

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION — Kent Group

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

NEWSLETTER



Number 73



August 2007

www.ldwa.org.uk/kent



LDWA KENT GROUP SOCIAL WALKS PROGRAMME

August-December 2007

Sun Aug 12 CREAM TEA WALK

c.20mls. Meet Charing Stn. C.P. GR 949492 for 8.30am start. Pub stop probably food available. Contact leader nearer the time. Ldrs: Neal & Jan O'Rourke. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sat Aug 18 WHITE CLIFFS FIFTY - Marshals' Walk

For further details contact Gordon Harker on [REDACTED]

Sat Aug 25 SOUTH DOWNS THIRTY

A walk on the South Downs for those missing the Sussex Stride! c.30mls. Meet 9am at Eastbourne, western end of promenade (B2103) by South Downs Way marker post. GR 600972. Park near school on left. Ldr: Mike Pursey. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sat Sep 15 WHITE CLIFFS MAIN EVENTS

See Events Diary in Strider.

Sun Sep 23 LES TROIS CHATEAUX

c34mls. Meet for prompt 7.30 start at Cranbrook C.P. near windmill. GR 776359. Unsupported walk linking Scotney, Bodiam & Sissinghurst castles. Only for those able to complete the distance. Pub stop. Ldr: Maurice Faircloth. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sun Oct 7 GREENSAND WAY THE MISSING BIT

c20mls. Linear walk. Meet 8.30am Hamstreet Stn. (GR001337) to arrange cars and drive to start at Folkestone, East Cliff. Pub stop. Ldr: Mike Pursey. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sun Nov 4 DOVER TO CANTERBURY

c.18mls. Linear walk. Meet 9am Dover Priory Stn. GR 314415. To Canterbury via the North Downs Way and return to Dover by train. Pub stop. Ldr: Graham Smith. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sun Nov 11 ANOTHER MINNIS MEANDER

c.18mls. Meet at Ivy House, Stelling Minnis GR 147483 for 8.30am start. Bring packed lunch. Ldr: Liz Keeler. Tel: [REDACTED]

Sat Dec 8 CHRISTMAS CRUISE AROUND CALAIS

c.14mls. Calais to Escalles and return. Meet by SeaFrance desk, Dover Eastern Docks at 7.30am for 8.15am sailing. Ring SeaFrance reservations on 08705 711711 for foot passenger day return. Don't forget your passport! Please ring Graham for confirmation of times and news of possible crossing by CAR/FERRY. Ldr: Graham Smith. Tel: [REDACTED]

Tue Jan 1 NEW YEAR IN SUSSEX AGAIN

c.22mls. Rye Hastings & return. Meet 9am Rye Station GR 919205. Pub stop. Ldr: Mike Pursey. Tel: [REDACTED]

Fri Jan 4 TROSLEY NIGHT WALK

c18mls. Meet 9.30pm for 10.30pm start at the George pub, Trottscliffe. GR 641599 (Expl.148). Ldr: Ivan Waghorn. Tel: [REDACTED]

PUB meetings are 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. Meetings commence at 8.30pm. All welcome.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman - Brian Buttifant, [REDACTED]

Secretary - Bill Gillibrand, [REDACTED]

Treasurer - Neil Higham, [REDACTED]

Members

Duncan Brice - [REDACTED]

Joy Davies - tel [REDACTED]

Gordon Harker - [REDACTED]

Mike Pursey - tel [REDACTED]

Graham Smith - [REDACTED]

Footpath problems

Shirley Higgins - tel [REDACTED]

Newsletter editor - Graham Smith - tel and e-mail as above.

PHOTOS on the front cover and page two were taken by Christophe Delogne from the Heart of the Weald challenge. Pictures on the back page were taken by Marita Sanders of the Four Pits Walk.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

WE would like to congratulate the six group members who completed the Cant Canolbarth 100: Jill Green, Avril Stapleton, Don Newman, Merv Nutburn, Andrew Boulden and Keith Warman. And commiserations to the four who did not finish - it was a tough one by all accounts, made worse by the awful weather in the second half. This is something I have experienced myself, so I know the situation they faced. Having said that, I am sure they will all be on the starting line in 2008.

Congratulations also go to Barrie Morgan, a former Kent Group member who completed the Cant Canolbarth Cymru marshals' walk in 44 hours and six minutes (42 starters and 27 finishers in generally much dryer conditions than on the event). Grateful thanks to all who helped at the Llangunlo checkpoint, where they all worked hard to support all the walkers to Kent Group's usual high standard.

Next year we have agreed to man a checkpoint at Kettlewell on the Yoredale 100. It opens at midnight on Saturday May 26 through to 8pm. Sunday evening in the village hall GR SD969723. To cover this time we will need a lot of help to spread the load, so please give it thought, put it in your diary and let me know in due course if you can help. I will not be mentioning this only once! - **Brian Buttifant**

CHRISTMAS LUNCH - DECEMBER 2

YOUR chairman, Brian Buttifant, and I were very excited on finding a venue for our Christmas gathering. The London Beach Golf Hotel is in a totally different class from places we have used in recent years and exceeded all our expectations. It is on the A28, 12 miles from Ashford and a mile north of Tenderden (GR TQ883358).

We will be provided with our own room with its private bar. The room is large and airy but can be partitioned to be a comfortable size to suit the number dining. Glazed doors down one side give a wonderful view over the golf course and surrounding countryside and also allow access to our own terrace (in case there should be heatwave in December). The three course meal plus coffee or tea will cost £17-50 per head and allows a choice of two starters, four main courses and two desserts. We have been assured of quality.

The usual walk will begin at 10am for those wishing to participate and there is even a path through the golf course at the start so as to avoid having to use the roads. For those arriving in the car at that time but not walking, we have been offered the use of the lounge so that a pleasant few hours could be spent over a cup of coffee in an elegant setting. It is also an incentive to arrive early even if you are not walking. Those returning from the walk will be free to use the golf club changing rooms to change and clean up as required. In addition to the above we were even offered hotel rooms at a discount for anyone travelling a distance and wishing to stay overnight.

What more could one ask? This is an opportunity for a quality meal at a reasonable price in fine surroundings. Don't take my word for it. Come and see for yourselves on December 2. The booking form is included with this newsletter.

Bill Gillibrand

KENT GROUP AGM

THIS will be on January 27 2008 at Bearsted & Thurnham WI Hall, The Street, Bearsted, GR805557, starting at 2pm. The meeting will be preceded by the usual walk, which will start at 10am from the hall, and will be followed by the usual free and very good! - buffet lunch. So put this date in your diaries.

NEWS OF KENT CHALLENGE WALKS

White Cliffs Challenge

THIS year's White Cliffs Challenge is nearly upon us. The event will be on Saturday and Sunday September 15/16, from Betteshanger Sports Centre in Deal, and is again being organised by Gordon Harker and his East Kent team. As with last year, there will be two distances 50 miles and 29 miles. As always, marshals are desperately needed for this event please contact Mike Pursey on [REDACTED].

The 50-mile marshals' walk is on Sunday August 18 - see **Social Walks Programme**.

Plans for a South East Triple Challenge

KENT Group committee members are in dialogue with Surrey and Sussex groups with a view to organising a South East triple challenge of 50-mile walks for 2008, 2009 and 2010. These would be the Surrey Tops already arranged for the weekend of March 29-30 next year, and going from Witley, starting point of the Punchbowl Marathon - our own White Cliffs Challenge in 2009 and the Sussex Stride, an excellent event on the delightful South Downs which was cancelled last year due to an apparent lack of interest, in 2010.

If the plans go ahead, the 50-mile White Cliffs Challenge would need to be held every third year, but we would continue to hold the shorter (29-30 miles) version of the walk every year, as we want to maintain interest in the event.

There will be more details of this proposed South East triple challenge in the next newsletter.

In the meantime, for those who want a good walk on the Sussex Downs, Mike Pursey is leading a South Downs Thirty on Saturday August 25 see **Social Walks Programme**.

Weald challenge walk

THIS year's Heard of the Weald challenge attracted 107 entries, with 97 starters and only four retirements. This is an excellent number considering the Tour de France was taking place in Kent at the same time.

Next year's Weald challenge walk will be the Walk with the Smugglers, starting from Goudhurst, which Neal and Jan O'Rourke will again be organising. There will be 26-mile and 14-mile walks.

Sevenoaks Circular

NEXT year's Sevenoaks Circular will be held on March 16, again from the new venue of Vines Cricket Pavilion, and will follow a new route. Routes will again be 30, 20 and 15 miles. The marshals' walk will be on March 2.

A NEW FRENCH SUMMER CHALLENGE

THIS year's Boulogne-Calais walk, completed by Mike Pursey, Eric Rolfe and Graham Smith on June 30, will be the last for the foreseeable future. The Boulogne-Calais walk followed on from the Channel Cliffs Challenge, which involved meeting at Dover Hoverport at 5am, walking along the cliffs to Folkestone to get the SeaCat for Boulogne and then walking to Calais before getting the hovercraft back to Dover. This was discontinued when Hoverspeed stopped operating from Folkestone in 2001. Since then Graham, Mike, Joy Davies and several others have kept the cross-Channel tradition going every year by taking a ferry to Calais, then a train to Boulogne and walking back. But in recent years the walk has become increasingly difficult to do, owing to restrictions on the times foot passengers can travel imposed by the ferry companies, erosion along some parts of the French cliffs near Cap Gris Nez and the closure of some of our regular 'checkpoints' (i.e. bars!) along the route.

So it has been decided that there will be a new summer French walk next year, to replace Boulogne-Calais. This will be a circular walk, going out to Wissant and including a visit to Mont de Couple, at 530 feet one of the finest viewpoints in the Nord Pas de Calais region. The walk will be about 25 miles, and is likely to be in early July.

Further details will appear in the next newsletter.

Meanwhile, the annual Christmas Cruise Around Calais will still take place on Saturday December 8 see **Social Walks Programme**.

SOCIAL WALKS

By Liz Keeler

DO we want social walks? May 13 weather forecast was heavy rain, the first time for a month. Surely not all members of Kent LDWA believed it? We do normally walk in the rain.

Social walks have been getting less and less well supported over the years - but nobody came. Was it because of the weather? Was it because it was a picnic? Was it the area? Was it me? Am I too slow now (sometimes pace is too fast)? Was 18 miles not worth getting into the car? Was it because it clashed with other events? Was it because it was not a challenge walk (more members attend these events)?

I am not a committee member but I am sure the committee will organise what the members want, if only they could be told.

** All Kent Group members will surely hope that Liz will continue to organise her lovely Minnis Meanders (and her next one is on November 11 see **Social Walks Programme**). It appears several members who would usually have joined Liz were enjoying a weekend of walking on the South Downs, organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers group. But what do other Kent Group members think? Are social walks too slow or too fast? Please send your views to the newsletter editor.*

WALKING IN LANCASHIRE

WE have been contacted by East Lancs LDWA with a view to Kent Group members having a weekend of walking in Lancashire next year at a date to be fixed. The basic plan would be to travel up on a Friday and then spend the Saturday and Sunday walking (with the Saturday walk a more challenging one) hosted by East Lancs Group. Anyone going from Kent would have to pay for their own accommodation.

The idea is being discussed by your committee, and further details will appear in the next newsletter.

SHOTLEY 50

MANY Kent Group members will have enjoyed the Shotley 50, organised by Essex & Herts Group and last held in 1996. Essex & Herts are planning to rest their Three Forest Way next year and hold the 54-mile Shotley 50, and have earmarked the weekend of September 13/14 for it. It will not clash with our White Cliffs 50 because we will not be running our 50-mile walk next year because of the plans for a South East triple challenge (see item above).

QUIZ EVENT INVOLVING BEDS, BUCKS & NORTHANTS, ESSEX/HERTS, THAMES VALLEY, LONDON, KENT AND SURREY GROUPS

THIS quiz, on Sunday November 18, is BBN's fourth and has become an established event in the group's social walks calendar. It is preceded by a walk of about 10 miles (starting time 10am), followed by a light lunch. The quiz lasts for about two hours. Teams can be made up of family and friends from other groups, with BBN asking for a small donation to cover the cost of food and hire of the venue the Riverside Centre in Emerson Valley.

BBN are keen to forge closer links with neighbouring groups, and any Kent Group members who are interested in taking part in what should be a most enjoyable day are asked to contact Norman Corrin on [REDACTED]

MORE NOTES FROM A COMMON MAN - CANT CANOLBARTH CYMRU (THE MID-WALES HUNDRED):

May 26-28

By Keith Warman

I WAS really looking forward to this one. The Organisers had promised "a journey through the heart of Wales". We certainly got that and a whole lot more too.

My previous experiences of this lovely area were climbing Radnor Forest on two occasions to its highest point (Great Rhos at 2,165 feet), strolling around Beacon Hill common and a very wet and boggy tussock-bashing yomp across the top of the Elanydd watershed. They were all many years ago when I was still in short trousers. In those far off days when men were men,

if you didn't go in a bog up to your knees at least three times, it wasn't considered a proper day's walk.

After a dry spring, rain had fallen in May so the ground had softened up a little. There were to be 485 entries, 432 starters and 303 finishers.

At the start . . . Most people managed to find the venue, despite the organiser's map pointing to the wrong place several roads away. The usual frenzied atmosphere at the start of the Hundred was noted, with talk of the unpromising weather forecast for the Sunday heard above that of food, kit-checks, Vaseline, amount of ascent, etc. Apparently, one entrant had smothered his feet in coconut butter. On the subject of ascent, the route description declared 13,800 feet of both up and down, but someone on the marshals' walk had used technology to come up with nearly 17,000 feet. Onwards and upwards, Warman.

From the Old Pavilion Theatre in Llandrindod Wells, we made our way to the start five minutes away by The Lake. We had a welcome and final instructions from the organiser and from the Leader of Powys County Council.

Bizarrely, the route description started from a trig point about 1 mile away. We were to be led there by two young local runners. This was to take us through gates opened for the event rather than cross stiles and it seemed to work quite well. I set off in calm conditions with Neil Higham and Tony Lewington at the back of the jostling scrum.

1 mile . . . The first queue, not for a stile, but a narrow bottleneck on the climb to the trig point, which had the Welsh flag planted by it. Neil and Tony disappeared into the distance. Tony had said that he was "in good nick" and wanted to "push on a bit" this year. The fact that he finished in 34½ hours (over 11 hours quicker than he and I finished last year's Meat Pie Hundred in Northumberland), well, it must have been something really bad I said to upset him . . .

2 miles . . . Started to rain. Donned my Pertex top. Sky threatening and looking full of precipitation.

3 miles . . . Caught up Mike Pursey and Graham Smith, cagging-up, and walked with them until I stopped for chat with marshal kindly holding open a gate for us.

4 miles . . . Wonderful ridge walk (with far-reaching views) across the flank of Gilwern Hill. Native red kites and buzzards seen wheeling around.

6 miles . . . Overtook three walkers so I was now fourth from last! A rough section underfoot to Cefnbychan Farm. Stopped raining. Heard cuckoo.

8 miles . . . A long pull up to a saddle, followed immediately by a long, steep and knee-jarring descent on tarmac to Checkpoint 1 beside the A.481 road. 1,350 feet of ascent already. Met Paul and Mary Hatcher here, completely by chance.

9 miles . . . Across a couple of fields to come face to face with the enormous bulk of the north face of Aberedw Hill, which had been staring at me for the past mile. It was the steepest climb on the route, most of it on wet grass.

11 miles . . . Glorious ridge walk across Aberedw Hill. Short-cropped grass, no fences or stiles for 3 miles with the Wye valley down to the right. Great stuff.

14 miles . . . A more gentle descent to Checkpoint 2 at Aberedw village, manned by Surrey Group. Upon leaving, met the sweepers arriving. I am sure they were well-meaning folk, but I didn't want to see them again.

16 miles . . . A pattern was developing. Stiff climb, ridge walk then descent into checkpoint, which meant another climb to follow. Found self-clipper point, then another good ridge walk on grassy tracks across Llandeilo and Llanbedr Hills. The Revd. Francis Kilvert (he of the diary) had trodden these paths from Clyro to the south. Passed the curiously-named Twm Tobacco's Grave.

20 miles . . . Crossed an unfenced minor road. Marshals had thoughtfully left bottled water, but all empty by now. Caught up and passed Neil Higham and the blustering brummie, Tony Francis.

22 miles . . . Another short but steep ascent to Glaschw Hill, then a gradual descent via an excellent path to checkpoint 3 in Glaschw village hall at 6:07 pm. Standard and choice of refreshments very good so far. Cheery marshals.

23 miles . . . Alone from checkpoint with temperature dropping. Yet more climbing.

25 miles . . . Striding out to keep warm past Cwm Kesty Farm. A swift rain shower from behind, but relatively clearer skies (a lighter shade of murk) followed. All good training for what we all thought was ahead of us on the Sunday.

27 miles . . . Caught up and walked with another of the usual suspects, Tim Glenn. Bizarre conversations about Mrs. Tibbs' cat being stuck up a tree for a second week, or something. Ask Tim. Either his hallucinations had started early this year, or he had failed to take his daily medication.

29 miles . . . Relatively easy-going, high-level tracks around Burt Hill and the wonderfully-named The Smatcher.

30 miles . . . A steep descent to Checkpoint 4 at New Radnor in another comfortable hall. Met Shirlie here for the first time and Paul and Mary again. Fed well and donned night-time gear. It was only 9 pm but darkness would soon be on us and the next stage included the high crossing of Radnor Forest. It had got no colder so I kept my shorts on (to avoid the possibility of arrest). Skin dries quicker than material after rain.

32 miles . . . Alone again on the most unrelenting climb on the whole route. Route had been diverted to avoid unexploded shell on original path up Harley Dingle (used for ammunitions testing and rumour was that the shell had been placed in an old tractor. The story of the unexploded tractor will be told for years to come). I'll feel I got off lightly if I get blasted by a shooting party in future. Overtook four on the ascent roaming in the gloaming.

34 miles . . . On the summit plateau, in the last light, met by low cloud. Very eerie! Torch was next to useless. The radio tower by the trig point on Black Mixen (the highest point on the route at 2,150 feet), incredibly, was not lit at night. The tower drifted in and out of sight in the swirling, wet cloud. What an adventure!

35 miles . . . Across the boggy moorland to the forestry plantation, caught up five more then, oh dear, four more torches way

off to the left. They came to join us, then another lone torch joined. Got into forestry and I announced the correct track to take, downhill in light drizzle to road and Checkpoint 5 at Dolau at 11:37 pm. Shirlie again.

37 miles . . . Left with Jean and Jim Ayling from Taunton in a very dark night. Tricky navigation for a couple of miles.

39 miles . . . Found self clipper 2 with no trouble. Jean and Jim very good company.

Jim is in his 76th year and this was, all being well, his 10th Hundred. (They both finished).

41 miles . . . Straightforward navigation to the Kent Group Checkpoint, no. 6, at Llangunllo. Good to see familiar faces. The three of us left at about 2:30am.

42 miles . . . Under the Heart of Wales railway line near the lonely Llangunllo Station (950 feet above sea level) but my Ian Allan ABC stayed in my rucksack as no trains tonight. Another long, lonely section, 9.4 miles and 1,400 feet of ascent over Beacon Hill, now following Glyndwr's Way. Waymarking helpful, but could not be guaranteed when you needed it most. Found self-clipper 3 (in wrong place).

46 miles . . . Five miles above the 1,600 foot-contour on good paths and glimmer of dawn in the eastern sky.

50 miles . . . Feeling very sleepy now and told Jean and Jim to go on. Skylarks starting singing in Welsh. Descended to Checkpoint 7 at Felindre, where arrived at 5:58 am, slept for one hour then fed and drank. Just about to leave at 7:15am and the heavens opened. The noise on the hall roof was amazing. A glance at the map showed that we were frighteningly close to (but did not cross) the English border, only 100 yards away.

52 miles . . . A gentler section of 5.5 miles to the breakfast stop at Llanbadarn Fynydd. Cold wind and rain coming from north, not south-west as forecast.

57 miles . . . After a rough, windswept crossing, dropped downhill following the smell of the teapots to meet Shirlie just before the hall. Arrived at 9:02am. Although I was towards the back of the field, the hall was busy with wet and tired walkers, many of whom were tending to sore feet. Here, I first became aware that many had retired. Blustering Tony Francis breezed in and promptly told others that I was the first person to walk a Hundred once in flip-flops! Left alone at about 10:20 am in heavy rain.

58 miles . . . Another long section of 8.6 miles with 1,450 feet of climbing, still following Glyndwr's Way. Shirlie accompanied me for the first half mile until the route left the road up a track. Tony Francis just behind me and told his companions, "she had to come up with him to make sure he takes the right track.". Great stuff.

59 miles . . . Turned south for ridge walk of about four miles. Aware of drop in temperature and wind and rain blowing hard from behind. Scenery lovely but we were all concentrating on keeping as dry and warm as possible. We didn't know it then, but it was to get worse.

63 miles . . . A very steep descent down a muddy gully through a forest tested knees, thighs and tread on footwear.

64 miles . . . Crossed a tricky stream, slithered down muddy bank to avoid fallen tree and up steps to awkward stile. That must have slowed the field down a bit.

66 miles . . . Met Shirlie on approach to Checkpoint 9 at Abbey-cwm-Hir, Arrived at 1:20 pm. Nice calm atmosphere here, run by Staffordshire Group. Felt great but was unprepared for the next stage, the shortest on the route, 3.4 miles to Bwlch-y-Sarnau. Left alone but happy and still enjoying the experience.

67 miles . . . Rain had turned to horizontal sleet as I started ascent of Upper Esgair Hill. Paths now very wet and slippery and all gates and stiles had trails of mud around and on them.

68 miles . . . Not nice now. It was a job staying upright and I huddled my map-case to stop the route description disappearing over the horizon. Whilst recceing this section in April with Shirlie on a still and cloudless day, we chatted with the farmer with beautiful birdsong all around. What a transformation! Now, I could see Mike Gregson and his companion ahead, but progress was painfully slow as the lack of any cover on the grassy hill meant it was a stern test. The noise of the wind was remarkable and the sleet was driving into my face and eyes. There was neither shelter nor respite from the elements. Character-building stuff indeed, as Tim Glenn would say.

69 miles . . . Over the brow and joined a filthy, muddy byway, the sort I thought existed only on The Ridgeway. Managed to stay on my feet but was starting to shiver and vowed to change into trousers, overtrousers and cagoule at the next Checkpoint, no. 10 at Bwlch-y-Sarnau. A hard 3.4 miles. Staggered into the checkpoint, which was very cosy with little room to move. After a good feed and drink, I decided that it was too cramped to change so pushed on for the next gentler section to try and warm up.

71 miles . . . Having now left Glyndwr's Way (I hope the weather was kinder when he did it), the navigation was easier on clear tracks towards St. Harmon. Warmed up a bit, but with the next three checkpoints being outdoors and described by the Organisers as 'spartan', was getting concerned that I would get cold when I changed clothes.

73 miles . . . Through St. Harmon, past the church where the aforementioned Rev. Francis Kilvert (of diary fame) was vicar for one year. Minor road now to checkpoint 11 which, upon reading ahead, was described as being "in an otter hide that is a small shed and the facilities are spartan".

74 miles . . . Met John Westcott just before dropping steeply to the otter hide. There were no otters hiding there. Small shed? Rubbish! There was plenty of room for at least two marshals and a tea urn. Marshalled by Westmorland and North Lancs Group. Great atmosphere inside hide, on the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust's isolated Gilfach Farm. Off with shorts, pertex top and socks and on with long trousers, overtrousers, waterproof socks and cagoule. Hot tea and biscuits. I sensed that this was going to get a lot tougher now. I would be right. Arrived at 5:00 pm and left at 5:50 pm.

75 miles . . . Glad to have a bit more protection from the wind. Alongside the turbulent River Marteg for a while in the company of two sisters, Sue and Helen. Along a disused railway line (for the anoraks among us, it was the Mid-Wales line from Moat Lane Junction to Three Cocks Junction). Met Shirlie where we crossed the A.470 at Pont Marteg. Sky very threatening. Felt a bit warmer as I crossed the footbridge over the young River Wye and began ascending through woodland. About 1,000 feet of ascent in the next mile now up into the Cambrian Mountains. Wind whistling through trees and branches creaking and cracking.

76 miles . . . Re-joined Sue and Helen and we overtook Mike Gregson and his companion. Left woodland to pass radio mast. The wind and sleet, coming from our right (north) was unbelievable. Such noise and turbulence. I told the ladies that it was a long slog up a clear grass track to a saddle, from where the path dropped across lonely moorland to rise again to reach the mountain road between Rhayader to Aberystwyth. Difficulty in staying on my feet as I huddled my route description again.

77 miles . . . One slow step at a time, we made the saddle. I couldn't believe how Shirlie and I sat here just five weeks previously under a clear blue sky with no wind and with skylarks welcoming us! It was just 7:00 pm, but somewhat dark already.

78 miles . . . A slight respite from the wind as we trudged across the moorland plateau. Feet wet through. The rest of the world, apparently, has global warming but Wales seems to have global cooling. This sleet and rain should fill up the reservoirs.

79 miles . . . We reached the relative sanctuary of the mountain road, where we had to turn left for 400m. This measurement must have been lost in the translation as it was more like 800m to the small notice board, where we were invited to turn right on, as the description stated, "a bushwack for 500m". It was an open access area, and the route was all tussock grass and hidden bogs, down to a small stream where the organisers had thoughtfully built a bridge. The flagged route was very wet, with water over shoes for the whole way. Welsh flag just discernable in the gloaming by the bridge (a slithery wooden pallet).

80 miles . . . Reached a bridleway and the ladies, sensing they were holding me up, invited me to push on "as long as they could see me in the distance". This was some feat in the available light and while trying to keep the wind and sleet out of faces. I pushed on, and followed the bridleway alone across treeless lonely moorland at about 1,600 feet. The wind and sleet were behind me as I had turned south-west. This was nature in the raw. It was very eerie. At no time had I thought of retiring, luckily, but this was testing stuff. When I had had a bad moment, I kept thinking of one of Neil Higham's phrases "cometh the hour, cometh the man". Started descending and felt a lot nearer the finish when I spied the silvery outline of the first of four of the Elan Valley reservoirs, Craig Goch, down in the valley.

81 miles . . . Arrived at 8:50 pm at the second spartan checkpoint, number 12, at Craig Goch dam. It was a very welcome but surreal sight. The wind was whipping up the water on the reservoir's surface and waves were crashing into the top of the dam's wall yet here, on the only piece of flat ground for miles around, was perched precariously close to the water's edge our refuge. It consisted of several sheets of white canvas lashed to a framework of scaffolding with ropes. Inside, the whole thing rattled and shook in the wind, which found its way in through all the joints between the sheeting. How did it not blow away down the valley? I sat, quietly, trying to take in this absurd situation. Sensible people were safely tucked-up indoors waiting for the storm to pass, but a dozen or so hardy and selfless marshals, known as The Sanguine Summiteers, were up here in very arduous conditions ready to wait on us hand and foot. Everyone had to shout to be heard above the cacophony of the wind, which was hurling itself through the tent as well as around it, and the sleet was lashing against the canvas. An outside generator was barely audible, chugging away to provide basic lighting. Kettles were boiled on wobbly gas stoves, then emptied and handed to us to 'cuddle' to try and keep warm. The spirit and camaraderie among the marshals were magnificent, wonderfully heart-warming and in the finest tradition of the LDWA. Two walkers shuffled out into the teeth of the gale for the next section. Another man, who I had not seen or met before, came in and thanked me for leading him safely over the top. He took one drink, thanked the checkpoint, then disappeared out again. The two ladies, then another group of four, staggered in and slumped into folding chairs. I drank hot tea and, having decided that it was time I left, passed my still warm kettle to another cold soul. I was shivering and thought I would visit the public toilet 100 yards away to warm up under the warm air drier. It wasn't working!

82 miles . . . Feeling very cold, I followed my torch beam as fast as I could manage. 6 miles now, alongside the reservoirs, and all downhill on the trackbed of the old railway line built to build the dams. Torched up now in rapidly-failing light. Easy navigation and I had hoped for some respite and shelter but, wrong again Warman! The inky-black waters to my right were choppy and the trees around me and on the hillside to my left were swaying and lurching in all directions as the buffeting continued. The only consolation was that the sleet had given way to rain.

84 miles . . . I was warming up a bit and still enjoying it. Caught up the man who had thanked me at the last checkpoint and we walked together. He was Bill Warbrick from Preston and we would share each other's company to the finish. Like me, he was aiming to complete his seventeenth Hundred.

86 miles . . . Relatively easy going, but the promised moonlight was nowhere to be seen as we reached the dam of the lowest reservoir, Caban Coch. There were lights ahead and we stumbled down a stony bank towards them.

87 miles . . . Arrived at the third spartan checkpoint, number 13, another large tent among trees at Elan Village. It was 11:10 pm and a bright and cheerful Shirlie was there to greet us, no doubt as relieved as we were to have survived the onslaught. I was wet through and had the luxury of being able to change into dry thermal vest, polo shirt and fleece. It was here that we learned that several people had been withdrawn by the marshals at the previous checkpoint due to signs of hypothermia. We

hoped they were all safe and well. Another sterling effort by the marshals from Thames Valley Group.

88 miles . . . Left with Bill. Cautious as this was the first stage which Shirlie and I had recced in April and, in our excitement then, we went wrong after only 50 yards! This time, I found the correct route up through trees but the two ladies, who had left the checkpoint just before us, had made the same mistake as we did in April. I called them back and, in their frustration, they joined us.

89 miles . . . After a steady climb up a road, we followed a rough bridleway up through a wood and onto the final serious moorland section across Carn Gafallt.

90 miles . . . Our jolly foursome plodded on in heavy rain and noted that the wind had dropped in intensity, so we were able to converse without shouting. Found the final self clipper point, where we joined the Wye Valley Walk, without difficulty. A long stony descent into the Wye valley.

91 miles . . . Strolled into checkpoint 14 at Llanwrthyl at 1:35 am to be met by Shirlie again. Cornwall and Devon Group here and Hazel Bound was definitely in charge. Bombarded with delicious hot snacks and more tea. The two ladies needed to attend to their feet so we wished them good luck and bade them farewell.

92 miles . . . We shuffled silently through the sleeping village, past the church and along a long minor road, with the majestic River Wye to our left.

93 miles . . . A well-defined track, still on the Wye Valley Walk, across wooded slopes became a little relentless and Bill and I both felt sleepy, but the occasional gate broke up the monotony.

95 miles . . . Amazing! It had stopped raining and the wind was now merely a gentle (and very welcome) breeze. Vigilant navigation was required now as we crossed several fields and stiles and went through gates and copses.

96 miles . . . The morning's first light was upon us and this lifted our spirits. A torch ahead of us was shining our way and we soon met a marshal who had walked back along the route to help guide walkers. Soon, we met a very lively Lillian Millen, who accompanied us across the River Wye, through a cemetery, under a disused railway bridge (the Mid-Wales line again) and up through the village of Newbridge-on-Wye.

97 miles . . . With a dawn chorus for company, we strolled into a delightful new hall, the final checkpoint (number 15) at 4:40 am. Met Shirlie again. Bill and I felt quite chipper but other walkers around us appeared less so. None of us would forget quickly the battering we'd endured. Suitably refreshed, we left, glowing in the realisation that, barring an accident, success was just four miles away.

98 miles . . . We thought the world was still asleep, but we hadn't bargained for the jolly lady quietly but purposefully delivering milk.

99 miles . . . The last section included about 20 stiles, probably more than we'd climbed in the previous 97 miles. All were slippery and muddy and needed great care in negotiating. Caught up and overtook Merv Nutburn, happily helping a limping couple to the finish. Blue sky with fluffy cotton-wool clouds. No wind. Perfect day for a country stroll.

100 miles . . . The last stile and onto the road into Llandrindod Wells. Passed, incredibly, the first shop on the route, "the one you've been needing since the start" claimed the route description!

101 miles . . . Thrilled to be met by Shirlie, once again, and she took our photograph and walked us into the finish at The Old Pavilion Theatre at 6:50 am. Bill and I congratulated and thanked each other and we just sat and tried to take in our achievement. After refreshments, I collected my badge and certificate and was gratefully driven back to our bed and breakfast for bath, breakfast and sleep, in that order.

It was a splendid challenge and well worthy of the continuing series of Hundreds. You do see many facets of life on a Hundred, and this was no exception. Grit and determination were definitely needed and that was just for the marshals and the supporters. I would like to thank all organisers, marshals, friends and helpers for their sterling efforts over a long period of time which culminated in a well-run and much appreciated event.

In addition, I am very grateful to all the Kent Group members who gave up their time to run, with the usual calm efficiency, checkpoint number 6 at Llangunllo in the Radnorshire Hills. Finally, I must thank Shirlie for her unstinting encouragement. Next year, all being well, the Hundred moves north to Skipton.

SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR MARSHALS' WALK: March 4

By Neal and Jan O'Rourke

WE arrived at the start with a breezy and wet day forecast. However, Jan and myself set off and scampered down the steps to soon turn left away from Knole House, formerly the home of the Sackville family for many a year. Then through a golf course passing some disgruntled golfers, as we were holding up their game. **Mind your head!** Eventually we arrived at Mote Farm, scene of checkpoints past, to pick up the Greensand Way, which was the route used for the 1992 Invicta Hundred. We followed this to Shipbourne Church. Passing through two woods etc and then into a field which was under water, being the first of many. My feet were wet by now as I was wearing trainers. We arrived at checkpoint one with a cheery welcome, a quick drink and we set off with food in 'my' hand and then on to checkpoint two at Weald Village to be suitably 'fed up'. I had a short chat with Brian and then we left with a 'Get a move on' from Jan, as she was by now biting the bit. There then seemed to be a lot of uphill. We turned left along a road and as we glanced back down we saw others who could be very soon on our heels. And yet more climbing to pass the seat erected in the memory of Tom Emery, who had led walks for the group and others and also with his wife Eileen had helped on events. By now it was raining steadily, so cagoules were put on. At checkpoint three we received more eats etc. Then onwards, it was getting very slippery underfoot so using flooded gullies was probably the best

option, although rather cold. We went up past Chartwell and then continued through French Street. An unusual name derived from a connection with John Le Ffrenche (1332). We soon went over Toys Hill to checkpoint four, where it was said to us 'we were doing very well for time considering the conditions' we thought so too. Eventually we arrived back at the finish. We had a great day out, all be it rather damp overhead and underfoot. So our thanks go to Ann, Duncan, Brenda, Brian, Tom etc for their support and encouragement. We would like to be back next year with hopefully drier conditions.

ANOTHER SOUTH DOWNS WAY LOOP: April 7

By Graham Smith

THIS year's annual Good Friday trip to the delightful South Downs was one of our best yet. Fourteen of us turned up at the end of Eastbourne promenade in excellent April sunshine - in such contrast to the fierce winds which had greeted us on the New Year on the South Downs walk on January 1. What a surprise it was (and a very pleasant one at that!) to see Don Newman arrive on time. I led the 26-mile walk while Joy Davies, as usual, led those doing the 20-miler. We set off together on our usual route to Beachy Beach and Birling Gap before the Seven Sisters. I remain convinced there are nine of them - I usually get so tired after ascending number 6 that I find it difficult to continue counting. But if there are actually seven, then all I can say is that the other two must be step-sisters. At the end of the Sisters we were, of course, rewarded with superb views across the Cuckmere Valley, and we dropped down to have our usual break by the river. We then followed the river, and just after the White Horse carved into the hillside on our left, the groups split. Joy's group of six followed the river to Alfriston for a lunch stop and then kept on the South Downs Way to eventually arrive back at Eastbourne. My eight climbed Cradle Hill - on a wide green carpet of a path, and then followed a fine track in a long, gradual arc to the South Downs ridge. We then turned left to the wonderful viewpoint at Firle Beacon (217 metres) for a quick break before turning round and following the grassy ridge all the way to Alfriston, where some of us had a pint (or two) at one of the village's pubs. Then it was back to the Cuckmere for a short distance before crossing fields to Milton Street and ascending Wilmington Hill, where we followed a good airy track and then descended to Jevington, where we just couldn't avoid going into the Eight Bells (well, it was a hot day and we're only human!) to rehydrate ourselves. From Jevington I decided to take the Wealdway route instead of the South Downs Way, because I reckon it's more picturesque. We ascended Willingdon Hill and all appeared to be going well, when we passed a Wealdway sign which pointed south instead of east. I just assumed there had been a path diversion and we pushed on for a good half a mile. When we started to see signs for East Dean and Birling Gap definitely not where we should have been headed we realised we were going off course. We had strayed into a valley bottom, and we had gone too far to turn back, so we followed the compass east to the track we should have been on, helping each other over a barbed wire fence in the process. Here the Wealdway and the South Downs way coincide, and we followed the track back to Eastbourne, finally getting back just before eight o'clock.

THE FOUR PITS WALK: April 28

By Graham Smith

FOR about 17 years, I have been leading a Three Pits Walk, taking in the three Kent coal mines which closed during the 1980s - Tilmanstone, which closed in 1986; Snowdown (1987) and Betteshanger (1989). That walk is roughly 18 miles.

But there were four Kent pits, and the other one - Chislet, which closed in 1969 - is out on a limb, a fair few miles from the other three, and to reach it involves crossing the River Stour. And if you are going to visit Chislet as part of a circular walk taking in the other three pits, you've got to re-cross the Stour.

So turning the Three Pits Walk into a Four Pits Walk was never going to be particularly easy, and it is interesting that the 30-mile Miner's Way Trail, launched by the publicly-funded White Cliffs Countryside Project in April, gives Chislet a miss. But to do a proper walking tour of the former Kent Coalfield you must visit Chislet, so in February myself and Kent Group colleagues Joy Davies, Nicola Foad and Gordon Harker did a walkout for the Chislet loop, so I could add it to the route I had been using for the other three pits to make it a proper Four Pits Walk. We estimated the whole expedition would be about 40 miles.

So at 7am on Saturday April 28 Joy, Nicola and myself, plus Trevor Hills, Marita Sanders (from London Group), Alan Sutton and Geoff Thorpe (Gordon was otherwise engaged, doing the Dorset Giant that weekend) met at Fordwich, just outside Canterbury, to embark on what we reckon is the first walk linking all the former pits in the Kent Coalfield.

For the first couple of miles we followed the north bank of the Stour, then we turned off to reach the village of Westbere, from where we followed the A28 (a Roman road) to Hersden, the pit village of Chislet. We then took what was obviously a former miners' track to view what remains of the mine workings. Canterbury Industrial Park covers the rest of what was the pit.

It was then back to the A28 for a short while before turning off and following tracks and paths to the villages of Chislet more than three miles from the site of the pit and Chitty, before taking the Saxon Shore Way south to reach the Stour again at Grove Ferry, which we made Checkpoint 1. We arrived just before 10am.

We then followed the south bank of the Stour through a nature reserve to Stodmarsh, then we crossed fields to reach Wickambreaux, from where we followed some excellent, straight paths to Wingham. There were then more good paths to Goodnestone, where we arrived at 11.45am, making the village pub Checkpoint 2.

The plan had been to reach the second pit, Betteshanger, before having our lunch stop, but as Betteshanger was the best part of six miles away it was decided to have lunch at Eastry, the largest village visited en route and which would be Checkpoint 3.

We used lanes and a bridleway to reach Eastry, getting there at 1pm.

After a good break, we set off again and followed more paths to Betteshanger, around which Fowlmead Country Park a huge

recreational area whose attractions include networks of footpaths and cycleways has been created. We then took another former miners' track and more paths to the hamlet of Betteshanger from where the pit got its name and then woodland tracks to cross the A256 to reach the village of Tilmanstone, which gave its name to the next pit.

The former pit of Tilmanstone was reached via more woodland tracks and a bridleway which took us up to what was the pit's slag heap. The rest of the site has been developed into a mini-industrial estate. Then it was more tracks to Elvington, the pit village of Tilmanstone, and then a road and a bridleway to Checkpoint 4 the Royal Oak at Nonington, which we reached at 4.40pm.

One and a half miles along the road is the last former pit we were to visit, Snowdown. Because of a long-running dispute over ownership of the site, this is the only former pit which has not been developed. What remains are ruins, enclosed by barbed wire fences which are a dreadful blot on the landscape.

We then followed the B2046 to go through Snowdown's pit village of Aylesham, then paths to Adisham and a good track passing a trig point offering panoramic views of East Kent and more paths to Bekesbourne, and then farm tracks to Checkpoint 5, Littlebourne, which we reached at 7pm.

After that it was more tracks and woodland paths and we finally got back to Fordwich just after 8pm. The weather had been dry for weeks, so conditions underfoot had been hard, and most of us were a bit footsore, but we had done the Four Pits Walk so we felt quite exhilarated. We had also been helped by some lovely sunny April weather. It was a good route, which we reckon ended up 38 miles. Some time in the future we may use it for an LDWA Challenge Walk I'll keep you posted in the newsletter.

STRIDERS AND GROUP NEWSLETTERS

By Ernie Bishop

NEWSLETTER No. 12 appeared in August 1975. It retained its name and contents but reduced its size, increasing the number of pages to 38, and introduced one or two photographs. From an original size of approximately 8x11½ inches, it reduced to approximately 6x8 inches, although there was a very slight difference in size in later years. In this new edition, our editor (Chris Steer) and his assistants just advertised themselves by half a dozen lines in print at the bottom of the back cover. It seems to me they were improving all the time and deserved to make themselves known. They finally jumped to the first page, together with the committee and regional representatives, on Newsletter 17 in March 1977. The first photograph to appear on page one of No. 12 was of Alan Blatchford in a road race. There was no indication of how he fared, but if anyone deserved to win it was Alan.

Diann Pegg (a well-known walker in the early days) gave a detailed four pages of a double Lyke Wake Walk. It was well written and the walk was carried out in dry conditions which led to a shortage of water, but was overcome. The 'Double Lyke Wake' walk took 38¾ hours, although the relative times for outward and back were not printed. There was also a report on the second Downsman Hundred. John Offley won, under 19 hours, followed nearly an hour later by David Rose.

Newsletter No. 13. Alan Blatchford was very pleased with the reaction to the new format and stressed that many challenge walks attract members who are interested in this type of activity. This edition had a variety of articles:-

1. A 'Lug' walk in the Wicklow Mountains (by Joe Glover, LDWA 419), a group of the Irish Ramblers Club who covered 27 miles from the stone cross at Ballinascorney to the summit of Lugnaquilla (3,039ft). The route at no point drops below 1,500ft and crosses some 18 summits.

2. The Welsh 3,000s (by Brian Groves, LDWA 648), four pages. Similar to above, 23 miles with 14 peaks over 3,000ft.

3. Trans-Sahara (by Rev. Geoffrey Howard), three pages. Not quite like the two above, a sole person crossing the Sahara Desert from north to south, carrying food and water, using a one-wheeled barrow (with a spare). At one point the one tent that was carried was accidentally burnt out with other flammable items. In fact all he had left was passport, travellers' cheques and air tickets. It was more than 1,000 miles in 94 days. One short paragraph pointed out that Wainwright added a footnote to his Pennine Way Companion "If you make it, have a pint on me", no doubt expecting that few would make the full distance. In fact by 1975, apparently, 4,000 had claimed the pint at Kirk Yetholm. A further 32 years have passed since then and the cost of a pint of beer has at least trebled, so be careful what you say. In the section for past events, there was a short article from John Leather (12) who over the years must have taken part in most events at one time or another. His journey was to Liverpool, where he caught the boat and reached Douglas, to be thrown off at 5am on a freezing cold morning. He understood it was for walkers and so he kitted himself up correctly: boots and walking gear. All the rest had running shoes etc. John eventually arrived home at 23.55 hours on Monday. On the North York Moors Crosses Walk, John Leather appeared again. Before the start he helped with kit check, he came fourth in just over 11 hours and then helped in the kitchen for ten hours! Two regular events were held in the early autumn. The Chiltern Marathon had its sixth event, 25 miles inside nine hours. Some Kent Group members will remember young Rosalind Paul who finished in a creditable time of 5hrs 7mins. Two weeks later the ninth Long Mynd Hike was held from Church Stretton in Shropshire. There were 243 starters, 8,000ft of ascent in 50 miles, the highest being 1,730ft. It was some years later when I first entered the Long Mynd, and I still remember a small hill which was within one mile of the finish, but which made me feel I was going up Snowdon.

Newsletter No. 14 (March 1976). Things were moving up for the association. More than 500 new members were listed in the previous 12 months. Chris Barton had taken over as South East representative. Peter Rickards had moved across to put his time into the plans for the Sevenoaks Circular Walk, and Dave Page, from Belvedere, organised a Kent Group programme. The various groups had expanded during the past year and five pages were taken up for them and four for Future Events. The

Tanners Marathon was advertising its 17th event and in a few years was to have a record attendance. From that point attendance has reduced, perhaps due to the number of other events which became available during the summer months. Up until now I have written from what is in the earliest LDWA newsletters. From this point I can mix some of what is available in forthcoming newsletters with some of my own recollections of Kent Group and events that I experienced. More to come.

THE GENTLE ART OF TRAMPING

By Laurie Lowe

IN the December issue of the newsletter, I introduced readers to the Rev A N Cooper and some of his accounts of "tramping" written around the 1900s. Stephen Graham was another writer who published accounts of his wanderings on foot all over the world. Most of his books were published during the period 1910 to 1930 and, although of a slightly later date than those of Cooper, they make equally fascinating reading for the modern long distance walker.

The following is his advice on how to cope with wet weather. I think that it makes interesting reading for today's Goretex-clad walk

DRYING AFTER RAIN

Wet weather is not the tramp's worst enemy, but it leaves him with the problem of drying his clothes. It may not damp his spirits, but will probably damp his attire. The walk in the rain, or worse than that, the walk through rain-laden thickets after the rain has ceased, the night slept in the rain when it begins to drizzle at eleven and you think nought of it, and to rain steadily at twelve and there is no refuge, and to pour gently at one and in torrents at two, and it is all the same because you are already as wet as can be - these are modifications of Nature's blessings, pleasant or unpleasant in themselves according to taste and breeding, but having, as a natural sequence, the common duty of drying. The wet dawn peers through the trees; pale morning looks faintly upon a washed-out camp, and two Rip Van Winkles, feeling a hundred years older, lift up heavy and rusty limbs, and reflect that it has been a wet night. The problem is to get dry.

The first means is a fire. Grant the matches have kept dry; or if they have not been kept in a canister, that one of the tramps happens to have a briquet! With a petrol-lighter one is independent of wet matches. Then the fire must be carefully begun, nursed and nourished. Perhaps one can find an old ruined and red-rusty bucket on the waste - a gift of Providence. The fire may be well started in that. If you feel cold you may bring fuel to the fire-spot on the run - dead fuel of branch and withered weed, heaps of it. One needs to get a good fire going, a big fire, a drier.

You know at sight when your fire has got the upper hand of the surrounding damp. That is your moment for executing a war-dance around it. The longer you dance the quicker you dry. But do not forget reserves of fuel. You need a fire on which you could roast a sheep. For you have to dry, not only your clothes, but the blanket, the knapsack, and your spare linen. You find a corner for your pot. It will boil and provide coffee while you are engaged with drying. Somehow or other the blanket has to be hoisted up on to a line. You need string, which I hope you have brought. If there is a tree or a telegraph post or any other post, or preferably two convenient trees, two convenient posts, you can tie up the blanket and let it dry in the heat of the fire. If these are absent there may be a corner of a wired enclosure. You must shift your fire to the place where you can rig up the blanket. It is seldom that absence of uprights of any kind reduces you to holding the blanket in your own hands in front of the fire and drying it so. Indeed, if no convenience offers, you may simply dry off your clothes and then tramp on till you find a spot better equipped for blanket drying. You will not, as a rule, have to tramp far.

Clothes, however, do not dry as quickly as expected. Especially the tweed jacket and its shoulders take an unconscionable time a-drying. It is not good for one's health to tramp with a heavy knapsack on wet shoulders. The weight drives the damp inward, and as the back warms and perspires it takes potential rheumatism from the steam of the jacket. A night out in the rain will not give you rheumatism; many nights in the wet will not give you rheumatism. It is not getting wet which gives you these pains; it is the way you dry. You are, in fact, safer scampering naked in the wet than drying slowly in a heap of wet clothes. Perhaps it is not amiss to remark here that a waterproof worn over wet clothes is a sure way to cultivate rheumatism. The damp cannot escape outwards - and so goes inward to your very bones. Your shirt will dry quickest and easiest. Wearing that, you can dry the rest of your clothes at the fire, the lightest first. If your boots are soaked it is better not to try and dry them by a fire.

Leather liketh not fire. There is little harm in wearing wet boots and trusting them to dry themselves as best they can.

It is a happy occasion, this of drying off. One's spirits are naturally exalted by it. It is victory of a kind. The tramp sings as he circles the fire. There is a music which belongs to the mood, and it is a pity no great musician has composed 'While waiting for my clothes to dry by an early morning fire.' The musicians have not tramped enough.

However, in this light-hearted frolic, let us not allow our linen to be ruined. Beware of the long flames which try to lick your trousers as they hang there in the wind; beware of the scorching heat which browns and ruins a shirt; beware of the showers of sparks which rise when you throw a new log on the fire. For some good reason, sparks are more plentiful after rain than in the dry. Your fire may be sending up sparks all the while, big, substantial living sparks, which, settling on your drying blanket may fret it with holes. I have had a blanket made holey by this before now. The spark settles on the wool, ignites it gently, and starts a hole which may be as big as a cigar end before you notice it. As the blanket gets nearer being perfectly dry you need to retire it from the intimate ardours of the fire. Your fire, in any case, has been getting hotter and hotter. You have not noticed that it is beginning to scorch your clothes and your wraps.

That is the way of drying off. It suits all weathers. But if, while you are engaged upon it, the sun breaks forth, promising natural heat, you may relax your energies from the fireside and place your hopes on the morning warmth. Nothing is more

delightful than the sun-bath after rain. You enjoy it, your clothes enjoy it, blanket enjoys it, knapsack enjoys it, coffee enjoys it. As you are all spread out on the hill-side the butterflies settle on your bare chest trying to take honey from you, and flit thence to the knapsack which, perchance moistened with sugar, gives an even pleasanter reaction to the proboscis of a Vanessa.

A third dry off is in a farmhouse at the kindly hands of a farm-wife, who hangs your blanket and jacket in her kitchen, while her husband regales you in the parlour with home-brew and a hunk of fruit pie.

There are other less satisfactory ways of drying; using newspapers as blotting-paper and stuffing the legs of your trousers with them. But first find your dry newspapers. Another method is to get up into a tree and sit there till you are dry. The last I have tried, but shivered* so steadily that I gave it up, resumed my way, and walked myself dry. It is part of a genuine tramping outing to get once thoroughly wet - and dry off.

**No mention of hypothermia . . . perhaps it had not been invented at that time!*

In addition to the book published under the title at the head of this article, other titles by Stephen Graham are:-

A Tramp's Sketches

Tramping with a Poet in the Rockies

In Quest of Eldorado

A Vagabond in the Caucasus

Undiscovered Russia

As with the Rev Cooper's books, I would recommend that anyone interested in the early days of trekking should seek out these titles in second hand book shops.

(Thank you for this, Laurie, and very good to hear from you. We hope this will be the first of regular communications from deepest Bedfordshire - Ed.)

A SRI LANKAN SAFARI

By Tom Sinclair

1. HIATUS NON SERENDIPITOUS

Our driver to Heathrow arrived promptly and gave us an uneventful journey to reach the airport an hour before check-in time. After browsing in coffee, book and chemist's shops, we queued for check-in, customs and to board flight UL504 to Colombo and were ensconced in our seats in good time for our scheduled take off at 21.25 hours on 6.2.2007. Little did we know that those three queues were to be the first of many over the next 27 hours! The engines seemed to be warming up nicely when the captain announced that there was a problem with the fuel system and that our meal would be served while it was sorted out. Later announcements led to queues to disembark, collect luggage, board a coach, check in to a hotel in Hammersmith (fill in form, show passport), for hotel breakfast, to collect luggage, for coach to the Park Inn Hotel nearer Heathrow (unload luggage, fill in form, show passport), to collect luggage, for coach to airport, to check in luggage for flight, for customs and to board the aircraft which finally took off at 12 midnight on Wednesday February 7. The only saving grace was the unfailing courtesy of the airline and airport staff, one of whom dealt with one nastily-voluble passenger with admirable decisiveness thus silencing the aforesaid person. We were well looked after during the flight and were greeted by Gemma, Andrew and Daniel only 24 hours after our original E.T.A. Our first experience of being driven in Colombo traffic did little to alleviate recent tensions but the ambience of the Galle Face Hotel, not to mention a few cooling drinks and an excellent buffet meal with the waves of the Indian ocean lapping the nearby shore, did much to restore us to sanity. A good night's sleep was only slightly marred by the discovery, in the early hours, that I had managed to lock ourselves out of the en suite bathroom when responding to a previous call of nature. However, the problem (when reported by me minus dentures) was quickly resolved by the efficient staff and we were soon enjoying a lavish and leisurely breakfast on the terrace. More leisure, reading and lazing on sun beds by the swimming pool took up most of the morning and it was not long before Gemma and Daniel arrived from school. Andrew picked us up later and we drove to the Cricket Club café for a good meal and a bottle of Italian wine - Montepulciano, already known from the Wine Society.

2. ELEPHANTS, EUCALYPTUS, FLYING FOXES, TOOTH TEMPLE, TOPAZ

Having sorted out our luggage the night before and having arranged an alarm call, we were ready when our driver, Bernard, brought the Paynes to the hotel at 6.15am. We deposited our large suitcases at the flat before proceeding in our 7-seater vehicle through the almost deserted streets of Colombo except, that is, for a busy market. Seemingly interminable suburbs later gave way to rice fields and other cultivation interspersed with bustling small towns. A diversion from the road to Kandy, our destination that day, brought us to the Elephant Orphanage where animals of all ages, rescued from the jungle, are cared for, being fed and watered and taken daily to the river where the older ones are scrubbed by their keepers. We watched this and took more photos while enjoying coffee on the terrace of a riverside café. Next came a walk around an arboretum where Eucalyptus was home to the flying foxes (large bats) and the Giant Java Willow Tree, spread over half an acre, was the pièce de résistance. As well as the bats we saw a pair of toque monkeys raiding a refuse sack and walked past a house in which Lord Mountbatten had once lived. We were next driven in to Kandy and the Temple of the Tooth where there were strict security checks as well as religious rituals to be observed with the results that we had to remove headgear and footwear (inevitable tip to the guardian of the latter on recovery) and my Swiss army knife, for which Andrew got a receipt, was confiscated for the duration of our visit. The Tooth Temple is apparently a 'must' for tourists but towards the end of a very hot and tiring day I was not in the best mood to appreciate being followed by the eyes of a spooky Buddha figure and retreated. Topaz was the

name of the hotel where we were greeted by smiling staff handing us the customary warm, damp towels and cold drinks. Andrew, Gemma, Daniel and Jenny restored themselves by swimming and playing ball in the outdoor pool while I dozed and read in the air-conditioned bedroom and took photographs from the very hot balcony. A good meal, chosen from the vast buffet selection, a bottle of wine and a 'digestif' arrack, rounded off the day.

3. "I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS . . ."

After a good breakfast we were driven to Kandy Station to catch the 8am (?) train to Banderawela. According to our guidebook (Bradt Guide, very good) our train was due to leave Colombo Fort at 05.55 and, having shunted so that the observation car was at the rear, to leave Kandy at 08.55. Our actual departure time was slightly earlier. During our wait some of our party had struck up a conversation with a couple (she was American, he Danish) who had lived in Sri Lanka and were re-visiting after 10 years. They were pleasant traveling companions until Nanu Oya, the station for Nuwara Eliya and 14th on our journey so another nine before Banderawela. At every station and at many other places, we saw from our observation car at the rear, men, women and children re-emerging from the jungle to walk along the tracks a practice not to be adopted on South Eastern Rail between Kemsing and Borough Green. There was no refreshment car on the train so we were obliged to buy nuts and chocolate from the vendors who appeared at the larger stations to supplement the water we were carrying. The train rose steadily (well, fairly steadily, there were moments when the engine seemed likely to expire) during our journey through constantly changing countryside jungle, rice fields, beans, vines, tea plantations, open grassy hillsides, coniferous forests, rocky peaks, and the St. Clair waterfalls. The railway track reached its highest point of 1,911 metres (6,266 feet) above sea level 1 kilometre beyond Pattipola station. Most of the place names have a pleasing sound to the ear before reaching our destination at a mere 4,500 feet. The railway had originally terminated at Banderawela but now extends to Badulla. The weather being fine, we had opened the window to our side for cooling breezes and to facilitate photography but heavy rain began to fall shortly before our stop. Andrew managed to close the recalcitrant windows before we were completely soaked and Bernard, who had driven from Kandy with our luggage, was there to meet us and had parked the car close to the station. A short drive through the bustling town brought us to the Banderawela Hotel about which friends had waxed lyrical. We were not to be disappointed. After tea and cakes in comfortable armchairs we repaired to our en suite rooms to unpack. There we found large beds with brass knobs, an enormous wardrobe and a deep, long bath with four brass taps, two with a daub of red paint and two with a daub of green paint and one of each for the bath and the shower suspended above it. After a shower for Jenny and a luxuriating bath for me we met in the bar where the surroundings log fire, 1930s radio and gramophone - made the 'Brigadier' feel that a Gin & Tonic was the appropriate drink before a lavish four course meal. The reader will have noted by now that there was much food and drink and apparently very little walking but we had walked around the Botanical Gardens and the Elephant Sanctuary including down to the river and back and the next morning (after a 4-course breakfast) we walked through the town to visit a 'green' centre which encourages traditional crafts and gave us leaflets about walks in the area. Thus encouraged we explored some back lanes, watched some school sports while Daniel played on the swings and climbing apparatus and walked alongside the sports field to visit an Anglican church before dodging the traffic en route to the hotel for cool drinks in the garden. Later we were driven by the faithful Bernard to a nearby Tea Plantation and Factory where we were shown round by the manager who explained all the stages of production and where Sri Lankan and Tamil people work happily side by side. The heavy rain of the previous afternoon had repeated itself so we were unable to observe the tea-pickers but we had seen many on our way up in the train. After the tour we sampled Orange Pekoe, Broken Orange Pekoe and another brew which was next down on a descending scale. We drank it without milk, which was being served hot in the Sri Lankan fashion, and it was very pleasant. I thought it might be even better with a slice of lime (plentiful out there) and a dash of sugar. Another excellent meal was preceded by a game of pool with Daniel, who at nearly 10 is incredibly good at the game. We would gladly have spent another night or two in this hotel and at this higher altitude where heat and humidity were less oppressive but Andrew needed to get back to the Seafarer's Centre and we were to fit in visits to prehistoric stone carvings of an enormous Buddha and a Safari Park and a night in another hotel en route back to Colombo by car. We were again being driven by Bernard who negotiated some hair-raising hairpin bends. Even more hair-raising was the three-hour drive in the back of the ancient Land Rover, standing up most of the time and with frequent stops when our 'tracker' tapped the frame on spotting animals and birds in the Safari Park. He was very keen-eyed and showed us three varieties of Bee Eater, three different Kingfishers, several species of Hawk/Eagle, two kinds of Heron, a Hornbill and innumerable small birds. As well as the birds we saw water buffalo, elephants in the wild and I believe they can be very wild, crocodile, lizards and a species of deer whose name escapes me. Driving on dirt tracks through jungle and scrub we had to duck from time to time to avoid overhanging branches and we needed to hold tight on to the hot metal framework as the Land Rover swayed about. An exhausting experience but so packed with interest (and even incident when the Land Rover's steering gear threatened to leave us stranded in the bush with the prospect of a long walk back to base in the midday sun) that we had not noticed three hours elapsing. After tipping the Land Rover driver and the scout we transferred to our more comfortable 7-seater for a relatively short drive to the Hotel Centaur where we were greeted by the customary and very welcome hot towels and cooling drinks. Snoozing, reading and showering were my activities while the others splashed about in the swimming pool. More good food (another buffet with bewildering choice) and wine preceded an early bed in anticipation of the long drive back to Colombo the following morning.

4. DOWN TO NINETY DEGREES

We were up betimes and packed for our early departure. It soon became obvious that Bernard was determined to reach our

destination before the major rush-hour which coincides with schools closing at 1.30pm, having opened at 7.45am. We had already experienced the aggressive driving of Sri Lankan bus and other drivers but Bernard's style was something else. However, we were safely at the Paynes' apartment and were soon enjoying cups of tea. Meanwhile Andrew had driven to the Seafarers' Centre, where we were to visit him next day, but returned in time to order a Chinese meal for us to share and to draw a cork or two. The Mission to Seafarers (formerly 'to Seamen') had not had a chaplain for nearly 10 years and it was good to see how much had been achieved by way of improvements in the 6 months the Paynes had been there. A chief engineer from an American cruise liner was chatting to Andrew over a beer when we arrived and we soon joined them after a tour of the centre, including a brief game of table tennis with Daniel but not including the lessons in vertical defecation which would have been required to use some of the toilet facilities. Guided by Gemma we walked through the oppressive heat to the bank for some much needed cash and to the old-fashioned barbers' shop where Daniel and I had appointments. After a light lunch in a nearby hotel we visited a shopping centre where I found a comfortable chair and read my book. Returning to the heavily-guarded centre with our purchases by Tuk-tuk (3-wheeled taxi/motorized rickshaw), Gemma led us haughtily past military personnel to find Andrew and give him the 'doggy bag' which she had abstracted from the hotel restaurant, knowing that several ship visits would have left him no time for lunch. Later we were taken by the mission's driver to various shops including, after a search, one which could photocopy the relevant page of my passport which 'Uncle Noel', the travel agent who had organized our trip, needed to go with my travellers' cheques. Home to the air-conditioned apartment and very welcome tea and, after Andrew came home, to the Cricket Club café for another good meal.

5. *SUN, SAND AND SERENDIPITY*

After a second night in the apartment to the accompaniment of car and bus hooters we were off next morning to Bentota, pausing for a lavish breakfast at the Mount Lavinia Hotel, which overlooked the sea from a rocky promontory with distant views of the Fort (Port). The ocean was next to our hotel in Bentota and evidence of the Tsunami in December 2005 was still visible along that south western coastline. Our delight at our spacious room with hibiscus flowers on the beds and refreshing shower was slightly marred by the discovery that the newly-painted bathroom door had left a mark on Jenny's skirt but again the hotel staff responded promptly and efficiently and the skirt suffered no permanent damage. Andrew's attempts (after another good buffet supper) to rescue our sun loungers from the German couple in the adjoining ground-floor bedroom proved in the morning to have been unavailing but reports of an incipient 3rd world war were later revealed to have been highly exaggerated. The hotel boasted a fine outdoor swimming pool in which Daniel exhibited his prowess at another sport but the greater joy for Jenny was splashing in the salty ocean breakers. Much warmer, I was told, than the North Atlantic in which I had learned to swim but still a contrast to the blazing hot sands when I went for a paddle later. A very pleasant place; the food and service were excellent and the sea breezes alleviated the heat and humidity.

6. *MORE WILDLIFE*

On our second day we walked along a sandy track to meet our driver and guide for a pre-arranged motor-boat trip on the nearby estuary. As well as seeing much wildlife (kingfishers, bee-eaters, herons, cormorants, monitor lizards and a crocodile) we saw a new bridge being built, rubbish being burnt by the waterside and, much more pleasurably, coconuts being used in a variety of traditional ways at a family-run, riverside, open air workshop. The lady who greeted us was 'Mum' who later demonstrated the use of the fibres for making rope by hand and 'Granny' had tended the coconuts while the fibre was being softened in natural water basins. 'Grandpa' came in on a bicycle laden with coconuts. Later we spotted some primitive machinery made of old cycle wheels. Cleverly-carved elephants and other animals, serving spoons etc., all made from coconuts and timber from their trees, were on sale in a little shop but this part of the business is dwindling because the carving craft is dying. Next our hostess was chopping the tops off fresh coconuts and inserting straws in them so that her small child could bring them to us. The coconut milk had an unusual flavour not like other forms.

7. *BACK TO REALITY (for some)*

We returned to Colombo on the Sunday afternoon so that Andrew could prepare for work and Daniel for school on the Monday. Gemma, whose work as a classroom assistant is voluntary because of local rules about not employing foreigners, was not due back until Wednesday. The Mission's driver took Jenny and Gemma to the shops on a 'Sari Safari' before driving me to the Galle Face Hotel for a blissful morning, reading my book and drinking coffee and beer on the terrace. I was later taken to a café near Daniel's school and introduced to the proprietor who allowed me to sit and wait for Gemma and Jenny before sampling his wares. To the British School then to encounter pupils of all nationalities, meet the Headmaster, view Gemma's classroom and collect a very red-faced Daniel, who had been playing basketball. An afternoon of careful packing (Swiss army knife in the big suitcase to be followed by razor and blades in the morning) was followed by a good meal before a fairly early bed. A discussion of the logistics had revealed that it would be possible for the driver to take Daniel to school and return to take us to the airport in time to check in for our flight 3 hours before take off. We bade farewell to Andrew and Daniel before a leisurely breakfast and final packing. A slightly anxious wait for the driver was soon over and Gemma accompanied us to the airport, several miles north of the city, saying good bye at the gates before being driven back to Colombo.

8. *DOWN TO EARTH*

No hotel porter or driver to handle our baggage now so we were soon trundling our wheeled big suitcases and carrying our hand luggage through long corridors to check in (at the Business Class desk at no extra charge) and go through Customs. A long wait was whiled away with reading, drinking coffee and watching planes and people before another long walk towing

suitcases when our flight was called to the departure lounge for Gate 7. There we showed our tickets and passports and were given our boarding passes and sat ourselves comfortably with luggage to hand. Soon, however, there was another announcement calling us to Gate 9 departure lounge where the airport staff indulged with more procedural palaver with tickets, passports and replacement boarding cards with the same seat numbers. It was not too long before we were called on board, children first and then in seat number order. Once on board the flight was uneventful apart from occasional turbulence and the food was reasonable. However, 11 and a half hours is a long time to be reading eating, drinking, dozing and watching the screen which showed us maps of our flight progress, altitude, temperature and E.T.A. at Heathrow. Down to earth, literally, at 19.30 hours GMT but after being driven home it was about 3am on Wednesday by Sri Lankan time and even I did not feel like going to the Rose & Crown for a restorative Guinness as Andrew had predicted. Tea & toast, then bedde.

COMEDY CORNER

from Bill Gillibrand

No Flies on Them . . .

A HOUSEWIFE returned home after a shopping trip to be confronted by her husband, who announced that he had killed five flies in the kitchen while she was out. He went on to say that three of the flies were males and the other two were females. She was staggered to hear this, as her husband was not that clever when she left for the shops, so she asked him how he knew the sexes of the flies. "Well," he said, "the three males gathered around an empty beer can, and the two females were on the 'phone!"

