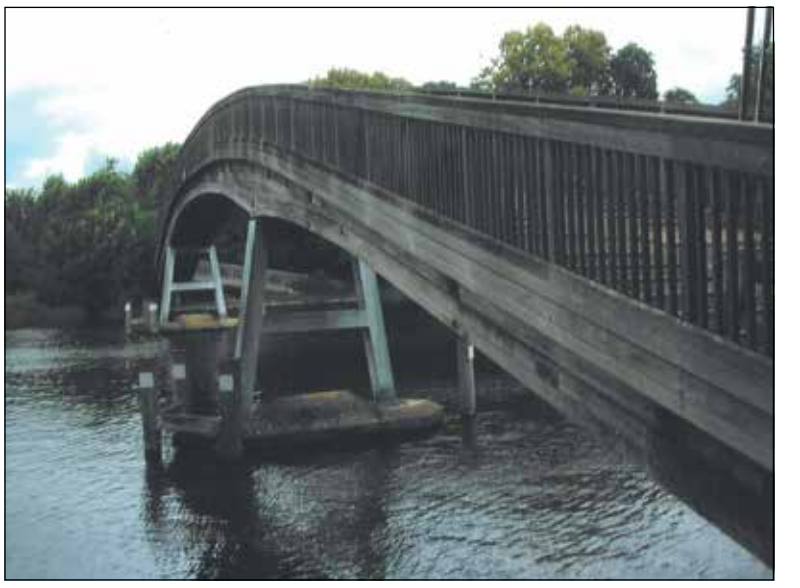
SOUTH EAST
walker
No. 130 June 2025

Bridging the gap

It was certainly an eventful winter for the Thames Path with the complete panorama of flooding events - fluvial, tidal, run-off, outflows from new developments and lakes overfilling and then, of course, overspilling onto the trail. And, not forgetting, the dramatic breach at Kew, thought to be caused by a combination of high river levels, stormy winds and torrential rain.



The Thames Path closure at Egham Hythe.



The bridge at Temple

If you've been walking on the Thames Path National Trail outside London in the last year or more you will have noticed that there are at least four long-term bridge closures all accompanied with diversions of differing lengths, accessibility and enjoyment. It has been a while since walkers have been able to cross the Thames using the Temple or Marsh footbridges, the Benson weir or Bridge 142 at Egham Hythe.

At the end of 2024 the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs released £100 million to the Environment Agency from the emergency flood relief programme. This enabled work to begin on the crossings at Benson and Egham Hythe and it is hoped that these crossings will be back in commission by the end of 2025.

Perhaps more importantly for the future, the Environment Agency, particularly Eliot Beagles who works there, has reformed their asset management policy. Previously footbridges were classified purely as leisure bridges and as such, amenities that raised no income, as compared to the bridges that take traffic. This meant these were always at the bottom of the pile and received little or no investment. Now they are just one more of the assets to be managed and which means work has begun in repairing both the Temple and Marsh bridges.

Just as the towpath was collapsing at Kew, Richmond council successfully completed improvement works on the Teddington Lock Footbridges . Work began in June 2023 and in the end cost £6.7 million. The work was completed under budget and ahead of schedule. If this sounds like a lot of money to spend, it is estimated that the bridges support over 5,000 pedestrian crossings and 2,000 cycle journeys on a normal weekday.

Des Garrahan



Repairs to the suspension footbridge main structure and lock cut iron truss footbridge at Teddington Lock have been completed.

Oxfordshire's Vale Way is 10

Lovers of long-distance trails may want to join Oxfordshire's Vale of White Horse Ramblers celebratory walks along the Vale Way this summer. After several years of recceing and refining the route, the group officially opened the Vale Way in Abingdon on 3 July 2015.

Peter Skuse, co-founder of the Vale Way, writes: We found that there was more to creating a trail than we thought, as a full survey found issues with bridges, stiles and paths which deviatiated from their defined line. Oxfordshire County Council's countryside department resolved these issues and we were able to achieve our objective of providing a safe route for walkers from the market towns into the wonderful Oxfordshire countryside."

The Vale of White Horse district has the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails on its northern and southern borders respectively and the Vale Way, a low-level route, meanders between them. At various points along the route, especially at the ends, the Vale Way is near the source of the River Ock (in Little Coxwell, adjacent to Longcot, in the west) and its outflow into the Thames (Abingdon, in the east), the Ock and its tributaries contributed to the formation of the Vale.

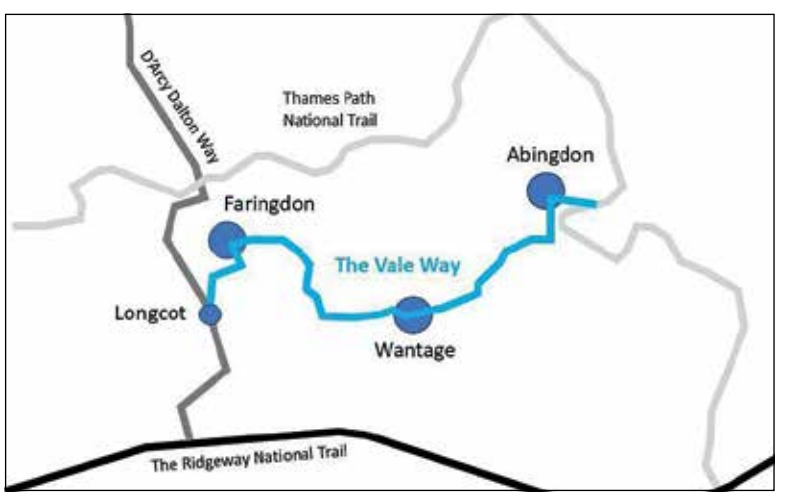
The route is 27 miles long, generally running east - west and connecting the three market towns of Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon. Its proximity to these centres enables public transport to be used to access the route at the ends and various points in between. The Vale Way also passes through a number of the larger villages such as Steventon and Stanford-in-the-Vale, as well as smaller ones.

The Vale Way gives the walker a good flavour of the Vale of White Horse, highlights include the causeway at Steventon, Ardington Estate Village, White Horse Hill and the Lambourn Down in the south, the folly in Faringdon (plus the tearooms and pubs along the way).

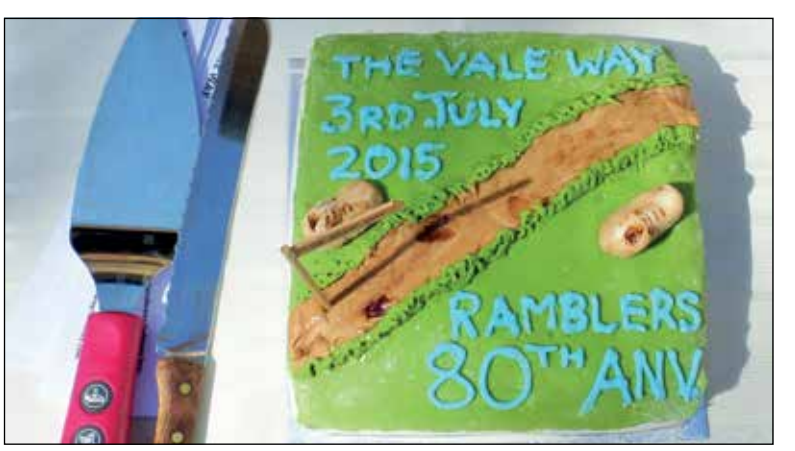
The route is entirely on public rights of way and is shown on the digital version of Ordnance Survey maps. Details of the route can be found at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/thevaleway/valeway.htm. The route also connects the D'Arcy Dalton Way at Longcot with the Thames Path at Abingdon.

On the 10th anniversary of the opening day (3 July), Vale of White Horse group will be walking the five-mile western-most section between Faringdon and Longcot, followed a week later by the eastern-most five miles between Abingdon and Steventon. These walks will be at a leisurely pace, making them accessible to many. For those who want to walk the whole length of the Vale Way, there will be three nine-mile walks in July and August. Walk details will be at www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/vwh/walking/walks.html.

Dave Cavanagh



The route of the Vale Way. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



The Vale Way was officially opened by the Mayor of Abingdon in 2015, the same year that the Ramblers celebrated its 80th anniversary. This cake commemorated both occasions. Photo: Peter Skuse

Surrey news in brief

Burpham Court Farm, Guildford: This 113-acre/46ha area of agricultural land to the north-east of the town, is being transformed into a country park and nature reserve. The site, which has previously been inaccessible to the public, will have four new pedestrian entrances, a circular walking trail and informal footpaths as well as a car park and picnic area. There will be wild flower meadows, wetlands and reedbeds beside the River Wey, trees will be planted and hedgerows restored. The work is related to the wider Weyside Urban Village scheme with the farmland becoming a 'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace'.

Hersham golf course development: Elmbridge Council has approved a housing development on part of the former 18-hole golf course in Hersham despite a 2022 planning document concluding that "the site is not considered to be suitable for a release from the Green Belt designation". The good news is that there will be a 52-acre/21 ha area of publicly accessible open space with a mile and a half of footpaths. Also, a 25-acre biodiversity habitat area will be created. Current rights of way will not be affected.

Tolworth Court Farm Fields: Kingston Council has approved plans to improve biodiversity and access to this 104-acre/42 ha open space to the south of Tolworth station. The site forms Kingston's largest nature reserve and was once a floodplain for the adjacent Hogsmill but the river was straightened in the 1950s. Creating a more meandering course was considered but found to be impractical because power and sewerage services are buried alongside. Instead, a wetland with a boardwalk will be created near the river. To improve biodiversity, 10 Sussex cattle will graze the site each summer and, for a shorter period, pigs will forage. A wheelchair-accessible path from the main entrance will enable year-round access.

Litter pick: Kingston Ramblers help look after Section 8 of the London Loop and held a litter-pick on Wednesday 26 March. It was also in memory of the later Joan Bull, an avid litter-picker on every ramble she attended. Nineteen members took part and a huge amount of rubbish was collected. Recyclable material was taken to the local transfer station. Unfortunately, there is plenty more to pick so we will be back.

Guildford to Godalming Greenway: The first phase of work to provide a four and a half mile (seven kilometre) improved route for walkers, cyclists, pushchairs and wheelchairs along the valley of the River Wey, began in January. Part of the route includes Dagley Lane, north of Shalford, an existing signed walking and cycling route which during wet periods can become impassable.

Beverley Brook: In past years, the South East Rivers Trust has made Beverley Brook more natural where it flows through Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park. Like many rivers, the brook was canalised in some areas, often in concrete channels. Consequently, water flow accelerated and the brook became disconnected from its floodplain. Now Community Bluescapes (Richmond Council, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and Barnes Common Ltd) plan to create a new winding river channel on part of Barnes Green to slow the flow of water. A gravel path beside the new channel and a drainage scheme should improve walking there throughout the year. The current channel will be kept to provide extra water capacity during heavy rainfall and tidal peaks.

London Rivers' Week: This year's event , organised by environmental charity Thames 21, runs from Friday 30 May to Sunday 8 June. The many events include walks along the Hogsmill (led by Kingston Ramblers), Wandle, Thames, Crane. Duke of Northumberland's River, Brent (with West London Ramblers), and Deptford Creek. There is also a Himalayan Balsam bashing session run jointly by Kingston Ramblers and the South East Rivers Trust. Details are at https://www.thames21.org.uk/london-rivers-week-2025/.

Copsem Lane: Work will start later this year to install a pegasus crossing for pedestrians and horse riders on this busy section of the A244 between Arbrook and Esher Commons. The bridleway crossing is near an A3 interchange and vehicles often come off it at high speed. In early 2021, a petition supported by the British Horse Society and Kingston Ramblers got over 1,600 signatures in favour of a safe crossing being provided. In March that year the Elmbridge Local Committee agreed to add the crossing to its list of priorities in its works programme.

David Cooper



Tolworth Court Farm Fields

SOUTH EAST walker

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

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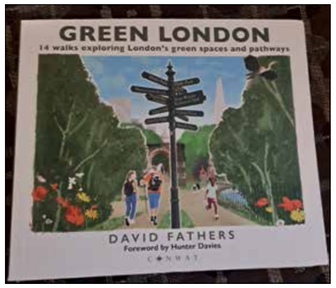
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Green London - a new guide to walks



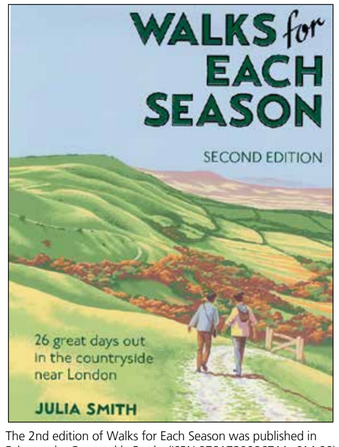
A quick visit to a bookshop or online search will show that there is no shortage of London walks guide books available. Indeed, it must be really difficult to establish a toehold in the market. One author, David Fathers, well-known to many of our London groups, has certainly managed this tricky feat and it's always a welcome treat when he adds a new guide to his collection. That list includes The Regent's Canal, The London Thames Path, London's Hidden Rivers, Bloody London and Diverse London.

Now comes Green London. As the front cover says: 14 walks exploring London's green spaces and pathways. This book is divided into seven sections - central, north, north-east, east, south, south-east and south-west. The walks are easy to follow and the illustrations are both informative and delightful. Just to pick one walk at random, the Peckham to Crystal Palace eight-mile/13km walk is very timely in that it offers an extension to London's newest strategic route, the Green Link Walk.

This book comes highly recommended. As Hunter Davies says in his foreword: "London's greatest glory is its greenery: all those parks, gardens, and open spaces. No other city in the world has been so blessed." And this book absolutely celebrates that sentiment.

Des Garrahan

(Green London, published 13 March 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing/Conway, ISBN 9781844866120, £12.99).



The 2nd edition of Walks for Each Season was published in February by Corncockle Books (ISBN 9781739986711, £14.99).

Walks for Each Season - second edition published

Five years after I'd finalised directions for the first edition of Walks for Each Season: 26 great walks in the countryside near London, I discovered that more had changed than I'd anticipated. I had read that walking guides had a life of around eight years, but obviously that's not the case.

Maybe it is because we live in the heavily populated 'south east'

I had just intended to organise another print run, but as I revisited a few of the walks I realised a lot had changed. Housing estates had sprung up, a path had been closed on the Guildford circular, a road fell away revealing the impassable chasm of HS2 on the Wendover route, damage caused by too much footfall in part of the Ashridge Estate became evident, large water-filled cavities close to the surface were discovered at Otford and a section of the coastal path into Hastings was reopened.

As anticipated, there were also many small changes; stiles had been removed or replaced with kissing gates, signposts had disappeared, information boards had moved, fences had been erected creating 'new' fields and enclosing footpaths.

In February this year I published the second edition. I walked every route again, checked directions and updated pub, food and train information and even discovered a few more loos for the toilet tips.

Walks for Each Season was born out of my frustration with going on the same old walks, a desire to explore the range of countryside within reach of London to make sure no season passed without being out in it, experiencing the best of it, immersing myself in it. The book I needed wasn't available - producing this one was a way to share my discoveries.

Latest updates can now be found on my website. We're reliant on you alerting other walkers to changes. So please do add your comments at https://walks4eachseason.blogspot.com or message me on instagram @jsmithwalks.

I really enjoyed revisiting each walk to check directions for this second edition. I was struck again by what great walks they are. I hope you enjoy them as much as I have.

Julia Smith

Clophill Lakes opened

Clophill Lakes nature reserve in Bedfordshire was officially opened to the public on Saturday 5 April. The former Fuller's Earth quarry site, in the Flit valley between Clophill and Chicksands, is now owned and managed by environmental charity, the Greensand Trust. Here, lakes and wetlands sit alongside the nationally-important Cainhoe Castle scheduled monument.

The site is managed to provide a mosaic of habitats supporting a wide range of species including otters, dragonflies, damselflies and wetland birds. The trust emphasises that this is a nature reserve with managed access rather than a country park.

The site is currently open daily from 9am to 5pm and a visitor centre, car park, and cafe (open daily 10am - 3pm) are available. Dogs are allowed but must be kept on a short lead at all times. A map of the reserve can be downloaded from greensandtrust.org/map-of-clophill-lakes-nature-reserve,



Cainhoe Castle is a prominent landscape feature.



An interpretation board at Clophill Lakes Nature Reserve



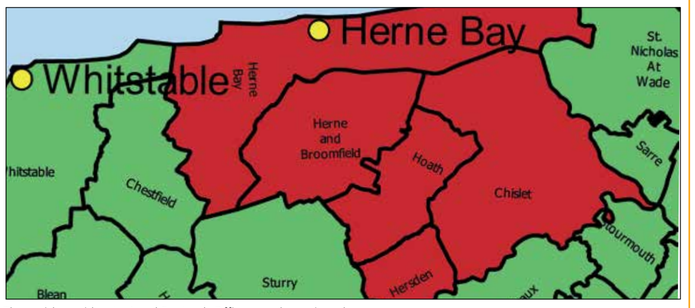
A network of paths has been provided. The visitor centre is in the distance.



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary

Vacant posts: I suspect that doggedness is the quality most characteristic of Ramblers volunteers, especially those engaged in public rights of way work. Our Area Management team has certainly been pretty dogged over the last 12 months in its mission to fill all the vacant posts for Local Footpath Officers who scrutinise planning applications and proposals to change the footpath network to ensure that walkers' interests are protected. Our success has greatly surpassed my expectations and we now have just one vacant post covering five parishes in the Herne Bay area on the north Kent coast. Could you take on this role, could you be the last piece that completes the jigsaw? You don't have to live in one of these parishes - much of the work is desk-based with site visits only when specific proposals need checking. Please think about becoming one of a very enthusiastic team doing really important work and for more information email prow@kentramblers.org.uk, Thank you so much to those who have already come forward and joined our team. Kent calling continues on page 4.



The parishes without a Local Footpath Officer are shown in red.

Green Link Walk map

London welcomed a new linear strategic route, the Green Link Walk back in March 2024. It goes from the edge of Epping Forest to Peckham (or alternatively Peckham to Epping Forest).

In March this year our good friends at Footways launched the Green Link Walk map. So now you can navigate the route with the GoJauntly app, the PDFs available on the Inner London Ramblers website or the new map. The map costs £5 and can be purchased on the Footways London website or at various libraries along the route or stores like Stanfords.

Des Garrahan



Copies are also available for free at the City Information Centre at St Pauls.

Nature calling:

A series of new art commissions located in six National Landscape areas, including the Surrey Hills and Chilterns, have been launched with the aim of encouraging new audiences to better understand and connect with their local landscapes.. 'Dawn After Night, Spring After Winter' an 'adventure game trail' at Hutchinson's Bank, near New Addington, Croydon, was unveiled by artists David Blandy and David Locke on 10 May and will be launched at Box Hill on 19 July. The games can be accessed online or by booklets available at both sites. In the Chilterns, 'Luton Henge', inspired by the ancient earthwork Waulud's Bank, will be launched in July. For more on the project go to https://naturecalling.org.uk.

KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary continued

Unusual public inquiry: Perhaps the highlight of the last quarter was a public inquiry in Pembury. This one was unusual in that Kent Ramblers had not been directly involved in the case and was not participating in the inquiry. The dispute concerned an application to add a footpath to the definitive map on the strength of having been in public use for some time and having thereby become a public right of way. Four of us trooped along simply out of interest. Usually the decision turns on whether there has been sufficient and appropriate public use over a period of 20 years specified in the Highways Act but this was a far from usual case. The last recorded owner of the land had been a company that went into liquidation so that the land had become Crown land, preventing the Highways Act provision from applying. Instead it was necessary to rely not on statute law but on common law rules for establishing public rights of way and the Inspector held that there had been insufficient public use during the period that the Crown had been aware of its ownership of the land so the path was not added to the definitive map. Whether that was the correct test of public use is doubted by some of us but whether there will be a challenge we do not know. It was certainly an interesting day out.

Coast path: I am at last able to report some progress with finalising the route of the England Coast Path in Kent. The Secretary of State has confirmed the route originally proposed by Natural England along the two sections of the north Kent coast, one immediately east of Lower Halstow which will offer views of Halstow Creek that have not previously been available to the public and one immediately east of Otterham Creek, also offering previously unavailable views. Additionally, Natural England has published a proposed variation to the route on the northern coast of Sheppey which will bypass an otherwise troublesome section and allow progress to be made. The only point now outstanding is also on Sheppey where it is proving difficult to find a route which avoids both collapsing cliffs and slippery clay and a potentially unsafe section of road walking. Work to open the now-agreed sections may be delayed until the bird-nesting season is over but I am hopeful that we will be able to complete our three-volume guide to the whole of the Kent coast path before the year is over.



Halstow Creek - there will be new access to the line of trees on the horizon. Photo: Robert Peel



The site of the proposed solar farm near Aldington.

Solar farms: Solar farms continue to threaten some of our finest countryside and public rights of way. While recognising the need for solar energy, many of us have serious concerns about the lack of any clear strategy over how many solar farms are required, where they would best be located, how adverse effects can be minimised and how to ensure that money will be available to restore sites when their useful life is over (especially if they are abandoned early and the operating company becomes insolvent). Colin Sefton (Kent Chair) recently raised this with Stephen Russell at Central Office one of the two was Kent's own Mark Lavenstein who was elected to fill a two-year vacancy. and Stephen has now raised the matter with the new New Energy System Operator (NESO), which was established late last year, as part of its role is to ensure a more strategic approach to planning for energy infrastructure and there has already been some interaction with them - we are awaiting NESO's response! Our volunteers secured a particular success when the inspector conducting an inquiry into a proposal for a solar farm near Aldington (where Erasmus was once rector) agreed to hold a special hearing to consider access concerns including the applicant's plan to re-route all rights of way rather than adjust the layout of panels to accommodate the existing path lines. We await the outcome.

Recognising path volunteers: At the beginning of April I attended General Council, in effect the Ramblers national AGM, where we elected four members of the Board of Trustees. I found it particularly dispiriting that of the six candidates seeking election, only two recognised the public rights of way work undertaken by Ramblers volunteers. Fortunately Sussex and Kent county councils, one for each section of the path.

Both councils already had long queues of outstanding DMMOs and could give no likely date when the orders might be considered, so after waiting for more than two years the Planning Inspectorate was asked to direct both councils to proceed within a year. As it turned out, this long wait was a blessing in disguise.

By early 2024 Groombridge Place had changed hands and whereas the previous owners had threatened to contest the claims, the new owners, The Pig Hotel Group, were happy for them to proceed. Their decision to restore community access and engagement is warmly appreciated.

Thanks are due to the many individuals in Groombridge, Withyham and beyond who provided testimonials, as well as the parish councils, council officers, and volunteers from the Ramblers and Open Spaces Society. Their collective dedication has ensured that this well-loved route will remain open for future generations to enjoy. And we remember with gratitude those witnesses who supported this cause but are sadly no longer here to see its success.

With the path now legally secured, walkers can continue to cross the bridge freely, knowing their right to do so is firmly protected.

Malcolm McDonnell

(A guide to the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk is available from Kent Ramblers -www.kentramblers.org.uk/books).



Celebrating the bridge success. Photos: Malcolm McDonnell



The bridge from the south.

Lenham meeting: Finally, a gentle reminder that we will be holding our next full-day meeting for footpath volunteers in Lenham on Monday 23 June. Anyone even vaguely interested in our footpath work is welcome to attend. Booking is essential (certainly if you wish to participate in an excellent free lunch) so please email prow@kentramblers.org.uk for more information.

Robert Peel

Secretary, Kent Ramblers

Bridge crossing secured

Groombridge village sits in both East Sussex and Kent, divided by the River Grom which forms the county boundary. The Sussex part of the village is in Withyham parish and the Kent part in Speldhurst. This part includes Groombridge Place, a moated manor house on a site going back to medieval times. The current house is about 300 years old and the surrounding estate extends across both sides of the river, connected by a picturesque stone carriage bridge.

For centuries this bridge has been used by the walking public without challenge, providing an essential pedestrian link between public rights of way along both banks of the Grom. However, in 2015 the then owner of Groombridge Place learned that it was not recorded as a public right of way and threatened to fence it off. This posed a serious threat to the villagers, local walkers, and users of the Tunbridge Wells Circular long-distance path which relies on this vital crossing. The alternative is a narrow road bridge with no footway on the B2110 that carries constant heavy traffic.

Withyham and Speldhurst parish councils tried to persuade the owner to dedicate the bridge path without success so members of the Open Spaces Society and the Ramblers stepped in. In 2018 Brendan Clegg and I began collecting evidence of unhindered public use over at least 20 years prior to 2015. By March 2019, more than 80 testimonials had been collected, some going back to the 1940's, and Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO) were submitted to East

Collaborating successfully

When I took over as Chair of Kent Ramblers a few years ago, I was fortunate to inherit a good working relationship with Kent County Council that had been developed over the previous years by my predecessors and others. Myself and others have been able to build on this solid foundation and this has been further enhanced in the last year in a number of areas:

Improved signage on promoted routes

This one actually started with a negative! Robert Peel, Area Secretary, noticed that a part of the Eden Valley Walk near Hever station had been re-routed. The rerouting made sense, as it avoided walking through some gardens and the new route was signposted, but unfortunately standard signs had been used, with no reference to the Eden Valley Walk. Robert correctly commented that anyone using an old Ordnance Survey map (or any guide - including the one that Robert wrote a few years ago - available to purchase from kentramblers.org.uk!) would have no indication that the route had changed - especially where the route intersects with the road near Lydens Farm. Robert contacted David Munn, West Kent Area Manager, who responded that he could get this fixed as there was a stock of special fingers for all the promoted routes.

David's comment piqued my interest, as I had noticed that when other fingers on promoted routes had been replaced they had often been done so with the standard fingers. I therefore agreed with David that I would log all of these I found on my walks onto the county council's online reporting system, along with other places on all the routes where fingers could usefully be added and these would then be replaced with the correct bespoke finger where this was available. The Kent County Council team has been very active over the past few months in getting these installed and David has also arranged for stickers to be produced for all seven of the promoted routes West Kent, (If you fancy a challenge, I list them all at the end of this article!), so in future it will be much easier to manage this.



A significant improvement that has recently been completed by Kent County Council - so hopefully this will encourage greater use of the nearby public rights of way network. Photo: Colin Sefton

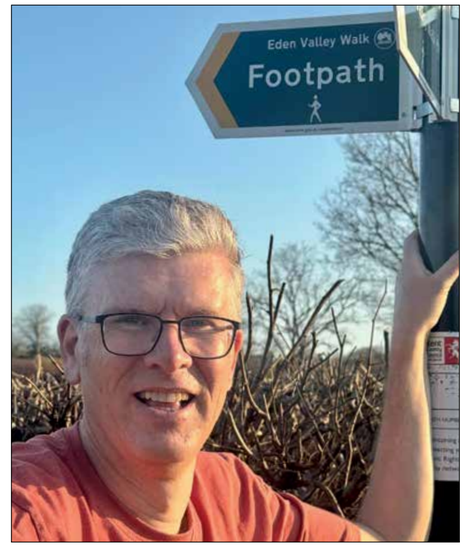
Helping the county council with outstanding issues

I was made redundant last September and decided that I was not going to seek a new job, but instead try to use my time for other activities. I asked Graham Rusling, Head of Public Rights of Way at Kent County Council, if I might be able to do something to help his team and we agreed that I could look at outstanding issues in the field. I started in my home parish near Tunbridge Wells with the county council sending me a list of all outstanding issues and a map showing where these are and I have to date visited almost all of these here and in four other nearby parishes. (I plan to slowly work my way through Kent, until age catches up with me!). Thanks to equipment already supplied to me by the county council (in particular an excellent 'Silky' hand saw that makes light work of most fallen tree branches) I have been able to deal with some of the issues myself and others have already been resolved, which now means that the county council team can focus their valuable time on resolving more of the remaining issues.

I also spent a day with Malcolm Wills, one of the county council's public rights of way officers, when he was out visiting issues in his area. This gave me a useful insight into the variety of issues they cover.

'Project 2026'

I have been coordinating Kent Ramblers activities on the 'Don't Lose Your Way' project (set up as 'Lost Ways' in Kent) for a number of years. My predecessor had set up an excellent arrangement with Kent County Council whereby they agreed for each potential route to supply a file of information from their archives,including the parish and draft maps and statements that were produced for the creation of the first Definitive Map. Recently I have been fortunate in that The Genealogist has copied all the 1910 Finance Act Maps and Field Books for Kent, so at the beginning of the year I looked at these for all my potential new routes (which was not as easy as I expected as rather annoyingly a lot of the routes seemed to go over several maps!) and where there was a deduction for a footpath in the Field Book for a property (called a 'hereditament') that my potential new route went through I have made an application for a new public right of way. (Almost all of these are to extend existing footpaths that currently end at a parish boundary). Laura Wilkins, Kent County Council's Definitive Map Team Leader, has been extremely helpful in guiding me through this process to ensure that the applications I have submitted provide the required information. (I am fortunate in Kent in that I have been able to use previous applications made by Hugh Craddock from the Open Spaces Society as an excellent template).



Colin with an Eden Valley Walk sign. Photo: Claire Betts

There have been a couple of other developments. I asked Ramblers if I could help them and this has resulted in two new activities (so far). Firstly, I have recently joined the Governance Review Group. Secondly, I have taken over coordination of requests from Ramblers volunteers for copying documents from the National Archives at Kew. Visiting here I have found very enjoyable. If anyone is interested in potentially getting involved in this, please contact me at colin_sefton@yahoo.co.uk.

And, those promoted routes in West Kent are: Darent Valley Path, Eden Valley Walk, Greensand Way, High Weald Landscape Trail, Medway Valley Walk. Tunbridge Wells Circular and Wealdway.

Colin Sefton

Chair, Kent Ramblers

BEDFORDSHIRE bulletin

Autumn festival

September may seem a long way off but already plans are afoot for the 2025 Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks. The nine-day festival will be held from Saturday 6 to Sunday 14 September.

Have you ever visited Bedfordshire? We believe it's one of the country's best kept secrets. So why not come along and explore our little-known county? The festival will give you the opportunity to visit historic towns like Bedford, Ampthill, Woburn and Leighton Buzzard, view our pretty villages full of quaint cottages and the wonderful countryside including the Forest of Marston Vale and the Greensand Ridge. There will also be the opportunity to enjoy river and canalside walks during the festival.

Bedfordshire Ramblers will be reaching out to local rambling groups and Ramblers groups in neighbouring counties to bring a variety of walks, events and locations to suit everyone. We can confirm that there will be the ever-popular John Bunyan Boat, Walk and Sail, but you will need to book as numbers are limited and this year it will be held on a Saturday.

We can also confirm that the Greensand Challenge event will take place again, offering the opportunity to walk the 40-mile Greensand Ridge over two days. For those of gentler disposition, we will have local history walks. We will also be looking to include accessible events for those who find walking difficult and, we hope, events for very young attendees where pushchairs can be used. There will be lots more to come including short walks, slow walks, interest walks, morning walks, afternoon walks and all-day walks. We hope that has whet your appetite.

We really need to build on the enormous success of last year's festival when we saw over 850 walkers attend one of 55 events. So please check us out! To ensure you don't miss out why not join our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/1624342594751555) or the webpage (https://www.bedswalkfest.co.uk/.(There is a 'contact us' button for any queries you may have). This will ensure that as soon as information becomes available you will be the first to know and make sure you have all the dates in your diary.

We look forward to welcoming walkers, both 'old' and new to our fabulous festival.



This year's festival poster, prepared by Anne Griffiths and Sandra Kelsey

Sandra Kelsey

Beds Area Publicity Officer

BEDFORDSHIRE bulletin

New shorter walks success

Aware that some members and potential new members might prefer a slightly gentler walking experience than our usual walks, we decided to trial 'Rambles' one morning each month. These would be no longer than five miles and at an easier pace than our standard offering.

The first of these took place in March at Sharnbrook. We were fortunate to have a beautiful spring day with bright sunshine, but we had no idea how many would turn up and if the offer would appeal. Then we watched with satisfaction as over 30 walkers arrived, some from our group, some from other groups, and at least five who were completely new to the Ramblers!

It was lovely to hear one of the newcomers say "Thank you, I have so enjoyed being outside walking and talking to different people". It was an encouraging start and we hope for similar success with further 'Rambles'.

Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers



The first of our 'Rambles'. Photo: Sandra Kelsey

Changing face of Bedfordshire

The recent announcement by Universal Studios to build a theme park and resort mostly on land previously used as a brickworks is great news for Bedfordshire and particularly for that part of the county. It appears that two footpaths and one bridleway may be diverted or improved. I spoke to their representatives during the consultation period and it would appear that access from Bedford to Stewartby, Wixams and the Marston Vale will be improved significantly for pedestrians and cyclists.

Depending on how one views the EastWest Rail Project as a whole, the improvement of the Oxford to Bedford via Bletchley line would be hugely beneficial to those communities and offer some great walking opportunities from all the stations along the line. However, the Universal Studios development has now made the extension of the line from Bedford to Cambridge almost inevitable, even if it was 90% certain before. The route chosen by East West Rail from Bedford to Cambridge, once the most expensive of the options, now appears to be the cheapest. It will affect more than 20 rights of way by the time it reaches the Cambridgeshire border. Various groups and parishes have met with EastWest Rail representatives and come away disappointed at their lack of knowledge of the area and its rights of way. Not only that but Highways England who are already in the process of constructing a dual carriageway link between the Black Cat roundabout at Roxton on the A1 and the Caxton Gibbet roundabout has been told to divert funds which would have gone to path improvements in the Roxton, Chawston and Wyboston areas to the creation of a multi-user path to the proposed new station at Tempsford, despite the actual location not yet being decided.

One further thought. Since the announcement by Universal Studios another abandoned railway is being considered for reopening. It is the Northampton to Bedford line which closed in 1962. The track bed still exists in places and could provide an interesting new link to Bedfordshire from the Midlands.

Barry Ingram

RIPPLE path work



Installing the final marker post at Bletsoe. Photo: Barry Ingram



Starting work on the path at Henlow Camp. Photo: Barry Ingram

The very wet weather in January and February led to a significant reduction in the amount of work our volunteers could do. It was too wet to safely improve paths and too wet to access land for installing or replacing footpath marker posts. Nevertheless, there were good turnouts to improve a section of the Chiltern Way at Upper Sundon, to the north of Luton, and on another task where we significantly improved a path on the perimeter of RAF housing in the Henlow Camp area of Lower Stondon. The latter path was almost completely blocked in places and was difficult to clear because it was only two metres wide and ran between a high hedge on one side and a fence on the other. But, as usual, a great morning's work saw the job done. It was a pleasure to see new faces including one from the Lea & Icknield (Luton) group.

With two big path clearances completed our attention turned to the resetting and/or replacing of yellow-topped marker posts. Thanks to the cooperation of local landowners and farmers we were able to work at Bletsoe on the path between the village and the Milton Ernest water tower, in Clapham on the golf course and along Green Lane and The Baulk. It is always good to see parish councillors coming along to help. Parish councillor Paul Goss, who also walks with North Beds Ramblers, joined us and helped put in posts at Cotton End on the bridleway between the village and the road to Old Warden, and in Harrowden on the path by Elstow Brook.

Bedford Borough confirmed at a recent Local Access Forum meeting that they had received funding from the Active Rural Grant for improving paths in Wyboston, Wootton and Renhold Pedley Way and the work has been completed.

Barry Ingram
Beds RIPPLE

ESSEX extras

Local turbulence

Given the current turbulence of international politics, you could be forgiven for not noticing that the government is engaged in a radical and rapid shake-up of local government - focused in the next few years on the south east. It seems that no-one can leave governance structures alone for more than a decade or two. This time the inspiration stems from ministers' belief that the UK's notoriously centralised administration structures urgently need a dose of devolution, designed to bring better local responsiveness and improved efficiency.

The strategy is complex and two-pronged: (a) enabling a strategic tier between national and local government - preferably led by elected mayors - and (b) finally doing away with the two-tier (county/district) configuration of public administration across the whole of the UK by the setting up of unitary authorities everywhere. The existing system is particularly confusing, as it remains an historical rag-bag of two-tier government with islands of unitary authorities and several mayor-led strategic authorities all in play.

Most developments in mayoral governance to date have been in the north (London being the main exception), but on 5 February the government launched its Devolution Priority Programme , including Norfolk & Suffolk, Greater Essex, Sussex & Brighton, and Hampshire & Solent. ('Greater Essex' means the territory covered by Essex County Council plus the adjacent Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea unitary councils). For these areas, direct mayoral elections are scheduled for May 2026, and any county or district elections originally planned for May this year were postponed. Two strategic authorities in the north have also been included in the programme. Together, these six areas have been chosen as having 'sensible geographies', to use the term in the devolution White Paper, which are of the order of 1.5 million in population,coterminous with the two or more authorities in the tier below, and relate well to typical local economies and travel-to-work patterns.

Running separately but in parallel, the government is inviting the leaders of all the two-tier authorities and existing unitary authorities in these same areas to submit proposals by 26 September this year for a move from two-tier to unitary government. For us in Essex, this means that the 12 districts, the two unitaries and the county council have all been tasked with coming up with proposals for a smaller number of unitary councils which are coterminous with Greater Essex. The status quo is not an option, and all 15 existing authorities will go. No doubt parallel requirements have been placed on authorities in the other five priority areas. In this case the government has given the existing councils a degree of flexibility but has suggested that no new unitary authority should be smaller than 500,000 in population, in order to give it scope for economies of scale and resilience to financial shocks. For Essex, that suggests that the 15 existing councils comprising the two-tier area be collapsed to just three or four unitary authorities. However, most of the existing councils (10 out of the 15) are registering a preference for Greater Essex to be carved into five new unitary authorities, each with populations closer to 300,000. Perhaps most controversially, the devolution White Paper envisages that a combination of a new strategic tier and a move to single-tier of unitary government below it will deliver "fewer politicians and a more efficient state". Elections for councillors in the new authorities are planned for May 2027, with a view to the new array being operational from April 2028.

Centenary walk

West Essex Ramblers are encouraging local walkers and groups to participate in the 49th annual Epping Forest Centenary Walk on Sunday 6 July. The walk celebrates the passing of the Epping Forest Act which effectively ended unlawful enclosures of forest land. Today, Epping Forest sees more than four million visitors each year.

Comments project leader, David Keane: "We want to invite individuals and walking groups to join us in celebrating the opening up of the forest to common people - that's you and me. That's why we think it's important that there's no joining fee and no need to register to participate. Simply turn up and join us for a fun day out."

Full details of the event can be found at www.west-essexramblers.org.uk.

Dave Evans
West Essex Ramblers



David Keane at the head of last year's Epping Forest Centenary Walk. Photo: Dave Evans

White Cliffs Walking Week:

Kent's White Cliffs Ramblers will be holding another Walking Week from 30 June to 6 July. The event is open to all, with walks each day designed to showcase the scenic coastline and countryside around Dover and Deal. Details are at https:whitecliffsramblers.org.uk/white-cliffs-walking-festival/.

Film map updated:

Waverley Borough Council in south west Surrey has released an updated version of its film map showing locations used locally in film and television shows. The most popular locations have been Bourne Wood, Waverley Abbey and Frensham Ponds. The map can be viewed by following links on the council's website. Hard copies are available from Guildford tourist information centre and Waverley libraries.



Does any of this matter to Ramblers?

Does any of this matter to Ramblers? Almost certainly; yes. First, Ramblers volunteers work across the country with 'their' highways authorities to feed back information on the condition, integrity and accessibility of the rights of way network our members - indeed all walkers - use. In Essex Area, this has meant almost exclusively working with Essex County Council, whose territory accounts for about 80% of our 4,000 miles of public rights of way. But there are on paper seven other highway authorities in our Area, viz the five north-east London boroughs and the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend. Mostly for reasons of economies of scale, these seven authorities have few, if any, staff capacity dedicated to public rights of way management. For Ramblers, or indeed any path users, it would clearly make sense for there to be as few separate highways authorities as possible, to avoid having to negotiate different reporting and partnership protocols.

Secondly, if the 15 authorities in the Greater Essex area were consolidated into five unitary authorities, the current number of 698 councillors representing the region would likely be reduced to less than half. Many commentators have already criticised such a development as creating a democratic deficit. This would change the character of constituency work and make it harder to engage elected members in any local issues affecting rights of way. Indeed, it would be a fair question to ask how significantly reducing the number of elected councillors for the relevant population could claim to bring better responsiveness. Much will depend, of course, on how many elected members are created for the new authorities; the predictions above assume that the number of councillors per capita will be similar to those in existing London boroughs adjoining Essex.

Much will also depend on how reorganised authorities are to be held accountable for the protection, upkeep and where possible enhancement of the rights of way network. The performance indicators which used to track the state of paths and bridleways fell into disuse with the abolition of the Audit Commission. This means that intervening where the network is impaired is more likely to entail labour-intensive constituency work, which would be harder under the new structure.

Finally, the responsibility for public rights of way management will probably not make the 'strategic cut' when powers are shared between the mayoral strategic tier and the new unitary tier below it. The mayoral strategic authorities will certainly have jurisdiction and devolved spending powers over strategic transport policy, given its importance in promoting economic viability and labour mobility. But although pedestrian movements are logically part of a transport spectrum - in urban and suburban settings at least - the state and accessibility of the rights of way network seem unlikely to be regarded as 'strategic' for this purpose.

I would suggest that Ramblers approach to these changes should be:

- Acknowledging that the local government reorganisation will result in significantly fewer councillors in the priority areas, we should seek reassurances that effective channels of communication will be in place to allow public rights of way access problems to be reported and dealt with.
- Anticipating that public rights of way management will emerge as the responsibility of new unitary authorities (and learning from the fragmentation of these services in Essex currently), we should urge the streamlining of public rights of way network management, so that fewer separate agencies are involved, and that those that emerge use compatible and transparent management systems.

David Radford
Essex Ramblers



INNER LONDON *insights*

Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk Project

Now that we are into the better weather our volunteers are able to get out on the routes and make their signage and other improvements.

I'm pleased to report that London Loop volunteers Keith and George have recently been able to get some important signage improvement works done at Foots Cray Meadows on Section 2 of the London Loop. The works were agreed with the Friends group and Thames 21, and were completed by their volunteer work party. They included the re-installation of two out-of-ground posts, redirection of a route pointer, some ground clearance around a Loop post, plus erecting two new posts (provided by them). Keith and George then walked the route from Bexley station to Foots Cray, and fixed new Loop discs to three of the posts. They also managed to attach a metal 'flag' pointer to an existing metal pole at a junction of paths.

We're also grateful to the Cranford Park Project Officer and site team, who added discs and stickers from our supplies to make Section 10 of the London Loop easier to follow in the middle section of the park - and then shared their photos with us. On Section 15 of the Loop, a long-overgrown path leading to Sylvia Avenue was at last cleared, meaning a diversion was no longer needed.

We're expecting that, by the time you read this, four of our new posts, to which we'll add waymark discs, have been installed in Crofton and Darrick Woods on Section 3 of the London Loop by the Friends group volunteers. And on Section 8 of the Loop, we're helping with repairs to the Ophelia mosaic at Malden Manor.

These kinds of improvements might sound quite simple, but a lot of contact-making/relationship-building and tenaciousness goes into each and every one of them - as well as some physical hard work by a number of different people. A good number of us are involved in this project to improve the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk, and together we've taken massive strides in the last six years since we initially came up with the idea for this project ... but it's very much one waymark at a time ...

In May we held our annual in-person project volunteers meeting with guest speaker Paul McGarrity who was, until recently, the Cranford Park manager. The meeting always provides an opportunity for volunteers to meet each other and the project coordination team, to pick up a printed copy of our Annual Report, hear about what we've achieved together in the last year, and to ask questions and make suggestions. The meeting is also a chance for us to distribute supplies of waymark discs and stickers, vinyl overlays for fingerposts and Ramblers hi-vis vests. We replenished our supplies ahead of the meeting, including making Green Chain Walk stickers for the first time.



A London Loop marker post is installed at Foots Cray Meadows. Photo: Keith Rodwell

As anticipated in our last project update, revised guidance for the London Loop was published in February. Due to changes on the ground - mostly the waymarking improvements we have been able to make over the last 18 months, although inevitably other things deteriorate at the same time - we had to make changes to almost all the walk guidance documents. 21 of the 24 sections needed updating - so this is a huge piece of work involving many volunteers who go to walk the route with the existing guidance which the volunteer group developed a few years ago, and note any revisions needed. The guidance PDFs are then edited to ensure stylistic consistency, any updates to maps made, and the layout amended as necessary. The final stage in the process is for Transport for London (TfL) to check all the guidance to ensure that it adheres to their accessibility guidelines, which then enables them to link to it from their website. Thanks, as ever, to everyone who contributed to this work.

On the Inner London Ramblers website we continue to highlight blockages, such as fallen trees, affecting the routes, as notified to us by our fellow walkers. Flooding and very muddy paths were often the focus of our news updates until the dry weather in March. We're grateful for all the reports, and we know that many walkers check our website before setting out.

If you would like to get involved in our project, please contact me at vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk.

Clare Wadd
Vice Chair, Inner London Ramblers

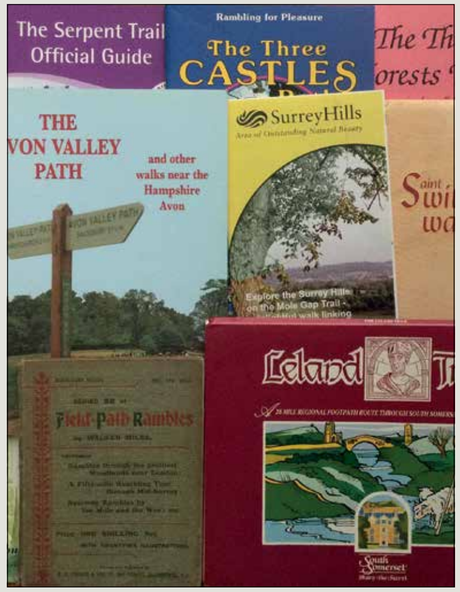
Ephemera *and some bits of old history*

It is possible that some of our older readers might try to count the number of guides to walking routes, be they short, local and easy dawdles or long-distance challenges across difficult terrains, they have on their bookshelves but haven't actually walked. It is often mentioned that there is the intention to purchase the guides but they don't get around to using them. One of our more senior plodders can report that his collection of unused guides would probably take about 10 years before he could reasonably use up his materials, some of which might now be out of date.

The more vigorous hikers might well keep the details of the walks they have completed and their records might well be significant. However, we still wonder why many of us purchase publications the content of which is unlikely to be fully used. Take for example Andy Bull's Pilgrim Pathways, offering 20 routes which sounds fine but they are scattered around England, Wales and Scotland so there is lots of journeying to do if you want to visit them all. Compare this with A Cornish Celtic Way by Nigel Marns which offers a complete hike through much of Cornwall rather than having walks spread across the UK. Similarly, Caroline Buckland's Hillwalking London offers a range of options which can be visited using a fair range of local public transport.

These comments should not be seen as negative as there is a long and interesting history with publications such as Paddy Dillon's Guide to the National Trails of Britain and Ireland published in 1994 which was very detailed. Many route guides are regularly updated while others are only published once. Older works by people like Walker Miles can still be of interest while some will just disappear. Some walkers enjoy the adventure of some of the older walking guides just to explore whether things have changed and that in itself can make for interesting stories.

John Pestle



Greenham Common anniversary:

This year sees the 25th anniversary of the reopening of Greenham and Crookham Commons in West Berkshire to the public after decades of military use. The commons were requisitioned by the Air Ministry in 1941 and repurposed as an RAF airfield the following year, before being handed over to the US Air Force later. In 2000. over a million tonnes of concrete and gravel were removed from the military runway and the site was reopened to the public. Now managed by Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust on behalf of West Berkshire Council, the commons have become havens for wildlife

Back to basics walk leadership training in The Lakes

Amanda Lee, a fellow Hillingdon Rambler and myself spent a week at Hassness in the Lake District at the end of March training to become holiday walk leaders for Ramble Worldwide Holidays. It was a full-on week, with 12-hour days, as it involved not just navigation and map reading but also dealing with clients, undertaking role play scenarios, handling emergencies, writing incident reports, diversity awareness and generally showing we had the right people skills to become a leader.

There were seven prospective leaders plus a member of staff going through the training which was to get us up to the silver level of the National Navigation Award scheme. Although I had previously obtained the silver qualification, I hadn't really put it to use since then as it's so easy nowadays to use a phone or tablet to plot/follow a route. Certainly my compass skills had been lost but the good news is that there is so much available on YouTube to remind you, I was able to brush up ahead of the course.

The first day was a gentle introduction and getting to know one another before map reading and map locating on the second day. Out in two groups we each had to lead a leg to a precise spot around the lake, which involved a mix of pacing and measuring. The following day we moved on to compass skills and how to take bearings, again heading out into more difficult terrain and being asked to lead the group to a spot roughly one metre square which certainly proved trickier than the previous day.

An indoor training day followed and again proved more difficult than expected with many scenarios discussed. Thankfully, both Amanda and I had brought two bottles of wine each to see us through the week - great minds think alike - as we certainly needed a glass or two before dinner to keep us going until 9pm.

Fast facts were another area we were assessed on - our ability to remember and impart facts in an engaging manner. I had been allocated Alfred Wainwright and his connection to Haystacks and Buttermere church. Thank goodness for Wikipedia and the internet as I was able to learn his ashes were scattered on Haystacks by his second wife, Betty, and that there is a memorial plaque in the church. For my second fast fact, I went off-piste and decided on Kendal Mint Cake, purchasing a packet off ebay with three types - brown sugar, white sugar and chocolate coated. Despite being known as the energy snack of choice for many walkers and climbers, it proved not to be very appealing to the group and I came home with half of it - so beware, it may be offered around on future walks!



Amanda (in blue) and Caroline (in pink), with trainer Hilary Cooper and another fellow attendee. Photo: Bernard Whishaw

For our week in the Lake District we were lucky weatherwise until the last day, even managing ice cream stops on two afternoons with Hilary, our group trainer, who got the fact that we needed a little bit of sugar and down time - referred to in the walk leader manual as 'cherry pie moments'. Unfortunately for Amanda and I, being strong candidates meant we got our assessment on the last day and whereas the first group had a lovely dry, sunny, clear day, we battled rain and wind gusts all day. Our glasses, compasses and maps were battling with the rain too and on several occasions we had to ask the assessor to go over where exactly he wanted us to head as trying to find a tiny 'x' among the rain drops proved hard. Likewise, visibility was less than 50 metres so there was no guessing or spotting features from afar. And he didn't ease up on us making us each do three legs for the assessment. Only mid-afternoon did we finally reach a hut where we took shelter for 10 minutes and poured the rain out of our boots!

The final assessment proved quite difficult and returning to our hotel for a hot shower afterwards proved a great relief. Anyway, all four of us in our group were awarded a silver and pass (70%) so going forward we can both lead Ramble Worldwide holidays up to grade 6, which means in future if you pick the company for your holiday, you may well end up with either Amanda or myself as your walk leader!

Caroline Wise
Hillingdon Ramblers

For more information on Ramble Worldwide Holidays go to rambleworldwide.co.uk or call 01707 537953 (Monday Friday 9am - 5pm, Saturday 9am - 1pm)

Remembering Felicity Kerr

In November 2024, we said goodbye to Felicity Kerr, a cherished member of our rambling community who led countless rambles for Croydon Ramblers. South Bank Ramblers. and was a familiar and friendly presence with the Capital Walkers. To honour her memory, I led a special walk - one of Felicity's signature routes in Kent and a perfect reflection of the landscapes and history she so clearly loved.

As we gathered at Borough Green, we shared fond memories of Felicity, her gentle leadership, her deep knowledge of the countryside, and her warmth on a ramble. Many were surprised and moved to learn of her life beyond walking - Felicity was a professional cellist. In a particularly touching moment, we played a recording of Glazunov's Chant du Menestrel, featuring Felicity on the cello. The haunting melody, drifting through the morning air, set a contemplative and beautiful tone for the day ahead. A total of 47 people turned up for the walk and we were honoured to be joined by Felicity's two daughters and members of her family, who walked alongside us in remembrance.

Our journey took us by way of Plaxtol, Ightham Mote - where lunch was taken at the National Trust's cafe - and Knole Park, before coming to a gentle close as we approached Sevenoaks. Most of the group headed for the train, whilst some, in a fitting finale to the day, stopped by a local pub to raise a glass to Felicity. The ramble was more than a day out - it was a heartfelt celebration of a life well-lived. Felicity Kerr will be remembered for her music, her kindness, and her love of walking - an inspiration with every step.

Tim Sai Louie
Capital Walkers



Felicity Kerr

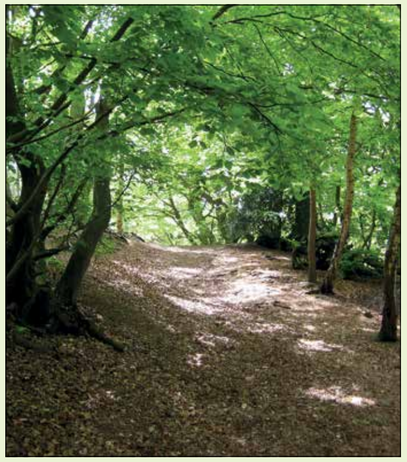


The group at Ightham

Salmons Brook guide

In the March issue Colin Saunders wrote about his new guide to this north London route. Sadly, Colin has since suffered serious health issues and been unable to respond to orders for the book. We apologise to those readers who requested a copy and wish Colin a successful recovery.

If you go down to the woods today...



In North Downs Woods,
whatever we may think, we are just
slight strands of movement on a path.
How much is lost, if we tie our plans
to time! At our own cost, we sacrifice
the rhyme of other lives around us.

Pause, and we shall see at first
the worlds in miniature underfoot:
the scurry-hurry of wood-ants under boots,
mining tunnels invisible below the loam
and chips of bark; the cones of bulging ants' nests
heaving with their busy summer lives.

Near south-faced, sunny orchards where grow
sweet-chestnut, smooth-trunked beeches,
in hedges beyond and to the north, bees
waltz or hover over little apples fattening there:
fly in and out of mulleins by the gate,
or spikes of foxglove rearing from the fern.

And where we choose to wait, or turn,
to still ourselves beside a farm-field's edge,
other movement may arrest us:
the shake of bearded barley ripening,
the ooze of sap---so slow, but sweet---
from yew and juniper in the heat.

In branches overhead, chaffinches---
so vivid and quick---dart twig to twig,
let loose rainbows of bright song to draw us
all along. Listen! Deep in scented shadow
we will hear soft tread or sudden leap of deer
leading their fauns away from fear.

If you go down to the woods today,
be moved by others' moving lives.
Breathe in that aromatic sap. Hear well
that interweave of sound. Don't miss what birdsong's
brightness may suddenly reveal: the true surprise
of walking in the woods is in your ears and eyes.

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher

SURREY snippets

Training day

Farnham & District Ramblers organised a Walk Leading and Navigation training day on Saturday 12 April, at Upper Hale, near Farnham. The event was open to all 16 groups across Surrey Area and this year we had a full house with all 20 places filled. This was an all-day training session designed to increase confidence in new and recently started leaders. It included theory and practical sessions using both maps and compasses.

The morning began with an overview of what the Ramblers expect from a new walk leader, including the requirement to be registered and to complete online training modules. Insurance and risk assessments were also covered. This was followed by a session on the types of paths and access land that can be walked, and how to select and plan a suitable walk. Following a refreshment break, the next session was on map reading and compass work. After lunch, attendees broke up into five groups, each with a trainer, and took a three-mile route around the nearby Farnham Park which required the use of map and compass skills taught in the morning. Glorious sunshine made this part of the day very enjoyable!

Several groups were represented, including Kingston, Reigate, Staines, Surrey Heath and Woking as well as Farnham. A big thank you goes to tutors Nick and Derek from Farnham, Jenny from Godalming & Haslemere, plus Paul from Farnham and Alan from Staines who assisted with the afternoon session in the park. We hope the day provided the participants with some really useful skills to help them navigate around the countryside!



Practising new skills. Photo: Sue Harvey

It is hoped that a similar course will be held in 2026.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

I can see clearly now



Work complete! Photo: John Stone

The viewpoint at Gangers Hill, to the south of Woldingham, was installed over 30 years ago in memory of a local walker. Despite previous maintenance, the last few years have seen it fall into serious disrepair and the vegetation start to block the view southwards. Having started to clear the undergrowth around the viewpoint in late 2024, Croydon Ramblers footpath working party returned to complete the work in March 2025.

With the aid of Surrey County Council's countryside access team, we removed all the rotten timber from the viewpoint and installed a new guardrail and bench. The viewpoint now provides a comfortable stopping-off point when climbing the steps up the hill and provides a great view southwards towards Oxted and beyond to the South Downs.

John Stone
Croydon Ramblers

BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Anniversary walk

Chiltern Young Walkers celebrated a major anniversary on Thursday 9 January. It was then 25 years since the group was formed (then called 20-30s South Bucks Ramblers Group but soon renamed Chilterns 20s-30s Walking Group.

A frosty Saturday morning on 11 January this year saw an incredible turnout of over 40 people gather at Amersham station before setting out to retrace the route of the first-ever group ramble to Great Missenden. We were delighted to see some familiar faces from the past including walk leaders and early members who came along to show their support and catch up with us.

The group is still going strong and we have an exciting year planned, but did you know the idea of having younger members groups in the Ramblers started in a bar in the Alps? For a full account of the history of our group check the new page on our website, kindly researched and written by Paul Rhodes.

Beth Stark
Chiltern Young Walkers



A frosty January day in the Chilterns. Photo: Paul Rhodes

Focus on Cuddington

Our work around Cuddington, a village close to our base in Haddenham, is finally bearing fruit after years of attempting to install gates on several well-used walks blighted by awkward stiles. Their parish council produces an excellent A3 full-colour map, based on Ordnance Survey mapping, which features six circular walks of various lengths (available at the local shop and pub for £1).

Now, with a proactive parish councillor and Chair both promoting footpaths and associated improvements, we have a rolling programme of gate installations and Donate-a-Gate opportunities. Last year we gated the walk to neighbouring Lower Winchendon, and the previous year a short circular walk close to Cuddington village centre. This year we are attempting to gate the five remaining stiles on the route to Haddenham. Negotiations have involved landowners varying from a willing allotments association, one farmer who will almost certainly give permission, to another very reluctant farmer. The latter has allegedly long been anti-gate, although we're not sure if anyone has actually talked to him, so we are hoping the Chair of the parish council will be able to cajole him into agreeing to replace the final two stiles on this well-used footpath.

As always, we rely on diplomacy and patience to achieve our goal of opening up routes to those less agile and to those walking with larger dogs. - 'Slowly, slowly, catchy monkey'.

Bill Piers

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

For details of the group's Donate-a-Gate scheme for North Bucks go to www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a0gate.html



Job done: RIPPLE volunteers (left to right) Jerry Michell, Phil Dudley, Keith Wheeler-Cherry and Peter Smith after a satisfying morning's work. Photo: Bill Piers

OXFORDSHIRE on-line

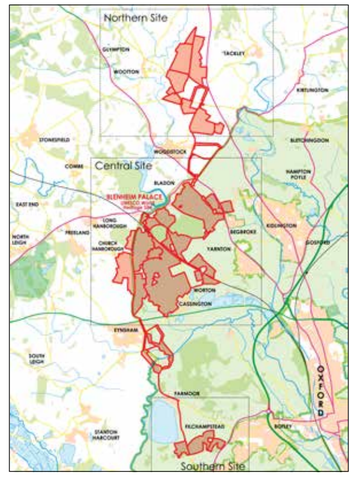
Area picnic

Come along and enjoy the Oxfordshire Area picnic on Sunday 29 June at Chilton Recreation Ground (SU 489589, OX11 0SR), adjacent to Chilton Village Hall (just behind the church), starting at 12.30. This year it is hosted by Vale of White Horse Group who will be providing cakes and hot and cold drinks, but bring your own picnic. The village hall will be open for toilets and shelter if it is wet.

Vale of White Horse Group will be leading six walks, all arriving at the picnic location at 12.30. The walks range from four and a half miles leisurely to 10 miles moderate, so there should be a walk suitable for everyone. The walk start points are: Chilton Village Hall car park (one walk of four and a half miles and another of seven miles), Blewbury recreation ground car park (walks of six and 10 miles), Chilton - in front of Chilton County Primary School, Downside (six miles) and Bury Down car park (five and a half miles). Details of the walks can be seen on the Oxfordshire Area website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk under the 'Walking' tab 'Monthly Reports'.

Richard Birch
Chair, Oxfordshire Ramblers

Large-scale projects proposed for Oxfordshire



The location of BWSF. Reproduced with the kind permission of Elaine Leggett and Stop Botley West Campaign Ltd.

Two large-scale projects are proposed for Oxfordshire - Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) and the South East Reservoir Option (Abingdon Reservoir). Both count as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) which are treated separately from normal local authority planning because of their size and importance to wider communities. NSIPs are approved by the appropriate government minister. Both projects, if approved, would have a significant impact on our public rights of way.

Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF): This would form Europe's largest solar farm on land mainly in West Oxfordshire covering an area 11 miles long and four miles wide, with over two million solar panels. Oxfordshire Ramblers is very concerned that due to the size of the proposed solar farm there will be a major adverse visual impact to users of some of the public rights of way throughout the period of the project, i.e. for decades to come. We estimate that around 60 public rights of way cross the proposed solar farm with a total length of 17 miles. We therefore object to the application because we consider that the negative visual impact and associated adverse health effects outweigh the benefits of the project.

The application for BWSF was accepted by the Planning Inspectorate on 13 December 2024. Oxfordshire Ramblers has registered as an 'interested party' which will allow us to participate in the examination stage of the planning application. Judith Wardle. Chair of West Oxfordshire Group, is our expert on the solar farm and is actively involved with the Stop Botley West Campaign group that is leading opposition to it. The Examining Authority was due to hold a preliminary meeting on 13 May, after which the Examination was expected to formally commence.

Abingdon Reservoir: Thames Water is proposing to build a new reservoir on farmland about five kilometres south-west of Abingdon, between the villages of Steventon, East Hanney and Drayton. The reservoir would take water from the River Thames during the winter months, store it until it was needed during the summer, then pump it back into the Thames for use mainly in the south-east. You can read about it on the Thames Water website.

The construction would take 10 years to complete with the current timescale aiming to start construction in 2030 with completion in 2040. The final two years of this 10-year period involves filling the reservoir. Thames Water says that the reservoir would be open to the public. Facilities would include car parking, a water sports centre with sailing, kayaking, angling etc on the main reservoir, cafe, benches and toilets around the reservoir; wetlands; bird hides; public education facilities; a network of paths for walking, cycling, wheeling, horse-riding; floating islands for nesting birds. The government has approved Thames Water's 10-year plan which includes the Abingdon Reservoir. Oxfordshire Ramblers will maintain a watching brief and participate in the formal consultation process once it starts.

Richard Birch
Chair, Oxfordshire Ramblers

Oxfordshire online continues on page 12.

Path maintenance

Some of our path maintenance teams were busy in the first quarter of the year.

In February, Banbury & North Oxfordshire group reinstated a footpath in neighbouring Northamptonshire. "We had seven volunteers," team leader John Gregory reported. "The footpath was completely obliterated by heavy vegetation that we removed. There was also lots of litter thrown from the motorway which we also cleared."

Members of Henley & Goring Ramblers group go out with the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers to clear footpaths, replace stiles with gates, and build steps on steep slopes. They are superbly prolific and proficient. For example, they were out on four days in February. One day involved a 'hit squad' where the team was split amongst several locations.

Vale of White Horse group's team, the Vale Path Volunteers, attended to paths in Ashbury, Letcombe Regis and Southmoor parishes, in addition to multiple visits to the scheduled ancient monument Scutchamer Knob to remove extensive overgrowth (see item below).

Dave Cavanagh

A haircut for Scutchamer Knob

You could easily walk past it, I know I have. And yet it's a scheduled ancient monument. The Knob is a mound or rather half a mound, following a dastardly deed in the 19th century, of which more later. That was but one event in a sequence of them since the Knob was constructed in the late Iron Age, over 2,000 years ago. The Vale of White Horse Ramblers path maintenance team, the Vale Path Volunteers (VPV), are making it more eye-catching by clearing the overgrowth of scrub. Scutchamer Knob is situated just 20 metres from the Ridgeway in the parish of East Hendred, near Wantage, in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL). It's a relatively small monument with a big history.



Archaeologist Dan Bashford explains the varied history of the site. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



The Ridgeway-side of the monument before the work started. Photo: Dave Cavanagh



Vale Path Volunteers finish off the work. Photo: Dave Cavanagh

On the first of the VPVs days at the Knob in mid-December, archaeologist Dan Bashford explained why this monument was so important. Dan is the Project Officer of the three-year Historic Ridgeway Project, financed mostly by Historic England with contributions from the NWDNL and the Friends of the Ridgeway. The Knob was initially a round barrow for the burial of the Wessex King Cwichelm in 696 CE. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle of 1006 CE refers to the hill on which the Knob sits as Cwichelm's Barrow, the hill now being called Cuckhamsley Hill.

One of the aims of the project is to remove scrub from a number of ancient monuments along the Ridgeway in the NWDNL, with the help of volunteers from the local community, managed by Hailey Gray, the Historic Ridgeway Volunteer Coordinator. The VPV have worked on clearing scrub - brambles, briar, gorse and small trees - for six half days to date, with the aim of returning Scutchamer Knob to a grass-covered mound.

In early Anglo-Saxon times the Knob was chosen as a meeting place for the shire moot - county parliament in modern parlance. Dan told us that disputes would be solved here and the will of the king at the time would be disseminated. No doubt it was also a venue for a good grumble about this and that. Eventually, this use of the Knob ceased and it became, said Dan "a meeting place, fair and major market until 1620." It was also used as a beacon hill, this use being thought to date from Elizabethan times, when fires would be lit on prominences to spread news or warnings of major threats.

Disaster struck in 1840. The landowner assumed that many bodies had been buried in the mound and that the soil could be used as fertiliser - for his rose beds. Consequently, his workers hauled away barrow-loads of the mound, leaving the current crescent-shape on the side that faces the Ridgeway. This activity also reduced the height of the mound from about eight metres to the current four metres.

As well as making the Knob more visible, the project aims to increase accessibility. To this end, Hailey widened and strengthened a walkway over the ditch bordering the approach to the monument from the Ridgeway and it is now suitable for mobility scooter users. The VPV and the Ridgeway & Thames Path National Trail Volunteers will also be improving access along the Ridgeway from the nearby parking area by filling potholes in the earth with crushed limestone. In order to tell the rich history of this unassuming Ancient Monument, an interpretation board will be put in place here and at the other monuments along the Ridgeway in the region. The Friends of the Ridgeway has contributed to the cost of these, and the NWDNL has funded a digital 'story map' to tell the tale of how the monuments relate to one another and how they have evolved.

The VPV, led by coordinator Pat Rosum, has undertaken to return each year, in early summer and winter, to keep the monument in good nick.

Dave Cavanagh

Vale of White Horse Ramblers, Vale Path Volunteers

Wish you were here?

Aramcao de Pera, Portugal

A group of Henley & Goring Ramblers had a great holiday in the Algarve at the end of March. We were lucky to have sunshine every day as the previous week had been unseasonably wet.

Three walks, two coastal and one inland, were led by our friendly and knowledgeable travel company (Involved Holidays) guides. On the other days we organised our own walks or took a boat trip along the spectacular coast. Coastal walks were either quite challenging, up and down the rugged and often crumbling cliffs, or very easy along the extensive board walks over the marshy lagoons and estuaries.

The Algarve was looking very green and wild flowers were in glorious profusion. There were many birds to watch and admire on the lagoon, marshy areas and along the rivers as well as around the coastal cliffs. We were lucky to see storks nesting and flying during an inland walk.

We explored Albufeira, Lagos and Silves, the former capital of the region in Moorish times. Food and accommodation in our hotel were excellent and we enjoyed lunchtime tapas and a memorable choice of afternoon ice creams!

Joan Clarke

Henley & Goring Ramblers



On the coast near Aramcao de Pera. Photo: Joan Clarke

Brussels

Seventeen members of the Capital Walkers group met at St Pancras International on Thursday 3 April to catch the 7.05am Eurostar for a day trip to Brussels, arriving there at 10.05am local time.

The visit began with a walk to the Grand Place, the central square. En route we stopped at several of the city's more unusual landmarks, including the famous Manneken Pis, as well as the lesser-known Zinneke Pis (the dog) and Jeanneke Pis (the girl). Once at the Grand Place we had a two-hour break. Group members used the time in various ways - some had lunch, others visited an art gallery or explored the City Hall, the Stock Exchange (Bourse), or browsed the shops.

Following the break we walked to the Galeries Royale Saint-Hubert, a historic shopping arcade and home to several upmarket boutiques. From there, the group continued to the Sablon district to visit St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral, before heading towards the upper part of the city which houses the Royal Palace and government buildings.

Our next stop was the European Parliament, where we took part in a tour of the Hemicycle, the main debating chamber. The tour provided insight into the workings of the European Union.

As the afternoon drew to a close, we walked past the imposing Palais de Justice, one of the city's major landmarks, before heading back to the station.

Overall, the day offered a good balance of sightseeing and cultural highlights following last year's day trip to Paris. Next year's planned walk will be in Lille.

Tim Sai Louie

Capital Walkers



Enjoying a sunny day in Brussels. Photo: Will Maier

Lagos, Portugal

Twenty-two of us enjoyed a week in the western Algarve at the end of March. We were based in Lagos where we had five days of walking and one day of resting. There were two walks on offer each day: a shorter one of four to six miles and a longer one of six to 10 miles. Highlights of the week included both groups crossing a rope (wire) bridge, the wonderful scenery of the Atlantic coast and walks along the Jurassic cliffs. At the end of each day we returned to our hotel where the hardier amongst us took a dip in the outside pool while others enjoyed the indoor pool and spa facilities.

Ed Berridge

South East Berks Ramblers



Following the Atlantic coast. Photo: Marian Cope

West Berks Ramblers have recently lost two important stalwarts of some years back

Paul Frances was Footpath Secretary for the Hungerford area for about 40 years - it might have been longer as he seemed to be a fixture on the committee! Paul was never one to give up on a footpath problem and our memory is of Hungerford Footpath 36 which took some 37 years to resolve by getting a bridge replaced over the canal to connect Hungerford Marsh to the road access and beyond. His grit, determination and stubbornness came to play once again to get a replacement bridge over the River Dun, again at Hungerford Marsh, which had been missing for over 50 years. Paul also arranged annual visits for London Ramblers with the inevitable tea before they boarded the train back to London.

Bob Withers was Chair of West Berks Ramblers for many years, way before I joined the group and then took over from him about 45 years ago! Bob was a direct man who stood no nonsense on the committee or on walks, but was so willing to share his knowledge and enjoyment of the walks he led. He was also Chair of Berkshire Area for many years until he resigned and I followed him in that capacity as well. There were many shared journeys to Reading for our meetings with lots of discussions that only ramblers would understand!

Two stalwarts who gave many hours of their time, and now so few current members will remember either of them, but that is the way life is and they would both understand that a new tranche of dedicated ramblers would take on their work.

Jane Kiely

Around the groups

Anniversary walk

A large number of Capital Walkers assembled at Eltham station in south east London on 12 January for a 15th anniversary walk to mark the foundation of the group. The walk, which followed the course of the first walk in 2010, was led by Phil Marson and also with us was our current Chair, Tim Sai Louie. Phil also started the Metropolitan Walkers back in 2007 to encourage younger people, in their 20s and 30s, to walk, and Capital Walkers was founded so that those getting older, including Phil himself, could continue walking together. Both groups are now amongst the most successful rambling groups in London. Walks take place all over the south east of England and all make use of public transport.

Kirk Martin

Capital Walkers



Leader Phil Marson and current Chair Tim Sai Louie are at the front. Photo: Kirk Martin

Those we have lost

Gordon Sencicle 1934 - 2025



Gordon in his later years with Kate Ashbrook, a former Chair of the Ramblers board of trustees.

Gordon Sencicle, who campaigned to keep scores of footpaths open and maintained in East Kent, has died at the age of 90.

Gordon described as a 'force of nature' - was the Ramblers East Kent Footpaths Officer for 25 years. He was also a founder member of East Kent Rambling Club and the White Cliffs Ramblers, as well as being Thanet correspondent for the Open Spaces Society for 11 years. As Footpaths Officer, his area took in 17 parishes in the Dover - Deal area. He stepped down from the role in 2013.

During his 25 years, Gordon campaigned relentlessly to keep footpaths open and properly maintained. This meant him continually walking the paths, reporting obstructions and contacting the county council to make sure work had been carried out. He looked into scores of path diversion proposals, agreeing to those he considered reasonable and objecting to those he felt were not acceptable.

In the years 1985 - 1995, when Dover District Council and Kent County Council were pursuing programmes of rationalisation which included huge cuts to the network of footpaths, Gordon was a major opponent in resisting the plans - writing to newspapers, lobbying councillors and opposing the local authorities at the inevitable public inquiries. Kent County Council finally gave up and considered the interests of the public much more in bringing forward path change orders.

Gordon attended 15 public inquiries, representing the Ramblers, giving evidence at six and providing expertise at the other nine. One of the highlights of his term of office was giving evidence, with other members of the Ramblers, at a three-day court hearing to keep open a footpath at Capel which the county council wanted to close. The judge ruled in the Ramblers favour.

He also played a leading role in the Ramblers campaign to take on Howletts Wildlife Park, which had wanted to divert a footpath to the main road. During the campaign, Gordon appeared on television. Being able to stop the path being diverted means that walkers now get a free view of the animals from the footbridge that crosses the park! Another of Gordon's major triumphs was in keeping open, on its definitive line, the footpath from the former Betteshanger Colliery to the main Deal to Sandwich road. It now crosses the area by means of three footbridges, installed mostly by volunteers in the late 1990s.

Gordon was born and brought up in Manchester, and moved to Kent in the 1960s. He was a chemist and spent eight years working at Pfizer at Sandwich. He was a Deal town councillor for three years. He and his partner Peter Cross had been together for 54 years.

Gordon was the last surviving member of East Kent Rambling Club, which started in 1958. He was eventually made club President. He led a huge number of walks for the club and for the White Cliffs Ramblers which he helped found in 1989. His walks were known for using footpaths which were threatened or rarely used. Even after he retired as a Footpaths Officer, Gordon still kept an eye on paths where there were problems.

In later years, a debilitating condition in Gordon's spine had developed which made walking increasingly difficult, finally confining him to a wheelchair. He bore his mobility issues with typical pragmatism and good humour.

Graham Smith

Walking from A to Z

Chilterns Weekend Walkers are known for their inventive collections of themed walks, but Anne Kimber's 'Alphabet Walks' have taken the group on its longest series so far. Anne had set herself the challenge of leading a walk every other week for a year when it dawned on her that the 26 routes could be pegged to the 26 letters of the alphabet. "It just came to me in a flash - a eureka moment", she says.

The marathon series began with walk A from Ashridge College in January 2024, amid intrigue over how Anne could possibly find routes to go with the problematic letters X and Z. At that stage, Anne admits that not even she knew the full line-up. "I didn't plan too far ahead at first as there was so much to do. Some letters were harder to find so I had to be creative, as there isn't anywhere in the Chilterns starting with a Z, for example."

For Anne, one of the joys of the alphabet series was discovering new places. "One of my favourite but most challenging walks was from Quainton which was only really chosen because it starts with Q. It ended up needing two recces - one done in blazing heat and the other in a storm. But it was worth it because Quainton is a gem. There is so much of interest there with great views, a windmill, village green, old almshouses and a cafe."

The Great British Weather took its toll on walks E from Eythrope and N from Naphill which had to be postponed because of flooding and rain. Walk T from Taplow went ahead in the face of Storm Bert. On Walk J from Jordans, walkers were menaced by a rogue horse.

Walk W from Wigginton was another of Anne's favourites. "I really enjoyed this one in an area little known to me. Our lunch stop at St Nicholas church was a really nice unplanned extra on a very cold day.

After 13 months and 156 miles, the series came to an end on a cold and foggy day in February this year with walk Z from Cowleaze Wood near Stokenchurch followed by celebrations in a nearby pub.

Including her recces, Anne walked 318 miles. Reflecting on the series, she said: "It was nice to hear several people commenting that they thought they knew an area well but that my walk had taken them on paths new to them. I love finding new and lesser-trodden routes."

The Alphabet Walks won't be forgotten. Anne is considering publishing them in a book for others to enjoy.

Mark Percy
Chilterns Weekend Walkers



Anne leads the way on walk G from Great Hampden.

Quiz time

Sharing its name with a farm animal, what is a female lobster called? Which London tube station is the only one with a 'z' in its name? These were two of the many questions put by quizmaster Jeff Balderson to more than 80 Croydon members who attended our 16th annual quiz. After a fish and chip supper, the prizes were distributed with wine for the winners, brain food (sardines) for those less gifted, and Smarties for those who won the interval picture quiz! It was a great evening of fun with wonderful quizzers. The answers to those two sample questions, by the way, were hen and Belsize Park.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers



Having fun at the quiz. Photo: John Tickner

First aid

Twelve Epsom & Ewell walk leaders attended a one-day first aid course on Friday 21 March run by Caroline Chapman, a qualified instructor. The course was designed to enable leaders to deal with situations they may encounter on a walk. They learnt how to assess a situation, protect the area from further escalation and how to get emergency help. They were told of the DRABC (Danger, Response, Airway, Breathing and Circulation) rule for dealing with a situation, to prioritise the treatment needed to help the patient and control the risk of any further infection.

The course started with CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and some dummy torsos were provided so that leaders could practice mouth to mouth resuscitation. We then went on to use a defibrillator. This is a very important device that could help save a life if used quickly. There is an app that can show where defibrillators are located.

The course was made more interesting by a couple of dramatic scenarios. One being where a walker's finger had been cut off, the idea being to see how the leaders coped with treating the casualty and what to do with the damaged hand and severed finger. A further scenario dealt with a walker who had collapsed and was unconscious. This required the use of CPR and placing the patient in the recovery position until professional help arrived.

The afternoon session covered a range of topics including asthma, bleeding, broken bones, burns, choking, diabetes, drowning, epilepsy, seizures, fainting, heart attacks, heat stroke, shock, etc. We were also shown how to apply bandages and what to have in a first aid kit.

It was a fun day out and we learnt a lot. Many thanks to Andrew Perks, our Chairman, for organising the event and to Caroline for passing on her knowledge.

Martin Thomas
Epsom & Ewell Ramblers



Dealing with a 'casualty'. Photo: Martin Thomas

Great start

Farnham Ramblers have got off to a great start in 2025 - with plenty of walks and events planned. The good weather lifted spirits and walk numbers - with nearly 40 members on a walk around More Park that included delicious refreshments (with brilliant cakes by Elisabeth) and a tour of walk leader Richard Holway's fabulous garden.

Our spring social was a great success and we enjoyed a presentation from David Rose and Geoff Burch who have extensive knowledge and involvement in the history of the railways in south west Surrey. We all became experts in the Westinghouse braking system!

As well as our usual range of walks, Glenn Rose is introducing some new extra-long (20-ish miles) walks on Saturdays for our more fleet-footed members.

We are always on the lookout for new walk leaders and comprehensive training is provided.

Celia Griffiths
Farnham & District Ramblers



The spring social. Photo: Celia Griffiths

Travel show

Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers held their annual travel show on Saturday 22 March. This very popular event gives members the opportunity to show their photos from travels taken in the previous year. Some lucky members travelled as far afield as Japan (Bella Best), Transylvania (Liz Cox) , and Svalbard (Heather Dillon). whilst group holidays in Weymouth and Lake Garda were illustrated by Margaret France and Jim Robertson. Don Gray showed us some lovely pictures of the Isles of Scilly and Paul Richards set his photos of local Surrey scenes to music.

In the interval, members shared a finger buffet organised by our hard-working social committee and with delicious food supplied by members. Technical aspects of the show were expertly dealt with by Jim Robertson.

Janet Cole
Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers



Gig racing off the Isles of Scilly. Photo: Don Gray

Given the boot

Veteran walker Keith Chesterton was literally 'given the boot' when he was presented with a birthday cake made in the shape of a walking boot at his 90th birthday party earlier this year. Keith has been a member of the Ramblers for 65 years. He founded the Guildford Ramblers in 1989 and was Chairman for 23 years. He is now our Honorary Life President. During his time with us he has led more than 1,000 walks and seen membership grow from 20 to over 300.

Keith has always been a keen walker; he remembers when he was aged eight asking his mother if they could walk home from the cinema, as he preferred it to the bus. Commenting on his life-long interest he said: "Walking is much more popular now than it used to be. People walk for many different reasons, some for fitness or to meet people, others for the love of the countryside or an interest in plants, trees and wildlife.

In earlier years Keith has climbed Kilimanjaro and trekked to Annapurna base camp. Closer to home he has completed the Surrey Three Peaks,Yorkshire Three Peaks and Welsh 3000s Challenges and has walked 11 of the best-known long distance paths in the UK. His other interests include his family, cycling and cross-country skiing when younger, and politics. He spent eight years as a Guildford borough councillor, and was lead for the environment, plus four years as a Surrey county councillor.

Richard Peters
Guildford Ramblers



The boot-shaped birthday cake.



Keith with family and walking friends at his 90th birthday party.

In the footsteps of giants

Hillingdon Ramblers don't only walk in Hillingdon or even in the Chilterns. We sometimes walk in central London and further afield. On 12 March, 19 of us went on an interesting walk from King's Cross to Waterloo via Primrose Hill, St John's Wood and Paddington. We couldn't let the opportunity pass by to join the tourists and Beatles fans in emulating the famous photo of the Fab Four crossing the road outside Abbey Road Studios. Colin, Richard, Debbie and Charles were up for a bit of fun. Not until afterwards did I spot two others who sneaked into the shot! Among other highlights of our walk were Coal Drops Yard, Camden Market, Lord's Cricket Ground, Hyde Park, Buckingham Palace and Horse Guards Parade. All very different from our rambles in the countryside!

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers



Colin, Richard, Debbie and Charles (alias John, Ringo, Paul and George) on the famous Abbey Road zebra crossing. Photo: Simon Thornhill

Disco night

Ivel Valley Walkers held a 70s-80s Disco and Quiz night on Friday 24 January at the Bedford Rowing Club. Members were invited to "Dig out those flares and New Romantics suits, and brush up on your music memories". We usually have a barn dance but that had to be shelved after our caller decided to retire so we tried something new. The sounds were great and everyone had a good time with many dressed in the 70s style. We will certainly do it again!

Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers



Getting into the spirit. Photo: Sandra Axtell

Introductory walk - who knows where it might end!

If you advertise widely enough you may be encouraged by the response. Barbara Crow, Chair of Kingston Ramblers, decided to take forward a suggestion to promote the Ramblers to a wider public. The invitation went out to 'join us for a free introductory historical walk of your locality led by your local rambling group'.

The time and meeting place were clearly shown and it was with great expectation that some 20+ local members were there to greet an unknown number of guests. We were not disappointed as the final number of guests was 22! Names were taken and it was discovered that one person had joined the Ramblers the night before, while another joined almost immediately after the walk. It was a highly successful walk from Hampton Wick station, taking in Bushy Park and Home Park to finish at Kingston station.

Brenda & David Horwill
Kingston Ramblers



The combined group of guests and members. Photo: Steve Ransome

Dinner with heroes



Before the feast. Photo: Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers gathered on Saturday 15 February for our annual dinner at the Axe & Compass pub, where a packed house enjoyed a lovely meal whilst watching a slideshow of photos taken on our walks over the past 12 months. These were a great reminder of all the wonderful places we have visited in all kinds of weather!

We also took the opportunity to recognise some of our unsung heroes to show how much we appreciate their support. We presented some very light-hearted awards to our heroes: Alan, who makes us laugh with his endless jokes; Karen, who bakes fabulous cakes; Mike and Helen, who organise our annual holidays amongst many other things; Ross, who is our music mastermind at quiz nights; and Peter, who is a dedicated wearer of our t-shirts! These may not be the Oscars but, to us, these heroes deserved their red-carpet night!

Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

Dodging the mud



On a misty Ivinghoe Beacon.

Over the wet winter months the Milton Keynes & District group took advantage of the city's extensive network of leisure routes and redways to avoid the mud and surface water that plagued much of the countryside. We did break the mould one Sunday and ventured to Ivinghoe Beacon where, despite the lack of views and muddy conditions, we enjoyed the challenge of the hills. Our Sunday walks ranged from five to 11 miles, with an average attendance of 16 people. It was encouraging to see some new people join our walks, including a visually-impaired man who was training for the London Marathon.

Sue Fisher
Milton Keynes & District Ramblers

Unlock walk

Fourteen North Beds members headed down to London on Saturday 12 April to take part in the 42nd 'Unlock' walk which has long been a regular feature on our programme. This event is put on by a church charity and involves a circular walk of about eight miles, with visits to seven churches which offer refreshments and toilets.

Each year sees a different part of London and this time the route took us to Kennington, Camberwell, North Brixton, Stockwell and Battersea. A map is sent out in advance and as the route is circular, groups can join at any convenient point and choose a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction. There is also a quiz and this has twice been won by Stephanie Wilson from our group. The weather was fabulous, the churches welcoming and the walk took in many interesting sights.

The trip also saw the first outing of our newly-acquired pointer and flag which proved incredibly useful for keeping the group together at times and drew comments of envy from others! We're looking forward to next year's Unlock walk which will be on 18 April.

Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers



On the Unlock walk. Photo: Sandra Kelsey

Canal walk



Enjoying the peace Photo: Brian Poulton

Eleven South East Berks Ramblers had a perfect day for walking the nine-mile section of the Kennet & Avon Canal Trail from Pewsey to Bedwyn in April. We enjoyed the peace and the views of rural Wiltshire as we walked along the canal towpath. There was a short climb at the Bruce Tunnel as the pedestrian route took us over the hill before rejoining the towpath on the other side. This was a section of the canal we had to miss out on earlier in the year when the towpath was closed at one point after a lorry carrying carrots left the road and ended up in the canal. Fortunately, the driver was unhurt.

Thanks to Steve Wells for organising the walk and to Alan Hoskins who operated a car shuttle to enable walkers to rejoin their cars or trains at the end of the walk.

Brian Poulton
South East Berks Ramblers

On the Greensand Way



In one of the many orchards passed. Photo: Shaun Claridge

Surrey County Council and Reigate Ramblers have replaced a rickety wooden stile with a kissing gate donated by SABRE. The location of the gate, on the Greensand Way east of Redhill, was specifically chosen to commemorate David Leedham. David was a valued member of SABRE who led a series of walks along the Surrey section of the Greensand Way in 2006 and 2007. We walked them again in 2023 in his memory. It was fitting that the new gate is on the section that his wife, Jackie, led. Jackie will lead a walk once the plaque is in place so that we can all see the gate.

Having completed the Surrey section, we then decided that we should complete the whole trail which extends into Kent, with Shaun offering to organise and lead these walks. The first section from near Westerham to Shipbourne was covered in July 2024 with the next four stages being completed over two weekends.

We completed the Shipbourne to Linton and Linton to Fairbourne Heath legs over the weekend of 22 - 23 March. We saw lots of daffodils, primroses and early flowering magnolia on the Saturday walk (and a serious lack of open pubs!) and enjoyed a fantastic Italian meal on Saturday evening. Some of us woke up to a burst water main in Wateringbury and missed out on our cooked breakfast! We dashed to a local supermarket to stock up on bananas, pastries and the all-important coffee while the rest of the group sent good-humoured messages to say how much they were enjoying their breakfasts elsewhere! Our Sunday walk featured many apple orchards and the Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats before ending with a drink in the Pepper Box inn at Fairbourne before heading home.

Clair Baynton
SABRE (Surrey and Beyond Ramblers for Everyone)

An experiment



Looking forward to lunch at the Cock Inn. Photo: John Tickner.

On a pleasant day last November I was driving towards Reigate where my other half was going to treat me to lunch in one of my favourite pubs (of which I have many) when we were stopped by an officer of the law who informed us that there was a big fire ahead and we needed to turn back. No problem I thought as I worked out an alternative route which happened to take us past the Cock Inn at Headley. It must have been at least 20 years since we had been to the pub so we decided to call in.

It was after tucking into a meal, followed by a very tasty apple and plum crumble with some rather fancy custard, that I noticed a group of about 15 men in walking gear had turned up and were occupying some reserved tables. It transpired that some were U3A members and others just friends who all enjoyed walking and going to the pub for lunch. Now this got me thinking that I could organise the same sort of thing for Croydon Ramblers. After confirming with the pub manager that we would be most welcome to make a booking, I managed to squeeze us in for 20 February, and put the date and a walk in the group programme.

To my surprise, it took off like a rocket. There I was thinking that all my fellow ramblers were keen to walk at least 10 miles, existing on a banana and a sandwich. But no, seven or eight miles followed by at least two hours for a nice pub lunch and a few beers seemed to be a very acceptable offer! As we had 24 keen lunch-goers booked, we were allocated to the pub's Derby Room which has a maximum capacity of 24 - well, that was handy! When the day came, the weather was pretty grotty and a gale was blowing. We got to the pub at 11.50, got our drinks, settled into our space and tucked in. Some of us could not resist a pud to finish off the meal and at about 2.25pm we decided it was time to wobble off to Epsom Downs, about three and a half miles away.

I asked everyone to let me know what they thought about our walk and long lunch and the good news was that all the comments were positive. The experiment was a success, so I will just have to do it again. I know that many groups do include a visit to a pub for lunch as a matter of course, but as Croydon Ramblers walks sometimes have as many as 40 or 50 walkers, it is not really practical.

John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers

Amazing achievers

The South West Coast Path adventures of three of our members were completed last year. Whilst Erika Witt had held a 40-year ambition to walk the national trail, Anne and John Cheese started it with a three day trip to Cornwall whilst their boiler was being repaired.



Erika Witt

After nine months of planning, Erika finally started walking the path from Minehead in May 2022. Having already walked about 130 miles in bits and pieces over the years, there was just the remaining 500 miles left to do! Her journey began with camping in Porlock - Erika has excellent girl guiding skills - and hoped to get to Bideford in her first two-week stint. The first day was stunning, with fantastic weather, wonderful views and lovely spring flowers. Evenings were taken up with delicious campfire meals like corned beef hash and baked beans, with a glass of nicely-chilled red (wrong bottle in the coolbox). Minehead to Instow was completed that May, followed by Instow to Tintagel in July. September saw Erika back to complete the Bude to Harlyn Bay section before packing the tent away for the winter.

In May 2023, Erika was back. The first day was Cape Cornwall to Land's End, which she found extremely challenging. The path then did get a little easier and pleasurable, and the wild spring flowers were again stunning. The weather was mostly perfect but the nights under canvas could be cold (requiring a three-season sleeping bag, king size duvet, blanket and a hot water bottle). Sections between Cape Cornwall and Falmouth were completed in May, followed by a further trip in July to complete the Portscatho to Downderry section.

In April 2024, Erika made the decision to tackle the last section of the path full-on, so the tent was abandoned for the luxury of bed and breakfasts. Erika spent much of the spring and early summer walking the coast, occasionally being joined by Harvey, one of her grandsons, either walking the trail or enjoying the Farnham group holiday in Swanage (which must have seemed like a rest). Finally, on Sunday 7 July 2024, the route was completed and Erika was met at South Haven Point by friends and family, plus all the grandchildren holding banners aloft whilst letting off streamers to celebrate.

Erika decided to raise funds for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice during her walk and managed to raise over £1,000 for the Surrey charity.

By contrast, Anne and John Cheese took a very different approach to walking the demanding route. In the beginning they didn't set out to walk the entire path. It all started when the boiler in their house needed to be replaced and they went away to Liskeard in Cornwall for three days to give the plumber more space to get on with it. Like many of their subsequent accommodation choices, being inland, Liskeard offered lower prices, good public transport links to the start or end of sections and easy access to both the north and south coasts so they could pick each day's walking for the best weather.

On the way home from this first trip they worked out that they had covered five per cent of the South West Coast Path in three walks so it sparked the idea that maybe they could try to complete the route over the years heading into their dotage! It became a bit of an obsession as the path is stunning and walking is a fantastic way to get to know the south west, the flowers, the wildlife, the tides, the ferries and meeting the locals when using public transport.

Not being slaves to the direction of travel or having to walk sections back-to-back worked well for them. They kept a log and photos to ensure that they didn't inadvertently miss out any bit of the 630 miles. Finally, after six and a half years, 11 trips and 56 walks, they strolled along Studland Beach in Dorset to complete the national trail at the blue marker by South Haven Point.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers



Anne Cheese.