

Welcome to another bumper newsletter

A Message from our new Chair



Hi everyone, thanks for all your confidence in me as the new group chair. For those that haven't met me, here's some background. I have loved going for walks with my mum since I was young but I started walking seriously when I lived in Bolivia, straight into multi day hikes in the Andes, jungle and desert. I discovered Ramblers after I moved back to England. I went to Richmond for a work trip and was looking for walks in the area and came across Richmondshire Ramblers without realising they were part of a larger organisation. I returned home to Hertfordshire and immediately joined my local young Ramblers group, Stag Walkers. I led my first walks with the group and really enjoyed it. On moving to Devon just over two years ago, I was keen to join a local group and immediately felt welcome at NDR and fell in love with the places I was able to walk in. I have been leading walks for the group for about 6 months now and have lots planned for the upcoming programme. Outside of walking I enjoy cooking, playing board games, playing cricket and kickboxing. If you have any thoughts on how you would like to see the group develop then please get in touch.

Gemma

Doone Valley Walking Weekend

On a sunny weekend in September, Janice, Maggi, Barbara and Gemma led 3 walks from Malmsmead in conjunction with the National Trust, for a weekend of celebrating and publicising walking in the Doone Valley. Over 40 people came on the walks, with several people walking on both days, and a good number of members of the public who said they enjoyed the walks very much and intended joining the group. The National Trust want to repeat this event next year, and the committee has agreed in principle to be involved again.

And in October, Anne and Richard lead 2 lovely walks from Exford, in celebration of the 70th Anniversary of Exmoor National Park. Over the 2 weekends, we experienced all seasons and weathers apart from snow! We also had some glorious Autumn colour views over Exmoor, including sightings of deer and Exmoor ponies.



Meet our new Secretary

Hi, many of you already know me as I have been on the Committee for 2 years as the Media and Publicity Officer. So I am now attempting to take over from Janice as Secretary (which is no mean feat!).



I originally joined the Ramblers with my husband when we first retired, but we then found that we had too much to do, so didn't continue our membership. It was not until after he died in 2021 that I realised that I needed to get out and about and meet new people. So the Ramblers was the perfect answer for me, and I would like to thank Edna for encouraging me to come along for my first walk. Since then, I have absolutely loved being a Rambler, from enjoying all the challenges of long walks, muddy paths and unpredictable weather to all the new friends I have made and the opportunity to go on walking holidays with them. This is why I needed the group to continue its work and why I agreed to step into Janice's shoes - well not literally!

I am grateful to Janice for helping me with the handover and I'm sure that with the Committee's help, I will be able to cope with the demands of the job.

Janet

AGM

The 47th AGM for North Devon Ramblers took place on 23rd November 2024 at Bishop's Nympton's Parish Hall, with 42 members in attendance. Due to Storm Bert raging through the country, we had already cancelled the morning walks, and given the wind and heavy rain lashing on the hall windows, everyone was very grateful not to be out walking in it! There was plenty of tea and coffee, and the amount and range of cakes was amazing! Many thanks to all the cake bakers, and to Bridget, Shirley, Margaret, Mel and others for their sterling work sorting the drinks, and clearing up afterwards.

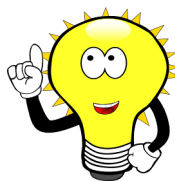
AGM IDEAS TABLES

For the last few years, we have had "Ideas Tables" at the AGM, asking members to comment on different ideas, policies, and procedures. We are very grateful to all those who write comments, as we use this feedback to help with decision making at committee meetings. Our next meeting is on 20th January 2025, 7pm at the Castle Centre in Barnstaple. Why not come along and help the committee discuss and decide? All welcome. Below are some of the ideas that we presented, with the comments members made. If you have thoughts or comments you would like to make, then please let one of the committee members know.

Social Activities

Different Paced Walks

Appeal for Walk Leaders



AGM Topic - Social Activities

Do you enjoy getting involved with group social activities?

Would you like more of the same?

Can you think of different activities that the group could try?

Have a look at the activities listed below and give them a tick if you would like them repeated. The more ticks, the more likely they are to happen again! And please add your thoughts or comments accordingly. (and politely please!)

- **Group lunch** (next one 9th March – details to follow) – 9 ticks
- **Skittles** (next one 24th January – details to follow) – 10 ticks
- **Day trip to Lundy** – 14 ticks
- **Treasure Hunt** – 11 ticks
- **And We have a new idea to try! Games night at a pub, with or without food** - 5 ticks

Do you have an idea for something else?

Feedback

- Walk involving Exmoor coaster (bus ride) there and walking back (could take bus to Lynmouth & join coaster there)
- Evening walks (short) ending at a pub
- Evening walks (4 miles) Summer starting 6pm – 6.30pm



Treasure Hunt

We had a chilly, but very sunny morning for the Treasure Hunt around Barnstaple a couple of weeks ago. Everyone who took part said they really enjoyed it, and discovered many new things about Barnstaple, that they either didn't know, or had not noticed before. Congratulations to the winning team comprising Anne, Richard and Jenny. The prize was not gold coins, but there was plenty of chocolate to go around! After the hunt, most people stayed for coffee and/or lunch, and we had a lovely sociable time.

Grateful thanks to Mike and Joan for supplying the quiz, and to Lynne and Teresa for their preparation and organisation.

AGM Topic - Appeal for Walk Leaders

At the AGM we also asked what might put members off becoming a walk leader. These were the comments:-

Feedback

- Needing Guidance on Routes & Training
- Maybe a buddy/mentor to help
- A Qualification? Training?
- Confidence needed to plan & deliver walks for members
- Map reading course including use of Ordnance Survey and other mapping Apps?
- Possible database of walks in area available for leaders who are unsure of where to lead a walk. Lots of us have maps, leaflets etc of walks with routes marked out & I know a lot has been 'passed on' by former members. Where is all this information which could be used?



Fortunately, we can answer some of the above comments here:-

- All new walk leaders have to complete some (fairly straightforward) online training, through Ramblers, - ask Sarah to get signed up and sorted.
- Our group offers an informal buddy system for walk leading, and we have tried to promote this in newsletters, conversations etc for the last few years. Most of the walk leaders are very willing to talk through walk leading, help plot routes, recce walks and give support on the day. Just ask any of the walk leaders, or ask Sarah to suggest someone if you are not sure who to ask.
- Our group has offered some map reading training in the last few years. The first time 5 people joined in. The second time, no-one came forward.
What do you think? Would you come forward to do some map reading training? Would you be willing to pay? Would you be willing to attend some training for Navigation Apps (most likely the OS App)? Let's have a show of hands to see how much of a desire there is. Maybe come to the next committee meeting and we can discuss further.
- Sarah has a digital file of previous walks, and is happy to share this with anyone who asks for ideas of walks. And Clarice has a paper copy of "older" walks programmes, from before we started keeping digital copies. You are welcome to look at these, although some are "well-thumbed" and won't take a lot of handling!

AGM Topic - Different Paced Walks

Following an idea from members, at the recent committee meeting we discussed the possibility of having some walks designed to be walked at a brisker pace. This doesn't necessarily mean fast (no yomping here!), nor does it mean no stopping to look at the views. It's about being able to keep up a brisker pace for longer periods. We all know walkers who seem to glide up the hills, whilst others need to take their time. Sometimes the stronger walkers can get a bit frustrated waiting for long periods for the group to catch up. And at the same time the not-so-strong walkers can get frustrated at keeping the group waiting, and not having much time before the group wants to move on again. Not always, but sometimes.

We are going to start a trial of having some walks, perhaps one a month on average, to be walked at a brisker pace. These walks will be clearly marked in the walk details on Walks Manager. If the pace is not specified, then the walk will be "as usual". The brisker paced walks could be a bit longer than usual, or similar length.

Another way of offering brisker walks, would be having 2 walk leaders and 2 groups on the same walk. Possibly one walk being a bit longer than the other. Similar to how we managed 2 of the "Pilgrims" walks earlier this year. Having different paced walks could mean specifying an easier pace too. Here, walkers could be more relaxed and not have to worry about the pace at all. Walk leaders are very welcome to offer this style of walk if they prefer. Wouldn't it be great to be able to offer our members a wide range of walks? But, of course, this idea is all dependent on walk leaders wanting to offer walks with a more defined pace.

What do you think? Is this a good idea? Would you like to see some defined brisker or more relaxed pace walks offered? Do let the committee know what you think. And let them know if you think differently when we've trialled it for a few months.

And don't forget to check the walk details to see if Pace is mentioned.

Feedback:

- It is not necessarily the distance or speed, it is the walking ability of any person over difficult terrain be it tussocks & uneven ground over moorland & number of hazards (river crossing, stiles etc) that can determine how slow a walk can be. I would therefore like individuals to consider their own ability honestly to what they can do. Equally it would be up to the individual leaders to really describe the route more fully on the walks programme.
- Good point – clarification on description of a walk will attract different walkers.
- Quite happy with present arrangements, thanks.
- Group used to put on 'Nice & Easy' walks on certain days to attract new members who wanted to give the 'N Devon Group' a go. (seconded)
- Maybe 2 leaders – one for a faster pace – one for a more gentle pace.
- RA groups have (in the past maybe) had a reputation for 'yomping' along and this has not always attracted new members not used to walking with a group. Nice to offer walks at a different pace but where are the leaders?
- Several historic members no longer attend as walks can be slow for some of us – if we can up the pace for some they'll rejoin.
- Walk recce fast as you like, take like minded walkers with you
- It is a good idea to have different speeds of walks but would depend on the distance. Longer walks slower? Shorter walks faster? Would have to be clear what group was doing what.
- Sounds worth trying, but not for me thanks. (seconded)
- Have half day walks & more figure of 8 walks

COMMITTEE NEWS

At the AGM Gemma Canham and Janet Ellis were voted in as the new Chair and Secretary respectively. Clarice and Janice were thanked for their time in the roles, and presented with beautiful bouquets. Both are staying on the committee – Clarice as an “ordinary member” and Janice as the 2025 holiday organiser. More good news is that Bridget has also joined the committee as an “ordinary member” – not the most flattering of terms! Bridget has come along to a number of committee meetings, and we are delighted that she has chosen to join the committee.

Stepping down from the committee after many years of loyal service is Lynne Clement. Lynne has been the Minute Secretary for much of that time, but Lynne also helps organise many of our social events, and has provided a caring and holistic responsibility too. We are all very grateful to Lynne for her time, care and support over the years.

New Publicity and Media Officer Needed

Janet has done an amazing job with Publicity in the last 2 years, but now she has taken on the Secretary role, we are really hoping one, two, or more people will come forward to either take over the Publicity role, or to assist with part of it. How about it? Maybe you have an interest in social media? Or perhaps you are a budding writer and could liaise with the North Devon Gazette and help produce the monthly articles? Or, could you see yourself organising and running a table at the North Devon Show? Please have a serious think whether you could take on part or all of the Publicity role. Janet would be happy to talk you through any aspect of the role.

Walks Programme Secretary from Summer 2025

Sarah has given a year's notice of her intention to step down from this role at next year's AGM. A year may seem like a long time away, but we all know how quickly time passes. Ideally, someone needs to come forward by next summer, so that they can learn the role alongside Sarah, and be ready to take it on by November. All the committee roles are important, but this is probably THE most important, as without a walks programme – what would we all do? Please start thinking about whether this is something you could do.

Another role which will come up during 2025 is **Holiday Organiser**. We have had some great holidays in the last few years, brilliantly organised by Janice. And we are confident that our trip to the Black Mountains in April 2025 will be just as good. However, Janice has said this will be the last holiday she organises. And as we know, organising a holiday for 2026, will start the year before – and the earlier the better. Could you organise a holiday? Maybe you could team up with a friend? Janice has lots of knowledge and experience to share.

SAFETY ON GROUP WALKS

Risk Assessments

No need to groan – this is good news 😊😊

Writing a Risk Assessment for each walk and keeping a copy for 3 years is no longer a requirement.

But it is still a recommendation. Because - in the (very) unlikely event of an incident on a group walk which required investigation, a walk leaders notes could be used to show what they had done to promote safety and minimise risk on their walk. Notes do not have to be on official paperwork, and would include the walk description on Walks Manager, notes about the risk assessment, and even a reminder list of things to mention at the start of the walk (mud, road, farm animals etc).

Here's a top tip: *Some leaders keep a brief diary of their walks to remind them of any hazards they've noted, weather conditions, any incidents or happenings etc.*

Ramblers has done a lot of work to make Risk Assessments much more user friendly. They have written Risk Assessment templates for each of the different walk grades. And all walk leaders need to do is make themselves aware of these templates, and use them as trigger points when planning and recceing a walk. It might be a good idea to print a set for easy access – or save paper and download a copy to your phone.

Each walk is individual, and will have its own “quirks”. You can add notes about these quirks to the template as necessary. Or to your “walk diary”!

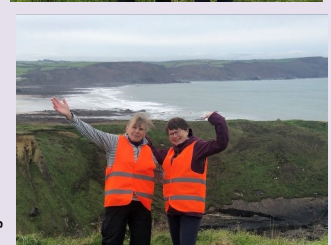
You can find the Risk Assessments on www.ramblers.org.uk , scroll down for “walk leadership”, then “resources for walk leaders” or simply use this link

<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/resources-walk-leaders>

There is a lot of information in the Resources folder, including the new Walk Leader Handbook, which sets out the 8-Guiding Principles of Walk Leading, that all walk leaders should aim to follow. It is pretty much common sense and what our walk leaders do already. But please have a look through it, and familiarise yourselves.

Hi Vis Waistcoats

With safety in mind, we are now trialling Walk Leaders and Back Markers wearing Hi Vis jackets, (or attaching them to rucksacks if they don't want to wear them). We discussed this at a recent committee meeting when 5 non-committee members were also present, and the vote was resoundingly in favour. We have purchased 16 orange waistcoats so far, and asked walk leaders and backmarkers to wear them on the walks over the next few weeks, and to feedback how it goes. It would be great if all members could let us know what they think about the hi vis idea, especially if they go out on a walk where they are worn.



Clarice and Carol near Bude

ICE Cards

Another safety aspect is having emergency contact information for all walkers. Our group has chosen to do this through each person having an ICE card. (In Case of Emergency) If you haven't got one already, please ask one of the walk leaders if they have a spare. And walk leaders, please ask Janet for some spare cards to give out on your walks.

UPCOMING SOCIAL EVENTS



SKITTLES EVENING

Friday 24th January at 6pm

The venue is the Mariners Arms in South Street, Braunton. We will meet at 6.00pm so that play can commence at 6.30pm. This year we plan to have a bring and share supper, customising the food nearer the time so that hopefully we will have a good selection of both savoury and sweet treats to suit all tastes and dietary requirements. As there is no charge for the skittles alley and the venue is happy for us to supply our own food, we kindly request you buy drinks at the bar. Participants will be limited to 22 max. enabling everyone the chance of knocking down some pins!

Please contact Anne Hunnibell for this event

text to **07592 880760** or email annecolehunnibell@talktalk.net



Leon is trialling a Games Night starting at 7.00pm on Friday 21st February at The Corner House pub in Barnstaple. Option to get food from the nearby chippie. Do come along and support it. Ask Leon for more details.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



Coffee morning – It is great to see lots of people at the monthly coffee mornings. Do come and join us on the first Thursday of the month, 10.30 at Queen Anne's café in Barnstaple. Next meeting is 6th Feb (café closed in Jan).



- **2nd - 5th January** - Festival of Winter Walks
- **20th January** - Committee Meeting, 7pm Castle Centre, Barnstaple. All Welcome.
- **24th January** - Skittles evening – see article on previous page.
- **21st February** - Games night, 7pm at The Corner House pub, Barnstaple.
- **22nd February** - Devon Area Ramblers AGM, Bovey Tracey. All welcome
- **9th March** - Annual lunch, 12.30 for 13.00 at The Pier House, Westward Ho! Details to follow, or ask Lynne at lynneclément@hotmail.com or **07757 384893**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair	Gemma Canham	07305 728 883	email Gemma
Secretary	Janet Ellis	07599 093 973	email Janet
Membership Secretary	Dune Simpson	07379 498 808	email Dune
Treasurer	Ruth Rouxel	07895 547 009	email Ruth
Footpath Officer (North Devon)	Jon Bennett	01271 375 906	email Jon
Footpath Officer (Torridge)	Mike Kelly	07495 048 339	email Mike
Walks Programme Secretary	Sarah McRae	07889 489 366	email Sarah
Holiday Coordinator	Janice Hurdle	07765 091 260	email Janice
Media & Publicity Officer	Janet Ellis (stand in)	07599 093 973	email Janet
IT & Web Editor	Peter Loombe	07453 194 985	email Peter
WhatsApp Manager	Anne Hunnibell	07592 880 760	
Newsletter Editor	Clarice Harwood	07972 510 903	email Clarice

Articles for the North Devon Gazette

Have you seen the monthly articles about our group in The North Devon Gazette? Usually the second Wednesday in the month. Aren't they great! We have been doing these for a year now, and are starting to run short of ideas. Can you suggest something of interest for an article? What might have attracted you to the group if you had read about it in the local paper? Could you write an article for the Gazette? Go on, release your inner author!! Articles can double up for our newsletter too.

Thanks to all of our contributors