**Zoolander, Sunday 2nd September 2018**

11 walkers, 23 miles – leader Peter Jull

Start delayed not so much by a late train but a premature level crossing closure next to the station which caused a queue of traffic which took so long to clear we would have waited longer than the good 5 minutes we did if one kind driver hadn’t paused to let us cross the road. London grouped up with Kent there were 11 to cross that still busy road again but this time with a button to turn the lights red, eventually. Once through Britain’s smallest town, Fordwich, the climb out of the Stour valley was gentle and soon we were within smell of the first zoo and some free views of its elephants. The Clouded Leopard enclosure next to the path through Howletts though offered views only of the Clouded Leopard enclosure. A rural route led to the first orchard of Bramling apples, only because they were by the hamlet of Bramling. Through Wingham village and more orchards led to Zoo 2, Wingham Wildlife Park although the only exotic beasts spotted bar the dinosaurs by the car park gate were two llamas in a field across the road, not part of the zoo. Powerful binoculars may have picked out some of its speciality birds in the distantly visible aviaries. A naked orchard awaiting its pear trees was intriguing and the purpose of the structure of wires, canes and posts only discernable because we has just walked through its older sister. All their effort to keep the PRoW clear through the labyrinth was spoilt by wires for new hedge saplings right across the exit point. Hot and sunny (but not as hot as early summer) it was the pub garden for lunch in the Half Moon and Seven Stars at the north end of Preston. With Grove Ferry the only point at which to re-cross the Stour more road than ideal was needed to get back west with a re-grouping drinks stop at Hoath church. The mixed pace group spent much of the day well strung out but without losing the tailenders. Not really zoo 2.5 but more birds were seen passing a private aviary just before real zoo 3, Wildwood. Leaving the main track through East Blean Woods allowed glimpses through the back fence of deer but not the wolves. The last stretch back to Sturry was covered just in time to catch the train with the guard holding on for a few extra seconds.

Photographs by Peter Jull; more by Gavin Fuller on the group Facebook page