

Zenecans at Arundel – South Downs National Park (10th - 14th Sept 2023)

Last year the Zenecans walked in the N Yorks National Park, so in 2023 we moved south again, to the South Downs based at the Avisford Park Hotel on the edge of Walberton near Arundel. Competitively priced, comfortable accommodation and good food is difficult to come by in most parts of the country, but especially the South East. However Steve Corfield with assistance from Peter Rankin, (a Farm Protection Product Manager Duo from the past) did lots of research and managed to find an establishment that matched our needs. We were down on numbers this year – 15: 'medical conditions' and family commitments had taken their toll. Two with new hips decided to come and take it steady.

As usual the early trekkers, this time only 4, arrived on the Sunday a couple of days before the main party. The weather, a bit iffy, they decided to take up the alternative offer of a croquet session organised by John Coutts. Like ducks to water, Ray Tucker, Ian Stott and Chris Ursell were soon running hoops with ease, and tonking each other's balls into the far distant yonder with some relish. With South Africa v Scotland in the Rugby World Cup to savour that evening, it had been a day of sporting contrasts.

Monday saw us walking roughly north west of Arundel circuiting the valley around Stoughton - About 12 miles. With the weather forecast for a fine day, we were in no hurry. So, so quiet and peaceful. We happened on a farmer and chatted for a while about his livestock: a herd of Belted Galloway cattle; and flocks of Lleyne and Zwartable sheep. No we hadn't come across Zwartables before either. They originate from the Friesland region of the Netherlands. Dark-grey, bit like Jacobs, with a whitish band down their faces. Ray was 'in his element' having had his own flock of Lleyne for quite a number of years.

The Barley Mow was ideally positioned to wash down lunch. (Peter Froggatt, who lives within a stone's throw of the hotel, had kindly delivered the packed lunch from the aptly named Buns n Baps at breakfast. These specialist treasures, including Peter, seem to be everywhere). After a pint, we ascended Bow Hill to enjoy the splendid views over Kingley Vale Yew Glade south to the sea. It had been a good day.

A car park near Goodwood Racecourse was the starting point for the Tuesday morning walk, taking in the Levin Down Nature Reserve and the attractive hamlets of Charlton and East Dean. It turned out to be a botanical challenge with so many species needing to be identified. We managed to drag 'Mr Ursell' away with time pressing in order to meet the main group arriving at the Bull, Fishbourne. for lunch. Everyone was in fine fettle, and the craic soon escalated as usual. Such was the cacophony, that it soon became difficult to hear yourself speak.

After lunch a gentle 5 mile stroll to Bosham and back was led by Mike South with Peter Froggatt, our blue badge guide, delivering lecturettes, highlighting historical gems and relating stories of interest to the attentive (but thirsty) audience. A pleasant afternoon, followed by the challenge of getting back to the hotel while trying to avoid traffic congestion on the notorious A27.

Wednesday, the main day, dawned fine and dry. There were two walks scheduled as usual. The 'shorter' was led by Steve Corfield peeling off after Arundel Park and returning along the Arun for lunch and another guided tour, this time taking in the sights of Arundel. Peter Froggatt had arranged for one of his blue badge guide friends to show the group around, so they'd go places and hear stories your casual tourist would never encounter. Reports suggested that it went very well.

Meanwhile, the 'longer walk' led by John Coutts, carried on along the Arun after Arundel Park to Amberley, then up onto and into the Downs to enjoy some great views across the Weald and along the chalk scarp. There was time for the customary pint at the George, Burpham before heading back to Arundel. Sunsets with Arundel Castle in the background make a fine climax to this route.

We returned to the hotel, had a pint of Harveys at a nearby pub, then dinner and the AGM. 10pm is not a good time for a meeting! The stand-in chairman pointed out that this year was the group's 20th anniversary, and that some of those attending most years could have walked up to around 400 miles with friends and colleagues. He wasn't sure whether or not anyone was impressed!

Changes in membership - Peter Northwood is joining John Gray as a social member. Mel Codd will join the walking group next year, when we will be based in Coupar Angus with Alastair Aitken and Gary

Stoddart the organisers. Already on the case, they have booked the hotel.

A farm visit on the Thursday morning hosted by Caroline Harriott, Lynchpole Farm, nr Sompting proved to be a fascinating experience for those who attended. Caroline and her husband David are very enlightened, progressive mixed farmers. Both are very active within the local NFU, and Caroline has trained as a Facetime farmer to go into local schools. The YouTube link :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRRMTGvUjNA> , will give you a taster of their farming philosophy. Worth a quick watch/listen.

As always it had been a most enjoyable few days. Good to see and catch up with friends and colleagues, continuous chatter and banter, lots of laughs, interesting places to go and explore, we are very fortunate.

A big thank you to Steve Corfield and Peter Rankin for the thought, time and effort which went into arranging a excellent event. We look forward to next year with Alastair and Gary at the helm.. Hopefully everyone will be able to make it.



Starting with Chris Ursell (chequered shirt with his back half-turned towards the camera) and going clockwise: Martin Frost; Simon Laidler; Peter Rankin; Alastair Aitken; Gary Stoddart; John Coutts, John Gray; Ray Tucker; Peter Thomas; Steve Corfield; Ian Stott

John Coutts – Nov 2023