

## **Wellington Walking Festival 2020 - from the secretary's viewpoint**

### **Background**

We run our Monday to Sunday festival in the second week of September, we normally start planning in January with an aim to produce the programme in May or June. Our programme is normally 4 sheets of A4 presented as a double trifold. We charge local businesses (and Ramblers Holidays) £25 for 1/12 of a page advert or £50 for twice that. We normally have about 16 (x£25) adverts which more than pays for printing 5000 copies. The committee do the distribution to visitor centres, advertisers, local shops, on walks, notice boards etc.. We usually have stalls at local community events, or we just set up at the base of The Wrekin or in the foyer of the leisure centre/library. In addition, the programme is as a pdf on our website with links from Facebook and Twitter. We usually get good coverage on Radio Shropshire, the Shropshire Star and a local free paper.

We usually have a mixture of themed events (which need booking) and just walks, plus an evening showing of a walking themed film at Wellington Orbit. Since 2018 we have launched the festival with a litter pick.

We usually work with other local organisations, in some cases channelling donations to them. Organisations we have worked with over the years include: Shrewsbury and Newport Canal Trust; Friends of Apley Woods; Friends of Dothill Local Nature Reserve; Shropshire Geology Society ; National Trust (we get discounted sports entry at the large Attingham Park and free entry at Wellington's own small property); Shropshire Fungus Group ; Severn Hospice; Shropshire Wildlife Trust; Windy Ridge (National Garden Scheme); Wellington LA21 (historical walks) ; Denso Manufacturing (who gave us a tour of their Eco Garden and a free pizza); the local vineyard; Telford Pride in our Community (part of the unitary council , for the litter pick)

There are usually just under 30 events. Also, since 2018, we have had a theme for most of the just walks. In 2018 we walked the, then new, Telford T50 50 Mile Trail in sections, starting and finishing at Telford Town Centre, travelling by bus or train to the start and/or finish. In 2019 we repeated the T50, going anti-clockwise this time and starting and finishing at Wellington (also using buses and trains).

Booking is now via our website. We use a built-in booking system which has some glitches but saves work compared to our former manual system. There is also a phone number for those who prefer to book that way ( Fortunately not many do).

Apart from the film (and NT entry for non- NT members), all our events are free. We suggest a voluntary donation of £2 per adult per walk, some people give this, some more and some nothing.

We use google docs forms to produce a feedback form.

The majority of our visitors are local (from Telford) but we do have visitors from further afield, including, in 2019, at least 2 (one from Chicago) who stayed in B&Bs.

### **The 2020 Festival**

This was our 9<sup>th</sup> Festival. Planning had started in January. Events followed the same general plan, including a final 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebratory social event with cake and coffee (which Wellington Town Council were providing). This was to be the finale of a day that walked 10 miles in 2 loops (as we always have a walk at 2 pm on the third Sunday of the month). Our planning included repeating some popular events and adding a couple of new ones. The theme for the "just walks" was the named routes (Shropshire Way, T50, Ironbridge Way, the Hutchison Way, The Silkin Way, The Perry

Way and the Wrekin and Wellington links) that pass through or very close to the town. By March, when we would usually be getting close to the final programme, it was looking doubtful and we decided not to try to produce a programme in our usual timescale. We had already spoken to the local independent cinema and decided on "The Way". We changed the Festival page on the website to say in effect "we don't know, watch this space". In June, we had restarted our twice monthly walks, once we knew that we were Ok as an organised outdoor activity, so we had some confidence. We thought we could probably run the "just walks" but we, and our partners, decided that the themed events, which involved people clustering round to listen to explanations and look at things, were probably out. So we began to work on a reduced programme. We decided to say on the website and Facebook that was what we were doing, but not go to a printed programme yet. We had decided that the printed programme would be a double sided third of A4 landscape sheet (so say, a 200 print run would give us 600 copies), with further details on the website.

By August we decided to go ahead with the opening litter pick, the film (the Orbit changed the day and added an afternoon showing), an introduction to Nordic walking, 13 walks, and the anniversary social (which we had moved to a local park from the Town Council building). One of the walks, a tough 12.5 miler was also part of the Shropshire Way Festival. (This was a minimum effort festival that just collated walks from different groups and listed them on their website). When I started to type the events up, I realised I couldn't get them in the space, so I unilaterally decided to expand to an A4 landscape trifold with space for 6 adverts. I decided to charge just £15 per ad, as there would be limited time in which the programme was current. After some debate in the committee between 1000 and 2000 copies, I ordered 1500. The ads did not quite cover the cost, but the donations more than made up the shortfall.

I set up the booking system for all events (the film entry just transferred to the Orbit website). As well as the obligatory name and email, I added questions about being free from Covid symptoms, social distancing, and (belatedly) the contact phone number. Each leader decided the maximum number (up to 30) they would take, these (including leader and back marker) varied between 10 and 30, most were 15 or 20.

Late in the day we decided to offer certificates (these are very popular in the Ironbridge Festival.) We had 2, walking 50 miles or more during the festival and walking The Ways of Wellington on 5 or more days. According to the feedback forms, people thought these were a good idea, but the take up was quite low with only 2 people outside the committee applying for certificates, although we know more people qualified.

We distributed the programme via the committee's contacts and the local supermarket. Disappointingly the library and leisure centre building would not take them (as they were not taking any leaflets or posters). Ironbridge visitor centre was delighted to have leaflets, as they had lost a lot in the floods and people weren't producing them. We hung a few posters.

We had coverage in the local press, including Radio Shropshire, on our website, Facebook and twitter, on the national WaW website events page and Facebook page, also on the Shropshire Way, Telford T50, Get Telford Walking and Telford and Wrekin Walking for Health Facebook pages (It helps that I am an admin for all these).

Bookings were coming in well and all was going smoothly until the Tuesday before the festival was due to start the following Monday. Late on this day the government introduced the "rule of six". We spent Wednesday talking to the national WaW secretary, combing the government and Ramblers websites and having an emergency Zoom committee meeting.

We reorganised everything into groups of 6, by drafting in extra leaders and in some cases, planning to tell those booking most recently that we couldn't accommodate them. On the Thursday, we issued a press release, updated the website and Facebook, dealt with various cancellations from walkers, but I didn't send the "sorry" emails out. We cancelled the litter pick (on advice from the Borough council) and the social (fortunately the cake hadn't been started and we weren't charged) .

Then, on the Friday, we got the go ahead for up to 30. We left the reorganised groups and extra starts on some walks at the request of the leaders. (This included the Nordic walking where we ran 2 groups of 6, as we felt it wasn't really a walk within our normal practice). Fortunately, I didn't have to send out any "sorry" emails.

The week itself went well. In general the booked attendance lists and those actually attending tallied. We had glorious weather. One walker was from Cambridge and had come to stay in a B&B all week as her Italian walking holiday was cancelled. She chose us because we were on a train line and all our walks (apart from 1 where we gave bus times) started in Wellington centre. Another was from London, but had local family. We had walkers from Cheshire and the West Midlands. Baz (national chair) came down from Whitchurch (Shropshire). I had originally invited him, as our mentor, because of the 10-year anniversary celebration, but he still came for the Sunday pm walk. We had picnic lunch in my garden with 2 of the committee and a regular walker. (Another change of plan, my original idea had been to invite all those doing both the am and pm walks on the Sunday.)

I updated the checklist for walk leaders/ back markers. I suggested leaders carry the email that I forwarded from the national WaW secretary. Leaders (except 2 guest leaders) and back markers wore Wellington Walkers are Welcome high viz vests. I was queried twice by members of the public on the Sunday am walk. Another leader was queried by a member of the public on a Friday walk. Both walks were relatively urban.

In the end we had, not including the film, 170 occurrences of people going on a walk, walking between them over 1200 miles. We had a disappointing 23 feedback forms filled in which is too low a number to really analyse, but they were generally complimentary about the leaders and the organisers. The graphs and comments are in an appendix below. The evening showing of the film was a sell out, the Orbit were pleased with how it went and are keen to collaborate again.

Would we do it again? Yes. It helped that we had experience with the Sunday walks, and we had an established booking system in place.

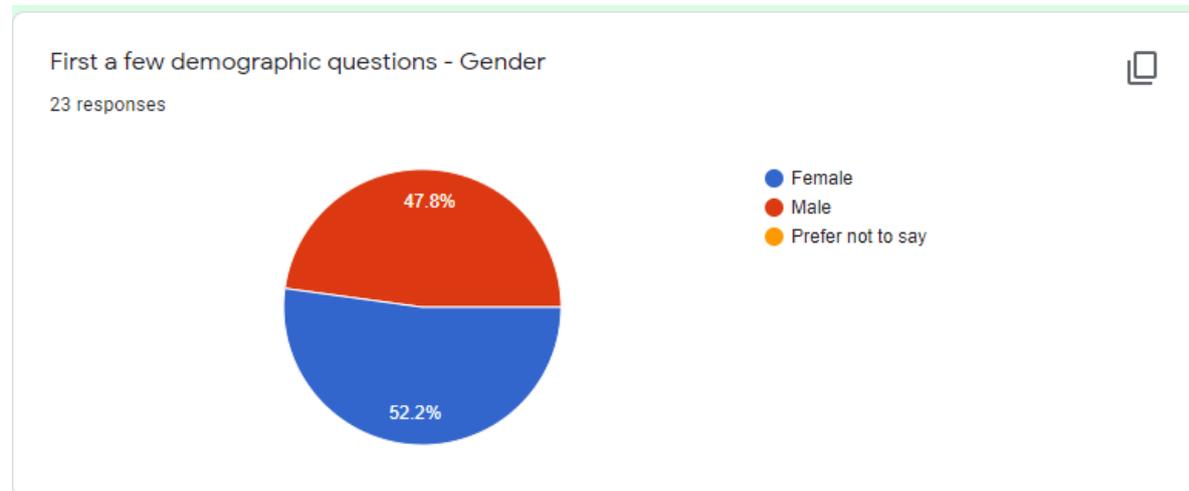
We also have a very committed and competent bank of people in the committee and guest leaders who lead and back mark regularly and effectively. Thanks are due (and are sent out by our Chair ) after the festival to them all.

For the first time I can remember we have had a formal thank you email from the Mayor of Wellington for putting the festival on.

Flexibility was essential, our plans changed, then changed again, then again. We scaled back our original plans, then still cancelled two events in relatively short order.

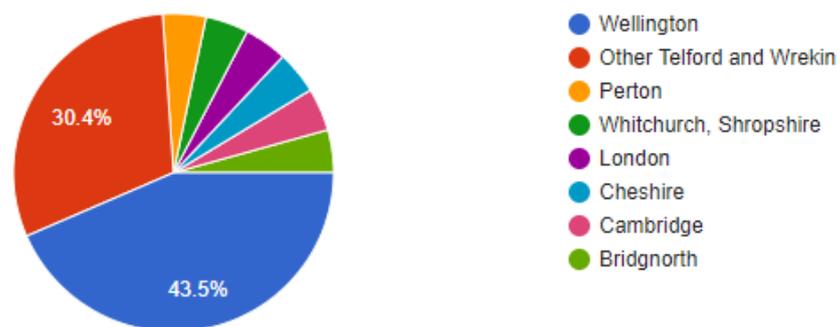
## Appendix

Comments and graphs from the feedback forms.



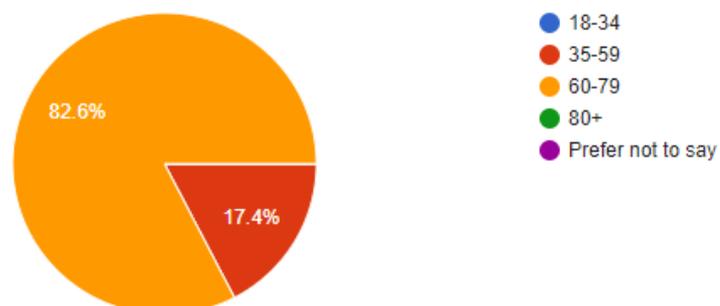
Where do you live?

23 responses



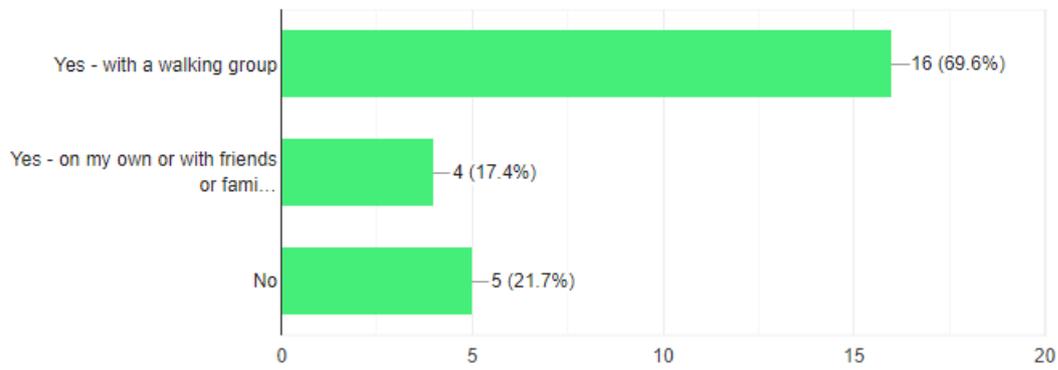
Age Group

23 responses



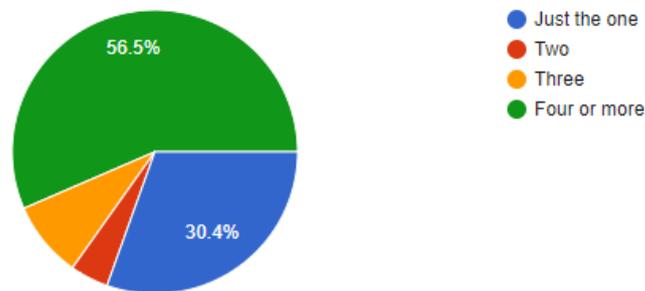
### Would you consider yourself to be a regular walker

23 responses



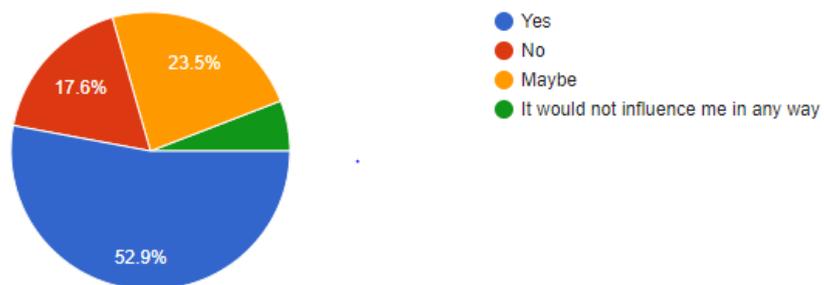
### How many events did you take part in?

23 responses



### Do you think offering certificates is a good idea?

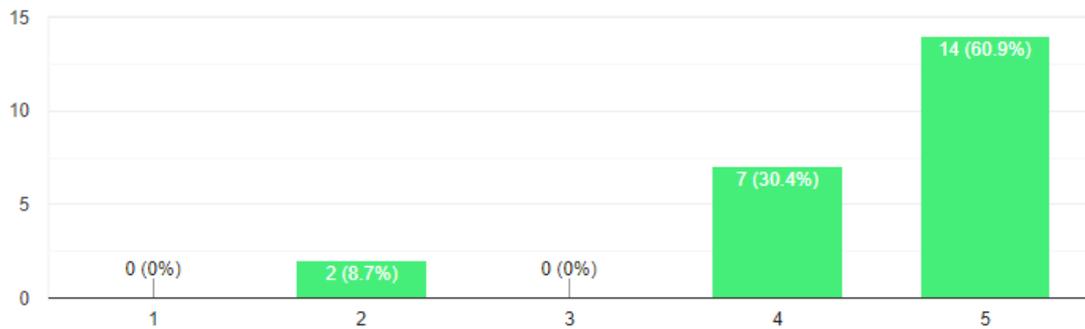
17 responses



The feedback showed that our respondents were generally local, loyal and most were over 60.

What is your overall impression of the festival ?

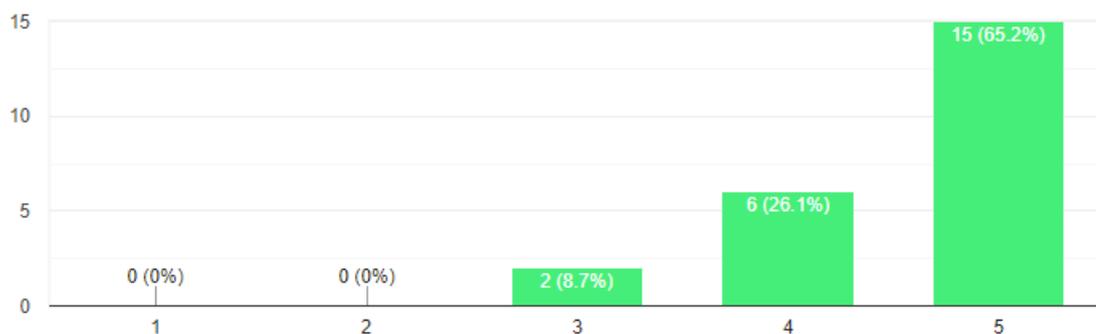
23 responses



The two at 2 deserve a comment, they seem to be from the same person who only went on the Nordic walking, which she rated as 4. She selected “ not a regular walker”, so it may be that she was disappointed that, this year, the walks on offer would really appeal mainly to regular walkers.

What is your rating of the event(s) above. Please feel free to fill in another form if you want to rate 2 or more events differently.

23 responses



**“Do you feel we coped well with the Covid restrictions and obeyed the guidelines? (This year we felt we couldn't offer our usual range of themed walks as they involve gathering together to listen to a speaker. )”**

The responses to this question all amounted to “yes”, but one person also commented that sometimes we got too close, not 1 metre apart.

**Here are all the responses to the open ended question (Please use this space to tell us anything you think we should consider for the future, or to expand on your rating above.)**

#### **First, suggestions for improvement**

The walk covered some lovely places. Some of us were expecting to stop for lunch. I know it didn't say to bring a packed lunch so maybe we should have realised. It was a shame as it was a lovely day and more could have been made of it.

It is best to list out the start time and expected finished time. The Friday's walk did not mention that it finished at 1:30 p.m. and I brought a packed lunch. Otherwise, I could have lunch at Wellington, trying the local cafe.

Short coffee/tea mid morning break on full day walks

It would have been helpful, in preparing for the event, to have had a brief description of the intended route / points of interest. Also, it was not a "leisurely walk" because the pace was quite brisk which was very good as far as I was concerned and, notwithstanding the minor observation, I enjoyed the event very much.

#### **Finally the “thank you”s and compliments**

A huge thank you to everyone who has worked so hard in very challenging times to put on some wonderful walks. It was so nice to be able to get out, see new scenery and talk to lovely people. I was only able to get a few days off work - hopefully next year, I can attend the whole week. Thank you again.

Another interesting and informative walk. Chris Hogarth very knowledgeable. Met people I knew from other walks, nice group of people. Had a lovely morning. Thank you

Malcolm was interesting and informative leader. Lovely stop for lunch. Nice group of people. Excellent day out. Thank you.

Two very different walks which, very much, illustrated Wellington's nearby walking environment.

All walks were led well , by informative and fun leaders - many thanks

All very well organized with excellent leadership and back marking

A varied programme for all abilities.

All v good

Loved it and can't wait to join you again.