

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION – Kent Group

furthering the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking

NEWSLETTER



Kent LDWA Group members enjoy a walk led by David Thornton before the Post 100 Party at Ryarsh. See report page 3.

Number 126 August 2025



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

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WELCOME to the August 2025 edition of the Kent Group Newsletter. In this issue we have reports on recent challenge events, including, of course, the Flower of Suffolk 100, together with accounts of walking adventures by Kent Committee members at home and abroad.

Last year we announced plans to make the entire archive of Kent Group Newsletters available online as a 50th anniversary project. They are now available to read at the following address: <https://ldwa.org.uk/Kent/W/6113/kent-group-newsletters.html#older>

Thanks to Keith Warman for lending his hard copies for scanning and to Michael Headley for uploading to our webpage.

Planning for the 2026 Hunnypot Hundred led by Kent group Chair, Peter Jull, continues, but the sub-committee would welcome more volunteers. Please contact Peter if you are able to help.

Cathy Waters

KENT GROUP COMMITTEE

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THE FLOWER OF SUFFOLK 100

Kent LDWA had 8 entrants successfully complete this year's 100 Challenge event: Alzbeta Benn, Andrew Boulden, Dawn Jones, Judy Rickwood, David Spring, Sarah Turner, Jude Unsworth and Keith Warman. Helen Strong successfully completed the Marshals' event.

Commiserations go to the following starters who, for various reasons, were unable to complete the route this year: Andrew Gordon, Peter Johnson and Alan Stewart.

Report from Keith Warman

Norfolk & Suffolk Group put on their splendid Flower of Suffolk Hundred this year and it was a wonderful experience. The Hundred had never visited East Anglia before and, perhaps predictably, the route had by far the least amount of ascent (around 3,500 feet) of any



Half a mile into the event and he's already at the back of the field!



Into the second night and about to leave Hollesley checkpoint with Leonard Fallick, 83 miles

welcoming, supportive and encouraging. Overall, there was an excellent variety of refreshments.

The weather was overcast on the Saturday, then sunshine on the Sunday and Monday morning. It was quite humid throughout and, for me, the light rain during Saturday night was most welcome.

I walked with Susan Wilkinson from Crowfield (15 miles) to the breakfast stop at Leiston (51 miles). Later, I accompanied Leonard Fallick (on his successful attempt to complete his record-breaking 43rd completion) for the four miles from Hollesley to Shottisham. At all other times, I was alone but rarely out of sight of other walkers for long.

Very short naps were snatched at the checkpoints at Stratford St Andrew (43 miles) and Sudbourne (68 miles) and I had near-fainting episodes at Butley and at Hollesley (76 and 83 miles respectively). A night-time trip and head-first fall on a sandy path after Hollesley gave me a shock but, luckily, no damage other than a bruised hip and dented pride!

My partner Shirlie met me several times during the second half of the route and her steadfast support was a great comfort, as always. I finished just before 9:00 am on the Monday morning to a wonderful and heart-warming reception.

The steepest ascents on the whole route were probably up the steps onto the sea wall at Orford and a weary climb up another set of external steps to the first floor at the finish. Some wag told me that the top of the latter was probably the highest point in Suffolk! For reasons of anonymity, I cannot disclose who this wag was, but his name begins with 'J' and ends in 'im Catchpole' ...

My sincere thanks go to the organisers and, in addition, to the droves of marshals, friends and helpers for their selfless time and trouble in looking after us all. It was a great joy to be welcomed by Kent Group members at our checkpoint at Hollesley (run jointly with South Wales Group) and my personal gratitude to you all for giving up your weekend to support this sublime Hundred. Photos courtesy of Shirlie Gill.

POST 100 PARTY AT RYARSH VILLAGE HALL – Sunday 8 June 2025

Report by Helen Strong

The annual Post 100 Party and Summer Social brought together Kent group members for a memorable day of walking, food, and celebration at Ryarsh Village Hall.

The day began with a morning walk led by David, whose route took in the local Coldrum Stones for a mid-morning break. As walkers returned, they were greeted by a delectable feast generously contributed by all. Pleasant weather allowed for unexpected outdoor

Hundred held to date.

The headquarters was the spacious Ipswich School Sports Centre on the north-eastern edge of the town. From here, we followed a clockwise meandering route via Coddtenham, Framlingham, Leiston, Aldeburgh, Snape Maltings, Orford and Woodbridge. There was a marked contrast between the mostly arable landscape in the first half to the sandy coastal fringe (ideal for salad crops and pig farms!) thereafter. We also enjoyed a couple of stunning sections – between Thorpeness and Aldeburgh and around Orford Quay – plus a beautiful section alongside the tidal River Deben through Woodbridge.

We may not have had steep hills, stony tracks and bogs, but the scenery was serene and verdant throughout. Walking-wise, it was not a familiar area to me but I now have many lovely memories of parklands, copses and peaceful villages, together with magnificent churches, moats and castles.

The event was very well organised and there have been many positive comments received. The sixteen checkpoints were



The stillness of early morning at Woodbridge, with the River Deben and the white-boarded tide mill, 94 miles



dining, adding to the relaxed atmosphere of the gathering.

After lunch, Peter addressed the group with a speech before Keith Warman delivered his much-anticipated statistical analysis of the 100. Keith's detailed and entertaining presentation has become a cherished tradition. His witty insights and clever commentary are wonderful and the event wouldn't be the same without his annual contribution.

We then had a ceremonial cutting of a 'rather healthy' New Zealand carrot cake, by Andrew Boulden in celebration of his remarkable milestone of completing his 30th 100 finish this year on the FoS.

The summer social provided an excellent opportunity for Kent members to reconnect with friends and fellow 100 participants they might not see regularly throughout the year.

Special thanks go to Marion and Neal for helping with the washing up, and to all those who helped tidy away at the end of the day.

HIGH WEALD 2025 – 5 July 2025

Report by Stephanie Le Men

This year the event was run from Stonegate, which allowed us to increase the number of participants to 200 since we could use the adjacent cricket ground as a car park. There were three distances, as usual, but the committee had decided to increase the longest distance to 30 miles instead of 26 miles. Jim and I formed a subcommittee to organise it, like last year.

I began researching this walk more than a year ago – I barely knew the area so it was great to discover new footpaths, and the charming town of Robertsbridge – so dynamic with events most weekends, and with the excellent Judges Bakery providing me with many cakes and teas at weekends.

I soon decided to design two loops of around 15 miles each, centred on Robertsbridge. However, the second loop evolved quite a lot before taking its definitive shape early this year. All three distances shared the same route to Robertsbridge. The 22 miles then did a loop in the hills around Robertsbridge, while the 30 miles did a bigger loop visiting Bodiam Castle.

All three distances then shared the same return route from Robertsbridge to Stonegate, which was my favourite part, crossing the grounds of Socknersh Manor, and providing beautiful views around Burwash. I must apologise to the Sussex group since the walk was entirely in Sussex this year! Jim and Sheila Briggs did a sterling job checking the route description.



Walkers start from Stonegate



Ali, Eve, Alan, Mike, Peter and Steve – our crew at the Herdman's Pavilion, Ewhurst

welcome surprise of discovering that the owners of a cottage adjacent to this footpath were in the process of clearing it! I profusely thanked them since it saved me a lot of time.

The week leading up to the event was really busy for Jim and me (we are both still working our respective day jobs). Jim organised and purchased the food for each checkpoint, which is a mammoth task, but he excelled and he's probably got a job for life. 😊

The weather forecast for the main event was for cooler temperatures but a bit of rain. 193 walkers registered for the walk and 164 took part. There was a mass start at 8am for the 30 milers and 22 milers, while runners and 16 milers started gradually afterwards. Unfortunately, the rain in the afternoon hid the views on the last leg. However, walkers enjoyed the event, praising the route and especially the very supportive marshals and the food at checkpoints and at HQ – the home-baked cakes cooked by Jane Bates in Robertsbridge were a particular hit! The only thing that walkers did not like were the number of stiles. However this is not something we can change, and I find them a lot easier to negotiate than the stiles up North. 😊



As usual, LDWA first-timers were surprised by how enjoyable our events are, especially for such an affordable price. So, many thanks to all our usual marshals, always keen to help – and to the new ones, who, I hope, enjoyed the experience.

Lastly, one of our marshals, Ali, kindly took a lot of pictures of the event – which are on the event webpage, providing great memories of that day.

Thank you to all on our list of marshals: Gwyneth Littlejohn, Eve Richards, Peter Jull, Ali Amanat, Alan Stewart, Steve Russell, Jane Bates & husband, Stephen Chandler, Michael Headley, David Thornton, Helen Strong, Mike Attewell, Andrew Melling, David Spring & wife, Jim Briggs.

N.B. There won't be a High Weald event next year since we are organising the Hunnypot Hundred on the second May bank holiday.

NORTH CHESHIRE WAY 7–10 MAY 2025

By David Thornton

On my very first night of the Pennine Way, back in October 2021, I stayed at the White House Farm bed and breakfast in Hadfield. Over breakfast the following morning I got talking with a chap on the table opposite me, who was walking the Pennine Way from north to south and was about to embark on his final day. Apart from the obvious tales he had experienced on the route, I remember

The Marshals walk was held on the 22 June. It was really warm the week before with temperatures above 30 degrees, but fortunately the temperature dropped in time for the marshals walk. Only five marshals could do the walk due to holidays and injuries, and everyone elected to walk the 22 miles. Everyone completed the walk and especially enjoyed the last leg!

When organising a challenge event, one part that nobody likes is clearing overgrown footpaths. However, I had observed that most footpaths on that walk were in good condition and well maintained – with one exception! So, the weekend before the event, I returned reluctantly, to Robertsbridge, in the heat, to clear a nearby footpath that is usually extremely overgrown. When I reached it, I had the



three things about this individual. Firstly, he was from Canada, with a very strong accent to go with it. Secondly, given that he'd been sleeping out in a tent for a good number of nights, he had the most impressively small rucksack. I remarked on this, at which he laughed and then stated that he and his main walking friend would have competitions on how small they could get their packs. When I asked how he fed himself during the day, he said chocolate, just lots of chocolate. The third thing I remember, was that when he completed the Pennine Way, he was considering turning right at the end of it and picking up the North Cheshire Way, with a view to potentially picking up the Offa's Dyke Path at Prestatyn. Since that conversation, therefore, the North Cheshire Way has always been parked in the back of my mind, so I decided to go and take a look for myself.

The North Cheshire Way is a 70 mile trail, which, if you're going from west to east, as I normally prefer to do, starts at Hooton in the heart of the Wirral. At the start of planning this walk, I laid out OS map number 266, which covers the Wirral in its entirety and was struck by the level of urbanisation on this large outcrop of land. Dissected by the M53, everything to the right is a mixture of housing and very heavy industrialisation and the left mainly housing. I wondered, whilst studying this, what the world's best golfers make of it when they travel to the Royal Liverpool Golf Club at Hoylake, to compete in the Open Golf Championship, which it periodically hosts. I suppose, once on the links course, you're in a bubble of lush, quiet green with the sea on one side and the urbanisation must seem many miles away. You get that same feeling as you leave Hooton on the North Cheshire

Way. It amazes me how planners are able to generate the most unlikely corridors of green space in such developed areas. It felt like you were walking through rural countryside, with only the complex network of heavy duty pylons above suggesting some huge development was just a short distance away. After 12 miles of relatively uneventful walking, I arrived at my first overnight stop on the outskirts of Chester.

The second day of 19 miles had a little more interest than the first. The first decent climb up to Helsby Hill late morning was good and provided a decent view of the Mersey estuary, the M56 and the overall development of the area. When I looked really closely, I could see the outer edges of Snowdonia to the west and to the east a similar view of the very edges of the Peak District. I dropped down from there and stopped for lunch in Woodhill Woods, which is owned by the Woodland Trust. I joined the Woodland Trust back in 2020, having walked through a small newly planted section of wood saplings, which had been funded by the trust. Since then I have also joined the National Trust, the Canal & River Trust and the Kent Wildlife Trust. But I have to say, that if anyone gets the urge to put back into the countryside which we enjoy so much through our walking, you would do well to find a better investment than the Woodland Trust. The work they do is vast and essential if we are to preserve the ancient woodland areas we already have and create new woodland habitats to enjoy. The route then skirts to the south of Frodsham, before a pleasant walk along the river Weaver towards my next overnight stay at Weaverham.



Helsby Hill



Helsby Hill

I had a long 26 mile walk ahead on day 3, so I left Weaverham bright and early. This was a better day of walking with a bit more interest attached to it. On the outskirts of Northwich, the route goes past the impressive Anderton Boat Lift, owned and maintained by the Canal & River Trust, and neighbouring Marbury Country Park, which was clearly a very popular destination, given the size of the car park. Arley Hall was very pleasant mid-morning and I even went through Knutsford around midday. To me, the name Knutsford just conjures up a grotty service station on the M6 and it's a shame the town is associated with this, as it's actually very nice indeed.

Perhaps the highlight of the day, would you believe, was the stretch of path which runs immediately alongside the Manchester Airport runway. The slightly elevated path, which seems within touching distance of the runway, gives the most fantastic view of planes taking off and landing. It was Friday afternoon and there were a few young families enjoying the spectacle, but I imagined it would

be a great place to come and have a picnic and bring the children at the weekend and school holidays. I'll happily confess that I would have stood there for good while longer, if I hadn't still got around 7 miles to get to Alderley Edge, my third and final stop. Alderley Edge struck me as one of those places in which people like to be seen. It was a warm sunny Friday evening and just about every bar and restaurant was crammed with people, who, along with drinking and eating, will have enjoyed the range of pricey cars, displaying even pricier number plates, roll by. After a very long day, I happily stayed indoors and settled down to a large portion of fish and chips, washed down by a bottle of chilled white wine.

The fourth and final day of 15 miles was, without doubt, the best in terms of terrain and scenery. It's a really lovely walk out of Alderley Edge and this whole part of the route is just remote rolling countryside and you really get the feeling that you're closing in on the Peak District. The highlight of the day was the



Lyme House, The Cage

walk up to Lyme House and its extensive grounds, owned by the National Trust. It is very impressive and clearly extremely popular, given the cars that were pouring into the car park and the hordes of people wandering around enjoying themselves. The best bit is when you reach The Cage on Cage Hill, a little outcrop of a building, from which the views over Manchester and the surrounding countryside are wonderful. A final drop down into Disley and its station, where I caught the 13.14 train back to West Malling, via Stockport and Tamworth.

After the thrills and spills of the Pennine Way, I should imagine my Canadian friend, who was walking east to west, may well have found the North Cheshire Way a little underwhelming, particularly beyond Alderley Edge. It certainly isn't the most exhilarating of routes and perhaps not one that I would highly recommend were I asked. However, I always take the positives out of all the routes I walk. On this trail I've walked through and past properties owned by the Woodland, Canal & River and National Trusts, of which I



Alderley Edge

am a member. I've been up to within arms reach of the Manchester Airport runway. I've seen posh Alderley Edge on a warm Friday night and I will now think of Knutsford just a little more fondly. And when I drive along the M6 and M56 in the north west of the UK, unlike nearly every other driver on that motorway with me, I will know that there's some great walking to be enjoyed out there, beyond the hard shoulder.

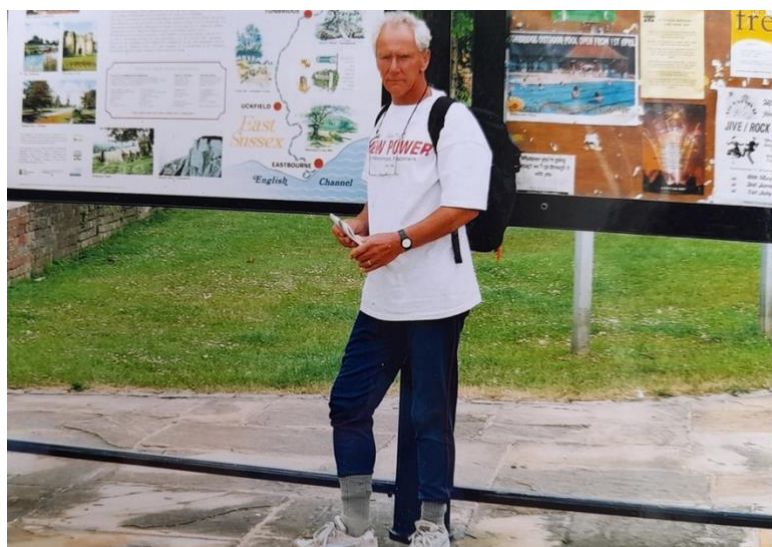
OBITUARY

Ivan Waghorn 1938-2025 (2684)

By Dave Sheldrake

We were saddened to hear that Ivan Waghorn passed away in January this year after being admitted to hospital. Ivan was born in Glossop and grew up in Greater Manchester before moving to Kent with his family to be nearer to his job as sales manager.

I first met Ivan on one of the many challenge events in Surrey in the mid 1980s. He was very competitive and would often endeavour to beat his previous year's time on an event. After moving to Kent he joined the local LDWA group and would go out running or walking most days of the year apart from Christmas. He was a regular entrant on the LDWA Hundred, starting 13 and finishing 10, his last completion being on the 1997 Downsman which I walked with him. His fastest hundred was in 1986 in 31 hours and 3 minutes, on a previous Downsman. As well as The Hundred he took part in many other long and ultra distance



events, including The Surrey Summits, Wealden Waters, both 100k, The Bullock Smithy, Dorset Doddle and many others.

Ivan was also a keen runner, completing the London Marathon, the Seven Sisters' marathon and several half marathons such as The Great North Run. He inspired his daughter Heather, who has also completed marathons both in Britain and abroad. He walked some of the national trails and long distance paths including The Dales Way, West Highland Way, Wealdway and The Great Glen Way which he did with his friend Brian Buttifant.

The Kent Group has traditionally held an annual night walk in winter and Ivan organised and led this for a number of years. These usually started from a local pub at 10.30pm and were very popular. I recall that on one of these occasions while passing through some dark woods, Ivan entertained the group with some ghostly tales and anecdotes.

When Ivan wasn't out walking his other interests were keeping fit, camping and swimming, and he regularly swam twice a week at the local pool where he was a member. He also enjoyed weekends away camping, sometimes when travelling to a challenge walk or others with a few friends. These involved a group walk during the day followed by a beer or two in the evening.

On the Kent group challenge events Ivan would often be seen marshalling and he ran a checkpoint on the Sevenoaks Circular with his wife Ann who worked with dedication in the kitchen. They also helped out on the annual LDWA hundred at the Kent checkpoint. Despite having a hip replacement operation and two knee operations, he continued walking although taking part in fewer challenge events. We often travelled to challenge walks together sharing cars as we lived relatively close to one another. I will miss Ivan, not only as a walking companion but as a good friend.

Ivan leaves his wife Ann, his daughter Heather and two grandchildren.

THE LARAPINTA TRAIL 31 May – 8 June 2025

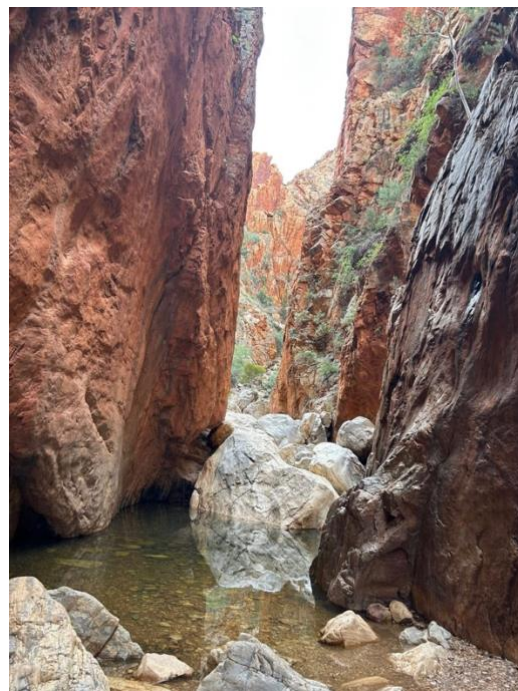
By Cathy Waters

The Larapinta Trail has been on my walking wish-list for some time. Located in the Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park at the heart of Australia's red centre, the walk can only be undertaken during the southern hemisphere winter. The Arrernte people are the Traditional Custodians of this area and the trail's title comes from their name for the Finke River (Lara + pinta = 'Salt water'), one of the world's oldest rivers, having followed its course for over 350,000 years. Extending from Alice Springs to Mount Sonder (Rwetyepme), the trail is 223 km in length and passes along high rocky ridges, through spectacular rock gorges, over mallee and spinifex plains, and across creek beds. This ancient landscape is rugged, vast and remote – which unfortunately makes it quite expensive to travel there.

Organised into 12 official sections, the marked trail can be completed in its entirety from either direction, with shelter huts, water tanks and toilets at the major campsites. However, intermediate campsites have no facilities; most groups walking end-to-end require the organisation of several food drops; some sections require all water supplies to be carried between them; and mobile phone coverage is limited to a few elevated sections. So Nicola Foad and I decided to complete a 9-day guided version of the trail with Trek Larapinta:



Day 2, along the Chewings Range



Standley Chasm

www.trektoursaustralia.com.au This involved walking some 120 km of the trail, carrying a day-pack with 3-4 litres of water, and accommodation in two semi-permanent eco-camps with short transfers to the start and end of each day's hike. Free information about the Larapinta Trail, including maps for each of its 12 sections, can be found on the Northern Territory government website at: <https://nt.gov.au/parks/find-a-park/tjoritja-west-macdonnell-national-park/larapinta-trail>

The West MacDonnell ranges are a geologist's paradise, comprising three mountain chains – the Chewings, Heavitree and Pacoota Ranges – with the oldest rocks in the Chewings, formed around 1600 million years ago, and the formations becoming younger heading south. Spectacular quartzite ridges made of steeply tilted strata dominate the landscape and provide rocky walking conditions underfoot. The climate is arid. However, we



Walking towards Brinkley Bluff, in the Chewings

were fortunate that rain had fallen during May and many plants were flowering as a result – acacias, mallees and desert grasses. In early June we had pleasant daytime temperatures in the low 20s, although the sun still felt fierce. Overnight temperatures hovered just above freezing and thermals plus sleeping bag rated to -4 degrees plus zipped-up swag were all needed to keep warm.



Although the trail officially starts at Telegraph Station near Alice Springs, we began our first day walking part of section 3 (8 km), on a steep, stepped track above Standley Chasm, which gave good views south of the surrounding ridges and plains. After descending to the Angkale creek junction we climbed steeply again to Gastrolobium Saddle (named after a poisonous plant that grows here after fires), before retracing our steps to Standley Chasm itself and enjoying a welcome afternoon tea at the café. At our first eco-camp nearby, we were introduced to the amenities, including the ‘bird-bath’ for ablutions – this entailed carrying a bowl of hot water up to a secluded spot away from the main camp and using a large enamel mug to wash with – and the rules for use of the composting loo. While I found these camping arrangements challenging 😊, the food throughout was truly excellent, tents were relatively spacious and camp beds with swags were comfortable.

Day 2 was a return walk (20 km) from our campsite near Standley Chasm to Brinkley Bluff. The first section along a dry sandy creek bed strewn with rocks and lined with River Red Gums was straightforward, followed by a gradual ascent to Reveal Saddle. But the next section – steeply down along a narrow spur and up into the next saddle before reaching the exposed ridge leading towards the bluff – was tough going. The challenge of walking in this terrain is not the distance, nor even the occasional steep ascent and descent, but the roughness of the track underfoot, dryness of the air and weight of water it’s



Ellery Creek Big Hole

necessary to carry to keep hydrated. We were rewarded, however, at the summit with fantastic views back along the giant orange quartzite ridges of the Chewings range we had been traversing, and the Heavitree and Pacoota ranges to the south.

We started on Day 3 (14 km) from Ellery Creek Big Hole – historically a vital water source for the Arrernte people. The water was freezing, but a trio of hardy women from another tour group were preparing to take the plunge as we left and we heard their screams of shock as we headed out along the track. Today’s was an easier hike, with small ascents and descents westward contouring the southern slopes of the Heavitree range. We crossed sharp dolomite outcrops to reach a Trig Point on the highest hill before descending to finish at Serpentine Gorge and another stunning waterhole. This one is sacred to the Arrernte, so there was no swimming allowed. We were transferred from here to our second camp near Ormiston Gorge, where we would be accommodated for the remainder of the trip.



Serpentine Gorge

The next day we returned to Serpentine Gorge to walk section 8

(15 km) east to west, climbing high onto the ridge of the Heavitree Range before reaching Counts Point, where ridge lines from the Heavitree and Chewings Ranges can be seen running westwards in parallel. We could see Mt Sonder in the distance: our destination on the penultimate day. Some of the rocks bore the traces of ancient sand ripples, revealing the astonishing geological history of this range where an extensive shallow inland sea once existed. From Counts Point we could also see on our right the valley between the two ridge lines where the trail follows section 9 – our route for the next day.

Day 5 was another easier walk of 14 km, starting at the Ochre Pits, a quarry still used by local Arrernte people for ceremonial decoration and painting. We then walked part of section 9, described by our guide Riley as ‘playful’. This involved scrambling over boulders at the base of the gorge through Inarlunga Pass, where we saw amazing folded rock formations and lots of cycads. We headed north-west into the wider valley we had seen from Counts Point the day before,



Buckled rock strata in Inarlunga Pass

and returned to have lunch in the Pass, where I was lucky to glimpse a Black-footed rock wallaby before it disappeared into a hole between the rocks. After the walk back to the car park, we drove to Glen Helen Gorge where some of us enjoyed a swim in the extremely cold water.

On Day 6 we walked section 11a (14 km), west to east, starting from Rocky Bar Gap and walking across dry creek beds and through Mallee scrub to follow a steep zigzagging climb up to Hilltop Lookout. This had excellent views across to Mt Sonder, now much closer. Lunch was at Davonport Creek after which we walked to reach the Finke River, finishing the day at its lookout.

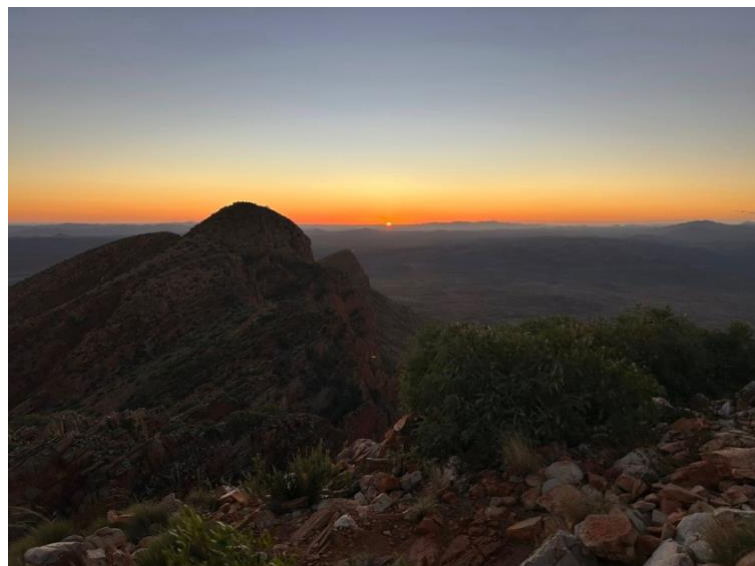
On Day 7 we walked section 10 from west to east (9 km). Starting from the Finke River Lookout, we crossed the sandy riverbeds of Ormiston Creek and George Creek, passing through some fascinating flora – Hakea, Bloodwoods, Batwing-leaved bean trees, Witchetty Bush and Mallee – before finishing at the



Mount Sonder seen from Hilltop Lookout

stunningly beautiful waters of Ormiston Gorge.

Day 8 was the highlight for me, as we completed a return walk of section 12 from Redbank Gorge to Mount Sonder (16 km). At 1380 metres, it's the fourth highest peak in the Northern Territory and the climax of the trail. We left camp at 2.45 am in order to begin climbing at 3.30 and reach the summit at 6.30 in time for sunrise at 7.15.



Dawn from Mount Sonder



At the Mount Sonder Lookout



Ormiston Gorge

before descending into it, crossing Ormiston Creek several times. Within the Pound, the antics of the Spinifex pigeons were comical to watch – the males fanning out their backside feathers in their mating dance. We also saw and heard plenty of Whistling Kites, some Pied butcher birds and Budgerigars flying in their distinctive ‘Budgie Ball’ formations. Lunch was in the north entrance to the Gorge. We had been warned that wading would be necessary to follow the trail through the Gorge to where it meets the Ghost Gum Walk back to the car park. The water was freezing and came up above our knees, so rolling-up trousers didn’t help, but they soon dried out as we climbed up to the Ghost Gum Lookout.

The 9-day Larapinta trek was an amazing experience, walking through sections of this vast and ancient landscape. My one regret is that we had no Aboriginal guides during our trip. However, we heard about some of the songlines and dreaming stories, and appreciated the opportunity to learn about local flora and fauna. Tourism can be one of the ways in which the culture of the Arrernte people is shared and honoured. As we learn from them, walking through country connects you both physically and spiritually to this ancient place that remains a living legacy of its Indigenous people.

Despite some anxiety about climbing a mountain in the dark, I found it actually much easier than it would have been by daylight, because we couldn’t see how much ascent was ahead of us nor how precipitous the drop at the side was occasionally. With a couple of rest stops on the way up, we reached the lookout in good time. A freezing wind was blowing at the top, but we’d been warned to bring everything warm we had, so puffer jackets and gloves were quickly put on. Our guide, Eve, shared out welcome cups of hot Milo, which I haven’t drunk since childhood! As the sun rose, it was a deeply-felt moment for me – connecting with sacred Australia – and worth the early start. A much speedier descent was followed by a fry-up brunch back at camp and an afternoon rest.

Our final day was a side trip off the Larapinta Trail: the Ormiston Pound loop walk (8 km). From Ormiston Gorge, we had a gentle climb up to a saddle and then a short climb left to a point on the escarpment overlooking the natural impoundment,



Looking towards Ormiston Gorge at the western end of the Pound

THE SHROPSHIRE WAY: NORTH AND SOUTH, 14 – 24 JULY 2025

By Helen Strong

Having walked in the Shropshire area on two occasions in the past – once on the inaugural walk of the Telford 50 in 2018 and on another weekend with the girls, the Shropshire Way had long been on my list of Long Distance Paths to complete. David and I knew



that the route would involve more than a week’s walking, and his meticulous planning confirmed this would be one of our more ambitious walking adventures to date – a complete circuit of the Shropshire Way, tackling both the North and South loops totalling 192 miles, in one hit.

Day 1: The Northern Loop – Shrewsbury to Wem (16 miles)

Our adventure began on the morning of departure with a last-minute panic at West Malling station to collect our pre-booked tickets just as the 05:40 train was pulling in. *Note to selves* always collect advance tickets well before travel!

Stepping off the train at Shrewsbury, just after 10:15am, we immediately began our walk, heading straight out of the station and onto the trail. The northern section of the Shropshire Way is flat – a gentle introduction we felt – the starter before the main course.

The route took us along the peaceful banks of the River Severn, England's longest river, and in the afternoon we were treated to expansive views northward and westward. The distant hills on the horizon sparked considerable debate – were those the Black Mountains in the distance?

Day 2: Wem to Oswestry (22 miles + bus journey)

We had 22 miles to cover, though mostly on flat terrain along a canal towpath, which made it entirely manageable. We experienced some persistent rain that could have tested our waterproofs. However, we were sheltered on the towpath, with mature trees and thick hedgerows providing natural protection. At the end of the day we had a 20-minute bus journey on the reliable X5 service from Queens Head to Oswestry, where we stayed in an excellent Airbnb.

Day 3: The Montgomery Canal

After catching the bus back to Queens Head, we embarked on a 20-mile day that would take us along the Montgomery Canal, locally known as 'The Monty'.

This waterway, which runs along the English Welsh border, is undergoing extensive restoration by the Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust. The scale and ambition of this project genuinely impressed us – it is being promoted as 'a corridor of opportunity' for rural regeneration and community resource development, while also providing significant ecological benefits to the area. Witnessing the restoration work in progress was fascinating. We could see how communities,



volunteers, and professional contractors are working together to bring this historic waterway back to life. The project represents more than just canal restoration – it's about creating sustainable rural economies, preserving industrial heritage, and providing wildlife corridors through increasingly fragmented landscapes. The work was so impressive that David made a donation to the trust.

After nine miles along The Monty we reached the town of Llanymynech (we passed the hotel where David stayed when he walked the Offa's Dyke Path), and continued five miles walking along the banks of the River Vyrnwy. We caught a bus from Nesscliffe back to Shrewsbury where we were staying for two nights.



Day 4: Switching onto the South Loop

Our fourth day marked a dramatic change in the nature of our walk. An early start with the 7:25 bus from Shrewsbury back to Nesscliffe meant we were walking by 8:00am. The morning conditions were a little challenging – very wet underfoot from recent rain – but by lunchtime, we had climbed onto Lyth Hill, a perfect spot for our lunch break, offering amazing clear views southward to the Shropshire hills that we were expecting for the rest of the walk.

This 20-mile day (12 miles on the northern loop to Shrewsbury, then 8 miles on the southern) concluded with a 2-mile walk to Dorrington for the bus back to Shrewsbury. Unfortunately, the last half mile took us through fields the last of which had been recently injected with manure. By the time we hit tarmac in the village, our shoes were filthy and the spray of the wet manure up our bare legs was quite unpleasant on the bus ride at the end of the day.

Day 5: Dorrington to Bishop's Castle

Day five proved to be one of the most challenging and rewarding. After catching the bus back to Dorrington, (with shoes still reeking of manure) the walk began with an unwise decision to take a different route back to the path to avoid the manure-injected fields. This mistake cost us time and energy as we battled through overgrown vegetation and blocked paths. After a frustrating 2.5 miles, we rejoined the trail and onwards to the Stiperstones. The day was becoming sunny and humid with little wind, and we were both getting bitten by the dreaded cleggs.

Stopping to put some insect repellent on, we became standing targets and were





painfully bitten again – so we pushed on with some speed to begin the gentle climb toward the Stiperstones, for a long time on my walking wish list.

Crossing the Stiperstones – a dramatic quartzite ridge – requires constant concentration as you pick your way across large, and some of them loose, stones. However, the panoramic views from the Stiperstones are simply spectacular. On this clear day, visibility extended for miles in every direction. We spent considerable time playing our game spotting the Wrekin, locating Pandly, and trying to identify other hills and valleys in the distance.

Day 6: Bishop's Castle to Clun

Our sixth day provided a welcome short day – just 11 miles

to the White Horse Pub in Clun, which allowed us to properly recover from the previous day's exertions.

The route briefly joined the Offa's Dyke Path. This section included the longest and sharpest ascent we had encountered in some time – which David reassured me was one of the toughest days on the Offa's – and a proper test of fitness.

Our destination, the White Horse Pub in Clun, proved to be spot on. This pub has its own brewery and serves some top beers and local ciders. After a couple of pints we enjoyed a hearty meal, in a relaxed atmosphere – just what we needed after several days of walking. Landlord Jack proved to be a great host, even offering the possibility of meeting the brewer and having a tour the brewery the following day. Unfortunately, we had an early start the next morning ...

Day 7: Clun to Ludlow

Our seventh day presented another significant challenge – 22 miles from Clun to Ludlow. On paper, this looked like a tough proposition, but it turned out to be one of our most enjoyable days.

The morning section took us along part of the Heart of Wales Trail, providing a sneak preview of a walk we have already planned for October.

As we approached Ludlow, we found ourselves on the very edge of a severe thunderstorm, with lightning flashes and constant rumbles of thunder which rumbled on for a good half hour as we approached the town. Ludlow itself was absolutely heaving with people. Crowds were gathered outside the castle, and we had been told in Clun that concerts were taking place there over the weekend. The next day, we discovered that the organizers had been forced to evacuate the entire crowd due to a red warning for lightning – the metal stage and electrical equipment had become too dangerous, requiring everything to be switched off.



Day 8: Ludlow to Burwarton

Day eight delivered some of the finest hill walking of the entire trip. Our 15-mile walk (13 miles plus 2 miles to the taxi pickup point) took us over two magnificent summits: Titterstone Clee (533m) and Brown Clee Hill (540m). The weather had settled into perfect walking conditions following the previous day's storms. We set off in cool 15°C temperatures that rose to a comfortable 22°C during the afternoon – absolutely ideal for hill walking.

Both Clee Hills provided panoramic views that ranked among the finest we had experienced anywhere in England. The visibility was exceptional, allowing us to see for miles across the Shropshire landscape.

Day 9: Burwarton to Much Wenlock

Our ninth day began with a taxi ride back to Burwarton and a 16-mile walk to Much Wenlock. Climbing back up Brown Clee Hill we soon saw Wenlock Edge and the Long Mynd beyond.

We continued through farmland and passed what appeared to be a substantial YHA property, but like most YHA facilities these days, it is available for whole-group hire only rather than individual bookings. I understand the challenging business environment facing the YHA in recent years, but it is rather frustrating for individual walkers who want to use hostels but cannot.

Wenlock Edge itself proved less picturesque than hoped. The first section follows an old track through woodland, then runs alongside a vast quarry that offers little inspiration. However, the village of Much Wenlock is a delightful, albeit a sleepy, attractive town and we enjoyed our stay.

Day 10: Much Wenlock to Wellington

It was our penultimate walking day of 16 miles from Much Wenlock to Wellington, and we could hardly believe we were approaching the end of the walk. We set off early, leaving Much Wenlock through the recreation ground (home of the modern Olympic Games) and local woodlands.

The morning's walk to Ironbridge was straightforward and we stopped at Eley's of Ironbridge bakery to buy hot Cornish pasties, which I kept warm in the top of my rucksack using my sit mat for insulation. The route continued through Coalbrookdale, birthplace of the Industrial Revolution – we should have stopped at the museum but regretfully we carried on.

The day's major challenge was summiting the Wrekin via the sharp side. This iconic Shropshire hill provided a fitting highlight to our southern loop adventure. From the summit, we enjoyed lunch while looking back over the entire landscape we had walked the previous day – Wenlock Edge, the Cleve Hills, and beyond.

The descent via the regular track proved straightforward, and the final walk into Wellington brought us back down to earth – as we walked through this town which is essentially a suburb of Telford.

Day 11: Wellington to Shrewsbury

Our final day required an early 5:00 am start – we had 16 miles to cover before catching our train at 13:30 – but it was an easy route across flat farmland, and along the River Severn, picking up the same path we had followed out on the northern loop.

We arrived in Shrewsbury with time to spare before catching our train. Rather tired, we relaxed on the train journey home, arriving back in good time for a well-earned gin and tonic and roast dinner.



Some final thoughts

We were extraordinarily fortunate with weather. It has been a warm, dry summer, with temperatures often reaching the high twenties or thirties. Had we encountered such temperatures, especially on our hilly days, the experience would have been far less enjoyable.

Instead, we enjoyed what can only be described as perfect walking weather – cool mornings around the mid-teens warming to comfortable 22°C or so in the afternoons, with clear visibility for most of the trip. The single day of persistent rain during the northern loop actually added to the experience rather than detracting from it.

The Shropshire Way, particularly the southern loop, represents one of England's finest long-distance paths, but is under-appreciated we feel. For serious walkers seeking challenging terrain, spectacular views, and genuine variety, it deserves strong consideration.

The Shropshire Way has earned its place among our most memorable walking trips. Perhaps in our top five? But definitely in our top ten. We look forward to coming back to this part of the world in October!

SAVE THE DATE – Sunday 15 March 2026

LDWA National AGM

Next year's LDWA AGM will be hosted by Kent LDWA Group on Sunday 15 March 2026 at The Village Hotel, Maidstone. We will be leading walks for attendees on Saturday 14 March. Further details will be available in December *Strider*.

!AND!

2026 Sevenoaks Circular

From David Thornton

It is with some frustration that I have been forced to change the date for next year's event, due to the availability of checkpoints. This will now be held on Sunday 15 March. You will see that not only does this collide with the 2026 national AGM, which is being held in Kent, but also Mother's Day, both of which I was keen to avoid. There are three brand new routes and entries for the event will open on 1 October. Any offers for marshalling would be very much appreciated. The marshals walk will be on Sunday 1 March.