**John Merrill’s Epping Forest Challenge Walk, Saturday 2nd October 2010**

12 walkers, 23 miles – leader Rob Myers

The weather was dreadful in the week before the walk so it was a massive relief for the 12 walkers present (including 3 first timers) to begin the walk in bright sunshine. From Waltham Cross station I took the group to the Town Centre to see one of the three surviving Eleanor Crosses (out of 12) in the country (the others being at Geddington and Hartingstone). From there we walked to Waltham Abbey where stopping at the grave of King Harold I gave a short talk on the history of Waltham Abbey Church and gave the group a chance to visit it. The route began by leaving the Abbey Grounds and entering Lea Valley Regional Park where we passed a series of fish ponds once used by the monks, a dragonfly sanctuary and a carved boulder from London Bridge used to mark the Meridian Line. After crossing several fields and a couple of nurseries we came across the first of two obelisks erected by Victorian farmers to mark the places (according to local legend) where Queen Boadicea took poison following her defeat by Roman Governor Suetonius and the place where she died. Shortly afterwards we entered Warlies Park where we saw some fallow deer. Also we walked through a field with a threatening looking bull in it. I realised I was wearing my bright red England shirt and had to cover it up fast. We passed the 2nd obelisk and headed towards Copped Hall which was a famous mansion dating back to Edward 3rd that is currently being restored. We entered Epping Forest via Epping Cricket field under which was the M25 tunnel built at great cost following a public outcry. After about a mile we reached Amesbury Bank Iron Age Fort the alleged site of Boadicea's battle. Lunch was at the Kings Oak, High Beach where the food, though slightly pricey, was delicious and served amazingly fast. After lunch we had another long stretch through Epping Forest, where the saw the famous long horned cattle, to Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge. This was a Tudor grandstand used to watch the deer hunt below. We ascended Pole Hill to get good views of London's skyline before descending to reach King George's Reservoir. The last few miles back to Waltham Cross were a pleasant walk along the Lea Valley Navigation back to Waltham Cross. A few of the walkers fell behind during this stretch and at Waltham Cross and I said goodbye to the rest of the group at the point and waited for the stragglers. They had, however, bypassed me and by catching a bus arrived at the station at the same time as the rest of the group. I was quite touched that some of the group decided to wait at Liverpool Street for my train in order to thank me. A first timer Rachel had suffered an adverse reaction to her boots and had dashed into Boots in Liverpool Street to buy a fetching pair of pink slippers. This was a memorable walk. One that I will definitely repeat at some stage.