

Region Centenary Fun Walk Full Report

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow

Never was there a truer phrase when it came to the Regional event which was the Centenary Walk. In April of 2021 the Secretary of SI Chester suggested that the Club walk the distance from SIGBI offices to Llandudno, which had been where Federation Conference 2021 was to have been held. As Joint Regional Programme Action Officer I agreed to take this suggestion to Region and, after discussion, it became clear that most Regional Clubs would like to take part in a walk and that a walk from Stockport to Llandudno was not viable for some of them. So the Regional Centenary Walk was born and I was asked to co-ordinate it. A small organising group was set up and it was agreed that the finishing point would be Llandudno on Sunday 12 September at 1600. With the help from our wonderful Regional Communications Team the walk was badged as **#WalktheRegion**. It was agreed that this walk would be a lead-in to our celebration of Federation Conference 2021 and to signify that a baton would be passed by our President, Louise Parry, from English to Welsh Clubs on Saturday and then on Sunday to the Conference Chair, Anne Macdonald.

The 3 parts of the Region, Cheshire North Wales and Wirral all had their own organisers who worked both as members of the organising committee and with Clubs. The only givens were the date (11/12 September), the end point and the fact that it was a fun walk which was inclusive in order to encourage all members regardless of their ability to take part. Each Area was given a free hand in how they set up their walks and each took a slightly different approach as it was agreed that a relay walk would not be feasible. However what was obvious was that the walks were being done by members of various clubs walking together. In Wales South Caernarfonshire decided to walk the equivalent of the 50 miles between themselves and Llandudno during the week.

The Area organisers put in a great deal of work into their part of the walk and managed, by various methods, to get a wonderful commitment from people. So as the weekend drew near we had walkers, drivers, refreshment providers as well as general supporters. Risk assessments were produced, each walk had an identified leader, emergency contact numbers supplied and, most importantly, rest/refreshment stops were identified

Saturday 11 September dawned bright and clear in Cheshire and Wirral. At around 1100 Soroptimists, Soroptimisters, Soroptodogs and friends, all resplendent in Soroptimist t-shirts, tabards, fleeces took to the byways, canal towpaths and coastal paths. Before their start some groups paused for a moment to remember the tragedy of 9/11.

Some walkers from Cheshire and Wirral met up where their walks crossed and continued as a group into Wepre Park, Connah's Quay where they met up with Welsh members.

Sadly it did rain a little then but it had cleared by the time of the symbolic baton handover. Once the handover had taken place a glorious double rainbow came out and the Red Arrows flew across (by chance). Following the handover some walkers from Denbigh & Ruthin as well as Rhyl Clubs set off on a walk back towards their 'base'.

Sunday 12 September was a clear day as walkers, dogs, helpers from the North Wales Clubs set off towards Llandudno. As with the previous day all were wearing tabards, t-shirts or fleeces which did attract a good deal of attention. Groups had a variety of routes, which

included crossing the Menai Bridge, walking the coastal path and through beautiful countryside until eventually their goal was in sight – Llandudno. Walkers were joined at the RNLI Building by others from Cheshire and Wirral and the whole group walked along the Promenade to the Bandstand where they were met by others including the Mayor of Llandudno, Cllr Harry Saville.

At the bandstand President Louise handed the baton on to Anne MacDonald whilst the Mayor joined in welcoming Soroptimists. Approximately 50 people were at the event and we were all delighted that Alan, the husband of our late, dear and much missed friend Barbara Dixon, was able to join the Llandudno contingent and take photographs.

Following the ceremony about 42 people went to a local hall where SI Llandudno had laid on refreshments which was very much appreciated by all.

And so the Regional Centenary Walk was over. It was a weekend of smiles and fun, of making new friends and catching up with old friends the pandemic has prevented us from meeting over the past 18 months or more. A member of one of the North Wales Clubs said to me today "***it brought members together again which was much needed***".

So, to all who took part and all who organised their various parts of the walk ***thank you***. Some people were only able to walk a short distance, others in excess of 13 miles, some couldn't walk but supported others. It truly was a Regional event as there were walkers from every single club in the Region and it the first time the Region had been able to get together since the start of lockdown in 2020.

With 2 Clubs to send their figures in we have had **85 walkers who covered 495 miles**, and so we can really say that we have **#WalkedtheRegion**.

Gillie O'Rourke
Lead