

## Tired of wandering 'lonely as a cloud'?

*Go further, get fitter, make new friends and enjoy more of this beautiful county by joining the Long Distance Walkers Association.*

We all know the benefits to be had from regular walking: It can reduce the risk of heart disease, type-2 diabetes, asthma, strokes and some cancers.

But this is just an added bonus for the millions of people who walk simply for the pure love of it. Walking is the most accessible and certainly one of the most inexpensive forms of exercise to be had.

Walking in Essex offers a landscape of huge variety. That famously vast East Anglian sky presides over rolling farmland, ancient woods, pretty villages, canals and rivers, plus stunning estuary and coastal paths. And of course, no strenuous mountains to negotiate in this county – unless one counts Mount Bures!

If you've ever had a hankering to roam further afield than your immediate vicinity but have been unsure as to how to work out a route, or are worried about getting lost walking alone, or feel that you'd like to walk further than your nearest and dearest are prepared to go, then the Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) is perfect for you.

The LDWA is a national organisation for people who share an enthusiasm for walking long distances in rural areas. Over 70% of Essex is rural so there's plenty of scope for the Essex and Herts LDWA. And with one of the driest climates in Britain it's the perfect walking terrain.

Walking with the group provides the perfect opportunity to explore our countryside, occasionally, as the group name implies, venturing into Hertfordshire, without having to spend hours poring over maps to work out a route.

Not only that, but one has the opportunity to meet other like-minded walkers. LDWA member Gill says: *'It's difficult to capture the many benefits of membership in just a few words, but my top three must be - making new lifelong friends who share similar interests; enjoying beautiful new parts of our countryside that simply cannot be seen by road, and finding the stamina, fitness and a vigour for long distance walking I didn't know I had. Exercise and enjoyment all rolled into one!'*

The association holds regular Group Walks throughout the year, usually on a Sunday or Wednesday, led by one of their experienced members, often including a pub or cafe for a lunchtime stop but always with the option to bring a packed lunch to enjoy in a churchyard or on a village green.

Group walks vary in length between 18 - 20 miles, and offer both a challenge and a chance to explore new areas, whilst making new friends. Walking is mainly off road, on footpaths and bridleways wherever possible, giving one a very different aspect of the beautiful countryside than that gained from a car. It's amazing how even the most familiar village is transformed when

approached across fields by following the hidden byways, bridleways and ancient footpaths that criss-cross Essex. Especially as someone else is navigating, leaving plenty of time to enjoy the surroundings!

You can be as sociable or as quiet as you like – chat in groups as you go along, or plug into your favourite playlist. The pace is brisk but not punishing – you'll be amazed at how quickly the miles go by. Of course, some of these crazy people walk for 100 miles non-stop – yes, walking, like most things, can be addictive – but the majority are happy with a day's walk that starts at 9am and finishes at approximately 4pm, with snack and lunch breaks along the way.

Essex and Herts Chairperson, Jean Bowers says: *'The group has lots of experienced walkers and plenty of newcomers as well. You don't have to be a fanatic to enjoy the walks and visitors are very welcome to join us for a day's walk to see if they like it. Many who come have doubts that they will be able to last the distance. I don't think we have had anyone join us who has been unable to complete the walk and I'm willing to bet we will have a new member by the end of the day.'*

Jean continues: *'Once people are made aware of the LDWA, their only complaint is that they didn't join sooner!'*

It costs just £13 a year to join the national association – a small amount to pay for the great benefits to be gained from long distance walking, both physical, social and spiritual.

If you are interested in walking with the Essex and Herts LDWA contact Jean at: <mailto:essexandherts.chair@ldwa.org.uk> or visit the website to see the programme of walks: [www.ldwa.org.uk/essexandherts](http://www.ldwa.org.uk/essexandherts)

By Julie Green

### **Members comments:**

**'Why didn't I join the LDWA till I was approaching 70? Because I'd never heard of it. Now 87 and enjoying LDWA walks as much as ever.'**

***Gabriel Newfield, LDWA member***

**'Monday mornings were no longer a problem after I joined the LDWA: after a Sunday walk I was re-invigorated, ready to tackle any situation, having blown away the cobwebs from the previous week's frustrations and finding companionable people to spend the day with.'**

***Georgie, LDWA member***

**'I brought to the LDWA a tired body and a frustrated mind and came away with fitness, companionship and the opportunity to travel the country, as well as the chance to walk a hundred miles!!'**

***LDWA member***

