

Chair's Report 2021



It has been another year overshadowed by the Corona virus pandemic. Early in the year we were restricted to walking in tiers which caused difficulties for our members who live outside Derbyshire and limited the locations we were able to walk. It led to the creation of a South Yorkshire bubble of Wednesday long car walkers who met to do alternative walks. Then, when cases of Corona virus continued to increase, walks were suspended again. Committee meetings were held on Zoom and a further programme was compiled in the hope that the 'roadmap' would work, and walks would resume in April.

Despite the general feeling that the rules regarding risk assessments are becoming increasingly bureaucratic and a reluctance of leaders to fill in so much paperwork, we have succeeded in organising walks programmes which are interesting and varied. This is due to the hard work and enthusiasm of our walk leaders, organisers, and our new coordinators. There have been specific difficulties arranging public transport walks because of fears about infection, concerns that buses may be full, cuts to bus routes and cancelled services.

Initially when walks resumed in April, bookings were required and numbers were restricted, but from October the numbers on most walks became unrestricted and bookings only required if the walk leader wished to restrict numbers.

We have tried to attract new members by running some taster walks in the evening during the summer and adding some shorter walks to the Saturday programme. The aim is to offer some shorter walks for people who work during the week and to provide a contrast with the Sunday walks.

In an attempt to publicise Ramblers, we have had some walk routes published in the Derbyshire Times. It would be helpful if some other members could suggest routes suitable for these articles or offer to check out route notes to ensure they are accurate. David Moore has continued to publicise our activities on Twitter and Facebook in addition to our website. Lockdown increased interest in walking and people have looked at our publicity. Our membership dropped during lockdown partly due to members delaying the renewal of their membership when walking was suspended. We now have 376 members a slight increase on numbers before lockdown.

Sadly, the last Visual Impaired Group walk took place on 23rd October. The group started in 1999 and in the past was highly successful with well attended monthly walks, annual coach trips and Christmas lunches. Although Covid has had a role in it ending, it has been struggling to attract leaders for a while. Thanks are due to Kath Collins, the most recent programme organiser, and all the previous organisers and walk leaders. I am sure the visual impaired walkers will miss their walks.

The Chesterfield Walking Festival took place later than usual with the numbers on walks limited by the council. CNED Ramblers put on several walks including the Chesterfield Round which was a logistical challenge due to the need to social distance. CNED Ramblers also contributed walks to the Chesterfield Canal Walking Festival.

Our members continue to report problems with rights of way and have been frustrated by the response we receive from Derbyshire County Council. The council have moved responsibility for rights of way to the highways department and a new Acting Project Manager for them has been appointed. At a recent meeting with him it was clear that he was more sympathetic to Ramblers than his predecessor. He is in the process of filling three vacant footpath officer posts which should mean that reports can be dealt with more quickly. He also seemed to be prepared to issue orders, to fix problems, and to prosecute if necessary. We have a further meeting with him in December. Unfortunately we failed to make any progress on the resumption of a maintenance group.

In the coming year we intend to contact parish councils to highlight the issue of problems with footpaths.

The committee continued to meet on Zoom until June when meetings started again at St. Thomas's. The footpath committee has dwindled and instead of having separate meeting, the issues are now being discussed at the monthly committee meetings. We need some input from other members as Mel Hardy is currently acting as the organiser for the Saturday walks in addition to checking planning applications and recording the reports on footpath problems. This is an onerous workload, and he is in need of some help. David Moore is trying to step down from being responsible for publicity, so we need someone who has IT skills and marketing skills to step forward and take over.

It would be advantageous if the short public transport walks were represented at committee meetings, in order that their views can be heard and considered.

The result of the vote on booklet vs printed programme was that the printed programme was preferred, mainly on cost grounds, but also some members also found it easier to read.

I thank everyone for retaining their membership during another difficult year, the committee for their hard work, the programme organisers, our programme coordinator and walk leaders. Joyce Denton has stepped down from organising the Monday walks and Cliff Lea has taken over. Bill Eyre is organising the short public transport walks and Val Fenton the long public transport walks. I also thank Lorraine Watson for auditing the accounts.

Sadly, we heard that Terry Powell had died in the summer.

Over the last two years everyone has concentrated on keeping their particular group walking, and it is now important that we resume working together as Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Ramblers and not as separate groups. We need to remember that Ramblers should be inclusive and guard against creating local rules that make it difficult for other walkers to join our walks.

In this meeting we need to confirm the posts of Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. We would like to appoint a new walk organiser for the Saturday walks and a Publicity Secretary.

The last 12 months have been difficult for me as my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease last December and she requires a lot of support. This impacts on the time I have available for Ramblers. I would therefore be happy to stand down. If no one comes forward I will continue but it is on the understanding that people are aware I do not have enough time to do justice to the role and will definitely not continue beyond the next AGM.

Isobel McCormick