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Cleeve Group Ramblers

Newsletter

within

Gloucestershire Ramblers Area

October 2025

With added Artificial Intelligence

AGM

The Group will be holding its AGM on Sunday 2nd November in [Southam Village Hall](#) GL52 3NS.
What3Words **sits.forgot.sugars**

The format



will be:

10:00 Short 4 mile walk.

12:15 Bring your own picnic lunch

12:45 AGM

Tea and coffee will be available in the hall.

So please attend the AGM to show your support for the efforts of those who keep your footpaths open, arrange and lead walks and keep the group functioning.

Reports

The reports from the Chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary and Footpaths Secretary are all embedded in the Annual Report for this edition of the Newsletter.

Cleeve Newsletter International

The influence of the Cleeve Newsletter knows no bounds! David Randell's piece on his background and family somehow fluttered across the Atlantic and landed in Colorado, USA —where an unknown cousin spotted it and got in touch. Proof, if ever it were needed, that our Newsletter has a mighty reach.

Membership Secretary's Report

The following new members have joined Cleeve Group since publication of the last Newsletter:

Mrs Jennie Thomas of Cheltenham

Mr Rob Stenning of Cheltenham

Miss Debra Gibson of Upton-upon Severn

Mr Mike Halls of Prestbury (formerly of Kent Ramblers)

Mr Richard McNeall of Cheltenham

Mr Bill Phelps of Deerhurst

We offer them a very warm welcome and hope they will enjoy walking and socialising – soon, hopefully! – with us.

Annie White, Membership Secretary

NB Remember to let Annie know if you change your email address

(Membership@CleeveRamblers.info)

Nature Notes

Nature's Fingerprints: How DNA Fragments Are Helping Us Track Biodiversity

Imagine being able to tell which animals have visited a pond, meadow, or woodland—without ever seeing them. Thanks to a remarkable technique called *environmental DNA* (eDNA), scientists and conservationists are doing just that. It's changing how we understand biodiversity, both nationally and internationally

Every living creature leaves behind tiny traces of DNA in its environment—shed through skin cells, waste, saliva, or even pollen. These fragments are like nature's fingerprints. By collecting samples of water, soil, or sediment, researchers can extract and analyse the DNA within. Using sequencing technology, they match the fragments to known species in a reference database. If the DNA of a great crested newt, for example, is found in a pond sample, we know the newt has been there—even if it's hiding under a rock.

This method is especially useful for detecting rare or elusive species. In the UK, eDNA has revealed thousands of insects, amphibians, and fish that traditional surveys might miss. It's also helping track invasive species like *topmouth gudgeon* and *Prussian carp*, which threaten native wildlife. Early detection through eDNA allows for quicker action to protect vulnerable habitats.

But eDNA isn't just found in water and soil—it's also floating in the air. Researchers have begun adapting air pollution monitoring equipment to detect airborne DNA. These devices, originally designed to measure toxic metal particles in the air, can also trap biological fragments: pollen, spores, insect scales, even tiny bits of fur or feathers. Once collected, these particles are analysed just like water samples, revealing which species are present in the area.

This airborne approach is especially promising in urban and wooded environments, where traditional surveys are difficult. It adds a vertical layer to biodiversity monitoring—capturing what's drifting above us as well as what's rooted below. In time, it could help track pollinators, migratory birds, and seasonal changes in local ecosystems.

Compared to traditional fieldwork, eDNA—whether from soil, water, or air—is faster, less invasive, and often more comprehensive. While visual surveys and trapping still have their place, eDNA offers a powerful complement. It's like having a silent witness to the comings and goings of wildlife. As we face growing environmental challenges, tools like eDNA give us a clearer picture of what's thriving, what's struggling, and where help is needed. For nature writers and community groups, it opens up new ways to tell the story of our landscapes—grounded in science and rich with possibility.

Cleeve Walks – A New Approach

Over the past few years, Cleeve Ramblers have seen a gradual decline in numbers on our walks, along with a continuing loss of walk leaders. To give some context, our typical turnout is around 10 walkers, whereas Gloucester recently had 31 on one of their walks. We now have six active leaders, some of whom are in or approaching their 80s.

At our recent committee meeting, we agreed to change the way we organise walks to give members greater certainty about when they will take place. We hope this will encourage more people to join us — and perhaps inspire new volunteer leaders to step forward.

Our new walk schedule:

Second and fourth Sunday of each month

One Wednesday walk every other month

This pattern will give us up to 10 led walks over a four-month period. While guest leaders from other groups may occasionally lead walks, and some Sundays may coincide with major public holidays, not every date will be filled. Nonetheless, our walk timing is now clearly established.

We're also encouraging our leaders to give more notice of when they plan to lead, making it easier for walkers to plan ahead.

Let's see how it goes — we look forward to seeing more of you on our walks!

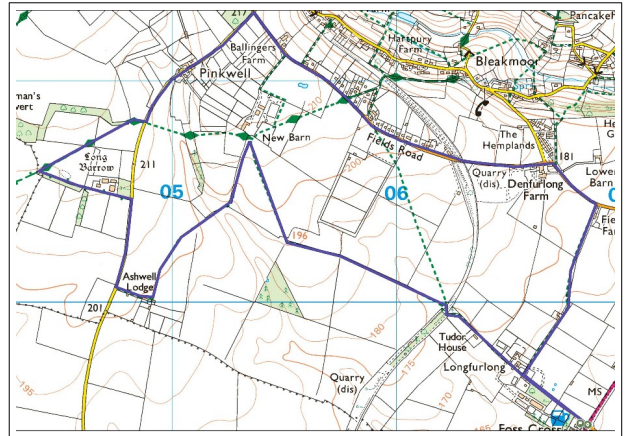
Note: If you're considering becoming a walk leader, please read the [accompanying article](#) on walk leader training

A Cleeve Ramble. Foss Cross

At five to ten our October Wednesday walk from The Stump at Foss Cross looked like it was going to be a non starter as Barb and I sat in the car waiting for walkers, but by ten three had arrived and the walk was on.

It was a dry cloudy day for the circular walk of 5 miles via Ashwell Lodge, Chedworth and Denfurlong Farm, an easy walk with a coffee stop at Chedworth Village Hall.

During the walkover the week before we had seen the wing walking plane flying circuits complete with wing walker! Unfortunately it wasn't to be repeated on the day.



However the walk was graced with two hares which hastily ran away, a buzzard and a shark. A bit of a surprise for the Cotswolds.

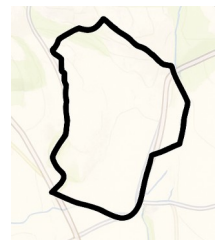
Towards the end we met a lady walking her dog. We mentioned the hares and she told us there had been problems locally with coursing.

Finally back at The Stump we were joined by Colin and Sue and enjoyed a very tasty lunch.

Brian Payne

Foss Cross with Artificial Intelligence

I thought it would be interesting to drop Brian's .GPX (a file detailing the walk coordinates) into an AI engine and ask it to provide a map and walk description. To my surprise, it did produce a route map, as shown on the right, but it is unrecognisable with the genuine article above.



AI suggested the 5 mile route would be completed in 5 hours and then produced the text below.

This week's circular ramble begins near Foss Cross, threading through the heart of the Cotswolds. With gentle inclines and a modest ascent, it's ideal for a breezy autumn outing.

The walk begins in neat fields, following ancient trails northward. You climb gradually to the highest point near the midpoint, where hills roll and woods thicken. Red kites circle above golden canopies as the loop turns southwestward. Views broaden over hedged-in valleys before you enter the southern limb, brushing past the vestiges of the Roman Fosse Way. The path then doubles back, ending where you began—refreshed and perhaps a little wiser.

- **Foss Cross:** Once a key junction on the Midland and South Western Junction Railway, Foss Cross station opened in 1891 and served local farms and quarries until its closure in 1961. Though the tracks are long gone, the route still echoes with industrial history.
- **Fosse Way:** This ancient Roman road stretched from Exeter to Lincoln, slicing through the Cotswolds. Its straight alignment and enduring presence make it one of Britain's most iconic Roman legacies.
- **Chedworth Roman Villa** (nearby): Just west of the route lies one of Britain's finest Roman villas, with mosaic floors, bathhouses, and a shrine to the water nymphs. A detour here offers a glimpse into Romano-British luxury and rural life.

Meet Our Members

David Denham

A Life in Motion: From Batley to the Alps

Walking became a part of my life from the time I began trekking across town with other students to attend Batley Grammar School. I much preferred walking in all weathers to travelling by bus. During my teens, I discovered the Yorkshire Dales and have walked there many times since.

I spent five years at Batley Grammar School and left at 16 with four GCEs and no clear idea of what to do next. Following the advice of a careers advisor who visited the school, I applied for a clerical job in insurance. I spent five years working in an office in Leeds from 1960 to 1965, but I saw no future there.

A Labour councillor in my hometown of Dewsbury persuaded me to join the now-defunct Labour Party Young Socialists. Although I didn't realise it at the time, this marked the beginning of my education—through visiting speakers and pub discussions with other members, mostly sixth formers, undergraduates, or recent graduates. That's how I developed an aspiration to study, though I knew nothing about universities or how to apply.

In the mid-1960s, the UK faced significant economic difficulties that dominated the news. Despite lacking confidence in my academic abilities, I applied to study economics at A-level at my local technical college, attending one evening per week. After just one academic year, I managed to pass with a grade D—not brilliant, but a pass nonetheless.

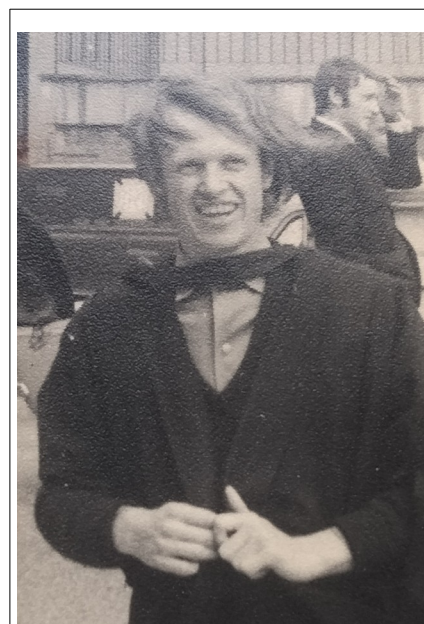
I learned about Ruskin College, Oxford through a Labour Party paper and submitted an essay with an unsuccessful application. However, they passed my details on to Newbattle Abbey Adult Education College in Dalkeith, near Edinburgh. At 21, I was one of the youngest in that year's cohort. It was a wonderful experience, and I remained in touch with two friends I met there until their deaths.

I studied A-levels in the British Constitution—which, intriguingly, does not tangibly exist—and in Logic and Scientific Method, which provided a useful foundation for understanding debates about the nature of Social Science that I encountered later in my degree.

Newbattle encouraged and supported my university application, which was invaluable as I had no idea how the process worked. I likely wouldn't have had the confidence to apply without their help. I began a three-year degree in Politics and Sociology at the newly chartered University of Bradford. During this time, I met my future wife, Ann, who had left school and was studying at her local tech before attending teacher training college in Hull.

I followed my first degree with a Master's in Social Science at Birmingham University and later obtained a teaching post in Sociology at Wolverhampton Polytechnic (now a university). Ann became a keen walker, and we often hiked in the Shropshire Hills and the Malverns. The "Three Peaks of Yorkshire Challenge Walk" became an annual event for me, friends, and relatives. The challenge is to complete the 25-mile route in 12 hours, which I've done six times.

I've also had memorable Alpine walks with a friend from Wolverhampton. Our first was from Chamonix to Zermatt, followed by a 100 km circuit in the Bernese Oberland and a long route in the



David in 1969

Vanoise. These days, Ann and I try to do a local walk for about an hour each day, weather permitting, often on Cleeve Hill and Cleeve Common.



We used to spend three days a week in Cheltenham helping care for our grandchildren while our daughter taught part-time as a primary school teacher. Eventually, we settled in Cleeve to be close to her, her husband, and their children—now teenagers. We love talking to them about all kinds of topics, especially their academic progress. The eldest is studying for A-levels and considering university applications.

Our son and his family live in a delightful village in Suffolk, but it's a long drive, so we don't see them often. This summer, we celebrated the academic successes of our granddaughters—the eldest begins her studies at Cambridge University this academic year, and her younger sister starts her A-levels in September after outstanding GCSE results.

Despite a busy teaching schedule, I completed my doctorate at Birmingham University as a part-time student. Over the years, I published around ten research papers in various academic journals. I had hoped to write more after retiring, and fortunately, I was invited to contribute two chapters to a book on victims of crime, drawing on my knowledge of the sociology of crime.

Around the time I retired, Professor John Bratton—whom I've known for over 50 years—contacted me from Canada and asked me to write three chapters on Émile Durkheim and half of the conclusion for a book we titled *Capitalism and Classical Sociological Theory*. First published by the University of Toronto Press in 2009, it has since reached four editions. My contribution grew to include a comprehensive discussion of Max Weber, and I eventually wrote about a third of the book. The latest edition was published in 2024, and I'm grateful to John for the opportunity to contribute to a major textbook.

The book explores the ideas of major sociologists from the 1840s to the 1930s and applies their concepts to contemporary issues such as gender, race, and class inequalities; the 2008–09 banking crisis; the atrocities at Abu Ghraib prison; homelessness in the US; and the impact of COVID-19 in the context of social inequalities in the US, Canada, and the UK. A friend once joked that I had to retire to find time to work! John and I have collaborated on several other book chapters, and I'm currently committed to writing 12 short discussion pieces for the sixth edition of another of his textbooks.

I began walking with the Cleeve Ramblers about ten years ago and have greatly enjoyed meeting fellow enthusiasts and exploring unfamiliar areas. I haven't walked with them as much recently as I'd like, but I hope to join group walks more frequently in the future.

David Denham

Editors Note

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Next Committee Meeting

The next committee meeting will take place on Wednesday 14 January at 9:30 A.M. using Zoom. Every member is welcome to attend. If you wish to join please send an email to Judith Secretary@CleeveRamblers.info



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Walk Leader Training

Traditionally, Ramblers groups have taken an ad-hoc approach to training walk leaders, with newcomers learning the ropes by acting as back markers and shadowing experienced leaders. Now, in line with other organisations that run outdoor activities, Ramblers requires all walk leaders to complete an online training course.

The course comprises a handbook and two modules — *Foundations* and *Preventing and Managing Incidents* — and takes approximately 2½ hours to complete. This ensures a consistent approach across all groups and helps maintain high standards of safety and leadership.

All existing leaders must complete the training by the end of 2025. Most of our Cleeve leaders have already done so.

If you're thinking about leading a walk, get in touch with Gerry at WalksCoordinator@CleeveRamblers.info and we'll start the ball rolling.

The Ramblers' Association is a registered charity (England & Wales No. 1093577, Scotland No. SC039799) and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales (no 4458492).
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