

The 2008 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail

A very difficult cold and slow start, yet it ended with extremely hot weather, beautiful bluebells and so many visitors, that overall attendance broke all records. The start date was spectacularly wrong, as we had snow for the first Sunday and only five intrepid visitors, another attendance record! Weather conditions especially at weekends are the crucial elements in organizing this event, as we have to quickly respond. It affects whether the car park is open or closed, muddy paths have to have extra grit otherwise visitors trample the bluebells to avoid the mud, heating has to be available in the barn for the refreshment volunteers, for those cold and windy days with few visitors, which often causes so much extra work in keeping the barn and toilets clear of muddy footprints!

The significant change this year were the replacement of stiles of various ages and heights by user friendly self closing gates, which have been acclaimed by so many visitors. Next year we want to provide more seating, which now ranks as the main comment, so my aim is to have something available at each numbered gate.

Charities seem pleased with their takings, as Medical Action Research took over £1800 from their secondhand book stall, Hailsham Old Pavilion Society made £1520 from their Farmers Mini Market, Royal Society for Protection of Birds took over £1200 from their weekend stall Arlington Church made over £2200 from their Plant Stall and the weekend charities made over £10,000 from selling their refreshments.

We launched the Friends of Arlington Bluebell Walk this year, but even though we did not have many members, those who joined were so enthusiastic about the concept and made many visits, that it will be available next year.

Having the diversity of walks was reflected in the comment cards, as the average visit length was two to four hours. This is due to the facility of walking over the farms of Andrew Johnston and Peter Appleton, for which I am most grateful and special thanks to Vicky who co-ordinates the notices and facilities for both the Primrose and Parkwood farms.

Our website www.bluebellwalk.co.uk has been redesigned by Tim Church and its use as a publicity channel is growing rapidly, as proven by Google Analytics which records the number of 'hits' when, how long and which pages are viewed. I am indebted to Tim to facilitate a means so that I could update the site every Friday as to how the bluebells look and state of paths for would be visitors.

Carolyn, Anne Hope and I are now looking to how the 2009 Bluebell Walk will be run and emphasis will be to upgrade the catering facilities, leaflet design and trying to be more accurate in deciding the dates we open!

John McCutchan