

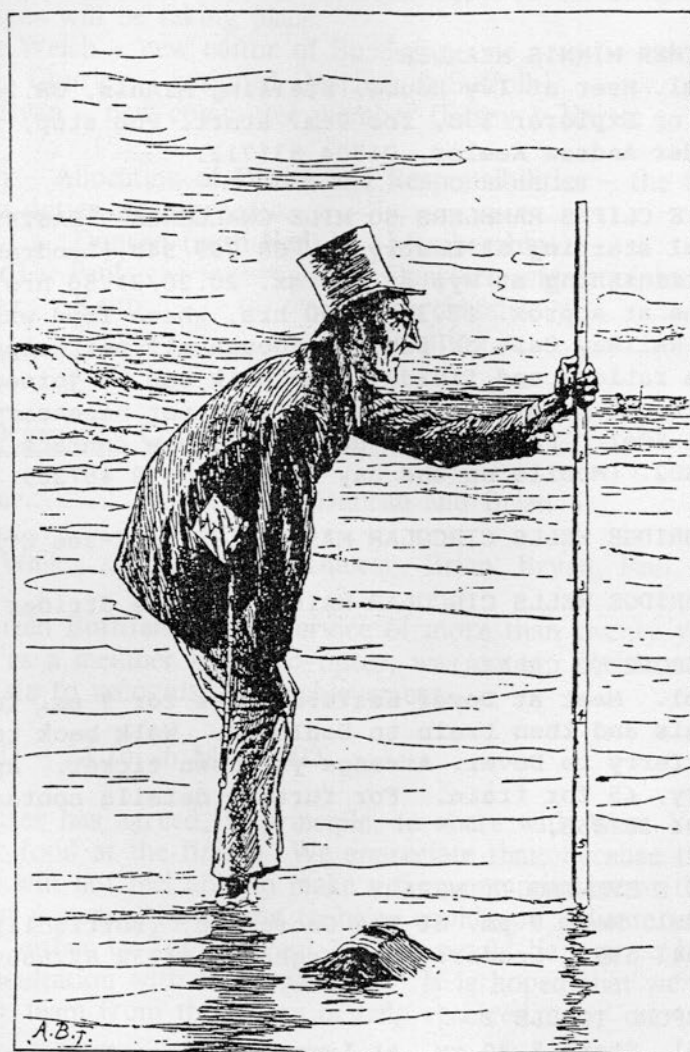


LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION

Kent Group

aims: to further the interests of those who enjoy long distance walking

NEWSLETTER



Setting up a self-clip point on the Wealden Waters

Number 57

April 2002

KENT GROUP PROGRAMME - April to July 2002

- SUN APR 7 WEDNESDAY WRINKLIES' WEST KENT KANTER REVISITED
c20ml. Meet 8.00am., Ide Hill cp GR 488 518, Explorer 147. Prompt start at 8.15. Pub stop at 12 miles, food available. Same area as previous kanter BUT this will be a group social walk - no kantering! Leader: Laurie Lowe, [REDACTED] 5.
- SUN APR 21 EVERYWHERE BUT ELHAM 2
c21ml. Meet Elham Church Square, GR 177 438, (Landranger 179, Explorer 138) for 8.30am. start. Pub stop, food available. Leaders: Jan & Neal O'Rourke, [REDACTED]
- MON MAY 13 PENSIONERS' PLOD
c5ml. Meet Rose & Crown, Wrotham, GR 612 592, at 7pm. for a short stroll before joining the usual monthly gathering. Leader Tom Sinclair, [REDACTED]
- SUN MAY 19 ANOTHER MINNIS MEANDER
c20ml. Meet at Ivy House, Stelling Minnis, GR 147 483, Landranger 179 or Explorer 138, for 9am. start. Pub stop, food available. Leader Andrew Keeler, [REDACTED]
- SAT JUN 15 WHITE CLIFFS RAMBLERS 50 MILE CHALLENGE - EASTRY TO WYE.
c50ml starting at Eastry cp, GR 309 548, (Landranger 179) at 0.01 and finishing at Wye at approx. 20.30/21.30 hrs. Lunch stop at Hythe at approx. 12.30/13.00 hrs, where food will be available at the Railway Cafe or pub. (Although all participants should carry some rations and fluids) The walk can be joined and left at different points on route so it is not necessary to complete the full 50ml. For further details please contact Joy Davies on [REDACTED] (Mobile on the day only - [REDACTED])
- SUN JUN 23 TUNBRIDGE WELLS CIRCULAR MARSHALLS' WALK-see Strider for details.
- SUN JUN 30 TUNBRIDGE WELLS CIRCULAR MAIN EVENT-see Strider for details.
- SAT JUL 13 BOULOGNE TO CALAIS
c31ml. Meet at Dover Eastern Docks for 7 am. to catch ferry to Calais and then train to Boulogne. Walk back to catch approx. 11 pm. ferry to Dover. Arrange your own ticket. Approx. cost £5 for ferry, £5 for train. For further details contact Graham Smith on [REDACTED]
- WED JUL 24 IVAN'S EVENING ITINERARY
c6/7ml. Meet 7 pm. at The George cp, Trottiscliffe. Landranger 188 GR 641 599. Leader: Ivan Waghorn, [REDACTED]
- SUN JUL 28 TOLSFORD TODDLE 2
c24ml. Start 8.30 am. at Lympne Village Hall cp, GR 121 349, Landranger 179 or Explorer 138. Pub stop, food available. Leader: Mike Pursey, [REDACTED]

PUB MEETINGS continue to be held on the first Monday of each month (except if that coincides with a Bank Holiday when they are postponed to the second Monday) at "The Rose & Crown", Wrotham, GR 612 592. Meetings commence at 8 p.m. All welcome.

COMMITTEE

Chairman.....Paul Hatcher
Secretary.....Tom Sinclair
Treasurer.....Neil Higham

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Trevor Blake - [REDACTED] Duncan Brice - [REDACTED]
Bryan Clarke - [REDACTED] Jim Oddy - [REDACTED]
Keith Warman - [REDACTED]
email:- [REDACTED]

Walks Programme - Neal O'Rourke - [REDACTED]
Newsletter Editor - Laurie Lowe - [REDACTED]

Notes from Committee Meetings. (Supplied by Tom S)

Meeting of January 8th - Pre National AGM information - it seems likely that the following executive changes will be taking place:

Julie Welch - new editor of Strider
Chris Chorley - resigned (Norfolk & Suffolk)
Pat Ryan - new committee member (Essex & Herts)

Meeting of February 4th - Allocation of Duties and Responsibilities - the following allocation of Kent Group duties was agreed:-

Meetings Minutes.....Duncan (with Neil)	Membership.....Tom
Quartermaster (food)....Paul	Quartermaster(equipment)..Trevor
Badges & certificates....Keith	Merchandise.....Keith
Social Secretary.....Trevor	Printing.....Bryan
Publicity.....Tom	

Appointment of Event Organising Committees:-

Sevenoaks Circular.....Trevor, Duncan and Brian
High Weald Walks.....Ernie
Wealden Waters Walk.....Trevor, Duncan, Brian, Bryan, Paul, Neil, Neal, Keith

Any Other Business:- Brian Buttifant's long service of more than twenty years to the Group Committee, both as a member and a co-optee, was noted. Keith was asked to design a suitable certificate to recognise this achievement.

WHITE ROSE HUNDRED - 24 to 26 May 2003

The Kent Group Committee has agreed, in principle, to share with West Yorks, the host group, responsibility for food at the finish. We appreciate that, because the date is a long way ahead, many people will not feel able to make a firm commitment at this stage. However, if you feel that you may be willing to help, could you indicate your likely availability or otherwise, either to Tom or Paul? This would be a great help to us in making our plans in consultation with the organisers. It is hoped that we will be able to assemble the core of our team from the offers of help received.

WEALDEN WATERS WALK - 12-13th October 2002.

As usual, much help will be needed to organise and run this major overnight event. Please send offers of help at the event HQ and checkpoints on the main event to Neil Higham, tel. [REDACTED]

The Marshals' Walk will take place on 7-8th September. Offers of help to support the walkers on this event to Neal O'Rourke, tel. [REDACTED]

The following two reports were held over from the December newsletter due to space limitations:-

NATIONAL TRUST WHITE CLIFFS CHALLENGE WALKS - 15 Sept 2001

The above event took place in mild, mostly dry weather although threatening clouds did blow up during the afternoon along with a small amount of rain. It was a welcome return to walking after the Foot and Mouth restrictions. The entry was very good and there were several Kent Group members taking part. There were 190 entries for the 10 mile walk, 55 for the 21 mile walk and 70 for the 26 mile walk. The total of 315 was good for walking and the National Trust. The National Trust hope that over £5000 will be raised for their project at Gt Farthingloe where they are planning to create, manage and maintain a meadow of wild flora and fauna. Similar Challenge Walks are to be held in 2002. The walk started and finished at the White Cliffs Visitor Centre at Langdon Cliffs, Dover. A complimentary cream tea was available at the finish and free bottles of Folkestone Spring Water were offered at checkpoints along the routes. Sponsor forms were issued and these helped to raise the money for the National Trust project but sponsorship was not essential as a donation could be given with the Entry Fee. A YHA discount voucher was also included in the entry fee. The 10 mile walk basically went to Old Stairs at Kingsdown and back. The 21 mile went out to Ringwood and the 26 mile had a loop from Ringwood to Eastry and back. The route description was not quite up to Kent Group standard but was OK.

Pat and Bryan Clarke

A MINI MOUNTBATTEN MEANDER

Some will remember the Mountbatten Marathon which used to start and finish at the "Anchor and Hope", Ash and more recently at Sole Street Station and whose distances in its early days lacked a certain military precision. Anyway, I remembered it on Remembrance Sunday when I took myself out on the off-chance of meeting Jim's Jolly Jaunters somewhere around Meopham where they might stop for a picnic.

From Wrotham I went east on the North Downs Way (NDW) using the Mountbatten route (in reverse) briefly between Hognore Farm and the point N. of Wrotham Water Farm where the NDW and the Pilgrims' Way diverge. Up the NDW to Vigo and Trosley Park and thence north to Meopham Green where I paused on a bench not far from the old Checkpoint Foxtrot. Then east (in the "correct" direction) to see if Jim Oddy & Co. might be coming up from Happy Valley. No sign of them so I proceeded west to reach Elbows Wood to which directions were given on a sketch map, in white on a black painted board seemingly placed there by a thoughtful farmer. This section of my route was again "Mountbatten" in reverse.

South then via New Street Farm to Hodsoll Street where I ate my picnic. I was sat on a stile, munching quietly, when I saw a group of walkers (not Jim's lot) some of whom were soon saying "Hello, Tom, what are you doing here" and eventually, "B-----r off" because they wanted to cross the stile and continue their walk. I unhurriedly stood aside before finishing my lunch and heading home via Pettings Farm, Fairseat and Coldharbour. During that final stretch I encountered two badly-damaged stiles north of Fairseat and a fallen tree trunk blocking steps on Wrotham Hill so, after a cup of tea and a bath, I phoned Shirley Higgins who is sending me a KCC report form - do ask her for one if you encounter something which impedes your progress (bulls don't count, you should just talk nicely to them - yes, really, I do and it works) when you are out walking.

Tom Sinclair.

STANSTED STAGGER - 30th December

Keith Warman.

As overnight temperatures were as low as -8°C , it was with some trepidation that Shirlie and I set off under a full bright moon for the journey to North Essex and the inaugural Stansted Stagger.

Approximately 130 starters slithered away (at staggered starting times) along local lanes resembling an ice rink, but soon we were striding along farm tracks and across the occasional frozen field linking delightful sleepy villages. When the sun rose, it filled a clear blue sky all day. The 23 miles long route was, in essence, a circular to Audley End and back, with just one outdoor checkpoint at the halfway point.

Although we were within close proximity to both the M11 motorway and Stansted Airport, neither intruded on a lovely day out. Upon our return to the start, we were treated to oven-cooked baked potatoes and baked beans.

Some might think Essex to be a bit of mudbath (especially in winter) but the frozen going meant that good progress could be made. Another bonus was the dearth of stiles, the first not being met until 13 miles. I hope this event will be repeated in future - it was most enjoyable.

TREVOR'S TRUDGE

Sunday 10th February

Twenty two people gathered at Longfield Station for the start of a walk led by Trevor Blake - the number of Kent group members being swelled by several walkers from neighbouring groups.

We set off for what turned out to be a very circuitous route through this area of NW Kent. Several times I checked my watch and thought "We must be near the pub by now." only to find that according to Trevor it was "Only a couple of fields and a short stretch of road to the pub." Six fields and three stretches of road later, the village wherein the pub lay, appeared on the distant horizon. It had been a very brisk pace all morning and it was nice to see Trevor moving so easily after his long spell of back problems.

Suitably refreshed by pints and pub grub we set off for the afternoon section - which was shorter but only marginally less brisk. We shed a couple of people who had travelled down by train at Farningham Road Station, and later the pace was stepped up a notch in order that other train users could reach Longfield Station for one of the infrequent trains provided by what is laughingly referred to as a 'rail service'.

Thanks to Trevor for an enjoyable day in NW Kent.

Laurie Lowe.

MINNIS MEANDER

24th February 2002

About 15 of us assembled at Liz Keeler's secret location on the outskirts of Stelling Minnis for another of her walks in this attractive and undulating part of East Kent.

We made good progress during the morning due to some good tracks, a paucity of group-slowng stiles and Liz's brisk pace (aided at times by Andrew's knack of taking over when Mum's pace appeared to slacken slightly. There were the usual moans and groans of course but these were ignored and we arrived at the all important pub on time.

The new owners at the pub did not normally do food on a Sunday but Liz had previously talked them into providing a plate of egg and chips, plus bread and butter, for all who wanted it. Once financial matters were settled (!) we set off again but the fine weather of the morning was now slowly deteriorating. At first a light dusting of fine sleet, then drizzle, followed by increasingly heavy rain and a rising wind.

The afternoon seemed to pass quickly and in no time (in fact it was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours) we were back at Stelling Minnis - wet but satisfied with an enjoyable walk in this attractive area. Our thanks to Liz and Andrew, who did his best to make the walk longer but who was kept on course in the later stages by Keeling senior.

Laurie Lowe.

TREE PLANTING IN MEMORY OF PETER BARNETT

23rd February 2002

A group of about 25 members assembled at "The Black Horse", Thurnham, and after coffee walked up the hill to the top of the Downs. It is here (Explorer 148, GR 806 586) just above the line of the North Downs Way that the KCC has bought a 26 hectare site to create a woodland and recreation area. The plan is to establish a wooded area of native species surrounded by a flower-rich grassland. Part of the overall plan is to form an avenue of oak trees leading towards the downland area and this will be known as "Kent Avenue". The oaks are available for adoption by individuals and groups and the adoptions are to be registered in a Book of Celebration and later will be recorded on a Kent Avenue colour illustration at the site.

The committee, in conjunction with Pauline Barnett, have for some time been considering what would be a suitable tribute to Peter. Planting trees was a favoured idea but initially finding an appropriate location proved to be a problem. This project - to be known as White Horse Wood - seems ideal. Andrew Boulden has been liaising with KCC and it was he who arranged this planting ceremony.

At the top of the hill we were met by one of the KCC staff responsible for the project and after a brief explanation of their plans, he invited the assembled members to set about planting the first two oaks which will form part of Kent Avenue. Trying to remain upright in the gale-force wind and struggling to create sufficiently large holes in the ground which seemed to consist mainly of solid flint, members of Peter's family, assisted by group members, managed to plant the two oak saplings (two more are to be planted in Peter's name at a later date when the precise line of the Avenue has been settled.)

Ernie Bishop led a one minute silence in memory of Peter and then Peter's son Chris thanked all present for attending. We then departed from the windswept hilltop before hypothermia set in and the approaching rain clouds arrived.

This site is particularly appropriate being as it is in close proximity to the North Downs Way. Peter's first hundred - The Pilgrims' Hundred in 1982 - passed this way, and of course the NDW was used again ten years later for the Invicta Hundred. Those who were involved in the organisation of the latter will remember the immense amount of effort and enthusiasm that Peter - as the then chairman of the group - put into it.

When you are next in the Thurnham area, take the time to climb to the top of the hill and visit this exciting new development.

Laurie Lowe.

Pauline has asked me to include the following message in the Newsletter:-

"I should like to express my gratitude to Kent Group for funding the planting of two oak trees in memory of Peter as part of the regeneration of White Horse Wood above Detling. There will eventually be four trees dedicated to Peter on this superb site and I am sure that he would have approved of this project by Kent County Council.

Many thanks to the hardy folk who took part in the planting last Saturday, I imagine that none of us quite knew what to expect but it seemed fitting somehow that the weather should have been wild and that we were expected to dig the holes as well as plant the trees; after all nothing was easy with Peter!

I enjoyed seeing old friends again, thanks to you all."

Pauline Barnett.



Above - Chris, Elida, Pauline & young Peter.

Left - Tree planting in progress.

Below - Mission accomplished!



COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000

There can be few amongst us who are unaware of the above Act which, after a long struggle, passed onto the statute book in December 2000. Whilst its prime inclusion of a freedom to roam over mountain, moorland, etc. might not apply here in Kent, common land and open access land are also included and (if you have access to the internet) it is worth studying the maps of the South East showing the latter two categories which are part of the public consultation process.

Stories abound (particularly from those with an anti-access bias) of householders' back gardens being classed as "open moorland". The dreaded thought of the great unwashed hordes with their bobble-hats and knapsacks traipsing through textbook vegetable plots has caused emotive headlines. That is what the consultation process is for, to ensure future mapping of access land is accurately and consistently plotted.

There are some interesting facts contained within the Act. If walkers drop litter, light fires or damage plants or animals, they will be treated as trespassers. Walking across grassland or heather moorland might possibly be classed as "damaging plants", so I am unsure how this will be interpreted.

Walkers will be responsible for their own safety. Landowners will not be liable for anyone injured by natural features, nor if walkers are injured climbing over walls, gates or fences.

One element of the present Countryside Code (which those of us who enter challenge events sign to adhere to) is "fasten all gates". For many years I personally have not always obeyed this, preferring to leave gates as I find them. Farmers do often prop gates open to enable stock in adjacent fields to reach food and water and to close a gate in this situation might cause undue distress.

Some years ago I read in Strider that a farmer had complained to an event organiser (I think it was in the Lake District) that, allegedly, walkers had not closed a gate. He had spent considerable time in separating animals into two adjoining fields in preparation for moving some of them on. Unfortunately, he had to carry out this task again due to the gate being left open.

I was alarmed to read that under the Act it will be a criminal (not civil) offence to leave a gate open. At the risk of suggesting that I may be up before the beak pretty soon, I envisage that this might cause difficulties.

Organised games are prohibited (except with permission) and damaging property or disturbing a person engaged in a lawful activity will be criminal offences. There will be no right of access to land within 60ft of a dwelling and land used as a park or garden.

cont.....

Finally, I was pleasantly surprised to learn of one part of the Act which many of us would applaud but about which very little seems to have been mentioned. Driving any motor vehicles (including motorbikes, quad bikes and scramblers), on footpaths, bridleways, byways or off-road is now an offence. I do not know quite how this will be policed, especially in the case of byways, but those of us who have been affected by this menace will surely welcome this. Presumably, the local Highways Authority would be pleased to hear of instances and monitor situations to advise the Police of persistent trouble spots. Whether this means that the designation of byway will become obsolete remains to be seen.

Keith Warman

DO AS YOU ARE TOLD!

During the early part of the 2002 Winter Tanners event, the route crossed a rather large grassy field with a copse in the middle, and with an uphill slope. The exit from the field was via one of two closely-situated stiles and the route description went to some length to ensure the desired one was crossed.

Having accurately described the correct stile's location, the route description included the words "The organiser does not want to hear any pathetic excuses about extra mileage because you went over the wrong stile"!

Keith Warman

RESPONSIBILITIES - (A blast from the past)

The walker has his social duties. He must be careful not to leave gates open, not to break fences, not to walk through hay or crops, and not to be rude to farmers. A second duty is to bury the fragments that remain from lunch. To find the neighbourhood of a stream-head, on some well-known walking route like Scarfell, littered with soaked paper and the relics of the feast is disgusting to the next party. And this brief act of reverence should never be neglected, even in the most retired nooks of the world. For all nature is sacred, and in England there is none too much of it.

George Trevelyan, Clio: A Muse and Other Essays, 1913.

The following message from Dave Street, Bristol & West Group was received by Tom on 21st January:-

Due to an unfortunate oversight, both of this year's Bristol & West challenge walks are not in Strider. Please be aware that both walks will go ahead this year now that we are Foot & Mouth free.

The Malvern Marathon will take place on Saturday 29th June. Entry forms can be obtained either from our website www.ldwa-bristolandwest.org.uk or by post from Dave Street, [REDACTED]

The Cotswold Challenge will take place on 28th September. Again, entry forms can be obtained from our website or from Richard Jasper, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

There will be a mailshot to all year 2000 entrants of either event. Also, if you apply to either Dave or Richard you will get entry forms for both events unless you specifically ask not to receive them.

Dave Street.

Hugh Frank Romer

"Renate and the children would like to inform you that Hugh passed away peacefully on Sunday 17th February at The Peace Hospice".

So ran the e-mail which went on to describe the funeral arrangements. The Kent Group was well represented on Monday 25th February when it was 'standing room only' at West Herts Crematorium. The chaplain at the Peace Hospice took the service and, as he said, the large number of Hugh's friends, many of them LDWA members, who were present, indicated their deep appreciation of Hugh's friendly, helpful and cheerful nature. When I asked him to write a piece about the 25th Sevenoaks Circular he very promptly came up with an article which, in small measure reflects that nature. Many Kent Group members who knew this stalwart of the Essex & Herts Group will have good memories of Hugh and will want to do whatever they can to support Renate who is well-known to many of us.

Tom Sinclair

25TH SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR

A herd of some thirty deer fled up the valley as Brian Buttifant unlocked the gates into Knole Park to allow nearly 300 runners and walkers to set off on the 30 and 20 mile circuits of the 25th Sevenoaks Circular Walk. We had been promised a flavour of birthday celebrations, but the steady drizzle dampened our expectations. Leaving the park the route traversed Sevenoaks Common, over the A21 and on to the first clip point at Goathurst Common. Here the route description told us of the views over Bough Beech Reservoir, which doubtless could be seen on a fine day.

Dryhill was the objective for the first Checkpoint, which even if it did not quite live up to its name, did lift our spirits with festive balloons and appropriately dressed marshals. A short climb up the hill soon brought us to a view of Ide Hill church steeple over the trees - we surely couldn't be near Checkpoint 2 already! We were, but the 30 mile route took us off in a 5 mile detour before we would reach it; we were sorely tempted by the sight of a line of 20 milers heading straight across the field to the fleshpots, but as the weather was distinctly improving we stuck to our guns.

A pleasant undulating section led to French Street, apparently in honour of the EU and six French walkers on the event, but then came the innocent sounding instruction "follow bridlepath to Toy's Hill". Perhaps the horsey establishment at French Street had something to do with the state of the path - the riders probably had some good laughs at our antics leaping from side to side in an attempt not to sink into the central morass. Never mind, over the top was another view of the church steeple; just down into the valley and a pull up to the local Scout Hut, where refreshments and a differently coloured set of balloons greeted us.

As faint shafts of sunlight and patches of blue sky were appearing, waterproofs were consigned to rucksacks, and we set off boldly southwards to pass close to Bough Beech Reservoir. The sun even came out strongly as we approached Sevenoaks Weald and Checkpoint 3 - which is where I made my big mistake. In divesting myself of another layer of clothes at the CP, I must have tempted the gods. (Perhaps a libation of purple squash might have appeased them?) Not ten minutes after leaving, the skies turned black and before we could get our cagoules out hail was coming down by the bucketful. Luckily this was only temporary, but in despite of the sun coming out again, my companions insisted that I kept my jacket on for the rest of the walk, which seemed to do the trick.

Fortunately Underriver did not live up to its name, merely being the point where the 20 milers headed back through Knole Park to the finish. We had one more Checkpoint (and another set of balloons) in the ever delightful setting of Ightham Mote. We approached this medieval manor house from a different direction to the one I knew from previous

events, passing through some of the grounds and getting a glimpse of the house which is now owned by the National Trust. Good tracks brought us back to Knole Park, passing along the side of Knole House before dropping down into the valley, where the deer were still grazing, and on to the finish just outside the gates.

This was a pleasantly varied route for the 25th running of the Sevenoaks Circular. On the several occasions I have done the event the route has been altered to show us a range of the countryside - from the ascent and descent of the south face of the North Downs to the more gentle undulating woods and farmland of this year's event.

In the true tradition of anniversaries, we were sent home clutching our parting gifts; not only a certificate but also a sit-mat with a picture of seven oak trees to remind us of a good day's walking. Thank you, Kent Group.

Hugh Romer, Essex & Herts

Printers and Copyshops Licensed to Reproduce Ordnance Survey Maps

I have received an O.S. booklet which lists printers and copyshops throughout Britain which are licensed to reproduce O.S. maps. These are able to copy maps on behalf of customers for their business use. The companies operate within the copyright rules and terms laid out in the current O.S. leaflet: 'Map Copying by Printers & Copyshops' and charge royalties in accordance with the rates shown in appendix 1 of that leaflet.

I have listed below the licensed shops in Kent:

ASHFORD	Cross's, 22 Bank Street, Ashford. TN23 1BE. 01233 635684 Kall Kwik Printing, 2 New Street, Ashford. TN24 8RY. 01233 624345
CANTERBURY	Cross's, 20 Lower Bridge Street, Canterbury. CT1 2LG. 01227 458776
CHATHAM	Kent Drawing Publications, Lower Ground Floor, 7 New Road, Chatham. ME4 5QJ. 01634 848445/829206
DOVER	Cross's, 38 Castle Street, Dover. CT16 1PJ. 01304 204339
FOLKESTONE	Cross's, 119 Sandgate Road, Folkestone. CT20 2BL. 01303 252391 PDC Copyright, 1 Town Walk, Cheriton Place, Folkestone. CT20 2AY 01303250367
MAIDSTONE	Cross's, 1 Week Street, Maidstone. ME14 1RF. 01622 677436 Page Plan Prints, Cornwallis House, Pudding Lane, Maidstone. ME14 1NY. 01622 756305
TONBRIDGE	Cross's, 21 Quarry Hill Road, Tonbridge. TN10 2RN. 01732 356434

Anyone who would like more information from the booklet is welcome to borrow it from me.

Laurie Lowe.

STOP PRESS!

Hot from the National AGM (via Tom S) It was agreed that the annual subs be raised from £7 to £10 as from January 2003.

Please send items for inclusion in the next Newsletter to Laurie Lowe, [REDACTED]

In the last days of October I hastily posted our entry for 'The Country Walking Magazine' Competition and was amazed to discover, only one week later, that ours was the winning entry. The prize was a Northumberland Weekend Break to be taken before the end of March, and I remember thinking it was a long way to go for a weekend but then I wouldn't win so not to worry. We decided to postpone taking it till March when the weather would be improving(?)

We booked with a helpful Northumberland County Council, who had donated the prize, for the weekend of 9th and 10th March 2002. I suppose we should have known that in the natural order of events we weren't due for an idyllic weekend weatherwise. We'd had that in February, on a weekend break with the family, when the sun shone from a clear, frosty sky for the entire four days.

We travelled up on Friday so we could spend the night with our eldest son and his partner in Manchester. Leaving them reluctantly we started the relatively short journey to Northumberland via the M6 and A69. Having gone all of 2 miles in Manchester's famous rain, we became firmly stuck in what appeared to be an endless traffic jam in roadworks. After about half-an-hour we managed to extricate ourselves and find an alternative route and in no time at all, despite two more lots of roadworks, we had hit the Lake District and a snow blizzard!! Snow ploughs and gritters were already busy as we slowly drove through the snow-capped fells.

After a several miles we lost the snow and arrived in Northumberland in bright sunshine. Our first stop was Alnwick where we collected our British-made, top of the range Mountain King trekking poles from 'Free Spirit' Outdoor Clothing and Equipment (www.wildspirit.co.uk for mail order details or telephone 01665 604961). From here we drove through the rugged northern countryside to Thropton village near Rothbury where Farm Cottage Guest House (silver star award, www.farmcottageguesthouse.co.uk) was situated. We were warmly-welcomed by Joan Telford and her husband Allan and treated like Royalty. The cottage has been in Allan's family for three generations and belonged originally to the Craggs Estate. Allan's grandad and father drove the NCC Steam-Roller and it was retired at the same time as his father. The cottage was furnished mainly with antiques but had all the modern comforts along with mouth-watering cooking.

Our Guided Walk was due to take place on Sunday and we had already selected Walk 5 from Shepherd Jon Monk's repertoire. This went up on to Simonside and along the top for the beautiful views then back down through forested areas to walk beside the River Coquet. It would have been a lovely walk but . . . ! I awoke early on Sunday looking forward to our day among the Northumberland scenery. Though Kent has become my home my Northern origins are strong and the Northern counties always beckon. Nostalgia is the sight of stone walls and the endless moors or the swift flowing clear waters of the rivers, ah, me! It is fortunate that Bryan shares my enthusiasm. But back to Sunday morning, leaping out of bed - and believe me that is most unusual - I drew the curtain and looked out at a Christmas-like scene of falling snow and snow-covered fields and hills. There was also a strong wind blowing.

As we ate a hearty cooked breakfast to insulate us against the weather our landlady suggested that Shepherd Jon (www.shepherdswalks.co.uk or telephone 01670 774675) might like to come and join us for coffee to chat about his walks programme and as the snow had by now changed to heavy rain which the wind was hurling against the windows and doors we swiftly agreed.

It was cosy in our hosts' pleasant sitting room but eventually the rain dried up and Jon suggested a lower, shorter walk as the strong wind would make Simonside unpleasant. We were given a generous packed lunch to take with us and wrapped up in several layers of clothing we set off from Rothbury car-park by the River Coquet in bright sunshine. Steep steps swiftly gave us a view over Rothbury and Jon told us a little of the history before we climbed steadily through farmland to 660 feet and into a strong wind. The sky darkened ominously and before long rain, hail and wind made the going through thick mud in places somewhat difficult - just like a Kentish summer's day in fact but several degrees cooler! After some time the sun broke through and dried out my walking trousers - once again I'd ignored Bryan's advice to put on my waterproof trews and ended with egg on my face so to speak. The last part of the walk took us along the sheltered river valley to return to the muddy car park from where we'd started two and a half hours previously. It was a pity we had to forgo our chosen walk but the one we did was a taster of the surrounding countryside. Jon doesn't normally guide walks but sells Route Descriptions of a variety of walks and would, we feel sure, happily put together longer routes for LDWA members on request. He walks each one out at intervals to check for changes.

This memorable Mother's Day finished for us with another tasty meal served by candlelight, and we went sleepily to bed by the light of a hurricane lamp as the electricity had been cut off for 8 hours from early evening! We had been treated with great friendliness and feel sure that we shall be in Northumberland many times more in the future.