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Introduction

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the successes and challenges for the Bristol Ramblers Group over the last year, and to recognise and thank the volunteers who have worked so hard to support the work of the Group. The activities of the Bristol Ramblers that this report covers include primarily our walks programme, but also recognises the wider activities linked to the wider purpose and objectives of the national Ramblers.

Our membership this year has fluctuated a little, but has on average been slightly up on last year. The number of fully paid-up members for each month is shown in the table below:

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept
2024-5	655	653	645	640	658	668	672	670	676	672	666	666
2025-6	663	663	657	662	670	670	669	666	663	668	676	678

Thanks to our dedicated leaders and coordinators, the Bristol Ramblers walks programme has largely provided the usual varied and interesting walking opportunities, with most weeks offering Wednesday and Saturday walks and a choice of two longer walks on Sunday, along with trips away. We have continued to support the Bristol WalkFest in May. The average walk numbers shown here are broadly in line with previous years, showing that the programme remains popular despite some challenges in supplying leaders.

	A walks (Sunday)	B walks (Sunday)	Weds walks	Saturday walks	Total
2021-2	9	15	16	10	50
2022-3	12	15	14	10	51
2023-4	9	15	14	13	51
2024-5	10	16	16	15	57
2025-6	9	15	10.5	16	50.5

Website and Walks Manager

The main purpose of the website is as follows:

- To showcase the group's upcoming walks in Walks Manager.
- To encourage joining Bristol Ramblers to people in the local area looking for a group to walk with.
- To provide easily accessible information to our regular walkers about walking related issues.

- To keep members up to date with the activities of the Committee.

Sarah and Tony have continued to keep the website running smoothly since the 2024 technology update, and to post news and information where the users who need it can easily access it.

The integration with the Ramblers Walks Manager software has bedded in, with most walk leaders comfortable using it to add their walks, with assistance from their coordinators or others where necessary.

eBoot

The role of the eBoot has changed over time, from its original purpose as a walk listing. Since the most up-to-date walk details are now to be found on the Ramblers website, and given that the majority of Ramblers members do not regularly partake of our walking programme, the eBoot is now mainly an important way to communicate news and make all members feel a part of the Bristol Ramblers community.

This last year we have offered a slimmed-down eBoot that both reflects this focus and is more manageable given the editor's other commitments. This change has been well-received, and members seem to appreciate both the news and local interest articles and the variety of different perspectives on fitness and the outdoors that the editor tries to offer.

We will continue with this tried-and-tested format over the next year, and hope that it continues to provide interest and entertainment for walkers and non-walkers alike.

Please note that the editor always welcomes articles and personal accounts, and will happily work with anyone who has something they would like to share, to bring your ideas to publication.

National Ramblers Initiatives

In the past year the national initiative that has had the most direct affect on our group has been the requirement for all walk leaders to complete a walk leader training course, or to self-certify based on experience. Fortunately the original deadline was extended to January, and between the efforts of our Projects Officer Graham, our Walks Coordinators, some additional research from Tony, and of course the walk leaders themselves, almost all of our walk leaders were authorised by the deadline, the exceptions being people who no longer lead for the group. I would like to thank everyone involved for their efforts.

It is currently not clear how long this internal certification lasts for, or what the requirements may be for renewal, and the committee will be keeping an eye on these and other concerns going forward.

Last year the Chair mentioned a review into the way the National Ramblers is governed, with a proposal to alter the current structure and discontinue the area councils into which groups like ours report. This proposal did not pass, so we can expect no sweeping changes in the near future.

Environment and Planning

Susan Carter continued to represent Bristol Ramblers on the Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) and Bristol's Neighbourhood Planning Network, reporting to the committee from time to time.

BWA is very active, as those attending the AGM will hear. Susan has led its work on green issues. The committee has agreed to contribute to the costs of holding a BWA event early in 2027, probably about how Bristol's green spaces can be made better for walking.

The Neighbourhood Planning Network, which meets City Council planning officers quarterly to discuss live issues, recently focused on the preparation of the next local plan being started even before its predecessor has been formally adopted.

Walks Programme Reports

Wednesday walks

Coordinator Margaret Ruse

Thanks to the ever fewer stalwart leaders, we have enjoyed 35 mid-week walks in this reporting year, including Walkfest walks led by Wednesday leaders (about the same number as 2024-2025). There were 13 weeks without a programmed Wednesday walk, plus Christmas and New Year weeks.

We currently have 7 regular leaders (including one who is at present unwell and unable to commit to leading) and 1 new leader since this reporting year.

The number of "qualified" leaders has dropped since Ramblers' new national training requirements came into force early in 2026. For some, aged 70's to 80's, the requirements were just a step too far, after many years of giving their time and effort to leading walks for a formal group.

Numbers on walks range between 3 (in very poor weather) and 22, the average being 10.5. Last reporting year's average was 16 walkers. Given the long, hot summer this year, it is perhaps not surprising that numbers of both offered walks and numbers of walkers dropped off during that time.

Despite encouragement from leaders to walkers to consider leading walks and highlighting the situation on Bristol Ramblers' website, it is proving an uphill struggle to recruit new leaders.

As far as I know, to date, no one has expressed an interest in taking on my role as Wednesday Walks Coordinator, when I relinquish it at the end of 2026.

Saturday walks

Coordinator Aubrey Newport

Again this year we have had a successful Saturday walks programme. During the period 1st September 2025 to 31st August 2026 we listed 48 Saturday walks. Combined with the walk organised for the Avon Area AGM, there was a walk for all

except 2 Saturdays of the period. No leader could be found for the two Saturdays without walks.

We also organised a walkers Christmas Lunch at the Failand Inn following a local walk on 13th December.

Walks have been as far afield as Tintern, Castle Combe, Sand Bay and Slimbridge but the majority have been within 15 miles of the city centre. Quite a few have been accessible by bus from Bristol.

Having a full walks programme encourages more people to join us and the average participation on our walks has increased to 16 people. The highest number was 49 on the Bluebell WalkFest walk led by Dorothy Greaves and two other of our WalkFest walks had 45 and 36 walkers. The lowest numbers of participants were unsurprisingly on walks with poor weather forecasts and two walks went ahead in the rain and mud with respectively 3 and 4 dedicated walkers on each.

The WalkFest Saturday walks attracted 71 non Ramblers members and some of these later joined our group.

We have to thank all of our volunteer leaders for the efforts which have made this year's programme a success. Unfortunately this success is becoming harder to achieve because some of our leaders are no longer available for Saturday walks. This includes Les Davison who has moved away to the South coast and several other leaders who are experiencing health issues. Advancing years also means some experienced leaders are becoming less active and less willing to take on the responsibilities of leading walks.

We welcomed 2 new leaders during the year and one of these, Sue Knight, has already led 3 walks.

For the long term success of Bristol Ramblers I believe we need to recruit more and younger leaders. Does anyone know how we can achieve this?

Sunday B walks

Coordinator Paula Cannings

It's been a successful year for the group, with a full range of interesting walks in and around Bristol, from Bruton to Burrington, Corsham to Congresbury, Portishead to Peasedown and Upper Swainswick to Uley, amongst many destinations. While some leaders have left the group, we have welcomed two new leaders, enabling us to offer a walk every week. Many thanks to leaders for their dedication. Although last winter was wet, we did not have to cancel any walks due to bad weather.

Sixteen walkers spent an enjoyable weekend in Combe Martin in June, walking the coast and doing a couple of inland walks, as well as swimming and dining in local pubs.

Numbers have remained steady, with an average of 15, maximum 28, minimum 6.

We have welcomed a few new regular walkers and some returners.

Sunday A walks

Coordinator Bob Gibson

Many thanks are due to all of the walk leaders who between them ensured that there were A walks scheduled on all but 4 Sundays this year (due to clashes with trips away). Two further walks have had to be cancelled due to severe weather. Attendance levels have varied from a high of 22 (the annual Solstice Stomp) to a low of 3, averaging 9 across the year. It was noticeable once again that summer (July & August) showed the lowest numbers of walkers, whilst autumn, winter and spring bring out the best in the group.

Rambles have included local excursions around Bristol, the Avon Valley, and the Mendips; further afield to the wooded delights of the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley; occasional seaside jaunts to the south coast and Somerset's coast paths; and various hill walks in the Black Mountains, Cotswolds, Malverns, and Quantocks. There have also been several group trips away, to Cornwall, the Lake District, and Scotland.

Bristol WalkFest May 2026

The Bristol WalkFest is an annual event taking place each May, which aims to bring together a range of providers to offer walks across the Bristol area. Bristol Ramblers again supported the event with a funding contribution. There were a total of over 400 joining the 26 Bristol Ramblers walks in this year's festival, many of whom were new to walking in Bristol.

The organisers are very grateful for our participation. Without us, there would be a big gap in the free, general walking element of the programme. Many thanks to our official WalkFest Coordinator Carew and to everyone who led a walk, long or short.

Plans are already afoot for next year's festival, and anyone who might be interested in leading a walk, long or short, in the Bristol environs, is encouraged to get in touch and discuss your idea. There's plenty of time to think it over before May!

Concluding Remarks

This has been my first year as Chair, and it has involved a certain amount of learning on the job; thank you to everyone who has helped me and on occasion compensated for my weaknesses.

It is a privilege to work for a group that has such a passion for and commitment to walking and the outdoors; from those who head out on long rambles every week, to those who contribute to the Ramblers mission without taking advantage of the walks programme we offer.

However it cannot be denied that we do face an increasing challenge in attracting the volunteers we need to keep our walks programme going. We currently face the possibility of losing our Wednesday walks programme if we cannot find a new Coordinator to take over from Margaret in January, which would be a great shame as those walks are still enjoyed by many people.

This is not a problem isolated to us; I have heard the same from other groups, and even from other volunteer organisations in different areas. We are open to all ideas to get the message out and attract more people; walk leading can be incredibly

rewarding, and the Ramblers offers all the tools and support our members need to not only lead their first walk, but to enjoy doing so.

So with that said I would like to give an extra big thankyou to everyone who puts time and hard work into making this organisation a success.

Ceiswyn Blake

October 2026