

October 2023

Newsletter of the Glamorgan Area

EDITOR

The reports in this year's Glamorgan Rambler show that groups feel that they are getting back to a more normal state after the disruption caused by Covid. The biggest concern this year is in-house: it is how to adapt to the new Walks Manager system whilst also coping with a succession of teething problems that has beset it.

On a more joyful note, a number of groups are celebrating anniversaries this year: for Cardiff it is their fortieth and for Penarth and Taff Ely, their thirtieth – congratulations to all three. Plus, last year, Bridgend celebrated its fortieth and more about that features in their report for this year.

Diane Davies

CHAIRMAN

Hi everyone, I hope you all enjoyed rambling the past year as much as I have. Now that the pandemic has ended, we can get back to normality. How do we decide what to do with the leisure time we are given to make a memorable year? Top of my list is rambling.



Swansea Ramblers helping Ramblers Cymru to showcase one of the walking routes created in the Ystalyfera area as part of the Paths to Wellbeing project. The sculpture was commissioned as part of the project.

We in the Glamorgan Area benefit from a variety of walks: mountains and valleys, the Coast Path, the Vale of Glamorgan and Gower. Walking and talking with like-minded people gives me a feeling of freedom, apart from the well-known beneficial physical effects of walking though the mental well-being and social benefits it

affords are less often mentioned. I would like to thank all the walk leaders and the group committees for their sterling work during the last year, without these volunteers there would be no walks. Finally, I must thank my fellow Area Officers for their support during the last year.

Les Meachin

GLAMORGAN AREA AGM (open to all members)

SATURDAY 18th NOVEMBER 2023 at 2:00pm

At

Lisvane Old School Community Centre

Corner of Llwyn Y Pia Road and Heol-Y-Delyn, Cardiff, CF14 0SX ///dined.loose.goes

Speaker: Peter Finch (local poet and author who will speak about his books *Walking Cardiff: Edging the City* and *Walking the Valleys*)

Morning walk from the venue starting at 10:00am.

GENERAL SECRETARY

The last year has seen following Ramblers senior volunteer appointments: Amar Latif, the blind adventurer, as the new President of Ramblers GB and Leanne Wood as Ambassador for Ramblers Cymru. [Note: "title "Ambassador" replaces previous title of "President".] Also there has been a change of Ramblers' London Office address to The Ramblers, 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA.

After much delay Ramblers launched their revamped Walks Manager and website. Adjusting group procedures to uploading walks on to the Ramblers website via Walks Manager offers both opportunities and challenges. Ramblers' guidance notes to help can be found on Assemble (go to Document Hub and then Walks Manager).

The new website has the usual links to Ramblers Groups, Group walks, Self-guided Walks, Ramblers Campaigns, Offers & Promotions, and much more. Of particular interest to new members will be the background information on Ramblers:

- **What we do:** open the way for everyone to enjoy the simple pleasures of walking.
- **Our History:** Since 1935 doing everything to make sure everyone everywhere can enjoy nature on foot.
- **How we are organised:** governed by a Board of Trustees and made up of local groups and regional areas across Great Britain.

- **Access:** campaigning to keep our countryside open to be explored freely and we speak up on issues that matter to walkers.

- **Environment:** working to look after the environment for future generations.

- **Paths:** protecting and improving this precious asset.

- **Equity:** removing barriers so everyone can enjoy walking in green spaces.

A little known section of the website is "Jobs": *"Ramblers has a staff team of around 100 people based at home or who work from our offices in London, Edinburgh, and Cardiff. If you're hard-working, love to find solutions, and enjoy working in a friendly and nurturing environment, then they might just be the team for you."*

Ramblers Assemble Document Hub continues to grow as a source of Ramblers guidance and should be the first port of call for Rambler related queries: Areas and Groups; Assemble; Big Help Out; Brand, Logos and Templates; Finance; Group Walks; Insurance; Membership; Path Maintenance; Path Orders; Protection and Access; Publicity and Communications; Safeguarding; Self-Guided Walks; Thanking Volunteers; Volunteer Role Profiles; Volunteering Policies; Wellbeing Walks.

Ramblers GB & Ramblers Cymru continue to offer online training for volunteers (e.g. Fifty ideas for local recruitment; Safety on group walks; Handling tricky situations; Footpath

Forums). Members need to be signed up to "My Ramblers' Account" to receive notification of these free online training opportunities.

November sees a most unusual event. An **Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)** will take place on Saturday 25th November 2023 at the Crowne Plaza City Centre hotel in Manchester. General Council normally meets once a year, at the annual general meeting (AGM) in April. This year, as an exception, an additional general meeting has been called as the Ramblers' Board of Trustees wishes to ask Council members to consider and approve a new strategy for the Ramblers, which General Council has the power (set out at Article 23.4) to approve. Unlike the General Council AGM, there will only be one item of business on the agenda – to discuss and vote on the proposed new strategic plan. The outcome of the EGM will be announced through Ramblers Volunteer Updates.

Gwyn Lewis

TREASURER

Expenditure by Area continued to be low. In 2022/23 all groups accepted their basic allocation, except Maesteg and Tawe Trekkers, who required no funding. The total Budget Payments to Groups is £3,237 (2021/22: £3,129).



Penarth Group celebrating, in front of St Peter's Church, Old Cogan on 30th March, the formation of the Group thirty years ago

		9 Months to June 2023 Actual	2022/23 Budget	2023/24 Budget
Reserves b/f	9,015	8,634	8,000	8,000
Total Income	3,300	2,250	3,000	3,000
Group Funding	3,129	3,237	3,237	3,598
Newsletters/publicity	145	188	300	250
Practical work	131		1,200	1,200
Meetings	276	326	1,000	400
Admin		25	300	150
Other				
Total Payments	3,681	3,776	6,037	5,598
Surplus/Deficit()	(381)	(1,526)	(3,037)	(2,598)
Reserves c/f	8,634	7,108	4,963	5,402

Area submitted a funding request of £3,000 (2021/22: £2,250) again just to cover group funding.

As of 30th June our reserves were £7,108. The final quarterly payment was received of £750 and no major items of expenditure are expected. Our reserves at year end should be approximately £8,000, slightly down from the previous year.

Our Budget Application for 2023/24 has been submitted and is awaiting approval. We have again requested funding of £3,000, which just covers payments to groups of £3,598. This is an increase from 2022-23 as a budget was submitted by Taff Ely for first aid training costs. All other groups have accepted their basic allocation (£95 per group plus £1.01 per member), except Maesteg who required no funding.

I give comparative figures in the summarised Receipts & Payments Accounts shown in the Table below.

I have reduced our budget expenditure for 2023/24 to reflect levels of expenditure over the last few years. I feel that we are still in a period of transition where established spends have reduced or disappeared, for example, printing and distribution of the *Glamorgan Rambler* and for Groups' walks programmes. For the last few years we have not requested any funding for Area activities but our spend has been low, resulting in a slow reduction in or

reserves. This is a very negative approach, and it would be better to reduce our reserves by increasing expenditure on our charitable objectives of Promoting Walking and Footpath Work.

Walking is a popular form of recreation but, for that reason, we have a lot of competition. We have the resources for both Area and Groups to improve our publicity and increase membership.

Ian Fraser

FOOTPATH SECRETARY

Whilst the composition of the Glamorgan Area Group Footpath Team remains stable, we did say "goodbye" to Peter Lane (Vale of Glamorgan) and Susan Davies (Penarth) and we thank them for their contribution and wish them well for the future. There was a welcome return of Ian Fraser (Vale of Glamorgan) to the fold.

Volunteers we may be but there is no getting away from some business speak: Succession Planning. Recognising the need for Succession Planning features in our Group Footpath meetings and I would encourage anyone interested in protecting our footpath network to make themselves known to your Group Footpath Officer. Those

hesitant in coming forward should be reassured that you will have the support of myself and the other team members and have an extensive library of guidance in the Ramblers Assemble Document Hub covering:

- Protection & Access: including Public Rights of Way, Don't Lose Your Way, Green Routes and Planning;
- Path Orders;
- Path Maintenance: including Insurance, Legal Guidance and Waymarking.

Ramblers GB have regular Footpath related on-line training as well as forums that are available to all members. To be aware of these training opportunities members need to have signed up with Ramblers "My Ramblers Account".

The Don't Lose Your Way "Good News" that featured in last year's *Glamorgan Rambler* was premature as the UK Government has backtracked on its decision to scrap the 2026 Deadline in England and has been merely changed the cut-off date 2031. The Welsh Government remains committed to not implementing the 2026 Cut Off Act.

Through the year the Ramblers has launched or supported a number of footpath and access campaigns:

- Don't Lose Your Way: over 49000 paths could be lost;
- Expanding the freedom to roam to increase access to the outdoors for everyone;
- Improving access to nature for everyone, everywhere, everyday.

Ramblers Cymru campaigns

- Our Paths Our Future (Ramblers Cymru): calling on the Welsh Government to provide additional funding for the path network.

• Paths to Wellbeing: working in eighteen communities across Wales to equip volunteers with the skills and knowledge to manage and improve paths and nature in their local areas. The 145 routes created in these communities can now be found and explored on the new website.

- Launched twenty-two short walks from train stations across Wales in partnership with Transport for Wales.
- Welsh Government Agriculture Wales Act (2023): its Sustainable Land Management objectives includes "to conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access



Front page of the **Glamorgan Gazette** of 13th October 2022 highlighting the fortieth anniversary of the Bridgend Group

to and engagement with them” following lobbying by Ramblers Cymru and others.

As ever for info of your group’s footpath work and initiatives contact your Group Footpath Officer.

Gwyn Lewis

MEMBERSHIP

On the surface it has been a quiet year for membership with numbers increasing by only sixteen between June 2022 and June 2023 to 2436 in the Glamorgan area. However, this hides quite a lot of activity with an average of 10% turnover for most groups. The number leaving after membership of two years or less is still about half of the total of those leaving. It is unclear whether this reflects people who tried something new but decided they did not like it after all, or those leaving for other reasons. But it reinforces the need to make new members welcome - suddenly joining a group where everyone but yourself appears to know each other can be a daunting experience!

Robin Pitcher

PUBLICITY

The use of social media

1. My intention in this report is to inform members of the apparent effectiveness of Swansea Ramblers Face-

book Group. Before I go into that I decided to do a desktop survey of Glamorgan Area Groups and their use of social media. This is attached as an Appendix to this report and is for information. I was surprised how much variation there was and that only two groups do not use social media at all.

2. At Swansea Ramblers we have used You Tube for a long time but, only

relatively recently, started using Instagram and then Facebook. I faced some opposition from some committee members of my Group when I proposed using Facebook. They were rightly concerned that this would attract trolls. However, thanks to helpful advice from Jackie Brett of Vale of Glamorgan Ramblers and Bran Devey of Ramblers Cymru I was able to set controls to prevent this issue occurring.

3. Initially I intended to set up a private Facebook Group and a Facebook Page. However with advice from colleagues, I decided to follow The Ramblers Guidance and go for a public group. The guidance states that it should not appear that a Ramblers Group is a private club: “if you only have a private Facebook group it creates a barrier for people to find you and join you. We never want the Ramblers to feel like a closed, private club.” I am pleased to report that has been a good decision and we now have 315 members, the majority of whom are not members of The Ramblers. I, know this because, when anybody asks to join, they are asked if they are members. So this gives us an opportunity to promote our walks to potential new members.

4. As mentioned above we have controls in place. Firstly, new members

Use of Social Media in Glamorgan Area Groups

Group	Facebook	Instagram	Other
Cardiff SW1	Yes: public and private group	No	Twitter and Flickr
Neath Port Talbot SW2	No	No	None
Bridgend SW3	Yes but appears to be a page	No	Twitter
Vale of Glam. SW5	Yes but appears to be a page	Yes	Twitter and Flickr
Swansea SW6	Yes: public Group and Page	Yes	You Tube
Maesteg SW8	No	No	None
Merthyr SW9	Facebook	Yes	Twitter
Penarth SW11	Facebook page	Yes	Twitter, LinkedIn Instagram
Taff Ely SW12	Facebook page	No	None
Tiger Bay SW50	Facebook page	Yes	Twitter, You Tube
Tawe Trekkers SW51	Facebook page	Yes	Twitter



Members of Tiger Bay Ramblers with their Social Butterfly Award given in recognition of their outstanding use of social media to publicise The Ramblers

are asked questions and have to agree to the Group rules. Secondly, they can only post messages with the approval of the administrators i.e. myself and one of my colleagues in Swansea Ramblers.

5. In conclusion, I would advise any group to set up a Facebook public group. I realise that for those groups who have already set up a private group they are not able to change this without starting again.

Richard Beale

WALKING ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues continue to appear in the national headlines, although thankfully our rambling in south Wales has been relatively little affected. Nevertheless, the wider effects of environmental change are still reflected in our area.

Another windfarm is proposed on Mynydd Margam. Y Bryn Windfarm, with eighteen turbines, is being developed in the area between the Afan and

Llynfi valleys. It is difficult to decide whether to support a development that reduces atmospheric carbon dioxide or oppose the inevitable skyline eyesores and numerous tracks that will be required. This area is currently mainly forestry, so the damage will hopefully be limited.

I have continued to take an interest in the Lost Peatlands project, itself an initiative partly funded to compensate for the destruction caused by a neighbouring wind farm. I took an interesting walk around Craig y Nos to see the work being done to return land, ravaged by forestry, to peatland.

Another visit, to help with work at Hendre'r Mynydd, near the Rhigos, was unfortunately cancelled when the whole area went up in flames - again highlighting climate change through the prolonged dry spell we have enjoyed but which has brought its own problems. Ironically, the aim of the project is to restore dried out grassland to damp peat by undoing drainage work carried out in the past.

Finally, on the theme of fossil fuels, illegal mining continues at the Ffos y

Fran opencast site after planning permission has expired and there are doubts over whether or how the area will be properly restored.

If anyone is interested in pursuing these, or any other potential threats to our walking environment, please get in touch.

Mike Kohnstamm

GROUP REPORTS

BRIDGEND

Bridgend Ramblers started the year with a bang, when we celebrated our fortieth anniversary with a special Group Walks Day on Sunday 2nd October. In the morning we organised two group walks both starting from the Bridgend Rec Car Park. A five mile walk was to Merthyr Mawr and back, and the eight mile walk followed a route passing through Pen y Fai, Court Colman and Laleston, before returning to the Rec. The five mile walk was joined by Huw Irranca-Davies MS who has a long standing association with The Ramblers. The eight miler was joined by our other guest, Cllr John Spanswick, who was Mayor of Bridgend County Borough, from 2021 to 2022, and is no stranger to walking



Bridgend Ramblers passing through Laleston on their eight mile walk for the Groups Walk Day in October of last year



Bridgend Ramblers on their way to Merthyr Mawr on their Groups Walk Day in October of last year

and mountain climbing! Following the walks, over seventy members and some former members, enjoyed a celebratory get together at Bridgend Tennis Club. The events were featured in the *Glamorgan Gazette*, where, as well as making “front page news”, two inside pages were devoted to our celebrations.

We have had publicity stalls at Wellbeing Events organised by Bridgend College and by Employability Bridgend, where we have been able to promote the Ramblers and our Group’s activities. Throughout the year, thanks to the efforts of our walk programme coordinators and walk leaders, we have put on a program of six walks every week. We pride ourselves on our varied walk programme which offers three or four mile strolls, shorter walks of about five miles, medium walks of about eight miles or more challenging full day walks of ten to thirteen miles.

All our Sunday and mid-week group walks are displayed in spreadsheet format on our website at: www.bridgendramblers.org. Thanks to the efforts of our dedicated team of walk programme coordinators and over eighty volunteer walk leaders, our October to March programme is almost complete.

Our membership numbers have continued to steadily increase

with an influx of new members. A number of our members have stepped up to the challenge of becoming registered volunteer walk leaders, knowing that our experienced walk leaders are always available to help.

Our group walks have taken us to the Gower and the Swansea Valley, the Brecon Beacons, and to the Newport area. We have also put on as many local walks as possible because of the impact of high fuel prices. All our walks have been well supported. Our Sunday short walks regularly attract over thirty walkers and many of our medium walks attracted twenty walkers. Our fortnightly summer evening walks have also proved to be very popular and have attracted over twenty walkers on occasions. As well as welcoming quite a few new members, members from other groups now join our walks on a regular basis.

On the social front our short walkers organised a night out before Christmas and a lunch in January following a walk. About forty of our members have been on two highly successful coach trips: one to Laycock near Chippenham in June and one to Llanstefan in September. Both these trips included pleasant local group walks.

Some of our members have also been on informally organised trips. Last Oc-

tober, two of our members walked the fifty-five mile Taff Trail over six days. Two of our members visited the Isle of Arran in May. While there, they climbed Goat Fell, the highest of Arran’s mountains, where they met two ‘kilted’ locals who insisted that “*a kilt is essential for a day out in the hills*”. Three of our members arranged another trip to Scotland, including some time on Orkney, where they visited several historic sites.

Graham Crocombe

CARDIFF

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Group and we decided to celebrate by having leaders choose forty favourite walks to go into our programmes.

A twice-yearly walks programme booklet continues to be sent out to members. At last year’s AGM there was a motion asking for this to be stopped but the motion was soundly defeated: it is clear the membership values receiving these booklets, which give them a physical reminder of what the Group offers them. In addition, it was felt that such a booklet was tangible evidence for members, who may not walk with us, of their connection to the Group. Being a group with over around 650 members it is difficult otherwise to ensure that we remain in touch with everyone.

So, many thanks to all the walk leaders who provide the huge variety of walks that provide something for everyone; with walks ranging from four to seventeen miles on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays plus Thursday evening walks in the summer. A selection of these walks are coach trips, so many thanks to Karen Walters who has taken on the job of organising these events. All have proved successful with each being sold-out despite the increase in price of tickets and the need for them to be bought in advance. Thanks also to Roma Whiteley who organised a very successful back-packing walk of the recently-created Snowdonia Slate Trail in May.

Putting the programme together is a team effort: so thanks must go to Jan Aplin, Leighton Hill, Barry Southwell and Gwyn Lewis, who act as co-ordinators and inspire leaders to put for-



Cardiff Ramblers setting off from Roath Park Lake on a memorial walk for Len Bowker in April

ward walk and to Andrew Price, the Publications Officer, for putting it all together ready for the printers. Thanks also to Jean Board, our new Membership Secretary, for organising the mail-out and Mike Kohnstamm, Webmaster, for the uploading of the informa-

tion onto the website and The Ramblers walks' database.

All this has all been done despite the fact that we still lack a Rambles Officer; consequently we are still on the look-out for someone who is willing to co-ordinate all the work needed to pro-

duce a programme which has at least half-a-dozen walks per week. It has also been done whilst labouring to integrate the new Walks Manager system with our ways of creating a walks programme. It is clear that we need to educate walk leaders into new ways of providing walks for members and hope, in the coming months, to ensure walk leaders are *au fait* with the new system whilst also determining what impact it will have on the way we publicise walks to members.

Trevor Whateley, a staunch supporter of the Group, died last year and left a legacy to Ramblers Cymru which came to us. In consultation with his family, it was decided to erect four kissing gates in the Pentyrch-Creigiau area. These have now been installed to the benefit of walkers in the area. Also on the footpath front, thanks must go to Jan Aplin and Sue Johns for rechecking the walks that are in ***Capital Walks II*** and ensuring that the details of them on our website are now up-to-date.

Finally, we have started WhatsApp Group for Saturday walks to allow those who want a lift to contact with



Cardiff Ramblers on the stepping stones over the River Ogmore during a linear walk from Bridgend to Llantwit Major in June

prospective car-drivers. It seems to be working well and we are looking to extend it to Wednesday walks.

We will be hosting the Area AGM on Saturday 18th November and look forward to welcoming delegates from the other groups to the Lisvane Community Centre and beautiful countryside that is on its doorstep.

MAESTEG

Our group continues to go from strength to strength. We have had a number of new faces joining us over the last twelve months, each of them has very quickly gelled into our friendly and welcoming fold.

Each person brings something to the group and plays an active part: whether this is walk-planning, suggesting new routes, lifts for non-drivers or just taking lots of photographs to share within our WhatsApp group, the best of which go into our popular Facebook page and weekly summary of completed walks. Our page has quite a following, with a number of people checking in each week to view our routes. It is invaluable, not just for those who wish to explore the local area but also a welcome post for those no longer able to enjoy the great outdoors or for those who have moved from the local area.

Our founder member and walk leader, Neil Perry, is no longer the most 'recognised' face of our group, probably because his dog, Lexi, is the one who



Maesteg Ramblers with Lexi on Garnwen Mountain near Measteg in August



Maesteg Ramblers on the Heritage Coast near Llantwit Major in August

rushes up to everyone to give kisses. Lexi has very quickly earned her place as our group mascot, she joins us on most walks and, being very particular about what she will eat, has become quite the connoisseur on what can be considered a decent packed lunch. Lexi is just as important as any other member of our walking family. 'Family' is very apt as everyone is very supportive of each other and our walks have become very much a social affair.

A few of our group have been away on personal travels, undertaking such things as the Camino De Santiago, etc. But we have a group walking holiday planned in the autumn that everyone is looking forward to; we have planned to stay a few days in Church Stretton and walk each day around the local area.

We have had many new and interesting walks, which have all been added to our ever-increasing portfolio of routes. So much so, our 'walk planning' meetings have now been extended into a full social evening-out, with a meal and drinks. Any excuse! However, as firm friends, the social aspect of our group extends beyond our WhatsApp group and the planning meetings. Our Christmas outing arrangements are pending.

Our group is open and gives a ready welcome to all. There are plenty of friends here that you have yet to meet.

Trudy Harris

MERTHYR VALLEY

This past year has been a mixed one for the Merthyr Valley Ramblers. Early in the year, we lost Richard Rys, a popular and charismatic walker and recently Chris Sloan, who many in the area knew as a popular and dedicated Ramblers member and who, with her husband Alistair, led many walks and attended many area meetings and events.

Overall, we have had a successful year. Our walk statistics have reached and sometimes exceeded the pre-Covid numbers. The walks remained regular, including revisiting some much loved areas and exploring some new routes. We have some new walk leaders as well.

Our membership has increased. We had more new members joining than those leaving or those whose membership lapsed. We now have eighty-two members. We were also glad that several Ramblers have renewed their membership. There is also an increased interest via the group's social media accounts.

Our AGM was held in the Red Lion, Heolgerrig. Walk booking was discussed and we agreed that it was up to each individual walk leader as to whether they want booking in or not. We also agreed to keep walk registration to one month in advance rather than the pre-covid six months. Simon



In tribute to Richard Rys (left) and Chris Sloan (right) of Merthyr Valley Ramblers

Williams agreed to understudy David Lewis's role as webmaster and, later-on in the year, David stepped down as group webmaster and Simon Williams took over. A big thanks is due to David for all his hard work keeping the membership informed and the webpage going over the years. And a big welcome to Simon, who has a big pair of boots to fill but has done a wonderful job since taking over.

We hold a social evening and quiz on the first Monday of the month in Merthyr's Wetherspoons and have occasional bowling nights in the local bowling alley. One of our social events was to see 'Les Miz' in Cardiff. Our Christmas meal was held in the Cilsanws Golf Club and, after a superb meal, the usual certificates were presented including youngest walker of the year for Ruby, an eight year-old girl who has completed several 8km walks; and Susie, who got the electric fence tester award! We also raised £50 for the Welsh Air Ambulance.

We had a well-attended weekend away in May in Aberaeron where we did three walks in three days in great weather. A big thanks to Peter for all his hard work in organising and recceing everything,

Our path-clearing sub-group has finally got off the ground after waiting almost eighteen months for the relevant permissions from NRW and we have already completely cleared one

impassable PROW. Many thanks to all that helped.

A big thanks must go to Paddy, our Treasurer, who has been the backbone of the group by leading many memorable walks and stepping in at short notice when walks have been cancelled.

We look forward to new ventures in the coming year!

Alan Hancox

NEATH PORT TALBOT

Our group numbers have risen in the past year which is very encouraging. We would like to extend a warm welcome to our new members, some of whom have registered as walk leaders and are leading new and varied walks in some areas which we have not previously explored.

Members celebrated Christmas 2022 with dinner and a get together at The Loft in Glyn Clydach. Many thanks to



Neath Port Talbot Ramblers on the Tarr Steps as part of their trip away to Devon in September

Richard and Beverley for organising a very enjoyable Christmas event.

In February 2023 a small group visited Scotland, staying at Loch Tunnel. The scenery was beautiful, it was quiet and the weather unusually good. Strenuous and shorter walks were enjoyed, particularly around Pitlochry, as well as interesting excursions to historic areas, including the wonderful Blair Castle. In Dundee some members had a fascinating visit to **RRS Discovery**, Captain Scott's historic ship which is now a museum there. A big thank you to Brian for organising our Scottish trip and planning such varied walks for us.

Later that year, in September, a larger group visited the beautiful Woolacombe Bay Area in Devon. The weather was good for our stay with several varied walks planned. The first walk was circular through beautiful National Trust property, Watersmeet, Countisbury then back along the coastal path to the start but then continued upwards by riding on the cliff railway to Lynton; followed with walking around the Valley of Rocks. The final leg was returning down on the cliff railway with everyone enjoying the steep ride and its incredible views. One day was spent exploring the stunning coastal path starting at Croyde Bay, followed by a traditional cream tea in a cottage tearoom. On another, the group started from Tarr Steps, following the River Barle from Withypool and returning along lanes, bridle paths/countryside with a pub to welcome them both at Tarr Steps and Withypool. Many thanks to Jean for organising the trip, and Richard and Brian for planning and organising the lovely walks.

Finally, a special big thank you to Brian and Wendy, and Richard and Gwyneth. Both couples have hosted 'get-togethers' and given members the most wonderful welcome and hospitality in their homes.

As a group we are encouraged that increasing our numbers has led to a wider range of ages and also by the fact that recently joined members are interested in developing walks for future programmes. We look forward to developing a greater variety of walks and welcoming new members in the upcoming year.

Maureen Griffiths



Penarth Ramblers celebrating their fortieth anniversary with a picnic in Porthkerry Park in July

PENARTH & DISTRICT

The big event this year for Penarth & District was achieving the thirtieth anniversary of the formation of the group. Started as a breakaway from Cardiff in 1993 there was some doubt initially whether the group could flourish on its own but, thanks to a continuing dedicated band of committee officers and walk leaders, it is still going strong and has increased membership by 25% to nearly two hundred in the last five years. Although the official anniversary was on 30th March, the Group celebrated by holding a month of daily walks in June, which concluded with three walks finishing with a picnic in Porthkerry Park on Sunday 2nd July, which was supported by David Rees of Ramblers Cymru. The continuing dry weather at that time helped make it a month to remember for everyone!

During the year there were a lot of other activities. In September a group of eighteen walkers joined William in Newport, Pembrokeshire for two days visiting the coast and the Preseli hills during which they had wonderful views and saw some seals. December saw the annual Christmas lunch (after which a number of people caught Covid!). In January the annual New Year's walk/visit (in the mud and rain!) was made by eight intrepid walkers to the Blue Anchor pub in Abergavenny. In March Joy led a walk (in the snow!) to celebrate International Women's Day and William led a group to see the Severn bore. Louise took a group to Anglesey in April, where they had a great time walking the various coastal paths. In May, the Group hosted the Area Walk from Penarth clifftop: fourteen walkers

joined Geraint for a historical five-mile tour of the town; twenty-nine walkers joined Area Secretary Gwyn for a six and a half mile walk around Penarth and Cosmeston Country Park; and William led ten keen walkers on a thirteen mile walk along the coastal path to Sully, over to Dinas Powys and back to Penarth. June saw members taking part in an interesting geology walk at Penarth and Lavernock with ex-group member and geologist Chris Lee, where, on a sweltering hot morning, they learned about the Triassic and Jurassic eras in the rock formations and cliffs and located dinosaur footprints. And, in addition, Sheila has explored every inch of the Vale and Joy has continued her very popular Thursday evening rambles!

It is a group of very dedicated leaders who make all these walks possible (and not just those mentioned above). We thank all leaders and officers, past and present, for contributing to a very successful thirty years!

Robin Pitcher

SWANSEA

Our membership now stands at just below 400 and is recovering from the slump during the lockdowns.

We do provide a very ambitious programme of walks. The most popular are on Saturdays; these always start at 11:00am and run to a maximum of six miles. Numbers have been known to run into the forties, and, occasionally, more. In addition, there are walks throughout the week. These are very sociable affairs and, to support this, we have a very active Social Committee which runs all kinds of activities. Trips



Swansea Ramblers on a walk in June above Craig y Nos with Fan Girhrych in the distance

away are very popular as are meals in restaurants etc. And, of course, going down the pub afterwards is always a possibility.

To reach out for new members we have an active publicity function, and, recently, we have started a Facebook Group which in itself seems very attractive. It is open to all.

The Group Committee have recently been very busy because of the changes which Ramblers UK are considering and actually making. This is producing a great deal of paperwork which places a heavy burden on our Secretary and some other committee members. We are all too happy to get out for a walk!

And walking is our essential business, but paths are always under threat. Through our Footpaths Officer we are constantly trying to monitor what is happening locally and keeping in touch with the Footpaths Officer in the local City Council.

Another threat to paths is simply that they get overgrown and, in one way or another, deteriorate to the point of being unusable. The work of our paths maintenance team, who work very closely with the local council, has recently been highly praised by elected Council Members and we are very proud of their work.

John France

TAFF ELY

This last twelve months has seen many changes with new initiatives from Ramblers UK and Ramblers Cymru. This has been coupled with several changes in personnel on our Group's committee, with Brian Morgan having to resign suddenly, so that, unexpectedly, I became the new Chair for Taff Ely from the AGM in November. I had a steep learning curve and have benefited from attending, via Zoom, the first online training induction course for new Group Chairs and Secretaries. I recommend others new to their role to attend such a course. Similarly, attending for the first time the Welsh Council weekend in Carmarthen was interesting and a good occasion to learn how other groups address the perennial issues of attracting new members and encouraging members to lead walks.



Taff Ely Ramblers below Cerne Abbas on their Dorset weekend away in March

Our Group has had a very busy and productive year and amongst the highlights were several extra trips in addition to our full programme of walks. Last autumn a small group went to Croatia in September, and a larger group spent an excellent long weekend in October in the Elan Valleys, based at the Elan Valley Lodge. Both trips were so successful that similar ones are planned during the next twelve months. During this calendar year we have had a long weekend based at Dorchester just prior to Easter and, then, a coach trip to Marlborough and Avebury in May.

Another area of interest of the Group is footpath maintenance and the maintenance team will renew its focus on the local Llantrisant "Bunny" and Pontyclun "Badger" walks.

Our ever-enthusiastic social secretary Hayley organised a variety of social events throughout the year. Although



Taff Ely Ramblers on their Elan Valley trip last October



Taff Ely Christmas Event in December

Covid restrictions were lifted last year, initially there was still difficulty in arranging a venue for the Christmas meal. Hayley was able at quite late notice to organise an evening at the Miskin Catholic Church Hall with external caterers and a group of entertainers brought in.

This year is the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Taff Ely Group and we will have a special meal and walk to celebrate in November, instead of the normal Christmas meal held in December. During the year we had a Bowls evening, and certain themed walks. Hayley introduced monthly Newsletters summarising our walks and events and this has added yet more interesting content to the Taff Ely website, adding to our gradually increasing digital and social network footprint. However, there remains a significant minority of active members who do not use or are even opposed to new social media and we must find a balance between using new technology and methods of communication with the support of all the membership.

We have benefited from an upsurge in interest in walking during Covid restrictions and this year we could resume a full season of walks every Sunday, with shorter walks on alternate Saturdays. From May we restarted the summer season of Thursday evening walks. Through the year we have covered a large geographical area in South Wales with a range of walk types. In summary, we had eighty-nine walks of which five were cancelled with an average of seventeen on each walk and 10,500 miles walked by 1,555 walkers.

We continue to attract new members coming in and replacing those who no longer walk with us so that our overall membership is roughly the same as before. We are lucky that several members have recently joined our hard

working and supportive committee to help us navigate the new challenges ahead.

Derek Wallis

TAWE TREKKERS

Tawe Trekkers are a small group: we currently have fifty-eight members on record with approximately fifteen attending our Sunday weekly walks.

It has been tough terrain since the pandemic, with a loss of some of our regular walk leaders as they recover from injuries. We have plodded on regardless, sometimes with less walks on our programme than we would like.

On a positive note, we now have a social secretary (well two, job sharing) and have met on a few occasions for a curry and/or bowling and held our annual Gluhwein walk, aptly along the river Tawe, which concluded in a local pub with a delicious carvery. Our Instagram and Facebook accounts are attracting potential new members which is always encouraging. The switch over to the new Ramblers' website, especially Walks Manager, has had a rocky start, but we are getting used to navigating it.

So, to report on the last year, we have not managed any group weekends away but we have had plenty of hikes with stunning scenery in different re-

gions. We covered all areas of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, from Castell Carreg Cennen to Llangattock. We have rambled across Gower (see photo of Trekkers on Worms Head), Porthkerry and Barry (yes, we visited the home of Gavin and Stacey!). We travelled further east to hike the Wye Valley Greenway which included walking (quietly) through the 1km Tiddenham tunnel, home to lesser horseshoe bats, unfortunately the weather was not favourable for fabulous views at the Eagles Nest viewpoint. We wandered west as far as Angle and trekked many more picturesque places in between.

Continued thanks go to our valuable walk leaders, without their commitment and knowledge our group would not survive. We strive to plan a varied programme encouraging new members to join us, without discouraging current members. We continue to be mindful of different walk abilities and we give everyone a warm welcome. We have had members from other Ramblers groups join us when we have travelled slightly further afield and received positive feedback from them which is always good to hear.

On a personal note, I used Ramblers Walking Holidays to book a snow shoeing holiday this year and, by registering with The Walking Partnership when I booked, I nominated our Group to receive a small financial contribution; it is not huge, but every penny counts! I can recommend



Tawe Trekkers on Kilvey Hill above Swansea



Tawe Trekkers on Worm's Head with Rhossili Down in the background

Ramblers Walking Holidays: once I met my Ramblers volunteer at the airport it was time for me to relax, as everything is well organised by them. I enjoyed the snowshoe experience so much I have booked to go again in 2024!

Helen Thomas

May to raise money for the MND Association in memory of her late father, Taff. Members from the group joined her for a walk in the Black Mountains and everyone was in awe of her determination to complete the challenge, which ultimately raised over £2,700 for the charity. Congratulations Vonda on your fantastic achievement!

Back in January, our members stayed in the youth hostel in Minehead. Although we have had weekends away since Covid, this was the first time that we were able to stay in the same venue together which made the trip even more enjoyable. A great time was had by all especially on the walks in and around Exmoor National Park and during the fiercely competitive quiz! In July the group enjoyed a long weekend away in the Peak District. Unfortunately, the weather was not on our side and we all became accustomed to a daily drenching. One of the walks to Mam Tor had to be cut short on the first day after we experienced sun, hail, thunder and rain in quick succession; however, we were successful in reaching the summit the following day. Luckier were the members who camped in Newport, Pembrokeshire in early September and were rewarded with glorious sunshine and spectacular scenery for walking along the Wales Coast Path.

Tiger Bay Ramblers was originally formed as a young persons' rambling group back in 2001, as part of the national drive by Ramblers GB to encourage younger people to join. However, in the intervening years our demographic has grown steadily older, leading to a re-branding of the group several years ago as being for those of working age. Over the last year, we have been investigating the possibility of forming a new young persons' group. Following thorough research into the different options and advice from colleagues in both Ramblers Cymru and Ramblers Scotland, the

TIGER BAY RAMBLERS

The last year has been another successful one for the group with plenty of walks, holidays and exciting plans for the future.

Tiger Bay Ramblers was thrilled to win the Social Butterfly award from Ramblers Cymru in March. This award recognises our use of social media to document walks and social activities as well as boosting posts and campaigns from Ramblers Cymru, among others. We have also expanded our reach by advertising walks through MeetUp.

One of our members, Vonda Price, walked up a mountain every day in



Tiger Bay Ramblers amongst the bluebells of Coed y Bwnydd hillfort in May

decision has been made to create a new sub-section of the group called TBR 20s-30s. With the support of Ramblers Cymru, we have created links with the recently-formed Cardiff Metropolitan University Rambling Society and will be working with them to offer joint walks and share our local knowledge and experience. It is hoped that TBR 20s-30s will launch in October.

Looking to the future, the group already has a weekend away in January planned, staying in the Cheddar Youth Hostel and we are looking forward to a potential walking holiday in Croatia next September as well.

Fiona Gibson

VALE OF GLAMORGAN

2023 has been another successful year for the Group, with good attendances on our walks and a full walks programme. Membership has dipped slightly by four to 151 as some members have allowed their subscriptions to lapse, but we have had a few new members to offset these.

The Group walking weekends away have proved as popular as ever, with very enjoyable visits to Llandudno and Ludlow. Unfortunately, on the last day of the Ludlow weekend the walk

leader Ruth Curle twisted her foot descending a hill and had to be rescued by a farmer using his quad bike and then taken to the nearest road in his ancient Landrover before being taken off to A&E. It transpired that Ruth had broken a bone in her foot and ended up in plaster. Fortunately, she is recovering well and we look forward to her rejoining our walks. We also had a well-attended coach trip to Cheddar, with short and long walks converging at Cheddar Gorge. Many thanks must go to our leaders for organising all these events.

Last year the group sponsored a reprint of a Valeways walk leaflet re-named to commemorate Graham Woosnam, a longstanding VoG member, who was involved in setting up Valeways and documenting many of their walks. In April this year John Gray, Graham's nephew, led the group around the "Woosnam Walk" in and around Hensol Forest, accompanied by Graham's partner Helen Fletcher and his daughter Karen.

Peter Lane, our Footpath Officer, resigned in January, after a frustrating time working with the Vale of Glamorgan Council on insurance liability issues with powered path clearing equipment, and our thanks go to him for his efforts over the years. Ian Fraser has agreed to cover the role until a new officer can be appointed at the next AGM. Ian has re-started manual

footpath clearance evenings over the summer focusing on the Valeways Millennium Heritage Trail.

The Group ran a Ramblers stand at the Vale of Glamorgan show with many visitors dropping in to see the stand, which had an excellent display organised by Gwenda, our Publicity Officer. We have also maintained an active Social Programme, with well attended winter and summer meals.

The Group website has now been transferred to the new Ramblers' website format as required by Ramblers HQ but, despite great efforts by our website manager Jeff Roberts to supply data, we still have not been able to load our group newsletter or walks programmes, so at the moment our website is not as useful as it was before the change imposed on us. We hope HQ will improve the functionality of the site soon.

Many thanks must go to all the committee and walk leaders for all their work to keep the Group running successfully. Unfortunately, like some other groups, we rely on a hard core of walk leaders to sustain a varied walks programme. So thanks must go to those who have volunteered to lead walks this session and we hope we can encourage some new leaders to come forward to keep the group vibrant.

Mike Holley



Vale of Glamorgan Ramblers on Kenfig Beach enjoying one of their last summer Wednesday evening walks of 2023