and stayed at the equally excellent CCC site near the village. I had a short walk on the hillside just behind the camp site, visited the very good visitor centre (which is free), and generally relaxed before my first day of hillwalking.

#### **Friday July 12**

I had decided that my first hill would be Beinn nan Aighenan (3150ft and pronounced byn yan yannan). This is pretty remote, and is between two others I planned to do later, Ben Starav (3573ft and pronounced byn sta-rav) and Glas Bheinn Mhor (3271ft and pronounced glas vyn voar). One of the Munro guide books, by Cameron McNeish, recommends doing all three together, but I find it usually takes me a good couple of days to find my hillwalking legs and start to build up some kind of hill fitness, so I felt it best to climb one Munro to start with. And I have to say it was a pretty tiring day. As Beinn nan Aighenan is such a remote hill, it involves a long, quite laborious walkout, with a lengthy, steepening climb to a bealach (a pass between mountains). At one stage I had a funny five minutes (well, a funny 40 minutes actually) where for some reason I felt I was on the wrong path, so I dropped down, crossed a burn and began to climb the steep hillside to a ridge. This was very laborious, and after climbing for a good 20 minutes, I got a clear view of my intended direction, and realised I had gone wrong. So I went down again and picked up my former path. It's the sort of thing which often seems to happen at the start of a Scottish walking trip, when I am beginning to familiarise myself with the surroundings and the hills. So I carried on to the bealach, and then had a stiff, steep climb to the summit of Beinn nan Aighenan. At the top, the clouds came in immediately, so there was no reason to stop. So I turned round, dropped down and then up again to the bealach, and had a long walk back to my car. It had been a long, tiring day.

#### **Saturday July 13**

I was feeling pretty tired from the previous day's efforts (yes, I must be getting old) so I decided not to do a hillwalk, and instead do what I called the Lairig Loop, parking the car in a car park in Glencoe and walking down the Lairig Eilde to Glen Etive and then taking the Lairig Gartain back to Glencoe. Well, I had an interesting half a walk. As my main pair of walking shoes were a bit wet from the previous day, I wore another, much older and quite battered, pair which I had brought with me. I had a very enjoyable walk along the Lairig Eilde to Glen Etive. I then turned round, found the start of the Lairig Gartain and started to walk along it back to Glencoe – when I suddenly realised just how battered my shoes were, when the sole came off the left one. I tied my shirt (I didn't have any rope) around my shoe to stop it flapping, and put on a sweatshirt I had in my rucksack. I shuffled along the road and stuck out my thumb in the hope someone would stop and give me a lift. Luckily, someone did, after a couple of minutes – a very nice couple who had been to Glen Etive with their daughter. They took me right back to the car park. And regarding my footwear, all I can say is that it was a lesson learned ...

#### **Sunday July 14**

This turned out to be a wonderful day. I had decided to climb Stob a' Choire Odhair (3100ft and pronounced stob a kora oer) and Stob Ghabhar (3576ft and pronounced stop gower), involving a drive of a good 30 miles from Glencoe to Loch Tulla, near Bridge of Orchy. I had a fairly long walk-in, following a burn, before heading north-east to the sub top of Beinn Toaig. This was a good, steady climb, and was followed by a nice zig-zag path to the top of Stob a' Choire Odhair. I then had to drop down to a bealach to re-ascend for Stob Ghabhar. This involved a fairly steep scramble on some scree, which was not pleasant and very tiring. It brings you to a ridge called the Aonach Eagach (not to be confused with the more famous Aonach Eagach in Glencoe). I found this Aonach Eagach very pleasant – a little exposed in places but with no difficulties. It leads to the broad ridge of Stob Ghabhar – where I was rewarded with marvellous 360 degree views. The views were better than on Stob a' Choire Odhair because Stob Ghabhar is 476ft higher than its neighbour. I just sat, had my lunch and gazed all around me in sheer wonder at a view encompassing nothing but other hills, lochs, and that lovely blue sky. Words really can't do it justice. Then it was a nice path from

the summit to a steep section, following a burn, which eventually brought me back to the outward route. It was the sort of day when I realise why I love Scotland so much.

### **Monday July 15**

My plan had been to climb two more Glen Etive Munros – Stob Coir' an Albannaich (3425ft and pronounced stop kor an alapaneech) and Meall nan Eun (3045ft and pronounced myowl nan ayn). Well, I started the walk, but I think it's fair to say that I bottled it really. Following the route described in the Munro guide produced by the Scottish Mountaineering Club, this involves a very steep ascent through a gully, which is reached via woodland after going through a gate. Basically, I missed the gate and followed the track I was on to a burn, where I turned south-east. It was a good path, and I could see lots of bootprints. It gradually dawned on me that I was doing the route in reverse. I should have really carried on, but bearing in mind it was hot, and I had two demanding days of walking ahead of me, I decided to turn round, go back to my car, return to the camp site and spent the afternoon relaxing. As I went back, I found the gate I had missed, and could see just how steep that gully is. So I was glad I had missed it in the first place. I guess I don't like admitting my weakness like this, but I have to say that now I am getting older, climbing the Scottish hills takes a bit more out of me in my sixties than it did when I was in my forties and fifties. Anyway, I had a very relaxing afternoon in the camp site.

### **Tuesday July 16**

Another marvellous day, the best of the trip, where I climbed Ben Starav and Glas Bheinn Mhor. As I drove down Glen Etive, it was dry but certainly cloudier than it had been for the past few days, and there was some cloud on the summit of Ben Starav. I had been really looking forward to this walk. Ben Starav involves an unrelenting climb to the summit, but I didn't find it too steep. I took it steadily, and by now I was certainly getting my hillwalking legs, and I was getting fitter. I got into cloud at about 2,000ft but I was on a good path, which re-assured me I was going in the right direction. A main problem with walking in the cloud – apart from sheer lack of visibility – is you tend to get lots of false summits, where you think (and hope) you are near the top, but when you get there, you then see the next summit in front of you. So I just ploughed on, by now on rocks which often involved using hands as well as feet to make progress. But at last I reached the summit cairn. It was still very cloudy, so I didn't stay long. I took a good path round to a knife-edge ridge (a little exposed in places, but with no difficulties), and as I began to descend out of the cloud, so the scenery around me was starting to be revealed. The ridge brought me to the same bealach I had visited on Friday, when I climbed Beinn nan Aighenan, then it was a drop and a short, steady climb to the top of Glas Bheinn Mhor. I didn't get a 360 degree view, as there was still a bit of cloud on the summit of Ben Starav behind me. But in front, and to my left and right, the view was just ... majestic. I had my lunch and stayed for a while, drinking it all in, before taking a good track from the summit round to the headwater of the burn Allt Mheuran, which I followed until I could pick up my outward route.

### **Wednesday July 17**

I met Dave Sheldrake at the camp site, and the plan had been for us to walk Bidean nam Bian (pronounced beetyan nam beeoan) and Stob Coire Sgreamhach (pronounced stop korra skree-yach), but we had agreed that we would not climb these magnificent hills if the weather was bad. When Dave informed me that the weather forecast was not good, I feared for the worst, and I'm afraid that's how it turned out. When we woke up in the morning, there was cloud and it was dry, but it seemed only a matter of time before the rain came. So we abandoned our plan, and instead Dave was keen on my suggestion of the Lairig Loop – but properly this time! So that's what we did, this time going to the far car park, so we walked along the Lairign Gartain first (by which time the rain had started), then taking the Lairig Eilde back to the A82 and following a nice path running parallel with the road back to the car.

So that was my 2019m Munro trip. It was a shame I wasn't able to climb more Munros – but, as my good friend Mike Pursey says, they won't go away!

### **COMEDY CORNER (jokes from the late, great Tommy Cooper)**

I went to the doctor. He said "I'd like you to lie on the couch".

I said "What for?"

He said "I'd like to sweep the floor".

I went to the doctor. He said "What appears to be the problem?"

I said "I keep having the same dream, night after night, beautiful girls rushing towards me and I keep pushing them away".

He said "How can I help?"

I said "Break my arms!"

I went to the doctor the other day,

I said "It hurts when I do that".

He said "Well, don't do it".

I went to the doctor the other day,

I said "With all the excitement of Christmas, I can't sleep".

He said "Try lying on the edge of your bed, you'll soon drop off".

My wife had a go at me last night. She said "You'll drive me to my grave".

I had the car out in 30 seconds.

I went up into the attic and found a Stradivarius and a Rembrandt.

Unfortunately Stradivarius was a terrible painter and Rembrandt made lousy violins.

### **THE LAST WORD FROM THE EDITOR**

WELL, we are the end of another year, and 2019 has been pretty busy for Kent LDWA (although not as busy as 2018 ...).

Our group has put on three highly successful walking events – the Sevenoaks Circular, the Andredsweald and the White Cliffs Challenge; we have a full programme of social walks, with walker numbers on the up; we organised excellent checkpoints at the Hadrian Hvyndred in May and the Sussex Stride in September; and 23 Kent members started this year's Hundred, with 13 finishing and 10 retiring. That Hundred was widely considered to be one of the toughest ever, with entrants having to battle continual heavy rain and 40-50mph winds in that tough Northumbrian landscape (I completed my 12th and last Hundred when I did the marshals'.



walk at the start of May, in conditions much easier than those encountered on the event).

And it has been good to see some of our (relatively!) newer members making big contributions to our group, like Don Arthurs, Andy Clark, Helen Franklin, John Gilbert and Dale Moorhouse (who, despite dealing with chronic asthma this year, has still managed to be such huge help at our events).

Next year promises to be another busy year for us, with our Sevenoaks Circular in March, a new Weald challenge walk (see story above) and the White Cliffs Challenge. 'The magnificent Joy Davies' and her marvellous friends Mary Shillito, Brenda Trew and Audrey West will be ensuring entrants on all our events are well fed. I reckon there is no one better at catering in the entire LDWA than our Joy, who was presented with a well deserved LDWA Volunteers Award by association chairman David Morgan at this year's national AGM.

Also, next year may see Peter Jull's idea for another Kent Hundred progressing (see story above). Yes, we did stage the Cinque Ports 100 last year, so no one is under-estimating the enormous amount of work which would be involved. If anyone is willing to help with this project, please contact Peter, who needs volunteers to take on some of the major jobs in putting on a Hundred – such as checkpoint coordinator and catering manager.

With all that Kent LDWA achieves every year, it makes me very proud to be chairman of our group. And I would like to thank all our members for what they do for the group throughout the year.

And, as I say every year, editing this newsletter is a labour of love. Our members seem to like it, and it is interesting that many still choose to have it delivered so they can read it in paper form, as opposed to reading it on our excellent website (which is so well maintained by Michael Headley).

So, many thanks to everyone who sends me contributions for the newsletter. They are always very welcome, so please keep them coming. If I didn't get these stories and photos from Kent LDWA members, there would not be a newsletter.

I must also thank Neil Higham for proof reading and checking the newsletter before it is sent out – when he is also our group's membership and data protection officer, and organises our annual Weald walk single-handedly.

And I must particularly thank Bryan Clarke, who is so good at interpreting my instructions, puts the pictures where they should be, and then gets the newsletter printed and sent out to our members. Bryan – you are an absolute star.

Finally, may I wish all Kent LDWA members a very happy Christmas, and lots of wonderful walking in 2019. I look forward to seeing you on a walk soon.

**Graham Smith**

## **THE CORNERS OF MONTENEGRO by Peter Jull**

### **DAY 1**

EXTORTIONATE French motorway tolls to get there and parking charges in first thought Andorra that rivalled hotel prices, encouraged investigation of alternatives. I thus found myself on the first plane off the Gatwick runway (so early the last train from



Deal the evening before only got there with 90 minutes to waste) to Podgorica. Early departure meant early landing and time to do some walking on arrival day but allowing for car collection and driving time to somewhere interesting, only a short walk was planned.

AA route planner said average speed would be less than 35mph which was treated sceptically, but someone needs to send Montenegro a ruler so they know what a straight line looks like when it comes to building roads and with the last town centre to pass through being pedestrianised and no direction signs to where I wanted to go. Having eventually found the right road the tarmac ran out into a dirt track - they were right: 75 miles as the crow flies, 140 miles by road, 4½ hours. The target was the Montenegro/Bosnia/Serbia tripoint and I parked at what looked like the closest point to which the AA would calculate a route. Maps of Montenegro detailed enough for

hiking are hard to find and the best I had for here was screenshots off Google Earth.

At first the loops in the track and the position of houses looked a match, and then they didn't. I could see a twin peaked mountain, one craggy, the other rounded towards which the track was headed so continued.

Darn – I've left my passport in the car and I'm planning to cross into Serbia. There won't be anyone there, I won't bother going back. Come upon two friendly couples, porch sitting in the shade, and gestures confirm the seen mountain is where to go. Then round a barn and three peasants are watching two children rake the hay. "Good afternoon", I say. "Where you going?" says one. "Passport," he demands. "ID." I show him my driving licence; the interrogation continues; he thinks I'm a Ukrainian spy. Suddenly his demeanour changes, he accepts I'm just a mad English tourist and points me on the way.

The track soon comes close under the craggy part but then starts to descend. Take a less defined side track steeply towards the rounded part, and then not. Why would the foresters build a track to the top of a mountain anyway? It eventually comes to a top but the tripoint lines on GPS are further on. An even less defined track leads towards a rocky lump which is climbed to share the top with a tree. GPS is still not happy and from here I can see an even higher rocky lump which I tree dodge to the top of. GPS still says the tripoint is further on but that is steeply down. I know its mapping is only approximate and assuming the logical point for boundaries to meet is at the highest point I must be there.

Google Earth shows a clearing in the direction of the track I should have come up from Serbia but I can't find it. Prudence decides it's best to use the GPS track as Minotaur string to find the way back down. Seduced by more open trees into choosing my convergence point I find myself at the top of those craggy cliffs with the track below. Much time is used pushing through trees to find a point where it is not precipitous to rejoin the track. Once there, back to the car is straightforward. Eight miles with 2000ft of ascent in 4¾ hours which is not very relevant given the amount of searching and stumbling involved.

Subsequent reflection shows I parked too soon, the track I intended was another bear left ¾ mile further on. Also the tripoint probably was 600ft down beyond the top I reached, I may have to go back to claim it properly.

Drove to Zabljak, the country's ski resort for the night. On the way there people are not walking the dog in the evening but walking the cow! Following it with a big stick to a patch of long grass and watching it eat.

## DAY 2

Also in this corner of Montenegro, in Durmitor National Park, is the Tara River Canyon, claimed to be Europe's rival to the Colorado version. Rafting through it is heavily promoted but that's not for a long distance walker. A short (in distance) drive out of town finds a small car park with a sign to Curevac, 1km 30min. Flies swarm the car. Take the path, the flies know the way, which is rocky, very in places, and in one kilometre and 30 minutes a sign tells me I'm there, Curevac mountain 5300ft with the (best?) views of Tara canyon. At 7am a clouded sun and haze is despectacularising the scene.

Now where to go? The gorge has no continuous rim and certainly no sign of a high level footpath. So how to get from here down to the river? The map I have managed

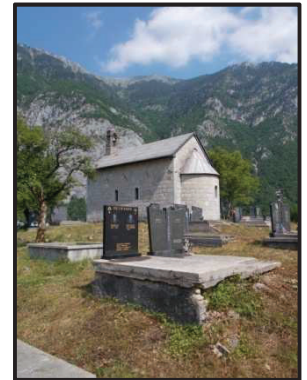


to buy shows a dotted black line used for footpath elsewhere but not overprinted with red for hiking trail here. Double checking on Google Earth, it ends at a camp site which has reviews. A little way down stream there is a smudge of a white line across the river on Google Earth which can only be a footbridge. If there's a footbridge there must be a footpath. Geocaching.com uses a different mapping dataset and that does show a footpath leading off the track to where I don't want to go and reaching the river. A sign from the car park points to where I don't want to go; the flies know this way as well.

After ascending disconcertingly for a while, the track begins to descend. At about the point where there should be a footpath to cut off a long loop of track there is clearly new, bulldozing of a track. Ponder, cogitate then take it; the flies concur. After several zigzags it joins a more mature track and then the loops match the map loops to confirm the decision. The next loop cutting footpath



is invisible. Continuing on the track is easy going enough but will the one I really need be there? A first house is reached and then the treescape opens up allowing various vistas to be viewed. I nearly miss the turning off the track to where I don't want to go but that I'm at the right place is confirmed by a short side track to a mini church. The churchyard is in current use, a cross is dated this year, but where are the population who are using it? I'm well past the point where the footpath should be before I even think to look and the track opens into hay fields towards a house. Turning round, a second branch towards the bridge is readily spotted. As expected it gets very steep but is also loose underfoot and sloping sideways to a steeper drop. Where's my walking pole? They wouldn't let it on the aeroplane. The path eases and arrives beside the river but the bank is swampy.



A rickety looking bridge is in sight and walking that way finds an old picnic bench and footpath mark where the bank is rocky/gravel and water accessible. Some rafters come rafting by. Climbing up to the bridge it looks better closer up but has boards across suggesting it's officially closed. Take some tentative photos and return to the rocks for elevenses and water bottle refills. Elevation here is under 2000ft, the car over 5000ft. Heading back I take the shorter but steeper path to the track to sate my curiosity why I missed it; it's unmarked and a bush hides it from the approach direction. The track is an extraction route for half day rafters and several vehicles have passed, one three times. I'm walking from shady spot to shady spot breather. The sky rumbles and drops are heard on the leaves but barely felt on me or seen in the dirt. Back above the pine line where shade has been more persistent all day progress is more consistent. Now the sky flashes and cracks

and falling coolant is initially welcome. But soon I'm wetter than I want to be with only 15 minutes to the car.

Some 3900ft of ascent in 19 miles and 8½ hours. It got too hot at the bottom to try harder; had 15 minute snooze on a bench on the way up. Just fast enough to make a 100 cut off though. Softened by trees and with grey rock instead of red and a serrated ridge rather than flat. Tara lacks the spectacle of the Grand Canyon. It's certainly long and certainly deep but with mountains higher than Curevac set further back can they be counted in calculating its volume? Rafting through it probably gives a more impressive impression. Transfer to Gusinje in Prokletije National Park and the Albania corner of Montenegro. More cow walkers.

## DAY 3

There's fog on the Grncar (river) for a not as early start as intended to drive to the neighbouring village of Vusinja. More time is lost trying to find the trailhead, white lines on the map can be tarmac or track. Find the right turning then consternation sets in as tarmac becomes track becomes very rough track. But it's too narrow to turn round so the only way is up. When there is a wider point there's also enough room to park so abandon the car there.

Following the track further on foot, a group of 3-4 houses are passed beyond which it becomes footpath. The most defined option leads into a grassy field through which there is a faint route but that dissipates after a while. Been above the fog for some time but the grass is wetting through to the thighs. Turn back to find the less obvious choice has white in red circle footpath markers painted on rocks to follow. Shady 'til now opens into sun in the eye





mountain meadow with cows that have been patting the path up, first sight of distant snow and a shepherd shearing sheep. His sign offers coffee, cheese and beer.

The path frequently bifurcates and rejoins so each time take the right hand option because directions have said a right turn is easily missed. Still nearly miss it because it is eroded and down to a gully but after a few wrong steps spot red paint down and beyond to follow. Then another meadow is reached and the red marks end. A faint path suggests a direction in which to guess a way out and that does find a path. The next point of reference is a concrete marker post at the Albanian border. Directions said if you reach the border come back some yards and take a path on the right. Looking carefully, I've retraced more yards than expected and seen nothing. The mountain on the right looks mostly grassy to near the top. Try off piste and soon find a crossing path although it doesn't seem like the right direction other than up. It leads to some huts which GPS says is well into Albania and the wrong side of the mountain so back again.

On the higher path just beyond where I joined it and still converging with the lower path there's suddenly red and white paint on a rock and the path turns uphill. These marks lead me on and up but



away from the mountain I'd tried to climb. Crossing a windy ridge is refreshing but perplexing as more mountains come into view. The distance walked feels too long for the length of line on the map but red paint draws me on. Thunder rumbles in Albania and spits spot on me. Hail hurts as it hits but halts hastily. Down and up reaches a peak with a name painted on it, Bajrak. Beyond is down in all directions and I can see Plav Lake which is completely wrong. I can see a mountain that might have the additional

elevation required but is dominated by others beyond, perhaps they're in Albania. From the only point where there was an alternative path a saddle is quickly reached.

I'm unsighted as to which side is the highest so try the clearest path. This circles round until there's another mountain in front of me, my sense of direction is now completely shot. The path goes on but starts descending so come back. To the top looks grassy enough but I'm not convinced this is even Zla Kolata, the highest mountain in Montenegro that I'm trying to climb. Even adjusting for the deviations the best part of half the hours 'til sunset have elapsed and prudence decides it's time to head for the car.

The descent was unremarkable apart from being remarkably quick and I could have spent another 1½ hours looking for the right route. But I'd run out of ideas where to, was convinced I hadn't missed the easily missed right turn, had reached the right Albanian border post and was in roughly the right place. Checking later I wasn't, there's a second pass into Albania I'd ended up at. I can only think that where the red marks after the easily missed turn ended I should have gone straight across the meadow instead of bearing left, although there was no indication on the ground that that was so. Apart from the disappointment of not finding the highest peak, it was a perfectly pleasant day's walking in the mountains.

Some 4600ft of ascent in 17 miles over 10 hours. Slower than yesterday although it didn't feel it.

#### DAY 4

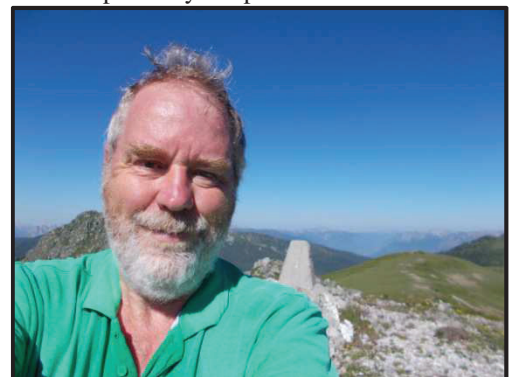
The mosques are calling on their faithful, three of them doing it differently, as I drive off to Plav to find today's trailhead. This time finding the road is easy but how far to drive along it as it goes from tarmac to tarmac with potholes to there was tarmac here at some point to never been tarmaced. Thinking I've battered my little car enough, find a parking spot and continue on foot. Soon come to an informal camp site with picnic bench and water spouts which is probably the point to which AA would calculate a route.



Beyond, a ford is now a bridge and then the track arrives at 2-3 dozen houses/huts/shacks with barky dogs, jangly cows, clucky chickens and a man shovelling shit in a shed.

Another asks if I'm German and gestures I'm on the right track for Tromedja. And then the track runs out but a faint path leads across a hands required gully with an expanse of ankle deep springy grass ahead.

I can see a track running below the ridge and make my way across to it. GPS says the tripoint is to the left but after 10 minutes reconsult the map and decide GPS is wrong. Map shows the track runs below the peak so when a grassy gully points directly at the mountain, take it. Easy enough going albeit steep. Reach a crossing path which also runs below the peak so straight on up. The last bit is more challenging but pick the way others seem to have picked before and at the top, a concrete pillar. One side says RJ for when this was Yugoslavia and no one's changed, now it's the Montenegro/Albania/Kosovo tripoint. Map says 7650ft although GPS says less.







Back down to the path which is part of the Peaks of the Balkans route, a circular joint effort by Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro although more there and back again by a different route. Underfoot it could be the South Downs despite the patch of snow below. Come to a sign which says Tromedja is 20 minutes in the direction I'm going. GPS border lines are still that way but the only mountain of significance will clearly take more than 20 minutes to get to. Somewhat perplexed, press on and 30 minutes later come down to more signs at a pass which match the name and height on the map. Decide the last was a mistake. Having seen from on high the route I had intended to take up, a left turn had seemed only to serve the end shack, I am confident of the way down.

A shepherd asks "Allemande?" Why do I look like a German? Two safari jeeps come bouncing up the track. Even in these big tired beasts I wouldn't want to cross

some the long step eroded ravines across the track with only cracked timber chucked in to stop a crunch. I'm back at the car before midday. Some 5½ hours to do 10½ miles with 2400ft of ascent although the highest point reached was 7650ft. For once I'm content with the navigation error as it turned the route into a circular one.

What to do with the rest of the day? Tomorrow's schedule was always going to be tight so let's try tomorrow morning this afternoon. Time is lost when a digger is trenching across the only road back to Plav to put in plastic pipes to take water across the road. No hard hats, work boots, yellow vests or fencing. When they've bulldozed the dirt back in they just let the now four cars



waiting drive across to squash it down. A sink hole further down the road looked in more urgent need of attention to me. Then they're resurfacing the main road out of Plav. Locals are turning round so follow hoping they know a bypass; they do. Then at the border, Montenegrin police make a fuss about taking a rental car out of the country. Then the recurrent problem of tarmac and tracks looking the same on a map. By the time I've bumped a long way down a Serbian forest track to the point I take pity on the car and park, it's gone 4pm.

The track continues but the elevation is already higher than where it should become a footpath. A viewpoint is marked but I see nothing but trees. Forestry machines have cut recent paths so a number of dead ends and downhill are abortively followed. I should be in a valley bottom but even with the trees can see I'm not. I'm wild guessing which track will be mostly up and towards the Montenegrin border which the path is later supposed to follow. A hot spot is

warming up on my left foot and even if the path was certain and not another phantom I'm running out of daylight time to climb another 1500ft to the Kosovo/Montenegro/Serbia tripoint. So rather sooner than intended turn back to not jeopardise the rest of the week. Nearly at the bottom I spot a red in white circle painted on a rock – expletive! It could have been a nice late afternoon walk in the woods but it wasn't really – too many trees and too steep. Less than two hours of trying achieved 900ft of ascent in 2½ miles.

Back at the hotel an Albanian mini-coach in the car park is explained by a hiking group staying the night, dancing away the evening and walking back over the mountains the next day. "Traditional" Albanian dancing seems to be Greek steps to a Turkish rhythm and disco beat. If we organised something similar who would play the part of the middle aged man whose enthusiasm exceeded his talent?

## DAY 5

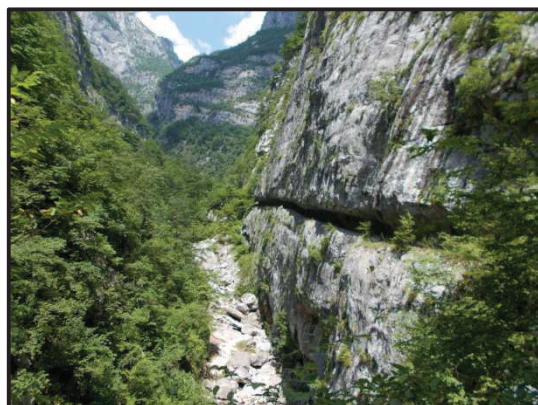
Transfer day to the Croatian corner of Montenegro and Lovcen National Park. Have I got time to have another go at Zla Kolata and get to the next hotel in time? Is that last minute footpath mark enough to try this morning's original plan again? The answer to both is no. The schedule was pretty much complete when a work colleague taking an interest in where I was going asked is this the



gorge? More Googling revealed little detail other than some pretty pictures of Mrtvica Canyon. As this transfer would take me right past the entrance it seemed churlish to forgo an exploration.

Parked in a layby on the main road and followed hand painted signs now supplemented by an official footpath one. Two cars are parked in a field, one MNE the other BH, both groups of hikers ask ME the way. I have printed a screenshot of the geocaching.com map and can point the way but soon leave them behind. Someone's been out with the red and white paint, prolifically if not so neatly. The first highlight, an old stone bridge is only a mile in. From there its steppy rocks up to join a track. At the end a man is selling water from his hosepipe. With the constant sound of tumbling water I decline but he points me in the right direction. Footpath again the river is constantly heard but often far below when seen.

A path junction leads down to highlight 2 the Gate of Wishes. Two rocks arch





almost to a touch with a view through to a turquoise pool of water, pictures of which tempted me here. Beyond here it becomes a much more gorgey gorge than Tara, walls close on either side soaring vertically three or more times the height of Dover cliffs. This is the most picturesque stretch of the canyon leading to the Gallery which the Yugoslav army blew out of the side wall in the 1970s to make it easier for the villagers at the top of the canyon to get to the road at the bottom. They've made this bit easy enough walking, what about the rest?

Water is cold showering down the wall so use it for a slow refill as well. Signs have mentioned another point of interest 30 minutes further on, so on I go. Suddenly there is silence on the left, no sound of water, only isolated pools can be seen and then dry. I'm well past the 30 minutes and 4 hours total in so turn back. I had ignored a faded sign pointing down because three lads were lighting a fire. This time go down to get close to the river and they friendly offer me beer and barbequed sausage. But the river has gone underground at this point and huge boulders prevent a photogenic view. Back on the on the path, decide the sign says Plaza (beach) and it must be the last point of interest although nothing like 30 minutes beyond the Gallery.

I had spotted these three earlier coming up a side path which drew attention to a third bridge which is more clearly visible from the other direction. Its usefulness had seemed doubtful in the limited information I had found but go down for a closer look anyway. With rotting wood it looks more condemnable than the one across the Tara but is open and leads to another bridge that is just three long telegraph poles strapped together across a side stream. Then it's steeply uphill to a track where the only indication there is a turning is a faded mark on a rock in the track. The track is easy going but banal so chose to have a closer look at the pretty stone bridge trusting that car parked in a layby with path leading down is the right turning even though unsigned. Although it was built as a memorial to a 19th century Ottoman noble's mother it's difficult to envisage what practical purpose it could have served.



Back on the original side I'm nearly at the end when a 3ft snake scares the hiss out of me but not as much as I scare it into the bushes. Back at the car the layby sign identifies some of the high proportion of Montenegrin bird species living there that I haven't seen in the canyon at all. Lots of lizards though, shades of brown, yellow, big and small. For a little known, unpromoted area I saw more hikers here than on any other day; it was a Sunday. At the next hotel in the old royal capital, Cetinje, the receptionist asked where I'd come from; my pronunciation of it got no recognition. High walls have sent GPS doolally, it thinks I've walked 39 miles and climbed 11000ft. Only 8 hours is reliable. It was more than the 3000ft elevation difference between start and turn round because there were downs as well as ups on the way up and the signs say is was about a 16 mile round trip

## DAY 6

As with other small countries, I had thought to walk from one side to the other; Croatia to Albania is 50 crow miles at the narrowest point but Kotor Bay and Lake Skadar both jut into the way. If there are footpaths, finding a map showing them defeated me, and buses were hard to confirm other than between main centres. There is the Primorska Planinarska Transferzala but its main aim is to connect the three main coastal massifs and designed for wild camping backpackers, not for me. But looking at it did draw attention to it being only eight miles in a straight line from Cetinje to the port of Kotor and about 13 miles factoring in footpath meanders even though the bus route back was 35 miles. That sounded like a purposive walk and that it went over King Peter's mountain made it a must.



The cool dawn road out of Cetinje was devoid of life apart from three squabbling cats and pointed directly at what looked like the right mountain. The gradient soon begins to rise as does my temperature. At the first hairpin the now familiar red and white sign identifies a loop cutting footpath to follow. Rejoin the road and round the corner bear right to the hamlet of Gornic. I'd driven up here the night before to make sure the next footpath wasn't a phantom which would have involved a long detour or replan. A local who spoke no English insisted of helping with the aid of a 'phone call to his wife who knew some. Having got over her curiosity of why I wanted to walk to Kotor when it was easier to drive, she eventually persuaded him to show me where the footpath mark was. I would have found it quicker on my own.

Now on foot, the path climbs steeply following more marks, tops out and contours round a bowl and becomes a track before reaching the road again. Miss the next

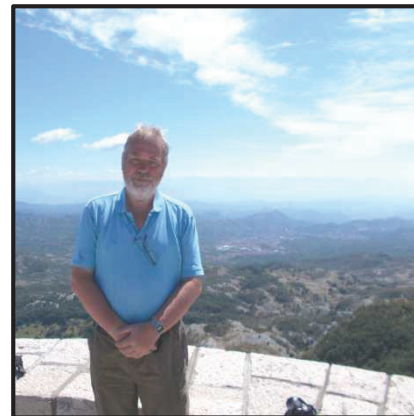


loop cut but the road's easy going and quiet and this loop not too long. I had been warned that Cetinje has to turn off its water supply overnight but still hadn't pre-poured enough to slake my waking thirst. I had three bottles to last six map pages. Although refreshments options on route had been expected the first had been a map phantom. Celebrate the end of page 2 by swigging the last of bottle 1. My turn off the road has acquired a sign since the Street View van last passed and makes the route on map 3 across the page instead of along and oh, there's only actually 5, swig some more.

Shade which has been plentiful is now sparse and track becomes path steadily climbing the mountainside. Meet the tourist road a couple of times and then there's the monument; busy as expected given the number of engines heard. But then there's another 467 steps to climb, many in a cool breeze tunnel, and pay €5 into the inner sanctum of my namesake's mausoleum at 5400ft. View the all round views, where I've started from but not yet where I'm headed. At the bottom of the steps the restaurant provides elevenses of goulash, beer and ice lolly.



Down the tourist road a bit then turn off through fields of fluttering butterflies feasting on flowers. Later the path descends more steeply and comes to a road clearly upgraded only recently, the tarmac still smells. As they do here, the rubble has been merely bulldozed over the edge, right where I'm expecting the onward path to be. The road would be a very long loop. Looking for a way into the trees thinking to swing round the bottom of the rubble to pick up the path I spot an almost covered red mark further right than expected and just at the edge of the rubble. I have a path, and then maybe I don't, and then do, maybe not, then yes again; other rock slides have encroached to confuse the way. Get a first glimpse of Kotor Bay and reach the road again. Round the corner is a zip line station from where the footpath down to Kotor starts.



It's hard work and unattractive but eventually arrives at the top of the serpentine path with the "best" views of Kotor Bay. Further down the views are only incrementally less enthralling and starting from the bottom I would have been satisfied enough well before getting this far. In return I get 1900ft of

continuous descent round 62 hairpins in scalp scorching sunshine taking nearly two hours during which water ran out. Oh the peace and joy of something underfoot that doesn't crunch and an air conditioned supermarket. GPS says it's been nearer 20 miles in 11½ hours (I did spend an hour atop the mountain). Descent is 2000ft more than ascent because Cetinje sits that high in the mountains but the totals seem unreliably excessive. It was the longest and hardest walk of the week though and with a huge cruise ship in port dwarfing the old town I couldn't avoid the first Britons since the airport.

#### DAY 7

Only the Bosnia/Croatia/Montenegro tripoint is left to attempt. Drive to Kotor going down the road version of the serpentine (better views?), round all the arms of the bay and take the road towards Mostar in Bosnia. Park just before the border post. After previous tribulations I've made a note from Wikipedia of the co-ordinates but on arrival they've clearly used the border post and not the tripoint – darn. I still have my untrustworthy GPS map, a screen shot from Google Earth and have seen some 360° images added to Street View purportedly taken at the spot.

After leaving a short track leading to a house there is a discernable path leading in the the right direction. An old goat herder in weeds says something but it doesn't sound like get off my land so I wave at her and continue. The Street View photos looked like I'd be rock hopping much of the way but a path more or less continues before it does come down to picking which sequence of rocks is the best to continue climbing to the top. Get to the top of a ridge and although I can't see as much Adriatic as in the Street View pictures the position of the house and border post look right for this being the tripoint according to Google Earth. GPS doesn't agree. There is no marker. Older borders I've been to have plenty of marker stones and posts but until the 1990s this was just internal Yugoslavia, I guess they don't bother with such things now. Later, down by Herzeg Novi harbour, I spot a map of



hiking routes which shows yet another alignment of borders and checking geocaching.com it differs again. With so much disagreement I decide I'm at as good a point as any. If anybody wanted to fight over this scrubby scratchy lump of rocks I'd say "Nah – you have it".

Now, how to recognise the rocks I used on the way up? Back at the car it's only been 1¼ miles and 380ft of ascent; too rocky to go faster than the 1¾ hours it took. For the last half day my burnt body, bruised feet and broken shoes can just be tourists with a mooch around Herzeg Novi old town and a 10 minute ferry cruise across the bay to get to Budva where my fellow Tui passengers have been imprisoned on its beaches before returning to Cetinje with its grand old embassy buildings.





**Pictures from the Kent LDWA trip to Snowdonia on July 20 -  
see inside for report and more photos.**





**Scenes from the White Cliffs Challenge,  
based at St Margaret's, on August 24.  
The photos were taken by Peter Salenieks and Jessica Wright.**

