



The Backpackers Club

www.backpackersclub.co.uk

A Newbies First Meet (Leicestershire, June 2014)

It's all Andris' fault. I'd just popped to the hairdressers for my bi-monthly shear but, due to some poor lady's collapse over a washbasin (the ambulance crew arrived just before I did), my appointment was delayed. After reassurance from the hairdresser that the lady would be OK but things were running late, I sat down to wait and got talking to Andris, sitting in a chair with his hair half-cut. Somehow we got talking about walking, camping, gear and trips done, and he said he was a member of the Backpackers Club and thought I would really like it. I googled when I got home, thought "what the hell", and joined. The Welcome Pack came quickly and after meeting my local Rep (Frank) in the pub for a chat, the first local meet I could get to was Nuneaton.



I did feel a little nervous. I knew I would enjoy the camping and walking part but would I be fit enough to keep up with everyone else? And as a woman, would it feel a bit macho or competitive? I didn't really fancy a speed march or weight-lifting competition on a weekend off from work. Getting my gear together, I wasn't sure if *my* idea of minimal & lightweight would be the same as others'. I've always tended to pack the kitchen sink and extras, "just in case", but this was one of the things I was hoping to improve on by learning from other members.

On arrival at the campsite at Upton, I was pleased to see we had been allocated a quiet (well, it was in the afternoon anyway!) spot at the back of the far field, next to a hedge.

The other members seemed very friendly and after tent-up and dinner, we enjoyed a 6pm thunderstorm and then retired for drinks in the campsite bar. I had a really good evening and was relieved that the Club seemed to be organized in a laid-back and inclusive manner. People could walk as groups, small groups, or alone; you could walk or cycle, choose your own route, whatever, so there was no pressure.

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The next morning, most of us decided to walk as a group to Carlton, via Twycross and Sheepy Parva. Contrary to earlier gloomy weather forecasts, it stayed dry and warm, and the walking was pleasant, although there were plenty of high stiles so I did feel a little like a cart horse running the Grand National! No wild animals were encountered near Twycross but a very pleasant watering hole (or two) was, and a rest of the legs and some refreshments were

very welcome. Using natural resources to keep the weight down yet also supporting the local economy seems like a brilliant idea to me. The only negative of the day's walk was near the end, when we approached the old Steam Railway Museum outside Shackerstone, to join the Leicestershire Round. The old footbridge over the rail line is the right of way but had been declared "unsafe" and blocked off. The Railway staff wouldn't let us simply cross the line and shin over a low fence to join the path on the other side, so we had to retrace our steps and endure a mile diversion to rejoin the path. No information on the closure or diversion signs were visible at the point needed in our direction of travel, didn't seem very satisfactory. *C'est la vie.*



On approaching Carlton I was looking forward to getting my bag off my back and putting up my tent. I was somewhat bemused, and amused, when I saw that we were to be camping in someone's back garden!

The family's little girl was obviously very excited to be getting all these camping guests, and we enjoyed a tray service of cups of fruit squash and sweeties. Her pop-up tent also joined the growing collection in the garden. It was very kind of the family to let us all stay and use their bathroom etc, they were perfect hosts.

The next day's walking was to be shorter, as most people needed to be on their way home at a reasonable time. We had a very sunny and comfortable morning's walk along the Canal and minor roads back into Upton. I knew I'd had a really good weekend when we finished, because I would've liked the day to have been longer and I was still smiling at work on the following Tuesday!

To sum up, I wished I'd known about the Club earlier. I had a fantastic time with very welcoming and friendly people. It's going to make weekends seem all the more enjoyable and I can't wait 'til my next meet. I also think I will learn a lot from the other members re: travelling lighter and having fun. Oh, and I can now talk with people about tents and shiny gear and camping food without them trying to run away!

Lisa Johnson