

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

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

## ***NEWSLETTER***



**Peter Jull on the summit of Scafell Pike after completing his Three Peaks challenge - see story and more photos inside.**

**Number 113**



**December 2020**

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



**Pictures from some of the Kent social walks, which restarted in July.**



**Canterbury Outer Ring on July 26.**



**The Cream Tea Walk on August 2.**



**The Cream Tea Walk on August 2.**



**Graham Smith and Dale Moorhouse narrowly avoid a falling tree walking the Lewes Loop on August 30.**

**◀ Something in the air during the Castles & Vineyards walk on September 6.**

## **KENT SOCIAL WALKS DECEMBER 2020-APRIL 2021**

A second lockdown in England, due to end on December 2, was in force as this newsletter was being produced. All LDWA walks are subject to LDWA NEC rules which are in turn dependent on Government guidelines. So please check the Kent LDWA website to see if walks are going ahead.

### **Sun Dec 6 Round Dover Ramble**

18ml. 9:00 Chance Inn, Guston CT5 5EW. (GR TR324445). Lunch stop River. This walk may have up to 15 participants. Registration in advance required via [walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk). C: Graham Smith.

### **Sun Dec 13 Farming Today**

17ml. 09.00. (GR TQ744445). Marden public c.p. Lunch stop in Goudhurst. This walk may have up to 20 participants. Registration in advance. C: David Thornton,

### **Mon Dec 28 Post Christmas Sevenoaks Stroll**

17ml. 09.15 Upper Green Road, Shipbourne off A227. (GR TQ592522). Lunch in Sevenoaks town centre. This walk may have up to 20 participants. Registration in advance via [walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk), Map - Expl 147. C: Dave Sheldrake,

### **Fri Jan 1 New Year on the South Downs Again**

c20ml. 09.00 Meet at Eastbourne, W end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, park nr school on left. (GR TV600972). Lunch stop at Alfriston. This walk may have up to 20 participants. Registration in advance required via [walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk). C: Nicola Foad.

### **Sun Jan 10 The Bleak Mid Whitstable**

17ml. 09.00 Eastern end of Tankerton slopes sea front. (GR TR126673). A simple linear there and back route along my favourite section of Kent coast. Lunch stop in Faversham. This walk may have 20 participants. Registration in advance. C: David Thornton,

### **Fri Jan 15 Coldrum Night Walk**

17ml. 22.15 21.00 - 22.00 The George, Trottiscliffe (GR TQ641599), guidelines permitting. Or 22.15 at Trottiscliffe village hall. (GR TQ643602). Registration in advance required via [walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk) This walk may have up to 15 participants. Torch essential. C: Dave Sheldrake

### **Sun Feb 7 Beale's Revenge**

17ml. 09.00 Orlestone Forest c.p. (GR TQ986347). C: Peter Jull

### **Sun Mar 7 Sevenoaks Circular Marshals' Walk**

32ml. All details for this event are currently subject to change or cancellation. For participation please contact event organiser David Thornton. C: David Thornton,

### **Sun Mar 21 Sevenoaks Circular Walk**

See Events Diary.

### **Fri Apr 2 A South Downs Loop**

26 or 20ml. 09.00 Meet in Eastbourne at western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post, park nr school on left. (GR TV600972). The 20ml is a circular route on the South Downs via Beachy Head, the Seven Sisters and the Cuckmere valley; return on the South Downs Way. The 26ml visits Firle Beacon before rejoining the 20ml route. C: David Thornton,

## **KENT GROUP COMMITTEE**

Interim Chair – Stephanie Le Men

Interim Secretary – Helen Franklin

Treasurer/Walks Secretary – Peter Jull

Membership/Data Protection Secretary – Neil Higham

Life President – Brian Buttifant

Members

Don Arthurs, Andy Clark, Joy Davies, Nick Dockree, David Thornton, Sarah Turner.

## **STEPHANIE TAKES OVER AS INTERIM CHAIR**

STEPHANIE Le Men has been appointed interim chair of Kent LDWA, following Graham Smith's decision to stand down as he is leaving Kent to move to Scotland (see THE LAST LAST WORD FROM THE EDITOR below). Helen Franklin has agreed to be interim group secretary, replacing Stephanie. Stephanie and Helen will hold their interim posts until the AGM (see story below) when all committee positions are up for election.

Joy Davies and Don Arthurs are also standing down from the committee, so if any Kent members are interested in joining, please email Helen (contact details above).

We are sure all Kent LDWA members wish Stephanie and Helen well in their new roles, and will join the committee in thanking Graham, Joy and Don for their hard work for the group over the years.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Kent LDWA AGM is scheduled to go ahead on Sunday January 31 2021 (traditionally the AGM is held on the last Sunday in



January). Unfortunately, due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, it is unlikely that we will be able to hold our usual morning walk, followed by lunch and the AGM with a guest speaker.

The committee is in the process of finalising arrangements for a video conference meeting as an alternative. Please check the Kent website for details or ensure that you have signed up to receive the group's emails, in order not to miss out.



**Mary with Keith at the Haltwhistle checkpoint on last year's Hadrian Hvndred.**

### **MARY HATCHER**

KENT LDWA members will be very sad to learn of the sudden death, at the end of October, of Mary Hatcher, wife of former group chairman Paul, who preceded Brian Buttifant. Mary was very active with the group and a willing, cheerful checkpoint, and a great support for Paul during his chairmanship.

Said Brian: "Mary and Paul moved to Cumbria and it was nice to meet them during last year's Hundred, albeit briefly. Mary was a lovely lady with mischievous smile and a happy personality."

Our thoughts go out to Paul and his family at this time. The following tribute was sent in by Keith and Shirlie Gill.

We were so shocked to learn of the sudden passing of Mary in October. She was always a staunch supporter of the group when she and Paul lived in Kent and, even more so, when Paul served as our chairman prior to their move to Cumbria around 2004.

Mary was a very willing and hard-working checkpoint with a cheeky smile and infectious laugh. We count our good fortune to have been her friends for many years. We enjoyed many walks with her and Paul, notably the High Weald Landscape Trail in day stages around 2001, then on the group programme the following

year. During our numerous outings, we were always on the lookout for a tea room for Mary to enjoy a much loved 'cuppa'. We fondly remember Mary serving us cream teas in Pluckley church after Paul's annual Cream Tea Walk, which ran for ten years from around 1990. Keith also recalls the 1992 Invicta Hundred Marshals' Walk, where an official checkpoint just happened to be in Mary's kitchen in Pluckley – it was nothing but joyous laughter. Mary, helped by her mother, made sure we were all fully refreshed before cheerily sending us on our way.

Following their move to Cumbria, Mary and Paul eagerly took to fell-walking in the Lake District and completed all 214 'Wainwrights' plus many of the Outlying Fells. Mary (with Paul) was heavily involved with bowls (outdoor and indoor) and tended the gardens at the outdoor club in Brampton. Last year, when given a personal tour by Mary of the clubhouse and grounds, Shirlie reported that the gardens around the green were a riot of colour and absolutely immaculate. Latterly, Mary became a geocaching enthusiast with Paul and this kept them both very active and alert.

We saw Mary and Paul twice last year:- a wonderful day with them after we had finished our recce of the Hadrian Hvndred route and, also, as supporters to Keith over the event weekend. We cannot believe that our dear friend is no longer with us and send our heartfelt condolences to Paul, daughter Sharon and son Graeme and their families.

Finally, a fitting example of Mary's cheerful attitude to life; on one walk, Mary asked a weary Keith if he was OK. "Actually, I'm feeling a bit dopey today," he replied. The instant, lively response from Mary was, "No change there then, Keith".

Rest in peace Mary.

### **NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS**

#### **Sevenoaks Circular**

NEXT year's Sevenoaks Circular is due to take place on Sunday March 21, with a new route of 32 miles. It was hoped that Sport England would give the go-ahead for challenge events in England to restart as this newsletter went to press, so the Sevenoaks Circular could potentially be one of the first to take place after the Covid-19 suspension.

Organiser David Thornton has done a lot of work on the walk, planning a new route and also ensuring the event will be compliant with LDWA NEC Covid-19 rules, which in turn adhere to government guidelines. The event will again be based at West Heath School but will be entirely open air, with registration outside the school building, one outdoor checkpoint, and no food provided for entrants. The marshals' walk is set for March 7.

Further details will appear on the Kent LDWA website.

#### **High Weald Walk**

OUR annual Weald challenge walk is set for Sunday July 11, with a new route and a new venue at Langton Green, just outside Tunbridge Wells. Main distance will be 26 miles, and other distances were dependent on LDWA NEC rules.

Further details will appear on the Kent LDWA website.

#### **White Cliffs Challenge**

NEXT year's WCC will be on August 28, and will again be the showpiece walk of the White Cliffs Walking Festival (see story below) taking place between August 26-31, with one route of 30 miles, and again based at St Margaret's. No date has yet been set for the marshals' walk. With Graham Smith relocating to Scotland, organisation of the event has been taken over by Peter Jull.

Further details will appear on the Kent LDWA website.

#### **KSS TRIPLE CHALLENGE**

NEXT year's leg of the Kent Surrey Sussex Triple Challenge of 50-mile walks, to be completed in successive years, is the Surrey Tops, scheduled for September 18-19, with the date of the marshals' walk to be announced. As usual, Kent will be organising a checkpoint, and this is likely to be at Elstead (16 miles).

Our own 50-mile WCC is now due to be held in 2022, with the Sussex Stride in 2023.

Further details will appear on the Kent and Surrey LDWA websites.



## **FAMILY CHRISTMAS DINNER CANCELLED**

DUE TO Covid-19, we cancelled our annual Family Christmas Dinner, which usually takes place in December.

It is hoped that next year, we can return to London Beach Country Hotel, just outside Tenterden, where we held the event in 2018 and 2019. Neal and Jan O'Rourke are again happy to organise the event, with Neal leading a short walk before the dinner. Further details will appear on the Kent LDWA website in due course.

## **WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL RETURNS IN 2021**

PLANS are being made for next year's White Cliffs Walking Festival, taking place between August 26-31.

The annual festival is organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers, and plans for this year's event were well advanced before the event was cancelled due to Covid-19.

Next year's will be the seventh festival organised by the group, and will comprise around 36 walks ranging from short walks of one or two miles to our 30-mile White Cliffs Challenge on August 28.

Members of the event's organising group will be meeting regularly to plan the event, and it is hoped to incorporate several of the walks originally scheduled for this year's festival. The 2021 festival will be opened in a ceremony on Dover seafront by Natalie Hoare, editor of The Ramblers' Walk magazine. A choice of two or three walks will follow the opening ceremony.

## **BUSINESS CARDS**

KENT LDWA business cards, with details of the Kent and national LDWA websites, are being produced, for distribution to potential new members on walks. They have been designed for us by Helen Franklin's artistic son, Joe, and 500 are being printed. Many thanks, Joe!

## **KENT WELCOMES YOU T-SHIRTS**

GROUP equipment officer Sarah Turner has ordered a new stock of Kent LDWA T-shirts to be worn by marshals at checkpoints, as we were fast running out. They are the same design as before, with the curved (smiley!) Kent Welcomes You message. They are in a selection of sizes, ranging from small to extra large.

## **FANCY CAR SHARING FOR A 50-MILER IN SCOTLAND?**

ON Saturday-Sunday October 9-10 next year, North West Grampian LDWA is staging the Laich O'Moray 50, a 50-mile challenge event from Forres, in the north of Scotland.

Anthony Mitchell, from Sussex LDWA, is planning to enter, and he was wondering if anyone from Kent would be interested in joining him. He says: "I returned from six days on the Moray Coastal Path and actually completed most of the route because organiser Julie Cribb very kindly gave me the route description even though the event was cancelled this year. The event includes more than seven miles along a beautiful sandy beach with hard sand.

"I know it seems a long way off, but I wondered if anyone from Kent might be interested in doing the event next year. I travelled up by train which was the most economical way of travelling on one's own, but if three or four of us were to go, then a car would be most favourable."

You can contact Anthony via <https://www.ldwasussex.org.uk/index.php?Content=CommitteeContact&ID=11>

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

IN August Kent Ramblers published the new guide to the *Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk*. The process of getting our two previous guides printed had been very stressful – printing our guide to the *Kent Coast Path* was delayed for two months when our first choice of printer failed to deliver any copies and we had to reprint our guide to *Three River Valley Walks* because the cover lamination on the first batch was unsatisfactory, again resulting in a two-month delay.

It seems we are jinxed because this time the sections of the book were bound in the wrong order and all 2000 copies had to be pulped. However, the printers moved very quickly to reprint and the overall delay was only five days.

Book sales have boomed since publication of the new book, most buyers opting for our 'superbundle' which, offering all our publications for a mere £12.50 including postage, is an almost irresistible bargain. However, for readers of *South East Walker* – which is carried with the Ramblers' Walk magazine for Ramblers' members in the South East - who already have some of our publications, the special offer of any one book for £5.50 or two books for £9 remains open and is extended to January 31 2021 – please quote reference SEW2012 and add 30p if paying by cheque – see website for address.

Buoyant book sales have allowed us to build up significant funds for improving the condition, waymarking and promotion of Kent's many named walks. However, actually getting the work done remains a challenge, partly because of administrative bottlenecks in local authorities and partly because there are never enough volunteers. Kent County Council is working to overcome the former problem and we are trying to solve the latter by filling at least one vacant volunteer position in Kent Ramblers – see article in current edition of *South East Walker*.

Publication of the new guide means that work can now proceed in earnest on guides to the remaining part of the Kent Coast Path (Ramsgate to Woolwich) and the Saxon Shore Way (Gravesend to Hastings), which partly overlap.

## **HUNDRED FOR 2021 LIKELY TO BE CANCELLED**

AFTER this newsletter went to press, organisers of the Y 100 Sir Fynwy - which was originally planned to take place this year, but because of Covid-19, was rescheduled for 2021 - were due to meet on December 15 to decide whether the LDWA's flagship event would go ahead.

It is fair to say that prospects were not looking too encouraging, particularly as the LDWA's Challenge Event Guidelines – issued in response to the pandemic – were mainly aimed at events of up to 35 miles.

We had been planning to organise a checkpoint at Treadam (71.9 miles) and Brian Buttifant would like to thank the following people who had kindly offered to help:-

Eve Richards, Joy Davies, Mary Shillito, Clare Newman, Ros Humphreys, Andy Clark, Graham Smith, Neil Higham, John Gilbert, Nick Dockree, Dale Moorhouse, Don Arthurs, David Thornton and Mike Attewell



**Clockwise, from top left – the queue for Snowdon, ignoring social distancing; the top of Snowdon; Peter on Snowdon summit; more social distancing ignored on the Ben Nevis summit.**

### **THREE DAYS, THREE PEAKS By Peter Jull**

COGITATING over arrangements of a self drive version of the Three Peaks Challenge in 24 hours, I found the August Bank Holiday price of the Travelodge in Fort William was five times the price of one in Glasgow, so my thoughts were turned in another direction.

#### **DAY 1: MOUNT SNOWDON**

An early start and six hour drive reached Snowdonia as 9 o'clock approached. Having checked the price of the most convenient car park that would be reached first it was £10 a day on the Thursday – ouch. But for the Saturday an advance booking system had been introduced and when I tried, the Pen-y-Pass price was £20! There was another car park further back and when I got there it was full. Didn't I just pass a layby? Turning round, it was just across a council boundary and free parking in a free space. It was a 20 minute walk to the start of the Miner's Track but £20 or a 20 minute walk – no contest. Just before I got to the £20 car park two buses had disgorged; the crowd could be the start of a challenge walk.

A mile and a half in and lakes are reached. Without a cloudy sky and a stiff breeze ruffling the surface, they might have been more picturesque. The Land Rover track ends and a managed path continues, climbing again. Brief respite round an upper lake then up more steeply. Natural bits are hands required climbing, turn taking with coming downers and faster uppers. Litter picking, Welsh speaking volunteer wardens get in the way. At last a view the other side, west to Anglesey and beyond. Paths join and soon the summit station hoves into view. Covid closed today, but there's still a queue for the final few steps to the very top. Forty minutes later I get my 40 seconds by the trig and obligatory photo by the queuer behind.

Thoroughly chilled, it's down again, this time the Llanberis Path shadowing the railway. In a lee, hands defrost and jacket off. Too many people and not a bush in sight for a weak bladder. The halfway tea hut is trading briskly. This path is better graded this side but the scenery is less interesting and little changing all the way down. Civilisation resumes with fences, power lines, views of Llanberis and then a tarmac road. Two hours up and 1½ down, easy peasy. A village centre sign points though a council estate warren. Meet four sheep in the road at the police station. Llanberis is very linear with little to inspire a recommendation. It ends for me at the chip shop. Then £2 bus back to the car.

#### **DAY 2: BEN NEVIS**

As soon as awake, ablutioned and breakfasted, drive to Fort William. Bite the parking charge bullet and follow the signs for the visitor centre. Nearly 9 o'clock again and the car park's full. Create a space on some grass as others are doing. Ticket machines are not working – a bonus. Set off up the managed path, sooner steeper and steeper than yesterday. Today's crowd looks more athletic. Whatever happened to the near freezing forecast overnight? The air is still and I'm getting well perspired. After about an



hour at 1800ft the gradient eases for a while.

Zigzags begin and then scree has defeated management although the direction remains obvious. The Ben's cloud shroud has been thickening and thinning overhead and is no longer overhead but all around. Cairns in the mist raise then dash expectations as another reveals itself beyond. A four hour slog ends in a thickening phase. View to the north fog, view to the south cloud, view to the east grey, view to the west – I'm running out of words that mean there isn't a view. Eschew the queue for the cairn or the hut, they're artificial anyway, and settle for a selfie on the natural top. Drizzle sets in, I set off down.

Lunch is late on the first dry rock below the cloud. Continuing down the air is clearer and the view more interesting than Snowdon but changes little with an eye catching caravan site constant. The crowds yesterday were a spur; today they're an irritation with voices and footsteps (even six-year-olds) constantly catching. Rare moments of solitude were relished. It was beginning to feel like it would take longer down than up but it was 3½ hours gone when the car was reached. Unimpressive time overall.

With the least amount of driving needed today, there was going to be time to fit in something else rather than time in a bland hotel room. Nothing much inspired and plumped for the Hogwarts Express viaduct, previously the Glenfinnan, even though it was 20 minutes in the wrong direction. The relatively short climb up exposed tiredness in the legs. The 'film' viewpoint was occupied by Chinese newlyweds complete with white gown and veil being photographed. The Jacobite steam train was long gone and by the time it returned from Mallaig the light would be gone, overcast again after a sunny spell had heated the last hour down the mountain. Settled for a naked shot of the viaduct and then across the road for a brief look at the Glenfinnan Monument memorialising where Bonnie Prince Charlie raised his rebel flag in 1745. Headed back towards Glasgow but stopped in Fort William. Barring a small park it has little more charm than Llanberis. The only stretch of dual carriageway within 50 miles cuts off the identikit town from Loch Linnhe. Wetherspoons is at Covid limit; I don't stay long. The route continued back through Glencoe.

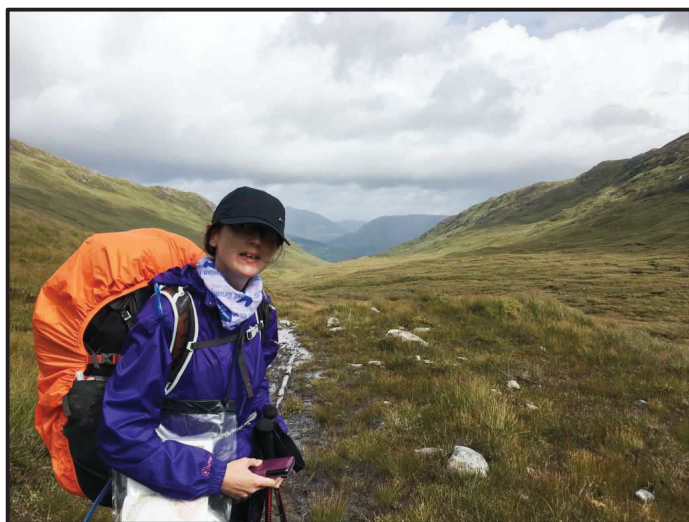
### **DAY 3: SCAPELL PIKE**

A cloud of gloom hangs over Glasgow but south towards the Lakes the sunrise is colouring prettily. Again 9 o'clock is nigh before the end of Borrowdale is reached at Seathwaite; join other cars parked on verges. No crowds, no signs, map required for the first time. Choose west of river footpath option. It starts as boggy grass and rock to which my newly split left shoe is no longer suitable. Submit to soggy sock and squelch on. Ill defined path turns up a side gill revealing views of Taylor Gill Force waterfall. Rocks are reached requiring hands-on climbing. Soon in a position where continuing is pretty scary but going down is even less appealing. A small metal gate is found keeping who or what from what or who is completely unclear. Where to go beyond is even less clear but down is out so up some more. A cross scree path does appear, follow dry stone wall, then fence then stream which GPS says is right.

One water bottle already gone, refill while stepping stone crossing gill to where others are seemingly striding comfortably. This side the path is managed with piles suggesting more to come. From Sty Head junction the Corridor route is started. I've seen no mention that this is not a footpath but requires more rock climbing, down as well as up. Having to cling on descending backwards with an unwelcome precipice awaiting a slip is not what I was expecting today. But there are a number of others in both directions using the route. A final choice of routes leads into a scree field which steepens until every step slides. It takes a full five hours to the top, I'd expected to be nearly back down by then.

Views are clear but mostly unidentifiable other hills. Jacket not required for lunch sheltered by the cairn. All these people must have arrived by other routes. Can't go down the way I came up but to start, the boulder field has to be escaped and then a loose and skiddy stretch to a col from where it's straight up into another boulder field. An hour has passed before the managed path spied from the peak is reached. At last some regular walking and reasonable progress possible. A path junction but no direction signs like I've found in similar spots abroad. Map says turn right then turn left. This doesn't feel right. Ask someone coming up who confirms it's the way to Seathwaite so start descending. Over a ridge Seathwaite comes into view but a long way off and down. When at last the knees get a break as the gradient levels beside the stream and underfoot allows what striding I have left in me I fall in with another solo hiker. The lack of identifiable features is beginning to worry me which turns the conversation to reveal that I'm in Langdale not Borrowdale. The hotel at the roadhead is reached four hours after leaving the top. I can't bring myself to say how much the taxi back to Seathwaite was but it dwarfed my parking savings. Seven hour drive home; that'll be the M1 route then with its regular service stations for safety snoozes.

Been there, done that, don't need to do them again, I can die at peace.



Four pictures (two here and two on next page) from Helen and Stephanie's Cape Wrath Trail adventure.



## **WALKING ON SCOTLAND'S FINEST: THE CAPE WRATH TRAIL – September 2020**

**By Stephanie Le Men and Helen Franklin**

WE did not have that long to plan this trip – our original plans to the Alps were disrupted due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, we had booked the time off work, so we decided to head up to Scotland. We were both ready for the break - to be in the wilderness of the Scottish Highlands.

The Cape Wrath Trail (CWT) is described on the walk highlands website as:

“...a superb route for very experienced long-distance backpackers, passing through magnificent wild landscapes for most of the route, with the freedom to choose your own exact route...The trail is completely unmarked and passes through extremely wild and rugged terrain, far from services and facilities for much of the distance. Although many sections follow paths and tracks, there are also some sections which are pathless, and a high degree of navigational skill is required. Walkers need to be self-sufficient and to carry food needed between resupply points. There are also several unbridged river crossings which can become dangerous or even impossible in spate conditions. The route has the reputation of being Britain's toughest long-distance walk.”

Ooohhh, that sounds good!!

A few GPX files were downloaded, and the guide book by Cicerone and Harvey's maps was purchased.

Then there was the question of food. If all went to plan, then we would need to carry about five to six days' worth to see us to the first resupply. This would require a heavier load in the backpack than our previous Scotland trip – the West Highland Way – dubbed a pub crawl with quite a nice walk attached. The CWT was going to be a proper challenge.

### **Friday – Kent to Fort William**

We had a relaxing flight to Inverness from Gatwick; the airport was eerily empty, but the flight was on time! The fact that we had to wear face masks for the duration was not a problem.

We arrived in Inverness and took the bus into the city where we purchased some gas canisters in Blacks. We had time to kill before the coach to Fort William and found a nearby tearoom to quench our thirst.

When we reached Fort William we checked in at our hostel, and went out to get a meal – the High Street was busy, and tables being offered at 9:30pm, the only option that still had places was, unfortunately, the Wetherspoons... We got back to the hostel and were just getting ourselves ready for an early start when we were (politely) asked to move rooms since they had made a mistake - lucky for them we were still up!

### **Saturday - Camusnagaul to Corryhully bothy**

After a chaotic night due to other guests banging doors, we got up early to catch the 7:30am ferry from the quay in Fort William to Camusnagaul, the start of the Cape Wrath trail. We met two older men who were headed to Glenfinnan, one of whom had completed the Cape Wrath Trail. They looked at us 'wee lassies' and did not seem convinced we would even reach Glenfinnan that day. They left the ferry before us, but we overtook them five minutes later and never saw them again.

The start of the walk is a pleasant introduction - the route follows a quiet road along the shore southwards for seven miles before going inland following a river. Everything was great, the weather was good, the trail easy so we were making good progress. By mid-morning we decided to take a short break, we sat down near a river but were soon bothered by midges – unfortunately, this would be a recurring experience! We then climbed an easy path, had our first shower of rain, and then pressed on to Glenfinnan along a boggy path. There was a visitor centre there where we could get a cup of tea. Knowing the cafe closed at 4pm helped to speed us along.

Glenfinnan is a tourist spot – it's where the 'Harry Potter' viaduct is, so when we arrived, just after 3pm, the car park was awash with tourists who like to watch a steam train coming and going along the viaduct. We used the visitor centre and enjoyed a last cup of tea and cake before going 'into the wild'. We were heading up to Corryhully bothy (sometimes called the 'electric bothy') where we were hoping to camp. We actually happened upon Glenfinnan's friendly estate manager Alastair. We had a very interesting conversation, after which he told us the bothy was closed because of Covid-19 but that we could camp in front. So we followed the easy climbing track to the bothy and put the tent on a patch of flat ground in front, next to the river, to enjoy our first wild camp night. Two other campers arrived late and pitched, rather too close for comfort, but we left before they did in the morning and we never saw them again.

This had been an easy 25 miles in a day. But the few days ahead of us would be rather different! And the miles covered would be irrelevant.

### **Sunday – Corryhully bothy to Sourlies bothy**

We left before 8am on a beautiful day (the only 'good weather' day we had!) and reached the first pass easily. But that's where the difficulties started. The path (well, there was no real path) down from the pass alongside a river was really boggy, especially the



section after crossing the river. It was like some paths in the Peak District, in **winter**! We kept going in ankle deep, sometimes more... There were some deeper sunken streams in the peat which had been cut into by the flow of the water, and this was when Helen had her first dunk of the day. Fortunately, the water was only a foot deep! It was late morning by the time we reached a bridge where we could have a proper break, and for some reason there were no midges! Stephanie decided there was no point changing her socks since they would be wet every day anyway and would not dry.

The next section was rather nice – we followed a wide track into some woods, we were intrigued by the moss hanging from the trees, and then past the A'Chuil bothy, another popular stop for those on the CWT. This bothy is away from the main path, far down across a field, so we couldn't be bothered to hike there and back simply to put our head in the door. The weather was still nice, so we pressed on along the track. We managed to have another short and midge-less break early afternoon –after which the scenery was stunning, but there was a definite sense that we were increasingly walking into isolation.

We entered another wood following a proper footpath. The guide book warned it could be very boggy, but fortunately it wasn't, and actually rather charming, like something out of a film, almost magical - but the magic soon wore off as the trail led us to an open area after a steep climb. From there we made our way to the lochans at Mam na Cloich 'airde. The footpath became boggy again and disappeared.

We diverted from the route and followed a kind of vehicle track (a buggy since no other vehicle could go on that terrain) to a house in ruin, which was easier, and then veered left to reach the loch. Stephanie met some fishermen who stared at her blankly when she mentioned a walking companion, but Helen was not around despite being close behind minutes before! A moment of panic, after which but she appeared from behind a rock. She never saw the fishing party.

It was late afternoon and we were getting tired, so stopped next to the lochs for a quick couple of handfuls of trail mix. We still had to walk down towards Loch Nevis and find a suitable camping spot near the bothy. This path was also boggy but by that time of the day our legs just kept moving without us thinking too hard about it. Finally, we reached the bothy, we had a look inside – there were some sleeping mats, sleeping bags and we were not sure if we would be alone. But the forecast was for heavy rain that night, so we decided to stay in the bothy and dry our tents. Fortunately, nobody else joined us – two walkers did arrive later but decided they'd rather camp next to the bothy. They may well have regretted their decision given how much it rained that night! It was also incredibly midge-infested outside.

### **Monday – Sourlies bothy to Barisdale camp site**

We heard the heavy rainfall that night, and also a scratching noise. It was a mouse who got trapped in a bucket. In the morning, Stephanie discovered it had helped itself to her coffee sachets! But no real harm done. Helen freed the mouse a few metres in front of the bothy with Stephanie's blessing, though it was probably back inside the bothy before she was.

We left the bothy around 8am under a thin drizzle. We had to climb a promontory to reach a flat stretch of marshland, then across this area to reach a bridge. Again there was no path - so we had to choose the best route, keeping track of the GPS, knowing the guide book indicated there were waist-deep bogs here. Fortunately, we did not sink that badly! (Well that was Stephanie's experience, Helen ended up with her right foot in a bog right to her hip and had to haul herself out with all the weight of her kit – thank goodness for walking poles).

We found the bridge and donned our waterproofs for warmth since the rain and wind had increased. The path was supposed to be easier, following a river, but it had rained so much that most of it was covered in muddy puddles. The river we were walking aside was quite high. We soon encountered a tributary to cross. We hesitated since it was very fast, Stephanie started crossing it, made it and Helen followed.

Soon we could see a raging torrent ahead and realised we had to cross it too! We went up the hill, trying to find an easier crossing but it was worse. We went back to the point where it met the main river. It was deep, wide, and fast. Stephanie made a few tentative steps inside and considered backtracking when Helen gave it a go - went further, so Stephanie followed this time! We were now committed to continue as we did not want to go back to cross it again!

So we continued following the river, soon arriving at a mini canyon. The progress was made difficult by the river being high, but it would have been very pleasant in nice weather. The guide said that at a given point we had to take a bearing and climb a hillside, without any path to reach a good footpath. We were apprehensive of missing it, but Stephanie managed to identify the spot where we had to turn and in fact there was a very faint trace and followed it and eventually found the good footpath – Helen was really relieved. We followed this good footpath to a pass, then down the other side, it was still raining, as it had been all day, and there had not been any real opportunity to stop.

On our way down, we met a couple walking up who were staying at the basic camp site we were heading for. We were relieved to hear that it was open, and had a toilet, but no other facilities. Helen was tired, Stephanie was a bit cold, so we stopped at the camp site with relief instead of continuing! It was about 3:30pm, but we had not stopped since we left the bothy that morning - walking through deep boggy marshland and up over the pass had been slow and exhausting.

It was good to pitch the tents and have access to plenty of water from the burn for hot drinks and some food. The rain had almost stopped by the evening. We managed to dry our clothes in the little toilet block and had a relaxing end to the day. The midges were pretty bad here, so we stayed in our tents as much as possible to avoid them.

This day had been tough because of the weather and the terrain, but we worked well as a team, and would not have managed on our own. We motivated each other to push on.

### **Tuesday - Barisdale to near Morvich**

We woke up to a dry morning (that was not going to last, but we did not know since there was no phone signal!), and the burn behind the camp site was noticeably lower than the previous day – indicating that there would be potentially less issues than the day before in crossing rivers. We left the camp site and followed a path along loch Hourn to Kinloch Hourn. The path was continuously up and down like a rollercoaster following the shore of the loch, so quite tough, but beautiful.

We met a nice couple who had spent the whole of the previous day in their tent on the shore of the loch. The lady had an injury and they decided to give up the walk, but we would not have guessed she was injured since she was so good at climbing. The couple could not believe we had difficulties crossing the rivers the previous day. Stephanie had a surreal nerdy discussion with the 'male

walker' about work and the merit of different programming languages.

We reached Kinloch Hourn after three and a half hours. Despite what the guide book said, the tearoom was closed and there was building work going on... The couple who had camped on the shore found the only other couple who happened to be walking in the vicinity and asked for a lift - there is no public transport around here and it's 22-mile walk along the road out of Kinloch Hourn to the nearest town. We hope that they managed to get back to civilisation!

We had a short break and pushed on. The path was easy to follow but we had to climb steeply to a pass. Over the pass, the remoteness and open landscape were once again impressive and again it felt really isolated. We followed a good path round the contours of some hills until we came to a wooden stalker's hut which could provide shelter for walkers in a storm. There was yet another river crossing we had to make - the guide book said this would be dangerous in case of heavy rain, but it was easy that day. We then reached a point where we had to make a decision: follow the guide book or the GPX file from walkhighlands, to reach the next pass. The book advised to follow a contour round a hill without any path, the GPX indicating - more or less - to follow a river up and then veer right to the path. At this point there was a faint path, so we thought the latter would be easier. Unfortunately, we could see clouds accumulating up on the pass, and it started raining heavily, we lost visibility and then the path disappeared. So we had to follow the GPX up and across as best we could. It was getting late and Stephanie suggested we stop and set up camp if there was a spot before the pass, but Helen wanted to push on.

So, we finally got to the top and over, and followed a slippery footpath flanked by huge stones along the Forcan Ridge. The rain was now heavier than ever, and it was very windy up there. The guide book described the path as very rough, and later there would be a river crossing that's impossible to cross in heavy rain.

It was 5:30pm and again we had walked all day with just two very short stops of less than ten minutes. Stephanie spotted a flat section which was not too boggy, so we pitched our tents at 601 meters on the OS map. (GRNG 949 133). It was not sheltered at all and the weather increasingly stormy - but Stephanie was confident her tent could withstand this wind and pitched in front of Helen's to shelter her a bit.

Once pitched and inside we were grateful to have stopped for the day. We felt warm and safe in our tents and had everything we needed, food, water, and warm sleeping bags. We even had a phone signal for the first time in days, so we checked the forecast: heavy rain for most of the night but also for most of the week, from Thursday onwards! A yellow warning of rain for the whole of the west coast of Scotland.

Given this information, we decided to follow our original plan which was to get to Morvich and take the Affric Kintail Trail back towards Inverness. Having a phone signal up high, where we had camped was a slightly surreal phenomenon. Despite the heavy rain and high winds we were able to relax and look forward to a different trail the next day and a stop in Inverness, and we were able to book a hotel there for the end of the trip.

### **Wednesday - point 601 camp to Morvich and onto the Affric Kintail Way**

We slept quite well despite the noise from the wind and rain. By the morning, the rain eased and there was a lull in the wind just long enough to allow us to pack up around 9am. We had a 'wow' moment when exiting the tent - the views were superb. We were on a kind of pass and saw hills on both sides which we could not see the evening before.

Reading the guide book, it was apparent that there was another way to reach Morvich avoiding the potentially high river crossing. We were glad we had stopped the night before when we did, we would not have had the energy to have gone any further.

So we headed off. Stephanie's brain was not awake yet and she started in the wrong direction, but she soon recognised the huge stones we followed on the previous day. Helen was also disorientated, but confirmed we were heading back up the path on her GPS. Note to self: leave camp on a compass bearing! Eventually we found the footpath leading down to a road that we followed to Morvich under the rain.

We stopped at a fuel station just outside Shiel Bridge to resupply, but the supplies were very disappointing, and the shopkeeper was not over friendly - in fact, the couple running this service station were possibly the most miserable and unhelpful people we met in Scotland. Helen had seen on Google maps another shop a mile further called Kintail Crafts, so we headed there and had a much better experience. We both found what we needed - there was ample choice compared to the shoddy offerings from the extortionists at that service station. We treated ourselves to a Bakewell tart, and one look again at the forecast confirmed our decision to switch to the Affric Kintail Trail.

The sun was making appearances in between showers, but it would be raining again soon enough. The Affric Kintail Trail was much easier under foot and signposted, as it is a national trail, and there was a clear path. We followed a river along a nice valley to a private refuge and then had a shock. The map showed we needed to cross a bridge, but the bridge had been destroyed and the river was in a kind of gorge and not crossable. We walked down a few metres to see if we could cross somewhere else and we were relieved to see that a new bridge had been built! Phew!

We then climbed steeply to a pass, on the way past nice waterfalls, the scenery at the top was splendid, we were in a kind of circ. We decided to pitch soon after when we found a sheltered spot close to a stream, what a beautiful location to sleep in!

### **Thursday - pass on Affric Kintail Trail to woods on Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin**

We woke up to a dry day in our beautiful wild camp site - the best of the trip - and walked onwards the AKT. We identified several wild camping spots and reached an immaculate bothy - called the Camban Bothy. We soon reached the youth hostel and took a break there. We met and chatted with two young German walkers who also had a break there. The youth hostel - the most remote in Scotland - was closed because of Covid-19, but the dormitory block was open in case someone needed to shelter, which was really considerate.

The scenery was still lovely, the path easy but we noticed that the weather was changing behind us! Rain was coming, but so far, we had outwalked it. We eventually reached Loch Affric and met two LDWA walkers from the Irregulars Group. We did not know them but had a good chat. We also met a lot of midges! Even with the midge nets on, they seemed to be getting in everywhere - there was almost no chance of stopping for a break.

After Loch Affric, the path follows the shore of Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin, it's a fairly flat track surrounded by trees. We found that section quite monotonous and could not see any place where to pitch our tents... until we spotted a gap in some trees and yes! A



perfect bivouac spot that had been used by others previously! Well, perfect was not the right word as it was as full of midges. They got into our tents somehow. Not even the rain deterred them! Stephanie kept wiping them from the walls of her tent and sleeping mat, but they kept coming in. We did our best to cover ourselves with repellent, hats, and buffs as we slept, but there were so many that we did get bitten!

### **Friday - camp on Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin to car park near Drum**

As predicted, it rained again during the night and we had to pack up that morning in the wet. We walked a couple of hours on a never-ending forest track, heading to the town of Cannich. We went to the well-stocked Spar shop and then found a tearoom, the Bog Cotton Café - it was blissful... the owner Jill was lovely, and originally from Kent. Her cakes were delicious. We stayed around 1.5 hours there.

We then left, the rain had stopped, and it was sunny! The route followed a road up for a few miles, but we quite enjoyed it. We met an ex-teacher pushing her bicycle to a croft belonging to some friends. She was full of common sense and had a particularly holistic outlook on life - she was incredibly interesting to listen to, her conversation was refreshing. She advised us to take an alternative route to the AKT, but it did not make sense on the map, and although we tried to follow her advice, it did not make sense on the ground either - we clearly missed something. Anyway, by late afternoon, the rain had started again, we had made a big detour up and down on a forestry track to try and find this alternative route so as to find a good spot to camp but decided to get back to the trail.

After a few miles we were getting tired and yet could not find a suitable place to camp. We reached a car park a few miles from Drumnadrochit - or 'Drum' as it is locally known, the official end - or start, of the AKT. The car park itself would have been good for camping but there were signs that it was forbidden. It was getting late and we really wanted to stop, fed up with the monotony of the track and with the increasingly heavy rain, so decided to pitch in a clump of trees next to the car park. Technically we were outside the car park! It first seemed a bit lumpy but actually turned to be quite comfortable. Stephanie had a phone signal so booked a room for the next night in a hostel in Drum.

### **Saturday - car park camp to Drum!**

The next morning we left in the rain again to walk to Drum. It was still just a forestry track, but some trees had been cut so we had a few vistas of Loch Ness. We noted that we would have struggled to camp past the car park spot - getting ever closer to civilisation, so we clearly made the right decision the evening before. The path took a diversion just before Drum, going uphill to an Iron Age fort - it was nice to be up high and see the town beneath us.

We finally reached Drum centre and the rain stopped allowing us to have an early lunch outside cafe 82 (no space inside). Café 82 had been recommended to us by Jill at the Bog Cotton, who lives in Drum - and we were very pleased to be able to sit outside in the sunshine taking in a couple of rounds of coffee and cake.

We then walked through the town towards our hostel and checked-in - it was a nice surprise as it was a detached, heated wooden cabin with two beds and an en suite bathroom! Much better and cheaper than the hostel in Fort William. It also had a launderette, which we made good use of having wild camped for seven days! We then made the decision not to walk back to Inverness the next day via the Great Glen Way since we could not stand walking along a forestry track in the rain another day, but to take a bus instead (30 mins, £5!)

The hostel was very conveniently positioned opposite a deli and a pub. In the evening we enjoyed a meal at the pub and took the bus the next day to Inverness after breakfasting in the deli. We enjoyed the deli so much we very nearly missed the bus.

We had time to visit Inverness and what a nice city - with a delightful promenade along the river Ness to the botanical gardens. The river was very high though, some trees were in the water. It had clearly been a very wet week! We made use of the coffee shops and restaurants and made up for the lack of food consumed on the trail - we probably ate our own body weight in scones.

On Tuesday it was time to leave Scotland - but we had time in the morning to visit the museum before taking the bus back to the airport and the plane home - which arrived in Gatwick earlier than scheduled.

### **Some final thoughts...**

The CWT is not for the faint hearted, it's a navigational and wild camping adventure. People who enjoy long distance walking say that they would like to do the trail - but there are some serious matters to consider.

Firstly, it is perhaps not the best trail to undertake on your own. Even those who are used to walking alone may find the isolation and lack of facilities difficult to bear.

It is important to have experience of wild camping, and of navigation across areas which do not have any identifiable paths - the use of GPX is necessary at times and good map skills will help with deciding on the best possible routes.

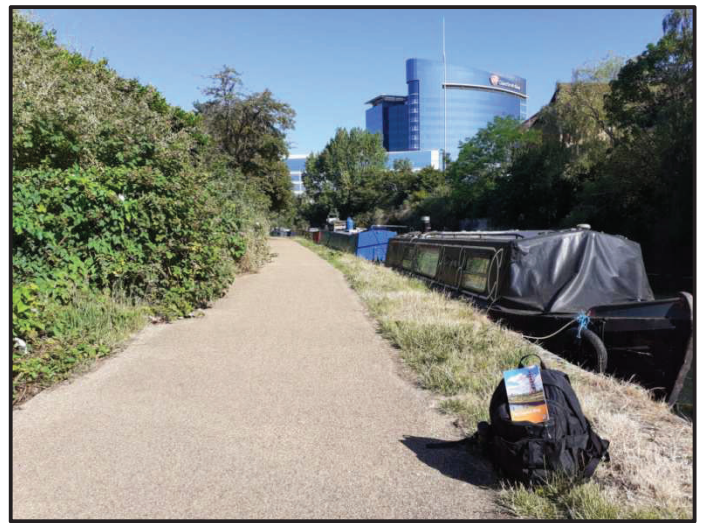
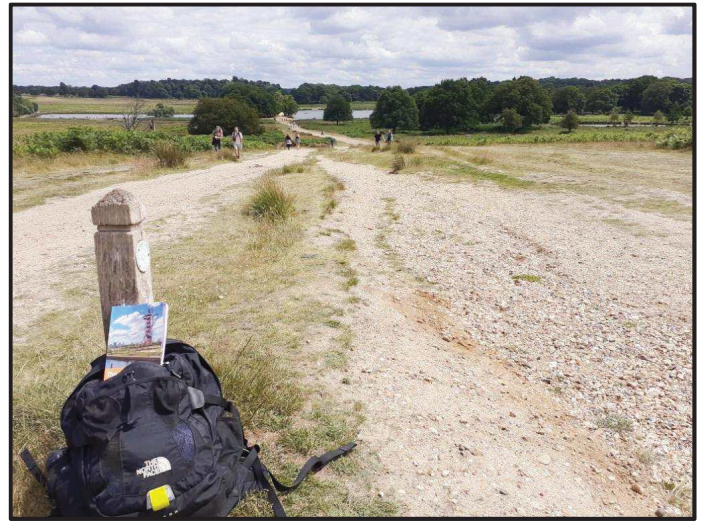
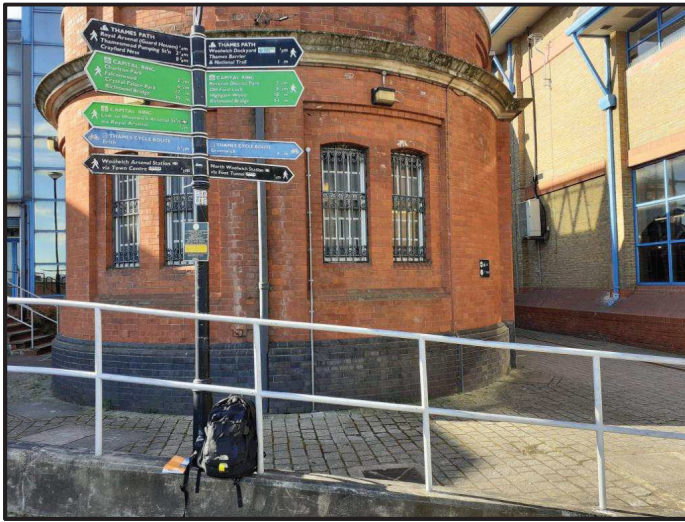
The weather will certainly hamper your attempts at some point - unless you are incredibly lucky.

The kit needed should be as reliable as possible - the footwear you need is particular - the boggy mud is slippery; Helen found the new Vibram soles on her shoes were not grippy enough, when usually they are fine - Stephanie had a pair of Inov-8 g-grip boots which were much better. Walking poles are also necessary, in our opinion, to test the depth of bogs, and to be able to haul yourself out if you are hip deep.

People who don't like wet feet are not going to like the CWT or the AKT - you have to cross so many rivers - that you really cannot afford to think about it. You cannot wear leather boots, so it's trail shoes or trail-mid boots - it's a given that you are going to have wet feet all day, but fabric uppers dry quickly.

The midges were an issue when we tried to take a break and most of the time we didn't bother stopping - it wasn't worth the irritation, so we walked with fewer breaks. The only way round this would be to eat more on the hoof or walk in the spring or early summer before the midge season gets going - which is what we propose to do when we continue on our adventure on the Cape Wrath Trail from Morvich.

**Watch this space!**



**The Capital Ring: clockwise, from top left – Woolwich Foot Tunnel at the start/end; Richmond Park; the Grand Union Canal at Brentford; David by the Thames near the end.**

### **CAPITAL RING JUNE 13-17 By David Thornton**

LIKE so many other keen walkers, I was forced to forgo my 2020 spring plans to do one of the National Trails. Although all my bookings for accommodation fully understood, it was still with some sadness and a strange sense of guilt that these were all cancelled.

Where possible, I decided not to accept any refunds on the assumption that I would be booking them again in the not too distant future. One only hopes that given the huge impact on these small rural businesses that they all survive and continue to trade. I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

By early June, some of the restrictions on the use of public transport had been sufficiently relaxed, so as a bit of a last minute decision I decided to take some time off work and have a go at completing the Capital Ring. This is a route I had looked at doing as a fill-in over odd days, as and when, but given the circumstances and the ability to travel in and out of London every day, without the need for accommodation, it seemed to be a logical route to attempt.

In keeping with these apparent rapidly changing times, I ditched for the very first time my favoured OS full paper maps (I hear you gasp) and decided to buy the official Capital Ring OS guide book. I know, I know. One day I may even venture into the world of GPS maps, but steady on! I am very happy to report that this turned out to be an excellent decision, as the guide, written by Colin Saunders\*, is as clear as you like including an enormous wealth of useful historical facts, which are really essential for a route of this nature. It also helpfully showed all the logical links to underground and overground stations, making the days so much easier to plan.

The Capital Ring is 78 miles long, officially starting and finishing on the south side of the Woolwich pedestrian tunnel, and takes in as many green spaces and areas of interest as it can. Now, for someone like me, who has spent more than 30 years driving in and out of London, along pretty much every arterial road there is, this route provided such an endless supply of highlights, I genuinely wouldn't know where to start and quite frankly I would be typing here forever and a day. Even what most would have considered to have been a fairly mundane section of the route, I found really interesting.

To pick one at random and as a classic example, shortly after walking round the back of Brent Cross Shopping Centre on day three, I found myself along a tiny slither of woodland, about 400 yards long, which ran the course of a small section of the Brent River, but also ran immediately alongside the North Circular Rd, which has the unwelcome tag of being Britain's noisiest road and certainly one of the busiest. Now most walkers would probably be happy to get through a section like this as quickly as possible, allowing it to simply pass them by, but for someone like me, who has spent far too much of my valuable time sat stationary in my car on that section of road, it was of real interest. In future, whenever I'm sat in my car, patiently and painfully waiting to pop



through the traffic lights which junction the A406 and A1, I shall glance across at that little wall of green, with a grin, now knowing what sits behind it. And if I'm honest, it really was these little moments which made the walk so enjoyable for me, equally as much if not more than the bigger ticket sections ... of which there were many of course.

These regular tiny oases of green helped break up the urban sections, before you eventually hit some of the major open spaces and landmarks of the trail. In a clockwise direction from the start, these included the following: Woolwich Common, Shooters Hill, Eltham Park and Palace, Avery Hill, Beckenham Place Park, Crystal Palace Hill and sports complex, Wandsworth Common, Wimbledon Park, The Wimbledon All England Lawn Tennis Club, Putney Heath, Richmond Common, Syon Park, Perivale Park, Grand Union Canal, Horsenden Hill, Harrow on the Hill, Highgate Wood, Finsbury Park, Clissold Park, Walthamstow Marshes, Hackney Marshes, the Olympic Village and stadium, East End Docklands and the Woolwich walkway back under the Thames to the start.

A good majority of these spaces I have never stepped foot on and I really had no idea how vast some of them are. Richmond Park is just huge, and Highgate Woods were amazing to walk through when you consider their proximity to the centre of London. And the walk along the River Lea, through Hackney marshes, looking at the array of canal boats and glimpsing into the lives of those people who live in them on a permanent basis, was so interesting. However, I'm going to pick on two, on the face of it, relatively small highlights of my four and a half days of walking, which will remain permanently in my memory.

The first was on the morning of day three, as I walked along a small section of the Grand Union canal, which runs underneath the A4 and alongside the elevated section of the M4 at Brentford. For those of you who know the building, at this point the path passes immediately alongside the enormous glass office block which is the world headquarters of GlaxoSmithKline and is one of many buildings and business estates which make this one of the most industrialised areas of London.

I can't begin to tell you how many times I have driven past that building chugging along the M4, completely oblivious to the relative peace and tranquillity of the path that lay below it. Walking along this short section, you immediately become aware of how so little of that traffic noise from up above travels down below to what is wooded waterway and peace and quiet. And then to cap that moment a flash of bright blue passed my right eye, as I clocked a Kingfisher darting across the water. You'd be lucky enough to see a Kingfisher on a remote river in the middle of the countryside, but to see one here, in this location, was really quite something. Isn't it encouraging that even in a location such as this, somehow nature often finds a way to exist.

The second moment was around midday on day four as I entered Stoke Newington, the nearest point of the Capital Ring to the centre of London. The route takes you into the vast Abney Park Cemetery. What a strange and eerie place that is, with an estimated 200,000 graves, nearly all of which are unkempt and densely surrounded by mature trees and undergrowth. The stillness and tranquillity of this patch of land was a stark contrast to the relentless comings and goings of the busy world immediately outside its boundaries. The trees and foliage have taken over the cemetery and remained untouched to the point that it has become an official nature reserve. This large patch of earth was never consecrated and therefore, back in the day, became a burial place for dissenters and religious non-conformists. It felt like such a bizarre place and I shall never forget it.

When I first came across this route my initial thought was that it would be an ideal winter walk, given the fact that a good majority of the foot conditions would be favourable, compared with some more remote trails on offer. However, the main advantage of doing this trail between May and September is that all the trees are in full leaf and so you really do get a sense of how much impact the green spaces have. I'm not sure this type of route is for everyone, but if you fancy a day out in London with a difference, why not jump on a train and do a section. It would be well worth the trip.

\*David lent his Capital Ring guide – which has just been updated and reprinted (see story in the current Strider) – to Graham Smith, who completed the trail in five separate day walks between mid September and early November. Graham enjoyed the trail immensely, and found Colin Saunders' guide book every bit as useful as David did.



Left – Graham and Cal on the summit of Ben Wyvis; right - Cal, Tumble, Caper, Lark and Fen at Tarbat Ness – Tumble and Caper belong to Graham and Sarah's daughter Jessica; and (on next page) the views from Little Wyvis.



## POSTCARD FROM SCOTLAND By Graham Smith

THIS is a much shorter Postcard From Scotland than usual – because this year’s trip north of the border was much shorter than usual.

What with Covid-19 restrictions, my usual hillwalking trip to Scotland was always unlikely to happen in May or June. My wife Sarah and I had been planning to go to Tain, in the north of Scotland and where daughter Jessica lives, for 10 days in July anyway, so at the end of June, I eventually decided to abandon my usual hillwalking trip and have a couple of days in the hills while there. So, at the end of July, Sarah and I headed north with our dogs – while Jessica headed south to see friends in London and Swindon, leaving her dogs with us. So Sarah and I were dog sitting. This meant we were looking after five dogs – our collies Fen and Cal and Portuguese Podengo Lark, plus Jessica’s ‘Pod’ Tumble, and Caper, a little cross-breed Jessica obtained from a Glasgow-based animal rescue centre who had been found roaming the streets in Romania.

After a very pleasant few days in Tain walking the dogs on some of those delightful sandy beaches near that little town, and taking them to the lighthouse on the remote headland of Tarbat Ness, I decided to cut loose (with Sarah’s agreement) to climb a Munro, taking Cal the blue merle collie with me.

I decided to climb Ben Wyvis, at 3432 feet a medium sized Munro which I had been up 12 years previously with Mike Pursey. Ben Wyvis is one of the most straightforward of all the 282 Munros, involving a pleasant walk by a burn through trees from the car park by the A835, before you start going up. Ben Wyvis is known as the Inverness Munro, as it is a few miles from the city (and a good 45 minute drive from Tain). Cal and I set off on the walk at about 10.30, and it wasn’t long before we left that path by the burn to head up the hill. It’s a good path which zig-zags but is steep in places as you get near the first top, An Cabar. Cal coped with the steep bits much easier than I did (but he does have four legs). It was great to get to the top, after which there’s a wonderful 2km ridge to the main summit, Glas Leathad Mor. Striding along a summit ridge in Scotland, with the sun out and a little wind, I find the best walking of all, when you look around and in all directions you can see nothing but hills and lochs and – in this case – the North Sea over to the east. It was just fantastic.

I had lunch by the summit cairn, before descending. This time, instead of going back the way I had come – as I had with Mike Pursey 12 years previously – I decided to follow the advice of the Scottish Mountaineering Club’s Munro guide and make it a round walk by going on to the sub top of Tom a’Choinnich before the descent. Going on to Tom a’Choinnich was fine, involving a short, easy up and down to the summit, and at first the descent was fine as well, following a clear path. But, after a few hundred yards the path seemed to run out, and I spent the best part of an hour ploughing through heather to reach a burn to be followed and eventually link with the outward route. When I finally reached the burn, I was hoping to find a proper path – but, sadly, there wasn’t one. Cal and I had to continue ploughing through heather by the side of the burn for a good hour, until we reached the track taking us to the outward route. It was very tiring, but Cal seemed to enjoy continually splashing in the water (even if I certainly didn’t). I was so relieved to find that track at long last. But it had still been a good day – and Cal had climbed his first Munro.

Two days later I had planned a big walk taking in three Munros – Meall a’Chrasgaidh (3064 ft and pronounced myowl a chraskee), Sgurr nan Clach Geala (3586 feet and pronounced skoor nan klach gee-ala) and Sgurr nan Each (3028 feet and pronounced skoor nan yach). This time I didn’t take Cal and the drive to the start of the walk took me a good hour. I had really been looking forward to the walk, particularly as I felt I had been starting to get my ‘hill legs’ (as Mike Pursey would say) having been up Ben Wyvis. But ... when I got to the start of the walk, there was rain and cloud at about 2,000 feet, and the weather forecast was for more of the wet stuff. The days are long gone when I would go up Munros in all weathers, so I reluctantly decided to scrap that day’s planned hillwalk, and think of something else.

That something else was Little Wyvis, a 2506 ft Corbett (Scottish hills of 2,500-3,000 feet) which is the little sister of Ben Wyvis and which I had christened ‘Wee Wyvis’ when I scaled it with Mike Pursey on that same trip 12 years previously. The approach is the same as for Ben Wyvis, along that track by the burn. I took the same route I had taken with Mike before, crossing the burn and then free-ranging through heather and following deer tracks (where I could) up the hillside to the main track which curves around the hill to eventually arrive at the summit. And it’s a fine summit – as good as many Munros, offering wonderful extensive views. From the summit there was short ridge, and I went down a slight dip to a col and a short climb to Tom na Caillich, a sub top of Little Wyvis. The descent presented a similar issue to my descent from the Ben Wyvis walk – the path ran out so I had to free-range through the heather back into the valley. Fortunately the descent didn’t take too long and it wasn’t too uncomfortable. Free-ranging through the heather is what you have to do on so many Scottish hillwalks. And I always find that a bit of discomfort and



wet feet is a small price to pay for the sheer exhilaration I get from the summit of a Scottish hill, particularly when I am lucky enough to have a ridge to stride along, as I did on both these walks.

#### **WALK REPORT - HHH 14-16: July 19 By Peter Jull**

THE last hurrah before lockdown had five, this “Hurrah we’re back” also had five after a last minute Covid test & trace withdrawal. From Goathurst Common the ‘little’ dipper between Ide Hill and Toys Hill was met with fresh legs rather than 80-90 miles fatigue if 100eers come this way. Collecting No 5, who’d left it too late to leave home to arrive in time, at Toys Hill village hall it was NT paths rather than PRoWs across and beyond Toys Hill hill heading north. A drinks pause at Brasted church brought on the drizzle. The optimistic men were proved wrong by the waterproof donning ladies as it lasted and was heavy for an hour and more before easing and brightening through the afternoon. A climb up the North Downs scarp could be called sadistic with three miles to go and today the top field exit proved elusive in long grass. Lunch on the grass in front of potential HQ Darwin Academy in Biggin Hill was a wet bottom avoiding standing affair. Turnings invented and missed added a bit back off the Downs with tarmac hard to avoid but rewarded by welcome tea and coffee at the welcoming White Horse in Sundridge. The other 100 route was coincidentally reversed a while then nearly back at the start a turn east before regaining the Greensand Way west to east. At Sevenoaks Weald church a turn for home followed a detour into the village for their hall before more Greensand Way led west to cars.

#### **WALK REPORT - CREAM TEA WALK: August 2 By Peter Jull**

GROUP 2 were a group of seven (Roxy was a terrier so no rules were broken) leaving Doddington’s pub for Doddington’s church where the sign proclaiming its dedication to the Beheading of John the Baptist had been beheaded. From there a map reading error by leader 2 following leader 1’s map unrehearsed was soon put back on track. A misleadingly clear path through long grass misled again but with GPS assistance, we were soon being back on track. From the hamlet of Seed a gone to seed bean field was a challenging traverse with any reinstatement line only vaguely visible from the far side. Another map reading mistake went the wrong side of a water tower and must have been where clockwise Group 2 missed anti Group 1, dropping down to the North Downs Way too soon but finding a pleasant spot for a mid morning stop. An audible pssh deflated a passing cyclist’s whizz downhill. Stour Valley Walk out of Lenham then across railways and motorway and signs to Boughton Malherbe were seen but a patch of vicious stinging nettles were yet to intervene. Group 2 lucked in for the lunch stop with willows shading benches on Grafty Green’s green and the Kings Head right next door. Back up the hill to pass Boughton Malherbe’s cream tree free churchyard. Rejoin the Stour Valley Walk where a huddle of more than 20 cows started streaming behind us but inquisitiveness had been overcome by lethargy before we turned off the walk. Back over motorway and railway both groups met in Lenham Heath for a socially distanced hello and chat across the lane. Round the corner a chicken had crossed the road and now didn’t seem to know why. Group 2 now lucked out in facing the climb up the North Downs scarp on a hot late afternoon. But, once up, it was mostly gently down into the Syndale Valley in which Doddington lies. In the meantime leader 1 was treating Group 1 to almost Cream Tea from his boot; still no cream though.

#### **WALK REPORT - HPH 2: Sunday August 23 By Peter Jull**

AFTER taking care to ensure Leader 2 (Jim Briggs) and Leader 3 (Michael Headley) knew where to go Leader 1 (me), carelessly led his group from the Oldbury Hill car park start where the figure-of-8 route crossed, out of the wood on the short loop first instead of the long. A sharp up and down soon revealed a variation in abilities of the six. On Greensand Way from Ightham Mote, Knole House was reached and rested at without Group 3’s three catching up from Ightham’s village hall start and properly doing the short loop first. Back to Oldbury Wood the three who had signed up for 14 miles were short-changed by having done only 10 but dropped out as planned. The others leisurely lunched on what had been left in cars, Andrew Melling particularly well prepared with deck chair and beer. Long loop now last the 34° sunshine exposure experienced on recce, debilitating across open fields, was now more comfortable and the shade of Mereworth Woods now sheltered from a brief sprinkle. The last field before crossing the A20 hid the route roughly but was clear across West Malling golf course where we felt surely hidden from view as driving range users continued firing balls close across our right of way. Group 2’s cars at Addington village hall evidenced their starting point west to follow the Wealdway and the HPH part of the walk. With home nearby Judy peeled off after Platt and from Brasted, HHH’s route shared the way to a last sting up and down Oldbury Hill. Despite the measured morning pace the diminished Group 1 finished at 5:30 having pulled ahead of Group 3 who took an hour longer. Group 2’s five were back at 5:45 after long ladies loo queues at Knole, a missed turn meander in Mereworth Woods and posing at Ightham Mote.

#### **WALK REPORT - ALLITERATION J, JULLIBERRIE & JUMPING DOWNS: Sunday September 13 By Peter Jull**

THIRTEEN (well below the 30 limit) attended the first large group Kent LDWA walk for six months. A late start was later still when engineering works required a wait for the rail replacement bus. Soon up above Chilham railway station the first J of the day is Julliberrie Down. Despite the double L it is invariably pronounced as in Julius, having postulated connections with Caesar’s army of 54BC, which doesn’t alliterate so well. A Rex recommended permissive path provided magnificent morning views across the valley which would have been hidden by trees on the Stour Valley Walk intended. An unreinstated field of maize had grown quite sparsely so was not the barrier it might have been to access Denge Wood. The navigation nightmare this name evokes did not transpire, the route having been double rehearsed for this and a Hundred. Horses tried to join the queue for a stile out of their field. A debate as to the toponymy or etymology of Covet Wood and the following Covert Wood was interrupted by a failed attempt to aid a lost motorist which caused a traffic jam on the remotest of roads. For J2, open access land allowed a gratuitous climb and descent for views and a photo op to prove Jumping Down had been conquered, not just looked upon from below. In Barham for a 2 o’clock lunch, the green has many benches but some preferred the grass in the shade of a tree on a brilliantly sunny but not oppressively hot day, the breeze in places being welcome and pleasant. The Duke of Cumberland provided drinks and its garden tap was advantaged for bottle top ups. An alternative to the oft repeated Elham Valley Way past Kingston exploited and those misguided gone beyond Bishopsbourne recalled, on the road up and out Liz Keeler cycled by not recognising her friends and not hearing their calls. Terrier Roxy entertained by overoptimistically chasing some pheasants across the biggest of fields but rejoined with energy still undiminished. Before and after Lower Hardres, the afternoon’s hills were less hard than the morning’s, the route

largely level. The opportunity for an escorted deviation through the Stickland estate at Mystole was taken leading back to Julliberrie Down to reverse the up back down to Chilham station for 6:45 after 24 miles in 10 hours and a bit.

#### **WALK REPORT - ALLITERATION I – IGHTHAM AND IDE HILL: September 20 By Peter Jull**

A CHECK with Jim's infra red camera showed us all equally well, or all equally ill. Who's that with hot legs? We had a no risk assessment required six. Turning south towards, but not quite to, the Mote a "runner" pulled out in front but was overtaken before the end of the road. Turning west beside a marked on map stream, the reason it could not be recalled from recce was revealed as rare visibility and switching often between left and right. Elevation gain continued steadily and slowly and then was quickly and steeply lost to reach a checkpoint. Not for us but, as conversation uncovered, a horse event, a participant in which was soon passed, not riding but leading. Through river-less Underriver to reach a quiet corner of Nizel's golf course for eleven o'clock elevenses with bonus blackberries. South west now, harvesting and other farming operations had revised the landscape since the route was revised but a deviation was soon rectified with satellite assistance. North west led into Ide Hill's foothills and after a discomfortingly busy B road Ide Hill steepened to reach a busy with picnickers Ide Hill village green for us to join them on still free benches of the many there. A clear blue sunny sky clouded autumnally but summer soon returned as the return route began, much on Greensand Way and much of that through Knole Park. Sarah was bemused by Bitchet Green as named on maps and impressed by the size of the sign pronouncing it on the roadside. Up to St. Lawrence and down, up again Oldbury Hill and down its ravine then led back to Ightham's recreation ground after 23 miles and 8½ hours.

#### **WALK REPORT - ALITERATION H, HARTLEY, HARVEL & HAWLEY October 4 By Peter Jull**

A WET forecast deterred registrants to a diminished 10 who set off from Farningham Road station. Soon beside the river in South Darent, the Darent was clearly in spate. Crossing where in medieval times, the river for fish ponds, the wood between branches, under water on recce, was thankfully dry. At the edge of Hawley, without going further into what is a rather suburban village to find a better example, the address on a factory sign had to suffice as photographic evidence of our passing. Back across the river, what is often soggy ground was remarkably solid despite the recent days of rain. We passed the London Marathon – well, one of the dispersed groups doing the Covid safe version anyway. Climbing out of the valley, Rex began to struggle but his dog's electronic collar was with David (not round his neck) so could keep us in digital view. Hartley village was skirted to reach Hartley church's photographable sign. Pressing on Rexlessly, it became increasingly clear that the Rule of 6 having effectively banned us from the preferred pub stop, insufficient calculation had been given to arrival time at the alternative picnic spot picked. At 1:30 a track became an impromptu feeding point with sheltering trees from the intermittent rain which was more on than off but lighter than first thing to the extent it wasn't inconveniencing the walk. Harvel village green was therefore the turning point not needed for lunch, just the evidential photo. Although the general trend down had begun some of the steepest dip slope dry valleys were yet to intervene, down then up. Down became more consistent on road where the gurgling and rushing Darent was rejoined to finish 23½ miles after 8 hours or so; Rex having caught up, just in case anyone was worrying.

#### **WALK REPORT - HHH 6&7: October 11 By Peter Jull**

AT the top of the scarp near the Chilham starting point, the potential 100 route was joined down then up to Shottenden then up some more where the 'pulpit' provided a photo opportunity. From Perry Wood, west to cross a favourite dry valley without sight of its ghostly Cromwellian era musketeer. 0.9 mile of less favoured contiguous arable field (debate: Is this the largest such field around?) follow, to reach Sheldwich scout camp site, maybe kit check point for a morning interlude. After roads and fields between the many hamlets of Throwley parish, three rebel against a large and flinty field in favour of a bit longer tarmac. At Stalisfield Green the last pub used before lockdown was the first to provide food, well chips anyway, since reopening, in a garden marquee. Turning east to leave the 100 leads to Pested, then Molash, then into King's Wood. Satellites perfect navigation to the planned exit but there's a lot of ducking under fallen vegetation on the path down to Bilting. Four lost walkers directed to their path to Wye, our path leads across the Stour and water meadows still free of squelch. Turning north to complete the morning's triangle side recrosses the Stour to pass Godmersham's church, then house, then through its park. A sprinkle does no more than produce a rainbow of a day of practically perfect walking weather: 24 miles finished in 8½ hours or so.

#### **WALK REPORT - WHY WALTHAM? Sunday October 25 By Peter Jull**

East from Wye a straight and long and level path leisurely filled the first mile and a half but the nearing hills inevitably meant it ended with a strenuous climb up the scarp to join the North Down Way. Approaching Cold Blow we instead got a cold shower which got heavier, forcing waterproofs on. Coming down off the Downs the rain ceased coming down, revealing views of where the previous week's walk was in Sussex until shrouded by a distant shower. Happening upon a substantial branch hanging over the road, our civic duty unhooked it from the telephone wire with a substantial crash, then man and woman handled it onto the bank. Straight and long and level again the fields underfoot were comfortably firm. Into and through Brabourne and its churchyard, out the back a collective groan at sight of the next field freshly cultivated, soft and unreinstated. Mud clung to mud clung to feet and at the far side stream Jim's attempt to wash his boots caused a bigger splash than intended, resulting from a slippery bank. That far away shower was now far too close and rain remained with us for the remains of the morning. Back up the scarp after Stowting, a straight and long and level path through West Wood led to a straight and long and mostly level lane leading to lunch which inexplicably dead ends at Stelling Minnis. Benches and the village notice board shelter supplemented the bus stop shed meeting point with Liz Keeler, who in fitter days regularly led an October Minnis Meander in this vicinity of her home. Warned of muddy fields ahead, a deviation was devised more on roads to Waltham. While hoods were down a snap was snatched of most of the 12 while strugglers straggled up Church Hill. But our morning's penance was rewarded by a drying and brightening afternoon. Indeed, British Summer Time having expired the night before, the lowering sun was right in the eyes, particularly while toiling up the valley side after Crundale church. West to Wye finished downhill to finish 19 miles plus imperfections in 7¼ hours and ½ an hour before sunset.

#### **KENT GROUP'S FIRST HUNDRED - THE 1992 INVICTA By Don Newman**

WHILE searching through some old Winter Tanners route descriptions recently, I discovered an interesting historic document, the *hand-written* 1992 Invicta Hundred Marshals' Walk results and report. The Invicta was, I believe, the first LDWA 100 organised by the Kent Group, and with a route within the boundaries of Kent. A previous 100 had gone from Guildford in Surrey to



Canterbury along the North Downs Way (before my time).

Back in the day marshals' walks were more low-key than they are today. There were just nine checkpoints (the main event had 14) but with 10 additional drinks points due to the hot weather. Just 35 walkers started, including 24 from Kent. It was the Kent Group's policy that our members could not enter the main event, as we were all expected to marshal on that.

The list of walkers contains many famous names. Sadly, several are now deceased, including the walking legend Ann Sayer, and also my walking rival/comrade Peter Barnett. Today, several of those listed are still actively walking, and a few of us are still doing Hundreds. The finish times on that very hot weekend are also notable, especially our own Andrew Boulden's sprint finish from the last checkpoint, to get in ahead of Sherwood's Colin Lees.

Twenty-eight years have not dimmed my own memories of the event. I started out from the Wildernesse School in Sevenoaks with seven others on the faster walkers' start at 10am. All the others had left at 8:30. I had just returned from a cross-country skiing holiday, felt really fit, but had a niggling pain in one ankle. I was soon limping, and watching the others disappear ahead of me. This was set to be my eighth official Hundred, if only I could finish! At a drinks point near Yalding (13 miles) I was suffering from my ankle, the heat, and earache from my supportive and competitive then-wife Jackie, who demanded to know why I was last! Then came a turning point. Struggling uphill on an enclosed footpath, I had lost sight of all the others. I found the concrete Greensand Way sign low down in the undergrowth, turned right through the hedge, and saw Ernie and Celia Bishop waving to me from the barn checkpoint. They asked me "Where are the others?" The others had missed the sign, and continued to charge up the hill. Soon we saw them all coming back, cutting across the stubbled field, with the redoubtable Peter Barnett in the lead. I gave them a cheery wave, which was not returned, and set off.

Suddenly my ankle pain was forgotten, as I strode eastwards. All that mattered was that I had a 10-minute lead on Peter. All through that hot afternoon we raced each other along the Greensand Way. We hardly stopped at drink/checkpoints, and had no time to chat with our supportive wives, Pauline and Jackie.

Peter eventually caught up with me as we crossed the valley, and the remnants of the M20 construction site, near Lenham, leaving the Greensand Way to turn north-west on the Pilgrims Way. We walked through the night together, with support from Brian Buttifant and Peter's son Chris. On Sunday morning we could look left down towards the Wildernesse School. Unfortunately we weren't going straight there. We still had to continue west, with another 23 miles to go, in a hilly loop to the finish. In the hot afternoon I started wilting on the hills. Peter didn't do wilting. He continued to stride up the hills with the same vigour as he displayed on the previous day. Unusually though, he stopped and waited for me. We were both very glad to finish at 7pm, in a creditable time of 33 hours (if only I could still do that today!).

The event report – a large chunk of which is reproduced below – contains some interesting insights into attitudes at that time. "Rejoice, brave sons of Kent, hail! Crown'd with loud applause." (from Pope's "Ode in Praise of Kent") Presumably the *daughters* of Kent didn't need such an exhortation? There is also a mild chastisement "The current fashion for competition and PBs is not followed in the Kent Group – to complete the walk is our mark of success". So, slapped wrists all round for Andrew, Peter and myself! I don't think I have ever finished ahead of Andrew on a 100. If I had, I would surely have framed the results! However, he has never beaten my fastest time of 27:28 on the 1986 Downsman. All irrelevant of course, because 100s have never been competitive, have they?

The weather on the main event was even hotter, resulting in a 25% retirement rate. There were more than 200 stiles on the route (many presumably now replaced by kissing gates). I have few memories of my marshalling activities, except for a chat with a Surrey Group walker, who had left home telling his wife that he was just going out for a walk and didn't know when he'd be back! There was drama at HQ, though, when someone turned off what they thought was the porch light, but was actually the master switch for all kitchen equipment and lights. Work continued by torchlight until the caretaker was roused from his bed to resolve the problem.

There were several notable individual achievements. The first finisher was a runner from Cleveland, in the apparently brilliant time of 22:01. A few years later he was banned from entering Hundreds, when it was found that he had cheated on several events. Roger Cole became the first person to complete 20 Hundreds (he would go on to complete 41). There were no 20 badges then, but he was presented with an engraved tankard. Martyn Greaves also finished (he would complete 40). Octogenarian Henry Bridge completed his 10th.

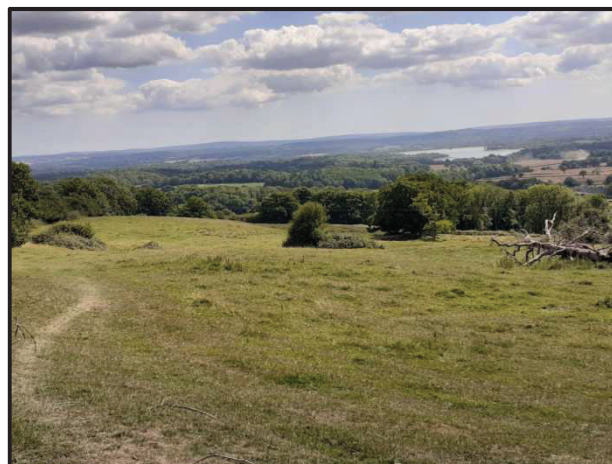
I'm told that it is good to have long-term aims in life. I wonder how many of us will go on to pass Roger Cole's Hundreds total, and how many will still be doing Hundreds when we are octogenarians?

**The following is a large part of the report of the marshals' walk, written by Ron Roweth under the heading "REJOICE, BRAVE SONS OF KENT, HAIL! CROWN'D WITH LOUD APPLAUSE" (from Pope's 'Ode in Praise of Kent')**

THE marshals' walk was held over the weekend of May 2-4 1992 in excellent weather, cooler at first with the odd shower, and warmer later, but with two very cold nights. The Kent countryside is perhaps at its best in early May and it is to be hoped that our visitors for the main event are lucky enough to have similar weather and that the apple blossom and the bluebells are still out. The walk attracted a total of 41 entries. Of these, 35 started and 30 (20 Kent members and 10 from other groups) completed the full 100 miles. Twenty-seven walkers chose the early 8.30am start, whereas eight opted for the 'faster walkers' start at 10am. Various comments were heard during the event concerning walkers who appeared to have turned up for the wrong start; however, the advantage of having two starts soon became clear as the time-span between the first and last remained quite short until the end, and this enabled us to provide a larger number of drinks and support points.

First plans for the walk were for a maximum of eight checkpoints, but many additional offers of help received from Kent members and friends, neighbouring groups and entrants unable to participate through illness or injury meant that we eventually provided nine checkpoints and ten drinks points. The level of support surprised and delighted many of the walkers and a large number of appreciative comments, both verbal and written, have been received. I hope that the Kent Group members who worked so hard on the event don't mind not being listed in this note of appreciation – it would almost resemble the current membership list either walking or helping. But mention should be made of the 'Sussex Ladies' team, led by Mavis Marshall and Diana Warland, who provided outdoor checkpoints at Lenham Cross – a model of efficiency on a cold dark night, and deserving of the unanimous praise of the walkers.

The current fashion for the competition and ‘PBs’ is not followed in the Kent Group – to complete the walk is our mark of success – and congratulations are offered to Pam Prince, Ken Heath, Kevin Puttock and Robert Lawlor for achieving their first Hundreds, and similarly to George Young of Norfolk/Suffolk Group. **Ron Roweth**



**Above: four of David's photos from the Greensand Way.**

#### **GREENSAND WAY: JULY 15-19 By David Thornton**

SINCE joining the LDWA Kent Group around five years ago, I have noticed that one of the more regularly contested debates between members, while walking around Kent or Sussex on a social walk, has been the merits and attraction of the Greensand Way, compared with its more advertised neighbour and National Trail, the North Downs Way.

I had already done little sections of the Greensand Way on a small number of social walks and challenge events, the latter organised by our Surrey neighbours, but I decided to have a go at doing the whole thing, so that next time the subject was raised, I could join in. Much like the Capital Ring, this was a route I hadn't planned on doing at this stage, with more focus being on completing the remaining National Trails, but with the relatively unstable environment that still existed, this was a logical route, given that three of the five days could be tackled directly from home and using public transport, meaning only two nights of accommodation would be required, along with the fact that if the Covid situation suddenly took a turn for the worse, I could exit the route very easily.

So off I set from West Malling Station, at 6am on Wednesday July 15, arriving in Haslemere, where the trail starts, just after 9am and eager to crack on. A mile or two outside of Haslemere, the route takes you through thick woodland, into Hindhead Common and up to Gibbett Hill. As I stood at the trig point there for a short while, enjoying my first significant view, all the way into the city of London, a chap came alongside with his dog for a brief chat and remarked that he had rarely seen it so clear. I was in for a good day.

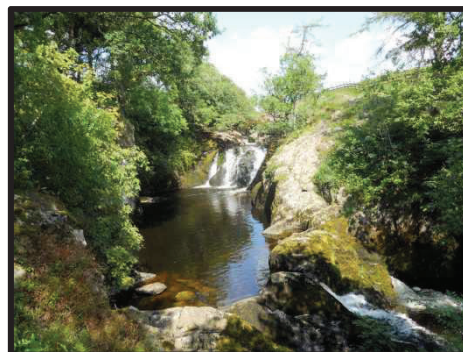
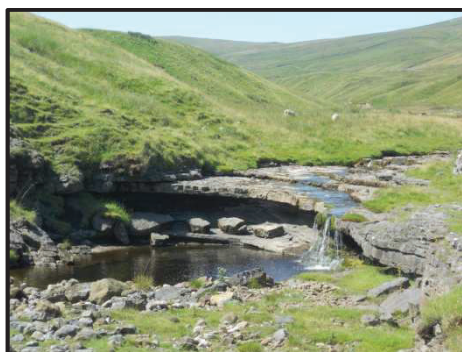
Immediately after Gibbett Hill, the route takes you around the Devil's Punchbowl, an area that will be familiar to anyone who has participated in the Punchbowl Marathon challenge event. I imagine the Greensand Way was on the map well before the old section of the A3 was dug up and tunnelled through these hills, with the traffic noise making it a far less pleasurable experience than we enjoy today. The theme of dense woodland and regular viewing points continued throughout day one, as I weaved my way through the Surrey Hills towards Peaslake and the Hurtwood Inn, setting for my first overnight stay. This place was buzzing with cyclists, as I sat outside in the warmth of the evening for a couple of beers and a bite to eat, watching endless mini pelotons race past. I knew this part of the world was popular with cyclists, but it turns out that Wednesday is recognised as 'the' day for off road night time cycling. The Hurtwood Inn, by the way, was rather pricey, but very nice indeed.

I had a very long and warm day ahead on Thursday, as I headed towards Redhill for my next overnight stay. Continuing through the Surrey Hills for most of the morning, the route took me past the rather posh and exorbitantly costly Duke of York School and on towards Leith Hill and its tower, where I stopped for a cup of tea from the tiny café there and took some photos. Having turned down many potential opportunities since I started the walk, I finally plucked up the courage to ask someone to take a photo of me, as I like to have at least one as a memento for each trail. With my phone in one hand and my hand sanitiser in the other, there came that inevitable awkward moment where this particular gentleman gave me a very alarmed look as I rather sheepishly explained how



we could coordinate the swapping of items between us, to avoid any chance of either of us, but more specifically him, catching whatever contagion I may have been harbouring. We eventually fumbled our way through the process as I thanked him profusely and moved on ... what a sad and sorry state of affairs, isn't it? And I must ask one of my daughters to educate me on the use of the timer, so I can avoid asking anyone in the future! From Leith Hill, the Greensand Way turns inland as such, but as I thought back to my day and half so far, I realised what an outstanding 30 miles of path I had been privileged to walk. It really is stunning. I continued onwards towards South Nutfield Station, where I would catch the train back one stop to Redhill, but not before stopping at a pub in the lovely village of Brockham, mid afternoon, for an unscheduled but very welcome cold drink and chance to catch up with England's progress in the latest Test match against the West Indies. After a stop at the Travelodge in the centre of Redhill and an early train back to South Nutfield in the morning, day three took me through the remaining undulating Surrey section of the path, just south of Godstone, then passing through Tandridge and Oxted before reaching the fabulous Kent hills of Toy's and Ide that sit above the Sevenoaks Weald. There is a particularly picturesque short stretch after Ide Hill, just as you leave Brockhill Wood, which always makes me pause and stare, as you look from high across the Weald and beyond Bough Beech Reservoir. It's a shame that this is then rather spoilt soon afterwards by the less enjoyable stretch taking you under the A21, shortly followed by the particularly unpleasant and dangerous crossing of the A225 just before you get to Knole Park. Get the timing of that crossing wrong and you could find yourself in all sorts of bother. From Knole Park I left the Greensand Way to catch the train from Sevenoaks to West Malling, requiring a return journey and walk back to the trail early on the Saturday morning for day four. As always, I was up and away really early for day four, taking in an early packed breakfast, whilst sat and enjoying the calm surroundings of Knole Park. From here the path continues along the high ridge, taking in Carter's Hill and on past Ightham Mote, before starting a steady drop down into Shipbourne, the starting point for David Sheldrake's traditional Post Christmas Stroll social walk. From here the path continues to descend, passing Dunk's Green, the lovely village of West Peckham and on into the river valley and the village of Yalding. The route then steadily rises again along a ridge section which is very familiar to me, with beautiful far reaching views to the south and one of my favourite stretches of path in Kent. This ridge is like one last hurrah for the Greensand Way as it passes Linton and Sutton Valence (from here I caught a bus and train home Saturday afternoon, with a return journey on Sunday morning), past the church at Boughton Malherbe, the starting point for another Kent Group annual tradition, the Cream Tea Walk, organised by Neal and Jan O'Rourke, and then on through Egerton and Pluckley. Now, given the fact that Pluckley is a rather nice village and has a train station, I would have ended the route there, had I been the mastermind behind the Greensand Way, but rather frustratingly it doesn't. Instead, it drops down and then ploughs on through the low-lying farmland south of Ashford, before eventually finishing at Hamstreet. Maybe it's because it started raining heavily at that point, which makes walking waist deep in mature crops really unpleasant, especially in shorts, but either way it isn't the most inspiring bit of path on which to bring an end to what was a great five days.

So back to the debate. I can now see why opinion is quite divided when it comes to these two routes. The high viewpoints you're treated to on the North Downs Way have my vote, but then the comparatively undulating rolling sections you have in between these on the Greensand Way are so much more enjoyable. What possibly gives the Greensand Way the tiniest edge is that it is spared the almost incessant background traffic noise which can blight sections of the North Downs Way. However, I'm going to have to widen this debate still further. Having completed this 93 mile route over a four day period back in September, I would say if you're looking for a west to east trail which shows off, at its beautiful best, the rich variety of the South East countryside, along with some of its most stunning small towns and villages, it would be the High Weald Landscape Trail for me ... by a country mile.



**Clockwise, from top left - Pen-y-Ghent; Ingleborough summit; Ingleton Falls; Bardale Beck.**

#### **A WALKING BREAK IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES: July 2014 By Andrew Melling**

MY 5.30am start earned me a free pass through the Dartford Tunnel and, with no congestion on the roads, I enjoyed a coffee break at Peterborough Services and arrived at Bainbridge Ings Campsite, Hawes, in good time to establish myself and walk into town for lunch.

But first, there is the Wensleydale Cheese Centre to visit, busy with coach parties but freer later. Hawes is a delightful town with all necessary facilities including five inns from which I chose one for lunch of game pie. Then back to site for post-prandial snooze, afternoon tea and the first of five late dinners beneath an azure sky disturbed only by the happy sounds of children playing games, flying kites or murdering each other.

The site did not include tent pitches with electricity and my unpowered fridge did not cope well with the very warm conditions (until the inevitable rain on the last morning). Fortunately, the site office sold fresh milk which I had to buy every day.

Wednesday started misty and I needed fog lights on my drive over to my start at Horton in Ribblesdale. I went the long way round up Pen-y-Ghent via Plover Hill. Reminding me of my backpacking youth, I left the trodden path to follow a beck across the open moor with nothing and no one in sight. The silence was disturbed only by the sound of my breathing, the song of the birds and the rippling of the water - and an email from the court office checking my up to date contact details! After my descent from the hill, I enjoyed a late lunch, with two pints of a good local ale, at a typical country inn at Helwith Bridge. Then I had a gentle stroll back to Horton along the bank of the River Ribble with good views of the hill along the way.

Another day, another hill: Ingleborough, straight up from Ingleton (but not that steep, really). On the top were families with quite young children, all full of other walks they had done or were planning. Having ascended from the west, I descended to the north, near to the village of Chapel-le-Dale. Well outside the village is the splendidly old fashioned Old Hill Inn - all scrubbed tables, a dresser and pots of jam and chutney for sale. And a pleasant, chatty landlady. She had grown up in the area and remembers being cut off by the snow for two weeks each winter. No school! Apparently, her mother once had to climb out of an upstairs window to clear the snow from the front door so that they could get out of the house.

Returning to Ingleton over the moors, I looked down on a helicopter which had apparently landed to help an injured walker. Ingleton has a quite famous set of waterfalls which can be viewed from a circular walk, described as 'arduous'. The landowner profits from this but, as it was the way I wanted to go, I paid my £6 and enjoyed the walk. (There was no charge the last time I was here, in 1966.) I had a visitor that evening. She was curious and charming but not talkative. I met her again next day, curled up on a cushion in the site office.

A small catastrophe: by the end of that day, the uppers of my walking shoes had parted company with the soles. In such hot weather, I find boots less comfortable than shoes and, anyway, Yorkshire towns usually have very good outdoor equipment shops; so I found one next morning and spent 40 minutes trying on ten different pairs before concluding that I needed a make and style they did not stock. Staying only for a traditional Dales ice cream, I returned to camp to plan a shorter, bootied, walk that would suit my late start.

This led me over the hill behind my camp site, down the other side to the hamlet of Marsett and then along Bardale Beck with many small waterfalls. When the path left the river, a sign asked me to respect the conservation quality of the land and stick to the waymarked paths. That was the last waymark I saw! Progress across pathless moorland was slow but I eventually reached the road I wanted, leading to reliable tracks and paths bringing me back into Hawes (with good views of my campsite on the way) for a well-earned pint.

Saturday, and my last day of walking for a while. There were a lot more walkers about and, on the way up Buckden Pike, I was overtaken by a lad with a dog and ... carrying a unicycle. He did not ride it up hill but was planning to ride it down. My planned descent was the other way, past a memorial to five Polish Airmen who died in the war when their plane crashed on the hill. The memorial incorporates a carving of a fox's head, the story being that a surviving airman managed to crawl down the hill to Buckden, following a fox's trail. I was headed south to Kettlewell for lunch - an indifferent turkey sandwich but a nice drop of Timothy Taylor's Landlord, always a reliable pint.

Making my way back to Buckden along the River Wharfe, I came upon two lads I had met near the memorial. They had seen the unicyclist ride down, coming off more than once.

Campers are generally a friendly bunch and children, especially, soon make friends. The camping field was arranged with tents around the edges and a large central space for the games and kite flying. There were a few long stayers, but also much coming and going. Next to me when I arrived were an energetic young couple out for long days of sightseeing. They moved on to Robin Hood's Bay to be replaced by a Dutch couple who seemed connected to other Dutch campers in that corner. The Dutch are very keen campers and it seems you cannot be long on a site anywhere in Europe without having Dutch neighbours. They also have excellent English. This couple moved on to the Lake District to be replaced, for one night, by one man and his dog from Sunderland. His conversation was mainly half formed sentences and grunts, but strangely improved after coming back from walking the dog admitting to be 'a bit worse for wear' (while taking another tinny from his coolbox). After a while, I got the drift. And I got to see a photo of his Thai girlfriend.

My other neighbours, for most of the time, were a young family with two pre-school boys whose philosophy seemed to be: loud is good but louder is better. It only needed mummy to say 'stay out of the tent while I make the beds' for them to rush in to it whooping and screaming. The funniest thing was to hear "No, those are not mummy's knickers, that's a kite. You don't have to believe everything daddy tells you". In the washing up room, a man was on the phone to his 'Mither'. It was his first camping trip. "Well, Mither, we got here at 7.00 and, Mither, we went into town and got a Chinese takeaway and, Mither, the bairns are enjoying themselves".

Early in the week, one of the fathers was refereeing a football match with what seemed like a full field of pre-teens. Later, the games were less organised and one little girl could be heard complaining (to her brother?): Why am I always in goal? A great week was had by all, for sure.

And so, back to Bexley.



## COMEDY CORNER: You Are Old, Father William

A well-known ode, by Lewis Carroll, mangled by the wandering mind of REX STICKLAND while walking the dog

"You are old, Father William," the young man said

"And your hair has become very white;

"And yet you incessantly go for long walks—

"Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,

"I feared it might injure the knees

"But with these brand new titanium ones.

"Why, I can walk as much as I please."

"You are old," said the youth, "as I mentioned before,

"And have grown most uncommonly fat;

"Yet you leapt over that stile like a two year old stag—

"Pray, what is the reason of that?"

"In my youth," said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,

"I kept all my limbs very supple

"By the use of this ointment - one shilling the box

"Allow me to sell you a couple."

"You are old," said the youth, "and your legs are too weak

"For walks longer than half of a day;

"Yet you finished the Hundred, in a jolly good time

"Explain that to me, if you pray."

"In my youth," said his father, "we lived five miles from the pub

"And I argued each night with my wife;

"And the muscular strength from that ten mile round trip,

"Has lasted the rest of my life."

"You are old," said the youth, "one would hardly suppose

"That your eye was as steady as ever;

"Yet you navigate still with compass and map—

"What made you so awfully clever?"

"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"

Said his father; "Just do what I say!

"Go onto the net and fill in a form

"And join the Kent LDWA."

## THE LAST LAST WORD FROM THE EDITOR

THIS, sadly, is my last Kent LDWA newsletter, as my wife Sarah and I are leaving Kent to move to Tain, in the north of Scotland, where our daughter Jessica lives. The move means that I have stepped down as Kent LDWA chairman after being on the committee for 15 years.

I started doing the newsletter in April 2007 (no 72), taking over from Laurie Lowe, to whom it was handed over from Brian Buttifant. Brian started doing the newsletter shortly after the group was formed, and it was initially a News Sheet. This is my 42nd newsletter, working on all of them with the wonderful Bryan Clarke, who checks it, inserts all the photos (and there are lots of them) and arranges for it to be printed and sent out to our members. I suppose the main change for which I am responsible is colour photos, which were introduced in April 2009. With the massively increasing use of digital photography, there are so many more pictures available these days, so we have been able to have lots of picture spreads, which our members seem to like.

I have always said that producing the newsletter is a labour of love, and over the years I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Bryan over its production. Bryan is one of Kent LDWA's unsung heroes, and the group owes him a huge debt of gratitude. I am also grateful to Neil Higham, who checks the content for typos. I am very glad to say that Neil has agreed to keep the newsletter going. Hopefully the new editor will be happy to include an occasional POSTCARD FROM SCOTLAND in the future.

I was co-opted onto the Kent LDWA committee in 2005, when we began organising the White Cliffs Challenge as an annual event, becoming secretary in 2011 and succeeding Brian Buttifant as chairman in 2017. So Kent LDWA has been a huge part of my life for a long time, and I must say that over the years it has been wonderful to walk and work with so many lovely people in our group. It has been a huge honour to be elected chairman, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the committee members for their support during my term of office. I know Stephanie Le Men will do a fine job as chair, for however long she wants the job. Kent LDWA has an excellent committee, full of people who love their walking and are always happy to do what they can to help out. And there is much to look forward to next year – David Thornton's new Sevenoaks Circular, Neil Higham's new High Weald Walk, a White Cliffs Challenge organised by Peter Jull, and loads of fine social walks. Nicola Foad – who, I am glad to say, is about to join the committee – wants to keep our walks in France going and that is good news. Our summer and winter forays across the Channel have been very popular parts of our calendar over the years.

Before signing off, I must just mention someone else who is also leaving the Kent LDWA committee – 'the magnificent Joy Davies.' Joy joined our committee shortly after I did, and what a colossal asset she has been, organising the catering at our events – including the Cinque Ports 100 in 2018 – and earning a well merited LDWA Volunteers Award last year. The mould was broken when our Joy was made.

So thanks for everything, all my Kent LDWA friends. Scotland beckons, but I am going to miss you. **Graham Smith**

**KENT SOCIAL WALKS RESTART**  
**Pictures from some of the Kent social walks, which restarted in July.**



**Three pictures from Alliteration H –  
Hartley, Harvel & Hawley:  
Sunday October 4.**



**The 'pulpit' during  
HHH 6&7:  
Sunday October 11.**



**The group during  
Why Waltham?:  
October 25.**



**On August 18, Dartford boy Andy Clark gave Eve Richards and Graham Smith a guided tour along the Darent Valley Path, which runs from Chipstead/Sevenoaks to the River Thames at Dartford and is a good 20 miles.  
Some of Andy's excellent pictures are here.**



**Lullingstone Castle.**



**The Ostler's Box at the King's Arms, Shoreham.**



**Towards Eynsford Viaduct.**



**Farningham Folly – it's either a bridge or cattle screen, what do you think?**



**Eve and Graham at the end.**



**Part of the Eynsford Village Society Arts Trail.**



**KENT SOCIAL WALKS RESTART**  
Pictures from some of the Kent social walks, which restarted in July.



**Alliteration J September 13 –  
socially distancing on Julliberrie Down and Jumping Down.**



**HPH August 23 -  
rear view of walkers in Knole Park.**



**Near the end of the White Cliffs  
Challenge on August 16.**



**Two photos from Alliteration I on September 20.**