

NEWSLETTER July - December 2023

EDITOR'S BEGINNINGS

A sunny Saturday. 10.25am and 28.1C according to our weather station on top of the shed and only 22.6C in the office.

Q. What's a better thing to do rather being outside getting soaked with sudsy water washing the motorcaravan ready to go away?

A. Getting the newsletter sorted, of course. The motorcaravan washing will just have to wait until late afternoon when we get some shade.

Conveniently, I have contributions from everybody, and the ever-reliant Mary has continued her record of contributing something of interest to every newsletter since I took over from her as editor. Maurice has exceeded all expectations (*not a word from you, please, Jan – you know what I mean!*) and Janet sums up the theme of the year so far in her unique way.

Thanks to you all. Without your input there would be no newsletter.

Some of you might note from the cover sheet that we have welcomed a new Secretary to the Committee. Hello, Jan. Celestine, was one of the most efficient secretaries of any committee I have been on and will be a hard act to follow. Thanks, Celestine, for all the work you have done for TWRC.

SWMBO has just come in from inspecting the garden and has decided to warm things up by doing some baking. Who am I to argue with her, I will just have to suffer the extra heat for later benefits. Cake! Yea!

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I do hope that you have all enjoyed your walking during the first half of this year, despite the mud.

My suggestion that we have Five Mile Sunday Walks was not favourably received with only one person showing any interest. I did think I had a willing leader upon reading one of my emails, but it turned out that the person had emailed the wrong Janet! The only other responses I had were not positive. It therefore follows that this is a complete non-starter, which I personally think is a great shame as I had hoped to attract younger people who worked during the week.

Moving swiftly on to the Three Mile Walks, I have to say that these are not going well, either. Of the half dozen walks which I organized and led we had a maximum of nine people attend but not all on the same day, in fact the maximum on any one day was six and the average just four and on the first walk only one! Six people provisionally volunteered to lead depending upon the day of the week chosen. Only one person, Susan Westlake, offered to organize the group so I passed everything over to her. We did a bit of a survey on the preferred day and Susan, quite rightly, chose Tuesdays as being the most popular. However, Susan later contacted me to tell me that she tried to organize a programme but only two people volunteered to lead so she decided it was not possible. However, I am not prepared to give up on this just yet, who knows I might need these myself before too long, so plan to do just three more in the coming programme. The dates will be Monday 24th July, Tuesday 22nd August and Tuesday 26th September.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing I am not doing terribly well with the pre-walking. At the beginning of this week, I set off to the Ashdown Forest which was intended to be the first walk and it turned out to be a disaster. Firstly, there was the parking charge fiasco where I found I had paid for the car that was happily sitting in our garage and not the one in which I had arrived. Husband, David, then took over and after much loading of the app, putting in card details, giving it a password etc. etc. he ended up paying three times! Eventually we set off in a freezing cold wind and before we had gone far, I tripped over a rock in the next car park and fell flat on my face amongst rocks, stones, and gravel. As I write I am still feeling somewhat battered and bruised. After I had rubbed myself down and insisted on continuing against husband David's advice, I found that there were just so many tree roots and other trip hazards in the dark woods that it is not feasible, to say nothing of the fact that a perfectly straight path on the map turned out to be anything but and left us fighting our way through scrubland.

A couple of days later, I set off with a friend to try to find another walk. It took so long, and we had to re-trace our steps so often that we completely lost track of the mileage and ended up approaching our cars from the exact opposite

direction I had intended! It is still a contender though. I have run out of time now so will put some starting places in the programme and worry about the details later.

One thing that has come to light is that there are several others of you out there who like the idea of Three Mile Walks, but you want to walk on the same day that you have been walking previously – that's Wednesdays and Fridays. This is absolutely fine, and I can understand that but I can't be in two places at once so you will have to organize it yourselves – both the organization and the leading. Good luck!

Enough of my ramblings (pun intended). Let's look forward to some lovely walking in the autumn of the year.

Janet Wilson

GROUP REPORTS

WEDNESDAY 5 MILE WALKERS

MUD

Janet Wilson

LONGER WEDNESDAY WALKERS

Yet another very wet winter which meant mud and slipping and sliding everywhere. We have a league table of the muddiest walks and a walk from Shipbourne in March went straight to the top of the table. Over the boots and knee deep in mud just one of the pleasures of walking in the winter!

However, the winter weather has produced spectacular displays of rhododendrons and azaleas. Every year we walk around Bedgebury Pinetum in May to see the display and this year it was truly sensational (see photos). We also did a walk around Bewl Water but that was as full as we have ever seen it and we had to divert from the footpath in places because it was under water (but I bet we still have a hose pipe ban this summer).



Unfortunately, we have fewer walkers at the moment due to people with hip or knee problems, but we hope to see them back in the not-too-distant future. Some walkers have joined us from the Sunday group. We are very pleased to welcome them as they have led new walks that we haven't done before (and also new mileage that we haven't done before!!!)

One of the standout walks was led by Mary from Warlingham where we saw a flock of 16 Red Kites!! In the past we have seen a few pairs flying over the Downs, but this was something exceptional.

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.

FRIDAY WALKERS

Our first set of walks in 2023 started with the usual ropey weather. Wet and muddy was the order of the day. Christine Simpson led from the Kentish Rifleman at Dunks Green followed by Ian and Joan from St Andrews Tin Church on the Hadlow Road in Tonbridge. We walked by the River Medway near East Lock where the conservation people were clearing the ash trees (due to ash dieback). The idea is to fell the trees but use them as wildlife areas, mixing them with other vegetation on the nearby island.

Our next one was Nick and Diana from the Halfway House – a new route trying to avoid the mud. We had a good view of a starling murmuration above the orchard as we walked back towards Brenchley on the High Weald Landscape Trail section after Furnace Pond. Big group for lunch – 20 of us! Nigel and Claudette led us next from Chiddingstone Causeway (Little Brown Jug). It was a bit nippy when the wind blew. We had a good lunch, and it was nice to have Tony, Pat and Wendy join us for a bite to eat.

Sheila led from the Camden Arms at Pembury – lovely day and walk from Pembury through the woods on to Pippins orchard and back via Romford. Bits of mud, but we hadn't had rain for ages. There was a spectacular tree collapse which had bent the railings on a bridge just before our break at the NE corner of the walk - a step had been cut right through the portion of the trunk on the bridge! Very stropy bar folks at the Camden Arms. They got very upset with Stella and Peter sitting at our table because they weren't stopping to eat! Next up was Janet from Hartfield – a lovely day and great walk. Always good to go to the Crown at Groombridge – one of our favourite watering holes.



I was sorry to miss Mary's walk from Shoreham, so the following week was Susan leading from West Peckham. I took a picture of alder tree cones and catkins and snowdrops in the churchyard at East Peckham old church. Another good pub – the Swan on the Green at West Peckham. Eileen's walk from Offham must qualify for a record – the walking route was sandy underfoot and very dry – the boots did not need cleaning at all!

We are now into March. Brenda led a walk from Plaxtol. It was a wild and wet day, with a temperature of 2.5°C with some snow. At Plough Hill at Basted, a tree had brought down power lines to just above our heads. The tree had fallen in the water course and seemed likely to block up the river. The electric power lines were sagging along the riverside as we walked – very dodgy. We had our lunch at Poulton Wood golf club and celebrated Janet's birthday. Next was another Halfway House at Brenchley walk – again very muddy on an overcast day with fairly heavy rain at the start. MD changed the route slightly west of Matfield and this cut off a horrible section on duckboards which was very wet. Good turnout despite the rain. The Halfway House was great – we had the long table upstairs at the back of the bar. Great meal, atmosphere and beer.

Sylvi's walk from the Vauxhall Inn was next on the programme. This was also pretty muddy – a strong contender for muddiest walk. However, the Vauxhall has a very strong claim for worst pub of the year!!! Loads of issues!! It started off with logging the car registration with the pub – seemed like this was an issue straight away. The system wasn't working, but if you could not register, the pub parent company fined you. Then despite Sylvi having confirmed our booking for the group to walk from the pub (twice), the Vauxhall staff had no record. Worst of all, when we turned up after the walk, they had no draught beer so we had to have beer in bottles.

The last walk in March was led by Jane from Porcupine Pantry car park at Penshurst. A real muddy cracker – and with rain as well! What’s not to like? A proper Q1 walk with a good turnout. I remember one gateway that I ended up on the wrong side of a quagmire and only got to other side via some strategically placed mud tussocks. To be fair, Jane did incorporate a fair bit of nice solid road/lane walking. Lunch at the Leicester Arms – I think we were 80% of the pub clientele! Also, the date prior to the annual Real Football match – the battle between the two rival pub teams from the Rock At Chiddingstone Hoath and the Castle Inn at Chiddingstone. (*Played with a weirdly shaped ball, the object is to score a goal by touching a post near the respective pubs – something analogous to a sport called Murder Ball which we played at school, but with about 50 a side! The result was 0-0 this year.*)

Into April, and a walk from Nigel (but led by Nick) from Horsmonden Green. The classic rectangle from Horsmonden out past Share Farm and the two major crossings of the river Teise with the long pull up the hill near Grovehurst Farm. The weather forecast was not great – rain on and off all the way round, but not super wet, and not too muddy either. For the pub, the Halfway House at Brenchley – our third visit in 2023 – a record! Tony joined us for lunch.

Sylvi from East Malling was next. A horrible wet day to start with but it got better as we walked. Really good underfoot – nice solid, non-muddy, stony ground (we walked near an active quarry). The walk ended by walking through East Malling Research Station. 90% of the world’s fruit tree root stocks were developed at East Malling! The pub (King and Queen in East Malling) was top notch – lovely beer – Otter Bitter from the brewery in Devon and good food.

Our next walk was Susan from Birling. On the walk out (a lovely sunny day) we saw lots of butterflies – peacock, tortoiseshell, orange tip (with lovely speckly green underparts) and brimstones (plus a few others unidentified). The walk day was fairly decent, but we had torrential rain on the evening and night of the previous day. Highlights of the walk – Nick heard a garden / willow warbler and checked the bird’s identity on his phone – confirmed by Mr Google

audio (alias Merlin software)! He also heard a nightingale which we all stopped to listen to – and also saw our first swallow. When nearly back we came across a deep flood (Celestine paddled in a bit but didn’t go too far!), but fortunately there was an easy detour by road which added a bit to our journey. The Duke of Wellington at Ryarsh did us proud for lunch.

The following Friday was led by MD from Danehill. A good walk –almost wall to wall bluebells (see photo from Ian B), a few wood anemones and cowslips and the wild garlic just coming into flower. Views to Birch Grove house (Harold Macmillan’s house) from the private golf course en route.

Next up was Jane from Burwash. Pretty manky day weatherwise – mizzly rain for most of the way round, otherwise a lovely walk with great views across the valley. Bluebells going over but still pretty. “Merlin” the bird song identifier programme was used quite a bit! Nice bits adjacent to Bateman’s where we saw a pond full of tadpoles. Pub (the Bear

in Burwash) was good.



Finally, here is a picture of the cheeky robin who “helps” me clean my walking boots – in return for a bit of seed and suet!

SUNDAY WALKS

Our 2023 program started with a perfect post-Christmas workout from Penshurst, looping to Ashurst, Stone Cross and Fordcombe. A glorious walk in good weather only marred by the unexpected extended Xmas closure of the Kingdom Cafe, not good for the caffeine addicts amongst us.

Nigel picked up the baton, taking the group in dry conditions around Motts Mill and Withyham, spoiling us with glorious scenery.

Linda closed February by taking the long way from Goudhurst to St Dunstons Cranbrook for lunch. returning via Glassenbury, a good Wealden walk.

Keith kept us local with a circuit of Leigh, slightly more mud than we were accustomed to with some out of order brambles tripping up our walks secretary!!

Mary sadly had to delegate her walk based on Matfield. We explored the western environs of Matfield before heading North to explore the new builds on the edge of Paddock Wood (an interesting but massive expansion), before reaching the charms of Brenchley.

On Easter day, Joan Fry introduced us to the back slopes of the North Downs around Cudham, including a lunch stop in the middle of Downe high street complete with Easter Eggs, followed by a meeting with a friendly Highland Cow (bull).

Celestine continued our April walks with a scenic walk from Shipbourne Common along the sandstone ridge to Knole returning via St Lawrence's church at Stone Street. Whatever the time of year this is a delightful walk.

Keith followed this up with another visit to Downe, but after rain which made the chalky paths very interesting.

Bob stood in for Mary, taking everyone up to and around Broadwater Down.

Joan Fry extended our knowledge of the scenery near Maidstone with an excellent walk based on Penenden Heath.

A lung busting ascent of the South Downs from Kingston led to some good leg exercise into and out of the valleys, before calming down with a flat wander along the Ouse into the outskirts of Lewes. A 14 mile walk of two distinct halves.

Keith bookended this program with a sunny 11 miles around Blackboys, with the countryside proudly showing off its summer plumage.

All in all, some glorious walks taking us from full winter into the start of summer.

FROM MARY BLINKS

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

Les Powell 2023



*You don't have to play cards in Deal,
Nor get stung in Nettlestead Green,
Ham has many vegetarians,
And Peacehaven's not always serene.*

*Nobody asks questions in Hoo or Wye,
It can sometimes be dull in Brighton,
In Sittingbourne people also stand
And in Battle none are fighting.*

*It's O.K. to be sad in Mereworth,
Dymchurch has some very bright folks,
Broadstairs has narrow streets too,
And in Five Elms you may find Sevenoaks.*

*You may also buy in Selling,
Dogs live in Catsfield too,
Gravesend's not as serious as it sounds,
And Cooling may be much too warm for you.*

*In Leysdown you can sit if you wish,
And money can be tight in Loose,
You may find great pebbles in Littlestone.
And little pebbles.... in Greatstone if you choose.*

*Not everyone wriggles in Wormshill,
In Rainham sleet has also been seen,
They have nice baguettes in Sandwich,
And there's no hidden treasure in Golden Green.*

*It is all very confusing,
It's the same wherever you roam,
You can't trust place names anymore,
But in Borstal you may have to...*

STAY AT HOME!

EDITOR'S RAMBLINGS



I was glad I missed this one at Leigh.



But made up for it here near Bewl.

The Committee continues to try and spend the footpath money. We thought we had found two worthy candidates for stile replacement near Brenchley, but we were too late, and the rickety stiles had already been replaced with metal kissing gates – most satisfactory. We did, then, come across a set of unsafe steps near Paddock Wood and KCC have been contacted to see if we can help. We await a response.

If any member has any other suggestions, they would be welcomed.



I hope that you all have a lovely summer. Keep walking. Keep healthy. And keep smiling.

Editor.