**Ardingly and Weir Wood Circular, Saturday 4th September 2010**

12 walkers, 24 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

Twelve of us set off from Balcombe Station nice and early that morning. There was still a lot of moisture at ground level with the morning due and what appeared be the aftermath of an overnight rain shower. We walked due south from the village of Balcombe, crossing the railway line that runs down to Brighton and back up to London. We soon joined the Sussex Ouse Valley Way, south east of Ardingly reservoir and carried on heading into the morning sun along the valley to return to the railway track that we had recently crossed to the north. This time though, we walked underneath it in magnificent style as this was the Ouse Valley Viaduct no less. It really is a magnificent monument in the landscape and its warm, mottled brickwork looked fabulous on this crisp sunny autumnal morning. We soon reached the banks of Ardingly Reservoir where the usual watersports were taking place near the damn on its southern shores. We followed the waterside path that lead us round the lake towards the north and west and almost back to Balcombe itself, but we soon turned eastwards again and walked on in the direction of Wakehurst Place and Tilgate Wood. It was just in this area that we took an opportune moment for a great morning break by the waterside at the peaceful northern extremity of the reservoir. Skirting the ancient woodland in this area to our north and with great views looking south towards the Downs, we soon found ourselves at the county showground at Ardingly and then down into the village itself where we encountered one of the few busy roads on the route. After crossing this we descended sharply down the valley to the east of the village and then soon picked up the High Weald Landscape Trail that allowed us some excellent walking through delightful woodland and some warm open fields with good conditions underfoot for this time of year. We kept ourselves on this long-distance path until we reached Philpots and then broke off towards Chiddingly and then due east to our lunch stop at West Hoathly. With almost fifteen miles done and having had a really good rest in their sunny beer garden at the pub we continued our way north through more thick woodland up to the old steam railway line of the Bluebell Railway that runs through Sharpthorne just to the south. Now joining the Sussex Border Path for a very short distance we soon reached our most north easterly point on the route only to cut back sharp west, through Bushy Wood back to the High Weald Landscape Trail. Passing the magnificent Gravetye Manor we pushed on west to cross Ardingly Road just south of Selsfield Common and then down a very long winding track that made for excellent walking at this stage of the day. This took us along the bottom of Paddockhurst Park and through Great Wood in the late afternoon sun back to Balcombe where we pushed hard in the last few miles to successfully reach the station just in time to catch the once hourly train.