

As part of their 40th anniversary celebrations Kent Group have been re-walking their 1st solo 100 in a series of social walks.

The last 20 odd miles largely coincide with the Sevenoaks Circular challenge walk which followed shortly afterwards, but this is the story up to 78 miles. The original event was notoriously hot and sunny with several heat exhaustion cases ending up in Ashford hospital.

Words and pictures by Peter Jull, who also led the walks.



Leg 1: Sevenoaks to Linton

19 January 2014

Day 1 and blue skies with bright sunshine were reminiscent of the original Invicta 100 even if the temperature was not, nor the underfoot conditions described in 1992 as hard when now, any antonym of that would be inadequate. After some confusion over travel arrangements to the start, a party of 7 set off from Sevenoaks railway station rather than the original school. A little over a mile in, the original route was joined at "TR to cross RD under police control". No police for us of course and as we progressed it was clear ST in the old route description frequently needed now to read k/gate. Almost as often orchard was no longer accurate, a sad reflection on the changing fortunes of farming in the Garden of England, although one described as newly planted had not been grubbed for arable but was now decidedly gnarled. Lunch was in the pub opposite the original first drinks stop where chairman Brian met us with the photographic album record from 22 years before. The landscape had not changed as much as the people or the computers. Walking on, an old manor house now fenced off as a dangerous structure meant the path was diverted but where did we rejoin the route description? Rather than the words the Greensand Way markers were followed until they stopped. A short retrace and it was deciphered that stile at top of bank was now kissing gate at the bottom. Flood waters inundating Yalding just days before had receded and the village was traversed with little more than a long hop over one wet patch. A good pace was maintained but we arrived at our finish between busses. With over half an hour wait what was there to do but resort to the pub for a hot toddy.



Leg 2: Linton to Charing

2 February 2014

A timely break in the endless sequence of stormy rains gave us, 6 this time, a repeat of the weather a fortnight before. Morning news pictures had shown Yalding under water again but that was behind us. Early views across the Beult valley revealed that that our route was not as paddley as we would have found that lower ground. Again stiles, gates and gaps were now variously gaps, gates and stiles and orchards and hop gardens were no more but the route description kept us right with just an occasional hesitation. Until leaving Boughton Malherbe when a combination of expecting the route description to be no longer perfect and the perennial no no of following the people in front (dog walkers) rather than the instructions led us across a big field that turned out to be a big mistake. A map consultation revealed the magnitude of our deviation but also helped us rejoin the route without retracing surprisingly quickly so that we arrived at lunch only a little later than expected. Shirtsleeves sufficed for much of the afternoon and soon we were at the Bermuda Triangle known locally as Hothfield Common. Fences had moved tracks had moved and we had to turn away from the Greensand Way markers. With a bit of guesswork though, we escaped at just the right point. As we began the climb to the North Downs Way darkness fell, it wouldn't be a 100 without some darkness after all. Turning back westwards it wasn't too far to the point were we were to turn off the route down to Charing station from where we would reconvene for part three.



Leg 3: Charing to Cuxton

16 February 2014

Part 3 and the weather gods were reminiscing about 1992 again providing azure skies once more. However in places the roads around the start were Sochiesque in the degree of traction offered. Rejoining the route at an angle across Charing racecourse (no meeting this week so only one galloper was encountered) it was not clear where we were on the route description until reaching the first road. It mattered little because it mostly said SO, SO, SO and many miles were covered in a few lines with North Downs Way finger posts removing any doubt. Apart from one point where a tree brought down by the previous day's storm in a sunken track required bank mountaineering to get round, we bowled along. At least we did on the surfaced sections, the equally prominent muddy bits induced significant slipping and sliding causing an injury to one that required directions to the lunch pub by road to avoid the switchbackiest section of the NDW approaching Thurnham Castle. Reduced by that from 8 to 6 navigation remained error free with so few stiles expected any changes went unnoticed and even a whole new wood couldn't hide the target radio mast. But then in an older wood a large tree, victim of this winter's winds, had crushed the marker post and hidden the required path so effectively by its size that even when the errant trailblazers were called back they missed the leader beyond it and wandered astray again. Shouted back and by some more limboing we escaped the wood and it was on to the next challenge. At the Medway crossing they have built not one but two new bridges for Eurostar and 4 more lanes of M2 without the slightest thought for our historic route. So it was follow the signs rather than the instructions. Picking up the pace got us within a few hundred yard of Cuxton station when the target train for the return journey rumbled past. With so long to wait for the next what was there to do but resort to the pub again!



Leg 4: Cuxton to Dunton Green

2 March 2014

Part 4 and the morning weather was undecided whether to piddle on the railway engineers messing up our travel arrangements or continue with the 1992 type skies. A few steps from Cuxton station and we (6 with a change of personnel) were back on the 100 route and a little further on, on the North Downs Way which we were to follow for the rest of the day. At the first confusion between the old words and the plentiful NDW signs we soon decided to favour the signs and not much later we were into the realm of a familiar (not the witch's cat sort) who led us on unerringly when there was doubt, to the extent that the route description remained mostly in pocket. Around here significant stretches of the NDW have treated surfaces so, although off road, progress was less slippery than before. But much is also byway and our outing seemed to have coincided with quad bike Sunday with participants intent on disturbing the peace but puzzlingly also avoiding any puddles and mud as much as we. After lunch in Wrotham the weather was more intent on recalling the conditions of early 2014 than 1992 to the extent that in a squally drizzle a muddy and forlorn looking horse had decided that the best shelter was with its head firmly in the V of a kissing gate from where it was determined not to be budged by anyone squeezing through however muddy they were from its poached and muddy field. Overall the walk was straightforward and uneventful and arriving at the Dunton Green finish with cars pre-placed we could cock a snook at Southeastern's suggested changes at Orpington, Bromley, Rochester and Strood - nearly 2 hours to get back. The only downside was there was no excuse for another pub finale.



The group's Sevenoaks Circular Challenge in April will stand in for the fifth and final leg of the Invicta Hundred.

The group will be re-walking their other Hundred, The Millennium, later in the year to fit in with the White Cliffs Challenge.