



RAMBLERS

Oxfordshire

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2021

WIMBORNE KELOKI FOR THE LEYK 50ST



CHAIR



It has been my privilege and honour to be the chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers Area Council for the past year. The year 2021 has seen the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic with its restrictions on travel, social activities and general life. While it has always been possible to take solitary walks in the countryside, we were only able to restart group-lead walks at the end of March.

I was heartened by the quick reaction of Oxfordshire groups and their walks organisers in resuming the walks programme once led walks were allowed, Members are to be congratulated on adapting to the new booking arrangements which have had to be implemented, and observing the rules for safe walking.

Your Area Council met 4 times during the year following the now familiar Zoom procedure for holding meetings. The most significant issue which the Council considered has been whether or not to resume publication of the twice yearly Area Walks programme. Area Council had already agreed not to publish the normal printed Winter Walks programme October 2020 to March 31st 2021 because of the uncertainty of being able to run it. Area Council has given much time to debating the issue because it has been necessary to use on-line information on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website. This has proved to be a very popular, efficient, and moreover, flexible way of communication with members and some of the Groups expressed a strong preference for this method of advertising walks to continue. On the other hand, it was clear that some members would prefer a resumption of the 6 month- Area printed programme. However, the Area Council considered the issue at its meeting on January 11th and voted not to continue to publish the 6 month Area walks programme.

During the year your Council has appointed John Gordon as Area Vice Chair. I would like to thank most heartily all Area Officers and Group Representatives for their support and contribution to the running of Oxfordshire Ramblers; to the members who volunteer to lead the walks and who also engage in other activities - our Parish Path Wardens and our Path Maintenance teams. To you all our gratitude and hearty thanks.

I know you will find the following reports interesting and informative. In spite of all the current problems, they bear testimony to the continuing healthy state of Rambling in this our county of Oxfordshire.

Jim Parke

SECRETARY



This year we have had meetings online which has proved to be extremely successful with most meetings having all members from Area Council attending. Fortunately, we agreed to continue with the zoom subscription because again we have Covid spreading and meeting in groups is not advised so we will be holding the AGM virtually as well as Area meetings.

I have in the past year attended courses by Central Office via Zoom which consist of using the Access database, the rebranding of the Ramblers Logo and recruiting new members all of which I have found interesting and informative and attended cluster meetings. The use of Zoom in having meetings and courses has managed more members to attend courses where otherwise they wouldn't have been able to, this is one of the positive sides of COVID.

Rosemary Williams

Treasurer's Report



. Income & Expenditure for the year ended 30 September 2021

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2020</u>
	£	£
INCOME		
Allocation from Ramblers National Fund	5372	10470
Walks Programme Advertising	0	220
Bank Interest	0	0
TOTAL INCOME	5372	10690
EXPENSES		
Group Allocations	2681	2424
Group (Other)	0	64
Walks programmes	0	2310
Walks related	0	0
Walks leader training	0	108
Newsletters/publicity	1204	1041
Publication/goods costs	0	0
Campaigns/casework	370	215
Practical work	1939	268
Fundraising costs	0	0
Meetings (inc. AGM)	0	78
Admin	44	145
Other	40	0
TOTAL EXPENSES	6277	6652
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	-906	4038
Balance Sheet as at 30 September		
ASSETS		
Bank Balance	8904	9810
RESERVES		
General Fund brought forward	9810	5772
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	-906	4038
TOTAL RESERVES	8904	9810
Reserves (% of annual expenditure)	223%	236%

The Area's income was from the allocation of funds from the Ramblers Association. Significantly less funding was requested for this year (2020-21) to reduce our reserves, following reduced expenditure due to COVID.

Routine expenditure included the allocation of funds to the Oxfordshire Ramblers Groups (£2681) and, under the 'Newsletters/publicity' category, the South East Walker publication (£989). In addition, we donated £952 to the Chiltern Society for two kissing gates, and purchased a further brushcutter (£777), both included in the 'Practical work' category.

Our Reserves (£8904), remain high due to the reduction in activities/expenditure resulting from ongoing COVID restrictions.

Our funding request for next financial year 2021-22 is £2230 less than our expected expenditure to reduce our reserves to within the desired limits.

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 2021.

Mr S A Kenner
Independent Examiner

Stuart Kenner has confirmed that he will continue as our Independent Examiner for the 2021-22 financial year.

Richard Birch

FOOTPATH SECRETARY



The Ramblers are represented at the Monitoring Group and the District Fora, which discuss strategy and important cases.

Definitive Map: 70 cases are on the list, eight of which were received this year and 13 during 2020. Of these cases 27 cases are being investigated, four have been determined (three accepted and one under appeal). Fourteen have had modification orders made, of which eight have received objections. A further nine have been confirmed. Three cases from 2017 and 22 more recent cases are shown on the list as not been started. Since the beginning of the year 11 orders have been confirmed. There are 28 diversion cases on

the list.

Committee: West Oxfordshire and B&NO lack Footpath Officers. These posts need to be filled urgently.

Planning and diversions: Three planning diversions and 15 OCC diversions are in progress. 7 planning orders (five made by districts) and ten OCC diversion orders have been confirmed this year.

Obstructions: B&NO, Vale, B&K, Oxford City and T&W Groups have clearance teams.

Across the county: The hippopotamus-bath on Old Marston FP3 has now been surfaced with hardcore (photo). A fallen tree on Woodeaton FP5 (in the wood) which I reported in September 2020, and required serious limbo practice, was cleared only a year later.

The proposed diversion of Tetsworth FP65 at Attington Stud is likely to be confirmed; the impossible stiles have been repaired (the one at the road, which belongs to the neighbour, after the threat of a Section 130 order) and the one on the diversion route will be replaced by a gate. The remaining Impenetrables belong to the neighbouring landowners; we hope to have the worst of these dealt with as a follow-up. The whole area is a mess; I recorded over 20 obstructions in just two site visits.

The diversion of Oxford FP80 to the road at Warren Crescent has been confirmed after the County Council agreed to dedicate a path run alongside Lye Valley nature reserve.

The proposed diversion and creation on Noke BR10, which would remove the necessity for Green Belt Way walkers to brave the masochists' paradise of walking along the B4027, was objected to by BHS on the ground that horses would be frightened by the noise and sight of heavy lorries on the other side of the hedge. Having visited the site and been almost blinded by sunlight reflected from car bonnets, I must agree with them. Alternative routes have been suggested; watch this space.

There are proposals for diversions at Perrots Hill Farm in North Leigh, where the farmyard is plagued with cyclists interfering with the movement of sheep. The proposed diversion of FPs 20 and 38 would cure this, but a diversion of FP19 is also proposed which has nothing to do with the farmyard and would lose the important woodland section.

We have objected to a proposal at Coldron Mill to move the path away from the house, as the proposed route is a tunnel. The remainder of the proposal would send another footpath over the existing bridge instead of through the lake; however, there is a third path in the lake which needs to be diverted to complete the original triangle.

Cropredy FP7, created by the M40 side roads order, terminates at the foot of the pillar of the M40 bridge owing to a drafting error (anyone fancy a 30ft climb?) and there is a diversion proposal which would correct this.

The Great Deluge of October 3-5 2020 was followed by the Christmas floods, which coincided with lockdown. The bridleway to Kidlington was completely flooded on December 25; a photo of the bridleway sign north of the appropriately-named Water Eaton Manor appeared in *South East Walker*. Floods came again in February, and Noah finally got his dove back around the end of March. On October 31 came a big storm, followed by two bigger ones, resulting in several fallen trees. I encountered one of these on a recce; it took just over half an hour to clear before I could proceed.

A visit to Rotherfield Greys FP21 to check on a stile which had been the target of years of complaints was rewarded by the sight of not one but two spanking new stiles on this path (photo of the stile at the junction with RB32).

David Godfrey

MEMBERSHIP

	Group	As at end September 2020	As at end June 2021	As at end September 2021	Change over last 3 mths	% Change over last 3 mths		Change over last 12 mths	% Change over last 12 mths
	Banbury & NO	299	299	296	-3	-1.0		-3	-1.0

	Oxford	281	283	287	4	1.4		6	2.1
	Vale	309	305	318	13	4.3		9	2.9
	West Oxon	174	186	192	6	3.2		18	10.3
	Bicester & K	192	180	189	9	5.0		-3	-1.6
	Didcot & W	166	168	177	9	5.4		11	6.6
	Henley & G	336	350	363	13	3.7		27	8.0
	Thame & W	183	191	192	1	0.5		9	4.9
	Hike Oxon	57	54	53	-1	-1.9		-4	-7.0
	Week-end W	139	137	147	10	7.3		8	5.8
	Others	110	97	96	-1	-1.0		-14	-12.7
	Total	2,246	2250	2310	60	2.7		64	2.8

Oxon membership continues to increase slowly but steadily. There is no indication that the pandemic has had a significant impact on membership numbers this year.

Wendy Mannix

PARISH PATH WARDEN NETWORK CO-ORDINATOR

In spite of periods of Lockdown it has been possible for Parish Path Wardens to go out into the Oxfordshire countryside throughout the year to undertake snapping, clipping and to report on any path problems in their areas. Including the parishes covered by the Chiltern Society and the Cotswold Wardens, nearly 90% of the county's 320 Parishes are now covered by a PPW or path representative.



There has been a change to the personnel in the Countryside Access Service. Steve Tabbitt was appointed Principal Officer - Countryside Access. Sarah Aldous who had been Acting Principal reverted to her substantive role as Technical Officer.

It is noteworthy that at present there are nearly 4000 path problems listed on the County's database.

This year the annual PPW workshop was held on September 24th at Eynsham Village Hall. Nearly 30 PPWs attended, drawn from the various Rambler Groups in the county. The main speaker was Sarah Aldous who gave an illustrated talk on the work of the Countryside Service. This was followed by a practical session involving a walk along local footpaths looking at typical issues a PPW might need to deal with. The PPWs were split into two groups with one group lead by Katie Walther, Countryside Access Officer for West Oxfordshire. In the afternoon Katie gave a talk on the CAMSweb reporting procedure.

David Seed, one of the two Local Coordinators for parishes in the Didcot and Wallingford Rambler group, indicated that he wished to retire from that role in the Autumn. I am still without a Local Coordinator for Banbury and North Oxfordshire and would be pleased from any member who would be interested in filling the vacancy.

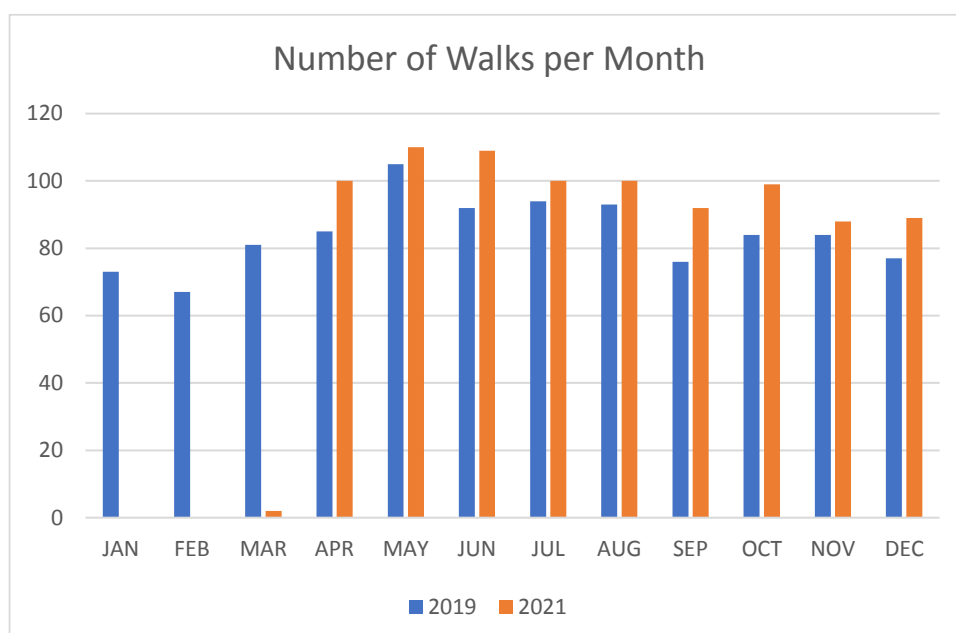
I wish to express my particular thanks to the 12 PPW Local Coordinators for their support in looking after their teams, and to Sarah Aldous for sending to me the twice-yearly lists of path problems in the parishes for distribution via the LCs to their respective PPW teams.

Jim Parke

WALKS CO-ORDINATOR



2021 has once again been a year disrupted by the pandemic, leading to significant changes in the way that we plan and publicise our led walks. For the first three months the Country was in lockdown with no Ramblers walks. It wasn't until 29 March that we were able to restart led walks. Ramblers walks were exempt from the 'rule of six' as they were classed as organised sport and physical activity. However in order to obtain walkers' details, and to make it easier to maintain social distancing on walks, most Walk Leaders continued with a booking process and many continued to limit the maximum number of walkers.



The bar chart compares the number of walks per month in 2021 with the walks in 2019 before the pandemic started. Remarkably, over the past 9 months, there has been more walks each month this year than before the pandemic, with 12% more walks overall. Initially, during April and May, this was influenced by some Groups choosing to limit the number of walkers on each walk but putting on additional walks when they became fully booked. For example, Oxon Weekend Walkers organised twice as many walks during April and May than normal.

As restrictions eased through the summer months there was less restriction on the maximum number of walkers and fewer walks requiring booking. Less than half of the walks in December required booking. Despite this return to near-normal walking conditions the number of walks each month has remained high. This has mainly been due to Henley and Goring Group and Bicester & Kidlington Group who have organised 45-75% more walks respectively over the past couple of months.

A major change since the pandemic started has been the suspension of the Oxfordshire Walks Booklet. Following Ramblers guidance, Oxfordshire Ramblers has publicised walks only online on the Ramblers websites. In addition, most Groups have emailed to members a printable version of their Group's walks for the following month. More recently we have produced a printable, monthly listing of all Oxfordshire walks (in the format of the Walks Booklet) which has been very well received by members. A decision is expected early in 2022 as to whether to have a Walks

Booklet in the future, or whether to rely on the on-line walks listings together with emailed monthly reports.

Richard Birch

WALKING ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS OFFICER

OxCam Arc

The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway was cancelled in February. The proposed developments, especially the one million houses, are still proceeding being specifically pushed by developers. For further information on the campaign against the arc proposals visit the following website: www.stopthearc.org.

Great Wolf Development, Chesterton

This is a hotel and leisure development on a golf course adjacent to Chesterton which will have a significant impact on the surrounding area. The area objected together with hundreds of other objectors. Unfortunately, the inspector at the inquiry completely ignored the local objections and allowed the appeal by the developer against the refusal of planning permission by Cherwell DC.

Waterstock

Speculators want to turn Waterstock Golf Course into an industrial hub – this would destroy 200 acres, (or 150 football pitches) of Oxford Green Belt. And they have options on 300 more acres of adjacent land. Apart from the loss of green belt this development will have a major impact on an important wild life area. It will also affect the Oxfordshire Way. The area is supporting the local campaign against the proposals. Thame & Wheatley group is represented on the local campaign group.

Britchcombe Farm Camping Site, Uffington

The new owners have a proposal to turn a small casual summer campsite into a major year round site including static caravans. It will have a major impact on the AONB and important pre-historic sites such as the Uffington White Horse. The area is supporting the campaign against the proposals. Dave Cavanagh is representing the RA on the campaign group.

Access – Nothing to report.

Terry Pollard

WEBSITE

The general structure of the Area website is unchanged, but a new menu item was added to the Area walking menu being “Monthly Reports”. This is a hark-back, as it were, to the format of the walks as printed in the booklet. These are published monthly, obviously, and the list is here:

<https://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/patrick/monthly-reports.html>

There are now two ‘backup’ Super Users, John Gordon and Richard Birch.

Richard manages the process of publishing the Monthly Reports entirely on his own using his Super User privileges.

Pat Lonergan





RAMBLERS

Oxfordshire

GROUP REPORTS

BANBURY & NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

I must start by thanking the committee. Without their willingness to adapt to remain Covid compliant, we would not be in the strong position of offering a full programme of group walks.

Following a partial resumption of walks in the summer of 2020 until another lockdown in December, walks resumed again in April. In many cases we ran walks that had originally been submitted for 2020. The walks programme consisted of Wednesday afternoons, Sunday mornings, plus summer Thursday evenings. In October, fast paced Saturday morning walks resumed. We continue with end of month Sunday afternoon walks plus some Friday morning shorter walks.

The pandemic and changing guidelines from government and from Ramblers nationally has forced more flexible and shorter-term planning. Previously there was near frantic activity in January and July to complete a 6 monthly printed walk programme booklet, requiring walks up to 9 months in advance. Currently we are updating walks at least monthly, which allows us great control but demands administrative time. The Oxfordshire Area Committee are considering whether to revive a printed booklet; in the meantime, since October we have published monthly printable lists of all group and area walks (www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/banbury-north-oxon/walking/walks.html).

Some walk leaders have not been able to participate this year, though we hope that the more flexible approach and reduced restrictions will encourage some to return. However, we have had 30 different walk leaders since April. On behalf the committee and all members, a big thank you.

However, there has been some difficulty getting back to the pre-Covid standard of Sunday walks: there appears to have been a shift of the preferences of walk leaders, fewer B&NO members are turning out and fewer members from other Oxfordshire groups are attending. Are we just seeing the consequence of how people have adjusted after time spent under Covid restrictions?

Membership has held up well, with 47 new and 5 returning members over the last year balancing 47 lapsed memberships. We currently have 293 members, 5 up on a year ago. 3 of the departures were transfers to other local groups.

Financially, with spending restricted by the pandemic, the bank balance rose above an appropriate level (£500). With no other upcoming expenditure, the committee decided to purchase and install two kissing gates near Tadmarton for £842, to replace stiles in need of maintenance. Arrangements were made with Oxfordshire County Council to facilitate this. This matter will appear in next year's accounts.

Bank balance at 1 st October 2020:	£660.90
Income: Ramblers' Association	£387.00
RWH Travel Ltd	£30.00
Expenditure:	nil

Bank balance at 30th September 2021: £1,077.30

We publicised activities in partnership with a housing development, a retirement home and a commercial organisation, all in Banbury. Notices of walks are published in local media, also we have posters at supermarkets & libraries.

Covid restrictions prevented social events.

For the year ahead it would be great if one or two new members would be prepared to join the committee. Currently, Parish Path Warden Co-ordinator and Footpath Officer roles are vacant.

Stuart Dyer

BICESTER & KIDLINGTON

Since the lifting of restrictions on Covid 19 many of our members started walking again, numbers per walk increased and we continued with “the need to book system”. This was mainly due to restricted car parking opportunities in the smaller villages. Our main challenge has been the shortage of Walk Leaders. The requirement to keep records and complete forms appears to be a disincentive for some. One of our main aims for next year is to recruit new Walk Leaders, we have appealed to our regular walkers to go on to the Assemble website and look at the training opportunities offered to potential walk leaders.

We held a recruitment day in July at the Cotswold Outdoor shop in Bicester, several of the committee turned out to help on the day. As a result a Taster Walk was organised at the Tusmore Estate near Bicester, this was well attended and 2 new members were signed up. Our publicity officer has been busy organising walks which can be reached using public transport. Several of the people who came to chat to us on the recruitment day said they couldn't drive, so it is our intention to help with this situation. An Oxford City walk took place in October for those who rely on, or prefer to use public transport.

Our summer Friday evening walks proved to be popular again. The opportunity to meet for a pub meal following the walk was well received and we have been asked to organise these walks again next year. A BBQ was organised in July as a thank you to Mary Gough who served as Group Chair for eight years. (this was delayed due to Covid restrictions)

Cotswold Outdoor Store in Bicester hosted a night in August for our members, 20% discount was on offer including stock that was in the sale. It is hoped to repeat this again and other groups will be invited to join us.

A minibus trip from Bicester to Bedford took place in September. We discovered that there are many famous people associated with Bedford among them John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. After a short stroll around the town we walked along the river bank and then back to town for lunch, 5 miles in total.

Our AGM took place on 6th November in Islip Village Hall at 2.00pm. A five mile walk was organised in the morning from Islip to Noke via Woodeaton and back to Islip. A speaker from the RSPB Otmoor Reserve was our guest speaker prior to the formal business of the AGM. Barry Whitehead, our Treasurer for eight years retired, and was replaced by Steve Hawkins who is a regular walker. Mary Gough was elected to the group committee.

Russell Thompson

BLITZ & KLEAN

Nothing to report

Ian Baldwin

DIDCOT & WALLINGFORD

Chairman's Report: This is my second year as Chairman and though we have seen a general increase in the walks program slowly getting back to pre-pandemic levels I hope you understand the committee's decision to hold the AGM by ZOOM. Though the year has been disrupted by the Pandemic we did however manage to hold a successful BBQ in the Summer and I would like to extend my thanks to Sue White for hosting the event. The other normal event being the short break in September did also take place though not as originally planned. Nick will outline details in his report below. Richard has again done an excellent job of organising the walks program for both the group and the area and I would like to extend my thanks to him for what has again been a difficult program due to changing government guidelines. It has also been nice to see a small increase in members this year, more below, though I'm not sure that this has been reflected in an increase in these new members actually joining our walks. I would also like to record my thanks to the committee members, particularly Sue White who has been the group treasurer for many years but has unfortunately decided to step down from that role this year, though she has agreed to remain on the committee for the time being, John for dealing with new members and Nick for managing the weekend away.

Membership Secretary Report: The current membership is 180 which is up 28 from this time last year and includes both new members and members moving from other Rambler groups, But does not include members whose membership had lapsed until reminded of same, or those who have not renewed their membership, which would show the group has increased by 11.

Would suggest that Covid pandemic has shown people the benefits of walking for both health & mental health. The groups leaders and walks leaders are doing a good job, and although this gives me more work, my thanks goes to them.

Treasurers Report: The accounts for 2020/21 show there is very little activity, apart from holiday payments. These take up a lot of space but have nothing to do with the running of our group. The small amounts spent on administration in the current year were for stamps, some stationery and a Zoom licence for last year's AGM. These were funded by Head Office.

All the holiday payments were funded by members (self funding) and were for a weekend away in Lulworth which was cancelled and as a deposit for a substituted venue in the Cotswolds. No payments for the weekends away are ever funded by Head Office.

We had quite a healthy balance in the bank on 30th September, 2021 of £337.67. This compares with our balance at the end of the financial year in 2020 of £155.45.

I am pleased to be able to hand over a comfortable balance to the next treasurer for the group.

Social Secretary Report: After a very difficult 2020, when all social activities were forbidden, 2021 has been much more open.

We were able to hold our BBQ in Sue and Terry's garden and it was great to see friends again. Paul was our sanitised chef and a fun evening of socialising safely was achieved.

After having our long planned weekend away to Lulworth cancelled by HF, at 4 weeks notice, I swung into action to find an alternative. 11 of us originally signed up to go to the Cotswolds for just over 24 hours. 2 walks were planned and a lovely overnight stay arranged at 'The Pudding Club' Hotel. Due to various injuries and illnesses 7 of us eventually made the trip.

In 2022 we will hopefully hold our BBQ and enjoy a weekend away in Canterbury.

And then we need to look again at new dates for Lulworth.

David Baker

HENLEY AND GORING

The majority of the year our group has been able to walk in groups, keeping to the restrictions as laid out by the government. The number of participants on walks have been steadily growing, helped by more people being fully vaccinated. The number of walks on offer has been higher than usual, most likely due to switching to a monthly instead of a 6 months programme, which walk leaders find easier to plan. From April 2021 to January 2022, we had on average 24 walks per month, with a peak of 29 in May 2021, whilst the lowest count was 20 in October 2021. The variety in distances on offer has also increased with much appreciated regular 3 mile easy walks and more walks longer than 10 miles. Attendance is excellent with an average of 12 during the summer months and 10 during the winter to date.

With more people interested in walking we focussed on informing the public in weekly and monthly local newspaper and magazines, meetup, Facebook, our website and on other channels, resulting in a growth in membership from 330 to 370, higher then ever before. We kept our members updated via email and monthly electronic newsletters, each time with lots of updates on Covid and other walk news. We have updated our website and Facebook page and encourage people to post. Our meetup group has grown from just over a 100 to 147 members.



Our committee functions well, with many members also helping out, and we have also gained some new walk leaders.

In this year we were able to go ahead with 3 of our social activities: our AGM Dinner in November, with 70 people attending, 70 people attending the yearly BBQ in August, and 27 people attending the Last of the Summer Wine Evening walks in Stoke Row. Unfortunately, the Carol Service in December, the Chantry House Lecture in January and the Get Walking Day in May all had to be cancelled due to Covid.

Our main Social Event Co-ordinator and Caterer June Cross serving delicious food during the AGM dinner, with Gill Heaven, Graham Cross helping out as some of the other many other volunteers (photo Joan Clark)

With regards to trips, we were lucky enough to go ahead with a trip to Scotland in May, a trip to Cricket St Thomas in July, and the trip to the Lake District in October. All trips were well attended with 25, 15 and 30 people respectively. Trips to Howgills, Dolomites and Tuscany had to be postponed or cancelled.

As last year, our Trips Coordinator and Treasurer Peter, has helped with reorganising our trips and dealing with cancellations and changes in booking. As a result of fewer social activities, less money has come into our accounts, but we still managed well, and were again able to donate a gate and purchase wine glasses for the social activities.

A number of footpath issues were dealt with, and a big effort was made to identify many lost paths (175 were identified, of which 17 listed as valuable to put forward, with a cumulative length of almost 16 km). We worked closely with the South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers (run under the authority of the Chiltern Society) as in previous years. Many work sessions were organised with many volunteers from our Ramblers group helping out, including some new volunteers. We continue publishing the Chiltern Society Sunday walks.

HIKE OXFORDSHIRE

Unfortunately due to the coronavirus restrictions we didn't manage to lead many walks after our 2020 AGM until May and our 2021 trip to France was cancelled altogether.

With a relatively quiet summer our walks picked up in the autumn and we are looking forward to starting to organise more trips and socials in 2022 with a trip away to Snowdonia in April 2022 on the cards.

Fingers crossed we can do more walks and socials as well next year!

Matthew Hutton

OXFORD CITY

Despite all the odds, the walks have continued and been greatly enjoyed. Greg Burton has done a sterling job in coordinating the walks in a challenging year. Thanks to all the individuals concerned. (See photograph 1).

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 previously purchased by Robin Harrison on behalf of the Committee have augmented this work.



The pre-AGM walk in December along part of the Jubilee Way (amid snowflakes) also included a visit to the Hinksey Meadows, part of which are threatened by the Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The usual springtime OxClean event was cancelled but in June a multi-disciplinary group of us litter-picked in Magdalen Wood West. Items collected among the ancient oak trees included an iron bedstead, a bucket of broken glass and two televisions. We shared a post-work party tea together .



Robin Harrison as Treasurer presented the accounts. Allocation of funds from the generous bequest of Keith Holly has been made. The remainder of the bequest is to be used in the 2021/22 year by including a bench in Cutteslowe Woodland Trail and more waymarking on the Jubilee Way.

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.

Rosemary Williams, as the Group's Webmaster, has reported back that 261 Members are now on email, with 64 on Facebook as a private group.

Jane Foster as Group Secretary has ably continued her role. I thank her for her vital contribution. We thank David Godfrey for his continued input and expertise to the Committee. Membership as of 30th November is 288, an increase of 6 members from last year.

Elaine Steane was invited to provide an audio clip for the hard-hitting 'Meat the Future' exhibition at the Oxford's Natural History Museum on the likely environmental benefits of reducing the numbers of cattle bred for meat consumption, and promoting insects as a protein replacement). Elaine Steane, having taken up the Membership Secretary role in 1990, then the Chairmanship role about 20 years ago, put in her resignation at the AGM. She expressed how much she had enjoyed the role but wanted to gain more time for new projects.



Keith Frayn expressed his wish to step down from his role as Path Wardens Coordinator after five years of skilled contribution. He will continue to work in the background until a replacement is found. The well-attended AGM thanked them for their input.

Tony Dale volunteered to take on the Chairmanship for the next year, and Rosemary Williams the Membership Secretary role.

The AGM concluded by a very interesting talk on 'Physical activity, walking and health' by Professor Adrienne Hardman.

Elaine Steane

THAME & WHEATLEY

Despite the difficult year, our Ramblers group has thrived. This has been due to the large numbers of our members who have been willing to volunteer in various capacities to make sure that we continue to have lots of walks as well as social events. Our membership is just over 190, a slight increase from last year. Amongst that number we have around 20 walk leaders.

Once organised walks were permitted again at the end of March, we were able to swing into action very quickly and reactivate the booking system that we had used previously. However this was fairly quickly dispensed with once it was not a requirement as we found that booking in advance did not suit everyone. Since organised walks started again we



have had around 90 led walks and just less than 80 of our members have been on at least 1 walk

Our summer social took the form of an outdoor quiz followed by a supper cooked by some of our members.

We had a very successful holiday on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors and a Christmas lunch together in a hall in one of the villages in our area.



We managed to hold our AGM in person and our special cake to commemorate the group's 25th anniversary was cut by two of our original members (Janet Noyce and Mike Smith).

During the year we have had a very active group undertaking footpath maintenance tasks. We have been provided with an additional brush cutter from Area funds and now have several people waiting to be trained to use it. For the first time we will continue hacking and chopping throughout the winter, rather than concentrating only on the growing months



Linda King

VALE OF WHITE HORSE



In a second year of lockdowns the group adapted to new times. In the spring lockdown I was aware of many more members going buddy walking. This started in pairs and gradually increased as the restrictions relaxed. Once Ramblers gave the go ahead for group walks, we hit the ground running. Almost every week since restarting in April we have had three led walks. We had a few cancellations

due to weather and inability to replace an unavailable leader, but we also had a few weeks with more than three walks. And our members turned out too. Average numbers were up on our long-term averages; by a lot just after lockdown, returning nearer to average in summer when there were other things to do. We really appreciate our volunteer leaders. We have unfortunately lost a few due to injury, illness, and relocation so would greatly appreciate any members who could lead a walk to come forward. Support will be given.

Although it was back up to the level of previous years in number of walks, our programme didn't have all the special events and walks that add spice to our local walks. We had no linear walks using car sharing or public transport. We had no multi-day trips and our awayday to Avebury was cancelled due to threat of thunderstorms. We did not take the risk of planning physical social events until our AGM in November.

The booking system was a bit smoother this year and although it took effort, there were also advantages; one could start a walk early once everyone booked had turned up and changes and cancellations could be disseminated easily.





Our path maintenance team, The Vale Path Volunteers, held 18 working parties in the calendar year; excellent given that we only started in April and had to avoid some paths because we were already in bird-nesting season. This year we celebrated our 100th working party with a clearance in Drayton where we had a celebration cake.

I'd like to thank all our volunteers: the committee; walks leaders; the walk bookers; the path maintenance team; and the parish path wardens. You are appreciated – keep

up the good work

John Gordon

WEEKEND WALKERS

Last year's Oxon Weekend Walkers AGM was on Nov 8th 2020 and another COVID lockdown had just started. From November to early December only two people were allowed to meet for exercise, so it was a time for recces and private walks with friends from the group.

During December, our group walks could resume. Our walk leaders could decide number limits using our booking system, this meant we often had two or even three walks on a Sunday, and an

extra workload for the
Walks Programme
manager.



On Dec 25th our first ever Christmas Day walk provided an alternative for 9 walkers who were unable to have a traditional Christmas due to the COVID restrictions.

During Jan, Feb and March 2021 we were

again in a tough lockdown that restricted all group walks so we were back to private walks for just two people. During this period group Quizzes, charades and even scattergories provided a substitute to meeting on walks until many COVID Restrictions were eased. On March 29th we resumed group walks with restricted numbers which often meant multiple walks on a Sunday.

By June some walk leaders were happy to allow larger groups and on June 6th we hosted a walk for over 20 from Chipping Norton, our largest group walk for over 15 months.

By mid August walk leaders had the option to start "no need to book - just turn up" and many walks since then have been on that basis, but still with the option for walk leaders to use the booking system. So, in summary, my personal thanks go to the committee, the walk leaders and all the individuals on the walks but especially to our walks programme manager who has taken on so much extra work to keep us all going during such a difficult period.

Amazingly, despite everything this year we delivered around 64 walks - more than in the previous year. During the pandemic, our membership numbers have stayed pretty constant however since lockdown ended, we are gradually increasing our membership which is up by nearly 6% for the year.

Ian Macpherson

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

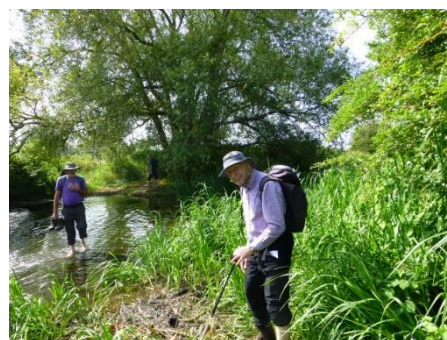
It is apparent that walking, especially in the sort of attractive countryside to be found in West Oxfordshire, has continued to be very popular, including with people who have no contact with the Ramblers' Association. I note that online forums and Facebook Groups quite often refer to the state of footpaths – often to complain about the mud or the amount of dog poo, but also celebrating what they gain from walking. There seems to be a lack of understanding about who is responsible for maintaining the actual paths – as opposed to gates and stiles. Perhaps, we, and other Oxfordshire Ramblers' Groups should create publicity about who to inform regarding paths where there are problems underfoot, but also encourage walkers to clear small vegetation, such as brambles & nettles, themselves.

Some would-be walkers have experienced problems with getting the phone numbers of leaders to book – apparently the “app” runs the number for a landline into that for a mobile. Many people, including those who were joining our Group for the first time, have said how much they would prefer having the booklet of walks – especially true for people in more rural areas whose access to the internet is unreliable.



I had an e-mail via national Ramblers Association asking if our Group would be willing to protest about a planning application for a large building in Wilcote, close to the “Ash Walk” that runs from Bridewell Farm to Wilcote.

I asked Alan Cobb and David Godfrey for their views. Both had difficulty getting access to all the documents for this application: some documents were listed on the WODC planning site but constantly “not available”. It turned out that the proposal falls within the Parish of North Leigh, where I live. Since the Parish Council put in an objection, I was able to copy technical details for my own objection on behalf of WO Ramblers – I didn't know, for instance, that there is special protection in the WODC Local Plan for the Wychwood Project area. The developers have now revised their application again – been ongoing since 2016.



I hope there will not be a lot of other such applications, but I think members of WO Ramblers should try to keep an eye out for them – would help to get us more known in the community (as well as enabling us to take actions that promote the aims of the organisation).

The Vale/W.O. Tuesday walks are back and numbers not quite 2019 standard but average 18 people per walk. We had 21 yesterday for the annual Eynsham Christmas walk. Everyone was prepared to trudge across muddy fields with the promise of warm mince pies and mulled wine at the end.

Judith Wardle

