

## Strolling Stones Walks - 2009

Darenth Country Park - January 1st 2009

The first group of Strolling Stones 2009 braved a very chilly New Year's Day and donned their boots and thermals for a walk around Darenth Country Park. This 'dinosaur egg' in the picture was just one of the sights to see en route as was a panoramic view of the newly open and very complex junction between the A2 and the M25. Lunch was later enjoyed by all the walkers, as well as some of the 'senior Stones', at the Wheatsheaf pub in Bean.

Danson Park - February 7th 2009

An intrepid band of Strollers turned out in thermals for their stroll around a very icy Danson Park but the beautiful snow scenes and bright sunshine, along with the prospect of a good lunch and the usual banter and general chatter made it a very pleasant outing. The walk took us around the footpaths of the park passing Danson House and Danson lake which was almost frozen over, much to the disgust of the ducks. Despite the cold and snow there were numerous birds and other wildlife to see alongside a wide variety of dogs enjoying their daily exercise, even if their owners were not. Some of the stalwart 'senior strollers' joined the party for lunch at 'the Stables' along with a couple of the usual walking group who had 'other commitments' during the morning! See you in boots next time.....

Stone History Walk - 21st March 2009

We were greeted by a good bright day on 21st March when a group of 35 people set off from the Church Hall for a walk around Stone, led by Mike Woodward who pointed out places of interest. We walked to the church passing the site of the old St Mary's School and Stone Rectory, along church path to the London Road where Archie Warrs garage once stood; looking across to where, as children, we played in the sand pits. Previously this was the site of Barnesfield House and Stone Park, now reclaimed land. We continued to Stone Castle, home of the Norwoods and Wiltshire families. On to Sandy Lane, to the left of which now is the site of Bluewater. This was previously a chalk quarry and before that Jimmy Turnbull's farm. Then Hedge Place Road to Horns Cross, where we talked about the old Bull Inn and Jennings store, now the Co-op. Down Stone Place Road to where once stood the Drill Hall, Kent House, Stone Place and the old school playing field, all now used for housing. Back to the Church Hall for a lunch of fish and chips and to view a display of old photographs of Stone. After lunch we had a pleasant stroll along Elizabeth Street and Cotton Lane, then cut across the fields, that were once a chalk quarry, to the Welsh Tavern and Stone House; after which we returned to the Church Hall.

Ash-cum-Ridley and Hodsoll Street walk - Easter Monday - 13<sup>th</sup> April 2009

It was a 'misty moist morning' as 23 Strollers gathered at the Green Man in Hodsoll Street and prepared for a circular walk through the local countryside. Setting off through the village and then onto a footpath the going was muddy and the visibility poor, but the air was still and the temperature mild so spirits were good and the chatter, as usual, constant. A slight detour via Walnut Tree Farm was not on the original route planned but owing to the misty conditions that had vanished from sight at one point, but a quick re-route was easily achieved and we continued across the varied terrain alongside fields and through woods where the first bluebells were already colouring the scenery. Skylarks could be clearly heard through the mist and at one point a woodpecker was tapping away somewhere nearby. Gradually the mist became less dense and the undulating landscape could be better seen and appreciated with the bright green shades of the new season's leaves and grass. Returning to the Green Man, two hours later, all enjoyed excellent food and very welcome drinks while the weather cleared and as we returned to Stone, muddy and (for some of us) tired we were welcomed by bright sunshine - good enough weather for Kenneth (who still had some energy left) to cut the grass!

Camer Park and Meopham - Monday 25th May 2009

(Report not available)

Ifield and Cobham - Saturday 11th July 2009

An intrepid band of St Mary's Stroller set off from Jeskyns Community Woodland near Ifield on Saturday 11 July. Jeskyns is a newly planted forest park owned by the Forestry Commission on land remaining after the completion of the High Speed rail line and the new A2. For more info about Jeskyns visit <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns>.

Our route today included a trail through Jeskyns towards Cobham where we spent some time in the Church admiring amongst other things the largest collection of brasses in the UK and some famous local tombs; Lord Darnley for one. Onwards through the orchards behind the Church towards Round Street and across the Paddocks of the local dressage stables down to the Wealdway and on towards Nursted; here we saw Nursted

Church in the middle distance, before turning right up the hill towards Pepperhill. On route we pass open fields of barley and linseed and a variety of small wooded areas. At Pepperhill we climbed a short bank onto a the new bridges over the Channel Tunnel rail line and the new A2 before turning east along the new parkland created on the line of the 'old' A2 which has now been converted into cycle track and is planted with many new sapling trees - a far cry from its former state! Lunch was at the George PH where 14 of us enjoyed an impressive carvery meal and some delicious puddings. After lunch we crossed back over CTRL and A2 to St Margaret's Ifield, where we were met by the Churchwarden Chris Brisley and his wife who had laid on tea and coffee for us, and some wonderful music; what a charming little 'country church' with Saxon origins (It seats c 80 people, but has all the mod cons of a loo and a kitchen!). We were made most welcome. Afterwards a short stroll back to Jeskyns and then homeward bound. All in all a walk with much variety and an interesting mix of the ancient and modern; enjoyed by everyone.

Hucking estate and the North Downs way - 31<sup>st</sup> August - Bank Holiday Monday

A small band of Strolling Stones set off from the Woodland Trust car park in Hucking village remarking at the dramatic change of scenery from the busy M20 that we had just driven down to the tranquil rolling countryside that we were now walking in. What a county of contrasts we live in and all within such a relatively short distance of one another!

The walk followed parts of the marked routes laid out through the Hucking estate where evidence of woodland management was clearly visible with coppiced areas, clearings and tall stands of trees at different points along the route. On leaving the estate to join the North Downs Way a few of us snacked on blackberries growing alongside the path and enjoyed the panoramic views across the Kent countryside.

A little wary of the sign 'beware of the bull' at one point along the footpath, we braved the field and hoped that the cattle at the bottom of the hill were too lazy to charge up it towards us which fortunately proved to be the case. Finally leaving the North Downs Way we climbed a rather rickety stile and struck across country again towards Hucking, the path leading straight through a newly harvested but recently manured wheat field! We were further entertained by a madman in a small aircraft who was busy demonstrating his aerobatic prowess by looping the loop, and by several picturesque fields with grazing horses, cows and pigs alongside the footpath. Finally reaching the Hook and Hatchet in Hucking we found seats in the garden and enjoyed a drink and substantial BBQ lunch while the horses, tethered outside the garden, looked on.

After lunch another short walk took us back into part of the Hucking Estate through rolling grassland and finally back to the car park. Some of the party decided to finish the day by taking a short drive to visit the tiny St Margaret's church before returning to the Hook and Hatchet to enjoy the warm sunshine, another drink and entertainment by a band playing Cajun music. A very enjoyable day!

'Talk like a Pirate' Walk - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2009 - Haysden Country Park

After a week of chilly Northerly winds Saturday dawned calm and misty, with the promise of some sunshine, as 18 Strolling Stones of all ages, cunningly disguised as pirates, set off around Barden Lake in Haysden Country Park near Tonbridge. The fishermen around the lake were somewhat bemused by the strange band, accompanied by two rather oddly squawking 'birds' delighting in the names of Russell and Jasper (the crow and the parrot!), but in typical British fashion, made no comment about our strange attire! The lake looked beautiful with a good variety of birdlife busily swimming and diving for their breakfast, and some of our party, not to be outdone, extended theirs by sampling the blackberries growing in the hedgerow along the path.

The circuit around the lake was enough for some of our band, although strangely enough not our 'less mobile' members whose buggy batteries still had plenty of life in them! Some, therefore, decided to sit and enjoy the scenery while the rest of the party walked and wheeled further along the footpath beside a very narrow river Medway, still, at that point, some considerable distance from its wider self with which we are very familiar at Rochester!

Meeting up with the others again we travelled the short distance to the Hand and Sceptre pub at Southborough for our lunch where the sunshine made the terrace area very appealing with it's view over the green, but we opted for indoor seating and enjoyed sampling dishes from the wide choices on the menu.

Promised sponsorship for the walk already exceeds £200 which will go to the 'Cure Parkinson's Trust', so all that remains is to collect money promised and encourage anyone else to support this very worthy cause.