



**Wessex Wanderer
Railway Walks**

Wessex Wanderers FlexiGroup 2025 Annual Report

Referring to last year's annual report you will know that it is thirty years this year since the Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks first began.

Despite the unhelpful two hourly Heart of Wessex train service, the walks have been well attended this year, once again the best since 2019, but it was disappointing that, as in previous years, no Dorset Area members went on most of the walks which took place in Dorset.

We do ask that all Groups add these walks to their Group programmes but not all of them do. This can be done by simply including a link to our website on the appropriate days as my local Group (Sevenside) does whether there is already a walk on any of the days or not and no matter where the walks are taking place.

With regards to the thirtieth anniversary in the end, it was decided that it wasn't practical to produce a special souvenir programme so instead we had souvenir leaflets and posters designed and printed which were then distributed far and wide.

There were walks from or to all the stations along the line which was fantastic, and thanks go to our Leaders Chris & Sarah, Sally and Alison & Lawrence (Dorset Area), Sonia, Tony and co-leader Cleve (Somerset Area), Val (Wiltshire Area), David, Margaret, Jonathan, Joy, and Dorothy (Avon Area). Mick (Gloucestershire Area).

There were twenty seven walks on the programme, the first being (according to Walk Magazine) a 'Pub Crawl' around Bristol which I led. We passed by at least thirty real ale pubs but clearly didn't go in them or we would have been 'crawling' back to Temple Meads station had we not passed out by then!

The final walk on the programme was in conjunction with the Dursley Walking Festival, but which was badly impacted by engineering works with bus replacement services to and from Cam & Dursley railway station.

Thanks to Val for typing up the programme this year and the other volunteers who have helped in one way or another, Joy as the official Programme Co-Ordinator and Mike (Dorset Area) for dealing with our finances.

Thanks also to Ken (Avon Area) for administering our splendid website, Judith (Somerset Area) who set up and maintains Facebook and Instagram accounts for us and Alison for posting our walks on Walk Manager.

So, with the publication of my 'star' letter with regards to the WWWs in the Spring edition of Walk Magazine and the mention of the WWWs in the Summer edition, we enjoyed some excellent publicity which surely helped boost the number of people on the majority of the walks, many for the first time, including a lady from Cardiff after reading my letter in Walk.

The 2025 annual Winter Get Together took place in Frome in February, all thanks to Tony who organised it all as well as leading the pre-lunch walk.

We also enjoyed another get together in July which was the Thirtieth Anniversary Reunion. This was held in the TransWilts/GWR meeting room on Platform 1 at Westbury railway station. Thanks to Sue Blake (Dorset Area) for contacting as many past Leaders and supporters as possible and generally helping me with the organisation.

Those attending brought their own lunches and Great Western Railway gave us an amazing cake plus small gluten free ones, in appreciation and recognition of all the work we have done over the last thirty years in highlighting and introducing people to the wonderful countryside along the Heart of Wessex (Bristol to Weymouth) railway line. I also received a personal letter of thanks from Mark Hopwood CBE, Managing Director of GWR as well as warm congratulations from Lucy Robinson, Chair of the Ramblers.

We were delighted that redoubtable 'Campaigning' Kate Ashbrook was able to join us and who gave a short congratulatory speech. Kate also went on the walk which followed lunch and, true to form, immediately reported some footpath problems encountered on the way.

If you refer to our website www.wessexrailwaywalks.org.uk you will find all there is to know about the WWWs, including a picture of the celebratory cake.

The End of Season meeting is booked for 15 November 2025 and will be held in the meeting room at Westbury railway station, which as a charity, we do not have to pay hire fees.

However, we face an uncertain future unless we get some more volunteers to help run the Group. Joy is opting out as Co-Ordinator, a position she has held for a number of years, and I don't intend to do as much as I have been doing over the last few years.

I don't plan to opt out altogether though and would continue to liaise with GWR with regards to Leaders passes, the Community Rail Partnerships who support us; attend their meetings and Dorset Area's AGMs, as well as leading one or two walks, albeit much slower and shorter than I once did, being the only person left who has led since the beginning.

Then, of course, there is the Governance Review and what that may bring although, at the time of writing because of the feedback to the proposals, Areas will remain as an entity for the time being at least so if the WWW FlexiGroup continues it should remain being hosted by Dorset Area.

And finally, GWR will be taken back into public ownership sometime in the near future although one hopes they will be able to continue with their community based work and support.

Sylvia Popham (Avon Area)

October 2025

21.11.25

As a rider, due to a bereavement, the End of Season meeting was postponed until the new year when we hope to plan the 2026 programme. We have had offers of walks, but so far no further offers of help in organising the Group.