NEW MEMBERS
A very warm welcome to new members who have joined the Group since the last Forest News.
Membership is now 230.

PROGRAMME DEADLINE
- March – June 2016 programme.
  e-mail: walks@fodramblers.org.uk

Details of walks for the next programme should be submitted no later than 7 February, directly onto the Group website if possible (www.fodramblers.org.uk), or to the walks co-ordinator. Any member, whether old or new, is welcome to lead a walk. Anyone who wants to borrow books of walks or who needs help to organise a walk, please contact any Committee member.
Many thanks to everyone who has led a walk since the last newsletter.

AGM
The Group AGM will be held at the Catholic Church Hall, 4 High Nash, Coleford GL16 8HL at 7 for 7.30 pm on Friday 6 November 2015. Do come along and learn what we’ve been doing for the last year and have your say on what we should do over the next twelve months! Please bring something for the ‘bring and share’ supper afterwards, which provides a good opportunity to socialise with fellow members, some of whom can no longer walk regularly with us. Tea, coffee, and fruit juice will be provided.

NORTH WALES WAY
The next of Ronnie’s long-distance walks will again be in Wales: a section of the North Wales Way, which runs from Bangor to Prestatyn. The plan is to walk the 34 miles from Bangor to Llandudno, a scenic route of coast and mountains, between 20 and 24 April 2016. More information will be available at the AGM or ring Ronnie Walker on 01594 845225.

BULGARIA HOLIDAY, JULY 2016
Unfortunately I have had to cancel this holiday as I have discovered that the hotel is up for sale and my e-mail asking for further information has not been answered. I am hoping to be able to offer a different holiday some time next year, but will not have the time to organise it until after the AGM due to other walking commitments. (Mike Ingleby)

LAKE DISTRICT HOLIDAY
Our second holiday of the year, in September, was at the enigmatically named Land Ends Country Lodge, a former Lakeland barn which had been converted to provide very comfortable self-catering accommodation. It is located a few miles northwest of Ullswater.
During the previous week the weather forecast had been dire, warning of heavy rain during most of our four-night stay, so the ambience among those eleven of us who arrived around mid-day on the Monday was one of some trepidation. However, having sorted out our rooms (all en-suite) and introduced ourselves, ten of us set off on an afternoon walk to the nearby Gowbarrow Fell, at 481 metres (1578 feet) a modest hill by Lake District standards. It did, however, possess a couple of useful features: it was a 6-mile circular walk from Land Ends, meaning we didn’t have to drive to the start and, in clear weather, it had good all round views of some of the mountains which were on our itinerary during the rest of the week. So when we got to the summit, I was able to point out the area of cloud to our northwest which concealed Blencathra, the mass of cloud to the south enveloping the entire Helvellyn range and, to our southeast, more cloud obscuring Place Fell. Still, the heavy rain promised by the Met Office had held off and the walk over varying and sometimes interesting terrain gave a worthwhile introduction to our immediate surroundings.
For our first evening, we had booked a table for 13 at the Herdwick Inn, Penruddock, a short drive from Land Ends. The Herdwick had glowing reviews on Trip Advisor, to which it more than lived up in real life – so much that we immediately agreed to return on Thursday, our last evening.
On Tuesday we set off for our first real Lake District mountain: Blencathra at 868 metres (2848 feet). We had chosen a route starting from the tiny village of Scales and climbing via Doddick Fell, a benign rounded ridge with none of the terrors of Sharp Edge. This proved much more interesting than the standard route up Scales Fell: the views into the gills on either side of the ridge, with the summit of Blencathra towering above, were as good as we got during the entire holiday. From the summit we were rewarded with splendid views: Skiddaw to the west appeared out of the cloud, further southwest were the hills around Derwentwater and to our southeast we could see the jagged low outline of Gowbarrow. To the south was the large

As a taster for the walk, I include a photo of Conwy Castle, taken near the end of our Cambrian Way walk in May 2008. Incidentally, like the North Wales Way, the Offa’s Dyke Path finishes at Prestatyn.
cloud enveloping the Helvellyn range. Our return took us to the eastern slopes of Blencathra, Bannerdale and the Glendermackin valley and we did have some rain, although gentle by Lake District standards. That evening we dined at Land Ends on lashings of home-made curry.

Wednesday had always been forecast to suffer the worst weather of our stay. It also offered a choice of walks. (It was certainly very wet on the South Downs Way. Ed.) Most of us drove to Patterdale at the southern end of Ullswater and then walked east across the valley along a section of the Coast-to-Coast path, ascending to Boredale Hause (a feature that would be called a ‘bwlch’ in our usual hill country) and on to Place Fell. We were rewarded by magnificent views of the Helvellyn range to our west, clear of any cloud and beautifully lit by the morning sun. We then gradually descended to Howtown on the eastern shore of Ullswater, where we met other members of our group who had caught the steamer from Grisedale, some of whom joined us for the return walk along the shore to Patterdale. The weather could not possibly have been better for walking. In the evening we dined on fish and chips, brought all the way from Penrith, followed by home-made apple crumble.

On Thursday a small but intrepid party again drove to Patterdale, but this time walked to the west as our route was to be a 14-mile circular walk including the summit of Helvellyn. Resisting the lure of Striding Edge and Swirrel Edge, we took a more northerly ascent via Sticks Pass onto the range and continued southwards on an undulating track that included a series of named summits. Again the weather was superb, offering splendid views to the east over Place Fell and the High Street range. To our west, however, low cloud obscured many of the higher fells and to the north Blencathra was also hidden. We eventually dropped down to Grisedale Tarn and followed the valley back to Patterdale. A slightly larger party drove to Brothers Water and climbed ‘The Knott’, part of the High Street range. For our last evening we returned to the Herdwick Inn. Then on Friday no-one seemed particularly interested in walking, for some reason, so we headed back down the M6 home.

Many thanks to those who participated, made curry, led walks, hunted down fish and chips, made apple crumble, went shopping and eventually left Land Ends clean and tidy. (Mike Ingleby)

The company must have been as good as the walking, since two of the three guests who participated have now transferred their membership to our Group. (Jackie Huck)

SOUTH DOWNS WAY

The same week as the Lakes holiday, the Editor, with two friends, was walking the South Downs Way. This is 100 miles long and runs from Winchester to Eastbourne, mostly over the chalk hills, but also through some attractive villages. Before setting out from Winchester we visited St Cross Hospital, a charitable organisation, to claim our ‘wayfarers dole’ of bread and ale. (Some people will do anything to get a free beer!) We walked for 8 days, with mostly reasonable weather, apart from the Wednesday when we copped the rain that had been promised for the Lake District! Fortunately, we arrived at our destination of Amberley early enough to visit the interesting museum there. Tuesday was also a short day (only 8 miles), and we arrived at our destination of Cocking with plenty of time to catch a bus into Chichester to look around. By great good luck, we arrived there just as the aircraft taking part in the Battle of Britain 70th anniversary flypast were taking off from nearby Goodwood airfield. For a while, the sky was full of Spitfires, Hurricanes and a Blenheim, just as it would have been in 1940. The last part of the walk, from Lewes, via Alfriston, to Eastbourne was in glorious sunshine, the finale being the walk over the Seven Sisters, past Beachy Head, and down into the seaside resort. I would certainly recommend the walk, even though it was quite different to some of our earlier exploits ‘up norf’ (Coast-to-coast, Hadrians Wall, West Highland Way, etc.)

MONDEAN WALKING FESTIVAL

This took place between 27 June and 5 July. Our Group played a major part by leading no less than 7 walks, quite ambitious for our first experience of putting on a walking festival. The Festival started and ended with challenge walks of some 20 miles (Three Peaks and Three Castles) and included 4 walks from our book Exploring Historic Dean. We sold several copies of this book and also gained a new member.

Our leaders enjoyed the experience, learning more about dealing with ‘unknown’ walkers and really appreciating the support of their back markers. We sometimes jest about it being okay to lose up to 10% of a group, but on these walks it was no small relief to finish without loss or even mishap! (I gather that this joke is now very much a no-no with leaders on Ramblers holidays, after someone took it seriously and complained! Ed.) Our walk leaders certainly haven’t been put off and are looking forward to taking part in the next Walking Festival in October 2016. We thank Jenny Robbins, who has kindly agreed to be our representative on the Festival committee. (Jackie Huck)

JOIN THE BIG PATH WATCH

The Big Path Watch is the Ramblers’ most ambitious campaign ever to take part: simply choose one or more OS 1km-grid squares (ideally in our patch, but it could be anywhere) and walk the area noting any path problems you encounter and any good things you see. For those with a smart phone or tablet, there is an app which allows easy recording as you walk. If you don’t, you can use the web version to pick your square(s) and print off a map. After your walk you can come back and upload your findings. Many of our members signed up to this initiative at our activities evening on 15 May, but we still need more grids surveyed, so please consider taking part. You can check the website to see which grids have already been surveyed and learn more at http://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/the-big-pathwatch

MEMBERS ON THE RADIO

Both Mike Ingleby and Ronnie Walker recently appeared on the Kate Clark programme on Radio Gloucester, Mike on 18 July and Ronnie on 20 September. Ronnie was talking about the Soudley Circles walk, one of our published leaflets. It was all good publicity for the Group.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE WONDERING IF A WALK IS GOING AHEAD

As we approach winter, there may be occasions when there is an adverse weather forecast or reports of flooding etc, and you wonder if a walk is going ahead. All our leaders are made of stern stuff and it would be a rare event when a programmed walk does not take place. Nevertheless, if a leader considers that conditions are unsafe they may take the decision to change the walk route or even cancel it. Cancellation would only be in exceptional circumstances and every effort would be made to post information on our website or send an e-mail. In any case, unless travelling is unsafe, the leader will still go to the starting point to let people know the situation (not everyone can check the website) If you are in any doubt about whether a walk is going ahead, please phone the leader. (Jackie Huck)

TWMBARLWM WALK

A case where a programmed walk route had to be substantially changed occurred on the walk from Cwmcaurn Country Park on 8 October. This was supposed to be a joint walk led by Maurice and
the Editor, but I was unable to go as Jean had broken her ankle and was (and still is) laid up at home. The first mile or so included a climb through woodland towards the hill fort on the summit of Twmbarlwm, but the path had been closed off, due to planned forestry operations, and the indicated detour was a very long way round. It took some considerable time to overcome this obstacle and get back onto the planned route. In the event, it was probably just as well that the walk was poorly supported, with only five people, as finding a route through the woods was not easy. The annoying thing was that the affected woodland had been closed since mid-August, supposedly for just three weeks, but forestry operations had not even started in the relevant area by the day of the walk.

Twmbarlwm, with its hill fort and Norman motte, is a prominent feature to the north of the M4 between Newport and Cardiff. The woodland below the hill, on the far side of the valley in the photo, was closed off to walkers.

One of the perils of relying overmuch on GPS!

FROM THE EDITOR

This will be my last edition of Forest News. I have now been Editor for 13 years (since the February 2003 issue), so I feel that it is now time for someone else to take on the job. It is not an onerous task, just three issues per year, and I will be happy to assist anyone who would like to volunteer. I hope members have found the Newsletter useful, and even entertaining, and I would really like to see it continue.

GROUP WEBSITE

This can be reached either via the national Ramblers site at www.ramblers.org.uk and searching groups, or directly at our own site www.fodramblers.org.uk