

Chairman's Chat – Summer 2015

Phil Guest

The summer is upon us and for me the month of May is the best of the year. It's just all those fresh and bright greens in the trees, the lawns and especially the hedgerows. Enough musing- South Cheshire Ramblers is currently turning itself into a holiday company- the choices this year include Scotland, Cumbria, Guernsey and Spain. For a small group as ours this is a great achievement and shows the strength of our membership.

We have a new challenge coming up in the next few months- **The Big Pathwatch.**

Ramblers, funded by Ramblers Holidays are launching a major exercise in checking the state of our nation's paths. It's a big task but they are hoping to use this opportunity to increase awareness of the vital importance of protecting our rights of way, upon which we rely for our walking pastime. With the help of a number of other organisations such as Scouts, Guides, Duke of Edinburgh Awards the military and Schools, Ramblers hope over just six months to map the majority of paths in the UK.

The next Walk magazine, which will be issue in June, will have all the information we will need to take part ourselves. It includes an 'App' for our phones into which we will report on the path so that the information can be consolidated. Problems found will be fed back to the rights of way teams at County level so that they can address an issue.

Andrew Franklin, our 'Footpath Officer' and I attended a briefing in Birmingham some weeks ago and raised a number of issues which we hope will be addressed when the final plan is launched in June.

So, keep a look out for Walk magazine and how you can contribute to a major part of being a Rambler, the upkeep of our nation's paths. Happy walking!

Committee

Chairman - Phil Guest

Tel: 07918 687683

Rambles Programme Coordinators –

Carole Bentley, Rae Davies

Tel: 07702 592753 Tel: 07887 243933

Website Editor – Jim Eckersley

Tel: 07713 036232

Committee Members: David Smith, Diane Birkenhead, Phillip Keogh, David Roberts

Secretary - Kevin White

Tel: 07922 147135

Membership – Hazel Wallis

Tel: 01270 811186

Newsletter Editor – Bev Brady

Tel: 07759 325818

Treasurer – Philip Lund

Tel: 01270 610763

Footpath Secretary –

Andrew Franklin

Tel: 07860 447747

Publicity – Paul Boniface

Tel: 07786 232348

FROM YOUR COMMITTEE

Walks Programme – Carole Bentley

Rae and I are living a new life as your 'walks programme coordinators.' Rae does all the technical work - compiling the six months calendar of walks and loading all the information onto the national Ramblers website - while I liaise with the walk leaders, mostly by email.

We have been impressed with all the walk ideas we have received and the fact that the information reached us so promptly. It has made the compilation of the programme easier than we had feared.

The first six months has, nevertheless, been a steep learning curve for both of us. However, you will see it's a very busy programme, and it's only been made possible by all the offers from walk leaders. We are hoping to make the programme compilation a 'rolling event' in which walk leaders, old and new, will feel free to email their walk ideas throughout the year. We will in turn, from time to time, issue an updated programme skeleton for the following six months so that walk leaders can see which dates are still available. This brings me on nicely to saying we are already in the market for your walk ideas for January to June 2016. Don't delay, seize the day! Carole Bentley (carole.bentley@gmail.com)

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Membership Secretary – Hazel Wallis

Membership update from October 2014 to April 2015

The membership in October was 212, since then we have had some new members, but we have also lost some. At the end of April the numbers were the same as October 2014 !

We have looked at ways of encouraging membership and to this end we set up a table for two Saturdays at Cotswold Bridgemere. This generated some interest but the weather was not on our side, I would like to thank all those who came and manned the table and I am looking at repeating this in August. We have had some enquiries by e-mail some of which have resulted in us gaining new members. I welcome any suggestions of ways in which we may encourage membership.

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Footpaths Secretary – Andrew Franklin

Greetings everyone - this is my first report since being appointed - oops I mean appointed as the Footpath Secretary at the end of 2014 and I hope to keep it shorter than my walks!

I have been amazed by the number of Planning Applications I receive from Cheshire East on a weekly basis. They ask if we, South Cheshire Ramblers, wish to object to such applications.

Where relevant I will visit such sites as some developments have no Footpath / Public Right of Way - others have proposals for acceptable diversions that developers have included in their plans.

It is interesting to note that developers have applied to build from Audlem to Worleston in one form or another with plans as equally diverse from Housing Estates, Marinas and Solar Farms.

There have been specific difficulties reported to me from our own Ramblers, Ramblers from other areas who have been visiting south Cheshire and also members of the public. These have involved fields that have been flooded for long periods due to landowners not making sure drainage has been done on a regular basis, livestock issues, broken stiles and lack of Waymarks.

Accordingly I have advised the Enforcement Officer at Cheshire East plus visited the sites concerned and where possible discussed the issues with the land-owners.

Without exception all issues have been amicably resolved.

The Big Pathwatch

The Big Pathwatch will be launched on the 13th July - the "WALK" magazine which Ramblers will receive during June will have a 3 page article advising details of this project.

Basically Ramblers are being asked to walk every Public Right of Way in 1km x 1km grid squares and report findings back, eg good parking, toilets, views, fly-tipping, blocked paths etc - if you wish to participate then details how to register will be given in the above article.

Whilst I always carry secateurs with me (obviously not whilst shopping in Waitrose) on my walks I do not do "Bramble Bashing" activities as this function would be organised by our "Access Officer" but as this position is vacant please feel free to nominate yourself to our Chairman.

Finally please report any problems you have via my email - walkytalky121@yahoo.co.uk

Enjoy your walks !

Trip to Scotland (April 12th to 16th, 2015)

Liz Taylor

Scotland by coach was definitely a new experience for Graham and I, so we approached it with a degree of caution. Would we enjoy that long journey?

We were deposited at Crewe Bus Station early on the Sunday morning by our daughter and boarded the coach. For me sleep took over, then a little reading and several stops for refreshment. Then a change of coach at Tebay and “Eureka”, we were entering the Highlands! Brown grass (the snow had only just receded), craggy snowy peaks and twisting roads assailed us and our cheery proud Scottish driver amused us with jokes and tales of the Highlands. At last, the coach pulled off the road and there was our hotel at Tyndrum.



We were welcomed by the manager on the coach and formalities completed including our luggage miraculously appearing in our rooms. Well, it hadn't been too bad so far! After a three course evening meal and a briefing later we were really in the swing of it!

Next day the skies were cloudy and sadly no prospect of sun, but eager to get walking we split into two groups, Graham leading one group to try and climb snow-capped Ben Lui (only four takers! - Jim, Steve, Alan and Graham). A much larger group opted for a train journey to Bridge of Orchy, with a walk back along the West Highland Way. This was guided by Rob Spowage, but he said that the way was so easy we didn't need a leader! A few of our party went by coach to Edinburgh for the day. I took the train and walk-back option –about seven miles.

Interestingly, the tiny village of Tyndrum boasts two stations – an Upper and a Lower! We climbed up to the Upper station and caught the train to Oban but alighted at Bridge of Orchy station. It seemed like quite a distance by train so the walk back was started at a cracking pace! The path was well-defined and easy-going with wonderful unfolding views of the mountains. The snow on the tops and in the gullies added drama to the scene as did the winding stony river below. We met one or two people walking in the opposite direction including Paul Boniface, who was doing it the other way round! Coffee and lunch stops were welcome and allowed you to take in the grandeur and remoteness of it all. There was one point where a few of us went the wrong way Ooops ... we should have followed the path under the railway line... sorry Rob we do need a leader!! Anyway, the walk was a fitting start to our sojourn! Back at Tyndrum and there was ample time to sample the local hostelry and relax our tired limbs. It was a good first day!

Day two was wall to wall rain!! You must remember that this is Scotland in April!!

Fortunately, this was the advantage of being on a “Coach Holiday”, as we now had the option of going by coach to Loch Lomond and taking a trip by steamer on the Loch. The whole party chose this option!!!

Off we went with our cheery driver Adrian, still full of Scottish jokes and tales of Scottish history. The time passed pleasantly. A few hardy souls braved the top deck of the steamer but we stayed in the warm of the lower deck. The banks of the Loch were barely visible in through the grey rain and sadly the wonderful views were shrouded in mist. Then we were taken to a very touristy shopping mall full of outlet stores – shopping was the last thing we had gone to Scotland for but Hey-Ho perhaps we will spend some money?? The other option was to visit to an aquarium.

Time was rushing by. We had already had two days of our holiday! By Wednesday the rain had stopped and the forecast was for it to be dry and a bit brighter. This was the day to tackle something more serious and ten of our party (Phil, Alan Vicky, Diane, Jim, Ann, Maggie, Steve, John and Graham) successfully climbed Beinn Odhar. Well done! This was a great feat.

The "B party" opted for a circular walk from the hotel again led by Robert. This took us up through a forest and over a small pass. We descended onto a beautiful valley with no visible habitation, just mountain views to our left and right. Wow ! it was perfect.

The sun shone a little and we had our coffee stop here – we all agreed it was a memorable spot. We continued along the valley then turned right and made our way round the hillside descending to an area of bare grey ground. The land was scarred by the remains of lead mining and a notice told the story of how the ore was crushed and washed on site and the grey powder carried by beasts to Loch Lomond and smelted. Finally, the metal was taken to Glasgow – a long hard journey but lucrative! We still hadn't had lunch, but we took advantage of the benches on the lower railway station to eat. Here Jenny Edwards nearly jumped on the train thinking that it was bound for Oban, when really this one was going to Fort William --- a narrow escape!

Well, this was a shorter walk than the one on Monday, but much appreciated by all. Thanks Robert for guiding us!

I think Graham and I are hooked and it was all very enjoyable and such good value.

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I'll Take the High Road **Jim Eckersley**

This is a short description of the higher level walks undertaken by the group. Most people are quite sensible and keep to the low level tracks, but there are always a few fanatics who have to go through the pain barrier to climb up as far as it is possible to go.

Two higher level walks were undertaken taken by the group.

The first on Monday was an attempt on Ben Lui which at 1130m is generally regarded as one of the grandest mountains in the Southern Highlands. From the hotel it was clear that there was considerable snow at higher levels. Never the less four of us set off full of optimism and in good spirits on our quest. The walk on good paths to the base of the mountain gradually revealed an unfolding panorama of snow covered mountains. On reaching the snow line it was apparent that without the necessary snow climbing gear we had no chance of reaching the summit, which was generally what we expected when we left the Hotel. We skirted round the snow line and Ben Oss came into view which with it's less severe approach and moderate snow slopes one of our party thought was a good option. However having been out voted by 3 to 1, another adventure was spotted, the entrance to a lead mine high up on a grassy slope. After this had been explored to the satisfaction of the mining engineer we set off on our return to the Tyndrum Inn. We had achieved all that we had reasonably expected. A very enjoyable walk with great company.



I must mention the excellent food we enjoyed at our hotel. It was all served at the same time with the starters offered off a trolley and orders for main course and sweet taken very smartly by an army of waiters and waitresses. It was a very slick operation and very tasty food. Well done to them. Also, to add to our enjoyment we had evening entertainment which included comedians and dancing. There was one evening when the Ramblers stole the show - at one point about a dozen of us were "Twisting the Night Away"!! Great fun and much enjoyed.

A big thank you must go to Eileen for organising such a varied, entertaining and memorable five days. **THANK YOU, Eileen.**

The second walk on Wednesday was to Beinn Odhar at 901m not quite high enough to be a Munro which is higher than 914.4m. It had been raining all day on Tuesday and at the lower elevation it was considered there were good prospects for reaching the summit. This time 10 walkers set out, perhaps the additions to the party were given confidence by the fact that the 4 walkers on Monday had actually returned and were full of tales of daring do. The climb up from the hotel is continuous and quite severe on a ramblers scale of walking, rain scudded across the landscape with quite severe gusty winds and low temperatures. Never the less the whole party reached the summit in good order and we were rewarded with magnificent views of the snow covered higher peaks of the Southern Highlands.



Beinn Odhar is not classed as an official Munro, but for the sense of achievement of the whole group on reaching the summit, it is and always will be, a Munro in my book. Nice memories of a great walk. On the way down we bagged a Corbett, Meall Buidhe then on down to the West Highland Way and to the Tyndrum Inn where some took the opportunity for refreshment, others perhaps a little tired but happy with a job well done, returned to the Hotel.

Hong Kong to Singapore: A Cruise of Different Perspectives

Robert and Judith Spowage

For our winter holiday this year we chose South East Asia as our destination via a Ramblers' Holiday Cruise and Walk holiday. Our ship being the Balmoral.

Our bit was part of a "Far East Explorer" cruise. We started out from Hong Kong and visited Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore. Each port of call offered an opportunity to explore the character of the country as well as making comparisons between them. However one thing was consistent; temperatures of 30+ - 40 °C and very high humidity 80% +.

Our first port of call was Hong Kong. It is major financial and shipping state and has a population of some 7.1 million occupants, mostly Chinese. It consists of two Islands (Hong Kong and Lantau Islands) and a large patch on the mainland, known as the New Territories.

The individuality of the population has led to tensions between China and HK with a sit-in recently, opposing the way in which China selected new leaders. However there is a strong

tourist market with a wide range of visitors and many tourist friendly locations. On our visit to Hong Kong Island we viewed the island through low cloud. All we could see were the tips of skyscraper building pushing through the cloud. A tour of Aberdeen Harbour followed in a Sampan boat. Finally we walked through the China Town observing the wide range of exotic foodstuffs on sale.

We spent five days in Vietnam calling in at three ports: Chan May, Dha Trang and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). With a population of 93.5 million it is the largest of the South East Asia countries and is a Communist State, in name, but over the years it has liberalised it's approach to ensure the development of the Country by engaging with outside investors.

Buddhism is the largest religion and its impact and influence shows in many aspects of the country.

Vietnam's long history culminated in the 19th Century where France sought to make it part of their empire. Whilst in Hoi An a 17th Century Japanese wooden bridge was found in the old city along with a collection of houses of that era. Whilst driving through Da Nang the remains of helicopter hangers left over from the American war in 1963 to 1974 were visible from the road.

Next day we travelled to Hue (the old capital of Vietnam). We started out with a visit to the Imperial Citadel which housed a seat of government and royal apartments making up the Purple Forbidden City. This was followed by a journey up the Perfume River on a "Dragon Boat". We were able to see how the local population brought building materials down river on boats that were literally loaded to the gunwales. We left the boat to visit Cam Ke Mount where the Tomb of Minh Bang is situated, consisting of mix of Palaces, Temples and Pavilions making a large complex park.

The Balomoral then sailed up the Saigon river for about 25 miles to Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon): population 7.6 million people and 2 million motorbikes all of which appear to be on the roads together. The city reflects its French history, particularly in the centre. Their influence was seen in Saigon in terms of the Cathedral and Post Office. A short distance from the Cathedral it was possible to see the CIA residential building, made famous for it being the place where the last helicopter collecting Americans left Saigon.

We visited the Cu Chi Tunnels where the Viet Cong hid from the American Army. It consisted of 200 Km of tunnels and housed up to 2000 combatants close by and under the nearby American base. The visit brought to life what had been a historical event some 40 years ago.

Ironically the most favoured currency is the American Dollar!

The next stop; Sihanoukville, Cambodia: a society that was decimated, in the 1970s, by the Khmer Rouge under the control of Pol Pot, a dogmatic Marxist. Over 1.7 people were killed to create a peasant society.

As a result it is a young society with nearly 90% of the population being under the age of 55. Only Vietnam with 85% of this age range is close.

Our trip down one of the local rivers in a typical river boat enabled us to observe a range of fishing techniques and to visit local fishing village.

Then to Thailand which is a totally different animal. It has a population of 68 million people. Cultural influences are largely derived from India with a mix of Buddhist and Hindu religions. Laem Chabang was our first stop: a very large container port. Across from our berth a chemical processing plant was being built. This along with a substantial area filled with cars ready for export and a flourishing tourism industry indicated that Thailand was becoming a prosperous country.

We visited three tourist places: The Floating Market (it did not float), "the Sanctuary of Truth" and the Botanical Gardens (how does a racing car museum fit in?). They were all disappointing, each being devices to take money from the tourist pockets without having much merit.

On to Singapore; surely the bread basket of South East Asia. Its wealth was obvious with the prestigious high rise buildings in the state centre. e.g. the Marina Sands Hotel with 2500 rooms in three towers topped by a Sky Park with a 340 metres 'infinity' pool. Yet the various ethnic quarters showed a more intimate life, with older housing and small local shops. Still hot and humid though.

Finally a long flight back to the UK.

