

# THE VANGUARD WAY

66 miles from Croydon to Newhaven

The logo for the Vanguard Way, consisting of the letters 'VGW' in a bold, black, sans-serif font, enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

## ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 2021

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[www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk). [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk)

*This review is sent annually to anyone with an interest in the Vanguard Way. If you no longer wish to receive it, please email [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk) with "No more VGW reviews" as the subject. Reviews for previous years (from 2014) can be obtained from the same address.*

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## VANGUARD WAY ASSOCIATION TO LAUNCH ON 28 MAY 2022

Before reviewing 2021, we would like to update you on our proposal to launch the Vanguard Way Association. The Vanguard Way (VGW) was devised by members of the Vanguards Rambling Club and launched in 1981. For over forty years it has been voluntarily managed and promoted on behalf of the Club by the Vanguard Way Working Party. However, we have now all reached retirement age, and although we feel capable of continuing for some years yet, we think the time has come to establish a more formal organisation to take over from us in due course.

A meeting has been arranged for Saturday 28th May at 2.30 pm at St Matthew's Church, Chichester Road, Croydon, CR0 5NQ. It's about half a mile, and passed by buses from, East Croydon Station, just 100 metres from the Vanguard Way, and limited free parking is available. That's the church itself, not the hall, though there will of course be no religious significance to the proceedings! Free light refreshments will be provided, and the meeting will be followed by a presentation by John Jefkins of the Vanguard Way Photoguide, a route description app for smartphones.

If you would like to attend and have not yet informed us, please email [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk). We will send you a formal invitation about one month beforehand, including full details of how to reach the venue.

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### VGW 40

We had hoped to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Vanguard Way in 2021 by walking the whole route over 6 days, as we try to do about every five years, but due to covid we had to restrict ourselves to just one day. So on Monday 3rd May, the actual anniversary of the launch in 1981, we celebrated by walking 19 km (12 miles) from Croydon to Oxted, with a relaunch ceremony on Chelsham Common. It was attended by 22 members of the Vanguards Rambling Club and friends, and performed by Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society and member of the Vanguards Rambling Club.

*Kate Ashbrook relaunches the Vanguard Way on its 40th anniversary. Photo © Angela Bellwood.*



Read Kate's full account of the day at [The Vanguard Way at 40 | CampaignerKate \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.campaignerkate.com/).

## The Graham Butler Mile

Through the generous donations of members of the Vanguards Rambling Club and Surrey Ramblers, over £4,000 was raised to provide a memorial for our late former route manager, Graham Butler. We decided that the best way of doing this would be to replace stiles by kissing gates, and identified a closely-located series of seven stiles on Nore Hill and Warren Barn Farm, near Woldingham. We are working with Surrey County Council, the farmer and Surrey Ramblers to achieve this, and intend to call this stretch the Graham Butler Mile, with a commemorative plaque at each end. We have also asked the landowner to allow permissive use of a short stretch of track, which would avoid having to walk along an unpleasant and potentially dangerous stretch of the parallel Slines Oak Road, and have asked for steps down to the road to be repaired. Furthermore, we are providing a bench near the top of Nore Hill, the cost to be shared with the Vanguard Way Marathon. We hope that all this will have been completed by Summer 2022, allowing us to have a grand opening walk.

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## Other route issues

Despite the pandemic, a substantial amount of work has been carried out along the VGW during 2021, as shown below, in sequential order from north to south.

**Park Hill, Croydon.** We rectified the long-misaligned finger outside Park Hill Recreation Ground.

**Great Park, Surrey.** Chelsham & Farleigh footpath 93 had once again become very rutted but was repaired by Surrey CC, with encouragement from Gareth Davies, organiser of the Vanguard Way Marathon.

**Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.** We submitted a report to their consultation about extending the area covered, saying that we are fully in favour. At present, the VGW has about 4.5 miles within the AONB, but if extended this could rise to 7.5, providing additional protection to the countryside through which it passes.

**Titsey to Kent Brook, Surrey.** Three stiles along this stretch have been replaced by kissing gates at Pitchfont Lane and either side of Kent Brook, south of Trevereux, with the help of Surrey Ramblers' local footpath secretary Tony Pearson, Titsey Estate, Limpsfield Parish Council, Sir Richard Stilgoe, Kent County Council and Kent Ramblers.

*The double kissing gate over Kent Brook, near Crockham Hill.  
Photo © Tony Pearson*



**Grasshopper Inn, Moorhouse Bank, Surrey.** Still closed following the calamitous fire in 2020.

**Kent & Surrey Golf Course, near Edenbridge, Kent.** We donated 10 waymark posts to the golf club, which have now been installed by the greenkeeper and waymarked by us. However, a major redevelopment of part of the grounds is planned to take place in the near future, so the club is currently closed until further notice, but the route followed by the VGW is still open. Also, the stile at the northern boundary of the course has been replaced by a kissing gate.

**Dry Hill, Surrey.** We learned that a resident of Moon Lane, north of Dry Hill, is thinking of opening some sort of refreshment establishment, which will be very welcome in an area that is very short of such facilities.

**Cansiron Lane, West Sussex.** A seemingly insurmountable signage difficulty exists on Cansiron Lane, near Ashurstwood, where the lie of the land currently prevents installation of any suitable fixing point for our discs. It's actually in a tiny sliver of West Sussex that protrudes into East Sussex, but ESCC have assumed responsibility for it, and their engineers will try to find a way of resolving the issue.

**A27 at Berwick Village, East Sussex.** Work has started on the new roadside track for walkers and cyclists east of Lewes. Sadly, this will not include a pedestrian facility where the VGW crosses, so in heavy traffic walkers are expected to make a 560-metre diversion to the traffic-light crossing at Drusilla's Roundabout.

**England Coast Path, East Sussex.** New ECP signage has been installed along the 10 km stretch of the VGW between Exceat and Newhaven, most of which is shared with the ECP. We have been given permission to attach VGW discs to the posts and will do this in the near future.

**Exceat Bridge, East Sussex.** Temporary traffic lights have been installed to ease the jams resulting from increasing traffic at this congested location, for which a new bridge has been proposed and awaits planning permission.

**Cuckmere Haven, East Sussex.** Most of the rutted and/or muddy track between the Cuckmere Inn and the Haven has been resurfaced, but the landslip beside the beach has not yet been repaired.

**Tidemills Village, East Sussex.** English Heritage are carrying out a major restoration of the ruins, which will add interest to this area and hopefully make it more appealing to some VGW walkers who think the route should finish at Seaford.

**Minor issues.** We reported a broken finger in Lingfield Road, near Edenbridge, Kent; a post out of the ground near Dormansland, Surrey; and several reports of crop obstructions in East Sussex.

**VGW Routesiders.** This is what we are calling some 800 people or organisations that live or operate beside the route. We have compiled a list of them, for internal use only, because later this year we would like to let them all know by means of a hand-delivered postcard that the Vanguard Way Association has been established. We suspect that many have no idea that the route passes their door.

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## Signage and maintenance

Our small maintenance team aims to check signage and minor vegetation clearance annually along the whole route, but due mainly to covid were only able to carry out three such forays during 2021: in April on Section 4 between Dormansland, Surrey, and Forest Row, East Sussex; in August, on Section 9 between Berwick Station and Alfriston, together with our volunteer local warden Diana Gerard; and in September on Section 3 between Gaywood and Troy Town, Surrey.

**Cernes Farm, near Starborough, Surrey.** A smart new 'destination fingerpost' was made for us by the Resourceful Wood Company of Selsey and installed in May by farmers David and Emma Huxtable just south of the farmyard. It stands at the point where the VGW intersects with the Eden Valley Walk and Tandridge Border Path, with fingers and destinations for each route. The cost was shared by the Vanguards and Kent Ramblers. Emma tells us that on most days they see VGW walkers taking selfies beside the post. We would like to instal more such posts at key locations along the route in due course.



Photo © Emma Huxtable



Back in 2004, the RiverOcean charity made two charming carved wooden signs for the VGW route across the Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club's Old Course, which is part of the Ashdown Forest. Since then, at the club's request, we slightly altered the route to take it off the course, with the result that one of them was no longer visible. The owners of an adjacent house called Warren Heights kindly offered to relocate it to their fence, as shown here. *Photo © David Cheeseman.*

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## Participation

Travel restrictions eased during 2021, consequently there was an increase in the number of walkers telling us about their experiences and applying for certificates and/or our fantastic badge.

We receive many requests for advice from people who are planning to walk or run the route, often as a group, sometimes Ramblers and LDWA local groups, or just families or friends. We also hear from people who have encountered problems while walking the route, and we're most grateful to them for doing this. We also receive regular requests asking whether the VGW is suitable for cycling, which it isn't, as nearly half is on public footpaths, with (at last count) 168 stiles and gates, plus much crosses terrain that is unsuitable for even the hardest bikes.

In August, eight members of the Surrey Walking Club completed the route in three days, travelling out and back from home each day, and despite experiencing severe delays and cancellations on the Uckfield line. Two Vanguards travelled to Newhaven to welcome and present their completion certificates.

*The group celebrates with VGW route manager Colin Saunders (2nd from left) at the Engineer pub between Newhaven's Harbour and Town Stations. (Photo © Dave Williams)*



There were two very creditable but unsuccessful attempts in 2021 to beat the fastest crossing time of the VGW, which still stands at 10 hours 43 minutes, by Jonny Muir in 2013. They were by Joel Eaton (12h 21m in July) and Daniel Bhugon (14h 32m in April).

We published a sixth edition of [An Introduction to the route](#) which includes a comprehensive distance chart, the history of the area, and general information about travelling to and from the route, signage, refreshments, accommodation, toilets, accessibility, walking with dogs, maps, recommended clothing and equipment, health and safety, and how to obtain certificates and badges. It can be downloaded from [vanguardway.org.uk](http://vanguardway.org.uk) (click 'Directions & Maps').

## Website and blog

**Website** ([vanguardway.org.uk](http://vanguardway.org.uk)). In 2021 there were 2,449 new users of the Vanguard Way website. These users had 3,856 sessions and 6,781 page views (most of which were to download free route direction pdf files). The great majority of users were based in the UK, but the second largest number were based in China. It seems unlikely that Chinese users were seriously interested in walking the Vanguard Way: it's more likely that this is an expression of China trawling the web for information that might be of use in the future. Users of the website used the following operating systems: Android 29%, iOS 27%, Windows 25%, Macintosh 18%. This continues the trend of access moving from desktop to mobile systems.

The **Vanguard Way blog** ([vanguardwayblog.blogspot.com](http://vanguardwayblog.blogspot.com)) contains up-to-date news of the VGW and those who walk it.

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## Vanguard Way Photoguide

John Jefkins has been making good progress with this route description app for smartphones, and has been invited to demonstrate it at the launch of the Vanguard Way Association on May 28th (see above).

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## Events

The seventh annual **Weald Challenge Races**, took place on Sunday 13th June, including a 50 km ultra route starting at Chiddingly. The route alternates direction each year: this time, with 155 finishers, it first went north along the Wealdway into the Ashdown Forest, then back to Chiddingly along the VGW. There was also a half marathon (221 finishers this year), which started at Blackboys to join the ultra runners to Chiddingly on the VGW. The organisers kindly made a further donation of £125 out of the entry fees, bringing the total to nearly £650, and we are planning to use this to provide waymark posts where there are gaps in East Sussex.

The Ninth Annual **Vanguard Way Marathon**, organised by 1m2go, was staged on Sunday 1st August, when over 100 runners took part in the half and full marathons. The 26.4 mile (42.2 km) full marathon course follows the VGW from Lloyd Park to Broomlands Lane, just south of the M25 near Limpsfield Chart, and back. The half marathon turns round at Ledgers Road, near Chelsham Common. The organisers have kindly donated half the cost of the bench that will be installed on Nore Hill soon.

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## Publicity

During 2021 the VGW has been featured in or added to several publications and websites, including:

[The West Sussex Gazette](#) on 26 February described the VGW as ‘one of the best walks in Sussex’.

The June edition of [South East Walker](#) featured our 40th anniversary celebration, with a photo of the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

A feature in [The Guardian](#) travel section on 7 July mentioned the VGW as an aside while interviewing our route manager during an unconnected event he was attending.

Several websites have added substantial descriptions of the VGW, including [The Walking Englishman](#) (“the most visited free content website for walking in Great Britain”), [Cicerone Press](#) and [Beautiful South](#), the website of the South East England Tourist Board.

There are several videos of VGW crossings on [YouTube](#): just sign in and search ‘Vanguard Way’, and there’s an entertaining blog by Claire Taylor about a wild-camping experience along the VGW at [travelnshit.com/vanguard-way-2021](http://travelnshit.com/vanguard-way-2021) – be warned, there is much use of four-letter-words!

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## Looking forward

Planned dates for 2022 are:

Saturday 28 May: Launch of the Vanguard Way Association (see front page).

Sunday 12 June: Weald Challenge Races ([www.trailrunningsussex.co.uk](http://www.trailrunningsussex.co.uk)).

Sunday 7 August: Vanguard Way Marathon ([www.1m2go.co.uk](http://www.1m2go.co.uk)).

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### **.....and finally**

In a rare quiet moment, we established that there are at least 14 other Vanguard Ways in the world, of which seven are in Britain (two in London; one each in Shoeburyness, Rochester, Shrewsbury, Cardiff and Renfrew) and seven in the USA (three in California, one each in Idaho, Texas, Maryland and Virginia).

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For further information about any of the items mentioned above, please email [colin@vanguardway.org.uk](mailto:colin@vanguardway.org.uk), phone 020 8886 8285 or text 07768 453159. Full details of the Vanguard Way including free route descriptions can be found at [vanguardway.org.uk](http://vanguardway.org.uk).

Vanguard Way Working Party  
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