**Westhumble to Ockley, Saturday 30th January 2010**

20 walkers, 22 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

Our walk in Surrey on the 30th January was our final trek of a very tough walking month with snow and ice blighting our terrain on and off for the previous few weeks. This however was a perfect day to be out and spectacularly beautiful with a crystal-clear blue sky and crisp icy air that remained mercifully still right through until dusk. Conditions underfoot were predictably easy going on such a chilly day with many of the footpaths and tracks utterly frozen allowing a nice firm floor to eat the miles up. Twenty of us set off walking from Boxhill and Westhumble Station at around 08.25, immediately climbing sharply the chalk hills up to the crest of the North Downs ridge. We continued westwards with wonderful early morning views looking south to the summits of the greensand ridge, with Leith Hill and Holmbury Hill being prominent among them. The low January sun and frosty air made much of that morning feel quite charged with atmosphere. Descending the North Downs saw us turn back on ourselves and continue east towards Westcott before which we swung south and down what appeared to be an extremely ancient track that meandered through some lovely woodland and up into the greensand hills. Arriving at our lunch stop we went on to spend well over an hour at The Plough Inn who were hardly expecting such a large group at that time of day – well ahead of schedule at 11.40! They did however provide us with a very warm, comfortable and cosy stop with a log fire and good food. Nicely rested and with the sun now simmering just past its peak, we set off to climb up sharply towards our peak of Leith Hill. Blessed with such fabulous visibility, the Thames Valley and central London was clearly visible to the north and east and further on at Holmbury Hill the South Downs seemed to be spreading their undulating mass across the southern horizon forming a beautifully alluring silhouette. A crazily steep descent of Holmbury Hill was surely a bizarre memory that many of us will take from that day although thankfully we all made it down safely. A more flat and fragmented walk on the lower level terrain saw us push on through a patchwork of fields, farms and private estates, passing through Forest Green, Jayes Park and finally to Ockley itself with the first sense of dusk just starting to set in as we reached the station, well in time for the penultimate train of the day, taking us back through the hills and woodland of Surrey towards London.