

East Herts Chain Walk: mission completed

In early autumn 2011 Brenda Barrett completed one of the less well known long distance routes in our county.

Back in the spring I determined that my dog, Fluff, and I would walk all 15 sections of the Hertfordshire Chain Walk before winter caused much of it to be rendered virtually impassable due to mud. On Sunday 25 September we successfully completed Walk 12, which in our case was the final section, having done the more northerly sections on occasions when travelling that way to visit a friend.

I am not very good at map reading, so, although I checked the routes on the OS before setting out, and did take the OS map with me, in case of emergencies, I relied when walking on the instructions and sketches in the second edition of the book published by East Herts Footpath Society in 1994. It is a pity that there is no later edition and the second edition is now out of print. I think I must have purchased my copy (priced £4) in about 1994 and I had done some of the sections over the intervening years.

It was not only my personal inadequacy that caused me to rely on the printed instructions. Part of the exercise was to discover how easy it was, after nearly 20 years, to use these instructions to follow the route. A couple of sections I did a second time because I knew that I had not followed the route meticulously first time round. On Walk 6 I was fooled because Westend Farm no longer exists (though it is still on the OS map) and on Walk 13 a farmer had planted over the footpath and as I did not have confidence to stride across the field I tried to walk round the edge.

For the other sections it was possible to follow the instructions, though in some places I had to track back to pick up from where I knew I had gone wrong. This was often because I was not sure whether hedges still existed. Thus on Walk 10 I was misled because I was expecting there to have been a hedge ahead and continued forward when I was intended to go through the hedge on my right. On Walk 12 I had problems detouring round a field that has been partitioned off by stables and we (dog on very short lead) were harassed by some very frisky horses.

For the rest I particularly noted the number of ponds that had dried up, the ditches likewise; and the hedges that had been removed or had grown so tall that it was difficult to determine where the hedge ended and the tree line began. Also I found absolutely no mud. On 25 September we had to cross a number of recently ploughed fields, which were rock hard (here the instructions were important as the line of the path was not visible).

From time to time I looked at the blogs on the internet where more heroic walkers than I had undertaken the route, doing several sections at a time in the depths of winter, but I have a strong suspicion they did not rely on the printed instructions and may well have deviated from the traditional route, which, of course is not way marked. However I am grateful to the blogger who informed me that Westend Farm had been demolished.



Fluff the collie was Brenda's companion from start to finish.