

The 32nd Alfriston Safari

At about 3.30pm on Tuesday 29th September a group of walkers drifted into the car park at the Deans Place Hotel. They shook hands, thanked those who need thanking, and wished each other a safe journey home. This for me was the end of my first Safari but for all my fellow walkers this was just the end of a well established annual event to the Sussex village of Alfriston.

Well how did a young 65 year old like me who had only been in Probus just over a year find myself not only attending the walk but organising the said event. A question I asked myself many times leading up to the walk but I know who must take responsibility – a certain Ken Holmes who having organised the walk for 15 years deserves remission for good behavior.

Following on from previous years I found that Deans Place Hotel was still in business and they quoted prices for single and double twin rooms plus dinner and breakfast. It was only later that I found that the Hotel was under new management and that the cost had risen by about 40%. It was too late to find alternative accommodation but there was a plus side as the Hotel never asked for a deposit.

Thus it was that on Monday 28th September a group of ten men, having unfortunately lost Rob Harcourt as his father was ill, met in the Smugglers Inn for lunch. After wining and dining we walked a short distance to Berwick where we stopped in the local Church to admire the murals. We continued on the lowland, flat track to Alciston then started the return journey along a Byway called Comp Lane which used to be the main highway in the 18th Century joining Eastbourne and Newhaven.

A quick scuttle into Alfriston to make sure that the tea room was still open ensured that we all got a cup of tea and a toasted tea cake. How useful that we had ten people as dividing by ten was even within my capabilities. We then all made our way to the Hotel where we were warmly received.

People seemed to be happy with their accommodation and we met in the bar prior to going in for dinner. The restaurant was very pleasant but the nouvelle cuisine was not of the highest order but our Chairman Cecil Pedersen managed to compete with a large group of noisy Americans to thank those responsible for organising the walks.

Next day was brilliant sun shine with an azure sky. We gathered in the Hotel car park at 10am and first walked down the Cuckmere River to Littlington. We then started a steady ascent on to the Downs doing a circular walk passing the top of The Long Man of Wilmington. With continued sun shine we had wonderful views of the sea and Beachy Head on one side and the Weald looking inland. We lunched again at the Smugglers Inn and suitably refreshed we did a short afternoon walk down the Cuckmere River returning on the opposite bank to the car park at Deans Place Hotel.

So the Safari is completed but it just leaves me to thank all those men who joined me, many who were completing their 19 and 17 Safari. The weather was

fantastic, the conversations and company was brilliant and I had a wonderful two days on one of the best parts of the country that is just an hours drive from Sevenoaks. Let us hope that we can follow the example of the Spring Safari and next year encourage the ladies to join us.

David Checkley.