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Dear friends,

- 2013 has been a year of ups and downs, but a success overall. Paul has started a 20% move towards his retirement; Margaret has had difficulty fitting all her activities into her time!
- We finished last year with a Ramblers trip to Barbados over Christmas, where the most memorable things included the number of passengers squashed on the minibuses (and the volume of the music), together with the whiteness of the beaches, the beauty of the botanic gardens, and the 'England in the tropics' feel - we stayed in Worthing!
- Paul continues to work for the US company Esri while based in Cambridge. His business trips are like London buses (none for ages then lots together). A new destination is Tbilisi in Georgia, imminent for December.
- It was Paul's 60th birthday in August, celebrated with a long weekend in Carcassonne, including visiting his room-mate Nigel from college days, who lives with his family nearby.
- Paul has negotiated a phased retirement from Esri, so from September he is on 80% hours (for 80% salary) for a couple of years and then review. He is planning a 'man shed' extension behind the garage for his retirement projects.
- Margaret has seen more of her doctor, dermatologist and 'dishy surgeon' than we would wish and we had to cancel a trip to the USA, when a skin lesion on Margaret's leg grew dramatically. She had an operation to remove it, and a skin graft from her thigh, but a biopsy showed that it wasn't what they thought, so they had removed more than was necessary. She has since walked 120 miles of the Route St Jacques so the leg is still serviceable!
- We have enjoyed various walking holidays this year (Valencia in Spain, Sorrento in Italy), but the highlight of our travels was a recent trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos. In Ecuador we travelled the Avenue of Volcanoes with walks in national parks above 4000m, and visits to local markets and cities with colonial architecture. In the Galapagos we marvelled at the birds and animals which showed no fear of man - and we took photos by the hundred.
- Paul plays concertina in local folk music sessions. Recently he had an old concertina converted to a MIDI instrument with electronic sensors instead of reeds. This means it can sound like a cello, trumpet or whatever, but also that he can put on headphones to practice silently!
- Margaret enjoys the varied life of a retiree, walking, playing badminton and bridge, improving her Spanish and French, and enjoying the diverse activities of a 'Seniorita'. She has given up supply teaching, as she was never free when needed, but does some voluntary work, so doesn't lead a life of total leisure and pleasure.
- Our foster son Dom and his girlfriend Sam still live in Bedford. Dom has been working as a lorry driver, but currently both are working in the vast warehouse at Amazon, picking and packing. They expect to be made redundant on Christmas Eve.
- We are planning to spend Christmas in Spain on a 'proper' walking holiday, based in Competa (in the hills between Málaga and Granada). We were there for the millennium, but the walking may be more of a challenge this time!

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, and a happy and successful year in 2014.

Paul & Margaret