



FOOTNOTES

The Heart of England Way Association
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www.heartofenglandway.org

Editor Stephen Cross editor@heartofenglandway.org

DOWN YOUR WAY

Where do the weeks and the months go? I could add years as well! I actually cannot remember when I became Chairman, but suspect it was in 1998 or thereabouts. Is that too long a time? I think so but others do not and as always I am open to be replaced at our AGM.

One of the great delights of the last few months has been the selection of the section from Milford Common to Lichfield Cathedral to be a linear walk in a new Ramblers Association collection of walks for their 75th year. Good wardening by David and Harry as well as cooperation from the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Staffordshire County Council makes for a good route. Come and try it either in portions or all in one go and use bus or train to return to the beginning!

On the walks I actually get to join I have been pleased to see old (long established I mean!) members and some newer (and younger) ones. The life blood of our Association is both monetary support and people enjoying what we have . walking our two wonderful routes. So I have been overwhelmed by the unsolicited generosity of a couple of walkers (not members) with a donation of £1 per mile they walked as they completed the main Heart of England Way this year. A huge thank you to them! Similarly I have been pleased that The Arden Way has featured in The Sunday Times which has resulted in more Guide Book sales and of course renewed interest in this route. It is a clear example of the quality we have in both our landscape and our route coupled to the waymarking and wardening. A big thank you is owed to them all and to our best diplomat, our Warden Coordinator Brian Keates.

You will see the cost saving exercise this new look Footnotes heralds. You will not see penny pinching in the detail of the new Heart of England Way Guide when Stephen has it finished and published in 2011!

So, wherever you walk, and who ever you walk with enjoy, have fun and tread safely. I'd hopefully see you at our AGM.

Graham Rothery Chairman

EDITORS NOTES

There are two reasons why this edition of Footnotes is in a reduced format. I decided earlier in the year that I would find it difficult to devote the time to producing a full blown edition and undertake the production of the new Heart of England Way Guide. The second reason is that after producing the last six edition of Footnotes I decided to relieve myself of the embarrassment of prevailing upon my daughter's company Watermark PR to produce future editions. I am sure that we will all share in my appreciation of the value that our Association has gained from the many £100's we have saved and the quality which they provided.

I have now walked and written up all 32 individual circular walks and my friend David Higgins is well into his voluntary task of walking all the walks. His comments on the accuracy of my maps and descriptions is proving invaluable. I therefore took the opportunity to re-walk one of the walks with David, and enjoyed being lead. We had already noticed that we had joined a new stone road and suddenly came to a dead end at a now rebuilt cottage. A new perimeter fence prevented access to the continuing right of way. In overcoming the problem I discovered that David depends solely on my map and descriptions! The problem has been reported to Worcestershire CC.

David's experiences walking routes later in the year than when I did the surveying show that vegetation and crop growth, even on the Way, can become difficult. One issue that has been a constant problem to David is my propensity to mix right from left. The explanation is that my orientation tends to become confused when sat in front of a keyboard, but it does keep David on his toes.

THE HEART OF ENGLAND WAY TRIVIA (YOU MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW)

In writing the new guide I have become fascinated by various facts - where's that anorak!!!!

The Way crosses:

- 3 motorways; the M42, M6 and M40.
- 5 rivers; the Tame, Alne, Arrow, Avon and Dickler.
- 3 canals; the Birmingham & Fazeley, Grand Union and Stratford upon Avon.
- 7 railway lines; Cannock to Rugeley, lines from Birmingham to Lichfield, Derby and north east, Nuneaton and the east, London Euston and Marylebone and finally Worcester to London Paddington. Unfortunately the only stations are at Lichfield, Balsall Common, Lapworth and Henley in Arden
- 18 frequent regional bus routes serving 22 points along the Way.

Now some facts about the climbs and elevations along the Way:

- The Way starts at 78m/254q ends at 132m/430q the highest point is the Bats-

- ford summit at 258m and the lowest point is Bidford on Avon 29m
- The biggest continuous climb of 116m from the start to the Glacial Boulder.
- The toughest section is from the start to Castle Ring a distance of 9 miles in which the total gross climb is 323m
- The total gross climb over the length of the Way is approximately 1062m
- The steepest gradient is the climb from Blockley to the Batsford summit a total of 98m over a distance of 1.6k or 1 mile.

The two watersheds the Way crosses, neither of which compare with the Rockies Pacific - Atlantic divides, are the Chadwick End north east south west divide (described in my River Blythe piece) and the Batsford summit. It is here that the water splits between the Avon/Severn rivers and old father Thames.

If you like a drink with your Heart of England Way meanderings then there are a total of about 39 pubs adjacent to the path. But it is a little dry between Lichfield and Kingsbury, and Henley and Alcester. The gastro pub conversions also potentially reduce the number that may be considered a walker friendly

THE RIVER BLYTHE

My circular walks/wanderings has lead me into places I have not known before, places I have not walked for years and places that I thought I knew well. Virtually each adventure has lead to new discoveries or set me off on a path of research. Watersheds! Where are they? The most southern north south divide between the Trent and Severn, together with their tributaries, is at Chadwick End 300m south of where the Heart of England Way crosses the Warwick Road. It will be marked in the new Guide.

The river which drains this area is the Blythe which, although only 39km (24miles) long from its source at Spring Brook, to its confluence with the River Tame at Coleshill, proves to be fairly unique. Not only because its head waters manage to end up in both the North Sea and the Bristol Channel. Whilst the natural water-course flows to the River Tame, the feeder to Earlswood Reservoir and the Stratford canal, finds its way to the River Avon. This is my own deduction, whilst the rather more interesting information reveals that the Blythes whole area, some 102 ha or 252 acres, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This quiet stream is a particularly fine example of lowland river on clay. According to the SSSI notification it has a wide range of natural features such as riffles, pools, small cliffs and meanders. I can testify that it even has a small ox bow lake.

The river also has a wide variation in sub strata types ranging from silt and clay to

sand and gravels. Its diversity is also mirrored in its range of plant communities. The number of plant species found in any one 1km stretch is above average for its type as is the total number recorded for its whole length. Botanically the Blythe is one of the richest in lowland England containing as many species as the very richest, poet lauded chalk streams.

The clear succession of plant life reflects the similar succession of its differing river features and substrates. From the upper reach stream, tree and shrub lined; to the faster moving shallower sections; together with the poorly drained, often flooded, adjacent meadows; each support many and sometimes rare botanical species.

The river also supports a diverse invertebrate community with a wide range of molluscs, oligochaetes (earthworms some of which are semi - or fully aquatic) and caddisflies. Apparently the most notable species is the pea-shell cockle. There are also dragonflies with the least common but beautiful Calopteryx vigo being represented.

There you have it, the short, narrow, winding River Blythe can flow along there with the widest and longest.

CHANGES ON THE WAY

- An additional fence has been constructed below Meon Hill which corrals the route along the Way.
- In the same area Lower Clopton Farm (www.lowerclopton.co.uk) has developed farm trails, in partnership with Natural England. These cross, but do not obstruct the Way. Access is therefore available to a higher elevation, but not the top, of Meon Hill.
- Approaching Sezincote 8000m of new fence, according to the fencer I spoke to, is being installed. The intention is to separate the attractive brown cattle from walkers. I think when complete the route along the Way will be clear, but we will have to re-survey for the Guide.
- Drayton Bassett to Kingsbury Waterpark. Should we change the existing unattractive route via road/canal to the original preferred, but then obstructed, cross country path, via Middleton? If you have a view or would like to discuss, have a chat with a committee member or drop me an email.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members: Pamela Gibson - Four Oaks, Colin Hackney - Shirley, Frank Maher - Alcester, Anne Parker - Stratford upon Avon, David Rees - Water Orton, Kim Ross - Kings Norton, Nigel Smith - Worcester, David & Kate White - Wellesbourne.