

THE AGM

**The 27th Annual General Meeting
of the Leicestershire and Rutland Area
will be held on Saturday January 30th
at the Burton Lazars Village Hall, LE14 2UR**

**Teas and coffee will be available from 9.30 for 10.00 start and
we hope to finish by 1.00.**

**Michael Jeeves of the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust
will be our guest speaker**

**There will be a short afternoon walk led by the host group for
those who wish to join them. If doing so bring a packed lunch.**

The hall is located on the A606 travelling from Melton Mowbray towards Oakham. Once passing through the outskirts of Melton it is on the right just as you approach Burton Lazars. There is a finger post signing the Village Hall and a church opposite.

The Village Hall has a large car park. Should this be full the turning on the left, opposite by the church, provides easy street parking.

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER AND REPORT

I have been very fortunate to have Chaired Leicestershire and Rutland Ramblers through 2015. During that time I have walked and talked with many members, and I have to say you all seem to enjoy being out and about plodding the network of footpaths, whatever the weather conditions.

I need to remind you all that these network of footpaths have to be guarded and protected; they are a precious asset and with ever tighter financial constraints on Local Government Highways Authorities we all need to champion rights of way. Ramblers do work very closely with Leicestershire and Rutland Councils, and we are very fortunate to have very proactive footpaths committee members who have vast knowledge and a good working relationship with local government officers.

This year this has further been enhanced with the Ramblers Big Pathwatch, and I am pleased to report that as I write this Leicestershire and Rutland footpaths are maintained better than the average according to the latest survey reports. This is no surprise because, when I'm out walking I often hear *"I wish the primrose waymarkers were adopted over the entire British network"*.

Over recent months I have had the great privilege to attend group committee meetings; my favourite part of these visits is simply listening to our volunteers and hearing what's on their minds. It's insightful, it's fascinating, and I always learn a tremendous amount. These conversations are where the magic happens - one of the single greatest tools that can undoubtedly improve any organisation doesn't cost a penny - feedback! I consider it a gift, and one that only holds any value if you take it to heart and use it to address issues and concerns and make improvements. I have had feedback and I tried to respond positively.

The biggest issue seems to be attracting members to get involved at group and area level. We currently have a great mix of people who give their time, skills, energy and life experiences to ensure we put on fantastic walks 52 weeks a year, make the financial books balance and communicate the Ramblers message to a wider audience.

The Ramblers - Britain's walking charity working to protect and expand the places people love to walk and promote walking for health and pleasure.

So the Challenge Leicestershire and Rutland Ramblers has, is no different to each group.

Succession planning for the future is an ongoing opportunity for our members; it's an ideal vehicle for members to grow and experience new tasks and skills that can be transferred to employment and family interests.

How do we create an environment of succession for these vital officer roles that we need to have filled, to ensure the current great work is not lost?

If you have any thoughts please let me your group, or any member of the Area Committee know.

Finally a big thank you to all of my area team for the great support they have given me and all the back ground work that does on to make Leicestershire and Rutland Ramblers a fine organisation to belong too.

Wishing you all a happy, healthy Christmas and New Year.

John Howells

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Leicestershire and Rutland Area Ramblers
held on Saturday 24 January 2015 at Gaddesby Village Hall, Leicestershire (42 attendees).**

1. *Chairman's welcome and opening remarks*

Roy Denney welcomed all to the AGM. Roy named the winning entries of the Best Kept Footpath competition. These are:

Winner - path near to Waltham-on-the-Wolds - Runner up - path near to Swithland

Roy is trying to ascertain who the land owners are so that we can present certificates.

Roy gave thanks to various individuals for their support in particular the following:

Stan Warren for his work as Footpath and Survey Secretary, Jim Storer for his work creating IT enhancements for Stan's Unrecorded Ways spreadsheet and Martin James for his work in dealing with the issues around the Ramblers membership database.

2. *Apologies for absence* - Apologies received from Howard Freeman - Webmaster

3. *Approval of the minutes of the 25th AGM, 25 January 2014*

The minutes were approved.

4. *Matters arising from those minutes not otherwise on the agenda.*

None.

5. *Presentation of annual reports*

a) Treasurer - nothing to add to report submitted in Write of Way. As stated in her report, Jeanette thanked all group Treasurers for the timeliness and accuracy of their returns and she also thanked Chris Tipper, our honorary auditor, for independently examining the accounts.

b) The meeting voted to accept the Treasurer's report and adopt the accounts.

c) Other officers' reports. There was nothing to add to the reports submitted to Write of Way with the exception of the Footpath officer - see below.

Footpath Officer - Updates to submitted report:

Rail crossings

An Order has been made to extinguish the rail crossing at Brooksby. Network Rail are consulting on the proposed closure of a crossing at Wing, Rutland.

Regarding East Midlands Gateway, a public hearing is due on 4 February in Kegworth and Stan and Roy will attend. There is a site visit on 3 February which Martin hopes to attend.

Coleorton - the diversion order has been confirmed.

New issues

Nailstone - Obstruction on bridleway at Crown Farm east of Nailstone. Photos of the path showing it obstructed by a haystack and a gate covered in barbed wire were shown to the meeting. Over many years path users have faced severe harassment.

Stan has served a notice on the County Council requiring it to enforce removal of the obstructions. Stan will attend a meeting with the County Council on Monday 2nd February to discuss the matter.

New routes have been created around Diamond Jubilee Wood on the former opencast mine at Longmoor many of which will be dedicated as public rights of way.

Surveying

We intend to survey every path in Leicestershire and Rutland once every four years. As at 13 Jan 2015 we have around 1628 problems recorded; this has fallen from 5703 recorded on 31 July 2001. It is notable that the number of problems in ploughed fields has reduced.

Stan expressed his thanks to all those who have undertaken surveying. In particular he mentioned the following individuals for particular praise, members who have been involved for some time and have done sterling work: Alan Loasby, Michael Parr, Steve Peck and Bob Crosby. Stan now has 9 further surveyors following the volunteer evening last September.

In support of the Footpath Officer's report, Jim Storer gave a presentation to demonstrate how he is enhancing Stan's unrecorded ways spreadsheet. He has taken Stan's spreadsheet and created hyperlinks to link it to a file system thus various files can 'hang off' the spreadsheet including maps and photos. Jim also demonstrated an App he has downloaded called View Ranger that can be used to create maps. Maps can be created based on OS maps downloaded and photos can be attached. Jim was very pleased that View Ranger have allowed us to use their maps. Unrecorded routes can be super-imposed on the maps.

5. d) The Officers and Group reports were all adopted.

6. a) *Guest Speaker Amy Morgan [facilitator for the Get Walking, Keep Walking project]*

Amy explained the background to the GWKW programme. It is funded through the Department of Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund following a successful bid by Leicester City Council and it was subcontracted to

the Ramblers. Its initial funding period was from 2012 to 2015 and confirmation is awaited on funding for a further year.

The project covers a defined section of the city and its about giving people the confidence and encouragement to walk in their everyday lives, for example to their place of employment. The programme acts as a short intervention with the hope that people will gain the confidence and enthusiasm to walk by themselves on an on-going basis.

GWKW has target groups. These are the young unemployed, older people, women, those with physical or mental health issues and carers.

The programmes run for 12 weeks with a weekly walk for the first six weeks from when participants will be encouraged to walk by themselves with a final walk on week 12 to see how they are doing and to encourage them to 'keep walking'.

Key achievements

81 programmes completed with 1,050 attendees in 3 years

40 businesses engaged

280 routes created and available on Ramblers Routes

66 volunteers trained

A presence at 57 events

3,173 Get Walking packs issued

themed events including fancy dress for Hallowe'en

Promoted other walking opportunities including Ramblers groups

A few people have joined the Ramblers via GWKW.

6. b) *Guest speaker Peter Tyldesley, Land Agent and Surveyor, Bradgate Park Trust.* Peter introduced the meeting to Bradgate Park. It was given in Trust to the people of Leicester in 1928 and is now a Grade II listed Historic Parkland. The park includes two Scheduled Ancient Monuments and various listed structures and it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are 370 Hectares available for public access plus 10 Hectares recently added (part of Swithland Wood). The park contains nearly 400 deer of various types. The Leicestershire Round footpath passes through the park and there have been celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the Round's existence. The park also forms the eastern end of the National Forest Way. Much of the funding required to maintain the park comes from two sources - the car park [40%] and the cafe [38%]. At Bradgate House, there have been theatrical productions including *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Jungle Book* and *Pride & Prejudice*.

There are environment education programmes for children.

The park's deer supply venison

David Attenborough is patron for an appeal for funding to refurbish the visitor centre.

7) *President's address and response.*

Peter Williams thanked Peter Tyldesley for a 'marvellous talk'. He praised Roy and Stan for their many years of hard work for the Ramblers. He referred to the success of Stan's work improving the partnership between the Ramblers and the County Council, the huge victory of getting a footpath open in Groby and he spoke of Roy's success in getting the Charnwood map created and on sale. Peter presented Roy with a book on the countryside AND Stan with a voucher to buy something of his choice.

8) *Affirmation of President and Vice Presidents:*

The following were all reaffirmed:

President: - Peter Williams

Vice-Presidents: - Mike Statham, Tony Andrews, Alan Loasby

9. *Elections of Honorary Officers*

New Chairman elected:

John Howells

Secretary re-elected:

Mark Hewitt

Treasurer re-elected:

Jeanette Hollis

Footpath Officer elected:

Martin James

Assistant Footpath Officer elected:

Stan Warren

Membership Secretary elected:

Ray Phipps

Editor re-elected:

Roy Denney

Walking Environment Officer re-elected:

Roy Denney

Publicity Officer re-elected:

Eddie East

Webmaster re-elected:

Howard Freeman

IT Officer elected:

Jim Storer

10. *Elections of further members to serve on the Area Executive Committee*

- a) Up to two representatives of Affiliated Organisations
 - b) Up to two 'elected' members from the floor
- None elected.

11. *New Chairman's address* John Howells said a few words in acceptance of his election and thanked Roy Denney for the considerable work he had done for the Ramblers and to general amusement presented him with a pipe and slippers.

12. *Nominations of Group representatives to the Area Executive Committee*

Coalville, Hinckley, Leicester, Loughborough, LRWG, Lutterworth, Melton, Rutland.)

Mary Rooks and Howard Whatmore will share the role of Area Representative for Leicester group. All other group representatives to the Area will remain the same. One of these will be nominated Vice Chairman of the AEC at the first meeting of this committee.

13. *Confirmation of appointment of an Auditor/Independent Financial Examiner*

Chris Tipper was reaffirmed in this role.

14) *Motions/constitution changes previously notified, including any for General Council*

None.

15) *Nomination of two representatives to General Council*

Roy Denney and Stan Warren were nominated as our delegates and were accepted by the floor. No observer(s) have yet been nominated. The AEC is willing to fund up to two observers should any member wish to come forward. Any member wishing to be nominated needs to inform the Area Secretary before 11th February.

16. *Date, venue and format of the next AGM*

It was agreed that the 2016 AGM will be held on the last Saturday in January (30th). Rutland will be hosting. There was some discussion about when to have the refreshments and the floor voted to have them as people gather and in the break. (For this meeting they were just served before the start of the meeting.)

It was noted that Leicester are to organise the Area Quiz this year and Rutland to organise the Area Walk.

17. *Presentation by Central Office Representative, Des Garrahan, Ramblers Trustee.*

Des thanked the AEC for inviting him to speak. He made some comments on his observations during his visit. He said that there was a bigger crowd at our AGM when compared with others he has attended. He commented that our Area Committee is male dominated; he said this is typical throughout the Ramblers. He praised our use of technology at the AGM including the use of a projector saying this was unusual at AGMs. He praised our path surveying work saying that other Areas generally don't do this. Referring to General Council, Des stressed the importance of sending delegates with considerable knowledge and experience of the workings of the Ramblers. Des asked if we have been doing anything to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the organisation that became the Ramblers. Terry Bates of the Leicester group was joined on a walk on Tuesday 13 Jan by Leicester Sound who interviewed him. Roy provided Terry with a Press Release obtained from Central Office. The interview went well. Des then spoke about some of the achievements of the Ramblers as follows:

Of the 107,000 members, 25,000 were volunteers

Nationally there are 140,000 miles of path and 1 million hectares of open access land.

There are 102 path maintenance teams who have improved 600 paths

Ramblers have saved over 800 paths from being closed or badly diverted.

Des said that creating a complete coastal path is a major priority and that the complete coastal path for Wales was a 'success for Wales'.

He praised the success of Ramblers Holidays and said 6,000 people had been hill-walking with them.

Ramblers Holidays are sponsoring the 'Big Path Watch' initiative.

The Ramblers website has had 1 million users.

There were 760 responses to the recent survey of members.

Des said that membership had been hit by the recession but said it was now stable.

18. *Open Forum*

Karl Piggitt said that LRWG have a presence on 'Meet Up' in an effort to gain new members. Des responded by saying that it can be difficult to transfer these people to Ramblers membership as they can find group walking opportunities for lower fees.

Terry Bates raised the cost of producing two issues of Write of Way per year and suggested that one issue per year may be sufficient (one to notify members of the AGM). Roy Denney said that as a large proportion of our membership are not involved in the groups, the Write of Way was their only way of being aware of what was happening locally in the Ramblers and that we had reduced the number of issues from 5 to 2.

The meeting closed at 1:05 pm. - Mark Hewitt Area Secretary 01/02/2015

OTHER OFFICERS REPORTS

TREASURER Jeanette Hollis

This was a prudent year for the Area with the main costs being on communication to our members and a focus on strategy. The year has ended with a surplus of £602 to carry forward to the 2015 / 2016 year.

Income:

The reduction in Central Office funding was at Area level only and did not impact individual Groups and reflects the request in 2014 for publicity material. No additional funding for publicity was requested in 2015 - the aim being to accrue the benefits of the previous year's investment

The £20 publication/goods sales is the final payment due from the sale of the new Charnwood maps.

Expenditure

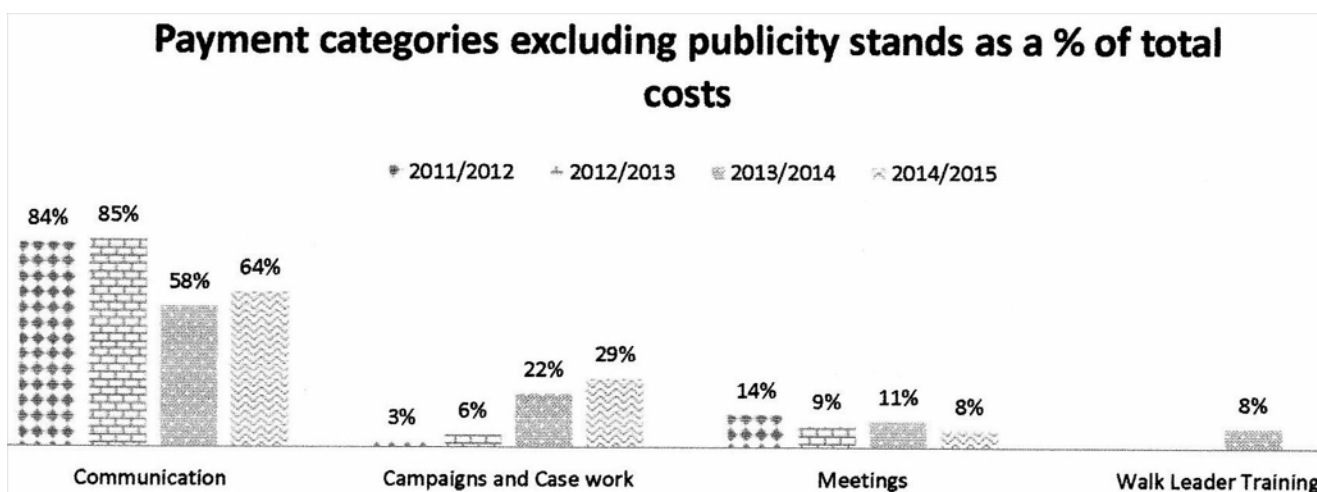
Newsletter printing and distribution saw a decrease on the year - due partly because of a reduction in the number of pages but also a 'competitive rate for combined printing and distribution which the Editor secured with the Printers.

The additional focus on campaigns and casework is shown in the bar chart below. This includes the purchase of a Proxima to use at the volunteer evenings and the investigations into 'lost ways' and the 'big path watch', membership to the Open Spaces Society, and purchase of Area Business Cards.

As a percentage of total costs (excluding publicity and funding to Groups) expenditure on campaigns and case work continues to increase year on year.

Meeting costs have been kept to a minimum.

Thank you to all Group Treasurers for their timeliness and accuracy of returns. Also thank you to Chris Tipper for independently and cheerfully examining the Accounts.



Ramblers - Leicestershire and Rutland Area

Receipts & Payments Account Year ended 30th September 2015

Income:	Current Year £	Prior Year £
Central Office funding	7,078.12	9,158.00
Donations	0.00	100.00
Other	0.00	0.00
Fundraising	0.00	0.00
Deposit interest	4.11	3.64
Publication/goods sales	20.00	290.00
Contribution from First Aid Training	0.00	172.50
Total Income	7,102.23	9,724.14



Balance Sheet at 30th September 2015

Assets:	Current Year £	Prior Year £
Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00
Investments	0.00	0.00
Stock	0.00	0.00
Debtors	0.00	0.00
Cash & bank	4,134.03	3,532.36
Total Assets	4,134.03	3,532.36

Liabilities:	
Creditors	0.00
Total Liabilities	0.00

Net Assets & Funds at end of year	4,134.03	3,532.36
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For information, the distribution of the Area entitlement to Groups was as follows:

Coalville	550.00	550.00
Hinckley	302.10	301.00
Leicester	1,420.00	1,360.00
Loughborough	450.00	232.00
Lutterworth	201.40	194.00
Melton Mowbray	234.65	226.00
Rutland	209.95	200.00
L & R Walking Group	360.00	200.00
Total	3,728.10	3,263.00

Expenditure:	
Funding to Groups	3,728.10
Newsletter printing	814.48
Newsletter distribution	956.12
Publicity including exhibition stands	0.00
Campaigns and casework	793.30
Meetings, including AGM and GC	208.56
Charnwood Map Purchases	0.00
Other (Walk Leader Training)	0.00
Total Expenditure	6,500.56

Surplus	601.67	598.35
Funds brought forward	3,532.36	2,934.01
Funds carried forward	4,134.03	3,532.36

Note: In accordance with RACO guidelines, these accounts are prepared on a "receipts and payments" basis, and debtors and creditors are accordingly not recognised.

Treasurer's Certificate:- I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the books and records presented for audit were an accurate record of the Area's financial affairs and were complete in all respects.

J Hollis

J Hollis (Treasurer)

C S. Tipper

C Tipper (Hon. Auditor)

FOOTPATH OFFICER - Martin James

The footpaths committee has met regularly in the last year to look at proposed footpath diversions and the ever increasing number of planning applications that are being submitted to the local councils. These include major developments at Garendon, Lubbethorpe, Thurmaston, Airfield Farm Market Harborough and East Midlands Gateway at Kegworth. Whenever the committee has thought that a more suitable route for a proposed diversion is more appropriate this has been fought for through the relevant Planning Authority.

I must thank Alan Lowsby for his hospitality when hosting these meetings.

Nailstone.

At the AGM last year it was reported that bridleway R67 at Crown Farm, Nailstone was illegally blocked by concrete blocks, straw bales and barbed wire. A section 130A notice was served on Leicestershire County Council (LCC) requesting that they remove the obstructions. Following discussions with LCC the notice was withdrawn to help them proceed in sorting the obstructions without the implications of the notice.

On 19th May we were informed by LCC that the path was open and available for use.

On the 4th June the path was walked by Mr Warren and a representative of the Leicestershire Footpaths Association.

By 23rd June the path had again been blocked by the original concrete block, fresh straw bales and **razor wire**.

LCC responded to reports of the blockage and were told that we would like monthly updates as to what progress, if any was being made. A update was received 4th Aug. Having not received any updates for a while I requested an update on 16th Sept. without response. Having already discussed this footpath at the Area meeting in September it was decided to serve another s130A notice on LCC. This was done 9th October 2015. Ongoing.

Little Bowden.

In mid June we were made aware that the rail crossing at Little Bowden had been closed without any consultation. It is the opinion of the Ramblers' that this closure was illegal. Following advice from Central Office a s130A notice was served on LCC (2/9/15) requesting that they remove the obstruction. The latest news is that Network Rail are carrying out signalling works to make the crossing safer. This work is due to be completed by Christmas 2015. LCC are not planning to take matters further at this time. At present we are considering our position but have not ruled out continuing the legal process if it is appropriate. Ongoing.

Footpath changes 2015

Blaby District.

Braunston. W13. A diversion to put map to where path has always been walked.

Charnwood Borough.

Cossington. I55 (Leicestershire Round). Minor diversion to correct an anomaly to definitive map and to move path away from sports pitch and nursery at Ratcliffe College.

Cropston. J62, J66. Addition and deletion to definitive map to correct a long standing dispute.

Rothley. K23. Diversion to correct a long standing anomaly.

Loughborough. K107. A disputed route which has now been added to the definitive map.

Harborough District.

Sharwell. X27. A further temporary diversion of the bridleway around Sharwell quarry.

Church Langton. A86, A88. Small diversion confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate.

Willoughby Waterleyes. Y25, Y26. Very minor diversion to allow for electrical power distribution modifications.

Shangton. B19. Small diversion to take footpath away from farm buildings.

Melton Borough.

Brooksby. H56. Path diverted and footpath crossing of railway closed. Crossing was not good. New route uses road level crossing then a purpose built path through college farm yard.

Melton Mowbray. E361 Mucky Lane. Small diversion to accommodate where new council offices were built.

Six Hills. G93. Further diversion of footpath around new business.

Wycomb. F13b. Diversion to sort out long standing problem.

Somerby. D74. Small diversion around new agricultural buildings.

Shoby. H28. Small diversion around new agricultural buildings.

Frisby. H48. Small diversion onto route already used. Planning mistake in the 1980's.

Asfordby. H108, H108a. Following a Public Enquiry two new paths around Frisby Lakes have been added to the definitive map.

Barkestone-le-Vale. G16a. A new path within the village.

Hinckley & Bosworth.

Higham on the Hill. T49. A small diversion of path for new housing. Path was a dead end, it now exits onto Station Road.

Barwell. U74. Dedication of a path (200m) from Shilton Road to a path which runs between Dawsons Lane and Carrs Hill.

Hinckley. T100. Addition of a path along Battling Brook

North West Leicestershire.

Bardon. N49, O35, O22. A series of temporary and permanent diversions, creations and closures associated to the quarry extension. Further changes to the network affected by the quarry extension are being discussed at the moment

ASSISTANT FOOTPATH OFFICER - Stan Warren

Unrecorded Ways

Around 3000 possible routes have been logged and now mapped by Jim Storer in Leicestershire. The LAF is now set to prioritise these, and hopefully find researchers from user groups such as the RA to bury themselves in the CRO and other archive sources. I have access to the files held at County Hall relating Definitive Maps, including Parish Returns and Highway handover-maps when maintenance was passed to the County Council from the various Urban and Rural Districts. Although the cut-off date of 2026 has now become a reality, some relief has been obtained by the exemption of routes which appear as Publicly Maintained on the Highways List of Streets – many of our routes logged so far fall into this category. The question of user rights remains unclear, but they must at least be available to walkers.

In Rutland, a similar process is almost complete (only around 300 routes), and the LAF will again be looking for volunteers to carry the process forward.

What we are still looking for is those routes which are not mapped, not recorded, but are in daily use – recent informal visits to Harby and Oadby implied that such routes exist in abundance. These are the most vulnerable. Please spend time thinking of any such routes where you live and tell me about them. Don't wait until they get blocked or built over – it's probably too late then to save them.

Leicester City

Communication with planning officers is an ongoing problem, with schemes which affect open space and walking/cycling routes not being brought to the attention of the LAF in a timely manner. One example was the sale of open space at Beaumont Park to DMU, with an artificial football pitch removing part of the area from public access. The major Waterside redevelopment (Frog Island, Soar Lane etc) is commencing and should give enhanced access to the river frontage in this area. Harvey Walk is no more, but an alternative ground-level route is to be provided, with two additional sets of traffic lights on St Nicholas Circle – don't blame me when traffic congestion becomes even worse here as a result, I tried to keep the high-level walkway open.

Surveying

This progresses steadily, but one of my regular surveyors has suddenly decided to hang up his boots, and this will make achieving our target more of a challenge. All Melton Area squares are now complete or in progress, and remaining unallocated squares are shown elsewhere in Write of Way. Volunteers are now urgently needed to check these before the end of 2016 to complete our four-year cycle.

Many of the allocated squares have been outstanding for some time, and I would request that the volunteers complete these as soon as possible, or admit defeat so that they can be re-allocated.

From 2017 onwards we hope to co-ordinate our efforts to meet the needs of Leicestershire County Council, who have always appreciated our efforts, and see it as more valuable as their own resources are stretched. If we do commit to helping LCC, the practices and timescales may become more rigid, but the RA must rise to the challenge and demonstrate its commitment to protecting the path network.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY - Ray Phipps

was the membership secretary for the Leicestershire & Rutland area many years ago. Back then it was a “proper” job as all of the membership figures for the 7 groups (as it was then) came in the form of paper reports, and for the few groups that had a computer, a floppy disc. My job was to separate the paper list and post them off and for the others with computers to copy their reports onto a separate floppy disc.

This thankfully took place only once a month. This system was quite clearly expensive, for central office, and I and it turned out, wildly inaccurate. I passed the post onto Martin James, complete with a card index of the 2000 or so members that central office thought we had, just as the system went pear shaped.

So fast forward many years and I have the job back but in a vastly different format. The groups get their new members weekly by e-mail and a full list once a month. There is no paper involved and really all I have to do is monitor the situation, give some figures out at area committee meetings and write a report like this.

The report from Martin last year showed that we had a total of 1577 members broken down as follows:-

1. Hinckley	220
2. Leicester	453
3. Melton	148
4. Coalville	234
5. Rutland	123
6. Loughborough	158
7. Lutterworth	114
8. LRWG	113
9. Others	14

The figures for this year are a total membership of 1565, broken down as follows:-

1. Hinckley	229
2. Leicester	464
3. Melton	152
4. Coalville	220
5. Rutland	121
6. Loughborough	139
7. Lutterworth	110
8. LRWG	112
9. Others	18

This represents a total fall of 0.77% The figure nationally is a fall of 0.2%

WALKING ENVIRONMENT OFFICER - Roy Denney

This role is a bit strange and is a big as the job holder wishes to make it. To a large extent it involves representing the interests of the Ramblers on other bodies working to similar aims.

We can assist other organisations whilst using such influence as we have to encourage them to protect and enhance the rights of way networks and open spaces.

I am supported in this role by other members of the Area. I am on the Steering Group of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park supported by our President, Peter Williams who attends meetings of the Stakeholder Group. I attend meetings of the National Forest Access and Recreation Group as the representative of Orienteering and the Local Access Forum (LAF) but obviously push the interests of the Ramblers. Mike Statham actually represents the Area at those meetings and when he or I cannot make it our Chairman, John Howells does so. I also represent the LAF at meetings of the Heart of the Forest Access and Connectivity Forum (HOFF) working to improve walking and cycling routes in that part of the Forest and Graham Morrison of the Coalville groups is actively leading part of that project.

John Howells, Stan Warren and I are members of the Local Access Forum and whilst we represent walking interests rather than the Ramblers as an organisation it is a valuable way of pushing our agenda.

It can be seen therefore that as a team we ensure the interest of the Ramblers are to the fore.

A few things of note to report: Everything seems to have been on hold with HS2, but we can expect developments shortly. HS2 Company did say they would engage with us but as yet we have heard nothing. The government has tabled a bill to give HS2 more powers which may actually allow them to plan the right of way network changes from further out which is to be welcomed.

The East Midlands freight gateway enquiry has now closed and has reported to the Minister of State who will finally decide. I spoke at two hearings of the public enquiry supported by Stan Warren and argued several issues about rights of way the main one being objecting to an existing right of way being diverted but only as a permissive path.

The LAF have made contributions to numerous District and Local plans and major planning applications arguing the corner for suitable off road routes and open spaces preferably linked by green corridors. Amongst these we submitted observations to Blaby DC re their audit of open spaces and provision for sport and recreation and to Harborough DC on their Open Spaces Strategy. We also formally responded to Harborough on two massive developments at Magna Park. We have engaged with Blaby DC on the rights of way and open spaces elements of the Lubbesthorpe development and have submitted comment to the County Council on their new Minerals & Waste strategy. Stan Warren and I have since met with the Lubbesthorpe Developers and Blaby to further discuss the rights of way impacts, open spaces provision and public transport.

We have been having discussions with Everard's about their ideas for their new site and the improvements offered to the rights of way in the area and have met with the Aggregate Industries about the transitional period as quarry work at Bardon progresses and have made suggestions to improve the short and medium term footpaths. I have also been having ongoing discussions with Wilson Bowden who are to create routes from between Glenfield Ratby and Groby as part of the massive development in Glenfield and this will include a new bridge over Rothley Brook giving access to R115 bridleway.

As for the National Forest, they have a new CEO, John Everett from Nottingham Wild Life Trust. This may mean a change of emphasis for wildlife considerations but is being balanced by the fact that they have recruited somebody for a post promoting sport and activity within the Forest. Some of the main things she will be involved with are: the management, development and promotion of the National Forest Way and other trails; developing the Forest's sport offer and looking at how access can be best represented on the new Visit website. As part of the new push to encourage usage they are also to provide a new portal on their website where groups will be able to lodge details of all events and activities within the Forest. An early priority will be developing a volunteer ranger programme for the National Forest Way. Initially it is proposed that the volunteers would be monitoring the Way and not be involved in maintenance works

The HOFF main priority at present is connecting Hicks Lodge Cycle Centre to Newfields Road via Newfields Woodland. Planning permission has been granted for a surfaced path. In the longer term they also seek to extend in the other direction connecting Hicks Lodge to Ashby de la Zouch. Once these links are completed, there is a planned diversion of the Ivanhoe Way promoted route, re-directing it via Hicks Lodge.

A link from Church Gresley to Tunnel Woods has been completed. An extension of this route to Rosliston is now being progressed by Derbyshire County Council.

Another ambition which may become a real possibility is the creation of a route between Moira Village Hall and Maybury Wood. Planning Application has been submitted for a housing development off Ashby Road and as part of the planning comments the National Forest Company and Ashby Woulds Town Council are requesting that a route be provided from Sweethill into Maybury Wood. A decision is pending.

A restoration plan for the waste disposal area adjoining National Forest lands near Boothorpe is being discussed and we are pushing for links into the neighbouring areas.

The County Council's Ashby canal team have decided to create the towpath between Measham and Snarestone even though they cannot afford to re-water the actual canal. At this stage it will just be a mown grass track.

One thing of interest is that there is a complete set of guides to the new National Forest Way on a new dedicated web site- It is imaginatively named: www.nationalforestway.co.uk

Finally, the OS had now released an updated version of the National Forest map but had not consulted the National Forest Company prior to publishing and as such much possible information which is still missing.

SECRETARY - Mark Hewitt

The Area Executive Committee has met four times this year and all meetings have been well attended by Area officers and group representatives. Area officers have also met on a number of occasions between these AECs to progress various projects.

We sent an experienced team to Ramblers General Council as major changes had been planned to streamline the organisation and Stan Warren and Roy Denney were our delegates. Our Chairman John Howells went as well as an observer.

The business of the Area proceeds smoothly and a lot of work continues to be done in the background.

PUBLICITY OFFICER - Eddie East

I have attended some Country Fairs it is difficult to quantify the gains ,if any, however it does "show the flag" . The local radio here in Melton is always happy to provide us with some Air time.

EDITOR - Roy Denney

This is a relatively easy role. Apart from chasing up reports this is largely a case of slotting together the input of other people. I keep an eye on the press and information from other bodies to produce some snippets of interest, useful when I have space to fill. We try and keep the summer update to 16 pages but the winter / AGM edition runs to 28 or 32 pages (they have to be in blocks of four). It is rare that my material exactly fits so some little space fillers are useful. The other part of my job is to keep the content of the web site current. We need a webmaster to look after the black arts in the background. We are currently exploring the options to switch to the RA server and are looking for a format to make this a lot easier which may remove the need for a webmaster.

Thanks to contributors and officers for prompt reports. I have done this job for many years now and would like to hand it over to somebody younger.

GROUP REPORTS

LUTTERWORTH

Our year kicked off to a very good start with a well attended annual dinner at "The Greyhound" in Lutterworth. We had a very successful Spring Walking Weekend in Ruthin, North Wales, where we held a series of walks in the beautiful Clwydian Hills.

Throughout the year we have run an interesting walking programme with rambles in the local area, surrounding counties, the Cotswold's and Derbyshire. During the summer we introduced some short mid week walks in an attempt to broaden our appeal. In general, walk attendance has been slightly down on previous years, however, our membership has remained fairly stable throughout the year.

We continue to promote our Group as much as we can via the local media, and now take monthly advertising in the local press. In August we took part in the Walcote Walking Festival, during which, we did our bit to promote the Ramblers Organisation.

Geoff Manning

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND WALKING GROUP

Another action packed year for LRWG with trips away to the Cotswolds, Castleton in the Peak District, Eskdale in the Lake District, Betws Y Coed in Wales including climbing Snowdon, Millers Dale in the Peak District, The Malvern Hills and the Coalport area of Shropshire.

A number of trips are already being planned for 2016 by LRWG members and also a few members will be attending a National Young Ramblers event.

We have held weekly Sunday walks and evening walks on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from May until the end of August covering Leicestershire, Rutland and the surrounding counties.

The regular social events have continued with monthly Pub meets and quiz nights. In addition to this we have also organised a meal out most months. The summer barbeque was held at the Black Horse in Aylestone this year and we also had the use of the Skittles Alley, luckily as it was raining heavily for most of the evening.

For this years Christmas party, we are doing something completely different and visiting Athena with live entertainment and plenty of food!

There have also been a good selection of other socials throughout the year including beer festivals, cinema and theatre outings, a visit to Newark Houses Museum, a visit to Twycross Zoo trip, Cocktail nights and a trip to watch a Shakespeare play at Stratford.

We held a new members weekend in May which included a Saturday walk at Market Bosworth and a Sunday walk at Wistow.

In August we held a suggestions evening which was well attended by the group and some good ideas were raised.

We also agreed to trial three, four month long programmes over the next year to try and encourage more walk leaders as this means members do not have to plan quite so far in advance.

LRWG also launched on the Meet Up social network at the end of December 2014. It has led to many new people coming along during 2015 who we would not have otherwise met and a few have gone on to join LRWG. This was initially a one year trial and a decision will be made if to continue it in to 2016 at the AGM.

Karl Piggin

COALVILLE

It is pleasing to report that we have had another successful year with a full and varied walking programme as well as a number of enjoyable social events. There have been a number of changes to our committee in 2015. Robert Woodward, our long standing Walks Programme Officer stepped down and has been replaced by Phil Dillon. Also, Ken Storer our Area Rep, Walks Statistician, Membership Secretary and former Chairman has retired, again after many years of valued service.

The decision taken last year to reduce the number of weekend walks from two to one has been confirmed a success with numbers being as good as the combined totals of the past. Overall, the numbers of attendees has been good across most of our regular weekly programme apart from our summer evening walks where the numbers have been down a little. One reason for this could be the fact that a higher proportion of our members are now retired and are therefore able to walk in the day. Over the course of the year our numbers dropped from 243 to 227 despite gaining 19 new members. We placed adverts in two free local magazines in an attempt to attract new walkers with mentions from time to time on Hermitage FM.

In April the group organised a very different and enjoyable Coach Ramble in and around the cliffs, monuments and caves of Hawkstone Park, Shropshire which was very well received by those who took part. The venue for this year's weekend away was sunny Whitby and included a wide range of both coastal and inland walks. We were very pleased to welcome our friends from Loughborough Ramblers on both of these events.

The committee has widely encouraged our members to get involved with the Big Pathwatch and a number of volunteers are busy 'ticking off' their list of claimed grid squares. We wish H.Q. every success with this important but massive and ambitious project especially with groups like ours where the membership is generally not very confident with Information Technology.

Finally, we are proud to say that 2016 will be our 30th anniversary year and we are looking forward to celebrating this landmark

Graham Morrison

RUTLAND

Rutland Ramblers continue to enjoy a fairly constant 125 membership. The average walk attendance is 21 although over 50 members walk regularly with the group. The group walks every other Sunday in tandem with Stamford Ramblers our neighbouring Rambler group and because we co-ordinate walks many members of each group are able to walk every week.

The Rutland Walking Festival was held in May 2015 and the group's regular Sunday walk marked the beginning of the Festival. The Rutland Round, a total of 65 miles formed the usual second week of the Festival which was devised and is still lead by John Williams Rutland's Footpath Secretary.

Our AGM was held in November attended by 21 members and we held our annual dinner at Greetham Valley Golf Club at the end of February. David Middlemass gave an extremely interesting talk about his cycling adventure through South America, and we all marvelled at his experiences. In August Carole Duffey (our Treasurer not the poet) provided an outdoor cream tea treat after our normal Sunday walk and the occasion was enhanced by all day warm sunshine. Later in the month it was our turn to host the Area Walk. There were 22 people on the morning walk and 10 for the afternoon also a good day weatherwise.

At the end of September 16 members spent a long weekend in Bakewell, following the success of a similar weekend last year. The weather once again played its part and a "golden" time was had by all. Who says we haven't had a summer!!

Lesly Hayes

LEICESTER & DISTRICT

We go from strength to strength, principally due to the enthusiasm and willingness to participate of our band of nearly 100 volunteer leaders. We now offer around 270 walks each year. Weekly morning walks on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with all-day walks and shorter leisurely strolls on some Thursday mornings; evening walks May to August; all-day Saturday walks pretty well every week and all-day Sunday walks every week unless there is a coach ramble which are organised every month. We also have shorter Sunday walks once a month, Saturday morning walks twice a month and a New Year's Day Chairman's walk. We have also organised a couple of weekend walking holidays during the year. All the morning walks end up with a meal at a pub, which turns the walk into a social occasion that appeals to everyone. The attendance on all of these walks has shown an increase over the year, though we would still like to see more people coming on the leisurely strolls that are put on specifically for those who prefer short, slower and stile-free rambles. And, of course, all our walks are open to everyone.

Over the year we have attracted 70 new members, but 59 have left, so our overall net membership has increased by only eleven members. But that does mean that the active membership (i.e. those who take part in our led walks) has increased significantly, and this is reflected in the high turnout on nearly all our walks.

Breaking from tradition, we held our AGM in November 2014 on a Saturday afternoon, preceded by a walk round Bradgate Park, a lunch, and a talk on Walking from the Landowner's Point of View. This format proved very successful and is to be repeated this year.

On the social side, we have organised a couple of Skittle Evenings which were well-attended and something we haven't tried before - a Pie Night at Beaumanor Hall. The Group entered several teams in the Area Quiz in October, held at The Linford in Newtown Linford. Terry and Anne Bates organised the evening but Roy Denney did the hard work of setting the questions and being question master. Thank you Roy. 34 people turned up to compete of which 17 were Leicester members. There were 9 teams. The result was a win for one of the Leicester teams and as Loughborough usually win this event most years it was very satisfying for Leicester to win when hosting the event.

We have had many requests from members for some instruction in map and compass work, so we have put on a number of afternoon map reading and navigation seminars during the summer. Restricted to three participants at each seminar, these have comprised an hour or so theory followed by field work at Newton Harcourt. Fourteen members have benefited from these sessions.

Dave Siddons

MELTON MOWBRAY

We have had a wonderful year. Our walk leaders have provided interesting walks for us over the past year (which are open to non-members to come and try). Overall the walks have been well attended. There has been a walk most weekends of around 10 miles and sometimes a short walk alternative for those who prefer not to go so far. Walks every Wednesday evening of 4 - 6 miles between May and September have also been offered, which are always very popular.

We are keen to advertise our walking programme, and in addition to e-mailing it to the majority of our members and placing it on the website, we upload it onto the Ramblers "Walks Finder", have a regular section in the local weekly newspaper and local radio station and post programme leaflets at various venues in and around Melton.

We have had some exciting social events, including a narrow boat trip, meals out and evenings at Melton Theatre. Map reading sessions have been made available for those members who wish to improve their skills. The annual Christmas Dinner at La Torre is also enjoyed by our members.

2015 has proved to be an enjoyable year for our Group, and I'd like to say a big "thank you" to all our members for their support during the year.

Jo King

HINCKLEY

2015 for Hinckley Ramblers started with a change in Chairman designed to cause confusion with the new and outgoing Chairmen having the same name! Same name but no relationship.

It has been a successful year on the walking front with walks arranged for virtually every Saturday, Sunday and Thursday with good attendances throughout the year. The short season of Tuesday Evening walks every fortnight in July and August met with a mixed response and attendances down compared to 2014.

We are seeing a small but steady flow of new walkers which is encouraging. We try and make them feel welcome and some do join The Ramblers. However others come on 1 or 2 walks and then are not seen again. Some are obviously trying a number of different organisations and opting for "private" clubs where the subscriptions are substantially less than the cost of being a

member of The Ramblers. Understandable really if they just want to walk and are not concerned with the wider issues that need significant funding such as campaigning.

We try to establish how people hear about us and have found a wide range of "hows". These include of course our Website, our Facebook page, the local weekly newspaper, friend's recommendations and a new one last week – the walker's mother passed on information discovered at the weekly Walking for Health gathering. In addition to the regular walks a number of weekends away and a midweek 5 day holiday have been arranged including a trip to the Lake District and Holme Lacy, Herefordshire which were successful events, a trip to H.F. Beddgelert, North Wales will also have taken place by the time this Write of Way is published. Plans are also well advanced for a holiday next year to Norfolk.

The group have had a busy time on the social front with several events having taken place this year, including the Annual Dinner held in January. Other events were a Beetle Drive and a "Fur, Feather & Food" evening both well attended with participants totalling mid thirties. The fourth event was a Coach Ramble, the first organised by Hinckley for almost 10 years, with three walks of varying lengths on offer (5, 8 and 11 miles) with a fourth option of a stroll around Henley-on-Thames taking in a part of the Heritage Trail and numerous cafes, restaurants and pubs. Almost 50 people took part and it must have been a success as a number were offering suggestions as to the destination of "Next Year's" Coach Ramble. The Social Year was rounded off with a Skittles Evening: Long Alley Skittles, Table Skittles and "Devil Amongst the Tailors" It was a great success with nearly 50 people in attendance.

The final social event of the year will be a Christmas Meal in mid December. It is really too early to use any of the Christmas salutations although the first Christmas trees were spotted in shops before September was out. Easter Eggs on Sale by the end of November? Enough of that! Looking forward to some excellent Winter walking with the group; but please, sparing with the mud.

Tony Smith

LOUGHBOROUGH

It's good to report another successful year for Loughborough Ramblers with core activities maintained and new initiatives pursued. During the year a total of one hundred and two rambles have been led spread across eight different counties with more than 210 separate people joining in one or more them.

As part of our programme we have led walks for the National Forest Walking Festival, Charnwood Borough Guided Walks, and invited individual to join us when walking for the BBC Countryfile Children in Need appeal. Each of these have resulted in added publicity for the Group and of course increased attendance. A membership initiative has seen us launch a postcard campaign inviting anyone interested in walking and the countryside to join us on one of our walks. A number of new and enthusiastic walkers have joined the Group although unfortunately these numbers have not matched the decline which is due to factors ranging from arthritis, to the increased cost of membership and availability of free walks elsewhere.

We have continued to monitor and, where appropriate, comment on planning applications affecting footpaths in our area. In the future this aspect will have added significance with increased building in rural areas and in particular with planning permission having recently been given for a new 'village' North West of Loughborough with consequences for current paths and potential for new ones. More recently we have played our part in the Big Pathwatch initiative, checking the state of paths in our area and helping with the verification of reports.

Our social activities have been greatly enhanced this year with the addition of a three day holiday for members in May. The destination was Llangollen where the Llangollen Ramblers have devised a circular walk, high above the Vale of Llangollen. While some take up the challenge to do the 54 km Llangollen Round (1700 m ascent) in a day, Loughborough Ramblers went for the rather more leisurely approach of a three day walk, with the finale on the famous Pontcysyllte aqueduct. Plans are already afoot for similar events in 2016 when the destination will be Church Stretton, and 2017 when we hope to tackle the Yorkshire Three Peaks. Once again we were grateful to accept an invitation to participate in a coach ramble organised by the Coalville Group and also their very successful annual holiday this year to Whitby when we were able to assist by leading three walks.

The Group's annual general meeting in November 2014 was again held after a breakfast for all, and before a rather wet walk beside the Soar.

Our biannual newsletter, Soar Feet, has continued to be published thanks to a number of contributors. We will continue to work to recruit and warmly welcome new members. Financially we remain healthy due to grants from the Ramblers Association and our Partnership with Ramblers Holidays.

Finally a big thank you to everyone who has led a walk, helped with the holiday, served on the committee or supported Loughborough Ramblers in any way over the last year.

John Harper