

THE ZENECANS WALKING GROUP AT LUDLOW – Tuesday 13-15 September 2016.

This year our twenty members from England and Scotland had their annual meeting in the beautiful county of Shropshire at Ludlow. We stayed in the very comfortable Cliffe Hotel close to the River Teme and Dinham bridge, arranged by Neil Niblock. The whole hotel was given over to us and we were extremely well-fed and looked after. Mike South and John Coutts both gave Neil considerable support with the excellent trip arrangements. We welcomed the return of Harry Crossley to the group after a year away, also Kevin Price with his maiden appearance. Unfortunately John Humphreys could not be with us owing to a long-standing work commitment.

We congregated on arrival on Tuesday at the Charleton Arms overlooking the river at Ludford Bridge for lunch. There was a view of the ancient horse-shoe weir which had been repaired by voluntary effort some years previously. It divided the river and allowed two mills to be run. Following lunch we moved to our hotel and prepared for the afternoon walk. This was to Bromfield village via Priors Halton, a return distance of about 5 miles. Unfortunately we encountered very heavy rain and thunder on the way which spoilt visibility, but on return we still had a view of the old Norman castle from Corve meadows. In the evening dinner was excellent and very lively, helped as usual by a steady supply of wine.

We awoke to a fine day on Wednesday and drove to Church Stretton. Two options were available for tackling the Long Mynd. The longer 6.1 mile walk was from the Square in Church Stretton, following the valley and stream up past Devils Mouth to the summit, around past the trig point and down Ashes Hollow to the Green Dragon at Little Stretton for lunch. The other option was to leave out the early and steepest part of this walk by taking the car up Burway Hill for about 1.1 miles, thus reducing the distance to 5 miles. From the top we had good middle-distance visibility of the splendid, surrounding countryside, but slight haze prevented us from seeing further to the Welsh hills and Malverns. It was marvellous to take in the fresh air away from pollution, one can easily forget what it's like. A sandwich lunch had been pre-ordered for us all in the Green Dragon.

After lunch and for those willing there was a very steep 500m ascent of Ragleth, the first of the 3 volcanic larval hills along the Stretton valley on the Eastern side. A large fault line runs N-S near the bottom of the hills. Those who did not partake had other options such as a visit to Stokesay Castle, one of the best examples of an historic fortified manor house. Thanks were due to the drivers who juggled car transport for us for the day.

The Annual General Meeting was held at dinner that evening and there was good discussion of how we operated as a group and any possible improvements. Also, confirmation of the broad arrangements for next year at Aviemore being organised by Gary and Alastair. An extra two nights will be booked because of distances involved. We were all sorry that John Cotterill said he would be leaving the group for personal reasons. His joie de vivre will be much missed and we hope he will keep in touch. As Harry Crossley is rejoining us, there is no need to invite a new member and the number will remain at twenty.

For Thursday morning, a local historian Michael Page had been arranged to give us a walking tour of many of the interesting parts of Ludlow and the town's historical significance. This was much enjoyed and left some of us wanting more for another time. Lunch was taken at "Rose and Crown" in the town centre and here we said our farewells. Another fantastic time was experienced and we are all grateful for the enduring friendships. The next meeting is at Aviemore from 11-15 September.