

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

JANUARY 2026 EDITION

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LWR TRIALS NEW RECRUITMENT INITIATIVE



A major concern of all the walking groups involved with the West Riding Area review process, was the difficulty in recruiting new members. Most had tried different recruitment initiatives but none had succeeded. New members are the life blood of any voluntary organization and clearly failure has serious long-term consequences for the longevity of local Ramblers groups.

In recent years, new members have made a major contribution to the success of LWR. Our last two Chairs (Lesley Hill & Janet Williams) and our current Chair, Mike Briers, were all new members. Amanda Siswick has ignited our social activities and Helen Hartley has recently become our new Membership Secretary. LWR has benefitted enormously from enthusiastic new members, including walk leaders in every group.

Working on the basis that the best place to find new members is amongst people who already enjoy walking, LWR are piloting their own recruitment initiative this summer but it is one where every member, old or new, can help.

This year the Otley Walking Festival runs from Saturday June 28th until Sunday July 5th. On Tuesday 30th June, the regular A, A(S), C and D walks will form part of the OWF programme. On Thursday 2nd July, the Tuesday and Thursday B groups will combine to offer a walk. The full programme of walks being offered by LWR members is as follows:-

DATE	WALK	GROUP	LEADER
June 30th	Lower Washburn Round	A	Caroline Davies
June 30th	Four Reservoirs	A(S)	Ian Haigh
June 30th	Chevin Up Westwards	C	Antonia Woosnam-Savage
June 30th	Historic highlights of Otley	D	Jim Heslop
July 1st	Fame is the Spur		Chris Tye
July 2nd	Washburn Wander	B	Amanda Siswick, Gina Brook
July 4th	Otley (literature) Run		Chris Tye

The OWF is ranked by the 'Guardian' newspaper as one of the top 10 walking festivals in the UK. Each year the festival offers around 50 walks which attract around 1,000 walkers, of whom about 66% live locally. Our goal is to attract some of these residents to join LWR.

Our walks will appear in the OWF 2026 leaflet of which 6,000 copies are distributed to local libraries, leisure centers, visitor information bureaus, train and bus stations etc. Additionally the walks will feature in walking magazines, the OWF website and the 'World Walking Festivals' website.

A member of Leeds Ramblers said to me on a walk, "If we could bottle the wonderful atmosphere and friendship we have on our walks, people would be queuing to join us". She was absolutely right. We can't bottle it but we can expose people to the warm, welcoming atmosphere that LWR has always enjoyed.

You can help by doing what you were probably going to do in any case. Just join your normal walk, make your visitors feel welcome and answer any questions they may have. Put the date in your diary now. No 'selling' is required. If at the end of the walk, your visitors leave happy, that's great, if they join, even better!

RAMBLERS HQ TO CLARIFY POSITION ON NEED FOR WRITTEN RISK ASSESSMENTS



All qualified Ramblers walk leaders are covered by Public Liability Insurance. Hopefully they will never need it but if whilst leading a walk one of their group had an accident or an unclosed gate led to animals being injured, the insurance would cover the leader.

The Ramblers Public Liability Insurance is provided by 'Howden' who have a section on their website regarding the requirement for **written** Risk Assessments prior to a walk. The Ramblers UK website also provides guidance on this important issue. Unfortunately the two websites said different things.

Former Chair of LWR, Larry Bagshaw, spotted this anomaly and took it up directly with Ramblers HQ. After waiting some months, with no response, Larry raised the issue with the LWR committee, who recognized this was not simply a local issue but impacted all Ramblers groups across the UK. They contacted Ramblers HQ expressing their concern and seeking clarification.

Ramblers HQ issued an instant apology for their tardy response and committed to clarify the issue with Howden, ensuring both websites said the same thing.

The updated policy has yet to be received, at time of press. In the meantime the LWR Committee recommends all walk leaders continue to follow the Walk Leader Handbook found on the Ramblers website.

LWR LEND A HELPING HAND TO LOCAL GROUPS



With spare capacity available on the second LWR walk leader training course, the two trainers, Mike Briers and Keith Wilman, agreed to invite members of other local groups, free of charge. The training was held in Guiseley Theatre on Monday 8th December.

As well as members from the LWR A, C and D groups, guests from Craven Ramblers, Chesterfield & NE Derbyshire Ramblers and West Riding Coach Rambles were made welcome.

LWR now have 80 members who are qualified walk leaders. Other local groups have had to cut back on their walk programmes due to a lack of qualified leaders but thanks to all our members who have qualified, LWR can continue to offer 6 walks a week throughout 2026 and beyond.

Ramblers HQ have pushed back the implementation date by two months. Thank you to all LWR members who have completed the training which is now mandatory for all walk leaders with effect from March 2nd 2026. Unqualified leaders will no longer be covered by Ramblers insurance after this date.

WEST RIDING AREA OF THE RAMBLERS – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year the AGM has moved from Ilkley to Leeds and will take place at 2:00pm on Saturday January 31st in the St George's Centre, 60 Great George St, Leeds LS1 3DL. The center is about 10 minutes' walk from the railway station.

Prior to the AGM will be two optional walks, with a Leeds theme, both starting from the Centre. Full details of both can be found on the Leeds Ramblers website – Future Walks.

Main focus this year will be the outcomes of the West Riding Area review process and draft reorganization proposals from Ramblers HQ to scrap Areas completely, and streamline group structures. Former LWR Secretary, Steve Rawlings is also stepping down as Area Chair.

These are important issues impacting every member and the AGM is your chance to make your voice heard.

LWR TO TRAIN OTLEY WALKING FESTIVAL WALK LEADERS

The OWF offers around 50 walks every year over the 9 days of the event, which this year runs from June 28th to July 5th. Some of the walk leaders are very experienced whilst others only lead one walk a year for the festival. Equally the walks on offer are free of charge and open to anybody. The result is a wide range of walks, a wide range of walk leaders and a very wide range of walkers.

The festival organisers were looking for a means to enhance leader training and LWR offered to run their Ramblers Walk Leader training programme for OWF walk leaders. Mike Briers and Keith Wilman will be providing the training on a date nearer the Festival

The OWF is a long-standing associate member of the Ramblers and always complies with their guidelines in areas such as Risk Assessment, Incident Reporting and First Aid. Providing the training is a natural extension of this relationship. It is also a way to say thank you to the OWF for a £500 grant to enable the LWR Footpath Maintenance Team carry out stile repairs in the Otley area, on both sides of the river.

Some OWF leaders are Ramblers members and once they have completed the training they will be eligible to lead Ramblers walks. Non-members will not be permitted to lead Ramblers walks. However all OWF walk leaders will be trained to a high standard which can only enhance the existing reputation of the OWF as a safe environment for novice walkers.

JACK JOWITT'S LEGACY LIVES ON



Left to Right - Antonia Woosnam-Savage (C), Nick Dybeck (Bradford Ramblers Footpath Officer), David Creer (A), Geoff Midgley (C)



Jack at work, repairing a bridge at Bankfoot Farm, Timble 1996

Today, if a walker reports a damaged stile in North Yorkshire, to LWR Footpath Officer, Antonia Woosnam-Savage, she has to report it to the council. They approach the land owner but if the damage is not dealt with they will often call Richard Brook, who leads the LWR footpath maintenance team. The council then agree a date with the landowner and Richard to do the work. Materials are provided by the council and delivered to site. Richard and his team then do the work which the council then come and inspect. It can be a long process as many walkers navigating broken stiles and wonky bridges can testify!

Jack was effectively a one man footpath maintenance team and laid the foundations for our current team but he had a very different approach. If a problem was reported, Jack, simply went and fixed it, sometimes with his wife. Many examples of his work can still be found throughout the Wharfe Valley area.

The current team were asked by NYC to replace a broken stile with a metal gate guarding a footbridge over a stream at Weston which is located between Otley and Askwith. The gate is on the 'Welcome Way' between Clifton and Askwith. The original bridge had been built by Jack around 17 years ago but was washed away by a flash flood. This bridge had been replaced by the council but a plaque commemorating Jack and his wife, Pat, on the original construction, had been recovered and attached to the new one where it remains.

Richard expressed his gratitude to the council for their thoughtful gesture and hoped Jack would approve of their more recent work.