

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

furthering the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking

# ***NEWSLETTER***



*David Thornton leads Kent LDWA members on a short walk before our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday lunch at Ryarsh Village Hall (see report page 3)*



**Number 123**

**August 2024**

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

## CONTENTS

|                                                             |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Kent Group Committee                                        | 2  |
| The Speyside 100                                            | 2  |
| Ryarsh 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lunch – Peter Jull      | 3  |
| Obituaries                                                  | 5  |
| Plappeville – Peter Jull                                    | 7  |
| The Dales Way – David Thornton                              | 9  |
| Memories of my first LDWA Hundred Mile Walk – Jill Green    | 11 |
| NEW Kent LDWA Challenge Event – Wye Not Wander              | 12 |
| Travels Without a Donkey on the GR70: Part 2 – Cathy Waters | 13 |
| High Weald Challenge – Stephanie Le Men                     | 15 |

WELCOME to the August 2024 edition of the Kent Group Newsletter. We have news in this issue of the Speyside 100 and of our celebration afterwards in Ryarsh village hall both to acknowledge those Kent LDWA walkers who took part in the annual flagship challenge and to mark our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Once again, I invite anyone who has any reminiscences they would like to share in the Newsletter on the occasion of our Golden Anniversary to please get in touch with me at [newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk)

Cathy Waters

## KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

|                                       |                                |                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chair</b>                          | Peter Jull                     | <a href="mailto:kent@ldwa.org.uk">kent@ldwa.org.uk</a>                       |
| <b>Secretary</b>                      | Nicola Foad and Penny Southern | <a href="mailto:secretary.kent@ldwa.org.uk">secretary.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a>   |
| <b>Treasurer</b>                      | Jim Briggs                     | <a href="mailto:treasurer.kent@ldwa.org.uk">treasurer.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a>   |
| <b>Groups/Social Walks Organiser</b>  | Peter Jull                     | <a href="mailto:walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk">walks.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a>           |
| <b>Newsletter Editor</b>              | Cathy Waters                   | <a href="mailto:newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk">newsletter.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a> |
| <b>Membership Secretary</b>           | David Thornton                 | <a href="mailto:membership.kent@ldwa.org.uk">membership.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a> |
| <b>Other Committee Members</b>        | Stephanie Le Men, Helen Strong |                                                                              |
| <b>Life President (non-Committee)</b> | Brian Buttifant                |                                                                              |
| <b>Web Master (non-Committee)</b>     | Michael Headley                | <a href="mailto:website.kent@ldwa.org.uk">website.kent@ldwa.org.uk</a>       |

## THE SPEYSIDE 100

Kent LDWA had 5 entrants successfully complete this year's 100 Challenge event (\* signifies a first completion): Alzbeta Benn, Andrew Boulden, Nicola Foad, Tara Taylor\* and Keith Warman.

Commiserations go to the following starters who, for various reasons, were unable to complete the route this year: Alan Stewart and Sarah Turner.

## Report from Keith Warman

This was an odd Hundred, but very enjoyable. For various reasons, the route was radically altered in autumn 2023.

The new route had much less ascent (approximately 8,600 feet) than on the Games Hundred in 2012! Some sections presented no difficulties, being forest tracks, old railway lines, minor roads, etc., but there were three quite difficult sections. We had to cross the featureless and very boggy Cromdale ridge at about 1,960 feet. There was a summit fence with a gate in it to find. Thankfully, white posts had been thoughtfully inserted in the bogs to aid our navigation. After 30 miles, we had a long night-time section up and over Carn Diamh at around 1,950 feet – the paths were easier to find here but a few bogs were thrown in to ensure we stayed alert. The third tricky part was after 80 miles, with a section of 1,100 feet of ascent including roughly three miles on enclosed paths



*The mighty River Spey at Aberlour, taken from the disused railway line which hugs the riverbank. Note the lone fisherman*



*Nethy Bridge Village Hall and the final checkpoint at 95 miles. Len Fallick and me unable to keep awake!*



*Easy going along a disused railway track, amidst delightful greenery near Advie*

with numerous 'chain stiles' or 'chain gates' – quite awkward to get through.

Otherwise, the going and navigation were straightforward. In fact, overall, the route-finding was probably the least taxing of any Hundred I've done. The green corridors of the old railway lines were delightful and the forests serene and majestic. We were in close proximity to the River Spey and what a powerful spectacle that is. It is Scotland's second longest and fastest-flowing river. Plenty of fishermen everywhere.

I walked the first section and also the final 30 miles to the finish with the remarkable Len Fallick. It was his 42nd Hundred and it broke the late Roger Cole's 'record' (held for 51 years!) for the most Hundred completions. It was a pleasure and a privilege to accompany him as I did – a truly amazing and quite emotional occasion. A lone piper had set us off at the start and, by chance, he was marshalling at the Tamdhu checkpoint (70 miles). Len and I were asked if we would like to be 'piped out' of the checkpoint, which we gleefully accepted. What a lovely gesture to send us on our way and Len delighted in telling folk about this.

It was great to see both Peter Jull and Neil Higham at the event – they were part of the transport team ferrying retirees back to the headquarters. I was very pleased to hear that Jim Catchpole, with great determination, was able to decline their services and managed to finish!

Shirley and I spent three weeks in Scotland and completed our planned full route recce before the main event. Speyside is delightful, the roads were quite empty, people were extremely friendly and we struggled to see any litter. A quiet pride in the area seems to pervade. There was quite a lot of snow visible on The Cairngorms but, luckily, none underfoot.



*Len and me finishing. Simon Pipe, from the Media Team, is between and behind us.*



*Jim Catchpole finishing, accompanied by Jill Green. Jill walked in with Jim for the final few miles*

During our recce, we passed near several distilleries. This is business on an industrial scale. For example, the Glenlivet distillery has an output of nine million litres per year! Whisky tankers were flying around everywhere in the day-time, akin to petrol tankers but carrying somewhat more expensive cargo ...

In conclusion, some wonderful memories of our time and experiences in Speyside. The icing on the cake though? We actually saw a red squirrel!

## RYARSH 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY LUNCH – 9 JUNE 2024

**From Peter Jull**

*This is the text of the speech made by Kent LDWA Chair, Peter Jull, at the lunch:*

Fifty years ago I was just a schoolboy contemplating his 'O' levels; at least one of us was as yet just a proverbial glint in an eye, while our predecessors, one or two of whom are still here with us, were enthusiastic enough to conclude that Kent needed its own branch of the recently formed LDWA to better enjoy long distance walking and the crazy things we do (in the eyes of mere muggles who are yet to be converted) like regarding 20 miles as a mere Sunday stroll and walking 100 miles in 48 hours.



*Peter Jull addresses the audience at Ryarsh*

I am reminded by Penny that this is Volunteers Week and a voluntary organisation needs a rolling cadre of volunteers to continue for 50 years, so thank you to David for leading this morning's walk and Helen for co-ordinating the catering. We are gathered here today not to just mark the passing of those 50 years but to commend the endeavours of Kent members in the recent Hundred – not so many this year as the Speyside in Scotland was a long way to go.



*Keith Warman announces the vital statistics*



*Andrew Melling cuts the cake*

Keith Warman gave a statistical report on the Speyside including records broken; Len Fallick with 42 completions, Jim Catchpole at 82, the new equal oldest finisher, and the first finishers born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and noted the 5 Kent members who completed: Nicola Foad, Andrew Boulden, Bett Benn, Tara Taylor and himself. For two others, their bodies decided too much of a good thing was too much this time.

As the last man home last year I took particular note of the last man home this year who also had a bad case of the leans and was effectively frogmarched by a marshal down the last road and at almost a trot for last hundred yards to finish in 47 hours 59 minutes and 58 seconds and join the elite of the LDWA, along with our own Mike Pursey, in possession of a certificate that says they completed a 100 mile route in exactly the 48 hours allowed. It now falls to us to continue that rolling cadre of volunteers for the next 50 years so that there is a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary which none of those here will be around to see, [objection from Poppy] and there is still a group for those school boys and girls who are now contemplating their GCSEs ('O'

levels are long gone) and those yet to be who are as yet just a glint in an eye. No celebration would be a celebration without a cake and I invite Andrew Melling who was one of the few there at the start of the LDWA (if not in Kent) to cut the cake.

## OBITUARIES

### Shirley Higgins (1934 – 2024)

*Keith Warman writes:*

I am sorry to report that ex-Kent Group member Shirley Higgins passed away in February 2024. She was just a couple of months shy of her 90th birthday.

Shirley was very active in the Group from around 1987 until 2010. This included being an enthusiastic social walk leader, event checkpoint, crossword-setter and distributor of our Newsletter. She had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Kent's public rights of way and, for a while, she monitored and followed up problems which Group members had raised with Kent County Council.

Being a very keen walker, Shirley often clocked up in excess of 2,000 miles each year and was a regular participant on our social walks. Whenever I visited her in her cosy cottage in Watlingbury, there were usually several maps unfolded on her dining-room table – she was always plotting and planning future walking opportunities. She took part in many local challenge events, walked long-distance paths (some with her twin brother, Hugh) and enjoyed walking holidays.

Together with Kent members Laurie Lowe and Jean Dunton, Shirley became one of the 'Wednesday Wrinklies', an unofficial 'splinter group' whose mid-week walking escapades took them far and wide.

For many years, Shirley was a committed member of The Ramblers, leading many of their walks for Maidstone Ramblers as well as being their Social Walks Secretary and responsible for their extensive programme. She was also a Parish Footpaths Warden for two local Kent parishes, Watlingbury and Nettlestead. Her other interests included gardening, botany and poetry. Her plant identification skills were legendary.

Shirley joined the LDWA with her husband Chub and they enjoyed their memberships to the full. However, personal tragedy struck when Chub collapsed and died whilst taking part in the 1990 Chiltern Hundred Marshals' Walk on an extremely hot weekend. Shirley gained great comfort from the compassionate support she received from Group members.

Increasing mobility difficulties put an end to Shirley's walking and Group activities and, around 2014, she moved into sheltered accommodation in Wiltshire to be near her son. He told me that her long, slow decline was prompted, in part, by the Covid pandemic.

I remember Shirley as a joyful, reliable and engaging person who overcame the untimely loss of Chub with remarkable stoicism and dignity. She was a truly wonderful lady and valued friend.

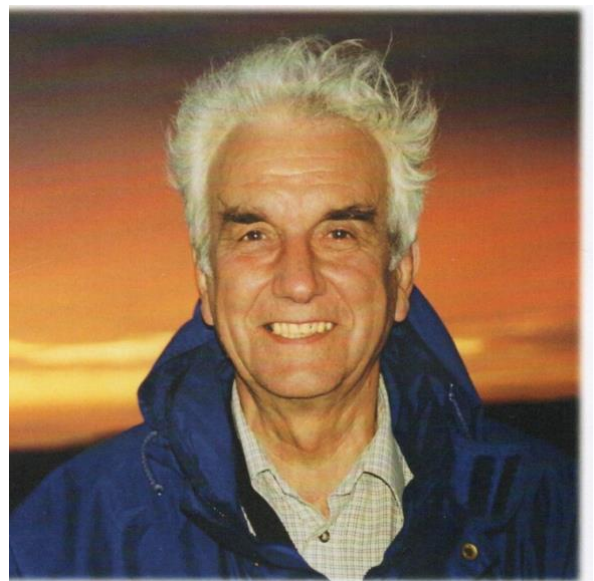
### Martyn Berry

*Brian Buttifant writes:*

I write with the sad news of the death of Martyn Berry after a long illness fighting Parkinson's.

My first memory of Martyn was as a teacher at Chislehurst & Sidcup Grammar School when he organised talks at the school – given by Kemsing-born Rebecca Stevens and a young Nick Crane – to inspire his pupils. He would take his pupils to Snowdonia and other mountain areas. His encouragement extended to getting his pupils to enter the Sevenoaks Circular 30 miles: no shorter distances in those early days! He also led a winter climbing walk on the Greensand Ridge and Oldbury Hill for the group.

Martyn was a good and faithful checkpoint on many 100 mile events in Cumbria, Yorkshire and one particularly busy checkpoint in Cornwall. There we had Martyn, Mike Attewell and me and we worked ourselves to exhaustion serving Ginsters Cornish Pasties!



## Geoff Betts

*Brian Buttifant writes:*



Geoff Betts – a Kent Member – was introduced to walking by myself. He sadly passed away recently from cancer.

He helped on the Sevenoaks Circular and a small group from our village of Kemsing formed 'The Bell Walkers' (our local PH) to fundraise for charity. He became a keen walker who was interested in events leading to a 100 along with Judy (Rickwood), his step daughter. We all completed the 1991 Lancastrian 100 and he went on to complete 7 hundreds before moving North. He was a great friend and will be missed.



## John Gilbert (1947 – 2024)

*Graham Smith writes:*

Kent LDWA members will be very sad to learn of the death of John Gilbert (membership no 40287), who has died after a long battle with cancer.

John, who lived in Barfreestone and would have been 77 in August, was a very strong walker who walked all 19 National Trails and also one LDWA Hundred – our Cinque Ports 100 marshals' walk in 2018, which he completed a year after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. He amazed everyone when, after getting a few hours' sleep following the walk, he got up to cycle the four miles home.

John, whose working life included serving in the Merchant Navy as well as being a miner, tattooist, gravedigger and lorry driver (among other jobs), was a relatively late-in-life convert to long distance walking.

He was an active and popular member of the White Cliffs Ramblers, then stepped up and joined the LDWA, completing the 50 mile White Cliffs Challenge in 2016. He enjoyed the event and loved the camaraderie of the LDWA, regularly marshalling on group events and taking part in their marshals' walks.



This culminated in his entering the Cinque Ports 100 marshals' walk, at the age of 70, which he completed in a time of 45 hours 46 seconds. He had qualified for the event the previous year by completing the Red Rose 50, organised by East Lancashire LDWA.

John's friendly nature, cheery presence and long-flowing locks made him an unmistakable – and very popular – character on checkpoints at LDWA events, where he was a stalwart and creative volunteer in the kitchen, putting to good use chef skills he had learned in the Merchant Navy.

John loved the outdoors, very often wild camping when completing long distance trails. He was an expert forager with an extensive knowledge of flora, always ready while

on a walk to share his passion for foraging.

After his cancer diagnosis, John bravely battled the disease. He managed to put in an appearance at the group Christmas lunch in 2022, held at Bearsted Golf Club. The loss of his long hair was a clear sign of the treatment needed for prostate cancer, but remission was followed too soon by relapse which forced him out of his home in Barfreestone. He remained in good spirits during his last months in a nursing home in Deal, where he was visited by several of his walking friends.

John was a great character and his dry sense of humour was maintained until the end, making people laugh with his many jokes, one he often told being: 'All British mushrooms are edible - some of them only once!'

One of John's best walking buddies was Dale Moorhouse, who said: 'John was a very close friend who I spent many hours walking in the countryside with. He was a fountain of knowledge and a colourful character. Things are going to be a lot duller without him'.

Brian Buttifant adds: 'Very sad to hear of the death of John Gilbert. He and I – both cancer sufferers – exchanged views, but I was in awe of his achievements, completing a 100 and cycling home afterwards and helping us on the Hadrian 100. Spending time together, I thought him a brave man and he will be greatly missed by the group.'

In memory of John, a 10 mile memorial walk is to be held on Sunday September 8, starting from Shepherdswell Railway Station at 10am. John's family have booked Shepherdswell Village Hall from midday to 4pm on September 8 and all are welcome to attend, walkers and non-walkers. A buffet and refreshments will be provided.



*John Gilbert as many walkers will remember him –  
downing a pint on a break during a walk*

## PLAPPEVILLE

From Peter Jull

I was just passing so it would have been churlish not to stop and participate wouldn't it? After a couple of circuits round the diabolical Metz one way system, I found the right road to the right suburb and soon encountered parking marshals who directed me into a nearly full car park, aka large patch of grass. I followed others into the Polyvalante hall and paid my €3 licence fee to get a map and a card on which to write my name and address which no one took any notice of thereafter. Mine was numbered 339 but I suspect the total entrants were many more.

No mass start, outside I followed the crowd and soon spotted white arrows on the road and Crédit Mutuel plastic tape tied to branches which must be event related as the same was being used to line up the car park. Heading out of the Moselle valley up Mont St. Quentin I was overtaking many. Within 35 minutes checkpoint 1 is reached. I take some dark green liquid in a Crédit Mutuel disposable cup. It seems to be a type of peppermint flavoured squash. Not sure I'm keen and follow it up with a red version to neutralise the taste.

The route continues through some abandoned fortifications which must have been served by a narrow gauge railway from rails in the ground



connecting the disparate parts. Further on the 10k route diverges and the 15/20 descends steeply through woods to Kentesque farmland – and mud. Climbing again through woods I'm now the one being overtaken. Levelling out and out of the woods checkpoint 2 comes into view, instantly identifiable by the 2 cars and a tent.

The 20k route is an additional loop leading back to the same checkpoint, no significant climbing, mostly in woods, but for the last  $\frac{2}{3}$  mile the checkpoint is visible across arable fields and the track between is dotted with increasingly matchstick walkers well spread. Continue conversation with two English-speaking checkpointers, an Appalachian Trail aspirant and a Scottish midge detestor, contrasting how events are organised in France and England and retirement ages. 66 = shocked.

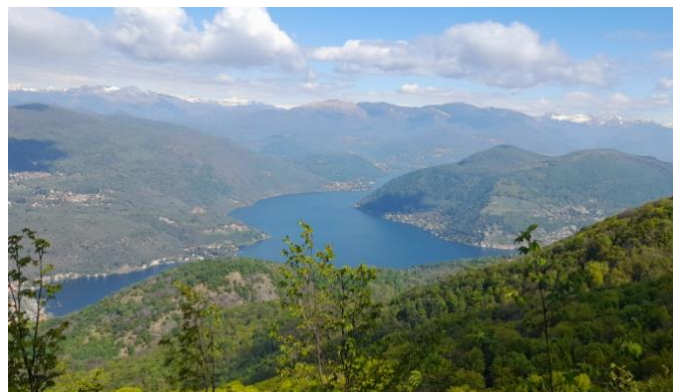
The next checkpoint is where the 10k route rejoins and is reached so soon there's not been time enough to work up an appetite for more of the ubiquitous lumps of cake, sliced oranges or barely even another drink. The last section becomes more challenging climbing steeply up to some different fortifications with a date from when Metz was a part of Germany. After some short but steep, slippery-looking drops, the descent becomes more even and continues down through Plappeville to the start, the car park now  $\frac{3}{4}$  empty. Despite the Internationale title, mine is the only foreign number plate apart from a couple of Luxembourgers which is less than forty miles up the road.



Inside, the hall it is now laid out with long tables covered by Crédit Mutuel disposable table clothes, and the French are doing what they do best on a walking day, eating and chattering with a glass of wine (available by the bottle). The menu was varied and my €7 quiche was substantial and tasty. L'Association Poppeville Loisirs is affiliated with FFSP who in turn are affiliated with the international IVV. If you're at a loose end in France of a weekend have a look at their website – [www.ffsp.fr](http://www.ffsp.fr) – and give one of the listed events a go so I'm not the only Brit (and 1<sup>st</sup> for this event) sharing the joys of

walking. So much of the event would be immediately recognisable with what we do, including the age profile of participants, but other aspects intriguingly different. I don't know what happened to what must have totalled  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of plastic tape left out on the course though.

And why was I just passing? On the pretence that it counted as work, I'd been to Varese to see my Italian stockbroker. Unfortunately I hadn't thought to check it was Liberation Day, and they were closed, so what else to do but go for a walk. Starting from nearby Saltrio seemed to offer some interesting options. Despite the clear blue skies (or because of) it was decidedly chilly getting out of the car; the frost light had come on during the short drive and I'd driven through a late April snow storm approaching the Gotthard Tunnel the day before. But, you know me, 10 minutes uphill and the jumper was off.



Targets were: a dinosaur mine, I couldn't translate the sign saying what they had been mining for but fossils were found (picnicised); a cross at a viewpoint that was visible from below rather than at a summit (picnicised); some WW1 fortifications (gloomy); a wheelchair accessible viewpoint (picnicised); and the

tourist board's favourite – Big Bench with queues of people waiting to be photographed sitting on it. As essentially an outsized piece of picnic furniture I take advantage of the additional picnicisation to eat a picnic. Using a rudimentary map I'd found all the intended targets but not by the intended route and I'd reached the Big Bench down the Sentiero 1000 Scalini, or to me, an endless series of back threatening deep and uneven rocky steps. The only route into Switzerland was from the top of Sentiero 1000 Scalini and going back up no longer appealed. So took the most direct route back to the car against a stream of yettobephographed.



Cheated by driving into Switzerland to get into that wheelchair accessible view of Lake Lugano. Parked outside Riva San Vitale and took the first footpath sign I spotted. Next sign said it led to Monte San Giorgio 2h40 which had been my walking target from Italy. But the route was steep and rocky and steepy and mostly in woods and views of the lake

diminished by the constant hum of traffic on the motorway the other side. After less than 2h40 of not encountering anything worthy of a remark in this newsletter and after yet another there might be something round the next corner turning out to be more of the same, enthusiasm for the top wanes to a turning round point. Conclude that Lake Lugano looks much better from that wheelchair accessible view than from the definitely not wheelchair accessible path I'd tried, or even from close up back in Riva San Vitale.

I have an old friend called Gary Lahr and previously had been just passing Lahr in Germany without time to stop to see where he presumably has some ancestral roots. So contrive to be just passing on the way





from Varese to Metz with time to stop on the edge of the Black Forest where Lahr is to be found. A remote chapel and 2 ruined castles appear to be encompassable by a route that should be achievable in the time available.

From where I'd parked, 14 stages of the cross beside the track count down the distance to the chapel (sermonised). The intention was to follow a rudimentary route description surmised from looking at Google Earth and Streetview. Soon after leaving the chapel it fell apart. The tracks had signs but most seemed to be just their names, unhelpful with them not being on a map. Yellow diamonds seemed to lead to some place names that were not back to the start, so followed. At least the Black Forest foresters' tracks were benign underfoot and the extra navigational uncertainties were less draining than those Swiss rocks although the total ascent may not have been dissimilar. After some dead reckoning, guesswork and sun compassing, escaped the forestry bit of this bit of the Black Forest

and, if not by the intended route, at the intended point.

Back in the open the RD kicked back in and country lanes led to signs to Burg Hohengeroldseck. The last lane deteriorated to a track which became steeper and woodier and steeper and longer than expected. When I escaped the woods I could see the castle – on top of a different hill. No point in despairing, signs say back to the car is via that hill anyway. At least it was only a little bit down before climbing again and then, what's a little bit more climbing to the castle itself. I eschewed the 100 extra steps up to the top of the keep however, even though it said they had been repaired by the local walking group. All the navigating and climbing had eaten up time so I forwent the detour to the 2<sup>nd</sup> castle and took a shorter route back to the car finishing along a riverside cycle path. A perfectly pleasant way of passing part of a day as I was just passing anyway.



## THE DALES WAY: 11–14 MAY 2024

### From David Thornton

In May 2023, I caught the 05.40 train from West Malling arriving in Ilkley at 10.31 and set off in a north easterly direction to walk the Ebor Way and then the Tabular Hills Trail, finishing in Scarborough. Almost exactly a year on I was, once again, jumping on the same early train, heading for Ilkley for 10.31, but this time heading in a north westerly direction to walk the Dales Way. I'd set a tight schedule, with a plan to complete the 79 mile trail in 4 days, including travel, with my first day set at 16 miles.

Last night, by chance, I stumbled across a 30 minute walking documentary on BBC4, presented by Shanaz Gulzar, who was meandering along the 'treacle coloured River Wharf' for a few miles, starting at Bolton Abbey. As I watched this, recognising a good few of the minor landmarks I too had passed, I noticed how quiet and peaceful her surroundings were, with hardly a soul around. Clearly, she wasn't filming it on a sunny Saturday afternoon in May, because my 16 miles, which pretty much hugged the River Wharf all the way to Grassington, was absolutely rammed with people. The packed river sections were then regularly punctuated by enormous open fields, which were also jam packed with cars and music and barbeques and a general cacophony of noise. It wasn't quite what I expected on my first day, although I should emphasise, it didn't curtail my enjoyment. It was just a bit different, that's all.



With the route leaving the River Wharf for a few miles at Grassington, the contrast the next day, Sunday, was quite stark. With 23 miles to do to reach Ribbleshead in good time, I was up and away from my very comfortable bed and breakfast at 7.00am. Grassington is a lovely village and even more so at that time in the morning when it seems you're the only one up and about. I left the quiet village behind, soon passing the noises and smells of the local dairy farm on the outskirts, before heading up onto the moor - peace at last. This was more like it. This is what I came for. A slightly elevated and open moor, with the silence broken only by the restful tunes of the Skylarks and Curlews. I didn't know they were Curlews until I bumped into a chap about 5 miles in, who



was out walking his dog and doing a bit of bird spotting. He showed me an App on his phone called Merlin. Some of you may already know about this app, but I certainly didn't and his successful demonstration left me quite impressed.

After six miles, it was a little disappointing to follow the path dropping back down to the River Wharf at Kettlewell, but fortunately by now, the river was a very long way from any built up areas, so remained relatively quiet. It's simple and pleasant walking for 14 miles, with the River Wharf linking into Outershaw Beck, before finally climbing again, as the path crosses with the Pennine Way, Pennine Bridleway and Ribble Way, heading towards Ribbleshead. The last time I stood at this junction was in October 2021, walking the Pennine Way and all day I had been looking forward to re-visiting this particular spot. I remembered the finger post so vividly and standing there I felt a tingle of excitement, recognising the view in all directions, as memories of that trail, both positive and negative, came flooding back – I just wanted to stand there and soak it all in. Eventually however, I had to drag myself away, as time was pushing on and I'd had a long day already, the prospect of another 23 mile day ahead tomorrow and with a very comfortable bit of accommodation waiting for me at Winshaw, a mile or so away from Ribbleshead viaduct.



The owners of this property had moved up from Buckinghamshire just over a decade ago and they certainly would have struggled to find anything more remote. They said they never regret the move, although the winter months were admittedly challenging. During my conversation with the hosts that evening, I remarked on how little flow there had been on the upper section of the River Wharf and Ottershaw Beck, with some sections completely dry. It turns out that they'd had little or no rain for well over a month, which was a surprise to me, given how much rain we'd had in the south of the UK over the same period. However, that was about to change that very evening, with a torrential thunderstorm lasting a couple of hours and depositing significant volumes of water in the process. I woke up to very different conditions. The initial four mile stretch in the early morning mist over Blea Moor was very wet underfoot,



before dropping down to Dentdale, at which point the route picks up the River Dee. Along here, the weak flow of water had been replaced by a booming torrent, which really added to the enjoyment of this river section.

The route goes through the very pleasant village of Dent, then rises over a small section of Frostror Fells, before skirting around Sedburgh and picking up the River Lune, as I headed for Lowgill, my next overnight stop. Another very pleasant and comfortable bed and breakfast, with very friendly hosts, who had retired there 18 months ago, having moved up from Coventry. I looked back on the day, realising how enjoyable it had been, with a third day of near perfect weather. The only drawback was a rather large blister I'd developed on the ball of my right foot. It's very unusual for me to suffer from these, although on the plus side I'm quite confident that I know how it occurred, so I can avoid it in future. During my lunch stop I attended to it with a sharp miniature penknife and good dousing of hand gel – that made me yelp a bit, I can tell you!

With 17 miles to complete the trail and a 3.00pm train to catch at Windermere, I was up and away at 6.00am the next morning. Steve, the host from the previous night, seemed to think that the best sections of the Dales Way were behind me, although his wife, Liz, rather disagreed. I have to say that I side with Liz, despite the fact that very heavy rain all day did its best to spoil it. The terrain was a mixture of pleasant undulating farmland, quiet, rural and I dare say on a clearer day, very impressive views of the lake district peaks in the distance. Between the small towns of Burneside and Staveley, the route on this final day included a four mile walk along the River Kent, no less! I arrived at Windermere in plenty of time and despite a couple of frustrating delays, alighted at West Malling Station at 8.20pm.



To cram this route into just four days, including all the travel was tiring, but I look back on what was a very enjoyable trip, covering some fantastic landscape, which wasn't too challenging and during which, as always, I met some very pleasant people. Whilst planning this route, I happened to clock another trail called the Dales High Way!! A 90 mile route with 14,000ft of ascent. On paper it looks amazing and is certainly one I shall be keeping well and truly on my radar.

## MEMORIES OF MY FIRST LDWA HUNDRED MILE WALK

### From Jill Green

The 1986 Downsman 100 started from Winchester. The Guildhall there was the grandest start I have ever experienced: plush carpets, polished furniture and gleaming brass handles everywhere. (Mud was forbidden to enter!). 'Good job this is the start and not the finish then', we all thought.

In spite of the cheerful chatter, an hour of waiting to set off seemed endless. Excitement mounted as we were assembled outside by the weirs on the River Itchen. John Westcott (the Organiser) gave a short speech to the motley crowd gathered around him. Finally, at 10.00am, we were off!

Bidding farewell to my supporters, I heard a familiar voice telling her neighbour, 'That's my daughter-in-law's sister and she is going to walk 100 miles'. Pondering on this as I walked across the park to begin my journey, I vowed to myself, 'Yes, I *am* going to walk 100 miles'.

On Beacon Hill, after thirteen miles of comfortable walking, I rejoiced at the superb views. Next up (literally) was Old Winchester Hill and then, after a further six miles, Butser Hill. Friends and family appeared here and there, smiled encouragement and wished everyone GOOD LUCK!!!!

I soon reached Queen Elizabeth Country Park and, by now, my legs and feet did not feel quite so springy and fresh. Perhaps they sensed what lay ahead. From Harting Down to Cocking I was delighted that walkers from 'up north' were seeing our lovely Downs at their best. The wild flowers abounded everywhere. Cowslips were prolific. Some hillsides were a dense mass of soothing mellow yellow – a treat for the eyes and mind.

Evening arrived and I reached Bignor Hill checkpoint (43 miles) in the dark. Feeling cold and shivery, it was wonderful to see my husband Dave there. To my surprise, I was ahead of my schedule. I had been walking with five chaps from Kent led by Ron Roweth. The group of torch lights certainly helped as we set off again. Soon the lights of Houghton twinkled and beckoned in the valley below. As we descended in the gloom, some thirsty soul remarked, 'We should be there just before closing time'. Yes, we were and thoroughly enjoyed a pint a-piece!

Much refreshed, on we marched to Rackham Hill and saw a light coming towards us. It was Dave again, having walked out a couple of miles to find me. He was full of his busy day, helping to close checkpoints and accounting for all the walkers. I was heartened to hear updates on other chums.

Further progress to reach Chanctonbury Ring and then gritted teeth to tackle the steep descent into Steyning. My left knee was hurting badly now. The checkpoint here was just over halfway at 59 miles. Hot food was available but, at 2.30am, I could hardly call it breakfast! The smell of feet, sausages, embrocation etc. was a bit over-powering so I did not linger too long.

I had previously walked out the section between Cocking and Steyning in the daylight to familiarise myself with the terrain. Now I was alone on a section not so well known to me. The huge moon made a stunning silver pathway across the water of the River Adur

and shone magic moonbeams over some sleeping swans. At that moment, there was no other place I would rather have been. A very special memory.

Others soon joined me and we found our way to Truleigh Hill. Indecision at one point – out came the maps. Yup, we were right. As we crossed Pyecombe golf course, some wag said, ‘Why aren't people playing golf? It's such a beautiful morning’. I did point out that it was 5.30am and perhaps no-one was quite that keen! A little later, we marvelled as local skylarks rose above and sang a serenade to welcome the imminent dawn for us as we reached Ditchling Beacon.

Lacking sleep, we plodded on to reach Newmarket Inn, the next checkpoint at 77 miles. Now I was extremely tired. Not surprising, everyone else looked just as I felt. My feet were sore and I had unwelcome blisters on my right ankle. Dave was there to buck me up and lift my sagging spirits.

When I reached 84 miles I realised this was further than I had ever walked before. Then my dear friend Bobby Andrews suddenly appeared and walked awhile with me. She was a bit perturbed to find I was not my usual bouncy, dotty self! At Firle Beacon, the strong wind from the sea was extremely chilly. Even though some folk were now in shorts and shirts, I was not at all tempted to shed any of my jumpers or my warm woolly hat.

Later, I was joined by Julia Barrett\* from Manchester and we chatted away. I told her she looked far too young to be doing this 100 mile walk (in 1986 you had to be over 16). ‘I am 23’, she clarified. ‘Oh dear, that shows I am getting old’, I thought to myself. Her parents appeared at checkpoints to meet and encourage her. They were so pleased with her progress and had booked Julia into a bed and breakfast in Eastbourne as she would not now be walking through a second night. She, like me, had exceeded her expectations on her planned schedule.

The route description was very well written – especially so for weary walkers. As the last hill came into view, I thought what fun it would be to run down it to the finish at St. Bede's School in Eastbourne. Unfortunately, my painful knee, sore feet and blisters dictated that I took each step very carefully – just like a frail old lady.

At the finish, I was thrilled with a completion time of 29 hours and 12 minutes. Phew!

Far too excited, I did not sleep that night. So many happy moments to savour and enjoy. New friends made, plus all the wonderful people who volunteered their time (and sanity!) looking after us at the splendid checkpoints spread along the miles of my first ever Hundred. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. Thank you LDWA - a Hundred-fold.

*\*In April this year, Jill was amazed to be told that Julia Barrett (mentioned above) is now Julia Warman, who Jill knows extremely well. Jill had absolutely no idea!*

## NEW KENT LDWA CHALLENGE EVENT – WYE NOT WANDER



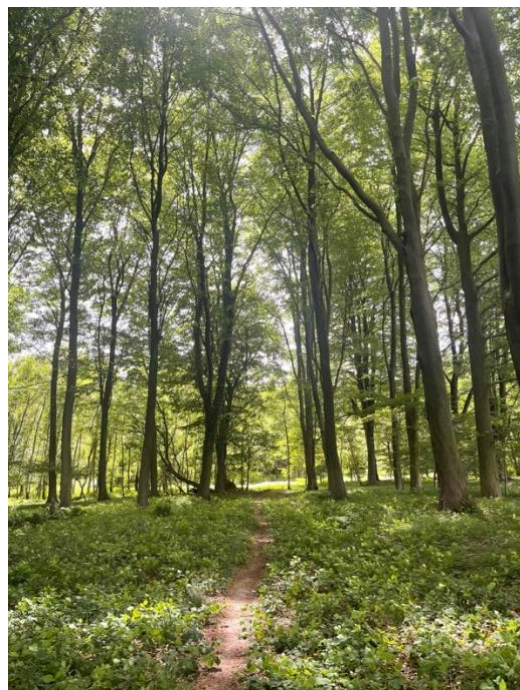
Kent LDWA will be running a brand new challenge event in place of the traditional White Cliffs Challenge this Autumn. It will be on **Saturday 12 October 2024** and traverses some truly splendid countryside in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Three routes will be available – 14, 20 and 27 miles – all starting and finishing at our HQ in the village hall at Wye. All routes are now complete and in the process of being checked. There will be

three indoor checkpoints in total, with all three being used on the 27 mile event, two on the 20 mile route and one on the 14 miler.

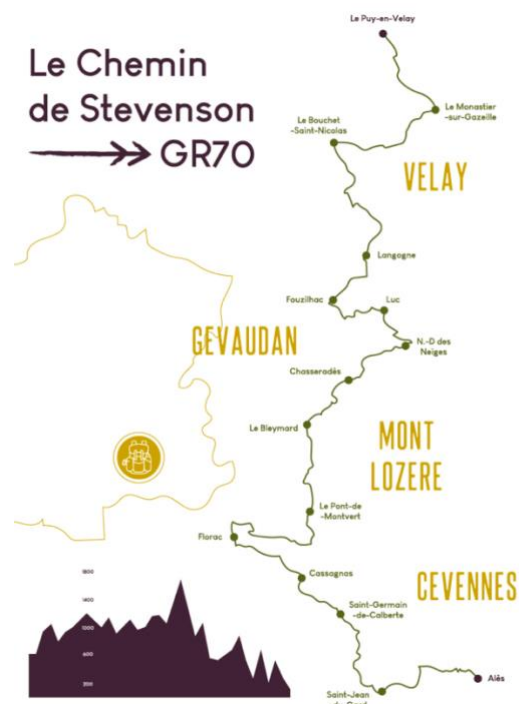
Any offers of support to help on the day will be greatly appreciated. Please let Peter Jull know if you would like to volunteer ([peterjull@yahoo.com](mailto:peterjull@yahoo.com)). There will be a supported marshals walk, for those who have offered to help, on Sunday 6 October 2024.

Entries are now open on [SiEntries - Wye Not Wander](https://ldwa.org.uk/Kent/W/9479/wye-not-wander-2024.html). More information is available on the Kent group website under Events Archive tab or here: <https://ldwa.org.uk/Kent/W/9479/wye-not-wander-2024.html>



## TRAVELS WITHOUT A DONKEY ON THE GR70 – PART 2

From Cathy Waters



As noted in my Part 1 piece in the August 2023 Newsletter, Nicola Foad, Sarah Turner and I had decided to complete the Chemin de Stevenson in two halves. This hilly, 169-mile path (from Le Puy-en-Velay to Alès) is based upon the route Robert Louis Stevenson (RLS) pioneered in 1878, when he walked from Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille south through the Central Massif of France with his donkey, Modestine. We resumed our journey on Tuesday 25 June 2024 where we left off last year – in Chasseradès – having made our way there first by Eurostar to Lille and then train via Nîmes (Sarah travelled from Paris).

Arriving early in the afternoon at the same gîte in which we stayed last year – Les Airelles – we had time to explore the tiny village and its 12<sup>th</sup> century parish church. Stevenson stayed at the only inn and described his conversation at dinner with five railway engineers there to conduct surveys for the proposed railway (the very one by which we had arrived). Our conversation over dinner at Les Airelles was with a group of four Scotsmen, all hill walkers, and a Frenchman from Versailles who was completing the trail with his son. Both of these groups were only walking as far as St-Jean-du-Gard and ‘M. Versailles’ (we never learned his name) helpfully warned us of a diversion to the route coming in to St-Jean. We would encounter these gentlemen – as well as a Parisian named Didier – at various points over the course of the trail.

Having spied an épicerie

in the village, we stopped there the next morning to buy baguettes and cheese before setting off on the 10.6m to Le Bleymard. We started off in glorious sunshine accompanied by birdsong and crickets through rolling countryside. We stopped before Mirandol where the viaduct on the railway line crosses the gorge. We were in forests for most of the day. Approaching Les Alpiers, we had fine views over the next valley of the Lot, looking down towards Le Bleymard. Then the rain started, but we were lucky enough to make it into the village before it became very heavy. Our hotel, Le Remise, was the same building in which RLS had dinner, before he left Le Bleymard to camp out in the woods.



On day 2 to Le Pont-de-Montvert (13.7 miles with 2110 ft of ascent), we had a steep climb out of Le Bleymard and had been looking forward to a coffee break at Mont Lozère ski station (supposedly open year-round) but it was shut. So we kept going up to the Pic de Finiels, the highest part of the GR 70 at 1699m, where an overly friendly donkey tried to take our lunch. The descent to the village of Finiels had fine views of rock-scattered hillsides. The stony path down to Le Pont-de-Montvert required concentration and it was a welcome sight to find a bar at the bottom next to the river, where we stopped for a drink before locating Gîtes du Chastel. The village is one of the prettiest we have seen. We found M. Versailles in contemplative mood on the bridge over the River Tam the next morning. This, he explained, was where the War of the Camisards began on 24 July 1702, when Langdale, the French Catholic Abbé of Chaila and persecutor of the Protestants, was murdered in the tower that he occupied on the bridge.

Our walk to Florac on day 3 – 18.3 miles with 2361 feet of ascent – was the most challenging section of the whole trail for me, because the ascent was all within the first 5 miles and the weather was very warm. We had been warned by our gîte host that hot temperatures were forecast and there would be no water or food available on the route, which meant I was carrying 2 litres. The steep climb on a



Day 4, from Florac to St-Germaine-de-Calberte (20.70 miles and 2279 feet of ascent) was another hot day with temperatures in the high 20s, so the ascent was again energy-sapping. But the trail took us through more forests, so at least we were moving in and out of the shade. We had an easy route beside the River Tamon to start before some low level climbing. We bumped into our friend Didier this morning, but he (like the other walkers we had met) was stopping in Cassagnas. It was notable that from this point onwards we met no one else walking the GR70 – only day walkers – until our final day (see below).

After pausing for a drink in St-Julien-d'Arpaon, we joined an old railway track (Gare de Cassagnas) that took us through several deliciously cool tunnels before we reached Espace Stevenson (a gite and camping ground) where we stopped for lunch. The afternoon took us up 480 metres on a forest track and a long slow descent – on stony paths again – into St-Germaine and to our hotel, Au Figuier des Cevennes, opposite the catholic church, where the body of Abbot Langdale was brought the day after his murder by the Camisards.



find our hotel, the skies opened up to torrential rain accompanied by strong winds. The Auberge du Peras was a tavern at the time when Stevenson stayed here and now boasts locavore cuisine in its restaurant.

Stevenson had planned to complete his travels with Modestine from St Jean-du-Gard to Alès. But a close inspection of her on the morning of 3 October 1878 revealed she was not in a fit condition to continue, so he sold her in St-Jean (for 35 francs) and took a stagecoach instead. We nevertheless completed the remaining 15 miles (with 2800 ft of ascent and 2900 ft of descent) on foot – at a mean moving speed of 2.2 mph, which says something about the challenging nature of the terrain.

We bought lunch supplies in the centre of St-Jean and noticed a few locals drifting in to the polling station at the Mairie for the first round of the French national election. We saw the Stevenson memorial water fountain and then headed east, climbing out of

narrow stony path out of Le Pont-De-Montvert was exhausting in the sun although we had fine views back over the village. After levelling out for a bit we had another steep climb up to Signal du Bougès, again with stunning views, before we began the long slow descent. There was no bar in Bédouès when we reached it and we had to keep going for the final 3 miles to arrive in Florac after 5pm at our B&B. Les Chambres du Thérond turned out to be an extraordinarily well-preserved mid-18th century terrace house with large cool rooms and lots of dark timbers and ancient-looking doors. Its owner, Roger, is British and it was interesting hearing how he came to buy the house and run it as a B&B, together with his work as treasurer of the Association Sur le Chemin de Robert Louis Stevenson.

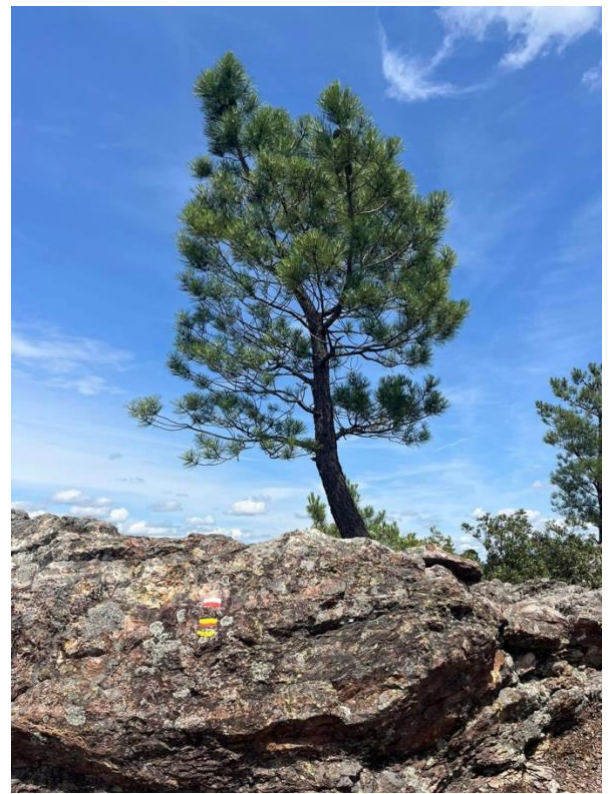


We left St-Germaine about 8.30 and followed a forest track contoured to the mountainside to reach St-Étienne-Vallée-Française for a welcome morning drinks break. Then we started the long stony path uphill towards the Col St Pierre. Sarah took a photo of us at one of our several rest stops. We got to the picnic site at the top just before 1pm and had lunch. As we started off, thunder and rain threatened and the waterproofs soon came out. As M. Versaille had warned us, the route had been diverted and we were somewhat dismayed to find we had more ascent to come after we had been expecting to head downhill from the Col. As we reached St-Jean-du-Gard and made our way through the town and out the other side to





the valley. By this stage we were tired of stony paths, but the woods were cool ahead of another warm day. We descended to cross the Pont des Camisards and walked through the pretty village of Mialet before beginning another ascent that took us up towards the Col de L'Escoudas, stopping for lunch in some shade before we got there.



The Chemin de Stevenson guidebook contained a warning that parts of route between St-Jean and Alès are 'unsuitable for donkeys'. I suppose we should have thought through the implications of this advice! After the Col de L'Escoudas, we repeatedly encountered sections of rock climbing which, although short in themselves, were quite challenging for me with my dodgy right hip. They continued almost until the final steep descent into Alès. I wouldn't want to attempt any of this in bad weather.



*The end in sight – Alès*

We finished at Notre Dame de Rochebelle around 5pm, 'without fanfare' as Sarah put it, although as we were coming into town a local hailed us, asking whether we had been doing the Stevenson trail. Oui! It was a happy surprise when we reached the railway station the next morning for our train back to Paris via Nîmes, to find Didier and the four Scotsmen also embarked on their return journey. They had caught a coach from St-Jean to Alès the previous day, while Team Kent – sans donkey – was clambering over the rocks!



## HIGH WEALD CHALLENGE – 13 JULY 2024

### From Stephanie Le Men

This year the High Weald was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, starting from Langton Green near Tunbridge Wells. As usual there were three routes of approximately 16, 21 and 26 miles. Those routes were undulating but not strenuously so, with nice views and pretty typical villages like Hartfield. The 26 mile route additionally visited Frant and the famous Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells. The 21 mile route took in the Spa Valley heritage railway and Groombridge Place.

To say that organising the event was plain sailing would be an exaggeration. First, we had an exceptionally wet spring that delayed route checking due to flooding. Second, we had the news that the M25 would close in Surrey that very weekend. How unlucky could

this be after the same happened for the Sevenoaks Circular? Both Jim and I had family emergencies close to the event – requiring last minute trips to France for me and Jim also caught Covid two weeks before the event, which really impacted his energy.

Prior to all this, Jim had done a tremendous task of reviewing my route descriptions, correcting many L and R. I knew that I occasionally confuse them but not to that degree! I need to find a trick to get them right for next year. Any advice please contact me!



The Marshals' walk occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June with 8 marshals taking part. Jim had tested positive for Covid the day before and I was wondering how to man three checkpoints on my own, but thankfully Rex Stickland and Michael Headley offered to man the first checkpoint in Hartfield (a true feast I heard!), then they would follow the 26 mile route to Tunbridge Wells and take a taxi back to their car at Hartfield. How kind is this?



The actual event became full quite early and despite the M25 closure we had over 170 entrants. The forecast on the day was for light rain in the morning and dry in the afternoon. It was actually dry in the morning and it rained heavily for a good hour in the afternoon, flooding streets in



Tunbridge Wells and soaking the 26 mile walkers! However, everyone seemed happy about their day when they got back to HQ, praising the routes (which were enhanced by pretty wild flowers), the helpful and lively marshals, and the food. The potato salad at HQ proved quite a hit (but so far David is refusing to reveal the recipe). Due to the weather not being as hot as last year, some walkers left with an unexpected gift of a watermelon. I should also praise a runner, Yiting, on her first LDWA event, who, after more than 26 miles, helped us clear the hall while waiting for a lift to the train station!



We received a lot of really kind emails after the event. Some of them were from entrants who were doing their first LDWA event, and they were really impressed by it – especially the quality of the checkpoints and friendliness of the marshals – so many thanks to all who

helped on the day – you were fantastic as always. See below some of the emails we received.

Next year the High Weald will start from Stonegate, as 2023, and we will increase the number of entries since we can use the cricket ground as a car park once again. We are



planning to increase the longest route to 30 miles and we hope it will be as successful as this one.

In the meantime, good luck to the Wye Not Wander, our new event in October!

### Unsolicited Feedback from Entrants

**MD** – ‘Nice choice of route, with a good variety of **beautiful landscapes** (I especially liked the **fields of wildflowers** early on, and walking through the centre of Tunbridge Wells during an absolute downpour), though the terrain was substantially gentler than I'd expected based on last year's event. **Excellent marshals** throughout: Upbeat, encouraging, friendly, and helpful throughout the long day (please share my appreciation with them). The **route description was clear** enough that I never had to pull out a map or compass, and I essentially never went wrong. I really liked that you **offered fruit** at the checkpoints, and plenty of it – delicious and refreshing, and works for most dietary requirements. Also thank you once again for going out of your way to make the event **doable for those reliant on public transport**. Much appreciated.’

**P&J** – ‘A big thank you to you, Jim and everyone involved in putting on yesterday's High Weald Challenge. The **warm welcomes** at the start, finish and all checkpoints in between made the distance less daunting; a special thank you to whoever had the idea to put the gazebo up on The Green in Frant – saved us from the first deluge. **The route was beautifully put together** – the views from the ridges will last a long while in the mind. Hartfield and Frant are **extremely pretty villages**, and we loved the **woodland walking** too.’

**EIS** – ‘I'd just like to thank you all for such a lovely event yesterday and **gorgeous route**. So please pass my thanks on to all concerned in the running of the event. The **checkpoints were excellent**. We won't mention the rain except to say it added to the adventure.’

**JU** – ‘Many thanks again to you and Kent group and yourself for creating a **wonderful route** for the challenge. And thanks for support and snacks from the marshals.’

**TW** – ‘Just to say thank you to you and your **fantastic team** for giving us a very enjoyable day out on Saturday – probably more so because I beat the rain! The **RD was very good** and I did not end up hopelessly lost at any point. The CPs were great – **loved the watermelon**. As always, your **end of event catering was just what was needed**. Thank you to everyone whose hard work ensured that we had a lovely day trotting around the wilds of Kent.’

**JT** – ‘I just wanted to say a big thank-you. What a **magnificent event!!** I love the route! **Incredibly cheerful and helpful Marshall's!** The spread at checkpoints was impressive and well balanced!! The **potato salad at the end was to die for** and it mixed really well with the pulse salad!! Thank you very much.’

**CS** – ‘Just to say an extra thank you for the lift as well as the event. It was really helpful to get off to a prompt start with the transport from Tunbridge Wells, and very thoughtful, green and generous of you to organise it. The event itself was **excellent**. The route was pleasant and varied (despite my slight fear of cows) and the **food delicious**, a complete change from the packaged items post-Covid with such healthy fruit – grapes, bananas, watermelon, strawberries – plus salads, vegetarian savouries, crisps, nuts, yoghurts, all much appreciated. And of course, the **company of fellow walkers and community made the day**.’

**MG** – ‘I've been meaning to put something **heartfelt together as praise for your team** 🙏 It was a **fab event**, my first experience of LDWA. I was concerned that a runner might be a little out of place amongst the walking participants, but I had **such a good time with friendly and supportive** marshals and staff. A **very excellent route** that opened up a lot of new areas I've only driven past – and I'm looking forward to taking my family to revisit some of those footpaths. Thank you for all the effort put into preparations, and long live the LDWA!’

