

## **The 2014 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail**

What a wonderful season we had as the weather was on our side, so different to the past two difficult years. It was not an easy start as after all the publicity leaflets were printed and the seventeen charities had agreed their dates, we had to make the major decision to bring the start date forward by one week as spring was very early, so different from last year when we had to contend with one of the latest springs in recent years! Our thanks go to those charities that at the last minute had to change their 'duty days'.

This year for the first time we planned an Official Opening of the 2014 Bluebell Walk, with Geoff Rowe the Hailsham Town Crier kindly agreeing to cut the ribbon at The Gate House, the occasion marked by celebration drinks all round!

We were pleased that the major improvements we made last year to the Bluebell Barn and the installation of The Gate House, allowed us to cope easily with the increased numbers of visitors, so different to the waiting queues of visitors which often stretched across the road at busy times in earlier years!

The elimination of the well-used Wilbees Wood Walk due to ownership changes of the land over which this Walk traversed, caused many problems. Firstly all our maps had to be replaced showing a new route that the Appleton Family kindly provided, but this field was already ploughed to the field edge over which our visitors had to walk, then when it was cultivated to sow maize we experienced wet weather, and being Weald clay caused very muddy conditions for which we apologize. We plan to have a firm and relatively smooth surface for next year.

We found that in 2013 there were some postings on TripAdvisor so decided this year to encourage more and to date have over 60 reviews from visitors, as social media including Facebook and Twitter are now a growing way to promote awareness and is free advertising, so long as what we offer keeps our visitors happy and they post good reviews!

No Bluebell Walk functions without the valuable help and delicious food supplied by the participating charities, so we thank them for their commitment in ensuring our visitors have an enjoyable experience and making sure everything including the loos are kept spic and span.

Planning for the 2015 Bluebell Walk starts now, as each year we note the comments made by visitors both verbally and completing our comment cards. What has been highlighted is that improvements can be made by improving the signing especially in relation to the Farm Trails, to help avoid the unexpected electric fence and to keep cows and visitors separated!

Finally we are grateful for the help and support from the Appleton Family and their staff in allowing access to their farmland and especially the milking parlour, as all this adds to an interesting day out to so many of our visitors. We welcome the many family groups, as creating an interest in what children are able to see and understand in our lovely countryside augers well for the future, as the completion of the 'Kidz Quiz' sheets increase year on year.

The Bluebell Walk Partnership of John & Carolyn McCutchan and Philippa & Michael Vine