

# Ramblers Volunteer Section Round-Up

## 9 June 2010 - 7 July 2010



This round-up contains the text of all items posted on the Ramblers Web site Volunteer Section since the 5th June. Some of the items had deadlines which have now passed. These are included for interest only.

In some items as originally posted, web site hyperlinks gave access to more information. Where possible, we have included the full linked text. Where this is not possible we have provided the full link location.

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### General

## Tom's Blog July 2010

### Thoughts and reflections from the Chief Executive (News - posted 28th June 2010)

*Dear volunteer,*

Congratulations to North East Lancashire Area for a splendid 75th Anniversary event last Saturday. The Area's Groups took different routes to the top of the iconic Pendle Hill (famous for its 17th century 'witches' and also as the place where George Fox had a visitation which led him to found the Quakers) - where we met on the summit for lunch and a rally. More than 100 people took part, both young and old.

At the summit, I met one long-standing Ramblers member, Mary Thorpe (pictured in the top photo), aged 85, who first climbed Pendle Hill with her grandmother exactly 75 years ago - at the age of 10!

Recruiting (and keeping) members - six of the best

Without our members, the Ramblers simply wouldn't exist. If the Ramblers didn't exist, very quickly we would start to see our cherished public paths disappear, and simply going for a walk would become increasingly difficult. On the other hand, if we had more members, the Ramblers could put on more walks, have a greater pool of volunteers to share the work, have more clout with local authorities and government, and have more funds for campaigning. The RSPB, with over one million members, has achieved this.

For the last few years, Ramblers membership has been in gradual decline, and we need to reverse this. We've set this as our goal for the year ahead.

I've been looking at membership numbers in Groups to see if there are any patterns. Since January, out of every ten Groups, about four have either grown or stayed the same, and six have shrunk. A 'good ideas' session at General Council listed volunteers' ideas for increasing membership, but I've also spent the past month phoning up different Groups each day - some that are growing and some that are shrinking - to ask for their views. These are my 'six of the best' themes from what they've said:

Growing Groups make a special effort with newcomers. They've told me how they "*hug the newcomers*" or "*talk to the strangers*". (Conversely, one of the reasons new members give for not renewing after their first year is that they weren't made to feel welcome on walks.)

Growing Groups make a continual effort to recruit new volunteers onto the committee. Somebody described it thus: "*in football parlance, your team is only as good as the first substitute on the bench*". There's a constant rotation of roles, so that new people keep coming through (bringing energy and ideas). (I've noticed that some of the Groups that are shrinking are having problems recruiting new volunteers, and have more volunteer role vacancies.)

Growing Groups emphasise the social. They build in pub or café stops and organise social evenings. Some of them organise 'new member evenings'.

Growing Groups tend to put on a range of walks – ranging from under five miles to 12 miles or more. This means there's something for everyone. (However, quite a few Groups tell me they have difficulty recruiting walks leaders for the shorter walks.) People tend to join the Ramblers for the walks, but they might stay for the campaigning – once they've found out more about how important this is.

Growing Groups do more promotion. They use Walks Finder, have a good website, attend local fetes, and send laminated walks programmes to libraries or parish councils. One group told me they've arranged to have membership leaflets on the counters of local outdoors shops.

Some of the Groups which are shrinking in size do some of these six things too, and I don't think there is a 'magic answer' that I can say "if you do this, membership will grow". It depends on a number of factors. However, volunteers in growing Groups believe the ideas listed above do make a difference, and I think your group is more likely to grow if you do them too.

Do we know your email address?

I spoke to a volunteer at the North East Lancashire 75th celebrations on Saturday who was complaining that he doesn't hear from us now that we have stopped sending out paper mailings. I asked him if we knew his email address, and he said we didn't. I've now added his email address to our 'CRM' system, so he'll be getting the monthly e-Newsletter from now onwards (like the one in the picture above). We only know email addresses for a quarter of the Ramblers' 12,000 volunteers. If we have your email address, it means we can get news to you directly and faster, and it helps to keep postage costs down. If you don't hear from us by email, the chances are we don't know your email address, so why not sign up? Make sure you check the third item on the form, entitled '*News for Ramblers Volunteers*'.

Special 75th anniversary volunteer awards

Do you know a volunteer who deserves special recognition for their work for the Ramblers? Why not put them forward for a special 75th anniversary award. There are eight categories:

Membership (somebody who makes joining a Group or Area welcoming, easy and simple)

Led Walks (somebody who has increased the number of people attending, and made them as interesting as possible)

Growing the organization (somebody who has grown their Group or Area membership and/or put an induction process in place to make new volunteers feel welcome)

Campaigner Award (somebody who has had a major campaign success for the Ramblers)

Introducing people to walking (somebody who has helped to introduce a new section of the community to walking)

Successful Committee Member (a Group or Area Committee member who has worked to make sure the organisation can function well).

Partnership (somebody who has worked successfully with a local council or other organisation to achieve a success for walkers)

Media Award (somebody who has successfully worked to get their Group or Area in the local media on a regular basis in a positive way).

It's a really simple nominations form, and anyone can nominate someone from their Group or Area. Go to <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/Recognising-volunteers.htm> for further information.

### Public Path Successes

We've had lots of public path successes for Ramblers coming through recently – 122 paths unblocked, opened, or newly recorded so far this year, each of them as a result of the work of Ramblers volunteers. It's important to have information about successes, because it helps with our campaigning work (we can highlight where successes are happening, and where they're not), and with our fundraising. With the budget this week, with many Government Departments facing budget squeezes of 25%, we're going to need to pull out all the stops to safeguard public paths. Some of the recent successes include a new path on the definitive map in Swannington, Leicestershire, thanks to Stan Warren's campaign and attendance at a public inquiry; and a new Right of Way create in Perrnuthnoe thanks to the work of Graham Ronan at a public inquiry.

Also in Cornwall, in the village of Wendron, Hazel Perham reports that a route which has been completely grown in, with stiles missing and very boggy, has finally been cleared after a vigorous campaign. And in Woking in Surrey, a decrepit and partially collapsed stile, which was very difficult to cross, has been replaced following representation to the council by the local Ramblers.

We need to know your successes too! Please keep them coming in – go to [http://www.ramblers.org.uk/rights\\_of\\_way/successes.htm](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/rights_of_way/successes.htm) to tell us about your success.

### Special Regional and National Volunteer Meetings

Last year, following the big reductions in spending which we had to implement, Ramblers Chair Rodney Whittaker and myself attended eleven special regional and national meetings. We met with more than 200 volunteers, and most of those attending reported that they found them very helpful. We certainly found them very useful, in hearing the different views of volunteers and reporting them back.

This year, in rather better circumstances, we've decided to hold some more. We'll use the same informal format as last year, looking at the priorities for the year ahead with much time to ask questions and give views. But we also want to focus on the issue of membership – as I say above, we think this is absolutely crucial to us, and we want to discuss with as many of you as possible what we can all do to boost membership over the coming year.

The meetings will be taking place in Glasgow, Cardiff, Newcastle, Liverpool, Plymouth and London during October and November. Please book early, because last year several of the events filled up fast. For more information and to book a place go to

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/Special+National+and+Regional+Meetings+2010.htm>.

That's enough for this month - enjoy the fine weather. And **thank you** for all you do for the Ramblers.

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## Special National and Regional Meetings 2010

Meetings across Britain for volunteers with the Chair and Chief Executive this autumn (events – posted 25 June 2010)

Meetings to take place in Newcastle, Cardiff, Glasgow, London, Liverpool and Plymouth during October and November 2010. Please note - there will be another meeting in Nottingham later in the year, date to follow.

The two-hour meetings are being held to help improve communications between central office, the Board of Trustees, and Areas and Groups of the Ramblers - Britain's walking charity. They follow similar meetings held across Britain during last winter, which were well-received by those attending.

Each will involve both Rodney Whittaker, Chair, and Tom Franklin, Chief Executive. All volunteers are welcome, although as space is limited (and several of last year's events were fully booked) early booking is recommended to avoid disappointment (see booking form below).

The meetings will:

begin with an introduction to the Ramblers business plan for 2010/11 – setting out what the priorities are for the year ahead, for both our campaigning and our walks programmes;

focus on the issue of how we are working to increase our membership – after many years of gradual decline, we all need to work to increase our membership this year;

include an opportunity to discuss volunteer concerns and views, for Rodney and Tom to report back to the Board of Trustees and the Senior Management Team.

Tea and coffee will be provided.

The dates and times (exact times TBC) of the meetings are:

Newcastle - 7 October 2010 - early afternoon

Cardiff - 14 October 2010 - early evening

Glasgow - 26 October 2010 - early evening

London 2 - November 2010 - early evening

Liverpool 19 - November 2010 - early afternoon

Plymouth 23 - November 2010 - early evening

Timings will be confirmed in an e-mail confirmation of booking during August. We would expect your Area or Group to reimburse your travel costs. If this is not possible, please indicate on the registration form, under other comments.

Please note that spaces are limited, you are recommended to book early to avoid disappointment. Complete one form per person, following the instructions on the form and submit. Go to <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/Regional+Meeting+Registration.htm> to register (Registration Form)

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## Volunteer Support

# Volunteers' Top Tips: Keeping public paths clear

## Volunteers share their ideas on how to effectively keep the network of public paths clear and useable, following a 'Good Ideas' workshop at General Council.

Safeguarding our public path network is at the heart of Ramblers work. Yet the quality of the network differs across Britain. Sometimes this is down to differing attitudes in local authorities, and sometimes down to the effectiveness of the Ramblers locally. We asked volunteers to share their ideas - you can share your own at the bottom of this page.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs), their implementation and Local Access Forums (LAFs)

The Welsh experience – money in Carmarthenshire for the Plan. The Local Access Forum is running the RoWIP.

Merseyside – the Local Access Forum is key – it has produced an action plan and is driving it forward.

In a number of places the RoWIP seems to be focussed on maintenance, rather than big ideas...

East Riding – they starting to rewrite their RoWIP.

A number of councils pay lip-service to it.

Often just seen as a document on the shelf.

North Yorkshire – split between the LAF and the Ramblers. LAF does not represent walkers' interests and is landowner dominated. It has not been given the budget it needs this year.

Help for practical path work through RoWIP – need to identify pots of money.

Use the RoWIP to defeat gating orders.

LAFs – by invitation/interview – if you are militant or noisy, you do not get onto LAFs.

Leicestershire – now has a fairly influential LAF. But RoWIP is largely based on maintenance – not extensions.

Way forward, what to concentrate on

Need to get onto the farmers – question of cross-compliance. Challenge farmers on this. Need to start putting down Parliamentary Questions.

Councils are now going backwards on rights of way. Need to be very clear with councils – clear message from DEFRA. Need to take legal action where needed – and challenge inaction this way.

Glastir in Wales – cross-compliance is not being pushed enough. Need to look at this.

Central Office needs to give more help on grant funding – support local Areas and Groups – Oxfordshire and Merseyside.

Herefordshire – contracted out the whole system to Amey. Doing highways and rights of way. Public Service Agreement for paths. Had some money in. What happened to these?

Creations – where is the future here? There should be far more, as it is simple and relatively cheap.

2026 cut-off date – where are we now? Support for volunteers. Big project in Hampshire – looking at routes for RoWIP. Generalised scoring system – some sort of matrix, which links in to usefulness. Claims going in in East Riding – about 50 per year, but council is only processing about 4 a year.

## Alleygating

Alleygating– need to highlight safe routes to schools, bring to bear the full weight of governors and Parent-Teachers Associations. Need to get the gating reviewed – find where people are unhappy. Gated paths that are in a terrible condition.

Need to establish demand for these routes.

Need to find local opposition. Gating – need to consult LAFs. Litter and detritus doesn't help.

Also worries about other illegal closures and obstructions. Need to take action on these.

Need to carry out research into how much gating is costing. We need to know how much gating is going on and the overall cost.

## Role of National Parks

National Parks – do they all have responsibility for footpaths? If not, we need the National Park to do it. North York Moors and Dales have taken on responsibility. Harrogate District Council – handed back agency agreement. Carmarthenshire has delegated to National Park.

## Practical path work

Nottinghamshire – new system of parish wardens. Beds has parish wardens. North Yorks has parish survey. Walkers are Welcome is mobilizing a new group of volunteers. Need to support footpath volunteers.

More working parties are starting (or restarting) – Ramblers has got insurance sorted out. But a number of councils don't welcome volunteers because of concerns about liability. We need to address this.

Walk leaders with loppers – they do this at their own risk!

Some councils won't let volunteers work near main roads. But are willing to negotiate with land-owners elsewhere.

North Somerset – to get on with practical work get councillors and other organisations on board.

## Shared use and upgrading of paths

Upgrades to bridleway status. No objection if wide enough. Cycle tracks – needs to be designed right. Commercial aspect comes in. Surfacing is a major issue. Bells on bikes is a real issue.

Canals – Sustrans. Not a tarmaced surface. Off-road generally not tarmac. Good practice in Herefordshire.

## Urban paths

A high number of footpath claims in the West Midlands. 108 applications in to Coventry. 130 in to Birmingham. Lots of good work on urban paths. Need to be aware that a path claim can sometimes lead to a gating application.

## Surveys

Ploughing and Cropping surveys – Nottinghamshire. Good example of surveying and follow up legal action having an effect.

Notts are also still doing surveys like BVPI. Devon – wardens are expected to survey paths every two years. Herts are still doing it, Hampshire are still doing it.

Additional tips from readers (to add others, click on the link below)

*I have a small set of folding gardening tools including secateurs and small saw purchased at a modest cost (£3.99) from Wilkinsons. They came with a case intended to be put on a belt but the addition of a simple key ring makes it easy to attach them to the front of a rucksack strap. Thus on encountering stiles etc. barred by new brambler growth I can have the offending bram-*

bler trimmed before other walkers can get their rucksack off to look for the tools that they might have included. As well as being a useful suggestion for walkers to take with them there could be a publicity opportunity to be exploited with the Wilkinsons or other hardware suppliers.

*LAFs: In Surrey the LAF is dominated by equestrian interests who are saying the ROWIP should only include projects for those who did not benefit under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) i.e. there should be nothing in the ROWIP for walkers. They quote a page from the DEFRA website in support, even though there is nothing to this effect in CROW about the content of ROWIPs.*

*WAY FORWARD: Creations are only cheap when they are creation agreements; when it is an order the question of compensation to the landowner may arise.*

*PRACTICAL PATH WORK: About half the Groups in Surrey do practical path work. Other organisations, though notably not the British Horse Society, also do practical work. We are covered under Surrey County Council insurance, which is wider and better than the Ramblers own insurance.*

*SURVEYS: Surrey still use the Best Value indicator, BVPI178, as a measure of their rights of way work. The Ramblers have been asked to assist in this.*

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## **Volunteers' Top Tips: Putting on a varied walks programme**

Volunteers say how they manage to get variety into their walks programme, following a 'Good Ideas' workshop at General Council.

Groups with varied walks programmes are generally more successful in recruiting and retaining more members. A discussion at General Council looked at the best ways this could be done. Give your own feedback at the bottom of this page.

This was an energetic and creative discussion group which overall was supported by about 50 participants including from 20s-30s Groups, Areas experimenting with alternative programmes, and the Merseyside Area Coach Rambles project.

There was some surprise among participants about the range of different ways of working. However there was also a good deal of consensus, particularly on the need to attract new members by running shorter and more varied walks. Those who had been involved in running shorter walks reported these were the most popular of the walks offered, and were capable of attracting a different audience to that of the regular Ramblers walks. "We have two Groups that are successful and growing," said one participant, "and they're the ones with the more varied programmes. The rest are static or declining." "Everyone goes on our short walks," said another. Variety was important not only in length but in pace and also environment, with some groups having popular programmes of short urban/town walks.

The overwhelming barrier to running more walks such as this was the unwillingness of existing leaders to provide them. "People who like leading walks tend to be the ones who like long walks," said one.

Notable differences emerged in different Groups' interpretation of the role of Programme Coordinator. In some Groups, coordinators act mainly as a clearing house, allocating walks offered by leaders to particular slots in the programme. In others they and their committees take a more proactive role in encouraging leaders to do specific kinds of walks in order to achieve both geographical coverage and variety. Running / participating in walking festivals and events like Get Walking Day can provide a "way in" for shaping the walks offered by leaders more deliberately.

Several successful shorter walks programmes depended on individual leaders with a particular interest, and on recruiting new leaders, but this is a struggle. Training was suggested by several as an important tool in securing new leaders. Some Areas / Groups run their own training days, for example Chiltern 20s-30s, using their own ad hoc materials, and numerous groups employ informal mentoring / buddying. Ongoing support for leaders and bringing them into the loop was also mentioned, through regular social events and good communication (for example leader newsletters), as otherwise there's a tendency to leave them to get on with running their own walks with little contact with other leaders or Area/Group volunteers.

One Group had subsidised would-be leaders to attend MLTE-accredited Walking Group Leader training on Dartmoor.

Mainly leaders are left to devise their own routes but some Groups have libraries of routes that other leaders can use.

Groups generally attempt to recruit leaders from existing walkers, some treating it almost as a duty: "Everyone who walks regularly is expected to lead." But others accept many of those willing to attend a led walk will never be willing to lead. No-one appeared to have explored external sources of volunteers.

Success in establishing a dynamic walks programme can sometimes be down to one or two active and inspirational individuals. One volunteer recounted how a single individual had revitalised a moribund Group.

The discussion covered promoting the walks programme, with some delegates from Areas that produce consolidated programmes advocating this practice as a way of more fully reflecting the variety of walks available locally. By pooling resources more professional results could be achieved, making the presentation more appealing.

There was some discussion on the balance between promoting walking and keeping walks as a membership benefit. Some participants were surprised to hear about the Merseyside Coach Rambles and other public walks programmes. The coach rambles organiser said many of the regulars do indeed go on to join the Ramblers, though many don't, but others admitted that non-members regularly attend their regular walks. There was a feeling from some that a members-only policy would help maintain a "core group" of walkers that aided sustainability of the Group.

Some contributors regarded shorter walks as a temporary stage to help access the longer walks rather than an end in themselves. A volunteer from a Group that had participated in the Ramblers Cymru Cerrig Camu programme was disappointed that most participants "just enjoyed a stroll" and didn't want to "graduate" to more challenging Ramblers walks. "We didn't get a single member," he said. But others said there was no real problem if people didn't move on so long as leaders were available to sustain the programmes.

There was some discussion of the possibilities for introducing specialised programmes within a single Group or within an Area. One contributor showed a programme which brands particular kinds of walks from across all the Groups in strands, including some more challenging upland walks. Programmes for walkers aged 40+ run by a Hike Group may avoid the need to set up a separate Group for those who are now "too old".

Many Groups are very informal in monitoring the success of their walks. There was a lively discussion about the use of registers and leaders reporting back from walks – some found these requirements onerous but those already implementing them said they were much less time and trouble than imagined especially considering the usefulness of the information they can yield.  
Ideas to share

Make sure you communicate well with walk leaders, giving them opportunities to get involved in the wider programme compilation process and to share ideas and experiences with each other and with other volunteers.

Running regular and well-promoted shorter, easier walks is a tried and tested way of bringing in more new people and potential members – but be prepared that many of them will be happy to stick with the shorter walks and won't necessarily want to "graduate" to longer ones.

Think about variety in the walking environment too – include urban walks and themed walks (heritage, nature etc).

Help planning by reading Led Walks the Way Ahead.

Think about recruiting volunteers specifically as walk leaders, perhaps even from external sources – accept that not all regular walkers will want to lead.

New walk leaders need and expect support and confidence. Consider training courses, support materials and mentoring. Keep an eye on [www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer) for support materials.

Think proactively about guiding your leaders and shaping your walks programme – you will need to be diplomatic, but don't just leave it to the leaders to decide which walks take place.

Area programmes are a good way of demonstrating the variety of walks available locally and pooling resources means the results can look much more appealing than a single Group could manage.

Use the Group Walks Finder to promote your walks – most new members first hear about walks online. Email [volunteer@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@ramblers.org.uk) to get started on Walks Finder.

Carry out some simple monitoring to try to judge the relative success of different walks and the factors influencing it.

The social element of walking attracts many people so exploit it. Include a meal break or end a shorter walk at a café, pub or site of interest.

Think about including distinctive "sub programmes" if you can, perhaps of shorter walks, ones with particular themes or ones aimed at particular groups of people.

Tips from other readers (to add your own, click the link at the bottom of the page)

*Figure of 8 walks i.e. walks that return to the start point e.g. for lunch and then go out again are a way to provide both short and longer walks on the same day. The East Dorset group has included half day walks typically on Saturday mornings/afternoons for many years. I understand they are very popular with leaders/walkers who don't have time for a full days walking*

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# Volunteers' Top Tips: Using funds effectively

Volunteers share how they get the most out of limited funds, following a 'Good Ideas' workshop at General Council.

In these difficult economic times, we need to stretch our money further. Some Groups have found ways to save money and do things better. Here are their ideas - feed back your own ideas at the bottom of this page.

Walks programmes, newsletters, websites and publicity

Use of email and internet for walks programmes and communication: some Groups (especially the 20s-30s) are entirely electronic with communications, but most Groups have members not on the internet, so need to continue with paper communications to some degree.

Discussed opt-in vs opt-out into electronic communications. Some people favour an opt-out system e.g. walks programmes on Group website, saving on postage costs, with an opt-in to paper copies. However, others prefer to have an opt-in to electronic communications.

It was pointed out that electronic communications can transfer the cost to individuals if it is necessary to print off themselves.

Suggested that Central Office should actively collect member email addresses and share with Areas and Groups. *[Note: member email addresses are now provided in the electronic membership reports. Central Office would welcome additional email addresses from Groups.]*

Some Groups are able to negotiate lower fees for website hosting, although may not always be possible.

Number of walks programmes per year varies between two and four. Some Groups adopt a rolling walks programme rather than setting in advance – a more casual arrangement.

Where newsletters are sent on paper, these can be posted with walks programmes, with weight kept low enough to avoid increasing the postage costs.

Some Groups co-ordinate sending out walks programmes/newsletters with their Area to save time and costs. However, the timings do not always match to be able to do this.

Meetings, administration and governance

Area Council meetings: frequency between three and six times per year. One Area tried to cut down to three times per year, but this didn't work as it caused a loss in momentum and issues to be missed.

Informal Area meetings: around four per year.

Group meetings: between one and six per year. 20s-30s Groups generally have fewer meetings.

Income generation (fundraising, publications)

Possibility of generating income through production and sales of walks publications.

Groups can generate income through selling advertising space in walks programme, newsletters or on website, provided this is sold to organisations relevant to the Ramblers charitable aims.

Walks related expenditure (including walk leader expenses)

**Maps:** some volunteers said that members are asked to contribute to the cost of purchasing maps. Others use a map borrowing service from a library. Some expect walks leaders to provide their own maps.

Free walk leader training may be available e.g. from 'Walks for Health' in Suffolk.

**Walk leader expenses:** Some Groups set coach trip prices to include a recce expenses element, paid to the walks leader.

In a straw poll of those present in the discussion, on whether the Ramblers should pay walk leader expenses, 2 said Yes, 5 said No, and 3 Didn't vote.

However, this vote did not reflect the distinction between coach trips and other Group walks. Most people were happy for coaches to subsidise recce expenses, but not happy for Ramblers as an organisation to meet this cost.

Some people thought that we cannot say a blanket 'no' on paying out recce expenses. Instead we should not pay recce expenses unless the individual is in financial hardship. However, this cannot be judged by the Group/Area committee –the system has to operate on trust.

General agreement that where recce expenses are paid, they should only pay for one recce per walk, unless sufficient time has passed since the previous recce to warrant carrying out another recce.

Coaches, holidays and socials

**Social events:** trips, BBQ, skittles etc. These should aim for breakeven, but a small incidental surplus is fine. Same applies to coaches and holidays.

Surpluses shouldn't be allowed to accumulate, but should either be used on charitable activities or to subsidise future events.

Miscellaneous

**Volunteer expenses:** Most thought that volunteers should be able to claim their legitimate expenses on Ramblers business (e.g. travel to meetings, cost of printing etc). However, recce expenses not included in this.

Some suggested that claims can be made and then donated back to the Group, although this would have administrative implications.

Small claims can be rolled-up together to reduce Treasurer workload.

Some felt that central policies are not needed as these are set locally, but others felt that some co-ordination and consistency is needed.

Car sharing should be encouraged – voluntary contribution to be made to driver, at a suggested rate.

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## **Volunteers' Top Tips: How to increase Group membership**

Volunteers say what they find to be useful in boosting Ramblers membership locally, following a 'Good Ideas' workshop at General Council.

Some Ramblers Groups are growing, whilst others are finding their membership is shrinking. We asked volunteers to share their good ideas. If you have any comments on their ideas, feed them back at the end of this page.

Publicise both your walks and your group as widely as possible, e.g. in local press, shops, libraries, hotels, pubs, surgeries, etc.

Have a presence at local fetes and carnivals.

Keep existing members happy as most new members appear after talking to existing members.

The prospect of suitable walks leads people to join – they take an interest in the other objectives of the Ramblers once they have joined.

Cater for all abilities – the walks that the ‘serious walkers’ in your group enjoy may not be the ones that attract new members. Alay all fears about Ramblers’ walks being too fast/too slow, always stopping for coffee breaks when they just want to walk, etc.

Ensure a range of different walks – long, medium and short distances.

Try themed walks e.g. a historic trail, a visit to a stately home, bird watching or a photography outing.

Shorter walks bring out more members.

Family walks encourage children (future members) to come out.

Vary the walks programme – weekdays, evening in summer, alternate Saturday and Sunday walks.

One group has an extensive programme including: Mondays: bus-pass walks; Wednesdays 5/6 mile walks; Thursdays: summer evening walks; weekend walks (1 in winter, 2 in summer) which are more challenging.

Another has a ‘light and leisurely’ 4 or 5 mile programme to help new members find their feet and return for another walk – it is all some people require.

Get yourself a good web site – one group suggests that the layout and tone of the site is all important – nothing too stuffy.

Bear in mind that you have competition from many alternative walking groups (some of which are affiliated to the Ramblers) and your offering may need to be different or have an added value considering the cost of membership.

Encourage new members to lead walks using more experienced members to mentor them and accompany them on their recces.

Use an appropriate ‘walks etiquette’ which might include a brief talk at the beginning, information about the group, a welcome to new members or those coming along for the first time who may be potential members and, introduce these people to others on the walk who will make them welcome.

‘Brand’ your group as local.

Introduce a walking festival.

Social events create a bond in a group which might be missing in other non-Ramblers walking groups – one group has a monthly social evening in winter months.

Broaden your horizons and walk in different areas of the country – some groups organise several holidays/trips away, both in the UK and abroad.

The group itself needs to be a 'bunch of caring and friendly people'.

'Hug' new members as they are precious – many feel that the current (early 2010) responses from Ramblers head office are discouraging people.

Once a member has joined encourage them to lead walks and help them to understand that the group relies on volunteers – but don't put them under any pressure!!

Members have noted difficulties resulting from: competing walking clubs, too much work falling on one group member (the 'willing horse'), problems with the Ramblers membership system, new Ramblers groups being formed taking members away from existing groups and failure of the local press to include group reports prominently. BUT DON'T DESPAIR!! Many Ramblers Groups are growing, so it can be done!

Don't be daunted by the list above - perhaps start with one or two things, and then build from there. Rome wasn't built in a day.

Tips from other readers (to add your own, click the link at the bottom of this page)

*Tell your family, friends, work mates etc. what a great time you had on a Ramblers walk and why. There may be many people out there who have no idea that joining the Ramblers is the solution to their fitness, wanting something to do, boredom etc. problems but have no idea what Ramblers get up to. If people you know know you are having a good time they can pass the information on to somebody who could enjoy Ramblers membership. If you don't tell people how will they find out?*

*With regard to welcoming new members and members from other groups. Somewhere in the leaders material leaders are advised to introduce new members. This can be intimidating to some because of the 'they know my name but who are they factor" . The use of walks finder by members increases the chance of a the leader facing a party of people from different groups some recognised with/without knowing their names. Also the leader might not have met people from their own group but who are obviously familiar to other people in their group.*

*More practical advice for leaders and especially new leaders would be how to estimate for a given party size how long it would take and how to instigated everybody saying their name and which group they come from or if they are new trying out the Ramblers. Group officers may care to add this too their personal into.*

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## **100 Good Ideas from Volunteers**

Volunteers share their top tips for: boosting group membership, using funds effectively, putting on varied walks programmes, and keeping public paths clear. (News - posted 18th June 2010)

Are you struggling to increase your Groups' membership? Are you a treasurer trying to make ends meet? Do you despair at keeping your local footpaths clear? Do you need inspiration on new walks ideas?

Volunteers have come up with a hundred good ideas to help inspire you. They were generated at four 'Good Ideas' sessions at this year's General Council.

Tom Franklin, Chief Executive, said, "*These are all suggestions from volunteers on what they have found works for them. There are so many good ideas and initiatives in local Groups, we thought it would be good to share these more widely*"

## Feedback from the Volunteer Survey

Following on from the Volunteer Survey, undertaken late last year and early this year, the Ramblers has now produced a report outlining what was contained in the survey results as well as the actions to be taken forward improve the support and development of volunteers. You can now download all the information as well as getting involved in the implementation of the recommendations (News posted - 6 July 2010).

### Background

Between November 2009 and January 2010 the Ramblers ran a volunteer survey to look at the level of satisfaction amongst Ramblers volunteers as well as looking at overall trends of those volunteering within the organisation. As a result of this research the Ramblers have produced a report that outlines the trends and ideas identified from the survey and how we can, as an organisation, better support and develop our volunteers. To help take these steps the document outlines a number of recommendations to be completed within three different time frames. These are:

- Short term between July and September 2010
- Medium term between October 2010 and September 2011
- Long term recommendations between October 2011 and September 2013

The full document and recommendations are available to download at the end of this page and will remain available on the volunteer section of the Ramblers website. The key to success in this area is making sure that all the outcomes fit in with the Ramblers and its volunteers. To ensure this two focus groups will be set up to look at certain aspects of the report and how best to implement the action points. If you would like to be involved in this area of the Ramblers work you can get in touch by [e-mail](#).

### Recommendations

A full list of recommendations can be downloaded at the bottom of this page. To get the ball rolling a number of documents, focus Groups and relationships will be started to ensure that the short term recommendations are implemented in a suitable way. These recommendations are:

- The survey is repeated but only aimed at those who volunteer in the Get Walking Keep Walking campaign.
- A volunteer focus group should be set up to look at possible ways of improving volunteer satisfaction.
- A relationship is built up between the Ramblers and other organizations that work with people who offer volunteering to those in the lowest age bracket of 16 to 24, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, V, Girlguiding UK and the Scout Association.
- A factsheet is written as a guide to delivering training to volunteers.
- A training focus group is set up to look at how the Ramblers should embrace volunteer training in the future.

- A guide to a number of models for delivering training is developed.
- The current volunteer certificates are more actively promoted.
- A mini poll is run on a bi-weekly basis through the Web Pages asking members opinions on a particular issue.

## Documents

The report from the volunteer survey is a living document and will change as more of the work continues and more feedback is received. You can view the very latest versions of the document from the volunteer section of the Ramblers Website as they are made. You can also download the documents at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/volunteer-survey>.

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# Walking Environment Update - July 10

## A request for information from the Walking Environment team. (Action request - posted 6 July 2010)

What is the Ramblers doing in your Area?

Have you, or your area or group, achieved any of the following since October 2009:

- Defeated a path diversion, extinguishment or rationalisation plan, whether an order had been made or at the pre-order consultation stage – thanks to Ramblers comments
- Cleared a path of an obstruction – thanks to Ramblers comments or practical path work
- Got a path signposted or waymarked – thanks to Ramblers comments or practical path work
- Recorded a path on the map – thanks to Ramblers research
- Succeeded in getting a new path created – thanks to Ramblers campaigning and lobbying
- Or anything similar, which opens, saves, protects or records a path for the public?

If so, we'd like to hear from you.

So far there has been very little information on path successes coming in. If the statistics are to be believed approximately 90% of Ramblers Areas and Groups are not working on rights of way issues at all. We know that is not the case, so please [get in touch](#) and set the record straight.

If you're holding back until the end of the year, please don't – it's most helpful to find out about successes soon after they happen. Likewise, if you don't want to report things that you see as run-of-the-mill, please send in that information – a path issue that may seem ordinary or minor to you will be added to a long list of similar achievements to give a far more accurate picture of the work the Ramblers is doing across the country. And, if you're leaving the reporting to someone else (perhaps your Area Footpath Secretary), please get in touch as well – better to have two reports of the same success than none at all.

Without information on what is going on across England and Wales on path issues we can't plan effectively as an organisation – not only for rights of way campaigning and local support, but also for volunteer recruitment and training, publicity and media work, membership recruitment and retention work, fundraising and membership servicing – in fact, the whole of our operations. Our rights of way work is key to so much of what we do. We need to share information

on where we have succeeded in this work in order to continue our success and build on it further.

The easiest way to report path achievements and successes (of any kind – both minor and major) is through the online form at [http://www.ramblers.org.uk/rights\\_of\\_way/successes](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/rights_of_way/successes)

If that form seems a bit involved feel free to jot down the information in an email to [walking.environment@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:walking.environment@ramblers.org.uk), put it in a letter to me at central office, or pick up the phone and call Anastasia on 020 7339 8584 or me on 020 7339 8524.

Thanks very much indeed.

Adrian

Annual Meeting with the Planning Inspectorate

Every year, the Planning Inspectorate invites its 'Stakeholders' to a meeting. Representatives of the Inspectorate tell us about their targets and whether they have met them and about their plans for the coming year. We are asked to tell them about any problems which we are experiencing with Public Inquiries, Hearings and the Written Representations procedure in respect of public path and definitive map modification orders. This year's meeting for rights of way user groups will be taking place on 1 September.

If you have experienced any problems in your dealings with PINS which you would like us to raise at that meeting please send details to Janet Davis ([janet.davis@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:janet.davis@ramblers.org.uk)) by Friday 27 August.

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## Get Walking for the Games

### Get Walking For the Games, Ready to go! Launch of the Ramblers Get Walking for the Games project is taking place on the (News - 24 July).

Get Walking for the Games

Ramblers launches its new Get Walking for the Games project with two special led walks visiting 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games venues on the London 2012 Open Weekend, Saturday-Sunday 24-25 July. The walks are meant to inspire Ramblers Areas and Groups across the country to plan their own Get Walking for the Games walks. Saturday's walk runs from Windsor to the spectacular rowing venue Dorney Lake and back along the Thames. Sunday's walk focuses on the main Olympic Park in Stratford, East London, and includes local waterways as well as good views of several landmark venues now in advanced stages of construction. See the [Group Walks Finder](#) at

[http://www.ramblers.co.uk/walksfinder/search.php?advanced=1&area=&from\\_date\\_day=0&from\\_date\\_month=&to\\_date\\_day=0&to\\_date\\_month=&grade%5B%5D=EA&grade%5B%5D=E&grade%5B%5D=L&grade%5B%5D=M&grade%5B%5D=S&grade%5B%5D=T&weekday=&distance=&group=&festival=2012](http://www.ramblers.co.uk/walksfinder/search.php?advanced=1&area=&from_date_day=0&from_date_month=&to_date_day=0&to_date_month=&grade%5B%5D=EA&grade%5B%5D=E&grade%5B%5D=L&grade%5B%5D=M&grade%5B%5D=S&grade%5B%5D=T&weekday=&distance=&group=&festival=2012) for more information about the walks .

Get Walking for the Games aims to get more people active through walking using the energy and inspiration of the Olympic Games. Walks can include not only games venues but Cultural Olympiad sites, places linked to the history of sport and the Olympics, training venues and paths and green spaces improved thanks to the event, so there are opportunities for Groups all over the country to get involved. The project has been awarded the coveted Inspire brand by London 2012 and is a great way of getting more people involved with walking and the Ramblers. For more information please see <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Walking/Projects/2012.htm> or contact [thomas.moulton@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:thomas.moulton@ramblers.org.uk) .