



Walk East Norfolk

Walking for fun and fitness

Chairman's Report 2018.

Walk East Norfolk has just celebrated its second birthday and we are, once again, able to reflect on another most successful year with 89 paid up members. The committee has met regularly and discussed a variety of issues. The minutes of the meetings, once agreed as a true record of proceedings, are uploaded to the website and hopefully accessed by members keen to read about the variety of discussions held and decisions made. A brief summary of each meeting is also posted in the 'News' section of the Website.

Most years do throw up a few challenges and 2017/2018 has been no exception. This year has seen some of the most extreme weather that East Norfolk has experienced for some time. I'm sure that those of us who have been walking together for over a decade will be unable to recall as many cancellations as have been forced upon us this year. Members' safety is always of utmost concern and such were conditions on at least four walk days, it was decided in the interest of health & safety, not to risk the chance of broken limbs or encounters with skidding vehicles. We have also had to spare a thought for the unfortunate chalet owners of Hemsby Marrams and make last minute changes to scheduled walks which would have passed by their properties less than 24 hours after the elements had done their worst. As well as the snow and gales, this winter has been very wet and we have had to negotiate lots of mud, mud, glorious mud. Thanks are due to all those members who at times, cheerfully endured the necessary 'chop or change' approach of the walk leaders following impromptu risk assessments.

As if the weather conditions didn't cause enough problems, ongoing legal 'rights of way' disputes along a section of riverbank at Martham, have for the time being deprived us of some of our regular routes. However, we are always open to suggestions for new walks and in the time that Walk East Norfolk has been active, new walks have been introduced such as those at Lound Lakes and Acle. We're also mindful of the fact that some walks are poorly attended on a regular basis so a decision was made to remove them from our programme. One such example is the Breydon Water walk.

Within any organisation, there are bound to be differences of opinion about the walks themselves or the policies adopted and practised by the group. As we have seen in the past, these differences can potentially have a negative impact on the well-being of the group. This year, in order to assess how well (or badly) we were doing and also, to minimise the potential for significant conflict and negative undercurrents, the committee decided that it should offer members the opportunity to express their opinions frankly, freely and anonymously through a questionnaire. In this way, we would gain an insight into not only what people thought of the routes, but also be made aware of any ongoing troublesome issues that may need addressing. Although the section entitled 'Walks' was aimed primarily at the Tuesday & Friday participants, the remaining sections offered everybody the chance to express views about the day to day management of Walk East Norfolk. A summary of members' responses as well as a few replies from the Chairman will be provided as a separate document. Thanks are due to all members who took time to complete the questionnaire.

The committee agrees that it has been a useful exercise and one which should be repeated biannually.

From the walk leaders' perspective, one big improvement this year, has been the purchase of a set of four good quality walkie-talkie radios. Some members may remember that radios were used back in the days of the Gt. Yarmouth 'Fit Together' scheme. The usefulness of these was very 'hit and miss' as the efficiency was relative to the available technology over a decade ago. Our new versions are robust, the range is good, the signal strong and battery longevity impressive. They have proven to be 'worth their weight in gold' on more than one occasion in recent times, particularly when the walkers become spread out.

Last year saw some members attending first aid courses, and further sessions are being arranged for the coming year. Hopefully, we'll never need to use the related skills on our walks, but better to be safe than sorry. These courses are usually for Walk Leaders, however, if any regular walker would like to attend please let me know as soon as possible.

As always, we had a most enjoyable Christmas Lunch at the East Coast Restaurant plus our traditional picnics, mince pie walk and hot cross bun walk. The raffles have proven popular and prizes have been generously donated by members. It has been noted that we haven't managed the extra social events of the previous year although we have a new one planned for later this Summer. Watch this space! As a postscript to this paragraph, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and time given unselfishly by the committee and friends in ensuring we remain a social group as well as simply a walking group. People have in the past, approached me with a, "Why don't you...?" or "Have you thought of doing...?" I would remind members that there is only so much that one can expect of regular volunteers, so if you do have any ideas for a great social event, then please give some serious thought to 'coming on board' (if only for the event) and help to make it happen.

One concern which has often been expressed, relates to the number of available walk leaders. We have a relatively small team of individuals who selflessly give of their time in ensuring that walks are properly organised and marshalled in a manner that keeps our insurers happy and also strives to keep the group safe and on course. I often wonder if any thought is given to the extra demands that would be placed on the present team should there be any more departures or if any leaders become incapacitated in some way. In the past year we have had to readjust, having lost two walk leaders. At the moment we are 'getting by' while a full squad is available but desperately need new blood if we are to keep our walks running for three days per week. The alternative may be to reduce the number of days we walk.

Finally, I would like on behalf of everybody to once again acknowledge the hard work done by the officers and committee members, the walk leaders and those friends/relatives who although not 'official' can always be relied upon for active support. Thankyou!

Jerry Walker

Chairman