

# Walker

## Footpath campaigner Margaret Bowdery MBE retires after 43 years

**M**embers of Maidenhead-based East Berkshire Ramblers paid tribute at their AGM on 15 November to Margaret Bowdery, who is well-known across Berkshire Area and nationally for her tenacious involvement in countless footpath campaigns and access issues.

Margaret well remembers that on first coming to live in Maidenhead, and with a love of walking, she didn't know where to go for a walk as there were no signposts or visible paths on the ground. Paths which could be found were mostly badly overgrown. Margaret's response was to sign up to the Ramblers national

'Adopt a Footpath' scheme in the 1960s and in 1967 she helped the former Berkshire County Council update their Definitive Map. Then, on 30 June 1970, following her own initiative, the first meeting of what was to become East Berkshire Ramblers group was held.

Since that date - and until her recent retirement - Margaret has been the group's Footpath Secretary and through numerous campaigns and successes has become one of the country's most respected champions of rights of way.

Within East Berks Group, Margaret is pleased to be able to hand over her Footpath Secretary

duties to fellow-member Phil Smith. She remains however as Honorary Life President of the group. Margaret has been presented with a signed card from members, a framed certificate of good service and - at her own request - a bird table and a cheque to spend on her garden where, she says, she hopes to spend more time but 'with fewer problems!'

In a letter thanking the group Margaret writes: 'When I offered to adopt a single path chain from Maidenhead to Henley all those years ago, little did I realise where that would lead. I can look back on so many happy memories and still



Rt Hon Theresa May MP with Margaret at the official opening of the 'Bowdery Arch' on 17 June 2005.  
Photo: Dave Ramm

continue to enjoy the long-lasting friendships from our earliest task force days. I am profoundly grateful to all members, especially committee members past and present, who have given me such wonderful support and encouragement over the years. Particularly important was the introduction of the social side of the group. The group holidays

and coach walks were especially rewarding as well as indoor social events. I am deeply grateful for everyone for making the East Berks Group so successful.'

**Gerald Barnett**  
*East Berks Group Secretary and David Bailey East Berks Group Chairman*

Continued on page 2

## Walking with our MP

**S**taines Ramblers were delighted to be joined by Kwasi Kwarteng, the MP for Spelthorne, on one of their scheduled Saturday walks.

They were blessed with a beautifully sunny late autumn morning and the walk provided an excellent opportunity in an informal setting for an exchange of views on current local and

national issues facing the walking community. This was initially in response to a request from Central Office for each group to consider contacting their local MP. The underlying purpose behind this request is to ensure that our representatives in government (and opposition) recognise and understand the issues facing the Ramblers, such as the aim of joining up coastal paths and protection of existing rights of way, particularly when forestry land is being sold off.

The walkers on that day had a chance to get to know their local MP and discuss issues with him whilst exploring some of the lovely paths around our area. They were impressed by Kwasi's enthusiasm for Spelthorne and his evident enjoyment of the walk and hope he will find time to walk with them again. He generously offered to talk to a representative from the Ramblers Central Office in order to discuss key issues more fully. This message was duly passed on and a meeting is to be arranged.

As a 'thank you' to Kwasi, Ramblers HQ sent him a specially created card resembling the cover of an OS map with a picture of the group taken on that day. A photographer from one of the local Staines papers was present at the beginning of the walk to record the event and the short item which appeared subsequently meant further publicity for the Staines Ramblers.



Kwasi with some of the Staines Ramblers

Photo courtesy Staines Informer



## Project launch

**O**n our centre spread you can read about the project to get London walking, launched by the Ramblers Greater London Forum.

We've stated our case in the brochure above, produced by the Forum's steering group. It's now going out to TfL, local authorities and other interested bodies, to gain their support.



Margaret has worked closely with staff at Ramblers' Central Office on many campaigns over the years. In particular Janet Davis and Eugene Suggett, both Senior Policy Officers.

**Janet Davis writes:**

Margaret was an established figure at the Ramblers when I started work for the organisation almost 30 years ago. What became apparent from my earliest encounters with her was that the title Footpath Secretary didn't do justice to the work she was doing for us. Margaret was a campaigner who would investigate every possible means of achieving changes to the rights of way network which would benefit the walking public - she would speak to councillors and to council officers, and to landowners, she wrote letters and she carried out research - no stone was left unturned. I visited her house on one occasion and was shown her Ramblers 'office' which I think had more paper in it than I had around my desk at Central Office, and in more than one instance it was apparent from a conversation with her that she had been working on a case into the early hours of the morning. The list of her achievements is prodigious and shows that persistence is often the most vital ingredient when it comes to footpath work. This is illustrated very well by the saga of the tunnel under the A404 when eight years of campaigning, including representations to the Secretary of State, and a three day public inquiry, eventually led to the diversion of a footpath through a tunnel under the road, in place

of a life-threatening crossing of the A404 itself. That tunnel - the 'Bowdery Arch' - and Margaret's other achievements, bridges, towpaths and new path links, gates in place of stiles and so on, represent very real improvements to the path network, which will be there for everyone to use for years to come. They are a brilliant legacy and I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to work with Margaret as she fought for those improvements.

**Eugene Suggett writes:**

It was 27 years ago, when I joined the Ramblers staff, that I first encountered Margaret. She was already a legendary figure by then, with a long-established reputation as a defender of public rights of way, and a campaigner for a better deal for walkers. To work with Margaret has been a delight, and an inspiration: whether it was her tenacious pursuit of councils in their dealing with obstructed paths, or her claiming of public rights of way for them to be added to the definitive map, or her collaborative practical work in the provision of user-friendly gates. Margaret's energy seemed (and still seems) boundless. The vast amount of work and effort Margaret had contributed on behalf of the public in general, and the nation's increasing number of walkers in particular, is something for which very many people have good reason to be grateful and glad. After about 10 years of working with Margaret, I just about stopped being astonished by the number of challenges she seemed prepared to take on, and the number of things she did. But I have never ceased to be bewildered about how she found

the time in which to do them. That will remain a perpetual mystery!

**Margaret lists amongst her proudest moments:**

- the opening of Temple Bridge over the Thames in 1972 - the ferry had stopped operating there in the 1950s. Ramblers donated £9,100 to the cost of the bridge.
- the opening up of access to Sashes Island at Cookham, inaccessible since the ferry there closed in 1956. Access over the new weir bridge was granted in 1991.
- the visit by David Maclean, then Minister of State for the Environment and Countryside in 1993 to see the many achievements of the group, which included the opening of the first disabled access kissing gate in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
- the opening of the towpath under Cookham Bridge in 2007, thus avoiding crossing a busy road and two flights of steps. Campaigning for this started in 1988.
- champagne celebrations with Theresa May MP in 2005 on the opening of what is now known as the 'Bowdery Archway' - a tunnel under the busy A404 at Bisham. Persistence over eight years, with the active support of Theresa May, finally resulted in success at a public inquiry.
- persuading Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council to fulfil their duty and provide a new footpath link across the Public Landing Steps upstream of Maidenhead Bridge, avoiding three road crossings. Campaigning for this started in 1998, and after East Berks Ramblers donation of £10,000



Margaret with David Bailey, East Berks Ramblers Chairman, next to the bird table in her garden which she says is already giving enormous pleasure to her and husband Bernard.

to kick-start the project this new link for the Thames Path National Trail was completed in 2007.

- accepting an MBE for services to rambling from the Prince of Wales in November 2006.
- meeting Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh at a reception given at Windsor Castle in 2010

for those involved in work in rural communities.

Unfortunately Margaret is retiring before a successful end to another campaign with which she has been involved for many years - the missing link in the Thames Path National Trail at Bridge Gardens, Maidenhead. She is however, hopeful that a satisfactory route will be negotiated.



Kenwood - a popular spot for strollers in north London

## Kenwood House restored

**A**fter several months closure during which much of the building was covered with scaffolding, Kenwood House in north London reopened to visitors in November.

During the closure the roof was repaired and eight rooms redecorated to show as accurately as possible the original interior scheme designed and intended by Robert Adam.

English Heritage has also given the house more the feel of a home by dispensing with ticket desks and rope barriers. Kenwood House is open free of charge to visitors daily.

## Tea at the station

**W**alkers gathered at Ridgmont railway station last October for one of the walks on the programme of the Bedfordshire Walking Festival, a day which happily coincided with the opening of a tea room in one of the Victorian station buildings.

The tea room and adjacent heritage centre result from a joint restoration project between the Marston Vale Rail Partnership and the Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users' Group. The tea room is open all year - for opening times call 01525 287120.



Photo: Barry Ingram



## SOUTH EAST walker

Distributed quarterly to members of the Ramblers in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex, Inner London, Kent, Oxfordshire and Surrey Areas and to members of the Havering & East London, Lea Valley Friends, Redbridge and West Essex groups.

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# Ramblers Greater London Forum

Thames estuary  
**Essex Area Council was kind enough to agree to fund me to attend the annual forum of the Thames Estuary Partnership on 7 November. This was held at the Royal Geographical Society in London and attended by about 200 delegates representing all kinds of firms with an interest in the Thames from dredging companies to fishermen. and bodies like the English Heritage and the Zoological Society. The framework was 10 presentations interspersed with question and answer sessions.**

The keynote speech was delivered by Professor Chris Rapley, head of climate science at University College London (UCL is the academic sponsor of the Thames Estuary Partnership) and Britain's top climate change expert. He explained that there was now international scientific agreement that there was only a 5% chance that climate change was not an established fact. He demonstrated the short to long-term effects that would be faced by people living in the Thames basin - 750,000 households are currently at risk.

Subsequent speakers like those from the Environment Agency and the Port of London Authority described what they were doing to increase flood defences and reducing, by increased river transport, the CO2 produced.

The future of the estuary itself



## Our five-day walk

In March we are taking the first of two five-day circuits to explore some of the walks on our proposed Extended London Network, including the Celandine Route seen above on day two. For details see page four.

is presently quite healthy; river traffic has increased and the water is cleaner. The movement of ballast by barge increased by 50% over the last year and will continue growing as material is transferred to Wallasea Island in Essex from the tunnelling associated with Crossrail and the Thames Tideway and Lee tunnels.

One presentation demonstrated how the London Gateway (the new deep-water container port on the north bank of the Thames in Thurrock), which received its first cargo on the day of the forum, had transformed, not only the riverside, but the junctions around the A13 and added railway lines. Like the proposals for the sewage tunnels, much consideration has been given to the natural environment and

considerable effort has been made to transfer endangered species and compensate for loss of habitats.

Southend council representatives emphasised how important the clean-up of the water and thus the beaches was for the £350 million spent by visitors to the town each year and DEFRA explained how, in consultation with Sustrans, it was developing the coastal path in the area.

There is considerable work going on which has an impact on walking on both sides of the estuary and is something which Essex and Kent Areas might like to be more directly involved in.

**Len Banister**  
*Chair, Ramblers Greater London Forum*  
[len@talkingwalking.co.uk](mailto:len@talkingwalking.co.uk)

## Waterside walks

Inner London Area's popular Waterway Walks return for the summer, again led by Mike Biggs who will point out places of interest along the way. All walks are on Wednesday evenings, start at 18.45 and take about two to two and a half hours. Any queries to [mikebiggs11@sky.com](mailto:mikebiggs11@sky.com).

- 14 May: Brentford to Hammersmith - meet Brentford station (trains from Waterloo) for a five mile walk along the Grand Union Canal and south bank of the Thames.
- 28 May: Hackney Wick to Angel - meet Hackney Wick station (London Overground) for a four mile walk exploring Victoria Park then continuing along the Regent's Canal to Islington Tunnel.
- 11 June: Blackheath to Canary Wharf - meet Blackheath station (trains from London Bridge) for a five mile walk exploring Greenwich Park, then through the foot tunnel to reach Canary Wharf via the River Thames and one of the West India Docks.
- 25 June: Erith to Crayford - meet Erith station (trains from London Bridge) for a five mile walk along the Thames, Darent and Cray.

There will then be a five week break with walks continuing as below:

- 30 July: West Drayton to Southall - meet West Drayton station (trains from Paddington) for a six mile walk along the Grand Union Canal.
- 13 August: Warwick Avenue to Harlesden - meet Warwick Avenue station (Bakerloo Line) for a four mile walk along the Paddington Canal.
- 27 August: Tower Hill to Rotherhithe - meet Tower Hill station - London Wall exit (Circle and District Lines) for a four mile walk along the south bank of the Thames to historic Rotherhithe.



Livingstone explored the local countryside when resident here

# To Africa via Ongar

**A plaque on this row of cottages fronting the United Reform church in Chipping Ongar commemorates the room occupied for about 15 months by explorer and missionary David Livingstone before departing for Africa in 1840.**

Livingstone trained for his missionary work in Chipping Ongar under the eye of the Rev Richard Cecil and on one occasion was called to take a service at nearby Stanford Rivers where he is said to have forgotten his words. He is also said to have walked many of the local footpaths during his stay and to have even walked to London and back to visit a sick friend.

A leaflet describing a David Livingstone Walk from Chipping Ongar to Stanford Rivers and back, published by Ongar and Stanford Rivers parish councils with assistance from West Essex Ramblers is available locally.

An exhibition on Livingstone, part of the 200th anniversary of his birth events, continues until 22 March at the Brunei Gallery of University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. It is open Tuesdays to Saturdays until 22 March, free admission. Details: [www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/livingstone/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/livingstone/), 020 7898 4046.







# Enthusiasm renewed at AGM

South Bank Group's AGM was held on 23 November and, as in previous years, the meeting was preceded by a walk and then lunch.

Some 42 members came, and apart from enjoying the home-made soup and chocolate brownies, participated in discussing how we could update and improve our communications with members. Various ideas are now being taken up by the new committee, which was voted in at the meeting.

We are really pleased that we continue to get new and enthusiastic people involved in the work of the group. The key posts of Walks Organiser and Web Manager are now newly filled by Ann Constable and David Hetherington while Dudley Cloake continues to steer us as Chair. Speaking at the AGM Dudley thanked in particular our walks leaders, for without them there would be no walks! He also commented that although we are a lively group which attracts new

members, and numbers hold up well (currently 622), we continue to need to work on this.

During the year a good step was taken to encourage people to receive their walks programmes by email. 50% of members have agreed to this and this has saved a lot of postage costs. The group is looking forward to another active year and hoping to recruit new members as well as continuing to produce excellent varied programmes of walks.

John Pestle



South Bank Group's new committee.

Photo: John Pestle



Some of the group are seen on the edge of a 'footpath' looking more like a waterway.  
Photo: Arthur Moore

# In deep water

A group of Hammersmith Fulham & Wandsworth Ramblers set off by train from Paddington on Saturday 11 January for a leisurely walk around Cookham in Berkshire.

The planned walk along the Thames from Cookham church, along the edge of Cock Marsh

had to be revised in favour of higher ground as the path was totally submerged by the flooded river.

It might have been very wet underfoot but it was a bright clear sunny day, perfect for a winter walk, with Wellington boots.

George Fletcher

This was the scene from the old stone bridge, now pedestrian, in Cookham. The road beyond the old bridge is deep under water and is located where the 30mph sign is visible.

Photo: Arthur Moore



# Exploring London's green walks with the Ramblers Greater London Forum

In March we have planned a series of five linked walks which cover a 50 mile circuit of some of the best walks in the north west and northern parts of Greater London.

Each day we will be highlighting some of the named walks which form part of the network we are promoting with the aim of seeing them brought up to a high standard and then promoted to Londoners (see centre spread). We believe you will be surprised to discover just how attractive these London walks can be.

You are invited to join one or come on all five walks. The start times should allow most walkers from around London to make the starting points in time. We will delay the start of the walk if a train or tube is due to arrive a few

minutes later.

We will be walking at a steady pace to cover the distances, given the shorter daylight hours. We will have refreshment stops for drinks where facilities are available, but please bring lunch with you to avoid long waits for meals.

Not everyone will want to complete the whole walk and as we are deep within London there will be places where you can easily break off and take train, tube or bus home, especially at lunch time, but please let the leader know if you are leaving the party.

For further information contact Graham Butler on 01424 845052 or email: butlgerc1@aol.com On the days of the walks the leader can be contacted on 07702-121433.

(The walks in bold form part of our proposed network)

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Monday 10 March</b>    | Ealing Broadway Station to Ickenham Station 10 miles. Walk via Dormer's Wells, <b>Hillingdon Trail</b> . <b>Meeting Point:</b> Ealing Broadway Station ZONE 3 at 10.30 (Mainline trains/District/Central tubes) <b>Finish:</b> Ickenham Stn ZONE 6 (Piccadilly/Metropolitan tubes)  |
| <b>Tuesday 11 March</b>   | Ickenham Station to Stanmore Station 10.4 miles. Walk via <b>Celandine Route</b> , Pinner, Middlesex Greenway. <b>Meeting Point:</b> Ickenham Stn ZONE 6 at 10.30 (Piccadilly/Metropolitan tubes). <b>Finish:</b> Stanmore Station ZONE 5 (Jubilee tube)  |
| <b>Wednesday 12 March</b> | Stanmore Station to Finchley Central 10 miles. Walk via Middlesex Greenway, Exploring Totteridge Manor and <b>Dollis Valley Greenway</b> . <b>Meeting Point:</b> Stanmore Station ZONE 5 (Jubilee) at 10.30. <b>Finish:</b> Finchley Central ZONE 4 (Northern)  |
| <b>Thursday 13 March</b>  | Finchley Central Station to Marylebone Station 10.5 miles. Walk via <b>Dollis Valley Greenway</b> , <b>Hampstead Heath Link</b> , London North City Walk and Regents Park. <b>Meeting Point:</b> Finchley Central ZONE 4 (Northern) at 10.30. <b>Finish:</b> Marylebone Station ZONE 1  |
| <b>Friday 14 March</b>    | Marylebone Station to Ealing Broadway 10 miles. Walk via Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens ( <b>Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Walk</b> ), Holland Park, Hammersmith, <b>Thames Path</b> , Kew Bridge, Gunnersbury Park, Ealing Common. <b>Meeting Point:</b> Marylebone Station ZONE 1 at 10.30 (mainline trains/Bakerloo/Circle & District at Baker Street). <b>Finish:</b> Ealing Broadway Station ZONE 3 (mainline trains/District/Central tubes) |





# KENT calling

## Path clearing pilot scheme launched

**T**he county council's Public Rights of Way and Access Service recently started a pilot scheme for path clearing with Maidstone and White Cliffs groups.

Those interested attended a meeting in Brabourne and were given a short induction course in the safe use of hand tools. Both groups have been issued with bow saws, loppers, bill hooks and slashers and maps highlighting paths designated for clearing by volunteers.

If the trial is successful it could be extended to other Ramblers groups in Kent in the future. This could be of great benefit to the Ramblers by raising public awareness of our organisation and we could

make a huge difference to the state of the paths.

My husband and I have been clearing paths with the advance knowledge of the county council for some time. We select overgrown paths discovered whilst out walking and have found the work fun to do.

It doesn't take long to see an enormous improvement and it is lovely to know that other walkers will enjoy the benefit of our work. Last summer the county council phoned to ask if we could clear two impassable footbridges on Romney Marsh, reported by another Ramblers group.

Although we live some distance away we agreed to go. It was a lovely sunny day and the air was filled with hundreds of tortoiseshell butterflies feeding on purple thistle heads. We had never seen so many and were delighted. What a reward!

*Averil Brice  
Secretary, White Cliffs Ramblers*



before...

... and after

Photos: Averil Brice



The group make a stop on the Mani peninsula.

Photo: Frank Hughes

## Walking in Greece

**T**wenty members of Canterbury group visited the Mani peninsula in Greece in the autumn of 2013 for a holiday organised by myself and Alan Clewer.

The holiday was made possible after EasyJet began scheduled flights last year to the Messinian capital of Kalamata which is only a one-hour coach ride to delightful Kardamyli where we stayed in village rooms and spent a week walking in the Toyotas mountains.

The terrain was testing but we took things slowly, which was just as well as everyone wanted to admire the views of the mountains, gorges and seascapes. We started out at 8am so as to do most of the hard work before the hottest part of the day which was reserved for swimming and snorkelling in the blue sea. One walk took us to the ancient Mani capital of Areopoli where Mavromichaelis started the revolution that led to Greek independence from the Turks. From there it was a short walk to the Diros caves where we were punted along caves encrusted with beautiful stalagmites and stalactites.

Another of our walks took us past the former home of classic travel writer Sir Patrick Leigh Fermor. There was a local link here as

Fermor went to The King's School in Canterbury from where he was famously expelled for holding hands with a local greengrocer's daughter. When only 19 he walked from London to Istanbul and later wrote of his experiences in 'A Time of Gifts' and 'Between the Woods and the Water', both still in print. During the Second World war he was a resistance leader on Crete. The 1957 film 'Ill Met by Moonlight', starring Dirk Bogarde as Fermor, tells how he captured the German in charge of the island and shepherded him across mountains to a waiting British vessel. Fermor, who died in 2011, also wrote 'Mani', which tells of his and his wife Joan's travels in the wild and rugged peninsula before tourists came. Canterbury resident Artemis Cooper, the wife of historian Anthony Beevor, recently published Fermor's biography and also helped publish 'The Broken Road' which tells of the last section of his trans-European walk which he never got around to writing. We also visited the village of Exohori, where the ashes of writer Bruce Chatwin were scattered. Chatwin fell in love with Mani after meeting Fermor.

This was not just a walking holiday!

*Frank Hughes*

## 50th anniversary celebrated

**N**orth West Kent Group, which draws its membership from the London boroughs of Bexley and Bromley, celebrated its 50th anniversary on Sunday 8 September 2013 with a lunch at the Bromley Court Hotel.

We were delighted to welcome Brian Reader who, as a founding member of the group, was at the inaugural meeting in Lewisham town hall on 19 July 1963. Brian later went on to become a trustee

and Chairman of the Ramblers.

Pub lunches are a popular feature of the group's rambles and, naturally, we visited some of our favourite hostellers during the week-long walking festival which followed the anniversary lunch.

For more information on the group, including our walks, check our website at [www.nwkrampers.btck.co.uk](http://www.nwkrampers.btck.co.uk).

*Stuart Booth  
Chairman, North West Kent  
Group*



At the anniversary lunch on 8 September: long-standing group member Stephen Roberts, founder member Brian Reader and Stuart Booth, group Chairman.

Photo: Jack Yan





# Path user groups meet council

In January path-user representatives met Bucks County Councillors to express their concerns about the threat to the county council's rights-of-way budget and the transfer of part of the team to Ringway Jacobs, and to emphasise the importance of the public-path network (see 'Back to bandit country in Bucks?', December 2013).

The Ramblers, British Horse Society (BHS), Chiltern Society

and Cyclists' Touring Club were present.

The BHS presented a report which showed that recreational horse-riding brings £57 million a year to the county's economy, thus illustrating the value of the bridleway network.

We were pleased that Janet Blake, cabinet member for planning and transportation, recognised that the council must carry out its legal responsibilities on rights of way, we shall hold the council to

that. Because of the reduction in budget, the summer clearances will be cut. Some money will be given to parish councils to do path work but this will of course be patchy. We were told the team will focus on enforcement so we hope to see notices served on landowners who fail to follow the law.

We shall keep a close watch on the council and will make a fuss if standards drop.

*Kate Ashbrook  
Area Footpath Secretary*

## Colin Kennedy receives his 1,000th walk certificate

At the recent AGM of Wycombe Ramblers, and with typical modesty, Colin Kennedy made an acceptance speech thanking his mother, grandmother, and relatives long forgotten and bravely managed to avoid an outbreak of tears which come with such high achievement.

But, (I was taught never to start a sentence with 'But', but it seems fitting here!) aren't we all covertly envious of his being only the third person to take this prize and it should therefore not be underestimated. Since 1992 (21 years to save your math) when Colin joined the Ramblers and began amassing this considerable total, he has faced wind and weather and all manner of human kind that turn

up each week; he even took on the cloak of Chairman for 15 long and dedicated years. So we should be

proud of him, Rosemary Weston and John Esslemont before him.

*Angela Shipley*



Colin celebrates after his 1,000th walk with the group.

## Leaders' lunch

The Chiltern Weekend Walkers' group has again had a very successful year and much of this is due to the many volunteers who come forward to lead walks.

The group organises its walk programme in a different way to many groups. The planning is done using Google Calendar and members can see when gaps occur and, sometimes at quite short notice, add a last minute walk in time for the Chairperson's weekly email update.

In order to thank all members who have led walks during the year, we held a walk and lunch on a Sunday in November. 36 people gathered in Lane End, Buckinghamshire, for

the pre-lunch walk. No chance of getting lost with all those leaders! On getting back to Lane End there was a warm welcome awaiting us in the village hall with an excellent three course lunch prepared for us by Iain Thompson. The soup had to be Scotch Broth, followed by lasagne and a choice of desserts. All good walking food and with a vegetarian option too.

The committee wanted to highlight some of the outstanding contributions made by a number of individuals over the past year.

\* Sandra Rooney, who has led 19 walks during the year and at a swift pace now known within the group as the 'Sandra pace'.

\* Mark Percy, who has introduced

midweek walks to our programme as well as leading many interesting and innovative walks.

\* Andrew Zelin, one of our former members, has been a regular contributor to our walk programme and is helping us get fitter by putting on the Yorkshire 3 peak challenge again.

\* Alan Shiell, who continues to lead for us.

\* Jon Hilton, who has encouraged others to lead walks and organised unusual walks as well as hosted camping and social events.

Anne Mograby, group Chairperson for the second year, was thanked by many walk leaders for organising such a memorable event. A good time was had by all



The moment of no return - West London members contemplate the ascent of Pen-y-Ghent. Photo: Margaret Lydamore

## Walking with West London

West London group members enjoyed holidays in two contrasting walking areas last year. In April, we had a short break in Moreton-in-Marsh, an excellent centre for exploring the northern Cotswolds and served by good public transport.

Buses took us to our starting points, and enabled us to walk the Monarch's Way from Moreton through Blockley with its former silk mills to Chipping Campden, along the Cotswold Way from Broadway to Stanton and the Windrush Way between Bourton-on-the-Water and the Slaughters. There seem to be more long distance trails in this part of England than you can shake a boot at, and all link attractive picture-postcard villages, cosy pubs and the most beautiful landscapes.

October saw us back in Skipton, another very good centre, from which we were nearly washed away two years ago. We were luckier this time, and had excellent walking every day, again making use of good public transport. One of the highlights was the ascent - by a representative party - of Pen-y-Ghent by a somewhat precipitous

route that involved stepping into space on nothing but a wing and a prayer. After the descent, a flower festival with tea and cake in Horton church helped us recover. Another splendid day was spent walking from Haworth to Top Withens, reputedly the scene of Emily Brontë's farmhouse Wuthering Heights. As well as the Brontë parsonage and museum, on this occasion housing a rather strange exhibition which seemed to have little to do with the Brontës, Haworth also boasts many excellent tea shops. Some of us also visited Saltaire, where the Victorian philanthropist Titus Salt founded a mill and village for his workers on the River Aire, and which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The mill, now an exhibition centre, has a strong connection with David Hockney, and houses several of his works.

Every holiday should offer beautiful and varied walking, reliable transport, good pubs and tea shops, and a bit of culture. The Cotswolds and the Yorkshire Dales have them all.

*Margaret Lydamore  
West London Group*



Thanked: Leaders Andrew Zelin, Alan Shiell and Jon Hilton. Photo: Anne Mograby

and we all left feeling well fed and much appreciated.

*Lawrence Jones/Anne Mograby  
Chiltern Weekend Walkers*



# Extra awards at Aylesbury AGM

**A**ylesbury Ramblers have introduced two additional awards in recognition of some extraordinary achievements of members during the past year.

Roy Johnson was awarded the 'Best Group Member' award of 2013, and presented with a glass trophy, in recognition of his work in establishing the Outer Aylesbury Ring. This does not detract from the efforts of others in raising funds, preparing publicity and fitting waymarks etc, but without Roy's vision and persistence the implementation and inauguration of the route may never have materialised.

Another important factor, which has become a key factor of the Thursday walks, is the location of a suitable pub that can accommodate 20 - 30 ramblers, serve drinks quickly, and provide good lunch time food at reasonable prices. John Taylor has aptly demonstrated, on numerous occasions, his ability to sniff out such places. For his much appreciated efforts John was awarded the 'Best Pub Picker' trophy, being a ceramic model of five figures active with their jugs of ale. It has become essential for the Thursday walk leaders to find a suitable lunch venue which could see a challenge for the trophy in



John Taylor with his 'Best Pub Picker' Trophy. Photo: Aylesbury Ramblers

2014.

The Thursday walks are very well supported, having upwards of 28 ramblers and sometimes over 30. This may be down to the 'baby boomers' swelling our ranks from recent retirees, but in any event they will be introduced to the Outer Aylesbury Ring and the best pubs in the area.

We have our core regular ramblers on the Tuesday and Sunday walks but during 2014 we aim to encourage new walkers on these days as part of a recruitment drive for new members. This will be the main challenge for 2014.

*Peter Spinks  
Aylesbury Ramblers*



Roy Johnson leading the Aylesbury Ramblers along the Outer Aylesbury Ring. Photo: Aylesbury Ramblers



Some of the group ascending the Long Mynd ridge.

Photo: Bill Collins

## Shropshire visit

**A** party of 21 members of Amersham group spent a very enjoyable three days walking in the Shropshire hills last October. Having arrived at the HF Longmynd country house at Church Stretton on the Monday afternoon 14 October, we were looking forward to three days of autumn walks.

Tuesday's walks went well with no concerns and the weather was set fair.

Wet weather was forecast for the Wednesday and some took a bus into Shrewsbury whilst the hardy (or should that be foolhardy?) ones enjoyed the wet Shropshire hills.

Heavy, continual rain left many with more water in their boots than outside them. After lunch the sun came out and the walks were completed in some warm weather.

Thursday was a repeat of Tuesday insofar as the weather was concerned. I undertook one of the medium walks and whilst beginning the descent from the Long Mynd ridge heard a horn. Coming over the horizon were two riders and a pack of hounds who we were told were just out for exercise.

There were many more walkers than usual at our centre and this led to us having five leaders, not something I have experienced before.

All were up to the usual high standard and the food was excellent with the staff working as a team. Thursday evening's entertainment was one of the best I have been to. One of the guides led us in some rather energetic dancing which possibly owed its origins to the unique way in which it was demonstrated. Many of our group and the audience were crying with laughter at the antics going on.

Thanks go to Jean Bamford for arranging yet another holiday for us. We look forward to autumn 2014 for long walks on the Jurassic coast from the HF country house at Lulworth Cove.

*Bill Collins  
Amersham Group*



The old and new London blend in east London.

## 'I can't believe I'm in London'

**The above comment was made by a Spanish tourist who joined us for a day's walking after finding our details on the web.**

He had not appreciated the number of rivers, parks and green spaces in London which we take for granted and are all part of the Capital Ring. Neither had he expected a coffee stop or organised lunch. 'Londoners are so lucky to be able to walk in their city and listen to birdsong and imagine that they are in the countryside' was his comment as we walked along the Lea Navigation toward the Olympic site.

He saw the old and the new London and was amazed at how they blend together. Sometimes a stranger's comments remind us how fortunate we are. Hillingdon Ramblers completed the Capital Ring in 2013, and were often joined by members of surrounding Ramblers groups who wanted to do a specific walk advertised on the web.

Attendance on walks varied between 11 and 22. The

opportunity to visit new areas and take time to explore places of interest along the way gave this walk its unique appeal. Camaraderie grew as we sampled Lebanese coffee shops, German delis and Thai restaurants and these stops soon became a regular feature of the walk. So, how do we follow this?

The Evening Standard recently ran an article on riverside developments in London ... 'The Thames Path has been named Europe's most spectacular city walk - only beaten worldwide by a forest trail in Rio' ... And so, we are commencing the Thames Path, walking from the Barrier to the source, visiting many places of interest along the way and sampling a wide variety of coffee shops and eateries within the Greater London boundaries. Walks will be around five to eight miles but will increase in length when we get out into rural areas later in the year. Come and join us every third Tuesday.

*Elise Harvey  
Hillingdon Ramblers*

## HS2 Phase One

**At the time of writing, a public consultation on the Environment Statement on the proposed London to Birmingham high speed rail link was about to close, with the hybrid Bill to enable construction due to start its parliamentary process in a few months time.**

Buckinghamshire is the county most seriously affected, with not only around a third of the overall length, but with the line passing through our best walking country in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Many, perhaps most, of our members would prefer to see the scheme scrapped but, if it goes ahead, we must do what we can to minimise the impact on our walking environment. The Area Executive Committee has agreed in principle to support the campaign

by the Chiltern Ridges Action Group to extend bored tunnelling throughout the AONB.

The plans published by HS2 Ltd show adequate provision for most of the footpaths crossing the route, but there are a number of proposals we are unhappy about. Last summer we submitted comments on a draft version of the Environment Statement. Discouragingly, none of these appear to have been taken up in the final version of the statement, now under consultation. We shall resubmit them but suspect that, if there is to be any chance of improvement, we shall also have to ask Ramblers Central Office to petition the parliamentary committees which have the job of scrutinising the Bill.

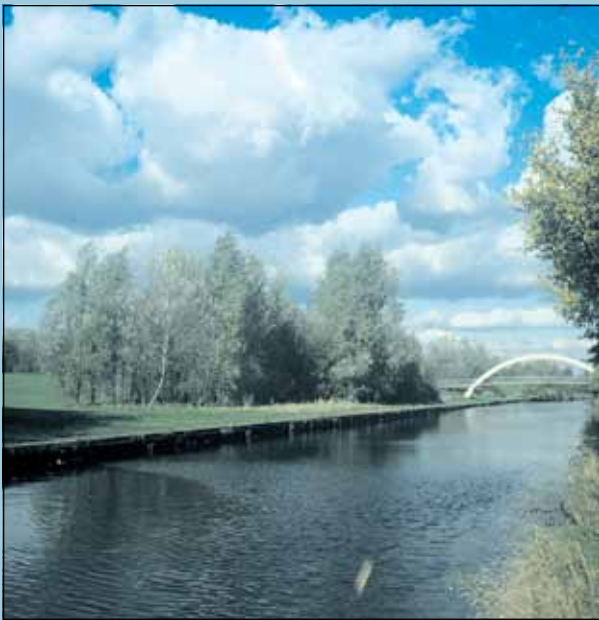
*John Esslemont  
Acting Area Secretary*





# Getting London

Above: The Epping Forest Centenary Walk was created by local ramblers in 1978 to celebrate the centenary of the Act that gave the forest to the Corporation of London – saved for all time. It sets out over Wanstead Flats, the open heathland soon giving way to woodland as in this view near Wood Street.



## The secret world of canals

**T**his distant view of Willow Tree Bridge on the Grand Union Paddington Branch well illustrates how walking the towpaths beside London's canals can take you into a peaceful world, hidden away behind the city's urban face.

Both the Grand Union and its offshoot The Regent's Canal provide miles of quiet walking and waterside interest, disturbed only perhaps by the passing cyclist, and indeed the Grand Union takes us out into true countryside beyond Rickmansworth.



## The cross-borough trail

**T**he Hillingdon Trail was planned to cross the borough for nearly 20 miles, from Cranford Park through west London to end at Springwell Lock on the Grand Union Canal.

The further north it goes, the more amazingly rural through Ruislip and Bayhurst Woods until, beyond Harefield, following the path illustrated, the views open up gloriously over the Colne Valley.



## Walking by our London streams

**T**here is a special pleasure in strolling by the banks of a gentle stream, and a surprising number of our routes follow the green corridors provided by Thames tributaries.

Shuttle, Ingrebourne, Wandle, Dollis Brook and Beverley Brook, along with the little Pinn and others, all have walks to be explored, often to their source. Illustrated is a view along the Pymmes Brook Trail.



**It's Spring...get out with the family and sample London's secret green walks...there's one near you. Imagine for a moment, a message like this going out Londonwide, and how it could change ideas about walking, That's the aim of a Ramblers project just launched – read more about it!**

**We all recognise the need to encourage urban-dwelling Londoners to a more active lifestyle, and in particular to walk more about their everyday affairs.**

These are the opening words of a new brochure, launched last year by the Ramblers Greater London Forum. It presents the case for their number one project – to build up a truly Londonwide network of attractive green walks and then promote them to Londoners, telling them how much family enjoyment awaits them when they explore this unique but little-known resource, all around them.

First we are talking to Transport for London (TfL) to see how far they are prepared to go in backing our project. When we have their response, a far wider list of bodies needs to be approached, including the local authorities who created many of the walks that form the network. The essential aim is to set up a central management structure, able to handle the project, and especially its promotion, on a Londonwide basis. It may be that we will need to take this initiative ourselves, and then seek funding to make it all happen. There's a lot

of work involved, but well worth while when you consider how we can benefit the health and quality of life of so many urban-dwellers. After all, that's a major aim of the Ramblers.

#### **The walks**

Now take a look at the map. Six of the routes, including the mighty London LOOP and the Thames Path National Trail, are already recognised as London's Strategic Walks. So some 343 miles of the proposed network are already fully prepared and only lacking promotion. The further routes we aim to add are needed to give a truly Londonwide coverage, so that every Londoner has a walk within easy reach. That's the point where we can really start persuading your typical urban family to get out and enjoy a walk. A few of the routes (the broken lines) still have to be created, but most, around 170 miles of the network, already exist. They exist but, in these days of drastic budget cutbacks, most are suffering from neglect and few local people even know they exist.

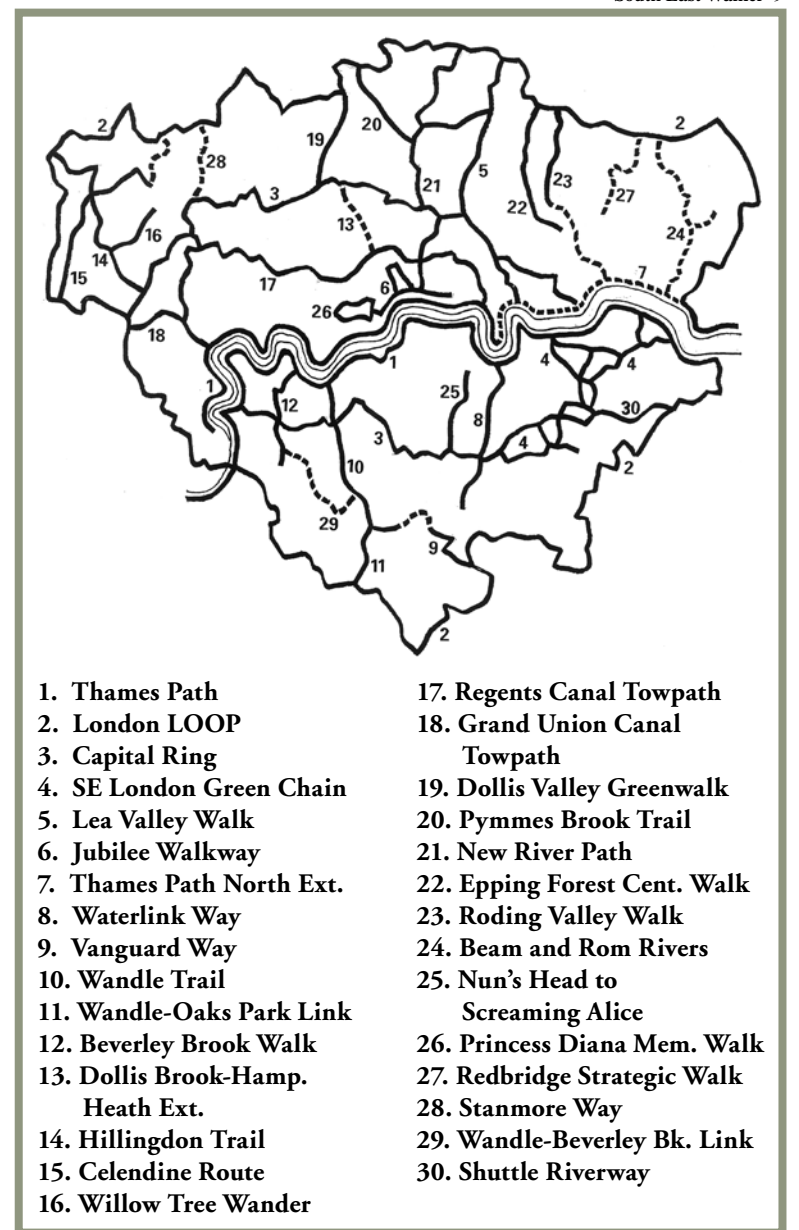
The aim then, is to attract the complete novice walker and his family, so signing and waymarking must be to a high standard. The

paths followed are often typically modest country ways but we wouldn't want to meet broken gates or muddy patches, or least of all, hear that chorus of 'daddy, we're lost!' somewhere deep in the woods. So plenty of work is needed to ensure that our urban family has an enjoyable day out, whichever walk they choose.

#### **How much will it cost?**

Several of our London-based groups are already surveying their local routes to see how much needs to be done. So within months we should have a clear idea of how much it will cost to create and bring our network up to standard. Add on the cost of a project officer and finally the leaflets, website and whatever publicity media we will need to reach that Londonwide audience – and we will be able to say what budget will bring the project into reality. At that point we may need to go forth and seek a funding source.

Returning to that original point – it seems to baffle most authorities when they seek to encourage walking. The fact is, they're up against a mindset that rejects walking in favour of lazier ways of getting around – hopping on



1. Thames Path
2. London LOOP
3. Capital Ring
4. SE London Green Chain
5. Lea Valley Walk
6. Jubilee Walkway
7. Thames Path North Ext.
8. Waterlink Way
9. Vanguard Way
10. Wandle Trail
11. Wandle-Oaks Park Link
12. Beverley Brook Walk
13. Dollis Brook-Hamp. Heath Ext.
14. Hillingdon Trail
15. Celendine Route
16. Willow Tree Wander

17. Regents Canal Towpath
18. Grand Union Canal Towpath
19. Dollis Valley Greenwalk
20. Pymmes Brook Trail
21. New River Path
22. Epping Forest Cent. Walk
23. Roding Valley Walk
24. Beam and Rom Rivers
25. Nun's Head to Screaming Alice
26. Princess Diana Mem. Walk
27. Redbridge Strategic Walk
28. Stanmore Way
29. Wandle-Beverley Bk. Link
30. Shuttle Riverway

a bus or into the car. We believe the answer is to present walking as an activity the family will enjoy. Happily, this embryo green network enables us to do just that, with

big benefits in health and quality of urban life. Health and obesity issues loom large today, and we believe this Ramblers project can play a major part in meeting them..

# walking...a major project



## Croydon to the sea

**U**nusually, the Vanguard Way was created by members of the Vanguards Rambling Club. It takes you from East Croydon Station through some of the best countryside in the south, down to the Sussex coast at Newhaven.

The five mile stretch from Croydon to the London boundary provides an excellent escape from suburbia out to the North Downs, passing over Lloyd Park (as illustrated) and through a series of woodlands – Coombe Wood, Littleheath and Selsdon Woods.



## Wonders of the Royal Parks

**O**ne walk takes you exploring the parks of central London – the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Walk. With its roundels set into paths, it takes you through Green Park, St James's Park, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens with spectacular views, best perhaps when the trees are showing their Autumn colours, as our view in Hyde Park.

Lose the distant roar of traffic and you can be amazed at this escape from city scenes, deep in the heart of London.

## Like the project?...

## You can help

**C**arrying this project forward is going to involve a lot of work, and at present the Ramblers Greater London Forum depends entirely on its small band of delegates, most with heavy involvements elsewhere.

So we would like to make contact with other members who can see the importance of an urban project like this, and are prepared to give some time to help us bring it to reality.

Interested? Then contact the Steer Group Chairman David Sharp, email: david.a.sharp@hotmail.co.uk

*Text, map and photos: David Sharp*





## OXFORDSHIRE *on-line*



A workshop for Parish Path Wardens was held at Horspath on 5 October 2013.

Photo: Oxfordshire County Council

# Parish Path Wardens

**O**xfordshire Area Ramblers, working in partnership with the county council's Countryside Access Team, were active during 2013 in setting up a network of volunteer Parish Path Wardens.

The first step was to establish Contact Officers from each of the Ramblers groups. This was followed by an email, jointly signed by the Area Chairman and the Chairman of Oxfordshire Fieldpaths Society, and sent to every clerk of the 320 parishes in the county. The email asked if the parish already had a person undertaking the role of a Parish Path Warden.

Jim Parke agreed to compile a county-wide register of wardens which would be circulated to Group Contact Officers as wardens volunteered their services. Parishes

without a warden would be listed on the Ramblers website so that members could see where there was still a vacancy.

Just under half of parishes now have a Parish Path Warden in place. This figure includes parishes in the south of the county that have wardens working under the aegis of the Chiltern Society and parishes in the north west of the county situated in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and served by the Cotswolds wardens.

In January this year, where there was a vacancy in the parish for a path warden, parish clerks were contacted again. Posters and items for village/parish newsletters were sent. In some cases this involved using the post as email was unavailable.

The county council's field

officers will be assisting with two further training days for Parish Path Wardens on 22 March and 20 September. To book a place on the 22 March course which will be held at Tiddington Village Hall, contact Jim Parke on 01865 730664 or [jmh.parke@btinternet.com](mailto:jmh.parke@btinternet.com) or check the Area website at [www.ramblers-oxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.ramblers-oxfordshire.org.uk).

There will also be a meeting on 11 April with Hugh Potter of Oxfordshire County Council, for all Contacts and Coordinators to discuss problems and successes. There are still many vacancies for wardens and, importantly, Coordinators who will help as advisers to wardens and become the main contact with the county council.

**Jim Parke (Publicity Officer)**  
**Susan Maguire (Chairman)**

## Diversions, claims etc

**T**he order for the crossing at Chippinghurst Stepping Stones has been made; two landowners have objected.

The diversion order at Haywards Close, Henley, which had several errors as originally made, has been confirmed, as have the orders for Kingston Lisle Footpath 1 (the railway) and Swalcliffe Bridleway 7. We are trying to get Network Rail to reopen another crossing on Uffington Footpath 4.

The Didcot diversions rumble on, appearing one or two at a time as development proceeds. One of the diversions of Footpath 21 is mainly along estate roads because of the county council's insistence on not taking over tarmac paths (a consequence of budget cuts).

There have also been two new proposals to avoid riding stables at Hobbshole Farm, Sandford St Martin (Bridleway 11) and Chilling Place, Piddington (Footpath 6).

## Other matters

**N**o sooner than the saga at Hampton Gay Footpath 1 south-west from Bletchington had been resolved than another set of paddocks was built over the path, probably needing yet more gates.

the rogue's gallery is the sort of Gordian knottage shown in my report in the last issue.

Fortunately the Masterpiece of British Technology, found frequently in the 70s and 80s and consisting of random pieces of metal, wood, string and barbed



This gate is on Fringford Footpath 6

Photo: David Godfrey

Speaking of gates, my particular bete noire is the type which consists of two heavy metal halves, opened with a heavy metal Thing which pivots on the top of one half of the gate and comes down over the other in order to close the assemblage, and is intended to crush your fingers in the process.

There is a particularly nasty one on Fringford Footpath 6 near Cotmore House which is already shoulder high before you try to lift the finger-crusher. Next in

wire chucked into the air and tied together somehow as they came down, has almost become extinct.

And finally, a plea: will those who put on walks in the summer (especially late summer) please, as far as possible, recce their walks and clear overgrowth on stiles? I realise that leaders may run out of time (I have myself) but I find it odd that on many occasions I am the only person present with secateurs.

**David Godfrey**  
**Area Footpath Secretary**

## Thame & Wheatley's Christmas treats

**O**n 10 December, for the second year running, Thame & Wheatley Group held their Christmas luncheon at the Bridge Inn (Harvester) in Wheatley.

But before tucking into the festive fare, our Chairman, Mike Smith, took a party of 30 walkers on a 4.5 mile circular walk starting from the hotel car park. The group set off alongside the River Thame before ascending to the village of Cuddesdon, where at Ripon Theological College, permission had been obtained to visit the recently-built Bishop Edward King Chapel, set in the extensive grounds of the college.

After taking in the unconventional, striking exterior view of the elliptical drum of sandy-

coloured stone, the group filed inside to admire the chapel's stunning interior, with seating designed in white ash and beechwood and soaring columns rising to an elaborate lattice vaulted ceiling. Niall McLaughlin Architects, with their image of a buoyant tethered boat, were chosen after an open competition to design the building. It has already achieved national recognition, winning a number of awards, including being one of the six buildings on the 2013 shortlist for the Stirling Prize for British Architecture.

As one of our group commented, it was a fitting Christmas experience and one that was well appreciated.

**Ruth Cornish**



Building an appetite before the Christmas lunch.

Photo: Tony Clark





Enjoying a chat before the lecture.

Photo: Joan Clark

## Seasonal tonics

**A** few years ago Henley and Goring Group came up with a couple of ideas to provide something to look forward to either side of Christmas.

These events have become firm favourites and are now included in our winter programme every year. They are the Christmas walk, carol service and lunch in mid December and the Chantry House lecture at the end of January.

The Christmas walk, carols and lunch is a particular favourite as it brings out some members we don't often see. We meet at the chosen lunch venue, a country pub, then set off on the walks - about three to five miles with one slower and shorter option. The walk leads us to the chosen church - we are lucky in our area to have a choice of lovely small rural churches - where a special carol service for our group is conducted by the local vicar. A short walk to the

pub leads us to lunch for which most of us are more than ready! Numbers are restricted to the capacity of the pub and we often have a waiting list for places. This year we were very lucky with the weather with glorious sunshine all day, but on two occasions snow has been a problem. A couple of years ago the event had to be cancelled as the vicar could not get to the church and the pub was cut off with no deliveries of beer or food possible!

At the end of January, often a quiet time socially after the festivities of Christmas and New Year, for a number of years now we have held a social event called the Chantry House Lecture. The Chantry House is Henley's Grade I listed building which dates from about 1400. Originally a merchant's house and store, it later became a school. Now St Mary's church hall, it is used for a wide range of

events. We start our evenings with wine and nibbles downstairs then move upstairs for the lecture. the speakers and subjects are chosen to be of interest to people who enjoy walking in the area. Topics have included Red Kites in the Chilterns, the geology of the area, stories of the Thames, local buildings of interest, curiosities of the Chilterns the history of Wallingford Castle and the story of the Ridgeway. he event is a good opportunity to meet old friends and get to know new people as well as being able to hear someone talk about things that will add interest to our walks. We often follow up the talk with a walk in the summer to the area featured in the lecture.

We are always on the look-out for good ideas for our programme, so if you have something that works well for your group, why not share it?

Joan Clark



Tucking in at the Banbury &amp; North Oxon dinner.

Photo: Daphne Lever

## Dinner date

**M**embers of Banbury and North Oxon Group enjoyed their Christmas Dinner and Social at the George and Dragon pub in Chacombe on Friday 29 November.

It was ably organised at short notice by the group's Social Secretary, Anne Loakes, and everyone had a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Roy Clements

## Mince pie walks in the Vale

**W**alking with Vale of White Horse Group during December was rewarded with a mince pie or, if really lucky, a glass of mulled wine.

To support the Ramblers Festival of Winter Walks, we offered themed walks, 'The Twelve Vale Mince Pie Walks for Christmas', with the chance to enjoy a mince pie en-route.

Over 200 mince pies were eaten! Walks were advertised in the local press and on

noticeboards and websites serving the area. They showed off the diverse countryside in the Vale, the historic market towns of Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage and included a guided history walk around Cumnor.

The walks attracted 145 walkers, including at least 20 non-members who we hope will join in the future.

*Peter Skuse  
Walks Organiser, Vale of  
White Horse Group*



A mince pie break on a newly rebuilt railway bridge south of Faringdon.

Photo: Peter Skuse

## Bicester & Kidlington events



Walking to the AGM.

Photo: Mary Gough

**M**any members enjoyed a very pleasant walk on 16 November followed by our annual general meeting. Prior to the meeting Peter Chivers of Bicester Local History Society gave a very interesting talk on the history of the town over the centuries.

Various members were re-elected but in some cases to different offices with Mary Gough elected our new Chairperson. We also enjoyed our annual mulled wine and mince pie walk in mid-December despite all the mud and rain.

*Hazel Thatcher  
Joint Publicity Officer, Bicester & Kidlington Group*





# SURREY snippets

## Achievements and concerns at the Surrey AGM

**There was plenty of good news in the annual report presented to last month's Surrey AGM, but we also noted two continuing areas of concern.**

Very aware of county council cutbacks, we noted with relief that footpath maintenance budgets were little changed from previous years, but with worrying rumours of cuts to come. Some cuts to the Countryside Service legal team a couple of years ago seem to have been overdone and an extra team member has been reinstated, bringing numbers up to four.

This is still far short of the seven staff they used to have. As Brian Reader comments, 'we must continue to monitor the whole budget and staffing situation carefully.'

The other concern is a still falling membership. Area Membership Secretary Connie Norris reported that although we had recruited 708 new members over the year, we ended with 262 fewer members – less than the national average but still worrying.

At the end of September our Area membership totalled 6738, down from 7000 a year ago. As our Chairman commented, 'whether we

like it or not, we are in a competitive market for walkers, which did not exist twenty years ago.' The only Surrey groups to show an increase over the year were East Surrey, Farnham and SABRE.

One way to tackle a falling membership is to see how our walks programmes can be improved, and in 2013 three leaders training courses and one 'Train the Trainers' course were held. We have now trained almost 100 new leaders and hopefully this will lead to bigger and more varied programmes.

A major source of recruitment these days is our Area website. In 2013 a new webmaster, David Leedham, took over from Julian Yorke, setting about a refurbishment of the site. The opportunity was taken to move to Ramblers Webs hosting, which is free to Areas and groups.

The aim is to make the site more appealing and easy to access, not only to members but to those searching online for a walk or a walking group. This calls for links to group websites and constantly refreshed news and summaries of forthcoming walks and events. Currently our website is receiving about 600 visits a month, but David wants to increase this.

### Footpaths work

More positive news came from Area Footpath Secretary Brian Reader. We have continued to undertake inspections of a random 5% of Surrey rights of way for the Council's Best Value Performance Indicator scheme. This involved 178 path inspections, with the verdict that in November 87% of paths met the 'easy to use' standard – a big improvement. Much credit for this high standard must go to our volunteer working parties – 11 of our 17 groups now have them. Farnham Group estimates that their members contributed 500 hours of volunteer labour on the seven tasks they completed over the year. With work ranging from clearing vegetation, repairing stiles, installing gates and signs, to building sleeper bridges and broadwalks – including in the other groups, it's clear we are making a big contribution to maintaining Surrey paths.

As a constitutional requirement, the AGM saw several Area officer posts changing hands, and we will report in the next issue. But we must note that Brian Reader stood down as Area Footpath Secretary after 25 years in post. Hearty thanks, Brian, for a vital job, handled expertly.



Enjoying a windy blow on the top of Rhossili Down on the Gower

## Farnham's holiday hat-trick

**Farnham Ramblers enjoyed a trio of terrific holidays last year. Starting in May, a bumper group of 46 members travelled to Oxwich Bay on the Gower to enjoy a fine week of walks that explored all parts of this famous Welsh peninsula.**

From the Worm's Head to Three Cliffs Bay, they explored woods carpeted in bluebells and ramsoms, windy hilltops, and sunny, sandy coves. Then in early September, 23 members basked in sunny Sheringham on the Norfolk coast. A packed 5 day programme saw them travelling on steam trains, visiting local National Trust estates, playing croquet on their hotel lawn, and even swimming in the sea!

And finally, as September waned, a further 33 members enjoyed unexpectedly fine weather in the Lake District. Based in Keswick, outings included Helvellyn, Blencathra, Red Pike, and some walks combined boat trips on Derwentwater and Ullswater. All Farnham Ramblers' holidays are self-organised, so many thanks go to Mike Desborough, Gaynor Ross, Jean Mortlock, and Chris Hodge for laying on such a successful series of holidays in 2013.

This year promises more exciting walking with a Spring trip to the Isle of Man walking festival and Autumn rambling in the Yorkshire Dales.



Jack about to cut one of his cakes.

Photo: John Tickner

## 100 not out!

**Well that would be a great score for a cricketer but an even better one for a Rambler! More than eighty friends from Croydon Group gathered to wish Jack Crisp a very happy 100th birthday at a special tea in Whyteleafe in late November.**

Jack had been a stalwart member of the group for many years and he was the original organiser of our regular Thursday walks, and he then went on to do the same for Tuesdays. These days remain our two most popular walking days. Still looking spry and active, Jack was treated to a slap up cream tea and presented with a certificate to thank him for his hard work for the group over so many years.

Happy birthday was sung, though it is probably true that our walking is better than our singing!

## Sabre's puzzling American link

**SABRE (Surrey and Beyond Ramblers) Membership Secretary, Julie Holes, had been puzzling for some time why one of their members had an address in California.**

Janet Alexanian had joined the group a couple of years ago and SABRE were very pleased to finally meet her at the recent Christmas walk and lunch where she explained that she had been brought up in Surrey, but had been living in California for more than 20 years. She is now planning to return to live in the UK and had joined the group in preparation for life in Surrey. She is looking forward to many more walks with SABRE.



Janet (left) and Julie





The sun did shine, albeit briefly

## No washout for Farnham Ramblers' Winter Festival

**The weather gods tried to throw cold water on Farnham Ramblers' Festival of Winter Walks this year – but failed to dampen their enthusiasm for country walking and good camaraderie.**

The south-east of England suffered some of the wettest and stormiest weather on record this Christmas that saw trees blown down, roads and paths flooded, and fields turned into lakes or quagmires. Despite all this, over

200 people joined walks organised by local volunteers as part of Farnham Ramblers' annual Festival of Winter Walks.

Seventeen walks over the Christmas / New Year break explored some of the finest countryside in the Farnham area. Walk leaders were sometimes forced to improvise when they found their planned routes impassable, but they always managed to find a safe path around the obstacles. A popular ramble, despite a very wet and

windy day, was called the 'Bah/Bar Humbug Walk'.

With stops at some of the fine hostelrys along the Bourne stream in south Farnham and free humbugs for every walker, this was an excellent way to avoid the last minute Christmas shopping frenzy. Farnham Ramblers – who won the "Best Walks Programme in Britain" award in 2013 – are now looking forward to a (hopefully!) drier 2014 with many more varied and enjoyable outings.

## Cotswold membership drive

**In January, Cotswold Outdoor encouraged their customers to get active in the outdoors for the New Year and improve their health. As part of this campaign, they had a membership drive for The Ramblers. Volunteers from Kingston and Richmond groups took turns meeting customers at the Cotswold store in Kingston. This photo shows two Kingston members helping out at the event.**



From the left: Caroline Cunliffe and Linda Fitch.

Photo: Brenda Horwill

## Falling membership - Surrey Survey suggests solutions

**Membership in Surrey is gradually falling through lower recruitment levels and many members do not renew after the first year. In September 2010 there were 7448 members; in the year to August 2013 membership dropped by 3.5% from 7000 to 6755.**

The reasons behind this change are much debated and almost certainly are complex but the trend is there to see in our regular monitoring of membership data.

With the agreement of Surrey Area Council, Nigel Woodhead and Derek Bunn, two members of SABRE Group (Surrey and Beyond Ramblers), carried out a fact finding study into the recruitment and retention of members in the Surrey Area. They visited most of the Surrey Ramblers Groups on their walks and also other walking groups and clubs considered to be our main competitors. They informally discussed with walkers including committee members how their groups operated.

All the group web sites were looked at plus those of the main competitors.

The study took place in the summer of 2013. It looked into how groups operated, the attitudes of existing members, walks programmes, how the public see us and the use of web sites as our shop window. The report was detailed and comprehensive but there were five main conclusions,

- Because of the internet, information can be quickly gained or discarded. People are now accustomed to be able to consider many choices and move on quickly if a choice does not meet with their expectations. There is far more competition than a few years ago and the internet allows people to search easily for other walking groups.

An interesting and informative web site is vital, with better walk descriptions that encourage new people to come along.

- We must aim at a wider age range than we do now and get the average age of the membership down by especially, but not exclusively recruiting more people of working ages. The Ramblers is not just for retired people. We appreciate that many younger people have a long working day giving them fewer opportunities to walk, so we need to offer walks at more varied times.
- Trying new ideas including more varied start times, more afternoon walks especially at the weekend, walks to new and interesting destinations outside the usual boundaries and more social events. Avoid repeating the same walks too often.
- Walks are what most people join us for and newcomers will judge us by the quality of our walks. Remember that we should not be simply offering a walk, but a whole experience that has a friendly greeting at the beginning, has interesting features, a chance to chat and take in the countryside, does not go on a route march and ends up with a time to socialise hopefully at a tea-room or pub at the end. If people have a good experience they will come again...and again.
- Be proud and vocal to promote the virtues of the Ramblers. We are unique in that we are part of a national charity that promotes walking and protects footpaths and rights of way. There is no other organisation that can claim that.

Copies of the full report are available from: [recruitment@sabre-walkers.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@sabre-walkers.org.uk)

**Denis Holmes**  
Area Publicity Officer

## Briefly

- Reigate & Redhill HF Rambling Club will mark its Diamond Jubilee on 28 June with a celebration lunch in Guildford. Any lapsed members who would like to attend are invited to contact their secretary, Doris Brown, on 020 8643 7330. The club was formed in March 1954 under the banner of the Holiday Fellowship (now HF Holidays Ltd), to which it remains affiliated.
- Oxford University Museum of Natural History reopened on 15 February following a year's closure while the roof was restored. The museum, a spectacular Grade I listed neo-Gothic building, houses the university's collection of zoological, entomological and geological specimens including the Oxfordshire dinosaurs.
- Lesnes Abbey Woods in south east London are to benefit from an enhancement programme after Bexley council secured almost £3.5 million funding in January from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Work will take place between late 2014 and early 2016 to restore historical features, improve paths and gateways and construct a new community and education building. The site, which includes the ruins of a 12th century abbey, ancient woodland and a fossil bed, is on the route of the Green Chain Walk, close to Abbey Wood railway station.





# RIPPLE carries on



Ramblers with Central Bedfordshire Council rights of way officer Gemma Harrison after clearing a completely blocked path between Houghton Conquest and Wiltstead.

Photo: Barry Ingram

**F**ollowing a short period of concern about the future of our RIPPLE activities within Bedford Borough when the countryside access department was being transferred to Highways and redundancies looked a distinct possibility, I am happy to say that our initial concerns were unfounded and normal service has resumed. This means we have an ongoing programme for both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough.

## Bedford Borough

**Tuesday 18 March:** 10am, Harrowden. Clearing the new permissive path and vegetation around Bunyan's birthplace. Meet at grid ref TL 067471, Bumpy Lane, Harrowden.

**Tuesday 15 April:** 10am, Stagsden. Walk, survey and fix circular walk. Meet at grid ref SP 981489 near Royal George pub.

**Tuesday 20 May:** 10am Pavenham. Walk, survey and fix circular walk. Meet at grid ref SP 991555 near war

memorial.

## Central Bedfordshire

Work has been taking place during February subject to weather conditions.

**Thursday 10 April:** East Area, Sutton Bridleway 8 clearance. Contact: Andrew Gwillam (0300 3006544). Meet at High Street near John O'Gaunt pub.

**Saturday 26 April:** East Area, Sutton Bridleway 9 clearance. Contact: Andrew Gwillam (0300 3006544). Meet at High Street near John O'Gaunt pub.

**Thursday 15 May:** East Area, Sandy Bridleway 28 clearance. Contact: Andrew Gwillam (0300 3006544). Meet at Sandy High Street car park then transfer to RSPB car park.

**Thursday 29 May:** South Area, Sundon steps and waymarking. Contact: Michelle Flynn (0300 3006072). Park in village near Common Lane.

**Thursday 12 June:** West Area, Milton Bryan clearance and waymarking. Contact: Rick

Thompson (0300 3006113). Details to be confirmed.

**Saturday 21 June:** West Area, Milton Bryan clearance and waymarking. Contact: Rick Thompson (0300 3006113). Details to be confirmed.

**Thursday 10 July:** West Area, Cranfield stiles to kissing gates. Contact: Rick Thompson (0300 3006113). Details to be confirmed.

**Thursday 24 July:** Mid Area. Contact: Gemma Harrison (0300 3006574). Details to be confirmed.

**Thursday 14 August:** Mid Area. Contact: Gemma Harrison (0300 3006574). Details to be confirmed.

**Saturday 23 August:** South Area, Toddington bridge or kissing gates. Contact: Michelle Flynn (0300 3006072). Details to be confirmed.

Towards the end of 2013 we started to receive reports from members requesting clearance work and marker posts. This is just what we wanted and when the work gets scheduled those members will often come along and help.



On the pre-AGM morning walk at Sharpenhoe Clappers.

Photo: Barry Ingram

## Area AGM

**O**n a damp and windy Saturday morning in November, members set out from Streatley village hall led by Jeff Petts, Chairman of Lea & Icknield Group (who were hosting the event this year), on a short scenic walk around Sharpenhoe Clappers.

The rain clouds were soon blown away and everyone enjoyed both the sunshine and the walk before returning for lunch which consisted of three choices of soup followed by a choice of ploughman's lunch. During the meal, slides of RIPPLE activities were shown. Afterwards an excellent presentation was made by Bob Tarron of slides which took us along the Lea Valley Walk from the river's source at Leagrave, near Luton, to the Olympic Park in east London.

The Ramblers marketing manager

then delivered a short address which was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Following a short break the Area AGM took place. I was re-elected Chairman and Bob Tarron re-elected Chairman/Secretary of the Footpath Committee. Sue Giordano had said that she wanted to hand over her role of Membership Secretary primarily because she was unable to attend Monday meetings. After some discussion following the AGM Sue agreed to carry on for another year but was unlikely to attend meetings.

Kevin Barrett, a qualified accountant with many years experience (yet young enough to be still working) has taken over the role of Treasurer from Tony Sheward. Again we were unable to fill the posts of Secretary or Publicity Officer.

Barry Ingram

## A group AGM with a difference

**T**raditionally, our group AGM has tended to be a bit of an anti-climax; committee members arrive hopefully, put out three rows of chairs, sit at the front table (periodically checking watches - 'We'll give it a couple more minutes - someone might come') and eventually start the meeting with an audience of five or six faithful members.

So what was different about this year's meeting? For some time now an idea to hold an evening to enable members to share photos taken on walks had been floating around the committee, but had no firm place in the social calendar. So it was agreed to combine it with the AGM, throw in some cheese and wine for good measure and, hey presto, a recipe for a successful social evening!

The formal business of the evening took place first, with the officers and committee re-elected en bloc as there were no other nominations. Then Peter Miller, a member of the group since its inception 20 years ago, gave a short talk on the founding of the group. And then on to the cheese and wine (with a liberal dose of tea and coffee thrown in), followed by a presentation of members' digital photographs put together by Eric Peppiatt. 'Did we really go out in those conditions?' What was that person's name? 'Did we really look like that?'

Everyone enjoyed the presentation so much that it was run through a second time, just to let people mop up the last crumbs of cheese. The challenge now is - how do we follow it up next year?

A record number of members - approaching 30 - attended the Eastbourne weekend in early October. Leader Mark West, who is known for his ability to attract extreme weather, did not disappoint - so much so that the Sunday walk had to be cancelled because of torrential rain! Despite this, a good time was had by all.

Our regular walks have seen generally reasonable weather for the time of year and we particularly enjoyed the late autumn colours in locations such as Ashridge, Rowney Warren and Wendover Woods. But it was a different story on New Year's Day when five hardy members (all female - where were the men?) met at Dunstable Downs for the traditional walk in howling winds and teaming rain!

As always, we are in urgent need of additional walk leaders with more pressure being put on existing leaders to fill the programme. We are hopeful that the regular map awareness courses being held in Bedfordshire will give other members the confidence to have a go. We look forward to a successful 2014.

Rosemary Hasker  
Lea & Icknield Group

## Map reading courses

**O**ver the last year Bedfordshire Area has run a number of successful map reading courses, articles on which have been included in South East Walker. We are now planning two further courses. On Sunday 6 April at Lilley village hall there will be a Map Awareness Course providing all you need to know to read a map. This will be followed on Sunday 27 April at Sundon village hall with a Walking with a Compass Course which will offer a guide on how to use a compass to navigate your way around. The cost of each course is £7.50.

To help promote these skills further afield we would welcome not only non-members but members of Ramblers groups from outside Bedfordshire. If this would be of interest to you or would like further details please feel free to email me at [ivwramblers.nm@ntlworld.com](mailto:ivwramblers.nm@ntlworld.com). There are still places available.

Nick Markham



# John Foran

**M**embers of Lea & Icknield Group have been saddened by the death of John Foran. John had been a member of the group for nearly 10 years and during that time had regularly attended walks, served on the committee as Footpaths Secretary (continuing post-committee as a Local Footpaths Officer) and, until the onset of his illness in early 2012, was a walk leader.

John was a popular and respected member of the group. He led walks throughout Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, often taking us to locations we didn't often visit. He would always look for ways to make his walks a bit different - for example, organising carol singing on a pre-Christmas walk two years ago which resulted in a member of the public giving a donation - nobody was sure if it was in appreciation of the group's efforts,

or a bribe to make them stop! John could also be relied on to step in at the last minute to help out if a leader was unable to lead for any reason, and he was often undertaking the role of backmarker on walks.

John was always good company and possessed a playful sense of humour. Many will remember him arriving for a picnic walk with a large koala strapped to his rucksack, also sporting a 'bad hair day' wig when filling a vacant spot in an all-ladies team at a quiz night.

John remained cheerful and continued to walk with the group as often as he was able throughout his treatment. He became involved in RIPPLE over the summer and as recently as September took part in several of the walks in the Bedfordshire Walking Festival including the 18-mile stretch of the Greensand Ridge from Leighton Buzzard to Ampthill. However in November his health began to



John in 2010. Photo: Eric Peppiatt

deteriorate and in December he was admitted to the Keech Hospice where he died peacefully on 31 December. He will be greatly missed.

*Rosemary Hasker*

## Reflecting and correcting

**T**he winter sun on one of its fleeting appearances brought a sparkle to the surrounding countryside already dusted with snow as I climbed the hill leading to the ridge.

I knew that the warmth currently experienced would soon be replaced with an icy blast on reaching the top and there would be a head wind for the next mile or so before descending into a wooded area and some shelter. On reaching the top my pace quickened and stride lengthened, as I was looking forward to going back to an area which Ramblers RIPPLE volunteers had restored by clearing and putting in marker posts earlier in the year. Along the ridge my thoughts returned to that cloudy day when so much was achieved by those people voluntarily helping to improve the rights of way network.

On reaching the shelter of the wooded area I stopped at the marker post recalling the lively and amusing banter between the people, first digging, then ensuring the post was not only put in deep enough but straight, not leaning nor tilting, but perpendicular, before filling the hole and packing the ground around so no man nor beast was going to move it and, shortly afterwards, adding the directional discs. I recalled how they stood for a short time to admire their handiwork before picking up their tools and heading for the next location and next marker post. Their faces reflected pride and achievement of a job well done.

Leaving the marker post I ambled along the path remembering how overgrown it was when they arrived that day and with a few tools had cut and pruned, trimmed and strimmed

and in just a few hours a path which had not been accessible for years was now not only usable but a joy to walk. And, like the people putting in the marker posts, there had been lively banter and a similar look of pleasure and satisfaction when the job was completed. At this point my thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of a dog followed by a couple who looked in their late fifties or early sixties. We exchanged the usual pleasantries and comments on the weather before the man said 'We've been walking round here for many years and only recently discovered this path. Somebody has put in a lot of work to get it like this.' I replied by saying 'What would you say if I told you it was done by Ramblers volunteers working with the local council and with the consent of the landowner?' 'I thought Ramblers only walked' said the man. 'Our local group once discussed getting involved in footpath work but several members including the member who looked after the footpaths said 'We shouldn't as we wouldn't be insured, would be liable if things went wrong, we could easily upset landowners and we haven't any tools.'

'Hmm', I said, 'it sounds to me that your footpath member was not only putting forward incorrect information but perhaps did not want to get involved and didn't want others to either.' I explained that all work done was in conjunction with the local council who had the responsibility for obtaining permission from the landowner and for supervising the work whether it was clearing, putting in marker posts, repairing or replacing stiles, putting in kissing gates, replacing or putting in sleeper bridges. The

council provided the tools and the training plus refreshments during work time. Volunteers are covered by council insurance and Ramblers insurance provided the work is published by a Ramblers organisation. Ramblers members and non-members may participate safely. What would not be covered is an individual or group deciding to clear a path without council and landowner authorisation.' I added 'Ramblers are not letting councils avoid their statutory duties but are providing an additional resource which must be to everyone's benefit and members wishing to get involved with footpath restoration work should be actively encouraged by their group.'

'I've enjoyed meeting and talking with you this morning and our conversation has given me a lot of food for thought,' said the man. 'Oh, and can you pass on our thanks to the Ramblers volunteers for making such an excellent job of this path.' I wished them and the dog a happy and healthy new year, handed them a leaflet showing the volunteers footpath activities in 2014 and said they would be very welcome at any time.

I heard them talking about our conversation as they walked off and as I ambled along the path and reached the second marker post put in on that cloudy day I wondered how many more people had used, not only this path but all the paths Bedfordshire Ramblers volunteers had improved over the last six months and how many had observed and perhaps said, either to themselves or out loud, 'Whoever has done this, what a big improvement, thank you. Because if they didn't they should have done.'

*Ronnie Rambler*

# Bedfordshire Walking Festival 2014

**T**he sixth Bedfordshire Walking Festival will take place from Saturday 6 to Sunday 14 September. This will include the RU4 The Challenge event covering the 40-mile Greensand Ridge Path over the weekend of 13 - 14 September.

This event is proving more and more popular with the number of participants increasing year on year. It is a really good and enjoyable walk and some participants also raise money for their favourite charity so please sign up early by emailing walking@madasafish.com. The Long Distance Walkers will be doing the circular 70-mile North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail over the weekend of 30 - 31 August and the first weekend of the festival

and to do this please book by emailing roycarter@hotmail.com. There will be a transport charge for both events. As well as these long distance walks there will be lots of shorter walks and interest walks which by the time this is read will have been added to the programme which we anticipate will be available towards the end of May. The website [www.bedswalkfest.co.uk](http://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk) should also be updated by the end of May.

The festival offers a warm welcome to individuals and groups from outside Bedfordshire and we would be pleased to hear from any group wanting to come and join us for a day, weekend or a few days. More details in the next issue.

*Barry Ingram*

## Briefly

- Meadow Farm, described as 'a remarkable suite of medieval meadows untouched by modern farming and full of wildlife' has been bought by the Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust after winning a £758,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The trust is planning a series of activities and events on the 28-hectare site on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border near Blackthorn, so that residents of nearby Bicester, Aylesbury and the villages of the Upper Ray can discover the beauty of this wildlife haven.
- Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in east London will see the south park open to the public from 5 April for the first time since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The newly-landscaped parkland will feature 25 art installations. The north park opened in July 2013 and eventually the park will equal Hyde Park in size.
- Adelstrop, the Cotswold village immortalised in Edward Thomas' poem of that name, will be marking the centenary of the celebrated work on Tuesday 24 June, 100 years to the day when Thomas made the journey from London to Ledbury when his train stopped - 'unwontedly' - at Adelstrop. The station closed in 1966 and the only remaining station sign hangs in the village bus shelter. To mark the anniversary, a special train from Oxford to Moreton in Marsh is expected to stop at the station site for a celebrity reading to take place. There will also be events in the village and, possibly, a special bus link to the village from Moreton in Marsh.
- Oxford to Bicester Town trains are currently replaced by buses whilst the line through Islip is upgraded and a new curve installed at Bicester to allow for a new Chiltern Railways service from Oxford to London Marylebone via Princes Risborough and High Wycombe to start in the summer of 2015. A new station at Water Eaton, expected to be called Oxford Parkway, will be on the route.
- A useful new path in Enfield's countryside, linking Stag Hill at TQ 273986 with a path junction at 272988 has been won by Dave Cockle of the Enfield Society. At the southern end the path joins another path running east towards The Ridgeway, making possible new walking routes which avoid major road crossings.
- Four heritage trail leaflets for Bexhill on Sea have been devised by local museum volunteer Paul Wright and can be obtained from Bexhill Museum (01424 787950) or downloaded from [www.bexhillmuseum.co.uk](http://www.bexhillmuseum.co.uk).
- A woodland at South Ascot was bought at auction in December by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The four acre site off Woodlands Rise is popular with dog walkers and joggers who feared a new owner might fence off the area.





## BERKSHIRE *bites*

# West Berks update

**Members provided their own cabaret at the group's annual Christmas party on 13 December with seven members providing 12 items of entertainment, plus a quiz.**

A great time was had by the 53 people who attended. They were provided with the usual excellent buffet and pitched in with preparation, washing and tidying up afterwards.

Thirty members of the group's working party enjoyed their festive lunch on 16 December.

Before the festivities began however, there was the more serious business of the group AGM in November. Our Chair, Graham Smith, reported another excellent year, with increases in numbers of walks and walk leaders. He thanked all involved in making the group so successful. Not only members making a visible contribution but also those who worked so hard behind the scenes to ensure all activities run smoothly. A full report is available on the group's website at [www.wberksramblers.org.uk](http://www.wberksramblers.org.uk).

One point of note from the AGM of concern to all Ramblers was the local strategy which plans an increase of 10,500 dwellings in West Berkshire by 2026. Although the emphasis is stated to be on urban expansion and protection of the countryside it is up to us to focus on ensuring it is so protected and that the existing rights of way network is improved so that residents of these new urban areas can also access the shrinking countryside.

*Denise Buchan*  
*West Berks Ramblers*



Following a lavada.

Photo: David Turner

## Walking on Madeira

**A group of Loddon Valley Ramblers enjoyed a short break last November on the island of Madeira which included three full-day walks on different parts of the island along the levadas or irrigation channels (which meant level walking!).**

Two of the walks were around 350 metres above sea level and the final one in excess of 1,000 metres. This small volcanic island in the Atlantic is warm, full of hills, tunnels, flowers, trees, with every available piece of fertile land used to grow sugar cane, grapes, vegetables and millions of small but very tasty bananas.

The first day of walking was at the east of the island and for our lunch break we took a footpath away from the lavada to a high point with a magnificent view over the Atlantic. There were many spectacular views, especially on the way to the second day of walking when we stopped at the Cabo Girao

skywalk with a 580-metre drop to the sea, which was visible through the glass floor of the viewing area. At the end of our walk on the west side of the island we had the opportunity to swim from the small artificial beach at Calheta.

On our last day of walking in the north west of the island, there were two long dark tunnels in the cliff to walk through. Fortunately we were well equipped with torches to ensure we emerged from these tunnels unscathed. The surrounding cliffs were covered with all kinds of ferns, which made it seem tropical, especially with the odd cascade of water coming down. Unfortunately, the sea was too rough for us to swim in the rock pools at Porto Moniz at the end of this third day of walking. As well as telling us all about the levadas, our guide was extremely knowledgeable about the various flowers and trees. Tree-sized lily of the valley and heather were new to a lot of us, as

were banana passion fruit, tomato passion fruit and lots more.

During our stay we were able to enjoy a free day and many of us visited Funchal and experienced the market, cable car, tropical garden and watched the wicker basket sledges with their 'boatmen' driving them down the hill in their boaters like gondolieri. In the evenings some of us visited restaurants in nearby Camara de Lobos and Funchal and on our final night we all went to a folk evening with singing and dancing and plenty of food and wine. The main course was espetada, delicious chunks of beef on giant suspended skewers. Most meals it seems begin and end with Madeira wine.

Madeira is certainly worth a return visit, perhaps when all the agapanthus which border the levadas are in full flower.

*David Turner*  
*Chairman,*  
*Loddon Valley Ramblers*

# Diary Dates

### Until 23 March: Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Winning images from the annual wildlife photography competition. Admission charge. Natural History Museum, London SW7. [www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk), 020 7942 5000.

### Until 29 March: George Kenner

An exhibition of pictures by German artist Kenner who, as a registered enemy alien at the outbreak of the First World War, was sent to Frith Hill prisoner of war camp near Frimley (now part of the Pine Ridge golf centre) where he painted scenes of camp life. Surrey Heath Museum, Camberley 01276 707284

### Saturday 5 April: Map and compass course

Following on from the success of previous years, North West Kent Group is holding another course for those wishing to improve their skills. It will be held at the Grasshopper on the Green, Westerham, starting 10am. Cost £3 (lunch extra). To register, please contact Chris Baker on 01322 341722 or [chrisw.baker@ntlworld.com](mailto:chrisw.baker@ntlworld.com) by 31 March.

### Also Saturday 5 April: Explore with map and compass course

Another one-day (10am - 4pm) course at Battle, East Sussex, arranged by local member John Harmer for those with little experience to gain confidence and experience in map reading and land navigation. £10 with reduced rates available. Additional courses including a more advanced one will be held later in the year if there is sufficient demand. John Harmer 01424 773998, [john@harmerfamily.plus.com](mailto:john@harmerfamily.plus.com).

### Until 27 April: Discoveries - Art, Science and Exploration

A free exhibition presented by the University of Cambridge Museums which 'challenges and responds to the very notion of 'discovery', displaying objects that span millennia from artworks to scientific artefacts, historic instruments to rare zoological specimens. Two Temple Place, London WC2 [www.twotempleplace.org](http://www.twotempleplace.org), 020 7836 3715.

### Until 27 April: A Dialogue with Nature - Romantic Landscapes from Britain and Germany

Exhibition exploring aspects of Romantic landscape drawing from the 1780s to the 1840s. Admission charge, cheaper on Mondays. The Courtauld Gallery, The Strand, London WC2. [www.courtauld.ac.uk](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk), 020 7872 0220.

### Saturday 10 - Sunday 11 May: National Mills Weekend

Annual festival of milling heritage offering an opportunity to visit many wind and water mills not normally open to the public. [www.nationalmillsweekend.co.uk](http://www.nationalmillsweekend.co.uk)

### Until 2 November: Extremes

A family-friendly exhibition offering budding explorers the chance to discover how animals and plants survive in extreme heat, cold or dryness, in constant darkness or with little oxygen. Admission charge. Horniman Museum, London SE23 [www.horniman.ac.uk/extremes](http://www.horniman.ac.uk/extremes), 020 8699 1872.

## Briefly

- Rebuilding work at Whitchurch Bridge, which links the Berkshire and Oxfordshire banks of the Thames near Pangbourne, has been delayed by recent flooding and will probably not now be completed until July. In the meantime a temporary bridge provides a crossing for Thames Path walkers.
- Trans Wilts trains began in December linking Swindon, Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge and Westbury as part of a three year trial subsidised by Wiltshire council's sustainable transport fund.
- Brixton windmill in south London will open to the public again at Easter (see [www.brixtonwindmill.org/visit](http://www.brixtonwindmill.org/visit) for details). An appeal has been launched to get the mill back in working order and grinding in time for its 200th anniversary in 2016.
- A new series of one-day tours organised by the Churches Conservation Trust might appeal to readers who enjoy visiting country churches. Tours by coach from a railhead include Surrey on 18 June and West Sussex on 24 September. Details from [www.visitchurches.org.uk/historicchurchtours](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/historicchurchtours) or call 0800 206 1463.