

talking walking

Oxfordshire Ramblers Issue 63, January 2025



The Oxfordshire Area AGM is on

Saturday 25 January 2025
at 1330
in Eynsham Village Hall
46 Back Lane, Eynsham,
OX29 4QW

Our hosts will be Oxon Weekend Walkers. Look at the Walks Programme nearer the time for details of a pre-AGM walk.



Photos Dave Cavanagh



Cover photo:
Becky David

Start place

I always expect September to be a good month weatherwise, October not so much. My recollection is that September fell below my expectations whilst October exceeded them. The autumn leaves gave a great display up to the middle of November. I recall on one walk treading through thick carpets of them, producing a satisfying crunchy, swoosh sound. Then came Storm Bert, bringing a month's worth of rain in 24 hours, and then some. And so began the season of walk cancellations and re-routings. Almost at the end of the month thick mist enveloped the low land; the hill tops were the place to be.

Grades Table List Calendar Map Filter

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Print Add to Calendar

Click on item to display full details of walk

- Sunday, 24th November, HG - Circular walk from Nuffield CANCELLED DUE TO BAD WEATHER, 5.5mi / 10.5km
- Sunday, 24th November, BK - Sturdy's Castle and Tackley, 6.5mi / 10.5km
- Sunday, 24th November, BNO - Warrington Circular walk CANCELLED, 7.8mi / 12.6km
- Sunday, 24th November, A pre - AGM Amble starting from Farmoor Reservoir, 10mi / 16.1km, Contact: Nicola C
- Sunday, 24th November, Maharajah's Well Stoke row 12 miles CANCELLED, 12mi / 19.3km

Group: Vale of White Horse Group

Walk CANCELLED: Extensive flooding

V - Steventon and the Hendreds CANCELLED

Tuesday, 10th December



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Unless otherwise stated, items were written by the editor.
Back issues www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/magazine.html



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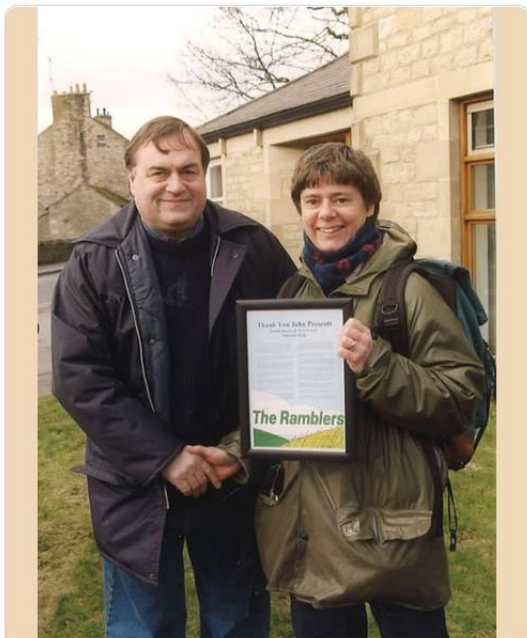
Late November walk near Abingdon, Vale of White Horse. This ghostly photo was taken on the same day as the photo below and that on the previous page – looking over the misty Vale from above Ashbury.



Photo Dave Cavanagh



Des Garrahan
22 November at 09:22 · 🌐



Kate Ashbrook
21 November at 20:59 · 🌐

I am grateful to the late John Prescott for two things in particular - the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and the announcement on 29 Sep 1999 that the New Forest and South Downs should be national parks. The Ramblers organised a walk for him in the Yorkshire Dales on 22 Jan 2000 to thank him for that announcement.

In a [Facebook post](#), Kate Ashbrook, Secretary of the Open Spaces Society and former Chair and President of Ramblers, remembered John Prescott.

She wrote “I am grateful to the late John Prescott for two things in particular [when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions] – the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 [which gave us the Right to Roam], and the announcement on 29 September 1999 that the New Forest and South Downs should be national parks. The Ramblers organized a walk for him in the Yorkshire Dales on 22 January 2000 to thank him for that announcement.

Kate’s post had been shared by Des Garrahan, himself a former Chair of Ramblers.

Tony Dale's 80-80-80 walk

in support of Muscular
Dystrophy UK

At the end of September Tony Dale of Oxford City Group celebrated his 80th birthday by walking 80 miles from Cambridge to Oxford.

Tony had hoped to do it in not more than 80 hours but torrential rain stopped play on Day 3. "it would have been crazy to go on," he said. So, in the end it was 83 hours, but then he walked over 80 miles, as, on the last day, Sparsey Bridge over the Cherwell was flooded which meant that he had to back-track a few miles.

Tony used a mixture of public rights of way and minor roads, and was fortunate to find decent accommodation along the way. And, said Tony "My wife, Pam, was indispensable! With a change of clothes in the car at the end of each day, I only had to carry the basics."

As of early December, Tony had raised £2835 for his charity.



Central Oxford, from the top of the Westgate Centre. Photo Dave Cavanagh.

Tony's log

Day 1 Cambridge to Broom (west of Biggleswade). 25.5 miles

The morning took me along the Wimpole Way due west out of Cambridge. The last stretch before lunch was through the pleasant parkland of Wimpole Hall (NT). From the nearby village of Arrington, where I had a sandwich lunch, I followed the Clopton Way at first, west by southwest towards Biggleswade. At points I hit my first roads, where I discovered how busy Bedfordshire traffic could be. Luckily, the last five miles or so into Biggleswade were along elevated footpaths with goods views to the south. I couldn't avoid Biggleswade and then discovered that the River Ivel to the west was flooded. Luckily, I was able to inch my way along an edge above a flooded underpass and got to a road leading out of town to my destination, the excellent Cock Inn at Broom, where I met up with my back-up team, my wife, Pam.

Day 2 Broom to Woburn. 21 miles

The first five miles or so were along minor roads. They looked quiet and remote on the map, but at 0815 they were full of rush hour traffic heading, I guess, from local villages to nearby towns. It was raining slightly and was unpleasant. Luckily, I then hit the excellent Greensand Ridgewalk, which was to be my companion on and off through the day. I couldn't help but notice how dry the path was underfoot, after some of the wettest weather ever in the area. I crossed the M1 on the Ridgewalk and then parted company at Ridgmont and spent the last four miles walking through the deer park at Woburn Abbey. One of the highlights I won't forget was the imperious way in which large stags stood and observed me with contempt from a distance of ten or so yards.

Day 3 Woburn to Waddesdon. Cut short by heavy rain. 11 miles

A mixture of Greensand Ridgewalk and minor roads took me to Rushmere Country Park. Inside the Park I found it difficult to follow my route thanks to a plethora of well-marked paths showing all sorts of symbols except PROW! I made the mistake of following the Greensand Ridgewalk where it appeared, forgetting that I was meant to leave it quite early on within the Park. The result was that I emerged at the wrong point. To make up lost distance I then decided to take a winding footpath that cut off a corner made by two roads. It was one of those footpaths from hell, where the markings disappear, and the paths are swallowed up by undergrowth. When I regained the right route which was the start of the Cross Bucks Way, the rain began! It became the worst kind of driving rain and I was soon soaked. At the village of Stewkley, I contemplated the next stage of the walk, heading south-west along the Midshire's Way through open countryside. I decided I would only make myself ill, so called on Pam to pick me up. It was a disappointing but realistic decision.

Day 4 Waddesdon to Oxford. 23 miles

The first stretch to Brill took me through several villages (Westcott, Ashendon, Dorton) where the paths were poorly maintained. At one point, where there was a railway crossing near Dorton I was forced onto my hands and knees crawling through a bramble thicket. Once I got to Brill I was able to make good time along much quieter roads (over the M40 to Horton) than on my second day. Because of the rain delay on Day 3 I had miles to make up. Luckily for me my plan for the walk meant that I would have walked 80 miles well short of Oxford, on my way to the village of Beckley. So I had a good chance of walking 80 miles into Oxford, but no chance of doing it within 80 hours. In the event, I met up with a couple of friends at the Abingdon Arms in Beckley. Our plan was to cross the Cherwell at Sparsey Bridge, but we discovered that it was flooded. We then had to backtrack to Woodeaton where we then walked down to the Oxford ring road. Not a nice way to end the walk, but it probably enabled me to clock up an extra few miles that ensured that I had walked over 80 miles (in 83 hours). My reception at the Plough in Wolvercote was well worth the effort!

Tony's tips "for other senior walkers"

Take poles. This was the first time I had used them. I'm convinced that they helped.

Use a decent app. I have Outdoor Active. It really helped speed things up. Even if I did get lost at one stage, it wasn't the app's fault. But take maps and compass as well, of course, with your way highlighted in marker pens on the maps.

A few new pairs of the thickest socks (Bridgedale - other socks are available), started each day on a high note.

I tied a hi-vis vest to my backpack for road walks. At least it helped give me confidence. Large SUVs on narrow wet roads can be quite scary.



Tony, between two friends at the walk's end.

Tony sent this photo of a page in The Oxford Times of 11 March, 1927. Four Cambridge students “simply for the sake of something to do” walked from Cambridge to Oxford in 23 hours 25 minutes. One of them wore plus fours. At the end of the walk, they were driven by taxi to the Clarendon Hotel, as one does.

The Chief Constable attended with police, including Chief Inspector W. Stevens, Inspectors Murray, five sergeants and 22 constables. County Police were represented by J. Rippington, a sergeant and four constables. Former members of the Police followed were ex-Inspectors Dicken, Dicks, Dukes and Furrledge.

Oxfordshire Ramblers AGM

Richard Birch - Chair, Oxfordshire Ramblers

The Oxfordshire Ramblers AGM is on Saturday 25 January 2025 at the Eynsham Village Hall (OX29 4QW), hosted by Oxon Weekend Walkers.

The day starts with a 5-mile leisurely walk leaving from Back Lane Car Park at 1030. We aim to arrive back before 1300 to allow time for members to have a drink and eat their packed lunch in the village hall.

The AGM will start at 1330 with a presentation from our guest, Clive Sanders, Ramblers Chief Commercial Officer. We will then go through the formal business of the AGM whilst looking at some of the highlights of the past year and challenges of the coming year.

The AGM Agenda, Minutes of the last meeting, Accounts and the Annual Review will all be found on the [Oxfordshire Ramblers website](#) shortly before the AGM.

Of course, the main task of the AGM is to appoint a new Committee. Under our Constitution all the current Members stand down and then a new Committee is elected. Obviously we hope that the current Committee Members will put themselves forward for re-election but, even if all of them do so, it would be good to fill the following vacancies that have arisen:

- Area Footpath Secretary (South Oxfordshire)
- Area Publicity Officer
- Members' Representative without portfolio

There is very limited parking at the hall itself but there is a large free car park just down the road.

The Procedure for nominations and elections to Area Council is covered by our Standing Orders:

Any member not already on Area Council and wishing to stand for election to an Area officer post or as a Members' Representative should inform the Area Secretary of this and be proposed and seconded by two other members at least seven days before the AGM.

Note that any motions/proposals for debate at the AGM must be sent to the Area Secretary, in writing, in advance of the meeting.

Please give serious thought as to whether you can volunteer to be on the Area Council. Supporting Oxfordshire Ramblers in this way can be a rewarding experience and could give you a warm glow knowing that you have "done your bit"!



Photo Fiona Hitchcock

The meeting will conclude with the all-important cakes/tea/coffee. See you there!

How many walks did you do in 2024?

Richard Birch
Area Walks Co-ordinator

Not all members like loads of statistics, but if you do then read on....

2024 Summary

During 2024 there have been 1184 led walks covering a total distance of 8467 miles. Distances varied from 1.5 miles up to 18 miles. To enable comparison with previous years the Oxfordshire Strollers walks have been included with the Oxford Group.

2024 Walks	BNO	BK	DW	HG	HO	Ox	OWW	TW	VoWH	WO	Total
Easy	6	1		10	2	1		3	5		28
Leisurely	80	144	26	55	8	56	6	25	53	12	465
Moderate	60	26	58	194	30	7	50	62	78	37	602
Strenuous	35			51	1		2				89
Grand Total	181	171	84	310	41	64	58	90	136	49	1184

There were 169 different Walk Leaders – some led just one walk, whereas one Walk Leader led a staggering 80 walks during the year. In May we saw the introduction of the Walk Leaders Handbook with mandatory training for all new Leaders. We have had 37 new Leaders registered during the year with just 3 still to complete their training:

New Leaders	Training	BNO	BK	DW	HG	HO	Ox	OWW	TW	VoWH	WO	Total
Up to 14/5/24	Optional	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	11	1	3	20
After 14/5/24	Complete	1	2	0	4	2	0	1	3	0	1	14
After 14 May	Incomplete	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
New Leaders	Total	3	2	1	6	3	1	2	14	1	4	37

A huge thank you to all of the Group Walk Organisers and Walk Leaders that provide us with such an extensive and varied walks programme.

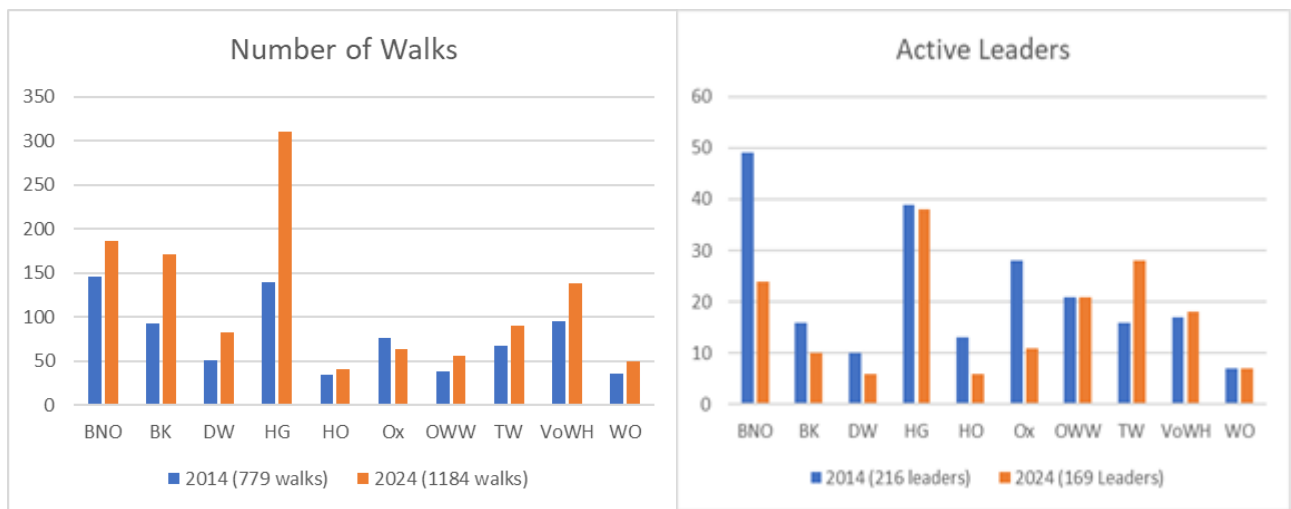
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Photo John Gordon

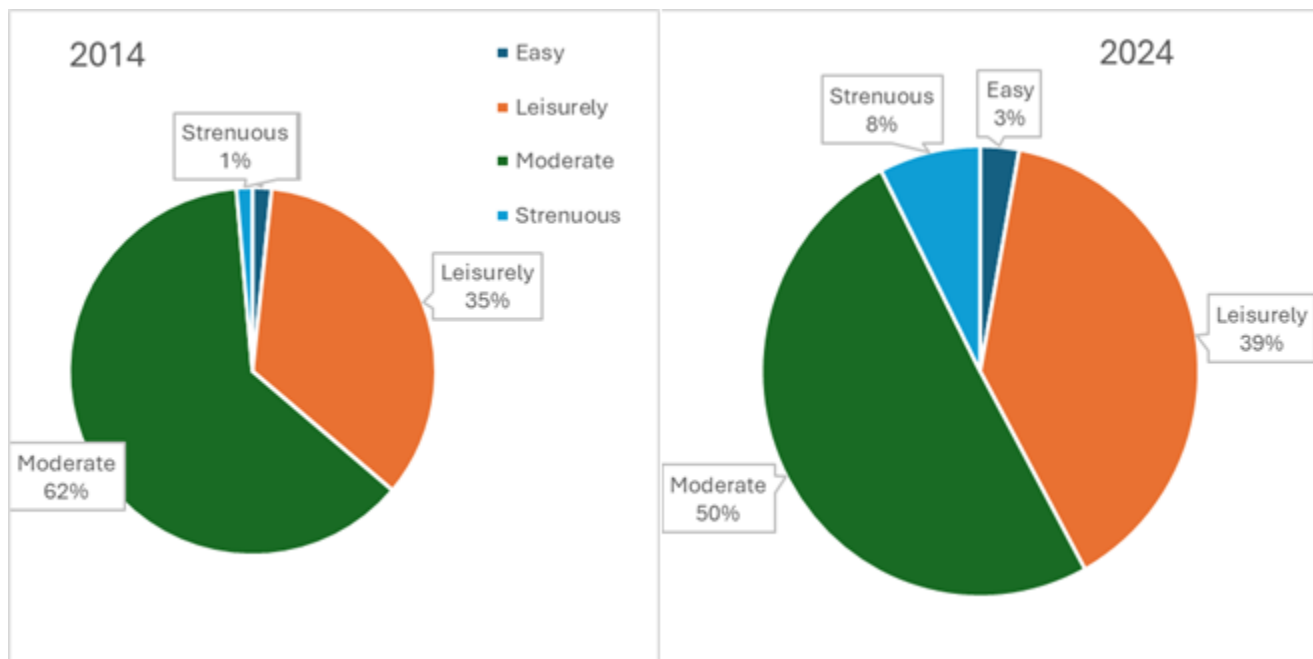
2014 to 2024

To better understand how the walks programme has progressed in recent years it is useful to compare the 2024 programme with that in 2014, 10 years ago.



In 2014 there was 779 walks led by 216 leaders compared to 1184 walks with 169 leaders in 2024. On average each walk leader is leading twice as many walks in 2024 compared to ten years ago.

Comparing the Grades of walks:



Since 2014 there has been a reduction in the percentage of Moderate walks (62% reducing to 50%) with a corresponding increase in Strenuous (1% to 8%) and Leisurely (35% to 39%) walks.

Conclusions

- Oxfordshire Ramblers is providing a more extensive, varied walks programme compared to ten years ago;
- The number of Walk Leaders has reduced, but we are providing many more walks – therefore we could do with a lot more walk leaders! Don't delay, volunteer today!

BNO at work at the Long Wall, Adderbury Lakes.

John Gregory reports that Banbury & North Oxfordshire's path maintenance team assisted in the clearance of vegetation and young elder trees from the wall to allow access for maintenance inspection. The Lakes have their own volunteers but this job was too large for them so they called us for help. We had 14 volunteers in all and we completed the job in around 3 hours. Adderbury Parish Council owns the [lakes](#) which are designated a Local Nature Reserve.



The Vale Path Volunteers cleared 800 metres of bridleway between Little Coxwell and Faringdon. This involved using a telescopic tree pruner to cut off thin branches that were no trouble for walkers but were at head-height for horse riders. Fresh horseshoe prints showed that horse did go along there.

The VPV informed Little Coxwell parish council of what we had done and got this reply from the parish clerk:

“Many thanks for doing this work on the footpath/bridleway. It is a well-used path by villagers and Faringdonians, both walkers and horse riders, so I am sure the work will be well appreciated by many. I have often had to squeeze into the hedgerow to let the horses past so it sounds like this work will make a much more pleasant path.”



Above, at the start: you can just about see the wall.



Some of the team



After ...



I'm sorry, I'll say that again

Bob Evans informed me that there is now a blue plaque in honour of Reverend William Archibald Spooner, whose particular type of malapropism gave rise to the term 'Spoonerisms'. Spooner, who lived between 1844 – 1930, was British Reverend and Warden of New College, Oxford. He was of a nervous disposition, resulting in sentences such as “You hissed my mystery lecture” rather than what he meant to say “You missed my history lecture”. Another was “Three cheers for our queer old dean!” rather than “dear old queen. [Victoria].” And “Someone is occupying my pie. Please sew me to another sheet.” rather than “Someone is occupying my pew. Please show me to another seat.”



The plaque was commissioned by [The Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board](#), which was established in 1999 under the chairmanship of no other than ‘our own’ Robert Evans, FBA, Regius Professor of History Emeritus.

The plaque was unveiled at 11 Keble Road (now part of Oxford University Department of Computer Science) on 19 October 2024. You can read more about the new plaque for Spooner [here](#).

Rest stop

What did the seal with one fin broken say to the shark?

If seal is broken, do not consume.

What two-word answer can you deduce from this?

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| issue | issue |
| issue | issue |
| issue | issue |
| issue | issue |
| issue | issue |

Answer at the bottom of the page.

N. Woodley, a contributor to the Sunday Times’ online ‘letters page’, added a tongue-in-cheek comment on a photo of the actors in *The Magnificent Seven* film. “Interesting,” he said, “that Yul Brynner wasn’t mentioned in the caption. Sometime after the success of the film, all the actors were linked to an aftershave ad to be filmed at Liverpool’s ground, Anfield. But only six turned up ‘cos Yul never wore cologne.”

The Great Chalk Way

The Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR) and the Icknield Way Association (IWA) have been at the forefront of the GCW. Tim Lewis, trustee of the FoR and a stalwart behind the GCW attended the launch, accompanied by Mike Lewington (Chair FoR) and Doug Landman (IWA) with Mary-Ann Ochota (Patron of the Ridgeway National Trail). Speaking at the ceremony, held at the Dunstable Downs Visitor Centre, Mary-Ann spoke of the Way as a connection of beautiful, nature-rich and ever-changing geological, natural and farmed landscapes. Tim is also Footpath Secretary of Wiltshire Ramblers. You can read his personal account of how the GCW was conceived and delivered in the autumn issue of The Friends of the Ridgeway newsletter (<https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/autumn-newsletter-2024/>) or read a shorter version in the upcoming spring issue of *Rambling South East Walker*.



Left to right: Doug Landman (IWA), Mike Lewington (FoR) and Mary-Ann Ochota (broadcaster specialising in anthropology and archaeology www.maryannochota.com/)

The approximately 400-mile Great Chalk Way (GCW) is the sum total of six established long-distance paths that stretch along chalk hills between the English Channel at Lyme Regis, Dorset and the North Sea at Holme-next-the-Sea in Norfolk. On 10 October the Great Chalk Way (GCW) was officially launched.

MARY-ANN SAID “Old paths really matter because they connect us to where we’re going from where we’ve been. They tell the stories that connect communities with local history, cultures and nature. People on these paths connect with each other and the landscapes around them. In each section of the Great Chalk Way, you’re walking through living landscapes – from the wind-stripped Norfolk fens to the lofty beech woodlands of the Chilterns, to the wide downs of Wessex and through Dorset to the Jurassic Coast. I hope the Great Chalk Way becomes one of the best-loved and celebrated long distance routes in the country.”





Eight information boards are being placed at the ends of each of the component trails between Lyme Regis and Holme-next-the-Sea. Tim Lewis (left) is with Mark Annetts (Parks Officer for Salisbury Council) alongside the new GCW information board on the path beside the river Avon between Crane Bridge and the Kings Head pub in Salisbury – one end of the Sarsen Way.

You can read an overview of the GCW on [The Friends of the Ridgeway](#) website. For more route details, visit the website of the [Great Chalk Way](#)

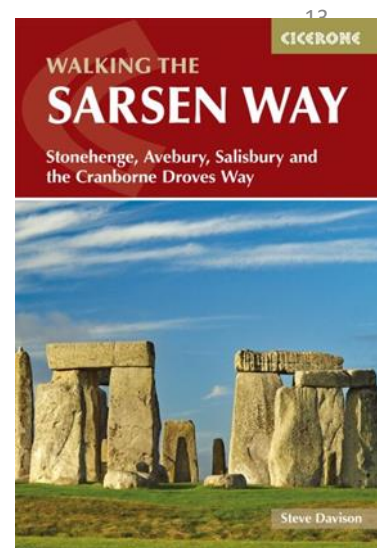
You can also watch a wonderful video on [YouTube](#) where Paul Whitewick reveals the history of the Great Chalk Way landscapes, with clips from the launch event.

A new guide to the Sarsen Way

The Sarsen Way is a 50-mile (79-km) trail from Swindon to Salisbury, and is part of the Great Chalk Way.

The guidebook experts at Cicerone have released a new guidebook to it that offers optional loops that take in two of England's greatest prehistoric sites: Stonehenge and Avebury. Perfect for a long weekend, the route is suitable for walkers of all abilities and can be enjoyed all year round.

www.cicerone.co.uk



Path maintenance in the South Chilterns

Here are just a few examples of the countryside access work done by the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers (SCPMV), which includes members of Ramblers, recently.

In mid-November the SCPMV collaborated with the OCC Countryside Access Officer to instal six waymark posts. They also cleared 1000 metres of path and sorted out a fallen tree. This and the other tasks on this page are on the Chiltern Society's Facebook Page.



Chiltern Society

15 October · 🌐

...

A tricky stile replacement took place last week by our South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers. New wooden oxford gates took 8 volunteers 40 volunteer hours to install thanks to troublesome tree roots. The finished result was well worth the effort.





Chiltern Society

12 November · 🌐

...

Our South Chiltern Path Maintenance Volunteers have been working hard near Chinnor this week. They installed two gates including a medium mobility woodstock gate, which pushchairs and manual wheelchairs can use. Helping as many as possible to access nature 🍏



Chiltern Society

29 October · 🌐

...

Spot the path! The South Chilterns Path Maintenance team cleared 450 metres of pathway in Goring. It took a total of 27 volunteer hours. Great job 🍏





John and Pat alongside a pillbox on the western edge of Abingdon. Photo Dave Cavanagh.

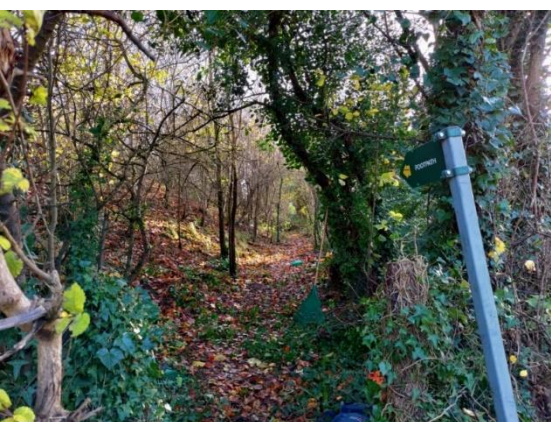


The VPV undertook eight clearances in the fourth quarter of the year, from west to east: Ashbury, Little Coxwell, Bradfield (between East Hanney and Grove), Scutchamer Knob on the Ridgeway above East Hendred, Sunningwell, and Abingdon (three locations).

Alongside the defunct and disappearing stretch of the Wilts & Berks Canal near Mill Road on the west side of Abingdon was a World War II pillbox. These were constructed to help repel an expected seaborne invasion of Britain after the German armies had advanced to the nearby coastlines of The Netherlands, Belgium and Northern France. Production of the pillboxes lasted less than a year, proceeding in

summer 1940, with the order to stop making them coming from the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, in February 1941. This was in favour of more mobile forces, comprising reservists with recently produced transport and weaponry. The pillboxes that we come across on our walks are amongst the 7,000 or so of the original 28,000 that were produced.

Six of the VPV teams in quarter 4. Photos by Pat Rosum, coordinator of the VPV.



Top, hauling an ivy-covered fallen tree off a footpath in Ashbury, which people had skirted by going up a slippery slope. Bottom, the now open lovely path through the wood. Photo Dave Cavanagh.





Late November, on an Oxon Weekend Walkers walk. You can imagine what it felt like, can't you? Photos Ian Macpherson.

Three weeks earlier, same group. Photos Leonor Barroca





Photo Nicola Jones

Cormorants, Farmoor Reservoir. Photo John Gordon.





**Atmospheric views
– walking up to the
Ridgeway from
Bishopstone.
Photos John
Gordon.**



Whilst on a recce I was walking back to the Ridgeway along a restricted byway that would ultimately pass Odstone Barn, on the Downs above Ashbury in the far west of the Vale of White Horse. I spotted some red berries and assumed that they were the fruits of the hawthorn. Closer inspection revealed that

they were on a spindle tree, *Euonymus europaeus*. There were half a dozen specimens in one small area. I had not previously seen so many close to one another. As you would imagine the wood of this species was used to make spindles for spinning wool, its wood being hard, dense, and easily split.

Spotted on walks



Top right photographed by Peter Skuse at The Crown, Aldbourne, the others by John Gordon.

Feet up

When my sister-in-law was a waitress in Canada, she took drink orders from a group of Americans. They each ordered a glass of red wine. She suggested they choose a litre instead. They discussed it among themselves, then one put his hand up and said “I’ll be the leader.”

I accidentally swallowed some invisible ink. Now I’m at the hospital waiting to be seen.



Bert's Books, Swindon

Why *that* word? *Understand*

From time to time, I use a well-exercised word and then ask myself ‘how did that word come about?’ One such is *understand*. The answer is ‘we don’t know’. By ‘we’ I mean learned etymologists and lexicologists. There is a lot of literature on the subject but no convincing conclusions have been reached as to how this word, comprising ‘under’ and ‘stand’ came to mean ‘comprehend’. If you would like to understand why we don’t understand what *understand* means, in its sense of ‘understand’ as opposed to ‘stand under’, then you could go to the blog of the Oxford University Press for an erudite [article](#) by Anatoly Liberman. I’m not recommending that you read that essay, just showing that it exists. Understand?

Guy who invented the clock:

There will be 12 numbers in it.

Friend: So, the day will be divided into 12 segments?

Inventor: No, 24.

Friend: So, will the day start at 1?

Inventor: The day will start at 12, which is at night.

Friend:

Inventor: The 6 means 30 (when it doesn’t mean six)



In The Woodman pub, Fernham. Photo Dave Cavanagh