

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

STAFFORDSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS



Picture – How a path should be, the National Forest Way near Rangemore

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Editorial.

I remember, many years ago, discussions in one of the walking magazines about the use of guidebooks, the pros and cons. Whilst not wishing to open up that debate I realised that the books actually form a kind of record of the state of our paths. I came to this realisation when I started re walking some of the walks I had written about in 2008. Whilst the routes on the map were still the same (no closures, diversions etc) I was pleasantly surprised to see how much more walkable they all were, not just in honey pot places. For the most part where I had written before faint path or overgrown etc, the majority were actually now quite clear and very obviously used, Not only this, many stiles had been replaced with gates and waymarks and signs in evidence.

Of course not everything is rosy, there are still paths that are overgrown, blocked etc but it seems that compared to 8 years ago things have improved. Part of our work as Ramblers is footpath clearance but this is becoming more difficult and it seems to me that if we could all walk as many paths as we can this will help prevent them from becoming overgrown as well as demonstrating to the Councils that paths are used. When I started putting this annual report together I was concerned about the future of our paths because of the cuts and few volunteers to take on the work. Whilst this concern remains (see Secretary's report) I do feel encouraged that a few steps (pun intended) could help to keep our paths free from obstruction.

Chairman's Report.

As in my previous reports I wish to thank the members of the RA in the Staffordshire Area who individually, in their groups or on the Area Council, do so much to protect and maintain our rights of way. I also wish to thank those who give up their time to represent our views on local and national bodies.

Marjorie and David Cashmore, Graham Evans and I attended General Council in April in York. I have reported on General Council to the Area Council and have sent copies of that report to groups. A 'members day' preceded the opening of General Council at 4.30 pm. At the end of his 'review of the year' Benedict Southworth, C.E.O., announced his resignation his reason being the lack of progress on his proposed governance reforms. As yet a permanent replacement has not been appointed.

At this time last year I reported on the County Council's

proposed review of the management of its Countryside sites. After one meeting nothing more has been heard from them but no doubt this and the organisation of the Rights of Way department will come up again later in the year.

The condition of footpaths and stiles and the access to them is of concern to all walkers. It is probably the issue that persuades many people to join the R.A. My thanks go to the members of the groups and of the Area Council who give of their time to ensure that everything possible is done to maintain accessibility and access throughout Staffordshire. I wish to thank Harry Scott and David Hewett for the many hours they put in inspecting, and then reporting on, problem footpaths. Most of the successes achieved are due to Harry's tenacity in pursuing the difficult issues

Once again thank you to all of the members of the Ramblers Association in the Staffordshire Area for the work you do on behalf of the Association. Most of what the RA achieves is achieved by local and regional volunteers.

George Greensides, Area Chairman.

Area Secretary's Report

I'm sure we all know the general health benefits of going for a walk, particularly in open countryside with people who have a similar outlook as oneself. Equally I'm sure that we are all very mindful of the economic benefits that we bring to the various rural communities that we walk through. At the time of the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 our Area Footpath Secretary, Harry Scott was being informed by the then Head of the Rights of Way Department for Staffordshire County Council that because of our desire to assist local farmers in their hour of need by not walking in the countryside and risk spreading this dreadful disease, the public had also stopped going out to the village pubs and tea shops. They thought that because ramblers were not out walking that the countryside was closed. This ultimately led to rural businesses suffering financial difficulty and loss.

By now I'm sure you are wondering where I'm going with this report. Well much of my time during 2015/16 has, and still is, being taken up by the threat of financial cutbacks by Staffordshire County Council and The Cannock Chase AONB. George Greensides, Harry Scott and I have had several meetings with Staffordshire County with regards to their review of the counties countryside estates and more are being planned as I write this report. Similarly I and Dick Turton

(Walsall Group) attended an open meeting of the Cannock Chase AONB where its governance and organisation was discussed. I feel that in both the County Council and the AONB are looking for financial savings. I am also beginning to feel that there is a serious danger that our Rights of Way network in Staffordshire and beyond will end up being unusable because of becoming blocked by overgrowth from trees and vegetation of one sort or another as a direct result of cuts in spending. If we are not careful it is not impossible for the reach a stage not seen since the 1970s and 80s when it was almost impossible to venture off the beaten track. At present there may still time to avert this wholesale destruction of the footpath network. Presently we have several volunteer maintenance teams who are assisting the local highway authorities but there is more work to be done so why not volunteer a little of your time in assisting in this vital work. We all enjoy walking on our favourite footpaths, perhaps close to where we live, but why not walk on a less well used path and help to keep it open.

After all the best way to keep the footpaths open is to walk them regularly and if we all incorporate some of the less popular paths into our wanderings we might all gain a new prospective on our countryside. If we are also carrying a pair of secateurs and we happen to come across a section of path that is partially blocked we use them that to may help to keep it open. Equally important is that we all report blocked footpaths to the appropriate highway authority, these days most have a website so it is possible to contact them on-line. Rest assured Staffordshire Ramblers is doing all it can to assist and encourage the authorities to fulfil their collective responsibilities. But we, as individuals, must also think about what we can do to keep our footpaths open or lose them!

Graham Evans: Area Secretary

Treasurer's Report.

This year our expenditure was slightly higher than last year, mainly due to higher payments to Groups and the increased cost of Stepout. Whilst expenditure on casework appears to be down this is because the previous year we purchased several large scale maps. Overall our expenditure was greater than our income but this was intended as our reserves were higher than they should be so Area budgeting request was for less than we needed. This coming year

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however we shall be seeking a full budget to maintain our reserves at the current level.

Peter Matthews, Area Treasurer

Membership Report

	September	15			16		
		Total	New/Rejoin	Debtors	Total	New/Rejoin	Debtors
NS01	East Staffs	249	4	4	248	3	3
NS02	Stone	225	0	3	213	3	2
NS03	Stoke/Newcastle	342	1	9	333	4	4
NS04	Lichfield	128	2	6	128	1	4
NS05	Mid Staffs	181	1	6	167	0	6
NS06	Stourbrdge	214	3	5	206	1	1
NS07	Wolverhampton	261	0	8	253	1	8
NS08	Walsall	157	2	4	172	4	0
NS09	Sandwell	132	2	6	144	2	2
NS10	Chase	106	2	4	101	1	5
NS11	Leek	122	0	3	117	0	2
NS12	Biddulph	118	0	4	126	2	0
NS14	Bilston	43	2	-	39	2	2
NS50	Black Country	47	1	-	80	2	1
NS51	Staffs WG	75	2	5	86	4	5
NS Area	TOTAL	2448	27	70	2470	35	51

The first time for years that there has been an increase in membership. Almost entirely due to young person's Groups. Our future?

Gerald Gittens, Membership Secretary

Access Report

The requirement for updating the 8 maps covering open access, England, is now deferred to every 20 years. The next (?) review expected 2020.

The RA is keen to identify any access areas without accessibility. There is also a review of access to National Nature Reserves. I have noted Blackshaw Moor and Thorncliffe but if you

know of any other areas, including nature reserves, please let me know.

The Coastal Path is improving and on course for 2020 completion. Further information can be obtained from the Natural England website.

Eddie Dawson

Area Footpath Secretary Report

As I look back over the year 2015/16 there has been progress with some setbacks. As Area Footpath Secretary I could not do this job without our Footpath Volunteers and our District Footpath Secretaries (DFS), and my thanks go out to all of them, the Area could not manage without them. We are always in need of more volunteers and if you are interested give me a call 01543 274805 or email harrywscott@btinternet.com

As in previous years our DFSs have monitored the planning applications that could affect footpaths, around 90 were investigated over the year. Several footpaths were saved from being built on, or the path having an unsatisfactory diversion. As well as receiving planning applications from the District Councils we monitor the monthly lists issued by the Councils.

The number of footpath diversion consultations from Staffordshire County Council reduced over the year to around 12, this was due to reduced resources at the County Council, Officer time to progress them. One disappointment, we lost the Public Inquiry (PI) into the closure of part of footpath 10 Sheen Parish, through Pool Farm, the path is now closed. However, we did win the PI into the diversion of footpath 7 Sheen Parish, the plan was to move 7 to the field edge on very boggy land, the path is now saved. Currently we are objecting to the diversion of footpath 5 Hednesford in Cannock Chase, they propose to divert the path onto estate roads, this in affect closes the path.

The financial cuts at Staffordshire County Council are beginning to bite and it is taking longer to resolve footpath issues and the amount of money they have to spend is greatly reduced. Unfortunately, more cuts are on the way in 2017.

There is good news about Stoke on Trent. As I reported last year there are over 1,300 unrecorded footpaths waiting to go onto the definitive map by the cut-off date of 2026. This is the date set by the Government to close the definitive map for historical claims. A number

of us have with the agreement of the Stoke Rights of Way Officer been surveying the above paths with a view to getting them put on the map. My thanks to the volunteers, for their help and assistance. Other good news for Stoke is that the Council have employed another Rights of Way Officer, there now being two of them in post. My thanks also go to Graham Evans for his help and assistance with the work load in Stoke on Trent.

Harry W Scott

Canal and River Trust (CRT) Report

As the Ramblers' representative, I have attended meetings of the Central Shires Waterway of the CRT. I attended a Local Waterways Forum at Rugeley on 15th October 2015, and a drop-in session at Mountsorrel, Leicestershire, on 28th April 2016.

After contact from the Central Shires Waterway Development and Engagement Officer, my partner Phil Cheesewright (Lichfield and District Chair) and I reviewed some CRT information sheets by visiting the relevant sites, checking whether the information was up to date, and if there was anything else that could be added (e.g. a walk). We visited sites in Staffordshire (Fradley Junction, Great Haywood, Westport Lake, Consall Forge, and Rudyard Lake) and one in Leicestershire (Sutton Cheney) in late 2015 and early 2016, giving feedback to the CRT. From Ramblers' perspective, the visits were a reminder of the diverse landscape around the canals, and the experience can feed into future walks.

However, from July 2016, the Central Shires Waterway is closing down, with its team, roles and responsibilities being absorbed into the neighbouring West Midlands, East Midlands and Manchester and Pennines Waterways of the CRT. These changes will take some time to bed in.

Judith Meredith

Cannock Chase AONB

All of our meetings, with one exception, have been dominated by discussions about the new governance structure for the AONB. The one exception was a report about HS2.

The new structure will mean the disbanding of the advisory partnership and it be replaced by "Task and Finish" groups, this means that because the officers working group who created the new structure say that Ramblers cannot claim to represent all walkers we

are classed as recreational users of the Chase, the recreational users are being asked to elect a representative on a rotational basis to represent all groups using the Chase.

Bryan Phillips

Webmasters Annual Report

Another year has passed and I have enjoyed the challenge of managing the Web site

The website continues to grow. During the past 12 Months I have added a number of new items to the website

The usual Combined Walks program updates which I receive from Peter Mathews from time to time

I have also added links to Long distance footpaths that come through our area

Also added are links to the Ramblers Website walking Festivals for the Walkabout festival and the Winter Walking Festival

These events have promoted a new addition for 2016/2017. I will be researching all of the Walking Festivals within the Staffordshire area and adding links to their Festival walks program.

Also I will be adding links to details of Health Walks, which are supported by The Ramblers, and relative contacts in our County

My Target here is to cover all walking events within the County of Staffordshire and where possible promote the meeting of new friends in the walking world.

If any Ramblers Member Living in Staffordshire has any suggestions as to things that could be included in the Web site contents please email me on glen@gscs.co.uk and I will fully investigate the suggestion and respond to your email with my findings and submit them to the council for inclusion in the web site

Glen Sibley Webmaster for staffordshireramblers.org

National Forest Access and Recreation Working Group

The major news with the National Forest this year is the introduction of the volunteer ranger programme for the National Forest Way. This is the first instance of the company using volunteers and they have held a series of meetings/courses recruiting 26 volunteers, 5 from East Staffordshire, the rest from Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Jane King

Bilston Group Report

Bilston are the smallest group in Staffordshire , but have a good committee. Our problem, and I am sure we are not alone in this, is that we do not have enough walk leaders and not enough active walkers and we are all getting older. Public transport works in some aspects, but is becoming more difficult as a lot of buses have been stopped. The walk leaders can produce a full programme and we try to do this.

To improve the situation requires advertising. I have tried doctors surgeries and libraries but need to do more. We need a better social programme which may help. I also will be working on getting more people from walking for health to possibly join us . We currently survive well, however and have a walk every week to all parts of the midlands. Long may this continue.

Barry Smith Bilston Chairman

Biddulph Group Report

The continuing support and enthusiasm of our members for walks and social events is an indicator of the success of the group. Our thanks go to everyone involved, in whatever capacity, and for the spirit of cooperation in the group.

Glancing back at last year's very positive report I noted that several initiatives had been put in place to encourage the use of maps. It was hoped that a spin off might be more people offering themselves as leaders. This was successful and from our existing membership and new recruits more leaders have come forward during the year. However, such is the demand for us to put on more walks, and as our older leaders tire, there is a constant need for yet more.

Responding to members' requests for additional medium walks, we introduced extra weekend and Thursday walks on a trial basis. These work concurrently with our traditional pattern of Wednesday short/medium and pub walks and fortnightly Sunday long walks. A further request for longer Sunday walks has also been met. Numbers of walkers on each are continually monitored and all are viable. Most popular remain the Wednesday walks, particularly pub walks. Again this year, our contribution to the Biddulph July Festival is a weekly programme of evening walks which regularly attract 30+ people from the local community. The first walk this year had 39 walkers and the second 37. There were several new members recruited from the evening programme last year.

We have continued with our monthly social programme this year basing activities on members' suggestions. In May we enjoyed a 10 day holiday in Cyprus walking in the Akamas peninsula and Troodos Mountains. There have also been the popular long weekends, this year in Skipton and Crickieth. Amongst other days' out has been a coach ramble to Anglesey, a city day in Oxford with Blue Badge guide and visit to the Black Country museum preceded by a walk in the geological area of Wren's Nest nature park just designated UNESCO status for geology. Our social evenings with entertainment are always popular and this year we were joined by some of our summer evening walkers.

Our website is a superb, concise and user friendly tool, well used by our members and other walkers. Over the years our webmaster has continually improved it. The pages contain all the information about our current programme to enable members to select walks and within a few days photographs are posted. There is also a comprehensive archive, including maps of past walks, a photographic archive and details of our social events. Our Publicity Officer has just initiated a Biddulph Ramblers Face Book Page and is establishing it as another useful form of communication. He has had published in local newspapers a number of articles promoting the health benefits of walking and is currently working on other material to publicise the group

Membership has remained stable through the year and is currently at a high of 124. Turnout for the AGM is 50% but we are planning a "new look" this year with changed venue, food and beverage and a different format. Hopefully, it will encourage a few more members to come and enjoy the evening.

Next year is our 20th Anniversary and a celebratory party to which current members, founding members and past friends who now find group walks challenging are invited. The plan for our monthly social activities for 2017 is complete and will be distributed at the AGM. It promises to be a dynamic and exciting year!

Linda Drakeford

Black Country Young Walkers

The BCYW successfully hosted the Staffordshire Area AGM at Coven Memorial Hall in November 2015. The time since has coincided with the strongest membership growth in the group's history which is a credit to all involved with the group. We have actively used Social

Media to promote our events and hence membership has increased significantly.

Over the past six months, we have continued with our Sunday programme of walks of varying distances and difficulties. Our walks have been within the counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, and West Midlands area with the Shropshire and Worcestershire counties being particular favourites for our group walks. We have also included the odd Saturday walk and a couple of Sunday walks in Gwynedd.

The Easter weekend enabled us to put on a couple of extra walks to include Manifold Valley in the Peak District on Good Friday and Cannock Chase on Easter Monday. At the start of May, several members took part in the Dudley Trail challenge walk.

During the summer months, we have also included 14 mid-week evening walks. Most of these were very local to the Black Country and have run from Mid-May to the end of August. In May, there was a weekend away to Snowdonia and in July, there were also weekends away to both the Wye Valley and Barmouth. These weekends all included walks on both the Saturday and Sunday.

We have also put on some socials for our members including Meals, Pub Drinks, Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Greyhound Racing and the cinema.

Thank you to our committee members, walk leaders, event organisers and everyone who has taken part in continuing to make the group a success.

Mark Ridgway and Mark Gatenby

East Staffordshire

The East Staffordshire Group has had a very enjoyable year – in no small part due to the members and I must give a big thank you to the Committee who have all, in their own way, given their enthusiasm and time to ensure the success of the Group.

On our walks programme, we are offering 5 to 6 walks a week, although with the difficulty in attracting new leaders this may have to reduce. We have held a basic map reading course with a practical session which has led to at least one new leader! The shorter half day walks remain the most popular. Highlights of the walks programme have included a breakfast walk, the family walk this year was not so popular as it, unluckily, clashed with the Queen's Birthday

celebrations where the children had prior commitments, the picnic in the park and a tea and cake walk with Les and Cathy.

Our evening walks were held with Abbots Bromley Footpath Society and enjoyed by all. The extensive walks programme is helping us attract new members, although this is not offsetting those we are losing.

On the Social side, the Christmas lunches at the Lakeside, Moira and the Ramblers Retreat were, as usual, well-supported. We had a Christmas Lights evening walk followed by food at Rolleston Club. In March, the Annual Buffet was enjoyed by nearly 60 members and the Muddy Boot Award was presented to Phil Arnold for his walk in January where we encountered the muddiest green field !! The evening walk followed by a Fish and Chip supper was enjoyed by all.

The coach ramble was to Rutland Water with a choice of walks, the shorter walk had the opportunity for a boat ride on lake, whilst the other walks seemed to be enjoying a drink at the pub ! We held the annual trip to the High Peak in August, where we were finally graced with a weekend of good weather. The walks took in Lantern Pike, Saddleworth Moor and Birchen Clough and Win Hill.

The Group holiday is being taken in October to Anglesey.

The launch of the National Forest Way, of which 25 miles is in our area, has led to some members volunteering to act as rangers, where they regularly walk and report any problems, on their Stage of the Way. Overall, a successful and active year.

Jane King, Group Chairman

Leek Group

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the Walk About Festival. We put on four different walks during the nationwide walking festival which ran from the 3rd to the 11th September. These ranged from a short Walking For Health walk, to a ten mile linear along the top of the Roaches. The walk along The Roaches boasts stunning views in one of the most dramatic landscapes in Staffordshire and is a worthy addition to any national festival.

Our walks kicked off with a day of special walks on Sunday 4th September. There was a linear walk with a difference, coupled with our usual short walk which was also linear. Both walks started from the car park in Leek. The long walkers were driven to the start at Danebridge by minibus. Their route began by climbing through the pine trees to emerge at the foot of The Hanging Stone, and then

followed the path running below the escarpment to Roach End. We ascended to the top of The Roaches which was shrouded in low cloud, and continued along the ridge before dropping to Windygates Gap (the saddle between The Roaches and Hen Cloud). The sun broke through as we headed down to the Visitor Centre at Tittesworth Reservoir for our lunch stop.

The short walkers had also walked here from Leek. After lunch, everybody had the option of either returning to Leek on the minibus or continuing on foot. By use of the minibus we were able to offer walks of differing distances - 4, 6, 8 or 10 miles.

Our local Walking for Health Group, Fresh Air Fitness and Friends, held a walk on 5th September. Meeting in Cheddleton, the walkers set off for a short walk of 30 minutes by the Caldon Canal and this was then extended to 90 minutes for those wishing to go a bit further. After a steady climb from the canalside the group took a breather at a viewpoint and enjoyed the fantastic scenery of the Staffordshire Moorlands countryside.

On Wednesday the 7th September there was a five mile morning circular from Ilam Hall, crossing the stepping stones at the entrance to Dovedale, where participants posed for photos holding their festival flags. Finally A seven mile circular walk from Lamaload Reservoir up to Shining Tor and Pym's Chair took place amidst glorious sunshine on Sunday 11th September. The views were stunning and there was an opportunity to look inside Jenkin Chapel built in 1733.

Kevin Andrew

Lichfield & District Group Report

In the year since the last AGM we have put on 69 walks, mainly on Sundays, ranging from 5 to 12 miles. We have recently started to arrange additional short walks, which are run on the days when the alternative is a particularly long or hard walk. This has catered for new walkers, as well as for those who no longer wish to do the harder walks. It also gives those who wish to do the harder walks more scope to go at their own pace. Attendance on each day walked (i.e. adding long and short walks on the days when these are run together) has averaged 17, which is exactly in line with what we've seen in the past. Thanks go to all our walk leaders.

Our Footpaths team, led by Tony Grady, have been busy this year carrying out repair and maintenance projects virtually every

month; the tasks have included clearing overgrown footpaths, erecting replacement stiles and repairing bridges.

Socially, this year we've had a beer and skittles night in March at the Bridge Brewery in Burton-upon-Trent. In June a short walk followed by an American Supper at a member's house with a lovely garden in Harlaston, and in July a BBQ in another lovely garden owned by a couple of members in Lichfield. All were thoroughly enjoyable events.

In May, our annual midweek breakaway was based in Betws-y-Coed, 15 members stayed in two separate B&B's, coming together for a number of different walks and evening dinner get-togethers, where the events of the day were discussed. We were lucky with the weather; the view from the top of Snowdon (via the PYG Track) was spectacular, and it only rained once during our four day stay!

Ed Watson

Mid Staffs Group Report

This last year has seen mixed fortunes for the Mid Staffs.

Thanks to a willing and growing band of excellent leaders, ambitious to provide ever more interesting walks, we continue to offer a day walk every Sunday. These have been proven to be increasingly popular and are the backbone of our group's activities.

On the other hand, last year we were also providing an almost weekly programme of shorter walks, despite a trend towards ever falling support, where some walks attracted only one or two walkers. This year we don't have anybody prepared to co-ordinate the short walks and we are currently down to offering only one short walk per month, with many leaders not unreasonably disillusioned by the lack of support for their previous efforts.

More positively, we have continued to forge close links with the Wolverhampton Ramblers, who are a great bunch of people. We now regularly enjoy 'joint walks', where both groups share a single walk, led by a leader from either group. This has helped both groups to fill their walk programmes and they have proven to be popular with members of both groups, with new friendships being forged as a consequence.

The benefits to be had from our links are best illustrated by the coach ramble that our group organised last September and which Wolverhampton advertised as a 'joint' venture. This consisted of three different lengths of walks in the Cotswolds and without their members support we would have made a large loss, as fewer than twenty of our

own members supported the trip. Our group has organising another 'joint' coach trip this year and we certainly would not have done so without the continued support of the Wolverhampton membership. Earlier this year, as last year, many of us took advantage of joining the Wolverhampton Group organised coach trip to the Lake District, which we were able to feature on our programme as a joint venture, to the benefit of both groups.

We are fast approaching our groups AGM and we have very real concerns about the outcome, due to the lack of volunteers prepared to take on the responsibility of key roles within the group. We currently do not have a Chairman and despite a number of appeals, we do not yet have any volunteers to replace the outgoing Secretary and Treasurer, both of whom wished to resign last year but kindly offered to continue for one more year, when no replacements could be found. Area is aware of our problem and I hope that a solution will be found. If not, I am not sure if we can continue in our current format, which would be a great shame as many of us who derive great pleasure from the walks, holidays and other social activities organised by Mid Staffs. We can only hope that volunteers will soon come forward to fill some of the vacant posts.

David Jakeman

Sandwell

It is not easy in a few words to summarise a year of progress and enjoyable walks. Thanks to our walk leaders, committee and teams, we are continuing to tread the path from a close-knit group of friends to a more outward facing – and, we hope, still friendly – group, open to change and glad to exchange ideas with other *Ramblers'* groups, in particular with our closest neighbours, *Wolverhampton, Walsall* and the *Black Country Young Walkers*.

Since our walks have been on the *Ramblers'* web site – and since we switched to the *Ramblers'* walk grading categories – we are more often than not joined by members from other groups which is heartening and educational. The recent *Sandwell Six Towns Challenge* enables runners and walkers from other areas to celebrate Sandwell's industrial heritage with us. We also venture well beyond our once smokey Borough with our led walks, recently with weekends in Keswick and Hunstanton and a coach excursion to Chatsworth, which included a walk on the gritstone edges of Baslow, Cubar and Frogatt.

Thank you to our members who lead walks for us. Volunteering sets *Ramblers* apart from other charities as no led walks would take place without your help. There are always two sides to this. Our group needs your involvement. But you benefit too from becoming a fully fledged member of the group by helping out. Volunteering can provide a sense of belonging and a structure (particularly after retirement, redundancy or unemployment) and we all need to feel useful, even if you are only a mere chairperson!

Andrew Budden

South Staffs District Report

During the last year I have examined twenty Planning Applications for South Staffs to check that they do not adversely affect Public Footpaths. Only two needed objections.

I have, over the year, submitted a large number of complaints to the County Council regarding broken stiles, steps and missing fingerposts. Several have been mended but many still remain outstanding. The footpath which passes beside the Lower Hattons in Brewood has been obstructed by a large mound of rubble and two fences for a long time and the County are finding it difficult to locate the landowners and deal with the situation.

I have carried out clearance work in Featherstone and Shareshill on some paths reported by a local resident to be unwalkable. The landowner was also deterring walkers with an illegal notice. I've also cleared some paths in Pattingham and Patshull Parish. David has also been busy on a number of days carrying out path clearance in South Staffs and Stafford Borough.

There is to be a major reorganization of paths in Coppenhall Parish. The cross field paths, of which there are four, are to be moved to the field edge. The path across the moat will be diverted. A new path is to be created along the side of Bigwood Lane to provide a circular walk and the footpath from Church Lane will be diverted to the farm track. It is all quite convenient for the public to use,

A diversion of Footpath No. 33 from Landywood Lane in Great Wyrley Parish will take place as it goes through an Animal Sanctuary and the boundary needs to be secured; the diversion will be only a minor one.

There are plans in the pipeline for a huge development called The West Midlands Rail Freight Terminal Interchange to be constructed between the A449, the A5 and the M6 motorway, at

Junction 12. Wagons would come off the M6 and unload into ten giant warehouses. Trains would then be loaded and sent up the West Coast line to distribute the goods. This would operate 24 hours a day. Approval for this would be sought from the Transport Minister. I made strong objections to it at the public consultation because the land involved is Green Belt Land. There are green fields, mature trees, hedges and ponds full of wildlife. There is also a public footpath across the site. If this gets approval the bulldozers will move in and we can say 'goodbye' to this lovely rural area.

Marjorie Cashmore

Staffordshire Walkers Group report

Staffordshire Walkers continues to thrive, enjoying strong turnouts of 30+ members for some walks this summer, across a range of locations from popular local spots such as the Roaches, to Cannock Chase and a variety of routes around the Peak District to cater for everyone. As well as superb views and tranquil environments, excellent weather has also seen more than a few ice-creams and cold beverages enjoyed along the way!

Furthermore, the group continues to welcome new members, many of whom contribute actively towards the lively Facebook page, which is testament to the group's vibrant programme for both walking, official Ramblers' information, and social events. This includes regular monthly meet-ups, as well as several rambling weekends to the lovely coastal paths of Conwy and Borth, as well as Ambleside, where members enjoyed the views from a challenging route along Crinkle Craggs and Bowfell.

Finally, a map reading course earlier in the year encouraged some new walk leaders to step up and it is wonderful to see the walking programme complete for the entire year! It seems that the slogan 'Staffordshire Walkers do it outside' certainly isn't putting people off! The group now looks forward to continuing to construct next year's programme and welcoming newcomers.

Rachel Johnson

Stoke/Newcastle

It's been another busy year. All our walks have been well attended, helped of course by our excellent and willing group of leaders who have endeavoured to take us to places hitherto unseen by many. Also, our hardworking committee always seeking new ways (guided by

the Ramblers, of course) to improve on our programme of walks which continue every week throughout the year. Coach rambles seem to be in decline at the moment, although they are an efficient and excellent way to get around our countryside, and cheap too. Unfortunately, the Bolton Abbey/Grassington coach ramble fell victim to cancellation due to lack of support. However, on the up side, our Tenby week's walking holiday was well supported, excellently organised by Dave Martin, and proved a resounding success. It was totally complemented by good food, excellent accommodation and, best of all, dry and sunny weather, in spite of the rest of the UK having more than its share of rain. Walk leaders were recruited on a day-to-day basis and covered many miles of that wonderful coastline. Full advantage was taken of the Tenby pubs with World Cup fever spicing up the whole town atmosphere. All this and our coach being available each day for the walks made the holiday a great experience which was enjoyed by all.

The Group was contacted by Eggheads (BBC TV) to put up a team to challenge their very knowledgeable team and it resulted in six members of our Group (team name "Ramblers Away") journeying to Glasgow, staying overnight and the following morning being transported to the BBC studios to take up the challenge against the indomitable Eggheads. We've not been permitted to disclose the results of the contest – all will be revealed when the programme is broadcast. But this I can say, Ramblers Away did the Group proud!

Richard Clamp, Secretary

Walsall Group Report

I am pleased to report that our membership has been rising steadily for the last 18 months. It is difficult to be able to explain for certain why this is happening, but there are a number of factors that when combined, could be the reason. We have spent money on advertising and also attach importance to publicity in our local newspapers on a regular basis. When we gain new members we hope the quality of our walks programme and the regularity of our social calendar helps retain them.

We offer walks ranging from strenuous to a gentle stroll. We do 4 super recce's a year, more on that in a minute. alternating each Sunday between leisurely walks no more than 7.5 miles and main walks averaging around 10. In addition we have our fortnightly short Saturday walks averaging 4 miles. We recently had 26 attend one of these walks and they are proving very popular with new members and

particularly with some of our older members who don't want to walk so far these days.

We aim to put on a social event each month and they are always well supported. We have had a beer and skittles evening, Quiz night, games night, christmas meal, annual meal, a trip to the Mayor's parlour, barn dance, garden party and a coach trip to Winchester so far this year. We have a walking holiday in September.

We literally had high drama on our super recce in July. The walk leader unfortunately slipped and broke his leg, having to be airlifted to hospital by sea and air rescue service. Hopefully a fuller report on this will be in the next Walk magazine. We were also assisted by the local Aberdifi search and rescue team who safely brought us down from the mountain. They are all unpaid volunteers who do a great job. One of our group, Frank Sheehy aged 76, was so impressed with their efforts that he decided to do a sponsored walk to raise funds for them. He climbed Ben Nevis and our collection totaled £670 which we have sent to them. So thanks to Frank, we have turned a negative into a positive.

Kevin Wilcox, Chairman

Wolverhampton Group Report

It is good to see that our Group membership numbers are stable and a number of new people have joined over the last year, which is very encouraging.

A big 'thank you' to Julie Gearns, our Walk Programme Co-ordinator, for her excellent work in getting out our Walks Programmes on time, every time for the last three years – no mean feat. And a big welcome to Susan Tappin who has volunteered to take on this crucial role – thank you. Our Path Clearing Team continues to be busy with its vital work maintaining routes. Everyone enjoyed the Lake District one-day coach ramble where Helen, Steve and Suzanne worked hard arranging the coach and walks to suit different abilities.

Wolverhampton's Walking Festival was again a successful event with our Group's walk leaders providing a wide range of walks on most days. The walks included a 29 mile excursion of the City's 'Ring Walk' designed and led by John Wallbridge. All we need now is some way marks to ensure everyone can find their way round. We look forward to participating again in the 2017 Walking Festival when all ideas for walks will be most welcome.

Our walks programme continues to be varied and interesting. Do support your walk leaders who, without exception, go to an immense amount of trouble to design and lead their walks and are vital to the success of the Group.

Judith Rose

Next Issue

Will be published mid April. Contributions please by 15th March 2017.

And Finally

If you do change your address please let Head Office and/or our Membership Secretary know, not the Editor as he does not have the membership list.

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