

Bristol HF Rambling Club

Affiliated to HF Holidays

Spring 2024 Newsletter



Greetings!

There's nothing better than a host of daffodils to herald in the Spring, and this year there was a bumper crop of them wherever you went in the countryside or around town.

Perhaps the seemingly incessant wet weather has suited them. It's hard to recall a previous year when the ground has been so saturated and the mud so deep and soggy. And it's difficult to ignore the near-certainty that the effects of climate change will have been a contributory factor to this year's mudfest.

In a world that is so full of change in so many ways, the cycle of the seasons does give us some much-needed continuity and a sense of renewal.

For many people, early Spring is the favourite time of year – when the relative bleakness of the Winter months can be put behind us and we can enjoy the fresh life that is bursting

forth. Snowdrops, then the daffs, followed by the tulips and the bluebells, with lots of colourful wild flowers taking turns to join in the parade.

As I write, the cherry and almond blossoms are blooming and everything is starting to green up. And of course the birds have become much more active, singing their hearts out, gathering their nesting materials and foraging for themselves and their new-borns. Even the butterflies have started to emerge when we have been treated to the occasional warm, sunny day.

On a positive note, at least for us in the UK, the rain can be seen as a blessing, although our farming community would disagree, with crop yields down and problems with getting livestock out into the fields. But in the more southerly parts of Europe, it's a very different story, with drastic shortages of water to drink and to irrigate the fruit and vegetables that we have come to rely on.



Buttermere, Lake District

So, perhaps there is an opportunity for us to consider exporting our surplus water to the more drought-stricken parts of the world. As we become less dependent on oil to power our cars and to heat our buildings, why not convert those massive oil tankers to carry water?

Anyone interested in an investment opportunity?!

RG

Chairperson's Message

First of all, thank you to all those members who have given me positive feedback about the Christmas Newsletter. It has provided me considerable encouragement to carry on with the job, at least for the moment!

Anyway, here we are, having hauled ourselves through the somewhat overly-moist Winter period, with many months of pleasurable walking ahead of us.

The weather conditions over recent months certainly seem to have taken their toll on the numbers of members getting out on a regular basis with our walking groups. I'm hoping that, now the weather is finally beginning to improve, that the numbers will bounce back.

I have tried to get out as often as possible and have enjoyed some really great walks, particularly when there has been a welcome sunny break in the weather. A big thank-you to all those members who have led walks for the Club, and a big yes-please to all members who are willing and able to lead in the coming months.



Dragon's Back, Black Mountains

Improve your navigation skills!

For anyone who would like to lead a walk, but is not confident about their map-reading and way-finding skills, I can really recommend the use of one of the mobile phone Apps that are available. I now use one called Outdoor Active; for a modest annual subscription, it

gives me access to all the OS maps for the UK, as well as detailed maps for many other countries. Over the last year or so I have used it to plan and navigate walking trips in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and here in the UK and it has been hugely helpful.

Provided you have a basic knowledge of mobile phone use, it is very straightforward and the brilliant thing is that you always know where you are on the map. So, even if you go a bit astray from your intended route, you can get back on track with relative ease.

As they say, other similar Apps are available, so why not try one of them and see how easy it is to find your way around!



As high as an elephant's eye!

Club affiliations

I have only recently become aware of the fact that our Club is affiliated to *The Open Spaces Society*. Founded in 1865, it is Britain's oldest national conservation body. They campaign to protect common land, village greens, open spaces and public paths, so important in maintaining our countryside heritage. See their website on <https://www.oss.org.uk>.

We are also affiliated to the Ramblers Association, who also play a major role in preserving our ability to access our wonderful countryside. And, of course, we are affiliated to HF Holidays, who are major providers of walking holidays and outdoor pursuits.

RG

Recent Social Events

Christmas Lunch

The 2023 Club Christmas Lunch was a great success, attended by almost 30 members. It was a relaxing opportunity for friends to meet up and chat and get into the Christmas spirit.

We intend to maintain the Christmas get-together as an annual event – more about this in ‘Upcoming Social Events’.

Hedgehog Talk

In February, we hosted a presentation by the Prickles Hedgehog Rescue Centre, based in Cheddar. This proved to be very popular and was very well-attended. We were regaled with a host of interesting facts about the prickly little creatures and about the ways in which the rescue centre is helping to ensure their survival.



Laura Batt delivering some hedgehog facts

Their numbers in the UK have dramatically dwindled from around 30 million in the 1950's to an estimated 1.2 million today. Since its foundation in 2007, Prickles has cared for and released some 2,500 hedgehogs into the wild. Their facilities include a hedgehog hospital, complete with an ‘A&E Department’, operating theatre, recovery wards etc.!

Following the talk, we had a lively Q and A session, followed by copious refreshments provided by our members. Hedgehog-related

memorabilia was on sale, including some very cuddly soft toys.

The event raised over £180 for the charity and the modest entrance fee covered the cost of the hall hire, with the surplus going towards the charity donation.

Posh Nosh

For the recent Posh Nosh lunch on 13th March, a small group of us gathered at the Giggling Squid in Clifton village.

The name of the restaurant somewhat belies the fact that it serves a tasty selection of Thai cuisine, with the ubiquitous Thai Green Curry being one of the favourite dishes. It was a delicious lunch and I think we will be back for more soon.

Upcoming Social Events

Our Club's next social event will be the **Annual Garden Party** on Saturday 27th July at Sue and Roger's house. All members are welcome and you will shortly be receiving full details by email or pigeon-post.



There's still time to sign up for the **Club Walking Weekend**, 20th – 23rd September, based in Lynton, to explore the beautiful Exmoor National Park. Further details from Roger.

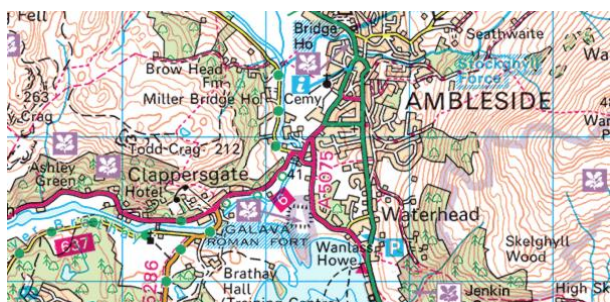
Gill Pocock is currently researching the next venue for our **Posh Nosh Lunch** (somebody has to do it!), which will take place later this year. Date and venue will be circulated shortly.



At our recent committee meeting, we discussed the **2024 Christmas Lunch** and we have decided to try something a bit different! It's going to be a 'Bring and Share' event, so you will be asked to bring a dish to place on the buffet table. We are also looking into providing some entertainment and other activities to create more of a party atmosphere. More details will be published in the Summer Newsletter.

In August last year we held a **Map Reading** session, looking in detail at how information is presented on OS Maps and talking about navigation.

We said at the time that it would be good to have a follow-up session 'out in the field' to work on putting navigation skills into practice. We have yet to put a date on this, but in the meantime it would be helpful if you could let us know if you would be interested in taking part.

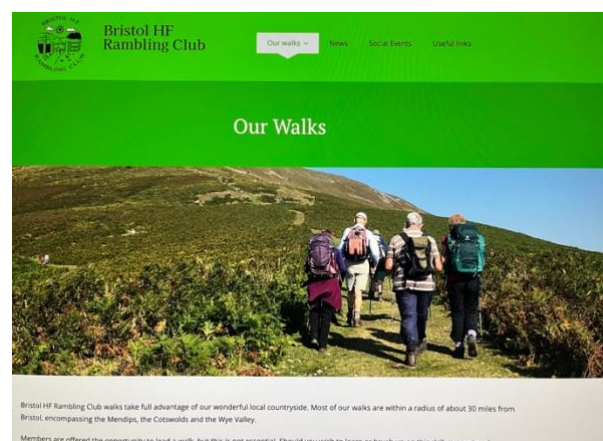


We would be meeting up at a location near to Bristol, with maps, compasses and mobile phone Apps at the ready to follow a pre-determined route. Along the way, we would be observing features in the landscape and seeing how they are represented on the map. If you are interested in taking part, please let Roger know by phone or email.

Website

Our new-look website is now up and running! Tom Logan has been doing sterling work to bring it to fruition and we hope that you will enjoy using it.

As well as general information about the Club, the new website has an easy-to-read calendar of recent and up-coming walks.



We will be adding more content to the website over the coming weeks, including a link to these Newsletters. There is information about up-coming social events, as well as other links to useful sources of information, such as the National Trust, English Heritage, our nearby National Parks and books of walk ideas.

If you have suggestions for interesting content, or eye-catching photographs of a recent walk, please contact Tom.

A Question of Stile

In these days of ever more frequent kissing gates, there are still some stiles out there to set the blood racing! Does anyone have candidates for the highest, oddest, most beautiful, etc?

Here is *Jenny Hall's* offering in the 'Most Challenging Stile' category.



Firstly – find it. This one is easy to miss!



So steeply up – you need a rope!



So steeply down too!

Did You Know?

The first Giant Redwood tree was introduced to the UK in 1853 from the Sierra Nevada in California and the first "official" tree planted on the Duke of Wellington's estate in Hampshire in 1857. The tree was due to be named *Washingtonia* in memory of the first USA President but William Lobb, a British plant hunter, obtained seeds and, in a race with the Americans, became first to register the tree and name it *Wellingtonia* - much to the annoyance of the Americans and leading to an international row.

While out on a Club recce in Chew Magna a few days ago I came across a *Wellingtonia* believed to be the very first Redwood tree in England to be discovered by Treecreepers who were attracted to its "ideal home" potential. The thick bark is exceptionally soft and fibrous and will even withstand the forest fires that ravage its homeland.

News of trees offering such perfect living conditions quickly spread through the British bird world, with the result that the Treecreeper population has been stable since 1987 and the number of trees has multiplied to many times greater than its homeland in Sierra Nevada where the tree is now under threat because of climate change (80,000 in California and approx. 500,000 in UK).

Research and scientific climate modelling has shown that redwoods could be suited to future conditions in southern areas of England. Redwoods' size and fast-growing nature means they store a lot of carbon as they grow. When used for timber the carbon stays locked up and the trees have good potential as a sustainable timber source in England. The wood produces wide boards that can be easily cut and great for cladding exteriors because of its resistance to rot.

Muriel Reeves

Bluebells and Butterflies

Lower Woods Nature Reserve near Wickwar is one of my favourite places to spend time in nature during the spring when the bluebells and wild garlic are in full flush. Although it has the singular name of Lower Woods, it is in fact a tapestry of 23 individual woodlands which have a long history reaching back to Roman times. It is one of the largest ancient woodlands in the south-west, and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



The wood covers 282 hectares and contains many varied habitats for wildlife including a watercourse - The Little Avon - flowing through it. Due to its varied natural environment, it has a rich biodiversity. Traditionally it was well known for Nightingales but sadly they are no longer present due to the abandonment of coppicing. Nevertheless, there is much wonderful flora and fauna to be seen within the woods.

One of my favourite trees found in Lower Woods is the wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) which is an indicator of ancient woodland. The tree bears fruits which are known as chequers, and are said to taste like

dates. They can be made into an alcoholic drink and it is thought they influenced the naming of 'Chequers Inns', although it is unclear which came first – the name of the fruit or the inns, according to the Woodlands Trust.

At this time of year the woods are alive with the sound of birds arriving from Africa such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Spotted Flycatcher, and there are carpets of bluebells and wild garlic, and orchids starting to peep through.

During the summer months the wood is a mecca for butterflies. 32 species are present including the gorgeous silver-washed fritillary which can be seen feasting on the nectar of brambles. This butterfly is our largest fritillary and gets its name from the beautiful streaks of silver found on the underside of the wings.



Lower Woods is a bit of a well-kept secret and as a result is very peaceful. It is not signposted from the road, and on the few occasions that I have led walks starting from the woods there is always someone who can't find the entrance. However, once you do find the entrance you will be rewarded with a beautiful walk in unspoilt nature.

<https://www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/nature-reserves/lower-woods>

Linda Moysey

Walk Groups – Reports from Coordinators

Tuesday 'A' Group

We have carried on walking stoically through the winter through mud, cold and rain and we still seem to enjoy ourselves. Numbers have dropped a little in the A group for health issues but hopefully some will return in the summer. We were pleased to welcome Mary back into the fold last Tuesday and she seemed remarkably fit. We have only had one Tuesday when there was no walk so the group is doing well. We have enjoyed a lovely variety of walks going to the Cotswolds, Wye Valley, North Somerset, Wiltshire, Mendips and South Gloucestershire. Well done everyone.

Sue Finney



On the hills above the Wye Valley

Tuesday 'B' Group

The B walkers have enjoyed as many walks as possible this year despite the rainy weather. We have walked at Portishead, Clevedon, the Docks and Clifton and Westbury on Trym using firm paths to avoid the mud. We have also admired the countryside near Chepstow and the deer at Berkeley. We look forward to more walks when the ground is less muddy.

Vanessa Pinniger

Saturday Group

Although the struggle to find more walk leaders is an ongoing issue for the Saturday group, it's thanks to a number of regular leaders that we have been out most Saturdays over the past few months.

Some of the locations we have visited over the winter period include Blagdon, Stone, Chipping Sodbury and Doynton, and more recently we have had outings to Avening and Chew Magna.

Muriel Reeves



Time for a coffee break

Saturday Hill Walk Group

The Hill Walk group has kept going all through the winter period, with fantastic outings into the hills and valleys of the Black Mountains.

In January, we hiked on the hills around Sugarloaf. February saw us exploring the valleys and hills around Llanthony Abbey and in March we completed an epic trek from the Grwynne Fawr valley.

Unfortunately, our April walk had to be cancelled for a number of reasons, including minor injuries, jet lag and holiday commitments. I'm sure we will be back out on the hills in May.

Tom Logan

2023/2024 COMMITTEE

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'B' Walks : VANESSA PINNEGAR

WEBMASTER : POSITION VACANT
Very Effective Temporary Cover being provided by
TOM LOGAN