Southam and District Group
News and Views
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Warwickshire Area Ramblers AGM

It is Southam Ramblers' turn to host the area AGM this year, at Long Itchington Community Hall.

The Annual General Meeting is from 10.30 a.m. on Saturday 8th February.

This is followed by guest speakers:

Tom Heap, of BBC Countryfile

Lucy Robinson, Chair of Ramblers Trustees

Hot and cold drinks are provided, as well as lunch at 12.30 p.m.

There will be a choice of local walks leaving after lunch, at about 1.30 p.m.

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered to help at this event. This is being co-ordinated by Richard Clarke, who has sent out information to the volunteers about their roles, so if you want to attend and are not listed, please contact him.

Ann Forgan

Southam Ramblers
Celebrating 40 years 1985-2025

The lead up to the establishment of Southam Ramblers was at a public meeting at the Welfare Hut in Craven Lane, on the 21st May 1985. Thirty two people attended and the proposal to set up a branch of the Ramblers Association, as it was then, based in Southam, was approved by all. A steering committee was formed, with Southam residents Denis and Hazel Montgomery and Michael Pritchett, as well as Mary van Garderen, of Napton. Denis went on to serve on the committee for 18 years. 1985 was also the Golden Jubilee of the national Ramblers Association, since it was formed on January 1st, 1935, with 1,200 members, based on another national group formed in 1931.

The inaugural meeting of the Southam Steering Committee was held a week later. The initial walks programme was four walks, all on Sundays. Car sharing was, from the start, from Wood Street Car Park, in Southam. Denis Montgomery and Mike Pritchett led the first walk of the newly formed group. The Southam and District Group, of the Ramblers Association, held its first Annual General Meeting, led by a steering group, less than six months later, on 12 November 1985. The main aim was to elect a committee and draw up a constitution in line with national guidelines. A document, presumed to be from 1985, lists eighteen members. Only nine of these lived in Southam. Others were from Harbury, Napton, Fenny Compton, and Upton-upon-Severn. At the first Southam and District Group committee meeting on 28 November 1985, Harry Green was unanimously voted Chairman.

The rest, as they say, is history. We have tried to capture some of this history, in the photographs of Southam Ramblers walks and activities over the years, attached to the electronic version of this Newsletter, on a display on posters at the Area AGM and on the Southam Ramblers website. Ann Forgan
History research by Richard Clarke.

Chairman's Report
Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who has offered support at the Area AGM, which we are hosting. It is good to see such a positive response.
Otherwise, I have picked out some key issues, which we have discussed at committee and at our AGM, which were also discussed at the recent Area Quarterly Meeting.
Discussions on Walk Leader guidance at the Area Quarterly Meeting
Concerns have been expressed by some groups to Area Group about the new requirement for Walk Leaders to do on-line training for at least 2.5 hours. Some groups already struggle to recruit enough Walk Leaders and this requirement is putting some people off. These groups want the Area Group to put pressure on Central Council as to whether this needs to be compulsory or just encouraged. It has been decided that Area Group should write to Central Office and possibly submit a motion for the next General Council on this issue.
First Aid training
Some people at the area meeting had attended national Zoom sessions about First Aid trainings and the contents of first aid kits. They recommended outdoor first aid courses as being more relevant to us than the standard Red Cross, or St John's Ambulance, courses. On page two, I have listed places to access courses on-line. Contact a committee member if you are interested in a tutor led course. Gordon Smith

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Webmaster's Report

Walk Master

The Walk Manager software continues to work well, and we can publish our walks on the Ramblers' site and on our own Southam Ramblers' site. The Ramblers nationally have improved the awareness of walks in any area and, if you search Find a Walk, a good selection of walks will be suggested. We have had visitors join our walks who have seen the walk advertised on the national site. It is also possible to publish a cancellation, or a change notice, easily.

Course about our Website

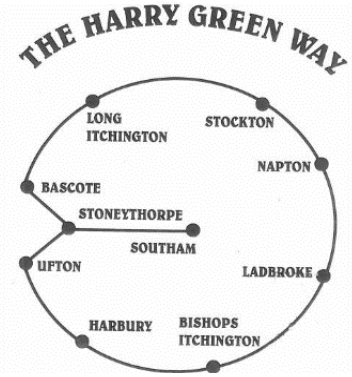
At the AGM last year, it was agreed that I would run a hands-on awareness course to give members information about using our website and some training in locating the many walks we have done, and how to plot your own walk on OS Maps within the website. The number of volunteers for the course was low and it was agreed that we would suggest a different venue and time for the meeting, as there appear to still be some members who would like to make better use of the website. Eric Forgan

Editor's note

People who do not want their photograph published here, on the website, or on posters, should ensure that they stay behind the lens, or inform the walk leader. The welcome letter now includes a note on this for new walkers.

The Christmas Dinner and quiz at the Bowling Green, on 17 December 2024, was a successful event, attended by thirty-four people. Thanks go to Richard Clarke for organising it. Ann Forgan

Friends of the Harry Green Way



The Harry Green Way is a long-distance path around Southam, devised by Harry Green, a former chairman of Southam Ramblers, in 1988. Southam Ramblers members ensure that it is cleared and waymarked. Will anyone who walks any section of the Harry Green Way please advise Eric Forgan at southamramblers@gmail.com of any problems with the condition of the stiles, signage, or the routing of the path.

Thanks go to the Friends of the Harry Green Way for keeping the route clear last year. The weather meant an excessive amount of growth in the hedgerows, making some of the paths quite difficult. The new signs have been useful where a traditional sign cannot be fixed.

HS2 is having a major effect on the route from Ladbroke Hill down to Ladbroke. There is a well signposted diversion, but it does add about half a mile to the walk.

It is many years since Southam Ramblers did the whole walk as a group and I propose that we plan to do the walk in four parts, either over two weekends, or on the alternative Wednesdays to our normal walks, sometime in the spring or early summer. Eric Forgan

Contacts for First Aid Courses for Ramblers

For Ramblers guidance on a first aid kit https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/walking-first-aid-kit-what-do-i-need-bring

Ramblers' volunteers have access to the Preventing and Managing Incidents e-Learning course. The course covers the most common incidents that happen on our walks, gives an opportunity to hear some real-life examples from our walk leaders and provides some practical tips.
The course intro video is at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_yr554HSC0
To access the course, login to the Training Library:
https://www.ramblers.org.uk/support-us/online-training

Some groups had organised training with Aid Training and Operations Ltd or with Madeleys First Aid Plus https://www.madeleysfirstaidplus.co.uk/

The area may be interested in a course on a Saturday, somewhere local to the attendees, or easily accessible by public transport, and will follow this up. Gordon Smith

The elected committee members for 2024-2025 are:

Chairman	Gordon Smith
Secretary	Richard Clarke
Treasurer	Jeff Round
Footpath Secretary	John Maughan
Membership Secretary	Kath Chapman
Wednesday Walks	Nigel Chapman
Summer Strollers	Richard Clarke
Newsletter	Ann Forgan
Webmaster	Eric Forgan
Publicity	Richard Clarke, Di Weaver (non-committee)

Treasurers' Report
In financial year 2023-24 we received a Group Allowance of £450 from Warwickshire Area and Central Office. We had no additional income, apart from the reimbursement of £111, which we had paid on behalf of the Area for a room booking.

In total, we spent £336.37 so we have £113.63 to add to our credit balance. We therefore had a credit balance of £254.09 to carry forward to financial year 2024-25. Therefore, our accounts are healthy. For financial year 2024-25 our Group Allowance is £370. The reason for the reduction in our Group Allowance was that additional funds were needed in 2023-4 to set the finances on an even keel.

The Unity Bank Account is working well, with an increased number of people authorised to make payments, Jeff, Nigel, Gordon, Eric and Richard. Members should continue to claim for necessary expenses, for example carrying out pre-walks, as the funds are there for this type of purpose.

Jeff Round, figures as at December 2024

Key Dates for your diary 2025

The next Southam Ramblers AGM will provisionally take place on Thursday 6th November 2025, at The Nelson Club at Stockton.

Warwickshire Area Quarterly Meetings: "
1 March 2025,
7 June 2025,
6 September 2025, at Meriden.
Contact Richard Clarke if you wish to attend.

The Wednesday Walks
As usual we have found just about enough walks leaders to keep the programme going. We rarely need to fill gaps urgently, though sometimes there are only a few walks booked on the programme. It would be good to see a few more leaders come forward who have not led walks before. There are a large number of local walks on the website, created by Eric Forgan, which makes it easier for volunteers to choose a destination. There are local ones, as well as some which are much further away, which gives a good variety to the programme. Most walks are around 4 to 5 miles in length, though some of the group would like to walk further, whilst others would prefer 3 to 4 miles. Our thanks to Richard Clarke for organizing the Summer Strollers programme.
Di Weaver advised at the AGM that, whilst she is standing down as a walk leader, if anyone decides to lead a walk from Flecknoe in future, they should advise her, so that she can obtain a reduced charge for parking at the village hall. Di was thanked for the many walks she has led and her other various contributions to the group over the years.



Wednesday Walks Programme

Date	Leader	Location	Distance in miles	Tel No	Email
5 February	Eric Forgan	Long Itchington	5	07775 860693	eric@4gan.com
19 February	Di Weaver	Sawbridge	4.5	01788 890383	dianaweaver@btinternet.com
5 March	Jeff Round	Harbury	4.5	077997771778	Jiround77@gmail.com
19 March	Richard Clarke	To be arranged		07969960968	richvib@hotmail.co.uk
14 May	Don Bates	Bluebell Walk Badby	4.5	01926 812584	debates@talktalk.net

Wednesday walks usually meet at an agreed start point at 10.00 a.m., with lifts available from Wood Street Car Park at 9.30 a.m. Only guide/assistance dogs are allowed.



For booking a walk slot in the programme nigelchapman@hotmail.co.uk

Summer Strollers Programme on alternate Thursdays to the Wednesday Walks
Last year was a disappointing year for the Summer Strollers. If we count the walk where six of us turned up, but it was too wet to walk, the average attendance was around five people. This is around half of last year's average. I emailed all the Strollers leaders asking for ideas on where we go from here. No-one said the programme should be scrapped, but most thought that we cannot blame the turnout entirely on the poor weather. Only one person wanted to keep the programme the same for next year, and most said we needed to review it. One person wanted to shorten the Summer Strollers programme but include 2-3 longer walks in the programme at weekends, not necessarily from Southam, intended to appeal to new people of working age and walkers from other groups. My proposal is to shorten the programme by omitting the two least popular walks, Southam Holt and the Stoneythorpe Estate. We should also include the pub stop at the end, as an optional attraction, on all of the posters and other publicity, as Bob McAulley suggested.

Because the walks are mostly a bit fast to be classed as strolls, I am proposing to rebrand them as 'Paths and Pub' walks, with the sub-heading 'Guided walks led by a member of Southam Ramblers'. I will emphasise that these walks are for everyone, Ramblers members and non-members alike. If you have not tried them, or have not joined in one recently, you would be most welcome. **The start date of Paths and Pubs is Thursday 22 May.**
All start and finish at Wood Street Car Park, with the start at 7, or 6.30 (Blue Lias).
Richard Clarke

Publicity
Derek Price has started a Southam Ramblers Facebook page There are only twenty-one people on it at present, but they include a few names I do not know, so it may be reaching out to some people outside of our group. Derek has posted details of all our walks and Annie Lane uploaded photos from the Braunston walk, some of which she also sent to Eric for the website.

I have continued to post details of walks on Southam News and Views. Di Weaver has had articles published from time to time in the District Advertiser. Most people evidently get their information about our walks, either from the emails sent round by Kath beforehand, or from our website or the Ramblers website.
Richard Clarke

West Midlands Walking Trail and proposed Riverside Walks
Nothing has been heard about the proposed trail since the new West Midlands Mayor was elected. Andy Street's Walking and Cycling Commissioner stepped down from that role in May – Richard Parker has said he would replace him but does not appear to have done so yet.

The Labour government's manifesto said they would create nine new riverside walks around the country, but it is not known whether that includes the River Avon. Michael Bird, area Footpath and Countryside Secretary and Access Officer, has sent all the documentation he has about lack of access to the River Avon between Stratford and Warwick to Kate Conto at Central Office, in case the upper Avon is one of the rivers. Gordon Smith

Membership Report
There are currently eighty-one members, two members have recently resigned and one membership has lapsed. There are five recent new members, so on the whole membership is stable. About 50% of the membership regularly walk with the group. Others join for other reasons, for example, access to walks in other areas. The portal continues to be updated.

Risk Assessment Update
Some while ago I contacted the national site for any update on risk assessments and registers for walks. The website now has risk walk descriptors for each level of walk. I received a reply with comprehensive information, which was discussed at committee.

Important points to note
As a walk leader, as you know, you need to assess and mitigate risks on your walks. However, the way that you do this is now more flexible and is proportionate to the type of walk you are leading.

From now on, you no longer need to complete a new risk assessment form for each walk and store it for three years. Rather than starting from scratch and doing a new written risk assessment for every walk, there are example risk assessments according to walk difficulty to help you get started. These are graded-well-being or easy, leisurely or moderate, and strenuous or technical. Then, all you need to do is think about any additional risks that are specific to your walk and your route. It is good practice to write down the risks and mitigations but it is not mandatory, and you do not need to fill in a form. On the day of the walk itself, you should let your walkers know of those risks and mitigations, which you can do in your welcome briefing. I have sent an email, with the link to the example risk assessments, to all our regular walk leaders.

Registers Update
We agreed to continue to take a register at the start of the walk, also to ask walkers to carry In Case of Emergency information. Walkers should be reminded about these ICE cards and given a supply if needed. Kath Chapman



Footpaths Report
The Harbury to Lighthorne Heath path, SM192 over the M40, should include a Three metre path through to the new housing estate. This is the path that Eric and Ann could not get through early last year.
Dallas Burston have made an application for a football training facility and a one hundred bed accommodation block. Path SM24 runs parallel to the site.
A challenge to the proposed diversion of SM 37, opposite the Kings Head pub, has been made by Nigel Rock, a Lib Dem councillor. Bridge Nursery, the applicant, insists on a full round-the-field diversion. Councillor Rock and we argue that a simple dog leg should be enough. I repeated our attempts to achieve this. So, we wish him the best of luck with this.
SM49 from the church at Napton has been blocked by a resident in a new development. This has been reported to Stratford council. However, this path is little used, as there is a parallel path SM 50b, with better access to the canal.
A member of the public has sent a detailed complaint to the Council about the bridleway SM 32 from Galanos House to Southam Holt, with photographs. It was agreed that this was a longstanding problem, the subject of several complaints logged by Southam Ramblers, over a number of years.
There has been a new application for a Solar Farm on land east and west of the Fosse Way, near Morton Morrell. No public rights of way are involved.

The Grand Union Canal Transfer is a new scheme to move water from the Midlands to the south-east, via the canal, in a combination of new pipelines, water treatment plants and the canal. It avoids the Warwickshire area, by going from Atherstone to Coventry, then south on the Oxford Canal, through Braunston to Leighton Buzzard. There could be diversions to avoid any towpath work.
John Maughan

