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STAFFORDSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS

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Photo – A haven in Bilston, not all urban walking is urban!

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Editorial.

It might come as a surprise to learn that Staffordshire has 2734 miles of footpaths. Whilst the County Council has a duty to maintain these paths, cuts to budgets make this an impossible task as the article, state of our paths, demonstrates. However we can all play our part and I apologise in advance for laboring the point in that article but if we are not to return to the 1960's we need to be proactive.

Urban walking might seem contrary to our concept of walking in the countryside but it can come as a surprise to see that there is 'countryside' in our urban areas and for some, it could be a step towards enjoying the great outdoors.

As you all know, Staffordshire County Council, whilst retaining ownership of its country parks etc is seeking to find management partners to carry out the work needed to maintain them. So far the RSPB are contracted to maintain Consall Nature Park, Consall Forge and Wetley Rocks and Wimblebury Parish Council is in the process of taking over the maintenance and management of Wimblebury Mound picnic area.

Access Report

I hope all members have read the excellent article on the history of 'trespass' in the WALK magazine. What-ever your feelings are of walking on private land, and there were many pre crow-act, there is still no open access to 75% forestry and open water. This vast walk potential is yet to be achieved. No ten year Open Access review is now expected, therefore, anyone with an access issue, please contact me on 01782 512851.

On the other hand, being optimistic, the English Coastal path appears to be on course to be completed by 2020. 9 stretches are now open and work started on all the rest of the other 66 sites. Progress can be checked via NaturalEngland.gov.uk.

Eddie Dawson.

Cannock Chase AONB Report

As I didn't submit a report to Step-Out last year regarding activities within Cannock Chase AONB that might be relevant to Ramblers, (mainly due to initiatives being kicked off during the year, but not necessarily progressing significantly), I thought I should provide an interim report now so that members are aware of the latest situations regarding these projects.

You may well be aware of some of the items I'll mention below, since, as with most initiatives of this scale, consultation will have been

widespread and opportunities to comment will have been made available.

Staffordshire Footpath Repair Review.

This has been the object of one consultation process, and one that Area Council requested members to respond to relating to the proposed prioritisation of footpath repair work. (Just to say that currently footpaths in the AONB are proposed to have the highest maintenance rating).

Since the completion of the consultation process on 25th December 2017, updates are now awaited with regards to the next steps; however this is likely to be months rather than weeks away possibly.

Managing Cannock Chase.

Another project proposal which also caused some indignation during it's consultation period was the Managing Cannock Chase initiative, which I've reported back to Area Council on in 2017 and which involves the potential use of cattle grazing as an additional method in keeping down the spread of invasive species across the Chase. (Invasive species can be something as simple as silver birch, oak, holly, bracken etc. growing amongst the low-standing heathland species such as heather, bilberry, cowberry, eventually crowding them out and ultimately turning the area into scrub forest).

On the surface this seems a sensible idea, as it should support other methods of control, such as spraying, burning, bruising and chopping down by volunteers, and would be a 'greener' alternative to many of the current methods. The downside to this is that cattle have to be fenced in one way or another and the initiative proposed the fencing in of much of the AONB into sections so the cattle would be circulated between these as grazing availability dictated. Clearly this became a very controversial subject, especially with the nearby population, who raised significant numbers of objections and which a second workshop in October, 2017 attempted to address. It should be noted however, that much of the fencing involved would be invisible, consisting of buried cables sending repulse messages to sensors on collars worn by the cows. This works well generally, but is not used alongside roadways, where more conventional fencing will be required, and it is this that has caused the majority of the local concerns. Looking at the proposed fencing arrangements it would appear that these include suitable gates, etc. to admit walkers and other users of the paths in the locations where conventional fencing is installed so hopefully issues of blocked paths will not arise!

The evaluation of all the feedback from the discussions involving as many interested parties as possible is currently underway and I aim to keep abreast of developments via an e-forum , (once it is created), and will pass back updates to Area Council as they emerge.

Visitor Management Task and Finish Group_
Restructuring of the manner in which the many groups that use the AONB have representation to the decision-making bodies with Staffordshire Council changed last year and four Task and Finish Groups were set up into which various organisation such as the Ramblers were assigned. The aims of the Task and Finish Groups are:

Task and Finish Groups are topic specific groups, set up to ensure specific projects and assigned tasks in the AONB Management plan are delivered. Task and Finish Group topics will be flexible to respond to different opportunities and projects that present themselves. Task and Finish Groups, as part of a wider Partnership structure, will work together to deliver specific actions and objectives within the AONB Management Plan, in order to protect and enhance the AONB, promote its understanding and appreciation to help to deliver sustainable development.

Ramblers are represented in the Visitor Management Task and Finish group, whose aim is to address issues in the 5-year plan relating to how visitors to the area are managed during their stay, so that the environments of the location are not impacted upon any more than is absolutely necessary. This incorporates a number of ideas that are currently being developed and which include better communications of facilities and events across the AONB through a new hub website; development and implementation of a car parking strategy, greater coordination between visitor centres, stronger event management, (important with the forthcoming Commonwealth Games mountain biking events being planned), and better signage outside the AONB to help guide visitors.

Last year two officers were recruited to develop improvements in the Special Area of Conservation, (SAC*), and amongst other things they will be looking at digitally mapping all the definitive paths, trails, permissive paths, etc. within this area of the AONB and making recommendations about upgrades, maintenance and signage. I am trying to keep as close to this as possible, as I'm anxious that the control of visitors to the SAC and beyond does not compromise the Open Access designation of the ground involved.

**The Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Cannock Chase was notified in 1987 and covers 1264.3 hectares. Almost all of this area (1236.93 ha) subsequently has been designated on 14 June 2005, as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the provisions of the European*

Habitats Directive. Cannock Chase represents the largest area of heathland habitat surviving in the English Midlands and though much diminished in area from its original extent, as with all lowland heathland zones, the habitat and dependent species are of very high nature conservation importance.

[Footprint Ecology Evidence Base relating to Cannock Chase SAC and the Appropriate Assessment of Local Authority Core Strategies]

The Special Area of Conservation includes a wide area of land from the Satnall Hills, (Milford), through the Sherbrook Valley, down to the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery; land around Brindley Heath and Furnace Coppice, (Moors Gorse); and a small area to the north of Rifle Range Corner.

As there are some resources now to work on the SAC, it is important that the rest of the AONB is not neglected by the Task and Finish Groups, especially from our point of view the footpaths, tracks and permissive routes, so I'll be looking to offer Ramblers support for mapping these routes to a similar standard later in the year.

Conclusions.

As I've said previously Cannock Chase is a much-loved and extensively used area of land, and consequently there are a great many interested parties who have concerns about it's future. This is often reflected by the amount of consultation and debate that surrounds virtually every proposed or perceived change that may arise. Whilst this situation is likely to ensure that no high-impact variations to it's current governance go ahead without consultation, it can make the overall processes of introducing necessary changes somewhat protracted. It can also mean that the interests of one concerned group of users may not coincide with that of other group(s), and it is often the seeking of consensus in these areas that can be the most challenging.

Ramblers in Staffordshire and beyond use Cannock Chase AONB extensively, in ways that we try to make the least intrusive to the environment and which I believe are appreciated by those tasked with it's care and protection. We may see some changes in the future, but hopefully they will have been well understood and we'll have had some input into them so we are not in any way disadvantaged by them.

Cannock Chase AONB, beneath the obvious beauty, generates a vast amount of discussion and concern that is largely invisible to the everyday visitor, but as long as this can continue and we, as responsible users have an option to contribute, the future should remain positive.

Dick Turton.

Urban Walking

The Ramblers, rightly or wrongly, are promoting urban walking. Whilst my initial reaction was not favourable, further reflection gives the idea some merit. It all began really with our AGM. Bilston is not an area considered to be rural and the fact that the AGM walk was based here may well have put some members off from joining the walk. Yes, much of it was streets but there were some lovely, and unexpected spots (see photo on cover) and the town of Bilston itself was a surprise. I expected a 60's style, soulless centre but in fact it was full of character. Nearby are some disused railway and canal paths and whilst our walk did not use these they reminded me of my own area of Stoke on Trent and Newcastle.

Perhaps we are lucky here but recently I had a good 8 mile walk covering the Apedale and Silverdale country parks, I can also easily manage a 6 to 8 mile walk at the other end of the city using Parkhall and Bentilee open space areas and barely touching a road. In my running days I had a half marathon route using the greenways (old



The view from Silverdale Country Park
railway tracks and canals). And this is just a small selection of what's available. Whilst it is not rural, all these areas had places where it felt

to be in the middle of nowhere and was certainly the next best thing to a rural walk, air free from car fumes, plenty of greenery and some excellent views. Yes there were houses to be seen but overall a good walk out. Stoke on Trent is not alone, Sandwell and Dudley have good rural areas and Wolverhampton has its ring route (though I have not walked it). Canals and disused railways abound in Staffordshire and these all provide routes through urban areas.

There is another advantage, for the most part it is easy to get to these areas by public transport, often its close to home and there are usually refreshment spots as well. Sadly, as we get older, (speaking for myself) travelling for an hour or more to a walk becomes less appealing,, especially as the walking distances become shorter. So perhaps our urban areas can offer a new perspective on walking and maybe encourage others to venture further from town and into the countryside once they experience the joy of walking.

The Walsall Walking Challenge in June might be a good place to start (see last article)

State of our Paths

Most of you know the County Council's plan for the grading of paths into A,B and C, the grading depending on usage and importance. All paths have been categorised and can be viewed at <https://staffscc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/SimpleViewer/index.html?appid=c9b1a9063af74dd1b350bc0e5456ff93>

Of course all paths have two ends and sometimes one end is one category and the other end another because the path crosses two parishes. One example in Stone is the path from Walton to Shallowford which on the Stone side of the motorway is Stone rural no 32 cat B and on the other end it is Chebsey 4 Cat C. Another example is the footpath from Sandon Church which is a category B at this end but changes to a category C before reaching Hartley Green.

On walking these paths there is no difference on the ground between each end and both serve as examples of how our paths could deteriorate through the lack of council funding to keep them clear and open. The Council has certain duties as do landowners and these are shown below

The County Council's role

Staffordshire County Council, as Highway Authority, is responsible for the maintenance of public rights of way. A Parish Council has the power to maintain footpaths or bridleways in its area, but this does not remove responsibility from the Highway Authority.

The County Council should:

- keep the surface of the public path network in good repair and control vegetation (other than crops) growing from it;
- maintain bridges over natural water courses, including farm ditches;
- signpost rights of way from metalled roads and provide additional signs and waymarks as necessary along the route;
- protect the public's right to use and enjoy rights of way;
- secure the removal of obstructions, including ensuring that paths over cultivated land are reinstated and marked out after they have been disturbed;
- ensure that there are no intimidating notices that would deter the public from any paths;
- provide a minimum 25% contribution towards any costs incurred by a landowner in maintaining stiles or gates on public rights of way.

The Landowner's role

The landowner or occupier of land must:

- keep rights of way clear of obstructions;
- cut back vegetation encroaching from the sides and overhanging the path, so that it does not inconvenience the public or prevent the line of the path from being apparent on the ground. (On bridleways, horse riders should be allowed 3 metres [10 feet] of headroom);
- ensure that all field-edge public paths are never cultivated;
- ensure that cross-field footpaths and bridleways are cultivated (i.e. ploughed or disturbed) only when it is not convenient to avoid them and are properly reinstated after disturbance;
- keep paths clear of crops to ensure that they do not inconvenience users;
- maintain any stiles or gates on a public path in a safe condition;
- ensure that bulls are not kept in a field crossed by a path unless they do not exceed 10 months old or are both not of a recognised dairy breed and are accompanied by cows or heifers;
- ensure that any warning notices are displayed only when a bull is present in a field;
- never keep any animal which is known to be aggressive in a field to which the public has access;
- ensure that no misleading signs are placed near rights of way that might discourage access.



The Parish Council's role

Parish Councils have no specific duties for rights of way, however, they are given certain powers which can help the public to enjoy the public path network.

Parish Councils can:

- maintain any footpath or bridleway within its area which is maintainable at public expense;
- erect lighting on any footpath or bridleway. Although the number of public paths likely to require lighting is small, lighting can be important on paths leading to a village or bus stop for example;
- erect notices, with the consent of the landowner, on or near a footpath or bridleway, warning of local dangers;
- create new footpaths and bridleways by agreement with the landowner over land in their own and adjoining parishes if satisfied that the creation would be beneficial to all or, any part of, the parish or community;
- signpost and waymark public paths on behalf of, and with the consent of the highway authority. A highway authority can give permission for other persons such as Parish Councils to erect and maintain signposts on its behalf;

- provide seats and shelters at the side of public paths.

So if you come across a blocked path etc what can you do about it? After all if the paths are like this now, what will they be like in a few years time (*see picture on previous page, Goldsitch, back of Roaches*) if nothing is done. There are two things really. Firstly, where a path is obstructed by vegetation it is lawful to remove it. (see the landowners role above, you would be doing them a favour as well!) Whilst several of our Groups do this as matter of course , individuals can as well. Several of our members do so on a regular basis and it is a great help in keeping the paths open.

The main thing though is to report it, preferably directly to the local authority (Staffordshire County Council through their website <https://apps2.staffordshire.gov.uk/web/reportfault/#divSelectionHeader>) or at least to your Group, or Area Footpath Officer, or through Area website, <http://www.staffordshireramblers.org/footpathproblems.html>. It is tempting to think that with the cuts, nothing will be done. That may be the case, after all, resources are limited. But it is the backlog that is important. If no problems are reported, then come budget time each year, those making the decisions will think that there is no problem and cut even further. On the other hand if they see that there is a long list of problems it shows that there is a need. It may not stop further cuts but certainly it should reduce them and possibly even prevent further cuts. However a time will come when cuts no longer apply and more money becomes available.

Like me, many of you will remember what paths were like in the 1960's. it is not a situation that we would like to see repeated.

AGM Reports

East Staffordshire Group

This report is for the year ending 30th September 2017.

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.

Our walks programme is offering 5 to 6 walks a week although on the new programme we have had to reduce this. The short Friday walks remain very popular, with the shorter walks, in general, being the most popular, although there are a lack of leaders for these walks. The process of changing to three programmes a year trying to avoid Christmas has now been completed. We would like to thank all those

members who lead, or who have led, without you we would not be able to provide such a varied programme to attract new members. The programme is our main tool for attracting new members and once they turn up on the walk, it is you the members who influence whether they return. Therefore I would like to thank all members who make them feel so welcome.

Highlights of the walks programme have included the family walk, picnic in the park and various walks based on Coton where we have finished the walk with breakfast butties, or tea and cake thanks to Mervyn for arranging with a local resident. We have supported BBC Countryfile Ramble raising £200 for Children in Need, and the RA Festival of Winter Walks.

Our evening walks were held with Abbots Bromley Footpath Society and enjoyed by all.

On the Social side, we held a skittles evening at Rolleston Club in October followed by the Christmas events; 2 daytime lunches at Rambler Retreat, Alton, one evening dinner at Lakeside Bistro, and Christmas lights walk. They say the Army marches on its stomach and so do we !!

There was no coach ramble this year, instead we held a Monday morning walk followed by a visit to Tissington Hall.

We holidayed in Anglesey last October where over 40 members enjoyed walks on the island taking in some of the local heritage. We spent a day in Snowdonia when the intrepid few climbed Y Garn with weather conditions preventing a continuation to Elider Fawr, and the lower level walk enjoying a circuit of Llyn Padarn.

November saw 18 of us travelling to Spain where we enjoyed a holiday arranged with Walk Andalucia. We stayed in local houses and ate at local restaurants in the evenings. The transport to and from the walks plus comprehensive instructions were provided. Thank you to Peter for leading.

We held the annual trip to the High Peak in August, where we walked Country Walkings' White2Dark linear route from Bakewell to Hope via Eyam, Stanage Edge and Win Hill. We did not see the Memorial Flight as last year, but just a Lancaster bomber cruising up the valley towards the dams.

Some members act as Rangers for the National Forest Way, regularly walking and reporting on any problems on their section. The Way passes through Staffordshire from near Walton-on-Trent to the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas.

At the end of the year, we have been contacted by Trent Rivers Trust, to help with the Trent Valley Way through Staffordshire. They have received funding to extend the the long-distance path to Wolsely

Bridge near Rugeley from Shardlow. We are giving advice on the route and doing preliminary surveys. Thanks to Peter, and Len and Pauline, who have been helping

Overall, a successful and active year.

Jane King, Group Chairman

Mid Staffs Group

Last year I reported to ‘Step Out’ that “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.”

During the course of that AGM, it was proposed that we should close our group altogether. This was discussed and voted upon. Fortunately, the overwhelming wish was for us to continue. It was also agreed that due to the lack of members prepared to take on administrative duties we should concentrate on our core aim of offering a walk programme and to cut out the ‘frills’.

We were very fortunate to have Jenny offer to continue in her post as Secretary, despite her great wish to resign and then to have Gerald volunteer to act as Treasure. With these two in place, we are able to continue with a committee of six.

At that time, none of the ‘short’ walkers was prepared to take charge of programming walks for themselves but since then, Carole has joined us from outside the group and has taken on the task with real gusto and enthusiasm. Previous organisers have resigned through lack of support for the walks but support for this form of walk has now significantly increased and continues to grow.

This year, in collaboration with Wolverhampton Ramblers and a local, Ramblers affiliated group, we have been able to offer three coach rambles, a ‘long’ walk every week and a ‘short’ walk nearly every week. We have also provided very successful walking weekends away in the Lake District and Hay on Wye, with another Lake District trip arranged for September. Thanks to Suzanne, Nicky, Gerald and Sally, for organising these.

The support for walks has increased significantly. Since November’s, AGM, we have had an average of 14 on the longer walks, compared with last years 9.5. No figures are available for last year but we are averaging 7 on the shorter walks.

A surprisingly high number continue to join us from outside our own group, with quite a few regularly appearing with us. Testament, I feel, to both the quality of the walks and the friendliness of the group. The pub stops at the end of most of the walks may also have something to do with it.

We will continue to do what the AGM asked us to do, provide walks for our members. Long may it continue but if any of our members reading this would like to join our committee you would be very welcome. We could then look to build upon the solid foundations that currently exist. At least until the next AGM.

J. Maddock

See later report.

Around the Groups

Biddulph

Prior to writing this report I thought long and hard about what makes Biddulph Ramblers tick and it seems to me that we are constantly striving to build on our solid base and improve what we offer to members. At Committee level we benefit from the knowledge and guidance of older members, some of whom founded the group, and who have given many years of dedicated service to the R.A. and relative “newer members” with many ideas to contribute.

Several of our long serving members continue to liaise with the local council in an advisory capacity, suggesting walks around our area which highlight features of interest, some of which are new, for local people and visitors alike. Committee positions are full with the exception of Countryside secretary and group membership is stable. We seem to gain some but then sadly lose some At the A.G.M. our Chairman of 10 years, Neil Oakden stepped down. Prior to becoming Chair, Neil served in many other capacities including the organisation of holidays and days out. Our thanks go to him for his stable leadership and contribution. He is continuing to support us, however, by editing our quarterly newsletter, holiday booklets etc. Our new Chairman, Frank Simpson, has some interesting ideas to contribute to improve what we do.

Our walks programme is under constant scrutiny to be sure we are providing the range of walks to suit our members. Mid - week walks continue to be most popular and there can be 30+ walkers. However, attendance at weekend walks, particularly the longer ones, is disappointing. We are looking at the reasons for this and thinking what can be done. One suggestion being discussed is the inclusion of some shorter weekend walks aimed at both our own walkers and the general public. It may be that some of these people then go on to become members and do longer walks. We do struggle sometimes to fill

all the walk “slots” but just seem to scrape by each quarter. We are all getting older and many of our experienced leaders are to be applauded for the steps they take to ensure they can still walk. Hip replacements, knee replacements, troublesome backs, arthritis and countless other ailments fail to prevent them from rambling, albeit strapped up, ‘pilled’ up and wearing various support aids.

Improvement of the website has been continual now over many years. Recently our Web Master, Eric Barker conducted a survey of users for their views and suggestions. Whilst most were more than happy a few areas were identified for improvement, including photographic presentation and ease of use of the archives. Both have now been revamped some modifications to the archive enables regular users to get a complete list of all the walks in a specific area which will be a valuable tool. Whilst we have a meeting point in Biddulph and share driving to walks, occasionally some people go independently and can find difficulty getting to the start point despite there being directions on the web. To help them Eric has now added an additional column to the walk programme – “Start for Sat Navs” which gives a unique number for each walk. The number is then used, either with a smart phone running on Google Maps, or a car Sat Nav. Full instructions are given and users are impressed by its simplicity and accuracy. Eric feels that the current site represents his “optimum effort” and plans to be freeze it in this state. No doubt he will for the time being but we don’t quite believe him, such is his dedication to the site. If there is anyone unfamiliar with it we invite you to view it at www.biddulphramblers.org.uk.

Our social programme for 2018 features a regular monthly venture introduced some years ago. Included this year are long weekends in Somerset (based in Weston) and Wales (based in Criccieth, a Devon holiday (based in Paignton), coach rambles to Ludlow and Llangollen. We also held an evening social night with speaker, a party night, a late afternoon walk with meal and a Theatre visit. We often invite our members who no longer are able to walk to join us and at such times it is more like a family reunion showing the tight bond that develops within the walking fraternity. For all the events to happen and be successful we thank our social committee for all their work and dedication. dedication. Thanks goes too to our neighbouring group, Stoke Newcastle Ramblers, for supporting us and we look forward to joining them again on their coach rambles during the summer. 2018 promises to be a busy, challenging and hopefully, a very enjoyable year.

Linda Drakeford

Black Country Young Walkers

Over the past six months, we have continued with our Sunday programme of walks of varying distances and grades. Our walks have been within Staffordshire, The West Midlands, Worcestershire, and Shropshire. We also included a couple more day walks in the period between Christmas and New Year and a night walk to see in the New Year at the top of the Clent Hills. There have been two weekends away to Snowdonia over the Autumn and a weekend away to Llangollen in January. All the weekends included walks on both the Saturday and Sunday, and opportunities for attendees to socialise on the Saturday evening. We have also put on some local socials for our members including curry/drinks nights, a visit to the Christmas Markets in Birmingham and a Viennese Concert. 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

Mid Staffs

The Mid-Staffs group is making great strides forward with increasing numbers of walkers participating, which includes some new members. We have had a full programme of walks in 2017 and this continues in 2018 with weekly Sunday and Wednesday walks. Last September we had an enjoyable coach ramble to the Cotswolds where participants had a choice of three different levels of walks. In the same month, a repeat weekend to Glenridding was also successful.

We would like to thank David Jakeman for organising the Sunday walks in recent years and also for his contribution to the running of the website. Although he has stepped down from this role, the new programme has been recently finalised. We would also like to thank Carole Pattison for taking on the Wednesday walk programme and also for updating the website.

I have taken over the Chair of the group and would like to thank Jenny Maddock, as Secretary, for the general running of the group with support from Len Maddock, as Membership Secretary, Gerald Griffin, Treasurer, and committee members Sally Griffin, Steve Craddock and Alan Jackson. Although the Social Secretary post is still vacant, that does not mean to say that social events are not being organised. We are grateful to Gerald and Sally for organising the forthcoming weekend to Abergavenny in May, Nicky Cork for another weekend in Glenridding this September and Carole Pattison for a holiday at the HF house at Alnmouth in October this year. Coach rambles will include joint trips to the Lakes in May and Dolgellau in September with the Wolverhampton group.

A big thank you to all walks' leaders who have provided a wide variety of interesting walks. Without your contribution, there wouldn't be a programme.

Angela Spencer

Stone

Spring has arrived with a blast of cold air and snow from the East. Parts of the country came to a standstill but hardy members of Stone Ramblers continued to walk. Leaders rearranged routes or offered alternatives where it was not possible to continue. The leaders commitment to offering walks amazes me, our new program is testament to this. Our group is thriving.

The HF holiday to Glen Coe in September was a huge success. The walks to many were challenging but the views and warm welcome on return to the hotel made it worthwhile. During October a group walked in the Lower Lakeland Fells and during February around the Church Stretton area. A huge thanks to organisers and leaders, they spend many hours organising walks and completing reces. Special thanks to John , he takes great pride in arranging quizzes for our evening entertainment.

The AGM in November was well attended. Members learnt about trees with an interactive talk by Peter Thomas. A short, wet, muddy walk (typical for Winter) was offered before our NewYear lunch. Service was slow so there was lots of time to catch up. Thanks to all the organisers of both events.

Social benefits of walking with a group are well documented. Our group certainly love any opportunity to catch up with friends old and new over a meal or a drink. The skittles evening however brought out their competitive streak, everyone was keen to win!! Terry took the first prize. A professional guide took us on an historic tour of Leek and a visit to Tissington Hall was followed by lunch and a short walk.

Geoff and Margaret have offered shorter walks to bridge the gap between Ramblers and Walking for Health, they have proved popular. Our group remains committed to encouraging less able people into the habit of walking and all the benefits it can offer.

After a winter break the working party have taken up their tools again to assist the council in improving accessibility to local paths.

The Peak District, Cannock Chase and the Roaches all featured in the Top 100 Britains Favourite Walks during January. Over 8,00 people voted. These areas feature heavily in our program.

The following words from Alfred Wainwright sum up , for me , the benefits of walking.

“The fleeting hour of life of those who love the hills is quickly spent , but the hills are eternal. Always there will be the lonely ridge, the dancing beck, the silent forest; always there will be the exhilaration of the summits. These are for the seeking and those who seek and find while there is still time will be blessed both in mind and body”

Taken from the Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells.
Carol Skelton, publicity officer.

Wolverhampton Group

Over the last six months our programme of walks has continued thanks to our walk leaders who give their time so generously. Our walks are of varying distances and grades, taking place locally and further afield in Shropshire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire etc. We aim to have walks on Saturdays and Sundays as well as offering mid-week walks. It is a busy, ambitious programme and we must extend a very big thank to our two walks co-ordinators who work so hard to produce and publish the programme. It is always on time which is no mean feat. Last October the Group revisited Llandudno for another enjoyable walking holiday. Our next walk programme (July /September) is on its way but needs more walks. New walk leaders will be most welcome. So if you have a favourite walk that you can share then please claim a date as soon as you can.

Last Autumn the Group increased the size of its path clearing team considerably when 8 members responded to a request for extra volunteers. The group met with Staffordshire County Council representatives some time ago and have been waiting for appropriate guidance and training since most of our volunteers are inexperienced. There have been a number of messages sent by us to SCC’s Footpaths and Countryside staff about ‘getting started’ but with little response. We would welcome advice from other path clearing groups on the best way to proceed!

Judith Rose

Walsall Walking Festival

WALSALL WALKING FESTIVAL 3RD JUNE 2018

Organised by WALSALL RAMBLERS GROUP as part of WALK ABOUT, a national program by RAMBLERS FUN FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Radiating out from and returning too Walsall’s Arboretum taking in areas within the Borough

6 to 8 walks of varying length, accessibility, interest and difficulty to suit many abilities and capabilities.

From 2 to 10 miles. Including a children's activity walk and mobility access where possible

A platform to raise money for your local and national charity by dedicated sponsorship of a specific walk or individuals and provision of other fund raising activities on the day

A platform to raise public awareness of your group by organising and manning a stand featuring your activities, its links to a healthy life style and volunteering activities

To launch a series of walks within Walsall to promote walking as an effective route to a healthy life style, an introduction to other social activities and general wellbeing

Our objective is to get as many people as possible supporting the event and charities so bring along friends and relatives. With your support we can make it a day to remember.



ITS FREE SO REGISTER YOUR INTEREST NOW. Email:
szaneii53@gmail.com Tel: 07967270315 or visit the website
<http://www.walsallwalkingfestival.co.uk/>

Contact details

At the time of writing the new data protection law (GDPR) is due to come in force and until we know the full implications of what details can be published without permission (I give myself permission to publish my details!) in respect of individuals the normal contact list is currently suspended so that we do not fall foul of any legislation.

National Office

The Ramblers Association, 2nd Floor, Camelford House, 87–90 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TW. Tel 020 7339 8500

Stepout Editor

Peter Matthews,1 Barbrook Avenue, Longton, Stoke on Trent, ST3 5UG. peter.matthews20@ntlworld.com Tel 01782 336556

Area Website

<http://www.staffordshireramblers.org/>

National Office Website

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/>

Ramblers Routes

Want to find a walk, then try the Ramblers routes, then try
<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/routes-and-places-to-walk/about-ramblers-routes.aspx>

Next Issue

Will be published mid October. Contributions please by 15th September.

And Finally

If you do change your address please let Head Office know, not the Editor as he does not have the membership list.