

Sevenoaks Ramblers

Otford Solar System Circuit - 5 miles

Sunday, 15th March

On Mothering Sunday, 12 ramblers and 3 keen dogs came to discover more about our planets, all held in the maternal warmth of the Sun. Otford's scale model of our Solar System is the largest in the world, and was dreamt up by a local astronomer to be accurate at 00.01 hours on 1 January 2000 - the start of the millennium.

We began with the closest planets: Earth, the right distance away to support life, Venus and Mercury (scorched), then moved on to Mars, sunk into the football pitch of Otford Recreation Ground, Jupiter by the hedge, and Saturn, conveniently situated by the doctor's surgery (not in fact the apt location for Uranus, as one joker quipped). In Telston Lane we found Neptune and passed Uranus at the start of the footpath leading us to Pluto, which has been demoted to dwarf planet as it meets only two of the three criteria for full planet status in current astronomy: orbits the Sun - tick; has enough mass to be round - tick; has cleared its orbit of debris - cross.

The scale of the model is 1:5 billion, and there was some discussion beforehand on the WhatsApp group as to what Pluto's actual distance from the Sun is, at 984 metres away near Fillston Farm on the edge of Shoreham. We think the answer is 4.92 billion kilometres, though some were too modest to put their correct answer on the group chat, and were practically that far away at their holiday destination anyway. Right or wrong, the distance was deemed too far for even the heartiest of Sevenoaks Ramblers to tackle.

We were back in time for refreshments and Mother's Day celebrations for those who qualified maternally or were lucky enough to still have a mother alive. Those who didn't qualify could pay homage to the Sun instead.

Thanks to all for coming, Phil for the arty photos, and the Otford Society for creating the Solar System model. The idea for the walk came from the musicians on the memorial walk to our fellow Rambler Charles Hebert. They had completed the walk to inspire their performance of Holst's The Planets, so thanks to them too.



