

The 2020 Arlington Bluebell Walk that never happened!



Due to Covid-19 we were unable to open on April 9th as planned, so the various improvements we had carefully thought about and implemented, will now have to wait until next year! Sadly, the biggest losers were the 27 participating local charities, whose involvement creates this unique local attraction now so widely known. It is for many of these charities their most important source of raising much needed funds. The Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trails has become an annual 'must do' event visited by thousands, who enjoy and appreciate our lovely countryside. Beatons Wood which is 24 acres of ancient oak woodland is quite special, as it emerges from winter into spring and then just for a few weeks it is bursting with colour. Firstly with vistas of white wood anemones against a backdrop of the green leaves of the English Bluebells, which follow on with their carpets of blue.

Tim Church who manages our website www.bluebellwalk.co.uk and produces our regular Newsletters, used the five weeks we should have been open, by posting an update on each charity as their Duty Day(s) should have happened, to help raise their profile. My daughter Philippa Vine produced images and videos of Beatons Wood, illustrating how it changed over the five weeks it should have been open, which was all we could do to support our frustrated visitors who were all in 'lockdown'.

Looking ahead to 2021 when the various restrictions we trust will have been revoked, will mark that it will be 50 years since Carolyn my late wife first suggested a Bluebell Walk. We will want to celebrate this important point in the history of the Arlington Bluebell Walk, how and what to do depends so much on restrictions following Covid-19. Anyway, it does mean that the three major improvements we were unable to use this year, will become available. Firstly, the Bluebell Barn Kitchen has had a major refit, so the charities should find it easier to operate no matter high large the number of visitors, who need their refreshments. Secondly, we have now added a Front Terrace, built under the two large oak trees alongside the road, for visitors to sit and enjoy their food and drink in the shade. Thirdly, all the signs we use on the six Farm Walks have been re-designed with additional directions, that in combination with the map available at the Gatehouse will hopefully allow easier navigation of the Walks.

We are having a NHS day which will be on Wednesday 28th April, whereby all NHS staff with their photo ID, will have free entry to the Bluebell Walk and any accompanying dependents. This day will be run by The Friends of Eastbourne Hospital, who in addition will for the first time in 5 years, have Bates Green Garden open with entry by donation, which should make it a busy day!

The Easter Holiday in 2021 starts on April 2nd, so we then have to decide whether we will open for Easter. If we do, it will be the earliest we have ever opened! However, it all depends on the weather. If we have a similar weather pattern as this past year, with an unusually mild winter, meant the wood anemones and bluebells flowered early. This decision will have to be taken in late November, to give time for the charities to get prepared. Weather is always the most important factor in deciding how successful the Bluebell Walk is, so will we have a repeat of this year, with such a hot sunny Easter Holiday plus each weekend dry? I wish I had a crystal ball!!

John McCutchan of behalf of the Bluebell Walk Partnership