



# Ramblers Scotland

## Annual Report

### 2022-23

Our vision is a future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors.

#### **Ramblers Scotland**

The Melting Pot, 15 Calton Road, Edinburgh EH8 8DL

0131 357 5850 | [scotland@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:scotland@ramblers.org.uk) | [ramblers.org.uk](https://ramblers.org.uk)

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## Who we are

(as of 30 September 2023)

### Honorary officers:

President  
Vice Presidents

Zahrah Mahmood  
Dennis Canavan, Ben Dolphin, John Holms,  
Andrew Murray, Alistair Cant, Kate Ashbrook,  
Lucy Wallace  
Malcolm Dingwall-Smith  
Beth Dickson  
Mike Gray

Convener  
Vice Convener  
Honorary Treasurer

### Ramblers Scotland Strategic Committee:

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith\* (convener)  
Mike Gray (treasurer)  
Beth Dickson (vice-convener)  
Sue Thomas  
David Webb  
Andrew Bachell  
Dave Rennie  
Mike Dales  
Jarka Polednova  
Karl Erik Wilson  
Jacqui Thomson  
Jane Searles

Convener  
Treasurer  
Vice Convener  
Ordinary Member  
Ordinary Member  
Ordinary Member  
Ordinary Member  
Ordinary member  
Ordinary Member  
Ordinary Member  
Co-optee  
Co-optee

\*Also on GB Board of Trustees

### Motions committee:

Alison Mitchell  
Liz Hunt  
Barry Pottle  
Malcolm Dingwall-Smith (Ex officio)  
Mike Gray (RSSC representative)

### Members of staff:

Director:  
Campaigns and Policy Manager  
Communications and Engagement Manager  
Volunteer Development Officer  
Project Manager - Mapping Scotland's Paths (MSP)  
Project Officer - Walk Leadership  
Project Officer - Young Adult Development  
Governance and Events Administrator  
Community Engagement Officer (MSP)  
Equalities Outreach Officer

Brendan Paddy  
Helen Todd  
Danny Carden  
Jeannie Cranfield  
Luke Phillips  
John Nicholls  
Sam Knight  
Claire Exley  
Heath Brown  
Angela Musk

## Our groups:

<b>Clydesdale to Solway area</b> Biggar Clyde Valley Dumfries and District South Lanarkshire Older Walkers	<b>South West Scotland area*</b> Cunninghame Kilmarnock & Loudoun Wigtownshire	<b>Highland &amp; Islands area*</b> Badenoch & Strathspey Inverness Inverness Young Walkers Lochaber & Lorn
<b>Lothian &amp; Borders area*</b> Balerno Coldstream East Lothian Edinburgh Edinburgh Young Walkers Eildon Linlithgow Livingston Midlothian East Lothian Ramblers and Hillwalkers Tweeddale	<b>Forth Valley, Fife &amp; Tayside area</b> Blairgowrie & District Brechtin Dalgety Bay & District Dundee & District Dunfermline & West Fife Forfar & District Forth Valley Young Walkers Glenrothes Kinross & Ochil Kirkcaldy Perth & District St Andrews & North East Fife Stirling, Falkirk & District Strathtay Tayside Young Walkers	<b>Renfrewshire, Cowal &amp; Bute area*</b> Eastwood Inverclyde Isle of Bute Paisley
<b>Grampian area</b> Aberdeen Aberdeen Young Walkers Inverurie Moray Stonehaven		<b>North Strathclyde area</b> Bearsden & Milngavie Cumbernauld & Kilsyth Glasgow Glasgow Young Walkers Helensburgh & West Dunbartonshire Mid Argyll & Kintyre Monklands Strathkelvin

\*Indicates areas in abeyance during the period

## Organisations affiliated to Scottish Council:

Red Rope Scotland and Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society

## Organisations Ramblers Scotland is affiliated to:

Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland	Scotland's Landscape Alliance
Scottish Outdoor Access Network	Cairngorms Campaign
Scottish Campaign for National Parks	Transform Scotland
Scottish Environment LINK	Voluntary Health Scotland
Scottish Rewilding Alliance	North East Mountain Trust
Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society	Scottish Sports Association
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	Hostelling Scotland
	Scottish Outdoor Recreation Alliance

## Convener's Foreword

As a long-time supporter of Ramblers campaigning, the greatest joy of becoming Convener has been seeing the variety of fantastic Ramblers Scotland activity across the country supporting people to enjoy walking. Whether it is knowledgeable walk leaders, dedicated group and area organisers, tenacious path mappers and access advocates, expert staff, or friendly members I have met on walks, you are what makes Ramblers special - thank you.

In November, we collectively agreed a new strategy for the Ramblers across Great Britain that should see us thrive for the next 10 years and beyond. In many ways this strategy will continue what we have been doing well for almost 90 years – campaigning for access to the outdoors and creating walking opportunities for all. At the same time, it will push us to do more to ensure equitable access to walking outdoors for all communities. Building on our roots of working-class people in urban communities wanting the right to walk in the countryside, we still have an important role to play in supporting those who face barriers to walking.



Reading this report, you will find some Scottish work, such as the Equalities Outreach Programme and the Out There Award, that already reflect this new strategy.

It is impossible to mention all the amazing activities covered in this report, but let's celebrate that our membership of over 6,700 is the highest for more than 10 years. This is great news. Of course, this overall growth shouldn't hide that some groups are struggling to return to pre-pandemic membership levels, and we are committed to supporting all our groups.

In 2023 we also celebrated 20 years of the Land Reform Act. I have been lucky to enjoy its outdoor access rights for most of my adult life. I only have these rights because of the tireless campaigning of walkers that came before me, including many of our own members. You have my thanks. Our campaigning never stops and I have been delighted by the support for our campaign to reopen the Radical Road around Arthur's Seat in my home city. Not only a route of historical importance, it is the nearest path through green space for those living in the working class Dumbiedykes neighbourhood. I can't think of a better example of why our work continues to be vital if we are to achieve a future where anyone can enjoy walking outdoors.

**Malcolm Dingwall-Smith**

**Ramblers Scotland Strategic Committee convener**

## Helping everyone find their feet

### Scottish Walk Leadership Project

We have hosted 25 Walk Leadership - Next Steps courses throughout Scotland, providing skills training for 93 volunteers. Of the participants, 62% were new to leading walks or were just starting to volunteer. These courses have been led by our superb volunteer trainers across the country from Gatehouse of Fleet in the south to Inverness and Fort William in the Highlands. These courses are complemented with 10 days of advanced navigation courses on the Scottish hills, helping walk leaders to develop their abilities to lead walks in more challenging environments. Safety themes have been explored through partnerships with Scottish Mountain Rescue and Mountaineering Scotland who hosted online events with Ramblers Scotland, supporting volunteers to prepare for winter walks.

Our learning pathway includes:

- eLearning – Walk Leadership Foundations
- eLearning – Preventing and Managing Incidents on Group Walks
- Walk Leadership Next Steps – in-person skills courses taught entirely outdoors
- Advanced skills courses
- Online Events – evening webinars for volunteers

We produced and launched a series of 17 films on the basics of navigation. These [films](#) are designed to break down one of the key barriers to getting outdoors, in a user friendly and accessible way and are designed for enthusiastic amateurs for whom traditional navigation training can seem daunting. They are now enjoying wider distribution to the walking public by platforms including [BBC Countryfile](#).

### Learning and Development Programme

In addition to the Walk Leadership project, we've provided a rich learning and development programme for volunteers over the last year. We ran 15 bitesize training workshops which included getting started on social media, telling great stories on social media, membership recruitment, welcoming new members, getting the most out of the Ramblers app, understanding access rights in Scotland and standing up for access through the planning system.

We also hosted shared learning groups to enable chairs and secretaries from across Scotland to network, share ideas and learn from one another. Staff also provide dedicated one to one training and support to volunteers where required. All Ramblers Scotland's events can be found on [Ramblers Scotland's Eventbrite page](#).

### Equalities Outreach Project

The Equalities Outreach Program (Scotland) began in May 2023 to develop the skills and confidence of independent walkers from communities who are underrepresented in the outdoors. In our first year we are focussing on two audiences – people from minority ethnic communities, and refugees and asylum seekers. Our approach is collaborative and works with each group to co-design a programme which helps breakdown the barriers to them getting out walking.

The work explores four core delivery areas: experiences for all, skills for individuals, skills for champions and local introduction and integration (to existing Ramblers groups). This year we have worked with Grampian Racial Equalities Council, SCORE (Edinburgh), Amina Glasgow, Amina Dundee - Inspiring Women Network, MEARS (Dumfries), Friends of Scottish Settlers (Falkirk) and The Welcoming (Edinburgh). Initially we have offered staff-led introductory walks, with some skills training incorporated, after which we work with the group to empower them to sustain their involvement in walking. We have introduced some of the groups to local Ramblers groups, who have provided welcoming and supportive walks.



## Young Adult Development Project

This year has seen the Out There Award flourish with 103 participants completing the Out There Award and 30 completing the Out There Award Plus, which focuses on introductory responsible camping skills.

Participants have reported through the post award survey massively improved skills, confidence and networks of walking friends, as a result of participating on the award. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds, are aged 18-26 years and most have faced some additional barriers to getting outdoors, such as being from minority ethnic backgrounds or disadvantaged communities.

In 2023 we launched the Out There Award Ambassador Scheme. The year-long syllabus helps young adults further develop their outdoor skills and is an opportunity to inspire other young adults in Scotland to get out walking. Participants on the scheme gain formal qualifications in the outdoors industry.

The Award and Award Plus remain completely free. This helps participants obtain the skills, confidence and friendships they need to get outdoors regardless of their budget, background or experience.

The award is delivered in locations which are local and accessible via sustainable transport and all participants are provided with a free Ramblers Scotland starter pack to ensure it is as inclusive as possible.

As a result:

- 78% of participants had at least one additional barrier to participation.
- 39% were from a minority ethnic group\*
- 16% lived in neighbourhoods in the lowest 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
- 32% LGBTQI+ and
- 22% considered themselves to be disabled.

\* All groups other than white Scottish/British as per Scottish Government definitions



## A Scotland designed for walking

### Radical Road, Edinburgh

In 2018, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) blocked the historic Radical Road path in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, due to the risk of rockfall. This path is hugely important for the enjoyment of the Park, and was well used by walkers, runners and climbers. The Park is a short walk from some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city and the route is popular with locals as well as visitors. We have worked with other organisations to draw attention to this issue. There is particular concern due to the lack of communication on the future of this path from HES. We believe that their response is disproportionate and a way should be found to safely reopen the route. A meeting with HES in 2022 had not led to any meaningful progress, so we highlighted the fifth anniversary of the closure in September 2023 with a protest at the locked gates.

### Other campaign updates

**Coul Links** – in February we objected to a second application to build a golf course on Coul Links, one of the last undeveloped dune systems on the east coast, near Dornoch. The Links are heavily protected by international and national designations for nature. A core path runs through the site and this is also the route of the John O’Groats Trail, which would be crossed by up to seven holes. We had taken part in a public inquiry relating to the previous application, which led to it being refused in 2019. Therefore, it was particularly upsetting that a very similar application was lodged so soon afterwards. Council officers recommended refusal and NatureScot objected to the new application but in December 2023 the council approved the application. We are considering next steps.

**Level crossings** – throughout the year we took opportunities to raise the issue of the locked level crossing at Dalwhinnie, including writing to the transport minister and taking part in meetings with Transport Scotland and Network Rail. We also supported Glenrothes Ramblers in a local campaign against the closure of Doubledykes level crossing. This is an historic crossing which was closed in the summer with the construction of the new Levenmouth railway, leaving a five-mile stretch of the railway with no crossing point.

**Glenborrodale** – we continue to be involved in this case in Ardnamurchan where a landowner has blocked a historic route by building a wood yard across the track. Working with the Highland Council we are in negotiations relating to an alternative route.

### Responsible access campaign

We built on the award-winning success of our responsible access videos in 2021 and 2022, with our biggest and boldest campaign yet.

This year’s campaign was again co-produced alongside young adults and supported by major Scottish Government partners including VisitScotland and NatureScot.



While we’ve always had a wide range of voices on our co-production panel and film crews, we were determined this year to feature on-screen diversity. We were pleased to work with Glasgow musicians Tyrese Ojo and Dexter Brady and Stirling student Melissa Wright.

We prioritised Snapchat, but also used Tiktok and Instagram. The videos took a suitably off-the-wall, eye-catching and irreverent approach to pushing Scottish Outdoor Access Code messages about:

- Leaving no trace, by removing litter
- Avoiding fires
- Reducing wildlife disturbance



The campaign surpassed previous years, with a total of 3 million views and – most importantly – 161,000 completions of the full videos. By some distance, this was our best result yet.

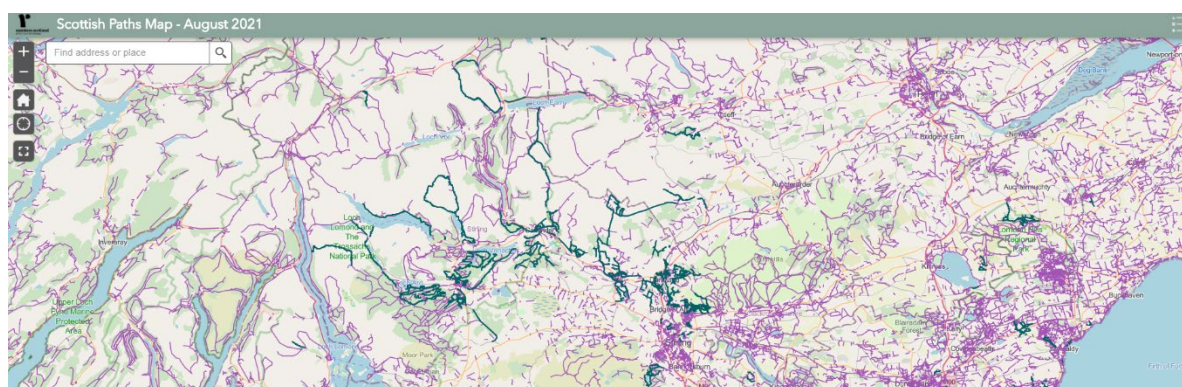
### Scottish Paths Map

We've continued to make great progress in updating the most useful digital map of Scottish paths ever created for walkers. Since launching the Scottish Paths Map in August 2021, it has been viewed more than 115,000 times, showing the high level of interest in the project.

As of November 2023, we have trained over 400 volunteers to check the paths in our network using apps and digital tools, along with resources to support them in their activities. To date these volunteers have checked over 14,000 paths and captured over 3,000 new paths, many of which have never been available on public mapping before.

Since November 2021, our Community Engagement Officer has been working with more than 10 excluded communities across Scotland to help them promote and develop their local path networks.

The project also made an impact in the press and on social media. It featured in local and national newspapers through various promotions, such as “Scotland’s best hidden paths”. The project was also featured on an episode of the BBC’s technology program, Click, which included interviews with the project team and volunteers. This appearance led to a considerable boost in volunteer numbers and views of the map.



### Regular policy work

We continued to take part in the national stakeholder group advising NatureScot and the government on the process of establishing Scotland’s third national park. We also sit on a national Visitor Management group to ensure that the voice of people who enjoy outdoor recreation is heard.

We represented the interests of walkers by responding to a range of consultations and planning applications on topics such as the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs national park plan, the Flamingo Land development and proposed legislation relating to agricultural funding and land reform. We helped to influence UK and Scottish guidance relating to forestry management in relation to access.

As members of the National Access Forum, we took a lead in producing a briefing for MSPs on the importance of access rights in this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the access legislation. With other recreation bodies we continued to hold regular liaison meetings with the national parks, Forestry & Land Scotland, Police Scotland and Scottish Forestry. These are important to help influence these organisations with regard to how access rights are upheld and managed.

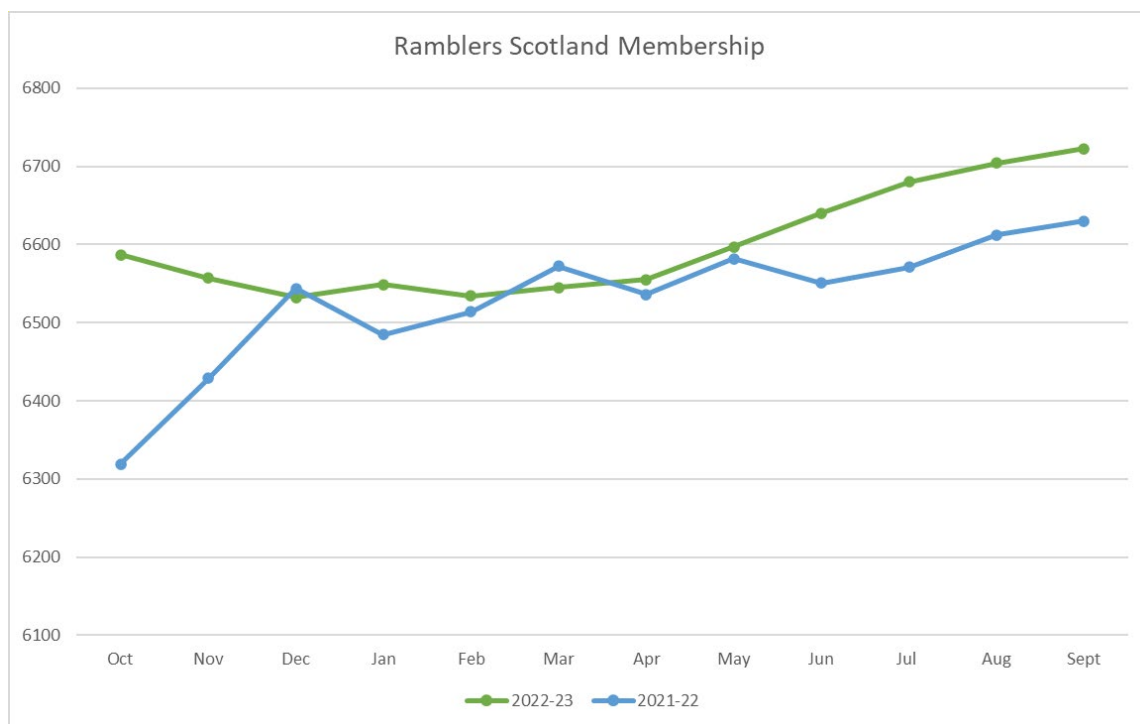
Finally, we advised over 60 individuals and Ramblers members who contacted us for advice in relation to access issues they had faced.



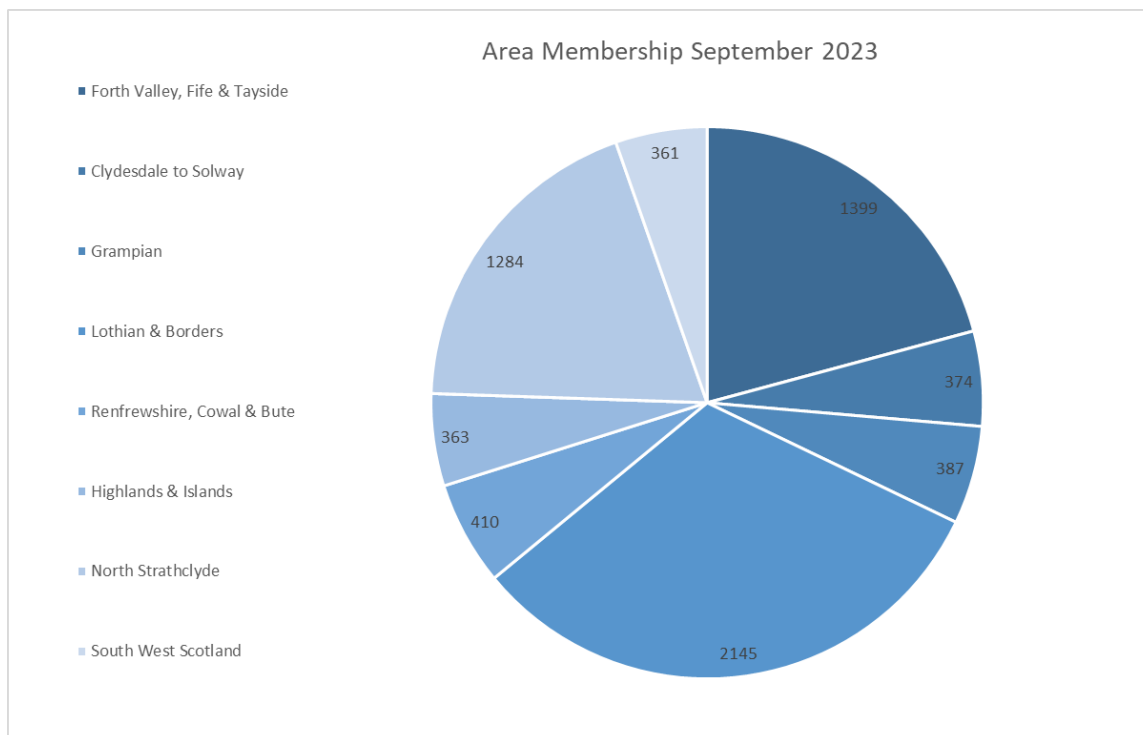
## Growing members, supporters and income

### Membership

Ramblers Scotland's membership has for the second year in a row hit its highest point for more than 10 years, following a year of rather more modest but still very welcome growth. We started the year with 6,587 members and finished with over 6,723 – an increase of 2%.



Most Areas saw a modest growth in membership, though in a few places membership remained broadly flat.



## Group Update

We love to celebrate all the great things our groups have achieved. In the last year they have organised and run an impressive 2,771 group walks.

Glasgow Ramblers celebrated the first anniversary of the launch of the 11-mile route on the southside of Glasgow – the Magnificent 11 – that they helped to develop. Edinburgh Young Walkers organised an impressive 40 days of volunteering to help improve paths and the environment. Also Balerno, Aberdeen, Livingston, Clyde Valley, Bearsden & Milngavie and Glasgow Ramblers have worked alongside us to test new approaches to reaching new audiences. Groups have opened their arms and welcomed those who face barriers to the outdoors – be they disabled, or refugees or minority communities. Committees have surveyed members and changed programmes to meet needs and have given a huge amount of enjoyment to members. We'd like to thank all our committees who work hard to keep groups running smoothly and all our walk leaders for the enjoyment they've given over the year.

## Online engagement

We delivered a strong suite of communications and engagement results throughout the year, surpassing nearly all our targets. On social media, this included a 6% increase in Twitter followers, 10% rise on Facebook and 48% increase to 2,500 on our fledgling Instagram feed. We'd almost a half a million impressions of our unpaid content on Facebook. We also launched an Instagram presence to help engage younger walkers, with encouraging early signs.

Our popular monthly member newsletter continued to perform well, being opened by an average of 60% of recipients. The number of members opting in to receive the newsletter increased to 3,792 – up 4% on the last year.

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

We marked the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 by organising a reception at the Scottish Parliament focusing on the theme of 'Outdoors for All' in January 2023. This highlighted



the success of Scotland's world class framework but also the fact that the benefits have, so far, been unequally distributed. This was the main event marking the anniversary. Our chosen focus on the role access can play in improving diversity and inclusion in the outdoors was very well received by stakeholders, including the then Minister Màiri McAllan. The speeches by Out There Award ambassadors Heather Thomson and Iqra Mahmood,

about what the award and the outdoors meant to them, were undoubtedly the highlight of the evening.

In March we were delighted to appointment Zahrah Mahmood as our new President. Zahrah has been very successful in promoting diversity and inclusion in the outdoors as 'The Hillwalking Hijabi' on Instagram and we have benefited hugely from working alongside her this year.

There are details above of the work we have already delivered through the Out There Award, Mapping Scotland's Paths community engagement and our Equalities Outreach, and this is a sign of things to come. The new Ramblers strategy means we will be more focused than ever on helping people from excluded communities overcome the barriers they face to getting outdoors, in addition to supporting our existing members, volunteers and groups.

## **Walking Events**

The Gathering organising committee, made up of volunteers from across Scotland, did a terrific job of organising a very enjoyable walking festival in Aviemore in May 2023. One-hundred members participated in 3 days of walks, talks, fun and friendship so thank you to all involved. Plans are now in place to hold a Gathering on the Isle of Bute in May 2024, with details on our website.

## **Becoming a great charity**

### **Access volunteering**

We continued to support the RSSC Access Sub-committee, which has advised RSSC on important strategic decisions. We held our regular online training events on responsible access for our members during the year, running five sessions on access rights & responsibilities and two sessions on access and the planning system.

We also continued to recruit access volunteers. These volunteers are mostly non-members who have an interest in improving access locally and welcome support from Ramblers Scotland in this.

### **Scottish Council and Dick Balharry Memorial Talk 2023**

Scottish Council was held in person at the Stirling Court Hotel in Stirling.

At our formal AGM, we elected a strong Ramblers Scotland Strategic Committee including a new convener, Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, to steer the strategic direction of the work carried out here in Scotland. We heard from Ramblers CEO, Ross Maloney on the review process for a new strategic plan. We received a short introductory film of our new President Zahrah Mahmood and her vision to break down barriers in accessing the outdoors. And most importantly we heard from volunteers on the great work being carried out across Scotland.

We were delighted that Scottish writer, academic and activist Alastair McIntosh delivered this year's highly entertaining Dick Balharry Memorial Talk at the Edinburgh Training and Conference Centre in February 2023. Alastair's talk was part of the celebrations around the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

**This ends the annual report.**