

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

furthering the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking

# **NEWSLETTER**



*Martin Bruce, Stephanie Le Men and Poppy Whiteside at HQ, Sevenoaks Challenge (see report page 3)*



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**<https://ldwa.org.uk/kent>**

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WELCOME to the April 2024 edition of the Kent Group Newsletter. We have news in this issue of our Sevenoaks Challenge event, which saw both marshals and entrants encountering record levels of mud! We are also celebrating our wonderful volunteers again, and thanking them for all their help. Finally, as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, I take a look at some early news of the Kent group from the archive. If anyone has any reminiscences they would like to share in the Newsletter on the occasion of our anniversary, please get in touch with me at [newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk)

Cathy Waters

## KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

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## SAVE THE DATE – SUNDAY 9 JUNE 2024

### From Helen Strong

As is now the new tradition, we will be once again hosting our summer social event for members of the Kent Group at Ryarsh Village Hall, on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June.

This event has been popular with the membership, a time when we can get together to celebrate the successes of those who have recently completed the 100. This year we will also be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kent Group LDWA.

As in previous years, the day will begin with a short walk of about 8 miles led by David, followed by a ‘bring-a-dish’ buffet lunch – where we all bring something for us to share and enjoy with others.

Further details of the day will follow by email, but any questions in advance, please contact myself ([helenldwa@gmail.com](mailto:helenldwa@gmail.com)) or David ([david.thornton1011@hotmail.com](mailto:david.thornton1011@hotmail.com)).



*Marshals Walk starters, Sevenoaks Challenge,*

# SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR CHALLENGE EVENT – 17 MARCH 2024

## From David Thornton

There was a new route for the third year in a row for the 47<sup>th</sup> Sevenoaks Circular Challenge. This year, for the first time for many years, the route neither started nor finished through a section of Knole Park. Instead, the route immediately headed out west and then north towards Knockholt, which operated as both check points one and two, before heading south to Ide Hill, for check point three, then back east to West Heath School, our chosen HQ. I particularly enjoyed putting this figure-of-eight route together, getting to know a good few new paths, which was also the case for the 22 and 15 mile routes.



*Enjoying the mud!*



*Stephanie Le Men checks in Laura Smith at HQ*

For those people who remember last year, we had 13 days of rain leading up to the event, when by some miracle it turned out to be dry on the day itself. It was deemed a very muddy route, especially the well-trodden last leg between Plaxtol and the finish at West Heath School. Bearing in mind the seemingly continuous rain throughout the winter, the marshals walk, which took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> March this year, seemed surprisingly firm underfoot, apart from one or two sections which are notoriously muddy throughout the



*Jim Briggs marshalling cars in the rain*



*David Thornton and Helen Strong at HQ*



*These muddy boots belong to Jackie Barker and Debbie Wilkes*

It was very, very muddy indeed. The muddiest Sevenoaks Circular ever, some participants were saying, as they staggered into the hall at the finish. Worthy of a Winter Tanners, I even heard someone say. And judging by the state of every pair of legs at the finish, you would certainly have believed them. I dare say there will have been some heavily silted bathroom plugs on Sunday night! There is no doubt, however, that the overwhelming feedback – of the day, the route, the exceptional support and cheerful nature of check point teams and personnel, plus the food at the finish – was very positive



*HQ West Heath School*

Jull, Jim Briggs, Nicola Foad, Cathy Waters, Dave Sheldrake, Keith Warman, Andrew Melling, Penny Southern, Dale Moorhouse, Alan Stewart, Judy Rickwood, Michael Headley, Clare Evans and our chief caterer Helen Strong. I would also like to thank those who also offered to marshal, but were not required on the day, Steve Russell, Marion Mueller and Karen Dineen.

The 48<sup>th</sup> Sevenoaks Circular will be on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2024. West Heath School has been booked and three new routes are already mapped out.

winter. However, despite the same levels of rain which fell during the intervening fortnight, the course seemed to have changed considerably and I don't think anyone was quite expecting the deterioration in the ground conditions on the day of the main event.



*Michael Headley, Penny Southern, Clare Evans, Dale Moorhouse, Alan Stewart and Judy Rickwood at CP 1/2, Knockholt*

and I certainly got the impression that intentions were already being formed to come back next year.

Due to the closure of the M25 at Junction 10 for the duration of the weekend, extra effort was put in to keep entry numbers high, in anticipation that there might be a larger number of 'no shows' than usual. In the end it wasn't too bad, with 229 entries and 39 no shows, of which 11 advised us prior to the day of the event – so 28 didn't advise us of their non-attendance. Notwithstanding that there will always be a small number of entrants who will have a genuine bona fide reason for pulling out at the very last minute, I would suspect that this isn't 28 and as an event organiser I am not going to shy away from saying that this fairly consistent statistic remains an annual source of frustration to me.

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 Lemen, Poppy Whiteside, Andy Clark, Peter



*Andrew Melling, Cathy Waters and Nicola Foad welcome Debbie Wilkes to CP 3, Ide Hill*

## THE CALDERDALE WAY (CW) (49.7 MILES) AND THE TODMORDEN CENTENARY WALK (TCW) (23.7 MILES), TUESDAY 24 – SATURDAY 27 JANUARY 2024

### From Helen Strong

Having carefully nursed his foot injury for the last six months, by mid-January David had slowly built up walking for longer distances and announced it was time to book a trail. As is the norm, I left it up to him to decide on the route – and do all the planning. We had such a wonderful time walking the Barnsley Boundary walk last January, that thoughts turned to doing another trip back up north. We had been blessed with fine, but cold sunny weather on that walk. This year the UK was experiencing a series of winter storms – namely, Isha and Jocelyn – which meant on this trip we had our fair share of winds gusting to 50 mph plus, and some horizontal rain in our faces to cope with. We felt thoroughly weathered by the end of the week.



On Tuesday morning we had a super early start, leaving West Malling at 5am, and travelling by car to Brighouse, where we would park up for the duration of the trip. Most of the spaces David finds on the Just Park website involve parking on someone's private residential property. However, this was a parking space in a local Sainsbury's car park in the centre of town. This would later prove to be a useful place for parking indeed.

It had started to rain on the journey up, and it was necessary to don full waterproofs as we started on the walk. Had I known that a fellow LDWA member lived just 20 yards off the path near here we may well have headed to his place for a cuppa – never mind – next time Chris! We soon found the waymarked tow

path which led us out of town. We had about 11 miles to do that day, but it was 11am by the time we had got going. David set the pace – and not too fast at that – as walking at speed was still bringing on his foot pain. We soon stopped for lunch under a railway bridge crossing a canal – sitting on the towpath looking like a pair of damp tramps as there was nowhere else to shelter from the weather which failed to abate.

The highlight of the afternoon was crossing Norland Moor – it was quite exhilarating having the wind and rain in our faces and though it was not always easy to follow the path, we enjoyed being up so high. Coming down from there we headed to Rippendon to stay in a comfortable Airbnb right on the path. David's new waterproof had been well and truly tested by the conditions, whereas my old waterproof had begun to wet out and I was beginning to feel the cold as we descended. As we walked into the property, we cranked up the thermostat and fortunately there was a fan heater in the living room which meant we could quickly dry our clothes on the airer in front of the warm air.

After a trip to the local Co-op, we enjoyed a hearty pasta meal – including meatballs and courgettes – preceded by our favourite post-walk tippie, a bottle of Cava. It had been a long and tiring day. I record all my walking and running on my Coros, and when I checked my activity stats for the day, it had recorded nearly 1800 ft of ascent. I realised that when David said it would be a tough walk – he meant it!



We got up quite early the following morning as we had about 20 miles to do to get to Hebden Bridge and we were going to be taking it slowly. We set off in the semi-dark, but it wasn't too long before we began to feel hungry and stopped for our breakfast. The day was one of spectacular views and less rain, though the gusts of wind were ever-present. We seemed to be climbing up and down all morning – albeit long climbs up, which I prefer. Up on Withens Moor we crossed the Pennine Way and once again we enjoyed the open freedom of the moorland paths. We headed through the village of Mankinholes and past the YHA – and I remembered the name. However, the hostel looked completely closed. Apparently, it is only open for group bookings. I wonder how many of these YHA hostels are exclusive whole hire now compared to a few years ago – it's a shame if a building is then left empty for much of the year, though I guess that they have looked at the economics of each hostel and come to their decisions.

We continued on the Calderdale Way through Todmorden and out the other side – we would be back here again for the second part of the trip, but today continued on the path that snakes up out of the town and follows high ground above the valley towards Hebden Bridge, where we left the path and dropped down to the town to stay for the night. It was getting dark, and the descending path was steep, rocky, and slippery in places after all the rain. It was nice to have our feet down on the flat tarmac at the bottom of that path!



We headed just a few minutes into town to find our accommodation. We were pretty tired having completed 20.6 miles and 4500 ft of elevation. Dinner was a little later than scheduled, and our bodies welcomed the calories. We had another long day to follow and planned to get up early again and start in the dark.

Although there had been these winter storms passing through, the temperatures were mild for the time of year. We left the accommodation early – with our headtorches on and, for me, too many layers – as we walked up the steep road and cobbled path up to Heptonstall. This was a pretty village from what we could see of it. We headed down the next valley

and across the river Hebden Water and continued up again out the other side. We stopped for a break and David took the opportunity to look over the ‘very busy’ map again. The path is generally well waymarked, but there are a few signs missing here and there and with so many public rights of way criss-crossing the area, it was sometimes difficult to see whether the path was the trail or not – which is when waymark signs on the ground become useful. However, there were also a number of link paths – connecting the CW to the surrounding villages and towns – and it was all too easy to spot these signs and head in that direction only to then realise that it was a link path taking us off the main route.

The morning’s walk continued as we made our way around the edge of Wadsworth Moor which was peaceful and easy going. We struggled over some tall ladder stiles with missing rungs then through some more farmland and on towards the town of Holdsworth. We stopped at the bottom of the next hill for a snack – and headed up another steep climb, this time on a narrow enclosed stone paved path that looked as if it had been used for centuries it was so worn away. We had completed the nicest parts of the trail by this stage of the afternoon as we began walking through more farmland with lots of stiles and small towns on our way back to Brighouse. The plan was to catch the train from here to Todmorden where we were staying for two nights.



We had enough time to get our food supplies from Sainsbury’s and say hi to the milk float, before walking to Brighouse station for the short journey down the track. When we arrived in

Todmorden, the accommodation was incredibly close to the station – and we were greeted by one of the hosts, a young chap who was very pleasant. The flat was very clean, spacious, and warm. He explained that he had had some problems with the TV, but it was now working – in hindsight I should have asked him to switch it on. I’m fairly technically minded, but for some reason we often get into a pickle with TVs in Airbnb’s. For some reason, most hosts seem averse to leaving some kind of quick guide for how to get the TV on and all too often it’s a struggle to find the ‘correct source’ or which remote control to use or ‘box’ to turn on first, to allow you to even to watch BBC1 live.

Between settling in and getting the dinner on, we both attempted and failed to get the TV to work – an SOS text to the host ended up with the young chap coming over – and somehow he got the antiquated Amazon Fire stick operating the TV to work – albeit for one night only. Having completed just over 20 miles and 3714 ft of elevation that day on top of our day’s solid walking, it wasn’t long before we were nodding off in front of the box.

The Todmorden Centenary Walk was the second trail David had chosen for this trip – and we left the Airbnb that Friday morning having treated ourselves to a lie-in (i.e. not 5:30 alarm) with a plan to walk either 15 or 19 miles and then catch a train back to the accommodation.

We headed out of town and up a steep concreted track, passing around the Whirlaw Stones and high ground above Tod. At times crossing the Calderdale Way, we stopped for breakfast near a waterfall, trying to get some shelter from the wind which was gusting strongly. The real treat on this trail was the ascent to Stoodley Pike. David and I have both been past this monument on our own endeavours on the Pennine Way. The TCW would



have us approach the monument a completely different and direct way – from the road beneath it, via a sharp incline to the top. Although I was feeling a little tired, my legs were feeling strong which was just as well because by the time we reached the top, the wind was gusting strongly and taking my legs with it.

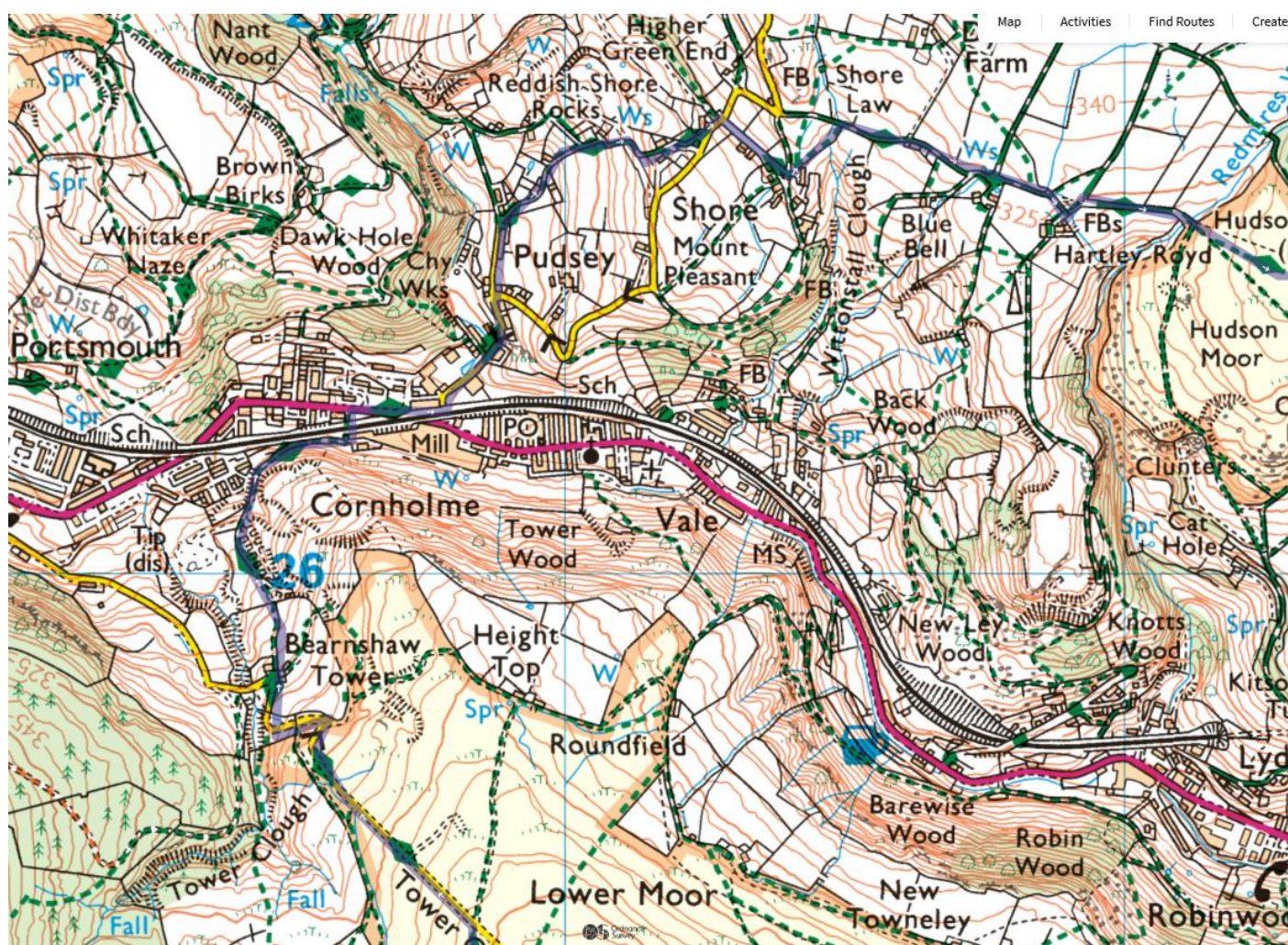
We decided to try and take a couple of photos: it was a stunning day, so sunny and we could see for miles. We were not the only crazy people on the edge of the moor. We saw a group of cyclists – and I just don't know how they managed to cycle in the gusts – busy taking a group shot, while other folks who were walkers hid behind the monument for their banana break.

We decided not to stop on account of time. Although we had decided that we would do 15 miles of this walk that day once again the ascents and descents would slow us down. We picked up the Pennine Way (for us in the opposite direction) as it snaked around the edge of the moor. Despite the incessant wind, the sun continued to shine over the scenic views from which we felt the most amazing sense of calm and happiness. When we reached the Warland Reservoir we were both incredibly hungry. We managed to drop down to find shelter from the wind but in the sun near a bridge, and it was quite idyllic. We had just seen a young teen running beside the reservoir in a vest and shorts and there we sat with several layers on – soft southerners clearly!

After lunch heading along the reservoir path, we had to watch that we didn't end up walking all the way to the road near the White House pub and kept our eye out for the TCW path forking off to the right – which could easily be missed. Coming down quite steeply again and over the road we began climbing again around the edge of Shore Moor. We were getting close to the point where we were going to leave the path at Brown Road Farm down the valley through another steep woodland path riddled with tree roots underfoot, to catch the train from Walsden. As we approached the station, we had just a few minutes to wait before the train arrived. The service on this line is rather good – with plenty of trains throughout the day.

Having completed 15.14 miles and 3212 ft of ascent we had completed perhaps one of our favourite, albeit tough, days of walking – it had it all. So, we deserved every sip of cava and mouthful of food that we consumed that evening, alas with no TV.

As is the case with these trips, you reach the final day with a mixture of feelings – tired and ready for a rest at home, and sad that it is nearly over. This morning, we had about 10 miles to finish the walk before heading back to Kent. We got up early again and caught the train back to Walsden and up the hill to connect with the trail where we had left it the day before. We skirted around Inchfield Moor and on to Todmorden Moor before picking up a track down to Cornholme.



This screenshot of the map shows just how 'busy' it can be – so hats off to David for keeping his eye on the route amongst all this. He vowed to make his next walk very flat and away from civilisation.

The last section of the route had us heading back to Todmorden and the station to catch the train back to the car in Brighouse. We were fortunate with the train again – I could see on Trainline that it was delayed by a few minutes – so we didn't have rush to catch it, and risk injury.

Arriving back in Brighouse, we threw our gear into the milk float and changed footwear – my Uggs felt amazing on my tired toes – and collected some food in Sainsbury's. Heading off back down south by 12:00 we were glad we had got up and out of Todmorden early. We were keen to be home in time for a G&T by our usual time.

We had completed 10.92 miles that day with 2073ft of ascent – so in total had completed at least 78 miles and 15,300 ft of ascent in three (very) full and two half-days of walking.

We would certainly recommend these trails to others. Although we had mixed weather, we were well clothed and well fed. Also, well done to David for his planning, organising, driving, and navigating – as ever I am super grateful – as he well knows – and look forward to telling you about our next adventure.

## **A BIG SHOUT OUT TO KENT LDWA VOLUNTEERS!**

### **From Penny Southern**



*Penny Southern, Helen Strong and David Thornton wearing our eye-catching volunteer T-shirts*

It's been another great year for Kent LDWA, but none of it would have been possible without the amazing group of volunteers who work tirelessly to support the fantastic opportunities the Kent LDWA offers to people who are passionate about walking a very long way!

There are lots of ways our local group values volunteers. Without them, none of the activities we all enjoy undertaking would be possible. Over the past year, our local group has recognised and thanked our volunteers for their support at two key events: we organised a celebratory lunch last summer to congratulate everyone who set off and/or volunteered at the Elephant Bear and Bull 100 annual flagship LDWA challenge event; and we subsidised the very enjoyable Christmas lunch held at Bearstead Golf Club.

I reported at the January AGM the first year's activity on the newly developed process for volunteers to claim out of pocket expenses:

Kent LDWA has a number of volunteering opportunities and sees these roles as a vital part of the organisation's work. We encourage and support volunteers within the Kent Committee and at Kent Challenge Events. We also support volunteers who help with neighbouring LDWA local group events and the annual LDWA 100 Challenge Event.

Kent LDWA believes that anyone volunteering their help with these roles or events should have the opportunity to claim a number of specific expenses incurred in undertaking them. By introducing an equitable process for all Kent LDWA volunteers to be reimbursed for these expenses, we recognise the very important role volunteers play within the group, aim to maintain the existing group of volunteers and seek to attract new volunteers.

We will monitor our progress against our aims at the Kent LDWA Committee meetings.

The full policy – titled Volunteering with Kent LDWA Group – can be found at <https://ldwa.org.uk/Kent/W/8923/volunteers-expenses.html>

The first review of our policy was shared at the AGM. We explained how our treasurer had fixed a few glitches during the year to make the online form work better and I reported that we received a total of 19 claims reimbursing a total of £1248.85. This is excellent progress and shows that it is really important for volunteers to have a consistent process for claiming. If you are a volunteer and have incurred expenses in helping us, don't forget to make your claim!



We agreed at the AGM not to make any changes to the current process but to review it again in 2025. Whether it be volunteering for the annual 100, local and neighbourhood checkpoints, preparing food at the AGM or travelling the length of Kent to recce new routes, the process has been designed by volunteers for volunteers. So don't forget to use it!

If you have any ideas for recognising our amazing volunteers or you are interested in becoming a Kent LDWA volunteer yourself then please don't hesitate to get in touch. Email me, Penny Southern – [secretary.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:secretary.kent@ldwa.org.uk)

## OBITUARY

### Bill Gillibrand

#### From Brian Buttifant

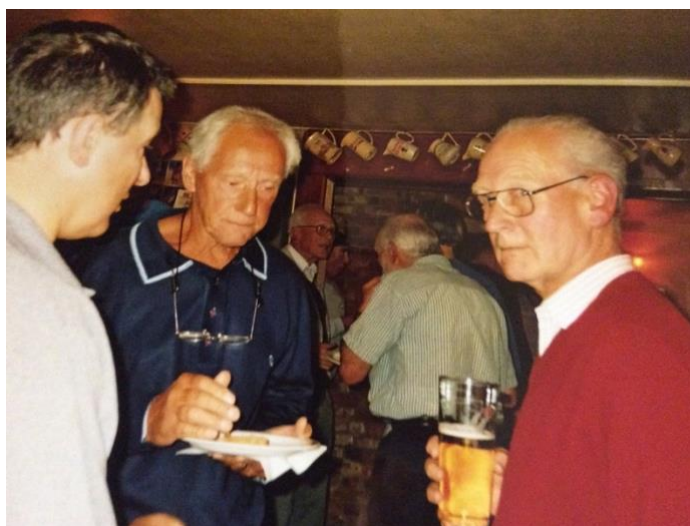
It was sad to hear of the death of Bill Gillibrand at 91. He had a declining illness over a number of years but always had an interest in the group.

Bill came to walking later in life. Living in Eltham, his walks were mainly in the West Kent area. Bill was a good group member, quiet but very helpful and reliable as a check pointer.

He served as secretary when I was Chairman and he was very efficient: an ideal Secretary.

A lovely man, good friend, greatly respected and will be greatly missed.

Keith Warman writes that he and Shirlie were saddened to hear of Bill's passing: 'He served as Group Secretary around 2004 - 2010, although I do not know the exact years. Bill was a quiet, private, efficient man, always unfailingly polite and interested in others' well-being. I think he preferred our social walks to events. He contributed regularly to our Newsletter with his "Comedy Corner" of jokes.'



*Bill at a post-Hundred pub gathering at the Rose & Crown in Wrotham, probably c. 2010, with Keith Warman, Ernie Bishop, Ivan Waghorn, Brian Buttifant (in shadow), Mike Pursey (back view), Dave Sheldrake (just visible in blue top) and Bill*



*Bill with Brian Buttifant marshalling at West Heath School for the 2017 Sevenoaks Challenge*

## THE HEReward WAY 16 – 21 FEBRUARY 2024

### From David Thornton

The chief criterion I have for choosing a long distance trail to walk is picking an area with which I am unfamiliar – or at least to rotate my choices around various parts of the UK. The Hereward Way fitted rather nicely, a 110 mile route, starting in Oakham and heading east mainly through Cambridgeshire, a part of the country I didn't know at all well and finishing about 7 miles east of Thetford.

However, at various points of my six days of walking this trail, I questioned the wisdom of my decision to tackle this route during the third week of February: much of the route sits below sea level and it's an area which has since been reported to have had the highest February rainfall on record.

I caught the first train out of West Malling at 5.40 on Friday 16 February, arriving at Oakham on schedule at 9.30, for my first 16 mile day to Stamford. From a planning point of view, this trail was without doubt the easiest one I have had to put together. The days were



Oakham to Stamford 16 miles, then Peterborough 17 miles, then March 19 miles, on to Ely 21 miles, then Brandon 23 miles and finally 15 miles to Harling Road station on my last day. These are all large places, with very little by way of development in between, so to say that these towns were conveniently located would be quite an understatement.

This first day was very pleasant, taking me several miles around Rutland Water before eventually picking the last few miles of the Jurassic Way (an 88 mile route I completed back in March last year) heading into Stamford. I hadn't been confronted by too much ground water thus far, but a mile or so outside Stamford a fairly significant footbridge had clearly been unhinged by a torrent of water and was deposited a good few feet on the opposite side of the river – the first and rather ominous sign that further troubles lay ahead. A two mile detour eventually took me into the lovely town of Stamford and a very comfortable Airbnb in someone's house.

I had planned to take full advantage of the relatively low daily mileage by nevertheless leaving in good time each morning and taking a very steady pace, so I was up and away from Stamford by 7.30. The first half of the morning was very enjoyable, taking me through the impressive grounds of Burghley Park and then through Sacrewell Farm, the eastern headquarters of Riverford Farms, one of the UK's largest growers of organic produce and the largest UK supplier of veg boxes. I used to see their vehicles in the early hours at the fruit and veg wholesale markets in London and I was always mildly amused by their well-liveried delivery vehicles with the tagline 'Live Life on the Veg'. It was a mile or so beyond this farm, about 8 miles in, that I hit the river Nene and then my troubles started.

I'm not going to bore you with every detour that I was forced to take over the next three days, some of which were rather unpleasant, otherwise I could well be writing this for some considerable time. But that same afternoon, I happened to speak to several locals, three of whom happened to divulge some slightly alarming information. Firstly, that the river Nene was notoriously known for flooding; secondly, that they had not known the flooding to be so bad at this time of year; and thirdly, and I quote, 'You haven't even got to the Fens yet!' I did eventually find a circuitous route into Peterborough but was then hit by the realisation that I'd booked an Airbnb in a modern second floor flat, but on top of the pub/club strip on the high street, on a Saturday night. Not clever.

Given that I now realised that my daily mileage could now vary quite considerably, I didn't hang around in Peterborough for long. After an early start and big detour out of the town, I soon realised that my route into Whittersley, via the official Hereward Way route towards March, was completely cut off by more flooding. I quickly replanned my route and headed off for a 10 mile plod on a raised dyke alongside the river Nene and its neighbouring 1 km-wide floodplain. Believe it or not, in this part of the world, a raised dyke is actually quite pleasant to walk along, as the land around it is dead flat, so the views are, as it were, quite extensive. I lost count of the number of hare and deer I spotted all the way along this section. I eventually approached March from the north, via the surrounding grounds of HMP Whitemoor, for a very comfortable stay at an Airbnb.



On the Monday, the first 10 miles or so out of March were calm and enjoyable, relatively dry underfoot with nice weather and no detours. Then I reached the village of Welney. Here I was stopped by a lady who was also out day walking and who enthusiastically enquired where I had come from and where I was heading to. 'Ely' I replied to the latter. It was the sudden and excessive raising of one eyebrow which was the most disconcerting. 'Oh', she said, 'I'm not sure how you'll manage that! You see, the Hundred Washes Road crossing, just round the corner there, is flooded and, I'm afraid to add, all the way along'. At that point an old lady from the house across the road, who apparently had lived in Welney for 40+ years, came out of her house at some speed, clearly anxious to join in on the debate. As we all stood there, consulting my map, the explanation of 'all the way along' became rapidly apparent. The Hundred Washes, as it's called, which I needed to cross via the road at Welney, is a man-made flood

plain, which is, once flooded, just under a mile wide, with a crossing to the northeast at Downham Market, 8 miles, and a crossing to the southwest at Mepal, also 8 miles – so a 16 mile detour, either way. The only other ‘solid’ crossing was the main Ely to March railway line, just under four miles heading to the southwest end. I spent the next hour or so it took me to reach this crossing thoroughly examining the Ely/March train timetable, desperately attempting to calculate a trainless window large enough before very recklessly making my way across, which I made with about two minutes to spare. I sincerely hope I’m never in a position where I have to contemplate that again and it is certainly not something I would recommend. I finally arrived in Ely at 5.45, 26 miles later and very tired.



It was dark when I arrived in Ely, so I had to wait until the following morning before I was able to take in the awesome sight of Ely Cathedral. Goodness, what an enormously impressive building that is. A monumental statement, which can be seen for many, many miles around. I intend to re-visit Ely one day, with the specific purpose of taking a look inside, which I am reliably informed is equally amazing.

Much like the previous four days, this day’s walk was as flat as you like, the best bit of which took me through the Lakenheath Fen Nature Reserve. Five miles of lovely well-drained raised banks, above freshwater plains, packed with birds and a lukewarm sunny breeze to boot. Perfect.



The other thing I really enjoyed about this day was watching the US fighter jets taking off from Lakenheath Airfield. Lakenheath is the largest and in fact only US airfield in Europe, storing the very latest combat US F-35/F-15 jets. The noise was deafening as you see them pop up from behind the tree line and rapidly disappearing into the sky. What was even more impressive was watching them taxi back into the airfield at very low altitude in the evening sky, directly over the small town of Brandon, which was my last overnight stop. The residents probably hardly notice them anymore, but the noise was so loud that it was difficult even to hold a conversation with my Airbnb host that night as he ran through the checking-in and -out details outside the house. I’m not sure I would like to live there.

My last day took me through the Brecks and Thetford Forest, crossing over the Peddars Way National Trail, as I completed my last day of 15 miles, before reaching Harling Road Station. For the first time on this six-day walk, the weather was atrocious, as the wind and rain were relentless for every step. However, as I sat on the various trains back to West Malling, via Thetford, Ely and Kings Cross, I reflected on my walk and how lucky I was with the weather overall. I can only imagine how hacked off I’d have been faced with the lengthy detours as well as the added challenge of poor weather. I also smiled as I reflected on the fact that despite having walked well in excess of 125 miles, I reckon I only did about 75% of the official trail. But I’m not going to be too harsh on myself and I’m going to mark the Hereward Way as a completed trail – and one which I shall remember for a very long time.

## EARLY DAYS

### From Andrew Melling

We didn't call it backpacking, in the Scouts: it was the First Class Journey, 14 miles by the badge requirements, 20 miles by our scoutmaster's design, with an overnight camp. In our Troop, we did this twice, first as a practice. My practice was in September in fair weather but the test was in February. My intended companion pulled out and I pressed my brother Stephen to join me although he was by then a Senior Scout and had already passed the test. We had to arrange to camp at a farm but the first three refused us and it was dark by the time we found a pitch. We had fresh food to cook for dinner, breakfast and for sandwiches for our second day lunch. Cooking was on an open fire so my kit both times included an axe.





Clevedon,  
August 1962

Stephen left us to visit a friend in Weston-Super-Mare and re-joined us at Clevedon. After a review of 'finances', we visited a tea shop on Clevedon Pier and cheekily asked for a cup of tea for one with three cups. The kindly waitress put an extra teabag in the pot. After camp at Cheddar, our last evening was round our campfire in a wood sharing a loaf of bread and a pack of butter (funds being reduced). We then went to Bath station where, although we had tickets for the next day, we could not stay in the waiting room overnight. Instead, we used the emergency button on a bus in the carpark and had a reasonably comfortable night before returning

It snowed a little the first day and a lot the second day. I learnt first-hand the insulating effect of a layer of snow on the tent!

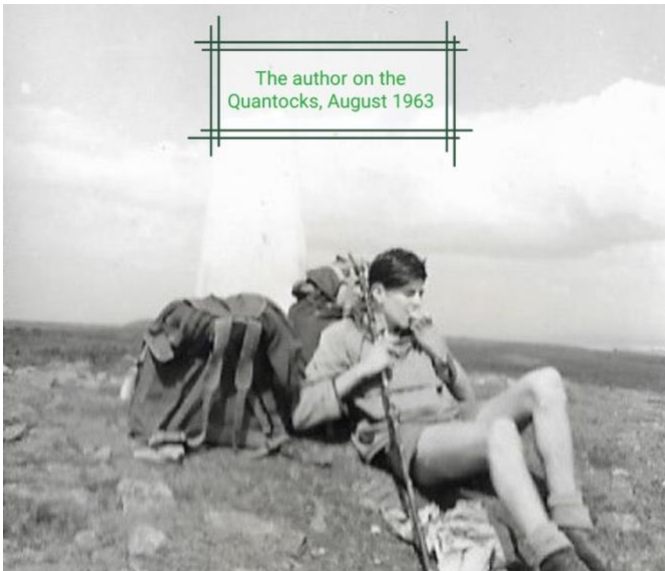
Six months later, Stephen and I, with our friend Colin from the choir, borrowed an Itisa tent from the Scouts for a Cotswold camping tour. We bought return train tickets to Bristol and from there got a bus to our start in Gloucester. My hobnail boots were not best suited to Gloucester's pavements but I managed not to slip over and we were soon on our way south. In going south, we missed the best of the Cotswolds but were constrained by available transport. Still, there were pretty towns and villages to be enjoyed, not overdeveloped or traffic-bound back in 1962. I remember Cirencester, our third night's camp; Tetbury, the fourth night near Sodbury; and Axbridge, camping at Cheddar.



Campsite at Tetbury,  
August 1962

home.

A year later, Colin and I were on a coach to Bridgwater to start an Exmoor tour. The Itisa was a bit heavy to be shared between two so I borrowed a lightweight tent from a Scout friend. What it lost in weight, it gained in permeability. On two mornings, my notes record an early rise and transfer to drier quarters. I carried the tent strapped to my rucksack and on the fourth day one of the wooden pole sections fell out, undiscovered until the evening. My thumb stick had to stand in but it was never straight again. On one wet day, near Brendon, we found a hay loft for a dry night. Next morning, the farmer came by, agitated. He was not worried about trespass but that he had laid rat poison! We were unaffected. Perhaps our most comfortable night was in a goose paddock, absent the geese. In the morning, we were invited to join the family but we had already



The author on the  
Quantocks, August 1963

breakfasted and were almost packed, ready to move on.

We followed rivers when we could, the Exe and the Barle, although they were often paralleled by quiet roads. Exmoor is full of interest. Dunster is an especially attractive village but we also visited Dunkery Beacon, Lorna Doone Farm, the Caractacus Stone and Tarr Steps. Along the way, we explored the beautiful churches at Crowcombe, Watchet, Dunster, Wootton Courtenay, Winsford, Exford, Oare and Withypool. By prior arrangement, we visited my parents at a B & B at Lee and were allowed to 'camp' three nights in the barn. A chance to relax, perhaps, but my notes show shorter walking days on our way back to Bridgwater. There may have been some (unrecorded) hitchhiking earlier.

Arriving at Bridgwater in the evening, Colin set off to join a family holiday on the Isle of Wight while I looked for somewhere for my last night. At school, I had been reading about the American hobos who would travel the country on goods trains and spend nights in police stations. I thought I should try my luck but the duty sergeant had not read the book and needed some persuading. He suggested I could stay



By River Exe,  
August 1963



Near Wootton,  
August 1963



Caractacus  
Stone

cheaply at the YMCA hostel across the road, but 18s 9d was way outside my budget. (My outlay during the fortnight totalled £3 9s 6 1/2d.) I was allotted a cell but, before I had settled down, there were second thoughts. It was a Friday night and all the cells would be needed for drunks so I was moved with my (very comfortable) cell mattress and pillow into the adjacent courtroom. If the sergeant had told his relief about me, it would not have been such a shock for the bobby who came to sweep the floor in the morning.



Hayloft near Brendon,  
August 1963

My journey home was uneventful; except that I sat near the front of the coach and was disconcerted to see the difficulty the driver had changing out of first gear, even with both hands on the yard long gear stick.

It was during these years with the Scouts, that I had my introduction to night walking. I was just 11 the first time when the whole Troop had a short walk from summer camp, starting after dark and returning before midnight for soup or cocoa round the camp fire. This was then a regular feature of Scout camps and eventually I was able to join the all-night hikes. It was a feature of these hikes that only the leader and the back marker used torches.

At 15, I moved from the Scouts to the Senior Scouts when we were able to plan our own night hikes, without necessarily having an adult to lead us. Some were memorable. On one clear summer night, we lay flat on our backs on a quiet lane while my friend, who knew about such things, identified for us the many visible stars and constellations. Refreshment breaks were not a matter of a cheese roll and a flask of

soup. We would build a fire and cook a (very) late night supper. My photos are not of the best quality but you may be able to make out that we (or most of us!) were in our Scout uniforms. This was the practice when on a Scout activity.

*(A shorter version of this account appeared in Backpack magazine, summer 2021)*



On a night hike

# HEART OF KENT WALKING FESTIVAL – SATURDAY 24 MARCH 2024

From Peter Jull



The nineteen that started, including some who signed up through the Festival website and visitors from London and Surrey, would have been more if it hadn't been for engineering works further up the line messing up the train connections.



A pleasant wooded valley trended downwards before a brief climb to the edge of Bicknor which was also the boundary of



From Harrietsham station, it was straight into the squelchiest mud directly from the car park, but although heavy going in places, wasn't so bad for the rest of the route. After the initial mud came the initial climb up to the top of the Downs after which the climbing wasn't so bad for the rest of the route. Sounds of congregational singing could be heard while we stopped at Hucking church for an elevenses pause.



Maidstone Borough which was duly beaten given that the route was inspired by the traditional beating of parish boundaries when the elders would take the boys round the edges of the parish and beat the boundary stones (or was it the boys that were beaten?) so that they'd remember where the boundaries were.

With our Swaleites on their side of the road a bit more of the boundary was followed the other side of Bicknor but much of it is inaccessible to the public and far too long to include in one walk so it was only the north-east quadrant this time. At the end of what



is an adopted road on the map but a track at best on the ground we came close again but diverged to lunch at Frinsted church.

Unlike the previous iterations of the Festival the weather was rain free but a chilly breeze had everyone soon ready to move on. After Wichling the bounds took a last beating before the longest stretch was followed until it wasn't, the fastest being too far past a missed turning to be called back from invading Swale. In improvised diversion got back on route without too much extra distance before long descent back to Harrietsham.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### From Cathy Waters

2024 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Kent LDWA, and we look forward to celebrating our birthday at the Ryarsh event on 9 June. Thank you to Stephanie Le Men for alerting me to the early issues of the LDWA Newsletter that are now available online at <https://ldwa.org.uk/publications.php>

The launch of the Kent group was announced by the South East Region Representative, Peter Rickards, in the tenth newsletter, published by the LDWA in December 1974:

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## NEWS FROM THE REGIONS

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### THE SOUTH EAST REGION.

This region stretches from a few miles east of Portsmouth in the south and extends north as far as the Wash- it has the largest concentration of members in and around the capital.

So far in the region we have established two groups - the West Surrey and the newly formed Kent Group. There are possibly two more forming in the very near future, one in Hampshire, the other in Sussex. All of these groups are south of the Thames. I feel sure that there are some members north of the river who are interested in getting together to form some local groups. If so, would they please contact me and I will give them all my possible support:-

Peter Rickards (176)  
South East Region Representative,

It's encouraging to read in the same issue that the first Kent group walk was held on 27 October 1974 and 'attracted nine members'!

We also learn that the Sevenoaks Circular Challenge was central to the group's walking plans from the outset, because the early social walks were devoted to recce-ing a route for the first SCC to be held on 30 March 1975:

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# GROUP NEWS

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## KENT

Our first Group walk was held on Sunday, 27th October, and attracted nine members. The route taken was the first part of our Sevenoaks Circular Walk, from Otford to River Hill via Oldbury Hill and Ightham Mote.

The next Group walk will take place prior to the newsletter being circulated but we look forward to meeting readers on our Third walk on January 5th. This will leave from Sevenoaks Station at 10.00 a.m., led by Len Wilson.

The Kent Group was formed with the aim of promoting informal group walks in the Kent area and promoting an Organised walk in the Sevenoaks area. All of our walks to date have been aimed at routing our Organised walk and we are proud to announce that the Sevenoaks Circular Walk will be held on Sunday, March 30th 1975, starting from Otford Village and covering between 25 and 30 miles. Details available by the end of February.

The March 1975 issue contains the following notice of the first SCC:

### MARCH 30th EASTER SUNDAY - SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR (Kent)

A new walk, and the first to be arranged by the Kent Group. The 30 miles route will start from Otford (533594) near Sevenoaks, Kent. There will also be a 12½ miles walk held concurrently. Route description sheets will be issued and the route is covered by O/S maps sheets 187 & 188 (1:50000). Time limit is 10 hrs and all successful finishers will be awarded a certificate. Entry fee 20p.(members) to Peter Rickards

A curious report on the event appears in the August 1975 issue:

## KENT

In the eight months that the Kent Group has been going, members have been very active in all local events. Highlights worth mentioning are The Sevenoaks Circular Walk (our first open walk), the cross Surrey Walk (4½ members completed the 50 miles in 18¼ hours), and our first victory (a team award in a 30 mile walk). I would add that the two ladies who walked in the latter event intend to burn their bras, to form our own version of the 'Ashes'.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 2nd - Crockham Hill.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6th - Evening Walk; starting point Tonbridge.  
Details to be confirmed.

AUGUST 23/24/25th - Family Camping Weekend at Westwell near Charing, Kent. All the fun of the fair and walks along the North Downs Way.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3rd - Evening Walk - Oxted 7.0 p.m.

For further details contact Dave Page  
or come along to one of our walks.

Was the ½ member a child, I wonder? 'Bra-burning' was a myth that seems to have stuck in perceptions of 70s feminism and I can think of more desirable trophies. But as a proud Aussie, I happily note that Australia won the 1975 Ashes test series, 1-0 with three matches drawn. It was Ian Chappell's last tour as captain.

A year later, the August 1976 issue has the Kent group proposing a trip to participate in the Four Days Nijmegen Marches, but it's



# KENT

Dave Page

After a successful start to the year the group has been dogged by a series of unfortunate accidents which curtailed some of its planned evening walks.

The last one of the series is on September 1st at Bexley Station (Kent), starting at 7 p.m.

Other plans include evening walk/barbecue/walk, in the Sevenoaks area on Saturday 6th/7th November; and a cross Surrey - cross Kent (130 miles) in October or November. If any members are interested would they please contact me. We envisage the walk taking place over two week-ends.

Group members will also be supporting the main 'events' in the walking calendar; a camping weekend at the Long Mynd Hike is also planned.

Nijmegen Marches 1976. The 61st Four Days Marches are on the 19th-22nd July, 1977. How about forming a LDWA group to go? If we fill a mini-bus the cost comes down. Interested members contact the Kent Group now for the experience of a life time.

The March 1977 Kent Group news report shows that muddy conditions underfoot for the Sevenoaks Circular Challenge have not changed much!

# KENT

In anticipation of a bumper entry for this year's "Sevenoaks Circular Walk", the Group have been busy walking out and amending the route description for the course. Last year the walk was referred to as the "Gin and Jag" walk; unless conditions change rapidly I'm sure that after this year it will be called the "Soup and Sludge" walk.

Group membership grows slowly - we now have 20 members and 4 recent enquiries. It was agreed at a recent meeting to cut down this year on the number of summer mid-week evening walks as last year they were not well supported.

## PROGRAMME TO AUGUST 1977

16th March	Evening Get Together. Meet 7 pm The Bull, Otford.
20th March	Sevenoaks Circular Walk. Start 9am Otford Scout Hut.
4th May	Evening Walk. Meet 7pm Tonbridge Railway Station. Leader Ernie Bishop
21/22 May	Surrey Hills Walk west to east. Meet 1pm Frensham Ponds Hotel.
1st June	Evening Walk. Meet 7pm Shoreham Station. Leader Derek Williams.
4/6 June	Manning Checkpoint Downsman 100. Marshall Dillon (Page).
14/15 August	Weekend based on Doddington Hostel, Kent. Saturday and Sunday walking on the North Downs Way. Further details from Peter Rickards.

Group Programme enquiries from Peter Rickards