

Walker



Ramblers trustee Malcolm McDonnell speaking at the Wealdway40 ceremony at Tonbridge Castle. Photo: Scott Wishart

Ramblers unite to celebrate 40th anniversary of the Wealdway

Eleven walking groups from Kent and Sussex joined together to host the Wealdway 40th anniversary festival in September. The Wealdway stretches for 82 miles through Kent and East Sussex, from Gravesend to Eastbourne. An impressive 388 walkers took part in 26 'Wealdway40' walks, enjoying mainly warm and dry weather during the five weeks to 29 September.

The original idea for a route from the Thames to the Channel came from the late Jim Carley of Meopham & District Footpaths Group, a walking group affiliated to the Ramblers. Jim devised the first section from Gravesend to Tonbridge. The full route was then developed over 10 years by Ramblers groups in Kent, steered by the late Geoff King of Tunbridge Wells Ramblers and, latterly, Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers, leading to the official opening on 27 September 1981.

The Wealdway40 festival host groups were Beachy Head Ramblers, Bromley Ramblers, High Weald Walkers, Maidstone Ramblers, Medway Ramblers, Meopham & District

Footpaths Group, North West Kent Ramblers, Sevenoaks Ramblers, Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers, Tunbridge Wells Ramblers and West Kent Walking Group. Each walk included a section of the Wealdway with distances ranging from a mile and a half stroll around Tonbridge Park to a 15-mile ramble from Tonbridge to Groombridge and back to Tunbridge Wells. The walks were open to everyone and publicised on BBC Radio Kent, in local newsletters and magazines, on social media and online.

Between them, festival participants walked a total of 1,800 miles along the Wealdway (and many more miles on other paths). In addition to the 26 festival walks, four members of Maidstone Ramblers took on the challenge of walking the entire 82-mile route over six days, arriving at Eastbourne Pier on 10 September (see page 2).

Neil Whittall, Chairman of Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers, is confident that the Wealdway40 festival has encouraged new and returning walkers to enjoy a ramble in the wonderful Kent and Sussex countryside. "We

were delighted with the enthusiastic response from the volunteers who planned and led the walks", said Neil. "For Ramblers members, it was an opportunity to discover footpaths beyond their usual walking routes - and to make new friends. For non-members, it was an opportunity to enjoy the camaraderie of walking with a group, and we look forward to welcoming new members as a result of our 'flying the flag' for the Wealdway.

The highlight of the festival was the 40th anniversary ceremony on 26 September in Tonbridge, where the Wealdway meets the Medway Valley Walk and the Eden Valley Walk. The Mayor of Tonbridge, Councillor Roger Roud, told the story of the Wealdway and its significance to the town and surrounding area. He later joined one of three walks which set off from Tonbridge Castle after the ceremony. Malcolm McDonnell, a member of the Ramblers' Board of Trustees, spoke about the importance of protecting public rights of way and thanked local ramblers for their work on maintaining the extensive footpath network in Kent and East Sussex.

A special visitor to the Tonbridge ceremony

was Brian Buttifant, 84, of Kemsing. Brian was one of 500 walkers from across the UK and Europe at the official opening of the Wealdway at Camp Hill in Ashdown Forest in 1981. On that day, he and fellow members of the Long Distance Walkers Association had set off early to walk 35 miles along the Wealdway from Eastbourne, arriving just in time for the opening ceremony. Also present at both the 1981 opening and the 2021 anniversary was Mary Blinks of Tunbridge Wells Rambling Club.

Robert Peel, Secretary of Kent Ramblers, feels that the Wealdway40 celebration has been a great opportunity for cooperation between different groups and Areas within the Ramblers, an affiliated club and East Sussex County Council (who supplied new oak posts so that Sussex Ramblers could restore waymarks on the route across Ashdown Forest). "We hope to continue to work together to improve the route and raise its profile, producing new information boards and a new guidebook in due course", said Robert.

Nicola Brown

Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers

New signs mark ends of Oxfordshire Way

Although the Oxfordshire Way is a well-known and signed route running for about 67 miles/108 km from Bourton-on-the-Water to Henley-on-Thames, the start and finish points in both towns had not been specially marked in any way and many who walk such routes know there is nothing more satisfying than taking a photo when setting out and completing the challenge.

This was pointed out to us in 2018 when Kevin Rodd, an Oxfordshire member who had just completed and enjoyed the walk, told us that his only disappointment was not seeing anything that marked each end of the walk and suggested that if there were signs they might

help draw attention to this wonderful route.

The Walkers are Welcome network in Henley-on-Thames decided to put this right and launched a project to create and install signs at both ends of the route and Oxfordshire Ramblers (although Bourton is in Gloucestershire, most of the route is in Oxfordshire) provided funding for both signs. In September we were pleased to see our project through to completion when our new signs were unveiled in both Bourton-on-the-Water and Henley-on-Thames. And we were delighted that Kevin, who made the suggestion, was able to attend the Henley unveiling.

Alie Hagedoorn

Henley & Goring Ramblers



The new Oxfordshire Way start/finish sign in Bourton-on-the-Water. Left to right: Ernie Ramsey; Bob Hadley, Chair of Bourton-on-the-Water Parish Council; Peter Stone, Chair of Walkers are Welcome Henley-on-Thames; Alie Hagedoorn; John Gordon, Vice Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers; Catherine Notaras of Walkers are Welcome Henley-on-Thames; Cllr Lynda Hicks, Vice Chair of Bourton-on-the-Water Parish Council and Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak, Henley Town Council. Photo: Catherine Notaras

Blackwater Valley Path now stile-free

The last remaining stiles on the Blackwater Valley Path have been replaced with kissing gates by Berkshire's Loddon Valley Ramblers working with Finchampstead Parish Council. This means that the entire 23-mile/37 km route which follows the River Blackwater from the Rowhill nature reserve near Aldershot in Hampshire to near Swallowfield in Berkshire is free of stiles. The river often forms the border between the three counties of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire with the path switching sides along the way.

Steve Vale, Footpath Officer for Loddon Valley Ramblers, writes: Four stiles were replaced with kissing gates near Greenacres Farm between May and July. These gates were paid for by the Ramblers and the parish council and installed by a team of Loddon Valley volunteers, led by project coordinator Ray Sharp. Permission for the replacements was kindly granted by Greenacres Farm landowner, Peter Nice. The installation required particular care as the gates give access to fields used for keeping horses, with electric fences, so that equine and human safety were both paramount in planning the work.

The work followed the installation of two gates to replace stiles on the same path near Jouldings Lane in 2019, and the installation of another gate at Fleethill

Farm in 2020. This is a major step along the way to converting as many stiles as possible in Wokingham Borough, for the benefit of those walkers who find stiles difficult to cross. I was very pleased with the cooperation from both the parish council and the landowner which ensured that, at long last, we have excellent access for all along the Blackwater Valley Path

David Cornish, Chair of Finchampstead Parish Council, adds: "We were delighted to work with the Ramblers to support this project. The new gates have made it easier for our residents to take shorter local walks, as well as for those wanting to walk longer distances without meeting obstacles on the way.

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust has a route description of the Blackwater Valley Path on its website at <http://www.bvct.org.uk>.



With one of the new gates are (left to right) Peter Nice, landowner; Steve Vale and Sheila Hobbs, Loddon Valley Ramblers; David Cornish, Finchampstead Parish Council; Graham Croucher and Ray Sharp, Loddon Valley Ramblers. Photo: Michele Vale

Walking the Wealdway

As lockdown regulations were easing and Ramblers' groups were meeting again, a group of friends from Maidstone Ramblers started to talk about wanting to do a more challenging walk, maybe one of the long distance trails. Then the Wealdway 40th anniversary was brought to our attention and, inspired by that, a plan to walk the whole route from Gravesend to Eastbourne was hatched. It seemed to tick all the boxes, offering the right amount of challenge and was relatively local to us.

We set off on Sunday 5 September. The 83-miles (or is it 82 miles - depends on what you read and is largely irrelevant as you have to walk extra in any case) could be divided up into roughly 14-mile stages with a pub strategically placed at the end of each day's walk, as well as plenty of opportunity to celebrate our success at the end in Eastbourne. We all knew it was a challenge, especially as some had to bail out before we even started, mainly because of knee strains. It was therefore four of the group who reached Eastbourne complete with numerous blisters and a bit of dehydration. During the week we were joined by others for one or more of the days. Particular mention goes to Mel who, despite a knee problem, managed to complete over half the walk including the all-important last stage.

I must mention the help and warm response we received from pubs at key staging points: the Royal Oak at Wrotham, Dorset Arms at Withyham, Blackboys Inn at Blackboys and Plough at Upper Dicker. They were very accommodating, letting us park on two days to allow our car shuffle each day, helpful in providing endless jugs of water along with good and much-needed meals at the end of each day. Some of our group also used them for overnight accommodation. Their walker-friendly approach was important in making our adventures such a success.

We took plenty of photos and we relaxed at the end of each day. These were shared with friends and family, to let them know we were doing well. The response from several of the children was that the 'rents' (short version of 'parents' which I have only recently been party to), were on an extended pub crawl. Possibly their view was reinforced by photos on several days where a pub had been found at lunchtime as well.

There were a few unexpected challenges along the way. Particularly the weather, which was exceptionally hot and dehydration became a concern. So we made efforts to carry additional water and used the pub stops to take on board as much water as possible as well as the welcome pint of beer. Another challenge was provided by Network Rail who had closed all the

footpath crossings on the Uckfield line. We eventually found a way around after an additional hour's walking. Previous experience has taught us that there will always be unexpected challenges which are part of the whole experience and a talking point for stories later.

It is easy on a long distance walk to quickly forget the areas seen along the way. But the Wealdway is an exceptional walk for the amount of beautiful countryside including long stretches of woodland and views over the undulating Kent and Sussex Weald. The route includes stretches of many other paths including the North Downs Way, Greensand Way, South Downs Way, Vanguard Way and 1066 Walk. We sometimes forget just how beautiful the countryside is in Kent and Sussex.

So, a special mention to the four members of the group who walked the whole route. To Chris Spicer - for making it despite some of the worst blisters I have seen, to Giles Day - for walking with boot soles which had become completely detached, to Les Holmans - for donating his hat to sheep who seemed to enjoy the supplement to their dinner. And of course there was myself whom the others had to put up with. May we have the opportunity to walk this route again, perhaps on the 50th anniversary.

*Des Relf
Maidstone Ramblers*



Journey's end in Eastbourne with (left to right) Mel Collins, Giles Day, Des Relf, Chris Spicer and Les Holmans.
Photo: Tony Bushe



Veteran long distance walker Brian Buttifant receives a standing ovation at the ceremony at Tonbridge Castle on 26 September.



Mayor of Tonbridge, Cllr Roger Roud, pictured with members of West Kent Walking Group before their 15-mile Wealdway40 walk.
Photos: Scott Wishart

Leith Hill Greenway opened

The Leith Hill Greenway, a new nine mile/15 km multi-user route in the Surrey Hills between Denbies vineyard near Dorking and the summit of Leith Hill, was officially opened on 23 September. The route uses permissive paths across the Denbies estate and existing bridleways.

The opening event was also used to promote the 'Be Nice - Say Hi' campaign in which all users are encouraged to be considerate to each other. That message is repeated on signs along the Greenway.

The case for the Greenway's development came from Cycling UK as part of its plan to promote a series of capital-to-coast off-road routes for cyclists, but the route is intended for all to enjoy and is of benefit to walkers who can include sections of it in new circular walks.

The new permissive path from Denbies also allows walkers to use a tunnel under

Ranmore Road and follow the old carriage road on the National Trust's Denbies hillside. There have also been improvements to the surface of Wolvens Lane which runs between Wotton and Coldharbour.

Surrey Ramblers is seeking to strengthen its links with the Surrey Hills AONB who organised the opening event and have hopes of developing further Greenways. We were therefore glad to have the opportunity to be represented at the Leith Hill Greenway opening, alongside representatives of Cycling UK and the British Horse Society. I gave a short speech on the benefits of walking and the need to be respectful when sharing the Greenway with other users.

*Fiona Spencer
Mole Valley Ramblers*

For more information on the Leith Hill Greenway go to <https://www.surreyhills.org/discover-route/leith-hill-greenway/>



Helyn Clack, Chairman of Surrey County Council, opens the Leith Hill Greenway.

Photo: Surrey Hills AONB

Ena's gate



Ian with the plaque in memory of his mother.
Photo: Andrew Swarbrick

A new gate to replace a stile on Kent's Elham Valley Way has been installed in woods at Palmtree Down, between Wingmore and Redoak. It was paid for by Ian Perrott in memory of his mother, Ena Andrews, who passed away at the grand age of 103 two years ago. Ena was born and brought up in the nearby village of Barham and loved the countryside around.

The gate was installed in September by our footpath working party, with the help and supervision of Averil and Steve Brice, together with John Polden who used to lead the team. Averil was, until recently, a key link between the Ramblers, Kent County Council and many local landowners and arranged for many gates to replace stiles to improve footpaths and make them safer and more accessible. Averil and Steve had already obtained the gate materials and undertaken to see the project through before Covid interrupted activities.

The Elham Valley Way was unfortunately blocked near the site of the gate by several fallen trees. Averil, in her inimitable style and in keeping with the excellent rapport she has always fostered with farmers and landowners, happened to meet the manager of a large local farm on the day the gate was to be installed. As well as seeking permission to take vehicles across a large field to the site, Averil also arranged for the manager to bring his chain saws to make short work of the fallen trees.

Whenever we use the footpath in future, let's spare a thought for Ena Andrews - and also remember with gratitude the indefatigable efforts of Averil, Steve and the White Cliffs footpath team to improve and clear so many of the footpaths in our part of Kent.

*Andrew Swarbrick
White Cliffs Ramblers*

The Elham Valley Way is a waymarked 22-mile/35-km route from Canterbury to Hythe.

Love Your Loop - Celebrating the London Loop's 20th birthday

The very first Love Your Loop festival took place in September, celebrating 20 years of the iconic London Loop.

The festival featured over 30 walks from 16 groups in four different Areas of the Ramblers. Thank you to all of the groups and walk leaders involved in creating such a brilliant event and to the members of the festival organising committee for all your work to make it happen.

The festival both celebrated this brilliant walking route and promoted it to a wider audience of Ramblers, the public, and stakeholders, including landowners, park friends' groups, local councillors, Assembly members and MPs. It was also intended to highlight the investment needed to improve the route, in line with the

Mayor of London's 2021 manifesto commitment: ... "I want to develop a new plan for connecting these areas with local communities, making sure these green routes are accessible for everyone. This will include improving existing walking routes, such as the London Loop and Capital Ring." Whilst the Ramblers' London Loop project group is making waymarking improvements, at the moment this is limited to replacing broken and missing discs and adding stickers - but in many places new fingerposts and signposts are needed, which require council/landowner investment.

With this in mind, we were pleased that a number of politicians joined us on several of the festival walks. These include the leaders of both Kingston and Sutton councils, the Chairman



Bambos Charalambous, MP for Enfield Southgate (second from left in front row) and Joanne McCartney, Greater London Assembly member, were among those who attended the Love Your Loop walk organised by North London & South Herts Ramblers and led by Bet Houghton. Photo: Joanna Christophides

of the Bromley Health and Wellbeing Board, Bambos Charalambous, the MP for Enfield Southgate and Joanne McCartney, the Assembly Member for Enfield and Haringet. Whilst other politicians were unable to attend any of the festival walks, we will keep in touch with them, having made contact, and may take them on separate walks, as we did with the portfolio holder for Environment and Sustainable Transport in Kingston.

As well as regular Ramblers walks, the festival featured linkups with other organisations with an interest in the Loop. These include a London Strollers walk around Rainham Marshes with a chance to visit the RSPB reserve there; a day exploring part of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve (see below); a guided history and nature walk

organised by the Friends of Crofton & Sparrow Woods and Petts Wood & District Residents' Association; a litter pick along the canal from West Drayton run by Friends of the Grand Union Canal with Hillingdon Litter Pickers; and a walk on the Loop in Bromley organised by the local branch of the Campaign for Real Ale.

The Ramblers London Loop volunteer team recently published new maps and route guidance - downloadable from <https://innerlondonramblers.org.uk/18-articles/265-walking-the-loop.html> - and adds information about diversions, temporary closures etc, to the website. - <https://innerlondonramblers.org.uk/articles-62328/london-walking-network-guardians/london-loop.html>.

Clare Wadd



Chairman of Bromley's Health and Wellbeing Board, Cllr David Jefferys (in suit), was among those who attended a Capital Walkers Loop walk during the festival. Walk leader Tim Sai-Louie is in the red top. Photo: Clare Wadd

Exploring Happy Valley on the London Loop

The Friends of Farthing Downs and Happy Valley hosted a special day to mark the 20th anniversary of the London Loop which runs through the South London Downs National Nature Reserve which was designated in 2019.

Dominic North, Croydon council's Countryside Warden for Happy Valley, led a guided walk through this important area of chalk downland and ancient woodland and provided fascinating insights into their strategy for conserving and enhancing its rich diversity of flora and fauna. For example, each year they rent a carefully calculated number of Beulah, Jacobs and Herdwick sheep because grazing is a much more environmentally sensitive way to clear the scrub than tractor cutting. The result has been a marked increase in the number and variety of wildflowers, including rare orchids, the round headed rampion, the woolly thistle and the greater yellow rattle. The flourishing of the wildflower meadows has in turn encouraged greater numbers and more species of butterflies and other insects, including the rare Roman snail.

During the lockdown a lot of work was done to update and

improve the audio commentary for the Happy Valley and Farthing Down self-guided nature trail. A particularly memorable moment of our visit came when Dominic accessed on his smartphone the audio guide for one of the posts in Devilsden Wood and the dulcet tones of Joanna Lumley ran out with an explanation of the importance of hazel coppicing. It provides an ideal habitat for birds and mammals such as the nationally rare and protected dormouse. The Friends enlisted the services of many celebrities including Tony Robinson, Clare Balding, Rowan Williams, Benjamin Zephaniah and Roger McGough to record the audio guide and have had it translated into Polish, French and Hindi.

Another highlight was a visit

to the church of St Peter and St Paul at Chaldon which has a remarkably well-preserved 12th century wall painting depicting the 'ladder of salvation'. Graham Lomas, Chair of the Friends, helped us to interpret the graphic images of sinners being forced down into the flames of hell as well as to identify the prophets and saints being led up to heaven. The mural is one of the best preserved and most important in Europe and is well worth the short detour off the Loop to view it.

Our day exploring Happy Valley was a wonderful finale to the very successful Love Your Loop festival and we plan to return next summer to see the orchids in flower.

Jackie Gower
West London Ramblers



The footbridge near Fyfield.

Photo: Brian Smith

Another kissing gate installed on the London Loop

It's a phrase that wouldn't be out of place in a Shakespeare sonnet. So, why is a kissing gate called a kissing gate? Well, sorry to all you romantics out there but unfortunately the explanation is all too prosaic. It comes from the fact that the hinged part touches - or 'kisses' - both sides of the enclosure rather than being securely latched like a normal gate. The result is a small gate hung in a U or V shaped enclosure, letting one person through at a time.

Following government initiative, most local authorities are committed to making paths as accessible as possible whilst balancing the needs of land and stock management. They look towards the 'least restrictive option for path users' as authorised in the British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles (BS 5709: 2006), where a gap is the most accessible, followed by a simple gate, a kissing gate, with a stile being the least accessible. Up and down England a lot of these local authorities work with Area-based Ramblers work parties when installing these gates.

The other day I joined three Surrey Area Ramblers - two Micks and a Geoff - led by Peter Robinson, from Croydon Ramblers, to remove an old stile and fit a new gate on the London Loop at Kingswood Lane, Hamsey Green. This was my first gate but Peter's 26th! It was a thoroughly enjoyable day where my role was mostly to do as I was told by folk who had way more experience in this sort of work than me. Tools were supplied by Peter

and the stone and clay in the ground by geology. The abundance of flint certainly made the digging hard but ultimately all the more rewarding when complete.

As a final touch Peter fixed a commemorative plate for Alan Whiting, a longtime and much-loved committee member of Croydon Ramblers. I don't know how many stiles are currently in place on the 150-mile London Loop, nor how many are scheduled to be replaced, but the adding of a reminder of a local volunteer strikes me as a great way to remember them and the Ramblers for all the work done in the natural environment. All in all a day well spent in good company.

Des Garrahan



Work party.

Photo: Peter Robinson



Plate for Alan Whiting. Photo: Peter Robinson

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: 3rd Floor, 1 Clink Street, London SE1 9DG.

Switchboard: 020 3961 3300

Membership Services:

020 3961 3232

Email: ramblers@ramblers.org.uk

Web: www.ramblers.org.uk

Company registration no: 4458492

Registered charity no: 1093577

EDITORIAL

Editor: Les Douglas

Email: southeastwalker@gmail.com

Tel: 020 8809 2338

DESIGN AND PRINT

Designed by DPS: 01529 300452

Printed by Blackmore Ltd

Opinions expressed by contributors are not specifically endorsed by The Ramblers.

ISSN 1747-4140

© 2021 The Ramblers.

All rights reserved.

Copy Date: For issue No. 117 is 12 January 2022.



Capital Ring and London Loop update

London Loop and Capital Ring volunteers have continued to walk and monitor their sections and to make improvements to waymarking the routes during the last quarter.

In particular, Sue Aldridge and Tony Butler had great success over the summer on Section 15 of the London Loop. Having made contact with Harrow council, they were able to put up new waymark discs in and around Harrow Weald, making the route much easier and more enjoyable to walk. They have also been able to use new London Loop waymark stickers on other parts of the section around Elstree and Aldenham and are in discussion with the council about the installation of some additional fingerposts. Also on the London Loop, signage improvements have been made in Bushy Park, including indicating a route around the Woodland Gardens for dog-owners, who can't take their dogs into the gardens, and for when the gardens are closed.

On the Capital Ring, waymarking improvements have been carried out on much of Sections 7 - 12. On Section 11, volunteers have provided a full survey of all remaining problems to Barnet's Public Rights of Way Officer, and on Section 12 agreement is in place to get signposts added in Clissold Park. Stickers have been used on Section 15 to indicate the route through the ever-changing housing and commercial developments by the Docks and River Thames. Large scale maps showing the state of every sign/waymark etc, totalling almost a thousand assets, have been created for Sections 1 - 5 of the Capital Ring; these sections have mainly metal signs rather than waymark discs and so will be much harder for us to improve. However, we expect to install new vinyls to replace the bleached-out ones on signposts on Section 5 around Streatham and Tooting in the near future.

Another huge success of the project has been the complete overhaul of the maps and text PDF guidance, now published on the Inner London Area website www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk. As at the start of October, the new Capital Ring guides had been accessed nearly 35,000 times and the London Loop ones, published more recently, nearly 17,000 times. It's been especially gratifying for those of us involved in the project to see walkers using them when out on the routes. Volunteers are continuing to keep the maps and route guidance updated as and when anything changes on the ground. We publish news items on the Inner London Ramblers website reporting updates about diversions and temporary closures of sections, with alternatives proposed where possible.

During the summer volunteers and other walkers have alerted us to a broken bridge, regular flooding, a section that was heavily overgrown and closed toilets, along with good news stories about steps reopening and development completing.

We currently have a full complement of Capital Ring and London Loop section volunteers and coordinators but are still looking for one or more people with an interest in publicity to join the project and help us promote the routes in the media and/or social media so we can encourage more people to enjoy these routes. Please contact me if you would like to get involved.

Clare Wadd

Chair, Inner London Area

chair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk



Capital Ring volunteers Maeve and Jen at work in October improving route waymarking through Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington.

Photo: Keith Sharp



Participate in our AGM and exercise your democratic right!

The Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area Annual General Meeting will be held at 2pm on Saturday 5 February 2022, provisionally in the main hall of Stoke Mandeville Village Community Centre, Eskdale Road, Stoke Mandeville, HP22 5UJ (grid ref: SP 836107). Should there be a resurgence of Covid-19, with new restrictions imposed, it may be necessary, instead, to hold the meeting by video-conference. Further details of the meeting and any associated walks (or information on how to participate, should a video meeting become necessary) will be published on the Area website, <http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk>, a few days before the meeting.

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

Notices of any formal motions to be proposed at the AGM should reach me no later than one week before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 29 January. Note, also, that it is the business of

the Area AGM to elect two members of General Council, who become company members of the Ramblers for legal purposes and are entitled to speak and vote at the General Council meeting, provisionally to be held at the NEC, Birmingham, on 9 April 2022; expenses are paid by Central Office. Areas are encouraged to seek candidates from all parts of the membership, in line with our values of being inclusive to all and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. If you wish to put your name forward, or to find out more about what is involved, please contact me.

John Esslemont

Acting Area Secretary

Our biggest team

We put out our largest-ever workforce (eight) at the end of June to replace two stiles with gates. Our site for the installation of two new-style Secure-a-Field kissing gates was in the parish of Stewkley (at grid reference SP 841254) in the middle of nowhere. Although we'd had the two adjacent jobs on our books for nearly two years we had been unable to access the site due to the incredibly boggy nature of the land. On the day, our Land Rover Discovery performed valiantly to ferry the team and its extremely heavily-loaded trailer across three hilly and wet fields to the site through a large herd of cows. The result was a great day out and ended with a happy farmer who willingly used his JCB to rip out a section of hawthorn hedge that had encroached across the position of one of the stiles.

Bill Piers



The team: left to right are Joe Fontoura, Bill Piers, Michael Ayers, Jerry Michell, Keith Wheeler-Cherry, Peter Smith, John Chantler and Allen Fairbrother. Photo: David Rolff



One of the new kissing gates installed.

Photo: Bill Piers

Could you become an Area officer?

We have a number of vacancies for Area officers, including for the Area Secretary. As Area Secretary you would work with the Area Chair to arrange meetings of the Area committee and the AGM; this includes preparing agendas, booking rooms and sending out invitations. Other duties include taking and circulating accurate minutes of meetings and ensuring Area records are kept up to date and safe. Keeping in touch with announcements from the Ramblers'

office and sharing news (including of key organisational policies) with the Area committee and groups is an important part of the job, with the opportunity to learn more about new aspects of the Ramblers' work.

We need a Vice-Chair, a position left unfilled at the 2020 AGM. Vacancies also exist for several other roles including Access Officer (to monitor the state of open access land in the Area and to keep informed on developments nation-wide), Countryside Secretary

(to take a lead on planning issues affecting the Area in partnership with our groups) and Publicity Officer.

However, all officer roles are up for re-election at the AGM; do not assume that the incumbents would not welcome the opportunity to be replaced!

Any offers of help, or enquiries about what is involved, are welcome; please contact me at johnandjean@thamesinternet.com.

John Esslemont

Acting Area Secretary

Thames Chase Forest Circle

A 43 mile/69 km circular route has been devised by the volunteer walks team of Thames Chase Community Forest, an area of 40 square miles of south west Essex and east London. Officially, the route begins at Weald Country Park (near Brentwood) and, walking clockwise, passes through Thorndon Country Park, North Stifford, Purfleet station, Rainham station, Eastbrookend and Bedfords Park before finishing back at Weald Country Park.

Two sections coincide with the London Loop. Since Thames Chase was set up in 1990, a major aim has

been to promote informal access to all the regenerated areas on foot, cycle and horse with a strategic network of recreational paths, referred to as Greenways. After 30 years of development, the Forest Circle has been devised to provide a key Greenway which links many of the areas where the landscape has been regenerated after many years of neglect and extraction.

A pack of leaflets describing the route can be bought at the Thames Chase Forest Centre at Pike Lane, Upminster RM14 3NS (01708 642970) which is not on the route of the Forest Circle.



BEDFORDSHIRE bulletin

Bedfordshire Walking Festival 2021

"One of the best and most interesting walking festivals we've been to" commented a couple from Leicestershire and they were not the only ones who left favourable reviews.

Although uncertainties about the pandemic meant we were late to start our organising, Bedfordshire Ramblers together with the Greensand Trust, Marston Vale Forest Centre, Friends of Bedford Cemetery, Central Bedfordshire's Countryside Team, the Long Distance Walkers Association and Sandy and Flitwick town councils, were able to put together a programme of 37 walks over the nine days of this year's festival between 11 and 19 September. In addition to the traditional half and full day walks we had two challenge walks of 18 and 26 miles, one walk of 17 miles and eight shorter interest/informative walks.

In previous years only a few of the walks required advance booking but this year almost all had to be pre-booked or the leader had to take names and contact details at the start in order to meet the government and Ramblers guidelines at the time. Despite concerns this might put people off, some leaders reported having waiting lists and turning people away. Apart from the wet Tuesday of the week, attendances on the walks



Festival walkers enjoy a drink after the walk to Riseley.

Photo: Barry Ingram



A festival walk at Little Staughton.

Photo: Barry Ingram

exceeded the organisers' expectations.

One organiser said "promoting the festival was more difficult this time because we started late and missed some magazine deadlines, didn't have the usual big gatherings to promote the festival at and some places where we normally advertise the event were closed. Despite all

this it was amazing to achieve what we did and everyone involved with the festival deserves a big thank you for their support and contributions."

Looking ahead to next year, the 2022 Bedfordshire Walking Festival will take place from Saturday 10 - Sunday 18 September.

Barry Ingram

RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Local Paths for Local Enjoyment)

There has been a lot going on in Bedford Borough but nothing with Central Bedfordshire over the last few months. After our big clearance task in Thurleigh on the bridleway around the edge of the wood near Yarl's Wood along with work on marker posts nearby, our attention turned to work on the edge of Wootton by the old and new A421. A bridleway there had a lot of overhang and side growth while the line of a footpath was indistinct and a sleeper bridge was blocked by brambles. A good morning's work by nine volunteers dealt with the problems on both routes.

At Roxton, in the east of the county, a bridge over the River Great Ouse linking Roxton with Tempsford had been closed for over 18 months

while the rivers authority decided how best to repair it and consequently the paths either side had been little used and overgrown. Once we knew the bridge was to be reopened, a great turnout of our volunteers stepped in with one group clearing a path through 600 yards of nettles to the north while another group cut back side growth and overhang to the south. Bedford Borough was notified of a sleeper bridge which needed replacing and some surface work needed and all the work was done in a week or so. They also replaced a sleeper bridge further upstream towards Great Barford and cut the path on an overgrown section, significantly improving the Ouse Valley Way.

More recently, the paths over the golf course at Great Denham (which used to

be well-maintained when the course was open) have seen side growth with brambles and laurel bushes becoming a problem. Thanks to our volunteers, paths have been checked and improved where necessary.

At the beginning of this year some of our volunteers surveyed the path network of Bedford Borough. The results were summarised and divided into two categories: those paths requiring work and those paths where no action was required. The results were discussed with the council with a view to scheduling any work required into our programme. The first to be tackled was at Cardington, followed by Chellington, Pavenham and Carlton. The work at Chellington was mostly minor clearance and adding discs to marker posts.

At Pavenham our volunteers replaced old marker posts and put in new ones. We were able to do this work thanks to the report from Jane and the cooperation of landowners.

Some of our tasks have required only two or three volunteers. These have included the clearance around a path sign in Upper Dean and Great Barford, putting in two marker posts and creating a gap through a hedge in Riseley, putting in a post and some minor clearance in Kempston Wood, and clearing gates and installing a marker post at Wootton. These are small-scale jobs which make all the difference.

Thanks to all our volunteers for doing such a tremendous job over the past year and I look forward to your continuing support in 2022.

Barry Ingram

Continuing my 'Don't Lose Your Way' journey

Since my article in the December 2020 issue, the Ramblers' Don't Lose Your Way project has moved to its next stage, to establish priorities for claiming paths. Unlike the earlier task of identifying old paths where local knowledge was not needed, this time I have concentrated on my local area which I am familiar with, largely in Buckinghamshire and parts of adjoining counties.

My methodology for prioritising potential paths has been to rule out those paths that:

- were invalid for one reason or another (largely due to landscape changes having made a route impossible such as motorways or housing estates).
- were invalid as they were marked on other features such as contour lines, rivers, private tracks or existing rights of way.
- were dead-ends, usually established for access to farms, etc, and of no real value to the path network.
- had already been extinguished or diverted.

I then set about identifying claimable paths and rating them 'low', 'medium' or 'high' priority. This stage saw me looking at a variety of maps (so worth discussing the maps involved which are:

- Current local definitive map - this by definition is 'the map' however a while ago I was told that Buckinghamshire had hundreds of map anomalies which would take years to clear up and are being added to all the time, so not entirely straightforward.
- Current Ordnance Survey map - these are updated in printed versions

only every four or five years so will also be out of date although presumably there is a master electronic copy these days which is kept up to date whenever the Ordnance Survey is notified of changes. Additionally, some paths on maps are shown on an off-line route which is the one walked rather than the definitive line.

Find My Street - is very useful to identify all the public rights of way and help identify private tracks.

Google Earth - is useful as the aerial view can reveal features that are not on other maps and can be confirmed by using Street View

Historic maps - some old maps can be found at <https://www.old-maps.co.uk/#/Map/483826/212009/12/100076>.

By using historic maps and old Ordnance Survey maps, it is possible to track the history of any path and identify roughly when it fell off the map, eg the path is on a 1888-1913 Ordnance Survey map and on other maps up to 1950 but not on maps a few years later, eg post 1955, which suggests that it never made it onto the definitive map and therefore not on to later Ordnance Survey maps.

Evidence found from these maps helps a priority to be proposed and a basis for further supporting evidence if a claim is made. On completion we await the next stage for each of the paths chosen for claiming.

Roy Johnson

*Footpath & Countryside Secretary
Aylesbury & District Ramblers
The Ramblers' Don't Lose Your Way campaign has so far found nearly 50,000 miles of rights of way missing from the definitive map of England and Wales and is now racing to save these by 2026.*



RIPPLE volunteers add a yellow cap to a marker post at Yarl's Wood.
Photo: Barry Ingram

Permissive route over bypass reunites severed paths

When the A4146 bypass was constructed, it interrupted rights of way in the network linking Leighton Buzzard paths to those in nearby Billington. To restore the link, Central Bedfordshire Council has been seeking the opening of the old Grovebury Farm bridge over the A505 to link developments on the south side of the town with Grovebury Quarry and Billington rights of way. A kissing gate has now been installed at the Billington end of the bridge which also provides a significant link in the Outer Leighton-Linslade Green Wheel masterplan.

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers and other organisations have been pressing for the opening of the bridge for some time. The need was emphasised during lockdown when the only activity for many people was to exercise on local footpaths.

There is a new way of crossing the bypass from Peace Meadow, opposite

the Grovebury Retail Park, established by Leighton-Linslade Town Council. This goes under the bypass and then back on the other side. It has some fine views but it is quite a long diversion to get to Billington. Traffic has increased recently and it is impossible to use existing rights of way to cross the bypass safely due to the volume of fast-moving traffic.

In his position as a Church Estates Commissioner, our MP Andrew Selous, expressed support for the case and indicated that it was a matter for discussion between the agents acting for the Church Commissioners, who own part of the land near the bridge, and Central Bedfordshire Council. This has resulted in the agreed permissive access. We are grateful to Aggregate Industries Ltd and Central Bedfordshire Council, especially Councillor Victoria Harvey, for their work in achieving this result.

*Ted Herbert
Footpath Officer, Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*



Helen Shephard of Leighton Buzzard Ramblers at the kissing gate (grid reference SP 925234) giving access over the bypass. Users should be aware that although the gate might appear to be locked, this is not so and the padlock is for wheelchair users to open the gate outwards. Photo: Ted Herbert

Area AGM

With the removal of Covid restrictions, the 2022 Area AGM will be held at the usual venue, Essex County Cricket Club, New Writtle Street, Chelmsford CM2 0PG, on Saturday 19 February at 10am for a 10.30am start. Lunch will be included.

Collaboration with county council brings success

Despite the efforts of Simon Taylor, Essex Highways' rights of way enforcement officer, walkers across the county continued to be confronted occasionally with unwalkable crossfield paths which had crops grown on them. It is illegal to block a right of way and growing crops on them is an obstruction. Part of the issue seemed to be the method of getting the information quickly to the enforcement officer.

Members felt that the process of reporting, inspection, contacting the farmer and, if required, involving the enforcement officer was stacked against walkers and resulted in the same paths being blocked year after year during the growing season with the harvest being used to remove the problem.

In true Ramblers' fashion they moaned, to each other, to their groups and even to the Area Council. However, after getting that out of the way, their thoughts turned to ways of addressing the problem. After kicking around ideas, Simon was approached and, following discussions, Essex Area agreed a process which allowed greater involvement of our members to reduce the existing timescale. Members would identify one of the long-standing problem paths, report the issue on the Essex Highways defect system and at the same time forward this with a photograph to me and I would, in turn, copy this to the enforcement officer.

If the rights of way inspector's communication resulted in the farmer responding positively, no further action was taken. But

if confirmation was not received, the enforcement officer already had the information to proceed to the next stage.

Our members were sometimes asked to help in the follow-up, checking paths where the farmer had stated the path had been cleared but did not provide evidence of this, or where there had been no response.

The result of this cooperation was that several long-term cropped paths were walkable in summer for the first time in years, with members being high in their praise of the results. Clearing a long-term path obstruction is always satisfying and this was no different. It brought home to us that offering to work with Essex

Highways can bring real benefits to walkers.

Simon Taylor tells us that as a result of this project he has been able to enforce around 30% more cropped crossfield paths than in previous years, with the added benefit that those paths are known to be those where long-term problems are recognised. We are pleased to be able to work with him in order to generate that improvement. Thank you Simon for understanding our frustrations and being willing to work with us, Essex Ramblers look forward to further years of ever-increasing clear paths.

*Alan Goffee
Area Footpath Secretary*



Communications matter

Sometimes, I suspect, we tend to be a bit introspective. We don't think enough about how we are seen, if at all, by the outside world and we probably don't give sufficient attention to the way we reach out to our members.

So the Area Executive has been looking at how our communications can be improved. Good communications are important because they influence retention and recruitment of members, as well as the way in which we are perceived by others, such as local authorities. There has been a slight decline in the Area's membership over the last couple of years.

Taking our communications with members first, we do a great deal of work which may not always be noticed or appreciated by members and indeed non-members - currently and most obviously, our efforts to improve relations with Essex County Council, the Parish Path Adopters' initiative and of course the fight against rail crossings closures. If members do not know about these activities, they may be inclined to not renew their subscriptions, especially if they are among the 60% who do not participate in group walks, so our path maintenance and other work needs publicising to retain members and recruit new ones.

South East Walker (SEW) is of course the principal way of keeping members in touch, and I hope we do a reasonable job through these pages in keeping all members updated. But it is only published quarterly with relatively long lead times, so if something urgent comes up there needs to be another mechanism.

Until recently we had Essex Area Update (EAU), distributed monthly by email which sought to fill that gap. However, a review last year showed that EAU was received by only a minority of members - probably only around a third and maybe fewer. Moreover, EAU went out monthly, irrespective of whether there was any real news. On the other hand, sometimes one important issue may be worth publicising immediately. The Area Council therefore decided to replace EAU with an irregular publication to be sent out only when there was something to say, and headed with the subject covered. This would provide the sort of immediacy not always available via SEW. In addition, Area Chair David Radford now writes a quarterly Chair's Update (currently on the home page of the Area website but in future to be circulated via the same mechanisms as EAU) which should keep members better informed.

However, there is a problem of reaching everyone because technical issues mean that EAU and its successor can only be circulated directly to about 1,200 members. We will therefore be asking groups to put a link to the new publication on their websites and to circulate it to all members as a matter of course so that all members are aware of the good work we do.

We believe that communications from groups to members are equally if not more important in keeping them in touch and feeling involved, but from an Area perspective it is difficult to know exactly what groups

do; the impression is that some are more proactive than others. Clearly they inform members about group walks, but what other mechanisms are used for information and to foster a sense of community which is important in recruitment and retention: for example, do they have regular newsletters, do they use Facebook or other forms of social media, and in what manner?

Turning to communications with the outside world, to quote the Ramblers website, 'The Ramblers is a charity whose goal is to protect the ability of people to enjoy the sense of freedom and benefits that come from being outdoors on foot. Our roots are in groups of walkers who wanted access for the public to the countryside. To this day most of our work is done by members who volunteer their time.'

We need to make the wider public aware of what we do in Essex. The growth of interest in walking as a result of the pandemic represents an opportunity for recruitment. But how to take advantage of this may be easier said than done.

One way is to use print and broadcast media, but at county level there are limited opportunities. However, Gordon Bird, Alan Goffee and David Radford (all previous or current Chairs) have appeared on BBC Radio Essex in the past 24 months and we are establishing ourselves as the 'go to' body for comments on walking. Most recently David has appeared on Radio Essex's breakfast show, being interviewed about the car parking charges in Epping Forest.

In terms of print media, local newspapers are in decline and often only exist as free sheets, wholly reliant on advertising and with few staff. Yet, perhaps perversely, this represents an opportunity because they are always looking for copy to fill their pages. We believe that through their publicity officers our groups could do more to advertise what they do in terms of path clearances and opposition to closure or re-routing of footpaths by sending press releases with photos to local papers, or by writing letters to the editor. This is not something that can be handled centrally.

In addition, a simple way of raising our profile is to use the plaques available from Central Office when paths have been cleared, or while work is being done to put up a notice stating it is being carried out by the Ramblers.

Social media is of course another way of communicating with both members and non-members. Given our demographic it is perhaps not the most used and, arguably, we need to make more use of it, especially if we want to attract younger members. We need to establish what groups do and pass on good practice; Assemble gives guidance on the use of social media.

With all the above in mind, we need to establish what groups do and to share good practice so that we can all benefit. We are therefore sending a questionnaire to all our groups asking about how they communicate with members and with the outside world. We will then summarise the results to share them with groups, while making recommendations about future practices. Watch this space for the results.

*Mike Cannell
Area Media Officer*



Before and after at Great Horkesley Footpath 36. Photos: Simon Taylor/Essex Highways

Strategy aims to make walking the top active travel choice

Esssex County Council has recently published a strategy to encourage residents to cut out short car trips and walk instead. Walking should be the natural, everyday choice, whether for shorter trips or as part of longer journeys, they say. The council wants us to think about whether we really need to drive. The strategy follows the publication of an active travel survey in which 74% of respondents supported prioritising and increasing space for walking across the county with 31% saying they would like to walk more for leisure now that Covid restrictions have been lifted. Essex Ramblers, as part of the biggest national organisation representing walkers, fully endorse the objectives of the document and look to work closely with Essex County Council to implement the proposals.

The walking strategy sets out objectives and priorities to 2025 in order to provide a policy framework that will promote more walking and better walking networks. These include:

- increasing walking for everyday trips - with the aim for 400 walking trips (for travel) per person per year by 2025 where the average trip is approximately one kilometre or 10 minutes duration.
- improving road safety for pedestrians -

so that pedestrians' needs are prioritised in all infrastructure projects.

- enabling physical activity and walking for health - with the aim of residents achieving two 10-minute sessions of physical activity per day via active travel.
- enabling more walking to schools through behavioural change programmes.
- promoting walking for leisure - by encouraging social walks in green space to link individuals and reduce isolation.

The strategy's greatest focus is on encouraging walking in urban areas by establishing 'coherent walking networks' with better street design and improved road safety. Essex Ramblers welcome this. Urban walking has been much neglected over the years with many open spaces being built on. The creation of walking networks to connect existing routes can only be applauded. The construction of safe 'greenways', acting as conduits for local walkers to move from one open space to another will increase enjoyment and numbers. This is long overdue and something the Ramblers has long called for. There will be financial constraints. However, many low cost initiatives are available to be used to get this underway, and we suggest they should be the priority.

Ramblers members will be especially interested in what the strategy says

about walking in the countryside. Not much is the answer, though given the emphasis on walking in towns and for health this is understandable. 'Walking for Leisure' gets only three of 55 pages in the strategy document, and much of this is about the coastal path and 'green infrastructure' - country parks and the like.

Pointing out that the public rights of way network in Essex comprises approximately 6,300 km of footpaths (84%), bridleways (12%) and restricted byways (4%), the document says that to maximise the opportunities for leisure walks, the council will seek to identify how to improve access to the rights of way network; in particular those rights of way near to main settlements and urban areas.

It argues, 'While long trails offer the more experienced walker an opportunity to enjoy the countryside, shorter routes provide opportunities for those new to leisure walking to explore both their abilities and their environment. As well as improving and linking paths from urban areas for leisure and recreation, it's also important to encourage communities to create and use a greater variety of short routes. These can be enjoyed by people with different levels of ability, and may include circular walks around towns and villages, or walks to places of interest. The county council will explore innovative ways to maintain and enhance the rights of way network. This may include liaising with neighbourhood plans, which can seek

funding for rights of way improvements and require information about local walking routes be distributed to new housing. Volunteers have an important role to play in leading walks within communities, and to keeping paths in good condition.'

Essex Ramblers have for years operated work parties in conjunction with the county council, dealing with rights of way maintenance including vegetation clearance and waymarking. We hope this cooperation can be developed. We feel that a more structural approach to this work, incorporating yearly plans and flexible working to help complete newly-created footpaths, would be a positive move. We have much to offer in local knowledge and a willingness to put our money where our mouth is in working to maintain the existing path network.

The strategy reflects the importance the county council gives to walking and health, and that can only be applauded. We hope the county council will set up a new forum open to all organisations representing walking, to advise on proposals, and not use existing groups. This is a new start and deserves new thinking. Treating the Ramblers as stakeholders can only benefit everyone.

The full document can be found online by searching for 'Essex Walking Strategy'. It is accompanied by a video focussing on the health benefits of walking.

Mike Cannell, Area Media Officer and Alan Goffee, Area Footpath Secretary.



Area Secretary's diary

The end of September marked the end of the Ramblers financial year and what a busy year it has been with well over 7,000 emails on Kent Ramblers' and related business passing through my inbox and outbox. Sometimes it's quite hard to see what all that effort has achieved.

The best news we've had for a while is that we have now filled our long-vacant post of Public Rights of Way Manager. Connie Nolan, a member living in Canterbury where she is a local councillor, has taken on the role and is quickly getting up to speed with the demands of looking after over 4,500 miles of rights of way spread across four highway authorities.

One of the highlights of September was the Wealdway40 celebration (see page 1). This presented the opportunity to do something about the poor waymarking of the Wealdway across Ashdown Forest where conventional waymarks had originally been prohibited and many of the grooved oak posts used instead were almost indecipherable. Sussex Ramblers were able to persuade the Conservators of Ashdown Forest

to relent and allow new posts with plastic roundels. East Sussex County Council provided the posts, Sussex Ramblers installed them and I designed the special roundels that were needed because much of the relevant part of the route is not along recorded rights of way.

The other highlight of September was the High Weald Walking Festival, organised by Sussex Ramblers along with the High Weald AONB team. As well as 34 led walks there were 30 self-led walks provided on the festival website, many of which were borrowed from the Kent Ramblers' website (www.kentramblers.org.uk/kentwalks) where there is a good selection of walking routes.

As part of my research for a new Wealdway guide I visited the Luddesdown area for the first time in several years and was surprised at the enormous acreage of vineyards that had been planted since my previous visit. What I have subsequently learned is that this all belongs to Vineyard Farms, a 1,200 acre farm of which 700 acres is planted with vines and another 200 acres will be planted in the next two or three years. This is already the UK's largest vineyard site and the vision

is to produce English sparkling wine that competes with the best that European countries have to offer. The project requires a new and quite large 'Kentish Wine Vault' visitor centre and winery on the outskirts of Cuxton and as a public footpath crosses the site our volunteers in Medway Group have been looking at the proposals. Indications so far are that the interests of walkers are not threatened and may even be enhanced with additional walking opportunities.

Our most recent Area Council meeting was dominated by anguish at the impact on led walks programmes of the requirement that a written risk assessment be prepared before every led walk. No one felt that these risk assessments made walks safer, so it seemed likely that there had been a breakdown of communication and understanding somewhere in the chain of decision making. We have already lost walk leaders as a consequence of what is perceived as excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy and if nothing changes we expect to lose more.

Planning for the 2022 AGM is well under way. We hope to have



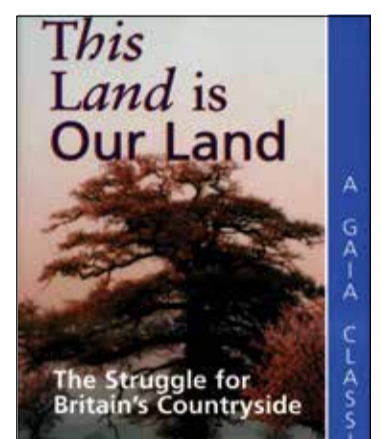
New vineyards at Luddesdown.

Photo: Robert Peel



Malcolm McDonnell of Sussex Ramblers attaches one of the new Wealdway roundels to a waymark post assisted by Clive Grumett.

Photo: Elaine Saunders



Marion Shoard's This Land is Our Land. Marion will be the guest speaker at Kent Area's AGM.

a face to face meeting in the village hall at Headcorn on Saturday 5 February. This will start at 10.30am and we are planning to provide lunch and a walk in the afternoon. This could all change though so it is essential to check our website at www.kentramblers.org.uk/agms before setting out. We are fortunate to have booked as our guest speaker Marion Shoard, a member of Kent Ramblers and campaigner for countryside access, perhaps best known for her book This Land is Our Land and a Channel 4 documentary entitled Power in the Land. I'm currently ploughing through the book and, although I've so far read only 59 pages out of 483, I've already learned a huge

amount about land rights across the centuries. Marion will address the impact on access campaigning of the Covid-19 experience when more people visited the countryside but did not all treat it with the respect that our members do.

The saddest event of the last quarter was the death of Les Preston from Covid-19 to whom there is a full tribute on page 10. It would be hard to overstate the impact that Les has had on the Ramblers in Kent over the last 20 years and I shall miss him as one of the most energetic and outspoken colleagues I have worked with during my 16 years as an Area officer.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers

Tough climbs in the south east

I have been musing about the extremely steep paths one sometimes encounters. Difficult scrambles and tricky footholds are normally associated with mountainous trekking but surprisingly are also encountered in the gentler terrains of the south.

Two are Surrey bridleways which conjure up packhorses lashed together rather than today's kitted-out equestrians. The wonderfully named Breakneck Hill (Hascombe 168) near Hascombe, starts as a near-vertical path from the top

of Holloways Heath then takes a steep sweeping course to Marwick Lane. One of the ways down from the viewpoint at Holmbury Hill in the Surrey Hills near Peaslake (Shere 193) takes one on a scramble straight to the road.

Both have warning signs about the steepness and one wonders if erosion has contributed to this. Or was footwear and horsemanship in a different league years ago?

The trickiest I have found is Worldham 13 down Wick Hill hanger near Hartley in the peak-like Hampshire hangers. It has

appropriate warnings but can only be slithered down or climbed up in my experience and has already done for a pair of glasses!

In Kent, by contrast, the incline of MR265 through Hanginghill Wood near Halling is provided with rather overgrown small steps and an abseiling rope - highly useful. One wonders if with pressure such aids to walking could appear on these and other 'Everests' of the south. Does anyone have other paths for the adventurous to share?

Michael Render
michaeljrender@gmail.com



Making use of a rope at Hanginghill Wood, Kent. Photos: Michael Render



Warnings at Wick Hill, Hampshire. Photos: Michael Render



Enjoying the presentation. Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

A bubbly walk in Surrey

A short walk through Hatchlands Park followed by a visit to the High Clandon Estate Vineyard was first planned for our group's 40th anniversary celebrations but had to be postponed because of the pandemic. So you can imagine how pleased we all were to be finally able to resurrect the event on 25 August this year!

Mole Valley Ramblers has a sub-group of fully-fledged oenophiles (wine lovers) who were more than happy to spend an idyllic few hours learning all about the fascinating intricacies involved in the making of award-winning sparkling wines, from the choice of the plot, to the type of soil and the choice of grape and the actual planting and pruning of the vines.

We were given a lively presentation including an explanation of the history of producing wines created in the classic Methode Champenoise - apparently the British were responsible for creating the process

back in the 1660s and also the extra strong pressure-resistant bottle was first produced here too. It seems that the French had little to do with the process at all!

Our hosts Sibylla and Bruce Tindale at the vineyard are clearly perfectionists and have set themselves very high standards at every stage of the process. We tasted their Euphoria Cuvee 2016 Prestige Vintage Brut followed by the Essence of High Clandon Eau de vie du Vin Liqueur and finished with the Cupid Blue Gin. We toured the vineyards and heard how they have planted a copse of hazel trees which have had their root systems impregnated with the ascomycete fungus which is responsible for producing truffles. Afterwards we were able to picnic in the beautiful grounds of the vineyard with hazy views of London hovering in the distance beyond the wild flower meadow.

Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers

Let them eat cake

Marie Antoinette may have said this as well as Muriel, our coordinator of walks and all things tea-related. One Wednesday afternoon in July, Muriel organised a tea as a gesture of goodwill and thanks to our walk leaders. Not only were they treated to cake but also strawberries and cream and scones with jam and cream if so desired! Our Chairman, Roy Endersby, welcomed everybody and thanked those present for their efforts during the past, rather difficult year. Rita the Raffle twisted arms to extort money from attendees and I am sure added substantially to the coffers. Unfortunately, the number attending was down on previous years, probably due to people being cautious about socialising. However, every cloud has a silver lining and fewer people meant more cakes for us to take home!

About a month later, Muriel organised another tea, this time for those who have been a member for over 15 years. This is a fairly relaxed rule and although I am a relative newbie only notching up 12 years membership, I managed to inveigle my way in on the grounds of being capable of taking a group photo (and also being an expert on cakes, especially Jan's coffee and walnut cake). Over 60 members attended this tea and enjoyed a jolly afternoon and a good natter with old friends. There was a slight downside to this occasion in that Muriel, the organiser and chief tea expert, was unable to attend as she had been in contact with a Covid suspect and had to isolate. How frustrating for her - but she is in the clear now!

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



At the tea for long-standing members. Photo: John Tickner

Old Road

In this poem I describe a holloway section of the North Downs Way/Pilgrims' Way that forms a spur off the main path. It is mentioned by Hilaire Belloc in his walking classic, The Old Road, published in 1911 but as fresh now as it was 110 years ago.

*In a chaos of branches,
between the polished ebony of yew-
stumps and the cling of ivy,
the haste of wood ants,
and the must of rotting chestnut leaves,*

*trace a path traversed
for longer than clock-hands have turned:*

*by herdsman, drovers,
traders, pilgrims...*

*whose footsteps, voices,
echo in the yew fronds,
are lost in mist, layered
in the startle of deer;*

*are confused by the meander of springs
and shifting greensand,*

*are bewildered by the silent work
of fungi-frilling trunks.*

*To journey down this holloway
is to travel with peoples in their
thousands, through years in thousands,*

*to where you can chase
those slow-blowing dreams,*

*watch seeds, fluff of dandelions,
twist, lift from their moon-faced clocks*

*and drift away to future time obscured
in branches that lace the path ahead.*

© Lizzie Ballagher



App to the rescue

Whilst many of us will be aware of the what3words app, some may not have heard of it or may not yet have downloaded it to their phones.

The app was launched in 2013 after developers divided the world into 57 trillion squares, each 3 x 3 metres, and randomly assigned three words to each to pinpoint that location. The app uses just 40,000 words to cover the whole world using the English language. It is free and downloadable to both Android and iPhone from <https://what3words.com/products/what3words-app/> and can be used to precisely determine location when out and about.

The what3words app was used by our group recently when a member became unwell on a walk in Hertfordshire. Others in the party noticed that he was stumbling over stiles, his gait was unsteady and he was walking more slowly than usual and he said that he felt unwell. The walk leader decided, following discussion with other members, that he should stop walking as soon as possible, and that an ambulance be called.

The group was able to get to a nearby

B road, but other than knowing that they were about three miles from Ware, couldn't confirm their exact location. However, a retired GP on the walk who called the ambulance was able to identify exactly where the group was, using the app. The ambulance found them very easily and the walker was taken to hospital, where we hope he made a good recovery.

Similarly, the BBC covered a case in 2019 where walkers were lost in a 5,000 acre wood in County Durham. They became cold and wet and were advised by the 999 service to download the app and were then quickly located.

I understand that emergency services in 35 areas in England and Wales are now using the app and I would recommend that all Ramblers with smartphones download the app as it may prove crucial in getting help from emergency services should that be required.

Grant Winstock

Blackheath Ramblers

Opinions vary on this with some warning that a single character error made when calling emergency services could send them to the wrong location.

Discovering my local area

Over the last 18 months, members of my group have needed to be more creative in finding routes and places of interest to explore. I've found walking routes from my home to local places of interest that in the past I would have accessed by car or bus. I have found parks, recreation grounds, commons, open spaces and joined these together as much as possible using footpaths.

Local historical spots include Nonsuch Park, where Henry VIII's palace once stood, and Beddington Park, part of a larger estate, owned over about four centuries by the Carew family. Part of their country house, Carew Manor, including an early 18th century dovecote, still remains in the park.

Some walk leaders have led walks that combine local walking with imparting information on the history of the local area. One such covered the area of south Sutton and Belmont.

By the 17th century Banstead and Epsom Downs were a popular area for hare coursing. A warren was built in south Sutton for the breeding of hares and substantial remains of the walls can still be seen, including hatches in the wall used to control the release of the hares. These walls are grade-II listed.

By the 18th century the area was also a popular venue for point-to-point horse racing. The present Oaks Park was once part of a much larger sporting estate owned by Lord Derby. He and his friends established two races - the Oaks and the Derby - that are now run at Epsom.

Various milestones - grade II listed - mark the route from London Bridge, initially to Banstead Downs for horse racing. Three dating from 1745 can be seen in the borough of Sutton, including one at Rose Hill. Only a few years later, Brighton became popular as a sea bathing resort and the route developed to this destination.

The sign of the Cock at the end of the hill now known as Sutton High Street commemorates the Cock Hotel that once stood nearby, the original dating from

the 17th century. This hotel was the first stage on the road to Brighton, where breakfast was taken some two hours after setting out from London. Surprisingly, the avian cock on the sign does not reflect the origin of the name. In fact, the cock was the name given to extra horses that could be hired to help pull coaches up a steep hill. Hence the nursery rhyme 'Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross'.

Alison Dines

Sutton & Wandle Valley Ramblers



The dovecote at Carew Manor. Photo: Alison Dines

You write

Rollright footpath 7 (SEW 115, page 7)

At the time of writing, 5 October, the Open Spaces Society is waiting for permission to appeal to the supreme court on its challenge to the confirmation of a diversion order at Rollright Manor in Oxfordshire. The society lost in the high court and court of appeal. The case is of great importance to path users because, if successful, it will ensure that the landowner's interest can only be considered once in the diversion process.

Currently inspectors are interpreting section 119 of the Highways Act 1980 so that, for diversion orders made in the landowner's interest, they must balance that interest against the loss of enjoyment to the public, giving landowners two bites at the cherry to the severe disadvantage of the public. When the landowner's right to apply for diversions comes into effect under the Deregulation Act 2015, and with increasing numbers of privacy and security diversions, it is particularly important to stop this legal virus from spreading.

Kate Ashbrook

Working together (SEW 115, page 13)

I must object to the praise lavished on Kent County Council in this article. I have reported several issues through the map-based online reporting system and 12 months later the public rights of way team has yet to visit the site. In one instance, what was a minor issue that could have been easily resolved by a brushwood cutter is now a major obstacle warranting chainsaw intervention! By any criteria a wait of over 12 months for someone to visit a site that is easily accessible at the roadside is inexcusable.

John Fisher

Colin Sefton replies: Thanks for your feedback. Your experience is unfortunately not as uncommon as I would hope (hence my comment "There is ... room for improvement - it would be great if issues could be addressed more quickly.") - there are indeed over 6,000 this, - eg how much should we publicly campaign for improvements. What I believe is a major positive from the county council's rights of way team is that they do regularly engage with Kent Ramblers in "an honest, constructive dialogue" including recognising that the time taken to deal with issues is longer than it should be, due to the severe constraints on local government budgets. On balance, I believe this constructive approach does lead to an overall improvement - and I will definitely continue to push for further improvements.

Excursions 90th anniversary:

Friday 26 March 2022 will be the 90th anniversary of the first great ramblers' excursions by train from London. A celebratory excursion is planned to the original destinations, Tilehurst and Pangbourne, and it is hoped that many of those who took part in them will be able to attend. More information will appear in the March 2022 issue of *South East Walker*.

London Loop:

A new guidebook to the London Outer Orbital Path has been published by Trailblazer (ISBN 978-1-912716-21-0, £12.99). It includes hand-drawn maps at 1:20,000 scale and masses of detailed information (which will quickly date) on such things as cafes, pubs and food shops along the way. It competes with the Aurum Press guidebook (ISBN 978-1-78131-561-3, £14.99) which includes Ordnance Survey mapping and route descriptions. You can also find a walk description for free at www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire:

An exhibition at The Higgins in Bedford running until October 2022, looks at the history of this Cistercian house thought to be one of the most influential in medieval England, using research by members of the Old Warden History & Heritage Society. Details at <https://www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk>.

England Coast Path:

The 26.5 mile/42.7 km Maldon to Salcott stretch in Essex was officially opened on 30 June.

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize:

The Friends of the Ridgeway are inviting entries to their annual competition to find new artworks inspired by the Ridgeway National Trail with separate classes for wall art, sculpture, photography and writing. Entries need to be in by 3 March 2022 and the winners will be exhibited in Uffington, Oxfordshire on 2 and 3 April 2022 and online. Details at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/swire-ridgeway-arts-prize-2022/>.

Those we have lost

Les Preston

Warm tributes have been made to White Cliffs Ramblers and Kent Ramblers stalwart Les Preston, who died from Covid on 26 September. Les would have been 80 in February.

Les started walking with White Cliffs Ramblers in the late 1990s and joined the group's committee in 2003, first as Membership Secretary and then as a committee member without portfolio, leading hundreds of walks, organising scores of map reading courses, and getting involved in every aspect of the group's work.

He was a co-founder and mainstay of the annual White Cliffs Walking Festival, which the group started organising in 2014, and in 2019 he played the key role in setting up the Kearnsley Loop, a 2.6 mile, family-friendly walking route in the Dover area. Les personally negotiated with the Ministry of Defence - which owns part of the land - to create a permissive path, thus avoiding a good half mile walk along a busy road.

He was behind the move to organise and distribute first aid kits to walk leaders; he wrote press releases for the White Cliffs Walking Festival; he often appeared on BBC Radio Kent to promote the festival and walking in general; he organised group holidays to Cyprus, Majorca, Morocco and Spain; he even personally ordered a quantity of bright green sun hats for festival walk leaders, to ensure they could be seen when leading their walks!

In addition to all this, Les served as Vice Chairman of Kent Ramblers for many years, helping to set up the Kent website, and in 2002 he set up Trailfinders, the first walking group in Kent targeted at people in their 20s- 50s (later renamed East Kent Walking Group). He regularly attended Ramblers General Council and was still on the Kent committee when he died. Last year he was presented with a Ramblers Volunteer Award for his services to walking.

Les was born in Ilkeston in Derbyshire, the youngest of four brothers and with a younger sister. He was the shortest and stockiest of the family, but reckoned to be the family's dynamo. Les served in the army for 34 years, starting in 1957 when he joined the Infantry Junior Leaders' Battalion at Plymouth. His long and distinguished service saw him achieve the rank of Major when he retired in 1989. Les and his wife, Wendy - who he met in Folkestone and who died last year - were married for 53 years. They had a daughter, Sarah, and a son Adrian.

Kate Ashbrook, Ramblers Vice President and Trustee, said: "Les was feisty, and absolutely dependable. He fought every battle to the end. He campaigned against the military (despite having been a soldier), winning access to land used for training. Through his efforts, closed land at Capel Battery above Folkestone was regained for the public. He helped to save a cliff path which Kent County Council wanted to close. We owe him so much. Les invited me to White Cliffs Walking Festival on three occasions. He did so much to make the festival the success it is, and it has become more popular each year. I chose Les's walk when I could, as along the way he would stop and explain how Ramblers had helped to save paths



Les pictured during a White Cliffs Walking Festival walk with Dover in the background.

Photo: Sarah Preston

and areas of land, telling our story and encouraging non-members to join us. He was a model walk leader. We shall miss him greatly, a true friend of the Ramblers."

White Cliffs Ramblers interim Chairman, Tony Bristow, said: "Les's contribution to the Ramblers at both a Kent and especially group level, was incomparable. In attempting to encourage others to make a contribution he would suggest that you should take nothing from the fridge without putting something back in return. Les certainly made sure that the fridge was well-stocked many times over, often with goodies fit for a banquet! But it is not only on a practical level that he will be missed. 'Warm and welcoming', 'kind-hearted and generous', 'supportive', 'inspirational', 'enthusiastic', 'dedicated' and 'inventive' are just a few of the personal qualities that have been used to describe Les, and why his passing is such a loss to us all in White Cliffs Ramblers."

Kent Ramblers Secretary, Robert Peel, said: "What impressed me most about Les during the 15 years I worked with him was his dogged determination to see through to a successful conclusion any project on which he embarked. Perhaps his most valuable skill, however, was encouraging, supporting and developing other volunteers to step up and take on important roles contributing to the success of White Cliffs Group and Kent Area. Les was an innovator, a huge champion of exploiting information technology and a major player in the creation of the Kent website at a time when most Areas didn't have them; but he always cautioned that technology is not for everyone and that we mustn't leave behind those who prefer the old ways of doing things."

Our thoughts go to Sarah and Adrian at this sad time.

Graham Smith

Hugh Crawley

Hugh Crawley, who died in September aged 98, was a six-foot tall giant among ramblers - and he has left a giant's footprints for country walkers to follow, places where we could not go to and paths we could not trace until he opened them.

He was a man of varied talents and wide sympathies. During the war he served in the 81st Assault Squadron Royal Engineers, and shortly after D-Day was repairing armoured vehicles under fire. Post-war he took a first-class degree in engineering at Swansea University and then worked at the Culham Laboratory where he contributed to cutting-edge research on fusion power, and reached the rank of Principal Scientific Officer. He and Yvonne were married in 1948; she died in 2011. Hugh was an accomplished painter who exhibited and sold his works through the Oxford Art Society. At the age of 89 he walked 250 miles between Cahors and St- Jean-Pied-de-Port on the Spanish border with a tent in his rucksack in case he could not find a hotel on the way, one of numerous European expeditions.

For many years he served as Footpaths Secretary for the Vale of White Horse and on Oxfordshire Area's Footpaths Committee. Here he was always a principled defender of public rights; successive chairmen (myself among them) knew that he would crush witheringly any member inclined to accept a path diversion not clearly in the public interest. He was no respecter of persons or instructions and some of his most notable victories were won against their opposition.

In 1996 for instance he took on the Vale District Council and its obdurate tenant who had fenced Hinton Waldrist Footpath 4 against the public. The council failed to act against the tenant and the county council did not clear the path. But, after five years of complaints and invocations of the Local Government Ombudsman, Hugh persuaded the county council to reopen the path.

In 2003 he defeated the wealthy, land-owning St John's College, Oxford, and Oxfordshire County Council simultaneously. Here he fought

another five-year battle to get nearly a mile of path in the parishes of Kingston Bagpuize, Southmoor, and Fyfield & Tubney restored to the definitive map, from which the college had persuaded the county to remove it. Handicapped in his research because St John's refused to allow him access to its property records, he relied on documentary evidence, none of it more recent than 1844, and a 1961 aerial photograph. I watched with awe his calm, logical performance at the public inquiry, after which the inspector's decision in his favour was no surprise.

At Milton in 2004 he upset a private but illegal deal between Sustrans and the district council aimed at diverting a path. Hugh repeatedly pointed out to the council that their plans were unlawful but they would not listen until the Secretary of State summarily dismissed their case. And high on the downs above Childrey, he had the minute but exquisite Pigtrough Bottom mapped as access land.

His greatest battle was the struggle to get the right of way across the Thame at the site of the former stepping stones near Chippinghurst onto the definitive map - and thus reunite the severed networks of paths on both sides of the river. His prodigious research included the mid-19th century sketch maps made by the Ordnance Survey, masses of correspondence, and parish council minutes; publicity for the claim included events for the benefit of the media in which Hugh and Yvonne paddled over the river in a rubber dinghy. One of the landowner opponents was a wealthy banker, just the sort of target Hugh, a socialist by conviction, relished. Eventually in 2016 the case came to a three-day public inquiry at which the Open Spaces Society employed a QC to make the case based on Hugh's meticulously gathered evidence. Alas, he had reached a stage when he could no longer fight for public rights and, against the weight of the evidence, we lost. But I believe that if Hugh had been able to come forward as a witness to stiffen an intellectually unimpressive inspector we would have won.

Chris Hall



Hugh Crawley

Pewley Down:

The community group which bought Pewley Down, near Guildford, in May subject to contract, completed the deal in October (see SEW Sept 2021). The group, now called Saving Pewley Meadows, has completed contracts on the site which will be managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Rail works:

Train operator Southern has warned that engineering works will mean that no trains will be able to run between Three Bridges and Lewes/Brighton/Hove for nine consecutive days from Saturday 19 - Sunday 27 February 2022. Buses will be provided instead.



OXFORDSHIRE
on-line

Footpath matters County council

The Draft Map Modification Order waiting list is now 70 cases. Of these 31 are under investigation, three are awaiting orders, and 12 orders have been made (three confirmed, and eight objected to, seven of which are with the Planning Inspectorate). There are 30 diversions on the list, two of which have been confirmed.

We await completion of work on the bridges on Merton FP1 and Marcham FP17. The work on

Marston FP3 has been completed, with a spanking new gravel surface (hallelujah!) replacing the hippopotamus-bath into which I sank over the top of the boots, and new gates and bridges replacing decrepit stiles. Ramblers (from the legacy left by the late Keith Holly for improvements) and Oxford Fieldpaths Society contributed towards this work. The failed culvert on Merton FP1 has been replaced, and work has started on the bridge at the Merton/Wendlebury boundary.

Diversions, claims etc

The verdict on Oxford FP80 has at last appeared from PINS (the Planning Inspectorate for England); the order has been confirmed, so we await the dedication of the route alongside Lye Valley. At the time I last wrote on Rollright FP7 (see also You Write on page 9) I knew only that the Open Spaces Society (OSS) had been refused permission to appeal to the High Court (which is normal, otherwise it would imply that

the judge's verdict was in some way wrong); in fact the OSS had already sought leave to appeal from the Court of Appeal (which is required for any appeals). An extinguishment of a claimed path at Milton-under-Wychwood has also been confirmed.

We have been consulted on a diversion at Coldron Mill, where the path goes past the house; a Ramblers group tactlessly had a coffee break in full view. At the same time they want to divert the

other path to the walked-route over the bridge, which is offline, over a lake which a previous owner built in about 1975. Whereas the latter is fine, the diversion away from the house is an awful tunnel in which any view is obscured by tall hedges on both sides. Also there was a third path, which formed a shortcut between the two paths and is now in the lake; we want this diverted one side or the other.

Other matters

As reported last time, Thame & Wheatley Group has designed a 20-mile walk around Thame called the Thame Outer Circuit, details available on the Thame Town Council website. The route includes Tetsworth FP65. The directions suggest using the

road - which is almost as dangerous as the stiles - until the stiles are sorted. The county council is trying to get the offending stiles replaced by gates.

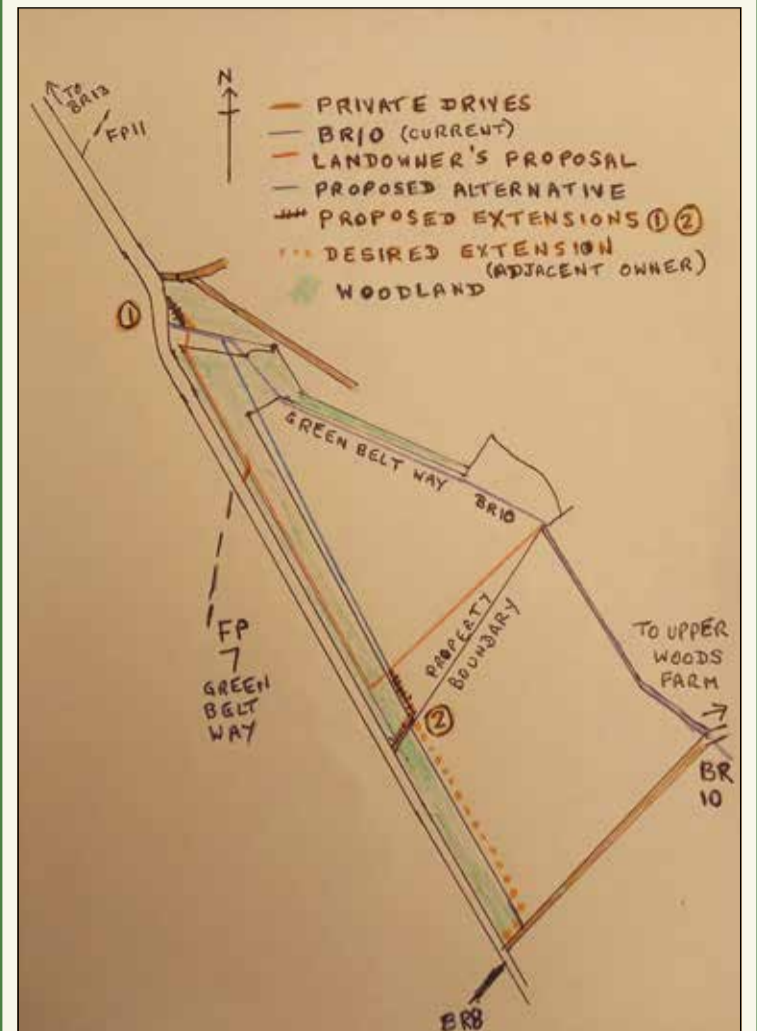
David Godfrey
Area Footpath Secretary



One of the new footbridges and associated gates on Marston Footpath 3.

Photo: David Godfrey

Noke - a case study



A sketch showing the proposed diversions of Noke bridleway BR10.

Photo: David Godfrey

A diversion of Noke BR10 has been proposed which would resolve the long-standing problem on the Oxford Green Belt Way which at present means walking 250 metres along the masochist's paradise which is the B4027, with a blind bend and a 50 mph sign which is regarded by many drivers as a random fraction of the minimum; a new exit to the road would be created opposite Woodeaton FP7. The bridleway also exits to the road close to this bend. The diversion itself runs from the gate at the property boundary into a corner of the field and then at right angles in a strip of newly-planted woodland alongside the B4027, instead of proceeding in a more-or-less straight line from the gate across to a hedge, then along the opposite edge of the field and then along the former drive to the road. This would shorten the Green Belt Way by about 250 metres and lengthen BR10 by about the same amount.

On my first site visit it was apparent that the woodland route lost the fine views of Beckley Hill. A further complication arose from the British Horse Society (BHS), who are objecting because the woodland strip is too close to the road and would be affected by noise.

My second site visit also revealed that the route would be subject to blinding flashes at horse's eye level from reflections off car bonnets. Also there are two other bridleways and a footpath which BHS and others have been trying to get connected to BR10: Noke BR13 is about 650 metres north-west, Noke FP11 is 200 metres north-west and Woodeaton BR8 is about 850 metres south-east. BR8 is opposite the drive to Upper Woods Farm which we tried and failed (the owner of the house at the road objected) to get dedicated as part of an earlier diversion package (which connected the paths round Upper Woods Farm, which formerly did not meet).

We have suggested exiting to the road at the corner, which would reduce the distance to BR8 to 250 metres, if the adjoining landowner does not dedicate an extension to the Upper Woods drive. At the other end we are asking for BR10 to be extended towards the property boundary, where it would exit on the outside of the bend, where there is much greater visibility (not as far as the new drive, where emerging vehicles could also frighten the horses).

We are also asking for the diversion to be in the field alongside the woodland strip, which would shield the horses from the bright lights of the road and preserve the views - and give extra ones. The connection to Woodeaton FP7 is vital to stop somebody being run over on the B4027, but not at the expense of being struck by a bolting horse.

David Godfrey
Area Footpath Secretary

Parish Path Warden workshop



Attendees at the workshop in Eynsham.

Photo: Jim Parke

A workshop for our Parish Path Wardens was held on 24 September at Eynsham. This was organised by Oxfordshire Area in partnership with the county council's Countryside Access Service and the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (OFS). Just under 30 wardens attended, drawn from the various ramblers groups in the county.

After Liz Adams, Chairman of OFS, and I welcomed everyone, Sarah Aldous, Acting Principal Officer, Countryside Access, gave an illustrated talk. After outlining the varied role of the Rights

of Way Officer she explained how the large caseload (currently some 4,000) of path problem reports are analysed and prioritised. It was noted that county officers deal with the impact on public rights of way of many planning applications, whether minor, large scale residential developments or infrastructure projects such as the HS2 railway line. She also illustrated the wide variety of maintenance tasks that the county's team undertake to keep the path network in good shape.

After a coffee break came the practical session to demonstrate the varied tasks that might befall a Parish Path Warden.

In beautiful sunshine Sarah was assisted by her colleague Katie Walther, Countryside Access Officer, West Oxfordshire, in leading the group along some of the footpaths in the parish of Eynsham. The walk gave an opportunity to observe and comment on aspects of the quality of path infrastructure - stiles, bridges, gates, etc. Other issues which came to light were path deviations from the definitive route. Secateurs were used to cut back overhanging vegetation and waymarks and finger post direction signs were cleaned.

After lunch I led a discussion on the Parish Path Warden guidelines,

which was followed by an online demonstration by Katie of the use of the CAMSweb path problem reporting system.

Currently almost 90% of the county's 320 parishes have a Parish Path Warden in place. This percentage includes those parishes where representatives of the Chiltern Society and the Cotswold Wardens act in that capacity.

Jim Parke

*Area Parish Path
Warden Network
Coordinator*



Walking on MoD lands

In north west Surrey and north east Hampshire, extensive areas of heathland are owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and used for training purposes. Some areas are closed to the public at all times. Others are open to the public on 'non-firing days'. A web search for 'South East Training Estate firing times' will find the schedule of days when these lands are open. The remaining areas could, in theory, be used at any time for military training but in practice many areas are never so used.

For the walker, this open heathland with gentle, heather-clad hills is a delightful place to walk, with a surprisingly wild feel despite the proximity to built-up areas. Numerous

rare heathland plant, invertebrate and reptile species such as sundews and the green tiger beetle are to be found.

The use of MoD lands is governed by military bylaws, which amongst other things prohibit 'public or private meetings'. This has sometimes been interpreted by agents working for the MoD as disallowing Ramblers' group walks unless permission has been obtained, and this has led to awkward confrontations.

Representatives from Ramblers' Hampshire and Surrey Areas have attended a meeting with the MoD to clarify the situation for groups of walkers. The bylaws are due to be updated by the end of 2021, but in the meantime it has been agreed that walk leaders should notify the MoD's Defence



Looking towards Caesar's Camp, an iron age hill fort, on the Aldershot Military Lands which straddle the Surrey/Hampshire border. Photo: cc-by-sa/2.0-C Colin Smith - geograph.org.uk/p/1740913

Infrastructure Organisation in advance of any group walk that will go onto MoD lands.

Further details including email addresses and contact numbers can be found under 'Quick Links' on the Surrey Area website (www.surreyramblers.org.uk).

David Leedham
Area Secretary

Area AGM

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 22 January at 2pm in Wootton and Dry Sandford Community Village Hall. There will be a walk beforehand. Given the uncertainty surrounding Covid and whatever else winter throws at us, you should check the walks programme at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk for details of both the AGM and the walk, close to the day of the meeting.

You may eat your own picnic lunch in the hall or lunch can be booked in the local pub by contacting me prior to the meeting. Tea, coffee and cakes will be available after the meeting.

If having the AGM in Wootton and Dry Sandford should not be possible, the meeting will be held by Zoom on the same date and time. Again, check the website nearer the time.

Any member wishing to stand for election to an Area officer post or as a Members' Representative should inform me of this and be proposed and seconded by two other members at least seven days before the AGM. This procedure also applies to a member who is on Area Council and who wishes to take on a different or additional role. In the event of more nominations being received than there are places, an election will be held at the AGM.

Rosemary Williams
Area General Secretary
oxford.ramblers@gmail.com

Back in action

Four of our path maintenance teams got cracking once restrictions were lifted in summer: Bicester & Kidlington (BK), Oxford City (OC), Thame & Wheatley (TW) and Vale. There were reports of nettles being taller this year. An alternative phenomenon, that team members were getting shorter, was not considered.

Collaboration was a feature of some of the clearances. BK's Blitz & Klean were assisted by 3rd Bicester Scouts on a path between Bucknell and Middleton Stoney. OC's Oxford Path Wardens got to work with members of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society and some friends to tackle Oxford footpath 79 between the golf course and Barracks Lane.

A golf course - Shrivenham - also featured in one of Vale team's task days. This was the brainchild of Jane Archer, a parish path warden of Shrivenham. The two public rights of way that crossed the golf course were poorly signed, and the few existing non-official waymarks were not in the correct place. So, Jane, the team and the county council's Countryside Access Officer, Arthur McEwan-James put in new waymark posts, moved an existing one, added waymarks to

telegraph poles (this time pointing in the right direction) and cut a much overgrown path through from the golf course to the A420.

Chris Melbourne, leader of TW's team, contacted the landowner of nine paths. Then the county council cleared one of them in Watlington, and the landowner agreed to clear another in Holton (the notorious Polecat End Hollows!). A golf course featured yet again, the team clearing a path on the perimeter of the Oxfordshire Golf Course.

If you would like to work with any of these teams, write to them via their Contacts page on our website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk.

Dave Cavanagh



Shrivenham parish path warden Jane Archer assisting Countryside Access Officer Arthur McEwan-James with the final waymark disc on Shrivenham Golf Course. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

Walk leader training

When plans for walk leader training courses in 2020 were brought to an abrupt halt by the pandemic, our training team adapted the course to online delivery and successfully provided three such courses via Zoom. Since then Ramblers has produced an e-learning foundation course in walk leading and is available to current and prospective leaders registered on Assemble. The course is well put together, with film clips from leaders and tips on all aspects of leading from how to plan, why reces are important, how to write an inviting walk description, keeping walks safe, what to take with you, managing a group and the qualities of a good walk leader. The aim is to make walks safe, enjoyable and inclusive.

However, there is more to be gained

from meeting in person to learn navigation skills and practice them outside. It also provides an opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas about walk planning between Surrey groups. We would therefore like to resume the opportunity for in-person training if possible. The likelihood is that we would use Wotton, near Dorking, as a central location again. Some of the training team have retired and we could do with one or two more people with experience of leading and, ideally of delivering training as well, to join the team. We are also looking for a new volunteer administrator to coordinate the courses, publicise and handle bookings. If you would like to get involved as either trainer or administrator, please contact me.

Fiona Spencer
training@surreyramblers.org.uk

BVPI survey

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) are used by the government to track the performance of local authorities against a wide range of measures. One of these, BVPI 178, relates to the rights of way network. It measures the percentage of paths (by length) that are 'easy to use'.

To assist Surrey County Council in compiling this statistic, Ramblers volunteers go out and check a random sample of paths, chosen by the council. They note any flooding, upgrowth, damaged stiles/gates/bridges etc, and give each path a pass or fail mark. This year the overall BVPI result for Surrey was 87%, a good result - up from 81% in 2019.

David Needham
Area Secretary

How well do you know Surrey?

How well do you know Surrey? I was born and brought up in Surrey. I walked to school which was just down the road from where I lived. My earliest childhood memory of walking for fun was when on holiday away from Surrey or on Boxing Day walks around Banstead Woods. Most of the time my parents drove me to places or, in later years, I would drive myself.

Until I started walking with my group I hadn't been to many places in the county. What I'm trying to say is that when talking to fellow new young walkers about what they know about Surrey and where they have walked they might say something like they saw Box Hill on television in 2012 but they haven't visited. If you regularly walk and travel in Surrey to get to a

walk how many of you just switch your car on and plug in your satnav? I never used to, instead I studied maps beforehand to find how to get to the start point. These days I'm so familiar with the roads of Surrey that I hardly need use my satnav, but I notice many fellow walkers - and not only the young ones - use their satnav all the time to get to the start

of a walk, even if they have been there before. If I asked you to get from A to B without the satnav, could you do it? And have you ever led a walk for your group and, if asked, could you?

Holly Matthews

Chair of Surrey Area and Surrey

Young Walkers

Surrey shorts

Beeline Way: This is the new name for the cycle/pedestrian route opened in 2019 between New Malden and Raynes Park (see SEW September 2019). Kingston and Merton councils held a poll to decide the name with more than 1,200 people voting. The Mayor of Kingston conducted the official naming ceremony on 22 September, Car-Free Day.

Chobham Common works: The Southampton to London Pipeline project is replacing 90 km of underground fuel pipeline between Boorley

Green in Hampshire and Hounslow in London. Preliminary work on Chobham Common has started with some path diversions. Work will continue until February 2022 and resume in October. Details of the two-year project with maps are at <https://www.slpproject.co.uk>.

Wild Surrey: Surrey Wildlife Trust has launched its Wild Surrey art and photography competition with a deadline for entries of 1 March 2022. Categories are animal behaviour, insects in action, wild beauty and vision for Surrey. Details are at <https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org.whatson/>

wild-surrey-art-photography-competition.

Rights of Way Officer for Kingston and Sutton:

After years of no dedicated resource, the London boroughs of Kingston and Sutton are contributing £25,000 each to employ a Rights of Way Officer to start in early 2022. For Kingston, this means its Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which has been languishing since its creation in 2009, might start to be implemented. The successful candidate will need to find out if Sutton has such a plan at all.

David Cooper
Area Publicity Officer

Malham, North Yorkshire

Twenty-three Croydon Ramblers set out, some in cars, some by train, to Newfield Hall near Malhamdale, in September. We were in for a week with no rain and with the temperature up to about 28 degrees on a couple of days. The accommodation was set in a beautiful landscape, very peaceful and welcoming, and with a heated swimming pool too. Good, bountiful food, even scones and tea on arrival!

HF Holidays are the perfect hosts for a group of ramblers with four walks a day, suitable for all abilities. Just sign up for the one you want and everything else is done for you. We had four great leaders who looked after us very well. A great week and thanks to Geraldine for organising it.

Anne Golbourn
Croydon Ramblers



Croydon Ramblers at Malham.

Photo: Anne Golbourn

Hackness, North Yorkshire

For our eighth annual holiday we chose to go further afield this year, travelling to Hackness Grange Hotel on the southern edge of the North York Moors National Park, but within easy reach of Scarborough.

Forty of us enjoyed excellent accommodation, food, weather and even entertainment from a magician on one evening. Our Footpath Officer, Ken King, had spent months poring over maps of the area and came up with routes for four walks on each of the four walking days. These ranged from short and leisurely to long and energetic and were assigned to volunteer leaders, most of whom were unable to recce them in advance but all rose to the challenge!

Walks from the hotel went north to Broxa Forest, south to follow the River Derwent through Forge Valley and west to take in views above Troutdale. On our final walking day we took a coach to the coast to enjoy a stretch of the Cleveland Way.

Special thanks are due to Ken for devising the routes and supporting the leaders, to Wendy Mannix for managing the bookings and liaising with the hotel, and to Bob Ward for planning late afternoon and evening entertainment!

Ruth Cornish
Thame & Wheatley Ramblers



Climbing coast path steps.

Photo: Ruth Cornish

Wish you were here?

Loxton, Somerset

A group of 38 Reigate Ramblers took a four-night break at the Webbington Hotel and Spa at Loxton in October. With seven walk leaders offering guided walks for a full five-day itinerary, there was a walk suitable for everyone. The weather forecast was for rain almost every day but luckily this came at night and somehow we didn't get wet on any of the walking days and on some days the sun shone!

The Mendip Hills is an area of outstanding natural beauty and we certainly saw some beautiful sights including the Somerset Levels, Wookey Hole, Ebbor Gorge, Priddy, Crook Peak and, not least, Glastonbury Tor.

Evenings were occupied with a team quiz night and musical entertainment from a singer with keyboard. The hotel bar also provided a great opportunity for us to socialise after a pleasant day's walking. Coming after lockdown, everyone was ready for a holiday and enjoyment was had by all. Thanks to holiday coordinator Sandra Simmonds

Chris Upton, Reigate Ramblers

Berwickshire Coast

I joined 10 other Croydon Ramblers on a walk along the Berwickshire Coastal Path in July. The path runs for about 30 miles from the village of Cockburnspath to Berwick-upon-Tweed. We decided to extend the walk and start from Dunbar, a few miles east of Edinburgh.

So long as you keep the sea on your left you can't go wrong, can you? We took it in turns to lead a section each day and it was my turn together with Roy Endersby, our group Chairman, on the third day. I'm pleased to say that despite thick fog we managed to lead the group safely to St Abbs and our lodgings in the village of Coldingham. Roy had all the gizmos and maps needed whilst I was busy as back marker with my cameras! It's called teamwork. Actually, the fog wasn't that bad.

Next day we ended in Eyemouth and I must say how impressed I was with this harbour town. The fact that the sky was blue and the sun was shining may have had something to do with it.

Then we walked to Berwick-upon-Tweed, another lovely coastal town which has switched between England and Scotland 14 times.

On our penultimate day we were mini-bussed to the point where pilgrims cross to Holy Island, (also known as Lindisfarne). I didn't realise I was to be a pilgrim but as the tide was out it would have been churlish not to have taken off my boots to wade over the black sand and mud to the island. Unfortunately, on the way one of my toes struck something hidden under the surface, causing a lot of pain and blood to flow. I was a brave soldier but, by golly, did it hurt.

This holiday was in place of last year's trip to the Azores which, due to you know what, did not take place. However Ann Toomey, the very kind and able lady who organises trips for us excelled herself, in spite of the nightmarish logistics in organising the holiday. I know the other walkers feel the same debt of gratitude to Ann as I do.

John Tickner, Croydon Ramblers



Crossing the border from Scotland to England.

Photo: John Tickner

Coniston, Cumbria

Wet, wet, gloriously sunny, wet again. That sums up the weather on our recent trip. Undeterred, our party of 29 enjoyed a choice of three walks each day during our stay at the HF house at Monk Coniston. We had planned a mix of low-level easy walks to leg-stretching longer ones at higher levels but the weather had other plans and a change of route for the higher altitude walks had to be made on all but one day.

On the one day of glorious sunshine and intense blue skies we all walked on the Old Man of Coniston with two of the groups, who had followed different routes up the mountain, meeting at the summit for a lunchtime picnic. The third group took a meandering path to Brown Crag where they too enjoyed a picnic. Everyone was so happy to be out in the sunshine that we were all in the best of spirits.

Monk Coniston is an interesting and welcoming place. The facilities are good, staff friendly and helpful and meals



On Coniston Old Man.

Photo: Chris Rickards

are excellent. A large barn houses a skittle alley and on one evening we enjoyed a hilarious skittles match when the levels of ineptitude among the skittlers made us all laugh out loud.

Overall, this was an enjoyable holiday, well organised with a high standard of accommodation, good company in the evenings and the wonderful day on Coniston Old Man more than compensated for the poor weather on other days. Thanks to our organisers and walk leaders.

Joan Clark (with help from Glen Teasdale, Rosemary Burton, Anne Francis and Nick Sunderland).

Henley & Goring Ramblers

A longer version of this report can be found on the group's website.

Wish you were here? continued

Llangollen, Denbighshire

Plans were made in 2019 for a short break in north Wales to take place in September 2020. But, as the expression goes, plans are what we make until life comes along. Or, in this case, Covid-19. The night before we were due to travel, Wales closed its borders and our visit had to be postponed. We decided to wait a year until September 2021 and, thankfully, were successful in taking eight of our original 12 participants to walk the Llangollen Round. The Round is a 35-mile circular route visiting every summit around the Vale of Llangollen and Nick, our leader, devised a plan which allowed us to walk the route over four days and return to our hotels each evening.

We walked in sunshine, rain and high winds but always with spectacular views. On the first leg we left cars at the Ponderosa to walk 12 miles to Moel y Gaer on a ridge path then down to the River Dee and back to our base. The next day from Carrog was very different with dramatic remote scenery and rain all day. Day three saw us heading over the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, where it's good to have a head for heights, then to Dinas Bran where we enjoyed panoramic views and no rain. On our last day we continued along Offa's Dyke beneath Eglwyseg escarpment to complete our walk.

Most of us stayed at the Chainbridge Hotel in Llangollen which overlooks the turbulent River Dee. We had some tough walking but the fantastic scenery was a bonus and we were never far from the hotel with its hot showers and bar. Definitely to be recommended!

*Lesley Maister
Hillingdon Ramblers*

Listen up walkers

It sometimes seems that the whole world, if it isn't actually listening to a podcast, is making one. You get them about sport, politics, crime, current affairs, music - even podcasts about podcasts.

So, what exactly is a podcast? Well ... a podcast is an episodic series of spoken-word digital audio files that a user can download to a personal device for easy listening. Streaming applications and podcasting services provide a convenient and integrated way to manage a personal consumption queue across many podcast sources and playback devices. A podcast series usually features one or more recurring hosts engaged in a discussion about a particular topic or current event. Discussion and content within a podcast can range from carefully scripted to completely improvised. Podcasts combine elaborate and artistic sound production with thematic concerns ranging from scientific research to slice of life journalism.

I'm pleased to announce that Inner London Ramblers are joining this crowded field when they launch the 'Backmarker' podcast, hosted by me, in January 2022. As the new kid on the block, we'll be jostling for your attention by talking all things walking and rambling and probably pubs and public transport and so much more in the New Year.

Check out the Inner London Ramblers website at <https://www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk/> to listen and find details of how to download.

Des Garrahan



INNER LONDON *insights*

Hold the date!

We are hoping to have an 'in-person' Annual General Meeting, subject to any social distancing rules that may be in place at the time. If we are able to go ahead as planned, the AGM will be held on the afternoon of Saturday 5 February 2022. If we are not able to go ahead with an 'in-person' meeting, it will be a virtual meeting.

The AGM will consider the formal business

of the Area. This includes electing committee members for 2022-23; electing three delegates for the Ramblers General Council 2022 (due to be held in April); reviewing the annual report and accounts; and consider any motions for General Council.

The Area website www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk will be updated with details nearer the time, including agenda and details of any external speakers.

We hope you will be able to join us.

*Clare Wadd
Chair, Inner London Area*

First steps towards a leisure walking strategy

The Greater London Authority and Transport for London (TfL) are taking the first steps towards a leisure walking strategy for London, thanks to campaigning by the Ramblers.

In May's local elections, the Ramblers' manifesto called on the next London Mayor to create a strategic plan for 'green routes' in the capital, which aimed to improve existing routes (like the London Loop), identify new routes and better promote the network to all Londoners. This call from Ramblers received overwhelming support from candidates and, most importantly, from the eventual election winner, Mayor Sadiq Khan.

The Ramblers understand that TfL is now in the early stages of sketching out what a leisure walking strategy for London might look like. We expect to be consulted on a draft plan that sets out high-level principles for the network (rather than detailed proposals for route improvements) in the coming months. More information to follow, but if you would like to be kept up to date, please contact me at ramblerdes@gmail.com.

Des Garrahan



A Capital Walkers group explores the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in east London. Photo: Des Garrahan

Volunteer with us

The Inner London Area committee is looking for new volunteers to join the existing team. The role of the committee is to support our groups and to make sure that activities in the Area are consistent, integrated and in line with Ramblers mission and strategy.

We'd like to hear from anyone keen on walking and committed to Ramblers' aims who might be interested in getting involved with the Area in whatever capacity - please contact me to express interest and for more information. To join the committee you must be a member of the Area or one of our 10 groups.

The committee generally meets five times a year in the evenings, plus we have an AGM, normally in February. Having met on Zoom for the last 18 months, we're likely to alternate Zoom and in-person meetings in central London during 2022.

I have been Area Chair for the

last five years and intend to step down at our AGM in February 2022 and give someone else the chance to lead the Area. Whoever takes over will have support from the rest of the committee and will work closely with our excellent Secretary and Treasurer.

The Area Chair's role is to:

- support groups to run well, follow good practice and join in national and Area initiatives
- make sure policies and procedures are followed so that the Area, its members and volunteers are kept safe and legal
- oversee the Area's working relationship with local authorities, organisations and politicians
- develop Area activities in line with the Role of Ramblers' Areas document (<https://innerlondonramblers.org.uk/images/RamblersAreaDescription.pdf>)
- make sure that the Area follows all of the required governance, including AGMs and attendance at Councils

- put in place activities and initiatives so that belonging to the Ramblers in the Area is enjoyable and welcoming

The skills you need:

- people person, able to lead a team with good humour and patience
- able to understand policies and apply them to real-life situations
- organised with the ability to develop and manage Area plans
- diplomatic, with excellent communication skills for developing working relationships with people who may not share Ramblers' aims and objectives

What's in it for you:

- the opportunity to be in a key Ramblers' leadership role for the Area, to help deliver the organisation's aims
- to bring to life the vision for the Area that you and your committee agree
- a challenging leadership role that you can shape and that offers many different options for you to get involved with.

*Clare Wadd
Chair, Inner London Area
chair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk*

Abney Park Cemetery:

Work on a £5 million restoration of the cemetery in Stoke Newington, north London, began in October. The Capital Ring runs through this open space which will remain open throughout the restoration. A new accessible entrance on Stoke Newington Church Street is included in the plans together with the restoration of the long-derelict chapel.

Greenwich Park:

The Royal Parks charity is leading a restoration project at the site of the Saxon burial ground in the park and to re-establish the site's rare acid grassland landscape. The project will remove the tarmacked footpath which has cut across the monument between Croom's Gate and the Royal Observatory.

Path returned:

The Three Mills Island path at Bow in east London reopened in August after a 'temporary closure' which dragged on for 14 years. The path, which links the Lea Valley Walk with the Greenway and Capital Ring, closed in 2007 for work to start on a new lock to be built on the Prescott Channel.

Around the groups

Nature and history walks

We decided to put more 'short and local' walks on during the summer.

These all started in the town so car-sharing and transport were not an issue and more people could take part. Being

leisurely and mostly only three or four miles long, they attracted people who hadn't walked with us before, including some who either couldn't manage longer walks or were short of time. We had plenty of stops to look at nature, admiring

orchids, butterflies and sand martins. We also had stops at points of historical interest and many participants said they had learnt something about the town or seen something for the first time. I also enjoyed doing the research. Some walks

were in the evenings, some midweek and others at weekends for the benefit of those working during the week and everyone could take part.

*Gill King
Leighton Buzzard
Ramblers*



Admiring bee-friendly planting.

Photo: Gill King

Walks and picnic day

We welcomed the return of our Annual Walk and Picnic on 14 July, this time at Lullingstone Country Park. We were unable to hold the event last year because of the pandemic and our usual venue, the Girl Guiding centre at Cudham Shaws, has since closed. It was good to get together again and catch up with old friends. The event was attended by 42 members, most of whom walked. Some long-standing members who no longer walk went directly to the picnic.

A delicious selection of home-made cakes was on offer - many thanks to all those who contributed to our waistlines! - and a giant jenga to test our skills, which caused a lot of amusement. Once again we were lucky with the weather and we thank Mike Hickie, Maureen Carroll and Richard Wilkes for leading walks in the beautiful Darenth valley. Also, thanks to Lullingstone Country Park for allowing us to take over an area of the park.

*Carole Flowerday
North West Kent Ramblers*



Jenga fun.

Photo: Bob Tolson

Tea party

Our group is slowly recovering from the effects of the pandemic and we have now gained about the same number of members that we lost (not literally!). We are short of walk leaders - the need to complete a risk assessment form has proved unpopular - but are still averaging two or three walks a week.

Cecil Chappie, one of our founder members and a Chairman for 14 years, suffered a fall in the summer but I'm pleased to say he has since made good progress and we all wish him well.

Until the pandemic we used to have a couple of coach trips each year. We took a poll to see if members wanted us to resume these. Some were relaxed about coach travel, some said they would only go if everyone on the coach wore a mask and others said they would only go if they didn't have to wear a mask. We will ask again next year!

We held our annual tea party in August at Sandhurst and this was attended by nearly 50 members. This event is also popular with those who are no longer able to walk with the group but want to meet up socially. For those who did want to walk, David Hunt led a ramble around Moor Green Lakes. Home-made scones were supplied by Kate Wratten and Denise Jones. The event is free to members and financed by profits made from other social events.

*Brian Poulton
South East Berks Ramblers*



Our three tea party waitresses, Coral Mist, Shirley Poulton and Denise Jones. Photo: Brian Poulton

Recovering

Walk leaders are no longer in short supply having increased from 4 to 11 and numbers joining walks have steadily increased. The group continues to offer four walks a week - two morning walks and two all-day walks - and our online booking system works well and will probably remain for the foreseeable future. This allows leaders to limit numbers when necessary or advisable because of parking restrictions or the number of stiles or gates to be encountered as well as any personal Covid concerns. The system also allows leaders to know in advance to liaise with those attending if necessary and make contact with any late arrivals.

Working parties have restarted although weather conditions have limited the number attending these. Our power tool group has also been in action following a refresher course.

Discussions are well underway for a full programme of coach walks from April 2022 as well as a possible group walking holiday.

*Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers*



This was the winner in our photo competition to find an amusing sign. Photo: Joan Crosbee

Limpsfield collaboration

Over the past two years our group has developed a close relationship with Limpsfield Parish Council, one of the largest parishes in Tandridge district. With a parish councillor particularly keen to improve the local path network, we have identified work that needed to be done and the council has provided funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy. The work has included the installation of 10 gates to replace awkward or defective stiles with the council paying for the equipment

and installation by a contractor. Originally the plan had been for our path maintenance team to do the work but due to Covid-19 and the delay in the county council getting path maintenance teams back in action, this has not been possible over the past 18 months. The moral from our story? Work with your local parish or district council and you may be able to tap into funding for capital equipment.

*Tony Pearson
East Surrey Walkers*

Life's a picnic

Our group has been meeting monthly for a walk with a picnic lunch. These have been very well attended and are an ideal way for us to gather and socialise safely. After the disruption to our programme it has been really refreshing to witness the camaraderie that unites

us all and to rediscover the joviality and laughter when good friends are reunited.

On 3 September, four separate walks converged on Steer's Field, Ranmore, for the second of our monthly picnics. In total the event attracted 51 walkers (plus four dogs) who, together, will have walked about 397 miles.

*Louise Stilwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers*



Picnic time.

Photo: Louise Stilwell-Stage

Dynamic programme

Our walks provide a long-term programme. We have now completed, as friends rather than as a group, the Saxon Shore Way in Kent and members are also walking the Wales Coast Path in stages. We were originally walking from south to north but high accommodation

prices led us to walk nine days and 107 miles in the other direction, from Chester to Anglesey.

Our path checkers have continued with their work despite us not having a Footpath Secretary at present. Well done to them.

*Ian Dunford
Milton Keynes & District Ramblers*

Historic woodland

We often walk through Joyden's Wood on the borders of Dartford and the London Borough of Bexley. As well as providing great walking, the wood boasts Anglo Saxon defensive structures and medieval underground excavations known as 'deneholes' and a line of bomb craters from the second world war. During the war, two Hawker Hurricane

fighter jets were shot down here and the metal remains of one can still be seen at the northern end of the woods.

Members of our group are pictured left at the wooden sculpture of a crashed plane commemorating where pilot officer James Muirhead's plane was shot down. He successfully bailed out but was killed in action two weeks later. Walking maps of the woods can be downloaded from the Woodland Trust's website.

Beverley Johnston
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers



Exploring Joyden's Wood.

Photo: Beverley Johnston

Hog roast

Our first combined walk and social event since the pandemic was our 'Yomp Chomp and Roll Up' event, organised by Bernard and Mary, where we had a morning walk in the Langford/Henlow area followed by a hog roast and then a chance to try outdoor bowling. The weather was kind and the bowlers had fun.

We had a successful coach trip to Ironbridge in September and a weekend break in Marlborough, Wiltshire, in October. Plans for 2022 include a week in Ambleside in the Lake District in May and a break in the Peak District.

Ivel Valley Walkers



Members on the coach trip to Ironbridge.

Photo: Barry Ingram

Rambling over Ash Ranges

Our group has been led many times over the Ash Ranges, west of Pirbright, Surrey, by David Cooper, Surrey Area's Publicity Officer. However, members of the public are only allowed on the Ranges for a few days a year (mainly bank holidays) when the military are not firing and the red flag is not flying. Ash Ranges cover 1,635 hectares and has been owned by the Ministry of Defence since 1854 and now managed on their behalf by Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Just seven members enjoyed the incredible views from the Ash Ranges on David's walk at the spring bank holiday this year. Then the August bank holiday walk was another opportunity for David to lead a further 17 members over the ranges. The main attraction this time was the swathes of heather.

Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers

David Cooper adds: On the first day of lockdown in 2020 and with no consultation, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation closed 12% of the Ranges on grounds that are disputed by local residents (see SEW December 2020). On 7 October, local MP Michael Gove visited the Ranges with the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to discuss how to improve access overall. Mr Gove said: "We discussed a number of ways in which residents could enjoy easier access while respecting the army's need to train safely".



Kingston Group members behind the targets.

Photo: Brenda Horwill

Saved from the brink

It is a year since Surrey Heath Group was almost disbanded due to the mass resignation of the former committee. Concerned members spoke to Surrey Area to find out what our options were and to seek advice. Area encouraged us to run the group without a Chair if necessary and a committee was formed and has gone from strength to strength ever since.

We have introduced three levels of walk each week with new walk leaders. Membership has increased by 10% and we are attracting 23% of visiting members on our walks. To celebrate our achievements we held a garden party in August to thank everyone for making this possible.

Surrey Heath Ramblers



The garden party. Photo: Graham Evans

Back to work!

After a long break by our Surrey County Council 'handlers', Reigate Ramblers footpath team was able to get out and restart work to the north of Horley. This is an area with new housing development but where green spaces have been sympathetically developed and maintained by the borough council. During lockdowns it became obvious that many people discovered not only these green spaces but also the pleasant walking to be had in woods and fields to the north, including a lovely walk along the banks of the Burstow Stream before it meets the River Mole. These paths serve a community purpose, especially for those who cannot walk longer distances. Unfortunately, many of the paths have stiles and gates which are not up to a standard that will encourage their use and rampant vegetation growth after the warm and wet summer did not help.

Our first tranche of tasks started with bridging a ditch and replacing two broken stiles as well as cutting back vegetation around them. The result is an easy to use path north of the new housing estate. This work benefits not just us seasoned walkers but those for whom walking is a newer experience. I hope we

get many more tasks like these.

Glyn Jones
Secretary and Task Leader,
Reigate Ramblers



Task completed.

Photo: Glyn Jones

Downland challenge



Enjoying a break.

Photo: Anne Golbourn

A group of 17 Croydon Ramblers set out from Eastbourne one day in July to walk the 23 miles to Lewes. Although our intended train was cancelled - "trespasser on the line" - the half hour delay meant the rain had cleared by the time we set out along the sea front and then steeply up to Beachy Head to our first stop at Birling Gap. A fair pace was set and as everyone seemed happy we tried to keep this up as there was a long way to go.

After coffee, we continued across the Seven Sisters, the highlight of the walk, with views made more dramatic by the low cloud and swirling mists. Then, above Cuckmere Haven, we turned inland on the South Downs Way to stop for lunch by a pond at West Dean. One of the party decided to call it a day here but the remaining 16 were all for carrying on through Friston Forest and Litlington to Alfriston for a welcome ice cream. Then we went over Firle Beacon, a wonderful viewpoint, to Glynde where we found a splendid pavilion in which to rest and watch cricket.

Our final push over the hill to Lewes was hard going after nearly 20 miles but everyone was still smiling - or was it grimacing?

Anne Golbourn
Croydon Ramblers