

PLANNING YOUR WALK

INTRODUCTION

The group relies on its members volunteering to plan and lead walks. We have three regular walks – in Hastings prior to the Christmas lunch, in Alexandra Park in January and at Fairlight for the joint shared lunch with the longer group. So we need a further 9 walks annually. Members usually partner up to plan walks, so with 36 members or 18 pairs we should only need to volunteer every two years if everyone takes a turn.

The convenor will try to make sure we have volunteers for a few months ahead. The volunteer then lets the convenor have brief details of location, which the convenor then puts on the website. Details of the meeting place and lunch arrangements can be finalised a couple of weeks beforehand for an e-mail to be sent by the convenor.

THE IDEAL WALK

We normally meet for a 10.30 start (ie boots walking at 10.30!). As the group can be quite large, the leader may decide as a courtesy to the group not to wait for late-comers.

We normally expect the walk to take about 2 hours, with a brief stop for drinks, so lunch will be at about 1pm.

We would ideally like:

- A pleasant/interesting walk of about 3 miles.
- Not too strenuous, as there is a wide range of fitness levels in the group.
- Broadly in the triangle Rye - Battle - Pevensey.
- Sufficient free or cheap parking at the start of a circular walk.
- Lunch afterwards at a reasonably priced pub or café.

It is quite hard to achieve all of these ideals if we are to find new walks, and we are likely to have to compromise on some of them, as long as there are some walks in the programme to suit everyone.

The group belongs to the members, not the convenor, so let me know if, for example, the walks are too difficult or if you want to be more adventurous.

Three Miles

Walks should be about 3 to 3.5 miles. The group does not walk fast, with the emphasis on a social occasion rather than a march! A shorter distance may not warrant the drive to get there and is not likely to fit with lunch. A longer distance may be beyond some members, and a later finish inconvenient for some members.

Walks are usually circular, though we have successfully done linear walks with a bus or train return.

Pleasant/Interesting

Some pleasant countryside and/or views are all we really need. Time does not permit proper visits to any places of interest. Ideally the amount of walking along roads should be minimised, though many of the walks in books or on websites will include some road walking in order to create a circular walk.

Not Too Strenuous

This is difficult to give guidance on, and difficult to assess and describe to others. The potential problems are:

- Long ascents. These should generally be OK – there can't be that much on a three mile walk.
- Steep ascents. These should be avoided unless short and sharp.
- Steep descents. These should be avoided unless there is a good surface or some support.
- Difficult stiles. What's difficult varies with individuals. A walk should have no more than 2 or 3 stiles.
- Slippery mud. Short sections are to be expected, but a lot of it can spoil the walk.

My feeling is that, for example, the coastal ascents and descents of the glens in Hastings Country Park are too strenuous for the shorter group. Similarly most of the South Downs ascents. It would be OK to use a car park on the Downs and stay high.

You should pre-walk – "recce" – your walk to make sure it meets the criteria.

Our Patch

We have members living at all three corners of our triangle, so some members may have a 45-60 minute's drive to a walk. This is relatively

long in relation to the two hours of the walk, so we should try not to stray too far from the Rye - Battle - Pevensey limit.

Nevertheless, if, say, 15 minutes further on a fast road bags us a good walk, then it would be worth it. We have been to Arlington Reservoir and the Cuckoo Trail, and these seemed well received.

Parking

There needs to be adequate parking at the start of the walk. We don't want a long road walk to the walk proper. Parking should be free or reasonable.

Many lunch venues will allow us to park if we are returning for lunch, as they are not usually busy on a Tuesday morning.

Lunch

Lunch can be at a pub or café. Prices should be reasonable, and/or there should be a good range of options.

Some venues are happy to just know the numbers on the morning of the walk, whilst others require menu choices before the walk, or even in advance. Being a Tuesday lunchtime, they are not usually busy, and thus may have limited staff or stocks. Many local pubs do not open on Tuesday lunchtime, or do not provide food. You need to check with your proposed venue.

Whilst it is good to start/finish at the venue, that does limit the walks or venues, so it is acceptable for the venue to be a short drive from the walk.

FINDING A WALK

Your Regular Walk

Members don't all live where you do! Your routine local walk might be interesting to everyone else.

OS Maps

It is possible to develop a walk by studying the OS map and trying to join up the Rights-of-Way and open- access land into a circular walk. Start with an area around where you know there to be parking or a lunch venue.

Books

There are a number of books such as:

- Pathfinder Guide East Sussex and the South Downs.
- Guide to East Sussex Pub walks.
- East Sussex a Dog Walker's Guide.
- Countryside Dog Walks South Downs East.

They usually contain only a few walks which fit our criteria, but they can be a good starting point for cannibalising a walk, using the OS map and/or your local knowledge.

Websites

I believe the internet is the spawn of the devil, designed to enslave us all in a life of administrative drudgery. If you like log-ins and memorable information, there are some walking web-sites. I do not give full references here – just google “walks in East Sussex”, and it will find them.

East Sussex County Council is the authority responsible for public rights-of-way, and it has some walks on its web-site. Wealden District also has some walks “Wealden Walks” which are waymarked.

You might also try:

- fancyfreewalks.org
- go4awalk.com
- 1-2-3walks east sussex (I think only via facebook).

Like the books, they usually contain only a few walks which fit our criteria, but they can be a good starting point.

Happy Hunting!

Steve Gibbs

June 2021