

THE VANGUARD WAY

66 miles from Croydon to Newhaven

ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 2017

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www.vanguardway.org.uk

The Vanguard Way (VGW) was devised by the Vanguard Rambling Club, launched in 1981, and is managed on behalf of the Club by the Vanguard Way Working Party (VWWP). If you would like further information about any of the items mentioned below, please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk.

1. Overview

2017 was a fairly quiet year on the Vanguard Way, partly due to the working party members having been occupied with family and other matters. Our Route Manager, Graham Butler, has been seriously ill but we hope he will be fully recovered soon. However, a completely revised and updated edition of the South to North route description was published. The VWWP continues to function effectively by means of email and verbal communication rather than meetings.

2. The route

a) Proposed route diversions. Several sections of the VGW follow roads that were comparatively quiet when the route was launched in 1981, but have since become much busier. This makes for unpleasant walking at least, and at worst potentially hazardous, especially where right-hand bends are encountered. The areas that mainly concern us are around Haxted (especially Dwelly Lane and Haxted Road) and Hammerwood (Shepherds Grove Lane). We are also investigating possible diversions to sections of poorly maintained footpaths in the Forest Row and High Hurstwood areas. The VWWP has been considering how these sections can be avoided and intends to approach the relevant highway authorities when rational proposals have been prepared.

b) Littleheath Woods. Badger activity in March resulted in a temporary minor diversion of the VGW route, but the original route has now reopened.

c) Nore Hill Chalk pinnacle. A minor diversion to the route of the public footpath across the field has been made, to avoid the apparent necessity to use climbing gear where the definitive map showed it crossing the deep pit surrounding the pinnacle! The pinnacle itself may not last much longer as it is being steadily eroded by precipitation and weathering. The fingerpost here was in the wrong position anyway.

d) Oxted Western Link. A permissive footpath on National Trust land now takes some of the link off dangerous Chalkpit Lane. We are supporting the North Downs Way trail officer in investigating whether this can be extended.

e) Westerham Link. An unexpected problem occurred in 2016 when it was discovered that part of the link, shared with the Greensand Way, was not a right of way and had no permissive agreement. We understand that this has now been sorted and there will be a permissive bridleway here – thanks to Kent CC and the Squerryes estate for this.

f) Proposed DPD distribution depot at Moorhouse. This could slightly affect the VGW link with the Grasshopper Inn, and increase traffic on the A25, which the VGW crosses, but the original proposal was turned down, re-submitted and turned down again.

g) Haxted Road. The increasing amount of fast traffic on this road, past Haxted Mill, is a cause for concern as there is no pavement and visibility is poor. We asked Surrey County Council if it would be possible to instal traffic calming measures, but they are unable do this at present as it is not justified by police accident records.

h) High Hurstwood. The diversion between Slines and High Hurstwood is still in force. It is a pleasant route and we are considering whether it should be made permanent, or perhaps provide two alternative routes.

j) Berwick Station. We're grateful to VGW walker Philip Hall for getting a fallen tree removed, on the footpath north of the station, by contacting East Sussex County Council's rights of way officer.

k) A27 crossing at Berwick Village. Highways England (HE) conducted a public consultation during the year covering improvements to the existing A27 at various points between Lewes and Polegate. One of these, near Berwick village where the VGW has to cross, would be a shared use cycle/walking path on the south side of the A27 from Drusilla's Roundabout past Berwick village to Alciston, so although there would still be no protected crossing where the VGW crosses into Berwick Village, which obviously we would prefer, there is the option of walking eastwards to the existing cycle/pedestrian lights crossing nearer the roundabout and then walking safely back to the Village Lane using the new shared path. The route description already advises VGW walkers to do this when the road is busy, but it involves a 600-metre diversion and currently requires walking in the roadway on the south side. The VWWP will ask HE to install that section of the new shared path before the rest of the works are carried out.

l) Exceat Bridge. East Sussex County Council has applied for Department of Transport funding to instal a new two-lane bridge with a pedestrian walkway on both sides, to replace the existing bridge, which has just one lane and one walkway, requiring alternate one-way working for vehicles and a double-crossing of the busy road for pedestrians.

m) Seven Sisters Country Park. The future management of the park is currently under discussion, but it appears that this will not affect the VGW route, which follows a public footpath through the section of the park west of the Cuckmere. However, some of it is in a very poor condition and would anyway have to be moved further west when the Cuckmere and Sussex Havens Catchment Flood Management Plan takes effect, expected in about 2021. The VWWP is in discussions about this with the relevant authorities.

n) Seaford Head. The cliffs here regularly suffer erosion and rock falls. In mid-2017, after a serious storm, ropes were installed at the top and on the approaches to keep visitors away from further potential falls. This stretch of coastline will become part of the Shoreham to Eastbourne section of the England Coast Path in 2019 (the VWWP is a stakeholder), with its associated coastal margin, and will then become even more heavily used. The footpaths are now already encroaching on one of the golf fairways.

p) Newhaven Port access road. This is not expected to have much effect on the VGW but the VWWP will maintain a watching brief.

3. Completions and events

a) Thirteen individuals have so far applied for completion certificates for 2017, including three who tackled it as their Duke of Edinburgh Diamond Challenge. It takes some people a while to make a claim (we received nine notifications during 2017 for completions in 2016), so no doubt we'll hear of more over the coming months. And we know that many more walk all or part of the route but don't let us know, including Ramblers' groups and walking clubs, and our website receives thousands of visits each year.

b) In August, Quentin Monein and Mariette Pau, international walkers and bloggers from Normandy, took the ferry from Dieppe to Newhaven then walked the VGW from south to north, with the intention of wild camping and recording interviews with people they met about their views on Brexit. However, as they only had limited time, planning to walk it in five days, and as wild camping proved more difficult than expected, they soon abandoned the Brexit interviews, but may return to do this in 2018. They were supported for much of their journey by VGW route manager Graham Butler. They enjoyed the English pubs and food, and Mariette especially liked the cream teas!

c) Others completing the route included Matt Glen, Head of Quality at St Christopher's Hospice in Sydenham, who enjoyed walking the VGW so much, with his mother and grandfather, that he is constructing a VGW fingerpost in his garden! Some have sent us very detailed reports of their 'crossings' and put photos on Flickr, Geograph and other image-hosting websites.

d) Many completers say how much they enjoyed walking the route and appreciated the detailed route instructions. Occasionally there are criticisms about signage problems and surface conditions in some places. As far as signage is concerned, this applies especially to the Ashdown Forest; the VWWP has from time to time asked the Conservators to let us instal additional waymark posts there, but so far to no avail.

e) The VGW is one of the permanent long-distance routes organised by the **British Walking Federation**, the UK arm of the Internationaler Volkssport Verband (IVV), which translates as International Federation of Popular Sports. This enables its members to walk the route at any time and claim 106 km towards IVV distance awards. For an explanation see www.bwf-ivv.org.uk/about/About%20us.html.

f) Two running events used parts of the VGW, though they have no connection with the Vanguard's Rambling Club:

- The annual **Weald Challenge Trail Races** took place on Sunday 28 May 2017, following parts of the VGW and the Wealdway from Chiddingly. The 21.1 km half marathon event was completed by 248 runners, while 174 completed the 50 km ultra event. We were most grateful to the organisers of the Weald Challenge Trail Races for their kind gesture in donating £100 to help with work on the VGW.

- The Fifth Annual **Vanguard Way Marathon** took place on Sunday 6 August 2017, when a record 150 runners followed the 42.2 km course along the VGW from Lloyd Park to Limpsfield Chart and back.

- The **Croydon Ultra** 50 km race along countryside trails within Croydon borough, including parts of the VGW, is no longer being organised, at least for the time being, due to family illnesses.

4. Website and blog

We regularly receive compliments about the high standard of our website www.vanguardway.org.uk and the quality of the route instructions and other information that can be downloaded there, so if you haven't done so, please take a look.

The blog shows comments and photos we receive from VGW walkers and can be found at <http://vanguardwayblog.blogspot.co.uk>. It's not only for those who walk the VGW – if you have any nice photos taken along the route please email vanguardwayblog@gmail.com.

5. Looking Forward

We intend to carry out more signage maintenance during 2018, using the Vanguard's Rambling Club's own funds.

The Weald Challenge Trail Races, organised by Trail Running Sussex, will take place again on Sunday 10 June 2018; further information from www.trailrunningsussex.co.uk/trailraces.html.

The Sixth Annual Vanguard Way Marathon, organised by 1m2go, will take place on Sunday 5 August 2018; further information from www.1m2go.co.uk/races/vanguard-way-marathon.

Vanguard Way Working Party
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For further information please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk or phone 020 8886 8285 or 07768 453159. Full details of the Vanguard Way can be found at www.vanguardway.org.uk.