Officers' reports

Chairman

Once again a very busy year for all concerned. As I don't make a speech at the Area AGM, may I take this opportunity to thank my Area EC colleagues and all other volunteers throughout the groups, committee members and walk leaders alike and others who help out selflessly, for example, at social events.

As Area chairman, the highlights for me were the get-together in Abingdon Abbey Meadow with six groups converging by the Thames to enjoy a picnic hosted by the Vale group. Bicester & Kidlington group are hosting a similar event on 23 June 2012.

As usual I attended both days at the White Horse Show at the end of August. The public showed much interest, particularly in the 'Guess the distance' competition for which ten routes had been prepared, with three on display at any one time. Yet again we had tears between two siblings when one won a bigger chocolate bar than the other. On the first day we offered string to help those keen to be as accurate as possible, but too many people won. We stopped doing that on the Monday, so one young man used the string on his balloon and duly won a larger chocolate bar! More details are here: http://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/News.htm.

I was very pleased with the amazing response to our questionnaire. We won't be publishing the comments as some of them are rather personal, but the analysis is at Annex II carried out by Alice Marten, chair of the 20s&30s group.

Pat Lonergan

Secretary

Your Area committee has had a busy year. Early in the year walk leaders from most groups attended a British Red Cross First aid course specifically designed for our walk leaders. This is the third course that has been organised and there will be more in the future if there is demand.

You will remember, I hope, that in April, Oxfordshire Ramblers hosted the General Council meeting, which meant that many ordinary group members could take the opportunity of attending the meetings and finding out about the issues discussed. Jim Parke, our new Publicity Officer, put up a splendid display with all groups contributing.

We had an Area Summer Picnic, this time hosted by Vale group, with groups meeting for lunch in the Abbey Gardens in Abingdon. Next year, Bicester and Kidlington will be the hosts on June 23rd. Please note the date for your diaries.

We need to publicise any footpath stories, large or small, that show the impact that Ramblers members make on improving access to the countryside

During August, 6 representatives from Oxfordshire Ramblers attended a Practical Footpath Day in Kettering. It is hoped that this year's course, again held in August, will be hosted by Oxfordshire Ramblers and will take place in the South Chilterns. Since that course, we have been emphasising the need, of working more closely with OCC to try to rectify some of the outstanding problems in our countryside. Several members have become path wardens and are reporting problems as well as doing a small amount of clearing and replacing broken waymarks. With the reduction in the funding for the Countryside team at OCC, it has become more and more important that as Ramblers members we do what we can to reduce their workload. Please consider offering to check paths in your locality and to avoid duplication, let your group committee know what you are doing and copy them in with your reports. We need hundreds of volunteers for this task to cover Oxfordshire. If the Chiltern Society can do it in the South Chilterns then I am sure we can with the rest of Oxfordshire. I recently received a letter from a member of West Oxfordshire group who became a path warden 10 years ago who is now covering 6 parishes on his own and only recently replaced 40 waymarks within a week. His parishes cover 50 miles and 78 paths. I think he needs help!

Susan Maguire

Treasurer

Our expenditure increased this year as a result of a number of items including the hosting of General Council in April. The purchase of new display boards, increased funding of local groups and the holding of a first aid course for walks leaders; the publication of our consolidated area walks programme continues to be the biggest cost.

Full accounts are included at the end of the report.

Footpath Secretary

Committee

During the year we have welcomed Robert Hollister (20s30s) to the Footpaths Sub-Committee; she has replaced Sarah Billam. Also Susan Maguire (H&G) has replaced Robin Hanson. We still have no representative for West Oxon. John Orchard has indicated that he will retire at the next AGM.

Footpath Work

There are now moves to set up working groups from Ramblers, Oxford Fieldpaths Society and CPRE (the more the merrier). A joint letter from OFS and Ramblers was published in the Oxford Times on December 8. We are now getting more cooperation from OCC since they realise that they will be getting work done at no cost except for possible supervision and coordination; the latter will be necessary to prevent different working parties from arriving at the same job, or going to sites OCC have already cleared. OCC are also encouraging the appointment of parish footpath wardens.

Tony Clark (T&W) has continued to organise working parties, which have done clearances in Little Milton. A clearance at Attington Stud had to be abandoned because the growth was too thick to be cleared in any reasonable time with hand tools.

Oxfordshire County Council

The Monitoring Group met in April and October. The Countryside Service has had its budget cut by 25%, most of which has been met by the retirement of Keith Wheal and one other, combined with the efficiency savings which are still flowing from having all the relevant departments in one place at Signal Court. They cut the National Trails budget by 28%.

The Definitive Map (or, legally speaking, the working copy, which is more up-to-date) is now online, and it is possible to click on a location and report a problem. The legal Definitive Map, as at 2006 when published, is also online.

The project to clear the paths between the Cherwell and Marston is almost complete; attention is being switched to Lye Valley and Warneford Meadow. There are moves by Friends of Warneford Meadow to buy the site, which the Health Trust wishes to sell.

Definitive Map claims

The Order to modify the paths round Binfield Heath playing fields has been confirmed. The applicant's appeals in respect of claims for extension of Watery Lane, Charlbury to Dean, for a bridleway at Tittenford Bridge, Wootton and for a footpath at Great Milton and Waterstock have been successful. The claim for the Trap Grounds railway crossing was refused.

Planning and diversions

I attended two days of the public inquiry into the proposed diversion at Bodicote Mill, which would remove the view of the mill stream (except via a detour). The diversion was unfortunately confirmed, mainly on the grounds of the applicant's privacy and the muddy state of the existing footpath.

I have also made a site visit to part of the Oxfordshire Way at Christmas Common, where the owner of the former church wants to divert the path round the edge of some land that he has just acquired; the effect would be to move the path from one side of a tree to the other.

I also attended a South Oxfordshire planning meeting at which it was proposed to put up a fence on the approach road to Lobb Farm at Great Haseley in order to stop up the road, which is public highway. The debate tied itself up in knots because the applicant had insisted on the stopping-up being part of the title of the application and therefore part of the subject of the debate; the problem being that the stopping-up could not be part of the planning permission. In the end permission was granted with a note that the stopping-up was excluded. It is hoped that the next stage will be final resolution of the obstructions on Great Haseley FP1, with a link to the A40 being provided.

The threat of an enormous reservoir south-west of Abingdon appears to have receded for the foreseeable future, as the plans were roundly slated by the Planning Inspectorate.

The inquiry into Chiltern Railways' plans to upgrade the Oxford-Bicester line has ended and the scheme has had approval withheld because of the presence of bats in Wolvercote tunnel and Great Crested Newts elsewhere. Chiltern Railways are in negotiation with Natural England to resolve these matters. We have lost the attempt to get Gosford FP4 connected to the station and Oddington FP6, which runs from Charlton-on-Otmoor to Weston-on-the-Green, saved from a mile-long diversion along the railway (with another half-mile to get back). Mansmoor Road (Charlton-on-Otmoor BR4) will also

be diverted. The Trap Grounds allotment holders have kept their level crossing, on the grounds that the bridge was a severe obstacle to heavily-laden wheelbarrows.

HS2 will clip the north-eastern corner of the county; we are at present waiting for full details of the effects on footpaths to emerge. The Ramblers have joined other groups seeking to minimise the effects.

The Order has been made for a diversion package which will link up the dead ends at Upper Woods Farm, Noke. The diversion of BR7 at Sydenham Grange has yet to go ahead pending solution of the remaining problems on the estate. We are involved in trying to get the Oxfordshire Golf Club to re-divert the paths which were originally diverted in 1991 before the then owners laid them out somewhere completely different.

Five diversion orders made by South Oxfordshire District Council for Watlington FP1 and at Great Western Park, Didcot have all proved to be defective for various reasons.

We have accepted minor diversions at Pusey FP4, Enstone FP15, Shrivenham FP2 and Curbridge BR12. Diversions of Souldern FP7, Banbury FP31, Benson FP6, Cottisford FP8/9, Stanton FP9 and a part-width extinguishment of Milton RB13 (leaving 23ft width) have been confirmed.

Obstructions and other matters

The paths at Castle Hill, Little Wittenham are still closed, and there are few trees left. Highmoor FP5 is now clear, and the owner has applied for a diversion.

Thanks

Finally, my thanks to the group footpath secretaries for their hard work, and to anyone else who has helped with footpath matters, and all those whose secateurs have helped to keep paths open.

David Godfrey

Membership Secretary

Once again I must report a decline in membership over the last year of almost a hundred, which compares to the previous year's fall of almost a hundred and fifty. So, does this mean we are arresting the decline? I would like to think so. We seem to be recruiting new members, but sadly we are losing rather more. Detailed figures are as follows:

Membership by groups 30th Sept 2011		
	2010	2011
Banbury & North Oxfordshire	257	251
Bicester & Kidlington	170	160
Didcot & Wallingford	163	161
Henley & Goring	315	314
Oxford City	413	380
Thame & Wheatley	147	149
Twenties & Thirties	88	78
Vale of White Horse	426	388
West Oxfordshire	217	203
Weekend Walkers	67	88
Unallocated	7	4
TOTAL	2270	2176

It will be seen that Thame & Wheatley and the Weekend Walkers are showing an increase, the latter possibly at Twenties & Thirties expense. Didcot & Wallingford's and Henley & Goring's figures are holding up well, as indeed are B&NO and B&K. Oxford City and Vale are perhaps more cause for concern - the former probably suffers from a more transient population.

Nationally, the RA has lost some 7,500 members over the last year - it is now down to just under 114,000. My arithmetic is not what it was, but Oxfordshire appears to be losing fewer than the national average.

On the administrative side, I am now receiving details of new and reinstated members on a weekly basis. This tremendous improvement allows groups to send out the Walks Programme and welcome letter in a fraction of the time compared with the previous rather unwieldy system. Eventually Central Office hopes to email Group Membership Secretary's directly, thus cutting out the middle-man, i.e. your Area Membership Secretary!

Finally, I am only able to reiterate my last year's thoughts and message - keep plugging away at the advantages of being a member of the Ramblers' Association, particularly the Oxfordshire Area.

Peter Offord

Publicity

An important task for the Publicity Officer this year was the mounting of an Oxfordshire Area publicity display at the Ramblers National Annual

Conference held in Keble College over the weekend April 16th-17th. The eight geographically-based groups in the county were each invited to contribute a written statement and photographs about themselves and their area. The 20s & 30s and Weekend Walkers groups were also asked to supply similar publicity material. The statements and the pictures revealed the diversity of the landscape of the county. The photographs covered a full range of typical rambler activities, including walk scenes, social events, publicity displays, training events and residential and away day excursions to other parts of the UK.

In addition there were panels showing the 75th Anniversary celebrations on Shirburn Hill, the baton walks, and also illustrative material on footpath maintenance and Countryside matters. The central map of the county showed the eight group areas and the main footpath trails. While the Oxford newspapers did not follow up the press notice sent to them about the conference I had a 5 minute interview spot on BBC Radio Oxford in which I was able to emphasise rambler activities in the county. Groups need to be aware that all the statements and photographs have been retained and they are therefore available for use, together with the display panels, by any group who wish to mount displays at venues throughout the county. Recently a banner has been produced bearing the ramblers logo and slogan 'at the heart of walking' and the title Oxfordshire Ramblers and this, too, is available for groups to use.

During the year various groups have organised stalls and displays at local events, namely Thame & Wheatley at the Oxfordshire County Show in July, Vale at the White Horse annual show in August, and Banbury & North Oxford at the Oxford Canal Day in October. These shows provide an opportunity for Ramblers members to engage in dialogue with the general public, many of whom are sympathetic to the aims of the Ramblers and to whom it is possible to emphasise the role of the organisation in keeping the network of paths open and available. There may be other shows in the County, such as the Wychwood Forest Fair held in September, where a Ramblers stall presence would be appropriate.

Ramblers central office has produced a series of attractive publicity templates on which to set out details of rambles in a local area. These can then be displayed on publicity boards in libraries that are located in a group's district.

A publicity initiative undertaken in November saw the production of a jointly signed letter from the Chairmen of the Oxfordshire Area Ramblers and the Oxford Fieldpaths Society to the Editor of the Oxford Times. The purpose of the letter was to draw the attention of the general public to the 25% reduction in the budget of Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Service. The Service has the responsibility of maintaining the footpath network in the County and it is feared that a reduction of this magnitude in its budget will lead to a major deterioration of the network. The letter was given top billing on the letters page when it was published in the Oxford Times on December 1st. As well as drawing attention to the cuts in funding it invited volunteers to join in any light path maintenance working parties that might be set up by the two organisations. It is hoped that the letter gave publicity to the two organisations in the county that do care about the continuation of the path network. If any response is made for the call of volunteers then perhaps the first step would be to suggest to the individual to become a path warden of their home parish.

The Oxfordshire Area maintains a large website, it is important that members continue to provide it with photographs and any interesting snippets of news and details of forthcoming events.

Jim Parke

Access

There are doubts about the determination of the Government to create the coastal right of way around England as prescribed in the Marine and Coastal Access Act. While coastal Ramblers groups are working locally on the route options, Ramblers Central Office is campaigning for members to write to local MP's to exert pressure on the Government to publish an implementation timetable.

The application to erect fencing on Kingwood Common to allow seasonal grazing was refused by the Planning Inspector. After many years of preparatory work by the Nettlebed Commons Conservators, with the support of ONCF, BBOWT , SODC , the Chilterns Conservation Board and others, there is resigned acceptance of the decision. To quote the Conservators:

'The Nettlebed and District Commons (Preservation) Act which has served us well for over one hundred years did not legislate for conditions that prevail in the 21st Century and sadly and somewhat predictably has been the principal reason for the failure of this application.' and: 'However we still have a challenge finding the best means of conserving the lowland

heathland on Kingwood which it is important to preserve.'

John Case

Countryside

During this year, I looked at the proposals for development at Graven Hill, MoD land at Bicester, the Barton Area development plans outside Oxford and an extension to quarrying at Sonning but found no issues for Ramblers at present. There was also a proposal to build a giant turbine by Horspath (later abandoned) and I responded positively to the plans at the Westmill Farm wind and solar energy cooperatives at Watchfield.

Thames Water has shelved the plan for the new reservoir near Steventon for the time being as the economic downturn has led to a sharp drop in consumption. However, planning for the reservoir will continue as they anticipate it will be needed a few years later, in 2026.

Countryside matters have been dominated by several Government proposals and subsequent formal consultations. Ramblers Central Office has responded vigorously to these consultations and I contributed where I could. The current situation on these national proposals are as follows:

- hs2: After General Council, Ramblers signed up to the Right Lines Charter to work with CPRE and others to influence Government transport policy. As a result of the Transport Select committee findings (to which Ramblers contributed), the Government decision has been postponed until early 2012 while it considers a further length of tunnel beyond Amersham. While we would welcome the latter, the delay implies that hs2 is likely to go ahead with or without a national transport plan or details of the protection afforded to rights of way.

- Planning: The proposals to radically streamline the National Planning Policy Framework increased the danger that green belt could be under threat: It suggested all planning applications should be considered favourably unless there were specific reasons for objection e.g. being illegal or contrary to neighbourhood plans. We await the outcome of the consultation.

- Village greens: The Government proposes to reform registration process and fees which could affect the ease by which these protected areas can come into being. We await the outcome of the consultation.

- Forestry: While the original proposal for a sell-off was abandoned, the Government is now being advised by the Independent Panel on Forestry, which has taken evidence from all interest groups. Its recent progress report favours more proactive management of private forests, new forestry and retention of some publicly owned forestry.

John Case

Walks Coordinator

The Summer and Winter 2011 programmes comprised 396 and 306 walks (including a few other events) respectively, running from April 2011 to March 2012, a total of 702! The actual walks totalled 687. This excludes any walks which may be submitted by the Weekend Walkers and 20s&30s groups in January, February and March 2012. Of the 687 walks, 663 were in the middle categories, Leisurely and Moderate.

Banbury & North Oxfordshire group submitted the most number of events during the year with 150, followed by Henley & Goring with 131. Expressed per number of members, Banbury & North Oxfordshire group were still the highest, but followed by Bicester & Kidlington.

The most events goes to Lionel Howse with 18, then Mary Gough with 17, both of Bicester & Kidlington group, then Len Lamb of Banbury & North Oxfordshire group both with 16. 14 leaders submitted 10 or more events.

199 leaders, couples or other sets of leaders submitted events averaging 3.5 events per ‘leader’, the same as last year. The shortest distance was 2.5 miles, the longest 18 and the average 7.4, the first change in many years from 7.5! The average is higher in the summer than the winter, 7.5 (7.7 last time) versus 7.3 (the same).

48% of the walks were at the weekend, a 4% decrease on last year but we are still catering well for our working members. There were 105 walks on a Thursday, 10 less than last year. There were 60 walks on a Tuesday, 12 more than last year, though this compares with 153 on a Wednesday, so it looks like Thursday has ‘suffered’ to the benefit of Tuesday, but I have been asking for more walks on a Tuesday, but had hoped it would be at the expense of Wednesdays. That Wednesday total is an increase of 14 on last year but is once again outshone by Sunday with 195 walks, nearly a third of the walks!

It still appears that hardly few leaders wants to lead on a Monday (18), or a Friday (24) , albeit these are increases on last year so, again, I think we should concentrate on giving more choice mid-week, Tuesday

through Thursday. Again, ideally, I would like a group to commit to regular walks on a Tuesday, or at least more leaders doing do. Please, but preferably at the expense of Wednesday to even the numbers out a bit.

Thanks for all the hard work put in by all concerned, especially, yet again, to Peter Offord of Banbury & North Oxfordshire group who typed in both sets of his group's walks - fantastic! One can list walks on the Area website www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk by clicking on the appropriate navigation entries.

Pat Lonergan

Website

On the Area website, www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk, seven of the eight geographically-based groups now have multiple-pages, with Henley & Goring still 'leading the way' with seven pages. Please bear in mind that the 20s&30s and Weekend Walkers have their own websites anyway. The site now comprises 47 pages.

A Google calendar has been put on a page, displaying the walks for the "This" and "Next" month, that is, as I write, December and January.

The Start Places pages update was delayed this year because of waiting for extra walks from the Weekend Walkers and Twenties & Thirties Walkers until the end of September. At the time of writing, end of November, this task is in hand. There were 641 such entries with Oxfordshire out of a total of 953, but the other 312 were outside Oxfordshire and have not been checked, although they appear in the alphabetic pages. The index page is:

http://www.ramblers-oxon.org.uk/startplaces.htm

I can supply the new figures on request once they are available. As a matter of policy, this reference is not in the website menu, so I advise you to put it in your Favorites (sic) if using Internet Explorer or to bookmark it if using Firefox or Google Chrome.

Pat Lonergan

Group reports

Banbury & North Oxfordshire

Our 2010 AGM was held at Chacombe Village Hall. The existing committee was re-elected. At 30th September 2010 membership of the group stood at 257. Over the past year membership has again declined in line with the overall reduction in membership nationally. Current membership is 248.

As usual our walks programme is full, varied and well supported with the walks on Wednesday afternoons, Sundays, Thursday evenings in the summer and occasional weekday and bus-friendly Saturday walks. The B&NO Twelve Days of Christmas walks shrank to nine at Christmas 2010 due to serious road conditions making it impossible for would-be walkers to reach the starting places on three of the walks. The numbers attending ranged from 8 to 39 with an overall total of 140 walkers. Eight intrepid souls gritted their teeth in a temperature of minus 12 degrees at the start of the Christmas Day walk, revived by mulled wine and mince pies in a Woodstock pub at the end. Many thanks to all the leaders for the excellent walks which they put on.

We held a Summer Garden Party on 16th July in Middleton Cheney, but due to the inclement weather it was transferred to the local village hall. As usual the food and wine were excellent. The live jazz which was kindly provided by friends of Mary Thomas was the highlight of the afternoon.

The group took a stand at the annual Banbury Canal Day on 2nd October. From among the constant stream of visitors to the show many stopped to look at our display of photographs, general information about rambling and specific details of walks organised by B&NO group, acknowledging the fact that Ramblers caters for everyone. We had positive conversations with over 30 visitors and are confident that we will gain new members from amongst them.

I thank all the members of the committee for their support and hard work during the year.

Our 2011 AGM took place at Chacombe Village Hall on Saturday 26th November 2011. After nine years as Chairman I have resigned from the B&NO committee, together with Bob Clement (longstanding membership secretary), Lesley Milne, Frank Duty and Jim Tipping. Peter Offord was elected Chairman and the following members have now joined the committee: Sally McGurk (footpath secretary), Anne Booyens (social secretary) and Mick Knott (Oxford Area rep).

Following the meeting 50 ramblers enjoyed a most delicious lunch provided by the social committee and the afternoon was rounded off with a barn dance.

Charles Woolland

Bicester & Kidlington

Bicester & Kidlington have enjoyed the last 12 months with a variety of walks and events. Although our current membership of 162 active members is slightly down on last year (6.4%), we have fared better than many other groups in the current climate.

Throughout the year we have continued to enjoy a variety of walks in the delightful Oxfordshire countryside. In the last twelve months we have led some 75 walks of various lengths to suit all tastes. Some of the highlights were our annual mince pie walk, a London walk with a maritime theme, a guided historic walk of Chipping Norton and visits to nature reserves. In order to attract new members we have recently introduced short walks every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month. They have been well supported so we shall continue them into the New Year.

We have supported Ramblers Festivals such as "Get Walking Day" and "Walk in the Woods Week." On "Walk in the Woods Weekend" we held a joint event with Bicester Green Gym. This included a leaf hunt for children. Everybody present learned something new about trees and leaves.

During the year we manned publicity stalls at Home Base and Bicester Carnival. Both attracted a good deal of attention. We also helped Thame & Wheatley with the Thame Show. Next year we are looking forward to joining in with "Get Walking for the Games Weekend" and the "Summer Evening Walks Festival".

Our group enjoyed their annual weekend away in Weston-super-Mare where they walked coastal paths. On the social front, we held our annual quiz evening at Sturdy's Castle public house. Everyone had a fantastic evening with plenty of good food and entertainment. In the summer we celebrated with an annual barbecue.

Other events - we provided a candidate for the General Council in April and our Chairman is raising the money to improve the footpath on the popular Lark Rise to Candleford walk. Initially two stiles will be replaced by kissing gates, with plans to do more if funding applications are successful.

We took advantage of Blacks and Milletts Discount Scheme and many of our members signed up for 15% discount on all goods including sale items.

Cotswold outdoor gave a fascinating talk on layer clothing at our AGM. They have offered their premises for our next AGM which we have accepted.

Mary Gough

Didcot & Wallingford

We have had our most successful year for a while. In August we had our first summer social in four years, in the form of a barbecue in the garden of Sue and Terry White, which was attended by nearly 20 members. The weekend away in Crickhowell, on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, in September was blessed with mostly glorious weather and attracted 24 members.

This year's AGM reverted to a morning walk followed by a soup lunch and then the meeting; resulting in our highest attendance for many years. At the AGM John Jones stood down after 10 years as Membership Secretary and was replaced by Sue Buzzacott, Nick Morley added the role of Chairman to his post as Treasurer, and Kate Hart took back the role of Walks Coordinator from Keith Tibbs.

We are already planning next October's weekend away to Swanage which bodes well for the year ahead.

Nick Morley

Henley & Goring

Once again Henley & Goring members have enjoyed a lively and varied programme of walks, trips and social events. Around thirty walks leaders take advantage of our lovely area to put on a varied local programme twice a year. Evening pub walks were particularly popular during the summer with one held almost every week and all well supported. A Walk Leaders' meeting and supper was held to keep people up to date and the annual festive dinner, held this year at The Four Horseshoes in Checkenden, was a very jolly affair. Trips away both in UK and abroad have been well supported and very much enjoyed by those who took part. Groups of twenty or more went to Montgomery at Easter, Bridport in September and Turkey and the Cotswolds in October. Trips already organised for 2012 'Exploring the Gower' in May, 'Walking on Exmoor' in June and 'September in the Dolomites'. Long distance linear walks continue to be popular. The Wessex Ridgeway from Avebury to Lyme Regis was walked over a series of weekends last winter and the last sections of the Chiltern Way were completed. This winter's linear walk is the Greensands Way done over five weekends from October to March.

Our colourful stand in Falaise Square on Get Walking Day attracted a lot of visitors but fewer members actually signed up compared to last year when the £1 membership offer had great appeal. We joined other Oxfordshire groups in Abingdon in June for the Area picnic - a good day out. Cooperation with

the Chiltern Society on footpath issues continues with some of our members joining the Chiltern Society working parties doing invaluable work to keep our paths open and well signed. A number of footpath issues have been raised with SODC.

Social activities are a popular part of the programme, sometimes in their own right, other times with together with a walk. The Chantry House lecture at the end of January is a well established annual event, as is the summer BBQ, this year as last, accompanied by a jazz band supplied by one of our members. Our AGM supper and social evening was attended by almost 70 people. We use e-mail lists to facilitate car sharing for walks and the Arts Group publicises its activities in the same way. Malcolm Wade acts as the spider in the centre of our e-mail web sending out messages to members about walks, events, activities, and appeals or just keeping us up to date.

There have been some changes on the committee. Susan Maguire, who has chaired our group for ten years, is standing down; we are delighted however that she is not leaving the committee but is taking over as Footpaths Officer. Peter Stone is taking over as Chairman of the group. Robbie Hanson, who has served as Footpaths Officer and before that as Walks Organiser, is relinquishing his post but staying on the committee. A new member, Anna Dowling joins. Anna will coordinate the next summer walk programme in Peter Stone's absence and may take over this role from Peter in due course.

Joan Clark

Oxford

We continue with a strong, able committee and members of the Group who have influenced Ramblers progress at both national and local level. The input of our treasurer and auditor who gave guidance to the senior financial staff of the national Ramblers office have resulted in a much more robust financial management. In the latter part of this year, another member has been instrumental in conducting the questionnaire aimed at boosting membership. Most of the replies included the Oxford and BNO Groups.

The Walks programme continues with loyal Wednesday group support and an almost full quota of walks every week. Our new Walks Organiser, Don Manley, held a party to encourage submission of more walks and floated the idea of themed walks particularly around Oxford. We hope to incorporate those into future programmes.

Following the appeal for more path surveying I hope that our group will join other groups to assist the Footpath Officers' task.

I should like to thank all the Committee Members for doing so much of the necessary background work essential for us to deliver and publicise the programme. Janet Smart has resigned after many years input and we thank her for her valuable contribution.

Elaine Steane

Thame & Wheatley

The group has enjoyed a good year, developing many of the ideas and suggestions from its members, and doing all that it can to hold membership levels.

In its main area of responsibility, that of organising and publicising walks, Bob Ward, walks organiser, persuaded leaders to volunteer a record 54 walks to the summer and winter programmes. Two new walks leaders were recruited, and the short monthly introductory walks, introduced on Bob's initiative, are attracting increasing support. Bob's 'awayday'to Avebury on 9th April was well received, as was Ruth Cornish's walk to Abbey Grounds, Abingdon, for the area picnic.

On 29th January the group played host to the Area AGM at Horspath village hall, committee members and helpers contributing to the day's success. That help was also apparent when the group supported the Ramblers' General Council conference at Keble College later in the year.

On the social side, the established formula of skittles and BBQ at Ickford village hall was repeated on 15th July, some 34 guests enjoying an evening of good entertainment and good food.

On the publicity side, the Get Walking Day on 15th May proved disappointing, the stand at Thame town hall lacking visitor interest, largely due to the unseasonably squally weather. But, Tony Clark's next-day walk, associated with event, fared better.

Ruth Cornish, group publicity officer, continued to use every opportunity - newsletters, posters, media articles and e-mails - to see that group activities were promoted and supported. There is also no doubt that Ruth's efforts also had an impact on the membership figures that treasurer and membership secretary Chris Bignal, was able to report as holding to last year's level, thereby bucking the general trend.

Tony Clark, footpath officer, has played a significant part in persuading local parish councils to share in the responsibility of keeping footpaths in good

repair, against the background of cuts in Oxfordshire Countryside Services budgets. Two such successful co-operative efforts have led to improvements on the Weston Estate at Sydenham and the relief of flooding problems at Sewells Lane, on the Aston Rowant/Sydenham border. Tony has also been very successful in raising support for his regular path-clearance exercises, useful, but also socially enjoyable.

Ann Harman, in her first year as group secretary has given valued help to all members of the committee. Ann has also taken a fresh look at group activities, suggesting many new ideas for T&W to use in the future.

Finally, the group AGM, for the first time in its history moved to a Friday, and used the same arrangements as last year. More members than ever attended the evening of formal business, an excellent speaker, Rod Byles, on the subject of a River Thame project, and a fish and chip supper.

In conclusion, with the same committee intact, T&G group look forward to another productive and enjoyable year ahead.

Mike Smith

Twenties & Thirties

The Oxon 20s&30s group has had another successful year. There has been a varied programme of walks most Sundays with some Friday evening walks during the summer, three trips away and many social events.

There have been a few new walk leaders leading their first walks this year, which has been very welcome. It is important to have as many walk leaders as possible to help maintain a varied walks programme.

As well as having regular local walks, the group has had three trips away. A week-long trip to Scotland, making the most of the extra bank holiday in April, a weekend trip to the Gower over the August Bank Holiday weekend where some of us sampled another outdoor activity: surfing, and a 3 night weekend in South Devon which was perfectly timed to make the most of the Indian summer.

Our two Social secretaries have coordinated a wide range of social activities (and organised many of them themselves). In particular, we attended a concert "Return to Broadway" in Abingdon, had several pub nights, a wine tasting event, a trip to a festival, a night time bat-watching walk, a meal following a walk, a curry night and a trip to a bonfire night fireworks display.

The group is also keen to build good relationships with other groups, in particular within the Oxfordshire Area and with other 20s&30s groups. We have had several joint walks with the Chilterns and Berkshire 20s&30s groups and we joined forces with them for a big Christmas party at a hotel near Amersham, which also included some walks.

We have carried on doing joint activities with the Oxon Weekend Walkers, especially walks and the Gower weekend away was also a shared event between the two groups.

We recruited 8 volunteers from our group (approximately 10% of our membership) to help run the Ramblers General Council in April. All our volunteers enjoyed helping run the event and all the messages of thanks afterwards helped make them feel valued. We also joined the Area picnic walk in June in Abingdon and enjoyed meeting members of other groups during this nice event. It is our turn to organise the Area AGM. We are looking forward to hosting the meeting in Cumnor in January.

In terms of recruiting new members, we organised a Get Walking Day walk in May, which attracted several new members. The walk was followed by a well-attended pub night the following week. We have also started to make more use of our Facebook group for publicising events and promoting car sharing. It took a bit of effort from the Committee to post messages to build momentum but it is now a successful forum for discussions between current and also prospective new members. Now that it is going well, it requires very little effort from the Committee to maintain it.

We had our AGM on 5th November in Wolvercote. The attendance was very high (over 20 people) thanks to the promise of a fireworks display afterwards. We started with a short afternoon walk, followed by refreshments before the meeting. Three Committee members stepped down and were replaced with two new members. We have been able to fill all the posts as the Social Secretary role is no longer shared between two people.

Alice Marten

Vale of White Horse

At the AGM in November we paid thanks to Maria Simpson for many years of volunteering in several different roles, latterly as walks organiser and

treasurer. Welcome to Lorraine Oates as our new treasurer and to Stuart Hughes as walks organiser.

The countryside in the Vale seems under less threat than previously. There are fewer planning applications due to the recession, so fewer affecting rights of way. The Radley Lakes have been saved and improved under the management of the Northmoor Trust. The Abingdon Reservoir is not dead after its rejection at public inquiry but it has shrunk and receded into the future. We still need to be vigilant though; the coalition's plans for a presumption in favour of development could wreak havoc with the green belt and tax breaks for green-site development still militate against building on brown sites.

In 2011 we saw an increase in publicity with stands in Abingdon Market Place as well as the White Horse Show and displays in libraries. We also hosted the Area Picnic in Abbey Meadow where a large collection of ramblers eating and drinking around a gazebo amused passers-by. We also started initiatives for parish path wardens and footpath clearance working parties. I hope that these will come to fruition in the coming year. If you are interested in either, get in touch.

While the Vale walks programme is a reasonable size we have fewer different walks leaders for the size of our membership than other groups so I encourage those of you who enjoy walking to share your favourite walks with the rest of us by proposing a walk for the programme. The course we run each autumn can give you some of the requisite skills if you need more confidence in leading.

A Happy New Walking Year to you all.

John Gordon

Weekend Walkers

The Weekend Walkers have had a good year in 2011: membership has broken the 80+ barrier as stated in official returns from Head Office. Our recent walking and publicity activity has attracted several new members to the group and these people now walk with us on a regular basis. New members bring fresh ideas and make the group more diverse and cosmopolitan which in turn attracts more people: like any group we want our membership to prosper and grow.

As we are a walking group walking is at the forefront of all we do and I would like to thank all the walk leaders who have led walks for us during the past year - this includes those leading at weekends, evenings and on weekends away. We have had several members lead walks for the first time this year and this is very encouraging. Along with contributions from regular walk leaders this has led to an interesting and varied walks programme. I would encourage all our members to get involved in the group and put something back by leading walks. Please send all walk submissions to Julie Minch via the form on our website.

Julie Minch submitted the following statistics. The group listed 69 walks via the web site this year, this equates to 577 miles walked. The longest was 16.5 miles and the shortest 3.5 miles; 8 of these walks were generously provided by other groups as joint walks offering the opportunity to meet members from different areas and age ranges. 33 members of the Weekend Walkers have led walks this year, some of these have led several walks over this period, all walks were appreciated by those who took part. Finally I think the members deserve a big pat on the back for unstinting support they have given to pubs and tea shops throughout the region at the end of most walks!

I would also like to thank all the volunteers who took part and helped out with various roles at General Council which was held at Keble College this year. The lectures, discussions and debates were interesting and informative. It was equally good to meet groups from other areas of the country and to share points of view. The whole event went well and the participants thanked the Oxford Area for hosting it.

A group of people completed the Cotswold Way over several weekends this year and last, walking from Chipping Campden to Bath. This event was organised and led by Kerry Forkner assisted by Karen Bridge: it was a fantastic walking experience through some beautiful countryside. A similar group, led by Helen Barham, also completed the d'Arcy Dalton Way this year. This is another linear walk from Wormleighton near Banbury to Waylands Smithy through the equally beautiful Oxfordshire countryside.

We have had four weekends away this year. Gerry Barwell organised a long weekend on the Isle of Lundy walking and watching the local wildlife. Pete Norris organised a long weekend in Yorkshire near the village of Kettlewell which included several walks and even an outdoor barbeque. A joint weekend away was held with the Oxon 20-30s group in the Gower where walking and surfing were the main events. Pete Richards and Glynis Toye organised the group's first camping weekend away in the Peak District - fortunately the weather was ideal for camping. On

behalf of the group I would like to thank everyone who was involved in these activities. Weekends away are good social events and allow people to get to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere.

Social events over the last year have included regular meals out (sampling the cuisine of many different countries), an Aunt Sally pub evening and a very popular trip to the Globe Theatre's Touring Production of 'As You Like It' where again we were lucky with the weather.

I would to thank all the committee for their hard work and input over the last year. Ian Feetenby is standing down as treasurer at the AGM. He has been doing this role since the inception of the group and set up our finances from scratch. Liz McGowan has been doing the social secretary role for the same time and is also stepping down. Jillian Southwell has resigned from her joint role of publicity officer which she shared with Carolyn Blackmore. Vanessa Corrick and Catherine Guiver are stepping down from their supporting roles as members without portfolio. I would again like to thank all these members who have served and help run the group. Hopefully we can get some members from the group to step into these roles: full hand over and support will be given.

I am looking forward to the coming year, to see more new faces on the walks, people getting involved in leading walks, and organising and taking part in social events. I hope to catch up with everyone on a walk at some point for a chat, and hope you enjoy the coming walking programme.

Happy Walking!

Gavin Powell

West Oxfordshire

West Oxfordshire group have had a series of varied walks which have been very well attended.

Pat Jennings

Income & Expenditure Account for year to 30th September 2011

	£	*2010*
INCOME		
Allocation from Ramblers National Fund	6,575	6,658
Walk Program advertisements	450	515
Bank Interest	4	4
Share Dividends	13	9
TOTAL INCOME	7,042	7,186
EXPENSES		
Walks Programmes	3,747	3,590
South East Walker	980	965
Annual Report & AGM	138	115
Group funding	2,040	1,592
Campaigns & Casework	12	7
Publicity	550	173
Walk Leader Training	415	50
Management & Administration	900	285
TOTAL EXPENSES	8,782	6,777
EXCESS / (DEFICIT) of INCOME over EXPENDITURE	(1,740)	409

Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2011

	£	*2010*
RESERVES		
At start of year	4,319	3,910
Add Surplus / (Deficit) for year	(1,740)	409
At 30th September 2011	2,579	4,319
ASSETS		
Shares in Ramblers Holidays	0	442
Bank Balance	4,541	3,607
Debtors	205	270
	4,746	4,319
Less Creditors	2,167	0
Net Assets at 30th September 2011	2,579	4,319

Notes

The accounts are prepared in accordance with guidelines from The Ramblers Association.

The area's main income comes from a grant from The Ramblers Central Funds based on an expenditure budget.

Our expenditure was higher this year mainly as a result of the purchase of
new display boards, a first aid course for walk leaders, expenditure incurred on hosting General Council and increased funding for local groups.

Peter C Stone Treasurer
11th December 2011

Independent Examiner's Statement

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group Independent Examination Guidelines, I consider the Oxfordshire Area accounts to have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year to 30th September 2011.

Signed Lorraine Oates

Date 23 December 2011

22 St Peters Road
Abingdon OX14 3SJ

2011 Oxfordshire Ramblers Survey

Introduction and Rate of Response

A survey was sent with the mailing of the Oxfordshire Winter 2011 walks programme to 1758 addresses. This covers the full membership of the Oxfordshire Ramblers as one mailing is sent per address whether that address is associated with a single or joint membership.

Respondents had a choice to submit their answers on paper or electronically via SurveyMonkey (or by downloading a copy of the questionnaire from the Area website). The responses from all sources were combined together and the total number of responses was 308. This represents a response rate of 17.5%. Typically, when sending a survey to members of an organisation, one would expect a typical response rate from 5 to 40% so the rate of response for this survey can be treated as typical for a survey of this kind.

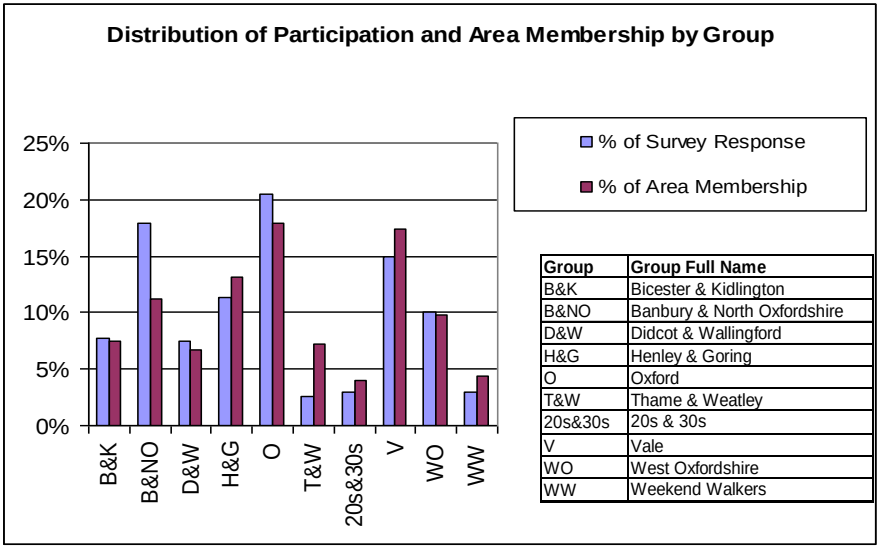
In order to encourage responses, a draw was organised whereby 3 lucky winners each received a £25 shopping voucher. The winners were:

Rod Hudson of Ratley, a member of the B&NO group.
David Day of Burford, a member of the West Oxon group.
Sarah Howse of Headington, a member of the Weekend Walkers group.

Profile of Respondents

Respondents were asked to state which group they belong to. The proportion of survey responses for each group has been plotted next to the proportion of Area members belonging to that group. This allows determining whether the rate of responses in each group is proportional to the size of the group.

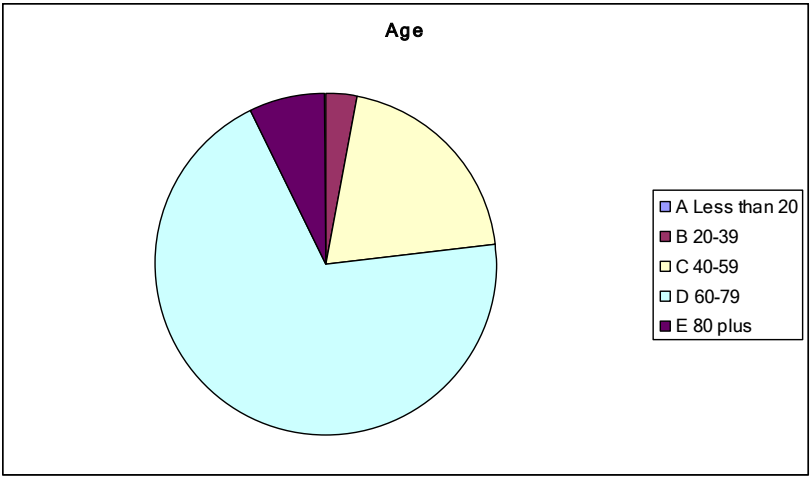
The numbers are generally consistent with a few exceptions such as the Banbury & North Oxfordshire group, which had a much higher proportion of survey responses than expected given the size of the group. This suggests that a diverse range of participants, evenly spread between the groups, took part in the survey. The responses can therefore be treated as representing the opinion of members of all groups in the Area.



Group	Group Full Name
B&K	Bicester & Kidlington
B&NO	Banbury & North Oxfordshire
D&W	Didcot & Wallingford
H&G	Henley & Goring
O	Oxford
T&W	Thame & Weatley
20s&30s	20s & 30s
V	Vale
WO	West Oxfordshire
WW	Weekend Walkers

44% of respondents are Female and 56% if respondents were Male. We do not have exact figures for the actual Male/Female ratio for Oxfordshire Ramblers but we estimate the Area to be made up of approximately 58.5% Female and 41.5% Male members. The Male/Female ratio of respondents was slightly different to what we perceive to be the true ratio in the Area, with a higher proportion of Male rather than Female members responding than expected.

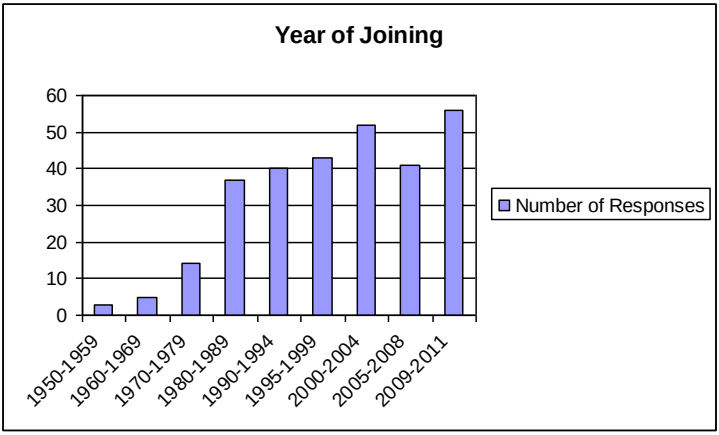
There were no respondents below the age of 20 and well over half of respondents were in the 60-79 age bracket. Here is the age profile of respondents:



This would suggest that an overwhelming majority of members of Oxfordshire Ramblers are aged over 60. This is a concern for the organisation as without an increase in younger members, it will be impossible to maintain the membership numbers over the long term. The organisation should therefore focus more on recruiting younger members.

Length of Membership

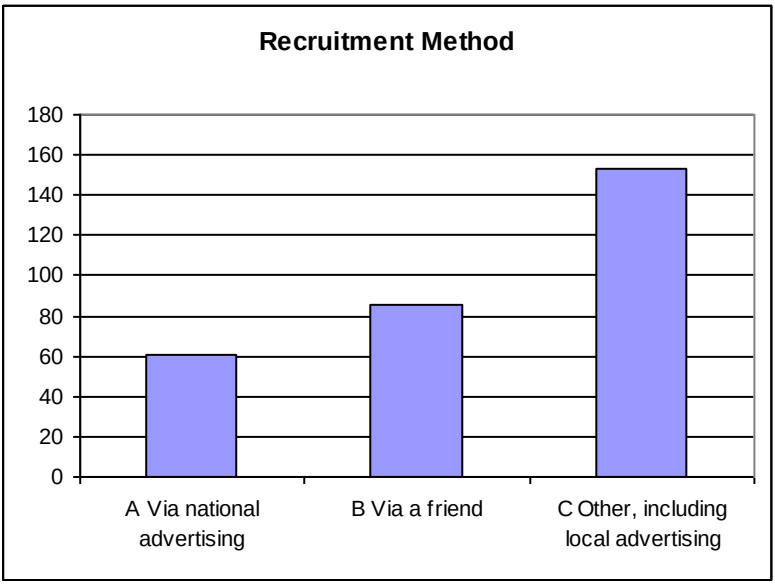
Members were asked to state the year in which they joined the Ramblers. 6% of respondents didn't respond to this question or said they could not remember. Responses were grouped into bands to enable interpretation.



49% of respondents have been members for over 10 years and 19% have been members for less than 3 years. This shows that there are reasonable retention rates within Oxfordshire Ramblers but ensuring long term retention, especially within the first 3 years of membership is important for maintaining a healthy number of members.

Recruitment Method

In order to assess the effectiveness of various recruitment methods, the survey asked how members came to join the Ramblers. This was done via a multiple-choice question with three choices.

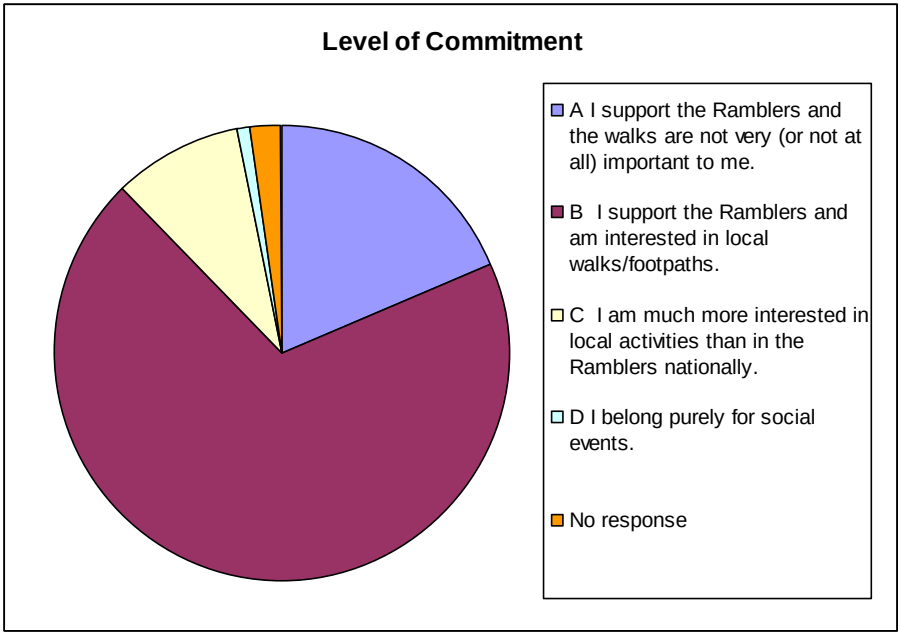


The data shows that all advertising methods are effective but that national campaigns are the least effective. Local methods such as recommendations from friends and local advertising seem to work best. This shows that publicity efforts at Group or Area levels are very valuable and members should be encouraged to refer their friends.

Commitment to the Ramblers

A multiple-choice question with four choices asked members to state their level of commitment to the Ramblers. The purpose of this question was to understand whether members belonged because of an interest in the Ramblers nationally, in local walks and footpaths or for other reasons.

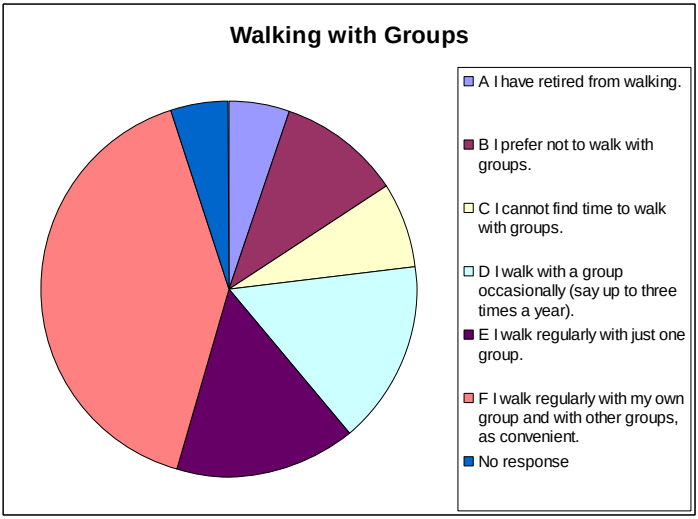
An overwhelming majority (nearly 70%) of members responded that they support the Ramblers and are interested in local walks/footpaths. This is encouraging as it shows a good level of commitment to all the main purposes of the organisation. The next most popular answer (nearly 20%) was supporting the Ramblers with the walks not being very important to the respondent. Very few respondents said they belong purely for social events.



Walking with Groups

A lot of effort is made by all the Groups within the Oxfordshire Area to put together a varied programme of led walks. In order to better understand how important these walks are to our members, respondents were asked to choose one of six options to describe how often they take part in these walks.

Walking with groups is popular amongst respondents with 57% choosing option E or F, meaning that they walk regularly either with just one group or with a variety of groups. Less than a quarter of respondents said they never walk with groups for one of the three reasons A to C.



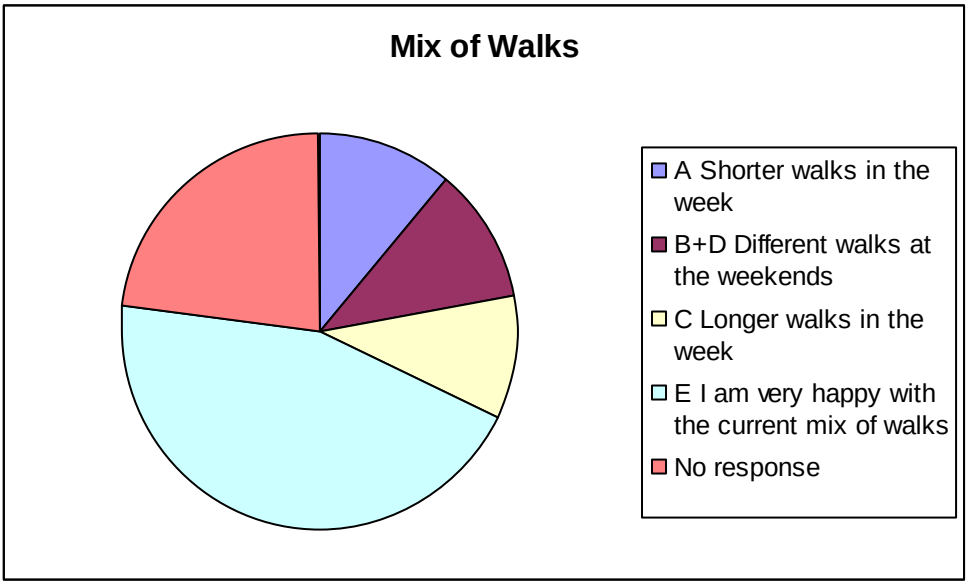
Mix of Walks

Respondents were given the opportunity to state whether they were happy with the current mix of walks or whether they would prefer different types of walks. There were four alternatives but unfortunately a mistake was made and options B and D ended up being identical. They both offered the option of "Shorter walks at the weekend", while one of them should have read "Longer walks at the weekend". The error occurred in SurveyMonkey and in the paper version of the questionnaire but was later corrected in the electronic version that was available to download from the Area website.

Options B and D both referred to different choices of walks at the weekend so all the responses from these two questions have been merged and put under an amended category "Different walks at weekends" to allow analysis of the results.

Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) did not answer this question and almost half (48%) said that they are very happy with the current mix of walks (option E). The distribution of all other responses is evenly spread between A, B+D and C.

This shows that the current mix of walks suits a lot of our membership but there is scope for experimenting with slightly different options, which may suit a small portion of our membership better.



Conclusions

The response rate of the Oxfordshire Ramblers 2011 survey was typical of surveys of this kind with a good balance of responses from members of all groups. The survey suggests that an overwhelming majority of members are aged over 60 and this is telling us that more efforts are needed to recruit younger members.

Nearly half of respondents have been members for over 10 years and nearly a fifth for 3 years or less, showing that Oxfordshire Ramblers is good at retaining members for a long time but also needs to carry on focusing on retention.

In terms of publicity, it appears that local methods are more effective than national campaigns, suggesting that efforts at Group or Area level are very worthwhile.

An overwhelming majority (nearly 70%) of members said that they support the Ramblers and are interested in local walks/footpaths and very few belong purely for social events. This shows a good level of commitment to some or all of the Ramblers' main objectives.

Over half of respondents walk with either just one or several groups, which confirms a high level of interest in the group walks. Nearly half of respondents said that they are happy with the current mix of walks, although different types of walks may appeal to some members.

The Oxfordshire Area EC would like to thank all members who took part in this survey, as it is very helpful to understand our membership better. A large number of comments were also collected. The Area EC will carefully study these comments and the responses to individual questions to help focus work on areas that should have a positive impact on members.