

## 'The Big One' – 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023



Around 30-40 u3a members (that we know of) descended on Westminster, from all over the UK, between 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023. They were there to participate in a huge, multi-faceted and peaceful event, organised by Extinction Rebellion along with around 200 other organisations. It was designed to put pressure on the government to take appropriate action on the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency.

Two members – Jenny and Clive – were there for all 4 days; some of our members were there with their families; others with friends/other members.

Jenny Wilson was so inspired by Day One that she decided to attend on Day Two and ultimately attended every day; she even addressed the crowd from the main stage! 'I was listening to Jamie Kelsey-Fry speak. He asked for four people to come forwards to tell everyone 'What's getting under your skin?' I was there – straight to the front and invited to speak. Rant in Red! The non-reporting by the media was my 'beef' – where were the TV cameras, the news reporters? Jenny can be seen on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQyh3Tp1mpo>.

Clive Teague had trained as both a steward (Day 1) and a well-being officer (Day 4), keeping the happy crowds following the agreed guidelines with a smile on his face. As a steward he was one of over 1200 trained stewards and over 100 wellbeing officers that volunteered and were trained to organise the very large crowds that were expected at The Big One. About his Day 4 role he said, 'The well-being of everyone at [these] events is paramount. During the march three ambulances and one fire engine, under blue flashing lights, went through the crowds without delay.'

Several members commented on how good it was to be part of a group of kindred spirits: 'I enjoyed the camaraderie and the feeling of belonging. Sometimes I feel my concerns about the climate emergency are only shared by people with extreme views, but that day there were so many 'ordinary' people expressing their concern together'(Terry Joiner). Other comments included 'Lots of families and a wide spectrum of people' ( Martin Cooke); 'My biggest impression was the noise, laughter and general bustle of goodwill from our group and passers-by'(Margaret Derrick); 'We were struck by the diversity of the participants, both organisations and individuals' (Nick & Carol Ward.)

There was a carnival atmosphere, with street entertainers, music, activities and speeches, all on the theme of the climate emergency. 'What a time I had! I've never felt so much energy, and shared caring. Care and fear - both walked together.' (Anne French); 'I had a great time

yesterday singing and dancing with 90,000 other climate concerned people' (Wendy Hubbard); 'I enjoyed the samba bands, such energising drumming!' (Terry Joiner)

Some of those present commented that they felt a range of emotions, not least being moved – rather unexpectedly - by participating in the 'mass die-in' at the end of the biodiversity march. This was held to remember all the people around the world who have died as a result of, or been affected by Climate Change. 'It felt quite remarkable to be lying in the road outside the Houses of Parliament. And then XR's ghostly faced, red-robed figures - The Red Rebel Brigade - drifted gracefully right by us... wow!' (Nick and Carol Ward)

Most people were energised and inspired by the experience: 'I learnt that all types, ages and diversities can stand alongside one another and peaceably shout our message to those in power' (Wendy Hubbard). Anne French commented: "I came away far wiser, humbled but with refreshed resolve, and purpose'; and from Jenny Wilson: 'We older people must not think we are impotent – we have a huge part to play in our own ways.'

Others had specific things in mind. 'I went to London to build my network and discover new ideas for our climate activism in Stratford-upon-Avon. I now want to learn more about the intergenerational work with Warwick University, as Warwick is so close to us in Stratford. I am also thinking of starting a Climate Choir after hearing the Bristol Climate Choir perform!' (Janet Palmer)

Writing to MPs might now take on a new style in some u3a climate groups: 'Outside the Houses of Parliament someone had stamped addressed envelopes for us to take the voice of our favourite animal, and write to the Environment Secretary, being that animal's voice, asking for what we believe that animal needs from us now, such as a pesticide free crop for bees to pollinate' (Wendy Hubbard).

With thanks to the following members of Countdown to COP – and wider - who have shared their stories for this article: Anne French, Clive Teague, Janet Palmer Jenny Wilson, Martin Cooke, Margaret Derrick, Nick and Carol Ward, Terry Joiner, Wendy Hubbard and Brenda Ainsley.

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