

# Walker

## Thames Path opened at Craven Cottage



The view towards Hammersmith.



Looking towards Putney Bridge. Photos: Des Garrahan

**A** long-awaited addition to the Thames Path at Fulham's football ground in west London has opened. Des Garrahan tells the story:

Back in 1894 representatives of London's oldest professional football club, Fulham, were searching for land for a new stadium. Formed in 1879 as Fulham St Andrew's Church Sunday School Football Club in West Kensington they had already moved grounds at least eight times by 1888. They found some very overgrown land on the north bank of the Thames next to Bishop's Park.

The original Craven Cottage was built in 1780 by William Craven, the sixth Baron Craven, but this had been destroyed by fire in 1888. The ground was so overgrown by 1894 that it took two years to clear before work could begin on a stadium that was built right up against the river and the stadium was completed in just three years. All this is quite a long-winded way to illustrate that the public have never had the right to walk by the Thames at this point.

On 27 July 2012, Fulham football club was granted permission to redevelop the Riverside Stand, increasing the capacity of

Craven Cottage to 30,000 seats. Following the lengthy consultation it was decided the proposed development would include a riverside walk; light pollution would be reduced with the renewal of floodlight masts; new access points would make matchday crowds more manageable; and the new stand would be respectful in design to its position on the River Thames.

It's been a long, and sometimes frustrating, 12 years but in September 2024 the riverside walk was finally opened to the public. So back in the closing days of the 19th century it took three years to build a complete stadium while by the beginning of the 21st century it took over 12 years to redevelop a stand from proposal to construction!

The new path does, of course, come with restrictions - notably, it is not available on match days and will be shut overnight - but it is a magnificent addition to the Thames Path on the north bank. I hope you take the opportunity to enjoy it and while you are, I'd ask you to spare a thought for all those who had both the vision and persistence to see the project through to completion.

## 'Major concerns' over Epping Forest walking



Len Banister

**W**est Essex member and President of Essex Ramblers, Len Banister, has issued a challenge to the newly-appointed Superintendent of Epping Forest, Jacqueline Eggleston, citing 'major concerns' over the state of walking paths in the

forest.

Says Len: "Over the past two years the quality of walking in the forest has declined steeply. Many paths have become impassable due to reduced maintenance, the use of heavy contract vehicles and inadequate ranger numbers. But the main difficulty for walkers, especially in the winter months, is the destruction wrought by cyclists. Whereas a few years ago walkers could travel whole stretches of the forest using secondary paths which were little more than animal tracks, nowadays this option is closed to them. These paths are being destroyed. Even when the ground is just damp, they become uncomfortably rutted. When wet they are reduced to quagmires. The legacy of this damage is carried on to the summer as the ground hardens,"

He continued: "We now have

a forest-wide destruction of paths and habitat. In the past, many of these problems would have been picked up by keepers who would have patrolled on foot or horse. Now keeper numbers have been reduced and they have been given police-style cars. They have additional duties looking after car parks and thus have less time to report the condition of the forest."

Len has suggested that vital measures must be taken to ameliorate the situation for walkers, flora and fauna. These include:

- keepers should produce an inventory of the condition of all the forest paths, primary and secondary.
- cyclists are directed to rides and restricted from other areas in the same way as horse-riders.
- several areas are allocated or created where mountain-biking can take place.



Mountain bikes are making some Epping Forest paths difficult to walk.

Photos: Dave Evans

# First Green Chain walking festival held

**I**nner London Ramblers' Green Chain Walking Festival took place in the first two weeks of September with ten walks of varying lengths on the Green Chain in south east London led by different Inner London groups.

As well as regular walkers with the groups, we attracted some members who don't normally walk with us, members from outside our Area and also some non-members, including people who live locally. We were delighted to be able to introduce the Green Chain Walk to people not already familiar with it, or with south east London more generally, and to spread the word about the Ramblers and our work.

We had a successful event and short walk on the route at Lesnes Abbey with Will Norman, London's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, various members of the London Leisure Walking Forum, the Friends of Lesnes Abbey, local environmental groups and the borough. We are grateful to Will and to Hana Surch from Go Jauntly walking app for speaking to us about the importance of leisure walking, to Colin Sefton, Chair of Kent Ramblers, for joining us and to the Friends group who took some of us on a tour of the abbey ruins.

The festival included three walks on the 'missing' section 12 of the Green Chain from Eltham to Greenwich, which was never waymarked. We had some good engagement with councillors from the Royal Borough of Greenwich, two of whom walked with us, and with some officials in Lewisham, one of whom gave a group an interesting talk about Blackheath which the route crosses. We are hopeful that this all might take us a lot closer to getting the 'missing' section waymarked.



At Lesnes Abbey. Will Norman is on the right (with glasses).

Photo: Sarah Harrison

We were also able to arrange a special opening of Severndroog Castle for 28 walkers from West London Ramblers, who were treated to some of the best views in London.

A huge thank you to all the walk leaders and other volunteers who made the festival possible. I hope everyone

enjoyed the festival walks as much as I did.

If you haven't yet had the opportunity to explore the Green Chain Walk, we have maps and guidance available to download on the Inner London Ramblers website ([www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk](http://www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk)).

Clare Wadd

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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## A fantastic walking festival



**T**he Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walk 2024 ran between 7 and 15 September and it is fair to say that it was a huge success with 55 walks attracting 850 walkers over the nine days.

What did we do differently this year? The festival is hosted by the four groups that make up Bedfordshire Ramblers - North Beds, Leighton Buzzard, Lea & Icknield (Luton) and Ivel Valley Walkers. It's a huge task managing to source a large number of walks so this year we reached out to other groups and invited them to come in and provide walks as part of the festival. We had a terrific response to our request with support from our neighbouring Ramblers groups - Wellingborough Ramblers, Hunts Ramblers and Stag Walkers, but in addition to these we garnered support from local affiliated clubs Bedford Rambling Club and Toddington Ramblers together with general walking groups like the Northampton Shamblers and U3A. And of course, we should also mention the fantastic Wellbeing walks who contributed a number of shorter walks. We also saw the return of the Greensand Ridge Challenge, covering 40 miles in two days. All this meant we were able to offer walks from one to 21 miles across the nine days! Absolutely something for everyone.

The festival tries to reach out to people who may not normally consider walking and this year we had a large number of interest walks that sparked attendance from far and wide. The festival covered Friday 13 and we were delighted to host a Ghosts, Murders and Mysteries walk which attracted 29 walkers. There was also an evening bat walk where walkers were provided with bat detectors. We spotted four types of bat and saw a huge number as they emerged from their roosts to feed around the lake at Harrold and

Odell Country Park. There were short town walks looking at the industrial parts of Leighton Buzzard and the various industries associated with Luton. One of the benefits of town walking is that it allows accessibility for less mobile members of the public.

Fancy a nosy around a cemetery to discover the history locked up in the gravestones? The two walks around the Victorian cemetery in Bedford certainly sparked interest.

We are proud that our efforts opened up walking to a wider community. Our dedicated website and Facebook page also attracted groups who contacted us to advertise their walks via the medium and Turvey, a north Bedfordshire village, saw huge interest generated in their historical weekend. Then there were nature walks - it's the bird migration season and an early morning walk was offered by Marston Vale to see the birds packing their bags before flying south.

All the above supplemented our usual offering of morning, afternoon and all-day walks, covering the whole of the county and showcased the beautiful countryside that we call home.

Ramblers groups often find it difficult to attract enough walk leaders with time to source and recce walks, so imagine our delight when Northampton Ramblers decided to join one of our walks en masse thereby saving the need to source a walk and swelling our ranks at the same time.

Fancy something different? What about a walk and sail? We are privileged in Bedford to have the John Bunyan community boat which enables us to offer a walk along the Great Ouse and sail back, but it offers so much more than that because it offers flexibility, allowing people to choose how much of the walk they wish to do, so opening up the experience to many more people.

Having lots of walks is no use without walkers so here is a big shout out to those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes ensuring that our dedicated web page had all the walks information readily available and the massive push we had through the Bedfordshire Festival of Autumn Walks Facebook page and other group and local Facebook pages to spread our message far and wide.

Finally, what would a festival be without a course - a map reading course was also open to everyone to help develop map reading skills with an afternoon of practical application.

All in all, I think all would agree it was a fabulous festival.

Bedfordshire Ramblers would like to extend grateful thanks to all the walk leaders and all who attended one or more of the activities and also to all those behind the scenes. See you all next year!

Sandra Kelsey

North Beds Ramblers on behalf of Bedfordshire Ramblers



# BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

## Participate in our AGM and exercise your democratic rights!

The Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area AGM will be held at 2.00pm on Saturday 1 February 2025, in the Small Barn Hall of the Amersham and District Community Association, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP6 5AH. Please check the Area website, <http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk>, before the meeting for any changes or additional information. It is likely that there will be walks in the morning, details of which will also be published on the website. There is an adjacent car

park, but be aware that it is pay and display. The railway station and bus routes are within a few minutes walk.

Copies of the Annual Report will be available during January, on request from me, either as a PDF file (requests with 'Annual Report' as the subject, to [johnandjean@thamesinternet.com](mailto:johnandjean@thamesinternet.com)) or in print (requests, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope of suitable size for an A5 booklet, to 4 Park Farm Way, Lane End, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP14 3EG). An abbreviated version of the report, excluding personal details, will be published on the Area website.

Notice of any formal motion to be

proposed at the AGM should reach me no later than one week before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 25 January.

Note, also, that it is the business of the Area AGM to elect two members of General Council, who become company members of the Ramblers for legal purposes and are entitled to speak and vote at General Council meetings; expenses are paid by Central Office. Areas are encouraged to seek candidates from all parts of the membership, in line with our values of being inclusive to all and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. If you wish to put your name forward, or to find out more about what is involved, please contact me.

*John Esslemont*  
Acting Area Secretary

## Can you help the Area to continue functioning?

The Acting Area Secretary, who is also the Area Treasurer, is not willing to continue to fill both roles, and would prefer to find people to take over both roles. There may be scope for job sharing, particularly for the Secretary role.

Vacancies exist for other roles

including Countryside Secretary (to take the lead on planning issues affecting the Area, in partnership with our groups) and Publicity Officer. However, all officer roles are up for re-election at the AGM; do not assume that the incumbents would not welcome the opportunity to be replaced!

New officers, with new ideas, could revitalise the Area, while failure to fill the main officer roles could make the Area non-viable, in which case alternative arrangements would have to be made to support the Area's groups. Please help to rejuvenate and potentially, to save the Area. Any offers of help, or enquiries about what is involved, are welcome; please contact me at [johnandjean@thamesinternet.com](mailto:johnandjean@thamesinternet.com).

*John Esslemont*  
Acting Area Secretary

## Chippings laid



The plaque on the gate. Photo: Bill Piers

Four members of North Bucks rRIPPLE (Ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure and Exercise) laid down around a tonne of limestone chippings on a 10m length of footpath on 28 July. The short sloping section of path that leads down to a bridge over a small stream is perennially flooded due to water emanating from a spring in the field. This is a very well-used path linking Haddenham to Dinton and, in particular, the Seven Stars community pub, where a beer festival is held annually to raise funds for village projects. Requests have been made by numerous walkers over a number of years as to whether anything could be done to drain the muddy, slippery and potentially dangerous approach to the bridge to make it safer and easier to negotiate. Funding for any such improvements was promised by Dinton Beer Festival.

The landowner dismissed an initial suggestion of a boardwalk as he didn't want a 'structure' up against the hedge. At a site visit it was agreed that limestone chippings would be appropriate and acceptable. On

the day, the wettest part of the slope was dug out to form an improved gully down to the stream to allow the spring water to by-pass the line of the path. The line of the path was cleared of bricks, stones and odd bits of timber that had been used as stepping stones over the years. These were recycled to form an edge to the path in an attempt to separate it from the newly cleared gully. With the line of path relatively smooth, a premium non-woven geotextile was laid down, onto which the chippings were laid. A wacker plate was then used to tamp down the chippings.

How long this surface will last only time will tell. However, so far we've had nothing but appreciative comments. A plaque acknowledging Dinton Beer Festival's contribution was fitted to the gate at the bridge.

*Bill Piers*  
North Bucks rRIPPLE

For details of the group's Donate-a-Gate scheme for North Bucks go to [www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html](http://www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.html)



Job done! Left to right are Josh Hilbocus, Dave Watkins and Bill Piers. Photo: Gary Petersen



# INNER LONDON insights

## London walks project

Our volunteer team has continued to make good progress on this project to care for the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walks.

Now the London Loop is nearly 25 years old, many wooden posts and signs have fallen over or rotted away. Over the five years of our project we have upgraded the waymarking considerably with discs, stickers and some new vinyl overlays for waymark signs, however we have not been able to make improvements where there is nothing to attach a disc or sticker to.

We are grateful to have received donations of £500 to the project from each of the Long Distance Walkers Association (London Branch) and South Bank Ramblers which, with additional financial support from Inner London Area, have enabled us to buy 20 waymark posts, along with small plaques to recognise the donors. The first eight new posts to be installed will be on section 2 of the London Loop in Pests Wood, where National Trust rangers and the trustees of St Paul's Cray Commons had stated that if we could provide the posts then they would be able to install them. At the same time, we hope to adjust the route through the woods to a more attractive one which passes two memorials and is on higher (less muddy) ground.

Two further post installations are planned on section 21 of the Loop, where we believe we also have the means and permission to get them installed. We are aware that some Ramblers groups have working parties able to carry out this kind of practical work, so please do let us know if you have a path maintenance group which could support us to install the remaining 10 posts on the London Loop near you (please contact me at [vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk](mailto:vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk)).

General improvements continue to be made, including on section 15 of the Loop where it was possible to knock an old post back into the ground to prevent walkers taking a wrong turn near Grim's Dyke Golf Course, where development work is taking place. And we understand that there is now better signage for the diversion around the development work alongside the Thames at Cyprus on section 15 of the Capital Ring. Through the Inner London Ramblers website we continue to highlight blockages affecting the routes, often fallen trees, as increasingly notified to us by fellow



Clare spruces up a Capital Ring sign.

walkers; we also alert councils to these blockages to expedite their removal.

We have committed to keeping the detailed PDF walks guidance up to date for the Capital Ring, London Loop and Green Chain Walk - and our team of section volunteers is now in the process of doing the updates for 2024. Thank you to all the volunteers working on this. This guidance replaced the old Transport for London (TfL) PDFs and links from TfL's website to ours. This comes with the requirement that the PDFs meet TfL's accessibility requirements and for TfL to approve them before publication; while this prevents us from undertaking ad hoc updates, a considerable amount of the traffic to our website comes from the link on the TfL website, and we find there have been sufficient changes in a year to make annual updates a very valuable exercise.

Having carried out full audits of each of the routes which were then compiled into borough-by-borough improvement lists (for London boroughs) last year, we are now engaged in the process of contacting councils to press them to carry out the necessary works. Earlier this year we were able to get TfL to change the guidance issued to London boroughs for Local Improvement Plan (LIP) funding such that it can now be spent on leisure walking, which removes one barrier to improvements taking place. The improvements required range from minor but important (realigning signs to point the right way), to more major (re-routings, road crossings, speed limit adjustments and so on). Incidentally, even getting in touch with councils to try and progress this is proving a long and painful process, but we'll keep trying as this is a key part of our work to improve the London Loop, Capital Ring and Green Chain Walk for all to enjoy.

*Clare Wadd*  
Inner London Ramblers



# Area Secretary's diary

**V**olunteer vacancies: Filling our volunteer roles, particularly those involved in footpath work, has continued to be a key focus of my activity and I am pleased to report some encouraging progress, particularly in the west of the county. As a large Area covering four Highway Authorities with about 4,675 miles of public rights of way, we have a slightly more elaborate organisational structure than most Areas.

Our most numerous volunteers are our Parish Footpath Observers (PFOs) who each take on the task of walking all the paths in one or more parishes at least once a year and reporting any issues to the relevant Highway Authority (council). We have

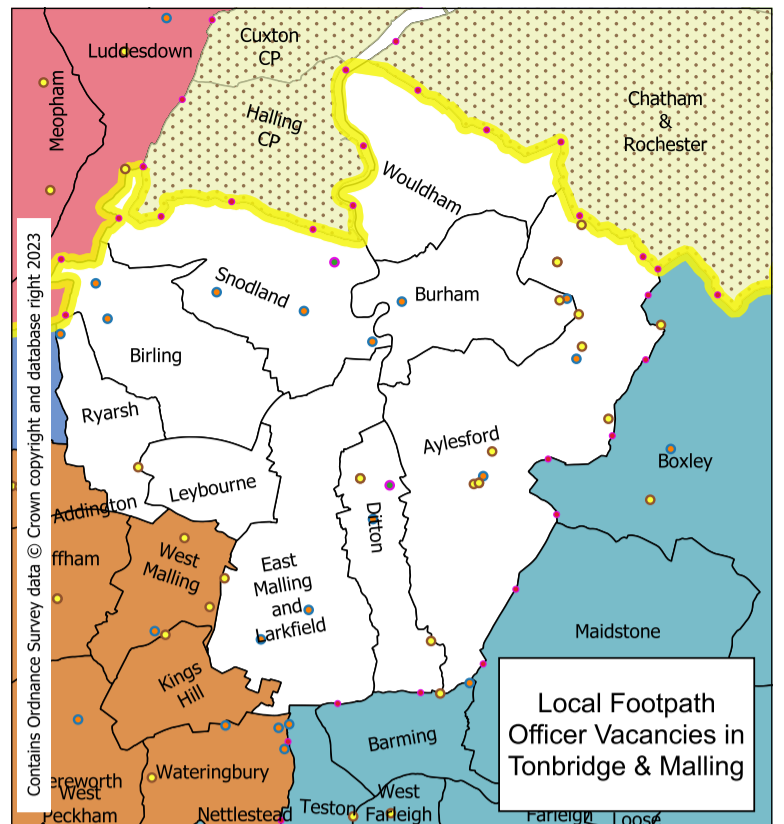
387 parishes and 294 of them are currently covered by 183 PFOs.

A little more demanding is the role of a Local Footpath Officer (LFO). This involves scrutinising proposals to close or divert footpaths and planning applications that affect footpaths to ensure that the interests of walkers are protected as far as possible. In many parishes such work only arises every few years so an LFO will normally cover several parishes. We have 39 LFOs in post covering 347 parishes making the average around eight parishes each and leaving 40 parishes vacant.

I am pleased to report that the Tunbridge Wells parishes that featured in my last diary now have an LFO. My next priority is to fill a group of nine vacant parishes in

Tonbridge & Malling District and shown in the accompanying map. You do not have to live in or even very near the area as much of the work is desk-based and visits are only necessary when particular proposals need to be checked out. If you are or might be interested in the role, please email [pro@kentramblers.org.uk](mailto:pro@kentramblers.org.uk) for more information. Please think very hard about whether you can help out - this work benefits all walkers but, sadly, few contribute to it.

**Ordnance Survey:** My dialogues with this once-great mapping organisation continue and perhaps progress is being made. The good news is that they have released a new edition of Explorer 149 (Sittingbourne & Faversham) so if you like to



LFO vacancies in Tonbridge & Malling

keep your maps up to date now is the time to buy a copy. The bad news is that they are still using an image of the 2015 edition on their website, which is very confusing for purchasers. They have promised to do better in future. If this sheet can be updated after a 'mere' nine years, one wonders why we are still waiting for a new edition of sheet 148 (Maidstone and the Medway Towns)

after 16 years and counting. Errors showing rights of way continue to surface and I have just reported one near Edenbridge where in the course of reflecting the consequences of a path order confirmed last year an unaffected path has been accidentally deleted. The path order in question diverted part of the Eden Valley Walk and the error is in addition to those I mentioned in a previous diary.

## AGM and Annual Review

Our next AGM will be in Wye on Saturday 1 February 2025 - please see your Annual Review for more information and check our website immediately before the meeting if you are planning to attend in case of last minute

changes. Talking of the Annual Review, in last year's edition we invited views on whether an online version would be an acceptable replacement for the printed version. Although there were quite a lot of responses,

there were not enough to be statistically reliable. However, the vast majority of those who did respond were strongly in favour of retaining a printed version. We do in any case allow members to opt out of the printed version and access the Annual Review online but very few do.

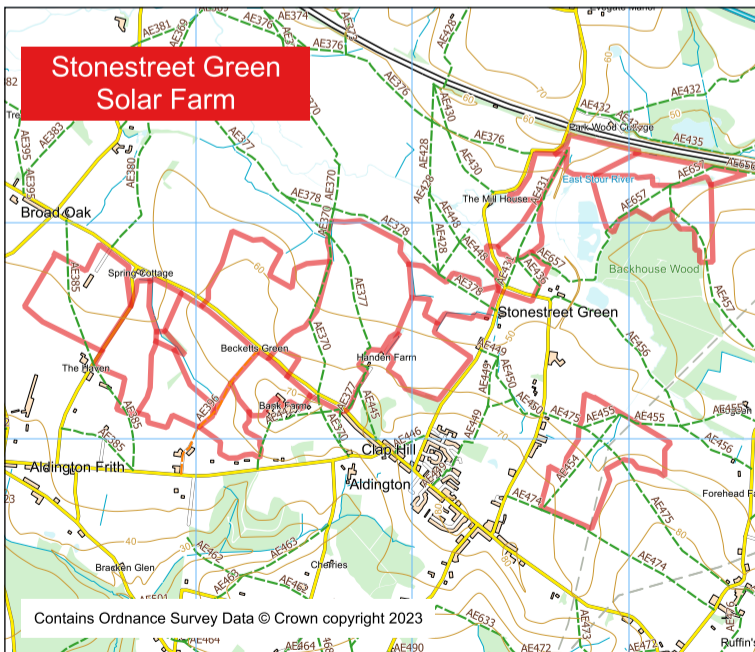
## Parish maps

Readers may be wondering about progress with our parish maps project. This involves refreshing some of the 100+ parish maps scattered around Kent using profits from sales of walking guides. Some of these maps, between 15 and 25 years old, are in poor condition and replacing the map panels (but

retaining the frames in most cases) is an opportunity to inspire people to explore their local path network and experience the benefits of walking the fine Kent countryside. It has taken a while but we have now agreed a basic design with Kent County Council, who own the frames containing the maps, and we hope to have the first map installed early next year with others following rapidly thereafter.

## Solar farms

**T**he downside of Kent getting more than its fair share of sunshine is that everyone wants to build a solar farm here. Of course we need renewable energy and we must accept that some solar farms will be built in Kent. Indeed one of the UK's largest is already under construction on the coastal marshes adjoining the Saxon Shore Way and coast path between Faversham and Seasalter - it will take around an hour to pass from one end to the other. But how much of the glorious Kent countryside should be covered by solar panels and to what extent is it reasonable to reorganise the path network to fit the preferred layout of panels rather than plan the layout to respect the path network? Furthermore, it would surely be better to have an overall strategy for Kent, setting a limit on the

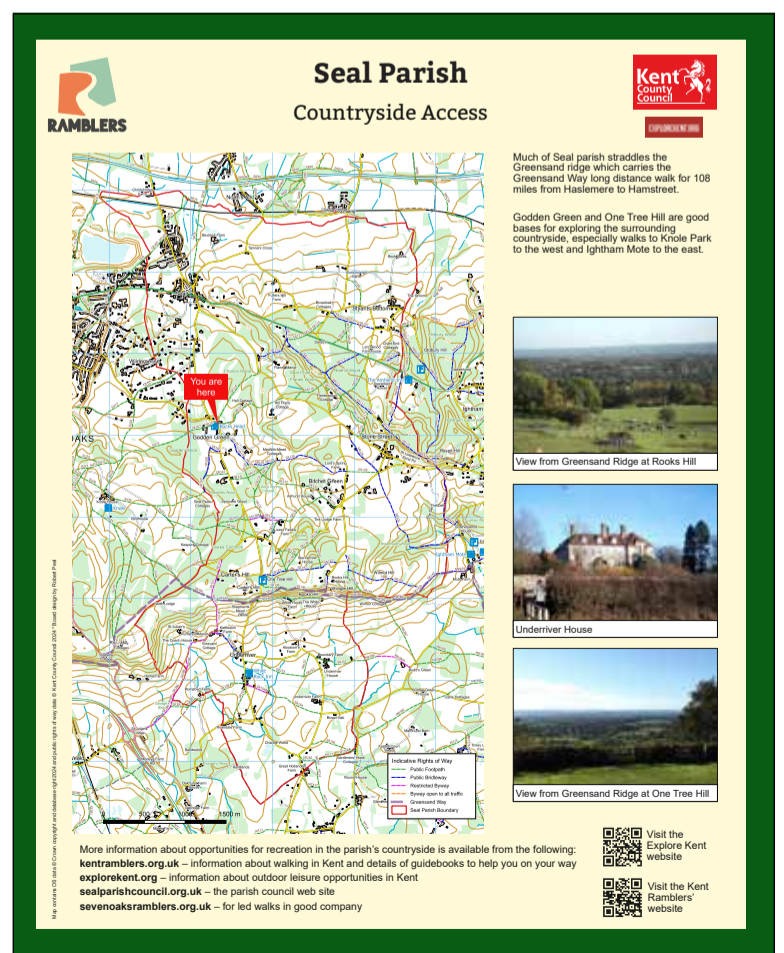


Stonestreet Green Solar Farm

acreage of countryside to be sacrificed to solar panels and then allocating it optimally rather than dealing with each application in isolation. We will be considering these and other issues at our next meeting for footpath workers.

The map shows a large solar

farm being proposed for a site near Aldington, perhaps most famous as home of the Holy Maid of Kent who was executed by Henry VIII for speaking out against his marriage to Anne Boleyn. The map covers an area three kilometres by four kilometres.



Draft new map for Seal parish.



# SURREY snippets

## Bridge building



Woking Ramblers team with the new bridge.

Photo: Linda Fell

**B**ack in August on one of the hottest days of the year, Woking Group members undertook a successful path maintenance task removing a rotting sleeper bridge over a ditch on Woking Footpath 82 at Pyrford and replacing it by building a new H-frame bridge. This was supplied in kit form by Surrey County Council, and we had to assemble it.

What hadn't been realised by the county council when doing their risk assessment was that there was some concrete under the earth surface and breaking this up with pickaxes to be able to dig the holes for the uprights of the new bridge was hard work! Luckily, the ditch was bone dry on the day of the task, as it is more often full of water. Many thanks to all who took part.

*Brian Reader  
Woking Ramblers*

## Walking with refugees



Enjoying the English winter!

Photo: Heather Hardie

**I**nspired by an article by Mole Valley Ramblers in the September 2022 issue of South East Walker, members of Croydon Ramblers have been organising monthly walks with refugees since May 2023 and the positive comments and happy photos we've received after every walk make it really worthwhile. The term 'refugee' here is used in a wide sense to cover asylum seekers, who are waiting for a decision on whether they can stay here and generally live in hotels with very limited income, and also those given refugee status and who are allowed to stay in the UK but are often struggling to find accommodation and jobs.

We started by liaising with refugee agencies in Croydon and

initially decided to focus on one local hotel housing asylum seekers. One of the residents had the role of 'activator' and was able to help with recruitment. We decided to walk at weekends, to keep the walks to about four or five miles, to take walkers by bus to the start point and to have frequent stops, with home made cakes to share. We raised a modest amount of funding (used for bus fares and church teas so far) from a project supporting refugees. We recruited a bank of volunteer helpers from Croydon Ramblers to call on as needed and we had a successful pilot walk with refugees and helpers. One of the refugee walkers suggested a WhatsApp group to advertise the walks - a great idea which we have adopted and used

ever since - and all was going well but then the activator disappeared. This is one of the hazards - people are often transferred to other areas at very short notice or their circumstances change.

We had fairly small numbers of walkers throughout the winter, not helped by the weather, and we sometimes had to stand down volunteers. A local refugee centre provided lots of donated walking boots which came in useful in the wet weather, especially for one walker who turned up in flip flops. We found that taking the bus took ages so we changed to driving refugees from their hotels to the walks.

Recently we've been helped with publicity by Care4Calais, a voluntary agency that supports asylum seekers in hotels. We've started getting referrals from other hotels and suddenly we are getting more people wanting to walk than we can cope with, and need more volunteers, especially those with a car. Our July walk with refugees from Afghanistan, Morocco, Poland, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, was one of our most successful and took place on a beautiful day with a great welcome for tea and cakes at the lovely old St Mary's church at Farleigh.

If anyone from the Croydon area would like to volunteer to help, please contact us.

*Mary Simpson (maryksimpson@sky.com) and Heather Hardie (heathermhardie@gmail.com).  
Croydon Ramblers*



# OXFORDSHIRE on-line

## Area AGM

Our Oxfordshire Area Ramblers AGM will be on Saturday 25 January 2025 at 1.30pm, Eynsham Village Hall, 46 Back Lane,

Eynsham, OX29 4QW. Our hosts will be Oxon Weekend Walkers. Other details, eg of a pre-AGM walk, will be on the online walks programme: click on the 'walking' tab at [www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk](http://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk).

## Grant from Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment

**T**he Trust for Oxfordshire's environment has provided a grant to the Vale Path Volunteers (VPV), the path maintenance team of the Vale of White Horse Ramblers. This was to buy new, greener tools for improving the accessibility of footpaths in the Vale.

"Knowing how hard the VPV works maintaining paths around the district, we were delighted to award them a grant for new tools," said Rachel Sanderson, Head of Community Grants at the trust. "These unsung heroes work throughout the year in all weathers and their invaluable work is much appreciated by countless walkers. It's great to see the new tools being put to good use and immediately making footpaths easier for us all to enjoy, thanks to the VPV."

"Our heavy petrol-driven long-handled hedge cutter was proving problematic," said Pat Rosum, coordinator of the VPV. "We wanted to replace it with a lighter greener battery-driven hedge cutter for mid-level trimming, a manual lightweight telescopic pruner for higher tree branches, and a robust pruning saw for thick stems. Also, these tools can be carried by three different volunteers, making it more comfortable than our older hedgecutters for getting

to and from the target footpaths.

The VPV have used the new tools to clear footpaths in several parishes, including on Boars Hill in Sunningwell. Blackthorn, brambles, briar, nettles and thistle blighted the 450-yard-long footpath from Lincombe Lane, past Bayworth mobile home park to Brumscombe Lane in Sunningwell. This made it hazardous to walk along, no doubt deterring many locals, especially since another path connecting it through a historic quarry to the village had become impassable for some years.

"Now both paths are accessible, thanks to the clearance work of the VPV, and will be widely used, helped by the publicity they can be given through parish websites and newsletters," said Ramblers member Bob Evans who lives in Sunningwell. "Besides affording a splendid panorama of the Vale of White Horse, the two cleared paths link to a network of other popular walks in both Sunningwell and Wootton."

The new tools, in combination with the VPV's existing ones, were extremely effective in restoring the Sunningwell footpath to provide a wide, scratch-free route along Boars Hill, with its lovely views over the surrounding countryside.

*Dave Cavanagh  
Vale Path Volunteers*



Bob with the new telescopic tree pruner.  
Photo: Pat Rosum



Andy with the new battery-operated hedge cutter.  
Photo: Pat Rosum

# Imprint

'Imprint' features a muddy, chilly walk we did on the North Downs Way near Molash and Chilham in Kent; the deer we hoped to see eventually made a rather dramatic entrance!

Lizzie Ballagher

*Have you seen deer today?* they ask.  
Heads down, tramping fields by Molash,  
our horizon is little else but mud---  
clagged mud and hollows drop in rain-water  
where footpaths run counter to furrows  
by the winter woods.

*Have you seen deer today?* Another stops us,  
demands to know, as if in cheery mockery  
while an iced wind burns our cheekbones;  
the furrow-pools boast panes of glass;  
and our boots weigh heavily  
with Wealden clay.

*Have you seen deer today?*  
This time, we simply shake our heads:  
weary. Trudge along, make the best  
of the trek, now singing loudly  
in chorus to ornament the air  
with puffs of pallid breath.

*Have you seen deer today?*  
Sticks break. Twigs snap.  
Sharply, we turn --- hear animals  
bursting through the thicket.  
Our voices have sent them  
bounding away, unseen.

Later, as we pass that place again,  
we see the wild typography of deer  
careering off the path we'd taken.  
Deeply impressed in wet earth,  
cloven-hoof-prints --- however dumb---  
speak eloquently of deer: their bravery.

Words © Lizzie Ballagher.  
Photo: Scott Carroll on Upsplash



## Exploring the Gainsborough Line

One of our projects this year has been a series of four walks, some 40 miles in total, along the Gainsborough Line on the border between Essex and Suffolk.

The train service that shuttles between Marks Tey and Sudbury is what is left of a branch line that swept on past Haverhill to Shelford near Cambridge. It is now named the Gainsborough Line - the artist was born and spent his early years in Sudbury. This remnant of railway history inspired four members of our group to piece together a walking trail. The idea was to use the stations as staging posts for a chain of walks, three linking the four stations of the line, and a fourth exploring the countryside around Sudbury following in part stretches of the former rail track now refurbished for cyclists and walkers.

The walks pursued the railway theme. The four stations themselves have been tarted up for tourists: they each have information panels on the area, and when we passed were bright with summer bedding. After Marks Tey the line crosses the Chappel Viaduct, built in 1847-49, and one of the largest brick-built structures in the country. Chappel & Wakes Colne station has the East Anglian Railway Museum - we arrived too late to catch a special steam train run, but were rewarded with a view of no less than Thomas the Tank Engine on a visit and a glimpse of his pal Henry.

As well as railway attractions, the walks offered variety: country churches; blue fields of borage in flower; riverside paths fringed with umbellifers; a beer festival at Bures; a monument to Dodie Smith, author of 101 Dalmatians; World War II pillboxes; and of course the Gainsborough Museum at Sudbury with a display crinkle crinkle wall - a feature of local architecture - in the garden.

Our four guides sorted out hiccoughs on the recces. The first stage in particular required testing several options, as there were no obvious routes. The walk proper made a detour away from a chicken farm, which was judged too smelly. Outside the planners' control, the Met Office issued a yellow weather warning for the final walk - but we just kitted up and strode it out ...

The project was completed successfully. Our four leaders are now glad of a break from the Saturday slog of the 9.05 out of Liverpool Street; and the rest of us have the satisfaction of having enjoyed the walks and getting to know an area previously unfamiliar.

Ruth Le Guen  
South Bank Ramblers



East Anglian Railway Museum at Chappel & Wakes Colne.

Photos: Ruth Le Guen



Chappel Viaduct.



Fields of borage.



South Bank's four Gainsborough Line leaders.

# Walking with the London Blind Ramblers

## Getting close to nature

An urban walk full of natural history interest was enjoyed by members of London Blind Ramblers and West London Ramblers in October. Starting from Alperton tube station it was an easy walk along the green banks of the Grand Union Canal. Then a welcome break for picnic lunches and delicious home-made cakes at the Selborne Society's Bluebell Centre in Perivale Wood Local Nature Reserve.

The society, one of the country's longest established conservation organisations, owns and, with the help of volunteers, manages the wood for biodiversity. We enjoyed a fascinating talk about its conservation work and also had the chance to see up close some very cute harvest mice, kept in a terrarium at the centre, which delighted many of our members. We then had a guided walk

through the 18 acres of ancient mixed woodland experiencing the unique atmosphere of the wood. Our visually impaired visitors were impressed that the paths were marked with small branches on either side, making navigation much easier.

After another short walk along the canal we reached Paradise Fields in Greenford. This is the location of London's first fully accessible urban beaver reintroduction project. We weren't able to see the beavers as they are only active at dawn and dusk but we could see signs of their dam building activities. Some of our visually impaired members used their white canes in order to get an idea of the size and sturdiness of these dams. They were impressed!

Overall, it was a wonderfully varied and interesting day.

*Mary Rutherford, West London Ramblers and Steven Lane, London Blind Ramblers*



In Perivale Wood.

Photo: Lina Ma



Time for tea.

Photo: Ann Brinton

## A day in Farnham

Farnham Ramblers had a great day out with the London Blind Ramblers on Sunday 12 August. Eight blind ramblers came down from Waterloo (even though their travel plans were disrupted), with three of their own sighted helpers to assist with the journey, and were met at Farnham station by Liz Q and her band of helpers. They had the choice of a four and a half mile or six and a half mile walk and we all set off together for the first part with the route taking us out to Farnham Castle.. This was by special request of one of our visitors and Liz was happy to incorporate the castle visit into the walk

It was then on to the cafe in Farnham Park for a drink and snack break before splitting into two groups with the shorter distance walkers heading for the Six Bells pub. The longer distance walkers took a circuit of the

golf course before returning via the Six Bells and High Mill. As usual the day ended with a splendid cream tea, hosted for us in the garden of John and Mary S. There were mountains of scones with jam and cream and gallons of tea and coffee. After tea, we all walked back to the station. A huge thank you must go to Liz who has been organising this annual event for a number of years. The walks were led by Liz W and Alan K and we must thank all the Farnham members who helped provide one to one assistance for each of our visitors.

*Sue Harvey  
Farnham Ramblers*

London Blind Ramblers are always delighted to hear from groups who would be happy to host them. To find out more about what hosting a walk involves, please email [enquiries@londonblindramblers.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@londonblindramblers.org.uk)

## Fighting the traffickers

Members of Croydon Ramblers joined a 10-mile walk from Chipstead on Thursday 1 August to raise funds and awareness for Caterham-based charity, 'Their Voice', which helps victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. The organisation accepts donations of clothes, toiletries, toys and books and runs workshops aimed at promoting self-esteem and emotional rehabilitation

for those who have managed to escape their traffickers. The walk was led by Dave Scott and accompanied by two members of staff from 'Their Voice'. A shorter amble around Kenley airfield was held on the following Sunday. A welcome cup of tea and choice of home made cakes was available at the end of each walk.

*Sue Matthews  
Croydon Ramblers*



At the start of the walk.

Photo: John Tickner

## Digital only:

Sadly, this issue of South East Walker is only available in digital format. This follows the decision by Central Office to publish the December 2024 issue of walk magazine (which South East Walker is mailed to members with) as a 'trial' digital only issue. The cost of mailing South East Walker on its own would be prohibitive, so only an online version is possible this time. We hope to be back with a printed version of our March 2025 issue.

## Explore with Map and Compass:

East Sussex member John Harmer is planning to run another one-day course for beginners in late March or early April at Battle. A standard charge of £10 is made with concessions available. If you are interested, please contact John on 01424 773998 or email [john@harmerfamily.plus.com](mailto:john@harmerfamily.plus.com). A more advanced course will be run too if there is sufficient demand.

## Pirbright Military Trail

The Ministry of Defence opened the Pirbright Military Trail, an 11-mile multi-user recreational route, on 5 November. Much of the route is on MoD land that is not used for live firing, a section of the Basingstoke Canal, and some existing public rights of way. The nearest railway stations are Brookwood and Ash Vale, both with direct trains from London Waterloo.

# Around the groups

## Jason's 100th walk

Jason Owen led his 100th walk for the Berkshire Walkers from Pewsey station on Saturday 9 September and around 20 people turned up to celebrate, despite train delays and cancellations. Jason was presented with a specially made walk leader badge to commemorate the occasion as well as a framed print with group photos from every one of his walks to date. He was also presented with a celebratory cake. Our Chair, Grant, praised

Jason for the enthusiasm he brought to the group and for consistently ensuring his walks are accessible by public transport.

Jason also played a huge role in helping us all get through the Covid pandemic, sometimes even leading two walks in a weekend when permitted, to ensure we all had an opportunity to get out and about. We are all looking forward to seeing what Jason does next!

*Shannon Jones  
Berkshire Walkers*



Jason with his certificate. Photo: Georgia Kingston

## 500 miles of smiles



Greeting the Gruffalo.

Photo: Chris Candy

Members of Chilterns Weekend Walkers hiked a combined 500 miles in a weekend during the group's biggest walking festival in September. The anniversary events have become a highlight of the group's year. The first two, in 2022 and 2023, took place at Penn Street on a single day, with a choice of five circular walks which all intersected at lunchtime for a picnic with cake and prosecco.

This year the concept was taken a stage further with a festival expanding to two days and using two bases. The focus for Saturday was a picnic at Lane End. It was a 9.30am start for the first walk, a hilly sevenmiler around the Hambleton valley led by Jane Major. I led a short walk to Wheeler End later in the morning. At lunchtime, returning walkers were joined by a party on a ten mile circular from Bradenham - a walk so hilly it required three pub stops to keep everyone

hydrated! In the afternoon, I set off again on a six miler via Frieth.

On the Sunday walkers converged on Wendover Woods, a convenient picnic venue with plenty of benches near the cafe. Lisa English led a four mile circular walk and brought cakes for the lunchtime gathering. Alan Cooper led the longest walk of the weekend - an 11-miler from Tring, while Mark Percy brought a group from Wendover, pausing by the Wendover Woods Gruffalo for a photo opportunity. After the picnic, Mark's walk continued with a flying visit to an open day at Halton House, the former Rothschild mansion used by the RAF as an officers' mess.

More than 60 walkers took part in the two-day festival which also marked our group's 18th anniversary. Once again the festival was a big success. It's a great opportunity to bring the group together, showcase the variety of our programme and welcome newcomers.

*Tim Axten  
Chilterns Weekend Walkers*

## All aboard

Farnham Ramblers spent a fabulous summer evening cruising the Basingstoke Canal preceded by a four mile walk from Colt Hill to North Warnborough and back. We had 37 members on the walk and were joined by another five for the cruise which included a fish or chicken and chips supper. We met up with the John Pinkerton 2 and her crew at Colt Hill and headed up the canal towards King John's Castle, one of only three fortresses built during King John's reign and half way between Windsor and Winchester. We enjoyed Rose Prosecco and Bucks Fizz aboard and there was a bar available for those who prefer beer or maybe something stronger. After dropping off some of the



On board the John Pinkerton 2.

Photo: Clive P

cruisers who wanted a closer look at the castle, we carried on along the canal a short distance to a turning point where we were able to witness the skill of our crew in turning a 68 feet narrow boat.

A big thank you to Clive P for leading us on the walk and to Celia G and Sue H for organising a great event.

*Sue Harvey  
Farnham & District Ramblers*

## Remembering Jeremy

The Chiltern Young Walkers set off on a beautiful yet poignant walk on 28 July from Chesham through rolling farmland and strips of woodland towards The Lee. Just before we reached Ballinger Common we stopped to admire the new gate donated by the group via the Chiltern Society's 'Donate-a-Gate' scheme in memory of Jeremy Frost. Jeremy was a very active member of the Chiltern Young Walkers but sadly he passed away a few years ago and together with his wife Clare they were particularly well known for their excellent weekends away, and Jeremy for his habit of speeding up when we were close to the pub!



Jeremy's gate. Photo: Beth Stark

We were honoured to have Clare join us for the walk and say a few words about her husband, and to uphold the inscription in Jeremy's honour we paid a wonderful visit to the Cock and Rabbit pub at The Lee, where we received a warm welcome. Thanks to Paul Rhodes for devising and leading this lovely walk.

*Beth Stark  
Chiltern Young Walkers*



Jeremy Frost. Photo: Clare Frost

## A life worth celebrating

We've installed a memorial gate at the church of St John the Evangelist at Wotton, near Dorking (see SEW March 2024), and now we've had a party to celebrate the life of Natasha Claridge, a much-loved member of our group who died in December 2022. Sixty five members gathered at St Anthony's church hall in Hamsey Green on Friday 5 July for the party. Natasha had always said she would like us to remember her in this way.

And what did we do? We played bingo! Now, whether Natasha ever played bingo I don't know, and frankly it seems unlikely given her more highbrow interests. But she was willing to have a go at most things; she was an accomplished amateur photographer and painter as well as an indefatigable walker, and I'm sure she would have tackled bingo with her customary enthusiasm. But our members? Not so much. They stumbled through their bingo cards with many requests for numbers to be repeated, and false calls of 'House'. After this

display, the players who complete three cards simultaneously at Gala bingo have my undying admiration.

Following our laughable efforts at bingo, we were rewarded with a splendid high tea, a proper spread with home made cakes and prosecco to wash it down, as an alternative to our customary cups of tea.

John Tickner, our very own group photographer, had compiled three slide presentations about Natasha to close the party - one of the lady herself, always smiling whatever the situation on group walks and holidays; one lyrical photo essay to the big skies above the South Downs which she loved to walk over; and last to the rain-sodden crew installing the memorial gate last December.

Our thanks to the committee and many members of our catering team who made it all possible (and special thanks to Chris Harman who stepped in to run the slide show in John's absence). We all enjoyed ourselves, and I think the guest of honour would have approved, even if she couldn't be there in person.

*Peter Southgate  
Croydon Ramblers*



Ready to bingo!

Photo: Chris Harman

## 'Walk n talk'

Fancy a gentle local walk with chat and a coffee on a Saturday morning? A very neat solution to this particular wish has been found and is proving very popular and advantageous both for Hillingdon Ramblers and also for Ruislip (Manor Farm) Library. In order to support their local community and increase attendance at this historic site, the library, which is housed in the Little Barn, a Grade II listed oak building, has teamed up with us and we hold a twice monthly 'Walk n Talk' event.

Our walk leaders find local easy walks generally up to four miles long and we meet outside the barn. The pace is slow and there is a lot of

chat along the way. At the end, the library is open to welcome us in to sit and have a coffee (for the princely sum of 50p!) and continue chatting. We typically will have at least 20 walkers turn up, some of whom could no longer manage many of the longer and more strenuous walks that our group offers.

Despite the relatively urban area, there are many pretty walks and places of interest such as Eastcote House Gardens, within close proximity. The Manor Farm site dates back to the 1066 era and the grounds include a Norman motte and bailey on which there is archaeological evidence of a wooden castle also dated from 1066. So there is much of interest in this location to make it an excellent meeting place for these popular walks.

*Simon Thornhill  
Hillingdon Ramblers*



Outside the library before setting off.

Photo: Jess Lee

## Happy 40th birthday Ivel Valley Walkers

Members of Bedfordshire's Ivel Valley Walkers celebrated the group's 40th anniversary on Wednesday 17 July at Langford. This began with three separate walks. The 10-mile walk was led by Marcus Kilby, the seven-mile walk by Colin and Jackie and the five-mile walk by David and Rosemary. After the walks there was a hog roast (or vegan alternative) before Tony Sheward talked about the group's history from its humble beginnings through to the very successful group it is today. Then founder members Linda Kynnersley and Bruce Blott cut the anniversary cake before everyone enjoyed an afternoon tea which included some superb homemade cakes made by members. To round off, Bernard Morse, who had done a fantastic job organising everything, including the weather, offered the opportunity to try crown green bowling at the local bowls club.

*Barry Ingram*



Bruce Blott and Linda Kynnersley cut the anniversary cake.

Photo: Barry Ingram

## Picnic invite

There are many members who can no longer enjoy our walks. Barbara Crow, our Chair, thought it would be a great idea to invite them to a picnic. But why not have a walk for our regular walkers as well and all to meet up at Horton Country Park to enjoy some chat, reminiscing,

and a picnic lunch?

Nearly 40 members (plus one non-member) met at Chessington South station on Wednesday 18 September for a seven and a half mile walk. The majority had arrived by train and a few by local buses. The leader, Caroline Cunliffe, then led us to the Barn at Malden Rushett for coffee before continuing on via Ashted and Epsom commons to Horton Country Park. Several members

were already there to prepare hot and cold drinks to go with the homemade cakes made by members to supplement the picnic. There was a bus opt out and toilets at the park.

Our walk back to Chessington South followed the Thames Down Link and field paths. There were immediately requests for another event!

*Brenda and David Horwill  
Kingston Ramblers*



Enjoying the picnic.

Photo: Steve Ransome

## No such thing as bad publicity



At the carnival.

Photo: Pamela Bates

We are all eager to increase membership of our groups and social media plays a key part in the promotion of our activities locally. We assume that everyone is tuned into Instagram, Tik Tok and all the other digital platforms, yet many of our members tell us that they never look at social media.

It seems you cannot beat good old-fashioned publicity and as Leighton Buzzard Ramblers we try to take part in as many community

activities as possible. We are fortunate to have a Charter market and at the invitation of the town council, we have taken stalls at the Easter and Halloween markets and at the town's very first Pride event. We also have a very busy stand at our annual canal festival and take part in the Christmas tree festival, with our tree suitably adorned with rambler-themed decorations. This year we also took part in the walking section of the town carnival and, whilst a long way from Rio, the day was an enormous success with an incredible

atmosphere. Wearing our group t-shirts, we waved and cheered to the crowds lining the route which generated a lot of interest in our group afterwards. The icing on the cake was winning first prize and a shield in the walking category.

So, while our social media presence is very important to us, you can't beat boots on the ground for spreading the rambler gospel - walking is good for you and great fun!

*Pamela Bates  
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*

## Trip back in time

We stepped back in time with an afternoon trip on a horse-drawn narrowboat on the Kennet & Avon Canal, run by the Kennet Horse Boat Company, on Wednesday 26 June. Fifteen of us began the day with a five-mile circular walk in scorching heat from Kintbury station before returning to scoff some lunch and try to cool down with a swift drink at the Dundas Arms. Ten more then joined us for the boat trip with horse power

provided by Monty who plodded along the towpath while we glided serenely along behind him. It was a gentle way to pass the afternoon. The people operating the boat were friendly and helpful and Monty appeared not to mind too much. Many thanks to Diana for her expert organisation.

*Alistair Lax  
Pang Valley Ramblers*



Monty.

Photo: Diana Lincioln

# Keeping busy

We have been busy. Apart from our full walks programme we have completed a leg of the Kennet & Avon Canal Walk led by Steve Wells, had a coach trip to Bibury in the Cotswolds and enjoyed another well-attended skittles

evening at the Binfield Club. We have also thanked our fantastic walk leaders for their outstanding efforts by providing a lunch at the Bird in Hand in Sandhurst.

*Brian Poulton  
South East Berks Ramblers*



Along the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Photo: Brian Poulton

# Rise of the slashers

**O**ur path vegetation clearance team, also known as the 'slashers', celebrated three years of activity in June. After the dormant period created by Covid, and the 'retirement' of the previous crew, we started out as four volunteers with some very basic tools. We now have a team of up to 10 volunteers, of whom seven are trained in the use of trimmers by Kent County Council. Three of the original members remain.

The trimmer capacity means we are capable of clearing large sections of path at an impressive pace. One of the team, David Gardner, measured it as two volunteers clearing 500 metres in one hour. We did 24 hours of clearance work in the first

(autumn) quarter of 2023-24, 73 hours in the second quarter and 94 hours in the third quarter.

During the summer we worked with L'Arche Kent to clear paths around Cliffsend and Plucks Gutter for a 'pilgrimage walk' involving around 40 people of varying abilities. We have also replaced two finger posts on the Kearnsey Loop Walk, devised by the late Les Preston. In July we were asked by Kent County Council to clear parts of the coast path at Kingsdown, ER 9, which goes up from the pebble beach at Kingsdown towards St Margaret's Bay. It is good to know that we are regarded as of value to the county council.

*John Shale  
White Cliffs Ramblers*



One of the 'slashers' at work strimming.  
Photo: Steve Baldry

# Pat and Ivan's gate

The Ramblers survives on the time and effort given by volunteers. Wycombe Group has recently acknowledged the contribution made by two long-standing members, Pat Endacott and Ivan Rutter. In appreciation of their commitment we have installed a gate under the Donata-Gate scheme run by the Chiltern Society, Both joined the Ramblers in 1993, immediately walking with our group and leading walks including those on weekends away. Ivan walked 459 times with our group and led on 30 occasions. Pat participated in 573 walks and led on 43 of them. Pat was our Chairman for five years where she was

effective, involved and proactive, particularly in keeping us well-informed on national, Area and General Council matters. Ivan was a major contributor to designing and updating the group's website. The chosen location for their gate is on a path that goes through Middle Grove Farm in Hyde End. It is a metal kissing gate replacing a wooden stile which had fallen into disrepair and was becoming a potential safety hazard. The location is close to Pat and Ivan's home so they are able to wander over to it as and when they wish.

*Hamish Ross  
Wycombe & District Ramblers*



Pat and Ivan at the gate.

Photo: Hamish Ross

# Oldies' get together

**C**roydon Ramblers have continued with one of its traditions. On Monday 2 September about 50 of our members gathered in St Antony's church at Hamsey Green, Sanderstead, for our annual cream tea for long-standing members. To qualify as 'long-standing' technically you need to have been a Croydon member for 15 years or more. But qualification seems to be a bit discretionary and as long as

you are 'old', either in age or as a member, you get an invitation. It's a lovely way of rewarding members for sticking with us.

Depending on how old you were when you joined, or when you joined, some of us are still avid walkers but others have had to slow down to a gentle ramble around the block. However, the cream tea enables loyal members to get together and meet old friends who are no longer able to get out on group walks. It's good that people who do not walk

regularly any more maintain their membership so they can keep in touch and enjoy events such as this. It was walking that brought us together but the friendships that were formed continue for life.

We are used to tea and cakes at the end of our Thursday walks. However, in addition to these Jan and her team provide sandwiches, scones, jam and cream. Thanks must also go to Muriel for organising the event. We all had a lovely afternoon and chatted to regular friends as well as renewing old acquaintances.

*Chris Harman  
Croydon Ramblers*



The oldies' cream tea.

Photo: Chris Harman

# A day in Salisbury



Exploring Salisbury.

Photo: Trish Shaw

Forty seven Farnham Ramblers boarded our coach to Salisbury on Saturday 17 August. Some chose to spend the day sightseeing in the city whilst the majority chose to walk. We set out on a six mile walk via the impressive cathedral to the Old Mill pub and restaurant which was to be our lunch stop. It was mostly good walking underfoot in woodland and on tracks, with far-reaching views. We split into smaller groups for the return to the city where we had time to explore the cathedral and some other places of interest, such as Arundells (Edward Heath's former home) and Mompesson House (used in the 1995 film of Sense and Sensibility). Thanks to Chris and Sue for organising the day and to Chris Ho and Simon T for walk leading.

*Sue Harvey  
Farnham & District Ramblers*

## Along the Clarendon Way 1



Outside Winchester Cathedral.

Eight of our members walked the Clarendon Way in Hampshire during the summer. This runs for 24 miles from Winchester Cathedral to Salisbury Cathedral and takes its name from Clarendon Palace, once a royal hunting lodge for Norman kings. Today the only part of the palace to survive

is one end wall of the great hall. Fortunately the weather for the weekend was superb and at Kings Somborne our walkers were kindly served with tea and cakes by a member of St Peter and St Paul's church. A very welcome break!

*Richard Trimmer  
West Berks Ramblers*

## Along the Clarendon Way 2

Five of our members travelled west to enjoy a two-day walk along the Clarendon Way in June. They stayed in Salisbury at the western end of the route and used local buses to get to Winchester on the first day. They found the route was particularly prolific in wildflowers and there was a lot of enthusiasm for the orchids. The peace was drowned out at one point as the Red Arrows flew over but they say the sight and sound was worth the disturbance.

The second day started at Salisbury with its magnificent cathedral whose spire was visible for several miles. Again, the orchids were much appreciated and particular attention was also paid to the very fine properties and gardens along the route back to our cars in the village of Broughton. This was a delightful walking route. Thankfully the weather was very kind to us too. We all thanked our leader, Barbara, for such a good couple of days.

*Caroline Wise and Simon  
Thornhill  
Hillingdon Ramblers*



Ready to start in Winchester are (left to right) Denise, Lesley, Barbara, Simon and Caroline. Photo: Caroline Wise

# Wish you were here?

## Eastbourne, East Sussex

In early July, North Beds Ramblers headed down to the South Downs for three days walking, based in Eastbourne. We used the coastal bus service and returned on foot taking in the wonderful paths at Cuckmere Haven, the Seven Sisters and Beachy Head.

We also headed inland for a countryside walk from Alfriston that took us up on the Downs and enjoyed wonderful views. It was a good three days of coastal and countryside walking that was enjoyed by all..

*Sandra Kelsey and Paul Goss  
North Beds Ramblers*



North Beds members in Sussex.

## Newcastle upon Tyne

At the end of July, a group of 27 members visited Newcastle and enjoyed many walks in the area including Hadrian's Wall, Winlaton Mill, Whitley and Stocksfield. Most walks were organised by members of our group and two were led by members of the Northumbria Walking Group of the Ramblers. We all travelled to Newcastle by train, testimony to the Ramblers green credentials. We were lucky with the weather, for while London suffered a heatwave, we enjoyed the moderately warm weather of the north east.

The Northumbria Walking Group set up two

very interesting walks for us, led by local members who could tell us much about the heritage of Northumbria. Deborah Cairns led a walk from Roker to Souter and Steve Young took us around Winlaton Mill and the 'Land of Oak and Iron'.

Each day we met in the common room kindly provided by Northumbria University's accommodation office, where we discussed the places we would be visiting the next day and the modes of public transport available.

On the last day we enjoyed a meal together at a local restaurant and thanked Jane Rosoux without whose tireless efforts such visits would not be taking place.

*Hadi Samsami  
Hampstead Ramblers*



The group at Winlaton Mill.

Photo: Steve Young

## Simonstone, Lancashire



The stepping stones at Pendle Water.

Photo: Anne Mograby

**H**enley & Goring Ramblers had another excellent trip to a place with many identities: Simonstone, Pendle Hills, Forest of Bowland, Burnley or Lancashire. Whatever we call it, the area is certainly

great walking country and very picturesque. The Higher Trapp Hotel, Simonstone, was in a great location with views over the Pendle Hills, the staff were very friendly and helpful and the food was plentiful enough for hungry ramblers.

There were walks from the hotel or a short drive away. There were three walks most of the days so there was something for everyone. We visited the local haunts of the Pendle witches following the Pendle Witches Trail in places. Did we find the witches? Maybe.

Our walks took us on moorland with the compulsory bogginess, tracks and farmland. Many went to the Nic of Pendle and everyone summited Pendle Hill at the Big End. We were blessed with excellent weather, warm but not too hot for walking. The waterproofs, gloves and hats were not needed.

Memories of the trip: wet feet crossing the non-existent paths on the moorland; great views from the hotel with a mare and foal in a neighbouring field; Pendle Hill with the least steep route up and down; the stepping stones which were very easy considering the training we had been given for walking on or through water; sunny walking weather with no rain; bog cotton like snow all over the moorlands; Pendle Sculpture Park with figures carved into the trees.

Thanks to Susan for all her wonderful organisation and the walk leaders Inge, Nick and Audrey, who had to make many adjustments en route to account for the terrain and conditions.

*Anne Mograby*

*Henley & Goring Ramblers*

## Malhamdale, North Yorkshire

**S**oaked to the bone after two hours in the year's heaviest downpour and ending the walk on a film set is not an everyday experience for most walkers. But for a dozen or so on a Pang Valley Ramblers group holiday in the Yorkshire Dales it was memorable. The Wharfedale village of Grassington had been transformed into a 1940s village for the shooting of an episode of All Creatures Great

and Small, with crew, cameras and characters.

But if the appeal of the Dales needs no enhancement to be wholeheartedly enjoyed then one monsoon afternoon aside, the weather, the moors, and dales and hills, the glorious walking, the company of other ramblers and the organisation of HF at whose Newfield Hall we stayed, all ensured a great time.

It's always a pleasure to be in a hotel that understands the

needs and enthusiasm of the hiking community. Three walks of increasing challenge were offered each day and one of the delights was meeting with and chatting to the other guests. As well as board and lodging HF offers evening entertainment. There was a quiz one evening and some country dancing at which our group proved enthusiastically energetic, if not of a 'Strictly' standard. Next year's walking holiday is already planned!

*Richard Hanson-James*

*Pang Valley Ramblers*



Limestone country.

Photo: Alistair Lax

## Elan Valley, Mid Wales

**I**t is all about gravity. At heart, every rambler knows this. But here we are perched on a Welsh hillside admiring the views of the Elan Valley.

For those who don't know, the valley has a series of dams and reservoirs which feed water to Birmingham. As it is some 50 metres or so higher, the water just falls downhill 70 miles to reach it. It was a Victorian engineering project constructed at the end of the 19th century. But as impressive as all this is, equally impressive are the views and scenery on the walks taking us around the valley.

We are here for a four-night stay. The valley provides a variety of walks each day. It includes walks around the reservoirs, walks over hills and even one through a dam. Elan Valley is in the remote middle of Wales, with the area managed by the Elan Valley Trust. As it is a catchment, the area is unspoiled although there are sheep and a few cattle to help manage the landscape. This all makes it a great area for walking. There is a good website (<https://elanvalley.org.uk>) that has more details. We stayed at the Elan Valley Lodge, a renovated old school which is nice and homely. Getting to the Elan Valley is surprisingly easy and most of our group came by train. So, all in all, highly recommended.

*Innes Garden*

*West London Ramblers*



Enjoying the Elan Valley. Photo: Innes Garden

## Hastings, East Sussex

**I**n 2019 SABRE members walked from Westminster Abbey to Battle following in the footsteps of King Harold. In the next chapter of 1066 history, 13 members travelled to Hastings in October to follow in the footsteps of Duke William of Normandy. The walk took us along the promenade, stopping at William's Stone where legend suggests the Duke dined on his arrival in Hastings, and the West Marina Gardens with the statue of Edith Swanneck finding the body of King Harold on the battlefield at Hastings. It was then on to St Leonards and Combe Valley Countryside Park to our picnic lunch stop in Crowhurst and onwards to Telham Hill where the Duke marshalled his troops prior to battle. We finished our walk at Battle Abbey before catching a train back to Hastings.

steeply up East Hill we were rewarded with great views across the coast. We walked through lovely countryside with more coastal views and enjoyed lunch on the beach on a very warm and sunny autumn day. From Winchelsea we followed the Royal Military Canal and Saxon Shore Way, passing Camber Castle which was built between 1539 and 1544 to provide artillery protection for vessels entering Rye and Winchelsea ports. It was then on to Rye before catching a train back to Hastings.

A big thank you to Jane W for organising a very enjoyable weekend, leading the walks and providing lots of historical insights, and to Sandy and Jeanie for finding great restaurants in Hastings for dinner. We enjoyed fish and chips on Friday, a Turkish restaurant on Saturday and finished our weekend at an Italian restaurant on Sunday. And, of course, visited some lovely cafes for tea and cakes post walks!

*Shirley Creed*

*SABRE - Surrey & Beyond Ramblers*

We also walked in the other direction from Hastings to Rye, starting from the iconic Winkle Island with a photo opportunity at the shiny winkle. Heading



The group in Hastings.

Photo: Clair Baynton

# King's Lynn, Norfolk

Members of Reigate Ramblers thoroughly enjoyed a holiday over five days at the end of September near King's Lynn. The 35 participants had a choice of walks each day and these encompassed the north and west coastlines, nature reserves, historic houses and churches, a royal estate, a

castle and a lifeboat station. There was also the opportunity to sample the history of King's Lynn during our welcome walk. We are most fortunate to have Sandra and Rob Simmonds who organised this as their sixth holiday for the group.

*Chris Dougill  
Reigate Ramblers*



Reigate Ramblers at the Guannock Gate, King's Lynn. Photo: Sue Mitchell

# Gower, Glamorgan

The end of September saw 20 North Beds Ramblers head off to the Gower Peninsula for three days walking in the area, organised through Ramble Worldwide. The weather held up and we enjoyed a visit to the Mumbles followed by coastal walking on the first day. The next day we had varied walking with a Norman

castle and the Gower Way gave spectacular views of the whole peninsula. On the final day we visited Worm's Head and the spectacular Rhossili Bay. Thirty miles of glorious walking and great company. Here's to the next trip!

*Sandra Kelsey and Paul Goss  
North Beds Ramblers*



Break on the Gower. Photo: Sandra Kelsey

# Swanage, Dorset

Our spring holiday was a great success and a big thank you must go to Sue H and Chris H for organising the hotel accommodation and admin side, to Celia G and Clive P for putting together such great walks.

Fifty plus walkers descended on the Pines Hotel Resort overlooking Swanage Bay for a week-long programme of walks. We were treated to a choice of three walks each day (apart from the obligatory rest day), ranging from five to 10 miles. There was a great mixture of coastal walks, countryside walks and even a day at the Arne

nature reserve. We also had some evening events. On Tuesday evening we were entertained by Dr Steve Etches MBE, who began collecting fossils from Kimmeridge clay over 40 years ago. He has received numerous awards for his work in the world of palaeontology and what amazing stories he had to tell. The next night we had an entertaining quiz (with all the usual disputes). Meals were enjoyed each evening in the hotel restaurant which offered stunning views over the bay and we were looked after by very attentive staff. At the end of an amazing week our walkers left fitter than when they arrived but probably not lighter because of the food and wine we had enjoyed!

*Sue Harvey  
Farnham & District Ramblers*



Exploring Purbeck.

# Morocco

Six West Berkshire Ramblers set off for a walking tour in Morocco on 25 September. Following a guided tour of Marrakech we travelled by minibus to Imlil village in the Toubkal valley. Our first day's walk took us through walnut groves before a scramble uphill to reach a great viewpoint from where we descended after lunch to the valley and visited some wonderful waterfalls. We were accompanied by a donkey which carried water and gave one of our group a ride back to the hotel. The next day we travelled to Azilal in the Ait Bougmez valley, known as the 'happy valley' because of the friendliness of the locals.

Over the next three days we enjoyed walking through dry riverbeds, over sandstone outcrops, through apple orchards whilst



Now that was some walk!

Photo: Dawn Tait

coping with some steep ups and downs. Walking in the Atlas mountains requires a good head for heights, not that we were near the tops at 4,000 metres! We visited a Berber market in Tabnant though vehicles still ran through the thronged village streets.

Our last walk took us to a former community granary, now a shrine to Sid Moussa (St Moses), an important figure in the local community and noted for his

healing powers. The climb to the shrine required concentration. At the top we paid a small entrance fee to explore the shrine and receive a welcoming cup of tea. We then travelled back to Marrakech for two nights at the Hotel Andaluz for some poolside rest before the homeward journey. We are planning another trip to Morocco next year together with North Hampshire Ramblers.

*Eugene Fletcher  
West Berkshire Ramblers*

# Transylvania, Romania

What a wonderful week Henley & Goring Ramblers had walking in Transylvania. Given the forecast the week before we left, none of us could have expected such good weather, allowing us to walk in t-shirts. With three levels of walking organised by a small Romanian company, Grind Adventures, our group of 29 had the option of strenuous, medium and shorter walks.

Our walks began in the Piatra Craiului National Park with its spectacular karstic limestone gorges and mountains. We visited the excellent interactive visitor centre where we learned about the flora and fauna and geology of the area. The first walk took us to an ancient monastic shrine built in a cave. The following day the long walkers tackled the 950m ascent through Zarnesti Canyon to Mica peak, a new experience for some as we climbed the rock face with the aid

of a metal rope. We were rewarded with amazing views, including the Bucegi mountains, where we would walk two days later. The medium walkers followed the same route but without the final rocky ascent. On the next days all walks climbed up steep forested tracks to sunny open areas passing through mountain villages with the opportunity to taste and buy locally produced honey. The only rainy day was spent sightseeing in the attractive city of Brasov and visiting Bran Castle, the legendary home of Count Dracula.

We transferred to a mountain resort in the Bucegi Natural Park, arriving in low cloud and poor visibility. We woke the next day to brilliant sunshine, when 10 of our fittest walkers made an impressive ascent of at least 1,400m to Stranga saddle, followed by a ridge with superb views. Again, the moderate walk followed the same route but without the high level ridge. Our final day's walking was very varied;

we met a wedding party (having first quickly visited the beautiful village church), and were welcomed by a Romanian couple to their home and were provided with home made refreshments. The century-old house was furnished with colourful rugs, tapestries and Romanian costumes, ready to welcome guests.

When we got together for the evening meals there was lots of discussion and, of course, photos shared on the WhatsApp group. One night we were entertained with traditional songs and dances by a local youth group. We even joined in the dances!

Those on this trip will no doubt be remembering the great time together for many months to come. A big thank you to all involved in the organisation, Grind Adventures did a wonderful job; nothing could have been done better and we returned home with many happy memories of this beautiful country.

*Janice Spearing, Kevin and Jean  
Harradine  
Henley & Goring Ramblers*



Mountains in the Piatra Craiului National Park.

Photo: Joan Clark

## Limone, Lake Garda, Italy



The group on the last day of the holiday.

Photo: Jim Robertson

Our attractive and well-appointed hotel, the Hotel Christina, geared towards the German tourist market, was situated high on the hillside facing Lake Garda (atop a huge number of steps). It afforded stunning views of Italy's largest lake, of the tall mountains on the opposite shore

and, below us, of the outskirts of the delightful and eponymous village of Limone, once famed for its cultivation of lemons.

This area of Italy has changed hands on numerous occasions. A century of Austro-Hungarian rule ended in 1919, the old border being evident where we passed grottos and tunnels, former customs posts

and hidden gun emplacements once defended by Italy's Alpini mountain infantry, who sported bird feathers in their caps and helmets.

The food was good but the hotel was unable (or unwilling) to seat our group (30 in all, including our HF tour manager, Peter, together to prevent scattering and fragmentation across a restaurant crowded with 'early bird' German tourists already in situ whilst the self-service regime and strict closing time curtailed opportunities for leisurely conversation and social interaction. On the other side of the scale were the much appreciated general knowledge team quizzes organised by Rose Gray and John France.

Undeterred by summer coughs and colds, we were led by our friendly and knowledgeable local guides, Sara and Laura, along old mule tracks and through olive groves,

vineyards, forest, verdant pastures, to the tops of mountains and the shores of picturesque lakes (Garda Lendro and Tenno) in comfortably warm but changeable weather.

Notable was our ascent in a slowly rotating cable car to the damp and chilly summit of Monte Baldo (where wrapped in winter clothing we encountered wild marmots), followed by the return journey down to Malcesine's delightful and ancient streets and Castello Scaligero, one of the few castles in the area to survive deliberate destruction by the French during the war of the Spanish Succession. Inside, sketches of the area drawn by Goethe, the eminent German poet, who visited Malcesine (and was mistaken for a spy) during his Italian travels in 1788, were on display.

The (now diesel-converted) historic paddle steamer Italia (1909)

ferried us to Torbole where we walked along a Roman road used in 1438-9 by the Venetians who, in a remarkable feat of engineering, transported 33 ships over dry land and through mountains from the Adriatic coast to Lake Garda!

The 'hard walkers' climbed Monte Bestone (917m/3,008 feet) encountering a seemingly disgruntled German lady inexplicably carrying a bike on her shoulders! and, after ringing the bell at the summit, were able to record their achievement by signing the official visitors' book there.

Once again we have to thank Bella for organising yet another wonderfully scenic, stimulating, relaxing (mentally rather than physically!) and thoroughly enjoyable trip.

*Keith Bulley*

*Godalming and Haslemere Ramblers*

## Taunton, Somerset

The base for our holiday was the Corner Hall Hotel, a Gothic building complete with gargoyles and turrets. It was originally a house built for a retired Bishop of Winchester but unfortunately the poor chap died before he could move in. Bishops of Winchester became a common theme throughout the following few days.

Our first walk in glorious sunshine included a tour of the town. Sue gave us a brief history of many of the interesting buildings we passed. Taunton Minster was particularly impressive. Apparently, the donkey used to move stone during the building work was hauled up to the top of the tower on the building's completion to admire the view! We later continued along the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal and River Tone.

On the second day the rain held off until late afternoon. We walked out into open country via Vivary Park (formerly fishponds for the Bishops of Winchester) and through beautifully planted flower meadows to Pitminster where the church has a beautiful window depicting Christ asking the disciples to become 'Fishers of Men'. Walkers then enjoyed a hearty lunch in the Queens Arms at Pitminster with the odd pint or two of 'Old Lane' beer. The second leg of our walk took us to Orchard Portman, stopping on the way to admire St Nicholas church at Corfe. Return to Taunton was by a rather delayed bus.

On the last day we walked to Corford St Luke through more land once owned by the Winchester diocese. Sue demonstrated her horse whispering skills when we needed to go through a field with some skittish occupants! Corford St Luke is a modern village on the site of a former hospital and lunch was taken in the hospital chapel which has been tastefully converted into an eating venue where a local beer called 'Chapale' is available. The last leg, in glorious sunshine, took us to the Quantock brewery in Bishops Lydeard.

Thank you Gordon and Sue for a brilliantly organised trip. Your planning, attention to detail and kindness is legendary.

*Janet Fisher*

*Pang Valley Ramblers*



Enjoying a meal.

Photo: Diane Lincoln

## Selworthy, Somerset

We had a very enjoyable SABRE holiday staying at HF Holnicote House in Selworthy. Thirty six members joined the trip together with two couples from Mole Valley and Kingston groups. The walks were varied and covered coastline, woodland and moorland. We walked on both Exmoor and the Quantock Hills and were rewarded with views across the coast and masses of purple heather and yellow gorse flowers. Highlights

also included Selworthy and Dunkery Beacons, the Valley of the Rocks and, for some, a trip on the funicular railway linking Lynton with Lynmouth. On the last day we walked to Dunster (sadly in the rain), discovering a very well hidden trig point in the woods and the tallest tree in England. On the Quantocks we saw deer and Exmoor ponies.

On the rest day, and for anyone who fancied a non-walking day, there was plenty to do. There were visits to Dunster Castle and

watermill, Coleridge Cottage, a trip on the West Somerset steam railway and an Exmoor wildlife safari.

In addition to the lovely meals and packed lunches we also took advantage of the great cafes and cream teas on our walks - the debate on cream or jam first continues!

We all enjoyed spending time together and the wide variety of walks meant a good spread of walkers across all three daily walk options. Thanks to Shirley for organising another memorable holiday.

*Clair Baynton*

*SABRE - Surrey and Beyond Ramblers*



The SABRE group at Selworthy.

Photo: Mike Boon

## Selworthy 2

Twenty Epsom & Ewell Ramblers joined a four-night HF holiday at their house in Exmoor. Holnicote is a beautiful house which is owned by the National Trust and leased to HF. It is in wonderful grounds close to the village of Selworthy. This was our ninth HF holiday in six years.

Excellent breakfasts and dinners were enjoyed at the house with packed lunches provided for our days out. In the evenings activities were on offer such as a quiz and indoor bowls. One evening we were taken to visit a beaver enclosure in the grounds, although we weren't lucky enough to spot any of the creatures.

Our group made up half of the guests at the



An Exmoor stream.

Photo: Linda Buckley

house so it was interesting to meet and mix with other guests. The lovely weather helped to make this another wonderful short break for our group.

*Linda Buckley*

*Epsom & Ewell Ramblers*

## Yarmouth, Isle of Wight

Forty-eight Dartford & Gravesham members went to Warner Hotels Norton Grange Coastal Resort, near Yarmouth, for a walking holiday in August. The weather was very kind to us and each day we had the option of a short or long walk. Alternative days were arranged for those who did

not wish to walk and the destinations included Osbourne House and Carisbrooke Castle where a jousting event was taking place. This was a fabulous holiday and one of our best so far.

*Christine Raynsford*

*Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers*



The group by the sea.

Photo: Christine Raynsford