

Newport Outdoor Group



Putting our best
boots forward
since 1960

Editors

Mike Alder-Woolf
& Nick Meyrick

"It was a hot day with shimmering views of sun-blached corn and crops, and whilst Somesh sensibly always found a sheltering tree or bush for our coffee break and lunch, the rest of us basked in the sun like iguanas."

**Get
The
Outdoor
Habit!**

SOUTH DOWNS EXTENDED TRIP

July 2014
By Nigel Bolter

Sadly Alfriston was closing. (Almost as dramatic start as Marley was dead!). The NOGs had planned a trip to the South Downs to spend some time in this house of character before it might leave the YHA forever. However the hostel was fully booked for the weekend so what to do? It was then that the idea was established to combine a two centre trip with Truleigh Hill, another pleasant, more modern and spacious hostel with fine views over the South Downs right down to the coast. This seemed a gem of an idea: this would be an extended trip as the distance was more than usual for a weekend and the two centres would allow a wide range of walks covering varied terrain. We would also get that chance to stay at Alfriston...



Nigel tackles the South Downs

However the takers for this tour were few in numbers as some Nogs had recently had a busy weekend at Howarth seeing the Tour de France and others could not manage the extra time for this trip. Six people booked for some or all of the South Downs experience.

I had arranged to take Sally and Somesh down in my car on the Wednesday and to make some use of the journey down we first visited a National Trust property in West Sussex. Petworth House and Manor is an art lovers dream. This house contains the greatest art collection of any NT property with priceless works by Turner, Van Dyck, Reynolds, Titian and Blake as well as a huge collection of classical sculptures all proudly displayed in the opulent state rooms and North Gallery. The house was shaped by a family of collectors for over 800 years and the gardens designed by Capability Brown.



Petworth House

The grandeur of the house and greatness of the artwork was evident in our tour of the house but as a bonus, some of the upstairs bedrooms were also open to the public midweek, thanks to the present owners Lord and Lady Egremont who still live in the property. A contrasting but equally interesting spectacle awaited us downstairs with the extensive kitchens; a real taste of upstairs/ downstairs. This area gave a real insight into the lives of the cooks, maids and butlers who worked and lived here. The kitchens even had a Victorian ice-cream machine. After trying out their excellent Visitors Cafe for its banana and walnut cake and cappuccinos, the group completed a tour of the gardens, woodland pleasure ground and lake, we continued our journey to Alfriston.

When we arrived at Alfriston, John Thompson had only just arrived by train and public bus, and after the usual hostel formalities we agreed to walk to the nearest pub for a snack, the Plough and Harrow in Litlington. Steak, fish of the day and wood pigeon were consumed with relish and a sample of the local ale. The hostel on our return was extremely welcoming with many families from continental Europe all eager to chat and socialize.

On the Thursday John had prepared and led an excellent walk from the hostel up on to the South Downs way with outstanding views down to the sea with the Newhaven ferry steaming away towards Dieppe. We could also see inland to the North for many miles. The path climbed quite steeply from the village but then undulated greatly from beacon to beacon. We eventually reached our highpoint for the day of Firlie beacon, where we stopped to take in the wonderful 360 degree panorama. It was a hot day with shimmering views of sun-blached corn and crops, and whilst Somesh sensibly always found a sheltering tree or bush for our coffee break and lunch, the rest of us basked in the sun like iguanas. At one point we passed a large group of hang gliding enthusiasts taking off from the ridge and preparing for their flights.



The afternoon's walk was even hotter as we descended from the ridge and returned to Alfriston via lanes and tracks. On reaching the beautiful old town of Alfriston we made a beeline for the Olde Smugglers Inn, where the refreshing soft drinks hardly touched the sides! The historic market square, thatched cottages and floral displays on the pubs were all appreciated and photographed before we took the scenic route back through the village green and along the river.

That evening as we enjoyed an excellent three course hostel meal we were joined by Brian who was just staying for one night amongst a scurry of visits to old friends, family and places of interest. Brian had interesting stories to tell of his meetings and places of interest visited. We then enjoyed an evening of scrabble and chatting to the Dutch and German families in the comfortable lounge area.

The following day I had planned a walk from a walking book taking in the Seven Sisters coastal route and Friston Forest to the North. I however made the mistake of trying to navigate directly from the guidebook, and after several blunders and finding the route description was out of date, I utilised Somesh's satnav to determine our position and reverted to the OS map for the rest of the walk with much greater success. Surely a lesson to be learned here for every walk leader!

The walk however was delightful, with an old deciduous forest to the West of Friston, a fascinating and ancient village pond in the village and a very scenic route down a deep valley to join the south Downs Way by the coast. The next series of short ups and downs took us over some of the Seven Sisters, a walk of incredible beauty with stunningly white chalk cliffs, aquamarine sea and green grassy slopes. We then relaxed on the beach at the estuary just East of Seaford where the Cuckmere River meanders to the sea and then strolled back up to the Visitor Centre. Just as we reached the car, the heavens opened and we got emerged in a real tropical downpour.

On arrival at Truleigh Hill we checked in and treated ourselves to another superb hostel meal with wonderful views from the upstairs lounge and dining area. We were now joined by Tony Hall, another welcome visitor to the NOGs and originally from the Gloucester Outdoor Group. The Hostel again had an interesting mix of British and continental families with some camping in the hostel grounds. The Millionaire Game and Scrabble again added to the evening entertainment.



On the Saturday Tony led the walk from the hostel, firstly Southwards with great coastal views and the path taking us over the tunnels of the A27. As we moved North East for our lunch stop, we passed a large farmers fair with steam engines, side shows and carriages pulled by tractors taking villagers on farm tours. Somesh had a detailed look at the fair while the rest of us ate our lunch and basked in the sun like iguanas.

Eventually we re-joined the South Downs Way at a pub, the Devil's Dyke, where we stopped for welcome refreshments on this blisteringly hot day. The final section of the walk was spectacular, following the South Downs Way Westwards with a steep embankment to the North and wonderful views of rolling farmland bleached and hazy on the hot July afternoon. We were surrounded by teams of Gurkha runners who were on a long distance charity run of 100km. We finished the day with a relaxing evening at the hostel.



On the final day we drove to Brighton and walked along the seafront from the marina to the pier. After a cappuccino and chat at a cafe on the pier we said goodbye to John who was travelling back by train, had a further tour of the pier and relaxed on the beach.

After a fish and chips lunch on the prom, we walked back to the marina, said farewell to Tony and took the fast route home along the M23, M25 and M4. Somesh gallantly carried Sally's luggage over the bridge at Newport Station and she just caught the early train.

All in all it was an outstanding and memorable summer NOGs trip, but I still can't understand why when walking on the Downs there are still so many ups.

