

NEWSLETTER January - June 2024

EDITOR'S BEGINNINGS

Last night, as is not unusual, I woke from a dreamless sleep for a prowl around the house. Pat says that I am always worried about something when I do this. What was on my mind you may ask? Answer, the Newsletter of course!! I usually sit down at the computer with a blank word document open and a blank mind – nothing abnormal there then. This time though, after I got back into bed, I was faced with a brain whirling with a lack of ideas about how to fill a few pages and sheep failing to send me back to sleep. Eventually, I did think of a couple of things and here they are:-

The 2024 AGM has been booked for 19th March in the evening at King Charles the Martyr, Tunbridge Wells. Put the date in your diary and full details will be sent out nearer the time.

Do you know that Berghaus will repair their gear free of charge. I have just had a Goretex jacket repaired. I had to pay the postage to them but the repair and return postage was free. See:- <https://www.berghaus.com/repairs> for details.

Editor

GROUP REPORTS

SHORTER WALKS

Earlier this year, Janet started a programme of shorter walks of about 3 miles to provide an opportunity for members who, for one reason or another, were unable to walk as far as they had been used to. There was varied success with this, but she has arranged a programme for the first 3 months of 2024. This programme is circulated with this newsletter.

If these shorter walks are to be a permanent feature, Janet needs assistance with walk leaders and a volunteer walk organiser to take over from her would be very welcome.

Editor

WEDNESDAY 5 MILE WALKERS

Well, what can I say that I haven't already said before? We have, once again, had some lovely walks thanks to our leaders. Sadly, a couple have recently had to be cancelled due to bad weather, flood and mud and it has been challenging to say the least to find acceptable walks on firm terrain. Writing this on a cold gloomy and wet day it is difficult to imagine that back at the beginning of the second half of this year we actually had to cancel one walk because it was too hot!

The highlight of the second half of this year was a BBQ which was hosted by Jan & Maurice in their garden on a splendid sunny afternoon at the beginning of September. Maurice was in charge of the barbecue and did a magnificent job while Jan co-ordinated everything in the kitchen and dining room and with everyone bringing a dish of some kind, we had a lovely spread. Some of our 'old' members joined us and it was, of course, lovely to catch up with them. We are all most grateful to Jan & Maurice.

As I write we are looking forward to our Christmas Lunch which will be held, once again, at High Rocks. There will be the usual quizzes (when I can find a moment or three to think of something suitably challenging) and we will have our usual raffle with proceeds going to The Hospice in the Weald.

As this year draws to a close may I wish all our members a happy New Year.

Janet Wilson

LONGER WEDNESDAY WALKERS

The year started off as usual with mud glorious mud. A walk from Shipbourne was particularly bad as you can see from the photo. You will also see I am not in it as I didn't go!

However, the sun soon appeared and a few weeks later we were sitting in the sun on the beach at Hastings having coffee after walking up and over the East and West cliffs.

In the summer we like to walk on the coast, and we have done several South Downs walks this year starting from Winchelsea, Udimore near Rye and, of course, Birling Gap for the Seven Sisters walk. On one of the walks, we were looking **down** on the hang gliders and had beautiful views down the Cuckmere Valley (see photos)

A first this year was to be attacked by a pig loose in the field we were walking through. It probably was just nosey or expecting to be fed. This was on a new walk from Horsmonden to Goudhurst which proved very popular and is one we must do again but, next time, come armed with some apples for the pig!

Usually, we arrange to end up in a tearoom for tea and cakes afterwards and some of us have even taken to have coffee before the walk! However, because of this, we have managed to persuade garden centres who have cafes to allow us to park on their property for the duration of the walk which is very helpful as finding somewhere to park 10 or more cars is becoming a problem.

PS In my last newsletter I said there would be a hose pipe ban this summer and I was-----right. Now I am saying there will be a hose pipe ban in summer '24 (you heard it here first).

Wednesday longer walks Picture Gallery





FRIDAY WALKERS

June started off with a couple of walks led by Christine Simpson from Groombridge (a new walk for MD) and Eileen from Cudham. This was followed by Nick and Diana from the Bottle House at Penshurst - we saw a yellowhammer and a mistle thrush. A lovely old house en route – Pilbeams. First day of the first Ashes test at Edgbaston! Next up was Ian Bond from Dunks Green. A good walk through lots of Fairlawne territory returning to the back of Shipbourne church – I could not believe the ground was so dry and cracked! Most un-Shipbourne like! The Kentish Rifleman as good as ever – a decent pint of Tonbridge Coppernob. This was followed by Brenda from Seal Chart. It was a lovely walk with loads of woods – not beloved by Joan S-G!



July kicked off with Janet from Swanmead car park in Tonbridge. Very little shade on this one and it was a hot day. We needed plenty of water. This was an action replay of a recent Wednesday walk and featured a brilliant banana break site at the side of Porters lock on the Medway, complete with a 14-seater picnic bench! This was followed by Sheila from Rushlake Green (near Heathfield) A great walk - a 6-miler! A neck of the woods which we haven't walked from for quite a while. A very light bit of rain, but mainly fine throughout the walk and we had some great views. One or two spectacular stiles, and one or two pretty lethal ones which certainly added to the time taken for our walk. The pub was to die for – the Horse and Groom did us proud. Great food and the Harveys was absolutely spot on. This was followed by Nigel and Claudette from Markbeech – a lovely walk as per usual with decent weather – we sat outside at the Kentish Horse pub – and had a good turnout. The pub did really well because they had us and a funeral wake to cater for.

The next Friday was our all day walk from Oare near Faversham. We covered a couple of different areas – the morning session was a walk round the Oare Marshes Nature Reserve. We didn't see a lot of birds, but it was a very different terrain for us to walk along – lots of water in the form of creeks and views across to the Isle of Sheppey. In Luddenham churchyard, was a very strange tree – a hop hornbeam which, as the name suggests, had leaves like a hornbeam and hop-like flowers (see picture). We stopped for dinner at the Three Mariners which had a lot of good seafood – the fish and chips was popular. The fish was very novel – locally caught rock (in batter), which looked like a battered box of After Eights in size and shape – it had the backbone in the middle sandwiched by an inch thick slab of fish on the top and on the bottom! Very, very good.



On leaving the pub for the afternoon session, we came across a lovely plant growing up a house (see picture) with big pink trumpet shaped flowers.

After lunch we had a shorter walk just south of Oare, at the Gunpowder Works Country Park. Faversham was a prime gunpowder making area and the Oare Works was a major site in the 17th Century. Lots of the original buildings are still in the park and a walking route has been created to tell the story. A nice, wooded

area to walk around in the afternoon and return to the pub.

Into August, and Sheila led from the Fountain at Cowden – a lovely walk past the Three Manors of Leighton, Crippenden and Waystrode, returning via the Sussex Border Path to Cowden. After a long dry spell, this was also the day that Southern Water revoked their hosepipe ban. Ironically, the following day the forecast was for rain all day! The Fountain was closed for lunch, so we backtracked to The Kentish Horse at Markbeech.



Nick and Diana led next from the Elephant's Head at Hook Green followed by Christine S from Southborough – this had a very muddy steep-sided section in the woods – in the middle of August! September already – Ian and Joan led from the Windmill at Sevenoaks Weald. Very wet walk underfoot because of previous rain. It drizzled a bit as we were walking and then chucked it down at the banana break – described by Ian as a “clearing up shower” – and so it proved to be. Much better weather for the second half of the walk. Susan led from Ide Hill the following week -great drifts of pretty little cyclamen flowers and a lovely purple plant/tree (see picture). Great views across to Emmetts (at the beginning) and Bough Beech reservoir (at the end).

Ian Bond walked from Hollingbourne – MD was away but by all accounts, a smashing

walk, and a new pub for us – called the Windmill, at Eyhorne Street. Joan S-G led next from Lamberhurst – a good walk and a long one – Nick clocked it at 6.7 miles. Beautiful weather as well, with a finish across the golf course and back into the Chequers car park. Our last one in September was led by Brenda from Watlington. Again, a nice day weatherwise - very sunny and had a lovely cool breeze for walking. Lots of swans on the river at the break on the River Medway. The Watlington (Chef and Brewer) was a surprisingly good pub – good food and service. The beer was a Greene King offering called “Bonkers Conkers” – the wackiest beer name this year?

The following month saw Sylvi lead from Burrswood at Groombridge. Notable because a short 3 miler had also been organised (Sarah’s doing). Sylvi’s was a 6 miler – a gorgeous day with a new bit of walking up the hill just out of Groombridge. Everyone finished and met up in the Rose and Crown at Groombridge. Perfick!

My next walk in October was led by Ian B from Charcott. A lovely day – Fran, the landlady of the Greyhound, came out to see us before we set off. A great walk – we saw a short-eared owl! MD just got a glimpse. Another notable beer – “Kicking Donkey” from the Lakedown Brewery in Burwash (owned by Roger Daltrey). We toasted Tony’s 91st birthday!

November arrived, and Sheila led from Kingdom near Peshurst. Storm Ciaran hit the Southeast just before this walk – 100 mph winds in the Channel Islands but an absolute shed load of rainfall on the Wednesday night and all day Thursday before the walk. The Friday dawned bright and clear, and we had a beautiful day, lots of sun. The track was pretty good underfoot – some mud. Sheila had incorporated a road section which cut off the southern loop of Marilyn’s original walk from Kingdom. We saw lots of wonderful large fungi that looked like the fringed rush parasols you see on a sunny beach in Spain. Sarah W also led a 3 miler from Peshurst layby – this was very wet, apparently – loads of standing water in the fields at Peshurst. Everybody met up at the Spotted Dog.

The following week was John and Evelien from Offham. John did a great job of promoting this walk with a listing of several historical places we would be passing during the walk, including Offham and West Malling churches, the Abbey, and St Leonard’s Tower in West Malling plus a fantastic collection of blue plaques. However, we had our heads down for a lot of the way as the weather was not the greatest – a fair bit of rain. There was a record attendance (18!) at the pub – The Kings Arms in Offham - and green hop beer to drink.

Our next walk was a very eventful day! Started off well, beautiful weather, clear and sunny – tooling down to Ticehurst, but found the A21 blocked at the roundabout south of Lamberhurst. Then the phones started ringing, with people realising the roads were blocked. Susan manned the phone and Ian sorted out a new route for us. We were diverted off through Wadhurst – a nightmare, full of parked cars and heavy traffic (normal for Wadhurst) and heavy artics (abnormal). Arrived late at The Bull at Three Leg Cross, along with everybody else. Eventually started off about 45 minutes late. Sarah was leading a shorter walk from the Bull with a smaller group. A lovely walk, although it did have some horrendous, deep, muddy bits – we avoided the “Stile from Hell” by inadvertently doing an extra little loop on the road. Lots of great-crested grebes and cormorants on Bewl Water and a great black-backed gull. Back at the pub by 1.15, after shortening the walk a bit to finish on the road and avoid the “river” section near the finish! Very good food at the Bull. We eventually got back home in the dark after another encounter with the traffic through Wadhurst during the major road closure – access to Blacksmiths Lane (which cuts off Wadhurst) was effectively inaccessible because so much traffic was turning in to the road.

And finally, a lovely field of poppies taken in July on The North Downs!



Maurice Dickins

SUNDAY WALKS

Our Summer walk season started in great style on the South Downs in all their magnificence. Swiftly moving East to the Stour valley for our next walk, we exchanged the sunshine for refreshing rain !! Moving to Hollingbourne Station we wandered the North Downs, enjoying the views and sunshine, a great day out.

Godstone Station provided the start for our next walk, and a chance to see the Surrey countryside.

Following the Station theme, Battle provided a walk through the East Sussex Weald in circumstances less stressful than those 957 years ago. A swift change of compass bearing took us to Birling in the Medway Valley. Moving a little South, we explored the footpaths from Goudhurst to Cranbrook and back luxuriating in the high Kentish Weald. Switching back to Sussex the picturesque village of Waldron played host, leading to an eleven o'clock stop at a BSA motorbike rally in a pub garden, sixties music and coffee, just so English.

Otford then Toys Hill were the starts for our next walks. Pluckley gave us open fields, vineyards, and orchards heavy with unpicked apples, but no ghosts.

Buxted countryside gradually morphed into the vistas of Ashdown Forest and spectacular autumn scenery in gorgeous sunshine, amply backed up if not overtaken by a walk from Jarvis Brook.

With one walk in the current program to go from Shoreham, you can see that we have explored the very best of the countryside around us.

Dermot

EDITOR'S RAMBLINGS

Your editor and SWMBO have not done a great deal of what I call real walking over the last few months. Much of the steps we have recorded on our Fitbits have been incidental to visits to towns and villages whilst away – it is surprising how many miles can be clocked up just wandering. We did manage a bit of coast path walking in North Devon, near Ifracombe and Lynmouth but I will confess we chickened out of climbing the path from Lynmouth to Lynton and took the lift! We only managed one walk around Dulverton on Exmoor as on the other 2 days we were there it poured with rain – bits of Exeter to the south and Minehead to the north were both flooded whilst we sheltered in our motorhome praying that the river that runs along the campsite did not overflow – it didn't. Maybe we will do better next year.

I wish you all the best and many dry miles for 2024.

Editor.

