

OXFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS ANNUAL REVIEW 2019



CHAIR



It has been my privilege and honour to be the chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers Area Council for the past year. I thank Dave Cavanagh, my predecessor as chair, for the contribution he made. I am pleased that he has agreed to continued editing 'Talking Walking' and coordinating the Oxfordshire section of the South-East Walker insert.

One of my first objectives as chair was to arrange to attend, as many as I could, the various Rambler Group Committees to enable me to meet those hard-working volunteers who organise the wide range of Group activities and to thank them for all that they do. There are still more Groups I want to visit and I hope to complete this early in the New Year.

I have also had one-to-one meetings with the officers of the Area Council who have been kind enough to induct me into their specialist responsibilities.

I would like to pay tribute and to give my thanks to Peter Stone – our membership secretary – who retires from this role this year. Peter has been a staunch member of the Area Council since 2007 – initially as treasurer then more recently as membership secretary.

The highlight of the year for me was the Annual Area Picnic - hosted by the Didcot and Wallingford Group in the historic setting of the grounds of Wallingford Castle, blessed with beautiful weather and attended by around a hundred members drawn from all parts of the county.

I am sure you will find the following reports interesting and informative. They bear testimony to the continuing healthy state of rambling in this our county of Oxfordshire.

Jim Parke

SECRETARY

We have continued distributing email newsletters keeping our members informed of activities originating from the Area. Groups who can, if required, personalise the newsletter themselves which is proving a very useful way of keeping in touch.

In February 2019 I organised a first aid course for walkers organised by Red Cross. I liaised with the BBC for our stand for Countryfile and upgraded the OS and Long-distance path games. In July I attended a Senior Management meeting with the team from Central Office with Jim Parke.

Rosemary Williams

TREASURER

Income & Expenditure for the year ended 30 September 2019

	<u>2019</u> <u>£</u>	<u>2018</u> <u>£</u>
INCOME		
Allocation from Ramblers National Fund	10588	10846
Walks Programme Advertising	185	355
Other	0	0
TOTAL INCOME	10773	11201
EXPENSES		
Group (Funding)	2745	2565
Group (Other)	456	
Walks programmes	5325	4239
Walks related	0	0
Walks leader training	673	89
Newsletters/publicity	2315	2069
Publication/goods costs	0	0
Campaigns/casework	414	299
Practical work	1104	0
Fundraising costs	0	0
Meetings (inc. AGM)	460	190
Admin	520	415
Other	533	205
TOTAL EXPENSES	14544	10072
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	-3771	1129
Balance Sheet as at 30 September		
ASSETS		
Bank Balance	5772	9543
RESERVES		
Opening bank balance	9543	8414
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	-3771	1129
Closing bank balance	5772	9543
Designated Expenditure		-1013
TOTAL RESERVES	5772	8530
Reserves (% of annual expenditure)	51%	100%

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 2019 Oxfordshire Area organised a stand, on behalf of Ramblers, at the Countryfile Live at Blenheim Palace. The cost of £1,125 is included under the 'Newsletters/publicity' category.

During 2018-19 the aim was to significantly reduce our Reserves. This aim has been achieved and the Reserves on 30 September 2019 were £5,772. Our Reserves, expressed as a percentage of the annual expenditure (excluding Group Allocations), were 51%. The Ramblers Association guidelines are that the Reserves should be between 40% and 100% of annual expenditure.

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 2019.

Signed



Mr S A Kenner

Date

24 October 2019

Richard Birch

FOOTPATH SECRETARY

Committee: West Oxon, B&NO, B&K and D&W lack Footpath Officers. These posts need to be filled urgently.

Oxfordshire County Council

The Ramblers are represented at the Monitoring Group and the District Fora, which discuss strategy and important cases. All the Field Officer posts are now filled. The Definitive Map team is complete, but the Tasks Team is now short.



Definitive Map

79 cases are outstanding, down from 108. Four orders have been confirmed, 34 claims have been refused (31 for vehicular byways), three accepted, 13 orders made and 17 cases are being investigated. Eight orders were received on a single day, which makes London buses seem tame. Objections have been received to South Newington FP21 (a cul-de-sac along the river) and Mixbury FPs 31 and 32 through school grounds near Westbury; objections to determine the width of Cow Lane in West Hanney have been referred to the Secretary of State.

Volunteers are urgently needed to research documentary evidence for paths not on the Definitive Map, especially those documented in Enclosure and Tithe Awards and railway plans.

Planning and diversions

18 planning diversions and 15 OCC diversions are in progress. 17 orders have been confirmed. Since August I have spent at least 70 hours on diversion and modification orders, (including site visits), plus walk recces, minor clearance, meetings and research; those cases which are particularly complicated can involve four or more site visits. Three diversion orders have been referred back to the various councils for incorrect details and re-issued. An extinguishment order for a claimed path in Milton-under-Wychwood will not be opposed, as there is no practical way of saving it through the half-built houses; it looks as if the claim was made to preserve private access through the back gates of two properties to the alternative route. A diversion in Eynsham has been opposed as it routes the path into an active flood plain “for the safety of users”. The order has been made to divert a cul-de-sac path out of Soho Farms; the continuation to the road is “Private Road and Millway” in the Enclosure Award, and in any case the alternative route, provided that it can be properly drained, takes one out of the Soho Farms eyesore (I have seen better architecture in Maasai and Zulu villages; which is probably insulting Maasai and Zulu villages). The big diversion package around Chippinghurst, demanded by the landowners as a condition of allowing a bridge, has been refused as there is no legal means of making the orders as a package (a diversion can only be linked to an unconditional creation order, without any conditions attached to either, and the diversion and creation orders must be able to stand on their own merits). We have opposed the diversion of Oxford FP80 to an estate road at Warren Crescent, where proposed social housing was approved in 2008, which has attracted endless correspondence in the press. The diversion of FP7 through Little Rollright has been confirmed, where a previous owner had his wall built over the path allegedly by mistake (but I am certain that it was accidentally on purpose). I also receive planning applications which turn out to be nowhere near a right of way, or are adjacent to a right of way which is not affected; these are generally ignored except in the latter case where I comment that the path must be kept open. I still need to examine the plans, which are often difficult to decipher.

Obstructions and other matters



B&NO, Vale, Oxford City, B&K and T&W Groups have clearance teams. While on recces I find various obstructions, which get reported to the council. The photo (a selfie, to indicate scale) is an amusing case of a waymark directing walkers over an impassable fallen tree (fortunately there was a way round) over the county boundary near Skirmett. OCC have managed to track down the owner's land agent for Marcham BR17, where the major crossing over the River Ock has

been closed for years; it is now possible that perhaps maybe there might be progress. Sunningwell Parish Council has become involved in the quarry face on FP8, which has also been closed for a considerable time; the path bisects the deer farm. There has been an almighty row over the closure of Fawley FP12 just over the county boundary from Henley, where refusal by the landowner's agent to allow access for repairs has condemned walkers to a two-mile squeeze along the lethal A4155 or a massive detour via Hambleden or Roundhouse Farm and the Oxfordshire Way. Finally, my recce of the Vale Way revealed a number of fallen trees and a couple of stiles towards the Longcot end clearly designed for Goliath.

David Godfrey

MEMBERSHIP

	Sep-19	Sep-18	Sep-17	Sep-16	Sep-15	Sep-14	%increase 1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
BNO	290	282	281	268	280	254	2.8	3.2	8.2	3.6	14.2
B&K	180	175	190	179	164	167	2.9	-5.3	0.6	9.8	7.8
D&W	159	166	158	161	160	167	-4.2	0.6	-1.2	-0.6	-4.8
H&G	339	339	318	306	304	312	0.0	6.6	10.8	11.5	8.7
OX	288	284	305	303	313	319	1.4	-5.6	-5.0	-8.0	-9.7
T&W	175	179	171	153	155	140	-2.2	2.3	14.4	12.9	25.0
Vale	308	310	325	324	319	322	-0.6	-5.2	-4.9	-3.4	-4.3
Woxon	175	175	169	163	152	159	0.0	3.6	7.4	15.1	10.1
WW	133	132	160	149	141	136	0.8	-16.9	-10.7	-5.7	-2.2
23/30	56	63	75	76	92	91	-11.1	-25.3	-26.3	-39.1	-38.5
Un	120	97	85	63	60	35	23.7	41.2	90.5	100.0	242.9
	2,223	2,202	2,237	2,145	2,140	2,102	1.0	-0.6	3.6	3.9	5.8

Area membership increased marginally over the year but is still slightly below the 2017 level.

Peter Stone

PARISH PATH WARDEN NETWORK CO-ORDINATOR

This year has seen a significant turnover of staff in the Countryside Access Team at County with changes in personnel and location of officers. Two new field officers have been appointed, Beth Rutterford for Cherwell (Banbury & North Oxford) and Katie Walther for West Oxfordshire. 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 85% 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 at Wootton (Abingdon), attended by 15 PPWs. I thank Arthur McEwan-James (OCC Field Officer) and Liz Adams (OFS Chairman) for their assistance in running the day's programme. 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.

At the request of the County Council PPWs were asked to record their hours spent on PPW activities including time spent on recording path problems on CAMSweb for the period April 1st to September 30th. 55 PPWs participated in the survey (28% of the total) and recorded a total of 1291 hours, each PPW spending an average 24 hours on PPW activity over the 6 month period.

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 Jennifer Berrill (who replaced Bob Ward) - Thame and Wheatley, David Seed and Daryl Dixon - Didcot and Wallingford, Dave Cavanagh, John Gordon and John Orchard - Vale of White Horse, and Rosemary Clegg - West Oxfordshire.

I thank also Sarah Aldous (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 the start of their walkabout in Wootton.

Jim Parke

PUBLICITY – we currently have no publicity officer

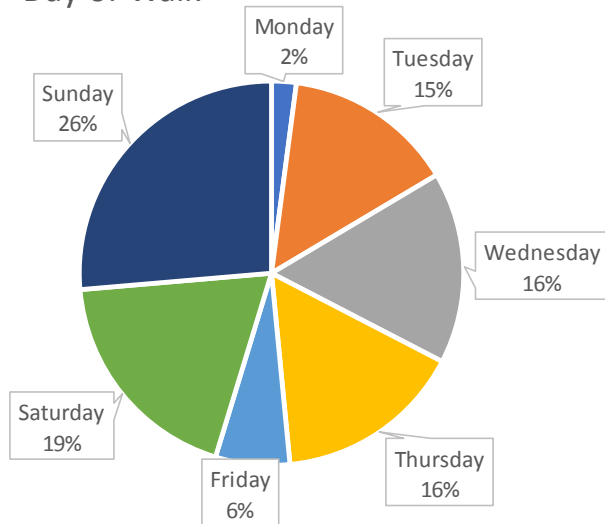
WALKS CO-ORDINATOR

For the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 the ten groups in Oxfordshire have produced a varied programme of 1,009 led walks. The walks varied in distance between 1 and 29 miles, covering a total of 7,236 miles, with 45% of the walks at the weekend. Nearly half (49%) of the walks were 'Moderate' but over the past few years there has been an increase in other grades of walks – 'Easy' (4%), 'Leisurely' (42%) and 'Strenuous' (5%). Many thanks to our walks leaders for producing such an excellent programme.

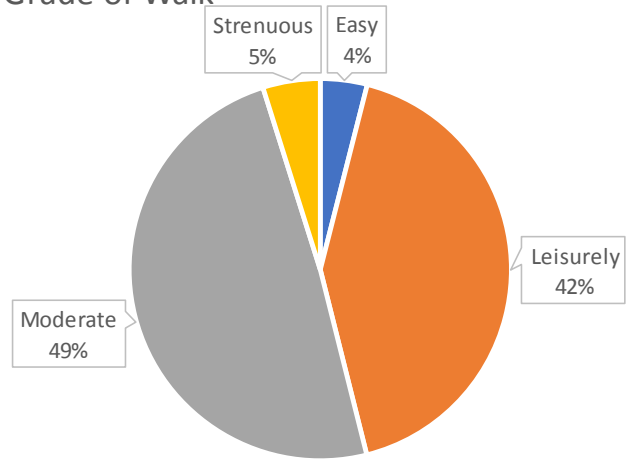
Two Walks Programme booklets, each covering 6 months, have been produced. The net cost of publishing and distributing 3800 walks booklets was £4,078 (£1.07 per booklet). Included with the Walks Programmes were Newsletters from Vale of White Horse, Henley & Goring, and Thame & Wheatley Groups.

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

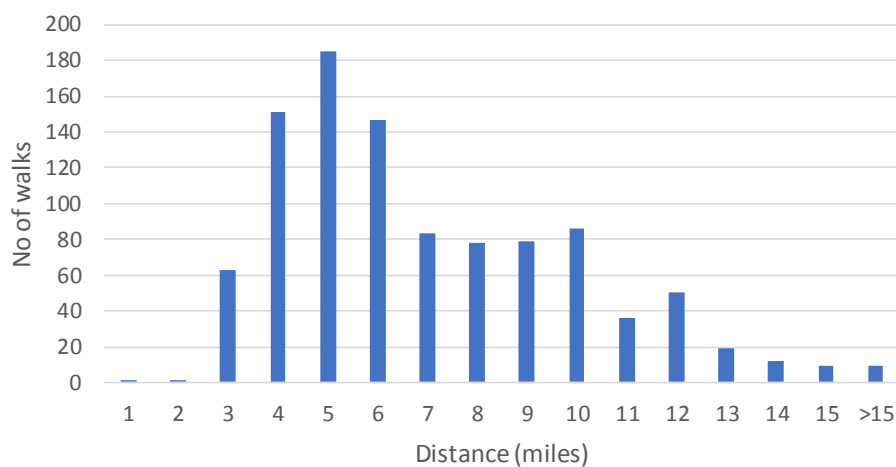
Day of Walk



Grade of Walk



No of Walks



Richard Birch

GROUP REPORTS

20s & 30s

This year we have organised a walk most weekends across the county as well as social events and weekends away. Thanks to Kelly for organising many socials, to David, Laura, Gareth and Callie for organising trips away and the walk leaders for organising walks. Here's to 2020 being another great year for walking.



Matthew Hutton

BANBURY & NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Our membership numbers have remained steady (284 compared to 287 last year and 283 a year earlier), despite a national decline in membership. Our retention rate is above the national average, suggesting that we offer what local people want, and our recruitment is matching our losses. 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. Sadly the year saw two active walk leaders (Bob Whittall and Betty Griffiths) die unexpectedly and a previous chair (Bob Clement) pass away aged 93.

The group has maintained a comprehensive and varied walks programme, a factor helping recruitment because our range of walks have wide appeal. We have added a monthly “short Sunday afternoon walk” to our programme, which is meeting the desire for a walk by those with commitments in the morning.

A selection of our walks is advertised regularly in various venues. These ads are aimed not only at reminding the general public of our existence but also for recruitment and as such often feature a range of easy walks through to more challenging distance walks.

In June we ran a stall at the Banbury Show again and I consider that we did better than usual with all thanks to our Show Team consisting of Ann, Marion, Martin and Roy. August saw our show team at CountryFile Live 2019 where once again we performed very well and certainly interested a few people even though we were not in a prime site. Our success in publicity is demonstrated by lots of new people on the walks.

We supply leaders for Middleton Cheney Health Walks and Aynho Health Walks, among others and we occasionally recruit from that them. Recently we had 44 people on one of these walks which could have been a control problem had not had other Ramblers leaders been present.

Thanks to an initiative from Head Office and co-operation from Richard Birch, The Cotswold Life has confirmed that they will be publishing two of our walks in their Christmas edition.

We offered our familiar Christmas/New Year festive walks, had a well-attended group Christmas meal, ran minibus trips and, in midwinter, experienced a trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands through the eyes of two of our members, then in the summer, enjoyed our now regular garden party for members.

Overall, a year where the group has continued to deliver strongly at a local level.

Martin Powell

BICESTER & KIDLINGTON

Bicester & Kidlington members have enjoyed another good year. Thank you to the Committee for all their hard work in making this possible. Thank you to Steve and Margaret Atkins who both served on the Committee but have moved to be near their daughter. Thanks you to Andrew for his fantastic newsletter. Our membership has increased to 182 slightly more than last years.

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. Our evening walks in the summer months, continued to be popular.

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 Hidden City of London
- Walk around Hyde Park



Christmas Lights Walk



We organised two coach outings: - One to Worcester where we walked around Elgar's City and then along the River and Canal. The other one was to St Albans where we visited the Roman site of Verulamium.

St Albans

In October, a small group of us went to the South Downs for a long weekend. We enjoyed walking around Petworth and Pulborough.



Other social events include, Cotswold Store open evening, pub lunches every other month and the Area Picnic at Wallingford Castle.

Area Picnic

and we have ordered another reprint

Our book “Short Walks Around Bicester”. Is still selling well

Some of us went to the Ramblers’ volunteer development days in Birmingham and Northampton. These offer 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.

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

Future Events

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 Lulworth Cove. If you have any ideas for future walks or events, please let us know.

Mary Gough

BLITZ & KLEAN

We have carried out work on 9 paths since the last AGM. Areas covered have included Launton, Chesterton, Wendlebury, Souldern, Islip and Bicester some more than once.

Nine of us have been involved in the work parties over the year with two regulars leaving for pastures new and two new starters joining us just at the right time. Another willing volunteer is waiting for the next venture. The average turn out tends to be 4 – 5 per session. We meet at the venue from 10 a.m. and work through until approx. 12.30 p.m. which includes the important tea break.

We received a request from a Local Scout group in August wanting to assist us with clearing a path and this took part in September. They have asked for a repeat performance in the Spring of 2020 In the region of 26 scouts took part and it appeared to be enjoyed by everyone.

Our working relationship with Oxfordshire County Council has continued to be good with a steady amount of work coming in. We have also been praised a number of times for the work we have undertaken.

Equipment wise we trained one volunteer for the brushcutter in December unfortunately they re-located from the area in August. The Brushcutter has recently been serviced and we are in the process of buying some new equipment, eye protection glasses and some shears for light vegetation.



I attended the Oxfordshire County Council Rights of Way Local Forum: Cherwell and West in October 2019 for the first time. This takes place twice per year and is an overview of paths in those areas and the work undertaken/issues arising. The next one is set for 22nd April 2020.

It has been a very enjoyable year. I think we have managed to achieve a good balance between getting the job done and having some fun along the way.

Ian Baldwin

DIDCOT & WALLINGFORD



In Feb 2019 we hosted a walk where several Area Council members and our Group Treasurer were joined by the new regional staff officer from Central Office. In April we made a provisional booking for 20 people at a hotel in Canterbury for September 2020. In June we hosted the Area Picnic in Wallingford Castle Gardens on a lovely day which about 100 Oxfordshire Ramblers attended. In July we had our Group Barbecue in the garden of our Treasurer on a lovely evening, attended by about 20 members. In September 22 of us spent a lovely weekend at HF Bourton-in-the-Water. We had great weather on both Friday and Saturday and although Sunday's walks

started and finished in the dry, they were rather wet in the middle. At our AGM last weekend David Baker was elected Chairman, John Rust was elected Membership Secretary and Peter Mobbs and Wendy Freemantle were elected as Committee Members.



Nick Morley

HENLEY AND GORING

In 2019 we organised 188 walks (slightly more than last year) with on average 13.5 participants (increase of 1). Henley & Goring Ramblers walked in total 17259 miles this year.

The maximum number of participants was 41 participants. 18 walks were over 12 miles and 89 walks were under 5.5 miles. We had 2 walks with mobility scooters.

We attended 4 shows this year: 2 Health-Wellbeing Shows, Countryfile Live and the Henley Show. The last one in September saw a particular large interest. Along with all other publications like the Henley Standard, Round & About, distribution of Short Walk Leaflets, our Get Walking Day in May, and our contribution toward the Henley Walking Festival we saw an increase of 7 in membership to 348. Our group have started to have a presence on Meetup and are doing a trial with putting some walks on there.

We gained a few more walk leaders, and made an effort to teach our walk leaders the benefits of electronic ways of creating & following routes like for example Viewranger. We have done some more stages of the Shakespeare's Way and finished the Palladian Way, and we started the Hardy Way in Dorset.

We kept our members updated via email, printed newsletters and 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, including trying to convert a footpath into a public right of way at Christmas Common. A protest walk was organised in an attempt to move forward replacement of a broken footbridge at Fawley in Buckinghamshire and was attended by more than 150 people and made the frontpage of our local paper.

Our trips are known far and wide as lovely walking holidays, and this year saw us going to Llanbedr in the Brecon Beacons, Cornwall, Lincolnshire, Western Ireland, Buxton in Derbyshire and Andalucia. Next year's trips are nearly full and will bring us to La Palma (Canary Islands), Howgills, Cricket St Thomas, Brendon, Dolomites, Pembrokeshire and Swanage. 2 of next years trips have 30 participants or more.

Our social committee organised 7 events. Best visited was the Get Walking Day with Tea and Cakes (92) participants). The others were Chantry House Lecture, BBQ, Carol Service, Walk Leaders meeting, Christmas dinner and AGM

Our Ramblers Income and Expenditure had a surplus of £146. All designated funds were used. Our bank balance 30/9 was £302. The main expenditure was printing of newsletters and walk programmes. Our social account remained approximately the same with a balance of £1550 at year end. We donated a gate from our surplus in this account.

Our committee currently consist of 11 people, with a vacancy for a publicity officer. However, one of the new committee members is planning to fill this vacancy over time.

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. (See photograph).

- 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 beside the River Thames from the Victoria Arms in Marston. (See photographs).



- Siobhan Stead-Ellis again organised volunteers for the OxClean litter picking event in March which has now expanded from Oxford to be a national initiative. They collected rubbish from The Oxford Academy (formerly the path near Peers School in Littlemore). To make a very satisfying end to the afternoon's work, an Oxford City Council employee arrived and quickly loaded the collections into the back of a truck for disposal. We plan to participate in the 28th-29th February 2020 event.
- Robin Harrison as Treasurer presented the accounts. Ramblers holidays awarded £100 from Oxford City Members booking

their holidays.

- Robin Harrison's work on the now published Jubilee Way will be put in the programme for the spring and summer booklet.
- The Oxford Group led a walk to the Annual Area Summer Picnic on June 23rd where all of the Oxfordshire Groups gathered at Wallingford Castle.
- Volunteers from the Oxford Group attended the Countryfile event at Blenheim from 1st-4th July.
- 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 (see photographs).
- 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 290 as of 31st October, an increase of 6 members from last year.
- Several members of the Committee will again 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 again voiced by the Chairman at an Area Meeting.



Elaine Steane

THAME & WHEATLEY

Walks 84 plus 12 on holiday, including special interest walks including BBONT reserves, Bluebells, Snowdrops, Railway heritage, Awayday- downs, canal locks of Devizes, London, Summer evening supper walks. We also contribute some walks to the Chiltern Festival of Walking, twice a year.

Social A team Quiz (42 participants) and supper in July and A Christmas lunch and cabaret (!) in December (51 booked).

Holidays The annual break in September was for 4 nights at Selworthy for 45 walkers. Two non-members joined Ramblers subsequently.

Footpaths Maintenance continues as required. Efficiency has increased now with a trained brushcutter team. PPW still vigilant for footpath inadequacies.

Publicity Walks programmes mailed to our 34 parishes and press, a monthly radio slot . Get Walking Day, the old format of a short walk, widely advertised, and chat over tea and cakes. Usually produces a trickle of new members.

AGM A reshuffle of the committee. with Chairman and Secretary standing down, two new members appointed. This to help maintain the freshness of thinking and vigour of action of the committee.

2019 was another excellent year for the group. 2020 is eagerly awaited.

Bob Ward

VALE OF WHITE HORSE

The group's led walks programme this year had 136 walks from 21 leaders. The number of walks has been increasing year on year with a roughly stable number of leaders so the walks/leader has increased. As well as our local walks we had a 3-day break in Dorset and an Awayday in the New Forest. We walked two named trails – The D'Arcy Dalton Way which runs 67 miles along western edge of Oxfordshire and the Lambourn Valley Way, 21 miles from the Uffington White Horse to Newbury. We hosted a visit by the London Blind Ramblers in August and had publicity stands at two local events, the Abingdon Clubs and Societies Day and the White Horse Show, the latter representing Oxfordshire Area. We tried a non-walking social event in a pub and it proved successful.

We run our own mini festival of winter walks, called the Vale Mince Pie Walks running throughout December into the start of January. All walkers get a mince pie. These have proven popular in recent years. There are eight planned for 2019. Those falling within the scope of the official festival of winter walks are listed there too. Since walkers appear to be successfully bribed with food we advertised hot cross buns for a walk in Easter Week and attracted some extra walkers.

Our path maintenance team, the Vale Path Volunteers, undertook 18 clearances this year mostly in the Vale. This year we added a long pole hedge trimmer to our two brushcutters, and this greatly increased our effectiveness when working on hedgerows. The team cleared just over 8 kilometres of hedgerow or woodland, and has spent around 340 person work hours doing it.

Our annual Navigation and Leadership Course which we run for Oxfordshire Area attracted 18 students , including a few from adjacent areas, some of which have already started leading walks.

I wish to thank all our volunteers for their work this year. Parish Path Wardens included, as well as path clearance and walk leading. We greatly value your work.



Vale walkers en route to Oxford along the Thames



Vale Path Volunteers on a working party

John Gordon

WEEKEND WALKERS

OWW has led a full walks programme this year with 54 walks covering a total of 525 miles, led by 26 walk leaders, including three new people/pairs. As usual, our walks have been in all corners of the county, and included forays into the Cotswolds and Chilterns, and a walk along the Thames with boat trip home. A small group enjoyed a splendid weekend away continuing last year's walk on the North Wales coast path. Many new members have commented on how warm and welcoming the group is.

The two initiatives set up last year to help walk leaders (a single walk leader's number from which calls are forward to the current walk leader in the preceding week; group subscription to OS maps online) continue to be useful to walk leaders.

Over the last year we have set up Twitter and Instagram accounts, which currently have small following. Our Facebook group has over 240 members, and a few individuals regularly post photographs which give a great flavour our walks. Facebook and the website continue to be our main source of new members. Membership has remained steady at about 135. Walk attendance is higher than last year (15–20 per walk) and post-walk socials are also proving more popular.

A new committee was elected at our AGM in November. Helen Barham, Chair for 3 years (plus 1 year without portfolio), Devinder Sivia, treasure for 8 years, and Anna Gillespie, social secretary for 2 years, stood down. We welcomed four new members on to the committee, including new Chair Ian Macpherson.

This year we celebrated the group's 10th anniversary, with a walk around Wolvercote and Wytham woods, and a stop-off to share a magnificent cake, followed by a meal. We also led a series of ten 10 mile birthday walks over the year, as an extra nod to our birthday. The 5-yearly Oxford Orbital has been postponed to 2020. Next year OWW will join the Chilterns and Berkshire Weekend Walkers groups to walk the Thames path across their respective counties.



Some pics above of walks in Oxford (port meadow), Cotswolds (bibury) and Sezincote (moreton).

The Harlech holiday, Chilterns (Antoinette's Walk) and THE cake!

Helen Barnham

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

Yet again the West Oxon Group has managed to put on the equivalent of one walk for every week, ranging in distance between 5 and 14.5 miles and either leisurely or moderate. (No strenuous ones this year.)

Also, we managed, sort of, to hold only 2 committee meetings in the year – The AGM, a January meeting, and then the usual thing of asking by e-mail in June if anyone had anything to discuss, and since there answer was “no”, we didn’t waste anyone’s time. However, on one walk some members of the committee were creative: 3 of us were on the same walk so we took the opportunity at the “coffee” break to discuss the weird rules about which members the Group can and cannot contact.

This year, I am giving a personal report related to what I have, and have NOT done.

In March, the leader of a walk was accused of having allowed the group to leave a gate open and let sheep out. The complaint came via the national website to Alan and thence to the walk leader who was actually me. NO we absolutely did not leave a gate open – since there were only 5 of us by this stage in the walk (2 had dropped out when they got near home), I would definitely have noticed. Some farmers just seem to have it in for the Ramblers – the farmer claimed the careless people could not possibly have been the dog walkers we saw!



And a suggestion to all our members that we keep an eye out for how we can use our knowledge to contribute to local consultations. The future so-called “Eynsham Garden Village” happens to be planned to go right

across the right of way that goes north of Eynsham towards Freeland. I noticed that the publicity photos for the project showed only open fields, but in fact the South end of that path (path 206/31) is a delightful wooded lane (with grass underfoot) – much used by local people for recreation. I have therefore challenged the developers to prove that they will actually, as they claim, be increasing the environmental gain, when building in the area. And OF COURSE, I sent them pictures of the lane taken from 2 directions. They have promised to get back to me when they are doing the detailed plans!! – watch this space.



Judith Wardle

