

Keratoconus Group News

Autumn 2002

Keratoconus is a condition of the eye meaning cone-shaped cornea
Registered Charity 1057629



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THE THAMES PATH WALK



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The Thames path walk was completed on 18 September. Mike Oliver and Anne Klepacz set off on from the source of the Thames and arrived 11 days later at Tower Bridge as shown above. They were assisted on the way by several other group members, and various cows, dogs and well-wishers. With the walk complete let's make it all worthwhile and get the sponsor money in!

Thames Path Walk – Anne writes...

What pictures does that phrase conjure up? A leisurely stroll along the riverbank... Riverside pubs every few hundred yards... A pleasantly flat, wide towpath... No chance of getting lost because the river is always there...

And the reality? A 6 mile stroll in the countryside once in a while is NOT adequate preparation for an average 14 miles a day, day after day after day.

Riverside pubs between the source and Windsor can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The path, for most of its length, is narrow, full of protruding stones, tree roots, stiles, marauding cows and, above all, frequently leaves the river altogether to take you down main roads, up hills (!), through fields, through industrial estates. The guidebook, though excellent, is no help when a temporary diversion, beautifully signposted at the beginning, leaves you stranded in the middle of a housing estate. And oh, the PAIN of those boots you thought were so comfortable for the first few miles!

But we did it! And despite the low points, the river was often stunningly beautiful, we had only one day of driving rain and lots of brilliantly sunny days, we made new friends (and, believe it or not, I got chatting to a woman walking her dogs on the towpath whose son turned out to have keratoconus!) and we have hopefully raised lots of money to enable us to continue developing the work of the Keratoconus Group.

So, many thanks to Mike for coming up with the idea and organising it all, many thanks to all who joined in the walking (or provided very welcome lifts at the beginning or end of a day) and many thanks to all who have sponsored us.



Anne Klepacz

Mike, Amanda, Sue, Colin and Anne (left to right) take a break for a photo.

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Dialogue with Moorfields

The second meeting attended by Mike Oliver, Anne Klepacz, Dan Erlich (Head of the Moorfields Contact Lens Clinic and Dr Lali Moodaley of Moorfields) was held in July. The Moorfields website has recently been revised and now includes an entry for Keratoconus (under Eye Health, other conditions) which includes details of the KC Group. We were also asked for feedback on how well the Moorfields Helpline is working. This deals with general queries and refers them on for more expert advice if needed. If anyone has used the helpline recently, please let us know.

Dan Erlich was interested to hear about our proposed information leaflet for schools and colleges and has offered to comment on the draft. He has also offered to comment on a proposed survey questionnaire which we are hoping to send to all members in the next few months. Moorfields have recently been asked to produce statistics on the number of patients referred to them from Wales, where there is a shortage of hospital optometrists. This has already led to proposed improvements in the service provided in Wales.

The next meeting in the series has been arranged for January 2003. Please let us know if there are any issues you would like us to take up at that meeting.

Sponsored Walk Money

The walkers have done their stuff now it's our member's turn. All those that have pledged money for the walk or collected sponsorship, please get your sponsor forms and money in as soon as possible. Money and forms can be sent to the group address.

All money raised will go towards the Keratoconus Group. The money will be used to support our current activities including publications, and the website. We are planning a booklet on keratoconus and schools, and another conference. Funds raised will support this work and enable us to plan other activities to raise awareness and provide self help and support to those with keratoconus.

West Midlands

Next West Midlands meeting date 'Living with Keratoconus'
11am Saturday 2nd November at the Eye Centre, City Hospital, Dudley Road, Birmingham.
For more info, contact Marion Bargery 01746 767906.

Thames Path Walk- Mike writes...

It was supposed to be a pleasant long walk. It was definitely pleasant with (apart from one day) excellent weather and the best of company. But at first there was no river and often no bank. The Thames, as natives of Cricklade insisted, does not begin at its source. We had set off from a stone by a dry ditch in a field near Kemble in Gloucestershire. It bore an inscription to the effect of 'here beginneth the Thames'. There was no water in the ditch for many miles. We marched on through fields, gravel pits taking care to avoid quicks and, large dogs and blisters. We survived encounters with some very strange country folk, a drunken farmer insisting he had a big tractor to show us and a very upset cow charging full speed at us along a narrow path. That dry ditch grew first into a navigable channel and then became a torrent hundreds of yards wide controlled by locks and weirs. Anne braved injury to make the distance and many joined for a day or several days-- providing much needed support and ensuring our team completed the trek to Tower Bridge on schedule. It was an unforgettable experience -- I lost over half a stone and will never forget sitting at a lock in pouring rain (no shelter anywhere) eating lunch, watched by a dry lockkeeper in his hut smugly sipping hot tea.

Thanks to all who took part or helped in anyway. Special thanks to Sue Ingram, Colin Wells, Jill Oliver and Mark without whom we would never have finished.

Mike Oliver



Sue, Mike, Colin and Jill at the (dry!) source of the Thames.