

Walker

Publishing success leads to funding for access improvements

In the 1990s and early 2000s, members of East Berks Ramblers Group devised and published the *Rambling for Pleasure* series of illustrated guide books describing walks in and around Berkshire. They were written by David Bounds and devised and produced by Dave Ramm who generously donated the copyright and profits to our group. The books sold extremely well and generated substantial profits but the financial rules do not allow local groups to hold significant surplus funds in their accounts.

We spent some of the profits on footpath improvements on our patch, primarily on replacing stiles. Now, all stiles where the landowners agreed to replacement have been dealt with and we have been able to support other Berkshire groups with similar improvements.

In 2002, we set up in the national Ramblers accounts the 'East Berks Endowment Fund' for the 'excess profits', with a last transfer in 2007. The express purpose of the fund was to finance practical projects that were of benefit to Ramblers as a whole. Expenditure is agreed between the Ramblers staff team and our group. Some £10,000 was spent supporting

the 'Don't Lose Your Way' initiative and the remaining fund balance currently stands at some £39,000.

As no further book sales were anticipated and given the advent of e-publishing, we approached the Ramblers staff team in 2023 to agree a plan by which the fund could be spent in the near and medium term rather than simply sitting in a bank account. We all agree that funding of special projects would be a very appropriate use of the fund.

East Berks members met with Head of Paths, Jack Cornish, and Volunteering Officer (Paths), Helen Bates, to discuss how we could move forward; we agreed to support some of the projects in the Path Accessibility Fund that so far had not been progressed.

The fund was set up in 2021 thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor. Its intention is to improve access to paths so that they can be enjoyed by as many people as possible. Bids were invited from groups, rights of way teams and others, and projects to improve path access across England and Wales were supported in 2023/2024. These have included projects at Ickwell Green near Biggleswade in Bedfordshire, along

a section of the Dartmoor Way near Ivybridge in Devon, at Weymouth in Dorset and at Elkstone in Gloucestershire. Work at these sites will enable paths to be enjoyed by many more people and particularly those with reduced mobility.

Improvements such as these are vital as 56% of people with physical and sensory disabilities say physical barriers stop them from using the path network.

The next funding round of the Path Accessibility Fund has just been launched with information circulated in Ramblers volunteer news and Walk magazine. Application details are also on the Ramblers website.

We are delighted to be supporting path improvements, which we think is entirely in keeping with the intention and spirit of the Endowment Fund as it was originally set up. David Bounds is unfortunately no longer with us but we feel sure he would approve. The generosity of those who wrote and produced the *Rambling for Pleasure* series is well remembered in East Berks and we are pleased to help the wider Ramblers community.

Liz Richardson, Secretary, and Steve Gillions, Immediate Past Chair of East Berks Ramblers



Thanks to funding from the East Berks Endowment Fund, South Dorset Ramblers will be able to support the RSPB with a project which will improve access to one of Weymouth's unique treasures, the nature reserve of Radipole. The reserve lies within a high flood risk zone and allowed to flood to protect low-lying parts of the town. Because of this, a public right of way which runs across the site often becomes unwalkable during the winter. The scheme will involve providing an additional layer of stone along a section of the path to raise the level. Welcoming the news are (left to right) Peter Robertson (Senior Sites Manager RSPB Dorset reserves), Dave Ackerley (Senior Ranger Dorset Council), David Northam, Sarah Moyle and Janet Davis (South Dorset Ramblers).



Some of the titles published in the *Rambling for Pleasure* series.

Busy time for the Vanguard Way!

It's all been happening along the Vanguard Way this year! Friday the 3rd of May happened to be the 43rd anniversary of the day in 1981 when Alan Mattingly, then General Secretary of the Ramblers' Association, cut the red tape at Gills Lap in the Ashdown Forest, halfway along, to launch what was then a 62.5

mile trail from Croydon to Seaford.

So much has happened since then. In 1998, the trail was relaunched (using reattached pieces of the original red tape!) at Berwick station by Kate Ashbook, General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society and a former President of the Ramblers. This marked a three and a half mile extension through the fascinating

abandoned village of Tidemills to Newhaven Harbour station, and this year a further short extension to Newhaven Town station was added. This provides a link with the Newhaven - Dieppe ferry, and consequently the Vanguard Way has sometimes formed part of a journey from London to Paris, and even as the start of a pilgrimage through France to join the Camino

de Santiago! Conversely, French walkers have followed the Vanguard Way on their way to London.

But the anniversary was coincidental, as it happened that on 3 May this year two significant events took place along the trail. In the morning, a plaque to mark the start and finish of the Vanguard Way (because it can be walked either way) was unveiled by the aforementioned Kate Ashbrook outside East Croydon station at the north end - with the full blessing

of train operator Govia. The original red tape (which had been recut and joined back together on several occasions) was unusable by now, and it was necessary to splash out on a new roll! A similar plaque has been attached to the ticket office at Newhaven Town station at the south end.

Then in the afternoon 35 people walked from the Bull Inn at Chelsham Common to nearby Nore Hill to launch the Graham Butler Mile. (continues on page 2)

It commemorates the man who died in 2018 and did so much for the Vanguard Rambling Club and the Vanguard Way, as well as for Surrey and Croydon Ramblers. Some £4,000 was raised by members to replace seven rickety old stiles along the Mile with gates that were installed by Ramblers members. They are much appreciated by walkers trying to negotiate the very steep slope there. Once again Kate was on hand to cut the tape, this time jointly with Graham's wife, Janet, with several members of his family in attendance. Plaques have been attached at each end of the Mile to let walkers know about its significance.

A further comfort along the Mile for those tackling Nore Hill was the installation of a five-person seat at the top, providing a magnificent view across the sloping fields of Warren Barn Farm to the wooded hills around Woldingham. It has been funded jointly by the Vanguard Rambling Club and the organisers of the Vanguard Way Marathon, which takes place annually from Lloyd Park in Croydon to near Limpsfield Chart and back.

From the late 1970s, the trail was researched, created and managed by members of the Vanguard Rambling Club. Then in 2022, with most members now in their 70s and 80s, they set up the Vanguard Way Association (VWA), with a view to handing over its management to younger people. A complete overhaul of the easily recognised 'VGW' signage was undertaken



A plaque was placed outside East Croydon station by (left to right) Murren from Southern Railway, John Jeffkins, Kate Ashbrook and Colin Saunders. Photo: John Jeffkins

by the new Route Manager, John Jeffkins. The only gaps now are in the Ashdown Forest, where the conservators are reluctant to allow the proliferation of waymark posts.

This year two new facilities are being introduced. The Vanguard Way has many links with stations and other points of interest near the route, and those at Oxted, Edenbridge, East Grinstead and Buxted have been waymarked with a special 'LINK' disc. Also short circular routes that make use of parts of the Vanguard Way are being signed to introduce local walkers to the concept of walking for pleasure! The first was at Tidemills and more are being considered at Oxted, Crockham Hill, Edenbridge, Forest Row, Buxted and Exceat.

The Vanguard Way rejoices in having two free trail guides, in both north - south and south - north



The Graham Butler Mile is declared open by (left to right) Brian Reader (President of Surrey Ramblers), Kate Ashbrook, Janet Butler and Colin Saunders. Photo: John Jeffkins

directions - the latter was updated this year. One is in the form of a series of 10 PDF documents, which can be downloaded at vanguardway.org.uk. The other is the 'Vanguard Way Photoguide' for mobile devices, which shows the way by means of a yellow arrow on a series

of photographs of key locations along the trail, together with text from the PDF versions. It can be downloaded from Google's Play Store or the Apple Store - look out for 'VGW Guide' on a yellow arrow.

Colin Saunders

Vanguard Way Association

At the Association's Annual General Meeting on 8 June, Colin Saunders handed over the Chair to John Jeffkins, and

was replaced as Membership Secretary by Fiona McNicol. He remains on the committee as Vice Chair and Publicity Officer. Also staying on are

Gavin Fuller as Secretary, Lesley Secker as Treasurer and Registrar, John Pestle as Facebook Co-ordinator, Dan Hawksworth as Assistant Route Manager and Gareth Davies as Vanguard Way Marathon organiser.

Membership of the Vanguard Way Association is open to all who would like to support its aims, mainly to maintain and promote the Vanguard Way, including of course those who have walked (or are walking) it.

The annual subscription (covering any number of people at the same address) is currently £7 a year (£10 from 1 January 2025) while life membership is £120 (£160 from 1 January 2025). Full details can be found at vanguardway.org.uk.

Restoring Enfield Chase

The London Loop's section 17 is a 14 km (8.7 miles) stretch that winds its way from Cockfosters to Enfield. On the way you pass through Enfield Chase, once an area of ancient woodland that was mentioned in the Domesday book as being able to support over 4,000 pigs. Over the centuries the land has been the site of royal hunts and seen a great many struggles over various enclosures. Indeed, nearby Crews Hill station is named for the Crew family who fought long and hard but were evicted from their home in the mid-18th century.

Today, Enfield Council, Thames21, the Friends of Enfield Chase and many other organisations have teamed up to help reforest and rewild Enfield Chase. So far, 134,200 trees have been planted and many

wetlands created to increase local biodiversity, control and quality and levels of water flowing into local brooks and rivers, like the close by Salmons Brook, and to create a special place for visitors, walkers and the community to enjoy.

The Enfield Chase Woodland Restoration Project will see another 51 hectares of publicly accessible woodland created, extending the green space to 130 hectares and improving accessibility to the east of the borough. The project will enhance the 80 hectares of woodland and 3.3 km of new footpaths that have already been created in previous phases of the project.

It will include natural flood management features, footpaths and signage and will contribute to the council's ambition to plant one million trees and create a greener Enfield for everyone to enjoy. The project will be funded by £500,000 from the Greater London



New trees in Enfield Chase.

Photo: Des Garrahan

Authority's Green and Resilient Spaces Fund, with additional funding from the Forestry Commission and other sources. Importantly, the woodland

will help to combat the effects of climate change in Enfield. Trees absorb carbon dioxide which means they can help to stop rising temperatures, keep soil moist and

reduce the risk of flooding to homes and the surrounding area and enhance the walking experience on this section of the London Loop. Des Garrahan

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City of rivers

In many ways London could be viewed as a city of rivers. True we've buried many of them, like the Fleet and Effra, underground in a pipe under centuries of development. While others, like the Wandle and the Shuttle, can still be seen, gurgling their eventual way towards the Thames.

At their June meeting, Transport for London's Leisure Walking Plan Delivery Group committed to the creation of two more walking routes, adding to the Green Link Walk unveiled in March, by the end of 2027. One of these will be the Forgotten Rivers Walk that is planned to run from the London Loop at Borehamwood down to Blackfriars. This journey will take in the Silk Stream at Burnt Oak, the Dollis Brook in Barnet and the hidden River Fleet rising on Hampstead Heath.

The second route, which is still to be finally decided, will include parts of south London. It is hoped this route will not only intersect with the Capital Ring but also the Green Chain Walk and maybe the Green Link Walk. It might even be possible to walk alongside less well-known rivers like the evocatively named, Quaggy.

I remember the Quaggy from my youth in Lewisham. The River Quaggy itself is a tributary of the Ravensbourne, which in turn flows into the Thames and has small and named tributaries of its own, including the Milk Street Ditch, and the Fairy Hall Flow. It also has wonderful local champions like Sarah McMichael, who has been battling for a River Quaggy Trail for years.

London really is a city of rivers whose names range from the mundanely literal to the high blown romantic, some we can see, while many more are hidden and it would be marvellous if we were able to walk alongside or above so many more of them because that would be the best way to make sure they are not forgotten,

Des Garrahan



The Quaggy in Lewisham, south east London.

Photo: Des Garrahan



Power struggles

You will no doubt have noticed that the National Grid is consulting widely on its proposals to bring the nation's power infrastructure up to date. Specifically, it seeks to boost capacity in order to link relatively recently commissioned as well as future proposed offshore wind turbines to centres of maximum electricity consumption in the south east. There are many segments of the national grid involved in this project, but the one which has attracted probably the most public attention is that which would link Norwich to Tilbury. The three strategic local authorities affected - Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex County Councils - have jointly and formally urged the Grid to reconsider its proposed overland transmission lines, and to pause any such changes until alternatives have been fully evaluated. Local MPs have given vociferous support - especially during the General Election in July - to 'stop the pylons' campaigns.

As you might expect, the prospect of new and conspicuous pylons appearing in a mostly new line across these three largely rural counties has upset many local walkers too. There are two causes for concern. First is the dislocation of several hundred rights of way (195 in Essex alone) as a surprisingly broad - eight metre - swathe of land either side of the relevant line is commandeered

as a haul road for several months by the Grid during erection and cabling. Secondly, although some particularly sensitive landscape areas would be eligible for more costly underground cabling, there is the permanent (or at least decades long) visual intrusion of the pylons and 400kV overhead cables on the landscape.

Essex Area realised that there were two conflicting principles involved here - protecting the landscape from visual degradation on one hand but supporting the earliest practical achievement of Net Zero carbon emission on the other. In discussion with Ramblers Central Office staff, we resolved that engaging in a technical evaluation of alternative transmission technologies was outside Ramblers expertise and remit. Our submission, prepared by our Walking Environment Officer, Graham Reeve, has therefore concentrated on means for minimising dislocation of the public rights of way network during construction, while urging that less intrusive options be adopted where practicable.

The incoming Labour government has already given high prominence to its plans to accelerate strategic infrastructure projects such as this, so the original timetable of a 2027 start running through to a 2031 completion may well not survive the next few months' ministerial scrutiny. For our part, we don't believe that Ramblers should support any delay in capitalising renewable energy generation.

David Radford
Chair, Essex Area Ramblers



West Essex member Brian Smith and his wife Marion, at the gates of Buckingham Palace where they'd been invited to attend the Royal Garden Party on 21 May. Luckily, they'd brought their umbrellas as the day was unseasonably wet! Brian was instrumental in establishing the model for parish path adopter schemes in Essex and for many years was the hand at the tiller of our group's footpath working party.

Dave Evans
West Essex Ramblers

Beware of false definitives

The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of 'definitive' is "... serving to promote a final solution or to end a situation". This is probably the spirit in which we resort to definitive maps of rights of way, and certainly was when our colleagues engaged in the Don't Lose Your Way campaign were tracing the past use of a public right of way near Braintree. Although some members claimed to have used the relevant path, the highways authority is proposing to delete the path from the definitive map entirely because, it

says, "... its initial inclusion (in 1953) on the definitive map and statement did not adhere to the prescribed statutory process ...". The case may be referred to the planning Inspectorate for resolution, but Don't Lose Your Way volunteers might like to be aware that paths shown on definitive maps can occasionally disappear, even if an alleged procedural error comes to light after 71 years.

David Radford
Chair, Essex Area Ramblers

December issue

You will read in the accompanying Walk magazine that their December issue will be a trial digital-only edition. Sadly, this means that we will not be able to produce the usual paper edition of South East Walker because it is normally posted to members with Walk magazine. The cost of posting out a paper edition of South East Walker separately from Walk is prohibitive. The best we can do instead is produce a digital version which will be available to view on Area websites from the last week in November. Some Areas may be able to alert you to this (if they have your email address). This is not a decision made by us but by the Ramblers office. We hope to be back as normal in March 2025.

Explore with map and compass course:

Another one-day beginners course is planned for Saturdays 21/28 September and 5/12 October at Battle in East Sussex. Standard charge £10. If you are interested, contact John Harmer on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com.

Christ's Hospital and Amberley stations:

New timetables introduced in June have brought half-hourly trains on Mondays to Saturdays (still hourly on Sundays) to these two stations in West Sussex popular with walkers. Both stations are on the London Victoria to Bognor Regis line

Heritage Open Days:

The annual festival returns 6 - 15 September with transport as this year's theme at many properties

opening to the public. Details at heritageopendays.org.uk. A similar but separate festival in the London area - Open House - runs from 14 - 22 September. More at open-city.org.uk.

Seven Sisters Country Park:

As part of the refurbishment of the country park by the South Downs National Park, three cottages have been restored and made available as holiday lets. A nearby barn has also been restored as a camping barn able to accommodate groups of up to 35 people, plus a camping field can host up to 20 tents. The site is close to the South Downs Way. For details go to cuckmerecottagesandcamping.co.uk



Green Link Walk added to walks project

Our project volunteers have continued their valuable work on the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk over recent months and now the Green Link Walk has been added to the project.

Ian Bull and Andrew Hunt produced and published detailed maps and guidance PDFs to London's newest walking route, the Green Link Walk, which opened in March. They worked with GoJauntly!, who also have directions on their app, to split the route into four easily walkable sections, and the PDFs are available free for download on the Inner London Ramblers website. The Green Link Walk is the eighth route in Transport for London's Walk London network and is the first of the new Greenways - which Ramblers campaigned for in the 2021 mayoral elections - to be implemented.

On the London Loop, volunteers have now carried out waymarking improvements to all 24 sections - with waymarks having been replaced and stickers added as needed on Section 24 during the spring. Improvements had already been made to all 15 sections of the Capital Ring.

We're pleased to report that pressure exerted on the local council by Chris Simpson has led to a badly damaged footbridge over a ditch on Section 21 of the London Loop (Havering-atte-Bower to Harold Wood) having now been replaced with a new one.

In Hanworth on Section 9 of the London Loop (Kingston Bridge to Hatton Cross), the council has made footpath improvements to link Pevensy Nature Reserve with the Cavalry Tunnel under the railway line adjacent to the River Crane - this is an alternative route that we recommend in our walk guidance instead of going over Hounslow Heath. As well as the footpath improvements they have removed the imposing steel fence and gate to the north of the tunnel and some trip hazards removed to make the alternative route more inviting and safer. They are trying to find a budget for lighting or CCTV in the tunnel



This new footbridge replaces a dilapidated and dangerous one on the London Loop near Paternoster Row in Havering. Photo: Chris Simpson

itself to make it feel safer. We're very grateful to former project coordinator Paul Miner and Alan Parry, who took over from him, for liaising with the council on this work. The council is also extending the path improvement northwards to the river access point at Cygnet Avenue.

Our volunteer team has had a number of successes in recent months as a result of reporting incidents such as fallen trees via council websites - leading to the issues being dealt with as swiftly as possible.

Having previously run festivals on the Capital Ring and London Loop, the team is organising a Green Chain Walking Festival in September (see below). Ian Bull has also just completed detailed maps of the assets (signposts, etc) on the Green Chain Walk, which should make future maintenance and surveys more straightforward.

We continue to be very grateful to the project volunteers and coordinators who survey their sections, keep guidance and maps up to date and press councils and landowners to make improvements to the waymarking and the routes themselves. Our audit spreadsheets documenting issues which need fixing have now been submitted to councils by Transport for London and our next priority is to contact local councillors to press for necessary works to be carried out.

Clare Wadd

Mud glorious mud

All of us who walk will remember last winter and spring for the endless, everlasting mud. Nobody who walks regularly can have escaped it - in fact I was still wading through huge deep puddles on a walk in May - whilst wearing sun tan lotion! And our boot-washer and drying balls have never seen so much use as in the first few months of this year.

As our climate changes and we experience more extreme weather - heavier downpours and more flooding - we are likely to see more wet winters. Whilst hopefully next winter won't be as bad as the one just gone, the trajectory is only in one direction.

Walking in mud is not only tiresome and tiring, but also makes accidents much more likely as we slip and slide about, trying to hang on to barbed wire fences and tree branches to keep our feet dry. And, of course, it's very off-putting to new and potential walkers and Ramblers members. As Ramblers, we want to encourage those who don't walk to take it up, and we want great places to walk and to lead walks.

Individually and between us we have a wealth of knowledge about walking in and around London. Walk

leaders all have a bank of walks they draw from - as well as developing new ones to keep it interesting. We pick up ideas from each other and each others groups and share generously.

So, before next winter I wanted to add a 'Mud Free Walks' section to our website (and perhaps a 'Not Much Mud Walks' section) so this is a call-out for submissions to help us build a collection.

These could be in the form of detailed route instructions or more general ideas for walks or anything in-between. The collection will be walks within London and accessible from London by public transport, that are short/close enough to be walkable in winter daylight hours. Through the website, walks will be available to Ramblers members and the public, and to other leaders to inspire their own led walks.

I have a few ideas of my own, but I really need your ideas for us to be able to build a decent sized collection of walks and walk ideas to help keep walking enjoyable all year round for all of us next winter.

Please send your submissions to me at the address below.

Clare Wadd



Muddy spots like this can be a safety concern.

Photo: Clare Wadd

Green Chain Walking Festival

Inner London Ramblers' Green Chain Walking Festival will take place from 1 - 15 September.

The festival fortnight will include around 12 Ramblers free guided walks of varying lengths, taking in different aspects of the Green Chain Walk. The walks will all be open to the public and a booking system will be in place. Festival walks will be compiled on the Inner London Ramblers website news pages. We're extremely grateful to the walk leaders and groups who have submitted walks for the festival programme.

The festival aims to promote the Green Chain Walk and its many attractions to those living locally, and in London more generally, whether already walkers or not. The walks will vary in length and difficulty so

there will definitely be something for everyone! All walks will start and end at train or tube stations, and will go past other public transport stops, so anyone who doesn't wish to walk the full distance can drop out part-way through a walk.

The 52-mile Green Chain Walk is a branching network of 15 existing sections offering many opportunities for circular and linear walks in over 300 open spaces and woodlands in south east London. We are currently working to get the 'missing' Section 12 - from Eltham to Greenwich - waymarked, and will use the festival to highlight this excellent walk, for which signposts were manufactured but never installed.

The Green Chain Walk features many places of interest, including Lesnes Abbey ruins and woods,

the Thames Barrier, the Art Deco glamour of Eltham Palace, the 18th century Gothic folly of Severndroog Castle, the Horniman Museum and gardens, the dinosaurs at Crystal Palace Park and the Dulwich Picture Gallery. The routes take in a variety of landscapes including ancient woodland and marshes and offer great opportunities for birdwatching and enjoying nature. The terrain makes for generally easy walking, but some of the northerly sections include steep gradients - meaning glorious views over central London and the Thames estuary.

Walkers unable to join a festival walk will find the Green Chain Walk is well-signed and offers excellent opportunities for self-led walks - and is now much more accessible from central and west London



On the Green Chain Walk at Oxleas Wood.

Photo: Hilary Pearson

thanks to the Elizabeth Line. Inner London Ramblers has up to date guidance and maps available to download on its website at www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk.

Clare Wadd
Vice Chair, Inner London Ramblers
vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Area AGM

Notice is hereby given for the Annual General Meeting of Inner London Area Ramblers on Sunday 8 December 2024 from 2.00 - 4.00pm. The venue will be Coram Fields Meeting Room - Band Room, 93 Guilford Street, London WC1N

1DN. Nominations for the following positions on Inner London Ramblers Council - Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Publicity Officer, Digital Officer, Affiliated Groups Representative - are required to be submitted by email to secretary@innerlondonramblers.org.uk by

1 December. Also, nominations for Inner London representatives to General Council 2025 are also required to be submitted by email to secretary@innerlondonramblers.org.uk by 1 December. Further details and agenda will be posted on the Inner London Area website closer to the date. *Tim Sai-Louie*
Chair, Inner London Area

West London AGM

Members of West London Group are invited to the group's AGM and social on Monday 2 December at 7pm in Northfields Community Centre, 71a Northcroft Road, London W13 9SS (near Northfields station on the Piccadilly Line and local bus routes). Please bring some food and drink to share for the finger buffet. You will

hear reports covering the past year and discover what is planned for 2025. Tell us also what you think of our programme and website (www.westlondonramblers.org.uk) and if you would like to get involved do email us at westlondongroup@yahoo.co.uk. *Martin Harris*
West London Ramblers



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary



The sailing barge Cambria, viewed from the Edith May.



A typical Medway hulk seen from the England Coast Path.

Volunteer vacancies: Our focus on filling volunteer vacancies, particularly for footpath work, is a continuing preoccupation. In my June diary I reported that Margarethe Batteson had taken on one of our key Local Footpath Officer roles and I am now even more pleased to report that she has agreed to become our volunteer Public Rights of Way Manager, the role with overall responsibility for our public rights of way work.

Spreading the load: We have undertaken an exercise to gauge the amount of work for our Public Rights of Way volunteers generated in different parts of Kent. Thanks to data supplied by Kent County Council we have been able to plot almost every application for a public path order or definitive map modification order received by the county council over the last 25 years on a map showing the areas covered by our Local Footpath Officers (LFOs). We are still in the process of analysing the information and hope to add details of planning applications affecting public rights of way shortly but already we can see scope for adjusting LFO areas to balance workloads and improve coverage. We will also be better able to predict workloads when recruiting new LFOs and match allocations to the time they are able to spare.

Tunbridge Wells: The area for which we are most urgently seeking a new LFO is Tunbridge Wells District where all parishes but one have recently become vacant. It is not necessary for an LFO to live in the area they cover as most of the work is desk-based with site visits when necessary,

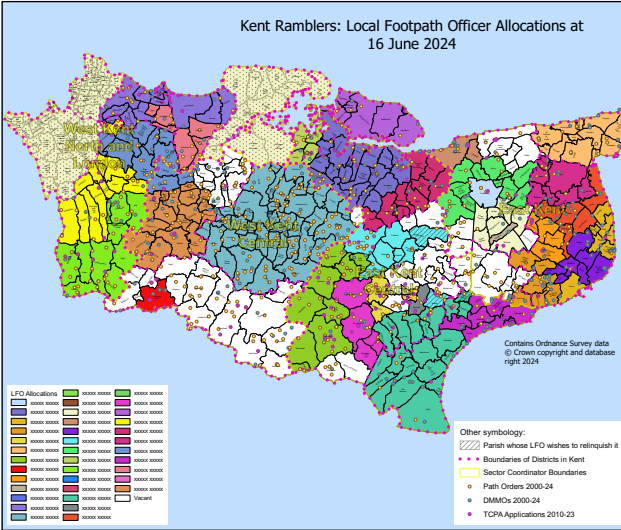
so if you would like to help protect the rights of way in an exceptionally fine area, much of it within the High Weald National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), please contact us on prow@kentramblers.org.uk.

Soundwalk: In May I was invited to attend the launch of a new 'Soundwalk' at Lower Halstow Creek on the Medway estuary. The creek, although now delightfully rural and home to much maritime leisure activity, was once a busy industrial area with a large brickworks and a constant stream of Thames barges bringing in clay and taking the finished bricks up to London. Many of the barges were long ago abandoned and their rotting hulks can be seen at low water as one walks the coast path in the area. It is these hulks that give their name to the project to create the new soundwalk, 'Hulked', which involves downloading an application onto a smartphone then wandering around the creek-side area, including the former brickworks which is now pleasant woodland. The application detects your location and offers descriptions, poetry, music and dialogue related to your exact position as you progress. You can visit at any time and download the application from <https://www.hulked.co.uk/> but there will be another Open Day on 28 September when people will be available to help master the technology.

Hulks: Although so many Thames sailing barges are now rotting hulks, one of the survivors, the Edith May, is often moored at Lower Halstow and I took advantage of the opportunity at the launch of the soundwalk to take a trip around the Medway estuary. Another survivor, the Cambria, was also out in the estuary, allowing a brief race between the two.

Coastal disputes: Incidentally, Lower Halstow is the site of one of the unresolved disputes over the line of the England Coast Path. The route proposed by Natural England goes through the yacht club along the eastern bank of the creek and there have been objections. A planning inspector visited the site in November 2021 and we expected this would lead quite quickly to a decision by the Secretary of State but at the time of writing we are still waiting. I wonder how high this will be on the agenda of the new government. Other disputes on Sheppey and near Otterham Creek are in the same position and the delay is holding up publication of further parts of our guide to the Kent Coast Path.

Bison: I represent the interests of walkers on the Kent Countryside Access Forum. Our June meeting involved a site visit to the woodlands of Blean, north of Canterbury, where bison have been introduced by Kent Wildlife Trust as a landscape improvement measure. Although this is described as a rewilding project, I don't think that historically there ever were bison in the area but apparently there used to be aurochs which are now extinct and bison are the next best thing for trampling down coarse vegetation and inhibiting tree growth. We didn't see any of the notoriously shy bison but we did see sites where footpaths are being diverted to create bridges over which the public will walk and beneath which the bison will travel between the different areas to which they have access. Although no recorded public rights of way (i.e. on the definitive map) have been lost, fencing off large areas for bison does mean that other woodland tracks which were previously used by the public are no longer available. Bison are not currently permitted on public rights of way in Britain but advocates of rewilding hope that once we become more accustomed to their presence and behaviour this will change, as apparently it has in Holland.



This map shows Local Footpath Officer allocations with path orders and definitive map modification orders superimposed.

Lenham meetings: We held one of our twice-yearly meetings for our footpath volunteers in Lenham in late April when we discussed a variety of footpath-related topics. We were pleased to welcome to the meeting not only Graham Rusling from Kent County Council's public rights of way team but also Stacey McGregor who was appointed last year as the person responsible for footpaths in Medway. I have recently heard that the London Borough of Bromley has appointed a new officer responsible for their footpaths and I shall be inviting him to our next Lenham meeting on 11 November.

Mystery package: In my March Diary I mentioned a 'mystery package' of walk descriptions from 1970s editions of the Kentish Times that I had received. Prompted by my Diary the senders have been in touch again, although still without revealing their identities, to explain that there should have been a covering note and the hope was that the descriptions might provide evidence of unrecorded rights of way that we could apply to have added to the definitive map before the cut-off date of 1 January 2031. They also sent me a book describing the history of Petts Wood, where I live, so many thanks for that.

Making space: Another topic covered at the most recent Kent Countryside Access Forum meeting was the Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway project which I mentioned in my last Diary. There has been much confusion about the extent to which this project can deliver increased access and originally the subject was said to be out of scope. Following representations from forum members and others, a special workshop on health and access was held in early July. While this was very welcome, the focus was very much on the urban environment where we all agreed that joining up small green spaces to create useful routes would be hugely beneficial. It remains unclear how the project can deliver on even that modest ambition for increased access but one has to live in hope of being pleasantly surprised.

Mapping anomalies: My dialogue with the Ordnance Survey continues, aimed both at addressing the mismatch between the revision dates stated on their shop website and errors on the maps themselves. More recently I noticed that the latest Explorer mapping lacks a couple of public rights of way west of Edenbridge that used to be part of the Vanguard Way. My best theory of how this has happened is that when the Vanguard Way was diverted and the green lozenges had to be removed from these paths and placed elsewhere, the rights of way designation was accidentally removed too. Curiously the same mistake was not made with the Landranger mapping and it surprises me greatly that they maintain different digital rights of way files for the two mapping series. I do a lot of digital mapping work for Kent Ramblers walking guides and organise the data in such a way that a mismatch, of which this is not the only example, could not happen; I wonder why the Ordnance Survey operates differently.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



Exciting walking!

In the last issue we shared our plans for the 2024 Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks. Ahead of the festival, running from 7 to 15 September, we would like to share with you some of the really exciting things we will have on offer.

This year we have decided to go bigger and bolder and have reached out beyond the four Bedfordshire Area groups. Firstly, we have engaged with local Ramblers groups that border Bedfordshire. As ramblers I am sure many of us enjoy a day out across the county border - so let's invite groups into Bedfordshire to share our beautiful county. So far, we have commitment from Huntingdon Ramblers, Wellingborough Ramblers and the Stag Walkers, a Hertfordshire Ramblers group

aimed at those in their 20s - 40s. We also have a walk offered by the Northampton Shamblers. Other walking groups are also keen to be involved so look out for the Bedford Rambling Group and U3A who are also contributing this year.

Thinking outside the box, local interest walks always get a good turnout and so we are delighted to share that on Friday 13 we will have a Ghost Walk run by our great friend and original festival organiser, Barry Ingram - come if you dare! We also have guided walks around Bedford's Victorian cemetery, one looking at interesting names and the other at the variety of trees to be found there. There are also two history walks in Turvey led by the Turvey History Society. There will also be a history walk around Luton and a pre-history walk in the surrounding hills, plus two historical walks

around Leighton Buzzard, one focusing on the industrial past. We are also delighted to have a nature walk in the Warden and Galley hills run by the Chiltern Trust.

What would a festival be without a training course? So, we are delighted to announce the return of a map reading course, being run as part of the festival.

Feeling a bit more adventurous? Why not try the 40-mile Greensand Ridge Challenge. Too much like hard work? Then maybe a gentle stroll along the River Great Ouse with a leisurely cruise back to Bedford on the John Bunyan boat? Or maybe our Bat Walk will interest you!

Our nine days of walks will vary from a half mile leisurely stroll to a 21-mile march across the Greensand Ridge. Walks will be spread from north to south and west to east, so hopefully there will be something for everyone.

The festival will be so much more than just walking. Come and find

Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks

Hosted by RAMBLERS Bedfordshire

7th to 15th September 2024

Explore our beautiful little county on foot

Short Walks Wellbeing Walks
Local Walks Long Walks

Most walks are free to everyone and most do not require booking

Full details on www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/walks

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers, North Beds Ramblers
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers, Ivel Valley Walkers

The festival flyer.

out. For more information and the full programme go to www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/walks or check our Facebook page Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks. We look forward to meeting you.

Sandra Kelsey

RIPPLE at work

Around the county the number of complaints about overgrown and blocked paths has shot up dramatically compared with previous years and our RIPPLE volunteers have been working in overdrive for the last few months helping to improve the path network and alleviate a good proportion of these complaints. Most of these path problems have been caused by the wet and warm weather which has increased the growth of vegetation. One of our two councils has also reduced the number of seasonal vegetation cuts because they have insufficient money available. This council changed its highways contractor over a year ago, allegedly a better deal, but is already being shown to be worse for public rights of way. This situation is likely to continue as it is a five-year contract. Whilst frontline council workers are bearing the brunt of these cuts and complaints from the public and councillors, the top people are claiming success and slapping each other on the back!

The frontline workers are having to ask volunteer groups like us and local P3 groups to do more. Our team is doing what it can but some of their tools are now beyond repair and there appears to be no money for replacements. One example of this was in Broom where a new footpath created last year alongside the River Ivel had become overgrown. The path is over half a mile long and would have been a task for just a few people using wheeled trimmers and brush cutters. On the day, both wheeled trimmers refused to perform and have now been retired. However, as we had exceedingly good support from our volunteers and by using a combination of brush cutters, shears, hedgecutters, scythes, loppers and rakes, we were able to cut the path. More recently, work



Finger painting. Photo: Barry Ingram

has opened up blocked and overgrown paths on the Kingfisher Way in Stotfold, the Bunyan Trail on the edge of Shefford, at Marston Thrift, and Jubilee Walk in Lower Shelton. Thanks to Central Bedfordshire' rights of way team, a number of our volunteers have been on both brush cutting and hedge cutting courses, resulting in a five-year Lantra qualification.

Our work with Bedford Borough has been just as rewarding and varied from replacing the last stile with a kissing gate in Wilstead, removing fallen trees at Anstey Wood, Kempston, Roxton and Souldrop, opening up paths and installing yellow-topped waymark posts in Staploe, vegetation clearance in Sharnbrook, Wootton, Felmersham, Harrold, Keysoe, Carlton, Kempston Rural, Rehold, Roxton and Little Staughton, clearing blockages in Pertenhall, Souldrop and Wootton.

We have also found time for some finger painting. Fingers are the arms of the metal posts usually found at the side of roads to indicate a public right of way. A number of these fingers had become scratched and the paint damaged. Our painting team was asked if they could help and, always keen for a challenge, one of the team volunteered and the fingers have now been restored and our team



Clearing and installing posts. Photo: Steve Woodward

member promoted to Chief Finger Painter! Staploe, on the eastern border of the county, is now separated from Eaton Socon and St Neots by the A1 trunk road. Boundary changes and the building of the bypass in the 1970s saw the development of both places whereas the land on the Staploe side, apart from an electricity substation by the A1, has remained agricultural. Ordnance Survey maps still show a path crossing the A1 and generally heading in both a westerly and northerly direction towards the village and the one going under the A1 towards Wyboston, Chawston and Roxton. This area is going to see some dramatic changes over the next few years and we have decided to ensure all the paths are open and waymark posts are clearly visible. In early July a team of volunteers put in seven waymark posts, added directional discs and, with the help of the farmer using serious equipment, opened up two paths which had become blocked. It was a great job by our RIPPLE team and we have been thanked by the parish council, farmer and Bedford Borough.

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



Removing a dead tree at Marston Thrift. Photo: Barry Ingram

Area AGM

The Bedfordshire Area AGM will be held on Saturday 23 November, hosted by North Beds Ramblers. The venue will be Husborne Crawley Reading Room, Bedford MK43 0XE. Join us at 10am for a morning walk of approximately five miles followed by lunch. The meeting proper will start at 2pm.

Anne Griffiths



OXFORDSHIRE on-line

New approach to the Area picnic



Thame & Wheatley Chair Linda King thanks all who made the Area picnic such a success. Photo: Ruth Cornish

This year it was the turn of Thame & Wheatley Group to host the Oxfordshire Area annual picnic. Group Chair Linda King and her committee decided to take on all the responsibilities. With huge support from the group, not only did they source the venue and make the cakes, but they chose the routes and led all the walks for it. When planning the walks they realised that some of them had to cross a notoriously difficult stile on the steep

slope of Red Hill in Holton Parish, so the group's maintenance team, led by Bob Merry, repaired and improved it the week before.

All the organisation paid off as the event, which took place on Saturday 22 June, was a great success. Seven walks, starting from places such as Waterperry Garden Centre, Shotover Country Park and Stanton St John, and of lengths varying from four to 10 miles, all took the walkers to the picnic site in Holton. It was hoped to have the picnic in Holton Orchard, but following overnight and early morning rain, the ground was too wet there so the adjacent village hall was used.

Around 65 walkers from Oxfordshire groups took part and they were met in the hall by an amazing display of cakes and an endless supply of tea, coffee and soft drinks. John Gordon, Vice Chair of the Oxfordshire Ramblers executive committee, gave a vote of thanks, while Linda took the opportunity to thank all her team, including the seven walk leaders and their backmarkers, the 11 cake makers, the drinks servers and washers-up and all those who helped set up the hall and clear away afterwards. There were many appreciative comments about the walks and the cakes, so it seems the event was a winner!

Ruth Cornish

Making our footpaths a pleasure to walk



The Cotswold Outdoor Vango path maintenance pack won by Ian Baldwin of Blitz & Klean. It comprises a flask, two cups, waterproof first aid kit, thermal blanket, waterproof poncho, Kendal mint cake, all-weather notepad and document bag. Photo: Ian Baldwin

Four of Oxfordshire's groups have been active on footpath maintenance since the beginning of spring.

Henley & Goring Group do not have their own path maintenance team. Instead, they cooperate with the South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers (SCPMV) who work in our area. The SCPMV liaises with the Chiltern Society, which takes care of the volunteering rules and also provides some help. "Henley & Goring Ramblers cooperate with the SCPMV in the sense that we deliver people power," says Wim Klaucke, long-time volunteer with the SCPMV. "I should not forget to mention that Oxfordshire County Council is also involved in funding and sometimes delivery of tools/materials and training, and they give us the odd job to do." If you are interested in volunteering for the SCPMV, email them at scpmv@gmail.com.

Blitz & Klean, the path

maintenance team of Bicester & Kidlington Group, cleared a path in Wendlebury. They were joined by James from the county council's Countryside Access Team. The day was also the occasion of a photoshoot as Ian Baldwin, coordinator of Blitz & Klean, was a winner in the draw for completing a Ramblers survey on path maintenance. Ian's prize was a Cotswold Outdoor Vango path maintenance pack.

Golf courses have featured in two of the three outings by Thame & Wheatley volunteers since March. They replaced some waymarks on Waterstock Golf Course as the previous waymark posts had rotted and were lying in the undergrowth. At Oxfordshire Golf Club the volunteers firstly replaced a rotten and collapsed waymark post on the bridleway from the Oxfordshire Golf Course to Thame (385/31), and cleared brambles. Secondly, they added a handhold to a stile



Dozens of people passed and said 'thank you' to the Vale Path Volunteers when they cleared the town section of Faringdon Footpath 17. A great motivator! Photo: Dave Cavanagh

on Footpath 232/21 on the path near the A329 road. It required a scenic 800 metres walk through the golf course and carrying tools and materials for replacing an unsafe stile on Footpath 251/72 in Holton Parish. This footpath was on one of the routes led by Thame & Wheatley Group for the Area Picnic on 22 June, so the volunteers had a deadline for repairing the stile, which they met. The county council's Countryside Access Team had provided the materials, sufficient to add a third step on the downhill side of the stile, plus a firm handhold.

Vale Group's path maintenance team, the Vale Path Volunteers (VPV), were in action half a dozen times between March and June. These included two beyond the Vale of White Horse for clearances on the other side of the Thames in Bampton and Newbridge/Standlake parishes. That was because Vale Group leads midweek walks twice

a month in West Oxfordshire. The paths attended to were ones that Vale walk leaders often use. One job was on Faringdon Footpath 17, an 'old favourite', the VPV having cleared that very long path several times before. The town section of this footpath is metalled and heavily used by town folk, not least because it leads to a health centre. Anyone using this path would assume that it was simply part of the normal pavement network of the town and maintained accordingly. It isn't; by a quirk of fate, it is a public right of way with the same status as other rural, and usually non-metalled, footpaths. The county council's Countryside Access Team, which is responsible for public rights of way, does not have the resources to keep the vegetation at bay along this footpath. So, this has become a regular task for the VPV. The path continues on the south side of the A417, along a causeway up to Wickleshamlodge Farm and the

adjacent quarry. Consequently, two VPV teams were in action, with coordinator Pat Rosum overseeing both teams, not least to deliver the chocolate Hobnobs at break time.

Let us know where footpath problems are. Oxfordshire Ramblers volunteers can only improve footpaths, eg by cutting back vegetation, if they know where the problem sections are. If you know of an overgrown path you can let the coordinator of the appropriate path maintenance team know by clicking on their name near the bottom of the path maintenance page of the Oxfordshire Ramblers website, www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/footprotect/footpath-maintenance-teams.html. That will open up an email in which you can describe the issue. Banbury & North Oxfordshire and Oxford City groups also do path maintenance work.

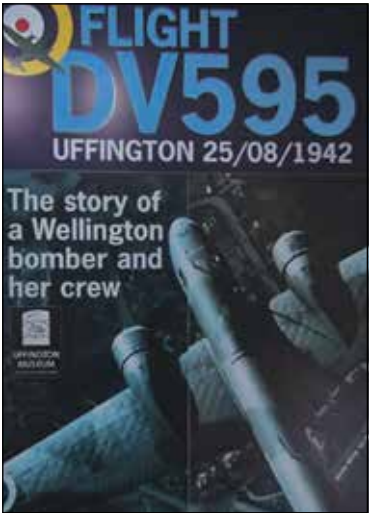
Dave Cavanagh

Crash crew commemorated

At 01.05 hours on 25 August 1942, Wellington bomber DV595, on a night time bombing practice flight out of RAF Harwell, near Odstone Down (south/south-west of Uffington), collided with Wellington N2755 from RAF Hampstead Norris. While N2755 survived, DV595 crashed just a few hundred metres from Uffington village, killing all the crew of six. A small memorial plaque was later placed alongside Footpath 19 in the field where the bomber crashed. Uffington Museum is commemorating the crew of DV595, and indirectly all the young men who died in accidents during World War II, with a special exhibition. Vale Ramblers offered seven walks which featured aspects of the tragedy. One, a 10-mile weekend walk, went from Uffington village past the memorial plaque then up to Odstone Down where the bombing range was situated and

above which the aircraft collided. One must remember that the night was pitch black, and the crews of the two Wellingtons would have no awareness of each other's presence. The pilot of the surviving Wellington, which landed safely at the airfield at Stanton Harcourt, knew that they had hit something but didn't know what until they had landed. At the other end of the walk scale, four very short walks (1.8 miles) were on offer, on weekends in June and August. These followed

part of the Uffington village trail and then headed for the memorial plaque. There was the opportunity after all the walks to look around the special exhibition and other exhibits in Uffington Museum. Dave Cavanagh Uffington Museum (uffingtonmuseum.co.uk, Facebook: The Uffington Museum) is open Saturdays and Sundays from 2pm - 5pm until 29 October. Entrance is free although donations to maintain the museum are welcomed. Teas are available at the adjacent St Mary's Church on Sundays from 2.30pm - 5pm until 29 September.



A panel in the exhibition at Uffington Museum. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

Long After

In this poem I reflect on the changes along the North Downs Way and Wealdway brought by the Great Storm of 1987 - perhaps a long time ago in human years, but not long in tree years. A divergence from the footpath I was following brought me close up to green and glorious signs of life even among dead trees or trees that were felled so shockingly in October 1987 but are now, nearly 30 years on, sprouting new trees from their own bulk.



Three decades almost gone:
and how do the Wealden woods fare now?

Broad boles heaved to horizontal,
torn from holes deeper than I am tall;
upturned sandstone crumbling
into dead brown leaves, to mud;
whole root-balls upended, suspended
Wayside beeches still lie in ruins.

But if I leave the path; if I look
between bleached, broken roots
and crusts of clay, I see the new velvet
of carpet-mosses; fronds of star-moss
opening like sea anemones from trees-corals:
from death, decay, destruction.

Even where trunks are cracked
or branches wind-lopped, new limbs
explore the air with tentative traceries,
put out fingers to the sky, point out
the path, pull down light from clouds
to affirm their right to live on longer:

to spread their leafy selves across the hills
long after savage winds have gone.

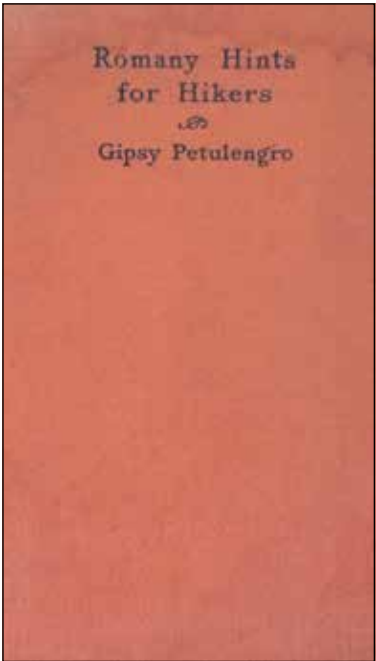
Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher

Ephemera

A long time ago, publisher Methuen & Co Ltd, sent out a book titled 'Romany Hints for Hikers' for reviews. It was published on 2 April 1936 and they asked that the book should not be reviewed before that date but they were "glad to have a copy of the page containing a notice of the book." There was a further edition of this book which was published in 2012, long after the death of the author 'Gipsy Petulengro', who's real name was Xavier and who died in 1957. He was known as 'King of the Gypsies' and was a horse trader, violinist, businessman, writer and BBC broadcaster, according to Wikipedia. So wouldn't it be interesting to follow up the original publisher's wishes for a review, even though it will be 88 years ago that the request was made!

One of the first hints in Xavier's book was a description of the

increase in walking and stating that "a few years ago anyone walking long distances by choice would have been considered 'insane' and that by the 1930s men and women would be striding across the countryside. Guidance on clothing and footwear was promoted and although some male walkers would still wear a collar and tie when hiking, Xavier wouldn't recommend it. He went on to provide advice on suitable clothing for both women and men and sending forward clean clothes rather than carrying them when walking long distances. He also advised on how to make a backpack or rucksack and creating a simple sleeping bag from old mackintoshes. Simple hammocks could be made from corn sacks and also tents could be made from stout sheeting and stakes which can be cut from hedges or woods or suspending a sheet on a rope between two trees. toilet facilities could be created with some efficiency and also there were various forms of lighting in



Book cover.

the tent at night using candles or paraffin oil. A full list of articles being carried was advised for the male hiker and for ladies it was much the same with the exception of shaving tackle. Xavier also advised you to have a Romany filter to clean water in a camp or caravan which involves an earthen flower pot, old iron nails, small pieces of chalk, lumps of charcoal, a layer of fine charcoal and some sand. Xavier recommended all sorts of things including food and cooking, how and when to eat on hikes, lighting fires, making temporary ovens, weather signs, and also gave the hiker some examples of specimen trips. Other warnings included never taking shelter under a tree standing by itself and oak and elm trees should be avoided because they are more likely to be struck by lightning than beech trees and there does appear to be some truth in this notion. Advice is also given on walking speeds and how, when and what to eat on hikes and keeping away from traffic as far as possible. There does appear to be a degree of sexism in the narrative with hints, for example, that women are somewhat frail in comparison with men when carrying heavy loads. This little book is a fascinating exploration of the walking world of yesterday and today it's interesting to note that the basics of walking have not really changed since Xavier's publication but the values and ideas, as well as kit and technology, have changed significantly. John Pestle



'Gipsy Petulengro'.

Walking with the London Blind Ramblers

London Blind Ramblers is a Ramblers-affiliated group for blind and partially-sighted people who meet regularly for guided walks in and around the capital. Where public transport allows, the group ventures further afield to join up with local host walking groups

Having always enjoyed our annual walk with the London Blind Ramblers, one of our members, Jan Campion, came up with the idea of hosting a short group holiday. She liaised with our members and Geetha Shamanah, the London Blind Ramblers' organiser, and then set about making sure it could happen.

There was considerable interest with 13 blind or partially-sighted ramblers, including Jan's grandson Max from Norwich Ramblers, keen to come. The holiday took place from 17 - 20 May when our visitors spent three nights in a lovely country hotel locally, where they enjoyed good food and were provided with packed

lunches. We accompanied them on three walks of six to eight miles each. These walks were almost entirely off-road and took in Happy Valley, Coulsdon Common and Banstead Woods.

Lots of our members were happy to participate and each day we had 15 helpers, some of whom were involved on all three days. Jan organised us so that we knew in advance who we would be walking with and we swapped walk partners at lunchtime each day. The weather was excellent, the walks took in a pub stop and we all had a great time. Croydon Ramblers has a reputation for enjoying cake so home-made cakes were provided and enjoyed.

No promises, but we hope to offer another mini-holiday next year. It was a happy and enriching experience all round. Well done Jan who wants to thank her team of helpers and say that she couldn't have done it without them.

*Helen Thomson
Croydon Ramblers*



Croydon members with their visitors.

Photo: John Tickner

A special day in our summer walks programme came on Sunday 9 June, when 19 members of our group welcomed 11 guest walkers from the London Blind Ramblers for a seven and a half mile circular walk from Borough Green station led by Simon Parsons. Simon, who previously worked for the Kent Association for the Blind, explained how the preparation for the event was slightly different to our usual walks. "We needed to start and finish at a station with quick access to and from London so our guests could get to us easily, the route needed to have stiles which were in good condition, use footpaths without too many obstructions or trip hazards, and use only quiet country lanes with few cars on them."

Members of our group tested the route in advance to get an idea of the terrain and tips on guiding our visitors. "I also had an alternative route in mind in case of bad weather which was mainly on the lanes, but thankfully we had good

weather on the day," said Simon.

Steve, one of the visiting walkers, found the walk to be a challenging and varied countryside experience. Jamie, another of our guests, said that our members were extremely thoughtful, taking great care to ensure everybody was looked after. "My guide asked how best to guide me, and had thought about it carefully I think, as he told me about kerbs, roots, overhanging branches", said Jamie. "We also encountered different animal sounds such as donkeys and sheep, although I don't think they ordered that specially for us!"

On the day of the walk, our group Chair, Neil Whittall, acted as 'backmarker' to ensure that all 30 walkers kept together and that the pace was manageable by all. "We are grateful to Simon for making the effort to introduce this variation on our usual walks and we hope to make it an annual event," said Neil.

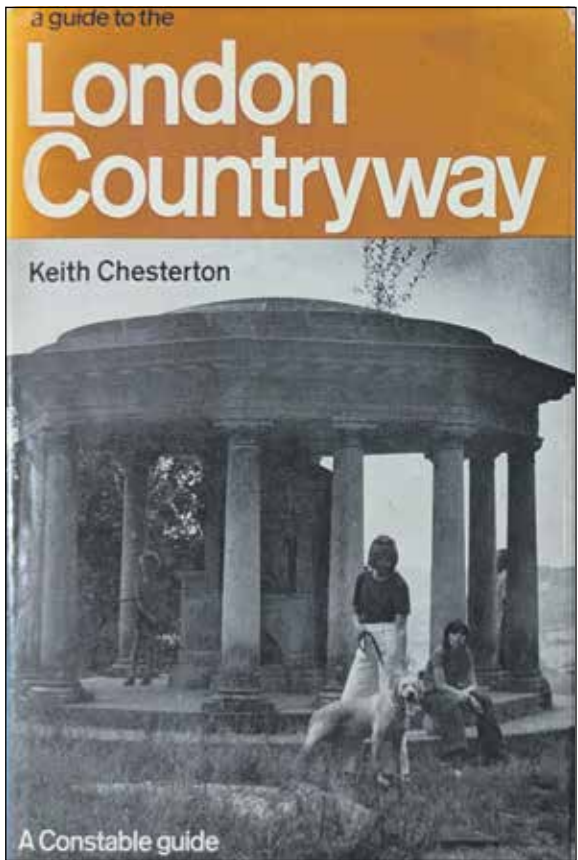
*Nicola Brown
Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers*



A welcome lunch stop was made at the Kentish Rifleman pub at Dunk's Green.

Photo: Robin Aldcroft

The London Countryway: London's lost walk?



The guidebook published by Constable.

New to walk-leading, several years ago, I chanced upon a hardback copy of Keith Chesterton's A Guide to the London Countryway, published in 1978.. This copy, withdrawn from Buckinghamshire County Libraries, turned out to be a gem of a find. Some two and a half years later, having completed the walk and reflecting on my experience of leading this route for the Capital Walkers, I have nothing but gratitude for Keith. This is a truly great walk, taking an orbital route around London into some of the best countryside within easy travel of the capital.

I was really inspired by an important principle of the book. This being that you map out and create your own journey. There is a core route, but you are encouraged to deviate from this, so that the lesser-used paths are walked. A really good example of this is on the Brentwood to West Horndon section in Essex where I routed the walk through Warley Country Park and surrounding fields. Reaching St Mary the Virgin church at Great Warley we found the church locked but, while the group took a rest, the church warden arrived and offered us an impromptu tour of the impressive and unique Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau interior. Whilst this building does not feature in Keith's book, there are many sites of interest both on the route and close by for walkers to visit.

I followed the 22-section format, recceing the walk and

then offering this as a monthly group walk. In the end, my version extended Keith's 205 miles to over 300 miles.

Walking with a group is, of course, not only about seeing the sites, or travelling from A to B. There are also the discussions and friendships that develop along the way. My personal journey was one of navigating and recovering from a divorce. Walking provides a valuable tonic and arena where I could build my confidence and literally explore pastures new.

Well it is always difficult to select highlights, so here are a few but by no means a full list.

West Horndon to Gravesend: The beautiful and remote fen-like landscape, north of the Thames, with arable land and big skies. I titled this section 'A Walk to The World's End.' (this being the name of a pub towards the end). This played out as it was one of the hottest summer days and memorable as the group walked through harvested fields passing the derelict and intriguing site of the Bata shoe factory at East Tilbury.

Borough Green to Sevenoaks: A crisp, beautifully misty, winter morning, with a harsh frost. A great day for walking. I was grateful for warm gloves! A terrific walk taking in Ightham Mote and Knole Park where the house is worth visiting or, if you prefer, just sit and watch the deer.

East Horsley to West Byfleet: A classic walk for late summer, the pink flowers of common heather blooming. On this walk I was asked if I was navigating by taking a bearing. The suggestion being that my route was somewhat wandering. In truth, my route was to take in the wonder of Chatley Heath and the semaphore tower there.

West Byfleet to Sunningdale: Some lovely and delicate sections, walking along the Basingstoke Canal, very narrow with ferns and overhanging trees, The day was also remarkable for a bit of weather. An hour of torrential rain, navigating overgrown paths at Stanners Hill. So memorable for the group that one member wrote a song about the experience.

Information on the London Countryway has been caringly updated by Des de Moor who provides online maps and detailed information which you can find by going to desdemoor.blogspot.com and clicking on 'London Countryway'.

*Liam Hall
Capital Walkers*

Des de Moor adds: Even my write-ups are a bit out of date now. I first started writing them in 2009. Before the lockdown I started rewalking the route and revising my notes, I need to get back to that. It was always an unofficial route, only existing in the book, which went out of print. I think other official routes like the London Loop have overshadowed it. Making the London Countryway 'official' would be a huge challenge as it passes through so many local authority areas. The other issue with the route at the moment is that it relies on the Tilbury to Gravesend ferry to complete the circuit and that has been suspended with no immediate prospect of it resuming.



Inside St Mary the Virgin, Great Warley.

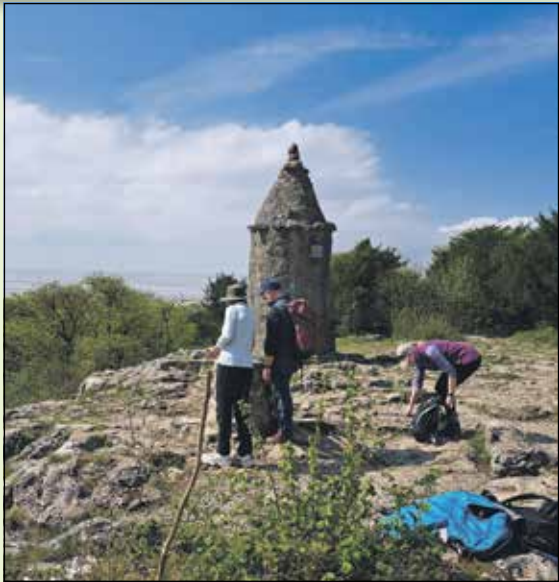
Photo: Liam Hall

Wish you were here?

Arnside, Cumbria

Most people go to the Lake District without realising this beautiful area to the south along the Kent estuary leading to Morecambe Bay is there. Our hotel, on the promenade at Arnside, gave us wonderful views across the ever-changing sands and channels of the estuary with its dramatic railway viaduct close by. We made use of the trains to get to the start of the three walks that were on offer daily.

A short climb to Arnside Knott on arrival day gave us scenic views over the village and Morecambe Bay with Blackpool Tower in the distance. Our walks during the week crossed several nature reserves, most notably Leighton Moss where some of us heard the rare bittern calling. Other notable highlights of the walks included Warton Crag, the highest point in the area, the Pepperpot, built to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee, the 'Fairy' steps (a natural set of limestone steps tightly squeezed in a cleft between two sheer rock outcrops), Heron Corn Mill (a watermill dating from 1740 and still working), an area of limestone



The Pepperpot, on top of a hill overlooking Arnside.
Photo: Joan Clark

pavement and amazing sunsets over the estuary. Many thanks to Susan for introducing us to this area and for organising the trip, and to all our walk leaders.

*Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers*

Libanus, Powys, Wales

Over midsummer's weekend, 37 members of our group descended on Bannau Brycheiniog (formerly Brecon Beacons) National Park for a four-day hiking trip. The majority of us stayed at Forest Lodge Cottages near Libanus, where we were split over the spacious and comfortable bunkhouse and three small cottages that are part of the same farm.

On Friday we all met to explore the famous Ystradfellte Four Waterfalls walk, before checking into our accommodation and enjoying a group cooked meal. The next day we all took on Pen y Fan, but had planned to split into two groups so everyone had a choice - the first group quickly summited Corn Du and Pen y Fan before heading along the ridge to also

bag Cribyn, Fan y Big and continuing in a loop back to the car park. The second group were content with just the first two peaks before taking a more direct route downhill. We were spoiled with glorious sunshine and extensive views and couldn't have picked a better day. On Sunday we again offered two walks. I led the gentler route up the spine of the ridge towards the peak of Fan Frynych and through the Graig Cerrig Gleisiad National Nature Reserve. Meanwhile Dan led a group of 12 adventurous souls on a picturesque horseshoe hike around Llyn y Fan and Llyn y Fan Fawr through the morning mist. In the evening we were treated to a delicious meal at The Tai'r Bull Inn, which opened especially on Sunday evening for us. There we celebrated a member's birthday and a successful trip and I thanked Dan, Paul, Palvi and Chris for their help in organising the weekend.

*Beth Stark
Chiltern Young Walkers*



The speedier group atop Pen y Fan on Saturday.
Photo: Eleanor Oakley

Bantry Bay, County Cork, Ireland

During the last week of April, 15 Croydon Ramblers booked into the Maritime Hotel overlooking Bantry Bay, a good hotel offering everything we required. It must be the Guinness, or it could be the pleasant towns and villages, with some very colourful houses, or perhaps the lovely countryside and views, or the friendly people.. No, it's definitely the Guinness, to be sure, that made me come over all poetic. Well, I call it poetry!



On the Sheep's Head Way.
Photo: John Tickner

*We came from London to walk the Sheep's Head Way,
We stayed at the Maritime, overlooking the bay,
The first day's walk Gerry led the way,
In fact it was quite an easy day,
And in the evening we had Guinness to down,
In one of the bars up in the town.*

*The second day's walk was led by Chris and Anne,
I don't think it went exactly to plan,
We went on and on and up and down, as if we were on a mission,
And then the minibus appeared, like an apparition.*

*Sunday's walk was led by Roy - my friend,
But ten ramblers were missing when we got to the end.
The start was a bit dodgy as I recall,
The van dropped us off nowhere near the start at all!*

*Monday morning came round swiftly,
And we took to the water. in the ferry to Whiddy,
Now Whiddy Island is a gem of a place,
We all slowed down and walked at a sweeter pace,
After seeing the highlights and lovely views,
We returned to the harbour and sat in the pews,
Where a lovely Irish lady took our orders for a meal,
Cheese toastie, chips and salad was quite a good deal.*

*Now come Tuesday we were led by a small crowd,
I like to think of them as girls aloud!
As a group of leaders in a team,
They led us upwards - in a stream!
Through rocks and reeds and Irish bog,
It often seemed quite a slog.*

*Wednesday morning it was Graham's turn,
Leading us through mud, passing rock and fern,
And the road seemed to go on and on,
Some thought for far too long.
Before we knew it we were back in town,
So sat on the headland for lunch to down.
After lunch we had time to kill,
So we went back to our rooms with luggage to fill.*

*Now our holiday is coming to an end,
It's time to thank our special friend,
Behind the scenes she's worked hard for us,
Including the arrangements for the minibus,
So thank you Ann for all you have done,
Now you can relax and have some fun!*

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*

Elan Valley, Mid Wales



A sunny interlude by Caban-coch Reservoir.
Photo: Simon Thornhill

A group of 20 members of our group set off in mid April for a walking week in the Elan Valley, staying at the Elan Valley Lodge which was once a village school but has been converted to provide accommodation for walking groups, Outward Bound type holidays and business team-building events. Being so cold and wet before the trip, we were

glad that the Lodge was warm and comfortable with excellent catering too. We walked on four consecutive days and were very ably led by Steve, our resident guide and organiser for the Lodge. The Elan Valley estate was established over 120 years ago by the Birmingham Corporation Water Department and comprises six reservoirs and dams of the rivers Elan and Claerwen and around 70 square miles of mountain and moorland, much of which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Despite the variable weather, which included hail, wind and driving rain, there were periods of warm sunshine that more than made up for the rest of it with the glorious views. Most spectacular were the Elan Valley dams, masterpieces of Victorian engineering. These stone-faced dams looked fabulous especially with water teeming over the tops and given the recent rainfall there was plenty of that! Being of an engineering background, our leader Steve was full of interesting information about the construction and workings of the dramatic water systems including the 72-mile gravity-fed pipeline to Birmingham - which the engineering-minded amongst us lapped up with enthusiasm. Who would have thought that Barnes Wallis perfected his famous 'bouncing bomb' by deliberately blowing up a redundant dam here in May 1942? The remains of that dam are on show as a piece of our history.

*Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers*

Selworthy, Somerset

More than 40 members of our group enjoyed an excellent four-day walking holiday on Exmoor at the end of May, based at HF Holidays Holnicote House. Highlights included walks to the iron age hillfort of Bat's Castle on Gallox Hill, to Hurlstone Point and Selworthy Beacon, to Dunkery Beacon for views over the Severn estuary and south to Dartmoor, and a gentle walk along the pretty Doone Valley made famous by Richard Blackmore's Lorna Doone. Three grades of walk were offered each day to cater for all abilities and tastes. The sunny and largely dry, if blustery, weather ensured that we saw Exmoor and the spectacular North Somerset coast



On the walk to Bat's Castle.
Photo: Richard Peters

at their best, and a stop for tea and cakes after most walks provided a welcome period of relaxation.

*Richard Peters
Guildford Ramblers*

Glyn Ceiriog, near Llangollen, Denbighshire

We were greeted by two magnificent peacocks as we walked up to the entrance to Plas Ceiriog Lodge for our week's walking in the Llangollen area in June. It was lovely to be so greeted and there was no need for alarm clocks as we were awakened by their raucous cries early every morning! There were 19 of us at our house party in the well-appointed lodge. We were self-catering and particularly enjoyed being able to sit together around the enormous dining table and get together in the spacious lounges before and after dinner. The area is full of interest, both in terms of walking and the wealth of things to see. We had a choice of two walks each day ranging from seven to 12 miles, taking in the steep wooded valleys, open moors, ridges with great 360-degree

views, sections of Offa's Dyke, Llangollen Canal, atmospheric ruined castles on the tops of hills and the grounds of the impressive Chirk Castle. The weather during the week was mixed - sunshine and showers - and we arranged to have a day off from walking on the most rainy day. It didn't feel like June and we actually lit the log burner in the lounge in the evenings, but the weather was fine for walking, especially when the sun shone. Asked for comments at the end of the week, the common thread was clear: great walks in an interesting area, very comfortable accommodation, delicious food, good company. Thanks to the organisers for a great holiday.

*Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers*



Crossing the aqueduct on the Llangollen Canal.
Photo: Joan Clark

Lymington, Hampshire



Ivel Valley Walkers on the beach.
Photo: Tom Collier

Our Chair, Bob Wallace, and his wife Celia, have lived in and around Lymington and were only too pleased to show 35 of us around the area during a group week away at the end of April. We started with a walk around the historic port before discovering Lymington and Keyhaven marshes. During the week our walks took us to the New Forest, along the coast to Hengistbury Head and Christchurch, and to the Isle of Wight via the Lymington to Yarmouth ferry. Our thanks go to Celia and Bob for an amazing holiday.

*Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers*

Ipswich, Suffolk

One of our party, Steve Ransome, a former local lad of Ipswich, led us on a fascinating tour of the town when we came together on the Friday afternoon. This included the Charter Hangings at St Peter's on the Waterfront and a 17th century Unitarian chapel. On Saturday, for the aficionados of shipping containers, we thrilled them with a walk from Trimley round the Felixstowe port. So many were seen that we soon lost count (of the containers, not the ramblers). This walk

led us to Trimley Marshes nature reserve and onwards to a picnic lunch overlooking the River Orwell. We returned via a community shop close to Trimley station for tea and cakes. There were two highlights on Sunday, one at the beginning and one at the end. Starting in Wrabness we soon spotted the 'House of Essex', designed by Sir Grayson Perry in memory of 'Julie'. This time we kept to the River Stour and followed the Essex Way. Our picnic lunch was at Bradfield and then we crossed fields to Mistley where we visited the famous Towers and had a delightful tea at the 'Tea at the Quay'.

*Brenda and David Horwill
Kingston Ramblers*



Walking near Trimley.
Photo: Steve Ransome

Windermere, Cumbria



On Wansfell Pike. Photo: Pamela Bates

Back in May, we journeyed up to the Lake District for our annual spring break. Based in Windermere, we were very fortunate to enjoy some great weather which, as we all know, is seldom guaranteed for that area. We had a wonderful selection of walks to choose from each day which included a climb up Wansfell Pike, the Crier of Claife walk, Helm Crag, Orrest Head, Tam Hows, Hill Top Farm and a walk above the shoreline of Ullswater. For those less mobile there were trips across the lake and visits to places of interest.

Every evening we gathered in the bar before dinner to exchange stories about the adventures of the day and to hear leaders for the following day 'selling' their walks to us. As you can imagine, this process became very competitive by the end of the holiday!

All in all it was a fabulous week and perhaps only Wainwright himself could adequately put into words the beauty and drama of the wonderful Lake District. Our thanks go to Mike and Helen Shephard for organising such a great trip.

*Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*

Lake Garda, Italy

Our members went on a week-long visit to Limone on Lake Garda with HF Holidays in early May. We stayed at Hotel Christina where our balconied rooms provided views over the lake and the mountains beyond. We enjoyed five walks and one free day which was the only wet one when most of us looked

around the town and its lemon and fishing museums. Our days included a boat trip and walk from Riva, a cable car ride and passed through many of the local villages. The shorter walks were such that all were able to participate while the more energetic found the longer walks just as pleasing.

*Ed Berridge
South East Berks Ramblers*



Lake Garda. Photo: Ed Berridge

Harrogate, North Yorkshire



On the Harrogate holiday. Photo: Richard Trimmer

The high spot of the year to date has been our summer holiday in Harrogate where 33 walkers of all abilities were housed in the Cain Hotel for three days of walks. The trip was once again organised for us by Clwydian Holidays Ltd and, as with last year, the weather was perfect with blue skies and high temperatures. Clwydian not only offered short and long walks each day but also organised the transport to and from the walks, as well as replenishing our water bottles at the lunch stops on the long walks. The trip proved a great success and our holiday committee is in touch with Clwydian about next year's summer break.

*Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers*

Italian Dolomites

Some 50+ West Essex Ramblers enjoyed their annual overseas holiday. This year, members travelled to the Italian Dolomites where walking was tailored to individual abilities and the South Tyrol scenery was simply astonishing. The overseas adventure has been a regular feature of our programme with demand often outstripping available places. It seems the Tyrolean air agrees with them - planning for next year's trip to Maria Alm in Austria has already begun!

*Dave Evans
West Essex Ramblers*



Enjoying the air. Photo: Alistair Thom

Cape Verde

Cape Verde (or officially the Republic of Cabo Verde) is a group of 10 islands almost 400 miles off the west coast of Africa, in the Atlantic Ocean. They were Portuguese until gaining independence in 1975.

A small group of us flew into Mindelo on the island of San Vicente on 3 April after overnighing in Lisbon. Some tour operators fly direct to a couple of other islands but these are mostly beach resorts and not of much interest to intrepid explorers like us! The next day we took a ferry to the island of San Antonio for

a minibus to Cid Das Bombas, a small village on the coast, from where we started to walk very steeply uphill. With the temperature now at 28 in the shade, some of our group were suffering and decided to take an easier route.

We spent five days walking, exploring and sightseeing in glorious sunshine, staying mainly in small hotels and guest houses and enjoying the local food, beer and wine. Some of the walking was quite hard-going and some less so and we took turns to lead each day with supplied maps and instructions. What could possibly go wrong? Well, one hazard we were not expecting was the donkeys laden with bananas or sugar cane which were encouraged to trot



Donkeys may look slow but ... down the mountain paths at speed. The holiday was expertly organised by Ann T, our group Secretary, and a brilliant time was had by all.

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*

Jersey

We enjoyed a glorious week of walking and sightseeing on the lovely island of Jersey in May. This small island of only 46 square miles provided lots of interesting options for longer routes of nine to 10 miles, medium routes of five to six miles and shorter routes of three to four miles, combined with sightseeing. The walking terrain included sweeping sandy bays, rugged coastal paths and leafy green lanes where walkers along with cyclists and horse riders are given priority over vehicles.

Some routes enabled us to make the most of Jersey's beautiful scenery and sightseeing spots. There was an easy railway walk

to Corbiere, with its impressive lighthouse. Inland routes took walkers past fields of potatoes, orchids and Jersey cows. Scenic routes included the 'Waterworks Valley', named after the many mills that used to be powered by the stream there. Plenty of delicious Jersey ice cream was also consumed.

Other walks featured castles, spectacular sea views, steep steps and a chance to view the local wildlife which included kestrels, choughs, red squirrels, lizards and slow worms, plus abundant wildflowers that we usually only see in our gardens at home.

Our stay at the Beausite Hotel in Grouville, on the eastern side of Jersey, was very comfortable and the location, five minutes from the seashore and a bus stop, made it easy to travel to just about every part of the island via the excellent network of buses. The hotel staff were helpful and friendly, the food



Giant puffins were seen along the Jersey coast. was excellent, with a varied menu and portions large enough to satisfy the appetite of any hungry rambler. A huge thank you must go to Peter Stone and his team of helpers for planning and organising the trip and of course to the walk leaders.

*Catherine Ewart
Henley & Goring Ramblers*

Those we have lost

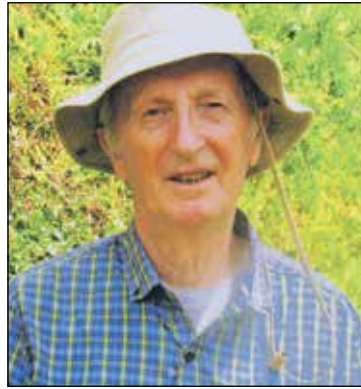
Ray Clayton 1931 - 2024

I am sad to report that Ray Clayton died in May, after having been ill for a number of months. He was 93. It is no exaggeration to say that Ray was the mainstay of Pang Valley Ramblers for many years. He ran the walks programme by himself for over 17 years, and was on the group committee for even longer.

Ray led numerous walks, and when he was no longer able to walk the lengthier distances, he set up short Saturday walks - a programme that continues. His talents and energy had a wider output in the walking community and beyond. For example, he was

involved in the Reading Borough initiative to produce local maps to encourage children to walk to school; he was a founder member of the West Berkshire path clearing work party; he worked on a project to get children with special needs out into the countryside.

His knowledge of the local path network and the problems that had arisen over time was prodigious and was something he never lost. For years Ray attended the local access forum, which seeks to reconcile the interests of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and landowners, for his own interest and to promote walking. For his major involvement in walking he was awarded a Ramblers Commendation in 2017, and when he left the Pang Valley committee last year, he was made Honorary Life President of our group.



Ray was involved with scouting for 50 years. He was first a player and then a referee at Henley Hockey Club, only giving up the latter on his 80th birthday. He was involved with other charity work. Ray was a one-off; he will be sadly missed.

*Alistair Lax
Past Chair, Pang Valley
Ramblers*

Cecil Chapple 1934 - 2024

Members of South East Berks Group were sad to hear that Cecil died on 11 April after a short illness.

Cecil served as Chairman of our group for 14 years when it was founded almost 40 years ago. With his large, heavy rucksack on his back, Cecil was an ever-present sight on our walks, sparking curiosity amongst us as to what he could possibly have in it.

One of Cecil's most enduring legacies is the holiday walking club he co-founded with fellow member Mel Barlow. This was known as Cecil and Mel's Rambling Association (or CAMRA). This venture evolved into a group of around 15 friends who still have an annual one-week UK walking holiday. Although both Cecil and Mel are no longer with us, CAMRA

continues to thrive, a fitting legacy to them both. CAMRA was a perfect acronym for the holiday group because Cecil was also a keen member of the Campaign for Real Ale and was a regular on our Wednesday pub walks.

Mel and Cecil's friendly disagreements over where we were and which path we should be following became legendary, providing moments of amusement and laughter on our walks. Cecil's indomitable spirit and determination to keep going persisted well into his 80s, only coming to a halt after a fall that resulted in a broken hip.

Beyond his love for walking, Cecil was also a talented photographer and a dedicated member of Bracknell Camera Club for over three decades. His keen eye for capturing the beauty of the world around him will be fondly remembered by all who had the pleasure of viewing his work.



Cecil will be deeply missed by his friends, family and fellow walkers, but his spirit lives on in the laughter shared on our walks, in the memories captured through his lens and in the enduring bonds of friendship he helped foster. May he rest in peace, forever remembered with his cheeky grin, as a true Rambler and friend.

*Brian Poulton
South East Berks Ramblers*

Mike Chapman 1941 - 2024

It is with sadness that we report the death of Mike Chapman in March, after a short illness. Mike, 83, had been a member of the Ramblers, and our group in particular, for nearly 30 years. He always lived in the West Kent area and knew it very well. He was never one to sit on the sidelines, and soon after joining was regularly leading walks, often assisted by his wife Sylvia,

Mike joined our committee in 2001 and had been active on it ever since. A very practical man with a love of the countryside, in 2005 he took on the role of Path Maintenance Officer like a 'duck to water'. He developed a good

working relationship with the officers of Kent County Council, and helped organise the training of our volunteer path maintenance crew by the county council. Anyone walking in our area will most likely have walked along a public right of way that Mike had some hand in keeping clear and accessible.

Always one to volunteer, Mike, helped by Sylvia, organised our popular Christmas lunches with his customary enthusiasm. Recently he also took on the role of Social Secretary and successfully organised our two most recent walking holidays. A large number of fellow walkers joined friends and family at his memorial service, and we will all miss his energy



and 'can do' approach, along with his wry sense of humour.

*Neil Whittall
Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers*

John Gilbert 1947 - 2024

John was a decent human being, the freest of spirits and a colourful character known to sink a pint or two. He was a man with a love of the outdoors which manifested itself in being an expert forager with an extensive knowledge of flora. He also undertook all 19 National Trails on a solo basis whilst wild camping.

Graham Smith, who went on many White Cliffs Ramblers and Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) walks with John, remembers him as "a great character and one of the strongest walkers in the group. I was so pleased he joined the LDWA where his cheerful presence on challenge events made him very popular. One of my memories of John is of him completing the Cinque Ports 100-mile walk in 2018 and then having a kip before cycling several miles home!"

One of John's walking buddies, Dale Moorhouse, said: "John was a very close friend who I spent many hours walking with. Things are going to be a lot duller without him." John's dry sense of humour was maintained until the end. Graham recalls one of John's many jokes: "All British mushrooms are edible but some of them only once!"

Included in his various careers was time spent as a merchant



John in his role as a pirate at the White Cliffs Walking Festival.

Photo: Les Preston

seaman, miner, chef, tattoo artist, lorry driver (whose cab was his home) and grave digger in Canterbury which was hard work until the council provided a mechanical digger.

*Jill Roche, Graham Smith,
Dale Moorhouse
White Cliffs Ramblers*

In memory of John, a 10-mile memorial walk will be held on Sunday 8 September, starting from Shepherdswell railway station at 10am. John's family has booked Shepherdswell village hall from midday until 4pm and all - walkers and non-walkers - are welcome. Refreshments will be provided.

David Bailey 1944 - 2024

It is with great sadness that we report the passing in June of our former Chairman, David Bailey. In his youth, David was a keen cyclist but walking had always been a real passion. He had been on many walking holidays in his time. He just loved walking, be it in the Chilterns, along the Thames Path or in more adventurous climes such as the mountains of Nepal or the wilds of Patagonia.

David joined East Berks Ramblers in September 2002 and made a significant contribution to our group over more than 20 years. He joined our committee in 2004 and served in varying roles including Publications Marketing Officer, Shows Organiser and latterly (2012 - 2017) as Chair. He also organised eight group autumn holidays between 2012 and 2019, including visits to the Yorkshire Dales, Sidmouth, Llangollen and Malvern.

In addition to staffing the Ramblers gazebo at shows and regattas selling our 'Rambling for Pleasure' books and encouraging people to try rambling, he was a prolific walks leader and continued leading walks until 2023. He led both longer and shorter walks and what we called 'Strollathons'; anything to help



David Bailey.

Photo: Eve Norton

fill our walks programme. He was always willing to swap dates to fit in with the demands of other leaders. In recognition of his contribution and dedication in leading many hundreds of walks for our group, he was presented with a Long Service Walks Leader award at our AGM in November 2023. Last autumn he led one last walk, a favourite of his, from Maidensgrove Common, which was fittingly the first walk he ever led.

Despite his failing health, David continued walking with us until only a few weeks before his death. He was a kindly, gentle man, always good for a friendly chat on our walks and in the pub afterwards! He was a very popular member and will be much missed by all his friends in the group.

*Liz Richardson
East Berks Ramblers*



BUCKS *briefs*

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Area and group Annual General Meetings

The AGM season is approaching: generally October to December for groups and January to March for Areas. Constitutionally, notice of AGMs has to be given to all members, but difficulties associated with the General Data Protection Regulation may make this difficult to achieve.

Please accept the following as notice of AGMs of the Area and its groups. You should check the Area and group websites, or contact secretaries nearer the time for further information about meetings and any associated walks if you do not hear from them directly.

- Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area:**
Saturday 1 February, 2pm, Small Barn Hall of the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, HP6 5AR.
- Amersham and District Group:**
Thursday 14 November, 8pm, Large Barn Hall of the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, HP6 5AR.
- Aylesbury & District Group:**
Friday 29 November, 7.30pm, St Anne's Hall, Aylesbury Road, Wendover, HP22 6JG.
- Chiltern Young Walkers:**
Check website for details.
- Chilterns Weekend Walkers:**
Sunday 20 October, 2pm, Great Missenden Memorial Centre, Link Road, Great Missenden, HP16 9AE.
- Hillingdon and District Group:**
Saturday 26 October, 2pm, St Martin's Church Hall, Eastcote Roads, Ruislip, HA4 8DG.
- Milton Keynes and District Group:**
Sunday 17 November, 1pm, Cricket Pavilion, High Street, Great Linford, Milton Keynes, MK14 5AX.
- Wycombe District Group:**
Saturday 9 November, 2pm, Cedar Barn, Barn Lane, Hazlemere, High Wycombe, HP15 7BQ.

John Esslemont
Acting Area Secretary



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Berkshire Area AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting is being hosted by Windsor & District Group and is booked for Saturday 23 November at Eton Wick Village Hall, Eton Wick Road, Windsor, SL4 6LT. Join us to find out how the nine Ramblers groups in Berkshire support walking in the county. The programme for the day starts with a choice of two walks: a six-mile walk leaving at 10am and a four-mile walk leaving at 10.30am. These will be followed by a talk on Windsor and the Great Park by Leslie Grout and then, lastly, the AGM will be held. The hall will be open all day (10am to 5pm) for anybody who arrives during the day. There is a small car park in front of the hall and a recreation ground car park at the side of the hall as well as road parking by the shops, but please use public transport where possible. For more details nearer the time, please keep an eye on our Area website at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/berkshire>

Grant Allsop
Area Secretary

Bucks to Oxon route finally stile-free

On 18 June, a Haddenham U3A walk celebrated the removal in early June of the last stile on the walking route from Haddenham to Thame. Although about 100 metres inside Oxfordshire, the Buckinghamshire farmer finally agreed to the removal of a stile and the installation of a kissing gate near Keepers Cottage, Kingsey. The gate was generously sponsored by Thame & Wheatley Ramblers through the Donate-a-

Gate scheme operated by North Bucks rRIPPLE. This was our 346th gate installation, with our first and second gates being only about a mile away towards Haddenham.

Bill Piers
North Bucks rRIPPLE (Ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)
For details of the Donate-a-Gate scheme go to www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html



Haddenham U3A Tuesday Walking Group celebrate with Bill Piers (in centre wearing white cap). Photo: Michael Ayers



The plaque on the new kissing gate funded by Thame & Wheatley Ramblers. Photo: Michael Ayers



SURREY *snippets*

Bridge building



Work in progress.

Photos: Martin Dunn

Ramblers footpath volunteers and friends, along with two of Surrey County Council's countryside access officers, have constructed a footpath bridge in Horley. According to the county council, this was their first volunteer build of a complex three-bay footpath bridge, saving around £4,000 compared to a contractor supplied and installed bridge of this type. The success of this project opens the possibility of future complex footpath bridge builds across Surrey using volunteer groups.

The bridge spans a 3.8 metre gap across a stream near Thunderfield Castle/Haroldslea in Horley using a three-bay bridge design drawn

up by one of the county council's countryside access team. With this design the upright handrail posts are not sunk into the ground but are instead bolted to a transom (a bar that extends across the width of the bridge at the same height as the treads) and then braced using a diagonal support known as a 'raker'. This design complicates the bridge construction, with all the drilling and assembly being done on site. The old, dilapidated bridge had been removed by contractors the day before, who also placed the three main

support beams onto which the footbridge was then constructed. With a good turnout of volunteers the team also undertook vegetation clearance work on the adjoining footpath and replaced all of the rotted 2.1 metre tread boards on a nearby bridleway bridge. Well done team!

There is a time-lapse video of the build on YouTube which can be viewed by searching for 'Haroldslea Bridge Build'

*Martin Dunn
Reigate Ramblers*



A 3D model of the bridge.

Rail to Ramble

New posters designed by local artist Diana Croft, have been unveiled along the North Downs Line in Surrey, with the aim of getting more visitors to travel sustainably by taking a train rather than a car.

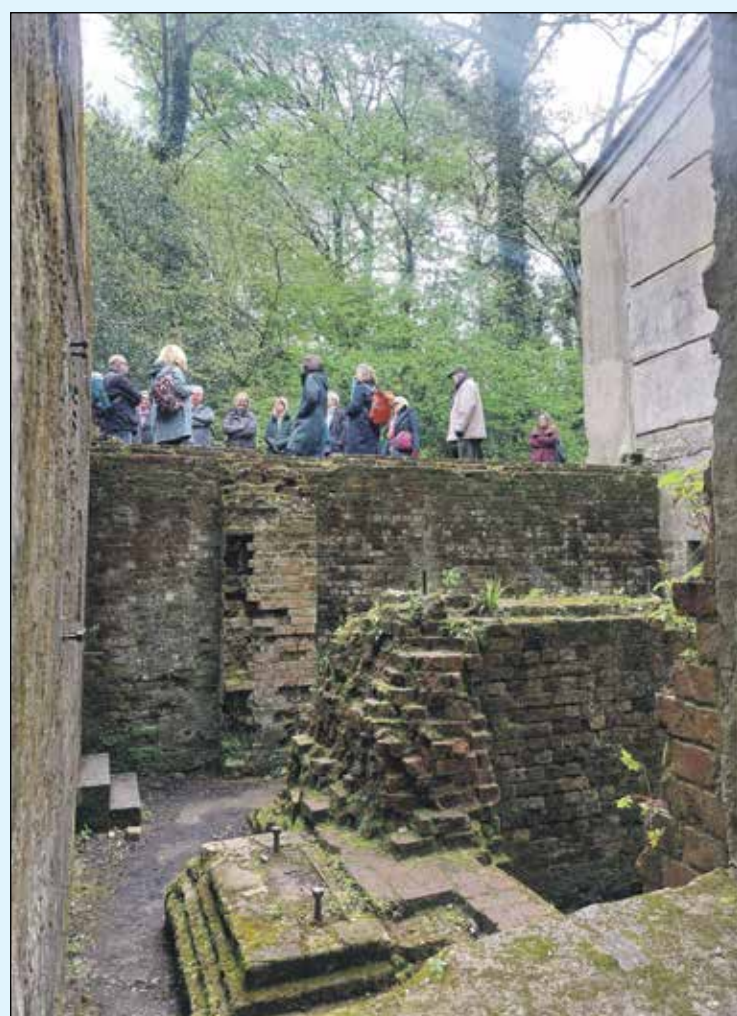
The initiative, which was launched in 2021, is the result of a collaboration between Great Western Railway, Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills National Landscape. Following the poster launch at Chilworth station, participants were treated to a tour of the remains of the nearby gunpowder mills before refreshments in the Percy Arms.

The North Downs Line between Guildford and Redhill offers access

to attractive countryside and villages, with views from the train of St Martha's Hill and Box Hill.

*Louise Stillwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers*

The Rail to Ramble initiative has devised and published walks of five to nine miles between a number of stations in the Surrey Hills. These can be downloaded from surreyhills.org/activity/rail-to-ramble. The descriptions with maps cover walks Shalford - Chilworth, Chilworth - Gomshall, Gomshall - Dorking, Dorking - Betchworth, Gomshall - Guildford, Haslemere - Witley, Witley - Godalming, Frensham to Bourne rail/bus, Woldingham circular and Leatherhead - Dorking (Mole Gap Trail).



Exploring the Chilworth gunpowder mills.

Photo: P Tarassoli

Around the groups

A day in Paris

A group of 15 weary walkers embarked on an unique adventure on Thursday 11 April, departing from London's St Pancras station on a 7.00am train bound for Paris. This excursion marked a first for our group, venturing beyond the borders of the UK for a day-long ramble. The prospect of a relatively short journey - just over two hours from central London to central Paris - made the French capital an enticing destination.

After we arrived at Gare du Nord, we headed towards the Marais area, once the Jewish quarter and now with lots of hip bars, boutiques, restaurants and galleries. We stopped at the Quartier de l'Horloge to see the Defenseur



The group pose before the Eiffel Tower.

Photo: Ruby Noorani

du Temps, a sculpture of a man perched on a rock, armed with a sword and shield. The clock was not working but when it does, the man fights a dragon, a bird and a crab.

Then off to the Centre Pompidou and the Stravinsky fountain with its colourful and kinetic sculptures. Time now for a coffee and patisserie stop before heading to the Hotel de Ville and Notre Dame cathedral - still being renovated after the fire in 2019. No time to stop as many had timed tickets for the Musee d'Orsay at 1.00pm. A two-hour break gave the choice of visiting the Musee d'Orsay, enjoying a long lunch in a restaurant or just sitting by the Seine to people-watch.

After lunch it was on to the Eiffel Tower, then to the Arc de Triomphe, and down the Champs-Elysees, before stopping in the Opera area for an early dinner in a brasserie.

The last part of the walk was up the hill to the Montmartre area and the church of the Sacre Coeur before heading back to the Gare du Nord for the 9.12pm train back to London.

It was a long day but enjoyed by all and missed by many (as numbers were limited). I have already recce'd Brussels for next year and await the reduced price tickets from Eurostar before deciding on the date.

*Tim Sai-Louie
Capital Walkers*

Rambling romance



Danny and Sue. Photo: Elvie Canuto

Between the lockdowns in 2020, we received an enquiry via our Facebook page from a Danny Welch, a single ex-London taxi driver (he told me to say 'wealthy millionaire') who subsequently joined our group and became a very popular

member. Meanwhile, Sue Green, also single, was living in semi-lockdown in her new house in Kent and missing her Essex rambling friends. Long ago a friend had said that she might meet a new man in her rambling group, but Sue had gloomily discounted this!

In August 2021, we walked the 45-mile St Peter's Way, which Sue came over from Kent to participate in. On boarding the minibus on the first day, Danny was introduced to Sue as a retired London cabby who was "just a bit naughty". This last bit intrigued Sue. Fast forward a year to our group's annual holiday in Carmarthen and Danny spent a considerable amount of time with Sue and her friends; ice creams in the

breaks, swims in the sea after walks, and despite never previously having shown any interest in plants and flowers, an entire day was spent at the National Botanic Garden of Wales! Sue became quite impressed with Danny and the feeling was mutual as finally, in January 2023, after a ramble, he asked her out. At our Christmas lunch last December they announced their engagement, and in May this year they were married at Chelmsford Registry Office.

Danny had once said that "the woman does not walk the earth that I would marry", but on his wedding day referred to his new wife as "the incredible .. full of life Sue." The power of rambling! So always go on your rambles and group holidays, because you never know! Congratulations to Danny and Sue.

*Fiona Lau
Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers*

Brain train



Quizzers on the Watlington Fryer.

Photo: Julie Shah

Our longest-running social event is chugging towards its 15th anniversary. It's a quiz with a difference... on a vintage train. Not content with the usual heritage railway diet of Santa specials and wartime nostalgia weekends, the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway goes one better with the Watlington Fryer, an onboard quiz with fish and chips. Our group has been fielding teams since 2011, thanks to the efforts of organiser Julie Shah. "It's become something of an institution," she says.

Opened in 1872 to link Princes Risborough with

Watlington, but closed to passengers in 1957, the line now runs from Chinnor on a scenic four-mile route along the foot of the Chilterns escarpment. Julie says it's a pleasure to gaze out of the window at the sun setting over Aylesbury Vale but the main business of the evening is serious quizzing. "We start at 7pm with three rounds of general knowledge questions on the first trip to Thame Junction and back. We're then served with a fish and chip supper at our tables on the train. On the second trip we tackle the picture round, which always provokes lots of discussion. There are further rounds of general knowledge during the third and final trip and the winning teams are given their prizes before the train arrives back in Chinnor by 10.30pm.

The quiz night is so popular with our members that four to six teams have been fielded most years. Regular quizzier Tony Bungay has been on the winning team twice but admits that luck has played a part. "One year we had to bluff our way through a sports round as none of us knew much about the subject. We guessed most of the answers and, incredibly, got all 10 questions correct!

This year we fielded four out of the 20 teams and put on a strong performance. "We did ourselves proud with all four teams coming well up in the top 10", said Julie.

*Mark Percy
Chilterns Weekend Walkers*

A delicious thank you By the sea

More than 40 of our walk leaders were treated to a delicious cream tea at St Anthony's church hall at Hamsey Green on 15 April. This was a big thank you from our Chairman, Roy Endersby, and his committee for all the walks they have organised during the past year.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



Patiently waiting for the word go!
Photo: John Tickner

Our second outing to the coast this year took place on 1 July when 38 members set off by coach to Steyning in West Sussex. There they divided into two groups to walk by different routes to Worthing where everyone enjoyed fish and chips, ice cream and cake. It was a fantastic day out and enjoyed by all.

Christine Raynsford
Dartford & Gravesham
Ramblers



Taking a break on the way to Worthing.
Photo: Christine Raynsford

50th anniversary

When Godalming Ramblers was established in February 1974, many of the founders were already members of local rambling groups like Haslemere and Guildford, but being residents of Godalming and its surroundings, they decided to form their own group. As it turned out, the Godalming and Haslemere groups quickly developed a common walk programme and the two groups were formally combined in 1976 to form the current Godalming and Haslemere Group.

To mark the 50th anniversary, a tea party celebration was held on 2 June at the Godalming United Church, attended by 98 members. There was a rolling photographic display of the group's more recent activities and a static display of older photographs, walk programmes and memorabilia. All attendees received a booklet describing the early days of the group and this included a copy of the first walk programme which ran from May 1974 to March 1975.

After enjoying tea, sandwiches and cake, Andy Piercy, our present Chair, introduced three founder members who are still active today: Rosemary Bryant, Susan Holmes and Richard Evans. Rosemary gave an inspiring talk about how the group had grown from an original 75 members to 450 today and from one walk a month, on a Sunday, to more than 20 a month today. Rosemary also highlighted the active participation by members right from the early days through to today. Not only through committee and walk leader participation, but also the organisation of social events, coach walking



Founder members (left to right): Susan Holmes, Rosemary Bryant and Richard Evans.
Photo: Jim Robertson

trips, walking holidays, fund-raising activities, local rights of way inspections and maintenance, monitoring of planning applications, and attendance at planning inquiries where rights of way are affected. Overall, the group continues not only to create its own social cohesion within, but also to promote the aims of the Ramblers nationally. The way to a successful group: participation! Richard Evans also spoke about the huge contribution that founder members of the group such as Len Clark, George Hyde and Denis Holmes had made.

After the cutting of the anniversary cake by the founder members, Andy finished off the afternoon with thanks to the many members who had contributed to the organisation of the event.

Janet Cole
Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers

Early start

I again led a walk to mark the Summer Solstice in June to see the sunrise at 4.42am. It was cool to start with but soon warmed up for our walk in the Barton Hills - Bedfordshire's bumpy bit - where we took in the views. We found a seat for a coffee and muffin break before parting with wonderful memories of the day.



The sun rises.
Photo: Tom Collier
Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers

All aboard

Our members enjoyed a walk with a difference in late June when we travelled to Central Milton Keynes to board the electric narrowboat Electra for a 'walk and glide' on the Grand Union Canal. The boat is owned by a community boat scheme which aims to make the waterway accessible to all. As the boat can only carry 12 passengers and there were 24 of us, one group boarded the boat to Linford Wharf and walked back whilst the second group did the opposite. The two walks were slightly different in length and route and were both led by very knowledgeable leaders. We



Members with the narrowboat Electra.
followed a trail of artworks, most of which had been visible from the boat. Many of these were Japanese-themed and we learnt that there was once a large Japanese community in the area. It had its own boarding school which closed about 20 years ago and is now a huge housing estate!

Rosemary Hasker
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Discovery walkers Safety, safety, safety

We have recently enjoyed a holiday in Warwickshire where we visited Coventry and the Shakespeare Experience. Walking is our main objective and to get as many people sharing this experience is what drives us. We have often heard the comment that we pack so much into our short walks that our programmes will be headed The Discovery Walkers and details will include the



Exploring Coventry.
Photo: Pauline Macfarlane
special topic covered by each walk.
Pauline Macfarlane
Lea Valley Friends Group

Sell-out canal trip

Our first social event of the year took place on 17 April with a choice of morning walks followed in the afternoon with a narrowboat trip on the Wey & Arun Canal. Our appetite had been whetted by having a speaker from the Wey & Arun Canal Trust at our AGM last October. Was it the magical lure of a cream tea on the boat that led to all 40 places selling in less than 24 hours? We were also able to see the strides forward the canal volunteers have made in opening up a section of the canal, restoring



Members with the narrowboat Electra.
four locks and the operational base at Loxwood, West Sussex.
Tim Westwell
Mole Valley Ramblers



'Patient' Steve Killick with first aider Tony Wilkes.
Photo: Anne Griffiths

It won't have gone unnoticed that safety on group walks has been high on the agenda for the Ramblers over the last 18 months or so. It has also been on the agenda of our group. Back in 2022 we had a small surplus of funds and decided to buy hi-vis jackets for all our walk leaders. Each leader was issued with two jackets to ensure that the backmarker also had access to hi-vis. You will now never see a North Beds Ramblers walk without this useful piece of safety equipment.

Our hi-vis purchase was followed up with whistles a year later - again issued to all our walk leaders

and regular backmarkers. Whilst not used much, they have been employed occasionally when large groups have become stretched out or walk leaders dive through hedges becoming invisible, and have proved their worth in these situations.

In 2024 we decided, again with surplus funds, to run a first aid course. It has been highlighted by the Central Office safety project that first aid training is recommended but needs to be met from group budgets.

Our initial general first aid course was run in April with 14 attendees, funded by the group and completely free to our members. We are very lucky to have a qualified first responder and paramedic

locally and not only did she carry out the training but also brought home-made cakes! On the course we discussed the value and content of first aid packs and now ensure that we carry a pack on all our walks. This preparation was put into practice recently when one member got a blister at the start of a walk - new boots being the culprit. First aid packs to the ready ensured the walk was not ruined!

Also, during the course, we took time to ensure that all attendees had signed up to the free 999 text messaging service and they also had their emergency contact details entered into their smartphones so, in an emergency, we could access their details. We will keep pushing this information at local gatherings. Indeed we walked through these easy self-help points at our Summer Lunch.

A further first aid course was held in August and covered CPR. Again, it was free to our members and provided plenty of hands-on practice. We truly believe in safety on walks and ensuring we do everything in our power to keep our walkers safe. May our training never be required, but, just in case...

Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers