



STEP OUT

THE STAFFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS MAGAZINE

Autumn 2022

and

ANNUAL REPORT

In this **STEP OUT**



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Digitally captured photographic images are
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FROM THE EDITOR

I had a lot of positive feedback about the last
edition of Step Out from readers. Thank you
for your kind comments. This edition features
the 2022 AGM and the Annual Reports from
Officers.

There are also several great articles for you
to enjoy. There has been some lively
correspondence after Harry W Scott's article on
the proposals for Solar Panel Farms in
Staffordshire and I have selected two letters for
you to read. Greg Spencer's article links
Rambling with Bird Watching and I am pleased
to report that I was present to witness the rare
feathered winter visitor that Greg refers to!
There is an interesting piece on the
anniversary celebrations of the Long Distance
Walkers from Laura Channon and a short
report from Stone Ramblers on their recent
litter picking activities.

I am getting more and more reports from
Groups, which is most encouraging and makes
interesting reading. It seems that our groups
have recovered well since COVID and are
thriving on both walking and social fronts.

Thank you to Jane Norman and Ange
Spencer for their sterling work proof reading
and editing.

We have attracted some advertising in this
issue, which helps cover its production cost.
We need some more! If you know of a business
that might like to advertise their services in a
magazine that reaches
over 2000 people in
Staffordshire, please give
them my email address:
stepout@griff45.com.



Gerald Griffin





Greg Spencer, a long time member of Staffordshire Ramblers and a member of the RSPB asks:

RAMBLING and BIRD WATCHING

Why not combine both?

Angela and I settled in Stafford in 1984 when we moved to the area for work. Angela had been introduced to 'hiking' by a teacher at her school who regularly took kids out into the hills in the North West of England. She loves walking and we wanted to get to know the Staffordshire area as well as make new friends. We joined the South Staffs Ramblers in 1985 and there began a 'beautiful relationship' which has enhanced our life in many ways. Eventually, the 'South Staffs' became the 'Mid Staffs' as more

A few years ago our interest extended to bird watching and we joined the Newcastle Group of the RSPB where we made more friends.

Rambling and bird watching: why not combine the two? Here is a little tale about one of our favourite walks where both activities complement each other. If you want to follow the same 8.5 mile trail, you can do it either as a walk, or as a wildlife safari, or indeed both ; the choice is yours! If you are looking for birds, you will need your binoculars, a pocket Bird book and a pencil to jot down your sightings. Oh yes,

and do not forget the map!



If you are looking for birds, you will need your binoculars, a pocket Bird book and a pencil to jot down your sightings. Oh yes, do not forget the map!

The walk starts at the Shooting Butts public car park on the top of the Long Mynd, just outside Church Stretton. The old shooting box was removed in 1992 and the mound next to the

rambling groups were formed in the area.

About 15 years ago, our interest in wildlife flourished as we became more involved with the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. We attended meetings and helped to organise them locally.

car park is a tumulus dating from around 1700 BC. However, since it is a circular walk you could just as easily start at Bridges where there is a bigger car park and a pub!

What you may see of the birds and other

wildlife will depend, in part, on what time of the year it is. In March, you will likely hear the songbird on the Myndd, including the beautiful Skylark song high in the sky, and the less obvious contact calls from Meadow pipits lower down in amongst the heather. When the males are displaying in the spring, they fly vertically up to about 20 metres, and then, using the breeze, they parachute down at an angle. The song starts with a “Zip, Zip, Zip” and then at the apex of the flight changes to a fluty, buzzy and complex expression finishing with a Tschu, Tschu, Tschu. “Birders” love their jargon and Meadow pipets are the epitome of the LBJ, (little brown Jobbie) and are known as “Mipits”, Rock pipits are “Ripits”, and Water pipits are “Wipits”!

There are around 2 million Mipit nesting sites in the UK and they are the favourite food of many raptors. If you are very lucky in June you can see Britain’s smallest falcon, the Merlin, chasing the small songbirds over the Heather to catch and feed to their young. However, the Long Myndddd is better known for the slightly larger Hobby falcon. The Hobby particularly loves dragon flies, which they catch on the wing.

Mipits are a favourite host of the Cuckoo,

often heard on the Myndd from April onwards. Cuckoos time their arrival with the emergence of hairy caterpillars, which is their main food source, and of course the nesting of small birds.

From the car park, follow the well-made track past the tumulus mound heading northeast. There are fantastic views to your right over Church Stretton and on towards Caer Caradoc, The Lawleys and Hope Bowdler. Continue along the top until you join the Portway.

Members of the mid-Staffs might remember that on this path, in September 2019, we came across a Lapland Bunting feeding on heather seeds. It was so tame it stayed on the side of the path as dozens of walkers, even with dogs, came past, mostly oblivious to its presence. This bird became a celebrity in birding circles at the time.

The Portway is an ancient track which runs across the top of the Long Myndd. It is thought to be Bronze Age in origin dating back 3000 years and passes several burial mounds or “tumuli”. It may have linked the trade in bronze age axes from the axe family on Corndon Hill to the west and later as a main drover’s road.

Just before a clump of trees, close to the



Mipit mobbing a cuckoo. (Visit the British Trust for Ornithology at www.bto.org)



Lapland Bunting – Rare visitor from Siberia!
Visit <https://shropshirebirder.co.uk>

minor road you meet, there are shallow pools at the side of the path in which you can find Frog's Spawn.

There are numerous Stonechats around here. They sit on the top of bushes and prominent clumps of grass, precariously balancing in the breeze and making their harsh onomatopoeic "chat chat" call.

At this point we cross the road and follow the Portway as it veers off to the left. For about 1.5 miles we follow this grassy ridge. Again there are stunning views towards Shrewsbury and across the Cheshire plain. Here is a great opportunity to see the corvid family pecking amongst the sheep or soaring above the ridge: Rooks, Crows, Jackdaws and especially Ravens. Look out for their coffin shaped tails and listen for their deep croaking voices to identify them from the much smaller crows.

Occasionally when walking here in Winter the fields here seem to "bubble" with large

numbers of Redwings, Fieldfares, Mistle Thrushes and Starlings in large mixed flocks on the ground feeding on worms and invertebrates. We have also seen Hares on the hillside.

Just after a gate the walk leaves the Portway and turns to follow the Staffordshire Way down the Golden Valley. Here in the spring and summer we hear the "little bit of bread and cheeeese" call of the male Yellowhammers. In the spring there are often large numbers of the brightly coloured Small skipper butterflies to be seen. As the path drops down towards Ratlingshope alongside the Darnford brook you may hear the loud "cackling" yaffle sound made by the Green woodpecker, a stunning bird of green, yellow and red which feeds

on ants as its primary source of food. Here Willow warblers, Blackcaps and Chiff-chaffs are abundant.

Often called Ratchup and marked Ratchop on 19th century maps, Ratlingshope is a settlement of much less importance today than in the past. There are records of a mill here from 1291; the old mill building probably dates from the 18th century and was last working in 1900. Look out for dippers in the running stream.

Past Ratlingshope and just before the path reaches the Bridges Road, there is an area of open woodland with some gorgeous huge Beech trees. This is a favourite location for Nuthatches, Redstarts, Pied and Spotted flycatchers, The latter is a beautiful rare and red listed summer visitor from Africa.

On reaching the road, turn right past the Youth Hostel. The Bridges Youth Hostel was formerly a school, built in 1866. It became a youth hostel in 1931, one of the first 10 in the

whole of England.

Then on to The Bridges Inn, named after the settlement that surrounds it. The inn originally served a major coaching route between Shrewsbury and Bishop's Castle and boasted a smithy until 1940. Currently the pub is run by a young couple who we found to be very friendly serving us a pot of tea or a beer which we drank sitting at one of the many outside benches.

Our walk now takes us past the front of the pub and up the minor road to the farmstead of Coates. In the lane there are plenty of Sparrows, Chaffinches, and tits taking advantage of the feeders in the cottage gardens. Curl left through the farmyard and keep climbing up to the "County Road".

Here, in March this year, we had an amazing sight of at least 10 buzzards circling above seven Red kites. We think there may have been carrion attracting them. The Red kites were sometimes flying alongside us at head height so we could clearly see their deep V-shaped tails twisting from side to side as they floated on the strong wind.

One May we saw a Reed bunting and a Wheatear or "White Arse" in this area, so named because of its obvious white backside in flight. This county road with stunning views is quite a long steady climb but takes you directly back to the Shooting Box car park. On arrival you will be

Wheatear

Visit www.birdspot.co.uk

ready for a cup of tea or a beer in Church Stretton or Bridges while counting up the number of different birds seen or just reflecting on a wonderful walk!

Greg Spencer



Pied Flycatcher, visit www.woodlandtrust.org.uk





Laura Channon, Walk Secretary of the Staffordshire Group of the Long Distance Walkers Association, writes about the National and Staffordshire's anniversary celebrations.

**50th
ANNIVERSARY!**

of the

**LONG DISTANCE
WALKERS ASSOCIATION**

Last month the Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA) celebrated its 50th anniversary as a national organisation. Our Staffordshire Group celebrated this milestone and our own 45th anniversary with a walk across the County using the 50km Way for the Millennium. Later there was a tea party at Maer Village Hall and we were delighted to see Tony Hewitt, our founding chair here, together with many others.

The LDWA was formed when our two the co-founders, Allen Blatchford and Chris Steer, met at a 30 mile marathon around Tanners Hatch Youth Hostel. They realised there was a need for an overarching national organisation to collate and publish information about longer distance walking activities. They placed adverts in 'Rucksack', a previous Ramblers Association magazine, and elsewhere, and soon had 350 members. Local County groups were quickly established. Today there are 11,000 members nationally and the LDWA continues to be volunteer led and run. The

LDWA has similar aims and close links to RA in terms of access to the countryside and encouraging and pursuing the interests of walkers.

The LDWA flagship event is the annual 'Hundred', a 100 mile walk over a May Bank Holiday. Up to 500 people enter and hope to complete the distance within 48 hours. Many of you know Vera Evans of the Staffordshire group. Vera and her late husband, Bob, both completed nine Hundreds!

The organisation produces a lively magazine, 'Strider', three times a year. It includes articles about walking adventures in the UK and abroad, the environment and diary of walking and social events. Walks are usually around 20+ miles with checkpoints, organisation and sustenance provided by local groups. These well attended events show just how much people enjoy walking and the achievement and challenge involved. Often the last to arrive gets the warmest welcome!

Many people, including myself, joined the



LDWA having heard about it through RA friends. Back in 1977 I was a keen Rambler and when Ronnie and Frank Blount put on an 18 mile walk on the RA programme I thought I would have a go. I was amazed how much I liked it and promptly joined the LDWA where I met many others who have also enjoyed longer walks, often in Shropshire and the Peak over 45 years!

The Staffordshire group has many enthusiastic members who organise and support two challenge walks a year. In April we run the Three Shires; a 30 mile walk around the Staffs, Cheshire and Derbyshire border. In November, there is the Six Dale circuit, 25 miles based on Biggin Village Hall. There is a deal of work in planning a route, ensuring safety, supplying food (we have a nationwide reputation for our cheesy oatcakes) and getting everyone safely back in the time allowed. Our reward is the many "thumbs up" and sheer enjoyment we see in the 300 or so participants. The group organises several residential holidays, with Winter Weekends often spent in a snowbound Youth Hostel!

Like other groups we offer a walks programme which includes both longer and more challenging days out but also shorter walks for those, like me, just getting older. There are



Photographs from the Strider circa 1975.

Above, a tented camp and left, a drink at the end of an enjoyable walk!

summer evening rambles and the occasional winter evening walk with torches. If you are ever walking through Lud's Church and appreciating the boardwalk above the mud, our LDWA group spent a day restoring it. I hope some of you might consider coming to join us on a walk. As Walk Secretary you can always contact me or the walk leader to see if it is suitable for you.

Laura Channon

STAFFORDSHIRE

PROGRAMME

THU MAY 14 STOCKTON BROOK (Evening Walk). Meet 7.00 p.m. The Sportsman, Stockton Brook (GR 917519). Leader Phil Birtles (0782 535063)

FRI/SUN MAY 15/17 LAKES WEEKEND at the Gordon Walker Chalet, Stair. Bookings Pat Mason (96 663174)

SAT MAY 30 MARSHALS' WALK for The Leek Moors. Meet 8.00am the Travellers Rest, Flash (GR 033678) Leader Sylvia Mackney (0782 660240)

TUE JUN 2 NOT THE BARLASTON DOWNS (Evening Walk). Meet The Plume of Feathers, Barlaston (GR 886382). Leader Geoff Robinson (0782 619534)

SAT JUN 6 LEEK MOORS MARATHON. See 'Future Events'.

FRI/SUN JUN 12/14 JACK'S WELSH FOURTEENS (incorp. a possible double). Contact Jack Allen (0782 616731)

THU JUL 2 UPPER SHERBROOK. (Evening Walk) Meet 7.00 p.m. the White House, Cannock Chase (GR 994161) Leaders Marjorie & Dave Cashmore.



Above, an extract from an early edition of the Strider showing the Staffordshire Group's diary.
Below, A feeding station for walkers on the recent Six Dales Circuit.



OFFICERS' REPORTS

Chairman

It has been over two years now since COVID restrictions were introduced and group walks and events were stopped or restricted. The last year has seen a gradual return to some kind of normality, with over 100 walks now being planned each month across Staffordshire Ramblers. This has been down to the tremendous efforts of the volunteers from each group, and a special mention must go to walk leaders. Without you and the time you dedicate to plan, recce and lead walks, we would not be in the position we are now. This dedication and commitment you give to this role is much appreciated by all.

At a national level a number of initiatives have either started or continued to progress over the year. There have been a few cluster

regional meetings between areas, where information on area issues are passed to the regional officers. Risk assessments and walks management have both been discussed at length. On-line Zoom sessions are now readily available for all those who wish to learn more about leading walks. These can be found via the Ramblers Eventsbrite webpage. Over the next 12 months we will see the transition to the newly branded Ramblers website, designed to make it easier for members to access & navigate. We also plan to launch our own social media pages, bringing together some of the wonderful work done by groups in the area, and to ensure everyone is aware of the information available on our own Staffordshire Area website.

Jimmy Poole

Secretary

The last year has seen a number of changes in the Ramblers with new branding, website, Assemble, online courses and more. At Area level some meetings have reverted to face-to-face. Step Out has a new editor, Gerald Griffin. He has remodelled the magazine on the new Ramblers house style. Harry Scott, who has served our Area so well for many years as Area Footpath Secretary, has stepped down. Rosemary Moreton has stepped into his shoes. I should like to thank Harry for all the work he has done for our footpaths over the years, a role model if there ever was one. Our previous Chair, Judith Rose stood down at the last AGM and Dick Turton kindly stepped in to act as temporary Chair until our new Chair, Jimmy

Poole took on the role.

Glen Sibley also stood down as Area Webmaster and Charlie Bigley stepped up to the task and re-designed the Area Website. In addition he set up the Mailman software, which means that members can communicate through it, as they can with Assemble. From my point of view, it means that I can email Area Officers, Group Chairs and others using this software rather than using my own email address. I can also upload the minutes, agenda and reports directly to our website rather than sending them out as attachments. Any member can access them at any time. There were, as always, some teething problems but hopefully these are now resolved. I still receive

information from Central Office which at times is forwarded to Groups through my own email address. Since emails these days have to comply with GDPR I do not always know if the relevant member has received it or not, which means that some of these forwarded emails are duplicated. My apologies if that is the case.

Central Office arrange a number of online courses and I attend many of these. Some are not necessarily relevant to my post but are of interest anyway as I find that the Secretary is often the first port of call for a query. Attending these courses may well give me the answer to

that query. It is also a good way of getting to know staff at CO, which means that if I do not know the answer then I know someone who does. All this makes the role an interesting one!

Whilst I enjoy being Secretary and Area Treasurer, I am aware that having these two roles is not an ideal situation for the Area. Should any member be interested in either of these two positions please feel free to contact me and/or put your name forward at our AGM.

Peter Matthews

Update on the Staffordshire Ways

It has been a frustrating year trying to save the Churnet Way from being taken off the Ordnance Survey map. The Churnet Way is a 30 mile long distance path following the river Churnet from its source in the Staffordshire Moorlands near Ramshaw Rocks, to where it joins the River Dove near Rocester.

Staffordshire County Council said that it was up to our Group to check and report any issues about the path. The working party checked and replaced direction markers where needed and over 120 direction discs have been fitted plus a direction marker board close to the start of the walk.

A stretch of footpath near Ladderidge, shared with the Staffordshire Way, was almost impassable due to a muddy section. Work on the path has already started and hopefully will be finished when you read this article!

The Hamps Way will be taken off the Ordnance Survey because no one is willing to keep up its maintenance; for example, marking up and checking the path for work to be done.

There had been many complaints about lack of markers on the Limestone Way on the Staffordshire side. As a result, over 60 Limestone Way markers have been fitted during three visits to the area.

Alan Bell

Access

It is sad to report, that there has been no apparent activity from members on the open access front. This is even after trying hard to whip up some enthusiasm for more investigation of the many restricted areas of access that we have. I have reason to be satisfied with what we have achieved so far, but there is still work to be done. There are still so many places and spaces that we should be

allowed to visit unrestricted! Perhaps old members are getting too complacent and new ones not knowing what it is all about? Or maybe we are waiting for Head Office to kick start a fresh round of 'open access'. Watch this space!

Eddie Dawson

Membership

Staffordshire Area had a membership of 2,261 at the beginning of August 2022. This was made up of 48% female and 42% male with 10% unknown. The average age of Staffordshire's membership is 68 years old. Each group will, of course, have different ratios

and group membership officers will have that information. You may be interested to know that in my Group, Stone, the percentages are 46% female and 48% male and the average age is 73 years old.

The changes in membership since the last AGM are given below.

		2022	2021
ns01	East Staffs	237	238
ns02	Stone	182	190
ns03	Stoke/Newcastle	294	292
ns04	Lichfield	123	125
ns05	Mid Staffs	177	177
ns06	Stourbridge	193	177
ns07	Wolverhampton	238	253
ns08	Walsall	148	156
ns09	Sandwell	132	121
ns10	Chase	110	109
ns11	Leek (now Flexi)	36	83
ns12	Biddulph	144	139
ns50	Black Country	64	64
ns51	Staffs Walkers	91	68
	TOTALS	2298	2282

Please note that the difference in totals relate to affiliated and non allocated members.

Gerald Gittens

Cannock Chase AONB

As the Cannock Chase AONB 5 Year Management Plan (2019-2024), passes its half way point, it may be useful to look at some of the challenges it originally highlighted:

- Climate Change – Hotter summers /uncertain rainfall are proving threatening to habitats and species with Government help being sought to address these.
- Housing Development – Steps are underway to protect key areas, (especially SAC), from changes to the character and setting of the AONB plus additional expected visitor numbers.

- High Speed 2 – Owing to its close proximity to the north-eastern edge of the AONB, the Trent-Sow Parklands & Cannock Chase AONB HS2 Group has been set up to obtain funding for mitigation projects in the area.
- Commonwealth Games – Initial feedback suggest that the Mountain Biking event carried out in Birches Valley, was both successful with attendees following landscape protection instructions.
- Brexit – New legislation for environment support is awaited to replace CAP, but short-term, “Farming in Protected Landscapes” is seeking to fund local farmers who develop suitable projects.
- Wildlife – This is continually impacted by all of the above plus wildfires, new pests and diseases and the decline in traditional management techniques.

Among the responses to these challenges numerous projects have been undertaken across the AONB, using various funding sources including Defra, HS2 and the Sustainable Development Fund, (SDF), to enhance, understand and protect the AONB. Details can be found with this link:

https://www.cannock-chase.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/AONB-Annual-Review-2022_compressed-1.pdf

Despite its small size and its heavy footfall, small professional teams are successfully employed to ensure that Cannock Chase remains attractive and protected in the future.

Dick Turton

Below, Sherbrook Valley and
Clearing invasive species and its after effect.



Treasurer's Report

RA Accounts Summary for Year Ending	2020/21	2021/22
Income		
Bank Interest	£ 0.00	
Received from CO	£3,000.00	£ 8,501.36
Other	£ 636.13	£ 50.00
TOTAL	£3,636.13	£8,551.36
Expenditure		
Access	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Countryside Protection	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Footpaths/Rights of Way	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Governance	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Payments to Groups	£2,367.93	£2,501.40
Promoting Walking	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Walks Programmes	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Newsletters/Publicity	£3,016.72	£3,870.69
Campaigns/Casework	£1,418.86	£ 482.10
Practical Work	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Meetings (including AGM)	£ 86.80	£ 567.56
Administration	£ 55.00	£ 122.22
Other		
TOTAL	£6,945.31	£7543.97
Excess income over expenditure	-£3,309.18	£1,007.39

The unaudited accounts are shown above and reflects the current position. As we withdrew from Covid restrictions, expenditure started to return to normal. Nevertheless expenditure on casework had not reached pre-epidemic levels. Whilst it might appear that far more was spent during lockdown it was because in that year a large amount was spent on updating maps. In 2020 we were not able to hold a live AGM so costs were nil whereas last year the AGM, and meetings in general, returned to normal. (Two Area Council meetings remained virtual.) The main increase in expenditure was on Step Out. Now having a

new editor, Step Out is transformed and is a much larger and better produced publication.

In terms of funding, income returned to normal. During the previous year Staffordshire Area reduced its expenditure and elected not to receive its full funding in order to decrease reserves.

My thanks go to the Group Treasurers who have made the Area work run smoothly and respond to my, or rather Central Office's, requests for budgeting, annual accounts and annual returns.

Peter Matthews

**You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the
Staffordshire Area Ramblers'
on SUNDAY 27th NOVEMBER 2022, hosted this year by the
Stoke and Newcastle Group.**

The meeting will be held at Fulford Village Hall, Fulford Road, Fulford, Staffordshire ST11 9QT.
Grid Reference SJ 951 378.

Directions by car:

From A50 (Meir Crossroads).

Follow the A520 uphill towards Stone. After approximately 1.5 miles at the mini roundabout (Grindley Lane, Meir Heath) continue straight and at the second mini roundabout turn left onto Hilderstone Road (B5066 signed Sandon). After approximately 2 miles at Spot Acre Spinney crossroads turn left onto Fulford Road. Upon entering Fulford look out for the Village Hall on your left just after Highview Road.

From Stone.

From the junction of the A34/A51 continue north (signed Stoke/Newcastle), passing Aldi on the left. At the next roundabout take the third exit onto the A520 (signed Stone), following the road round the town (right hand lane) to reach High Street on right. Bear left and keep in left lane to follow A520 (signed Leek) for approximately 4¾ miles, then at the mini roundabout bear right (3rd exit) travelling uphill towards Meir Heath. After approximately ½ mile bear right at a mini roundabout onto Hilderstone Road (B5066 signed Sandon). After approximately 2 miles at Spot Acre Spinney crossroads turn left onto Fulford Road. Upon entering Fulford look out for the Village Hall on your left just after Highview Road.

The meeting will commence at 1.30pm and will be preceded by two separate walks, both starting from the Fulford Village Hall car park. The first will be 8 miles and start at 9.30, while the other will be 6 miles starting at 10. Both walks will finish in time for you to eat your packed lunch before the meeting starts. The usual refreshments will be available from 12.30pm. At the end of the meeting there will be a break for refreshments followed by a talk given by Phil Boam & Malcolm Gray. It is expected that the day will finish about 4.00pm. All Officer Posts are up for election, subject to appropriate nominations being received. We also have to elect three Individual Members' Representatives and three Representatives from Affiliated Organisations. Nominations are welcome and can be made before and at the meeting.



2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF STAFFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS

AGENDA

1. Welcome to the AGM
2. Chairman's opening Comments
3. Apologies for Absence
4. Minutes from the previous AGM
5. Matters arising from these minutes
6. Treasurer's Report
7. The adoption of the Annual Report
8. Election of Officers :
 - i) Chairman
 - ii) Vice Chairman
 - iii) Secretary
 - iv) Treasurer
 - v) Membership Secretary
 - vi) Footpath Secretary
 - vii) Access Secretary
 - viii) Environmental Officer
 - ix) Publicity Secretary
 - x) Webmaster
- Appointment of Independent Examiner
9. Election of Area Council Individual Members' Representatives (3)
10. Election of Affiliated Organisations' Representatives (3)
11. Appointment of General Council Delegates (2)
12. Any other business notified to the Secretary at least seven days in advance of the AGM .
13. Dates and Venues for Area AGM 2023 and 2024

Speakers

Phil Boam & Malcolm Gray of CRT and their talk will be on

"Maintaining our Canal Heritage."

FROM THE GROUPS



Biddulph Ramblers

In addition to our group walks that take place mainly on Wednesdays and Sundays, a programme of eight local evening walks took place this Summer. These ran from 30th June until 4th August, The 4th July walk formed part of the Biddulph Festival. These were very popular, and 181 walkers took part, in lovely evening conditions. This has proved to be a good way of gaining new members. Some join after retirement as the seeds were sown on these evening sessions.

On 17th August, 43 members travelled by coach to Sedbergh to take part in two organised walks in this stunning part of the Yorkshire Dales. The weather was wonderful as well!

We have a 5-day holiday booked in Penrith in October, with walks planned for each day. This holiday follows the very successful one to the Isle of Arran, in June. Our holidays organiser, Dave Martin continues to deliver some excellent breaks and we have more to look forward to in 2023.

Our website biddulphramblers.org.uk gives details of the walking programme, which is continually updated by Ken Sale, Web Master. Please take a look. Our Publicity Secretary, Gillian Gibbons, organises the blog for the website and her detailed walk descriptions make you feel as though you were there! Gillian has also made our Face Book site popular, raising interest in our walks amongst younger people.

On a sad note, Roger Simpson, our chairman and long standing treasurer and walk leader, has decided to retire from the committee following illness. Roger is an excellent raconteur and is the only person who can turn a set of annual accounts into a hilarious tale. Some of the RA accounting system foibles were 'discussed'!

Chase and District

In overall terms 2022 has been a positive year for the group after pandemic paranoia finally abated in the Spring.

An after effect of the restrictions is that nowadays we are finding that what started out as a temporary measure in producing a three monthly walk



programme actually suits us much better since we tend to fill each edition to within a couple of dates at the quarterly planning meetings. The Chase & District walk leader pool now stands at twenty-one members. Total membership, currently 111 as I write, has held steady throughout the last twelve months but definitely shows signs of improving just lately as peoples' confidence returns.

Sunday walks form the mainstay of the group's activities and have been reasonably well supported throughout. Once again we have tried to not repeat walks by actively searching out new locations as a start to the subsequent route planning process. It is worth mentioning that the recent fuel crisis has highlighted the benefit of car sharing wherever possible, especially if venue parking is likely to be limited.

Our two long weekends away both took place in Wales this year. Llanwrtyd Wells in May, followed by a September soiree at The Hand Hotel in Llangollen. There were over thirty participants on each occasion. Both family operated hotels looked after us well, and indeed The Neuadd Arms in Llanwrtyd even provided walk leaders with fabulous afternoon tea & homemade cakes, and plenty of 'em too! Throw in their own micro-brewery and what more could you possibly wish for? The final social event on our calendar is our Christmas meal coming up in December.

Wishing all of our fellow Staffordshire Area ramblers well for the remainder of this year and 2023.

Barry Collis, Chair

East Staffs

The past year has seen a welcome return to near normal for East Staffs Group. With no lockdowns or limits on walker numbers we have got back to what we all joined Ramblers to do – walk with our friends in the glorious British countryside!

Along with some other Staffordshire groups we have lost leaders during the pandemic. Despite this we have continued to offer three or four walks most weeks. We are very grateful to those members who have led walks over the past year and we are encouraging more members to lead walks.

A new group website was successfully introduced in March replacing the previous site, which had served us well for many years but had started to look tired and outdated. We are very grateful to those members who were involved in its implementation.

Group social activities and holidays gained pace in 2021/22. Three Christmas meals and the return of our annual buffet in March were well attended by hungry members. In late April 15 members completed the 40 mile Peak Pilgrimage walk from Ilam to Eyam. In early summer, we enjoyed a holiday to Guernsey and a Peak District weekend. Planned activities include a presentation by Peak District Mountain Rescue in October and a short 'Christmas' walking weekend with a dinner at a hotel in the Peak District.

Group membership has remained broadly stable in the past year. We are

constantly aiming to keep the Group in the public eye and plans are afoot to set up our first group facebook pages, which it is hoped will enhance our profile in the local community and attract new members. The continuation and success of East Staffs Group is only possible because of the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of our committee. A number of new committee members have joined up in the last 18 months or so and their new ideas and dynamism have added to the energy and vision of the group. I am confident that the future of the Group is in safe hands.

Tom Castle, Chair



Members of East Staffs enjoying a Trig Point!

Lichfield

This year is the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Lichfield Ramblers Group. After half a century the group continues to thrive. We have never been a large group, and, although membership has remained at around 130 over the last few years, only about 30 walk with the group.

Apart from our regular Sunday walks we also organise an annual midweek break, usually based in one of the Holiday Fellowship Houses. This year 19 of us went to Whitby, which was a great success. We were blessed with good weather as well!

We also organise several two day excursions over a Sunday and Monday, further afield than our Sunday walks. This year our destinations were Oswestry and Cirencester.

Looking back on the recent walks programmes, the trend is for shorter walks of eight to nine miles. This is no doubt a reflection of the present age profile of the

members which has changed from 50ish to 70ish over the last 20 years. Fortunately there is a hard core of walkers who are prepared to lead walks, keeping things ticking over.

We have over the last few years put a lot of effort into recruiting new walking members, sadly with not much success. So far we have not been able to find the magic recruitment formula!

Tony Grady, Chair

Mid Staffs

Sadly, this year our group has lost two very good friends who were both active walkers of Mid Staffs. Our Walks' Secretary, Steve Craddock, and long-time member, Roy Whitehouse, passed away this summer. Both Steve and Roy were regular Sunday walkers for many years. Prior to joining Mid Staffs, Steve, with his partner, Suzanne, were members of the Wolverhampton group where they led walks and organised coach rambles. In recent years, Steve, in his walks' co-ordinator role, was responsible for the input of our programme of Sunday walks online.

From the early days of the group, Roy with his wife, Margaret, were both active members. In fact, Roy was walking with us until a short while ago, nearly up to his 90th year. Rambling was a passion for Roy, which included leading walks and attending group holidays. Many of our members, past and present, will remember him with fondness.

Both Steve's and Roy's contributions to the group have been invaluable and they leave behind many people who will very much miss their friendship.

What a summer it has been weather-wise. I cannot remember many days when we have had to cancel walks due to excessive heat! Nevertheless, our full and varied programmes on Wednesdays and Sundays have continued to hold some lovely walks. Geoff, our IT webmaster, kindly took on the role of Sunday Walks' Co-ordinator with Suzanne in Steve's absence. We now have a programme of walks going up to November.

Our Social Secretary, Nicky, has been busy organising socials for the group. Even one of these, a trip to Shropshire Petals, had to be cancelled as it fell foul of the heat. We look forward to an upcoming train and walking day in October and before that, the Patterdale weekend near the end of September.

Angie Spencer, Chair

Sandwell

Since my last report, our progress in relation to walks and other matters, has continued as was set out in the spring. Whilst we have lost seven members over the last twelve months, we have also gained the same number, hence our membership remains static and healthy.

A major milestone in our year has been the celebration of our 30 year anniversary. To celebrate we organized a walk in Dovedale, which was well attended and included the first Chair and two founder members. The weather

was glorious, and a good time was had by all.

We advertise a walk of 8-10 miles each Sunday and continue to partner with Wolverhampton and other local groups in order to share resources, including walks on different days. I would like to thank Paul, a Wolverhampton member, for his contribution to our walks programme.

Ray has excelled in providing a Sunday walks' programme which is varied and well supported by walk leaders. However, we are always glad when new leaders step forward, and recruiting new walk leaders remains our focus. A big thank you to Alan and Maria for their huge contribution. One further change made has been to return to pre-covid use of a meeting point. It is Edward Street car park in West Bromwich. This means we can provide a car share opportunity and so we welcome others who either wish to join our group to walk or the car share scheme. Last but not least, I would like to congratulate all members who make it possible for walks to take place and also provide such a joyful experience.

Mary, Chair

Staffordshire Walkers

This year has seen the welcome return of weekend walks, social events and weekends away for Staffordshire Walkers. Weekend walks have occurred most Sundays and walks have been varied in both their length and level of challenge, with a number of new members becoming welcome additions to the group. A summer schedule of Wednesday evening walks was also reinstated, proving popular for those members seeking a post work shorter walk. It has also been pleasing to see that the walk schedule is now fully planned until new year. Thanks to Martin Kneller's promotional work as newly appointed 'Walks co-ordinator'. A special mention must also go to Jimmy Poole who previously managed this role



Staffordshire Walkers prepare to tackle Catbells and High Spy in the Lake District.

so successfully for so many years and has now moved on to the dizzying heights of group Vice Chair and Area Chair!

The group have also enjoyed the luxury of being blessed with sunny weekends away in both Bewdley and the Lake District, as well as enjoying a camping weekend in the Peak District, with a dining experience that will live long in the memory! A range of fantastic walks have enabled us to experience new locations and once again enjoy the social aspect of group weekends together. The traditional Christmas weekend away has also been planned, this year in Bakewell. Members are already giving serious consideration as to which Christmas jumper to pack!

On the social front there have been a number of events, including meals at both Greek and Indian restaurants, and an evening spent trying to avoid being on the receiving end of the comedian's attention at the comedy club!

Finally, following a period of transition, the Staffordshire Walkers website has been decommissioned as we have moved walks promotion to the Ramblers website. Thanks go to Phil Haferer who managed the website on behalf of the group for so many years. Further details about Staffordshire Walkers can also be found through Facebook to see the latest schedule of walks, and to view past activities from the group.

Matt Stanlake, Media and Publicity Officer

Stoke and Newcastle

The immediate focus for the Stoke and Newcastle Group is our group's aim to provide and deliver walks within a safe and hospitable environment. This year our active members can look back on a summer of hot weather, water shortages and even drought in many areas. To save costly fuel, meeting points for car sharing are beginning to return. Walk numbers had reduced a little but are up again reflecting the special enjoyment in meeting and socialising with others of a like mind.

Our Committee have been working hard towards hosting the Area AGM and have confirmed the venue at Fulford Village Hall on 27th November. A Trustee from CO will be present as well as speakers from the Canal and River Trust. Walks have been planned for Staffordshire members before the meeting. We have a number of volunteers who will be helping on the day, covering the walk, hospitality and safety. Details are available on the website and will be finalised in early November.

Our own AGM is now in the planning stage and needs some creative thinking to generate more volunteers for next year's committee to ensure our group thrives and continues into the future on a sound footing. If you are interested in supporting our group please contact one of our committee members. Details are on the website.

My thanks go to the many long term members who have given 30 or more years' service to the Ramblers! I will not name them as I do not want to embarrass them. You all know who you are!

Phil Snow, Chair

Stone

What a glorious Summer we have enjoyed. Temperatures reached record highs and rainfall was at record lows, resulting in drought conditions in many areas of the UK. Leaders rose to the challenge and although some walks were cancelled many were rearranged or altered to suit the conditions. A huge thank you to all our leaders; you do a great job! The programme secretaries continue to need your support to offer a full and varied programme of walks.

Membership of the group remains stable and numbers attending the walks has returned to pre Covid levels.

A variety of walks are on offer twice weekly, visiting not only Staffordshire but nearby Derbyshire, Cheshire and Shropshire. Using the train from Llangollen and walking back over Vivod Mountain made an exciting day out.

The HF holiday to the Isle of Wight was a huge success. Participants enjoyed exploring the beautiful island. In early October a group are off to the Lake District and next year will visit Malhamdale in the Yorkshire Dales.

Wellbeing Walks continue to run weekly and are very well attended. Their program can be accessed via the main website.

The working party continues to improve footpaths and stiles locally. Stone, Standon and Bowers, Hilderstone, Oulton, Sandon and Cotwalton have all benefited from their hard work. Thanks to Wolverhampton Ramblers for the donation of a brush cutter to the team.

We look forward to welcoming you all to our AGM in November. Details of the New Year Lunch will be available in the new programme.

Rambling is a common word used in the UK for walking in the countryside, with many rambling clubs and groups taking part in this outdoor pastime. I looked the word up! It is an old English expression meaning 'to walk without purpose'. Ramblers however do walk with purpose on defined routes. Whether the purpose is social, for exercise or to fill time, long may it continue!

Carol Skelton

Stourbridge

We are continuing to produce a full programmes of walks despite long term injuries to members of the group. We wish Margaret and Dudley continued speedy recoveries and look forward to you both putting walks on again soon.

We are also happy to report that in August we had our 200th member sign up to join us alongside other new members from this year. This is great news and maybe new walk leaders in the making.

Our members have so far this year enjoyed a holiday in Torquay which was a great success and also a memorable night at Bodenham Arboretum, with a meal followed by a quiz. Our day trip to Oxford was also a great success.

We also had our first family fun day, a five mile walk followed by kayaking, once again a great time was had by all involved. So much fun that we are planning it again for next year.

On October 16th we have a walk followed by lunch to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Stourbridge Ramblers. Still lots to look forward to this year as well as planned holidays and events to look forward to in 2024.

We strive to offer a varied walk programme and hope to continue to grow next year, we welcome walks from guest walk leaders and from our own group members. Lastly we would like to thank everyone for their continued support.

Elaine Davey

Walsall

Well thank goodness! We seem to have got over the worst of COVID-19 and our overall membership seems to be slightly higher than this time last year. Unfortunately this does not reflect in the number of walkers who are coming on our regular Saturday and Sunday walks.

The Saturday shorter four to five mile walks, usually less than 10 miles from Walsall, seem to be gaining in popularity. The numbers arriving for the Sunday 7 to 10 mile walks, which are further afield and more challenging, are down to a dedicated band of 10 to 14 regular walkers. Before COVID, the number was between 20 to 25. We are car sharing again on the Sunday walks, but we still have not seen an increase in members or new walkers.

Even before COVID it was a struggle to fill all the walk leader spots on our programme, but now this has become a critical problem.

On some Sundays we have now joined with the Wolverhampton Group, which I hope has increased the enjoyment of walks for both groups.

Our social activities have started up again. This included a well-attended Skittles evening and a lovely Christmas dinner at Calderfilds Golf Club. For me the highlight of the year was our six day holiday to Tenby. One of our walks was to Bosherton Lilly ponds, where we had a very good view of two otters swimming around. Our coming barn dance, I am sure, will be a success.

Our path maintenance group we have helped put some finger posts up around Hammerwich and we hope to do more projects in the Walsall area.

To conclude I would like to thank all our walk leaders, the life blood of our group, and the committee for keeping the show on the road. **Peter Turner, Chair**

Wolverhampton

This September we finally celebrated our 40th Anniversary as a Ramblers Walking Group although we were well into our 41st year! The delay was due to COVID restrictions. Nevertheless it was worth waiting for as it was such a pleasure to meet up with members past and present who have contributed so much to our Group. We have managed to keep our walking programme going even though we now have only a small number of walk leaders. A very welcome recent development is our collaboration with our neighbouring groups; Walsall, Sandwell and Stourbridge, to provide joint walks. We had an enjoyable joint walk

along the Long Mynd on Bank Holiday Sunday with Stourbridge, Walsall and Sandwell. Luckily there is plenty of room on the Long Mynd and no stiles! Thank you so much to all walk leaders and co-ordinators for helping this to happen. Information about our walks and events are on our web site: www.ramblers.org.uk/wolverhampton. Our walks programme can be updated at very short notice so do keep looking. This final paragraph is an 'advert' for various roles in the Group which have become vacant. They are; a Walks Programme Co-ordinator to support and encourage walk leaders to work with our rolling programme of Pop-Up walks on the web site, and a Publicity Secretary to promote our Group and its activities in and around our 'patch'.

Please consider volunteering for these roles as we really need your help. To get in touch you can email me: wolverhampton.ramblers@outlook.com or phone 01902 331266

Judith Rose, Chair

Stafford Wellbeing Walk Group

Our objective is to support people who are recovering from a physical problem and to support peoples' mental health. We have noticed a significant increase in walkers following the ending of lockdown. Most of the walkers will go for a coffee after the walk and many new friendships have been established. Many of those that participate are on their own and appreciate the fellowship extended by the group. Some come for specific purpose, for example, rehab after surgery to knees and hips. Some stay for a few weeks and then move on as they achieve their aim. A few have gone on to be members of Ramblers.

The scheme offers a walk of up to three miles that lasts a maximum of 90 minutes. Shorter walks are also available so the walkers can build up their fitness and confidence. It is a principle of the scheme that walks are free and open to all.

Sadly, the Stafford Town Group, which was one of the most successful, decided to leave the federation. We are keen to re-establish the group and are looking for volunteers as Group Leader and Walk Leaders. Full support and training will be provided. If you are interested and would like more information, please contact Chris Calkin c.calkin@btinternet.com or 07778 318572.

Chris Calkin, Chair

CONTACT NAMES, POSITIONS AND EMAIL ADDRESSES NEEDED!

Can each group's secretary/chairperson please make sure that Peter Matthews has an up to date list of who I should contact for your group's article for Step Out please. As you will have guessed there have been a few hiccups in communication with groups. Your contributions make great reading and we do not want anyone to be left out!

Many thanks.

Gerald Griffin, Editor



More Group pictures

Top, Stone members using the train for a walk near LLangollen.

Middle, Stourbridge Group getting ready for Kayaking

Left, an intrepid member of Mid Staffs tackles a stream in spate. She did not get wet!

HOW GREEN IS RENEWABLE ENERGY ?



Staffordshire Area Footpath Secretary and Area Environmental Protection Officer, HARRY W SCOTT wrote about the prospect of wind farms in Staffordshire in the last issue. His article has led to several letters. ADRIAN MABE writes:

In his article Harry Scott seeks the views of the Ramblers' membership as to how the Officers should respond to large scale solar farm developments. This is an example of an issue that confronts all of us. To what extent are we prepared to accept changes to our lifestyles in order to reduce the threats and consequences of man-made climate change?

My view is that if we want our children and

exceeded 40 degrees for the first time ever.

There is no doubt that mankind has caused the climate to change, and that things will get a lot worse if we do not take urgent action.

This is not the place to debate the relative merits of solar, offshore wind, onshore wind or tidal energy. I would say that they all have a place in building a sustainable future. So I am not opposed in principle to the building of

solar farms in Staffordshire. However there is a balance to be struck. Nature, our countryside

and wildlife; and the needs of walkers for fresh air and recreation are all part of the equation. So our Officers must scrutinise any planning applications for solar farms. If rights of way have to be diverted then I would say that is a price worth paying but I hope that we can resist attempts to extinguish footpaths altogether just for the convenience of companies seeking to make profits from building solar farms.

Adrian Mabe



If we want our children and grandchildren to have a lifestyle that is as good as we have had we must take urgent action to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

grandchildren to have a lifestyle that is even half as good as we have had over the last 60 years we must take urgent action to reduce further increases to the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Switching away from fossil fuels to renewable energy is urgently required. If the UK had adopted the switch to renewable energy more quickly we would not now be facing huge increases in our domestic fuel bills because of the spike in gas and oil prices caused by the war in Ukraine.

This July temperatures in parts of England

TOM GLIDDON writes

1 MOUNT SQUARE, LEEK, STAFFS, ST13 5DA, UK
 May 23rd 2022 01538 373 023

Dear Gerald,

Thank you for taking over the duties of editor,
 and Peter for his work.

I would like to make a few points regarding solar
 panel farms in Staffordshire.

The biggest threat to our Staffordshire countryside and
 wild life is from climate change. We don't have the
 choice of doing nothing.

Yes Harry is right to look into them. We may decide to
 halt through them, if we were shown that they -
 or one of them - were necessary to reduce some
 part of climate change.

If they were to be shown to make a valuable contribution
 we might not see them as "a blot on the landscape" but
 as a wonderful part of human attempts to change the
 climate of the whole world.

Thank you Harry for making me pay attention.

Best Wishes

— Tom (Gliddon)



RAMBLING LITTER PICKERS

On Sunday April 3rd, a dry Spring morning, 25 Ramblers from the Stoke and Newcastle Group enthusiastically turned for their first short walk and litter picking initiative.

The three locations chosen by the leaders were Ford Green to Chatterley Whitfield, Hanchurch Woods and Urban Greenways leading to the Newcastle Dales. Julie and Al accompanied by five members started from Ford Green and attempted to walk as far as Chatterley Whitfield. However it soon became apparent that the amount of litter to be collected would slow the pace down considerably. We were relieved to get to the first litter bin so we could leave the first batch of heavy bags and continue on our way! In total 20 bags of rubbish, a shopping trolley and other



They collected several bags of rubbish including a toilet cistern and a bag of tiles!

discarded paraphernalia was recovered. Phil and 11 members started at Hanchurch car park. They collected several bags of rubbish including a toilet

cistern and a bag of tiles! Everyone thought it was a therapeutic exercise and would be happy to do it again. They were also amazed by the equipment they were provided with.

Brian was joined by five members for 2.5 hours 'picking' over 3 miles of the Newcastle Urban Greenways route to Silverdale Country Park. They collected 21 bags of rubbish, which were left at four litter bins along the route.

Special thanks to the leaders and the 21 members who took part. We can be proud that so much rubbish has been removed from a small part of the places we love to walk, which can only be a benefit to the environment and wildlife. We are grateful to Paul Capewell, Community Development Officer at Stoke Council, who helpfully provided the litter pickers, rings and bags. The 'high viz' vests worn were provided by Ramblers Central Office and the gloves purchased using club funds.

Phil Wheatley





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