

The 2006 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail

The 34th Bluebell Walk is now over and one we will not remember too fondly. Bluebells very late, so we had to extend it by one week, which entailed us over-stamping our publicity material, plus not one of the five weekends had warm sunny weather, which we enjoyed last year. In all our visitor number were the lowest since the Foot & Mouth debacle, being under 10,500.

We produced new comment cards that included market research boxes to tick, which has been very interesting and we had nearly 200 returned cards. Twenty five percent were from first time visitors, so doubt due to the unexpected publicity by being featured in the Waitrose monthly national magazine, with the three local stores agreeing to distribute our leaflets. Two cards were memorable for their content. One saying 'So beautiful and peaceful I thought I had died and gone to heaven', the other 'I should have gone to Sissinghurst, but came here instead, so glad I did, it is heavenly and even better than Sissinghurst. To receive unsolicited comments like that prove that the Bluebell Walk offers something quite unique in this area.

The public appreciated brochures in full colour including the maps, and with the new picnic facilities in the car park field, were subsidized by a grant from the England Rural Development Programme supervised by Defra.

My grateful thanks to the two participating farmers, Andrew Johnston and Peter Appleton for their support and for allowing access to their land and farms. This adds a greater breadth to visiting the Bluebell Walk and comments from our visitors confirm how it is appreciated, especially being able to witness the milking process at Parkwood.

We had our annual assessment for the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Service (VAQAS) to confirm that we can continue to carry their red rose logo, proving that we offer a quality visitor service. The comments they make and what we glean from our comment cards, are always helpful in planning how we can make further improvements for 2007.

The organization to ensure the Bluebell Walk runs smoothly and able to cope with whatever weather conditions we may face and the ensuing numbers of visitors, has become quite complex. I should like to thank those key individuals including those representing charities, for all their support, hard work and fun we get from running this event, that brings so much pleasure to so many. We look forward to its 35th year and long may it continue.

(Article for The Arlington Scene)