

Walker

Signing the Maidenhead Millennium Walk

Since spring this year, East Berks Ramblers and the Maidenhead Civic Society have been hard at work waymarking the eight-mile Hurley to Maidenhead Millennium Walk.

The route runs between Hurley and Maidenhead Riverside, connecting at each end with the Thames Path National Trail. The route was devised by Margaret Bowdery, the East Berks Footpath Secretary, and Ann Darracott, Maidenhead Civic Society's Projects Coordinator, to celebrate the Millennium. It mostly uses existing public rights of way, together with some permissive paths crossing land owned by the Berkshire College of Agriculture, National Trust and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

The route does include some stretches of road walking and we continue to campaign to secure safer and more enjoyable alternatives using countryside paths. Some years ago we were successful in securing access across Battlemead Common near Cookham, purchased by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for public use and to provide a missing link in the

Millennium Walk. A spur route from Pinkneys Green to the Thames Path at Marlow has also been added.

The route is very popular and we wanted to waymark it so that people could walk all or part of it without having to rely solely on the leaflet. The project was approved by the Windsor and Maidenhead Access Forum and Maidenhead Civic Society and East Berks Ramblers set up a small committee to plan and carry out the work. Each contributed £500 towards the costs and help was also forthcoming from the council's parish paths scheme and Rotary Bridge. The council's footpaths team were very helpful when it came to selecting suppliers.

We first surveyed the route to ensure it was in good order and to plan where waymarker discs and finger pointers were needed. The walk takes the same route as the Maidenhead Boundary Walk for part of the way and we took the opportunity to work with Rotary Bridge, who organise an annual fundraising event along the Boundary Walk, to refresh their signage and avoid unnecessary duplication. The main walk is now fully signed and we will waymark the



Left to right: Ann Darracott and Tim Burt of Maidenhead Civic Society, Steve Gillons of East Berks Ramblers and Maureen Bell of Maidenhead Civic Society. Photo: Bridget Morris

Marlow spur when funding allows.

Project Coordinator Ann Darracott says 'The Millennium Walk is a valuable addition to walking in this area as it connects with the Thames Path and the Green Way walks, both of which are already waymarked. It is an attractive walk for all to enjoy and our waymarking has made it more

welcoming and easier to follow'.

The project has shown the benefit of partnership working with other organisations. Thanks to the contributions of local groups, volunteers and official bodies such as the council and the College of Agriculture we have together delivered a significant improvement to the local paths

network that can be enjoyed by all.

*Steve Gillons
East Berks Ramblers*

A downloadable map of the Maidenhead Millennium Walk can be found under the Publications and Reports tab on the Maidenhead Civic Society's website at www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk.

New Greenway for London

We're delighted to announce that the first of the six new Greenways we campaigned for during the last mayoral election campaign is scheduled to open in early 2024.

The Green Link Walk will run from the edge of Epping Forest near Wood Street station in north east London to Peckham in the south. It is the evolution of the Five Boroughs Link route proposed as one of the six new Greenways in 2021. The Green Link Walk will connect a number of low traffic neighbourhoods in Islington and Hackney, with green spaces including parks, waterways and marshes, and will feature newly greened streets.

It will pass through Walthamstow town centre, before going through the Wetlands, Walthamstow Marsh and Leyton Marsh, Millfields Park, over Hackney Downs, then

over London Fields, through Stonebridge Gardens in Haggerston, along the Regent's Canal to Angel, through Smithfield, and over the Millennium Bridge. It will then follow the Low Line through the Elephant, including Elephant Park and Victory Community Park, Salisbury Row, and then through Burgess Park and into Peckham. Points of interest include medieval monasteries, an ancient market, almshouses, Georgian and Victorian terraces, 21st century buildings and both St Paul's Cathedral and Tate Modern.

The Green Link Walk will form part of Transport for London's Walk London network, meeting the Capital Ring at Lea Bridge Road. Route guidance will appear on our website, www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk, on Go Jauntly's app, and on a new Footways map at <https://footways.london>. The route can, of course, be walked in either direction, and in its entirety or in sections,



A new Green Link Walk sign.

Photo: Transport for London.

with public transport links throughout. Keep an eye out for wayfinding signage - in a distinctive green and yellow design - which is expected to start appearing

towards the end of 2023 ahead of a launch event in the spring of 2024.

*Clare Wadd
Inner London Ramblers*

Graham Butler Mile takes shape

Seven gates replacing stiles have been installed along a one-mile stretch of the Vanguard Way at Warren Barn Farm on Nore Hill, near Woldingham, Surrey. It will be called 'The Graham Butler Mile' to commemorate a member of Surrey Ramblers and the Vanguards Rambling Club who died in 2018 and worked so hard over several decades on many projects that have benefitted walkers, especially the 66-mile Vanguard Way from Croydon to Newhaven. Some £4,500 was raised by the Vanguards and Surrey Ramblers to cover the cost of the gates.

The mile of the Vanguard Way concerned follows footpaths 16a in Chelsham & Farleigh parish and 16 in Woldingham parish, starting at Limsfield Road and ending at Slines Oak Road. Under the supervision of Surrey County Council's Countryside Access team, one of the gates was installed by Croydon Ramblers, the others by members of several other Surrey Ramblers volunteer teams. The original plan was for kissing gates at all seven locations, but in practice the chalky ground was found to be too hard and steep for this, so standard self-closing gates (with posts to limit opening) have been installed in four cases, with the agreement of the farmer.

Surrey County Council and the Vanguard Way Association have upgraded signage along the Mile, and a short flight of steps leading down to Slines Oak Road has been refurbished by the council.

Colin Saunders



A new gate at Slines Oak Road, one end of the Graham Butler Mile. Photo: Colin Saunders

A launch ceremony for the Graham Butler Mile is being planned for spring 2024. For further information email Colin Saunders, Chair of the Vanguard Way Association at chair@vanguardway.org.uk. For more information on the Vanguard Way go to vanguardway.org.uk.

Another section of coast path opened in Sussex

A 44-mile (71km) section of the King Charles III England Coast Path, from West Wittering to Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex, was officially opened by

Natural England in October.

Jim Seymour, Natural England's area manager for Kent and Sussex said: "This new trail has spectacular sweeping coastal views, beautiful spots like Pagham Harbour, and abundant wildlife at Medmerry while providing sustainable sea defences."

This new stretch starts by the sand dunes at West Wittering, near the mouth of Chichester Harbour, a popular spot with a long sandy beach. The path then follows the open coast eastwards and inland beside the raised seawall bank around Medmerry. This had a recent realignment of the coast by the Environment Agency and is now a new RSPB nature reserve. Returning to the open coast, the trail goes around Selsey Bill towards Pagham Harbour.

Next comes Bognor Regis seafront promenade. Along this section, on shingle beaches in

places, you pass through Felpham and Middleton-on-Sea. Between Elmer and Littlehampton Harbour, the trail follows a section of natural coastline including the sand dunes and shingle beach at Climping. After Littlehampton the trail uses public footpaths across grassland and along promenades adjacent to the open coast, through the seaside villages of Rustington, East Preston, Ferring and Goring-by-Sea, then to the seaside resort of Worthing and past the beach huts at Lancing.

Works along this new section have provided new boardwalks, improved path surfaces and better signage. Natural England worked with a number of partners including West Sussex County Council, RSPB, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Ramblers and the district councils. The adjoining section, from Shoreham-by-Sea to Eastbourne, opened in 2022.

* Also in October, the 25-mile (40km) section of the King Charles III England Coast Path from Ramsgate to Whitstable in Kent, was officially opened.



At Shoreham-by-Sea the England Coast Path crosses the mouth of the River Adur.

Studios Walk opened at Shepperton

Shepperton Studios in Surrey officially opened the River Ash Corridor, known as Studios Walk, on 26 September following the completion of work carried out in partnership with Spelthorne Council.

The River Ash community and ecology enhancements included an investment of about £1 million into Studios Walk which runs along the Shepperton Studios boundary. The works aim to improve the site's amenity value for the public, whilst maximising the wildlife and biodiversity potential. Pathways have been extended, benches added and a new stepped footbridge, Sherwood Bridge, installed to create a one-mile (1.75km) loop walk. Bird and

bat boxes have been installed and wildlife refuge areas, where access is restricted, allow native vegetation and wildlife to thrive.

The shallow River Ash is a key ecological feature within Spelthorne District, flowing for about six miles (10km) from Staines Moor to the River Thames. Studios Walk also forms part of the landscape associated with the historic Littleton House and Park, and has an interesting association with Shepperton Studios, most famously providing a backdrop for some scenes in the classic 1951 film The African Queen.

Studios Walk can be accessed via a gate on Squires Bridge Road next to the River Ash (grid ref TQ 070685) on Explorer map 160.



Sherwood Bridge on Studios Walk.



Along the River Ash Corridor.

Historic garden site to be restored

The National Trust has acquired Munstead Wood, once the home of designer and author Gertrude Jekyll, near Godalming in Surrey. The garden is of international importance as it was here that Jekyll evolved her planting schemes and developed her collaboration with Sir Edwin Lutyens who designed the Grade 1-listed Arts & Crafts style house at the heart of the garden. The trust is now working to restore the site and reopen it to visitors.

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: 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA.
Switchboard: 020 3961 3300
Membership Services: 020 3961 3232
Email: ramblers@ramblers.zendesk.com
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

DESIGN AND PRINT
Designed by DPS: 01529 300452
Printed by Blackmore Ltd

Opinions expressed by contributors are not specifically endorsed by The Ramblers.
ISSN 1747-4140
© 2023 The Ramblers.
All rights reserved.

Copy Date: For issue No. 125 is 12 January 2024.



New life for Bridge to Nowhere



In south London's Burgess Park, Southwark Council has restored a steel lattice girder bridge which once crossed the Grand Surrey Canal. The canal closed in 1970 and was later filled in but the footbridge survived and in recent years has been closed off because of its poor condition. After renovation work the bridge - known as 'The Bridge to Nowhere' - reopened in September can be crossed again. The Friends of Burgess Park have devised a heritage trail which includes the bridge and this can be found on their website at bridgetonowhere.friendsofburgesspark.org.uk.

Solar farm plan threatens paths



A recent Ramblers walk along one of the paths affected by the Stonestreet Green Solar proposal. Photo: Andrew Swarbrick

To the south east of Ashford in Kent, between the large Inland Border Facility with the new M20 junction which was constructed for it and Sellindge, where the proposed new town of Otterpool Park has received planning permission for around 8,000 new homes, lies a four-mile stretch of the East Stour Valley, overlooked by the villages of Mersham to the north and Aldington to the south.

The valley here is currently mostly arable land, with some rougher ground used for grazing sheep. The valley

is bounded along its northern edge by the A20, M20, conventional and high speed railway lines, but views to the North Downs across the valley are extensive. To the south, a ridge along which runs an old Roman Road from Port Lympne, through Aldington towards the Weald, includes the scarp sloping down to Romney Marsh and the ROYAL Military Canal and gives views to the Channel.

The area is criss-crossed by a large number of historic public rights of way - mainly public footpaths - including the Saxon Shore Way. This makes the area great for walkers and Ramblers group walks in particular - a number of groups regularly begin walks at Aldington.

This public rights of way network is now threatened by a proposed project called Stonestreet Green Solar, covering around 450 acres. The developers plan to divert or extinguish at least 12 public rights of way to the detriment of the network of footpaths well beyond the area included in the project. The installations would also inevitably have a significant impact on the views across the valley and on the experience while walking through the area. A separate project by EDF proposes a further 250 acres of solar installations contiguous with the larger project and stretching almost to Sellindge, though EDF - as is the case with other solar projects in Kent and elsewhere - are undertaking to retain the public rights of way which cross their site.

Kent Ramblers have made representations at the public consultations undertaken by the developers but the company still intends to reroute many currently direct paths around the outside of their enclosures, adding inconvenient distance and involving several changes of direction instead of the current direct and intuitive lines of the paths.

Stonestreet Green Solar, because of its size, is classified as a nationally significant infrastructure project, so will be considered by the Planning Inspectorate before being decided by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

In line with Ramblers guidance, I have no objection to solar developments per se, and I accept that renewable energy developments are a necessity, but as an active Ramblers member and regular walk leader, I feel strongly that we must oppose in principle the ability for the developers to disrupt historic public rights of way networks in such a cavalier fashion which could set a dangerous precedent for other large projects in the future.

Andrew Swarbrick
White Cliffs Ramblers

Shell house restored



Sherwood Bridge on Studios Walk.

The shell house by the lake at Hatfield Forest in Essex has been restored by the National Trust thanks to a generous gift left in a will. The building is thought to have been built in about 1750 when the forest and adjacent Hallingbury estate were owned by the Houlblon family who as

Huguenots had fled from Flanders. Hatfield Forest, to the east of Bishops Stortford, is a National Nature Reserve and said to be the best surviving example in Britain of an almost complete Royal Hunting Forest. In 2024, the National Trust will celebrate 100 years of caring for Hatfield Forest

On Putney riverside

London has just got a little bit bigger. Next time you're walking the Thames Path in Putney or just wandering around the area, pause just by the bridge on the south side opposite the Fulham Palace grounds and check out the brand-new piece of public space built out into the Thames as part of the super sewer project. It's the first of a new network of riverside public spaces to open as part of Thames Tideway Tunnel (commonly known as the super sewer) construction.

The opening of the riverside space, in an area synonymous with the river community, makes visible for the first time the above ground legacy of the super sewer, with hints to the feat of engineering deep below. The 500m2 space just

west of Putney Bridge is the first of seven new mini-parks to be created as part of the project, all with unique architectural features and specially commissioned artworks.

Glasgow-based artist Claire Barclay has created 'Water Finds A Level' which is a series of three artworks that respond to the area's heritage of commercial and recreational boat use along with a nod to the area's historic past with a text within the bronze inlaid which reads: 'The Best Leveller is the River we have in Common'. The post English Civil War Putney Debates took place in the nearby riverside church of St Mary's in late 1647. This bronze inlay also acknowledges the start line of the University Boat Race which begins on the river here every year.

Des Garrahan



The new public space at Putney.

Photo: Des Garrahan



Festival success

The rebranded festival was hosted by the Bedfordshire Ramblers groups between 9 and 17 September. The festival was a great success with the four groups hosting 38 walks and attracting over 525 walkers. Walks were held all over the county and comprised Wellbeing Walks of various lengths as well as short walks, long walks and interest walks. There was even a litter pick run in Dunstable which attracted 25 children. It is always lovely to

encourage the youngsters to join in! One of the festival highlights was a day walking along the River Great Ouse followed by the John Bunyan boat, which after lunch carried us all home again up the Ouse. Whilst we would always expect to have our own members join the walks, the festival allows us to publicise our activities to a wider audience and we are delighted to announce that 40% of the walkers were new to us. As Ramblers we are very proud of our beautiful little county and it is always a

pleasure to introduce others to the hidden gems and countryside that we have discovered and now explore regularly. Let's hope that we have inspired more people to get outside and explore the area. We are already starting to plan the 2024 Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks, which will run from 7 - 15 September. So put these dates in your diaries and come and join us. With special thanks to all the walk leaders from Leighton Buzzard, North Beds, Lea & Icknield (Luton) and Ivel Valley groups - we couldn't have done it without you. Sandra Kelsey North Beds Ramblers



Photo: Pamela Bates



Installing a new yellow-topped marker post.

Photo: Barry Ingram

Many hands improve paths

The Chinese proverb reads 'Many hands make light work.' The English version could read 'Many hands help improve paths' because that has certainly been true during the summer months of July, August and September. For some, the highlight may have been the replacement of a bridle gate in Riseley. For others, perhaps putting in marker posts to the north and east of Swineshead, completing the work started in the south and west last year. For a larger number it is relishing the challenges of clearing heavily overgrown paths whilst avoiding the brambles and nettles. Whatever the reason, our volunteers obviously enjoy their time out in the countryside, doing something very useful, putting something back, getting fresh air, exercise and enjoying the social element too because more and more people are volunteering and wanting to participate. This is great and is enabling us to have small

working groups for the small tasks as well as the larger groups for the larger tasks. All the work is most appreciated by path users, landowners, farmers and councils. Having such a talented and flexible group has enabled us to complete more than 20 path improvements within Bedford Borough, plus several more for Central Bedfordshire during the summer months. Clearance work took place at Biggleswade, Cardington, Carlton, Chalgrave, Chicksands, Hinwick, Kempston (two locations), Roxton, Stewartby, Wilden, Wiltstead, Wootton (four locations) and Yelden (two locations) Yellow topped marker posts were put in and directional discs added on paths in Carlton (two posts), Hinwick (two posts), Northill (two posts), Podington (one post), Riseley (one post), Stevington (one post), Swineshead (six posts) and Yelden (two posts). At Riseley a bridle gate was replaced with the addition of a new post and directional discs. Reading this you may wonder what the councils are doing

and the answer is a lot. Central Bedfordshire is developing groups in parishes reminiscent of the P3 groups in the 1990s. Bedford Borough has a hard working team putting in bridges and culverts and dealing with larger problems. In addition to the statutory signs at the road ends of paths, both councils are committed to continue putting in yellow-topped marker posts to show paths in the countryside. These additional posts are very helpful to all users and we should be encouraging other counties where only basic roadside signs are used to do the same. This year is drawing to a close and what a challenging year it has been and what a fantastic amount of work has been done, and all due to every one of our reliable, dedicated and hard working volunteers. Thank you to each and everyone of you for your valuable contribution and look forward to seeing you in 2024. Barry Ingram Bedfordshire RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Public Paths for Local Enjoyment)



RIPPLE volunteers with a new gate at Riseley.

Photo: Barry Ingram



BERKSHIRE bites

Remembering Derek Smith

Loddon Valley Ramblers staged a commemorative walk in Remenham to pay tribute to their long-time member and former Secretary, Derek Smith, who died early in 2023. The seven mile walk, in early October, included a small ceremony to unveil a plaque on a recently-installed kissing gate in memory of Derek. David Moffett, a former Chairman of the group, reminded those present of Derek's immense contribution to the group, having been a founder member and a very effective Secretary over many years.

Derek's widow, Jenny, recalled that over the years Derek had led 110 walks for the group and that she and Derek had organised eight holidays. They had also attended 57 weekend trips and holidays organised by the group. In addition, Derek had been a member of the committee which established the Wokingham Way and had been involved in checking and signposting the route. He had also assisted with the installation of numerous gates to replace stiles in Wokingham Borough by the group.

Steve Vale

Loddon Valley Ramblers

Details of the 55-mile Wokingham Way can be found at Loddon Valley Ramblers website at lvra.org.uk.



David Moffett and Jenny Smith at the ceremony.

Photos: Michele Vale



The plaque.

Thank you walk leaders



Our group is fortunate in having some fantastic walks on our doorstep. This photo was taken on one of our walks in Windsor Great Park. If King Charles III happens to read this, could we just say thank you for allowing us to walk in your front garden (or is it your back garden?).
Photo: Brian Poulton

Our group has continued to offer three or four walks each week this year. This has been achieved because of the efforts of a small number of very special people, our walk leaders. A very big thank you is due to them from everyone who has taken part in our walks. The walk leader's contribution to the Ramblers should never be under-estimated. They are all volunteers giving their time to planning, pre-walking and leading walks for the benefit of others. Without them the Ramblers could not survive. We cannot thank you enough.

Brian Poulton

South East Berks Ramblers



BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Participate in our AGM and exercise your democratic rights!

The Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area AGM will be held at 2.00pm on Saturday 3 February 2024. It is expected to be in the Small Barn Hall of the Amersham and District Community Association, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, Buckinghamshire HP6 5AH. The booking was not fully complete at the time of writing, so please check the area website, <http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk>, before the meeting. It is the intention to hold a choice of walks, details of which will also be published on the website. There is an adjacent car park, but be aware that it is pay-and-

display. The railway station and bus routes are within a few minutes walk.

Copies of the Annual Report will be available during January, on request from the Acting Area Secretary, either as a PDF file (requests, with 'Annual Report' as the subject, to johnandjean@thamesinternet.com) or in print (requests, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope of suitable size for an A5 booklet, to 4 Park Farm Way, Lane End, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP14 3EG). An abbreviated version of the report, excluding personal details, will be published on the Area website.

Notice of any formal motions to be proposed at the Area AGM

should reach me no later than one week before the meeting, ie, by Saturday 27 January.

Note, also, that it is the business of the Area AGM to elect two members of General Council, who become company members of the Ramblers for legal purposes and are entitled to speak and vote at General Council meetings; expenses are paid by Central Office. Areas are encouraged to seek candidates from all parts of the membership, in line with our values of being inclusive to all and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. If you wish to put your name forward, or to find out more about what is involved, please contact me.

John Esslemont
Acting Area Secretary

Could you help the Area to continue functioning?

The Area Chair and the Acting Secretary have indicated that, having been in office for more than a decade, they are reluctant to continue indefinitely. The Acting Secretary is also the Area Treasurer and, ideally, would prefer to find people to take over both roles. Volunteers registered on Assemble can find job descriptions in the document hub; if you are interested in any of these

roles but not registered on Assemble, please contact the Acting Secretary for further information.

Vacancies exist for other roles including Countryside Secretary (to take a lead on planning issues affecting the Area, in partnership with our groups) and Publicity Officer. However, all officer roles are up for re-election at the AGM; do not assume that the incumbents would not welcome the opportunity to be replaced!

Some form of job-sharing might be possible, particularly for the office of Area Secretary.

New officers, with new ideas, could revitalise the Area, while failure to fill the main officer roles could make the Area non-viable, in which case alternative arrangements would have to be made to support the Area's groups. Please help to rejuvenate and, potentially, to save the Area. Any offers of help, or enquiries about what is involved, are welcome: please contact me at johnandjean@thamesinternet.com.

John Esslemont
Acting Area Secretary



Awareness needs raising on rights of way protection

The Ramblers has three main aims: to organise group walks; to protect and maintain rights of way; and to campaign on behalf of walkers. To improve our services to members and fulfill our charitable objectives, we wanted to discover the extent to which our members in Essex were involved in these activities. An online questionnaire was sent to all members we have an email address for in May and this article summarises the results.

We received 404 responses, or about 10% of the membership. This is about the rate of response which would be expected from an online questionnaire. However, none of the responses summarised below total 404 because not every respondent replied to every question.

Group walks

Respondents were asked whether they participated in group walks and if so, how frequently. 284 said that they did take part in group walks, while 105 said that they did not. Of the walkers, 142 took part in 25 or more walks annually, 73 in 11 to 24 walks, and the remaining 69 walked on less than 10 occasions. So exactly half of those who walked with groups might be classified as regular group walkers and the rest as occasional walkers with groups. But a substantial majority did not walk with groups at all.

284 people answered a question about whether they walked with groups other than their own. 82 said they never did, 157 did so occasionally and 45 did so regularly.

The next question was whether respondents had led group walks. 242 people answering this question had led group walks in the past year, an encouragingly high percentage of the 284 participants in group walks. Of these, the majority (164) had led four times or less, 45 between five and nine times, and 33 said 10 times or more.

Those who did not currently lead group walks were asked whether they would consider doing so. 124 said they would not, but 62 said they would consider it.

Protecting rights of way

The questionnaire reminded members that most of our groups have work parties which clear blocked paths, improve signage and erect bridges, often in collaboration with Essex Highways. They were asked whether they were aware of

work parties in their group's area. Replies were evenly split: 179 said they did know of work parties but 165 did not. (Some respondents may have been from groups which do not run work parties, so the level of awareness may be higher than these figures suggest at first sight.)

Members were next asked whether and how often they participated in work parties. 174 said they never did so, 26 participated occasionally and just 24 did so regularly. This suggests that there is work to be done to encourage more people to take part in work parties, which makes the responses to the next question - if you do not currently participate in work parties, would you consider doing so? - particularly relevant. Although 158 said they would not participate, 174 said they would do so.

Our Parish Path Adopters scheme, in which members 'adopt' a parish and monitor the state of its paths, has had wide publicity in South East Walker and elsewhere. It was disappointing that although 212 respondents knew about the scheme, 180 did not. But 54 respondents were already Adopters and, when those who were not Adopters were asked whether they would consider becoming Adopters, 139 said they would. So it seems there is work to be done here in terms of both raising awareness and recruitment.

Respondents were also asked about Don't Lose Your Way. 264 were aware of the campaign and 123 were not, a decent level of response which perhaps reflects the publicity given to it by the Ramblers nationally. 32 of our respondents had participated in the Don't Lose Your Way campaign.

Websites

Finally, members were asked about their use of Essex Ramblers' websites. They were first asked how often they visited their group's website. Most (159) visited it more than 10 times a year, 42 said six to 10 times, 117 said one to five times, while 62 never visited it.

The last question concerned visits to the Area website. Here the responses were reversed. 164 never visited it, 154 visited one to five times a year, 34 looked at it six to 10 times and just 37 made more than 10 visits. It is a reasonable speculation that those visiting their group's website fairly frequently do so to get information about walks, while the fewer visits to

the Area website may be by those looking for particular information or links to other groups' websites for potential walking opportunities.

Conclusions

A 10% response rate is respectable for an online questionnaire, although it leaves room for different types of unrepresentativeness and bias to intrude. The most obvious of these is that some respondents were probably more engaged than non-respondents. So it's probably the case that a higher proportion of the membership than the survey suggests are unaware of footpath maintenance, Parish Path Adopters and the Don't Lose Your Way campaign, and anything else that isn't encountered by word of mouth through mates on group walks. In other words, where our survey shows low awareness or participation, we can be confident that they are really low!

A much-quoted figure by our Area President, Len Banister, is that only 30% of members are regular group walkers. Most respondents (284) did walk with groups but only 142 of the total of 404 said they were 'frequent' (25 times a year or more) group walkers, suggesting that he has a point. The more important point is that at least a significant minority even among our respondents probably don't have regular contact with 'their' group. It is arguable that some groups may have focused too much on organising group walks, while neglecting other matters such as path clearance: a greater focus by groups on path clearance (which might lead to some members becoming involved in more 'technical' aspects, such as the installation of gates and bridges) could help in recruitment.

Certainly there is room to publicise and recruit in areas beyond group walks, especially path maintenance and the Parish Path Adopters scheme, where a decent number of respondents said they would be interested in getting involved.

Finally, other Areas may be interested in carrying out a similar exercise and a copy of our questionnaire can be made available. Just contact me at michael.cannell@btinternet.com.

Thanks to Ian Glen and Stuart Tanner for their technical help, without which the exercise would not have been possible.

Mike Cannell
Essex Area Media Officer

Pylons will impact the path network

Since joining the Ramblers four years ago, my wife Sue and I have very much enjoyed walking the paths across Essex. At a local group level I have taken on the role of Planning Monitor which provides me with an insight into the impact of proposed developments within the Chelmsford City Council district. Anything from a conservatory next to a footpath to 500 new homes requiring bridleway and byway diversions.

When I became aware of the proposal by National Grid for 180 km of pylons across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk I wanted to investigate the impact this would have on public rights of way across Essex. This was achieved by comparing National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury interactive map and the Essex Highways information map.

The proposal by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) is to reinforce the high voltage power network in East Anglia. The only option put forward by National Grid, during a recent non-statutory consultation, involves the building of a new 400,000 volt (400kV) electricity transmission line, work at existing substations and building a new substation to connect new proposed offshore windfarms and interconnectors to the energy transmission network. Pylons East Anglia is campaigning against this proposal and is putting forward the option of an Integrated Offshore Grid, deemed better for the environment, although National Grid say that this would cost four times more than going over land.

To illustrate the magnitude of the NGET proposal to fellow ramblers in our region I have produced a spreadsheet listing the public rights of way that would be impacted. This includes all the public rights of way that are within about 50m and/or cross the proposed infrastructure. I also included the impact on long distance paths. Copies have been provided to the Ramblers, both at group and national levels.

My investigation identified 116 public rights of way that would be either restricted or inaccessible during the construction period. Having in mind the necessary construction methods and a period of at least four years (Norwich to Tilbury) we can see that a significant swath of Essex countryside will be impacted.

The challenge to meet the Government's ambitions for offshore power generation and net zero by 2050 is undeniable. The future electrical demand across East Anglia, especially to serve London, is also not in doubt. What is in doubt, in my view, is that the technology of the 1960s, namely the use of pylons, should have no place in this day and age. For the rambling community, the disruption across our county (and Suffolk and Norfolk) will be significant.

The main aim of this article is to alert all our fellow ramblers across the south east and, if they so wish, to make their views known at the next statutory consultation in 2024.

Simon Polley
Chelmer and Blackwater Ramblers



Photo: Simon Polley

Mike Cannell adds:



From the campaign in the Pyrenees. 'Ni aquí, ni enlloc' translates from the Catalan as 'neither here nor anywhere'. Photo: Mike Cannell

I have been here before! For about eight years I lived in France, in the Pyrenean foothills on the Mediterranean side. The proposal there was for a high-tension line to take excess French electricity to Spain. The proposed route would literally have planted pylons on our property. More importantly, it would have damaged the landscape in a poor area which relies heavily on tourism for employment. It transpired that we were about the fourth choice: earlier proposals had been to run it through the Basque country, but this was shelved after the separatist movement threatened to blow it up. The next idea was to go through

the centre of the Pyrenees. However this would have taken it over the King of Spain's summer residence, so that was out. So EDF decided to impose it on we poor Catalans.

This being France, all the communes in the department got together and their mayors signed the Oath of Montferrer (our village) pledging to oppose the development in each of their areas - one idea was that landowners should sell a square metre of their land to individuals to make land purchase as difficult as possible for EDF. We got supportive press and television coverage and had several marches on either side of the border, culminating in a 20,000-strong demo in Perpignan, all perfectly peaceful with residents

of each commune walking behind their villages' banners; as far as I could see, the whole thing was policed by one gendarme.

Anyway, in the great post-revolution French tradition of giving way to people on the street, EDF backed down and took the undersea route, which was more expensive, although nowhere near as costly as they had claimed.

It's a good story and I still have the T-shirts. However, I rather doubt that even if we wanted to, we could get 20,000 out to demonstrate over here, or to get the chairs of parish councils (who don't quite have the same prestige or authority as French mayors) to collaborate and sign an oath. *Autre pays, autre moeurs!*



Area AGM

Inner London Area will be holding its Annual General Meeting on Saturday 3 February 2024. As is our custom it will be in person and we'll be gathering on the banks of the Thames at the AHOY Centre, Borthwick Street, Deptford, SE8 3JY.

Starting at 2pm the meeting is scheduled to last two hours, divided into two distinct halves. The first is the formal portion that includes the prosaic but necessary tasks of approving committee members for the forthcoming year, the reporting of the accounts and hearing about

membership numbers. While the second allows us to report much more informally about our work and successes on projects like the Capital Ring, London LOOP, Green Chain Walk and Thames Path in London and more.

Refreshments will be available before and during the meeting. Please keep an eye on the Inner London Area website for news about led walks on the day to the venue and if there are any guest speakers arranged.

Des Garrahan

Chair, Inner London Ramblers

Nearest stations to the venue are Cutty Sark (DLR), Deptford and Greenwich (all about 12 minutes walk away). Or take buses 47, 188 or 199.

London Loop, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk Project



Justin Lumley (left) and Martin Single at work on section 13 of the London Loop. Photo: Jackie Gower/resurfaced section of the Capital Ring/New River Path. Photo: Ian Bull

Over the summer and autumn months our volunteers have made further waymarking improvements, in particular to sections of the London Loop which we had not been able to pay attention to previously..

A small team of volunteers - Jackie Gower, Justin Lumley and Martin Single - spent a day on section 13 of the London Loop, which runs from Harefield West to Moor Park, replacing and cleaning a large number of waymarks and signs and pruning back vegetation that obscured signage and the path. The group then went on to do the same on section 14, Moor Park to Hatch End. Almost all sections of the London Loop have now had their waymarking improved by our project volunteers, as have all sections of the Capital Ring.

Other volunteer activities over the past quarter include meeting with the site manager at Cranford Park

about reinstating signage after their restoration project. We also continue to push for Capital Ring signage to be replaced in Abney Park Cemetery and Clissold Park after similar improvement projects and are trying to get diversion signage installed around housing developments on the final section of the Capital Ring near the docks. On section 21 of the London Loop from Havering-atte-Bower to Harold Wood, Christopher Simpson carried out a litter pick with a local group, removing four bags of rubbish and doing some sign cleaning and waymark disc replacement at the same time. Volunteers have also replaced over 100 vinyl overlays on London Loop signs where they had faded and bleached in the sun during the last 20 years, particularly on sections 1 to 7 of the London Loop led by Keith Rodwell.

Ian Bull and Andrew Hunt have developed maps and guidance for the 'missing' section 12 (Eltham

- Greenwich) of the Green Chain Walk, and we have started campaigning for it to be waymarked. This section of the Green Chain Walk was due to open at the same time as the others but, for various reasons, the signposts and waymarks were not installed, and so the section has never officially been opened. It is a fine walk which can be easily and safely followed with our guidance published at innerlondonramblers.org.uk/ideasforwalks/green-chain-walk-guides.

As part of the London Walking Plan Delivery Group, we are pushing for funding to make further improvements to the London Loop, Capital Ring, Green Chain Walk and other strategic walking routes in London. Whilst project volunteers lobby local councils and landowners to realign signs pointing the wrong way, and to replace rotted posts and missing signs, the value of the routes as a whole needs to be recognised and valued. As part of this work, we are auditing the routes again so that improvements needed are catalogued and prioritised and can be provided to the relevant borough council.

We're always on the lookout for volunteers to join this project in roles including publicity, litter picking and more - please email vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk if you would like to get involved.

Clare Wadd

Vice Chair, Inner London Ramblers



The resurfaced section of the Capital Ring/New River Path. Photo: Ian Bull

New River Path re-surfaced

The bane of walkers' lives in London for as long as I can remember has been the wet and muddy state of the New River Path between Green Lanes and Seven Sisters Road in north London where the Capital Ring follows the route. The path was unwalkable for much of the year and, along with filthy wet feet, came the

risk of slipping into the river whilst trying to avoid the mud.

Ramblers, including our Capital Ring project, and others, have been trying to get Thames Water to improve the path for years. Work finally started in May, initially intended to last 7 weeks, but ended up taking longer because of supply chain issues with the materials.

We are delighted that

this section has now been resurfaced, and it reopened to walkers at the end of July. Section 12 of the Capital Ring between Highgate and Stoke Newington follows this section of the New River Path, meaning it is a particularly well-used route.

The New River Renewal Campaign (newriverrenewal.co.uk) has been started by local residents in Woodberry Down, and is now actively campaigning to see the New River brought

up to the same high standards as the Woodberry Wetlands for wildlife and people, aims that Ramblers in London share. At the time of writing, another section of the New River Path is closed for repairs due to a bank collapse, illustrating the age of the infrastructure - but should have reopened by the time you read this.

Clare Wadd

Vice Chair, Inner London Ramblers

Square Mile on Sunday: A Ramble with Ghosts

Remembering a walk in the City of London taken whilst I was researching for a collection of poems, Tradition With Vision, I wrote in 2017-18.

*In Guildhall Yard we trace the curve
that marks the bounds of an amphitheatre
Romans built two thousand years ago.
Those revellers may be silent now,
yet voices ring around us down the years.*

*We hear them loud in Leadenhall:
the bustle of a forum in another age
has scarcely changed. Nor has the peace
of city gardens loved by Romans in their baths,
or by friars a thousand years ago--*

*Wandering in their garths to pray
or gather herbs for physic; or children
saved from poverty, clad in bluecoats
to play in the yards of Christchurch,
or in Greyfriars' gardens.*

*On Fish Hall Street we hear the cries
of cheery fisherfolk on the riverside,
or at wharfside where they've docked;
and hearty shouts of fishmongers
plying trade at the top of the hill.*

*Then over Tower Hill we meet
the shade of Samuel Pepys,
diary in hand before he lost his sight,
walking solitary as he sometimes did at night
before the Great Fire swept so much away ...*

*while from the Tower we hear
the old laments of fast-locked princes,
doomed queens in their darkened cells ...*

*yet all the while the sweetest murmur
of the Thames -- oldest voice of all -- the river
that has seen and carried all.*

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher



Ephemera - and trying to reduce hoarding especially in this electronic age

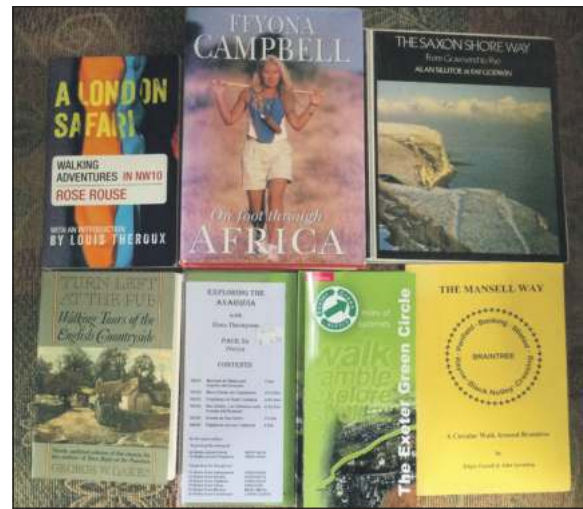
This scribbler's last message was about trying a short pilgrimage route and exploring more decluttering stories. So here we go again but not quite as planned. Firstly, the pilgrimage got overtaken by Caroline Buckland's Hillwalking London publication (see page 3 of the September issue) which turned out to be a bit of a treat with 10 walks and lots of interesting and useful information.

Moving on to hoarding and decluttering our first story is about *The Mansell Way* which was published in 1993. A quick search online didn't reveal any more information than is contained in the guide, which is a circular walk around Braintree in Essex. The 20-mile route was created by Edgar Eastall and John Spratling and dedicated to the memory of Dennis Mansell, a journalist, photographer and hill walker. Circular walks around towns and cities can be regarded as an activity of interest similar to other walking activities but in this case the Mansell Way doesn't appear on any lists including the Ramblers Essex Area list of long distance paths within the county although Edgar Eastall's Church Fields' Way is listed. Walkers in Essex and further afield might be interested in this walk guide, otherwise it's destined for the recycling bin.

Keeping in tune with other circular walks around towns and cities we came across the *Exeter Green Circle* which is a 12-mile walking route in the city. It's divided into five sections and the whole route can be easily completed in a day.

Another example that's been sitting in a pile for ages is *Exploring the Axarquía*, part of a series of walks in an area east of Malaga in Spain which suggests that yours truly has either walked some of these paths or purchased the guides when in area so long ago that he can't remember the details of his adventures or didn't keep a diary.

And then there is an American book called *Turn Left at the Pub - Walking Tours of the English Countryside* which was originally published in 1968 shortly before the author, George W Oakes, was killed in a car accident. However, there have been at least three editions with two of them updated by others with the third edition published



More titles gathering dust.

Photo: John Pestle

in 1985. Our scribbler can't remember how he came into possession of what is essentially a guide for tourists.

Apart from lots of route guides there is an abundance of walking literature which might be of interest to readers. There is the saga of Ffyona Campbell who came to fame as a long distance walker and was regarded as the first woman to walk around the world. She had her share of controversy and a copy of her *On Foot through Africa* is available.

Closer to home is *A London Safari*, subtitled *Walking Adventures in NW10* by Rose Rouse which has her exploring the streets of the part of London where she lived after realising that she knew little about it.

Finally, *The Saxon Shore Way from Gravesend to Rye* by Alan Sillitoe and Fay Godwin is more of a detailed narrative than a route guide and allows the reader to experience the walk from the comfort of their home.

Please shout if there is any interest in any of the publications mentioned and hope that our kind editor will give us some more space next time to talk about the piles of guides and books which many of us need to stop hoarding!

John Pestle

johnpestle@btinternet.com

Ramblers improve Elham path in memory of key members

During the summer Kent's White Cliffs Ramblers spent a hot Tuesday installing a kissing gate along path HE334 in Elham Valley. The new gate is to be a memorial for Margaret Lubbock and Les Preston who dedicated so much of their time to the Ramblers. Margaret was Chair of the White Cliffs committee for 11 years and Les received an award for 30 years service to the Ramblers. Both also served on the Kent Area committee and were active in forming the White Cliffs Ramblers into the effective

and friendly group it is today.

It has taken a long time to find an appropriate place for our memorial gate. A lot of research and groundwork has been carried out to identify the landowner and seek permission to carry out the work and liaise with Kent County Council. The working party laboured for nine hours with determination to complete the task having to dig through tree roots, chalk and flint to construct new steps and install gate posts. The team was guided by Steve and Averil Brice and John Polden, veteran members of the group and experts at gate installation. They

all said it was the most difficult gate they had ever installed.

As well as acting as an important memorial for the group the gate benefits the wider community. The stile it replaced was rotting, on an incline and difficult to climb and the last to be replaced along the path: improving accessibility for walkers along the whole path and opening it up to residents and visitors.

Group members and the family of Margaret and Les were invited to a short walk to celebrate the unveiling of plaques that commemorate our much-missed Margaret and Les. A big thank you to all of those who put so much effort into making the gate possible.

Lee Pickup

White Cliffs Ramblers



The stile was rotting and difficult to negotiate.

Photo: Andrew Swarbrick



New gate and steps installed by White Cliffs Ramblers.

Photo: Andrew Swarbrick

Walking the Saffron Trail

The authors of The Essex Way in Circular Walks (reviewed in the December 2020 issue) have now given the 71 miles of the Saffron Trail a similar treatment. The book describes 22 walks, typically about seven miles in length, from the start in Southend to the finish in Saffron Walden. Naturally it had to be road-tested, as it were, and we chose the walk starting at The Compasses, Littley Green, described by my companion (an authority in these matters) as 'A prince of pubs'. He wasn't wrong: at the end of the walk I had an outstanding pint of mild, a rare treat these days.

Anyway, back to walking. As with the authors' previous publications, the instructions are detailed and it's difficult to go wrong. However, there are several cross-field paths in the opening section, hardly any of which are marked by fingerposts (thanks, Essex Highways), and because crops had just been harvested it wasn't always easy to identify where the paths began and ended. Fortunately we had the Ordnance Survey app on our phones which tells you exactly where you are and the direction in which you are walking. The authors recommend this in their introduction and so do we; we could easily have got lost without it.

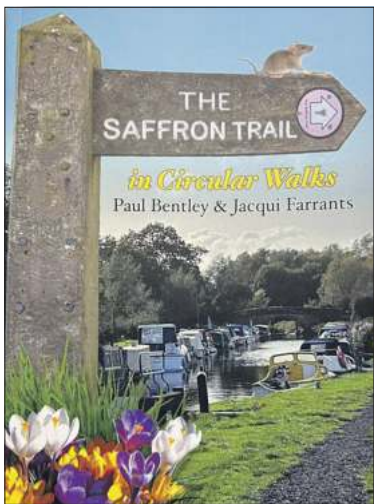
The walk itself takes a tacked-on loop from Great Waltham to Broads Green and back to Great Waltham, where it joins the Saffron Trail. Frankly, this loop lacks interest and seems to have been included only to make up the mileage; it would have been better to omit it. This would have made an eight and a half mile walk a pleasanter six miler.

But generally the book is as good as its predecessors in terms not just of precise instructions but in describing points of interest and having good photographs of the many architectural gems on the way.

Together with having just completed a walking holiday with very detailed notes, the book got me thinking about what makes a good walking guide.

* Start with a walk overview and the distance. This helps you decide whether to undertake the walk.

* Describe points of interest, historical, religious, natural or architectural. It's too easy just to give directions - people like to know what



they are looking at. If the nature of the publication allows, use photographs.

* Be precise. Don't write something like 'In a short while' or 'A good distance' (our authors are occasionally guilty of this). Instead say, 'In about 100 yards' or, in the case of longer distances, use time: 'In about 10 minutes'.

* Be clear about difficulties. The notes for our recent Alsace holiday didn't warn us that the final approach to a castle was a near-vertical scramble. And while there's a sustained gradient, we should be told. More prosaically, in flat but muddy Essex, tell readers that a cross-field path or a narrow path through woodland can be tricky in winter. Perhaps mention evil stiles.

* State whether the route is a footpath, bridleway or byway. This helps navigation, especially where routes diverge. Too many guides simply say, 'Take the path to the left', without specifying its nature.

* Mention food outlets or opportunities for refreshments (our authors are good at this). You've probably realised that I like to finish at a pub but that not everyone's choice!

So a positive review. How could it be otherwise when the penultimate walk, Widdington to Wendens Ambo, takes the reader down my street, with a distant photo of my front door? What next for the authors: The Harcamlow Way in Circular Walks?

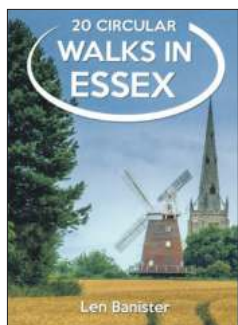
With thanks to Murray Lowe.

Mike Cannell

Essex Area Media Officer

The Saffron Trail in Circular Walks by Paul Bentley and Jacqui Farrants, Half Way Publishing (ISBN 978-1-3999-5982-7) costs £14.95 plus £2.80 pp from Amazon, or £14.95 plus £2.95 pp from eBay.

More Essex circulars



It is now nearly 20 years since my first Essex walking book, Drive and Stroll in Essex, was published by Countryside Books.

Three more books followed: Pub Walks for Motorists, Essex, Suffolk & Norfolk, Essex a Dog Walker's Guide, and Essex Year Round Walks. All have been revised and rewritten for second editions and most can still be obtained from Countryside Books or local bookshops. Now I am delighted to announce a new venture: 20 Circular Walks in Essex.

This new book tends to reflect my own diminishing physical capability and will be particularly welcome to older walkers.

Where possible it also features attractions for younger members of the family - in fact the main emphasis is on family outings.

Finally, a first for me, the book is pocket-sized and beautifully designed, (it's worth buying a handful ready for Christmas presents). The published price is £6.99 and I am glad to tell you that South East Walker readers can obtain copies at a 20% discount by going to www.countrysidebooks.co.uk and typing LB20 in the discount code box at checkout.

Len Banister



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary

When I wrote my last diary, I was wrestling with the challenges of getting our new guide to the Wealdway printed, in particular trying to ensure that colours including black would be reproduced satisfactorily. Fortunately by the time South East Walker hit members' doormats, I had received 2,000 copies of the guide with the quality of the many maps, photographs and diagrams meeting my highest expectations. The response to the piece in South East Walker was excellent with orders flooding in for both the new and previous guides so that total sales (net of postage) in August and September covered half the printing costs of the guide. Unfortunately we have had to increase prices on the website from the beginning of October because of substantial increases in postal rates - it costs a lot more to post a book than to print it!

In my last diary I lamented the neglect of rights of way in Medway. I later learned that my comments were put on the agenda for a recent meeting of the Medway Local Access Forum and that a full-time rights of way officer had been appointed. It is too early for celebration, especially as the allocated budget for rights of way works is a measly £10k per year, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

On the subject of Local Access Forums, most county and unitary authority councils are supposed to have one. Those in Kent (on which I serve in a personal capacity), Medway, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex all publish minutes and lists of members on their websites. London boroughs are not obliged to have one but Bromley has chosen to have a Countryside Consultative Panel which seems to be equivalent. The strange thing is the secrecy that surrounds its membership and proceedings, which are not made public. Being affronted by such a lack of transparency and curious about what could be so sensitive, I make occasional requests for minutes using the Freedom of Information Act - how ridiculous is it that I should have to resort to such an approach? The one that I made in September produced no minutes in the 18-month period covered by the request but I found that rather implausible and persisted - and sure enough a set of minutes eventually emerged but with the names of all participants other than councillors redacted. So why the secrecy? Embarrassment at how little the panel appears to be achieving? Surely not.

One of my various roles is to be custodian of the Kent Area event kit - a marquee, tables, banners, information boards, books to sell and leaflets to give away. I deliver the kit to events attended by groups and take it away afterwards. There are not as many of these events as there used to be but in September I took the kit to 'Go Wild at Capstone', an event promoting the outdoors run by Medway council. The

event itself was a bit of a disappointment but I was impressed with the venue, Capstone Farm Country Park, which despite its proximity to the Medway towns offers extensive walking opportunities. Parking is free and there's a cafe, so it's well worth a visit.

During the summer a new information board about the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk, funded by sales of our walking guides, was at long last installed in Groombridge car park to replace one that had long ago rotted away. The installation was carried out for us free of charge by four 'occupants' of the 'Men's Shed' which has also been installed in the Groombridge car park.

We have been organising our November meeting for footpath volunteers. As a change from the pattern of recent meetings we have a single speaker from the Ramblers Central Office Paths Team to take attendees through the key legal provisions that protect (or sometimes threaten) our rights of way and how they might be applied in a range of practical examples. We now hold two meetings a year as a contribution to improving communication with our footpath volunteers - the informal discussions between volunteers are as important as the formal sessions - but we typically get only 30 - 40 attendees despite issuing over 200 invitations. I would love to hear from those volunteers who could attend but don't and learn what we could do to make our meetings more attractive to them.

Writing walking guides and producing routes to download from our website involves a lot of very careful scrutiny of maps and inevitably errors come to light. In the case of the Wealdway, the route as indicated by green lozenges on the Explorer map across Combe Hill not too far from Eastbourne is wrong so I've been in correspondence with the Ordnance Survey. The good news is that they have agreed to change the route in accordance with my request at the next revision. The bad news is that they have at present no planned date for a revision.

I did have a diary entry for 4 October to attend the opening ceremony for a section of the England Coast Path running from Otterham Creek through much of Medway to join up with an already open section at Grain. However, the event was cancelled at the last minute as Natural England were not happy with the arrangements at a level crossing at Grain. The Secretary of State still opened the route from Otterham Creek to Stoke Marshes, leaving a short gap from there to Grain and any ceremony for another day. I presume that the many wrongly-oriented England Coast Path fingerblades across Medway that I have been complaining about for a couple of years have at last been put right.

Kent Area AGM will be in Bexley on Saturday 10 February 2024. Further details will be in the Annual Review and on the Area website.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



The Men from the Shed who installed the new board at Groombridge. Photo: Robert Peel



The England Coast Path at Otterham Creek. Photo: Robert Peel



Oxfordshire Ramblers AGM

The Oxfordshire Ramblers Annual General Meeting will be on Saturday 20 January 2024 at 2.00pm in Charlbury War Memorial Hall, Brown's Lane, Charlbury, Oxon OX7 3QW, organised by West Oxfordshire Ramblers. The AGM will be preceded by a talk at 1.00pm by a member of the Ramblers Board of Trustees.

There will be a walk in the morning, details of which will be provided later, including in the online autumn/winter walks programme. The hall will be open from 10.00am. Car parking in Charlbury is limited so please use the train or bus service if possible. There is limited parking for disabled people, so one is recommended to park near the Co-op in Browns Lane.

Footpath matters

Diversions, claims etc

Two diversions are proposed on Shilton FP2, one to the walked line at the Whitehill quarry with an earlier exit to the road, and one at the farm between the existing offline fences, also on the walked route, to move the definitive line out of the garden. We need to claim the inclosure award path on the proposed diversion of Ramsden FP2, as it serves a different purpose to the existing FP2. Ardley FP4 is proposed to be diverted along

an existing farm track instead of climbing sheds. A series of diversions at Marsh Baldon and Nineveh Farm, Nuneham Courtenay will put the paths onto the walked line, and the associated work should remove the existing problems. There are also proposals at Chalgrove recreation ground to separate the paths from play areas and a skate park. There is a claim for a path to South Stoke recreation ground, which could form a link through the ground to other

paths. Diversion and modification orders at Waterstock FP6 (removing several problems, including a knees-touching-nose stile on FP6), Middleton Stoney FP8, Idbury FP15, Marcham BR3, Clifton Hampden FP24/25, Longworth FP4, Spelsbury 44/44a have been confirmed, the Oxford FP153 decision has been abandoned, Clifton Hampden FP15 extinguishment has been withdrawn.

Other matters

Oxfordshire Area is still in need of a Southern Area Footpath Secretary. Bob Evans is the new Lost Ways Coordinator. I will be retiring at the Area AGM in January. I need to retire while I still have a functioning brain

and knees, and can accompany a successor if necessary without falling over. Work has been completed on Sunningwell FP8, where steps have been installed on a quarry face that has been closed since 2016. Our thanks to Sunningwell Parish

Council, whose persistence finally convinced the county council that a solution need not cost the vast sum that they had quoted. They have also claimed a walked path to Lincombe Lane, and succeeded in getting the steps recut at the A34 bridge on the way to Radley. David Godfrey Area Footpath Secretary



Before and after new steps were fitted on Sunningwell FP8, at a quarry, by Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access department after much campaigning by local Rambler, Bob Evans, and his colleagues on the parish council, including Sunningwell's parish path warden, Mike Wykes. Photos: Bob Evans



SURREY snippets

Kingston Group celebrates 60 years

Early records can throw up some interesting and little-known facts about the formation of the Kingston Group some 60 years ago.

An initial meeting was held on Friday 8 November 1963, when 50 people became members. This was under the 'chairmanship' of the Rt Hon James Chuter Ede CH, PC, DL, JP, MP, who conducted the meeting with his usual courteous competence and lively wit. Although Mr Ede was the Labour MP for South Shields he was born and lived all his life in Epsom. He was the longest serving Home Secretary in the 20th century and became Baron Chuter-Ede of Epsom.

The inaugural meeting was held in the Kingston Market Hall on Wednesday 11 March 1964 and was again chaired by Mr J Chuter Ede. There were 70 people in attendance and 64 signed up to become members. From those small beginnings membership has grown to nearly 550. It was agreed that the rambles would be based on rail and bus excursions.

Also involved was George Platt, a well-known figure as the organiser of the Ramblers' Association's train and coach excursions from London.



A plaque on this trig point on Wolvens Lane in the Surrey Hills commemorates Margaret Loveless and Tony Parker. Photo: Kingston Archives

However, his tenure as Chair was short-lived. The first AGM was held in Kingston Congregational Church Hall on Wednesday 3 February 1965. There were then 88 members. Two people were proposed to be Chair, so there was an election and George Platt was defeated by Peter Lawrence.

Besides the main offices of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, there were other committee members elected who would go on to play a significant role in the Ramblers: Christine Lipscombe, Margaret Loveless, Tony Parker and John Edmund Rice.

Brenda and David Horwill Kingston Ramblers



Margaret Loveless (left) with Christine Lipscombe, around 1946-47. Photo: Kingston Archives.

Area AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Surrey Area will be held at

2,00pm on Saturday 3 February in the Wilfred Noyce Community Centre, Crown Court Car Park, Godalming GU7 1DY.

Summer in Surrey



Awaiting the hungry hordes.

Photo: Holly Matthews.

We were in Surrey alright but we seemed to lose the summer on the day, Sunday 30 July. After lots of planning, the day went ahead despite the rain. The idea was simple: have a number of walks from different locations and all routed via Brockham cricket ground to meet up for afternoon tea and cakes. It was a great way for members of different groups to meet up and share experiences.

When you have been walking in the rain, the thought of stopping in a warm cricket pavilion for a hot drink and cake and a chance to dry off can be very appealing.

That's just what happened and through the afternoon many walkers turned up (somewhat wet) to the point that a couple of volunteers had to go out to buy more cake. I was delighted by the turnout. There was a real buzz in the air that afternoon and we were joined by Vanessa from Ramblers staff. It was lovely to see everyone and say hello. Thank you to all those who attended.

I would like to say a big thank you to Sue H of Farnham group for her work in the kitchen as well as Laura and Dave from Surrey Young Walkers for their help.

*Holly Matthews
Chair, Surrey Area*

Walking national trails

Walking is pretty much in the centre of everything I do. I have previously walked the North Downs Way, and that took my partner and I the best part of two years.

This year, a couple of friends and I decided that we would walk the South Downs Way but this proved trickier than you might imagine as parts of the route don't match up with public transport or are of lengths that I can't manage in a day. Therefore we decided we would do circles around the South Downs Way instead of walking along it. I thought a year would be plenty of time but 2023 is fast running out and the trail is still to be completed.

The same can be said for the South West Coast Path. When me and my partner first met,

one of our first holidays was in Dorset to walk a section of the route. After returning home, we jointly decided to walk the whole 360 miles. By returning each year for a week's holiday in Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, we have walked a large proportion of the route.

I start these walking projects with good intentions and lots of energy, but life sometimes gets in the way. In recent months the Surrey Young Walkers' book club has read 'The Salt Path'. It was an interesting and thought-provoking read. I found myself enjoying this more as I had already walked much of the path and could see the places in my mind as I read.

*Holly Matthews
Chair, Surrey Area*

Those we have lost

Vic Lewis 1942 - 2023

Many of our walking friends joined us at SW London Crematorium to say farewell to my beloved husband Vic Lewis who died on 24 June at the age of 80. He was well known among Richmond Ramblers as a walk leader, serving as Secretary of the group for 13 years as well as being an organiser of walks programmes. Together we were founder members of Richmond Health Walks and volunteers with the Friends of Bushy and Home Parks where we led history walks, tree walks and poetry walks.

In the 1960s Vic studied physics at King's College, London University, where he gained a PhD in Nuclear Physics. For over 340 years he worked at the National

Physical Laboratory at Teddington, where he innovated a number of techniques in the field of radiation science, becoming a Principal Scientific Officer. He collaborated with teams of scientists both here and abroad. At the National Physical Laboratory he would split atoms then cycle home for lunch through Bushy Park.

We were a good team, sharing our love of walking and adventure. We were fortunate indeed to have had 58 happy and fulfilling years together. Vic was much loved by our three children and six grandchildren. Despite his diagnosis of prostate cancer, and during six years of excellent treatment at Charing Cross Hospital, he remained active and positive. He was delighted to be



Vic Lewis

offered targeted therapy using a radionuclide within the nuclear medicine department where he could chat to the hospital physicist about radioisotopes. This treatment brought him hope and some extra time, for which we are grateful. He died peacefully at home with his loved ones. Vic was appreciated for his kindness, unassuming manner and quiet good humour. He will be missed and remembered by so many.

*Diana Lewis
Richmond Ramblers*

Gerald Barnett 1935 - 2023



Gerald Barnett

It was with great sadness that we learned of Gerald's death in the summer. He died peacefully at home in July from complications following bladder cancer.

On his retirement from a senior management position with ICI Paints, Gerald decided to devote

more time to his interest in walking, becoming a member of our group in 1993. He joined the committee soon after and took on the role of Secretary, a position he held with distinction for over 15 years. This was an important time for the group, as it sought to raise its profile and establish itself as a champion of the countryside. The group became a stronger force in negotiations with the local council and landowners to improve and extend the public rights of way network. Our effectiveness was due in no little part to Gerald's diligence, administrative know-how and social skills.

Gerald was also a keen walks leader, and together with his wife Sheila organised walking holidays twice yearly for the group with Holiday Fellowship and in private hotels. He became a certified

leader with HF and spent three months every year running walking holidays for them. He was the Field Officer at their hotel in Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight, where he achieved many plaudits for his work. He was an inveterate social organiser, organising and acting as master of ceremonies at our group parties and in his HF role, running games, quizzes and barn dances.

Gerald's interests went far beyond walking. He was a keen golfer, an avid reader and enjoyed a wide range of music both as a listener and player.

Gerald's contribution to Ramblers and the wider walking public over many years was immense. Our group owes much to him. He is sadly missed by those friends and colleagues who knew, worked and walked with him.

*Gordon Marrs
East Berks Ramblers*

Richard Lovell 1954 - 2023

Richard joined the Ramblers in September 2003 and was instrumental in setting up Surrey Area Weekend Walkers (SAWW). In March 2004 he led his first walk, with many more to come. In 2015 Richard helped set up Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE). Having held roles on the committees of both SAWW and SABRE for many years, in 2020 Richard took on the role of Surrey Area Treasurer which he continued to do, despite his health deteriorating, until shortly before his death.

Along with his wife, Sue, Richard led countless walks for SAWW and SABRE and joined many of the groups' holidays. Never seeking the limelight, his contribution to the Ramblers has been immense, and his friendly manner and genuine interest in other people

made him a pleasure to walk with.

After retiring from the civil service Richard used his skills to help others; he was unfailingly kind and patient with great attention to detail and a keen determination to resolve issues. Amongst his many skills, Richard was an enthusiastic and regular player of Magic: The Gathering (the card game). He would often be found doing this when he wasn't rambling.

He has been described as "a great guy who helped me enormously", "he helped see me through a difficult time and was always positive and cheerful", "always an interesting walking companion... a valued friend", "helped me unconditionally, fun, caring and kind and someone you could rely upon 100%."

Richard was very much a family man, and those of us who walked with him and Sue were



Richard Lovell. Photo: David Le Quesne

often entertained with stories first of their children Philip and Helen, but in more recent years of Ben and Sam, his grandchildren who he and Sue often baby-sat.

Richard died peacefully on 27 September at Woking Hospice with Sue, Philip and Helen at his bedside. Our thoughts are with his family at this time.

*Shirley Creed
SABRE*

Wish you were here?

Sedbergh, Cumbria

"Another fabulous holiday." This was the consensus of opinion from everyone who went on the SABRE trip to the Yorkshire Dales. The HF House, Thorns Hall, in Sedbergh proved to be a beautiful location and the food and hospitality there were as good as ever. The selection of HF guided walks was excellent and varied.

We climbed various fells including Howgills, Great Shunner, Wild Boar and White Head. At lower levels we walked through picturesque valleys and along the

River Dee. The weather outlook prior to the holiday was not great, but the forecast changed and we had some excellent bright, sunny weather which meant we often enjoyed great views. We walked parts of the Dales High Way, Pennine Way and Coast to Coast Path and saw a number of impressive railway viaducts. One surprising sight was a parade of 57 tractors along a narrow uphill track in Swaledale which held up our Option 2 walkers!

Our HF walk leaders, Debs, John and Howard, were excellent as was Helen from the catering team who provided a fun finale evening of linedancing. The memories of that evening will become part of SABRE history!

Shirley Creed

SABRE (Surrey and Beyond Ramblers)



Another peak conquered.

Photo: Mike Boon

Aberystwyth

At the end of July, a party of 23 Hampstead Ramblers had a week's holiday in Aberystwyth, based in newly-built university accommodation divided into eight-room flats each of which had spacious bedrooms and well-equipped kitchens and soft seating areas.

Five of our walks were led by members of Aberystwyth Ramblers who made them even more enjoyable by imparting some of their deep knowledge of the area. Their first walk gave us a good idea of the layout of the town and its immediate surroundings, including Penglais Woods with its lovely deciduous broadleaved woodland, and Constitution Hill (known as Consti) which rises dramatically from the sea and boasts the longest funicular electric railway in Britain and one of the world's largest camera obscuras.

The next day some of our party braved the ascent of the 893m (2,930ft) Cadair Idris in Eryri - which may mean a 'fort shaped like a chair' - from Minfford, not put off by the route being strenuous and usually given an 'A' grade by the Aberystwyth group, whilst most of the rest were led along the hilly coast path from Borth to Aberystwyth, passing Sarn Gwnfelyn at Wallog,



At the panorama above Barmouth.

Photo: Jill Koay

one of several 'causeways' stretching several miles into the northern part of Cardigan Bay at right angles to the coast which, together with the remains of the submerged forest at Ynyslas, appear to be the remnants of the legendary land of Cantre'r Gwaelod, established on soft glacial deposits laid down at the end of the last ice age and lost to the sea between 4,000 and 5,000 years ago.

Aberystwyth Ramblers also led a circular walk from Machynlleth partly along Glyndwr's Way, which afforded excellent views of the town and hills to the north up to Cadair Idris, and another walk giving wonderful views from Llwyngwrit

to Barmouth, including going over the long wooden railway bridge across the Mawddach river. We were very fortunate that the daytime weather during our stay was pleasantly warm and dry, with the exception of one afternoon of persistent rain when some took the opportunity to visit the impressive National Library of Wales.

In Hampstead we take pride in being a diverse community and we were pleased that Aberystwyth Ramblers helped to raise our awareness of the Welsh language and culture.

Jane Rosoux and Hadi Samsami
Hampstead Ramblers

Selworthy, Somerset

In May, 18 Croydon Ramblers went on an HF Exmoor guided walking holiday, staying at Holnicote House, Selworthy, on the National Trust's Holnicote Estate. We had sunshine, good food and good company and spectacular scenery.

There was a varied programme with three walks on five of the days. On two days a coach took us further afield so that we were given a taster of what this lovely area has to offer. One favourite memory was of walking on the Quantock Hills to Nether Stowey via a beautifully tree-lined ancient droveway. On our free day Minehead, Dunster Castle and Porlock were popular destinations.



Crossing Selworthy Bridge.
Photo: Diana and Peter Roud

We also learned about the National Trust's scheme to reintroduce beavers on the estate where in 2022 twins Russo and Roone were born! Thank you Muriel for organising another great holiday.

Diana and Peter Roud
Croydon Ramblers

New Forest

During one of my regular visits to the New Forest in July, it was obvious to me that the heathland there would soon be covered in its annual display of purple heather. To take advantage of this, together with our group holidays coordinator, Lesley

Maister, I decided to offer a couple of 12-mile walks at short notice over an August weekend. A small but appreciative group of nine members was rewarded with acres of glorious flowers over the undulating heaths of our smallest National Park as well as atmospheric ancient woodland and close encounters

with herds of fallow deer and the New Forest ponies with foals at foot. Fine weather, the Royal Oak at Fritham and a convenient tearoom all contributed to a delightful weekend break.

Barbara Macdonald
Hillingdon Ramblers



Heathland in bloom.
Photo: Caroline Wise

Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

Our trip away this year was to Stratford-upon-Avon, organised by a member. We hired a coach for three days. On our outward journey we had a stop at Marlow where we took a walk beside the Thames and had lunch before travelling on to the Stratford Manor Hotel.

Next day we went to Bourton-on-the-Water for a five-mile walk to Clapton-on-the-Hill. It was such a beautiful landscape

with magnificent views from the hills. Later, we returned to Stratford-upon-Avon for members to tour the town before our evening meal and social evening. On our way home we stopped to visit Blenheim Palace.

We are a very active and social group and throughout the year have a range of trips and events like quiz nights and evenings at the races.

Cliff Downes
East Essex Friends Group



On the walk from Bourton-on-the-Water.
Photo: Chris Barclay

Storrington, West Sussex



The group at Abingworth Hall.

Photo: Ajay Gandhi

After crawling around the M25 we met up at the HF's Abingworth Hall on Friday for a good meal at the start of a weekend of walking and socialising.

On the Saturday we were bussed to Amberley, the start point for three different walks. Most of us opted for the medium walk, but a few hardy souls went

for the hard hike and a couple for the easy ramble. Those of us who chose the medium walk had a hill to climb before rambling up and down along the ridge before a quite steep and slippery descent. After the walk, some enjoyed using the heated outdoor pool at Abingworth Hall before dinner. This was followed by a game of 'Call My Bluff' which was good fun.

The next day started grey and damp but once again we avoided any rain. This time a few more of our group joined the hard walk, while a lot of us still opted for the medium one which started from Midhurst on the level before a long climb but not as steep as the previous day. The descent was also easier. All walks ended at Petworth with the easy and medium groups having time for a drink in a local hostelry. After dinner there were a couple of quizzes, which most of our group attended.

After breakfast the next day we said our goodbyes and returned home - again crawling around the M25. It was good to see some friends who we haven't seen for some time and socially it was a great weekend with some good walking thrown in. Thanks to Ajay for organising the trip which was enjoyed by all 15 of us.

Beryl Rook

Lea and Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Norfolk coast

A weekend away where it's warm enough to not need multiple layers and also dry so that you don't have to use waterproofs is a wonderful thing. For it to happen on the last day of September would be considered very fortuitous but that is what we had on our weekend of walking on the Norfolk Coast Path. As most will know, the county is not known for its high peaks and this made the weekend suitable for a wide range of our members to enjoy.

This was our first weekend away and we limited numbers to 20. We based ourselves at Burnham Deepdale which had the accommodation and facilities we needed and was on the Coasthopper bus route which enabled us to get to the start



The start in Hunstanton.

Photo: Paul Goss

of each day's walk with relative ease. Starting at Hunstanton we followed the national trail all the way back and on day two we walked back from Wells-next-the-Sea.

The Norfolk coast has a mixture of wonderful beaches and marsh lands which attract both tourists

and a diverse range of birdlife. The national trail also took us via pine forests and alongside nature reserves. A good time was had by all and a repeated question that we have heard since is 'when is the next one?'

Paul Goss

North Beds Ramblers

Clent Hills, Worcestershire



At St Kenelm's church near Romsley.

Photo: Simon Thornhill

When our Wednesday walks organiser, John Morris, suggested a walking break in the Clent Hills we were all puzzled over where they could be. It turns out that they lie south west of Birmingham.

On 10 September, nine of us travelled there to become better acquainted with these hills. The

nearest town was Hagley, where in the 18th century Lord Lyttleton had his home at Hagley Hall and had a number of follies erected in the surrounding area, perhaps the most well known one being the Four Stones Folly. Our walks were over three days and we had mixed weather. Our luck was in as we came to our first point of interest which was the medieval St

Kenelm's Church where the warden invited us in and gave us a talk about its history. Over the centuries this and its springs of healing waters had become a place of pilgrimage and is mentioned in the Nun's Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

We could see for miles from the tops of the hills and when the sun shone on the third day, the views were very beautiful with the late summer sun on the hills and woods. We found rock houses carved into the red sandstone rock faces in one area and one cave system called Nanny's Rock was particularly interesting and made a very different snack stop to our normal places in the Chilterns.

Despite not being particularly familiar with the Clent Hill paths, John's uncanny ability to lead us on the day mostly without the aid of a map was very impressive. It had been a very interesting and enjoyable few days away exploring a totally new location for us.

Simon Thornhill

Hillingdon Ramblers

Buxton, Derbyshire

Members and friends of our group reached new heights when they climbed Mam Tor in the High Peak area of Derbyshire. They were on their 10th annual holiday, this time staying at the Old Hall Hotel in Buxton for four nights in September. Three levels of walk were arranged for each day, walking to the moors on the first day, then through Millersdale on the second day and finishing

with Mam Tor, the Great Ridge and Castleton on the final day. Wet weather gear was required for the first two days, but the sun eventually shone to give extensive views when we climbed Mam Tor.

Special thanks are due to Ken King for planning the walks along with Jenny Berrill and Natasha Challoner, and to Wendy Mannis for managing the bookings and liaising with the hotel.

Ruth Cornish

Thame & Wheatley Ramblers



On the Long Ridge.

Photo: Linsey Saunders.

Dartmoor

Adour, grey, desolate and forbidding landscape with dark tors looming out of the rain? Not on our trip to Dartmoor in September. We found it a green and lovely place with beautiful rocky tors bursting out of the ground in the bright sunshine. The walks - we had four on offer each day - varied from the open moors, deep wooded valleys alongside rivers, the spectacular coast between Dartmouth and Brixham and the delightful moorland village of Widecombe. We were even able to include a steam train ride back to Buckfast at the end of one walk.

Our base was the Northgate Hotel, Buckfast Abbey's new accommodation adjacent to the abbey's extensive gardens. Most of us took the opportunity to explore the grounds and admire the artwork

in the abbey church which was only completed in the 1930s on the site of a medieval abbey shut by Henry VIII.

I asked people on the trip about a memory or special moment that would stick in their minds. Some said that the visit had totally changed their view of Dartmoor, others commented on the enjoyment of climbing up to open space with views all around, especially the view from a tor overlooking Widecombe. One person enjoyed walking the outline of a Bronze Age settlement high on the moor, then being able to imagine what it must have looked like thousands of years ago by visiting the amazing exhibition at the national park centre at Princetown.

To sum up the trip: beautiful location, wonderful weather, great company, interesting walks. Many thanks to all involved in the organisation and smooth running of this great trip!

Joan Clark

Henley & Goring Ramblers



Moorland above Widecombe.

v Photo: Joan Clark

Cambridgeshire

We enjoyed a three-day getaway in September when 30 members stayed in Madingley Hall, University of Cambridge conference centre, four miles from the city of Cambridge. We had negotiated a half-board price for 22 rooms and all were clean and modern and the meals excellent.

Walks were organised and led by a team of six. A five-mile circular included Audley End House and Saffron Walden,

a nine-mile circular started at Madingley Hall while a charming five-mile walk from Cambridge to Grantchester followed the River Cam. We also had a six-mile walk along the River Ouse at Ely which whetted our appetites for a traditional Sunday roast in a nearby hostelry. Members also enjoyed a town trail walk in historic Saffron Walden, a tour of Trinity College in Cambridge, a visit to Ely Cathedral and to Oliver Cromwell's house.

Gordon Shefford
Surrey Heath Ramblers



The group at Madingley Hall.

Photo: Paul Seidman



Croydon Ramblers in the Azores where they found hydrangea used as hedging.
Photo: John Tickner

Holidays, holidays, holidays

About 13 Croydon Ramblers wended their way to Westport in Ireland in April for what has become an annual pilgrimage. We were each tasked with leading a daily section of the Western Way - together with impulsive deviations as the mood took us. Needless to say, the walking was excellent and by staying in a town like Westport we were never short of places to go for evening meals, Guinness and music. The eight days of walking, accommodation, meals and transport were organised by Ann Toomey who I must say is just brilliant at doing this sort of stuff!

In May we had a wonderful holiday on Exmoor, described by Diana and Peter Roud elsewhere on these pages.

Moving to July, our Ann again took us on holiday, this time to the Azores. Many people look a bit puzzled when the Azores are mentioned because they are islands in the Atlantic, a few hundred miles south and a bit to the left of the Canary Islands. They are Portuguese, so some euros do nicely. The main island is San Miguel and because of the very temperate climate it is

very green. Good walking and stunning vistas are guaranteed. After a few days we took a 25-minute flight to the other main Azorean island of Santa Maria and a very pretty little place it was too! Very green and lush and quite hilly - a bit like Wales but with more sunshine. A few more days of rambling followed after which we had to return to the main island to fly home via Lisbon. Again, many thanks are due to Ann for organising what turned out to be a complicated itinerary.

Come September we were on holiday again, this time in Dovedale. Geraldine had managed to book 17 places for us at the HF Peveril of the Peak. Now I could waffle on about the three walks a day, the lovely walk leaders, the beautiful countryside and excellent food. But if you check back to page 14 in the September issue of South East Walker you will find an admirable report by Linda Buckley of Epsom and Ewell Ramblers about the same holiday but taken at a different time of year.

Last year when we went to Coniston HF one of our walkers turned up with only one boot. This year (and I won't mention Dave by name) he forgot to bring any socks!

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers

Inspiring

We were pleased to host members of the London Blind Ramblers on Sunday 20 August for our annual walk together. The sun shone as we left Coulsdon South station and climbed Farthing Down. After a pause for coffee it was then on to Chaldon church which dates from 1086 and made a peaceful stop for lunch. In the afternoon we stopped at the Fox pub for a welcome pint before making our way back via Happy Valley to the home of our walk leader, Jan Campion. There we

were treated to a splendid tea on the lawn with more varieties of cake on offer than you would find at the Ritz! So, next time your group hosts the London Blind Ramblers, go along and find out what it's like to experience the world as someone who is blind or partially sighted. You'll be amazed at what can be achieved - playing bowls and cricket, ballet dancing and learning multiple languages amongst other accomplishments - and allow yourself to be inspired by what you can learn from your visitors.

Peter Southgate
Croydon Ramblers

Around the groups



On Farthing Down.

Photo: Andrew Coleman

Constable country

In mid-September, 32 of us set off in reasonable weather for a walking and sightseeing trip to Flatford Mill in Suffolk. We all had a very enjoyable time exploring the beautiful area with a choice of

three walks and the opportunity to join a tour of the mill. We were lucky to escape with just a couple of intermittent showers!

Liz Stratton
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers



Resting at the mill.

Photo: Beverley Johnston

Treetop challenge

One Saturday earlier this year 14 of our members met at Go Ape in Woburn. We began with a safety talk and demonstration to test our abilities before set free to face the first obstacle. Having climbed a rickety ladder to a small platform we clipped on to the safety system before being swung into a cargo net. The only way was down, so off we went feet first - not necessarily

the right way round - into a pile of chippings. There were many obstacles, including rope ladders, zip wires of varying lengths, wooden slatted bridges and vertical log bridges. Nevertheless, we all had a great time and agreed we would do it again. A big thank you to our Social Secretary, Roger McLeod, for arranging the event and to all participants for making it such a fun day.

Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers



Getting ready to Go Ape!

Photo: Tom Collier

Why lead?

We recently discussed our experiences of leading group walks with three other Kingston leaders: Gabrielle Fuller, Angela Horrocks and Maggie Wheeler.

Thinking about why we lead walks, our responses (paraphrased here) were:

- I enjoy getting to know an area in some detail as a result of leading several walks there, then appreciating its history, biodiversity and beauty.
- I enjoy helping to create a walking community by encouraging

walkers to get to know each other. It's lovely to hear a gentle bubble of nattering going on as you walk.

- I find it rewarding to plan and complete a walk successfully. I challenged myself to acquire the skills to do this and feel proud of myself that I can now invite others to walk a route and get them round it.

- It feels great to contribute, especially as without volunteer leaders there would not be a walks programme.

- There is a sense of 'giving back' having enjoyed many walks led by others. Asked about their 'best moments' the responses were:

- I got a round of applause at the end of the walk!

- When everyone said how much they enjoyed the walk.

- Planning a bluebell walk some time ahead and then, on the day, finding bluebells were out in force!

And the worst moments?

- When an accident occurred. It was only minor but I did worry about the person's welfare.

- Problems with trains, poor connections or asking the group to hurry to ensure we caught a particular train.

- Starting in the wrong direction and having to admit the mistake and correct it (the authors admit to this one). What advice would you give to new leaders?

- There is a lot of help available

to find suitable walks, such as walks guidebooks, websites, apps on a smartphone, some local councils list walks on their websites, and then when confidence builds you can branch out and get better at map reading. Many groups, including ours, run map reading courses.

- KISS: Keep it stupidly sensible. Begin with a really simple walk, perhaps one you've walked often before. Short walks are just as popular as longer ones.

- Get a buddy: It helps to co-lead with someone with a little more experience initially. Confidence improves with each walk successfully led.

- Check it all out: Practice the route, perhaps with your buddy.

Check public transport in advance and again a few days before the walk.

- Briefings: At the start of the walk, welcome everyone and tell them the framework for the day, walk length, breaks planned, etc.

- Phone: Ensure your phone is fully charged.

Enjoy: Don't forget to enjoy the walk yourself!

If you would like to know more about leading a walk and the support available then please chat to someone in your group's committee. You are sure to be welcomed!

Barbara Crow and John Dixon

Kingston Ramblers

Bench installed

On Sunday 27 August, 31 of our members gathered at Walthamstow Wetlands to celebrate the installation of a bench there which we donated. We have also enjoyed a super programme which has included three walks with a biscuit theme, including one trip out to Reading for a Huntley & Palmer walk. We are on a firm footing and our programme of short walks aims to encourage all to join us. A warm welcome is guaranteed!

Pauline Macfarlane
Lea Valley Friends Group



At the bench celebration.

Photo: Christine Jones

On the Saxon shore

Having set themselves the aim of completing one named walk in the south east each year, an intrepid group of walkers set off on 26 July to tackle the Saxon Shore Way, which extends from Gravesend to Hastings. It is a long-distance path that traces the coast of south east England as it was in Roman times, 163 miles in total.

The first 88 miles were spread over six consecutive Wednesdays in July and August. We were joined by an array of different walkers over the next six weeks, walking an average of 14.5 miles each time. The landscape was varied, taking us mainly around the shoreline but occasionally inland along the many creeks. The public transport used to get to and from these linear walks sometimes proved problematic, which once resulted in us not getting home until 10pm!

After a one-week break, seven friends set off for the final section

to be walked over six consecutive days, starting from Upstreet on Monday 11 September and finishing in Hastings on the 16th. With distances on Ordnance Survey maps not always seeming to represent the mileage underfoot, an average of 14 - 15 miles was walked each day. The terrain was very undulating at times, but allowed us spectacular panoramic views on the White Cliffs of Dover, along the escarpment of

the old sea cliffs from Folkestone to Rye and from the sandstone cliffs of the High Weald to Hastings. Our walking was made all the better with the gorgeous sunshine and genial company each day.

The group finished mainly blister-free, and in good spirits. With a cold beer in hand at the end, we decided that the challenge had been worth it and it was time to start planning the next expedition!

Mel Collins
Maidstone Ramblers



At the start at Gravesend Pier.

Photo: Maureen Pearson

Sponsored gate

We have sponsored a kissing gate in North Crawley parish in conjunction with Milton Keynes Council's rights of way department. Parish path checker Jim has since led a figure of eight walk which included visiting the new gate.

This year David Reed will step down as a path checker for many parishes. Thank you David for all your work in

ensuring the path network on your patch remains in good condition. We have been able to recruit six new path checkers, so welcome to them. We still have some parishes without checkers but hope to find some more volunteers.

After a summer lull our autumn walks programme has picked up once again with plenty of walks to enjoy.

Ian Dunford
Milton Keynes and District Ramblers



MK Ramblers with the new gate in North Crawley parish.

Photo: Jim Monaghan

Support for food hub

Following the success of walks organised in November 2022 to raise funds for families from Ukraine, we were keen to find a new challenge. After consulting a number of people about favoured charities we settled on Purley Food Hub, an organisation that serves our borough by providing food and essential services to people who are struggling to make ends meet.

On Sunday 13 August we held two walks, one of 10 miles and one of two miles, which were very well supported. Representatives

of Purley Food Hub joined us and spoke powerfully about the work they do. In true Croydon Ramblers fashion each walk ended with tea, more chat and an excellent selection of homemade cakes.

Our aims were fairly modest and we set a goal of collecting £500. Thanks to the generosity of members, their families and friends, we collected nearly three times that amount! We gained much pleasure and satisfaction from organising the events and hope to do something similar on an annual basis.

Helen Thompson
Croydon Ramblers



On the walk with Steve Hunt and his wife from Purley Food Hub (in red shirts) on the right.

Photo: Jan Campion

Ridgeway 50

More than 70 people gathered on Coombe Hill, near Wendover in Buckinghamshire, on Friday 29 September to mark the 50 years that generations of people have been enjoying the national trail. On the same spot on the same day in 1973, the route was officially opened as a national trail. To ensure the trail continues to be a much-loved

route, the Ridgeway National Trails Officer is encouraging everyone to share ideas for the future and support work to realise these ideas. Send ideas for the Ridgeway Future 50 vision to ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk. Projects welcoming volunteers, sponsorship and donations are detailed on the Ridgeway's anniversary webpage at https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/ridgeway_anniversary2023/

Map reading for beginners

East Sussex Rambler, John Harmer, is organising another of his <i>Explore with Map and Compass</i> courses in March 2024.	Tentative dates are Saturdays 9, 23 or 30, depending on demand. The course costs £10 (reduced rates available) and consists mainly of fieldwork in the countryside around Battle. If interested, contact John on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com .
---	---

Footpath campaigner remembered

Keith Holly, who died in 2019 aged 93, was Footpath Secretary of our group for over 20 years. Following a distinguished career at Oxford University's Department of Agriculture, Dr Holly threw himself into footpath work after retirement. One notable achievement out of many was the successful joint campaign with CPRE to create two footpaths on Warneford Meadow in the middle of Oxford against strenuous opposition from the landowners. It took nearly 20 years and was an example of Keith's dogged determination and meticulous gathering of evidence. The result is a green lung (now a Town Green) in the heart of the city which might otherwise have been built over, in contravention of the original owners' wishes who bequeathed the land to the Warneford Hospital.

In his will, Keith left £7,000 to Oxford City Ramblers. We felt it only right that we should use some of that to erect a bench in his memory on Warneford Meadow, where he had worked so hard to create new footpaths. We applied for permission from the landowner, the local NHS trust. Then Covid struck! At first we thought it only right not to press our case. The NHS had more important matters to contend with. Then, in 2021, when we thought that we could raise the matter once more, we were given some encouragement but asked to be patient. We were patient, and waited until eventually, in early 2022 we were told that we were not going to get permission. After another abortive effort to place a custom-made bench on a site near where Keith lived, we settled on a bench in Cutteslowe Park, where Keith had been a member of the committee, another of his many civic engagements. The bench is now in place, in a pleasant location, facing west into the evening sun, where Keith is bound to have walked over the years.

*Tony Dale
Oxford City Ramblers*



The bench erected by Oxford City Ramblers in honour of Keith Holly, walker and campaigner. Photos: Tony Dale

Unpredictable weather



Negotiating unexpected summer puddles.

Photo: Richard Trimmer

Sadly, the promised long hot summer which started towards the end of June, was not to be. The weather changed in early July and brought some very autumnal weather which led to an abundance of nettles, brambles and other vegetation. Our working party continued throughout the summer clearing many footpaths which had become overgrown following the lack of maintenance during the Covid months but it will probably take some time before all our paths are clear and easy to walk despite our best efforts.

Although new members have been recruited to the working party, further offers of help would be appreciated. Gates to replace stiles continue to be installed by our small but dedicated group of volunteers.

August and September saw the last two coach walks of the season with visits to Bath and Winchester. These followed trips to Marlow, Lacock and Salisbury and the organising committee were very pleased with the ongoing popularity of these walks.

*Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers*

Rickety stile replaced

A group from our committee went to Haddenham in Buckinghamshire on Tuesday 3 October for a walk along the Wychert Way and to see the kissing gate sponsored by us. This was installed for us by the North Bucks rRIPPLE (ramblers Repairing and Improving Public Paths for Leisure and Exercise) group and replaces a rickety old stile. As well as seeing the gate we were lucky enough to see the rRIPPLE team in action, installing two more new kissing gates in a nearby field. We were greeted by the group's coordinator, Bill Piers, who explained to us how they operated and how their Donate-a-Gate scheme works. The cooperation is impressive and this small team of ten or so volunteers has carried out over 300 installations since 2015.

*Dave Hetherington
South Bank Ramblers*

The Wychert Way is a 12-mile circular route in the



Our group at the new gate.

Photo: Dave Hetherington

Vale of Aylesbury, passing close to Haddenham & Thame Parkway station on the London Marylebone to Oxford/Banbury line. More details at wychert.org.uk. (Wychert is a traditional form of walling). For more information on the Donate a Gate scheme in North Bucks, go to <https://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html>.

Remembering Elaine

In August, when we learnt that a member of our group, Elaine Lagdon, had passed away at home suddenly and unexpectedly, a sense of shock and disbelief descended on us all. How could this happen to Elaine, who was young, fit and the one who always took up the extra challenges on walks? We were confronted by a stark reminder that life is fragile and so much can change in the blink of an eye. Although Elaine had been with our group for only a few years, she had touched the lives of so many with her bubbly, outgoing nature and winning smile. She walked with us regularly and this year signed up for all five of our trips away. She had completed three of these: to Wales, Devon and the New Forest. It was on the Brecon Beacons trip that she took up all of the most challenging options available.

We decided to organise a memorial walk based on the route Elaine led for us in 2021. It was in her favourite area around Ley Hill, near Chesham. Never one for maps or grid references, Elaine knew her walk from memory as she lived nearby and walked there all the time. We set off from Ley Hill Common and retraced her steps, passing Latimer House where she had once stayed as part of a work training course, and down to the River Chess where a fallen tree made a perfect lunch stop. On the original walk Elaine had made tiffin and Toblerone brownies for everyone; for this day two members recreated those bakes and we all indulged in a chocolate feast. If Elaine was watching from above she would have been very pleased!



Elaine Lagdon 1960 - 2023.

Photo: Nettie Dearnun

After the walk we retired to the Golden Eagle pub at Ashley Green where we raised a toast to our dear friend and regaled some memories. One memory came from a walk to celebrate our late Queen's jubilee, with a garden party afterwards. Elaine really got into the spirit of the day and, just before the garden party, surprised us all by changing into a sparkly sequined Union Jack dress! As we were leaving the pub, one of our group was heard to ask, "If I should ever go suddenly will you do the same for me as this has been so nice." Let's hope we don't need to any time soon.

May Elaine's memory live on in the footsteps of her walk; whenever you pass this way, think of Elaine.

*Anne Kimber and Tim Axten
Chiltern Weekend Walkers*

Barn dance

About 60 members got together on Thursday 5 October for a traditional English barn dance where the Wraggle Taggle Ceilidh Band, along with our very own Mick Jenkins as caller, got everyone jigging around. Thanks to Olly S and her team of helpers, a piping hot supper of chilli and jacket potatoes appeared part

way through the evening. They had produced enough for a small army and then some!

By the second half of the evening everyone had got into the swing of things and we were treated to a sparkling display of footwork, albeit slightly eccentric and not altogether in time with the music. But what was lacking in rhythm was made up for in exuberance and enthusiasm. Perhaps a moderate amount of alcohol and an earlier practice had served to reduce our inhibitions!



Getting into the swing of things. Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

*Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers*

Cream tea

About 70 members attended our Strawberry Cream Tea on Wednesday 23 August. The event, organised by our Muriel Fell, was for long-standing members to have a get-together and chat whilst consuming large quantities of scones with cream and jam (or should that be jam and cream?), strawberries with more cream and a lovely selection of home-made cakes accompanied by lashings of tea. Our Chairman, Roy



Ready for tea!

Photo: John Tickner

Endersby, was collared to serve tea to arriving members and this gave him the chance to have a brief chat with them as they came through the door. I was going to

offer my services to help wash up but there was no room for me! A lovely afternoon was enjoyed by all!

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*