



April Issue, 2016



STAFFORDSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS

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Photo – Shutlingsloe (extracted from walkingengishman.com)

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Editorial.

It's been a wet winter, so much so that I have invested in a pair of boots after 36 years of fell shoes. If nothing else it's got rid of my dislike for boots, they have come a long way since my last pair that took over two years to break in and even then were not comfortable. These are like putting on a glove, are light and allow the foot to move. I've barely had them off my feet since November. I can now plunge through puddles and muddy areas and still keep my feet dry. Which is just as well after this winter. Indeed Peter Turner must feel the same way as his entertaining piece 'Water on the next page' will testify.

Although group reports are not essential for the Spring edition a number of Groups have put pen to paper and it is interesting to see how varied their activities are. With government cuts our footpaths are under more threat than ever and the more we can do to keep them open the better. I am sure, that like me, many can remember the sixties when paths were overgrown, lacked stiles, were obstructed and that's if you could find them. Since then paths have come a long way with signage, stiles, footbridges etc so we must not lose what we have. So on that cheerful note, on with the magazine.

Response to 'Greetings from Halesowen'

Kinver, Staffordshire and Stourbridge, Worcestershire were adjacent border territories. Previous to 1982 the Staffordshire Area Committee must have decided in committee decisions that they would like to form a group in their most southerly zone, In that year I found myself, as a non member at the time, attending the inaugural walk starting in Kinver. Members walking were of sufficient numbers and interest to form a committee. In my case however interest was dissipated by the fact that in attendance were two push chairs. The leader of the day did not indicate that they were not suitable for the terrain. Energy was exerted in negotiating a stretch of loose sand.

Also I would point out that the exact route cannot be repeated, Vandals in a subsequent year set fire to a scout hut. The decision was closure of a short stretch resulting in walking along narrow roads without footpaths for some three times the original distance.

After a small number of years had passed and on joining the Ramblers Stourbridge group I found it dominated mainly by the Stourbridge community. If ever the Kinver name was used I have no knowledge.

A tree in commemoration of 25 years of the Stourbridge Ramblers Group was planted in Mary Stevens Park Stourbridge and is growing well, the accompanying plaque has been remounted a couple of times.

Roy Foster

Membership Report

Month		Sep-15			Feb-16		
		Total	New/Rejoin	Debtors	Total	New/Rejoin	Debtors
NS01	East Staffs	249	4	4	252	5	3
NS02	Stone	225	0	3	219	1	2
NS03	Stoke Newcastle	342	1	9	341	2	5
NS04	Lichfield	128	2	6	129	1	4
NS05	Mid Staffs	181	1	6	173	3	4
NS06	Stourbridge	214	3	5	207	1	4
NS07	Wolverhampton	261	0	8	262	6	5
NS08	Walsall	157	2	4	167	3	1
NS09	Sandwell	132	2	6	134	3	7
NS10	Chase	106	2	4	106	0	4
NS11	Leek	122	0	3	121	0	
NS12	Biddulph	118	0	4	120	0	1
NS14	Bilston	43	2	-	39	0	2
NS50	Black Country	47	1	-	52	3	
NS51	StaffsWG	75	2	5	83		1
NS Area	TOTAL	2448	27	70	2452	30	48

Membership figures February 2016

Water, Water, everywhere without a way to walk.

I am sure we will not forget in a hurry, last winters walking conditions that we all had to endure, (or at least walkers like ourselves that walk in any condition no matter what the weather and say "there is no such thing as bad weather just bad equipment" just to make ourselves feel better) through the wettest winter in living memory. How we all struggled to get through some kissing gates because of the mud that was so deep we all had to limber round the edge of the gate and then make a desperate leap to solid ground that regrettably not all of us made. Mud is just as much a problem as an over grown path and

with a little thought can be overcome by installing hard core when a kissing gate is installed, also thought should be given to installing hard core to existing gates where there is a mud problem.

How we all (well I do) struggle to get through some stiles that were so narrow there was not enough room to swing a leg over and when it was your turn to go over all covered in mud from every one else that had gone before.

How we all struggled to get up or down even the slightest sloping muddy path or shall we say rut without falling down. We all have our own technique. Do you favour the walking on the left or right side of the rut in the hope you don't slip into the mud in the centre? Or do you straddle each side of the rut hoping you don't do the splits? Or do you take the direct approach and walk up the centre of the rut in the hope the mud is not too deep get dirty to the end looking like a wise walker, but unfortunately this year more likely looking like an idiot. (but it was all good fun !)

How we all tried to cross fields in a straight line only to get half way across and find that it had turned to liquid mud, and to get to the other side you had to do a wazy staggering run in the hope that you got to the other side, still with your boots on. We are now all looking forward to our new spring and summer walks program with the longer days to come and we hope better weather.

Peter Turner Country side secretary for Walsall Ramblers

Stoke on Trent Footpath Surveys.

Last year four members surveyed the footpaths in Stoke on Trent to assist the Authority in determining which paths needed attention and enable them to ask for a budget. This work has been valuable to the Council and this year they have asked for a survey of all, non definitive footpaths in the Authority's area. Surprisingly there are far more paths unrecorded than there are recorded. Many of these are on local authority land but there are still many on private land. Several of the paths are urban corridors or even part of a road itself but nevertheless the survey is identifying a multitude of paths, most of which are clearly defined on the ground. This will hopefully mean that in due course many of these will be put on the definitive map. Working closely with the Footpath Officer not only establishes a good relationship between the two bodies but also helps keep the Authority aware that people do walk our paths.

The Walking Englishman.

There is a useful site www.walkingenglishman.com which is great for planning walks over the whole country. Whilst there are many

sites offering walks, these need to be paid for but this site is free. In addition, it has a wealth of information on a number of things including a walk time calculator. You enter the distance, height climbed and descended and time for breaks and then gives you an overall time. A great site to browse.

Area Website

If you haven't visited the Area website recently (or even before), do take a look. Navigating it is easy and it has a wealth of information as well as quick links to Group and the Ramblers websites. It can be found on <http://www.staffordshireramblers.org/>

Book Reviews

Its some time now since I have been able to write a book review and now along come two.

Cheshire's 1000 ft Peaks.

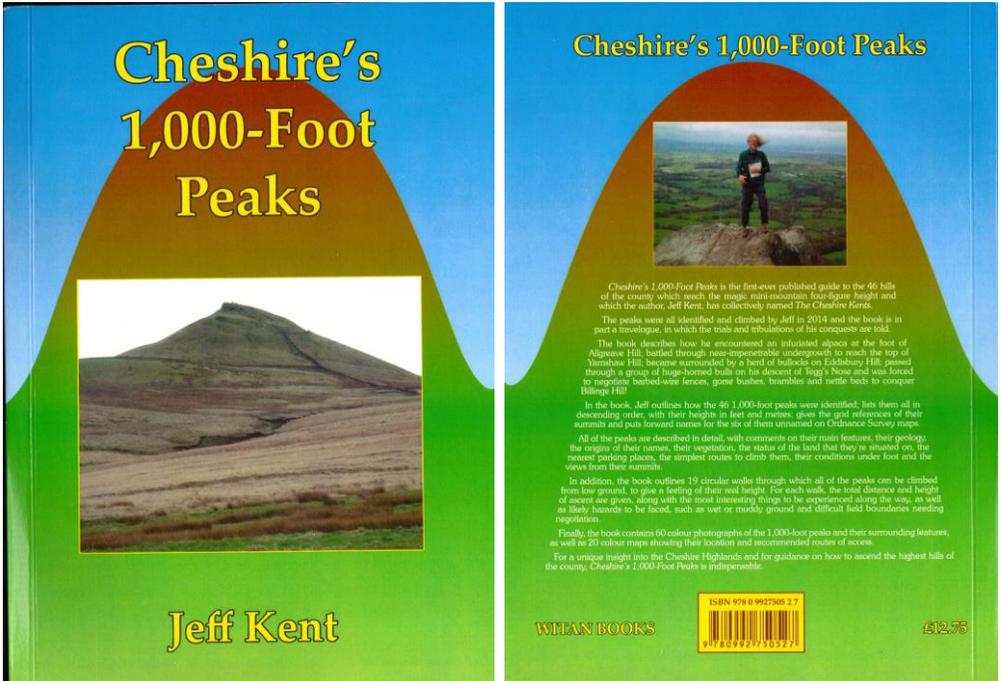
In 2014 I reviewed Jeff Kent's book on Staffordshire's 1000 ft peaks. I am delighted to see that he has now produced a second book in the series, Cheshire's 1000ft peaks. It follows the same pattern as his previous book and is 4 books in one. The first part is an entertaining diary of his walks to the various summits and is a worthy read in itself. The next section describes each peak and how to reach it and this makes an excellent reference section. There then follows 60 colour photographs and finally 19 circular walks with OS maps and good route descriptions. The walks vary from 3.25 to 7 miles in length. Some of the peaks are on private land but the walks can be adapted to avoid this where applicable. The content of the book is best described in the authors own words, from the back cover;

Cheshire's 1,000-Foot Peaks is the first-ever published guide to the 46 hills of the county which reach the magic mini-mountain four-figure height and which the author, Jeff Kent, has collectively named The Cheshire Kent

The peaks were all identified and climbed by Jeff in 2014 and the book is in part a travelogue, in which the trials and tribulations of his conquests are told.

The book describes how he encountered an infuriated alpaca at the foot of Allgreave Hill; battled through near-impenetrable undergrowth to reach the top of Yarnshaw Hill; became surrounded by a herd of bullocks on Eddisbury Hill: passed through a group of huge-homed bulls on his descent of Tegg's Nose and was forced to negotiate barbed-wire fences, gorse bushes, brambles and nettle beds to conquer Billinge Hill!

In the book, Jeff outlines how the 46 1,000-foot peaks were identified; lists them all in descending order, with their heights in feet and metres: gives the grid references of their summits and puts forward



names for the six of them unnamed on Ordnance Survey maps.

All of the peaks are described in detail, with comments on their main features, their geology, the origins of their names, their vegetation, the status of the land that they're situated on, the nearest parking places, the simplest routes to climb them, their conditions under foot and the views from their summits.

In addition, the book outlines 19 circular walks through which all of the peaks can be climbed from low ground, to give a feeling of their real height. For each walk, the total distance and height of ascent are given, along with the most interesting things to be experienced along the way, as well as likely hazards to be faced, such as wet or muddy ground and difficult field boundaries needing negotiation.

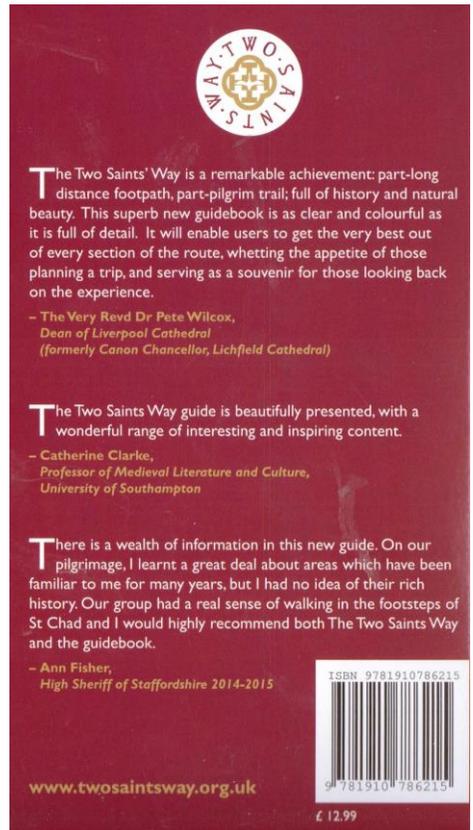
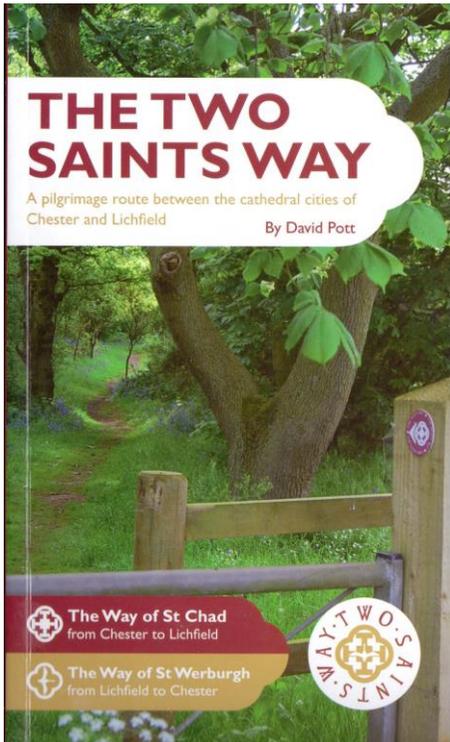
Finally, the book contains 60 colour photographs of the 1,000-foot peaks and their surrounding features, as well as 20 colour maps showing their location and recommended routes of access.

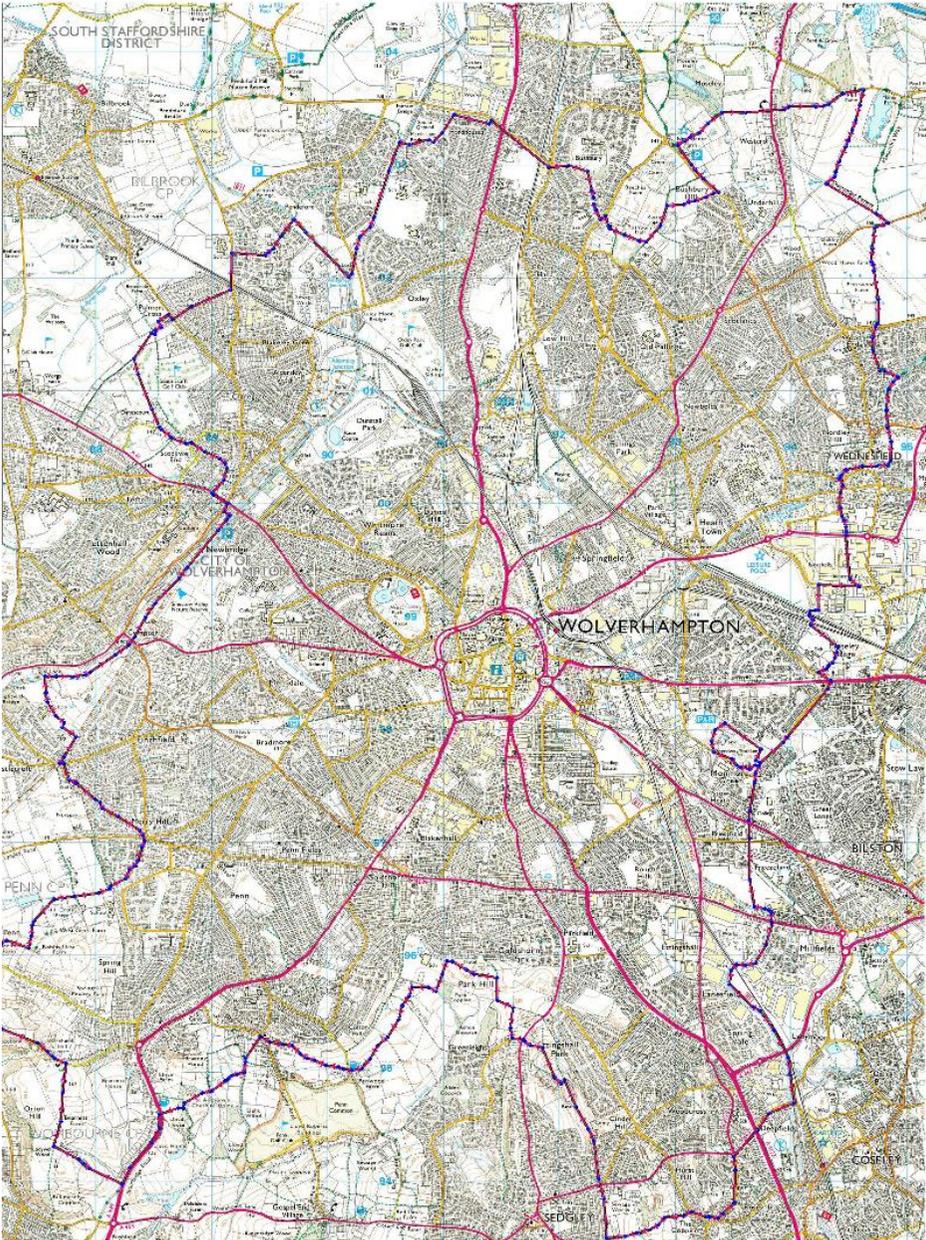
For a unique insight into the Cheshire Highlands and for guidance on how to ascend the highest hills of the county, Cheshire's 1,000-Foot Peaks is indispensable.

It is available from local bookshops, ISBN 9780992750527 or through Amazon, Waterstones or directly via the publisher (Witan Books, Cherry Tree House, 8 Nelson Crescent, Cotes Heath, Stafford, ST21 6ST, 01782 791673 witan@mail.com) at a cost of £12.75. If you are not too far away the Author may well deliver.

The Two Saints Way

The Two Saints Way is a waymarked 92 mile route from Chester to Lichfield. This excellent guide not only describes the way in detail but also in both directions. Accompanied by OS maps the route description also describes points of interest. The route is broken down into sections and is described in 4 large sections of around 24 miles each but within each of these are smaller sections of varying length from 3.2 to 8.6 miles. Each stage is accessible by public transport so it is easy to do the walk over a long period of time using public transport.





Overview of the Wolverhampton Ring Walk – see next page

The book is available through Amazon and local bookshops at £12.99, I SBN 9781910786215. There is also a website www.twosaintsaway.org.uk

A Wolverhampton Ring

A walk of approximately 29 miles around Wolverhampton along canal tow paths, old railway lines, footpaths, tracks and pavements. See www.wolverhamptonring.info. There is no route description but you can download an OS map with the route shown or a sketch map showing bus numbers which is very useful. An overview map is produced on the next page.

Area Walks Programme

Why not find out more about the walks organised by other groups and walk with them for a change? The information you require can be found on the Area Walks' Programme and a copy can be yours by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Peter Matthews (address on rear of Stepout). When you send your envelope please make sure that it is large enough to accommodate from between two and six sheets of A4. The minimum size should really be C5.

Black Country Young Walkers

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, West Midlands and Worcestershire, with the Shropshire and South Staffordshire areas being particular favourites for our group walks. We also included an additional walk on Boxing Day and a night walk in February around The Wrekin.

Membership continues to increase and we are actively working at getting more people to join the Ramblers.

We have also put on some socials for a members including Meals, Drinks, Bowling, Tribute Bands and a visit to the Black Country Museum for their Christmas Event.

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

Leek Group Report

In spite of the terrible weather over the last few months, we still enjoyed a varied programme of walks with one or two having to be altered because of waterlogged ground! Thanks go to our leaders for

rearranging walks at short notice. Our long walks, held on the first Sunday of the month, are still proving to be popular and attracting an increasing number of walkers with new members joining the group.

Last year, we formed a Footpath Repair Group in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council – usually about six members venture out to spend a few hours doing maintenance work – one such project was to put down hard core on the Staffordshire Way at Ladderedge Country Park in Leek. This improvement to the path has been welcomed by the local dog owners who regularly walk along this route.

Our Spring Programme has just been completed with a good mixture of walks – including monthly Wednesday walks, and monthly evening pub walks.

Liz Rhodes

Sandwell Group Report

What is it about a Ramblers group that is so special? Or, in business jargon, what is our unique selling proposition? I would say that it is our led walks – that is, the countryside, the weather and the social interaction. Those who experience these walks regularly know that they can be transformative, even life-saving. We contend with nature and forget our worries. The difficulty in promoting this as a way of life is that it is ephemeral. We have nothing to show for it other than muddy clothes, a shared memory, better health and a calmer disposition. As the supermarkets say, when it's gone, it's gone! In Sandwell, we have been trying, where possible, to post reminders and photos about some walks but this is never anything like as good as having experienced a walk. And each Staffordshire group will be acutely aware that we are only as good as our next walk!

Another interesting challenge that we continue to work on is how to re-invent our group for those who have grown up in a digital age without alienating those who have been with us the longest and who continue to support us and the good work of the Ramblers. This picture will be familiar to other Staffordshire groups too. The tightrope walk might be less difficult in Eastern cultures where more credit is given for the wisdom arising from experience than is usually shown for this on the streets of Sandwell! We have no solutions here other than to value all our members one way or another. What we have in common, by and large, is an absence of self-importance, knowing how to recognise baloney and an ability to laugh at ourselves and each other. We are also all expert on the different kinds of mud in and around Sandwell!

Andrew Budden

Stourbridge Group Report

Although the membership figures for the group were officially 212 in the Annual Report of 2015, the majority of these we never see. Bearing in mind that for many, the prime reason for joining the RA is the security of walking on a maintained footpath network. By paying their dues, these supporters may feel that they should be able leave walkers' rights and the walking environment to the Association to look after their interests, without a commitment or involvement they haven't time for or just don't want.

We have a reasonable level of walk leaders and our walks programme offers both long and short walks; with a short walk every second Sunday in the month and often short mid week walks, we hope to provide the 'next step' for health walkers who would like to move on, as well as those in the group who find the long walks too challenging. Whilst the main aim of the group is walking, we have had our 'jollies', not just this year, but for thirty years or more for the original members. It's these stalwarts we have to thank for starting the group and promoting the camaraderie which has so enhanced our walks together.

We started off the year with our Annual Dinner. This is a time when we try to recognize who's who out of the waterproofs, hats and scarves - and instead of the mutual admiration of the latest gaiters and thermal 'whatevers' we can dress up! No one has trousers tucked into socks at Blakelands.

Our annual coach holiday in May, which this year was to Patterdale, was a real treat. We were blessed with good weather, though Helveln was curtailed owing to the drifting snow. We had a great weekend at Llandridnod Wells in September and our annual Summer Outing this year was to Liverpool. It's hard to say just how much we value those few good folk who sort out these breaks for us and devise all the walks (and our coach driver Rick!). Our last jolly brightened up a dark and dismal February evening with a very convivial skittles tournament. We have lots to look forward this year with a varied walks programme and a few more 'jollies'.

Jill Hollyhead

Stone Group Report

Signs of spring are noticeable everywhere whilst we are out and about enjoying our walking. The snowdrops were reported as magnificent on a walk at Cound near Shrewsbury recently. Membership of the group continues to be fairly stable and attendance at walks and events is excellent. Walk leaders have provided two excellent programs throughout 2015 and early this year and the

members have supported them. Most walks have been well attended. Keep up the good work. The walks are great fun, there always seem plenty of chatter and laughter. Members exchanging opinions and new ideas about future walks, holidays and world events. Until a steep hill is reached that is and then the chatter is replaced by heavy breathing.

The AGM in November was well attended, an interesting talk was arranged regarding the work of the Air Ambulance. A donation and collection was made to the charity.

Our 20th anniversary was celebrated at the Boar in Moddershall. David and Anita Wright catered for all, providing a hog roast and a vegetarian option for everyone to enjoy. A huge green cake was enjoyed and fantastic speeches were delivered by founder members.

A delicious New Year's lunch preceded by a short walk took place in January at the Peveril in the Peak. Another great opportunity for old friends to catch up.

During our walks we've continued to visit the Peak District, Shropshire and Staffordshire, with trips up to the Lake District and over to Wales. Walks of varying lengths and difficulty are offered every week.

Rowena has taken groups town walking in Wolverhampton and Tamworth. She gave an interesting insight into the history of the towns and a view of the major sights.

The ramblers holiday to Pelion and Sporades, led by John Knott, was a huge success. Walking through mountain villages on the Pelion peninsula and a week on the island of Skopelos. Plenty of time for lazy taverna lunches and swimming in the late afternoon.

John Rawlins took a group to the HF hotel Long Mynd in Church Stretton and led four days of fabulous walking in February. He tested everyone's knowledge with a quiz each evening. Terry Tomsk made a clean sweep of the prizes.

Holidays to Italy, Lynn peninsula and Selworthy are all in the program for later this year.

The walking for health group has had an increase in numbers recently following some effective advertising by Pam Bradley in local papers. Walking is an ideal way to regain good health and improve fitness and wellbeing.

The walking party have worked tirelessly alongside the county council to improve styles, gates and footpath access throughout the local community. Members of the committee helped in the Nationwide Big Pathwatch organised by the Ramblers. They walked local paths and reported back any problems. We look forward to hearing reports

from the ramblers regarding the condition of the nation's footpath network.

Carol Skelton Publicity Officer

Wolverhampton Group

It has been an active time for the Wolverhampton Group over the last six months. The holiday in Llandudno was a great success. A large group of us enjoyed the beautiful walks. Some led by our own walk leaders and some were with Ramblers' walk leaders who lived locally. Many thanks to Helen Nicklin for organising it. North Wales is likely to be the venue for a holiday next Autumn so watch out for details.

The Walks programme continues to be varied with a good selection of strenuous, easy and moderate walks. The number of real ale 'pub walks' has increased and are proving popular. Thanks to all our walk leaders for continuing to put the work into preparing these walks and to the path clearing team for helping to keep so many paths open.

New walk leaders are needed as some of our regular leaders have 'retired'. So if you have a favourite walk then please share it with us. You will be most welcome. There will be training days for volunteers, provided by Ramblers nationally, from April-June. Group members have attended previous workshops and found them useful. There will be workshops in Birmingham on 13 May. There are more details on the Ramblers' website.

Events we are looking forward to are Wolverhampton's Walking Festival in early May. Also a day coach trip to the Lake District and visit to the Cotswolds again with Mid-Staffs in September.

Judith Rose

And Finally

Something to share. If you suffer from arthritis there is a simple fruit that may well help you and that is sour cherries. Several people I know suffer bad backs, knees or neck and all have found that dried sour cherries gives great relief. Either 10 dried sour cherries (which are actually quite soft and sticky) or the equivalent freeze dried cherries or powder does the trick. After a year of knee pain, my own knees are almost like new since taking them. Within a week or so my knee pain has disappeared entirely. There may not be a scientific reason why it should work but work it does.

SANDWELL SIX TOWNS CHALLENGE WALK/RUN

Sunday 28 August 2016 - 26, 18 or 14 miles routes, plus a 5 miles guided Sandwell Stride walk, within Sandwell Valley. Sandwell Ramblers, in conjunction with Sandwell MBC and sponsors My Time Active (Sandwell Stride Health Walks), are staging the seventh Six Towns Challenge event on Bank Holiday Sunday 28 August 2016, starting and finishing in Sandwell Valley, B 71 4BG (OS 019915, Explorer 220).

The self-led routes include country parks and open spaces with minimal road walking and make extensive use of the canal system which was the lifeblood of the Black Country during its heyday. The 26 mile route visits each of Sandwell's Six Towns and includes the 1.75 miles of the famous Netherton Tunnel (torch essential), which in 2013 underwent a four month restoration scheme by the Canal & River Trust at a reported cost of £1.5 million. For details, see www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-21373005.

Refreshments and snacks will be provided at checkpoints and the finish. Start will be at 8.30am for 26 miles (check-in from 7.30am), 9.30am for 18 miles (check-in from 8.30am) and 10.00am for 14 miles (check-in from 9.30am) for both runners and walkers. All to finish by 8pm.

The 5 miles guided Sandwell Stride Jamboree walk will start at 11.00am (check-in from 10.30).

Note: this year all check-ins, starts and the finish will be at the Fort pavilion in Dartmouth Park, adjacent to the Sandwell Valley car parks. Certificates for all finishers.

Entrants under 18 to be accompanied by an adult. The previous six year's events attracted entrants from far and wide including London, Lancashire, South Wales, Oxford, Cheltenham, Devon and a good number from the West Midlands. For details of the 2015 event, click on www.sandwellramblers.org.uk

£6 entrance for 26, 18 & 14 miles routes and free for the 5 miles guided walk. Entries on the day £7 for 26, 18 & 14 miles. This year, there will be a £2 pay and display fee for parking in Sandwell Valley.

Applications for entry forms to Lorna Johnson (Events Co-ordinator), Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury, West Mids. B69 3DE. Daytime phone 0121 569 8276. Email lorna_johnson@sandwell.gov.uk.

This event is supported and sponsored by
MyTime Active (Sandwell Stride Health Walks)

National Office

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

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Vacant

Next Issue

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

And Finally

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