

Walker

Kent Ramblers 'back on board'

Kent Ramblers celebrated the arrival of a new information board by the Big Bridge over the River Medway at Tonbridge on Sunday 19 March. Sited just below Tonbridge Castle, the new board promotes the three long-distance 'named walks' which intersect at Tonbridge.

The new board replaces a succession of Wealdway information boards which had stood on the site since the early 1990s. The original board was designed by the late Ramblers member, Geoff King, to promote the Wealdway, the long distance walk from Gravesend to Eastbourne, which he played a huge part in developing. Identical

boards were installed at Gravesend and Eastbourne and the Gravesend board is still in place. Sadly, during the night of Storm Eustice in February 2022, the Tonbridge board disappeared - likely carried down the Medway, never to be seen again!

Robert Peel, Area Secretary of Kent Ramblers, designed the new board. "It is printed onto an aluminium sheet which should better withstand the elements and general wear and tear", explained Robert. "Kent Ramblers funded the manufacturing and Kent County Council's Public Rights of Way team installed it for us". Kent Ramblers 'Named Walks' project aims to promote and improve Kent's many fine long-distance

walks. Profits from sales of guides to the walks have helped fund improvements such as waymarking and information boards.

Colin Sefton, Chair of Kent Ramblers, added: "It is good once again to have Kent's great walking opportunities and the role of the Ramblers advertised so prominently beneath Tonbridge Castle".

Kent Ramblers has plans for further similar projects, the next being promotion of the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk where it passes through Groombridge on the Kent/Sussex border.

*Nicola Brown
Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers
Those three 'named walks' which intersect at Tonbridge are the Eden*



At the unveiling of the new information board are (left to right) Graham Rusling (Kent County Council Public Rights of Way and Access Service Manager); Robert Peel (Area Secretary of Kent Ramblers); Colin Sefton (Chair of Kent Ramblers). Photo: Nicola Brown

Valley Walk (from west of Edenbridge to Tonbridge Castle); the Medway Valley Walk (from Tonbridge Castle to Rochester); and the Wealdway. The Kent Ramblers Guide to Three River Valley Walks in West Kent, which includes the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk, is available from <http://www.kentramblers.org.uk/books>, from the tourist information centre at Tonbridge Castle or from online booksellers.

Globe View Walkway completes City of London's riverside path

A section of the Thames Path in the City of London has reopened, removing a diversion that had been in place since 2003. In doing so, it has completed a long-held desire to open up the Thames riverside along the entire width of the City of London.

Originally closed following complaints of anti-social behaviour, in 2011, the City looked again at how they could reopen the walkway as part of the Riverside Walk enhancement strategy and Transport for London (TfL) paying for improvements to facilitate re-opening. The cost was estimated in the range of £500,000 to £650,000 but this became too expensive for TfL following budget restrictions caused by a fall in passenger numbers as a result of the pandemic. To get it restarted, the City of London tapped its own developer-supplied Section 106 (legal agreements between local authorities and developers linked to planning permission being granted) funds in October 2020 to get the path opened.

Work has been completed on a number of changes - lighting and widening in the main - to the corridor to remove or reduce the problems that caused it to be closed in 2003. A large metal joint, possibly for holding up the floor, which used to be lower down when this was a warehouse, is now an unexpected addition to the walkway. It's been painted in the City's heritage red, the same colour that's used on Blackfriars Bridge and Holborn Viaduct. As Ian Mansfield of Ian Visits says: "The splash of red adds a pleasing punctuation point within the passage".

This long-closed walkway, along with some changes to the riverside path on either side had been a bottleneck in plans to let people walk the full length of the riverside within the City of London. But now it's possible, for the first time ever, to walk from Temple to the Tower of London without having to divert away from the river.

Des Garrahan



The large metal joint painted in the City's heritage red. Photo: Des Garrahan



The view from the path which is named Globe View Walkway as it is across the Thames from the Globe Theatre on Bankside, a reconstruction of the playhouse for which Shakespeare wrote his plays.

White Cliffs Walking Week

White Cliffs Ramblers will be hosting a week of walking around the beautiful coast and countryside of East Kent from 17 -23 July. The event is open to Ramblers members and anyone who wishes to join us on a walk. There will be two or three walks each day, led and supported by volunteers from the group. Details of the programme will be in the walks section of the group's website www.whitecliffsramblers.org.uk once they are finalised.

Unfortunately, many of our dedicated team of volunteers who used to give up a great deal of their time and put in an enormous effort to organise our

festival in the past have decided to take a well-earned rest. Their hard work and commitment to the festival over the last 10 years attracted many people to visit our area and enjoy the benefits that walking in the countryside brings. The group wishes to thank them for their service. We are in the process of recruiting volunteers this year so that the festival can return in the future.

However, not to be discouraged, we are adapting to our situation. It is time to try something different. So please join us for our White Cliffs Ramblers Walking Week. A simpler affair but no less enjoyable.

*Lee Pickup
White Cliffs Ramblers*

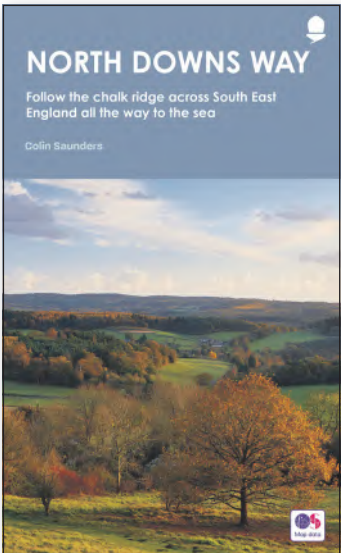


White Cliffs Ramblers enjoying the countryside near Alkham. Photo: Lee Pickup

North Downs Way guide updated

A new (4th) edition of the North Downs Way guide by Colin Saunders has been published by Aurum Press, an imprint of the Quarto publishing house. Last year the author re-walked all 125 miles (250 km) of the route from Farnham in Surrey to Dover in Kent via Folkestone, plus the 32 miles (51 km) of the alternative route via Canterbury, finding no major changes, but many minor details have changed. However, between Detling and Thurnham, Colin suggests taking a short diversion of 550 metres from the official route to go over, rather than below, the White Horse Country Park as this provides panoramic views in level open country, avoiding some 250 steps, up and down, mostly in woodland.

The book draws attention to the remarkable, recently-



Book cover.

installed creations of the North Downs Way Arts Trail that are passed, providing opportunities to take a rest at places with outstanding views, as well as the 'Ales of the Trail' passport, the North Downs Way Ambassadors and Google Trekker, all of which have featured in previous issues of *South East Walker*.



Salvaged timber has been used to create 'Monumenta Romana' near Shepherdswell in Kent, by Dover-based Charles Holland Architects. This section of the North Downs way National Trail also features on the Via Francigena pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome. Photo: Colin Saunders

Walk leaders' forum



Deborah Quow (on the right) leads a walk from Margate.

Photo: Jane O'Neill

Our committee is constantly searching for new ways to attract volunteers to fill roles within the Ramblers. In March they brought together a group of members interested in becoming walk leaders. In the past we have run a more formal navigation programme for interested parties but this meeting was different. Our 'Walk Leaders' Forum', the idea of our recently appointed Walks Coordinator Deborah Quow, came from the previous Walks Coordinators identifying the need for more walk leaders as several who had been leading for years were retiring. Deborah said the new format "was designed to allow interested potential walk leaders to plan a walk with guidance and support from a small team of experienced walk leaders from the group."

The forum was a small gathering with 11 volunteers taking up the offer of support. Activities included planning a walk - where to get ideas, the use of the Ordnance Survey online mapping app to plot a walk as well as paper maps and books. This was followed by an informal group discussion on issues that

may arise when leading a walk, an introduction to the risk assessment form and registration on Assemble. For continued development, experienced walk leaders offered their services as mentors to our new recruits by accompanying them on reces and help with preparing for the walks and paperwork, all designed to build confidence. For those that wished to develop their mapping skills one of our senior walk leaders offered individual tutorage. A real team effort.

Of the 11 participants, eight completely new walk leaders agreed to contribute a walk to our July-September programme. By the end of the session the willing new leaders had planned a walk. Two more of the group were new walk leaders and had already submitted a walk for our spring programme. For them the meeting was a chance to meet up with experienced walk leaders and share good practice.

In all it was an enjoyable, active, and highly successful afternoon. What became evident in the summing up was how different we all are. There were many ideas of what a good walk looks like and walk leaders have assorted views and ways of choosing and

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.

THE RAMBLERS

Address: 3rd Floor, 1 Clink Street, London SE1 9DG.
Switchboard: 020 3961 3300
Membership Services: 020 3961 3232
Email: ramblers@ramblers.org.uk
Web: www.ramblers.org.uk
Company registration no: 4458492
Registered charity no: 1093577

EDITORIAL

Editor: Les Douglas
Email: southeastwalker@gmail.com
Tel: 020 8809 2338

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preparing a walk. John Pye, our group's Chair, congratulated us on the session saying "Encouraging our members to volunteer to lead walks enables the group to provide a wide ranging and varied programme that gives a choice of walks to suit all ages and capabilities."

Being a walk leader gives volunteers the opportunity to choose, organise and prepare in a way that suits them, ensuring that everyone is safe, and they are aware of the risks. There is no prescriptive way of doing things and the wide range of ideas and views makes for a diverse programme of walks.

Lee Pickup
White Cliffs Ramblers

Vanguard Way



Members of the Vanguard Way Association gather round the plaque marking the Greenwich Meridian on Oxted Downs during a walk on 16 April. This was their first walk together since the organisation was formed last year to care for the 66-mile route from Croydon to Newhaven. Anyone who walks the trail or would like to support it can find details at vanguardway.org.uk. Photo: Angela Bellwood

Hainault Forest centre opened



The new visitor centre.

The Woodland Trust opened its first-ever visitor centre on 1 April at Hainault Forest on the borders of Essex and Redbridge. It is housed in former Victorian farm buildings which have been adapted to provide visitor facilities, craft workshops and a cafe (named 'Cafe 1856' after the former barn's year of construction). The cafe is open daily from 9am to 5pm. The openings marked the completion of phase 1 of the Hainault Forest Restoration Scheme which secured £7 million of funding in 2019 to restore and 'revitalise' Hainault Forest and encourage visitors to become more connected to the site.

Read now, walk later

THE ENGLAND COAST PATH - BOOK 1: THE SOUTH COAST

First and foremost a walking guide book needs to guide the walker clearly and accurately. So, for me, to quote architect Louis Sullivan, form follows function. In the case of walking guides this is a form that is at once familiar with the reader but also quite restricting for the author. To put it another way, an accurately written walking guide book might not be an enjoyable read but it doesn't matter how enjoyable the read might be if the guide isn't accurate. The challenge for any author writing such a book is to find a way to do both and thus separate their work from what is probably a very crowded field of competitors.

The establishment of the England Coast Path

is an extremely ambitious project. When complete it will be over 2,700 miles long and amongst its aims are the boosting of tourism, connecting communities, improving our physical and mental health, and allowing everyone to rediscover the simple pleasures of the English seaside. Britain is an island nation shaped by the sea and it will let all of us access, appreciate and enjoy our rich natural and maritime heritage.

The writing of any guidebook or books is no less ambitious. Christopher Goddard, the author of *The England Coast Path - Book 1: The South Coast*, from Gritstone Publishing, has chosen to divide the path into four: Book 1 takes you from the River Thames to the River Exe in Devon. A journey of 706 miles (1,137 km) of tremendously varied coastline that took him 54 days to complete with

a total ascent of 36,880 feet (11,240 m). He tells me his favourite part of the walk was around the Isle of Wight which is perhaps unsurprising as this walk contains a little bit of everything.

The book is a labour of love with every page showing the joy, fun and curiosity the author finds from being beside the seaside. There are quotes from Dickens, Shakespeare and Paul Theroux. The route descriptions are evocative and I loved the suggested playlists. Waiting on a Friend by the Rolling Stones in the section that includes nearby Dartford, where Mick Jagger grew up, is inspired.

This book passes the accuracy test with flying colours, is in a style loved by armchair walkers and is definitely a guide to read before planning your England Coast Path walk, whether short or long. It is pitched somewhere



An England Coast Path signpost near Newhaven in East Sussex.

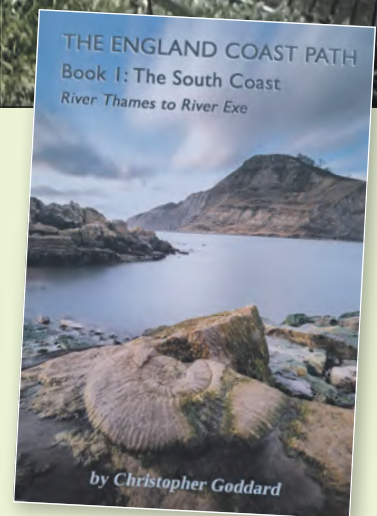
between coffee table/armchair walker style and an 'on the walk' guide.

The author offers some alternative routes and with Sheppey in Kent (where a decision on the route has still to be announced), for example, he starts with 'If the new route is not yet in place ...'

I have only one suggestion to make, and that is, I hope to hear more female voices in books 2, 3 and 4.

Des Garrahan

The England Coast Path - Book 1 (South Coast), by Chris Goddard, £15.99. ISBN 978-1-913625-09-2. was published by Gritstone Publishing in March.



Book cover.



INNER LONDON *insights*

Green Chain Walk guidance and maps published

The London Loop and Capital Ring project team are delighted to have been able to extend our project recently to include the Green Chain Walk.

New maps and guidance for the Green Chain Walk have been devised and are published at innerlondonramblers.org.uk/ideasforwalks/green-chain-walk-guides.html. Links from the TfL website are in place, and the old TfL guidance has been taken down. Particular thanks are due to Ian Bull and Andrew Hunt for the huge amount of work they both put into devising the maps, writing the guidance, designing the PDFs in line with TfL's accessibility guidelines and getting them published.

The 52-mile Green Chain Walk was London's first long-distance footpath, established and waymarked in 1977. It

links together over 300 open spaces and woodlands that form an arc of undeveloped land between the River Thames and Crystal Palace Park. The path is a branching network of 15 sections which provide many opportunities for circular and linear walks. The recent opening of the Elizabeth Line to Abbey Wood has made the Green Chain Walk more easily accessible to a much wider audience.

Our project volunteers are continuing to make waymarking improvements to both the London Loop and Capital Ring. Significant waymarking improvements have been made recently to sections 8 (Ewell to Kingston Bridge) and 16 (Elstree to Cockfosters) of the London Loop, making both much easier to walk. On section 16, an alternative route is proposed in our guidance that avoids all of the

main-road walking at the start, and there is also an alternative to the second (east) section alongside the A1. We are in the process of ordering yet more waymark discs and stickers for the London Loop as stocks have run low again.

On the Capital Ring we have started to install overlay stickers on fingerposts where the originals have bleached out due to the lack of UV coating. The first ones were installed in February on section 6 of the route in Wimbledon by Stan Bond and Jackie Gower. We are now ordering overlays for the London Loop as some of those fingerpost arrows are very faded and illegible too.

We're always keen to have more volunteers working on the project, so please contact vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk if you would like to get involved.

Clare Wadd

Vice Chair, Inner London Area



On the Green Chain Walk in south east London.

Photo: Jane Thompson



Many railway stations in south east London now have signs pointing to the exit for the Green Chain Walk and/or the Capital Ring, like here at New Beckenham.



Leisure walking in London and other urban areas

There's a reason why we don't start articles in South East Walker by listing motions debated at Ramblers General Council. With all that cumbersome prose, stifling formality and technical phrasing everybody would stop reading immediately. However, this year Inner London Area successfully proposed a motion with the title you can see above this article. And amongst other things it included:

"Council further calls upon the Board to ensure resources are invested:

- in the implementation of the London Leisure Walking Plan through the London Leisure Walking Forum;
- in ensuring that the strategy is emulated in towns and cities across Great Britain"

National policy and resource are important though. Without it the Ramblers wouldn't have achieved the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2000 or the England Coast Path in 2009, amongst other notable successes. Furthermore, in reporting back to General Council, Ramblers senior staff highlighted the recent successes in London. The future looks brighter for urban walking and we await the announcement on Ramblers strategy with expectations high.

Of course, the everyday work continues on the Capital Ring, LOOP, Green Chain Walk, Thames Path and the proposed new London Greenways. Routes are being audited, PDFs updated, waymarking improved, routine maintenance carried out on signage and much,



Waymarking improvements continue to be made. Photo: Des Garrahan

much more. The Ramblers would not be able to consider committing resource and effort nationally if it were not for all the myriad actions of our volunteers across the south east.

Des Garrahan
Chair, Inner London Area



Summer celebration

Join your group and friends on a walk in and around Brockham, taking in the lovely Surrey countryside, on Sunday 30 July. All groups are invited during the course of their walks to stop at Brockham Cricket Ground for a social get together to Celebrate Summer In Surrey. It's a wonderful

opportunity to spend the day with friends from your own group and talk to members of other groups, share ideas and stories. The first kettle will be boiled at 2.30pm.

There will be light refreshments (tea/coffee and cake) served by some of our lovely Area volunteers. In order to know how many to

cater for, please book your ticket via <https://surreyyoungwalkers.org.uk/walk-detail.php?id=1735> no later than 24 July.

If you don't fancy walking and just want to turn up then please be warned that there isn't a lot of car parking space at the cricket club. There is some street parking possible on local roads (but not a lot). I look forward to seeing you at the event.

Area AGM

Thank you to the 60 members of Surrey Area who attended our annual meeting held this year in East Horsley village hall on Saturday 4 February. There were a number of walks in the morning, by Woking, Kingston and Surrey Young Walkers groups and we were lucky with the weather though there was quite a lot of mud around.

I was quite nervous before we all sat down at 2.00pm as this was our first face-to-face AGM since before Covid and I was sitting at

the front talking into a microphone with the PowerPoint presentation behind me. However, the meeting went off without a problem and I'm extremely grateful to three volunteers (they know who they are) without whom the day wouldn't have happened. The afternoon ended with tea/coffee and cake and it was lovely to catch up with fellow members of the Area and to hear all the news from our different groups.

This year's officers are as follows: President - Brian Reader; Chair - Holly Matthews; Vice Chair - Elliott Caines; Secretary: vacant; Treasurer - Richard Lovell; Membership Officer - vacant; Footpath/Access: Andrew Bowden; Publicity - David



At the Surrey Area AGM in February.

Cooper; Website - Deb Skinner. As you can see, we are without both a Secretary and a Membership Officer, both of which are really important roles. We are looking for volunteers to step forward for these roles (or part of a role). If that is you, please contact me at chair@surreyramblers.org.uk.

Congratulations to Surrey Heath!

A success story was told to us at the annual meeting this year. Surrey Heath group really has something special and some amazing volunteers. It's a true wonder, considering the journey they have been on over the last two years. I couldn't have been prouder than to present them with the cup for the group with the biggest increase in membership during the past year and the biggest turnaround in fortune.

A full walks programme and several group holidays have all helped to make them a vibrant and successful group. Alexis Gould, their Membership Secretary, told me that the success was partly due to the use of Meetup to advertise walks to a wider audience and their reputation as being a friendly, fun and inclusive group have all helped to increase their net membership over the year.

Holly Matthews
Chair, Surrey Area



Surrey Heath's Membership Secretary Alexis Gould and Chairman Gordon Shefford receive the membership cup from Holly Matthews (right).

New gates for old stiles

Our path maintenance team, known affectionately as Ken's Krew, has been busy installing gates on a couple of paths. On a particularly awkward section of a public footpath off Tandridge Lane, where some of the stiles had been broken for years, four have now been replaced by gates and a narrow concrete bridge has been replaced with a new wooden bridge. The group funded two of the gates, Tandridge Parish Council funded another gate while the self-closing gate by the road was funded by Surrey County Council. On another path, near Oxted Mill, two fingerposts were repaired and a wooden kissing gate installed, funded by Titsey Rotary. These works should make both footpaths much easier to walk for all users.

Deb Skinner
East Surrey Walkers



A new footbridge and gate on Footpath 248 off Tandridge Lane. Photo: Barbara Bulman

Making a difference

Back in February 2022, our work party was tasked with reopening Footpath 533 in Hascombe which had been blocked for some time with fallen trees and brambles. The first task was to remove the dead wood, small bushes, brambles and ivy along the path. A team of 19 spent a hard day successfully clearing the lower 335-metre section of path. However, accessing this newly cleared section from Bridleway 201 required a scramble up an exposed slope.

After consulting Surrey County Council, a team of eight returned in March 2022 to install a flight of 17 steps, a waymark and a fingerpost. The steep slope and loose mixture of earth and leaves provided an extra frisson to the installation experience! Having successfully installed a beautifully inset step board we could step back to admire it, only to find that half the infill and supporting material had now cascaded to the bottom of the slope. Fortunately, dogged perseverance eventually won the day. Meanwhile another six volunteers continued to clear the 640-metre length of the upper path.

A year on, a group of Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers enjoyed the results of the work parties efforts by walking the path and safely negotiated the steps down to Hascombe and their lunch stop.

*John France and Jim Chipchase
Work party leaders, Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers*



The work party at the new steps.

Photo: Margaret France

Mammoth task

Our team of path maintenance volunteers completed a mammoth task adjacent to Henley Business Park in Normandy in April. The path forms part of the Fox Way, a 39-mile circuit around Guildford. The first task was to dig out either side of a sleeper bridge to install a ramp on each side with aggregate, using a petrol-driven compacting plate to ensure a smooth surface. On another section of the path, four finger posts and a waymarker were installed. There was also a requirement for vegetation to be cut along the entire route and plastic rubbish to be collected. The final part of the work included replacing some rotten handrails and supports on a bridge which had become a safety hazard.

A team from Guildford Ramblers usually goes out every month to carry out work which has been agreed with Surrey County Council. The council provides the tools for major tasks. The monthly working party makes a major contribution to maintaining and improving the paths in our part of Surrey.

*Richard Peters
Guildford Ramblers*



The Guildford footpath team prepares to build a ramp either side of a sleeper bridge.
Photo: Brian O'Connell



Ann McLaren: 48 years of service to the Ramblers



Ann McLaren (right) receives an engraved bowl from Ramblers trustee Lucy Robinson.
Photo: Mike Cannell

At Essex Area's AGM on 11 March, Ann McLaren was presented with an engraved bowl by trustee Lucy Robinson to mark her 48 years of involvement with the Ramblers. How to fit everything she has done in that time into 500 words is a real problem. We can only summarise the highlights.

Ann joined the Ramblers in 1975 and within a year was serving on the Brentwood Ramblers committee. Her decision to join was, she says, partly based on her liking for the rucksack logo, as it then was. Since then, she reckons, there have been maybe five rebrandings. Were they all worth it? A waste of money, Ann thinks.

Ann has served in virtually every capacity except Treasurer at group and Area level since she joined, and no longer in the best

of health has just retired as Area Membership Secretary. In 1995 she formed the Essex Friends group for older members who could still manage a slow two to four miles walk. "The fact that Essex has three such groups and has done so for over 20 years and they have kept so many walkers fulfilled and enthusiastic means the world to me." Her final stab at providing for rambling people in Essex was the 'Ramblers' Dining Club' set up for those who because of age or recovering from illness were unable to walk. She still organises this in an informal way for about 10 - 12 former members. Several groups including West Essex have taken the concept on board and hold their own Dining Club meals.

To celebrate the Ramblers 50th anniversary she helped to pioneer the Essex 100, consisting

of a 10 mile walk every day for 10 days. This lasted 20 years and was quite a logistical challenge as it involved various groups collaborating and organising coach travel. It was "like a holiday from home", and Ann recalls that she met a previously unknown second cousin, Eric Barker, through the Essex 100. Another pioneering effort was helping to develop a walk from Hadleigh to Stratford to celebrate the 2012 Olympics, Hadleigh being where most cycling events were held and Stratford the Olympic Park.

Having begun working life as a teacher for just three years, Ann became a civil servant. This presented a problem when, with her husband Eric and second husband Norman, she began to write walking guides. As a civil servant, she was barred from using her own name until her retirement in 1995 so they had to be published only in Norman's or Eric's names. (As an aside this seems overly restrictive: guidebooks are hardly likely to infringe civil servants' political neutrality.) In all, she has produced 10 publications, of which the most successful is Pub Walks in Essex, still available from Amazon, as are others. Another book focused on tea shop walks. In all, around 65,000 copies have been sold.

Ann still has views to express. As Membership Secretary she found the Insight Hub "slow and cumbersome" and the Ramblers interpretation of the General Data Protection Regulation requirements "made my previously easy job very hard"

Ann, you will be missed.

*Mike Cannell
Area Media Officer*

Marston Vale line:

Trains on the Bletchley to Bedford line have been suspended since December when the maintenance company Vivarail went into administration. A bus replacement service will run until the autumn when trains will return at peak times. Full train services are expected to resume in January 2024.

Short Walks Made Easy:

Ordnance Survey has launched a new series of guidebooks, each describing 10 walks of up to five miles. Chilterns and North Downs were published in April with South Downs to follow in July.

Hidden Hands: Women and Work in the Chilterns:

This free exhibition running at Wycombe Museum until 10 September looks at the lives of traditional skilled craftswomen across the woodlands of the central Chilterns. Details at wycombemuseum.org.uk/visit

Earth Photo:

A free exhibition showing a selection of shortlisted still and moving images telling stories about our fragile planet. At the Royal Geographical Society Pavilion in Exhibition Road, London SW7. Runs from 22 June - 23 August. (rgs.org/events/summer-2023/earth-photo-exhibition. 020 7591 3000).



Ramblers team helps open part of coast path



Work begins on the Hullbridge path.

Photos: Simon Swanson



The path restored.

In the previous issue we reported that Essex Ramblers were working successfully with Essex Highways to clear and waymark footpaths. But we also said that the Essex section of the England Coast Path was still a long way off being completed and the end date looked like being 2024 at best. Several sections were still being worked on or were yet to be agreed with landowners. The Ramblers were looking to work with Essex Highways to develop paths, which needed work parties.

So it is good to report that progress is being made. Simon Swanson of the South East Essex group has been involved in work on a section of the path at Hullbridge on the River Crouch. He says, "Some decades ago, the Crouch was allowed to breach its banks and flood an area of land, close to Brandy Hole, effectively severing Path 9, the coastal path at the time. No provision for a replacement was made. It also made half a kilometre of Path 8

from Lower Road, Hullbridge to the river wall pointless as it gave no useful access. So it had fallen into disuse and become completely obstructed by overgrowth. "But the coast path project now means that Essex Highways are working to deliver the Essex section from Canewdon to Battlesbridge and they have identified that Path 8 would be a useful access link. At the same time several Ramblers members involved in Pathwatch activities in the area were discussing with Essex Highways options for them to assist in clearing some path defects in the area, so a footpath clearance team was created. "After the footpath team undertook a couple of small sessions, they were asked if they could take on Hullbridge Path 8, if Essex Highways committed to replacing a missing footbridge at the river end. Over November to February a steadily growing team made up of members from South East Essex and the Rochford & Castle Point groups, along with a couple of Maldon&

Dengie group's path team, have worked on the path five times and it's now open. The photos show the level of work these volunteers have put in. Well done to the team led by Sue Leonard, Kevin Price and Mike Sullivan."

Good news indeed. Essex Area Council wants to encourage similar initiatives along the length of the proposed route and fully involve the six groups on the coast. All these groups are being asked if they can provide volunteers. Some members might be apprehensive about the potential level of commitment, but Russell Griffiths of Maldon & Dengie group told Area Council that his group had used word of mouth and had started with a small core. Members knew that they could be flexible and do as much or as little as they liked, and this was helpful in developing work parties with a mix of skills.

If you think you can help, please get in touch with your local group.

Mike Cannell
Area Media Officer



Area Secretary's diary

My last diary came as a revelation to some, not least my wife who often wonders what I am doing typing away at my keyboard for several hours a day.

The last quarter started badly with the resignation of one of our Sector Coordinators. We have four **Sector Coordinator** posts across Kent, responsible for guiding and supporting the 43 Local Footpath Officers who in turn look after our 387 parishes, in particular checking all proposals for diverting or extinguishing paths or for adding paths to the definitive map to get the best outcome for walkers. Two Sector Coordinator posts are now vacant and 91 parishes are without a permanent Local Footpath Officer so please email us on prow@kentramblers.org.uk if you would like to help - you will get plenty of support.

On 4 February we had our **Area AGM** in the village hall in Headcorn. After the formal business, which included passing a motion to General Council (effectively the Ramblers national AGM) asking for staff to be given a better understanding of Area and group needs, members enjoyed an excellent lunch and then chose between a short walk and a film about rambling in the mid-20th century.

Our long anticipated **information board** for installation in Tonbridge High Street was delivered in February, kindly installed by Kent County Council and 'unveiled' on 19 March as reported elsewhere in this issue. Flushed with that success, I have turned my attention back to our next information board which will be installed in Groombridge car park on the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk. I have today returned from a site visit where I discussed location with occupants of the Groombridge Men's Shed, also situated in Groombridge car park, who have agreed to undertake installation for us. The Shed was an amazing place, containing a really well equipped workshop and being a hive of activity with folk coming and going and carrying out tasks for the local community. Wonderful.

One of my many roles is to represent Kent Ramblers on the **High Weald Network**. This is an informal group set up by Sussex Ramblers with representatives from a range of amenity groups including CPRE, National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust to promote and support the work of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the designation of the High Weald as an AONB and we are wondering how to commemorate that. I am trying to persuade Walk magazine to run an article on the High Weald as, in my opinion, it is the finest walking area in the south east. Whether that happens or not, I am very much focused on producing a new guide to the Wealdway, a long-distance walk from Gravesend to Eastbourne which was created largely by Kent and Sussex Ramblers. If all goes to plan, the guide will be available by the time the next issue of South East Walker lands on your doormat. Another opportunity to enjoy the area is the High Weald Walking Festival, organised by Sussex Ramblers and the AONB team, which takes place from 9 to 17 September - more details at www.highwealdwalks.org.

Our further guides to the **Coast Path** remain on hold as the Inspector responsible for resolving objections to the proposed route has still not issued his final decisions despite the site meetings having taken place in November 2021.

In March, Colin Sefton (Kent Area Chairman) and I met with a senior member of Central Office staff to discuss how new staff might be given a better understanding of Area and group activities. This was prompted by the Kent motion to General Council mentioned earlier and we were pleased to find that our concerns were very much shared. Accordingly, subject to a couple of amendments, our motion was accepted by the Board and passed by General Council when it met at the National Exhibition Centre on 1 April. The General Council meeting was a very rushed affair which lacked the opportunity for exchanging ideas with representatives from other Areas that was very much a feature and benefit of pre-Covid General Council meetings.

I was intrigued to be invited last week to an **online meeting**, hosted by the editor of Walk magazine, with three other Ramblers volunteers. Two of us were very experienced volunteers - I led my

first Ramblers walk in 1979 at the age of 15 - and two were relative newcomers. We shared experiences and a report of the meeting is to be published in Walk - presumably accompanying this issue of South East Walker - as part of a Volunteers' Week celebration.

In May we will be holding a full-day meeting in Lenham for our **footpath volunteers** following a similar, successful event in October. I'm currently trying to pull together a programme focusing on planning applications, as these often require quite difficult judgements on whether to object where the impact on a footpath is only indirect, for example where it is detrimental to the view from the path. There have long been calls for clearer guidance on such cases and a recent flurry of applications for solar farms has served to highlight the difficulty.

Yesterday we received a complaint about a locked gate on the Greensand Way in East Peckham parish to which was attached a notice bearing the charming message **'WARNING. GUARD DOGS ON DUTY. DO NOT ENTER!'**. The relevant Local Footpath Officer, Dave Wetton, went out to take a look - the gate was no longer locked but the notice was still there.

He has taken the matter up with Kent County Council who have been quick to send an officer to the site to remove the notice but Dave is still worried about the possibility that there might really be dogs. Back in 2021 Dave had dealt with another notice on the same gate, on that occasion threatening a £20,000 fine for trespassing.

We take our stall to fewer events nowadays than we used to but a regular item in the calendar is the **Medway English Festival** at Riverside Country Park on the bank of the Thames and I was there again this April supporting the team from Medway Group who spent a busy day telling visitors about both their own walking programme and that of the local Health Walks team. It is hard to know how effective these events are but they do offer an opportunity to raise the profile of the Ramblers.

There's **never a dull moment** looking after the interests of walkers in Kent. Why not join us and share the excitement. Whatever skills you have or however much or little time you have to spare, we should be able to find a role for you.

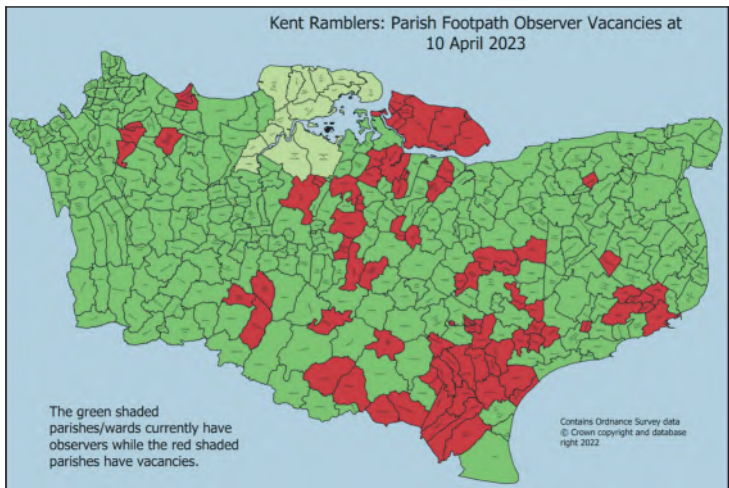
Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



At the Kent Area AGM with (left to right) Robert Peel, Vice Chairman Tony Bristow, Chairman Colin Sefton and John Billings, Chairman of Medway Group which hosted the meeting. Photo: Tony Faulkner



The High Weald.



We are looking for Parish Footpath Observers to fill vacancies in the red areas.



The offending sign at East Peckham.



At the Medway English Festival with Mayor of Medway, Cllr Jan Aldous, at the Medway Ramblers stall.

Photo: John Billings

The wrong trousers



Photo: Moira Moreman

I was looking back through some old photos and came across one of Croydon Ramblers taken in 1953. They were out on Colley Hill near Reigate, and the photographer makes a point of stating that "the ladies are in skirts and the men in flannel trousers". This got me thinking about the clothing choices we have these days before we go a-wandering.

Back in the 1960s, I remember my parents taking me on a shopping trip to buy me some long trousers. I ended up with some very smart but very itchy and uncomfortable dark grey trews. My complaints about the lack of comfort fell on deaf ears - I was told that they were quality trousers made of wool worsted. Worse was to come - my mother, god rest her soul, then decided to buy me some bright orange jeans. I wore them a few times under duress and soon found that I was the only boy in the world with bright orange jeans!

I digress. back to the matter in hand. The evening before my day out rambling, I watched the BBC weather. They have said recently that the temperature will struggle to get above 10 degrees and taking into account the wind chill factor it will feel a lot colder, also we are likely to have some heavy showers - so - very cold and possibly very wet. I, therefore, reach into my wardrobe and pull out my super-duper waterproof, windproof, stormproof, rip proof, all singing and dancing, very expensive (don't tell the wife!) hiking trousers. Now, these are not overtrousers - my legs are still nicely warm and dry - oh oh here comes the rain, a short sharp five minute shower - my legs are still nicely warm and dry - I'm feeling very smug, seeing other walkers staggering around trying to put on those ghastly over-trousers.

We turn left and start going up a steep hill, a long slope, the rain has stopped, and now the skies clear and the sun comes out - this was not in the forecast! The wind



Len is helped out of his zip-offs.

Photo: John Tickner



A total submersion test.

Photo: John Tickner

has dropped, the sun is beating down and my legs are cooking. I feel like one of those boil in the bag kippers!. All is not lost, the people who designed my trousers have put in side zips in order to let the steam out. What a relief! It is very easy to forget about these zips being open and on one occasion, returning after a ramble, I had to pop in the local supermarket and wondered why I was getting strange looks from people, and soon discovered that I was flashing rather a lot of thigh - not a pretty sight!

I do have in my wardrobe some waterproof overtrousers. They were quite expensive but they have certain drawbacks. Firstly they are really difficult to put on in a hurry especially over wet and muddy boots. You either have to sit on something wet or hop around on one leg and hope for the best. By the time you have them on, the inside of the legs are going to be wet and possibly muddy. As you walk along in the rain feeling content with your efforts, the rain will probably stop, the sun may well come out and your legs become very sweaty, which will condense onto the waterproof membrane thereby making your legs and inner trousers more damp than the outside of your overtrousers! So you might think it's stopped raining so take the damn things off - and that presents another set of problems. You need a volunteer to hold onto, so you don't fall in the mud, and another volunteer to pull your trousers off! In Croydon Ramblers, we can usually find some keen helpers to assist.

My Photo 2 shows Len being helped out of his zip-offs by Sue M and another member. What a good idea zip-offs are, you put them on when getting dressed for walking and the temperature is cool and as the thermometer rises you just unzip the leg part of the trousers, the zip being just above the knee - and then, you are wearing shorts. The only problem is that they can be difficult to remove, but some do have a vertical zip in the ankle/boot area to assist removal, but help may still be needed for balance and stability.

In Photo 3, Elizabeth accidentally tests the quality of her trousers by total submersion - this was an extreme test of trouser and anorak - needless to say they failed. And Photo 4 shows Dave, our publicity man, testing his trousers and his jumper and his shirt the hard way - he did manage to save his mobile - just! Phew, just lucky I had my camera with me.

I do have other walking trousers that were designed by a certain Peter Storm - with a name like that they have to be good! It says on the label that they are water-resistant - mmm - well they seem to absorb water quite readily but the good news is, being made of fairly thin material, they dry out quickly. Fair enough. Obviously the best breathable and waterproof membrane is your skin. Some of our more hardy walkers are quite happy any time of year to wear shorts, I do enjoy wearing shorts when the temperature is on the up and even in the rain you only need to carry a small towel to dry your legs, but when it does rain, the water tends to run down your legs and into your boots, which really is not comfortable - soggy socks and feet, no thank you.

So there you have it, decisions have to be made - what trousers will we wear? Even after over 70 years of outdoor experience, a Queen's scout badge, I still end up, more often than not, wearing the wrong trousers!

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



Dave tests his kit the hard way.

Photo: John Tickner

Reporting path issues

When I am out walking and come across an issue with the path network, I want to report the problem there and then, on a hand-held device, without having to tackle several council websites when I get home. The Ramblers' Pathwatch app enabled me to do that until it was

withdrawn last August.

Since then I have been experimenting with the what3words (w3w) app and found it to be a very suitable alternative. Using its 'photo mode', I can also mimic what I did previously. For example, in a report I recently made to Hertfordshire County Council - one of the few authorities in

the south east to provide an email address to 'share' the 'reports' with - I was able to quickly report a fallen waymark post.

All councils ought to provide an email address, or a dedicated mobile number. We are, after all, voluntarily helping them in their work, so how we report issues should be up to us, it's about options. There's too much focus on 'online' reporting currently, which, in my opinion, deters some from reporting issues. Technology has moved on. Natural England has realised this and

is currently developing an app, though probably, for more 'professional' use. The w3w app provides all the information authorities need, and works 'offline'.

I've even reported a suspiciously slain red kite to the RSPB using w3w (always backed up with Easting and Northing coordinates in 'Display settings' to avoid error). The bird was retrieved in 48 hours, emphasising the app's accuracy and usefulness.

Andrew Hussey

Boudicca's last battle

The devastating defeat of the Ancient Britons in AD 61, a defeat inflicted by a Roman legion, became a pivotal moment in British history. For the next four centuries, Britain was an outpost of the Roman Empire. Only a millennium later did another devastating defeat make a similar cultural and social change, the Normans winning the Battle of Hastings.

The events leading to this defeat in AD 61 are well known, because a woman warrior, Boudicca, led the Britons to their deaths. But this was only after numerous victories over the Romans, who were seeking to extend their control over Britain.

However, the one missing piece of information is where this final battle took place. On behalf of an enthusiastic amateur historian, the late Ian Bell, I wish to put forward his research into identifying the site. Based on his topographical inspections, including aerial viewing, he was able to select the site and I was able to visit and photograph this with him in 2009. Afterwards, as he was reaching the end, he contracted a virulent brain cancer. Within nine weeks, he passed over, leaving his wife Carole to grieve and his family having to sort out his estate. Unfortunately, the significance of his military writings was overlooked and, in the disposal of papers, his writings were discarded.

So, before describing his chosen site, we can refresh our knowledge of Boudicca's early victories. She was the wife of the king of the Icenii tribe, based around modern East Anglia. In AD 60, King Prasutagus collaborated with the Romans. But, when he died leaving half his kingdom to the Romans and half to his wife, the Romans seized the whole. Queen Boudicca was publicly whipped, their daughters raped. In revenge Boudicca raised a revolt and some 100,000 Britons, including the Trinovantes tribe, advanced to destroy Camulodunum (Colchester), their war chariots being very effective fighting machines in the defeat of the Legio IX Hispana legion. Londinium (London) followed and suffered the same fate, then Verulamium (St Albans). Tacitus records the horde of Britons swelled to 230,000 warriors, men, women and children.

Meanwhile the Roman governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus was, with his legions, destroying the Druids and their culture in Mona (Anglesey). On receiving news of the Roman disasters, he left his legions and rode south to join a legion which had not been engaged. At a site still unknown, the undisciplined Britons attacked the disciplined Legio XIV Gemina legion positioned across their path home to East Anglia: 230,000 against some 10,000 soldiers and auxiliaries. Discipline won the victory, Tacitus records the death of 400 Roman soldiers and the slaughter of 80,000 Britons. The fate of Boudicca is unknown. The Roman empire expanded north to become fixed on Hadrian's Wall,

Ian questioned the accuracy of the many battlefields that have been put forward and sought to relate the site to the likely movements of the horde of Britons milling around after Verulamium. Having destroyed by fire the three important Roman towns, they would have needed to consider finding food to feed their hordes as their supplies began to run low. These supplies were most likely to only be reliably found in East Anglia. The ancient pathway, the Ridgeway Path, offers the best route east and north.

Seeking a suitable site where to position a legion to command the Ridgeway Path, Ian discovered a hillside slope between Wendover and Tring. The grid reference in Hale Lane is SP 886074. This is shown as the ancient Icknield Way which joins the Ridgeway Path. The wooded Boddington Hill lies between the site and



The site between the Ridgeway Path and Boddington Hill.
Photos: George Bailey



The hillside slope above the Britons 'camp site'.

Wendover. On it is an Iron Age hillfort. At the foot of the hillside slope lies an open plain which could have accommodated the wagons, tents, livestock, plundered goods and other bits and pieces being carried by the Britons. The top of the slope is where the Roman legion could have been drawn up. The open ground at the bottom narrows as the slope is ascended. For a military force, outnumbered but highly disciplined, the layout is ideal, the right width to present itself ready to receive a charge from an enemy tiring from ascending the slope.

That tactic is described as being the essence of the battle. The Briton horde charged up the slope, probably on foot, before becoming impaled on the weapons being thrust or thrown at them from soldiers protected by their shields. As the warriors in front were cut down, those behind were pushed forward and suffered the same fate. This would have gone on with many dying in the crush. At some stage, the Roman soldiers would have sensed the collapsing morale of their enemy. They are then likely to have advanced down the slope, slaughtering any wounded they encountered and driving before them the remains of the Britons. Tacitus claims 80,000 Britons died. Not just warriors, but women and children would also have fallen to the sword. The soldiers could not be expected to show any mercy after the brutalities, including torture, suffered by the Roman residents of the three towns.

As a military historian well used to the Great War battlefields and 1815 Waterloo, it makes sense for the Romans to have positioned themselves above the Britons' 'camp site', inviting the Britons to charge them up the slope. The Britons meanwhile were blocked from their escape route along the Ridgeway and had to push the Romans aside. The Romans were probably well fed at the time whilst the Britons were starting to starve.

This suggested site for the battlefield can be found on Ordnance Survey Explorer 181 (Chiltern Hills North). If the slope can be agreed as the battlefield, it would reflect on the dedication of Ian Bell in searching for it and be a fitting memorial to him.

I am pleased to acknowledge the support of Carole Bell, the help of Cllr Patricia Birchley who represents the Chiltern Ridges Ward on Buckinghamshire Council, and Stephen Putman of Aylesbury & District Ramblers for their assistance with this article.

Dr George Bailey OBE MBA MA (War Studies).

Gateway to Summer

Half way down Godmersham Hill in the North Downs I came across this gateway. My words below were inspired partly by this gateway and partly by the many others through which we've passed on our thousands of miles of walking over the years.

*Strong on hinge and latch
the gate invites us:
push on, push through--
see where the track will lead you
now the ground is drying,
the larks somersaulting
overhead.*

*Don't you mind the bramble
coiling to snare you, catch
and snag you like barbed wire.
Disregard the nettle--but
leave it for the butterflies:
push on, push through--
see where the track will take you:*

*over wind-waved fields
of wheat and barley,
broad-beans, oats,
burning oil-seed rape ...
into moss-clumped valleys
under intricate oaks
where springs trickle out ...*

*where, invisible above you,
buzzards climb thermals,
mew or shriek for their prey,
where foxgloves raise spires
among the commonplace
of bracken, the curl and uncurl
of green ferns' long fractals.*

*Strong on hinge and catch
the gate invites us:
push on, push through
but latch that gate behind you.*

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher



Wales coast achievement

Two of our members, Alan and Eleanor, have recently completed walking the 870-mile Wales Coast Path. They walked it in stages from north to south (Queensferry in Flintshire to Chepstow) starting in April 2019 but, because of Covid restrictions,

did not finish it until January this year. What an achievement! They have previously walked England's longest National Trail, the 630-mile South West Coast Path.

Brian Poulton

South East Berks Ramblers



Alan and Eleanor take a break after their epic walk.

More Elmbridge towers



Semaphore House.

Photo: Rodney Whittaker

Richard Peters' article in the December South East Walker featured the impressive Chatley Heath tower, one of the 15 semaphore towers used by the Admiralty to send messages from London to Portsmouth. It mentioned the remains of another tower on Pewley Hill at Guildford but there is yet another of the 15 on Telegraph Hill in Hinchley Wood near Claygate.

Semaphore House at the top of Telegraph Hill was built in 1822 to serve as the fifth link in the chain to Portsmouth and was sold by the Admiralty when semaphore became obsolete in 1847. Now with a Grade II listing, it is a private house though Esher council showed great foresight in 1932 by buying up the surrounding open spaces of Telegraph Hill, a large area widely used for walking on a daily basis.

The Surrey branch of the Long Distance Walkers Association walked the whole line of the semaphore towers in 2008/9. The part over Telegraph Hill started at Berrylands station on the London side of Surbiton and continued past Chatley Heath to Horsley station. I have devised a walk from the nearby Hinchley Wood station to Chatley Heath, largely over commons and

footpaths. This 11-mile walk, with a pub stop after seven miles, returning from either Effingham Junction or Horsley, can be broken up into shorter stages, starting and returning from different stations along the London - Guildford via Cobham line. Kingston Ramblers plan to incorporate the route into their programme.

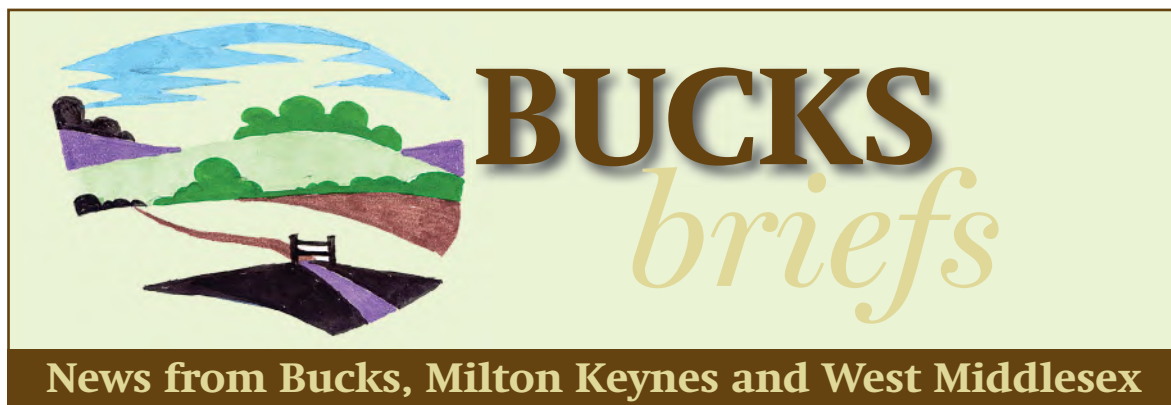
The walk can also take in the impressive Ruxley Towers in Claygate. Originally a hunting lodge built for Henry VIII, the Ruxley estate was bought by the fifth Baron Foley for his new wife and he added the tower in 1870. Somewhat controversially, the buildings became the headquarters of the General & Municipal Workers Union in 1964, complete with its own golf course and swimming pool. The estate is now wholly given over to housing and the tower is a luxury flat. This was most recently in the news when a certain Rolling Stones guitarist rented the tower for himself and his girlfriend; for the tabloids it was, inevitably, 'Ronnie Wood's love nest'.

Rodney Whittaker



Ruxley Towers in Claygate.

Photo: Rodney Whittaker



Area AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area was held on Saturday 4 February at The Wades Centre in Princes Risborough with 26 people attending. It was good to be back to a normal face-to-face meeting following a Zoom meeting in 2021 and a hybrid meeting in 2022, but it remains a disappointment that such a small proportion of our membership, just over 1%, takes

this opportunity to participate in Ramblers' democratic processes.

We offered a choice of two walks in the morning, before the meeting, led by Paul Rhodes and Tim Axten, with a total attendance rather higher than for the meeting itself.

In the December issue I expressed concern that the Area might be unable to continue functioning effectively if we were unable to recruit new officers. That situation has been, at least temporarily, averted. We have a new Vice Chairman, Trevor Jones, in the light of which Paul Rhodes has agreed to continue as Chairman and myself

as Acting Secretary for one more year. However, identifying a new Area Secretary, or possibly dividing this role between two or three individuals, remains a high priority.

The formal business was followed by a walking-related quiz, kindly organised by Kate Lambourne, recently retired Chair of Amersham and District Group. Then we heard from a Ramblers' trustee, Bekah Cork, with a brief update on recent national Ramblers developments.

John Esslemont

Acting Area Secretary

Milton Keynes Ramblers meet local MP

Following the publicity from the Ramblers national right-to-roam campaign I wrote to Ben Everitt, Conservative MP for Milton Keynes North (my MP). I was pleased to receive a positive response and an invitation to meet him at his local office to discuss issues of common interest.

Three of us from MK Ramblers and MK Access Forum (representing walking and cycling interests), Deborah Cooper, Gail Dunn and I, were joined by Ramblers past president and Area Footpath Secretary Kate Ashbrook on 10 February for a meeting with Ben. While we did explain the need for a wider right to roam in the national context and deplored the government's failure to provide public access, we also argued for better access to the countryside surrounding Milton Keynes, especially along the rivers where there are few if any public rights of way.

We raised the recent decision by



Ben Everitt with the Ramblers. Left to right: Deborah Cooper, Philip Ashbourne, Ben Everitt, Kate Ashbrook, Gail Dunn. Photo: Liam Andrews

MK Council's planning committee not to extend the redways cycle/footway system to include safe crossings of main roads, by underpasses or bridges, in new expansion areas. The vote had been narrow: 6 - 5. Ben was clearly aware of this issue but as an MP he has little influence on local planning issues.

Kate, speaking for Ramblers and the Open Spaces Society, told Ben about the failure of the government to include payment for access in the environmental land management

scheme (ELMS). Ben, who grew up on a farm, was sympathetic, saying 'When people can access the countryside, they appreciate how it works'. We definitely agree! He subsequently asked a parliamentary question for us about ELMS, but sadly received a stock response.

We all enjoyed meeting and hope to arrange to walk with Ben in the summer. He will be hearing more from us.

Phil Ashbourn

Milton Keynes Ramblers

Path inspection pays dividends with HS2

Many footpaths across Buckinghamshire have been closed by HS2, which carves through the length of the county from south-east to north-west. In my work with Aylesbury & District Ramblers as the parish path checker for Quainton, I found that part of one path had been closed for no obvious reason as it did not cross the route of HS2. This closure was in the centre of the parish network, and it meant that there were no off-road routes west from Quainton village that could link up with the main north-south bridleway across the parish.

I notified Buckinghamshire Council of the closure through its website and, several months later, I was pleased to receive an email from its Strategic Access Officer to say that the HS2 contractor had listened and created a through route for walkers, linking the east-west path from Quainton village to the bridleway going north. The section of path that has been opened is at Railway Cottage (grid ref SP729202) and extends a short distance west to 727203.



Railway Cottage and the re-opened path. Photo: Charles Todd

We are very grateful for the support of our county council in pushing for the re-opening of this short section of path which means there are now a variety of options for circular walks to the west from Quainton village.

Charles Todd



BUCKS

briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Village pub route to be fully gated

With pubs closing at ever-frightening frequency many villages are losing the only one left. So where's the nearest and how do you get there? In Berton, on the east side of Aylesbury both pubs have closed but just two and a half miles (4 km) north across the fields in Weedon is the smashing Five Elms. To get there one used to have to negotiate a series of high, single-step stiles, just about possible on the outward journey but definitely risky on the return. With our footpath champions negotiating hard with local farmers we've got job sheets from Buckinghamshire Council to replace the stiles.

John, who lives in Berton and who's actually one of our team, works

closely with the parish council that gets support from the Mike Griffin Trust making it possible for them to regularly donate gates in both Berton and Hulcott. In Weedon, our friendly parish councillor Wendy is proactive in addressing the needs of local walkers and organising Donate-a-Gate contributions.

Bill Piers
North Bucks rRIPPLE
For more on the



A warm welcome awaits walkers at the Five Elms in Weedon.

'Donate-a-Gate' scheme go to <http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html>



This Secure-a-Field kissing gate replaced an awkward stile. Photos: Bill Piers



BEDFORDSHIRE

bulletin

Area update

In the previous issue it was reported that "the Area is currently mothballed" following the retirements and resignations of three of the Area officers. We have received at least one enquiry from a member regarding the status of the Bedfordshire groups and would like to provide an update.

The group Chairs, together with Area Treasurer Kevin Barrett and Vanessa Slawson (Regional Engagement Officer at Central Office) have met to discuss the way forward and we are delighted to announce that the four Bedfordshire groups (Ivel Valley, Lea & Icknield (Luton), Leighton Buzzard and North Beds) are all delivering full and varied walks programmes for you to enjoy.

Our Area Treasurer has set up signatories to ensure that payments can be made as required and we have agreed a system for authorising any expenses, thus stabilising our financial processes.

After some discussion we agreed that the current combination of Area/group

officers would work in two main spheres until a full Area committee can be re-established. During 2023 we will be focussing on footpaths and rights of way and delivering a slimmed-down Festival of Autumn Walks.

We are delighted that a husband and wife team has volunteered to step into the Area Footpath Officer role. We extend a warm welcome to Stephen and Patrizia Franks and hope that they will be able to get up to speed very soon, ably supported by the footpath team at Central Office and group Footpath Officers.

We are still looking for volunteers to step into Area roles, so if you feel you would like to support walking in Bedfordshire and are interested in one of the following: Area Chair, Secretary or Publicity Officer, please contact your group Chair or Membership Secretary or Vanessa (vanessa.slawson@ramblers.org.uk) who will be able to provide more information.

Anne Griffiths
on behalf of group Chairs, Bedfordshire Area

Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks 2023

Bedfordshire Ramblers groups are really pleased to announce that the Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks will be continuing this year.

The Chairs of Leighton Buzzard,

Ivel Valley, Lea & Icknield (Luton) and North Bedfordshire groups have formed a festival committee. The event will take place from 9 to 17 September and provide a variety of daily walks throughout the county to tempt walkers old

and new to explore the beautiful and varied Bedfordshire landscape. Details can be found at <http://www.lbramblers.org.uk/bfaw.php>.

Stephanie Collins

New year, new challenges for Beds RIPPLE

There was no rest for our RIPPLE volunteers for no sooner had the old year ended and the new one began, they were soon back in action with the challenge of putting in waymark posts, adding discs and doing clearance work at Colmworth. Rising to the challenge with an excellent turnout, and helped by the landowner dropping off posts at agreed locations and transporting tools to the start, our volunteers were soon hard at work and all 12 posts were installed and vegetation cleared by early afternoon. After a break the disc team set about adding the directional discs onto the posts. This task is easy if the path goes straight ahead or turns right or left but where it goes off at an angle there is often quite a discussion. People have their own views as to the angle of the disc. The day's task was finally completed before the sun went down. This was a big task and our RIPPLE volunteers had once again risen to the challenge.

Between this and the next group task there were a number of small tasks involving two or three people. At Bolnhurst a short length of footpath between a fence and a ditch had become overgrown and people were using a route through a garden. At Upper Dean a post needed relocating and discs were needed on waymark posts in the locality. At Wilden a bridge over a ditch and leading

to a stile had become overgrown and unused since the farmer had left the adjoining gate open for a number of years. The bridge needed clearing as the gate was to be closed and fastened ready for the field to be used again by livestock.

Two marker posts were erected in Wootton and not far away a couple of gates were cleared of vegetation.

In March our volunteers completed a task in Pertenhall begun last September when we carried out a survey of paths in the parish and made recommendations. The council has acted on those recommendations and we have also replaced four missing or damaged waymark posts and cleared vegetation. Pertenhall Parish Council has thanked us.

Also in March two waymark posts were put in, discs replaced and a challenging clearance task completed in Oakley, plus six posts put in and minor clearance done in Thurleigh near the airfield.

Our work has been recognised by the Mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson, who said "I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the RIPPLE team from the Ramblers for their invaluable support throughout the year. Their team provided much needed assistance with clearing vegetation and installing new waymark posts throughout the borough." In addition to the work done by our RIPPLE volunteers the council's works team has improved bridges, steps, handrails and byways and has been working to refurbish



The footbridge at Wilden when RIPPLE volunteers arrived. Photos: Barry Ingram



The same scene later.



The team at Colmworth install the last post.

and replace 20 of the borough's most important bridges. In addition the council has installed 20 metal finger posts to help guide visitors.

Barry Ingram
Bedfordshire RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Public Paths for Local Enjoyment)



OXFORDSHIRE *on-line*

Footpath matters

Diversions, claims etc

The public inquiry into the extinguishment of the Culham rail crossing ended on 26 January and we await the verdict.

We have received a complicated diversion proposal for paths in Bix Underwood which have been blocked for 50 years. Most involve minor straightening, but Nettlebed Parish Council is objecting to a larger diversion of the main bridleway between Bix and Nettlebed. Retaining the definitive route will involve a tremendous amount of tree-felling, and there are indications that most of the diversion route is along the historic route of the bridleway.

A proposal to divert the paths in Bletchington Park would see the access from FP5 to Bletchington and Kirtlington simplified, instead

of meeting FP6 in the middle of a field, and FPs 4, 6 and 7 straightened so that they no longer make a dogleg to the Bletchington Park stable block, which is no longer any use to man or beast.

We have also received a creation and extinguishment proposal for the former Burford road from Bridewell Farm in North Leigh to North Leigh Lane. The result would be to create a north-south restricted byway along BR31 and FP32, retaining the old Burford road, part of which is FP5, as a bridleway across the arable. Consequently we would get two new rights of way for the price of one.

The modification orders for Yarnton FP23/24 (closed off by the school), Burford BR24 and Westwell BR4, Deddington FP24 (a path in the village), and Henley FP35 (a path in Lambridge

Woods) have been confirmed.

Other matters Oxfordshire Area is still in need of a Southern Area Footpath Secretary and a Lost Ways Co-ordinator. I will be retiring from both roles at the next Area AGM in January 2024.

I did a recce for a walk from Islip, and found on the way back that a completely new bridge had been installed. Unfortunately it had been neither anchored nor weighted, so my photo shows the sight which greeted me, necessitating a detour along a track festooned with 'No Right of Way' signs. I can now at last see the problem on the county map, which states 'Mitigated'. I haven't yet had time to re-check.

David Godfrey
Area Footpath Secretary



When is a bridge not a bridge? At least it has a waymark disc on it!

Photo: David Godfrey



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Mill Lane at Barton Court, Kintbury



The locked gate across the eastern end of Mill Lane with additional fencing to block what at first appeared to be a gap left for pedestrian access. Photo: Richard Trimmer

Change is inevitable but not always desirable. Until very recently and throughout living memory the owners of Barton Court have allowed people living in and around Kintbury to pass freely along Mill Lane. This is the lane which links Kint/14 (the footpath between Kintbury and Avington) and Kint/13 (the footpath between Station Road north of Kintbury and Elcot).

The connection is some 300 metres long and provides a safe passage for runners, dog walkers and family groups. The alternative route involves walking along the busy Station Road which has blind bends with no pavement, creating a real danger for the many users who have historically enjoyed the safe access along Mill Lane.

A gate has recently been erected across Mill Lane which denies access to all but invited persons to Barton Court. As a ramble I view this as a great shame. Ramblers cannot now enjoy the circular walk from Kintbury using the two paths connected via Mill Lane. More significant is the loss of safe access for the people of Kintbury to the surrounding areas north of the village.

I am particularly saddened by the loss of access for the residents of the children's home 'Spinney House' at the Station Road end of Mill Lane; staff have previously taken the children on evening walks along Mill Lane to the lake but have not done so since Mill Lane was blocked by the locked gate.

On behalf of West Berkshire Ramblers I have asked the Countryside Team at West Berkshire Council to consider declaring Mill Lane a public footpath based on common usage for a period exceeding the last 20 years. I understand that the council's Countryside Officer is preparing a submission for the councillors to make a preliminary decision on whether or not to put Mill Lane on the list of 'claims to be determined' in 2023/2024.

To assist the process, I have received 29 witness statements plus a testimonial from a former resident of Barton Court all confirming that the public enjoyed unfettered access along Mill Lane going back to the 1960s. I encourage anyone who has ever used Mill Lane, whether just once or regularly, to email me at efutcher@gmail.com and I will forward a witness statement form to complete. Once returned to me, your statement will be added to the existing statements already submitted to the Countryside Team.

We are all encouraged to walk for physical health and mental wellbeing, both of which will be well served if Mill Lane can be granted footpath status.

Eugene Futcher
Chair, West Berkshire Ramblers



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Updating Wokingham's definitive map

Members of Loddon Valley Ramblers walked all 140 miles (238 km) of Wokingham borough's footpaths, bridleways and byways to record the location of 84 stiles, 231 gates, 108 bridges, 21 benches and 876 signs. All the information was passed on to Wokingham Borough Council which added the data to its updated definitive map of rights of way and can now be viewed online on the council's website (www.wokingham.gov.uk and search for 'find a public right of way').

The task was carried out by our 15 footpath wardens, who monitor the network all year round and report problems. The council created a special map and survey for the wardens to record the information using their smartphones. Their efforts were hugely appreciated as the council's officers were keen to produce this map but would have found it difficult to find the time to do so. It will be especially useful for those with limited mobility, who may struggle to negotiate stiles or may want to plan rest breaks along

the way. We are working with the council to replace as many stiles as possible with gates to improve access.

Cllr Ian Shenton, executive member for environment, sport and leisure said: "We really appreciate the Ramblers role in helping us update the map and improve the amount and quality of information available. This was a fantastic example of partnership working, tapping into the expertise of a dedicated local group for a task that would have cost us a great deal of time and money when we're already facing unprecedented financial challenges."

We've always tried to work in partnership with the council as we have the same aims in many areas - in this case, widening access to the footpath network and checking its accuracy. We flatter ourselves that we did a very thorough job, and it is hard to see how anyone else could have undertaken the work our volunteers did, given their detailed and extensive knowledge of their own parishes.

Steve Vale

Footpath Officer, Loddon Valley Ramblers



Steve Vale records a gate on a Wokingham path, observed by Cllr Ian Shenton.

Photo: James Burton/Wokingham Borough Council

Wish you were here?

Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire

Twenty-six members of our group went on a four-day walking trip with HF Holidays at Harrington House in Bourton-on-the-Water last October. Harrington House is in the middle of the village, which made for some enjoyable exploring when we weren't walking.

Some of our group chose to go on self-guided walks to visit local places of interest such as Hidcote Gardens, Chedworth Roman Villa and Broadway. Those on the guided walks visited the nearby Rissington villages, the source of the River Thames which was completely dry on the day of our visit, and the impressive Cirencester Park with its beautiful beech trees lining the long drive into Cirencester. Those going further afield walked via the Gloucestershire and Diamond Ways, visiting the villages of Notgrove and Cold Aston.

As always with HF holidays there was entertainment in the evenings. HF runs an inter-house quiz and Bourton has missed the elusive first prize for some time. Unfortunately we didn't change their run of bad luck! On our last night we took part in the 'boat race' down the Windrush. We were asked to construct 'Boats' from any material we could find. Sandwich boxes,



Enjoying the 'boat race'.

Photo: Sheila Vallance

leaves, crisp packets, sticks all turned up. They were launched and all, amazingly, reached the finish line.

The walk leaders provided by HF were excellent and, along with a great group of our members, helped to make it a very enjoyable few days.

*Julie Clayton
Epsom and Ewell Ramblers*

Hardy Way, Dorset

On a lovely sunny day in the summer of 2019, two Henley & Goring members were in Dorset doing a recce for our planned long distance weekends' walks over the following two winters, when we saw a cute little green bus with the name Dorset Community Transport (DCT) on the side. We checked it out on the web, registered our group with them and DCT became our transport on the linear walks around Dorset for the whole of the 220-miles long Hardy Way.

The plan was to walk five weekends in the winter of 2019/20 and five weekends in 2020/21, finishing in March 2021. However, Covid got in the way and we were only able to complete the walk in February this year. The composition of the group of walkers varied a bit over such a long period but a core of those who started at Hardy's Cottage in September 2019 were still there when we reached the graveyard where Thomas Hardy's heart is buried in Stinsford near Dorchester, having circumnavigated the county of Dorset. Our furthest point north was Shaftesbury, furthest south was Portland Bill, east was Cranborne Chase and west was Beaminster. We stayed in Dorchester, Weymouth, Wareham, Yeovil and Shaftesbury, travelling by car to the pick-up points where the DCT bus transported us to the start of the walks. We had lots of convivial evening meals in pubs and restaurants and great Sunday lunches before driving home.

The route is full of interest and variety made even more

interesting because so many of the places we walked were associated with Hardy's life and immortalised in his novels. The real and imagined landscapes blended as we trod in the footsteps of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and the Mayor of Casterbridge. When we walked the Blackmore valley stage it was cold, wet and muddy, so all too easy to imagine Tess, abandoned by Angel, picking turnips in the winter fields.

I can never forget the fantastic view from the prison cafe high on Portland Bill where we had lunch. We could see from Old Harry's Rock right along Portland Bill and Chesil Beach, the vista made even more dramatic by the rapid changes from brilliant sunshine to white-out and driving rain. Not funny at the time but a good story afterwards, I remember when some of the group got completely stuck in mud while crossing fields in the Blackmore valley and had to be rescued by stronger members of the group. We could not fail to be impressed by the range and variety of the landscapes from the open heaths, delightful villages and small towns to dramatic coastal sections, all of which had associated cultural and historical stories - Badbury Rings, the harbour at Wareham, Wimborne Minster, Gold Hill (the 'Hovis street') at Shaftesbury, lagoons where Bomber Harris tested his bouncing bomb, beaches where troops trained for the Normandy landings, the resort of Weymouth.

The Hardy Way is an amazing long-distance walk and although it took us two years longer than planned to complete, I think everyone who went on all or just some stages were glad that they did.

*Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers*



On one of the coastal sections of the Hardy Way.

Photo: Joan Clark

Marlborough, Wiltshire

In early April, 12 Hillingdon Ramblers took a two-day mini walking break based in Marlborough. The walks were led by Barbara Macdonald, who knows the area well and led a walking holiday here for us last year. Given the weeks of cold and rain preceding these two days, we were very lucky that the clouds lifted and the sun came out especially on the second day

where the spectacular views and early spring colours were made so much more enjoyable.

Both day's walks were in the Vale of Pewsey where we walked through delightful villages with picture-postcard thatched cottages. This area is so rich in history and beauty and is marked by numerous ancient earthworks and by more obvious features such as the prominent white horses carved into the hillsides. We

walked along a few short stretches of the Kennet & Avon Canal and had time for browsing in churches and enjoying tea and cakes along the way. A few of us overindulged at our afternoon tea stop on the second day and payback was a long steep hill shortly afterwards!

We are all very appreciative of the time and effort put in by Barbara in putting this little get-away together.

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers



Descending towards Oare village.

Photo: Simon Thornhill



The group in Wells.

Photo: Graham Evans

Wells, Somerset

For our first short break of 2023 we decided to go to Wells, where our Chairman had negotiated an attractive two-night package at the White Swan Hotel, opposite the cathedral.

Our first walk took us up Glastonbury Tor to admire the views before returning to Wells for a talk by a local guide which gave us an insight into the history of the city. Our second walk was to Wookey Hole and Ebor Gorge before offering a choice of exploring the caves or taking a longer route back to our hotel. Our final walk

was around the famous Cheddar Gorge. We'd marked this walk as 'moderate' but rain had made the two steep climbs at the top of the gorge rather slippery. However everyone made it and there was later a choice of routes back to Wells.

Although heavy downpours were forecast we managed to dodge the worst of them, though conditions underfoot were sometimes boggy and slippery. Once again the efforts of our Chairman and walk leaders who volunteered to recce and lead the walks resulted in another successful break for the 28 members who joined the trip.

Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers

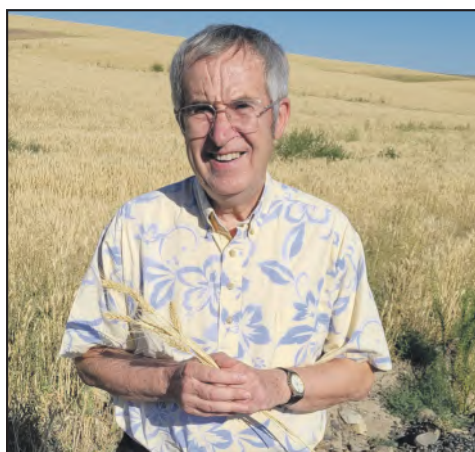
Those we have lost

David Mark

We were much saddened to learn of the sudden death of our fellow walker David Mark on 17 March following a brain aneurysm. David was our Secretary and he was both assiduous and professional in his approach to the role which he took on three years ago. He also led walks for the group and was an amicable and cheerful leader.

David was a pupil at Battersea Grammar School, and later studied physics at Sussex University where he gained a first-class degree, with a minor in Russian. This led to a career as a system analyst for Esso. David made the most of life and, in addition to rambling, loved steam trains, particularly the Bluebell Railway. He travelled on many well-known train routes and journeys, most recently in Switzerland. Like me, as a child, he used to love seeing the trains passing through Wandsworth Common. He also enjoyed watching Formula 1.

He was a talented photographer and his slides were recognised by the Royal Photographic Society. David also had an interest in local history and from time to



time attended meetings of the Tooting History Group and local history walks and talks. He was well travelled and visited the USA, New Zealand and trekked in Nepal. He is survived by his younger brother Pete who now lives in Hawaii.

After such a full and busy life, David had one other task to complete; and perhaps the greatest of gifts to give, because he made provision for his eyes and kidneys to be donated. This was the final chapter in a life well lived. Thank you David, and rest in peace. We miss you.

Rose Harley
Hammersmith, Fulham & Wandsworth Ramblers

Margaret Lauder

Members of our group were very sad to hear of the death of our Chair, Margaret Lauder, so soon after being diagnosed with leukaemia. Margaret joined Epsom & Ewell Ramblers in 2008, around the time she retired as a head teacher of a Surrey primary school. Before long she became a walk leader and member of the committee, firstly as our Newsletter Editor and then our Chair about four years ago.

Margaret was a very active person and had lots of interests. She enjoyed watching football and was a Fulham season ticket holder. She joined a local bowling club, playing several times a week in the summer months and taking part in friendly matches and championships. For a while Margaret was involved in amateur dramatics but the demands of teaching meant she had to give that up, but she belonged to

several choirs over the years.

For many years she spent part of her summer holiday camping in the Scilly Isles with friends and that may be where she developed her interest in the work of the RNLI. For more than 10 years she was a volunteer with the local branch serving on the committee, rattling collection buckets in Epsom High Street and selling RNLI Christmas cards at local events. Visitors arriving at Clandon House and Hatchlands might well have been welcomed by her as she was a National Trust volunteer there.

Margaret celebrated her 70th birthday during lockdown with only family and close friends; numbers were still restricted so she had to hold the event outside. We had a committee meeting in her garden soon after that.

As an active member, Margaret always joined in, and helped organise social activities, day trips and holidays for our members.

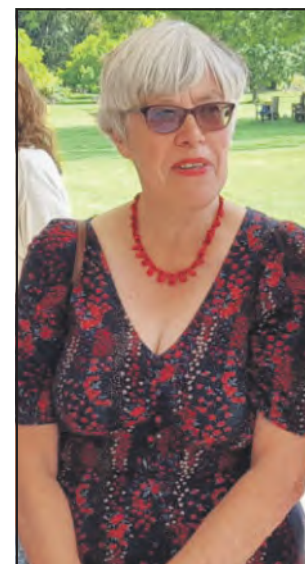


Photo: Don MacLeod

The group had been on a walking holiday to the Isle of Wight, where she led a walk one day, shortly before her diagnosis.

The group held a memorial walk and tea in April to celebrate her life. The walk was one she often led along the Hogsmill river in Ewell. Her sociability, amusing and interesting company, determination and leadership will be greatly missed.

Linda Buckley
Epsom & Ewell Ramblers

Purbeck link:

In Dorset, the Swanage Railway is again running trains from the main line at Wareham (connecting with trains from London Waterloo, etc) to Corfe Castle and Swanage. These will run on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays until 9 September with through tickets available from South Western Railway stations.

Richmond Park minibus:

The free minibus service RP1 in Richmond Park has been expanded to run three days a week this year (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) with the season extended to 29 November. As well as doing a circuit of the park, the route links with other buses at Ham and with Mortlake station. For details go to royalparks.org.uk/parks/richmond-park and follow links.

West Reservoir, Stoke Newington:

Hackney Council in north east London has consulted on plans to provide public access to this large open space and improve the existing path along the north side of the reservoir which forms part of the Capital Ring and New River Path. The East Reservoir is already accessible and managed by the London Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.

Chess Valley Walk 'relaunched':

New information boards and signs have been installed and path improvements carried out along this 10-mile route which follows the River Chess from Rickmansworth to Chesham. An updated leaflet can be downloaded from chilternsaonb.org. The work has been funded by the Chalk Streams and Wetlands Meadow project, a partnership between the Chilterns Conservation Board and Chiltern Society.

Grand walks

As well as having easy walks of a few miles at a leisurely pace we also offer 'Grand Walks' which are strenuous and at a brisk pace. These take place in the Chiltern hills where you can enjoy glorious countryside with some steep climbs. The 'Grand' series is composed of three walks which start from the village of Ibstone and offer the highest ascent possible within the shortest distance. The walk distances range from 19 - 23 km, include up to 10 hills, and up to 800 m of ascent with the added challenge of completing the walks within a set time. If you are looking to improve your fitness and stamina you would be very welcome to join us. Our full walks programme at <https://sites.google.com/view/chilternsweekendwalkers/home>.

Pierre Roche
Chiltern Weekend Walkers



On Turville Hill.

Photo: Pierre Roche



Ready to start at Ivinghoe Beacon.

Photo: Beth Stark

Ridgeway challenge

To celebrate the Ridgeway National Trail turning 50 this year we decided to walk the entire route over the coming months. We kicked this off on Saturday 11 March when 23 walkers joined us for the first 11.8 miles from Ivinghoe Beacon to Wendover. A few of us, slightly distracted by the stunning views from the beacon, immediately fell over in the mud - leader included!

We were very pleased that some of our newest members and walkers from other groups were attracted by the challenge of walking the whole route, and happy that so many were able to carpool from

the end back to the start. Along the way we entertained ourselves by thinking of things we could track, such as miles walked, number of people completing the challenge, number of pub stops and number of times lost (zero, so far).

Our next legs took place on 10 April (Wendover to Chinnor) and 7 May (Chinnor to Wallingford). We'll continue to do one section a month until August, when we'll cover the last two legs from Uffington White Horse to Ogbourne St George and onto Overton over one weekend.

Beth Stark
Chiltern Young Walkers

Following the Len

Our 'Wednesday Walkers' enjoy a challenge and recently took on the Len Valley Walk, a 13-mile hike which follows the River Len from Maidstone through Mote Park and via Leeds Castle to Lenham. The route can be walked in one go or in stages and is highly recommended.

Beverley Johnston
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers



Our members on the Len Valley Walk with Leeds Castle in the background.

Photo: Mike Hickmott

Full house

It was a full house for our quiz night on Saturday 11 March at South Farnham School and expertly organised by former Chair, Chris Hodge, and his tech-savvy wife Sue. Sixty-three members turned out to pit their wits against some of the finest brains our group has to

offer. A bar kept us fueled as Team Elstead stormed in triumphantly followed by Team Frensham. The scores were displayed on a spreadsheet lit up on a large screen so that we all knew who we had to beat! Some of us languished in the doldrums but that didn't stop us from having a great night out.

Claire Griffiths
Farnham & District Ramblers



At the quiz night.

Photo: Sue Harvey

Delayed certificate

In mid-January we presented Denise Cherry with a certificate for leading 219 walks for us. More usually, certificates would be issued after 100 or even 200 walks but on this occasion due to a number of reasons, Denise's certificate was delayed. However, not many people can claim to have led 219 walks. Indeed, it is almost a record in our group and certainly the oddest number to have been printed on a certificate!

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers



Denise with her certificate.

Photo: Inge Mikkelsen



Mountnessing windmill passed on the walk from Shenfield in March.

Photo: Mike Wheeler

Elizabeth Line rambles

Trish volunteered to lead for us three circular rambles from stations on the Elizabeth Line for our March to June programme. The first, entitled 'End of the Line', was from Shenfield and passed the windmill at Mountnessing.. The second, called 'Earthly Paradise and Political Scandals', was from Maidenhead and included Cookham

and the Thames Path. The June walk will be 'A Forgotten Garden and a Unique Church', from Harold Wood. Trish is one of our long-standing leaders who delights in seeking and devising innovative walks, sometimes with a theme.

Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers

Going forward

We recently celebrated 20 years of walking together. Our membership continues to grow and last year we welcomed some new walk leaders. We are fortunate in having existing leaders who are happy to mentor new leaders coming forward. Our programme is varied and a holiday in Suffolk is planned.

On the social side we offer those who may be experiencing difficulties in walking a chance to meet up midweek to keep in touch and enjoy lunch together. With an enthusiastic committee and keen members we are going forward at pace.

Pauline Macfarlane
Lea Valley Friends



Group member and local historian Dennis Galvin (fourth from left) led the group on a walk around Highams Park. Photo: Pauline Macfarlane

Family market

Our group was invited by the town council to participate in an Easter Family Fair where charities were allocated a free stall if they offered a free activity for children. As the new Publicity Officer I thought this would be a great opportunity to raise our profile in the town. We had not taken part in a family market before so I needed to devise some activities that children would have fun engaging in but would also have a rambling twist. I opted for an Easter Chick adventure walk storyboard with rambling

equipment and an Easter Bunny egg hiding worksheet, using map symbols and grid plotting.

We were incredibly lucky with the weather and our pitch was on the sunny side of the street. I had several volunteers from our group to help throughout the day, which was just as well as there was huge interest in the Ramblers and engagement in the activities with happy children, parents and grandparents. The town council has since invited us to four more themed markets and the Mayor has asked if she could join us on one of our walks!

*Stephanie Collins
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*



Mayor of Leighton Linslade, Cllr Farzana Kharawala (centre) with Pamela Bates (left) and Stephanie Collins. Photo: Pamela Bates.

Goat herder

In February we held our post-Christmas lunch in the Bird in Hand at Sandhurst with long and short walks before the meal. Twenty-nine people attended the event and feedback received has been very positive.

Our committee meetings are still held on Zoom and this appears to suit our committee members.

On one of our recent walks we spotted some goats who soon decided to join us. The photo shows them being expertly led by our newly-appointed goat herder, Steve Wells!

*Brian Poulton
South East Berks
Ramblers*



Steve Wells leads the newcomers.

Photo: Andrew Johnson

Programme continues

Our varied programme has continued, thanks to the walk leaders who have come forward, and we now have walks of between five and 11 miles most weekends. Attendances are good and our membership numbers remain stable. Our

popular evening walks returned in May and we were pleased to support the Milton Keynes Walking Festival organised by the local parks trust over the weekend of 12 - 14 May.

*Ian Dunford
Milton Keynes Ramblers*

On the Bunyan Trail

This year we are walking one of Bedfordshire's most famous routes, the 86-mile John Bunyan Trail. We are walking the trail in quarterly stages, each around 10 - 14 miles and new walkers are most welcome to join us. Fourteen of our members completed the first 12-mile stretch from Elstow to Shillington in February and a similar number walked the next 14 miles from Shillington to Streatley. The next section is planned for Saturday 24 June, from Streatley to Westoning. This 12-mile part of the trail passes the famous, but now dead, 'Bunyan's Oak Tree' where Bunyan is said to have preached shortly before his arrest and subsequent interrogation at nearby Lower Samshill. Please see our website (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/north-bedfordshire>) for further

details if you would like to join us.

As part of the Coronation celebrations on Monday 8 May (designated nationally as 'The Big Help Out' where volunteer groups are asked to 'lend a hand, make a change'. we marked the occasion with a litter pick around the Bedford Park area before a six-mile walk from the park, through our historic cemetery and into the countryside to the north of Bedford.

On 1 July we will have our summer event - a morning walk from beautiful Ampthill Park (also on the John Bunyan Trail) led by our Footpath Officer, Steve Woodward, followed by a picnic in the park. You are most welcome to join us. Look on our website (see above) or follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/groups/northbedsramblers/) for further details.

*Graham Stark and Anne Griffiths
North Beds Ramblers*

In praise of short walks

Some people might think rambling is for hardy individuals who walk long distances in shorts and heavy boots with an Ordnance Survey map slung around their necks. But we are not all like that are we? Most of us simply enjoy getting out for a walk which helps to keep us fit and healthy as well as enjoying the social aspect of meeting fellow walkers. For me, just concentrating on putting one foot in front of another seems to clear my mind of the troubles of the world and helps me sort out my thoughts so that when I return tired, yes, but also feeling much better for the exercise.

I lead a monthly short walk on

Saturday mornings of about two or three miles for those like me and many others who still want to walk but for shorter distances. Some might call us 'amblers' but it really doesn't matter. Our Saturday group is not exclusively a bunch of OAPs ambling along at 1 mph. We also attract all ages of like-minded ramblers who enjoy getting out for a walk in all weathers and seasons, who appreciate the slower pace allowing for chatting and looking at the scenery. We have ages ranging from 90+ to people in their 40s on our walks all around our local area. Why not give us a try?

*Michael Howes
Pang Valley Ramblers*



Singing in the rain.

Photo: Gloria Barnard

Successful season

Our programme between October and March included a walk around Windsor Great Park, our traditional mulled wine and mince pie walk at Peper Harow and a tour around the Grade I-listed Brookwood Cemetery. This diverse selection of walks was well attended with an average turn out of 20, with 42%

of our members walking at least once during the winter. Our bi-weekly evening walks started at the end of April and our '2024 Feature Walk' is being planned which should see us complete the 39-mile Fox Way circular walk around Guildford in four stages.

*Graham Evans
Surrey Heath
Ramblers*

Scrub clearance

About 15 of our members helped Natural England staff and volunteers clear some scrubland at Thursley National Nature Reserve on Sunday 22 January. We were joined also by wardens from the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership. This was all thanks to a brilliant initiative by our

member Victoria Huth who made it all happen. The aim was to create a better habitat for various insects and reptiles who play a key role in the biodiversity of the reserve. Armed with saws and loppers loaned by Natural England, we worked hard from the morning until the afternoon with breaks in between. Even

our new Chair, Nathan, fresh from running a half marathon that morning, came to help.

The feedback from Natural England was that they were delighted with our efforts and look forward to welcoming us back. It was a fun day had by all and we have more volunteering days already planned.

*Peter Deakin
Surrey Young
Walkers*

Around the groups

Five complete the Seven Shires Way

Starting in the autumn of 2021, five of our members completed the 234 miles round the border of Oxfordshire - the Seven Shires Way - in early January. The route was devised by Elaine Steane who has been a member of the Oxford group for many years. The route, which is well marked, goes in and out of bordering counties

(hence the name). The route starts and ends at Moreton in Marsh. It's a very varied route that goes near several battle sites, along the Thames Path for a while and on the Berkshire Downs and through some lovely villages. Conversations along the way included discussions about the difference between a skirmish and a battle (there is a committee

to determine these things!) and lamenting not having picked some of the lovely sprouts in a field the route went through. Coincidentally after the group had completed the Seven Shires Way, they looked up other trails that are not too far away and came up with the Roman Way which they discovered was also devised by Elaine!

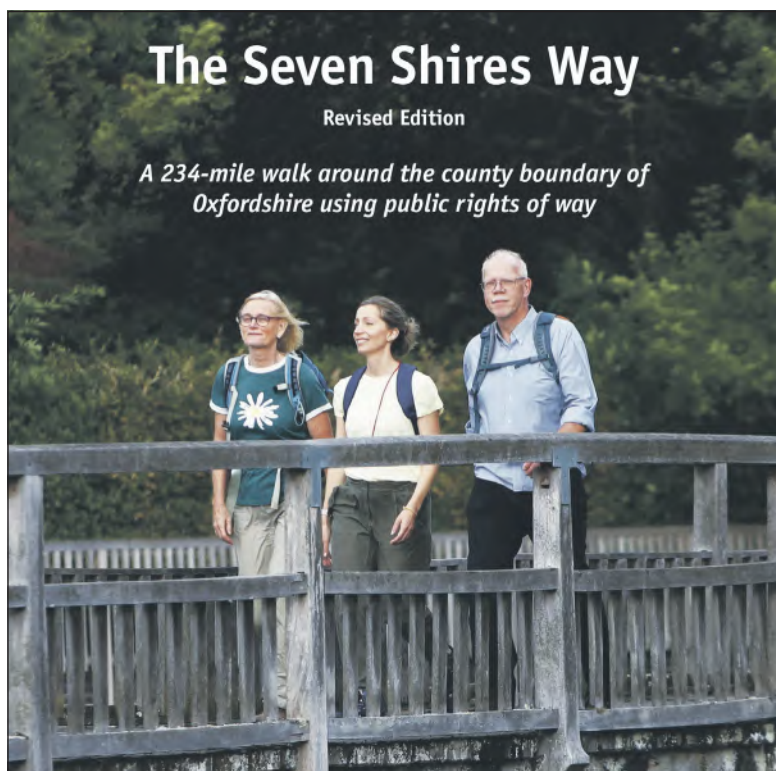
*Linda King
Thame & Wheatley
Ramblers*



At the Four Shires monument which marks where Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire once met.

Photo: Ken King

An updated 2023 guidebook to the Seven Shires Way has been published. Copies can be obtained from Blackwell's, local bookshops or via Oxford Group member (and author) Elaine Steane at e.fullardsteane@gmail.com, price £9.99 plus £4.00 p&cp, ISBN 978-1-915787-40-8. All the sections have Ordnance Survey map extracts and car parking information plus vividly detailed illustrations of archaeological, historical, botanical and literary interest.



Guidebook cover.

Thirty years a volunteer

Robin Cooper has stepped down from our committee. He has been a member of the group for around 30 years and has been involved with volunteering in many different ways. Whether

he's out with our path clearance team or leading walks, Robin has played a big part in our group. Most weeks he'll be out on one of our walks or will act as a back-marker which, because of his height, helps everyone spot him easily. On our

last rambling holiday in Cromer we presented Robin with a framed picture of him leading a walk during a previous group visit to Norfolk nine years ago. Robin was striding out in front with the Cley-next-the-Sea windmill in the background.

*June Hammond
Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers*



Robin strides out.

Photo: John James

A day of sunshine

We were lucky with the weather when we welcomed our friends from the London Blind Ramblers to explore some of Ealing's lovely parks on the first Sunday in April. The walk attracted a large number of members from both groups and was thoroughly enjoyed by all as much for the lively conversations as the actual walking. We had lunch in Gunnersbury Park on the terrace of the recently restored Regency mansion and enjoyed the spring flowers and cherry blossom in the extensive gardens.

The London Blind Ramblers run a programme of

walks every Sunday from April to the end of October, walking both in London and in the surrounding countryside. Their members are all keen walkers who just need a bit of assistance to be able to enjoy rambling like the rest of us. They rely on Ramblers groups to host the walk for them, planning the route and providing guides to assist those visually impaired members who need support, usually by offering an arm and giving warnings of potential hazards. They are always looking for new groups who might be interested in hosting a walk. To find out more about what it involves, please go to <https://londonblindramblers.org.uk/> or email enquiries@londonblindramblers.org.uk.

*Jackie Gower
West London Ramblers*



Enjoying the sunshine in Gunnersbury Park.

Photo: Jackie Gower

Ring completed

Members of our group completed walking the Capital Ring in London in March. The route was to be walked in 15 monthly stages starting in January 2020 but with Covid lockdowns, rail strikes and bad weather delays, we finally finished the walk 39 months later! Numbers varied but we had 25 on the section across Richmond Park and 10 for the final leg. We are indebted to Colin Saunders for his guidebook to the route and to Inner London Ramblers who keep route details up to date on their excellent website.

*Steve Wells
South East Berkshire Ramblers*



On the final stage of the Capital Ring.

Photo: Andrew Johnson