

All about Ian Fleming...

I have always enjoyed walking, and, in the mid-1980s, I started undertaking long summer solo backpacking trips, carrying a lightweight tent; I have since walked many of the long distance paths of England, Wales and Ireland. I continue to do so, although my trips are not quite so long these days.

In the 1990s I led occasional 8-10 mile walks with a group of friends and my wife suggested in about 2010 that becoming a leader with Alton Walking for Health might be a good idea. Since then, I have enjoyed helping people gain more confidence and fitness through these short weekly walks. In 2021 I set up my own walking group for people who wanted walks of up to 10 miles and the Five to Ten Group has enjoyed three very successful years; there are now 125 people on the mailing list and every monthly walk is very well attended. The participants are a lovely bunch of people from all kinds of backgrounds – a very special group of friends!

I have been a leader for the Alton Walking Festival since its inception and have seen the event grow from just a weekend to a full month of walks. It is a great event and so many people have had their first experiences of country walks and have fallen in love with our glorious countryside as a result of taking part. It has been a privilege to lead walks for the Festival, but also a challenge, as you never know who will turn up or what challenges might arise! A few years ago, one of the walkers on a short evening walk I was leading had an accident, tripping, falling and dislocating his elbow. I learned a lot on that occasion about how to deal with an emergency and have since been able to pass on my experiences to others by leading Walk Leader Training sessions for Walking Festival Leaders

When leading walks, especially longer ones, it is really important to check constantly that the walkers in the group are enjoying the experience; a buzz of happy chatter is always a good sign and it's sensible to look out for any individuals who might be struggling, so that they can be helped and reassured. Having a good backmarker is vital, as this person has a good overview of the whole group. On occasions, someone who may be lagging at the rear can be helped by bringing them forward to the front of the group, even if only for a short time.

I served as Footpath Officer for the parish of Binsted for several years, inspecting and maintaining the parish footpath and bridleway network; this stood me in good stead when I carried out Rights of Way Surveys for both Studland parish and for Swanage Town Council in Dorset. Until the end of 2023 I was Chair of Walk Alton and still continue as a member of the Walk Alton Committee, assisting with the planning of the 2024 Walking Festival on behalf of the Town Council

In May I will be leading six walks for the Walking Festival, ranging from 5.5 miles to 21 miles in distance

Ian Fleming