WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL (2015) - REVIEW

*Not just a walk - an experience*

*healthy, interesting, sociable*

The purpose of the Festival

*Through a varied programme of walks to suit different age, ability, and interest groups, the purpose of the Festival is to attract local people and visitors alike, of varied walking abilities, to develop the love of walking for health, interest, enjoyment and social benefits, and consequently promoting the area, the facilities, the attractions and its friendly communities.*

Summary

The White Cliffs Walking Festival 2015 was organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers Group, Kent, part of the overall Ramblers organisation, Britain's walking charity.

The Festival ran (sorry – walked) from Thursday 27th August, to Wednesday 2 September, 2015, covering the Bank Holiday weekend. Forty-one walks were organised, plus a geocaching walk, all within the Dover District Council area (Deal, Dover, St Margaret’s at Cliffe, Sandwich). Overall the walks covered over 270 miles in this beautiful area of the country.

Over the seven days the weather was not particularly kind to us with rain showers on several days. But there were many dry and bright sunny periods in between, so the weather didn’t dampen spirits.
The cumulative total of walkers was 1095. This is an increase of 90 (9%) on 2014. This demonstrated the popularity of the walks and the interest of local people and visitors alike, despite inclement weather.

Whilst the largest group of people came from the Dover District Council area (37%), there were many from all over Kent. We also had a number from various parts of Britain including Surrey, Sussex, London, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Scotland. We also had visitors from the Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, USA and New Zealand.

We encouraged honest feedback so we can always improve. Again it was nice to see so many positive comments on the White Cliffs Walking Festival website (www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk), praising the organisation, the quality and interest of the walks and the cheerfulness, care and knowledge of the walk leaders.

**The development of the walking festival**

Between 2008 and 2012, annual Deal Walking Festivals were organised by a local Deal man, and participants came mainly from a walking group based in Deal, and with occasional visitors.

In 2013, the White Cliffs Ramblers Group was invited to take on the organisation and planning of the Festival by the previous organiser. With some initial advice and guidance from the previous organiser, the Deal Walking Festival, 2013 was organised. With greater promotion of the event, the Festival proved very popular with significantly increased numbers.

To further increase the appeal of the Festival, the White Cliffs Ramblers Group decided to re-brand the 2014 and 2015 festivals as the White Cliffs Walking Festival, increase the number of walks to cover Dover and the surrounding area, as well as Deal, St Margaret’s at Cliffe and Sandwich. Numbers participating have continued to increase.
**Where did walkers come from?**

Walkers could book online through the White Cliffs Walking Festival website, phone-in, or just turn up on the day. Whilst we were able to count the numbers on all the walks, we were only able to capture additional information from the online bookings. Therefore this information should be considered as an indicator only, as the figures only represent 90% of the people attending the walks. Of the 177 who took part in the White Cliffs Challenge walks, one of 18 miles, the other of 53 miles, 131 were from outside Kent.

As the Festival walks were all in the Dover District Council area (Dover, Deal, St Margaret's at Cliffe, Sandwich), much of the promotional work was in this area. It is of no surprise to find 37% came from the District (who booked online). However other promotional work included circulation of walk programmes to various groups and organisations, our Twitter and Facebook campaigns, a YouTube promotion, our website, an article in the national Walk magazine, and newspaper advertisements reached out to a much larger audience. In all 65% came from Kent, with 22% from outside Kent, and 3% from abroad.

Of the 833 people who booked online, 72% were not members of a Ramblers’ walking group. Whilst it was always expected Ramblers’ members would be supportive of the festival, this also showed the popularity of the event to less frequent walkers who were attracted to the walks by their variety and suitability to the individual's ability and interests. Hopefully this will lead to many getting out and about on various walks on a regular basis.

Through conversations on many of the walks, Ramblers members highlighted various options for the infrequent walker, to improve health through walking, not just about joining the Ramblers, but other smaller walking groups, or forming a small group of friends or neighbours to go on walks, or just to leave the car behind for short journeys and walk instead.
So many to say thank you to

Firstly thank you to Dover Town Council, Deal Town Council and Stagecoach for providing funding to support the event, and to the Ramblers Association for their ongoing support.

We also much appreciated support from people and organisations outside of the Ramblers including Up on the Downs Project members, the Long Distance Walkers Association, Kent Explore, the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group, the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership. The Western Heights Preservation Society, Simon Holyoake – local historian and author, The Deal Society, The Dover Society, The Land Trust, and the Sandwich Local History Society. Several other organisations were supportive in promoting the festival on their websites, and also our Twitter and Facebook campaigns.

And finally to the White Cliffs Ramblers Group themselves - so many gave up so much time to make this festival happen. We were also so grateful for the support from Kent Ramblers and the other Ramblers’ groups in Kent.

In all the White Cliffs Ramblers Festival project Team were able to call on over forty volunteers to help. A big thank you to all involved. This included development and management of the website, a YouTube video, Twitter and Facebook, the design, production and circulation of 7000 walk programmes, display of banners in Deal and Dover, design, production and display of posters, financial management, contact with numerous organisations including schools, parish councils, army, air and sea cadets, camp sites, scouts, guides, and other walking groups, the path clearance team, the many walk leaders and back markers, the walk coordinators, the administrators, those involved in publicity, booking advertisements, liaison with external organisations, undertaking talks to groups about the walking festival, and so much more. Thank you to all.
Feedback

We invited walkers to provide feedback on our website. Please view all the feedback on the ‘Comments’ page.

Here are a few clips from those comments and a few memories of the happy Festival:

Writers in Dover

“Very interesting walk with lots of interesting facts...and a lovely sing song at the end.”

Reptile Ramble

Excellent walk at Samphire Hoe with an enlightened talk about reptiles, their habits and hiding places.

White Cliffs Walk

“A beautiful walk with stunning scenery. Very well organised and led.

Battle of Britain Walk

This was a really varied walk with added poignancy of remembering young lives lost.

Fort Burgoyne Walk

“Just wonderful. We experienced the fort in all its unkempt beauty. Thank you so much.”

Blue Plaque Trail

“Fascinating walk. Having lived in Deal for many years I had no idea half of these existed.”
Dover Hills Walk “Wonderful views and very varied walking including few ‘jungly’ bits. Shame about the downpour.”

Walmer’s Colourful History
Extremely interesting early evening stroll led by Gregory Holyoake. He was full of interesting facts about Walmer’s history ...

Charming Parkland Walk “Our first walk ever with the Ramblers. What a wonderful start.”

“Thought the whole programme was brilliantly planned with walks to suit everyone”

Lighthouse and Cliffs Walk – “Thoroughly enjoyable, varied walk with beautiful views. Alan showed his broad and in depth knowledge of the area. Very glad I went.”

And so to 2016 --- 25th to 31st August – the planning starts soon!