



LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION

Kent Group

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

NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 18

MARCH 1989

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:-

JOHN VINNELS

The committee are still open to suggestions for alternative venues for the monthly meetings. If anyone knows of a suitable pub - preferably with a private room which we can use - will they please contact any member of the committee.

DEAR EDITOR,

I read the letter from member Roger Tuckey in Newsletter 17 with interest as I too live east of the Medway and have done during my seven years of group membership.

Based upon the 1987 membership list, there are 66 members living west of the Medway and 27 to the east; these totals do not include those residing either outside of the county or in Maidstone or Tonbridge, i.e. on the Medway. It therefore seems hardly surprising that the historical centre of group activities and meetings is continued in the west of the county.

With regard to the monthly meetings, no less than five venues have been used during my period of membership (all to the west of the Medway) with each one being further westwards than the last. From my own distant experiences of searching for suitable meeting venues, it is not easy finding a reliable pub which may have a room we can use.

Over a whole year, I would think that more social events than any other are 20 - 25 mile walks, with a pub stop. I believe slide shows, family rambles and night walks only happen once each year, even though many may like to see, for example, more night walks. I have, to date, organised three group walks which fit Mr Tuckey's requirements, all being away from the west Kent area.

Perhaps Mr Tuckey would like to show members around parts of Kent he would like to walk, by organising a social walk or two. The group belongs to its members, who will decide its activities.

Keith Warman, Sittingbourne. 23 January 1989.

DEAR EDITOR,

It would appear that we have a smart person in the Kent Group, forwarding complaints (or helpful suggestions !)

Yes, we do meet in the western extremity of the county and at this point in time the committee do also come from this area, but Kent is Kent is Kent !! As far as Charing being the centre of the county, well let's walk it out and see.

It is indeed difficult to suit all tastes but let's not knock what we do, let's invite the new members to get off their butts and organise a 20 - 25 miler when ever they please, we will give them any support necessary. The slide show is a very important part of the group's social activity, showing walks that have been undertaken by members and who put themselves out to put on a show.

The Kent group was formed very early in the history of the LDWA and was the brain child of one of our prominent members. In fact, it was the second county group to be formed and the committee was made up of local members in this vastly populated area. Do come to the AGM and get on the committee whenever you feel inclined. New voices are always welcome.

Critical letters are also part of the group, so let's keep hearing from you but let us dispense with any sarcastic remarks like "visiting Kent occasionally". As a Man of Kent and born in the heart of the county, I have probably forgotten more about Kent than most members who live on the outskirts know. No, we are not natives, and yes, we are friendly, but get your facts right and then get to know us, and then shout your mouth off.

John Probert. (524)

THE WIGAN PIER WALK - Sunday 18 September 1988

DON SCOTT

There are many unlikely venues for the start and finish of LDWA events and this was one of them. Who has not read or heard of George Orwell's book and wondered whether Wigan really has a pier, - it has !

The postal strike had meant a high entry on the day and we were asked to arrive at 7.00 am. in ample time to register for the 8.00 start. Guiltily, I rolled up with 15 minutes to spare - and, of course, beat the long queues. The friendly registration was more so when they realised I was from Kent; only Bill Stirling from Essex had come from any distance.

Without a map, my plan was to toddle along in the rear of the 200+ field until I found my pace and could latch on to someone of similar speed and better prepared. Route descriptions alone can sometimes be followed but they can be indifferent. (Do not, for example, go on the Two Crosses Circuit without a map and compass or close by somebody with them). But on this walk I had no cause for concern. The description, including alterations, was impeccable. So I joined the end of the crowd, ready to go, but when we did, I was shocked to see the entire pack bear down on me. Unwittingly I was in the front! I shot off like a startled rabbit, feverishly reading the description. Fortunately the first couple of miles were along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal so there was no problem. The runners went past and I found myself walking with a young local chap who aimed to be the first walker back. He had done the walk before but had forgotten the route, had no map and packed his route description in his sack!

The canal is left to climb up through the woods of Haigh Hall Country Park, a modest 450 feet with glorious views over the Lancashire plain. Re-joining the canal for a short stretch, the Douglas Valley Way is picked up via a dis-used railway line. A mixture of riverside and canal path - all through pleasant country - eventually leads to Duxbury Park. From there, a very long 1,000 yards through woodland brings you to more open country. At several of the checkpoints, Uncle Joe's Mintballs are an unusual addition to the normal fare and a handful will keep you in top form throughout the day.

Having now reached the environs of Chorley the route swings west, crossing the M6 towards Parbold, passing over the Harrock Hill. This too is less than 500 feet but affords wide ranging views from Blackpool Tower to Southport on one side, to Winter Hill and Rivington Pike on the other. There is a spaciousness about the vast skyscape dominating the plain below. Half an orange from the marshall then a quick descent to the Douglas Valley where the river of that name and the ubiquitous canal run side by side. And it is along the latter that the final 6 miles goes. Once under the motorway again the scenery, for the first time, begins to wane. Wigan appears in the distance, the canal path meanders endlessly towards it, then the pier is thankfully and suddenly reached. The 27 miles are over!

A huge salad roll, massive slice of apple pie and cream, apple, crisps, endless tea, badge, certificate and stick of Wigan Pier rock await you, all included in the £3.50 day-of -entry fee - one of the LDWA bargains if ever there was one.

I finished 16th, a small group of walkers having passed me as I stood chatting to the jolly team at the 8th checkpoint. The latter had been at the registration, recognised me as the man from Kent and extolled me to tell everyone there about how good the walk was - which I am glad to do. Not everything in the north is "dark, satanic mills" and I urge you to see this for yourself. Even if you don't like canal paths you won't mind the sections on this walk. The 4th event is next year -try to go.

THE RABIES STORY - Part 2

JOHN PROBERT (524)

Rabies is a viral disease of the central nervous system. The signs in dogs are diverse, but for the sake of convenience they may be divided into two categories; 'furious' and 'dumb'. Furious rabies has always been comparatively easy to recognise and there are accurate descriptions that date back to the third century. The dumb form is much more difficult despite being more common than the furious form. In those parts of the world where the disease in dogs has been brought under control, cases of rabies are rarely seen and there are very few experienced observers. Therefore, there is a danger that recognition of the disease may be delayed should it appear in this country.

Rabies is present in all continents except Australasia and Antarctica. There are however, several countries, including the UK, which at present are free. Because of its specialised mode of transmission, the rabies virus can only survive when suitable hosts are numerous and in close contact for the virus to be passed on by a bite or the saliva. Dogs are still the greatest danger to man but the virus has been carried by other animals in many parts of the world, notably skunks, racoons, vampire bats, the mongoose and the fox. Cases in foxes have been reported in Europe for centuries but following the second world war, the fox population increased considerably enabling rabies to spread throughout Europe, and the fox population in England is on the increase even in urban areas and now constitutes a major potential menace. Most of the viruses that affect the fox, the dog and man can be treated by vaccines prepared for one single type and offer suitable protection. But do not under any circumstances become complacent, a lick on a cut can kill.

The virus from a bite area can enter the nervous system within 5 hours and it will then enter the brain. Once the brain is involved the infection spreads rapidly and may cause a fox to die before the virus has left the brain, so susceptible is the fox. The dog requires a larger dose of the virus before it becomes infected but may still die from a fox bite in a very short time. Should you have any doubts or suspicions about a dog or other animal, report it to the authorities at once, it may be your life at stake!

My thanks are due to a very good veterinary friend of mine who wishes to remain anonymous - without his help my two articles on this subject could not have materialised.

RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION MAPS

Dave Sheldrake still has supplies of the two RA maps of the Sevenoaks area. These large scale maps show all defined rights of way and are produced by Jim Fergusson of the RA.

Sheet no 1 - Sevenoaks District, southern section. This sheet extends from Sevenoaks Weald down as far as Tonbridge Wells.

Sheet no 2 - Sevenoaks District, central section. This map covers Sevenoaks itself and extends north to Eynsford.

These useful items are available from Dave at 50p each.

SURREY INNS KANTER - 2nd January 1989.

KEITH WARMAN

A crisp winter's morning saw 185 walkers, determined to get an active start to the year, set off from St. Catherine's Hall, Guildford, on the 15th Kanter.

Unlike a traditional challenge event, this light-hearted happening has no manned checkpoints, entrants plotting their own routes between grid-referenced locations, mostly pubs, and answering simple questions. Circular routes of 13 or 20 miles were offered, and I chose the latter.

After an initial stretch along the Wey Towpath, the chosen route wound up through Guildford Castle and grounds. At the pubs we were required to note the landlord's name. The Two Brewers in Guildford must have recently changed hands or been subject to local vandalism. The nameboard above the door was missing. As I arrived here, a bleary-eyed and bemused landlord was to be seen chalking "landlord is Mr Brown" on his external menu board!

Onto Pewley Down next, where a basic navigational error sent me along the wrong path and half a mile of extra tarmac to answer the next question. The firm underfoot going meant good progress through Clandon Park, East Clandon (lost two pencils here) and up to Netley Heath. Across the North Downs Way and the tranquility was shattered as I dropped to Gomshall and the A25. The railway was crossed twice, to Albury Heath and Albury village. The house with the massive ornate brick chimnies was passed and the lemon sole at the Drummond Arms (checkpoint 2) was enticing. On Blackheath, a wheeled sledge strapped to six panting huskies caused a local stir - possibly a way of getting a checkpoint crew to an isolated outpost?

Over Wonerish Common, above the River Wey, through Shalford and across the ugly wooden bridge back to the hall. Keith Chesterton had arranged a scenic route on behalf of the Surrey Group, and the tea and soup at the finish were most welcome.

For the record, 112 completed the shorter route out of 118 starters, and all of the 67 starters on the longer route successfully finished.

GROUP NIGHT HIKE - Friday 13th January.

LAURIE LOWE.

At last the dreaded night had arrived! After months of preparation involving route-checking and walkouts (both in daylight and at night) all with the inevitable pub stops, bar food, drinks, etc, etc, Peter B and I had agreed to meet at The Staff of Life at 9.30 pm to see how many brave souls would venture out to walk with us on Friday the thirteenth!

By the time we had consumed a meal and supped a few pints, we numbered thirteen - was this a double bad omen? Fortunately a late arrival made the number up to a more acceptable fourteen and Peter and I considered this a good turnout in view of the forecast of rain and wind. So famous are our night walks that one LDWA member travelled from the Isle of Wight to join us.

The first part of the route took us northwest out to Higham Marshes, past the gravel workings to the raised embankment which forms the flood defence in this remote part of the Thames Estuary. For a lot of this eastward section we were able to walk along the top of the bank with the strong wind on our backs. To our right were the desolate areas of Cliffe marshes and later Cooling marshes - dark mysterious stretches with only the occasional light seen in the distance to indicate a place of habitation. By contrast, to our left was the River Thames and the mudflats of Blythe Sands. On the far side of the river the Essex shoreline was a blaze of light from the refineries of Shell Haven and Canvey Island.

We made good progress to Egypt Bay and then on to St Mary's Bay where we took

shelter behind a concrete wall for a quick food and drink break. By this time the tide had raced in across the mudflats and was now lapping at the foot of the embankment. From St Mary's Bay we turned south and inland, climbing gently to the small hamlet of St Mary's Hoo. From this slightly elevated position the lights of the river could be seen from Gravesend down to Southend.

We were now on more familiar terrain, i.e. muddy fields, tracks and the occasional stretch of road. We were also facing into the strong westerly wind! The trees and bushes of Northward Hill Nature Reserve provided us with some welcome shelter as we took our second break while sitting comfortably on the raised walkway in the centre of the reserve. Spirits were still high and everyone seemed happy with the prospect of the last few miles to the finish.

As we descended from the Nature Reserve there were a few spots of rain in the wind and the distant lights became blurred, warning of rain on the way. It arrived as we were on the road approaching Cooling. We quickly donned waterproofs and trudged silently through the village of Cooling. First we passed the gaunt church - featured in "Great Expectations" - and containing the mound of childrens' graves, known as 'Pip's Graves'. Then on past the towers of Cooling Castle, to turn south again over a couple of muddy fields to finally reach the pub car park where we had left our vehicles for the night. The round trip had taken just over 7 hours.

Peter and I enjoyed organising the walk and we hope those taking part found it worth the effort. For those of you who have not yet tried one of the night walks, why not give it a go? We have not lost anyone yet!

THE WINTER TANNERS - 15th January 1989.

KEITH WARMAN.

Bearing in mind that three years ago, this event was cancelled due to snow, the contrast this year was complete, it being a perfect mild day with no wind.

7.30 am. and keen walkers began lurching off in the dark from Leatherhead car park on a 30 mile figure-of-eight circuit, crossing near Abinger Hammer and reaching Pitch Hill. Around the Leisure Centre, I was overtaken by a '5 mph' man shod in gleaming new trainers; after the quagmires of the first five miles, I bet he rued breaking them in on this occasion.

The stretch around Polesden Lacey to the Ranmore road proved to be heavy going, and it got no easier descending to Honeysuckle Bottom and climbing to the North Downs scarp. From Blatchford Down we descended to cross the A25 to drinks at Holmbury Youth Hostel. Hombury and Pitch Hills followed, but mist obscured distant views. After the long drop to Peaslake, Hound House - complete with stone 'hounds' on the gate pillars - was skirted. I tried to keep up with Bob Ford as we passed Ponds Farm, which gets my award for Surrey's cleanest farmyard; off the immaculate tarmac forecourt was the equally immaculate garage barn to house the Range Rover. Into Shere, past the old jail and onto drinks at the Memorial Hall. Astroturf had been laid inside part of the hall which made me feel at home.

Under the A25, up the scarp, through the hurricane-hit wooded slopes and down again to meander parallel to the railway. A group of about 50 ramblers was met and passed, prior to the stiff climb up to the North Downs Way. Drinks were gratefully accepted at Tanners Hatch. At Crabtree Cottages, torches were required for the final section back into Leatherhead. John Probert and Ron Roweth passed me during this thoroughly enjoyable day out.

A CIRCULAR WALK AROUND MAIDSTONE

HARRY BISHOP.

Using various leaflets published by the R. A. and Maidstone Public Paths Society

On a bright morning in August of last year, I parked the car at Boxley and strode out on the high adventure of circumnavigating Maidstone, an old and busy town set in the fair county of Kent. By dint of steps on some early embankments, it was up and over the hazard of the A 249 and thence to Detling Church. Through Detling, half-awake only, in the early morn and then many gasps and wheezes later to the top to the hill, cross over, think of taking the first rest of the day, decide not to and scratch myself unmercifully on the brambles of the N.D.W. So I sat down amongst the profusion of grasses and wild flowers in a little paradise of my own, got out the Dettol cream and daubed it on my bloodied legs.

Get up, get up, the sun was out, the sky blue, the clouds above so fleecy. Clichés all, but it was a perfect, lovely morning with views from the scarp absolutely glorious.

Down from the Downs and into the hidden footpath country, eventually emerging at Bearsted Church in time for a wedding. Dishevelled and dusty, a poor old tramp I must have appeared to the guests in their finery for the day. Sat down in the churchyard on a bench, had a banana and a swig from the canteen. Decided not to attend the service.

Went on my way and soon got into a muddle over the newly constructed golf course, started climbing fences with a yellow marker on them until an eyeball to muzzle confrontation with a large grey Alsatian and discretion ruled. I took to tarmac. The dog still eyed me suspiciously (or hungrily) even then as I passed its household gate. It was lunchtime after all!

Turned into a farm between sheds and barns and a short sharp shower forced me to don a coat. I wished for my umbrella - that's the instrument to use in this sort of weather. Anyway, back to the route through an orchard and a track to Langley Heath.

I paused here at a convenient oasis and quaffed a foaming pinta. Nectar! Pressed on behind two fishermen (I thought) on a headland path, aiming for Langley Loch. In the next field I found them, each on one knee, guns at the ready. Was this the firing party promised me by my many poetry admirers? No, they disregarded me, so stealthily I stole my sun-soaked, sweat-stained way via The Quarries, a pretty little hamlet to Loose and thence along the causeway to the pumping station and Coxheath sewage works. Phew, what a whiff!

Stock car racers were hurtling around a track as I pursued the way to East Farleigh. The dust they created was like a Saharan sanistorm and all in the middle of some nice houses with lovely gardens.

Downhill to the Bull Inn and the church where another wedding had just finished. They too, had been lucky with the weather. Meandered along the Medway to East Barming, boats lying idle at their moorings, people gossiping and supping their afternoon champagne on board whilst a myriad of flies and other winged insects chased me for the salty water I was producing.

Up the hill and through the hedged footpaths to the Shopping Centre at Allington where, the sun having disappeared, the heavens opened and a twenty

minute deluge forced me to take shelter with the late afternoon shoppers in the Mall. Down to the lock, the rain stopped, the alligators went home (Camp Grenada), the sun came out and I passed the Malta Inn and looked longingly inside at the cushioned comforts ready for the evening reveller. Ah me, what a dreaded fate it is to be a long distance walker and spurn the pleasures of the easy life.

From the river bank, a few steps up to the Running Horse at Sandling and down under the motorway, follow across fields around the ruined walls of Boxley Abbey, through a cornfield under the rays of the newly found sun. Bliss - utter happiness, pushing your way through corn on a path kindly left by the farmer, the scenery sublime and Boxley village ahead.

Finished, a long day, twenty two miles, some route-finding, a lot of checking and a final pint in the pub. What more can you ask?

P.S. Hands up or tell the secretary all those who would like me to take them around this course on a social walk later this year!

DEAR HARRY.....

by John Probert (524)

I do beg your pardon Harry for the shocking things I said,

But it gets the others thinking as the newsletter is read,

Of boots and walks and even pubs, and Harry's funny rhymes!

The Kent Group is what matters but I think we could do better, so keep writing silly poems for a larger newsletter. Let us have your news, your stories of walks you've done and let's get back to fifteen pages or we may end up with none.

P.S. I think as far as it goes, this subject is now closed.

TED'S SEAT.

Many Kent members will recall with affection Ted Laundon who died in March '87. Ted was a longtime member of the group and for several years the group treasurer.

You will be happy to hear that his wife Mary has had a seat installed at the top of Otford Mount. The seat bears an inscription in memory of Ted, and it affords excellent views back across Otford to the distant hills.

As the inscription records...."Ted loved to walk here"

Remember Ted as you pass by and make good use of this chance to regain your breath if you have ascended the Mount.

"THE FOOTPATHS STORY"

The following item appeared in a past issue of Kent Life under the above title. It was written by a Mr H. B. Hampton in 1932. Mr Hampton lived in Biggin Hill and was Parish Clerk there.

Ten little footpaths, easy to define,
A millionaire fancied one,
Then there were nine.

Nine little footpaths, full of brick and slate,
Bungalows a-building,
Then there were eight.

Eight little footpaths, terribly uneven,
Villagers won't use one.
So now there are seven.

Seven little footpaths, all among the ricks,
Farmers find one in the way,
Now there are six.

Six little footpaths, trying to survive,
The British Army rounds one up,
And then there are five.

Five little footpaths, as they were before,
Cows have stamped one out again,
Now there are four.

Four little footpaths, open wide and free,
Councils are not much concerned,
So there are only three!

Three little footpaths for everyone to view,
Ratepayers still chattering,
See them reduced to two.

Two little footpaths, meander in the sun,
But half the village is content
That there shall be but one.

One little footpath sharper than a knife,
Calls itself a main road,
And saves its little life.

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Editor of 'Kent Life'.

Annual Subscription Reminder.....

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Better still, as times are hard,
Lord, accept my Barclay card.