

11:51

50%

Better Health

Let's do this

NHS

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talking walking

Active 10

Active 10

Active 10

Oxfordshire Ramblers Issue 67, January 2026

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RAMBLERS

Oxfordshire ramblings

will give you a brief update each quarter on the current issues in Ramblers Oxfordshire Area

Richard Birch, Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers



Photo Kerry Forkner

Botley West Solar Farm

The Planning Inspectorate's Examination of the Botley West Solar Farm application closed on 13 November 2025. Oxfordshire Ramblers submitted a closing statement. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Ed Miliband) will reach a decision by 13 May 2026 at the latest – fingers crossed that it will be rejected!

If approved there would be a 10-year construction period, including two years to fill the reservoir, followed by three years of landscaping. The date when it would be open to the public would be around 2043.

The latest information can be found at <https://thames-sro.co.uk/SESRO>

Abingdon Reservoir

The statutory public consultation was held from 28 October 2025 to 13 January 2026 along with a number of information events in local villages/towns. After considering the feedback Thames Water intend to apply for a Development Consent Order (DCO) during 2026.



Cover page:
the NHS
Active 10 app.



Photo John Gordon

Editor Dave Cavanagh davecavanagh1000@gmail.com
Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



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Website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine/talking-walking.html
Facebook @OxfordshireRamblers

Walks Programme 2025

It is time for your annual treat of pie (charts). Our Walk Leaders and Group Walks Organisers have provided another outstanding year of led walks:



Photo John Gordon

Grade	BNO	BK	DW	HG	HO	Ox	OS	OWW	TW	V	WO	Total
Easy	2	17		12	1	1		1	1			35
Leisurely	94	153	39	64	3	7	37	6	18	52	11	484
Moderate	57	26	48	197	28	6		48	72	93	39	614
Strenuous	5			50	2			1				58
Total	158	196	87	323	34	14	37	56	91	145	50	1191
Walk Leaders 2025	20	10	8	38	4	6	4	23	26	21	6	166
Certified Walk Leaders 2026	22	11	8	37	4	6	4	22	33	18	8	173

During 2025 there have been 1191 led walks covering a total distance of 8262 miles. Distances varied from 2 miles up to 16 miles.

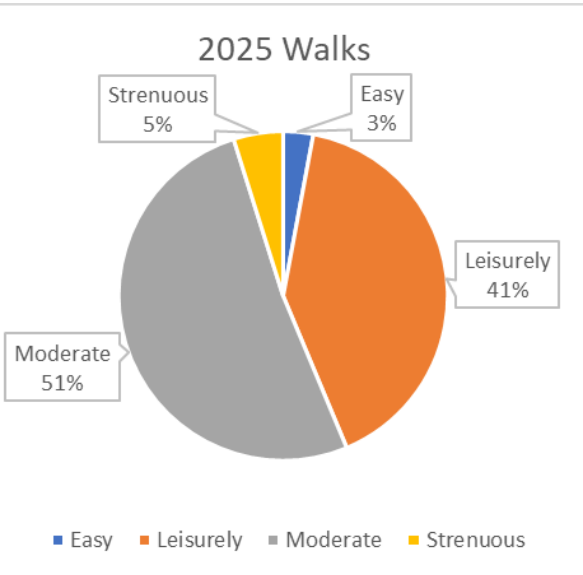
In the last issue of ‘talking walking’ the impact of inclement weather on our walking programme was presented. During 2025 there were 28 walks that had to be cancelled due to inclement weather and Leader unavailability:

Reason for cancellation	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Ice/Snow/Cold	4				4
Thunderstorms/rain/wind		1	2	1	4
Hot		2	2		4
Flooding	1				1
Leader unavailable	6	4	3	2	15
Total	11	7	7	3	28

The walks in 2025 have been provided by 166 Walk Leaders, each leading between 1 and 87 (impressive!!) walks. You will see from the Table that we have a comparable number of Walk Leaders available at the start of 2026 so we are in a strong position to continue with our excellent walks programme.



Photo John Gordon



Didcot & Wallingford Ramblers

We have a new Flexi-Group!

What is a Flexi-Group?

- A Flexi-Group runs a specific activity e.g. a programme of led walks.
- A Flexi-Group has a named contact and sometimes a small co-ordination team.
- It has no elected committee; no Constitution, no AGM and it does not hold any funds.

Why has Didcot & Wallingford Group become a Flexi-Group?

Didcot & Wallingford Group (D&W) was formed in 1997 and now has around 165 members. Its team of eight enthusiastic Walk Leaders lead around 80 walks per year. The D&W Chair for the past six years, David Baker, stood down at the AGM. David has also been Treasurer for the past few years. In addition, Brian Bolton, the D&W Footpath Secretary, also stood down due to ill-health. There were no volunteers for these vital posts and so the Group was unable to form a committee.

With the agreement for Oxfordshire Area, D&W Group has transitioned to a Ramblers Flexi-Group (named **Didcot & Wallingford Ramblers**):

- all members have transferred to the Flexi-Group
- the area of operation remains the same as Didcot & Wallingford Group
- Richard Birch is the named contact and will organise the walks programme
- the Flexi-Group will continue to organise its own social events (annual BBQ)
- the remaining funds have been transferred to Area and the Group bank account closed
- if the Flexi-Group requires any funds in the future (e.g. replenishment of First Aid kits) then this would be requested from Area

The intention is that members will not notice any difference to the led walk programme nor the information that is routinely provided about Didcot & Wallingford Ramblers and Oxfordshire Ramblers.

Oxfordshire Membership

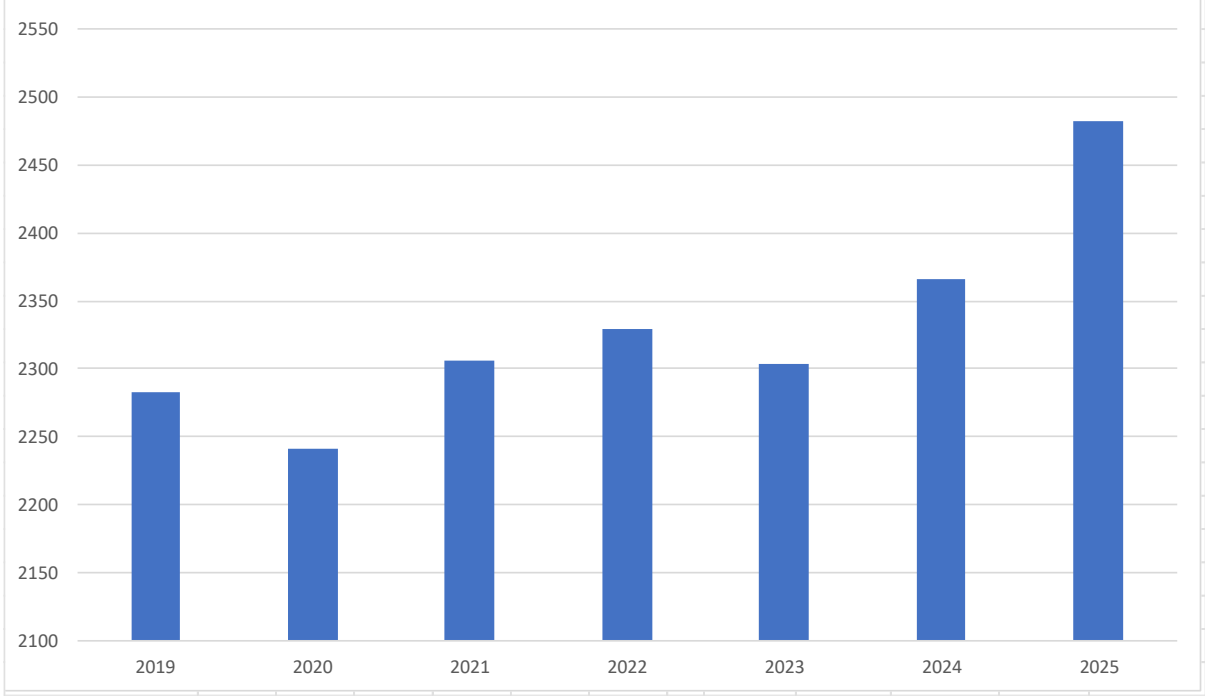
Our membership continues to grow. At our recent AGM we heard that membership had increased by 4.9% over the year to 2483, a new record.



Photo Kerry Forkner

Membership Report 30 September 2025

Members on 30 September



	Previous Years (on 30 September)						Current Year (ending 30 September 2025)				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Joiners	Leavers	Members	Growth	Retention
B&NO	299	298	296	284	280	290	58	-56	292	0.7%	84%
B&K	183	192	189	204	199	208	45	-32	221	6.3%	85%
D&W	164	166	177	168	168	154	40	-29	165	7.1%	82%
H&G	353	336	363	367	390	413	82	-62	433	4.8%	86%
HO	61	57	53	62	53	72	31	-25	78	8.3%	76%
Ox	290	279	286	283	273	267	34	-46	255	-4.5%	85%
OWW	136	139	147	151	147	147	25	-14	158	7.5%	93%
TW	181	183	192	199	196	197	46	-30	213	8.1%	87%
VoWH	317	308	317	321	301	278	36	-40	274	-1.4%	86%
WO	177	174	190	190	190	194	46	-30	210	8.2%	87%
Blitz & Klean	1	1	3	3	3	4	0	-1	3		
Ox Strollers	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	-1	5		
Unallocated	121	108	93	97	104	140	111	-75	176	25.7%	74%
Internal Transfers							-60	60			
Oxfordshire	2283	2241	2306	2329	2304	2367	497	-381	2483	4.9%	84.9%

Photo Nicola Jones





Photo Nicola Jones

Two moods of November

Photo Nicola Copeman





Dukes Cut linking the Oxford Canal with the Thames.
Photo Ian Macpherson

As part of the Historic Ridgeway Project, archaeologist Dan Bashford organised a series of online lectures in 2025. These largely feature archaeological aspects of the Ridgeway and its environs but there are also other intriguing presentations. You can see these lectures and more on the YouTube page of the Ridgeway National Trail https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9MUTxI2Zjn5_LmNDRqo9cw

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Living with the White Horse excavations at three hillforts along the Ridgeway National Trail

1:09:06

Managing Earthworks, Buried and Structural Scheduled Monuments and Designed Landscape...

1:05:41

Managing Earthworks, Buried and Structural Scheduled Monuments and Designed Landscape...

1:05:41



Photo John Gordon



Sir Muir Gray, President of Oxfordshire Ramblers, is really hot on walking.

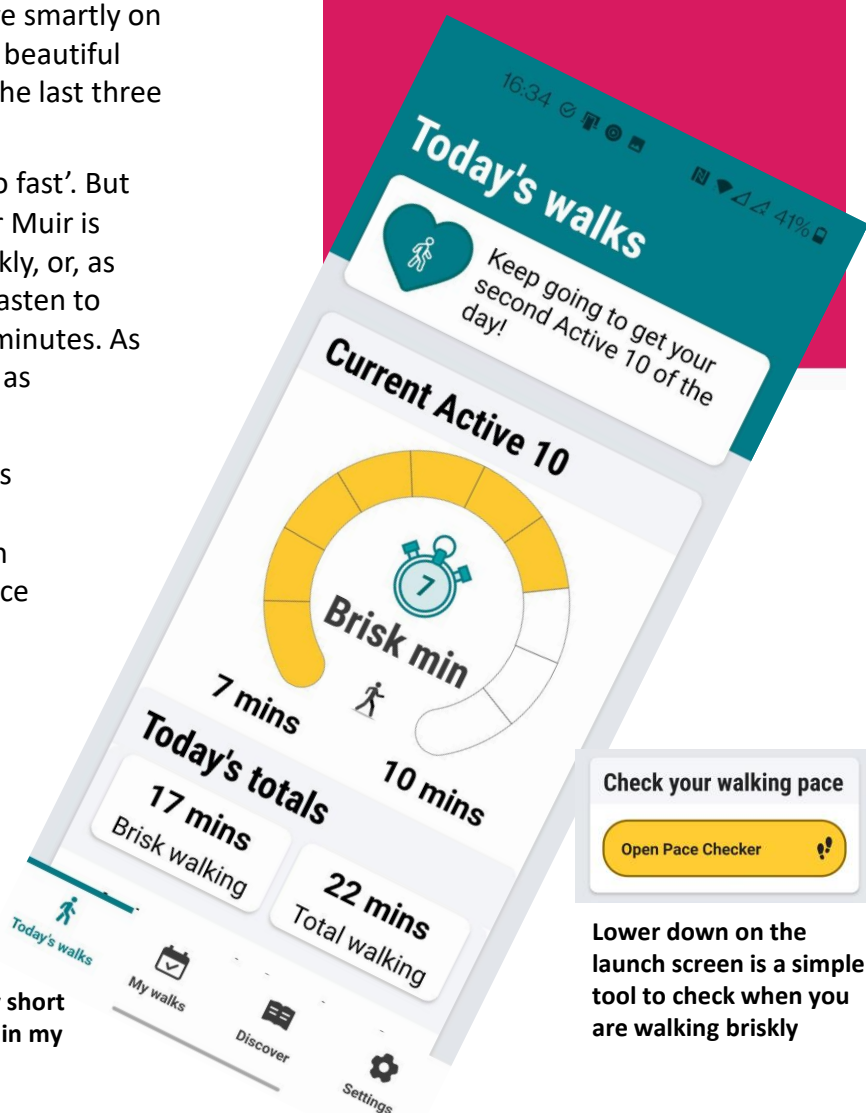
Even at this early point in the magazine I can imagine you thinking “Of course he is, Dave; we are Ramblers, we do what it says on the tin. So, please, quit writing. Instead move smartly on to showing us some more of the beautiful photos taken by members over the last three months.”

To which my response is ‘Not so fast’. But then, that would be wrong, as Sir Muir is really keen on us all walking quickly, or, as he would put it, ‘briskly’. Not, I hasten to add, for a whole hike but for 10 minutes. As a doctor, Muir might add ‘repeat as required.’

To help motivate us all, Muir has collaborated with the NHS to produce the Active 10 app, which you can get from your usual source of apps.

It is really easy to use. Just switch it on (at least once every five days) and put it in a trouser pocket. It will record your total time walking and highlight the number of those minutes that count as brisk.

The record of my short Boxing Day walk in my neighbourhood



Lower down on the launch screen is a simple tool to check when you are walking briskly

Sir Muir Gray to give a talk to Oxfordshire Ramblers

Sir Muir Gray, Oxfordshire Ramblers President, will give an online talk *Rambling, the Elixir of Life* to us on Monday 16 March 2026 at 7pm.



Invitations will be sent out to members by email nearer the time. Members will be asked to book and those that have booked will receive a link to the Zoom call.

Muir, of the Optimal Ageing Programme at Oxford, writes:

Hundreds of millions of pounds and dollars have been spent in pursuit of the Elixir of Life, a medicine which would slow the normal biological process of ageing and enable people to live to 120 or more, so far without success. However, we are pleased to report that an Elixir of Life has been developed in Oxford but it is not a pill or potion it is Knowledge.

Furthermore, it is not knowledge about how to reach 120 or more, it is knowledge about how to have a good quality of life in your 60s, 70s and 80s and reach your 90s in good nick! It is about Healthy Life Expectancy not just life expectancy – living better for longer and being dependent on others for a shorter period of time.

We now know that the normal biological process of ageing is not a cause of major problems until the later 90s, the problems come from loss of fitness, caused by decades of sitting, disease, caused by the physical and social environment and by social factors notably deprivation and ageism, the negative and wrong beliefs about ageing.

It is also now proven that walking is an ideal form of exercise, particularly brisk walking and Rambling is a particularly good form of brisk walking, being with others on rough ground and in a green environment, and volunteering is very good too and will reduce your risk of dementia! The Ramblers also organise therapeutic Wellbeing Walks for people recovering from disabling disease.

So, the Ramblers is a health service, part of the WHS, the Walking Health Service, supporting the NHS and it will play a key role in the campaign called Lets Walk More so let's get more people joining and walking more.



Photo Jan Knight



Letter from Sir Muir Gray in the *Sunday Times*, 21 September 2025

Spoilt for choice.
Photo Nicola Copeman

The crunching sound on this walk was not from stones but from the oak mast – acorns –, so plentiful this year, as were the fruits etc. of most trees after a record warm summer. Photo Dave Cavanagh

Living healthier later

The report on Jack Simpson working as a carer after retirement shows what people need to do to increase the probability that they will reach 90 in good health (money, Sep 14). Enabling people to live longer and better is the aim of a new NHS system in which we use the term “renaissance” rather than “retirement”. The main means of achieving good health in later life is through activity: physical and mental. Everyone in their late fifties will be offered tips on how to become more active. They will be encouraged to complete the Oxford Personalised Longevity Plan, which includes finding job opportunities and volunteering. Knowledge and support will come from communities and via the GP record system along with – sometimes instead of – drug prescriptions.

Sir Muir Gray

Joint director, www.livelongerbetter.uk



Thame & Wheatley group, greatly improve access along a footpath in Worminghall

Photos from start through construction to performance test



Preparing to start path work after carpet and gravel materials delivered

As **Bob Merry**, leader of the TW path maintenance team, said “This was by far the biggest task that we had undertaken, with many hours in the planning and organising, followed by four, hard working days of construction to provide a novel low-cost accessible pathway on a muddy lane in Worminghall, a few miles west of Thame.”

The task involved cutting and laying second-hand tennis court carpet, followed by barrowing 20 tonnes of gravel to spread over the carpet.

Bob acknowledged the support of Peter Hall (ALP Sports Recycling Centre) who provided tennis carpet rolls free-of-charge; Chris Craggs who provided his time and van free-of-charge to collect the salvaged tennis carpet from way up in Lincolnshire; to Worminghall Parish Council for the funding of the path gravel.

Read more about it in the spring issue of Ramblers South East Walker.



Using Stanley knife to cut carpet



Gravel delivery – 10 tonne each end of path



Carpet laying with overlap joints



Gravel transport



Gravel spreading and compacting



Performance test

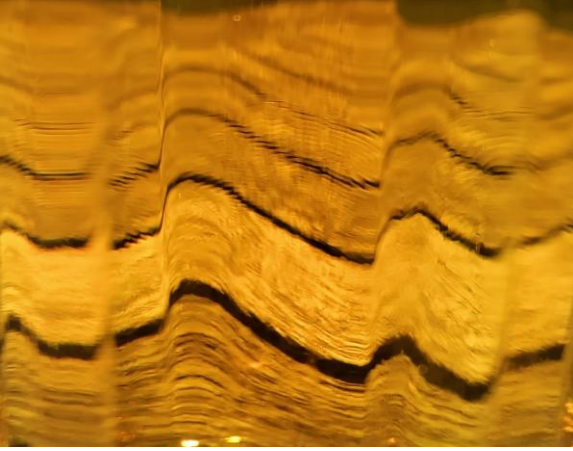
rest stop

Tim Vine

Conjunctivitis.com — that's a site for sore eyes.

I took part in the sun-tanning Olympics – I just got bronze.

I was reading a book... 'the history of glue' - I couldn't put it down.



What inspired this photo? Answer on the last page.

What do you call fake spaghetti?
An impasta.

Did you hear about the man who got hit by the same bike every morning?
It was a vicious cycle.

We all know what skyscrapers are: very tall buildings whose tops might sometimes be in the clouds. However, I learned from reading Bernard Cornwell's *Sharpe's Trafalgar* that the term was used long before such buildings existed; the highest sails on warships of the line, for example, those that took part in the Battle of Trafalgar, were called the 'skyscrapers'.

They were called ships 'of the line' because in battle the warships of two opposing navies would form two lines facing each other, broadside on. Then they would blast away with their cannon.

How do you get rich writing songs?
Start by making a fortune.

A young man was in love with two women and could not decide which of them to marry. Finally, he went to a marriage counsellor. When asked to describe his two loves, he noted that one was a great poet and the other made delicious pancakes.

"Oh," said the counsellor. "I see what the problem is. You can't decide whether to marry for batter or verse."



Photo Ian Macpherson

What do you call birds that stick together?
Vel-crows.

When she was very young, our daughter kept getting into plant pots. I was a bit concerned but her father said "Don't worry, she'll grow out of it."

October 2025

South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers – Henley and Goring Ramblers

The SC PMV is a group of volunteers working to keep the paths in the South Chilterns to a high standard. The group operates under the banner of the Chiltern Society. The H&G Ramblers participate with workforce. If you are interested in volunteering to keep the paths in your area suitable for use, feel free to send an email to the.scpmv@gmail.com. Once you are on the volunteering list, you get ... [See more](#)



Path maintenance by Henley & Goring Group members

(Left) Keep up to date with recent exploits of Henley and Goring (H&G) members working with the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers by following H&G's Facebook page.



Early last year, Carolyn Maunder, a member of Henley and Goring Ramblers, pointed out that where the Oxfordshire Way comes up to The Mount from Henley-on-Thames it was very steep and slippery, especially dangerous when coming down. Being close to Henley on Thames, the path is used by many walkers to admire the attractive Henley Park and it is also part of the much-walked Oxfordshire Way. Installing a flight of steps was the obvious solution (image on the right). This was duly done by the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers (SCPMV; linked to the Chiltern Society). The SCPMV and Henley & Goring Ramblers cooperate for path maintenance.

Swiss farm kindly allowed them access to the work site via their property, which greatly reduced the effort required to create the steps, as it was possible to bring the tools and materials within a short distance from the work site.

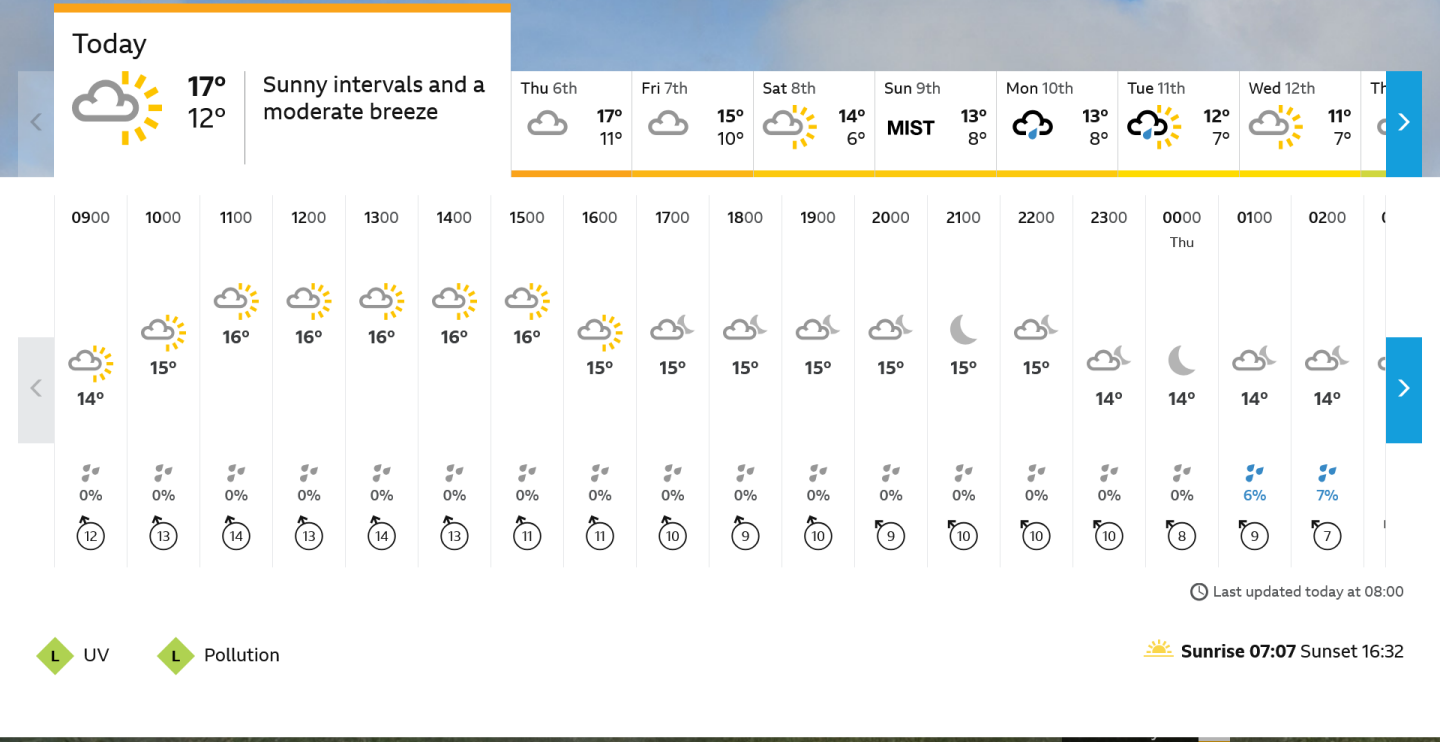
Oxfordshire Ramblers provided funding.

Read more about it in the spring issue of Ramblers South East Walker.

Helen Browning, of Eastbrook and Lower Farm, stretching from the Vale of White Horse to the Downs, between Ashbury (just inside Oxfordshire) and Bishopstone (just inside Wiltshire), and of the Royal Oak in Bishopstone, has created some permissive paths on both sides of the Ridgeway.



The walk up the coombes along the bridleway from Bishopstone to the Ridgeway is part of one of Vale Group's favourite walks. We usually start in Idstone, where parking is good, walk along the Vale through Idstone to Bishopstone, then up to and eastwards along the Ridgeway, descending directly into Ashbury. Helen Browning's permissive paths now offer variation on that theme. The Royal Oak is well worth a visit.



The warm early autumn weather continued into November. Weather conditions approached normal in December, below. Photos, clockwise from left: Wendy Spicer; Steph Woodley; Ian Macpherson; John Gordon



Vale Path Volunteers reach 200

No, **not** their combined age, which would be *much* higher than that. Rather the VPV completed their 200th task in October.

To **mark** the occasion, they had a chocolate cake and bubbly to replace the usual biscuits (below). The location was at the end of Mill Road, Abingdon, the site of the VPV's first task in 2012 and their 100th outing in 2012. It took 9 years to clock up the 100th task but only half that for the second hundred. The VPV currently goes out on the first Monday and third Wednesday of each month.

The **200** path-clearance projects covered 72 kilometres (45 miles), involving 4,000 hours of volunteer time. And countless biscuits.

At Ardington Wick the team refitted two waymark posts that had rotted off and fallen over.

Final clearance of 2025 at Scutchamer Knob on a very cold November day. Photo Pat Rosum



Going home, task complete

Photo Andy Boyd





Two of the stained glass windows of St John the Evangelist church in Fernham, south of Faringdon. I ducked about until I caught the sun shining on the faces of Joseph and Mary. Photos Dave Cavanagh





Also taken on a walk from Uffington via Fernham church. Fortunately, the sun was in just the right position to get this wonderful, evocative shadow. Photo Dave Cavanagh





Photos Ian Macpherson

The Harry Potter Tree

Welcome to The Harry Potter Tree. This tree was the setting for the scene showing Snape's worst memory, in the film, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

In the book, J K Rowling referred to it as a beech tree, but this tree is actually a Cedar of Lebanon, and was planted by Capability Brown in 1770s. It is now visited by tens of thousands of people every year.

Ancient trees are fragile and need to be cared for. We have the largest concentration of ancient oaks in Europe and caring for them is an important part of what we do.

In 2016 our Forestry Team and specialist tree surgeons used climbing ropes and a cherry picker to secure The Harry Potter Tree's larger branches with cables. If you look up you will be able to see them.



Over the course of their lifetime, trees like this one shed their branches, leaving behind a 'wound'. These wounds usually heal, but if they don't, rot and disease can cause the centre of the trunk to die; and they then become hollow.

Despite this, the hollow trees you see in the Park, are very much alive!

Because soil compaction can damage the roots, we have placed wooden fencing around The Harry Potter Tree, in order to protect it, and ensure it can be enjoyed by people from all around the world for years to come.



BLenheim PALACE

Thank you for helping preserve our natural wonders for the future



Photo Ruth Cornish



St George's church in the small village of Hatford, near Stanford in the Vale. It dates from the 12th century though it is on the sight of a Saxon church. What strikes you is its simplicity; it is chapel-like, with no spire or tower. Of particular interest is the main, south, doorway (on left in the photo), with traditional Norman chevron decoration. The hood above it is modern. Photo Dave Cavanagh

Feet up



This was the inspiration for my photo on the 'rest stop' page. A summer beer, late afternoon, warmth. Remember those? Photo Dave Cavanagh

I had assumed that Lancelot 'Capability' Brown got his nickname because he was very capable at visualising how he could transform a landscape. Turns out that when he surveyed the grounds of the landed gentry, he saw their naturalistic 'capabilities'. We might say 'potential' today.

What do you call a person who appreciates the finer points of liquid waste disposal?

A connoissewer

What do you call an Irish person who appreciates the finer points of liquid waste disposal?

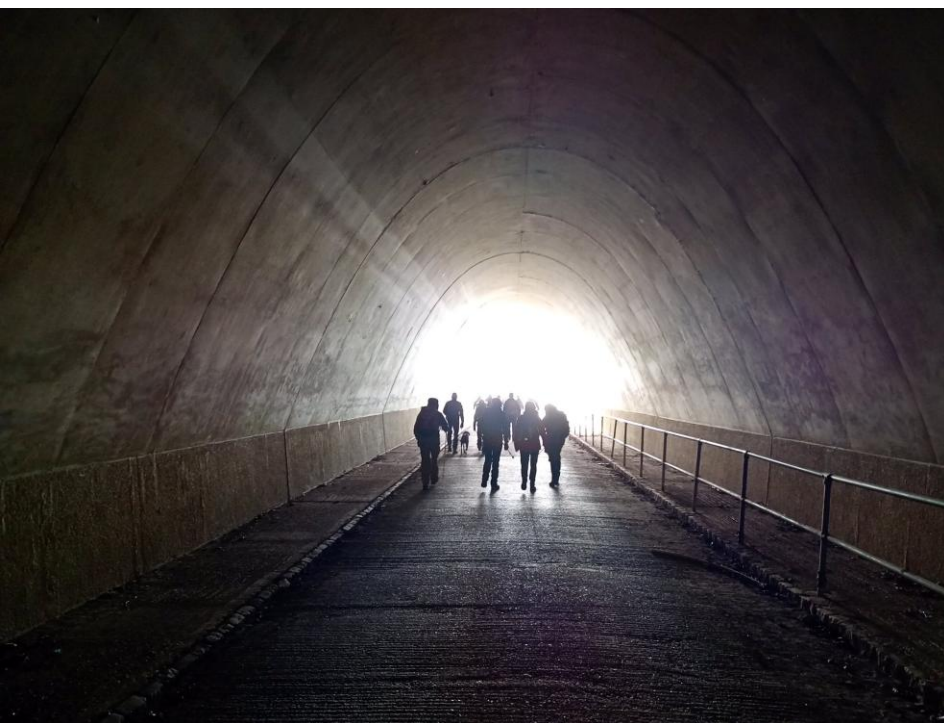
O'Connorsewer

Tommy Cooper

Police arrested two kids yesterday, one was drinking battery acid, the other was eating fireworks. They charged one and let the other one off.

Electricity is a wonderful thing. Do you realise that if we didn't have electricity, we'd be watching television by candle light?

My wife said, 'Take me in your arms and whisper something soft and sweet.'
I said, 'Chocolate fudge.'



Oxon Weekend Walkers being pulled by a tractor beam into an awaiting alien spaceship. Or were they going willingly? Alternatively, they are walking under the M40 near Stokenchurch. You decide. Photo Ian Macpherson (whereabouts unknown).