SOUTH EAST walker

No. 121 March 2023

Happy 50th anniversary to Ridgeway National Trail



Cover of the RidgewaySpotter. Photo: Mary Tebje



Launch of the 50th anniversary at the Sanctuary, Avebury. Patron Mary-Ann Ochota is front and centre. Photo: Mary Tebje

It was in 1973 that Lord Nugent officially conferred National Trail status to the Ridgeway, the 87-mile (139km) chalk way between the World Heritage Site of Avebury in Wiltshire and Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. The 'golden' anniversary is an opportunity to promote the Ridgeway to a wider public so that more can enjoy 'getting away from it all' whilst never being far from 'normal' life in the vales below the scarp slopes. The anniversary celebrations were launched on 6 January at the Sanctuary, Avebury, Wiltshire, led by anniversary Patron Mary Ann Ochota, broadcaster and anthropologist. The event was attended by representatives of many organisations, including Ramblers, who contribute in so many ways to the Ridgeway.

The Ridgeway is a trail of two halves. West of the River Thames it is a broad track passing through the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Habitations near the Ridgeway here are few and far between. Popping into a pub requires a downhill walk of a mile or more, and what seems twice that distance to get back on track. Even water is in short supply up there; the chalk is greedy, sucking the rain up as fast as it falls. The views, though, are amazing. To the north one looks over vales, with hills such as those of the Cotswolds and Chilterns on the horizon. Southwards one looks into the Downs, a quiet world.

The halfway line is formed by the Thames flowing through the Goring Gap. East of the river the Ridgeway goes through the more-wooded and intimate hills and valleys of the Chilterns AONB. The trail goes close to or through several villages and small towns where refreshments and other facilities are readily available.

Both sides of the trail feature archaeological treasures - Stone Age long barrows and standing stones, Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age forts, the Uffington White Horse - and a flora that adores the chalky soils.

Patron

Mary-Ann Ochota, Patron of the 50th anniversary and a former Time Team presenter, is a perfect fit for the role, having a high media profile, specialising in presenting anthropology, archaeology, social history and outdoor adventure across a range of media. The charity Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR), together with the Ridgeway Partnership that manages and promotes the National Trail, has devised 12 monthly activities, the #RidgewaySpotter, to encourage people to look at the Ridgeway and its environs with fresh eyes, and to share their photos on social media with the hashtag #RidgewaySpotter. Actually, one can use the guide anywhere to freshen a walk. The Partnership will also be releasing online, on a weekly basis, the Ridgeway Top 50, described as a 'year-long treasure hunt revealing the rich history, wildlife, art, farming, sport and landmarks of the Ridgeway.' You can see all this and more at www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/ridgeway_anniversary2023/. The beauty and inspiring nature of the Ridgeway will also be celebrated at the FoR's annual Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize Exhibition in April (see below).

Vehicles

There is an open invitation for people to share ideas about what they would like to see along the Ridgeway in 50 years' time. This will create a vision for the Ridgeway's future - the Ridgeway Future 50. One aspiration that comes to my mind is unfinished business: the total prohibition of recreational vehicles from the Ridgeway. The FoR was formed in 1982 principally for this purpose. FoR and other organisations, including Ramblers and GLEAM (Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement) campaigned for decades to this end. Partial success was gained through the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006: byways defined as Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) became restricted byways - banned to unnecessary motor vehicles. This was a boon for the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire, as that section was still a RUPP. Sadly the byway sections in Wiltshire and Berkshire had already been redefined as byways open to all traffic (BOATs). Further campaigning resulted in these BOATS being closed to motor vehicles for half the year - 'winter' - when 4x4s and motor cycles cause the most damage, We look forward to the Ridgeway and other National Trails that include byways living up to Natural England's original version of National Trails, namely a 'presumption of routes being traffic free.'

Dave Cavanagh

Ramblers representative on the Ridgeway Partnership Board, and Secretary of the Friends of the Ridgeway.

*__Ridgeway Arts Prize__: The Friends of the Ridgway are again running a competition open to all which celebrates the artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway National Trail. Called the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize, it encompasses painting, sculpture, photography and writing (poetry and prose). The closing date for entries this year is 23 March. An exhibition of the entries will be on show on Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 April at the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall in Uffington, Oxfordshire, and online at https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/swire-ridgeway-arts-prize by 22 April.

Dukes Meadows footbridge opened

The Dukes Meadows footbridge was formally opened on Friday 13 January. It provides users with a continuous riverside walk on the Chiswick bank of the Thames at Barnes Railway Bridge in south west London where previously walkers needed to divert to an underpass some distance to the north.

The enhanced route will provide walkers with convenient and safer access to the Thames Path, removing the previous obstacle of a long detour to rejoin the route after Barnes Bridge. It also improves accessibility and safety for pushchairs, mobility scooters and wheelchairs, and improves pedestrian flow for residents and visitors. And, not only all the above, which are always to be welcomed, it is an innovative, elegant design which puts the user above the Thames while offering sweeping views up and down the river.

It is the culmination of six years of campaigning by various community groups, spearheaded by Councillor John Todd of Hounslow Borough and tributes were paid at the opening to the partnership of the borough, Network Rail, Moxon Architects and bridge builders Knights Brown.

The project is part of the Mayor of London's £53 million Liveable Neighbourhoods initiative and is a prominent example of Hounslow council's commitment tyo invest £5 million to ensure its parks and open spaces remain some of the best in London. It is hoped that the project will increase access to the Thames Path at Dukes Meadows and encourage local residents and visitors to use more sustainable modes of travel.

Des Garrahan



The elegant new footbridge takes walkers under Barnes Bridge. Photo: Des Garrahan



Thames Path National Trail manager Hannah Gutteridge with Hounslow councillor John Todd at the opening. Photo: Wendy Tobbitt.

Mole Valley Spring Walks Festival



Walkers take a break at the 'Perspectives' shelter designed by Giles Miller and located at Winterfold in the Hurtwood, Surrey.

Fancy walking somewhere a little different for a change? We are excited to announce the return of this ever-popular event which will take place this year from 22 April to 1 May. Set in the Surrey Hills, it has a programme crammed with captivating walks. There is certain to be something to please everyone during the 10-day period.

These guided walks are completely free and will include a good selection of both day and evening hikes, generally between three and 15 miles long. We are planning to incorporate a few walks with quirky or unusual themes to further enhance the experience.

For full details go to https://www.molevalleyramblers.org.uk/festival.

Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers

Richard Jefferies Wildlife Walk: 175 miles for 175 years

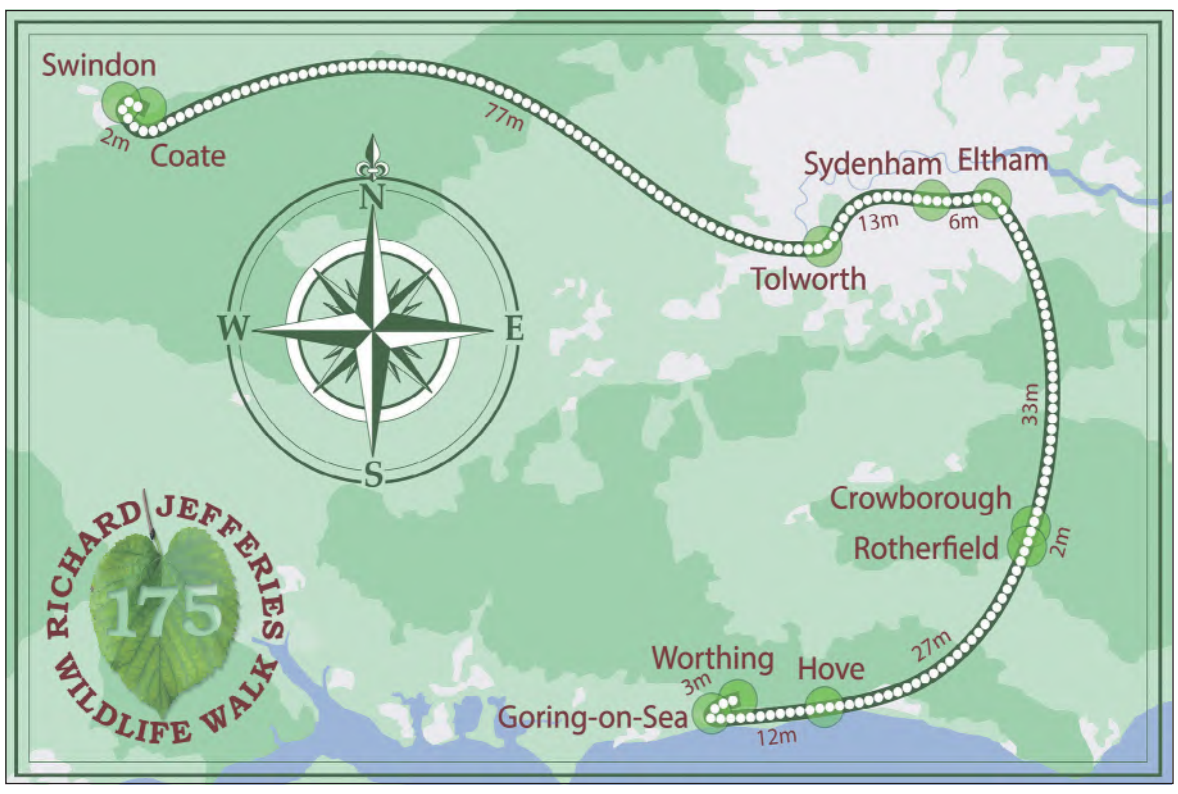
The Richard Jefferies Museum is organising a Wildlife Walk across Southern England to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the birth of Jefferies. The route, which visits the main places in which he lived, will reflect the life and interests of the author, a Victorian writer with a passion for the countryside and the richness of nature.

The public are invited to join in along any section of the walk they wish. It will start at Broadwater Cemetery in Worthing where Jefferies was buried, go through Sussex and the suburbs of London, and follow the Ridgeway in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire from Streatley past Uffington to Liddington Hill before dropping down to finish at the museum in Coate, Swindon.

All who join in will be asked to tell the museum about how the walk went for them, and to share their photos, videos, drawings etc. This will enable the museum to compare many aspects of the environment along the way with what Jefferies saw. This will all contribute to the final stage of the project - a book telling the whole story of the Wildlife Walk beginning with the life and writing of Richard Jeffetries, including the things discovered when retracing his steps, and finishing with reflections on the lessons learnt by everyone who took part.

The launch of the walk will be in the week leading up to Earth Day on 22 April and it will end with a celebration at the museum in Swindon on 6 November, Richard Jefferies birthday. For more information about the walk visit the museum's website at www.richardjefferies.org. They also have a dedicated email address at walk@richardjefferies.org.

Dave Cavanagh
Oxfordshire Ramblers



The route of the Richard Jefferies 175th anniversary walk.

Canterbury Walking Week

Canterbury Ramblers are delighted to announce the third Canterbury Walking Week will take place from 23 to 30 April. This event is entirely free to all participants and Ramblers members from outside the area are warmly invited. We try to time the event to take advantage of the bluebell season. This is a time when the ancient woodlands which surround the city erupt into new life with the warming spring weather and the longer days. The displays of bluebells and wood anemones are some of the best in the country and a natural spectacle not to be missed.

As usual we welcome all comers but especially potential new members of our local Canterbury Ramblers group. We have a wide selection of walks to choose from. Just check out the programme on our website - http://www.kentramblers.org.uk/canterbury/events/html - and book direct by text with the leader.

David Reekie



A carpet of bluebells near Canterbury. Photo: David Reekie

Ash Ranges update

Readers may recall that in March 2020, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) locked the gates to 330 acres of Ash Ranges in Surrey without notice or consultation. The effect was that residents of Ash Vale and Ash were denied access to a popular local exercising area during lockdown. Previously, when the red flags were lowered at 4pm, that part of the ranges filled with leisure walkers, including wheelchair users, who found the concrete range roads a safe place for exercise. These roads were also a good place for families with young children to cycle.

Following the predictable public outcry, which was later supported by local MP Michael Gove, the DIO backtracked a little. Its first response was to improve paths outside the range boundary. Although of fair quality, they were no replacement for the routes lost.

In April 2022, the western boundary roads within the restricted area were reopened when the ranges were not in use.

A Freedom of Information request has shed light on future work. Work on an east-west route was due to start earlier this year and is expected to be completed by the end of March. This route should give ramblers an attractive path from the Ash Vale station area to the Romping Downs.

Ash Ranges and other ranges provide some of the most interesting landscapes in the south east. For those wishing to walk across military lands, do an online search for 'south east training estate firing times'. Firing times for a given month are generally posted around the end of the previous month. If you can't see the times for a month, try scrolling down the long page. As a rule of thumb, the army facilitates its troops to visit their families around public holidays so you are most likely to get daytime access around Easter, the three public holidays this coming May, August Bank Holiday and the Christmas period.

David Cooper
Publicity Officer, Surrey Area

R-OAR with Aylesbury Ramblers

2023 will be the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Outer Aylesbury Ring (OAR), a 53-mile circular walk following the higher ground around Aylesbury and enjoying the best views of the Chiltern hills and North Buckinghamshire. To celebrate the milestone, Aylesbury & District Ramblers are planning to incorporate all 23 circular walks in their regular walk programmes and thereby walk the entire OAR in this anniversary year.

Roy Johnson (then our MembershipSecretary and now our Footpath and Countryside Secretary) came up with the concept of an 'outer' ring and carried out the majority of the work to define the route and the associated local circular walks (varying between four and 13 miles). These can be walked in isolation or as stages in a complete walk of the OAR. In 2012 over £12,000 was raised thanks to the generosity of many local sponsors and relevant organisations which funded the development of the route, the design and production of wa;lk guides, the waymarking and the clearing of many paths. In 2016, the OAR was shown on the relevant Ordnance Survey Explorer maps for posterity.

So if you are looking for a long distance path through beautiful countryside and interesting small towns, why not give the OAR a go? You can find all you need to know at our website (www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk/outer-aylesbury-ring. And if you do walk it, let us know how you get on. You might even bump into some of us along the way this summer.

Stephen Putman

Aylesbury & District Ramblers



Looking over the Vale of Aylesbury from the Outer Aylesbury Ring. Photo: Stephen Putman

SOUTH EAST walker

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London's leisure walking plan launched

Transport for London (TfL) launched their Leisure Walking Plan on4 November 2022 and, in so doing, became the first city in the world to have such a plan. In publishing the capital's plan to boost the level of walking for leisure they acknowledged a number of points the Ramblers has been making for years. Leisure walking provides people with an affordable and easy way to support good health, and physical and mental wellbeing while protecting and improving the environment. The new action plan will enhance and expand leisure walking routes and better connect London's communities with green spaces, building on increases in leisure walking seen since the pandemic.

Inner London Ramblers have been active partners in this for the last seven years. Along with London Living Streets we have had regular quarterly meetings with TfL's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, Will Norman and, again with London Living Streets, we were the main contributors in supplying the Mayor of London with ideas for six new Greenways.



Will Norman, London's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, with Des Garrahan (front) and Clare Wadd, Vice Chair of Inner London Ramblers.

In February the plan moved into delivery implementation mode and Inner London Ramblers will be in the room talking about how best to achieve this. We will be active on two fronts: improving the existing routes and advising on expanding the network. As Will Norman said at the launch: "London is already a great place to explore on foot but as Londoners grapple with the impacts of climate change, a child inactivity crisis and spiralling cost of living, it is vital that we move to improve London's leisure walking network. Walking provides people with an affordable, easy way to maintain their mental and physical wellbeing while protecting and improving the environment. Our action plan will enhance and improve the Walk London network making London much more walkable and in doing so improve Londoners' health, reduce health inequalities and increase access to green spaces - contributing to building a better, greener London for everyone,"

These are sentiments we completely endorse and we will, along with our partners, be at the heart of making it happen for walkers in London.

Des Garrahan

Chair, Inner London Ramblers

Don't miss out:

Not receiving membership emails from the Ramblers, your Area or your group? If these are not reaching you, make sure you update your email contact preferences on the 'My Account' (www.ramblers.org.uk/my-account) so you don't miss out! You can also change your contact preferences by calling the Ramblers Supporter Care Team on 020 3961 3232.

Ridgeway:

A new visitor information leaflet for the National Trail was published in January. It shows places to eat, drink and sleep along the route, together with a little on the history. It can be downloaded from nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/leaflets/

London Rivers Week:

Environmental charity Thames 21 is planning another London Rivers Week to take place this year from 29 May to 4 June. The theme this year is how river restoration can reduce the impact of climate change. There will be a range of events including river walks and talks. Details from thames21.org.uk.

Alpkit:

This outdoor clothing retailer has opened a new store in Kingston-upon-Thames (at 26-28 Old London Road). The firm has a foundation that makes small awards to people, groups and schools which work to remove barriers to getting outdoors and experience wild places. If you have a project in mind go to https://alpkit.com/pages/foundation.

Explore with map and compass:

John Harmer plans to run another of his one-day corses for beginners on either Saturday 15 or 22 April in Battle, East Sussex. If you are interested, please contact him on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com. A more advanced course may also be offered later in the year.



INNER LONDON *insights*

London Loop. Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk

Having had to postpone our scheduled volunteers meeting at Transport for London (TfL) in November because of the transport strikes, many of us finally met up in January for our first in-person meeting since the project's inception back in 2019.

London's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, Will Norman, hosted the meeting at TfL's offices in Stratford, and thanked us all for our work in recent years to improve the waymarking and guidance for the routes, as well as to promote them to the walking public. Our guest speaker, Alexandra Rook, who was the Project Manager for Walk London on the original project to build the Ring and the Loop, shared some of their history with us, and inspired us to continue our work. Colin Saunders, author of the Capital Ring book and of recent updates to the London Loop book has been supportive of the project since inception, and we were delighted he was able to join us too. Volunteers were able to meet each other as we shared successes, knowledge and challenges. At the meeting we gave out supplies of waymark discs, stickers and the special screws used for the discs, along with cards for volunteers to hand out to walkers we meet on the routes, directing them to our website and updated route guidance.

Project coordinator Jo Cuttell has put together the inaugural report showcasing what the project has achieved so far, and this was circulated to volunteers at the meeting and to TfL. The report is also now available on the Inner London Ramblers website. We plan to make this an annual report from now on, to make sure they take note of and share our successes and can see the totality of them, as well as keeping us on track for the future. The annual report will also serve to make interested third parties aware of what we're doing to improve the routes and route guidance.

There are around 60 volunteers on the project, and we are still making waymarking improvements to sections of both the Capital Ring and the London Loop, with the result that both have become considerably easier to follow since we started our project. In the autumn we prepared newly updated walk guidance for the Capital Ring that was published on our website at the start of January 2023. Hits on the Capital Ring route guidance, published first, now stand at over 150,000, whilst those for the London Loop have now exceeded 80,000.

We're grateful to Marcus Liddle for supporting the project on Twitter and Instagram over the last year, which has led to a noticeable increase in walkers using the #CapitalRing and #LondonLoop hashtags and in our number of followers. Marcus has had to step down due to work commitments, so we are looking for someone to take over this role, who can post about walking some of one or other route now and then, and can give a little time every few days to posting and re-posting on social media. Please contact me if you could take this role on, or if you would like to get involved in the project in any other way.



Volunteer Philippa Huston with a new Capital Ring sign on Harrow High Street. Photo: Jackie Gower

Clare Wadd
vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Active Thames 2023

Inner London Ramblers have had a strong, productive working relationship with the Port of London Authority for over 10 years. We were active supporters of the Thames Vision 2035 river strategy, launched in 2016, which captured six goals for increasing the use of the Thames in a safe and sustainable way across port trade, inland freight, passenger transport, sport, environment, culture and community.

When the Thames Vision 2050 was launched, last year, we were a key partner (see Destination Thames: Voices from the river at thamesvision.pla.co.uk/destination-thames) . And this year we were successful with two grant applications from the Port of London Authority's Active Thames Fund.

More than £90,000 was awarded to 24 organisations promoting activity on the tidal Thames and inland waterways in London, Kent and Essex. For 2023 Inner London Ramblers will receive £8107.50 for two separate projects. The Port of London Authority is responsible for the tidal Thames. The tidal Thames is a 95-mile long estuary starting at Teddington Lock and winding its way through the most heavily urbanised city in Europe. It continues through Kent and Essex until it flows into the North Sea, running alongside are both the Thames Path National Trail and the England Coast Path.

Inner London Ramblers will receive £3450 to devise, develop. deliver and document 10 walks along the route and £4657.50 to provide walk leader training to other organisations who were successful in Active Thames 2023 grant applications. These projects are primarily outreach in nature and you can look forward to updates on progress through the year.

Des Garrahan
Chair, Inner London Ramblers



Des Garrahan (in yellow) leads a group by the Thames as part of the 'Illuminated River' project. Photo: Milo Robinson



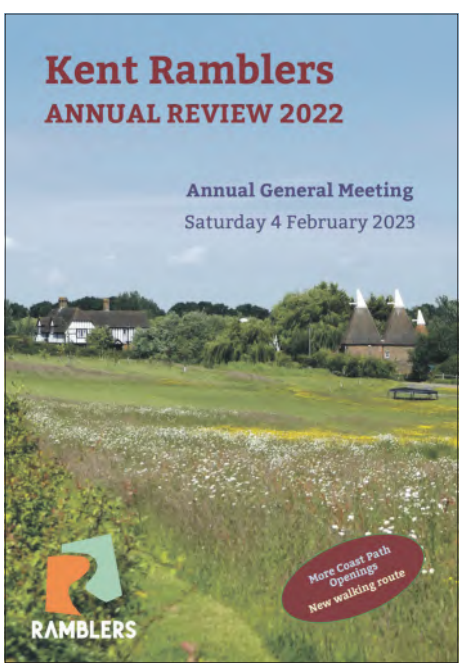
KENT *calling*

Area Secretary's diary

For many the Christmas break is an opportunity to put aside the cares of work and unwind. For a busy Area Secretary, however, it is a time to catch up on a backlog of pressing tasks.

It is always a relief to get the Annual review off to the printers but relief turned to panic when I downloaded a mailing list from the national membership database and spotted that several lines were missing from one address ... and another ... and another ... In fact over 25 once I had spent an afternoon trawling through over 3,000 addresses filling in the missing lines from Royal Mail's address finder. You can view our Annual Review from the News page of our website at www.kentramblers.org.uk/news.

As usual the Annual Review contained a plea for more volunteers to help with our public rights of way work, this year focusing on our Local Footpath Officers. I am pleased to say that the response has exceeded expectations and we have filled a significant number of vacancies for both Local Footpath Officers and Parish Footpath Observers.



The Annual Review 2022.



Sir John Hawkins' Hospital on Chatham High Street.

The next task was, at the request of Area Council, to draft a motion for the AGM to send to General Council seeking a better understanding by Central Office staff of the work we do in Areas and groups and the way we do it. We have been concerned that projects such as Assemble and the new Walks Manager indicate a substantial mismatch between what staff think we need and what we actually need.

It was then time to turn my attention back to our footpath volunteers. We have long recognised the need for more communication with them but we have had vacancy or volunteers for whom the work was very low priority in our top public rights of way leadership post for many years. So I had, perhaps rashly, agreed to step into the breach and produce the first issue of what we hope will be a regular newsletter for all our footpath volunteers. Now was the time to deliver. In our first issue we have concentrated on reporting the talks given at our conference for footpath volunteers in October. While attendance had been in line with past experience, those present were nevertheless a small fraction of our total footpath volunteers so the newsletter is the only way of getting the very useful information presented to the rest of them. Piecing together a coherent narrative from slides and scribbled notes is quite challenging but the job is done and the speakers were all satisfied with the result.

I'm not much of a one for Christmas presents but I was delighted when a courier rang the doorbell with a metre-long cardboard tube. Inside was a proof of the information board I have designed for installation in Tonbridge High Street, adjacent to the castle, promoting the Wealdway, the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk. All looked good on the paper proof and the design will now be printed onto aluminium sheet, framed and delivered to Kent County Council's public rights of way team who have agreed to install it for no charge. We hope the board will promote not just the walks but also the Ramblers. It has been funded with profits from the sale of our walking guides.

My first outing of 2023 was to the Kent County Archives along with a couple of colleagues. We were looking for paths omitted from the definitive maps, focusing particularly on old railway plans which identify public footpaths that proposed lines would cross. I was specifically looking for evidence of a path on the Isle of Sheppey that would complete a link from Eastchurch to the southern shore of the island for access to the England Coast Path. I came away with over 200 photographs to work through when time allows.

The New Year is always marked by a flurry of Annual Reviews being returned by Royal Mail as undeliverable. I find it astonishing that so many of our members move house without arranging to have their mail forwarded or letting us know their new address. All the returned envelopes have to be scanned and emailed to Central Office to note the membership records and attempt to make contact with the member.

One of the articles in the Annual Review concerned my exploration of the route of the newly opened section of the England Coast Path through Medway, particularly Chatham High Street. I was pleased to receive an email from one reader who is involved with a project to revitalise Chatham High Street to create a more vibrant community and encourage the refurbishment of its many historic buildings, As part of this, Historic England has produced a report on the history, commercial development and architecture of the area on which I hope to draw when writing the relevant part of our guide to the Kent Coast Path - although distilling the report's 135 pages down to a few choice paragraphs seems likely to test my capacity for succinctness to its limit. This project, known as Chatham Intra, is just one of Historic England's 'High Streets Heritage Action Zones' and I see that another is Ramsgate, also on the Coast Path in Kent, so I shall be reviewing that material too.

Our Saxon Shore Way web page is the third most visited on our website and nearly 50 people have taken up our invitation to test out our draft guide to the route. The latest approach came from a team planning to create an audio walk along a section of the Saxon Shore Way near Lower Halstow with a particular emphasis on celebrating the role of the sailing barge in commerce along the Thames in past times. It is really helpful to make contact with local people whose knowledge greatly enriches our walking guides.

Media events have been a recurring theme of the past quarter. First we were asked to participate in a podcast with comedian Ed Byrne walking the clifftop path between Broadstairs and Ramsgate in late October. Next I was asked to find a really old (and old-looking) path in Kent for a photoshoot starring our Chairman Colin Sefton for the cover of Walk magazine. The final choice was part of the route from Penshurst to Hever on the Eden Valley walk that was likely used by Henry VIII when staying at Penshurst and visiting Anne Boleyn at Hever. The path has been cut through a section of solid sandstone. Then BBC South East sought my advice on a route from Gravesend to Eastbourne ('Pier to Pier') for a walk for Children in Need. Although I was able to help improve their oute, I was unable to help with the weather. Today I am corresponding with a team wanting some ramblers to participate in a photoshoot lasting nine days at different sites along the North Downs Way to produce photographs for Kent County Council's Explore Kent section.

All in all, another busy quarter with over 1,800 emails received and sent and around 300 hours spent on Kent Ramblers business.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



Restored sailing barge 'Edith May' at Lower Halstow.



Shooting the cover for Walk magazine.



ESSEX extras

Change of date for AGM

Because of maintenance work at the venue, Essex Area's Annual General Meeting will now be held at Essex County Cricket Club's ground in Chelmsford on Saturday 11 March, rather than on 11 February, commencing at 10am. The guest speaker will be Stephen Neale, author of *The England Coast Path: 1,000 mini-adventures around the world's longest coastal path.*

Essex Highways issue ID cards

In the previous issue of South East Walker, I wrote about the work the Ramblers were doing in certain parts of the county to fill the gap left by local authority cutbacks by using work parties to clear footpaths and replace waymarks, among other tasks. But it's possible that our members could be challenged, perhaps by landowners questioning their right to be on the site. For this reason, Essex Highways has produced a laminated credit card-sized card to be carried by volunteers, which reads as follows: "This volunteer is working on behalf of Essex County Council Public Rights of Way team to improve access to the countryside. If you have any concerns or questions about the works they are doing please contact me on the email below or at the above address".

Essex Ramblers believes that this is a great initiative which illustrates the good relationship which has recently developed between us and Essex Highways. Might highway authorities in other counties produce similar cards if they do not already do so?

Mike Cannell
Media Officer, Essex Ramblers

National Mills Weekend:

Many wind and water mills across the UK will be open to the public for the annual event which this year takes place on 13 and 14 May. The event is coordinated by the mills section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and details can be found on their website at spab.org.uk/mills/national-mills-weekend.

Surrey Diggers' Trail:

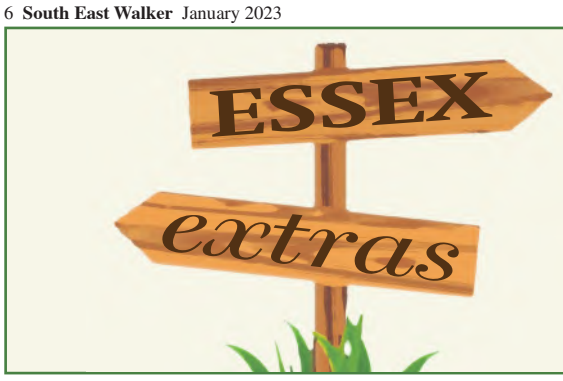
Elmbridge Museum has updated its web pages on the Diggers' Trail which spans Cobham, Weybridge and Walton-on-Thames. The pages tell the story of the radical group led by Gerrard Winstanley which emerged in the 1660s and the sites in the borough associated with them. Details are at elmbridgemuseum.org.uk/surrey-diggers-trail/.

Camden Highline:

Camden Council in London approved plans in January for the first section of a walkway along disused railway tracks between Camden Gardens and Royal College Street. The Camden Highline project, which has been supported by Inner London Ramblers, aims to eventually extend the route to York Way.

UK breaks:

Ramblers Walking Holidays has added new UK short breaks to its programme this year. A four-day holiday in Leamington and Kenilworth is available in April and October whilst five-day breaks have been added for the Isle of Purbeck in May, June, September and October, and to Buxton and the High Peaks in the same months. Details from ramblersholidays.co.uk or 01707 537277.



ESSEX *extras*

How it is now

Most groups have memories of special members who have shaped their histories and West Essex Ramblers is no exception. Two friends, Harry Bitten and Freddie Matthews were founders of the group in 1970. Harry took on the role of Countryside Officer and went on to become a very influential member of the Friends of Epping Forest; an organisation which supported the City of London in its pioneering work to make the forest welcoming to everyone. Freddie Matthews was the first secretary of the group and initially became known for his leadership of 'commando raids' to open public rights of way which had been largely lost since the war. He eventually became President of the Ramblers Essex Area.

Both had other strings to their bows. Freddie researched and wrote books and Harry, who was a gifted artist, illustrated them and drew the maps. Their routes like the Harcamlow, St Peter's and Essex Ways are all featured on Ordnance Survey maps.

In the mid-1970s they had a brilliant idea: they would design and publish a walk through the length of Epping Forest which would commemorate the centenary of the passing of the Epping Forest Act of 1878 which saved the forest for the people. The walk, which was sensibly called the Centenary Walk, was described, and mapped in a booklet which also contained advice on what to wear, location of toilets, and the fact that the route had several access points. The first organised Centenary Walk started from Manor Park in 1978, and it subsequently gained in popularity as it annually made its 14+ mile way to Epping station mainly because people were encouraged to join it along the route.

The walk was an immediate success, every September, with Harry leading from the start. Numbers grew and it was not unusual for 200 people to take part in what became a regular event in the East London walkers' calendar. After 28 years, at the age of 81, Harry passed the baton of leadership on to Mike Whitely, then a Secretary of the West Essex Ramblers. Mike was another popular leader until the walk was cancelled in 2020 because of Covid.

In the meantime, there were other developments; the Friends of Epping Forest amalgamated with another charity, the Epping Forest Centenary Trust, to form the Epping Forest Heritage Trust. The new charity, with a bank balance of over half a million pounds appointed a Chief Executive, spruced up its newsletter and enhanced its campaigns to increase funding.

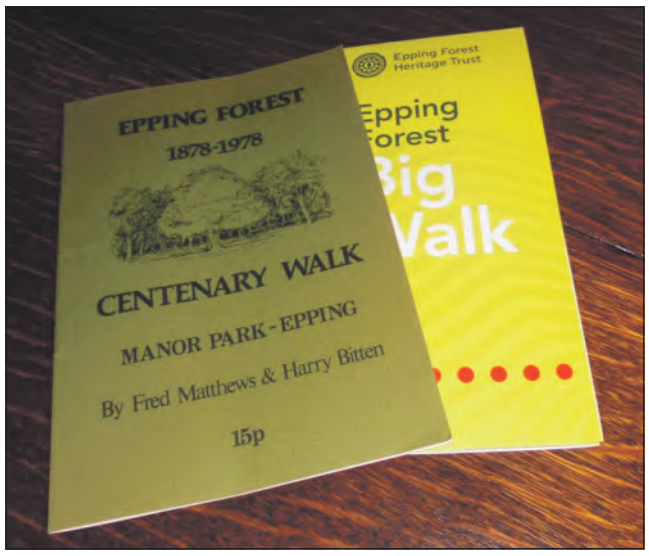
At roughly the same time the City of London, which manages Epping Forest, also decided that it needed more cash and started to institute a plan for pay & display parking in its 37 car parks. The collection of fees is outsourced. Some of this increased income has been used to improve the car parks but much was needed for the parking machines. The number of forest keepers or 'constables' was reduced but the remainder patrol in cars painted like police vehicles,and lock and unlock the parking areas each day. The imposition of these charges was energetically opposed by local Ramblers and the Essex Area; any opposition from the Epping Forest Heritage Trust was not publicised.

But the Heritage Trust had bigger fish to fry. Although, sometimes, the trust seemed reluctant to acknowledge the part the Ramblers had played in the Centenary Walk for 42 years, it was obvious that West Essex Ramblers was the main engine behind its success. In 2022 the Heritage Trust, along with the City of London decided, without any consultation to re-name our walk as 'The Big Walk' thus, at a stroke, removing the historical connotations of the event - it should be noted that one of the trust's objectives is, "To preserve the historical and cultural heritage of Epping Forest''. Perhaps even more disappointing is the notion that tickets are to be issued for the annual walk, numbers will be limited, and sponsorship sought. All of this is advertised in a glossy production which carries scant reference to the way that Ramblers have cared for and enhanced the event. At a time when unhindered countryside access is at a premium, public services are being cut, and volunteer efforts need to be recognised more than ever, this seemingly graceless and dishonourable airbrushing of Ramblers out of what has been a success story is very sad.

Things change.

Len Banister

President of Essex Area Ramblers



The original guide produced by Harry Bitten and Freddie Matthews with Epping Forest Heritage Trust's guide to what it calls 'The Big Walk'.



OXFORDSHIRE *on-line*

Footpath matters

County council

The public inquiry into the extinguishment of the Culham rail crossing was on 24 January. Ramblers and CPRE both asked for written representations, but Network Rail insisted on an inquiry. The safety, or lack of it, is not an issue; only the convenience or otherwise of the alternative route.

The diversion order on Tetsworth FP65 has been confirmed; it remains to be seen whether the adjacent landowner has removed the fence. A proposed diversion at the Tuthill Porsche plant is an improvement, as the definitive line runs between the buildings and the trees and climbs over two of them; on the proposed diversion the trees block out the buildings rather than the view.

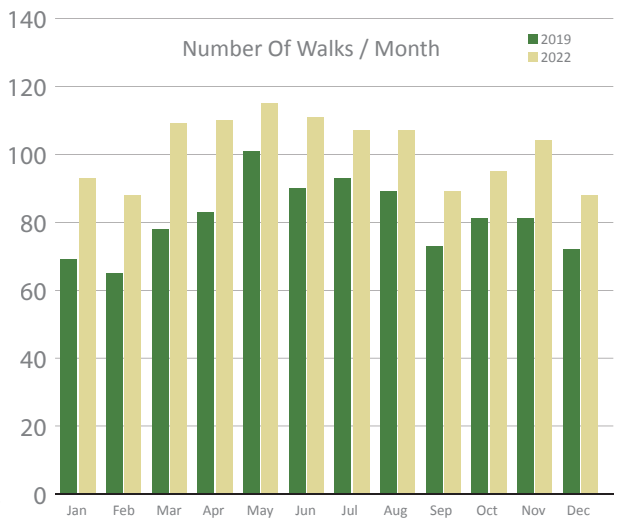
The modification order for Hayway Lane in Hook Norton, listed in the inclosure award (1774), has been confirmed. Also confirmed is the diversion of Caversfield FP1 to the walked route rather than over an impassable MoD fence. The objectors to the modification order at Beachborough School, Mixbury, refused to attend the inquiry, and the order was confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate on the evidence they had.

Walks programme healthy despite Covid

During 2022 Oxfordshire Ramblers had over 1,200 led walks (5% Easy, 40% Leisurely, 46% Moderate, 8% Strenuous) with distances varying between 2.5 miles to 18 miles. The main change since the pandemic is that the number of Strenuous walks has more than doubled to 111 during the year. The bar chart (right) compares the number of walks each month in 2022 with walks in 2019, before the pandemic started. Overall there has been a staggering 25% increase in the number of walks, with Bicester & Kidlington Group (+68%) and Henley & Goring Group (+49%) leading the way. Huge thanks to all our walk leaders and group walk organisers!

Richard Birch

Area Walks Coordinator



Other matters

One can find all sorts of strange facts whi;le looking for something else entirely. The place-names dictionaries give the boundaries of Anglo-Saxon estates, most of which I find totally impenetrable but occasionally part of the text may be blindingly obvious. On the right is a photo of the River Humber in full spate (it is usually dry). In case anyone may be more familiar with the estuary up north, this one is on the boundary between Shipton-on-Cherwell and Thrupp from the charter of 1005, and there are three more Humbers in Oxfordshire. The name is common in charters, and nobody knows what it means.

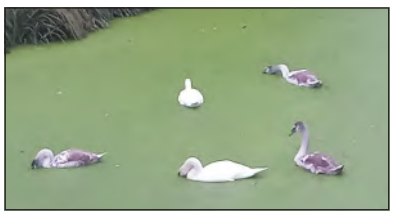
Also (right) is a photo I took while walking back from a group walk from Abingdon to the Redbridge park-and-ride, of swans swimming in what looks like green slime in the Hinksey Stream below the old Abingdon Road.

David Godfrey

Area Footpath Secretary.



River Humber on the boundary between Shipton-on-Cherwell and Thrupp. Photo: David Godfrey



Swans on the Hinksey Stream below the old Abingdon Road. Photo: David Godfrey



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Area AGM

Berkshire Area held a well-attended AGM on Saturday 26 November at Purley Barn, a beautiful old barn, near Reading. The event was hosted by Pang Valley Ramblers who made everyone feel very welcome.

The day started with a choice of walks - one of four miles, the other of six miles - and these were well received with attendees commenting on how good they were. Walkers then sat down to tuck into their packed lunches followed by wonderful cakes made by members of the host group and washed down with plenty of tea and coffee. Next came an informative talk from Jeff Knot of the RSPB about red kites in the Thames Valley before the business of the day. We had reports by the elected officers about the activities of the past year. A new committee was formally elected with some old faces stepping down after years of hard work and some existing faces sticking around for another year. We welcomed a Vice Chair onto the committee for the first time too!

Last item on the agenda was a question and answer session with a couple of Ramblers trustees. We were lucky enough to have Helen Tranter and Bekah Cork to update us on the goings on at Ramblers Central Office and update us on future plans before answering questions.



Preparing for the AGM in Purley Barn. Photo: Jason Owen

Thank you to all who attended the meeting and we look forward to the 2023 AGM!

Jason Owen

Staycation

Berkshire Walkers Group hosted the 'Winter Staycation; for people who were around over Christmas and New Year and wanted to get out to walk off all the turkey, mince pies and chocolate eaten during the festivities.

The event was held from Tuesday 27 December to Monday 2 January. We held seven walks varying from five and a half to 10.5 miles. Sadly, the weather wasn't always on our side. On some walks it seemed to rain all day but others had no more than a shower. Yes, we may have been damp at times and feet may have started to get wet from the puddles but we had some new faces join us on their first walk.

The walks covered a large part of Berkshire and beyond, giving people the chance to explore new areas. Thanks to our committee members and walk leaders for making this event possible for without your hard work and dedication we wouldn't be able to host these fun events during the year.

Jason Owen
Publicity Officer, Berkshire Area



A good turnout for a Staycation walk around Bucklebury. Photo: Jason Owen

Joint walk

Two Berkshire groups met up for a joint walk to celebrate the New Year. Members of Windsor & District and South East Berkshire groups walked together on a route which started in Upton Court Park, Slough, and circled around Eton and along the Thames Path in Windsor. It was a dry day but somewhat muddy underfoot in places. Everyone enjoyed the chance to meet and chat with members of a neighbouring group.

Joyce Keegan
Windsor & District Ramblers



Ready to start in Upton Court Park. Photo: Doc Bailey

No more soggy feet

A new boardwalk, funded by South East Berkshire Ramblers, was installed last summer on Warfield Footpath 7 which runs between Malt Hill and Church Lane and has been prone to flooding. The work was carried out by Bracknell Conservation Volunteers and Bracknell Forest Council.

Brian Poulton
South East Berkshire Ramblers



The new boardwalk. Photo: Rob Solomon

Trig bagging

Have you heard of trig bagging? Well it was a new one for me! Apparently some people like to keep a tally of all the different trig pillars they've encountered.

In the UK these concrete pillars were erected on top of prominent mountains and hills by the Ordnance Survey. They were used to mount a theodolite so that by using a mathematical process called triangulation an accurate unified map of the entire country could be created. Brigadier Martin Hotine was head of the Trigonometrical and Levelling Division at the Ordnance Survey and was responsible for the whole process and it must have been an enormous feat of engineering and organisation. The process was started around 1935 and lasted until 1962.

Of course, they are obsolete now having been superseded by aerial photography, satellite and laser technology. Represented on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps by a blue triangle with a blue dot in the middle, these concrete monuments have become a familiar site to walkers and runners. There are almost 5,500 of the original 6,500 still standing and they now have a sort of 'fan club' of 'trig baggers' who try to visit as many of them as they can.

Now, for some bizarre reason, Mole Valley Ramblers member Henri de B had set his heart on seeing the trig point sited on Oyster Hill near Headley, Surrey. It is marked with a little 187 next to it on the Ordnance Survey Explorer map (this refers to the height above sea level). Each trig point has a brass plate on the side with a number on it. This one on Oyster Hill has S3363 on it. As it was Henri's birthday we humoured him and accompanied him on a route around Walton on the Hill. What follows is an account of our adventure.

I am not certain if it was the thought of seeing trig pillar S3363 or whether they were lured by the promise of cake, but a whopping group of 25 people plus two dogs turned up! It was a rowdy bunch of birthday revellers that set out from the National Trust's car park at Headley Heath on that cold January morning. Initially, we followed a trail marked with copious quantities of cake crumbs which mysteriously led us to a local friend's house where there was even more cake (of the ginger and lemon drizzle varieties) on offer.

Thus fortified with cake, a raucous verse of Happy Birthday was sung and then with no further ado we embarked on the trig hugging mission. In many ways hunting a trig pillar is a pretty tame sport. For one thing they are made of concrete and don't move BUT they do sometimes hide - or at least this one had! Eventually with the help of a compass and some rather impressive machete-like-action from the front runners, we finally encountered it deep in the undergrowth.

Just in case it made a bid for freedom before we had obtained the necessary photographic evidence, it was deemed crucial to restrain it. One brave member actually pinned it down from above whilst it was surrounded by the others. In this subdued fashion a photo was taken.

As a result of this entertaining experience we are considering including a trig pillar related challenge in our Mole Valley Ramblers 2023 Spring Walks Festival.

PS The trig pillar was released back into the wild and seemed unharmed by the experience.

Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers

For more on trig points and bagging them go to trigpointing.uk.



The trig baggers met up on Oyster Hill, near Headley, Surrey. Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage



That elusive trig point is spotted! Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

Walking the Weald

A walk along a section of the Wealdway between Uckfield and the Blackboys Inn in East Sussex during springtime a few years ago led me to this scene and inspired my words below.

We walk out early,
glad of slow-growing light,
the mild air from the south ;
both gifts unlooked for, now,
in a cool month only just spilling
clumps of daffodils across the grass--
nodding their honey on the breeze.

And bumblebees,
clumsy along the path-edge,
blundering into legs and sticks and boots,
like drunkards walking in surprise
to find it's morning, after all,
no longer a winter night's dreaming.

Above the greensand ridge we're following,
on the north edge of the Weald,
two buzzards rise on thermals:
spiral over spiral on invisible sky-stairs.
In their gimlet eyes we are as nothing;
their shrieked calls are in a language
meant for each other, not for us.

Then fieldfares explode ahead of us--
a hundred, more--fling
diamond breasts into the haze; swirl,
gleeful with sunlight, glutted
on rotting orchard pears;
gleam like silver coins against the blue...

Now, all along the Greensand Way,
crab-apples, fat and red,
decorate fresh trees.

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher



Ephemera and other things

Our man in the dusty attic, John Pestle, takes another look through his collected papers.

My copy of the Red Rope Bulletin of March 1991 is on its way to the recycling bin while at the same time it raises the question of whether this walking group still exists and as it turns out it does. Probably the only defined socialist walking group in the UK, it currently has an excellent website and looks comprehensive and well-organised. And while Red Rope looks flourishing, we now know sadly that the Connoisseurs Walking Club which I mentioned previously has ceased to exist but all is not lost as a history of the club has been written and should be available in the near future. Watch this space for a review soon.

As some walking groups and clubs gain strength and others falter and fade away so do walking guides and trails. While some disappear completely others remain on the Ordnance Survey maps but their guidebooks go out of print. An example is the Saxon Shore Way; some work is underway (see Kent Calling on page x) but a complete up-to-date version isn't yet available. Having walked some of the trail over the summer months the route still has some of its waymarking and the route is fairly easy to follow as it is on the Ordnance Survey maps. You can also run into some interesting characters and obstructions along the way, one of which was a supposed 'accidental dumping of building waste' which almost completely covered the path but according to a local the validity of this accident is doubtful.

Another piece of paper that was going into the recycling bin was an advertisement for walking the Baltic Sea coast path through Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia which on closer examination revealed to be part of the E9 route which runs all the way from Estonia to Portugal (or the other way round). While I assumed that this route was solely mainland Europe, I soon discovered that a big chunk of the south of England provided this route linking France with Plymouth and then returning to France via Dover. The European Ramblers Association website provides a lot of information including the details of the English part of the E9 which consists of seven existing paths - South West Coast Path, Bournemouth Coast Path, Solent Way, then a possible diversion via the Isle of Wight, Staunton Way, South Downs Way, 1066 Country Walk and Saxon Shore Way. So. it's possible that many of us have walked parts of the E9 without realising that we were on a much longer trail. Sometimes this makes me think that the more I try to pass on or recycle my walking materials I end up discovering more enticing stuff which might or might not ever be used but you can dream.

Felsted Mill

In an article published in the June 2021 issue of South East Walker concerning proposals made in recent years to re-route Footpath 59 and construct a new bridge at Felsted Mill, it was stated that local homeowners had shown a "disregard" of the legal position. The Ramblers did not intend to suggest that the homeowners had acted unlawfully. However, we accept that the article could have been construed in that way, and apologise to the homeowners for this.

The article stated that homeowners had sought to divert FP59 by declaring the existing bridge unsafe. Whilst some residents, including local homeowners, had raised concerns with Essex County Council about the condition of the bridge whilst also campaigning through Felsted Parish Councilfor the re-routing of FP59, the Ramblers recognise that they did so in good faith and that only the council had the power to declare the bridge unsafe, which it did following an inspection by its engineers.

The article also said that local homeowners had "stopped" the public from accessing FP59. The Ramblers now understand that the path was not blocked unlawfully. Between 3 September and 14 October 2018 the section of FP59 running between FP60 and FP97 was closed by two consecutive Temporary Prohibition of Use orders. One of the homeowners displayed a copy of the order at the point of access to this section of FP59, as they were entitled to do. In September 2018 some members noticed that the gate at one end of the closed part of FP59 had been nailed shut and that a barrier had been erected at the other end, and raised this with the council. Members were advised by Essex Highways at the time that the closure notice applied only to the bridge. This advice now appears to have been misleading: it gave the impression that the notice did not apply to the barred and gated section of the path. It therefore gave rise to a concern, held in good faith, that those obstructions were unlawful.

On 15 October the council made a further order, restricting the closure to the bridge alone. A copy of the order continued to be displayed by the homeowners but was taken down at the council's request on 19 October 2018. In early December 2018, members noted the appearance of a further sign stating that the bridge at the mill was closed; this was also taken down on request.

Some members were concerned that signage displayed after 15 October could have deterred walkers from exercising their lawful right to walk the re-opened section of FP59. However, a council representative has subsequently confirmed that he did not consider that the homeowners had unlawfully blocked the path at this time, and The Ramblers accept the homeowners' assurance that the sign displayed in December 2018 was intended to forewarn walkers intending to use the bridge that it was closed.

The article also stated that planning approval had been obtained for the installation of a new bridge. For the record, this was incorrect: although the council had submitted a planning application, it later withdrew it prior to determination, having decided that no application was required for a 'like-for-like' replacement of the bridge.

Finally, the article expressed the view that the proposal to move the bridge offered "no benefits to walkers". Whilst this reflected the views of many local walkers opposed to re-routing FP59, we acknowledge that there were other points of view and that those proposing to move the bridge believed in good faith that the proposal would have significant benefits for the public.

We are happy to clarify these points and apologise to the homeowners for the misleading impression given by the article.

Heathland task

Thanks to the enthusiasm of our Chair and the efforts of Banstead Heath Conservators and the Surrey Hills Society, a plan to find volunteering opportunities for a group of asylum seekers was put to the test in January. After receiving instruction on the safe handling of equipment, the working party divided into small groups before removing hawthorn bushes which were encroaching on the heathland. Not only was the work completed with great energy but during the lunch break they launched into a party with music and an exuberant display of dancing!

Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers



Energetic group. Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

BEDFORDSHIRE bulletin

Can you help the Area?



The pre-AGM walkers at Sharpenhoe Clappers. Photo: Barry Ingram

A well-attended Area AGM was held on Sunday 27 November, hosted by Lea & Icknield (Luton) Group and preceded by a short walk led by their Chairman, Jeff Petts. Jeff took us around and over Sharpenhoe Clappers where we enjoyed misty views over the surrounding countryside. After an enjoyable ploughman's lunch we sat down for an informative presentation by Ramblers Trustee Michael Penny, and Ramblers Regional Engagement Officer Vanessa Slawson.

It was then on to the main business of the day. Members had been informed in advance that both the Publicity Officer and Footpath Officer were standing down but it was a shock to many to hear that our Chairman, Nick Markham, was also standing down for personal reasons. Therefore the only position remaining filled was that of Treasurer and Kevin Barratt was happy to continue in this role. Presentations were made to Nick, Bob and Barry in recognition of their services to the Area over many years. Unfortunately there were no offers to fill any of the vacant positions of Chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary and Publicity Officer and Vanessa Slawson explained the ramifications of this. The result is that the Area is currently 'mothballed' until at least the positions of Chair, Secretary and Footpath Officer are filled.

I think it is a poor reflection on members when we get in a situation where an Area with nearly 1,000 members cannot find volunteers to fill important positions. Many members seem happy to engage in activities but not so willing to put something back into the organisation to ensure that what they enjoy keeps going. Please give some thought to whether you could fill one of these vacant positions and help save the Area. Contact your local group Chair or Membership Secretary if you think you might be able to help or would like to know more.

Bedfordshire Walking Festival 2023

After 13 very successful years the future of our annual walking festival, including the popular Greensand Ridge Challenge, is in doubt. I started the event back in 2009 when I was the Area Chairman but in early 2022 I made it clear that this was to be my last year as organiser and others would need to take over. Nick Markham then arranged for Ruth McNally and myself to draw up a document detailing what needed to be done and when. This was presented at the Area committee meeting in October 2022. At the time, Nick intended to lead the way with support from the groups. Walks arranged by other organisations could still be obtained but the compilation and distribution of the programme and the publicity for the event caused some concern. However, members wanted the event to continue and agreed to discuss the matter again at the next meeting which was to be in January.

As there is now no Area committee and therefore no meetings it would seem the only way forward is if someone came forward to offer their services and took a lead by making contact with our groups and other organisations to get something underway. Could you help to ensure the festival takes place in September? Please contact me at barry.ingram74@btinternet,com or text me on 07860 348347 if you could assist.

RIPPLE activities

There's always something needing doing and our footpath volunteers are always willing to do it, whether it is a large task requiring a number of people or a small task which can be carried out by two or three volunteers. Since my report in the last issue we have carried out large tasks across the county from Poddington in the north to Totternhoe in the south, from Potton in the east to Marston Thrift in the centre.

Our tasks at Poddington involved some clearance on a bridleway and the replacement of old or missing marker posts on the edge of the old airfield near the Santa Pod raceway. At Totternhoe we improved two very overgrown footpaths leading to the Knolls. This took us longer than anticipated but was well worthwhile. At Deepdale, near Potton, we were joined by a local horse rider to widen and heighten a section of bridleway which runs alongside a disused quarry. At Marston Thrift we improved an overgrown path near the Thrift car park in very wet conditions. We last worked on this path in 2019 but it shows that if a path is cleared thoroughly and is well used, it stays good for a few years.

In between these larger tasks our smaller groups have completed the installation of marker posts in the Duloe area, re-erected a knocked down post in Bolnhurst, improved a section of bridleway in Southill and installed two posts to the west of Wootton. To finish the year, two tasks near Kempston were completed.

In November we were delighted to be asked to give advice to a new P3 (Parish Paths Partnership) group which Central Bedfordshire council had helped start in Leighton Buzzard and we spent an enjoyable morning replacing old marker posts on the Greensand Ridge Walk not far from the Globe pub.

Bad weather thwarted our activities in early January but as soon as we could we started clearing footpaths and adding directional discs to paths in the village of Harrold, When the weather allows we will be taking on a very large task in Colmworth.

Barry Ingram



This was the path at Marston Thrift when we arrived. Photo: Barry Ingram



And this is the same path later. Photo: Barry Ingram



Some of our volunteers in their new Ramblers high-vis jackets. Photo: Paul Crossman

BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Cuddington calls

Last July Ken Bixby, Chair of Cuddington Parish Council, requested a meeting with us in the Crown pub. The village has a well developed footpath network and has produced an excellent map detailing six circular walks around the village (£2 from the pub or shop). Interest in maintaining and improving the network is high and a number of problems need fixing.



Before.



After.

On a chilly day in December we replaced two dilapidated stiles with good-looking timber kissing gates. All the posts used featured Postsaver sleeves but both installations proved highly problematic. One turned out to be on top of a spring, so the hanging post hole completely filled with water as we dug down. The other one was beside a 'pollarded' horse chestnut tree with an extensive root system at ground level. With dexterous use of the chainsaw, the gate hanging post was eventually installed, with the closing post supported by rails bolted onto the tree trunk itself. As it was getting dark, a couple of us returned on New Year's Day to finish the job. Both gates were funded through our Donate-a-Gate scheme and feature donor plaques, one being the parish council. These gates now provide a new fully accessible, interesting loop down Tibbys Lane, through a field, past Holymans Farm and back into the village of just a couple of hundred metres really close to the village centre - a valuable asset for leisure and exercise for less able villagers.

For action in 2023, a number of really difficult stiles have been identified. Although local walkers (and the county council) would dearly love to have these converted to gates, at least one tenant farmer prefers stiles to gates as they perform such an excellent job restricting the number of walkers, and in particular dog owners, crossing his land. Once again it's a case of 'Slowly, slowly, catchy monkey'.

Bill Piers
North Bucks rRIPPLE Group

For more on the 'Donate-a-Gate' scheme go to http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html



The path team at Cuddington taking a break (though the temperature was just above freezing). Left to right are John Chantler, Mike Kershaw of LDWA, Keith Wheeler-Cherry, Michael Ayers and Jerry Michell. Photos: Bill Piers

Kimble calamity

Buckinghamshire Council is better than most at dealing with rights of way, but there are some long-standing problems which it has failed to tackle. One such is in the parish of Great and Little Kimble, about two miles south of Aylesbury.

The paths in question should provide an attractive circular walk of just over a kilometre from the hamlet of Marsh. This circuit is made up of bridleway 28, footpath 31A or 29, and footpath 27, with minimal road walking. Sadly, it is anything but pleasant.

When I went there on 20 November 2022, bridleway 28 had a deep pool of water on it. Footpaths 31A and 29 were illegally obstructed by undergrowth, fences, and a large amount of rubbish from a mobile-home development. The eastern end of footpath 27 is lost in dense vegetation and possibly a fence, and is completely impassable. Consequently one has to use a stretch of lane to complete the circuit, which is dangerous, with speeding traffic and no footway.

I was aware that these problems were not new. When I came to report them again, I found previous reports over many years which had apparently not been acted on. I have now written to Buckinghamshire Council's rights of way team leader and received an encouraging response. Perhaps we shall have progress at last.

Kate Ashbrook



Mobile homes adjacent to footpaths 29 and 31A, the definitive paths are not obvious.



The completely obstructed eastern end of footpath 27. Photos: Kate Ashbrook, Area Footpath Secretary.

15 Short walks in the Surrey Hills:

Cicerone has launched a new series of guidebooks to short walks (under three hours and suitable for all abilities) with one of the first covering the Surrey Hills by Nike Werstroh and Jacint Mig, (ISBN 9781786311535 , £9.95).

Royal Parks panel:

A new research platform has been set up to seek the views of park users in two ten-minute online surveys each year. Users can be local or just occasional visitors from afar. To sign up go to www.trueology.com/parkspanel.



SURREY snippets

Summer celebration

We will celebrate Summer in Surrey on Sunday 16 July at Brockham Cricket Pavilion from 2pm onwards. There will be a number of walks from Dorking and Reigate stations with details on the Area website nearer the time. Tea/coffee and cakes will be served from around 2,30pm and the pavilion does have a kitchen and toilets. I'm looking for members to join a subcommittee to organise the day, lead a walk (if you need a route, one can be provided), help with set-up and packing away, catering and running a publicity stall. Please email me at chair@surreyramblers.org.uk if you could help.

A new chapter for Surrey Young Walkers

When I joined the Surrey Young Walkers group I met some fantastic walkers and made some wonderful friends. I joined the committee in 2010 and a year later felt honoured to become the group's Chair. I'm a true believer that you get out as much as you put in and for the last 11 years the group became my life and I have got so much out of it. Now the next chapter of Surrey Young Walkers begins as Nathan Taylor is the group's new Chair and as his amazing journey starts, I'm really excited to see what happens next.

Holly Matthews



The new Surrey Young Walkers committee. Chair Nathan Taylor is the one wearing a bow tie. Photo: Holly Matthews

Try volunteering

When asking members of Surrey Area to volunteer either face to face or virtually, the answer is often "If only I had the time" or "I haven't got the time". Volunteering is often what you make it to be, the ball is in your court. I have got so much out of volunteering and I'm a better person for it.

We have 16 groups in Surrey Area and all of them need volunteers to keep running and be successful. Volunteers are needed to join committees, lead walks, organise socials or run an event. We are always looking for footpath wardens too and help with our footpath working parties.

Do you volunteer for the Ramblers? If your answer is no, could I ask you to think about becoming a volunteer? Please think about it. I promise you it will change your life for the better!

It's 2023!

2023 is an anniversary year for me as it's 15 years since I joined the Ramblers and 14 years since I became a volunteer.

Since joining the Ramblers in 2008, I find that a pair of walking boots lasts about 1,000 miles before either the soles go or I get cracks in the leather uppers which leads to holes and making them not waterproof. Last year I recorded each walk I did on my mobile phone and on New Year's Day got a shock when adding up the distances and found a total of 1,719 miles walked in 2022.

I knew that I had walked a lot as my boots had worn out more quickly than before and I had urgently had to buy a new pair in early autumn, well before my normal yearly purchase in the Black Friday sales in November. On announcing this news to my family and telling my good friends that I had walked over 1,000 miles, they started to question if I was walking too much.

This got me thinking. A member of the public could well walk around two miles a day on a round trip to a local shop or railway station or bus stop. Those with a four-legged family member could easily walk a couple of miles a day on a dog walk. I have recorded the last couple of trips done to go shopping around my local town and this came to around five miles and I know that just walking around an 18-hole golf course can be about six miles.

All these distances add up without even being noticed. I believe that we should keep fit and healthy both for our physical and mental health. Walking is my chosen form of exercise which does just that but also provides me with a great group of friends and an active social life. In a world of sitting at a computer screen or on a mobile phone for long periods of the day it is wonderful at a weekend to go out into the fresh air and talk with likeminded people whilst exercising at the same time. So, to answer the question of am I walking too much the answer is no.

Holly Matthews
Chair, Surrey Area

Surrey Hills Symposium

Hosted by the University of Surrey in Guildford, Surrey Ramblers joined the marketplace held prior to the Surrey Hills Symposium on 23 November 2022. Representatives from Guildford, Mole Valley and Surrey Heath groups staffed a display. We did a lot of talking! Informing symposium attendees about Ramblers and encouraging folk to get out into the Surrey Hills and come walking with us. Other stalls within the marketplace included community groups, Surrey Hills partners and enterprises. A thriving marketplace with a common goal; to help make the countryside more accessible to all, ensuring it is protected for people and nature.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape is one of 46 nationally protected landscapes in the UK, having equal landscape status and protection to a national park. The Surrey Hills was designated on 8 May 1958, which makes it the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now known as National Landscapes) in southern England to be designated. The Surrey Hills National Landscape stretches across a quarter of the county of Surrey and includes the chalk slopes of the North Downs from Farnham in the west to Oxted in the east, and extends south to the deeply wooded greensand hills which rise in Haslemere. The 16 Ramblers groups in Surrey walk the area intensively and are affiliated members of Surrey Hills.

The marketplace was followed by a showcase and debate asking how we can all protect, respect, and enjoy our National Landscape. The event was opened by Professor Max Lu, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey. Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair of the Surrey Hills Board, showcased some of the collaborative projects undertaken throughout the year helping connect people to nature. In-person and online guests then heard from four speakers about their focus and vision towards making the countryside a place for all.

Lynne Davies
Guildford Ramblers

Those we have lost



Jim Parke, leader of the Vale Path Volunteers, pointing out that there was indeed a bridleway below all the nettles. Photo: John Gordon

Jim Parke

It was with great sadness that we learned that Jim passed away on Christmas Day after a short stay in a hospice in Oxford. Many will have known Jim through one or other of his several roles in Oxfordshire Ramblers, or on a walk with him around the county. Jim, who joined the Ramblers in 2006, established the Oxfordshire Ramblers Parish Path Warden (PPW) network with Susan Maguire some 10 years ago and became its chief coordinator. He recruited regional coordinators, was the liaison with Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access team, and organised workshops for PPWs, among other things. Around the same time he became the leader of the newly formed Vale Path Volunteers, the path maintenance team of the Vale of White Horse Ramblers group.

As well as leading walks for this group he also led them for Oxford Fieldpaths Society, of which he had also been President. On top of all that he was Area Chair for the last four years.

Jim was very organised and methodical in everything he did, which made him effective in all these roles. Although Jim had learned only recently that his cancer had become terminal he immediately set about - successfully - finding successors. He was a great friend to many of us: he will be sorely missed.

Dave Cavanagh
Secretary, Oxfordshire Ramblers

Those we have lost

Natasha Claridge

In the 1970s, Natasha and her husband Bill were regular walkers on the Ramblers train excursions from London until a spell of industrial action on the railways brought these to a temporary halt. They found Croydon Ramblers and joined the group every Sunday becoming walk leaders. After Bill passed away Natasha took a more active part becoming a member of the group committee and serving for 19 years.

Natasha, who died on 22 December 2022, will be remembered for her indomitable spirit, her determination to get the most out of life and living it to the full. She loved her holidays, going off to far off places including Nepal, Tibet and China, where her favourite destinations were away from the tourist areas. She was interested in people and the countryside, a keen photographer and artist, and had an interest in geology. A long tradition for our group is to have tea out of the boot of a car at the end of walks on Thursdays and Sundays. Natasha, together with Ritchie, were our chief 'tea-makers'. Tea out of Natasha's car will be sorely missed.

Over the last few months Natasha struggled on the walks but never gave up and was there with a smile. It was only on a short break to the Isle of Wight last November that a diagnosis of cancer was sadly given. She spent her last month in East Surrey Hospital where many group members visited her. Staff there said she was the most popular patient they had ever had!



Natasha at the Croydon Ramblers AGM in 2022 where she was presented with a gift by the group Chair, Roy Endersby.
Photo: John Bailey

She stayed cheerful and optimistic to the end. An example to us all.

Muriel Fell
Croydon Ramblers

Wish you were here?

Monk Coniston, Cumbria



On the Old Man of Coniston. Photo: John Tickner

"Well Watson, what do you make of this situation?" barked Holmes to his companion, and without waiting for a reply continued ... "Here we are in the boot room at Monk Coniston HF Hotel, all the boots are in pairs except for peg number 4 which has only one boot." After careful consideration Watson replied. "Well Holmes, I can think of three possibilities: 1, there is a boot fetishist around and has stolen the boot for their gratification, 2, a fox has found its way into the boot room as they seem to enjoy chewing on all things leather and has run off with the boot or, 3, there is a one-legged rambler staying here." The famous detective looked puzzled and said "Well Watson, you may well be right but there are 19 Croydon Ramblers staying here at the moment, they are clever, resourceful and tough but a one-legged rambler walking in the rugged environment of the Lake District beggars belief. Questions will have to be asked."

And whilst we were sitting in the bar after dinner, questions were indeed asked and it came to light that a certain rambler from Croydon direction, whose name, Anne, I will not divulge for fear of embarrassment, had indeed come on a walking holiday in the Lake District with two good feet but only one boot! On further discrete questioning it transpired that whilst packing her suitcase, she carefully wrapped one boot, placing it in the said case, and then received a phone call. At the end of the call she returned to continue packing but unfortunately forgot about boot number two! To put matters right, she phoned her daughter and asked her if she could pick up the boot and send it to the hotel by express delivery (which when you think about how much that costs, it would almost be better to buy a new pair of boots!). The stray boot turned up a few days later to the delight of the proud owner and some serious walks were enjoyed by one and all, also much merriment!

Monk Coniston HF Hotel sits in splendid grounds overlooking the stretch of water it is named after. When you arrive you are invited into the lounge and given a large slab of cake and a cup of tea - what a good start! We were introduced to Phil and Gary, our two walk leaders for the week - the third leader arrived a bit later. The walks 'menu' comprises three walks a day. Option 3 is fairly hard-going, Option 2 is allegedly easier and Option 1 - a piece of cake? Obviously, my colleague (and group Chair) Roy, and myself, being supremely fit and macho, went for Option 3 on day one - The Old Man of Coniston - only nine miles and 2,800 feet of ascent - a doddle! Later that evening, enjoying a few pints of local brew in the bar, we realised that scurrying around Walton Heath and Box Hill for our usual rambles was not good enough training for what was in store for us.

Our group was joined by some independent walkers and a contingency from Canada who, incidentally, we whopped in the quiz - ok they then whopped us in the bowling alley! I thought the catering was excellent, the staff very pleasant and attentive, and the whole week which was kindly organised for us by Geraldine Deas, extremely enjoyable. Now where did I put that knee support?

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers

Dovedale, Derbyshire

Fifteen Bicester & Kidlington Ramblers have enjoyed a Holiday Fellowship walking holiday in Dovedale and were very lucky as the weather was kind.

Russell Thompson
Bicester & Kidlington Ramblers



The group in Dovedale.

Harrogate, North Yorkshire



At Bolton Abbey. Photo: Beverley Johnston

Dartford & Gravesham members set off by coach on Monday 23 October for a walking holiday based at Harrogate. What a wonderful walking and sightseeing experience it was! Our first walk en route was in Knaresborough while the non-walkers had lunch and explored the town. We then continued our journey to the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, famous for its connection to Agatha Christie.

The greatest highlights were the walks we took in and around Fountains Abbey. We also walked near and visited Bolton Abbey, around the hamlet of Draughton and Bolton Priory. Next was Barden Beck Bridge, returning via the River Wharfe, both fantastic walks. Non-walkers went to Skipton to visit the medieval castle, then a canal cruise. Finally, we had both short and long walks in the area around Brimham Rocks and Pateley Bridge. Harrogate is a wonderful centre for both walking and sightseeing and we felt that we would have to return in order to see and walk much of it again.

Beverley Johnston
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers

Isles of Scilly

A walk round an island every day! That was the pattern on our October trip to the Isles of Scilly. After breakfast in our comfortable hotel on St Mary's, the largest island in the group, we walked down to the jetty for a boat trip to another island, then walked round it. In our week's stay we circumnavigated each of the five inhabited islands. Each island was different but all provided interesting walks with wonderful views.

On Tresco we also visited the tropical gardens and the ruins of fortifications dating from the time of the English Civil War. On Bryher we looked (in vain) for the rare bird blown off course from America that had attracted hundreds of twitchers to the tiny island that week. On St Mary's we enjoyed a very windy coastal walk, a visit to a nature reserve (more like a tropical jungle in places) and a tour of the garrison with its Star Fort and many gun emplacements.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers



On the Isles of Scilly. Photo: Joan Clark

Canterbury

Members of our group based themselves at the Pilgrims Hotel in Canterbury at the end of October 2022 whilst walking the Wye to Dover section of the North Downs Way. The weather was extremely kind with much of the walking spent wearing t-shirts. We passed the gigantic sprawl of the Channel Tunnel terminal at Cheriton, vineyards, orchards, delightful churches, many woods (one with wild boar but fortunately we didn't come across any) and enjoyed many stunning views and finished with weary feet but smiles on our faces. We enjoyed a lovely tour of Canterbury Cathedral too.

The group is planning two more trips away. The first will be based in Portsmouth (19-22 May), details from Brenda Horwill (dmhorwill@aol.com), and the second in Bavaria (October), details from Barbara Crow (barbaraanncrow@gmail.com).

Brenda Horwill and Barbara Crow
Kingston Ramblers



All smiles at Cheriton Hill. Photo: John Dixon

Bakewell, Derbyshire

Our fourth and final trip away in 2022 was to Bakewell in the Peak District. On arrival we explored the local area and walked part of the Monsal Trail before heading back to the hotel to meet one of the local park rangers who had offered to lead our walks.

Day 2 saw us head towards White Edge where we had two walks planned. Both started together before the short walk peel off to the Grouse Inn for a meal whilst the long walkers continued along Baslow and Curbar Edge before heading to the Grouse Inn.

Day 3 was centred on Chatsworth Park with both walks going via Chatsworth House and Edensor, the village that was moved to suit the Duke of Devonshire. Those on the longer walk were treated to a wonderful view of deer grazing in the grounds.

Our last day was to be around Dovedale Gorge but the ranger who was to lead us had fallen sick so two of our experienced leaders found an alternative walk which proved strenuous but provided stunning views.

Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers

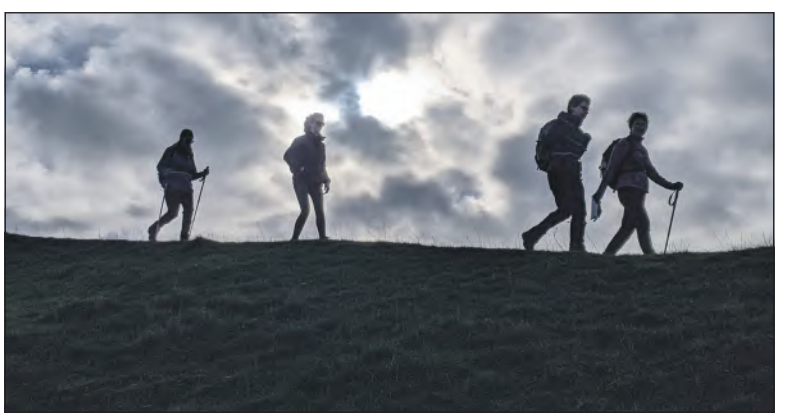


On the stepping stones across the Dove. Photo: Graham Evans

Marlborough, Wiltshire

Thirteen of our members enjoyed a two-day break in November at Marlborough with good weather. Everyone organised their own accommodation and we got together for dinner on two evenings and kept in touch via WhatsApp. The walks took us to Barbury Castle, the Marlborough White Horse, Pewsey Down and the aptly named Walkers Hill. Thanks to Ann Stevenson and Clair Baynton who organised the weekend and led the two walks of 10 and 12 miles.

Shirley Creed
Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE)



A moody view near Marlborough. Photo: Sandy McCulloch

Dunston, Norfolk

Early October saw about 40 Croydon Ramblers descend on Dunston Hall Hotel, a rather attractive brick-built manor house built in 1859 and situated four miles south of Norwich. We went to conquer the hills of Norfolk and the four days of walking organised by our very own Geraldine Deas did just that and more. I was particularly impressed by some of the local churches that had round towers attached to them. The walks centred on local villages with our final day's walk from Rockland St Mary following the River Yare for a good while. Geraldine was ably assisted by John Hilton and together they come up trumps every time with very popular holidays.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



All present and correct for the first walk which started from the village of Mulbarton. Photo: John Tickner

Around the groups

Dressing up

Our group has enjoyed two special walks recently, one to mark Halloween and the other a chance to have fun whilst wearing our silliest hats!

Russell Thompson
Bicester & Kidlington Ramblers



On the Halloween walk at Waddesdon Manor. Photo: Pam Wheeler



One of our members on the Silly Hats walk in September. We will repeat this event in 2023! Photo: Fiona Hitchcock

Around the groups

There's something about Sarratt



Christmas cheer in Sarratt. Photo: Stephen Sharples

Any village boasting great walks and three fine pubs is bound to attract walkers, but our affection for Sarratt runs deeper. As a social hub, the Hertfordshire village seems to have a magnetic attraction for the group, hosting our Christmas lunch for many years (including 2022) and a spree of summer events.

Our favourite pub is fittingly called the Boot. It's been the group's Christmas venue since 2017, replacing the nearby Cricketers where the festive lunch tradition began. It was 20 years ago when I was leading a walk on the Sunday before Christmas and we went into the Cricketers for an intended quick pub lunch as other people were shivering outside with their sandwiches on the green. The pub was offering a three-course special including turkey for the price of not much more than a single course so naturally we all partook! We didn't come out of the pub until 2.45 and still had three miles to go before it got dark. The following year I arranged the Sarratt meal for the end of the walk and included the slap-up dinner that we all know today.

Not all has gone to plan on our Christmas walks. Extreme weather forced cancellations in 2010 and 2017. Leading a walk through snow one year, Alan Shiell remembers how a group of skittish horses seemed spooked by walkers' Santa hats.

But Sarratt's charms are to be enjoyed all year round so, last April, I hosted a Saturday afternoon walk and meal at the Cock - the village's only pub not previously used for a social gathering. When the village hall hosted a pop-up cafe in June, Mark Percy jumped in to arrange an accompanying afternoon walk. This was swiftly followed by a return to the Boot for a summer evening figure-of-eight walk with fish and chip supper.

So what makes Sarratt special? It has a magical appeal as one of the many attractive villages in the area bounded by the Rickmansworth road, Watford, the A41 and Chesham. Each village has its own character and pub; Sarratt has three, and a massive attractive green. I envy the residents at all times of the year ... except during a winter freeze!

Andrew Zelin
Chilterns Weekend Walkers

Walks for Ukraine

In November 2022, with the support of Croydon Ramblers, we led three walks to raise money for children and families in Ukraine. Twice we walked 11 glorious miles in and around the beautiful Ashdown Forest ending with tea and a range of cakes that people told us were delicious. These made up for all the mud that had to be squelched through as it had rained ceaselessly for what seemed like weeks and the first outing was more like a marathon swim than a ramble. Then, for those who fancied a short Sunday walk in the sunshine, including friends and families, we led a local walk on Remembrance Sunday, again with tea and lots of cakes. We raised £1445 which has been donated to the UNICEF Fund for Children and Families in Ukraine. Most importantly, we loved organising and leading the events and we all had a great cake-filled time. We want to thank everyone for their generous donations and support, with a special mention for Sue Matthews who helped us every step of the way.

Helen Thompson and Jan Campion
Croydon Ramblers (and cake makers)



Ready to ramble for Ukraine. Photo: JohnTickner



East Essex Friends Group had fun on a Christmas Hat walk at Galleywood, near Chelmsford. It's an annual fixture on their programme, writes Cliff Downes, but this time they had the bonus of snow.

Mud and mince pies

Our group organised a variety of five mile circular walks between 25 December and 2 January for our annual Festival of Winter Walks. The weather was variable with a couple of very wet days and some lovely winter sunshine. The total attendance was 134 with a range of seven to 30 each day. The very wet days did not stop people turning up for a soaking!

Where did we walk? The Punchbowl on Christmas Day with stollen and mince pies and hot drinks, a walk from Frensham to the Devil's Jumps on Boxing Day followed by a circular walk from Brook ending at the Dog and Pheasant for a post Christmas drink. On the Wednesday, light rain fell as we took a circular route from Guildford via the Watts Gallery (where we dried off a little) before returning to Ye Olde Ship for lunch. Glorious sunshine on 29th brought 29 people to the village of Shackleford for a walk where we stopped at Peper Harow church for a coffee break with optional cake.

Next day we started from Godalming in the rain and just concentrated on not slipping in the mud. New Year's Day was fine but after all the rain there was flooding and plenty of mud for our walk from Godalming via Eashing to Peper Harow and sherry and mince pies were enjoyed by everyone as we toasted the arrival of 2023. The final walk, on 2 January, was from Chinthurst Hill in dry weather and included the aptly named Christmas Hill.

Carol Bateman
Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers



Rain, what rain? Photo: Jim Robertson

Jon's 100th walk

Traditionally, we present a certificate to those walk leaders who have led 100 walks for the group and in November 2022 it was Jon Kellett's turn. He had always enjoyed walking his dogs and after helping a friend recce several walks for our group he decided to join the Ramblers in 2003. As Jon still works as a systems analyst during the week he finds that having a walk to lead motivates him to head out into the fresh air on a Saturday and he has become one of the stalwarts of our group. He has discovered the many faces of nature in Stanmore Open Space, Rickmansworth Aquadrome and Burnham Beeches where his love of woodland walks can be shared with others. Jon aims to add two or three new walks to his repertoire each year.

His one humorous memory is from the "world's easiest walk" around Langley Park three years ago. When approaching the cafe he saw the area taped off and police shepherding people away. They were told that an unexploded World War II bomb had been found and they had to find another route. Luckily he had his sat nav or they might all have been very late home!

Well done Jon and a warm thank you from Hillingdon Ramblers.

Elise Wright
Hillingdon Ramblers.



Jon with his certificate and appreciative members. Photo: Rob Jones-Owen

Winter wonderland

A sprinkling of snow and a little determination saw five of us enjoy a walk on the snow-covered hills in January. Children were having fun sledging on the Barton hills though it was not so easy for us to ascend the slippery slopes. There were some amazing views when we did get through and without trips or slips either. On the Pegsden hills we met a skier who was there to take photos of the Highland cattle sheltering at the foot of the hills.

Looking ahead to 2023, we have plans to Go Ape at Woburn, spend a week at Melrose in the Scottish borders and enjoy 'Walking on the Water'. Don't worry about the last one, it's just a boating experience!

Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers



The hills are alive! Photo: Tom Collier

Top of the tree

Our entry for a four-day charity Christmas tree event held in early December at a church in Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, not only had doves of peace in line with the overall theme of 'peace on earth' but also cardboard figures of all shapes and sizes, religion and colour, to spell out that all are welcome to join us. Our tree attracted a lot of attention and the copies of our walks programme were soon snapped up. A record 64 charities participated in the event which was well supported by the local community who came not just to see the trees but join in the carols and music.

Steph Collins
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers



The group's tree. Photo: Celia Hamilton

Mind walks

Not content with being a regular walk leader for us, a London Loop leader and an ambassador for the North Downs Way, Barbara Crow took it on herself to lead short walks for the mental health charity Mind in Kingston. Barbara was moved to take on the new challenge following the tragic death of our member John O'Reilly during one of the Covid lockdowns.

Rachel Dykins, Director of Development at Mind in Kingston, has said: "We can't thank Barbara enough for approaching us to set up and lead our 'Happy Feet' wellbeing walks. These weekly walks enable our beneficiaries to experience the significant mental health benefits that come from walking, connecting with others, and getting into nature."

Initially the walks attracted only three or four walkers but now the numbers can get into double figures. Barbara has also raised £1,900 on a sponsored walk and been awarded their volunteer of 2022 title.



John O'Reilly, whose tragic death moved Barbara Crow to start the walks for Mind in Kingston. For more about MIND in Kingston go to www.mindinkingston.org.uk

Barbara's work adds to that of David Cooper who initiated and leads our joint walk with the London Blind Rambling Club.

Paul Draper and Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers

Burning off calories



Taking a break on the Christmas walk. Photo: Ian Dunford

We have a varied walks programme although not as full as pre-pandemic times unfortunately. Our Christmas walk and social were based in Great Linford. The walk led by Elaine followed a cultural route via Newport Pagnell using the old railway track. A local walk on Boxing Day led by Boyd gave everyone a chance to burn off calories added during the festive season and we had a good turnout for a New Year's Day walk from Woburn following a route which is now a group tradition.

Our AGM produced one new volunteer, Philip Turnbull who has taken over the Treasurer role from Keith Lloyd who stepped down after eight years of great work. We hope additional offers can be taken up during the coming year.

Ian Dunford
Milton Keynes Ramblers

Mud reminder



Having fun at Wheathampstead. Photo: Rosemary Hasker

We started 2023 well with our first two walks attracting 17 and 16 members respectively. The first walk, from Woburn, also reminded us what mud was like (we hadn't encountered too much before that this winter) but was enjoyable anyway. The second walk, from Whethampstead, included a visit to the no longer used, but well-preserved, railway station.

The group has in some ways returned to normal post Covid, although we have lost a number of members for a variety of reasons. However, over the last few months we have gained quite a few new members but unfortunately we've only seen a few of them out on walks! Do other groups recognise this situation?

Covid restrictions brought in some changes which have proved popular with both walk leaders and members. We have kept to a rolling monthly programme instead of reverting back to a four-monthly one. Also the requirement to book for walks makes it much easier for leaders, especially if last-minute changes need to be made. However, we are no longer placing limits on numbers for the majority of walks.

The AGM season before Christmas was quite busy for us as it was our turn to host the Area AGM. Our own AGM, two weeks prior to that, our first in-person event for three years, returned to our tried and tested formula of combining the formal meeting with a cheese and wine evening. It was a great success with 30 attendees (an all-time record) and a productive meeting as well!

Rosemary Hasker
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Presentation

We held a very successful AGM in November. Our members braved rain and mud to complete a five-mile walk before arriving at a warm and welcoming Keysoe village hall for tea and cakes before the meeting. We opened with a presentation from Ramblers Walking Holidays explaining what they can offer members and how groups can benefit from the Walking Partnership. Following on to the main business, the existing committee was voted back into office and we elected a new Footpath Officer, Steve Woodward, to our committee.

During December, a number of members enjoyed a great Christmas meal at a local pub. Later in the month 33 members and friends joined our annual mince pie and mulled wine walk through suitably snowy countryside finishing at a church for refreshments and carols.

In January we began walking the John Bunyan Way in stages, led by Graham Stark, our Secretary. On 25 March we will continue our occasional walks following the Thames away from central London, ably led by John Le Warne. Then on 22 April we will be travelling to London again for the annual Unlock Churches walk which this year will be in the Thamesmead and Bexley area (see http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk/support.walk.php for more about this event).



Enjoying the Christmas meal. Photo: Anne Griffiths

For more details of our walks go to https://www.ramblers.org.uk/north-bedfordshire or follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/groups/northbedsramblers/ or Twitter at twitter.com/NB_Ramblers

Anne Griffiths
North Beds Ramblers

Around the groups

Post-Christmas lunch

For a number of years our group has organised a post-Christmas lunch in February. This gives us something to look forward to during the winter months and shorter days. This year we met at the Bird in Hand in Sandhurst. Looking ahead, we have again been invited to visit the Fawley Hill Steam Train and Museum for one of their VIP days on 3 September. Any group member interested should contact me.

We still struggle to find new walk leaders and our existing pool of leaders are leading more walks than is fair. Despite this we continue to offer walks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays.

Brian Poulton
South East Berkshire Ramblers



Welcome winter sun on a walk near Maidenhead. Photo: Brian Poulton

Festive season

We held our first 'live' AGM since the start of the pandemic with 46 members attending. The Chairman was pleased to announce that despite a shortage of walk leaders the group had managed to put on 212 walks covering a total of 1744 miles over the year. A number of new members had been recruited, most of them new to walking. The business of the AGM was followed by refreshments and a captivating talk on the history of Donnington Castle by Dr David Peacock.

In the run up to Christmas a number of our shorter walks were followed by festive lunches whilst mince pies and sausage rolls formed a welcome addition to the Christmas Eve and Boxing Day walks.

In January we held our New Year get-together meal at a local restaurant. Our annual quiz should be back in March followed by a picnic in May, an evening canal trip and five-day holiday in North Wales in June. Our popular series of coach walks starts again in April with a trip to Marlow, followed by outings to Laycock, Salisbury, Bath and Winchester.



Enjoying a festive lunch after a six-mile morning walk. Photo: Richard Trimmer

Our footpaths working party has continued to clear as many paths as possible despite atrocious conditions at times and a number of new gates have been installed. However, the group would welcome a few new members and if anyone is interested they should contact the Work Party Coordinator via our website.

Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers

Alive and thriving

At our AGM the full committee offered to stand for re-election after a year which saw us gain the highest net increase in membership in Surrey, four trips away, along with the regular and 'special feature' walks arranged by our Walks Coordinator, Mo, assisted by our walks leaders means that Surrey Heath is very much alive and thriving. The hard work and dedication of the committee and walk leaders was recognised by members at the meeting with the committee being re-elected for another year. Once the formal part of the AGM was over the attendees had a chance to mingle whilst enjoying a sandwich buffet whilst in the background a slideshow of some of the year's highlights was played.

Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers

Ups and downs

We see more and more people at our AGM each year, which is mainly due to the excellence of the visiting speakers and the quality of the home-made cakes after the meeting! Chair Linda King was pleased that this year was no exception with an excellent turnout for the walk before the AGM and at the meeting in November. Linda gave the Chair's report and presented Bob Ward with a gift as he was leaving the committee after being on it in various capacities for a very long time. Clive Jones, who runs Wheatley Birds of Prey, entertained us with his talk which was illustrated with the six raptors that he had brought along.

Linda has come up with many initiatives while Chair, including offering spare secateurs to walk leaders to use while recceing and leading walks. However, she was less successful when checking in at Luton airport just before Christmas for a walking holiday in Madeira, as she had forgotten her spare pair of secateurs were still in her backpack side pocket - so they were duly confiscated!

Ruth Cornish
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers



Clive Jones hands one of his raptors to member Maureen Baker. Photo: Ruth Cornish

Christmas at Kew

To start the festive season, Windsor & District Ramblers ventured to Kew Gardens for the spectacular 'Christmas at Kew' event. We followed the after-dark trail around to discover light displays, some accompanied by music. As we wound through the pathways passing large Christmas baubles, illuminated trees, floating light displays and light projections, some members stopped for a glass of mulled wine while others took to a carousel. The highlight was at the end of the trail in front of the palm house where a glorious display of lasers, dancing fountains, fire-lit candles and light projections were choreographed to music.

Afterwards 25 of us re-gathered at the Tap on the Line pub next toKew Gardens station for a meal. The food was marvellous and well-deserved after a few hours in the cold! It was wonderful to have a late afternoon walk together with so many of the group's members in Kew Gardens and to end the evening with a delicious meal.

Amita Sharma
Windsor & District Ramblers



The spectacular show at the palm house. Photo: Mike Brown

Back to normality

We had our AGM in November (always the Saturday nearest Guy Fawkes' night!). It was lovely to get back to some sort of normality after the difficulties of the last couple of years. About 100 members turned up for pre-lunch coffee and chat and to shop at our 'ramblers market'. Lunch of home-made soup, sarnies and fruit was followed by a very speedy AGM, dealt with by our efficient committee and Chairman Roy Endersby. Then I showed three audio-visual sequences and then there was tea and cake to follow.

On Friday 2 December we had our annual Big Quiz, expertly hosted by Jeff Balderson while his granddaughter Hannah kept score. Jeff's new toy, a personal PA system, managed to keep 72 keen and voluble quizzers in order. Jeff has been doing this now for 14 years. This time the event was reconfigured to be more relaxed and streamlined and allow us more time to socialise and eat our fish and chips at halftime. My team, the Croydon Rumblers, was so relaxed that we nearly didn't make it onto the scoreboard. A really good night out. Thanks Jeff and Hannah.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers