



Summits Revisited – Sept 6/7th Sept

Following the apparent interest in arranging a trip down the 'memory lane' of the Surrey Summits the numbers on the walk itself were somewhat disappointing with 5 on the Saturday and 4 on Sunday.

None-the-less an intrepid group of Dave Challenger, Bill Grace, Jerome Ripp, Janet Chapman and myself (Tony Cartwright) set off at 8am on a bright but misty Saturday morning to walk the route of 1978. Since our overnight stop was to be at Chichester Hall Witley and this some

67km along the route, our walk bypassed the most easterly section of Mickleham, Box and Redlands Hills to ensure the walk remained 'social'. When the event started in Guildford participants had to walk 2km from the registration at Henley Fort to the actual start beneath the Tunsgate Arch in the centre of the town. This 2km was not included as part of the official 100km! It was during this 'walk-in' that someone idly enquired where the meal stop was on the event. Well of course in those early days there was no such thing as a meal stop - it was a straight walk with all check points in the back of cars or tents. It was not until the 80's that the slippery slope to a meal stop began when John Westcott first served hot potatoes at Henley Fort. These early events also required walkers to gather clues round the course. I was never sure whether this was to prove that walkers had been following the route or simply give them something other to do than just walk!

The initial part of our route took us east along the North Downs, over St Marthas and on towards Ranmore. Skipping the eastern hills, we dropped off the downs short of Ranmore and crossed via Wotton Hatch and the Greensand Way to pick up the route again on the top of Leith Hill. A brief lunch by the Tower saw us on our way via Upfolds Farm and then Holmbury Hill via the original very steep ascent from the south – only in later years did the route take the less dramatic (but still steep) path up the eastern side. The brilliant afternoon sun bathing the fields south of the Greensand Hills with Blackdown and the South Downs veiled in a thin mist was truly atmospheric and gave us a real scene to remember.

With Dave Challenger and Jerome Ripp leaving us after Pitch Hill, the remaining three began the decent of Jelley's hollow, notorious in earlier years for the 2Km of unavoidable mud, half-submerged branches and bricks. On this day almost a dust bowl!

Smithwood Common, Rowley Drive and The Leathern Bottle were passed in brilliant sunshine (the '78 route remarked that excellent hot dogs were to be had at the pub - but sadly now a pub no more). Up over Hascombe Hill and Holloway Heath to the last climb of the day, Hydons Ball. With the sun now setting we reached our day's end at Chichester Hall a little before 8pm.

Due to a 'lame'(!) chef at the White Hart we had to shift the venue of our evening meal to The Star also in Witley – an excellent choice as it turned out.

Louise Cartwright joined us for the Sunday walk of 30km, swelling our numbers to 4. Unfortunately, due to being unable to distinguish a fridge from a freezer (well they are all white and box-like) it took us some time to unfreeze not just the bacon and sausages but also the baked beans, eggs and tomatoes! Ah well...

Setting off at 9am with a fairly settled sky above, we continued west via Culmer Hill, Begley Farm, Boundless Copse and up onto Gibbet Hill. A brief stop for tea at the Punchbowl Café took us down and through the Bowl before continuing up onto Kettlebury Hill. In later years the route reached Elstead via the Hankley Ridge and Yagden Hill but in '78 the route skirted the eastern boundary of Hankley Common and on over Elstead Common. From Elstead some road walking took us onto Puttenham Common where we spent some time trying to locate the spot where John Robinson ran his traditional open air checkpoint characterised by a roaring fire – pre-ranger days! A fire was a clear necessity given the fact that on one such event walkers had to break the ice on the water before they could drink from the cups.

With 10km to go the sky blackened somewhat and at 4km to go we were forced(!) to seek shelter in Watts Gallery for a cut of tea and a slice of excellent home made cake! The last hill via Conduit Farm up to the Hogs Back saw us complete the round by 6pm.

In researching the route descriptions and then walking the route it was brought into sharp focus just how much effort went into defining and refining the routes. There seemed to be two strong drivers: One was to reduce where-ever possible the amount of tarmac walked and the other the need to route away from paths which became in many cases virtually impassable due to water and mud. (Most of those paths now just get a little muddy even on the wettest of days – Upfolds Farm, Jelleys Hollow the Brooke gully etc). For these refinements we have to thank the likes of Alan Blatchford, Chris Steer, Jeff Ellingham and John Westcott. These were truly the pioneers of the Surrey Summits.

Finally many thanks to Reg Chapman for transporting bags and people and to John Lay for arranging the hall.

Tony Cartwright Sept 2003