**Ashurst and the Weald, Saturday 5th December 2009**

9 walkers, 23 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

Our first walk of December saw nine of us walkers meet at Ashurst Station for a linear walk south over the High Weald to Buxted via sections of no fewer than five long distance paths. Starting in Kent we very soon crossed the border into East Sussex, following the River Medway upstream towards its source in the weald near Forest Row. A gloriously mild and sunny day was a welcome bonus although it was truly difficult to imagine more testing conditions underfoot with a tremendous amount of standing water and clawing mud paying testament to the recent heavy rains. We soon past Henry VIII's Hunting Lodge of Bolebrook Castle and then climbed to a beautiful promontory on an area of high ground near Coomb Wood where we were treated to spectacular sweeping views over the hills of the mid weald to the south where we were heading. Picking up the old dismantled railway near Hartfield we swung back eastwards to take the Wealdway south towards our long climb up through woodland onto the open, barren expanses of Ashdown Forest with its distinctive scrub and heather strewn terrain. By this time in the year, winter always somehow seems to have its talons through our landscape with the trees now looking bare and beautiful and the daylight hours seeming so brief and precious. Finally reaching Poundgate after fifteen miles we were welcomed by a very comfy and warm pub, The Crow and Gate, which had a delightful log fire going and a beautiful rustic atmosphere, especially welcome now as the weather was by this time turning against us with a heavy grey sheet of cloud sweeping in on the strong south westerly winds. With two-thirds of the walk complete, we left our lunch stop well rested but although it was still only early afternoon there was no mistaking the strong sense of night already setting in. Under a menacing sky and with rain now starting to fall we took a south easterly course towards Hadlow Down through some steeply undulating fields, ploughing our way through sopping wet grass and leafy undergrowth that felt at times like it was floating on a subterranean sea. However, determination was clearly in abundance as we made our final push south west down a very long, winding bridleway that was clearly a very ancient track, forming a deep and well-trod gash in the rural landscape. With head torches now on, our procession of bobbing lights finally made our north westerly ascent into Buxted where another pub, The Griffin Inn, made a very pleasing resting place for us to wind down while we waited for our train to carry us back through the night to London.