

Annual Report – 2024

This year’s Annual Report commences with the good news that Dorset Area is now out of abeyance, and can function once again with an ‘Area Council’ (AC). This is thanks to David Coleman, of the Young Walkers Group, who came forward after the 2023 AGM, to express an interest in the role, and has since been gradually taking up the reins.

This year marks the **50th Anniversary** of the formation of the **Dorset Area of the Ramblers**, and we hope to be able to commemorate this with a year of celebrations beginning at the Annual General Meeting, and followed by a project to be chosen by members at the event.

Ramblers Dorset Area – Beginnings....

Dorset Area was formerly part of the South East region of the Ramblers' Association (now known as the Ramblers). It then became part of Wessex Area, and when the local government re organization in 1974 put parts of Hampshire into Dorset, the Dorset Area was created. Membership was then just under 400 and there was one Group East Dorset. In 1981, the South Dorset Group was formed, followed by North Dorset in 1989 and West Dorset in 1994.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DORSET AREA ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024

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General Council 2024 (in brief)

The annual general meeting (AGM) of the General Council(GC) of the Ramblers took place on Saturday, 20th April 2024, at the Concourse Suite, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.

Sarah and Chris Moyle were the Dorset delegates to GC for 2024, but unfortunately were unable to attend, and submitted Proxy Papers, nominating Rebecca Dawson, chair of the board of trustees, to vote on each delegate’s behalf.

Six Motions had been submitted for debate (one of which was subsequently withdrawn) and Dorset Area submitted an Amendment to Motion 1, *Support for Bus Services* which was accepted by the proposers, and subsequently carried.

A new chair (Lucy Robinson) was elected unopposed. Winding up the meeting, the retiring chair wished Lucy good luck, and thanked everyone for attending. She closed the meeting by thanking Simon Kellas, head of governance, for the organisation of another successful General Council.

The meeting was formally closed at 4.35pm. The full Minutes of the GC AGM can be found [here](#).

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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TREASURER'S REPORT

The Ramblers' financial year finishes on 30 September and at the time of writing the **2023/24** 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 slightly lower budget, which included all Group budgets, was claimed for this year. The reduction mentioned in last year's report to the AGM was later rescinded and the full budget for 2023/24 was received. The accounts for this year again show a slight overspend of the income received during the year.

Although the Area is now out of abeyance, expenditure during this financial year is still being affected by Area Officer activity or alternatively the generosity of Area Council members not claiming their expenses incurred on Area business. Meetings apart from two Area Footpath Committee meetings are still being held on Zoom.

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 the train service on the Bristol to Weymouth railway line. The Wessex Wanderers is now a flexi-group administered by the Dorset Area and 2025 marks 30 years since they started their walks programme and it is hoped members will support them celebrating those 30 years in joining their walks next year. Already plans are being formulated including, it is hoped, a special souvenir programme.

Jubilee Trail guides are still on sale at a reduced price of £7 (including postage) but sales are slow. All monies from the sale of Jubilee Trail guides and the generosity of donations all go to improving the Trail and this year £1600 was paid to Dorset Council as part payment for the repair of two bridges near to Stoke Abbott village.

As will be seen from the accounts, money received to help with Don't Lose your Way expenses and the Dorset Young Walkers flexi-group are administered by the Area as restricted accounts.

In conclusion, may I thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in supporting me during the past year and, also, may I specially thank Martin Ford-Horne FCA for auditing the Area accounts, a very important job, which he has done now for 23 years.

Mike Heckford

October 2024

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MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REPORT

The Ramblers have made a welcome change to the way they record and manage volunteers. Until recently, this was all done on a linked but separate website, called Assemble, which included both volunteers' details and documentation they might need. As this site was not available for scrutiny by members who were not volunteers, they had no way of viewing the documents about volunteering, so finding out what they might be doing if they volunteered was difficult. Now volunteers are listed on the same password-controlled Ramblers' site that lists all members and the documents are all on the usual Ramblers' site, open to all.

The number of members in the Dorset Area continued a small decline over the last year and stands at 1360 as at the end of September 2024, a 1.6% drop compared with the same month in 2023. Within the Dorset groups there is a variety of figures, some groups having dropped in number and some increased. National membership is increasing showing a 2% increase over the same time period.

Margaret Kettlewell

8th October 2024

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ACTING WEBMASTER'S REPORT 2024

Minor changes are made regularly to the Dorset Area Website to keep up with administrative changes, changes to information about the Jubilee Trail and to link the latest version of Footnotes to the site.

A more substantial change was made in May 2023 to make the site a secure one, giving it an https address. No problems with this have been encountered since. Another change is coming up shortly. The host company, TSO host is handing all its sites over to 123 Reg, another reputable hosting company, towards the end of 2024. It will be doing the work of transferring the information when possible complications in the transfers could result from the fact that not only does TSO host currently manage the website for Dorset Area, but also those for East Dorset Group and West Dorset Group. We shall await the changes with interest!

Margaret Kettlewell

27th September 2024

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Publicity Officer

This post is vacant

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Area Picnic 2024

This year's Area Picnic was a slimmed down event, and three Groups are to be thanked for putting on walks on July 14th, for which the Hardy Monument was the meeting place for lunch. The 40/50s Walking Group, the East Dorset Group and the South Dorset Group all offered different routes and distances for the circular walks. South Dorset Group put on a figure of 8 walk, so that walkers wishing to do a shorter walk, could join them either in the morning or afternoon.

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EDITOR – DORSET FOOTNOTES

Ramblers Footnotes has had an interesting 2024 as E-Footnotes is now the way that the vast 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 198 copies. The following 'Distribution letter' extract tells the story:

.	North	Dorset	Group	–	10	copies
.	South	Dorset	Group	–	17	copies
.	West	Dorset	Group	–	6	copies
.	East	Dorset	Group	–	150	copies

In addition, The Area Treasurer receives 10 copies and the Footnotes Editor 5 copies.

The January Edition of Footnotes is always a little difficult to compile. With the exception of East Dorset, very few printed copies are going out that need to co-ordinate with the Group Newsletters. I understand that these are also mainly E-Newsletters. I am therefore considering a Christmas Edition of Footnotes that might be more fun. Several years ago, I had a Christmas Edition, and it was well received. I will be checking with my 'distributors', but don't be surprised if Footnotes goes Crackers this year.



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 how many read Footnotes or E-Footnotes, but I do know that I receive very few comments, and it is rarely referred to on walks, meetings, etc.

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. Footnotes is also formatted into a Printers pdf which I also use for E Footnotes. Thank you, James Burland, who has a very fast turnaround time. 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

AREA FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT 2024

The Area Footpath Committee has continued to deal with applications, path orders and other legal procedures, which in most part emanate from the Definitive Map Team at Dorset Council (DC), and a smaller number from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council. These can either emanate from applications via the Highways Act 1980, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. At the time of writing, since the last report the footpath secretaries have responded to twenty-two applications for diversions, extinguishments or modifications, and fourteen pre-application consultations, six of the latter involving Network Rail (NR) crossing proposals, most of which were first mooted in 2011.

Several Orders are currently with the Secretary of State for determination, but we are not taking an active part in these. (i.e. not submitting statements of case). A diversion Order to which we did object, and which was subsequently dealt with by the written representation procedure, was that at Melcombe Horsey/Cheselbourne. We were unsuccessful on that occasion, and the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, confirmed the Order. However, we were partially successful when we objected to a diversion Order at Poundbury (Dorchester footpath 2/Winterborne Monkton footpath 6). This was also dealt with by the written representation procedure, and we were gratified when the Inspector agreed with the Ramblers' suggested route for part of the diversion, in preference to that proposed by the applicant, supported by DC. Following an interim decision, to which there were no objections, on 16 October 2024, the Inspector confirmed the Order, subject to those modifications set out in that interim decision.(Copy available on request).

The Area Footpath Committee continues to hold the two 'winter' meetings via Zoom, and the two 'summer' ones in person. The Committee feels 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 motoring, paucity of public transport, and the recognition that driving on country roads, in inclement weather, is becoming increasingly stressful.

Don't Lose Your Way

There have recently been changes in the Paths Team at Ramblers Central Office, which have impacted on the DLYW team structure. At the time of writing, we are uncertain about the composition of the team: in 2022, there were seven members of staff in the Paths team, now there are four – three having left the organisation. There is not a structured group in Dorset, conducting research, but I personally am beginning to investigate a possible application in the East Holton Area. I may well be approaching members seeking 'evidence of use'.

As you will be aware, the cut-off date for registering applications is (at the time of writing) January 1st 2031. We understand that Ramblers together with the BHS, OSS, BMC and others are lobbying for this to be abandoned.

The Area Footpath Committee (AFC) comprises the Area Footpath Secretary, Group Footpath Secretaries, the Countryside Secretary, the Access Officer, and the Jubilee Trail Coordinator, 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 where 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, and respond to enquiries from the Countryside Secretary, relating to planning applications in their area, where public rights of way could be affected. The Ramblers (in Dorset) are consulted on these applications, whilst not being statutory consultees.

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.

Path/Access Forum Motion – 49th AGM

Whilst the Motion I submitted to last year's meeting i.e. '*That Dorset Area seeks to establish a Path/Access Forum*' was carried unanimously, and despite circulating information widely, through groups, Dorset Footnotes and on the website, disappointingly only one member responded. Therefore no further action has been taken.

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.

Jan Wardell
Area Footpath Secretary
November 2024

The Dorset Jubilee Trail (JT)

I took over the role of coordinator for the Jubilee Trail in Spring 2024 from Jan Wardell who had kept it going on an interim basis after the death of Rosemary Bramah in December 2021.

There are 18 monitors, plus several helpers, who monitor the Jubilee Trail. They are a mix of people some of whom walk regularly with their Ramblers group and others whose primary involvement with Ramblers is through their role as a JT Monitor. I had walked with 8 of the monitors by November and had covered just over half of the Trail (mainly walking with the monitors but also including some personal walking). One monitor, who currently covers two sections and about 10.5 miles, has indicated that she would like to give up one section. Another monitor is currently unable to cover her section due to personal circumstances. However, in general our coverage is good and the 'new' MNT system used by DC allows us to see all of the MNTs raised on the Trail.

There was significant work on the Jubilee Trail during 2024 with two replacement bridges installed by Dorset Council: one near Broadmayne and one near Stoke Abbott. There was financial support from Ramblers for the work at Stoke Abbott. There had been a temporary diversion on the path near Broadmayne and the bridge at Stoke Abbott had been virtually impassable so the completion of these works was important.

There were a significant number of MNTs raised because the Trail had become overgrown or muddy but this was true of most Rights of Way this year because of the wet summer. One area near Mapperton is particularly difficult and will be raised at the meeting with DC in early November.

Chris Moyle
October 2024

AREA ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT

The English Coast path in our area is still 'under development' with problems getting routes around the Lulworth ranges and Christchurch Harbour, for example. We have kept in touch with RA Head Office to try and find out if they know what is going on, and have been assured that progress is being made. We have been asked by Head Office to let them have feedback on how we have found the exercise as part of a survey they are doing - this will be discussed at the next Area Footpath Committee meeting. Until recently the government was claiming that the whole path would be finished by the end of this year, but have now finally admitted that it will not be, but with no revised completion date being announced. According to the Government web site only 1277 miles of the whole path are fully open out of 2680 miles which have been approved.

There is still no news on the programme for updating the Open Access maps originally issued in 2004/5 although we have been told that it is supposed to be finished by the end of 2030. You can see the current open access land on Explorer maps. Unless they change the methodology used last time there is no hope that this review will be achieved!!

Under the Ramblers Freedom to Roam we submitted comments on the proposals to extend CROW definitions to include woodlands, riverbanks etc. but have had no recent update.

Not a very happy picture but it is still early in the new Government.

Mike Beams
Area Access Officer
October 2024

COUNTRYSIDE SECRETARY'S REPORT

A Ramblers Countryside Secretary tries to protect and enhance the landscapes in which we walk, and the paths and access land which we use, by supporting positive, sustainable projects, and to protect them by opposing potentially intrusive or damaging developments and plans. 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.

1. Planning applications

Dorset Ramblers is consulted by the Dorset Council planning team 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 determines 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 2023 to 30 September 2024, we were consulted about approximately **1,076 applications**. We commented on **52** of these and objected to **7**.

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 motor vehicles. In cases where it appeared 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 objections were made in the following cases:

P/VOC/2023/04760 and P/VOC/2023/04761: These applications relate to Woodsford Quarry and seek to vary the planning conditions applied to earlier permissions to extend the period during which the quarrying is to be carried out. We objected because of on-going problems with the rights of way over the sites.

P/VOC/2023/07144: The variation to condition related in part to limiting the availability of a new permissive path to certain hours and we objected to this. We had previously asked for the path to be dedicated as a right of way. (Granted.)

P/FUL/2024/03517: Erection of a steel portal framed agricultural barn, Bowridge Hill Gillingham. We objected to the application as made because it ignored the existence of a public right of way which runs through the site. There are a number of outstanding problem reports for this path. (Granted, although the decision letter contained a reminder that the path should not be obstructed during the works, or before any necessary diversion has come into operation.)

P/FUL/2024/03653: Retention of a stone retaining wall to prevent public access to dangerous cliff top (including removal of a redundant stepped access to a closed section of footpath, SE26/15). We objected because we could find no record of the permanent diversion or extinguishment of this path. The rights of way team said that “the public footpath to which the steps provided access no longer exists in its entirety as the cliff has fallen away. The route has been closed to the public since at least 2015. Additional sections of cliff fell in 2024 and the team confirmed that for public safety reasons the right of way should be closed permanently”. (Granted: the decision letter contains an informative note confirming that the path should be closed permanently by way of an order.)

P/RES/2024/03588: 69 dwellings on land north of Crown Road, Marnhull. We objected because, although the applicant appeared to be aware of the existence of three rights of way crossing the site, there was no indication of how these paths were to be dealt with.

P/OUT/2024/02874: Up to 70 dwellings on two sites to the west of Milborne St. Andrew. We objected because it was unclear how a right of way on one of the sites was to be dealt with and concerns about a proposed crossing of the A354. This led to the applicant requesting a meeting with us which the Area Footpath Secretary attended. Whilst this led to some re-assurances, more work is still needed in respect of pedestrian access.

Following DC’s decision to refuse to grant planning permission for the controversial Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) on Portland, there was a public inquiry in December 2023. On 14 December members of the public were able to make statements directly to the Inspector (with no cross-examination from the applicant’s barrister). I took advantage of this opportunity to make our representations about the impact on paths and the landscape. It was heartening to hear the huge range of reasons why this proposal is a bad idea; lots of elected members spoke against it (from Dorset Council, and from Weymouth and Portland Town Councils); health and pollution experts plus private individuals, and organisations such as ourselves, CPRE, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Weymouth Civic Society. All of this was to no avail. The Inspector recommended to the Secretary of State that the appeal be allowed and the Secretary of State agreed. You can read the decision here:

[Recovered appeal: Portland Port, Castletown, Portland, Dorset \(ref 3327692 - 16 September 2024\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Any appeal against that decision would have to be by way of judicial review.

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

2. Planning policies

I commented on the following:

- The draft of the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan. This is a good document from the point of view of walkers and pedestrian access in general. I welcomed the plan and my comments were of a technical nature relating to some of the terminology and a word of caution about not providing facilities for cyclists at the expense of facilities for walkers.
- The Knightsford Neighbourhood Plan (covering West Knighton, West Stafford, Tincton and Woodsford). The draft contained a number of references to provision and protection of rights of way but I felt these could be much stronger.
- The BCP Local Plan This has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The process is expected to take 12 months and BCP Council hopes that the final document can be adopted in 2025.

Production of the Dorset Council Local Plan now appears to be subject to a new timetable; the council doesn't now anticipate adoption until the second quarter of 2027. It remains unclear whether any further public consultation will take place, although earlier comments must now be out of date.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is similarly stalled and there is no indication of when we are likely to see the draft for comment.

3. Other matters

All AONBs have been rebranded as National Landscapes. This means that we now do a lot of our walking in the Dorset National Landscape and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

4. 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. Dorset Council support for the LAF over the last year has been minimal and it appears that there is no officer whose job description includes servicing the LAF. This means that once again little progress has been made. However, at our July meeting we had speakers from the Forestry Commission who gave a presentation about the access offered in woodland creation grant schemes, and the Countryside Higher Tier scheme and discussions about how the public can find out where such access is being made available. The report about the work of the DC rangers was encouraging in terms of work on the ground but the position regarding processing definitive map modification order applications remains dire: they have 240 applications on which they haven't started work. As the LAF link to the *Dorset National Landscape*, I have continued to attend their twice-yearly Board meeting and receive regular updates on their work.

Janet Davis
Area Countryside Secretary
October 2024

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GROUP REPORTS

North Dorset

From the Chair

We have had a full programme of walks this year, with most Wednesdays being filled, but also now there is a new drive to fill the gaps on Sundays, partly to attract new members, but also for those who are unable to attend Wednesday walks. The White Hart Link circular walk was undertaken in sections over the course of the Spring and Summer, and successfully completed in September, followed by a celebratory lunch at the Old Brewery in Gillingham.

A new committee was formed in January 2024, with a new Chairman and Treasurer. We have now embarked on 'online banking' and updated signatories have been assigned. These signatories can approve payments electronically making the process much easier. Our group is in a healthy financial situation, with our bank balance at the end of the financial year being a little over £1,300. We will be seeking opportunities to put surplus funds to good use, within the Charity's objectives.

Bruce Marriott stepped down from after many years on the Committee, having served as Chairman through the COVID-19 shutdowns and over the difficult re-opening phases, when he provided invaluable support and guidance. We have much to thank Bruce for.

Thanks must go to the other Committee Members whose involvement and work in the background enables us to enjoy all the benefits of Ramblers Membership – the exercise, the natural beauty, the camaraderie – and of course, the banter.

Group Secretary

Committee meetings were organised in January, May and October. These meetings allowed the Committee to review the health of the group via evaluation of the Walk Log, considering the state of the walks programme and updating on interactions with Dorset Area and the central Ramblers administration.

There has been regular e-mail, and sometimes telephone, requests for information on the Group and its activities with a view to the possibility of joining the Group. Responses to these enquiries require careful and sympathetic consideration. Many of these requests turn out in a positive manner with new people joining the Group however requests for dogs on walks require a diplomatic response as we generally advise only bringing registered assistance dogs (RAD). Communication with Dorset Area is also maintained on a regular basis by sending Area reports to Committee and reporting Committee meeting minutes to Dorset area.

Membership Secretary

Members total: 180 with 5 new members since July. However, 10 members left in the same period (2 lapsed, 6 resigned and 2 left the area). The total number of North Dorset members remains virtually the same as last year. The project of walking the White Hart Link this year gained us 1 new member.

Walk coordinator

Since May 2023, due to an updating of the Ramblers website. I alone put up the information on each walk for internet viewers to access. The walk leader emails me the outline of their walk and I merge this with the template provided by the Ramblers. I have further adapted this template specifically for North Dorset walks so turning a walk description into a published website takes 5 to 10 minutes, although it does not go live immediately, often Ramblers seem to update their website overnight. So, everything is normally visible the next day.

In truth I would welcome a little more detail for each walk, and even an interesting title to help promote the walk. Plus, a photo or two if possible. Otherwise, all is good for me to put the walks up on the website.

The Ramblers website software appears to be slowly coming good after a steep learning curve, and one of the bonuses is that if anyone has led a walk since May 2023 all the details of this earlier walk are accessible to me so I can duplicate this walk very easily and change it to a new date so virtually no effort is required by the walk leader.

In 2024 we have been walking virtually every possible Wednesday and about once a month on Sundays, between 6 and 12 miles, with most in the 7-to-9-mile range.

I will end with some observations

1. Personally, I think we are still short of walk leaders.
2. Linear walks are considerably more complex to organise and adapt for the website.
3. I think themed walks are most popular. We had a good response to our first White Hart Link Walk, possibly as a result of putting out a press release.
4. If anyone is short of walk ideas the internet is full of suggested walks that can be adapted to suit our group and its preferences. So, we really have no excuses in putting forward suggested walks.
5. Sadly, I quite enjoy doing this role!

Footpath Secretary

The year commenced with a flurry of activity from Network Rail, with five pre-application consultations (PACs) relating to the diversion of footpaths crossing railway lines, as part of its Railway Upgrade Plan. These are 'passive' crossings, usually in rural locations, where there is no warning of a train's approach other than by the train driver who may use the train horn. It is the user's responsibility to stop, look and listen to check whether it is safe to cross. There were 4 on the Basingstoke-Exeter line, and one on the Weymouth line.

Overall, during the year, I have responded to 9 PACs, 9 Consultations, and 30 Planning Applications, where rights of way have been involved (via the Area Countryside Secretary). Because of the increase in housing development throughout the area, we are increasingly alert to the effect that they have on the network, and always try to obtain the best outcome, should paths need to be diverted permanently. This involves liaising with planning officers and developers at the earliest opportunity. These developments have the potential to present problems when temporary path closures are needed, and a watchful eye has to be kept on the Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) to ensure continued access for users.

Other matters affecting rights of way in the North Dorset Group area, include two Orders submitted to the Secretary of State for determination, the first relating to a bridleway at Rowden Mill Lane, Stourton Caundle, and the second relating to a claimed path at Bradford Abbas. Ramblers are supporting the Orders, but not taking part in either.

Personally this year, I have finally been successful in having a path recorded on the Definitive Map – after 13 years! This is a short section in Sturminster Newton, past the Old Chapel, and has now been given the number N53/104. Thank you to all members who were able to complete 'User Evidence Forms'.

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South Dorset

Membership.

The total membership is 224 which is a small reduction from 231 last year. There have been 25 new members since November 2023 and it is standard for new members to register an email address. Only 12 of our members now receive communications by post, sadly reflecting the passing of some of our more longstanding members.

Walks.

The numbers of walks that we are able to offer and the number of members on walks continues to be lower than pre-COVID levels even though a good number of walkers from other Ramblers groups join our walks.

Our main concern is the reduced number of active walk leader numbers with a small core group provide the bulk of our walks. The number of newer members coming forward to lead walks, despite encouragement and offers of support, has been disappointing and we are unable to provide the three weekly walks that were available pre-COVID.

A memorial 'bluebell walk' was held for Belinda Bentley. She had been our longest serving member and an inspiration for many of our older members and those who knew her.

The walk that we provided for the Area picnic was designed as a figure of 8 around Hardy's monument. We hoped to encourage back those members who might now prefer a shorter morning or afternoon walk (6.5 and 5.5 miles respectively), but all the walkers chose to do the whole walk.

Group Holiday.

In March a group of 32 members travelled with Ramble Worldwide Holidays (RWH) to Tolox (near Ronda) in the Sierra de las Nieves Nature Park to enjoy a week of walking in the mountains. We had two walks a day and the weather was good (though there was snow and fog a week later so we were lucky!) and the hotel perfect. For our annual Group holiday in 2025, we have booked with RWH to go to the Malvern Hills in June.

Walking Weekend,

Over the long weekend 21-23 June a group of 20 members went to the Chichester /Petersfield area for a walking weekend on the hilly South Downs and flatter coastal areas. The walks were led by SDG members who had lived in the area. Walkers arranged their own accommodation. Again the weather was good considering there was such a wet start to the year.

Social events.

In April a Skittles evening was held at the Old Ship Pub in Upwey. The summer social in August was at the Tudor House in Weymouth, followed by tea at the Sunflower Café run by a Ukrainian lady who makes amazing cakes. 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.

Main Account

Our expenditure on the Main account, at £425, was lower than in previous years due to committee meetings being held in a member's house. Expenditure included a walk leaders training and lunch and hire of a hall for the AGM.

Our income increased to £811, mainly due to RWH Walking Partnership scheme. The standard Area Grant of £321 was slightly lower than last year, due to slightly lower Membership numbers. We are currently looking to spend some of our surplus funds on the Ramblers Jubilee Trail in the SDG area.

Social Fund

The account was only used for the Xmas lunch and the coach transport to Bournemouth Airport for the Group Holiday this year. The main holiday payments were made directly by members to RWH. Income was £1,894 and expenditure was £1,896.

Publicity

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. In July we issued a Press Release regarding the grant for footpath improvements (see below and over) at the RSPB Radipole reserve in Weymouth. This was picked up by the Dorset Echo and the West of Dorset magazine.

Footpaths and Countryside.

Currently SDG members fulfil these roles for both SDG and Dorset Area (and therefore most information will not be duplicated here as it will be in the main body of the Area report). In the SDG area there were 258 planning applications on which we were consulted and comments were made on both the Weymouth and Knightsford¹ Neighbourhood Plans.

Two proposals of particular note in our area are: -

- 1) The application for a Special Extinguishment Order and Special Diversion Order around Radipole Primary School (Footpaths 131 and 62) to which we placed a Holding Objection. Historically Ramblers successfully fought to keep these paths open since they are an important gateway from an urban area to country walks in the Wey Valley.
- 2) The proposed Portland Incinerator. Ramblers made representations to the planning Inspector at the Public Enquiry in December (along with several other organisations and individuals who all opposed it including Dorset Council, Weymouth and Portland Town Councils, CPRE, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Weymouth Civic Society). Unfortunately, the Inspector recommended to the Secretary of State that the appeal be allowed and the Secretary of State agreed.

Footpath Improvement S1/138

SDG were recently awarded a grant from Ramblers for improvements to the Public Right of Way which passes through the Radipole RSPB reserve², largely due to the efforts of member David Northam.

This section of low lying path is often impassable due to flooding in winter. As well as connecting a residential area to the town centre (avoiding roads) it is also the start of the River Wey walks, which is a network of Public Rights of Way leading to the source of the River Wey.

The project, which is a partnership between South Dorset Group, the RSPB and Dorset Council, will raise and improve the surface of the path to make it suitable for use for all throughout the year. The signage will also be improved. Dorset Council will oversee the works which will be carried out in early autumn 2024.

The Ramblers grant is £11,400 and is coming from the East Berkshire Ramblers' Endowment Fund, rather than the Ramblers Accessibility Fund to which we had originally applied³.

¹ Covers the West Knighton, Tincleton, West Stafford and Woodsford Parishes

² (PRoW) S1/138

³ East Berkshire Group had produced a very popular series of guide books and made a considerable sum of money. This had been passed to Ramblers central office as an endowment fund to support suitable path improvement projects.



Radipole - Photo courtesy of the SDG

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West Dorset

This year has been a challenging one for our rambling group. Despite the very wet winter and a drop in numbers attending, which led to the cancellation of several walks, members have enjoyed some lovely days out. We continue to offer at least one walk a week varying from 6 to 10 miles, ensuring there is something for everyone. It is proving difficult to recruit new leaders, the bureaucracy appears to be discouraging. Membership stands at 166, with 10 new members since July.

Funds are still buoyant with £400 being donated to the Jubilee trail, a cause close to our hearts, and another £100 going towards repairing a bridge in Litton Cheney. Socially one of the standout events of the year was our trip to the Isle of Wight in the spring. A group of 16 had an excellent time exploring the island from the HF house at Freshwater Bay. 7 members really relaxed using public transport for the journey!

There was also an enjoyable post Christmas walk from Nettlecombe followed by lunch at The Marquis of Lorne, a favourite. Next spring's trip is to the South Downs. Support was given to a local campaign to save a well used footpath and bridleway at West Bay which some residents were trying to close. It had not been correctly redrawn on maps after a housing estate was built across it in the 1960's. We were able to provide proof of its regular use for over 20 years for our walks. During the autumn the Group held a recruitment drive and endeavoured to raise awareness of the work done, especially locally, by the Ramblers.

In August there was a stall at the Melplash Show and this was followed by another in Bridport town centre, thus making good use of the display boards and tablecloth kindly loaned by Area and handouts from HQ. There has been some feedback from these with potential new members joining walks.

We were also fortunate to be featured on Radio Solent as their club of the week, testing the committee's 'techie' abilities, with grandchildren being roped in to help with recordings. Here's hoping for some crisp dry walking days to come,

Heather Thomson, WDR Secretary

15th October 2024

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Dorset 4050 Walkers Group

The Dorset 4050 Walkers group has had another very successful year in 2024. Our membership briefly rose to 100 but currently stands at 95, similar to last year's total. We have had walks on most Sundays throughout the year, mostly within the 10-13 mile range, and have regularly had turnouts of around 20. We have welcomed several new members during the year who have become regular walkers. 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.

We repeated our litter-picking walk to mark World Environment Day, first introduced last year.

Our regular four-day walking trip to Porlock took place in early July and was well attended, with everyone enjoying a variety of Exmoor and South West Coast Path walks. Plans are already under way for a return in 2025.

We continue to advertise the walks online and on our Facebook page which has over 400 members and is used to share photographs of the group walks - hopefully a good means of attracting new members. We held another very enjoyable and well-attended Christmas social event in Poole.

Group funds currently stand at £679.68 after some expenditure this year on walk leaders' expenses in preparation for the Porlock weekend, and small contributions to committee meeting expenses. We will be holding a subsidised thank-you lunch for walk leaders later this year.

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East Dorset Group

It has been a challenging year weatherwise, but in between wet spells and with some judicious re-routing from our walk leaders, plus some well tested wet weather gear, walks have continued to take place.

After record rainfall over winter months the spring blossomed like no other. Our bluebell walks were outstanding. Even well into July everything remained fresh green and brightly in bloom. So, it is to the walk leaders who have put on some beautiful walks this year, to whom we extend our heart-felt thanks.

The social calendar has been excellent too. A good speaker at the AGM and another well attended winter meal shared by our friends from Caprow plus a wonderful coach trip to Arundel. The coach was close to capacity and the weather perfect. The six-mile walk, researched and led by Kevin, showed us into a rich breathtaking church, out onto the magical South Downs, through narrow rural pathways and woods then out along the river Arun and back to historic Arundel for refreshments and a relaxing look around.

The annual Purbeck Plod also took place this summer. After some anxiety, our marshalling numbers were fulfilled. Sunday June 23rd proved to be perfect walking weather. Slightly overcast, light breeze and a nice temperature. As a result, a large number of participants turned up on the day, adding to those who had already pre-booked making our total number to be around 130. Everything went extremely well even though we had changed some of the routes due to land slippage. We have received some very positive feedback supporting the changes. A great thanks to all who made this iconic challenge walk another day to remember. It simply would not happen without all the check point volunteers, the administrators, the marshals and welcoming catering staff at the church hall at the finish. A terrific team effort of which the East Dorset Group should be proud.

Roger Eede

2024

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Wessex Wanderer Railway Walks FlexiGroup

The annual End of Season meeting was held in Bradford-on-Avon on the 28 October 2023 and was attended by fourteen Ramblers members (nine apologies were received)

Next year will be the thirtieth since the first Wessex Wanderer walks took place, albeit it in a very modest way, and which were simply included in Bristol Group's Sunday walks programme, an initiative of Peter Gould, Avon Area

The programme has evolved over the years to what has become despite all the problems which have beset us, and still do, in producing a programme which covers four Ramblers Areas and all their Groups rather than the normal one Area, it's even more of an achievement that we are still going and one which we really should celebrate

However, due to the lack of resources we will be unable to celebrate in the fashion we had planned, and which was in place, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary in 2020, but was subsequently cancelled because of the pandemic

I have suggested that we produce and print a limited number of Souvenir programmes featuring a walk from each station along the line, but we may not be able to have any copies printed if we cannot secure sufficient funding. It was decided earlier in the year to wait and see how well supported the 2024 programme would be before taking any further action, so the actual planning is yet to start.

The 2024 programme featured twenty-four walks, and the number of participants has been the best since 2019. Only one walk was impacted by Industrial action, some others by extremes of weather but on the whole, it was very encouraging despite the current train services changes which have adversely impacted on our programme

However, I was rather disappointed that no Dorset Area member joined me on my walk around Portland in July despite good weather.

The Winter Get Together took place in January 2024, once again at the Toby Carvery in Trowbridge.

We aim to hold that and the End of Season meetings at venues which are as much as possible equal distance south and north along the line. At the time of writing these have not been arranged although the Winter Get Together will not take place until after January because of planned engineering works in the Westbury area during January 2025.

In place of printed programmes excellent coloured flyers and posters have been created. Whilst printed programmes remain popular, we no longer have the resources to have them printed and distributed as we previously did. However, a PDF version of the programme is posted (and updated when necessary) 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.

Thanks to Leaders on whom we rely, to Joy for continuing as Programme Co-ordinator, Alison Ridge for posting the walks on Walks Finder, those who helped to proof-read the 2024 programme and those generally support us, to Ken Mill for maintaining our website, Mike Heckford who deals with the Group's finances and Dorset Area for hosting the Group.

Thanks to Great Western Railway I was again able to obtain passes for Leaders and Co-Leaders who required them, one each to pre-walk and one to lead on the day.

The three Community Rail Partnerships which cover the line continue to support us, mainly by featuring the WWWs on their websites. Railways.co (whose aim is to have created walking routes from every station on the rail network) also added a link to the WWWs, particularly from one of their articles in the Guardian newspaper which resulted in some non members coming on our walks

Sylvia Popham
Assistant Programme Co-Ordinator
Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks

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Bournemouth Happy Monday Walkers (FlexiGroup)

Our current membership stands at 132 up from 99.

We continue to offer two walks each Monday to cope with the growing number of walkers.

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/>

We continue to expand our web site 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 walked.

DAVID MITCHELL

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Dorset Young Walkers' Group (FlexiGroup)

The Dorset Young Walkers is seeking to attract both members, and importantly walk leaders, as I am currently the only one who puts on walks.

Whilst I enjoy this, it is not always easy to fit in with my other commitments, and walks are limited. If anyone would like to join us, and is interested in leading walks please do come along. Group walks are a fantastic way to experience the outdoors, and meet friends. New walk leaders are given guidance and resources and helped to build the confidence to lead their first walk.

We look forward to welcoming you.

David Coleman
Dorset Young Walkers

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Report compiled and edited by Jan Wardell
Area Vice Chair
November 2024