

The Zenecans Walking Group – by John Coutts.

It started in June 2003 when nine ex-Zeneca colleagues, most but not all retired, found themselves walking up the Manifold valley and then down Dovedale in Derbyshire. A few bebies and a fine dinner at the Olde Gate Inn, Brassington and the crack turned to where in 2004? Derbyshire was central so why not the 'Dark Peak'. The start - Ladybower Reservoir: photograph taken by Kevin Eddison.



Howden Moor was to be our first taste of 'wilderness'. However the weather 'on top' was miserable: continuous drizzle, cold and poor visibility. The decision to descend back into the valley and ultimately to the 'Castle' in Castleton was easy. Undeterred, a few brave souls tackled Mam Tor the following morning: there's nothing like a hearty meal and a good night's rest to recharge the batteries. It was also a fine day!

Such was the bonhomie, perhaps a few more might like to join the group for the next year; and so we were 15 on the Cotswolds in 2005. Starting at Bourton-on-the-Water we walked up the Windrush valley to Naunton where the Black Horse Inn was ideally placed for refreshments and returned via the 'Slaughters', two more of the many attractive villages on the

Cotswolds. (*I remember a kingfisher flash by on the river*) Accommodation at The Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester was a real nostalgic venue for some. It proved comfortable if basic. Dinner was in the panelled dining room; it was time to discuss and organise the future of the group. Oiled with plenty of wine, proposals were presented by individuals for different venues and a list drawn up alternating north and south where possible. Each event was to be coordinated by its 'presenter' and take place in early September. We had, following good ICI/Zenecan practice, produced a plan up to 2013. Rules were few: the maximum number would be twenty and if anyone missed two successive events a new member would be invited to join the group.

A format had also been established. Meet about lunchtime on the first day at a pub, followed by a 4/5 mile stroll. Dinner and accommodation for 2 nights at a local hotel or college. Two walks on the main day: the morning about 5 miles with everyone together, followed by either a 'recreational afternoon' or another 5 to 7 miles. Dinner and the AGM (usually very short) on the second evening; with a morning stroll and lunch on the final day to conclude. It works well and accommodates all current levels of fitness!



Some new and a couple of 'old' faces on the Cotswolds.

2006: Lake District based in Ambleside co-ordinated by John Coutts. Pictured (courtesy of Ray Tucker) are the

smiling group at Tarn Hows near Coniston in the Southern Lakes.



From what I can recall the main walk started with a steep ascent (my worst nightmare). However the consolation is that what goes up must come down! We came back along the coffin road between Grasmere and Ambleside: the views were wonderful!

The main day took us up the 'moderate fell' of Loughrigg in the heart of the Lake District to Grasmere. Some came back along the valley while others took on a more challenging route ascending to Alcock Tarn and Heron Pike. The weather was sunny and the views stunning. The final morning was in complete contrast with lots of showery liquid sunshine typical of Lakeland. However for a few hardy souls above the clouds on top of Wansfell Pike overlooking Lake Windermere and Ambleside, it proved quite atmospheric and a satisfying conclusion to the trip.

2007: Yorkshire Dales based in Reith and co-ordinated by Ian Stott; here with Peter Froggatt, Steve Yates and Chris Gooderham.

After tours of Ian's cottage at Gunnerside it was time to tour Swaledale. Just like the picture postcards: barns in every other field, and so green. We explored the dale in sometimes quite bracing conditions over the three days; but don't mention stiles!

We got lost trying to find our way round a rather large house on the main walk!

Guest of honour at dinner was Paul Coppen who keeps a herd of 'Belties' at his farm on the N Pennines. If you can afford it 'Rules' restaurant in Covent Garden serves 'Gilmonby' beef; but you have to know the time to go as supplies are limited.

Peter Froggatt chose the wine again, however some of us chose an alternative red!



2008: N Yorks Moors based in Whitby and co-ordinated by Steve Yates.

Harry and I turned up too late to join the first walk, advertised as a gentle stroll. As it turned out I think we were lucky sheltering in the pub as the rain poured down and the stroll turned out to be in mountain goat country.

Steve excelled in taking us to Trenchers fish restaurant for dinner on the first evening. However his star faded on the main walk when we found ourselves confronted with a stile overgrown with nettles and brambles which would have proved a challenge to even the highest rates of 'Trioxone' or 'Garlon'! (The message to reccy fully has been heeded by all ever since) He redeemed himself in the eyes of some with an option to travel back to Whitby on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway.....after a few jars of course. The others did find the route back, with a grand entrance to Whitby on a coastal stretch of the Cleveland Way via the Abbey. The following moorland morning near Danby went without a hitch.



2009: Scottish Borders based at Peebles co-ordinated by Gary Stoddart and Alastair Aitken.

Stuart Shields made a guest appearance for one year only. For some reason he has a preference to take folks, especially Americans on tours of Scottish distilleries and golf courses.

Such was the deluge on the first afternoon, we needed to take refuge. We forgot Peter Thomas and Kevin! However they managed to amuse themselves.

A visit to the John Buchan museum at Broughton before the walk on the main day was our first real taste of culture. Appropriately we then walked the John Buchan Way back to Peebles. *Some of us who didn't do the full walk visited a*

knights Templar church which was an amazing piece of very idiosyncratic architecture. The final morning saw Dr Noon up a tree pointing out a fungus to the rest of us as if it could be the source of unique fungicidal activity; strobilurins I think he said!



2010: Isle of Wight based at Newport, co-ordinated by Ray Tucker assisted by his wife Gill.

We 'more or less' crossed the Island from East to West walking mainly along the S Coastal path with Gill doing a lot of ferrying. Afternoon tea with Dave and Harriet Buckeridge proved very pleasant and a chance to catch up. A couple of 'brave' souls decided to go for a dip at Ventnor while the rest of us watched from a balcony not sure

whether or not to be impressed. Ray had kept the best until the end: Afton Down, then Tennyson Down culminating finally with splendid views of the Needles.



2011: Forest of Bowland based at Clitheroe, co-ordinated by John Cotterill and Harry Crossley.



Dunsop Bridge after tea and ice cream

This was the first occasion that Harry and I realised all the hard work our predecessors had put in to make the walks such a success in the past. So no pressure!

The area is one of those lesser known gems and we had great walks in the Ribble valley and the surrounding fells. The weather was again kind especially on the final morning when we had fine views from the top of Fair Snape Fell and along the ridge to Parlick. Inevitably these included Blackpool Tower and for once it was believable as we were only a stones throw away! The gaggle of ducks crossing the road at Dunsop Bridge, the scantily clad octogenarian

lady fell runner on Parlick and the fantastic value accommodation at the Old Post House in Clitheroe.....could only be appreciated if you were there.

2012: Dorset based at Swannage, co-ordinated by Peter Froggatt and Bob Noon with assistance from Mike South, although none of us are quite sure what he did: probably kept Froggy and Noon 'in order'. The train ride from Swannage to Corfe Castle was a very enjoyable leisurely novel idea to start the main walk: certainly one for the rail anoraks in the group. Relaxation seemed a central theme and the temptation to stay at the Square and Compass after lunch on such a fine day was too much for some. For the rest the delights of the Dorset coastal path back to Swannage; and for everyone the path from Lulworth Cove to Durdle Door in brilliant sunshine on the final morning.



Excellent lesson in the outdoor classroom on the history of Corfe Castle by Froggy.

Here it seems appropriate to mention our two 'unsung heroes' Peter Thomas (foreground on the left) and Kevin Eddison (on the right). Peter has managed the finances with great skill since we started. His lowest denomination is a tenner, more often a twenty and everyone coughs up remarkably readily. Kevin is our computer whiz-kid and his skills have kept our website running smoothly throughout. www.zenecans.co.uk for all the latest.

2013: Suffolk based at Long Melford with John Humphreys, Kevin Eddison and Peter Thomas co-ordinating.

Was it a signal that we were getting past it or simply another different means of transport? On the first afternoon a flat short stroll followed by a boat trip along the river Stour to the Henny Swan Pub, and a classic coach back to the hotel. Novel, relaxing, most enjoyable.



The walks were very agricultural, on the flat and provided memories of careers past with 'field margin inspections'. For those accustomed to relaxation after lunch there was the opportunity to explore the historic buildings of Lavenham and, as it happened, the vintage cars parked taking part in a rally in the town square.

The first cycle of events was now complete. We have been joined by a few new faces over the years; however the core remains the same and as enthusiastic to continue as when we started. Sadly Steve is now 'in another place'.

The AGM was likely to take longer as we needed a review and to decide about our future. Lo and behold within half an hour we had another plan, one which takes us through to 2022 (!) and for the time being it follows the same format.

2014: Northumberland based at Wooler and co-ordinated by John Coutts and Gary Stoddart. The difference on this occasion was an option of two additional days to sample the remoteness of the Cheviots and ascend one of Northumberland's sacred hills, Simonside. The fringe group of seven, based at Thropton, started up the river Coquet valley and followed the old drove roads to the Pennine Way and the summit of Windy Gyle; Glorious panoramic views, and fine weather which was to continue the rest of the week.

November 2014.



We were only a stones throw from Redesdale where once upon a time there was an experimental husbandry farm. Some of you will remember ADAS and EHF's! With their co-operation we developed a technique to improve the productivity of moorland; known unsurprisingly as the 'Redesdale Technique'. Now, the emphasis is on the management of conservation meadows funded by DEFRA. Times change!

A short ascent and bit of a scramble saw us at the top of Simonside the following morning; a different landscape yet equally great views. And so to Embleton to meet the main party at the Greys Inn. The afternoon stroll took us to the golden sands of Embleton Bay with the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle, a stark, forbidding backcloth.



On to the Tankerville Hotel Wooler, dinner and a session on 'Get-you-By' Geordie. Soon the phrases such as: *Whatfettlethedayladz*; *Nowtbutcanny*, *hooze yersel*; *Gizabroonjack*; *Syemagen kiddie*; *Weor's the netty?* and especially *Wheyyebuggar*, were rolling off tongues. The main day saw everyone get to the top of Humbleton Hill on

the outskirts of the Cheviots and the scene of much activity over the centuries. Way back in the early 14th century Harry Hotspur and his fellow Percies (read English) routed the Douglasses (read Scots), especially pertinent with the Scottish referendum only a week away. With another walloping at Flodden Field just up the road, and not forgetting Culloden, one was left wondering just how many victories other than Bannockburn the Scots have had over the English!

The group then divided with some continuing further into the Cheviots to the summit of Yeavinger Bell, and others visiting the NT property at Craggside, home of the Victorian industrialist Lord Armstrong. The final morning took us to St Cuthbert's Way and his Cave on the heather-clad Greensheen Ridge. The three days had been an unusually fine taster of the varied Northumbrian landscapes; and so quiet.

More photos of this trip can be found on our web site: www.zenecans.co.uk

Next year sees us back down south on the Downs near Winchester with Peter Rankin and John Gray the organisers, The area different, the beers different, a chance to catch up and once again to enjoy the company of old friends in a most convivial way.

PS You may have noticed a few wry, almost Cotterillesque comments in this article; thanks to John for his observations – with a little tinkering here and there!