

Longer Walks (October 2018 to September 2019)

Here is a record of our longer walks in iU3A's sixth year. There's a link to the detail of each walk at the end of each section. For more recent walks, go to our web page [here](#)

October 2018



Milford to Godalming Milford to Godalming: industrial action on South Western Railway threatened to thwart delivery of this walk, but six of us managed to adapt and make the new start time (apologies to those who didn't). We started at Milford with mist and thick dew which soon started to burn off. We passed lakes and the timber-framed Enton Mill and then joined the Greensand Way, a sandy bridleway through The Hurtwood. An unexpected encounter was with llamas being herded (in Surrey?). After a very pleasant lunch in Autumn sunshine in Hascombe, the walk went through the NT's Winkworth Arboretum. We had a few climbs which gave us good

views over the North Downs. From there we continued north toward Godalming, approaching the town via the River Wey and Godalming Navigation path along the canal. We then came to a spot in the sun which seemed overrun with ladybirds — hundreds of them, getting in our hair and everywhere. Research afterwards (thanks to Jane) proved they were invasive harlequin ladybirds, which threaten our native species.

As we approached the town there was a decision to be made — the option of tea in the ancient High Street or the restricted train service back into London. In the end both were achieved for all. Details [here](#)..

Buxted: this walk took just six of us into the rolling East Sussex countryside, through a mixture of crop fields, sheep and horse grazing and woodland. We were never far from habitation, but (other than in the popular lunchtime inn) met only a handful of other people. Another warm and sunny day meant excellent walking weather, with regular clear views of the Weald and the more distant South Downs ridge. Our arrival back at Buxted station was carefully timed to allow over 50 minutes before the next hourly train to London, which we devoted to welcome pots of tea (and, for some, even more welcome chocolate fudge bites) in the conveniently located nearby pub. Details [here](#).



Holmwood to Reigate: The rather murky, misty, autumnal weather conditions failed to deter 16 of us from enjoying this very pleasant walk through the Low Weald of Surrey in the Mole Valley. The terrain there is gently undulating and provides a variety of paths, lanes and bridleways through woodland, open country and across fields. Unfortunately there were no clear views of the North Downs ridge, it being comprehensively shrouded in mist. A very good lunch was taken at the Plough Inn, in the pretty village of Leigh (possibly pronounced 'Lie'?). The afternoon walk ended with a stroll through Reigate's Priory Park, (named for its Grade 1 listed Priory) with its gardens and

wildfowl lake, and then across town to the station. Details [here](#).

East Tilbury to Pitsea: this walk followed the Thames Estuary Path with great open skies and views over the estuary, last undertaken in August 2017. We walked through many RSPB and WWT reserves, with loads of bird life all the way. Lunch was at Fobbing with Wat Tyler (Peasants Revolt connections). We were a bit slow but perhaps this was because we were 14. The afternoon brought more of the same clear bright skies with open vistas. We did pass the odd industrial part and had some back streets — typical Essex, but still overall an interesting walk. Details [here](#).



November



Woburn Estate: it was almost like a visit to the zoo. Elephants, rhino, buffalo, eland, camel, wallabies, not to mention hundreds of deer. All in glorious autumn weather and without having to pay the entrance fee. A lucky 13 of us traversed a large part of the Woburn Estate and then endured a lengthy wait for food at a popular pub in picturesque Woburn village. Easy going throughout, so it didn't feel like a 9-mile walk — even for those who explored the tranquil village of Aspley Guise with its high proportion of listed buildings before catching the return train. Fortunately a warning that the connecting service would be "standing room only" proved a false alarm.

Details [here](#).

Gerrards Cross to Cookham: as the unseasonably mild November weather continued, seven of us were lucky to enjoy yet another bright sunny autumnal day, which provided a perfect backdrop to the changing colour of the leaves. This walk took us through many pretty woodland paths including Egypt's Wood, part of the famous Burnham Beeches Wood which some of us were surprised to discover is owned and protected by the Corporation of London. As is usual in this part of the country there were plenty of red kites to be seen soaring gracefully overhead. After an early lunch stop (some 5.5 miles into the walk) we continued through more open countryside to eventually cross the Thames into Cookham. There was plenty of time for a visit to the church where artist Stanley Spencer worshipped and for a slow meander through the village to the station...everyone having voted for an early return to London rather than stop for tea and cakes! Details [here](#).



Chelsfield: very pleasant autumn weather for this relatively straightforward walk in what used to be Kent but now falls within the GLC borough of Bromley. After a kilometre through uninspiring suburbia, the main part of the walk took our small but select group of seven into the woodland of High Elms country park (with plenty of autumn colours) and then through open countryside. We passed Charles Darwin's house just outside the peaceful village of Downe and lunched at the 17th century Blacksmith's Arms in Cudham (which one or two recalled having visited on a different walk earlier in the year). Unsurprisingly, on the return everyone opted to catch a bus to Orpington rather than retrace the route through suburbia, but we still managed to clock up a respectable 9 miles. On the return train one of our number (we'll spare her blushes) was solicited with the sobriquet "pulchritudinous" by a seemingly educated - if a little inebriated - admirer. Details [here](#).

West Croydon to Earlsfield: this walk was part of the Wandle trail through south west London, which is a green trail linking up a string of local parks as it follows the River Wandle. We picked up the river in East Croydon, then passed by Waddon Ponds, and into Beddington Park, sighting two egrets en route. At Morden Hall Park, now a National Trust property, we stopped for a good lunch and then continued to Colliers Wood, where our walk ended, our original plan to walk to Earlsfield having been changed due to serious disruption in South Western Railways services. We were fortunate to have better weather than forecast, with sun bringing out the autumn colours of leaves. One intrepid member of the group continued on solo to finish the Wandle trail in Wandsworth. Details [here](#).



Broxbourne Woods: a hiccup with booking the pub (it's closed on Mondays!) meant a slight alteration of the walk route, shortening the length to eight miles, with the pub at the end rather than the middle. But no one seemed to mind on this cold day: the lunches were good so it was worth the wait. This was a typical Hertfordshire walk — starting from Bayford we passed the grand offices of the IMI and then were out in rolling countryside with many woods, an SSI & a nature reserve. We followed sections of the disused Ermine Street in a straight line and enjoyed this 'Fancy Free' walk. Details [here](#).

December

Christmas Social, Willesden, Paddington and Regent's Canal: this was an easy walk alongside canals for most of the way. It started quietly at Willesden Junction but the closer in the busier the towpath became. What's worse, joggers or cyclists? It was amazing to see all the developments along the way and particularly the redevelopment around Paddington. We had 32 members either starting from the beginning, joining us along the way, or joining at the end. Some were over the top with Christmas decorations, others were more discreet in their participation in the festive spirit. An on-route coffee stop meant several toilet stops were necessary and then it was a bit of a scramble back through Islington's squares to get to the Brewhouse in time for our booked lunch. But it was a good walk and hence a well earned lunch. Kind words were offered to all the Walk Leaders for their superb efforts in 2018. Walk details [here](#).



January 2019



Broxbourne to Hertford East: this turned out to be a great revival of a previous walk from 2015. We started from Broxbourne station, going south on the New River Path, but soon leaving the valley and turning west on to the Hertfordshire Way. This led us through the countryside to the National Nature Reserve of Broxbourne Woods. We then met the old Roman road of Ermine Street, close to where we had walked in December 2018. As we approached Hertford Heath we left Ermine Street and walked through the grounds of the very grand Haileybury private boarding school (famed since East India Trading Company days). This led us back to the Lea River at St Margarets for our lunch stop. After lunch we picked up the New River again and passed the springs of Amwell and Chadwell to the New Gauge and the start of the New River. From there it was a short walk along the Lea Navigation to Hertford East. Details [here](#).

Woolwich to Mottingham: this was a 10 mile walk, mainly on two sections of the Green Chain in South East London (and also forming part of the Capital Ring for much of these sections). While a lot of the Capital Ring is quite urban these sections were very rural. We did have a few main roads to cross but most of our time was hopping between large green spaces. These were mainly made up of parks, commons and woodland, with good views from the higher ground back over Canary Wharf and the City. The threatened rain held off until we'd finished the walk — very considerably! We passed the folly of Severndroog Castle (Rowena's favourite!) before reaching the café in Oxleas Wood for lunch. In the afternoon we passed Falconwood station (recovering one member who'd taken a slight detour — all in a good cause), then on to Eltham Palace ending at Mottingham. Details [here](#).



Ingrebourne Valley: this was an eight mile meander through the Ingrebourne Valley starting at Upminster and ending at Hornchurch. The overnight slight fall of snow meant a few muddy sections and everyone staying well wrapped up. But we followed the zigzag route, taking in some Nature reserves and an SSSI around the Ingrebourne river valley, also utilising parts of the LOOP. There were some fine 360° views of the London skyline from just a slight elevation rise. Lunch was at the relatively new Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centre with our large group (12) meaning they had to open up the annex for us! Having completed 6 miles before lunch there was only a couple of miles left to finish the walk. Details [here](#).

February

St Margaret's and the Ash Valley: this was a very pleasant circular walk north then east from St Margaret's, dovetailing nicely with the walk we did early in January. Last time we had lunch at St Margaret's, this time we started from there. We walked through Stanstead Abbots and then up the hill to cross open fields past Hunsdon to Widford and through the churchyard to join the Hertfordshire Way. We then dropped down to cross the River Ash which we followed, partly on the old railway track bed, until we diverted to Wareside for lunch at The Chequers Inn — which has this amazing over boot cover dispenser! After lunch we rejoined the old railway at Mardock and followed it past Watersplace Farm into the Amwell Nature Reserve. We then crossed the River Lee and followed the towpath back to St Margaret's. All enjoyed the rolling Hertfordshire countryside. Details [here](#).





Merstham to Westhumble: not sure what it is about this walk. It meets many of the main criteria — 10 miles, attractive countryside and views, not too far from London, good lunchtime pub. But we've done it in both directions now and still haven't got to double figures in total participants — even counting those who did it both times twice. The few who came along this time experienced a walk of two halves. Fairly easy in the morning, more strenuous in the afternoon, with several climbs and descents on the slopes of the North Downs and quite a few muddy stretches



that slowed progress. The threatened rain was never more than light drizzle and was outweighed by sunny intervals. We saw the sun starting to set from the top of Box Hill and managed to exit the woods before it got too dark — opting in the circumstances for the footbridge to cross the River Mole rather than the stepping stones. Details [here](#).

Cuffley: this was an 11 mile walk last done by us (led by Alan Cranston) in August 2016. It was selected to try to minimise mud and proved the right choice. There were a couple of very short slightly muddy bits, but otherwise all clear — and everyone appreciated the walk for it! It was a glorious mild clear day, which added to the satisfaction. Then the lunch portions at The Farmer's Boy, Brickendon, were enormous. It was a bit of a stagger to get going after lunch, but that didn't deter some of us from stopping for tea and cake at the end..... Details [here](#).



Saunderton to Princes Risborough: this was a lovely walk on a mild clear day. The route took in quite a bit of the Chiltern Way and the Ridgeway so there were quite a few ups and downs. We lost count of the number of red kites we saw. The pub at Bledlow was also lovely and welcoming with quick wholesome food. In the afternoon we had a quick dip into Lyde Gardens a dingy dell with many water features and goo plantings. Then it was an easy stroll to the station. Details [here](#).

Totteridge and Whetstone to Gospel Oak: this was a nine mile walk that we have done previously — but in different forms and combinations. It was such a glorious day — hottest February day since records began which might be part of the reason why no sooner had we started than we stopped for coffee. Apparently it was necessary as it was going to be a late lunch. This time our route was down the Dollis Brook Greenway through London's green spaces and woods, to the Mutton Brook. Then we branched off for a short detour through Hampstead Garden Suburb to see the Lutyens church. After that we picked up the Hampstead Heath Extension, which took us right to the Spaniards Inn for our late lunch. After that it was a short stroll up Parliament Hill, pause to take in the vista, then down to finish at Gospel Oak. Details [here](#).



March



Beaconsfield to Chorleywood: most of the morning was spent in woodland, Hodgemoor Woods being the most challenging. Directions in the walk source of — "It is easy to get lost during the next 500 metres or so" — was true, but fortunately we emerged to reach The White Hart in Chalfont St Giles in time for an early lunch. After this we passed the cottage where Milton lived for a short time to escape the Great Plague in London and where he completed *Paradise Lost*. Having unsuccessfully tried to see inside the Parish Church with an interesting covered lynch gate, we continued up to the Chiltern Way and the Chiltern Open Air Museum. The route was straightforward and

brought us into Chorleywood and as we reached the station the rain arrived. Details [here](#).

Staines to Hampton Court: the threatened rain was restricted to only a few drops, the sun shone more frequently than expected and the wind blew mainly from behind, all of which helped make this a very pleasant early Spring walk along quite a varied stretch of the Thames close to London. We took in a peaceful and secluded loop at Penton Lock, the last surviving natural meadowland in Surrey near Chertsey, one of the few remaining ferry crossings at Shepperton and a former racecourse at Hurst Park. Decent lunch at one of several riverside pubs and just time to grab a take-away tea and treat before catching the train back from Hampton Court. Our 'man with the app' clocked it at almost 20 km — but then it was flat and wind-assisted. Details [here](#).



Richmond to Putney: this week we did more of the Thames Path. The weather forecast was correct this time with mild temperatures hence the numbers were high for this walk — or was it the attraction of a flat mud free walk that did it? This walk was a repeat of our 1st walk back in November 2013 and our 100th walk in July 2016. But it was time for a return and was enjoyed by all — a good mix of some founder members of the Long Walks group and some new members. There was plenty of activity on the river with many rowing crews out practising. We stopped at the White Hart at Barnes for lunch. Good food and generally quick service — except for mine. Seemed to take them for ever to find a second pie! We eventually emerged to find the river path submerged — high tide was in. But a short stretch of road took us to a higher pathway and then the tide was receding fast. Details [here](#).

Garston to St Albans: a lovely spring day for our walk following the meandering rivers Colne and Ver into the Roman city of St Albans. We started with a very leisurely morning ramble — in order not to arrive at the lunch stop before opening time! At Moor Mill (with working water wheel) we had a very acceptable lunch in a private room by the bar, and after a quick photo call by the duck pond continued on our way. The river path took us into Verulamium Park, where we detoured around the lake and uphill to see the well preserved Roman mosaic and hypocaust. After a quick visit to the magnificent Abbey/Cathedral and then a conveniently placed ice cream van, it was a short stroll to the Abbey station for a perfectly timed journey home. Details [here](#).



April



Chess Valley: we started at Chesham station, from where we immediately picked up the Chess Valley Walk. We left Chesham through Meades Water Gardens and headed out of town across the playing fields. Then there was a tricky bit using stepping stones to cross a shallow stream but no one got wet feet. We left the valley floor and steadily ascended the valley side with great views back down the valley as we passed through the Latimer Park estate. Unfortunately Watercress Farm was closed so buying was impossible. We again struck uphill to the lunch stop at the Cock Inn, Sarratt. Very speedy service — for most. After lunch we dropped down into the valley and picked up the

Chess Valley Walk again. There was an ugly section until we crossed and cleared the M25. Leaving the noisy road behind us and returning to the Chess valley we skirted Rickmansworth, passing the large Royal Masonic School, then followed the path to Rickmansworth station. Details [here](#).

Windsor Great Park (Sunningdale to Windsor): a question: in which park can you find a 600 foot totem pole, a large obelisk and a huge statue of a copper horse? Well ten of us managed to see them all on this delightful 10-mile walk from Sunningdale to Windsor — and lots more besides. A polo ground, the lakes at Virginia Water, colourful azalea in The Valley Garden, Cow Pond (actually a lily pond) and the Deer Park. Not to mention Windsor Castle — from a distance and (almost 40 minutes later) close-up. Splendid sunny spring weather allowed us to sit out for lunch, on a terrace overlooking the renowned Savill Garden. It's one of those walks most people are happy to repeat — as several participants verified. Details [here](#).



Wickford: the beautifully warm spring weather soon had us peeling off our many layers and rejoicing in the blue skies and sunshine. Bluebells (native English of course) were in abundance, as were swathes of anemones in the ancient woodland of Crowsheath. Hedgerows and trees were alive with the sounds of birdsong, (someone observed that the chiffchaffs seemed to be tweeting 'Bre..xit. Bre..xit!') and later, we heard the very determined ratatattat of an unseen woodpecker.

Food orders were taken on the train and phoned through to the pub, so we enjoyed a very nice, super fast lunch at the Nags Head at Ramsden Heath. The afternoon walk pulled off a neat trick: emerging from a gap in the hedgerow we found ourselves at the top of a hill (having done no discernible climbing!), the view stretching for miles across the Essex & Kent countryside. Passing De Beauvoir House and farm (sadly no sign of their rare breed British White Cattle) had some of us wondering about a possible Islington connection. We returned to Wickford with almost perfect timing to get a fast train back to London. Details [here](#).

Tunbridge Wells: eleven walkers joined our guest leader Tony and his wife Libby in pouring rain at Tunbridge Wells station. Within 10 minutes we were out on the Common and it was dry for the rest of the 10 mile walk via Eridge and Frant through varied woodland, parkland and large sandstone rock formations. Snack stop in delightful bluebell woods, late lunch promptly served in the garden of the picturesque George Inn at Frant, a quick look in the church with beautiful painted ceilings, and a gentle amble downhill back to the Pantiles for optional tea before the 50 minute train journey back to London Bridge. Details [here](#).



May



Tewin: this was a repeat walk last undertaken in October 2017. But of course no one remembered it.... It was a typical Hertfordshire walk — rolling hills, views back over Welwyn, and down towards Potters Bar. The forecast had threatened cold and wet but actually it wasn't that bad. The rain, only a shower, held off until about 3.00pm and we had some sunny interludes. Lunch was a bit slow but worth the wait — for those who were eating. Rina was with us so we had the bonus of being able to identify various bird calls and we saw our first martin of the season. Although not expecting to catch the early train we just made the station in time. Details [here](#).

Leith Hill (Holmwood to Gomshall): low turnout for this one, perhaps in part because of the inclement weather forecast. We can't pretend it didn't rain, but the balance between sunny intervals and the occasional light shower was much more favourable than anticipated, so overall it was a very pleasant outing. Given the rather slippery conditions, we opted for the longer route up to Leith Hill Tower (pictured, and one of the highest points in the South-East) rather than scrambling up the 1 in 3 gradient. Overall it was relatively easy going, much of it through delightful National Trust woodland. We caught the end of the bluebell season and plenty of fields ablaze with yellow rape seed. Some recognised the welcoming, off-the-beaten-track lunchtime pub from when we last did the walk in 2015. Unlike on that occasion, we timed our arrival at Gomshall station just in time to catch the hourly service. Heaviest rain of the day came during the 200 yard walk connecting the two stations in Dorking. Details [here](#).



Great Chesterford to Newport, via Saffron Walden: this was a 10½ mile linear walk from Great Chesterford, situated on the river Cam, to the historic market town of Saffron Walden where we had lunch (and nearly lost one member!). It was a glorious sunny day as we strolled down country paths and crossed large open fields. We continued through Audley End Park and Village, and passed Debden Water to finish at the interesting village of Newport — just in time to catch the scheduled train. However, this only took us to Bishops Stortford before being cancelled! Which meant some quick thinking to figure out alternative routes to get us back to London. But in the end we were only

about 45 minutes longer than anticipated. Details [here](#).

Canvey Island: this was a 14 mile walk around all of Canvey Island on a glorious hot day, with large open vistas and expansive seascapes. The Benfleet Creek and then the wide Thames glistened in the sun. There was interesting painting of Canvey life along the flood barriers and quite a Costa Brava beach at one point. Some dropped after a good lunch at the Lobster Shack but eight made it all the way round. Details [here](#).





Farnham to Guildford: lovely walking weather for this first stage (just over 10 miles) of the 153-mile North Downs Way from Farnham to Dover. Less hilly than most sections, so relatively easy walking, mainly through varied and attractive woodland areas (with one rare sighting of a badger), then along the River Wey navigation for the last stretch into Guildford. Outdoor garden pub lunch for the 10 of us at the fairly aptly named Good Intent pub in Puttenham. Brief afternoon stop at the Watts Gallery (where some visited the rather eclectic chapel while others enjoyed tea and cakes). Details [here](#).

June

Burwash and Bateman's: a very pleasant and tranquil 10-mile circular walk in the High Weald, from the rather remote Stonegate station: we spotted just one other (dog) walker all day. The weather turned out less wet than the forecasts suggested — it rained much of the morning, but nothing torrential, and was dry most of the afternoon, with quite a bit of sunshine. We went through the well-preserved village of Burwash and most of the small group opted to visit nearby Bateman's, Rudyard Kipling's former house (pictured) now owned by the National Trust. The leader managed to miss one turn, so we arrived in a somewhat disgruntled gentleman's back garden — but fortunately his dog proved to be rather friendly. Details [here](#).



Richmond Park & Barnes: this was an 11 mile (18 km) walk starting and ending at Richmond. The forecast was for rain all day but 13 still joined the train. We were rewarded with a dry and even warm morning at least. After climbing up from the river to Richmond Park, pausing to take in the superb views and get our breath back, we zigzagged through the park visiting Henry's Mound to take in the protected view to St Paul's. We saw red and fallow deer in the park before reaching our exit at the Sheen Gate. Then we wove our way through the back streets of Barnes — some streets but often quaint paths past old railway cottages or allotments. We popped out right at Barnes railway station. After crossing this we stopped for lunch at Strand on the Green, where the bonhomous landlord soon got us all organised. By the time we came out the rain was quite heavy so we lost a few but seven headed on in their wet gear. We followed the Thames Path passing by Key Gardens and taking in the view of Syon Park before reaching Richmond. Disruption on the Overground didn't

prevent us from making a speedy return by train. Details [here](#).

Burnham-on-Crouch: this was a 10 mile walk along the river Crouch following the estuary sea wall through areas of SSI. Unusually for a linear walk we started at the mid point (Althorne) and walked eastwards to lunch in the attractive small town of Burnham-on-Crouch (coincidentally featured recently in The Sunday Times 'Great British Breaks' column). There a local tried, unsuccessfully, to sell us a rusting up-turned tub of a boat! At the pub we chose (out of many) we were given a good welcome and hearty food. After lunch we all caught the train one stop back to Althorne where the walkers got off and those opting out stayed on. We then walked westwards along the river to end at North Fambridge. Details [here](#).





Dartford to Shoreham/Otford: this walk followed the Pilgrims' Way along the River Darent which was, despite heavy rain the night before, surprisingly mud-free; but the humidity was high. We passed through South Darenth with its landmark chimney and 10-arch railway viaduct, lunching at Horton Kirby, where some enjoyed a two-course lunch for £9.99. We continued through picturesque Farningham, climbing slightly to follow an ancient path with wild orchids plus good views across the valley and the remains of Eynsford Castle. At Eynsford two walkers opted out with the remaining nine valiantly taking the higher route to Lullingstone Castle and Visitor Centre for tea and ice cream. We then passed lavender fields, some of which were in full flower, across farmland to rejoin the riverside path into Shoreham. After a brief visit to the church to admire the Burne-Jones window, we finished the walk there. After 11½ miles we opted for the air-conditioned comfort of the train, leaving Otford for another day. Details [here](#).

July

Berwick to Eastbourne (on the Vanguard Way and then the South Downs Way): disruption on the Victoria line threw us into a panic, how to get to Victoria by alternative means. In the end all made it — other than the Leader, how embarrassing! There needed to be a bit of quick re-planning. In the end the solution was simple — do the walk in the reverse direction — then only half an hour was lost. So we stayed on the train(s) and started at Eastbourne. There was a steady climb out of the town up on to the South Downs Way to see the glorious views all along the south coast. The weather forecast said it was going to be hot but there was a bit of cloud cover, making it perfect. We had an early lunch down in the valley at Jevington, then it was a haul back up to the ridge again and down to the pretty village of Alfriston in time for an ice cream. We pressed on to the rail halt at Berwick (and even managed a quick pint while waiting for the train). All's well that ends well! Details [here](#).

Sevenoaks: a lovely day out in the beautiful Kent countryside. This walk covers a bit of everything, from the magnificent historic buildings of Knole House and Ightham Mote (both perfectly placed for lunch and tea), through fields of the bluest lavender, past traditional Kentish oast houses to the far-reaching views across the Weald to be seen from up on the Greensand ridge. We were thankful on such a warm day (especially when tackling one or two quite steep uphill!) that there were plenty of well shaded paths, and even some with an occasional well placed bench. Details [here](#).



Watton-at-Stone: we suspected there wouldn't be too many other walkers in the area when we were the only ones getting off the train. That proved to be the case on this tranquil and varied 12-mile ramble through the Hertfordshire countryside, enjoyed by a group of eight regulars. Although it was a fairly hot summer's day, light cloud cover and a gentle breeze made for very pleasant walking conditions during the afternoon. The terrain alternated between farmland, wheat fields, woodland and country estates. We also passed through several rural churchyards, one of which proved a good spot for a picnic lunch. Frustratingly, we contrived to pass three closed pubs

en route, so it was something of a relief to find two that were open within a hundred yards of each other near the end, which enabled the group to enjoy some well-earned liquid refreshment before catching the train home. Details [here](#). **Might be one of the last photos of Martyn before his globe trotting. We could have a caption competition on this one. eg "this sandwich looks just as dead". Other suggestions?**

August

Wivenhoe: this very pleasant walk is centred around the attractive fishing and boating village of Wivenhoe on the tidal river Colne. Weather conditions were just right for a summer walk, warm with a gentle refreshing breeze. Much of the walk was along the banks of the river, looking very wide and full at high tide, although not so high that Wivenhoe's own 'Thames barrier' needed to be closed. Away from the sea wall the walk was through woodland, nature reserve and farmland (home to small herd of buffalo) and crisscrossed the railway via unmanned public footpath crossings, some of which Network Rail seem dead set on closing. Ramblers have been prominent in campaigning against this and have had success locally - at least for the time being. We enjoyed a late pub lunch in the village where, in spite of us not having pre booked, they still managed to cope with 14 'walk ins'. Details [here](#).



Paddock Wood to Yalding: another decent day for walking, plenty of sunshine but not too hot, although quite humid. Once we all finally made it to Paddock Wood this 12-mile route took us along a peaceful and nicely shaded stretch of the Medway Valley Walk to a picturesque riverside pub lunch stop at Twyford Bridge. In the afternoon we did a figure of 8 walk through agricultural land and a couple of small villages, also passing a rather intriguing film set with abundant flora and a large globe-shaped marquee, which the minders informed us was for a "secret" event - some speculated a celeb wedding. Just managed to get back to Twyford Bridge for a welcome pot

of tea (and home-made bread pudding) before the café on the aptly named Tea Pot Island closed. Small group but still an array of very diverse and at times eclectic conversational topics to keep us amused. This was Martyn Waring's last walk for leading duties, but he will be supporting our summer social walk. Details [here](#).

Summer Social, Finchley to Canonbury: we might have just repeated the walk we did for last year's summer's social, but conditions were very different. Last year midway we were all eating ice cream, this year we wanted hot chocolate. For those who were starting at the start it was wet gear on from the beginning. While the day before and the day after had sun, we had rain all day — it was just a matter of whether it was sheeting down or merely drizzling. I think all deserve a medal for taking part. Does this walk set the record now for our wettest walk? We made it to the Canonbury pub with a chance to dry out and last year's winner of the cup for 'Longer Walker of the Year', John Schrader, presented to this year's winner, Martyn Waring. Details [here](#).



Oxford Parkway: at the second attempt after 30+° and a closed pub led to a last-minute cancellation in July. The weather was just right this time for our group of ten, on a longish walk with a mix of sun and light cloud. Luckily we lost no-one to the doubtful charms of Bicester Village as we headed from Marylebone to this new station, opened by David Cameron in 2015.

We soon left the busy A4165 to follow a long drive to reach the River Cherwell as it curls round to Islip, where we joined the Oxfordshire Way. Several wheat fields later led us to the small village of Noke, and on to the Otmoor RSPB

Nature Reserve, a bonus for the birders but a pleasure for all as we followed the flat pathway, listening to birdsong if not actually spotting more than a few kites. The steep hill up to

picturesque Beckley was rewarded with a great pub, the Abingdon Arms, where we sat in the garden looking back over Otmoor. It was hard to get going again, but after a quick squint at the 'squint' in Beckley's church we followed what appeared to be a fairly unused stretch of the Oxfordshire Greenbelt Way through the landscape of gentle hills, barley fields and small plantations of trees that are typical of North Oxfordshire. The pretty village of Woodeaton was worth a stop for a brief visit to its unusual church with a rood beam, minstrel's gallery and family pews. Downhill then, and the footpath through more recently harvested barley fields eventually led us back to Sparsey Bridge over the Cherwell and we retraced our outward journey back to the station. Details [here](#).

Coulsdon, Chaldon and Happy Valley: 14 walkers set off on a very warm day to do an eight mile circular walk from Coulsdon South Station. We quickly reached Farthing Downs, which is part of the most extensive area of chalk and natural grasslands left in Greater London. It is managed by the Corporation of London. Before descending a stony track towards Chaldon we looked at the information boards at Farthing Downs car park. Following a path along the edge of a field which led up through a wood we came to the 'new' village of Netherne-on-the-Hill where the ex-chapel contains a leisure centre and swimming pool and the Water Tower, which can be seen from miles around, is flats. The green is partly encircled by maisonettes ending in the old Asylum. Even in its early days Netherne Hospital gained a reputation as a pioneering force in the treatment of psychiatric illness and in 1946 it became a national centre for art therapy under Edward Adamson. It played a vital part in the rehabilitation of servicemen and became part of the NHS after WW2. It closed in 1994 and 10 years later the redevelopment began.



Leaving the village we continued through woods and a field to Alderstead Heath caravan site and Furze field Wood. After crossing a large field we arrived at Chaldon Church, where we were amazed by the 12th century wall painting 'The Ladder of Salvation of the Human Soul'. In the bottom right compartment the artist shows dishonest tradesmen on the 'bridge of spikes' which is held by two demons! Read more [here](#).

Lunch, slightly late and rather slow, at The Fox Inn on Coulsdon Common, was the next stop. During the Cold War it was used by the Military School for Linguists for intensive Russian courses. The return walk to Farthing Downs led us on to open hillside with views left into Happy Valley, a SSSI rich in many species of herb which are uncommon in London. I don't think that we identified any of these. The final climb up a bank to Farthing Downs was the steepest we had done all day but once up there we had an easy walk back to the station. Details [here](#).

September



The Glass Sea: we returned to a walk we first did in 2014, just over 10 miles through the Hertfordshire rolling countryside. The first link in the Hertfordshire Chain Walk. The weather was good. We had to dodge the guns which were out in force following the 'glorious 12th'. Poor birds... It was a bit of a jungle in places — needs more walkers to keep the route open. Or a longer time with the secateurs. Lunch at Goffs Oak was a bit slow but worth the wait. The afternoon's walk was longer, but we finished the circle and arrived back on the station platform as the train arrived. Details [here](#).

Extended Walk 2019, Malham: this year's weekend away took us to hf Holidays' Newfield Hall, Malhamdale in the Yorkshire Dales. This was our biggest number yet at 30. We set off on Friday by train through Leeds and Skipton, where the coach was waiting to take us the final leg. Then we managed a short afternoon's walk to orientate ourselves and stretch the legs. There was the odd light shower but the forecast bode well for the next two



days. Then of course there were the evening entertainments to

participate in as well. Saturday we did the classic walk in the area, a steady climb up to Weets Top (414m) and up to the first geological feature — the Gordale Scar with its waterfall cutting through the limestone. The hf picnic lunches were as large as ever and we enjoyed them in glorious sunshine.

Then after a quick look at Janet's Foss most of the group headed along the Dales High Way to the next geological feature — the limestone pavement at Malham Cove. These

features were all formed from glacial action. As we turned down the valley and through Malham the local pub was a welcome relief and some took the option of the local bus back to the hall. Saturday's entertainment — skittles — was well represented by iU3a, our own Chris winning overall. Sunday saw another glorious sunny day and this time the walkers turned east and went up Winterburn and round the reservoir. Some took the option of adding a few more miles and returning by Weets Top. The free bar was lasting well and the evening meal was as huge as ever. The evening's 'entertainment' was more educational this time: a presentation on geology, with many local samples. A true U3A self-learning experience. Monday saw some of the group having to leave early but a few were up for a morning walk despite the drizzle. Then it was time for us all to head for home and the train south. Another successful Extended Walking Weekend for the Long Walks group. Details [here](#).



River Stour: it was a perfect day for our walk through Dedham Vale, an area much loved by Constable. We set off across tracks soon passing autumn produce outside a local church before we joined an ancient trail, the Essex Way. The path meandered across several fields and a railway crossing, soon opening out to a view of the River Stour and Dedham village. Inevitably, we passed paddocked horses before our descent into the beautiful village of Dedham, which had prospered during the wool trade. Constable had attended the grammar school here, the Parish church of St Mary's houses one of his paintings and is inspiration for a second. After lunch we rejoined the River Stour, passing

Dedham Lock and Dedham Mill, strolling gently as it was too hot to rush. At one of the bridges we gazed at the fish swimming in the crystal clear waters, the gossamer wings of dragonflies and the striking shadows cast by the sun. The river winds along to Flatford Mill, the site of Constable's Hay Wain and Bridge Cottage, a National Trust exhibition space for Constable and tea for us. The Flatford lock is the final Constable inspiration before we leave the river, not glimpsing the black swans who nest along the bank. Then it was a homeward path to the station. Details [here](#).

Laindon to East Tilbury: we last did this walk back in April 2016. Then it was a bit long (15 miles) so this time we shortened it to just over 12 miles and it was even better. There were some jungle sections — had anyone walked this way since us back in 2016? It was a glorious warm sunny day and a walk of two halves. The morning was countryside (Laindon Hills) and the afternoon estuary walking. A good mix. I think for the first time we had an opt-in person (at lunchtime) rather than someone opting out there. We had time for tea at the historic Coalhouse Fort then walked out to East Tilbury past the redevelopment of the Bata shoe factory. Details [here](#).



Chalfont & Latimer: a day of light showers and occasional sunshine coupled with warm temperatures led to much taking off and putting on of layers, on what was a very enjoyable walk. The route, centred on the 'chalk stream' river Chess once famous for the many watercress farms along its banks, included ridge and valley walking, plenty of woodland and views, and two interesting historic buildings: the Victorian Latimer House high on the ridge and the stately Tudor Manor dominating the village of Chenies. A very good lunch was had at the Cock Inn, Church End, and full marks to them for providing a walkers boot rack by the back door! Details [here](#).