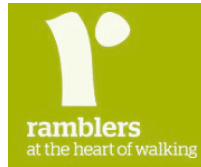


WHITE CLIFFS WALKING FESTIVAL (2021)



Not just a walk - an experience



Overall aim of the festival

The overall aim agreed by the WCWF committee was the 'promotion of health via walking'.

Whilst promoting, and enhancing the reputation of the Ramblers, we also aimed to operate a varied programme of walks to suit different ages, and interest groups, 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 promote the area, the facilities, and its attractions.

Where possible our aim was to engage with other interested people, groups and organisations to assist in promoting and organising walks.

Our agreed key objectives were:

- 1) To secure adequate funding to cover publicity, advertising, promotional material, maintenance of the website, postage and out of pocket expenses.

- 2) To produce a walk programme of around 33 walks.
- 3) To publicise, advertise and otherwise promote the festival
- 4) To organise and operate all aspect of the walk programme (including routes, path clearances, start of walk coordinators, walk leaders, back markers).
- 5) To promote recruitment to Ramblers

Approach to Covid 19

During the planning of WCWF2021, the UK was in a period of lockdown due to the Covid 19 pandemic, WCWF2020 having been cancelled, and the committee was keen to run a 'modified' festival to suit the revised conditions.

Therefore, the WCWF2021 committee discussed and decided upon a strategy for WCWF2021 whereby the risks of spreading Covid 19 could be substantially reduced, whilst still operating a reduced Walking Festival. The strategy included the following:

- Limiting the number of walkers to 20 for each walk.
- Planning walks that did not include visits to enclosed spaces
- Not holding an opening ceremony
- Not having a 'Start of Walk Co-ordinator' at the beginning of each walk as this tends to create bunching of walkers.
- Issue of briefing notes to Walk Leaders and Back Markers on how to reduce bunching of walkers and to encourage social distancing.
- Recording contact details of all walkers so that we could contact walkers under the UK Government's Track and Trace system.

Summary

We had another very successful Walking Festival. We were delighted to have a good number of walkers, who clearly enjoyed themselves. The key stats were as follows:

- 6 days mostly dry.
- 33 walks.
- The 33 walks had a cumulative length of 265 miles (427km).
- There were 528 individual walkers who collectively did 582 walks.
- Of the 528 individual walkers 55% are members of Ramblers. Hence 45% of the walkers are non-Ramblers and this demonstrates how the festival acts as an encouragement for people to do more walking.
- Collectively the walkers covered over 6031 miles (9706 km)
- Numerous volunteers gave up their time in planning, organising and operating the various walks.
- 41 walkers attended the event from areas outside Kent, and with many attending the festival over a number of days; they would have stayed in Kent overnight. This is a boost to local tourism.

- Each year we have overseas visitors from mainland Europe and even from Australia and the USA. However, this year we did not have any overseas visitors as a result of restrictions on travel due to Covid; we hope to see our overseas visitors return on our next festival in 2022.

Introduction

The White Cliffs Walking Festival 2021 (WCWF2021) was organised by the White Cliffs Ramblers Group, Kent Area, part of the Ramblers organisation, Britain's walking charity. This is the eighth year White Cliffs Ramblers have organised a walking festival, with WCWF2020 having been cancelled due to Covid restrictions.

During the year, our good friend Margaret Lubbock died. As Chairman of White Cliff Ramblers, Margaret was one of the key instigators of setting up the festival and contributed to the walks programme throughout.

WCWF2021 took place from Thursday 26th to Tuesday 31st August 2021, covering the Bank Holiday weekend. Thirty-three walks were organised. Overall, the walks covered over 265 miles (427km) in this beautiful area of the country.

Over the six days the weather was mostly fine. Walk Leaders and Back Markers took the opportunity to remind all walkers to bring sufficient water and to keep themselves hydrated throughout the walks.

Promotional Activity

Promotion starts with raising people's awareness of the event, from exciting their interest, to providing sufficient information for people to make choices as to what walks they wish to participate in. Then to do our very best to make each walk a friendly, enjoyable event, to motivate participants to continue walking as part of their healthy lifestyle. And we also hope they will tell their friends and relatives to come along on the 2021 festival walks.

We are grateful to Dover Town Council (for ongoing support and assisting promotion) and Destination Dover (assisting with promotion information).

The promotion of the WCWF 2021 is very important and this year the committee decided not to use the normal brochure, as there was not the confidence at the time of planning that the UK would have been released from the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions, hence the WCWF2021 committee decided to rely on the following:

- the website,
- social media,
- advert in local papers namely Shepway and Ashford Advertiser, What's On Magazine and Thanet Extra.
- Leaflets delivered to local shops etc
- Leaflet drop in Dover and Deal.
- Leaflet Drop at campsites around Deal, Canterbury and Folkestone.

Savings on the usual printing of the 5000 copies of the brochure will be used for the brochure for the next walking festival.

Key to the whole event is the excellent website, (<http://www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk>) , and we are grateful to Gavin Trevelyan for running this each year. The website has the walk details and how each walker can sign up. We receive numerous comments from the walkers who express their delight that the website is of such a high standard, and is so easy to use. In turn we can use the website data to:

- Determine the number of walkers signed up.
- Note the address for each walker so we can determine the beneficial tourist impact of people coming into the county.
- Retain their email address (with their permission) so that we can contact them for the following year's Festival.
- Monitor progress with sign up for walks, and where necessary use digital media to promote a particular walk.
- Provide any last-minute changes to the walks.

Early in the year our media release was sent to a wide range of organisations, both local and national, which are interested in walking, the environment and history. The following organisations used it to support the festival:

- Parish Councils in their newsletters and websites
- Dover Council's electronic and static display boards.
- Kent Based organisations websites on their event pages: DATROWs, Explore Kent, Visit Kent, Kent Downs and Surrounds and White Cliff Country.
- Ramblers' websites both national and local
- South East Walker Magazine.

We continued to work with the goodwill of many volunteers and within the budget which we were able to attract through grants. Those grants this year were primarily used for printing the festival leaflets and posters, advertisements and other promotional material and display equipment. Grants were also used to replace the first aid kits that are carried by all walk leaders.

Banners were displayed at various places in the Shepway area, Deal, Dover and Sandwich. Social media played an important part with successful campaigns on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, where targeted advertising was purchased. Leading up to the festival, newspaper advertisements were placed in the Kent Messenger newspapers, and Kent Online.

This year we increased our focus on social media. We were grateful to Diederik Smet of Destination Dover for providing some training to us, and advising us on how best to promote the festival via social media. From speaking to quite a few walkers it was clear that they were picking up messages on social media, that then diverted them onto the website for booking up the walks.

Variety of Walks

As part of the planning of the festival, the committee usually ensures that there are a wide range of walks, but this year we did not run walks that would result in walkers being in close proximity in enclosed spaces. Where walks included talks, such as those at Dover Castle and at the former Kent coalfield, these were undertaken by specialist local guides in the open air, and were well received by the walkers.

Sponsors

This year, grants were provided by Deal Town Council, Dover District Council and Kent Community Foundation (from Port of Dover Community Fund).

The WCWF2021 committee are grateful for all the work that John Grace does in applying for the grants. They are fundamental in running the festival each year.

Kent Long Distance Walkers Association - White Cliffs Challenge Walking Event, Saturday 28 August 2021

We were pleased that the LDWA Kent Group's White Cliffs Challenge was in the WCWF programme and took place as planned. 61 entrants registered to follow the 30-mile route and 25 entrants registered to follow the 16-mile route both starting and finishing in St Margaret's at the village hall. After a wet start, the weather improved, allowing participants to enjoy stunning coastal views. Feedback from participants indicated that they enjoyed the day and greatly appreciated the support from the organisers and volunteers. Further details about the LDWA and this annual event can be found at: <https://ldwa.org.uk/Kent/W/7928/white-cliffs-challenge-2021.html>

Cumulative number of walkers

The quality of how the walkers enjoy themselves is fundamental to our approach, from first point of contact through to the last contact. This includes a warm welcome to walkers and a friendly approach throughout. All walks have to be pre-booked on the website and at the start of the walk we ensure that there is always a count of the walkers and this is checked throughout the walks. Each walk has an experienced walk leader and a back marker to ensure that the walkers are guided correctly. Each walk has already been walked by the walk leader and back marker prior to the event to ensure that there are no obstructions etc.

Over the past 6 years, we have seen an average of 1150 walkers per Festival, with the highest total being 1252 in 2019.

With the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, the WCWF2021 committee decided to scale down the number of walks and the number of walkers permitted on each walk, so that we could still operate a Festival with significantly reduced risk of spreading Covid 19.

Whilst Ramblers' members are always supportive of the festivals, the fact that 45% of attenders were not Ramblers' members showed the popularity of the event to less frequent walkers who were attracted to the walks by their variety and suitability to each individual's ability and interests.

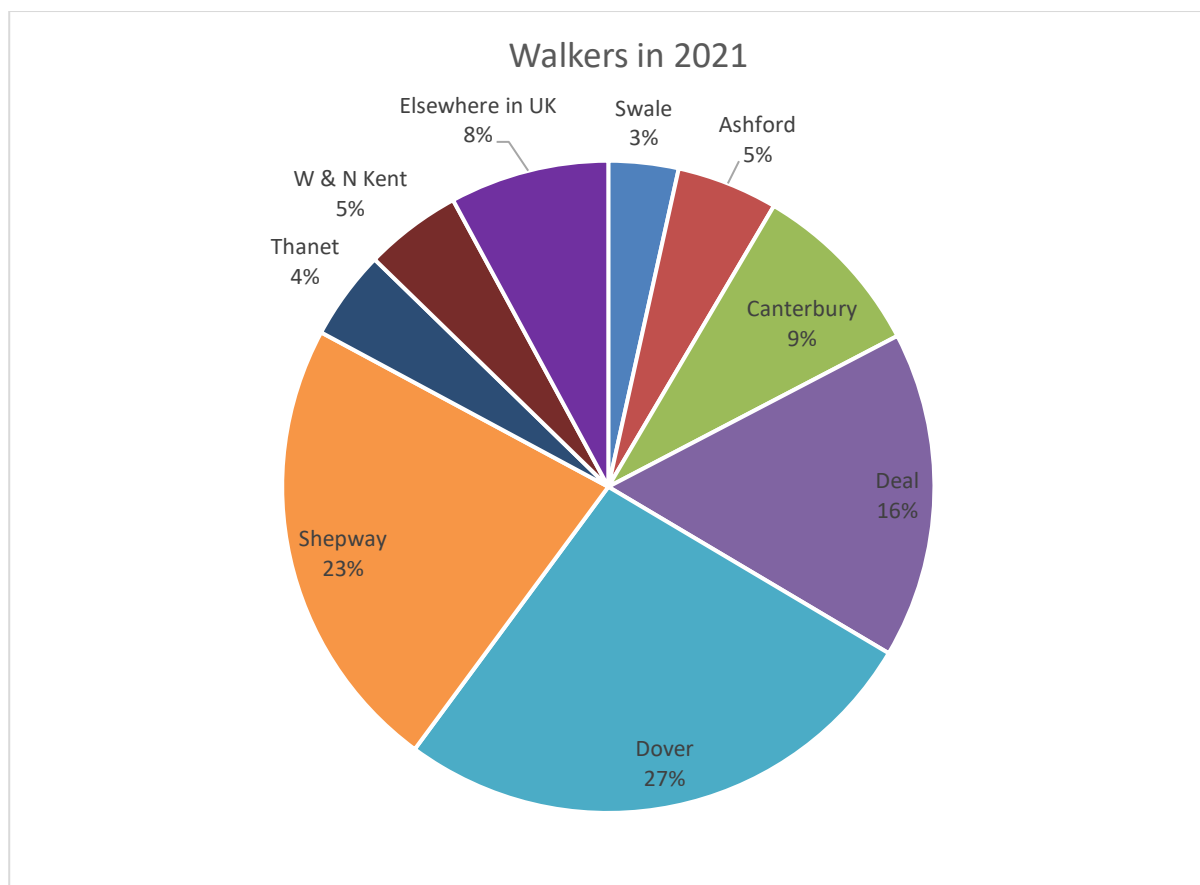
Where did our Walkers come from?

As to be expected, most people came from East Kent and this is a similar pattern of where Festival walkers resided in previous years.

These are the patterns in comparison with 2019:

- 87% of the walkers come from East Kent, compared with 61% for WCWF2019. We suspect that this is due to people being more apprehensive to travel longer distances at present.
- 5% of walkers come from other parts of Kent.
- 8% of the walkers come from elsewhere in the UK. The festival continues to be a draw for people to visit and stay in East Kent and hence the current and future tourist impact is significant.

We are pleased that we have managed to run a festival this year, and look forward to seeing twice the numbers in the next Festival, with a larger number of people coming from outside Kent and especially overseas again.



Recruitment

The festival plays an important part in enhancing the reputation of the Ramblers organisation, and also an opportunity for recruitment. Of the walkers 45% were not a Ramblers member, and all were offered

information on the benefits of being a member of Ramblers; existing members did offer their personal insight into the organisation during the walks. There are clearly numerous people who really enjoyed the walking and hence we can only assume that they will consider joining their local Ramblers Group.

A Huge Thank You to All Involved

So many people have been involved in the success of the festival. Firstly, thanks to Deal Town Council, Dover District Council, Kent Community Foundation, Port of Dover Community Fund, for providing grants to support this event. This is very much appreciated.

We very much appreciated support from people and organisations outside of the Ramblers, including the Long-Distance Walkers Association, Parish Councils, Gavin Wright from Dover Castle, Stepping Out, Sue Mott, Steve Durbridge, David White. Several other organisations were supportive in promoting the festival on their websites. Our Twitter, Instagram and Facebook campaigns continue to develop and are attracting increasing interest.

Thanks to Dover District Council for providing free car parking spaces in Dover and Deal for some of the walks.

The festival's success enhances the strong reputation of Dover and Deal as Walkers are Welcome destinations.

And finally, to the White Cliffs Ramblers Group themselves. In all, there were many volunteers from the White Cliffs Ramblers Group plus volunteers from other organisations. Hundreds of hours of volunteer time were required in the planning, organising and operating the festival, for the benefit of the wider community. Without their goodwill, skills, determination and sense of humour, the festival would never have transformed from an idea to such a successful annual event.

Feedback

We invite walkers to provide feedback on the website. Below are just a few clips from those comments and a few memories of this most enjoyable Festival.

'It's an absolute credit to all of you to get this festival up and running again this year.'

'Enjoyed the walk and the company.'

'Just wanted to thank you and everyone involved for a great walking festival. Everything was very well organised'

'I wanted to give feedback to Lee Pickup and David White who were leading the 2 walks that I participated in. Thanks for their good company and informative and scenic walks, as well all the behind the scenes work that goes on. Good to hear that the festival was successful and that you have new members'

6 Exciting days of the White Cliffs walking Festival 2021 came to an end!

**We hope you enjoyed it
and will be ready to join us for more pleasant walking on the next
White Cliffs Walking Festival**

Report prepared by: Neil Fraser (Festival Project Manager)

With the assistance of the Organising Committee:

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