

Claire Matthews – Walking with Friends

I joined the Harlow Walking with Friends Group (set up in 2010 when the Council withdrew funding for Life Walks) about two years ago and was immediately made to feel extremely welcome. I was concerned that I would be like the tortoise in Aesop's fable of the Hare and the Tortoise on my first walk, and later ones, as I might struggle to keep up with the others! I must hasten to say, that at no time was I ever teased about being 'last man'.

Members of the Group come from all walks of life and are so different, each with something quite unique to share. As well as couples there are several single men and women, some retired and some still working. I have taken my two grandchildren on a walk and they thoroughly enjoyed it. The walks take place Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.



The walks are usually about 3 miles and take about an hour, culminating with a coffee where possible.

On Saturdays we walk further, about 6 miles, with meeting points sometimes out of Harlow. Numbers participating can vary from 2 or 3 to as many as 21. Generally folk will enjoy a light lunch or breakfast after the walk.



There are about twelve different walks and we receive a list of them twice a year, which I find very useful. We meet up in good time to set off at 10am.

The walks start from various places in Harlow or nearby, for example the Town Park, Church Langley, Potter Street and Churchgate Street. On Saturdays we sometimes meet at Nazeing, Roydon, Dobbs Weir, Matching Tye or Hooks Marsh in the Lea Valley. On the Lea Valley walk we stop for coffee at the White Water Raft Centre, which is always a most enjoyable addition to the outing.



I have discovered that Harlow abounds with several woods, many grassy areas, streams and rivers and several of the walks take us through nearby fields. From many areas we have the most wonderful views too.

I really enjoy the wildlife; we've seen swans, ducks, coots, moorhens, heron, stoats, deer and much more. We enjoy all the seasons too: low mists lying still over the fields, grasses and ponds encased in frost, and the amusing sight of a frozen canal with ducks and geese skidding along as they hurry about their business! The sound too of the ice cracking like a shot as it warms and dislodges itself from the riverbank.



As well as our more country strolls, the Harlow Town Park is also a delight and well worth a visit.

We have a summer outing, and at Christmas a meal together. This year the outing was to London when we walked the 'Hidden Gardens' trail.

Some of our members occasionally host our coffee stops, which is a really nice social thing to do. We also enjoy sharing and hearing about the other interests and activities our members do, for example: photography, caravanning, gardening, history, music, dancing, keep fit, DIY, holidays, sport and much more.

One can walk quietly or chat a little and as you stop, perhaps to do up a shoelace, or take a photo, you find you are with someone else so that is quite fun.

I absolutely love my Walking with Friends. I always feel uplifted, happy and just so much better within afterwards. The benefits from companionship and our wonderful outdoors are immeasurable. And, I am no longer always the Tortoise now!



If you would like to learn more about Walking with Friends Group or would like to join us, please contact me: claireEmatthews@btinternet.com or go to the website:



<http://jrd.eu5.org/walk.html>

Additional information and photographs made available by fellow Group member, Cleone Chapman.