

The view from Bickerton Hill to Brown Knowle

SPA **Feature**

Walking with a purpose

by David Kendall



Having spent 29 years at Thornton Research Centre, Shell's former Oil Products Laboratory in Cheshire, now leading an energetic local footpath society provides David Kendall with a gentler form of satisfaction.

I retired from Shell 15 years ago, having spent my entire career in research and development, latterly heading a team focused on motor gasoline additive packages.

Country walking works particularly well for me – it's a terrific way of keeping fit and healthy, and getting to know people. A few years ago, I discovered a very keen walking group, the Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society. Formed in 1960, the society aims to promote, maintain and protect the 1,200 miles of footpaths in the centre of this surprisingly diverse county. Though they don't often make the headlines, similar societies exist in many parts of England.



Fingerpost at Mow Cop

The society organises regular guided walks across mid-Cheshire with the underlying purpose of keeping footpaths open and easily negotiable. So, for example, we'll clear vegetation and replace missing waymarks as we go. We'll also log any obstructions, dodgy stiles and so forth, and pass our findings onto the council, which, much to its credit, is generally good at fixing these things.

A simple, sociable walk can easily turn into more of an adventure when planned routes turn out to be impassable. Suddenly everyone is looking to the leader for solutions as well as offering their own ideas. (Does that remind you of the famous phrase, I'm from head office and here to help you?) It calls for quick thinking and the ability to improvise – not unlike the old job, actually.

What started as a retirement pastime quickly became a passion. It's led to my running the society these past five years as chairperson, with ultimate responsibility for the walk programme, various outings, social events and a popular walking weekend away each autumn.

The Society maintains several local trails and provides route guides available on our website. Some years ago it devised and established The Baker Way, a 13-mile trail running between Chester and Delamere railway stations, which was the subject of a feature in *The Guardian* newspaper recently.

You get to learn a whole new arcane language in this game. BOATs are one of my favourites – 'byways open to all traffic'. But what really floats my boat is getting out, meeting people, enjoying the countryside and getting to know Cheshire better. It's a marvellous place to have retired.

Membership of the society is on the up and includes several other Shell retirees, among them Tony Harbottle, formerly from Shell's Wythenshawe office, and Joanna Bauldreay and Richard Clark, who were colleagues at Shell Thornton for many years. To find out more or join us on our walks go to **www.mcfs.org.uk/**.



Shropshire Union Canal bridge near Wrenbury