

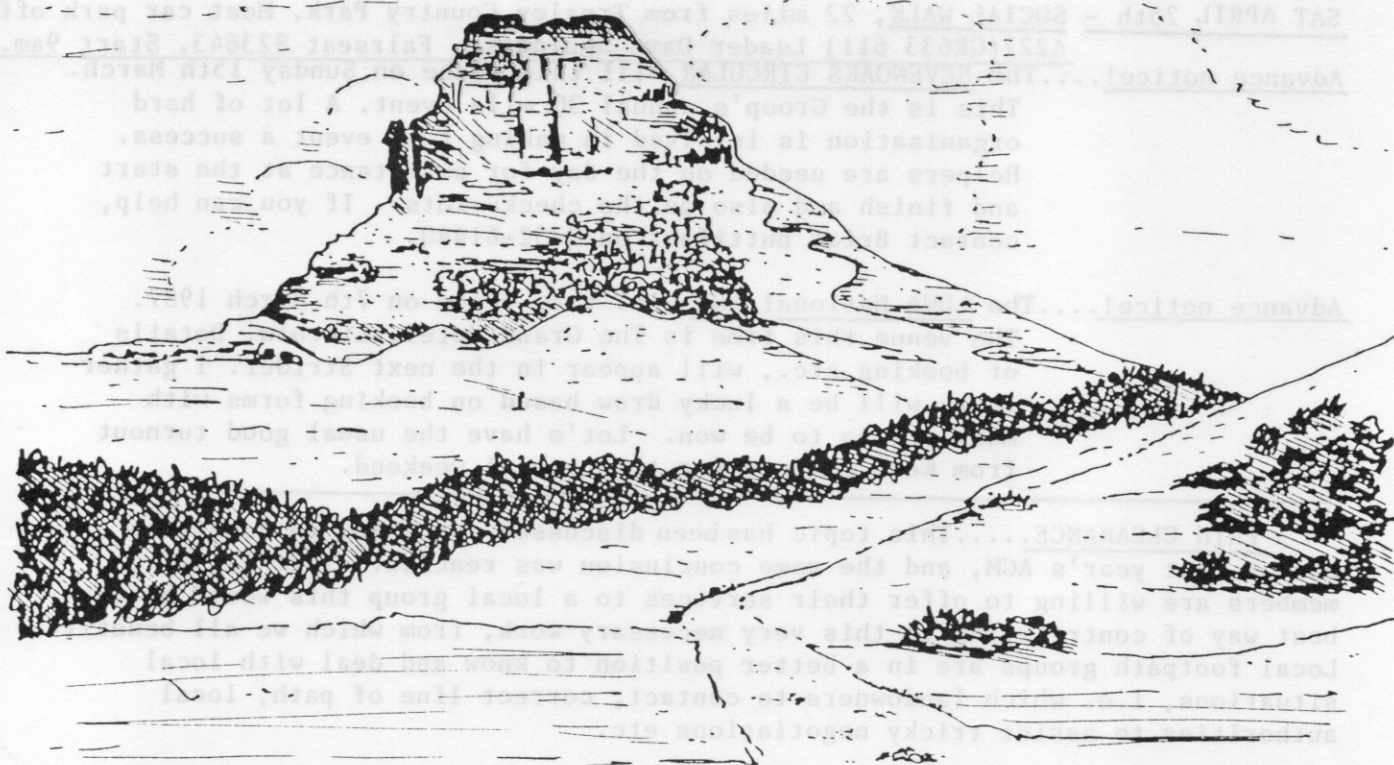


LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION

Kent Group

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

NEWSLETTER



DECEMBER 1986

NUMBER 12



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EDITED BY

LAURIE LOWE

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PROGRAMME OF EVENTS - December 1986 - February 1987.

FRI DECEMBER 12th - CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING at the 'Bull', Otford from 7.30.
Enjoy a Christmas drink with the group - free sandwiches!!

FRI JANUARY 16th - NIGHT HIKE. Meet at the 'King's Head', Charing at 10pm for a drink of 'courage' before leaving from the car park near the church at 11 pm. Leaders are Peter Barnett [redacted] and Laurie Lowe [redacted] Distance approximately 22 miles.

FRI JANUARY 23rd - GROUP AGM at St Edith Hall, Kemsing. 7.30 for 8 pm.
All members are earnestly requested to attend.

SAT FEBRUARY 14th - 'TRAVEL WITH TREVOR' - a 20 mile circular walk from Farningham Road Station (555 694) leaving at 9 am. Pub stop en route of course! Leader Trevor Blake, [redacted].

THU FEBRUARY 19th - SLIDE EVENING at The Kelsey Arms, Tunbridge Wells. 7.30 for 8.00 pm. "Walking in Kent" by Keith Potter of the Ramblers Association.

SAT APRIL 25th - SOCIAL WALK, 22 miles from Trosley Country Park. Meet car park off A227(GR633 611) Leader Dave Sheldrake. [redacted]. Start 9am.

Advance notice!....The SEVENOAKS CIRCULAR will take place on Sunday 15th March.

This is the Group's annual 30 mile event. A lot of hard organisation is involved in making this event a success. Helpers are needed on the day for assistance at the start and finish and also on the checkpoints. If you can help, contact Brian Buttifant on [redacted].

Advance notice!....The LDWA National AGM will take place on 7th March 1987. The venue this time is The Grand Hotel, Lincoln. Details of booking etc., will appear in the next Strider. I gather there will be a lucky draw based on booking forms with many prizes to be won. Let's have the usual good turnout from Kent members for this social weekend.

PATH CLEARANCE.....This topic has been discussed twice now in committee and at last year's AGM, and the same conclusion was reached. That is, if members are willing to offer their services to a local group this would be our best way of contributing to this very necessary work, from which we all benefit. Local footpath groups are in a better position to know and deal with local situations, i.e. which landowners to contact, correct line of path, local authorities to assist tricky negotiations etc.

The Kent Rights of Way Council, which has now been disbanded, did much good work to preserve our paths but lack of funds made their task difficult. We were affiliated to this body. The Kent branch of the Ramblers Association has now largely taken over the work of KROWC and we have now affiliated to the Kent RA mainly in recognition and support of their valuable work.

One of their hard working officials will be showing us some Kentish slides in February and will no doubt depict some of their work in the county. If any of our members do not know who to contact in their area for footpath clearance please let me know and I will try and find out for you.

Brian Buttifant, Hon. Sec.

ON THE SAXON SHORE WAY

By Brian Buttifant

As I waited at Herne Bay station for Trevor, Richard and Ron, the evening sun was warm and the sky promised a good start to our night walk, this was contrary to the forecast, which spoke of a wet weekend.

The lads arrived at 7.45 pm and 15 minutes later we were off along the sea front. Darkness had fallen when we got to Reculver, so realising that this was probably our last chance of a beer, we called in at the 'King Ethelbert'. From here we struck inland to follow what the guide book described as 'The Lost Seaway' - the Wansum Channel or the coastline as it was in Saxon times. This section took us over the marshes of East Kent which, with the moon shining on the waters of the dykes and the River Stour, reminded me of my home area of the Fens. The lights of the cooling towers of Richborough Power Station were seen from miles and as we progressed along the banks of the river, their massive bulk loomed larger. We left the river and then found ourselves in a new car compound!! After scrambling out onto the main road into Sandwich, we read the warning notices..... Oh well, the dogs must have had a sleeping draught.

It was as we made our way towards Pegwell Bay that the threatening storm broke. The lightning was spectacular over the sea but the heavy rain was a bit much as we walked over the golf courses to Deal. Soon it was getting light and this section to Dover was probably the most scenic of our route and fortunately the rain had stopped, so we were able to enjoy this early morning walk over the cliffs to Dover and thoughts of a preplanned breakfast helped even more. The cliff walking gave us good views of the busy Channel shipping and later as the weather brightened, the coast of France was clearly visible.

Some feet were beginning to get sore so the pace slackened and when we got to Folkestone, Trevor and Richard were overcome by tiredness. We all know what happens to Trevor wherever he sleeps - yes we have 'heard' it all before!! After fish and chips and a beer of two (who's counting ?) progress waned even more and arrangements were made for an earlier pick-up in Hythe. We had walked about 50 miles, not as far as had been planned but we had enjoyed ourselves, which is what it is all about.

In closing we must again offer our grateful thanks to Bryan Clarke for picking us up so promptly.

The HAWKHURST RAMBLE

by Eileen Emery

We were to start from Hawkhurst car park at 9 am. After a short delay due to a mix up over which car park, we eventually started off by 10 am. on what was to be a really super social walk.

There were 10 humans and 3 four legged friends. Kim the eldest and most docile Alsatian you could wish to meet, Jess a real faithful border collie and Bertie the Bounder, who I feel sure will need watching or Brian will have several paternity suits on his hands!!

The weather was perfect - a real Indian Summer's day - we had superb views over some truly lovely Kentish countryside. A stop in the delightful village of Rolvenden for a pub lunch at the Bull where we were able to sit outside in the sunshine and munch our grub.

We proceeded on our way across a field of what looked like a herd of harmless yearlings, only to discover that they were very frisky, inquisitive young bullocks. We must have looked a peculiar bunch scurrying to the stile, at the same time the bravest among us were chasing the offending creatures away.

A tea stop found us in a freshly cut straw field, a little prickly but the view compensated for the discomfort. We continued on our way through another field

of bullocks only this time we were prepared for them, the bravest shooing them away whilst the not so brave made quick tracks for the stile.

Many thanks to Maurice for a thoroughly enjoyable walk, also for the cup of tea back at his 'in the midst of renovating' oast house.

THE BULLOCK SMITHY

by John Probert (524)

As another group member commented last year, I was having second thoughts about the Bullock Smithy, but this time I intended to be there, and having arrived at Colin Harris' home the night before, we could start out before the streets were aired for the journey to Hazel Grove in the Manchester area.

One of the organisers was having some nasty things to say about the three people who had promised to come along and start the walk but had not turned up, so I suggested that he had a real blacksmith to ring out the anvil and I was promptly given the job! My efforts to have the anvil placed at the other side of the recreation ground, so that I could get out of the gate first, came to no avail and at 12 noon I thumped seven barrels out of the anvil and legged it for the gate behind 150 others all trying to get out of the gate and of course by this time it had started to rain.

A short road walk took us out into open country and onto the first checkpoint at five miles. Then over farm land to Whalley Bridge and onto the open moors to Edale. A cold wind blowing deters any tendency to linger plus the fact that the checkpoint had run out of hot drinks and was just brewing up. On then out of the car park and up over Edale Cross and on into Castleton. By the time we had reached Millers Dale it was getting dark and we had left Colin quite a long way behind but I knew that he would be grouped up for the night. We press on in our group of three (the minimum). On reaching the Cat and Fiddle, I decided to change my socks as the amount of road walking had matted the two pairs together and they were very uncomfortable. After this we head for Shining Tor and within ten minutes the socks are wet through again! Oh well, press on, following a stone wall for most of the Tor.

At day break we are off the moor and following fields and tracks to Lyme Park Country Estate and a fast slog back to Hazel Grove and breakfast. A most enjoyable walk. Colin came in about two hours later but still well inside the 24 hour limit, and this being his first walk since his broken ankle. We agree that he has done very well on such a tough walk. The journey home provided enough time to unwind and ruminate on the wonders of long distance walking!!!

Most Kent members will know that in early September Ian Waddell attempted a 200 mile plus run to raise money for Valence School, Westerham. He was accompanied throughout the 'Megarun' by Dan Coffey and David Coward. Dan is an experienced ultra distance runner, and has a number of long distance records to his name. He holds the 1000 km U.K. track record, the 'over 50' 1000 mile, 1000 km and 1500 km records and he has recorded the world best 'over 50' 6-day track record.

The following is Dan's accout of Ian's Megarun. It has been submitted for publication in "Marathon and Distance Runner" and is reproduced here with the author's kind permission.

"STEPS BEYOND THE LIMIT....."

by Dan Coffey

What does one do when a statement has been made publicly to attempt a run in excess of two hundred miles over fairly difficult terrain inside sixty hours? See it through? Come out in a rash? Twist an ankle at the last minute or hope it was all a bad dream? This was the dilemma that faced Ian Waddell of the Swanley Striders at 01.55 hours on Thursday morning September 4th.

It was the culmination of eighteen months planning to run from Valence School, Westerham to Sevenoaks via the North Downs Way, Saxon Shore Way, Sussex Border Path and returning along The Wealdway. The main purpose was to raise money for the physically handicapped pupils of Valence School and also the Wings Appeal for the Royal Air Force. The motto of the school is "steps beyond the limit".

At 02.00 hours the moment had arrived. Ian set off at a brisk pace to the cheers of supporters, friends, back-up crews. The night was cold, clear and starlit. In order that he should not get too lonely, Squadron Leader David Coward of RAF Biggin Hill and myself accompanied him. At various intervals back-up crews were waiting with drinks; dawn arrived, not a single tourist had been seen, not another human being. Where were they all? Sensibly in bed!

Breakfast is taken, then on to Medway Bridge. Check watches, two and a quarter hours ahead of schedule, so leave a message for local ATC who were going to guide us. "Running through early, cannot stop - sorry!" Hope they do not mind! Now going so fast that back-up vehicles are left behind, all communications with them lost for two hours. Ian is now desperate for water and we stray off course. A telephone is needed. There is a Happy Eater, David makes contact with communications HQ at RAF Biggin Hill and gives our position. Meanwhile Ian sits on the steps of the Happy Eater, a group of businessmen leave, look at him, and comment loudly that they expect this is another of those fellows making their way from on DHSS office to the next. Little did they realise that he was in the process of raising over £10,000 for children at great cost to himself!

Back on course, the North Downs Way reveals great views and backbreaking hills, a local farmer decides that a challenge is needed, so he has ploughed his field right up to the edge on an uphill section. Suddenly a figure emerges coming towards us, he is a member of the back-up team carrying water! Spirits revive as jam butties and more water are consumed, check watches - no time lost, so away again.

Soon the quite village of Hollingbourne is reached. The weather is very warm, Ian seeks inspiration with feet in a bowl of cold water. On the move again to the swirl of bagpipes nobody is hallucinating, Biggin Hill's piper has arrived resplendent in kilt, and pipes the runners out of the village with a selection of Scottish tunes. At this point we pass our first walker at great speed, take a lunch stop at Charing Hill and the same walker strides by; this is not good for one's ego as he looks really fresh!

Wye is soon reached and left behind. Stowting Court is the next target, this was a pleasant pub tucked away in the depths of Kent, in fact everybody got lost trying to find it until we discovered that it had been renamed "The Tiger"! An hour's break, food and a pleasant horizontal position with the sun setting on the first full day.

New shifts arrive to take over the back-up vehicles and Pete and Laurie from Kent LDWA also turn up to lead us through the difficult section leading to the Saxon Shore Way. They had their priorities in the right order..... pub first for a beer, but due to the fact that the runners were so far ahead of schedule it did not open until the party were due to move off! Delicate negotiations ensued, resulting in a quick pint and an even quicker departure! On into the night which became colder by the hour, along the Royal Military Canal which gave off a damp, bone-chilling mist.

The back-up vehicles had been fitted with amber flashing lights on their roofs, they made rendezvous at various road intersections ahead of us. There was always a great psychological lift when the shout went up - "I can see a flasher" even though it was often over a mile away. A slight diversion occurred on this section. The trail was narrow with the canal on one side; out of the darkness a herd of cows emerged, no real problem was envisaged until our travelling farming expert Ian, casually mentioned that one was a bull! A great silence descended and the pace drastically slackened as he was moving ahead of us..... fortunately he was a love sick animal and just trotted along until he found a convenient point to leave us to go our way.

The River Rother Lock (try saying that when you are tired and cold at 2 in the morning ! Ed.) was reached, twenty four hours had passed, one hundred miles covered and we were still ahead of time. An hour's break and a change of guides with grateful thanks to Pete and Laurie and a warm welcome to Ernie Bishop who was going to lead us through the Sussex Border Path. He apologises that some of the route may be difficult and a few stiles a little awkward. We learn that he is a master of understatement and soon begin to appreciate some of the special 'Ernie's treats'. Brambles that reach out to grab the ankles, ferns which cling to the body, nettles seven feet high that require a quick hunt for dock leaves. Ploughed land, lumpy earth, burnt stubble, young bullocks playing at matadors and picadors, encouraging us to even more world best sprints.

It was not all like this, there were the easier bits; little hills that made the north side of the Eiger look like a nursery slope. Rustic wooden bridges with planks missing, deep vertically sided ditches too wide to jump and dogs rushing out of farms to greet us. Were they friendly? I promised them a Bonio on my return, they are probably still waiting!

The views are spectacular as the quiet dawn heralds another glorious September day; Bodiam Castle comes into view then passes by and a little later we are seated in Ernie's house eating his food, having changed our feet. Ian confesses later that he took a shower. This was strictly forbidden on the grounds of becoming too comfortable! We move on to Bewl Bridge Reservoir, idyllic in the warm sun, a passer-by wishes us good luck, he has heard about the event on Kent Radio. Everything is going smoothly - too smoothly! We leave the beauty spot and so does one back-up vehicle, the other refuses to start. Rumours abound, main bolts to engine sheared off, mechanic on way, be at least five hours. It turns out later to be a jammed ignition lock. The RAF lads in the moving back-up take it all in their stride. While we continue to eat up the miles, they pick up every rendezvous, go off shopping and still get ahead with bacon butties sizzling by the road side just after Boars Head.

Ernie has brought his dog Clem along for the last part of his section; she is in her element and enjoys every minute. A fox breaks cover with a 300 metre advantage, Clem takes off in pursuit, covering 50 metres before wisely deciding that that was quite far enough. Evening is approaching and we arrive at Ham Farm for the final section. George the piper had popped up with bagpipes in a cornfield, a farmer's wife had treated us to a pot of tea and put five pounds towards the charity. There was a carnival spirit felt, over an hour and a half in hand and just the final effort to make.

The party of comparative strangers at the beginning had welded into a family supporting each other. An RAF helper had been bitten by the 'ultra' bug and was now trying to keep with us for a full twenty four hours. Ernie's wife Celia arrived to take him and Clem home and another guide arrived to take us on to pastures new along the Wealdway. There is no doubt that all our guides did sterling service, they saved considerable time as we would have had to check and re-check so many footpaths and probably still have gone off course.

Now for Tonbridge, reflective clothing put on again for the night, torches inspected, a quick count of the party which is growing steadily and off again. It was at this point that members of the local Rotary Club appeared and travelled ahead of us by car to little village pubs announcing our imminent arrival and doing the rounds with a collecting bucket; The interest and generosity was all very encouraging.

Shortly before Tonbridge, the Swanley Striders joined to give support to their fellow member Ian and ran with us into the town. A final break of one hour is taken only to be woken by polite requests as to what form of warm nourishment was needed before leaving. The last dawn was faintly beginning to make itself known.

Ian is suffering from blisters and soon after leaving Tonbridge the track disappeared completely causing consternation and extra roadwork, however, Barnes Street eventually emerges out of the gloom and there is Peter Rickards waiting to take us on to Wrotham Heath. The Post House Hotel is reached an hour ahead of schedule. The management had put the resources of their Leisure Centre at our disposal, this meant hot showers and the unbelievable luxury of a jacuzzi, an out-of-this-world experience for tired aching bodies.

A police escort arrives, plus George with his bagpipes. Many members of the 'Hearts of Oak' come to run into the finish and the last eight miles disappear quickly to the swirl of the pipes and the company of Sarah Rowell who has also joined us. At Sevenoaks up St John's Hill to a dramatic increase in pace, until the centre is reached where the Mayor, civic dignitaries and many fund organisers were waiting with a 'reet warm welcome'. Two wheelchairs are presented to the school, tried out immediately by two pupils who want to have a race!

Eighteen months planning, many doubts and fears, then this wonderful moment for Ian and his wife Debbie: he had achieved what many thought was just not possible. He had made the lives of a lot of folk a good deal richer. Well done Ian, you took a lot of steps beyond the limit!

Dan Coffey.

Editor's note:- Ian, on behalf of his fellow runners Dan and Dave, was subsequently presented with the first award for the Sevenoaks Chronicle Sports-person of the Year. The award, in the form of a cut-glass decanter, was in recognition of the trio's feat of running 230 miles virtually non-stop and raising over £10,000 for the school.

THE WELSH FOUR DAY WALKS

by John Probert (524)

Having heard quite a lot about the Welsh Four Day Walks, I decided in plenty of time that I would go and see what it was all about. If you book your train ticket with the Welsh Tourist Board two months in advance, there is quite a concession to be had - £16.50 instead of £40.

I arrived on Monday evening in time for the briefing and went straight to the Victoria Hall in Llanwrtyd Wells. The briefing was just a get-together to explain the basics about the walks and the printed map that is provided for each walker.

Tuesday at 9 am. saw 200+ walkers in the hall and we were addressed by Roger Livsey, the local MP who started on a rather sombre note, reminding us of the death of Lord Crawshaw and he asked everyone to observe a one minute silence. Life touches each one of us for just a breath of time and then moves on. Dick Crawshaw will be missed by all of us.

On now to the mundane, checkcards punched and out into the bright morning sun, turn left over the bridge and along the highstreet to turn onto a moorland road. We pound uphill on that road for over an hour, setting up the feet for tomorrow's blisters! At Abergwesyn we headed for the open moors, forest and tussock grass for several miles, crossing streams and bogs and again on to rough tracks to skirt around Llyn Brianne reservoir. Across the dam, beneath which an enormous fan-shaped jet of water some fifty feet high erupts. We noted it earlier this year on the Red Kite Trail.

Push on following the waymarkers that were very easy to miss - a blue card on the green background of trees and grass. An enormous climb now to 1600 feet to the top of the world, with the view that leaves me short of words and with air as sweet as in the Alps. A great and lovely place, and then some Welsh wizard goes and spoils it by dropping us down off of the track for about 500 feet down a fire break that was almost vertical (and very dangerous) only to turn right and in ten yards turn right again to climb back up to the track again! Left now and away downhill for the last six miles to the finish in 7.5 hours for 26 miles of very tough going.

Day Two - Bright sunshine with an overnight frost on the ground. If you have walked the Red Kite Trail you know about this. A 7 am start with a coach to take us to the start at Llanwrthw. We started with the inevitable 5 miles of road and then onto moorland with its tussock grass, to pick up the Trail just before Gro Hill. More rough tracks with the Caban Goch Reservoir some 600 ft below. We drop down to water level and back up the other side to the moors again, only to find walkers going in all directions as some bright spark had been round and taken out most of the markers. Having been there two months earlier, I had no problem and headed southwest to higher ground, dull overcast with a strong wind blowing. The experienced backpacker will find a good sheep-track and follow it, providing it is heading in the right direction and the one on the high ground was what I was heading for. Sheep won't let you down. Follow their tracks into boggy ground and your boots will hardly get wet. Get to one side or the other of the trail and you can be over your knees. On finding the track, I gave the walkers a wave to get to the high ground and some time later saw about twelve of them in single file on my sheep track.

Dropping down to look for the cairn over a mile away, I came across a chap that had wandered around for twenty minutes looking for flags and I pointed out the cairn to him. Told him to take a bearing of 170 from the cairn to hit the sheep sheds at Pen Coed. On reaching said sheds, he was right with me. Good walking now with lots of forest and long hard climbing to farms and field tracks. Thinking back it was here that one of our stalwart backpackers had freed a sheep from a wire-mesh fence. It had been slowly choking itself in its struggle. Several miles now on roads to the finish. A good day with 26 Welsh miles in just under 7 hours. My estimate was more like 22 !!

Day Three, with a nice clean pair of breeches - will have a slow quiet day. Started off at 8 am with road and track through forest with bright sunshine until we came to an enormous drop down to the left. It would have been dangerous climbing down facing the bank but I had to go down the first bit facing out - quite safe unless you slip, and of course I slipped and was on my way in mid-air - all 30 ft of it! No problem, being a good parachutist that I once was, I went into a full spread, counted to three, and hit the mud with my face! Fortunately the mud was knee deep or I would have been in trouble. A voice from above said "Cor Blimey mate, are you OK?" The owner of the voice then came down feet first and nearly landed on top of me, but I was up and away I dare not look back because of the big grin I was sporting and what is more his language was far worse than my own!

Immediately you are in the mud for about three hundred yards, ankle deep at times, then into forest, uphill, more bog and tussock for a good two miles with water over the boots most of the way.

Wales is all about going up and down with not much in between. Still climbing to 1000 ft with dark cloud coming up and thunder in the hills around. I was on my own for so long that I thought I was the only one on the walk. Along a ridge now with the road and checkpoint below. Now on the Devil's Staircase, a long steep downhill with corners to left and right. Over the bridge to the CP an hour and a half from the time that I first spotted it. Uphill through forest again and out onto open loorland for five miles to two cairns and then drop down to follow the river for another four miles with the odd bog and rocky outcrop to make life more interesting.

At the road turn right to the CP, an old chapel miles from anywhere. A quick cup of tea and back-track along the road then uphill over farmland - very steep - to join the Red Kite Trail once again and a long slog on track and roads for what we thought was an easy finish. Then going downhill, we find a left turn into the forest and then onto the 300 yards of mud that we started out on and the 30 ft that I came down in such a hurry! Safely back up and not a bad climb to the forest track and the finish. A good 28 miles.

Day Four - Start 8 - 9 am. A good walk mostly on forest tracks and fields with just one bad piece of forest where the trees had been cut down and the brush-wood left to rot over the years to help stop erosion. After this section the walk was easy, ending up at about 16 miles to finish at 2.05.

To sum up - It is a long way to go for a walk but well worth it. The organisation is first class down to the most unexpected problem i.e. at the last minute on Thursday, a farmer refused permission to cross his land and a hurried route had to be way-marked to join up in the correct place with the day's walk. Good food and hospitality can be had at the Drovers' Cafe in the square. The entry stood at 230 with people from five countries. One young lady from Seattle was presented with a cut-glass goblet being the person to have travelled the greatest distance to the walks.

Bed and breakfast at Mrs Hill's at Cartrefle turned out to be a gourmet's paradise. Breakfast was so large and inviting that I missed the start on three mornings and a packed lunch for fl was anything from beef to turkey with little delicious home-made cakes or mince pies. I will be first in line to book for next year!

ROUBAIX 28 HOUR ROAD WALK

by Phil Hastings

Nine started and nine finished! This year we assembled our largest team of walkers and attendants to make up our challenge in this very long road walking event at Roubaix in Northern France. The French organisers were over the moon by the response from the English walkers to take part in their walk. Previously only a very small group had gone across to France.

We were most fortunate to have a very experienced and competent team of attendants. Apart from the ladies, all were "Centurion" walkers themselves. Amongst this group was Gareth Davies 'wine buyer for the NAAFI'. A mountain of equipment was also taken for the smooth and efficient running of our bus shelter checkpoint.

On Friday morning we found ourselves down at the Dover Dock gates. Once on the ferry there was a rush upstairs to the restaurant for our now traditional cross-channel meal. What a delightful way to while away the one and a quarter hour crossing to Calais. Once through customs, it was a swift trip around to the intercontinental hypermarket to buy our presents for 'her in doors' and French wines. Having loaded up with beer and wine, in addition to our equipment, the

mini-bus groaned on its axles as we set course for Roubaix.

We motored our way into Roubaix along now very familiar streets, where we would be walking in 24 hours time. Past the famous and historical hole-in-the wall urinal, around a corner and up to our Hotel de la Gare to renew acquaintances with the hotel proprietor and his wife. We had a quick wash and clean up before going down the road for the big Friday night gathering to meet all the other competitors. Loads of real authentic French type atmosphere. Someone remarked that the cafe owner reminded him of Rene in the TV programme 'Hello, Hello!' The two nuns would be seen lurking in the bogs out the back of the cafe. We all enjoyed the supper and a couple of beers in rather crowded and noisy surroundings. A great hub-hub of languages with greetings to officials and friends alike. As much as we would like to socialise, it was essential that we get our heads down to get as much sleep as possible.

The morning of the race is rather busy. Firstly there is the compulsory medical check at the Red-Cross centre. A quick check on heart/lungs/pulse etc. Once this has been negotiated, it is around the corner to a scruffy little cafe, where Mr Louis is checking through the walkers on the list. Here we paid our 50 Franc entry fee and collected out race number. A last minute toilet stop as the sense of the occasion gets to the walkers. A local band marches off in front playing "The Saints Come Marching In", while we the walkers come shuffling in behind to the starting point in the town square of Croix. Market stalls and a fun fair are going full blast as the 91 competitors finally set off at 1.00 pm on the Saturday afternoon.

I soon found myself walking along with Ian Bradwell 'cottage pie buyer to the gentry'. This was all taken at a gentle even pace well within our capabilities so as not to take too much out of ourselves on the initial 45 km lap of the course. The rest of the English walkers were now over the hills and far away. Roger 'Rambo' Lemoine and 'Blisters' Hayes followed us around in a car to dispense drinks or chocolate biscuits. There were some nasty freshly tarred and gritted stretches of road which I felt would cause havoc with feet and blisters later in the race. Eventually we all arrived back in Roubaix and passed the main control point for the first time. Now we had to settle down to a steady plod around a 6.8 km lap. It was reassuring to know that there would be a cup of tea waiting for us, around at our checkpoint. Mick Marshall's tea carries a government health warning - "This tea could ruin your health".

The leaders had already lapped the back markers. you simply ignore what everyone else is doing and just get on with your race as best you can. On our way back into town we had to walk along a most delightful tree-lined boulevard beside a park. I was amazed to note how many weddings had taken place that day. The groom and his bride in white gown were having the happy moments recorded with photographs taken in this most beautiful setting. This was by far the most pleasant aspect of the route and was in stark contrast to the seemingly endless laps around the scruffy Algerian end of Roubaix.

Our checkpoint staff were working overtime as there was always someone arriving or departing. Some serious tea drinking was done by one and all. It was not only the English walkers enjoying the tea, as our Dutch friends got stuck in as well. It seems that people never go to sleep in France as there are scores of people milling about town. The little bars never seem to close. At one corner on a small stand, a quartet of musicians were playing away till late at night. I would like to stop and listen but I had to press on. Down the high street was a disco pumping out very loud pop music. I am sure they have not heard of the noise abatement society!! At the top end of the high street we are able to check our position on the master score board and find out your general forward progress in kilometres, and then convert into Christian units of MPH. From time to time throughout the night walkers retire or step off the road to

have a rest or medical care to blistered feet or a rub down with a copy of "The Sporting Life", or perhaps even an organ transplant.

In the early hours of the morning a thick fog settled down over Roubaix and visibility was down to 100 yards. It was an eerie sight seeing walkers either disappear around a corner or pass on the opposite side of the road. This fog caused havoc with the vocal chords and by dawn everyone was complaining of sore throats. Again plenty of tea to lubricate the tubes.

So far so good! We had all managed to walk our way through the long night section, but we were all going through the pain barrier. This was now a blood and guts affair which sorts the men from the boys. Now it is the most unseemly of characters who keep pressing on. The sane from the insane. There is still some ten hours of walking to be done before the finish at 5 pm. This was the crisis period for most people, but with encouragement and that bulldog spirit, we all eased our way into late afternoon. Towards the end I sat down on a park bench for a quick snooze. It was bliss but some Frenchman insisted on talking to me - "Allez! Allez vous!"

During the last hour the high street is closed to traffic and those walkers left in the race are required to promenade up and down the one and a quarter kilometre long section. By now there are some desperately tired competitors and then finally the race is won by Jean-Claude with Claudio Strepin second and Ed Shillabeer third. When the final positions were announced we found out that Ed had lost second place by a mere five seconds! This was cruel luck after 28 hours of walking, but there was no way we could let him know. A lot of race positions alter during the final melee up and down the highstreet. We had five walkers who completed over 200 kms.

A slow shuffle back to the hotel for a much needed rest. A wash and clean up before going down to the Hotel de Ville for the speeches, presentations, and prize giving. The organisers had made an error in the final positions and unfortunately for Ian Bradwell, he was caught up in the misunderstanding. He took it all in good grace as he had been completely overlooked in the final classifications. Here the organisers sportingly suggested that they would have to give him an extra big trophy next year - a good excuse to come again! You lose some, you win some - so they say! On completion of the presentations, glasses of champagne were brought round - "Your eternal youth and good health" These were treasured moments as we chatted amongst ourselves before departing to the various countries with the firm commitment of reassemble again next year and the pious hope that we would do better next time.

An evening meal over the road at an Algerian hash house where we ate Kous-Kous and kebab on a stick, tired but elated with our endeavours. Come Monday morning there is a certain amount of urgency to get away to Calais and back home.

This had been a magnificent team effort. Collectively we walked more than a thousand miles. We hear and read a great deal about training, standard times, schedules, circuit training qualifying times, diet and energy drinks, carbohydrate stacking etc, etc, but how do you quantify determination, persistence, or old fashioned bull dog spirit?

Note - This is an abridged version of a much longer article submitted by Phil. Unfortunately I have had to edit the original due to the cost related space limitations of a local group newsletter.

Laurie

WEALDEN WATERS WALK - 1986.

Some further observations by a marshall,

Checkpoint Team: Paul Bourne, Bryan Clarke (LDWA), Anita Harper (LDWA), and Ernie Pike.

Checkpoints 1 and 4 were our duty, as last year.

The weather was the best yet. Checkpoint 1 at Bewl Water was open from 11.45 am to 1.45 pm, two "walkers" arrived before time and two others arrived at 11.45 am. 63 starters went through with two quite late. Information from H.Q. said a 12 noon starter (fast) was due. We waited till 2.50 pm which we thought was as late as we could leave for checkpoint 4 but he had not passed through by then.

Checkpoint 4 was open at 5.45 pm and we settled in with a caravan and awning set up and food ready. As last year, the yacht club's dressing rooms were used as a rest and retirement area. There were, I think, 8 retirements at this stage.

Mr Pendry, the yacht club president, visited us during the evening and in his usual kindly fashion invited us to use what facilities we wanted. He gave us permission to use the upstairs lounge for sleeping in after we had finished our duties.

Food consumed was much the same as last year. Both tins of creamed rice eaten but only one tin of fruit, virtually all the bread (must remember that thin or medium sliced goes further than thick sliced), nearly nine pints of milk (tea and coffee were in great demand) and a good quantity of jam were consumed by the fifty plus walkers who got to this checkpoint.

After accounting for everyone and clearing our site we settled down on our camp beds in the yacht club lounge at 2.30 am. - an hour later than last year. We rose at about 8.30 and went to the car park for our breakfast in the caravan after which we went to H.Q. to see what help was needed before returning home.

Bryan Clarke.

VECTIS WEEKEND

by Laurie Lowe.

It was all young Dave Cowley's idea. Let's go as a group to the Isle of Wight for a long weekend and do the Vectis Marathon while we are there.

So it was that one Friday morning early in October, we assembled at Dave's for coffee and bickies before setting off on our trip abroad. Peter Rickards had taken care of the transport by 'borrowing' an ambulance which was ideal for our party consisting of Dave Cowley, John Probert, Moira and Peter Rickards, Celia and Ernie Bishop, Pauline and Pete Barnett, Eileen and myself. Clem Bishop and her mobile bean bag also accompanied us. There was ample room for all the luggage, and Clem had the whole of the centre aisle to herself and her bed. At one stage, quite early on, Peter tried to impress us with efficiency of the vehicle's brakes and a rather surprised Clem slid gracefully forward from her position at the rear to come to an abrupt stop against the back of the driver's seat!

Steady (or should it be stately?) progress was made on the way to Portsmouth. A great cheer went up when Peter eventually got the ambulance up to a reasonable mph, and we overtook our first vehicle on the M25. After this bout of excitement we returned to the slow lane for the remainder of the journey. It was quite an achievement that we managed to get to Portsmouth without stopping for food (for Pete Barnett) or a loo (for me)!

When we got to the ferry car park, Peter carefully parked alongside an articulated lorry, out of sight of the booking office. He then went to the office and explained that he had a party of eight elderly disabled and two attendants. This resulted in us getting half price fares. Clem got across free! The ferry crossing was very pleasant (especially at half price) with calm water and bright sunshine.

Once on foreign soil, we headed for "The Mount" guesthouse where we filled the available parking space with the ambulance and the house with our bodies and baggage. Mrs Skeats, the proprietress, was somewhat taken aback by the ancient ambulance and its 'patients'. Her joy was not enhanced by the sudden appearance of Clem in her establishment!

In the afternoon we filled in time in Newport with some last minute shopping and afternoon tea. Later that evening we had a good meal in a local Italian restaurant before dashing cross country to Whitwell to pick up the route description for the event the next day. Back at the guest house, we settled down for a moderately early night - only to be disturbed by a steady banging noise which I was sure came from Moira and Peter's room! I commented to Eileen that I admired the energy of some people considering it was the night before a hard walk, and then all was quiet. Five minutes later the noise began again. My admiration increased! We discovered the next morning that the noise was caused by the Victorian plumbing system of the establishment.

After an early breakfast (or two for some people) we drove into Newport for the start at the bus station. There was a sprinkling of familiar LDWA faces who had come over from the mainland for the Vectis Marathon. The weather was fine and after the mass start we made our way out of the town and into the pleasant I.O.W. countryside.

Because of an injury problem (old war wound!) I had been having, I planned to saunter out to the first checkpoint at 6 miles and then return by the same route to Newport to pick up the ambulance and take it to the finish at Whitwell. This turned out to be a convenient arrangement for all concerned. Peter had given me permission to drive the vehicle but I had not had the opportunity to familiarise myself with it. It was parked adjacent to the one-way system in the town centre, so to be certain that I knew exactly how to get out of the town, I approached a local man and asked his advice. He gave me instructions and then, as I got into the ambulance (to find out what all the knobs, etc were for) he held up the busy traffic and waved me out of the car park. I turned the ignition on, stamped on the clutch and waggled the gear lever in the general direction of what I hoped was first gear. The ambulance lurched forward over the pavement and into the one-way system. I think I drove the two miles out of town still in first gear, terrified to let go of the steering wheel. Once in the country, I pulled into a lay-by and sorted things out. Never did find the switch for the blue flashing lights! I then continued on my way, occasionally doing a bit of unintentional hedge trimming along the narrow lanes, to Brook where checkpoint 4 was in the village hall.

Ernie and the two Peters had gone through before I arrived, but it was not long before Moira, Celia, John and Dave came in together. John was suffering from some virus infection (which we all went down with a week later) and so was taking things easy. Dave was glad of John's company, he said that it prevented the two ladies from molesting him.

Pauline and Eileen - who take a much more relaxed attitude to challenge events - came in just as the checkpoint was closing, having stopped for the odd ice-cream here and there along the route. Since they were well down on time they decided to complete the rest of the journey in the ambulance. The three of us made our way back to Whitwell, via the scenic route, to find that the three fast men had finished before the marshal had arrived. Their early arrival was quite convenient, since we could use the ambulance to shuttle them back to the B&B

where they could get washed up and thereby alleviate the strain on the ancient hot water system. The party of four stayed together and finished in good spirits to give the Kent Group seven finishers and a certificate for the team award. Well done all! In the evening energy reserves were well replenished at a local fish restaurant where a table for ten had been booked for us in advance.

After another spartan breakfast we set out on Sunday morning in the van for Freshwater Bay, stopping off at an antique fair on the way. We parked at Freshwater and had morning coffee in a small cafe where we took the opportunity to book an evening meal for the ten of us. We then walked the clifftop path along past the Tennyson Memorial and out to Alum Bay and the Needles. Back at Alum Bay we sampled the tourist delights - cockles, welks, warm beer, a ploughman's lunch and gigantic ice-cream cornets (in that order). Then the boldest took the chairlift down to the beach while the rest of us wandered up to another cafe for yet more food and drink. This was followed by a gentle walk back to Freshwater just in time for the evening meal! The intake for the day was probably around three million calories.

Monday saw us on the return ferry - our proud ambulance parked hard alongside a Parkhurst police van complete with prisoners and escort. We all wanted to see the Mary Rose Exhibition and so we headed for the dockyard area. There was an American carrier in harbour and security was fairly tight. Peter was going to park his ambulance at the dockyard entrance, on double yellow lines and among the 'No Parking' cones which were there for the special occasion. We eventually persuaded him to move into a sidestreet. The ambulance, with its pile of bags and suitcases, would probably have been blown up by the security forces had we left it where Peter first stopped.

The exhibition was magnificent. It is well worth a day out - especially as the D-Day museum is also nearby. The Mary Rose itself is in a covered dry dock, where it is constantly sprayed with water to prevent premature drying out of the timbers and resultant damage through shrinkage.

The journey home from Portsmouth became something of a saga as we struggled to survive the increasing pollution from exhaust fumes which were infiltrating the interior of the vehicle from a leaky exhaust manifold. We eventually arrived back at Dave's coughing and spluttering and with running eyes. However the suffering was soon forgotten as Iris made us welcome with plentiful food and drink, while we each settled our debts with Dave who had financed the whole week weekend.

Our sincere thanks to Dave for his arrangements and to Peter for the transport (we enjoyed the fumes, honest!)

The Mount

