

## **LDWA SUSSEX GROUP NEWSLETTER – WINTER 2013/14**

Welcome to the LDWA Sussex Group Newsletter for the purpose of communicating what activities the Group and individual members are participating in and also to raise general interest in walking associated activities. All contributions, comments etc. are very much welcomed.

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### **1. GROUP NEWS AND MEMBERSHIP**

As at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 197 LDWA members had elected Sussex as their Primary Local Group (this is up from 165 as at 30<sup>th</sup> June) with 140 further members nominating Sussex as their or one of their Associate Groups.

**The Groups Annual General Meeting took place on Thursday 30th January. Here is the Chairman's Report for 2013:**

#### **The Walks.**

Including the Christmas walk the total for 2013 reached 18. The attendance varied between 7 and 23 giving an average of 13, an increase from 10 in 2012. My thanks to Trevor Beeston, the Walks Organiser, for an interesting program.

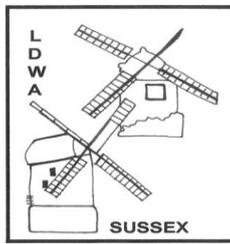
#### **Challenge Events.**

The South Downs Marathon (SDM) on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

A re-run of this event, based at East Dean, the route crosses the Seven Sisters and passes through Exceat, Litlington and Norton then over The Downs to the checkpoint at Glynde. The return is via Firlie, Alfriston and Jevington - 28 miles in all. The event, as far as the runners were concerned, was affected by the proximity of both the Brighton and London marathons. 77 started and all finished. In an attempt to prevent clashes with other events the next SDM will take place on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2014. However, after the date had been announced the Kent group booked their popular Sevenoaks Circular for the same day, the only date their walk HQ was available. The best laid plans.....

#### **The KSS Challenge Walks.**

The Kent, Surrey and Sussex Challenge comprises of three 50 mile walks, The White Cliffs 50, the Surrey Tops and the Sussex Stride, each walk taking place on a three year rotation. Badges and certificates are awarded to those completing three successive walks and this has proved popular with walkers who enjoy the extra challenge of 50 miles. The KSS has been extended to those completing six or even nine walks, in groups of three. This year it was our turn. The Sussex Stride has had a chequered history. Starting in 1998 it was, we thought, finally cancelled in 2006, due to lack of interest. The Triple Challenge led to its revival in 2010. That event was quite successful despite many difficulties. The 2013 event, on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September, proved to be something else entirely. The event was oversubscribed, 150 - the limit - entered, 134 started and 110 finished. Interest in the Challenge, a perception that a 50 mile walk is now an 'Extreme Sport' event and improved facilities and communications at the walk HQ, Longhill School, all played their part. However, it was the marshals, both the experienced and the first-timers, who made this event so



successful and many warm comments about their friendliness and efficiency were received. Despite the high running costs the event made a small surplus. All this despite a thick mist descending on the route for twelve hours!

**Thank You.**

Many thanks to the Secretary, the Treasurer and ALL the members of the Committee for their hard work and support in 2013 and for their attendance at the various meetings throughout the year.

Special thanks to all who marshalled on the SDM and Sussex Stride - without you these events would not be possible.

My thanks, on behalf of the Officers and Committee, to all of you that participated in any of the walks or events. We hope you enjoyed yourselves and look forward to seeing you again.

This is my last report as Chairman as I am standing down at the AGM. I will still be involved in organising the Challenge Walks so you haven't seen the last of me just yet. My thanks to everyone for their help and support over the years.

Good Walking.  
**Chris Baines-Holmes**

A massive thanks also to Chris for all his work as Chairman. As he points out in his Report, Chris will remain the Challenge Event Organiser and continue as a Committee Member. Also thanks to Kay Armstrong who has decided to step down from the Committee due to other commitments.

A warm welcome to Dave Weatherley who has been formally elected as a new Committee Member.

Elected Members of the Committee for 2014 are:

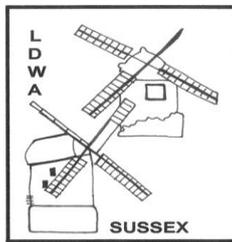
Chairman and Walks Organiser: Trevor Beeston E: [beestont@aol.com](mailto:beestont@aol.com)  
Secretary: Anthony Mitchell E: [anthonyemitchell@btinternet.com](mailto:anthonyemitchell@btinternet.com)  
Treasurer: Shirley Greenwood E: [shirleygreenwood@btinternet.com](mailto:shirleygreenwood@btinternet.com)

Challenge Event Organiser: Chris Baines-Holmes E: [chrisbainesholmes@btinternet.com](mailto:chrisbainesholmes@btinternet.com)  
Webmaster: David Hodge E: [david@weavingtree.co.uk](mailto:david@weavingtree.co.uk)  
Member: Gillian Aitken  
Member: Chris Coates  
Member: Dave Weatherley

There still remain vacancies on the Committee. Should anyone like to join please contact either the Chairman or Secretary.

**Website**

Thanks to David Hodge we are pleased to announce the launch of our new Group website [LDWA Sussex Group](http://LDWA Sussex Group). If anyone has any suggestions for ideas or materials they would like to see on the site please contact David E: [david@weavingtree.co.uk](mailto:david@weavingtree.co.uk)



## 2. CHALLENGE WALKS

### Past Event – The Sussex Stride

As mentioned in the Chairman's report 2013 was the year to put on the Sussex Stride, one of three events making up the KSS triple challenge.

Here are the thoughts and experiences of one of those 110 finishers. Thank you Helen:

*It adds a certain spice to my account of the walk by actually writing about it after the next event in my calendar (the Founders'). The Sussex Stride was not only a popular talking-point among those who had been on it but even some who had not. Its fame or notoriety had spread far!*

*Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September began reasonably auspiciously: dry and mild with light cloud; someone observed what a nice day we had for the walk. I muttered something sceptical about the cloud cover having watched the Met Office forecasts with some irritation as the benefit of a near-full moon, especially for an inexperienced night walker such as myself, seemed to be receding the nearer the event came.*

*However on the plus side, the route description used nearly all the South Downs Marathon route, which I had done three times before. A large section of the night walk, with a variation before Norton, would be familiar. Thereafter it seemed the main difficulties would be finding the right-angle turn on the South Downs Way before the escarpment above Southease, and the faint tracks over the downs on the final leg.*

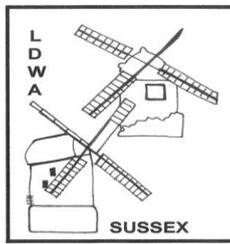
*The walk began at an unrelentingly fast pace, which surprised me on such a long event but many people had rightly set themselves a schedule in order to keep to relatively tight checkpoint times over the first half of the walk. The many long hills, the stony ground, and a tricky downhill chalk track were no obstacle. Apart from chatting about the intricacies of GPS and smartphone route plotting, and the locations where the photographer was going to be lying in wait, we were entertained by some fine views to the right over the coastline and the wide downland to the north. At Lewes town centre the shoppers must have been bemused at the stream of determined-looking walkers who kept striding through their midst. Beyond the hilly golf course, CP2 at Glynde was a major milestone marking not only the point where the route joined the SDM but also a feast of quiche and brioches.*

*It was just after Glynde that the first hints of trouble appeared. As I approached the Firlie escarpment, wisps of clouds started to form below the crest. I started to lose concentration, thinking about the coming night section rather than the current route, but the climb up the escarpment re-focused attention. No inspiring view though as there had been on the April SDM where we could see the blue sea both to the right, west of the Cuckmere valley, and ahead beyond Eastbourne. Instead at the top we were greeted by dense misty cloud and a strong, cold, drizzle-laden wind from the southwest trying its best to blow my route description out of my hands. The photographer was in a more sheltered spot but instead of oncoming silhouettes against a stunning backdrop I imagined him instead snapping a succession of windblown apparitions emerging from the mist, curiously soaked down one side only.*

*A variation in the SDM route led straight down to Alfriston where there was another CP (welcome shelter in a church building rather than part-way up the next hill as per the SDM). By Jevington the slippery tracks had started to slow me down and even as early as 5pm any wooded section was already quite dark. Rejoining the SDM route at Jevington, after the long familiar climb conditions had deteriorated again, very wet and now with visibility really closing in. What a contrast it was to the typical end of the SDM, striding along in warm sunshine with a view of the approaching sea, newborn lambs gambolling alongside, and only a couple of miles to go before the triumphant descent through the bungalows to a relaxing re-hash of the walk in East Dean Village Hall.*

*Instead there was over 21 miles to go and a premature nightfall was approaching. For my part I had hoped to reach East Dean by 7pm but anything earlier was a bonus, to get in a few more miles before it was fully dark. (At this time in September my village was still running hour-long Health Walks starting at 6.30pm). My hopes as I approached East Dean around 6.30 after pushing the pace along again were quickly dashed as it was already dark enough for the lights to be on at the Village Hall. There was a brief moment of amusement when the marshals asked to see people's check cards in case, by this stage, they got the numbers mixed up or upside down....*

*I didn't stay around for a hot meal, and rushed straight out again. The conditions even at low level were not pleasant and I started to hesitate on this very familiar "start" of the SDM, suddenly struggling as I came to the climb past cottages and the slog through soaking grass to climb the wall. Suddenly in thick fog on the hillside above Crowlink I relied on memory and missed my direction, circling round the field before finding my way back to the entrance, (and soon encountered some of the walkers who did stop at East Dean). Checking bearings more carefully, but still hesitantly I found my way down to Crowlink and in deepening gloom over the Seven Sisters, hardly able to see the path up one from the other.*



Suddenly, it seemed, it was pitch dark. I stood at the turn at the end of the Seven Sisters, fumbled for the head torch and snapped it on... and froze. I could see nothing beyond the small patch of light, not even the waymark post or fence to the left. At this moment along came another walker with a GPS (and more importantly, an accurately plotted one) and undoubtedly more night walking experience! We got going again together and I slowly became more used to the conditions. Descending into the Cuckmere valley the visibility cleared completely with lights visible in the far distance, setting a pattern for the rest of the walk: clear and increasingly calm conditions at low level and fog over the hills almost as far as the finish at Rottingdean.

Once we were into our night-walking stride I felt almost a sense of relief, the pressure of the earlier deadlines being over and with closer-spaced checkpoints and plenty of time left. The slippery steps at West Dean proved no more problematic than during the day, though the difficulty of spotting and keeping to faint paths in wet grass was a common theme. Again, compass bearings were key.

Throughout the rest of the walk there was an element of teamwork as people naturally seemed to form into groups. Our duo was heavily reliant on the GPS as in the hill fog I found it difficult even to read a conventional compass precisely enough let alone spot supposedly obvious features on the route description, even fences alongside or gates to aim for, let alone the infamous invisible dewpond on the last leg. Any advantage of prior route knowledge or scrutiny of aerial images was narrowed down to a small circle: a familiar gate or track surface, a gradient, an overgrown wall which should not have been there... At its worst we spent five or ten minutes after the climb out of Norton, circling looking for the South Downs Way fingerpost and track beyond a cattle grid, marking the westward turn to Southease. I only spotted it when literally about an arm's length away.

Other isolated moments stand out: pairs of eerie luminous discs in a hillside beyond Littleington, the cows' bulk only gradually looming up as we approached; a flash of total disorientation before Norton when a fence on the left failed to materialise (reassurance from the GPS quickly showed we were simply on the wrong side of it); fighting through bushes as we stuck literally next to another fence to avoid missing a key left turn above the Southease escarpment. Then there was arrival at Southease itself where, meeting up with another group we exclaimed one after another at the flat, level ground, the manageable six or seven miles to the finish, the now dry conditions, and even a glimpse of moonlight in the clearing visibility – then a little later on, hot bacon sandwiches at the checkpoint.

There was one more navigational sting in the tail before the end though, probably the most difficult section wholly reliant on following bearings in hill fog, plus a few more tediously muddy ups and downs before the visibility again cleared, revealing swathes of lights from the built-up areas on the coast to the south. Suddenly we were on the final on-road section down and up to the aptly named Longhill School.

At the finish it all seemed weirdly normal to be wandering around a deserted school in the small hours after walking 51 miles. There were of course the creature comforts of hot drinks, breakfast to order, and showers but it was also striking that the marshals were careful to check how the walkers were feeling. That had been a feature of all the night stops.

My main reaction at the very end was that of a learning experience: it had been my first 50 and first major night walk. Although I had done many 40s the scale of planning and in particular the night section made it a quite different level of challenge. Route knowledge and prior scrutiny of aerial photographs and Streetview, had definitely paid off though to a more limited extent than expected. However, compared with some other lurid accounts of the walk which have emerged our duo may have gone frustratingly wrong several times but never drastically or dangerously.

Lessons learned? To get a GPS as a reserve (and plot an accurate route), and if regaling my local Health Walkers with any similar adventures in future, to bring the smelling-salts!

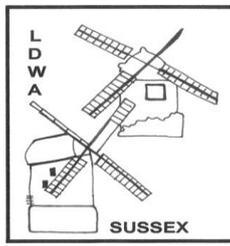
**Helen Abbott**

Thank you to all those that took part and for the many kind comments we received. We are pleased that you enjoyed the experience. We hope to see you all again in 2016.

The next KSS Triple Challenge event is the Surrey Tops organised by the Surrey Group and will take place over the weekend of 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> September.

## **Future Events**

Our next Challenge Event is the South Downs Marathon 2014 that will take place on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April. Details, rules and entry form are now available via the website.



### 3. GROUP WALKS

#### Half-Year Review

What a great month July 2013 turned out to be. As reported in the Summer Newsletter, the first of our two walks that month started from Herstmonceux and took place during an exceptionally dry and warm period (seems such a long time ago!).

It was therefore disappointing that the weather forecast for our second walk in July predicted rain and more rain. However those who turned up at the car park at Benbow Pond, Cowdray Park were in for a pleasant surprise – Thank you Jerome for this report:

July 27<sup>th</sup> - Cowdray Park to Black Down lead by Paul Farrell. 19 miles

*The weather prognostication was dire in the extreme; torrential rain and thunderstorms were predicted so not surprisingly there were only 7 of us. However the reality turned out to be very different with a hot humid morning, which had us stopping regularly to take on water. Although clouds rolled in during the afternoon there was only a brief light shower, followed by cooler more refreshing temperatures.*

*Paul had devised a superb route starting from the hidden car park at Benbow Pond, taking us through Cowdray Park with a view of the Elizabeth oak, supposed to be the tree in which Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> took shelter, and still going strong. The first of many stretches of delightful woodland lead round the side of Bexleyhill before we started the long slow climb up through Blackdown Estate with view of vinyards and the ascent of Black Down. The views were spectacular and we were taken on a conducted tour of the sizeable plateau with lovely heather, butterflies and dry sandy tracks. Descent to Lurgashall for picnic lunch on the village green, although village brown might be a more accurate description as the long hot spell was taking its toll on the vegetation.*

*The afternoon took us to the edge of Petworth Park; the original plan of going through the park was only possible with some illegal climbing, so we made the best of the alternative and continued through Upperton common which was more woodland before the return into the vast expanse of Cowdray park. We passed a memorial to Nathan, a boy or a dog? We weren't sure but the view was delightful. There was the option of a shorter return but we were all in favour (or coerced) into the longer route doing a circuit of the park and its golf course which was a lovely finish to a perfect summer walk.*

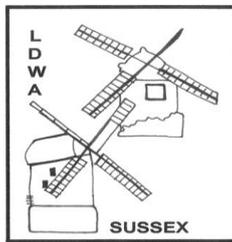
**Jerome Ripp**

The good summer continued for our early August walk – A stroll Through Three Counties. The leader Mary, was concerned that the turn out may be low. This fear was unfounded. In fact 23 keen walkers were ready for the off from East Grinstead, the highest attendance for a Sussex Group walk since I have been involved with the Group.

There was a blip in the summer weather on the Saturday of the August Bank Holiday (Sunday and Monday were fine!). This was the day, and night, of the Sussex Stride Marshal's Walk and an event that you really would like some dry conditions to help conquer the 51 mile route. It started off in light rain that turned heavy then back to light and so on. For those who took part there could only have been an hour or so when there was no precipitation at all. However, everyone just got on with it. Many thanks to the support team with the mobile checkpoints that assisted the 14 that started and the 12 that finished back at Longhill School in the middle of the night.

Twelve joined the second of our walks starting from the Whiteways Lodge car park in 2013 year. A different route with some great views of the south coast with Halnaker Windmill never far from sight...and not to forget the South African sausages at the Winterton Arms.

The forecast was grim for our early October walk from Burwash. So grim in fact that I had expected that no one (apart from the leader Chris) would make the effort. I was therefore amazed as I turned into the car park to see the number of car boots and doors open with people busy attiring themselves with suitable (or not) wet weather gear. A surprising dozen



finally set off in light rain which gradually got heavier and heavier. All were drenched by the time we reached The Carpenters Arms in Mayfield where we were greeted with enthusiastic sympathy. A great welcome. The afternoon was not so wet and there was certainly a sense of achievement when finally returned to the car park. Those that were there will recall Clive Agran, a freelance journalist, who joined us for the purpose of providing an article for Sussex Life magazine. An excellent article subsequently appeared in the December issue.

Alfriston was the base for Gillian's Birthday Walk. Apart from the showers when we set off, we remained dry all day. However, the feature of the day was the battle against gale force winds, which nearly blew us over at times, especially in the afternoon when we were on the South Downs ridge. A great walk and many thanks to Gillian for buying afternoon tea and cakes at the end.

What a beautiful sunny day it turned out to be for Remembrance Sunday. Unfortunately, our first November walk was on the previous day in unforgiving rain that carried on all the way to lunch. We arrived at the pub like drowned rats! However, the kind landlady took armfuls of our wet garments (once we'd struggled out of them) and put them in the drier. Unexpectedly, the afternoon was much better as the sun broke through the clouds. Despite there being little wind we had to waver carefully along the Undercliff path to avoid the spray (this time salt water) from the heavy waves crashing into the sea walls. Thanks to Joan for leading.

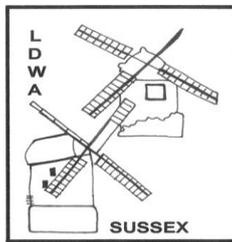
It's late November and thirteen and Ben the dog set off in good spirits from Lancing Ring in the dry with the sun shining. Descending to Steyning, and a deviation from the original planned route took us to Bramber Castle, an ideal coffee stop, enabling us to explore the historic site. A glorious walk along the banks of the Adur River brought us to our lunch stop at Small Dole. After lunch a pleasant walk through autumn-tinted woodland led us to Truleigh Hill, the steepest climb of the walk, but we were well rewarded with sweeping views and a spell of easy walking as we descended once again to the Adur river valley. Thanks to Kay for a great walk.

On a clear and bright morning 16 set off from Alfriston on the annual Christmas Walk. Heading west along the Downs as far as Firlie, then back along the lower coach road to Berwick. It clouded over but turned bright again as the Group reached the Cricketers at Berwick for lunch and the traditional singing of carols. There was a choice of a shorter or longer walk back to Alfriston. A great day enjoyed by all that attended.

January and a New Year and time for the Group's annual trip to London. 16 started at Regents Park tube station with a clear blue sky. The day took us passed the zoo, along the Regents canal towpath through Little Venice to Paddington Basin where an empty cafe-bar were glad to see us for lunch. After lunch we went through a maze of streets to Kensington Gardens, the Albert Memorial and Hyde Park. Then through Belgravia to finish at Victoria station. Thanks to Chris for leading. A great day.

Thank you to all those that participated to make it a very good year for group walks. Particular thanks to those that agreed to put together excellent routes and lead from the front!

**Trevor Beeston**



## **Future Programme**

The Group walks programme up to the end of August is now available on the LDWA website. Walks are between 18 and 20 miles. So put the dates in your diaries!

Members may also be interested to note that the Group has been approached by Worthing Samaritans to design two routes for their Sponsored National Walk 2014 to take place on 14<sup>th</sup> June. Outline routes with checkpoint locations have been established and work will shortly commence in writing route descriptions. Details of the Event are available via the Samaritans website: [The National Samaritans Walk 2014](#)

## **4. DID YOU KNOW?**

### **Deregulation Bill – Benefits all round?**

One of the key measures in the draft Deregulation Bill published on 1<sup>st</sup> July (part of the government's ongoing drive to remove needless bureaucracy that costs British businesses millions) is devolving decisions on public rights of way to a local level, which will cut, it is claimed, the time for recording a right of way by several years and save almost £20m a year.

Measures contained in the Bill should make it easier for landowners to divert public rights of way that cross their land. The Environment Secretary is understood to want there to be a presumption in favour of landowners who apply for rights to be diverted. The aim is to reduce red tape and costs of rights of way challenges. The Minister is said to want it to be easier to divert or shut down rights of way because of disruption caused to landowners when path cross their land.

The Bill is also expected to benefit walkers as it provides measures to enable walkers, organisations etc. to apply for the creation of new rights of way. Also, it should make processes such as adding existing but unrecorded paths to the definitive map (official record of all public rights of way) more straightforward. Adding paths to the definitive map should mean that they are protected for walkers.

### **Path Problems**

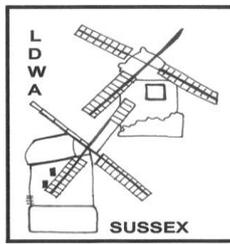
It was reported in November that according to the Ramblers, that Councils had not fixed 100,000 problems on paths. Problems included overgrowth, dangerous barbed wire and missing signposts. Of no real surprise, a report said that more than 30 per cent of councils in England had had their path budgets cut. The Ramblers listed eleven councils that had made "substantial cuts to budgets" or have a large number of path problems.

### **Just Walking in the Rain**

Rain and more rain, the wettest January on record. On the Downs the muddy places are under water, the dry places full of mud and those chalky paths just another ice rink. And it's still raining.

Where to walk? Let's go urban – let's go along the prom. Noisy – yes, crowded – yes, wet – more than likely but firm and mudless solid tarmac underfoot. OK some places are covered by shingle and there are a hundred yards of white slurry on the undercliff behind the Asda at Brighton Marina

So, Hove to Saldean and back? Not far by LDWA standards but a walk nonetheless.



Past the King Alfred, over the shingle, on to the undercliff and through the slurry. But oh dear – a miscalculation? The wind is up, gale force southwesterly, the tide is up. In fact the tide is full, fuller than it has been for months and the undercliff becomes a whirling hell of white.

The dripping bus ride home from Rottingdean was beyond unpleasant. It takes forever to get the salt out of the waterproofs.

Oh well, back to the mud?

**Pathtrekker**

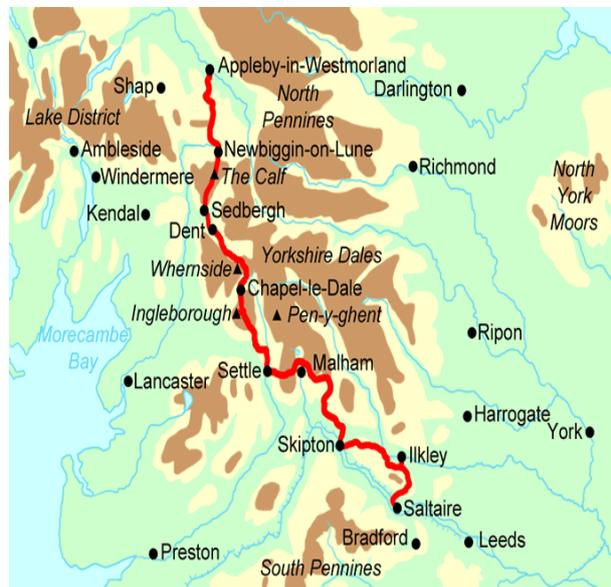
## 5. Your Walk – “The Dales High Way”

### Pavements And Scars, Hot And Cold Treats

We are only a few miles from Bradford, so it seems appropriate to treat ourselves to a large curry ...

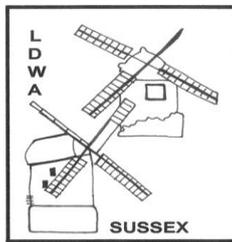
My friend and I had arrived in Saltaire, near Shipley, in the late afternoon and had spent a couple of hours in a cursory exploration of the World Heritage Site ‘model village’ – housing, hospital, school, church etc - founded by the textile magnate Titus Salt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the banks of the river Aire adjacent to his mill. On the morrow we would don our boots and start walking north.

The Dales High Way runs from Saltaire to Appleby-in-Westmorland, a distance of approximately 90 miles. It passes through magnificent scenery ranging from lush lowland dales to high, stark limestone pavements and scars, wherever possible following ancient trade routes, green lanes and packhorse ways. It takes an ‘up and over’ approach to high ground, unlike the better known Dales Way that tends to follow river valleys. We walked the Way in early June, at which time the scenery is enhanced by many meadows carpeted with a wonderful variety of wildflowers.



#### Day 1: Saltaire to Skipton - 19 miles, 2640ft.

Feeling refreshed after a good night's sleep and a substantial Yorkshire breakfast we leave Saltaire and are soon on the open grass and heather of Bingley Moor where we are mobbed frequently by adult ground-nesting birds, predominantly lapwing and curlew, aggressively protecting their young. Bingley is one of several local moors encompassed within Rombalds Moor, a large, ancient and empty landscape in which there is substantial evidence of our Mesolithic and Neolithic ancestors and during the morning we pass several examples of enigmatic ‘cup and ring’ rock carvings. We take a short drinks break at the ‘Twelve Apostles’, a Bronze Age stone circle from which the panorama includes a distant view of the



domes of RAF Menwith Hill, operated by the US National Security Agency and reputedly the world's largest Communications Intelligence facility. Little do we suspect that a rogue US operative and *The Guardian* newspaper will soon draw its work into sharp focus. Throughout the morning the peat terrain reminds me of the Derbyshire moorland where I had walked as a youth; flagstones have been laid on the wetter stretches of ground and the recent weather has been fine and dry, so the boggy patches I have been anticipating are few and far between.

After crossing Ilkley Moor, the most famous within Rombalds, we pass more prehistoric artifacts before diverting to Addingham for a lunch stop. Whilst leaving the village we pause to chat briefly with a small group of friendly and inquisitive locals who are quaffing ale outside a pub. I relish hearing the short, flat vowels of my youth and squirm with pleasure at dialect words familiar to me but a mystery to my companion; the good residents of my adopted town occasionally have problems with my accent and vocabulary but here I feel I am among my own folk. The village know-all listens to us for a while and then holds forth; "You're a Brummie," he says, correctly placing my friend and then, turning to me, "and you're from Australia!" I would wet myself had it not been such a hot, dehydrating morning.

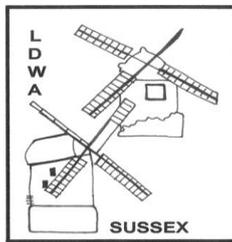
From Addingham we cross the wide and empty Skipton Moor on a green lane, an old turnpike that follows the line of a prehistoric track, eventually in the late afternoon sunshine dropping down into the busy town of Skipton – 'the gateway to the Dales' - whose main streets are thronged with people and lined with market stalls. Skipton is home to one of the best-preserved mediaeval castles in the country; besieged for three years during the English Civil War it was 'slighted' after surrender of the Royalist garrison and, like several others in the area, was restored in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the redoubtable Lady Anne Clifford.

It is Saturday and our overnight accommodation is adjacent to the only disco within many miles. My companion's room affords him a grandstand view of young revellers being ejected and collapsing drunk in the street, whilst mine has a dormer window that is very efficiently coupled acoustically to a loud and incessant bass line. I sleep like a log from midnight until 02:30.

#### Day 2: Skipton to Settle - 19miles, 3760ft

Fortified by eggs, bacon and the weakest coffee I have ever tasted, we sally forth past the brooding castle and depart from the town on our way northwards. My friend remembers being captivated by the splendour of Malham Cove during a school trip when he was a young inner-city boy and is eagerly anticipating making a return visit. At the same time he is fretting because the local shops are closed and he has been unable to obtain a packed lunch at the B&B.

We soon pick up where we left off the previous day - moorland terrain of grass and heather on top of gritstone and peat. An easy climb to the minor summit of Sharp Haw is followed by a descent to the isolated hamlet of Flasby, one of many settlements in the area with a Scandinavian patronymic name, where we see large drifts of bluebells three weeks behind those in the southeast. After following a clear, energetic beck through wildflower meadows and evading more anxious avian parents we arrive in mid morning at the tiny village of Hetton, featured in the film *Calendar Girls*. Hetton is the home of a photogenic stone hostelry that according to its website '*...is one of the best known and best loved inns in the country...*' Although we are the only customers in the pre-lunch period, staff at this paragon of hospitality produce a pot of coffee only after a protracted debate - and then very grudgingly. A polite request for a sandwich is flatly and unashamedly refused: "Chef says he has neither ham nor cheese ... and we're not a public house you know, we're a dining inn and we have standards to maintain!"



At Weets Top we pause to marvel at the change of scenery – gritstone and peat moorland lies now behind us to the south, whilst ahead across our route are deep valleys, limestone pavements and scars, products of the Mid Craven Fault and glacial action. A small U3A group draws to a halt nearby ready for lunch and close to open revolt, holding the leader to be unreasonable, arrogant and dictatorial - behaviour unthinkable within the LDWA Sussex group of course ...

Sustained by a doorstep sandwich of home-cooked ham purchased from a farmer's wife at her Gordale Bridge roadside stall, my friend is once again bowled over by the scale of Malham Cove, a massive dry waterfall carved out by glacial melt waters. For me the highlight of the day comes a little later at Attermire Scar where early Mesolithic man sought refuge in the numerous caves and left behind much evidence of his lifestyle. Here the hauntingly stark and beautiful scenery is enhanced by the empty, silent landscape and the complex quality of the late afternoon light

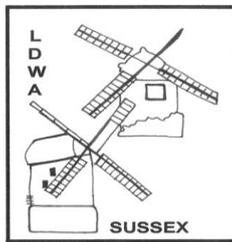
Our lodging in Settle, an ancient town with a 13<sup>th</sup> century market charter, is a rugged 17<sup>th</sup> century stone pub with rooms long overdue for refurbishment and a management team on the unfriendly side of neutral. On the other hand the tariff is modest and the beer good.

#### Day 3: Settle to Ribblesdale - 16 miles, 2600ft

I am dismayed to find that coffee at breakfast time is a DIY job involving cups (no saucers, just cups), sachets of instant Nescafé and a flask of hot water; breakfast itself is rather meagre. We have been the only guests in an establishment badly in need of income but the manageress seems very pleased to see us depart and as we set out we agree that she has probably not finished the first chapter of *B&B Management For Dummies*. We buy wonderful sandwiches in the village bakery and my companion is pleased and relieved to find that the nearby outdoor pursuits shop stocks Compeed and orthotic footbeds. The weather is set fair and another day of adventure beckons.

We leave Settle on a path beside the youthful Ribble and delight in the clear water, the wild flowers, the rocky riverbed and the occasional small 'force' or waterfall. At the 14<sup>th</sup> century packhorse bridge close by Stainforth we happen upon a telephone engineer unable to locate a specific telegraph pole because his GPS system has failed and astonish him by using map and compass to locate the appointed spot. When he enquires how he might learn such impressive skills I give him a LDWA (Sussex) card. A little later *Elaine's Tearooms* in the tiny hamlet of Feizor provides us with excellent coffee served with a shortbread biscuit and a warm smile; we shudder as we recall our treatment at the 'dining inn' in Hetton. Our route onwards takes us through the hamlet of Wharfe and the most magnificent of all the wildflower meadows we are to encounter during the week, after which an old clapper bridge provides a convenient and scenic spot for a lunch break. I have with me a copy of *The Times* bought in Settle and I skim through it to find out what is going on in the world, feeling very happy that, selfishly, I do not really care.

After lunch we climb gradually to the limestone uplands east of Clapham and Austwick, an area I know very well and that is a particular joy to me, walking through and across limestone terraces and pavements towards Simon Fell and the track to Ingleborough. As we ascend the track we pass many Yorkshire Three Peaks walkers in various states of exhaustion and exhilaration as they descend from the final peak of their day and make their way back to Horton-in-Ribblesdale a couple of miles distant; interestingly the older ones seem to be in better shape than most of the young bucks. Tarrying awhile on the summit of Ingleborough amongst the remains of the Iron Age circular stone dwellings once inhabited by the Brigantes we bask in the sunshine and admire the far-reaching views. When eventually we set off



again we continue towards our destination via the NE ridge. Behind us Ingleborough's north face - its familiar profile resembling that of an Easter Island mo'ai figure - is now backlit and appears to glow at us; to our right Pen-y-ghent stands proud and aloof; to our left a sunlit Whenside beams down benevolently, whilst ahead in the middle distance the Ribblehead viaduct beckons.

As soon as we enter the *Station Inn* we know we have found a gem. Our rooms are compact but comfortable and surprisingly affordable considering that the inn is right in the middle of a walking area with the nearest competition a good few miles distant. The food is very good and, once again, less costly than it might have been, and the staff extremely hospitable. The craic is excellent and the beers on offer are superb, a fact confirmed by the presence there of a CAMRA group from Lancaster whose members are looking very pleased with themselves.

#### Day 4: Ribblehead to Sedbergh - 13miles, 1960ft

The morning reveals a change in weather to what in Ireland would be called 'a soft day' and we don waterproofs for the first time. We bid the inn a fond farewell and for a few minutes walk in the shadow of the Ribblehead viaduct, a Grade II\* listed building and a scheduled historic monument. The engineering challenge of the Settle to Carlisle line is illustrated by the scale of the viaduct, built in a terrain of peat and clay, and by one relatively minor piece of work we pass close by the entrance of Blea Moor tunnel where the 19<sup>th</sup> century engineers diverted a large beck over and away from the line by means of a substantial and extremely handsome stone aqueduct. Our route traverses the eastern shoulder of Whenside alongside Force Gill on the old packhorse way to Dent and as we reach the summit the rain stops. The sun emerges to warm us as we coast down into lovely Dent Dale.

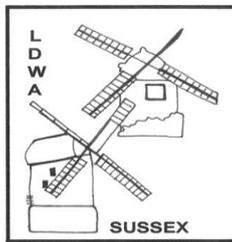
Our approach to the village takes us beside Deepdale Beck and then the Dee, its deep and inviting clear pools interspersed with long stretches of dry, rocky riverbed. Dent was established by Norse settlers and in more recent times has been famous for its 'terrible knitters' and for being the birthplace of Adam Sedgwick, one of the founders of modern geology. It is 12:45 and the owner of the local shop-cum-post office will not allow us to purchase anything, saying he closes at 13:00 - perhaps he feels threatened by my Australian accent? We walk on, past the large granite monument to Sedgwick, and find a much warmer welcome in a tearoom at the other end of Dent's cobbled main street.

The final stretch to Sedbergh, a small historic town and England's official Book Town, is across empty moorland on another former packhorse way from which we admire the rolling, steep-sided Howgill Fells, over which lies our route for the morrow. We remark upon the extremely dark clouds cloaking their summits.

The day's walk has been the shortest on our itinerary but even so *The Bull* is a welcome sight, especially for my companion whose feet have been increasingly painful. As dusk envelops the town the narrow streets resound to the sound of hooves on cobblestones and windows rattle as several strings of horses clatter past, driven onward by horse traders who with their carts, caravans and families are on their way south and westwards from the Appleby Horse Fair towards the Irish Sea ports and home. Some time later my friend declares the combination of blisters and fatigue such that he feels unable to tackle the final stage; he will make his way to Appleby by public transport.

#### Day 5: Sedbergh to Appleby - 22miles, 3800ft

The weather had deteriorated during the night and the morning is wet. The climb towards the ridge of the Howgills is a good workout, although less demanding than it might have



been because a stiff SW breeze is pushing me along, and I am glowing when I reach The Calf. From here on a good day can be seen the Three Peaks, the hills of Lakeland, Wild Boar Fell and the Pennine range, but not today; rain that has been steady but moderate suddenly becomes a heavy downpour, the wind strengthens to a gale, the visibility drops to a few feet and the temperature plummets. Map and compass work become difficult but I manage to find my way across the range in a careful six-mile traverse slower than intended. After descending into Bowderdale I walk rapidly for a couple of hours, eventually stopping for a leisurely lunch atop a remote limestone pavement close by Great Asby Scar. The Scar is a rewarding hunting ground for those seeking evidence of prehistoric man and is part of the Orton Fell range that runs broadly parallel to the River Lune from Lakeland to the Pennines. The rain has stopped, the clouds have dispersed save far behind me atop the Howgills, and the sun shines brightly.

After reluctantly leaving limestone high ground for the last time I walk the final stretch to Appleby in clear conditions and at a good pace. The landscape becomes gentle but is memorable throughout, not least for the numerous small hamlets, villages and natural features with Norse-inspired names. I take few photographs, preferring to soak up the views, smells and general ambience. In the late afternoon I enter the town by the High Cross at the top of Boroughgate adjacent to Appleby Castle, another of those restored by Lady Anne Clifford whose tomb lies in the nearby church. Since leaving Sedbergh I have seen just one group of four walkers in the far distance and have spoken to no one; the solitude has been an opportunity to reflect on a wonderful few days and has been invigorating. I am feeling fresh and relaxed. I am blister-free and at peace with myself. I feel that my God is smiling on me.

I am in dairy farming country, so it seems appropriate to treat myself to a large ice cream ...

#### Logistics

We travelled to Shipley and returned from Appleby by rail, an arrangement that was comfortable, relaxing and logistically simpler than going by car; by dint of advanced booking and railcards it was also cheaper. The return journey was especially memorable for the initial section from Appleby southwards along the wonderfully scenic Settle to Carlisle line. Even when making bookings a few months in advance the task of finding accommodation was not without its problems, notably in the Chapel-le-Dale/Ribblehead and Settle areas and especially in Appleby where rooms are at a premium during the period of the annual Horse Fair. We used a baggage-carrying service to convey our cases between places of stay and so were able to walk with small daypacks sufficient to carry waterproofs, snacks, first aid kit and my friend's north-south phrasebook.

A reluctant Australian