

Peterborough Walkers
Easter 2024 in Eastbourne

Thursday 28th March - Eastbourne

Despite the rain all arrived safely in Eastbourne with several of the group making it to the traditional pre-walking weekend meet up location: Wetherspoons. It was Curry night and absolutely heaving requiring nabbing of tables as soon as other customers vacated them. But where else can you get a curry and a G&T for £10! Walking back to our accommodation in heavy rain we wondered what the weekend had in store for us.

Friday 29th March – East Dean, Friston, Birling gap – walk leader: Debbie.

A miracle! A dry and sunny day that was blustery to start with but improved by lunchtime. The meet-up point was the (free) car park in the charming village of East Dean. We were approached by a lady asking if we were the “Meet Up group” as she was meant to be joining them for a walk. “We haven’t seen them, and we have been here for 20 minutes”, we told her, “But we are a walking group, and you are welcome to join us”. So, she did. Turns out Kristina lives and works in Lewes and is originally from Scandinavia.

Our walk took us up through Friston woods before descending to an excellent lunch stop at the Seven Sisters visitor centre next to the Cuckmere River.

The second half of the walk initially required walking along a good path following the river where we encountered some flooding. People coming towards us were either wearing wellies or had taken their shoes off. A variety of tactics to cross were explored (going on tiptoe, walking fast, walking slowly) and all managed to make it through.

A bit further on the group split into two (without the walk leader’s permission!) as a result of an on-the-spot risk assessment by the back six who decided a steady climb up a grassy track was preferable to the very steep scramble up an eroded cliff edge.

After traversing several of the sisters, an unscheduled stop was made at Birling Gap for toilets with some of the group indulging in expensive ice creams. As we approached the gap we could see creatures bobbing in the sea. Were they seals? No – they were hardy souls windsurfing.



The approach to Birling gap with the lighthouse in the distance

The last stretch was inland to get us back to East Dean where we passed a blue plaque on a cottage, allegedly the retirement home of Sherlock Holmes from 1903 to 1917, describing him as a consultant detective and beekeeper.

Some of the group indulged in a pint whilst others departed to get ready for a night at the Thai restaurant for an excellent meal organized by Sara. We met up with our Cultural Attaché Jane who due to a foot injury couldn't walk with us. She gave us a comprehensive overview of the Turner Prize Exhibition being hosted this year by Eastbourne in the Towner Gallery.

Saturday 30th March – Eastbourne, East Dean, Birling gap and Beachy Head – walk leader: Dean



We met at the park on the edge of Eastbourne at 10.30am to allow one of our fitter members time to complete a Park Run. (They do not feature in this photograph).

After a steady climb up we turned inland along fine tracks past fields of heavily pregnant ewes and some very recently born lambs.

The first coffee stop of the day was at East Dean where we found an Easter fayre taking place in and around the village hall. The live music was of a dubious quality, and we weren't sure if it was karaoke or not. Debbie purchased a fine hat from one of the craft stalls. The many distractions included a teashop, delicatessen and a pub which severely tested our walk leader's rounding up skills.

Next stop Birling Gap. Gorgeous weather meant many of the group descended the steps to lunch on the pebbly beach. More cat herding skills needed to ensure no-one was left behind as we traversed more of the Seven Sisters towards Beachy Head.

There was much debate about the best place for a group photo taking into account that parts of the cliff had clearly disappeared into the sea in recent years. The more risk adverse stood "inland" whilst the more adventurous stood "sea-side." We asked a group passing by if one of them would take a photograph and a girl some-what shorter than all of us volunteered. A great photo was taken but later when we looked back to where we had been stood we could see we had all been stood on a ledge!



After 9 miles (or more depending on whether you walked/bus/drove to the walk's start point in the morning) the group made it safely back.

Dinner organized by Janet was at Charlie Brown's diner who served huge portion sizes and very reasonably priced wine whose origin was dubious, but it was drinkable and good value.

Jane told us about her fun-packed day making the most of her Dotto train all-day Rover card. Other discussion topics included an explanation as to why two members of the group had caught the sun much more than others – it was because they walked at the front. It was also noted that one diner left her Buns (or was it Baps?)

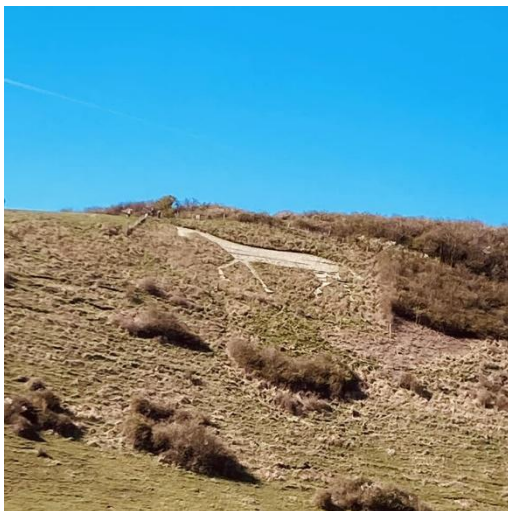
Sunday 31st March – Seaford to Alfriston via River Cuckmere – Walk Leader: Eleanor

The group rendezvous was at the Martello Tower where we experienced the temporary compost toilets – not recommended unless an emergency! We were joined by a member of a local Ramblers group who originated from Slovenia.



The walk immediately took us up a steep cliff but the views were worth it resulting in a debate as to whether we could see six or seven sisters.

A gradual descent brought us down to a spot overlooking the scene of the previous day's wading. Mary provided the first Easter chocolate treat of the day whilst we admired the views over Cuckmere Haven. After a toilet/coffee stop at the Cuckmere Inn at Exeat we followed the meandering River Cuckmere to Alfriston.



A highlight was an unexpected White Horse. *Known as the Litlington White Horse, this chalk filly trots over the South Downs, above the Cuckmere River, southwest of Litlington village. Three local men are said to have cut it into the hillside by the light of a full moon in 1924. And it is believed that it replaced an ancient chalk horse which had become overgrown.*

We arrived at Alfriston for lunch (and toilets) which offered a variety of spots to sit and places to purchase refreshments. Alfriston village shop/post office/delicatessen was a real gem with lots of lovely home-made pies.

A review of progress made so far versus the planned route revealed that it would be dark before we got back so a new route was quickly designed. A long steady climb up a bridleway brought us to a fantastic viewpoint where the longest serving member of the group declared a coffee stop. Dean provided the second Easter chocolate treat of the day whilst we admired 360-degree panoramic views of the South Downs and the coast.

Our route back took us through the Rathfinny wine estate vineyards – a visit to be arranged on another occasion.



Two options were presented for the final mile or so into town depending on preference for short route on pavements or slightly longer route on footpaths. Well done everyone for achieving 13 miles on Day 3.

Dinner was organized by Julie at the Belgian café where craft beer was drunk in a large test tube. Excellent food was accompanied by a duet singing a wide range of music to a very small audience. Our Cultural Attaché, Jane, shared the highlight of Eastbourne that day was a brass band performing in the band stand on the sea front. The senior members of the group returned to their hotel in search of their missing teapot whilst several of the group were enticed to get up and dance to the group's anthem: I'm Gonna be (500 miles) by the Proclaimers.

Monday 1st April – Wilmington – Walk Leader: Stephen

A hardy 8 met up at Wilmington for a 5 mile walk despite the threat of some rain. Other members of the group decided they needed to set off for home in the hope of missing bank holiday traffic jams at the Dartford Crossing.



The Long Man of Wilmington is a 70-metre-high chalk figure of a man holding two staves cut out from the turf on Windover Hill (part of the South Downs and not far from Polegate in East Sussex). He's also described as one of the great mysteries of Sussex as nobody really knows who carved him out of the ground or why.

The walk involved a mixture of paths, the South Downs Way and some steady inclines and declines passing through a field of frolicking baa lambs. Fortunately, the rain showers were brief.

After the walk we stopped at the Long Man Inn – a delightful pub that keeps tables free in the bar area for drinkers/walkers.

Vote of thanks

A fabulous weekend of walking in gorgeous weather along excellent tracks (hardly any mud!) that linked together meaning we walked the whole of the coast from Seaford to Eastbourne. Thanks/recognition go to:

Walk leaders: Debbie, Dean, Eleanor and Stephen

Dinner coordinators: Sara, Janet & Julie

Ian J: For doing a sterling job opening, holding and closing gates

Mary & Dean: For maintaining the tradition of chocolate on Easter Sunday

Lorraine & Claire: First time away with the group and they did all four walks!

Sarah: For producing the Easter report