



The Poly Rambler

Members' Newsletter of the Polytechnic Rambling Club

www.polyramblers.org.uk

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Chair's message

Our AGM held on the 23rd March turned out to be the last opportunity for some time for us to meet, chat and catch up with other Polyramblers who we had not seen for a while. Martin Gill marked a special birthday by making a generous donation to assist towards funding the room and catering for the meeting. The presentation for Rambler of the Year award was made jointly to Gillian Swan and Pam Beach.

Material for this edition collated by the committee.
Production by Kim Chowns

The Treasurer noted that the club's finances were in a healthy state helped by a generous donation from long standing club member Shirley Hafey who has in the past led a number of walks, excursions and a trip away to Jersey where she now resides.

Following the official lockdown, continued communication was ensured through the introduction of a WhatsApp group. Polyramblers have been able to share their lockdown experiences and amusing video clips to lighten up what can be a rather dull day. Weekly Zoom meetups have been very successful, and also included two quiz evenings organised by Gillian and Stuart. We had a successful committee meeting on Zoom, but we needed to remind ourselves, myself in particular, not to jump in when others were speaking!

The impact of the lockdown has inevitably resulted in a temporary stop to our walks programme. We are hoping that this will resume in the next few months. Pam has some volunteers ready with walks, as soon as we are able to restart. We may start with shorter walks than usual as our fitness levels might have decreased slightly! We have now cancelled our trip to Alsace Lorraine. Many thanks to Dominique and Danny for sorting this out. We are very hopeful that the trip will be reconvened for next year's Spring Bank Holiday.

Sadly we have also had to cancel the Peddars Way trip planned for June, but are hoping that the trip to Newcastle (Northern Ireland) is still a possibility. Plans for a trip to Leek in Staffordshire on the weekend of the 9th of October are underway.

We have continued to review our health and safety guidance led by Geoffrey, Susan and Jennifer; our new guidance should be completed in time for our Autumn programme.

I look forward to seeing many of you on walks soon!

Take Care

Hilary

The Polytechnic Rambling Club

(in association with the
University of Westminster)
Founded 1885

Affiliated to the Ramblers'
Association (Inner London Area)
Affiliated to HF Holidays

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Honorary members

Christine Bignold
Peter Bonfield
Shirley Hafey
Rosemary MacLoughlin

GENERAL COMMITTEE

CLUB OFFICERS

Chair

Hilary Abbey

General Secretary

Gillian Swan

Treasurer

Daniel Duffy

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Pam Beach
Kim Chowns
Mike Coyle
Susan James
Dominique Le Marchand
Jennifer MacKenzie
Geoffrey Waters

CONTACT FOR

CORRESPONDENCE*

Kim Chowns

k.chowns@yahoo.co.uk

Club's Facebook page:

<http://tinyurl.com/qclyyfq>

* Articles for inclusion in the newsletter are welcome from all members. They should be walk related, but do not necessarily have to be about a club walk, e.g. walking holiday or past memories of events and walks.

WhatsApp and Zoom

For many of us, especially those who like me live alone, this can be a lonely time. As we cannot walk at the moment many of us are keeping in touch virtually. The WhatsApp group started on 19 March and boasts 24 members. We greet each other in the morning sending positive vibes and post funny photos and videos. The cat owners photograph their beloved pets in numerous delightful poses, the gardeners show off the exquisite results of their efforts and the bakers exhibit their delicious looking cakes. We share photos of our daily walks and each week Gillian posts some of 'where we were this time last year'. Various anecdotes of past and present are shared. We also marked Solvig's cremation together, some of us exchanging experiences trying to make the famous Swedish cinnamon buns. I have to confess that mine tasted fine but were as hard as rock; I blame the dried yeast! Each month a member is invited to choose the group icon. If you wish to be added to the group, please message Susan on 07763 131145.



On March 28 we held our first social evening on Zoom. Over the last eight weeks 45 members have taken part, including Moira and Ann from Canada. Most of us bring a glass of something alcoholic, we don't want to break with

tradition! As we sip and nibble our snacks we chat about our current experiences, enquire after each other's health and family and look forward to when we can walk again. For our seventh meeting we held a quiz. 24 members took part divided into 6 teams. There was something for everybody, the topics being Castles, Word links, Art and Artists, Cryptic cities, English counties and the 1970s. The Quintins, Maggie C., Joyanna, Ruth and Danny, claimed first place with an impressive 63/75 points. Well done to them! Good fun was had by all, Gillian and I heaved a sigh of relief that it worked and we look forward to more of the same. The evening when the Eurovision Song Contest should have been televised we had a singalong to a couple of old favourites. You should be receiving an invitation to this meeting each week, if not, please contact Gillian.

I personally would like to say a big thank you to everybody for their friendship and company which makes this club so special.

Susan James

Snow-walking weekend in Scharnitz, Austria Friday 17 to Monday 20 January 2020

So much has happened since that weekend that it seems to have taken place a lifetime ago! This year, we were a small and bijou group with only 6 participants. We flew to Innsbruck and took a short bus journey to the train station where, after some dithering about lunch in Innsbruck or Scharnitz, we decided to take the train and make our way to Scharnitz. This train journey is very scenic but, where was the snow? Once in Scharnitz, we checked in our B&B, Gastehaus Frankenhof and then had lunch in Gasthof Risserhof, where we received a warm welcome from the owner. She told us snow was expected during the night. We did a short walk around Scharnitz and went back to the B&B for a rest. 7.00pm was time for a pre-dinner drink in Dominique and Sunita's flat before dinner in Gasthof Risserhof.



The owner of the Gasthof Risserhof was right; it had snowed during the night and the scenery was transformed when we woke up on the Saturday. After breakfast, we took the bus (free with the guest card) to Seefeld. We followed part of the Way of the Cross to the 14th station before starting our walk to Mosern. There was a cross-country skiing race taking place on the piste along the path and we could see the skiers zooming along. It seemed like hard work. It was part of the Winter World Master Games (winter sports festival for over 30s). We made a small detour to Mosern lake which was frozen solid and went in search

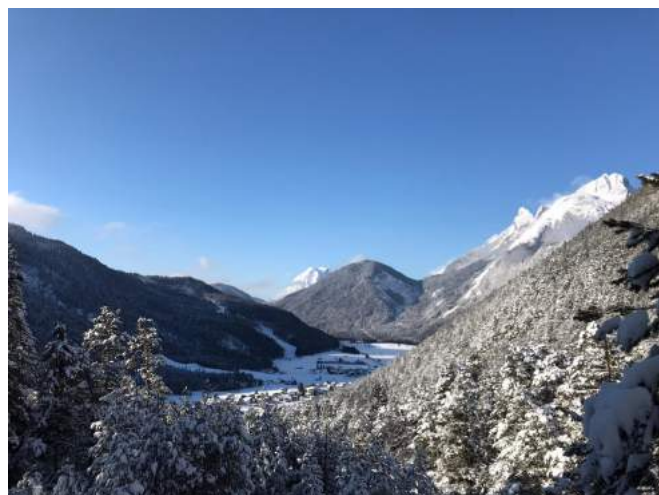
of a place to have lunch. We were advised to go to Dorfkrug where we had a very nice light lunch. Danny was determined to do a free trip on the chairlift in Leutasch (courtesy of the guest card) so he left us to take the bus. Five of us continued our walk along the high-altitude trail back to Seefeld. We walked an extra half-hour because the leader did not read the instructions properly - but we saw the Wildmoosalm and more cross-country skiers. We arrived back in Seefeld at the same time as Danny and dived into a coffee and cake shop that the leader had seen earlier. We went back to Scharnitz by train and to our B&B for a rest. Pre-dinner drinks in our flat before going to the Alte Muhle for a pizza. Danny had a currywurst pizza. No comment!



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Snow-walking weekend in Scharnitz, Austria Friday 17 to Monday 20 January 2020 (continued)

On Sunday, it was snowing when we woke up and, after breakfast, we left our B&B and made our way to the river Isar, which we followed for a short while and went up to the Porta Claudia and down again. We followed a lovely track through a pine forest for a few kilometres. As we walked, the snow stopped and the sun came out. When we arrived near Mittenwald, Danny and Sunita continued to the town along the flat path while the rest of us decided to be more adventurous. We followed a very steep uphill path which had not been cleared and, after a while, we arrived at a bar/restaurant with a beautiful view and tables in the sunshine. We could not resist and had a drink before continuing along a narrow path to the Geister Gorge. The scenery was spectacular with the gorge covered in snow, the river at the bottom and the metal bridge and walkways. We went back down to the valley along a narrow zigzagging path and made our way to Mittenwald in the middle of a snow shower. We met Sunita and Danny in the brewery where they had been waiting for us. We stopped there for lunch and Danny left us to do a (free) trip on the local bus. We went into the centre of Mittenwald - where we had stayed on a previous snow-walking trip - to see the beautifully painted houses and shops. Then we walked in the wrong direction and it took us a while to get out of town. By that time, it was quite late so we decided to follow a path by the river which would be shorter. However, it had not been cleared and walking in the deep snow was quite exhausting. We finally arrived back in Scharnitz in the dark in a snow shower. After a rest, we had the usual gathering for a pre-dinner drink which consisted of Prosecco and then hazelnut schnapps. Dinner was in Gasthof Risserhof served by our waitress, Katia, who was quite entertaining.



On our last day, we woke up with a beautiful blue sky and, after packing and breakfast, we went for a last walk in the snow. We followed the river Isar for a while and crossed it to go uphill on a forest track walking over tyre tracks to make our walking easier. After a while we had to turn left and follow footprints - which was a bit more difficult in deep snow - and reached the small Birzelkapelle, the aim of our walk. We had gone up and had to go down - which was a bit tricky on a steep path covered in snow. We all managed it, some on their backside. We reached the river Isar again and went to Gasthof Risserhof where Danny was welcomed like a long-lost friend by our friendly waitress Katia. While we were eating, a group of 20 English walkers came in. We learnt that they come to Seefeld for a week's holiday every year. Too soon, it was time to pick up our luggage from our very nice B&B and make our way to Munich airport with a short stop in Mittenwald for a drink. Another successful January weekend. Next year, the plan is to go to Ruhpolding but, who knows.....

Dominique

Autumn weekend to Leek Staffordshire Friday 9th October to Monday 12th October

Leek is an historic market town in the vicinity of the Peak National Park about ten miles south of Stoke on Trent. It is an area of moorland a reservoir a canal and country parks.

We will be staying by Rudyard Lakes and accommodation will be self- contained lodges and additional accommodation at Rudyard hotel situated nearby, as there is limited availability of lodges.

Although I would expect hotels, restaurants and pubs to be open by the beginning of October, it would be difficult to know the impact of any continued social distancing and other possible regulations in place as a result of Covid 19. There may be a need for single room reservation instead of shared rooms with implications for cost.

Please confirm if you wish to attend with an email to habbey@btinternet.com by the first week in July. You will also need to make a deposit of £50 by bank transfer to the club's bank account (number 29935940 / sort code 05-02-00) or send a cheque, made out to the Polytechnic Rambling Club, to Danny Duffy at 28 Dunraven Road, London W12 7QZ.

Hilary

Solvig Starborg – an appreciation



Solvig was my good friend for 45 years. Thinking about her now, I would say that the main motivating force in her life was to help people. That does sound trite but it's true.

Her cremation was, for various reasons, brief and no one had expected to say anything, so when we were asked if anyone would like to speak, it was off the cuff, the first thing that came to mind about her.

What everyone remembered first was her stepping in to help in a difficult time, her dealing with a problem that seemed too much, her going out of her way to visit a friend in hospital and speaking to the doctor, very nicely but firmly, about something that hadn't been done properly.

That opened my memory to the many, many times that, as a Health Visitor, she had stood up for people and put in far more time and energy into helping clients than would have been considered necessary.

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Solvig Starborg – an appreciation (continued)

Solvig was born in 1945 in rural southern Sweden, close to Wallander country! I remember her descriptions of life in that small community; as a small child going to village dances on the back of her father's bike and all the children falling asleep in a pile when it got late and the adults were still dancing. She used to torment the very good-natured cat by making costumes for it and pushing it around in her old pram. She also loved the Potato Harvest holiday when children really did help with picking the potatoes - now it's just time off school. I had the impression of a peaceful, happy childhood with parents who, although very different in temperament, were comfortable with their lives.



She went to Grammar school by bike, all year round, which included the Swedish winters, and after that she always refused to get on one. Actually, one summer when I stayed with her in her cabins, she and I did once go to the nearest village on her father's old bikes. They were very old, very high, not adjustable and had no brakes. You had to train yourself to pedal backwards to stop which was all right except going downhill and meeting a main road on a sharp bend. We managed but Solvig was incensed when a neighbour, peacefully hosing his vegetable patch, lost control of the hose which spun like a snake and soaked her as we cycled past. At Grammar school one of the boys was a bully. She said that one day, seeing him tormenting a smaller child, she found herself flying at him, pinning him to the ground, punching him and telling him that he was never, ever, to do that again. The teachers were so surprised at this calm, well-behaved child administering justice in such a way that she wasn't punished for fighting and earned respect from other potential bullies. She had a strong sense of justice even then!

After A levels Solvig went to Israel to work in a kibbutz where there were people from many places and of many faiths, Jews and Muslims working side by side. She said that that experience taught her a lot about co-operation, humour, resilience and how strongly motivated people can be to act for good. In 1966 she went to Lund to study nursing and then to Stockholm to qualify in Acute Nursing which was her speciality. She decided to go to India and use her nursing skills there - I can remember so many stories about that and the journey there, far too many to fit in here. She and a friend went by train to Moscow, grey and forbidding in those days, then on a flight to Kabul, which she loved. She described how beautiful and hospitable the people were, how wonderful the colours and materials and how gorgeous the markets were, filled with bright vegetables and spices. Then a flight on Afghan Airlines- cats in baskets loudly expressing their displeasure, and people spreading out lunches on their laps - to Delhi.

I think her time in India was the most important in her life. I won't write much about it here because I have included a link to an article* she wrote about her time there which is, obviously, much more interesting and revealing.

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Solvig Starborg – an appreciation (continued)

I do remember a couple of stories she told which are worth telling. One night she was sleeping on the roof of her house in the colony where she worked and was awoken to an alarming noise. A pack of feral dogs was running around and they jumped up and ran right over Solvig on the roof, snatching the saris that had been left to dry, dragging them off and ripping them up. Another story she liked was how, while walking back from the town, a group of rough-looking men came and surrounded her. Foreigners were targeted and she knew she was vulnerable but some local women, seeing the situation, came out and chased the men off. She was highly amused at being invited to the Swedish embassy for their mid-summer celebration - a very important cultural event in Sweden. In the sweltering heat of Delhi, there was the traditional bonfire around which Swedes dance, drink strong schnapps and sing traditional songs. She said that the Indian staff and onlookers found it extremely amusing to see them all sweating and trying to dance. I wish I could have been there. The rest of Solvig's Indian story you can read in her own words.

Returning to the materialism and affluence of Sweden was hard. She wanted to travel again and came to London to study at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases where she passed the exam with distinction, something she never mentioned. In 1975 she went to the Ogaden in Eastern Ethiopia with Oxfam. She ran a baby clinic and visited tiny villages where people suffered what, to us, seemed unimaginable deprivation. She described often trying desperately to save babies that were brought to them by mothers who had walked for days and were themselves suffering severe malnutrition. She had a deep respect for Somali and Ethiopian women, who she said were amazingly clever and resilient.

After returning to London Solvig decided to become a Health Visitor as that seemed to be a continuation of the work that she loved. I met her in 1975 in a shared house in Clapham. We fell into an easy friendship and were amused by our differences! She had many friends from India and I remember how often Indians would appear in the kitchen. Solvig and they would produce meals out of whatever was around. For her Health Visitor training she had to spend 2 weeks in a clinic somewhere different from where she was studying so I suggested she stay with my mother in Wiltshire. Solvig is the only person with whom that would have worked but it did. They had similar tastes in art, textile, food and sherry, although my mother sipped the driest of dry while Solvig knocked back the Bristol Cream. It is a tribute to Solvig that my mother, although now a hundred and forgetful, still remembers that time with pleasure.

Solvig worked for Wandsworth Health Authority for many years with varying degrees of satisfaction and frustration. What kept her going I think was her art. She was always making things; she did a City & Guilds diploma in Embroidery and had her quilts exhibited in the Birmingham Festival of Quilting for many years. She made housing for clocks, prints, paintings, embroideries, more beautiful things than I have names for, and a friend is hoping to be able to put her work in a book.

One of my happiest memories of Solvig is of her sitting with a glass of wine in hand, on the veranda of her Swedish cabin. It was still light, being midsummer, and totally peaceful. She was watching a hedgehog Hoover crumbs from under the bird table and then trot off along the line of the hedge. I remember the smell of wild honeysuckle and the night air with the sea just audible in the distance and I remember my good friend.

Harriet Longman

* <https://archives.sci.ngo/volunteers/starborg-solvig.html> (Ctrl and click)

Ian Gordon

We were saddened to hear of the death of longstanding Club member, Ian Gordon, last May. Ian joined the Club in the mid 1990s. He will be remembered for his eccentric dress code on walks - waterproofs, ruck sacks and walking boots were not for him. Instead he typically sported a Harris tweed jacket with matching breeches and smart shoes, carrying his lunch in a Harrods (or sometimes a Sainsburys) carrier bag.

Ian was a real character and delighted in his refusal to conform to society's norms. While he was not always the easiest person he could be very sociable and seemed to enjoy his walks with us. He held strong views on a range of topics, and many of us remember having interesting, if robust, discussions with him. He generally ended his walks with a trip the Union Jack Club near Waterloo, which provides facilities to former members of the armed forces. He was also a prolific letter writer. His correspondence was instantly recognisable by his distinctive copper plate handwriting and his insistence on putting the stamp in the middle of the envelope.

Although he had not walked with us recently, Ian was a regular at our AGMs and we last saw him at the 2019 AGM last March. We are grateful to Pam for making enquiries in his local area, through which we learnt of his death. He will be sadly missed.

Various contributors



Alas Alsace!

A quite apt name for the Polyramblers' quiz team I am part of (thanks for the suggestion Kim).

Because of the evil Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to cancel the May 2020 walking weekend in Alsace. Thanks to Danny, you should have received all the appropriate refunds. The French holiday centre has retained our deposit and transferred it to 2021 and, for those for whom we booked the Eurostar tickets, we have been given a credit note which can be used for the trip next year. I am hoping to organise a walking weekend in the same village (Orbey) from 28 May to 1 June. I will readvertise the weekend and contact this year's participants in due course.

In the meantime, you can look forward to the trip by checking the website: <https://www.kaysersberg.com/en>.

Dominique