

Walker

Along the Thames: so much rain, so much flooding



Flooding by The Ship in Mortlake, the finishing point for the annual Oxford Cambridge Boat Race.
Photo: Clare Delmar

By now most of us are very familiar with the figures associated with the last year. They do, however, bear repeating:

* July to December 2023 was the wettest period on record for the UK as a whole, dating back to 1890.

* Highest February rainfall in the Thames catchment (rivers in the Cotswolds, Berkshire Downs and Chiltern Hills) since 1836 when records began

* Sea levels rising, more tidal flooding affecting the Thames Path between Putney and Teddington twice daily

during monthly spring tides.

And remember as the Thames Path runs alongside the actual river, it is by definition often part of the flood plain. All this has meant interrupted journeys and multiple diversions, which, of course, are often permissive paths which have to be negotiated with landowners, posted and signed for walkers.

Additionally, there are three long-term closures of crossings including two bridges. The row over the closure of the Thames Path at Marsh Horsebridge, near Henley on Thames, came to a head in April when a landowner closed the

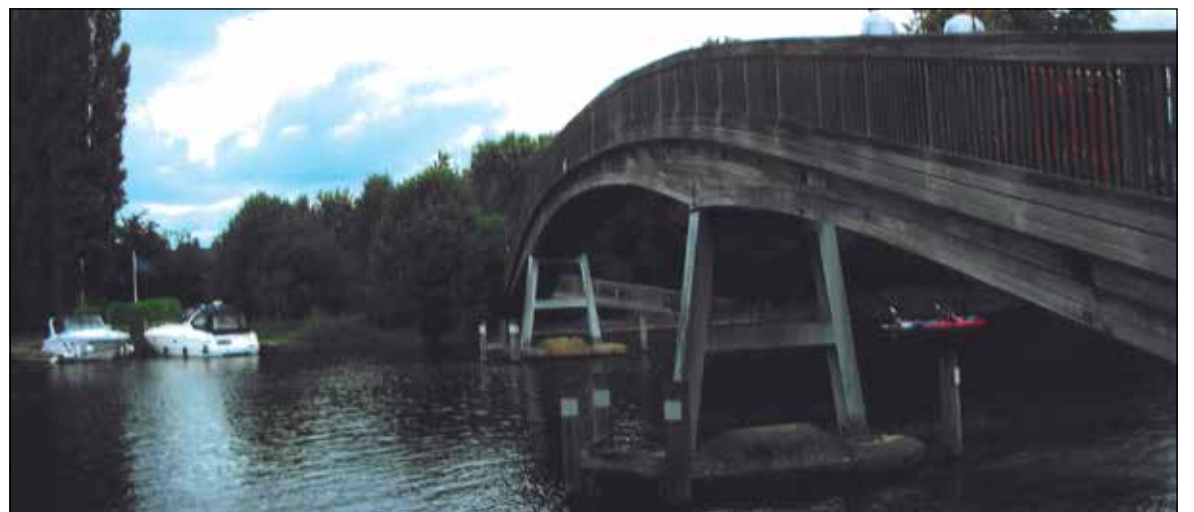
permissive diversion route to try and shame the Environment Agency into fixing the rotting wooden walkway after almost two years of "complete inactivity". As the nearby A4155 road has no continuous footway, a new and much longer diversion via Harpsden Wood has been signed for Thames Path walkers. This is in addition to the apparently indefinite closure of the Thames Path at Temple Bridge, between Hurley and Marlow. And Benson Lock is closed at least until December 2025.

It is worth noting that the Environment Agency owns more than 100 towpath bridges on the Thames Path National Trail alone and has been subject to the same years of chronic underfunding from central government as all other government agencies and local authorities. Under the current rules and funding it is hard to see imminent solutions to some of these major infrastructure issues.

Des Garrahan



Closed: Marsh Horsebridge, near Henley-on-Thames.



Closed: Temple Bridge, Hurley.

Green Chain Walking Festival



Green Chain Walking Festival

Photo: Ian Bull

Inners London Area, with the London Loop, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk Project, is planning a Green Chain Walking Festival in south east London to take place from 1 - 15 September.

We'll be organising a number of led walks of different lengths on the route as a way of promoting the Green Chain Walk to Ramblers members and to the public alike. Festival walks are intended to appeal to different audiences, including new walkers and those living locally. They will be a mixture of linear and circular, with some linking to and including parts of other walking

routes such as the Thames Path, Capital Ring and London Loop.

The route is well signposted and up-to-date section guidance and maps are available on our website at www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk/ideasforwalks/green-chain-walk-guides.

Through the Elizabeth Line, public transport access to the Green Chain Walk has been opened up to large numbers of people, so lots more walkers are now getting to explore the many wonderful green spaces of south east London and the likes of Lesnes Abbey, Eltham Palace and Severndroog Castle.

We will compile festival walks on our website and, as we intend publicising the festival as widely as possible, we expect to put a booking system in place for festival

walks (unless groups have their own system) so that numbers of walkers are manageable, with one option under consideration being an even split of places being available for members and non-members.

Project volunteer Ian Bull has put together a list of publicity outlets we will be using to promote the festival in south east London and has been able to arrange free entry to Severndroog Castle for participants on some of the festival walks too.

If your group would like to be involved and lead a public-facing walk as part of the festival, please contact me. We welcome offers of walks from groups in other Areas as well as Inner London.

Clare Wadd

vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Green Link Walk launched



One of the Green Link signs. This one directs those heading north to cross the Thames by the Millennium Bridge. Photo: Clare Wadd

A new signed leisure walk in London, the Green Link, was launched by the Mayor's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, Will Norman, on 1 March. Joining the Walk London network as an addition to the Capital Ring, London Loop and Thames Path, its route stretches for 15 miles from Peckham to Epping Forest, passing through Southwark, the City, Islington, Hackney and Waltham Forest.

As the name implies, it links a host of green spaces, large and small. A route map, with a guide to the buildings and places of historical interest, is available on Footways London's Green Link Walk webpage and you can follow it on the GoJauntly app.

The Green link is the first of the six Greenways proposed when the Ramblers, CPRE London, London Living Streets and other partners came together to develop mainly radial routes from central to outer London, contrasting with existing concentric walks, and providing residents of five boroughs with easy access to an official Transport for London route.

The Ramblers and their partners proposed specific routes. The Green Link was promoted by London Living Streets, using the Footways quiet attractive network, and benefitting from the boroughs' Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. It aims to



The Green Link follows the route of the infilled Grand Surrey Canal at Peckham.

show the delights of urban walking including the joys of strolling through quiet and beautiful streets as well as through marsh forest.

It's a journey through time, including medieval monasteries, a Georgian hospital, Victorian pubs and warehouses, sites of early 19th century riots and radical meetings, Modern Movement architecture, pedestrianised streets and 21st century buildings. For example, on leaving the City the walk enters Smithfield, once a 12th century livestock market and the atmospheric St Bartholomew the Great church of the same period. Next, Spa Fields and Exmouth Market and leafy early 19th century squares. Highlights include the medieval gatehouse to St John's Priory and its ancient crypt, and the Marx Library where Lenin wrote Iskra.

There are also splendid natural sites such as Walthamstow Marshes,

a remnant of London's once vast floodplain grasslands where locals grazed livestock. The marshes support plants, insects, grass snakes, toads and water voles. Peregrine falcons watch from pylons and kestrels hover. Ancient Epping Forest comes as a final climax.

Next? It's time to consider a second Greenway; the Forgotten Rivers Walk from Elstree on the London Loop to Burnt Oak, then following the Silk Stream and Dollis Brook to the springs of Hampstead before tracing the River Fleet to Blackfriars. This route is being developed by Des Garrahan and would be a good choice. But the Green Link can be walked and enjoyed today!

David Harrison

(David is co-founder of Footways and was lead developer on the Green Link Walk)

White Cliffs Walking Week

Come and join us for the White Cliffs Walking Week from 15 to 21 July. There will be a choice of walks each day of varying lengths and difficulty. Walks are designed to showcase the scenic coastline and beautiful countryside of Kent. Most walks will include a visit to a local hostelry or place of interest. There is no need to book and the

walks are free (but food, beverages and entry into places of interest will be at your own expense). All are welcome and further details of the programme of walks will be available on our website at www.whitecliffsramblers.org.uk.

Lee Pickup

White Cliffs Ramblers



A group enjoying sparkling coastal views over Folkestone on last year's White Cliffs Walking Week. Photo: Lee Pickup

40 years on

Most Ramblers Areas in the southeast were set up in 1984 and celebrate their 40th anniversary this year. The exception is the Oxfordshire Area which was formed in 1977.

All the territory from the Isle of Wight to Norfolk was at one time included in one Area - called Southern Area - but as the Ramblers grew in size and stature it became necessary to break up this vast area into more manageable units where there was interest and, most importantly, volunteers willing to take on tasks. Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight became separate Areas in 1962, followed by Norfolk and Cambridgeshire in 1975, Sussex in 1976 and Oxfordshire in 1977.

The momentum then seems to have fizzled out until a new effort began, with Jean Jefcoate as Devolution Secretary, to form new Areas in the south east. Much of the discussion at the time revolved around how to deal with London

: should it be one Area or divided up into north and south or inner and outer boroughs? The thinking at the time was that members would do most of their walking in the county closest to them rather than in London itself.

Members were invited to a series of meetings in 1984 beginning with Kent on 31 March. Further meetings were held on 28 April in Essex, 19 May in Bedfordshire. 9 June in Buckinghamshire. 23 June in London. 7 July in Surrey and 17 October in Berkshire. All of these gatherings were successful with local members voting to set up new Areas for their counties. The Southern Area itself then held a Special General Meeting on 27 October 1984 to wind itself up.

The first AGMs of the new Areas followed in 1985, with Surrey, Bedfordshire, Essex, Kent, Buckinghamshire and London Areas holding their first AGMs in February, and Berkshire Area in March.

At its AGM in February this year, Kent Area noted that four members who attended the Kent inaugural meeting in 1984 were present, including their first Secretary, Treasurer and (almost) first Chairman (see page 9). The Area has asked its

groups to designate their walks in the first week of October this year as 40th anniversary walks.

Bedfordshire Area - the smallest of the Areas set up - now has four flourishing groups (North Beds, Leighton Buzzard, Ivel Valley and Lea & Icknield (Luton)). Bucks, West Middlesex and Milton Keynes Area give a more detailed account of their anniversary on page 4.

But what of the future? David Radford, Chair of Essex Area, comments; The 1984 vintage Area model has now outlived its usefulness, in that it is rather bureaucratic and has certainly struggled to hold the engagement of our 20 groups. We have reinvented Essex Area as a coalition of footpath monitors, maintenance volunteers, and access lobbyists and we call ours the Area Footpath Hub, leaving behind the 1984 vision of the Area as a policing organisation for local groups. There is also a 'London periphery' issue. In Essex we try, probably not adequately, to cover five north east London boroughs and two unitary authorities (Southend and Thurrock) as well as Essex County.

It seems that while there is much to celebrate, this might also be an opportune time to review the current structures.

SOUTH EAST walker

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

THE RAMBLERS

Address: 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA.

Switchboard: 020 3961 3300

Membership Services:

020 3961 3232

Email: ramblers@ramblers.zendesk.com

Web: www.ramblers.org.uk

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

© 2024 The Ramblers.

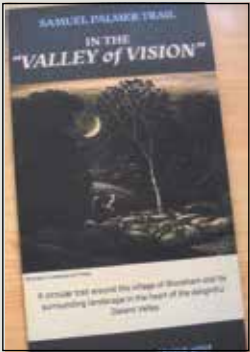
All rights reserved.

Copy Date: For issue No. 127 is 12 July 2024.



Samuel Palmer Trail - In the 'Valley of Vision'

A circular walk of 5.3 miles from the Kent village of Shoreham in the footsteps of artist Samuel Palmer is described in words and on a linked audio trail produced as part of the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme. A leaflet can be downloaded at darent-valley.org.uk/explore-the-darent-valley/samual-palmer-trail/ With the audio guide, Samuel Palmer will accompany you and tell you about his time in Shoreham and the paintings he made here, inspired by the Darent Valley.



Leaflet cover.



Water House in Shoreham,once the home of Samuel Palmer.

Abney Park revived



The restored main cemetery gates to Abney Park Cemetery.

A National Lottery Heritage Fund supported restoration project at Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington, north east London, has been completed. The cemetery, crossed by the route of the Capital Ring, was opened in 1840 and one of the 'Magnificent Seven' private cemeteries authorised by an 1832 Act of Parliament. Works have included restoration of the derelict chapel which is now used for concerts and weddings, and making the entrances step-free. A cafe, education room and toilets are also expected to open soon.

The Lost Paths

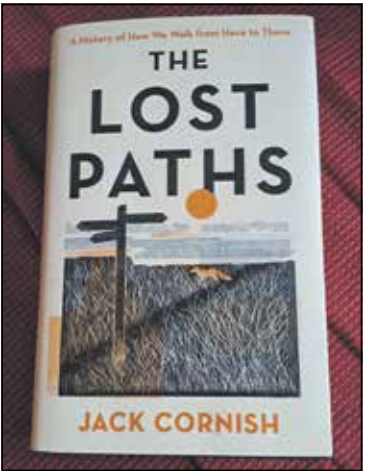
As well as being Head of Paths at the Ramblers, I know Jack Cornish to be a proud Londoner, a passionate walker and now a published author. His book 'The Lost Paths', published in April, is no walks guide but a history. as it says on the strap line on the cover, 'A history of how we walk from here to there'.

An ambitious project but Jack is no stranger to such projects. He is currently attempting to walk every street in London's A-Z and in 2017 he walked across the country from Land's End to John o'Groats and this book is a testament to research done

through his feet as well as on them.

Many of you will be familiar with the ancient history of trails like the Ridgeway or the stone circles that dot our landscape but this book also includes the dips and gullies of prehistoric times that have left their mark. The book rattles through millennia and especially illuminating is the chapter covering 'Railway Mania' but for me it is the 'Urban' chapters that spring into life and bring the book to a conclusion with the most interesting tales and observations.

At its heart this book is as much a history of people as it is landscape, trails and paths and is a worthy addition to this expanding canon associated with authors

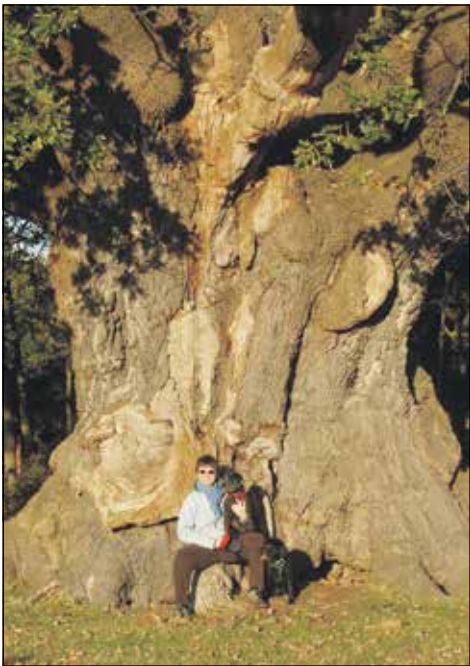


The Lost Paths, published by Penguin, ISBN 9781405951289, £20.

like Robert Macfarlane, Amy Liptrot and Helen MacDonald.

Des Garrahan

Wildlife protection creates access opportunities with 'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces'



An ancient oak tree in Windsor Great Park, of European importance for wildlife.

Photo: Shelagh Cuell

Opportunities for improving access to the countryside are being created throughout south east England as a result of wildlife legislation. Natural England, the government body responsible for biodiversity, identifies rare habitats and works with local authorities to protect them and minimise future damage. This produces a plethora of new access sites, many of which act as nodes in our network of rights of way. They are creating new gateways to the countryside.

The regulations originated with the European Wild Birds Directive 1992. There have been various updates and amendments since, and post-Brexit, the principles have been

transposed into UK law by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019.

The locations of all these sites are shown on Natural England's MAGIC map (see <https://magic.defra.gov.uk>) as Special Protection Areas (birds) or Special Areas of Conservation (habitats). In Essex, the Lee Valley, Epping Forest and the Essex Estuaries are designated. In Kent sites include the Medway Estuary, the Swale, the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay. Sussex has Ashdown Forest and Pevensey Levels, Hampshire the New Forest, Chichester and Langstone Harbours, Solent and the Isle of Wight as well as lots of small sites, such as Butser Hill. Surrey has sites at Pirbright/Chobham and the Thames Basin Heaths which extend into Berkshire and Hampshire. Windsor Great Park is designated as are the reservoirs at Datchet. Other sites include Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common, Burnham Beeches, Chiltern Beechwoods, Oxford Meadows and Little Wittenham.

One of the biggest threats in our heavily populated southeast comes from recreational use; continuing population growth will add even more pressure. To avoid increased walking on these delicate habitats, developers of homes near them have to provide alternative green spaces where residents can walk and enjoy fresh air. Typically, these have car parks, new footpaths, circular routes and simple signage to attract visitors. Some are improvements to existing local authority sites, others are completely new, sometimes on former agricultural land.

Local authorities have developed strategies to make this happen. For instance, the Essex coast has a Recreational Avoidance, Disturbance and Mitigation Strategy with projects costed at £8.9 million. Over a 20-year period, 800,000 new homes are planned and developers are

required to pay a tariff of £122 per dwelling to fund the sites. In Surrey Heath planners require developers to provide eight hectares of new accessible land for every thousand new residents. These sites are known as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).

Unmanaged access leads to problems: litter, fly-tipping and fires. Too many visitors on sensitive sites can damage wildlife, dogs can disturb ground-nesting birds and dog fouling raises nutrient levels. Mid-Sussex District Council has a Strategic Access, Management and Monitoring Strategy for Ashdown Forest with a tariff of around £2,000 in a seven kilometre zone, varying according to size of the dwelling. Dacorum District Council in Hertfordshire has a Mitigation Strategy for the Chiltern Beechwoods requiring developers to provide new SANGs, or pay over £4,000 per dwelling towards enhanced management, maintenance and monitoring of existing sites.

The heathlands on the Surrey/Berkshire/Hampshire boundary, collectively known as the Thames Basin Heaths, have a partnership project with local authorities, the Crown Estate, wildlife trusts, Forestry England and the RSPB. Already, 80 SANGs have been provided and there are lots more to follow as house building continues. Ramblers as an organisation is notably absent from this, and from other partnerships, even though managing access is fundamental to our work. Why are we not involved?

These new and improved sites are a valuable resource for all walkers and their leaders, but there is a problem identifying them as they are not shown on Ordnance Survey maps. The only way to find them is to search 'SANG' on the website of local authority or partnership projects. Local councils have the power under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000,

to dedicate them as Open Access Land. Were they do so, the sites would be shaded yellow on Ordnance Survey maps. Is there potential benefit to be had from some detailed discussion at sub-regional and inter-Area levels? Berkshire Area Ramblers are looking at options so if anyone else is interested, please do get in touch through chair@berkshireramblers.org.uk.

The Ramblers' new strategy has a policy of improving information on access and paths, and of encouraging more access near where we live. Raising the profile of SANGs, and getting involved with their creation and care, is consistent with those strategic objectives. By acting on gateways to the countryside, SANGs can open the way for new walkers and new members. Finally, at a time when local authority funding for rights of way is decreasing, any new funding for access management is to be welcomed.

Helen Tranter, Loddon Valley Ramblers (and ex-trustee),

Richard Hanson-James, Chair Berks Area Ramblers.



Cabbage Hill SANG, near Bracknell, Berkshire, provides six kilometres of paths to explore.

Photo: Thames Basin Heaths Partnership



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Mosses remembered

The work of two defenders of footpaths in Berkshire, Robin and Richard Mosses, has been recognised with the placing of a plaque on what is now officially known as 'Mosses Path' in Binfield.

The path was first named to commemorate Robin Mosses who died in 2010 but effectively now remembers both brothers following Richard's death in 2023 whilst on a

walking holiday in Hawaii.

The condition of the path has also been improved thanks to developer funds and is being upgraded in status from permissive to public right of way.

Our group will be arranging a walk to include the path and to take a moment to remember Robin and Richard and all their work for walkers in Berkshire.

Brian Poulton

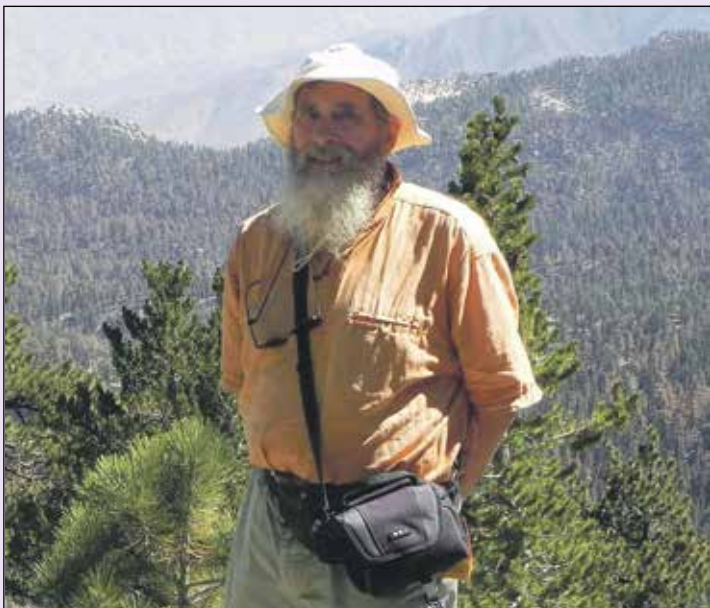
South East Berks Ramblers



Mosses Path runs from the north side of Stubbs Hill to Ryehurst Lane in Binfield.
Photos: Brian Poulton



The plaque. Photos: Brian Poulton



Richard Mosses 1943 - 2023. Photos: Brian Poulton



BUCKS *briefs*

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Area AGM

Members of the Area met at Amersham's Small Barn Hall on Saturday 3 February for the Area AGM. This was chaired by Paul Rhodes and well-attended, with 24 Area members and two guests. We were also joined by Glen Walker, Director of People and Organisational Development for the Ramblers, on behalf of Ross Maloney, the Chief Executive Officer, who sent his apologies.

Before the meeting Paul and Trevor Jones, Vice-Chair, led two excellent walks from the hall. Trevor's walk, of just over eight miles, took in the Misbourne valley, Amersham Old Town and Rushmead whilst Paul's walk of six miles headed in the opposite direction towards Chesham, enjoying views of the Old Mill Race on Chesham Moor before returning via the woodland of Chesham Bois.. Thanks to both for leading such lovely walks.

Glen kicked the meeting off by giving a refresh on the Ramblers strategic plan and developments with the Walks Manager, before discussing a recent BBC report on path maintenance that featured quotes from, among others, Kate Ashbrook, the Area's Footpath Secretary. He closed his talk by presenting surprise awards to Paul Rhodes and John Esslemont for their many years of volunteering for the Ramblers in many different roles, to the delight of all in the room.

Following Glen's talk, Paul and Trevor were proposed and agreed to take on each other's roles as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, effectively swapping roles. We'd like to extend a warm welcome to Trevor as our new Chair. The committee had hoped to fill the long-vacant role of Secretary, as John Esslemont has been kindly filling in as Acting Secretary for a



Glen Walker (left) with Paul Rhodes at the AGM in February.

Photo: Beth Stark

number of years alongside his role as Treasurer, but unfortunately no one came forward. There are many ways that the Secretary role could be split, such as taking the task of drafting next year's AGM report, or minuting the Area meetings. At the next AGM John will be stepping down from at least some of his roles leaving some activities unfilled if no one steps forward. Therefore the committee would greatly welcome anyone who would be able to spare some

time to support the Area and take on all or just part of the Secretary role. Anyone interested should reach out to John Esslemont at johnandjean@thamesinternet.com.

Thanks to all who attended and contributed to the meeting and we look forward to another year of activities.

Beth Stark

Area News Editor

40th anniversary

This June marks the 40th anniversary of the formation of our Area. By 1984 a decision had been made to split the Southern Area of the Ramblers' Association, which had originally been huge, covering most of southeast England (though by this time a number of smaller Areas had already been hived off). It was also decided that groups operating in outer parts of Greater London should be incorporated into Areas based in surrounding counties, seen as their natural walking hinterland.

On 27 January 1984, Jean Jefcoate, who had been asked to convene the formation of a Buckinghamshire Area, wrote to the affected groups and some individuals, calling an informal meeting in Amersham on 24 March, which was attended by 24 members including representatives

from Amersham, Aylesbury, Hillingdon, Milton Keynes, North West London and West London groups; the other group in existence at that time, Aston Abbots, was not represented. A steering committee, including volunteers for officer posts, was appointed and the name of Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area (rather than just Buckinghamshire) was adopted. (Whilst Milton Keynes became a unitary authority in 1997 it was not until 2008 that the Area name was changed to reflect this.)

The formal Area formation meeting was held in Wendover on 9 June 1984, chaired by Chris Hall, who was at the time Vice Chairman of the Ramblers' Association. Again there were 24 people present, including some Southern Area officers not resident in the new Area. A new committee was elected. The first Annual General Meeting, on 23 February 1985 (with 54 people present) adopted a constitution and appointed our first (and, so far, only) President, Tom Stephenson.

John Esslemont



Freedom of Information request reveals major cuts in paths maintenance

In late 2023, we stumbled across an undated Essex Highways rights of way maintenance and inspection strategy document, published in 2022. It can be downloaded from <https://www.essexhighways.org/road-and-pavements/roads-strategies>. (It's really quite difficult to find - very few Google searches will list it) Somewhat surprisingly, nobody in Essex Ramblers had heard of this document - and each year we attend several forums which Essex Highways also attends.

The document introduced and described 'a functional route hierarchy' across the Essex public rights of way network. It organised the rights of way that Essex Highways is responsible for into three hierarchies: the Primary network (PW1), Secondary network (PW2) and the Tertiary network (PW3). Essex Highways claims that 'these routes created a network that better reflected the usage of the public rights of way in Essex, which allows us to prioritise our maintenance and network decisions with greater accuracy and ensure a better flow and experience for the user'.

The Primary network is described as promoted routes (for example, the Essex Way) or high usage rights of way 'linking to high value countryside and leisure opportunities'. The Secondary network is 'High and medium range usage public rights of way that link local access urban footways, feed into local shopping centres, railway stations, bus stations, schools, hospitals, public gardens, sports centres, and other public spaces, etc'. Finally, the Tertiary network routes are 'associated with low usage through rural areas' - just the sort of path that ramblers are likely to make good use of!

The document goes on to list defects that would justify maintenance decisions - for example, fallen trees, overgrown footpaths, missing planks from bridges and so on. It then sets out a hierarchy for risk assessment. Risks are to be assessed by inspectors in two parts: *consequence and likelihood*. Under *consequence*, factors include whether the defect is likely to prevent or impair use and whether there is a safety risk. Inspectors are asked to quantify these factors on a scale of 1 to 4. *Likelihood* means 'the likelihood of a highway user interacting with the defect shall be quantified on

a scale of 1 to 4. Considerations will include its location in the highway and all users exercising their public rights on the highway'.

The assessment of these rights gives rise to what is called a 'risk factor', which is the combination of likelihood and consequence assessments multiplied together. This will produce a range of scores from 1 to 16 identifying the seriousness of the risk and consequently the appropriate level of response. From these, Essex Highways has developed a risk matrix, with Defect Response Times divided into four priorities. Priority 1 and 2 defects are those that following risk assessment require a prioritised repair or to make safe to ensure the safety of the highway user. Priority 3 and 4 defects are those deemed to be of 'low risk and ... defects that impact the long term serviceability and sustainability of the highway asset. These defects will be addressed in a planned manner as resources permit. Response time is defined as the time taken to effect a safe or permanent repair from the time the defect is assessed on site by an Officer'. Primary and Secondary networks receive higher priority for repairs than the Tertiary routes, where for Priority 2 defects there is a presumption that repairs should be undertaken within 40 days, or for Priority 3 and 4 defects there is a presumption 'not to undertake a repair within a stated time period'.

So, as a model to apply to the network in order to determine where best to apply limited maintenance resources, it seemed fine. But there was a key piece of information missing: exactly how many rights of way were assigned to PW1/PW2/PW3? And further, what proportion of reported defects were actually being categorised as Priority 1/2/3/4?

Unfortunately, a comprehensive search of the Essex Highways' website failed to answer either of these questions. So there was only one thing for it: to make use of Freedom of Information requests. We submitted two: one asking for them to list all Essex public rights of way together with their hierarchies, and the second asking them to list all defects which had been categorised Priority 1/2/3/4. If readers want to look these up on the Essex Highways website, they should enter: 'Provide listing of all ECC Public Rights of Way together with their Network Hierarchies' and 'Public Right of Way Issues Reported Sept 2017



The Essex Way is in the Primary network.

through December 2023, including Defect Risk Factor Scores'.

So what did all this tell us? That there are just over 11,000 rights of way in Essex, and of the 10,233 which have been categorised, 5% were PW1, 12% were PW2 and 83% were PW4.

Whilst we have data on around 12,000 defects since 2017, because the defect categorisation system was only brought in a couple of years ago, the number of defects which have been formally assigned a priority appears to be somewhat low in number at 354. But what we can say is:

- less than 1% were assigned Priority 1
- about 5% were assigned Priority 2
- about 33% were assigned Priority 3
- about 60% were assigned Priority 4

Whilst the introduction of such a maintenance and inspections model is a very good idea, the way it has been introduced in Essex suggests that by focusing on the top six per cent, the opportunity has been taken to give the appearance of substantially reduced response times to reported faults. In effect, what this means is that if a member of the public reports a fault on a right of way, unless it's a serious problem or on one of the six per cent of higher priority rights of way, no commitment will be made by Essex Highways as to when it will even be assessed, let alone fixed!

We will be raising the issues brought out here at our regular meetings with Essex Highways. And it occurs to me that other Areas of the Ramblers might also find using Freedom of Information requests useful in dealing with their highway authorities.

Ian Glen
Essex Area Hub Team

Spring pickers

Essex Wildlife Trust launched a campaign this year called 'Spring Pickers'. and asked our group (and others in the county) to pick up five pieces of litter per walker on each walk between 9 and 18 March. We had four walks in this period and our leaders and members were happy to participate, going armed with bags, grabbers and gloves ready to tackle anything in their path.

The weather for the first walk was so poor that only three people turned up and there was very little litter along their route though

they still managed to fill half a large bag. A lot more litter was collected on the second walk and even then the walkers felt they had hardly scratched the surface. One walker found an abandoned pack of six bottles full of milk whilst the leader picked up a large nitrous oxide canister. Even more rubbish was picked up on the third and fourth walks. I heard from Gemma at the trust that the campaign had been a huge success and across Essex at least 23,850 items of litter had been picked up.

Dorothy Cosh
South East Essex Ramblers



Job done.

Photo: Paul Thwaites



INNER LONDON insights

Area welcomes new Chair

At its AGM in February, Inner London Area elected Tim Sai-Louie as the new Chair of the Area. He replaced me, though I am remaining on the committee as Area Publicity

Officer. Tim organises a lot of weekends away as well as leading a great many walks for the Capital Walkers and is their current Chair.

Des Garrahan



Tim Sai-Louie

Walks project

At the end of March we held our annual meeting for all the volunteers involved with the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk project. This was an opportunity for volunteers to meet each other and the project coordination team, to pick up a copy of our annual report, hear about what we've achieved together in the last year, and to ask questions and make suggestions. The meeting was also a chance for us to distribute supplies of waymark discs and stickers, vinyl overlays for fingerposts and Ramblers hi-vis vests.

We were delighted to have Colin Saunders as our guest speaker. Colin gave an entertaining and informative talk about the inception of the routes, honouring those brilliant Ramblers volunteers who preceded us and created the amazing London walking infrastructure that our project is trying to preserve. Colin also talked about his books, which include his guides to the Capital Ring and, with the late David Sharp, the London Loop; his Definitive Guide to Walking in London, sadly no longer in print, has been an excellent resource for me in leading this project for which I'm very grateful.

The horrendously wet winter prevented most of our practical work, especially on the London Loop which has been - like much of the countryside - terribly muddy in many places. But now spring has sprung, we will be prioritising improvements on section 18 of the London Loop (Enfield Lock to Chingford), the one remaining section on which our team has yet to make waymarking improvements.

In March we met The Royal Parks' Greenwich Park manager and with the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Executive, including Greenwich Council, to discuss the signing of section 12 of the Green Chain Walk. This section runs for five and a half miles from Eltham to the Cutty Sark at Greenwich - but, whilst much of the signage was made many years ago, it has never been installed. The World Heritage Site is working on a new Grand Access Crossing through the site, with a good sightline to the river, through which they propose re-routing the walk so that it is more intuitive, and it would then follow the Thames Path to the Cutty Sark.

Greenwich Park is undergoing substantial works through its Greenwich Park Revealed project - the giant steps have been created, a new cafe is open and will be redoing its signage as part of this project. We are walking the route with the park manager soon to discuss



A London Loop waymark in Bexley is attended to.



Colin Saunders addresses the meeting of project volunteers. Photo: Clare Wadd

where waymarking is needed, and following up with the councils regarding the signage. This section was proposed many years ago, and it would be a huge achievement to get it waymarked for the public to enjoy, and to add another link between the Green Chain Walk and the other TfL walking routes at Greenwich. Ian Bull has produced maps and Andrew Hunt guidance, which are available on our website for those who want to walk it before the signage is in place. Go to www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk/ideasforwalks/green-chain-walk-guides.html.

Our project has been running

for five years now - interrupted of course by Covid and lockdowns - and we're proud of what we have been able to achieve during that period from a germ of an idea and a standing start. We're always keen to welcome new volunteers to join the project - inevitably circumstances change for some or, after five years it's simply time to do something else - so succession planning is always important for us. Please do get in touch if you would like to get involved.

Clare Wadd
vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk

Farewell Phil

Another notable change at our AGM was that Phil Marson stepped down as Area IT Officer ending over 25 years of active volunteering within London. During his

time he has held the posts of Area Chair, Area Membership Secretary, as well as IT Officer. He was a founder member of both the Metropolitan Walkers and Capital Walkers groups, a frequent contributor to General Council debates and a leading member

in innumerable London mayoral campaigns. He was at the forefront of many important and successful changes over this time and his experience, innovation and sense of humour will be hard to replace.

Des Garrahan

London by gaslight



The group. Photos: Kleo Zhao

Did you know that there are still about 1,300 gas-powered street lights illuminating the streets of London? The capital has the distinction of being the first city in the world to be lit by gas, and these lights have continued to cast their soft glow for over 200 years.

On the evening of Tuesday 27 February, we had the pleasure of joining Roger, our walk leader, to experience the unique ambience of London by gaslight. Our four-mile walk began at Lancaster Gate and took us straight into Hyde Park which was shrouded in darkness, with only the occasional cyclist passing by. Clusters of gas streetlights dotted the pathways, bathing the surroundings in a warm, yellowish glow. Interestingly, the phrase 'in the limelight' originates from the days when the brightest light on the stage was a centrally placed gaslight with a lime mantle.

As we journeyed through Hyde Park we passed the park police station which is marked by a gas-lit sign. Along the route in the park we also encountered a post box standing next to a gaslight, framed by a backdrop of daffodils. The scene was reminiscent of something out of an old movie, with the warm light casting a nostalgic charm.

After crossing Hyde Park and Green Park our walk took us to Pickering Place, a tiny courtyard

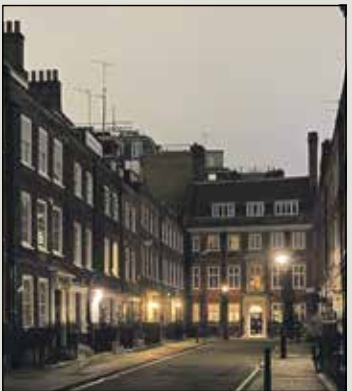
which is considered to be the smallest square in Britain. It was once home to the Texan Legation, the embassy for the Republic of Texas, until the state joined the United States in 1845.

We then continued to The Mall where gas lights line one side. The Mall after dark is a truly captivating experience. We learned that some of these gaslights are nearly 200 years old, each marked with the crest of the monarch of the year it was erected. Roger had even brought along a torch so we could examine the different crests on the lamp bases, including the oldest we encountered which dated back to the reign (1820 - 1830) of George IV.

After The Mall we wandered through streets, passing the 'Two Chairmen' pub, which derives its name from the practice of two men carrying a sedan chair. Our walk then took us to Smith Square where gaslights illuminated St John's church from all angles. Next stop was in front of Westminster Abbey where the two lights flanking the entrance are also gaslit. Then it was on by way of Great Smith Street, and Great College Street to arrive at Cowley Street, a quiet Georgian backstreet still lit by gas.

It was a delightful walk filled with history and views of London by gaslight.

Kleo Zhao
South Bank Ramblers



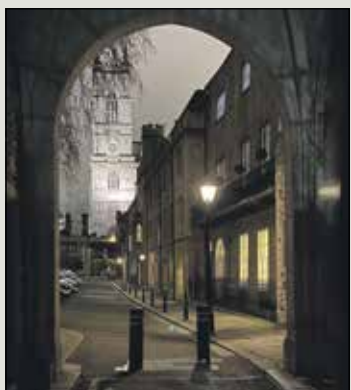
Cowley Street.



Gaslight, postbox and daffodils.



The Mall.



Dean's Yard.

On greensand hills

*Smudged violet:
all the blue blurred miles
of this long sand-ridge*

*where beech leaves,
whitebeam, linden-
all these-frame*

*your far-off dark plantations,
while in the foreground
rosebay willow herb*

*spikes all edges-
the white moth-wings
of dog-rose sprays reach*

*from hedges until
the sudden shimmer
of a breeze hefts my heart*

*so that I want
to lift my voice:
to sing.*

*Ide Hill boasts riches:
a hot grass harvest between
chestnuts, blue-green pines.*

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher



On the Greensand Way near Westerham.

Explore with map and compass:

John Harmer is hoping to offer another one-day course on a Saturday in late summer/early autumn at Battle, East Sussex. These courses are aimed at those with little or no experience and open to all. A standard charge of £10 is made with reduced rates available. If interested, please contact John (01424 773998, john@harmerfamily.plus.com).

South Downs Open:

Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery in east Hampshire will be celebrating the history, landscape and creative community of artists with the South Downs Open exhibition from 22 October until 1 February 2025. All artists (amateur and professional) inspired by the South Downs are encouraged to apply by 30 August to submit works for showing.

There's mud... and then there's MUD!

I have just finished cleaning my boots for the umpteenth time this year. Now since I joined the Ramblers some 15 years ago - gosh, doesn't time fly when you are enjoying yourself -

I feel I have become something of an expert on mud and its many qualities and variants.

'We plough the fields and scatter', as the hymn goes, and when we come to a recently

ploughed field after heavy rain my heart sinks almost as quickly as I do - into the mud. Below are some photos taken on recent walks.

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*



Our Brian - he's 92 and not enjoying staggering across this field.
Photo: Alan Harding



A depth of water that walking boots and gaiters will not cope with - wellies or perhaps waders would be more appropriate!
Photo: Alan Harding



Jeff, invited his sporty grandson to join him on a group walk. "You'll be fine in your nice new trainers", said Jeff.
Photo: John Tickner



Years of walking experience can sometimes be forgotten and we wander off into the great outdoors not properly prepared!
Photo: John Tickner

Ephemera: a failed project and the growth of walking opportunities in London

After my article in the last issue nobody was interested in owning my copy of London Rambler number 58 so it's now gone into the recycling bin.

My next bundle, also probably destined for the same bin, consists of a few documents relating to the attempt to create definitive maps in the inner London boroughs, the only part of England and Wales which are not required to record public rights of way on definitive maps. The question was asked about why the inner London boroughs didn't have definitive maps and the answer was that it was a historical anomaly. definitive maps were a requirement of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949 which was mainly focused on rural paths but over time there was lobbying to include urban paths on definitive maps of large towns. It wasn't until the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 extended definitive maps to all areas except Inner London. The Ramblers' view was that getting that achievement was seriously significant and the exclusion of inner London could wait for another day.

It wasn't until 2010, that the 'Put London on the Map' campaign was instigated. This urged each of

the 12 inner London boroughs plus the City of London to create definitive maps complete with support from ramblers, writers and artists but the campaign never delivered its objectives. Will Self wrote an interesting opinion piece in 2011 which indicated supporting the campaign while hinting at complex issues, an example being comparing the over-busy strollers on parts of the Thames Path to a pleasant hike from Streatham to Camberwell via Brixton.

Essentially the lack of definitive maps for Inner London has not restricted walking or taking up opportunities for walking way beyond the local boundaries. Footways (www.footways.london) provides maps of networks of quiet and enjoyable streets for walking . The Slow Ways project (beta.slowways.org) links towns, cities, national parks and invites people to review the routes. Again you can probably find your own local connections so you can explore nearby or further afield.

Lots of walking adventurers and groups start their journeys in central London and head for Paris, Santiago de Compostela, Rome and Jerusalem. The aforementioned Will

Self undertook walk-flight-walk journeys starting and finishing in inner London without definitive maps and many of the boroughs in question produce their own local walking materials which are of interest to both local people and visitors. And, of course, we can't leave out our Ramblers groups who share some of their time walking in and enjoying the centre of our metropolis. Pilgrimages starting in central London abound with examples such as the St Alban's Way from St Paul's Cathedral to St Albans and the Pilgrims' Way from Southwark Cathedral to Canterbury. Another source of walks linked with inner London is Transport for London's Green Link Walk from the edge of Epping Forest to Peckham. This route includes Hackney, Islington and Southwark, three boroughs without definitive maps.

It seems to me that not having definitive maps in inner London isn't particularly negative but this is only the view of yours truly. Comments, of course, are welcome and if you want my little bundle of paperwork, grab it before it goes in the recycling bin!

*John Pestle
johnpestle@btinternet.com*



Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks 2024

Following the roaring success of our 2023 festival we are delighted to announce that plans are well underway for this year's event. The dates are 7 - 15 September. Please put the dates in your diaries. We are hoping to build on the number of walks offered and ensure there is a good spread of walk types to appeal to all abilities across times that should suit all.

We are reaching out to

neighbouring Ramblers groups, inviting them to step across the county border and explore our beautiful little county with us. We also have plans to offer the 'walk and sail' trip on the John Bunyan boat, along the Great Ouse, but places are limited and will need to be booked in advance. We are also hoping to offer the opportunity to walk the Greensand Ridge Walk over two days. As before, the festival will encourage people to experience walking and the

Ramblers, along with finding out a bit more about some of the hidden and not so hidden secrets of this little-sung county.

Look us up on our dedicated Facebook page at Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks or our web page at www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/walks. Details will be added as they become available.

Sandra Kelsey, North Beds Ramblers and Pamela Bates, Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks

Hosted by RAMBLERS Bedfordshire

7th to 15th September 2024

Explore our beautiful little county on foot

Short Walks

Wellbeing Walks

Local Walks

Long Walks

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

Full details on www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/walks

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

This year's festival flyer has been designed and produced by Anne Griffiths and Julian Chritchlow. Photo: Paul Goss

Path works

Bedfordshire Area's RIPPLE team worked throughout the winter months on tasks ranging from major clearances to extending a bridleway, repairing a footbridge, removing tree branches and painting and erecting waymark posts.

The major clearance task was on partially blocked and overgrown Footpath 16 in Pulloxhill, on the route of the Bunyan Trail. A large team of volunteers using a mixture of tools in difficult conditions made short work of the 300 yards or so section of path and then everyone enjoyed refreshments including home-made cakes provided by Lindsay from Central Bedfordshire Council.

A very big task was the extension of a bridleway in Langford. Bridleway 8 connects Langford with Austwick and an anomaly existed by the East Coast main railway line. The bridleway needed extending by almost 500 yards and this involved a lot of our volunteers working over two days to clear vegetation and install a new marker post.

Further clearance tasks took place at Wootton, Turvey Station, Carlton and Upper Shelton where the path behind the houses had been completely blocked by vegetation. At Felmersham, our volunteers worked to clear a footbridge that had been blocked by the residue from flooding on the River Great Ouse and on the same path nearby where it had become overgrown in a narrow section between a ditch on one side and a fence on the other.

Our work is mostly path clearing and putting in marker posts, so we welcomed the opportunity to replace some rotten wooden



The footbridge at Felmersham before RIPPLE volunteers got to work. Photos: Steve Woodward



...and after. Photos: Steve Woodward



This footpath at Felmersham was difficult to walk. Photos: Steve Woodward



...but not now. Photos: Steve Woodward

decking on a footbridge at Upper Caldecote, near Biggleswade. The decking and screws were placed in what was deemed to be a safe place the night before but we arrived to find the screws had been stolen, necessitating a trip to the nearest DIY store before we could

start work. Once the decking was replaced we were able to clear the nearby vegetation blocking the path. Replacing waymark posts is another regular task and after the clearance challenges our volunteers welcomed the opportunity of putting in six posts around Riseley.

Another three loose posts in Ravensden were also reset. Our stock of marker posts has been replenished and our dedicated team has done a great job painting the tops of these yellow. We now have about 50 new posts ready for installing in 2024. Some terrific work has been done

and thanks to Roy and Steve for organising everything whilst I was on holiday. As always, a big thank you must go to all our enthusiastic volunteers. Without you all these tasks just wouldn't get done. *Barry Ingram Bedfordshire RIPPLE*



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary



Darent Valley Path near Shoreham.

In my last diary I bemoaned the shortage of footpath volunteers. I am pleased to say that a couple more people have stepped forward to take on local footpath officer roles - Glyn Lewis has taken on some parishes in the Dartford and Gravesham area that had long been vacant since Bill Ripper moved to the West Country and Margarethe Batteson has taken on a tranche of parishes in Sevenoaks, enabling Jim Fergusson to take a well-deserved retirement. Jim had been protecting the paths in Sevenoaks from adverse changes for over 50 years and was one of those present at the inaugural meeting of Kent Area in April 1984.

Jim was not able to attend our AGM in February but four others who had been present at our inaugural meeting managed to do so, including our first Treasurer Stephen Roberts, our first Secretary Keith Potter and almost our first Chairman Alan Smith. We should be very grateful for the long and dedicated service of so many of our volunteers. We might also marvel at their longevity - clearly both walking and volunteering are good for you.

We rely on book sales to fund our **Named Paths Project** which we have now expanded to include the renewal of some of the 129 parish footpath maps installed around the county by Kent County Council a couple of decades ago, many of which are in a sorry state. I am therefore pleased that the National Trust has decided to stock our books in its shops at many of its properties in the south east and I am even more pleased that they have sold sufficiently well for three shops to have reordered already, one of them twice.

One consequence of **selling more books** is that stocks of our Guide to *Three River Valley Walks in West Kent*, covering the Darent Valley Path, the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk, may run out sooner than I was expecting. I don't want to have a new edition printed just yet because there is talk of the Darent Valley Path being extended to Westerham (it currently goes upstream only as far as Chipstead with a branch to Sevenoaks railway station) and I want the next edition to include the extension - if it happens. I am trying, so far unsuccessfully, to obtain a clear indication of the likely timetable for delivering the extension which

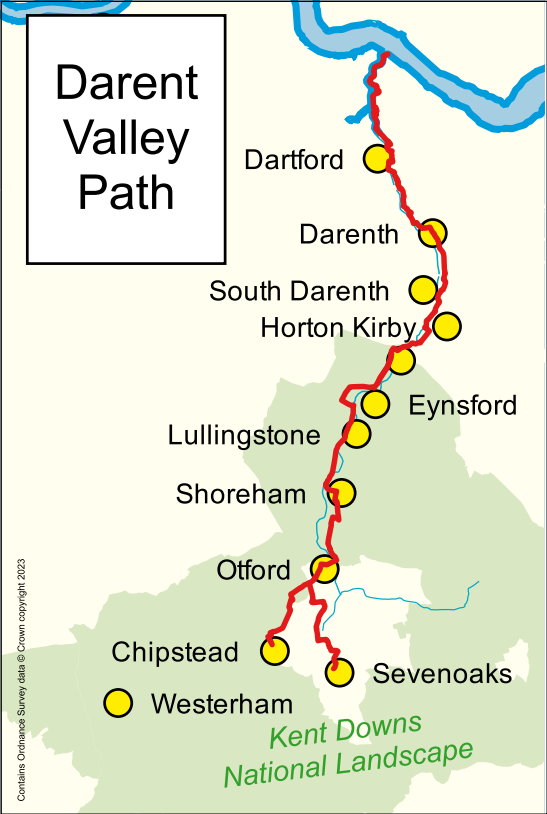
will apparently require landowners to agree to some permissive paths. Meanwhile further parts of our Guide to the Kent Coast Path remain in draft while the Secretary of State continues to ponder three objections to the route that were the subject of a visit by an inspector as long ago as November 2021.

In a previous diary I lamented that the available printed version of many of the **Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps** for Kent and adjacent areas are very out of date. Good news is that new editions of three local Explorer maps have been published recently. They are numbers 146 (Dorking, Box Hill and Reigate), 147 (Sevenoaks & Tonbridge) and 150 (Canterbury & the Isle of Thanet). However, the Ordnance Survey online shop still displays details, including images, of the older versions despite the newer versions being supplied if ordered, so those browsing the shop may well be deterred from buying up-to-date maps because they are described as being out-of-date. It's a funny way to run a retail business! Sadly the most recent edition of Explorer 148 (Maidstone and the Medway Towns) is still that based on revisions up to November 2008.

In February I attended a workshop organised under the banner of 'Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway'. This is just one of 48 such projects covering the whole of England with the intention of producing 'Local Nature Recovery Strategies'. The Strategies will identify priorities in terms of species and habitats and produce maps of the latter. However, no funding is provided for implementing the Strategies - they will simply document potential projects available to be picked up under Environmental Land Management Schemes, benefits to be delivered through Biodiversity Net Gain commitments in planning applications and similar opportunities.

It is not clear what, if any, opportunities there will be for seeking greater access to the countryside but we are engaging with the process of producing the Strategy and will eventually find out. Ramblers Central Office has produced a briefing note on the topic in case other Areas are invited to contribute to their local Strategies.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers



The current route of the Darent Valley Path.



OXFORDSHIRE on-line

Area picnic

This year's event is different from previous ones; hosts Thame & Wheatley Group will be leading all the walks, rather than each of our groups doing their own thing. Seven in all, the walks will start from various points, all aiming to arrive at the picnic location at 12.30. They range from four miles leisurely to 10 miles moderate so there should be a walk suitable for everyone.

The picnic will be at 12.30 at Holton Orchard, adjacent to Holton Village Hall on Saturday 22 June. The location is at grid reference SP 603064, postcode OX33 1PR, What3Words: otter, useful, reclining. Cakes, hot and cold drinks will be provided but do bring your own picnic.

Details of the walks can be seen on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website under the 'Walking' tab 'Monthly Reports'.

Richard Birch
Area Chair



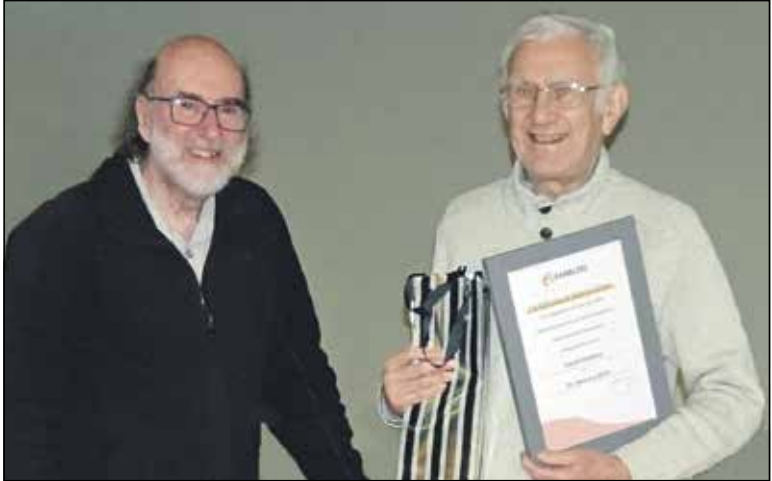
Photo: Fiona Hitchcock

Award to David Godfrey

David Godfrey has been a Footpath Secretary in Oxfordshire for over 45 years, initially for Bicester & Kidlington Group and for the past few decades as Area Footpath Secretary. The role of Footpath Secretary is to consider and comment on proposed footpath diversions or closures and David must have dealt with thousands

of them during this time, often walking 10 miles in a day to view the proposed routes. In recognition of his outstanding commitment I, at this year's Area AGM, presented David with a bottle of wine and a certificate signed by Ramblers Chief Executive Ross Maloney.

Richard Birch
Area Chair



Richard Birch (left) presents David Godfrey with a certificate on his retirement from the role of Area Footpath Secretary after 45 years volunteering with Ramblers.

Photo: John Gordon



How about becoming a Parish Path Warden?



The collapsing footbridge (left) was replaced with a new bridge (right) after a Parish Path Warden reported the issue to the county council. Photos: Dave Cavanagh

We have vacancies for Parish Path Wardens in some of our parishes. Would you be able to keep an eye on the paths in one of these? It involves something that you love doing: walking. You could do it alone or with one or more friends.

When you come across a path problem - e.g. vegetation overgrowth, difficult stile, locked gate, collapsing footbridge, path not made good after ploughing - you report it to Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access Team. This is done easily using their online

reporting tool. You'll find a link to that on the 'Report footpath problems' page after clicking on the 'footpath protection' tab near the top of the Oxfordshire Ramblers homepage at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk.

You will find helpful guidance notes by clicking on the Parish Path Warden link in the drop-down menu under the 'footpath protection' tab. If you need additional help, just ask using the email link at the bottom of the 'Parish path wardens' page.

Current Parish Path Warden vacancies
Banbury & North Oxon: Bloxham, Claydon with Clattercote, Duns Tew.

Bicester & Kidlington: Ardley with Fewcott, Arncott, Bucknell, Caversfield, Hampton Gay & Poyle, Horton-cum-Studley, Piddington, Somerton, Yarnton.

Didcot & Wallingford: Culham, Didcot, Newington, Nuneham Courtenay

Thame & Wheatley: Chalgrove, Cuddesdon with Denton, Forest Hill with Shotover, Tetsworth, Tiddington-with-Albury.

Vale of White Horse: Blewbury, Buscot, Coleshill, Great Faringdon, Harwell, Kennington, Letcombe Regis, Pusey, Watchfield.

West Oxfordshire: Bladon, Cassington, Clanfield, Curbridge & Lew, Ducklington, Grafton & Radcot, Hardwick-with-Yelford, Holwell, Kelmscott, Kencot, Langford, Little Faringdon, Sandford St Martin, Shilton, Standlake, Swerford, Westcote Barton, Westwell.

Note that parishes in both the Cotswold and Chilterns National Landscape Areas (formerly AONBs) have separate Parish path Warden schemes.

If you are interested in being a Parish Path Warden for one of these parishes, please contact me using the email link at the bottom of the 'Parish path wardens' page.

David Tole
Coordinator, Oxfordshire
Ramblers Parish Path Warden
Network

Online magazine

See what's going on amongst Oxfordshire Ramblers by looking at our quarterly online magazine. This is an easy-read publication, liberally illustrated by our members' great photos taken during the previous few months, plus jokes. In the current spring issue Tony Clark describes his 27 years as a walk leader and Footpath Secretary for Thame & Wheatley Group. Related to that, our Chair gave an award to David Godfrey who has been a Footpath Secretary for 45 years. Yes, 45, with many of them as Area Footpath Secretary.

For sheer joy and satisfaction from getting to the top of some of the UK's hills we highlight videos of the Muslim Walkers. Our members' photos have captured the splish, splash, splosh conditions underfoot during last winter, though they also remind us that there were actually some dryish sunny days. The featured Facebook page is the 'Bathtubs in Fields Appreciation Group; take a peek.

You can download recent issues of the magazine after clicking on the 'Magazine' tab near the top of the Oxfordshire Ramblers homepage at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk. The magazine is published early in January, April, July and October.

Dave Cavanagh



The spring issue of our quarterly magazine. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

Editor, talking walking

My time in Ramblers

I joined the Ramblers East Berks Group in 1997 as I needed something to do after I had retired and soon found myself on the committee in charge of the procurement and distribution of a series of local walks guide books written by members of the group. I also volunteered to become a path warden and was allocated two parishes in the Windsor area by the group's Footpath Secretary, the formidable campaigner Margaret Bowdery. I was given parish footpath maps and had to walk all the paths twice a year, report any problems and install missing waymark discs - it all sounds very familiar now. I also started leading walks for the group.

Then, in 2002, when we moved to Thame, I transferred to the Thame & Wheatley Group and soon found myself on their committee to fill the vacant Footpath Secretary role. In that role I quickly tried to establish a series of path wardens to cover the 34 parishes in the area but I was only partially successful at the time. This was all to take off and get established by others a bit later. As part of my Footpath Secretary role I was also able to take up and resolve a number of major and long outstanding footpath problems in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council and get several

descriptions of these successes publicised in South East Walker.

I continued to lead walks and had led a total of 95 walks for Ramblers. I had also introduced the idea of a newsletter to publicise the group's activities - an idea taken up enthusiastically and very successfully by our Publicity Secretary, Ruth Cornish. My other contribution was to set up the original Thame & Wheatley Group's footpath maintenance group, initially just carrying out basic path clearance, but which has now blossomed into a very active and efficient unit under more expert leadership.

After 10 years in the role of Footpath Secretary, and approaching the age of 80, however, I decided it was time to retire from this role. I continued to carry out the role of Parish Path Warden for Thame and that of Parish Path Warden Coordinator for 21 of the Thame & Wheatley parishes until the last few years when I managed to gradually reduce this total to just eight.

I continue to walk with the group, but now only on the newly-introduced super short walks as I approach my 90th birthday, but it has been a privilege to be part of the Ramblers community for so long and to have met and made friends with so many lovely people along the way.

Tony Clark



Tony leading a Get Walking Day walk for Thame & Wheatley Group. It was one of 11 such introductory walks Tony led for the group. Photo: Ruth Cornish

London Open Gardens:

117 usually-closed gardens and squares in 12 London boroughs will be open to the public on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 June. This will be the 25th year for this annual event put on by the London Parks and Gardens Trust. Details at londongardenstrust.org/whatson/london-open-gardens-2024/.

Restless Brilliance: The Story of J A Baker:

The life and work of wildlife writer John Alec Baker is celebrated in an exhibition at Chelmsford Museum which runs until 3 November. Baker's most famous book, 'The Peregrine', published in 1967, followed the story of a pair of falcons he tracked around the Essex countryside. He spent most of his life in Chelmsford and his writing is based on walks and cycle rides around the local countryside.

London Greenground Map:

Graphic designer Helen Ilus has produced a third edition of her London Greenground Map, "connecting 1,200 parks and open spaces with 20 green and blue lines for infinite options to explore". Taking inspiration from the London Underground map, Helen's work of art suggests ways of linking open spaces via a network of walking routes. Copies can be downloaded from helenilus.com/london-greenground-map-3rd-edition/. Donations invited.

Champing in Watlington

St Leonard's church in Watlington, Oxfordshire, has joined the 'champing' scheme which allows visitors to stay overnight from one to four nights in historic churches run by the Churches Conservation Trust. Walkers and cyclists are welcome. Other churches in the scheme include St James' at Cooling in Kent (featured in 'Great Expectations'), St Mary's at Edelsborough in Buckinghamshire, and Tom Paine's Chapel in Lewes, East Sussex. More details at champing.co.uk/where-to-stay/.



SURREY snippets

AGM

Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers hosted the Surrey Area AGM on Saturday 3 February in the Wilfrid Noyce Centre in Godalming. This proved to be a very suitable venue as it is easily accessible by rail as well as having a large adjoining car park. We succeeded in our objective to attract more participants to the AGM, thanks to everyone who was available to attend. We had 88 walkers on our four walks in the morning and 20 Surrey Young Walkers came with outgoing Chair Holly Matthews on a longer walk. We had a total of 142 sign in for the gathering, 139 Surrey members and three guests. Gordon Shefford should have a special mention for bringing a large contingent of Surrey Heath Ramblers to boost our numbers. Surrey Heath won the Membership Cup, awarded to the group with the biggest increase in numbers for the previous year, for the second year running!

Our very capable social committee managed amazingly well to provide all comers with tea, coffee and cakes, all home-made by the willing bakers of our membership. The only snag was a problem with the

dishwasher which led to extra work for the social committee.

We started with very pleasant 'Welcome to Godalming' opening remarks from the Mayor of Godalming, Adam Duce. This was followed by a well-received illustrated talk on 'Surrey villages - then and now' by David Rose, a local historian and author. The AGM was then chaired by Holly Matthews, this was her last AGM after five years of service. Elliot Cairnes reminded us of Holly's dedicated tenure and finally Vanessa Slawson, the Ramblers Regional Engagement Officer, led everyone with 'three cheers for Holly'.

No new Chair was appointed at the meeting so the post of Chair of Surrey Area remains vacant. All the other posts were filled.

Vanessa Slawson spoke about the work of the Ramblers nationally, pointing out that they had had a collective success last year, having increased the public profile of the organisation and received more publicity, including 150 stories about the Right to Roam. In response to a question Vanessa said we should use coming elections to campaign, including to extend the Right to Roam, include access in the new farm payments scheme and expand green routes.

A very interesting and successful meeting.

*Janet Cole
Godalming & Haslemere
Ramblers*



Preparing for the AGM start.

Photo: Janet Cole

Training day



Learning new skills.

Photo: Sue Harvey

Farnham & District Ramblers organised a walk leading and navigation training day on Saturday 13 April which was open to all groups in Surrey Area. Fifteen participants from groups including Richmond, Kingston, Surrey Heath, Mole Valley, East Surrey, Guildford, Woking and Farnham, attended the event which was held at Upper Hale, near Farnham.

The morning began with an overview of what is expected of a walk leader, including the requirement to be registered, the availability of online training modules, insurance and risk assessments. This was followed by a session on the different types of paths, access land and how to select and design a suitable walk. Then, after a refreshment break, there



Afternoon session in Farnham Park.

Photo: Nick Baxter

was a session on map reading and compass use.

After lunch the map reading and compass skills taught in the morning were tested on an interesting, but sometimes taxing, three-mile route in nearby Farnham Park. This was all made much more enjoyable by the glorious sunshine!

It was great to see such a wide range of groups represented and thanks must go to my tutor colleagues, Derek from Farnham and John D from Kingston, and to Sue H of Farnham for handling the admin and refreshments. It is hoped that another course will be run next year.

Nick Baxter

Farnham & District Ramblers

Those we have lost

Ken Clare

Ken joined the East Surrey Ramblers (as it was then) in 1999 after he retired from the building trade. It wasn't long before he became an intrinsic part of the group and started undertaking some of the long distance trails that the group had embarked on. The first was the second half of the Coast to Coast, from Kirkby Stephen to Robin Hood's Bay in 2002. The following year he joined a small group walking from Cherbourg to Mont St Michel and crossed the sands where, much to his delight, the ladies on the trip, realising he didn't have any suntan lotion on, set about anointing his arms and legs. Ken went on to join lots of other long distance walking holidays with the group and many of the weekends away.

Ken was our Walks Coordinator for many years with the unbelievable job of chasing everyone to lead walks. He became a regular leader of our long weekend walks and a member of the Wednesday linear walks. At 88 years of age Ken was still doing 10-mile walks: until



Ken celebrates his 90th birthday with a flight in a Spitfire.

Photo: John Nathan

Covid ground everything to a halt.

In 2008, the group set up a path maintenance team under the auspices of Surrey County Council's countryside department and, given Ken's background, it was felt that he would be the ideal person to lead our volunteers. He did a great job for several years and later the team came to be known as Ken's Krew in his honour. Ken eventually passed over the baton/spirit level to Barbara Bulman in 2017.

Having been in the building trade, Ken was always keen

to keep his hand in and spent many hours building a summer house in his back garden, along with patio, fish pool and chicken coop - all in his late 80s.

Ken was extremely interested in wartime military planes and for his 90th birthday his family and friends clubbed together for a flight in a Spitfire from Biggin Hill to Eastbourne and back. Family and friends were there to cheer him on.

Barbara Witherington and

Tony Pearson

East Surrey Walkers

Those we have lost

George Fletcher

I first met George at Cockfosters Underground station where he emerged complaining vociferously about the Piccadilly Line. His clear Edinburgh accent rang round the station, but there was a friendly twinkle in his eye as he surveyed the small gathering that was about to set off on a walk. I was a new member of the group. This was only my second walk, and George proved to be extremely welcoming, as he was invariably to new members of the group. He had a gift for befriending people and he always made sure that no one was left out or isolated. However, if anyone strayed out of line, he was not shy about reigning them in.

George had already been a member of the group for a few years before I joined about 20 years ago and he had established himself as a reliable, committed and popular member. He had soon become part of the committee and an excellent walks leader and he led walks for many years. They were always well-chosen, well-planned and great fun. He somehow managed to make any group into a temporary little community with everyone involved. He sought out ideal lunch and tea stops or found a pub at the end of the day and somehow, with George in charge, everything proved extremely convivial, and often laughter would ring round our venue. George attracted people rather like the pied piper and quite often complete strangers would approach him and start to chat.

George was a member of our committee for years, both as Publicity Officer and then as Programme Organiser, which he did with dedication and efficiency. He was also persuasive, and I soon found myself joining the committee too and was encouraged by George to organise weekends away. George joined them and a number of other trips with great enthusiasm. He was such an asset and joined the walks whatever the weather.

George had his share of tragedies and bereavements. Even through his long illness, which he had fought



George Fletcher.

since 2006, he remained stoical and almost unchanged. He rarely complained and seemed much the same, even as he became progressively weaker. All his friends were delighted that he found a new loving relationship later on in life and to see how happy it made him.

George loved exploring different parts of the world and travelled extensively. He adored France and revelled in being there. I was lucky enough to cross the Atlantic with him on a container ship, and we shared many adventures over a four-week period. His great joy was to find that the vessel was a French one, with a French chef and French wine.

We will always miss George. He brightened up many lives and had the gift of making the world seem a kinder and friendlier place.

Jo Buchanan

Hammersmith Fulham & Wandsworth Ramblers

Lesley Stephenson

Lesley, a stalwart of the White Cliffs Ramblers who helped organise the White Cliffs Walking Festival, has died after a brave battle with motor neurone disease (MND). Lesley who was 70 and lived in Dover, was a keen walker and a devoted member of the group. She served on the organising committee of the walking festival for eight years, for two of them taking on the role of coordinator with her great friend, Helena Trevelyan.

Lesley and Helena had first met at convent school in Dover when they were five years old, going to grammar school together and later becoming teachers. Lesley also served as a Labour councillor on Dover Town Council.

Helena said "Lesley's intelligent and calm approach to organising the festival made her a joy to work with and she played a huge part in making this yearly event the success that it always was. Lesley had been diagnosed with MND two years ago, but in spite of her illness she continued to live life to the full, and her friends rallied round to support her. Last year she enjoyed a wonderful barge holiday with 11 friends, and she also went on holiday to Italy with Sue Mott, another member of the group, and a group of others. And every Thursday, Lesley, Sue and the others would meet up to walk, play Scrabble and watch films. Lesley was out walking with them, in the early spring sunshine, a week before she died. The way she dealt with MND, which is such a cruel disease, was inspirational. Her attitude was to use her abilities while she still had them to enjoy life as much as she could."



Lesley, second from right, leading a walk during the White Cliffs Walking Festival. This photo was used on the cover of the 2019 festival brochure.

Lesley was a devoted and loving wife to husband Mick and to her three beloved children: Tom, Kate and Sarah. She adored her three grandchildren: Georgie, Wilf and little Shea, who is just a few months old.

Lesley's funeral was held on 12 April. To find how you can help fund vital support and research into MND - a rare condition which affects the brain and nerves, please go to mndassociation.org.

Graham Smith and Helena Trevelyan

White Cliffs Ramblers

David Harvey

David, who died on 4 March this year, will be remembered affectionately by many Ramblers in Essex and north east London. He and his wife Ann have been active volunteers - both for committee and field work - in the Braintree area and further afield, especially in the period 2007 to 2015. He was Countryside Officer for Braintree and North Essex (then NW Essex) Group, and served three years as its Chair. From 2011 to 2014 he was Essex Area Chair, and stayed on as Area Countryside Officer until 2015, when he resigned on

grounds of poor health.

During his extensive involvement, in addition to dealing with several controversial land use issues such as the expansion of Stansted Airport and gravel extraction proposals, he actively supported Ann McLaren's work to explore and develop the Hadleigh to Stratford (H2S) Olympic Legacy Walk, the Redbridge Group with the revision of the Saffron Trail and West Essex Group in re-working the Three Forests Way.

His commitment to Ramblers was exemplary, and he will be sorely missed.

David Radford
Chair, Essex Area Ramblers

Peter Miller 1932 - 2024

Peter Miller, one of the founder members of our group, sadly passed away in February at the age of 91.

Peter was a very popular member of the group, always welcoming to new members, and keeping us all entertained with his antics. But he was also an experienced walker, regularly leading walks for many years, both for our programme and also for a wider audience during several years of the Bedfordshire Walking Festival. He also served as group Chairman from 2006 - 2012.

Peter was born and brought up in north London before qualifying as a tool maker. His highly skilled profession enabled him to work in a variety of locations including Coventry and Leicester, and together with his wife Marlene and three children he also spent

some years in Canada and New England before settling in Luton in the early 1980s. He was a keen cyclist in his youth and very much an outdoors man, enjoying activities such as hiking and potholing. In later years he took up bowls; fiercely competitive and proud of his medals and trophies.

Peter hadn't walked with the group for a number of years due to declining health, but until the pandemic he would still support our social activities. His funeral was attended by members past and present, all wearing yellow accessories in recognition of his love of his garden, and particularly daffodils.

It was always a pleasure to be on a walk with Peter, and he will be sadly missed.

Rosemary Hasker
Lea & Icknield (Luton)
Ramblers



Peter Miller. Photo: Rosemary Hasker

Ken Warner 1934 - 2024

A contingent of Ivel Valley Group members joined Ken's wife, Sonia, relatives and friends at Bedford Crematorium on 26 March for a service in memory of Ken Warner, a long-time member of our group. He lived to the age of 89 but his later years were blighted by dementia and he had to give up regular walks with us.

Ken was born and brought up in north London, not far from Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Starting as a 15-year old apprentice, he worked his way up in the print trade and eventually started his own business. After marrying and having three children, the family moved out of London and later settled in the Bedford area, ending up in the village of Cotton End to the south of the town. He remained a Tottenham supporter despite the moves. Ken was an enthusiastic runner for much of his life and it was only after hanging up his running shoes that he joined our group. He was a member of the committee and Treasurer from 2003 - 2007. I enjoyed working



Ken Warner.

with him as the independent examiner of the accounts. Ken was an enthusiastic participant in the group's activities and always willing to help walk leaders with reconnoitres. A highlight of his walking was completing Alfred Wainwright's Coast to Coast Walk with Barry Ingram, Nigel Greenfield and myself.

What members of the group particularly remember about Ken was that he was a gentleman of the old school, kind, courteous and always willing to help.

Tony Sheward
Ivel Valley Group

Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk

In November, about 50 of our members boarded a coach to travel to Stoke-by-Nayland on the Essex/Suffolk border, for a four-night stay in a lovely four-star hotel. It being the end of November, the hotel was decked out in a Winter Wonderland style to help us start getting into the Christmas spirit.

For each of the three days we were there we had the choice of a long or short walk, a visit by coach to a local town, relaxing in the hotel grounds, or indulging in the spa. The walks explored the areas around Long Melford, Lavenham, Dedham and Flatford, including scenes made famous by many of John Constable's

paintings. The weather was kind to us for most of the time but previous rainfall meant that many of our routes were very muddy in places, especially in the fields on the way to Flatford Mill where the river had burst its banks and created temporary 'lakes'

Then, if the walking hadn't worn us out too much, there was after-dinner entertainment which included a presentation on the local area, bingo, quizzes and a disco. This mini-holiday was a great success and our thanks and congratulations were given to Helen Whiteley for organising it all.

Nikki Paintin
East Surrey Walkers



Our group with one of the 'temporary lakes'.

Photo: Nikki Paintin

Wish you were here?

Shaldon, Devon

On one of the hottest days of 2023, topping 30 degrees, we arrived for a long weekend stay. Our leader, Sue Atkins, had devised an excellent itinerary, starting with a walk on arrival around local villages.

The main highlight of the trip was walking the Dart Valley Trail, an 18-mile route which we set over two days, achieved by much planning and jiggling of cars by Sue. On our first full day we started at Kingswear to follow the Dart before climbing to some cool woods where, in the shade of the trees, we had our lunch stop. At Dittisham we signalled to the ferryman by ringing a bell and waited for him by sampling some delicious local ice cream at the little shop called 'Tarts on the Dart'. We continued our walk on the other side and headed

south to Dartmouth where we sampled some local hosteries before taking the ferry back to Kingswear.

Next day we walked south from Totnes to Dittisham where some of us crossed the river again, this time to visit Greenways, once home of Agatha Christie., whilst others enjoyed a welcoming drink before driving back to our base via Totnes. That evening we gathered together to share pizzas and wine at Sue's place and joined in the last night of the Proms with singing and dancing of our own.

On our final day we caught a bus to St Mary's Church and then walked back along the South West Coast Path to Shaldon. The finale was a stop at 'The Ness', overlooking the sea and the River Teign, for a farewell drink and a toast to a wonderful and memorable weekend. Thanks to Sue for providing it.

Anne Kimber and Tim Axten
Chiltern Weekend Walkers



A lunch stop overlooking the Dart.

Photo: Sue Atkins

Sidmouth, Devon

Thirty-seven members of our group set off from Dartford by coach in March for our first walking holiday of the year. We stayed at the Bedford Hotel in Sidmouth which was perfect and right

on the seafront. We had planned walks for each day and some proved challenging. For the non-walkers there was a visit to Bickton Park Botanical Gardens. A very enjoyable trip was had by all!

Christine Raynsford
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers



Smiles in the sunshine.

Photo: Christine Raynsford

Around the groups

Members Honoured

Two members of our group were honoured at our last AGM. Firstly, Lyn Kilbride, who has provided food at our social events for many years, was thanked by our Chair, Carolyn Brown, for all her work and presented with gifts from members. Secondly, Roy Johnson, our Countryside and Footpaths Secretary who has decided

to step down from the Footpaths role later this year. Carolyn Brown, our group Chair and Bob Turner, our group Treasurer, thanked him for his work in many roles over the years and he was presented with a certificate in recognition of his achievements.

*Liz Sutton
Aylesbury & District Ramblers*



Roy Johnson... with Bob Turner and Carolyn Brown.

Photo: Liz Sutton



Lyn Kilbride with Carolyn Brown.

Photo: Liz Sutton

Boots, banter and breweries

For those who love walking and beer, it's a combination made in heaven. We thought it would be lovely to offer a series of walks ending at a local brewery. We were pleasantly surprised to find that there were six in our local area: Chiltern, Creative Juices, Malt (since closed), Rebellion, Tring and XT. The focus was on walking, socialising and supporting the breweries. All the walks, which ranged from five to 10 miles, were fun and well received.

Highlights included our visit to the Vinyl Tap Room at the Malt Brewery in Prestwood where visitors were encouraged to take their favourite albums for a DJ to play. One of our group rather sheepishly presented his Kylie Minogue's Greatest Hits album fearing it might be dismissed as 'uncool' but the DJ turned out to be a Kylie fan and loved it! The offer of a six or 10 mile walk from Coombe Hill provided much amusement and discussion. Luckily, we hadn't lost anyone when the groups came back together for the picnic on the walk. It was great fun and the shared food was fabulous.

The Rebellion Brewery's stapyard with its lively partyvibe was the perfect place to relax after our five-mile Marlow walk. It was certainly the biggest brewery we visited.

After a nine-mile walk by the canal and through open countryside, the Creative Juices Brewery, near Maple Cross, catered for all



At the XT Brewery at Long Crendon.

Photo: Jane Hervé

tastes by offering tea and cake as well as beer.

Our 10-mile Long Crendon walk started slightly damp underfoot and only got worse. Let's just say that our two canine companions were able to practise their doggy paddle on our way to the XT Brewery at Notley Abbey.

The five-mile Tring walk ended with a visit to the town's King's Arms pub where we enjoyed beers from the Tring Brewery.

Having fun was the plan and we were delighted that so many group walkers plus fellow ramblers from other groups enjoyed the walks, the banter, the experiences and the visits to the breweries.

*Jane Hervé and Jon Hilton
Chiltern Weekend Walkers*

A bug for long distance routes

Last year was a particularly good year for us as we finished our challenge of walking the Ridgeway to celebrate the National Trail's 50th anniversary. We set the route out over seven sections, starting in March at Ivinghoe Beacon and finishing in Avebury in August. Some joined us for just a section or two, but a core group of regulars formed, determined to walk the whole route. We are truly lucky to have this route on our doorsteps.

Before we had even finished the challenge, conversations turned to which route we would walk next. After a bit of research and consultation we settled on the Shakespeare's Way, a 146-mile route from the Bard's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon to the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. At the time of writing we've tackled four of 11 sections. The first - and longest - saw 35 eager walkers meet up at Stratford-upon-Avon to walk to Shipston-on-Stour. Sadly, we had to postpone the next day's stage as the Stour had burst its banks and a large part of the route was waterlogged. This means we'll do the route slightly



Almost there! Near Avebury, on the group's final stage of walking the Ridgeway National Trail.

Photo: Beth Stark

out of order and will go back to that section later. We walked the third section, from Chipping Norton to Woodstock on 23 March, enjoying fantastic weather and made such a good pace that we caught the bus back an hour earlier than expected. We walked the fourth section, from Woodstock to Oxford, and the fifth section, from Oxford to Stadhampton, over the weekend of 13 - 14 April, enjoying blazing sunshine along the way. Walking 26 miles over the weekend was

a challenge but about 15 people did walk both days, a whopping 40 attendees for the Saturday and a respectable 20 for the Sunday.

The sixth section was scheduled for 18 May with further stages on 29 June, 14 July, 11 August, 24 August (for the postponed second section) 14 September and 12 October.

Anyone is welcome to join us. Recommendations for our 2025 challenge are already welcomed!

*Beth Stark
Chiltern Young Walkers*

Ken's Krew

Our footpath maintenance team, known as Ken's Krew, aided and abetted by others from Reigate Ramblers, Croydon Ramblers and Surrey County Council volunteers, went to Rookery Farm at Outwood on 26 March to replace a derelict stile and fix a broken gate on Footpath 480a. When we started work it was fine but it later turned distinctly damp.

We installed a wooden kissing gate (as the farm's neighbour had dogs

who might have been distressed by the clanging of galvanised gates), and a three-plank H-frame bridge with handrails. These were jointly funded by Surrey County Council and Outwood Parish Council. We also repaired a nearby gate which had fallen through its frame and allowed access to motorcyclists.

The landowner later emailed Thomas Chatfield, our Surrey County Council rights of way volunteer coordinator, to say how pleased they were with our work and the Chair of Outwood Parish Council emailed me too. We rarely receive

thanks from landowners though we occasionally get thanked by walkers who pass while we are working.

A few days later I was told of the sad death of Ken Clare (see page 11) who was instrumental in setting up Ken's Krew many years ago. Ken will always be remembered fondly for his good humour and high expectations of our work. The Ken's Krew team plans to install a commemorative plaque on the gate we installed at Outwood on the day of his death.

*Barbara Bulman
East Surrey Walkers*



Before.



After.

Social night

We held a spring social and quiz night at South Farnham School on Saturday 16 March, with a 'bring-your-own supper' and licensed bar. A total of 59 'quizzers' divided into teams with some imaginative names. We had The Flashes (causing some laughter and misunderstanding) Great Ideas, Abracadabra, The Nibblers, Up Down Walking, No Stiles and The Munch Bunch. Our quizmasters, Celia and Clive, set questions on a variety of subjects and, because the next day was St Patrick's Day, we had a round of questions related to the saint too.

After Round 3 we took a break to enjoy our suppers and to top up drinks. We also held a raffle and thanks to the amazing generosity of our members there were 36 fabulous prizes on offer. The raffle



'A fun evening' with 'The quizmasters'.

Photo: Sue Harvey

raised a fantastic £157! The final three rounds of the quiz followed with the final scores revealing that Great Ideas were the clear winners.

It was a very entertaining evening and a big thank you goes out to the committee and helpers, to Celia and Clive for

putting on such an entertaining (and sometimes educational) quiz and to all who participated in the raffle. It was definitely a better way to spend the evening than alone with a Sudoku puzzles book!

Sue Harvey

Farnham & District Ramblers

Special day

Tuesday 26 March was a special day for our member Barbara Macdonald when she led her 200th walk for the group.. Luckily, too, the weather held out and it was even sunny at times. Rob Jones-Owen presented Barbara with a certificate and flowers to mark the occasion which was held in Hodgemoor Woods, near Chalfont St Giles.

Barbara has been a leading light in our group for many years. She has been Chairman and head of our catering team, organising meals and refreshments at AGMs, social events and quiz evenings. Barbara transformed our AGM by getting the day moved from mid-week to a Saturday afternoon with optional morning walk and three-



Barbara (in bright red) receives her certificate for leading 200 walks for Hillingdon Ramblers.

Photo: Catherine Kelly

course meal. It was also moved to a more convenient location in Ruislip and numbers swelled as a consequence. She was also our Area Representative until 2016. Using her no-nonsense and organisational skills, Barbara has led several group holidays and recently revived our

popular bi-weekly Tuesday walks.

We are all very grateful to Barbara for her years of dedication and all the effort she puts in which contributes greatly to the ongoing success of the group.

Simon Thornhill

Hillingdon Ramblers

Maps gifted

We have received a gift of nearly 100 Ordnance Survey and some foreign maps. We were contacted in March by Julia. "Hi, I have a big bag of maps that were my late father's. I am loath to bin them so I wondered if your group would like them? I don't want anything for them, other than to know they have gone to a good home".

Although not a member of the Ramblers, Julia's father, Bill, was a keen walker and loved to climb the Munros in Scotland. "He always said a paper map didn't run out of battery or need GPS or a phone signal."

I have created a spreadsheet of the maps and their year of publication. If you would be interested in a list of the maps then please contact me at dmhorwill@aol.com.

Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers



Some of the gifted maps.

Photo: Brenda Horwill

It's murder on the dance floor

Like most groups, we have spent months squelching through a great variety of mud that we began to classify by its ability to cling to boots; claggy, sploshy, gloopy and sticky were just some of the terms we employed. It was a relief therefore to leave the muddy boots behind and put on our dancing shoes for our ceilidh night in March. All credit to the Linsleighers folk group for trying to teach us some simple dances as, despite a floor teeming with seasoned ramblers and walk

leaders, it appeared that many of us had been born with two left feet and had no sense of direction! Refreshed by tea, cake and probably something a little stronger, we finally got the hang of things and had a great time dancing the night away. But, for now, the dancing shoes are put away and it's back to our natural habitat exploring the beautiful countryside and villages that surround us.

Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers



Having fun at the ceilidh.

Photo: Pamela Bates

Roving reporter

New York Times' health reporter Dani Blum, together with photographer Jess Cheetham, joined two Ramblers walks in London during March and wrote affectionately about her experiences in the 9 April issue of that august journal under the headline 'Rambling Around, in Search of Friendship and Fitness'.

The concept of urban walking fascinated the writer who said: "These scenes might seem incompatible with the idea of rambling, a treasured Britishism that evokes sunny strolls through the fields. But members of the group argue that you can ramble anywhere if you've got the right attitude."

One walk was with the

Metropolitan Walkers on an evening stroll in north London led by Phil Bennett. This followed a daytime walk with the London Strollers, led by Andy Strouthous. Andy's walk was along the Thames Path in central London on a sunny day...

To quote Dani Blum: "Ramblers like to end their walks with some form of celebration... the Metropolitan Walkers clinked foamy pints in the Boston Arms pub; the London Strollers clapped and cheered as they ended their route by the Thames." One walker told Dani: "It does make you feel better. Being with people, but also just walking."

Since the article was published a few enquiries have been received from US-based walkers who hope to include a Ramblers walk on their next visit to London.

Les Douglas
London Strollers



London Strollers set off from Brent Cross West station on a walk to Hampstead on Saturday 13 April. The station only opened in December 2023 so they are probably the first Ramblers group to start a walk there (unless you know otherwise).

Kent from the other side

A Wednesday walk with a difference was experienced by 27 members in March as they viewed the Kent countryside from a different perspective. After using car share or public transport to Gravesend, we met up at the town pier before boarding the ferry for the short but pleasant crossing to Tilbury, Essex.

We started with a walk across the footbridge used by the Windrush arrivals and now the subject of an art installation telling their story. We then headed past the World's End pub, which dates from the seventeenth century, to

reach Tilbury Fort. Our walk then followed the river to Coalhouse Fort (the tide times had been checked to ensure this section was passable).

The sun shone and the domes of Gravesend's Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, one of the largest Sikh complexes outside of India, glistened in the sunshine. It was interesting to look across to the Kent side of the river, particularly as some of the group had walked past Cliffe Fort during the previous week.

At Coalhouse Fort there was time to explore the site and sit in the sun having lunch. The Engine Room cafe was brilliant and the staff welcomed us and looked after us well. There was the bonus of excellent toilet facilities,



The Gravesend - Tilbury ferry. Photo: Maureen Pearson. The ferry service across the Thames from Gravesend to Tilbury ceased running at Easter and its future was uncertain at the time we went to press.

always a good thing on a walk!

After lunch we retraced our steps to Tilbury to catch the ferry back. An alternative route would be to take in the former Bata factory and estate built for its workers at East Tilbury but that will be for another day, provided the ferry service is restored.

*Maureen Pearson
Maidstone Ramblers*

Natural hazards

Over the past two years we have introduced all-day walks twice a month and recently decided to look at splitting the all-day walks to offer a figure of 8 route once a quarter, meaning we could offer three walks for one walk leader - a great win when walk leaders are in limited supply.

This worked well until the beginning of February when there was major flooding in the north of the county and many bridges crossing the Great Ouse were closed. This particular figure of 8 walk was planned as two walks starting in Harrold, on the banks of the Great Ouse, with a walk to the south of the river in the morning and to the north in the afternoon. A

last-minute recce found that it was no longer possible to cross the river so the south walk was out! Teams pulled together and the morning walk was replanned by two of the committee and notification sent to all members by Facebook and email.

It is always advisable to recce walks before leading them but even the best laid plans can come unstuck. This was the theme for the day as a revised walk in the morning still came across flooded paths and quick diversions were required. There had to be some quick thinking at lunchtime as we returned to our start point to find access to the car park was flooding and all cars had to be removed. Then, imagine our surprise when returning from our afternoon walk along a path which was passable in the morning to find that the path



The walk must go on! Photo: Olivia Morrison

was flooded. One final diversion saw us back at our starting point.

Two walks were delivered, quick thinking by members to divert where required and everyone being patient and accepting as flooding issues were worked around - lots of smiling faces!

*Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers*

Clearing

Four of our path work volunteers have attended a council-approved brush cutter training day and have put the training to good use by working alongside the county council's countryside team to clear an overgrown footpath on Chobham Common. Once the path was cleared, the really hard work began of moving the cut vegetation to a point where it could be collected. This task left the eight volunteers shattered but very pleased with their



Before and after.

Photos: Sean Brett

newly acquired skills. Their next task, at the end of April and also on Chobham Common, was a joint task with volunteers from Woking Ramblers.

Chobham Common, one of

the largest remaining heathlands in the UK, is defined as a grade 1 national conservation area.

*Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers*

Sad farewells

Recently, our group has said a sad farewell to three stalwarts who were members for many years.

Pat Honeybone, who passed away in January 2023, worked predominantly behind the scenes supporting her beloved husband Colin. Between them they organised innumerable group walking holidays in Spain each summer and at Brimpts Farm on Dartmoor each autumn. Over the years most of Dartmoor was explored and strong links were forged with the farm. For many years Pat and Colin also organised our annual programme of coach walks, taking us to many areas around the region.

Denise Buchan, who passed

away earlier this year, was a regular member of the Spanish and Dartmoor walking holiday groups. Denise bought a camper van and set off to travel around Europe for many years before settling back in the UK to be near her family. She was a very positive person, always with a smile, and was our group's South East Walker correspondent for many years, even producing reports whilst away on her travels.

Roy Batty passed away in January this year. Roy was an amazingly knowledgeable man with a wicked sense of humour and a twinkle in his eye. As a walk leader he was always calm and collected and set a pace suitable for those attending. Always with a map around his neck and, more recently, a GPS for back-up, he was famous for sho-

ing fields of cattle by spreading his arms and quoting Shakespeare! He was our Walks Coordinator for many years, quietly badgering walk leaders to send details of their planned walks, filling any gaps in the programme himself and organising the printing and posting of our quarterly programme. He and his wife Fiona were involved with many of our group activities including path clearing, gate installations and with ROAR (Rangers on Active Response) helping adults with learning disabilities with tasks such as litter picking and clearing on Snelsmore Common.

They will be greatly missed by all who knew them.

*Eugene Fletcher, with help from
Dawn Tait
West Berkshire Ramblers*

No mud

In an interesting approach to finding routes which avoided mud and flooding during the spring, Alan Hoskins, led one of our Sunday walks through south Slough and Eton, passing an astronomical observatory, a radio telescope, Herschel Park, Antony Gormley's sculpture Edge II and the wonderful architecture of Eton College. We all enjoyed the walk and there was the bonus of not having to clean our boots when we got home!

On one of our January walks we were pleased to welcome Rosalind Fane, the Ramblers Chief of Staff. This gave everyone the opportunity to provide feedback to our Central Office and we hope set a precedent for other staff members to join



Enjoying Christmas in February. Photo: Jeff Lawrence

group walks on a regular basis.

On the social side we celebrated Christmas in February with a meal at the Rose & Crown in Minley. We do this each year as it gives us something to look forward to at a quiet time of year. We also had another skittles evening at the Binfield Club. Our coach trip on 5 June to Hayling Island to walk the Hayling Billy Trail is now fully booked.

*Brian Poulton
South East Berkshire Ramblers*

Thames start

A blustery start for 20 walkers at the beginning of our annual long distance trail on 23 March. This year the walk follows the Thames Path from Charlton in south east London to Henley on Thames in Oxfordshire and continues next year to reach the river's source. Divided into monthly walks of 10 -13 miles, our members, as well as those from



By the Thames Flood Barrier. Photo: David Keane

other groups, can choose to join as many of the walks as they wish.

*Dave Evans
West Essex Ramblers*

Mentoring new leaders

With the growing membership of our group we've made an effort to mentor some newer members into becoming walk leaders. For some it has just been a matter of what's needed, from the recce, publishing the walk details and registering those attending on the Ramblers app,

However, for some the mentoring has had to be more supportive which we have done by linking them up with an existing leader. Initially we work with them in finding their first walk which can be one they already know, or taken from an internet source or from our portfolio of documented walks. Once the route is decided, the new leader and their mentor recce the walk together and are guided on the things that need to be considered such as the meeting point, parking, road crossings, any risks that might be encountered, and how to keep the walk safe and enjoyable. Leader and mentor then make notes of points to remember and may need

to be announced on the day. Details of the walk are then entered directly to the Walks Manager by either the leader or mentor before being checked by our Walks Coordinator.

On the day of the walk we ask the new leader how much they want to do. Some choose just to lead the walk and leave the welcome briefing and registering walkers on the Ramblers app to the mentor whilst others are happy to do everything. After the walk the mentor and leader sit down to discuss what went well or, if any mistakes are made, to discuss how these can be avoided in the future. As the new walk leaders grow in confidence, the mentor takes a less active role but remains available to offer extra support if needed.

This approach to mentoring and encouragement has seen us recruit 10 new walk leaders over the last two years with one taking the next step to become one of our Walk Coordinators.

*Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers*



Meeting up for the start of a Surrey Heath walk. Photo: Graham Evans