

The 2010 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail

www.bluebellwalk.co.uk

The weather conditions this year made a very difficult to manage and on looking back to 2009 we did not at that time appreciate how fortunate we had been.

We have to start planning the dates we hope to open in December/January, to give time to the participating charities to organize their volunteers and resources, but we were not anticipating that 2010 will be remembered for having one of the coldest and longest winters for many years, The day before the publicity brochures were to be printed, it became apparent that we would have to delay the start date by a week and therefore extend the closing date by a week, very much the right decision, but in hindsight we should have made it two weeks at either end! The bluebells did not really appear until early May as the persistent cold east winds and frosts delayed all growing plants in Beatons Wood and grass on the farms.

Visitors had many favourable comments on the spectacular white swathes of the wood anemones against the green leaves of the emerging bluebells, but it was only in the last week we were open that the bluebells really looked at their best. This year as we were open for an extra week we had eighteen charities involved and between them they raised £35,493, quite a significant figure in spite of visitor numbers being down, due to poor weather every Sunday, except for the last one. It was great to welcome back Friends of Park Mead School, Eastbourne Samaritans, Wealden Citizens Advice Bureaux, Eastbourne Branch of the R.N.L.I., and for the first time Demelza Hospice Care for Children.

This year we introduced a childrens quiz comprising of three different competitions based on the Blue, Green and White Walks, the answers all to be found in the text on the many panels around these walks which we positioned so that young children and those in wheel chairs can easily read. It has been an encouraging start as over 100 children participated, hopefully in the process learning more about the flora & fauna described. We are indebted to Scats Country Stores for sponsoring the printing and the NFU for providing the prizes.

Another innovation was 'Paint me a Bluebell' Art Competition organized by Josie Tipler. Paintings from the 2009 Walk were displayed, the public being asked to judge the winning ones from each class. Winners will be announced at the Arlington Art & Craft Festival at the end of June, organized by the Arlington Arts Group.

Henry McCutchan's canvas shelter fitted in so perfectly at the beginning of the Millenium Avenue where he was seen practising his 'bodging' skills. He displayed the various wooden items made using his foot powered pole lathe, which all created much interest and discussion.

We have had many entries for this the second Photographic Competition, which as they will be judged early next month are still to be opened, so we are looking forward to that with great anticipation. The overall winner will have their image on the front of the 2011 publicity leaflet.

We continue to make a determined effort to attract more of the less mobile and elderly visitors, by increasing the parking spaces for the disabled and the provision of more mobility scooters, so giving a degree of independence in being able to get around and enjoy Beatons Wood. We are delighted with the increased numbers who use these scooters, with over 220 visitors this year availing themselves of this facility.

We are indebted to our two neighbours Andrew Johnston and Peter Appleton who allow access to their farms, which gives so much added interest to our visitors, and this is so visibly demonstrated by seeing how well those paths are used, reinforced by the many favourable comments both verbally and on our comment cards.

The Bluebell Walk first opened in 1972 and has altered out of all recognition from those early years. We appear to have a formula in which local charities can raise funds and their profile, whilst allowing visitors to view and learn about our lovely countryside and farming methods, so any future changes must be minimal. No matter what work, effort and planning is entailed, we just have to keep our fingers crossed, that for next year and subsequent one that the weather will sometimes be on our side!

John McCutchan