

Wessex Wanderer Railway Walks FlexiGroup Annual Report 2023/24

The annual End of Season meeting was held in Bradford-on-Avon on the 28 October 2023 and was attended by fourteen Ramblers members (nine apologies were received).

Next year will be the thirtieth since the first Wessex Wanderer walks took place, albeit it in a very modest way, and which were simply included in Bristol Group's Sunday walks programme, an initiative of Peter Gould, Avon Area.

The programme has evolved over the years to what has become despite all the problems which have beset us, and still do, in producing a programme which covers four Ramblers Areas and all their Groups rather than the normal one Area, it's even more of an achievement that we are still going and one which we really should celebrate.

However, due to the lack of resources we will be unable to celebrate in the fashion we had planned, and which was in place, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary in 2020, but was subsequently cancelled because of the pandemic.

I have suggested that we produce and print a limited number of Souvenir programmes featuring a walk from each station along the line, but we may not be able to have any copies printed if we cannot secure sufficient funding. It was decided earlier in the year to wait and see how well supported the 2024 programme would be before taking any further action, so the actual planning is yet to start.

The 2024 programme featured twenty-four walks, and the number of participants has been the best since 2019. Only one walk was impacted by Industrial action, some others by extremes of weather but on the whole, it was very encouraging despite the current train services changes which have adversely impacted on our programme.

However, I was rather disappointed that no Dorset Area member joined me on my walk around Portland in July despite good weather.

The Winter Get Together took place in January 2024, once again at the Toby Carvery in Trowbridge.

We aim to hold that and the End of Season meetings at venues which are as much as possible equal distance south and north along the line. At the time of writing these have not been arranged although the Winter Get Together will not take place until after January because of planned engineering works in the Westbury area during January 2025.

In place of printed programmes excellent coloured flyers and posters have been created. Whilst printed programmes remain popular, we no longer have the resources to have them printed and distributed as we previously did. However, a PDF version of the programme is posted (and updated when necessary) on our website for downloading if required.

Copies of the flyers and posters were sent to Leaders and other members for distribution to various outlets. However, advertising needs to be addressed if we are to attract more walkers especially non-members of the Ramblers, which we have done over the years, and those who do not find out about us via the internet.

Thanks to Leaders on whom we rely, to Joy for continuing as Programme Co-ordinator, Alison Ridge for posting the walks on Walks Finder, those who helped to proof-read the 2024 programme and those generally support us, to Ken Mill for maintaining our website, Mike Heckford who deals with the Group's finances and Dorset Area for hosting the Group.

Thanks to Great Western Railway I was again able to obtain passes for Leaders and Co-Leaders who required them, one each to pre-walk and one to lead on the day.

The three Community Rail Partnerships which cover the line continue to support us, mainly by featuring the WWWs on their websites. Railways.co (whose aim is to have created walking routes from every station on the rail network) also added a link to the WWWs, particularly from one of their articles in the Guardian newspaper which resulted in some non members coming on our walks.

Sylvia Popham
Assistant Programme Co-Ordinator
Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks

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