

## IVW Chairman's Report

Welcome to the 2019 Ivel Valley Walkers AGM at Old Warden village hall. This year we are holding the AGM on a Sunday afternoon for the first time. It was suggested last year we change from Tuesday evenings because of the darkness and narrow roads getting here in November. We can discuss the change later at the end of the meeting. We have many walkers willing to attend our diverse programme of walks and it has been a real pleasure representing you this year and have again put myself forward for re-election.

Our promotions to get people walking and interested in The Ramblers have been;

1. The walks programme in booklet form, has been a real success. All our members seem to like the quality and its presentation. It showcases our walk leader's efforts to put on walks and the programme secretary's efforts to attract new members in its design. Next year the committee will need to discuss increasing the number of copies and number of pages to the layout for better distribution.
2. We have continued to contribute walks to the Greensand Country Festival in May and got them advertised in their programme of activities. But walk leaders didn't notice much increase in attendance on their walks during the event, just one or two. Nothing like the attendance we would see on the Beds Walking Festival.
3. This year saw the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bedfordshire Walking Festival. We had a "ten" theme to some walks (Ten Shun) and we set up walking hubs in different towns at the weekends. The IVW hub was at Ampthill and members helped man the marquee on the last Sunday. Thanks to David & Rosemary, Vic, Liz, Sue, Bridget, John & Barry.
4. Next year we have the Bedford River Festival in July. This is our best event for promoting IVW and other Ramblers groups. I hope to see many of you volunteer to help at the marquee in 2020 and to distribute the IVW & BWF programmes in the weeks that follow it.

As in previous years, 2019 has been very busy for Ivel Valley. As is customary, we produced three walk programmes during the year and I would like to thank all those members who contributed to this undertaking; especially to the Programme Secretary, Alan Rowland, who has taken on the role enthusiastically from Andy and worked closely with Our Webmaster, Pauline Seddon to get the programme seamlessly onto The Ramblers website. To all the walk leaders coming forward with interesting walks in our county and beyond; to the walk co-ordinators, who work in the background to obtain and collate walks from leaders for the Programme Secretary. The programme continues to be comprehensive, ensuring that there is a walk for every member, by offering walks at different times of the day; different days of the week; different walk distances; walks in different counties around Bedfordshire; and an interesting social events calendar.

The membership continues to remain stable and the walks programme is key to keeping it that way. Talking to some who have joined IVW, the programme was often mentioned as a reason to join but we must also take heart that our friendliness to visitors was another important factor for them joining as well. So I believe IVW are in a good position to progress forward with our membership.

Earlier in the year, May to be exact, we had a week long holiday to Alfriston, in the South Downs National Park, organised by Bob & Celia. The weather turned out to be perfect and the walks were extensive; along the cliff edge (Seven Sisters); along the coastline (Seaford)

and along the Downs (Firle Beacon). But we did have a couple of accidents on a walk which needed reporting and I hope it didn't spoil their holiday. Our thanks to Bob & Celia for leading an enjoyable holiday, which had us wanting more.

Also, earlier in the year we had a number of walks far from Bedfordshire which involved travelling on trains – railway walks if you like. The first was to Birmingham with a walk along the Worcester & Birmingham Canal from Cadbury World to the Bull Ring. Interesting places were Bournville, University of Birmingham and Birmingham Library. The second was the Icknield Line Steam Railway from Chinnor to Princes Risborough, where we returned on foot. We were told there was only one stile (or was it eleven?). The third was a London trip, which involved walking from Blackfriars to Greenwich and returning on the Thames Clipper. However the train service that day was disrupted by cancellations but we managed to get almost everyone onto the walk at some point. Special thanks to Barry, Sandra and Roger McLeod for singularly organising these day trips.

The coach trip to Virginia Water and Windsor in May proved to be very popular, notably because of the Rhododendron and Azalea blossoms which are on display at this time of year. They looked majestic as we meandered through the parkland to Savill Garden for lunch. The 3-mile long walk in the afternoon from the Copper Horse of George IV to Windsor Castle was exhausting. The hour in Windsor to refresh was much needed and despite the air conditioning belt failing on the coach on the way home, we managed a good day out. My thanks to Andy for helping me organise the trip.

In June, over 30 intrepid walkers made the long journey to Liverpool (most by train) for our very first 3-Day City Break. Beforehand we had booked accommodation from Monday to Wednesday around Lime Street and dropping off our bags, we were soon found singing on the "Ferry 'cross the Mersey". The singing soon stopped on the open bus tour when the heavens opened in a downpour. The wet weather worsened the next day as we traversed the 12-mile Wirral Way from Hooton to West Kirby. A picture of us at Hadlow Road is on the front cover of our Autumn programme. On Wednesday, hoping for better weather, we walked around Aintree and out to the Gormley Statues on Blundellsands. But returning that evening, Barry found his catalytic converter had been removed from his car and he had to limp home. So it wasn't a good ending to our first City Break. Our thanks to Barry for organising the City Break to Liverpool.

In October, Antony and myself organised a long weekend to Great Malvern. We all started together by climbing to End Hill with great views of Worcestershire. The two walks on Saturday were linear to Ledbury, one traversed the Malvern Hills, the other went alongside on foothills and both were memorable journeys. The Sunday walks were split between visiting Elgar's birthplace or visiting Worcester, with some wishing to walk back to Malvern. The evening meal was a fabulous Fork Buffet at the Abbey Hotel. For a perfect end, we met at Elmley Castle on Monday to climb Bredon Hill to get a 360 degree view. My thanks to Antony for his help in preparing and leading the walks.

A second coach trip to Aldeburgh was arranged by Nick at the end of October. IVW had visited the place a few years ago in poor weather conditions but this time the weather was perfect. The walk followed part of the Suffolk Coast Path from Minsmere Nature Reserve to Aldeburgh with Sizewell B nuclear reactor in full view. Our thanks to Nick and Scott for organising and leading the coach trip

We marked the Christmas season with a well attended Christmas walk led by Marcus from Old Warden Village Hall followed by an annual dinner at the White Horse in Southill organised by Mary & Bernard. In June they also organised our second summer barbeque called "Pork Roast & Roll-Up" at Langford Village Hall. It began with a morning walk led again by Marcus and ended with a hog roast at the village hall plus a table quiz since it started to rain in the afternoon. Our thanks to Mary and Bernard for organising both of these events and to Marcus for leading both walks. The traditional Mulled Wine Ramble for Sunday walkers was held in Wootton village hall in December. The walk on the day was lead Dave. Thank you to Dave and Tina for organising it. There will be similar events this year with a Christmas luncheon at the Barns Hotel, Bedford on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December and a Mulled Wine Ramble on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December at Shillington Village Hall.

This years' social events started in March with the railway walk to Birmingham and was followed in May with IVW 'going to the dogs'. An evening at Henlow dog race track with optional fish & chips organised by our Social Secretary, Roger McLeod. The attendance might have been small but by all accounts the winnings were big. In the summer we had a well attended cruise and walk along the Grand Union Canal starting from Cosgrove. Two 12-seater narrow boats were hired by Roger to ferry walkers to Stoke Bruene and back. Half walked the toe-path, while the other half sat in the boat, then they swapped around halfway along the canal. At Stoke Bruene there was a prepared cream tea and cake donated by Mandy Wisson. Despite the weather it was good fun. In August, Roger organised a repeat experience to go gliding at Dunstable Down which was popular two years ago. This year sees another popular social event with the Barn Dance returning on 30<sup>th</sup> November at Houghton Conquest village hall organised by Val. So bring your dancing shoes and some food. Our thanks goes to Roger for organising most of the events and to his helpers who have contributed much to the social calendar.

In addition to IVW events, we continue to support Bedfordshire Area initiatives in both Training and Path Restoration (RIPPLE). Nick organised two courses during the year; a Walk Leader Training course in April for new and experienced leaders to refresh their skills and; an Apps Maps and Compass course during the Greensand Country Festival in May to improve walkers' navigational skills. Both were well attended and successful and our thanks go to Nick for his support in training our members.

The RIPPLE team were out early in February to clear and re-open two paths on the Shuttleworth estate, near Biggleswade. These tasks continued at fairly regular intervals (fortnightly) throughout 2019 and took a great deal of effort to organise considering the ROW plans were in chaos during the middle of last year. We have three RIPPLE tasks remaining to complete this year; on 5<sup>th</sup> November in Westoning clearing part of the John Bunyan Trail; on 19<sup>th</sup> November at Chimney Corner, clearing and marking a route to the station at Kempston Hardwick; and on 3<sup>rd</sup> December in Langford clearing a section of the Kingfisher Way. Our thanks go to Barry for continuing to organise these tasks with ROW officers in both Beds Borough and Central Beds Councils.

Our Footpath Officer, Derek Turner has continued to monitor diversions and temporary path closures as building work progresses at many locations throughout Bedfordshire. In particular the large outline planning applications along the A421 corridor affecting Kempston, Wootton, Stewartby and Liddlington (Marsden Vale). He has submitted some proposals for access which include a bridge over the railway at the Stewartby brickworks site allowing the possibility of opening up the old footpath to Wootton. Derek has also been monitoring planned upgrades to the A428 & A1, as well as plans on the East Coast

mainline to reduce the number of rail crossings and proposals for the route of the East-West Rail link through Bedford. The recently approved M1-A6 link road and freight terminal plans will also have to be monitored in the coming months. The Ramblers have reminded us to be mindful of the 2026 deadline for the Definitive Map and have issued an incentive to preserve or uncover historic rights of way - called "Don't Lose Your Way". The footpath network has evolved over centuries that link villages, hamlets and towns together. Some of them are unrecorded and if they are not put back on the map by 1 January 2026, they will be lost forever. So a guide on the Ramblers website has been issued to help us.

This year has seen major changes to our IVW website. Our webmaster, Pauline Seddon has worked ferociously to upgrade and refresh our website to the latest software and platforms which offer more secure and customizable website templates. We have also linked our walks programme into the main Ramblers website to give you walk details. Here is a list of the important changes that have occurred:

- Changed committee email addresses away from 'ivelvalleywalkers.co.uk' domain (using old address invokes an autoreply to sender - get correct address from website)
- Old website was replaced by Wix.com in June
- Walks programme links to main Ramblers website to obtain walk information
- Pictures now stored under Google Photos (free) rather than Flickr (quantity charge)
- Instructions and links updated to report footpath problems to council ROW officers.
- Ramblers First Aid courses in the local area added to Trips & Events

Our website should now be the first place to get the latest walk information. Walk leaders should inform Pauline and Membership Secretary of changes that need to be announced.

Looking ahead into next year, the committee have agreed some holiday plans for 2020 which include a week long holiday to Ambleside in The Lake District from 26<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 organised by Pauline Seddon & Roy Carter. There will be another three day City Break at the end of June, beginning of July to Bristol & Bath organised by Barry. And a coach trip to Ironbridge & Coalbrookdale on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 organised by Tony. These events cannot be booked at present but you can put them into your diary and find accommodation for the Ambleside holiday knowing they will take place. Please look out for them and the appropriate booking forms in the Spring walks programme which should be available by the Christmas Lunch or Mulled Wine Ramble.

Lastly, I would like to express thanks to the Committee and the backroom staff (the walk coordinators, the technicians and the auditor), all of whom have worked very hard over the past year on your behalf. However we will be losing some committee members at this AGM. John Kirkham is stepping down as Treasurer after many years in the role and has overseen the introduction of internet banking. Andy Knight is stepping down as a committee member and former programme secretary who introduced the current format of our walks programme. Graham Mills is stepping down after many years as Publicity Officer. Can we thank all three volunteers for their activities on the committee and their continued support as walk leaders for IVW. We have a vibrant committee with plenty of good ideas and know that we have members who have or who can step forward to fill vacant positions.

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

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