



RAMBLERS

Staffordshire



STEP OUT

THE STAFFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS MAGAZINE

Spring 2022

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FROM THE EDITOR

I have taken over editorial duties for
Staffordshire's Step Out from Peter Matthews.
Peter has done a wonderful job of editing and
producing this magazine for a long period of
time and I want to thank him, on all our
members' behalf, for his hard work and
dedication. He deserves a well-earned rest! I
would also like to thank him for the interest
and support that he has given me in the
production of this edition.

Many thanks to all of you who have
contributed to our magazine. I am sure you
will enjoy reading about Ramblers matters in
Staffordshire and beyond.

This Step Out has coincided with the
publication of the Ramblers new 'House Style'
and as you will see I have embraced this. I hope
you like it! You will also see I have included
more colour photographs and illustration to
support the text and I hope to show more
photographs of Staffordshire Ramblers
enjoying themselves in the future.

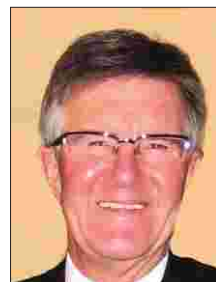
I have been given very good support from
Matthew Farrand at HQ with solving the
technical issues associated with implementing
the new design.

My thanks also to Carol Danby for her
sterling help with editing and proof reading.

Let us hope we all have many enjoyable
rambles in the future!



Gerald Griffin



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LATEST NEWS

...and it is not all bad!



Cambrian Mountain Events

After a two year sabbatical (over 2020 and 2021) which was dictated by the Covid Pandemic and associated restrictions, at long last, and with great joy, we can now confirm that we are ready to re-commence hosting events in the Cambrian Mountains again this New Year. After months of planning and preparation, we aim to make a 'soft start' this year by hosting a few past events that have been firm favourites amongst you all, accompanied by a few 'new' challenges that we remain confident would excite and entice you to join us.

Our 2022 Event Calendar is as follows:

- Saturday 26th of March 2022
The Booking System is now open to receive your entries.
- The 16th annual Sabrina Walk - 40k & 20k
Saturday 28th of May 2022
The Booking System is now open to receive your entries
- The "new" Wye Trail – 80k
Saturday 30th of July 2022
The booking opens: Friday 27th of March
- The "new" Clywedog Dragons Trail – 25k
Saturday 27th of August 2022
The booking opens: Friday 27th of March
- The 3rd annual Race to the Sea – 50k
Saturday 22nd of October 2022
The booking opens: Friday 22nd of April
- The 3rd annual Tinsel Run - 10k
Saturday 17th of December 2022
The booking opens: Friday 22nd of April

For further details on the Events, please visit our website at www.cambrianevents.co.uk
For regular updates leading up to the Events, please follow our Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/cambrianmountainevents>

For specific information pertaining to an Event or your Entry, please contact our Entry Administrators by message through our Facebook Page or by email. We also offer group discounts for groups of 10 or more entrants, from groups such as yours. Please contact registrations@cambrianevents.co.uk

We look forward to seeing you on our Events in the Cambrian Mountains very soon.

Graham S Evans

DEFRA to repeal the 2026 cut off for historic paths

This is to let you know that Defra told the stakeholder working group (of which I am a member) that it is going to repeal the 2026 cut off for historic paths, which is amazing news. Defra realised it just didn't have the capacity to do all the work needed, and there were many unanswered questions. The repeal has been signed off by the Secretary of State and needs suitable legislation into which to insert it

The downside is that it will expedite the right for landowners to apply for path changes, and get the necessary statutory instruments through parliament before the summer recess. This is an unpleasant piece of legislation which

could have serious consequences for the path network, and assist arguments about moving paths on alleged grounds of privacy and security. We shall try to mitigate it. The stakeholder group will discuss it further.

There were many good elements to the rights-of-way reform package, which would speed up surveying authorities' ability to process definitive map modification applications, and make the process less controversial. We pressed Defra to isolate those and see if it could progress them.

Defra is not planning a formal statement about this but will send us a note in due course. Basically, very good news.

Kate Ashbrook

Update on the progress of Peak District Review Plan

Following my last email, I have been in touch with the Peak District National Park Policy Team Manager to check on progress with the Local Plan Review.

The broad timetable is still as stated at the workshops that were held last summer:

- End 2022 – statutory consultation on Issues and Options
- End 2023 – statutory consultation on Draft Plan

At the moment they are running a series of internal workshops with the Authority Members to get their steer on some key questions and are also undertaking further research. They are shortly going to undertake an online questionnaire specifically for parish councils and later in the year when they are undertaking or about to undertake the statutory consultation, will organise some face-to-face events.

I have asked if there is anything that they can share with us on the research topics to see if there are areas that we could offer any insights on.

I have also asked for an update on progress with the National Park Management plan and there does not appear to be anything more to report than there will be a period of public consultation due to open next month.

Alan Manning

Charlie Bigley writes about

Websites



Risk Assessments

Our Area website has been updated using the standard Joomla framework and a template that was already in use for several groups. This incorporates a feature that supports documentation of our committee meetings. It also makes available the agenda, the reports from officers and minutes. This gives full transparency of the local decision making process.

Another new feature is being trialed. For many years now Central Office have been promising support for the vital task of keeping our members informed of our activities. Indeed at the AGM in 2018 an explicit promise was made by Richard Sharpe that this functionality is available within Assemble and that it would be made available to Groups within 12 months. We now know that Assemble is available only to registered volunteers and can never communicate with the general membership.

To avoid any further delay, I have developed some software that allows the sending of emails easily and securely to a group of members. Peter Mathews and I have created several 'lists', which means, for example, that Secretaries can send a message to the members on the chosen list. I hope that within a couple of months this 'MailMan' package will be available for any Group website, and can be used in the same way to send messages not only to the Group's committee members but also to their general membership. However, the software still needs more thorough testing for functionality and security. Watch this space!

The matter of Risk Assessments was of great concern at our AGM, and when I was selected as the representative to General Council, the overwhelming view of those present was that I should press hard for the withdrawal of this arbitrary imposition. Many other Areas feel similarly strongly, and active discussions are under way to table a common Motion that will be widely supported. As at the time of writing, the suggested wording is as shown below, but this may be amended.

"This General Council is gravely concerned that perceptions of bureaucracy are deterring leaders and potential leaders of group walks from offering their services. Council therefore calls upon the Board of Trustees to clarify that, except as required by any current legislation or in the event of an incident that seems likely to lead to a lawsuit, leaders are under no obligation to make or keep any written or electronic records relating to their walk, either before, during or after the event. Council further asks the Board to ensure that the absence of such records will not adversely affect the insurance cover provided for walk leaders."

I will certainly put my full weight behind the attempt to have this directive withdrawal or watered down, but cannot say at this stage whether I shall be proposing a motion, seconding one put forward by another Group, or just speaking in support. The situation will become clearer after the 28 February deadline for submissions has been reached.



HOW GREEN IS RENEWABLE ENERGY ?

Harry W Scott, Staffordshire Area Footpath Secretary and Area Environmental Protection Officer, looks at the prospect of having Solar Panel farms in Staffordshire.

There is no doubt that we need to have more renewable green energy. But do we understand and are we prepared to accept the consequences you may well ask. You may also at this stage be asking what I am going on about! Well, we are going to see the loss of around 20 footpaths/bridleways, to green energy in Staffordshire. There are in our county of Staffordshire going to be four solar panel farms (and more may follow), one north of Stone, another at Adbaston, one at Blithfield and one at Tamworth. These proposed Solar Farms are not going to be small developments, they are around 90, 000 panel developments, with infrastructure and connections to the electricity grid. The developments will have three metre high fences. They will be seen for many miles as a blot on the landscape This is industrialisation of the countryside and panel farms will be on the landscape for over 25 years. Afterwards they may be renewed or expanded. None of the planning applications have taken the footpaths/bridleways into consideration. So far we have had no reply to requests for confirmation that the Rights of Way will be retained.

They will be seen as a blot on the landscape.

But I ask the question “would we wish to walk through such large developments?” If the footpaths/bridleways were diverted around the solar farms, would we wish to use the paths for our walks? This will lead to a disconnect in the Rights of Way network, with walking areas decimated and becoming undesirable to walk in. I ask you, dear reader, if you are prepared to give up our countryside and the loss of part of our footpath/bridleway network? How do you expect your elected Officers to respond to these developments with the understandable need for renewable energy. Do we object? Do we agree? Do we agree but object to the loss of Rights of Way or do we ask for more rights of way around the developments? Rest assured we will try to maintain access to the Rights of Way network.



Concerns about the future of Staffordshire's Long Distance Paths

Peter Matthews looks at the history of these wonderful paths and reports on the current maintenance problems with **The Churnet Way**.

Above: The Churnet Valley with the canal and railway.

A number of Groups have established walking routes, which they have publicised and may even have had them placed on OS maps. Unfortunately there is a possibility that some of these routes could be removed from these maps. At present there is special concern over two of these routes, The Hamps Way and the Churnet Way. Others could follow. The problem is that some of the organisations and individuals who developed the long distance paths in Staffordshire have gone away and the routes they put in place have not been maintained. For example, way marking is not being updated and overgrowth not been removed, especially around stiles and gates. Because of this Staffordshire County



Way marking is not being updated and overgrowth not been removed around stiles and gates.

Council (SCC) are getting a considerable number of complaints from the public about such problems. Also, the public are asking the SCC to update guides that have been published.

Most of the long distance paths are on OS maps and also online at the OS website. The public are using the maps to walk the long distance paths, which generates the complaints. Whilst the County Councils do not have the power to remove long distance paths from OS maps, they can recommend to the OS that the path be removed. Because of the complaints and its limited resources to deal with them, SCC is suggesting that they may recommend to the OS that some long distance paths be removed from maps.

Before they take any action the council is asking Staffordshire Ramblers if we are prepared to maintain the paths. At our last Area Council meeting there was much discussion and a number of points were raised. As many of you are aware, there is a grading system for paths, based on popularity, A,B and C. Those listed as A receive the highest priority and C the lowest. With promoted routes the paths would be classed as A. If the route was declassified then parts could quickly become categorised as C. These would become a low maintenance priority. Furthermore, some of these routes have received Council support because they were promoted by a group. In view of these factors it was felt that SCC is trying to offload their responsibility. They are the maintaining authority and should act on their responsibilities. In particular cases the booklet on the walks clearly state that the route is supported by SSC and as such they would be failing in their duty if the paths were not maintained. Furthermore, whilst accepting that there is a shortage of SCC resources they should not expected Ramblers groups to undertake work that they should be doing. They too are short on manpower to undertake maintenance work.

There was support for the notion that general maintenance, such as stiles, is the responsibility of SSC and that of signage is the Groups, since they devised the routes. Discussions with SCC will follow in due course in an effort to solve the problems and preserve Staffordshire's wonderful long distance paths.

FROM THE GROUPS



Biddulph Ramblers

Things are on the up and up and up! Membership has increased and there are a lot more regular walkers enjoying our wonderful pastime. This has led to a few problems as with around 40 members on some walks. Things can be rather slow at stiles!

The ideal scenario would be to split the walk in two and to have a staggered start but, of course, that means another leader. There have been several new leaders from the influx of additional members and they are putting on a lot of excellent and interesting rambles, but we do need more bodies at the front. Now that a lot of the Covid procedures have been discontinued such as taking contact details, perhaps we will have a few more who will take up the challenge. After leading a crowd of ramblers up hill and down dale, there is always a pleasing sense of satisfaction to be had.

Another area that is extremely positive is the holidays. Dave Martin has been adding to the list that now includes Arran, Perth and Tenby. Eddie Dawson is taking a group away to Llandudno in March.

Karen Newsome has arranged a walk followed by our annual meal. The meal will be attended by members who are no longer able to walk plus those who have taken the ramble. It is always good to catch up and reminisce about past events.

There are a couple of coach rambles that are always well attended and enjoyed by all. A stop at a restaurant or pub on the way home usually takes place. Onwards and upwards (we hope)!

Frank Simpson

Black Country Young Walkers

The chair of Black Country Young Walkers stepped down at the group AGM in 2021 but continues to be a Ramblers member. During Mark Ridgway's eight-year tenure the group has grown in membership, hosted the Staffordshire Area AGM and continues to embrace electronic ways of working that help our group thrive, as it does to this day. Much admiration, respect and thanks to Mark Ridgway for his efforts and guidance with all things Ramblers.

Mark Gatenby, Chair



Dudley

Dudley group need someone to volunteer as their Footpath Representative. You do not need to live in Dudley but you need an interest in walking the footpaths of Dudley. If you are interested contact Harry W. Scott telephone 01543 274805 / 07485053141 or email h.w.scott@outlook.com

Mid Staffs

This winter we have mostly managed to get away with milder weather than normal. The mild and sunny weather has provided good walking conditions. As a result, we have generally had good numbers on both our Wednesday and Sunday walks. Leaders have provided us with a good variety of walks and we are grateful for people coming forward to maintain a consistently varied programme. However, as other groups have noticed, risk assessments have put some people off from leading a walk. In their defence, the Ramblers have decreased the number of boxes on the form and, therefore, the procedure is less onerous than the original format.

Since our last report, the group has had a HF holiday at Sedburgh in early October. This was organised by Carole Pattison, who has now moved to Scotland. At the end of that month Sally and Gerald organised a walking weekend to Llandudno. Both holidays were enjoyed by all.

Unfortunately, our Christmas Party had to be cancelled thanks to the omicron virus. However, our New Year Lunch, held at The Bradford Arms, did go ahead. This was preceded by a short walk beforehand that was attended by fifty people. Thankfully, there was only one stile! Thirty-five people stayed for a most enjoyable meal.

Our Social Secretary, Nicki, has been busy! She has recently organised our New Year Lunch and a visit to the Stafford Gatehouse Theatre to watch a play. An event like this can provide the opportunity for non-walking members to join in with group activities, for example, if they are injured or are recuperating from surgery. Soon there is a visit to the Black Country Museum.

Hopefully, the weather will behave itself for the rest of winter and we look forward to an active walking spring and summer.

Angie Spencer, Chair

Sandwell Ramblers

Following a successful A.G.M., when all existing committee members agreed to serve for the next twelve months, the Sandwell Ramblers has continued to maintain a regular weekly Sunday walk of 8-10 miles. We have achieved an average of 18 walkers per week, often attracting several participants from other groups in or outside of our local area.

At times we have shared walks with two other groups and also benefitted from guest leaders. Both of these are opportunities we would like to encourage in order to maintain a full programme because, as



described by other groups, we struggle to train new leaders.

However new walk leader training is high on our agenda for 2022, especially now that Covid restrictions have been lifted.

The atmosphere amongst our members is one of support, commitment and encouragement, which I believe has led to a warm and welcoming group. I hope we can build on this in the coming months with more opportunity to try extending our repertoire.

Our social calendar has also started to improve over recent months. We took advantage of a cancellation in October 21 for a walking weekend in The Elan Valley, organised by Elan Valley Lodge. 15 people attended and the weather was just right for walking, giving us plenty of opportunity to experience, not only fabulous countryside but also the history of the development of the provision of water for the Birmingham area. The food was excellent too, and the cost was very competitive!

In order to thank our members for their commitment throughout the last difficult two years we also decided to book a skittles evening with a buffet at Christmas. Although this had to be postponed because of Covid, we all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves in January 22 and well done to Rashid Mohammed who won the prize! We are all looking forward to continuing in this vein in 2022.

Mary Geach

Stoke and Newcastle Group

We look forward to the spring, though many flowers appear to be reluctant to emerge, to longer days that are a time the group looks to go further afield, to warmer weather when rambler holiday trips are booked in.

Looking back, Group Committee meetings in October and February were held face to face, the numbers at pre and post-Christmas social events was heartening despite Omicron concerns, and most importantly walking programmes were delivered, the weather being the only interruption.

Membership is reasonably stable with numbers fluctuating between 292 and 300 over the last couple of months. It is difficult to contact all members as some have opted out of receiving marketing emails, so only approx two thirds are contactable for Group activities.

The Group had an excellent weekend away in Ross on Wye in October with over 40 members attending. Various lengths of walks were organised for each day. A well supported and excellent meal at Orles Barn on Saturday evening was attended by 36 members. These events take a lot of organisation from many members within the Group, my thanks go to them all.

A pre-Christmas lunch was held at the Rose & Crown attended by 39 people, A post-Christmas 'Turkey Trot' walk and lunch at the Ramblers Retreat was attended by 30 members with no known Covid repercussions!

Two long distance paths The Churnet Way and Hamps Way were created by one of our members some years ago with assistance from the SCC but these paths have recently fallen into disrepair. We, as a Group, are keen to keep the Churnet Way viable and identified as a long distance path and Alan Bell and team are actively documenting, way marking and supporting this route with support from other volunteers and SCC. (Please see the separate report on page 6- Editor.)

We will be hosting the Area AGM this autumn and have a sub-committee working on the details. Please make a note of the date and venue: Sunday 27th November at Fulford Village Hall ST11 9QT.

Along with other Groups, we have to embrace new CO generated IT developments for our website and walking schedule. The detailed work entailed for our group and area is ongoing and thanks go to our (and Area's) Webmaster Charlie Bigley.

We applied for and received a grant of £300 from Audley Rural Parish Council towards the cost of equipment to use within their geographic area. This will allow us to work independently of SCC for maintenance of the footpaths. Many thanks to Tony Adair and of course Audley Rural Parish Council.

Plans are coming together to organise a day of litter picking on 3rd April when undergrowth is thinnest and litter exposed. At the time of writing it looks like the gales will also have its own contribution to the amount and distribution of detritus! Equipment investment will hopefully encourage subsequent dates too, if volunteers, CO and Councils give good support and feedback.

As I write our 2022 weekend away is being planned with Knaresborough the favoured destination. This should be a wonderful destination with all the accommodation and walking routes that are available in the area.

Phil Snow, Chair

Stone

As Covid restrictions are lifting and life returns to normal, walking remains important to the members of Stone Ramblers. Throughout the Winter months the twice weekly walks have been mostly well attended despite the storms and rain. Many of the walks have been local and shorter in length and leaders have made alterations to suit the conditions of the day. Whilst out and about there have been encounters with mud of all descriptions, some easier to clean than other from dirty boots! Muddy walks can be hard work, making boots heavy and the route slippery, increasing the risks of falling. Extra care needs to be taken. My granddaughter has a wonderful description of mud, she calls it 'Welly Sucking', and how right she is! By the time you read this, Spring should be well on its way. Hopefully the mud will dry up and make walking conditions a little easier.

Membership of the group remains fairly stable, we have said goodbye to old friends and welcomed new ones to the group.

The program secretaries have continued to do a great job producing the programme of walks. Many thanks to those who lead them. We continue to struggle to offer a choice of walks on the program and we need new leaders. Committee members can give them help and support if needed. Ramblers also offer an online training session, see the member newsletter for details. Some members of the Committee are currently working on updating the website to coincide with the Ramblers rebranding and upgrade to their own website. Details to follow.

It was decided to hold the AGM in November at Christchurch, Stone. Covid restrictions at that time were followed and the Committee served refreshments to those attending after the meeting. Our new chairman David Farnsworth was welcomed. Terry Tomask was thanked for his service as retiring chairman and we said goodbye to a longstanding Committee member, David Wright. Following the success of this meeting and a further relaxation of Covid rules, a New Year lunch was arranged and took place at a venue in Stone. Those attending enjoyed our first social event for a long time.

During December several members enjoyed a few days walking in the Elan Valley. Good walking, good food and a good time was had by those who attended. A HF holiday to the Isle of Wight is planned for May and a group of us are off to the Lake District in October.

The working party has resumed its fortnightly sessions to work alongside the Staffordshire Council in repairing local stiles, gates and footpaths. Details are on the website and new volunteers are always welcome! Enjoy your Spring and Summer programme. **Carol Skelton**

Stone Wellbeing



Stone Ramblers and Wellbeing Walks provide a programme of walks every Tuesday morning, when around 30 members of the public enjoy a free, two to three mile walk in or near to Stone. Trained leaders plan and lead Ramblers' Wellbeing Walks for the town and the surrounding area. The scheme has been running for 20 years when it was originally known as Health Walks. Who comes on the walks? People who might never have walked before, some come for companionship, others are recuperating from illness, or maybe have suffered personal loss. They come and find they have joined a very supportive group; many make lasting friendships. The volume of chatter outdoes even Ramblers walks! Like stile building and path maintenance, organising Wellbeing Walks is just one more way Stone Ramblers are involved with their community and are seen to be making a difference. At least twice a year we take a stall at the Farmers Market promotes the work of the Ramblers. Under the Wellbeing banner we also participate in Stone Festival by leading a short walk advertised which is included in the Festival Programme.

Pam Bradley

Stourbridge

Stourbridge as a group are happy to announce that we have continued to grow and attract new members. We regularly offer three walks each week and often welcome ramblers from other groups joining us. We have also done several joint walks with other groups which are proving successful.

We have growing awareness on Facebook and Twitter and have benefited from articles in the local newspaper.

We recently had the pleasure of celebrating the 90th birthday of our oldest active member, Dudley McGill. He was joined by 30 ramblers for a celebratory walk around Romsley, which was followed by a surprise meal at a local pub. We all kept the meal a secret, so it was a wonderful surprise for Dudley! A good time was had by all. Members gave him a

Dudley McGill at 90!
and opposite,
pictures from Stone
Wellbeing walks



birthday present of a new rucksack, boots and poles so he is now fully kitted out and ready to continue with his passion of walking for years to come.

We have lots of exciting plans for this year including holidays, meals out, skittles, a walk followed by kayaking, to name but a few. Now we are fully opening up after Covid, here at Stourbridge we aim to make the most of each and every opportunity.

We are looking forward to celebrating our 40th anniversary as a group in October this year. Plans are in hand to attempt to recreate the group's first walk, to be followed by a meal afterwards. Anybody with any photos from over the last 40 years are asked to get in touch with us so as we can look back over this time.

We continue to monitor footpaths and rights of way to make rambling enjoyable for all.

Elaine Davey, Publicity

Wolverhampton

The opening paragraph for this report is a plea for more walk leaders. Our group walks programme ebbs and flows because currently we have only a few people willing to put on walks. There is plenty of support within our group to help with planning and leading a walk. Do contact us via secretarywolvesramblers@gmail.com if you would like us to help you develop a walk. The national Ramblers web site also has some good information about leading and planning walks. They have also scheduled a series of on-line Walk Leader Conversations from March to September, so do consider booking yourself onto one of the sessions.

Our walks programme continues to be flexible because the walks are published on our web site 'as and when'. We no longer send out a twice yearly printed programme. Our walk leaders like the flexibility of 'advertising' walks on line as they no longer have to commit themselves months ahead. Do visit our web site regularly to check out new walks and any last minute changes: www.ramblers.org.uk/wolverhampton. Despite having so few walk leaders we have had regular interesting walks which have been well attended.

Thank you to everyone who has reported footpath, stile and access problems to our Group Footpath Secretary, Caroline Jones. She works really hard to ensure all reports reach the right people. In South Staffordshire we have seen a number of improvements to footpaths over the last few months thanks to these reports.

We will be sorry to say goodbye to our Footpath Clearing Team Leader, Keith Watts, who has done such a good job arranging training, equipment and keeping the team together over the last few years. We need a volunteer to replace him so do give some serious consideration to offering to lead this team. Their work is so worthwhile.

Thank you to everyone who has offered ideas for celebrating our Group's 40th Anniversary. COVID restrictions have made it difficult to decide what to do and when. As the situation is changing the committee will discuss all ideas and then decide on how to mark our 40 years (soon to be 41) as a Ramblers Group.

Judith Rose



Ramblers groups from Sandwell (above) and Mid Staffs (below) posing for a photo!



RAMBLERS UPDATE

by

Peter Matthews



As many of you know, the Ramblers has rebranded and is looking at ways of modernising the way it does things as well as increasing interest in walking and membership. As part of this project a series of meetings take place, called Cluster meetings. This is where Central Office and Groups meet, via Zoom, to discuss ways of achieving this. The Ramblers come up with the ideas and then members discuss them further with the idea that a basic plan is made. In addition there are a number break away groups, called SIGS (Special Interest Groups) who carry these ideas further. Many of the initial ideas are taking place and it is hoped that by the end of this year everything will be in place. Below is a synopsis of what has been achieved and what the next steps are.

Key Update: Brand and Let's Walk Together

On 19th January 2022 we launched the updated Ramblers branding to the general public. The refreshed design now features on the new website, across our social media channels and in our emails. Over the coming weeks and months, you'll see more new content arriving on the website and we will be publicising the Ramblers 'Opening the Way' story across all our channels and in the press and media.

« **From March to July 2022 , thanks to funding from PPL, we will be working in partnership with several magazines to advertise and promote the work of the Ramblers.**

From March to July 2022 , thanks to funding from PPL, we will be working in partnership with several magazines to advertise and promote the work of



the Ramblers. The campaign is called 'Let's Walk Together' and will feature across titles including BBC Countryfile, BBC Gardeners World, BBC Wildlife, BBC Good Food and Delicious. The campaign will be fronted by farmer and TV presenter Jimmy Doherty and in total will reach 15 million people.

we will share more information in February's Volunteer Updates. But in the meantime, updating your local communications channels to use the new brand will ensure that those people discovering or rediscovering the Ramblers through 'Let's Walk Together' get a real sense of who are as a charity and a community of walkers.

What is our brand story?

- Our new branding communicates that at the Ramblers, we 'Open the Way'. It has been designed to demonstrate that
- We exist to open up walking to people however it suits them – be that group walks, self-guided walks or Ramblers Wellbeing Walks
- We are for everyone who values the pleasures of walking
- We remove the barriers to walking through our campaigns, our advocacy work and our physical path maintenance work
- We are a modern, vibrant community of walkers that is open to all.

Key Updates: Website & Walks Manager

Over the last few months we have run a series of online sessions to introduce and get people up to speed on the new brand, website, area and group webpages and walks manager. Thanks to you and hundreds of other volunteers who have attended these sessions.

Beta version of the new website now live!

To support the launch of our new brand a beta version of the new website is now live – <https://beta.ramblers.org.uk/>

In this first phase, the new website will consist of a small selection of pages and run alongside the current site. This provides an opportunity to make sure everything is working as it should. It also helps us launch the Ramblers Wellbeing Walks programme – replacing Walking for Health.

During February 2022 we will be building each of Ramblers groups and areas pages and also, making the Walks Manager available so that volunteers can start to add group walks.

The Walks Manager is still being developed and tested - this is a process of getting the basics right and then continuous improvement based on user feedback.

We have listened to feedback and know more time is needed to get things right ready for a full launch later in Spring 2022. Our aim is to give groups access to the Walks Manager from early March. We will keep you all updated on timings and any changes via the volunteering newsletter.

Key Updates: Membership on the rise

Over the last few months, we have continued to see thousands of new members join the Ramblers. It's been a busy few months, here is what to look out for:

Guides on how to build your presence across social media: We have created five new guides on how to build your presence across social media. These are due to be circulated in February. The guides are: Getting Started with Local Social Media, Getting Creative with Local Social Media, Growing your Local Social Media, Telling Great Stories on Social Media, Comms Platform Cheat Sheet. A huge thanks to the local membership recruitment Special Interest Group (SIG) for their support and contributions.

New publicity materials

The new membership leaflets will be being delivered to groups and areas in January, and

catalogue where you can order newly branded posters, badges, pens and also borrow pop up banners for your stands and events.

Managing email distribution lists

A discovery project on managing email distribution lists starts in early 2022. This will include a quantitative survey to key volunteers, as well as a deep dive with the local recruitment Special Interest Group (SIG). Through this discovery project we hope to better understand the current issues you are experiencing.

Key Updates: Campaigning

The Ramblers campaigning team are busy campaigning and planning for the year ahead.

Our main priorities are: Access to nature

The UK government recently passed new legislation in the form of the Agriculture Act and the Environment Act. We are calling on the government to make use of powers in these new laws to connect more people to nature. This includes ensuring that new farm payments help to improve public access. New legislation for 2022 around planning and levelling up gives us another chance to improve access, and we're calling on the government to seize that opportunity. Find out more and get involved in all these campaigns on our website.

Green routes

Last May we launched the green routes campaign, calling for every town and city in England to have a network of green routes so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of walking and being in nature. We will be continuing this campaign into the local elections in May this year, with a focus on London and Manchester. We will share more details of the local election campaign soon.

Freedom to roam

The freedom to roam responsibly gives

everyone the opportunity to get out and reconnect with nature. We're calling for the freedom to roam to be extended so that it is more equally accessible and better connected to our footpath network, as well as our towns and cities. We will be in touch soon with more details on this area of campaigning.

Don't Lose Your Way With the help of thousands of supporters, we searched historic maps across the country and found over 49,000 miles of paths which could be lost forever. From April, we will be recruiting for new volunteer roles to support those building and submitting cases for these lost paths. We will be sharing more info soon.

Key Updates: New Paths team

We have created a new team within Ramblers GB which will focus on breaking down the barriers to walking and supporting the delivery of a better network for all. The New Paths Team

 **The New Paths Team will support the thousands of dedicated volunteers across Britain who protect, expand and improve our path network.**

will support the thousands of dedicated volunteers across Britain who protect, expand and improve our path network, and advise the public on their rights to use and enjoy their paths. This paths team incorporates our Local Advocacy, Don't Lose Your Way and Path maintenance functions as well as setting a long term vision for the path and access network. Jack Cornish has been appointed to a new Head of Paths role to lead the team.

Head of Paths role to lead the team.

The priorities for the new Paths team are:

- Improving our proactive and reactive advice to members of the public regarding
- Ensuring that we are providing the best possible support for our path volunteers with improved delivery of technical and specialist advice and new training and resources for those applying for unrecorded rights of way.
- Reviewing the opportunities to expand our work to maintain and improve paths, building on our established relationships with local authorities and landowners to enable more volunteer teams to work in this area.
- Delivering a long-term vision for the path and access network which will underpin all our path work and set clear metrics for the quality of the network.
- Improving how we measure and celebrate the impact of the Ramblers in delivering a better network and ensure that we remain the national authority on paths and rights of way.

As part of the new Paths Team, we welcome Helen Bates to the Ramblers as the Volunteering Officer for paths. Helen will focus on our support for Area and Group footpath volunteers. Helen is based in Nottinghamshire and joins the Ramblers from a long background of working in community engagement and volunteer management on heritage and natural world focused projects in the voluntary and charity sector. In recent times, she has worked on public engagement projects in academia, based in the Derwent Valley in Derbyshire as well as a connecting communities with nature project, based at Nottinghamshire's cathedral, Southwell Minster. For further enquiries contact policy@ramblers.org.uk

Key Updates: Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIGs were established to bring volunteers and staff together to tackle share organisational challenges and opportunities. We have three active groups with a new one in development.

The Local Recruitment Membership SIG has:

- Shared experiences & ideas for recruiting volunteers locally.
- Inspired by these ideas, a Local Membership Recruitment Accelerator Programme is being proposed – more info on this soon.
- Supported the production of new guides to support groups get the most out of social media (See membership update).

The Younger Groups SIG :

- Has brought together 15 volunteers from across our 50 younger walkers groups nationally to discuss common challenges – including how groups can manage their changing demographics and how the Ramblers can appeal to younger people.
- Over a series of meetings the group have discussed their initial thoughts, conducted a survey on best practice from existing younger groups, delved into the Ramblers research on younger walkers and their own insight before generating some short and long term recommendations.
- The group is now agreeing how to communicate these recommendations and have also voted to continue to meet with the aim of widening its scope and becoming a useful forum for all younger walkers groups to attend.

The Volunteer Recruitment SIG

This has been running for about 6 months and is looking at how we make volunteering more accessible and get people from a wider audience interested in and becoming a volunteer with the Ramblers.

The group are looking to create a short film showing why people get involved and encouraging those who don't know about Ramblers volunteering to get involved. They are also working on a few resources for Assemble to help those recruiting new volunteers.

The Future of Group Walks SIG

This group brought together experienced and new Walk Leaders and other volunteers responsible for group walks to discuss future changes and how we can work together to make Ramblers walks safe, supportive, fun and welcoming for everyone.

The group put together a booklet of ideas and inspiration to try out in your local areas. These are ideas based on the great working already happening across the Ramblers to

improve the experience for walkers and walk leaders.

The group has now finished – though we are keen to check in again and evaluate progress later in the year.

New SIG – Quality of the path network

Shortly we will be sending out information about an exciting new Special Interest Group which will support us in better understanding the quality of the path network. We are not only looking for people with experience of collecting information on quality and understanding the complexities of maintenance; but also people who love to explore new ideas and can bring their creativity to help us on our journey of better understanding how open and useable the network is for all.

**This article is a
synopsis by Peter
Matthews of the
report at the cluster
meeting on
9th February.**





Would you like to become more involved with the Area? Are you concerned about poor footpaths, lack of access, inappropriate building or concerned about walk finder, risk assessments etc? Then why not become an Area Officer and have an influence?

We have several vacancies and anyone interested please contact our Secretary, Peter Matthews by email peter.matthews20@ntlworld.com or phone 01782 336556. Whilst each role is for one year only, re-election is at each AGM and many of our Officers are in position for a number of years should they so wish. You do not have to be an existing committee member (Area or Group) and need not be involved with a Group to take on the role. All that is needed is the desire to fulfil that role.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you would like to know more about the Ramblers and become involved then being an Area Chairman might be for you. In this role you have the opportunity to become active as much or as little as you like through cluster meetings (Zoom

style), regular communications with Central Office and communicating with the groups. By working with the Secretary your workload can be adjusted to suit yourself. The full role does normally mean chairing meetings but this can be delegated as it is at present. You would be the 'face' of Staffordshire Area Ramblers.

If you are enthusiastic about the Ramblers and are anxious to promote its work, then Area Publicity Officer could be for you. This can mean talking to the

« Why not become an Area Officer and have an influence? ask Peter Matthews

press, radio and media, helping or advising groups on organising events or using social media to promote our work.

When you are out and about and see a road being built, a housing estate, wind or solar farm in the countryside that you feel isn't appropriate do you wish you could do something about future plans for similar development? Well you can by becoming an Environmental Protection officer (formerly Countryside Officer) for our Area. To find out more contact Harry Scott on h.w.scott@outlook.com

Whilst there are role descriptions on Assemble, they do not necessarily reflect the role as required for our Area and each role is dependent on the person taking on that role and how much they are prepared to undertake.



Join the Ramblers of Greater Manchester and High Peak Area at events to mark the 90th Anniversary of the Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout

Alan Manning writes...

This year marks the 90th Anniversary of the mass trespass on Kinder Scout, a key moment in the long campaign for access to open country and the “right to roam”.

There will be a range of events held in Hayfield, where the ramblers from Manchester gathered for the trespass. On Saturday 23rd April, the day of the trespass, there will be stalls and speakers, mainly in the Royal Hotel, together with exhibitions and stalls in the Village Hall and a Marquee attached to The Royal.

At 2.00 pm there will be a rally in the Royal Hotel and the speakers will include Kate Ashbrook, (OSS and Ramblers), Yvonne Witter (Mosaic and PDNPA member), National Trust, local campaign group and Keith Warrender, who will be launching his new book on the Trespass and follow it up with a longer session after the rally. It would be great to see many of today’s Ramblers present to help celebrate this landmark event. Parking will be limited so if you can travel by public transport that would be ideal.

One option would be to take the train to New Mills and then bus to Hayfield. Alternatively, you could walk from New Mills along the Sett Valley trail, which is a traffic free green route on the route of an old railway line.

THE STORY OF THE KINDER SCOUT TRESPASS

The mass trespass was an act of wilful trespass by ramblers and members of the British Workers' Sports Federation. It was undertaken to highlight the fact that walkers in England and Wales were denied access to areas of open country. The trespass was largely organised in retaliation to the expulsion of walkers from Bleaklow three weeks earlier and led by 20-year-old Benny Rothman.

It was a coordinated protest involving three groups of walkers who approached Kinder Scout from different directions at the same time. Accounts of the numbers involved vary widely from 100. To over 3,000! The generally accepted figure is around 400, reported by the Manchester Guardian. It began at Bowden Bridge quarry near Hayfield and proceeded via William Clough to the plateau of Kinder Scout, where they were confronted by gamekeepers and violent scuffles broke out. A gamekeeper was injured. The trespassers broke through, and reached the prohibited land to Kinder plateau, meeting up with ramblers from Sheffield and later the third group at Ashop Head. Six ramblers were arrested and although trespass was not a criminal offence some received jail sentences for violence against the keepers.

Many believe this act of civil disobedience was one of the most successful in British history. It arguably led to the passage of the National Parks legislation in 1949 and helped pave way for the Pennine Way and other long-distance footpaths. Walkers' rights to access common land were later protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act of 2000.

Gerald Griffin, Editor



There were hundreds of young men and women, lads and girls, in their picturesque rambling gear: shorts of every length and colour, flannels and breeches, even overalls, vivid colours and drab khak.

Benny Rothman, the trespass organiser.



The Future of Cannock Chase



Cannock Chase is one of England's finest landscapes, and arguably the jewel of the West Midlands. Well known and loved for its scenery, wildlife and rich history, it offers superb walking, cycling and horse-riding in a tranquil and peaceful setting. The AONB Partnership of local authorities, agencies and community groups work together to look after this outstanding landscape for current and future generations.

Fact:

THE DENSITY OF VISITOR USAGE ON CANNOCK CHASE IS BETWEEN 4-5 TIMES GREATER THAN THE DENSITY OF VISITORS TO THE LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK.

Some interesting facts

- Its area is 69 square kilometres or 26 square miles.
- The AONB includes Cannock Chase Country Park, managed by Staffordshire County Council – at 1,300 hectares, one of the largest in the country.
- The AONB includes Cannock Chase Forest, its 2,700 hectares managed by Forestry England in a sustainable way, to produce 19,000 tonnes of timber each year.
- The whole of the AONB is Green Belt.
- 63% is forest and heath
- 37% is farmland and other uses
- 1 Special Area of Conservation, covering 1244 hectares (18% of the AONB)
- 5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, covering 1392 hectares (20% of the AONB)
- 3 Local Nature Reserves

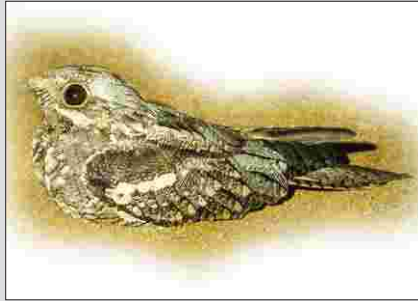
- 3 Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Reserves
- 21 County Wildlife Sites
- 5 Geological Sites
- It is an important habitat for several threatened species including, the Nightjar, the Dartford Warbler and the native Crayfish.

Some important Historical dates

- 500 BC – 100 AD: Castle Ring Iron Age hillfort occupied.
- 1290: the area we now know as Cannock Chase was carved out of the forest and formally granted by the king to the Bishop of Lichfield as a private chase.
- 1298: first record of coal mining on Cannock Chase.
- 1600s: most of the oak woodland on Cannock Chase has been cut down for charcoal production and turned over to sheep grazing, creating the heathlands we see today.
- 1914: the first of two huge military training camps is constructed, each housing 20,000 men, with associated infrastructure, such as, roads, rail lines, power station and water supply.
- 1921: the Forest Commission establish Cannock Chase Forest, making it one of the older national public forests, eventually covering some 2,500 hectares (9 square miles) of plantations.
- 1938/39: RAF Hednesford training camp constructed.
- 1958: Cannock Chase is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 1993: seven hundred years of coal production on Cannock Chase comes to an end with the closure of the Littleton Colliery.
- 2001: Cannock Chase AONB Partnership is established.
- 1993: seven hundred years of coal production on Cannock Chase comes to

an end with the closure of the Littleton Colliery.

- 2001: Cannock Chase AONB Partnership is established.



Nightjars

The churring of the European Nightjar is an iconic sound of Cannock Chase. In 2019 the AONB commissioned the West Midlands Ringing Group to carry out a breeding survey of this mysterious migrant bird.

2019 proved to be an exceptional year for recording Nightjar on Cannock Chase, with some fascinating data obtained. For example, more nightjars were caught during the survey than in any other year, and all of the birds that had previously been ringed originated from Cannock Chase. The survey also revealed that areas of clear-felled conifer plantations were popular for breeding. The 75% fledging success rate is higher than has been seen in similar studies where only 40% were successful.

The survey findings are being used to inform the future conservation management strategies for the Chase so that this iconic species continues to return each year and successfully breed.

Restoring the heathlands

Expanding and linking the surviving areas of heathland on Cannock Chase will improve conditions for a wide range of wildlife and open up views for people to enjoy. The AONB Partnership is developing a major project to restore heath on conifer plantations, acquiring land for a compensatory area of planting elsewhere.

Here are some examples of how it is being done.

Cannock Chase AONB has been awarded a grant of £192,221 under National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative to be implemented over the next 5 years for heathland restoration work at Gentleshaw Common, to be delivered by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

Managers are working with stakeholders to trial the reintroduction of livestock grazing to key sites to support the sustainable management of the internationally important heathlands.

Saplings are being felled, ahead of bird nesting, to provide more space for heather and other ground plants.

Cannock Chase is a wonderful place for people to relax in, to undertake physical activity, to observe wildlife and search for hidden history but these attractions cause problems for the future. Back In 2012 research by independent consultants have found that increasing visitor numbers are having the following impacts on the SAC (Special Area of Conservation):

- Widening and erosion of the paths;
- Disturbing of wildlife, with some visitors trampling on invertebrate nest sites, spreading diseases (i.e. phytophthora);
- Fragmenting habitats through creating new 'desire lines' & paths;
- Littering on the SAC;
- Enriching the soil nutrients through dog fouling (eutrophication).

With increased housing development near Cannock Chase and a growing human population, the number of people visiting Cannock Chase is likely to increase between 15% – 20% by 2026. With careful management, there will be space for everyone to enjoy the open air and natural beauty of Cannock Chase – even with a growing local population.

To safeguard the future of Cannock Chase for both wildlife and people we need to improve the visitor infrastructure (such as car parks, footpaths and visitor centres) as soon as possible, so we can continue to enjoy the Chase, and wildlife can continue to thrive. We also need to raise awareness and understanding of the vital role visitors can play in protecting this special area.

The material for this article was mostly taken from several websites.

Gerald Griffin, Editor





Cannock Chase AONB and the publication of the Government's response to the Landscapes Review

by Dick Turton

In the September 2021 edition of Step-Out I wrote about the ministerial statement the Government had made, (June 2021), to the publication of the Landscapes Review report into the opportunities to improve the management of our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

The Government's full response, (published January, 2022), accepted that whilst the Coronavirus pandemic had generated huge increases in visitors numbers, (with protected landscapes* contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of the country), it was clear that visitor management resources were insufficient to meet current needs.

There has been opinions in recent years that the 34 AONBs had generally been the poor relations when it came to government funding compared to the National Parks, and so the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership welcomed the report as it offered 'the opportunity to reinvigorate the status of AONBs with new purposes and powers' that should help them to achieve the following objectives.

Drive nature recovery within our landscape

The response acknowledges that the present policy to conserve and enhance no longer reflects the many landscapes that are badly degraded or suffering biodiversity loss, and so ambitious targets are to be in place by January 2023 enabling protected landscapes to contribute to the Government's wider plans to address nature recovery.

Address the challenges posed by climate change

Again the Government accepted that more action is needed to address climate change and that much more action is needed if their Nature

Recovery Green Paper which set out the aim to achieve a goal to protect 30% of our land for nature by 2030 is to be achieved.

Encourage improved access to our protected landscape for all parts of society

The report highlighted better opportunities for volunteering in protected landscapes, and an increase in Ranger numbers to help bring this about. It also recommended that local authorities should consider the prospects of introducing bespoke transport arrangements to their wider public transport plans.

Strengthen our role in the planning system

There must be a strong and effective planning system that can sustainably balance the safeguards it affords to protected landscapes, with the support of local communities and economies. Natural England is expected to take over from the Countryside Agency in providing guidance for AONB Partnerships to follow,

“ The response acknowledges that the present policy to conserve and enhance no longer reflects the many landscapes that are badly degraded.

aimed at improving consistency, performance, and transparency.

Improve governance including strengthened duties for public bodies

Here the aim s to create a single set of statutory purposes for AONB teams and National Parks Authorities, providing a more consistent and unified framework for all protected landscapes. It agreed that this strengthened purpose should be extended across all AONBs.



What might all this mean in reality for Ramblers?

The Government agreed that National Trails should be more joined up with our protected landscapes, particularly the planning and delivery of initiatives to improve access to the natural environment.

They aim to review the open access maps to clarify rights and confirm any further consideration of expanding open access rights.

The government has increased the grant to AONB Teams by £1 million this financial year



but cannot match the scale suggested in the review and the scope for further such increases is limited. The future is likely to see the national landscapes partnerships having to build capacity to generate additional income through green finance initiatives and joint funding bids

The government has recently set an ambitious new target to raise at least £500 million in private finance to support nature's recovery by 2027 in England, rising to more than £1 Billion by 2030.

So it would be unwise to hold our breaths waiting for changes to come along that will actually be visible in our area of protected

landscapes, but at least there was a favourable acknowledgement of the situation by the Government.

A consultation will run for 12 weeks, closing on 9 April 2022. Cannock Chase AONB Partnership will be working with key partners and stakeholders to develop a detailed response to the consultation, which we will publish on their website, once responses have been received.

Read the Government's response at

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response?utm_medium=govdelivery&utm_source=email

Respond to the consultation at

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-implementing-the-review?utm_medium=govdelivery&utm_source=email

Things You Might See Happening on the Chase Shortly

Preparations for the creation of a temporary route from Birches Valley Forest Centre past Fair Oak Lakes for spectators to reach the mountain biking event of the Commonwealth Games.

Reduced water levels in Fair Oak pools. (Not related to the Games). The dams are in need of structural repair and levels are being reduced whilst this is undertaken.

Tree felling around Birches Valley car park. Not part of the Games preparations, but some conifers have been diagnosed with a root fungus and felling is taking place of any that might pose a danger to visitors to the site.

***Protected landscapes:** In the response published areas designated as National Parks, the Broads, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are referred to collectively as 'protected landscapes'.

Advertising your Group with Business Cards

At least two of Staffordshire's Groups are already using Business Cards to advertise. The cards are left in such places as libraries, shops and community centres to get the attention of potential ramblers.

For further information on design and printing contact the Step Out editor: stepout@griff45.com

