



EAST BERKS RAMBLERS

Berkshire Area

Group website: www.eastberksramblers.org

Ramblers website: www.ramblers.org.uk

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No. 143 - April 2024

We have prepared a **Walks Programme** for **May - June 2024**. Details of all the EBR walks can be found on the [Walks page of the EBR website](#). You can also download the Walks programme for printing on the Walks Programme page.

New Members

A very warm welcome to our new Members:

Jackie Fricker Anand Gona & Anusha Moravaneni Sharon Holt Carol Cooke
Christine Fletcher Sally Waterman Esther Brienza Sandra Gee
Rosemarie Curran Merril Drew & Peter Pavliv Louise Mifsud Amanda Kirby

You have joined a very friendly and sociable Group and we look forward to welcoming you on our walks. We hope you will enjoy your membership on walks, at our social events, and by volunteering. But even if you play a more passive role thank you for giving your support to the Ramblers, the national Association for walkers and for the protection of our rights of way heritage.

For membership enquiries contact Malcolm Stone
Email: membership@eastberksramblers.org

The position of Chair remains vacant so we are missing our regular **Chairman's Chat** in this issue!

It has been a very wet start to the year and quite a few walks had to be cancelled due to impossible conditions and flooding but EBR members have demonstrated a commitment to walking. This was very apparent on the first coach walk in March when we were lucky to have perfect weather with blue skies and sunshine but the conditions underfoot were horrendous! No-one on the walk had experienced so much mud but we all plodded along with lots of positive encouragement and support from Dawn and Julie which was appreciated by all! Everyone's spirits remained high throughout the 11.5 miles and there were lots of smiles and laughter when we boarded the bus at the end of the day. Let's hope we have better conditions for the remaining stages of the Brenda Parker Way.

Newsletter Delivery *Malcolm Stone Membership Secretary*

Ramblers Central Office have decided to stop providing Ramblers Groups with address labels for posting out hard copies of Newsletters. The EBR Committee has decided that, after the April edition of our Newsletter, future editions will only be provided via email. The Newsletter is sent to all members who have provided an email address. If you wish to receive the newsletter and have email, please ensure that we have your email address on file. Email me at membership@eastberksramblers.org. In addition, a copy of the Newsletter is available on our website, under the Members Section tab.

For those members without an email address and who cannot obtain a copy of the Newsletter from a friend, please write to me at 80 Bissley Drive, Maidenhead SL6 3UU.

Planning and Countryside *Ian lent*

As you may have seen in The Advertiser, the planning application for Holyport film studio has been rejected by RBWM. We were one of the many groups that lodged objections as several paths would have been lost. Hopefully this will be the end of the matter - but of course there may be an appeal.

Several major housing proposals are trundling, slowly, through the planning process. These include plans for; 200 houses in Cookham; for 1500 homes on Maidenhead Golf Course; and for 225 homes at Woodland Park (Lillebrook). We will monitor these proposals as they progress and object/comment as public rights of way are affected.

Path Wardens *Ian lent*

Have you ever thought of becoming a path warden? The valuable work done by our dedicated path warden team generates a significant source of income for EBR. More importantly, it is instrumental in ensuring that our path network remains in good shape for everyone to enjoy. Some of the original group of wardens are retiring after many years' service and we are looking for volunteers to join the team. The role requires a few hours work twice a year to complete path surveys plus whatever time you'd like to donate to monitor part of the path network. Please speak to Ian (Committee5@eastberksramblers.org) or any of the other path wardens if you would like to find out more.

The autumn survey was successfully completed last November and we are expecting to commence the spring survey in the near future.

Two new path wardens have joined the team. **Kaye Carver** is taking over from Shelagh Whitehouse as Path Warden for Eton East and **Richard Falconer** is taking over from Phil Smith for Horton & Wraysbury. Many thanks to Shelagh and Phil for all their efforts over many years.

Booking a trip with Ramblers Holidays?

EBR are affiliated to the **Walking Partnership**. If you book a holiday with Ramblers Walking Holidays please remember to nominate **East Berkshire Ramblers** when you do your booking to ensure we receive funds. For UK holidays - £10.00 per person, European/short haul it is £20.00 per person and Worldwide it is £30.00 per person.

Please note the nomination must be done before the holiday and cannot be done retrospectively. For details please go to www.thewalkingpartnership.org.uk.

Temple Bridge Update

Graham Sexton

At our last AGM there was some understandable dissatisfaction expressed about the situation at Temple Bridge which provides a walking route across the Thames near Hurley. This was closed in May 2023 owing to structural problems. The bridge is the responsibility of the Environment Agency and they issued a press release in September 2023 but this failed to provide any concrete plans or timescales for the repair of the bridge. I am sorry to say that there has been no further news from the EA. On 20th February, I wrote to them to complain about the situation. Here is the text of the letter:

I am writing on behalf of East Berkshire

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Ramblers, who contributed to the funding of Temple Bridge in 1989, to express our concern with the situation that now exists. Nine months have elapsed since the bridge was closed and it has been more than six months since your last press release. There is still no plan or timescale for repair or replacement. As you point out, the bridge had a thirty year design life, so a prudent organisation responsible for its upkeep would have been making financial provision for the current situation over the past five years; it is not acceptable to now claim there is "no money".

Your press release reminds us of your legal obligation to maintain structures to facilitate navigation on the Thames. I would like to point out that there is also a statutory duty to maintain public rights of way. We do not accept the premise, implied by your press release, that boaters' rights take precedence over walkers' rights. As I am sure you are aware, the situation is compounded in this case because Temple Bridge is part of the Thames Path, which is a National Trail. Just because the local authority has specified a diversion does not mean that it is satisfactory or acceptable as part of a National Trail. There has been much work in other parts of the country to remove road walking from National Trails and your inaction in this matter threatens the reputation of National Trails as safe and pleasant walking routes.

I hope to receive news very soon of your plans to rectify this unfortunate situation.

As of today (26th March) they have not had the courtesy to reply. I know that other local organisations (Wycombe Ramblers, Open Spaces Society, Marlow residents) are also frustrated by the situation but like us are struggling to find ways to hold the EA to account. Complaints can be sent to enquiries_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk and it would be helpful if individual members of the group could register their views. You are welcome to use the same arguments as in my letter but if you could include some words of your own, maybe around how it has affected your local walks, that would be even better.

Walks Programme *Linda Francis*

First of all, a big thank you to all walk leaders who have battled on through mud and floods to provide a lovely programme with a great variety of walks through the winter. Without you there would be no Ramblers! We have been lucky to be able to provide walks nearly every Wednesday and Sunday, on most occasions a choice of longer and shorter walks.

However, we really need a few more people to come forward to lead walks, even one per programme helps and it doesn't have to be original - you can use walks from any of our Rambling for Pleasure books, OS websites, All Trails etc etc. Please don't be put off by paperwork, it's really not onerous - just fill in the Risk Assessment (which is already prepared) with details of the walk and then a short report afterwards.

I am very happy to help with that and with entering walks onto the system if you are not sure how to do it. There is guidance about leading walks on our EBR website. Please contact me if you would like to lead a walk.



We also need people to lead Strollathons. These are easy walks (about 2 miles) which always include a cafe at the end. They are especially popular with older ramblers and others who don't want to walk too far, who love meeting friends and having some fresh air. It would be fantastic to be able to offer a Strollathon every couple of weeks.



One or two people have suggested walks in London or from stations. I think this is a great idea, I've just bought a book of walks from the Elizabeth Line which looks interesting. From a green point of view it makes sense to use public transport where possible and it is inclusive for walkers who don't drive. Any suggestions welcome, please.

Please can I ask everyone to check the website before you walk? Luckily it is not often, but occasionally walks have to be

cancelled because of the weather or illness and it is disappointing to arrive and find that the walk is not happening. I know there are a few who do not use the internet and I will endeavour to telephone you with any changes.

It's fabulous to see the spring flowers blooming and the days getting longer, and hopefully drier. I am certainly looking forward to a spring and summer of lovely walks and great company!

The Brenda Parker Way Coach Walks March and April 2024

Dawn Davies

This year to date we have completed the 4th and 5th sections of the Brenda Parker Way. Each section of this trail has brought with it interesting history, geography, geology, flora, fauna and more, and these two sections were no exception.

After a very misty, grey start the weather perked up and we had a fine, often sunny, day for our walk on 6 March 2024, from Silchester to Kingsclere.



The mud and large puddles, the waterlogged fields and wet copses at times made our walk seem like a training exercise for joining the Army. In spite of the difficult conditions spirits remained high from the start, through the Pamber Forest and Tadley to our banana break in a field near Baughurst, through the Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve, to lunch on the Hampshire side of the fast flowing River Enbourne, and the final stretch through woods and fields back to civilisation and our finish point, Kingsclere.

The highlights of this section for me were: weaving through the trees and jumping over streams to avoid the mud and larger puddles; the respite afforded by the pavements and paths on the southern fringes of Tadley; St Paul's Church on Tadley Green – a striking modern church with a very unusual steep roof; the first long view of the day over Ron Wood's Meadow, on leaving Tadley; Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve with its board walks and footbridges.



The sun came out and brought the ponds and streams glinting to life; and the mysterious cottage in Harridens Great Copse, looking like a woodman's cottage from one of the Grimm brother's fairy tales.

It was great to have completed the first coach walk of the year, and the sight of our coach waiting for us at the end of our adventure was very welcome indeed!

Our next trip on 3 April 2024 started in Kingsclere in very fine drizzle but by the time we had walked to the centre of the town the drizzle had stopped and the day remained dry, though grey and sometimes windy. Kingsclere had (at least) two interesting stories to tell: that of the Kingsclere Massacre where 3 people were killed by American soldiers in the Swan public house

during WW2, including the landlady; and that of King John who was troubled by a bedbug when he stayed at a local inn, so he ordained that the church should erect and evermore maintain upon its tower a representation of the creature that had disturbed his sleep. A weathervane in the shape of a bedbug is still in evidence above the church today.

After walking past the Swan and the church, and crossing a beautifully clear chalk stream, we left Kingsclere and were treated to far reaching views across the gallops and over the hills. Unfortunately, the rain storms that had hit the country during the previous week had not helped conditions underfoot and we were again trudging through mud, large puddles and waterlogged fields. In spite of the squelchy conditions it was very uplifting to see signs of spring everywhere: young, lime green leaves on some of the trees and hedgerows, wild garlic, wood anemones, primroses, violets and even the odd early bluebell poking its head up above the woodland floors.

Our banana break was at the north end of the Sydmonton Court Estate. The manor house is of 16th century origins and is now owned by Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber. This area is also the setting for Richard Adams' book Watership Down. Some of the place names he used in the book are real places: Sandford, north of Burghclere, where the rabbits were fleeing from; Nuthanger Farm south of Burghclere, near Sydmonton Court, and Watership Down where the rabbits set up a new warren which is south of Sydmonton Court.

Lunch was in Burghclere outside a sports club which thoughtfully provided tables and benches. The club had its own miniature railway line but unfortunately we didn't see it in action.

The footpath out of Burghclere followed a tree lined, disused railway line, the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway, or DN&SR, a victim of the 1965 Beeching cuts. The old station buildings are now a very attractive private house.

Turning off the old railway line, our route took us up a long steady incline and short descent towards our final destination outside the entrance to Highclere Castle. This promises to be an interesting start to the next section of our walk on 1 May 2024!



Good news - the price for the coach walk, £20.00, has been held for the remainder of the Brenda Parker Way.

Votes of Thanks to Retiring Chair and Treasurer

At the AGM in November thanks and the presentation of gifts were made to the outgoing Treasurer and Chair.

Steve Gillions gave the vote of thanks to Alan Harding:



As Alan is standing down, I would like to say a couple of words. All groups need a good Treasurer and we have had that rare thing. If money is needed, Alan will find a way. Alan does not pretend to be a social walker preferring the golf course but I was very pleased to see him and Judith on the Millennium Anniversary walk.

Alan has fought for Ramblers and EBR. Just recently he made a polite enquiry why the rate per member payment of £1.01 from Ramblers had not changed for years. He happened also to make a passing reference that Ramblers continued to hold on to our endowment fund and pushed them to have ideas on how to spend that money; Alan is a good politician. He is calm, polite, considered and very canny with money. Everything you need and a hard act to follow. On behalf of all, thanks very much.

Pera Marrs gave the vote of thanks to Steve Gillions:

Steve has been a breath of fresh air on our Committee. For a man that declared from the beginning, that he hated committees and committee meetings he has turned into our own attack dog. He joined us in 2015 as Footpath Secretary and path warden. He rapidly took on the Royal Borough, landowners and the Local Access Forum in his own good-natured but effective way, making sure that footpaths came first. A new version of the late great Margaret Bowdery?

In 2021 he became our Chairman, and from there he took on the Area Committee and Head Office. He really enjoys outwitting the manoeuvrings of bureaucracy. Thankfully he's offering to be on hand on a "project" basis to help in future so we aren't losing his incisive contribution entirely.

Thank you Steve. We will miss you.



Note: The role of Chair remains vacant. Richard Falconer was elected Honorary Treasurer at the November AGM.

Long Service Walks Leaders

At the EBR AGM in November Pera Marris thanked **Alma Richardson, David Bailey** and **Jean & Don Todd** who were retiring from leading walks after many years. Pera wished to acknowledge that they had been worth their weight in gold leading more walks than most. Presentations were made to Alma and David and, as they were unable to attend the meeting, a separate presentation was made to Jean and Don Todd at a later date.



Obituary

Margaret Welsford: 1933–2024

by Pera Marris

Margaret joined East Berks in May 1995 when she retired. She was 62. Margaret and her friend Cynthia became regulars on our Wednesday morning walks, exploring the area around Maidenhead, Windsor and often out into the Chilterns. Margaret enjoyed walking and chatting with everyone in the group.

On one occasion Margaret was not paying full attention and walked into some particularly viscous mud and one boot came off, leaving her balancing on one leg. David Bailey waded in and rescued her, only to be sent back to fetch the boot.

Margaret and Cynthia led local walks together but after Cynthia died Margaret began to lead walks in London. She researched an area and then led a walk, stopping to explain the history and people associated with different buildings on the route.

Eventually time started to catch up with Margaret and her speech and hearing became a problem.

Margaret was a well-loved member of East Berks Ramblers who was always cheerful and willing to lend a hand.

Unfortunately, there are not many of us left now who remember her, but those who do, remember her fondly.





Things to Look Out for in April –

Just a small selection of things to look for when walking in April

- Birds – wheatears, sand martins, warblers and swallows are just some of the avian visitors that arrive in the UK this month.
- Flowers – we can enjoy seeing carpets of bluebells when we are on walks in April. Legend has it that the ringing of its flowers is said to bring fairies to summer gatherings and anyone who picks a bluebell will wander lost forever so you have been warned ! Pinkneys Green is always a favourite place to see cowslips.
- If you wish to go mammal spotting April is the month when wood mice and bank voles are busy among the leaf litter and log piles.
- The peak time for foxes to give birth is March and so April is the time when the cubs venture into the outside world in April when they are five or six weeks old.

.....when May arrives you can look forward to listening to the dawn chorus when males wish to impress the ladies but to hear the full chorus of birds you may have to get up very early !

Princes Risborough Charity Ramble

The Princes Risborough Rotary Club are holding a charity ramble day on **7th July** and there will be walks of 20 miles or 5 miles, both starting in the centre of the town at **Wades Park**. There will be a small entrance fee and all funds will go to Rotary and local charities.

For more information www.rotary-ribi.org/clubs/page.php?PgID=936136&ClubID=561

Wayfarer: Love, loss and life on Britain's ancient Paths –

book by Phoebe Smith

On an assignment to walk the most famous pilgrimage in the world – the Camino de Santiago, in northern Spain – Phoebe Smith somehow lost her way.

Having spent a lifetime exploring unfamiliar places, she quit her dream job, ended her long-term relationship and headed home to North Wales to discover the point to... everything.

In her search for answers she found herself – quite by accident – walking some of Britain's oldest pilgrim paths. And by following these old ways, she ended up confronting past traumas that she thought she had laid to rest.

Looking for a New Joint-Editor of the Newsletter *Rosemary Davies*

At the AGM in November 2024 I will stand down as Joint-Editor of this publication after seven years in the role! The search is on to find someone to take on this task.

Published twice a year the newsletter is issued in April and October. The work involved is not too onerous and it is not essential that my replacement will have to serve on the committee and attend committee meetings. The key responsibility is to gather articles for the newsletter and forward them to Peter Griffiths who shares the role of Editorship and he magically pulls all the articles together and produces the newsletter in its current format!

If you are interested in taking this on and wish to chat about it then please don't hesitate to contact me and you can either email me newsletter@eastberksramblers.com or call me on **07777 641908**. I look forward to hearing from you !

Comfort Breaks

Many of us stop on a walk for a comfort break but two men in Hertfordshire were recently fined for 'littering' or, more precisely, for urinating in public. The penalty notices were issued by District Enforcement, a private company contracted by the local council. There are various discussions by the legal experts as to what constitutes littering but you may wish to take extra care when you next take a pit stop!



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Recent Walks

We have added a new tab to the [Walks web page](#) in which walk leaders can describe walks led recently, to show in more detail the type of walk and the countryside we walk in. Have a look at the entries on the tab, as a guide, we suggest one paragraph on the walk and no more than two or three photos.

Demise of an EBR tradition

Pera Marrs Vice Chair EBR

From its earliest times EBR has arranged Group holidays, which have allowed us to explore different areas of England and Wales, walking and socialising with our friends. Unfortunately, the trip to Dolgellau in June will be our last until someone volunteers to be the organiser.

Despite constant requests over the last year and over 30 people joining the group in Wales, no one is willing to help. It really is not that difficult a job and there are half a dozen of us who have done it over the last 10 years, who will be very happy to help out.

Personally, I won't be asking again.

Q and A

Graham Sexton – Footpath Secretary

Where is your favourite place to walk?

That is an easy one to start with. It must be Scotland, but the question would get more difficult if you were to ask which part of the country. I have in the past enjoyed some of Scotland's famous "big walks", like the Glenfinnan horseshoe or Ben Nevis by the Carn Mor Dearg arête, both of which require around 5,000ft of ascent (and descent!). But I've also spent many happy hours on gentle walks around Scottish islands in search of wildlife. I have visited all the main island groups, from Arran in the south, through the Inner and Outer Hebrides to Orkney and Shetland in the north. If I had to pick a favourite island it would probably be Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides. It has a marvellous variety of scenery in a small island, a good chance of seeing eagles and gets very few tourists.

The islands are not without their challenges either. On Skye, there is the Cuillin ridge which is one of the few places in Scotland where hill walkers need to seek the assistance of a rock-climbing leader if they are to reach the summits. I was there back in 1999 and completed all the peaks in the most amazing sunny conditions. Another island adventure that comes to mind is Clisham on the Isle of Harris, which is the highest point in the Outer Hebrides but still a little below the magic 3,000ft required by "Munro-baggers". As a consequence, it is not climbed that often and this leads to a distinct absence of paths. After endless boulder hopping and heather bashing, I remember being grateful for the long hours of daylight of the Scottish summer when we finally got down.

What is your most important piece of walking kit?

It has to be a comfortable worn-in pair of boots. There is nothing that can spoil a walk more easily than uncomfortable feet. I always have at least two pairs of boots on the go, an all-weather all-terrain leather pair and a lighter weight fabric pair. Some people would call the latter type shoes as they don't come over the ankles and I remember they were somewhat frowned upon by some walkers when they first appeared because of the lack of ankle support. But they are much lighter and cooler in warm dry conditions – just be careful where you put your feet!

What's the best thing you put in your Thermos to warm you up on a cold walk?

For me, it is black coffee with just a trace of sugar. This is a slightly strange choice as I normally have milk but no sugar in my coffee. There could be an element of laziness here as the absence of milk means the flask only needs a quick rinse afterwards.

What other hobbies/activities do you enjoy?

Quite a few of you will know that my other main activity is playing badminton. I have been playing for longer than I have been walking. I first played competitive badminton when I was 15 and have never stopped. I used to play for Berkshire and have now graduated to what is known as the "Masters Circuit" (you would probably call it veterans' badminton). I travel quite extensively for this but I'm always looking to combine the longer journeys with some walking. Last October I was in Carlisle for a tournament and went on to walk most of the Hadrian's Wall path. Which conveniently brings me on to one aspect of my walking that I haven't mentioned so far. In the past, I have to some extent been a "summit bagger", but in recent years I have walked more long-distance paths including the Snowdonia Way, Offa's Dyke and the Coast to Coast. Soon I will be setting off for the Pembrokeshire Coast Path. There is a certain satisfaction in completing a long continuous walk, starting each morning where you finished the previous evening.



Dawn Walk on 7 April 2024

Mary Williams

We woke up in the dark but, by the time we set off, daylight had arrived, just. The Dawn Walk has been a date in the calendar for about 17 years, and there is always a good feeling being part of that special time of day.

There were 12 of us, many regulars.

Breakfast is part of the enjoyment at the end of the walk and the lady serving at Jenners Café was very efficient in providing excellent bacon butties and full English for the group. She was helped out with a couple of the regulars assisting her with waiting duties.

Are you worried that your map reading skills might let you down just when you need them most?

I will be running a Map Reading and Leadership Course in the early summer for members of EBR. Hopefully Steve Gillions will be available to help.

This short course should help to improve your OS map reading and compass work and it will also cover basic leadership. Even if you don't currently lead walks, this course should make you confident to read a local map and find your way in normal weather conditions. We do not propose to teach you how to walk across Dartmoor in a fog!

There will be 2 indoor sessions, in the afternoon (2.00 – 4.30) and one all day practical session, dates and venue to be confirmed.

You will also need a local OS map and a compass, preferably De Silva Expedition 4-360. (Or a compass with swivelling, clear Perspex base plate) but more details on that when we start.

If you are interested please contact me on 01628 629155 or vicechair@eastberksramblers.org.

APP Corner

Merlin Bird ID *from Ian lent*

Back in 2022, in the first of these App Corner articles, I reviewed the BirdNet, bird identification App. Well, there is now a newer, and even better bird identification app - **Merlin**. It is from the same makers, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and it is free and available for iPhone and Android.

Merlin is a global bird guide with photos, sounds, maps, and more. <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>



Merlin allows you to identify birds in three ways:

By bird song and calls - like BirdNet but even better. The app will 'listen' to birdsong and identify the species it 'hears'.



For example, in this screenshot, it has 'heard' a robin and a chiffchaff. The robin is highlighted as it was currently singing.

Merlin's birdsong identification is even easier to use than was BirdNet. Just touch 'Sound ID' and the app does the rest. It is very fast and seems pretty accurate. Sound ID works completely offline, so you can identify birds you hear no matter where you are.

The birdsong is recorded and can be replayed.

By photo. Take a photo of a bird, or use one from your camera library, and Merlin will offer a short list of possible matches. This feature works offline, so you can identify birds in the photos you take no matter where you are. I have tried this a couple of times - it doesn't seem to be as reliable as the sound identification.

Bird wizard. Answer three simple questions about a bird you are trying to identify and Merlin will give you a list of possible matches.

Merlin includes extensive information about all UK birds including a photo, description, a recorded example of their call and their distribution.

In addition to the UK other bird 'packs' are available (also free) which include birds from most other parts of the world. So when you go on holiday you can load the appropriate pack on to your phone and identify the local birds. I regularly use Merlin in the UK and also tried it on a recent trip to Bhutan where it also seemed to work very well. Give it a try.

The views or opinions expressed by individuals in this Newsletter are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Committee. The Editors welcome letters and articles from members but reserve the right to reject or edit contributions. Would contributors please note that all items for inclusion in the next issue of the Newsletter should be submitted, preferably by email, to the Editors (address below) as soon as possible and no later than **Friday, 27 September 2024**.

Editors: Rosemary Davies Tel: 01344 422707 Email: committee1@eastberksramblers.org
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The Ramblers promotes rambling, protects rights of way, campaigns for access to open countryside and defends the beauty of the countryside.

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