

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION – Kent Group

furthering the interests of those who enjoy long-distance walking

NEWSLETTER



Marion Mueller, Dawn Jones and Andrew Gordon leaving West Heath School, SCC



Poppy Norley still smiling at the finish, SCC



Dale Moorhouse and John Gilbert at CP1



Group of walkers at start, SCC



And they're off! Walkers start from West Heath School, SCC



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CONTENTS

Kent Group Committee	2
Save the Date – Post 100 Party	2
Sevenoaks Circular Challenge – David Thornton	2
High Weald Challenge – Stephanie Le Men	4
Volunteers, We Need You – Penny Southern	4
Leicestershire Round – David Thornton	4
Barnsley Boundary Walk – Helen Strong	6
My Roundhay 50 Experience – Jill Green	7
The Solitary Songster – Jill Green	8
Brian Buttifant’s View of Life – David Thornton	9
Chasing the Northern Lights 2016 – Andrew Melling	9
Roger’s Long Walk – Roger Wedderburn-Day	11
From Spike Milligan to Jane Eyre – Andy Clark	11
South and East of Darenth – Andy Clark	12
Pennine Way Comparison – Andrew Melling	13
Postcard from Scotland – Graham Smith	14
Walking in the Cyclades Part 1– Andrew Melling	17

WELCOME to the April 2023 edition of the Kent Group Newsletter. Since the last edition, we have held our AGM. This saw Peter Jull take over the reins from Stephanie Le Men as Chair. Thank you to Stephanie for her dedicated service steering the Committee and the Group over the last few years. Thank you to Peter for taking on his new role as Chair and to Jim Briggs who succeeds Peter as Treasurer. Committee member Penny Southern has been busy working on a Volunteering Policy for the Kent Group which will enable us to regulate reimbursement of expenses incurred by volunteers – see information about this later on in the newsletter. We also have reports from the Sevenoaks Challenge event, held on 19 March, and on walks undertaken by a number of members. Spring has sprung and I hope all members are enjoying the change of season.

Cathy Waters

KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

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SAVE THE DATE! – POST 100 PARTY AT RYARSH VILLAGE HALL – SUNDAY 11 JUNE 2023

It is a well-established tradition that the Kent Group holds a post-hundred get-together. Last year, the committee took the opportunity to merge this event with the LDWA 50th anniversary. A social walk was followed by a relaxed afternoon at the village hall in Ryarsh. We all took a dish to share and it was a truly memorable day. Many group members also brought their family along. The feedback from those who attended was that the post-hundred party should follow the same format this year.

So, we have booked the hall at Ryarsh already, and further details about the day will be circulated to members by email nearer the time. Until then, do please SAVE THE DATE!

SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR CHALLENGE EVENT 19 MARCH 2023

From David Thornton

On Sunday 5th March a group of 13 of us set off to tackle the Sevenoaks marshals’ walk. After a pretty wet January, February had

been one of the driest on record and ground conditions were more reminiscent of high summer. Even one of Kent's busiest footpaths, the Greensand Way from Ightham Moat to Knole Park was powder dry. It made for a very pleasant day of walking, made all the more enjoyable by the fresh rolls and homemade cake presented to us by Helen Strong. Helen's checkpoints are always a treat for us all.

During the marshals' walk, Dave Sheldrake piped up 'You do know that the long range forecast is for rain, every day, for the next fortnight!' Indeed, by the time the 19th March came around, conditions under foot were a whole lot different. The word 'mud' (not to be confused with the French word 'merde', which quite possibly was muttered a few times too) was probably the most commonly used word by our participants on the day of the main event. However, despite this, it would be fair to say that we rather dodged a minor weather bullet. As accurate as Dave's forecast was, fortunately he was out by one day, which happened to be on 19th March, which was a super day of weather. I'm writing this on Wednesday 22nd March and it has rained every day since.



Marshals' walk 5 March 2023



Brian Buttifant and his grandson Sean after completing 30 mile route

West Heath School was our HQ venue again. A brand new route heading east, towards Plaxtol and back for the 15 milers, with the 22 milers taking a loop via Hadlow and the 30 milers an extended loop as far as West Malling. The figure of eight design of the route seemed to work well, with the main advantage being that all the check points were indoors. Our limit of 225 was reached weeks before the event, so Helen, who ran SiEntries for this event, and I closely managed a cancellation system in a bid to reduce the 'no shows' on the day and enable as many willing participants as possible to take part. Of the 225, we had 196 on the day itself. Of the 29 who didn't attend, 16 had advised us in the week beforehand, but after the date where we needed to close off the waiting list. This is something I'll consider for next year, to see if we can keep that list open for an additional few days.

Therefore, in reality, we only had 13 'no shows' on the day, which is pretty good. 89 took part in the 30 mile route, with 1 retiree, 46 did the 22 mile route with 2 retirees and 61 did the 15 mile route with 0 retirees.

For Brian Buttifant and myself, the day had a lovely family feel to it. Brian's Grandson, Sean, completed the 30 mile route and my daughter Rebecca, along with her partner, Will, completed the 15 mile route. I know Brian was as proud as I was to see them on the day and to welcome them back at the school. It was very clear to me that all three thoroughly enjoyed themselves, particularly the whole positive atmosphere surrounding the event.



David Thornton with daughter Rebecca and partner Will at finish

On the whole, the day ran very smoothly indeed, although one participant did do his very best to cause a whole host of complications at the very end of the day. Not only did he bypass CP3 at Plaxtol, he then proceeded to jump into his car when he got back to West Heath School and go home, without letting us in the hall know. Looking back, it was with some significant relief for us that he answered his phone as he was driving back to North London, as we could have been wandering around in the dark between West Heath School and Plaxtol for a good while. On further investigation, I noticed he was a non-member, so a small amount of slack could be given, but I did personally contact him, in a bid to lay out clearly the rules of participation for an LDWA challenge event! He did apologise profusely and looks forward to coming to one or both of our events this summer.

As always, it is the marshals who give up their valuable time to make these events possible and I would like to thank them all as follows: Stephanie Le Men, Michael Headley, Andy Clark, Peter Jull, Steve Russell, Nicola Foad, Cathy Waters, Clare Evans, Dale Moorhouse, John Gilbert, Penny Southern, Jim Briggs, Dave Sheldrake, Alan Stewart, Andrew Melling, Judy Rickwood, Mike Attewell and our chief caterer Helen Strong. However, I should point out that we were right on the limit with marshal numbers, so those Kent members who took part in the main event this year may want to consider doing the marshals' walk instead next year and helping the group out on the day. It's important we all remember: no marshals' means no event.

The 47th Sevenoaks Circular will be on 17th March 2024. West Heath School has been booked, subject to costs, and three new routes are already mapped out.

HIGH WEALD CHALLENGE

From Stephanie Le Men

[SIEntries](#) are now open for the 2023 [High Weald Challenge](#), which will be on Saturday 8th July. The event will start from Stonegate Village Hall, accessible by train and with car parking available.

There will be three brand new routes (26m/20m/15m), primarily on undulating footpaths and lanes, offering extensive views over the surrounding countryside and a glimpse of the sea!

From Stonegate Village Hall, the three routes head towards Burwash and Punnett's town. The 15 mile route then returns to Stonegate. The two other routes continue to the pretty village of Mayfield, where they diverge. The 20 mile route goes back to Stonegate, while the 26 mile route visits Wadhurst before returning to the finish.

We look forward to welcoming you on the day. Any questions, please contact Stephanie Le Men: slemen93ldwa@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERS – WE NEED YOU!

From Penny Southern

Kent LDWA is committed to maintaining and increasing our fabulous group of volunteers who pop up doing incredible work across our organisation. As well as running Kent-based activities, you can see them at our neighbouring challenge events and the LDWA annual 100 event.

Friendly faces, a hot brew, their endless energy, encouragement and service at the Challenge Event checkpoints are at the heart of everything we do – whether it's taking part at the LDWA committee meetings, planning challenge events, volunteering at checkpoints, cooking, designing and/or walking out route descriptions, leading a social walk and much, much more.

The organisation would not survive without their enthusiasm, commitment and passion for long-distance walking and all that is entailed in keeping our footpaths open, our rucksacks packed and those incredible distances covered.

As part of our work to support, appreciate, maintain and encourage new volunteers, the Kent LDWA committee has agreed a set of principles for ensuring volunteers may be reimbursed for expenses. This new development will bring consistency, confidentiality and ambition to support existing volunteers and recruit new ones. Appearing on our website in April will be more detail about this and a new electronic process for any volunteer wishing to claim expenses.

For further information, or if you have any questions about volunteering, please contact Penny Southern LDWA committee member at (southernp03@gmail.com).



Nicola Foad and Michael Headley on check-in, WCC August 2022

LEICESTERSHIRE ROUND 23-26 SEPTEMBER 2022

From David Thornton



There's a room at the back of my house, known to family and friends as the Man Cave. There's even a road sign hung on the wall stating 'MAN CAVE', just for the avoidance of any doubt. Amongst other things, the room contains weights, an exercise bench, muscular and bone structure charts, a large map of the world, and some 183 (so far) displayed OS Explorer maps. However, pride of place is a 6ft by 4ft hardboard map of the British Isles. Now, every time I complete a trail, I mark these on the map, by way of colour coded pins at the start, middle section if required and finish, which are then joined up by matching cotton thread. Red for national trails, orange for OS mapped trails of 50 miles or more, purple for OS mapped trails of less than 50 miles and solitary yellow pins for circular OS mapped day walks. I love it! Every time I look at a trail I've marked I can instantly cast my mind back to the time I was there, with great memories that always put a smile on my face.

Now, last summer I was, for the umpteenth time, studying this map, thinking about what part of the UK I might want to visit next and then plan a trail accordingly. It struck me that there were reds, oranges, purples and yellows in Scotland, northern England, Wales, Eastern England and many in the South... but nothing in the middle. I'd spotted the Leicester Round some months back and being 102 miles long I decided it was about time I put a splash of orange right slap bang in the middle of my map.

Normally, when booking a trail, I would use public transport to get me to the start and home, but being a circular walk, it did lend itself to travelling by car and having found a safe place to park in Broughton Astley (a friend of mine used to live there so I kind of knew it) and I set off for my first day.

I know all counties have a good number of what I would consider to be slightly unusual place names, but it does seem to me that Leicestershire has rather more than its fair share, with its Astleys, Bassetts, Magnas, Parvas and Thorpes. My first day of 16 miles indeed took me through Dunton Bassett, Ashby Magna, Peatling Magna, Peatling Parva, Thorpe Langton and if that wasn't enough I also walked through Willoughby Waterleys, before reaching the outskirts of Kibworth Beauchamp to stay at a Premier Inn on the A6, right on the trail.

I have a particular dislike for Premier Inns, but there were no other options at this point on the trail. Yes, I know they're practical, spotlessly clean and functional, but they're soulless places. And I don't know what bright spark in their marketing team came up with the slogan 'A Good Night Guaranteed', because I've rarely had one over the years and didn't on this occasion either. The alarm bells should have rung when the receptionist cheerfully announced that I was booked into room one on the ground floor. Up until gone midnight I was kept awake by the double sets of sliding electric doors leading in and out of reception, plus the banging of the fire door as other guests marched down the corridor with their cases and their chit chat ... which started all over again at around 5.00am. Needless to say, based on the guarantee, I successfully applied for a refund.

The Premier Inn was located on one of those major road junction parks you often see, with a BP garage linked to an M&S Foodhall, Brewers Fayre and McDonalds. With 22 miles to get through and having been awake since 5.00am, I was away nice and early, avoiding the strong temptation of a McDonalds breakfast (with hash browns of course) and instead tucked into a small bag of muesli and a pint of milk about an hour or so in, proud of the fact that I didn't succumb but kind of wishing I had.



This section of the route, which is fairly flat, goes through some really lovely villages on the eastern side of Leicestershire, with a majority of buildings made with the local stone, giving the villages a kind of Cotswold feel. These included Hallaton, Allextion, Withcote Hall before finishing in Pickwell, where I'd booked a really nice self-contained Airbnb. Day 3 was a longer 25 miles, so I was back on the trail at first light. Being late September, there was that first refreshing post summer nip in the air, with a slight mist, a good sign that autumn was only just round the corner... and yet it seemed only a month ago that I was considering how I was going to navigate a 27 mile section of the Icknield Way between Linton and Icklingham, with temperatures set to reach a heady 37 degrees! Day 3 gave me my first significant viewing point from Burrough Hill, before continuing on through Thorpe Satchville and Ashby Folville towards Mountsorrel, my next overnight stop. Mountsorrel is a relatively large place, but I found accommodation was quite tricky to find, eventually settling for a comfortable stay at the Quorn Grange Hotel.

Day 4 took me through large areas designated the National Forest. Now I always thought the National Forest was just the name given to what is England's largest natural area of woodland, rather naively thinking this was also linked to Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. I have now learned, through various information boards en-route, that the National Forest is a huge ongoing project to convert low grade farmland in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Staffordshire, previously three of England's least wooded counties, into sustainable native forest fit for the 21st century, with the aim to stimulate environmental improvement and economic regeneration. The project started in the mid 1990s with an estimated 200 square miles of new woodland having already been planted. When I'm out walking I feel upbeat just seeing something as simple as a farmer planting new hawthorn around field edges and the birds that will eventually be able to nest in them, so to read that all this was going on in this part of the world was quite uplifting. This 20 mile day took me through a village called Thornton and alongside Thornton reservoir, before stopping overnight at a really simple Airbnb in Nailstone.

The highlight of day 5 was walking through the fabulous Bradgate Park and up to the great viewing point of the 'Old John' folly. Last time I was up there was the summer of 1988, when, as a new salesman for Toyota on a 5-day sales training course at our Leicester depot, a group of us were taken up there for a bit of a laugh after work. One of that same group and a very good friend of mine and his family, live in Hinkley, just off the route, so I enjoyed their hospitality that night. Despite a late and rather alcohol-laden evening, I managed to drag myself away from Hinkley at a decent hour, to finish the last 14 miles back to Broughton Astley, where I picked up

the car and headed home.

Apart from the general countryside, there were a couple of things that rather stick in my memory about the 5 days of walking the Leicestershire Round. Firstly, I lost count of the people enquiring as to where I was walking. One man and his wife stopped me just outside the village of Bagworth for a chat. It turned out that about ten years back he walked the 102 mile route on his own, supported by his wife, in 33 hours. Sounds familiar doesn't it and yet he'd never heard of the LDWA. On a second occasion the owner of Burbage Constitutional Club ran across the High St as I sat on a bench having a break, to ask me where I'd been walking and then revealed the various national trails that she and her husband had completed. I guess it's a bit of a novelty seeing someone walking around Leicestershire with a big rucksack, clearly going somewhere farther than just a day walk, or maybe they're just a friendly bunch. Secondly, outside the national trail network, I have never walked a route which is so clearly marked. It really is outstanding and the Leicestershire Footpath Association should be commended for the work they have put into making the route as accessible as possible. They've even come up with the novel idea of erecting 6ft posts at endless points on the trail, which are then painted yellow on the top so they're really easy to spot. No zigzagging across large fields or long valleys on this trail. You simply look up and there's the post. It might be a very long way off, but it's there at pretty much every turn. Somehow, it seemed to make the trail a more relaxing experience. I certainly enjoyed my 102 miles, the memories of which now come flooding back every time I look at the orange pins and cotton marked on my map in the Man Cave.

THE BARNSELY BOUNDARY WALK 18-22 JANUARY 2023

From Helen Strong



When I was walking the Trans Pennine 100 last year, I was particularly struck by how picturesque the route was. Not the first few miles, granted, along the solid track of the Trans Pennine Trail itself, but after Penistone. From there on came the rolling hills, dales, reservoirs, moors and plenty of wide open spaces which were interrupted every few kilometres by a pretty village to pass through. So, when David suggested that we do the Barnsley Boundary Walk (BBW) I was keen to head back to that part of the world and take in the wonderful views and pretty villages all over again.

We left Kent at lunchtime and headed up to Oughtibridge, on the banks of the river Don, to stay in an Airbnb, before setting off on the trail the following morning. We had 18 miles to do that first day, so got up and out reasonably early. The weather forecast said it was to be rather cold all week with the temperature barely going above zero – and so we had prepared for that – but we were fortunate to have sunshine too. This

meant that as soon as we started walking in the mornings, we felt the cold, and were keen for a climb up to get the blood pumping. One of my Christmas gifts – a pair of Montane mittens – was very well used all week.

Heading up the hill out of the village, we soon got warm as we found the path onto the trail. The BBW is marked on OS maps – and as we headed into the Wharncliffe woods, I had a sense of *déjà vu* – but actually I had walked this short section of the BBW on the TP 100.

The sub-zero temperatures also meant that despite the wet weather that the area had sustained earlier in January, we were pretty much walking on solid – albeit frozen – ground. We agreed that such underfoot conditions were certainly preferable to lots of sticky, slippery mud, which can be quite draining on the legs.

We enjoyed the morning's walk. We went through Elsecar – along the side of a disused canal and railway, and kept a steady pace. We met a man who asked us where we were walking to. He laughed as I had pronounced Oughtibridge phonetically – locally they say Oooti-bridge. Anyway, he told us he was interested in getting back into walking again. He and a group of friends had walked the Pennine Way in the 1980s when, as miners who had been made redundant, they were looking for a cheap holiday together – 'we begged, borrowed and stole our way!' he said with a smile. 'We had nothing' but the experience had clearly left an impression on him.

We walked on, and were on course to arrive in good time for the second night in Thurnscoe, yet, somehow that afternoon, our destination seemed to get further away. We struggled to find the path at times, mainly because the BBW is not well signposted or waymarked.

As we walked through some more populated areas, old mining towns which were clearly very run down and had seen better days, we felt grateful for living in West Malling. By the time we reached Goldthorpe, it was getting darker and colder, and the route took us through the back streets. We saw ever-increasing amounts of litter and near derelict abodes that people lived in. We were glad to get out of this area and pressed ahead to our accommodation for the night.

Heading off before light on day 2, the icy temperatures and flat fields made it difficult to warm up. We stopped for breakfast in a nice

spot, but not for long. We were in the countryside for most of the day – crossing the M1 at junction 38. As we headed towards Bretton Country Park, we noticed signs for the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. I then remembered reading something on the LDWA LDP page about there being an issue about access through the park. We reached the park gate and, sure enough, the footpath, being permissive, was closed to walkers. This is a recent move by the park – a bid to get walkers to pay an entrance fee. So, a quick look at the map and we turned back to take the route through Haigh. This was a really lovely part of the walk – we agreed that the BBW should go that way in future.

When I got home, I sent a report about our issue to the LDP team and following a few emails between myself and Iain Connell, all the GPX routes on the LDWA LDP database which pass through Bretton Park have been changed. It was worth the time it took me to explain the situation – and we hope that this helps other walkers enjoy this section of the trail without issue in the future.

By the time we were out the other side of Bretton Park we were getting tired and it was getting cold again. We headed to the Airbnb in West Clayton – a converted Printworks which the owners, two artists, had converted into their home, studio and self-contained unit. It was stunning. We were able to cook a nice meal and enjoy the rest of the evening in this spacious and comfortable abode.



Day 3 of the walk took us to Hade Edge. We knew we needed to arrive in the town before the local shop – a rather pricey but exquisitely well-stocked butchery and farm shop – closed at 4 pm. Again, the afternoon seemed to fly by and we had to take a mile off the route to stick to the road so that we got to the shop in time. We stocked up with some provisions though the owner of the Airbnb had said that she would leave some milk and eggs and basics. To be fair, she left enough food for several meals – a loaf of bread and fresh cakes from a local bakery and so much more besides. Some hosts really go above and beyond what we expect!

The final day's walk back to the car in Oughtibridge had us setting out early again. As we walked away from the accommodation, we were along the edge of a reservoir and could feel that a very cold wind had got up. I had all my layers on and zipped up and although we were heading steadily uphill, the wind was biting. Even David felt the cold and kept his waterproof layer on all morning. That initial section of the trail was glorious – we were on the edge of the moor and it was so peaceful. I enjoy moor walking – the barren open space gives me the most wonderful sense of calm. We reached the car about 3:30 pm and were glad to have got back in the daylight.

For a winter walk the BBW was perfect. We were incredibly lucky with the weather, despite the freezing temperatures. Walking in winter like this made me think about how much I prefer winter walking to all the skiing trips I used to go on. Without all the travelling to the Alps, here I was taking part in exercise that I much prefer to do, and the food, drink and accommodation were just as good. But most of all, of course, I enjoyed the company.

MY ROUNDHAY 50 EXPERIENCE 2023

From Jill Green

Three years ago, I was ill so not able to take part. Jim did it and told me about lots of deep mud.

We got up at 4:30 on Saturday the 18th of February, and had a long drive – we were told the car park was 500 yards away but there was street parking and we wanted to park near the hall. We got in just before 7am and they were doing a 7am start... Shall we join them? But I decided it's nice to have tea and toast and meet up with fellow walkers, and we had booked in for the 7:30 start.

We were told over 20 people were wanting to qualify for this year's 100. Sandra Brown was walking with our friend Deirdre Flegg who needed a qualifying event. Madeleine Watson saw us off with warnings of fallen trees and lots of road crossings. I enjoyed the first loop of 28 miles – wonderful views of Temple Newsam House. The weather was really warm – so I got wet with sweat despite of removing layers.

We got back before darkness, perfect. We had to report we haven't found the self-clip ... 'then I'll have to disqualify you' said the man with a big smile on his face. Just as we were leaving, a big crowd came in...

I called out 'we're going now Madeleine in spite of being disqualified!' I had to pull Jim away from the pretty girl he was talking to, one of the new arrivals. After a few miles Jim remembered he hadn't put new batteries into his Garmin and I remembered I hadn't checked out. I rang the number and left a message saying we had left at approximately 5:45 and Jim got the batteries in.

We were walking with four chaps – so nice to have company in the darkness. We got a wonderful welcome at the Irregulars

checkpoint. After my husband Dave died and before I met Jim, I joined the Irregulars because they went away on walking holidays together. When Jim came into my life he joined too. You pay £1 for a walk and get badges and T-shirts. After doing your 50th walk you get a fleece. I got my new fleece this time. It's red and I'm very pleased with it. In fact while we were staying with Christine Stratton for the week we did the three catch ups of the walks on the website. Simon Pipe joined us – very nice to meet to walk with him – he started at 9 am and he helped me pick up my pace a bit.

Unfortunately, I felt that horrid sickness feeling. Years ago when I was a race walker we developed a way of being sick without stopping... well the first time was ok, I didn't stop and then the second time was not so good – over my shoes, down my coat onto the nice lanyard of my compass! The third time I did stop, thank goodness. We were done. Dear Jim wanted to give me water but I knew that it wouldn't stay down so I pressed on as fast as I could, running on empty.


When we arrived we got a fantastic welcome as all the finishers did. I tried to keep away from people... I must smell very bad – of sweat and sick – and so I got my end bag with my new clothes and went into the ladies to change. Here I caught sight of myself. The person looking back at me was my mother when she was 91!! When I came out, Jim had enjoyed a full meal and had a nice chat.

Poor Clive from Wiltshire developed the dreaded lean. He got so slow his group had to go on, but John Walker had stayed with Clive, till he fell over and was unable to go on. John phoned for help and waited until Clive was safe, then went on alone to finish.

Deirdre did the 28 miles, but was not able to continue. Sandra is very fast and she is so good at getting people around. She joined the group that Clive and John had been in.

When Jim, and I drove away it was so nice to see Andy Todd and Sandra come in with the others. The other group we saw coming up the road was a band of five. They were walking in memory of a young man who died. His father and brother were in this group. Keeping five together for 50 miles is wonderful. This is the LDWA at its very best – when we look after each other, not only with the checkpoint people, but out on the walk.

The Solitary Songster




We've got a cock-sparrow with little
brown cheeks,
He sits on the drainpipe and cheeps.
He's loud and persistent there all by
himself,
He's been doing this now for some weeks.

At the back of the house are more of
his sort
Enjoying the food that's put out,
Shared by pigeons and starlings and
blackbirds and rooks,
They squabble and fight and shout.

There's such a palaver from all of these birds,
Entertaining us all with their tricks.
But our sparrow sits alone, at the front of the house.
In the space by the roof and the bricks.

Sometimes we feel just like him
And don't want to party and sing.
Perhaps this is his place to be alone
This corner away from the din.
I do hope he WANTS to be in this place,
And chooses to be there, just him.



Having just walked 100 miles non-stop
And endured two nights without sleep,
I'm happy to rest in this comfortable bed
And enjoy the sound of my little brown friend
And his persistent cheep!

... by... Jill Green..

WRITTEN FOLLOWING A TOUGH PENNINE 100-MILER! 7/6/22

BRIAN BUTTIFANT'S VIEW OF LIFE

From David Thornton

Every few months I arrange a visit to see Brian at his home in Kemsing. These visits usually consist of drinking tea and tucking into a big wedge of Brenda's wonderful cake, whilst Brian and I trawl over various maps and trails, generally chatting about all things LDWA. If I didn't have a home to go back to and two daughters to feed, we would quite probably carry on chatting until well into the evening, such is the fascinating and enthusiastic depth of walking knowledge that Brian has.

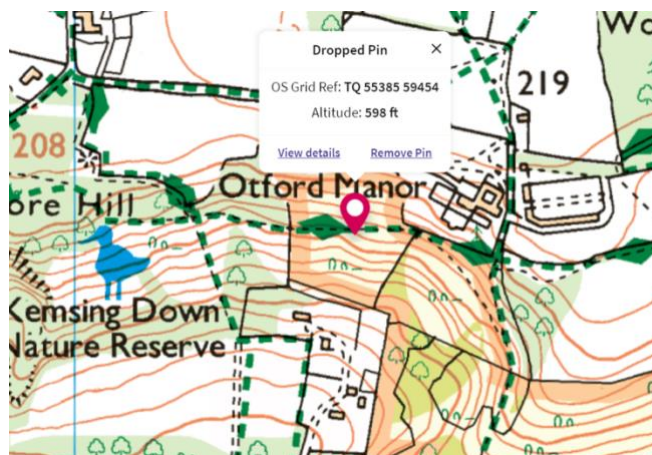
Last September, on a warm and dry day, Brian and I drove to Kemsing recreation park and took a steady climb up towards Kemsing Down Nature Reserve. Here, he proudly showed me a bench, which was presented to him by his close friend Julian, along with Brian's family, earlier that summer. The whole thing was a complete surprise.



You will hopefully see from these photos that it really is a wonderful spot. If you happen to be in the area it is well worth a visit. GRTQ555594. Alternatively, look out for a group social walk in the summer, where we'll all have a chance to take a pew and a glimpse of Brian's view of life.



Brian and his family



CHASING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS – 2016

From Andrew Melling

'It's snowing!' said the captain, on our descent. 'It never snows in Bergen!' The next plane load were diverted south and had a difficult journey to join the ship. Meanwhile, I wandered the city, my ski jacket keeping me warm, but not dry. It was not mainly for the coffee that I paid my second ever visit to a Subway. (Since you ask, the first was in Washington, DC.)

On board ship at last, and having recovered from the cost of the 'special wine package', I retired to my cabin to shed my wet outer clothing. Departure was delayed beyond the scheduled time of 22.30 and I was still asleep for the first of three 15 minute port stops that morning. The later stop at Alesund was long enough for a visit to the aquarium and to Mount Aksia, for views over the city. We stopped at Molde for 30 minutes and Kristiansund for an hour. What interested me at the short stops was seeing the young mums with their buggies or shopping trolleys standing near the exit, much as I would on the tube when only travelling a few stops. The coastal ferry is



Snowfall in Bergen



Viking grave (c.f. Kit's Coty)

the only practical way of getting to the shops.

Day 3 gave an opportunity to walk into the centre of Trondheim to visit the cathedral. The usual 'no photography' sign was supplemented by one prohibiting crampons! After breakfast, it had still been black as night but the sky gradually lightened to allow some street photos, including a statue of a skater. A mussel tasting on deck and a film about where we were headed filled the time between meals until our next short stop, at Rorvik.

On the morning of Day 4, after a short stop at Ornes, we crossed the Arctic Circle with a visit from King Neptune and an offer to buy a glass of champagne to celebrate. After lunch, at Bodo, I enjoyed a walk in the snow, including a visit to a Viking grave. That evening, I had a little time at Svolvær on the Lofoten Islands to visit an ice gallery full of fantastical ice sculptures, and take my place on the ice throne. Late that night, on deck, we had fishcakes and schnapps with a sweet little mug included in the price. That was the prelude to our first chance to see the northern lights, a mere foretaste of what was to come.



Kent LDWA social walk, maybe

The next big experience was from Tromsø, dog sledding in the late afternoon following candlelit trails. We were given blankets and I am glad I had my camera with me as it was too cold for the touch screen on my phone to work. The dogs evidently enjoyed their run and I enjoyed the following gathering round the fire in a sort of wigwam. Leaving Tromsø, we passed the Cathedral of The Arctic. (I had a closer look on the return journey.)



Enthroned in the ice museum

The next excursion took me to the North Cape, passing what must surely be the most northerly campsite in mainland Europe. The vast museum, gallery, shop and visitor centre are all below ground but hardy visitors preferred to wander above ground. Best to keep moving, though. Later, we were joined on deck by local fisherman, displaying their catch of King Crabs.

It was beginning to get cold and, on our short coach trip from Kirkenes to the Russian border, the internal display showed an external temperature of -38 degrees. But we did at least have our first glimpse of the sun, much to our guide's delight. The morning's dogsledding was cancelled because it was too cold, but ice dipping in the Barents Sea was not. (I passed.) A one hour stop in Vardo was



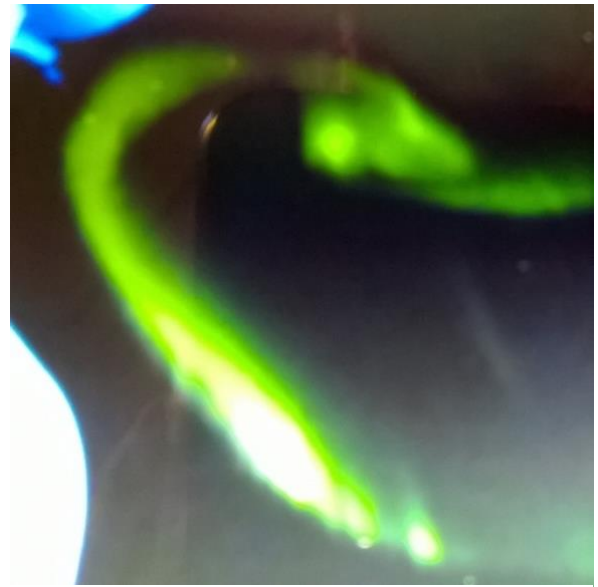
It's cold out there!

long enough for a walk to the Vardohus fortress, dating from 1737. Many displays included a sled-mounted cannon and a motorbike.

That night, I had my first good views of the northern lights. Most of the passengers gathered on the open deck, which was tricky because it was covered in ice. I couldn't catch the Lights on my phone but was given an advice sheet for using a digital camera. I would, anyway, have switched off the flash but more surprising was to use the 'daylight' setting. Taking photos involved an element of faith. When I pointed the camera at the heavenly lights, the monitor screen remained dark



A walking challenge!



Northern Lights

but, as soon as I pressed the shutter-release button, the screen filled with the vivid green I could see with the naked eye.

There were two more nights with displays, showing in all four corners of the sky, but not so vivid. The best way I can watch the photos is on a camera monitor screen: they just will not show at their best on my desktop screen. However, I used my phone to capture the monitor screen image for Instagram purposes and, curiously, that image was preserved better than any other. I have been able to do the same again, giving a number of worthwhile images.

After sightseeing in Hammerfest, we moved on to Tromsø (the largest town north of the Arctic Circle) for a midnight concert in the cathedral of the north. Next morning, I joined a panoramic coach trip of Vesteralen while the ship moved on to Sortland. The attractive church of Harstad could not compete with the stunning scenery, nor with the starkness of the prisoner of war camp. The prisoners were Soviet soldiers, mostly young and ill-equipped for the temperatures.

Returning to the ship at lunchtime I saw what was to be my last sunset of the trip. Then we revisited the Lofoten Islands on our way back to Trondheim, Bergen and the plane home.

ROGER'S LONG WALK – UPDATE

From Roger Wedderburn-Day

I am due to start my long walk (see December 2022 newsletter) in April. Sadly my plans have had to change for family reasons and instead of one six month walk I will now be doing three 2-month walks, in April and May 2023, June and July 2024 and August and September 2025.

Anyone interested is still welcome to join me for any part of it. You can contact me on Roger's Long Walk on Facebook or just follow my progress on it if you are interested.

'FROM SPIKE MILLIGAN TO JANE EYRE' WALK FROM ECCLES – SUNDAY 18 DECEMBER 2022

From Andy Clark

When the snow came down on the previous Sunday evening, I didn't for a moment think that it would still be there a week later. It was only as I came off at Junction 2 of the M2, I looked towards the North Downs on the east side of the Medway, saw how white it was, and began to have doubts about whether this was such a good idea. Would I be on my own? However, if I was foolish enough to organise a walk for the week before Christmas, not knowing what the weather was likely to be, what does that make the ten brave souls (that's being polite) who joined me?

From Eccles (Spike Milligan's character in 'The Goons') we headed towards the North Downs. Most of the fields and the paths alongside the vineyards still had an inch or so of snow cover but it was easy to walk on – later, on the better-trodden paths, it was not quite so straightforward where the snow had turned to ice. However, it allowed Jim to test out his recently purchased microspikes!

We had a quick stop at Kit's Coty (photo below), dating back to Neolithic times – it made you wonder how people from 6000 years



ago coped with similar weather.

An earlier than normal coffee/tea stop was had next to the Air Ambulance Memorial on Bluebell Hill before we continued along the North Downs Way and then into Rochester (Edward Rochester was a character in Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*) for lunch.

The rain had started to fall by the time we began heading back to Eccles and we basically followed the river wherever possible. It was really a case of head down and press on and we abandoned a loop to see the Battle of the Medway Stone, a memorial stone west of Burham, commemorating the battle of 43 AD.

We arrived back in Eccles around 3:15, having walked, trugged and slid about sixteen miles, rather damp but not too downhearted. Generally, it was agreed that it was a good walk and that we'd all enjoyed it, despite the wintry conditions, but that may just have been people being polite!

SOUTH AND EAST OF DARENTH – SUNDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2023

From Andy Clark

Fortunately, the weather was a lot more clement than the last walk that I led; today we had nothing worse than a bit of mizzle.

Fourteen of us, including friends from both the Essex & Herts and Surrey groups, started from the spacious car park in Darent Country Park, almost underneath the A2 viaduct. Even on a Sunday morning, the noise of the passing traffic could be heard for the first mile or so of the walk.

Having followed a very small section of the Darent Valley Path and the Timeball and Telegraph Trail (devised by our very own Peter Jull) we headed up to what passes as the closest thing to a ridge in North West Kent, with views over the Darent Valley.

We had a short comfort stop at the playing fields in Horton Kirby and then continued along another short stretch of the Darent Valley Path. Fortunately, it was now passable - it had been flooded when I carried out the recce a month earlier. We then climbed to near the M20 where we had our morning break. There are normally far-reaching views towards London and the Dartford Crossing but today these were shrouded in mist.



Some more ups and downs including crossing a golf course where we encountered an overzealous golf course official who tried to point out that there was no footpath across the golf course, despite there being waymark signs and the GPX showing we were on the correct route.

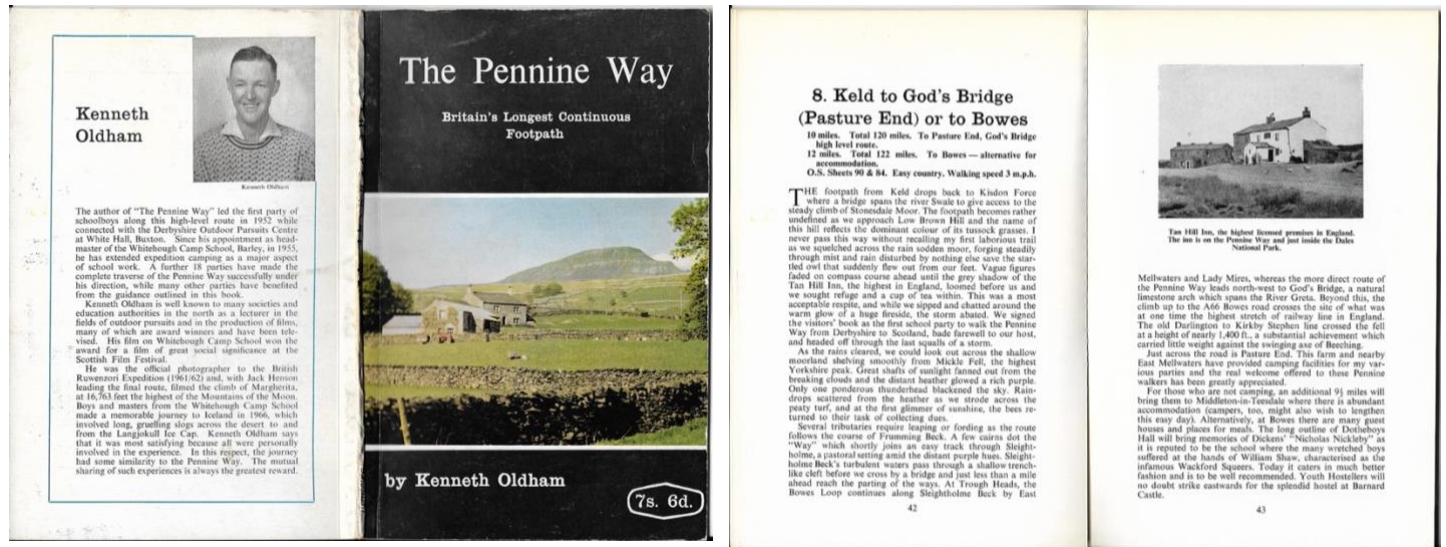
Our lunch stop was at around 11 miles, a relatively long morning session, at Longfield Hill and split between the benches in the small recreation ground and village green, with some of the group venturing into the Green Man.

The afternoon started with a pavement section through New Barn but we soon had some expansive views over the A2 towards Essex. We then passed through Southfleet and Beacon Wood Country Park, including further sections of the Timeball and Telegraph Trail, before returning to Darent, having walked 17.5 miles.

PENNINE WAY COMPARISON: AUGUST 1969 – OCTOBER 2021

From Andrew Melling

I much enjoyed reading David Thornton's account of the Pennine Way Trail, especially reviving memories from 50 years ago. There were some similarities, but many differences.



Guide cover and sample

Route

Like David, I walked from south to north but many were walking from north to south. I expected to walk 250 miles, the length given in all the literature. The present 270 miles follows the same route, I believe. I had a twelve page Ramblers' leaflet (1/-) and a book from Dalesman publishing (7s 6d) of which 62 pages contained sketchy route directions. The one inch tourist map of the Peak District, and the One Inch Seventh Series that I needed further north, had the Pennine Way marked on them. I supplemented them with eight sheets of the 2½ inch Provisional Series, which did not. Each sheet covered a 10km square and I would have needed at least twice as many for the whole route. I carried my maps with me throughout. The route was not well signed on the ground and signs were badly needed crossing the peat. Having struggled with the grouches, I rested on a rock outcrop and had a brew. Then I saw some lads not far from me belting along and I realised I had missed a good path.

Preparation

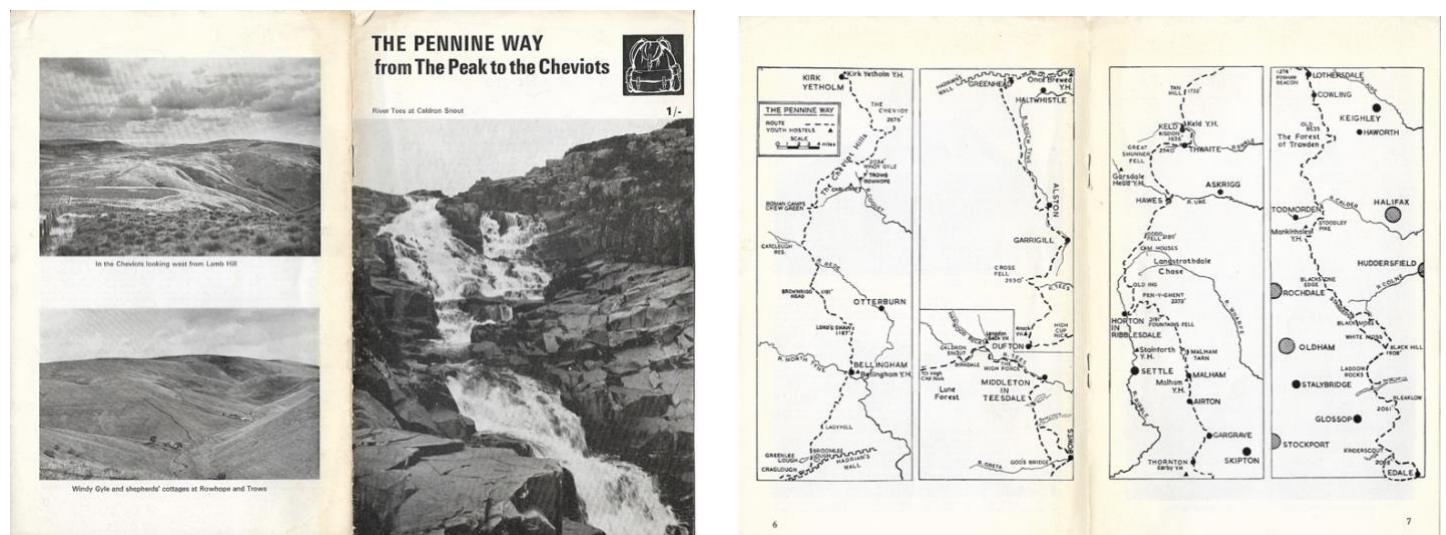
I had very little. I left London the day after my last Part II law exam (I failed them all).

Getting there

Having no car, and being unable to afford trains, I hitched from London to Edale. On completion, I got two buses from Kirk Yetholm to the A1, then hitched to York for my cousin's 21st birthday party.

Leaving things

I left my camera at home, although there would have been no sparkling pictures anyway. My first camera took twelve 2¼ inch square photos on 120 roll film and I had not progressed to colour. I also forgot my water bottle but easily found in Edale a replacement which I still have.



Leaflet cover and maps

Weather

My first days were baking hot. Having emptied my four pint water bottle crossing the endless peat, I stood forlornly at the roadside until someone stopped with water to spare.

Accommodation

I was backpacking, except for two unscheduled but welcome stops at the Manor House Hotel, Thornton-in-Craven and, on my last night, the Valleydene Guest House in Kirk Yetholm. I carried a 1pint paraffin pressure stove, with 2 pints of spare paraffin, and a three piece aluminium billy/plate set which I still use. With no seams or rivets it should last forever. My polythene bivouac shelter (hardly a tent) is pictured on Offa's Dyke path in 1970.

Health

My boots were the best I could afford but too cheap. They seem to have stretched in use and so my feet were constantly rubbing up and down. I soon had blisters which bled into my socks. Each blister developed an encircling ridge which grew bigger and harder day by day. I hope David does not bear the scars of his knee trauma in fifty-year's time, as I do my blister scars!

By the way

Early on, I was accosted by a north-south walker who produced a leather purse and showed me his big toe nail. It seems he had done the same with every walker ahead of me; I kept bumping into two trainee accountants and with our similar backgrounds we made a friendship that endured for some years. On one featureless top, I got chatting to an ordnance survey team rebuilding the triangulation pillar. I was OK to continue but it was fun to accept a lift off the top, with one of the team sitting on the Land Rover's bonnet, directing the driver round numerous boulders. Nearing Keld, or maybe it was Thwaite, a constant stream passed me as I was setting up my bivouac. There was some entertainment in the village hall so I went along to enjoy an evening of 'Acting. Folk-song. Dance' by a young touring company, The Barnstormers. Getting near to Hadrian's Wall, my new friends and I decided on a short train ride from Haltwhistle Halt – my first experience of a request stop on a railway.

Should I do it again? The suggestion is made from time to time but there are so many other walks to do.



Camp on the Clwyddian Range – 1970

POSTCARD FROM SCOTLAND: THE SPEYSIDE WAY

From Graham Smith



The Spey near Kingussie

In April last year, former Kent LDWA chairman Graham Smith walked the Speyside Way – an 89 mile Scotland Great Trail – with Peter Aylmer from London Group. The Speyside Way broadly follows the River Spey from Newtonmore to Buckie, which is on the Moray coast, and sections of the route are on North of Scotland Group's Speyside 100 next year (see below*). Here Graham reflects on a memorable five days ...

April 21 – Newtonmore–Aviemore (20 miles).

I got the 0659 train from Tain and arrived at Newtonmore at 9.40. I walked along the cycle lane to Kingussie, where I met Peter (who didn't fancy walking along the cycle path). It was lovely walking all the way – good, well maintained tracks, delightful scenery and fine sunny weather. We had our lunch stop at Insh, then we had a very nice stop and a drink in the old Post Office at Kincaig, which has been converted into a cafe, before the last seven miles to Aviemore, where we stayed at the Balavoulin pub/hotel. It certainly wasn't demanding, but low level walking in Scotland can't come much better than that.

April 22 – Aviemore–Grantown-on-Spey (17 miles).

This was another very good day – again, fine low level walking in the sunshine. We left the Balavoulin at about 9.30 to follow more nice, easy and very well maintained paths to Boat of Garten. We had a stop there and looked at the excellent railway station, before taking a delightful track through the Abernethy Forest to Nethy Bridge, where we had a very nice lunch stop in a cafe. We then followed the old railway track to Grantown-



The view from near Loch Insh

on-Spey, arriving at the Garth hotel at about 4.30. We made the most of that hotel – because we were wild camping the next two nights.

April 23 – Grantown-on-Spey–Cragganmore (15 miles).

This was quite a demanding day although not a long one in terms of miles. Because we didn't have high mileage, we didn't start walking until just gone 10. At first the walking was very similar to that of the first two days – straightforward on good, well waymarked paths, and mainly through woods.

At Cromdale we passed the impressive station, run by volunteers. Shortly after that we had the first proper climb of the walk, taking a very pleasant path running just below Tom an Uird Wood. Unfortunately, after that we encountered some difficulties on the route caused by an uncooperative landowner who we felt was being bloody-minded in places. For long stretches we were having to take a narrow path between barbed wire fences, when there were perfectly good tracks alongside. There was also poor signage, compounded by waymark posts which had either been knocked over or were non-existent. We also had to go through squeeze stile after squeeze stile after squeeze stile, which was most frustrating and very annoying.

Eventually we left all those difficulties behind and climbed a delightful path which rounded the Woods of Knocfrink. Then we had the steepest climb of the trail by the Garvault Plantation. But we were on good paths.



Uath Locahan near Kincaig



Peter crossing the bridge at Cragganmore

With 4.5 miles to go, we dropped down to the A95, which we followed for a short while before taking paths down to the river. We followed the river to the free camp site at Cragganmore, arriving at 4.30. We had dehydrated meals with us and the wash room/toilet was closed – but there was a tap!

April 24 – Cragganmore–Boat o’Brig (20 miles).

The night was very cold and testing, with the temperature down to two degrees, and I had great difficulty keeping warm and getting to sleep. Various thoughts went through my head – like making an early start today and walking 25 miles to Fochabers and finding a proper bed there. But I managed to get *some* sleep, and I got up just after 7. It was cloudy, with some fine rain, which persisted just about all day.

We started walking just before 8, and the first 12 miles were quite tedious – mile after mile after mile along the line of the old Strathspey Railway. At Charlestown of Aberlour we had our lunch stop, spending more than an hour in a very nice cafe (which, after the night I had had, I certainly needed!). Then we had two more tedious miles along the old railway track to Craigellachie, after which it was a relief to pick up a road, even if it went on for four miles.

The Speyside Way then left the road on a nice, gentle climbing path which at a couple of intervals gave very good views across to the River Spey. We had a nice, albeit at times slightly boggy, descent to Boat o’Brig, where we had decided to pitch our tents. Peter found a good spot quite close to the path. I had asked a very nice local if we could camp near her house – we could, but the ground was a bit lumpy. So we decided to pitch at the spot Peter found, not far from the river. I was a bit apprehensive after my experience the previous night, but the weather forecast said it would be a few degrees warmer. So I decided to put on more clothes – and hope for the best.



Camp site at Boat o'Brig

April 25 – Boat o’Brig-Buckie (17 miles).

I certainly slept better than I did the previous night, but I still didn’t sleep well. I got up just after 7.30, and we were moving by 8.30. The first few miles were on a road to Fochabers, which provided us with some good views, although the tarmac was a bit tedious at times. At Fochabers we had a stop and then took paths through the woods to Spey Bay, where we had a good hour-long stop for lunch at the visitor centre.

We then set out on the last six miles to Buckie and they were quite nice, although initially the path was blocked in several places by huge fallen trees. The weather was by then turning, and we were getting some light rain which was not very pleasant. We had a quick stop at Portgordon and then carried on to Buckie, getting to the official end/start of the trail in Cluny Square at about 3.45.

I’m afraid I can’t honestly say the Speyside Way is one of my favourite National Trails – much too much walking on former railway tracks, a bit too much road bashing, and not enough of the open countryside where you can enjoy sweeping views. But it certainly has some fine walking, particularly between Kingussie and Grantown-on-Spey – and that high level stretch near Tom an Uird Wood on day 3 was for me the best part of the walk.

The best section of the Speyside Way is, actually, the Tomintoul Spur. This 15 mile linear diversion goes from Tomintoul to Ballindalloch and takes in what for me is the best part of the entire trail – the 1870ft Carn Daimh, which is a great viewpoint. Peter and I did not do the Tomintoul Spur last year owing to time constraints. But I did it a few months later with Mary Atkinson, from North of Scotland LDWA, using two cars as it’s linear, and I have put it on NoS Group’s social walks programme.

I have now done all four of Scotland’s Great Trails, and in order of my preference, they are:

- 1) The Southern Upland Way (completed in 2003 and 2013);
- 2) The West Highland Way (1987) – which I may be doing again this year;
- 3) The Great Glen Way (2021);
- 4) The Speyside Way (2022).

* Next year’s Speyside 100, hosted by North of Scotland LDWA, takes place on May 25-27, with the marshals’ walk on May 4-6. I’m group secretary and I’m also on the event organising group with two jobs –



Graham at the end

marshals' walk and checkpoint liaison. The Speyside 100 starts from Badaguish, near Aviemore, and we are now very busy planning the event. We are anticipating a good turnout because A) we reckon many people will want to come up here and enjoy our fantastic Highlands landscape and make a whole week of it, and B) there is only going to be about 3-4 hours of darkness on the night sections on the event and on the marshals' walk – something we believe will particularly appeal to LDWA members who have walked Hundreds before. There will be regular updates about the Speyside 100 in Strider, and entries are due to open in October. I hope some of my Kent friends can enter, as it would be lovely to see you.

WALKING IN THE CYCLADES – PART 1

From Andrew Melling

After many years of package holidays, it was an adventure to arrange everything independently – flights, ferries and accommodation. I fancied a Greek island in the autumn and the Cyclades ticked so many boxes, even though it meant arranging a night in Piraeus at each end of the holiday. Sifnos appealed to me: no one seemed to have heard of it, it was small enough to walk across and the ferry crossing was not too long.

I wasn't going to walk every day but, when I did, I wanted a comfortable base to return to. The room I booked was small but had the essential fridge and electric kettle. Equally important was a balcony with a view. I lost the sun early in the evening but I still had a sun-drenched view of the Kamares Bay. Arriving mid-morning, I had time to get to know my surroundings, find somewhere for lunch and relax. Next day, I had a gentle stroll round the bay to Aghia Anna to explore the chapel complex and enjoy the views back across to my room.



Kamares Bay



Windmill with horse

The island had a good bus service with a 1.8 euro flat fare. I went across the island to Artemonas where, my trails map* showed, there was a promising path to a hillside chapel. The path certainly had promise between its two stout stone walls, but after 100 metres the thorns and other plants filling it became impassable and a possible diversion came to nothing. I back-tracked to a minor road and, after 800 km, passing a windmill and attendant horse, found a path leading not too steeply down to a cliff top chapel complex. As



Hilltop chapel, near Kastro



Rush hour

always, the Aegean below and sky above gave a perfect blue frame to my photos. Following a cliff top path, passing many other chapels, I came to the little town of Kastro, like the chapels, all white-washed with blue detail. I explored up and down its narrow streets before settling under the large parasols of an outdoor restaurant. (*Don't spend your money at home on a trails map. The tourist office gave away maps identical to the one I bought in London!)

After lunch, I hadn't stood long by the bus stop before someone came out from the restaurant to tell me there would be no bus. Despite the time table on the bus stop, this bus only came on a school day, which it was not. After walking the long winding road into Apollonia, the island's capital, I found the next bus was not until 6.00 pm. I wandered around the town to see what sights there were but left a full exploration to another day. I was somewhat confused until I realised that my detailed 3D map had south at the top. Not waiting for the bus, I carried on along a more main road, which, nevertheless, carried more goats than cars.

On many days, I just ascended to a plateau, enjoying the ubiquitous white and blue chapels, sometimes able to go inside, and the sea views. One day, I left Kamares along a winding, deserted road taking me eventually to the chapel of Aghios Simeon. The hot sun gave the climb a strenuous character it would not have had at home. My reward was the view down into Kamares, far below, and of other chapels perched on hill top and cliff top.

TO BE CONTINUED