

Walker

Thames Path reopened between Richmond and Kew

The popular stretch of the Thames Path National Trail between Richmond Lock and Kew has reopened following the completion of major repair works after being closed for just over a year.

On Saturday 8 November 2025 we gathered to see Richmond's deputy mayor, Councillor Clare Vollum, cut the ceremonial ribbon at the event which was attended by over 50 local residents and project staff.

Councillor Alexander Ehmann, chair of Richmond's transport and air quality committee, described the project as one of the council's most

technically demanding riverbank repairs. Despite challenges posed by tidal conditions. The restoration includes a restored culvert and new ecological features designed to stabilise and future-proof the route against erosion and flooding. Work was still going on either side of the path.

The reopening ensures this valued riverside path remains safe and accessible for Thames Path users.

Alan Matthews

Richmond Ramblers

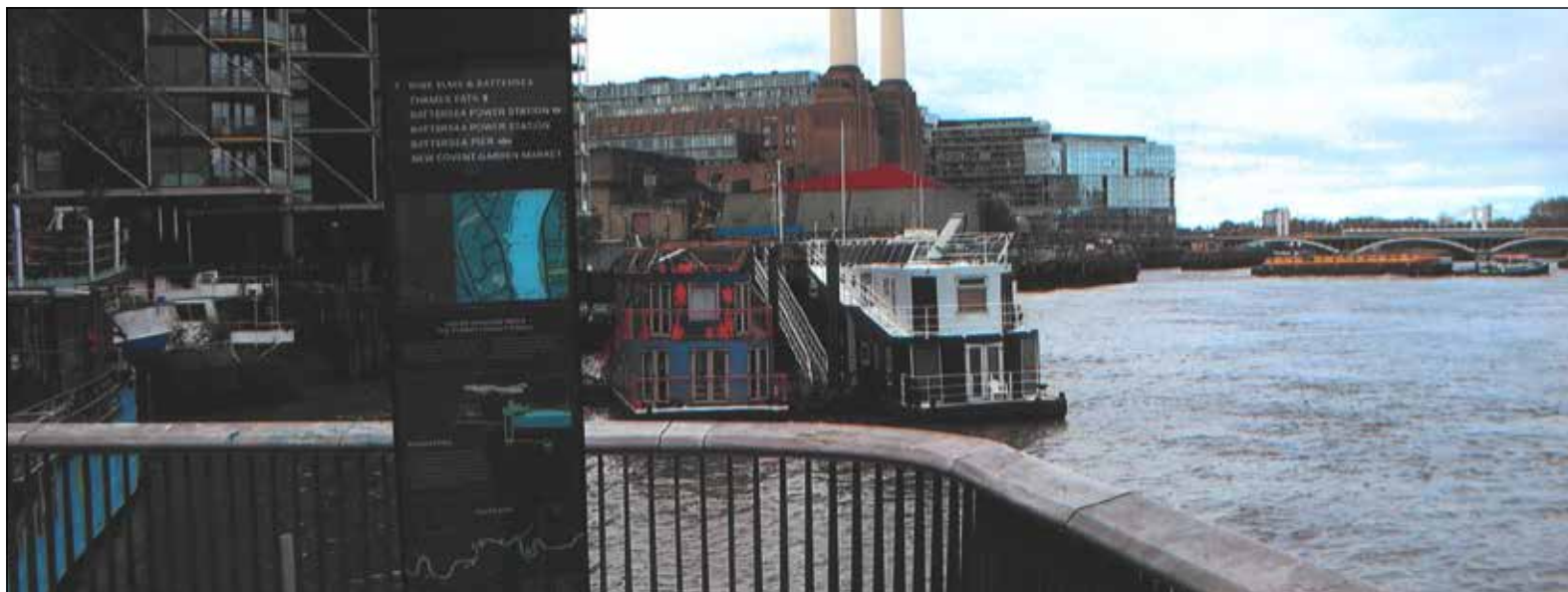
See also Thames Path National Trail update on page 3.



The repaired section of the Thames Path between Richmond Lock and Kew.

Photo: Des Garrahan

New public open spaces created along the Thames in London



Heathwall Quay, Battersea. Its construction has enabled a short new section of the Thames Path nearby to open.

Several new public open spaces have been created beside the River Thames in London as a result of the construction of the Thames Tideway Tunnel (or 'Super Sewer'). Although the Tideway Tunnel was declared open in May 2025, some work is still going on around the riverside public spaces created by the project.

Heading downriver the Thames Path walker will now pass new riverside open spaces at Putney Embankment, King George's Park and Falconbrook Pumping Station in Wandsworth, Carnwath Road Riverside in Fulham, Chelsea Quay, Heathwall Quay at Battersea, Effra Quay & Isle of Effra near Vauxhall Bridge, Tyburn Quay opposite the London Eye, Bazalgette Embankment near Blackfriars Bridge, King Edward Memorial Park at Shadwell and Deptford Church Street.

These new spaces are around deep shafts which provide access to the Tideway Tunnel for both routine maintenance and emergency access to the sewer and echo Sir Joseph Bazalgette's visionary overhaul of London's sewerage system more than 150 years ago. He not only transformed public health but also changed the look and character of the city with the creation of the Chelsea, Victoria and Albert Embankments. In total, the Tideway Tunnel project has created three acres of new public realm along the River Thames..

I was fortunate to be invited to London Mayor, Sir Sadiq Khan's opening of Heathwall Quay last summer and in early autumn I led a three-mile circular stroll for Tideway Tunnel that began (and ended) at Heathwall Quay and included Chelsea Quay and Effra Quay & the Isle of Effra. It seems to me that there are plenty of opportunities to

include these new public spaces in walks in London.

The Thames Tideway Tunnel is a deep-level sewer mostly under the tidal section of the River Thames in London, running for 25 kilometres (16 miles) from Acton in the west to Abbey Mills in the east. The tunnel is designed to capture almost all the raw sewage and rainwater from combined sewers which would otherwise overflow into the river during heavy rain. The sewage can be stored in the tunnel until it can be treated at Beckton in east London.

Construction of the tunnel began in 2016. The first sewage flowed into the tunnels in September 2024, it became fully operational in February 2025 and was officially opened in May 2025. By December 2025 it had diverted almost 13 million tonnes of sewage from the Thames.

Des Garrahan

Pilgrimage start point marked

A granite milepost was brought from Spain and installed in Reading in November 2025 to mark the start point of the St James' Way pilgrimage route to Southampton. The 70-mile route forms a part of the Camino de Santiago network of pilgrimage routes which lead to the shrine of St James in the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, north west Spain, a 690-mile trek from Reading.

The marker was unveiled by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire and the Mayor of Reading and attended by representatives from Galicia. A similar marker stone was installed on the route at St Bartholomew's church at Hyde, Winchester.



The granite marker in Reading's historic quarter.

Supporting the Ramblers path accessibility fund



One of the stiles ready to be replaced at Tincleton, Dorset.

Readers may recall that in the September 2024 issue of South East Walker we reported on our collaboration with the national Ramblers Path Accessibility Fund to use the East Berkshire Ramblers

Endowment Fund to support path improvement projects. Our fund was established from profits generated by the sale over many years of the Rambling for Pleasure walks books.

The four projects which we

supported in 2024 have been successfully completed and in 2025 a further request for applications for projects was sent out by the Ramblers Central Office. After sifting through applications received, Central Office provided the East Berks Ramblers committee with a selection for consideration. We chose five projects to support. One was very local to us; a footpath resurfacing project at Sonning submitted by our neighbouring Ramblers group, Loddon Valley. A report on the completed works can be found in Berkshire bites on page 11.

We also funded an excellent project in Selborne in Hampshire. This project replaced stiles with kissing gates on a popular path close to the site of Selborne Priory, in the South Downs National Park. The work was carried out by Alton Ramblers path maintenance team led by Paul Naish. Alton Ramblers also raised funds for the project through a grant from East Hampshire District Council of £500 towards the cost of the gates and construction materials. The improvements have opened up an immediate 1,357 metres along this path, which is now stile-free and has made the wider area more accessible.

The other completed project took place in the village of Tincleton in Dorset. Tincleton is just a short ramble away from popular tourist spots like Puddletown and Tolpuddle and is located a mile from the Hardy



The same spot after the stile was replaced by a pedestrian gate.

Photos: Steve Strong

Way. The parish council applied for funding to replace four stiles with pedestrian gates and also funded two additional gates itself. Dorset Council supported the project and their team installed the gates. Steve Strong, parish councillor, reported: "I keep getting very complimentary comments about how much of an improvement the gates have made, especially from our ageing residents who used to find the stiles difficult to climb over. Plus, when wet, the stiles could be very slippery."

We are delighted that our funds have been able to support these worthy projects. We still have an underspend in our Endowment Fund, so would welcome applications via the Ramblers Central Office for projects to take

place in 2026. We are particularly keen to receive applications from the counties that surround Berkshire, where we organise many of our group walks. Applications for projects to take place on paths in popular places which many people use are also valued. The next application round closes on 14 March. For more information, see the Path Accessibility Fund webpage on the main Ramblers website: (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/what-we-care-about/path-accessibility-fund>).

If you have any queries or wish to discuss project proposals please contact Helen Bates, Path Improvement Lead at the Ramblers by emailing paths@ramblers.org.uk.

Liz Richardson
East Berks Ramblers

Mayor walks the Wokingham Way

The Mayor of Wokingham, Councillor Carol Jewell, undertook a sponsored walk around the entire Wokingham Way between November and January, covering two stages on each of her walking days. She aimed to raise more than £1,000 for her nominated charity, Building for the Future, which provides support for

children and young people with disabilities. Members of Loddon Valley Ramblers, which created the 55-mile route, accompanied her on every walk to keep her company and make sure she did not get lost.

The Wokingham Way is a walking route around the entire circumference of Wokingham

Borough - which can be broken into 10 easy stages of four to seven miles. Members of the group regularly check the route to make sure it is fully accessible and signposted. Full details can be found at lvra.org.uk/workingham-way/workingham-way-intro.html.

Steve Vale
Loddon Valley Ramblers



The Mayor of Wokingham, accompanied by her daughter and Steve Vale of Loddon Valley Ramblers, set off on 28 November 2025 on the first stage of her charity walk around the Wokingham Way. Photo: Wokingham Borough Council.

Three Castles postcards



When the guide to the Three Castles Path from Windsor to Winchester was first published over 30 years ago, a set of picture postcards featuring six churches along the 60-mile route was produced for sale. Walkers obtained these postcards individually but they are now free to collect from all six churches. In some cases they are just the most appropriate one but at St Mary's, Greywell (they think of themselves as *the* Three Castles Path church), the complete 12-card set is available. This church and St James's at Upper Wield are the most likely to always be open.

Dave Ramm

SOUTH EAST
walker

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

THE RAMBLERS
Address: 13 Dirty Lane, London
 SE1 9PA.
Switchboard: 020 3961 3300
Membership Services:
 020 3961 3232
Email: ramblers@ramblers.zendesk.com
Web: www.ramblers.org.uk
 The Ramblers' Association is a
 registered charity in England and Wales
 (no. 1093577) and in Scotland (no.
 SC039799), and a company limited by
 guarantee registered in England and
 Wales (no. 4458492), Registered office:
 Stone King LLP, Boundary House, 91

Charterhouse Street, London EC1M
6HR.

EDITORIAL
Editor: Les Douglas
Email: southeastwalker@gmail.com
Tel: 020 8809 2338
DESIGN AND PRINT
Designed by IV Creative: 01529 300452
Printed by Blackmore Ltd

Opinions expressed by contributors
are not specifically endorsed by
The Ramblers.
ISSN 1747-4140
© 2026 The Ramblers.
All rights
reserved.

Copy Date:
For the next
issue is 15
May 2026.



Thames Path National Trail update



Still closed: Temple Footbridge which links the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire banks.

It's been another eventful tough winter for the world's most walked route, the Thames Path National Trail. Numerous flood diversions and footbridges closed to the public in 2023 remain shut. Work has been continuing at both Temple and Marsh footbridges but disappointingly both are still months from being reopened.

There is better news at Benson Weir which is expected to reopen in late spring but Bridge 142 at Egham Hythe still has no completion date at all. Back in October 2024 a short section of the towpath between Richmond and Kew collapsed in stormy weather which combined high river levels and strong winds. Richmond council began

emergency works immediately to prevent further damage and, after starting the permanent repair phase, they announced an ambitious aim of reopening the path by summer 2025. Although they missed that soft deadline the path has now reopened (see page 1). All things considered, I think this was a remarkable effort which they should be roundly applauded for.

As 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the official opening of the route, it's worth remembering how it all began and the part the Ramblers played. Briefly, in 1947 the towpath along the Thames was identified by the Hobhouse Committee on National Parks as one of six potential long distance and coastal recreational routes. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 enabled the six routes to be created and they are now all National Trails. When the River Thames Society was formed in 1962 one of its aims was to establish a continuous public walkway, following the historic towing path and extending access both to the source of the River Thames and through London. In 1973 David Sharp, a volunteer with the Ramblers, went to a meeting with the River Thames Society to discuss the creation of the Thames Walk. At this pivotal meeting he drew a sketch map of a possible route and passed it round the table. David's clarity of vision sparked the campaign. "I realised that we had to survey the route properly and really identify the problems," he said later. "That's how it started."

For the following 23 years volunteers from the Ramblers and the River Thames Society, along with other campaign groups, worked with landowners, local authorities and politicians along the proposed route to create what we now know as the Thames Path National Trail. Celebrations will take place throughout 2026 and it is hoped that as many Ramblers groups as possible will organise walks along the route. For more updates of

events near you and information about how you can help please consult the Thames Path -National Trails website at nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/thames-path/.
Des Garrahan

Problem spots: The Thames Path National Trail website has a map showing closures and diversions to the route. As we went to press, these were the most significant sites where diversions from the route are currently required:

Egham Hythe (between Staines-on-Thames and Runnymede, just south of the M25 bridge). A diversion is in place from just north of Staines-on-Thames to the Runnymede Hotel. This is because of structural damage to a footbridge after flooding.

Temple Footbridge: (between Marlow and Henley-on-Thames) A diversion is in place between Marlow Bridge and Temple on the opposite side of the river to the National Trail. This has been in place since May 2023 and due to safety concerns. The central span of the bridge was removed in November 2025.

Marsh Lock (between Henley-on-Thames and Shiplake) A three-mile diversion along the A4155 is currently needed. Alternatively, take a bus or train!

Benson Weir (between Wallingford and Dorchester) A diversion is in place between Wallingford Bridge and Benson on the opposite bank to the National Trail. This follows damage to the weir caused by river debris

Looping around Watford

A six and a half mile (10 km) walking and cycling route encircling Watford's town centre was opened last summer. The well-signed route makes good use of the paths in lovely Cassiobury Park and a lengthy stretch of the Ebury Way which follows the former track of the Watford to Rickmansworth branch line. A map of the route can be found at watford.gov.uk/green-transport-1/green-loop or pick up a leaflet available from Watford Library.



One of the many Watford Green Loop marker posts.

High Weald Walking Festival:

This annual walks festival which covers parts of Kent, Sussex and Surrey is a collaboration between the High Weald National Landscape

Partnership and four Sussex Ramblers groups. This year's event will run from Saturday 12 - Sunday 20 September. Find out more at www.highwealdwalks.org

New station at Chelmsford:

A new railway station in Chelmsford, Essex, opened in October 2025. The station, Beaulieu Park, is on the main line from London Liverpool

Street to Colchester and has been built (at grid reference TL 793088) to serve the town's ever-expanding suburbs.

Drawings from the South Downs:

An exhibition by artist Sara Lee, whose works have been inspired by walks on the South Downs runs until 18 April

at Petersfield Museum & Art Gallery (01730262601, www.petersfieldmuseum.co.uk)

London Rivers Week:

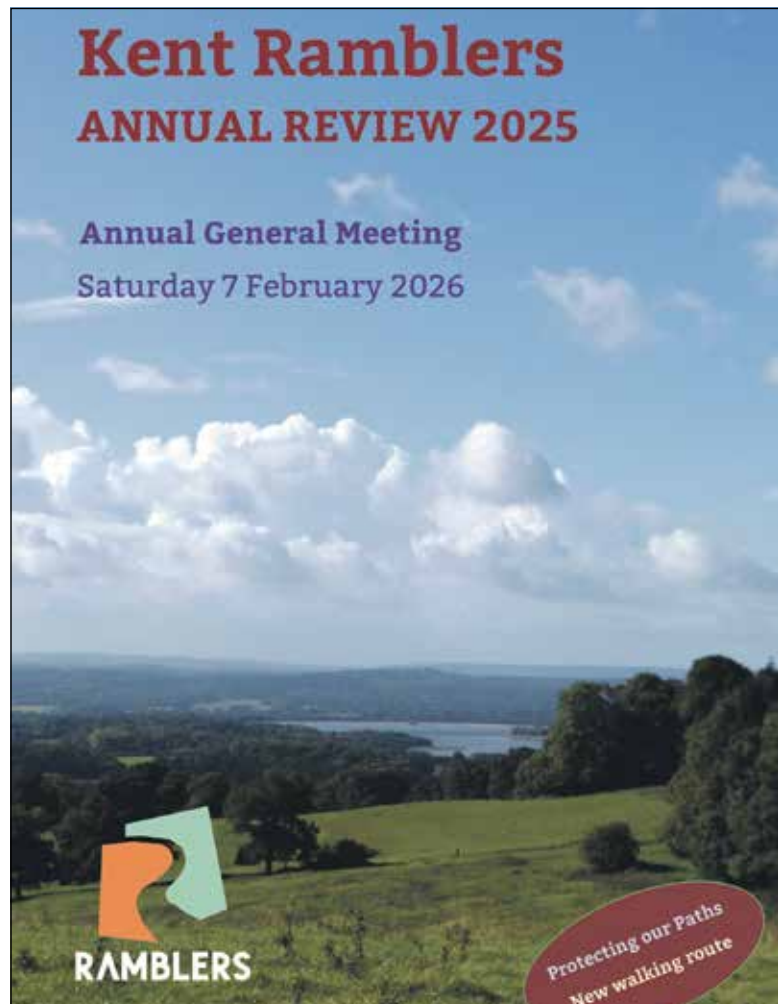
This annual event, organised by Thames 21, aims to celebrate London's rivers and the projects which protect them. Kingston Ramblers has participated

since 2024 with guided walks along the Beverley Brook and Hogsmill. Follow links at thames21.org.uk for more details.



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary



The Annual Review (Front cover).

The last two months of 2025 have probably been the busiest ever. As usual much time was consumed with the preparation of our Annual Review, which can be viewed by visiting the news page on our website (kentramblers.org.uk/news). Additionally on 27 November we held a meeting in Lenham for our footpath volunteers and anyone else interested in protecting and enhancing public rights of way in Kent. We have been holding two of these meetings every year for a while now and they always prove to be well-attended, lively affairs - on this occasion attracting 57 attendees. As no one from the hard-pressed paths team at Central Office could join us in person and we didn't feel that an online presentation would be satisfactory, we relied on our own volunteers and other contacts, including the Kent County Council public rights of way team, for speakers. For the first time we specifically invited all the parish and town councils in Kent to send a representative and, despite the short notice, around 17 turned up. Although this is a relatively small proportion of over 300 parishes in Kent, the value we gained in terms of opportunities for future collaboration was significant and we will certainly issue a similar invitation to our next such meeting.

Our next Lenham meeting will

be on Thursday 18 June so if you are interested please put the date in your diary now. You don't need to be a current volunteer or even from Kent to attend - there will be an invitation in a future issue of our Footpath Volunteer Newsletter - if you don't get this but would like to then please email us on prow@kentramblers.org.uk and we will put you on the mailing list.

One contact made in Lenham was with Chevening Parish Council. The significance of Chevening is that, in addition to being a location of a large stately home that serves as the country residence of whoever happens currently to be Foreign Secretary, it is also the location of the village of Chipstead which until recently was the starting point for the Darent Valley Path which wends its way northwards through a lovely and historically rich landscape to the Thames. In summer 2025 this status was lost when the route was extended further up the Darent Valley to begin at Westerham, known for its connection to General Wolfe of Quebec fame and Winston Churchill whose larger than life statue dominates the green. Nevertheless Chipstead remains an ideal spot for an information board promoting the Darent Valley Path and indeed was endowed with such a board when the route was created rather a long time ago. The original board was in a very sorry state when I last saw it sometime in the late 2010s and now it has gone altogether so I have for a while been harbouring a desire

to see a replacement installed. I am now in discussion with both the parish council and the Kent Downs National Landscape people (who are responsible for the path extension to Westerham) to do just that.

Another useful contact made as a result of the Lenham meeting was with **Leeds Parish Council**. This Leeds is of course not the post-industrial city in Yorkshire but a village in the middle of Kent best known for perhaps Britain's most picturesque castle, situated on an island in a lake. Actually Leeds Castle is just outside the parish boundary, but much of the estate is within the parish. At the November meeting I described the Kent Ramblers project to renew many of the parish footpath map boards that were installed on village greens across the county 20 to 30 years ago and Leeds are interested in taking one or more. We installed our first renewed board under the scheme on the village green at East Malling in September and have several more in the pipeline, held up temporarily while waiting for Explore Kent to create the web page to which a QR code on the maps will link.

Returning to the subject of the **Darent Valley Path**, this route featured in a guide we published in 2018 - this also covered the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk and was therefore a guide to 'Three River Valley Walks in West Kent'. Fortunately, and thanks to a surge of sales in National Trust shops, especially at Sissinghurst Castle Garden, stocks of this guide recently ran out so that now is the ideal time to produce a new edition to include the Darent Valley Path extension. I am hoping that in the spring we might unveil the new information board and launch the new guide together. Further guides to the Coast Path in Kent remain held up while sections of the path on Sheppey and on the north coast between Sheppey and the Medway are not yet available for use.

Changing the subject, I continue to engage with the **Ordnance Survey** over curiosities on their maps. Most recently I noticed a red triangle on the new edition of Explorer 148 at grid reference TQ 715629. I had always thought that these symbols indicated youth hostels but there appears never to have been one at that location. The Ordnance Survey has chosen not to reply to my query. Any theories, anyone? Could it be one of those deliberate errors intended to catch out anyone illicitly copying a map?

Exhausting though all this activity is, it is very positive and encouraging. Much less so is a considerable additional burden from a **governance review** that the Ramblers has been conducting. This is not the time or place to explore the pros and cons of the proposals themselves, but I do



The Footpaths Map Board at East Malling before...



...and after.



The extended Darent Valley Path is clearly shown.

find it disappointing that no attempt appears to have been made to assess and mitigate the additional work this exercise would create for those of us who deliver such a high proportion of the Ramblers' public benefits. Could it possibly be that there are those on the Board of Trustees who don't actually appreciate how stretched many of us are and how important and demanding our work is?

The next item in my diary as I write

is a **public inquiry** in mid-January. This will relate to a proposed diversion of a footpath to enable Network Rail to close a level crossing. On this occasion we, Kent Ramblers, are not amongst the objectors so it will be a stress-free opportunity to watch a public inquiry in progress. Such events make for a jolly day out and are always instructive in one way or another.

Robert Peel

Area Secretary, Kent Ramblers



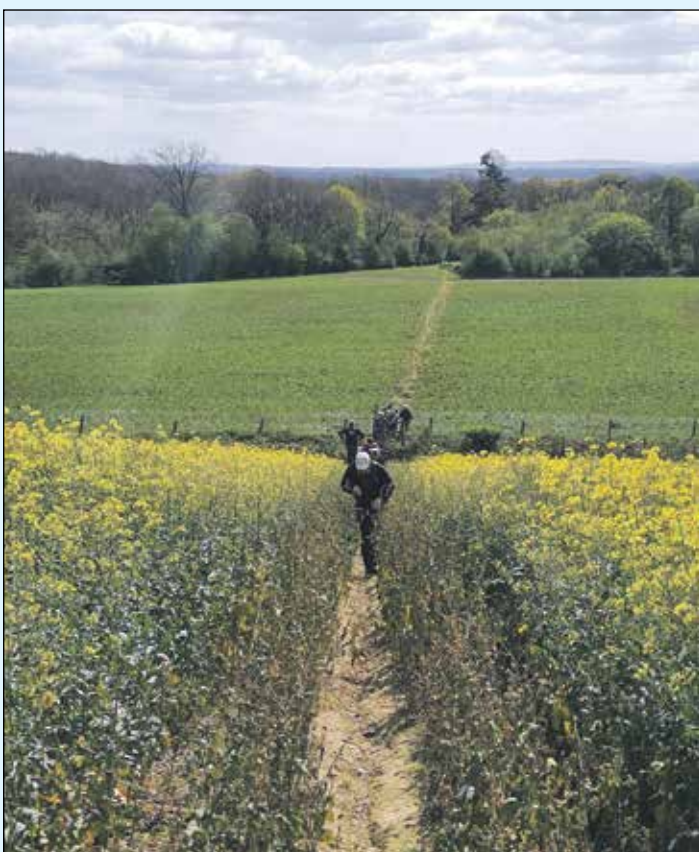
SURREY snippets

Mole Valley Spring Walks Festival

Mole Valley Ramblers week-long walking festival takes place this year from Wednesday 29 April to Wednesday 6 May. The festival is a very happy and friendly event, ideal for all ages and fitness levels. Experienced walk leaders will show you the beauty of the Surrey countryside from the rolling hills to the ancient woodlands and pretty villages. Up to three walks a day are planned ranging from the leisurely and the moderate, to longer and more strenuous walks, plus some evening walks with a short pub stop.

We warmly welcome new walkers. You can simply turn up at the start of a walk or call the leader in advance if you prefer. You will find details of the festival walks on our website www.molevalleyramblers.org.uk. So why not lace up your walking boots and step into a world of exploration, well-being and friendship with Mole Valley Ramblers?

Rob Tomlinson
Mole Valley Ramblers



Walking with Mole Valley Ramblers.

Photo: Rob Tomlinson

New permissive paths at Cobham Park

Two new permissive paths have been created just south of Cobham through parts of the Cobham Park Estate by the owners, the Combe family.

The one-mile linear Stud Path starts on Downside Road just past the gated entrance to the estate mansion now private apartments and conveniently near the Plough Inn on Plough Lane. The path runs along the landscaped estate boundary with its 200-year-old iron railings providing occasional views of the 1870 French Renaissance mansion (which Pevsner described rather unkindly as "very ugly").

The circular 0.8 mile River Walk, connected to the Stud Path by an existing bridleway, is accessed beside the Ash Ford pedestrian bridge in Stoke d'Abernon and runs through open fields largely beside the

River Mole. For those travelling by train, locals have established an informal access to the path via the corner of the Cobham & Stoke d'Abernon station car park at the end of the adjoining timber yard.

Both paths add to the existing network of public paths in the area and further links are planned. The permissive paths are for walkers only and dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.

Beer drinkers of a certain age may recall the profitable but infamous Watney's Red Barrel keg beer which, with other keg monstrosities, gave rise to the wildly successful Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA). Watney Mann had previously been known as Watney Combe Reid with the Combe family first involved in the brewing business in London in the 18th century.

Rodney Whittaker



On one of the new permissive paths at Cobham Park.

Gate installed at Wrecclesham

Our path maintenance group's final work event of 2025 took place on 9 December. This involved the installation of a long-awaited kissing gate, funded by Farnham Ramblers, on Footpath 17 which runs alongside the River Wey and the A31 close to Wrecclesham.

Despite the forecast for heavy rain and strong winds, seven volunteers attended. We began by hauling the new gate, plus all the heavy tools across a field to the site. Work began by dismantling the remains of a broken stile, some rotten fence posts and cutting through quite a lot of barbed wire. Measuring up then followed with the gate being offered upside down before the hole digging began for the posts. We were on very claggy clay soil and found we were hitting the water table when we got deeper, but the team made swift work of the task and soon enough the gate was the right way up, bolted together, and plaque affixed. It was decided that further work on this site would need to be scheduled to repair and extend the width of the steps and install a handrail. The gate was dedicated to the memory of Linda Rowland who was a long-standing member and volunteer of the group.

Our thanks go to Thomas Chatfield from Surrey County Council who supports our path work by getting the necessary permissions and supplying tools and materials. We must also thank Alan Keeley who decided to step down as the leader of our path maintenance team after five years in the role. We can happily announce that Martin Childs has since taken over as team leader.

Sue Harvey

Farnham & District Ramblers



The kissing gate installed at Wrecclesham. Photo: Ann Brinton

Hornet encounter

Kingston members had an unpleasant experience when walking at Norbury Park last September. We had seen a notice pinned to a branch warning 'Beware hornets nest' and soon found ourselves the centre of attention from the winged creatures. Only two members of the party escaped being stung. The rest had from one to many stings. We rushed to

the end of the path to treat our wounds.

There have been many reports of hornet activity in or near Norbury Park. In some cases these may have been the invasive Asian hornet in which case the advice is that If you see a hornets nest, do not disturb it; take a photo from a safe distance, note the location and report it immediately via the Asian Hornet Watch app or

the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology website at ceh.ac.uk/our-science/citizen-science/asian-hornet, or the Non-Native Species Secretariat at nonnativespecies.org/alerts/asianhornet.

Asian hornets require professional removal in order to protect public safety and local ecosystems.

Brenda and David Horwill

Kingston Ramblers

The first Asian hornet nest of 2025 in Surrey was confirmed in September at Holmbury St Mary.



London Walks Project - can you help?



Winter on the London Loop.

Photo: Andrew Hunt

Through the winter months our London Loop, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk volunteers have continued to walk their sections and make waymarking improvements - and we continue to share information about major disruption and diversions on our website <https://www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk/>.

As the project moves into its next phase, we're particularly keen to make sure the routes are walkable by the largest number of people - and have agreed to focus on replacing stiles with gates, and on signage from stations - to help walkers set off in the right direction at the outset.

We've been compiling data on the 40 remaining stiles on the London Loop, including logging their condition and difficulty of use as well as location. We would like to prioritise replacing the most difficult to use first - and we have funding to start replacing some of these with gates (and believe we can raise more funding). However, we are not a footpath working group and would very much welcome help from any working groups in the Ramblers Areas the London Loop runs through (Kent, Surrey, Bucks, Herts and Essex) to make a start on this work. The London Loop runs primarily within London boroughs but a number of sections fall into the surrounding counties as well.

We're grateful to still have a good number of excellent volunteers committed to the project but we're also conscious of the need to continually recruit and to plug gaps as they arise. We're currently looking for volunteers for London Loop sections 5 (Hamsey Green to Coulsdon), 6 (Coulsdon to Banstead) and 7 (Banstead to Ewell), and would welcome additional volunteers to help on sections 9 (Kingston to Hatton Cross), 11 (Hayes & Harlington to Uxbridge) and 12 (Uxbridge to Harefield). You can see the sections on our website at <https://www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk/>.

Thanks to the previous issue of South East Walker we're delighted to have recruited Nik Mortimer to help us to promote the routes and our work in the media and on social media - so please keep an eye out and engage with our social channels (Instagram, Inner London Ramblers' Facebook and @ldnloop-capingr.bsky.socialBluesky) to help us grow our reach.

Please contact me if you're able to help us with the project.

Clare Wadd

vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Something to celebrate!

CWW says cheers for 20 years

Chilterns Weekend Walkers (CWW) are celebrating two landmarks in 2026. It's our 20th anniversary year, and we've become the biggest Ramblers group in our region. With 350 members, we're not only the largest of the eight Ramblers groups in the Bucks, West Middlesex and Milton Keynes Area, but we're also one of the biggest of the weekend walkers groups outside London.

The CWW story began in 2005 when older members of the Chiltern 20s-30s Walkers met over a casserole at a house in Wendover and discussed the idea of setting up a new group. One of the founders, Andrew Zelin, said: "Not wanting to be responsible for putting off new younger people from joining, we looked at forming an intermediate age Ramblers group in a way that had been pioneered by Surrey Area Weekend Walkers. At one point in the meeting we went through a list of typical Ramblers

committee positions and shared them among us. I recall taking on three such positions initially!"

"The group 'conceived' in a casserole pot' thrived from its first walk in Ashridge in September 2006. "We saw numbers take off very quickly," says Andrew. "It wasn't long before members completely new to the Ramblers outnumbered those who had come from the 20s-30s group."

Socials were key to the group's success. Christmas parties involving an overnight stay became an annual fixture and have continued ever since. Holidays in the early years took us to destinations including Austria, the French Alps and the Pyrenees. In 2012 a hard core of our long distance walkers took on Yorkshire's Three Peaks Challenge and repeated the accomplishment in 2013 and 2014, with further challenge weekends in the Brecon Beacons in 2015 and 2016.

The Covid outbreak in 2020 sent the group and the rest of Ramblers into a two-part hibernation, but

members kept their spirits up by using our Facebook page to share photos from their solo walks, discovering a shared passion for spotting weathervanes. In the post-Covid years, imaginatively themed walks have become a defining feature of the group. The Alphabet series featured 26 walks each pegged to a letter. The Boots, Banter and Breweries series gave us a reason to visit six breweries. The Grand Huit walks pack in the maximum ascent. Not forgetting the Mill Walks, Early Risers, Really Get To Know, Mobilise to Socialise and numerous church tea walks. The Famous People of the Chilterns series is still going strong in its second year, revealing the region's connections to its most famous historical figures.

Walking festivals have been held each September since 2022, featuring a collection of walks on the same day, all converging on a group picnic at lunchtime. Fittingly, the 2026 festival will return to the Ashridge Estate, where the group took its very first steps 20 years ago.

Mark Percy
Chilterns Weekend Walkers



CWW members at Harrow on their Capital Ring walk in 2025.

Photo: Mark Percy

A great meeting

About 100 Croydon Ramblers turned up on Saturday 8 November 2025 at the church hall in Sanderstead for our AGM, which this time was to celebrate 75 years of the group's existence. So something a bit special!

As per usual on entering the hall we were greeted with a cup of tea or coffee and then wandered around to enjoy the

photo display of ramblers doing what ramblers do, or looking for bargains on the bookstall, pottery stall, home-made jam department or possibly the 'previously-loved' clothing and equipment stall. Obviously there was also a lot of chatting and catching up going on.

The committee in their wisdom decided to have the business part of the meeting before the delicious but modest lunch which was supplied by outside caterers rather than our usual in-house volunteers. I know which one I

prefer! After food and refreshment, including a drop of Prosecco, it was my turn to entertain the troops with an audio-visual presentation consisting of photographs from the group's archives from the 1950s to the 2020s, with appropriate music. I must admit it was quite long but I did not hear any snoring in spite of the alcohol!

We had a good raffle too. I still have my tickets - better luck next year!

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



Croydon Ramblers eagerly await lunch.

Photo: John Tickner

Hands-up and Knees-up to 40 years



Cutting the anniversary cake.

Photo: Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2025 and, on 4 October, we rounded off a year of special events and walks with a fantastic Cockney singalong evening. What a brilliant night we had with a packed house of ramblers disguised as 'Cockneys' singing along to our pianist entertainer, Eugene Portman. It was a revelation to many of us that the song 'The Lambeth Walk' had more than one verse!

We were delighted that one of our founders, Diana Mehew,

was able to join us that night together with her husband Eddie. Diana was very pleased to see some old faces and to see the group continuing to flourish after 40 years.

As well as lots of enthusiastic singing, we enjoyed a superb meal of bangers and mash before it was time to cut the magnificent anniversary cake, baked by our own star baker Karen V. We had a great anniversary year and look forward to many more happy years walking with friends.

Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

We are 50!

North Beds Ramblers, the oldest Ramblers group in Bedfordshire, turns 50 in 2026 and a recently discovered walks programme from 1976 will allow us to recreate our first year of walking! The programme offered just one walk starting at 2.15pm on the first Saturday of each month. The only detail provided was the leader's name and the meeting point. Sadly we have no idea of the distances walked but a 2.15pm start in the winter suggests they weren't very long!

So 2026 starts a year of celebration for us in which we also hope to have walks which incorporate parts of the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail which a number of our members have helped re-sign. It will be lovely to see some of their work!

As with any big birthday



we plan to have a celebration party and will be producing some memorabilia and promotional material which will include our new 50th anniversary logo designed by our member, Juliana Jagielska.

If you are in the locality please come and join us on one of our birthday walks (or any other, as we now walk every Saturday and not just one a month). You will find our walk details at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/ramblers-groups/north-bedfordshire-group>.

Sandra Kelsey

North Beds Ramblers

Banbury shop:

Outdoor clothing and equipment retailer, Mountain

Warehouse, opened a new 12,000 square feet store in Banbury, Oxfordshire on 21 November. It can be found at 10 Acorn Way.

South Bank Ramblers celebrate 40 years at joyful AGM

South Bank Ramblers AGM was both a great success and a warm celebration of the group's 40th anniversary. Held on Sunday 9 November 2025 at the Brixton Windmill, the event brought together more than 40 members after two morning walks,

The afternoon was as much a social occasion as a formal one. Members and committee volunteers baked cakes, cookies, and other delicious treats - including an anniversary cake created by committee member Gail Bourne, which became the centrepiece of the celebration. The room was filled with warmth and the buzz of conversation as fellow walkers reconnected and reflected on the group's shared journey.

Originally founded in September 1985 as the South West London Group (renamed South Bank Group in 1991), the group has grown into one of London's most active and welcoming Ramblers groups. To mark the anniversary, committee member Dave Hetherington delved into four decades of archives and shared some of his findings, sparking fond memories - and plenty of laughter.

From the archive highlights Dave shared, it's striking to see how far we've come. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, AGMs sometimes struggled to reach a quorum. The 1999 notice warned that the previous meeting had "barely reached a quorum" and cautioned that the group could "technically cease to exist" if attendances didn't improve. A similar message appeared in 2002: "Please make every effort to attend, not only is the meeting good for the democratic health of the group, but we need to have sufficient members present to form a quorum - the group will cease to exist if we are unable to do this." Today, in contrast, our AGMs regularly attract more than 40 people - a reflection of a strong, engaged community (and perhaps the generous spread of home-made cakes).

Walk leader recruitment has also been a recurring theme throughout our history. The programmes of the 1990s make their frustration clear. The autumn 1994 programme described the walks list as the "thinnest ... for some time," stressing that pleas for new leaders were "not bluff". By 1998 the tone had sharpened: Spring 1998: "I find it hard to believe ... there are not a few who are perfectly capable of leading a walk now and again ..." Winter 1998: "Unless new leaders can step into the breach then the group will simply wither and die!" Whilst walk leader recruitment remains an ongoing need, it's clear that



At the AGM.

Photo: Richard Hodgkinson

the group has navigated this challenge for decades, sustained by the enthusiasm and commitment of those who continue to step forward and lead.

Technology, too, has transformed how the group operates. In the early 2000s, mobile numbers appeared in programmes: 'for emergency use on the day of the walk only,' and a group email address was introduced at the same time so members could contact the committee and opt to receive programmes electronically. In 2006, the first South Bank website launched, offering a central place for updates and walk changes.

Walk submission and editing are now fully online, greatly reducing admin for the walks team. Meanwhile, the launch of our Instagram and Facebook accounts in 2020 has helped showcase walk photos and raise the group's profile to new generations of London walkers. Looking back, the path our group has travelled shows how far we have evolved with the times while keeping our community spirit at the heart of everything we do. South Bank has continually moved forward without losing sight of what makes it special.

It was a fitting tribute to 40 years of walking, friendship and community spirit - and a reminder that the group is about far more than just walking miles; it's about walking together.

Kleo Zhao

South Bank Ramblers

70 years of rambling

West London Ramblers celebrated their 70th anniversary at their AGM in West Ealing on 9 December 2025. On display was the group's first walking programme which made for interesting reading. None of the walks specified a distance and nearly all were led by male walkers. Old photos of events were also displayed including ones of a formal dinner dance at St Pancras Town Hall. There are currently 573 full members, including 17 who joined in the 1970s, some of whom were present at the meeting.

Two long-serving committee members, Monika Eady, Chair, and Martin Harris, Secretary, stepped

down from their roles and were thanked for all their hard work. Jackie Gower and Carolyn Oxley were elected as Chair and Secretary respectively. Our Treasurer, Innes Garden, was re-appointed. Members enjoyed a delicious buffet and were entertained as usual by a picture quiz.

West London is a lively and active group and in 2025 we enjoyed 150 walks and holidays in Hastings, Selworthy, Aberystwyth and the Forest of Dean. Plans for 2026 include walking the North Downs Way, London Loop and West Anglian Way, plus holidays in Germany, Kent and the Peak District.

Janet Clark

West London Ramblers



Outgoing Chair, Monika Eady, holds the group's first walks programme.

Photo: Vino Kanapathipillai



Installing steps on the Oxfordshire Way

Early in 2025, Carolyn Maunder, a member of Henley & Goring Ramblers, pointed out that where the Oxfordshire Way comes up to The Mount from Henley-on-Thames it was very steep and slippery, and especially dangerous when going down. Being close to the town, the path is used by many walkers to admire the attractive Henley Park as well as being a part of the much-walked cross-county route. Installing a flight of steps here was the obvious solution and this work was duly carried out by the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers, a Chiltern Society group which we cooperate with for path maintenance work in the local area.

During preparation for the work it was discovered that the path was off-line from where the start of the steps was planned, and it followed a curve around a difficult part of the incline. In conversation with

Oxfordshire County Council's countryside access team, it was agreed to bring the entire path back on line, and to create the steps on the first part of the definitive line. From the top of the steps, a path would be opened to bring it further in line with the definitive line. On the definitive line an abandoned badger hole needed filling as well. During the survey the area was covered in nettles, which made this survey a stingy challenge! Earlier projects had used a step width of 80cm and it was decided to do the same for these steps. We would also follow the construction method referred to as OCC standards. It was estimated that we needed about 13 steps but ended up with 19 in total. It was attempted to install the steps in one session, but weather and working circumstances made this impossible. and a second, shorter, session was arranged to complete the work. Wim Klaucke led the sessions in which a total of 42 work hours was invested, with eight and six volunteers respectively.



The finished flight of steps. Photo:Wim Klaucke

Thanks to the kind cooperation of Swiss Farm we were able to take our tools and materials to within a short distance of the work site. Thanks also to Oxfordshire Ramblers for funding the work. Alie Hagedoom Henley & Goring Ramblers

Vale Path Volunteers 200th task

Chocolate cake and bubbly replaced the usual biscuits when the Vale Path Volunteers, the path maintenance team of the Vale of White Horse Ramblers group, celebrated their 200th task in October 2025.

The location was at the end of Mill Road, Abingdon, the site of their first task in 2012 and their 100th outing in 2012. It took nine years to clock up the 100th task but only half that for the second hundred. The Volunteers currently go out on the first Monday and third Wednesday of each month..

The 200 path clearance projects covered 72 kilometres (45 miles) , involving 4,000 hours of volunteer time. And countless biscuits!

The Vale Path Volunteers work involves removing vegetation that obstructs footpaths, plus occasional fitting out of waymark posts, throughout the Vale of White Horse, which encompasses locations from Kennington, Abingdon, Kingston Bagpuize, and Faringdon in the north and west, to Wantage, the Hendreds, Grove, and villages extending as far south as the Ridgeway. They collaborate actively with Oxfordshire County Council's countryside access team. If you would like to join in their exploits, please contact me at patrick.rosam@hotmail.co.uk,

Pat Rosum
Vale Path Volunteers



Members of the Vale Path Volunteers celebrate their 200th task.

Photo: Andy Boyd

Improving the path surface in Worminghall

Thame & Wheatley Group members are a posh lot! Who else would lay carpets before improving a footpath? If you doubt me, take a look at them in their group photo (below), relaxing on rolls of the stuff. Mind you, if you look more closely you'll also see half a dozen big bags of gravel; the floor coverings were there to provide a supporting underlay and weed suppressant.

As Bob Merry, leader of our path maintenance team, said: "This was by far the biggest task we have undertaken, with many hours in the planning and organising, followed by four hard working days to provide a novel low cost accessible pathway on a muddy lane in Worminghall, a few miles west of Thame." The end result was a vegetation clear, free draining, hard gravel surfaced wide path that will be accessible to users all year round.

As Bob reported, "The novel features of this pilot project are the beneficial re-use of a waste product that has excellent long-lasting strength and weed suppression properties for founding an accessible footpath that is manageable by volunteer teams without the need of heavy plant excavators or deep stone sub-base or heavy-duty compactors. The gravel surfacing has self-binding properties that will provide a hard surface following initial light compaction and natural consolidation. The carpet rolls were 4.2 metres wide which were then cut in half and allowed a U-shape to be formed between fence panels to contain the path gravel within the path boundaries. A performance test with an electric wheelchair was conducted three days after path completion and the surface remained firm without cutting up."

This was a pilot project that will be monitored over the coming years for sustainability, particularly in respect of vegetation suppression by the tennis carpet underlay and



Dumping and spreading gravel over the newly-laid tennis carpet. Photo: Bob Merry

the firmness of the gravel surface for small wheeled baby strollers and heavy electric wheelchairs. The final 'as built' cost was a little under £1,500, around £9 per square metre.

Bob acknowledged the support of Peter Hall of ALP Sports Recycling Centre, who provided tennis carpet rolls free of charge; Chris Craggs who provided his time and van free of charge to collect the salvaged tennis carpet from Lincolnshire; and to Worminghall Parish Council for funding of the path gravel; and not least to the tremendous efforts of the path volunteers to complete the vegetation clearance, path preparation, cutting and laying of very heavy tennis carpet, and the hand loading, wheelbarrowing, tipping, spreading and compaction of 20 bags of gravel in only a few days. "The exercise warm-down was conducted via a guest ale at The Clifden Arms!" said Bob.

Dave Cavanagh



Thame & Wheatley Group's path maintenance team at the start of the project to improve the path visible on the left. Photo: Bob Merry



Essex groups partner at Saltmarsh festival

East Essex Friends and Maldon & Dengie groups were delighted to be official partners at the Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival during September and October 2025. The festival, delivered by Maldon District Tourism Group in partnership with Maldon District Council, continues to grow in popularity with participation doubling since the first event in 2023. In 2025 nearly 900 attendees took part in over 35 free guided walks across the Maldon District during the 10-day event and was recognised as one of the UK's top walking festivals by The Observer and featured in BBC Countryfile magazine.

Highlights included guided tours of Northey Island with National Trust experts, RSPB-led walks around the reserves at Wallasea Island and Tollesbury Old Hall Marshes, and special access to Beeleigh Abbey and Creeksea Place for garden tours. Visitors also enjoyed wine tasting and vineyard walks around Purleigh.

Alongside the daytime walks, the festival featured a packed programme of evening

events, including Maldon Ghost Walks, talks on the local brewing history and the town's lost railways. There were also talks by special guests including Julia Bradbury and James Lawrence.

Maldon & Dengie Ramblers have been involved since the first festival, providing walk leaders and routes taken from their back-catalogue. The organisers chose walking routes for their guided walks and others for the self-guided walks on the festival website.

East Essex Friends Ramblers Group got involved for the first time in 2025 and led one of their own five-mile pub walks from Tillingham. Volunteers from the group also led two of the organiser-selected walks around Wickham Bishops and Mundon.

It was a fantastic opportunity for both groups to be part of the local community, meeting other walkers and partners in the festival. Volunteers from both groups attended the closing reception. Everyone agreed the festival had been a great success and looked forward to the 2026 event.

Sharon Brook, East Essex Friends Ramblers and Terry Wood, Maldon & Dengie Ramblers



The East Essex Friends walk from Tillingham.

Photo: Alan Brook

Transforming path maintenance planning

A recent Essex Area Hub call produced a welcome response from members to join the Area's eight path maintenance volunteer teams across the county. The response brought with it a recognition of the importance that our path maintenance teams work efficiently, which means that the Hub is able to identify similar types of tasks in a given geographical area. That's why we have developed the PPA25 website - the latest version of our Parish Paths Adopter system.

Ian Glen, Parish Paths Adopters Coordinator for Essex Ramblers, said: "We're fortunate that Essex Highways is one of perhaps 75 highway authorities in the country which publish their rights of way defect data online. It's a good system as far as it goes, but if you zoomed out by one click the path defect, indicated by a purple diamond, disappeared. Furthermore, we couldn't aggregate the data, even at parish level, so we could not sort by defect type and it was extremely hard to plot a walking route between defects.

Our new website allows work party coordinators to select any parish, or several adjacent parishes, and

filter by defect type like waymarkers, stiles and vegetation. This helps work party coordinators to plan tasks and how to walk between them.

When building our new system, we discovered that a significant number of the defects shown on the Essex Highways' map no longer existed. This might be because contractors didn't flag jobs as completed, officers were not keeping the system updated, or information didn't flow properly from our own work party teams back to the council. Whatever the cause, it meant the data wasn't of great quality. So we built a second tool within PPA25, the 'Path Issue Checker'. This enables volunteers to check whether defects are still there. Parish Paths Adopters can now report their findings to Essex Highways immediately on their smartphones.

Says Ian Glen: "PPA25 turns scattered defect data into actionable work plans and helps keep official records accurate for everyone who uses Essex's 10,000-plus miles of public rights of way. We believe it's a major step forward."

Dave Evans

An epic journey



Bill at John O'Groats.

Idecided 2025 would be the year I'd tackle a long-standing desire to walk from Land's End to John O'Groats using, where possible, many of Britain's stunning national trails. It also gave me the opportunity to raise money for some of the amazing charities who helped save the life of my son who has now, thankfully, been in remission from leukaemia for five years.

As an active walker with Aylesbury Ramblers, I was keen to share my journey with their members. Each week I would post an update with photos on our WhatsApp group, and I was very grateful for their moral support throughout the walk.

Suspected this epic journey; would throw up some interesting challenges, however I hadn't anticipated just how strenuous the initial South West Coast Path would be, and I certainly hadn't bargained for a sprained ankle just five days in!

Aside from meeting some lovely people along the way there were some 'Fawltly Towers' accommodation moments and some close encounters with lively cows but you quickly improve your skills in scrambling over barbed wire fences when required! As for the highlights, Offa's Dyke, the Scottish Borders and the Highlands spring to mind but there were so many more. It's as much a mental challenge as a physical one and walking alone you definitely need to like your own company. I was very fortunate though to have picked one of the driest summers on record!

The final walk into John O'Groats was a special moment I will always remember with over one thousand miles behind me. After the long journey home and a few days of rest and reflection it was lovely to be back rambling again with my local group and sharing more of my experiences.

Bill George
Aylesbury Ramblers

Ephemera

Somehow we never got round to taking that stroll I mentioned in the previous issue based on the Bon Vivreur's Guide to hotels and restaurants in London published in 1955. The idea was to see whether any of the eateries and hotels were still in existence. Highly unlikely, maybe. Looking ahead to the new year, there is plenty of material to get us going, Some of it is rather old and a lot of it new and refreshing although I will be mainly concentrating on the past.

One of the old publications is the Second Series Country Walks published by London Transport in 1954 and which contains 20 walks in south east England ranging from seven to 13 miles, complete with details of the public transport of the time. Rather than throwing this neat little publication out, it must be worth exploring some of the walks to see if they remain in good condition especially as 72 years have passed since they were written..

Another publication was On Foot in the East End Volume II which was published in 1995 and written by Robert Philpotts. It consists of three shortish walks. The author uses timings rather than distances so the Mile End to Three Mills walk takes about two and a quarter hours, the



(Pile of books)

Tower of London to Tobacco Wharf walk takes one and a quarter hours and the Wapping to Canary Wharf walk takes about two hours. In other words, the three walks could be combined and, with a little use of public transport, be easily completed in a day.

Alongside our look at those two publications, we also have a 1998 book titled A Sense of Place: The Best of British Outdoor Writing edited by Roly Smith. This is full of interesting stories by a host of well-known outdoor writers who have shared their experiences. It's certainly a good read but there is one noticeable thing about the content: all of the contributors are men. A little research indicates that things have changed since 1998 and women would certainly be contributing to this kind of book and other walking publications nowadays.

John Pestle

Spring Lane



Looking back, our walk one spring from Limpsfield Common to the water-mill at Oxted was a delight, as was the Barley Mow pub in nearby Tandridge afterwards (other pubs are available, of course)!

*Bluebells have risen early this year--
as if a sunlit sky had fallen
at our feet.*

*We cross a common decked out
with celandines and primroses
in fat clumps;*

*break on oatmeal biscuit
for a piebald pony grazing near the mill,
stare, hypnotised, into the mill-pond.*

*Spring Lane is lush, all trees
and growing things luxuriant
with green and recent rain--*

*we thought its name well chosen
for an April walk. But, no, we learn
it's not for the season*

*but for water-courses in the greensand
that rise in banks to trickle
to the stream below*

*where once the mill-race
poured its River Eden waters
for the grinding of the flour.*

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher

Happy 90th birthday!



Gordon (left) and Roy.

Photo: Roger Spencer

Thirty-six Maidstone Ramblers attended a lunch at The Hook and Hatchet at Hucking on 4 November 2025 to celebrate the birthdays of its two well-loved nonagenarians, Roy Wheatley and Gordon Belcher. The lunch was preceded for some by a five-mile walk.

Roy was born in Clacton but was evacuated to Kidderminster during the Second World War and subsequently lived in Herne Bay. He attended Faversham Grammar School after which he worked for the Meteorological Office. He was involved in early research on nuclear magnetic resonance at the British Coal Utilisation Research Association, then successfully applied for the post of chemistry teacher

at Maidstone Grammar School for Boys, later becoming the departmental head of chemistry. His wife Bobbie was already a teacher and he envied her long holidays! They had numerous holidays with their children in Europe, always involving a Volkswagen campervan.

As a member of Kent Teachers' Mountaineering Association, in the 1970s Roy went with them on an expedition to Morocco's Middle Atlas mountains. When he retired in 1995 Roy started walking with Maidstone Ramblers and subsequently, as a walk leader, led many walks. Apart from rambling, Roy was a keen skier until two years ago and competed in roller hockey all over Europe. Roy still plays badminton every week but is

limited now to short local walks. Gordon was brought up in Yorkshire on the edge of the Peak District national park near the peat moors of the Dark Peak. He started hiking the moors to gain badges in the Scouts. Later, in the holidays, with his wife and son, he climbed Snowdon, Ben Nevis and Scafell Pike, usually in the rain. To avoid the rain he then spent several holidays in the Alps. With help from professional guides he climbed several peaks including the Matterhorn, the Eiger and Mont Blanc. He also walked the Pennine Way with his son, brother and sister. When he retired he joined Maidstone Ramblers to prepare for a walk from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Initially he found the pace set by Maidstone Ramblers to be rather fast before lunch whereas after lunch the pace was more leisurely. He enjoys the company of the Ramblers and exploring many parts of Kent he has never seen before.

Apart from walking with us, Gordon sails a laser dinghy on the Medway and cycled with a keen cyclist friend from Maidstone Ramblers from Land's End to John o'Groats.. In earlier days he ran a few marathons including those in Thanet, Maidstone and London.

All attendees had an enjoyable lunch and shared many memories with both Roy and Gordon. They are an example to us all and a great advertisement for the physical and social benefits of belonging to the Ramblers!

Bob Buist
Maidstone Ramblers



BERKSHIRE bites

Thanks Rob

Our Chair, Rob Cameron, stepped down at the AGM on 22 November 2025 following a total of 23 years with the group to move out of the county. Having first joined Berkshire Walkers 20s-30s in 2002, alongside three others in 2012 he helped form the Berkshire Weekend Walkers to bridge a gap, specifically for working age members in their 40s and focussed on weekend walking. This has remained a thriving, friendly and welcoming group, suiting the needs of many.

Rob has chaired and served on committee for most of this time in a number of positions, often

several at once! He's represented us at Area, is a walk leader and our website creator and administrator. Passionate for walking and the group, he's worked tirelessly in many roles. At the AGM we were able to show our appreciation by organising photo boards and a thank you card capturing his time with the group. He was presented with a monetary gift, a keepsake special edition Lego hiker, mouse-mat and gift. Following tea and cakes we moved to a local pub for a buffet and drinks, attended by past and present members, and finished off a momentous day.

Rob and partner Emma, also a member, will be very much missed. We wish them well for the future and once settled look forward



Rob Cameron.

to a group ramble in Wiltshire!

Kathy Dunmore
Berkshire Weekend Walkers

Major improvements to Thameside path

Loddon Valley Ramblers have undertaken major improvements to the surface of a Thameside path near Sonning. The path runs eastwards from the village towards Charvil along the south bank of the river. (It is not the Thames Path National Trail which runs on the north bank). The surface had deteriorated to the point that thick mud made it impassable in winter and in wet weather. Loddon Valley Ramblers applied successfully for funding for resurfacing material from the Ramblers Path Accessibility Fund.

In September a working party of 20 volunteers, led by project manager Ray Sharp, worked on two separate days, often in challenging weather conditions, to lay 20 tons of crushed concrete and 40 tons of road shavings to resurface the path. The result is a major improvement to the path over a distance of more than one kilometre.

The resurfacing restores access to an attractive path along the river, and means that there are again pleasant and accessible circular routes from the village. The local residents were impressed by and grateful for the works, so much so that some of them came

out to lend the volunteers a hand.

Thanks are due to the University of Reading for enabling access so that the materials could be transported across their fields to the site. Thanks also to the Ramblers for funding the project. But most of all to Ray and the team for completing one of the biggest projects the group has taken on in recent times.

Helen Bates, Path improvement Lead at the Ramblers noted: "Loddon Valley Ramblers put in a huge amount of time and effort to plan this project and it has been a tremendous success. This funding came from a donation by East Berks Ramblers to the Path Accessibility Fund (see more about this on page 2, 'Supporting the Path Accessibility Fund')."

Councillor Katrin Harding, executive member for Environment and Climate at Wokingham Borough Council said: "We're incredibly grateful to Loddon Valley Ramblers for their hard work and dedication. With around 145 miles of public rights of way across the borough, the support of local volunteers is vital in helping us protect and improve these important, much loved routes for everyone."

Steve Vale

Loddon Valley Ramblers



Sonning Footpath 1 before the work.

Photos: Steve Vale



...and after.



Some of the team members.



Weston Turville's big day



Peter Smith and Joshua Hilbocus at one of the two timber kissing gates.

Photo: Bill Piers

A couple of miles southeast of Aylesbury, Weston Turville boasts a wealth of walkable footpaths, which North Bucks rRIPPLE has steadily improved over the last few years by replacing dilapidated stiles with pedestrian gates. Our latest push involved 10 such installations carried out in quick succession over last summer. Reasons for haste were the parish council's

intended purchase of a large green space in the centre of the village for recreation, allotments and a community orchard, to be made secure against two-wheeled joyriders -plus the temporary availability of young, fit and very strong local resident Josh Hilbocus, all attributes that left us years ago! Josh was completing his A-Levels and awaiting acceptance on an engineering apprenticeship.

His enthusiasm, assistance in identifying affected landowners and site surveys enabled our intense programme.

Starting with demolishing five broken stiles and gates in one day, replacements ranged from metal pedestrian gates to custom-built wooden kissing gates. The underlying soil in Weston Turville is compacted alluvial gravel, which often proved impossible to dig with our usual spades and spoons, so our trusty digging bar, aka 'Doom Bar', was essential, holding our two-stroke jack hammer in reserve. Even a waymarker post took us more than two hours to install!

Other odd jobs to improve local paths involved removing extensive half-buried barbed wire, chain sawing low overhanging branches, plus the inevitable removal of carelessly discarded litter. Local residents and walkers were very supportive, with one gifting a gate next to her house in memory of her husband and another who intends to enlist neighbours to jointly fund their nearest gate. These donations will supplement the parish council's budget - just the sort of community involvement we like to encourage.

Bill Piers

North Bucks rRIPPLE

North Bucks rRIPPLE (ramblers Repairing and Improving Public Paths for Leisure and Exercise) - for details of the group's Donate-a-Gate scheme go to www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html.



A dilapidated timber kissing gate prior to removal and replacement with a steel pedestrian gate.

Photo: Bill Piers

Those we have lost

Malcolm Morse 1941 - 2025

It was with great sadness that we announced the death of our prolific walk leader Malcolm Morse. Malcolm had a spell in hospital during July and after being released on 1 August he was very optimistic and enthusiastic about getting himself fit and back to walking and leading again for Farnham & District Ramblers. Sadly, this was not to be and he was readmitted to hospital again in mid-August before he passed away on 31 August 2025.

After retirement in the 1990s Malcolm was able to devote more time to walking, especially as he had always had dogs and, as he often said, 'dogs always need plenty of exercise'. Malcolm then joined Farnham & District Ramblers in June 2002 and almost immediately volunteered to become one of our regular walk leaders. His very first walk as a leader was from Frensham Great Pond and his last was on 18 July 2025 in the Ash Vale area. Malcolm's love of walking was clear to see and hear and he showed great knowledge of the countryside and the history of the area where we walk and we were lucky enough to enjoy plenty of his fascinating stories and anecdotes as he led us on his many walks.

In the spring of 2018, Malcolm's health was suffering to such an extent that he decided it was time to 'hang up his walk leader's boots', although he was still hoping to continue walking with the group when his health allowed. He was dubbed 'The Man of a Thousand Walks' and Farnham Ramblers celebrated this amazing achievement by sponsoring and erecting a kissing gate with a plaque with his name on one of the footpaths in Tongham where he lived. This was celebrated



Gordon (left) and Roy.

with an evening walk and an official opening ceremony for the gate, with Malcolm as the guest of honour.

As is often said, you can't keep a good man down and although Malcolm suffered some serious and often debilitating bouts of illness from 2018 and in Covid times when he had to shield and was often hospitalised, by 2022 and normality was returning post Covid, Malcolm decided he would like to take up walk leading again for the group. This decision was due in part to his mental health, as Malcolm had always been very frank and honest about the serious bouts of depression he suffered from and was a staunch advocate for the benefits that walking, nature and being outdoors brought to his wellbeing. Between May 2023 and July 2025 Malcolm

notched up close to 300 more walk leading days for the group (and probably quite a few more for the local Aldershot walking club where he was also a member and leader).

There was no funeral or wake following Malcolm's death so the group is planning a memorial walk and get-together in his memory on Friday 24 April for those of us who wish to remember his friendship, his stories and anecdotes (some of which were told with a twinkle in the eye, so there may have been one or two 'tall tales' included). Most of all we will remember him as a very kind, humble and proudly independent man and we thank him for his loyal contribution to the group.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

Photo: Roger Spencer

Robin Setchell 1947 - 2025

It was with great sadness that the Ivel Valley group learnt of the death of Robin Setchell on 3 August 2025 at the age of 78 after a long battle with prostate cancer. Robin was the founder of the group and a former Chairman.

There is some dispute over the exact date when the group was formed but what is known is that Robin wanted to replicate the walking he had enjoyed with Huntingdon group before he moved to Biggleswade. He put together a programme of walks in the autumn of 1984 and led them all until early 1985 by which time it was possible to form a committee.

Robin was the group's Chairman from 1984 to 1991 and from 1992 to 1996 and during his tenure many of the features of the group were developed such as Sunday walks alternating with a full day and two half day walks, coach trips in the spring and autumn, weekends away, social events such as barn dances and Christmas sherry rambles. Robin did a spell as Publicity Secretary from 1998 to 2003



Robin cuts the cake at the group's 25th anniversary gathering in 2009.
Photo: Barry Ingram

before leaving the committee.

Robin was an interesting man with a variety of interests. He was knowledgeable about the countryside, both in Bedfordshire and further afield. He was also keen to protect rights of way and gained a reputation for tackling ploughed cross-field paths in the middle of winter! He was a lover of real ale and often chose a pub for the Sunday lunchtime stop on a walk accordingly.

When he had a pint or two he could be very good company! He was very forthright in his views and not afraid to express them. Unfortunately, this led him to sever his ties with the group after leaving the committee.

The group committee sends their condolences to his wife Ann, his children Becky and Lawrence and two grandchildren.

Tony Sheward
Ivel Valley
Walkers

Geoff Watts

Geoff Watts, who died suddenly in April last year, was a long-time Chelmer & Blackwater Group walk leader and our Treasurer for five years. He was always positive and helpful and we will miss him.

In September, we held a special walking day in Geoff's memory, centred on the Compasses Inn at Little Green. Participants could choose from three circular routes based on the 'Ridley Round' - a 14-mile trail linking former Ridley's pubs in the countryside

north of Chelmsford. Geoff, who always appreciated a pint on a walk, would have approved of the theme.

The Compasses, run by Joss Ridley of the brewing family, kindly provided parking and even opened early so we could gather there after the walks. Our respected member Andrew Bell gave a warm, witty, and poignant tribute, and together we raised a glass to celebrate our great friend, Geoff.

Peter Jepson
Chelmer & Blackwater
Ramblers



Geoff Watts, photographed in 2022 on a recce for a group holiday in Carmarthen.

Photo: Sue Hiller



Area AGM

The Bedfordshire Area Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 28 February at Husborne Crawley Reading Room. The programme for the day includes a six-mile circular walk starting at 10.00am from the Reading Room.

returning in time for lunch and a further opportunity to chat to fellow members. The business meeting will start at 1.30pm. We are delighted that Ramblers trustee, Joerg Kasproski, will join us for the entire day. Members of all four Bedfordshire Ramblers groups are invited to attend. Please come along and make this event a success.

Wow, what a success!

The Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks 2025 proved to be an unbounded success. Firstly, we had huge support from the four Bedfordshire Ramblers groups and on top of the 35 walks they put on, we welcomed Ramblers groups from beyond the county border. These included Wellingborough Ramblers, Stag Walkers, Hunts Ramblers and North Hertfordshire Ramblers who also contributed walks to the programme.

There were also walks offered by other organisations including Wellbeing Walks, Forest of Marston Vale, U3A, Parish Walking and Wildlife, Bedford tour guides, Bedford Rambling Club, Social Walks, Higham Ferrers Footpath Group, Dunstable District Walking and Hostelling Group - The Bogtrotters, Friends of Bedford Cemetery, Toddington Rambling Club, Mindfulness and Massage and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. We also had a walk and boat trip with the John Bunyan Community Boat. Sadly, the Bedfordshire Bat Group's walk was rained off. In total there were 74 walks with 1,066 walkers over the nine days of the event. Finally, what would our festival be without



The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Mrs Susan Lousada (in black), was just one of the invited guests who participated in the festival. Photo: Jo Williams

a navigation course run by Nick Markham and the Greensand Ridge Challenge event (40 miles over two days) organised by Ivel Valley Walkers.

We were also able to welcome a number of invited dignitaries including the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, the Chair and Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, plus three other councillors.

All in all, it was a massive team effort with a number of shared interest groups which allowed us to share our beautiful unsung county with as many people as possible and get more people out walking. Thank you to all who contributed. See you in 2026!

Sandra Kelsey
Area Publicity Officer



Smiling faces at the Greensand Ridge Challenge.

Photo: Julian Chritchlow

First aid training

Bedfordshire area held a first aid training/ refresher session on 20 September 2025. The event was hosted by North Bedfordshire Ramblers at Husborne Crawley on behalf of the Area, with 20 places available. The course was fully subscribed and proved to be very enjoyable.

Our trainer was Natasha Green who is a trained paramedic and first responder. The topics for the day were 'minor injuries, fits, faints and funny turns'. We

also had the 'Annies' to allow a rerun of CPR and finally an opportunity to try a choke vest. There was plenty of hands-on practice and we had the chance to bandage and strap up our fellow attendees' imaginary injuries.

Thanks to Natasha for an informative and useful three hours and to Clive Pattle, our Safety Officer, for organising the event. The session was followed by North Beds Ramblers regular afternoon walk led by Steve Woodward - as always, a team effort.

Sandra Kelsey
Area Publicity Officer

Twenty five kilometres of path improved

Our RIPPLE volunteers spent just over 400 hours improving Bedfordshire's rights of way between January and the end of November 2025. At the minimum hourly wage of £12.21, the value to the councils was around £5,000 but as a number of the volunteers have qualifications in brush-cutting and hedge-cutting and could be classed as skilled workers, the value when they are included would be much higher.

During the year we saw several

long-serving members hang up their tools and one moved to the south coast, but we were pleased to welcome some new and much younger replacements enabling larger tasks to be carried out much more quickly. To those who retired, thank you for all the time you gave us and for your valuable contributions. Welcome to our new volunteers and thank you for the sterling work you have done so far. I look forward to seeing you all again in 2026.

The work done by our volunteers in 2025 included installing waymark

posts, clearing trees and shrubs, cutting surfaces and vegetation, improving the height and width of paths, adding additional waymark discs, replacing handrails and checking the condition of paths.

It is estimated that our RIPPLE volunteers improved 25,000 metres, equal to 55km or 18 miles of paths during the year. This was a tremendous achievement and we have received big thank yous from parish councils, horse riders, dog walkers and others.

Barry Ingram

North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail

This 70-mile trail, originally devised and waymarked by the late Gordon Edwards, has recently been re-signed and improved by volunteers. Organised by Roy Carter, Membership Secretary of Ivel Valley Walkers, volunteers from Ivel Valley Walkers, North Beds Ramblers, and our RIPPLE group, did a 'Walk-and-Fix' across the whole trail. Clearing vegetation at gates and around waymark posts, replacing and/or adding signage where necessary and reporting missing waymark posts. The trail has also been extended into the very northernmost parts of Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council has agreed new signage for the start and finish of the route in St Paul's Square in Bedford.

The circular trail covers some of the most picturesque parts of north Bedfordshire as well as historic villages and the River Great Ouse before straying just over the boundary

into parts of Central Bedfordshire. It is intended to publish a guide to the trail, showing how it can be walked in stages using public transport, enabling more people to walk the route.

Barry Ingram



Trail sign.

Photo: Barry Ingram

Ouse Valley Way

The Ouse Valley Way is a long distance trail of 160 miles (CHECK) starting from its source near Buckingham and ending at The Wash. The Bedfordshire section starts at Turvey Bridge and meanders its way through Carlton, Harrold, Odell, Felmersham, Sharnbrook, Bletsoe, Milton Ernest, Oakley, Pavenham, Stevington, Clapham, Bromham, Kempston, Great Denham, Bedford, Willington, Great Barford, Roxton, Chawston and Wyboston before crossing into Cambridgeshire at Eaton Socon.

Currently the route is closed between Stevington and Pavenham at Stevington/Pavenham Marshes where the path is impassable because of the springs, and erosion of the path (this section is also part of the John Bunyan Trail). The cost to put in some form of permanent boardwalk for approximately 100 yards has been estimated at over £400,000. Despite the cost for

which Bedford Borough Council has understandably said they cannot afford, certain parties have said they believe they could raise some monies for some form of boardwalk which could lead to the reopening of the path but not until 2028. The obvious and most realistic solution is to divert the path but there is a reluctance by individuals to allow this. A diversion would be the cheapest and more permanent solution and enable the path to be reopened sooner.

Towards Roxton (at grid ref TL 148 536) the bank is eroding and the path is very narrow with the River Great Ouse on one side and a pond on the other. On the eastern side of Roxton the original route went away from the river through Chawston and Wybioston to reach Eaton Socon. With the building of a flyover and access roads at the Black Cat roundabout it was hoped that funding could be obtained to enable the route of the trail to go along the east side of the river towards Little Barford and St Neots. The government

then approved a plan to build 10,000 houses at Tempsford plus a new railway station for the East-West rail link and ordered National Highways to divert funds to provide cycle routes to the new station. So whether the river route will be achieved is now anyone's guess.

With the amount of building development including houses and solar farms there should be opportunities to improve the Ouse Valley Way (which should really have been named the Great Ouse Valley Way). If anyone has any thoughts and ideas for improvements please contact me at barry.ingram74@btinternet.com.

Barry Ingram



Ouse Valley Way sign. Photo: Barry Ingram

Wish you were here?

Madeira

Eleven Croydon Ramblers flew out to Madeira last July for a holiday walking some levada paths. We stayed in five different hotels as we walked around the island and enjoyed some stunning views. A holiday company provided the walk details via an app sent to our phones (mine didn't work) and we invited a lone German girl who was doing the same thing to join us. As usual, we took it in turn to lead each



Ready to walk the levada.

Photo: John Tickner

day using the app. The holiday was organised for us by Ann Toomey who certainly got our vote of thanks

for working tirelessly on our behalf. John Tickner Croydon Ramblers

Dunster, Somerset



At Dunkery Beacon.

Photo: John Wood

About 30 of us travelled to Dunster in mid-October 2025 for a walking holiday based at the Yarn Market Hotel which is next to the historic Yarn Market building. On the first morning, Mark (a member of the hotel staff) took us

for an informative stroll around Dunster. Then, after lunch, John and Stewart each led a walk into the surrounding countryside during which some of us climbed to Bat's Castle, a site of prehistoric settlement with views across the Bristol Channel.

The second day's longer walk was led by John, down to the beach and along the coast path before returning to Dunster by fieldpaths and through the castle grounds. Mark led a shorter walk and shared his extensive knowledge of the area. On the third day John led a party up to Dunkery Beacon, the highest part of Exmoor while Stewart led a walk from the cliff top near Porlock down into the village and returning via a beautiful wooded valley. Meanwhile Ann and Jenny led a gentle walk along the coast to Minehead. Some chose to return by bus in order to explore more of Dunster while others chose to explore Minehead. Thanks are due to Ann and Jenny for organising the trip, to Ann, Jenny and Julie for providing quizzes to entertain us in the evenings, to John and Stewart for leading walks and to the hotel staff for looking after us. David Newman Epsom & Ewell Ramblers

Worcester

In early August 2025 a party of 27 had a week's holiday with six day's walking based in comfortable self-catering accommodation on the St John's campus of Worcester University, although rather than eating in most preferred to have their evening meals in restaurants in the city centre, a pleasant half-hour's walk away. The weather throughout was perfect - not too hot, dry and mainly sunny - and our walks, led by members of the party without the benefit of a reconnaissance, took in as much as possible of this geologically and architecturally rich part of England. The first day's moderate-distance walk followed the Wild About Worcester Way through green spaces on the outskirts of the city, while the short-distance walk concentrated on the historic central area and included a guided tour of the cathedral. Over the following days our



Some of the party at Clent Hill toposcope.

Photo: Jane Rosoux

walks included Pershore to Evesham through the Vale of Evesham, along the Geopark Way from Colwall to Ledbury, from Worcestershire Parkway to Pershore, the Malvern Hills from Colwall Link to take in the views from Worcestershire Beacon (425m) and British Camp (Herefordshire Beacon). On the penultimate day there was another hilly walk from Hagley to Barnt Green along the ridges of the Clent and Lickey Hills,

whilst the short distance walkers followed a Worcestershire Rail Trail from Kidderminster to Hagley. The final day's walk aimed to follow the Three Choirs Way from Malvern Link back into Worcester. However a locked gate and frisky bullocks delayed our progress though fortunately we managed to reach Worcester Cathedral in time for choral evensong. Jane Rosoux Hampstead Ramblers

Brittany

Brittany - land of lore and legend, woods and sea. We experienced spectacular coastal walks, and enjoyed interesting meals both in our self-catering house and in local restaurants overlooking Paimpol's harbour.

The rocky undulating paths along the GR34, the Sentier des Douaniers, a route created in 1791 for customs officers, gave us wonderful coastal views. On one walk we followed the Shelburne Escape Line down to Bonaparte Beach, used by the French Resistance to rescue Allied airmen. We stopped at moving memorials - not only to the men who risked their lives, but also to the women who lived in constant anxiety under the threat of the occupying enemy. We took a boat trip around the Brehat archipelago, with its amazing rock formations, before landing and walking to the Phare de Paon, where we had the windiest, wettest picnic of the week. Cars are not permitted on this wild, windswept island,

home to protected flora and fauna. We visited Pontrieux, where 50 lavoirs (washhouses) were built along the riverbanks for the poor to launder the dirty linen from the local grand houses. A visit to the medieval Chateau de la Roche-Jagu, with its sweeping views of the river below, included an exhibition of First Nations artefacts, detailing the culture of indigenous North American tribes. We visited the ruins of Beauport Abbey, where pilgrims would gather before setting off on the Camino de Santiago. We explored the wonderful gothic architecture of Treguier Cathedral and Saint-Malo's imposing Cathedrale Saint-Vincent, which was largely rebuilt after devastating war damage. On our last night we were treated to a special meal prepared by a talented young chef. He came to our house and cooked a delicious three-course dinner, a perfect finale to a wonderful week. Thanks to the drivers, shoppers, walk leaders, meal providers and washer-uppers, but especially to our organiser Cyndy! Glen Teasdale Henley & Goring Ramblers



The end of the Shelburne Escape Line, the tunnel leading to the pick-up point for Allied airmen rescued by the French Resistance during World War Two. Photo: Joan Clark

Marlborough, Wiltshire

Last autumn, Hillingdon Ramblers had a three-day walking break at Marlborough. Expecting heavy rain and the arrival of Storm Benjamin, we packed for all eventualities though only the final afternoon put our rain gear to the test.

Our first walking day was led by Rob Jones-Owen from Bradbury Hill in west Oxfordshire and included a visit to the National Trust's barn at Great Coxwell, a magnificent 13th century building. The second and third days were more around Marlborough with walks led by Barbara Macdonald. We enjoyed frequent sunshine on our day walking around Avebury with its stone circles, some as old as Stonehenge itself. We also walked past the mysterious Silbury Hill, the second tallest prehistoric man-made mound in Europe, and

explored the West Kennet Long Barrow, a Neolithic burial site. On our final day's walk from Hungerford to Marlborough we had a morning coffee stop at the Warner Hotel at Littlecote House, a truly impressive place with the well-preserved remains of a Roman villa in the garden. As the final afternoon progressed, Storm Benjamin came to visit us and blustery winds and heavy rain tested our metal and our clothing. Despite this the autumn colours were stunning and we thanked Barbara and Rob for arranging this holiday for us. The meals at the Premier Inn had been particularly good so none of us went home having lost any weight even though we had each clocked up almost 100,000 steps over the three days! Simon Thornhill Hillingdon Ramblers



Passing Silbury Hill.

Photo: Simon Thornhill

Buxton, Derbyshire

When the date for our Buxton weekend was agreed in April there was no reason to suspect that the October weekend chosen would be that of Storm Amy, the first named storm of the season, bringing heavy rain and strong winds to the north of England. Nine intrepid souls arrived on Friday afternoon for the planned first activity, a stroll around the town looking at points of interest. This took place in really heavy rain, but luckily Buxton does have a lot of covered arcades and canopies!

Saturday morning's walk was judged to be do-able because it was along the Goyt Valley. What had not been expected was the ferocious wind that faced us when we got off the bus and headed down the valley. It was only when we were down by Fernilee Reservoir that the wind abated. The proposed picnic was abandoned and we diverted for an excellent pub lunch. The afternoon walk took us along the Peak Forest Canal to Bugsworth, then over a windy ridge back to Whaley



A wet and windy weekend. Photo: John Spokes

Bridge via the remains of the Cromford and High Peak Railway. Our Sunday walk was to be along an exposed ridge and although the rain wasn't quite as intense, the wind was still ferocious, so we walked from Buxton over the golf course and followed the 'Ring of Trees', a walk created by Buxton Civic Association linking several woodlands. After lunch in the Pavilion Gardens, the afternoon walk (for those staying on) took us on a loop passing an early home of the author Vera Brittain. An excellent Thai meal and pub crawl on Sunday evening rounded off a wet and windy, but enjoyable, weekend. Chris Ellis

Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Selworthy, Somerset

In August, 17 enthusiastic ramblers gathered at the charming HF Holnicote House Hotel in Selworthy, in the Exmoor National Park. Over the course of seven energetic days, the group embarked on 13 self-guided walks, embracing the full spectrum of Exmoor's natural beauty. HF Holnicote House Hotel proved to be an ideal base. Set in tranquil grounds with views of the surrounding hills, it offered

comfortable accommodation, hearty meals and a welcoming atmosphere. The evenings were spent enjoying skittles, quiz nights and even a bell ringing night where the visiting CEO of HF Holidays took part. As the week drew to a close, the group left with tired legs and a shared appreciation of the landscapes that make Exmoor such a treasured destination for walkers. Rob Tomlinson

Mole Valley Ramblers



On Exmoor. Photo: Christine Gittings

Tuscany, Italy



The group at Lerici.

The beachside resort of Marina di Pietrasanta in Tuscany was our base for a wonderful week of walking and sightseeing in September 2025. Three walks were led by Stefano, the local

guide from Involved Holidays, and included a circular walk around the medieval Nozzano Castle before exploring Lucca, a hilly walk through olive groves from the picturesque village of Calci in the serene

Gracious Valley, and a walk from the maritime village of Tellaro on the Gulf of Poets ending at Lerici with its 12th century castle.

A walking tour of Florence by a specialist guide was enjoyed by all. Our Chair, Alan Lander, also led a walk from the town of Viareggio along forest paths to its beautiful sandy beach. Some ramblers visited Pisa to climb the tower on the free day. Linda Thrift

Staines Ramblers

Peak District

At the end of September 2025, 24 North Bedfordshire members headed north to the Peak District for a long weekend of walking, laughter and cake.

We kicked things off on Friday afternoon with a short but steep walk from Cromford. The climb was worth it as spectacular views over the valley greeted us before we descended along an old railway line to the heritage centre where we bumped into a walker from our county. After a friendly chat we looped back to Cromford, legs stretched and spirits high. Saturday's main walk began at the Longshaw Estate. We took the high route along the Burbage Rocks, then circled round to Stanage Edge and down to Surprise View for lunch. Even though our ginger biscuit maker Cherrie couldn't join us, she'd sent biscuits along. Barbara, Linda, Julia and Clive also kept us sweet with plenty of cake over the weekend. We descended into Padley Gorge and followed the river to Nether Padley and climbed to Jubilee Rock before heading back to Longshaw. It was a proper Peak District day with wind in the hair, crumbs on the fingers and smiles all round.



Another peak conquered! Photo: Paul Goss

Sunday's start was near Youlgreave where we followed the Limestone Way into Bradford Dale and on to Alport. There we picked up the River Lathkill and Lathkill Dale to Cales Dale where 170 stone steps tested our legs. At the top we paused for breath and admired the views. It was then an easy stroll back to our start point. For our final day, both walking options started at Rowsley. The first few miles were shared before we split, some taking a gentle route while the rest climbed to explore Stanton Moor. Up there we visited the Nine Ladies stone circle, said to be women turned to stone for dancing on a Sunday. Luckily,

our own ladies danced around the stones on a Monday, so all's well! Our evenings were as enjoyable as the walks. Thanks to Sandra and Clive's superb organisation we shared lovely meals together on the three nights. Saturday even included Anne's quiz which sparked plenty of laughter (and just a touch of friendly competition). It was a fantastic weekend with beautiful walks, great company and plenty of cake. A big thank you to Steve for planning and leading the walks and to everyone who helped make this such a memorable few days. Paul Goss

North Beds Ramblers

Coniston, Cumbria



Lunch by Coniston Water. Photo: Syd Mephram

Thirty-seven SABRE members travelled to the Lake District in September 2025 for our annual group holiday, staying at the HF Monk Coniston House. Our first day was spent exploring the picturesque Tarn Hows, the Coppermine Valley, and the summit of Wetherlam. The scramble to the top was a bit harder than we expected but provided good practice for some scrambling later in the week! Walking back through Coniston meant a trip to the cafes and pubs plus a visit to see the restored Bluebird jet-hydroplane which returned here in 2024. After dinner we enjoyed killer skittles in

the barn with lots of cheering and good-natured banter. The inclement weather on Sunday was a good opportunity to explore the Rydal Caves, including the impressive Cathedral Cave. Eight of us braved Red Screes with a slight variation to the walk due to the heavy rain and winds, followed by a rapid descent to Ambleside. Sunny weather on our free day was perfect for exploring the local area with many enjoying a boat trip on Coniston Water while others had fun further afield. A few of us ventured over the Hardknott Pass to the Eskdale Valley and a challenging ascent of Mickledore, between Scafell and Scafell Pike, while lots of us climbed Coniston Old Man and Dow Crag. An ice cream van at the end of the descent was an unexpected treat! Luck was on our side for a day of walking in the Langdale Valley. We were able to enjoy views of Blea Tarn and Lingmoor Fell. Four of us enjoyed the almost two-hour scramble across Crinkle Crag. As the cloud was covering Bow Fell we decided to head back down to join our fellow walkers in the Stickle Barn to dry out over a variety of drinks. Our final day started from Grasmere in the pouring rain! Some very sensibly opted not to walk, while the rest of us headed up Helm Crag. Thankfully, a few dry spells and high winds dried us between the showers and we enjoyed amazing views. Our final evening ended with a game of curling in the barn - no ice or brushes needed! Clair Baynton

Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE)

Warwick

Surrey Heath Ramblers embarked on a delightful three-day getaway to Warwick in September, combining gentle walks with cultural discovery. The trip began with a scenic stroll from Warwick Racecourse, continuing along the Grand Union Canal to Hatton Locks, followed by a hearty evening dinner at the historic Tilted Wig

pub (no wigs were required!). The next day featured a relaxed circular walk around Warwick, with time to admire its medieval architecture and charming streets. That evening the group enjoyed tasty Thai cuisine along with good banter, which lit up the evening at the Giggling Squid restaurant. On the final day the group enjoyed the countryside around Stratford-upon-Avon, walking the disused railway track known as the Stratford Greenway, additionally stopping briefly at Holy



At Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo: Paul Seidman

Trinity Church - Shakespeare's resting place - before heading home refreshed and inspired. Veronica Wells

Surrey Heath Ramblers

Heythrop Park, Oxfordshire

Woking Ramblers enjoyed a luxurious long weekend in the Cotswolds last August when 25 of us stayed at Heythrop Park, near Chipping Norton. The weekend got going mid-afternoon on Friday which meant we could schedule two days of walking. On Saturday and Sunday there were two walks of different lengths. On Monday a choice of shorter walks was offered around Blenheim Park for those interested in visiting the home of the Duke of Marlborough. When not walking the group enjoyed delicious three-course meals, a luxurious spa, and a choice of evening entertainment. We are now planning our next weekend trip for September this year when we will be heading to another Warner hotel, this time at Studley in Warwickshire. You can find out more about our events at ramblers.org/woking.

Katherine Montgomery
Woking Ramblers



Outside the Heythrop House Hotel.

Photo: Robert Fell

Emsworth, West Sussex

Thirty-nine ramblers assembled at The Ropemaker for a wonderful walking and sightseeing holiday organised by Cyndy Gray (with much help from Jacqueline and Colin Calcutt who moved to the Chichester area from Marlow about five years ago). The Ropemaker is part of the Brasserie Blanc chain, implying superior gastro meals. Most agreed that the food was excellent with special praise going to the cheese and dessert souffles. The hotel is ideally situated on the A259 between

Portsmouth and Chichester with a bus stop outside and a frequent service to the starting points on the programme.

The group had the choice of three outings each day. These might include an eight-mile circular walk around Thorney island, a five-mile walk along the Centurion Way with a bus back to Chichester, or a seven-mile walk with breathtaking views along the South Downs Way and padst the Devil's Jump. Many enjoyed some retail therapy and a taste of history in Chichester itself, walking along the Roman walls, marvelling at the treasures in the cathedral or visiting

the Novium Museum. A group took the train to Arundel where they were met by Martin, a retired postman, who offered unique insights into the town's history.

To round off the holiday, there was a five-mile walk and climb to the iconic Halnaker Windmill. The walk passed the 12th-century Boxgrove priory and the Tinwood vineyards. After lunch at the Anglesey Arms on the Goodwood Estate, everyone thanked Cyndy and her helpmate Lauren, and Jacqueline and Colin for the holiday during which even the October weather stayed warm and sunny.

Lyn Taylor
Henley & Goring Ramblers



Henley & Goring group on a walk near Chichester.

Photo: Robin John

Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Spain

After walking the St James' Way in 2024, 13 Henley & Goring members decided to complete the pilgrimage in September and October 2025 along the English Way or Camino Ingles to Santiago de Compostela. As we were a largish group we enlisted the help of The Natural Adventure company to arrange accommodation and transport our luggage along the way.

We spent a day in Santiago before catching a bus to Ferrol, from where we had an easy stroll along the banks of the Ferrol estuary, through a largely urban landscape with occasional bays and beaches to Neda. Here we enjoyed a stay in a beautiful restored 14th-century monastery and had one of the best meals of the trip. Throughout the week we were treated to tortilla and paella and other Gakician specialities, though eating an evening meal after 8.30pm took some getting used to and some of us opted to have picnics in our rooms instead. We had our Camino passports stamped in Ferrol and at cafes, churches, hotels and bars along the way - two stamps per day are needed to qualify for a certificate at the end of the walk.

The second day's walk from Neda was a fairly easy ramble to the lovely town of Pontedurne through quiet country lanes and woodland dappled with autumn colours. The next two days were more challenging as we reached the longer uphill sections from Pontedurne

to Betanzos and on to As Trevasas. We made regular rest stops however to visit cafes and churches along the way and to soak up the views. At every stage we looked out for the characteristic Camino obelisks with their scallop shells, yellow arrows and signs counting down the distance to Santiago.

The walk from As Trevasas to Ordes was a mercifully short and easy downhill section along quiet roads and dripping woods in steady rain. We were grateful for the early check-in at the hotel to rest and dry off! Our penultimate day from Ordes to Sigüeiro was relatively flat walking along roads and lanes, with diversions through golden beech and aromatic eucalyptus forest. Everyone we met made us feel welcome and even on a quiet day we were greeted with 'Buen Camino' by locals and other pilgrims.

On the last day we completed our pilgrimage at Santiago de Compostela. Having started together, we arrived together as a group in the main cathedral square in early afternoon sunshine, accompanied by a bagpiper! We handed in our passports and were given our certificates, then we celebrated in a local cafe. The following day we attended the pilgrim's mass in the cathedral.

It was a truly special and memorable experience that we shared with hundreds of other pilgrims from around the world.

Catherine Ewart
Henley & Goring Ramblers



At the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela at the end of the pilgrimage.

Around the groups

Walking the Broomway



Walking on water.

Photo: Fiona Lau

Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers have completed some interesting walks in their history but walking on water is probably our most amazing accomplishment so far!

It began when one of our members, Lorraine, spotted the Broomway on a map. Keen to do the walk, but wanting to share the experience with her walking friends, she added it to our September 2025 walking programme. In consultation with 'Thames Estuary Man', Lorraine organised the walk and sent out information (and some dire warnings) for those of us brave enough to sign up.

The Broomway is a unique path connecting Foulness Island to the mainland near Great Wakering, Essex. The path stretches across the Maplin Sands when the tide is out and was once the only way for road vehicles to get on and off Foulness Island. A guide is necessary because it's a Ministry of Defence testing site, there are areas of soft mud, the tide comes in quickly, and visibility can suddenly deteriorate.

Not without reason has it been called 'the deadliest path in Britain'.

Despite all this, at 3.30pm on Saturday 6 September 2025, 27 of us met on Wakering Stairs, suitably clad and ready to go. We walked out to sea and then headed to Foulness Island for a picnic tea (and a wild wee or two), before walking - well, pretty much paddling - all the way back to Wakering, a distance of about seven miles, in four hours. We saw crabs, a marsh harrier, a shipwreck and a (what we hoped was redundant) defence weapon.

It was quite a tiring slog through water, soft sand, and mud, but on our return we were rewarded with views of a stunning sunset and a magnificent full moon. We could also say that we'd completed the most dangerous path in Britain and walked on water! Thanks to Thames Estuary Man.

Fiona Lau

Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers
For more information on
Thames Estuary Man, go
to thamesestuaryman.co.uk

Walking for charity

It has become something of a tradition for Croydon Ramblers to organise a walk to raise awareness of, and boost funds for, a charity chosen by one of our members. Last year, the selected organisation was the South East Cancer Help Centre in Purley.

On a glorious autumn day, 48 members assembled at Chipstead together with a member of the centre's staff and a former user

of their services. Twenty-eight walkers completed an undulating walk of 10 miles, while 20 opted for one of six miles. We were blessed with warm sunshine all day and enjoyed the beautiful autumn colours and scenery.

Tea and home-made cakes were enjoyed after the walks and the splendid sum of over £1,400 was raised - altogether a successful and highly enjoyable day!

Sue Matthews

Croydon Ramblers



Ready for the start of the walk.

Photo: John Tickner

Barrier walk

Twenty of our members enjoyed a fantastic six-mile walk in south east London on Sunday 7 September 2025. Our leader, Peter Finch, led us from Severndroog Castle on Shooters Hill down to the Thames Barrier on the day of the annual testing of the barrier. On arrival we were very fortunate to be greeted by a staff member who gave us a talk on how it all works.

Christine Raynsford
Dartford & Gravesham
Ramblers



At the Thames Barrier.

Photo: Julia Holloway

Fenland trip

On a sunny day last summer a coachload of us travelled to Anglesey Abbey in Cambridgeshire. We called in at Wicken Sedge Fen for coffee and cake on the way, and where we could also view the marshy

fen. At Anglesey Abbey we were able to stroll around the extensive park and gardens, to admire the rose garden and the herbaceous borders - all doing well considering the extended spell of hot dry weather at the time. Thanks to Ann and Jenny for organising the trip

Later, in July, 36 members joined our summer walk and lunch event. Arduous and genteel walks were arranged in the morning, all ending at the Dolphin Inn at Betchworth, Surrey, for lunch.

David Newton

Epsom & Ewell Ramblers

Showing our appreciation



Dave Gibbs and Anne Pullinger.

Photo: Sue Harvey

Certificates of appreciation were awarded to two Farnham & District members, David Gibbs and Anne Pullinger, at our group AGM in November 2025.

David joined the group in 1996 and is now a long-standing member of almost 30 years. One of his first roles with the

group was as our Walks Programme Coordinator and he undertook this vital role up to 2011. He then continued as our Sunday Long Walks Coordinator and held this post for 13 years until, at the age of 94, he made the decision to stand down. Dave has also been one of our valued Sunday walk leaders since joining

the Ramblers. He has been involved in so many of our activities from leading walks to footpath maintenance work, as well as sharing in many of the holidays and social events with his wife Ann.

Dave's wider charity work has extended to throwing himself out of planes. In June 2016, at the age of 84, he

undertook a skydive for charity, which raised nearly £4,000 for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice. His two granddaughters who were there to watch him made him promise to do it all again when they would be old enough to accompany him. So, in June 2022, then aged 90, Dave plus granddaughters skydived together, this time raising more than £5,000 for the same good cause. Earlier in 2025 Dave received an award from Farnham Town Council for services to Farnham. He has been a long-time volunteer and supporter of various local organisations including Sailability at Frensham Pond, which allows people with disabilities to experience sailing in a safe and supportive environment.

Anne Pullinger joined us in 1987 (a member for an outstanding 38 years), following in the footsteps of her mother and father who were founder members when the group was formed in 1962. Anne has taken on a number of roles over the years including spells as Publicity Officer, Wednesday Short Walks Coordinator, and Walks Programme Coordinator. Anne has also been leading walks for the group since 2002 and is an active member of our footpath maintenance team.

As a group we feel very fortunate to know both Dave and Anne as friends, fellow volunteers, passionate walkers and valued members.

Sue Harvey

Farnham & District
Ramblers

Open day

Members of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Group attended the Friends of Brompton Cemetery Open Day on Sunday 7 September 2025 and staffed a Ramblers stand there for the third year running. They were joined this time by members of Hammersmith, Fulham and Wandsworth Group. Plenty of people showed interest throughout

the day, making use of the magazines, leaflets and pens on show. Also attending was local author Matthew Bowmer who showcased his book 'Ups and Downs: 900 Kilometres on Foot through the French Pyrenees', a humorous and honest account of his trek in the summer of 2022. It was a very enjoyable and successful collaboration. Lorraine Gray Hammersmith, Fulham and Wandsworth Ramblers



Author Matthew Bowmer with Ramblers members. Photo: Lorraine Gray

Walking quiz

On a very warm afternoon last June, 33 of us gathered for a 'circular walking quiz' of about four and a half miles, mostly around Ruislip Woods. We were arranged into teams of four to six and given a route map and sheet of 25 questions. Numbers on the map indicated where answers to the questions could be found. It was a relaxed event but you did

need to keep a good eye on your surroundings or a question would remain unanswered. Two and a half hours later we all enjoyed hot or cold drinks with plenty of cakes and scones, plus lashings of clotted cream! This was an event for all and we met some members we do not often see which was nice. Special thanks to Rob Jones-Owen who organised the event and to Barbara who arranged the catering. Simon Thornhill Hillingdon Ramblers

Kingston's second picnic walk

After the successful 2024 walk and picnic it was decided to hold another and this proved equally successful. It took place on Saturday 13 September 2025. Before the picnic there was a six mile walk led by Lois Barlow, taking in Richmond Park and the Thames Path to finish

at Canbury Gardens in Kingston where an array of delicious cakes awaited us. Several more members joined there with a final figure of 34 and all were grateful to those providing the refreshments. Brenda and David Horwill Kingston Ramblers



The picnic walkers at Ham House.

Poetry in motion

On our walk at Barking Riverside in east London on Saturday 6 September we encountered 'The Poetry Takeaway' who had a stall at an event. After talking to them we were invited to return later to pick up a poem. Here's what 'Salmathepoet' presented us with.

Five miles or more? No thanks
Steep hills or steep stairs? No thanks
Informal and friendly, keen for discovery
Travelling from Middlesex, east London, Orpington and Dagenham
To walk across fields, canals, and cities
Obligatory stops for toilets, teas and coffee
In between fresh air and exercising
They talk about everything
State of the nation and what's for lunch
'Are we there yet' comes up a bunch
Today they're exploring Barking Riverside



The group at Barking Riverside. Photo: Pauline Macfarlane

On a sunny day in September 2025
Lea Valley Friends Walking Group continues to flourish
and grow
There are so many adventures to be had and tales to be told.

Pauline Macfarlane
Lea Valley Friends Ramblers Group

Chair handover

Our AGM was held on Sunday 16 November 2025 at Northall Village Hall, preceded by a five-mile walk. Before the meeting we enjoyed a hot meal of chilli and baked potatoes, followed by some delicious cakes baked by our members.

Our Chairman, Julian Chritchlow, was standing down and Paul Byatt was appointed to succeed him. Julian was presented with a card and gift voucher as



Vice-Chair Nigel Nauth-Misir (left) presents Julian with a token of thanks. Photo: Pamela Bates

a token of our thanks for all his hard work over the past four years. Pamela Bates Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

New gate

Milton Keynes & District Group provided a varied programme last year, welcoming a number of new members. In May we visited Badby Woods in Northamptonshire to walk amongst the carpet of bluebells and enjoy afternoon tea in the village hall. We celebrated the summer solstice with a late-afternoon walk and picnic. It was one of the hottest days of the year and we were glad of the shade of the trees. In August, six members completed the Seven Parishes Millennium Circular Walk in Bedfordshire in memory of a



Members at the new gate. Photo: Sue Fisher

past member and raised £2,000 for the Alzheimer's Society. Moving into autumn, one walk took us through a newly-installed gate between Haversham Mill and Little Linford Lane. This is the second gate which the group has purchased. Sue Fisher Milton Keynes & District Ramblers

Making it fun

North Beds Ramblers have tried to bring some fun to their AGMs. We always start with our regular afternoon walk, In 2025 it was very wet, but that didn't deter 29 walkers who were glad to reach a warm hall with hot drinks and plentiful refreshments.

Awaiting our AGM attendees was a picture quiz devised by our General Secretary, Graham Stark, mostly about Bedfordshire. Winners were presented with chocolates at the end of the meeting. We have also started a series

of awards which are presented at the AGM to members who 'go above and beyond'. There were two recipients in 2025. First was Tony Wilkins who has led 85 walks for us over the years. Tony stepped down last year but is still a regular backmarker and continues to make an important contribution to the group. Our second award was to John Knight who only joined the group in 2025 but has fully embraced our activities and become a walk leader and is involved with path maintenance. However, it is for his array of

headgear that the award was presented, Every walk is met with anticipation of what hat John will be wearing. His gift? A seasonal hat, of course. Our social activities have continued with the annual Christmas meal and a mince pie walk. We headed again to The Guinea at Moggerhanger for the meal and a crowd of 40 attended in this welcoming village pub. A gift and card were presented to all our walk leaders who were present. The mince pie walk also started and finished at Moggerhanger and took us over the fields towards Blunham with many members in festive gear. An impressive 58 walkers



Tony Wilkins receives his award from Chair Anne. Photo: Julia Krajnakova

turned out to walk and partake in festive drinks and refreshments back in the warmth of St John the Evangelist church in Moggerhanger afterwards. Sandra Kelsey and Patrizia Franks North Beds Ramblers

Guest speaker

At our 63rd AGM we were privileged to have Mark Lavenstein as our guest speaker. Mark was elected to the Ramblers Board of Trustees in April 2025 and brings a wealth of experience and expertise, not only as an engineer who worked in finance in the oil industry but also as erstwhile Chairman of West Kent Ramblers and, until recently, as Vice Chairman of Kent Area Ramblers Council.

Mark gave a fascinating insight into the process of becoming a trustee and what it means to be one. He had responded to an invitation sent to members. In his application he had been required to give his reasons for wanting to become a trustee. Here he had outlined his primary concerns which were firstly to raise awareness amongst the Board members of what groups do and how changes

would affect them and, secondly, to ensure Ramblers fulfilled its charitable aims of introducing more and a wider range of people to the benefits of walking. In addition he wanted to ensure a balance between local and national needs and to support, motivate and recognise volunteers whilst minimising bureaucracy. He had been elected on the second round of voting by the 106 members of the General Council, of whom two were from Kent, to become one of 12 trustees.

Turning to the governance review, Mark said he welcomed the proposals to widen democracy and was very pleased that proposals concerning changes to groups and Areas had been put on hold for further consultation. He recognised that Kent was particularly fortunate in having a well organised Area and group system and, in Kent County Council, a local authority sensitive to the needs of ramblers. He felt any future proposals would need to retain the strengths of the current system.

Stuart Booth
North West Kent Ramblers

Walking outside the box



On St Catherine's Hill.

Photo: Diana Lincoln

As a walk leader, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new walks for the Pang Valley Ramblers, so I was pleased to see two rather different walks in our programme.

The first, on Sunday 12 October, saw 12 of us take the train to London Paddington and then the tube to Waterloo. We then walked along the south bank of the River Thames past Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to a bustling Borough Market where

we split up to find some street food from the amazing selection available. After lunch, we crossed Tower Bridge and walked past the Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral to Farringdon station for our journey home via Paddington.

The second was on Wednesday 22 October when around a dozen members travelled from Reading to Winchester by train. After a few stops to admire some buildings in the city, we walked along the River Itchen before climbing St Catherine's Hill for some good views. We later crossed the Hockley Viaduct, once a part of the Didcot to Southampton railway line which closed in the 1960s, but now open for walkers and cyclists to enjoy as part of National Cycle Route 23. Back at the cathedral we managed to find the statue of author Jane Austen which was unveiled a few days before to commemorate the 250th anniversary of her birth.

Thanks to George and Lee for leading walks 'out of the box'.

Diana Lincoln
Pang Valley Ramblers

Volunteers evening



The enthusiastic welcoming committee.

Photo: Richard Hodgkinson

South Bank Group held its annual summer social for walk leaders and volunteers. It was a rare treat to see each other in something other than the usual walking gear and to enjoy an evening that combined training with plenty of food, conversation and laughter.

The evening brought together 28 walk leaders and volunteers - a fantastic turnout. Alongside the invitation to walk leaders and volunteers, we also reached out to members, encouraging them to consider stepping forward, whether by leading a walk, helping at events, or lending a hand behind the scenes.

We started off with the serious(ish) stuff. Chair Hilary and Walks Coordinator Liz introduced the Ramblers walk leader training programme and explained how it worked, what it covered and how it could help leaders feel more confident and supported on their walks. Everyone was encouraged to complete the training.

This was followed by a light-hearted look at walk data, presented by Secretary, Dick, spotting patterns such as how 'light drizzle' barely dented attendances, while 'heavy rain' sent numbers plummeting, and whether shorter strolls or longer treks tended to attract the bigger crowds.

The nine committee members shared the responsibility for organising the event. Everything had been thoughtfully prepared and the evening unfolded at an easy, enjoyable pace. Without the time pressures of a walk, everyone was able to relax, linger over conversations and exchange experiences and ideas with fellow volunteers.

Kleo Zhao
South Bank Ramblers



Stuart Booth (left) with Mark Lavenstein at the AGM. Photo: Jack Yan

Coach trip

Thirty-nine Staines Ramblers enjoyed a coach trip to Chichester in August 2025 where several options for walks were available. After being dropped off at Chichester Marina some walked into the city to explore, others opted to walk via the Chichester Canal to Bosham for lunch, and some were dropped off in Bosham to walk the second half of the route back to the marina, which included a short ferry ride.

Our traditional Christmas-themed walk from Tilford Green was led by Santa and two elves! After climbing Crooksbury Hill everyone was rewarded with mulled wine and a mince pie before completing the walk with a pub lunch.

Linda Thrift
Staines Ramblers



The Christmas walk at Tilford Green.

Photo: Georgina Marlow

Walking with SABRE

Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE) has continued to offer a variety of walks across the south east. Our short and medium length walks have stayed fairly local in Surrey and Hampshire whilst our longer walks ventured out to the Chilterns (the Chess Valley and Stokenchurch), Kent (Penshurst and Sevenoaks) and down to the south coast in Sussex. We have

also been walking the Serpent Trail in stages and will continue with this in 2026 from Petworth on Valentine's Day.

We finished 2025 with a festive steam train trip on the Watercress Line in Hampshire, enjoying the illuminations and lots of Christmas songs!

Clair Baynton
Surrey & Beyond Ramblers (SABRE)



A happy crowd on the Watercress Line in December.

Photo: Clair Baynton

Ending on a high

It is great to round off a busy year with lots of good news. In particular, after a few years without a Chair, we are pleased that at our AGM in November, Ann Brinton kindly accepted the position. She is joined by a much expanded committee too and plans are being made for 2026 and beyond. We also thanked members stepping down, including June Tranton, who's cheeky laugh will be missed at future meetings, but

still chuckling with us on walks!

Recent social events have included a well-attended quiz and a shared supper accompanied by a salsa dance class which got us all skipping around.

Our new initiative is to present newly validated walk leaders with their very own secateurs to help them cut back the brambles on the path ahead. Let's hope it works!

Celia Griffiths

Farnham & District Ramblers



Enjoying the salsa dance class.

Beavers and white storks return to east London

The London Wildlife Trust announced in December 2025 details of its 'Rewilding East London' species recovery project at Eastbrookend Country Park in Dagenham in partnership with Barking & Dagenham Council and supported by the Mayor of London.

The project will build on work to restore and enhance the important wetland habitats in the area with the reintroduction of white storks and beavers. The storks are expected on site in autumn 2026 with beavers arriving in 2027. A

purpose-built aviary will house the storks, whose chicks will eventually be released to help establish a new breeding population in the area. The beavers will be released into a publicly accessible enclosure featuring two lakes, under licence from Natural England.

Councillor Dominic Twomey, leader of Barking & Dagenham Council, said: "Securing £500,000 from the Mayor of London's Green Roots Fund is a testament to the strength of our partnership with London Wildlife Trust and our shared ambition to restore nature at scale. The return of beavers

and the reintroduction of white storks to Eastbrookend Country Park will transform how people experience nature in Barking & Dagenham. It's about more than wildlife - it's about giving families, schools and community groups the chance to be part of something inspiring and hopeful."

White storks were once a part of Britain's fauna but became extinct due to a combination of overhunting and habitat loss. A highly successful stork reintroduction project began at the Knepp Castle Estate in Sussex in 2018.

The joys of walking with the London Blind Ramblers

Are you finding your regular walking companions a touch taciturn as you trudge along together in silence, stumped for new or different topics of conversation? You should try hosting the London Blind Ramblers group. When admiring the distant view is not an option, the visually-impaired more than compensate by talking about their experiences in a world lacking the sense of sight that the rest of us take for granted.

And very interesting they are too. On one occasion a blind piano tuner (yes, really) told me about his visit to 10 Downing Street to tune the grand piano there. On our recent walks with the group, my companion turned out to be a music critic for one of the national dailies. It's never a bad idea to step out of your familiar cocoon and learn about other people's lives.

We had more members of the London Blind Ramblers than usual for our August walk over Farthing Down and Happy Valley, but thanks to strong support from

members of Croydon Ramblers, every one was matched one to one with a guide. We were blessed with fine sunny weather and finished on a high note as we left Farthing Down for tea and cakes in Jan Campion's garden nearby.

Our thanks go to Jan who has organised our annual walk with the London Blind Ramblers for several years now, and to the expert cake bakers and helpers who served up such a splendid afternoon tea.

Peter Southgate
Croydon Ramblers



The joys of walking with the London Blind Ramblers.

Blackwater crossing restored

A new footbridge over the River Blackwater at Shepherd Meadows near Sandhurst, Berkshire, was officially opened on 24 October 2025, replacing an earlier footbridge closed on safety grounds in January 2023. As well as improving local connectivity between Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park, the bridge restores a

key link in the route of the Blackwater Valley Path which follows the river for 23 miles (37 km) from Rowhill Nature Reserve, near Aldershot, to Swallowfield, Berkshire. The new bridge opening was attended by representatives of Bracknell Forest Council, Hampshire County Council and Blackwater Valley Countryside Project.

Under dark skies

The South Downs National Park's 2026 Dark Skies Festival, which runs from 12 - 22 February, will also celebrate the 10th anniversary of the South Downs being declared an International Dark Sky Reserve. Stargazing events are being held at Seven Sisters and Queen Elizabeth Country Parks, Amberley Museum, Alice Holt Forest, Winchester Science Centre and on Brighton seafront.

For programme details, go to southdowns.gov.uk/dark-skies-hub/dark-skies-festival. The festival comes as the National Park Authority is strengthening its commitment to dark skies in its Partnership Management Plan. Among the goals is expanding the current dark sky core - the very darkest areas of the International Dark Sky Reserve - by 10 per cent by 2031, by working with lighting authorities and local communities to further reduce light pollution.

New Kent woodland planned

Forestry England has bought a 163-acre (66-hectare) plot of land in Kent to create a new woodland, called New Luckhurst Wood. The land is between Smarden, Bethersden, High Halden and Biddenden, around 10 miles (16 km) west of Ashford. A public consultation is expected to take place during the spring with the initial planting of a mix of tree species beginning next winter. For more details go to consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/eelh/.