

Annual Report – 2023

Since November 2021, Dorset Area has been in abeyance, as the post of Secretary was not filled at the 47th AGM of the Dorset Area on November 27th, neither were there any volunteers for the role at the AGM in 2022. Abeyance is neither a formal nor constitutional ‘state’: the Area Officers who were appointed at the 2022 Area AGM all agreed to continue in their roles, and have co-ordinated activities across the area, including finance, the website, Footnotes, etc., and the Area Footpath Committee has continued as before. The elected Area officers work closely with Ramblers Regional Engagement Officer for the South and South West, Nicky Wilson, and take part in activities at a national level (e.g. Regional Cluster Meetings), and Dorset Area had delegates at General Council. Members are kept updated via Dorset Area Footnotes. We thank Nicky for her ongoing support and encouragement.

Thank you to all who have contributed to the Dorset Area Annual Report for 2023

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General Council 2023

The annual general meeting of the General Council(GC) of the Ramblers took place on Saturday, 1st April, 2023 at the National Exhibition Centre in Marston Green, Birmingham. Mike Heckford and Jan Wardell were the Dorset delegates to GC for 2023, but unfortunately Jan was unable to make the event. At 10.30 am, General Council was opened by the Chair to the Board of Trustees (B of T), Rebecca Dawson, who welcomed delegates and summarised the proceedings for the day, which was scheduled to finish at 5.30 pm.

Ross Maloney, the new Ramblers CEO, was introduced and gave a presentation, followed by various senior members of the staff. These detailed the progress of the charity during the past year and plans for taking the Ramblers forward in the coming twelve months.

The business of the AGM of GC followed, including the appointment of a new president, Amar Latif, and vice presidents; and the election of Trustees and the Motions Review Committee. There then followed discussion amongst small groups of delegates, regarding the Strategy Review. Following lunch, the afternoon session was taken up by reviewing past motions and dealing with nine new motions, eight of which were completed.

GC was closed by the Chair on time. After thanks to staff and to Janet Davis for taking the Minutes, the outgoing members of the B of T were given a small present for their services. In summary, GC was well organized and ably chaired.

Mike Heckford

Each Ramblers Area, and each national organisation affiliated to the Ramblers, is entitled to appoint members of General Council. Whilst Groups and individual members are not directly represented, they can influence the policy of the Ramblers via their Area's Council members. Trustees, the Ramblers president, vice presidents and members of the Motions Review Committee are also members of General Council.

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Annual Area Picnic

The re-scheduled Area Picnic (which had to be cancelled in 2022) took place on Sunday 11th June at Chardown Hill, West Dorset. It is hoped that the 2024 event will take place on either the first or second Sunday in June.

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TREASURER'S REPORT

The Ramblers' financial year finishes on 30 September and at the time of writing the 2022/23 annual accounts for the Dorset Area have already been audited and submitted to the Ramblers Central Office.

After all payments had been made, the Dorset Area accounts remain robust, although a lower budget, which included all Group budgets, was claimed for this year. An even lower budget, reduced by Central Office by £1000, has been imposed for the coming financial year. The accounts for 2022/23 show a slight overspend.

Expenditure during this financial year has largely been affected by the restrictions on Area Officer activity, mainly due the Area failing in its continuing attempts to find an Area Secretary and being in abeyance. Meetings, apart from two Area Footpath Committee meetings, being held on Zoom. It is hoped after this year's AGM, that someone will come forward to fill the Area Secretary vacancy and the Dorset Area may be able to return to normal.

As I have mentioned in previous reports, I continue to act as the treasurer for the Wessex Wanderers, an organisation that organises walks during the summer months using train services on the Bristol to Weymouth railway line. The Wessex Wanderers is now a flexi-group administered by the Dorset Area.

Jubilee Trail Guides have been on sale at a reduced price of £7 (including postage) now for several months but sales are slow. Bridges on the Jubilee Trail in the Stoke Abbott area prove to be a problem and in addition to the footbridge (Rosemary's Bridge) and boardwalk near Brimley Mill, to which we contributed in 2021, we are currently supporting Dorset Council by way of a donation from the Jubilee Trail Fund for repairs to a further two, near Flaxhayes. During the last financial year we were also able to support Dorset Council with a donation towards a replacement bridge near Toller Porcorum.

In conclusion, may I thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in supporting me during the past year and also may I thank Martin Ford-Horne for auditing the Area accounts, an important job, which he has done for many years.

Mike Heckford

November 2023

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MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REPORT

In February 2020, just before the start of the pandemic, there were 1382 members assigned to a group within Dorset Area. At the end of September 2023, there were exactly the same number!

From the middle of 2021, there was a distinct boost to the figures, a number of people who had discovered the joys of walking during the lockdowns were joining the groups and by late 2022, the number of Dorset members was 1427. Sadly the figures started to decline again in 2023. National figures showed a similar rise in 2021 and 2022 but less of a drop in 2023.

New Ramblers members assigned to one of the Dorset groups and members who have transferred to a Dorset group from another area receive a welcome letter from me on behalf of Dorset Area Council.

Margaret Kettlewell

25th October 2023

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Publicity Officer

This post is vacant

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EDITOR – DORSET FOOTNOTES

Ramblers Footnotes has had an interesting 2023 as E-Footnotes is now the way that the majority of Dorset Members receive their copy. This has primarily reflected Groups' move to digital for their communication, newsletters, Facebook, Websites, etc., driven by postage costs and lack of envelope-filling volunteers.

In 2010, we were printing and distributing 1750 copies of Footnotes, now, we are printing and distributing 710 copies. The following 'Distribution letter' extract tells the story:

- North Dorset Group – 10 copies
- South Dorset Group – 25 copies
- West Dorset Group – 10 copies
- East Dorset Group – 650 copies

This adoption of digital communication raises the question of whether a printed newsletter is more likely to be read than a newsletter attached to an email. There are both general observations and studies that have looked at this.

Printed newsletters offer a tangible, tactile experience, engaging readers physically. The ability to hold and touch the publication can make it more appealing and likely to be read. In contrast, email newsletters provide quick accessibility, allowing recipients to open and view content on digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers. This accessibility caters to those who prefer digital convenience.

Consideration of the environment also plays a role. Printed newsletters require paper and contribute to waste, while email newsletters are often seen as more eco-friendly.

Notable studies offer insights into the matter. The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) reported a substantial 4.4% response rate for direct mail, which includes printed newsletters, in contrast to email's meagre 0.12% response rate. This suggests that printed materials have a higher likelihood of being read and engaged with. On the other hand, MarketingSherpa's study found that email newsletters boasted an average open rate of 17%, implying that 83% of recipients did not open the email.

In this digital age, the choice between printed and email newsletters ultimately depends on various factors, including audience preferences, environmental concerns, and the desired impact of the content. I have no idea of how many read Footnotes or E-Footnotes, I do know that I receive very few comments and it is rarely referred to on walks, meetings etc.

Advertising interest now rests solely with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays; the impact of social media advertising has reached deepest Dorset. Producing Footnotes is a team effort, so a big thank you to all the contributors who make my job much more manageable. Stewart Borrett of Amber Graphics organises the printing and distribution, which can vary by month. We have once more changed Printers and there is some bedding in taking place. Finally, a big thank you to the Dorset Group Footnotes distributors who 'lick' Footnotes and 'click' E-Footnotes to the wider membership.

In conclusion, Footnotes is still strong, and I am enjoying my time as Editor. Each year brings new challenges, which keeps the job interesting. How many read Footnotes is an open question.

Doug Pigg
Dorset Footnotes Editor

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AREA FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT 2023 (INCORPORATING ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT)

The Area Footpath Committee has been dealing with applications, path orders and other legal procedures, which in most part emanate from Dorset Council Definitive Map Team, and a smaller number from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council. In the past year the footpath secretaries responded to twenty five applications for diversions, extinguishments or modifications involving thirty seven public rights of way, and thirteen pre-application consultations, involving eighteen public rights of way.

Several Orders are currently with the Secretary of State for determination, and we are taking an active part in two, for one of which information regarding the format and start date is awaited, whilst for the other we have recently submitted our Statement of Case. That is being dealt with by the written representation procedure. We successfully challenged a diversion Order for footpath 6, Gussage St Michael, when the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, was of the same view as the Ramblers, that the path should not be diverted.

The Area Footpath Committee holds the two 'winter' meetings via Zoom, and the two 'summer' ones in person. The Committee felt that, for a number of reasons, this makes sense, as the footpath secretaries hail from all corners of Dorset, and with the increased cost of fuel and paucity of public transport, it is our small contribution to reducing our carbon footprint.

Don't Lose Your Way

The major development this year has of course been the U-turn by the government on the announcement made in February 2022, of the repeal of the 2026 'cut-off date' for submitting applications for rights of way to be added to the definitive map.

Defra states "*The decision provides much-needed certainty for landowners, local authorities and users – and reflects the original intention of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW). The cut-off date will also be extended from 1 January 2026 to 1 January 2031*". On 26 October, a statutory instrument to extend the cut-off date to January 2031 was laid in Parliament and will almost certainly come into effect on 17 November.

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AREA ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT

Coastal Access/King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIECP)

[Coast Path Progress](#) (map of route)

In our area:

- Stretch 11 (Lyme Regis to Rufus Castle) is published but not approved
- Stretch 12 (Rufus Castle to Lulworth Cove) is open
- Stretch 13 (Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Bay) proposals are under development (issues on the ranges)
- Stretch 14 (Kimmeridge Bay to Highcliffe) the approved route has been quashed by the High Court as a result of arguments about the proposed route around Christchurch Harbour- it is under review by NE.

In other Coast Path news, there was a coast path celebration in Weymouth on June 11th sponsored by Natural England. The South Dorset Group represented the Ramblers, Dorset Area. Janet Davis has joined the Dorset Coast Forum (DCF), and receives updates on related issues. (The DCF is an independent coastal partnership that brings together individuals and organisations.) I have joined the South West Coast Path Association.

During the year, it was agreed by the Committee that 'Coastal' should be dropped from my role description, and thus revert to 'Access Officer' to reflect becoming the co-ordinator of CROW Open

Access updates, and Freedom to Roam initiatives (as described below), in addition to overseeing the Coast Path progress in Dorset.

Review of Open Access Maps.

After many delays Natural England (NE) has finally announced the review, to be completed by the end of 2030, of the Open Access maps drawn up in 2004/5 under the CROW Legislation. The results of this exercise are shown on the current OS Explorer maps. Hopefully the review will also address three major problems with the current mapping: firstly, 'islands' of access land but with no right of access!: secondly, providing actual access e.g. by the provision of stiles or gates (preferably the latter) and thirdly a review of the 'Open Access' land definitions. The original exercise was extremely time consuming and it will be interesting to see how NE propose to go about this. There are also potential interfaces with the DLYW project.

Freedom to Roam.

The Ramblers are looking to extend the existing CROW definitions of 'freedom to roam' to include woodlands, riverbanks etc. We have submitted comments on recent draft proposals from Head Office and look forward to progress on these initiatives.

Mike Beams
(Coastal) Access Officer

The Area Footpath Committee (AFC) comprises the Area Footpath Secretary, Group Footpath Secretaries, the Countryside Secretary, and the (Coastal) Access Officer, and is chaired by Dorset Area President, Laurie Fairhurst.

Group Footpath Secretaries operate in a slightly different way from other elected officers within groups. Whilst footpath secretaries are *appointed* by their groups, when it comes to legal procedures (that is when Ramblers are statutory consultees) they *function* within the Area Footpath Committee (AFC), and follow the guidance for dealing with those, thereafter reporting back to their Groups. Thus applications and Orders for changes to rights of way are discussed by the AFC, to ensure consistency, and comments recorded at those meetings.

Apart from attending the four AFC meetings each year, group footpath secretaries report to their group committees. (Ideally, when a group footpath secretary is looking to retire, a successor would 'shadow' them for a while, to gain experience, and attend the Area Footpath Committee meetings as an observer.) When there is no volunteer for the post within a particular group, then the rights of way work for the relevant parishes (e.g. responding to the various statutory consultations) is undertaken by another member of the AFC, until the post is filled.

For other rights of way issues, each footpath secretary will work within their locality to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon personal circumstances, interests and commitments. The members of the AFC are only too willing and happy to support new volunteers and answer any questions about aspects of the work involved. In the first instance please contact the Area Footpath Secretary.

Our continuing thanks go to the Committee, without whose members and work, many of the routes we take for granted would not have been possible.

The Dorset Jubilee Trail (JT)

Since the death of Rosemary Bramah in December 2021, we have been without a Jubilee Trail Co-ordinator, and JT monitors pass on any concerns about the trail to me. I distribute JT waymarking stickers etc when needed, and liaise with the Countryside Rangers.

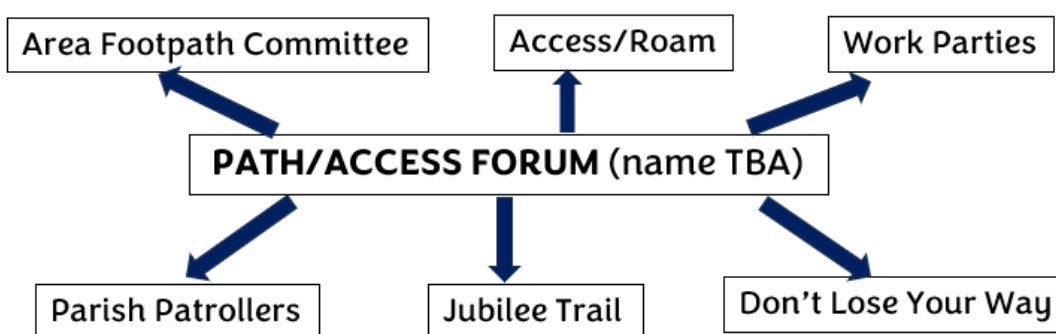
As Mike Heckford mentioned in his report, this year we have provided financial contributions towards a bridge at Toller Porcorum, and have agreed to doing so for two footbridges in Stoke Abbott, on footpath 4. Site visits are always made to assess the situation, before we commit to these contributions.

Without a co-ordinator, we are reacting to situations, rather than being proactive. We thank our group of 20 monitors, who between them look after their sections of the trail.

I would like to mention here the motion which I am putting to this year's AGM: *'That Dorset Area seeks to establish a Path/Access Forum'*

We know that there are many Ramblers members in Dorset who do not walk with groups, but would like to become involved in the core aims of the Ramblers.

Establishing a 'platform' would give the opportunity to those with a mutual interest to work outside of groups' confines, towards a common goal/objective, and without having to be on a committee (other than the existing Area Footpath Committee).



The above is a suggested format at this stage, and if the motion is passed, then there would be a preliminary Zoom meeting to gauge interest and support. The Jubilee Trail needs a co-ordinator; Don't Lose Your Way (DLYW) is overseen by Ramblers Central Office, but there is scope for volunteers in researching and checking. We would be looking for volunteers to lead on the Access/Right to Roam; work parties; and Parish Patrollers groups, once parameters have been agreed.

The groupings would be able to feed into each other's work: for example a Path Patroller could report to the AFC, the JT monitor (if applicable) and/or the Work Party. The amount of time each volunteer spends on their particular role would be up to the individual and/or circumstances. As this is a new concept, we have no guidelines as such.

Jan Wardell
Area Footpath Secretary
November 2023

COUNTRYSIDE SECRETARY'S REPORT

The role of the Countryside Secretary is to pursue the Ramblers fourth charitable objective of protecting the countryside and green spaces from harmful developments, so that walkers can enjoy their tranquillity and beauty. One of the key aspects of the job involves monitoring planning applications so that representations can be made about any proposed developments which are either going to impact directly on the rights of way network, or on the wider countryside.

Planning applications

As reported last year, Dorset Ramblers are now consulted directly about any planning applications which may impact on public rights of way. The distance of the site proposed for development from any right of way appears to determine whether we are consulted which means that many of the

applications which are referred to us do not need comment (e.g. they might relate to changes in the windows of a listed building or a minor household extension).

Our aim in making these comments and objections is to ensure that public rights of way are properly recognised and that they are not simply 'diverted' on to pavements, ensuring that residents will be able to use them to access both local facilities, and the wider path network, on foot. In the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023, we were consulted about approximately **1,103 applications**. We commented on 78 of these and objected to one. In most of the cases, our comments were about the need to keep the right of way open and available for safe public use, both during the development process and subsequently. In some cases we asked for warning signage about pedestrians to be provided in places where walkers would need to share routes with cars. In cases where it appears that diversion of public rights of way will be necessary to allow the development to go ahead we asked for early consultation about the proposed change. The only actual objection was to a proposal in Poole where the property concerned already obstructs a right of way. This is a legacy of a number of rights of way not being dealt with properly at the time of the original development, and we hope that it will result in a resolution of the problem.

The applicants appealed to the Secretary of State following Dorset Council's decision to refuse to grant planning permission for the controversial proposal to build an Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) on Portland. It will be recalled that I objected to this on behalf of Ramblers Dorset Area in November 2020 and made a supplementary objection the following year. There will now be a public inquiry and I am going to be called as witness by the coordinating group, Stop Portland Waste Incinerator, in mid-December.

I would like to thank Jan Wardell and all the Group Footpath Secretaries for their assistance, in dealing with these planning applications.

Planning policy

There is little to report on the timetable for the preparation of the Dorset Council Local Plan, the first consultation to which Dorset Ramblers responded in 2021. According to the Dorset Council website, the draft for public comment will be made available in December 2024, with adoption in the spring of 2026 (if it is found by the Planning Inspectorate to be sound).

Development of the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan continues and in February I attended a workshop at the Weymouth Town Council offices to discuss the landscapes and green spaces aspects of the plan. It has just been announced that the formal consultation on the draft plan will take place between 27 October and 8 December. I will prepare comments in consultation with South Dorset Group in due course.

I prepared a response on one consultation this year: Dorset Council's Planning for climate change guidance documents. The main thing which I said was that I was concerned there was no reference to public rights of way. I said "AONBs and Heritage Assets are specifically mentioned but there is no reference to public rights of way which have a particular value when seeking to address climate change because they offer a means of travel which isn't dependent on motor transport." I also said that "The definition of green infrastructure is inadequate and examples of what it covers should be provided. In particular, it should be made clear that public rights of way are part of our green infrastructure."

The Local Access Forum (LAF)

The LAF is a statutory advisory body which authorities such as Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole must appoint to advise them on access issues. (The LAF serves both councils.) I was re-appointed to the LAF in 2021, representing the interests of walkers, and I am currently the vice-chairman. The LAF has made little progress over the last year, but has had some useful reports from officers of both councils about the problems they are facing, and we have

raised various operational matters with them. We have continued to look at the issue of shared-use routes, and still awaiting consultation of the draft of the new Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Dorset Council. I continue to be the LAF link to the *Dorset AONB* and so attend their twice-yearly Board meeting and receive regular updates on the work of the AONB. These meetings are always very encouraging as the AONB seems to be able to access diverse sources of funding which is puts to positive use.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like further information on any of the matter discussed in this report.

Janet Davis
Area Countryside Secretary
October 2023

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GROUP REPORTS

North Dorset

The Ramblers North Dorset Group has had a very active year with walks on most Wednesdays and some Sundays. We have continued to operate a booking system for walks which has proved to be successful. This has advantages for the Walk Leaders and enables communication directly with participants should weather conditions deteriorate while walkers can call the Leader if they anticipate a delayed arrival. We have repeated our Walk Leaders course in June 2023 which was co-organised by Bruce Marriott and Edward Johns. This year it was decided to include a section on the use of electronic aids in leading walks for the Group.

The new Ramblers Website came on stream in the Summer which was challenging at first as the new formatting process required changes in inputting the information. The Walk Programme Manager and Web Master have now overcome the initial hurdles and the Website is much improved particularly in relation to the ability to more easily insert pictures. Members are finding booking walks is much easier and complies more with GDPR requirements. Our Walk Programme Manager, Tom, has been instrumental in the introduction of themed walks over the past year. There have been woodland walks, flower walks and village themed walks. Tom has more ideas for 2024 with a Morning Chorus Walk proposed. Walk numbers have been good, averaging 15 on Wednesdays and 10 on Sundays. Primary support is from within the Group members although there are several individuals who join us frequently from the other Groups/Areas.

The Ramblers North Dorset Group 2023 AGM was held on Wednesday 25th October and was preceded by a short walk. All vacant roles on the Committee for 2024 were filled and the Chairman thanked everyone who had taken responsibility for any aspect of the group's activities during the year. There has been changes to the Officers with a new Chairman, Treasurer, Footpath Secretary and three additional Committee Members.

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South Dorset

Membership.

The total membership is 231 which is a reduction from 253 last year. There have been 13 new members since November 2022. Only 22 of our members now receive communications by post.

Walks.

The numbers of members on walks continues to be lower than pre-COVID levels despite more walkers from other Ramblers groups joining our walks. Our main concern is walk leader numbers. In an attempt to increase the number of active walk leaders, we reviewed the list of walk leaders

on Assemble and contacted leaders who for various reasons have not led walks for a long period of time. Only 4 of these 'dormant' leaders intended to lead walks in the future. The number of newer members coming forward to lead walks, despite encouragement and offers of support, has been disappointing and we are not consistently able to provide the three weekly walks that were available pre-COVID. We did provide two walks for the Area Picnic.

Group Holiday.

In May a group of 22 members returned to the Shropshire Hills and Ironbridge Gorge area. The holiday was organised for us by Secret Hills Walking Holidays and was based at Eaton Manor, near Church Stretton. The holiday was a great success. For our annual Group holiday in 2024, we have booked with RWH Holidays to go to the Sierra de las Nieves in Southern Spain.

Walking Weekend.

Over the weekend of 23-26 June a group of 18 members went to Dartmoor for a walking weekend led by Amanda Browning. She grew up in the area and so knew some lovely spots for walking; walkers arranged their own accommodation. It was hot and there was no rain to be seen - a great time was had by all. We plan to do similar in the Chichester /Petersfield area in 2024.

Socials.

In March there a Skittles evening at the Swan in Abbotsbury and a walk leaders' training and social lunch at the Saxon Arms in Stratton. The Fleet Glass bottomed boat trip planned in summer got cancelled twice due to bad weather so did not go ahead. Christmas lunch will be at the Black Dog in Broadmayne as last year.

Finance

The South Dorset Group has 2 accounts:

- The Main account for all income and expenditure on behalf of Ramblers.
- The Social Fund for all income and expenditure for activities that the South Dorset Group decides to engage in for the benefit of its members, in accordance with Ramblers rules and procedures.

Our expenditure on the Main account, at £526, was higher than the previous year but remains lower than pre-COVID years. The standard Area Grant was much the same as last year at £370, the increase in funds from Ramblers Walking holidays meant our income and expenditure balanced.

Publicity

On 11th June we had a stand at the England Coast Path Celebrations at Nothe Gardens, Weymouth. This was an event organised by Natural England and originally planned to celebrate the completion of the England Coast Path. Despite the inclement weather the event was a success and Natural England said they were very happy with the attendance. We purchased a gazebo (paid for by Area) and created a display which included two pop-up banners supplied by Central Office. Photographs of our stand were posted on our group Facebook page.

On 22nd September we attended a stand with Dorset Area Ramblers at the Dorchester Streets Alive event, which was organised to celebrated International Car Free Day.

Leaflets are regularly distributed to local walking shops, such as Blacks, Mountain Warehouse, Trespass and Great Western Camping, as well as to local libraries and other information points.

Footpaths and Countryside.

Currently SDG members fulfil these roles for both SDG and Dorset Area (and therefore not being duplicated here).

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West Dorset

After a long spell steering well clear of committees, I have found my first year as secretary a challenge.

The Group has managed to offer at least one walk a week, offering a mix of long, more demanding routes and shorter, gentler rambles. Finding new leaders is proving a struggle and numbers attending are definitely down, rarely reaching double figures. The training material now available online for leaders and officers has proved useful but some are deterred by a fear of bureaucracy.

The new Rambler's website format has taken some getting used to and doesn't feel quite so user friendly as before, especially the app which shows limited information. Laraine Welch, who has given sterling service as walks coordinator, is standing down at our AGM on November 30th and is actively looking for a replacement. Finding new officers is a challenge. We are fortunate to have several members who may not walk with us but serve on our committee; or, like stalwarts Richard Meatyard, footpaths officer, and Jill Vine, our area representative, act in our interest externally.

Membership is down 14% to 180. Funds are buoyant with £500 being donated to the South West Coast Path Association this year. 14 members joined in their 50th Anniversary walk, completing the West Bay to Seaton section, (making up 75% of the group, definitely more advertising needed!). I represented our Group at the 'Streets Alive' festival in Dorchester, sadly under attended, again better advertising and venue needed.

Socially, members enjoyed a Christmas walk, led by our chairman Ian, at Kingcombe Nature Reserve, followed by a celebratory lunch at the Centre's Cafe.

In March, 16 of us ventured to Dunster in North Devon for 4 nights. Unfortunately, just before we were due to go, organiser, Bridget Trump, succumbed to Covid. Leaders rallied round and with the benefit of her efficient planning, were still able to offer a choice of walks in stunning countryside. Next year's foray will be to the Isle of Wight in April.

Heather Thomson, WDR Secretary
30th October 2023

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Dorset 4050 Walkers Group

The Dorset 4050 Walkers group has had another very successful year in 2023. Our membership continues to grow, currently standing at 96. We have had walks on most Sundays through the year, generally within the 10-15 mile range, and have had excellent turnouts, with many walks attended by around 20 people and on a couple of occasions up to 30. As ever, we continue to rely on a small number of walk leaders and our walks tend to be confirmed at short notice, but we are very grateful to our walk leaders for keeping such a good programme of walks going.

The roll-out of the new Ramblers Walks Manager can be described as disappointing: no thought was given to migrating existing walk history along with providing search and copy functionality. The new Dorset 4050 Web homepage is very basic and is far less informative than the old webpage. Feedback has been given on several occasions, but to no avail.

We marked World Environment Day with a 12-mile litter-picking walk around Puddletown, filling an impressive number of black sacks.

In addition to our Dorset walks, we had a walking weekend in the Brecon Beacons in April, and our regular four-day trip to Exmoor in June/July, timed to fit with the Porlock Weirfest for post-walk entertainment.

We continue to advertise the walks online and on our Facebook page which has over 300 members and is used to share photographs of the group walks - earlier this year a count revealed over 5,000 photographs on the site, and it is hopefully a good means of attracting new members.

Group funds currently stand at £773.00 after some expenditure this year on walk leaders' expenses, a subsidised walk leaders' lunch and contribution towards a social archery day, aimed at helping to attract new members. As well as the archery day, we had a very well-attended Christmas dinner in Poole and will be repeating it this year.

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East Dorset Group

We have enjoyed a varied walks programme, co-ordinated by Clive, roaming over the Purbecks, Cranborne Chase, the New Forest and all points in between but the number and variety would definitely improve with some more walk leaders. Our thanks to the existing leaders and their co-ordinator Margaret.

Another big thank you to Kevin, our Social Secretary for a well-attended Winter Meal at the Bridge Hotel in February, a coach trip to Chichester, shared with members of the local Caprow Group and a day trip to the Isle of Wight. 30 walkers enjoyed a walk around Bosham, some including the Roman Palace, whilst others walked along the Chichester Canal. A smaller group travelled to the Isle of Wight for an enjoyable, but more strenuous walk from Freshwater Bay on a gloriously sunny day.

June 25th was Purbeck Plod day and what a great day it was – the number of entries was certainly better than last year but getting enough volunteers to fulfil all of the roles proved somewhat challenging. To ensure the event can be run in the future, more members need to step forward to help. There was a lot of positive feedback from entrants and our volunteers worked enthusiastically to ensure the event went well. Thank you to all the volunteers, some of them new to the event, and hopefully they will volunteer again next year.

Please could all members consider how they can be more pro-active in the Group

- Fill one of the committee vacancies listed in the Group Secretary report
- Volunteer to lead walks
- Volunteer to support the Purbeck Plod in 2024

Roger Eede, September 2023

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Wessex Wanderer Rail Walks (FlexiGroup)

The annual End of Season meeting was held in Bradford-on-Avon on the 29 October 2022 and which was attended by fifteen Ramblers members. Joy Harrison, Programme Co-ordinator, chaired the meeting

The decision was made to begin future programmes in April with less emphasis on the busier times in July and August, although Leaders are free to lead then if they so wish. There were subsequently twenty-three walks offered for the 2023 programme, including from two Leaders who had not led for the WWWs before

It was agreed that I would once again organise a Winter Get Together which would be the first since 2019. This took place in February 2023 at the Toby Carvery in Trowbridge. As with the End of Season meeting the aim is to find venues which are as much as possible equal distance south

and north along the line. However, post Covid this proved a problem as several venues we have used in the past no longer offer what we wanted

Through my contacts at Great Western Railway they offered rail passes to those Leaders who required them, one to pre-walk and one to lead on the day

Unfortunately, changes to the train services and connections along the Heart of Wessex Line introduced in May 2023, were in many cases detrimental to the running of our programme. Not least that some walks had to be modified to enable the usual co-ordination of the 'down' and 'up' trains

Several walks were cancelled due to the Rail Workers ongoing industrial action and the numbers joining in the walks were mainly on the lower side, the weather also being a factor

In place of printed programmes excellent coloured flyers and posters were created. Whilst printed programmes remain popular, we no longer have the resources to have them printed and distributed as we did in the past. However, a PDF version of the programme was posted on our website for downloading if required

Copies of the flyers and posters were sent to Leaders and other members for distribution to various outlets. However, advertising needs to be addressed if we are to attract more walkers especially non-members of the Ramblers, which we have done over the years, and those who do not find out about us via the internet

Ken Mill, Severnside Group's current Webmaster, agreed to take over the management of the WWW website and has made a splendid job of creating and keeping it up to date

Severnside Community Rail Partnership have a link to our website and TransWilts posted details on their Facebook page. At the time of writing, the newly formed South Wessex CRP is yet to have the promised link added to their website

Thanks to Joy for continuing as Programme Co-ordinator, to Judith Anderson for taking the notes of the 2022 meeting, to Val Smith for booking the venue for the meeting and dealing with the caterers, to Alison Ridge for posting the walks on Walks Manager, to the Leaders and those who helped to proof read the 2023 programme, to Ken Mill, GWR, the CRPs, Mike Heckford who deals with the Group's finances and Dorset Area for hosting the Group.

The 2023 End of Season meeting is booked for Saturday 28 October, again in Bradford-on-Avon, when we will begin to organise the 2024 programme, which will be the twenty-ninth year since the programme began, albeit it in a very modest way

Two walks have already been offered, which is very promising, and we look forward to continuing to produce a WWW programme for the foreseeable future

Sylvia Popham
Assistant Programme Co-Ordinator

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Bournemouth Happy Monday Walkers (FlexiGroup)

Our current membership stands at 99.

We continue to offer walks each Monday morning within one hour's drive of Bournemouth, including the New Forest and Isle of Purbeck.

During early 2023 we had to arrange two walks each Monday to cope with the growing number of walkers but as numbers have reduced through the summer, we have reverted to a single walk.

We recently had a day walk around the Isle of Portland and a very successful guided fungi walk in the New Forest with many varieties spotted.

We have had a concerted effort to develop more leaders rather than relying on just one and now have several leaders with varying levels of confidence.

We design and navigate all our routes using the free OutdoorActive app and have an extensive library of walks in our area, available to all -

<https://www.outdooractive.com/en/list/ramblers-bournemouth-happy-mondays/211329988/>

When the Ramblers web site received its new look we developed our own pages on the site linked to our own site designed to attract new walkers and provide information to our members -

<https://bournemouthmondayramblers.org.uk/>

Finally, we are looking forward to our Christmas meal - with awards for members with the most miles under their belts (soles?)!

DAVID MITCHELL

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Dorset Young Walkers' Group (FlexiGroup)

The Dorset Young Walkers transferred from a committee-based group to a flexi group (non-constituted group with one main contact) in March 2023. I became the main contact with the ambition to host at least one walk per month, when possible and look to attract new members.

To help the group continue to be diverse and inclusive, I have arranged walks across many different parts of Dorset from Portland, to Charmouth, to Southbourne.

The below shows our walks and activities which I have arranged to date:

- Portland in March
- Charmouth in May
- Portesham in June
- Swanage in July
- Cerne Abbas in October
- Southbourne in November - to be rescheduled due to bad weather

The work to promote the group and increase the membership is still ongoing but is making good progress.

David Coleman
Dorset Young Walkers

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Report compiled and edited by Jan Wardell
Area Officer
November 2023