

# Walker

## Essex Ramblers save 18 rail crossings from closure

**Back in 2016 Network Rail decided to embark on a programme of level crossing closures in Essex, all of which were only for walkers or farmers. (Further closures were proposed in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.) Fifty-seven crossings were proposed for closure and Network Rail sought to steamroller them through by parcelling them together under the Transport and Works Act, which does not have the consultation requirements usually associated with rights of way. The fear was that this was the thin edge of the wedge, a kind of test case; if Network Rail won in East Anglia, the closures could be extended to the rest of the country.**

Some of the 57 crossings had been closed for many years or were used only by farmers, and it was decided not to object to them. But others were in use and Network Rail's proposals would have involved often lengthy diversions, or onto busy roads or inappropriate surfaces.

Essex Ramblers decided to object to 29 of the proposals, and after it was made clear that Network Rail was not willing to consider changes, a public inquiry was set up by the Department for Transport to hear the objections of organisations and members of the public. Similar inquiries were held in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, and the reports for those counties were published two years ago, with mostly positive outcomes for the Ramblers.

With the support of Central Office, Essex Ramblers had legal representation, but local members, who worked hard to detail our reasons, put the case for keeping each crossing under cross-examination from Network Rail's barrister. The

inquiry ran from September 2018, with many gaps, until February 2019, and on 17 March this year the inspector's report was published. Three years is a long time; how long it sat on the desk of the Secretary of State for Transport is unknown.

The report, which runs for 559 pages, is extensive and detailed, with the bulk of it giving detailed consideration to every proposed closure. Network Rail's case was to improve the safety of level crossing users, railway staff and passengers. Network Rail also said they wanted to reduce delays to trains, pedestrians and other highway users and cut operating and maintenance costs, but as the inquiry progressed it seemed that cost savings rather than safety were their main concern.

The Ramblers objected that there was a lack of justification to close the crossings and divert the relevant public right of way and that the alternative routes being provided were not sufficient, in terms of their suitability and convenience for the existing users of the rights of way that currently traverse the level crossings. In short, we considered that these alternative routes would be used by fewer people, or would not be used at all, resulting in fragmentation of, and loss to, the rights of way network. This would, in turn, discourage people from walking - both for leisure and for non-leisure trips (depending on the specifics of the crossing or alternative route's location). Moreover, some of the proposed diversions would put walkers onto busy roads which presented greater hazards than the rail crossings in question. Essex County Council made a similar point, arguing that doing so would merely mean transferring the responsibility for risk from Network Rail to Essex County Council.

The inspector decided to recommend 36 crossings for closure. Of the 21 excluded, 18 were the subject of an objection by Essex Ramblers, a success rate of over 60 per cent.

The inspector noted the Ramblers' criticisms of Network Rail's approach to safety, particularly our criticism of their "failure to compare and consider the safety risks associated with a level crossing with the safety risks associated with the proposed diversion for that level crossing (in particular, where that diversion would require users to walk alongside a road or its verge)." He noted what we said about their baffling failure to consider whether the proposals were safer from a user perspective. Hence his decision to retain, not extinguish, 21 of the crossings proposed for closure.

Network Rail clearly spent a lot of public money on the inquiry - usually there were a dozen of their representatives at the hearings, and barristers are not cheap. And it will have paid expensive consultants to make recommendations about the closures. In contrast, the Ramblers had one barrister and relied for evidence on local representatives; our stalwarts Gordon Bird and Alan Goffee carried a great deal of the burden and deserve full credit.

Will Network Rail learn from its experience in East Anglia and draw back from any ideas it might have had about extending crossings' closures more widely? Time will tell.

*Mike Cannell*

*Essex Ramblers Media Officer*

To read the full inquiry report or find the results for your nearest crossing, go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essex-level-crossing-reduction-transport-and-works-act-order>.



The inspector found that Dixies crossing at Newport should remain open because Network Rail's proposed diversion would have been too long at 1,150 metres, causing difficulties for older or less mobile users.



The crossing at Fullers End is one of the few to be controlled, and it is much-used as it links two parts of the community. Network Rail wanted to divert users to an existing underpass (to be improved), but the inspector accepted the argument that the approach to the underpass was too steep and would add to journey times. The safety measures at the current crossing were considered adequate. Photos: Mike Cannell



You could call this a draw. Elephant crossing in the centre of Newport is to remain closed but the path will be diverted over this narrow road bridge which crosses the railway. It is currently unsafe for pedestrians (and tricky for drivers, with its blind humpback). Network Rail will install a one-metre wide footway and traffic lights to improve the safety of users.

## Access win at Bledlow Ridge

**We don't have much access land in Buckinghamshire, but what we do have is important to us, writes Kate Ashbrook, Footpath Secretary of the Ramblers Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area. The access land at Chawley Manor, near Bledlow Ridge, west of High Wycombe is a broad sweep on a south-west-facing slope, with glorious views. However, the land, which is let to a shoot, has been subject to a repeated five-year restriction whereby walkers were required to stick to a path round the edge from July to February because of alleged disturbance to game. There were further restrictions on walkers with dogs.**

Last autumn Natural England consulted us on the renewal of this restriction to 2028. The Ramblers and Open Spaces Society made a joint submission, objecting strongly to the continuation of a restriction which we considered to be oppressive and unnecessary. In fact, the

linear route was overgrown showing it was not much used. It is evident that the site is not greatly visited and that the owners and occupiers are not inconvenienced by walkers.

As the main complaint seemed to be about dogs, we suggested that any restriction should apply only to walkers with dogs. The local access forum made similar points.

Natural England accepted these submissions and, after further consultation, has resolved that the restriction should be reduced. Now it applies only to walkers with dogs (which must be kept on a lead) who must follow the route as depicted on the site notice. That route will no longer be fenced, so those walkers will enjoy the open feeling of the hillside too.

This is a satisfactory result, and ensures that access is not unduly curtailed. Now we need Buckinghamshire Council, as access authority, to improve the access points and provide signs, so that they are more welcoming, rather than being obscure and hidden by vegetation. Then, perhaps, more people will enjoy this lovely place.



The view north-west from the access land. Photo: Kate Ashbrook



# Ramblers remember the excursions



The group gathered at Tilehurst, Photo: Angela Bellwood

**O**n Friday 25 March 2022 at 10.25, 22 ramblers departed from Paddington station, heading for Tilehurst in Berkshire. They were celebrating, to the minute, the day 90 years earlier (Good Friday) when 'The Hiker's Mystery Express No.1' pulled out from the same station. This time, our destination was known, but in 1932 not even the driver knew where he was heading until a few minutes before departure! It was something of an experiment by the Great Western Railway to tap into the growing popularity of 'hiking', but to everyone's amazement some 1,500 eager hikers turned up and an extra train had to be hastily summoned from the depot to

accommodate them all.

The destination turned out to be Tilehurst and Pangbourne, where no doubt locals stared open-mouthed at the hordes of booted ramblers heading off into the surrounding countryside. They had all been provided with a pamphlet entitled *Rambles in the Chiltern Country*, suggesting routes they could follow individually. Whether pubs and tea shops in the area were able to cope with the unexpected flood of business is not recorded, but (to quote David Sharp, former co-editor of *South East Walker*) "The day's biggest mystery was how everyone managed to get back to the train".

The excursions proved an enormous hit with London's hiking community, becoming more organised and sometimes with more

than one on the same weekend. They were described as 'conducted rambles', on which people could walk in 'parties', choosing between several regular leaders on reconnoitred routes of varying distances. They continued throughout the rest of the 20th century, even in a limited way through the Second World War. Most were bound for normally quiet stations in the countryside surrounding London, but some were more adventurous, reaching the Peak District, Lake District and even crossing the channel to the French coast and Paris. There were lantern-lit walks in the South Downs, and rambles with tea-dances, where one was required to exchange muddy boots for shoes that were suitable for dancing!

Over the years, most of the excursions were under the stewardship of legendary organisers Hugh E Page, John Grinsell, Len King, George Platt and Geoffrey Stevenson.

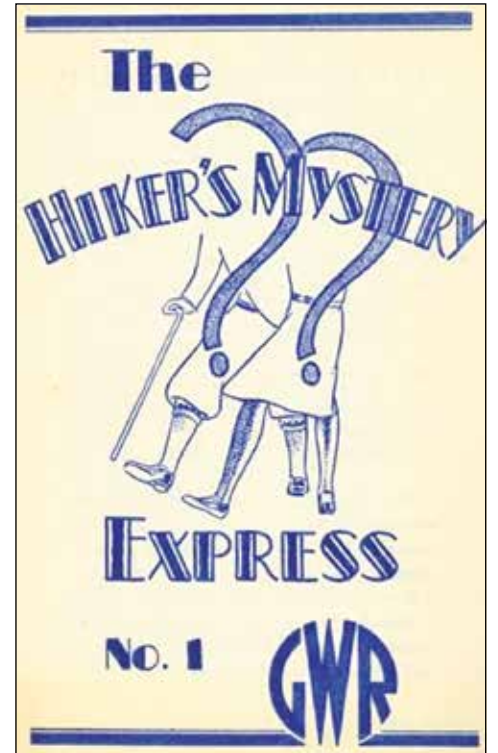
After the war, excursions by coach were added to the programme, alternating with the trains. They remained popular until the 1970s, but then numbers gradually dwindled, hit by increasing car ownership, greater confidence in map reading, guidebooks with route descriptions and the convenience of events organised by Ramblers' local groups. So in 2004 the inevitable decision was taken to bring the programme to a halt. However, the indefatigable Geoffrey Stevenson refused to hang up his boots and kept the excursions going informally for a limited number of former excursionists under the title 'Geoff's Jaunts', which continue to this day under the leadership of Roger Kemp.

Fast forward to 2022. We gathered on the green outside Tilehurst station for a

celebratory tippie, then set off along the Thames Path, heading for Goring with a lunch stop at Pangbourne. We were all members of Geoff's Jaunts and the Vanguards Rambling Club, which owes its existence to the ramblers' excursions, having been established in the guard's van on the homeward journey of a trip to Axminster and Seaton in 1965.

The story of the excursions is told in my book *Rambling Away From the Smoke*, available from Footline Press (footlinepress.co.uk) for £7.00 plus £2.00 postage.

Colin Saunders



The 1932 leaflet advertising the first excursion. Photo: The Science & Society Picture Library

## SOUTH EAST walker

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## What the papers said

**A**lthough news of the special train in 1932 was covered by several newspapers it is unclear whether their correspondents took a walk or simply joined the train. Here's how the *Daily Mirror's* 'special correspondent' reported that first excursion:

HIKERS OFF INTO THE BLUE  
Where are you going to, my pretty maid?  
I'm going a hiking, sir! she said  
That was the only answer that any of the hundreds of pretty maids - or their stalwart swains, for that matter - could have given yesterday as they crowded into 'the Hikers' Mystery Express' at Paddington station. For no one knew where it was going - not even the engine driver, who had been given sealed orders which he was not allowed to open until a few minutes before the train left on its journey into the unknown.

News of this novel enterprise of the Great Western Railway had brought crowds of Easter hikers to platform no.3. They came in all the glory of rucksacks and shorts - bright-eyed girls with bare legs, bronzed young men in open shirts, and weatherbeaten veterans swinging knobbly sticks and with the lapels of their coats smothered in badges. Many carried blankets, groundsheets and cooking stoves, and meant to make a camping holiday of it. One man - prepared for the Highlands at least - turned up with mountaineering ropes and an alpenstock. "You never know where they'll take you!" he said.

Nearly 2,000 strong, they tried to cram into the carriages, and another train had to be run to absorb all those who had answered the call of the

great adventure. And all that these hikers knew was that they had bought a four-shilling ticket, which carried the promise of a fifty mile trip into delightful countryside - destination unknown.

As soon as the train puffed out into glorious sunshine, amidst a storm of cheers the secret was out. "Pangbourne!" was the magic word which went round the packed compartment like lightning. Maps of the beautiful Chiltern and Thames Valley country, taking in such wonderful spots as Mapledurham, Goring and Streatley, were handed round, and eager eyes devoured them. To hundreds of the passengers this paradise of river, hills, dales and country inns was absolutely new ground.

The first stop was at Tilehurst, the romantic riverside railway station, where those who were eager to be up and doing could alight and start on 'Ramble no.23'. The others could go on to Pangbourne, where they had the choice of two routes. Returning trains would pick up the weary wanderers later in the day at either of the two stations, or at Reading.

The scene at Tilehurst, where the first contingent set merrily off on the footpath way, was picturesque enough; but it was nothing to 'the big hike' at Pangbourne. Led by Mr Holford Knight \* KC MP, the hikers' champion in Parliament and his wife and their dog, the huge army trailed away along the sun-soaked riverside road towards the inviting hills and woods. It broke up into groups and spread all over the countryside; and the luncheon-time congestion at the local inns is not difficult to imagine!

So began the first big hike of the year, in

propitious weather. The experiment has been so successful that the GWR are running another 'mystery special' at 10.45am tomorrow! \*\*

According to the same day's *Sheffield Independent*, a GWR official had said "they were overwhelmed with hikers. They had run out of tickets and almost out of literature, as they did not expect half the numbers."

The *Daily News* sent its 'Open Road Correspondent', Stanley R Baron, to report on the train. He wrote: The mystery of the destination was solved while passing Ealing. We were handed books of rambles, and told to get out at Tilehurst, the first stop, or Pangbourne-on-Thames. We all got off at Tilehurst, and then we all got in again. Like true hikers we wanted to have our money's worth.

Many had obviously never hiked before: others were old hands, keen to help the novices. The camaraderie of this great mass of people is delightful. Men of 70 were 'jollied' and helped along the highways by cheery girls. The road home was a weary road for some of the 1,500 hikers, 1,000 of whom were girls, but none would admit a waning of enthusiasm. Pangbourne station was crammed by six o'clock, 50 minutes before the express was due to leave. There were songs, laughter and cheers when an early special pulled out loaded. Hikers who followed the set routes walked at least ten miles. Many followed their own devices and did double the distance. Two girls walked 23 miles in the eight and a half hours between arrival and departure.

\* George Wilfrid Holford Knight was Liberal parliamentary candidate and later Labour MP for Nottingham South. He stood down in 1935 and died the following year.

\*\* The second 'Mystery Express' ran on Easter Sunday 1932 to Henley-on-Thames.



# Festival will celebrate Kent's Heritage Coast

**K**ent's Heritage Coast was named by Lonely Planet as one of the top ten regions in the world to visit in 2022. In placing the region fourth in its global list, the well known travel guide cited the fertile countryside, ancient woodlands and dramatic white cliff coastline as some of the key features in awarding this accolade.

Now in its eighth year, the White Cliffs Walking Festival presents a unique opportunity to explore the riches that the area has to offer. Held at the end of August (25 - 30 this year) the event will include 33 walks, many of which will feature Kent's Heritage Coast. Three linear walks (Margate to Ramsgate, Deal to Dover and Dover to Folkestone) will follow this section of the England Coast Path.

Between Deal and Dover the walk will pass the South Foreland lighthouse - the first in the world to be powered by electricity. Approaching Dover, with its imposing castle, the walk will also pass a memorial to Louis Bleriot, the first person to fly across the Channel in 1909. A separate walk around the castle is planned. As you climb out of Dover en route to Folkestone you will pass the Western Heights fortifications. Work on these defences began during the Napoleonic wars and were designed to protect Dover from a French invasion. As you descend into Folkestone, keep your eyes open for a number of public artworks that have featured as part of the town's triennial. For history buffs, there will be a short walk exploring some of the archaeological features to be found in Dover, whilst

a tour of Deal will highlight some of its more notable past residents. Nestling below the cliffs between Dover and Folkestone, Samphire Hoe has been built on reclaimed land created during the building of the Channel Tunnel. The area was sown with wildflower seeds and has now become a natural habitat for both plants and wildlife. Similarly, walks featuring the beaches and salt marshes around Pegwell Bay and Sandwich will delight bird watchers and you may even spot a colony of seals swimming in Sandwich Bay. To see why Lonely Planet rated the area so highly, the details of all these walks and more will be published in June on the festival's website at [www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk](http://www.whitecliffswalkingfestival.org.uk).

**Tony Bristow**  
*White Cliffs Ramblers*



Dover Castle, the jewel in the crown of Kent's Heritage Coast. Photo: Rob Riddle

## Source to sea

**S**ince the opening, on 12 January, of the 47-mile Grain to Woolwich stretch of the England Coast Path (see SEW 117), it has been possible to walk alongside the River Thames from source to sea on a National Trail. In the last few months I've visited both sites, the source and the sea,

All the Cotswolds rivers like the Coln, Evenlode, Leach, Windrush and nearby the source, Cirencester's Churn, become the River Thames. Because of this there have always been disputes as to the true source of the Thames. The river that the National Trail follows flows from Trewsbury Mead through the nearby Keynes villages. The nearest railway station is Kemble which is just over a mile away.

In truth the site is understated, you might even say plain, with only a fingerpost, a circle of pebbles and an isolated stone to mark the source. Rumour has it a bench is to be installed on site and the inscription on the stone will be freshened up.

The Isle of Grain, the easternmost point on the Hoo peninsula in Kent, is a complete contrast. No longer an island it now forms part of the peninsula, the

area is almost all marshland and is a major habitat for diverse wetland birds. The south of the Isle is an important industrial centre and until 1982 it was home to a major BP oil refinery. In the 1990s the refinery site was chosen for a purpose-built facility to make concrete lining segments for the Channel Tunnel. Next to the former BP site is Grain Power Station, built in the 1970s, which previously burnt oil. It was mothballed in 2003, but reopened in 2006 to provide up to three per cent of the National Grid supply. The oil-fired power station was demolished in 2015 and a new gas-fired station now stands on the site. Another major installation is the new Grain liquefied natural gas import facility.

The nearby Yantlet Creek is the downstream limit of the City of London's ownership of the bed of the River Thames. It is marked by a London Stone beside the mouth of the creek. In 1855, as part of military defences guarding the Thames, Grain Tower, a fort, was built. It remained in use until 1946, having been used during both World Wars.

I took the train from London to Strood, then a bus to Allhallows before walking the nine or so miles round part of the peninsula. Before catching the bus back to Strood I stopped for a pint in Grain's only pub, the Hogarth Inn.

**Des Garrahan**



Grain Fort



Marshland on Grain

## Walks for Each Season

**J**ulia Smith, a keen walker and member of the Ramblers living in north London, has written *Walks for Each Season: 26 great days out in the countryside near London*, a walks guidebook that suggests the most appropriate season to enjoy and appreciate each route.



So walks for spring lead you through bluebells, for summer past poppies and wildflower meadows and through beechwoods in autumn. A walk suggested for winter takes you to the Sussex coast to witness a startling murmuration in Brighton. The walks range from four to 14 miles (though most are between six and eight miles) and all start and finish at railway stations between Bedfordshire and Essex in the north down to the Sussex coast. Routes are plotted on Ordnance Survey maps which accompany detailed walk descriptions, together with notes on what to look out for on each walk.

Julia explains: "I was fed up with going on the same old walks. Investing a day in a walk is a big deal, especially for those who work, which I guess was why I tended to stick to tried and tested walks - I didn't want to 'waste' a day on a disappointing walk. So not only did I want to find walks

which showcased the best of each season, they had to be really good walks in themselves.

I must have 20 books on walks near London, the wonderful Time Out guides, Pathfinder guides, the Rough Guide etc. But none of them quite did what I wanted. I find the directions in Time Out brilliant but too long, so I had my head stuck in the book rather than taking in the countryside, I love the Ordnance Survey maps in the Pathfinder guides, so much better than the line drawings in most walking books, which I find pretty useless. And the introductions to each walk in all of these books (where there was one) never quite gave me enough information to help me make a decision about whether I really wanted to go on the walk - although some came close. I wanted to communicate what the walk felt like and also be honest about any downsides or 'nasty' bits. So I wrote the book I wanted but couldn't find, combining the best bits of the different guides which included having several colour photos for each walk - all of which pushed up production costs quite considerably - but this project was never about money.

The cover was important to me too. I found the covers on walking books disappointing, a bit boring and rather old fashioned - usually just a photograph. Neil Gower, acclaimed graphic artist, who designed the covers for the Bill Bryson and William Golding books, kindly agreed to design the cover. Given each walk begins and ends at a station, I wanted something which looked a little like those

wonderful old railway posters advertising days out, which looked a little retro. We also had an interesting back and forth about the figures. I was keen that they were a bit androgynous, so you couldn't tell whether they were men or women, a couple or not, black or white. I'm not sure if we've quite achieved this, but hopefully it's a move in the right direction. It's a shame the people in the photos are all white and middle aged (although people don't feature much) - as I haven't walked yet with any black friends, but that's something I'd like to change for book two which I'm currently scoping.

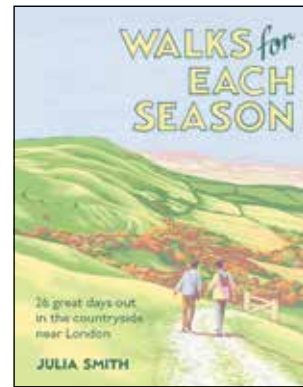
Writing the book has just been an amazing experience, on so many levels. My main focus was the quality of the writing, which interestingly isn't the 'thing' people comment on - their first reaction is how much they like the photographs. It made me return to walks time and time again to find the best route - it took me nine years to find the route included in Walk 3! It also made me research each area and the natural wonders on each walk - which I wouldn't have bothered to do otherwise, I've therefore learnt so much - about wild flowers in particular. And it made me realise how lucky we are to have access to such amazing countryside within reach of London by train. Lastly, I couldn't remain silent about the climate crisis or what we've done to our countryside through intensive farming - issues which have been gaining more and more traction over the last five years - the time it's taken me to research and produce the book. But I also wanted the book to be hopeful, to show through the walks what can be done to restore and protect.

The book was published last November. The feedback so far has been really interesting.

The book's been bought by a lot of people who aren't regular walkers and it's wonderful to get their feedback about how much they enjoyed one or more of the walks they've been on. Many seem to like the fact there are only 26 walks in there, it makes it feel less overwhelming somehow. I purposely didn't include many very long walks (unlike the Time Out books for example), so that the book would appeal to a wider group of people.

We all have only so many springs left - and I guess what I hope most is that the book will inspire people to get out there and walk and to experience it all - and help them on their way."

*Walks for Each Season: 26 great days out in the countryside near London*, ISBN 9781739986704, £14.99, Corncockle Publishing. Details of where to buy the book can be found at [countrywalksnearlondon.blogspot.com](http://countrywalksnearlondon.blogspot.com). Inner London stockists include Daunt Books in Marylebone, Hatchards in Piccadilly and the London Transport Museum. The book can also be bought online at [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org), Waterstones and Amazon.



Book cover





## Bedfordshire Walking Festival (10-18 September)

**A lot of work is going on to make the 2022 festival one to remember. Not only are Ramblers groups stepping up with contributions but other organisations are too.**

The festival coincides with Heritage Open Days and the programme will include some unusual informative walks such as the 'Unguided guided walks' at Bedford's Foster Hill Cemetery, 'The Three Ls of Henlow's Heritage' and Historical Parkland in Greensand Country' to name just three. There will also be a country walk followed by a boat trip with the option of a cream tea, and a point to

point walk from Bedford to Riseley returning by bus. All our groups are putting on walks across the county and will range from short ambles to half and full day walks.

The energetic can enjoy a 16-mile walk in the remote north of the county thanks to the Long Distance Walkers Association and we hope to see the return of the 40-mile Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge Walk Challenge over the weekend of 17 - 18 September.

All the walk details will be available on the festival website - [www.bedswalkfest.co.uk](http://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk) - by early July with programmes available from later in July.



A group at the 2021 walking festival. Photo: Barry Ingram

## Footpaths

**Both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire councils have been making good progress with the creation of new paths and to their credit are always looking for ways to improve and develop the network.**

Recently a joint venture has created a first-class walk around Rookery Pit north on the edge of Stewartby village in Marston

Vale. The creation of the route was complicated as part was in Bedford Borough and part in Central Bedfordshire. Users will enjoy great views of the lake and see how much has changed for the better since the closure of the brickworks. Few people realise that the older part of Stewartby is a model village created by the London Brick Company for its workers in the 1920s. A brickworks trail with plaques has been created and there are plans for more new paths

and a brickworks heritage centre

Further to the west, paths have opened across a former landfill site between Brogborough and Cranfield offering great views in all directions. The Marston Vale was once one of the most polluted places in the UK with over 150 chimneys belching smoke and producing over 500 million bricks a year at its peak. It is gradually becoming the most green and pleasant area in the county with appeal to walkers and wildlife enthusiasts.



New information board on the Rookery Pit walk. Photo: Barry Ingram

## Training courses

**Area Chair, Nick Markham, is running four one-day training courses this year. These began on Sunday 8 May with a course at Old Warden on 'Map Awareness'.**

Next will be a course for potential walk leaders who would like to refresh their skills and this will be held on Saturday 11 June at Keysoe Row Village Hall, just off the B660 Bedford to Kimbolton road in north Bedfordshire. On Sunday 10 July, the subject will be 'The Use of Apps and Maps for Walking' to be covered at the Summerlin Centre, Woburn Sands. A fourth course will be held during the Bedfordshire Walking Festival on either Saturday 10 or Sunday 11 September with details included in the festival programme.

The courses cost £10 and are open to both members and non-members. Under 16s must be accompanied by an appropriate adult and booking is essential as places are limited.

For more information contact Nick via [www.bedswalkfest.co.uk](http://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk) or phone/text 07803 125876.

## RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Public Paths for Local Enjoyment)

**Having completed painting a pallet-load of marker posts for Bedford Borough with one coat primer and two coats of yellow paint, we were asked if we could do the same for Central Bedfordshire. So our volunteer painters returned, got out their brushes and painted a further 50 or so posts.**

In February our volunteers along with members of Heath & Reach P3, successfully reopened nearly a mile of permissive path (permission lapsed about ten years ago but has since been reinstated). The route was overgrown with dense vegetation and provided us with probably the most challenging of any clearance we have ever undertaken. An additional challenge was that the path was fenced in on one side and had thick hedging on the other. The work was also somewhat pressurised as we aimed to complete the task before the start of the bird nesting season. Thanks to all involved, the work was completed in time.

We took a trip out to Chawston, near Roxton, where three path marker posts were needed along with some ground clearance. A good turnout ensured a successful morning's work.

Smaller tasks requiring only one or two people have been carried out in Kempston West End where a path marker post had been incorrectly positioned many years ago. Discs were changed and the ground around posts and gates cleared.

In Bolnhurst and heading towards Keysoe Row on Donkey Lane, a new marker post was installed near Woodend Farm to replace a low level one that people couldn't see. A fallen tree blocking the path was cleared and overhanging and side vegetation cut back.

On a lovely sunny morning towards Easter we saw one of our largest turnouts when we were supported by volunteers from the local horse riding community to widen over half a mile of bridleway 13 at Potton alongside the quarry.

Looking ahead, our volunteers will be installing at least six marker posts across Whipsnade Golf Course and several new and replacement posts in the parish of Staploe and Duloe in the north eastern part of the county.

In between all our activities several of our volunteers have attended courses on first aid and the use of brush and hedge cutters, organised by Central Bedfordshire Council.



Volunteers at Potton. Photo: Barry Ingram

## Future meetings

For the last couple of years all Area meetings have been via Zoom because of Covid restrictions but in July we will be returning to our usual venue of the Rufus Centre in Flitwick for a face to face meeting. Members' views have been sought regarding preferences for face to face or online meetings for group and Area AGMs in November.





# BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

## North Bucks rRIPPLE group cultivates local champions

**H**elping members of local communities gain better access to more regular outdoor exercise is the principal motivation for the North Bucks rRIPPLE group, benefitting particularly the very young, the elderly and dog walkers, who can struggle with even the best maintained stiles.

Our group of retired engineers and practically-minded individuals has been working for more than five years to help Buckinghamshire Council, parish councils and residents make public footpaths easier to navigate by replacing awkward or damaged stiles with gates. No potential improvement is overlooked, but a winning outcome is to create local community walks, ideally circular, where all stiles have been replaced by gates, making exercise more enjoyable and accessible to all.

Success relies on the cooperation and teamwork of the people involved. The best results come when parish councils, landowners and our group work in harmony on a significant and substantial improvement programme. This usually leads to immediate support from the county council. Where there is misunderstanding or apparent obstruction, lack of support or resistance to change, persistence can sometimes pay off. However, the group is rarely short of work and usually installs one or more gates most weeks; its coordinators try to focus on what can be achieved, rather than what cannot, although occasionally a waiting game pays off.

The best examples of cooperation



Team members with Chearsley Parish Council's footpaths officer Anthony Adams (far right) after refurbishing one of three dilapidated kissing gates. Photo: Bill Piers

are when a local champion can be found, (ideally the parish council footpath representative), obtaining a regular financial precept from the parish council, or getting access to funding from a local charitable trust. For many years Oving provided annual funding for several gates in the parish, resulting in vastly improved access to local footpaths. A trust fund in Bierton has made regular grants to replace stiles in the village and neighbouring Hulcott. More recently, the parish council of Ickford has committed significant funds to a full stile replacement programme to ensure unimpeded access to all the village footpaths. Local residents and landowners have also generously supported this work with donations.

The 'Donate a gate' scheme run by the group through the Area plays an important part in raising awareness and financial support, amounting to almost £6,000 during semi-lockdown 2021. A benefit to donors is to have the option of a commemorative plaque attached to the gate in remembrance of a loved

one or significant member of the community. Many of these have come from the families and friends of members of Aylesbury Ramblers.

In the financial year to April 2022, the group will still have met its target of 50+ gate installations and several ad hoc repairs and improvements. Indeed, one of the mantras of our members is to leave a site looking better than they found it, often repairing adjacent fencing, installing electric fence bypass conduit, and even rehanging sagging field gates at no cost to the landowner. Occasionally, steps will be refurbished and the odd rotten sleeper in a small footbridge over a ditch replaced, all reducing the burden on the council's resources while supporting its policies for improvement in infrastructure and taxpayers' health.

**Bill Piers**

**North Bucks rRIPPLE**  
[williamjsbpier@gmail.com](mailto:williamjsbpier@gmail.com)

For details of the Donate-a-Gate scheme go to [bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate](http://bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate).

We remain short of officers, and the situation could become critical next year. Our Chairman, Paul Rhodes, has indicated that he would like this year to be his last in the post. By then, I will have been doubling as Treasurer and Acting Area Secretary for 10 years and I am reluctant to continue filling both posts. Paul will be making strenuous efforts in the coming year to fill these and other vacancies.

Our gate installation team in northern Buckinghamshire goes from strength to strength (see above) and our path checkers have done a grand job walking the paths and reporting problems in their parishes. We are indebted to them for the many hours they devote to this. We were also pleased to learn that our representations on a long-term access restriction near Bledlow

Ridge had been heeded (see page 1).

However, several of our groups have been experiencing difficulties filling their walks programmes, in part because of the perception by current and potential leaders that the requirement to prepare and retain risk assessments constitutes unnecessary bureaucracy. Three groups had submitted motions to the meeting calling on the Area to submit a motion to General Council; this was approved by the AGM with just two abstentions and no contrary votes.

After the formal business our Area Footpath Secretary, Kate Ashbrook, who was approaching the end of her current period of service on the Board of Trustees, gave us an update on recent national Ramblers developments.

**John Esslemont**

**Acting Area Secretary**

## Area AGM

**T**he Annual General Meeting of Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area was held on Saturday 5 February as a hybrid meeting, with five members at Stoke Mandeville Community Centre and eight attending by Zoom video conference. This was a disappointingly low overall attendance and we hope we can get back to nearer normal next year. Our usual pre-meeting walk had been abandoned, partly because of rising numbers of Covid cases and partly because walking routes from Stoke Mandeville are currently unsatisfactory because of HS2 construction work and other building work.



## Area AGM

**B**raving both Covid 19 Omicron and Storm Eunice, over 50 Inner London Ramblers met face to face for the first time in over two years for their scrupulously risk-assessed Annual General Meeting near Clapham Common on Saturday 19 February.

For some, the now commonplace weekly ritual of lateral flow tests were completed and reported as negative. Chairs were laid out giving everyone plenty of space and the room was ventilated adequately.

Walks to the church hall were led, new officers were elected to the Area committee, retiring officers were thanked and long-standing volunteers were honoured. Tea was drunk, cakes and biscuits were eaten. A motion for General Council was proposed, debated and defeated. Oh, how wonderful it was to return to some sort of normal, even if it was a new normal. Once democracy had been

satisfied and reports had been received, the outgoing Area Chair, Clare Wadd, handed the floor to the two guest speakers - Rebecca Dawson, Chair of the Ramblers Board of Trustees and Sage Fitzpatrick, Marketing Manager at Go Jauntly - a free community-based walking app which invites you into a world of outdoor adventures.

Rebecca's whistle-stop talk included how the Ramblers had dealt with Covid, the lessons learned and her hopes for the future. Sage told us a little about Go Jauntly, our friends and partners for some activities. They describe themselves as "nature-loving city dwellers who spend much time deskbound and yearn to be a bit more active. We're not really fans of the gym but love to get out, stretch our legs and explore local areas, especially with our young families."

A few of us then retired to the nearby Bread and Roses for a couple of drinks before heading off to enjoy the rest of our Saturday. Continued on page 6.

**Des Garrahan**



At the AGM are (left to right) Rebecca Dawson, Chair of the Ramblers Board of Trustees, Sage Fitzpatrick of Go Jauntly and Clare Wadd, outgoing Area Chair. Photo: Des Garrahan

## Our volunteers work on London walks

Our teams of volunteers have continued making improvements for those walking the London Loop and Capital Ring routes.

**New waymark discs:** Using Inner London Area funds along with a donation, we've been able to purchase a large number of London Loop discs and stickers so we're now well-stocked once again with discs (forward, left and right arrows) and stickers (forward arrows) for both the Loop and the Ring.

**Waymarking improvements:** Volunteers are continuing to replace missing and damaged waymark discs on both routes, and to add stickers where this makes the route clearer to follow. Significant improvements have been made to several sections of the London Loop:

- On Section 1, Barbara Moss has been adding stickers where extra direction is needed, and Keith Rodwell, Volunteer Coordinator for Sections 1 - 7, and George Hall have fitted new discs to posts between Crayford and Bexley.
- Keith and George, with Ketta

Morris, have completed the majority of the disc replacement on Section 2.

- On Section 3, the Friends of Jubilee Park have renewed all of the discs in the park.

- Chris Goulburn, David Scott and Keith have renewed all of the discs on existing posts on the whole of Section 4.

- On Section 15, Tony Butcher has added new waymarks and stickers between Stanmore and Elstree.

- Chris Simpson has replaced discs on Sections 21 and 23 and added new ones, and has succeeded in getting Havering Council to correct the alignment of signposts where the route crosses the A12.

- On Section 22, Dave Smart has done a lot of path clearance work after trees came down in the February storms, and has signposted a short diversion, and added more waymark discs.

Work continues on other



sections of both the Ring and the Loop too of course.

The winter storms had a big impact on both routes, and we see waymark posts installed 20 years ago are now rotting away. We're having some limited success in getting landowners to replace these, but as many sections of these routes are on permissive paths, some landowners are citing budget restrictions. We are thinking about how we can approach this in the future.

**PDF guidance and maps:** Transport for London (TfL) has now removed the very out-of-date Capital Ring guidance and maps on its website at our request and are linking directly to ours, which we have updated again, ensuring the PDFs conform to TfL's accessibility guidelines. This has been a huge piece of work, for which thanks are due in particular to Andrew Hunt and Ian Bull, but also to all those volunteers who checked the guidance notes and maps on the ground once again. There have now been 75,000 visits to the Capital Ring pages on our website. The same updating process is now taking place for the London Loop - which is twice the distance, so twice the amount of work - with a view to publishing updated guidance and maps by the time you read this. TfL has agreed to take its out-of-date guidance down at the same time.

**Social media and promotion:** Thanks to Marcus Liddell, who joined the volunteer team earlier this year, we're now seeing many more social media posts about the two routes, with a lot of people using our #LondonLoop and #CapitalRing hashtags for their pictures. If you use Twitter and Instagram, please follow @capital\_ring and @LDNLoop and share your photos. This helps

us to promote the routes to new walkers, to point people to our route guidance and maps, and to highlight the Ramblers' role in the routes' creation and maintenance.

**Volunteering opportunities:** If anyone else would like to get involved in the project, we're looking for a coordinator of the volunteers who monitor Sections 16-24 of the London Loop, to take over from Andrew Hunt so that he can focus on the PDF guidance and website updates for diversions etc. This role involves supporting the section volunteers, liaising between them and the project management group, and collating status reports. We currently have a full complement of section volunteers for both the Capital Ring and London Loop but expect to expand the project to include the Green Chain Walk in south east London, and are now looking for volunteers to support with that, so please do get in touch if you would like to get involved.

Clare Wadd  
vicechair@

innerlondonramblers.org.uk



A new waymark disc installed by one of our volunteers in Havering. Photo: Dave Smart

## The results are in

**Local council elections were held up and down the United Kingdom on Thursday 5 May. As all campaigners know, it's now that the real work starts as we begin to match the 'asks' from the Ramblers with the commitments from the manifestos of the winners in London's boroughs.**

For the first time, during these elections, we tried to obtain and keep every manifesto from all the leading parties in each of London's 32 boroughs. In this way we can begin the tough but necessary task of holding the victors to their promises.

We kept our 'asks' simple and this year we enjoyed a lot of positive support across the political spectrum. Possibly, with the impact of Covid burning bright in peoples' memories, we had a marvellous

opportunity to remind prospective councillors of the value and benefits of walking, along with the need for better access to existing green space.

One particularly exciting development appeared in the Lewisham Labour manifesto: 'Create a new 50 kilometre Lewisham Walking Path connecting Lewisham's towns and green spaces through a series of walks'. Lewisham is a London borough that has a mayor. We have already established contact with Labour in Lewisham to offer our help with this project and we plan to organise a series of walks during the coming summer to help work begin on this project.

As we continue to scrutinise other manifestos we will keep our members aware of any new developments.

Des Garrahan

## Explore with map and compass:

A further one day course for those with little experience to gain confidence in map reading and navigation will be arranged by East Sussex member John Harmer for Saturdays 23 July

or 6 August at Battle. If you are interested please contact John on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com. Standard charge £10, reduced rates available.



# SURREY snippets

## Hard times

**We are in a worrying place with increased fuel and water bills and the price of petrol is high! Summer for me is about travelling further afield and doing longer walks as we have more daylight hours and, normally, good weather. It is about finishing in the pub for dinner and a soft drink or two. If not dinner then a tea shop with cake. It's a full day out and can be quite expensive. I never worried about the cost before as for me it is the most enjoyable time of the week and it is really good to be outside in the fresh air, keeping**

**fit both mentally and physically.**

Part of the fun for me in doing longer walks and driving further afield is arranging car shares. I believe the day starts when you meet your fellow walkers and start the journey from your home, their home or a mutually arranged car park. I think in the summer months ahead we need to look

into more car-sharing and consider the costs. Walking has always been a low cost activity but it is the extras around a day's walk that cost the money. For me, car sharing is definitely one way to bring down that cost!

Holly Matthews  
Chair, Surrey Area  
and Surrey Young  
Walkers

## Area AGM

**The 2022 AGM was held on Saturday 5 February by video conference with 56 members in attendance.**

Brian Reader was elected as President (see below), and the other Area officers continue in post: Holly Matthews as Chair, myself as Secretary, Andrew Bowden as Footpath and Access Officer, David Cooper as Publicity

Officer, and Deb Skinner as Webmaster. Keith Chesterton was elected as an individual member of Area Council, and as the Independent Examiner.

There remains a vacancy for Vice-Chair - anyone interested in this opportunity should contact Holly at chair@surreyramblers.org.uk for further details.

This year, Woking Group won the Area Membership Cup. This cup is awarded annually to the group which achieves the

largest growth in membership.

Guest speaker, Michael Penny, Ramblers' honorary treasurer, reviewed the highlights of the last year, including the increase in membership, campaign successes and the new website and brand identity, and the update to our values. His talk was followed by a Q&A session.

The AGM was rounded off with a short quiz devised by Holly.

David Leedham  
Area Secretary

## Our new President

**Surrey Area has re-introduced the office of President. The role doesn't come with any specific responsibilities - it's primarily to recognise the unique contribution made by an individual to the work of the Area over many years. Our last President was David Sharp. Known as the 'Father of the Thames Path', he made an immense contribution to the Ramblers over several decades and was Chairman of the vast Southern Area when it was split into several smaller Areas.**

At our 2022 Area AGM, Brian Reader was elected as our President. Brian joined the South East London and Kent Group of the Ramblers at its formation as a very young man in 1964, and almost immediately became a walk leader, a role he has continued to this day. In the 1970s he was elected to the Southern Area Council - a 100-strong body -

and remained a member until the formation of Surrey and the other county Areas in 1984.

For a few years he was on the Area Executive, and had the job of Transport Secretary. He was responsible for organising some of the very popular rail excursions out of London for ramblers. He remembers a classic station announcement - "The train at platform 3 is not for normal passengers".

In 1975, Brian attended General Council as an Area helper and, quite remarkably, has attended meetings of that body in one role or another every year since. Brian was elected to the Agenda Committee in 1980, and was re-elected every year until 1997 when he stood for election to the Executive Committee, the forerunner of the Board of Trustees.

Brian served as Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee from 2000 to 2003, during which time he was involved in

the complex negotiations with solicitors over the Ramblers incorporation as a company limited by guarantee, and then became Chair of the Board of Trustees for three years.

In 1984 Southern Area, which covered south east England and East Anglia, was broken up into the county Areas we know today including, of course, Surrey Area. Brian became our first Chair, and subsequently Area Footpath Secretary, a post he held for 25 years. Then, after Rodney Whittaker's five-year stint, with no

candidate to replace Rodney, Brian returned to the role for another year to help us out.

In 2016, Brian was awarded a well-deserved British Empire Medal in the New Year Honours List for services in promoting public rights of way in Surrey. Today, Brian is the Chair and Footpath Secretary of Woking Ramblers, an Area Council delegate, and Pathwatch coordinator for the Area. It is a quite extraordinary record of a lifetime's contribution to the Ramblers at all levels.

David Leedham  
Area Secretary



Brian Reader at the start of a walk he led near Guildford in March. Photo: Jackie Leedham



# Farnham course

**F**arnham Ramblers hosted a training course for potential walk leaders on Saturday 9 April. There were 13 members from six different groups across west Surrey and south west London. The morning sessions dealt with walk leading requirements, map reading, use of map applications and using a compass. After a brief lunch break, participants were asked to follow a three mile route around Farnham Park, to test out what they had learnt in the morning about navigation markers such as field boundaries, streams and contours.

Alan Keeley, the course organiser, said: "Getting people into the countryside to enjoy it and its health benefits is what the Ramblers is all about and

we need leaders to make sure this continues. Since Covid restrictions eased there are many more people wanting to walk but a noticeable shortage of leaders for many reasons. I am so grateful that more potential leaders are coming forward and we are pleased to help them build confidence.

Thanks were also expressed to Ann Stevenson, Treasurer of SABRE Group, who acted as coordinator to ensure the training session worked for all - a great example of cross-group working.

These newly trained walk leaders now join a community of about a hundred leaders on our books. It is because of this large pool of leaders that the group is able to offer up to eight walks each week with distances ranging from three to 12 miles.

*Nick Baxter  
Farnham Ramblers*



Farnham Ramblers and tutor on the course held on behalf of Surrey Ramblers. Photo: Nick Baxter

## A bridge to somewhere

**H**ow often have you found yourself struggling along a neglected and overgrown path, running the gauntlet of overhanging branches and hacking at brambles, only to discover that it leads to a bridge that is in a state of complete dilapidation? Have you ever wished that path could be magically transformed with a complete makeover?

For one lucky bridge near Gatton Manor golf course its dream came true on 24 March when it was given a new lease of life by seven of our path maintenance volunteers, in

conjunction with Adrian Riddle, a Surrey County Council Countryside Access Assistant. The revamp should revolutionise the life of the wretched bridge and footpath, allowing them to be fully accessible once more to the public.

The footpath had fallen into disuse over the years so the plan now is to promote awareness of it. Our group walks programme coordinator has challenged leaders to find it and incorporate it into a walk. It is quite a navigational challenge to find it, from either the golf club or Fishfold Farm.

*Louise Stilwell-Stage  
Mole Valley Ramblers*



New life for an old bridge. Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

# Popular work

**T**his had to be the most popular work we have ever done. Reigate Ramblers' footpath maintenance team was out in February repairing the steps that lead down from the ridge behind Reigate Priory Park to Park Lane East.

Normally on our task days we might get one or two passers-by wishing us a good day but on this occasion we could have done with traffic lights to control the flow! A steady stream of walkers and more than the occasional dog gingerly picked their way through our work

(the risks and mitigation carefully managed!) and the universal comment was "Thank you for doing something about those steps". Posting on the Facebook group 'Memories of Redhill/Reigate', we quickly got 210 'likes' and many more positive comments.

These steps are on the Greensand Way, a popular and well-recognised route. Of course, our work is of benefit to us Ramblers but, being on the edge of town, most of those using the steps on this day were locals out for a stroll or to walk the dog. We think we have



The Reigate Ramblers footpath maintenance team. Photo: Sally Wallace

performed a community was a good day's work! good with an impact far beyond Ramblers. It

*Glyn Jones  
Reigate Ramblers*

## Fisher's Farm footbridge closed again



Fisher's Farm Bridge in April. Photo: Brenda Horwill

**S**urrey County Council (and the Secretary of State for Transport) have closed the Fisher's Farm footbridge (grid ref TQ 015559) until December! The order states that

the closure is necessary on the grounds of public safety due to the poor state of repair of the bridge.

There is a dispute between the county council and the owner

of Fisher's Farm as to who is responsible for the maintenance of the bridge. Farm vehicles still go over the bridge and we have seen that local people take no notice of the Footpath Closed signs.

We led walks from Worplesdon to Woking in the summers of 2013, 2015 and 2017. The bridge was closed in 2013 and we had to completely change our route. The bridge was open on the two subsequent visits but it had been poorly mended.

On Saturday 2 April this year, we led a group of 17 members on the same walk but took the advertised diversion north-eastwards and were rewarded with views of a development made of Gresham Press, an old printworks, and the 19th century Gresham Mill. Lunch was at Send before continuing along the towpath and over Broad Mead and through Old Woking.

*Brenda Horwill  
Kingston Ramblers*

## Around Surrey

**Ashcombe Woods:** The National Trust has acquired this 134 acre (54 hectare) woodland at Ranmore Common. Much of the woodland is classed as common land which the public has open access to. The site adjoins the 450 acres of Ranmore Common, which the trust has owned since 1959 as part of the Polesden Lacey estate.

More details at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/national-trust-acquires-new-stretch-of-ranmore-common-in-surrey>.

**Beverley Brook bridge:** Wimbledon

and Putney Common Conservators (a charity which looks after these and other nearby areas) have launched an appeal to restore a currently closed footbridge over Beverley Brook on Putney Lower Common. A survey found the decaying and broken timber sleepers need replacement. The steel frame will be lifted and repaired because the metal ties that hold the beams together have corroded. The bridge will then be protected from corrosion, painted and restored at a cost of about £15,000 with any surplus funds used

to enhance the brook's banks and care for Putney Lower Common.

More at <https://www.wpcc.org.uk/support-us/lets-bring-back-the-bridge>. A pdf route guide to the Beverley Brook Walk is available via the London Borough of Merton's website at <https://tinyurl.com/beverleybrook>.

**Epsom Common volunteering:** The Epsom Common Association has produced a programme of volunteering sessions stretching through to October. Activities include charcoal burning, bracken clearance and pond tasks. More at [https://www.epsoncommon.org.uk/The\\_EcoVols.php](https://www.epsoncommon.org.uk/The_EcoVols.php)

**Surrey trees:** Plans to enable the planting of 1.2 million trees by 2030 have been announced by Surrey County council as part of its climate change strategy. There are nine funding schemes available for woodlands and larger areas plus two for smaller areas. The council aims to involve residents, businesses, the public sector and other local authorities.

More at <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/community/climate-change/what-are-we-doing/tree-strategy>

*David Cooper*





# KENT calling

## Area Secretary's diary

**T**he highlight of the last quarter was our AGM, again held on-line. We elected a new Chairman, Colin Sefton, to succeed Robert Campbell who has emigrated to Sussex. We filled only one of the Vice-Chairman roles so if you fancy taking the other on please get in touch. There are no specific duties attached to the role so this is a relatively gentle way of getting involved with running the Area and perhaps taking on more responsibility at a later stage. We resolved to send a motion to the General Council meeting in April, effectively the Ramblers' national AGM, seeking an improvement in communication and consultation between the Ramblers nationally and Areas and groups. I missed the General Council meeting thanks to a positive Covid test taken a couple of hours before my planned departure but Colin managed perfectly well without me and the motion was carried. We look forward to hearing what the Board of Trustees plans to do in response.

Sadly Marion Shoard was not able to deliver the advertised address to the AGM but instead we had a quiz involving the identifications of 30 pictures of Kent castles past and present. This seemed to be enjoyed by everyone with 22 being the highest score.

As announced in the last issue

of South East Walker, the section of the England Coast Path from Grain to Woolwich opened in January so I have been busy walking the route as part of the research for our forthcoming guide. The route is very varied with both Kent's most remote section of coastline from Allhallows-on-Sea to Cliffe Creek and perhaps its most built-up section from Erith to Woolwich. Even the wildest sections are plagued by rubbish washed up along the shoreline but the ever-changing views across the Thames with a variety of vessels docked or passing by compensate for this. We still patiently await the decision of the Secretary of State on disputed sections of the path elsewhere, especially on Sheppey, to enable completion of our guides.

Walkers are welcome to help test the draft guides - if you are interested please visit [www.kentramblers.org.uk/coastal](http://www.kentramblers.org.uk/coastal) for more details.

In my last diary I appealed for more Local Footpath Observers and was pleased to receive over a dozen enquiries and have reduced vacancies from 92 to 76 out of 387 posts. We would like to hear from even more people to fill the remaining vacancies. Why don't you have a go?

We have continued with our webinars for public rights of way volunteers in conjunction with Kent County Council's rights of way team. In January we discussed 'the extent of the highway' and in

May our topic was 'rail crossings'. This was a timely topic with concern about Network Rail seeking the temporary closure of paths crossing railways on what we think are dubious safety grounds and then not working urgently on a solution, resulting in closure extension for quite unacceptable lengths of time.

We are keen to install more information boards to promote our walking routes and I have been working on a design for one promoting the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk for the car park at Groombridge. Unfortunately the local parish council didn't like my first design, despite it being nearly identical to a previous board that it will replace, so it has been back to the drawing board. The latest version is shown in the photo but whether that will meet with approval remains to be seen. We have also been planning to replace the Wealdway information board outside Tonbridge Castle. This has taken on a new urgency as the original board disappeared during a storm in March. We are considering designing the new board to cover not just the Wealdway but also the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk which begin or end at the castle. The boards will be paid for from the profits from sales of our walking guides, now over £12,000.

**Robert Peel**  
Area Secretary

## Improving our footpath services



Four of the 'Slashers'. Photo: Lee Pickup

**H**aving been a walk leader for White Cliffs Ramblers for a number of years I have often been frustrated when coming across paths that are overgrown and impassable causing planned walk-outs to be diverted to a less suitable or less aesthetically pleasing route. This was especially noticeable during the lockdowns when path clearances had to be put on hold.

Since June 2021, once the ravages of Covid moved on, White Cliffs Ramblers have been working on improving their footpath services by bringing together volunteers. The group's new footpath maintenance volunteers team went into action and have completed over 250 hours of work clearing vegetation from local paths. This is a major achievement for our clearance team, some of whom also gave their time as Parish Footpath Observers and Local Footpath Officers.

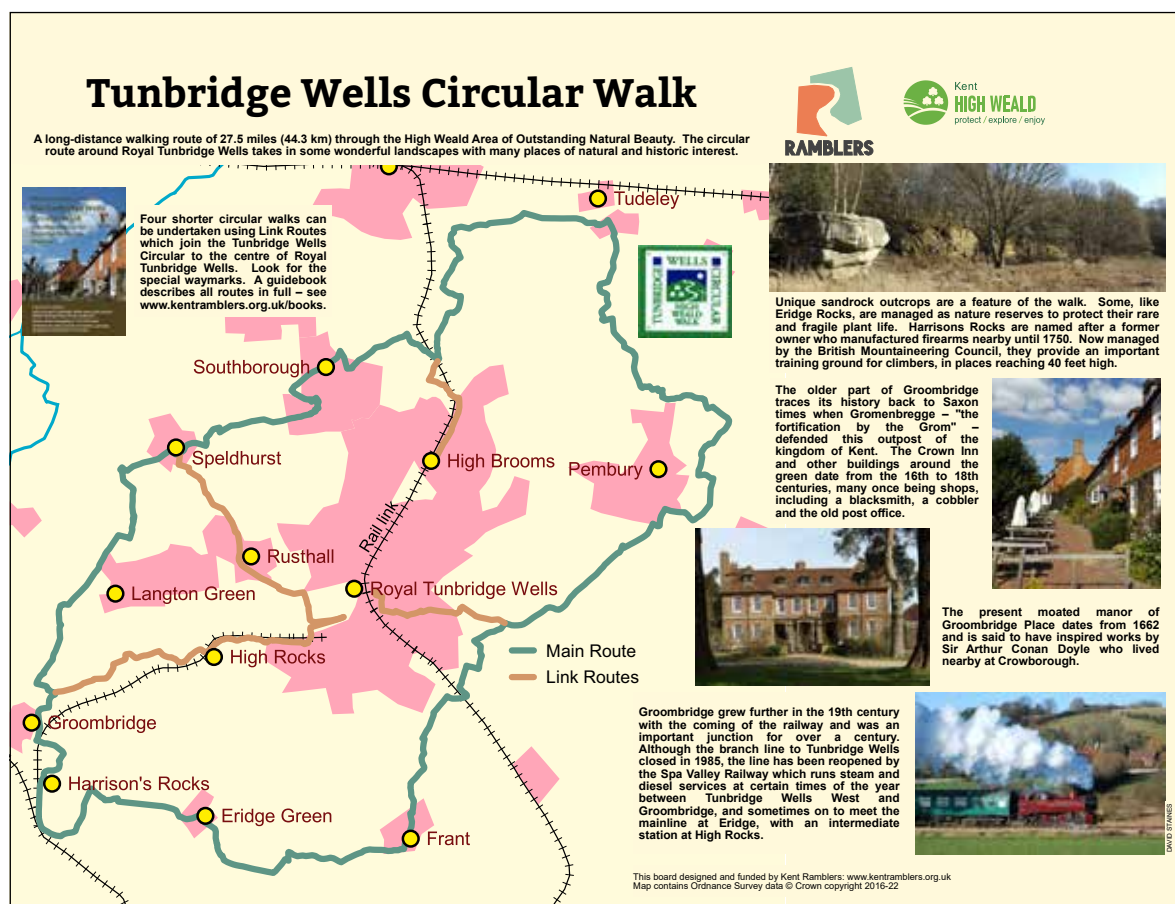
To build on this, we held our first annual meeting of all our Parish Path Observers and Local Footpath Officers in February to discuss the roles and how we can improve the job they do. We are encouraging all Parish Footpath Observers to report clearance issues not only to Kent County Council but to our clearance coordinator too so we can respond.

Andrew Searle, one of our clearance team, said: "Due to the fearsome name of one of the tools we use, our footpath maintenance volunteers group is known as the 'Slashers'. Acting mainly on issues that have been highlighted by the county council, we use their public rights of way map to pinpoint where the action is needed. We can tackle most vegetation clearance tasks. We all enjoy volunteering, working outside and walking footpaths, so this sociable activity suits us down to the ground."

Recently it was a pleasure to hear that the Slashers' efforts are valued after a satisfied customer, who had reported blocked paths in the Tilmanstone area, expressed appreciation of the work done directly to the county council. Their hard work has also been recognised by Tilmanstone Parish Council.

I would like to say a big thank you to the Slashers and all Ramblers volunteers who spend time looking after our precious paths. This work is surely of benefit not just to us but to all who enjoy walking in our beautiful countryside. There is so much more to being a Rambler than just walking!

**Lee Pickup**  
White Cliffs Ramblers



The proposed design for a noticeboard at Groombridge. Photo: Robert Peel

## In Their Footsteps:

Two more audio walks have been launched by the South Downs National Park. The first celebrates the life of Gilbert White, often referred to as the first ecologist and whose work in 1789 remains the fourth-longest constantly-in-print book in the English language. The three and a half mile (5.6

km) circular walk explores the village and countryside around Selborne in Hampshire. The second trail celebrates the artist Ivor Hitchens and begins at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester and takes a five and a half mile (9 km) circuit. Both walk apps can be downloaded for free on Android or Apple by searching for 'In Their Footsteps'.



# Ephemera

## London - a top class walking city?

**T**hanks to everybody who commented on my 'Face the Dawn' article in the March issue and it is now clear that Eddie Critchley is no longer with us and that many people still have copies of his only publication. And it would be interesting to discover if anybody would consider extending his route so that it could become one of the many coast to coast paths in Britain. It would stretch from the Bristol Channel to the Thames Estuary with both start and finish points linking with the England Coast Path.

However, we must move on to have a quick look at the question of whether London is one of the top class cities in the world for walking. I will cut to the chase and suggest that it is and there is plenty of evidence stretching back over decades. Back in 1995 the then Environment Secretary, John Gummer, gave his blessing to a scheme to map out ten long strolls through London. John Cunningham of the Guardian

newspaper wrote an article in which he suggested that Mr Gummer was now the Minister for Silly Walks although looking at what was proposed then they do not seem unreasonable at all today. The routes would include linking Hampstead with Covent Garden, Limehouse with Trafalgar Square, Kensal Green with Hyde Park Corner and Crystal Palace with the Strand. The real issue with this scheme seemed to be about the resources needed to achieve these proposals.

In 1996 South Eastern Rambler (as this publication was then called) reported on the London Walking Forum's LIFE projects which funded 14 specific walking action areas across London. Colin Saunders's London: the definitive walking guide published in 2002, and sadly no longer in print, indicated the vast array of walking routes with nearly 300 self-guided trails covering 1,450 miles, over 50 discounted and dormant routes plus more than 40 proposed walks. London was officially declared the world's first National Park City in July 2019 and within it there is a host of walking routes of differing types.

One National Trail passes through London, the England Coast Path



enters the city and long distance paths make their journey through or start or finish in London. Many of the London boroughs produce their own routes and the literature of London walking is extensive. Whether or not London is top of the class doesn't really matter because there is serious evidence to show that walking opportunities in the city are plentiful and there are also a number of new walking projects in the pipeline so watch this space.

**John Pestle**

[johnpestle@btinternet.com](mailto:johnpestle@btinternet.com)

# Returning after shielding

**A**s an immuno-suppressed person - I have rheumatoid arthritis - I was advised to shield when the first lockdown fell upon us in March 2020. No meeting friends or family and Ramblers walks were halted! To maintain my fitness and my sanity, I ventured out from the back door, for a one hour daily walk, taking care to keep far away from any other walkers.

I'm fortunate to live in the beautiful Lambourn Downs which provide mile upon mile of delightful tracks, through bluebell woods, poppy fields, thundering chalk gallops, sounds of the larks ascending and splendid views. Walking the Downs was my escape during those long months of the first lockdown. My escape from the captivity and isolation of my cottage and garden; escape from hearing the chatter of neighbours in their gardens as they enjoyed family company time, but without me being a part of it.

But, however lovely, it is lonely and repetitive being on your own and eventually you lose the drive to step out yet again, the novelty wears off and you just stop walking.

After two years, and four jabs later, I

contacted my old Ramblers group and joined them for a long 12-mile walk! What a wonderful welcome I received from members of the West Berkshire Ramblers and especially from the leaders! It was tremendous to walk further afield, exploring new hills, new woods and new wildlife, something I wouldn't feel confident to do on my own. The small group of 10 felt safe, outside in the fresh air. How lovely to laugh and chat as we walked along, sharing the pretty views, flowers and birds, the sounds and scents of the countryside with my fellow ramblers!

Most of us are sociable beings as I am too. So, to be able to discuss current issues, whether it was the development of the pandemic, political events of the day or family matters to gain other people's views and perspectives, was much more meaningful than the Zoom calls we had been relying on. The emotional value of sharing face to face company is not to be underestimated. It enables us to forget our fears, angers and sadness for a while or talk them through to calm or dissipate those harmful, persistent emotions. And perhaps more important is the reinforcement of the positive feelings of joy shared, at the wonders of



Walking again! Rosemary is in red. Photo: Richard Trimmer

nature or the ingenuity of farmers and architects, the amusement at the drilling of the woodpecker, the patience of the watching heron, the blaze of colour of bluebells, primroses and wood anemones or the overwhelming scent of wild garlic. The social, emotional and physical benefits of being able to participate in Ramblers walks are immense.

Let's thank those leaders who meticulously plan those walks for us each week and hope that we can all continue to enjoy them for many years to come. A sense of normality has returned but now valued in so many respects more than ever.

**Rosemary Black**

*A happy West Berkshire Rambler*

# Powered by the Thames

**P**ang Valley Group members mainly live near Reading and are from both sides of the Thames, so the Thames Path often plays a significant part in our walks. A couple of recent walks have crossed the river just outside Reading town centre at View Island. This island is linked to both sides of the river by footbridge; at its west side the path crosses Caversham Weir. There is a 1.4 metre drop at the weir coupled to a fast water flow, and in the

distant past various mills on View Island utilised this Thames energy, but all are long gone.

However, the island's water power tradition has recently been revived by the construction of Reading Hydro, a community-owned hydro-electric plant, nestling at the start of Caversham Weir. The plant has two Archimedes screw turbines, estimated to produce just over 300 megawatt hours a year. It began generating power in November 2021, and is

connected by cable under the Thames to its customer, the nearby Reading Lido, with any surplus going to the grid. A low-velocity fish pass meanders along the north-western edge of View Island, with its entrance at the turbine outfall (to the right of the turbine in the photo). The turbine house is decorated with two murals: one demonstrates the global rise in temperature over 100+ years; the other 'The Community Energym' designed by Guglielmo Miccolupi and applied by

an army of volunteers, links Archimedes, the Thames and the community.

Incidentally, our group has another river link: we are named after the River Pang, which joins the Thames at Pangbourne. The Pang nowadays is just a small stream, but its main claim to fame (apart from giving our group its name) is that it is thought to have inspired Kenneth Grahame to write 'Wind in the Willows'.

**Alistair Lax**

*Pang Valley Ramblers*

For more on the hydro-electric project go to <https://readinghydro.org/>

# Blue Earth, Green Light

Words inspired by a walk on the North Downs Way near Boxley, Kent.

*Cut the earth and it bleeds  
blue blood:  
bluebells among the brutal butchery  
of coppiced beech, of oak corpses  
felled  
by cacophonous winds  
this winter gone.*

*While heaven's hue falls  
full  
in ocean pools, cobalt  
below the April leaves,  
and cuckoos  
brand the air with heartbreak,  
blue earth given out green light.*

*Cut the earth and it bleeds  
blue blood:  
bluebells under the frill and trill  
of singing green, of winging green  
feathered  
by starry-eyed blackbirds  
this slow, slow spring.*

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher



Pang Valley Ramblers cross the Thames. Photo: Alistair Lax



Taking power from the river. Photo: Alistair Lax



# Searching for flora and fauna

**T**he weather had changed from gloriously sunny and warm in mid-March, shorts weather in fact, to freezing cold and blowing a gale with sleety snow included, at the end of the month.

The car park I was in was one of those country types, hidden amongst the trees, the surface was flattened compacted mud with deep ruts. As I was sitting in the car trying to summon up some enthusiasm to get out and put my walking boots on before the walk leader arrived, I noticed a couple of grey squirrels chasing each other around an oak tree and every so often would stop dead to see if any predators were approaching. Then I saw movement in the undergrowth and a rabbit popped out closely followed by two more in hot pursuit, occasionally stopping, noses twitching and looking out for danger. A few minutes later, a flash of colour caught my eye as a bullfinch hopped from bramble to bramble looking for food. And all this before I had even got out of the car!

It proved to be a good day. The walk led by Christine was very enjoyable and we saw some newish lambs, walked a section of the North Downs Way with beautiful views and, in spite of the very cold wind and lower temperature, saw a common lizard scurrying about. Now you are lucky to see one of these on a warm day in summer but unusual on a chilly spring day. Also, Chris promised me a sighting of a fairly rare fungus called a crimson elf-cup. When we got to the right place we had to look hard to find them but find them we did!

This walk got me thinking how lucky we are to be able to get out and see, smell, touch and generally experience nature through the seasons, virtually every time we get out walking in the countryside. Personally, as a keen amateur photographer I really enjoy the anticipation of not knowing what I may or may not see. So I thought I would wind up the old desktop and dig around some past photo files and see what I could find in the way of flora and fauna, images all taken whilst out rambling with Croydon Ramblers.

So here is a small selection of my flora and fauna pics. I will now be charging my camera batteries ready for my next foray into nature.

*John Tickner  
Croydon Rambler (and aspiring wildlife  
photographer!).*



A beautiful pheasant near Dorking, trying to find food below the snow.



Crocuses and snowdrops near Chipstead



An alpaca with a wonderful hairstyle. Always inquisitive, they bring a smile to our faces.



Belted Galloway cattle - we often see them keeping the scrub down on rough ground.



A fine meadow orchid on the North Downs



This over-inquisitive sheep tried to make off with my sandwiches!



Flora or fauna? This hedge at Limpsfield Chart is clipped in the shape of a cat.



A crimson elf-cup fungus



Another fungus as yet unidentified.



A heron in a royal park



This handsome stag was in Richmond Park. Luckily I had my telephoto lenses with me.



## BERKSHIRE bites

# Overcoming resistance

**L**oddon Valley Ramblers offers to purchase gates at no cost to landowners and has a large team of volunteers who will install them free of charge. But some landowners remain reluctant to give permission, including some of the larger landowners in Wokingham borough.

It has become very frustrating in the last 12 months that we were not able to carry out more stile removals or conversion to gates. We can usually obtain funding from parish councils or from Ramblers (Area or group) own funds, and we have lots of people willing to install gates.

We have also identified priority stiles in the borough whose removal or conversion would provide real benefits in making popular and attractive walks more accessible to a wider range of people. We know from our own members that stiles can often prevent people with just minor mobility issues from using routes they would like to follow.

The updated Country Code advice for land managers issued in February gives us an opportunity to re-approach landowners who have refused permission in the past in the hope that they will change their minds.

We hope this will lead to some successes, although further



An example of a stile in Wokingham borough where permission to replace it with a gate has been sought but denied. Photo: Steve Vale

changes, such as financial incentives for landowners to replace stiles or agree to conversions or a presumption in favour of removal or conversion, unless the landowner can show a valid objection, would be even more effective.

*Steve Vale*

*Footpath Officer, Loddon Valley Ramblers*

## Litter pick

**O**n Saturday 19 March we held our first litter pick walk of 2022 - actually our first such walk since before the pandemic.

The litter pick walk was around Theale and a group of six keen Ramblers helped to fill 10 bags of rubbish which had been thrown in hedgerows or along roadsides. This was all collected within a couple of hours.

Unsurprisingly, we collected many disposable face masks. Why people can't just take them home is beyond me. We even found a pair of men's boxer shorts hanging in a bush!

We are seeing more and more litter being discarded along footpaths and roadsides. Firstly, it's unsightly and secondly, it's dangerous for wildlife. Why can't people just put litter in bins or take it home?

We collected two full bags of rubbish within 200 yards of Theale station where bins are provided. This was a collection of sweet wrappers, plastic bottles, cigarette butts, single-use coffee cups and face masks.

All the bags we collected were taken to the local recycling centre for disposal in the correct manner. We could have been out all day collecting rubbish and still not have picked it all up!

*Jason Owen  
Berkshire Walkers*



The team makes a start at Theale. Photo: Jason Owen



## Maintaining paths with a Ramblers working party

I can't remember the last time I took a holiday abroad. These days I holiday in the UK and ensure I take a map so that I can explore new places or revisit old haunts on walks. Footpaths, bridleways and byways are well marked on the Ordnance Survey's Explorer maps but this is no guarantee that they are easily walkable. I've encountered deep banks of chest-high nettles, paucities of waymarking and deliberate path obstructions. I realise how lucky I am to live and walk in an area where rights of way are well maintained and mostly clear of impediments. This doesn't happen by accident and we must be grateful that our local councils in Berkshire have active rights of way organisations, well supported by volunteer groups.

Around Reading there are several active volunteer groups. Ray Clayton, of Pang Valley Ramblers, was very active in footpath maintenance with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the area and an enthusiastic and energetic approach to all things walking. He recruited me about 10 years ago to the West Berkshire Ramblers Working Party which I have worked with ever since. Other working groups include the Chiltern Society in South Oxfordshire and Loddon Valley Ramblers around Wokingham. Groups work closely with the rights of way officers in the councils. West Berkshire Council maintains a register of definitive rights of way and a database of reported issues on each one. The council liaises with landowners for gate installations and other issues and provides tools for West Berkshire Ramblers working party to use, waymarks and first aid kits. Some battery powered hedge trimmers and brushcutters can be used by a specially trained power tool group of the Ramblers' working party. Training has a strong emphasis on health and safety and the work needs a high level of personal protective equipment. Power tools can be used for very overgrown paths, with the option to call on a chainsaw operator if fallen trees are too much for a pruning saw. The Ramblers' working party is covered by the council's insurance. West Berkshire extends from Tilehurst in the east to Hungerford in the west, an area which includes many of the places where Pang Valley Ramblers like to walk.

The Ramblers' working party meets every other Friday, weather permitting. We rendezvous in a pub car park for a 10am start. Fiona Walker, who tirelessly organises the work parties, forms the volunteers into groups of two to four people and provides detailed maps of the routes to be walked by each group, with a list of issues from the database. Each team's route will be about three to five miles, sometimes with lots of shearing, cutting back and sawing but occasionally just a 'walk with tools'. We check signposts, cutting vegetation to find them if necessary, add or replace waymarks to clarify routes, check on any reported issues and note any new issues found with map references. We work parish by parish and a full cycle of all these takes about four years. At the end of the morning's work, some of us enjoy a convivial pub lunch before going home.

Fresh air, exercise, good company and improving the walking experience for others - recommended!

*George Saffrey  
Pang Valley Ramblers*



## Gates, cooperation and supporting each other



Fitting one of the gates required digging through the bedrock of chalk. Photo: Susan Maguire

**A**lmost 20 years ago, Henley & Goring Ramblers agreed to help the Chiltern Society's South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers with their path clearance, waymark post and gate installation programme rather than set up a team of their own. As a result, many of the Volunteers are also members of Henley & Goring Ramblers.

One of the tasks the Volunteers have is to find funding for the gate installations. Fortunately, where it's not possible to use funds from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment,

it is sometimes possible to receive donations for gates. Henley & Goring Ramblers have since 2008 made donations for eight gates, mostly from funding from the Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust, and the Volunteers have installed them.

Henley & Goring Ramblers offered to fund a gate recently on one of the footpaths in Nuffield parish which was difficult to use as there were three usually padlocked field gates to negotiate. Fortunately, Oxfordshire Area agreed to fund two of the replacement gates. This would then open up an area for walking on the Swyncombe Downs. The farmer agreed to the installations and was very happy with the generosity of Ramblers. He has been most helpful with reseeding and levelling one of the footpaths, flattening a slope in preparation for the installation and removing fencing which he has agreed to replace. The Volunteers installed the gates in early February.

New Volunteers would be welcome so if you are interested in joining the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers, please contact Alie Hagedoorn (alie.hagedoorn@gmail.com).

*Susan Maguire*

## Walks programme booklet

**A**t the Area Council meeting on 10 January it was decided that we could cease production of the Oxfordshire Walks Programme booklet. Over the past two years, due to the pandemic, we have had to move to a flexible programme online. Many of our walk leaders now prefer planning for a shorter-term programme and not having to commit to dates of walks up to nine months ahead.

As you may expect there was a wide range of views on

whether we should continue with the booklet. Some groups were very much in favour, whereas others much preferred a monthly online programme. However, a clear majority felt that the value of the booklet would be greatly diminished if it did not contain walks from all of the eight geographical groups. We therefore reached the rather sad conclusion that it should cease.

We have recently started producing monthly walks listings, containing all Oxfordshire walks in the same format as the

booklet. This has had very favourable responses from members and groups will continue to distribute this to members by email each month. The monthly walks listings can be found on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website (www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk) by clicking on the 'Walking' tab and selecting 'Monthly Reports'.

*Richard Birch*

*Area Walks Coordinator*

## Installing marker posts

**T**hree path maintenance teams came together to install nine waymark posts on land at Warren Farm in the parish of Holton, three miles east of Oxford. Because the farmland is criss-crossed by footpaths, the farmer had asked the county council's Countryside Access Team to install waymarks to define the routes. The team's access officers Arthur McEwan-James and Jackie Smith then asked the Ramblers path maintenance teams if they would be willing to do this work.

Vale of White Horse Group's Vale Path Volunteers, and the path maintenance teams of Thame & Wheatley and Oxford City groups agreed to share the work of installing the waymark posts and Brian Dobson, Holton's Parish Path Warden, accepted an invitation to join us. Altogether, 18 volunteers signed up for the task with each of the teams installing three posts. Each team was equipped with a double-acting spade to dig out the soil, and a heavy tamper to pack the replaced soil.

Being Oxford clay, the soil was quite soft and also stoneless, so it was not difficult to dig down into the subsoil. Spirit levels were used to ensure the posts were upright, the final task being to nail on the plastic waymark arrows.

*Jim Parke*

*Coordinator of Vale Path Volunteers*



Cutting the soil.



Tampering the soil back in. Photos: Jim Parke

## Footpath matters

### County council

**T**he Draft Map Modification Order waiting list is now 69 cases. Of these 21 are under investigation, three have been refused, four are awaiting orders, two are under appeal, and 15 orders have been made (10 objected to, eight of which are with the Planning Inspectorate). There are 28 diversions on the list, one of which has been confirmed.

A new bridge has been provided by East-West Rail on Launton FP11 to replace three level crossings; a new housing development east of this connects with FP1 and BR2. The diversion of FP12 is under discussion.

### Diversions, claims etc

**T**he diversion of Cropedy FP1 and 7, to remedy the route of FP7 up a motorway pillar, and a temporary diversion at Weston-on-the-Green FP2 have been confirmed. The addition of Chalgrove RB20 was confirmed by the Secretary of State - of course it's a right of way, since it connects the church and two pubs. The modification order to move Banbury FP20 to the alleyway, instead of climbing over houses, has also been confirmed.

A proposed diversion

at Stanton St John BR15 onto FP1 at Waterperry House, allegedly to prevent people from picnicking in the garden (the gates are often open), has attracted strong local opposition.

A diversion of Waterstock FP6 will be an improvement, especially if the stile at the road (obviously designed for Goliath, but I'm only David) is replaced by a gate; however, there are anomalies in the area of another proposed diversion on Tiddington FP11 at Albury House.



# Footpath matters continued

## Other matters

**This being the middle of the bramble season reminds me:**

1 And it came to pass, that the trees of the forest did contend, to be king of the forest.

2 And the bramble said to the Lord, I am the king of the forest.

3 And the Lord said, Be fruitful and multiply.

4 And the bramble waxed fruitful and multiplied, and the animals of the forest cried out to the Lord, because there was no room for them to move.

5 And the bramble said again to the Lord, I am the king of the forest.

6 And the Lord said to

the bramble, Get knotted.

7 And the bramble became ravelled, and tangled, and twined, but in no way could form a knot in its main stem, neither bowline, nor clove hitch, nor sheepshank;

8 And the Lord was exceeding wroth with the bramble, and said Did I not tell thee to get knotted?

9 Therefore, since thou art ravelled, and tangled, and twined, but not knotted.

10 Thou shalt remain ravelled, and tangled, and twined for the rest of thy days; and the trees of the forest shalt wax tall and shade thee for ever, and thou shalt be an impediment to all who attempt to pass thee.

*David Godfrey*  
*Area Footpath Secretary*

## Annual picnic

Oxfordshire Ramblers annual picnic will take place this year on Sunday 26 June at 12.30pm on Marsh Meadows by the River Thames at Henley-on-Thames (grid ref SU 770817, postcode RG9 4HB). This year's event will be hosted by Henley & Goring Ramblers who invite you to join one of the many walks to be offered for the day and bring your own picnic.



The last Area Picnic was organised by Didcot & Wallingford Group and held in the grounds of Wallingford Castle. Photo: Jim Parke

## Henley & Goring Group celebrate 25 years

**Blessed with the Thames and the beautiful Chiltern Hills on our doorstep, our group has grown steadily and now has about 380 members, making it one of the largest in Oxfordshire.**

The group is as active as ever with 20 to 30 walks every month, ranging from short leisurely walks of about two and a half miles through to strenuous hilly walks of up to 15 miles. One member recently said she was very grateful for the range of walks as she had sustained an injury and had been able to switch to the shorter walks in order to aid her recovery.

Our group also ensures that local paths are lovingly maintained and, together with the Chiltern Society, we have replaced many stiles with gates to allow for better access.

Our walking holidays have a good reputation and this year we will offer trips

to the Howgills, Ribble Valley, Isle of Man, Dolomites and Isles of Scilly. Next year we may go to the Malverns, Brecon Beacons, Chamonix, Dartmoor and Tuscany. Members of other groups are welcome to join these trips though our own members have first choice.

Throughout the winter our weekend walking weekends were well attended and included some long distance paths somewhat farther away, like the Hardy Way in Dorset which we will complete next winter.

*Alie Hagedoorn*

*Henley & Goring Ramblers*

You can find more details about us at [www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/henley-goring](http://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/henley-goring) or [www.facebook.com/groups/HenleyAndGoringRamblers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/HenleyAndGoringRamblers).



Walking the Hardy Way in Dorset. Photo: Alie Hagedoorn

## Out and about with Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers



Members of our group who stopped for a morning coffee break recently were surprised to find this pop-up cake stand waiting for them. In

charge was Jenny Caddy, our Secretary who lives nearby and adores making cakes. Not only did they all make the most of this unexpected

bonus to their walk but a few passing walkers also tucked in. It gave us an opportunity to encourage them to join our group!



The larger kissing gates being installed around the country to replace stiles are making access to the countryside easier for many people. They also set us

thinking about the craze some years ago for seeing how many people could cram into a car or phone box. We managed to squeeze in 17 members to one of the new

gates, so beat that if you can!

*Philip Watson*

*Godalming & Haslemere*

*Ramblers*

## Exploring Langley Vale

**What a pleasure it was to lead Croydon Ramblers in March on a walk around the Woodland Trust's Langley Vale Wood, near Epsom. The trust bought the 640 acre (259 ha) area of mostly arable farmland in 2014 and has since planted more than 180,000 trees in what is now the largest of the four First World War centenary woods (the others being in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).**

Each of the trees planted remembers a life lost during the 1914-18 conflict. Sculptures and features on our circuit of the woods included the 'Regiment of Trees', carved stone soldiers standing to attention for a visit from Lord Kitchener; 'Witness', a huge structure made from 35 massive blocks of oak on which are lines of poems from First World War poets, including Edward Thomas and Wilfred Owen. Its shape symbolises the destruction of the Flanders landscape, its poetry the pain of loss. At this point we listened to two poems read by Ron Williams, our group's poetry enthusiast, to highlight the impact this war had on individuals and the legacy left to us through their poetry.

Our walk continued via 'Jutland Wood', which commemorates the major sea battle of 1916, with names of ships sunk and numbers of sailors lost. Further on were ornately carved wooden benches, each highlighting naval or army action during the war.

This was a special walk for Croydon Ramblers to see and experience the unique structures at the site, with views of Epsom racecourse one way, Headley church the other. A further visit may follow when the flower meadows burst into colour and skylarks fill the air.

*Mary Brooks*  
*Croydon Ramblers*

*Ron Williams adds:* The two poems I read at Langley Vale are related to Edward Thomas. The first he wrote at Easter 1915 before he joined the Artists' Rifles:

In Memoriam  
The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into mind the men,  
Now far from home, who with their



Ron Williams read some fitting poems at 'The Witness' sculpture. Photos: John Tickner



Exploring a more recently planted area of Langley Vale. Photos: John Tickner

sweethearts should

Have gathered them and will do never again.

The second poem was written by Walter de la Mare following Thomas's death two years later on Easter Monday 1917:

To ET

You sleep too well - too far away,  
For sorrowing word to soothe or wound;

Your very quiet seems to say

How longed for a peace you have found.

Else, had not death so lured you on,

You would have grieved - twist joy and fear -

To know how my small loving son

Had wept for you, my dear.

Thomas was a writer of books about the countryside as well as a literary critic. But on meeting the American poet Robert Frost he was inspired to begin writing poems in November 1914. All 149 of his poems were written in the next two years before he was sent to France.

A map of Langley Vale Wood showing all the paths which can be walked can be downloaded from [woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/langley-vale-wood/](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/langley-vale-wood/). The site is open to the public for free at all times.



# Those we have lost

## Moira Parry 1936 - 2021



Moira Parry

Moira joined us in May 1991 after spending years as a very accomplished member of Northwood Golf Club and subsequently gave the same dedication to walking. She began

leading walks in 1992 and chalked up a total of 142 walks covering 962 miles, just short of her 1,000 mile aim. Moira was our Sunday Rambles Organiser from 1997 to 2007 and then Programme Editor until November 2010. Her favourite walk showing Cliveden at its best, surrounded by bluebells in spring, had a regular and very appreciative following. After an ankle injury Moira's walking became limited but she kept in touch with group members via her coffee mornings. Over the past year she put up a remarkably brave fight against motor neurone disease and her positive attitude to life will be sadly missed by us all.

*Elise Wright  
Hillingdon Ramblers.*

## Stewart Hinks 1940 - 2022



Stewart Hinks

**O**ur members were saddened to hear of the death in April of Stewart Hinks. Stewart had suffered a stroke in October 2021 from which he had shown little sign of recovery.

A member of the group for many years, Stewart was a quiet, unassuming man, liked and respected by fellow members. An active man all his life, he also enjoyed model-making, drawing and travelling in his custom-made miniature camper van.

Stewart served as Treasurer for 10 years and contributed fully to the running of the group. He was one of

the organisers of our 21st anniversary celebrations in 2014 and instigated the group's name change (adding 'Luton'), as he had come across a number of people who didn't know where our group was based. He was also a regular walk leader for several years leading walks throughout Beds and Herts including, for four years, our traditional New Year's Day walk from Dunstable Downs.

Stewart enjoyed the social side of the group as well, always attending events such as the annual dinner and taking part in a number of quizzes. He was also a regular partaker of a pub lunch following a midweek walk.

Always cheerful, Stewart celebrated his 80th birthday on the first day of the first lockdown, unable to go out or meet anybody, he was content to enjoy a glass of wine at home. Throughout the pandemic he walked regularly around his home village of Barton, but health issues prevented him from walking with the group after our re-start. He will be sadly missed.

*Rosemary Hasker  
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Group*



## Death to stiles

**I** hate stiles and so, I suspect, do most of our members. If they're not broken or too high, they may well be unnecessary; the sole reason for their existence is to keep animals in (or out of) fields, and in a largely arable county like Essex they often serve no useful purpose. (There are three utterly irrelevant stiles in the woodland near me.) And they slow you down; I reckon that on group walks you need to factor in at least five minutes delay per stile.

So it was gratifying at Essex Area's AGM in February to hear Simon Taylor, Footpath Enforcement and Liaison Officer for Essex Highways, agree when he spoke about the county's position on stiles. He reminded us that the purpose of a stile on a public right of way is to allow a boundary structure - a fence or hedge - to be crossed by a footpath. Stiles form part of the boundary structure and are the property of the landowner, whose responsibility it is to maintain them. There is a British Standard for stiles, and Essex Highways interprets this as the '1-1-1' rule; that is three steps of one foot each. How many of our current stiles meet this standard? I can't think of one. Some landowners, Simon suggested, wanted to retain stiles to deter dogs from their land.

Simon went on to point out that recent legislation,

notably the 2010 Equality Act, puts a duty on local authorities to take account of disabilities, meaning that stiles should only be used for new structures in 'exceptional circumstances'. In effect, this means no new stiles. Landowners cannot be compelled to replace existing stiles with gates but Essex Highways, using Section 177ZA agreements under the Highways Act, is encouraging them to put in kissing gates instead. Essex Highways supplies the gates and it is the landowners' responsibility to install and maintain them, although sometimes volunteer labour, including from the Ramblers, has been used. In addition, many unnecessary stiles have been removed where they are not needed to retain animals.

Members at the AGM were encouraged by Simon's talk and Parish Path Adopters and other members, as well as reporting broken or non-conforming stiles, might like to look out for 'unnecessary' stiles and report them to Essex Highways for possible removal.

*Stylistic footnote: I wrote this on my new laptop, which has Windows 11. Previously I used Windows 10 which, until I added 'stile' to its vocabulary, attempted to correct it to 'style'. In Windows 11, Microsoft has finally realised that there are two spellings and meanings, but Windows 10 users should beware. I've noticed that one walking guidebook of mine consistently uses 'style' - betrayed by spellcheck, perhaps?*

*Mike Cannell  
Area Media Officer*



A typical 'before' scene. Photos: Essex highways



Job done! Photos: Essex highways

## Globe trotting



Numbers are picking up on Aylesbury Ramblers' walks. Photo: Maurice Crump

During Covid restrictions, and in line with Ramblers' guidance, we ran a very successful but restricted small group walks programme. Although well-used, the numbers walking were much lower than pre-lockdown levels. But with the relaxing of restrictions and the resumption of our normal programme of unrestricted walks last July, the numbers joining our walks are steadily rising again. Average attendance on our leisurely Tuesday walks is up 33%, almost 50% on our medium Thursday walks and well over 40% on our Sunday walks. In the six months to January this year, our members cumulatively walked almost 8,000 miles, equivalent to almost a third of the way around the Equator. At this rate we'll soon be back to the annual 'globe-trotting' totals we experienced before lockdown.

*Steve Putman and Maurice Crump  
Aylesbury & District Ramblers*

## Wolf walk

**W**e had an interesting seven-mile walk from Aldermaston on Saturday 26 March which went past the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, near Beenham. Seeing wolves through the fences is not guaranteed, but they have been seen on the two previous times when our leader Tom H has led us this way. The trust's site has been closed to the public for a few years and the wolves are living out their retirement here.

To our amazement when we stopped to see if any wolves were in sight, we could see a couple! We quickly pulled out our phones to take photos of the wolves. What we didn't know was that some of the wolves' keepers had seen us too and came out to ask if we would like to see the wolves up close. Without hesitation we said yes!

So we all went in. The staff were so friendly and told us all about the animals and the trust and answered our questions. Being invited in was a fantastic surprise and this is one walk we will not forget quickly!

*Jason Owen  
Berkshire Walkers*



Meeting a wolf on a walk we will not forget. Photo: Jason Owen

## Around the groups



# Around the groups

## Paul leads his 200th walk

One of our most active members, Paul Rhodes, led his 200th walk for the group on Sunday 24 April. This feat is remarkable, yet will come as no surprise to anyone who has encountered Paul during his near 20-year stint with the Ramblers. A dedicated member, walk leader, Paul is a stalwart in the group and the committee would like to thank him for all his efforts over the years. Paul has been active outside of our group too, having done two three-year terms on the Board of Trustees from 2014 - 2020 and represented the then Chilterns 20s-30s at an Area level before becoming Area Chair in 2012, in which he still sits.

It was a happy coincidence that his 200th walk was Paul's legendary Bluebells of Ashridge walk, an ever-popular annual event that takes in blankets of stunning bluebells and allows us to pass through our donated gate commemorating our relaunch as the Chiltern Young Walkers.

We asked Paul how he first got involved. He said "Whilst talking to a friend of a friend about wanting to find some good views and new places as part of my interest in landscape photography, they told me they'd just joined Bristol's Brunel Walking Group, one of the 'new' Ramblers groups aimed at people in their 20s and 30s. A little later while walking with a friend she mentioned that she had recently been on a walk with the Chilterns 20s-30s Walking Group and enjoyed it.

We asked Paul what is his favourite walk to lead



Paul Rhodes Photo: Helen Finn

(always a tricky question to ask a keen walker) and he said "The walks I've enjoyed leading the most have been on weekends away, probably because I'm sharing the places I've discovered with others. I don't think I have a favourite but if pushed I would say Cnicht and Moelwyn Mawr in Snowdonia via the abandoned Rhosydd quarries."

Finally, we asked Paul if he had any advice for aspiring walk leaders. "Choose something you already know", he suggested. "The first walk I led for the group was one I did with a friend and was taken from a book of local walks."

Thank you Paul, for all the glorious walks you have led and for the dedication you have shown to the Ramblers.

**Beth Stark**  
*Chiltern Young Walkers*

## Eighty three walkers in one weekend

Over the last weekend in January we had an amazing total of 83 people on our four walks (one on the Saturday and three on the Sunday).

Sixteen walkers enjoyed Tim Axen's six-mile walk in the Chess Valley on the Saturday, with sunshine and very little mud! On the first of the three Sunday walks, Mike Ward and Caroline Green led 31 people on a mostly rural walk with lovely valley views and a steep climb up to a 200-year old oak tree and an overview of Chesham. Mike gave a brief history lesson by the Thomas Harding memorial, recounting our bloody past when we burnt poor souls at the stake for reading the bible in English rather than Latin!

For the long Sunday walk, Ian Inch led a happy group of 18 from Nettlebed around Swyncombe and down to Highmoor before making it back to Nettlebed in time for tea at the Cheese Shed. Richard did a great job as backmarker and ensured nobody was lost. Finally, Jane Herve and Jon

Hilton had an excellent day with barely a cloud in the sky. The eighteen walkers set off down to the Wormsley Estate hearing lots of facts about the area. Lunch was on Watlington Hill with views to the west and the added bonus of Jane's home made flapjacks. After the final hill we rewarded ourselves with a drink at the Fox and Hounds pub at Christmas Common.

Although much of this was down to the unseasonably warm and sunny weekend it does reflect the fact that our group offers a range of walks each weekend catering for all interests and abilities. Further weekends where four walks are offered have taken place.

This year we have also begun a series of 12 circular walks which feature some of the man-made structures and natural habitats managed by the Chiltern Society, like Lacey Green windmill and Ewelme watercress beds.

**Andrew Zelin**  
*Chilterns Weekend Walkers*

## Normal service resumed



The barbecue in August 2021. Photo: Joan Clark

It has been great in recent months to resume many of our regular activities, social as well as walks and trips.

2020 was a year of cancellations but we were able to hold our first social event of 2021 with our August Bank Holiday Monday barbecue and walks. People were obviously ready to get out and about and all 70 places were booked and a

waiting list started! Four walks were on offer before we all came together to enjoy local produce, homemade salads and sweets plus a jazz clarinet to serenade us.

Regular evening pub walks also returned last summer and we had a new event, a walk followed by a fish and chip supper in a member's garden. A regular September event returned with our Last of the Summer Wine walk followed by a bring and share supper.

Our usual face-to-face AGM and social evening also returned in 2021. Again we reached the maximum attendance of 70 for the welcome drinks, meeting and presentation on the year ahead, followed by an excellent sit-down supper.

Over the festive season we enjoyed a Christmas carol walk, church service and lunch together. Our Chantry House lecture and social in January had to be postponed until March because of Covid concerns but was worth the wait as our speaker, Professor Richard Fortey, gave a fascinating talk about Chilterns woodlands.

In May we held another annual event, our May Day walks and tea. We will be hosting the Area picnic in June, then it is back full circle to our barbecue in August which this year will celebrate our 25th anniversary.

**Joan Clark**  
*Henley & Goring Ramblers*

## On the Darnley Trail

Members enjoyed a spring walk on the beautiful Darnley Trail in north Kent. Encompassing the countryside around Cobham and Shorne, the trail takes in the exceptional wildflower reserve, Ranscombe Farm, as well as Cobham Wood, Ashenbank Wood and Jeskyns Country Park. Ranscombe Farm reserve is managed by the charity Plant Life International and from April onwards provides amazing displays of wildflowers. The area was home to the Earls of Darnley from the 1730s to the 1950s and the route passes the famous Darnley Mausoleum. We can highly recommend this six and a half mile (10.7 km) walk.

**Beverley Johnston**  
*Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers*

A leaflet on the Darnley Trail can be downloaded from [kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/37779/Darnley-Trail.pdf](http://kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/37779/Darnley-Trail.pdf)



A break on the trail. Photo: Beverley Johnston



Our group in Postman's Park, near St Pauls. Photo: Rosemary Hasker

## Something in the city

With numbers on our walks generally lower than before Covid and some members still wary about using public transport, we had wondered what response there would be to our London walk in April. However, Bob Shelley's tour attracted 25 members who took the train to London Blackfriars where we followed the ritual of a group photo before setting

off in lovely spring sunshine.

Impressive as the 'sights' are, it is the minor details that provide real interest (to me at least). Like when we passed the site of Marconi's first transmission of wireless signals in 1896 and later spotted a Victorian postbox painted in the original colour of green. One of the many quiet areas on the walk was Postman's Park with its fascinating display of plaques known as Watts Memorial to

Self-Sacrifice. In Clerkenwell we located the original Clerk's Well which can be viewed through a window and later passed through Bunhill Fields burial ground where we searched for and found John Bunyan's grave.

Although the walk was relatively short at four miles, we were all starting 'to feel our feet' by the end. We all enjoyed the tour and I think we probably all discovered something new.

**Rosemary Hasker**  
*Lea & Icknield (Luton) Group*



# Celebrating 20 years

**O**ur group, which specialises in short walks, is celebrating its 20th year of walks. Throughout the year events will be held and some super walks planned. We are also proud that a bench will be installed in our local wetlands with a plaque displaying our group's name.

Our social side will come into play with visits to heritage gardens, outings to a cinema specialising in vintage films, pop-up meals covering all tastes and cultures and steam train adventures, a holiday in

Yorkshire where all can indulge their love of walking. Our main offering will be a barbecue, bringing together past members who over the years have brought success to the group either by leading walks or serving on our committee. This really is a time to celebrate our group and as we celebrate our anniversary we look forward to sharing our love of walking with others in the years ahead.

*Pauline Macfarlane*

*Lea Valley Friends Walking Group*



Members set off on the anniversary walk. Photo: Pauline Macfarlane

## Long jump

We enjoyed some wonderful spring weather although sometimes there were four seasons in an hour. Our walks included an undulating ramble from Woburn Sands led by Sue, through woods and heathland to a site which illustrates just how far local athlete Greg Rutherford jumped

to win a gold medal for Great Britain at the London Olympics in 2012. Our walks programme continues to be varied, although reduced as a result of Covid. New walkers and guests are always welcome, as are new walk leaders. If you wish to lead a walk for us and would like support, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

*Maria Thompson*

*Milton Keynes Ramblers*



Forming a line to show the distance jumped by Greg Rutherford. Photo: Boyd Fisher

## Longer walks added to the mix

**W**e have recently started adding a longer walk to our programme once a month in addition to our regular Saturday afternoon walks. and the initial response has been excellent with new walkers joining our regulars.

A small band of our members on 26

March took a four and a half mile litter-picking walk along urban pathways and parklands around Bedford. In all, we collected 26 kg of rubbish which included refrigerator shelves, a car wheel cover and roof tiles. We were only limited by running out of bags, time and energy.

*North Beds Ramblers*



Litter pickers with just some of the bags of rubbish collected. Photo: SGK

# Wellbeing walks revived

**W**e were concerned to discover that during the Covid pandemic the Walking for Health group in our town had ceased to meet and there was little prospect of it restarting. This left around a hundred walkers without regular opportunities for short group walks.

Three members of our group, June Ayres, Julian Critchlow and myself, decided to see if we could get the walks restarted. Julian was already leading a monthly Ramblers walk and I was used to leading short local Ramblers walks. We decided to train to become walk leaders for the now rebranded Wellbeing Walks. Training was provided by Mike Fayers of Bedfordshire Rural Community Council, who also supplied publicity templates and other resources. Some of the previous walk leaders also volunteered to lead walks.

Permission was granted to use the meeting point used by the Walking for Health group - a car park used by local sports clubs. Julian set up some pages on the Leighton Buzzard Ramblers website for the relaunched walks and publicity was sent to doctors' surgeries and local organisations.

In November 2021 we were able to

relaunch three weekly short walks, now known as Wellbeing Walks. The 60-minute group continued to meet on Mondays, the 30-minute group now meet on Wednesdays and the 90-minute group (Wellbeing Walks are defined as walks of 90 minutes or less) on Thursdays. The 60-minute Monday walks are now the most popular, averaging 23 walkers each time, though on some fine days this can go up to 36 walkers. The 30-minute and 90-minute walks each average seven walkers. Some people walk more than once a week and many walkers enjoy a coffee and the opportunity to socialise at the end of the walks. Some Ramblers members also join the 90-minute walks which cover three and a half to four miles. Previous walkers who found they could not walk so far after two years break are regaining their fitness.

We are pleased to have offered these opportunities to so many people in our town and there have been benefits for both our Ramblers group and the Wellness Walkers. Already we are planning some joint social activities - including a joint walking treasure hunt!

*Gill King*

*Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*



The 60-minute Wellbeing group sets off. Photo: Julian Critchlow

## 'Old hand' discovers the pleasures of leading

**T**ony Dale, now Chairman of Oxford City Group, jumped into leading a walk for the first time in many years in April. Tony is a long-standing Ramblers member and has made a significant contribution to the protection and maintenance of Oxfordshire's footpaths over the last 20 years. He has held both the Footpaths Officer post on our committee and been one of our Path Wardens, but .. he has only ever led

one walk, a long time ago. Tony really enjoys solitary walks, a delight shared with Kenneth Grahame of *Wind in the Willows* fame. However, on 2 April he met seven of us at Wolvercote village hall to lead a moderately paced six and a half mile walk exploring first the Oxford Canal, then Yarnton Mead before a welcome coffee stop at Worton Kitchen cafe near Cassington.

We were an international group with new members from the USA, Australia

and Hong Kong, all glad to be led through countryside that they would never have discovered otherwise. We walked through water meadows with hundreds of lemon-yellow cowslips, and the startlingly white blossoms of a blackthorn hedge.

Back at Wolvercote, Tony felt the delight that so many leaders experience giving people a walk in pleasant company, countryside and coffee!

*Elaine Steane*

*Oxford City Group*



Tony's party. Photo: Jane Foster



## SABRE maps and apps workshop

**A**lthough I have been a member of SABRE for a long time, for various reasons I haven't led many walks. So when I saw the email from Ann announcing a Maps and Apps Workshop, it looked like it could be the ideal opportunity to get my rather dusty map-reading and navigation skills polished up.

A pre-workshop questionnaire set the scene for a very well organised day. The aim was to provide an overview of everything needed to lead a walk that is safe, enjoyable and inclusive. We were able to highlight in advance our navigational skills, the apps we use and any areas we wanted to focus on.

Held in the convenient and comfortable Wotton village hall, the day began with refreshments (always a good way to start) and introductions. An excellent turnout of 17 participants and presenters meant there was plenty

of opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old friends.

The workshop kicked off with an introduction by Group Chair Shirley, followed by an interactive presentation by Jeanie, Clair, James, Mike and Nigel on the practicalities of walk leading and how to improve navigational skills using maps and apps. It was useful to see the relative strengths and weaknesses of both traditional paper maps and mobile apps compared and discussed.

After lunch, each participant had a chance to test out their new-found (or refreshed) navigational

skills by plotting their own one-hour route from Wotton on a paper map and then walking it with a 'buddy' from the team of experienced walk leaders. After our return and home-made cake, an informal 'debrief' took place, with members sharing their experiences.

We unanimously voted the event a success and thanks must go to the organisers and presenters who put so much work and thought into the day. Let's hope we see more members put their new skills into practice over the coming months!

*Susan Tyzack*  
**SABRE (Surrey & Beyond Ramblers)**



On the course. Photo: Shaun Claridge

## Newlands by night

In March our walk leader Victoria Huth led one of her nighttime walks from St Martha's Hill. Twenty two of us started just after sunset and visited St Martha's church, Newlands Corner and Chilworth Gunpowder Mills on our six and a half mile walk. With clear skies we were able to do some star-gazing and put into practice what some of us had learnt on a recent visit to the South Downs Planetarium and Science Centre. With torches to guide us we finished our walk at the Britannia pub in Guildford for drinks and a board game. Thank you Victoria for leading the walk. For more on our group go to <https://surreyyoungwalkers.org.uk> or find us on social media.



The group at St Martha's church. Photo: Alex Calverley

[surreyyoungwalkers.org.uk](https://surreyyoungwalkers.org.uk) or find us on social media.

*Joshua Collings*  
**Surrey Young Walkers**

## Royal tour

Members of our group walked The Queen's Walkway again on 25 February to recognise Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The Walkway is a symbolic 6.373 km (four miles) self-guided walking trail around Windsor linking 63 of the town's points of interest. It was designed by the Outdoor Trust in partnership with local people to recognise the moment on 9 September 2015

when the Queen had reigned for 63 years, seven months and three days to become Britain's longest-reigning monarch. Each of the 63 sites is marked by a plaque in the pavement.

*Joyce Keegan*  
**Windsor & District Group**  
A guide book to the route is available from Tourist Information in Windsor Guildhall, price £2, or can be downloaded from [windsor.gov.uk/things-to-do/the-queens-walkway-p1189691](https://www.windsor.gov.uk/things-to-do/the-queens-walkway-p1189691).



One of the Walkway markers set in the pavement'. Photo: Sushma Sharma



The group on their Windsor tour. Photos: Sushma Sharma

# Around the groups

## New normal

**L**ike many groups we have now just about returned to the 'new normal'. Our walks programme is back with three or four walks a week. With the rising price of petrol and diesel and climate considerations, car-sharing has become even more important.

Our committee meetings have not yet returned to normality. Most matters arising can be dealt with by email but if we do need a meeting we can use video conferencing. This has the advantage of not only being

ecologically the right thing to do but means we do not have to leave the comfort of our homes in winter!

After a two-year pause, 20 members ventured onto public transport to restart our walking of the Capital Ring. This time we walked from Wimbledon Park to Richmond, led by Andrew Johnson and myself, using Colin Saunders' excellent guidebook but they were also grateful to Inner London Ramblers updated website details for the route.

*Brian Poulton*  
**South East Berks Ramblers**



The windmill on Wimbledon Common attracted our interest when walking the Capital Ring. Photo: Brian Poulton



Not a socially-distanced committee meeting but a rest break on a walk around Runnymede. The chairs are part of an artwork called 'The Jurors'. Photo: Brian Poulton

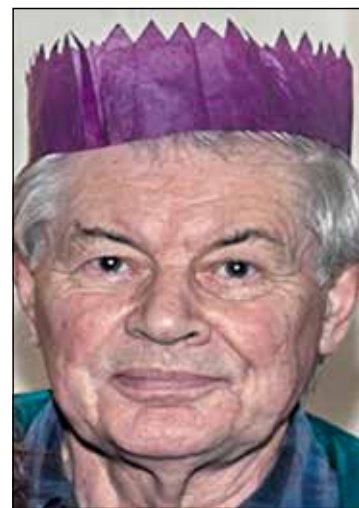
## Financial times

**D**avid St Pier has finally retired as our Treasurer after guarding group funds for the last 22 years. His eagle eye would spot any discrepancies or wrongly-dated cheques in a flash.

Dave has been a member of our group from the early days and was our Chairman before he became Treasurer. Working for 27 years in the accounts department at the old Greater London Council, he had plenty of experience to bring to the role. His knowledge and advice during this time have been invaluable.

During his time on the committee he was also involved with our French twinning (an annual exchange with a walking group in France) and our holidays in this country. Until a few years ago, Dave and his wife Mavis would be walking with our group on most Sundays.

Our new Treasurer, Linda James, has the job of managing



David St Pier in party mode in 2013. Photo: John James

those of us able to use internet banking and those who, for the time being at least, continue to use cheques. We are certain that Linda will rise to the challenge in these fast-changing financial times.

*June Hammond*  
**Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers**