

Long Distance Walkers' Association

SUSSEX GROUP

<http://www.ldwasussex.org.uk/>



NEWSLETTER

January 2017

1. Group News

In February last year the Sussex Group Annual General Meeting was, for the first time in recent history, held during the hours of daylight so that we could warm up with a walk over the Downs before having lunch at the Sussex Ox, Milton Street. The hope was that this would attract a few more members along. The general consensus was that this strategy was a success and that we should take a similar approach in 2017.

Long standing Secretary, Anthony Mitchell, announced at the AGM that he was standing down and he was thanked for all his work over the years. Gillian Aitken was nominated to succeed him and subsequently elected to the role ... but come November she said that she would have to give it all up as she would be leaving Sussex to start a new life on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. The Committee thanked Gillian for her commitment to the Group and were confident that the North Yorkshire Group would welcome her into their fold. The Committee will seek to elect a successor at this year's AGM.

The Group organised two Challenge events during 2016. In May we saw the LDWA South Downs Marathon. With such a good response the original cap on entrants of 150 was raised to 180 although 54 of entrants didn't turn up despite being blessed with good weather on the day (unlike the gales of 2015!). Come September, it was our turn to organise the 50 miler – the Sussex Stride. 150 entrants with 137 starting. Weather wise this turned out to a good weekend, probably warmer and more humid than would normally be expected in late September. Both events were deemed to be a success.

During the year work progressed in preparing for an additional and exciting new Challenge event to be called the Sussex Loops. This will entail three loops centred on Forest Row and the inaugural event is scheduled for September this year.

The Group's social walks programme attracted interest similar to previous years. There were again a number of new faces and we hope that they will continue to support our walks in the future. We put on 21 walks of which all but 4 were in East Sussex, with the occasional invasion across the border into Kent. The Committee were conscious that there had been little activity in West Sussex during 2016, however most of the Group's active members and volunteer leaders are based in East Sussex and this was reflected in the walks programme. We again put on a walk for the Wealden Walking Festival and this proved much more of a success than in previous years, with a high number of non-LDWA members who we hoped would consider joining the organisation.

As well as the South Downs Marathon, the month of May saw our second Group excursion away, this time to Dorset. During our three days in Dorset those that attended saw sufficient of the coast and countryside to understand how beautiful the County is despite an awfully wet Saturday! Dave Green of the Dorset Group lead two of the three walks which helped make the visit such a success.

There is still a need for more people to become actively involved in the Group, whether to lead walks, help out at checkpoints or become a Committee member. This will ensure that the Challenge events and Group social walks will continue to thrive into the future.

LDWA Sussex Committee, July 2016

Chairman:	Trevor Beeston
Treasurer:	Shirley Greenwood
Secretary:	
Challenge Events Organiser:	Chris Baines-Holmes
Walks Organiser:	Manfred Engler
Webmaster:	David Hodge
Newsletter Editor:	David Weatherley
Member:	Chris Coates
Member:	Anthony Mitchell
Member:	David Nash

There still remains a vacancy for Committee members. Please contact either the Chairman or the Secretary if you are interested in helping your local Group.

2. Challenge Events

Recent Events

Sussex Stride 24th & 25th September 2016

The Statistics.

150 entries
137 started
115 finished.
The no-show rate was 9%.
The completion rate was 84%.

The Weather.

Dry but hotter and more humid than expected during the day, cooler during the night. Some entrants may have been overdressed.



Route and Route Description.

Two changes to the 2013 Stride route were implemented:

1. Mill Hill (above Rodmell) to Balsdean reservoir. In response to complaints about the route between Mill Hill and the obscure gate south of Highdole Hill - a featureless, rolling down, crossed by the majority after dark - a loop to the north was used. This followed the South Downs Way (SDW) north west from Mill Hill then left it at Iford Hill heading south west to eventually pick up the tarmac road from the water works at Balsdean. However, once a barn is passed at Swanborough Hill, this route is also featureless at night. The South Downs Marathon (SDM) route from Cradle Hill to Norton was used, cutting out the dog-leg to Bishopstone.
2. To accommodate the change at (1) above the SDM route from Cradle Hill to Norton was used, cutting out the dog-leg to Bishopstone.

Thanks to comments from people scouting the route prior to the event, refinements to this part of the route description were issued via the website. In the event the new route seemed to work

well. However, about a mile of the SDW used is a concrete path and this, together with tarmac roads all the way from Balsdean to Longhill, a distance of about 2.5 miles, led to some adverse comments. A possible alternative route via Telscome Village will be investigated for the next Stride in 2019.

Longhill School – Event HQ.

The activities here are based on the cafeteria which proved adequate for the task. The drama suite, supplied with mats from the dance studio, was used as a sleeping area until noon on Sunday. In all respects the School serves as an effective headquarters for the event. It is a requirement of the hire of the school that a member of The Deans staff is on the premises throughout the event. This year it was the manager Allan Parker-Read. Allan is a fully qualified fireman and first aider which proved fortuitous. He was able to provide treatment for one man who had severe heat exhaustion and for another who had fallen into a barbed wire fence.



The Checkpoints.

The Stride checkpoints are located at Offham, Glynde, Alfriston, East Dean, Litlington, Norton and Southease. The first and the last two are in the open air. Glynde is staffed by the Surrey Group and East Dean by the Kent Group.

The CP at Glynde is regarded as the lunch stop and despite the space limitations of the Reading Rooms the Surrey Group managed to serve a proper cold lunch. If the move of the main CP to Firle on the 2017 South Downs Marathon proves successful, a similar arrangement will be considered for the 2019 Stride.

Due to the route change approaching Norton, this CP was relocated, with permission from the land owner, to farm land to the east of the hamlet. This location worked well.

The tradition of serving bacon butties at the last CP at Southease, started in 2013, was continued this year. A difference in concept of the bacon content between the organiser and CP management necessitated an emergency resupply of the porcine component during the night. The gas urn, essential at this CP for the provision of hot drinks before the last 7 miles back to Longhill, proved troublesome. Very difficult to light, the outer skin becomes hot enough to fry – well, bacon. The urn was bought for the 2013 event and had not been used since although it was successfully tested shortly before the event. A check on the Web revealed that this particular model is difficult to light. An alternative method of providing hot drinks will be provided for the next Stride.

The Food

The food proved adequate if not spectacular. The menu has not changed for several years and, together with the quantities provided, needs to be reviewed before the next Stride.

The Marshals.

The marshals are the life-blood of any event. Initially too few in number, the now traditional email appeal to the entire Sussex membership produced a good harvest, enabling adequate coverage at all the locations and checkpoints. My grateful thanks to everyone that helped.

Conclusions.

The event can be considered a success. As always there are a few wrinkles to be sorted out and consideration needs to be given to the future relevance of the event and any advances in digital communications affecting progress recording.

Chris Baines-Holmes, Challenge Events Organiser.

Sussex Stride 2016 – A Customer's View.

Pre-flight checks completed and pith helmet strap tightened, off I went on the Sussex Stride. With a pleasant breeze to begin, we ran, loped, trotted and walked out of Longhill school, where we would later stagger back to in various tired but happy states. The first leg took us up to Offham, on the way another walker and I took on some passengers in the form of two bananas. (If these were yours, they were well looked after and currently reside by the water tap at Housedean farm). After Offham, the route turned east through the town of Lewes, where the residents were much surprised to find a river of determined hikers zipping along their riverside walk, building momentum for the assault on Mt Caburn, a section of the Downs sitting like an island north of the main hills. Down then to Checkpoint 2 in Glynde Reading Rooms, before forging on along the route of the South Downs Marathon, which is also well worth doing. Passing through Alfriston and Jevington, over hills numbered 'lost count', 'who put that there', and 'I would like a ski lift', we arrived in East Dean. Here the Kent Group had done an outstanding job, providing not only squash and biscuits, but also pizza and chips, just what was needed to convince us that we did enjoy the hills really. Then the sunset over the Seven Sisters, each dip providing a picture frame for a sea which looked really rather splendid. After this, the walk became rather dark, with a distinct lack of members of the general public, I can't think why. I tried to use night vision as much as possible on this section, I find I can almost see the path better, with each hilltop revealing another town lit up like a Christmas Tree. After finding the person who sold me my boots at Norton (thank you once again, another 50 completed without any blisters), it was on to Southease. This checkpoint was worthy of an award, not only were they stuck outside late into the morning, they also roused many an exhausted walker with the offer of a magnificent bacon sandwich. Stomach filled and pith helmet strapped to my bag (given the sun had set a couple of hours previously, there seemed little point in trying to stop my head getting sunburnt any more) I set off into the dark. Ahead I could see two headtorches, so I hurried on to catch up. Sadly, my 'headtorches' were less enticing than they had appeared, being instead a burning manure heap. After the last couple of hills, the end was in sight, banners flying at the entrance. Finished. Lovely, time for a cup of tea. Thank you to all the organisers, checkpoint staff, and to the other hikers who were all so friendly on the way round, I'll see you next time.



Sammy Dawkins

Forthcoming Events

LDWA South Downs Marathon, May 14th

The Group's annual Challenge event, based at East Dean since 2010, will take place again this year. In response to requests from some of the participants to avoid the double crossing of the A27, the main checkpoint will be moved from Glynde to Firle. The hall at Firle is bigger than the Reading Rooms at Glynde and has recently been renovated. This change will cut the length of the route to 27 miles – the rest of which is unchanged. Full details of the event can be found on the Group website.

The success of this event is dependent upon a plentiful supply of marshals. If you would like to help on the day please contact me at chrisbainesholmes@gmail.com or via 07977 810964 or 01273 772076.

Chris Baines-Holmes, Challenge Events Organiser

LDWA Sussex Loops, September 10th

It is planned to hold this new Challenge event in two years out of three, i.e. those years when of the Sussex Stride is not on the calendar, and to provide entrants with routes of 10, 20 or 30 miles in a variety of Sussex terrain. The inaugural event will be based on Forest Row and will visit parts of Ashdown Forest and The Weald, but the concept has been designed to be transportable to other parts of the Group's domain and to different terrain.

The event has been designed to minimise the amount of on the day support needed and this has been achieved by adopting a route comprising three loops, each of approximately 10 miles, radiating from the event HQ. A minor checkpoint will be sited at approximately the half way point of each loop and the HQ will perform the function of a major checkpoint for competitors tackling 2 or 3 loops, i.e. the 20 or 30 mile routes.

The entry list for the 2017 LDWA Sussex Loops will be opened immediately after completion of the South Downs Marathon in May and numbers will be limited to 100 because of parking limitations in Forest Row. As is the case with the Stride, the success of the Loops - and the public image projected by the Sussex Group - will depend upon sufficient numbers of our members making themselves available for marshalling and other duties.

3. Group Walks

First of the Year – January 7th

12 miles from Firle beacon via Litlington and Alfriston - a walk to blow away the Christmas cobwebs.

This walk was first attempted in January 2016, when it was 'blown away' by driving rain and a mighty gale which made the opening of car doors at the exposed car park well-nigh impossible. Revived in 2017, it replaced the traditional London walk that had been defeated by Southern Rail strike action.

Heavy rain the previous night and a temperature rise resulted in the top of the Downs being shrouded in thick mist, including the car park at Firle Beacon. Some 26 had gathered by 10am, a combination of seasoned walkers and first timers attracted perhaps by the distance, short by LDWA standards. The weather conditions and numbers required a back-marker and I am grateful to David Hodge for fulfilling that role.



Fortunately, the presence of a wire fence marked the first part of the route to Bo Peep. Following a drop in altitude and a turn south towards Norton Top and Cradle Hill, the mist thinned somewhat making the route finding easier. The distant views remained very hazy but the Rathfinny vineyard, with its angular layout and regimented rows of vines, was clearly visible. The Alfriston road was crossed near High and Over and the hill descended into Litlington. Here the road to Alfriston was followed in preference to the very muddy river bank. Following lunch the party, now 24, left Alfriston to follow the SDW back to Firle where the car park was still shrouded in mist.

This route, that is mainly along the top of the Downs, is known for its views which, this time, were lost in the mist. However, the dark overcast and the mist gave the Downs an 'otherworldly' aspect, almost sinister at times. I intend return for a re-run in January 2018 – perhaps we will get a cold, sparkling winter day to really enjoy those views.

Chris Baines-Holmes

2016/17 Social Walks Programme as at January 22nd

Date	Walk	Start	Miles	No.
2016				
06/08	Wealden wander	Heathfield	21	9
20/08	Beckley and back	Westfield	20	10
10/09	Sussex Stride marshals' walk	Longhill school	51	
17/09	Lewes, Ditchling, Falmer figure of eight	Lewes	19	7
02/10	Ashdown Forest Circular*	Visitor Centre	20	18
15/10	Senlac 950	Ponts Green Chapel	19	7
06/11	Mayfield - Burwash circular	Mayfield	17	20
19/11	1066 reversed - Battle to Pevensey	Pevensey or Battle	17	7
03/12	Jerome's winter woodland appearance	Horsham	19	13
11/12	Christmas Walk & Lunch	Alfriston		15
2017				
07/01	First of the year	Firle Bostal	12	26
21/01	A little tour of the rocks	Crowborough	16	19
04/02	February in Friston	Wilmington Priory	17	
18/02	Walk & AGM	Milton Street	11	
04/03	Circular from East Dean	East Dean	18	
19/03	Bodle Street boogie	Heathfield	20	
08/04	At the chalkface	Eastbourne	21	
22/04	Two-level traipse	Westfield	19	
06/05	SDM Highlights	East Dean	22	
20/05	Cinque Ports 100 - Stages 3, 4 & 5	Rye	24	
04/06	Jerome's usual appearance	West Chiltington	20	
11/06	Joint walk with Kent Group	Rye	23	
18/06	From the top	Ditchling Beacon	20	
02/07	Round Frant in an eight	Frant	20	
15/07	Forest Row to Forest Row via Forest Row	Forest Row	10/20	

*Organised by the Sussex Group for the 2016 Wealden Walking Festival.

(Check the [website](#) to confirm details of future walks)

Are we missing something?



Do you have a favourite walk or area of the county - Downland or Weald, high ground or coast - that you think we have overlooked? Is there a gem of a pub that we have not yet visited for a half way refuelling stop? If so, whether you are a long standing member or a relative newcomer, we invite you to suggest a route for our future programme and perhaps to lead it. Friendly advice and assistance will be made available at each stage - planning, organising and, if appropriate, on the day - if you think you might need it.

Go on ... help us make the most of the glorious countryside in which we are fortunate to live ... make 'no commitment' contact with the Walks Organiser via the 'Committee' link on the Sussex Group [website](#). He's not as scary as he looks!

Ad hoc walks

For a trial period we will be offering a number of shorter walks to cater for those who have expressed an interest in Sussex Group outings but who are not yet sufficiently confident of their ability to walk for a full 'LDWA day'. The walks will not be included in our formal walking programme but will be advertised via the 'Ad Hoc Walks' link on the [website](#).

4. Miscellany

Big Pathwatch

In November last year The Ramblers reported the results of their survey of the 140,000 mile network of footpaths in England and Wales, during which volunteer 'citizen surveyors' walked every path in almost half the total area of England and Wales. The surveyors recorded more than 100,000 items of data relating to qualitative features (for example attractive views, interesting flora and fauna) and quantitative ones (number of locked gates, incidences of barbed wire across paths, missing or misleading signs, etc.).

The analysis presented in the report indicates that:

- 56% of paths are well-kept and signposted, 35% are in need of improvement and 9% are difficult or impossible to use.
- 55% of reported features are negative (muddy, ploughed or potholed paths, unsafe stiles, gates or bridges, heavy undergrowth or overhanging vegetation) and many of these made paths difficult or impossible to use.

- 45% of reported features identified are positive, with attractive views topping the charts.
- Barbed wire is a particular problem in Cornwall, accounting for a quarter of all the obstructions listed. South Gloucestershire has the worst problem with overhanging vegetation, whilst Wiltshire has the highest proportion of electric fences across paths. The state of routes is poorer in the southwest, West Midlands and Wales than for England and Wales as a whole.
- Within the South East region 5% of paths are poorly kept, 35% adequately kept but in need of improvement, 60% well kept and signposted. This represents a situation better than the average for England and Wales.
- Of the national parks, Snowdonia has the highest proportion of poorly kept paths (16% either difficult or impossible to use), whilst the Peak District has the best maintained ones (3% in poor condition). The condition of paths in the South Downs National Park is rated better than average.
- The top reported problem across all regions was that of missing or misleading signs. In many areas, walkers would struggle even to find paths, with 20,000 signs reported as missing. In Shropshire alone, 743 signs were missing. Addressing this problem will take priority in the first phase of the follow-on Ramblers campaign.

Partial blame for the poor state of the footpath network is attributed to the reduction of local authority teams: between 2009 and 2012 more than 70% of English councils cut their rights-of-way management budget; a third reduced the budget by more than a quarter; 55% reduced the size of the team responsible for maintaining paths.

Councils are exhorted to recognise the health benefits of having attractive and accessible paths, since health problems caused by physical inactivity are believed to cost the NHS £1.8 billion a year in England. The NHS recommends that adults aged 19-64 undertake at least 2 hours 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, such as cycling or fast walking, every week.

The report concludes that the general problem is far from insurmountable and The Ramblers call for each of us to take responsibility for our local paths by walking them and reporting any problems via the [Pathwatch app](#)

"... and a bottle of the 2018 Cuvée Alfriston, please ..."

Melton Mowbray pork pies ... Cornish clotted cream ... Cornish pasties ... Jersey royals ... Stilton cheese ... Scotch whisky. Some of many products that have been granted protected regional status. A recent addition to the list is a product of the South Downs countryside, namely Sussex Sparkling wine from producers such as the Rathfinny estate near Alfriston.

The recent Defra award means that only producers based in Sussex will be able to use the name of the county on their labels, provided that they meet a demanding set of quality standards. Recognition by the EU's geographical indication scheme will automatically follow and will put Sussex on a par with the elite winemaking regions of Europe, for example with Champagne in France, a region that shares with the Sussex Downs area the same microclimate and the same chalky soil that is perfect for producing the best wine. Comparing Sussex Sparkling to Champagne might seem far-fetched but in recent years English wine producers have won more major international awards for sparkling wine than any other wine-producing region in the world. The first vintage of Sussex Sparkling wine from the Rathfinny estate is expected to be available in 2018.

Anniversaries

950 years - the battle of Senlac Hill (aka Hastings)



Included in our autumn 2016 social walks programme was a short outing on the day 950 years after the battle that had a major impact on the nature of the English nation. A small group walked a circular route centred on the town of Battle, in the morning crossing the ridge along which the Norman army had travelled from Hastings to Senlac Hill, then skirted Caldbec Hill on which the Saxon forces had mustered the day before the battle. Before returning along a northern loop the group repaired to the Royal Oak at Whatlington for members to celebrate their good fortune at having avoided being roped into joining the ranks of the Saxon Army at the re-enactment of meeting its nemesis.

800 years - the Charter of the Forest

Soon after assuming the throne William I ('The Conqueror') declared many large tracts of England's woodland and heath to be royal forests in which the monarch had exclusive right to hunt deer, wild boar and game. Ashdown was one of these and close to what is now King's Standing car park was a royal hunting lodge and a 'standing' in which members of a hunting party could conceal themselves whilst awaiting the approach of their intended prey. A harsh code of forest laws dissuaded commoners from poaching or foraging within the bounds of these royal lands, for example by punishing with the loss of a limb or with death those caught taking the king's venison.

The Magna Carta of 1215 established the foundation of the rights to justice of the common man in Norman England. Two years later, in 1217, each of the rules it contained that related to the royal forests was put into a separate charter – the Charter of the Forest - that established commoners' right to take wood for their own use, to graze cattle between Michaelmas and Martinmas, to put pigs into the forest to forage for acorns and beechmast, and so on.

Perhaps we should be aware that the Charter made no provision for the right of passage of long distance walkers ...

5. 'Your Walk'

Lejog 2016 – Glasgow to John O'Groats

It was my intention to finish LeJog in 2016, but it didn't quite turn out that way.

I came up by train to Glasgow Central and then on to Milngavie to stay for 2 nights. The first day I walked down the Kelvin Way to Glasgow Central and caught the train back. The Kelvin Way is fairly easy to navigate except you need a bit of intuition to find your way through the streets in the last few miles to the station. The next day I started on the West Highland Way, using a bag carrying service, stopping at Drymen, Rowardennan, Inverarnan, Tyndrum, Kingshouse, Kinlochleven, and Fort William. I avoided Conic Hill, as I had broken my leg here in 2007, by taking the low road to Balmaha. The section between Rowardennan and Inverarnan is quite challenging with a long section by Loch Lomond that is rough and very up and down. Because of this I needed a day off so missed the Rannoch Moor section (one for this year). The Drovers Inn at Inverarnan is a good place to stop, with good food.

I had completed the Great Glen Way with my brother in 2009 so after a night in Fort William I took the bus to Inverness for a 5 day stay. I then bought a 1 week bus rover ticket that took me as far north as Dunbeath. I then used that ticket to get to and from Inverness as I walked on successive days, Inverness to Eventon, Eventon to Alness and Alness to Tain. I was following the National Cycle Trail on the minor roads.

At this point I was again behind on my schedule as I rested another day. Then I got the bus to Wick to the Seaview B&B. The next day I walked along the roads from Wick to John O'Groats. When you get to the village you think you have made it!, but have another mile to walk to the coast and the bit where the tourist buildings are.

So at this point I had missed 18 miles on the WHW and 71 miles between Tain and Wick.

I had always been unsure about the road walking between Tain and Wick as the A99 seemed quite dangerous in places. Since then a group of people have started on the John O'Groats Trail, Inverness to John O'Groats, using minor roads and a coast path between Tain and Wick. This was started in 2015 and is progressing well. If you are interested see their website www.jogt.org.uk

The B&B owner at Wick wanted a new website, so I stayed in Wick and did this for 3 days instead of walking. I also visited the Old Pultney distillery in Wick, well worth a visit.

So 89 miles to do in June.

David Hodge

Beauty and the Beast - an eventful stag trip

It all began a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away er, no in a landscape far, far away ...

The Beauty

On a September day many years ago I teetered alongside two friends on the serrated ridge of Stac Pollaidh, a peak of modest proportions but great character, and fell silent as I drank in the spectacular view. Westwards between the foot of the mountain and the coast sunlight glinted off

the surface of myriad small lochans, further out the Summer Isles dotted the surface of the sea and in the far distance I could just make out the outline of the nearest of the Western Isles. Turning to look inland I feasted on a panorama of mountains, some isolated and others in groups; each looked inviting but the sight of one in the near distance to the northeast took away my breath. This one was beautiful. I looked at the map. *Suilven* - even the name was enchanting - only 2400ft in height, so an ascent would not take long but it was too late in the day to be attempted. Neither would we be able to tackle it on the morrow, for then we would begin the long journey home (and, with three people and a massive amount of camping gear in and atop a Ford Anglia, a slow journey home). The new academic year would begin in a few days time, bringing with it the awful prospect of Finals and - horror of horrors - the search for gainful employment. With regret I turned my back on the beautiful one, vowing that I would return later to pay homage to her. I could not have known that the best part of a lifetime would pass before I did so.



Stac Pollaidh from the East

On a September day last year I shouldered my pack and set out from a Lochinver B&B to honour the vow. My intention was to approach the mountain from the northwest, ascend its north gully and camp on the summit before returning to Lochinver the following day via the south gully and Fionn Loch. It was one of those rare Highland days: the weather was sunny, the visibility excellent, the autumn temperature too cool for midges but too warm for snow. The forecast was for the conditions to hold for a time sufficient for me to be able to take sunset and sunrise photographs of the magical Inverpolly area from the high vantage point of my overnight camp. I had no idea that in fact the weather would be completely unsuitable for my purpose.

My pack was sitting comfortably on my back and, quite unreasonably, I felt smugly self-satisfied as I passed the well-appointed Glencanisp Lodge outside which a group of Barbour-clad clients stood watching their guns and supplies being loaded into Range Rovers by two ghillies. Then it was onto the stalkers' path to head southeastwards through a landscape of blanket bogs, freshwater lochans and woodland, the views dominated by the slowly changing aspect of Suilven half right. Straight ahead in the distance the isolated peak of Canisp came into sight and from that direction came the faint roar of a stag. I remembered that the red deer rut had begun.



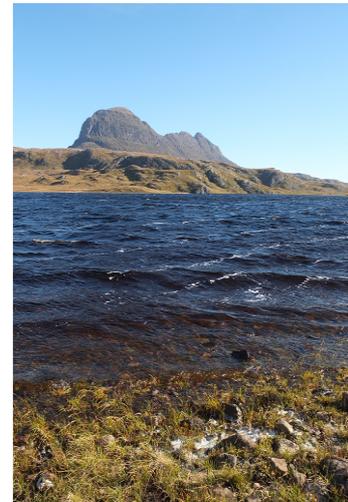
Suilven from Lochinver

A couple of hours later I left the path and struck out southwards across increasingly boggy terrain towards Loch a Choire Dhuibh and, beyond it, the foot of the north gully that leads up to Bealach Mor - 'the big pass' - at the mid point of Suilven's summit ridge. Progress was slow and on occasion, as I battled through the morass, above the loud squelching I heard the roaring of a stag away to the east. It seemed to be getting closer ... or perhaps it was my imagination? As I passed between the Loch a Choire Dubh and Loch na Barrack I observed in the former an angler up to his chest in the black water, methodically casting his line.

Whilst scrambling slowly up the vertiginous north gully I felt sluggish and heavy, regretting that I had accepted a second helping of fried breakfast. Part way up I met two young women who were on their way down and I enquired about the conditions on the summit, explaining that I intended to camp there; they gave me a strange look and said that it was "*a bit breezy*". As the gully steepened my pack began to feel leaden. I considered lightening my load by ditching the water from one of my containers but decided that I would not risk running short during my overnight camp on the summit around 1500ft above the nearest source; little did I suspect that I

could have ditched all the water, and with it my tent. When at last I hauled myself out of the top of the gully I was nearly blown off my feet; during the later stages of my approach a strong south-easterly gale had blown up, unknown to me because I had been in the lee of the mountain. It quickly became clear that pitching a tent on the exposed summit would either be impossible or potentially suicidal and the wind was so strong that I was able to explore only a short section of the ridge and to take a few photographs. After being buffeted for a half hour or so I slowly and carefully retraced my steps down the north gully, occasionally pausing to work out where next to put my feet or to watch the angler far below, still working the lochan. I thought him quite mad. In the final stages of the descent I was spurred on by the deafening roars of a stag that I did not see but that sounded uncomfortably close by and obviously ready for the challenge of the rut. Logic told me that the probability of being attacked was extremely small but the irrational part of my brain urged me to get as far away as possible and as soon as possible.

Once out of the lee of the mountain the strength of the wind was such as to persuade me not to pitch my tent, instead to seek shelter in the relative comfort of the Suileag bothy, a one-hour tramp away. Arriving there at nightfall I found a man of about my age preparing his evening meal; we chatted and I discovered he was the angler. He said he had seen me ascend the gully - he recognised my garb - and that he had met two young women who in passing had mentioned 'an older walker' who planned to camp on the summit of Suilven. He looked at my camping gear and realisation dawned ... it was clear he thought me quite mad. Later we were joined by two more anglers, each heavily laden with a pack from which stoves, a range of exotic foodstuffs and many bottles of alcohol were removed; the contents of the latter were generously offered around. The conversation flowed in direct proportion to the volume of alcohol consumed until one of the newcomers mentioned that on their way to the bothy they had met two women walking back to Lochinver "*... they said they had passed an aged backpacker who planned to camp on Suilven. In this gale? What a pillock!*". I decided it was time for me to leave the party and climb into my sleeping bag; once there I was quickly lulled to sleep by the sounds of the gale buffeting the building, the roar of nearby stags and, in the adjoining room, the chink of glasses and 'the one that got away' tall stories.



Suilven from Fionn Loch

At first light I awoke refreshed and after a hasty breakfast left the bothy and its snoring occupants to trek southwestwards around the base of Suilven to the southern shore of Fionn Loch. From there I spent some time admiring the mountain from an aspect similar to the one of many years earlier, albeit from a lower altitude and closer range.

The years rolled back. Her beauty endures.

The Beast

My next objective was to explore An Teallach, a sandstone massif on the far side of Little Loch Broom south of the busy fishing and ferry port of Ullapool. The Gaelic translates to '*the forge*' because when the mountain is viewed from the east in the dawn light its flanks glow red, and I once heard it described as '*the beast*' because of the challenges encountered in the traverse of its ridge, considered by many the best scramble in mainland Britain. My first sight of its alluring form was during the latter stages of my journey north towards Lochinver as I travelled along the Desolation Road, a name it was given in the 19th Century at which time it was constructed during a severe potato famine with the help of crofters who received handouts of food in lieu of wages.



An Teallach from the Desolation Road

I had decided to follow an anticlockwise route - my first mistake of the day - and began at the Dundonnell Hotel, ahead of me a long and steady climb to Bidean a Ghlas Thuill (*peak of the grey hollow*), the first of the two Munros on An Teallach. The weather was still fine, clear and relatively warm, the easterly wind had abated a little and the midges were nowhere to be seen. Conditions were ideal. At one stage during the ascent a small flock of ptarmigan waddled ahead of me up the stony slope, a little later a large stag roared loudly before slowly and imperiously climbing to the skyline to my right, where it paused to look back and observe me for a few minutes. On reaching the 3500ft summit I paused to catch my breath and to steady nerves set jangling by the sight of the ridge stretching ahead of me.

Before moving on I was joined by a fellow walker who had set out on a clockwise circuit before dawn and for whom this was the final peak of his day. He cautioned me against attempting a solo traverse, described the hazardous descent from the final pinnacle of Corrag Bhuidhe and



The ridge from Bidean a Ghlas Thuill

recommended I sought a bypass path across its western face. This dented my confidence a little but eventually I moved off and followed the ridge to the summit of Sgurr Fiona (*the fair peak*), the second Munro, then to Lord Berkeley's Seat, a massive pinnacle whose summit overhangs the corrie floor around 1500ft below. There I met the second of the three people I was to encounter during the day, a Spanish climber who too advised extreme caution on the descent from the final pinnacle of the ridge. I was undecided about how to proceed but the wind settled the matter; it had been blowing steadily from the east and across the

ridge but now it began to gust strongly. Not good. I continued to the summit of Corrag Bhuidhe, then retraced my steps along the ridge and descended until I found a bypass path - my second mistake of the day.

The traverse involved carefully, often painstakingly, picking out a route across the steep and treacherous western face of Corrag Bhuidhe and I think it was the slowest half mile I have ever walked. I made numerous stops, kidding myself that I needed to savour the magnificent view southwards to the remote Munros of the Fisherfield Forest or to watch the small groups of red deer grazing 2000ft beneath my feet; in reality I was trying to decide where the next safe step might be and trying to take my mind off what would happen if I lost my footing. Occasionally I heard roars from stags unseen but they were the least of my concerns. In retrospect I should have continued along the ridge or, even better, I should have followed a clockwise route to tackle the difficult pinnacle in ascent and remained on the ridge throughout.

Eventually I reached level ground at the narrow col beyond which is a steep but short climb to the penultimate summit of the day, Stob Cadha Gobhlach. Here I was overtaken by a fell runner



Lord Berkeley's Seat

in his 30s who told me he had left his home near Warrington in the wee small hours to drive the 450 miles to Dundonnell and had started his circuit of An Teallach in the early afternoon. My softshell trousers, technical baselayer, softshell jacket and full 28litre pack were in stark contrast to his minimalist shorts, running vest and seemingly half-empty 2litre bum bag. We did however share something in common, namely La Sportiva footwear, but mine were Trango trekking boots (ca. 1kg per pair) whilst he wore Mutant trail running shoes (ca. 300g per pair). I felt like a carthorse in the company of a greyhound. I was impressed by his stamina but not by his hillcraft for he was unsure of his location and, more worryingly, of the route off the mountain; he had been using a map on a smartphone whose batteries had become exhausted and he was carrying neither spares nor paper map or compass. We consulted my map and off he loped. The carthorse resumed its plodding.

A little while later I prepared to descend from 2800ft Sail Liath (*grey tail*), the final Top on the ridge. The geology had changed from Torridonian sandstone to quartz and the slope beneath my feet was a jumble of heavy scree and shattered blocks. At its foot, seemingly almost within touching distance, was Lochan na Brathan beyond which I knew was an easy stretch leading to a well-defined path that would lead me to the broad track to Gleann Chaorachain and, eventually, the road back to the hotel at Dundonnell. It was now mid evening and the light was beginning to fade. I had around 4 miles to cover before reaching the road, then an easy 45min march to the hotel. I calculated that I should be standing at the bar around nightfall. It was not to be.

There is an indistinct path from the summit of Sail Liath to the lochan below but I failed to find it and began my descent too soon - my third mistake of the day. I stumbled and lurched downwards through the heavy scree, occasionally lowering myself carefully over high ledges or casting left and right seeking ways to avoid boggy mires; the 1500ft/half-mile descent to Lochan na Brathan took more than an hour. After finally reaching the lochan I made good progress in the gathering gloom towards Gleann Chaorachain but the absence of technical challenges allowed my imagination to dwell on the sounds of what I imagined to be an approaching galaxy of massive stags, each bent on the *Cervus elaphus* version of grievous bodily harm. The track descended into the glen, whose sides closed in and amplified the increasingly frequent roars, and the light faded rapidly. I switched on my head torch to help me negotiate the rough underfoot surface of the track, wondering if either the 110 lumen white LED or the alternative red strobe would attract or deter a stag bent on mischief.

By the time I reached the deserted road at Corrie Hallie and started to stride out towards Dundonnell it was dark and the light from my head torch was becoming feeble. I was just able to make out the road and the verges on either side and so did not stop to replace the batteries, instead switching off the light to conserve them 'in case of emergency' and walked on in darkness. A short while later there was a very loud roar from a stag close to the road in the woodland to my left. It was answered by another roar from one of its kin further away and to the right. Another roar from the left - now much louder and clearly from a position much closer than the previous one - then the sound of something very heavy crashing through the woodland towards the road and towards me. Finally, the sound of hooves on the road behind me. What remained of logical thought proved incapable of computing the relative merits of switching on my head torch or remaining in darkness, of continuing to look ahead or turning to look behind. My legs ignored the processing problems and kept walking.

The duty manager smiled as he handed me my room key:

"Welcome! Have you had a good day?"
"Just up and down, or along the ridge?"
"Well done! Any problems?"

"Yes, thanks, a great day on An Teallach"
"The ridge"
"No, none at all"

David Weatherley

6. A Dales Diversion

During the period 26 - 30 June a group of LDWA Sussex members will be staying in the small market town of Settle for a series of day walks in the limestone area of the Yorkshire Dales, on occasion making use of the scenic Settle to Carlisle railway to reach a start point or to return to Settle after the completion of a walk. The itinerary will include delights such as Malham Cove, Ingleborough, Attermire Scar and some of the magnificent limestone pavements in the area. The routes will be designed for interest and enjoyment, not for extremes of physical exertion!

If you would like to join us please register your interest via the link on the Home Page of the [website](#) and you will be provided with more details.



Limestone pavement and Penyghent

Thank you to those who have provided material for this edition