**The South Downs and Seven Sisters, Saturday 31st October 2009**

15 walkers, 23 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

I had high hopes for our walk on the Sussex Downs on Halloween this year after walking the route out in full on the previous Tuesday and having a truly lovely day with plenty of warmth and sunshine. The forecast for the Saturday of the actual walk however was not so positive and so it turned out to be with heavy wind and rain lashing my car on the drive down to the south coast. Noticing I was the only driver who had turned up with only minutes to go before the train from London was due to arrive, I began to have doubts as to whether many people at all would drag themselves all the way from the city to the South Downs on such a wet and wild day. However, I was delighted to see fourteen walkers grouped together on mass appear from the train just as the weather started to ease. We began the walk from Glynde Station by crossing the A27 and ascending the long but gradual climb up Beddingham Hill to reach the South Downs Way on the main ridge in that area which was on that morning engulfed in a thick fog. That undulating ridge over Firle Beacon and on to Bostal Hill is on most days a walk leader’s dream as the trail is so clear and consistent along the brow of the ridge with the route clearly visible far into the distance but unfortunately we had no such privilege this time with most of the morning walking in visibility of just a few metres. Because of this however, the atmosphere was quite dramatic and rather mysterious. We made our way east along the local peaks and then along a very well-trod bridleway that took us south towards Bishopstone and Seaford. By around eleven o'clock the fog was dispersing and as we descended from the hills a beautiful panorama opened up of the English Channel and the port of Newhaven beneath us. Meeting the sea at the far western end of the town of Seaford allowed us a lovely stroll along the front to the Martello Tower at the base of Seaford Head where the Wellington Pub awaited us, though many people stopped to have a packed lunch by the beach. The variety of blues and greens of the sea that day were beautiful and very unusual, seemingly arranged in bars of vivid colour. After lunch we still had the majority of the distance to complete as well as the more brutal climbs of the day, starting with of course Seaford Head itself. After we had warmed back up with this climb the open expanse of the Cuckmere Valley lay in front of us with what must be one of the most iconic views in England – that of the Seven Sisters glowing their way into the distance. Almost pure brilliant white as always! The ghostly silhouette of the Belle Tout Lighthouse was already visible away on the horizon. Several hours later and with some hard miles completed we finally reached the brow of Beachy Head with the still warming sun beginning to set behind us amongst some dramatic cloud formations that seemed to add to the enjoyment. As we began to swing round the headland to a more north easterly direction, the lights of Eastbourne suddenly came into view and the dark of night took hold. We were treated to quite a clear waxing moon that was very nearly full. A brisk night walk along the promenade and on to the glittering pier and the buzz of the town centre completed our twenty-three miles in a very traditional and lively manner.