

Walker

Benson Weir crossing reopened

The Thames Path National Trail's crossing at Benson Weir, near Wallingford in Oxfordshire, reopened to walkers in April after a four-year closure for building works by the Environment Agency.

Deemed a 'significant project' by the Agency, the rebuilding of

the weir was necessary due to the "weakening of the overall structure" worsened by floating objects hitting the deteriorated steelwork. The improved walkway over the weir is wider than before, at 1.5m instead of 0.9m, allowing more people to use this key link across the Thames.

Des Garrahan



Kent valley walks guide revised

The highlight of the last three months was the publication of a second edition of our guide to Three River Valley Walks in West Kent. The three rivers in question are the Darent, the Eden and the Medway.

The Darent Valley Path was opened in 1986 running approximately 19 miles from either Sevenoaks railway station or Chipstead village to the mouth of the Darent where it enters the Thames a few miles north of Dartford. Last year the path was extended with a new section from Westerham to Chipstead, making the total length around 25 miles. Although readily accessible from London with good rail connections and despite having been very popular in Roman times with at least eight villas along the route, much of the valley remains very rural and was celebrated by artist Samuel Palmer for its exceptional bucolic character.

The Eden Valley Walk might well be the least known and least

used of all paths in Kent named on Ordnance Survey maps. Certainly it is very peaceful as it wends its way from the Surrey border in the west past ancient settlements and sites such as Edenbridge town, Hever Castle, Chiddingstone village (owned by the National Trust) and Penshurst Place to finish at Tonbridge Castle.

The Medway Valley Walk picks up where the Eden Valley finishes, at Tonbridge Castle. The upper reaches from Tonbridge to Maidstone pass through lush meadows and tranquil countryside that was once dominated by the cultivation of hops. There are locks, pleasure boats, oast houses and especially some of the finest medieval stone bridges in the country. Downstream from Maidstone the valley was once a hive of industrial activity, dominated by the manufacture of cement and bricks - so much so that the area around Snodland was in Victorian times referred to as Cementopolis. But all that has

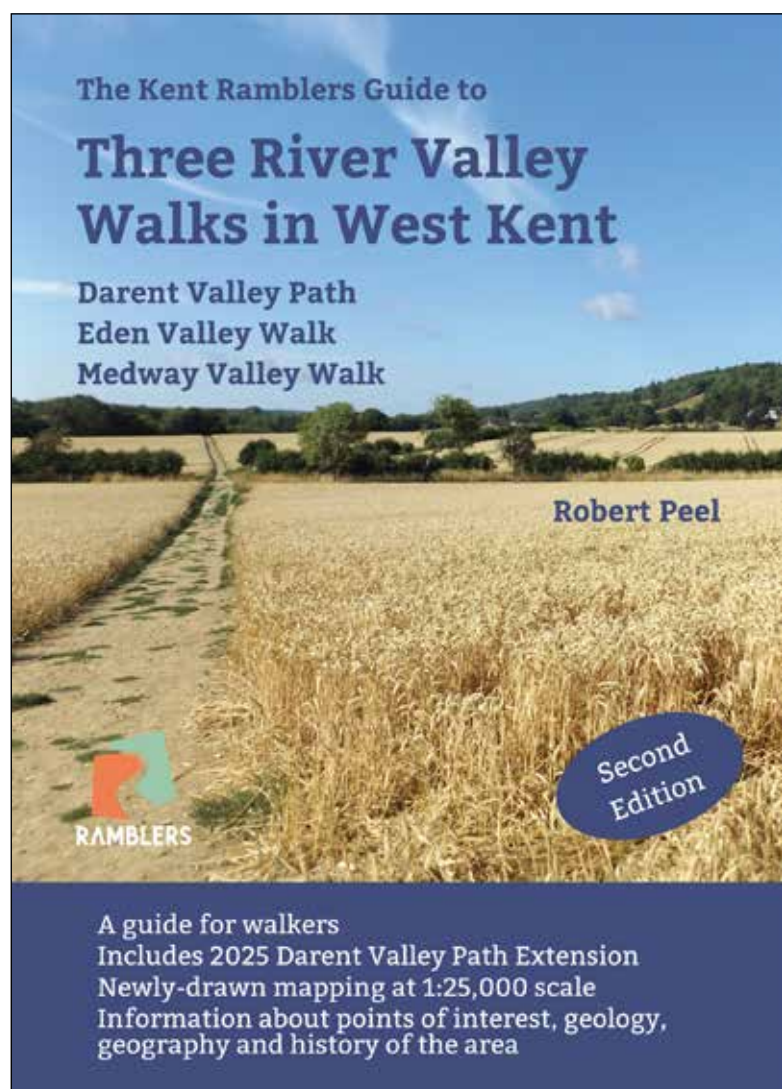
gone, nature has taken over and the route is delightful to walk.

Getting a book into print is always a fraught process and dealing with the printing industry quite a challenge. Perhaps it is just that I have exacting standards but after putting many hundreds of hours into producing a book it would be disappointing not to have a result that is beautiful as well as useful.

The cover price of the guide, which has 80 pages filled with information and over 100 maps and illustrations, is £8.50 but until 31 July anyone buying through our website (kentramblers.org.uk/books) and quoting code SEW26 can have a copy for £7.50 including postage.

Although I have moaned a bit about printers, their prices are actually quite reasonable compared with postal charges - it now costs significantly more to post one of our guides than it costs to print it!

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



The North Essex Path - a challenge for groups?

The prolific duo of Jacqui Farrants and Paul Bentley has produced books on circular walks for the Essex Way and the Saffron Trail, previously reported on these pages. Now they have gone one better, by inventing a new trail, the North Essex Path, and then circular walks to go with it. They have even produced a logo, shown on the front cover of the book.

Their invention is a long-distance path forming a 96-mile loop linking villages and hamlets across the north of Essex. It starts in Finchingfield, heads west through Thaxted, follows the Hertfordshire border to Great Chesterford, then eastward along the Cambridgeshire and Suffolk borders to Great Henny before returning to Finchingfield. Altogether there are 29 circular walks, each between five and nine miles. Public transport is unlikely to be available in virtually every case, so the walks are designed to take you back to your car and avoid what the authors call "the two-car tango".

Unlike their earlier publications, they have reproduced sections of the Ordnance Survey maps to make the routes clearer (this also means that

you don't have to carry the map with you, an obvious benefit). They give postcodes for the start of walks, and also what3words, which allows greater precision in locating many rural locations than postcodes. And, important for our route testers, they mention pubs on the way.

The only way to check out a guidebook is to walk it, so three of us set out to follow the Arkesden to Duddenhoe End section of five and a half miles. By and large the directions were clear and easy to follow, although at one point across an apparently limitless field I heard an exclamation from the book carrier of "Some qualification would be nice!" This followed the instruction of "Go straight ahead across a vast field". Some indication of length, either in terms of distance or time, would be helpful in such circumstances to give reassurance; I have made a similar comment in reviews of their other publications. We also disagreed with a reference to "two fields"; we made it three fields and resorted to the Ordnance Survey app on our phones to check the location. But these are relatively minor niggles, and I do like that the authors don't stick

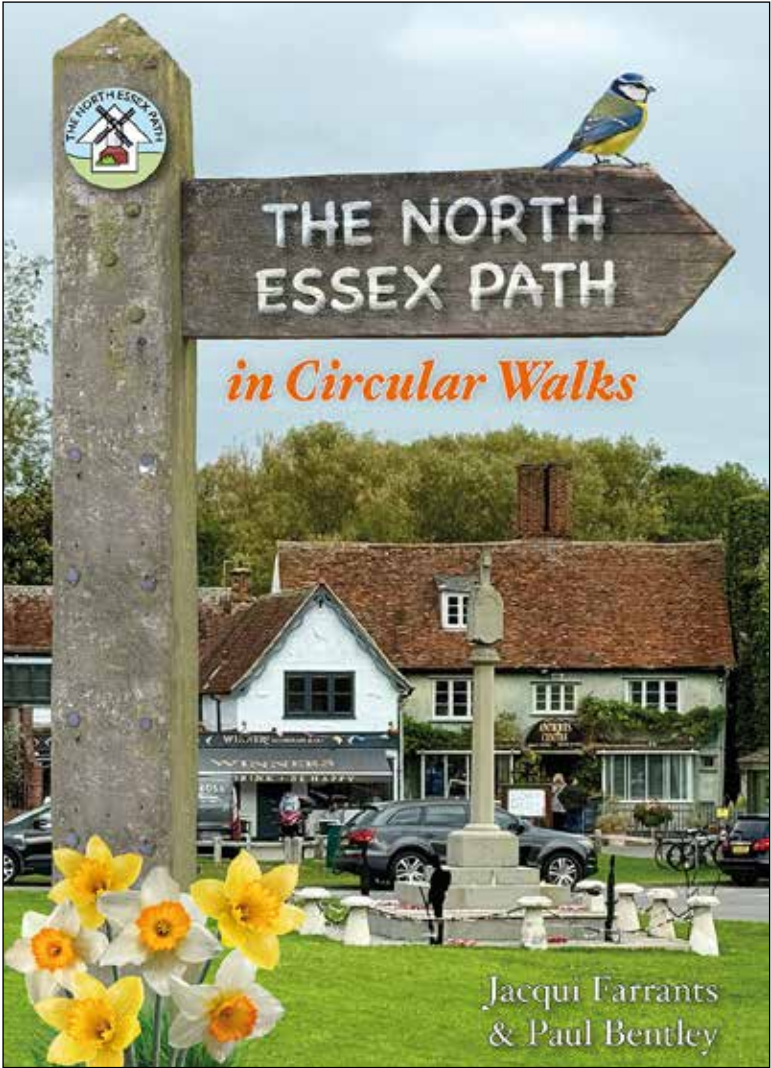
to simple descriptions; there are references to architecture and wildlife throughout, and the writing is as elegant as it can be, given the need to describe routes precisely. The photographs are good too.

There is however one unexpected criticism. I showed the book to Uttlesford Ramblers' resident naturalist, who took one look at the back cover which features deer superimposed over rolling Essex countryside and told me that they were red deer, a species rarely seen in Essex.

The most common species, seen in herds, are fallow deer, with the occasional roe and muntjac. Fakedeer!

The authors deserve great credit for inventing the route and say, "It is our dream that one day, perhaps with the support of local walkers, we might see The North Essex Path officially recognised by the Ordnance Survey". That's a challenge and one which Ramblers groups on the route might consider taking up.

Mike Cannell
Uttlesford Ramblers
with thanks to Sheila Batey and Murray Lowe



The North Essex Path in Circular Walks by Jacqui Farrants and Paul Bentley, Half Way Publishing (ISBN 978-1-0369-7136-6), costs £16.95 plus £2.80 pp from Amazon, or £16.68 plus £2.72 pp from eBay. Also available from libraries, bookshops and local visitor centres.

News in brief

Wildlife centre refurbished: Kent Wildlife Trust has completed a £2.1 million refurbishment of its Harrison Visitor Centre and cafe at Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve. The reserve, to the north of the town, covers an area of former sand and gravel pits created in the 1950s after diverting the natural course of the River Darent. The new centre has improved access, electric vehicle charging points and solar panels.

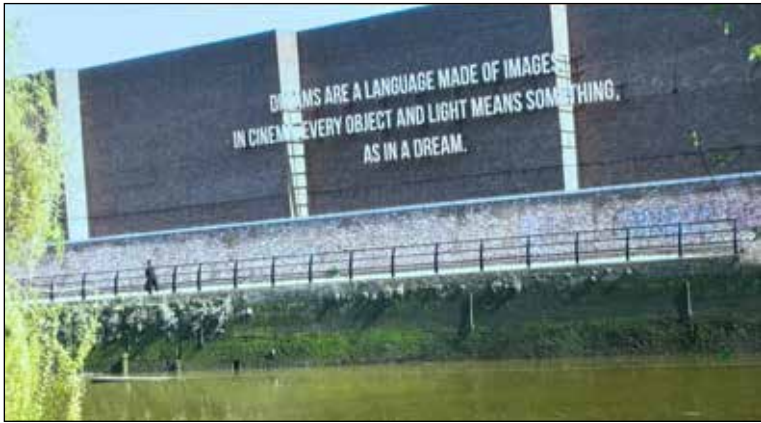


Sevenoaks

Walking the Line: A rebuilt cafe/bar has opened at Cody Dock on the east bank of the tidal River Lea in east London. Open daily it is run independently of the charity and social enterprise offerings at the site which features on The Line, a public art trail from Stratford to Greenwich.



Cody Cafe



This recently installed artwork on 'The Line', 'Dreams are a language made of images' by Zineb Sidera, is on the wall of the 3 Mills Studio at Bow.



Warren Farm

Warren Farm: A 60-acre area of former sports grounds in west London have been formally declared a Local Nature Reserve. The land at Warren Farm, off Windmill Lane, has gradually rewilded over the years and now supports skylarks, wildflowers, butterflies and bees. The site sits within the Brent River Park and the charity behind that is working with Ealing council to designate several other local sites as Local Nature Reserves as part of wider efforts to restore meadow habitats in west London.

High Weald Walking Festival: This year's festival takes place between Saturday 12 - Sunday 20 September when more than 50 walks will be arranged to explore the heavily wooded landscape which undulates across Kent, Sussex and Surrey. The annual event is a collaboration between the High Weald National Landscape Partnership and a number of Ramblers groups. For details go to www.highwealdwalks.org.



Plaque at Day's Lock

New greens celebrated: Residents of the Oxfordshire village of Dorchester on Thames and the Open Spaces Society have celebrated the erection of plaques on the new village greens at Dyke Hills and Day's Lock Meadow. The greens were the subject of an intense battle ten years ago when the then owner of Bishops Court Farm fenced off the lands. Local people together with the Open Spaces Society gathered evidence of recreational use and successfully applied to Oxfordshire County Council for the sites to be registered as village greens.



Dudwell Valley

Celebrating 30 years of the Thames Path

This year marks a special milestone for one of Britain's most cherished walking routes, the Thames Path National Trail, as it celebrates its 30th anniversary in memorable style. To honour the occasion, a unique relay walk will trace the full length of the trail - beginning at its source in the Cotswolds on Friday 5 June and culminating at Woolwich on Sunday 28 June.

More than just a celebration, the Thames Path Relay is part of a wider movement. Delivered in collaboration with Mayors for Drinkable Thames, the event supports the growing Drinkable Rivers campaign, which champions cleaner, healthier waterways for communities and wildlife alike.

Along the 185-mile route, Ramblers groups are stepping up to mark the anniversary in their own way - hosting an expanded programme of guided walks and, in many cases, taking part in the relay itself. From rural stretches to urban riverside scenes, walkers will carry the baton through a rich tapestry of landscapes and history.

In London, three groups from the Inner London Area are joining the relay effort. Among them, Capital Walkers, working in partnership with the Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea will lead a particularly scenic section on Thursday 25 June.

The Strategy is a partnership based on a 100-year visioning document, published in 2002, to guide change along the river from Kew Bridge to Chelsea and which continues to shape how the river, local authorities, and communities plan for the future. The strategy has been providing practical tools and helping to deliver projects that help manage change within the Thames Policy Area.

Their walk follows the river from leafy Kew to the striking Battersea Power Station - a stretch that perfectly captures the blend of heritage, nature and modern London that defines the Thames Path experience. Full details of the walk can be found at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-battersea-power-station-millennium-bridge-cutty-sark-linear>.

www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-kew-battersea-power-station.

Building on the momentum of the relay, Capital Walkers will also lead the next leg of the journey on Friday 26 June - this time as an evening walk. Setting out from Battersea Power Station, the route follows the Thames through the capital, finishing at the elegant Millennium Bridge. As daylight softens into dusk, this stretch offers a striking perspective on London's riverside - where historic landmarks and modern architecture are reflected in the water, and the city takes on a different rhythm. Details of the walk can be found at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-battersea-power-station-millennium-bridge-cutty-sark-linear>.

Continuing the relay through the capital, South Bank Ramblers will guide walkers along the next stretch on Saturday 27 June. This section begins at the Millennium Bridge and follows the Thames eastwards to the historic Cutty Sark at Greenwich. Rich in riverside character, this part of the route weaves past cultural landmarks and provides sweeping views of the Thames. Full details of the walk are at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-millennium-bridge-cutty-sark-linear>.

Bringing the relay to a fitting conclusion, West London Ramblers will lead the final stage on Sunday 28 June. Setting out from the Cutty Sark in Greenwich, the route follows the Thames east to its finishing point at Woolwich.

This closing stretch captures the changing character of the river as it widens towards the estuary, passing through areas rich in maritime history and ongoing regeneration. It's a powerful finale to the relay - celebrating not only the journey along the Thames Path, but the communities and landscapes that define it. Details of the walk are at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-millennium-bridge-cutty-sark-linear>.

[walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-cutty-sark-woolwich](https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/group-walks/thames-path-30th-anniversary-relay-walk-cutty-sark-woolwich).

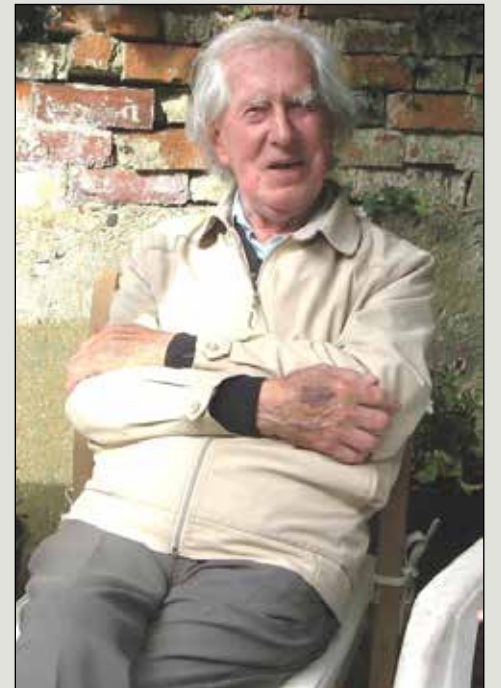
It is fitting that West London Ramblers lead the final section of the relay. The group shares a deep and enduring connection with David Sharp, widely regarded as the founding father of the Thames Path National Trail. As part of the West London Group, and later Richmond Ramblers, he was instrumental in transforming an ambitious vision into one of the country's most treasured long-distance routes.

David represented the Ramblers at the official opening of the Thames Path on 24 July 1996 at the Thames Barrier - then the eastern end of the trail. For many years, this marked the start or finish of the route, until its extension in January 2022 to the Woolwich Foot Tunnel, where it now connects with the King Charles III England Coast Path.

The origins of the Thames Path can be traced back to 1973, when at a public meeting in Windsor organised by the River Thames Society, David sketched out a possible riverside route - an idea that would grow into the trail we know today. He went on to mobilise Ramblers groups to survey the river, identifying missing links and proposing practical solutions, from new footpaths to much-needed footbridges. Within just 18 months, their work had evolved into a compelling campaign, demonstrating that a continuous path along the Thames was not only desirable, but achievable.

Momentum continued to build. In 1981, David published *The Thames Walk*, a guide that captured the public imagination and helped galvanise support. A feasibility study by what is now Natural England followed, and in 1989 the trail received official approval from Environment Secretary Chris Patten.

Even after its opening, the story of the Thames Path was far from complete. The former Countryside Commission worked with local authorities, landowners and businesses to refine the route, keeping



David Sharp, the founding father of the Thames Path National Trail. Photo: Kate Ashbrook

it as close to the river as possible. New footbridges were constructed at key points, including Shifford, Temple near Marlow and Bourne End, while more than 20 miles of new riverside path were created. Careful negotiation also secured continuous stretches between places such as Lechlade and Inglesham, and Sonning and Lower Shiplake.

As the relay reaches its final stage, it celebrates not only 30 years of the Thames Path, but also the vision, persistence and collaboration that brought it into being - an enduring legacy shaped by people like David Sharp.

For walkers and river-lovers, this anniversary relay offers a rare opportunity to be part of a shared journey - celebrating not just a trail, but the enduring life of the River Thames itself.

Tim Sai Louie
Chair, Inner London Area and Capital Walkers



Photo: Voice of the Thames Words below: Des Garrahan

Between Goring and Whitchurch locks one of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's elegant masterpieces graces the Thames. It is an evocative reminder of Victorian engineering genius in harmony with the river landscape. Completed in 1840 as part of the Great Western Railway, this bridge carries trains across the Thames on Brunel's route between London and Bristol. Its distinctive low-rise arches

and brick construction were designed to blend with the scenery, showing Brunel's sensitivity to both form and function. Nearly two centuries on, the bridge still does its job beautifully, unfussingly carrying the pulse of modern rail travel across a timeless stretch of river. Next time you're walking the Thames Path National Trail in this area you could do worse than stop and admire it for a minute or two.



The relay walk logo

'Bryan Ferry' to bridge Thames Path gap

A new ferry across the Thames has been introduced where Temple Bridge, between Henley and Marlow, remains closed. The service allows Thames Path walkers to avoid having to follow a lengthy diversion along a busy and dangerous road and to

walk the National Trail route as if the bridge was still in use, but in a different and potentially fun way.

The ferry is run by local businessman Justin Whelan, using his restored electric solar-powered boat known as 'Bryan Ferry', which can carry 12 passengers. The service

initially runs between 10am and 3pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, potentially expanding to seven days a week during school holidays, once a volunteer rota is established. Dogs and bicycles are welcome on board too. Passengers can board from the Temple side of the river and

travel to Hurley or vice versa. Fares are set at £2.50 each way for adults and £1.50 for children under 12. For more information visit Bryan Ferry the ferry on Facebook.

Malcolm Stone
East Berkshire Ramblers

How to 'live better, longer' with the Ramblers

Professor Sir J A Muir Gray, CBE, FRCPS Glas, FLIP, is Oxfordshire Ramblers President. He is a former Chief Knowledge Officer for the National Health Service and is dedicated to helping people to live longer, better and believes that all we need do is change our mindset towards ageing - "Knowledge is the enemy of disease and the elixir of life"

Muir worked for Public Health England at the time when financial support for health walks was cancelled and he started and led a project to ensure they continued. The evidence his team produced about the benefits of walking was so strong that Macmillan Cancer Support put up the money to fund them for three years and the Ramblers won the contract. Muir has promoted taking a regular 10-minute brisk walk and, linked with this, he collaborated with the NHS to produce the Active 10 app, which records an individual's total time walking each day and highlights the number of those minutes that have been achieved at a brisk pace (<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/active10/home>). He

has summarised the evidence about the benefits of walking in his book called Dr Gray's Walking Cure (www.drgrayswalkingcure.net).

Muir is Director of the Oxford Optimal Ageing Programme which contributes to the NHS Living Longer Better Programme (www.livelongerbetter.uk). Their latest initiative is for GPs to issue activity prescriptions, for activities such as wellbeing walks, alongside the usual medications. These activity prescriptions will be produced digitally and will be automatically linked to diagnosis and postcode, informing the patient about wellbeing walks even if the GP knows nothing about them because they are a locum from out of town. This will start in Hertfordshire this summer.

On 16 March, Muir gave an entertaining Zoom presentation to Oxfordshire Ramblers which explained to us how longer, better life could be achieved. Here's a synopsis of what he said:

Hundreds of millions of pounds and dollars have been spent in pursuit of the Elixir of Life, a medicine which would slow the normal biological progress of ageing and enable people

to live to 120 or more, so far without success. However, we are pleased to report that an Elixir of Life has been developed in Oxford but it is not a pill or potion, it is knowledge. Furthermore, it is not knowledge about how to reach 120 or more, it is knowledge about how to have a good quality of life in your 60s, 70s and 80s and reach your 90s in good nick! It is about healthy life expectancy, not just life expectancy - living better for longer and being dependent on others for a shorter period of time.

We now know that the normal biological progress of ageing is not a cause of major problems until the later 90s, the problems come from loss of fitness, caused by decades of sitting, disease, caused by the physical and social environment and by social factors notably deprivation and ageism, the negative and wrong beliefs about ageing.

It is also now proven that walking is an ideal form of exercise, particularly brisk walking, being with others on rough ground and in a green environment, and volunteering is very good too and will reduce your risk of dementia! The Ramblers also organise therapeutic



Sir Muir Gray

Wellbeing Walks for people recovering from disabling disease.

So, the Ramblers is a health service, part of the WHS - the Walking Health Service - supporting the National Health Service and it will play a key role in the campaign called 'Let's Walk More' so let's get more people joining and walking more.

You can view the video by

clicking on the link under Muir's photo on the home page of the Oxfordshire Ramblers website (<https://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/>). There is also a 'handout' which gives more information and links to relevant websites.

Richard Birch
Chair, Oxfordshire Ramblers

Walking the Nickey Line

Lea & Icknield (Luton) members, led by Chris Ellis, walked the route of the Nickey Line in mid-March. This is the former railway line between Harpenden and Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire and a popular walking route of about eight miles. We often do short sections of it on other walks, but this was to be the (almost) full length. We travelled to Harpenden, and returned from Hemel Hempstead, by bus - so we did our bit for the environment as well!

The route is easy walking, however the toughest part came right at the beginning in Harpenden, where we had to climb three steep flights of slatted wooden steps up onto the bridge to access the path! But then we were mostly walking on a gently undulating track between trees and hedgerows, with a short urban stretch through the outskirts of Hemel and a deep cutting towards the end,

with several information boards to tell us about the route's history along the way. Redbourne provided a good stopping point for our refreshments, and we were lucky to find a picnic table and benches waiting for us. Once we arrived in the centre of Hemel Hempstead, we enjoyed a lunch at 'The Full House' a Wetherspoons pub in a former cinema before heading to the bus stop for our journey home.

The source of the route's name is unclear; it has been suggested that it was named after the parish of St Nicholas in Harpenden; possibly the 13th century English Pope, Nicholas Breakspear, or the knickerbockers worn by the navvies building the line (we think not that one!)

Rosemary Hasker

Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers
The Nickey Line has its own Friends group - nickeyline.org - which celebrated its 20th anniversary in May.



Enjoying Lille.

Photo: Tim Sai Louie

Capital Walkers take Lille in their stride

Following successful outings to Paris and Brussels, this year's destination for the Capital Walkers was the vibrant northern French city of Lille.

With some walkers extending their stay, the core group opted for a whirlwind day trip, catching the 7.04am from St Pancras International. In just an hour and 22 minutes, the group stepped off the train ready to explore - helped along by a brisk walk to warm up on a fresh April morning.

The route quickly led into Lille's charming Old Town, where the group paused to admire the architectural gems of the Grand Place. Highlights included the elegant Opera House, the ornate Vieille Bourse, and the striking Chamber of Commerce with its imposing clock tower.

A wander deeper into the Old

Town brought a tempting stop at Meert, where beautifully crafted chocolates and pastries proved hard to resist - many making a mental note to return later for gifts. With Notre-Dame de la Treille Cathedral not yet open, the group continued on toward the leafy surroundings of the Citadel of Lille. A serendipitous find of a quiet cafe along the way provided a welcome and much-needed caffeine boost after the early start.

Refreshed, the walkers returned to the cathedral, now open, where the modern facade gives way to an equally impressive interior - light-filled, serene, and unexpectedly contemporary. From there, it was back to the Grand Place for lunch. Despite the inevitable queue, the group secured a spot at Estaminet Chez la Vieille, where all 11 diners were accommodated across two tables.

The reward? A hearty, good-value meal that perfectly captured the region's rich culinary traditions.

In the afternoon, many of the group took the Metro to La Piscine Museum in nearby Roubaix - a truly unique cultural stop. Housed in a beautifully restored 1930s Art Deco swimming pool, the museum blends fine art, sculpture and textiles with its original architectural features. After a couple of hours exploring, it was time to head back into the city centre and catch the return Eurostar - tired but thoroughly satisfied.

All in all, it was a day packed with culture, camaraderie and just the right amount of adventure. The only question now is: where next? Possibly Amsterdam is on the horizon.

Tim Sai Louie
Capital Walkers



A stop to read up on the history of the line.

Photo: Rosemary Hasker

Signs of the path: small details, big character

One of the quiet pleasures of walking isn't just the landscape - it's the signs along the way. Some guide, some warn, and some simply make you stop and smile.

Over the years, our walks have revealed a wide variety of signs. In the countryside, practicality often comes with personality: "This road floods each tide" - a calm statement of fact beside a marshy shoreline. Elsewhere, the message is more direct: "Caution: Unfenced cliff" - probably wise to take that one seriously.

Wildlife signs, however, are often the most memorable. From the polite "Slow - Hedgehogs" to the more urgent "Beware the Red Kites" - they will try to snatch your food!", nature clearly demands respect. Sometimes there is a lighter touch: "Beware frogs crossing" - a gentle reminder that even the

smallest travellers have right of way.

Then there are signs that lean into humour. "Trespassers will be composted" raises a smile (and perhaps a question), while "No jumping except in jumping lane" leaves room for interpretation - and, as some of our walkers demonstrated, creativity.

Some warnings are strikingly specific. Alpacas that "may bite, kick and spit several feet if disturbed", or geese described as "more ferocious than most dogs", are not easily forgotten.

Taken together, these signs offer small glimpses of local life - practical concerns, wildlife, and the occasional dry humour. They are easy to pass by, but worth noticing. Like much in walking, it is often the detail, rather than the distance, that stays with you.

Kleo Zhao

South Bank Ramblers



Flood risk (Chichester Harbour)



Frogs (Leigh)



Tresspassing (Rickmansworth)



Cliffs (Margate)



Red kites (Henley-on-Thames)

SOUTH EAST

walker

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Warning of hedgehogs (Amberley)

A range of signs seen warning of hedgehogs (Amberley), flood risk (Chichester Harbour), red kites (Henley-on-Thames), frogs (Leigh), cliffs (Margate) and trespassing (Rickmansworth). The photos were taken by various walkers over the years and collcted and organised by Dave Hetherington.

Resurrecting the fallen

I would estimate that one in three direction posts erected on paths are now on the ground in parts of southern England. They were mostly erected by local authorities but the cost of rescuing them will not make this a priority. Can passing walkers help in any way?

Just simply wedging them in bushes or tree branches helps. The vegetation holds the post in place and will keep it upright unless high winds, animals or unhelpful humans dislodge it.

Wire fencing alongside the path - especially mesh fencing - can be used to thread the fallen post in between without damaging its containing function. A staple - if included in the walking toolkit - between the post and wire makes it more secure. Some authorities - notably Surrey - invested in four

metre high wooden direction posts. Many are now rotted at the base and have toppled over. It's a more tricky task to resurrect them especially for a solo walker but with care they can at least be left upright. Ideally local walkers could dig a hole and use stones or concrete as a base. This is probably best undertaken with the help of the council who could also be asked to provide metal bases to fit round.

Like cutting back with secateurs or folding saws, saving posts can add time to a walk but it gives a real sense of achievement and fulfils the maxim 'A path should be in better condition after I have walked it'.

Michael Render

Don't attempt to lift fallen signposts (or anything else) unless you are confident you can do so without injury to yourself or others.





BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Area AGM

The Area AGM was held on 7 February in Princes Risborough, and was attended by 17 Area members and one guest speaker. We were joined by trustee Mark Lavenstein, who gave an insightful talk outlining his personal experience in the Ramblers, followed by discussing the two principle charitable aims: promoting walking and

maintaining the network of footpaths. A lively discussion followed where a number of issues were discussed, including how to recognise the contributions of long-time walk leaders.

The Area is still missing a number of volunteers for roles, namely Secretary, Countryside Secretary and Publicity Officer. In particular we would welcome a volunteer for Secretary which is vacant for the second year running. If anyone is interested in finding

out more about the vacancies please contact Area Chair, Trevor Jones, via the Contacts page on the Area website (<https://w.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk>).

Following the meeting Paul Rhodes led a lovely walk through the villages surrounding Princes Risborough and back along the Phoenix Trail. Not even copious amounts of mud could take away from the pretty countryside views.

Beth Stark
Area News Editor



John at his gate.

Photos: Kate Ashbrook

A new gate for John

Wycombe District Ramblers have dedicated a gate to a founder member, John Esslemont. It replaces a tricky stile on the boundary of John's home parish, Lane End, and Piddington and Wheeler End. John has two gates dedicated to him, the first was in 2015 in Piddington and Wheeler End parish.

Eighteen ramblers joined a walk

on 1 April to 'launch' the gate and thank John for all his work for the Ramblers, at group, Area, and national level. I told the gathering that John had been a member of the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area Committee for around 30 years, as Vice-Chair, Chair, Secretary, and now Treasurer. He was group Secretary for 21 years, and path checker for many parishes in the district; he has walked

over 2,000 times with the group and led more than 400 walks. He was also the Chair of the GB motions review committee, scrutinising the motions of General Council and spotting any grammatical or drafting errors.

If anyone deserves to have two gates dedicated to them, it is John.

Kate Ashbrook
Ramblers GB Vice-President



The plaque on the gate



The patched-up bridge.

Photo: Bill Piers

A sleeper (or three) in time ...

One of the first jobs North Bucks rRIPPLE has done after a very wet winter impeded access to many sites, was an emergency repair of a bridge over the local river. Following a closure order by Buckinghamshire Council on safety grounds, the substantial sleeper bridge, originally built on iron girders to allow occasional agricultural machinery across as well as walkers, had rotted in several places.

The public footpath between Haddenham and Kinsey is a popular walking route, and some pedestrians were ignoring the closure signs and stepping over or around half a dozen gaps in the bridge deck. Three 2.4 metre sleepers were obtained from a local

supplier, who kindly provided them at a staff discount, and these were fitted after carefully unbolting the rotten originals. A couple of square metres of 10mm strand board were then cut to size and nailed over the remaining holes as a temporary measure, pending a more permanent fix by the council's bridge team. Accumulated mud and weed along the edges was also swept away.

This early action has reduced the possibility of accidents and reopened a favourite local walk between villages - all accompanied in two or three hours on a sunny spring day.

Jerry Michell
North Bucks rRIPPLE
(ramblers Repairing and Improving Public Paths for Leisure and Exercise).

New south coast ferry link

A further 35-mile (56km) section of the King Charles III England Coast Path was officially opened earlier this year from South Hayling in Hampshire to East Head near West Wittering in West Sussex. Coincidentally, a secondhand landing craft has been restored by Chichester Harbour Charters and now provides a

direct ferry service from Hayling Island (Sparkes Marina) to East Head. The 15-minute crossing costs £8 single or £12 return and operates about hourly on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays until 25 September. Advance booking is advised. For more details go to chichesterharbourcharters.co.uk/ferry.

Boardwalk rebuilt

A boardwalk at Clophill Lakes nature reserve in Bedfordshire has been rebuilt following an arson attack soon after the reserve opened to the public in August 2025. In six months, the

Greensand Trust has managed to raise £100,000 to replace the damaged boardwalk and create an improved accessible route around Castle Lake.



Walk leader Steve and backmarker Clive keep everyone 'sweet' at the AGM walk break.



At the AGM.

Photo: Pamela Bates

Area AGM

I think it is fair to say that, despite the Area being in abeyance, the 2025 AGM, held on 28 February at Husborne Crawley Reading Room, was a huge success.

The day started with a five and a half mile walk, led by Nick Markham, from Ivel Valley Walkers. Forty-one members turned out for the walk, despite the weather being less than lovely. The walk was followed by a warming lunch of homemade soups and cake, courtesy of North Beds and Leighton Buzzard Ramblers.

Over 40 members then joined the AGM. We were most fortunate to have Joerg Kasproski, a Ramblers Trustee, join us for the meeting which was hosted by Julian Chritchlow, Area Treasurer and minuted by Chris Ellis of Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers.

Joerg talked about the current

Ramblers membership numbers and how this was reflected nationally. He also shared information about their finances and what has happened since Covid. He then moved on to talk about the Ramblers strategic 10-year plan and the Governance Structure modernisation. He then brought our attention to the demographics of the Ramblers, covering the initiatives underway to expand the membership to be broader and more inclusive. Finally, Joerg talked about current campaigns.

There were many comments following his presentation saying how interesting it was. The committee would like to extend its thanks to Joerg for taking the time to attend the meeting.

The meeting concluded with a slide presentation looking at a year in the life of each of the four groups that make up Bedfordshire Area together with Area initiatives. The presentation provided a 'buzz' in the

room. The presenters spoke from the 'floor' rather than it being a committee-led initiative. Members were interested to see their own group's activities in 2025 and to hear about other group's initiatives. There were a number of compliments after the formal meeting, subsequently the presentation was circulated to all members via group secretaries. A very successful meeting due to the cooperation of all four groups.

The conclusion of the meeting left the Area with a new committee member, Claire Wainwright as Area Footpath Officer. She joins Julian Chritchlow as Treasurer and Sandra Kelsey as Publicity Officer. The Area remains functional but in abeyance with vacancies for a Chair and Secretary. Please contact your local membership officer should you be interested in either of these roles.

Sandra Kelsey
Area Publicity Officer

Area training

This year's programme of courses began in May with a Route Planning and Navigation course, intended to enhance skills in planning routes and navigating them using a map and compass. This will be followed by a

Walk Leaders Seminar on Sunday 14th of June which will not only guide you through the art of walk leading, it may even excite your curiosity around leading your first or next walk.

A first aid course is also scheduled for later in the year and

details will be shared in the next issue of South East Walker. For further details on these or future courses please contact me at bedfordshireramblerstraining@gmail.com.

Nick Markham
Ivel Valley Walkers

Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks 2026

This year's Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks will take place from 5 - 13 September. The festival - hosted by the four Bedfordshire groups (North Beds Ramblers, Leighton Buzzard Ramblers, Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers and Ivel Valley Walkers) is expected to attract over 1,000 walkers during the nine days.

There will be something for everyone with nature walks, special

interest walks, wellbeing walks, along with the regular morning, afternoon and all-day walks. The 'Walk and Sail' day with the John Bunyan Boat will be a feature along with the two-day, 40-mile Greensand Ridge Challenge.

The festival attracts walks from lots of different groups. We have Ramblers groups visiting from other counties, local walking groups, Bedford Town Guides and Friends of Bedford Cemetery. All in all, it is set to be another fabulous

and varied nine days of walking.

Why not come and join us? Most events are free and do not require booking. To check the programme please visit <https://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/>. Walks will be added from mid July. Or check our Facebook page Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks.

We look forward to meeting you on a walk.

Sandra Kelsey
Area Publicity Officer



Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks

5th to 13th Sep 2026

Short Walks
Local Walks
Long Walks
Wellbeing Walks

Explore our beautiful little county on foot

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

For full details visit www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/walks

or scan the QR code 

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



The festival poster, designed by Julianna Jagielska

High Place

My words below were inspired by a walk taken one May between Holmbury St Mary and Wotton in Surrey, mostly on the Greensand Way, and passing the Leith Hill Tower. I certainly loved the walk and shan't forget it in a hurry

Lizzie Ballagher



Leith Hill Tower, south west of Dorking in Surrey. Leith Hill is the second highest point (294m) in south east England.

High, dry, yet under wads
Of unseasonable cloud,
The path rises up before us:
Holly, oak, birch & sycamore
Open doors on either side to where,
Below early summer leaves,
Splashes of late bluebells still
Cling to the hill.

The muted soundtrack
Of our panting breath—steps
Careful steps on the softened ground
And over tree-roots—
Are all we hear at first.

Then suddenly the woods
Grow dense with beech and birdsong:
Blackbirds, chaffinches, wrens,
Robins wild with joy at growing heat,
Until at last we reach
The high stone tower of Leith:
Climb the skymost point
In South-East England.

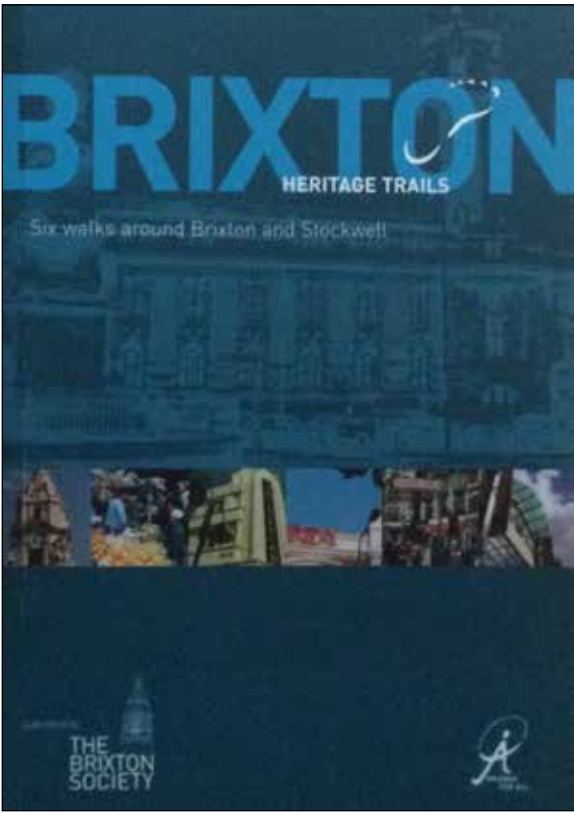
Up, then down the corkscrew stair
Inside the aged landmark,
Soon we descend beside
A gurgling stream, the Tilling Bourne,
That weaves its way through clay.

We hear a gathering force
Of rushing water: forty feet
Of gushing whiteness down to valley floor,
Below majesties of regal beeches,
We stop in awe to listen
And to stare,
Breathless once again,
Right there.

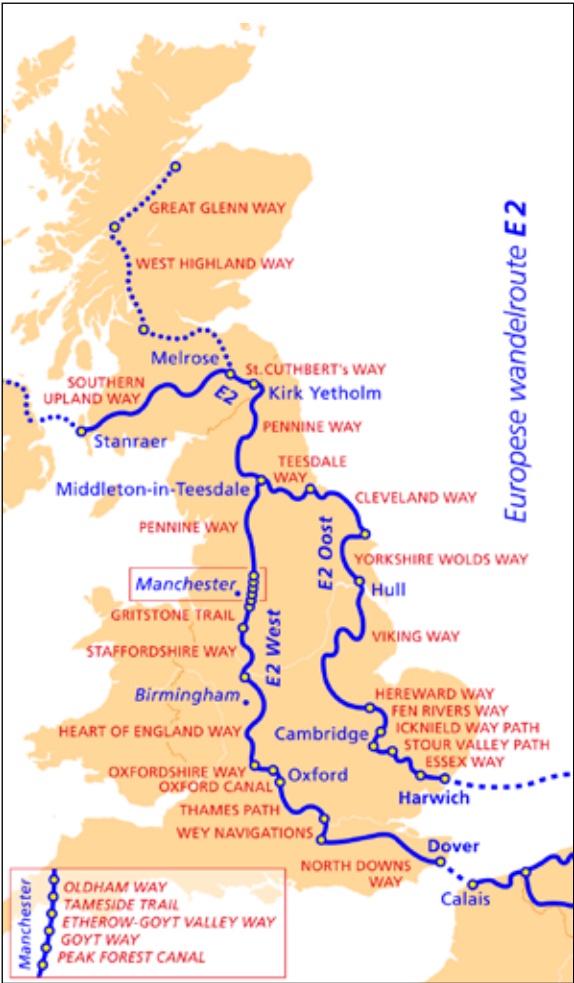
Words and images © Lizzie Ballagher



The corkscrew staircase inside Leith Hill Tower.



Brixton Heritage Trails



The E2.

Photos: John Pestle

Ephemera - and the short and long

Looking through my ever-growing collection of ephemera I collected over the years I came across two trails, one local to me and short, the other almost impossibly long. First was the Brixton Heritage Trail while the second was the E2 route which starts in Scotland and goes all the way to Nice on the Mediterranean Sea.

The six short walks which make up the Brixton Heritage Trails around Brixton and Stockwell were published in 2001 so things might have changed in a quarter of a century. These are strolls in a big city which is quite green and isn't flat. While there are lots of older buildings there are an enormous number of new premises; some homes, others shops, cafes, pubs and industrial services. And while Brixton is very busy it also has quiet streets, a big park and other green spaces. The routes take us to many heritage plaques including ones for historian and writer CLR James and broadcaster and writer Darcus Howe on Shakespeare Road and Violette Szabo who lived in Burnley Road and worked for the French Resistance. Sadly, she was executed by the Nazis in the Second World War at the age of 23..

Although the walks are short, exploring the in-and-outs turns up all sorts of things to look at. For example there is a horse stable which looks desolate and hidden away at the end of a road next to a railway line. Probably all the walks could be done in a day but it is likely that any explorer would want to spend time wandering this patch and, perhaps, visiting the windmill which is the nearest to the centre of London or sitting on a high point of Brockwell Park and looking over a view of the city probably with a cup of coffee.

A recently drafted article about the E2 and other sources of information reveal the complication of this route which runs for 4,850 km/3,010 miles. countries covered include Scotland, England, Belgium, Luxembourg and France with Ireland creating a further extension. There doesn't appear to be many walkers who have completed the route although many people have walked parts of it. The GR5 route from Lake Geneva to Nice is a key part of the E2 and it is suggested that 10,000 people walk it each year.

Yours truly can only have memories of walking the North Downs Way which forms a part of the E2 in England and the GR5 although it took a long time to cover Lake Geneva to Nice complete with diversions now and again enroute. Apparently the E2 is being celebrated this year by the European Hiking Federation but at the moment there doesn't appear to be any local celebrations for us but we will share any information if it appears. Also there seems to be little E2 waymarking in Britain so local walkers would be advised to follow the waymarking and mapping of the various routes which make up the E2 on our patch.

John Pestle

Explore with map and compass

East Sussex member, John Harmer, is planning another of his courses for this coming autumn. Tentative dates are Saturdays 26 September, 17 and 24 October. The one-day courses are held at Battle and provide an opportunity for beginners to gain confidence and experience in map-reading and land navigation. A standard

charge of £10 applies, with reduced rates available. If you are interested please contact John on 01424 773998 or email johnharmer31@outlook.com, stating your preferred dates. A more advanced course will be arranged at a later date if there is sufficient demand.



KENT *calling*

Area Secretary's diary

Parish maps: All profits from our guides like the new edition of Three River Valley Walks in West Kent (see page X) are used to fund Kent Ramblers' work facilitating and promoting walking, which includes our project to replace dilapidated parish footpath maps of which there are many displayed across the county. In the last couple of months we have funded replacements at Badlesmere & Leaveland (two parishes in Kent so well off the beaten track that I have yet to visit them) and at Godden Green where the map is exceptionally well situated immediately opposite the pub.

Buses: The most depressing aspect to creating the new guide was the discovery of how much bus services in Kent have deteriorated since publication of the previous edition in 2018. Buses on Sundays seem to be an endangered species and even when long-distance walks such as the Wealdway actually cross bus routes, there may still be a long walk along a busy road to find the bus stop itself. When I have a moment to

spare I may start a campaign to have bus stops better placed for walkers.

Coast Path: The official opening of the King Charles III England Coast Path in March took me rather by surprise as there are still some gaps here in Kent, especially on Sheppey - quite apart from temporary closures due to construction work west of Gravesend and a broken bridge at the town's marina. I worry that now the path is officially open, those responsible for getting it actually open may feel under less pressure.

Lenham meeting: Forthcoming events include our next meeting in Lenham for our footpath volunteers and anyone else interested in our footpath work on 18 June. If the date has not passed by the time you read this and you would like to attend (it doesn't matter if you are not a member of Kent Area) do please get in touch at pro@kentramblers.org.uk. We have a very lively bunch of footpath volunteers whose work is so vital protecting our public rights of way network - which is of course what makes the Ramblers special.

Public inquiries: One of the things that we footpath guardians

do from time to time is attend public inquiries. In January a few of us traipsed to such an event in the village hall at Bobbing, not far from the bridge over the Swale to the Isle of Sheppey. We weren't actually opposing the diversion of a path away from a dangerous level crossing to go under a nearby bridge, although there were concerns about minor aspects of the new route. However, it is a useful experience to observe these events in readiness for when we do have to present a case where an unacceptable diversion is being proposed. In general we find that the Inspector bends over backwards to ensure that anyone who wants to offer an opinion, however marginal its relevance, is able to do so. My biggest complaint is that, in my experience so far, PA equipment is not available and the proceedings can be virtually inaudible to anyone with a hearing impairment, which I think is totally unacceptable. Next time I attend a public inquiry, I will complain in advance in the hope that something gets done.

Robert Peel

Secretary, Kent Ramblers



The new parish paths map in Badlesmere & Leaveland
Photos: Robert Peel



... and before replacement



The new Seal parish pathmap



... and before replacement



SURREY *snippets*

How can an AGM be more exciting?

AGMs can be a little, dare we say, boring! Area AGMs are no exception. So this year we wanted the Surrey Area AGM to be different, and to attract more members because of the engaging activities we had planned. We wanted the AGM itself to be completed within 30 minutes (it was done in 20 minutes) and after hearing Lucy Robinson's talk on the changes to Ramblers governance to progress with some workshops in which everyone could contribute.

Eleven tables were set up, into group committee roles: Chairs, Secretaries, Treasurers, Membership Secretaries, Footpath Officers, Walk Leaders, Website Managers, Holiday Organisers, Social Media/Publicity Officers, Walks Coordinators, Mentoring Officers and other group committee roles, and a table regarding Ramblers governance at which Lucy Robinson was invited to sit.

Members could go to any table. We tried not to be too prescriptive about who sat at which tables, but tried to get Chairs to sit together, etc. We put three or four questions on each table and encouraged discussion to elicit the difficulties experienced by each of these roles and what ideas might be possible to resolve the issues. Notes were written up on sheets of paper. There was a lot of chatter! It brought up a lot of actions and a six-page

document was the result. We have now begun to discuss the actions at our Area meetings, encouraging the Chairs to independently converse more on issues such as risk assessments, mileage claims, and the use of Meetup and other social media platforms to increase awareness of our walks and events.

I asked the meeting after the workshops were over, if we should repeat the exercise. I received a resounding Yes! People talked about the issues we all experience and we have the beginnings of some ways to overcome them. Have we resolved all our issues - no! But I do think we have increased motivation and momentum to work on the resolutions! We plan to run something similar next year and build on the success and attract more members to come along to the 2027 Surrey Area AGM.

One unresolved issue is the three vacant posts in Area, despite advertising the roles prior to, and at the AGM. We have now filled the vacant Webmaster post but remain seeking: an Area Secretary, an Area Publicity Officer and an Area Footpath Officer. These role profiles are all available to view at the bottom of the homepage on the Surrey Area website (<https://www.surreyramblers.org.uk/>). If you are in Surrey and think you can help us, we would absolutely love to hear from you!

Barbara Crow

Chair, Surrey Area and Kingston group

Thames mural installed

A mural has been unveiled in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Thames Path officially becoming a National Trail. Created by artist Vickie Amiralis on a side of the Leichlingen Pavilion at Mill Meadows, the work

celebrates the flora and fauna to be found along the river. A QR code provided then links with Henley Town Council's website where a quiz for families can be downloaded and colouring sheets for children can be printed at home.



Volunteer Neil Maitland-Walker litter-picks on the London Loop. Photo: Alan Parry

London Loop, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk project

Now that we're into better weather our volunteer group is once again much more active on the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk.

As well as walking their sections and reporting issues, many volunteers are also out and about replacing newly faded, damaged or missing waymark discs and stickers. We have good stocks both of rectangular (straight-on) and of arrow/finger vinyl overlays for both the Capital Ring and London Loop - which means we can continue replacing these when they become very faded (if the signposts aren't overly high) - though the work requires a day with not too much breeze!

Some volunteers have recently undertaken litter-picks on the London Loop. In March, Barbara Crow organised a Kingston Ramblers group litter-pick from

Berrylands station on Section 8, supported by Kingston Council as part of the Great British Spring Clean. And new project volunteer Neil Maitland-Walker, an award-winning litter picker, has already been out on Section 9 with Alan Parry, one of our project coordinators - they found the route had remarkably little litter except for a build-up along the A30 towards the end of the section at Hatton Cross. They'll be out on more sections of the Loop throughout the year.

On Section 4 in the Addington Hills two new posts have been added where the route was unclear. And thanks to Ramblers Inner London Area and the London LDWA group, we have been able to order another 20 posts for delivery to two different ends of Greater London, having now used our initial purchase of posts.

Thanks to the persistence of local volunteers, Bexley Council has now installed handrails on both sides

of the steps up from Hall Place to the A2 on Section 1 of the London Loop - without rails, and with a steep drop, the steps were previously dangerous and had forced some walkers to turn back. Our volunteers have since added waymark discs to the rails to make the route clear.

We still want to see all 40 stiles on the London Loop replaced by gates - however there is no progress to report to date as this is not a simple task and will be a long-term project. our approach might be to focus on a few particularly concerning stiles - such as the broken one at Pinnerwood Farm on Section 14, which could cause injury - as our starting point.

And finally, we're delighted to share the news that the riverside route of Section 15 of the Capital Ring in North Woolwich is open again as the repairs to the King George V lock gates have been completed.

Clare Wadd



The new handrails on steps near Hall Place in Bexley

Constable 250

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of the English Romantic painter John Constable. To celebrate, Christchurch Mansion in Ipswich is presenting 'The Hay Wain: Walking the Landscape' from Saturday 11 July to Sunday 4 October to recognise Constable's connection to the countryside on the Essex/Suffolk border that inspired him. This will be followed by 'Constable to Contemporary' from Saturday 24 October to Sunday 28 February 2027,

which will include new works by local artists and community groups inspired by Constable. Details are at www.ipswich.museums.org.uk/constable250. Gainsborough's House in Sudbury, Suffolk, also has an exhibition - 'Gainsborough, Turner and Constable', exploring the emergence of the tradition of landscape painting in Britain through three of its greatest exponents and other notable landscapists. This runs until Sunday 11 October. Details at gainsborough.org or call 01787 372950.

Kent Downs rail trails

Kent Downs National Landscape has produced downloadable leaflets to 10 walking routes which include sections of the North Downs Way National Trail and start and finish at railway stations.

The routes range in distance from five to 11 miles,

with Ordnance Survey mapping and detailed walk instructions provided. Circular routes start (and finish) at Shoreham/Otford, Cuxton, Harrietsham, Wye and Chilham stations whilst linear routes run from Knockholt to Dunton Green, Borough Green to Otford, Charing to Hollingbourne, Shepherdswell to Dover and Folkestone to Dover. For more information go to kentdowns.org.uk.

Path talks

Paths through Britain' is the theme for an evening at the British Library in London on Thursday 25 June from 7pm with author and geographer Nicholas Crane, Wainwright archivist Chris Butterfield and adventurer Phoebe Smith. Tickets cost £12 and can be booked at events.bl.uk/paths-through-britain.

britain.

Nicholas Crane will also be discussing his latest book, 'The Path More Travelled: the secret history of Britain's footpaths' at Stanfords in Covent Garden, London, on the evening of Tuesday 30 June. Tickets (which must be booked in advance) are £8 which includes a glass of wine or soft drink. Details are at stanfords.co.uk/events or call 020 7836 1321.



The Vale Path Volunteers helping to make a dead hedge alongside the Ridgeway near Wayland's Smithy. Ash stakes were banged into the ground to form a framework, after which the thinner branches of the cut-down hawthorns and elders plus bramble and briar were pushed in between. Our team leader then walked on top of the dead hedge to compress the filling. Every five metres or so, trunks and thick branches were placed across the line of the hedge to provide strength and crevices for wildlife. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



Archaeologist Dan Bashford, Manager of Historic England's Historic Ridgeway Project, talking to the Vale Path Volunteers about the long and varied history of Scutchamer Knob. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



Members of Thame & Wheatley's path maintenance volunteers (left) part way through widening Thame footpath number 8. Photos: Bob Merr

Sprucing up our Ancient Monuments

On and off over the last 18 months the Vale Path Volunteers, the path maintenance team of Vale of White Horse Ramblers, have sometimes forsaken the public rights of way network to focus their attention on two Ancient Monuments: Wayland's Smithy and Scutchamer Knob. The thread that links them is the Ridgeway National Trail in the North Wessex Downs section.

Wayland's Smithy is one of the jewels in the crown of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. This long barrow, constructed five and a half thousand years ago, is fronted by massive Sarsen stones. Until recently it was possible to pass by on the Ridgeway and not notice that it was there. This was because of a high hedgerow of hawthorn trees and associated bramble and briar.

To rectify this, and overgrowth at other Ancient Monuments along the Ridgeway, Historic England has revived the spirit of community

participation in the maintenance of our heritage through the Historic Ridgeway Project. Well over a hundred volunteers have been contributing. At Wayland's Smithy, two professionals cut down the hedgerow, then relays of volunteers have used the resultant logs and branches to construct a 300-metre dead hedge where the hedgerow had been. This will be a desirable residence for wildlife. The professionals then planted 1,500 tree saplings (whips) in front of the dead hedge, which will shield the new hedge from westerly winds. The Vale Path Volunteers have had three sessions building the dead hedge, which is a slow business, with many other volunteers contributing over a period of months.

The Vale Path Volunteers's other monumental focus has been on Scutchamer Knob, a Bronze Age mound. This unassuming structure has a rich history. Initially it was a round barrow for the burial of the Wessex King Cwiclehm in 696 CE.

Subsequently, though still in Anglo-Saxon times, the Knob was a meeting place for the shire moot - county parliament in modern parlance. Disputes would be solved here and the will of the king at the time would be disseminated. Eventually this use of the Knob ceased and it became a meeting place, fair and major market until 1620. It was also used as a beacon hill, this use being thought to date from Elizabethan times, when fires would be lit on prominences to spread news or warnings of major threats.

Unfortunately, in recent years the Knob had become overgrown with scrub and was easily overlooked by walkers passing on the Ridgeway. In effect, the Vale Path Volunteers have adopted Scutchamer Knob, having spent no fewer than nine sessions there since December 2024, cutting back the vegetation on and around the mound. As every path maintenance volunteer knows, as soon as we've shouldered our tools and shuffled off back home, the vegetation has the last laugh, growing back with vigour,

Dave Cavanagh
Vale Path Volunteers

Improving access at Thame

Oxfordshire County Council is planning a Thame - Moreton - Thame access-friendly circular route of just over three kilometres, an idea which emanated from the Parish Path Warden Workshop, organised by David Tole (coordinator of our Parish Path Warden network) in May 2025, and then led to a site meeting between stakeholders in August 2025 to scope and plan the upgrade works. The county council asked our volunteer group to support this project by widening Thame footpath 383/8/70 and installing three new waymark posts marking

the route from the Phoenix Trail. This work was done over two working days and, with the post holes being close to town infrastructure, we hired a CAT4 scanner to check that the excavation area was free of buried power cables before starting the digging.

The original path had one or two layers of tarmac but over the years soil and grass had encroached from the sides to narrow the path to only 60cm width in places. We used lawn edge cutters and spades to remove the turf at least 20cm on both sides of the path to provide at least a walking width of one metre for the whole 270 metres. Tough work but

good for the arm and back muscles!

The path is in constant use by walkers, joggers, dog walkers and cyclists and we received many compliments from path users.

Rebessa McNaught, Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access Development Officer, joined us for the second afternoon session and helped with the path clearance on the closing section of the arable field boundary. A spot of London Pride at the Six Bells was the revival tonic!

Bob Merry
Team Leader, Thame & Wheatley Footpath Maintenance Volunteers



The team, after finishing the job and just before going off to the pub.

Those we have lost

Des de Moor 1961 - 2026

Des de Moor loved his walking, his beer, his music, all things London and his partner, Ian. Many of you will have known him as both a Ramblers staff member, a leader for Walk London and then for Inner London groups, Blackheath and London Strollers. Some of you may have copies of The CAMRA Guide to London's Best Beer, Pubs and Bars he wrote over the years. A few of you could have seen him perform his version of David Bowie songs at various London venues. I knew him as a friend for nearly 30 years and a colleague for some of that time.

Des was not a man to be hurried. After a Ramblers General Council in the 2000s, held in Nottingham, that we both attended as staff members, we were travelling onward separately to other meetings and had some time to kill before our trains. We headed for Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem. Des ordered his normal half pint and then spent the next 30 minutes sipping the beer and making precise notes in his little notebook. Me, I downed two pints and we barely exchanged a handful of words. It doesn't seem odd to me that I now remember this scene so fondly.

Along with a couple of colleagues Des implemented the Ramblers Walking for Health programme, often it has to be said, against a wash of indifference throughout the organisation. I think many people found him stubborn but he was fiercely loyal to his principles and



Des de Moor

hard to shift away from his way of doing things. (He always favoured Northern Soul to Tamla Motown for pity's sake!) Where others saw willfulness I came to see courage.

I know that Des was generous with his prolific notes he has on various walks and was largely responsible for the monthly First Sunday walks still going on in both Blackheath and London Strollers groups. And as far as I'm aware his notes and blog posts are now the only record we have of the London Countryway

Because of our shared first names,

on the odd occasion when we were both leading walks in London on the same day it wasn't unknown for us to get some attendees who mixed up their Des's and were expecting the other Des. We both took completely different approaches to walk leading and the contrast was so confusing for some.

All who walk in London have much to thank Des for, in his tireless promotion of routes and walkers. He was a fearless man who fought for his beliefs and I will miss him.

Des Garrahan

Simon Hildreth 1946 - 2025

It came as quite a shock to hear of Simon's death on 13 November 2025 after a short stay in hospital; he lived with a precarious heart condition for many years, yet he carried on walking within his limits until two days before he was admitted to hospital. On 25 October 2025, he managed a short walk with the easy-paced group before, prepared with his newspaper, he turned back to wait for the rest of us before all having lunch together for the last time.

Simon was a Peter Pan figure, he never grew up; funny, always caring of others, perpetually cheerful and sometimes outrageously naughty, - I remember him on rambles, sliding down icy patches on country lanes like we all used to do in the school playground, vaulting over gates at an age when he should have known better and entertaining us with all the scandal that took place behind virtually every closed door around the village, where he



Simon Hildreth

spent his childhood and worked as a shrewd businessman in the family firm.

He was a Ramblers member for 35 years, joining with his beloved wife Sheila in March 1989 and clocked up an impressive 713 walks and led a few; one time secretly hiding bananas and snacks under a bench in

the Lyle Garden in Bledlow, a mini picnic for the banana break.

He was knocked sideways by Sheila's death in 2006 but, in later years, found joy and companionship with fellow

rambler, Pat Evans.

Angela Shipley

Wycombe

Ramblers

John Morris 1952 - 2025

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of John Morris last November. John had been a leading light of Hillingdon Ramblers and in particular the Wednesday walking group that had grown so much under his leadership. He was "never" not there for our walks. He was a quiet and gentle man who seemed to know every footpath for miles around and was never seen to use a map and certainly not a mobile phone. He could step in at a moment's notice to lead a walk if the allocated leader was not available. He was nearly always the first to be seen at the meeting point of a walk with his white mop of hair and no matter how isolated the location was he always had a hot Costa coffee in his hand (other brands were also enjoyed)!

John had a very relaxed style of walking with his hands crossed behind his back regardless of the terrain. As leader of our Wednesday walks programme he encouraged variety in our programme and from time to time would take us to the far ends of the Transport for London network to experience new locations. He would frequently be seen

as we gathered for a walk with clipboard in his hand ensuring that there were no gaps in our programme and normally would have at least four months of Wednesday walks all lined up with leaders and a rough plan of each walk. He was not pushy with newcomers and normally a year would go by before a gentle tap on the shoulder and encouraging words to maybe think about leading a walk. He was a regular on our Sunday walks too and led sometimes in the Surrey Hills as well as the Chilterns.

His last walk with us as leader was last August when he achieved 198 walks as leader for our group. An achievement that few have and will surpass. John had no immediate family and we all felt he was part of our family and it was down to us in Hillingdon Ramblers to arrange his funeral service in early January. Many members, both active and less active, came along to say goodbye to our dear friend.

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers



John in the Clent Hills where he led our group on a walking holiday in 2023
Photo: Simon Thornhill

Roy Johnson

It is with great sadness that I write about Roy's passing. Roy was a well known, popular and very active member of our group and Area for many years. He held many positions in our group: Membership Secretary (2011 - 14), Footpath Secretary (2012-23), and Countryside and Access Secretary 2012 - 2025).

As Footpath Secretary he worked tirelessly for many years to maintain and improve the footpaths of Buckinghamshire and enhance the walking experience for everyone. I personally have very fond memories of walking with him on his monthly footpath checks in some of the wilder and more remote parts of the county, followed by a pint and a pub lunch, where he made sure everything we found was properly recorded and passed to the county council.

He leaves us with a wonderful legacy with the Outer Aylesbury Ring, a 53-mile footpath around the town that he conceived, designed and helped to implement. As he checked our paths

he realised that better views of the Aylesbury Vale would be obtained from the higher ground around the town. The Outer Aylesbury Ring was formally launched in 2013 after many years of work signing and mapping the route, and the creation of detailed guides and 14 associated circular walks. He then arranged for the route to be recognised by the Long Distance Walkers Association and the Ordnance Survey. The route has its own website and we know that many walk and enjoy it each year. Roy checked the route annually and as a group we celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2023 by making sure group walks covered the entire route that year.

We will always be grateful for the work he did, the example he set and the legacy he left us.

Stephen Pulman

Chairman

Aylesbury & District Ramblers



Roy (right) with then Chairman Dan Sullivan cutting the cake to launch the Outer Aylesbury Ring.

John McMillan

1935 - 2026

Late in January we found ourselves digesting the news that another long-standing member of our group had died; peacefully in his care home, aged 90 years. It is a fitting tribute to John that after several years of not walking with Wycombe Ramblers, so many members who knew him, wanted to pay their respects at his funeral on 18 February. Our memories are of a gentle, quiet, loyal man, who created no waves but was a good conversationalist, never taking the limelight. His career with the BBC made him an intriguing walking companion. He used to organise walks for BBC employees after his retirement.

He lived alone in the rather isolated, top end of Marlow Bottom, where he needed his car and after he made the decision to stop driving, life became too difficult to stay there and unfortunately none of us could find his whereabouts after that, so we rather lost touch. There was one highlight in my memory of him. In the days when my husband John was



John McMillan

Chairman, as his Girl Friday I organised a helium balloon when members reached 80; John was so pleased with his that he tied it to his belt and completed all six miles with it floating over him, a great big smile written all over his face.

John served Wycombe Ramblers well, joining in 1998, completing 1,232 walks (the fifth highest in the group's history) of which he led 67.

Angela Shipley

Wycombe Ramblers

Malcolm Morse

remembered

On 24 April, 75 members joined a walk from the Hogs Back brewery in Tongham in memory of Malcolm Morse, one of Farnham & District Ramblers longstanding members of 24 years, who died in August 2025 (see Those we have lost, SEW February 2026). Malcom led more than 1,300 walks for the group, entertaining us with his stories about the countryside, and his knowledge of the armed forces and military history.

Our leader divided us into manageable groups of 12 - 13 who each set off at short intervals with a sub-leader. The walk of just two miles took us to the gate we had dedicated to Malcolm in 2018 after he had led 1,000 walks. Then our official

photographer had the unenviable task of herding 75 people together for the group photo. It was then time for members to share some of their stories about Malcolm, some amusing, but all showing the real affection held for him. We then followed a route back to the brewery for drinks and a variety of pizzas and garlic breads which were enjoyed by all.

The huge number of walkers attending must surely be a reflection on Malcolm's popularity. This was our chance to celebrate his life and the friendship and loyalty he gave us.

Sue Harvey

Farnham & District Ramblers



Some of the screens displayed in memory of Malcolm Morse (1941 - 2025).



The gathering at Malcolm's gate.

Photo: Adrian R

Wish you were here?



Enjoying the sea breeze.

Photo: Sandra Parker

Sidmouth, Devon

Forty-eight Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers went to Sidmouth in March and stayed in the Bedford Hotel, a family-owned hotel on the seafront. We would definitely recommend this hotel to others looking for a superb base for a walking holiday. It was spotlessly clean and with amazing food. This was our second visit and we took over the whole hotel.

On our first day the coach dropped off the long walkers in

Budleigh Salterton for a linear walk into Exmouth to meet up with the short walkers who completed a circular walk around the surrounding area. On our second day we were off to Exeter dropping the long walkers off at the quay before continuing to Powderham Castle where our non-walkers had a private tour of the castle while they waited for the short walkers to complete a circular walk from the castle back along the River Exe. After lunch we returned to Exeter

to collect the rest of the group before returning to the hotel.

Unfortunately, on Thursday due to severe weather conditions, we had to cancel all planned walks and our coach took us to visit Sidmouth's donkey sanctuary. We found this very interesting after a video and speaker filled us with lots of information about the rescue and care for these lovely animals. Sadly on Friday we had to make our journey home after another very successful walking trip for our group.

Christine Raynsford
Dartford & Gravesham
Ramblers

Plymouth, Devon



Henley & Goring Ramblers at Edgecombe Gardens.

Photo: Joan Clark

The Tamar valley at the end of March is a lovely place to visit with the trees showing a delicate green and spring flowers everywhere. Our base was Plymouth and we were able to use public transport to get to the start of all of the three different walks on offer each day. Many of us caught the train to Plymouth and once there we were able to use a combination of buses, trains and ferries to explore the area.

Our arrival day afternoon walk along the waterfront and the famous Plymouth Hoe was interesting but wet! After that damp start, however, we had good weather for the rest of our four

nights' stay. On the first full day's walk we took the scenic Tamar Valley train line to Calstock then explored the Danscombe Valley. Those wanting a short walk with sightseeing visited the National Trust's Cotehele House. The views over the Tamar were spectacular.

Our exploration of the Bere peninsula continued on our second full day. One group followed the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail then braved the slippery walk across the Lopwell Dam at low tide before walking to Bere Alston to catch the train back to Plymouth. Another group walked from Bere Alston to Bere Ferrers station where they enjoyed a splendid late lunch and interesting stories from the

railway enthusiast proprietor at the cafe set up alongside restored vintage railway stock. The short walk with sightseeing option, enjoyed by many of the group, was a trip to Buckwell Abbey.

Our last full day was a complete contrast as we explored the coastline on the west side of Plymouth Sound. We admired the historic buildings in the Royal William Yard before crossing to Cremyll on the Tamar Belle. Some then explored Edgcombe Estate and gardens while others walked along the coast path before returning to Cawsand for the longer ferry trip back to the Barbican at Plymouth.

Some members took the opportunity to visit the exhibition celebrating the life and works of the artist Beryl Cook, whose comic pictures of everyday life bring a smile to everyone's face. We were all able to enjoy the life-sized reproductions of her characters dotted around the town.

With a group of 34, three walk options every day and complicated public transport arrangements, this was not an easy trip to organise. Our thanks and admiration go to Susan Maguire, the organiser, and to all walk leaders and helpers for making this such an enjoyable trip.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers

Church Stretton, Shropshire

In early March, 10 members of Milton Keynes & District Group enjoyed a self-guided walking weekend at the HF Holidays Longmynd Hotel in Church Stretton. We had four capable leaders in our party and were therefore able to provide a shorter and longer walk on each day. The low cloud

cover and impaired views did not deter us. After testing our fitness on the hills, a visit to the tea room after each walk was well deserved. Such was the success of the trip that we hope to do something similar in 2027.

Sue Fisher
Milton Keynes & District
Ramblers



On the Shropshire hills.

Photo: Andrew Gardiner

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Surrey Heath Ramblers' Spring Getaway, staying at the Premier Inn in Tunbridge Wells (very handy as a base), set off with plenty of springtime cheer on Sunday 22 March with a gentle seven-mile circular walk from the elegant towers of Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens to the charming town of Cranbrook. There was time for a relaxed lunch, a wander around Cranbrook's magnificent church, and a moment to admire the iconic Union Mill. Back in Sissinghurst, many enjoyed a leisurely stroll through Vita Sackville-West's gardens before gathering for a warm and lively dinner at the welcoming White Bear in Tunbridge Wells.

Monday offered two tempting

choices: a peaceful five and a half mile amble across the rolling landscape of Ashdown Forest, home of Winnie-the-Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood, or a more energetic nine and a half mile circuit from Withyam. After miles well walked, a hearty dinner was the perfect reward, enjoyed with the easy camaraderie of fellow ramblers.

The getaway rounded off on Tuesday with a delightful five-mile walk from Scotney Castle, followed by time to explore its romantic 14th-century ruins and gardens before everyone headed home - with satisfied steps, renewed spirits, and shared moments to treasure.

Veronica Wells
Surrey Heath Ramblers



The happy group in Kent.

Photo: Paul Seidman

Hotels plea

I wonder if people who write holiday reports for South East Walker could recommend hotels they stay in? Unfortunately, not everyone who writes a report

mentions where their group stayed. It would be so useful to have a bank of hotels to contact.

Virginia Berridge
North London HF Group

Around the groups



On one stage a stop for ice creams was made at the restored 1880s Gallions Hotel (now 'Galyons' bar/cafe) built to accommodate passengers joining P & O ships at the adjacent Royal Albert Dock. Photo: Jales Tippell

New year, new social calendar

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers kicked off the 2026 social calendar with a Burns Night ceilidh on 24 January. The event was a sold-out evening with the dance floor packed with enthusiastic dancers. We enjoyed fabulous music from the Ouzel Valley Ranters, a local ceilidh band, as well as homemade cakes, haggis sausage rolls and a dram of whisky to toast the bard of Scotland!

Our Annual Dinner was held on Saturday 28 February at Dunstable Downs Golf Club.

As well as enjoying great company and food, we recognised the efforts of our Wellbeing Walk leaders who deliver over 200 walks a year. These walks are hugely popular and contribute not only to physical health but also provide an opportunity for walkers to meet and chat with others over a coffee afterwards. All the leaders have completed training required by Central Bedfordshire Council and regularly give up their time to support the wellbeing of others.

Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers



Some of our Wellbeing Walk leaders receive their gifts. Photos: Pamela Bates

John 'the Hat'

There is a wise old saying, 'never judge a book by its cover' and that is certainly the case with John Knight from North Beds Ramblers.

I first met John and Suki, John's partner, on a wet and cold February walk. This was their first walk with the Ramblers. To say they came underdressed for the weather was an understatement. With driving wind and rain, John's only footwear option was a pair of trainers! But full credit, they not only completed the walk but also joined us in the

pub afterwards. The following week, again, things didn't go to plan as they misjudged the start time. But in full spirit, caught the group up at the mid-walk coffee break. Not only had John used a combination of luck and cunning navigation to find the group, but he was also wearing new walking boots, which were more appropriate for winter conditions. It was quite clear to the group that no matter what the obstacle, this couple were going to give the Ramblers the best shot possible.

Over the coming weeks John would attend walks with a different hat depending on the weather or occasion. This effort was picked up by others in the group and a joking challenge was set for John to attend each walk for

a year with a different hat.

John rose to the challenge, with both himself and Suki visiting local car boot sales and charity shops regularly, planning hats for future walks. In September, North Bedfordshire Ramblers spent a long weekend in the Peak District and John didn't disappoint with a different hat for all four walks. John didn't disappoint, with a different hat for all four walks. It was on day four that John displayed one of the best hats of his collection. He wore a sombrero style hat, just perfect for sunny Spain, but the Peaks? A number of people we met out walking commented on John's attire! Towards the end of the walk, we encountered a group of carers walking

with a group of people with learning difficulties. They all loved the sombrero and photos were taken in abundance.

In a true act of sheer unselfish brilliance, John and Suki presented the sombrero to the main walk leader, who was completely taken aback by this kind gesture. Sometimes it's the small acts of kindness that have the most impact. This certainly made an impression on both groups walking that day. Some unknown stanger had their day made by John. Who knows who you may come across in your Peak District adventures, maybe a group with a large sombrero!

Clive Pattle

North Beds Ramblers

Conquering the Capital Ring

Chilterns Weekend Walkers have completed a year-long trek round the Capital Ring.

Those hoping for a winter escape from Chilterns mud got a rude shock on the very first section from Harrow to Hendon when they had to negotiate the suburban swamps of Barn Hill and Fryent Country Park.

Members from Buckinghamshire found themselves making some

lengthy rail and tube journeys to reach the furthest sections of the 78-mile orbital path, but the reward was discovering parts of the capital many had never visited.

Highlights included crossing the Thames on the Woolwich Ferry, taking in the views from the top of Severndroog Castle in Shooters Hill, a weekend away in Wimbledon and walking through the urban beaver reserve at Paradise Fields in Greenford.

Dams and gnawed tree trunks provided ample evidence of the beavers' nocturnal forays.

With the finishing line in sight, a Sunday morning meltdown on the Elizabeth Line nearly derailed the final walk to Harrow. But the resourceful ramblers made it to Hanwell by bus and completed all 11 sections with a combined total of 1,150 miles under their belt.

But the celebrations weren't over. A month

later the group gathered for a walk and cream tea in Seer Green where a slide show brought back memories of the best moments.

Jon Hilton, who masterminded the adventure, said: "It was a success thanks to the camaraderie, the shared sense of challenge (the walking, but more particularly the travel), the support for me and the positive feedback.

Mark Percy

Chilterns Weekend

Walkers



On a bitterly cold January morning, the Ring walkers took a photo break outside the grand Streatham Pumping Station, opened in 1894. Photo: Jon Hilton



Dancing to the Ouzel Valley Ranters.



John and Suki.

Photo: Sandra Kelsey

To be a pilgrim

Eighteen Pang Valley Ramblers set off recently to walk the first few miles of the St James' Way. Some had purchased the pilgrim passport from Reading Town Hall and collected their first stamp before setting out. We walked to the Oracle shopping centre on the Kennet & Avon Canal and along the towpath. Our intention was to finish at Sheffield Bottom Lock and then walk into Theale for public transport back to Reading. However, it appears that modern pilgrims face different challenges to those who walked the Camino in the Middle Ages on their way to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Our walk had already been postponed once because the towpath was under water. This time we had to abandon our walk after five miles after finding the canal had breached its banks and the gap was too wide to jump across and the water too deep

for our walking boots! We returned a short distance to the Cunning Man pub from where we could catch a bus back to the town centre. We have planned a few more walks along the route, climate change permitting!

The St James' Way is a 168.5 mile (110 km) walking route from St James' Church by Reading Abbey ruins to Southampton. There is no documentary evidence that pilgrims took this route, but the Way uses existing public footpaths and passes churches and places of pilgrim interest. It forms part of an expanding network of routes to Santiago de Compostela. After crossing from Southampton to Spain, modern pilgrims can join the 75 km route from A Coruna to Santiago. The two sections thus provide more than the 100 km minimum requirement to qualify as a pilgrim.

During the Middle Ages, pilgrimage became a popular ritual among Christians.

Pilgrims would travel long distances to a sacred place to show their devotion and strengthen their faith. There were three main pilgrimage destinations: Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims from Britain would have started from home and headed for a port to take a boat either directly to Spain or across the channel to France. They would probably have banded together with others for safety and protection to undertake the journey through often war-torn lands.

Pilgrimage from England declined after the Reformation in the mid-16th century. The routes in continental Europe also declined but never really died. In the late 20th-century, there was a massive renaissance of interest in the Camino, largely due to the efforts of a parish priest in Galicia, the province in which Santiago lies. Today nearly 450,000 pilgrims arrive in Santiago each year.

Janet Fisher
Pang Valley Ramblers



The group at their start in Reading.
Photo: Janet Fisher



The flooded area.
Photo: Diana Lincoln



The blocked path before the Slashers arrived.

New kissing gate funded

February 2026 – South Bank Ramblers has funded a new kissing gate in the Chilterns AONB. As an Inner London group with most members based in Lambeth and Southwark, we are fortunate not to face the same access challenges on our doorstep as groups in country areas. Instead, we are pleased to support improvements in the rural areas where we regularly enjoy walking.

Earlier this year we were able to fund a new kissing gate in the Chilterns. The new gate replaces an awkward and potentially hazardous old stile. Its installation improves both safety and accessibility, helping to make the countryside more welcoming for walkers of all abilities. We are pleased that our group can contribute, even in a modest way, to enhancing the local rights of way network. The gate is located approximately two and a half miles from Great Missenden station and forms part of a well-

used footpath network in the area. The installation was carried out on our behalf by the Chiltern Society under their donate a gate scheme. We are grateful for the efficiency with which the society progressed the work from agreement to installation.

This latest project continues a programme of gates and stiles funded by our group over the past 10 years. Recent examples include a field gate at Cuddington near Haddenham in Buckinghamshire (2023), a kissing gate on the Greensand Way at Broadham Green near Oxted (2019), two kissing gates near Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire (2018), two at Alkham near Dover (2017) and five stiles near Plumpton in Sussex (2015). These projects demonstrate our commitment to improving access and safety on public rights of way for the wider walking community.

Dave Hetherington
South Bank Ramblers



The new gate near Great Missenden.



... and the stile it replaced.

Return of the Slashers

The White Cliffs Ramblers path clearance team, known as the 'Slashers', have improved a path in the parish of Hougham Without (between Dover and Folkestone). Path ER278 tracks alongside a busy main road and had been blocked and unusable for a long time, forcing walkers along a busy and - judging by the memorial flowers left on the roadside - dangerous alternative.

It was brought to our attention by one of the team members in December 2025. A recce was done on 20 January and the decision was taken to clear the obstruction. We waited for a day when we had a good number of volunteers to help, and that day was 4 February, when we were able to allocate seven Slashers to the task, and still have two left to take care of another issue elsewhere. We normally do clearance work on

Wednesdays and this one turned out to be a glorious sunny day. In under two hours the path was opened up. One of the team then suggested that if we put in some steps the path would be much easier to use. So, after collecting materials from Kent County Council who were very supportive and grateful for our efforts, we returned on 4 March to install a few steps, to make the steep and muddy bank easier to cross. Again, within two hours our three team members completed the task.

The White Cliffs Ramblers path clearance team operates all year round and now has 10 regular volunteers. The challenge is to keep everyone busy, so if you are local to the area, please report any path clearance issues to us (whitecliffsramblers.org.uk/contact-us/).

John Shale
White Cliffs Ramblers



Installing the new steps to make the path easier to walk.



The steps in place.