

## IVW Chairman's Report

Welcome to the Ivel Valley Walkers AGM using our Zoom Meeting account. The committee decided that this year's AGM should continue to be held online which the Ramblers Association have endorsed. We still feel this is the most responsible and safe thing to do under the current circumstances. Members are invited to submit questions and comments to discuss at the AGM via the General Secretary by email or by post before 1<sup>st</sup> November. Once you've been given details of how to log into the Zoom session, you will be able to listen into the formal proceedings of the AGM and then join the informal discussions when it occurs under 'Any Other Business'. I will raise member's questions at this point and open each one for discussion to everyone online. The General Secretary will be recording the proceedings to make it easy to take accurate minutes. So, please join me and contribute to our online meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> November at 19:30 from the comfort of your armchairs.

Unlike previous years, 2021 started very disappointingly in lockdown countrywide. We could not celebrate Christmas in our usual way by organising a Christmas Luncheon or Mulled Wine Ramble. We could not offer any group walks from the prepared Spring programme until the 12<sup>th</sup> April. During this period we could only walk in pairs or in bubbles or in groups of 6 as the Governments Covid-19 Roadmap evolved. The committee met monthly on Zoom to discuss the situation during which time we had asked our members to vote on whether walk numbers should be controlled by walk leaders or by the committee. An issue the committee had debated for months. The membership returned a decision that walk leaders should control their own walk numbers which helped us going forward in April when IVW returned to group walks. The Rolling programme we adopted after the 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown last year was reintroduced again this year, considering the roadmap out of lockdown remained so unpredictable. A majority of walk leaders preferring to have an "online" presence so they could change walk details as the roadmap changed, rather than produce a printed version. This system remains today and I thank the Programme Secretary, Alan Rowland and Webmaster, Pauline Seddon for organising an online programme of walks for this situation.

On behalf of the membership and Chair, I would very much like to thank the Committee and all the walk leaders for their contributions in restarting the walks programme this summer and autumn. We have had an amazing showcase of IVW walks being forwarded under restrictive circumstances. Walk leaders will continue to decide the numbers they want on their walks and we've a booking system in place to register members and keep walks to those limits. Some walk leaders have opened their walks to members where they just turn up, as we did before the pandemic and then register members names on the day of the walk. This will continue to be the situation through autumn and into the Spring programme of 2022, where it is hoped IVW walks might begin to return to "normal" and we look again at producing a printed programme.

It was a surprise that 18 members who had booked self-catering accommodation this April were given the green light from government to walk on our IVW holiday to Ambleside, cancelled from last year. The local populous looked upon us nervously as they hadn't seen groups of walkers this size in the area since late last summer. We had to take care not to raise concern. The weather also helped to make the whole week very enjoyable and the walks went to plan. My thanks go to Pauline Seddon who helped me prepare and lead the

walks. All being well we both plan to repeat the holiday next year from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> May for those who were unable to attend this year because of the restrictions on accommodation.

It was fortunate we didn't make firm plans for any social events over Christmas 2020 and into 2021 until the Covid restrictions on socialising became clear. It wasn't until April before any hope emerged of organising a social event like a summer barbecue, which happened in late July. Thankfully, it went according to plan for around 30+ members who were able to attend. My thanks go to Bernard & Mary Morse for organising the barbecue at Langford Bowls Club and to the walk leaders, Marcus Kilby & Mary. It was a sunny day and the first time so many had met after lockdown. The event was quickly followed on July 31<sup>st</sup> by a day on the Ouse where about 20 members took canoes and kayaks up and down the river from Bedford. Afterwards there were tea and cakes on the embankment and by all accounts everyone enjoyed the event. My thanks go to Roger McLeod and Mandy Wisson and those who helped prepare the tea. Barry Ingram was there to take photographs on both events.

Walk leaders have welcomed the Rolling programme since it is easier to get any changes advertised and allow walks with limited spaces to be marked as full before the start date of the walk. It also allows walks to be added by leaders when the need arises as in Pop-Up walks. But not everyone is in favour, especially members, where they would much prefer a published list of walks detailed in a programme as we had before the pandemic. The committee are looking at ways to do both next year to please everyone.

In August Roger & I managed to lead a London Walk where 54 of us from several Ramblers groups in Bedfordshire visited churches in the rhyme of 'Oranges & Lemons'. I had compressed it to a 10 mile circular walk from St.Clements to Shoreditch and Stepney with lunch at Stepney City Farm. It was quite a sight with all us walking in line down Brick Lane and we were lucky that streets had few tourists and little traffic. Many of our walks on the programme through late summer have gained attendance from members and attracted new members too. We saw numbers rise on some IVW walks during the Bedfordshire Walking Festival and I thank walk leaders for their contributions through this period. The festival was regarded a success despite some restrictions on walk numbers and a reduced programme. IVW would like to thank Nick Markham and Barry Ingram for organising the walking festival.

The IVW long weekend to Marlborough during their Mop Fair was held recently for 32 of our members. It meant traffic was very busy around town and noisy crowds gathered in the evening. The walks were held in pleasant conditions and I thank Antony Copsey and Nick & Marion Watt for helping to organise them successfully. Martin Whillis was helping but had to drop out due to ill health and we wish him well following his hospital operation.

In addition to IVW events, we continued to support Ramblers Area initiatives in Training and Path Restoration. Training began with a number of on-line courses at the beginning of the year but the outdoor RIPPLE activities couldn't really start as a group until April. Since then the RIPPLE activities have been quite substantial and intense since the local authorities have themselves been under the same lockdown restrictions as the Ramblers, as well as having a number of their Rights Of Way officers in furlough or leaving. I would like to thank Nick Markham and Barry Ingram for continuing to arrange these activities for the Ramblers.

Looking ahead to next year, we know that Covid will remain an umbrella over many of our planned walks and activities. Our second holiday to Ambleside will be from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> May, for those who were unable to attend the holiday this year. A second holiday to Hartington is being planned from 24<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April for members who have not booked Ambleside for 2022. We expect members to be on one or other holiday, but not both. Other breaks planned include the City Break to Bristol & Bath cancelled from 2020, a City Excursion to Leeds and at some stage a long weekend in the autumn. We will also have to plan a couple of coach trips through next year. On the social front, Roger has arranged an auction evening at W.H Peacock on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May and looking at other events like a Thames Barge trip and possible Canal boat ride. He has also received interest from members for the body flight at Thurleigh. In fact there is quite a lot being planned and arranged from now until the next Committee Meeting in January when these plans and ideas will be discussed.

IVW membership dropped by 3% during the pandemic but has recovered largely due to other Ramblers wanting to become affiliated members of our group. This is because we have tried to produce a full and safe programme of walks for our membership. It has been difficult for potential newcomers to join or become incorporated into our group because of the rules surrounding Covid and booking but these have eased allowing them to participate in activities and taster sessions. To that end, walking outdoors remains a safe environment.

Concluding, I would like to express thanks to everyone on the Committee, especially over the last 6 months where we had to prepare walks and events following lockdown. They have been helped very much by the Walk Coordinators and Walk Leaders who have come forward to offer walks and events on the IVW rolling programme. I can only thank them very much for putting forward walks and events that are in every way as good and interesting as before the pandemic started. A superb effort by everyone concerned.

The committee will be losing three members at this AGM.

Gillian Wilkes is stepping down as General Secretary to explore the world with her husband, following his retirement. Gillian was not convinced by us suggesting that Zoom and Email works well from Tropical Islands too, but she was having none of that.

Derek Turner is stepping down as Footpath Officer because he has always been very busy with community work and now finds he has even less time to relax with his family. He has offered to continue his work on the Ramblers project 'Don't Lose Your Way' which requires investigating the archives.

Carol Bond is also leaving the committee after more than 5 years helping with publicity and shaping the direction of Ivel Valley Walkers.

Can we thank Gillian, Derek & Carol for their contributions on the committee and their continued support of Ivel Valley Walkers. At the time of writing the report, we have no one coming forward to replace those leaving and we are looking for officers with plenty of zeal and good ideas to fill vacant positions on the Committee.

Lastly, I would like to thank Sue Tate who is stepping down as Tuesday Walk Coordinator. Sue worked on the Committee in the past and we hope to see her on walks in the future.

Please join me in giving all of the Committee members, a round of applause. Thank you.

Roy Carter.....Chairman, Ivel Valley Walkers

## FOOTPATH OFFICERS REPORT

The Footpath Officer's work this year has involved the usual mixture of short-term issues such as monitoring temporary path closures and evaluating the impact of large infrastructure schemes on the path network. In addition, the process to identify missing paths ahead of the 2026 deadline has accelerated.

Bob Tarron, Area Footpath Officer, has continued to pass me notices of Modification Orders and other legal processes affecting public rights of ways. I monitor these and many of them are related to developments such as the large one around Houghton Regis. I have not seen any contentious ones during the last year although some require lengthy temporary closures. Usually, a satisfactory alternative route has been made available.

Plans to replace the well-used Lindsells level crossing of the railway north of Biggleswade with a bridleway bridge have advanced with planning permission now granted. When built, the bridge will provide a safer crossing and accommodate a section of Biggleswade's Green Wheel. It will be situated nearly 400m north of the current crossing which will make short walks for Biggleswade dog walkers longer but should make little difference to longer walks for IVW members.

Further consultations for the East-West rail project took place earlier in the year and lower predicted train speeds means that some proposals to close or divert paths crossing the the line on the level will not be required after all. The exact alignment of the new route from Bedford towards a new station near Sandy or Tempsford and on towards Cambridge remains uncertain for now. As the plans evolve, details of changes affecting public rights of way will need careful scrutiny to check for the impact on walkers.

Most of the route for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet road scheme is situated in Cambridgeshire in an area with relatively few public rights of way. Highways England say that construction could start during 2022 and while some paths may require closure while this is underway, the long term impact on the path network should be minimal.

The Don't Lose Your Way search for unrecorded historic paths continues and earlier in the year, the Ramblers Association reported that nearly 50,000 miles of 'lost' paths had been identified. Footpath Secretaries have been asked to look through the suggestions and prioritise those for further investigation. The most important are those that would resolve dead ends and gaps in the network, improve walker safety, create circular routes, provide links to important public sites and improve countryside access where new development is planned. I have identified some paths in Bedfordshire that fit one or more of these criteria and need following up.

However, in many cases, the evidence for the path's existence seems to be rather flimsy especially where people have assumed that paths and tracks shown on old Bartholomew maps need recording when comparison with Ordnance Survey maps suggests that they were probably private routes such as farm tracks. I suspect that at least 95% of the routes identified can be discarded but this still leaves several miles of potential paths in our area for further investigation before the deadline for registration of historic routes is reached.

Derek Turner

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

Ivel Valley Walkers have 361 members, including 17 affiliate members from other Ramblers groups in the area.

Data on membership changes is only available from 10th July 2021.

Since 10th July 2021, 8 new members have joined, including 1 affiliate member.

Since 10th July 2021, there have been 14 movers and leavers. The breakdown of this is:

- 8 lapsed;
- 4 resigned;
- 1 moved area;
- 1 moved group.

In order to safeguard personal data, I do not maintain or store any distribution lists. These are stored and maintained by the Ramblers Association. For each mail out, I download the relevant, up-to-date distribution list from the Ramblers database, use it and then destroy it. If you are experiencing any problems regarding communications from IVW or the Ramblers Association, then please do not hesitate to contact me for my assistance.

Most members have given their consent for us to send information about our AGM, our walks and trips and events, and our Newsletter by email rather than by post. This is very helpful since it saves both time and money. If you still receive our mailings through the post and would like to change to email, please get in touch with me and I will assist you.

Wishing you all the best for the forthcoming year.

Ruth McNally