SOUTH EAST
Walker
No. 134 September 2026

The Thames Path at 30

The 30th anniversary of the Thames Path National Trail was celebrated with a 24-stage relay walk covering the full 185-mile length of the trail, from its tranquil source in the Cotswolds on 5 June to its finishing point at Woolwich on 28 June.

It was a rare wet day for the start of the relay leg from Eynsham. Photo: Thames Path National Trail

Des Garrahan writes: On Friday 5 June, Dame Fiona Reynolds, best known as Chair of the National Audit Office, former Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and Director-General of the National Trust from 2001 to 2012, started the full-length baton relay walk at the source of the Thames.

Many of these relay legs were led by Ramblers members and this is a wonderful opportunity to thank all who took part in the celebration. Along the way we welcomed local councillors, poets, artists and walkers who were new to the Thames Path National Trail.

Incidentally, on Thursday 11 June, I led the six-mile section from Eynsham, Oxfordshire. It rained solidly all day and was the only day of rain for the relay. Furthermore, from this vantage point it was the only rainy day I remember from our record-breaking summer. The walk showcased all that is great about the Thames Path National Trail and provided a magnificent advertisement for riverside walking.

The Thames Path is still the only National Trail to follow a river from source to sea.

Is it too much to ask that the Government, under a new leadership, revisit their manifesto commitment to create nine new national river walks and three new national forests? They go on to say: "As part of our plans to improve responsible access to nature, Labour will create nine new National River Walks, one in each region of England, and establish three new National Forests in England, whilst planting millions of trees and creating new woodlands.. Labour will expand nature-rich habitats such as wetlands, peat bogs and forests so families can explore and wildlife can thrive, including on public land." On their own admittance they have made no progress on this for two years and the proposals I have heard lack ambition and appear to be half-hearted access to nature projects done on the cheap.

Work continues, albeit slowly, on the various footbridges that remain closed. Near Marlow to temporarily replace the closed Temple Footbridge, a small eco-friendly community boat ferry service is currently helping walkers to cross the Thames (see Bryan Ferry bridges the gap, page 2). It's available from 10am to 4pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and costs £2.50 each way. Further details can be found on the Bryan Ferry the Ferry's Facebook page.

This month sees the return of Totally Thames, the month-long celebration of the River Thames in London. This features major river-themed arts events such as Catherine Yass's 'Turning the Tide' (17 - 20 September), Culture Cargo (1 - 30 September), and numerous live performances, exhibitions, and community celebrations. This has long been an excellent festival with something going on every day in September. For details of the festival visit https://thamesfestivaltrust.org/artistic-programme/...

Kleo Zhao of South Bank Ramblers reports on the final stages of the relay walk in London: On the morning of Saturday 27 June, 32 walkers gathered beside the Thames at Blackfriars in London, ready to carry the relay baton to the Cutty Sark at Greenwich, where it would be handed to the final team bound for Woolwich.

South Bank Ramblers were proud to lead this leg of the relay. Jointly led by Craig Dunant and I, our seven-mile walk followed one of the most scenic and historically rich sections of the Thames Path. Knowing that the baton had travelled all the way from the Thames' source made carrying it through the heart of London particularly special.

The day began cool and fresh, providing ideal conditions for setting off. By the afternoon, however, the temperature had climbed to around 32 degrees, bringing hot and humid conditions. Despite the heat, spirits remained high. We were also treated to the spectacular sight of Tower Bridge opening to allow a tall sailing ship through.

For the walkers, it was simply an enjoyable day on the Thames. Behind the scenes, however, the event was the result of weeks of planning. We worked closely with the Thames Path National Trail team and the relay organisers to coordinate timings, publicity and the all-important baton handover, while also carrying out route checks and risk assessments.

Within the South Bank Ramblers, the event was very much a team effort. While Craig and me jointly led the walk, committee members and volunteers all played their part. Hilary Jarvis, Dick Dunmore, Gail Bourne and Dave Hetherington all joined the walk to provide additional support, together with fellow walk leader Richard Hodkinson. Hilary acted as back-marker while Dick took on the role of mid-marker, helping to keep the group together. Ruth Le Guen documented the day with photographs, capturing both the scenery and the spirit of the occasion.

The relay also demonstrated the close collaboration between Ramblers groups. The four leaders responsible for the London sections, representing three Inner London Ramblers groups, set up a dedicated WhatsApp group and email group to coordinate arrangements, share updates and respond quickly to changing circumstances.

Tim Sai-Louie, Chair of Capital Walkers and Inner London Area, had planned to lead the previous two London legs. Unfortunately, the Met Office's red weather warning for extreme heat meant that Thursday's walk had to be cancelled in the interests of participant safety. Undeterred, Tim successfully led Friday evening's walk from Battersea Power Station to Blackfriars, ensuring the relay continued into the weekend.

Jackie Gower, Chair of West London Ramblers, kindly provided the high-visibility jackets for our volunteer marshals and worked closely with us over the baton handover. The following day, she led the final leg from the Cutty Sark to Woolwich with an impressive 65 walkers, bringing the month-long celebration to a fitting close. The finale also attracted BBC London news, helping to showcase the Thames Path 30th anniversary relay and the work of Ramblers volunteers to a wider audience.

Looking back, what I remember most is not the logistics or even the famous landmarks, but the people. Across the London stages of the relay, volunteers from three Inner London Ramblers groups, the Thames Path national trails team, the Drinkable Rivers campaign and, of course, the many walkers who joined us came together to celebrate this special milestone.

The group at the end of our section in front of the Cutty Sark at Greenwich.

Walkers gather at Blackfriars.

Baton bearer Nick with walk leaders Craig and Kleo.
Photos: Hannah Gutteridge

For South Bank Ramblers it was a privilege to play our part in celebrating 30 years of the route. Carrying the baton from Blackfriars to Cutty Sark was a memorable experience, but seeing so many people generously give their time, enthusiasm and support made it a truly fitting celebration of a trail that has connected people with the River Thames for three decades.

Kleo Zhao
South Bank Ramblers

Sarah Inwood from Staines Ramblers was on the Walton Bridge to Hampton Court stage:

Staines Ramblers were invited to join the Walton Bridge to Hampton Court stage of the Thames Path relay walk on Tuesday 23 June.

Organised by Habitats and Heritage in collaboration with Drinkable Thames the walking party included Cllr Judy Sarsby, Mayor of Elmbridge Borough Council; Alex, Hannah and Becky from Habitats and Heritage, Drinkable Thames. We were all welcomed at Hampton Court Lock by the lock keeper and the Chair of Habitats and Heritage.

Arriving at Hampton Court.

News in brief

New bridge links Surrey heathlands: As well as carrying walkers and vehicles over the A3, the newly-installed Cockcrow Bridge (at grid ref TQ 078588), allows wildlife to move between Wisley and Ockham Commons, near Cobham. National Highways constructed the bridge as part of works to remodel the A3/M25 junction nearby and say that it has been used by sand lizards, deer and badgers who have their own segregated heather-covered area on one side of the crossing.

New bridge links Surrey heathland.

The Queen Elizabeth II Garden: This enclosed two-acre climate-resilient garden in Regent's Park in London, opened on 27 April and features many of the species liked by the late Queen Elizabeth. It is located in a former area of glasshouses near the junction of Chester Road and Broad Walk, and open during normal park hours.

The Queen Elizabeth II Garden.

Constable 250: Events continue to mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of the artist John Constable with two small exhibitions in London. Burgh House in Hampstead (burghhouse.org.uk, 020 7431 0144) has John Constable in Hampstead until Sunday 20 September while the British Museum (britishmuseum.org) offers John Constable - Views of Nature in Room 90a until Sunday 4 October. Constable lived at a number of addresses in Hampstead and is buried in the parish church there. His last home in Hampstead (pictured) - at what is now 40 Well Walk and not open to the public - is near Burgh House.

King Edward Memorial Park transformed: At Wapping in east London, the last of seven new public open spaces created as a result of the Thames Tideway (or 'Super Sewer') project opened in August. It has extended the King Edward Memorial Park out over the River Thames and improved a section of the Thames Path through the area. New seating and artworks have been incorporated into the work.

Grosvenor Square: London's second largest square reopened on 20 July after a £25 million, one-year refurbishment. The six-acre square in Mayfair has been made more resilient to rising temperatures with the addition of 70,000 more plants, 44 new trees and two new wetland areas.

Constable 250.

King Edward Memorial Park transformed.

Grosvenor Square.

Bryan Ferry bridges the gap

Chilterns Weekend Walkers have become the first walking group to sail round a Thames Path closure on a boat named after Roxy Music star Bryan Ferry,

When the wooden footbridge over the Thames at Hurley was closed in May 2023 after falling into disrepair, walkers were forced on a road diversion through Temple and Bisham. All that changed in late April this year when Marlow councillor Justin Whelan launched 'Bryan Ferry' after working for a year to convert a 12-seater boat to solar power and negotiate permission to start the ferry service. "Boat operators told me a ferry service wouldn't be commercially viable and the Environment Agency made it clear that there was no immediate plan to replace the bridge," said Justin. "So I had to step in and quite literally bridge the gap for the sake of walkers and the local community."

"Daily passenger numbers have ranged from five to 170, so you never know what each day will bring, but walkers are lovely people and it's a pleasure to welcome them on board. Most are grateful to sit down and relax for a few minutes and share their stories while we take them across the river."

While friends and families walking the Thames Path have been quick to jump on board, walking groups have been slower to embrace the service.

In June, Chilterns Weekend Walkers became the first group to include the ferry ride in a walk when veteran leader Alan Shiell organised a five-and-a-half miler from Hurley to Marlow along the Thames towpath, returning to Hurley on the south side of the river via All Saints Church in Bisham.

Alan said: "Crossing on the ferry was an absolute delight and everyone enjoyed it. Someone even said it was a shame the journey wasn't longer."

Members of Chilterns Weekend Walkers with Bryan Ferry! Photo: Jales Tippell

A month later we were back-on a walk featuring TWO rides on Bryan Ferry. Liz Hirst led 14 walkers on a midweek stroll from Marlow to Hurley where they crossed the river for a picnic, followed by a return ferry ride and a walk back to Marlow.

Mark Percy
Chilterns Weekend Walkers

White Cliffs Walking Week

Setting off on the Kent coast. Photo: Faye Smith

Get ready to lace up your walking boots and explore the breathtaking landscapes of south and east Kent. Running from Sunday 4 - Saturday 10 October, the White Cliffs Ramblers Walking Week returns with an exceptional schedule of daily guided walks designed for outdoor enthusiasts of all experience levels. Best of all, every walk during the week is completely free, led by qualified White Cliffs Ramblers volunteer walk leaders, and open to all.

This year the White Cliffs Ramblers are collaborating directly with the White Cliffs Country Partnership to extend the programme. As these walks are included in the partnership's wider regional advertising, the walks will enjoy heightened visibility and a vibrant, community-focused festival atmosphere. The week features one or two guided walks every day across the scenic landscapes of Deal, Dover, Sandwich and east Kent, ensuring there is always a fresh adventure waiting just around the corner.

A highlight of the festival is to celebrate the opening of the King Charles III England Coast Path. Several specially chosen routes throughout the week will incorporate sections of this magnificent new national trail. Walkers will have the opportunity to experience clifftops, pristine beaches, and sweeping coastal margins right to the water's edge. From panoramic views across the English Channel toward France to the iconic chalk heights of the White Cliffs, these coastal routes showcase the very best of Britain's maritime heritage.

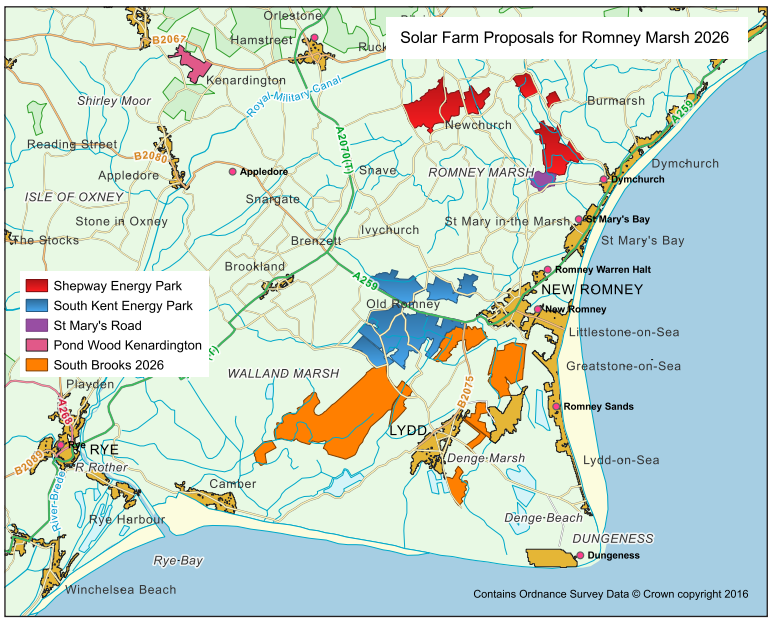
For those looking to trade sea spray for peaceful valleys and ancient history, the programme also features a three-day Inland Camino walk. Starting in the historic heart of Canterbury and ending at the coastal town of Folkestone, this inspiring pilgrimage route covers roughly nine miles each day.

Whether you choose a morning coastal stroll, a guided ramble along the newly accessible national trail, or the multi-day inland camino journey, this October walking week will offer an unforgettable way to experience the beauty, history and community spirit of Kent.

For details of the walks programme go to https;//www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk/whats-on/white-cliffs-walking-festival-2026 or https://whitecliffsramblers.org.uk/white-cliffs-walking-festival.

Tony De Voil
White Cliffs Ramblers

Solar farm/factory proposals in Kent



This map shows the proposed solar arrays on Romney Marsh.

Some of the land that would be covered by solar panels if the New Ash Green solar proposal goes ahead.

Public rights of way in Kent continue to be threatened by a disproportionately large number of proposals for solar factories - they are far too urbanising to be called solar farms.

Stone Street Green Solar, Aldington

This extremely large development has received a Development Consent Order from the Secretary of State. Aldington Parish Council made a request for a Judicial Review of this decision on the grounds that it did not take enough account of the nearby historical buildings. The first stage of a Judicial Review is a Preliminary Hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice and unfortunately the judge found that the application made was 'without merit'.

Local campaigners are now intending to collaborate closely with the planners at Ashford Borough Council, because it is these officers who will agree and supervise the finer details of the conditions attaching to the Development Consent Order. It is hoped that this process may mitigate the worst impacts of the development - including the proposal by the current developer, Evolution Power, to substantially reroute many of the 16 public rights of way impacted by this project.

New Ash Green Solar

The proposal to install a 49.9 megawatts solar factory from 72,000 solar panels on 235 acres near New Ash Green was reconsidered at the Sevenoaks planning meeting on 2 June and the members of the Planning Committee refused to accept the recommendation of their officers that the application be approved. The application retains all the existing public rights of way on the site, including one proposed public right of way. However, the area is particularly attractive and it will be the closest area to an increased New Ash Green population for recreational walks.

Following lots of hurried discussions, the Chief Planning Officer cooperated with some of the members to agree a counter recommendation that the application was refused. The reasons for the refusal were listed in the recommendation, but they were mainly based on the fact that harm to the visual amenity would be significant and would not be compensated for by the national benefit of the energy created. Other reasons were that the proposal would be contrary to various sections of the Local Plan, that there would be harm to nearby heritage assets and the danger of fire.

This all seems to hinge on the 'significant harm' to the visual appeal of a beautiful valley next to a residential area. The developers had claimed that the harm would not be significant and the officers had concurred. I think this is a key argument in the battle over solar.

South Brooks Solar

The scheme promoters EDF Energy and PS Renewables have launched their public consultation on the latest proposals for South Brooks Solar. The in-person consultation sessions ran from 11 June to 4 July. Technical webinars were held online during the consultation period.

The impact of the proposals on public footpaths in the area is a concern, but it is also a concern that the impact of the various very large proposals on Romney Marsh will be to change the appearance of the area from all directions, particularly the Saxon Shore Way along the cliffs bordering the marsh.

South Kent Energy Park

This proposal is another one of the very large applications on Romney Marsh. It is for a 859-hectare site near to the village of Old Romney. The proposed developers are a company called Low Carbon. They have recently produced a newsletter and project update. The main news is that they have now submitted the Scoping Report to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). The Scoping Report is a list of the things that the developer feels should be considered by PINS who then respond with their view of the items to be considered. The timeline on the project suggests that the second phase of public consultation will be in the first quarter of 2027. They are aiming for a decision on the application in early 2029.

Goshall Valley/Ash Levels

Dover District Council refused a planning application for a solar array to be installed at Goshall Valley/Ash Levels in December 2025. In doing so they went against their officer's recommendation, essentially on the grounds of the site's proximity to Richborough Fort/Castle. The developer has submitted an appeal and this is due to be heard in September. Details of the planning application can be found at https://publicaccess.dover.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=S4XFG7fZ01R00. Although no public rights of way are directly impacted, there are a number in close proximity, with views of Richborough Fort. These views would be impacted by the proposal.

Paddy Herlihy
Solar Array Coordinator, Kent Ramblers

Walking with the London Blind Ramblers

For a stimulating weekend, invite the London Blind Ramblers group. Early May marked our third annual walking weekend with the group, who are old friends by now. Croydon member Jan Campion (whose grandson Max is visually impaired) organised transport and accommodation at the Coulsdon Manor Hotel for the 11 guests who joined Croydon Ramblers for a weekend of walking in the Surrey Hills.

They included a former journalist on the Financial Times foreign desk (how impressive is that?), a radiologist from New Zealand doing pioneering research on PET scans, a writer of theatre commentaries for the visually impaired, and an IT specialist at a government department. Lacking the sense of sight the rest of us take for granted, our guests compensate by being lively conversationalists. Amongst the topics discussed as we walked were the unbelievable recklessness of the 47th US President on the international stage (all), recent local election results for the London boroughs we live in (me), the perimenopause (not me), and why 'The Magic Flute' is not a good choice for your first visit to the opera (that was me put in my place). At times we got so engrossed in the discussion we almost forgot our role as guides to provide a commentary on the scenery.

By now we know that London Blind Ramblers members are capable of taking most things in their stride, even when fallen trees blocked the path from Old Lodge Lane (see the photo). Such obstacles are as nothing to folk who have climbed the three national peaks in three days (no, me neither), gone gliding and skiing, walked the Cleveland Way, and enjoyed tandem cycle rides (no, on the back - don't be silly!)

Pausing only to draw breath, Jan is already planning for next year's weekend of walking with the London Blind Ramblers. In addition to Jan, our thanks go to the Croydon volunteers who led walks, guided and provided transport over the weekend. We'd happily do it all again.

Peter Southgate
Croydon Ramblers

Climbing over obstacles was no problem for our guests.
Photo: Peter Southgate

Croydon Ramblers with their guests
Photo: John Tickner

... and a south London stroll

On Saturday 6 June I led a joint walk with the London Blind Ramblers from Sydenham Hill in south east London. A group of 32 people, including six people with sight impairment, were taken on a 6.5 mile hike, passing London's last remaining toll gate, established in 1789. It has a charming price board quoting, for example, tuppence ha'penny for each score of sheep, lamb or hog - current price for cars £1.20!

We walked past the beautiful Dulwich College into Dulwich Park for lunch, then through parks, woods and gardens to One Tree Hill to see the Oak of Honour, where Queen Elizabeth I is reputed to have rested in 1602, and from where nearby Honor Oak Park gets its name. We also came across an odd structure resembling a small bandstand, but which is actually a gun emplacement where Zeppelins were shot down in World War 1, a spot now offering fine views over London.

Finally we continued through beautiful Horniman Gardens and Sydenham Woods back to the start point. Despite a mixture of sun and rain, a good time was had by all.

Sue Ledger
Bromley Ramblers

In Horniman Gardens Photo: Sue Ledger

OXFORDSHIRE *on-line*

Area AGM

The Oxfordshire Area AGM will be on Saturday 30 January at Wootton & Dry Sandford Community Centre.

Group AGMs

Banbury & North Oxfordshire: 21 November, Longford Park Community Centre, 1pm

Bicester & Kidlington: 14 November, Begbroke. 2pm

Henley & Goring: 20 November, The Christ Church Centre, Henley on Thames, 7pm

Oxford City: 7 November, The Plough, Wolvercote, 1pm

Thame & Wheatley: 21 November, HoltonVillage Hall, 2pm

Vale: of White Horse: 7 November, West Hendred Village Hall, 1.30pm

West Oxfordshire: 7 November, Combe Reading Room, 1pm

Oxon Weekend Walkers: 22 November, The Red Lion, Eynsham, 3pm

Further details on eg pre-AGM walks, lunch opportunities, parking, will be found in the Oxfordshire Ramblers online walks programme nearer the time.

Dave Cavanagh

Finding the way:

A further one-day 'Explore with Map and Compass' course is being planned by East Sussex member John Harmer for Saturdays 17 or 24 October, in Battle.

A standard charge of £10 applies with reduced rates available. Contact John if you are interested on 01424 773998 or at johnharmer31@outlook.com.

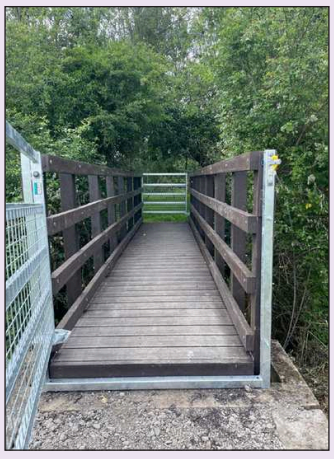
BERKSHIRE *bites*

Footbridge replaced

This footbridge is located between Warfield Church and Malt Hill on Warfield Footpath 7. It was in a dangerous condition and needed repair/replacement. Much of the damage was caused by cattle using the bridge, the gates at each end should prevent this from happening in future.

South East Berkshire Ramblers maintain a very close and productive relationship with Bracknell Forest Council's public rights of way team. The group carry out regular inspections of local footpaths and the council carry out any maintenance work required, sometimes with the help of Bracknell Conservation Volunteers. South East Berkshire Ramblers were happy to contribute £2,000 towards the costs of constructing the new bridge

Brian Poulton
South East Berkshire Ramblers



The old and the new. Photos: Rob Soloman

Beware low-flying sheep

Peter Maguire, a member of South East Berkshire group, recently had a possibly unique experience when he was knocked down by a low flying sheep. He was walking along a lane in South Wales when a sheep jumped off a high bank into the path of an oncoming car. The car hit the sheep and launched it towards Peter who took the full force of the impact. This resulted in a 17-hour visit to two hospitals, which, considering Peter will be 90 next year, was a very good outcome. I understand that the sheep was not so fortunate.

Brian Poulton
South East Berkshire Ramblers

Working with the local community at Sonning

Ramblers and residents take a break. Photo: Ray Sharp

Loddon Valley Ramblers have completed the resurfacing of a Thameside path in Sonning, with major help from local residents. The first phase of the resurfacing work was undertaken last autumn, when the eastern end of Sonning Footpath 1, which connects Sonning and Charvil along the southern bank of the Thames, was improved to make it much easier to use.

The work was funded by the Ramblers Path Maintenance Fund. As it proceeded, our volunteers were joined and helped by some of Sonning's residents, who appreciated its benefits, particularly for less able residents and families (who had been finding the muddy path increasingly difficult to use). So much so that the villagers were keen to complete the job and resurface the western end of the path as well, all the way to Sonning bridge.

Sonning resident and Ramblers member Paul Benton then played a crucial role in enabling this second phase of the work to proceed this summer by securing funding for materials for work on the western end from local charities in the village. As well as that, Paul worked with our project manager Ray Sharp to get local residents to help us complete the work.

The photograph shows how successful this was, with a large group of people turning out. Residents and our volunteers were almost equally represented, and this was probably the largest working party that the group has ever assembled.

Reading University also contributed by allowing access across their land for delivery of materials, and the project is a testament to what can be achieved when Ramblers groups work with the local community.

Steve Vale
Loddon Valley Ramblers

Trail signposted

Loddon Valley Ramblers have completed the signposting of the Lower Earley Green Corridor trail. This is a three-and-a-half mile (mostly) traffic-free route running across the whole of Lower Earley from London Bridge to Shinfield Road. Much of the route is in woodland or parkland, providing a pleasant walking experience. With public transport links at both ends of the trail, as well as in the middle, the trail lends itself to both leisure and active travel use.

The trail has been in existence for some time, but only some of the locals knew about it and used it. Waymarking it will open it up to a much wider group.

The signposting has been made possible by a grant from Earley Town Council and with the active support of members of the Earley Environment Group. The route is marked with roundels and black waymarker posts which were installed by Loddon Valley Ramblers and Earley Environment Group volunteers during the summer. Thanks are also due to Wokingham Borough Council, Reading University and the managers of Barn Croft Drive who gave permission for the trail to be signposted across their land.

The route is off-road, apart from a short stretch at the junction of Beeston Way, Lower Earley Way and Cutbush Lane (not far from Asda). It goes through woods, meadows and parkland, and takes in some of Lower Earley's more attractive areas such as Pearman's Copse, Swallow's Meadow Wood of Eagles and the Loddon-side path from Sindlesham to Loddon Bridge.

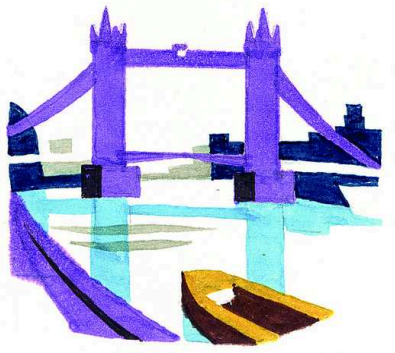
One of the waymark roundels on the Green Corridor Trail. Photo: Steve Vale

Leaflets describing the route will be available in local libraries, doctors' surgeries, council offices etc and directions for the trail (in either direction) are available on the Loddon Valley Ramblers website (https://www.lvra.org.uk).

Steve Vale
Loddon Valley Ramblers

Harpenden Green Loop:

A nine-mile (15 km) walking route encircling the Hertfordshire town of Harpenden has been unveiled by the town's council. It links green spaces and existing paths and begins at Rothamsted Park, a short hop from Harpenden railway station. A slightly different route for cyclists is also available. Details are at harpenden.gov.uk/loop.



INNER LONDON *insights*

London LOOP, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk project

Our volunteers got together at the end of May for our annual in-person meeting - at which we shared our project annual report and discussed progress, future plans and how to overcome some of the hurdles we're encountering. It was a very useful meeting, and we now have a clearer way forward on our priorities of replacing the remaining stiles on the London Loop with gates, and improving signage from stations on all of the routes we look after. Section volunteers were able to replenish their stocks of waymark discs and stickers, vinyl overlays, screws and hi-vis vests - enabling work to replace damaged and missing discs and stickers to take place over the summer months.

We're also working on a new document detailing toilets and cafes for each section of each route, which will be published on the Inner London Area Ramblers website. Whilst our route guidance generally does not need frequent updates - and making changes to the walks guidance is a protracted process, requiring TfL approval for each amended PDF - toilets and cafe information can change quite quickly and is key to walkers. In future we will be publishing this separately and keeping it as up to date as we can - doubtless with the help of those of you out walking the routes who alert us to changes.

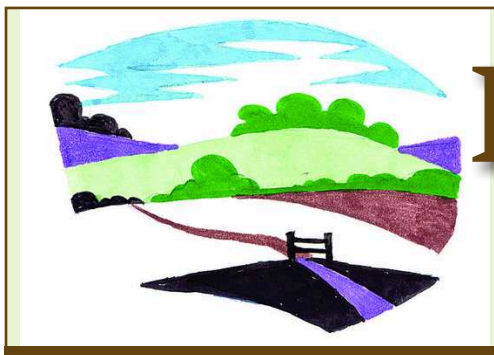
One key recent success to celebrate is the replacement of the Capital Ring signage in Clissold Park. This was removed when improvements were made to the park, but it was never reinstated. Our persistence over the last five years, and the fact that Ramblers Inner London Area was, on this occasion, able to support financially, means we got there in the end -and we're delighted that the route of the Capital Ring is once again waymarked through this popular park.

We're finding it difficult to get permission from landowners to replace stiles on the London Loop - and when we do have permission, we still need help from Ramblers footpath working parties to do the work, as well as to find funding. With 41 stiles remaining, the task ahead of us is huge - but we do now have permission to replace two stiles in Kenley, so we're hopeful we can make some progress before the year is out. Please do let us know if you can help in any way (email me at vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk).

And if your group is out walking one of the routes we look after, please share your photos with us and tag us in your social media posts so that we can continue to promote these brilliant London walks and Ramblers work to improve and maintain them.

Clare Wadd

Installing new Capital Ring signing in Clissold Park, Stoke Newington.



BUCKS *briefs*

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Summer evening taster walks

During late June and early July, Amersham & District Ramblers put on three summer evening 'taster' walks, all starting and finishing at a pub in Amersham. These walks were all carefully planned as leisurely walks of around three and a half miles and aimed at appealing to potential new walkers to Ramblers.

Our aim was to promote our group to a potential new and wider audience and to see if there was any demand for shorter after-work walks to be included in our programme. Each walk took place on a different weekday to appeal to as many people as possible and to avoid some missing out due to other regular commitments.

We put the effort in to promoting the taster walks using local Facebook groups and printed posters in local supermarkets, on local town council community boards and at the three pubs used as the start point for the circular walks. Our efforts proved worthwhile (particularly the use of social media), with around 25 new faces attending alongside existing group members who turned out in good numbers to support the initiative.

The walks were typical Chiltern walks on a mixture of town paths. open fields and woodland, with one or two small ascents thrown in. The walks were planned with the intention of giving a fair representation of the walks that make up our regular weekly walks programme.

Despite high temperatures, everyone seemed to enjoy themselves , with nearly all staying on for refreshments and social conversation in the pub afterwards. This was a great way to spend more time talking with potential new recruits and to communicate the many benefits of becoming a member of the Ramblers.

All in all, this has proved to be a successful initiative with 50+ people attending the three walks overall. Every potential new member was given a recently revamped leaflet, containing more details about Ramblers and specifically about our group and what we get up to.

The feedback received from those that attended was hugely positive and will definitely shape our future walks programme. We hope to see a number of these new faces on one of our coming walks, given that several attendees expressed their intention to join us.

Mike Hickling
Amersham & District Ramblers

Relaxing in the pub garden after a taster walk. Photo: Mike Hickling

Area AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Inner London Ramblers will be held on Sunday 6 December from 2.00pm to 4.00pm in the Band Room, Coram Fields, 93 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1DN.

The following positions on the Inner London Ramblers Council will be open for re-election: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Publicity Officer, Digital Officer, Affiliated Groups Representative. Please email your nominations to secretary@innerlondonramblers.org.uk by 22 November.

Nominations for representatives to the General Council in 2027 will also be open, please submit your nominations by email to secretary@innerlondonramblers.org.uk by 22 November. If more than three nominations are received for any position, nominees will need to submit a brief CV and a vote will be held at the AGM to appoint the representatives.

After the formal AGM, Phil Paulo from the London Tree Ring project (http://bit.ly/43NHn8O) at CPRE London, will give a talk about their work on improving the green spaces in and around London.

Further details about the AGM and the agenda will be posted on the Inner London Ramblers website (innerlondonramblers.org.uk) closer to the date.

Tim Sai-Louie
Chair, Inner London Ramblers

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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RAMBLERS

BEDFORDSHIRE *bulletin*

Publicity flyer

The Area has recently produced a flyer to advertise all of our four groups and the path maintenance activities across the county. This was designed by one of our members, Julianna Jagielska, and is intended for use at any local events and for placement in our usual Ramblers 'haunts'.

One side of the flyer.

Diary Dates

First aid: there will be an Area first aid training course on Saturday 21 November at Husborne Crawley reading rooms.

North Beds Ramblers: AGM will be held on Saturday 14 November at Colmworth village hall.

Ivel Valley Walkers: AGM will be held on Sunday 8 November, venue tba.

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers: AGM will be held on Sunday 15 November at Milton Bryant village hall.

Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers: AGM date and venue tba.

Bedfordshire Area AGM: date and venue tba.

Sandra Kelsey
Area Publicity Officer

North Beds Ramblers are 50!

The anniversary cake. Photo: Sandra Kelsey

2026 is a very special year for North Beds Ramblers who turned 50 this year. We have already been celebrating by recreating our 1976 inaugural walking programme of monthly walks and creating specially designed gold t-shirts with our 50th logo (thanks to Julianna Jagielska for her design talents). However, 11 July saw the main event - our birthday party at Ravensden village hall.

The day started with beautiful sunshine and a promise of great weather - generally not heard of with an NBR summer event! We kicked off the celebrations with three walks. Paul Goss led the 9.30, eight-miler, Steve Woodward left with the 10.00 walkers for a six-mile walk, followed by Mike Lee leading a four-miler at 10.30. Auspiciously we had 50 walkers on the three walks!

The biggest challenge of the morning was left to Clive Pattle, as he had to ensure that the car park allowed those just coming for the walks to be able to leave whilst some were staying for the afternoon barbecue and others arriving later for just the barbecue. There were no punch ups so I think we can conclude that Clive did an excellent job in organising things.

As the walkers arrived back they were greeted with a birthday gift of a specially commissioned buff and badge (also designed by Julianna Jagielska) and refreshments ahead of the barbecue which kicked off at 1pm. Along with the chicken, burgers and sausages there was a fabulous array of home-made salads and finally desserts provided by our members.

More teas and coffee and games in the gardens amused the attendees until it was time for the speech, given by our Chair, Anne Griffiths and birthday cake, made by Gillian Wilkes. The cake was cut by our very special guest, John Dixon. John was second Chair of our group from 1983, first Bedfordshire Area Chair and also chair of Bedford Rambling Club. The cake was accompanied with a glass of fizz and a rousing rendition of 'Happy Birthday'.

Events concluded around 4pm with everyone mucking in to clear up and leave the hall as we found it, always good to ensure a full return of a deposit!

Many thanks are extended to all who came, helped, organised and generally took part in our very special day.

Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers

East Park Solar

This huge project, planning to build a 1,900 acre solar 'farm' in north Bedfordshire and South Cambridgeshire, is entering the business end of the consultation process and potentially will have an enormous impact on walking in this area. North Bedfordshire Ramblers were approached by the Bedfordshire local access forum at the end of 2025 and asked to post objections to the project. The North Beds Ramblers committee hastily put together a document objecting to the project, posted from the group's Chair and Treasurer and privately from a number of group members.

Subsequently North Beds Ramblers were approached by the Inspector to attend and present at a live rights of way hearing on this subject at a project hearing on 9 June. This was one of a number of sessions focussing on different elements of the project. I represented North Beds Ramblers and gave a verbal objection to the hearing from a walker's perspective.

In an ideal world the objection would have been led by the Area Footpath Officer from the start of the East Park project. However, at the beginning of the project the area did not have a Footpath Officer and the first deadline was missed.

The subject and learnings from our experience were discussed at a recent area meeting. Solar developments are relevant across the country and any experience from one objection could, potentially, be applied to another project.

It was subsequently decided that the Bedfordshire Area should have a 'view' prepared on issues of this kind so that, in future, we are more prepared when large infrastructure projects are proposed.

Sandra Kelsey

Changes everywhere

There is so much happening across the county which affects our paths. In the centre and south it is houses, houses and industrial units whilst in the north paths are being affected by major road construction at the Black Cat roundabout A421/A1.

East West rail has not yet started work on the proposed rail connection from Bedford to Cambridge nor has the decision been made as to the actual location of the new railway station at Tempsford nor has provision been made for it to cross the A1/A421. There are proposals for a solar farm to the north and east of Bedford as well.

Barry Ingram

A plea for help

The first section of the Ouse Valley Way was officially opened in 1990. This was the 26-mile section through Huntingdonshire. The complete route from the source in Northamptonshire through to the Wash was then completely waymarked and launched in 2004.

Some 22 years later signs have been washed away, paths diverted and discs faded or been damaged and no one has any replacements, nor do we know who provided them in the first place. We are interested in getting the Bedfordshire section re-signed and would like to know who originated them and who paid for them and any help on this would be appreciated. Please contact me via email to barry.ingram74@btinternet.com

Barry Ingram

Ouse Valley Way sign.
Photo: Barry Ingram

RIPPLE

The great thing about improving rights of way is the size and variety of the task and it doesn't matter how long you have been doing it there is always something new or interesting. It is not just the trimming back and/or removing vegetation or improving the surface, it is seeing the path gain usage as a result and how other paths nearby are benefitting and the network used more. It's a win-win situation for all and it is always good when local parish councils acknowledge the work done and add details of the improvements on their websites and in parish magazines. Working with landowners and farmers provides an opportunity to illustrate that we are a potential asset to them.

Back in March the annual Central Bedfordshire Councils rights of way volunteers get-together they announced their emphasis this year would be on repairing and replacing bridges and would welcome volunteer assistance. Having first checked with Ramblers Central Office as to what we can and can't do, we asked our members whether they would like to learn new skills and cover new ground. The majority indicated that they would like to and some had already been involved over a number of years; the progression was seen to be natural and good for the group. A side effect was the addition of creating, replacing, improving steps. Sleeper bridges, footbridges, walkways and steps have all been done during the course of the year in addition to erecting and replacing marker posts and the ongoing vegetation clearance or path improvements to those who prefer. Bridge replacements were carried out at Northill, Upper and Lower Gravenhurst, Henlow and Turvey. In a joint venture with Bedfordshire's rural communities charity which manages the Pinnacles at Sandy, our volunteers created, repaired, and replaced steps on both sides whilst also improving other public paths.

A bridge repaired at Henlow. Photo: Barry Ingram

Some of the team working at Strawberry Hill. Photo: Barry Ingram

In another joint venture, this time with the wildlife trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants at Strawberry Hill, Knotting Green, North Bedfordshire, our members put in new marker posts on bridleways, public paths and permissive paths as well as assisting with clearance work to improve access around the site. The site offered an ideal opportunity to utilise the new plastic waymark posts bought as a trial by Bedford Borough last year.

Last year our volunteers along with assistance from both Ivel Valley and North Bedfordshire Ramblers re-waymarked the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail circular walk of 80 miles and the only missing sign was at the start and finish in St Paul's Square, Bedford. This has now been remedied thanks to Bedford Borough Council who provided and put up a new sign.

Barry Ingram

ESSEX *extras*

Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers celebrate 40 years

Forty years ago, in 1986, the Chelmer & Blackwater group was formed by Kevin Ascot and others. Of course we, in 2026, could not let this auspicious occasion pass without celebration, or indeed celebrations, as we've held many this year!

A highlight was our four-day challenge on the St Edmund Way, covering 40 miles across Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex at the end of May. Shorter walk options and visits to places of interest meant there was something for everyone. In total, 65 members and guests took part, with 29 completing the full route. Our thanks go to the walk leaders, backmarkers, planners and organisers whose hard work made the event possible.

Then, on Saturday 4 July we held a 40th anniversary tea party. What a day! We had not one, not two, but three walks, and they all ended with an afternoon tea at Galleywood Heritage Centre to celebrate.

There was part two of the Chelmsford Centenary Circle walk for those who had done part one the day before, also a shorter walk based on a section of the Centenary Circle Walk and, for those brave enough, a long walk- starting at virtually the crack of dawn - doing the whole Centenary Circle of 21 miles in a few hours - they had to arrive before all the cakes were eaten!

Arriving at the heritage centre, weary walkers were greeted with delicious cakes, thirst- quenching tea, and celebratory Prosecco to celebrate our anniversary. Older members, current members, and newer members travelled, often from far and wide, to spend a joyful afternoon recovering and reminiscing, and hearing two (short) speeches from Chairperson Peter Jepson, and a former Chair, John Champ.

We are fortunate to have so many members willing to help arrange not just a packed walks programme, but a very full schedule of social events too, and as a result thank you's were expressed to all who helped organise the day: the walk leaders and back markers, the kitchen helpers, the decoration gang, the Prosecco poppers, the cake bakers, and the speech makers. It was a wonderful afternoon!

Fiona Lau
Chelmsford & Blackwater Ramblers

The 21-milers start their day on the Chelmsford Centenary Circle. Photos: Fiona Lau

Anne and Elaine make the day!

Sharing memories.

Autumn Comes Earlier This Year

This poem celebrates a walk along parts of three trails: the Forest Way, the railway path that runs from East Grinstead to Groombridge in East Sussex; the Vanguard Way near Forest Row, and the Wealdway in East Sussex.

Railway path in autumn.

All along the trail September's berries
swell & darken on their hoops;
wild grapes fatten, black, blue-misted, in the hedge
...though calendars show only August.

Will October's fungi this year droop & cluster
in autumnal rains? For after weeks of rainless days,
all grass is withered, crisp; all green things
bleaching blond in unrelenting sun.

The heath is tinder dry, still warm as summer;
air breathless, dusty, thirsting for a sweetening rain
to soften ground beneath our boots,
to raise up mushrooms, soak pine-bark.

Still, we strike out anyway, to Ashdown
on the railway path from Forest Row
to where the infant River Medway runs,
now quiet, slow, below that famous Pooh-sticks bridge:

to where goldfinch wings scatter feathers
chilli red among the dry leaves; flutter
saffron-gold on desiccated thistle-heads,
chirruping, chattering in glee to find their autumn
hoard.

Words and image © Lizzie Ballagher

Ephemera - if walls could speak and other tales

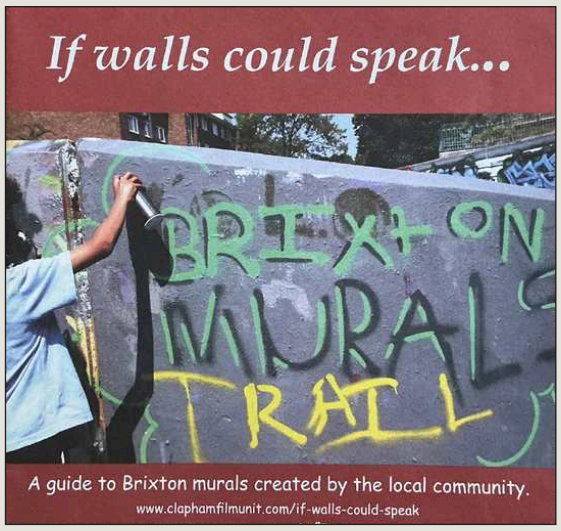
In the last issue I looked back at the Brixton Heritage Trails. Although these concentrated on a small part of London, there were all sorts of things to look out for. A drawback was that there was only a little linkage with the local murals and other pieces of art.

However, the Brixton Mural Trail guide consists of a short and a longer walk which starts from Stockwell war memorial, close to Stockwell tube station, and finishes at the Brixton windmill. The trail visited 12 murals but now at least one is no longer in existence. The murals were created from the early 1980s until about 2012 by 12 artists and three artistic groups called the London Art Group, positive arts and 'graffiti artists from all over the world'. Some research suggests that there has not been any upgrading of the trail guide and its contents but that does not mean that there isn't lots of availability especially as there appears to be a significant number of artwork features in this area way beyond what was available in the trail guide. Any local wanderers will easily find fabulous artworks by walking along the mural trail with some deviations from the route to find other artworks and creative painters working along the way.

On a different theme, yours truly finds it difficult to reconcile the contrasts in the piles of walking materials, be they books, maps, films and non-fiction stories with the reality of getting things done. Because the range is challenging there are often a lot of things that don't get done which is why you join walking organisations like the Ramblers as well as consider the growth of pilgrimages both in Britain and much further afield. One of the interesting features some people explore is gathering old walking material and finding out how much has changed. The other interesting feature is the authors who write their long-distance walking adventures like 'Land's End to John o'Groats' or 'walking to Jerusalem' and we wonder how they raise their funds?

Walking can be everything like strolling on a Sunday afternoon to being a professional adventurer and everything in between, Watch this space for our next adventure even if it is still only near Brixton!

John Pestle



Cover of the Brixton Mural Trail guide. Photo: John Pestle

Independent hostels: a hidden gem for walkers

Capital Walkers group is partway through walking the Fox Way, a 39-mile circuit through the varied Surrey countryside around Guildford, tackled in three sections. On the second of our three days, we stopped for lunch at Puttenham Barn Bunkhouse (by prior arrangement - it's not normally open during the day) and it prompted a conversation that stayed with us long after we had shouldered our packs and moved on.

Independent hostels occupy a curious place in the walking world. They are often more characterful than their larger, better-known cousins, rooted in particular places and kept alive by sheer commitment rather than commercial muscle. But that same independence can make them fragile without the backing of a national network; many depend almost entirely on walkers and cyclists choosing to use them. Many independent hostels, including Puttenham Barn, are listed in the Independent Hostels Guide; alas, some have closed in recent years, with others barely hanging on, so as ramblers if we want them to survive, there is a need to make use of them.

Puttenham Barn is a case in point - and, happily, an encouraging one. The barn is a listed building around 250 years old that came perilously close to dereliction before being rescued and sympathetically restored by Project Oasis North Downs, a registered charity. It now runs entirely on volunteers, with solar panels for electricity and hot water, rainwater harvesting, and a restoration that lets guests see the traditional building methods in the fabric of the structure itself. It is a small triumph of community effort.

What we found on arrival matched the spirit of the place. Our hosts were enormously welcoming, inviting us to sit in the peaceful garden, eat our lunch at the picnic benches, and use the facilities - exactly what a group of walkers mid-route needs and rarely takes for granted. The accommodation itself is simple bunkhouse-style, sleeping up to 11, with a communal kitchen, shower room, and a warden always present. It sits on both the North Downs Way and the Pilgrim's Way, at £25 per night for adults, with a discount for those arriving on foot or by bike.

For any Ramblers member planning a walk in the Surrey Hills, Puttenham Barn is well worth considering for an overnight stop. But beyond this one place, it is perhaps worth reflecting on how much the independent hostel network matters to walking in this country - and how directly our choices as walkers determine whether it survives.

Bookings and further details: puttenhambarn.uk

Simon Sprague
Capital Walkers

Capital Walkers at Puttenham Barn. Photo: Simon Sprague

Learning to walk again

My life changed on 17 December 1997 when I was involved in a bad car crash.

I was driving back from work in Southampton to Guildford on the A31 and when going around a corner came across a lorry trailer that spanned the road. My headlights were dipped as cars were coming the other way, so I could not see the road far ahead. I did not have enough stopping time before my car hit the trailer. I did brake significantly as my speed was 65 mph, otherwise I would not have survived.

The first operation repaired my broken right leg with external fixation plus a metal plate. Another metal plate was fixed in my left arm, and two nails held my left elbow in place. My left hand was strapped up and my right collar bone was left as it was.

I spent 44 nights in hospital where some of the metalwork was removed, then rested at home before I could work again. To start with I worked remotely, and about a month later I could visit another client. I travelled by taxi as I was unable to drive for a couple of years.

Since then my fitness has been like the teeth of a saw blade; slowly up then crashing down as some cracks caused a problem.

In 2003 my right subtalar ankle joint was fused, then in 2005 this ankle's main joint was fused. For each of these my right leg was in plaster for three months twice. I continued working through most of this time, occasionally by flights. I do remember travelling through airports on one leg, using the trolley to support my right side! Hotels were not easy either as there are so many closed doors, and sometimes the key did not work so I had to double the journey again, (unless I had the hotel number on my phone).

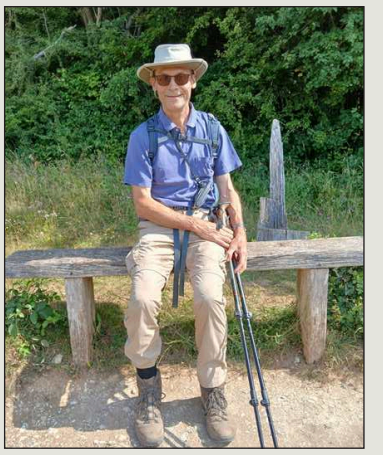
Following these operations, I was subject to more of these, this time on my right knee. In total, I have undergone 13 operations on my right leg, sometimes removing metalwork, sometimes adding more. An additional operation was carried out in 2019 for a vein removal. I have been told that I must never run again, and that only low-impact sports are possible.

I now have a double-fused right ankle and arthritis in my right knee. Given this constraint I have had trouble maintaining fitness and even with physiotherapy I have not been able to walk far. I managed to take up Laser dinghy sailing in 2007 and kept this up for three years, but then my knee became painful so I had to stop. We went on a family cycling holiday in 2016, however after this my knee caused trouble again.I managed just two short walks after that.

This changed in 2017 when during a short lunchtime walk I was invited to join some colleagues for a longer walk. This was about one and a half miles, longer than I had managed to date. I was surprised that my knee seemed a bit better after the walk, instead of worse as I had expected.

I kept these longer walks up, then later that summer tried a much longer walk, by taking advantage of the local Guildford Walkfest. Once again, I was surprised that my knee survived.

My wife and I joined a rambling club for a couple of years. I remember having difficulty going down slopes initially. Then, when my wife stopped walking, I joined the Ramblers, first with the Godalming & Haslemere group, then Farnham group and now I walk with Mole Valley Ramblers.



Peter Jaffe.

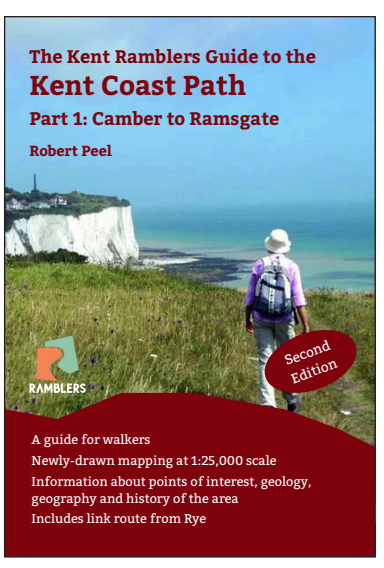
I now regularly walk up to 13 miles over the Surrey and Sussex hills, though I do have to look after my joints carefully, I therefore go to the gym some three or four times each week.

Now my left knee is playing up .....

Peter Jaffe
Member of Mole Valley Ramblers

KENT *calling*

Area Secretary's diary



The second edition of the Coast Path guide will be available shortly.

In the last issue I announced the publication of the second edition of Kent Ramblers' guide to the Darent Valley Path, the Eden Valley Walk and the Medway Valley Walk. Around 60 readers responded to the offer of a discount and free postage.

Our guide to the first part of the **Kent Coast Path (Camber to Ramsgate)** was also out of print and I am expecting that a second edition will be available to purchase by the end of October. Again, I am pleased to offer readers a discount - the cover price will be £9.00 but anyone quoting the code SEW2609 before 31 January 2027 can purchase a copy for £7.50 including postage. And I'm happy to extend that offer to cover also the Three River Valley Walks guide already mentioned and our Wealdway guide. Please visit kentramblers.org.uk/books where you will also find special offers for purchasing multiple titles. Those who have the first edition of the Kent Coast Path guide will probably not find sufficient changes in the new edition to justify purchase.

Sales of our walking guides have raised money for our project t**o promote walking in Kent**, especially using our long distance or 'named' walks. The project includes refurbishment of parish map boards around the county and we have recently completed two boards in Crockenhill. Another half dozen or more are in the pipeline and I hope also to progress brand new boards for the Wealdway or the Darent Valley path. This project has the benefit not just of enticing more people into the great Kent countryside but also of engaging with parish councils and building a real sense of partnership in the endeavour to make all parts of Kent welcoming to walkers. Most people know about our coastal walking and other named paths including the North Downs Way and these routes can be quite well used. However, there are vast swathes of glorious countryside in Kent that few people visit and most have never heard of.

In June we held one of our regular **full-day meetings for our rights of way volunteers** and others interested in footpaths at Lenham Community Centre. This was another opportunity to engage with parish councils, all of whom were invited to send someone along and many did. It was also an opportunity to say goodbye to Graham Rusling who had just retired as head of Kent County Council's public rights of way team and to meet his successor, Colin Finch. While it can be frustrating that the county council team does not have the resources to fix reported problems as quickly as we would like, we do recognise that the team does its best in difficult circumstances and is always happy to engage in dialogue over difficult issues. One cannot help but be deeply worried about the possible impact of local government reorganisation on this team, what is now Kent and Medway being destined to become four separate unitary authorities. Since we started inviting outside organisations to attend these meetings they have become ever more lively, allowing attendees not just to hear interesting presentations but equally importantly to make really useful contacts with each other. The next meeting will be on Saturday 7 November when we would be delighted to be joined by colleagues from other Areas, indeed by anyone interested in looking after Kent's public rights of way.

While in the main things are going pretty well in Kent with a fantastic team of volunteers working well together, inevitably every silver lining has a cloud. The cloud that has been hanging over my activities for many months is the **Ramblers' governance review**, which has led to proposed changes to our governance structure. This huge and fruitless drain on my time should have ended at the Annual Meeting of the Ramblers' General Council in April when the proposals failed to secure sufficient votes for adoption. However, the Board of Trustees won't take 'no' for an answer and slightly revised proposals are now on the table. I believe these proposals are seriously misguided, making it more difficult for us to scrutinise the Board and hold it to account, and I have written a detailed analysis of its flaws. Unfortunately, the Board does not think it would be useful for General Council who will vote on the proposals to read my analysis and has refused to make it available on the General Council web page alongside all the supportive documentation. If you think that the painstaking analysis of someone with as much experience of the Ramblers at all levels as I have ought at least to be available to decision makers, please do what you can to encourage your Area's appointees to General Council to read them before making their minds up. They can get in touch with me on email@kentramblers.org.uk

Let me end with another positive story. I recently received an email from a lady who had walked the **Greensand Way** from Haslemere to the Surrey border near Westerham thinking that was the end of her 55-mile adventure. She was quite surprised, pleasantly I hope, to discover that the route continues through Kent for another 53 miles to Hamstreet. Curiously, Kent County Council's Explore Kent website has a full and detailed guide to the Greensand Way in Surrey but nothing for the Kent section! I raised this with Explore Kent (part of Kent County Council) who said that they had lost the Kent section of the guide which was produced at the same time as the Surrey section (round about 2010) and an extensive search of their computer file storage had failed to find it. Fortunately, I had many years ago downloaded the guide and was able to supply Explore Kent with what they had lost, although it has yet to appear on their website. The moral, of course, is that one should never delete anything from one's computer (except when required by General Data Protection Regulation) - which is why I have an archive of more than 30,000 Kent Ramblers emails from the last six years alone.

Robert Peel
Secretary, Kent Ramblers

The Greensand Way across Surrey and Kent.

Graham Rusling accepts a retirement gift from Jeremy Boxall, Chair of Kent Countryside Access Forum, at the Lenham meeting in June.

One of our new local public rights of way maps installed in Crockenhill.

SURREY *snippets*

Mole Valley Walks Festival 2026

Mole Valley Ramblers walk festival got off to a good start with 85 ramblers assembling at Denbies vineyard near Dorking, for the choice of four different levels of walks and celebratory flapjacks to send them on their way. An evening walk later attracted another 11 people.

Our eight-day festival from Wednesday 29 April to 6 May had 43 walks. led by experienced leaders from a leisurely three miles through to an 18-mile hike. We also had evening pub walks, the highlight being Leith Hill in the Dark led by Henri, with views across to London.

Judith Wotton from Suffolk, who joined us for last year's festival, enjoyed it so much that she joined Mole Valley Ramblers and led her first walk for us during this festival. The walk was an 18-mile /29km hike with 3,000 feet/914m ascent!

On the final day we had four walks which all converged on Holmbury St Mary village hall for a picnic, tea and an array of homemade cakes. We enjoyed live music from the talented musician John Peppard and joined in with dancing , much enjoyed by all.

Congratulations to everyone who took part. Between us we walked the equivalent of Dorking to Boston in the USA and climbed Mount Everest 11 times.

Here is the walk festival in numbers:279 participants (187 Mole Valley Ramblers, 56 from other groups and 36 guests); 604 completed walks; 3,352 miles walked; over 323,000 feet of elevation.

Many thanks to our organisers for a successful walks festival, Simon Strudwick who produced the walk programme and led some of the walks, Sally Howe who baked countless flapjacks and other cakes for the final day, not forgetting the amazing job she did promoting the festival in the podcast she recorded with Jim Cornell of the Walking Post, and finally Adrian Barton for all the number crunching. And all the walks leaders for their time and dedication without whom the festival couldn't go ahead. Here's to next year's festival and another week of fantastic walking.

Rob Tomlinson
Mole Valley Ramblers

A festival walk at Leith Hill.

John Peppard entertains.

Judith leads her first festival walk. Photo: Rob Tomlinson

Godalming and Haslemere's half century

Few organisations have literally stirred up a hornets' nest but Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers achieved that claim to fame on a group holiday in Germany's Moselle region in 2005 when one unsuspecting member planted her walking pole in precisely the wrong spot, with chaos and pandemonium ensuing. Thankfully, such unwelcome vespine misadventures are rare in the life of this thriving and spirited group now celebrating its golden anniversary - a half century of exploring the gentle hills, valleys, heathland and woods of south west Surrey and beyond.

The story began in March 1976 with the merger of two existing fledgling groups - Haslemere Ramblers and Godalming Ramblers. Of the original 100 members (Godalming outnumbering Haslemere three to one), two stalwarts, Rosemary Bryant and Susan Holmes, still remain, a third, Richard Evans, sadly passed away only a short while ago (see page 11).

In the early years, walkers' map-reading skills were severely put to the test through inadequate signposting, lack of waymarks and with no modern GPS to come to the rescue. The appointment of the group's first Footpath Secretary in 1977 and close work with Surrey County Council improved matters, volunteer teams helping to consolidate paths, repair stiles, gates, bridges, railings and boardwalks, erecting signposts and waymarking named routes, activities which earned them a Ramblers national award in 2004.

Footpath work could sometimes be eventful as exemplified in 1982 when a path habitually blocked by aggressive dogs led to a confrontation between the Footpath Secretary and an irate landowner brandishing a shotgun!

The group played a key role in major public inquiries, including the successful campaign to include the Western Weald (with Blackdown) in the South Downs National Park and the A3 tunnel at Hindhead.

In the early days, walks were 8 - 15 miles and almost exclusively at weekends, as most members worked full-time. Many began at railway stations to accommodate those without cars, and there was occasionally an anxious march to reach a pub for lunch before the 2pm closing time on Sundays. Friday evening walks became an institution in summer and, as members retired from work, midweek walks were also added, a second Wednesday walk in 2005 and Thursday walks in 2011.

The growing portfolio of walking routes led to the group's publication of two much-loved books: 21 Favourite Walks (1995) and 25 Favourite Walks (1999). Today, walks cater for a range of paces, abilities and preferences - brisk, leisurely, long, short and, most recently, ambling.

Over the years, the group has experimented with all manner of themed outings: fish-and-chip walks, curry walks, London excursions, coastal days, some ferry-assisted, and even 'mystery walks' (where directions were drawn by lot in real time!). An annual highlight is the short walk hosted for the London Blind Ramblers ending (as occasionally with some of the group's other walks) with tea and cake.

Early foreign trips centring on France and Germany evolved into more recent holidays in Majorca, Austria, Lake Garda, Catalonia, Greece, Bavaria and Croatia. Closer to home, the group has enjoyed breaks in Suffolk, the Cotswolds, Dorset and the Mendips. Coach day trips - originally a makeshift replacement for a break at Evesham cancelled when their hotel flooded - have become a summer staple.

Regular social activities have flourished in the form of pub quizzes, bowls, skittles, Christmas and New Year's lunches.

The group has weathered crises too: Foot & Mouth disease in 2001, and Covid 19 two decades later, when restrictions briefly but memorably split members across either side of the Waverley boundary, unable to walk together.

On 27 June, Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers, now well over 400-strong, celebrated this special anniversary with a tea at Godalming United Church Hall in the presence of honoured guest Kate Ashbrook - one of Britain's most respected footpath campaigners - in acknowledgement of the achievements of a group that has spent half a century not only walking the landscape for their own pleasure, but protecting it for other walkers, both present and future.

Keith Bulley
Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers

Left to right: Heather Dillon (the group's current Chair), Kate Ashbrook (national campaigner and guest speaker) and Rosemary Bryant (founder member) watch the celebratory cake being cut by founder member, Susan Holmes.

Members of the group's footpath working party proudly display their handiwork, the latest of many kissing gates they have installed in collaboration with Surrey County Council.

Members pose on the iconic Nunn's bridge, Coggeshall in Essex, last year on the first day's walk of the group's idyllic annual spring break in Suffolk. Photo: James Robertson

Farnham Walking Festival

The annual Farnham Walking Festival took place from 9 -31 May when Farnham Town Council offered 32 walks, with nine organisations contributing to the programme.

Farnham & District Ramblers were very proud to contribute 19 walks to the festival programme and these ranged from two to 15 miles in distance, with a wide range of destinations, including the nearby ruins of Waverley Abbey, Frensham Ponds, Odiham, the Watts Gallery in Compton and the more distant Petworth Park.

There was also plenty of variety in the walks we offered, with an Aldershot town history walk and a history of the Bourne Woods walk, both contributed by one of our long serving walk leaders, Liz Witham. We also sneaked in an evening pub walk from one of our very popular village pubs.

As always, we have to say a huge thank you to all our walk leaders who kindly allowed their walks to be included in the festival programme. And not forgetting a thank you to Farnham Town Council for inviting us to take part.

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

Climbing to the Devil's Jumps - Liz Witham.

Those we have lost

Richard Evans 1936 - 2026

Richard Evans, who sadly died in May, was an inaugural member of Haslemere Ramblers which was founded in 1970. Haslemere and Godalming Ramblers amalgamated in 1976. Fifty six years after joining Richard was still an active member up until the time of his death.

Richard first joined the Godalming & Haslemere committee in 1996 becoming Secretary in 1997, and later Chairman. The role of Secretary then encompassed editing the Newsletter, doing publicity and coordinating campaigns. There is hardly an aspect of the group's work that has not been touched by his experienced hand. He helped with the Ramblers submission to the consultation on the route for the A3 road tunnel in Hindhead, dealing with a vast amount of information but always remaining concise, accurate and clear in his response. He also represented us in the ultimately successful campaign to establish the South Downs National Park. He acted as Footpath Secretary for a number of West Sussex parishes as well as being an active member of the footpath maintenance work party late into his life.

Perhaps amongst the most important work that Richard did, in his quiet, self-effacing way, was with regard to rights of way, the core of the Ramblers existence. He would prepare reports and attend public inquiries and also make very many 'on the ground' investigations of reported obstructions, line deviations, waymarking problems and so forth.

A sociable gentleman, he was a generous host inviting ramblers firstly to his mother's home, and then his, for tea after a walk. He had an amazing memory, especially for names, places and even dates!

He organised visual/picture quizzes on Ordnance Survey maps at social events. These were both fun and a stimulus to look closely and learn from the detail these maps provide. He had a very thorough knowledge of the history of Ordnance Survey maps.

Members of the Godalming & Haslemere group will miss Richard, a quiet, friendly and very knowledgeable man, who continued enjoying social events, including coach trips and the spring holiday, right up to the end. His death just two months before our 50th anniversary makes it even more poignant.

Richard Evans
Photo: Margaret France

Beila Best
Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers

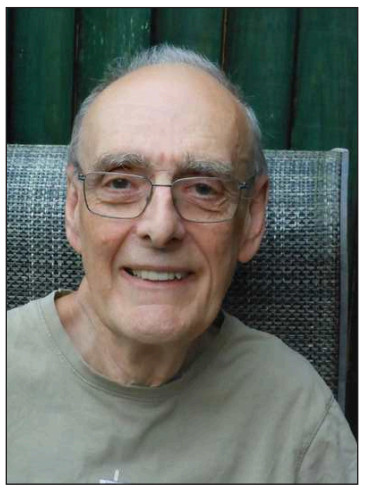
Andrew Turnbull 1950 - 2026

Members of Lea & Icknield were shocked and saddened to learn of the death, in early June, of Andrew Turnbull.

Andrew joined our group in 2008 following his retirement and the death of his mother, for whom he was carer in her later years. Initially quiet and reserved, he walked regularly with the group, becoming more confident as he forged friendships with others.

Barely six months after joining the group , Andrew volunteered to lead his first walk on the then Ramblers' Association 'Get Walking Day', in 2009. Later that year, Andrew offered to become our Walks Secretary when the previous incumbent unexpectedly resigned at the AGM. He probably wondered what he had taken on, as he had no previous committee experience, but with a little support from others he was soon turning out full and varied programmes, and continued to do so until 2024, when a series of health issues prevented him from joining walks.

Andrew's knowledge of local walks was extensive, and he was able to replicate almost any walk that he had been on, allowing him to cover for other leaders if necessary.


Andrew Turnbull Photo: Rosemary Hasker

His own walks were many and varied, often taking us into Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns, as well as in Bedfordshire. He also enjoyed London walks, devising and leading several different ones.

Andrew tended to be rather accident-prone; you could guarantee that if there were tree roots to trip over or overhanging branches to bang your head on, he would find them! Fortunately, he never sustained serious injury on a walk, but he did have us worried on occasions. His antics caused him quite a bit of teasing within the group, but he took it all in good part and was always ready to laugh at himself.

Andrew's funeral was attended by many Lea & Icknield members, past and present. Our walks won't be quite the same without him.

Rosemary Hasker
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Roger Chick

It was with great sadness that members of the Ivel Valley group learnt that Roger Chick died in May. He had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for the past eight years and spent his final years in a care home.

Roger and his wife Joan became active in the Ivel Valley group in the early 1990s when they lived in Biggleswade. Roger led his first walk for the group in 1994 and joined the committee in that year. He served as a member until 2000. Later, he rejoined the committee, serving as Footpath Secretary from 2008 to 2011. In addition to leading walks for the group, mainly in his home area, he organised a successful weekend trip to the Yorkshire Dales in 1999.

Roger had an easy-goizg manner and was always good company on walks. He had a meticulous attitude to problems and was renowned for his use of spreadsheets. As Footpath Secretary this stood him in good stead, particularly with the problems which arose in connection with the Biggleswade East housing development. He took the reams of paperwork in his stride and was successful in safeguarding the rights of way network in that area.

Roger was again in his element when a number of planning applications for gravel extraction arrived at the Area footpath committee and his thoroughness and diligence helped regain lost access and the creation of new paths once the extractions were completed. Probably Roger's one achievement which is easily recognised is the permissive path on the Shuttleworth estate at Old Warden accessing Queen Anne's Summerhouse and Keeper's Cottage.

Roger Chick on his last walk with Ivel Valley Walkers. Photo: Barry Ingram

Although Roger and Joan moved to Wiltshire in 2012 to be nearer their family they kept in touch and their last walk with Ivel Valley was at Avebury on Tony Sheward's coach trip in 2013.

The committee sends its condolences to Joan, their daughter and son and wider family.

Tony Sheward and Barry Ingram
Ivel Valley Walkers

Remembering Robin Setchell

A total of 45 members of the Ivel Valley group gathered on Wednesday 15 April at the Cock Inn at Broom in Bedfordshire, to remember Robin Setchell, the group's founder and first Chairman, who died in 2025 (see SEW 132). The pub was not far from Robin's home and he often visited it, particularly appreciating its traditional taproom.

Two memorial walks were arranged, a seven-mile walk led by Tony and a five-mile walk led by Barry. Most of the walkers later gathered in the garden of the Cock to admire the memorial bench, funded by generous contributions from members.Needless to say, many of the walkers enjoyed a drink and raised a glass to Robin.

Barry Ingram and Tony Sheward

Robin Setchell.

Robin remembered. Photo:Barry Ingram

Wish you were here?

Elan Valley Lodge, Mid Wales

The group at Elan Valley. Photo: Sandra Pahari

After receiving a glowing recommendation from another walking group, 25 Capital Walkers made their first visit to Elan Valley Lodge over the August bank holiday weekend in 2024. The combination of excellent walking, hearty home-cooked meals and warm Welsh hospitality proved such a success that a return visit soon became inevitable.

This year, over the second May bank holiday, a different group of 25 Capital Walkers - with only myself from the original trip - headed to mid-Wales to experience the delights of Elan Valley for themselves. Despite rail disruption affecting both the outward and return journeys, spirits remained high and the group enjoyed a memorable few days of walking in one of Wales's most beautiful landscapes.

Situated on the edge of the Cambrian mountains, Elan Valley is renowned for its spectacular chain of Victorian reservoirs. Built to provide water for Birmingham - a role they continue to fulfil today - the reservoirs create a stunning backdrop of lakes, hills and valleys that offer superb walking opportunities.

One of the attractions of staying at Elan Valley Lodge (https://www.elanvalleylodge.co.uk/) is the flexibility of the walking programme. The lodge staff work closely with each group to design walks that suit the participants' preferred distances and levels of difficulty, ensuring that everyone can make the most of their stay.

A particular point of interest during this visit was seeing how the landscape is recovering following the major wildfire that affected more than 20,000 acres of the Elan Valley. While evidence of the fire could still be seen, there were also encouraging signs of nature's resilience as vegetation and wildlife gradually returned.

The weekend once again demonstrated why Elan Valley Lodge has become such a popular destination for Capital Walkers: excellent walking, comfortable accommodation, good food and the chance to see and enjoy some of the finest scenery in Wales.

Tim Sai Louie
Capital Walkers

Some of the group sheltered amongst the graves of famous folk buried at St Boniface church, including the poet Swinburne. Photo: Celia Griffiths

Shanklin, Isle of Wight

Farnham Ramblers enjoyed a package weekend trip to the Isle of Wight in May. A full coachload set off from Farnham heading to Shanklin via Red Funnel; Ferries. The trip was organised by Ann Brinton, our current Chair, and her husband David - who is in fact a 'caulkhead' (born on the island) - so their knowledge was invaluable. On arrival, David led an introductory walk around the local area.

Over the next three days our group took a variety of trips around the island, visiting landmarks including Osborne House and the Isle of Wight Steam Railway. Also on offer were a selection of walks taking in Sandown, Ventnor, Godshill, Bembridge, Cowes and all places in between.

On Sunday - one of the first wet days for weeks - rain caught up with us and poured down, so we all got a good soaking on our return to the hotel from walks at Niton and Ventnor. Luckily cream teas and the sparkly lights in Shanklin Chine helped us dry out.

A popular feature at the hotel was a large bar area - with music - which allowed some keen walkers to energetically dance the nights away!

Many thanks to Ann and David for organising a great trip!

Celia Griffiths
Farnham Ramblers

Canterbury, Kent

Exploring Canterbury.

The choice of base for Kingston Ramblers 2026 walking weekend was the city of Canterbury. It began on Friday afternoon with a gentle stroll around the city fortifications and the Great River Stour.

We got into our stride on Saturday with an eight-mile circular from Walmer, passing close to the windmill and picnicking at the World War I war memorial at the clifftop. We were swept down to sea level by the following wind and had a drinks stop in a pub at Kingsdown. Some of the party took the opportunity to visit Walmer Castle

Sunday was a less strenuous ramble through the Kent countryside beginning at Bekesbourne and heading to Ickham for our picnic stop. Finally entering Canterbury along the Stour Valley Trail.

Brenda & David Horwill
Kingston Ramblers

After organising seven holidays from the group (New Forest 2018, Hastings 2019, Weymouth 2022, Portsmouth 2023, Ipswich 2024, Southampton 2025 and Canterbury 2026), Brenda and David have decided to 'retire' from organising. Kingston Ramblers thank them for all their efforts and hope to continue offering holidays in the future with new volunteers. - David Cooper

Dunster, Somerset - 1

So successful was our trip to Dunster in 2025 that we, in Hillingdon Ramblers, booked again for April this year and elected to stay in the same family-run establishment, the Yarn Market Hotel. Many of us travelled down on the Monday in hot sunshine and once settled in, our leader, Julian, led us on a short early evening walk around this pretty medieval village. At our briefing later that first evening, which was held by Julian. he explained that due to severe knee pain he reluctantly would not be leading us on our three walks but that his friend and local walking expert, Adrian, had agreed to lead for him.

Tuesday morning came and the lovely blue skies from the previous day had gone. It was cool and grey and windy too but at least it was not raining. We were taken by the hotel minibus to Countisbury, on the North Somerset coast. The walking would be mostly along dramatic cliff paths with magnificent sea views and we could see South Wales teasing us by basking in bright sunshine.. Our walk took us through Lynmouth and Lynton, with its famous water-powered cliff funicular railway. We heard of Lynmouth's devastating flood of 1952 but even our eldest members struggled to remember the news that far back!

Our route along the dramatic cliff paths took us through the Valley of Rocks where wild goats were seen and we eventually arrived at our destination of the Hunters Inn. It had become quite cold and windy by then so we gathered inside with a drink while we waited for the minibus to collect us.

The following day saw a return to sunshine and after a hearty breakfast we were taken to the village of Winsford for a circular walk that would take us into moorland and to the famous Tarr Steps, an impressive and ancient stone clapper bridge over the River Barle. We had our lunch there in the dappled sunshine by the water. After a beautiful bluebell-adorned riverside woodland path we crossed through moorland with vivid yellow gorse bushes and stopped at a fantastic contortion of the hillside at The Punchbowl. Our route brought us back into picturesque Winsford again and to our waiting transport. That evening our host had arranged for the Rohan clothing shop at Dunster to stay open late and we perused their wares with a glass of Prosecco.

Our final day's walking was sunny again and we were taken to the tiny hamlet of Brendon. We passed an ostrich paddock before ascending to a hilltop path with magnificent views over the East Lyn River valley below. We were soon entering typical Lorna Doone country and we followed Badgworthy Water deep into Exmoor. Adrian told us something of the Lorna Doone story as we sat for our picnic lunch in the remains of a medieval village. Our return took us over the high moor which certainly had a feeling of remoteness about it but in the warm sunshine we could only imagine how bleak it must be in winter or at night.

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers

At The Punchbowl near Winsford. Photo: Simon Thornhill

Buxton, Derbyshire

For the third year running we were blessed with fantastic weather for our annual spring break, which this year saw us staying at the Palace Hotel in Buxton in the beautiful Peak District.

The hotel is in the town centre and the staff looked after us very well. Each day there was a choice of three walks, varying in distance and location, to suit all abilities. It was incredibly hot and some of the longer, more strenuous walks proved very challenging in the heat but the stunning views, beautiful valleys smothered in wildflowers and the sheer joy of walking across wild open moors, made it all worthwhile! In the evenings we enjoyed a quiz night, visited local hostelries and were entertained by three of our folk musician members.

Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

Atop Shutlingsloe. Photo: Pamela Bates

Medway towns, Kent

At the end of May, a large group of walkers from Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers enjoyed a four-day break in north Kent where the towns of Rochester and Chatham provided the historical backdrop to the break. We stayed for three nights at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel and Spa on Blue Bell Hill, near Chatham. Nice hotel and facilities.

Beginning at Upnor, a historically and strategically important location on the estuary of the River Medway, the most attractive cobbled street with delightful houses gave us our first glimpse of the Medway and the famous Chatham Dockyard opposite.

Kent boasts two of the oldest continuously functioning cathedral foundations in England - Canterbury and Rochester. Walking around the latter's historic town with its Dickens and Huguenot museums and castle was an unexpected treat. The guided tour of the beautiful cathedral set the scene for the next three days of walking.

We traversed the Saxon Shore Way, over marshes, and in sight of hop fields; a Roman villa was viewed, as was the distinctive historic landmark of Reculver. The popular town of Whitstable provided an opportunity for ice creams and a spot of retail therapy. Finally, Chatham Dockyard with its historic warships and a submarine, the Ropery and RNLI Lifeboat Collection, were enjoyed.

All in all, this very diverse area with plenty of interesting walking and sights made for a most memorable trip.

Beila Best
Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers

Some of the group outside The Vines of Rochester, now a wedding venue but once where the monks of the Priory of St Andrew were granted land for their vineyard by St Augustine, the land being granted back to the church post-dissolution and remaining in the ownership of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral ever since. Photo: Beila Best

West Dorset

What makes a successful walking holiday? Spectacular scenery certainly helps, but our recent Mole Valley trip to west Dorset shows that the real magic lies in the people you share it with.

Over five days we explored everything from the hidden lanes around Symondsbury and the panoramic views from Pilsdon Pen and Lewesdon Hill to the dramatic cliffs of the Jurassic Coast. Along the way there were plenty of memorable moments: navigating unexpected obstacles, helping fellow walkers, searching for Dorset's 'last unicorn', and discovering that cake is an essential piece of walking equipment.

West Dorset, particularly the beautiful countryside north of Bridport, proved an ideal destination. As well as offering an abundance of varied walks, it also provided a wide choice of accommodation, from campsites and shepherd's huts to cottages and B&Bs, enabling everyone to choose something that suited both their budget and preferences. The flexible arrangements also meant that those wishing to bring their dogs were able to do so. Having our own space each evening, while sharing each day's adventures, created the perfect balance of companionship and independence.

A deal of careful planning by Fiona Spencer underpinned the holiday's success. Time spent researching routes, parking, cafes and pubs, together with a pre-holiday meal and a WhatsApp group that introduced members before the trip, helped create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere from the outset. Each day offered a choice of shorter or longer walks, and thanks to careful planning we were often able to begin together before the hardier souls ventured off to add a few extra miles. Having the WhatsApp group made it much easier to organise arrangements, including car sharing, the evening before. It was an approach that enabled the whole group to bond while allowing individuals to walk at a pace and distance that suited them.

A mindful moment on Golden Cap.

The holiday quickly became a shared enterprise. Walk leaders, navigators, photographers, meal organisers and cake providers all played their part. Evenings were just as enjoyable as the walks themselves, with a skittles night at a local pub, an excellent tapas meal in Bridport and a final meal together providing more opportunities for conversation and laughter. As the week progressed, friendships deepened, newer members felt completely at home and everyone contributed in their own way.

By the final farewell, it was clear that the holiday had been about far more than reaching hilltops or completing miles. West Dorset provided the scenery, but it was the warmth. generosity and shared spirit of the group that made it such a memorable holiday - and one that left us all looking forward to the next adventure.

Louise Stillwell-Stage
Mole Valley Ramblers

Saunton, Devon

Our May trip was to Mount Sandford House near Barnstaple on the north coast of Devon.

The house, set in large gardens, is self-catering with very good facilities and our group was large enough to have the whole house to ourselves. We made our own breakfasts and packed lunches but dinners were communal feasts with food brought in and then prepared by a different team of members each night. Dinner was provided and served by professional caterers one night and we went to a local pub where we were entertained by Morris dancers on another night. We ate very well! There were two or three walks on offer each day . North Devon has some beautiful and varied landscapes and we enjoyed walks on sections of the South West Coast Path, on Exmoor and exploring the dunes at Saunton Sands. Trips to some of the many tourist attractions in the area were also an option.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers

On Saunton Sands Photo: Joan Clark

Lymington, Hampshire

The first weekend in June should have lovely weather, one would hope. Sadly in 2026 the weather forecast was less than auspicious. With wet weather gear packed North Beds Ramblers headed south to Lymington.

We were trying something new for this holiday. For those groups that regularly organise trips away, you will be aware of the huge amount of work this can involve for the walk leader(s) in sourcing the walk routes and recceing. In 2026 we decided to use an external walk leader. We had met Amanda a couple of years earlier when she ran a bespoke group holiday for us in the Gower through a travel company. We asked if she would lead again!

So off we go to Lymington! Friday afternoon weather was promising with a short introductory walk exploring Lymington and the Burrard Neale Monument. We were also delighted to have Vanessa Slawson (Community Development Officer at the Ramblers) join us for the walk.

Saturday saw the weather take a turn for the worse, but thankfully much of the walk around Brockenhurst was in the New Forest and the trees afforded us some protection. Still the hardiest turned out ready for the worst and the weather was not as bad as predicted. We enjoyed an eleven mile walk in the beautiful forest, admiring the ponies, many with foals, and the splendour of the Tall Trees Trail and magnificent Californian redwoods.

Sunday saw the end of the rain and we had a very breezy day walking the coast path from Lymington to Keyhaven. With views of the Isle of Wight and the ferries, we remained dry throughout our nine mile walk.

Our final walk on Monday was a short one around Setley Pond and Royden Wood. We paid an interesting visit to the oldest church in the New Forest, St Nicholas, which has a rich history associated with New Zealand and the First World War, with the No.1 New Zealand hospital being set up in Brockenhurst. We returned to our vehicles to take our final group photo having had a dry walk, but once on the road homeward the heavens opened and there was the most enormous downpour - which we missed by minutes.

In summary, a wonderful weekend with four days of differing landscape and views and weather that didn't spoil the experience at all. A huge thank you to all involved and especially to Amanda for putting together such a great four days of walking!

Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers

Carrying the banner in Lymington. Photo: Gillian Wilkes

Deal, Kent

In July, 15 members enjoyed a weekend in Deal, organised by Bob and Maggie. Everyone enjoyed an evening walking tour of Deal on the Friday, and a walk from Deal to Betteshanger Country Park on the Sunday morning. But the highlight of the weekend was the 11-mile walk along the cliffs from Deal to Dover. Coincidentally this route featured in the summer issue of walk magazine although our trip was already planned before this was published.

Added to the walks were excellent venues for evening meals, and a fish and chip lunch in St Margaret's Bay. Members arranged their own accommodation though not everyone was able to find somewhere in Deal itself which seems to be short of accommodation for visitors. The weather was fresher on the coast than the sultry heat of Bedfordshire, All things contributing to a brilliant weekend.

Chris Ellis
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

On the coast between Deal and Dover. Photo: Ajay Gandhi

Great Malvern, Worcestershire

On Worcestershire Beacon.

Fourteen Surrey and Beyond Ramblers (SABRE) members spent a weekend walking the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire. We based ourselves in Great Malvern where most of us stayed at the Abbey Hotel which was ideal for the station and for visiting local pubs and restaurants for dinner.

Saturday saw us taking the train to Colwall. We set off ascending across the fields to reach the top of the ridge walking to the south end point of the hills. Although this is a ridge walk there is a lot of ascent and descent, including reaching the Herefordshire Beacon. After reaching the end of the hills we walked via the Geo Park Trail towards Eastnor where we came across lots of Land Rovers convening for the 40th birthday celebration for Blue Tits (an iconic 1980s Land Rover that is a frequent star on the 'OverInTheRover' channel), We then came across a piece of the Berlin Wall in Eastnor Deer Park - this had been installed in December 2025 and is one of 170 pieces of the Wall now displayed across the world as memorials to those who lost their lives attempting to escape to freedom. We headed across to Ledbury for beers and coffees before getting the train back to Great Malvern.

On Sunday we returned to Colwall to retrace our steps back up to the ridges and this time headed north towards Great Malvern. We had our group photo taken on top of the Worcestershire Beacon and our picnic lunch watching rain clouds starting to head across the valley below. Thankfully we reached the end of our walk just as a heavy downpour started!

Our journey home on Monday took us via the amazing Map Shop in Upton upon Severn where a few of us stocked up for forthcoming holidays abroad. Some of us also visited the National Trust properties of Croome and Hanbury Hall.

Clair Baynton
SABRE - Surrey & Beyond Ramblers

Plymouth

We started our holiday season at the end of March with a trip to the Tamar Valley, a lovely place to visit at that time of year with the trees showing a delicate green and spring flowers everywhere. Our base was Plymouth and we used public transport - buses, the Tamar Valley railway line and ferries - to get to the start of all of the three walks on offer each day.

On arrival day, an afternoon walk along Plymouth Hoe was interesting but wet! After that we had good weather for the rest of our four night's stay. We explored the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail with its wonderful views over the sinuous river. One group braved the slippery walk across the Lopwell Dam at low tide before walking to Bere Alston to catch the train back to Plymouth. Another option was a trip to Buckwell Abbey. On our last full day we took the Tamar Belle ferry to Cremyll and walked along the coast path returning from Cawsand to the Barbican at Plymouth.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers

Puglia, Italy

Our first overseas trip of 2026 was to Puglia in Italy in April.

After an unsettling start at Gatwick (we had to change planes as the first one we boarded had a fault) a frustrating time at Bari (getting through the new electronic EU entry system) everything went really well. After a wet spring the south Italian countryside was glorious - trees in blossom, olive groves, vineyards and a profusion of wildflowers everywhere. We had a choice of two walks each day and visited Polignano, Monopoli, the archaeological site and museum at Egnazia, Matera (a world heritage site), Alberobello with its famous Trulli village and the forest nature reserve of Bosco delle Pianelle. We walked along the coast of the Adriatic and had great views of the Ionian Sea inside the 'heel' of Italy.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers

Dunster, Somerset - 2

On Dunkery Beacon. Photo: Julian Wilkes

At the beginning of July Staines Ramblers embarked on a four-day walking holiday of Exmoor, based at the Yarn Market Hotel in Dunster. This was facilitated by Julian Wilkes of Wilkes Walks, who arranged the bespoke programme in consultation with our secretary, Margaret Daborn.

Julian led the group up to the top of Dunkery Beacon on the first day where we were able to admire the stunning views and see across the Bristol Channel to Wales before walking back to Dunster. The next day was a circular walk from Tarr Steps during which we crossed the historic clapper bridge.

Cath Murphy led the walks for the last two days and this included undertaking a leg of the South West Coast Path from Minehead to Porlock Weir, which was undulating with steep drops beside the narrow paths and views of the sea. On the final day there was a circular walk from Brendon that took us along the Doone Valley and past the memorial stone to R D Blackmore who had lived nearby and was inspired by the area to write Lorna Doone . A group of Exmoor ponies were gathered around the finger post sign on the moor but moved away for us to continue on the right path!

A good time was had by all and those that weren't rambling were able to explore the historic and picturesque village of Dunster or catch a bus into Watchet, where some were lucky enough to see the Sir Nigel Gresley steam engine go through on the West Somerset Railway.

Linda Thrift
Staines Ramblers

Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire

Harrington House.

In April, a group of Wycombe Ramblers went to the HF House at Bourton-on-the-Water for our annual spring walking break. En route, we stopped at Burford, had a relaxed walk towards Swinburne and sampled the cafes before driving on to Bourton and checking in at Harrington House.

We were blessed with brilliant weather and were able to fully enjoy everything the house and the Cotswolds have to offer. The choice of three walks of increasing difficulty enabled those wanting to do longer distances to have that option, while those wanting a gentler pace were also catered for. The scenery and small villages we walked through were picture perfect and we were all amazed at how busy Bourton became over the weekend with standing room only in the cafes and ice cream parlours!

On the final day, all walks ended at Broadway, giving a short time for teas and a look at the shops before getting back to the house.

The staff at Harrington House were very helpful and the leaders were all fun and knowledgeable. They even provided a music-based quiz which was enjoyed, even if it did highlight our inability to recall artists or the year of the tracks!

It's a great format which delivered an excellent break which everyone seemed to fully enjoy. Roll on next year!

Lindsay Vale
Wycombe Ramblers

Brecon

Sixteen South East Berks members enjoyed a guided walking holiday in the Bannau Brycheiniog/ Brecon Beacons National Park during a heatwave in July. During the week some brave members tackled the mountains in strong sunshine to conquer the four peaks including Pen y Fan, while others took easier lower level walks with some dappled shade. Everyone enjoyed the Waterfalls Walk, all three grades of walkers meeting at the last waterfall. Our thanks go to Ed Burridge for organising this and other group holidays.

Roger Jones
South East Berks Ramblers

On the Waterfall Walk.
Photo Roger Jones

Bonassola, Italy

In late April, 23 of us took the plunge and visited the Cinque Terre in Italy with HF Holidays. Cinque Terre is a stunning coastal area on the Italian Riviera featuring five colorful villages. Knowing the terrain would test our climbing ability to the limit we boarded the plane at Heathrow with trepidation. We were based in Bonassola which was approached down a valley with 15 hairpin bends. The hotel breakfast room overlooked the sea some 250 yards away.

The walks were either from the hotel or we caught a train to one of the villages along the line. After a walk around the village we started our walks through vineyards, woodland and meadows to an adjacent village, all with magnificent views of the sea and coastline. On the final day the walks ended in Portofino where we took a boat trip along the coast with views of the villages we had visited during the week.

We all returned fitter and happier for our experience and look forward to our next European holiday.

Ed Berridge
South East Berkshire Ramblers

Enjoying the Italian sunshine. Photo: Julie Veazy

Malta and Gozo

Surrey Heath Ramblers' choice for a group break in May was a two-centre guided walking holiday in Malta and Gozo for ten days with Ramble Worldwide.

What a fantastic time we all had. Beautiful scenery, loaded with history ... and the famous balconies; Malta for their unique, colorful enclosed wooden balconies and Gozo for their open stone balconies ... stunning! In Malta we stayed at a four-star hotel half board with good food choices while in Gozo we stayed in a hotel overlooking the pretty little harbour and dined out in different restaurants each night. Walking and sightseeing at its best!

Alexis Gould
Surrey Heath Ramblers

Enjoying the sunshine Photo: Paul Seidman

Around the groups

White Cliffs visit

The first weekend of June saw 45 Chiltern Young Walkers head down to Kent for a busy weekend by the sea. We spread ourselves across a bunkhouse, camping and holiday chalets, all conveniently in Kingsdown, and five different hikes took place across four days including a short and long version of the landmark-rich cliff hike which involved some very soggy ramblers, a bout of brilliant sunshine, followed by some soggy ramblers once more.

We managed some swims in the sea, a lovely first evening watching the sunset outside a pub right on the beach and many many miles through fields, woodland and along the cliffs.

One thing we did notice, however, was that we are just a little spoiled with the state of the footpaths in the Chilterns. We vowed never to take it for granted again after fighting our way through the overgrowth for the third time that day!

Beth Stark
Chiltern Young Walkers

Soggy on the cliffs. Photo:Beth Stark

Charity event

Croydon & Sutton Samaritans was the chosen beneficiary for our annual charity event held on Thursday 11 June. We held three walks of different distances and start times from Elmore Pond at Chipstead. All the walks ended at 3pm when our usual tea and cakes were ready after what proved to be a very wet day's walking..

We were very fortunate to be joined by three volunteers from the Croydon & Sutton Samaritans, Marion, Bob and Vicky who gave a most interesting and engaging talk on how the Samaritan teams are organised and supported, the nature of the calls they receive and the sometimes difficult decisions they have to make. Perhaps most stark of all is the fact that they provide a 24-hour service, taking calls when other services are closed. It can be difficult to keep 40+ wet and bedraggled ramblers quiet and attentive but our visitors did just that!

By the end of June the total raised had exceeded £2,000.

Mary Brooks
Croydon Ramblers

Time for tea and a chance to dry. The Samaritan volunteers are in the lime green tops. Photo; John Tickner

Working hard

Farnham & District Ramblers have completed some major path maintenance tasks. We have a core of six to 10 volunteers turning out for most tasks each month.

In April our task was to repair 18 steps on a very steep footpath in Lower Bourne. The work involved digging out the old and broken steps. This was followed by some serious strong shoulder and arm duties as the team needed to carry about 20 bags of aggregate to infill around the new steps. By 2pm we were still hard at it although close to finishing and most of us were regretting that we hadn't packed a picnic lunch. However, one of the team lived close by and went home to bring us all a cuppa (or beer if preferred), which was very welcome.

Our task in May was again in the Lower Bourne area where we were to install revetments (a facing of impact-resistant material applied to a bank or wall in order to absorb the energy of incoming water and protect it from erosion), where the path edges had eroded alongside a stream. This again was another task that required the use of strong shoulders and arms as we needed to carry plenty more bags of aggregate to the site.

Our July outing was to repair and make additions to a recently installed bridge over the ford close to Frensham Little Pond. There was just a small team of four volunteers for this task, but between them they were able to complete the job.

Our thanks go to Thomas Chatfield from Surrey County Council who supports us in the path maintenance work, by coordinating tasks, gaining the necessary permissions from landowners and supplying us with tools and materials..

Work on the steps is completed. Photo: Martin Childs

Sue Harvey
Farnham & District Ramblers

Canal trip

Twenty four Lea & Icknield members enjoyed a canal trip and walk in early June, courtesy of BMK Waterways and organised for us by Ajay. We departed from Fenny Stratford, split into two groups: one cruising the canal to Three Locks, the other enjoying a six-mile walk to Three Locks via Great Brickhill. We all met up at the Three Locks pub to enjoy our packed lunches before swapping over for our return to Fenny Stratford.

The boat, Electra, is powered by electricity (surprise!), so is very quiet and non-polluting; the relaxing two hour cruise gave us plenty of opportunity to see the local wildlife up close. One group's trip included an encounter with a boat which had broken free from its mooring, requiring the Electra crew (all volunteers) to assist with the rescue!

Group members with Electra before the trip.

Rosemary Hasker
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers

Summer evening walks festival

The garden party in full swing. Photo: Pamela Bates

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers have celebrated 10 years of summer evening pub walks. These were introduced in 2016 by Walks Coordinator, Karen Veal, who saw the opportunity to extend the programme during the lighter summer evenings. Starting with nine evening walks during June and July, they became popular very quickly, especially with those unable to walk during the daytime. Our Wednesday evening walks now start in mid-May and continue throughout August until fading light calls a halt. To commemorate 10 years of these walks, we held a week-long festival with a walk every evening from 29 June to 4 July. We had great attendances and hope the festival will become a regular feature of our walks programme.

A regular feature of our social programme, our annual garden party and barbecue was held on Sunday 19 July at Chalgrave village hall, preceded by a lovely five-mile walk in the beautiful Bedfordshire countryside. More than 50 members and guests enjoyed glorious sunshine, regular and vegan barbecue food, a groaning buffet table of delicious salads and desserts baked by our members, an ice cream cart and lots of outdoor and indoor games to try. We had a great afternoon and witnessed some truly shocking bowling on the cricket field, but it is always a wonderful occasion when our rambler family gets together to chat and have fun.

Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers

Walkers meet the wooden sheep Photo: Lynda O'Rourke

A walk in the park

Earlier this year the Milton Keynes & District Group participated in the annual Milton Keynes Parks Trust's Festival of Walking.

The non-Ramblers who joined our walk were enchanted by the wooden sheep at Great Linford Manor Park, Created in 2021 by artist Luke Chapman, they serve as playful companion pieces to Milton Keynes' famous concrete cows. Attendance on our walks over the summer was compromised by the heatwaves and even our evening walks saw temperatures in the high 20s. Our mid-summer afternoon picnic was also less popular this year.

Sue Fisher
Milton Keynes Ramblers

Following the Serpent

SABRE members recently walked the 64-mile Serpent Trail from Haslemere to Petersfield - only 11 miles apart in a straight line but the trail snakes its way through the South Downs National Park covering Hampshire, Surrey and West Sussex.

The trail includes the Greensand Ridge, Woolbeding and Petworth. We completed this over seven Saturdays through a combination of circular and linear walks using the train or car shares to getto the start of the walks. We started this long-distance walk in May 2025 and finished it in May 2026.

We enjoyed looking back at our photos and the contrast of being wrapped up during the winter stages and looking very warm on the final section which ended with ice creams at Heath Pond in Petersfield on a very hot day. A big thank you to Shaun who led the walks and organised a trip back to Petworth so that we could enjoy a relaxed visit to the National Trust property of Petworth House.

Clair Baynton
SABRE - Surrey & Beyond Ramblers

On the last section of the Serpent Trail at Heath Pond in Petersfield. Photo: Shaun Claridge

Woking AGM

Woking Ramblers are holding their 2026 AGM on Saturday 21 November at St Mark's Church, 37 Westfield Road, Woking, GU22 9NQ.

The start time is 6.30pm for the meeting, followed by a bring and share meal. The evening should finish by about 9pm. Papers will be available on the Woking Ramblers website to download beforehand. Please note that this is the official notice of our meeting so pop the date in your diary and we look forward to seeing you there, if not before. For more information on what we are up to, please visit https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/ramblers-groups/woking-group.

Katherine Montgomery
Woking Ramblers

A joint success story

White Cliffs Ramblers work in cooperation with the Kent County Council paths team by clearing vegetation where needed and carrying out improvement work where possible. We also aim to support the county council by using the online fault reporting system to alert the prow team of issues on paths. On a number of occasions, I have been impressed with the prompt response to these reports in dealing with issues such as fallen trees.

Another example of impressive teamwork and the achievements of the county council and other volunteers occurred recently. Hugh Craddock, a volunteer researcher with the British Horse Society, has been especially active in the east Kent area and made a number of applications for public rights of ways to be added to the definitive map or upgraded in status - all supported by copious documentary archive evidence that the routes once existed and should be reinstated.

One example of Hugh's diligence is the reinstatement of a bridleway at Knowlton Court near Eastry where the ancient Black Lane - once part of a highway to Deal - had been blocked by a landowner and not included as a public right of way. At the same time, Hugh discovered that a footpath across the parkland and through a wood once joined the bridleway at Knowlton and he was successful in having that path added to the rights of way network. The bridleway is now fully reinstated and waymarked and makes a useful west - east route across the area to the south of Eastry.

The footpath, however, although added to the definitive map and now shown on Ordnance Survey maps had not been reinstated, was unmarked and still blocked by locked gates and fences. Dave Russell, one of our volunteer walk leaders, knows the area well and planned to use these recently reclaimed routes on some of the group walks he was leading. He recced the path through the woods and added a few markers to help guide walkers. We still had to scale the gates and fences - which fortunately are sturdy iron ones - rather than barbed wire, so last year Dave led a group of us to exercise the right to use the path.

Dave Russell with the walk group at one of the newly-installed stiles on Footpath EE487 at Knowlton Court.

As we crossed the parkland to the west of Knowlton Court a vehicle drove at speed across the grass to stop in front of us and the occupants demanded to know what we were doing. They denied that any right of way existed despite the evidence to the contrary which Dave showed them. Dave then calmly told them that we would continue on our way. The incident was reported by Dave and several others to the county council.

Dave planned another walk in April this year using the same paths but in the opposite direction. Dave briefed the group on the day of the walk that we may need to climb the fences again and mentioned the incident which occured last year. We were pleasantly surprised when we reached Knowlton, however, to discover that the county council had just installed several new waymarks and wooden stiles over the fences as a temporary measure until agreement can be reached with the landowner to install proper pedestrian gates.

Well done to Dave, Kent County Council and Hugh Craddock!

Andrew Swarbrick
White Cliffs Ramblers

A rubbish day out

Since the early 2020s walkers in Central Bedfordshire could not miss the soaring red chimneys of a new incinerator sited in a former clay extraction pit near Stewartby.

In June, members of North Beds Ramblers enjoyed an informative and fascinating visit to the Rookery South Energy Recovery Facility. The visit began with a welcome from the site's staff, who provided everyone with the necessary personal protective equipment before leading a tour of the facility.

Our first stop was the education centre, where interactive displays, diagrams and scale models explained the principles of the circular economy and demonstrated how household waste can be transformed into a valuable source of energy.

The tour continued to the fifth floor, overlooking the vast tipping halls and waste bunkers where refuse delivered by lorries is stored before processing. One of the highlights was the control room, where members watched the enormous grab cranes lifting and feeding waste into the boiler chutes. We also saw what could best be described as the 'operational brain' of the plant, where technicians continuously monitor combustion temperatures, steam production and environmental emissions to ensure the facility operates safely, efficiently and within environmental standards.

The scale of the operation is impressive. Around 200 lorries deliver waste to the site each working day, and the facility processes approximately 657,000 tonnes of residual waste every year. This generates around 60 megawatts of low-carbon electricity, enough to supply the equivalent of 120,000 homes. The site operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and employs around 50 members of staff across a wide range of disciplines.

Kitted out. Photo: Patrizia Franks

We also learned that approximately 70% of the facility's income comes from accepting waste for treatment, with the remaining 30% generated from selling electricity back to the National Grid. Nothing goes to waste. The bottom ash remaining after combustion is processed and recycled for use as aggregate in road construction, while other recovered mineral products are recycled into building materials such as concrete blocks.

The visit gave members an insight into modern energy recovery technology and challenged many common misconceptions about waste incineration. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and educational day, and our thanks go to the staff at Rookery South for providing such an informative tour.

We also learnt why the chimneys are red - to reflect the industrial heritage of the historic London Brick Company brickworks.

Patrizia Franks
North Beds Ramblers