**The Eastern Borough Tops, Saturday 12th February 2022**

16 walkers, 20.5 miles – leader Gavin Fuller

Engineering works which weren’t advertised when the walk was put on meant that the start point was changed from Romford to Fairlop, whilst an overnight tube strike fortunately didn’t have much impact on getting to the start, where 14 walkers met at Fairlop for the next instalment of the Borough Tops walk. As it happened the new route to the first top was better than the original one planned, so all was good. After passing through Fairlop Waters, where the leader kept up the tradition of somebody going to the top of Mount Fairlop as it was passed, it was on to the first top of the day at Chadwell Heath Cemetery, which believe it or not contains the highest point of the borough of Barking and Dagenham, although the presence of public toilets in the cemetery appeared to elicit more excitement than the top itself.

By this time two latecomers who had been caught out by the Central Line splitting into two after Leytonstone and going up the wrong branch had joined the group, so it was 16 who trekked through the suburbs of Romford to Rise Hill and Bedfords Park; the latter containing a hill which didn’t count as a top although did have decent views. After saying hello to the deer in Bedfords Park it was on to Havering-atte-Bower and the second top of the day (Havering’s) on the village green.

Following the London Loop through Havering Country Park, with its Wellingtonia Avenue looking splendid in the sunshine, it was on to Hainault Forest Country Park, which contained the third top of the day, Cabin Hill, the highest point in Redbridge. The leader was then prevailed upon by one member of the party to descend to the café and toilets for the lunch stop, although service was so slow in the café that the one member of the group who got something there finally received it as everybody else was ready to leave, and discovered what he’d ordered wasn’t worth the wait!

After temporarily being deposed by one of the group with better local knowledge in the country park, once out of there the leader was able to reassert his position, although as most of the rest of the walk followed the London Loop there wasn’t much for him to do! At Buckhurst Hill four members of the group found the local tube station more alluring than the final top and departed, but the rest continued along the southern edge of Epping Forest to Chingford and Waltham Forest’s top at Pole Hill, easily one of London’s better borough tops. Then it was back through the streets of Chingford, with snowdrops and daffodils already out, to the station, where as chance would have it a train was ready to depart, meaning that with one unfortunate exception everybody had no wait to head for home.

Yet again for the leader despite doing largely the same route as the recce his trackers managed to record a longer walk than before, so it ended up being 20.5 miles (32.8km) with 979ft (298m) of ascent for those who did the full route.

Photographs by Ian Watson, Gavin Fuller and Stephen Wills