

The Tale of Two Ways

In 1999 Edenbridge and District Twinning Association (EDTA) and their twinned town Mount Saint Aignan (MSA) started walking weekends. To mark the 10th anniversary the two towns wished to celebrate by walking from MSA to Edenbridge. The route chosen was the “Chasse-Marée” from Rouen to Dieppe on the French side and the “Vanguard Way” from Newhaven on the English side. The “Chasse-Marée” was an ancient track used by fish wholesalers to get fish from Dieppe to Paris via Rouen. Speed was of the essence before access to ice and other forms of conservation. Specially designed 2 wheel carts pulled by 4 or 6 horses rushed fish from Dieppe, the closest beach to Paris, to the markets of Rouen and onward to Paris, using frequent, rapid, changes of horses. With the introduction of the railways in 1850 the track fell into disuse but it is still well marked as it runs through villages and over the French countryside. The “Vanguard Way” runs from the quay at Newhaven along the coast to Seaford and then winds its way north through Sussex and Surrey to South London. It is a mix of metal roads, tow paths and green lanes.

We crossed the La Manche using the Dieppe / Newhaven ferry. The total walking distance was a little under 100miles. Of the 8 core walkers (4 French and 4 English) 4 were in their 60s and 2 were in their 70s, so this was no small challenge. Guest walkers joined in for a number of the days.

The group left MSA on Saturday lunchtime to walk to Bosc Guerard and soon found the medieval track, through the forests north of Rouen, very muddy; this was not helped by recent rains. The second day's target was Auffay some 20 miles further north. The day did not look promising when we left and by 10 o'clock it was raining, which then turned to hail and finally snow. Ever hopeful that it was a passing storm we took some shelter under a railway bridge. It became obvious that our optimism had no basis so we had to go back into the snow and soldier on. Our alfresco lunch was abandoned for the warmth of a café. Wet and weary we got to our Hotel in Auffay before the blizzard struck. Having found places to warm our clothing, such that they would dry, and been fed, no one had any difficulty sleeping that night. We awoke to a cold morning and deep snow. Monday's target was Anneville-sur-Scie; a day's walk that would get us close enough to Dieppe to complete our journey by Tuesday lunchtime to catch our ferry. The clearing sky meant we had a cool start but as the day went on it warmed to a nice day. However the snow covering made the muddy tracks treacherously slippery which resulted in more than a couple of falls. Lunching at Longueville-sur-Scie we were revived and made Anneville-sur-Scie by teatime. Although many of us had no difficulty sleeping the large shared rooms of our accommodation caused one of our French walkers some difficulty, as in the English party was an individual who could snore for England. We needed an early start to get to Dieppe for the ferry. At 06:15hrs the snow had been replaced by a deep layer of frost in the -2C atmosphere. We had been walking some while before the warming glow of the sun appeared and stayed with us the whole day.

The ferry crossing was uneventful and after formalities at Newhaven we began our journey along the Vanguard Way. Passing the remains of the old River Ouse Tide Mills we walked the coast to Seaford then over the South Downs finishing at Alfriston. Day 5 was a long march through Berwick and Chiddingly to Blackboys. The most difficult part being where the Vanguard Way is designated a Green Lane such that Sports Utility Vehicles had converted the track into a complete quagmire. At the Blackboys Youth Hostel we were refreshed but at breakfast we became aware that our “apnea” party member had been heard by someone down the corridor 2 rooms away. Thursday was the walk north through Buxted, High Hurstwood, Poundgate and up on to the Ashdown Forest finishing at Hartfield. We spent a delightful 30 minutes playing at Pooh Bridge as 2 of the French walkers are great fans of A. A. Milne. Friday, the last day, was a leisurely cross country stroll to Cowden for lunch and onward to a warm welcome from Jill Davison, Chairman of the Edenbridge Town Council, and a reception at Doggets Barn organised by fellow friends within the Edenbridge and District Twinning Association.

As one of those 60 pluses that made the walk I can personally reaffirm the Bon'homie felt between friends that helped each other when every night you went to bed not sure you would be fit for the next day. “ne distancez jamais un ami tombé”, but actually with such pleasant company it was great fun.

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Core walkers: Andre Dehnel, Marie Line Madec-Arrignon, Fabrice Desgrippes, Christine Pierron, Geoff Darrington, Ron Sutton, Peter Stevens, Cad Cust
Guest Walkers: Jenny Chettle, Lois Offord, Chris Minahan, Jean Cust

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