



Join the dawn 'March on Lewes' Wed 14th May

The 'March on Lewes' walk, on Wednesday 14th May, commemorates the 750th anniversary of the Battle of Lewes, when Simon de Montfort defeated King Henry III and forced him to consult at least the great and to good in future – so advancing the beginnings of representative government in England.

This is a 12½ mile walk with a difference – starting from Fletching, where de Montfort first gathered – at dawn (5.15am). We ascend the Downs to Blackcap near Boxholte, site of the Sheriff's court, where de Montfort's forces gathered, and finish with tea and cake at Lewes Castle, guests of Sussex Archaeological Society. At 2pm we can attend the unveiling of the Battle of Lewes Tapestry, a community project to mark the battle, by Dr Louise Wilkinson, Reader in Medieval History at Canterbury Christ Church University. Afterwards, if we wish, we can attend her talk on medieval tapestry in the castle marquee. A minibus will then take us back to Fletching (time to be confirmed).

The walk is open to all. It is led by Sue Berry of Mid Sussex Ramblers, and organised by Rambler member Peter Varlow. Please book (£6 charge for minibus back) using the booking form, through Peter.

The walk traces some of the paths the Barons' army might have taken in 1264. The lovely route starts from Fletching village hall car park TQ429235, via Newick, South Chailey, Hurst Barns, Whitehouse Farm Barn (breakfast stop, toilets), Warningore Farm, Black Cap, Landport Bottom, to Lewes Castle.

Bring picnic breakfast.

Option to join at Newick (11 miles) or South Chailey (7.5 miles) – details from Peter.

Please note:

- Sorry, no dogs.
- Children: we're sorry the battle date is a weekday, but there are other weekend walks in the programme.
- Make sure that you are fit enough to undertake the walk, which is over 12 miles and involves a very steep climb up to the top of the Downs.
- The walk is almost all off-road, so have suitable footwear and clothing. Be prepared for rain and mud.
- Bring snacks and drinks in addition to your picnic breakfast.
- We will do the walk whatever the weather. Effective waterproofs are essential unless we have a heatwave (we have done this walk in both downpours and heatwaves, but the views are lovely either way!)
- We start walking at 5.15am, and it is best to arrive 15 minutes before this time to allow for putting on boots etc.
- Our Mid Sussex Ramblers walk leader may refuse to accept participants who in our opinion are inadequately equipped or unfit. If in doubt, contact Peter in advance.
- For your own and others' safety please read and abide by any advice and guidelines issued by the organisers, and the instructions of the walk leader. Though walking is inherently one

of the safest outdoor activities, no activity is completely without risk and it is your responsibility to behave sensibly and to minimise the potential for accidents to occur.

More about the route – and some history

We shall pass near Boxholte, an ancient meeting place on top of the Downs near Blackcap and the 'Five Ways' footpaths junction. Boxholte had been known to have been the gathering-place for Montfort's army; in the 13th century Boxholte was the site of the sheriff's tourn (a court held during his tours) in the rape of Lewes: so it was an official administrative site of which there would have been local and regional awareness. If the weather is fine and we're in good time (and preferably if someone has a GPS) we can pinpoint the spot.

The actual site of Boxholte had been lost, but was re-discovered quite recently by Christopher Whittick, of the East Sussex County Archive, and John Bleach of Sussex Archaeological Society – found via SAS's index volumes, leading to estate papers in the East Sussex County Archive including a map of 1772 that marks the spot. So local history lives on, thanks to the Archaeological Society and the Record Office!

Our walk cannot be a re-enactment of the Montfort approach to Lewes in 1264:

- We are doing a straight march in a few hours, but according to historians' interpretation of the records, de Montfort advanced in stages over three days, with halts in or near Hamsey and again at Warningore Wood (we pass through Warningore Farm).
- Whatever combination of pathways his troops may have taken, we are taking modern public footpaths.
- We are hastily crossing the modern roads we meet. These roads may perhaps have been some of his men's favoured trackways. De Montfort might well have marched down much of what is now the A275.
- And once up on the Downs, after our 12-mile trek we are heading not for battle on the slopes but for tea at Lewes Castle.

The definitive account of the battle, including the route Montfort took to it, is given in David Carpenter's booklet, *The Battles of Lewes and Evesham, 1264-65*, Mercia Publications, 1987. Unfortunately this is out of print though there is a copy in the Sussex Archaeological Society Library. A new revised edition is expected at the end of 2014.

Peter Varlow
15 March 2014