

OXFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS ANNUAL REVIEW 2018



CHAIR

All of you members – whether you go on Ramblers walks or not - strengthen the charitable outputs of Ramblers: thank you. Collectively we have much to be proud of in Oxfordshire Ramblers. Hundreds of volunteers delivered our large walks programme (approximately 1000 walks) and our local charitable work.

We had five footpath maintenance teams operating during the year, with other volunteers working with organisations in the Cotswolds and south Chilterns. Proposals for footpath diversions and planning applications drew comments and recommendations from our footpath officers.

Our Walking Environment and Access post was filled; the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Expressway will be a focus of attention. The Oxfordshire Ramblers parish path warden network is flourishing, helped by a good rapport with field officers and others in the County Council's Countryside Access Team.

Our exposure to the Oxfordshire public was boosted when 10 of our volunteers were interviewed on no fewer than 10 days on primetime BBC Radio Oxford. Our second presence at BBC Countryfile Live at Blenheim was augmented by the presence of Ramblers chief executive and others from Ramblers central office.

Our membership has risen 5% over the last four years, bucking the national downward trend. Increasing our membership is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, it would mean that more people would have more fulfilling lives through the social walking that we provide. Secondly, their subscriptions would enable Ramblers to further fulfil its charitable objectives.

Looking ahead, we must not overlook that increasing our membership is a two-fold process: recruitment and retention. Nationally over 50% of new members do not renew their subscription after their first year. Imagine how our membership numbers would increase if 75% of them stayed with us. For those who join to walk with us, we only have one chance to

make a good first impression. This means all of us group walkers taking pains to engage with new members on their first and subsequent walks, as well as providing something for everyone in our walks and social programmes. Perhaps our most successful groups are those that retain a higher proportion of new members?

Dave Cavanagh

SECRETARY

We have continued keeping our members informed of activities originating from the Area. Groups can, if required, personalise the newsletter themselves which is proving a very useful way of keeping in touch. In February 2019 there will be another opportunity to attend a first aid course for walkers organised by Red Cross. I also liaised with the BBC for our stand for Countryfile and organised the rota for the four days of the show.

Rosemary Williams

TREASURER

Income & Expenditure for the year ended 30 September 2018

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>
	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
INCOME		
Allocation from Ramblers National Fund	10846	11975
Walks Programme Advertising	355	235
Bank Interest	0	0
Fundraising	0	0
Other	0	5
TOTAL INCOME	<u>11201</u>	<u>12215</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Group Allocations	2565	2585
Walks programmes	4239	3337
Walks related	0	0
Walks leader training	89	532
Newsletters/publicity	2069	2787
Publication/goods costs	0	0
Campaigns/casework	299	494
Practical work	0	224
Fundraising costs	0	0
Meetings (inc. AGM)	190	26
Admin	415	735
Other	205	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>10072</u>	<u>10721</u>
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	1129	1494
ASSETS		
Bank Balance	<u>9543</u>	<u>8414</u>
RESERVES		
Opening bank balance	8414	6920
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	1129	1494
Closing bank balance	<u>9543</u>	<u>8414</u>
Designated Expenditure	-1013	-968
TOTAL RESERVES	<u>8530</u>	<u>7446</u>
Reserves (% of annual expenditure)	100%	82%

Treasurer's Report

These accounts are prepared in accordance with guidelines issued by the Ramblers Association.

The Area's main source of income was from the allocation of funds from the Ramblers Association.

Routine expenditure included the production of the twice-yearly walks programme booklet, the allocation of funds to the ten Oxfordshire Ramblers Groups and the South East Walker publication.

In August 2018 Oxfordshire Area organised a stand, on behalf of Ramblers, at the Countryfile Live at Blenheim Palace. The cost of £985 is included under the 'Newsletters/publicity' category.

The Reserves on 30 September 2018 were £8,530. Our Reserves, expressed as a percentage of the annual expenditure (excluding Group Allocations), were 100%. The Ramblers Association guidelines are that the Reserves should be between 40% and 100% of annual expenditure. In 2018-19 we propose to use our reserves to: fund Countryfile Live, should we decide to do it, at an estimated cost of £1100; purchase a brush cutter, train two operatives, and provide PPE (cost £1250); and purchase a petrol hedge-trimmer on an extended pole (cost £651).

Independent Examiner's Report

I have examined these Accounts and the underlying records in accordance with the Area and Group Independent Examination Guidelines. I consider that the Oxfordshire Area Accounts have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year ended 30 September 2018.

Signed



Mr S A Kenner

Date

5th November 2018

Richard Birch

FOOTPATH SECRETARY

COMMITTEE: West Oxfordshire, BNO, B&K and D&W groups have no Footpath Officer. In some cases this can mean that I have to do a 50-mile round trip to look at diversion proposals. Terry Pollard, the Area Access and Walking Environment Officer, is attending meetings in order to keep the Footpaths Sub-Committee up to date with the Expressway and any similar developments.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL: The Monitoring Group met in April and October. The field officers are still isolated in country offices, but at least we now have all four of the rural districts covered. James Blockley left on November 23, and his replacement will not have the additional responsibility for trees. It is hoped that there will be additional admin personnel, as there is a problem in that resolved issues (especially those reported by Parish Path Wardens) are not being updated. There is a new version of CAMSWEB which allows photos to be uploaded (but they need to be kept reasonably small).

DEFINITIVE MAP CLAIMS: There are 108 claims outstanding, with a backlog of at least ten years. The 32 claims made by the Trail Riders' Fellowship to upgrade restricted byways to byways open to all traffic (i.e. motor vehicles) are still being investigated, along with 13 other claims. Rachel Livingstone of British Horse Society is looking at lost ways near Witney; she has so far made at least 11 claims, one of which has already progressed to an order.



PLANNING AND DIVERSIONS: There are 21 outstanding diversion applications. We are opposing the closure of Culham FP1 across the railway level crossing and seeking a diversion. We have also opposed diversion and part-extinguishment of Tiddington FP19 as the proposal is unsafe at both the A418 and the Ickford road. There are plans to join up the missing links round Upper Heyford airbase; these are linked to proposed development on the site. The plan for 28 mansions and a Bentley car museum by Soho Farms, which would have involved diverting Sandford St. Martin BR13 (the continuation of the Great-Tew-Soho Farms road), attracted 260 objections (including mine and OCC's) and was withdrawn. A planning application to plough the field alongside Long Hanborough FP5 over the former quarry (to encourage rare arable weeds) caused confusion, as the path was shown on the wrong line; in fact the actual line is unaffected. We objected to diversion of Hook Norton BR32 at Swerford Park; the diversion was refused.

OBSTRUCTIONS, ETC.: The closure of **Sunningwell FP8** through the former quarry has been extended; the landowner refuses to allow a diversion, and creating a path up the quarry face will cost at least £30,000. Shortage of staff has led to the number of unresolved cases to rise above 4,000.



THANKS: Finally, my thanks to the footpath officers and clearance teams for their hard work, and to anyone else who has helped with footpath matters, and all those whose secateurs and other tools have helped to keep paths open.

David Godfrey

MEMBERSHIP

Ramblers Oxfordshire - Membership report for year to September 2018

	Sep-18	Sep-17	Sep-16	Sep-15	Sep-14	% Increase over 12 months	% Increase over 24 months	% Increase over 36 months	% Increase over 48 months
BNO	282	281	268	280	254	0.4	5.2	0.7	11.0
B&K	175	190	179	164	167	-7.9	-2.2	6.7	4.8
D&W	166	158	161	160	167	5.1	3.1	3.8	-0.6
H&G	339	318	306	304	312	6.6	10.8	11.5	8.7
OX	284	305	303	313	319	-6.9	-6.3	-9.3	-11.0
T&W	179	171	153	155	140	4.7	17.0	15.5	27.9
Vale	310	325	324	319	322	-4.6	-4.3	-2.8	-3.7
W OXON	175	169	163	152	159	3.6	7.4	15.1	10.1
WW	132	160	149	141	136	-17.5	-11.4	-6.4	-2.9
20/30	63	75	76	92	91	-16.0	-17.1	-31.5	-30.8
Unallocated	97	85	63	60	35	14.1	54.0	61.7	177.1
Total	2,202	2,237	2145	2140	2,102	-1.6	2.7	2.9	4.8

Membership shows a small decrease over the last 12 months though the following groups increased membership Henley & Goring, Didcot & Wallingford & Thame & Wheatley

Peter Stone

PARISH PATH WARDEN NETWORK CO-ORDINATOR



This year has seen a major reorganisation of the Countryside Access Team at County with changes in personnel and location of officers. The CAMSweb on-line reporting system has been upgraded and is now the general method used by PPWs to report path problems. One of the advantages of the upgrade has been the possibility of sending photographs of path problems. Each PPW has their own CAMSweb account and can track any progress made on their reports.

Including the parishes covered by the Chiltern Society and the Cotswold Wardens around 82% of the county's 320 Parishes are now covered by a PPW or path representative. There have been a number of resignations of PPWs but the vacancies have been filled through a combination of advertising them on local parish notice boards and also Local Coordinators using their contacts in suggesting names of volunteers.

A PPW workshop took place in March 2018 at Beckley, attended by 20 PPWs. I express my thanks to Dave Cavanagh and Liz Adams (OFS Chairman) for their assistance. The PPWs went on a walk around footpaths in the area which revealed the sorts of typical problems that are dealt with by a PPW.

Articles on PPWs in Oxfordshire has been included in editions of the South East Regional Supplement of the quarterly Ramblers publication - 'Walk' magazine. Oxfordshire Area ramblers have a Facebook page on social media which contains regular items of news on PPW activities.

I wish to express my particular thanks to the 12 PPW Local Coordinators for their support in looking after their teams in the Rambler Group Areas, viz. Peter Offord – Banbury and North Oxfordshire, Marion Ganthony - Bicester and Kidlington, Keith Frayn – City of Oxford, Tony Clark, Ken King and Bob Ward - Thame and Wheatley, David Seed and Daryl Dixon - Didcot and Wallingford, Dave Cavanagh, John Graham and John Orchard - Vale of White Horse, and Rosemary Clegg - West Oxfordshire.

I thank also Adam McQueen (CAT) for sending to me the twice-yearly lists of path problems in the parishes for distribution via LCs to their PPW teams.



The photographs show PPWs cleaning signs and the PPW group at Beckley.



Beckley Course members putting up waymarks

Jim Parke

PUBLICITY – we currently have no publicity officer

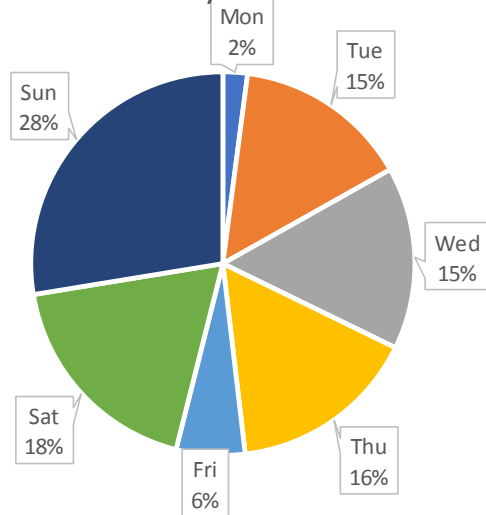
WALKS CO-ORDINATOR

For the period 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018 Oxfordshire Area has produced a varied programme of 968 led walks. The walks varied in distance between 1 and 18.5 miles, covering a total of 6,776 miles, with 46% of the walks at the weekend. Half (50%) of the walks were 'Moderate' but over the past few years there has been an increase in other grades of walks – 'Easy' (3%), 'Leisurely' (45%) and 'Strenuous' (2%).

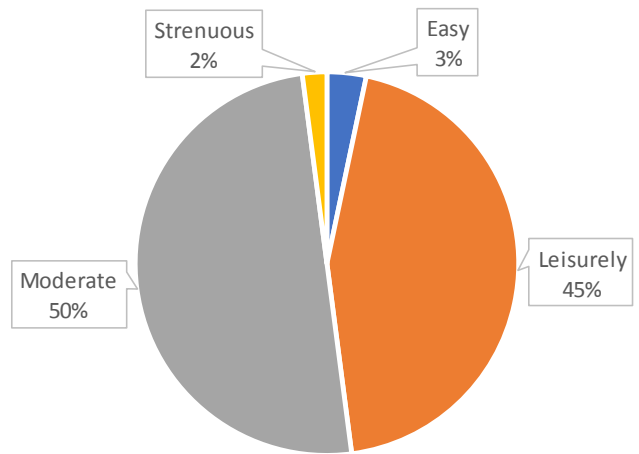
Two Walks Programme booklets, each covering 6 months, have been produced. The net cost of publishing and distributing 3800 walks booklets was £4,115 (£1.08 per booklet). Included with the Walks Programmes were Newsletters from Vale of White Horse, Henley & Goring, and Thame & Wheatley Groups.

The walks have also been uploaded onto Google Calendar and Ramblers Walks Finder.

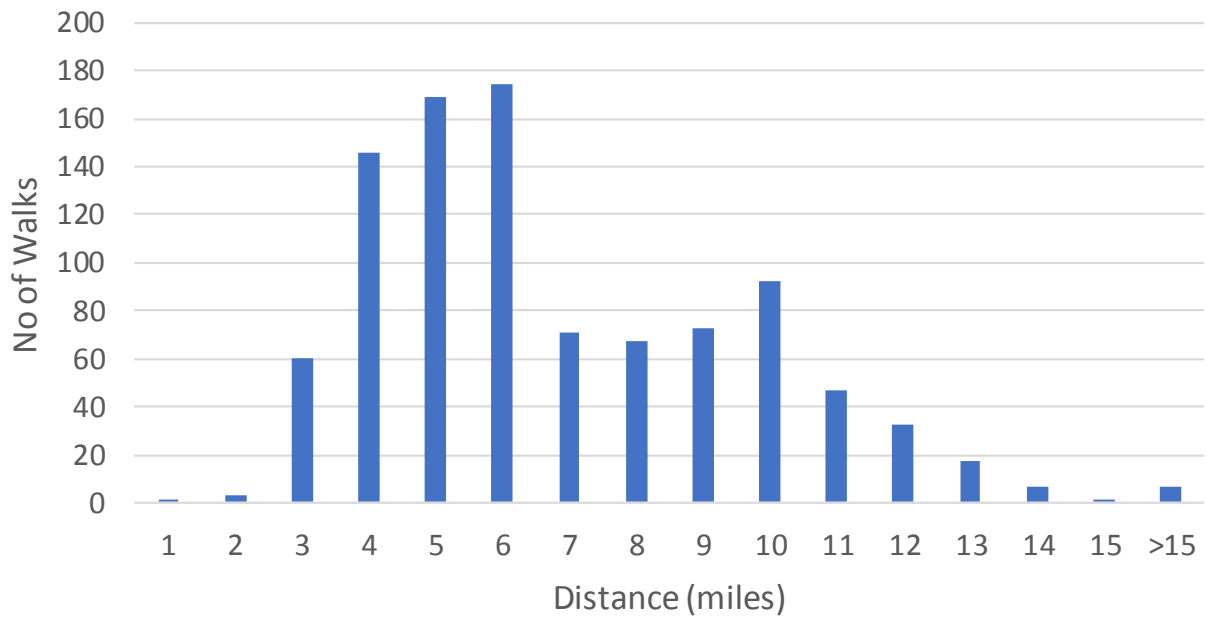
Walks - Day of the week



Grade of Walk



No of Walks



Richard Birch

GROUP REPORTS

20s & 30s

Since the AGM in October 2017 we have led 67 walks, 13 socials and 6 weekends away. We have had a good variety of walks and socials as well as some excellent weekends away.

My thanks to Rob and Laura for coordinating the walks and the socials respectively. My thanks to David and Rachel for leading walks for the first time, Rob for leading the most walks and Luke for breaking the ice and leading socials without being directly involved.

My thanks to David and Gareth for organising very successful weekends away for the first time, and to Vicki and Callie for doing most of the work for the Malverns Weekend away as well.

Matthew Hutton

BANBURY & NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

The past year has been one where the committee focus has had to be closely aligned to available resources. With no Chair or Secretary and limited availability of our Footpath Secretary it has been necessary for the group to be predominantly inward looking with priority given to what we offer to group members.

To this end it is satisfying to report that membership at the end of the year increased slightly when compared to 2017 (287 v 283)

This can partly be attributed to a substantial amount of publicity over the year via attendance and promotion of the Ramblers/BNO at local events, articles in local publications and flyers in prominent community buildings.

The group has been able to maintain its comprehensive and varied walks programme, also seen as a factor aiding recruitment because our types of walk have wide appeal. Probably, like most groups, finding new walk leaders is always a challenge and we have been looking into ways of beefing up the numbers where we foresee potential shortages for leading particular types of walk in the future.

We have noticed how we regularly attract a good number of walkers from outside of BNO's catchment/membership area e.g. Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire and Buckinghamshire, none of whom are recipients of the printed programme!!

On the social side we were able to put on our familiar Christmas/New Year festive walks, have a well attended group Christmas meal, run a day trip to Derbyshire Peak District and, through the kind offer of two members, an evening being taken through their Trans Siberian Railway journey followed in the summer with them hosting a garden party for members.

Very little was done during the year on footpath maintenance despite ongoing contact with OCC Countryside Access, although locally our Footpath Secretary did resolve some access issues in the Deddington area.

Finally, GDPR has not been a helpful addition to our ability to communicate freely with members where, based on the number of 'opt-ins', we cannot now email 30% of those we were able to prior to GDPR implementation.

Overall, a year where the group has delivered strongly at a local level.

Stuart Dyer

BICESTER & KIDLINGTON

Bicester & Kidlington members have enjoyed another good year. Thank you to the Committee for all their hard work in making this possible. Our membership stands at 176, a reduction on last year. This is largely due to some people moving out of the area.

Throughout the year we have continued to provide a varied walks programme. Thank you to Richard and our walk leaders. The walks generally take place at weekends with short walks every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month. We introduced evening walks in the summer months, which were well attended.

Some of the highlights included

- Richard's Mince Pie Walk
- London Christmas Lights walk,
- Mary's dawn walk in April which was very popular and many of the walkers enjoyed a hearty breakfast afterwards.
- Walk around Greenwich



Christmas Lights Walk

We organised two coach outings: - One to Cirencester where we walked around Cirencester Park and then explored the city. The other one was to Avebury where despite the driving rain we completed the 5 mile Pagan Way.

In September a small group of us went to Selworthy for a long weekend. We enjoyed walking on Exmoor, the Lorna Doone Valley and the Coastal Path.



Lorna Doone Walk

Other social events include, Cotswold Store open evening and pub lunches every other month.

Our book “Short Walks Around Bicester”. Is still selling well and we have ordered another reprint

Some of us went to the Ramblers’ volunteer development day in Oxford. It was an opportunity to learn more about the work of Ramblers and the chance to network with other groups. These days are a lot of fun and open to all.

We hosted the Area Picnic in Kirtlington Quarry. About 80 people attended. The weather and the cakes were excellent



Picnic Kirtlington Quarry

As part of the “Growing Healthy Bicester” project, Cherwell District Council launched their “Discovery Walk” round Bicester on 5 July. This was part of the NHS 70th Anniversary celebrations. I lead the walk with the Mayor. We followed up with a further 2mile walk around Bicester

Oxford Area Ramblers had a stand at “Countryfile Live “ at Blenheim Palace. Some of us helped out with this.

On a personal note I received the Ramblers National Volunteer Award for innovation. It was presented by Stuart Maconie at the General Assembly in April

We look forward to our London Lights walk and Mince Pie walk in December and many more interesting walks and events next year. Next September we have planned a weekend away to the South Downs. If you have any ideas for future walks or events, please let us know?

Mary Gough

BLITZ & KLEAN

Since July 2018 we have been working closely with Oxfordshire County Council to clear a backlog of 5 paths needing attention in our area. Through a combination of discussions with the owners Groundsman, clarification with O.C.C., some work undertaken by farmers themselves and the hard work carried out by the B&K Team we managed to clear this backlog by October 2018.

We have since had a further 3 path obstructions reported to us by the Launton footpath warden. Two of these have been cleared by the team with the third one scheduled for January, weather permitting.

A member of the team has recently undertaken the LANTRA brush cutting course through Cotswolds Rural Skills. This will enable us to be more flexible/efficient in clearing future pathways. The number of people turning out to clear paths have ranged from a minimum of two up to a maximum of six so far. The main reason for blockages so far have been brambles and overgrown hedgerows with a few fallen branches along the way.

It has felt a very productive 6 months and there has been a lot of support within the team.

Looking forward to the New Year ahead.

Ian Baldwin

DIDCOT & WALLINGFORD

In 2018 we have found some new walk leaders, who have increased overall the number of walks offered by the Group.



In May we made a booking for 17 people at a HF House in the Cotswolds for September 2019. With the popularity of HF, we find early booking seems the only way to guarantee a group booking.

- **In June** I led a walk, which attracted 5 participants, to the Area Picnic at Kirtlington Quarry. It was a hot day and fortunately we had lots of natural shade on the walk helping keep us cooler.

- **In July** we had our Group Barbecue in the double garage of our Treasurer, as the weather broke on the day turning very windy. Despite this it was attended by about 15 members.

- **In September** 23 of us spent a lovely weekend at HF Dovedale. The weather on the Friday was the only negative, completely covering the stepping stones on our afternoon walk along the Dove whilst testing our waterproofs. The group had recently decided to buy hi-vis vests and first-aid kits for our walk leaders, which were mainly distributed over the weekend.
- At our AGM Richard Birch was elected Group Walks Coordinator, taking over from Kate Hart and Keith Tibbs who between them had done this role for over 15 years.



Nick Morley

HENLEY AND GORING

In 2018 we organised 182 walks (about the same as the year before) with on average 12.8 participants (increase of 1). Henley & Goring Ramblers walked in total 14960 miles this year. We had a broad selection of walks of various distances from 3.1 to 13 miles. We had more short walks (less than 5 miles) and more walks over 10 miles in comparison to last year. Participation was good in spite of the hot weather. Like last year, we organise most walks on Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday, complemented with Friday pub walks in the summer. We had 2 walks with mobility scooters.

Our membership numbers keep being good, currently at 341 (6 more than last year).

We completed the Chairman's long distance path in the summer. In the Winter Walking weekends we finished the Mid-Wilts Way in 2018 in a true snowy winter fashion. Following on from this we started the Palladian Way in the summer, and are continuing to follow this path in weekends in the winter. The Sandstone trail was completed recently over a long weekend using a minibus for transport. We started walking the Shakespeare's Way recently, walking from London to Stratford upon Avon.

We produced our biannual paper newsletters for our members, plus our monthly electronic newsletters, each time with lots of news and showcasing our activities. We ensured that our website and Facebook page were updated, and we saw an increase of more people looking at the postings on Facebook.

Numerous footpath obstructions, signage and planning applications affecting footpaths have been dealt with. The Chiltern Society helped us install 30 gates (293 gates over several years), 40 Waymark posts, 37 fallen trees were cleared and 17675 were cleared.

Our trips were as popular as ever: Isle of Wight, Northern Cyprus, Austria, the Elan Valley in Wales, Upper Teesdale in Yorkshire and Limpley Stoke in the Cotswolds with in total 152 participants. The Isle of Wight had most participants: 35.

Our social committee organised 7 events, with in total 349 participants, on average 49 participants (against 47 last year). Best visited was the AGM (70) participants). The others were Chantry House Lecture, BBQ, May bank holiday event with tea & cakes, Carol Service, Walk Leaders meeting and Christmas dinner.

We helped out launching Henley as a Walkers are Welcome town. We also repeated a stall with some games at the Christmas market and helped out at the stand at Countryfile Live.

As a more tedious activity, we had to focus this year on ensuring we comply to the new GDPR regulations.

Our Ramblers Income and Expenditure had a surplus of £13. All designated funds were used. Our bank balance 30/9 was £156. The main expenditure was printing of newsletters and walk programmes. Our social account remained approximately the same with a balance of £1357 at year end. A gate with a plaque was donated from a surplus on the social account.



Our committee currently consist of 10 people, with a vacancy for a publicity officer.

Alie Hagedoorn

OXFORD CITY



- We have enjoyed a year's worth of a full programme of walks nearly every Wednesday far and wide, as a result of our energetic Walks Organiser, Wendy Thomas. Thanks to all the leaders.
- Thanks to Tony Dale, Footpath Officer, and to Keith Frayn, Path Wardens' Coordinator for their diligent work on footpaths. The strength of the team path clearances in

addition to the tools bought by Robin Harrison on behalf of the Committee have augmented this work. The pre-AGM walk in November included walking along a newly cleared section of the Thames Path near Kings Lock which now enables walkers to enjoy the river bank.



- Siobhan Stead-Ellis, a Rambler Member, organised volunteers for the OxClean litter picking event in March which has now expanded from Oxford to be a national initiative. This event was reported in the South East Walker magazine alongside a photograph of the 25 sacks of rubbish collected near the Churchill Hospital site. We plan to participate in the March 2019 event.

- Robin Harrison as Treasurer presented the accounts. Ramblers holidays awarded £160 from Oxford City Members booking their holidays.

- Robin Harrison has produced a report on his work on the Jubilee Way and has posted it with a good map both of which are available on the Ramblers website.



- In May Emily Seccombe, from the RSPB Oxford Swift Project joined Elaine Steane and others on a guided walk from the Natural History Museum to see both swifts and the swift boxes that have been



put up in Wellington Square.

- The Oxford Group led a walk to the Annual Area Summer Picnic on June 23rd where eight of the nine Oxfordshire Groups gathered at Kirtlington Quarry.
- Volunteers from the Oxford Group attended the Countryfile event at Blenheim from 2nd to the 5th August.
- The Oxford group are on social media including a Facebook group and the new Ramblers website page. On both the website and Facebook there are facilities for footpath maintenance updates and other matters which anyone can register to update issues themselves. Wendy Thomas gives a frequent photo update on Facebook of recent walks.
- Jane Foster as Group Secretary has ably taken on the role. I thank her for her vital contribution.
- We thank David Godfrey for his continued input and expertise to the Committee.
- Membership is 284 as of 30th September.
- Several members of the Committee will be present at the Oxford Green Fair to man a stand with the aim of raising the profile of the Ramblers and encouraging new members.
- The current concern of the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway on the potential damage to the Oxfordshire countryside was voiced by the Chairman.

- The Oxford City Group have the honour of hosting the 2019 Area AGM to be held on February 2nd at Wytham Village Hall with a walk through Wytham Woods in the morning.

Elaine Steane

THAME & WHEATLEY

2018 was another successful year for the group due to the commitment of an able committee and the loyal support of members.

We continue to have a vibrant walks programme with 76 walks planned, a little fewer than last year. We were pleased to welcome two new leaders to the programme. As well as local walks in the Chiltern Hills, Vale of Aylesbury and South Oxfordshire, we offered an awayday to Cirencester, two London walks and a series of summer evening pub walks. We continued to enjoy the Area Picnic at Kirtlington.

The spring "Get Walking Day" enticed two new members to the group. We plan the same format next year : well-advertised 4 mile walk, tea, cakes and chat with handouts.

The Summer Social was an Aunt Sally challenge. Over 40 took part, though the target "Aunt" spent a mostly untroubled evening.

34 members joined our September break, this time to the Wye Valley and Warners Hotel at Holme Lacy for three full days' and two half days' walking. The Christmas lunch at the Village Hall at St John's, Stadhampton has 45 bookings. For 2019 we have reserved the whole of HF's Selworthy house and are fully booked.

There continues to be a small rotation of PPWs with a few vacancies filled and a few remaining.

Our path maintenance teams have been busy on TW's section of Shakespeare Way and other footpaths where needed.

Bob Ward

VALE OF WHITE HORSE

This year we have managed to improve our walks programmes yet again with a record number of walks in the summer and winter. As well as all the regular Thursday walks we have longer walks most Saturdays. The Abingdon Strolls, short easy walks around Abingdon are now held regularly once a month and we now have two joint short walks with West Oxfordshire on first and third Tuesdays with increasing attendance from WO members and all the 3rd Tuesday walks now all led by WO leaders. The Away Day trip was to Bourton-on-the-Water and we walked two longer trails: The Oxfordshire Way over 6 days; and the Oxford Green Belt Way over 5 days. We also had 2 daytrips to London, a three day trip to Derbyshire to walk the White to Dark Trail, and a joint walk with the local CAMRA group.

Peter Skuse, our walks organiser has been checking the statistics of our walks over the past five years and found that the number of walks per year has increased by 50% and the average number of walkers attending our walks has increased by over 40%. This is a credit to all our volunteer walk leaders who create and lead a varied programme. Over the five years the number of leaders has remained about the same (with some retiring and new ones volunteering), which means that each has led more walks on average.

There have been a few resignations of PPWs during the year and replacements have been found for 4 parishes. At present 62 of the 71 Vale parishes have a PPW in place. Thus the following parishes are free to be monitored: Baulking, Blewbury, Denchworth, Fyfield & Tubney, Goosey, Hatford, Kingston Bagpuize, South Hinksey, and Watchfield. If you live in or would enjoy walking in these parishes you might consider volunteering as a PPW.

Vale rights-of-way continue to benefit from the path maintenance work of our active Vale Path Volunteers. This year we paid for fingerposts at either end of the 27 mile Vale Way, our very own trail.

The main area of both footpath and countryside work is with new major housing developments, with long-planned developments in Wantage and Grove finally starting work as well as large ones in Drayton and Kingston Bagpuize. Vigilance will be required to keep the developers to their plans and avoid unnecessary or overlong closures. We are already noticing a change in the size of towns with increased urban walking before one reaches open countryside. With the latest developments it will probably soon not be feasible to reach open country on a five mile walk northwards from Abingdon Town Centre.

On behalf of Oxfordshire we organised a stand at the White Horse Show in August and held the Navigation, Planning and Leadership course in October. Vale members also played significant roles on the Ridgeway National Trail Partnership bodies and in Friends of the Ridgeway.

Thank you to everyone who volunteers in whatever capacity.



“when we walked through fields of gold.’
above Bishopstone’



‘ The Vale from the Ridgeway

John Gordon

WEEKEND WALKERS

OWW has led a full walks programme this year (despite the weather!) with 53 walks covering a total of 524 miles, led by 26 walk leaders. As always, a few stalwart individuals offered several walks each year – three individuals led five walks each, and two led four walks each. Three people have led their first walks this year, and in fact one is on to her fourth already! As usual, our walks have been in all corners of the county, and included forays into the Cotswolds and Chilterns. A small number completed the Oxfordshire Green Belt Way over three legs of approx. 18 miles, and the Chair led a Four seasons series: the same walk from Wantage, with minor variations, one in each season. We had two splendid weekends away, one walking half of the Bishops Castle Ring in Shropshire and another on the Cardigan coast.



OWW has set up two initiatives this year to help walk leaders. We now have a single walk leader's number from which calls are forward to the current walk leader in the preceding week. This means that no-one has to share their personal numbers. We also purchased a group subscription to OS maps online, to help with walk planning and accurate measurement of walk distances, and to build up a walk library. This year we have launched a new website, based on a generic offering from Head office, which our webmaster has added to. It easier for more people to modify the content, and also has an option to post news items. We hope in the future to make this into a blog post where people can share photos from walks, instead of only using Facebook.

Two members of the OWW committee joined the Area steering committee to run a stand at Countryfile Live this year. Many OWW members enjoyed manning the stand and engaging with the public about the joy of walking. We had more than 1000 visitors to the stand over the 4 days.. Volunteers from OWW also helped with the Ramblers volunteer roadshow in Oxford and attended various workshops on publicity, walk leading, GDPR and various initiatives that Ramblers is planning. Two committee members took part in live radio broadcasts to talk about walking and Ramblers.

A new committee was elected at our AGM in November. Jane Pearson, secretary for 3 years (plus 3 prior years on the committee) and Phil Jeffries, walks secretary for 4 years, stood down. We welcomed three new members on to the committee.



Next year we will celebrate the group's 10th anniversary, with a walk and meal. The 5-yearly Oxford Orbital will also take place, an initiative established by the 20s&30s and carried on by OWW.

Helen Barnham

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

West Oxfordshire Ramblers continues to thrive. The only slight hiccup was that our Chair rashly did what she thought was an easy recce for the Area picnic walk on a very cold (though bright) day last January and developed "planta fasciitis" in one foot, which didn't heal in time for a walk she was supposed to lead in March – she was really looking forward to a long sweep through Cornbury Park from Charlbury. But, as usual, our leaders all help each other out, and Matthew stepped valiantly into the breach – Judith is now hoping to lead that walk herself in next summer's programme.

Over all, we maintain a regular annual programme of about 50 walks a year ranging, remarkably, from 5 to 16 miles. And just going back to the Area picnic, this year we did manage to have 4 from our Group on the walk there: the venue at Kirtlington quarry is a fascinating place and well worth a visit for any walker who have never been.

Membership of the group is also steady: as a few people drop out, they are replaced by others, giving an increase in membership over all – now 174 (last year was 166). We have some extra funds gained from people going on Ramblers' Holidays and at the AGM we agreed to use this to enhance publicity.



Liaison with other voluntary organisations can be fruitful. In October, Judith was asked by the group that provides a patient voice for the West “locality” of the county to provide a display for a “Health and Well-being” event in Witney. After borrowing the Area’s display board and a banner, with a bit of quick printing from the Oxfordshire Ramblers’ website, she could showcase not only our own walks, but those put on by the 20s & 30s, and Weekend Walkers, and even some Healthwalks – sourced from the main Ramblers website. Thanks to Rosemary for helping out with this day. We don’t know if any of the people we spoke to have now joined Ramblers, but Judith has just been asked to pass on a copy of the current programme to an independent group that we didn’t know about. And recently finding a dangerously gate area on a local path, it took just one e-mail to liaise with the Cotswold Wardens, who maintain that path, to sort out the problem.

Judith Wardle

