

**Chairman's Report to East Cheshire Ramblers Annual General Meeting
Saturday 11th November 2017**

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run.*

And haven't they conspired well this year to produce a bumper crop of berries of every kind. Savouring the blackberries has given pause to several walks and the hawthorn, holly and rowan berries have produced a reddish sheen on some woodlands viewed from a distance. Earlier in the year the scent of the gorse was arresting and again in the late summer with the heather. A truly sensational year which I hope has enhanced your walk experiences.

Another season coming to fruition is my three year term as Chairman. It has been eventful and enjoyable and after a total of six years on the Committee in two stints it is time for me to put some energy into other interests.

Looking back, one of the most enjoyable and satisfying events was arranging and presenting Ramblers Association Commendation Awards to Harry Hadfield and Norman Ridley - a small recognition of their extraordinary contribution.

The most emotional and moving was attending the funeral of Mike Bull, so recently our Membership Secretary, and learning more of the values and principles which shaped his life of service to others.

A significant milestone has been **halving our Bank Balance** through expenditure on two major Footpath restoration schemes: The extent of the effort and professionalism involved in the restoration of Bollington FP 22 by Brian Richardson's Team took me some time to comprehend fully: I could see the state of the "as was" and then the transformed "as is" but understanding the statistics: the volumes of earth, stones and debris removed and the weight of new curb stones, limestone and other materials moved, manoeuvred and stabilised still seems incredible. The ECR Group will take pride in this Project for years ahead.

The second scheme, 13 metres of Bridges and 5 metres of Boardwalk for Poynton FP54 was delivered through Colin's steady persistence over several months in co-ordinating the involvement of all parties, PROW, Contractor and ECR. We are fortunate to have a Treasurer who combines these people and project management skills with financial prudence. We have further funds for future projects and the Committee will have an opportunity to apply for grants up to £2,000 from the Ramblers Holiday Charitable Trust -

but the primary challenge remains the identification and agreement of specific projects on which to spend the money - and ownership by a good Project Officer.

Our **Walk Leader Training** day had been eagerly awaited by the full complement of 12 Trainees. (Four additional applicants had to go on a waiting list). In many years of running development programmes, I have rarely witnessed such intense collective concentration as occurred during the map reading and topography interpretation session; so absorbed were the Trainees that the scheduled timings had to be abandoned as they came to see just how much information a map can reveal to a Walk Leader and how Rights of Way exist in many different forms. Four experienced Walk Leaders attended as Mentors for the day and their "real life" insights were highly appreciated. Caroline Finlayson was a spirited advocate of the benefits of digital maps on smart phones and educated the tutors on a number of points and techniques for location finding. Colin Park offered to lead a follow-up day "in the field" putting into practice the class-room learning and over half the class attended this. Feedback from the 2017 Cohort suggests that future training should continue to offer time spent on Leadership best practice and technical information in the classroom as well as practical application on a Training Walk.

Members wishing to learn more about this training or our other course, "1st Aid and Emergency Incidents," should contact Jane Gay or talk to any Committee member.

This year we had to complete four "**Medical Incident Reports**" to Central Office; all casualties required Hospital referral, and two an Emergency Service response. This represented a spike in the normal trend of reporting - at 1.1% of our total number of Walks. The Committee has issued guidance for Walk Leaders and members in dealing with such Incidents, largely based upon the advice from 'The British Red Cross' which is accessible from our website. Please do acquaint yourselves with the way in which the 8 emergency incidents, which can occur on walks, may be recognised and responded to.

Turning now to **National and Area business**: the RA General Council is to be held on Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th April 2018 at The University in Bangor North Wales. It is the East Cheshires' turn to attend next year and this will be a convenient and attractive location for the Delegates of the new Committee to meet with colleagues from Areas and Groups all over the country and to establish contacts with RA Central Office Staff, which I found particularly useful at GC in Cambridge in 2015. This will be the first General Council for our new CEO Vanessa Griffiths who has adopted a radically different and collaborative style and approach compared with her predecessor; the Delegates will be listening carefully to what she has to say.

You will have seen notification of our own Area AGM which will be held on Friday 17th November. ECR are hosting and chairing this and I shall look forward to introducing our respective members and Committee Officers to each other.

And finally: **"It is quite astounding what the East Cheshire Ramblers do - and all through Volunteers!"** exclaimed a former work colleague who is not easily impressed. All the Committee Officers have worked hard on their remit and expanded their contribution: Adrian, our Secretary, has worked diligently to maintain the sheer volume of our communications - there is rarely a lull in demands on his time; he has worked patiently with a small number of members to resolve their problems with non-receipt of emails from our PHP system. These issues can be caused by the recipient's software rather than ECR's. When not being a Secretary he is maintaining Footpaths. Jane has delivered a vast array of Social activities and Events which have been eagerly anticipated and enjoyed. Sue has mastered the Membership procedures and reporting mechanisms and established collaborative contacts with Central Office. Dave Barraclough, by joining us as the Footpath Committee representative, has sharpened our attention on, what is after all, the Ramblers' central purpose: the protection and maintenance of the path network for the enjoyment of all. I remain awestruck by the amount and range of work his Footpath colleagues undertake and the influence which they wield on our behalf. Colin Park has maintained our weekly Press coverage, as far as articles from members and Walk Leaders allow; and his regular Postings on the website, describing all his extraordinarily varied treks and expeditions, has shown some of us just how much of the British Isles we have yet to discover.

Facilitating all we do, enabling most of what we do and managing much of what we do, is Roger Fielding and his website: truly the "sine qua non" of our entire operation. We are lucky to have his unique resource.

We owe all our Volunteers a resounding and sustained "thank you". And a further reason for gratitude is that they are all staying in post for another year. But we cannot and must not expect this to continue; both the Main and the Footpath Committee have operated with 2 vacancies throughout the year. This is, of course, unsustainable. We need at least five new members to join the Committees and to help with the work; initially members may have no specific role but contribute to initiatives and tasks and begin to understudy one of the Officer positions. Please speak with any of us and help us renew the Group and ensure it continues to flourish for us all to enjoy.