

SUTTON AND WANDLE VALLEY RAMBLERS

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025

Chair's Introduction (Barbara Pitts)

Welcome to our 31st AGM. The Committee presents this report for the year ending 30 September 2025. It was a special year for our Group as it celebrated its 30th anniversary. We marked the occasion with numerous celebratory activities. In addition to carrying out our usual, busy programme, including 230 walks, two successful coach trips, walking weekends away, regular pub evenings, and a wide variety of social activities, we also marked our 30 years by arranging a series of special walks around the borough, totally 30 miles in total. We followed this by a wonderful "bring and share" party which was thoroughly enjoyed by all members and was commemorated in an article in Southeast Walker, complete with a photograph of some of our founding members and our wonderful cakes! We also received a special, congratulatory message from Jack Cornish, the Director for England from Ramblers HQ, in which he acknowledged that Groups and their members are the lifeblood of the Ramblers. It is a tribute to the Group that so many of our founding members remain active and very supportive within it today.

This has been my second year as Chair, and it has been a year where we have faced numerous challenges as well as successes. The Group continues to receive enormous support from committee members, walk leaders, and other volunteers. Committee members report on their own areas of responsibility further down in this report, so I will limit my remarks here. But suffice it to say that much work goes on behind the scenes in support of the Group. Two of our committee members are stepping down at this AGM. I want to say a huge thank you to Peter Bruce (Webmaster) and Colin Hawes (Treasurer) who have contributed significantly to the Group. Peter has served seven years as Webmaster and has done a truly enormous amount of work looking after our website. Colin has kept a close eye on our finances and our accounts. I must extend my thanks to ALL our committee members and volunteers who do so much on behalf of the Group.

As ever (and common amongst many Groups) we face a challenge in recruiting new walk leaders. We have a team of wonderful, dedicated leaders, but are always on the lookout for more. An effort earlier in the year to recruit new leaders from recently joined new members met with no success. But running consecutively with our efforts, Ramblers UK have also introduced new guidelines for qualifying as a Ramblers walk leader. There are two, new, online training modules on their main website. And if members undertake these courses, plus reading a very short, straightforward Walk Leaders Handbook, you qualify as a walk leader! A stated aim of the modules is to provide potential new walk leaders with guidance and reassurance on what is involved. And, of course, Sutton and Wandle Valley's existing walk leaders remain at hand if a member wanted to take it further and try their hand at leading. I encourage members to have a look. The training modules are now a pre-requisite to becoming a leader.

This year we also took the difficult decision to cease production of our printed programme, and to switch to putting all our walks directly on to Walks Manager, rather than using Sutton and Wandle Valley's own, bespoke system. We have communicated extensively on this. I know the printed programme was immensely popular. This was not a decision we took lightly, and it was a long time coming. But the disadvantages started to outweigh the advantages. It was expensive to produce (it was professionally printed and then posted to many members), and it was frequently out of date very soon after it was issued. But the real

catalyst for its demise is that once we lose Peter as our webmaster, none of us have the skills to continue to produce it, and no new webmaster has come forward to pick up the baton! We are now in the first month (November) of totally switching to Walks Manager to manage our walks. We accept this will bring teething problems but are confident we can make it work. But it will bring changes around how our members access details about our walks and other activities.

Our website: <https://suttonwandleramblers.org.uk> remains a reliable source of up-to-date information on the walks. They are listed on the lefthand side of the front page of the website (Our Main Walks) and updated very regularly. These walks also appear on Ramblers UK main website and are available to all. Underneath "Our Main Walks" you will find (Other Walks). These walks are NOT currently published on the Ramblers UK main website (usually due to limited capacity around numbers, etc.) but they are available to those who look at SWVR website. And as a reminder, we also have a SWV Facebook Group that is used for sharing photographs and information between SWVR members which all members are welcome to join.

Finally, a reminder to please also carry a completed ICE card (in case of emergency) card with you on all our walks and events. Also, please note, that following a recent Walk Leaders Meeting, where the new "best practice" guidance issued in the Walk Leaders Handbook was discussed at length, it was decided that walk leaders will now take a register of names and contact details at the start of all our walks. These will not be forwarded on to anyone else, and they will be destroyed at the end of the walk. But it is important that leaders know who is on their walks and have names and contact details in case of any emergency.

Membership Report (Joya Cooke)

Our membership totalled 413 to end of September 2024 when I reported to you last year, which was almost the same as the previous year. This year appears encouraging as we had 89 new members but, we also had 74 leave us hence the overall rise of 15 making our number 428. I attended the Surrey Area Membership Secretaries' meeting in February, and we were informed there were 550+ Surrey members who were not assigned to any particular group. A fellow member did compile a list in July which showed 8 Surrey area groups with rising numbers and the other 8 had falling membership. We were in the rising numbers section. The most alarming item was that the number with no attachment to a group had increased to nearly 900.

I report to the committee every month, outlining the movement in membership. I was aware that many leave within a year and some after only 2 or 3 months. I set about examining these figures further. To explain this, in the year 1/10/2023 to 30/9/2024 we had 62 NEW members, not rejoining or transfers into SWVR. However now a year on 35 i.e. 56% of those members have left us. As soon as someone resigns or their membership lapses their details disappear. Hence, we cannot ask them why they left us.

We are being urged by Head Office to get our members to update their records with regards to inserting their email addresses and ticking the box to allow contact by email. I've been informed we should NOT be emailing members unless this is completed. So, this has led to my current mission. I am very aware that the email address column for a lot of our members is empty. However, I felt certain some were on our local updates email list. I obtained a copy of this and set about trying to match up the records. This has revealed a large number of members for whom we have an email address at Group level, but HO don't have it. An even

larger number of emails are going out to persons who are no longer members. This is not surprising as I mentioned earlier, the record disappears from view immediately someone leaves and hence it's sometimes awkward to identify which email address to delete. I have written to all these unidentified email addresses and had some replies. For those who state that they are in another group and just want to know what's going on with SWVR I've suggested they become affiliated to us then we are able to email them. I would urge you all to go on to the Ramblers website and log in to your account and check your email address is correct and contact email is ticked. I do not have access to your accounts so this is something you have to do direct with HO if you can't log in to see the content. You can contact HO by email to ramblers@ramblers.zendesk.com or telephone 020 3961 3232 and do state your membership number. I have not completed this task yet so some of you may still get an email from me. All our members with no apparent email address have been contacted by post.

Liaison (Jenny Kearney)

326 subscribers currently receive the Mailchimp Update. This was a useful communication tool whilst the printed programme was relevant. I continue to update our Mailchimp platform with information received from the Membership Secretary.

I will now be collating and editing our Social Events pages on the SWVR Website.

Social Activities (Jackie Deeks)

It has been a busy year as my first year as Social Secretary as we have been celebrating our 30th Anniversary.

We started the year with our usual lunch at the Rubbing House which was well attended and enjoyed by all those who went.

We had two coach trips this year, in April to Winchester and September to Deal, both were fully booked by SWV Ramblers and a big thanks to our walk leaders (Peter R, Roger, Juliet, John G and Mike C).

Waterstones and Dave's Rave are continuing to be very popular, although we are on our 3rd pub this year but the present one at the Old Bank seems a good choice.

Other social events were organised including trips to London and Juliet arranged a couple of short walking breaks in Folkestone and Weymouth.

The highlight of the year was celebrating our 30th Anniversary where Peter R devised 3 walks of 10 miles each round the Surrey area over consecutive days. The walks were very popular and walk numbers over the three days totalled more than 90. Three members completed the whole 30 miles. We finished with a drink or a meal at the California pub in Belmont where the last walk ended.

Marian organised a bring and share party at St Albans Hall which was enjoyed by the 50 attendees with games and a sing song.

We also managed to get a photo and report in the South East Walker.

Walks Programme (Liz Tadd)

This year we successfully executed 230 walks (between 4 and 5 a week) very similar to the 226 last year. In addition, there were social visits to places of interest including tours of two Guild Halls (Cutlers and Goldsmiths) and three museums (Sir John Soane's Museum, Cinema Museum and the Peek Frean's Museum – 2 visits) These proved very popular with more than 20 members on some of the visits. These numbers are not included in the walks analysis below.

The total length of the walks was 1,467 miles which was up slightly from 1,439 miles last year. In total 14,649 miles were walked compared with 13,973 in 2023/24. The average attendance was 10.57, up from 9.79 last year and 9.57 in 2022/23.

The table below analyses the walks by day of the week and by distance walked. The numbers in brackets are the comparable figures for last year (where available). The table excludes cancelled walks, the coach trips and social events. The number of walks by day of the week is very similar to last year but, on average, walks have become shorter. There were more medium length walks (5-8 miles) and fewer long walks (over 8 miles) over the last year than previously. We ran 70 walks on Saturdays this year (very similar to last year) and, when more than one walk was offered, it usually gave a choice between a short walk and a long walk.

Analysis of the walks that were executed

	Number of walks by distance				Average number of walkers	Average length (miles)	Total miles walked
	<5 miles	5 but <8 miles	8+ miles	Total			
Monday	0	0	0	0 (1)	0.00 (9.00)	0.00 (7.50)	0
Tuesday	2	12	20	34 (37)	7.91 (7.30)	7.51 (7.29)	2,022
Wednesday	7	26	1	34 (36)	10.53 (9.56)	5.43 (5.10)	1,945
Thursday	8	25	3	36 (30)	13.33 (12.07)	5.68 (5.74)	2,725
Friday	8	39	4	51 (45)	10.94 (10.44)	5.77 (6.56)	3,220
Saturday	18	29	23	70 (71)	10.33 (9.70)	6.30 (6.82)	4,554
Sunday	5	0	0	5 (6)	8.80 (11.50)	4.17 (4.77)	184
Total	48 (47)	131 (112)	51 (67)	230 (226)	10.57 (9.79)	6.02 (6.31)	14,649

My thanks to all the walk leaders who have led walks this year and enabled us to run an interesting programme. And my thanks to Peter Bruce for managing the walks submissions so effectively and diligently over so many years. As we move to Walks Manager, I have been encouraged to see many leaders embracing the change and submitting walks on the new system. Help is available to anyone who needs it.

The change to Walks Manager means the end of the printed programme. However, over the last year, a higher than usual number of walks were cancelled or re-arranged (more than 40), often at short notice due to ill-health or the extreme summer/winter weather. In these circumstances, our printed programme could no longer be relied on for accurate information.

Treasurer's Report (Colin Hawes)

The Treasurer's Report and Accounts have been published separately. The Group's finances are in good order. The accounts have been independently audited. My thanks to Peter Rogers.

Webmaster's Report (Peter Bruce)

Over the past year, I have:

- Continued to maintain the SWVR website
- Supported the production of the printed programme (spreadsheet of walks supplied to Liz after walk submissions close)
- Published walks and updates on the web using the Ramblers System "Walks Manager". Also maintaining a page on our website with updates to our printed programme (normally updated a couple of hours after the weekly update email has been issued).
- Provided advice to committee members and walk leaders on the change from using our own bespoke submissions system to all walks being submitted via Walks Manager
- In preparation for the loss of the printed programme, updated the front page of the website so that all walks and social events can be viewed easily

Footpaths (Sheelagh Donovan)

This is my first year as Footpaths Officer. I had a Teams call with the Merton contact responsible for footpaths to get an understanding of local issues. None have been reported in the past 12 months.

The Sutton contact is based within Kingston Council but he has not responded to several introductory emails I have sent to him. No footpath issues have been reported.

I have represented Surrey and Wandle Valley at one of the two Surrey Footpath Secretaries meetings.

Outreach Activities

The Group hosted its own stand at the annual Carshalton ECO Fair which is held every August Bank Holiday weekend. It was set-up, and manned throughout the day, by committee members and volunteers from the Group. And we received a visit from the local MP! Our aim is to publicise the existence and activities of the Group, and to promote the overall benefits of group walking. We produce a pamphlet of our own activities, but we also hand out walking literature from other sources too. We displayed a wonderful and varied selection of photographs (taken by Alison) showing where our walks lead us. These act as a magnet, drawing people in to look at our stall. We never really know whether hosting the stall leads to increased membership or not. But certainly, people stop by, have a chat, and are interested, and some may be our future members!

We also led a well-attended walk for London Blind Ramblers in the autumn. Many of our members turned up to provide support and act as guides for fellow walkers who are blind or partially sighted. Everyone enjoyed the occasion. It allowed our fellow walkers from London Blind Ramblers to walk in an area they were not familiar with (and much enjoyed) and it also allowed our members to meet new people and make new friends. These joint ventures also feed into the Ramblers over-arching aims of inclusivity and promoting walking for everyone.

Finally, at our AGM this year (23 November) we will be showing a short documentary film “Wandle: River At Risk”. The River Wandle is a rare chalk stream that flows through our local area and our Group is named after it. The film has been produced by the local community, including presenter and local MP, Bobby Dean. Over the years many of our members will have enjoyed walks along its banks. But in recent years the river has suffered pollution and serious decline. The film tells the story of efforts being made to restore it.

4 November 2025