**Cobham and the Downs, Saturday 5th September 2009**

21 walkers, 23 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

This was my first walk leading for LDWA London Group so slightly nervous at the start, especially knowing that I'd probably have a massively bigger group than I've ever lead before with Kent Group. And so it was; but this was a great challenge with twenty one people eventually making it to Higham Station in north Kent for a typically Kentish walk - very undulating, open and agricultural with the majority of the walk on hard chalk downland along the North Downs ridge near my home. The early stages of the walk moved us south over the downs into Kent where we got some great views of the Medway Valley and down towards Aylesford and Maidstone. We took lunch at the village of Harvel after traversing the brutally steep but thankfully not too long climb back over the chalk ridge. After this we made our way north along stretches of the Wealdway via Luddesdown and Cobham back towards the estuary just west of where the Medway and the Thames meet. Again we had some super views but of a totally different kind with the bleak north Kent marshes (of Dickens fame) laying open beneath us and the densely industrial coast of south Essex clearly visible on the horizon. We finally made it back to Higham around half past six, later than planned but with a good twenty four and a bit miles in our legs and hopefully some more happy walking memories for those who were there. Thoughts go to Lou Shepherd who had to abandon the walk at Harvel after twisting her ankle on a stile. Thankfully she made it back to London in good time via taxi and train and the injury doesn't seem too serious!