

Hot stuff!

As we write this weather is giving us a true taste of summer and we've had some scorching times both at home and on our **Two CONTINENTS** trip, but unfortunately some contrasting weather in the **DARK PEAK** and exploring **CADAIR IDRIS AND SNOWDONIA**, all reported on elsewhere in this newsletter.

And there are still some great 2009 events to come including our **SUMMER BARBECUE** in August. Later this month we're on the **NORFOLK COAST** (and there's just time for you to book to join us). Our trip to **CONSTABLE COUNTRY** and our fantastic sounding week in the **LAKE DISTRICT** are now fully booked. To round off our last long weekend away tackles another stretch of the **SOUTH WEST COAST PATH** in October.

Our Events Team have already mapped out rough plans for 2010 and we would particularly welcome your reaction to our suggestion about a week in **THE JULIAN ALPS, CROATIA**. Don't forget that this will be our 20th Anniversary and we are still hoping to have your ideas about how we might celebrate this milestone. Our September newsletter will include more details about plans for the coming year.

Where have all the leaders gone?

Our June mid week walk did not take place because we could not find anyone to lead it! And several other events are doubtful for the same reason:

- Monthly day walk on 13th September
- Weekday walk September, pick your own day

- Weekday walk October, pick your own day
- Weekday walk November, pick your own day
- Weekday walk December, pick your own day

And, of course, we need plenty of volunteers for our 2010 programme.

The Events Committee needs to have leaders agreed nearly 4 months in

advance so that full details of the programme for the coming three months can be included in the newsletter, giving you plenty of time to clear the decks for the events you'd like to join.

It's never too early to volunteer! We will welcome leaders for 2010 walks;

The EVC – Peter Dear, Mike Fitzpatrick and Ray Postill – started off as our three grumpy old men. With a little success they became the three wise men. But if they don't get volunteers they threaten to revert to three grumpy old men – not a pleasant prospect!

Does size matter?

How wide is 'wide enough' for a footpath? Herts CC was well ahead when it originally adopted 6'6" as the minimum for new and diverted paths some years ago. However, this seems to have slipped from 'minimum' to 'standard'. This 6'6" is barely wide enough for two people with dogs to pass safely, and certainly not wide enough for families with children to do so. Apparently footpaths in our county vary from 22 metres to 4' (if you know of wide or narrower please email photos and details to chrisbeney@aol.com).

But what exactly constitutes the width? The beaten track, the hard surface or the total? No one really knows. In Leicestershire the legal minimum for the beaten track is 1.8 metres but actually requires 3 metres of grass each side. Sounds good? Well, perhaps. If that 7.8 metres width were generally legal, the landowner could fence it with high security fences without permission being needed. That would be horrible.

We need to protect our footpaths. The Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan is due to be reviewed 2010/11. If you spot problems with footpaths please contact the Rights of Way Officer at Hertfordshire County Council.

Kettle finally on at Britain's highest café

We reported in March on the 'delayed progress' at the top of Snowdon, so are pleased to report that Snowdon's new £8 million visitor centre has now opened, including a new style café – at some 3560 feet above sea level.

The previous building, dating from 1935 (and didn't it show it!), has been replaced by a modern granite structure named Hafod Eryri, and opened for business on 12th June, with stunning views through a 'window on the world' wall of glass.

And how long did the photographer have to wait for this perfect view?



Forthcoming Programme

All events in July, August and September

Express interest!

Helps us get a handle on likely numbers. It does NOT constitute a firm booking.

Book now!

To secure a place you need to confirm your participation with the named contact and send them a deposit cheque payable to St Albans Rambler.

All monies paid to SAR are accepted on the understanding that members agree the terms in the Finance Policy.

Fully booked!

If you're interested in an event flagged fully booked, do ring the event contact. Participants drop out sometimes, especially for events planned a long way in advance. We may still be able to find you a space.

And apologies if you find many events fully booked. We have to work well in advance to secure the accommodation we want, especially at peak times.

Your ideas?

Please ring one of the Events Co-ordination Team if you have an idea for a walk or event or have seen a good place to stay. Even if you don't want to organise or lead, we can pass ideas on for further investigation.

SUNDAY 12TH JULY 2009

July Day Walk: Whitchurch and Quainton

A newly researched, 12-mile round walk just north of Aylesbury, taking in four historic villages and the wonderfully panoramic Quainton Hill.

TUESDAY 14TH JULY 2009

July Weekday Walk with St Albans Camera Club: Thames Bridges

St Albans Camera Club invites SAR members to join them on their London walk. The route meanders around the bridges from Westminster to Albert and covers about 4 miles at a gentle pace. We leave St Albans at 2.00 and get back around 9.00, including time for tea and a meal. Bringing a camera is useful as we plan to take photos of the bridges and their surrounds. A second walk is planned in August.

WEDNESDAY 22ND JULY 2009

July Evening Walk: Flamstead and Trowley Bottom

We hope to enjoy one of those long summer evenings exploring five miles or so of the rolling countryside around Flamstead, perhaps finishing up with a drink at one of the village pubs.

Last chance!

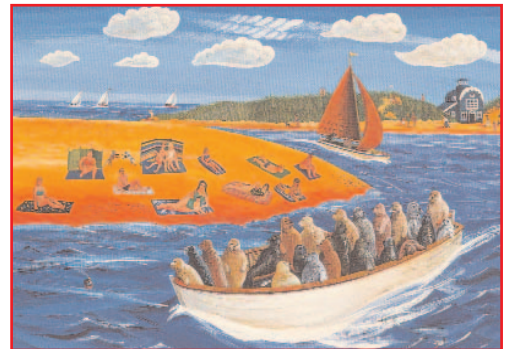
FRIDAY 24TH TO SUNDAY 26TH JULY 2009
Norfolk Coast

We'll be based in an independent backpackers hostel near Burnham Deepdale, exploring the coast (so not too many ups – hooray!). Take a boat ride to Blakeney Point to view the seals, tides permitting, and walk back along the pebble spit to Cley Next the Sea (don't miss the Cley Smokehouse!), with time to explore the picturesque village of Blakeney.

On Sunday we'll walk along the coast on the North Norfolk Coastal Path from the hostel as far as Wells Next the Sea. Much of this route is through sand dunes, much of it a Site of Special Scientific Interest, with fantastic opportunities for bird spotting. Lunch on the beach if the weather co-operates.

We are self-catering for breakfasts and lunches, but will eat at a local pub on Saturday evening.

Cost for the weekend likely to be around £80 and a couple of spaces are still available. Please send a cheque for £25 to Deborah at 19 Piggotshill Lane, Harpenden AL5 1LG



This picture of the seal trip near Blakeney Point, owned by Dee, is by Norfolk artist Brian Lewis. To see more of his fantastic work go to www.art-e-mail.com

Book now!

SATURDAY 1ST AUGUST 2009
Summer Barbecue

Our traditional summer get-together in Meg and Don's spacious garden, where we can also enjoy their smashing food. Rain or shine (who remembers last year's gales?) we can be sure of an afternoon and evening filled with fun, reminscences and gastronomic treats. This is one of the social highlights of the year – so make sure you don't miss it!

Costs just £10 per head, and bring your own booze. Please send a £10 cheque to Meg now.

Joining a day walk

Please ring the contact a few days in advance for full details: start time, directions, car sharing, etc. They will look out for you, especially if you are a new member.

If you're unable to come please try to let the organiser know, so we don't keep the whole party waiting. Most organisers can give you a mobile phone number.

Your safety

Our leaders take all reasonable care for the safety of the party. But it's your responsibility to see that you are properly equipped, to take responsibility for your own safety and that of others. SAR has appropriate Public Liability Insurance but you should have your own personal accident cover.

Our next

Our next committee meeting will be 17th August. If you have items for consideration please send to Angela by 10th August.

The next newsletter will be on 1st September 2009. If you have anything for inclusion, please send to Dee by 24th August.

WEDNESDAY 5TH AUGUST 2009

August Evening Walk: Sandridge

Our plan for this evening is to circumnavigate the boundaries of the new Hertfordshire woodland. We start from Sandridge village car park and wend our way via Nomansland across to Hammonds Farm and back. Between 6 and 7 miles, with a refreshing drink in Sandridge afterwards.

SUNDAY 9TH AUGUST 2009

August Day Walk: Wheathampstead

Stay close to home in the busiest part of the year with Angela's shortish day walk. Spot the Shetland ponies, explore Ayot Greenway and peer at Shaw's Corner. Just over 7 miles.

Fully booked!

FRIDAY 14TH TO SUNDAY 16TH AUGUST 2009

Constable Country

Our base will be the University of Essex at Wivenhoe Park, south east of Colchester and approximately 70 miles from St Albans. Colchester is a historic town with a wealth of Roman and medieval remains, castle, museums and pedestrianised 'lanes' of timber-framed buildings.

Walking will be in Dedham Vale, including Flatford Mill (*pictured*), Dedham and East Bergholt, all associated with Constable and where it is possible to recognise scenes from his paintings. This route is part of the Essex Way long-distance path, following the River Stour to its estuary. The second day will again be on the Essex Way, west of Colchester, visiting West Bergholt and other places of historical interest alongside the River Colne.

To be on the waiting list please contact Carol.



TUESDAY 18TH AUGUST 2009

August Weekday Walk with St Albans Camera Club

Contact Mike for more details of another chance to enjoy and amble with the camera club in an area with interesting subjects for the lens.

WEDNESDAY 26TH AUGUST 2009

August Weekday Walk: Whitwell

Our new leader Anna (and thank you so much for volunteering!) is still putting the finishing touches to her plan for today, so ring her closer to the date to find out more about her route on the northern boundary of the county.

SEPTEMBER 2009

September Weekday Walk: ??????

No volunteers to lead so far. Is this your chance to shine? We can help you with route planning if necessary.

SUNDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 2009

September Day Walk: ??????

No volunteers to lead so far. Is this your chance to shine? We can help you with route planning if necessary.

THURSDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2009

September Evening Walk: Sandridge and Childwickbury

Autumn's coming so this will be our last evening walk of 2009. An easy circuit from Sandridge village, via the picturesque hamlet of Childwickbury, and a chance to visit one of its three pubs later.

**Fully
booked!**

SATURDAY 12TH TO SATURDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER 2009
A Week in the Lake District

We've not visited the Lake District for a good few years and this looks to be a great week away. Shepherds' Cottage in Coniston village is on four floors and has two sitting rooms, a couple of four-poster beds, a secluded garden/patio and a general air of grandeur.

We're offering a variety of walks, taking in spectacular views of streams, lakes, mountains and seasonal colours, rather than conquering the highest peaks. However, there will be a couple of more challenging days out for those who want them.

Breakfasts and lunches will be catered in and evening meals will be a free choice: either cook and eat in or explore the facilities of nearby Coniston.

Cost for transport by minibus, accommodation, breakfast and lunches £230.

www.sykescottages.co.uk/cottages/1591php



Advance dates for your diary

**Book
now!**

16TH TO 18TH OCTOBER 2009
South West Coast Path 4

We'll be staying at the Ocean Backpackers Hostel in Ilfracombe, fantastically well placed right on the seafront (*pictured*) of this busy little town in a building dating from 1860, formerly home to a master boat builder. We'll explore some stretches of the northern side of the SWCP in our fourth visit to the UK's longest long-distance path. To justify the length of the journey we're making this a long weekend. We'll be in en suite dorms for 8 people (max) and for food will self-cater or perhaps explore the gastronomic offerings of the town.



Cost for three nights' accommodation and food likely to be around £100, but you will also need to allow for transport to Ilfracombe, perhaps some local transport too, and optional meal(s) out. Please send a £25 deposit cheque to Meg now to confirm your place.

www.oceanbackpackers.co.uk

SATURDAY 21ST NOVEMBER 2009

End-of-Season Party

We're repeating our DIY celebration to mark the end of another season of walking which we hope you've enjoyed. More details in our next issue, but do note the date now.

And in 2010 ...

JUNE/JULY 2010

Julian Alps, Slovenia

We are currently working on plans for a week's walking in this under-explored part of 'the new Europe'. More details in a future issue of the newsletter, but in the meantime if you are interested do contact Meg to help us get a better feel for likely numbers. To get the best flight prices we need to book before Christmas – so be prepared!

Recent local outings

MAY EVENING WALK: SOUTH

MYMMS. On a pleasant if windy evening in May a group met at the Black Horse in South Mymms for a 6 mile walk in this pleasant part of Hertfordshire. The route started in woodland and although we could not



May evening walk: our leaders round up the party

really appreciate them bluebells and celandines were out on force. The walk took us to North Mymms and the church where Liz and Malcolm got married; a small detour was allowed. Crossing the fields we could not help notice how dry they are, cracks are already showing in the earth: perhaps the summer forecast may be correct. The swallow holes were explained and as we crested the hill we were rewarded by a fine sunset over the M1 and A1M. Later on we were shown the flood defences near to where we cross the A1M via a footbridge. Tucked out of the way the massive gates ensure that local homes are safe if the water level rises significantly. The final stage was through woodland and as the light was fading we were all glad to see the lights of the pub. Fortunately there



was a small back room where we could relax and have a quiet drink despite the football match being shown on TV. Thanks for a pleasant and relaxing walk. **Mike**

MAY DAY WALK: WATTON. We had a gorgeous late spring morning for the start of our walk in rural east Hertfordshire. 18 and Alfie set off from Burns Green through woods where the last of this year's bluebells were just hanging on. The fields were exceptionally lush and green as we joined the Chain Walk through rolling fields.

The way took us through a farmyard where we paused to view the sheep and lambs that, unfortunately for them, looked about ready for someone's Sunday lunch. We had our own picnic lunch in the farmer's field sitting in lovely warm sunshine.

The walk continued onto Haultwick via Wood Green and we passed through tiny tucked away hamlets with large houses and beautifully kept gardens that pay tribute to the affluence of the area.

As we neared the end we passed a swarm of bees that had landed in a hedgerow. The air was full of insects and we had to take a path around just in case of stings but it was an interesting sight.

So we arrived back in Burns Green after 5 hours of very enjoyable walking in good company; thanks Peter.

Deborah

MAY WEEKDAY WALK: TEWIN AND THE MIMRAM WATER MEADOWS.

17 people not put off by the damp weather met at Tewin. We huddled in



May Day walk: Nick and Alfie entertain the party (above), while on the left Mavis and Heather lead the charge through ripening oilseed rape



May weekay walk from top to bottom: A damp start but everyone looks ready to go. Welcome shelter. Perce explains the workings of the water wheel

a tiled shelter on the Lower Green awaiting arrivals. Ray proved an excellent guide with many interesting historical facts to reveal, not least how Tewin got its name. The early Saxons worshipped the God of War, Tew, and Ing was an enclosure or meadow.

We set off for the Church of St Peter, set back from the Tewin road where Ray told us a section of the north wall dated back to Saxon times. The churchyard contained the graves of the De Haviland family and a tomb of Lady Anne Grimston who was said not to believe in the resurrection and is quoted as saying 'If indeed there is a life here after trees will render asunder my tomb', and indeed they had!

From the church we walked down grassy slopes to the Mimram and the

water meadows, crossing a bridge and heading up to Marden Hill, and admiring the fine mansion there. Then along tracks to Bramfield where we took our refreshments in another tiled shelter on the green like the one at Tewin. These shelters were formerly old wellhouses. On through the churchyard, passing the recreation ground and derelict pub into woods to emerge later at a wonderful view of Queen Hoo Hall, an Elizabethan, red brick dwelling standing on the ridge ahead. This was built in 1589 and was visited by Queen Elizabeth 1st while she was staying at Hatfield House.

From here we joined the road taking us back to Tewin passing the Plume of Feathers pub to the Upper Green. Those who needed to get away returned to our starting point while the rest took a path to a pond with yellow water irises. We passed the cricket green and arrived at the Rose and Crown pub on Lower Green where we partook of some lunch .

This ramble held plenty of historical interest plus pretty woods and water meadows. The drizzle did not dampen our spirits and we all felt that Pat and Ray had organized a most enjoyable walk. **Jenny**

REDBOURN PLAYERS: SEE HOW THEY RUN! Was this the best production we've ever seen from this group? Farce is notoriously difficult for an amateur company, when confidence and pace need to be perfect, but the Players romped through this one and had their capacity audience in tears of laughter. **Dee**

JUNE DAY WALK: HARPENDEN. It was a lovely, sunny morning when sixteen of us

met up by the gates to Rothampsted Experimental Station in Harpenden. There was an art exhibition on the Common so it was quite busy as we crossed it heading north towards Batford. We joined the path that follows the River Lea which was teeming with fish.

The route then followed the road through a residential area for a while before we could turn off the road and pick up the Nicky Line which was very busy with cyclists, most without bells which at times lead to near misses between bikers and walkers! As none of us seemed to know why the Nicky Line was so called, I turned to Google for some information and found the following: 'the Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead branch line of the Midland Railway Co opened on 16 July 1877 and closed on 16 June 1947. The origin of the name is not clear. One explanation is that, owing to the steep gradients, the name may have derived from 'funicular'; another that the name comes from the parish of St Nicholas in Harpenden. So, who knows? The only remnant that indicates that it was once a railway is a concrete platform at one point along the route that we passed.

As we turned off the Nicky Line to head towards Redbourn, across meadows and fields accompanied by very lively birdsong, it was getting very hot and when we found a shaded spot under a big tree we sat down for a welcome rest and our lunch. Revived, we continued to Redbourn where we turned off the High Street on a path that led to the River Ver which we followed along to Redbournbury Mill. We were hoping that we might by lucky enough to find the café open serving cream teas but were told that unfortunately this service was

discontinued two years ago! Still, we were able to buy excellent ice creams and also beautiful bread and stone ground flour produced at the mill.

After a rest and refreshed by our ice creams and after watching some young men driving their 4x4s through the ford, we continued back towards Harpenden, walking through West Common. The sun was now very hot and we were quite pleased to arrive back at 4 o'clock after our 10 mile walk. It had been a great walk through lovely countryside on a perfect summer day; we all thank Deborah for organising and leading. **Sonja**

JUNE EVENING WALK: SANDRIDGE.

On a beautiful warm, sunny June evening 12 SAR members joined the Sandridge walk, led by Carol assisted by Diane.

From the village car park, we walked west across the playing fields to join the well-trodden path towards the main railway line. Our circular route took us across the railway bridge, through the farmyard, and parallel with the main St Albans/Harpenden road.

We then ventured by fields of rape towards Ayres End Lane, turning right along the wooded footpath past Bluebell and Langley woods, and back into Sandridge.

It was interesting to see the notices about the proposed Heartwood forest, where the Woodland Trust plans to create an 850 acre new forest by planting 650,000 new trees. How lucky we will be to have the largest new native forest in England on our doorstep! It will be created over 10 years, so let's hope we will all still be active enough to enjoy it!

Unfortunately, our planned visit to the Rose and Crown had to be shelved, as a new road surface was being laid in St Alban Road. Seeing the massive vehicles resurfacing the road, and fearing being completely blocked in, we quickly returned to our cars to make our escape.

Some of us, however, managed a welcome tippie at the Blackberry Jack in Jersey Farm. **Diane**



June Day Walk: Along the Nicky Line and stopping for ice-cream at Redbournbury Mill

Two Continents

Sunday 19th April and 17 SAR members met at Luton Airport for the flight to Gibraltar, where we were met by Peter Strange, the Spanish Steps tour leader, our guide, mentor and leader for the week. First stop was Hotel Alameda in Tarifa, Spain, our base for two nights. Dinner in a local restaurant and an early night got us ready for a long walk the next day.

Things did not start well; Peter had parked his Land Rover in an area set aside for road works and it had been towed away, taxis were difficult to arrange but eventually appeared only to drop us at the wrong starting point. Finally the walk began. Los Acornocales is noted for its cork oak



In Spain, we enjoy the first of our walks ... and then a bit of relaxation for Peter and Richard



We celebrate Helen's birthday in style with an impressive cake

trees and Peter explained how cork is harvested and its uses, not just in wine bottles! Weather was excellent and across the bay we could see the Rif Mountains and Morocco. After lunch a steeper climb and to our amazement mist came down. Fortunately it cleared exposing brilliant views. It was suggested that some might like to take a more challenging path to the car park. However this ended abruptly at a land slip and we all ended on the same path, watching griffon vultures and admiring the wind turbines, although we had to admit they do not add to the landscape. Back at the hotel and refreshed we gathered for a good meal to celebrate our first day of walking.

Day 2 saw us change from Europe to Africa. The ferry leaves from Tarifa and after about 40 minutes we found ourselves in Tangiers. The time difference meant we arrived before we departed, just to add to the confusion around purchasing lunch and getting Moroccan money. The planned walk took us from the Moroccan side of the Pillars of Hercules along the coast. The group split into two after lunch with some heading further on and others taking a leisurely stroll back to the coach. The views along the way were spectacular especially as there in the background was Spain. Peter would have liked us to go further but time defeated us in the end.

The drive to Chefchauen showed how the King is developing Morocco: we saw huge container docks as well as smart apartment developments. In Chefchouen and made our way over the noisy cobbles to a quaint and interesting hotel. Drinks were available on the roof terrace courtesy of Peter S and an indulgent hotel. (Alcohol is not available in Morocco unless the hotel or restaurant has a special expensive licence.)

Day 3, the first of the Moroccan walks to a nearby Berber village. We met our local guide, Mohammed, and set off through the town. Chefchouen means the town that looks at the peaks. It is painted blue, either to keep the

mosquitoes away or to prevent the evil eye. It was once the centre of the *Hashish* trade, but we were never offered samples. Purchasing lunch at Mohammed uncle's shop, we were soon in the country meeting school children and admiring donkeys. Cake was shared with two local girls who managed to overcome their shyness; however we did not let on about the alcohol used in its making. The walk passed the communal ovens and olive press. We stopped for lunch at a local café for mint tea and learned that the owner had just completed a 12 month prison sentence for selling *hash*! The new King is determined to stamp out this trade. The return was through pine covered hills until we reached the town. A well earned rest and drink saw us ready for the excellent dinner; a feature of every evening.

Day 4: our rest day. For all of us this was an opportunity to be given a tour of Chefchouen led by Mohammed. It's a fascinating place combining the old and traditional with new developments including a sports centre. The washing place is used by everyone, from an old lady doing the family wash to a young man dealing with his jeans all by hand with no hot water.

The local market was a great source of interest and entertainment. The goods on sale might not have been suitable for our market but they served a need ranging from old clothes to quite modern looking tools and electronic

gizmos. Nobody bothered us and with Mohammed's excellent leadership no one got lost. Of course we visited a carpet shop and, yes, purchases were made but prices did get lower as interest waned. The afternoon was spent in individual sight seeing and resting ready for the evening.

Day 5: the most challenging day of the holiday. It also happened to be Helen's birthday but more of that later. Mohammed led us through a valley of walnut, cherry and olive trees serenaded by a chorus of frogs. Our eventual destination was God's Bridge, a natural sandstone arch 200 feet above the river Ourd Farda. This was the hottest day of the holiday and there at the bridge in the middle of nowhere accessed only by a simple



Meeting the locals in the carpet shop, in the spice souk and in the street

path was a café in a mud hut. The owner not only provided drinks but managed to make omelettes too. After lunch the group divided: some went down and some carried on up the path through beautiful countryside with a wide range of flowers and stunning views. We all met at the end for a well earned lemonade and chat and also to thank both leaders Mohamed and Peter for such a good, if challenging, day



Mike on the last night, with Ginny and Peter Strange from Spanish Steps

Having returned to the Souk in Chefchaouen, with last shopping for some and coffee in the square for most, Yvonne and Maggie experienced the *hammam*. This is a traditional cleansing and relaxation bath (women only!) where, stripped to their knickers, they lay on hot tiles for a full body scrub by local ladies (also down to their drawers) who then threw buckets of water over them as they lay there. They emerged glowing! The celebration dinner was a feast of kebabs, tagines and exotic salads set in the courtyard by candlelight. A magical birthday cake appeared for Helen at the end. This was a fitting finale to the Moroccan part of the holiday as next day we returned to Spain.

Day 6 started early with a visit to the souk in Tetouen on our way to Tangiers to catch the ferry. Here a local guide sped us around the

complicated narrow lanes of the shopping area. We were impressed with the wide range of goods on display including leather, basketry shoe shops and an apothecary selling herbs and homeopathic remedies. The sight and smell of the tannery was overwhelming and we were glad to move on. Our guide pointed out a very large coloured wooden box with handles and small air holes instead of windows. We couldn't guess that this was hired for weddings to take the bride from the reception to her new home at the groom's family house. Helen tried it out and the fit was good.

Returning to Tangiers we had time for a very quick lunch in the legendary Hotel Continental overlooking the harbour. This was Tangiers's version of art deco and was famous in the first half of the twentieth century for its avant garde literary set. Tangiers felt different and more cosmopolitan than the Morocco we had seen. It was time to say goodbye to Mohamed, our faithful guide, who wished us all a good life – in his words lovely jubilee!!

We were tossed back to Tarifa on the ferry where the Hostal Alameda felt like home. Peter Strange had arranged yet another celebration dinner for us at his favourite restaurant, and we followed this with a farewell singsong in our café!

Day 7 the time had come to say goodbye to Peter and Spanish Steps. We were to spend time in Gibraltar but sadly the weather, in particular the wind, meant that the cable cars were not running and the only way to get to the top of the Rock in the time was by taxi, a journey undertaken by some members. In addition most of the shops were closed as it was Sunday. We all met at the airport for the journey home, swapping stories of the day and admiring pictures of the apes.



On foot on Morocco

All too soon we were back in Luton ...

Quiz Question: Which airport has planes landing and taking off across the main road? Gibraltar.

Thanks to Mike and Ginny for all the work they put into the organisation, Peter S for his leadership and Mohammed for his good humour and ability to lead and support us on the walks.

The report is a compilation of the written contributions of fellow travellers and thanks to them for their contributions. **Mike S**

The Dark Peak

This trip to the Peak District offered the opportunity to travel without having to take the Friday off for once. A true weekend event. The Dark Peak sits with the UK's first National Park and gets its name from the dark millstone grit geology that makes up the area, compared to the lighter limestone in the White Peak area. The millstone grit produces some dramatic edges and stunning landscapes and gives good grip when walking, particularly when wet – as we found later. The underlying limestone around Castleton gives rise to an extensive network of caves, but those would have to be left for another day. We were based at Castleton YHA, an extremely popular hostel, and settled in with solicitors, cyclists and others on a team building weekend.

On Saturday morning the 'magnificent seven' set out to walk a circuit of 17.9 km in the Vale of Edale. From Castleton YHA we climbed steeply to the top of Lose Hill (altitude 476m) where we followed the undulating ridge walk, via Hollins Cross, to the top of Mam Tor (some call this the shivering mountain due to its shales and gritstones). All the way we had magnificent 360° views. We crossed Windy Knoll (very) and walked across open moors to the pretty hamlet of Old Dam, where we had lunch. Then to the Limestone Way across Old Moor and the dramatic Cavedale Gorge, passing beneath the ruins of Pevenill Castle, to return to Castleton.

The weather forecast was for sunshine and showers, which we had in bucket-loads. However the forecasters had forgotten to mention the gale force winds, hail, thunder and lightning. Regardless of the weather all the group said that they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves. To increase our

Hooray! The 'creaking seven' set off early: Julian's orders had been breakfast, make picnic, pack cars and move out by 8.45 a.m. - and we did!

Our route for the day was circular of 13.4 km along the banks of the attractive Ladybower reservoir,



Day 1: On top of the ridge with Mam Tor in the background, and descending Cavedale gorge towards Pevenill Castle



enjoyment, Ray laid on a display of acrobatics: chasing chased his waterproof jacket, which had taken off like a kite in the wind, and then tobogganning down a steep grassy slope on his backside to recover his rucksack cover. Anything for a laugh!

The day was rounded off with a lovely evening meal at the Old Cheddar Cheese pub followed by judging of the Eurovision Song Contest back at the hostel.

Sunday's weather forecast sounded much more promising than Saturday's.

ascending to Win Hill and back down through Parkin Clough. We enjoyed a gentle walk alongside the reservoir but taken at a speedy rate until we started the climb up through the plantations where felling was still in progress. Huffing and puffing, we had plenty of obstacles to tackle. After a coffee stop we arrived on the old Roman road, still in glorious sunshine with good views. Win Hill was calling us onward and upward. As we started the gradual ascent – yes, you guessed it – the heavens opened with rain, hail and gale-force winds. We had the usual fight to put on the overtrousers and were then blown to the top. Now the 'soggy seven', we oohed and aahed at the view but decided on a quick descent to escape the worst of the weather. The steep downward path was hazardous so we took it slowly.

Back at the reservoir we were all starving hungry but had to wait for Mike, ever the gentleman, to pull Pat out of her trousers (well, overtrousers, actually!), to great hilarity. In spite of the weather – or perhaps because of it – we all had a great time. **Pat, Ray & Ginny**



Day 2, clockwise from top left. At the Ladybower reservoir dam. Treacherous going on the descent to reservoir level. Ray finds a great vantage point.



Cadair Idris – the Giant’s Chair

On Friday our main group made its way to Kings Youth Hostel at the foot of Cadair Idris, while others stayed at the King George III hotel nearby.

Rain in the early hours of Saturday did not bode well, so wet weather gear was the order of the day. We were faced by a long steep climb through a wood to the Mynffordd Craig Lwyd path. Rocks had been laid to form

we’d come. We contoured round the mountain and picked up the correct path further down. This experience showed how easy it is to go astray in bad weather and poor visibility.

Conditions gradually improved as we descended out of the low cloud and eventually a watery sunshine revealed the beautiful view which lifted our spirits on the final homeward stretch.

progress with wide views of the Mawddach estuary, the tide ebbing and a lone heron on the stream.

At Arthog we struck north up a beautiful wooded valley with birch, sycamore, oak and other broadleaves over pools and waterfalls, the sun shining. We paused only to admire the view and for Ray to take a succession of group photographs. We’d been

promised second lunch at the lake at Llynau Cregennen. It was a long time coming, but very welcome. After ‘lunch’ the clouds had cleared, Cadair Idris and its satellites were bathed in sunshine. Back to the hostel and, for most of us, the best part of the day – a piece of Glenis’s cake. Our hearty dinner at the hostel but this time followed by table football challenge matches.



Day 1: a long slog to the top of Cadair and wet, tired but triumphant on the summit



Day 2: Along the waterfall walk



Day 3: An the edge on the precipice walk

steps in parts, but elsewhere we picked our way up steep boulder-strewn scree in low cloud, persistent rain and very cold wind. Julian’s thermometer showed only 6°!

Wet and cold, we were relieved to find a bothy close to the top: all 23 were determined to get inside even though others were already in residence! Two small windows let in little light so we couldn’t see much but we were out of the biting wind and rain for lunch and were able to add extra dry layers before facing the elements again.

To descend we planned to retrace our steps for a short distance and strike off to the right to the Pony Path, but in the mist and our haste to keep moving, we missed the path and found ourselves heading back the way

At the hostel a hot cuppa and Glynis’s delicious fruit cake revived us after our adventurous day, rounded off with a good meal at the hostel and one of Ray’s ‘entertaining’ quizzes.

On Sunday, we woke wondering what the Welsh weather would throw at us. Grey skies and drizzly showers to start, but the sun came out later and we warmed up as the day progressed.

From the hostel we climbed through open hills, past sheep and green fields. Once mobile phone reception was restored, we heard the happy news that Dick had become a grandfather again! A steep descent took us through pretty woods down to Penmaenpool, our picnic spot.

After lunch the path, the old railway track, was level so we made good

Further on we could see the river Mawddach which winds its way through the valley below. From here we had stunning views of Cadair Idris, Snowdon and the Mawddach Estuary so lots of photos were taken as there was no mist or cloud like the previous two days. We could see Barmouth in the distance. Further along we stopped for yet more photos and to eat some sweets (won with the quiz and football game!). We then followed the circle round and passed lake Cynwch, which looked lovely, we then walked on passing lots of sheep in the fields then through wooded area until we came back to the car park. This was such a great walk which we all really enjoyed. We all then said our farewells and started our long journey back home. **Meg, Sheila, Heather**

On Monday morning, after leaving the youth hostel, we all met up at the Saith Groesffordd National Park car park for the Precipice Walk. After a little road walking and a slight incline we started the circular walk. We were lucky not to have any rain, but some lovely sunshine! As we walked we had a fine view over the Forestry Commission’s Kings Forest, it looked quite bare.