

AGM AGENDA

- 1 Chairman's welcome, opening remarks and naming of best kept path winner
 - 2 Apologies for absence
 - 3 Approval of the minutes of the 26th A.G.M - 24th January 2015 (page ii)
 - 4 Matters arising from those minutes not otherwise on the agenda
 - 5 Presentation of annual reports
 - a) Treasurer's report (viii) and Presentation of accounts (ix)
 - b) Adoption of the accounts and acceptance of Treasurer's report
 - c) Other officers' reports Chairman (v) - Secretary (viii)
 Walking Environment Officer (26viii) - Membership Secretary (x) Editor (vii)
 Webmaster / IT Officer (vii) - Footpaths Officer (vii)
 - d) Group reports (xi)
 - e) Adoption of Officers' and Groups' reports
 - f) Update, Unrecorded and lost ways
 - 6 **GUEST SPEAKER** - Piers Lindley,
 Senior Access & Development Officer (Rights of Way), Leicestershire County Council
 - 7 President's Address and Response
- 15 MINUTE BREAK**
- 8 Affirmation of President and Vice Presidents.
 Peter Williams, President.
 Mike Statham, Alan Loasby, Vice-Presidents.
 - 9 Elections of Honorary Officers
 - Chairman, - Secretary - Treasurer - Footpath Officer
 - Publicity Officer - Walking Environment Officer
 - Membership Secretary - Editor - Webmaster & IT Officer
 - 10 Elections of further members to serve on Area Executive Committee
 - a) Up to two representatives of Affiliated Organisations
 - b) Up to two 'elected' members from the floor
 - 11 Nominations of Group representatives to the Area Executive Committee
 (Coalville, Hinckley, Leicester, Loughborough,
 Lutterworth, Melton, Rutland, LRWG)
 - 12 Confirmation of appointment of an Auditor/Independent Financial Examiner
 - 13 Motions/constitution changes previously notified
 - 14 Nomination of two representatives to General Council
 - 15 Central Office Representative
 - 16 Area Events
 - 17 Advertising
 - 18 Date, venue and format of the next AGM
 - 19 Open Forum

Leicestershire and Rutland Area Ramblers

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 30 January 2016

10.00 am at Burton Lazars village hall, Leicestershire (38 attendees).

1. Chairman's welcome and opening remarks

John Howells welcomed all to the AGM. He thanked the Area team for their work and support during the year. He said it had been a busy year and spoke of the considerable amount of work done to protect the Rights of Way network. A big on-going issue is Network Rail's policy to close at grade railway crossings. He referred to a crossing at Barrow upon Soar that, having been closed for 8 years, we are fighting for a solution (likely a bridge).

John thanked the Rutland group for organising a very good area walk and he thanked the Leicester group for hosting a very good area quiz.

He announced the winner of the Best Kept Footpath competition. The winner was a path in Spring Wood close to Staunton Harold. He said that commendations will be given to paths in Thrussington, Burrough on the Hill, Oadby and Ashby Folville. We have been working with Paul Tame of the National Farmers Union who has helped us to identify the landowners. The competition will be run again in 2016. This year we will carry out the judging earlier as later in the season the path may have been ploughed.

John thanked the Rutland group for hosting the AGM and he thanked the guest speakers, Michael Jeeves and Christine O'Byrne, for attending.

John spoke of the sad passing away of Vice-President Tony Andrews saying that he had contributed greatly to the Ramblers especially to the Coalville Group.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Ray Phipps, Alec Crombie, Mike Statham, Michael Parr, Geoff Manning and Sara Coy (Get Walking, Keep Walking).

3. Approval of the minutes of the 26th AGM - 24 January 2015

The minutes were approved (proposed by Roy Denney and seconded by Mary Rooks).

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

There were no matters arising.

5. Presentation of annual reports

Presentation of the accounts and Treasurer's report

Jeanette stated that it had been a prudent year and at the year end we carried forward a surplus of £602. Although a large proportion of the expenditure continues to be the cost of communicating with the membership there has been a focus on campaigning and strategy including recovering lost ways and the Big Pathwatch.

The Area has received less funding from the centre. This has not impacted funding to the groups. It reflects a lower publicity budget as previously we had purchased various publicity materials for use by the groups. In addition, we have secured a more competitive rate for printing and distribution.

Roy Denney suggested that costs could be higher in future as tasks may pass to a younger generation who may not be taking advantage of free bus passes.

Stan Warren added that costs of researching lost ways may rise if there is a need to visit such places as the Records Office at Kew.

Jeanette thanked all the group treasurers for the accuracy and timeliness of their funding requests and she thanked our auditor, Chris Tipper.

The Treasurers report and accounts were adopted.

John Howells thanked Jeanette for all her work in her three years as treasurer and gave her some gifts.

Secretary's report

Mark Hewitt thanked all those who had supplied information when requested.

Footpath Officer's report

Martin stated that there had been 12 path diversions during the year. There have been many temporary path closures and some new paths added.

Major issues:

Frisby Lakes - two new paths gained following a Public Inquiry

Bardon Quarry extension - this is a 3 year plan involving a number of temporary diversions, some extinguishments, and some new permissive paths. Martin said that the network will be excellent when completed. However, there will be some pain for around 2 years while work is in progress. We are awaiting confirmations of the relevant Orders.

Bridleway R67 Nailstone - Although we reported that the path was open last year, it was very soon blocked again. Martin has just had an update from the County Council and he is satisfied with what they are doing at present.

Railway crossing at Little Bowden - In July Network Rail closed this crossing for improvements to the signalling. NR applied to the County Council for a temporary closure but this was declined twice. However, the crossing remained closed. In September we served a Section 130 Notice on the County Council but nothing was done. In December NR promised to bridge the crossing but no application for this has been received by the County Council. The County Council will issue a Temporary Closure Order once an application for a bridge is presented. Martin said that we will wait until the end of March before pursuing this further.

Recording paths walked - Martin said that he would like all groups to record the paths they have walked so that if a path is in dispute, we can provide evidence of using the path. He said that Melton group are doing this using a database that Martin had available at the meeting to demonstrate to any members who were interested. The database includes the names of the walk participants and the path numbers of the paths used. Martin is willing to help groups establish a system for recording paths used.

Assistant Footpath Officer and Survey Secretary

Stan Warren outlined the Ramblers Big Pathwatch initiative which ran from July 3rd to January 10th. He presented various figures comparing our area with the national picture.

In our area 47.9% of the 1 km squares were completed including 59.41% of the sample squares that the Ramblers requested that we complete. (136 of the squares contain no Rights of Way). Out of 51 Ramblers Areas, we came 22nd in terms of total number of squares completed and 25th in terms of number of sample squares completed.

Positive features recorded in our area were higher than the national average while negative features recorded were lower:

Positive features (%): National Average 37.08, Leicestershire 45.02, Rutland 39.17

Negative features: National Average 54.16, Leicestershire, 48.73 Rutland, 27.84

The results also showed that one could walk considerably further in our area before encountering a problem than the national average:

National Average 1.22 km, Leicestershire 2.53 km, Rutland 4.77 km

Stan was concerned that the County Council would be swamped with spurious problem reports so he agreed to check the reports and remove any that appeared to be spurious before submitting the list to the Council. He was concerned that our good reputation with the Council could suffer if they received many spurious reports.

Stan said that 539 negative features were reported in Leicestershire of which 190 were reported to the County Council and 265 were rejected. A further 84 need to be verified before reporting to the County Council.

Stan said that one problem with the Big Pathwatch was the option of describing a negative feature as 'Other' as the County Council will not investigate an unspecified problem.

Editor and Walking Environment Officer

Roy Denney said that he did not have anything further to add to his written reports.

Publicity Officer

Eddie East said that he did not see much value in attending country fairs; although they get the Ramblers brand around the area, they do not seem to attract many new members. He did not feel able to continue in the role but he still has various publicity materials that the groups can use and that they can contact him if they would like to borrow items. He is happy to continue to store and distribute these.

Group reports

Stan expressed his own view that the group reports in Write of Way had too much emphasis on activities like weekends away and too little on work to protect the path network.

The Officers' and Groups' reports were accepted.

Get Walking, Keep Walking Report

In the absence of GWKW co-ordinator, Sara Coy, Stan Warren provided an update: In the past year there were 20 Get Walking programmes, involving 300 people and 900 GWKW packs were distributed.

The scheme has now transferred to the Ramblers and Macmillan supported 'Walking for Health' initiative and some of the GWKW volunteers are leading and supporting walks under Walking for Health. WfH are seeking more volunteers.

6. Guest Speaker - Michael Jeeves, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

Michael Jeeves outlined the history and purpose of the Trust. Established in 1956, the Trust now has 16,000 members. Its remit is to promote nature conservation and to provide access to nature reserves. It will acquire land for nature reserves and manage the reserves. The Trust manages 33 reserves covering 3000 acres and gives advice to landowners. It provides educational activities for children. However, it relies on volunteers.

Landscapes managed by the Trust include woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and heath lands for example Charnwood Lodge. These areas include 20 Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

At Rutland Water much work has been done to allow the less able to access the area.

Michael said that the trust faces a number of challenges including irresponsible dog owners allowing their pets to chase birds and motorcycles causing damage to grasslands by creating ruts.

Following his talk, Michael took questions from the floor.

7. President's address and response

Peter Williams thanked Michael Jeeves for his presentation.

Peter said that we have a number of members active in support of the aim of protecting the path network. Current concerns including the closure of railway crossings, the effect of HS2 on the network and the cuts in government grants to Highway Authorities.

We have been actively surveying paths, mapping potential routes that may be claimed as unrecorded ways, we have supported and assisted with the creation of the National Forest Way as well as walking the paths; 1000 led walks have been organised by our groups.

Peter added that we should try to use the whole width of the path rather than walk single file as this will help the farmer to maintain the full width. We should also focus energy on recruiting new members.

Finally, Peter paid tribute to the Area Officers who are retiring from the Area Committee, namely Chairman John Howells, Treasurer Jeanette Hollis, Assistant Footpath Officer and Survey Secretary Stan Warren and Publicity Officer, Eddie East.

8. Affirmation of President and Vice Presidents

The following were affirmed:

Peter Williams, President, Mike Statham and Alan Loasby, Vice-Presidents

9. Elections of Honorary Officers

The following were elected:

Tony Smith, Chairman, Mark Hewitt, Secretary, John Howells, Treasurer, Martin James, Footpath Officer
Membership Secretary, Ray Phipps, Walking Environment Officer, Roy Denney
IT Officer & Webmaster Jim Storer, Editor, Roy Denney

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

No representatives from affiliated organisations were elected.

Trevor Martin (Hinckley group) was elected as a member from the floor.

11. New Chairman's address

Tony Smith addressed the meeting. He thanked members for electing him as Area Chairman. He said that we need to attract younger members.

12. Nominations of group representatives to the Area Executive Committee

Jackie Seager	Coalville
Howard Watmore	Leicester
Tony Smith	Hinckley
John Howells	Loughborough
Martin James	Melton Mowbray
John Williams	Rutland
Geoff Manning	Lutterworth
Karl Piggin	LRWG

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

Chris Tipper has agreed to continue in the above role and this was confirmed by the meeting.

14. Motions to General Council

Two proposed motions were published in the winter 2015 newsletter 'Write of Way'

The Group Administration motion was withdrawn following expressed intentions of Central Office.

The Network Rail motion was redrafted prior to the AGM and Martin outlined it to the meeting and set it in context.

We are happy with the Ramblers policy on permanent crossing closures but we are unhappy with the way that Network Rail are pursuing 'temporary' crossing closures. We believe that they have been using the wrong legislation including the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to which we cannot object, and traffic regulations.

The redrafted motion was agreed by the meeting.

15. Nomination of two representatives to General Council.

The following were nominated: Delegates: Roy Denney, Tony Smith

It was agreed that Stan Warren and Mark Hewitt be also sent as observers

16. Progress report, Unrecorded ways

Stan Warren spoke about the work that was being carried out to try to ensure that unrecorded ways are added to the definitive map prior to the cut-off date of 2026. Around 3500 routes have been mapped with much of the work done by our IT Officer, Jim Storer.

Stan said that there are 15 key routes in Rutland that we would like to see added.

He said that much research would be needed which may include visits to the Records Office at Kew and we therefore need to encourage members to get involved. We may wish to approach colleges, universities and local history societies to see if they can assist.

17. Central Office representative - Christine O'Byrne

Christine thanked the Area Committee for inviting her to speak at the AGM. She said it was a great meeting and very positive. She said that the Area were well organised. Christine spoke about her background saying that she had been a Ramblers member for 4-5 years and was Publicity Officer of the Tiger Bay Ramblers - a group she described as 'for people of working age'. She said that she has been a Ramblers Trustee for 2 years and Vice Chair for one year. Christine commented that there are no women serving on the newly elected area committee; she would like to see more women getting involved in running the Ramblers and more younger people serving on the Board of Trustees. She stated that 56% of Ramblers members are women and 18% of members are in the age range 18-24. Christine said that the Ramblers has 108,000 members; however an estimated 6.5 million people enjoy walking. We therefore need to make a big push to increase membership. However, we have 25,000 volunteers carrying out a wide variety of tasks including health walks, organising walks for the groups and maintaining paths. To support these volunteers, the Ramblers has developed a 'Volunteer Took Kit' and a 'Welcome Pack'. It also has a scheme for volunteer recognition.

Christine spoke about the Big Pathwatch. She said that there had been no national picture of the state of the path network. The feedback received from the Big Pathwatch should help the Ramblers nationally to decide where to concentrate efforts to ensure that the network is maintained and easy to use. Around 50% of the country has been completed and two-thirds of the participants were not Ramblers members. The project has generated some positive media coverage.

Christine said that the Ramblers have been awarded £200,000 by the People's Post Code Lottery and this was followed by a further £25,000. In response to a question on education, Christine said that Ramblers Cymru have developed a number of lesson plans to promote walking in schools. If successful, this programme may be rolled out more widely.

The governance review is continuing and One Member, One Vote is likely to be readdressed in 2018. The Board is taking to GC proposals for updated articles which are gender inclusive and in plain English.

Christine thanked all volunteers and then took questions from the floor.

18. Date and venue of the next AGM

The next AGM will be held on Saturday 28 January 2017 and will be hosted by the Lutterworth group. The venue and time will be announced later.

19. Open forum

A number of questions were asked in the open forum and the meeting closed at 13:24

Mark Hewitt, Area Secretary

OFFICERS REPORTS

Due to timing issues this newsletter is out earlier this year and officers may be able to further update members at the AGM.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND COMMENTS

Well into my first year of office and so far have found it very rewarding, mainly due to the support and cooperation I have received from my colleagues both on Area committee and general membership. We seem to sing from the same hymn sheet which makes it easier. Although it was a big blow Stan Warren standing down in January. His knowledge and experience has been sadly missed on many matters but Martin James is proving a more than adequate replacement on footpaths.

I attended my first General Council at York which was very interesting but we did not get round to discussing our motion on crossing gates legislation and Ramblers Head office involvement. Time ran out which was very sad considering

the efforts put into the proposal by Stan, Roy, and Martin. However Martin is keeping us up to speed on any development at Barrow or Little Bowden. This is a national problem and pressure on Network Rail is very necessary both on footpath and general public safety.

We have completed the Pathwatch exercise successfully according to Ramblers HQ and can now move on, but we have Lost Ways looming round the corner. We will tackle this when we have more information from Roy, Stan and Jim Storer who will be attending the meeting at Birmingham in October.

When I was elected in January I promised to visit all areas in Leicestershire and Rutland during my term of office. So far I have visited Hinckley, LRWG, and Loughborough and have had contacts with Lutterworth. I still intend to visit all areas by the end of my office. I did attend a seminar in London with several other new area chairmen and must report that we are as well run and professional as any of the other areas, well done.

We had the Area walk in September which was successfully hosted by Lutterworth group at Foxton Locks. Thirty two people attended which was almost a satisfactory turnout considering the weather forecast. Two walks took place and were most enjoyable until the rain set in towards the end and the afternoon walk had to be abandoned. It was most enjoyable walking and talking to members from various groups.

A big thank you to all the groups for submitting their best kept footpath entries, we had nine nominations this year with all nominations in by end of August as requested. Having the judging late summer is the best time to do it, again thank you. Peter and I have made the final decision with a little help from Roy. There were two very creditable field paths worth a runners up spot and one very short path near Peggs Green where the owner cuts the grass regular and has planted roses and bulbs down the edge. A special mention to the Swannington Mill Trust site who are working very hard at improving their footpaths network and welcome Ramblers to visit and see the improvements they are making for the general public. I hope you have noticed our new web site set up by Jim Storer. We had problems with the old one and Jim has worked very hard to bring us into the twenty first century. Please use the facility it has many attributes especially for planning walks and programmes.

On a sadder note our present area secretary Mark Hewitt stands down next January due to his three year term being completed and we desperately need a replacement. I am assured it is not an onerous task these days with Email almost completely replacing the heavy post we used to have. If anyone is interested please contact Mark or myself. Without a secretary it will be very difficult to continue in the present format.

Dates to put in your diary -

Area Quiz October 28th at Hugglescote Social Club starting at 7.00pm. All teams welcomed from any part of the area.

AGM – Saturday January 28th at Lutterworth Wycliffe Rooms start 9.00am

Volunteers Development Day – April 22nd or 23rd 2017. This is a prestigious event for Leicestershire and Rutland Area. We need to make it a success, details and opportunities will be supplied later in the year. Venue is still to be decided. Map reading, first aid training, legislation updates, guided walk are all on the agenda plus lunch of course. The day will be run by Ramblers personnel from London with some local assistance. Please put these dates in your diaries it should be worth attending.

Finally a big thank you to all our area committees for keeping the flag flying so successfully over the year and I wish all ramblers my best wishes for remainder of the year and throughout 2017.

Tony Smith

FOOTPATH OFFICER

Details of changes since the last edition of Write of Way are provided on page 14 and a further update can be given at the AGM. If anybody would like further details about these or any other footpath alterations please feel free to contact me.

Martin James

EDITOR

This has been a busy and difficult if rewarding time. We lost our web site when it was hacked and lost this means of communication for several months. Jim Storer, our IT officer took on the mantle of building an entirely new one from scratch using a Ramblers template and we do now have a much improved product. This did mean I had to repopulate it with material which took a very considerable time. We are now able to put the Write of Way on there and articles etc from previous editions have been also put onto the site. I thank Groups for sending material in for publication and welcome photographs as they brighten up the pages. Where space does not permit for them to be used they can still go on the web site in glorious colour. It is our long term ambition to switch to using the site a rather than twice yearly paper newsletters but that is some years off yet.

Roy Denney

WEBMASTER & IT OFFICER

After some initial problems coordinating the transfer of the web site domain name, the Web Site seems to have settled down well. The domain name is now managed by the Ramblers with myself as Web Master. There was an initial steep learning curve regarding Joomla, the developer facility, but we now have multiple Web Pages that reflect the Areas requirements. There have been over 10,000 hits since it went live which means we are starting to find our audience.

As for the mapping of all unrecorded ways the initial problem was to provide a single map showing all the lost ways, unrecorded and therefore unprotected ways and the missing links in the network. This could be done on many online systems but I was able to use a Web product, ViewRanger, that could use an offline GPS App to show the routes via a computer, projector or even a TV with an HDMI connector. Over 2000 routes were created on ViewRanger with a

further 1000 routes shown on PDF files via scanning the original drawings. From this total a third of the ViewRanger routes were converted to GPX files that could be overlaid onto the mapping that local government used. Rutland has provided a PDF file showing their overlay but I have not yet seen anything from Leicestershire.

Jim Storer

WALKING ENVIRONMENT OFFICER

Another very busy year. Much of the work entailed in this role involves other parties. I serve on the Local Access Forum at County Hall as the Chairman of their Planning and Travel Committee and use that position to argue Ramblers causes and lend support to efforts of our Footpaths Officer when contesting or suggesting improvements to the footpath network when larger planning applications come in. Through them I also serve on the Leicestershire Parks, Open Spaces and Countryside Partnership, The National Forest Access & Recreation Group, The Local Nature Partnership, The Heart of the Forest Access & Connectivity Group, The Charnwood Forest Regional Park Steering Group and the Development Board of the Charnwood Landscape Partnership project. As such the Ramblers views are never overlooked.

Much of the specific work I have actually been involved with is the ongoing project to discover and identify lost or unrecorded and therefore unprotected paths. Under the umbrella of the Access Forum numerous groups have come together to work on this and John Howells, Stan Warren, Jim Storer and I are major contributors. The British Horse Society, Leicestershire Bridleways Association, Leicestershire Footpaths Association and other interested parties are all involved.

Roy Denney

SECRETARY'S REPORT

As usual the Area Executive Committee have held four meetings during the year and the officers other informal gatherings to drive the area agenda forward.

I will be standing down at the AGM after a maximum three year term in the role so we are in need of a replacement. The main part of the role is to produce the agenda and take the minutes for the formal meetings; not an onerous task.

The Secretary maintains a list of contacts including the area officers and the key Group committee members and will pass on to them any emails received from Ramblers Central Office and any correspondence generated by the area officers.

Mark Hewitt

TREASURER'S REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

Due to timing issues and the formal processes these reports are not yet audited. Any changes will be advised to members at the AGM and will be published for the wider membership in the next newsletter.

LEFT BLANK FOR ACCOUNTS

At our AGM in January I was appointed to the role of Area Treasurer having been big boots to fill. For the previous 3 years Jeanette Hollis had kept a firm hand controlling the Area finances, making all aware that any monies spent needed to fall within the charitable aims of the Ramblers. But more importantly Jeanette was always there in support of the Area team and Group treasures going way beyond balancing the books. Jeanette has given me further support during the year as I navigated my way through the bank accounts and the spreadsheets from the Ramblers finance team. Jeanette of course left the accounts in perfect order.

To help me be a competent treasurer I attended a volunteer's development day earlier this year in Nottingham to meet the Ramblers finance team and understand the finer points of the role. The day was enjoyable and I had the opportunity to meet like minded volunteers from our area and other areas.

My report is early due to WOW publication date being printed before Chris Tipper has independently examined the accounts, thank you Chris for your continued support.

The accounts therefore printed are unaudited but show that the year has been a prudent one. It has been another good year of cost controls with a commitment to ensure we had effective communication to our members. Therefore the main expenditure has been on the printing and postage of the Area news letter.

We have not yet had confirmation of next year's budgets, 3 groups have asked for additional monies over the base amount, the Area has asked for additional funding to ensure that we have a war chest available for the very important task of identifying lost ways if the need arises during the next financial year.

I would like to thank all Group treasurer's for their continued support

John Howells

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

This report is being produced in September for practical reasons so the figures are for the 12 months ending in August.

At the end of August 2015 we had a total of 1566 members and by August 2016 this had reduced to 1517 a drop of 49 or 3.23%

I have contacted the individual membership secretaries for their views on why their own membership figures have remained static or have increased or decreased. There appears to be no real reason as to why figures have fluctuated, but it appears that groups are relatively content that the members that they have got are more active and so in real terms are benefiting from being members of the largest walking organisation in the country.

The figures are made up as follows.

	2015	2016	
01 Hinckley	231	205	-26
02 Leicester	466	450	-16
03 Melton	152	129	-23
04 Coalville	223	232	+9
05 Rutland	123	124	+1
06 Loughborough	139	147	+8
07 Lutterworth	110	96	-14
50 LRWG	106	108	+2
98 Others	15	24	+9

GROUP REPORTS

Coalville

We have seen a slight upward trend in new membership, which stands at 233, a net gain of about six. It would be nice that some of our advertising and encouragement on walks was paying off, but it's hard to tell and some referrals seem to be word of mouth, website trawls and such.

Our walks have been well attended and we offered seven walks to the National Forest Walking Festival in May, one turning out 45 walkers. We also had a party of French people on the occasion of a town twinning joint venture.

Since the start of the year we have led 86 walks with 1198 walkers.

Loughborough Ramblers joined us on both our September weekend walking break to Whitby and for a day out in and around the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in May. Both these great excursions were organised by Gwen, our Social Sec.

This September we are walking the Bournemouth area.

A very well attended event to mark our thirtieth anniversary was held May 1st, with old and new members mixing and sharing stories.

It falls to our Group to host the Annual quiz this time, 7:00 pm for 7:30 start on October 28th at Hugglescote Social Club, LE67 2FP.

It is our AGM on Tuesday 18th October 2016 at Hugglescote Social Club 7:30pm.

Jacquie Seager

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. Walks every Wednesday evening of 4 - 6 miles between May and September have also been offered, which are always very popular. We have also had two weekends in the Peak District and a charity walk for St Basil's took place on 18 June.

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 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.

There have also been holidays arranged to Alnwick and Llangollen this year which were greatly enjoyed by those who went.

2016 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

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND WALKING GROUP

The group started the year off with a very cold weekend away in Buxton. So cold in fact the water to the accommodation had been turned off to prevent it freezing. Some improvising was needed with buckets of water from the owner's house which was nearby. Not put off by this freezing trip in January a number of LRWG members spent a weekend in Hartington in February.

For the bank holiday weekend at the end of May a large number of the group spent the weekend at Talybont On Usk in the Brecon Beacons. The weekend started with a tour of Brecon Cathedral, followed by a hill walking day which included many peaks including Pen Y Fan, a waterfall walk day and then a visit to a nearby castle on the way home on the Monday.

To enjoy the glorious summer weather a costal camping trip to Hemsby in Norfolk was the destination for the August bank holiday. This included a walk from Potter Heigham to Hickling nature reserve and broad and a figure of eight walk from Hemsby including a carvery Sunday dinner.

At the time of writing, a trip to Whitby was planned for October and a Christmas party at the Mercure Grand Hotel in Leicester.

Closer to home, we continue to have a walk nearly every Sunday, typically 8-13 miles, at locations all around Leicester & Rutland and also in the Peak District. Attendance can be anything from single figures to 20+. Our usual programme of midweek evening walks ran from May to August and we have a few sunset walks and night hikes outside of these months. We have also had occasional shorter walks or long challenge walks on Saturdays, and some combined short walks plus social events on Saturdays, e.g. a walk around Kenilworth followed by a visit to the castle.

With the usual regular pub meets, pub quizzes, meals out, beer festivals, night clubs, days out to Lincoln Castle to see the touring poppy display, Kenilworth Castle, Warwick Castle and Baddesley Clinton National Trust property, it was another great year for LRWG.

Karl Piggin

Leicester Group

The last year has been another successful one for the Leicester & District Group. Membership of the group remains high at over 450. This is about the same as last year. It is unclear how many of these individuals participate in the walks programme but with over 80 individuals acting as walk leaders and an extensive diary of walks we can presume that there is fairly high degree of participation.

At the heart of the group's success is the extensive walks programme. The group organises well over 300 walks each year. These vary from less demanding "strolls" of 3 to 4 miles to more strenuous hikes of 15 - 18 miles. The shorter walks of about 6 miles seem to be very popular and frequently will attract groups of 20 to 30 people.

The long established monthly coach trips remain as popular as ever and regularly attract walkers from other Leicestershire Ramblers groups.

None of this happens without a lot of work behind the scenes. Leicester Group is lucky to have a hardworking team of Walk Organisers and over 80 walk leaders. This sharing of the workload will hopefully make the walks programme sustainable into the future.

The Group has also had a series of regular social events throughout the year including Pub Skittles evenings, Pie Nights and a quiz. The group has raised over £300 for the Derbyshire, Leicestershire & Rutland Air Ambulance Service.

The group website has been plagued with malware during the year but is now up and running again. The walks programme can be accessed here or via the National Ramblers website.

Charles de Podesta

Rutland Group

Our Walks Leaders under David's cajoling continue to provide us with interesting walks which are always well attended, proving I think, that all members appreciate their efforts, although they are rarely publicly thanked.

2016 started with Rutland hosting the Area AGM which was the first occasion for the current Committee. It turned out that the venue was ideally suited for the occasion and we were relieved that the Area Committee swiftly organised furniture etc., to suit the occasion leaving us to concentrate on the catering element. We were fairly sure the occasion was a success.

It is often suggested that one joins a group of some kind to meet friends and like to think that Rutland Ramblers offer friendship to all newcomers. One couple took this to its ultimate conclusion and actually tied the knot in June. Congratulations to Rita and Barry and hope they have many happy years of marriage and that they will always enjoy walking with Rutland Ramblers.

Rutland Council is extremely good at maintaining footpaths under John Williams excellent guidance; many stiles being replaced by gates when repair is called for.

The High Sheriff of Rutland came to speak to us at our annual dinner which was very interesting, informative and amusing.

We will be sorry to lose Alec as our Chair at our next AGM. He has served us well for six years and as Secretary I have certainly appreciated his guiding hand. Alec is not sitting back on his laurels and has already become Mayor of Uppingham, we wish him well in that post but obviously we still look forward to his company on our walks.

Lesly Hayes

Lutterworth

Our walking programme has been well supported throughout the year. We have completed Sections 1-7 of the new National Forest Way and have had trips to the Malvern Hills and Derbyshire. Our Spring Walking Weekend was based in Whitby at the Wetherspoons Hotel and was a great success with our members enjoying a coastal walk to Robin Hoods Bay and a moorland walk from Goathland.

In September we hosted the Area Walk from Foxton Locks and despite poor weather conditions we had a good turnout for both the short and long walks. On the downside, for the first time in memory our membership has dropped below one hundred; despite our best efforts to promote our Group in the local media.

We look forward to welcoming Area members at "The Wycliffe Rooms", Lutterworth in January 2017 for the Area AGM

Geoff Manning

Hinckley

The group is fortunate that we are able to continue offering Saturday and Sunday walks every week with just odd exceptions such as no "Hinckley" walk when the Area walk took place and later this year it is unlikely we will offer a walk on Christmas Day although that missing date will be replaced with a walk on Boxing Day. The continued full programme being due obviously to many members being willing to lead walks and the gentle encouragement of our Walks Co-ordinator, John Sim, to said leaders every 4 months to get their walks in so they can be published on the 3 times a year programme. John is stepping down after 10 Years as Walks Co-ordinator after completing our November to February programme and, as many have said, he will be a hard act to follow. The other sentiment heard more than once is that "He has done a damn fine job". Apparently John only took over the role of Walks Coordinator for a few months when the previous incumbent was taken ill. And 10 years later.... Maybe a salutary story there for prospective Volunteers.

I'd like to record my thanks to John for his excellent contribution. It will be strange when he isn't doing the job next year as he has been doing it ever since I joined the Ramblers.

This year we expanded the number of walks on Tuesday Summer Evenings by having a weekly walk on the programme for the months of June and July instead of every fortnight. One of the reasons being that people said they "forgot" that a walk was on this week. However apart from the first walk of the season these Evening walks were not well supported so again we will have to consider their viability for 2017.

In addition to the programmed walks we also walk almost every Thursday. These walks, typically around 8 miles, are arranged some 3 to 7 weeks in advance and are advertised on our Facebook page, Twitter and our weekly Newsletter - Pete's Ramblings. Of course our walks are also listed on the Area Website and Walkfinder. So, one way or another we will have put on approx 160 walks during the year. And by doing so that obviously makes a decent contribution to keeping paths open.

It almost goes without saying, but I will anyway, that members of other groups are always welcome to join us for a walk as indeed are RA members who don't normally walk with groups. And of course non members can come and try out walking with a group to see if it is for them.

During the year the group had a couple of breaks away which were appreciated by those who went. Thanks to the organisers for arranging these.

Some members undertook path surveys in the last year or so - the rolling 4/5 year ones - in the area adjacent to Hinckley. It was surprising the number of miles walked completing the squares. With funding cuts we will need to be vigilant that

the condition of our paths is at least maintained. To that end we need members to report problems as they find them so that at least the serious ones can get on the Council "To Do" list.

On the social side we have had a successful quiz night. New quizmasters setting the questions with even the winning team claiming the questions were too hard. We need them to attend the Area Quiz and then they will find out the definition of "Hard Questions". A Walking Treasure Hunt was arranged and enjoyed by all who attended. Unfortunately we picked the wrong Saturday - it was wet in the morning - and this affected the attendance. In the afternoon it was a very pleasant day but by then decisions had been made whether to attend or not. We made this an "Open" event and we had a number of non members attend. Whether any will be tempted to become RA members remains to be seen but you never know what attracts people to join.

Between writing this piece and publication we are holding a Barn Dance. Again an "Open" event.

Last year, 2015, we had the first Hinckley Coach Ramble for a number of years with Henley-on-Thames being the destination. By popular demand this was repeated in 2016 with Shrewsbury being the destination. Two Linear walks were arranged and a 5 mile circular walk which all had good numbers.

Back in June/July Four members tackled The Pennine Way with three completing the trek of what is said to be the roughest and toughest Long Distance Walk in the country. The fourth suffered an insect bite which prevented "Rambling" for about two weeks. Planning has already started for "Take 2"!

Tony Smith (Hinckley Chairman)

Loughborough

It is pleasing to report a small increase in the Groups' membership in 2016. With a relatively small catchment area, and thus smaller membership than some groups, changes in numbers have to be viewed with caution. However, we have been pleased to welcome new and enthusiastic walkers some of whom have already volunteered to lead walks.

Over the past two years we have had an emphasis on recruitment and retention of members and perhaps this is now bearing fruit. Our programme of walks is varied not only in the areas we visit but the days of the week on which they are offered. This appears to be a formula which appeals to a membership which enjoys other commitments.

We have again participated in the National Forest Walking Festival, led walks as part of the Charnwood Borough programme, and taken advantage of publicity available through the Ramblers' walking festivals.

When appropriate we have also continued our postcard campaign inviting anyone interested in walking and the countryside to join us on one of our walks. Above all we have remained friendly and welcoming.

Work in monitoring planning applications affecting footpaths in our area and reporting problems continues to be a major responsibility for the Group. In December we completed checks on the state of all footpaths we were allocated in the Ramblers Association Big Pathwatch initiative, and subsequently dealt with the verification of a number of reports. We hope in future some members will be able to play a part in the Leicestershire County Council surveys and monitoring.

In May a three day holiday for members was organised to Church Stretton with all staying at HF Holidays' excellent Long Mynd Hotel. With perfect weather there were full day walks over the Long Mynd plateau on the Saturday, and over Caer Caradoc hill fort on the Sunday and there was still time for some to have a dip in the swimming pool before a good meal and after dinner entertainment. For those looking for something less challenging there were self-guided walks also directly from the hotel. In 2017 we will be staying in Malham when some will be tackling the Yorkshire Three Peaks.

Once again we were grateful to accept an invitation to participate in a coach ramble organised by the Coalville Group, which this year was to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, when we were able to assist in leading one of the walks. Some members also joined that Group on their annual holiday to Bournemouth. Our annual dinner in February was held amidst the grandeur of Beaumanor Hall but ignored the formalities of such surroundings and took the form of a highly successful pie night. Such events, together with a skittles evening, and the Area quiz, all helped form the Group's character and thus contributed to us fulfilling our wider aims.



Our Group's finances continue to be well managed. This year we have taken out Group membership with HF Holidays which has already resulted in benefits in the form of cheaper Group bookings and payment for adverts in Soar Feet.

We also continue to receive support from our partnership with Ramblers Holidays. In the 2016/17 financial year we will apply to the RA for a small additional budget so that we can continue with our recruitment and retention initiatives. In a few weeks another new initiative to engage members will be a short walk and buffet lunch prior to our annual general meeting.

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

John Harper (Chairman)