



ramblers
at the heart of walking

www.warwickshireramblers.org.uk

The Ramblers' Warwickshire Area

The Charity Working for Walkers

**Annual Report and Accounts For
the year 2019/2020**



The Ramblers' Association is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales. Company registration number: 4458492. Registered Charity in England and Wales number:1093577.

Registered office: 2nd floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Due to COVID19 restrictions and following the advice of Ramblers Central Office staff the next AGM planned for Saturday 6th February 2021 will be held as a virtual meeting using Zoom. This will be hosted by Nick Hillier the Area Membership Secretary. Members who wish to join this meeting should contact Nick by email:-
nick_hillier@hotmail.com

He will then send out the meeting ID and pass code shortly before the meeting.

Request for Nominations

Management of the Area is vested in an Area Council which meets quarterly and consists of:

- The Honorary Officers - as shown in the Agenda on page 4
- Two representatives from each RA Group in the Area
- Six Members representing individual members or affiliated clubs
(Up to two additional members may be co-opted by Council)

Members are invited to nominate Officers and Individual Members of Council for 2021/2022

Nominations, signed by the proposer and seconder, must be received by the Area Secretary not later than two weeks before the AGM motions.

Any motions for the Annual General Meeting should be submitted, in writing, and must be received by the Area Secretary not later than four weeks before the AGM.

Please email nominations and motions to billburton@virginmedia.com.

Meeting Agenda

Meeting starts at

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the last AGM.
- 3 Matters Arising from the Minutes.
- 4 Adoption of Annual Report & Accounts.
- 5 Matters arising from Annual Report & Accounts.
- 6 Any Motions received by the Secretary
- 7 Election of Officers for 2021/2022
 - Chair
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Footpath Secretary
 - Countryside Secretary
 - Access Officer
 - Publicity Officer
 - Group Liaison Officer
 - Area News Editor
 - Election of six independent members of Area Council
 - Appointment of Auditor
 - Any other business.
- 8 Appointment of delegates to General Council

Area Officers 2019/2020

Chair

Sandra Sutton - sandra.sutton3@btinternet.com

Secretary and Group Liaison Officer

Bill Burton - billburton600@gmail.com

Treasurer

Paul Drake - pauldrake@sky.com

Footpath Secretary, Countryside Secretary & Access Officer

Michael Bird - mabird.b43@gmail.com

Publicity and IT Secretary

Andy Page – andypage0203@gmail.com

Area Membership Secretary

Nick Hillier – nick_hillier@hotmail.com



Local Ramblers' Groups

WK01 City of Birmingham -	http://www.birminghamramblers.org.uk
WK02 Coventry -	https://www.coventryramblers.org.uk
WK03 Mid-Warwickshire -	https://www.midwarksramblers.org
WK04 Rugby -	https://www.rugbyramblers.org.uk
WK05 Stratford Upon Avon -	https://www.stratfordramblers.com
WK06 Southam -	https://www.ramblers.org.uk/southam
WK07 Solihull -	https://www.solihullramblers.org.uk
WK08 Sutton Coldfield -	https://suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk
WK09 Castle Bromwich -	http://www.castlebromwichramblers.btck.co.uk
WK10 South Birmingham -	https://www.sbramblers.org.uk
WK51 West Midlands Walking Group -	https://www.wmwg.org.uk
WK52 The Bear Walking Group -	http://www.bearwalkinggroup.co.uk/index.php
WK53 West Midlands 40+ -	https://www.wm40plus.org.uk

Area Officers Reports

Area Chair's Report

Having taken the post of Area Chair at the 2020 AGM in February, I managed to lead just one Area Council meeting before the whole country went in to lock down. It has been a very difficult time for our groups as walking was suspended for quite a while. Meetings had to be arranged virtually which was a steep learning curve for some of us who find computers a little intimidating.

On being able to restart walks Central Office advised groups that 30 walkers were allowed on a ramble, but it was up to individual leaders to assess how many they thought could safely be accommodated on each walk. Long-time leaders felt that risk assessment forms were also a bit daunting, but in fact were just what they did normally when planning a walk and the only difference was that they had to record the facts for COVID purposes.

I was please to say that groups restarted their walks in a safe and secure manner taking the advice offered. However just as we seemed to be getting back to near normal along came more restrictions for our leaders to contend with. Which I am sure they will do with the usual efficiency.

All in all, it has been a challenging time for our committee and groups but hopefully we have come through all the stronger for the experience.

I pass my thanks on to all group committees together with the area council for all the work they do in the background to keep our area strong.

Looking forward to the next year. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK and we will survive whatever we have to face.

Sandra Sutton



Area Secretary's Report

This has been a very strange year because of the lockdown in March this year and the new one which will start tomorrow for 4 weeks. We all started walking again a couple of months ago in groups of up to 30 people. Most groups chose to limit the numbers to 10 or 12 because of the booking process and having to record every attendee's contact details. I have also been walking informally with up to 6 people for some time. However, these informal rambles are not covered by the Ramblers insurance. I assume many of you have missed the great outdoors especially during March to July which is of course the warmest and driest part of the year. Hopefully, this lockdown will only last for the 4 weeks planned so that we will be able to get out before Christmas

As Area Secretary I set myself a target in 2018 to lead a walk for the six groups I have not led a walk for yet, Sutton Coldfield, Castle Bromwich, West Midlands, Bear, Coventry and Rugby. I failed miserably. So this year I reset the target and contacted each group's walks organiser over the autumn months offer to lead a walk for them. During January and February I finally managed to lead a walk for each group. I did cheat a little bit in that I combined two groups on one figure of eight 8 mile walk around Kenilworth. It was a fine day and 40 plus people turned up. At the half way stage about 20 dropped out so the second half of the walk was less crowded. It was nice to meet so many other Ramblers members especially the younger member from Bear and West Midlands groups

The June Area Quarterly meeting was cancelled this year but we did have a Zoom meeting in September with 15 real attendees. It was interesting with one or two technical issues but after a few minutes we managed to have the meeting which was hosted by our ex Chair Nick Hillier. Ramblers Central Office has informed us that we should still be holding Group and Area meetings and AGM's for good governance reasons and also to do the financial reporting. So to this end I will be attending via Zoom my groups AGM in November and the Area AGM on 6th February 2021.

At the moment I am busy composing the Area Annual report as I only really put it together for all the 12 Warwickshire Area groups submissions. It's always an interesting task to read all of the wonderful walks and things (perhaps not so many this year!) you all get up to during the year.

Bill Burton - Area Secretary



Area Treasurer's Report

Accounts for the Warwickshire Area of The Ramblers' Association Charity No. 1093577, Company No. 4458492

	This Year	Last Year
<u>Income & Expenditure for Year to 30 September 2020</u>		
Income		
Funding from Central Office	5,651	5,150
Expenditure		
Group Funding	2,750	4,818
Annual Report	295	385
Room Hire	60	120
Subscriptions	36	36
Travel inc General Council attendance	95	209
AGM Costs	1,020	1,244
Admin	0	87
Total Expenditure	4,256	6,899
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	1,395	-1,749
<u>Balance Sheet at 30 September 2020</u>		
Assets		
Cash at Bank	5,335	3,940
Funds		
Opening Balance	3,940	5,689
Surplus/deficit for the year	1,395	-1,749
Closing Balance	5,335	3,940

The £501 increase in 'Income: Funding from Central Office' is in line with the budget. Of the £2,068 reduction in 'Expenditure: Group Funding', £1,068 was budgeted and results from the ongoing drive to keep cash held by groups to 50% of their budgeted expenditure; the other £1,000 reflects reduced funding for Cobra due to lower coronavirus-related activities. Room hire and travel costs are also lower than last year for the same reason.

Paul Drake, Area Treasurer

Independent Examiner's Report

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group Independent Examination Guidelines, I consider the above accounts to give a fair representation of the Area's financial activities for the year to 30 September 2020.

John Phillips, 2 October 2020

Area Footpath Secretary's Report

THE MOST time consuming event for me this year has been Warwickshire Area's appeal to the Planning Inspectorate against the decision of Coventry City Council's Planning Committee to reject our claim to add a footpath from Westwood Heath Road to Charter Avenue in the City of Coventry to the City's Definitive Map of public rights of way. The footpath in fact already exists on the ground but does not as yet have the legal protection of being recorded on the Definitive Map. Our claim under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to have this footpath legally recorded was first made by my predecessor as Area Footpath Secretary, Steven Wallsgrave in 2006. Local Authorities are however notoriously slow at processing such Definitive Map Modification Order applications (we currently have around 100 claims outstanding in Coventry alone, all dating from 2006/2007) and it was only when adjoining householders took it upon themselves to obstruct the path and incorporate it into their gardens that our claim was brought before the Planning Committee at all. In the event the Councillors on the Planning Committee decided to support those of their constituents who opposed the making of the Order, against the recommendation of their own Footpath Officer that the Order should be made – hence Warwickshire Area's appeal! After much correspondence to the Planning Inspectorate from all parties involved in the dispute, we now await the decision of the Planning Inspector appointed to the case.

THE LEAST time consuming event for me this year has been Covid19 as the immediate consequence of the lockdown was that all planning and footpath consultations from the Local Authorities in our Area ceased as Council Officers took themselves off to work from home, and even the most rapacious of developers were forced to pause a-while from their seemingly relentless quest to build on every square foot of Warwickshire. Indeed, so little work was forthcoming during the first three months of lockdown that, finding time on my hands, I was actually able to get out and walk many of my local Solihull footpaths - as indeed it seemed at times was the rest of the Borough! Now I have no objection to people making use of footpaths for outdoor recreation, that is what footpaths are there for, but it very soon became painfully apparent that a vast number of our urban residents have no idea at all of how to behave in the countryside. The amount of litter was appalling; irresponsible dog walkers seemed to believe that farmers' fields exist solely as a playground for their off-lead canines; whilst illegal cyclists seemed determined to drive mere walkers off our own footpaths... Then, lockdown was lifted and before long we were hearing of the disgusting way in which ill-trained visitors were treating our National Parks! If the Ramblers wish to encourage respect to be shown for the Countryside Code, we have a much needed and difficult educational programme ahead of us.

On a happier note I must once again thank our hard working Group Footpath Secretaries for their valuable help and assistance throughout this very trying year.

Michael Bird – Area Footpath Secretary

Area Countryside Secretary's Report

Possibly the greatest desecration committed upon the Warwickshire countryside during my lifetime got going with a vengeance this year. It is nine years now since Warwickshire Area first took a resolution condemning HS2 to Ramblers General Council; a resolution seconded by Buckinghamshire Area with as much to lose to HS2 as Warwickshire. In the event our motion was opposed by Ramblers National Executive Committee who believed that more concessions could be got out of HS2 Limited if we did not oppose construction of the line too directly. In this belief the NEC were probably right; so anxious were HS2 to get their Bill through Parliament that they willingly conceded reinstatement or diversions for 57 of the 58 public rights of way in Warwickshire that would be severed by the line. Albeit, not all the proposed footpath diversions were by any means ideal, and we still had to petition Parliament before we could get any deal at all for two of these footpaths – but, by and large, I have to admit that HS2 do now seem to be keeping to the footpath provisions written into their parliamentary High Speed Rail Act. Nevertheless, we are still in for several years of hideous mess and unwelcome footpath diversions before we can see any order restored, either to the countryside or the rights of way network so massively disrupted by HS2's works in Warwickshire and Solihull.

In my ten years as Area Countryside Secretary I have watched with dismay as the relentless response of developers to meet the Government's wholly unrealistic housing targets has destroyed the pleasant rural character of so many of the Warwickshire villages we admired on our rambles. As I write this the Government are currently consulting on major changes to planning policy and regulations. This is mainly to allow them to speed up planning permissions for house building and other infrastructure projects, but in pursuing these aims there is a serious possibility that environmental safeguards for footpaths, the countryside and green belts, so painstakingly built into Local and Neighbourhood Plans over the last twelve years, would be side-lined and replaced by yet another "wonky government algorithm" on the housing numbers required!

It is worrying that ahead of this Government consultation, Warwickshire County Council have been pushing to become a Unitary Authority and take over the powers of the five District Councils in Warwickshire (including planning) with the inevitable loss of local accountability. Currently our five District Councils regard Ramblers Warwickshire Area as consultees on planning applications which affect public rights of way, and this accounts for some 80% of the consultations we receive. I very much fear that under a new amalgamated Unitary Authority we could lose the privilege of such consultations, an unfortunate loss to the Area as by being consulted at such an early stage of the planning process we are frequently able to suggest a far better deal for any public footpath affected by a planning application than that proposed by the applicant – if indeed the applicant even bothered to acknowledge the existence of a public footpath in the first place!

Michael Bird – Area Countryside Secretary

Area Membership Secretary's Report

October last year I reported that we had 3016 members. Since then of course we have had the pandemic, with all walks and social events cancelled for a spell. It is useful to consider the impact that has had on our membership numbers.

Our membership currently stands at 2989 a drop of 27.

This works out on a group by group basis as follows:-

WK1 – City of Birmingham	396
WK2 – Coventry	268
WK3 – Mid Warwickshire	168
WK4 – Rugby	253
WK5 – Stratford	298
WK6 – Southam	74
WK7 – Solihull	408
WK8 – Sutton Coldfield	235
WK9 - Castle Bromwich	75
WK10 – South Birmingham	361
WK51 – West Mids Walking Group.	196
WK52 – Bear Group	85
WK53 – West Mids 40+.	94
Wk96/98 – Area Only Members	78

Over the year we have actually gained 240 new members, but unfortunately we lost 267 members. Not unsurprisingly, there were very few new members between April and June inclusively. Between July and September there has been a steady drip, drip of new members. July there were 35 new members, August there were 26 and for September 32.

During the pandemic, anecdotal evidence suggests that more and more people are walking as part of their daily exercise. It will be interesting to see whether this translates into new members and whether those who have let their membership lapse will re-join.

Some other interesting information, is that nationally 55% of our members are female and 43% are male. Interestingly 2% don't know. The average age of your typical Rambler nationally is 66. In Warwickshire our average age is 65.

Nationally some 13% of our members are registered as volunteers. This compares with Warwickshire where 14% of our members are registered as volunteers.

Nick Hillier

Trustee's Report

Walks

In common with most other organisations the Covid-19 lockdown has had a significant effect on the work of the Ramblers. In line with Government guidelines, Ramblers' walks were initially suspended, then groups of up to 6 were authorised to walk and later this was increased to 30. With the need for social distancing, I suspect that few people felt comfortable walking in a group of 30, then at the beginning of November we were in to lockdown again, so walk programmes were again suspended.

Meetings

Recent **Board of Trustees' meetings** have been held on GoTo and Zoom. There are a few benefits of this: saving of travel time; saving of cost; being able to see all participants at the same time, but the disadvantage is missing the personal contact, particularly one to one conversations; and the difficulty of looking at the papers electronically at the same time as looking at colleagues on the screen. I overcome this by looking at the papers on my tablet and looking at colleagues on my laptop.

The most important decision has been to cancel **General Council** this year and to have a shortened version next year. After much discussion and seeking legal advice it was decided to replace the 2020 General Council with a virtual AGM which was held on Tues 15th Sept. Papers were sent to Council members with proxy forms to vote on constitutional items such as the appointment of the president and vice presidents; and to elect the motions review committee and trustees. I had already reached my maximum 2 year term of office as Vice Chair in April, so I stood down and Brenda Dawson was elected to replace me. There was no discussion of motions. Instead they were initially remitted to the Board of Trustees who published a response on 16th October. There was a further virtual meeting on Thurs 19th November for further discussion on the motions.

It is proposed that there will be a scaled down General Council at the Birmingham NEC in 2021.

The majority of **Area AGMs** in 2020/21 will be virtual and Trustees have been allocated to each AGM. I will be attending the Cornwall, Lincoln, Wiltshire and Avon AGMs. Dates have not yet been agreed for Scottish and Welsh AGMs.

Our **Business Plan** was reviewed and our strategic priorities for 2020/21 remain:-

- Growing awareness and engagement with the Ramblers and what we do
- Growing our membership and income
- Commencing the culture change that is required to take the charity forward to be an inclusive, engaging and diverse organisation.

CEO - Tanya Curry continues in post as Interim CEO while arrangements are made for a substantive appointment.

Digital and Data Transformation

Changes to our website are taking place to enable members to use the same email address and password to access all centrally provided Ramblers systems – Assemble; Insight Hub, Mobile App and Pathwatch.

This last year has clearly been very challenging, exacerbated by unpredictability, and it looks very much as though this unpredictability will continue into the next year, at least. Can I, therefore, thank members of Warwickshire Area Council for continued enthusiasm under difficult circumstances.

Dr Peter Rookes, Vice Chair (until Sept 2020), Ramblers Board of Trustees

Group Chair's Reports

WK01 City of Birmingham

This year was our 40th anniversary. I doubt it will be remembered for celebrations to mark the occasion but rather, a year of loss, sadness and frustration for many. Little did I know when accepting the position of Chair, that I was heading for the most extraordinary time in our history. The start of the year in October was set to provide a full programme of walks and social events. Many members enjoyed a wet October weekend in the Lake District, and equally wet walking back in the Midlands. Christmas walks with a Christmas dinner thrown in, all went ahead. New Year saw members shaking off the seasonal excesses with very popular walks on the Lickey Hills, our start on the LDP Elan Valley Way and continuing the Staffordshire Way. In February we hosted the area AGM at Bournville and were please so many of our Warwickshire Area colleagues were able to attend. Next came the hurricane Ciara and then floods along the river Severn both of which led to walk cancellations. Our last group walk was 15th March, doing a section of the LDP Elan Valley way.

In total there were 20 Sunday walks (3 each Sunday), 5 Saturday Walks for the Public, 11 Wednesday walks with a meal and 1 Ridges and Tops.

The task force path maintenance team continued their valuable work.

Then lockdown.

During lockdown we published regular e-newsletters to help keep in touch with members who were signed up. Members were encouraged to keep moving and enjoy the outdoors and the signs of spring, then summer. Committee meetings were held on Zoom. All our social events and holidays were cancelled or postponed.

When we were allowed to restart walks, we aimed to do so from September. A Walking Programme Subcommittee was establish to develop a programme of walks including a new series of short walks, a booking system which captured members' contact details and to keep numbers small but ensure fair access to walks. Our Eventbrite set up has taken time and for me, has been a huge learning curve, for that I have to thank the IT wizards on the committee.

At the time of writing our group has started walking again. There have been 2 walks on 2 Sundays, and 2 short walks, all attracting 10-12 walkers, a modest but safe walking group number. Without a coach on Sundays, many members have not been able to access the full programme. Regulations permitting we hope to restart coach walking soon.

Our Membership has remained steady at just below 400. New members have joined during lock down. Hopefully, with more choice of walks and the easing of restrictions, more members of the public will be keen to get out and join us.

Finally I would like to thank all our committee members, walk leaders, path maintainers, social events fixers, webmaster, and walks' organisers who have contributed to keeping the group active and have supported me so well in my first year as chairperson.

Celia Howell-Jones

WK02 Coventry

Like all other groups, we had to suspend our walks programme during lockdown, from mid-March until 30th June. Once small group walks were allowed, some informal groups (of up to 6 people) formed for regular walks together. In August, our Medium walkers took advantage of the Ramblers guidance allowing up to 30 people to join walks, and restarted their advertised walks programme. However, the Long walkers, more of whom are retired, chose to stay in their informal groups of six.

Our public transport walks have not been able to restart, due to the vulnerability of the walk coordinators, the risks associated with public transport, and the risks to groups eating in pubs. We organised one summer evening walk for two groups of six, walking the same route in opposite directions, which was much appreciated by the participants.

We will hold our AGM virtually. Most of the current committee will continue in post for at least one more year, but both our Long and Medium Sunday walks coordinators are stepping down, and we still have several other vacancies to fill (including the Chair).

Some new members have joined us, even during lockdown, but our total numbers are down by about 7%, though this is not too surprising in the circumstances.

Before lockdown, the Tuesday morning walks followed by a pub lunch were the most popular, but attendances on Sunday walks (both long and medium) remained fairly high, although the wet winter did cause numbers to drop somewhat then. Our two Saturday Public Transport walks also had slightly lower attendances than last year. We are always in need of more walk leaders, but people have responded well in these unusual times.

Our Footpath Secretary for Coventry City continues to monitor issues in the area. Applications to add evidenced paths to the Definitive Map are progressing slowly. One application partly refused by the City Council is being taken to Appeal at the Planning Inspectorate. We have not yet been able to recruit a new Footpath Secretary for North Warwickshire.

The countryside access working party has continued to clear footpaths, when they are made aware of problems.

Our Christmas lunch at Maxstoke golf club, preceded by a choice of walks, was popular. Some of our members enjoyed a holiday on the Isle of Wight in September, but no other social events have been possible.

We will continue to review the situation regarding group walks, and sincerely hope that we will be able to put on a more-normal programme at some stage in 2021.

Janet Lockett – Secretary



WK03 Mid-Warwickshire

We marked the end of the 2019 walking year with the annual festive outing. This time visiting local gin makers Moore's of Warwick to learn about the history of gin, as well as allowing time for tasting., Afterwards we rounded off the day with the group Christmas lunch at the Hatton Arms pub. As 2020 started it was business as usual with the continuation of the winter walks programme, which offered the usual variety of walks suited for the limited daylight hours. As the days lengthened so did the uncertainty with the novel Coronavirus, soon to have familiarity as the disease Covid-19.

The Ramblers suspended organised group activities in March, and the Mid-Warwickshire walks and events were postponed or cancelled accordingly. Group members were able to continue independent walks in line with the restrictions, such as the daily exercise during the height of lockdown, and also in small groups of up to six when restrictions were lifted at the beginning of July. We ran a trial walk in July, with weekly walks resuming from August. As with other activities and other Ramblers groups, we have had to adapt. We have moved to a booking system and have temporarily stopped meeting in Leamington to arrange car shares. At the time of writing numbers are capped at 10 per walk including the leader. This helps us to manage registrations on walks, and if necessary contact tracing. Also, as we have minimised car sharing, the smaller group numbers help us to be considerate where there is limited parking.

The committee has moved smoothly to remote meetings, and we look forward to holding our first remote AGM. As we head towards the end of the 2020 walking year we also have some changes within the committee. Peter Rolfe is stepping down as Programme Secretary and we thank him for his work in the role. Alison Tyler will succeed Peter in this role.

We will continue to adapt with the changing guidance and restrictions, and endeavour to offer as many opportunities for group walking as is practicably possible. Membership has remained stable in an exceptional year and we shall try to harness the renewed interest in walking. It has been encouraging to see non-members trying out a group walk in recent weeks

Alice Sim



WK04 Rugby

What challenging times we live in! Little did we anticipate the 'bombshell' forthcoming when our 'long walkers' circumnavigated Charnwood Peaks and enjoyed vast panoramas from Beacon Hill and Bradgate Park on March 15th. All the more now to savour memories of picnic lunches in the rain and post-walk cream teas at the Conservatory Tea Rooms, trying not to choke on the disappointing postponement of the Spring-Summer programme of walks.

But, we're moving on too fast here. Pre-Covid, our November AGM peaked with a stunning talk and slide show by Philippa Thompson, recalling her Himalayan trekking experience in the Annapurna foothills of Nepal. Our thanks as usual to Graham Bevan for supplying the technical wizardry. Allan Pinder made his debut on our Soups, Puds and Pictures night in March with a superbly compiled collection of 'pics' from the year's adventures, complimented as usual by our hostesses' delicious soups and home-made desserts. Members who stayed home missed a real treat on both occasions. In between, members struggled valiantly through fields of boot-sucking mud on the annual Mystery Walk before being rewarded with a 'Christmas Lunch' at Welford's Wharf Inn ... thank you again Barry Matthews and Chris Potts. Our February Quiz Night also enjoyed a welcome resurgence, with a full house, 11 teams, Barry and Tony Gibbons again devising the mental gymnastics.

Off the menu: coach trips to Bath and Hartington as well as our spring residential weekend at Lulworth House. Many anxious days preceded our Eastbourne weekend in September, but despite numerous withdrawals the Cavendish Hotel still managed to host a sizeable group of 23 members [4th-7th Sep.] Our dedicated walk leaders treated us to a range of challenging but enjoyable forays, with all that the South Downs National Park has to offer in this area, including Tea Rooms. Thank you to all of them, but additional special thanks to Philippa Thompson who spent endless hours ensuring the event came to fruition, a 'gift from heaven'. Luckily we were blessed with glorious weather, an oasis during an 'unsettled' period.

During the interim period, Judy Blagden has kept members up-to-date through her informative newsletters, magnificently formatted for online access by our webmaster Clive Buckley. Many of our members colluded to arrange their own walks locally, and continue to do so. Our committee deliberated the future through Jitsi -conferencing launched by Clive [Apr.] and a socially-distanced summit hosted by our Footpath Secretary Alain Foote. Each enabled us to fine-tune our response to the circumstances brought about by Covid-19. Following a cautious response to Restart Activities, both Pop-up walks and much of the pre-planned programme of walks have continued apace with a maximum of 12 walkers. Disappointingly, some members have booked places but not turned up. The period has also seen a number of members battling through health issues, with the longer A walks being hit particularly hard. Despite this, actual membership numbers have remained stable. We are in a time of transition though and grateful thanks go out to Vale Hargie [Programme Secretary] and Webmaster Clive for many dedicated years of service to the group as they loosen the reins at the next AGM. We share with other groups a need for more people to step forward to take up committee posts; we are very grateful for volunteers now 'learning the ropes', including myself as 'temporary' Chairperson. We are therefore hoping to complete some restructuring by or at the next AGM.

David Shaw

WK05 Stratford Upon Avon

The Year. What should have been a series of holidays and events just never happened.

We began well, with a very successful Mini Christmas Walking Festival, based in Stratford Upon Avon. Extremely well attended and some new faces.

We also had our Annual Lunch at a new venue, fully booked and an excellent day was had by us all.

Then Lockdown, walks, holidays and all events cancelled. In many ways we managed to keep in contact by technology and organising ourselves to walk independently, following the Government Guidelines when we were allowed to do so.

When official Ramblers walks were permitted to start we put together a programme, which ran through October, with restricted numbers, (this is what we were comfortable with), bookable only of course.

Some of us were also able to go to Malhamdale, which was lovely. Good to get away with a bit of normalcy.

Stratford Group had also completed their work on lost footpaths which was successfully submitted.

We have also done work on updating our Walks Book which will be reprinted in due course.

Even in Lockdown the committee and some of our members have been working hard to keep the group together. We have even seen some new members, although cautionary, there are also those who are considering leaving the organisation, which should be noted.

On a positive note members have liased with each other in their immediate areas to try to ensure members stay in contact which is good, with many people living in their own.

Let us hope for a better year in 2021

Diane Smith - Chairperson

WK06 Southam

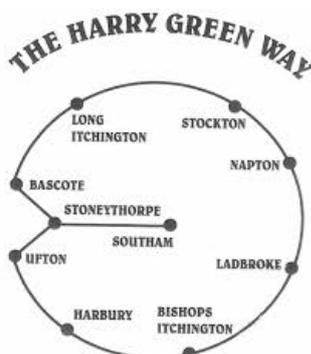
As with all groups it has been a year of three “halves”. Initially, walks took place as normal and were well supported through the winter months and, on 12th March, we enjoyed ourselves at our annual dinner at the Bell in Ladbroke. Then came the lockdown and, although we couldn’t walk as a group, we noticed many more people walking the paths radiating from Southam and the surrounding villages. Our webmaster Eric kept in touch with everyone by e-mail suggesting local walks and sending out the occasional quiz.

Eric, with the help of other Southam Ramblers, decided to update the booklet describing the Harry Green Way which is a 20-mile circular walk linking eight villages around Southam devised in 1988 by the late Harry Green. The route, which is recognised by the Long-Distance Walkers Association, was updated and waymarked in Harry’s honour in 2007. The new booklet can be found at www.ramblers.org.uk/southam. Eric also got involved with the Slow Ways project which aims to create a network of walking routes connecting towns and villages across the UK. Eight of the routes are centred on Southam. For further information go to ravenellison.com/portfolio/slow-ways.

When restrictions eased, we decided a group of six was not workable for our Wednesday walks. However, we didn’t want our Summer Strolls season to pass without an outing so, on the last scheduled date, we organised four leaders and 21 of us walked to Southam’s Holy Well and around the Stoneythorpe Estate on a lovely evening. Coincidentally, that was the very day that the permitted number was increased to 30 so, a couple of weeks later we recommenced our regular Wednesday walks. Initially, we had two leaders, following the same route, leaving at 15-minute intervals but now we are going out in one group – all suitably distanced of course – and all walks have been fully subscribed. A long-time fixture in the Southam calendar has been our annual Soup ‘n Puds walk. Since 2004 these have been provided by Jackie Westcott, whose late husband David was an early member, and through them she has raised £1,750 for local charities. This year was due to be Jackie’s last but, although the walk can go ahead, we cannot enjoy the food afterwards. As a mark of appreciation our members contributed towards a gift of a planter for Jackie with the excess donations going to the charity she would have supported this year.

We are pleased to have welcomed 7 new members recently, including Ann who transferred from the Solihull group, and 5 are actively walking so we finish the year in good heart.

William Pease



WK07 Solihull

What a year this has been - unlike any other most of us will have experienced! It has had three distinct parts. **Before lockdown** it was business as usual - a wide range of walks offered by our willing and imaginative walk leaders. In the New Year, Chris Mallett worked hard to put together two programmes of evening walks for the summer, but regrettably, some of these also fell victim to lockdown. **Lockdown:** 23 March to 3 July - cancellation of walk programme, path maintenance, Italy holiday, postponement of Elan Valley weekend and Paris trip.

After lockdown we re-started the walk programme on 4 July 2020, initially with 5 walkers per walk plus the leader. Later, this was raised to 10 walkers, plus the leader, on each walk. Our aim was to provide a good range of safe walks for our members. We introduced a booking system for walks which has worked well. There have been approximately 80 walks involving 30 walk leaders, most of which have been fully booked. In October alone we had a record 27 walks, occasionally with three walks on the same day, all fully booked. **Footpath maintenance** was also interrupted by lockdown but is now enthusiastically re-instated. A notable achievement has been the construction of a 'Bison Bridge' for Warwickshire CC, a task normally undertaken by professional contractors. **The website**, under the imaginative supervision of Viv Dobson, provided an essential means of communication and diversion during lockdown and has been vital to the operation of the walk programme subsequently. We are grateful to Sally Bean for taking on the administration of Walks Finder (GWEM). This is a crucial role now that we have to limit the number of walkers on walks.

Social activities Our annual dinner in January was a great success with 65 diners. It was followed by entertainment from the Ukulele Orchestra with considerable audience participation! The evening raised a substantial donation for Nieman-Pick Disease UK. Before lockdown, several walks included specially organised lunches, all of which were well attended.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of three of our long-serving members: Sheila Woolley, our secretary for many years, who had a very serious operation earlier in the year and is now leading walks again; Malcolm Leonard, our program secretary, who celebrated his 90th birthday recently, has taken enthusiastically to Zoom committee meetings and continues to work miracles with the walk programme; Adam Pearce, our co-ordinator of footpath maintenance work (the Bramblers) for many years, who has decided to step down for health reasons. He has made a superb contribution with his infectious enthusiasm and dedication to the work.

We have responded positively to the COVID epidemic and I am grateful to all the members of the committee for their individual contributions. Our membership has increased to 402 compared with 389 in 2018. We have some new walk leaders and we are offering more walks which are usually fully subscribed. However, we cannot lower our guard and we must continue to be rigorous in observing the safety guidelines for all our activities.

Brian Furniss,

WK08 Sutton Coldfield

This year has been completely unlike any other: at last year's AGM no one could have foreseen the events of 2020 and how they would impact on Ramblers. I took over the role of Chair of Sutton Coldfield Ramblers from Colin Lowrey and I would like to thank him for his energy, commitment and the outstanding contribution he made to the group in his three years as Chair and Walks Secretary.

The year became divided, inevitably, into pre and post lockdown. From last December until mid-March we had a full, varied programme of walks, locally and in Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Derbyshire: B and C walks on Sundays, a C and D walk on Thursdays, as well as Family Walks in Sutton Park. More than forty of us enjoyed the Christmas coach walk in Derbyshire and the excellent meal afterwards at the Bentley Brook Inn. We held coach walks in January and February, but the future of these is uncertain. As a hardy group, we rarely cancel walks, but we were defeated by storms Ciara and Dennis in February, although the walks took place at a later date. Our programme of social events got off to a lively start in January and February, with excellent catering by the 'team'. Without being negative, I feel it is important to mention the initiatives that could not come to fruition when all Ramblers' activities ceased in March. We had developed links with CRUSE Bereavement Care with the aim of supporting bereaved people through 'Friendship Walks' – part of a pilot project. Four of our group attended a day's training, but the walks in Sutton Park scheduled to start in April could not go ahead. We were also approached by Ramblers Central Office to help in planning Walk Leader training to be held in Sutton Coldfield. A local walk – a community initiative – had been planned for May in conjunction with an Open Day organised by the Friends of New Hall Mill.

Two holidays - to Bournemouth, and more recently to Criccieth, had to be cancelled. However, on a more positive note, a club weekend has been organised at HF Coniston in April 2021, which is fully booked and has given us something to look forward to.

The months of lockdown presented different difficulties and challenges to different people, some with worrying health conditions to contend with. In true Ramblers' spirit people reached out to support others with thoughtfulness and generosity. We were helped to stay connected through the monthly newsletter - not an easy task for the editor when news was in short supply.

When Ramblers gave the green light in July to resume group walks, we began in a phased way with groups of six. As restrictions were eased further, we increased to a group limit of fifteen, but at the walk leader's discretion. Our Walks Secretaries did a great job in recruiting and supporting walk leaders with the new protocols, and I would like to thank all leaders for planning, receiving and leading walks since August, as well as managing the booking system. Although not a full programme, there has been something for everyone: short walks in the local area as well as longer walks in other Midland counties. We look forward to when car sharing can be resumed safely as this, no doubt, will encourage more people to join walks.

It is encouraging that, since larger group walks have restarted, our membership has increased, partly I imagine because people who chose walking as their form of exercise during lockdown recognised the benefits to their wellbeing. We now have 234 members. I sincerely hope that this trend continues into the coming year.

Because of restrictions, it has not been possible for us to hold working parties to maintain footpaths, but our Footpaths Secretary has responded with detailed advice to all queries about footpaths from the public which I passed onto him.

Finally, I would like to thank the committee as a whole for their valuable contribution and support during these challenging past few months as all of us look forward to more normal times and the enjoyment of being outdoors walking with friends.

Barbara Twort –

WK09 Castle Bromwich

Our Group membership has stayed quite constant at around the 80 mark over the year. About half of our members have joined walks during the year, including a number of younger new ones.

We held a mixture of walks over the year, aiming to cater for members' different requirements and preferences. These were in two batches – pre Covid19 lockdown up to mid-March, and after restart in August. We held a total of 26 Sunday walks, varying in length from 6 to 9 miles, (only 1 in February due to weather and ground conditions), whilst only 2 Summer Evening Walks of about 4 miles were able to be held. During those months when there are no evening walks we planned to hold monthly Community Walks on Tuesday mornings. These are open to members and non-members, but due to poor weather only 3 of the 7 were possible.

Due to the pandemic, both our walking holidays were cancelled, the Autumn one, due to be based at Bournemouth, has been rescheduled for next May.

When Central Office issued their first guidance after lockdown was eased, it limited walks to groups of no more than 6. We considered restarting but felt it would be too limiting and bureaucratic to operate. However when the guidance was updated to allow groups of up to 30 (we never get near that number) we decided to restart and have held regular walks, observing the guidance, since the start of August. Numbers attending have been similar to those before lockdown. We have a rolling programme of walks looking about 3 months ahead.

On the publicity front our popular website continues to provide information and attract new members. We have supplemented our leaflets and poster displays in the community with business cards, which have been distributed among walkers. We have managed to continue to issue a quarterly newsletter to members despite the lockdown

Our social activities were limited to an annual Christmas Meal held at Maxstoke Golf Club and a New Year meal following a short walk at The Cottage in Fillongley.

Our June Committee meeting was cancelled, but consultation with the Committee on key issues has been carried out via Whatsapp. We will be trialling a Zoom meeting with the Committee prior to our AGM.

Ron Kitchen, our Treasurer for the past 10 years, stood down at the AGM and we thank him for his sterling service in both this role and previously as Secretary.

David Threlkeld

WK10 South Birmingham

I'm pleased to report that we have had a good year despite the pandemic. We managed a full and comprehensive programme during the winter and spring despite the very wet period of weather. For obvious reasons we suspend a number of our official walks programme from March to September. However, during that period we managed to run weekly walks with limited numbers and distances over the summer, during the week and at week-ends. This I felt keep the spirit of South Birmingham Ramblers alive during a difficult time.

After a significant amount of internal discussion and advice from the Ramblers nationally we've been able to launch a Covid-secure quarterly programme, operating from September to December. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the Committee and all the walk leaders in "stepping up to the mark", to make this possible. The walks held so far have generally been well attended, and a number of them have been over-subscribed.

Unsurprisingly social events have been somewhat limited. We held a very successful quiz/fish and chip supper in November, an excellent New Year's lunch and week-end away in Devon, before the virus descended upon us.

Membership numbers have increased again this year, by something around twenty, which I hope is a good portent for the future.

Our website moved to a new domain and hosting service. The number of visitors to the site remained fairly static, but we are expecting that this will increase in the future as this method of communication with our members and "the outside world" becomes more significant.

We have continued to work with Worcestershire County Council, on their footpaths improvement programme. However, due to the very wet winter weather conditions and the virus our input has been much reduced over the last year, but nevertheless worthwhile.

I feel that despite the difficulties experience over this year, and our continuing rise in membership, I feel that puts in a position to have a good year next year and some good walking, let's at least hope so!

Rob Swainston



WK51 West Midlands Walking Group

2020 has obviously been a turbulent year, presenting challenges that no-one could have foreseen or prepared for. However, I am pleased to say that the group has risen to those challenges very well.

Whilst we were unable to walk during lockdown, the committee organised fortnightly Zoom social events which provided a valuable means for members to stay in touch and help to relieve the isolation that many people were experiencing. And following the re-start of Ramblers activities in July we were able to rapidly put together a rolling programme of walks, offering almost as many as we would in a regular programme. Special thanks must go to Stephen Walton for his efforts in organising this, but also to everyone on the committee who helped with developing and implementing new ways of doing things, and of course to all of the walk leaders who have put on walks – a couple of whom for the first time! The decision on whether someone feels comfortable leading is clearly a personal one, but it has been heartening to see how many members have been willing to help out one way or another. I think this is a testament to the value that many members place on the group, and the sense of community and bonds of friendship that characterise it. Though no doubt of course it was also a good excuse to get out of the house!

As we took the decision to limit numbers to 12 in the interests of everyone's safety, walks have been regularly over-subscribed, which we have tried to relieve by organising two walks per weekend and on occasion running two staggered groups on the same walk. It has been good to continue seeing new faces on walks, and the membership figures indicate that we have continued to attract a good flow of new members.

At the time of writing, the next few months look very uncertain with the prospect of more lockdowns, but we will continue walking as much as we are able and, hopefully, next year will allow a return to the social events and weekends away for which the group is renowned.

Chris Thomas



WK52 The Bear Walking Group

This will be the last annual report I will write as I will be stepping down at this year's AGM after 7 years in the role of Chair, and Secretary before that. The recent arrival of my daughter in September is a big change in my life and therefore the time is right for me to step down. I will continue to be a Bear and Ramblers member and hope to support the group on walks and at the Area meetings at some point in the future.

As I write this no one so far has volunteered to take over the role of Chair or any other vacant committee role. It's disappointing, but not unexpected as this seems to be a problem affecting many groups.

As walking activities this year have been limited due to Covid-19 and considering this is my last report I decided to look back on the previous reports and mention a few highlights.

2013 - Hosting the area AGM at the Navy association building in Leamington Spa.

2014 - Two Bear members (one being me) appeared in a picture promoting the Ramblers in a Facebook advert. (Our group didn't know how the Ramblers photographer's would use the pictures that had been taken on one of our walks, and the first I knew of the advert was when a work colleague spotted me)

2015 - Some big distances, Shropshire challenge 25 miles, Knightley Way 24 miles, Grand Union Canal 20 Miles.

2016 - It says in the report we had every weather phenomenon possible when walking on Kinder Scout. It was nice to read about a walk I had forgotten about.

2017 - A walking holiday to the Isle of Man and a local Warwickshire walk encountering lammas and alpacas.

2018 – The arrival of GDPR. Two bear group members being interviewed on BBC Radio Coventry and Warwickshire.

2019 – Joint walks with other walking groups.

2020 – Well we started walking at the beginning of the year, then Covid-19 hit us. It's good to see some members following the Ramblers rule as walks are starting to happen again.

There was of course many weekends away, meals out and beer festivals over the years with some great memories.

I would like to thank all the past and present committee members, and volunteer walk leaders for your contribution to the Bear group and wish the group well for the future.

David Hamilton



WK53 – West Mids 40+.

Our year from last November started pretty much with business as usual with walks being scheduled regularly. Of course, like everybody else, we were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as the year progressed.

Up to March 2020 we had undertaken 116.9 miles of walks. With Lockdown, all walks stopped and we have followed the Ramblers guidelines as they have been issued throughout the year. On the whole, during the year when permitted, walks have been ongoing although some walks were through personal invite because of adherence to the rule of 6.

When it was advised that group walking was allowed for up to 30, some walk leaders were still reluctant to host more than 11-15 walkers and requested that notifications were sent out by email only to group members. This meant that some walks were not published on either the Ramblers or Meetup websites which led to an incorrect assumption, by those not on the group mailing list, that the group was not active. This started to change towards the end of summer with walk leaders agreeing occasionally to publishing walks on the Ramblers site only for Ramblers members to see. However, nobody as yet has agreed to extend walks to our Meetup group. This is a shame really as we have seen some 90 new members join the meet group since January and they are potential new Ramblers members. Nevertheless, throughout the year the walk leader's wishes have been respected because they are the ones who have to assess the risks and decide what contingencies they would like to see in place.

Due to COVID-19 three group holidays have been cancelled - Barmouth, Swanage and the West Highland Way. A weekend at Hartington still managed to go ahead but in a revised format. Since last year's AGM we have had 9 new members and our total membership currently stands at 95. Our Meetup group now has 1057 members.

Just before the AGM the question of rebranding cropped up and in order to assess the views of everyone the membership was polled on how they felt about this. The results of this poll are given in the table below:

% of votes		
Option A 'Change from WM40+ to WM50+'	Option B Remain WM40+	Option C Some other option, state what it is
29	29	42

It is fair to say that feeling from some of the members was quite high on this issue especially those choosing options 'B' & 'C'. When you also consider that all those who went for option C have, by default, also rejected option A, it means that 71% do not want to become a 50+ group.

With a further lockdown until early December, we do hope to get a couple of extra walks in but, like many others, our Christmas celebrations will not be taking place this year.

However, we look forward to a group get together when all restrictions are eased. In the meantime, we know that our members really appreciate getting out into the countryside whenever they can.

Sam Passmore
Group Membership Secretary