

# *Long Distance Walkers' Association*

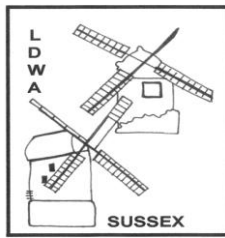
## **SUSSEX GROUP**

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



## **NEWSLETTER**

# **July 2015**



## Contents:

1. Group news
2. Challenge events
3. Sussex Group walks
4. Miscellany
5. 'Your walk'
6. Shadows of Sussex past: Ashdown Forest

---

## 1. Group news

### LDWA Sussex Committee

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

*There still remain vacancies on the committee. Please contact either the chairman or the secretary if you are interested in helping your local Group.*

---

### Committee meetings

In the six months since publication of the previous newsletter there have been 2 committee meetings: 23<sup>rd</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> July, each held at the Trevor Arms, Glynde.

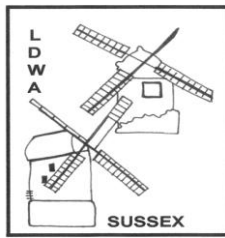
---

### AGM

The 2015 AGM was held at the Trevor Arms at 19:30 on the 26<sup>th</sup> February and was preceded by an informal meal. It is disappointing that despite being widely advertised this important event attracted just one attendee in addition to the Committee members.

The key issues addressed were:

- Group finances. The balance sheet is healthy but 2014 saw a small drop in Group assets because (a) only one Challenge event (the South Downs Marathon) was held during the year and (b) new safety-related equipment was purchased for use at checkpoints.



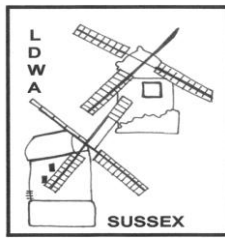
- Group constitution. A new Sussex Group constitution has been adopted, based upon a template provided by the LDWA parent body, to replace the previous (1999) version.
- Committee. In the absence of nominations for new members the Committee remains the same as for 2014. The Officers also remain unchanged.
- Support to other groups. The Group will staff a checkpoint to support the Kent Group 'White Cliffs' 50-mile Challenge walk.
- Support to the 2015 Eastbourne and Wealden Walking Festival. The Group walk programme will include a 20-mile Wealden walk to support the Festival. Discussions with the organisers will be held with a view to implementing measures to avoid the large numbers of 'no-shows' that marred each of the walks provided by the Group last year.

-----

### Website

The 'Ad Hoc Walks' section of our website provides a means to alert members to informal walks (i.e. ones not included in the published walking programme) or to enable them to advertise details of an outing on which companions would be welcome.

\_\_\_\_\_



## 2. Challenge events

### LDWA South Downs Marathon – 29th March 2015

157 entries, 109 started, 100 finished, a record for this event.

#### The Weather.

Very windy with rain at times. The forecast was for heavy rain and gale force winds. As it turned out the wind was stronger than predicted, blew most of the rain away and on occasion blew some participants over. A comment was made that the conditions on the Seven Sisters were dangerous enough for the event to be cancelled. I know from personal experience that the wind can swirl in the dips, which can be disconcerting. In view of this the relevant paragraph in the route description will be updated to further emphasise the need to keep well away from the cliff edge.

#### The Route and Checkpoints.

Two minor changes were made to the route.

- To avoid the hazard of stepping through a hedge into the traffic on the Alfriston road the route now follows the SDW into Alfriston and out towards Chapel Hill – a far safer route that gives everyone a chance to enjoy the village.
- Due to the flooding in the Cuckmere Valley in April the route leaving Litlington was changed to use a farm bridge further along the river. Of course, as soon as the new route was published the rain stopped. In my opinion the new route is easier to follow and the change will be permanent.

A participant highlighted an error in the route description on the approach to Chapel Hill. Happily it was not critical which was fortunate as IT HAD BEEN THERE SINCE THE ROUTE WAS ALTERED IN 2011! Woe, woe and thrice woe – well, five times woe actually.

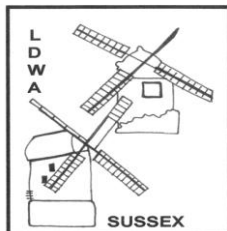
The wind made life difficult at the water points, particularly at Chapel Hill. Always exposed, this year provided the added delight of very smelly manure or silage in close proximity upwind and the marshals suffered from headaches and a (temporary) loss of beer drinking capacity. This water point will be relocated to Plonk Barn, in the layby on the Litlington road, some half mile before Chapel Hill.

The Chekpoint© on-line progress reporting system worked well with the occasional gremlin. A concern is the quality of the broadband service on which it depends and which is outside our control. The old paper recording system will be used as a back up for the foreseeable future. To overcome the appalling mobile cover on most of the route a messaging system may be added to Chekpoint©.

#### Some Problems.

The first two home were runners who left at 9am and passed through the Chapel Hill water point before it opened and before the marshals arrived. However, once they were booked in on the Chekpoint© system at East Dean they were not 'lost'. The official start time for runners is 10am, an hour later than the walkers. The staggered start is designed to prevent this problem.

Two walkers lost contact with their friends near Litlington and had no map or route description of their own. Due to intermittent mobile signals efforts to guide them to Norton failed and they ended up at Bo-Peep (on the return leg of the route). They managed to make their way back to



East Dean. The event rules, published on-line, state that the relevant maps are carried. A small number of printed route descriptions are available at the start.

#### What happens to.....the leftovers?

The supply of food and drink on these events is a compromise between minimal wastage and – heaven forbid – running out. With a very late on-line booking cut off and entries on the day (to be re-instated in 2016) a degree of over provision is inevitable, leading to leftovers. The most perishable items – bread, spread, biscuits etc. are distributed among the helpers. Anything in its original packaging, whose sell by date allows, is retained for use on the next Sussex Group event. Anything else in its original packaging is donated to FareShare, a supplier of food banks in Brighton. They are always very grateful for any donation, however small, and I take this opportunity to pass on their thanks to the entrants who, after all, paid for the donation.

#### Conclusion.

The event was a great success, despite the weather. My thanks to all the helpers and marshals for their hard work and to all those who participated making our efforts worthwhile. The next LDWA South Downs Marathon is on Sunday 15th May 2016 – maybe the weather will be better.

*Chris Baines-Holmes – Challenge Events Organiser*

*Just a quick note to thank all the wonderful marshals and helpers to ensure today's event on the south downs take place despite the very windy conditions! Without your support these events would not take place - I would particularly like to thank the cheerful ladies at HQ who served tea and coffee in real cups and saucers, and provided me with a splendid place of beans on toast with butter (naked!) at the end!!*

*Gareth*

*Many thanks to the entire team for putting on such an efficient and enjoyable breezy day (perhaps an understatement!) for the South Downs Marathon, especially to the marshals who stood for hours on end in such challenging conditions - it was fully appreciated by all entrants. Hope to see all your smiling faces again next year if not before.*

*Brian*

*Thank you so much to everyone involved in the South Downs marathon yesterday. It was a brilliant day & the atmosphere of fun & support was what every event must aspire to! I look forward to seeing you again next year*

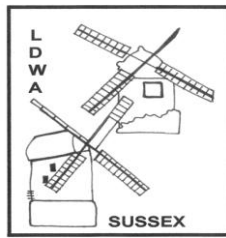
*Angie*

*I echo the thanks to all those involved in organising the event and helping on the day. You can not do much about the weather and while it was a little disappointing to hear of so many no shows you have to admire the sturdy souls who came and registered on the day. The more adverse the weather the greater the satisfaction on finishing which, with beans on toast and tea in proper cups rounded off a memorable day. Finally a special thanks to the cheery marshals at the Chapel Hill checkpoint. Not only did they have to cope with being buffeted by the gale, they were also downwind of a particularly ripe manure heap!*

*Bryan*

*I would just like to congratulate you on the use of and design of Chekpoint. My wife who was unable to walk due to a minor injury was able to monitor my progress. I got my official result as I arrived and I was also able to monitor on an android phone other friends who were walking. However you could have organized better weather :). Thanks to yourself and all the other organizers.*

*David*



### 3. Sussex Group Walks

#### Walks Programme – 2015

Date	Walk	Start/Finish	Mileage	No. Walkers
24/01	<i>London Jubilee Walk – Version 5</i>	<i>Blackfriars station</i>		14
07/02	<i>Wander from Woodingdean</i>	<i>Woodingdean</i>	18	22
22/02	<i>Loitering around Lewes</i>	<i>Horsdean</i>	18	16
14/03	<i>SDM 'highlights'</i>	<i>East Dean</i>	21	16
26/04	<i>Rocks and rolls</i>	<i>Birchden Wood</i>	20	16
09/05	<i>Anthony's Midhurst birthday walk</i>	<i>Petworth Park</i>	19	4
30/05	<i>Ashdown Forest perambulation Part 1</i>	<i>King's Standing</i>	21	11
13/06	<i>Lewes figure of eight</i>	<i>Lewes</i>	19	15
28/06	<i>Blackboys, bellows and bells</i>	<i>Blackboys</i>	19	13
11/07	<i>Slaugham surprise</i>	<i>Slaugham</i>	21	7
26/07	<i>A Fuller Follies variation</i>	<i>Burwash</i>	20	
08/08	<i>Looping around the Downs</i>	<i>The Trundle</i>	20	
22/08	<i>Ashdown Forest perambulation Part 2</i>	<i>Visitor Centre</i>	21	
05/09	<i>Jerome's annual appearance</i>	<i>Burton Mill</i>	20	
20/09	<i>Many views of Cuckmere</i>	<i>South Hill Barn</i>	20	
03/10	<i>Wealden circular*</i>	<i>Burwash</i>	20	
24/10	<i>A Kentish miscellany</i>	<i>Ashurst</i>	21	
07/11	<i>A loop from Lancing</i>	<i>Lancing Ring</i>	16	
21/11	<i>The Findon flyer</i>	<i>Findon</i>	15	
06/12	<i>Christmas walk &amp; lunch</i>	<i>Alfriston</i>		
19/12	<i>Hassocks humbug</i>	<i>Hassocks</i>	10	

*\*Organised by the Sussex Group for the Eastbourne & Wealden Walking Festival*

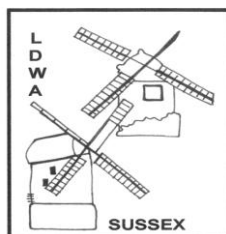
#### Summer 2015 Half-Yearly Review

##### **Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 - London Jubilee Walk - Version 5**

This was the annual excursion to London and like a number of previous occasions the January weather was glorious, bright and sunny, the wind chilly. 14 started out, wending our way along the Thames, then through the City and on to Leicester Square for lunch. Much teenage squealing here due to the appearance of contestants from the X Factor. Across Lambeth Bridge then back along the South Bank through the crowds at the Eye. At the finish only 6 survived, some London residents going home, the others seduced by the capital's flesh pots. Thanks to Chris B.

##### **Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 - Wander from Woodingdean**

The two recesses turned out to be a battle against strong winds. The day itself turned out pretty breezy as well. This did not deter 22 starting off on the day from a car park creaking for space. The first leg would be via Bevendean before heading off the top into the valley for the start of a very pleasant walk into the Downs between Brighton and Lewes. A fuel stop at Rodmell before the South Downs Way took priority back to the start. Thanks to Joan.



### **Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015 - Loitering around Lewes**

What on earth inspired 16 to decide to walk on a day when the forecast was for gale force winds and torrential rain! Not only that but we were hit by hailstones until blue in the face, blown in the opposite direction when trying to cross a stile, then encountered mud up to the thighs and then to finish us off completely, chased by a large herd of cows. We were all tired, cold and hungry by the end of it but why are we mad? Because we had glorious views of the South Downs, we had delicious lunch and beer and we kept smiling and laughing – well some of us did anyway! Thanks to Sima.

### **Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 2015 - SDM 'highlights'**

A repeat of last years' walk covering a good part of the route of the LDWA South Downs Marathon. 16 started from East Dean. Quite chilly on the hills, but all enjoyed some late afternoon sun with the bonus of a rain free day. Quite dry underfoot and some great scenic views from the Cliff tops down to Cuckmere Haven.

### **Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2015 - Rocks and rolls**

The third walk in a row that attracted 16 walkers. Starting from Birchen Wood car park near Groombridge. The route took us via Groombridge Place, Ashurst and Hartfield where lunch was taken. Returning through Fishers Gate, Mott's Mill and back to Birchen Wood. Thanks to Mary.

### **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – Anthony's Midhurst birthday walk**

Four had a great walk from Petworth to Cowdray Park on the outskirts of Midhurst. Lunch was at the pub in Lodsworth (recommended). Lots of great scenery and a slice of birthday cake to end the day. Thanks to Anthony.

### **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May – Ashdown Forest perambulation Part 1**

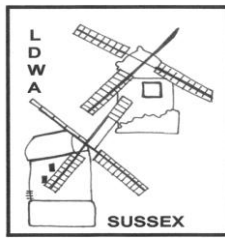
It was a nice and bright morning when 11 left from King's Standing CP. The 21 mile circular walk took us first to Hartfield, where we stopped for breakfast. We then made our way towards Boarshead via Withyham. After lunch we passed through Rotherfield and Jarvis Brook before we reached Poundgate, from there it was only 2 miles back to the car park where the ice cream van was still waiting for us! Thanks to Manfred.

### **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June– Lewes figure of eight**

14 enjoyed a great day on the Downs trekking from Lewes to Kingston via the Ouse valley and Southease. After lunch at The Juggs we headed back into Lewes for a challenging climb up to Lewes Golf Course. Then across the course and over the rolling downs before dropping down to Glynde for a refresher at the Trevor Arms. Then another climb back up to the summit of Caburn after which we headed back into Lewes. A lovely walk ably led by Clare on a breezy but rain free day.

### **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2015 – Blackboys, bellows and bells**

The absence of steep gradients on this Low Weald walk was a relief on a hot and humid day. Our group of 13, in which pleasingly were a few new faces, started out northwards from Blackboys (named from the charcoal burners who once lived there) then along the Tickerage Stream, passing close to the site of a 17<sup>th</sup> century iron furnace where cannon were once cast. We turned southwards to picturesque Waldron then through woodland and wildflower meadows to Stream Mill, the site of another Tudor era furnace that produced ordnance, and to aptly named Gun Hill. So much for 'Blackboys' and 'bellows'. We took lunch in Chiddingly, some at the *Six Bells*, others in the grounds of the church that has a peal of six bells and that is home to the



spectacular Jefferay monument. The return route followed the Weald Way before diverting through Framfield and the fringe of the High Weald to follow the Tickerage Stream as far as Tickerage Mill, originally another furnace and much more recently the home of Vivien Leigh after her divorce from Lawrence Olivier. Ten minutes later we regained our starting point at Blackboys village hall, thankful that the forecast heavy thundery showers had not materialised.

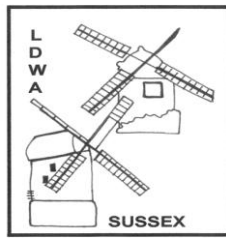
#### **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015 - Slaugham surprise**

Seven set out from the quiet village of Slaugham on a warm, sunny day for a scenic walk through varied countryside in a part of Sussex rarely visited by the Group. We were allowed a rare treat – a stop for coffee and cake at the local stores in Manning Heath – before pressing on to remote Nuthurst for lunch at the Black Horse. After lunch the pace increased for the return to our starting point. Thanks to Sonia and Robin for introducing us to this lovely area.

Thank you to all who have participated in the walks during 2015 and I hope that you will join us on future ones. Particular thanks are due to those who devised the excellent routes and who led on the day. **More walk leaders are needed!** If you would like to lead a walk for the group in the future (February 2016 onwards) please contact me at [beestont@aol.com](mailto:beestont@aol.com)

*Trevor Beeston, Walks Organiser*





## 4. Miscellany

### Boots, ballads, beer and heroes bold

What is the connection between a pair of boots, a centuries-old English folksong, a pint of Harveys Best and a mythological heroic figure? Why, the barleycorn of course ...

*John Barleycorn* is a traditional English folksong whose origins have been lost in the mists of time. Barleycorn's character is a personification of the once strategically important cereal crop and of the beer and whisky that was made from it. The song describes him enduring indignities - assaults, death and resurrection - that correspond to the various stages of barley cultivation; it also celebrates the reviving effects of drinking 'his blood', referring of course to the alcoholic draught produced by the brewer or distiller.

The 'hero bold' is the mysterious pagan figure Beowa who was associated with agriculture (the name translates to 'barley') and who appears in early Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies. Some learned scholars believe Beowa and John Barleycorn to be one and the same mythological being.

The link with a pint of Harveys should be obvious; if not, please consult a Sussex Group committee member for a practical demonstration during a pub lunch on a forthcoming walk!

That leaves the boots and this is the interesting bit (to me at least). The basis of UK shoe sizes – the former 'Imperial' system - is the barleycorn, an old English unit of measurement that corresponds to a third of an inch. The system is satisfyingly eccentric and I wonder if it has survived the scrutiny of the EU Standardisation Police because they are totally bemused by it:

- The starting point for the UK adult shoe sizes is the 'Size 12' that is based on a last (the foot-shaped former around which the shoe is constructed) 12 inches long. Successive smaller and larger half sizes have length decrements or increments of one barleycorn.
- In an equally satisfying manner the last used in the construction of a UK child 'Size Zero' shoe has a length of one hand (another old English unit of measurement that corresponds to 4 inches (or 12 barleycorns)). Once again the barleycorn scale is used to define smaller or larger sizes.

And so, if you find yourself at the back of the group, struggling to keep up with the greyhounds in front, your thirst raging and your feet throbbing in boots that you suspect might be a tad too small, be heroic. Hum an old English folk tune, think of barleycorns and fantasise about beer. I often do!

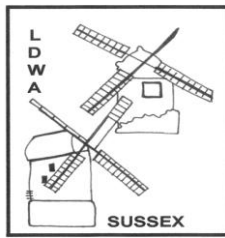
*Limper*

-----

### With apologies to Shakespeare

A sign advertising an outdoor specialist's summer sale announced '*Now is the discount of our winter's tent*'.

-----



## Biological warfare in The Weald

An EU law obliges member states to take steps to control the thousands of alien invasive species that are threatening the local environment. Here the initial assault includes a biological war against a plant that has become increasingly familiar to those of us who amble through the Weald at this time of year.

Himalayan balsam is a tall striking plant with bright pink flowers that was brought here in the mid-19th century by enthusiastic and intrepid Victorian botanists. It favours the banks of rivers and streams where it grows in dense stands up to 10ft tall, usually on the banks but sometimes in the water itself, and spreads rapidly to stifle native vegetation. The root system is insufficient to support the banks that then collapse, causing silting of the watercourse and loss of habitat for animals and birds. Hence a plant imported for its attractive appearance is causing major damage to the local ecosystem.

This incomer has no natural enemies in the UK and is extremely difficult to remove by digging. It threatens to spread inexorably and hence the introduction of a government-controlled pilot project in which *Pucciana*, an Asian fungus, is being used to infect specimens with fungal rust before they are transplanted into stands of balsam at a small number of monitored sites, hopefully to spread to and kill the healthy plants. This is the first example of a disease being deliberately introduced into Europe to control another invader and so trials have been conducted over several years to make sure it will not attack native species. (*Hmm ... remember Chlora*, the Asian fungus that was accidentally imported by plant nurseries and that threatens to wipe out the nation's ash trees over the next two decades?).

Japanese knotweed, another species introduced by the Victorians, is even more troublesome and destructive than Himalayan balsam and it seems that Britain's best hope of controlling it rests with another Asian import, the Japanese insect *Aphalara itadori* that feeds exclusively on knotweed. Specimens of the insect were released four years ago in a controlled trial to determine whether or not the spread of knotweed can be reversed.

Scientists are also searching for an insect or pathogen that can attack water primrose, another river-clogging invader from South America, but perhaps the most fearsome prospective new arrival is the Asian hornet, a 2-inch long insect that eats honeybees and has a potentially lethal sting. This airborne heavyweight has already spread to France and is forecast to reach the UK at some stage this summer. Think carefully before you don your shorts ...

-----

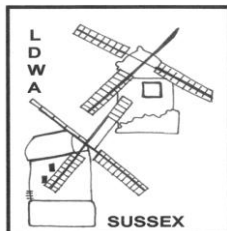
### It's all a matter of communication

#### MEMORANDUM

From: Superintendent

To: Assistant Superintendent

Next Thursday at 10.30 am Halley's Comet will appear over this area. This is an event that occurs only once every 75 years. Call the school principals and have them assemble their teachers and classes on the athletic fields and explain this phenomenon to them. If it rains then cancel the day's observation and have classes meet in the auditorium to see a film about the comet.



MEMORANDUM

From: Assistant Superintendent

To: School Principals

By order of the Superintendent of Schools, next Thursday at 10.30am Halley's Comet will appear over your athletic field. If it rains cancel the day's classes and report to the auditorium with your teachers and classes where you will show films, a phenomenal event that occurs every 75 years.

MEMORANDUM

From: School Principal

To: All Staff

By order of the phenomenal Superintendent of Schools, at 10.30am next Thursday Halley's Comet will appear in the auditorium. In case of rain over the athletic field the Superintendent will give another order, something that occurs only every 75 years.

TEACHERS TO STUDENTS:

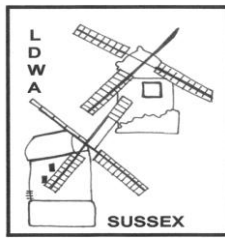
Next Thursday at 10.30am the Superintendent of Schools will appear in our school auditorium with Halley's Comet, something which occurs every 75 years. If it rains the Superintendent will cancel the comet and order us out to our phenomenal athletic field.

STUDENTS TO PARENTS:

When it rains next Thursday at 10.30am over the school athletic field the phenomenal 75 year old Superintendent of Schools will cancel all classes and appear before the whole school in the auditorium accompanied by Bill Halley and the Comets.

*Anthony Mitchell*

---



## 5. 'Your walk'

### LeJog 2015 - Gretna to Glasgow

*Our Webmaster is walking the 'End to End' (Land's End to John O' Groats) in 'easy' stages. He has now crossed the border into Scotland and this year's stage has taken him to the southern end of the West Highland Way.*



So I was back again in June for a week and a half to complete another section of my long walk. I had decided to stay a number of nights in three B&Bs and use buses or trains to go backwards and forwards.

Train to Annan and stayed in the same B&B as last time. This year was mainly road walking, so the first day was Bus to Gretna and walk the 16 miles back to Annan. On the way I came across 'The Devils Porridge Museum'. If you are up this way it is well worth a visit. Not interested in eating porridge? Well the porridge in question is to do with the making of gun cotton in WW1. This whole area was a huge munitions factory to supply the army in France. Some 20,000 women worked here and 2 towns were built to house all the people. On each of the next 3 days I walked along parts of the 55-mile Annandale Way that mainly follows the river Annan from The Solway Firth to the 'Devils Beef Tub' North of Moffat.

Then on to Lanark to walk down the Clyde Walkway, a 40-mile route which runs from Lanark alongside the River Clyde all the way to the centre of Glasgow. You do need a map for this as there are parts away from the river that require a bit of working out as to where to go. It's a mixture of grass, cinder, boardwalk, and tarmac paths but you are in countryside all the way.

Lanark has a world Heritage site – New Lanark, which is an old mill and surrounding buildings. This is by the river in a gorge and Lanark is up the top (a long way up if you are tired!!). This is also where you access the Falls of Clyde, which would be better to see when there is a lot of water around.

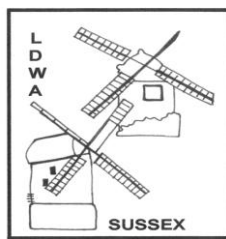
This stage comprised 8 days walking and around 130 miles in total. The full diary, pictures and map can be found at <http://www.qwazzle.com/LeJog>

*David Hodge*

-----

### Vectis Venture

A small group of Sussex Group members enjoyed a short break on the Isle Of Wight (Roman Vectis) during the week after Easter. The weather was fine throughout, the local food and ales tasty and refreshing and, when eventually we found them, the cream teas delicious. Oh, yes ... and the walking was excellent.



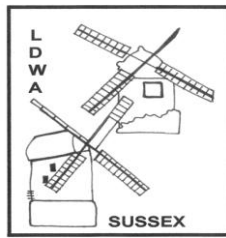
The short crossing from Portsmouth to Fishbourne was taken in the best tradition of Noah and his deluge avoidance project: two (and a dog) on Monday, two around noon on Tuesday, two in the early evening of the same day. We convened in a Shanklin hostelry for dinner:

- We compared our accommodation, which ranged from *“the naughty cupboard under the stairs”* in a B&B to en-suite rooms in a very smart private hotel that boasted an indoor pool/sauna complex and a dining room in which attentive liveried staff served a gargantuan breakfast banquet.
- Gillian and Anthony enthused about their visit to Osborne House. Chris held forth on the attractive Old Town area of Shanklin. Trevor described the delights of his invigorating short afternoon walk and the steepness of the final descent. Tony and David expressed relief at having arrived before the pubs shut.
- Anthony outlined a walking itinerary that was based on previous visits he had made to the Island. It promised a variety of terrain plus exciting opportunities for consuming cream teas.

Wednesday was a full day of 18 miles on a lovely route that took us inland and westwards from the outskirts of Shanklin to the summit of St. Catherine's Down, then back along the coastal path. We began with an ascent of Nansen Hill that in the 1930s was named after a former Prime Minister of Norway and later put in trust to be used for 'the result of recreation of adults, children and in particular the youth of England and Norway'. This was where Trevor had made his steep descent the previous afternoon and we stood at its base looking upwards with dismay, most of us weighed down heavily by a surfeit of bacon and eggs and the memory of his words at dinner *“I thought 'I'm glad I don't have to climb this hill!’”* Once at the summit we paused to catch our breath and to admire far-reaching views of land and sea; St Catherine's Down beckoned but seemed a long way distant. We set off westward across St Boniface Down, the highest point of the Island named for a native of Wessex who was a leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon Christian mission to parts of the Frankish Empire during the 8th century; Boniface is the patron saint of Germany. When abreast Ventnor we passed tall aerial masts, abandoned buildings and half-buried structures, remains of one of the radar stations in the WWII 'Chain Home' network built to provide early warning of Luftwaffe air raids. Here underground is an extensive bunker complex constructed later as part of a Cold War early warning network and subsequently converted for use as a shelter in the event of a hostile nuclear strike.

Descending from the chalk high ground we passed through gentle and rolling scenic countryside, climbing and descending from a succession of ridges until eventually we reached St. Catherine's Down via the Hoy monument that commemorates the visit to Britain of the Russian Tsar in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. We spent a few minutes on the summit beside the remains of an early mediaeval lighthouse and oratory, the latter originally dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, a 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian said to have been martyred on a 'breaking wheel' and hence the 'Catherine wheel' firework. The buildings were the work of a nobleman who in the 14<sup>th</sup> century had plundered wine from a nearby shipwreck; he was tried by a civil court, found guilty and heavily fined but this was not the end of the matter for the wine had been destined for a monastery in Picardy. A church court was convened and the guilty party was presented with the choice of being excommunicated or serving a penance by building a lighthouse and oratory.

Encouraged by the promise of lunch at a pub that Anthony remembered and that was marked on his (very old) map, we descended to the coast road at Blackgang Chine and the oldest theme park in the UK, established in 1843. Alas there was no trace of the pub and so, tightening our belts, we set out eastward along the coastal path. Forty minutes later we were basking in warm



sunshine outside *The Buddle Inn* at Niton where the bar staff were welcoming, the beer refreshing and the local crab sandwiches delicious.

Suitably refreshed we continued along the coastal path that at first followed the edge of a 300ft escarpment approximately a quarter-mile inland. Between the base of the escarpment and the sea was the Undercliff whose broken terrain is evidence of the largest landslides in northern Europe that followed the most recent Ice Age, and of more recent landslips that continue to this day. We paused at a finger post that marked the point at which St. Rhadegund's Path met ours and it seemed that our short break was as much an opportunity to research ecclesiastical history as it was to walk. Rhadegund was a 6<sup>th</sup> century Germanic princess who founded Holy Cross Abbey; she is the patron saint of a few English churches (one of which was inland about a mile distant from where we stood) and of Jesus College, Cambridge. The coastal path now turned seaward and descended to the village of St. Lawrence, from where for the remainder of the walk it 'did what it said on the tin' - it hugged the coastline. On reaching the Victorian seaside resort of Ventnor there was insufficient time to seek out a cream tea establishment but we consoled ourselves with wonderfully refreshing local ice cream whilst sitting in the sunshine overlooking the water's edge. We then followed the Esplanade past the Botanic Garden on the site of the demolished 19<sup>th</sup> century 'National Cottage Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest', then continued to the Bonchurch landslip where we turned inland and upward towards our starting point at the base of Nansen Hill. This final stage culminated with an entertaining ascent of 'the Devil's chimney', a narrow rock cleft that in Victorian times was a noted local visitor attraction.

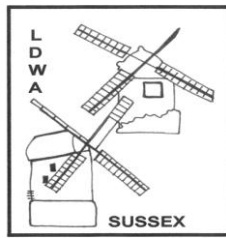
One of the topics addressed during the evening meal was the mystery of the vanishing pub at which we had intended to take lunch<sup>1</sup> ...

The second day was spent on a short (approximately 11 miles) linear walk from the attractive village of Shorwell to Freshwater Bay, our group reduced in number to five because Gillian had contracted a knee strain during the second half of the previous day and sensibly had decided not to risk causing serious damage. For much of the time we followed a chalk ridge and passed through terrain reminiscent of the South Downs, no great surprise since the chalk cliffs and escarpments on the south side of the Island are an extension of the Downs. Early in the day the sky was clear, the sun warm enough to cause thermals sufficient to support buzzards hunting for prey, and the views far-reaching - on one side to seaward and on the other side inland across the Island to the Solent and beyond to the Hampshire shore. However as the day progressed a mist appeared, the visibility dropped and the temperature fell substantially. When we reached Freshwater Bay there was little incentive to linger, for a dense sea mist and a cold breeze combined to make the afternoon cold and gloomy and - horror of horrors - the café could not provide us with cream teas (*"sorry, but we've only got cakes ... we're still out of season ... we might have cream teas in the summer ..."*). Nothing deterred, we made our way by car back to our starting point via Brighthstone, relishing the thought of replacing lost calories with lunch at an excellent cream tea establishment that Anthony remembered from a previous visit. We lunched at the village pub.

That evening we ate at a seafront restaurant in Sandown, the group happily restored to its full complement by the welcome appearance of Gillian restored to full fitness. Once again there was a topic for discussion over our repast ... the mystery of the vanishing tearoom<sup>2</sup> ...

---

<sup>1</sup> It had been subsumed within the Blackgang Chine theme park many years earlier.  
<sup>2</sup> It had closed many years earlier



We began our final day by driving to Yarmouth for an exhilarating 14-mile walk around the Needles peninsula. The initial stage to Freshwater was along the trackbed of the long-closed Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway that ran parallel to the Western Yar river; here the environment of saltmarsh, reedbed and mudflat provided an opportunity to deploy rusty birdwatching skills in attempts to identify a range of wildfowl and waders. We passed several signs informing us that we were on the Hooke Trail that is named for a native of Freshwater who was perhaps the best philosopher and scientist of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; many modern historians believe Robert Hooke was marginalised and airbrushed from history by supporters of his contemporary, a certain Isaac Newton. When we reached the old stone bridge over the River Yar, Anthony reminisced about childhood holidays and the occasion when his sister was trapped in deep mud and was rescued by a local farmer who pulled her out by means of a rope hitched to his tractor.

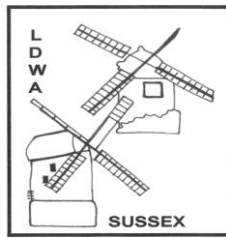
We joined the coastal path at Freshwater Bay and turned westward for the gradual ascent of Tennyson Down, rejoicing in the fresh air and the absence of crowds. The solitude was broken as we left the Tennyson monument to descend past a variety of abandoned fortifications and a Cold War era test site. The former were constructed to defend the Needles Channel, the latter to test the rocket motors of the Blue Streak missile designed to deliver the UK nuclear strategic deterrent. After a short diversion to admire the view across the Needles we walked on to Alum Bay, crowded with holidaymakers and rich in retail purchasing opportunities, for a lunch stop.

After lunch we turned northeastwards along the coastal path towards our starting point and a fascinating repeating pattern emerged - sandy heathland/waterside suntrap cove/inland retirement development, corresponding to varied wildlife/overweight humankind/little sign of life. We passed close by more historic military sites - first Fort Albert, then Fort Victoria - and by then the last vestiges of the morning sea mist had dispersed to allow frequent views of the westerly arm of the Solent, blue and inviting, to our left. On the far side of the water was Hurst Castle, standing out clearly at the end of the curved shingle spit that connects it to the Hampshire shore. This artillery platform was part of the technologically advanced defences built during the reign of Henry VIII to protect the strategically important south coast commercial ports and naval bases.

When we reached Yarmouth there was ample time to sit and relax before making our way back to the ferry terminal at Fishbourne. The late afternoon was warm and sunny, so local ice cream seemed the order of the day once again. After the last morsels had been consumed, whilst at least one of us was wondering if a second helping would be an excusable extravagance, Chris noticed that we were seated outside a tea room and that cream teas appeared on its menu. He was despatched inside hot foot with a bulk order ...



*It is proposed to resume The Great Cream Tea Hunt next year and to this end a short walking break in Dorset is being planned, probably to take place at some stage in May - perhaps an item for your diary? Experience to date suggests that your cholesterol levels should not be at risk!*



### A walk on the high side

Mera Peak, billed as the highest trekking peak in Nepal, at 6,474 metres (21,246 feet) and 20 miles south of Everest: well why not give a try? I'd done a fair bit of trekking, and only once summited a 6,000 metre peak (Stok Kangri in Kashmir) when it turned out misty on top and I didn't see a thing so, as a retired man, this was possibly a last ditch attempt to summit a properly high peak and get a view of seriously big mountains.

We were group of 10 blokes, led by one woman, Tamsin, on a trek organised by Jagged Globe. Three days before we set off in October 2014, more than 40 people including over 20 trekkers had reportedly been killed in the Annapurna region in freak storms, so we had been reminded of the potential risks in one of these ventures.

Our group left the Summit Hotel in Kathmandu at 4am to get an early flight to Lukla, at 2,480 metres gateway to the Everest region. Just before we boarded the 15-seater twin propeller plane they were pumping up its tyres: not a great omen. The short flight was spectacular, views of the Himalayas and a scary landing on a short sloping landing strip. Last time I'd been in Lukla, 16 years previously, there were the remains of 6 crashed aircraft dotted around the edge of the runway. This time there was only evidence of one; obviously things were improving!

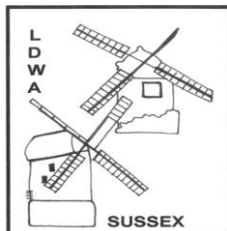
We had time for a bit of shopping in Lukla and I bought an umbrella, a slightly surprising recommendation in the kit list. Picking up on some mild anxiety in the group, I also bought some diamox (a drug used to ease altitude sickness) at a very small pharmacy, as a form of insurance. We then met our staff: porters, camp staff, two climbing sherpas and the Sirdar. The Sirdar was explicit that we shouldn't feel sorry for the porters with their heavy loads: there could have been eight of them, but five had decided they would rather get more money by carrying extra!

We set off for a short walk to our first campsite, heading south from Lukla, as the trek was helpfully organised to take a day longer than the usual route up. This was to assist acclimatisation to altitude, and to avoid going for the to and fro dash over Zatrwa Pass. A mule train passed us, with the guy at the front and the one at the back both carrying mobile phones. It seemed incongruous in such a poor country, but doubtless a sign of the times. At all of the lower campsites we camped next to a teahouse, where the camp staff cooked our meals and we could hang out in relative comfort. There was usually the option to upgrade from a night sleeping in the tent to a night in the teahouse, which most of us took advantage of at least occasionally just to get a bit more space. 'Shops' along the route carried the essentials: beer, toilet roll, Mars bars, coca cola etc, often just on a single shelf or outside on a carpet. The prices of things rose proportionately to how far away from Lukla we were, as absolutely everything had to be carried in/up.

The elements of a typical trekking day for most of the trip were:

- Being woken by smiling sherpas at 6am with 'bed tea', swiftly followed by them delivering a washing bowl with warm (though rapidly chilling) water for washing.
- Breakfast, then ready to start the walking day at 7am amidst the rarely less than spectacular scenery.
- A longish lunch stop, then typically arriving in camp around 4pm; the kitchen staff and porters had usually easily overtaken us mid-morning, naturally carrying loads equal to three kit bags or more.





- Evening meal at 6pm, and the really tough could sometimes spin it out till as late as 8pm before retiring to sleeping bags!

There was another Jagged Globe group running in parallel with us, who were going on additionally to Island Peak. They were a contrast to us: a chattier mixed group who happened to have two doctors, the ideal combination of one GP and one A & E specialist, all run in a contrasting style to our laid back group by their Norwegian leader, nicknamed Thor. We mocked their rigid 15-minute stops, though each group seemed happy enough with their different dynamics.

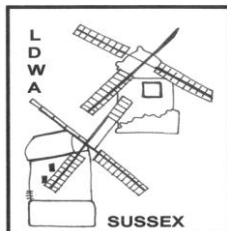
After eight days of varied scenic up and down trekking, we reached the snow line at Khare, 5,100 metres. This was time to test out the heavy double boots and to practice crampon, ice axe and rope techniques that would be needed at different points from now on. From this village on two consecutive days we said goodbye to a team member, an injured ankle and acute mountain sickness leading to them being helicoptered out of the village, as was the GP from the other group. This was clearly not for the faint hearted! The rest of the group had got by so far with only an eye infection and some relatively minor bouts of altitude sickness between us to give the doctors something to advise on.

We headed up to base camp, 5,300 metres, no tea house, plenty of rocks, snow and ice, and now sharing three to a tent rather than the relative luxury of two in a tent. The weather was clear but very windy, enough to give the Sirdar and Tamsin a bit of uncertainty about whether we would be able to attempt the peak. Next day we carried on to advance base camp, at 5,800 metres, with spectacular mountain views including Everest and Kanchenjunga, and with tents precariously perched in a bit of shelter. We were advised not to use the toilet tent that night, as it was liable to blow away!

Most of us got some sleep despite the noisy wind and cramped tent, and got up at 2am for an early 3am start in the dark for our summit bid. After a long roped-up trudge in clear visibility we finally got to the crux of the trek, a very steep icy section 50 metres below the summit ridge. This was where there was a fixed rope, and we used the technical gear of an ascendeur to get up and later abseiled back down this section, overseen for safety by the climbing sherpas. The summit was magnificent, with clear skies and superb views of Everest and other 8,000 metre peaks: Cho Oyu, Makalu and Lhotse and other high peaks like Nuptse and Amadablam.



Tired but happy, we started the 4,500 feet descent to Khare, doing in one very long afternoon what had taken three days to climb up. I was willing to play the age card at this point, being the oldest in the group and having successfully summited without having to resort to diamox medication, and willingly took up the offer from one of the sherpas to carry my rucksack down.



The descent in the unfamiliar double boots was hard, and a week or so later three of my toenails eventually fell off after their punishment that day.

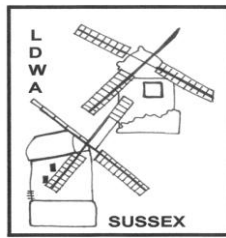
We still had a good four-day walk back to Lukla, and took the direct route over Zatrwa Pass at 4,600 metres, where there were still some challenging snow and ice conditions on the north side of the pass. Once safely back in Lukla, we had the inevitable ritual of cake, beer, some indeterminate alcohol and dodgy dancing the evening away. The final morning before the flight to Kathmandu we said goodbye to our Nepalese staff who had served us so well, and they benefited (?) from some of our cast-off gear, including my shirt and boots, and even better cash tips in proportion to their place in the hierarchy of the staff.

We had made such good progress on the trek that we were a day early back in Kathmandu, and stayed at a different hotel in the busy Thamel district, before we got back to our final stay in the Summit Hotel. Sightseeing, souvenir buying and generally taking in the sights, sounds and smells of Kathmandu occupied two days. The good advice from Tamsin to us blokes that a pashmina is a good present for partners was duly taken. A swim in the pool at the Summit Hotel was a luxury before our final group meal together, and after the long flight home I looked back with a great deal of satisfaction on an excellent trip successfully completed, not bad at 62 and not drug-assisted! Now I'm back in the UK, the challenge becomes can I keep up with the unrelenting 3mph pace on LDWA walks!



As I write this eight months after the trip, the satisfaction and good memories of the mountains, the group and the friendly hospitable local people are tinged with sadness thinking about the devastating effects of the earthquake in Kathmandu and across other parts of Nepal in April 2015, with lives lost and buildings and infrastructure demolished in a very poor country.

*Malcolm Price*



## 6. Shadows of Sussex past: Ashdown Forest

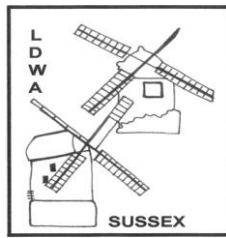
Recent Sussex Group walks have taken us across parts of Ashdown Forest, the least impressive forest I had seen or could imagine when first I visited it soon after moving to this part of the country, for at that time I had mistakenly believed that 'forest' implied extensive areas of dense woodland. I had no idea that the area had been established and managed for the sport of kings and to help control those who might wish to overthrow the monarchy. I did not know that it had played an important role in Britain's first industrial revolution. I had a lot to learn.

There is archaeological evidence of human occupation of the broad sandy upland dating back nearly 750,000 years and of more recent exploitation of its resources by successive waves of Bronze Age, Iron Age, Briton and Saxon peoples. The soil does not readily support ash trees and the area probably got its name when local Saxons associated it with *Aesc*, one of their kinsmen. At some early stage following the Conquest of 1066 the Normans were responsible for *Aesc's dun* becoming a royal forest.

In the Norman French language the noun 'forest' denoted a preserve for hunting. After defeating Harold and the Anglo Saxon army at what is now the town of Battle, Duke William had to solve the difficult problem of how to deploy his small body of followers to control the numerically vastly superior vanquished *Englisc* nation. His solution was to give control of major portions of the country to his relatives, nobles and knights, in turn requiring them to provide him with taxes and with military service as and when required. For many of the beneficiaries 'give control' meant just that and nothing more, since William asserted that he owned the whole country; the Domesday Book of 1086 was an audit of his possessions. Then the problem became that of how to maintain control of those whom he had endowed with property and power; one measure that he took was to establish throughout his realm extensive royal forests, each protected by a harsh forest law. At the peak of the era of royal forests there were 143 of them in which William's descendants could indulge their passion for hunting and in the south of the country approximately one third of the land was designated for this purpose.

The Ashdown terrain of undergrowth, scrub and mixed woodland provided ample cover for red and fallow deer, wild boar and a variety of game birds, and was ideal for hunting. The Normans enclosed the Forest within a 23-mile long ditch and earthen bank, the remains of which can still be seen in some places, with atop the bank an oak palisade. This arrangement was designed not just to keep animals within the forest but also to deny local folk uncontrolled access to it; many former common rights enjoyed in the days of Saxon rule were removed and the remainder (for example grazing livestock, collecting firewood, cutting heather and bracken for animal bedding) were made subject to close control. Harsh punishment was meted out to those who broke the law by trespassing 'against the venison' (by hunting any beast or fowl within the forest) or 'against the vert' (by enclosing a pasture, erecting a building, felling trees etc.). Enforcement of the forest law was assisted by the provision of 34 controlled access points, the 'gates' and 'hatches' that in some cases have been preserved in local place names.

Control of the Crown over the royal forests began to decline in the 13<sup>th</sup> century following the signing of Magna Carta and the nature of the forest began to change as the local overlords (and to a lesser extent the commoners, whose former rights were eventually re-established around the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) increasingly exploited its resources. An example is the construction in mediaeval times of the 'pillow mounds' that are shown on OS maps and that were used to house a readily available food source, namely the rabbits that burrowed within them, but the most significant influence in the creation of the environment that we see now was the rapid



growth of the iron industry in the Tudor era. The Weald had provided the Iron Age and Romano-Celtic smiths with the staple requirements for the production of iron (i.e. ore in the local clays, sand and clay to form the crucible, woodland for fuel) and within the bounds of the Forest are a few traces of the sites of their crude open-hearth foundries or 'bloomeries'. In the early Tudor period the technology of production evolved rapidly and local streams were harnessed to turn waterwheels to power the bellows of advanced high performance furnaces that produced increasingly large quantities of high quality iron that was used to revolutionise the arms industry. The grassed-over remains of the site of the first of these blast furnaces – the forerunner of Britain's modern iron and steel industry – are visible at Newbridge Furnace, built in 1496 near Coleman's Hatch. One consequence of this industrial revolution was major deforestation of the local area to provide fuel and the beginnings of the transition of Ashdown from an ideal hunting ground to the open heathland that we see today.

Henry VIII was an enthusiastic huntsman who visited the Forest, often in conjunction with courting trips to the home of the Bullens (aka Boleyns) at Hever Castle, and he is known to have stayed at the early Tudor royal hunting lodge at Bolebroke Castle a little to the north of Hartfield. A 'standing' was a patch of woodland in which hunters would conceal themselves whilst their prey was being driven towards them and around 500 years ago Henry would have spent time at King's Standing on the eastern fringes of Ashdown – but I wonder how he would have viewed the scene there during a typical weekend these days? I am sure he would have taken a dim view of groups of commoners clad in bright 'technical clothing' crashing through his personal hunting ground at a pace in excess of 3mph, individuals occasionally pausing briefly to pee on the undergrowth, but I cannot begin to imagine how outraged he would have been on being informed of the routine 'trespass against the vert' by the ice cream van from which a vendor peddles his wares at the King's Standing car park. I am sure he would have deployed his Warden, foresters, under-foresters, agisters and serjeants-in-fee to rid his royal playground of such a monstrosity in short order but I for one am glad to see it at the end of a long walk on a hot day.

*David Weatherley*

---

***Thank you to all who have provided material for this newsletter. Contributions suitable for inclusion in the next (January 2016) edition would be most welcome.***