

Walker

The England Coast Path comes to London

In a low-key Covid-restricted ceremony on Wednesday 12 January, Natural England opened the 47-mile Grain to Woolwich stretch of the England Coast Path. The England Coast Path, which is being opened in sections, will go all the way round the coast of England, including estuaries, and at around 2,795 miles will be the longest coastal path in the world when complete and become a magnificent addition to our array of National Trails.

The England Coast Path has been possible because of the introduction of a UK law, the Right of Coastal Access under part 9 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The Act provides for the establishment of both the England Coast Path and, usually, the right of access over the associated 'coastal margin'. This 'coastal margin' was a significant victory for the Ramblers who were keen not to see the right of access disappear due to coastal erosion. For the Ramblers, the England Coast Path has been a long held dream and became official policy following the adoption of an Essex Area motion at a meeting of the Ramblers General Council.

With the arrival of the England Coast Path in Woolwich and the variation order to extend the Thames Path National Trail from the Thames Barrier to the same point, it means walkers will now be able to follow the River Thames from source to sea entirely on National Trails.

This new Grain to Woolwich section covers a wealth of unique environments. As you set off from Grain on the Hoo Peninsula, you can enjoy views across to Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, to Southend-on-Sea, and the confluence of the Medway and Thames. Surprisingly, so close to such an urban area are some of the remotest grazing marshes in the south east. Between Allhallows and Cliffe in Kent you can walk more than 12 miles (nearly 20km) without passing another coastal village or car park. There are some gorgeous little pocket beaches and extensive mudflats full of wintering wading birds. Along the river, you may also see the occasional grey seal hauled up on one of the many small beaches.

In the Thames Estuary, the largest estuary in England, the creeks, extensive mudflats, saltmarsh and grazing marshes support a wealth of wildlife of national and international

importance. During the winter months, you'll see flocks of waterbirds such as avocet, knot and dunlin and the nature reserve at Cliffe Pools in Kent is a popular spot for bird watching. The Thames Estuary also has a long and rich military and industrial history. You can see forts such as Shornemead, near Gravesend, which were installed to protect London in the 1860s. You pass under the largest pylon in the UK and can look up at the impressive Queen Elizabeth II bridge, which is the busiest estuarial crossing in Europe.

Des Garrahan



One of the new England Coast Path and Thames Path signs.



Opening ceremony at Woolwich.



The remains of the torpedo launcher at Cliffe Fort. Photo: Ian Wild



On the isolated and remote section between Grain and Gravesend. Photo: Ian Wild

Ian Wild, Coastal Access Officer for Kent Ramblers, has been working with Natural England on the route of the England Coast Path in the county and first walked and surveyed the Grain to Woolwich stretch in 2009, writes:

Most of this stretch follows existing routes (including some which were not necessarily public rights of way) but there are new routes around the Swanscombe peninsula and the Isle of Grain. This is a fascinating stretch of contrasts. When you leave Grain you are soon walking in the remotest part of Kent with views to seaward of the Thames and Essex coastline and inland over wide areas of reclaimed salt marsh. You can walk for miles here without seeing a house. I found a number of historic sites along the way including Cliffe Fort where you can still see the launcher of the Brennan electric torpedo, arguably the world's first practical guided missile. There are a number of small sandy bays which I never expected to find so close to London. At Gravesend, the ferry across the Thames to Tilbury, provides a link with the Essex coast and the next section of the England Coast Path towards Southend-on-Sea. From Gravesend to Woolwich the environment becomes heavily urban and industrialised but still has many points of interest.

Enabling work is progressing on the remaining four sections in Kent (Ramsgate - Whitstable, Around the Isle of Sheppey, Whitstable - Iwade and Iwade - Grain), some of which have been delayed by objections from landowners. It is hoped to have a continuous coastal path around Kent by the end of the year.

Trail notes

*The recently designated Site of Special Scientific Interest at Swanscombe Peninsula has an industrial past which has resulted in a habitat that provides ideal conditions for a unique variety of wildlife. There are over 1,700 invertebrate species, which includes over a quarter of the UK's water beetle species, and more than 200 species that are considered of conservation importance. It is one of just two places in the UK where the critically

endangered distinguished jumping spider is found.

*For up-to-date information on the England Coast Path and details of any temporary diversions, go to: https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/england-coast-path/trail-information/

*There are several railway stations close to the route such as Woolwich Arsenal, Erith, Slade Green, Greenhithe and Gravesend. Allhallows and Grain are served daily by Bus 191 from Chatham, Rochester and Strood.

SOUTH EAST
walker

Distributed quarterly to members of the Ramblers in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex, Essex, Inner London, Kent, Oxfordshire and Surrey Areas.

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The route is lovely with many parts offering spectacular views; there's so much history along it, from Becker's time to the Napoleonic and the First and Second World Wars. There's a whole lot of geology to investigate and flora and fauna that is not found anywhere else in the UK. There's so much going on that the trail is possibly being overlooked as an option for a good walk! That's where Ambassadors come in. We're all about ensuring that you know how delightful the route is, how accessible it is with railway stations along the way making it possible to walk a section, nip home and return to walk another section later. The route is clearly marked, as you would expect of any National Trail, although I'd still recommend taking a guidebook (or a guide - me or one of my fellow Ambassadors) to tell you all about it! If you're a regular walker, it is far enough away from towns to be a countryside walk and close enough to be able to get to some of the fantastic pubs and restaurants along the trail.

For me, walking is so much a part of my life that becoming an Ambassador for such a stunning route was a no-brainer. Around 50 of us took part in training online and in person along sections of the route. We're encouraged



A group of the new North Downs Way Ambassadors. Barbara Crow is in the centre in yellow.
Photo: Alex Hare Photography

New plans for Dover Inland Border Facility cause concern

Plans by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for Dover's Inland Border Facility at Guston have been controversial. The finer details have yet to be published and there is still a lack of clarity as to the construction details and how the route of the North Downs Way will be affected.

The plans published in November show that, although the area of the border facility is now reduced to a third of the size of the previous plan and the current information states

the North Downs Way will skirt the eastern edge of the site, the schematic arrangement shows the diversion passing through the new facility.

White Cliffs Ramblers, who have been keeping watch over the developments since early 2021, have submitted their concerns via Kent Area Ramblers. They wish to ensure against any closure of the North Downs Way and that the diversion of the National Trail is undertaken prior to the construction of the border facility; additionally, the National Trail should be moved

further east, away from the building works, to within the eastern edge of the site. The new diversion should be landscaped with small trees and hedges to shield users from the border facility, and constructed with suitable surfaces to suit all users, as this part of the North Downs Way is a Byway Open to All Traffic.

John Pye, Chair of White Cliffs Ramblers, stated "We are pleased that there is a wonderful opportunity to enhance and protect this prestigious National Trail where it passes through the planned border

facility at Guston. We will continue to monitor the development of this site and look forward to seeing the specific details."

Lee Pickup
White Cliffs Ramblers
The Dover Inland Border Facility beside the A2 near the villages of Guston and Whitfield, will provide additional customs checks on goods entering and leaving the country (as a result of the UK leaving the European Union). For more information on the plans go to https://inlandborderfacilities.uk/page_id=1231.

Becoming a North Downs Way Ambassador

A team of ambassadors for the North Downs Way National Trail has been set up; Barbara Crow of Kingston Ramblers is one of them.

The North Downs Way is, as you may already know, a route of around 150 miles from Farnham to Canterbury and Dover and follows a route which might have once been walked by pilgrims paying their dues to the martyr Thomas Becket at Canterbury. But what is a North Downs Way Ambassador?

To speak about what we see along the trail and to tell the stories we have learned during our training and to bring the route and its history to life. By bringing walkers to the route we also hope to support local businesses.

A website will be set up to provide information on the Ambassadors and how we can be contacted and booked to lead walks. For now, it gives information on becoming an Ambassador - there may be another recruitment drive in a year or so.

Funding for the North Downs Way is decreasing, especially following the recent demand for funding in other directions following the pandemic. It costs £300 to replace a finger post and efforts to boost the funding to support the North Downs Way are a part of the Ambassador's role.

At the moment I continue to lead walks for Kingston Ramblers at no cost and I'm progressing with my led walks along the North Downs Way (see Kingston Ramblers website for the next section I will be leading). I hope to be leading other groups too and encouraging new walkers to walk the route in the future. If you would like me to lead a walk for you then please do get in touch via Kingston Ramblers.

Barbara Crow

Essex Way is 50 this year

The Essex Way is an 81-mile route from Epping to the North Sea coast at Harwich. It was established in 1972 as the result of a competition by the Essex branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), so 2022 will see its 50th anniversary. The route passes through some of the best countryside that Essex has to offer, moving from Epping in the south west of the county to painter John Constable's Dedham Vale and the Stour Estuary in the north east of the county. Essex Ramblers played a large part in its creation.

All birthdays need to be celebrated and plans are being drawn up by CPRE, Essex Ramblers and Essex County Council. At the

time of writing these had not been finalised, but the route passes through areas covered by six of our groups and we want to involve them closely in the celebrations, while paying tribute to those who played a large part in developing the route, notably Harry Bitten, Derek Keeble and Fred Matthews.

A future issue of South East Walker will have the story of the celebrations. In the meantime, readers who want to know more about the Essex Way and perhaps try it for themselves should look at Essex County Council's nicely illustrated guide which can be found at http://www.essexway.org.uk/documents/Essex_Way_booklet.pdf.

Mike Cannmell
Media Officer, Essex Ramblers



This plaque marks the start of the Essex Way at Epping station.



The Essex Way is well signed.

Mole Valley Ramblers Spring Walks Festival

Celebrate the return of spring and warmer weather by joining our friendly group during its annual walks festival from 20 to 27 April. Seize the moment to awaken your senses and restore your equilibrium by exploring the beautiful local countryside on foot!

This hugely popular event in the Surrey Hills will be back with an enormous variety of walks with something to appeal to everyone during the eight day festival. The walks are free for all and most do not need to be pre-booked. Our helpful, entertaining and knowledgeable walk leaders will make sure you have a safe, enjoyable and uplifting experience.



A happy group at Mole Valley's Spring Walks Festival in 2019 (before 'social distancing' was a concern).

Some walks will include a stop at a pub or cafe, others will have a picnic lunch break. More adventurous types might find a nocturnal walk to be an unconventional alternative. On the final day, there will be a selection of walks converging at Wotton village hall for a picnic-style gathering (inside, outside, or both, depending on guidelines and weather at the time).

Most walks will be between three and 15 miles and for the more energetic walkers there will be an opportunity to walk every day during the festival should they wish. For details of the festival go to <https://www.molevalleyramblers.org.uk/festival>

Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers

Canterbury Walking Week 2022

Canterbury Ramblers are delighted to announce that the second Canterbury Walking Week will take place between 23 and 30 April. Last year's event was a great success and attracted walkers from many parts of Kent, including some who joined Canterbury Ramblers as a result. It proved to be a great way to publicise walking as a healthy, sociable and enjoyable activity.

We are so lucky to have such a wonderful variety of scenery ranging from chalk downland, ancient

woodland, salt marsh and charming villages and river valleys. This year's event will follow 2021's successful programme and feature a variety of walks in and around the city.

Last year we were blessed with bright skies and dry paths. We are hoping this year will also be lucky and coincide with the astonishing displays of wild bluebells and anemones which are such a feature of this part of Kent. We will also feature several guided history walks in the city itself. There will be 22 walks to choose from, all guided by experienced walk leaders.

The programme can be found on the Canterbury Ramblers website: <http://www.kentrampers.org.uk/Canterbury/canterbury.html> or you can contact me at dareekie@aol.com or Alan Robertson at alanandkristina@alroberton.co.uk.

David Reekie



Admiring the bluebells in Dengrove Wood.

Photo: David Reekie

Wildlife not warehouses

Several members of our group joined a protest walk in July 2020 objecting to a proposal to build a 'logistics park' (an industrial warehousing centre and lorry park) on 200 acres of Oxford greenbelt. The Oxfordshire Way passes through the site which is adjacent to junction 8A of the M40 and includes Waterstock Golf Club. It is also close to a nationally protected local wildlife site which is home to over 100 bird and other species, 61 of which are on the UK's protected species list.

The developer, Greystoke, has not dropped its plans so campaigners wanted to raise awareness of this proposed development as well as much needed funds to commission reports (hydrology, environmental, legal etc) to make

a case against it. They arranged a second protest walk on Sunday 12 December 2021 and 250 people took part, including several members of our group together with Ramblers from other groups. Kate Ashbrook, Vice President of the Ramblers, was also present to support the action, as well as local MP John Howell.

As Waterstock resident Henry Manisty said "If Covid has taught us anything it is how important green spaces are for our mental wellbeing, so concreting over a much-used local amenity on green belt is mad. And the development would require the destruction of more than 15,000 mature trees, which soak up around 320 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year - surely not in line with COP26's declaration to end deforestation."

Ruth Cornish
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers



Thame & Wheatley members Mike Smith and Janet Noyce (with Kate Ashbrook behind them) on the protest walk on 12 December.
Photo: Ruth Cornish

Vanguard Way goes formal



Members of the Vanguards Rambling Club at the three-way fingerpost for the Vanguard Way, Eden Valley Walk and Tandridge Border Path at Cernes Farm, near Starborough in Surrey.
Photo: David Huxtable

After 40 years, the Vanguards Rambling Club intends to set up a Vanguard Way Association to take over management of the increasingly popular 66-mile trail from Croydon to Newhaven, which was established in 1981. For all that time, club members have informally looked after most of the signage and access issues that can arise on a route of this nature, with help from the highway authorities, local Ramblers officers, landowners and many individuals. They have also promoted the route and provided a free route description through their website vanguardway.org.uk. However, although they feel

able to continue doing so for a good while yet, it seems sensible to start looking for new people to take over this work in the future, on a more formal basis. Membership of the association will be open to anyone with an interest in helping to maintain, support, develop and promote the route.

Subject to any Covid restrictions that may be imposed meanwhile, the launch meeting of the Vanguard Way Association will take place at 2.30pm on Saturday 28 May in the hallowed surroundings of the magnificent, modern St Matthew's Church in Croydon. It will be preceded by a four-mile morning walk from Selsdon to Croydon starting at 11.00 am and allowing

time for lunch before the meeting. St Matthew's is half a mile from East Croydon station and tram stop, and is served by bus routes. There will be limited parking available. The meeting will be followed by a presentation of the Vanguard Way Photoguide, a route description app for smartphones, which is being developed for the club by John Jeffkins.

It will be essential to reserve a place at the meeting by contacting me (colin@vanguardway.org.uk or phone 020 8886 8285) by 21 May. Any Covid precautions and rules in force at the time must be observed.

Colin Saunders
Vanguard Way Route Manager

Historic Essex footbridge saved

An unusual and historic footbridge has been saved from demolition and restored to its former glory following a campaign by village residents, conservation bodies, and members of North West Essex Ramblers. The footbridge, generally known as Dick Nunn's bridge, spans the River Blackwater on Footpath 37 near Curd Hall Farm near Coggeshall. This footbridge has a long and interesting history. It was constructed in 1892 when a local blacksmith and social activist called Dick Nunn, who had been unable to persuade the parish council to replace the then decaying timber bridge, decided to build his own bridge, funding the work himself. The iron bridge was constructed in his workshop, wheeled into position, placed on concrete abutments and opened to the public on 31 August 1892 with several hundred people in attendance.

The bridge was of strong but lightweight construction, made of wrought iron members with a span of 30 feet and rise of three feet, and painted pink, a colour which reflected the combination of iron oxide and white paint used. The footway consisted of timber planks bolted to the iron structure. The centenary of the bridge was celebrated in 1992 by villagers with many wearing Victorian costumes.



Centenary celebrations on Dick Nunn's bridge in 1992. Photo: coggeshallhistory.com

However, in recent years the condition of the bridge has deteriorated and on 3 September 2019 Essex County Council issued a temporary closure order on the bridge deeming it unsafe and consequently preventing walkers from crossing the river at that point. Further investigations by the council concluded that the bridge was beyond economic repair and should be replaced by a new bridge built to current standards. This provoked an angry response from local residents and other interested parties who began a vigorous campaign for the preservation and restoration of the bridge.

Following months of campaigning the footbridge was granted Grade II listed status by Historic England on

12 October 2020 for reasons of its architectural and historic interest. This obliged the county council to repair and restore the bridge. The repair and renovation work was undertaken during 2021 and the bridge finally reopened to the public in mid-October 2021, thereby restoring Footpath 37 to its original line and completing the connection between Coggeshall village and the Essex Way. A unique and historic footbridge thus has been preserved for future generations, (with acknowledgements to Historic England, Coggeshall Museum and www.coggeshallhistory.com)



It's 2022!

It was Tuesday 17 March 2020 when, having gone on a long walk alone with little phone signal, my mobile went off as I reached the top of a hill. It was my group's vice-chair asking if I had seen the email that all walks were to be cancelled for the foreseeable future. My heart sank.

It's now two years on... I have been Area Chair

Celebrating 50 + 1 years



The celebration cake.

Photo: Jim Robertson

Richard Evans cut a cake to celebrate 50 + 1 years (Covid restrictions prevented us having a 50th celebration) as an inaugural member of Haslemere Ramblers,

on Saturday 20 November 2021. Haslemere Ramblers, founded in 1970, merged with Godalming Ramblers in 1976 to form Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers and

Guide to the Surrey Hills:

A new guide highlighting 'exceptional and sustainable' businesses in the Surrey Hills has

been launched by Surrey Hills Enterprises and includes an Artisan Trail featuring local businesses which offer the chance to taste local food and drink. Paper copies are available at local outlets or can be viewed at www.surreyhills.org/your-guide-to-the-surrey-hills.

Berks thanks:

Berkshire Ramblers Area committee would like to thank its nine groups for the efforts

they made in 2021 to keep members walking. The groups have adhered to all the changing rules and lockdowns whilst keeping walking as safe as possible.

Off the rails:

An exhibition telling the story of the proposed but not built extension of the tube from Edgware to Bushey Heath in Hertfordshire

is running at the Elstree & Borehamwood Museum until Saturday 20 August. The museum is in Shenley Road, Borehamwood (<https://www.elstree-museum.org.uk>, 01442 454888).

Dunstable Downs:

Views across the highest point in Bedfordshire, visited by around 750,000 people each year, have been transformed following the completion of a scheme to replace a section of overhead lines with underground cables. The UK Network Power scheme saw the removal of two circuits of 33,000-volt overhead power lines and the dismantling of the 23 towers supporting them.

SABRE creates an anniversary trail

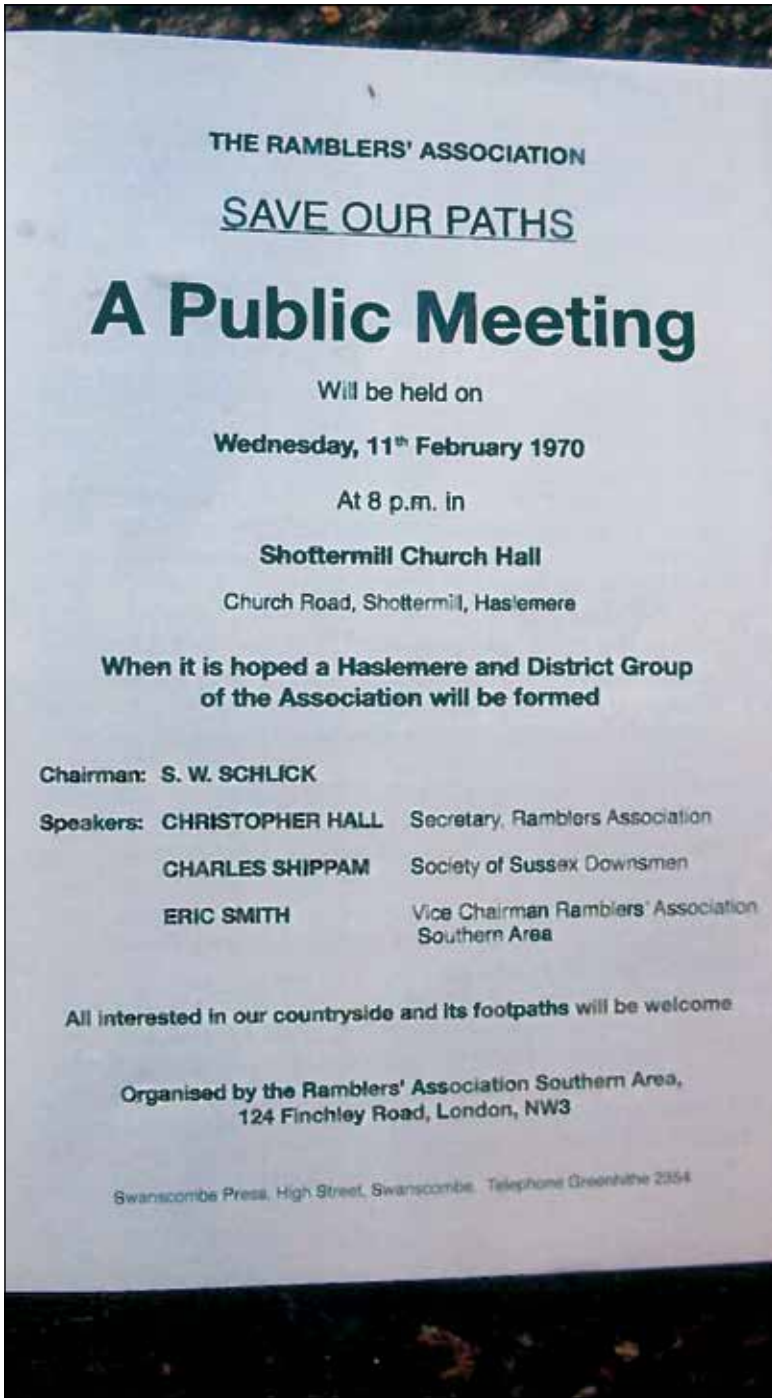
Undeterred by Covid, Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE) celebrated 2021 in style with a year-long series of events to mark our 10th anniversary. Although anniversary walks from Denbies Vineyard, one of our favourite walking spots, had to be cancelled on the actual anniversary date, we rescheduled all three walks in June. In July we walked in the Chichester Harbour area and held a party on West Wittering beach. In September we combined a fish and chip supper with a walk leaders' consultation, to continue our celebrations in Little Bookham Hall. In November we donated trees to the National Trust's tree-planting initiative.

But our biggest celebratory initiative has been the creation of the SABRE Trail which, true to the group's name, reaches beyond Surrey. It starts in Hampshire amid the beautiful scenery of the New Alresford and West Meon area) and finishes in Kent at Toys Hill and Westerham, whilst taking in a selection of the very best walking spots in our own county including the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is not a conventional linear trail but a series of 40 circular walks - one long and one short - around 20 location points along our chosen 'line of travel' across Hampshire, Surrey and Kent. The walks have been chosen by 19 of our walk leaders. Some are self-created favourites whilst others are from the Fancy Free website with permission from the founder whom we thank.

At the time of writing in early January, our webmaster, assisted by the group committee, is putting the finishing touches to the trail website where each walk will have a GPX file, a short description, photo and map. Watch for details of the trail on our Twitter feed and public Facebook page.

We hope that the trail will provide an excellent resource for all ramblers and the public. In the meantime, other celebrations continuing into 2022 include a new sponsored gate, and of course, we will be walking our trail from west to east. Come and join us if you can.

*Shirley Creed
SABRE*



The notice calling the public meeting to form a Haslemere Group, held on Wednesday 11 February 1970 at Shottermill Church Hall, Haslemere. The meeting was chaired by SW Schlick and the speakers were Christopher Hall, Secretary, Ramblers' Association, Charles Shippam of the Society of Sussex Downsmen and Eric Smith, Vice Chairman of Ramblers' Association Southern Area.

Guildford's footpath team back in action

Despite only restarting path clearance and maintenance work in August 2021 following the easing of Covid restrictions, Guildford Ramblers team has accomplished a formidable amount of work, improving footpaths in the Effingham, Shalford, Normandy and Bookham areas. This included installing two new kissing gates, repairing two stiles, mending a footbridge with four new boards, installing new finger signposts and renewing wooden slats on some steps on a slope which would otherwise have become slippery when wet. A substantial amount of vegetation was also cleared to make footpaths more accessible, including

one 50-metre stretch which required the use of an electric brush cutter.

Team leader, Brian O'Connell comments: "The team has performed heroically. Some of the work was really hard but we always find a range of tasks to allow for every level of fitness."

The team usually goes out every month to deal with a problem previously agreed with Surrey County Council who provide the tools for any major work. This monthly working party makes a major contribution to maintaining and improving the paths in our part of Surrey.

*Richard Peters
Guildford Ramblers*



The Guildford team.

Byfleet Footpath 94

This path, within Woking Borough, runs from Fullerton Road in Byfleet eastwards towards Byfleet Manor, and continues in the same direction as a grassy path beside the walls surrounding that property to meet Bridleway 95 at a bridge over the River Wey. The section beside the walls has been closed by successive traffic regulation orders (TROs) since 1 December 2018 on grounds of 'danger to the public caused by drainage works to the adjacent walls and piers at the Manor House'. The alternative route provided is on a track which leads north east to the three-way junction of Bridleway 95, Footpath 95, and Bridleway 128 (the latter two both lead to Mill Lane, Byfleet).

The owners of the Manor applied for a diversion order to move the path away from the walls more or less (but not exactly) along the lines of the alternative route in the TROs. This was discussed at a

meeting of Surrey County Council's Woking Joint Committee (of Borough and County councillors) in late November 2021. I and one other member attended and we both spoke against the proposal. The Open Spaces Society had also written opposing the proposal. Nevertheless, it was approved and Surrey County Council has since made the relevant Diversion Order.

The applicants for the order made great play in November of their public spiritedness in that the diversion/TRO alternative route has a firmer surface than the existing definitive path, and that in their opinion most path users coming from Fullerton Road were heading for Mill Lane anyway. But users had been unable to use the definitive route for three years because of the TROs.

The diversion route has been used by the public without challenge for well over 20 years. It is also on the Ramblers' map of potential Lost Ways.

The drainage works are still ongoing and appear to have taken an

unnecessarily long time to complete.

A planning application has been submitted since then for works at the Manor for 'erection of an outbuilding including an indoor swimming pool and gym and associated landscape work and pergolas, following demolition of existing outbuilding'.

The existing definitive route is illegally blocked by four obstructions (stiles which are not recorded on the definitive statement), Surrey County Council has confirmed that if the Diversion Order was not made these would have to be removed. At the November meeting the committee did not take on board the point that they should have been comparing the diversion with the definitive route as if it had been unobstructed.

The Ramblers position is that we want to keep the legal line where it is now, with the TRO lapsing upon expiry in June. We will also seek to claim the diversion route as an additional right of way, whether on user evidence or as a Lost Way.

Brian Reader

Around Surrey

Old Malden Lane:

Surrey Ramblers helped promote a petition aimed at improving the safety of this road (see SEW September 2021). This was discussed by Surrey County

Council's Epsom & Ewell Local Committee on 8 November who agreed to fund a feasibility study to assess options for improving pedestrian safety on this road which runs beside the Hogsmill River.

Optohedron award:

This Surrey Hills Arts installation just off the North Downs Way near Newlands Corner (TQ 046 491) has won

a Guildford Design Award 2021 in the public art category. The Optohedron combines hazel wood and kaleidoscopes in a curved steel frame.

Surrey Hills AONB boundary review:

Natural England is reviewing the boundaries of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural

Beauty, a process likely to take several years. The current area covers 163 square miles of the North Downs and Greensand Ridge. More information at <https://www.surrey-hills-aonb-boundary-review.org/>

Ash Ranges:

Following the closure of 330 acres of Ash Ranges in 2020 without consultation, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation has proposals to assuage some of the objections made by local protesters. Phase 1, to be completed this summer, will provide a continuous north

- south route by connecting routes outside the existing perimeter with hardtop inside and installing new fences, access gates, and hardening some new areas. As well as increasing the length of hardtop for those with mobility issues, this phase will provide access to 15 acres of woodland when the second phase, to start in the summer, would provide a west-east route to give a direct course from Ash Vale through the technical area onto the broader Ash Ranges. This is broadly similar to the delightful path from The Swan at Ash Vale to Lookout Hill mentioned in SEW December 2020.

Tice's Meadow:

This 137-acre site in Badshot Lea, near Farnham, has been protected as open space for the community. The former quarry site was put up for sale by Hanson UK in 2019. As the site is a registered Asset of Community

Value, community interest groups could register as potential bidders and have six months to raise the funds. Local residents lobbied their councillors and now a consortium of six councils has bought the site and the land will become part of Surrey County Council's countryside estate.

Dunsfold Green:

Following representations, including those from the Open Spaces Society, a

planning inspector has refused permission for an access road across Dunsfold Green, six miles southeast of Godalming.

*David Cooper
Area Publicity Officer*

Explore with map and compass course:

East Sussex member John Harmer will be running another of his one-day courses for beginners in map reading and land navigation in Battle on either Saturday 2 or 9 April. The cost is £10 but reduced rates may be available. Call John on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com for more details.

Camley Street Natural Park:

This unique urban nature reserve run by the London Wildlife Trust between St Pancras and King's Cross stations has reopened after a period of closure and now boasts a new visitor centre and cafe (open Wednesdays to Sundays).



Good and bad in East Berks

First the good news. Access to Battlemead Common has been agreed at last. In 2018 the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead bought Battlemead Common, a site of 110 acres bordering the Thames between Maidenhead and Cookham, as public open space. The council said that it would allow the opening up of a missing link, known as the Causeway Path, in the Millennium Walk. This route between Cookham and Bray was developed by East Berks Ramblers and the Maidenhead Civic Society.



The view to Cliveden from Battlemead Common.

Photo: Steve Gillions

Unfortunately, opening the Causeway Path was not as simple as we had imagined. Battlemead is home to much local flora and fauna and we recognised that a proper balance needed to be struck between access and wildlife. We worked closely with other local groups, including parish councils and the Civic Society, to achieve this despite determined opposition from some. After three years of indecision the Royal Borough finally announced in October 2021 that the path will be open from April to September each year. This will provide protection to over-wintering birds.

And the bad news is that a Cookham Dean cross-field path is at risk. The historic path which gives fine country views has been put at risk by the Royal Borough. The landowner has for some years been seeking to divert the path to surfaced field-edge paths which would also be used by off-road cyclists. We and many members of the public do not believe the proposed diversion meets the obligatory legal requirements.

The Royal Borough's public rights of way team agreed with us. In October the proposal was submitted to the council's Rights of Way Panel with a recommendation from council officers that it be refused. Despite this, the Panel agreed to the landowner's application and the diversion order will now be made.

However, if there are still objections - and there will be - when the order is made it must be considered by an independent public inquiry before it can be implemented. Cross-field paths are a valuable part of the rights of way network and provide opportunities to walk responsibly and safely across farmland and enjoy the peace and quiet of the countryside. If this one is lost, others may well follow.

*Steve Gillions Chair,
East Berks Ramblers*



Buckinghamshire Access Forum

Roy Johnson, Footpath Secretary of the Aylesbury & District Group, has been appointed to represent walking interests on the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. He replaces John Elfes (who was Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Ramblers Vice-Chairman and Access Officer) who was a member of the

forum from its inception, and Chairman for many years. We are most grateful to John for all his work, especially in the early days of mapping and defending access land.

We are delighted that Roy has now been appointed; he is a tireless worker for Ramblers' interests, championing paths in and around Aylesbury, and encouraging his team of excellent path checkers. We can be sure that our concerns will continue to be well represented on the forum.

*Kate Ashbrook
Area Footpath Secretary*

North West London Group

Sadly, at its AGM in October 2021, North West London Group, the second oldest Ramblers group in the country, decided to dissolve itself. There were insufficient volunteers for committee positions, or to maintain a viable programme of walks.

Existing group members have the

option to remain members of the Area with no affiliation to a particular group, or to transfer to another group of their choice. Hillingdon Group, the neighbouring group in this Area, will be happy to welcome North West London members who wish to take part in group activities. There are other neighbouring groups in Inner London and Hertfordshire

& North Middlesex Areas. The allocation of future new members in the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow is yet to be determined. Footpath and countryside issues in these boroughs remain the responsibility of the Area, though the level of support we are able to give is likely to be limited and we would welcome volunteers to assist us here.

*John Esslemont
Acting Area Secretary*

Reducing our carbon footprint



Reading Buses provide a good service to some of the group's regular walk start points. Photo: Mary Bather

Does walking have a carbon footprint? In many cases it does and Loddon Valley Ramblers is looking at ways in which it can be reduced, making rambling a green as well as a healthy activity.

Prompted by my seven-year-old grandson's question "How many miles a week do you drive Grandma?", I realised that at least half of my weekly mileage was devoted to travelling to and from the start points of walks. As a result, I have undertaken an initial assessment of the carbon emissions associated with organised walking.

My analysis of the November 2021 Loddon Valley Ramblers group programme, assuming the typical number of walkers at each event and an average of two walkers per car, showed that the total mileage driven by all participants to and from the walks was equivalent to approximately 0.9 tonne carbon during November and likely to be in the region of 10 tce per year. To put this in context, annual per capita emission in the UK is just over six tce and many experts believe that to reach a sustainable level, this should be reduced to two tce per capita per year. Obviously the 10 tce is the emission of the whole group's walking in November, not an individual, and should be shared between up to 40 people. Even so this would be about 0.25 tce per person - a significant proportion of the recommended annual allowance.

Carbon emissions could be cut in the shorter term by reducing the distance travelled to and from the walk, increasing car sharing and greater use of public transport. The first option would be the easiest to implement (just choose nearer start points) - and the most effective since halving the distance to start points halves the distance travelled. However, it would mean restricting the areas walked to those nearer home and a smaller range of walks in our programme.

The second option presents logistical problems, particularly if the walkers do not live close to each other and so have to travel some distance to meet for a car share. There may also be issues about willingness to share, even in the post-Covid era. In the case of the third option, many of the traditional walk start points are not easily accessed by public transport and some members do not live within easy access of a bus route or railway station.

However, I have undertaken an exercise to identify public transport access to many of our group's regular walk start points and we can now consider offering some 'low carbon' options each month. Where available, public transport links will be published alongside the traditional directions for cars to starting points in our walks programme. In addition, once Covid restrictions are lifted, the group will look to reinstate an official car share point for each of the longer walks.

This is just a start, but it is hoped that adopting these changes could reduce the carbon footprint of our travelling by up to 50%. However, we should not forget the carbon emissions associated with other aspects of walking, including that associated with the manufacture and transport of specialised clothing and walking gear - the possible subject of a separate investigation.

*Mary Bather
Loddon Valley Ramblers*

RIPPLE

The media sometimes has stories from landowners complaining that they have to reinstate paths at their own cost for walkers who don't make any contribution to the cost. When reading South East Walker I am always amazed at how much time and effort is being put in towards the upkeep and improvement of paths as well as other tasks such as responding to consultations, diversions and closures. Collectively Areas contributing to this publication will be saving councils many thousands of pounds and to answer the comment that walkers don't put anything back, I would point out that we are putting an amazing amount back and should be telling everyone about it!

In the last year our RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Local Paths for Local Enjoyment) volunteers have visited 31 parishes in Bedfordshire, putting in yellow-topped marker posts, adding discs and clearing side and overgrowth from paths and, on occasions, improving surfaces of those paths. Add to that, putting on three coats of paint on a hundred marker posts with another 50 waiting to be done and one can see what a tremendous amount has been achieved.

Almost 500 hours have been put in, equivalent to over 60 eight-hour working days and assuming a minimum rate of pay of £10 an hour, the savings to councils would be over £5,000. These figures don't include those individuals who do minor clearance work whilst on walk recesses, nor do they include the volunteers who carry out path surveys, or the work done by our Footpath Committee or Local Path Guardians. Nor do they include petrol or travelling time.

What the figures do show is the great contribution made by our volunteers, the people who turn up week after week whatever the weather and those who attend occasionally. Most of our work in recent times has been in the north of the county, partly because of staffing problems in Central Bedfordshire Council. However, the number of people volunteering and joining our work has increased. For some smaller tasks we are able to ask individuals who live locally to deal with them as they often require only one, two or three people. Despite all the restrictions due to the pandemic, all our volunteers have continued to do a tremendous job and this has been acknowledged by landowners, parishes, councils and walkers.

In November a great job was in the Carlton and Chellington area with clearance and new posts being the priority. During the morning an old stile was removed and the area around it made good.

In December, on a day with storms forecast, we had one of our best turnouts and cleared, widened and improved some 500 yards of bridleway in the Wootton area before heavy rain descended. January saw us improve a footpath at Stagsden and replace two old posts on a nearby bridleway. Later that month we turned our attention to replacing a broken post and removing side growth on the John Bunyan Trail between Kempston and Bromham ready for a contractor to mow the surface.

Last year one of our volunteers surveyed the area between Stagsden and Turvey and found many old posts in need of replacement. This lovely area is now on our work schedule for 2022.

There are lots of opportunities for work and for joining our RIPPLE volunteers in 2022.

Area matters

The Area AGM in November consisted of a morning walk led by Area Chairman, Nick Markham, followed by a Zoom meeting in the afternoon. All officers offered their services for another year and were re-elected. At the first virtual Area meeting of 2022 it was decided to continue Zoom meetings for the time being and to aim to have a face-to-face meeting in July if restrictions permitted.

Despite Covid restrictions and the need for walks to be pre-booked, the 2021 Bedfordshire Walking Festival was well received and participation exceeded our expectations. We will be aiming to go ahead with a full-scale Bedfordshire Walking Festival in 2022 (see below). In the meantime we have been invited to participate in the Mayor of Bedford's Green Event on 25-26 March, the Greensand Country Festival in May and Bedford River Festival 23-24 July. Nick Markham is looking to have some face-to-face training courses running by the time of the Walking Festival in September.



Path news

Work has begun on repairing Kempston Mill Bridge which has been closed for over a year. Once completed it will reopen a delightful circular walk to/from Bedford along the river as well as reopen an important link between Wootton and beyond. The council is committed to creating a multi-user off-road path from Kempston Mill Bridge to the Great Denham roundabout and link up with the riverside path to Bromham and Bedford.

Central Bedfordshire has announced the creation of a new footpath in the Chalton/

Luton area and is proposing the creation of new bridleways in the Biggleswade/Langford area. Information available from Bob Tarron, Chair and Secretary of the Footpath Committee: robert.tarron@btinternet.com



Kempston Mill Bridge awaiting repairs. Photo: Barry Ingram

Bedfordshire Walking Festival 2022

We are planning a full-scale festival this year to run from Saturday 10 - Sunday 18 September. This will include the popular 40-mile Greensand Challenge over the weekend of 17 - 18 September. During the nine day festival we hope to offer a variety of walks each day ranging from special interest walks, short ambles, half-day and full-day walks. These are at the planning stage with a cut-off date

in May to enable the programme to be produced and ready for distribution in early July.

In previous years we have welcomed groups visiting from outside the county and hope to hear from any wishing to participate in this year's event. More information will be available in the next issue of South East Walker and on the festival website at www.bedwalkfest.co.uk



Walkers on a 2021 festival walk at Clophill.

All items and photos by Barry Ingram (text 07860 348347)

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize:

Entries for this year's arts competition organised by the Friends of the Ridgeway will be exhibited at Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall in Uffington, Oxfordshire over the weekend of 2 - 3 April. An online exhibition at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/swire-ridgeway-arts-prize/> will be available from Sunday 3 April.

Streatley youth hostel:

The YHA has been seeking funds for its hostel at Streatley, on the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails, and was due to make a decision on the hostel's future in February. Local partners, councils and countryside bodies agreed to contribute about half the sum required to secure the hostel's future. More information at <https://getinvolved.yha.org/fundraising/appeals/yha-streatley-study/>.

Okehampton, Devon:

Regular daily trains returned to the Exeter to Okehampton line in December for the first time in 49 years. Great Western Railway now operates the route from Exeter, initially every two hours but with plans to introduce hourly trains later this year. It means the London Paddington to Okehampton (for Dartmoor) journey can be done in a little over three hours with one change in Exeter.



Footpath matters

County council: The Draft Map Modification Order waiting list is now 70 cases. Of these 27 are under investigation, one is awaiting orders, one is under appeal, and 16 orders have been made (eight objected to, seven of which are with the Planning Inspectorate). There are 28 diversions on the list, one of which has been confirmed.

The bridge on Merton FP1 has been replaced, and the culvert replaced with a temporary wooden bridge. A new bridge is being provided by East-West Rail on Launton FP11 to replace three level crossings; there will be new paths east of this to connect with FP1 and BR2. Also for the East-West Rail there is a new bridge connecting Jarvis Lane in Bicester with the footpaths on the other side. A boardwalk has been installed on part of the Thames Path at Abingdon, which can become very muddy.

Diversions, claims etc: A small diversion of Ardley FP22, to clarify the route through a small estate, and a temporary diversion at Wroxton Quarry have been confirmed.

The diversion of Noke BR10, discussed in the last issue, will be subject to new consultation. It is likely that an order will be made for Coldron Mill, but we don't yet know whether this will be for the original proposal or just the path over the bridge.

The diversion order for Tetsworth FP65 has been published; there will be a gate where the stile has been repaired at the parish boundary, and this includes part of Lewknor

FP1. All the other obstructions are on adjoining landowner's property, and it is hoped that these will be dealt with as a follow-up, probably with more diversions to remove the paths from the overgrown fences (if they get cleared they will only grow back again). At present I have 28 outstanding problems in Tetsworth and at least 20 in adjoining parishes.

We have been consulted on a diversion at Perrotts Hill Farm in North Leigh, where FPs20 and 38 are plagued by cyclists disturbing the movement of sheep in the farmyard, and a diversion is the only practical solution short of putting five-foot-high padlocked gates at all the approaches with a five-foot-high kissing gate beside each one (too high to lift a bike over). The owners also want to divert FP19 out of the woodland, which would change the nature of the path and has no obvious agricultural reason.

A proposed diversion at Clanfield FP3, to unite two halves of a field, has attracted local opposition.

Other matters: I have for some time selected walks from the Ramblers website based on the longest distance within reason, and as a result I have walked with all sorts of groups from outside Oxfordshire. Some of their leaders (they know who they are) have made comments when I told them that I had done a recce for an upcoming walk. The lack of a recce (combined in some cases with the leader's difficulty in reading the map) invariably held up progress at some point, and (since I always carry a map and try to follow the route; it is also useful for sitting on during coffee breaks) I have ended



Gosford FP11 before cutting up a fallen tree and clearing it off the right of way. Photo: David Godfrey

up rescuing a few of these leaders. On a recce for a walk recently, done the day before the walk itself (in order to make sure which parts of the canal towpath were closed), I encountered the obstruction in the photo. As I usually carry a small pruning saw on the recce it took about half an hour to clear, the debris being piled on the rest of the fallen tree or in a bramble patch. However, before clearing, (a) make sure you aren't going to let animals go where they wouldn't go before, (b) make sure you are clearing the definitive line, (c) be sure if dragging a branch out of the way you won't make the problem worse, and (d) be sure that there is a sensible place to put the debris. Normally permission is needed for clearance, but there is a common law right to clear enough to get through. And finally, a recce is essential. For longer walks I sometimes do two - one to clip vegetation and one to check timing.

David Godfrey
Area Footpath Secretary

Footpath work in the snow

On a very cold day last November, eight of us cleared two footpaths at Homer Farm, near Ipsden. The work was done by the South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers who we often work with (and four of the volunteers are also members of our group). The forecast was for wind and snow so we dressed warmly. We had two brush cutters, a pole hedge cutter and several hand tools.

The first footpath at Ipsden Heath was in a sheltered area, enabling us to make good progress, although at one point there was thick snow coming down. Several walkers passed by and thanked us and the

cleared path was later used by a Ramblers group walk. Once the work there was finished, we went on to Handsmooth Farm to clear a large section of overgrown brambles and half-fallen trees before returning for a hot lunch at the King William pub in Hatley.

Two weeks later we had another session with five volunteers from the same group, all Ramblers members, to install a new kissing gate. As the farmer had done most of the preparatory work and removed the old stile, we were finished in no time.

Alie Hagedoorn
Henley & Goring Ramblers



Installing a new kissing gate to replace a stile.

Photo: Alie Hagedoorn

Elaine Steane retires as Chair of Oxford City Group



Elaine Steane wearing the Tilley hat given to her as a leaving present by the Oxford City committee. Photo: Jane Foster

At a well attended Oxford City Group AGM, after a snowflake-sprinkled walk, Elaine Steane, our Chair and Membership Officer, announced that she was stepping down. This was after a term of 30 years as Membership Secretary, when she succeeded Annabel Oldfield who had likewise held the post for many years, then had taken on the Chairmanship role in 2003 when Derek Cash became unwell.

As Membership Secretary, Elaine found the role very rewarding as in those pre-internet days when hesitant new members phoned while taking sometimes a first step into the wider world after bereavement, divorce, illness or just wanting to walk socially. The change was quite dramatic in some people, such as Pat Cameron who declared "It's changed my life. I have made so many friends and we go off to outdoor Shakespeare plays and all sorts". Taking on the Chair meant hosting many meetings, having her diplomatic skills tested at times, but relishing the strong committee teamwork, many who stayed on year after year and divided up the tasks.

Elaine intends to continue to lead walks and produce further walks guidebooks. She introduces her Seven Shires Way with a tribute to the Ramblers with the words "It is the friendship and enjoyment of open spaces and general merriment gained from being a member of the Oxfordshire Ramblers that has been the inspiration for the development of this guide". Encouraged by fellow members Robin Harrison and Sue Crisp respectively, Elaine's next two guidebooks, The Roman Way and Milestones to Millstones, have kept her walking in circles ever since.

Tony Dale
Chair, Oxford City Ramblers

Chilterns Landscape Art Festival:

The Chiltern Chalk, Cherries and Chairs project is putting together this exhibition to run from Monday 25 April to Sunday 1 May at Wycombe Museum in High Wycombe. Details from <https://www.wycombemuseum.org.uk>, 01494 957210.

Ephemera

This time I am going to concentrate on a single piece of walking material rather than waffle on about the piles of stuff accumulated over the years. The piece in question is called 'Face the Dawn' written by Eddie Critchley and published in 1984 in conjunction with the Ramblers' Association. Subtitled 'The Bristol to London Long Distance Path' the route essentially uses waterways linking the two cities. Starting from the Clifton Suspension Bridge a walker will follow the River Avon then linking with the Kennet and Avon Canal to Reading and finally arriving in London via the River Thames.

A review of the walk in one of the Ramblers' Association's publications was fairly positive

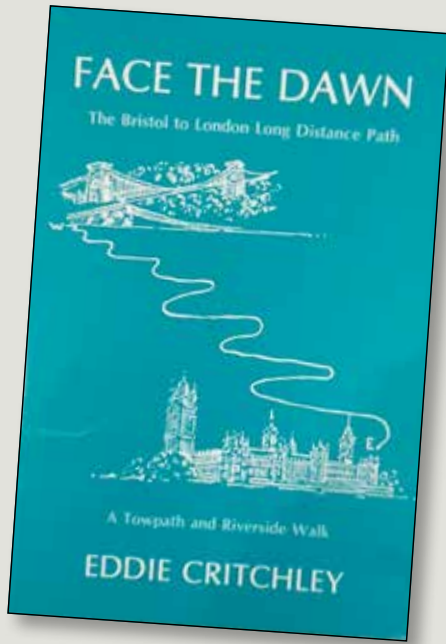
but the reviewer left out a couple of key aspirations contained in the narrative which are worth mentioning. The first is the idea that the route could be constituted as a linear park while the trail itself be recognised as a long distance trail. Sadly, neither of these aspirations were achieved and equally interesting is that we know very little about the author. Ten years after Eddie's publication, 'The Kennet and Avon Walk' by Ray Quinlan was published by Cicerone Press, was very similar to Eddie's route except that it went in the opposite direction. Quinlan made no reference to Critchley's endeavour and both of their works are now long out of print.

Eddie Critchley himself virtually disappeared after publication. There are hints that he lived in or near Bristol and frequently walked in the Mendips and Cotswolds and apparently the BBC filmed the start of his walk but a quick check in their archives didn't

produce any results. Similarly, the Ramblers' website did not provide any information of their ancient publication and the office was not taking phone calls. Bristol Central Library has a copy of his route but offers no additional information about the author. It also appears that Eddie's book was not a great success and lots of copies were given away for free although there is a copy for sale online via a Leicester bookseller for £8.95 plus £2.95 postage.

This is a rather sad story but all is not lost as by adding to this route we could have another coast-to-coast trail by starting from the Bristol Channel and then continuing on to the Thames Estuary where it meets the England Coast Path. Perhaps we are just looking for somebody to rewrite and extend Eddie's journey and add to the increasing number of coast-to-coast trails in Britain and beyond.

John Pestle
johnpestle@btinternet.com



A tale of two boots

Walker Siobhan Stead-Ellis from Oxford spent part of lockdown clearing out cupboards where she found a pair of leather boots, probably about 50 years old but still comfortable. She decided to try them out on a group walk in September. Unfortunately, during the walk one sole came away from the upper, but our member Bob Ward was on hand with duct tape (taken from his walking

poles!) and this was used to hold the boot together. However, it wasn't long before the same thing happened to the other boot, so this time Bob supplied a length of sticking plaster for the repair! The moral of this story must be: always carry duct tape (or bin old boots!).

Ruth Cornish
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers



Holding together. Photo: Linda King

How old?

It is a strange phenomenon that if you ask a young person, say 20 years of age, how old they are, they are quite likely to want to appear older and more sophisticated than their actual age and so add two or three years to their real age. When they become middle-aged they may want to knock two or three years off their actual age! However, when they reach a real milestone age (or should that be millstone?), let's say 90 years old they can consider themselves to be in an elevated and honoured position and quite possibly very lucky, depending on how healthy and active they still are. They will no doubt be happy to announce to the world their correct age and possibly mention the hope of receiving a message from the Queen in a few years time!

In a previous issue of this esteemed paper I reported on two members of



The buffet team.

Photo: John Tickner

Croydon Ramblers - Brian Harrow and Muriel Fell - reaching 90 years of age. Like buses, another two candidates have come round the corner, as Marie Oxborrow and Rex Spiller both turned 90 in 2021, but you would never guess their age by looks alone - they

look so young and fit. Both have been members of the Ramblers for many years and both still lead walks. I can only assume that going out and about with us each week must be extremely good for your health and well-being. But then we all knew that, didn't we?

As Muriel enjoys teas and lunches, she organised a lunch in a church hall in Sanderstead to celebrate the occasion. John Hilton got together his team to prepare a buffet lunch and we were invited to form a spaced out queue, wearing masks, to load our plates with good food. All in all there were about 60 attendees sitting at socially-distanced tables around the hall, regularly sanitising hands with that delightful gloop!

After the birthday boys and girls had extinguished the candles on the two cakes thankfully not 360 candles), our Chairman Roy Endersby presented the lucky foursome with a gift from the group.

John Tickner
Maturing slowly Croydon Rambler



left to right: Marie Oxborrow, Muriel Fell, Chairman Roy Endersby, Brian Harrow and Rex Spiller. Photo: John Tickner

Short Walks, Near Walks

*Our doors are opening now.
Slowly, with hesitation,
We stride at last with sticks and boots
into the long, bright spring.*

*In tune again, with one another
and with all bewildered birds
that have grown used to quiet,
to doors shut fast, voices distant,*

*We explore the bursting canopy
of startling springs: blue skies, willows circling
over us, dusted thick with yellow pollen,
bouncing with bees, with goldfinches*

*chattering, whistling from the hazel copse
on either side the path we choose ...
or does the path choose us
as we go stepping on through sunshine-*

*to follow brimstone butterflies, or
peacocks flitting on ahead of us?
Like them, we emerge with joy
from winter's tight, cool chrysalis.*

© Lizzie Ballagher



Cherry-blossom along Giddyhorn Lane, an ancient track in Allington, Kent. Photo: Lizzie Ballagher



KENT calling

As usual much time in November and December was spent working on our Annual Review which includes our accounts and AGM notification. Although there are regular suggestions that this might become an online only publication, feedback from members suggests that a paper publication makes a welcome break from on-screen reading. Certainly very few members have taken up the invitation to opt out of paper and rely on the online version - but any member can do so by emailing their membership number and postcode to nopaper@kentramblers.org.uk. The online version is available using links at kentramblers.org.uk/news and constructive feedback is always welcome.

We usually have an article in each Annual Review focusing on an aspect of footpath volunteering work both to let people know what Kent Ramblers is doing for them in addition to organising led walks and in the hope of encouraging more people to volunteer. This year we focused on Parish Footpath Observers, the equivalent of Parish Footpath Wardens in some Areas, so far generating eight responses or thereabouts. Welcome though these are, this level of response does not go far towards filling our 92 vacancies. The heart of the problem is that most of the vacancies are in rural areas while most of the members live in urban areas. However, there is no need to live in the parish you cover and indeed many of our Parish Footpath Observers cover several parishes. The duties are not onerous - just walk every path in the parish once a year and report any problems. To find out more please visit kentramblers.org.uk/volunteering.

Another consequence of posting out the Annual Reviews is a stream of copies returned as undeliverable by Royal Mail. Some copies come back months after they were

despatched. I am surprised how many people move home without making arrangements for the forwarding of mail.

At this time of year the AGM looms large. We don't often ask our AGM to send a motion to General Council but this year the Area Council decided that something must be done to improve the quality of communication and consultation that we get from Central Office and the Board. Risk assessments, Assemble (if you don't know what that is, just be grateful) and changes to the national website are some of the recent initiatives that have caused avoidable aggravation for volunteers. Drafting a motion that no one thinks they can improve on is no easy task and takes time that in the short run could have been spent looking after walkers in Kent - but in the long run these things matter and have a real impact on the successful delivery of our mission in Kent.

Just before Christmas I was interviewed by BBC Radio Kent about the joys of winter walking. Although I stressed the selection of routes available on the Area website, so far as I can tell from the website visitor statistics, the item did not generate any additional visits. Maybe no one actually listens to BBC Radio Kent at lunchtime on the Wednesday before Christmas or perhaps it was a mistake to mention the famous 'Wealden mud'.

In 2009 we published a book of walks which has proved very popular. One of the walks, from the National Trust's Emmetts Garden, uses a short section of tarred track which is shown as a 'white lane' on Ordnance Survey maps. Walkers had used it without problems for many years until in 2017 the land changed hands and the new landowner began challenging users (and rang me to complain). We were almost resigned to giving up on the route (there being difficulties about establishing a right of way through user evidence) when late last year a local resident



approached us with documents she had discovered in the county archives showing that a footpath had been legally diverted from a nearby field onto the track in question in 1882. As well as being good news regarding this particular route (although we are still awaiting Kent County Council's response), this incident shows what gems are hidden away in the county archives if you know what you are looking for. Unfortunately it isn't easy to know what one is looking for so Colin Sefton and I are planning an expedition to the archives to get a better feel for what is there and how to find it. This work is of course key to the task of getting unrecorded rights of way onto the definitive map before the deadline of 1 January 2026 which is now frighteningly close.

*Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers*

Area Secretary vacancy

We are looking for a successor to David Naylor as Area Secretary. The Area Secretary is one of the formal roles, along with Chair and Treasurer, without which the Area cannot function. It is not an onerous role and can be expanded to taste.

The basic tasks are:
* Sending out agendas (by email) for meetings, after consultation with the Chair, During the pandemic most meetings have been on Zoom and it is likely that many will continue that way.
* sending out papers (by email) for Area Council meetings and the AGM.
* noting actions agreed by committee, Council and AGM and circulating these as minutes.
* maintaining an email contact list of group and Area officers.
* keeping an eye on constitutional matters, answering queries, accessing Assemble online databases where necessary. The Secretary also fields general enquiries and directs them to colleagues where appropriate. Outside pandemic conditions, meeting rooms are block-booked by the Secretary. If you are interested and would like to discuss this, please contact either the Area Chair, David Radford (davidradford22@gmail.com) or the current Secretary, David Naylor (davidjohnnaylor@btinternet.com).

*Mike Cannell
Area Media Officer*



Big Society rides again

Essex Highways is halving the number of front line staff dealing with public rights of way. The new arrangements will come into effect in April, although discussions with the Ramblers and other voluntary organisations are only just beginning.

As I have reported before in South East Walker, the extensive public rights of way network in Essex is not in an ideal state of repair. In the resurgence of interest in countryside access that has emerged during the pandemic, there is understandable nervousness about how a reduction in staffing will make things better, but we are suspending judgment until the new operating methods are made clear. Inevitably, delivering an improved (or even the same) service with fewer paid staff will require more reliance on volunteer contributions, and Essex Highways has promised to "... work as closely as possible with volunteer groups to effectively maintain the public rights of way network".

This may strike a chord for acolytes of Conservative policy with David Cameron's ideas, first enunciated back on 19 July 2010, of a Big Society in which, as he put it, "... people in their neighbourhoods don't always turn to

officials and local government for answers to the problems they face." Thinking about how this has worked out for, say, local libraries, might not leave you with a warm feeling, but it is important that we Ramblers consider what it might mean for public rights of way management.

There is no shortage of enthusiasm or effort in Essex for voluntary footpath maintenance. We estimate that Ramblers alone contribute about 3,500 hours of volunteer labour annually to this, and there are individual parish P3 initiatives besides. In practice, this has meant that more and more waymarking and vegetation clearance has been delegated to volunteers, and there are even suggestions that waymarking and overgrowth defects would no longer be recorded at all by the local authority. This would seem to sit very uneasily with their Countryside Act section 27 duties.

Going back to the 2010 blueprint, even David Cameron's vision included three key strands to a successful Big Society initiative - which this looks increasingly like becoming. They were (1) decentralisation of the relevant power, (2) transparency in the relevant data, and (3) resources/finance to carry out the relevant activities.

*David Radford
Chair, Essex Ramblers
davidradford22@gmail.com*

Those we have lost Iran Adil-Smith

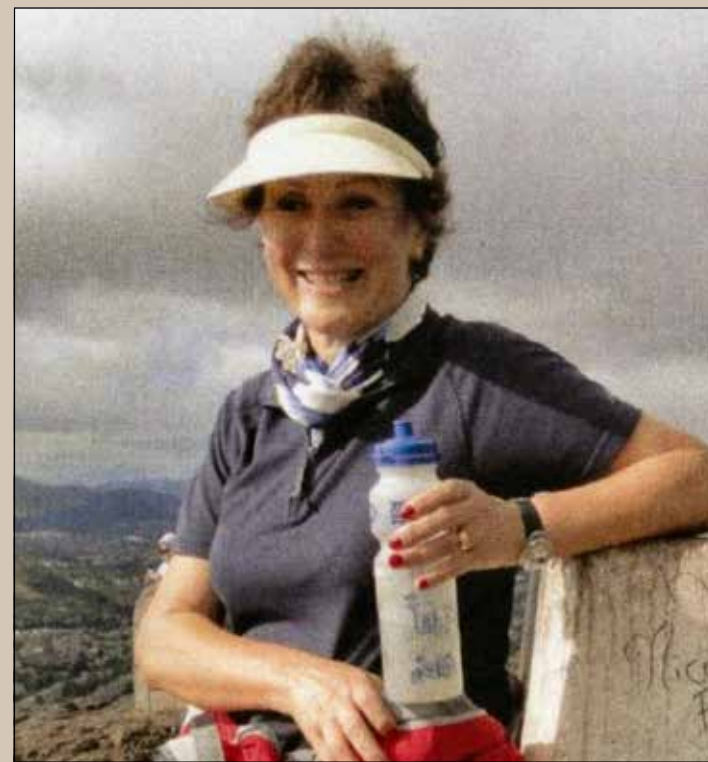
One of Hillingdon Ramblers well-known walk leaders, Iran Adil-Smith, died on 13 October 2021 after a short illness. Since joining us in 1998, Iran will always be remembered for her enthusiasm, energy and sense of humour. One of our members organised a holiday at Hassness House in Cumbria and Iran decided to travel there by train. However, the door stuck shut when she tried to get off and was transported to the next station. From then on she was greeted with 'Oh Mr Porter, what shall I do ...'. We enjoyed the irony of that moment for years afterwards.

John Morris, one of our walk leaders, told us how he was persuaded to join our group by Iran when they met on a package holiday in Nepal. He did as she suggested and has never looked back. Her academic background at Brunel University prompted her interest in unusual holidays and events such as her glow worm evening walks. After her hip replacement she was shown the removed decayed hip joint but medical staff would not let her keep it as a souvenir. Her visits to six of the seven continents provided her with endless anecdotes and entertainment for us all. These tales came to the fore during her summer garden parties where we had the opportunity to step out in style and leave our rucksacks and boots at home.

Iran's contribution to the group included leading 61 walks and a memorable five-day holiday in Lewes, East Sussex. She was a committee member from 2002 to 2007, our Saturday Walks Organiser from 2002 to 2005 and looked after our group website for several years.

Iran will also be remembered for her words: "After my first walk with Hillingdon Ramblers I went to bed as soon as I got home. Now, after a walk, I can cut the grass". We will miss her.

*Elise Wright
Hillingdon Ramblers*



Iran Adil-Smith

Wish you were here?

Thirty seven brave souls made the long trek from Amersham to the HF house in Alnmouth for a four night stay in October 2021. Covid restrictions were still in force in the house and on the coach but we were able to have a social gathering in the bar in the evenings.

HF provides a choice of three guided walks each day. On the first day I joined my first 'harder' walk which was led by Estelle in the Simonside Hills and at one point took us over large flagstones which had been brought to the site by helicopter. Next day I joined another 'harder' walk, this time led by Sarah, to Warkworth

and back. On the third walking day I opted for the 'medium' walk, also led by Sarah, which involved a coach to High Newton and then a very windy coast walk to Seahouses and Bamburgh.

Our evenings were spent in the bar after our three course meals. The staff were all following Covid rules with face coverings and hand sanitiser was freely available. This was all a little different from what we have been used to but everybody enjoyed the convivial evenings and we have already booked our place at the HF house in Bourton-on-the-Water for 2022.

*Bill Collins
Amersham Ramblers*

Stuart Pickford

Members of our group are mourning the loss of Stuart Pickford who passed away on 28 October 2021, just short of his 97th birthday. Stuart and his wife Alice were long-standing members of the Ramblers having joined in 1948 - an incredible 73 years of unbroken membership.

Born in Leeds in 1924, Stuart left school in 1941 and began training as an architect. A medical condition precluded him from military service and he took up walking and exploring his beloved Yorkshire. In 1946 he went to Cambridge to study architecture and help further his career and it was during this time that he met Alice, who later became his wife. In 1948 they joined the Ramblers' Association, initially with the idea of joining

organised walks on the continent.

After Stuart qualified as an architect, they married and later moved to Chingford before settling in Caterham, Surrey. They continued to take walking holidays both in the UK and in Europe and took great pleasure in walking long distance paths until Alice developed a knee problem and in 1996 had to retire. Stuart continued to walk locally and in 1999 started to join our fortnightly walks along long distance paths, completing 2,877 miles between 1999 and 2014. After completing the Downs' Link in 2015, aged 91, Stuart finally decided to give his walking boots a rest. At the age of 95, in order to keep up with group matters, particularly the social events, he enrolled on a local computer training course to learn about new



Stuart and Alice at the East Surrey Walkers AGM in 2018.

Photo: Pamela Cunliffe

technology and deal with emails.

He will be greatly missed at our events.

*Stephen Hanks
(with thanks to Pamela Cunliffe for help with this item).
East Surrey Walkers*

Elizabeth Parsons



Elizabeth is fifth from right in this group photo taken on a weekend in Salisbury in 2009.

It is with deep regret that we report the untimely sudden death of Elizabeth Parsons, who passed away on 8 January after a short illness. Elizabeth had an association with our group since its inception in February 1991. She was involved on the committee from the earliest days and meetings were held at her home.

Her walk in the first group programme was an Eynsford Circular on 30 June 1991 and her walks regularly appeared in our programmes for the succeeding 30 years. She took great pains in researching unusual walks in areas

off the beaten track. When she moved to Berkhamsted many years ago, new walking opportunities arose. An example was Elizabeth's last walk for us on 30 January 2021, which involved catching a bus from Milton Keynes to Grafton Regis then following the Grand Union Canal to Wolverton with a lunch stop at Thrupp. It was a very interesting walk for people happy to travel and see something new. Later that year she decided that the time had come to retire from walk leading.

The same attention to detail applied to her legendary and extremely popular weekends away

to places such as the Isle of Wight, Salisbury, Chichester and Stamford. Not only would Elizabeth carefully research the walks but would check out suitable accommodation. She was totally unflappable and took everything in her stride.

Rose Harley, who stood down recently as our Chair said that Elizabeth was one of the first people she knew in the group. She said that Elizabeth was cheerful, affable, friendly and had the effect of instantly making you want to go out rambling. It certainly worked for Rose who subsequently joined the committee and went on to become one of our most committed walk leaders.

Elizabeth led walks for other groups too, including more than 80 for Kensington Chelsea and Westminster Ramblers. We all owe Elizabeth a huge debt of gratitude for bringing so much joy, happiness and indeed fun to so many people. She will be sadly missed by so many of us and it was a privilege to have known her.

Finally, we send our profound condolences to Mike and Elizabeth's family.

*George Fletcher
Hammersmith, Fulham & Wandsworth Ramblers*



Some of the Amersham Ramblers party on the beach.

Photo: Bill Collins

Andrea retires as Chair

Having spent the last four years as Chair of Leighton Buzzard Ramblers and eleven consecutive years on the committee, Andrea Deeley stepped down from her post after our AGM in November. During her time as Chair, Andrea successfully guided the group through the pandemic, making sure all our members were kept up to date. She also oversaw the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in 2018, and throughout her tenure she dealt with numerous enquiries (both positive and negative!). Andrea is remaining with the group as a regular long walk leader and continues to administer our Facebook page.

Linda Hartley

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers



Andrea Deeley. Photo: Linda Hartley

Keeping busy

Our working party has been out in strength after a long lay-off during the pandemic and has been kept busy attending to overgrown footpaths and renewing rotten hanging posts on gates. An old squeeze stile was also replaced with a more user-friendly gate. Our AGM in November had to be switched to an online meeting at the last minute because of rising Covid rates and was attended by 29 members including the committee, all of whom were re-elected for a further year. Suggestions were made at the meeting to introduce shorter and slower walks, evening pub walks and a group holiday. We also saw the return of our Festival of Winter Walks with walks offered every other day from 17 - 31 December. Fortunately, the weather remained largely mild and dry up until Christmas Day after which many footpaths turned to deep, gloopy mud. Nevertheless, the last four walks were all fully booked and enjoyed by all.

Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers



Cheers everyone!

Photo: Richard Trimmer

Around the groups



Having fun on the Boxing Day walk. Photo: B Fisher

pleased to welcome Jan Kendall as our new Secretary.

Although the number of walks we offered in 2021 was about 50% down on a normal year, they were varied and well-attended. We enjoyed a good turn-out despite the rain and mud for our Christmas walk around Newton Longville and enjoyed stollen and a picnic lunch followed by a quiz. A new participant on our Boxing Day walk commented that it was 'excellent with friendly people'.

Although the pandemic continues to impact our activities, we hope to arrange a weekend in the Cotswolds in 2022 and that our annual coach ramble will return together with lots of interesting walks, thanks to the continued dedication of our walk leaders. We are always keen to welcome new members and walk leaders and encourage anyone interested to join our committee.

Maria Thompson
Programme & Publicity
Milton Keynes Ramblers

Committee changes

Sixteen members attended our AGM in November which followed a walk from Woburn Sands. Our thanks were extended to Sue Lloyd who stepped down as our Secretary and to Philip Catterall, who had been our Area representative.. We are

Just like old times

About 100 Croydon Ramblers attended our AGM on Saturday 8 November in the church hall at Sanderstead. It just felt like we had gone back to the good old days except for the fact that the windows were wide open, the lunch tables were spaced out, squirty hand gel was in abundance and a lot of face masks were being worn.

In the backroom, stalls were set out selling the usual array of goodies, pottery made by Gill, greetings cards and photo prints by Natasha, home-made jams and marmalades, wooly hats and gloves, unwanted or surplus walking gear and a

table full of books and maps. They were all doing a roaring trade - I only just managed to get myself a pot of damson jam!

We had to queue for the soup but the sandwiches and fruit were delivered to our tables by waiting staff recruited from the ranks of our members who also cleared the decks afterwards. Then our Chairman, Roy Endersby, called us to attention to commence the business side of the meeting. I never really understand how it works but suffice to say it didn't take too long. Then comes the raffle - I've still got my tickets - perhaps I can use them again?

Then it was my turn to wind up the old laptop, turn the

projector on and hope that everything was going to work. My audio visual presentation for this AGM was the same as I used in 2020 which, because it was on Zoom, did not come out as well as expected or draw as large an audience. The show lasted half an hour and was a look back to the beginning of the group in 1950, gradually working its way to 2020. The pictures and sound were good and most of the audience stayed awake and were most appreciative of my efforts. What more could I want?

We finished with a cup of tea and a slice or two of cake - what a splendid way to end a very enjoyable and social event.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers

In Ivel Valley

The AGM in November saw changes to the Footpath Officer with Derek Turner being replaced by John Clark and General Secretary retiring early in the new year and a replacement still to be found. There were also new members joining the committee. The Chairman thanked all officers, committee members and walk leaders for doing a tremendous job during a difficult 2021.

In recent years, apart from 2020, the Wednesday Walkers Christmas Lunch, organised brilliantly by Bernard and Mary, has been increasingly attended by other members of the group so much that it is now almost the group's annual dinner. For the 2021 lunch, the new venue of Stagden Golf Club proved to be another success. Following the morning walk led by Colin and Jackie on a wet and windy Wednesday in early December,

members enjoyed a meal of their choice followed by the reading by Mary of a Pam Ayres poem and finishing with a quiz and a prize for the winning table. A big thank you to Bernard and Mary for all the hard work in making the event such a success.

Some 10 days later was the annual mulled wine ramble followed by an excellent finger buffet. The morning walk was around the rapidly expanding village of Wootton and took in some green spaces deliberately left so as to show the end of Bedford and start of Wootton. During the walk the group used a path which had recently been cleared by our Area's RIPPLE team. Tina was instrumental in organising the mulled wine and buffet in the village hall which was well received. The group is gradually getting its walks programme back to normal and currently up to one month ahead. It is hoped to produce a four-month programme again in the summer.

Ivel Valley Walkers



Christmas lunch walk.

Photo: Martin Newman-Brown

Successful AGM

Surrey Young Walkers held their AGM on Saturday 16 October, this time as a face-to-face meeting. We started the day with a 10-mile circular walk at Box Hill. We managed to walk collectively as a group of 40 by providing two walks in parallel - one going clockwise around Box Hill and the other anti-clockwise. Both walks ended at the Stepping Stones pub where we held the meeting.

After a review of another successful walking year despite the restrictions, a full committee was voted in. Thank you to all the outgoing committee for your hard work!

For more information on our group go to <https://surreyyoungwalkers.org.uk>.

Joshua Collings
Membership Secretary, Surrey
Young Walkers



The 2022 Surrey Young Walkers committee. Left to right: Brian Kershaw, Richard Penna, Amy Filler, Joshua Collings, Holly Matthews, Tuelo Segwai, James Teunon, Peter Deakin and Alice Dugate.

Photo: Buu Lieu