

Walker

Thames Path closed at Kew



The collapsed section of the towpath.

Photo: London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

The Thames Path National Trail is 298 km long (or 185.2 miles in old money if you prefer). These days you can continue along the King Charles III England Coast Path beside the Thames Estuary making it the only source to sea path in the UK. Of course, the trail also goes through a world city, London, often on both banks. As a result, you hear commentators, including me, referring to the trail as the most walked route in

the world.

So, a closure on the south bank between Richmond and Kew is a major challenge for the local authority, Richmond upon Thames, as well as other institutions like the Environment Agency, the Port of London Authority, the Thames Path National Trail and the local Ramblers.

The Thames towpath between Richmond Lock and Kew Gardens car park on Ferry Lane is entirely closed following the collapse of a section of the towpath on

Saturday 19 October. Fencing has been installed at either end and residents and visitors are asked not to make any attempt to access the towpath at any time.

Because it is not safe, diversions are now in place for towpath walkers and other users. A route is shown on the map on the opposite side of the river, crossing at Richmond Lock. For a more direct route to Kew, pedestrians and cyclists can take Kew Road (A307) with diversion signage in place at Twickenham Bridge and at Ferry Lane.

At the time of writing, Richmond Council hopes to have the path reopened by summer 2025. The council has unveiled its timetable for repairs to the collapsed section of the Thames Path in Kew, with work expected to begin early in 2025. The council says it is leveraging this project to explore broader ecological and safety improvements along the towpath. A strategic Towpath Improvement and Management

Plan, commissioned in June 2024, is addressing maintenance and upgrades across the entire borough. Councillor Alexander Ehmann commented: "With climate change presenting increasing challenges, this project ensures residents and visitors can enjoy a safe, resilient

towpath for years to come."

The council promises further updates, including detailed timelines and designs, as well as communication with the relevant organisations with interest in the route, as the project progresses.

Des Garrahan



Closed off.

Photo: Des Garrahan

Ramblers press for Access to Nature Bill at House of Lords reception

The Ramblers hosted a reception at the House of Lords on 16 December to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Royal Assent for the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act. You may have noticed BBC News items on that day. It was also an opportunity for the Ramblers to promote their case for a new Access to Nature Bill, to tackle the barriers preventing people from getting outdoors.

I was fortunate to be one of three volunteers from across the nation to be invited by Ramblers to share with the audience their perspectives on why paths, walking and access to nature were important to them.

After a welcome introductory mulled wine to launch the general chit-chat, the reception got formally underway with speeches from sponsors Baroness Barbara Young of Old Scone (previous roles include Chair of English Nature and Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and Baroness Sue Hayman of Ullock

(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whose responsibilities include access, including rights of way and coastal paths), followed by the Chief Executive of the Ramblers, Ross Maloney, who outlined the case for improved access, and then introduced the three volunteers.

I talked about achievements made by volunteers to make footpaths safer and more accessible as well as experiences of my twin daughters accessing the countryside with their electric wheelchairs. I made suggestions on how standards for footpath surfacing could be improved.

Next up was Winston Walker from Birmingham, who spoke about becoming diabetic and partially sighted, but set up Wellbeing walks for people he met in doctors' surgeries to improve their health and mental well-being by walking in the outdoors.

Last up was Sian McCluskey from Scotland, a young Ramblers Out There Award Ambassador, who

spoke about initiatives to encourage under 26-year-olds, some of whom were recovering from post-pandemic agoraphobia, to experience the joy of being outdoors from city life.

Ramblers had invited along many like-minded organisations and after the speeches were over there was time to talk to representatives from agencies such as Living Streets, Active Travel England and Activity Alliance, who are all active in promoting better access to the countryside.

Members of Parliament were also attending the reception, including Greg Smith, MP for the neighbouring Mid Buckinghamshire constituency. Afterwards he invited me into the Gallery of the House of Commons to experience members' at work questioning Ministers' statements.

Before finally leaving Parliament, I went into the House of Lords shop, a treasure trove of ideas for Christmas gifts!

Bob Merry

*Footpath maintenance team leader
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers*



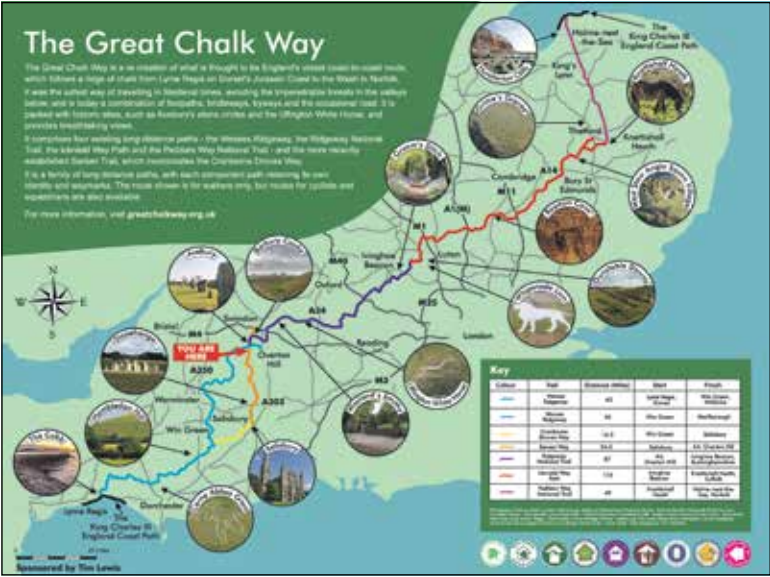
Baroness Young (speaking) and Baroness Hayman at the House of Lords reception.

Photo: Bob Merry



Bob Merry (second from right) with members of Thame & Wheatley group's footpath maintenance team.

Chilterns launch for Great Chalk Way



One of the Great Chalk Way information boards. Photo: Abby George



Tim Lewis (right) with Mike Lewington at the official opening. Photo: Wendy Tobitt

It was yet another rainy day as I drove to the Chilterns Gateway Centre on Dunstable Downs on 10 October 2024, but this didn't matter: I was going to attend the official opening of the Great Chalk Way. This was the culmination of a project initiated as far back as 2007, but it got off the ground only in September 2017 with the formation of the Great Chalk Way working group. This comprised representatives

of the Friends of the Ridgeway, Icknield Way Association and Norfolk and Dorset councils.

The Great Chalk Way is a new coast to coast trail from Lyme Regis in Dorset to Holme-next-the-Sea in Norfolk. It comprises the existing long distance trails of the Wessex Ridgeway, the Ridgeway National Trail, the Icknield Way Path and Peddars Way, which is also a National Trail. These trails represent what is considered to be the oldest continuously used path in England. It follows a broad ridge of chalk from one coast to the other, and is approximately 360 miles long, depending on your choice of route - see below.

The major difference between the existing Greater Ridgeway, for which Ray Quinlan wrote a Cicerone guidebook first published in 2002, and the Great Chalk Way, was the creation of the Sarsen Way and Cranborne Doves Way. These take the Great Chalk Way user on an alternative route to the existing Wessex Ridgeway one from Win Green to Salisbury on the Cranborne Doves Way and from Salisbury to Barbury Castle on the Ridgeway National Trail, past such icons as the Stonehenge and Avebury stone circles. Directions for both routes are available on the website of the Long Distance Walkers Association (ldwa.org.uk).

One problem which the working group wrestled with over the course of several meetings was the need to create a distinct identity for the Great Chalk Way whilst at the same time retaining the individual identities of its component long distance paths. We solved this by having information boards designed to be placed at the start and finish of each component trail, showing the route of the Great

Chalk Way and giving pictorial and factual information about it. This was a painful process giving rise to endless debate, and I learned the hard way never to ask a committee to design something! It was also necessary to obtain the agreement of landowners to have the boards installed on their land, and unfortunately we have not yet managed to achieve this for two of the eight boards.

Also attending the official opening with me were Mary-Ann Ochota, the broadcaster specialising in anthropology and archaeology, and Patron of the Ridgeway National Trail, Mike Lewington, Chair of the Friends of the Ridgeway and Doug Landman, then Publicity Officer of the Icknield Way Association.

Mary-Ann said at the opening: "Old paths really matter because they connect us to where we are going from where we have been. They tell the stories that connect communities with local history, culture and nature. People on these paths connect with each other and the landscapes around them. In each section of the Great Chalk Way you are walking through living landscapes - from the wind-stripped Norfolk fens to the lofty beech woodlands of Wessex and through Dorset to the Jurassic coast. I hope the Great Chalk Way becomes one of the best loved and celebrated long distance routes in the country."

Unbeknown to us at the time, the influential YouTube contributor Paul Whitewick was also at the opening ceremony. He made a video about the Great Chalk Way and its origins, which has received 137,000 views and attracted more than 900 comments, all but a handful of which showed much enthusiasm for the concept of the route. The landscape photographer Hedley Thorne has



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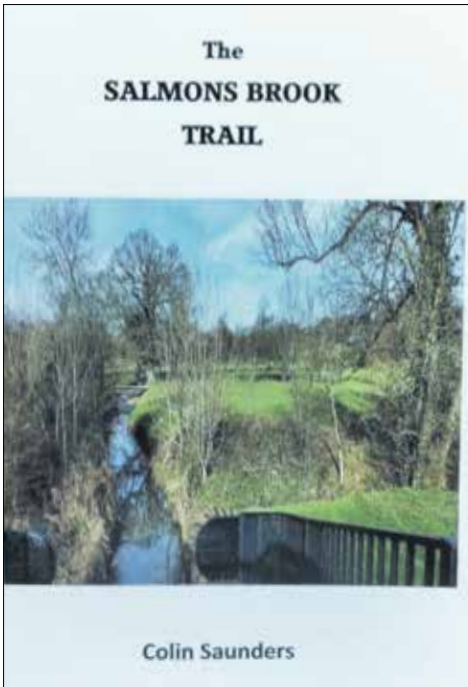
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also posted about the event on the Facebook account 'Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain and Ireland'. We look forward to seeing some southeast walkers on the trail after reading this article!

Tim Lewis
Area Footpath Officer for
Wiltshire Ramblers and Trustee of
the Friends of the Ridgeway

Salmons Brook Trail - a new walk across Enfield borough



The Salmons Brook Trail is a new 11-mile route for walkers that runs diagonally, northwest to southeast across Enfield borough, from Hadley Wood through Grange Park and Edmonton to Meridian Water,

where it links up with its companion, the Pymmes Brook Trail. Naturally, it follows as closely as possible Salmons Brook, a tributary of Pymmes. It has been devised by me in consultation with Enfield Council, the Enfield Society and the Pymmes BrookERS (see right).

Most of the first half is in the open countryside. From Hadley Wood station the trail follows the leafy avenues of Hadley Wood Conservation Area to reach Enfield Chase, where over 100,000 trees have recently been planted, and many new ponds created, to help restore the natural environment and alleviate flooding. A short climb leads to the Ridgeway road, Chase Farm Hospital and the Ridgeway Tavern, then the trail drops through woodland to reach the quiet pastures of Vicarage Farm, where Shire horses graze around the remains of a wartime anti-aircraft base, and the Jolly Farmers pub near Oakwood, the halfway point. Nearby on a short diversion is the charming confluence of Salmons Brook and its tributary, Glen Brook. The second half is mostly along

residential roads, punctuated by the greenery of Cheyne Walk Open Space, the New River Path, Bush Hill Gardens, Bury Lodge Wetlands, Churchfields, Montagu Recreation Ground, Kenninghall Open Space and Ladysmith Park (which only opened in 2024) near Meridian Water station where the Salmons Brook Trail finishes. Here it links with the Pymmes Brook Trail, which (if you still have the energy!) can be followed another two miles to the Lee Navigation towpath at Tottenham Hale. There are many opportunities for refreshment (including six pubs) and picnic spots, and the trail is well-served by public transport, passing or linked to Gordon Hill, Enfield Chase, Grange Park, Bush Hill Park and Edmonton Green stations.

A guide to the trail has been published by Footline Press (footlinepress.co.uk) for £10.00 plus postage, of which £5.00 goes to the Pymmes BrookERS to help with their restoration work. It contains step-by-step route instructions, sketch maps, photos and very detailed commentary about the many interesting and historic places you

Pymmes BrookERS

The Pymmes BrookERS (short for 'Pymmes and Salmons Brook RestorERS') is a volunteer-run group which wants to see long-term improvements to these rivers so that they are cleaner and more natural, able to support more wildlife, and more able to deal with the impacts of climate change like flooding and drought. They do this by taking practical action, organising river clean-ups, removing invasive species, monitoring river health and collecting data to press for change and restoration. You can read more about them at pymmesbrookers.org.uk or on their Facebook page.

pass, such as the handsome 'Church in the Orchard' in the Grange Park Conservation Area, the striking Nagapooshani Ambaal Temple and Edmonton's Church Street Conservation Area.

And if you think there should be apostrophes in Salmons and Pymmes, you'll have to buy the book to discover the reason for the omission!

Colin Saunders

The saga of Cox's Walk bridge

Linking Sydenham Hill and Dulwich, southeast London's Cox's Walk is a rare survival of an 18th century public walk. A formal avenue of oaks was planted in the 1740s by Francis Cox to connect his Green Man tavern and Dulwich Wells with Sydenham Wells. A tributary from the Effra, now one of London's hidden rivers, once flowed down from the Sydenham Hill woods and ran alongside the path.

By 1865 the Crystal Palace and South London Junction Railway replaced the brook and ran under a big cantilevered bridge in brick and wood. Camille Pissarro painted the Lordship Lane station from here in 1871. You can see the painting in the Courtauld but these days woodland and shrubbery obscure Pissarro's view.

The Green Man no longer exists, you can't 'take the waters' in either Dulwich or Sydenham Wells, the bridge was renewed in 1908 and the railway shut in 1954. But Cox's Walk survives and the refurbished bridge remained, falling into disrepair. These days both form part of Section 11 of the Green Chain Walk and under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 Southwark Council has a legal duty to keep the footbridge open and safe for public use.

As the footbridge continued to deteriorate the council began planning for a large-scale repair and in 2017 planted 15 replacement oak trees in mitigation. The refurbishment works now proposed the full replacement of the supporting walls on either side of the bridge. Unfortunately, this required the removal of the two oak trees on the west side of the bridge to

provide safe working conditions. However, the works were delayed because of significant public interest concerning the loss of the oak trees, which included a petition with more than 2,000 signatures. Therefore, Southwark Council decided to put the planned works on hold and see if there was any way they could preserve the two oak trees.

Further local consultation took place in 2020 and the footbridge was shut. A further two-year delay led to geotechnical surveys taking place in 2022, followed by a Arboricultural Impact Assessment and an Environmental Constraints Study. In 2023 planning permission was granted to build a temporary ramp to enable refurbishment of the footbridge.

By October 2024 full refurbishment of the footbridge with additional steel portal frames located in front of the existing abutments and wing-wall construction to the side of the bridge was complete. The visual context of the upper wooden frame of the bridge remains unaltered and intact and the frames are supported on screw pile foundations to mitigate impact to the root network of the two mature oaks,

The footbridge was finally reopened in November 2024. In all probability construction of the original bridge in 1865 probably took a few months and the refurbished version in 1908 something similar but in the 21st century a new bridge took just over seven years to clear planning controls and complete. It is lovely to have that section of the Green Chain Walk back!

Des Garrahan



The refurbished Cox's Walk bridge.

Photo: Des Garrahan

Underground, Overground, Wombling free!

Yes, the Wombles of Wimbledon are alive and well and on page 29 of my new book - *London Overground - 22 walks from London Overground stations - you will find a request that "any sightings should be reported"*.

This book offers a range of walks, all starting from stations on the London Overground which has more than 100 miles of track and 113 stations. The Overground was marked in orange on the London Transport map but in 2024 the service was rebranded as six separate lines called the Liberty, Lioness, Mildmay, Suffragette, Weaver, Windrush lines and each was given an individual colour. The new names were devised following consultation with passengers and were chosen to reflect London's diverse culture.

The walks in the book make best use of the green spaces to be found along each of the lines and minimise street walking in favour of paths, tracks, woods and towpaths. Five are circular. The others are linear but always finish where there is a convenient rail, Underground or Overground station for return travel. The walks vary in length from three and a half miles to nine miles and include : Woods and lakes of Epping Forest; Turkey Brook and New River; Ancient and Modern in the City of London; Parliament Hill, Primrose Hill and One Tree Hill; the Olympic Park and Lee Navigation; the University Boat Race course; the dinosaurs of Crystal Palace; Highgate Woods and Alexandra Palace.

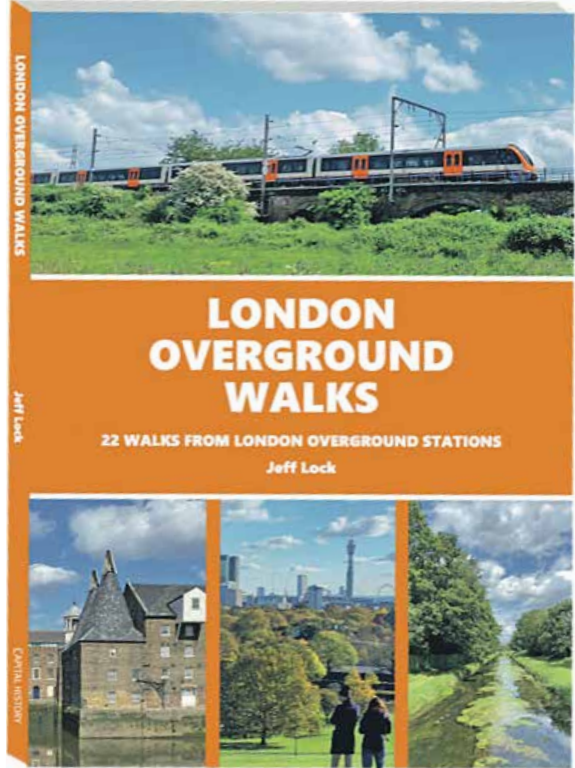
The book has 96 pages in full colour and is priced at £9.95. It can be obtained from Amazon or from the publisher's website at www.capitaltransport.com. It can also be obtained from all good bookshops. At some point in 2025 it will be available from the London Transport Museum but, at the time of writing, the museum was still having problems with its computer systems following the TfL cyber attack.

Jeff Lock

Jeff's previous guidebooks include 'Beyond the End of the Line - 26 walks from the terminus stations of the London Underground' and 'Exploring the Elizabeth Line - 23 walks from Crossrail Stations'.



Jeff Lock



Book cover

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Disappointment at City's response to forest walking concerns

President of Essex Ramblers. Len Banister, has expressed 'serious disappointment' at the City of London's failure to provide adequate protection from off-trail cyclists for secondary tracks in Epping Forest (see SEW December 2024, page 1).

Said Len: :Last summer I wrote to the new Superintendent pointing to how the damage caused by cyclists - especially in winter - contributes

to the steep decline in the quality of walking in the forest we've experienced over the past two years. The response we received was low on detail - simply information on planned new appointments and a programme of path repairs that is unlikely to commence until the spring. It also fails to appreciate that the damage we've highlighted is the result of cyclists diverting from main footpaths onto forest trails. We're

left with a 'wait and see' answer with no sense of a coherent plan.

We have put forward three measures that could immediately improve the situation. These are the keepers should produce an inventory of the condition of all paths, primary and secondary, in the forest; cyclists should be directed to rides and restricted from other areas in the same way as horse riders; several areas are allocated or manufactured where mountain-biking can take place, However, the City appears not to have taken these proposals into consideration.

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Transport strategy consultation

Transport for the South East is consulting on its draft Transport Strategy. The strategy encompasses the southern counties from Kent to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and the six Berkshire unitary authorities,

The strategy aims to get a higher percentage of the population engaged in physical activity through active travel options (walking and cycling), and deliver local cycling and walking infrastructure plans.

Most ramblers would agree with most of the strategy. However,

its emphasis is on functional walking such as 15-minute neighbourhoods and it says little about recreational walking and has no mention of rights of way.

The consultation is open until 7 March. To take part, start at: <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/>

David Cooper
Surrey Area.

Centenary Walk:

West Essex Ramblers have announced that the 2025 Centenary Walk will take place on Sunday 6 July. The walk - which commemorates the passing of the

1878 Epping Forest Act, opening the forest to all - runs for 14.5 miles from Manor Park in the south to Epping in the north, with strategically-placed joining and leaving points in between. Said David Keane, the walk leader:

"We're hoping the switch to a July date will result in a bumper turnout . It's a remarkable event and last year some 120 walkers joined in." Details of the walk will be on the West Essex website, www.west-essexramblers.org.uk.



SURREY snippets

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Groups and members have commented in the final round of consultation on the Surrey Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-35. An earlier round attracted over 4,000 responses.

Andrew Bowden, Surrey Area Footpath Secretary, commented: "It is a well-researched and written document but lacks specifics. It should review

what happened to the aims and budgets of the last plan, It should state what the baseline of funding is, that is, how many staff are needed to complete the basic work of the Countryside Access Department and how many are needed to make inroads into the wish list for the next 10 years. The consultation closed on 9 February.

David Cooper

Back to work

Croydon Ramblers had an active footpath work group for many years but the last leader, Peter Robertson, sadly died suddenly more than two years ago and filling his role proved difficult. The regular tasks ceased, though previous members continued to help with some special tasks arranged by Surrey County Council. We are now very pleased that John Stone has taken over as group leader and is liaising with the county council's volunteer coordinator, Tom Chatfield, to find new tasks for us.

We had our first Croydon-only work party event under John's leadership on 9 October 2024 at Tatsfield with a team of eight, some from the old group and some out for the first time. We managed to clear four stretches of a bridleway and footpath of overhanging branches and brambles. Local residents and dog walkers congratulated us on our efforts. This was technically an easy, if strenuous, task and Tom will consider finding more involved work for us in the future such as



The cleared bridleway. Photo: Chris Harman

installing gates, steps and bridges. walkers and horse riders. We hope our working group continues for many years to the benefit of all

Chris Harman
Croydon Ramblers



Tom Chatfield (second from left) and John Stone (second from right) with some of the Croydon work party. Photo: Chris Harman

Busy year

Mole Valley ramblers path maintenance team enjoyed a successful 2024, during which it was joined by volunteers from Epsom & Ewell group, at first to assist in installing a gate on their behalf, now two have become willing and welcome regulars.

At the end of last summer, over two contrasting days (one warm and dry, the other very wet) the team installed on the Wotton Estate 30 steps on what had been a difficult and dangerous

slope. These have since been well used on several group walks. During the year, six kissing gates, of which three were donated by Mole Valley ramblers, were installed; also a small bridge and a number of finger and waymark posts. Further repair work was done on another flight of steps and many paths were cleared of heavy vegetation. The team carries out regular monthly tasks under the direction of Surrey County Council's countryside management team, as well as undertaking ad hoc clearances as required.

Pauline Butcher
Mole Valley Ramblers



One of two gates installed at Dogkennel Green. Photo: Pauline Butcher



At work on the steps at the Wotton Estate. Photo: Thomas Chatfield/SCC

Training day

Farnham & District Ramblers will be organising another Walk Leading and Navigation training course on Saturday 12 April. The course is open to existing and potential walk leaders from any Surrey Area Ramblers group. It will include leading requirements and techniques, with a focus on learning and improving map and compass skills and will include a practical exercise in the outdoors.

The course will be held at the Hale Institute Village Hall, Wings

Road, Upper Hale, Farnham GU9 0HN and will be run by experienced Farnham & District leaders/trainers. The day will open at 9.45 am for a 10.00am start, and finish around 4.00pm. To secure a place you are invited to email me by going to the Contact Us page on the Farnham & District Ramblers website and selecting the 'Walks Programme Coordinator' option from the list of committee members. Then complete the template and press 'Submit'. If you leave your contact details, I will be in touch.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District ramblers

Another footbridge replaced in Horley

The culmination of a busy 2024 saw Reigate Ramblers footpath volunteers and friends completing work to replace all of the woodwork on a four-bay footbridge to the north east of Horley.

Previously, in December 2023, we had constructed a similar three-bay bridge across a small stream in Horley after contractors had removed the old bridge and laid new girders. We were therefore somewhat surprised to turn up in October 2024 to find this next bridge still in place and all the materials to build the replacement bridge on the Surrey County Council truck. Needless to say this wasn't going to happen in one day!

Undaunted, we agreed to tackle the replacement in sections. The existing woodwork was badly rotted with damaged tread boards covered by plywood sheets and handrail supports starting to break away, making the bridge unsafe. The bridge itself was constructed on top of a steel girder frame. We started stripping away all of the wood on the first half of the bridge and replacing it with recycled plastic alternatives and oak tread boards. Nearing the end of the first day, with just over an hour left before it would start getting dark, we had almost finished half the bridge when we took on the challenge to strip out and replace all of the remaining deck boards and their supporting nailing strips, meaning that on our next visit we would only need to replace the remaining three (of the original five) handrail support structures (transoms) and the last half bridge length worth of hand and guard rails. We managed



The original footbridge during disassembly.

Photo: Martin Dunn



The finished replacement (although somewhat muddy) footbridge.

Photo: Martin Dunn

this just in time for the big walk back to our cars as the sun was setting, whilst leaving the bridge in a safe condition for footpath users.

Our next task day (in November) was already scheduled to fit a kissing gate and pedestrian gate plus adjacent vegetation clearance on the Greensand Way near Redhill, and so we returned to finish the bridge with a smaller team in December. It still took most of the day to complete the task which involved ripping out the remaining wooden handrail support structure and hand/guard rails to replace again with recycled plastic alternatives. The new heavy handrail support

structures had to be drilled and assembled using pre-cut materials. These were then lifted into position and fitted to the steel bridge girders; a task made more challenging as the securing bolt holes had to be drilled to millimetre precision to match existing holes in the girders. Conditions on the day were very muddy, and we twice helped push the Surrey County Council truck when it got stuck trying to leave the field at the end of the day. The finished bridge would have benefitted from a good washdown!

Martin Dunn
Reigate Ramblers

Thursley boardwalk

The boardwalk on Thursley Common, near Elstead, was voted Britain's Favourite Path last October in a competition run by the Ramblers. The 1.3 km (0.8 mile) boardwalk is part of Thursley National Nature Reserve, which is managed by Natural England. More than 600 paths were nominated across England, Wales and Scotland.

The original boardwalk was destroyed by a fire which spread through more than 20 hectares of land in May 2020 after which the whole community came together to help restore the route. We in Farnham & District Ramblers were pleased to make a donation to the restoration fund.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

The boardwalk and the special area linking Thursley, Elstead and Ockley Commons was included on a Mole Valley Ramblers walk in each season of 2024.

Thanks to the determination of local residents, a fund raising group was formed by Elstead and Thursley parish councils after the 2020 fire which destroyed the boardwalk. Donations and grants were generous from organisations, individuals,



The Thursley boardwalk.

Photo: Christine Gittins

companies, Waverley Borough Council, etc, so the plan for a new boardwalk was created. A well-attended reopening took place in 2022.

In the warmer months the pools are a magnet for more than 20 species of dragonfly. Walk the boards slowly and spot the many newts, frogs and lizards which sunbathe here. So many wildflowers to identify. Do visit when the cotton grass is blooming. It is beautiful! In the spring I will be looking out for the hobby and listening for the cuckoo.

Christine Gittins
Mole Valley Ramblers

Thank you volunteers

Surrey County Council Countryside Access Officer, Thomas Chatfield, has written to thank all voluntary groups who

work on public rights of way in the county and gave these statistics for 2024 : 3,170 volunteer hours achieved; 707 individual volunteer

attendances; 48.6 kilometres of paths improved; 20 gates installed; 13 bridges installed; 22 waymark posts/fingerposts installed; 272 steps installed.

David Cooper



BERKSHIRE bites

Access issues raised with MP



At the entrance to the Langley Mead SANG: Yuan Yang MP with Stephen Russell, Richard Hanson-James and Helen Tranter, a Loddon Valley member with a keen interest in the SANG issues.

Photo: Steve Vale

Members of Loddon Valley ramblers met their local Member of Parliament, Yuan Yang, for a 'walk and talk' discussion about access issues in December. Yuan is the MP for Earley and Woodley in Berkshire, and the meeting took place in Shinfield, which is part of her constituency. Yuan is very interested in walking and access issues, and the meeting was also attended by Stephen Russell, Policy and Public affairs Manager at the Ramblers, as well as Richard Hanson-James, Chair of Berkshire Area of the Ramblers.

There were two key issues discussed. The first was about converting stiles to kissing gates, to improve access to walking for those with restricted mobility. Loddon Valley group has been very successful in converting stiles in recent years, to the point where only around 25 stiles need to be converted to make all the well-used rights of way in Wokingham Borough fully accessible. However, for all of

those 25 stiles, landowners have refused permission to convert. The meeting therefore sought to impress on Yuan the need for a change in current legislation, so that there is a presumption in favour of conversions unless the landowner can show good and valid reasons why it would not be appropriate.

The second issue was about suitable alternative natural greenspace areas (SANGs) and giving them open access status under the Countryside and Rights of Way legislation, so that they can be shown as open access land on Ordnance Survey maps. This would enable more walkers to be aware of their existence and to use them. The walk highlighted SANGs in Shinfield, and demonstrated to Yuan their value, both as attractive spaces in themselves and as additions to the walking network, providing new routes that link to existing rights of way. It was agreed, as a first step, to ask the owners of local SANGs to formally dedicate them as open access land.

Steve Vale



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Supporting Reading Walks Festival

Members of Berkshire Area and Loddon Valley Ramblers will be supporting the 2025 Reading Walks Festival by leading a number of walks. The festival is now in its third year and its success in previous years has made it part of the town's regular calendar of events. It is organised by Reading's Economy & Destination Agency and aims to promote the town's history, natural landscapes and attractions to both visitors and residents. It features around 50 walks over a 10-day period, some rural, some walking tours of historic sites and some longer walks.

The 2025 festival will take place from 10 - 18 May. The programme will be published in March and participation in the walks can be booked then (most walks have a limit of 25 walkers). Details will be at readingwalksfestival.org from 14 March.

I have led walks for the festival over the last two years. Whilst not run by the Ramblers, the walks offer a chance to attract a wider range of people and introduce them to the pleasures and benefits of walking, and shows them the wealth of interesting routes and locations the town offers.

*Steve Vale
Loddon Valley Ramblers*



One of last year's festival walks at Sulhamstead church, near Reading.

Photo: Steve Vale

Walking the St James' Way/Camino Ingles

In early November, Henley & Goring Ramblers completed the final section of the St James' Way, a modern-day pilgrimage route of approximately 68 miles from Reading Abbey to the port of Southampton. The route forms part of the Camino Ingles, one of a network of caminos that stretch across Europe to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. We had hoped to start from Reading in January, walking 10 sections of six to nine miles each month, but flooding and bad weather delayed the start of the walk until March and we were only finally able to get underway by starting at Theale and returning to the first section in June once flooding had subsided and essential repairs to the path were completed.

The Confraternity of St James only recently waymarked the route and provided lots of helpful advice on their website (csj.org.uk/st-james-way). A guidebook and pilgrim passport can also be purchased so that walkers can collect stamps at churches and pubs along the way. The stamps and distances recorded in the passport count towards the distance travelled towards Santiago. Most sections of the route were accessible by train or bus so we only used cars or taxis in a handful of places where this was absolutely necessary.

Following the distinctive blue and yellow scallop shell route markers, we found a route full of variety,



Henley & Goring 'pilgrims' at God's House Tower in Southampton.

Photo: Joan Clark

which largely skirted the major urban centres and led us instead through dappled bluebell woods, nature reserves, farmland, and along towpaths and clear chalk streams. We walked the latter sections alongside the River Itchen, which meandered through low-lying fields and occasionally divided around the path to give us the feeling of walking along a causeway. Other highlights along the way included visits to the remains of Roman Silchester near Reading, the remains of the beautiful Benedictine priory at Pamber, and the magnificent Winchester Cathedral where, as pilgrims, we were able to enjoy a free guided tour.

The combination of church and pub stops turned out to be ideal for our group. Pilgrim blessings were available at St James' Church Reading, where we also viewed the Shrine of St James, and at St Mary's Church Sulhamstead, where we were invited to ring the church bell. Those of our members who enjoy beer found

it in plentiful supply in the many comfortable and hospitable pubs along the way. On the section between Itchen Abbas and Winchester, we were lucky to find a village hall offering refreshments, including scones made with locally-grown watercress. We ended our walk at God's House Tower in Southampton, where we exchanged our completed passports for the Via de Sanctus Iacobus certificate and enjoyed a refreshing cuppa and baked goods.

We all agreed that this had been a very enjoyable walk, packed with interesting places to visit. We are very grateful to the Confraternity of St James who are responsible for the route, and to the many churches and pubs for their hospitality. We enjoyed it so much that one of our trips for 2025 will enable us to continue the route into Spain and to the ultimate pilgrim destination of Santiago de Compostela.

*Catherine Ewart
Henley & Goring Ramblers*

Linking central London's Elizabeth Line station entrances

The Elizabeth Line, long famed for being late and over budget, finally opened in 2022. On 28 December 2024, 35 of us walked past the nine new entrances for its five central London stations, all of them now among the 10 busiest stations in Great Britain. En route we glimpsed London from Roman times to the 2020s.



The entrance at Liverpool Street with lift adjacent.

Photo: Dick Dunmore

Liverpool Street's east entrance, our start, is in a new pedestrian plaza, from where we walked above the escalators down to the platform beneath the oval gardens of Finsbury Circus, and the escalators up to the west entrance in pedestrianised Moorfields at an expanded Moorgate station. We passed the remains of London's Roman wall, and the postwar lakes, gardens and brutalist architecture of the Barbican, to an overbridge into Barbican station.

Farringdon station's east entrance has a lift not shown on the Underground map, back to Barbican station from a quiet part of Long Lane. From there we walked past Smithfield, a meat market for over 800 years, into Cowcross Street, down which cattle were driven, and another new pedestrian plaza between the old 1863 terminus of the Metropolitan Railway and the new west entrance to the Elizabeth Line. We continued through the diamond quarter of Hatton Garden to the 1600s green spaces of Lincoln's Inn Fields and Bloomsbury Square.

Tottenham Court Road station's east entrance by the 1960s Centre Point took us under Charing Cross Road to the south side of Oxford street, the modern name for the Roman Via Trinobantina. After two blocks among the crowds of shoppers we reached the west entrance on Dean Street and returned to the back streets. Once across Regent Street we paused in Hanover Square, created in honour of George I and the house of Hanover.

Bond Street's two Elizabeth Line station entrances are in Mayfair. We left Hanover Square by the east entrance, through a new public space, Medici Courtyard, to New Bond Street. Round the corner in Brook Street we saw the adjacent Georgian houses occupied, at different times, by Jimi Hendrix and George Frideric Handel. In elegant South Molton Street, built over the Tyburn stream, we ducked through a narrow passage to emerge at the west station entrance in Davies Street. From there we passed through 1800s Grosvenor Square and the former US embassy, now being converted into a hotel, and at the Animals in War memorial crossed Park Lane into Hyde Park. We recrossed the Roman Via Trinobantina at Lancaster Gate towards Paddington, entering the station by the 'Wild Table of Love', a modern sculpture of wild animals at a dining table.

Paddington's Elizabeth Line entrance, in the former taxi rank under a cloud-patterned canopy, was the end of our walk.

The Elizabeth Line, not yet three years old, now carries one in six of all rail passengers. Its step-free access is a boon to those in wheelchairs, or with buggies or luggage, but it seems that the stations already need more and bigger lifts.

*Dick Dunmore
South Bank Ramblers*



Area Secretary's diary

As usual, the last quarter of the year was dominated by the production of our Annual Review. Paper copies of this 40-page celebration of the work of our volunteers, from led walks and walking holidays to path clearance and efforts to mitigate the adverse effect of solar farms, is sent to all but 40 or so of the 3,200 addresses of our 4,100 members. It is also available online with links from our News page (www.kentramblers.org.uk/news).

One article in the Annual Review reported that the **Kent Countryside Access Forum** had written a letter to the Secretary of State at DEFRA seeking repeal of the legislation that provides for historic rights of way to be extinguished on 1 January 2026 if not by that date added to the definitive map. The article exhorted members to write to their MPs in support of the forum's letter. However, by the time the Annual Review started hitting people's doormats just after Christmas the government had acceded to the forum's request. This is excellent news as there was no hope of getting all omitted paths onto the definitive map even with the extension of five years that the previous government had promised but not delivered.

Another major call on my time in the last quarter of 2024 was, with sterling support from fellow officers, organising a full-day **meeting for our footpath volunteers** in Lenham. We were particularly pleased to be joined by staff from three of the four highway authorities with which we deal (all except Bexley) and by volunteers from other organisations such as the Medway Towns Footpaths Group. The next meeting will be on 23 June and is open to anyone interested in footpath work, whether or not currently volunteering and whether or not a member of the Area. If anyone not already one of our volunteers is interested in attending, please get in touch - email me at PROW@kentramblers.org.uk - and we will send you an invitation and the programme in due course.

In October I had an extraordinary experience while walking part of the Greensand Way near Ide Hill when I came across a **lone walker literally stuck in the mud**. The path here had been very badly damaged earlier in 2024 by forestry operations and I was visiting to see how well the surface had been restored. Not well was the answer but even so I was not



The meeting at Lenham.

prepared for what I encountered on my return journey. Alerted by cries of "Help" I spotted, a few metres off the line of the path, a gentleman who had sunk so deeply into the mud and then twisted his leg that he was utterly unable to extricate himself and had been calling for assistance for some time. My wife and I dragged branches into position to enable us to help the poor chap to safety. The correct line of the path was not passable, forcing walkers to deviate to one side or the other; those who chose the south side were able to circumvent the problem but anyone choosing the north side, as this walker had done, risked life and limb. Kent County Council appear to think this walker should simply have diverted in the other direction, which with the benefit of hindsight is obviously true, but I feel that it is wrong that walkers are put in the position of having to make instant judgements in circumstances where a wrong call can have such consequences. Kent County Council has also pointed out that the forestry operations were part of the implementation of a management plan by the parish council which owns the land and that in the longer term walkers should benefit.

There is better news regarding a **long-term obstruction of a path near Well Hill** that I had been complaining about for over four years. The path was impassable due to felled tree trunks and brambles and apparently the landowner was seeking a diversion of another path that would have rendered this path a dead-end; or perhaps he was seeking to extinguish this path; it really wasn't too clear. The possibility of a landowner being allowed to divert an obstructed path is a red rag to a bull as far as I am concerned. So I am very pleased that Kent County Council has at last had

the path cleared and that the idea of a diversion or extinguishment has apparently been abandoned.

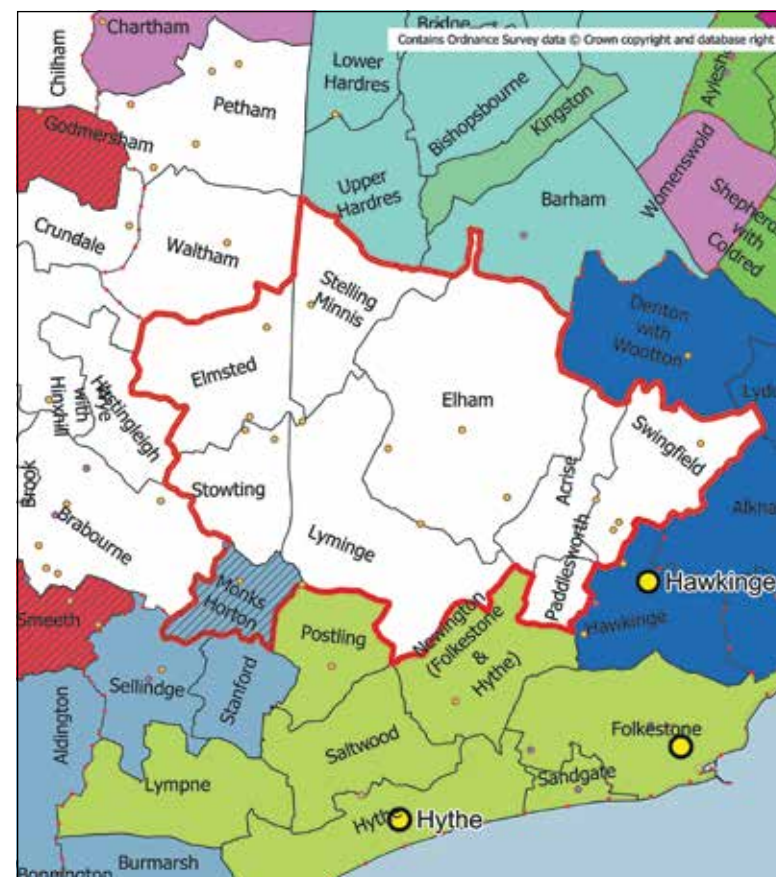
The New Year has started with a boom in sales of our **walking guides** totalling over 370 books in the first two weeks of January. While sales are of course always welcome, stocks of some titles are now perilously low and I feel under pressure to produce some more guides. A second part of our guide to the coast path in Kent has long been in preparation but is still held up by the failure of successive Secretaries of State to determine part of the route along the north coast of the Isle of Sheppey. Perhaps now that the current Secretary of State has bitten the bullet on the cut-off date for historic paths, he will now bite this bullet too.

In my last diary I appealed for someone to take on the role of **Local Footpath Officer (LFO)** for a group of parishes in the northern part of Tonbridge and Malling District. I am delighted to say that Fiona Wallin nobly stepped forward to do just that and in consequence we now have LFO coverage for all parishes in the western half of Kent. I am therefore now turning my attention to the eastern half of Kent and in this diary I am focusing on a group of parishes in Folkestone and Hythe District as shown on the map (right). There are more details in the Annual Review (link above) and in particular you really don't have to live in Folkestone and Hythe to take this on. So, wherever you live, please give serious thought to the possibility that you might help us to maintain the momentum in public rights of way volunteer recruitment that we've built up over the last year or so. Many hands make light work.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



The cover of the Annual Review.



Parishes without a Local Footpath Officer are shown in white.



The Well Hill path before clearing.



...and after clearing...

At the stile

'At the stile' is about the awkward moments when we encounter large animals blocking a right of way, in this case Highland cattle on a farm in Kent.

Lizzie Ballagher



*Curved horns spanning more than a yard,
sharp at the tips;
shoulders wider than a church door;
a snorting muzzle;
haystack of rufous-blonde hair fringing the face ...*

*Harmless, he said,
laughing as she hung back.*

*Unconvinced, she held her ground ...
exactly as the bull was doing.
I'm not going that way!*

*They diverted around three sides of the field,
to the stile they would have reached
had they followed the path intended.*

*Rock-like, still as a statue,
the bull went on guarding the first stile:
rump twitching away flies.
His furred tail swished,
but he did not turn or meet their eyes.*

*He's like a hippie, she ventured,
stoned on grass,
too mellow to move.*

*Harmless, he repeated,
triumph gleaming in his smile.*

*Returning, they crossed both stiles this time.
Even when they passed the bull,
he remained stalwart, snuffling, sighed as they passed him.
And, when they went to climb the stile,
he ambled off,
dipped his head to feed:*

*mild as the milk
that had brought him to his massive bulk.*

Words © Lizzie Ballagher

Image: Pascal van de Vendel on Unsplash

Ephemera

At the time of writing (January) the weather is very cold and wet and many trails are extremely muddy but that doesn't stop the boldest of walkers stepping out into the challenging environment. Other ramblers might wait for the occasional fine day and in the meantime dip into reading their walking-related literature. The literature itself can be complex but could be simply divided between following the route guides of walks themselves and the experiences of walking.

Charles Gros, the author of *Walking: A Philosophy* suggests "Nobody has yet found a better way to travel slowly than to walk. It requires two legs, nothing more." He goes on to suggest that "Once you are walking it's not performance that counts but the intensity of the sky, the splendour

of the landscape. Walking is not a sport." And while there are many walking events which are time-limited, which almost feels like sport, it is probably true to say that individuals walk at varying speeds and that's just what they do and, therefore they are not directly in competition with other walkers. Except perhaps, if they are determined to catch their bus or train or are in desperate need of refreshment.

On a different subject we will have a quick mention about a couple of items which you might have already heard about. The Trafalgar Way celebrates the journey of the naval officer who brought the victory news of the Battle of Trafalgar from Falmouth in Cornwall to the Admiralty in London by a series of horse-drawn coaches. The Trafalgar Way wasn't originally devised with walkers in mind but the Slow Ways project has started work on a walking route, which is worth exploring.

And if you're interested you might like to visit the Trafalgar Way website and register on the Slow Ways site (<https://beta.slowways.org/register>).

The other mention relates to the linkages of railways to walking. Over time there have been lots of connections and during the last couple of years there has been an amazing creation of walking/trains linked opportunities. This has largely been created by the introduction of the Elizabeth Line running from the east of London to Reading. Jeff Lock's *Exploring the Elizabeth Line* provides 23 walks from stations on this line. The range of walks varies from three to 10 miles, passing through urban and rural environments. In addition, the Go Jauntly team has identified over 30 Elizabeth Line linked walking routes. We might be looking out soon for more railway walking links.

John Pestle



Path maintenance



Some of Banbury & North Oxfordshire's volunteers who cleared The Long Wall at Adderbury Lakes. Photo: John Gregory



The pill box alongside the towpath of the Wilts & Berks Canal on the edge of Abingdon. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

Two of our path maintenance teams were out in the fourth quarter of 2024, plus other members who went with the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers. The Long Wall at Adderbury Lakes, part of a nature reserve, was totally overgrown, preventing

access for maintenance inspection, so Banbury & North Oxfordshire's team cleared it.

Vale of White Horse group's Vale Path Volunteers undertook eight clearances; Ashbury, Little Coxwell, Bradfield (between East Hanney and Grove), Scutchamer Knob on the Ridgeway above East Hendred,

Sunningwell, and Abingdon (three locations). It's motivating to get thanks from passers-by. The Vale Path Volunteers also inform parish councils of work done in their parish. This, too, usually elicits profuse thanks. The Vale Path Volunteers work on an 800-metre stretch of bridleway (including cutting back over-arching branches that would have got in the faces of horse riders) between Little Coxwell and Faringdon got thanks from the parish clerk, a walker, and from an equestrian resident.

Whilst clearing the towpath alongside the defunct and disappearing stretch of the Wilts & Berks Canal near Mill Road on the west side of Abingdon, the Vale Path Volunteers came across a World War II pillbox. It is surrounded by trees but was, presumably, devoid of them when it was constructed. The pillboxes were made to help repel an expected seaborne invasion of Britain after the German armies had advanced to the nearby coastlines of The Netherlands, Belgium and Northern France. Production of the pillboxes lasted less than a year, proceeding in summer 1940, with the order to stop making them coming from the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, in February 1941. This was in favour of more mobile forces, comprising reservists with recently produced transport and weaponry. The pillboxes that we come across on our walks are amongst the 7,000 or so of the original 28,000 that were produced.

Dave Cavanagh

Talking walking

In case you are not aware, Oxfordshire Ramblers produces a quarterly online magazine called talking walking with an eclectic content. To give you a flavour, here's a synopsis of the content of the current (Winter 2025, January) issue.

We have lots of members' photos, including those that show just how wet and foggy it was in late November. For the sake of balance,

there are some sunny ones. Tony Dale, recently reaching 80 years, describes his 80-80-80 walk from Cambridge to Oxford. Richard Birch crunches the numbers of our led walks during 2024. Some of our path maintenance teams were out in Q4, improving footpaths for the good of all. One of our teams came across a pillbox so we look at the history of those. Spoonerisms feature

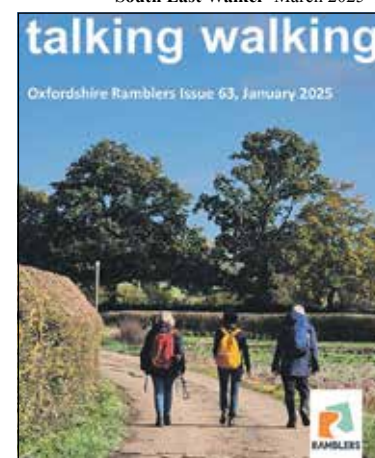
in another article on the occasion of a blue plaque to him in Oxford. We look at the approximately 400-mile Great Chalk Way that follows chalk hills between the English channel at Lyme Regis, Dorset, and the North Sea at holme-next-the-Sea in Norfolk, passing through Oxfordshire as the Ridgeway. And, as usual, some humour. For example, 'I accidentally swallowed some invisible ink. Now I'm at the hospital waiting to be seen'.

Members in Oxfordshire should receive a pdf of the magazine by

email, or a link to it by email, from the group with which they are associated. If you do not, or if you chose not to be associated with a particular group, and would like a copy of the magazine as soon as it is published, send an email to me. You'll find the winter issue and some previous issues on this page of the Oxfordshire Ramblers website: www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine/talking-walking.htm.

Dave Cavanagh

*Editor of talking walking
davecavanagh1000@gmail.com*



Cover of the Winter 2025 issue.

Photo: Becky David

Being a parish path warden

There are over 320 parishes in Oxfordshire, all with lots of public rights of way to enjoy. Nearly all are covered by the Parish Path Warden (PPW) scheme which was set up by local Ramblers over 10 years ago.

The role of a PPW is to walk as many of the paths in their area as they conveniently can, ideally twice a year, equipped with secateurs to do any trimming away of vegetation that may be overhanging or protruding onto the path, usually at a stile, gate or bridge, and to report more serious problems to the county council for action to be taken. Guidance and support are at hand in the form of experienced PPWs who act as regional coordinators.

Oxfordshire Ramblers run an annual training day open to PPWs old

and new, which includes input from county officers as well as practical demonstrations of what issues to report and how to do it. As the photo shows, bad weather doesn't put us off!

We have about 40 parishes that are currently without a PPW (the list is at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/footprotect/parish-path-wardens.html) and we'd love to fill these gaps! There's no need to live in the parish or even in the county - indeed a number of vacancies are for parishes on the border with adjacent Ramblers Areas. If you're interested, please get in touch with me at davidtole@gmail.com.

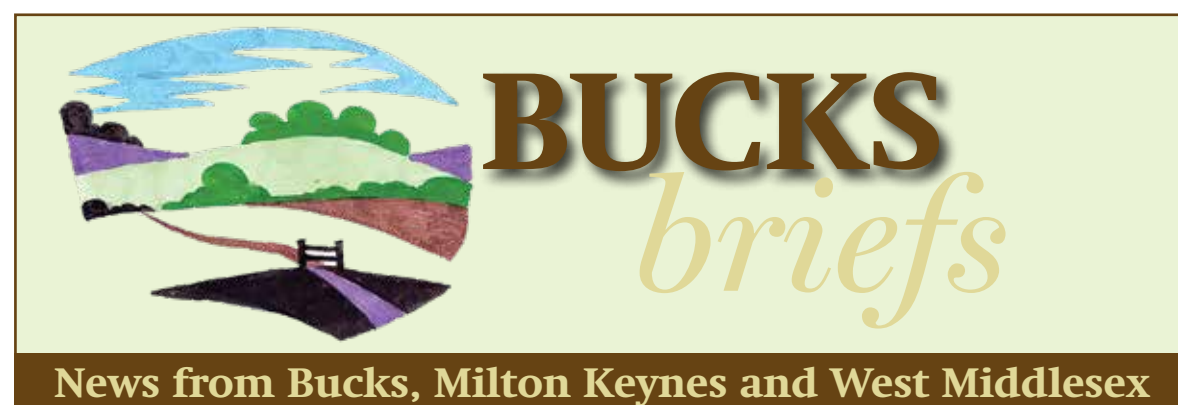
David Tole

*Coordinator, Oxfordshire
Ramblers Parish Path Warden
Network*



Oxfordshire County Council Access Officer Arthur McEwan-James demonstrates a path issue and what can be done about it.

Photo: David Tole



Spoil heap path victory

A Buckinghamshire footpath that lay buried under a spoil heap for more than a year has been unblocked after Chilterns Weekend Walkers raised the alarm.

The huge pile of asphalt was discovered by walk leader Anne Kimber on a recce in October 2023, blocking footpath 42 near the A4010 in Saunderton. Anne said: "It was in a narrow tarmacked area with a padlocked gate at one end, and with nothing else there apart from this strategically-placed pile of loose asphalt chippings blocking the public right of way. I tried to climb over the obstruction but it was slippery and too dangerous to take a group over. There's an alternative route nearby, but the principle remains. We must keep walking all paths, keeping them free and open- or risk losing them."

A full year after reporting the obstruction to Buckinghamshire Council, rights of way officers sent out a notification in October 2024 that the matter had been referred to the landowner. On a recce two weeks later Anne was delighted to discover the spoil heap had been removed.

The newly-unblocked path figured on a walk led by Anne in November. She said: "They have made a good job of tidying the area and clearing the entrance to the field which had become very overgrown". Andrew Lyon, the group's Footpath Secretary said: "The clearance of this path is probably our biggest footpath victory to date, but questions remain over why the council took more than a year to respond to our complaint."

Mark Percy

Chilterns Weekend Walkers



(Before).

Photo: Mark Percy



(After).

Photo: Chris Candy



INNER LONDON *insights*

Area AGM

Despite the wet and wintry December day, two groups - one from the east and one from the west - embarked on a ramble to attend the Inner London AGM. They were joined by additional participants for this annual

gathering. At the AGM the following were elected: Tim Sai Louie, Chair; Clare Wadd, Vice Chair; Jean Roberts, Secretary; Dick Dunmore, Treasurer; Joanna Christophides, Membership Secretary; Sarah Hornsey, Digital Officer; Isao Ayugase, Publicity Officer; Tony Atkins, affiliated groups.

Thank you Des

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Des Garrahan, who has decided not to seek reelection this year. Des has been an invaluable member of the Inner London Council, dedicating many years of service to Ramblers. His leadership as Chair and Vice Chair has been instrumental in guiding the Council through numerous initiatives and challenges. Most recently, Des has served as our Publicity Officer, where his efforts have significantly enhanced our

outreach and communication with the public. Des's commitment, wisdom, and passion for making a positive impact have left an indelible mark on Ramblers where he previously was Chair of the trustees. We are deeply grateful for his countless contributions and unwavering dedication. As he steps down from his official role, we wish him all the best in his future endeavours and hope he continues to inspire and support us in new ways. Thank you, Des, for your remarkable service and for being an integral part of Ramblers.
Tim Sai Louie
Chair, Inner London Area

Walks project

In our last update on the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk, we shared that we had received donations of £500 to this project from each of the Long Distance Walkers Association London Group and South Bank Ramblers. Inner London Area, who have provided the majority of the funding for our project since its inception, topped these donations up to enable us to buy 20 waymark posts and small plaques to recognise the donors.

The first six new posts were installed on Section 2 of the London Loop in Petts Wood and St Paul's Cray Common by the local rangers for the National Trust and the common, in locations agreed with them. An additional post was then provided and installed in Scadbury Park by the ranger there. We have taken the opportunity to adjust the route through the woods very slightly onto higher (and less muddy) ground, which has the added bonus of being more attractive and it also now passes two interesting memorials. This work was led by London Loop Sections 1 - 7 volunteer coordinator Keith Rodwell, to whom we are extremely grateful; the discs and plaque were installed by Keith and section volunteer George Hall.

Keith was also able to provide three posts to Jo Cuttall, who is the coordinator for Sections 11 - 15 of the Capital Ring, for installation on Section 12 in Abney Park Cemetery. The previous waymark posts there were removed during a restoration of the cemetery and section volunteers Keith Sharp, Jennifer Pedler, Douglas Ford, Nick Toner and Maeve Dorrian had been trying for some time to get them reinstated - however it was the funding to purchase posts that finally made this possible. We are grateful to the park manager, Tom Dawson, for organising the installation.

Further post installations are planned, with priority going to those locations where we have a means to get them installed via a landowner, manager or ranger. One of the intended locations is Section 21 of the London Loop in Havering.

General improvements continue across the routes, including on Section 8 of the London Loop alongside the Hogsmill between Old Malden and Kingston, where the council is carrying out footpath improvements and adding new posts and our discs at the same time. Our volunteers for Section 15 of the Capital Ring (Beckton to Woolwich) were able to arrange to walk the route with local councillors to highlight the issues resulting from development works, and have also been able to establish contact with the Albert Island Redevelopment Project who control a large amount of the docks area.

Revised guidance for the Capital Ring was published in December 2024 and revised London Loop guidance will be published around the time you read this. Thank



A new post on Section 2 of the London Loop. Photo: Keith Rodwell

you to all the volunteers who have worked on this and to Editor Andrew Hunt, who also liaises with Transport for London (TfL) to ensure the guidance meets their accessibility guidelines and that their walking pages link to it. We are always surprised by how much changes and are committed to updating the detailed pdf guidance and maps every two years as a minimum as, prior to our project starting, the old TfL guidance had become terribly out of date and could have left walkers horribly lost.

On the Inner London Ramblers website we continue to highlight blockages affecting the routes, often fallen trees, as notified to us by fellow walkers; we also alert the council to expedite removal

Last year we were able to get TfL to change their guidance to London boroughs for Local Improvement Plan funding to include expenditure on leisure walking, and we are waiting to hear whether, in this round, any of their funding bids to TfL include leisure walking improvements. We submitted audits of the improvements required - which range from minor but important, like realigning signs to point the right way, to more major re-routings, road crossings etc - to all the relevant councils in spring 2024.

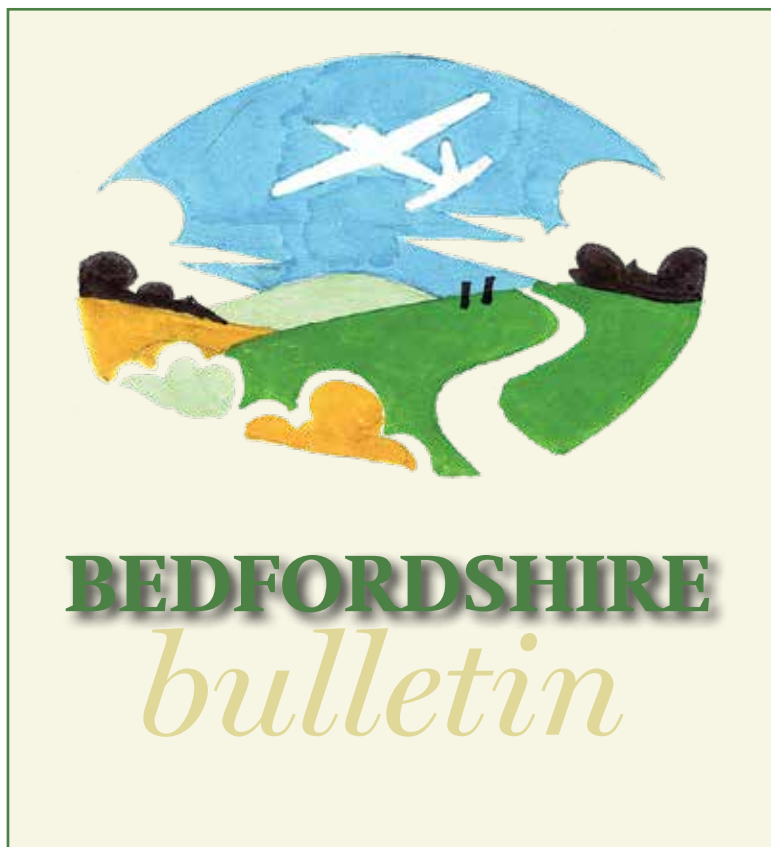
As always, if you would like to get involved in our project, please contact me at vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk.

Clare Wadd



Our volunteers with a new Capital Ring post in Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington.

Photo: Hackney Parks



Area AGM

Bedfordshire Area's AGM was hosted by North Beds Ramblers on 23 November 2024 at Husborne Crawley. The Area currently does not have a Chair or a full committee and so the meeting was run by three of the four group Chairs: Anne Griffiths (North Beds), Julian Critchlow (Leighton Buzzard) who is also Area Treasurer and Innes Griggs (Lea & Icknield). The Chairs were joined by Stephen Franks, Area Footpath Officer, and the meeting was chaired by Vanessa Slawson from the Ramblers staff team. Minutes were taken by Graham Stark (North Beds).

The AGM was preceded by a six-mile walk led by Steve Woodward, in fairly inauspicious conditions, through the beautiful Woburn Deer Park. The walk was well attended by some 26 brave walkers.

Once back in the warm and dry, those staying received a welcome warming lunch of homemade soup, cheese and pate followed by wonderful homemade cakes (thank you Leighton Buzzard), all washed

down with gallons of tea and coffee.

The meeting, attended by 30 members, swiftly convened with the general business of the day. We also had a presentation on the 2024 Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks and highlighted the great success that was achieved with 55 walks and 850 walkers over nine days. All of this was achieved with the grand outlay of £102, a remarkable achievement.

The new committee members were voted on - Julian Critchlow (Treasurer), Stephen Franks (Footpath Officer) and Sandra Kelsey (Publicity). The posts of Chair and Secretary were not filled and anyone interested in these posts should please contact their group Chair in the first instance.

The group Chairs would like to extend their thanks to Vanessa Slawson who as Regional Engagement Officer provided us with valuable support throughout 2023-24. We wish Vanessa good luck in her new role as Community Development Officer for the Ramblers.

Sandra Kelsey

North Beds Ramblers and Area Publicity Officer

RIPPLE's busy year

2024 was another very busy year for our great team of RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Public Paths for Leisure and Enjoyment) volunteers. We have gone from working on one Tuesday morning a month to weekly tasks involving a minimum of six people each. Additionally, we have smaller tasks which involve from two to four people and can take place at any time.

To avoid any misunderstandings or potential conflicts, all our work comes from the councils. If we are approached directly about a blocked path we pass the information to the relevant council and ask if we could do it. If the answer is yes then we schedule the work and get it done.

In 2024 we provided over 675 work hours on improving rights of way in the county. That equates to over 100 working days. The hours do not include time spent on recces, admin, communication or cleaning and maintaining tools. We worked in 42 locations and

completed 79 tasks. We put in 36 yellow-topped marker posts and worked on both major and minor clearance work which involved removing tree branches, replacing stiles with gates, repairs to bridges, painting wooden marker posts and cleaning and painting metal roadside finger posts. Members have also attended training courses, paid for by Central Bedfordshire Council, on first aid and the use of brush cutters and hedge cutters.

Appreciation of the group's work has come from councils and individuals and I would like to thank every volunteer who has given their time and helped improve the rights of way network. Without you we could not have achieved all that we have!

Looking ahead, with wetter winters and warmer summers, funding cuts for rights of way, reduced subsidies for farmers and the scale of new developments in the county, I think we are going to need as much assistance as we can get in the years ahead!

Barry Ingram
Bedfordshire RIPPLE



Volunteers prepare to install marker posts.

Photo: Steve Woodward

Farewell Allison

We said goodbye in December to Allison Nelson, Bedford Borough Council's Rights of Way Officer, who retired after 15 years service. Her knowledge and enthusiasm combined with the ability to talk

with and understand both sides resulted in a very productive and successful time for the borough's path network. Our RIPPLE volunteers presented her with a gift, chocolates and a signed card with the suggestion that she would be very welcome to join us!

Barry Ingram
Bedfordshire RIPPLE



Allison with gifts.

Photo: Barry Ingram



At the AGM.

Photo: Sandra Kelsey

Those we have lost

David Bradnack 1933 - 2024

David Bradnack, Area Secretary of the Buckinghamshire and West Middlesex Area (as it was then known) from 1996 - 2007, has died aged 91. He was keen on maps, orienteering, and cycling as well as walking, and played an important part in the campaigns for better paths and access.

David was born in Cheltenham in 1933 and went to Worcester Royal Grammar School. He then did his National Service with the Royal Artillery in Korea before reading Modern Languages at Brasenose College, Oxford.

After graduation, he spent a year in Strasbourg and a second year in Graz as a teaching assistant. He then became a teacher at King's School, Canterbury. In 1967 he joined Lord Williams's School at Thame in Oxfordshire, as Head of Modern Languages where he taught French and

German, as well as being heavily involved in extracurricular activities, such as swimming, life-saving and overseas trips. He lived in Haddenham, Bucks.

He retired from Lord Williams's in 1986, and continued to live in Haddenham, later moving to Oxford. In retirement he taught English to refugees, and was a regular volunteer at the Oxfam bookshop in St Giles, Oxford.

He took up the role of Area Secretary in 1996 and was a diligent manager of our work. He checked paths in Ickford and Shabbington, pursuing his love of maps, in 2008 he carried out a detailed exercise, mainly in Aylesbury Vale, of paths which on the ground did not strictly follow their definitive routes, and he asked the county council to consider amendments to the definitive map. He taught Ramblers' members how to lead walks, giving them confidence to

do so. He also initiated an Area walk in 2000 to encourage the groups to meet and talk, though sadly this didn't continue.

He was Secretary of Haddenham's Safe Cycling and Walking Group and a member of the Oxfordshire Orienteering Association, producing special maps for competitors. He did not consider himself to be a runner, and he enjoyed navigating accurately rather than going quickly.

David was a prolific letter-writer, to the press and to institutions, complaining about anything which he considered to be unjust, and not giving up until he got a satisfactory resolution.

His brusque and serious manner belied a kind heart and a sense of humour. He was an admirable Area Secretary and we remember him with affection.

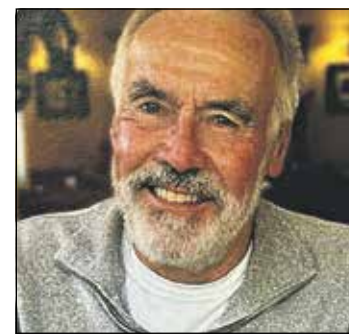
Kate Ashbrook

Eric Holes 1951 - 2024

With the death of Eric Holes in September 2024, the Surrey and Beyond Ramblers (SABRE) group has lost one of our much-valued members. A lifelong walking enthusiast, Eric made a huge contribution to the Ramblers for many years. He played a major role in setting up SABRE in 2010. He was the first Chair of the group, steering the committee with his characteristic quiet wisdom for a number of years. Later, he took on the Membership Secretary role for two years. At a time when membership was rising rapidly, Eric was an efficient and positive secretary. As a fully qualified accountant before retirement, Eric also kept a sharp eye on group finances when necessary!

A quiet and modest man with a dry sense of humour, Eric led countless walks for SABRE, becoming something of a legend for his walks in Sussex and Hampshire. These included the Serpent Trail and the West Sussex Literary Trail. Eric's preferred post-walk resting places were pubs, particularly those serving sticky toffee pudding and good beers.

After he retired, Eric trained as a walk leader with HF and guided at a number of their houses, including Church Stretton, St Ives



and Bourton-on-the-Water. He also came on SABRE group holidays to Glencoe, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. His favourite walking holidays were often in February in the Lake District with a group of SABRE friends known as 'the Lakers'. Walking at that time of the year in mountains could well include trudging through snow and ice and braving high winds. Eric and friends were unperturbed by such conditions, providing that good food and excellent pints were to be found after the walk! Eric's last holiday with these friends was to Gran Canaria in 2023 where he loved the walking, as well as the sun, food and, of course, the beer.

As his health sadly declined, Eric moved to Chichester where he became an excellent bowls player, joining a local club and serving on its committee. Gardening and a love of watching and playing cricket were other lifelong interests. He is much missed by his rambling friends.

*Jeanie Murray
Surrey & Beyond Ramblers
(SABRE)*

Wish you were here?

Abingworth Hall, West Sussex



Getting ready for the second day's walk.

Photo: Bill Collins

Our 2024 autumn break in October was spent at the HF Country House, Abingworth Hall, where we had a choice of three guided walks each day with our leaders Illy, Nick and Inga.

My first walk, graded 'medium' took us through Arundel Park and was fairly uneventful though we did manage some extra distance making it around 11.5 miles instead of nine miles. Sadly we did not have time for tea in Arundel as the coach was waiting to take us all back to the house.

The following day I took another 'medium' walk. This was an out and back eight and a half mile route from the house and far easier! We visited the RSPB reserve at Pulborough, walked through vineyards and spent a pleasant hour at the Queen's Head at West Chiltington where we remembered one of our leaders who sadly passed on last June after

an heroic battle with the 'Big C'.

Our last day of walking involved lengthy coach trips to start and finish but was the highlight of our week. A six and a half mile walk from Birling Gap to Cuckmere Haven along the rolling downs and Seven Sisters. It was quite slippery in places but we kept well back from the cliff edge where there was evidence of recent cliff falls. Some 15 of us were able to take shelter in the cafe at Birling Gap to avoid the only heavy shower of the week!

Our walk leaders ensured we all returned each evening to enjoy the good food produced by the staff at the house. The evening entertainment was varied and for the first time in over 11 years one of our teams won the overall HF Wednesday quiz. The bar had a good selection of beers and wines, all very welcome after a hard day's walking, and our rooms were all very good.

*Bill Collins
Amersham Ramblers*

England Coast Path:

A further addition to the King Charles III England Coast Path in East Sussex opened in December. The 28-mile section runs from Eastbourne to Hastings and Rye Harbour.

December 2024 issue of South East Walker:

Most readers will be aware that we were unable to produce a printed version of the December issue as a consequence of the corresponding issue of walk magazine being only available digitally. Some Areas and groups were able to send members a link to the online version of South East Walker. If you missed it, you can still read the online version on the websites of most of the participating Areas.

Explore with map and compass:

Another one-day beginners course in Battle, East Sussex, will be held on either Saturdays 22 March or 12 April, arranged by local member John Harmer. If you are interested, please contact John on 01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com. The course costs £10 with concessions available. A further similar course plus a more advanced one will be held later in the year if there is sufficient demand.

Inspired by the Ridgeway:

Over 100 artworks submitted to the 2024 Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize competition organised by the Friends of the Ridgeway will be on show on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 April (10am - 5pm each day) at Uffington Village Hall in Oxfordshire. This year's theme is 'Colours and Hues of the Ridgeway'. More details at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk>

Heythrop Park, Oxfordshire

About 35 Croydon Ramblers descended on the Warner Leisure Resort of Heythrop Park, not far from Chipping Norton, for the second week in October. The accommodation, hospitality, food and entertainment were excellent. The only fly in the ointment, so to speak, was the weather!

The holiday was organised by our very own John Hilton and Geraldine Deas, who have become experts in this field of walking holidays for our group. I could go rattling on about the scenery and lovely villages we passed through but I will let my 'poetry' guide you through the week!

*We came up from London to Heythrop Park,
Paid a few hundred quid
For a bit of a lark.*

*The first day's walk did not go well,
Our good friend Peter - he did fell,
He was up to his armpits in horrible mud
And then we noticed he was covered in blood!*

*Tuesday's walk was from the hotel's front. The front of the
hotel looks like the back
But Beryl and Viv didn't realise that!
But in the end we all got going
Just like the rain that kept on flowing
Through field and wood we rambled up and down,
My only thought was - are we going to drown?*

*From Charlbury village on Wednesday morn
Two groups of walkers we did form,
We wandered off through mud and water
And had to jump streams we shouldn't oughta!
Ditchley House was a highlight for all,
Where two Queen Elizabeths once stood tall.*

*Today, Thursday, is a good day for a ramble,
We parked in Adlestrop to start our amble.
It was very wet under our feet,
But the sun came out as a special treat.
We wandered through villages quite quaint and old
And the rain held off till we were back in the fold.*

*So many thanks to Gerry and John,
For holidays organised and walks not too long!
To Tony and Julia thank you too,
For walks a bit shorter for the other few!*

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers
(and still drying out!).



Stepping carefully. Photo: John Tickner

Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire

Twenty-four Farnham Ramblers checked in to HF Harrington House for the start of our seven-day holiday in the Cotswolds in September. We were staying in the impossibly pretty town, with chocolate-box cottages, old-fashioned tearooms and low-arched stone bridges across the River Windrush. We were all looking forward to the walking and HF were offering their usual three walks a day. A small number of our members opted for self guided walking.

We visited the 'plague church' at Little Rissington with its memorial window to the Red Arrows and a memorial with a moving testament to the RAF servicemen who lost their lives in World War II. On one of the coach walk days all walks ended in the charming village of Broadway, which is described as a fine show village, with old cottages, gabled houses and more tea and coffee shops than you could throw a stick at! Another of our coach walks culminated in a stunning end, through the beautiful Cirencester Park before we arrived at Roman



Walking in Cirencester Park.

Photo: Sue Harvey

Britain's second largest city where we could explore the Corinium Museum or the superb Cirencester Abbey. On some days there was even time to explore Bourton-on-the-Water itself or enjoy a pint in one of the pubs, visit the shops, or find a bench beside the Windrush and soak up this charming village.

After dinner, we were able to enjoy the entertainment provided by our leaders Hugh, Simon and Lindon every evening. On the first night we were treated to a knockout skittles competition (which got very competitive). We then had various

quizzes and a Call My Bluff evening. On the final day and evening we were tasked with boat building, in order to race our finished models down the Windrush between two bridges near the house. Erika W was declared the winner of the best boat award whilst Jean T and her boat were crowned the race winner.

After a final dinner we gave our thanks and appreciation to the HF staff and our leaders who looked after us so well.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

Mickleton, Gloucestershire



Walking in Cirencester Park.

Photo: Cyndy Gray

On our final trip of 2024, 38 Henley & Goring members stayed for three nights at the Three Ways House Hotel in Mickleton - 'the home of the Pudding Club' - near Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds.

This was a very mixed and inclusive group holiday with some using walking frames, crutches, sticks and others doing fast walks of 10 or 11 miles a day! We explored the beautiful region with carefully chosen walks to cater for differing abilities. There was a wonderful

mix of experiences, not least the stunning autumnal landscapes and golden foliage as we meandered through some of the area's most charming villages. There were three walks and one sightseeing walk on each of the full days and two walks on the days of arrival and departure. The sightseers enjoyed a guided tour of Chipping Campden and visited Snowhill Manor with its eclectic collection of artefacts and Hidcote Manor where the vibrant autumn colours were a feast for the eyes.

This memorable holiday gave us the perfect blend of exploration, relaxation and camaraderie. It was a joy to experience the Cotswolds in such good company. Thanks Peter and walk leaders for organising the trip and ensuring that we were all able to enjoy it.

Cyndy Gray and Inge Mikkelsen
Henley & Goring Ramblers

Blunsdon, Wiltshire

Forty-five East Surrey Walkers members attended our now 'traditional' group pre-Christmas jolly at Blunsdon, near Swindon. Most took the coach and some drove but all arrived in time to enjoy drinks and mince pies before getting ready for our three-course evening meal.

Over the next three days we enjoyed some wet winter walking, splashing in the swimming pool, eating far too much, dancing and even shopping, but all in a jolly spirit of bonhomie. As ever, this was a testament to Helen Whiteley's supreme organising skills in making all the detailed arrangements from bookings and payments, transport pickups, room allocations, dietary requirements, entertainment provision - and I'm sure, much more. Sadly she is hanging up her hat, so this was the last event she would organise for us.

Everyone who has enjoyed these holidays and the whole of the group committee send her a very big thank you.

Brian Smith & Helen McDonnell
East Surrey Walkers



Enjoying the Jolly.

Photo: Pamela Cunliffe

Around the groups

Capital day out

Twenty members of Amersham Ramblers took the train to London on Wednesday 8 January for a walk from Marylebone to King's Cross. We walked past Lords cricket ground and across Regent's Park before climbing

Primrose Hill. After a warming cafe stop we followed the Regent's Canal to King's Cross where lunch was enjoyed in the Parcel Yard pub.

*Bill Collins
Amersham Ramblers*



On Primrose Hill.

Photo: Bill Collins

Thanks Bob

Bob Turner stood down as our group treasurer at the AGM and members thanked him for the 10 years service he had provided in the role.

Once the general business of the AGM had been completed, Stephen Russell, policy & public affairs officer for the Ramblers, gave a presentation on the work of the organisation in protecting access and working with the government to improve access

for all. There was some discussion about the Ramblers relationship with group members, volunteers and risk assessments. It was felt that there is a need for local authorities to develop infrastructure plans where there has been a lot of change such as with HS2 in Buckinghamshire. The need for country bus networks and working with farmers to ensure paths are maintained was also part of the lively discussion. The meeting closed with members enjoying a glass of wine and seasonal food.

*Liz Sutton
Aylesbury & District Ramblers*



Bob Turner with group Chair Carolyn Brown.

Photo: Liz Sutton

Following the Bard

The Chiltern Young Walkers are pleased to report that we achieved our goal of walking all of Shakespeare's Way in 2024! We started in February at Stratford-upon-Avon and finished in October at the Globe Theatre in London, where to celebrate we treated ourselves to a matinee performance of 'A Comedy of Errors', followed by an evening meal.

The route showcases some lovely

areas in Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and London and gave us the opportunity to explore places we almost certainly would not have ventured to otherwise. The last 25+ miles were almost all along canals and the Thames but we were surprised how peaceful these stretches were despite being in the city! The route is generally in very good condition and we would recommend it to anyone looking for a challenge in 2025.

Many thanks to the volunteers who keep the route going - we did enjoy spotting the occasional Shakespeare's Way markers en route. It is commendable also that the majority of the route can be completed using public transport to return to the start points, making it a greener route for us than the Ridgeway which we walked in 2023.

Thank You to everyone who took part and helped with logistics and congratulations to those who walked the entire route!

*Beth Stark
Chiltern Weekend Walkers*



Journey's end at the Globe in London.

Photo: Beth Stark

A year of 'cake with walks'



Tea at Fingest.

Chilterns Weekend Walkers enjoyed a record-breaking 12 church tea walks in 2024.

The cake-fest began on the first weekend in February when two groups of 22 and 28 led by Alan Cooper and I embarked on a friendly 'race' to Radnage to enjoy the first

snowdrop tea of the season at St Mary's church. Alan said: "It was a nice opportunity for all to mingle, bringing together members whose paths might not ordinarily cross due to their walk preferences." Nettie Dearmun and Simon Kearey revisited Radnage the following weekend with a party of 30.

A landmark on the Ridgeway path, St Botolph's church in Swyncombe, Oxfordshire, has been offering snowdrop teas for 20 years, initially on a single afternoon but now held on three weekends every February. Our Chris Parsons has led a walk to St Botolph's from Watlington most years since 2013. She says: "After a long and often grey January it's so uplifting to see the carpet of snowdrops outside the church - a sign that spring must be around the corner."

In March, another walk from Watlington included a stop for tea in Pyrton where the churchyard is known for its blaze of daffodils. In July, a church tea walk from Penn Street ended with teatime trauma when a party of 27 arrived at Holy Trinity church to find only five slices of cake left!

Making up for the disappointment, September began with a chance to enjoy two church teas on the same walk when Alan Shiell led his 'Grand Gateaux Double' seven-miler from Great Missenden to Little Missenden and back.

The success of their snowdrop teas in February inspired St Mary's in Radnage to put on an Autumn Tea on the first

Sunday in October. As in February, two groups of walkers were led by me and Alan.

A week later it was the turn of St Bartholomew's in Fingest to welcome walkers with a mouth-watering array of 33 cakes. Again, two groups were led there by Chris and I which converged on the church from Ibstone and Cadmore End to enjoy a bakery bonanza of raspberry and white chocolate cake, double ginger cake, pineapple fruit cake and chocolate Guinness cake.

St Bartholomew's tea organiser Jan O'Brien said the afternoon raised a record total of £850. "It's much needed for all the expensive repairs endlessly required for our Grade I-listed church. More than that, we greatly appreciate your members' zeal for our baking."

The last chance to enjoy a church tea in 2024 came at the end of October with a 10-mile walk to St Mary Magdalene in Flaunden, bringing down the curtain on a record year of 'cake with walks'.

*Mark Percy
Chilterns Weekend Walkers*

Another good meeting!

Around 80 Croydon Ramblers met up in the church hall in Sanderstead for our AGM on Saturday 9 November. Members arrived from 11.00am to be greeted with a cup of tea or coffee and a chance to chat to others. In a side room we had our usual 'Ramblers Supermarket' where one could buy second hand books and maps, previously loved hiking gear, hand-made cuddly toys

and jars of home-made jam and honey!

Our Chairman, Roy Endersby, got proceedings going with instructions on how to get in line for soup and sandwiches - we didn't want a free-for-all! We then got down to business which went extremely well with voting hands bobbing up and down. It was then my turn to keep the troops amused with a variety of audio visual shows. Talking of troops, and as the date was close to

Armistice Day, I showed a sequence of images of members walking at Langley Vale, near Epsom, one of four First World War Centenary woods created by the Woodland Trust. I think my show was well received as I didn't hear any snoring! Then we moved on to the raffle (no luck for me as usual), followed by tea and lovely home-made cakes. What's not to like about an AGM like that?

*John Tickner
(full of cake)*

Croydon Ramblers



Ready for soup and sarnies.

Photo: John Tickner

Lively meeting

Farnham Ramblers held a well-attended AGM at South Farnham School on 23 November. This marked the end of a busy year for our walkers and also our many volunteers involved in planning walks, events, holidays and footpath maintenance. We said farewell to valued committee members passing on their roles to new successors - a big thank you to David, Susie and Claire and a welcome to new faces including Andy and Glenn; and also a well-deserved round of applause to Malcolm Morse for leading so many walks in 2024. A framed certificate of appreciation was presented by Tim Devis to David Ross for his valued contributions over many years. The formal business completed, we ate supper and concluded with a light hearted 'Call My Bluff' quiz which left us all thoroughly gongozled!

*Celia Griffiths
Farnham & District Ramblers*



Tim Devis (left) presents a certificate of appreciation to David Ross.
Photo: Ann Brinton



Enjoying the quiz.

Photo: June Trantom

Quiz night

It was a dark and stormy night with trees blowing over but that didn't stop Hillingdon Ramblers coming for the annual quiz evening in early December. The hall was warm and bright and we mingled and chatted before 45 quizzers had assembled and we had sorted ourselves into tables of six. Our question setters and joint question masters were Jenny and Rob. Barbara was in the kitchen overseeing the catering. As usual there was a marathon round that kept us pondering throughout the evening.

Half way through, the pizzas arrived and we stopped the quiz after round five to enjoy our supper which was accompanied by a generous selection of salads that Barbara had produced. "It all must be eaten" was the instruction so there was no hesitation for many of us to go

back for second helpings especially as the icy blasts outside encouraged us to stoke our internal boilers!

With supper behind us the quiz restarted and another three rounds of questions. Our knowledge of the London Underground map was put to the test again this year. But a photographic memory of the map would have helped with questions like "How many stations are there between Plaistow and Upminster inclusively? At least the answer was multiple choice. (For those now curious the answer was 12).

Once over, the scores were totted up and the results given in reverse order. The winning table consisted of many of the winners from last year's quiz: Richard and Alison, Charles and Elizabeth and Denise and Alan went to receive their prizes. Spare pizzas were offered to take home and tables and chairs put away before we braved the dark night and dodged falling foliage to get home.

*Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers*



Winning table: (left to right) Richard, Charles, Alan, Denise, Elizabeth and Alison.

Photo: Simon Thornhill

On Broadway

A crowd of 46 of us met up in a damp Bedford on 27 October to eagerly await our coach to Broadway (the Cotswold one). Two hours later we arrived at the foot of the hill and made our way up to the Broadway Tower cafe in brilliant sunshine. Our next stage took us to the beautiful village of Snowhill where about a dozen took up the option of visiting Snowhill Manor. The

rest of us headed into Broadway for lunch whilst a few went off to visit a steam weekend at the local preserved railway. After lunch (and watching a passing tractor parade) we set off on a sometimes wet and slippery walk to Willersey. One of our party took a tumble on a particularly steep slope but thankfully was uninjured and able to laugh about it. It was an amazing day out and thanks go to Roy Carter for organising it.

*Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers*



At Broadway Tower.

Photo: Tom Collier

Kissing gate in the City

Kingston group members and friends enjoyed a Christmas lunch at Casa Mia in East Molesey on 19 December. At the end of the meal, Barbara (our Chair) presented a certificate and Ramblers mug to Trish to celebrate leading Kingston rambles for 35 years!

At the other end of the scale, Sunita has just started leading Kingston rambles. There were spaces on our programme, so on 2 December she gave two days' notice to lead a sculpture in the City of London walk. Despite that, more than 20 people joined her and were amazed at the quirky and unusual nature of the sculptures.



The Kissing Gate.
Photo: Brenda Horwill. For more information on this annual free open-air event, go to sculptureinthecity.org.uk.

Favourites were The Granary (by Jesse Pollock and The Kissing Gate (by Maya Rose Edwards).

*Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers*

Bang on target

As well as fantastic walks, Leighton Buzzard Ramblers enjoy a busy social programme which admittedly involves a lot of cake! We have had great fun at ceilidhs, bingo nights, barbecues, theatre trips, tried our hand at croquet, taken to the sky in gliders and, more recently, we added a further string to our bows (pun intended) with an introduction to archery! We are grateful to the bravery of the Dunstable Bowmen who gave us

a morning's instructions and then allowed us to spend the morning firing volleys of arrows at its targets. It was the greatest fun and most of the arrows did hit their target, although a few concerned sheep were seen moving further up the hill. Coincidentally, we discovered the archery club whilst on a walk so who knows what we will get up to next!

*Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*



Taking aim.

Photo: Pamela Bates

Penguin hunt

Staines Ramblers started 2025 with a walk around the Fleet Street quarter in London to see the Penguin Parade Sculpture Trail. This display of 12 penguin statues, each decked out in festive finery by artists, were strategically placed near

historic sights such as St Bride's Church, Dr Johnson's House and the Old Bailey. The last penguin on our route was outside the Blackfriar pub so a visit inside to admire the stunning art nouveau interior was a fitting end to an interesting walk.

*Linda Thrift
Staines Ramblers*



Hunting for penguins.

Reasons to be cheerful

White Cliffs Ramblers continue to thrive. We have around 30 active walk leaders who lead a wide and varied programme, ably and competently put together by our walks coordinator, with walks every Thursday and Sunday and some on Tuesdays and Saturdays. We almost have a full complement of Parish Footpath Observers who regularly check paths in their parish and report any issues. Our vegetation

clearance team, fondly known as the 'Slashers' go out almost every week to make sure paths in our area are free from overgrown vegetation and are a pleasure to walk. Our Local Footpath Officers regularly deal with planning applications, again to help ensure that the footpaths in our area remain available for us all to enjoy.

*John Pye
White Cliffs Ramblers*

Always innovating



In a party mood.

Photo: Martin Newman Brown

We are the oldest of the four Ramblers groups in Bedfordshire and have often been known as the Saturday afternoon walking group, but things are moving on and in the last few years we have introduced some changes with all-day walks and quarterly figure-of-8 walks. With the introduction of new committee members, weekends away have become a feature and these are always

fully subscribed and usually have a waiting list. This year sees another addition and is reflective of ensuring inclusivity for all our members whilst hopefully encouraging new members. The group has recently seen an influx of younger members, and as such, the pace on our regular walks remains at a good speed. This can pose problems for some. Also, we acknowledge that for some new members a six or seven mile walk may appear somewhat daunting. So for our Spring programme we have introduced additional, slightly slower and shorter 'Rambles' on the first Saturday morning of each month. We hope these will appeal to both our existing members and encourage new members to feel confident about trying a little regular exercise.

Our AGM venue was Ravensden Village Hall. Thirty nine members turned up for the pre-AGM walk and 36 stayed for the meeting. During the business meeting the committee was re-elected and we welcomed Patrizia Franks to the team as Social Secretary. Walkers had been briefed to expect a quiz at the AGM where

the hall had been set up cafe-style for afternoon tea. Teams formed and names were chosen by the time we all sat down and the buzz generated was amazing. Rounds covered general knowledge, travel, our county, pictures of local churches (often a feature of our walks) and a local Ordnance Survey map. Well done Geoff's Angels who won the day and duly shared their box of chocolates with all. Thank you Anne Griffiths for the idea and creation!

Our Christmas meal was held on 5 December at the Guinea at Moggerhanger where 35 festive revellers enjoyed the wonderful meal and lovely atmosphere. The evening also allows us to thank our walk leaders with a small token of appreciation. Thank you to all who led a walk in 2024. Our annual Mince Pie Walk was held on 14 December when we returned to the Church of St Edmund or St James (yes, that's its name) in Blunham. The event was preceded by a four and a half mile walk to build appetites for a host of festive treats washed down with mulled, or not so mulled, wine, all to the accompaniment of festive tunes.

*Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers*

Christmas Day walk



The Christmas Day walkers.

Photo: Eleanor Huskisson

South East Berks group didn't let seasonal festivities interfere with their walks programme. Our most popular walking day is Wednesday, which in 2024 clashed with Christmas Day. In the past when this has happened the group has not put a walk in the programme but this time Alan Hoskins offered to

lead a Christmas morning walk. We were unsure if there would be enough interest to make it worthwhile but on the day 19 of us assembled in Windsor Great Park for a five-mile walk with a mulled wine break half way round. Now we can't wait for Christmas 2025!

Thank you to the committee,



Increased security was evident on Christmas Day! Photo: Brian Poulton

walk leaders and helpers who worked hard to make 2024 such a successful year for the group with lots to look forward to in 2025. Social events began with a post-Christmas lunch in January, to be followed by a skittles evening in March and a coach trip in June.

*Brian Poulton
South East Berks Ramblers*

Remembering the fallen

Surrounded by history, Surrey Heath members marked Remembrance Day last November with a military-themed walk around Aldershot. Starting from Wellington's statue, we moved to the 'Longest Yarn' D-Day exhibition at the Royal Garrison Church, observing the knitted and crocheted exhibits of significant events. The wooden Ypres cross from the Somme was poignant, as were plaques from global military campaigns. Following a tour past Queen Victoria's Royal Pavilion and the Cavalry Barracks, we dropped into Rowhill nature reserve before stopping at the cenotaph. The monument bears no names due to the number of casualties. Red poppies adorned the park's

railings and a cascade of crocheted flowers, some made by our member Bev, flowed from Princes Hall. The walk continued past the former soldiers pub the Queen Hotel, painted burgundy to mark links to the parachute regiment. Next came Prince's Garden where engineers first planned a military camp in 1854 when preparing for Crimea. Statues included the Airborne Soldier on Falkland Isles granite, the first Gurkha to receive a Victoria Cross, and the charging horse on a bailey bridge. Finally we walked along Willem Avenue, reflecting on the many soldiers who had passed before.

*Hazel Dewey
Surrey Heath Ramblers*



In the 'Longest Yarn' exhibition. Photo: Paul Seidman