

THE VANGUARD WAY

66 miles from Croydon to Newhaven

ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 2018

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www.vanguardway.org.uk

The Vanguard Way (VGW) was devised by the Vanguard Rambling Club and launched in 1981. It is managed by volunteers on behalf of the Club by the Vanguard Way Working Party (VWWP). Further information including free detailed route descriptions are available at vanguardway.org.uk. If you would like more information about any of the items mentioned below, please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk.

1. Overview



Sadly, 2018 was overshadowed by the deteriorating health and death on 23 November of our honorary route manager, Graham Butler, to whom we shall be forever grateful for the 40 years of time and energy he put into the Vanguard Way ever since it was devised in the late 1970s. The route manager role has been taken on by Colin Saunders.

We've been busy during 2018 checking out the route for new north-south editions of the route descriptions and the VGW Companion, to be published in April or May. Sections 3-4 will incorporate a substantial route change in the Haxted-Edenbridge area. We've also provided improved alternative routes for the approaches to Forest Row and Gills Lap, and new links with Warlingham Sainsbury's, Edenbridge, Haxted Mill, Gabriel's Fishery and Seaford Station. Further details are provided below.

2. Ten years of the Vanguard Way online

The Vanguard Way went online ten years ago in 2009, so it seemed appropriate to take a closer look at the responses we've received from those who have completed the trail. Going online resulted in a huge rise in the number of walkers and enquiries. Until 2008, in the 17 years since the route was established in 1981, we had only received comments from 58 walkers who had completed the route, but since 2009 there has been an average of 45 per year, and we believe this is only a minority as most don't bother to get in touch.

We know of 445 walkers who have completed the route: 410 went north-south and 35 south-north, taking an average of 6.5 days (the south-north version was introduced in 2010). Two separate individuals walked both directions in the same year. Most made separate day trips, sometimes over several years, but 91 covered it in consecutive days, staying overnight along the route. As would be expected, most completers hail from south-east England, but others have come from as far afield as Carlisle, Normandy, Italy, Japan and New Zealand.

The fastest recorded crossing is 10 hours 27 minutes, by Jonny Muir, one of a team from the Royal Russell School in Croydon, walking or running the route in one go in 2013 to raise funds for the Motor Neurone Disease Association. Several other groups walked or ran the route for charities, including the Spastics Society, Usher Syndrome and the Mtweni School in South Africa. In 2003 RiverOcean, a charity aiming to educate people about water use, provided a specially carved wooden sign for us after organising a walk along the route by schoolchildren. Many groups from Ramblers and other walking and social clubs (including the Ging Gang Goolie Club in 1996!) put the VGW in their programmes, though not everyone who participates completes the whole route.

The route has often been used as a means of walking from London to France and beyond, using the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry, and included pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Over the course of 2013-2014, a party of 21 primary school children walked the route with their teacher. One person was so taken with the route in 2016 that he has erected a waymark post in his garden carrying a VGW disc.



Certificates were claimed by 249 walkers, and our spectacular badges by 105. In 2015 we provided a special 'golden' certificate to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Vanguards Rambling Club, and this was issued to 38 people. Most completers expressed their admiration for the website, maps and accurate route descriptions, with literally just a handful saying they had problems.

It's very gratifying to know that the voluntary efforts of our small club have been so much appreciated.

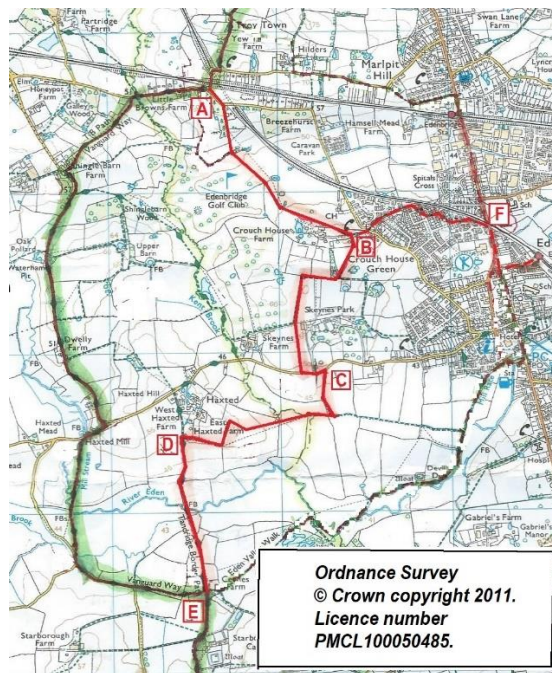
3. The route

1) New link with Warlingham Sainsbury's. As the infrequent bus service to Chelsham Common now only operates Mondays to Fridays, we've provided a 1.2 km link with Warlingham Sainsbury's, which has a frequent daily service into Croydon.

2) The Greenwich Meridian plaque was installed in 2000 by the Vanguards and the Downlands Project on Oxted Downs, where the VGW and North Downs Way run together. Vegetation has been gradually encroaching, but the plaque is now more visible following clearance by a VWWP member.

3) New route in Haxted-Edenbridge area.

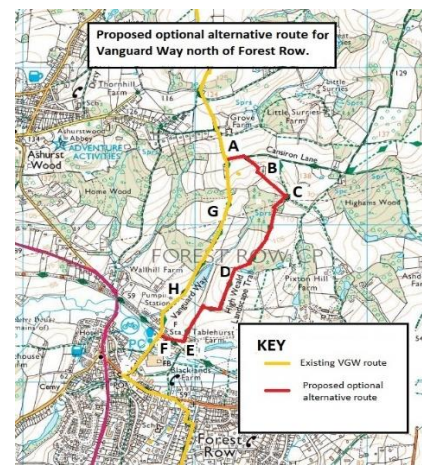
The original route, as devised in the late 1970s and launched in 1981, followed some 4 km of what were then quiet country lanes, but the exponential traffic increase since then means that they are now rather busy and constitute a potential accident hazard, especially at right-hand bends. After consulting with the highways departments of Kent and Surrey County Councils and landowners, we have therefore decided to make a substantial route change here (shown in red on the map), which is slightly longer but almost entirely follows public footpaths to the east of the original route.



Signage will be rearranged accordingly, and we have asked Kent and Surrey CCs to inform the Ordnance Survey of the route change. The new route has the additional advantage of going much closer to Edenbridge and now requires just one shorter link with its two stations instead of two rather long ones. Unfortunately, Haxted Mill, one of the original highlights of the VGW, is no longer passed, so we have provided an 860m link to it for anyone wishing to see the picturesque historic buildings. We have also retained part of the old southern link into Edenbridge to provide a 550m link with Gabriel's Fishery, a very pleasant picnic spot. The diversion will come into effect when the new north-south route descriptions are published in April or May.

4) Crouch House Green. We submitted a response to the Sevenoaks Local Plan Consultation expressing our hope that a proposal for a 'garden village' adjacent to the new route as described above (at point B) would not affect the footpath we intended to use. Subsequently, Sevenoaks District Council have confirmed that the proposal is no longer included in the Proposed Submission Version.

5) Alternative route north of Forest Row. The existing route north of Forest Row follows FP26a, whose condition has been steadily deteriorating since the VGW was launched in 1981. It offers just about every hazard that walkers are likely to encounter, including a very bad rutted surface, exposed roots, overhanging branches, steep and slippery descents on mud and barbed wire fences nearby. We recently learned that funds are to be made available by East Sussex County Council to improve this path, but had already decided to offer an optional alternative route to the east, which is slightly longer but provides one of the finest views



in this area, goes closer to the facilities of Tablehurst Community Farm and passes the delightful and historic Tablehurst Manor.

6) Gills Lap. The original route leading up to Gills Lap via Winnie-the-Pooh's 'Heffalump Trap' has become more overgrown by gorse in recent years as a result of a vegetation restoration policy, and at the request of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest we have diverted the VGW to follow clear tracks past Pooh's 'Enchanted Place', with its monument to A.A. Milne. It's slightly longer, but we think VGW walkers will appreciate not having to crawl through the gorse! It's still possible to visit the Heffalump Trap on a short diversion from Gills Lap.

7) Buxted Footpath 24 (north of High Hurstwood) has been closed for several years following a landslide resulting in the collapse of a bridge over the River Uck and a boardwalk near Chillies Lane. Nothing can be done until the slippage stops, which could take some years. East Sussex County Council kindly waymarked a diversion for the VGW via Quarry Wood and Perryman's Lane, and as this is quite pleasant we've decided to abandon the original route and transfer the route permanently to the alternative.

8) Scantlings Farm (between Buxted and Blackboys). We have been critical of this farmyard full of metal junk, but recently learned that it's the home of Best Ironwork Ltd., which specialises in bespoke metalwork. They have also put up two hand-carved wooden signs especially for the Vanguard Way – all is forgiven!



8) Stalkers Lane. We have long been trying to find a name for the substantial settlement that has developed along Stalkers Lane, near Chiddingly, and were told variously by local residents that it was part of Graywood, or Chiddingly, or just Stalkers Lane. We have now been able to ascertain with the Clerk to Chiddingly Parish Council that, as far as they're concerned, it is indeed called Stalkers Lane! So we are trying to get this added to OS mapping.

9) A22 Holmes Hill. The VGW reaches the A22 at a point near Golden Cross where crossing is hazardous at a blind bend. This was pointed out to East Sussex County Council, who have agreed to cut back an adjoining hedge as much as possible to provide better visibility.

10) Link with Seaford Station. The link with Seaford Station (where the VGW originally terminated before its extension to Newhaven in 1997) has been changed to follow a more interesting route through the town centre, passing several pubs, cafés and listed buildings, rather than the bland Dane Road.

11) Miscellaneous faults. The following faults on the VGW were reported to the relevant highway authorities:

- Misaligned sign on Fairfield Path (Croydon).

- Impenetrable crop on link with Grasshopper Inn (Surrey).
- Broken stile on FP SR 398 east of Guildables Wood (Kent).
- Broken fingerpost beside Berwick Church (East Sussex).

At present we are unable to confirm whether any of these have been rectified.

4. Completions and events

a) We encourage VGW walkers to apply for certificates and badges, though it's likely that only a minority follows this up. We have so far heard of 30 who did so during 2018, though some wait months or even years before telling us!

c) The VGW is one of the long-distance routes suggested 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 and click on 'The Award Scheme'.

d) We know of three running events that used parts of the VGW in 2018, though they have no connection with the Vanguards Rambling Club.

- The annual **Weald Challenge Races** organised by Trail Running Sussex took place on Sunday 10 June, following parts of the VGW and Wealdway from Chiddingly. The 21.1 km half-marathon event was completed by 244 runners, while 202 completed the 50 km ultra event.

- The Fifth Annual **Vanguard Way Marathon** organised by 1m2go took place on Sunday 5 August, when 120 followed the 42.2 km course along the VGW from Lloyd Park to Limpsfield Chart and back.

- The **London 2 Brighton Trail Marathon**, organised by Sussex Trail Events, which took place on Sunday 2 September, starting at Blackheath, used a substantial chunk of the VGW between Limpsfield Chart and Dry Hill. Their 'L2B' stickers have been liberally applied to posts etc along the route. This event should not be confused with the London 2 Brighton Challenge, which uses a completely different route starting from Richmond.

5. Website

The Vanguard Way website had 3922 new visitors in the period 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2018, an increase of 5.9% over the previous 12 months. Unsurprisingly, the number of visitors peaks in July and August, and is at its lowest in December and January. The great majority of visitors to the website continue to use desktop computers (though this declined slightly), mobile phone users were next (increasing significantly over the previous year), and tablets are the least used and declining. Visitors to the website are mainly from the UK, with other significant numbers from France and the USA. The website continues to receive high praise from users who download free route descriptions and maps.

6. Publicity

The Vanguard Way was strongly recommended in 'The Great Walks of Sussex', a new book by David Bathurst, published by Summersdale. David is the author of several walking guides, who has walked all the National Trails of Great Britain. And the website My London recommended the route as one of the best walks in London, while pointing out that it can be followed all the way to Newhaven.

7. Looking forward

- We are considering setting up a Vanguard Way Association, open to wider membership, and if we decide to go ahead more information will be circulated later this year.
 - The Weald Challenge Races are due to take place on Sunday 9 June, the Sixth Annual Vanguard Way Marathon on Sunday 4 August, and the London 2 Brighton Trail Marathon on Sunday 1 September.
 - We were approached by a person wishing to organise a London to Paris running event in 2019 via the Vanguard Way and the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry and offered some advice, but have heard nothing further.
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For further information please email colin@vanguardway.org.uk or phone 020 8886 8285 or 07768 453159. Full details about the Vanguard Way can be found at vanguardway.org.uk.

Vanguard Way Working Party
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