

CHAIR'S REPORT

Given the traumas of the sad loss of key WCR members and the effects of Covid, it was with some apprehension that I started my role as Chair. However, the support of other Committee members soon came to the fore, and it became clear that White Cliffs Ramblers were in an excellent position to move forward. There was an opportunity to look at the way things were done to make sure the wishes of our members were met in the undertaking of Group activities.

One of the key strengths of the group is the wide and varied walks programme, and the strength in depth of our Walks Leaders. I express my sincere thanks to Tony and Anne for their commitment, especially through the difficult Covid restrictions, in producing a first-class Group Walks Programme. Although Tony and Anne are stepping down in their Walks Co-ordinator roles, we have a willing volunteer in Deborah Quow to take over what they have done over the last 10 years. I am grateful for the guidance and mentoring Tony and Anne have given Deborah to enable her to carry on the task which is so key to our group.

A special thanks is also given to our Walk Leaders. Your willingness to provide the varied walks for our programme is core to the success of the group, as well as the support experienced leaders are prepared to offer to those wishing to take up the walk leader role. We are well placed with a keen and willing number of experienced walk leaders. However, to enable our walks programme to maintain its wide appeal and diverse list of walks we need a regular supply of new walk leaders to fill the gaps left by those no longer able to fulfil such a role. My advice to anyone thinking about leading a walk is to stick to a walk you know at first, to give you the confidence before developing, hopefully, into some more adventurous walks. There are plenty of resources and advice to help you.

It is encouraging to see that Group Holidays are now back taking place. Significant praise and thanks were given to Jim Bushnell by all those who went on the Isle of Wight holiday in May. After two years of cancellations Jim's perseverance finally enabled the holiday to go ahead, and excellently organised and managed it was too. With three grades of walks offered each day it was an unreserved success and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Just recently 20 of our members enjoyed a week of walking in Majorca, excellently organised and lead by Margaret MW, Lee Pickup and Diana Backwell. Warm weather and good walking and swimming were enjoyed by all.

I was reminded at one of our Committee Meetings that WCR is much more than a Walking Group. The work that WCR volunteers do in protecting and maintaining our footpath network is again one of the founding strengths of the group. The regular PROW updates we get from Roger King are invaluable and although Roger is stepping down in his role, once again we have a willing volunteer in Maura Pell who is currently working in conjunction with him to carry on his good work. Also, our willing vegetation clearance team, under the guidance of John Shale, go out on their weekly forays to cut back overgrown paths to enable us all to walk them much more easily. Having been trained in the use of power tools, which are provided by KCC, much more onerous path clearing activities are now carried out. John and his team have formed an excellent relationship with KCC who have the highest regard for the work undertaken. In this section we must also remember our invaluable Parish Footpath

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Observers who regularly inspect our paths to make sure they are walkable and our Local Footpath Officers who check to ensure any planning applications don't adversely affect our rights of way.

The numbers in our group remain fairly static at around the 500. Sadly, with the passing of time, some of our older members have passed away during the year, and our thoughts are with them and their families. New members have continued to join the group and we welcome them all and look forward to meeting them on group walks or other social events, and hope in time a number of them will take up some of our so important roles in helping lead walks and engage in other group volunteer roles.

Our finances are in good shape, this has enabled us to fund vital equipment for our vegetation clearance team and enabled us to plan for an upgrade in our Group website. Now the group is effectively paperless having an up-to-date website with all the relevant information is essential and enables us to be much more dynamic in communicating with our members. After many years of service our Web Editor, Gavin Trevelyan, is stepping down from his role and he certainly gets my warmest gratitude for the hard work and dedication that he has put into the role. Going forward we need to find a volunteer who can take over the managing and updating of the website to continue the great work that Gavin has done.

Our Publicity Officer, Lee Pickup, keeps the profile of our group well noticed with regular news items about our activities in South East Walker, which all Ramblers members in the SE receive along with the Ramblers Walk Magazine each quarter. The group Facebook page continues to grow and is open to people who want to see our activities with a view to joining.

Our members receive regular Newsletters during the year, produced by Tony Bristow. These reflect key things happening in the group and items of particular interest relating to the group. These newsletters are emailed out to members and can include some of the decisions made by the group Committee. I realise that the number of emails people receive appears to be on an ever-increasing scale, however it is one of the key methods we use to communicate "need to know information" about the group, so please try to find time to read the Newsletters, and please check your junk mail if you appear not to receive them.

Following the 2021 Walking Festival, which was restricted because of Covid, this year's event was able to take place as planned. Several of this year's Festival Committee were new recruits because of many previous Festival Committee members stepping down, including the Chair. Fortunately, Andrew Swarbrick Volunteered to lead the Co-ordination of the Festival, supported by some of the previous Festival volunteers as well the newcomers. Sadly, at a key point in the Festival planning and preparation, the Festival Web Editor, Kevin Joyce, passed away. However, the strength in depth of WCR came to the fore and the team soon mustered around to recover the situation as best they could.

On a final note, I thank all members who responded to our survey earlier in the year. It is your views and opinions that are vital to making sure the Committee delivers what you want and helps us continue to be the one of the most successful Ramblers Group in Kent, if not the UK.

John Pye (Chair)

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 1ST OCTOBER 2021 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2022

We have three accounts under the White Cliffs Ramblers "umbrella".
The main account, the Festival (Restricted) account, and the self-funded account used for Rambler's holidays and donations for specific purposes.

MAIN WHITE CLIFFS RAMBLERS ACCOUNT

Opening balance	£1,147.11		
Income		Expenditure	
Head office funding	£577.00	Clearance tools	£260.57
Donations	£405.00	AGM hall	£55.00
Ramblers hols	£90.00	Web costs	£50.35
		Bank charges	£2.10
		Paint	£24.65
		Photobooks	£100.00
		Mileage	£36.12
Total income	£1,072.00	Total expenditure	£528.79
Closing balance	£1,690.32		(£543.21 up on last year)

Walking Festival Account

Opening balance	£4,468.23		
Income		Expenditure	
Donations	£816.54	Internet costs	£100.96
		Printing	£1,117.00
		Sum up card readers	£92.40
		External walk guides	£80.00
		KM advert	£675.00
		Facebook	£38.14

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		Loyalty Gifts	£59.25
Total income	£816.54	Total expenditure	£2,162.75
Closing balance	£3,122.02		

Self-Funded Account

Opening balance	£112.58		
Income		Expenditure	
IOW HOLIDAY payments	£21,477.00	IOW HOLIDAY	£21,477.00
IOW donation	£5.00	LP PHOTO COMP	
		PRIZE	£47.98
Donations for Margaret Lubbock	£493.85	ML bench	£150.00
Donations for Les Preston	£110.00	Rose Lubbock costs	£91.20
Total income	£22,085.85	Total expenditure	£21,766.18
Closing balance	£432.25		

The Main WCR Account

We have spent £260 on new equipment for the path clearance team, primarily a large two man saw enabling them to clear medium size trees.

In total the rest of the expenditure was approximately £270 leaving us with a very healthy balance of £1690, over £500 up on last year.

We have been fortunate to receive two generous donations, £200 from Jane & Alan Ford, as they retired from walking and £205 from donations given to Ken Shale, a keen Rambler and my dad.

We are looking into a new website which would cost £800 approximately, but one which would be more user friendly all around.

The Walking Festival Account

We did not ask for, nor receive any donations from Dover Council, Deal Council etc but ended the year with a very healthy balance of £3114. Donations were very generous this year at £816, we also purchased 3 card readers enabling us to take card payments in the increasing cashless society.

It may be that this account will also contribute to the new website as a future festival would no doubt benefit from a new website.

The Self-Funded Account

This has been used for two purposes this year. The payments for the IOW holiday were received into it and the holiday provider paid out from it. The other purpose has been for monies received in memory of Margaret Lubbock and to a lesser extent for Les Preston.

The outstanding balance £432, which is primarily donations for Margaret; the committee is still reviewing how to best use for the purpose donated.

All Accounts have been Audited by Mr R McDougall, former Technical Director at Siegrist-Orel in Ramsgate, as last year.

John Shale (Treasurer).

Secretary's Report

As Secretary for the WCR group, I am fully aware of the commitment and dedication of the committee. They work tirelessly on your behalf, to provide a varied programme of walks. The walks are held two or three times weekly, throughout the year, rain or shine, for each and every one of you to enjoy.

Although, I know, you all felt so deeply the loss of Margaret Lubbock, our Chair, then Les Preston, not even a year later, the work of the committee has continued; and this is just what they would have both wished.

Initially, our WCR Committee Meetings, which are convened every three months, were held via Zoom, because of Covid. More recently we have met in person which is much better for meaningful exchanges. The Committee's attendance record at these gatherings is almost 100%.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony Bristow who was an excellent Chair after Margaret's death and for his unfailing contributions to the White cliffs Walking Festival sub - committee work, this year.

Now we have our permanent Chair in the person of John Pye. John has been brilliant in every area. John has been so innovative in giving this group new directions and fresh

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perspectives. I'm also in awe of the number of walks John has led or participated in throughout the year. It must be a record!

Thank you to everyone,

Helena Trevelyan (Secretary)

Membership Secretary's Report

We remain the largest group in Kent and Medway with a current membership total of 497 – which is slightly lower than at the same date last year (508), though the exact number typically fluctuates slightly around the 500 mark. (The Kent Area does also include the Bromley group which also has about 500 members.)

I have written to welcome 60 new members over the year ended 31st October – meaning that we have also seen a roughly similar number of members leave us. Sadly this has included several members who have passed away, but there is always a “good intentions” phenomenon where we see a number of members joining for one year – and numbers doing so seem to have peaked during the period of the pandemic - but who do not renew for a second year. As a result our membership total is reasonably stable.

Anecdotally, I have heard that a number of the people who have joined the White Cliffs Group have been encouraged to do so after attending one or more walks and finding us very welcoming– and this is where existing members can play an important role when potential members come along on walks by helping to make them welcome. Not all members, however, take part in Group walks but we don't currently keep a record of walk participants so we can't quantify this – but there are likely to be members who join to support other aspects of Ramblers work as a national charity.

The average age of our members remains 69 – slightly higher than the national and Kent averages – fewer than 10% of our members are under the age of 60. 14% of White Cliffs members have registered as volunteers compared with 11% of Kent members overall – but there is still an opportunity to involve more members in leading walks, joining the path clearance team, acting as Parish Footpath observers and or helping with Group administration.

Andrew Swarbrick (Membership Secretary)

Walks Co-ordinator's Report

Usually, the reports to the AGM look back at the previous 12 months, highlighting achievements and commenting on any key issues that emerged during that period. Before we come to that, as we will be standing down as the Walks Co-ordinators at this AGM, we would like to reflect on the 10+ years that we have undertaken this role.

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It goes without saying that we wouldn't have had a job to do if it weren't for a group of people prepared to plan and lead a walk for our Group. During our tenure, we have been fortunate to have worked with 111 walk leaders. Sadly, some of those are no longer with us, and others, for a variety of reasons, are no longer leading, but to all we would wish to extend a huge thank-you.

In 2012, there was a long walk on a Sunday and Thursday, and a short walk every other Sunday. Very soon after taking over as Walks Co-ordinators, we were able to offer a short walk for every Sunday. With the occasional walk on other days, the Group was regularly offering between 160 and 170 walks per year (excluding the Walking Festival). Then the pandemic struck, and with it the various restrictions that were placed on us. Undoubtedly, the lowest point for us as Walks Coordinators came in early 2021 when, following a further period of lockdown, we were forced to cancel an entire four-month programme of walks. Since all the restrictions were lifted, we have been only able to sustain 1 walk on Sundays and Thursdays, with an occasional walk on other days. So, during the past year we have offered some 116 walks.

Adding up all of the walks that have taken place during our time as Walks Coordinators, we will have curated over 1540 walks!

When we are asked about the benefits of being a Ramblers member, we will often suggest that it is a great way to get to know this part of Kent. We are fortunate that the county has an extensive network of public footpaths, giving plenty of opportunity to discover towns and villages and the countryside around them. In preparing this report, we have looked back at the walks programmes that we have compiled and have been able to identify more than 180, and possibly closer to 200, different start locations. Surely this must have meant that our walks have taken us along every public footpath in East Kent?

One final reflection – when we started, the walks programme was incorporated into a Newsletter that was sent to printers prior to being distributed to our members. The Newsletter also had to contain articles of interest, and several pages of adverts (that paid for the printing and distribution costs). This meant the space for walk descriptions was restricted to 3 or 4 lines. However, since we moved to sending out the walks programme via email (with a very small number of exceptions), those limits have been effectively lifted. Some have welcomed the additional information that can be provided, whilst others have commented that it takes away the mystery of a walk and coming across unexpected pleasures.

2021 – 22 Walks programme. Since the last AGM there have been 116 walks involving 41 different walks leaders. However, of these only 28 have led a walk on more than one occasion. The prize for leading the most number of walks goes to.....?

Anne and Tony Bristow (Walks Co-ordinators)

Publicity Officer's Report

Publicity this year has been good mainly due to promoting the White Cliffs Walking Festival (WCWF). We have had 6 articles published in the South East Walker (SEW) since

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December. Apart from festival promotion we have highlighted the roles of the Vegetation Clearance Team and Footpath Officers. The International Border Facility at Guston has now been cancelled, the final article regarding this was in the September issue of the SEW. We have also submitted articles for December regarding the WCWF to both the SEW and Walk Magazine.

The White Cliffs Ramblers Facebook page goes from strength to strength we now have 331 members (not all WCR members) who use the page. This is a good showcase for highlighting our walks and giving out information. We had a lot of requests to join the page after the festival hopefully this will encourage new members.

For the WCWF team publicity this year has been somewhat of an experiment. We have lost many knowledgeable long-term members, Gavin's departure, after many years of valuable service as web master and the untimely death of Kevin Joyce, his replacement, had an effect on the Festival website. We had some successes; Stagecoach put the poster Kevin designed in their buses, Southeastern trains included the WCWF in their email promotions for Dover and we got a mention in the Guardian travel section. The festival was also promoted on Dover local radio.

The highlight of the year was in January, when our Chair, John Pye, met Sarah Thornton from BBC Southeast who invited us, at very short notice, to share a winter walk with her. John did a great job showing Sarah our lovely area, choosing the White Cliffs of Dover as our showcase. It was great to see our group get a mention on TV.

Thank you to everyone who helped with publicity this year especially Jane, Kim and Kevin, may he rest in peace.

Lee Pickup (Publicity Officer)

Newsletter Editor's Report

Since the last AGM we have published six editions of the White Cliffs Ramblers Newsletter. Taken alongside the Walks Programme, The Newsletter aims to reflect all the various activities undertaken by or on behalf of the Group. In this it is important to remember that we are not just a walking club. Daily, our members are working to protect and maintain our local network public footpaths. Often their work is unseen, until a footpath is threatened with closure or has become so overgrown as to be impassable.

Therefore, in each edition of the Newsletter I have also endeavoured to throw a spotlight on the work of our vegetation clearance team or to highlight some of the issues being considered by our Local Footpath Officers (LFOs) and Parish Footpath Officers (PFOs).

The Newsletter is not the only means by which we keep in touch with you:

- Messages sent out via email from our Membership Secretary (Andrew Swarbrick);
- The WCR website;
- The Group's Facebook page.

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Finally, if you have a story or item of information that might be of interest to others, please do get in touch.

Tony Bristow (Newsletter Editor)

Local Footpath Officers Coordinator's report

With Roger King, our East Kent Sector Local Footpath Officer (LFO) Coordinator for over 15 years, stepping down from the role, Kent Area have appointed WCR member, Maura Pell, to take over the role. There will be a transition period during which Roger will mentor Maura in her new role.

County Issues

At KCC all posts relating to PROW management have been filled, although there is movement with officers coming and going.

Last year's cropping campaign was apparently a success though Dover and Thanet see little action compared to more central areas.

Vegetation clearance plan also went according to plan.

KCC, really appreciate the work that the WCR Vegetation Clearance Team "Slashers" undertake. It is important to report all problems on KCC website, even if they are reported to the WCR Vegetation Clearance team.

KCC have a huge backlog of issues approx. 5,000 for routine matters (reported on KCC map) and somewhere between 10 and 25 years for major issues!

Local Issues Affecting WCR Area

- **Dover** Fastrack Road Construction (with new bridge over A2) is well underway, affecting EE60.
- **Little Mongeham** Airfield proposal was rejected by DDC Planning Committee on 13 October 2022.
- **Betteshanger Country Park** Hotel & Swimming Pool, Quinn Estates
- **Birchington** Proposal to close railway crossing across TM37. Network Rail logic appears somewhat spurious - a housing estate is being built nearby therefore more people will use the crossing? Concern this may be the start of a sequence of many more crossing closures effecting PROWs in East Kent.
- **Adisham** New Town extending to Adisham 3,2000 houses.

Path Changes

Too numerous to detail but a key issue is the development of bridleways by Hugh Craddock from the British Horse Society. His passion project is the changing of any Public Footpath to a Bridleway. There is probably more good than harm in this approach in that many bridleways are being maintained that otherwise would not be, but horses do have a negative

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impact on our footpaths in that they churn them up. There is also concern that, where a Public Footpath becomes a Bridleway and crosses a rail line, Network Rail will use this to further support the closure of the Rail Crossing.

Recruitment

The coverage in the WCR area of LFO's is good, although there are current vacancies in the Dover and Folkestone areas.

Maura Pell (East Kent Sector Local Footpath Officer (LFO) Coordinator)

Parish Footpath Observer (PFO) Co-ordinator's Report

For the past 12 months I have undertaken the above role. The administration part has been challenging, to say the least! The list of PFOs for the White Cliffs patch is now up to date, with names and contact details on a spreadsheet, a big thank you goes to John Shale for his IT skills.

Meeting all the willing participants has been a pleasure, and I will endeavour to once again invite all PFOs to another informal meeting in 2023 to share successes (and frustrations) in carrying out this important work in helping to keep the footpaths open and in good repair. Many of the PFOs are also part of the 'slasher's team', thank you to all for this important work.

Finally, although 37 out of the required 52 PFO's are in place (71%), if any White Cliffs Rambler is at a loose end, you would be more than welcome to join us as a PFO for parishes where vacancies occur, currently:

Alkham, Deal, Dover, Elham, Hythe, Lydden, Lympne, River, Saltwood, Sandgate, St Margaret's at Cliffe, Sutton, Ringwould with Kingsdown, Langdon, Temple Ewell and Whitfield.

Margaret Milsted-Williamson (PFO Co-ordinator)

Vegetation Clearance Activities

The path clearance team, the "Slashers," as they are better known (after a piece of equipment maybe belonging to times gone by) consists of 4 regular volunteers plus John Pye when available.

As co-ordinator I liaise with Heather Waller at KCC, PFO's who report issues and walk leaders. I then suggest the weekly challenge based on numbers available.

We try to meet annually (most recently 13/10/22) to discuss the set up and matters arising.

This year the team from 01/10/22 to 30/09/22 has completed over 250 man-hours of work.

We were extremely grateful when KCC arranged and financed training in brush-cutters and strimmer's for 4 people late last year. The WCR committee also authorised expenditure of around £250 for tools and gloves. One of the items purchased was a two man saw nick - named "The Beast" bringing medium size trees to within the team's range.

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We have been able to respond directly to KCC requests, eg ER10 at Kingsdown in September 2022, which enhances the working relationship. The team has also cleared paths for walk leaders, PFO's and for the Festival.

We are always in need of more Volunteers! We would also like to receive more reports from PFO's. Finally, we are also reviewing whether we can resume stile maintenance work, but that it very much work-in-progress.

John Shale (Clearance Team Coordinator)

Web Editor Report

Our website promotes the WCR group in several ways. It provides a feed on the list of walks on the Rambler's website. It provides a printable copy of both the current walks and the newsletter. It hosts Roger King's report on the state of temporary path closures and changes of use. It provides reports on the work done by the path Clearance Team. It provides advertising and photographs about recent WCR Walking Holidays. It provides seasonal photographs of our walks, scenery and the walkers who participated in these weekly rambles. It is one part of our advertising and communications network. We also have Face book and email to keep in touch with our members. All in all, we are well represented on Social Media.

After over 9 years as the Web Editor for White Cliffs Ramblers I have decided to stand down in the role and wish my successor every success.

Gavin Trevelyan (Web Editor)

Social Secretary Report

I have volunteered to be elected as Social Secretary. Although I have been busy this year in compiling the Walks programme, stepping down as Walk Co-ordinator will enable more time to focus on organising some Social Events for 2023 and beyond. These will probably need to be indoors for the winter with perhaps Ten Pin Bowling, and Skittles outdoors in the spring or June time. I am hoping to be able to arrange an annual meal as a group, providing everyone feels comfortable with that. Also, a quiz may be organised, with someone filling in for our regular quizmaster if necessary. Please contact Anne if you would like to suggest particular social activities.

Anne Hickey (role as Social Secretary to be ratified at 2022 AGM)

Walking Festival Report

Please refer to previously issued Festival Report for 2022.

Andrew Swarbrick (Festival Co-ordinator)