



West Berkshire Ramblers

Chair's Report to the 2025 AGM

I find it hard to believe that a year has already passed since I was elected Chair. They say that time flies when you are enjoying life, which I think has a great deal to do with it. I hope that everyone has enjoyed the year as much as I have.

Our Group has had another active year, with a good record of offering four walks most weeks. Thanks to our walk leader mentors, we have several new walk leaders, too. However, there is always room for more, so please give it some consideration. There will be plenty of help and support available and just leading a couple of walks a year will make a difference.

We currently have about 320 members, which has been fairly stable over the year. It's not always easy to work out how many regular walkers we have but, subjectively, I'd say we have 50 to 60 people joining our walks each week.

We were able to lead some Wednesday evening walks this year, over the summer period, which went down well with the participants. These were shorter walks than our daytime ones, with the aim of a brisk, early evening walk, with the opportunity for a bite to eat and a chat afterwards. We will be offering these again, in Summer 2026.

Thanks to the hard work put in by the Coach Walk Committee, we enjoyed three coach walks this year: Windsor Great Park, Chippenham and Cirencester. There is something different about a walk **to** somewhere, especially, I am told, if there is a Weatherspoons at the end. I am very pleased to say that the Coach Walk Committee is already actively planning next year's destinations. We have four coach walks planned for next year, to Thame, Chichester, Romsey and Banbury. Dates and details are in Richard's Coach Walk Committee report.

We were blessed with excellent weather for our walking holiday in the Elan Valley in Powys, where 28 of us experienced some wonderful walks, with quite a few hills, lots of expansive views and plenty of education about Wales, Water and Birmingham, provided by our knowledgeable and informative walk leaders from the Elan Valley Lodge.

There were two picnic walks this year: the first around Wilton, with a guided tour around the Wilton Windmill. This was very interesting but required some concentration while climbing the ladders to and from the top! The second walk around Boxford was also well-attended and the weather just held for the walk and picnic but the journey home was **very** wet!

Following on from our successful Christmas walk and meal, January "get together" meal, and our enjoyable quiz evening in March, we are already planning similar events for the forthcoming year.

Our volunteer work has continued to be well supported, with a crowd of enthusiastic, hole-digging, cement-mixing, hedge-trimmer wielding workers, busy replacing dodgy stiles with sturdy gates and

clearing overgrown, sometimes impassable paths throughout West Berkshire. The frequent appreciation of the work of the Gates Group and Power Tools Group (PTG) shown by passing walkers has been a pleasant reward for a few hours' perspiration. Thanks are due to Graham Smith, who has also taken over the coordination of the PTG in addition to his long-standing work coordinating the Gates Group.

With grateful thanks to Tony Key, we have managed to restart the Ramblers Working Party, who will be surveying the ~740 miles of Rights of Way in the 63 parishes that make up West Berkshire. Tony is planning activities fortnightly, on Fridays starting at 10:00, ending by 13:00. The work involves checking the state of the paths, stiles, gates etc and some minor clearing, then reporting back to West Berks Council so they can ensure access is available and prioritise resources where necessary. Please contact Tony if you are interested in joining the Working Party.

Throughout the year, I have regularly attended the Area Committee, where I meet with the eight other Ramblers Groups in Berkshire. Through this forum, we are able to share concerns and influence policy at Head Office. Over the years, we have been able to bring about some improvements in the way we operate. At the Area AGM (November 29, Pangbourne), the current Chair, Secretary and Treasurer will be stepping down (nothing sinister, it's been planned for some time). If anyone would like more information about the roles, or wishes to put themselves forward for any of them, or for the role of Publicity Officer, which is also vacant, please let me know.

Now to our own Committee. Unfortunately, Shona, our Events Coordinator, decided to step down from the Committee for personal reasons, earlier in the year. I should like to thank Shona for her hard work in the role and with the Committee.

Eugene has also decided that he will step down from the Committee at the AGM. As you may remember, at last year's AGM, Eugene very kindly offered to stay on as a Committee member, to help me learn the ropes and benefit from his experience. This has been invaluable to me – and to the Committee, too, I would suggest. Thank you, Eugene for all your help to me, the Committee – and I promise to try not to pester you for advice on our Rambles together!

The remaining members of the Committee have all offered to stand for re-election at the AGM. Gill Key and Jan Montefiore have also offered to stand for election as the Social Secretary and Deputy, respectively. If you are keen to stand for any role on the Committee, please make yourself known to our Secretary Gill Lawrence (secretary@wberksramblers.org.uk), for inclusion at the AGM – which reminds me: a big personal thanks must go to Gill L for all her help keeping me on track with meetings, activities and actions throughout the year.

To finish, I would like to thank the Committee and sub-Committee members; and the walk leaders, who have all worked so hard to organise all the activities that West Berkshire Ramblers put on for our benefit and enjoyment. These are the people who do the real work for us.

Andrew Jackson
Chair, West Berkshire Ramblers
October, 2025