



West Herts Ramblers Newsletter Autumn 2026

As we progress into a cooler autumn, we can look back on some great memories of summer. Still a lot to look forward to though! We have the AGM coming up on 15th November when we return to the Box Moor Trust for a walk (optional), a lunch and an opportunity for the Committee to report back to you on this year. We welcome your support at this meeting and your suggestions and good ideas. You may also want to join us on the Committee – please do speak to us if you would like more information.

The Christmas Lunch is coming up on 13th December, do join us for a walk and a good meal provided by Redbourn Golf Club. Invitations will be sent out very soon.

We have had a diverse walking programme with lots of interest. Many thanks to our walk leaders, and special thanks to our newer walk leaders. We have a pretty full programme at the present time but we would like to do more and will support any member who wants to join the team.

In late May, we had an evening for our volunteers held at The 3 Brewers in Symondshide, a great opportunity to socialise and share ideas, with the venue kindly provided free of charge by the brewery. September saw us returning to The 3 Brewers for a group walk taking in their annual music festival.



In June we had our coach walk to Colchester. The long walkers had the pleasure of walking into Colchester through fields and villages, finally arriving at the ancient town walls with time to explore the town. The short walk took in the historic sites, it was led by Gordon who gave his usual well-researched historical information. The weather was good and some of us took the afternoon walk along the riverside. Many thanks to all those who came and all those who made it happen.

We were well represented at the October Area Walks Festival with Azar and Gordon providing 2 of the walks. Not an area that we often walk in, Welham Green was full of interest and well worth more walks in the future.

I am also very pleased to hear that we have a new footpaths officer for Tring Town and Tring Rural – a post which was vacant for some time. This leaves us with vacancies for Flamstead and Markyate, smaller parishes which you may be interested in taking on.

In August Azar introduced an enjoyable group picnic to the programme.

The Summer Picnic 16/08/2026

Our summer picnic walk proved a wonderful opportunity to bring Ramblers together for a day of walking, conversation, and friendship at Gadebridge Park in Hemel Hempstead. An impressive 29 people took part, making the event a great success and demonstrating the enthusiasm within our walking community.



To make the event as inclusive as possible, we organised three different walks of varying lengths, giving people the opportunity to choose a route that best suited their

ability and preference. This meant that more people could join in and enjoy the day at their own pace, while still being part of the wider group event.

The walks combined views of rural Hemel Hempstead with its historical pockets nestled in the Chiltern Hills, offering a distinct country charm, featuring chalkland valleys, the River Gade, medieval timber-framed cottages at Piccotts End, and a lovely view of the Old Town before arriving back at the starting point.



After completing the walks, everyone came together on the sun-drenched lawns by the water park for a well-earned picnic. It provided the perfect opportunity to relax, catch up with familiar faces, and get to know some new ones.



The feedback was extremely positive, with everyone saying how much they had enjoyed the event. Bringing together different walks followed by one shared picnic worked particularly well and helped create a real sense of community.

Some quotes from participants:

- “A lovely way to meet other walkers and enjoy the park together.”
- “It was a lovely day and a great way to combine good walks with the chance to relax and catch up afterwards.”
- “It was such an enjoyable day. Let’s make the summer picnic walk an annual event!”

The picnic was about much more than walking. One of our aims was to bring the group closer together socially, while also providing a welcoming introduction for new Ramblers and people who might be considering joining us for future walks. The relaxed atmosphere gave everyone plenty of opportunity to chat and enjoy each other's company away from the walk.

A massive thank you to everyone who led walks, brought snacks and drinks, or simply brought their wonderful energy to the lawn. I enjoyed the experience and learned a few things along the way.

Azar Thomson

Our policy on photos on walks

Our walk photos often give enormous pleasure, not to mention attracting new walkers. But we wholeheartedly accept Ramblers’ commitment to avoid behaviour that could make people feel uncomfortable ([see Ramblers guidelines](#)). To explain how we will balance these two important principles, the Committee has drawn up a [policy](#).

The published [Information for Walkers](#) and the email acknowledging walk bookings tell people that we take photos and that anyone who does not want to be in them should let the walk leader know. People on the walk taking photos will be told and those who have objected should then be left out of any photos on that walk.

Some photos in any case will always need the express consent of the person in the photo. These are ones that either show individuals as single subjects; or are manipulated to change how people look or animate their images. Consent can be given orally when the image is taken or by electronic communication afterwards.

In addition, anyone who objects to their image after it is published can still contact the [Photograph Administrator or Deputy](#) and the image will be removed wherever possible. (Images on WhatsApp can currently only be removed within two days of their uploading.)

This note, and the policy, apply to moving images and videos as well as to still photos.

Breathing Techniques Workshop

Twenty WHR members gathered in St Mary's Church Hall in Redbourn in August with the aim of learning how to improve our breathing techniques and consequently, our ability to walk for longer and more comfortably.

Michael Doyle, our leader, began by explaining the biology behind the techniques he uses and then convinced us, via a series of individual breathing assessments, that we were almost all breathing inefficiently. However, we had no need to worry as he then explained how we could overcome this by breathing deeply, slowly and lightly. We practised a number of exercises in functional breathing, including while walking round the churchyard.

I certainly learned a lot, and while I don't always manage to follow the techniques, I know it makes a difference when I do and I have a much better understanding of how functional breathing can help me to relax, walk for longer without feeling tired and give me enough puff to get up those pesky hills.

Lynda Abbott

14th - 18th September 2026

Autumn break to Weymouth, Dorset

West Herts Ramblers' weeks away are always a highlight. This autumn's trip to Weymouth was no exception and despite the uninspiring weather forecasts, the sun shone. I have no idea how this works but somehow the good weather has been following us around – long may it last. There was one cloudy and, sort of drizzly, start but that promptly dissolved into sunshine as soon as we left the hotel!



Weymouth was a great setting. Walks on the doorstep so no driving around. Sea and green countryside all within a short amble from the hotel. At least one of our group

even swam in the sea every day. I wasn't so brave and opted for the hotel pool and a relax in the jacuzzi.

The walks around the coast form part of the King's Coastal Path and provided three days of walking with long and short walks planned, while those who wanted to opt out had plenty to visit in the locality.

Day 1 saw us walking along the front towards Osmington. The short walk took in the nature reserve and the longer walk went inland and over to Osmington Mills. The best laid plans of mice and men were however slightly disrupted by some of us opting to do a hybrid of the nature reserve with the short walk group then to Osmington Mills where we met up with the long walk group for lunch and returned together. The coastal walk provided fantastic views as well as the view of the Osmington White Horse that was created in 1808 to celebrate King George III who was a regular visitor to Weymouth. The White Horse definitely needs some restoration work and significant weeding much like the Whipsnade Zoo White Lion did 3 yrs ago! (The Whipsnade weeders are thinking about offering our services – for a fee)



Day 2 took us all on walks around Portland with short and long walks. We went on the bus which allowed us to adjust the start and stop points but we were all able to meet up at lunch time. The views from Portland are stunning and the walking interesting as there is so much history attached to the place. Fossils, the site of castles going back to at least to late 11th century, prisons and now young offenders, a naval base that has played important roles in several wars, and more recently the base for sailing events in the 2012 Olympic Games

Day 3's walk started from the hotel and took us through the town and harbour and around to the start of Chesil Beach which is an 18-mile-long shingle barrier beach stretching from Portland to West Bay and is one of Dorset's most iconic landmarks. Shingle not being the easiest of walking surfaces we enjoyed lunch at the start of the

beach but then turned inland to walk around and back to Weymouth along the local footpaths.

After a day's walking discovering the local area it was back to the hotel making use of their facilities then to meet up to swap stories and then gather for dinner. We did have to persuade the kitchen staff that just because we were ramblers didn't mean we wanted double portions of food; it was very good though. And the evenings were spent in very good company.

Needless to say, there were many photos taken, many were shared and some at least added to our website.

None of this would have happened though without our fantastic volunteers. Gordon for organising the venue then all the walk leaders who tried to keep us under control and generally succeeded and everyone else who made it all run smoothly. Thank you for delivering a super autumn break. I'm looking forward to Swanage in the spring and then Norfolk next Autumn.

Anne James

Holidays Questionnaire

It's been some 4 years now since I last asked members about our holidays in the form of a questionnaire, during which time the dynamics of our group has changed.

When I first started booking holidays for our group, I had a 50/50 split of couples and singles, which made booking a hotel easier. I now find we have far more single members than couples. On one of my bookings, I had an 85% of singles. I am afraid hotels are not keen on so many singles taking up double rooms. This of course pushes the cost up. During my time of organising our holidays I have seen the cost of holidays increase for everyone, but especially singles. With this in mind, I thought the time was right for a new questionnaire, hopefully with a different take on the questions. I asked Jackie Hawkins and Sue Nethercoat to set the questions. With new ideas they did a stout job and I must thank them.

The Questionnaire we had 45 responses, of which 10 have never been on one of our holidays. I have no idea on members names who took part. Each person was just a number. However, I could deduce if someone answered with 'never been on WHR holiday before' I could work out some of reasons why not, which made for interesting reading. Also seeing members who have been before, if they were satisfied or not, along with some surprising suggestions. So, thank you to all who took part.

A breakdown of the questionnaire, in all 28 questions were proposed, from which I will deduce the key findings. Some questions were multiple choice, which are difficult to decipher, but do give an indication of feelings. For example, Q2. 'What might prevent you from going on WHR Holiday?'

- A. The biggest reply was 'Dates don't suit' 32.
- B. Fitness 12,
- C. Cost 9,
- D. Location 7.

- E. Travel distance with 2.
- F. Group size was zero.

So, I can't win on that one. Although going on past bookings, April and October seem to be the most popular.

So, the questions were set to give answers how we go about organising our holidays. With questions on booking, travel, duration, type of accommodation, location, distance of walks and of course cost.

I have gone through the responses and paid special attention to comments.

Booking: Booking a hotel is probably my biggest problem. Where and how many rooms? Do they do evening meals? car parking? price? Also walking suitability. Once I find a suitable hotel and make contact, the number of hotels who don't reply is amazing. When they do, it's a question of dates, numbers and price. I don't know numbers until I ask you, could it be 20, 30 or even 40, and how many will be single? All this then raises questions, date suitability? how many single rooms?

As far as the results from the questionnaire go, it looks like carry on as before with holiday dates only being for April and October.

Distance: Majority seem happy to travel 3 to 4 hours with mileage between 170 and 220. Also, a high proportion are also willing to travel further, along with no preference today of travel. Friday was the least popular.

Area type: Coastal was most popular, followed by hilly countryside. A surprising number suggested Norfolk and Suffolk as destinations, which I will bear in mind.

Walks: It seems that the group is most happy with up to 10 miles for a walk, with some give and take. Walk on departure date was interesting, I might well reconsider this option.

Accommodation: Vast majority would like to continue group accommodation, especially for the social side. However, I feel we must offer people the chance to book their own accommodation due to price, then they join us for walks and possible evening meals. Duration of stay, by far the most popular was 4 nights, along with 2 breaks a year.

Type of accommodation: I find independent hotels the easiest to deal with, Best Western hotels seem to offer a good standard (3-star hotel). HF Holidays, I find too regimented, great if I can book the whole hotel but a nightmare if not.

Sharing a room or bathroom which helps with cost, especially singles. Quite a number of you said you were willing to share, but this is not what I find when it comes to actually booking.

Price: I must admit that I was a little bit surprised by this reply, it's seeming my worries on single members cost being too high was unfounded. Going on the replies

it seems that members accept the prices on offer. Of course we would all like them lower.

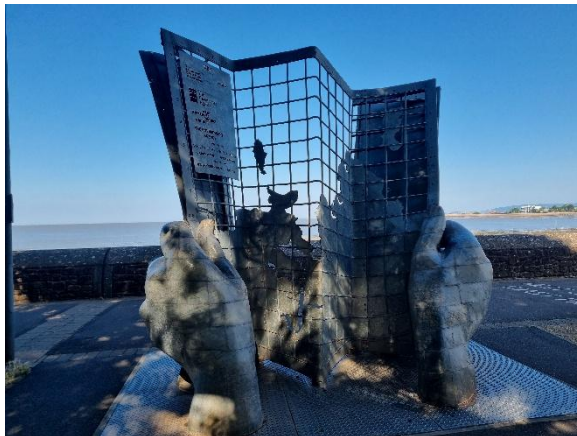
Transport: Many of you would be interested in coach travel. However, having tried it once before, I found the logistics a nightmare. How many pick-ups and where? Could you leave a car there for 5 days? What happens when we are there at the hotel? Can all walks be from the hotel? Do we need to keep driver and coach for the duration? Cost? Same goes for public transport, too many questions.

Wish list Generally happy with the status quo. A couple of comments I will keep in mind, like hotel close to civilisation, which makes walking into town easy. Harrogate was a big success for this but makes walking from hotel more challenging. Vegetarian food available poor, a difficult one to overcome. More places available, another challenging problem, different hotels have different criteria.

Gordon Munro

North Devon Coast Path

John Drake



Hands Sculpture



Bossington

This first segment of the Southwest Coast path runs 82 miles from Minehead by undulating coast paths and eventually old railway tracks along estuaries to Appledore. The first day starts at the Hands or Map Sculpture erected in 2001, from there the way climbs steadily through woodland to a more rugged cliff trail with great views before descending into the picturesque national trust village at Bossington with its welcome tearoom.

Then follows what even the guidebooks admit is a tough and exhausting 15 mile days walk from Porlock to Lynmouth. A highlight is the Culbourn church, still in use but with no vehicular access except by a precarious track. Later the path takes an irritating new diversion, a long wind uphill curving round a valley before coming down again. A few miles before Lynmouth there is an honesty box for cold drinks, never was a Fanta more appreciated!



Culbourn Church



Valley of Rocks

Lynmouth is connected to Lynton above the harbour by a water driven funicular railway, unfortunately this starts too late in the morning for walkers so the steep zig zag path must be ascended. The reward is a stroll through the weird ice age formations at the Valley of Rocks.

The path eventually crosses Hollow Brook waterfall, which the low rainfall had reduced that to a disappointing trickle before progressing over a very exposed trail high above the sea. At Heddon's Mouth there is a long hard descent into one of England's steepest valleys leading to a small bridge across the Heddon. At this point there is a choice; an intimidating climb up the other side and an eventual climb over Great Hangman into Combe Martin or the more tempting offer of the Hunters Inn. I admit I took the latter, a quenching cider and taxi, I was not the first and won't be the last, the cabbie said it was his most frequent run!



Watermouth



Ifracombe

From Combe Martin there is a shorter day on the cliffs with fabulous views over the coast around Watermouth to the lovely harbour at Ifracombe.

From here there is an easier and pleasant cliff path to Lee Bay before the more demanding trail with numerous up and down steps across the well named Damage Cliffs, passing Bull Point lighthouse and Morte Point where seals can be seen, but only one distant bobbing head on my day.

Woollacombe with its magnificent sands is reached before circumnavigating Baggy Point and entering the surfing village at Croyde again with a superlative beach.



Baggy Point



River Taw

Relief! the path is now fairly level to Braunton along the Taw Estuary; from there it is a rail track to Barnstaple continuing on to Instow. The guidebooks acknowledge some walkers can find this to be a tedious day but the contrast to the cliff paths and the waterfowl provide interest as does the tearoom converted from the railway station at Fremington. I recommend the scones, being Devon cream before jam, of course!



Bideford



Appledore

At Instow the end at Appledore can be seen just across the river, however it is a further 7 mile hike upstream to the Long Bridge at Bideford and downstream again. The quaint former fishing village has what the guidebook describes as “a jumble of tiny cottages connected by narrow cobbled alleyways” a lovely place to purchase a Devon cider and celebrate the finish.

John Drake

We introduced **I recommend** to the Newsletter at the suggestion of one member when she realised just how much time walkers spent talking about books, theatre and other leisure activities which were worth passing on to others. Don't forget to let us know your recommendations, especially as we will have new books for Christmas.

I recommend ...

Marion recommends

Book Title: God's Own Country

Author: Ross Raisin

Summary: Set on a farm on the North York moors, the story follows a solitary young man as the area changes, with ramblers coming in along with second homers. Witty and closely observed, the story takes another turn when he befriends an incomer.

Ian recommends

Book Title: Careless People

Author: Sarah Wynn-Williams

Summary: An expose of the toxic culture of Facebook and Meta from a former Facebook director. They've tried to suppress her by blocking publication of the book and obtaining a gagging order to stop her promoting it. What she thought would be her ideal job turns into a nightmare as she discovers what drives Mark Zuckerberg and the lack of morality among the senior Facebook Team. It turns out that being a force for good in the world isn't part of the Facebook agenda.

Dates for your diary

15th November 2026

13th December 2026

11th- 15th April 2027

6th - 10th October 2027

AGM

Christmas lunch

Spring break in Swanage

Autumn break to Norfolk

Marion Adams

On behalf of the Committee

Chair

Treasurer

Secretary

Webmaster

Walks Co-ordinator

Deputy Walks Co-ordinator

Membership Secretary

Dacorum Footpath Secretary

Area Liaison Representative

Publicity Officers

Other committee members

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Lynda Abbott

Ian Brander

Clive Sutton

Heather Harris

Chris Abbott

John Rowe

Marion Adams

Anne James and Azar Thomson

Gordon Munro, Ginny Harrison.

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Val Howlett, Ginny Harrison