



WRITE OF WAY NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2025

Welcome to the Winter edition of WoW.

SAVE THE DATE

Wiltshire & Swindon Area AGM – 7th February 2026 @ 10am.

All members and delegates of affiliated organisations are invited to attend the 51st Annual General Meeting to be held at:
North Wraxall Community Hall, SN14 7AF
GR: ST810747, W3W:///meanest.such.proclaims

Further details of the agenda are in the Area Annual Report 2024/25

The Community Hall was built on the old village hall site and opened in 2000 with funding from many sources. It is situated in North Wraxall village near the crossroads of the North/Upper Wraxall road and the Fosse Way. The Hall is accessible for wheelchair users and has a car park.

Area Committee Meeting October 2025 - Some Food for Thought

Acting Chair Report – David Trease

Many experienced walk leaders have become concerned at the excessive official attitude in the current Walk Leader training and renewal programme. There are two justifications for this:

Ramblers nationally applies for funding from many national organisations, and rambling, where only a pair of boots and a route is necessary to lead a walk, is compared with other sporting organisations where extensive training is mandatory or heritage groups where technical expertise and skilled experience is necessary to operate complicated machinery. The other factor is that health and safety is now an essential consideration for all industry and commerce, and large national charities like Ramblers are deemed to fall under the same legislation with risk assessments and other requirements.

It is therefore unfortunate that after an incident or accident involving Ramblers the legal sharks will see Ramblers as an easier target for claims than an industrial organisation with a strong legal defence team.

So, our proof of our training needs to be backed up by demonstration of our records at internet level.

It is unfortunate that some leaders have even given up leading for Ramblers and set up their own private groups, but a small group that replaces a Ramblers group will never have the resources that are attractive targets for 'legal sharks' although personal friendships may give adequate satisfaction on a walk, and individuals are still responsible for their own actions.

Area Membership Secretary – David Trease

A disappointing year with the area total decreased 13 (1%) from 1359 to 1346.

All groups except West Wilts and the Area Group have decreased.

If the Area Group increase 29 (28%) is omitted, the Area decrease is 42 (3%), not good.

		2024	2025	Associate	Increase	%	New	Lapsed
Area	WE	1359	1346	10	-13	-1%	232	245
North West	WE01	219	207	2	-12	-5%	40	52
Mid Wilts	WE02	142	122	0	-20	-14%	14	34
South Wilts	WE03	316	299	3	-17	-5%	39	56
SNEW	WE04	304	303	2	-1	0%	39	40
West Wilts	WE05	276	284	3	8	3%	45	37
Area Group	WE96	102	131	0	29	28%	55	26

All will know that the Ramblers annual subscription has increased to £45 from 1st October 2025.

Walks and Walk Leaders – Various Group Inputs

Shortage of walk leaders continues to be acute, as one long-term leader has resigned to continue leading walks for their private FaceBook Club. So, some weeks Groups only have a single short walk on Saturdays with attendance 10 to 25, although their longer Sunday walk leaders have complained that not many walkers want to come on long walks on Sundays.

Gaps in our walk programme are appearing much more often. There were only two Wednesdays in the October programme with no walk yet offered for November.

New walk leaders are still required despite several new leaders having completed the training modules. A list of how many walks each existing leader had led in the last three years has been compiled and only ten met the qualifying criteria set by Ramblers; one of those has left our Group and one is deceased, leaving just eight.

The evidence suggests that existing walk leaders have taken offence at the new policy, as predicted, although many of them probably had no intention of ever leading another walk anyway.

Area Committee Meetings – Adopt AI Generated Meeting Summaries

The following has been extracted from the Area October meeting. AI doesn't handle humour very well:

'David mentioned that the AGM was arranged, with a talk on sea fishing at Clevedon Pier being organized. Barry offered to give a presentation on Scouse jokes, and David expressed approval, though Barry noted that the topic might not be well-known.'

Tim Lewis, Area Footpath Secretary & Access Officer

I am aware that previous reports from me in Write of Way have rambled on (pun intended) for too many pages, which has probably discouraged anyone from reading more than the headlines, so I will try to be brief.

Since the summer edition of Write of Way, there have been two meetings of the Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum (WSCAF), on 23 July and 12 November 2025. As little changed between the two, I will concentrate on the most recent one.

On a positive note, the work on recording path furniture/assets on Public Rights of Way (PRoW) has progressed well, with 29 parishes completed and 38 in progress out of a total of 259 as of 5 November – although of course the number of assets varies hugely from one parish to the next.

The WSCAF has still not been provided with Wiltshire Council's (WC) draft 2025-2035 Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) for our review, which is a mandatory function of the WSCAF. This is entirely since Paul Millard, who has been tasked with writing it, has several other roles within WC, and apparently there is no one else who CC can spare, or with the relevant knowledge, to write the Plan.

Approval of the amendment to WC's constitution which was identified as a pragmatic way of speeding up the review of Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO) by the WSCAF's DMMO working group will not be considered until the Council's next meeting on 24 February next year. So, the 362 live applications on the DMMO register at the end of October will continue to reduce only at the present glacial rate. Happily, the flood of new applications has subsided to a trickle.

Construction of the gargantuan Lime Down Solar Park in North Wiltshire has been approved by central government, but there is still a huge amount of opposition to it both locally and nationally. It seems that most of Paul Millard's suggestions for existing PRoW within the footprint of the solar farm to be upgraded or improved, and new ones created, have been accepted by the applicant. However, the deadline for finalising these suggestions is apparently more important than that for reviewing the CAIP.

Matthew Hale continues to make a difference to the PRow department within Highways by dealing with the mountain of admin the Countryside Access (CAO) officers would otherwise have to process. Swindon Borough Council (SBC) has the same problems as WC, but in miniature. Martin Fry, the SBC RoW and Highway Information Manager, continues to do a remarkable job, but lacks a competent admin person to release him to do more work in the field.

Brian Micklam was instrumental in getting Councillor Nigel White to prod Chris Clark Head of Highways at WC, into producing a Memorandum of Understanding governing the work that West Wilts Ramblers' path maintenance team can do for WC. It is to be hoped that this will lead to the resumption of West Wilts' monthly outings to replace stiles with gates.

I went for a walk with Brian Mathew, the MP for Melksham and Devizes on 28 May. The walk was devised and led by Brian Flynn, and Paul Millard of WC also came. The route provided a good variety of path problems to show Brian, and we were able to supplement these by telling him about the problems we have been having with WC when it comes to anything to do with PRow.

However, Paul Millard was eloquent in his defence of the PRow department, so at least Brian got a balanced view. But he made it clear that he could not influence WC, for example to increase the PRow dept.'s funding allocation. I was aware that we were unlikely to secure Brian's passionate commitment to righting the wrongs of WC's PRow team by taking him on the walk, but it certainly does no harm to have established contact with our local MP in this way.

Finally, readers may not be aware of the report recently released by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature. It attracted over 750 submissions, including one from the WSCAF, and contains many of the suggestions for increasing access to nature made by the WSCAF.

It is apparently unusual for such reports to be released to the public and is hopefully a sign that the Green Paper on the subject being promoted by the Ramblers and others is gaining momentum – although of course this does not mean that all, or even any, of the recommendations will end up being implemented.

PRow Maintenance Activities

Several of our Groups continued to remain active maintaining the PRow in their Area.

South Wiltshire's Heavy Gang have certainly got a good working model working in partnership with their Wiltshire Council Countryside Access Officers (CAO) to report an impressive number of paths cleared and hours worked over the year.

Their work on GRIM12 at East Grimstead, Salisbury certainly demonstrates that if the CAOs are prepared to do all the background clearances and permissions with landowners to install new PRow infrastructures and provide the materials and tools

then coordinating with the Heavy Gang to undertake the work the combined partnership result is very impressive. They say pictures paint a thousand words.



Ramblers and Wiltshire Council North Area CAO Liaison Meeting

On a bimonthly basis, an online meeting takes place to discuss PRow issues in Wiltshire Council's North Area. At this meeting members of Swindon & NE Wilts, Mid-Wilts and NW Wilts meet with the North Area CAO's, Stephen Leonard and Alison Rasey, to discuss a wide range of current PRow issues and obtain feedback on what has been done in the Area by the CAO's.

As Peter Gallagher, Footpaths & Walking Environment, Swindon & NE Wilts, says:

'As well as helping to maintain a hopefully good relationship between Ramblers and the CAOs, one of the benefits I get from the meetings is an appreciation of how much maintenance and improvement work on the network the CAOs and their contractors do. That they can't do more, and the reason that many of the problems on the network that we all complain about don't get fixed, is down to insufficient resources (both people and finance).'

Peter also pointed out that one of this year's highlights has been the number of new footbridges that have been put in. The bridge at Collingbourne Kingston, CKIN2, to which the South Wilts Heavy Gang made a big contribution, is a fine example of joint working.



Three other bridge constructions were reported in the Highways and Transport Newsletter:

The bridge on Footpath 6 in Lacock (LACO6) has been successfully replaced

A traditional stone clapper bridge on Footpath 2 in Luckington (LUCK2) has been successfully repaired with support from the landowner

The replacement of Peppercombe Mill bridge (URCH16) in Urchfont has significantly improved access and reliability for users.



Did you know that you can sign up to receive the [Newsletter](#) at: <https://mailchi.mp/fa3d04e4d1a7/update> and select 'roads, roadworks and transport'.

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management System (HIAMS).

In the Summer edition of WoW Charles Penn submitted an article titled: **Counting Sheep May Help You Sleep But Counting Stiles Means Walking Miles! – Charles Penn Footpath Secretary, South Wilts Ramblers**

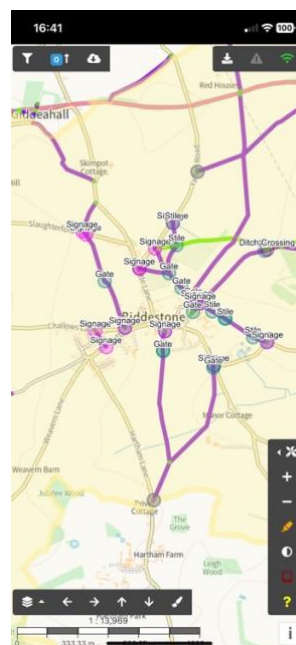
Wiltshire Council has an ambitious project to record all furniture associated with our public rights of way (PROW). This includes stiles, gates, bridges, boardwalks, signposts and other structures – referred to as “assets” though many are owned by landowners and not the Council.

I volunteered to undertake the one-hour training session, have access to the application on my smartphone and have made a start of walking the 31 PROWs, a total of 25km, in the Biddestone & Slaughterford Parish for which I am the Parish Warden for the Cotswold National Landscape.

I asked Matthew Hale, Senior Business Support Officer, Rights of Way & Countryside, if he would like some more volunteers and received the following reply:

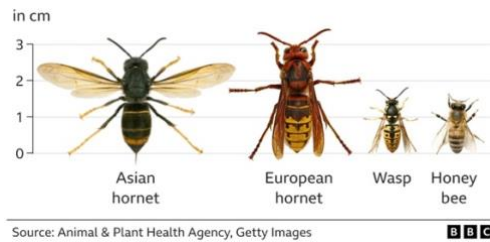
“Thanks so much for helping to recruit volunteers. Just to note that we can’t guarantee that we will be able to use all volunteers, but it would be great to know who is interested in helping. If they can contact rightsofway@wiltshire.gov.uk to register their interest and let us know where they are based and what parishes, they would be prepared to survey that will be brilliant.”

If you would like to volunteer send Matt an email.



HIAMS Screen Capture - Biddestone

Asian Hornets – Bee on the Look Out



The Asian Hornet arrived in France in 2004 where it spread rapidly. There have been several sightings recorded in the UK since 2016.

We are advised that it is important to report any suspected sightings of this species as soon as possible. Vigilance is particularly required in southern parts of England and Wales and around major ports. The Asian Hornet is active mainly between April and November, peaking in August and September, and is inactive over the winter.

It is a highly effective predator of insects, including honey bees and other beneficial species, which can cause significant losses to bee colonies, and potentially other native species.

As the weather worsens, there will be less activity, but queens may be found hibernating. Nests may be more easily seen in trees now. You are asked to send a photograph and location details. Do not under any circumstances disturb or provoke an active hornets' nest.

Lots of information including posters, apps., ID sheets and where to report is available on the NNSS website: <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/non-native-species/species-alerts/> - **Species 53**

You can also learn about other non-native species that are on special alert such as the American Bullfrog, Raccoon, Sea Murtle and the Japanese Sting Winkle.

MyWilts

As reported in the NWW Ramblers November Newsletter:

Despite there being a backlog of reported issues, the MyWilts app is still the quickest way to report issues (with Rights of Way) across Wiltshire to the council. For more details, please visit the Wiltshire Council web page at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/mywilts-online-reporting>.

Access MyWilts

You can download MyWilts on any device with an internet connection, including smartphones and tablets.

Sign in or register for an account

Sign in to MyWilts by clicking the 'Sign in or register' icon.

If you don't have an account, you need to register before signing in. Registering keeps you updated on the progress of your cases and allows you to add your own updates.

Report an Issue

Select the 'Report an issue' or 'Report' icons to view the issues that can be reported through MyWilts.

You can also use the 'Search' icon to find specific issues to report.

Once you select your issue, a form will open and you can provide details of the issue. You can save a draft of your report and submit it later when it's convenient for you. This lets you start a report even when you're offline.

You can report issues such as:

- potholes
- issues with drainage, gullies and manholes
- fly-tipping
- issues with public rights of way
- issues with grass, hedges and shrubs
- issues with pavements and kerbs

2026/27 - Cotswold Way - 10 Stage Guided Walk

Great Opportunity to walk the Cotswold Way from North to South with the Cotswolds Volunteer Wardens. Looking for a rewarding challenge starting in 2026? Why not walk the length of Cotswold Way?

First Saturday of the month beginning on Saturday 2nd May for ten months. Coach departs from Cold Ashton at 8.45 am and returns to Cold Ashton at end of each walk.

Walk starts at the Market Hall, Chipping Campden in May and finishes at Bath Abbey in February 2027. Walks are approximately 10 miles long per stage. Group of 25 walkers led by two experienced Cotswold Volunteer Wardens.

Reasonable level of fitness required. Walking boots essential and poles recommended. Great sense of achievement on completion.

Cost of £250 (TBC) to cover transport.

Contact John Bartram woodlandsbarn@btinternet.com for more information.

The Cotswold Way is one of the most popular of the National Trails and offers a wide variety of landscapes along the route. The one hundred and two miles of the Cotswold Way runs for most of its length on the Cotswold escarpment with fantastic views. It passes through many picturesque villages and close to several significant historic sites and churches.