

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION – Kent Group

furthering the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking

NEWSLETTER



Brian Buttifant Memorial Walk – friends and family by the seat, 'Brian's View of Life' (see page 2)

Number 127 December 2025



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

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WELCOME to the December 2025 edition of the Kent Group Newsletter. In this issue we have a report on the memorial walk held in honour of our former Life President, Brian Buttifant, together with accounts of walking adventures by Kent Committee members at home and abroad.

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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KENT LDWA AGM 2026 – SAVE THE DATE

Unfortunately this year Kent LDWA will not be holding a Christmas Lunch. We understand how much some of our members enjoy this annual event and we are sorry that it won't be going ahead this year. However the good news is that we have already secured a volunteer to organise next year's lunch. We can talk more about this at Kent's AGM.

We have commenced the planning for Kent LDWA 2026 – date for your diary:

The **Kent LDWA AGM will be held on Sunday 1 February 2026 at 1:30pm at Godmersham and Crundale Village Hall** – Canterbury Road, Godmersham CT4 7DR. It will be preceded by a walk. More details to follow.

A WALK FOR BRIAN

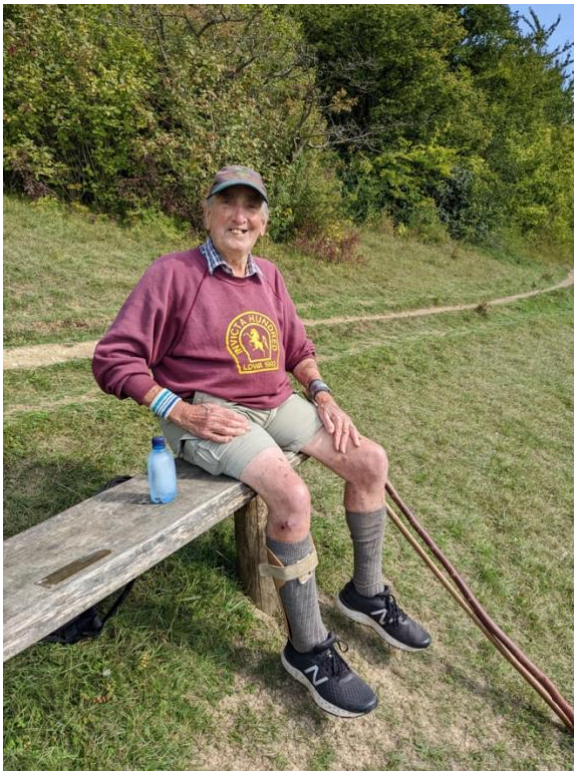
By Graham Smith

Twenty-seven walkers took part in a memorial walk for much loved Kent LDWA stalwart Brian Buttifant, held in glorious autumn sunshine on September 21.

Brian (membership no 2021 – obituary in the April 2025 *Strider*) died a



A walk for Brian, above Shoreham Cross



year ago. He had been involved with Kent LDWA since the early years of the group, serving as secretary for 11 years and chairman for 15 years, being made Life President in 2017.

The day was organised and memorial walk was led by David Thornton, who in 2019 took over the annual Sevenoaks Circular from Brian, who had organised the event for 38 years.

Two of the walkers, Jill Green and Don Newman, wore sweatshirts from the 1992 Invicta Hundred, which Brian helped organise and which they both completed. Four members of Brian's family took part in the walk – grandsons Olly and Sean, and their dads Gary (Parker) and Simon (Nichols).

The 16.5 mile walk started from the community hall at Kemsing, the village near Sevenoaks where Brian lived with his wife, Brenda.

The hilly route, with 2450 feet of ascent, took in some of Brian's favourite paths and places on the North Downs, culminating in a visit to his memorial bench, on Kemsing Down Nature Reserve, put up in 2021 by members of Brian's family and his friend, Julian Reed. It was Brian's favourite view and bears the inscription *BRIAN BUTTIFANT – Brian's View of Life*.

The walkers were met at the bench by more members of Brian's family including his two daughters, Fiona and Claire, as well as Julian.

At the end of the walk, walkers and family members went to the community hall in Kemsing for tea and cake, where they were met by Brenda, who was delighted at the turnout.

Fiona said: 'It was a lovely day, and all the family were really chuffed that so many of dad's friends could be there'.

Note from David Thornton:

I would like to thank everyone who attended and as well as those who contacted me to say that they would like to have been able to join us but were unable to. It was a super day all round, very fitting and the sun appropriately shone. A day I certainly will never forget.

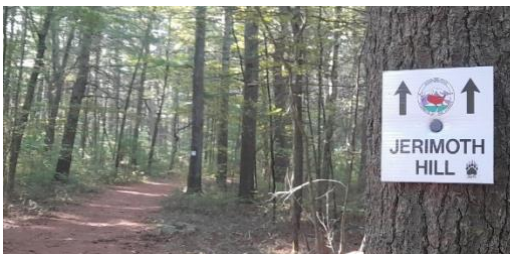
A particular thank you to all those in the Kent Group and Brian's family who went to the trouble of baking some wonderful cakes for us all to enjoy. It was very much appreciated.



THE HIGH POINTS AND TRIPOINTS OF NEW ENGLAND – OR NOT

By Peter Jull

It wouldn't be a Jull jolly abroad without a drama. This time it started even before leaving Deal. At the station the 7:29 arriving Gatwick 10:15 for a 1:10 flight was showing as delayed, then delayed some more, then cancelled. The next train was shown as delayed, then delayed some more, then cancelled. The next train, which I did get on, was delayed, then delayed some more, while passengers were transferred to a St. Pancras train, but I missed my connection in Tonbridge and the next. By the time there was another train I was 2 hours late, but should have still been OK until arrival at Redhill for the last connection to find all Gatwick Express trains were cancelled. The next train to Gatwick got me there with almost an hour still to flight time but 8 minutes after check



in closed, and they were not to be moved. Had to pay an extortionate price for an alternative flight and 14 hours after leaving home I was in Reykjavik rather than America. From there the flight to Boston landed on time but was then held on the taxiway for half an hour until it could park. Made it to the hotel with just 25 minutes to spare before reception closed.

Next morning drove on to Jerimoth Hill, the highest point in Rhode Island. An arduous and long hike from the roadside layby, I think it took longer to work out the

right buttons to press in the right order to allow me to lock the car than walk the distance. I knew I was there when the 'this way' signs ran out. I'll take the surveyors word for it that the nondescript rock is actually higher than the surroundings. An ammo box tied to an adjacent tree contained a logbook which I signed and looking back many pages was the only one from England. Back to the car which was easier to unlock.

Drove on some more to the Air Line State Park car park which they were just finishing poshing up so much, it didn't look as expected and had to turn round and come back. Set off on a trail that was once a railway, cicadas chirruping, trees shading from blue skies but not the mid 70's heat. Soon come to a trail marker for the Tri-State Trail turning, which is much rockier and uneven but easy enough. The 0.3 miles indicated passes soon enough and I'm at the 1883 concrete pillar incised with CONN, MASS and RI. I could go back to the car but that would make it a very short day with no other target within reach. I have a map of Douglas State Forest which rather parochially stops at the Massachusetts border but I can see where I am. The Tri-State Trail marker on the path that I didn't arrive by feels like the wrong direction but RI/Mass marker stones show it to be right. A map matching swing away reaches a



path junction and sign pointing 1.9 miles to my target lake. A couple more junction pointers and Wallum Lake dutifully appears with enough picnic benches to accommodate an army. With only half a dozen people there, it's a delightful spot to stop for lunch; maybe less so when an army's there. A connecting path swings back to the old railway track so it's level and mostly straight between swampy bits with singing cicadas back to Connecticut and the car. A perfectly pleasant way to spend part of a day.

Head north. The high point in Maine is too isolated from the others to justify the long drive but the road comes close to border. So, break the journey by stopping by a pizza place and walk across a river bridge into Maine just to say I've been there. Carry on to the White Mountains of New Hampshire.



Scraping ice off the car the next morning was unexpected, given the 70's weather forecast. Mount Washington, 6,288ft, is the highest point in all of New England. But there's a road to the top and a cog railway that comes up from the other side so there's no need to do any walking. To not feel like a complete cheat, I wait for the 8 mile toll road to open but park after 7. A few yards from the car I go back for the jumper I nearly didn't bring; the wind is chilling. A trail close to the road is marked by a line of cairns but turns out to be much more bouldery than Streetview previews where it meets the road indicated. Boulderiness = me slower but I make it to the top to find gift shop, toilets, café, and observatory that says the highest wind ever recorded was here in 1934 at 231 miles an hour. Definitely the windiest spot of my trip but definitely not 231mph. Obligatory photo begged from another visitor at the very top, walking back down the road is so much easier.



Cross into Vermont where their highest mountain also has a toll road to the top (almost). This time it's gravel rather than tarmac and they operate dynamic pricing, so because it's a nice day and a busy Saturday it costs more. A review I read said it's 1000 yards from the car park to the top of Mount Mansfield 4393ft. It's not, it's 2.4 miles there and back. The route starts easy, with duckboards in parts which are not needed today because it's dry and hot again without the Washington wind. Two lines of string along the ground guide you where not to stray. After passing a radio mast it gets rockier and I get slower even though the rocks aren't fractured and wobbly like this morning. The top this time is marked only by a small metal plaque fixed into the rock. About 40 people are sitting around admiring the views. French is spoken by





some: it's close to the Quebec part of Canada. I wobble, even if the rocks don't, back to the car.

A sunset cruise across Lake Champlain on the ferry into New York state completes the day's adventures.

Mount Marcy was always going to be the longest hiking day of the trip so I'm staying in Lake Placid for 2 days to avoid travel before and after. A first-light start is planned for maximum daylight and further encouraged having seen how much roadside trailhead car parks were

overflowing yesterday and today's still the weekend with a sunny forecast. When the TV weather says its 25°F outside I get a little less hasty. The trailhead is only a few minutes' drive and at 7am the \$18 car park is already ¾ full. The first navigational challenge is to discover a way out of the car park. When found there's a sign saying registration is compulsory and a log book to fill in. I can't see the usefulness of the information wanted. Surely a car registration so that if it's still in the car park at the end of day after you're expected back is more helpful in raising an alarm than the park rangers knowing my UK address.

The route starts along a could-be-Kent woodland path for a couple of miles, undulating but generally level, to reach a river and footbridge across. A sequence of signed path junctions includes Mt Marcy 5.2 miles, similar underfoot but now steadily ascending to cross another river via large stepping stones. And then the rocks/boulders begin and go on and on and on and on and on and on, solid but small, large, uneven, 1ft, 2ft steps up with nothing to see but trees and more trees and more trees and more trees and more trees. 3 hours later a clearing finally reveals a view of the mountain top after passing a sign 1.2 miles to go but looking like there's still a lot of up left. Now there's stretches of exposed smooth but steep rock that doesn't look like it has much grip coming down. By the time there's another view it's 1pm and I'm clearly not going to get to the top with enough daylight to then get down knowing that I'm likely to be slower down those 1ft, 2ft steps than up.



After a brief lunch give up on the target and start down. Collect a grazed elbow on one of those exposed smooth steep rocks that didn't have enough grip. A steady stream of walkers are on the path effortlessly hopping from rock to rock while I balance on walking poles struggling to stretch. Many have helloed on the way up and speak again on the way down. They've thinned considerably by the time the river is reached. Relieved that the light under the trees lasted longer than expected because I was slower down than up, but back on the could-be-Kent terrain before needing a head torch. In the car park there were only 3-4 cars left. I couldn't recommend this route unless you wanted the highest point in New York State – or you have a rock fetish.

A breeze has kept the ice away for a clear start southward to the Taconic Ridge State Forest. On approach the ridge looks mighty high but the road keeps climbing and tops out at a car park. From there it's a short climb to the top of the ridge where there's a map which shows the target New York/Massachusetts/Vermont tripoint down the other side of the ridge, 200 in contour lines but no path although reviews have said there is one. The map I have is even less detailed. Nearly miss seeing a side turning with a sign to not where I want to go to. Putting new batteries in GPS hoping to not walk past too far, a dog walker helloes and says the turning I need is not signed but explains how to find it. A regular path user, he says the last time someone was looking for the tripoint was over 2 years ago but today there's a party of 3 ahead of me. The description finds the side path and it starts down. Soon it's more than 200ft. Perhaps unusually for an American map it was in metres. So soon I'm down 200m and the path still descends but it can't be much further so can't turn back. Meet the party of 3 coming back who describe where they found the marker using yellow ribbons someone has tied to trees. The description doesn't work. The ribbons end at a camping shelter from where there's no obvious worn path. GPS is showing where I am but not the state boundaries. Phone is showing state boundaries but not where I am. Mooch about a bit but the marker could be anywhere in an acre or more of forest. Accept defeat and head back thinking to salvage some of the rest of the day. GPS measures the climb back up as 1100ft of continuous ascent which doesn't seem to take as long as feared (no rocks) before it levels out. Back along the ridge back to the car. Check that map while passing which does have contours in metres but still not explaining why I'd climbed so far.

It's been a 6 hour walk, double what was expected. Set off for Mount Greylock, the highest point in Massachusetts, but conclude that too much time and energy have escaped and having now missed two targets, missing more doesn't seem so bad. The Vermont/New Hampshire/Massachusetts tripoint is on private land and the one I'd always doubted getting to, so instead of trying either, short cut to the hotel. Realise later that I'd annoyingly misremembered Mount Greylock is another mountain you can drive to the top of and could have bagged with minimal energy.

The approach to the next day's first target is what I was thinking Mount Greylock was. The Streetview van has not been down the mountain roads/tracks so I have no preview of the last 10 miles. See no signs for the East Street I need before the tarmac becomes a mountain track. Miles later civilisation is reached but where am I? Eventually work out where my directions away from the trailhead would come out and follow in reverse but still no East Street sign before I end up at the start of that mountain track again. If it was the

right track I must have missed the Mount Frissell trailhead sign and parking. 2 hours have been wasted and I must give up on the highest point in Connecticut and the Connecticut/New York/Massachusetts tripoint which were both to be on the same 2 mile walk.

The highest point in New Jersey is unimaginatively called High Point. Another drive up, I park at the lake and walk the last bit. Divert to an observation platform which is on the Appalachian Way. With these 10 yards and 40 yards I did in Virginia 20 years ago I've only got 2197 miles 650 yards to go. With the monument viewed on the only cloudy day of the trip, the trail looks rocky so follow the road to the top. Out of season, climbs up the monument and the gift shop are closed. At least the last target is a success but overall, it's only been 4 out of 7 high points and 1 out of 4 tripoints.



Bucket list has included arriving by sea for my first visit to New York City. Achieved by catching the Staten Island Ferry from where I'd dropped off the car in Lois Lane. Subway to hotel near the Yankee Stadium and take in a baseball game. Only got exciting when the home team came from behind in the bottom of the 9th to secure a place in the playoffs. Even in the evening it's a swelteringly humid 75°F.



Also on the bucket list since I read about it, has been to walk the High Line, an old elevated freight railway line converted to a 2 mile linear park. Early the next morning it has the usual park users, joggers, dog walkers. Annoyingly a chunk in the middle is closed for repairs and I have to come down to street level for 5 blocks. Where it loops out to the Hudson River there's a cooling breeze but the southern end is more attractive. Finishes in the same street as the Empire State Building so I help them making more money from tourist visits than they do from renting offices. From there walk down Broadway through Times Square to Central Park. The map I have is more indicative



than accurate and navigating from south to north proves tricky. I do go wrong at the northern end where it's surprisingly hilly and exit at the wrong subway station to conclude a 7mile urban hike. Not so wrong to stop me getting the right flight home though.

Observations on America: immigration no worse than French at Dover; Walmart trolleys are

more cantankerous than Tesco's; light switches are wrong – on is up; Coke bottle tops still come right off; prescription medicine adverts on TV; a full tank of petrol is £25. The third week of September was too soon for the best of the fall foliage but some trees were showing off.



THE ROBIN HOOD WAY – 12 - 17 SEPTEMBER 2025

By David Thornton

As a member of the Woodland Trust, I get a seasonal quarterly magazine, updating members on the latest projects the Trust is engaged with, along with many related articles. In this summer's edition, there was a piece on Sherwood Forest and the work that is taking place to secure the future of some of its most treasured trees. I hadn't ever walked anywhere in Nottinghamshire and this got me wondering if there might be a Sherwood Forest Way? There wasn't, but there was the next best thing listed on the LDWA LDP library: The Robin Hood Way, a 107 mile route, which twists and turns its way through the county. That'll do me nicely.



Robin Hood Hill

At 9.23 on Friday 12th September, I alighted the train at Nottingham Central, the route starting point, and almost immediately dropped down onto the Nottingham & Beeston Canal. During the two mile stretch along the canal, more than anything else, I was overwhelmingly struck by the amount of litter flanking the tow path. I'm mildly obsessed by this subject and I'm sad to say that this rather set the tone for my first two days of walking, during which I repeatedly witnessed litter and fly tipping on a scale I've never experienced before. It was shocking. Along the canal I noticed a young chap from the Canal & River Trust rather ineffectually scraping off what looked like a thin slither of moss from a lock. I was tempted to quietly suggest that his time might be better spent clearing up some litter to help with the canal's preservation and enjoyment. However, I dare say his response would have been that in no time the litter will be back, so what's the point? Sadly he would be right of course, but then so too would the moss, although perhaps not quite so quickly.

As I made

my way out of Nottingham centre, the route took me past the impressive Wollaton Hall, built for Francis Wollaton and funded by his family inheritance, although it seems, on top of the cost of the hall, his lavish lifestyle and poor investments left Francis rather indebted towards the end of his life. This was the highlight of the day, as the route loops, rather uneventfully, around the greener outskirts of Nottingham and my first stop in Bulwell. I have to say that my second day of 23 miles was much of the same, with really not a lot going on. The route goes past Papplewick Hall and Newstead Abbey, but without a glimpse of either. In fact the highlight of the day was watching a potato harvest machine in action. Quite impressed by that, I was. I noticed that they grow a lot of potatoes and carrots in Nottinghamshire. And I got caught in a short thunder and lightning storm, which was quite exciting, before eventually reaching Blidworth.

There was some really heavy rain forecast around 2.00pm on day three so with 18 miles to go, I left Blidworth at 6.00am, having secured an earlier check-in at my next Airbnb in Kirklington. As I left Blidworth I finally felt as if I was coming into the better aspects of the trail: quieter, remote, scenic. That said, the detoured visit to the top of Robin Hood Hill itself left me a little underwhelmed. I'm not sure quite what I was expecting up there – a re-enacted jousting competition perhaps or a chance of some bow and arrow target practice, but alas, there was none of that. It's just an average hill. Not even a fabled plaque explaining how Robin Hood used to survey his land, spotting carriages below in the distance, loaded with relative wealth, before swooping down to relieve them of their goods and handing them out to the



Clumber Park

poor. So, I just stood there for a bit, enjoying the view and imagining how Robin Hood might have felt up there, before I headed back two miles to the main path.

Towards the end of the day, I went through Southwell. This is a really nice old town, with its Abbey and also the Southwell Workhouse. The latter was built in 1824 as a model institution for the destitute and which had an influence on the Poor Law Act amendment of 1834. It remained open until the early 1990s, offering temporary accommodation for mothers and children. It is now a museum owned by the National Trust and looks well worth a visit. I got to my Airbnb at 2.30pm and the rain hammered down for the remainder of the afternoon and evening. Good decision to get up and out early.

Day four started taking in the main forested areas of Nottinghamshire and Sherwood Forest itself. The route from this stage is very convoluted, deliberately so, in order to take in as many of these individual forests as possible. It goes on like this for the remainder of the trail and is an



Creswell Crags

absolute treat. I've always said there is something special about walking through mature deciduous woodlands, packed with oak, beech, ash and sweet chestnut. The woods are on a size and scale I haven't seen anywhere else on my walks in the UK. My only mild regret is that I didn't choose to do the walk a month later, when the leaves are turning colour. And I have never seen chestnut trees as magnificent as the ones in the National Trust's Clumber Park, which the route took me through on day five. Day five also started with a walk through Creswell Craggs, which contains the northernmost cave art in Europe, but which was only discovered as recently as 2003.

I only had 7 miles to get through on day six, but it was one I was looking forward to as much as any. A mile from the end, the route takes you past the Major Oak, a showpiece tree which has attracted visitors for nearly 200 years, having been growing for a further 1000 years before that. Now well protected from heavy footfall, which compacts the soil, preventing any trees from acquiring their nutrients, it is quite a specimen. After a couple of last photos, I headed off on my last mile to finish the route in Edwinstowe, to catch a bus to Mansfield and then grab my train home via Nottingham.



Major Oak

My thoughts on the trail are this – unless you're a trail bagger like me, my advice would be to skip the first 45 miles. Instead, get a train and bus to Blidworth and do the last 60. They're well worth the journey and you'll experience the very best of what Nottinghamshire has to offer. But if you do decide to do the first bit and fancy doing some good, you might want to replace your walking pole with a litter picker and pack a few large plastic bags to boot.

HEART OF WALES LINE TRAIL – OCTOBER 2025

By Helen Strong

141 miles through the Welsh countryside without a drop of rain

This October, we completed the Heart of Wales Line Trail, an eight day journey from Llanelli to Craven Arms that took us through some of the most spectacular terrain Wales has to offer. The trail follows a scenic railway line, weaving through the Brecon Beacons National Park, skirting the Black Mountains, and crossing into Shropshire. We were incredibly lucky with the weather – we wore shorts the whole time and I came home with tanned legs. Yes, tanned from walking in Wales in October!

Day 1 – Tuesday 7th October: Llanelli to Pontarddulais (12.38 miles, 433 ft)



We caught the 7.53 from West Malling with no delays – a good start to the week ahead. We headed out from Llanelli train station soon picking up the route and walking along the coastline with the Gower peninsular across the water, before heading inland across farmland. Our stop for the night was the Fountain Inn in Pontarddulais which turned out to be a lovely small hotel above the pub. A rather easy start to the week ahead.

Day 2 – Wednesday 8th October: Pontarddulais to Llandeilo (20.87 miles, 3,097 ft)

We had requested a takeaway breakfast so we could get an early start on the day – we picked up our bacon and mushroom butties and packed them into the top of the rucksack and set off. This buttie combo became our favourite breakfast for the rest of the trip. We like to get three to four miles into each day's walk before we eat – ideally with the best view we can find.

The morning entailed walking across the lovely moors at Graig Fawr with spectacular views all around. All too soon the route took us down off the moor and on towards Ammanford where we picked up our lunch in the local bakery. The route then headed into the Brecon Beacons National Park and the edge of the Black Mountains. We skirted past the dramatic Carreg Cennen Castle, where we picked up the Beacons Way. It was familiar as we had walked this section – albeit in the opposite direction a couple of years back. Walking past hedgerows at the end of the day, it was evident that there must have been a hornets' nest nearby. Far too many for our liking, so we picked up the pace. Our cottage in Llandeilo had everything we needed – most importantly, a bath and a food shop across the road.

Day 3 – Thursday 9th October: Llandeilo to Llandovery (20.93 miles, 3,136 ft)

Out of Llandeilo and back onto the Beacons Way with stunning clear views all day. The path undulated through the hills, and we could see the town of Llangadog from a long way off, recognisable by the pet food factory on the edge of town. I remember the factory from when we had stayed in the pub the night before we started the Beacons Way. We walked through the town and on to Llandovery. Another day over – hurrah our room at the Castle Hotel had a bath!



Day 4 – Friday 10th October: Llandovery to Llanwrtyd Wells (18.35 miles, 2,861 ft)

Walking out of Llandovery, we picked up a short section of the Cambrian Way, which we are both desperately wanting to complete before too long. We stopped to eat what was the second bacon and mushroom buttie breakfast of the holiday and we rated it four stars out of five.

Throughout the trip we walked in very close proximity to the railway stations along the line – if not walking over it at level crossings. Today we walked under the impressive Cyngordy viaduct that's featured on the waymarks. The afternoon took us through some forests. As we continued, the tracks were increasingly difficult to pass – as if huge logging lorries had been moving through the forest leaving huge puddles of deep muddy water which we had to navigate around. We then discovered it was a rally biking area and a couple of guys stopped to let us by and to chat. One chap from West London told us they had hired the BMW bikes locally, and told us to

look out for his friend who had hit a rock, damaged his bike and was waiting to be rescued.

We did not come past anyone, and soon reached our destination – Llanwrtyd Wells and The Nuedd Arms. This hotel looks rather dated from the outside but has a special history. Rex had told us the town is famous for the Man v. Horse Marathon. Actually, it's the hotel which is renowned – as it has been a hub for many of Llanwrtyd Wells' unique events including Bog Snorkelling championships! The couple running it since the 1980s have their own brewery on the premises, and there's also a local walking festival that would make a lovely 4-day break.

We had a great dinner in the pub – proper homemade with decent portions. We would absolutely go and stay there again.



Day 5 – Saturday 11th October: Llanwrtyd Wells to Builth Wells (13.81 miles, 2,021 ft)

David's birthday! Although we didn't have far to go, we opted for a takeaway breakfast and when we found a decent view, we stopped. We were entertained by watching the farmer whose land we were passing through, skilfully round up his sheep on a quadbike with his five dogs. We spoke to him, and he politely corrected our attempts at Welsh pronunciation, promising us a great view from the hilltop ahead.

On the map the route's forthcoming climb looked quite daunting, but actually it was quite a gentle approach after the initial incline. It was somewhat misty on top at around 450 metres. We were in the military training area and spotted another trail – the Epynt Way, which circumnavigates the area. Another one for the wish list! It was really quiet and rather isolated up here, and with more amazing views.

We headed on and down into Builth Wells. We passed the accommodation to get to the shop on the other side of town, and that evening celebrated David's birthday with a bottle of Kent fizz and home cooked dinner.

Day 6 – Sunday 12th October: Builth Wells to Knighton (21.69 miles, 2,615 ft)

It was quite a bit cooler this morning. An early start with an easy walk along the River Wye, stopping for breakfast in a shaded spot by the river. We walked through Newbridge-on-Wye and on through farmland to Llandrindod Wells, going slightly wrong on the exit of the town as the waymarks didn't match the map – but we were fine.

After the initial climb out of the town, we soon came back down and crossed the lovely heathland at Penybont where the weather had warmed up beautifully. Our objective for the day was to catch the trail from Dolau pronounced Doll-lie (as in 'lie' down – I was told



by my Welsh speaking mum) by 6pm – there are only two trains a day and we didn't want to miss it. We were glad to have arrived in good time – though we had an hour to wait. There is a little shelter, and to pass the time we ate some snacks and listened to a downloaded podcast as there was absolutely no signal.

It was dark when we arrived in Knighton – luckily the local shop was still open this late on Sunday. No bath, only a shower, but a lovely little flat for two nights. Perfect.

Day 7 – Monday 13th October: Circular from Knighton via Dolau (19.57 miles, 3,176 ft)

Early start to catch the 6.31 train back to Dolau. We started walking in the dark, but it was soon light, climbing back onto the hill to continue our north-easterly trajectory.

The route was less well marked around here and seemed to consist of field after field of thick long grass over rolling hills. We walked past Llanbister Road station and on, climbing up along a lovely section of craggy moorland around Cnwch Bank with a stream below. We swept around Pool Hill at 516 metres – source of the River Lugg - and picked up a short section of Glyndwr's Way. We did not have far to go back to Knighton – but stopped under the viaduct at Knucklas for lunch, then continued on Glyndwr's Way back to our accommodation.

Day 8 – Tuesday 14th October: Knighton to Craven Arms (20.55 miles, 2,808 ft)

We left Knighton passing the Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre heading north up the steep slope, a lovely walk up high. The route comes off the Offa's Dyke Path and on a grassy track and on through undulating woodland. We met a couple of gents from Leominster in Bucknell Wood who were interested in our trail and shared their favourite local routes. We agreed with all the hills there were plenty of training walk opportunities around here.

We skirted around Bucknell village, picking up the route by the River Redlake. It was a rollercoaster of a path up and down all day, stopping at Clunbury for lunch on a bench in the peaceful churchyard. One final steep climb over Hopesay Hill – we had been over before on the Shropshire Way South before arriving in Craven Arms.

Day 9 – Wednesday 15th October: Home

No walking today – but caught the 8.56 train, arriving home at 13.48.

Final Thoughts

The Heart of Wales Line Trail is generally well waymarked making navigation straightforward despite the varied terrain – from coastal paths and moorland to wooded valleys and farmland. We picked up sections of several long-distance paths we have walked already, including the Beacons Way, Glyndwr's Way, and the Shropshire Way, so could reminisce, and other trails which gave us ideas for future trips.

The railway connection throughout meant we could easily use a base of Knighton for two nights, and accommodation ranged from traditional pubs to Airbnb cottages. There were enough shops which proved essential for those evening meals.

With elevation gains ranging from 2,000 to over 3,000 feet per day and distances averaging 17-21 miles, this trail offers a proper challenge while remaining accessible to fit walkers. The greatest surprise? Walking the entire 141 miles without seeing a single drop of rain. The clear October weather gave us stunning visibility across valleys and hilltops – who'd have thought that!

If you're looking for a week long adventure combining spectacular Welsh scenery, charming towns with fascinating histories, and well-marked paths with good facilities, the Heart of Wales Line Trail comes highly recommended. Just don't forget to order those bacon and mushroom butties!

FRENCH ALPS – COMBLOUX EXPEDITION 2025

By Jim Briggs

Seven Kent LDWA members plus one New York Rambler visit one of the spiky bits of Europe



Mont Blanc from Chale

My son and daughter-in-law kindly allow me to 'rent' their chalet in the Alps. Plus points – it is near the top of the mountain road at Haute Combloux – so good in the Ski Season to ski from the front door. Spectacular, 'stunning' (says Clare) views of Mont Blanc and with huge binoculars on tripod provided; Sarah could relive her ascent and point out the route she took.

Newly built and very well equipped with terrace, indoor swimming pool, hot tub and sauna, plus well-equipped gym and large garage now with electric car charging point. It is about two miles to Megeve with excellent restaurants and posh shops, unfortunately mostly closed in June. A short drive to Chamonix – very touristy with lots and lots of shops.

Minus points – it is an 800ft climb up from the village mostly on a nice path for the morning croissant – Dr Clare was the champion for this. Great bread, croissants, pastries and quiches from the bakers.

My son had asked us to recce a walk up the mountains behind the chalet, so David Spring (who had

driven to the chalet with his wife, Sylvie, from the UK) and I did this on his first day. Not a long walk – only 20km but a lot of elevation gain. We could not use the most direct route as the area had been closed for work on installing a new ski lift. The alternative route was



David descending from Croisse Baulet

fine. The first test was to get up to a peak called Petit Croisse Baulet – almost

vertically up a slippery path through woods – a real slog. We both made it but at that point, I confess I was ready to give up. David and a local man we met there persuaded me that the route to Croisse Baulet was not as bad... The weather, although not hot, was warm enough for me to be down to one layer. On the saddle between the two peaks, we met a couple who were putting out flags for the Comblorane running event that was taking place over the weekend. They were well wrapped for winter. As we ascended further, we discovered why! It was more exposed and colder, but we both had plenty of



Returning to chalet

layers to add. We eventually reached the summit of Croisse Baulet (see photo) and enjoyed the amazing views as we ate our lunch. Needless to say, I arrived at the top about a day after David. We tried a variant of the route on the descent and were both struggling on the steep traverses that were running with water and wondering how they were going to run across this on the Sunday. I provided the GPX file to my son but warned him that middle-aged bankers/lawyers might find it tough. (He later said they managed it.)

Clare and Paul arrived the next day by plane to Geneva and then train to the nearest town. Dr Kay flew in from New York to Geneva and I picked her up from there. Sarah Turner came in a few days later from Paris by train.

Saturday was raining heavily in the morning, so we set off after lunch to hike to a waterfall in the woods above Megeve – it seemed logical on a wet day.



To Megeve waterfalls

Sunday was the day of the Comblorane run, which came past the chalet. Our walkers spent some of the day encouraging the 15km, 25km and 42 km runners as they sashayed down the narrow path past the chalet and leaped or stepped slowly down the steps to the road. The marshal handling the traffic turned out to be Irish, living in Combloux. She thought it was a big encouragement to have English yelled at the startled runners.

Monday, we were tourists visiting Chamonix – very busy compared with the quiet of Combloux and Megeve. Crowded with tourists and plenty to see but we needed to book the lifts up to the top of the mountain (or perhaps a hang glider trip?) – we will be better organised next time.



At Refuge of Mount Joly



Summit of Mount Joly

Tuesday, David had his heart set on a really big mountain – so Mount Joly (2500m!) was the target. Sarah, Clare, David and Paul (the non-walker?) set off on the 20 mile round trip walk. I had to do some shopping on the way back, so Kay and I drove the easy bit to Megeve, so that we had the car ready for shopping on the way back. We then slogged our way up the ski mountains above Megeve –



Resting at Sommet des Salles

Mont d'Arbois and Joux. The route is a variant of the Tour de Mont Blanc. In the ski season, I had been up there the easy way on the telecabine and had enjoyed Christmas lunch at an expensive restaurant among the snowy peaks, but in June everything was closed. At the Mont Joly refuge, Kay could not go further, so we had lunch and returned via a different route to Megeve descending through forest. Sarah, David, Clare and Paul struggled all the way to the top of Joly for the terrific views, now mostly above the ski-junk. They came down at least an hour faster than I had estimated. There were a few very sore legs that evening and some discussion among the two doctors present on what to do about cramp!

Wednesday was the last full day for most of the visitors and it was getting very warm, so we did an easier walk up to Sommet des Salles above Megeve. On the track down, we had to hide behind trees to avoid the gigantic off-road dumper truck ferrying aggregate for the ski lift



Path above chalet

refurbishment. There were signs up asking walkers to use an alternative path, but we were going to pretend we did not understand.

Most of the visitors left on Thursday. Sheila and I stayed and saw the finish of a big cycle race on Friday – they came up the road towards the chalet and the big finish with TV crews and crowds was 400m down the road. The winner was well ahead of the pack and looked like he was ready to do it again. Unfortunately, the cycle race closed the road up to the chalet, so we had to hike down a track to meet the taxi taking us to our evening meal at the best restaurant in Megeve. The owner/chef trained at Claridges. We changed footwear in the taxi to something more appropriate.

Sarah was the only one to undertake a proper test of the pool, hot tub and sauna – they were pronounced excellent. Sylvie, David's wife, proved adept with the table football game. I used the gym a few times, as did Sheila and Sylvie. No takers for the table tennis – so it remains brand new and wrapped in the garage. We could not quite fathom the retro-arcade games machine.

We had a sort of rota for meals with each couple making one main meal, plus the men used the over-complicated barbeque that looked like a vintage steam locomotive for another meal. Steak for most of us and haloumi for Clare and Paul. Sylvie did her tasty meatball recipe. Clare prepared a bean curry, trying her best to convince us of the delights of

vegetarian food. Sheila did a chicken and bacon dish for another evening. We drank the three bottles that my son had left for us – Dom Perignon champagne etc. We all contributed bottles for other evenings. With all of us there, we still did not fill the gigantic dining table. Many of the World's problems were solved over the evening meal but I can't remember what the solutions were now. No one plucked up courage to use the brand-new coffee machine that looked like it was just plucked out of an up-market coffee shop. It just looked too difficult to clean.

We went in early June. Normally the weather is cool and can be rainy. No snow on the trails but still the odd patch in shady spots. The mountain meadows were in full bloom, as was the small meadow around the chalet for the first few days, but then the gardeners came and cut it all! Sheila and I stayed another couple of days and it became very hot – hitting 35 C. We met up with someone who used to work for me and is from the area on our last day. He assured me that it was hotter than he had ever known. The chalet does have heat pumps that work in reverse to cool the building, but this did not seem to work well when we were there. My son has recently discovered that the thermostats the builder fitted only had a 'heat' set point. New stats are being installed, ready for testing again next year.



June is a quiet season, so few people around and the ski lifts are not operating. Some of the lifts start operating for the French school holidays in mid-July. I can have the use of the chalet whenever, but as they should have it available for rent, I would prefer to keep to off seasons. I am open to negotiation on when to go in 2026. The Comblorane trail run is 13th / 14th June if anyone wishes to enter that. The chalet is well equipped – plenty of cooking stuff, crockery, cutlery, glasses, towels and bed linen. It is also cleaned. Modest contribution is expected per night to contribute to taxes, agent's fees and costs (ignore the list price on the website). Sharing the cooking seemed to work well. There is a good supermarket in Megeve plus a butchers and bakers in Combloux. Three double bedrooms all ensuite, one more double bedroom and kids room with two sets of bunk beds share another bathroom. Another shower and changing room off the swimming pool. I will also see if anyone from the New York Ramblers wishes to escape to the Alps. If anyone is interested in coming in 2026, then please let me know – office@jamesbriggs.com.

AND A FEW MORE PHOTOS FROM KENT LDWA SOCIAL WALKS AND CHALLENGE EVENTS SINCE AUGUST ...



WCC 30-31 August 2025, walkers ready to start

Penny and Russell at HQ





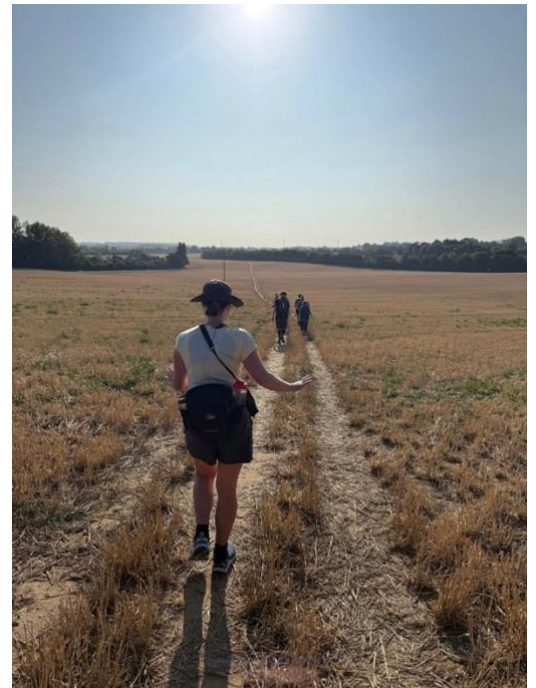
David, Don and Helen at CP 5



Rob, David, Sylvia and Peter at CP 6



'13 Churches' 3 August 2025



*'Hill, Mount, Down to the Bottom and Back'
10 August 2025*



'Surrey Hills Autumn Adventure' 19 October 2025



'AGM Preview' 16 November 2025

Season's Greetings to all Kent LDWA members and their families

