

MOURNE RAMBLING GROUP NEWSLETTER

July 2025



In this issue we report newly on:

- New Members since our last Newsletter
- Fires in the Mournes
- Walking in the last few months
- Wainwright's coast to coast walk by Peter McGowan
- reissue the call for more leaders by Peter and
- remind you of training opportunities run by Ian

NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER UP TO AND INCLUDING 28 JULY 2025

Connie Connolly, Monica & Leonard Cunningham, Christopher Day, Hazel Devine, Lorraine & Michael Gilmour, Christine Grant, Lisa Jeffers, Anne Maguire, Monica McStravick, Shona McStravick, Daniel O'Rourke, Nancy Papafio, Mike Reid, Lucy Topping.

We welcome these 16 new members to the Mourne Rambling Group and wish them many years of enjoyable rambling.

I trust we have not left anyone out. Membership now stands at 168.

A call from the Mourne Heritage Trust

The Eastern Mournes Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has suffered devastating damage following two major wildfires and several smaller outbreaks. Nearly 8 square kilometres of this protected landscape have been scorched, with even more affected beyond the SAC boundaries.

The fires have left a trail of destruction in their wake. Wildlife has been decimated—ground-nesting birds, their eggs and chicks, perished in the flames. Insects and invertebrates were wiped out, while mammals, butterflies, moths, and reptiles now face a barren landscape with no food, water, or shelter. The once-rich vegetation, essential for both wildlife and grazing animals, has been reduced to dry, nutrient-poor grasses.

This ecological loss is compounded by long-term environmental impacts. Burnt ground alters water flow, degrades raw water quality, and speeds up soil erosion. Vital peat soils, which store carbon and help regulate climate, have been severely compromised—releasing carbon instead of capturing it. The smoke alone contributes further to climate change.

All wildfire in this landscape is caused by human activity—whether accidental or deliberate. It's clear that the need for awareness and protection has never been more urgent!



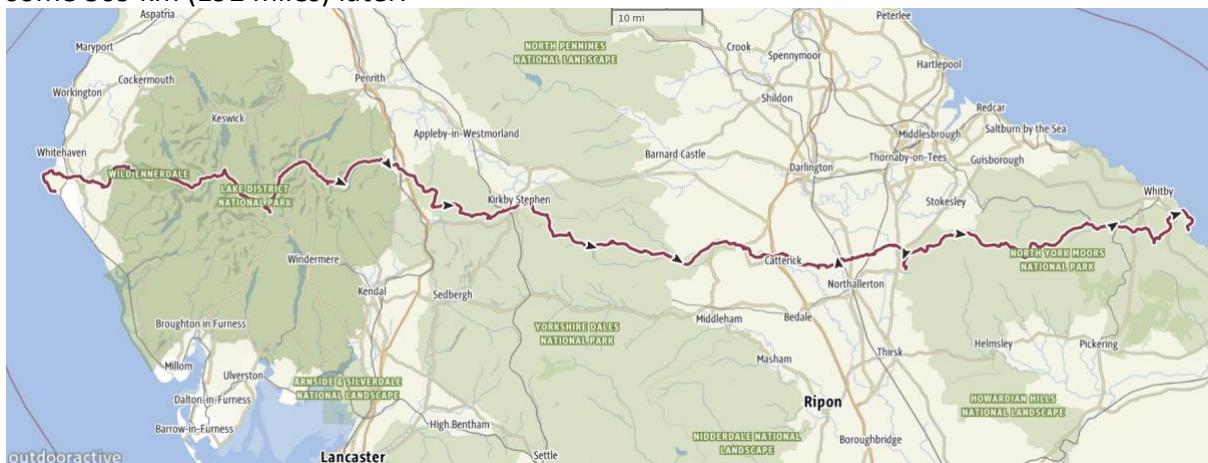
Walking statistics in the last few months

The last few months have again shown a new experience for the club i.e. that we had to call off all walks on 13 April because of the fires in the Mourne. The Trust and the fire service asked for everyone to give them the space to finish off dealing with the fires which had devastated a greater surface area than ever after the very dry spring. The media describe these as “wild fires” but according to the insiders they are not “wild” but “accidental” or “deliberate”.

We have maintained the sort of normal statistic that on average just over 34 walkers come out every Sunday. This time it ranged from 14 to 55. We tend to set record participation in the spring with a dip in the summer. Last year the top number was 52. Why we had only 14 on 25 May will remain a mystery. From the photos we got the weather looked fine

WAINWRIGHT'S COAST TO COAST WALK

This walk starts on the west coast of England (St Bees) and takes in three national parks (Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors) before finishing on the east coast of England (Robin Hood's Bay), some 309 km (192 miles) later.



THE LOGISTICS

On Friday 13th June 2025 (an auspicious day!), Ian Stuart, Noel Rice and I headed off from the George Best Belfast City Airport to hike this trail for 14 days (from Saturday 14th June to Friday 27th June). Given the popularity of this trail, we had to go off track to get suitable accommodation, so the walk took a total of 327.7 km:

Day	Date	Accommodation	Dist	Ascent	Descent	Time
			km	m	m	Hours
0	13/06/2025	The Manor, St Bees				
1	14/06/2025	Ghyll Farm B&B, Frizington (near Ennerdale Bridge)	26.3	633	531	7.0
2	15/06/2025	Glaramara, Seatoller (near Borrowdale)	23.3	709	755	7.5
3	16/06/2025	The Inn at Grasmere	17.0	621	721	6.5
4	17/06/2025	Fairlight Guesthouse & Café, Glenridding	15.2	531	490	6.0
5	18/06/2025	King's Arms Hotel, Shap	26.8	917	835	10.0
6	19/06/2025	Westmorland Hotel, Tebay (near Orton)	12.5	150	247	4.0
7	20/06/2025	Bollam Cottage, Kirkby Stephen	24.6	318	393	7.5
8	21/06/2025	Frith Lodge, Keld	20.0	763	547	6.5
9	22/06/2025	Black Bull, Reeth	21.6	268	510	7.0
10	23/06/2025	66 Frenchgate, Richmond	17.8	380	455	5.5
11	24/06/2025	The Golden Lion, Osmotherley	40.0	385	320	10.0
12	25/06/2025	The Lion Inn, Blakey	33.5	1,036	838	10.0
13	26/06/2025	The Witching Post Inn, Egton Bridge	20.9	239	440	6.0
14	27/06/2025	The Villa, Robin Hoods Bay	28.2	560	723	7.5
			327.7	7,510	7,805	101.0

It is possible to arrange accommodation along the trail yourself but recognising that this could turn out to be a nightmare, we paid for a holiday company to arrange this for us, and also to transport our luggage from place to place. This took away the headache of the logistics and meant that we were confident that we would have good accommodation each night. However, it also meant that we had to move on to the next location each day – “follow that luggage”!



A TYPICAL DAY

We aimed to be down for breakfast around 8 o'clock most mornings, bringing our luggage with us so that it could be collected from 8.30 onwards.

We walked on average 21 kilometres (13 miles) each day, but there were two days when the distances were 40 km and 34 km. We were generally walking for 7 hours each day, although there were three days when we were out for ten hours. Our speed averaged 3.8 kilometres per hour for the trip.

We walked over mixed terrain, mostly off-road except when traversing the Vale of Mowbray (Day 11). We had been warned that the crossing of the Pennines (Day 8) would probably be a mud-bath, but a flagstone path is in the process of being laid, with the worst parts already covered, so this ended up being a very pleasant walk.

Lunch varied depending on the facilities available at the start of the day. (We seldom passed any shops en route.) We were given a magnificent packed lunch by Ghyll Farm: sandwich, cake, tray-bake, crisps and

juice, but normally we just took sandwiches, fruit and tray-bakes. Notable snacks included a Fig and Date Crumble tray bake and a Yorkshire Curd and Currant cake.

We tended to arrive at our destination between 4 and 5 o'clock, had a sample of the local ale to celebrate then checked into our rooms. During our 14 days walking (plus staying in St Bees overnight), we tasted sixteen locally produced ales. (It was dirty work, but someone had to do it.)

Dinner was mostly pub grub (and delicious with it), but we did go to a nice French restaurant in Richmond.

HIGHLIGHTS AND LOW POINTS

We left St Bees during a thunderstorm and this stayed with us for about two hours. The rain was then pretty constant for the rest of the day, and most of the following day. We figured that this was to test our resilience, but we were rewarded with being able to have lunch inside the YHA's most remote youth hostel: YHA Black Sail in the middle of nowhere (actually, the head of Ennerdale Valley) – see pictures below. During our lunch break, we met some of the other Coast to Coasters including a couple from New Zealand and another couple from the Netherlands. We were to meet them continuously during our journey.



Robert Marshall and Kingsley Thompson were camping at Borrowdale, and we met them for dinner at the Glaramara Hotel in Seatoller on Day 2. It was good to see some friendly faces after our baptism of ~~fire~~ water.

This meeting of fellow Mourne Ramblers brought an immediate change to the weather, and we had a beautiful Day 3 when we were walking through the Lake District. When going up Stonethwaite Beck, we had a great view of a Hawk jet flying up the valley. It was very impressive. We heard other jets later that day and on the following day, but they were in other valleys, so we didn't even catch a glimpse of them. The turning point in the trip was arriving at Kirkby Stephen. This is a small market town in Cumbria, but it has the distinction of being the first town we came to that had a laundrette (and a pharmacy). It was half-way through the trip and was a good time to sort out clean clothes for the rest of the trip. The laundrette was something of a social centre and we met with other coast to coasters and chatted whilst the laundry was being done.

One of the low points for me personally, was that my left ankle started to get sore after the first few days walking. Noel loaned me an ankle support that helped greatly, as did the Voltarol gel that I got in a pharmacy in Kirkby Stephen, but this just meant that I was able to continue with an acceptable level of pain, rather than being pain-free. As a result of this, I decided to pull out of the 40 km flat walk across the Plain of Mowbray on Day 11, so that I would be fit enough to hike the 33.5 km and 1,000 m ascent from Osmotherley to Blakey Ridge on Day 12. Instead, I took a couple of buses to my brother's house just outside Osmotherley and spent the afternoon with his family before meeting up with the others when they were passing in the late afternoon.

The meal I enjoyed most was in Frith Lodge outside Keld. This is an isolated farmhouse with room for up to ten guests. Given its location, the owners offer evening meals and have a licensed bar, with a local ale, Black Sheep, on tap. The evening meal is a communal one, and we were lucky to have good fellow-guests. It was a hard slog getting to Frith Lodge and it was good to be able to relax in convivial company.



On our final day, we were wondering where to have lunch when we came upon an “Honesty Shop” (pictured above), which was a caravan with provisions (and a fridge to chill the milk and soft drinks) and a few seats outside. The Dutch couple we had been meeting throughout our walk thought it was magnificent, and we met a Grandad/Granddaughter who had also stopped for a break before the final assault on Robin Hoods Bay.

The final high point and low point occurred on the last day. Robin Hoods Bay is a seaside village six miles south of Whitby. When walking the Coast-to-Coast route, it remains out of sight until you’re nearly upon it, so the first sighting of the end of your journey is very memorable. However, it ends with a sting in the tail, because you have to walk down quite a steep hill to get to the sea – and then walk back up again to get to your accommodation!



SUMMARY

Wainwright’s Coast-to-Coast Walk is a challenging walk, but the people you meet, the varied countryside (and the beer) make it very worthwhile.

A call from the Peter McGowan for new walk leaders

Our club continues to grow year on year in terms of membership and to date we have endeavoured to provide a full programme of walks every Sunday. However, it has not been possible to guarantee a weekly walk for all grades from A to D due to a lack of leaders. In some cases, the programme is dependent on a small handful of leaders being willing to step forward time after time to lead the scheduled hikes.

We understand that not all members can make the commitment to become walk leaders. However, there are others who have the ability and experience to lead walks, and we would appeal to them to step forward and help us to deliver successful programmes for years to come.

Training and support will be provided, and existing leaders are happy to mentor and guide potential new recruits in the leadership role. There is an established support network among current leaders, and we regularly share ideas, thoughts and advice between leaders.

In addition, many group leaders would be happy to let you 'shadow' them during a walk to give you a sense of what it's like to lead: what decisions they have to make, how to gauge the fitness level of the group, keeping up group morale, and changing the route due to considerations of the weather or the make-up of the group. You'll learn quickly you're never on your own!

To find out more about what's involved, we would ask anyone who may be interested in becoming a walk leader to contact the appropriate committee representative for their grade for an informal chat:

A/B Group - Robert Campbell - RobertPCampbell@hotmail.com

C Group – Peter McGowan – ptmcgowan@binternet.com

D Group - Fionnuala Carragher - f.carragher21@gmail.com

Training news from Ian Stuart

Navigation Training

Last year we ran 2 Basic Navigation Courses, one in August and a second in September, these were well attended with 9 members on each. Several people had to drop out due to conflicting commitments; with them alone we could nearly run another Basic course. We will be seeking to schedule a course later this year so email me to express your interest in attending on either a Saturday or a Sunday.

A slightly higher priority is arranging a couple of Refresher Days specifically for those who attended the Basic courses, but equally open to any Club member who wishes to use a structured opportunity to practice what they have previously learned but may have not used sufficiently frequently. I will be seeking to identify suitable dates and will email the Club soon with more information. It is likely that these will be in October or November since we would prefer days with low visibility to provide a challenge and make the exercise meaningful. In the meantime, please let me know if you are interested in coming along. It would run from about 9am to around 4pm in the Mourne Mountains. You can get me at:

cjianstuart@icloud.com.

Last year we also flagged our intention to run a workshop for new and existing leaders. Our objective is now to run the workshop on a Saturday, probably in September or October. I am trying to identify possible dates, allowing for other commitments. The workshop will focus on route planning and people management skills rather than navigation or First Aid. If you would be interested in attending the workshop, then email me at the above address.

