**Going Loopy Part 1: Erith to Hayes, Saturday 10th September 2016**

3 walkers, 24 miles – leader Peter Aylmer

Possibly a record low for an LDWA walk, but the rule is that if one person turns up to join the leader, the walk goes ahead. And as one of the walkers was a potential new member in Sue, it would have been churlish to have said no.

In fact the number of walkers would better be recorded as 3.25, as Neil, whose walk this was going to be until knee problems required a substitution, gamely joined up at the half way point for the next six miles. Good luck Neil, and we hope you recover soon.

A number of things conspired against higher numbers. Top was that many of the LDWA hardcore were up on the London weekender in the Peak District, but a rail replacement bus service at the start, the slightly longer than usual distance, and a rubbish weather forecast must all have played their part. As it happens, the replacement bus was a luxury coach and the rain held off till late afternoon, and then was never torrential.

Credit to the Loop originators for such a varied route. Within the first hour we'd followed three rivers, Thames, Darent and Cray, the Cray to be a companion until nearly halfway, its water meadows at Foots Cray being especially charming. Neil joined us at Sidcup Place, a Brewers Fayre pub we decided not to bother with, for the stretch through Scadbury Park, Hawkwood and Pett's Wood, the latter two being National Trust woodland of the highest quality. There's a bit of housing to pad through on the Orpington fringes before charming rural countryside south of Farnborough and, to finish, the heathland commons of Keston and Hayes. No rail replacement coming home, just a 20-minute signal failure outside London Bridge.

One major gripe: a temporary bridge closure in Crayford Recreation Ground, without signed alternative, forced a lengthy detour. No way to treat a major long-distance path, or long-distance walkers.

Two more London Loop stages are planned for February and March - well worth making a note for.

Photographs by Peter Aylmer