



July/August 2025 Newsletter



The Fauld Crater

Fauld

In a November field, seventy souls took flight;
some broken, some drowned, some vaporised.
It was a long time ago but the land remembers
and its agony echoes in a deep grassy scar.

No-one's allowed in there now.
A pathetic broken fence and rusting signs
warn off the casual walker, like a bolt
drawn across the door of an empty stable.

Birds still sing there, despite what they say.
They make their homes in new trees,
pick worms, hunt mouse, harvest berry
and skip across the dangerous earth.

Each Spring, when autumn is forgotten
campion, ragged robin, nettle and trefoil
seed the slopes with ignorant abandon,
a joyous victory of life in a place of death.

Phillip Binding; a member of the Lichfield Poets

Chairperson's Report

The highlight of our summer walks was, most certainly, the coach trip to Llangollen in July with forty six Ramblers on board. Three walks of varying lengths were offered, with options for independent walking and sightseeing in beautiful surroundings. The ten-mile walk started in Carrog: the steep ascents at the beginning ensured stunning views of the valley below as the walk progressed. The shorter circular walks incorporated a section of the Offa's Dyke Path and the Panorama Walk. Sincere thanks to Rosie and Tony for planning the routes and making the travel arrangements. It was an excellent day out.

Walks Programme

We've continued to enjoy warm, dry conditions for walking with a busy and varied programme throughout July and August. Thursday walks (all in Warwickshire) have included Shustoke & Nether Whitacre, along sections of the Centenary Way; a choice of two walks from the Bull's Head, Barston in the Blythe River Valley and along the Grand Union Canal; and the walk from Ansley to the castle at Astley, returning along the North Arden Trail. Sunday walks have been further afield in Alton in the attractive Dimmingsdale area and the Churnet Valley; from Tutbury out to the Fauld Crater – the site of the devastating explosion in 1944, with an alternative walk around Shuttington and Seckington. Closer to home, we enjoyed a popular walk in Sutton Park, followed by a tranquil woodland and canal walk from Barr Beacon. We returned to Warwickshire for Mike's Alcester walk, passing through several pretty villages and on the Bank Holiday weekend, we enjoyed the countryside around Balsall Common. Thanks to all our walk leaders: Rosie, Tony, Marcia, John, Julie, Barbara, Pat, Sharon, Ynyr, Andy, Judy and Mike. Evening pub walks have been a great success: rolling countryside full of ripening crops, good company and convivial drinks in excellent pubs! John H insists he's in touch with the 'elementals' which has ensured wonderful summer evening weather on Wednesdays from May to August. Thanks to both John and Marcia for putting on these walks.

Ramblers' Walk Leader Training

You will know from the previous newsletter that Ramblers are requiring all existing walk leaders to undergo training to conform with current health and safety standards. We have until the end of this year to put this in place. If there is sufficient interest, we will organise a group training session, but we do need to get on with making arrangements for this. It's crucial that we maintain a pool of trained walk leaders for the continued development of the group. Please contact Barbara with your preferred option of completing the training as outlined in the email sent out last week.

Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Tour

A group of 18 Ramblers enjoyed a fascinating guided tour of the historic gardens including the Melon Grounds, Formal Garden, the Walled Garden and the Orchard. We

learned plenty about horticulture and history: a particularly interesting fact is that the Earl of Bradford's eighteenth century estate extended almost as far as the modern-day Star City. We enjoyed coffee and refreshments afterwards in the Courtyard Café and were impressed with the commitment of the volunteer group supporting the Charitable Trust.

Warwickshire Area Ramblers Celebrate Ramblers' 90th Anniversary

You will have had an email from Dr Peter Rookes, Chair of Warwickshire Ramblers, letting you know about plans for two or three walks and a picnic together, finishing at the Friends' Meeting House in Warwick on Saturday 27th September. There will be further details nearer the time.

Wishing you happy rambling as we move into the autumn season.

Barbara

New Members

A warm welcome to our new members; Aaron Baker; Cheryl Beale; Angela Chapman; Ursula Crow, Lyn Darrock and Mark Jones.

Ramblers '90 years of rambling'

The Ramblers recently announced the winner of their competition for Britain's Favourite Path 2025.



Almost 1,000 paths were nominated by the public, from tiny local lanes to sections of much-loved long-distance trails. The overall winner was the Hartland Peninsula - a stretch of the South West Coast Path. Closer to home, Kinder Scout in the Peak District in Derbyshire was the Midlands regional winner: the location of the mass trespass in 1932 by protestors to highlight how walkers were denied access to areas of open countryside that had been fenced off - a key event in the development of the Ramblers.

ramblers.org.uk/feature/discover-britains-favourite-paths

Continuing the theme of favourite paths, SCR members have been sharing their ***favoured local walks*** for inclusion in the next Newsletter. Local could be close to home or in the wider Midlands. Further contributions for favoured walks are welcomed - email suttoncoldfieldramblers-sharon-freedman

Walk Programme 2025

Our walks for July and August - a mix of distances and destinations - as well as weather conditions - plus two evening pub walks and a day to Llangollen by coach with two choices of walks.



Two Sunday walks with changeable weather; Alton with the Churnet Valley; and closer to home Edgbaston Reservoir and the Harborne Walkway.



Tutbury Castle and the Fauld Crater with inquisitive donkeys, cows and peacocks; and a shorter walk taking in Shuttington and Seckington passing WW11 events at Statfold Barn Farm.



Sunny evening pub walk from Little Hay.



Two Thursday walks out in Warwickshire - Shustoke with the Reservoir and Nether Whitacre; and from Barston with the Blythe River Valley and the Grand Union Canal finishing at the Bull's Head.



Two local Sunday walks from Barr Beacon through to Merrions Woods; and at Sutton Park a large group enjoyed a varied walk.



Middleton, and another warm evening for the last pub walk of the year.



Walking through the quiet Warwickshire countryside starting from the village of Ansley and following the Centenary Way to Astley with its historic castle and church.



A varied walk from picturesque Alcester following sections of the Heart of England Way and the Arden Way, and passing through the attractive villages of Oversley Green, Exhall and Great Alne.

A great turnout for the Bank Holiday walk from Balsall Common; plenty of sunshine and refreshments at the end at the Saracen's Head.



Check out more pictures and walk details on facebook.com/suttoncoldfieldramblers and on the Website - click on *Walks and Walking* and follow the tabs (or the orange arrow if using your mobile) to Sunday or Thursday walks. You can see details of the walks, photos and the route maps if the GPX data was recorded.

Details of future walks can be found on the website suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk. This shows confirmed walks plus provisional dates where walks are proposed but the recce has not yet been undertaken.

Walk Leaders

To provide a varied programme of walks for the Autumn, offers of both longer and shorter walks are welcomed. Training and support is available for new walk leaders. If you would like to offer a walk please get in contact with our Walk Coordinators;
Sunday Walks - Andy Addison andyaddison11@hotmail.com 07565153649
Thursday Walks - Julie Hamblen hamblen74@gmail.com 07817151165

Coach Walks

SCR's next planned coach walk will be the Christmas trip to Ludlow on December 7th. Leaders for 2026 coach walks are needed, if you have ideas of possible destinations and walks, and/or interested in leading, have a conversation with Tony P.

Car sharing to walks

Ramblers are encouraged where possible to car share to the walk start. Please text the walk leader if you plan to go directly there.

Check the Weather Outlook

bbc.co.uk/weather/outlook

Llangollen Coach Walk

The group enjoyed an excellent day out on the Llangollen coach walk with 46 members and friends taking part. There was good weather along with a choice of two walk options, both offering wonderful panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

The longer walk (10.3 miles) led by Rosie with 20 walkers started from Carrog - a village on the River Dee around 8 miles from Llangollen. After negotiating a steep climb the group enjoyed a stop for coffee along with the sight of a steam train puffing along the valley. From here the ascent became more gentle with pleasant walking through woodlands. By contrast the second half of the walk was largely downhill reaching the Horseshoe Falls on the River Dee, from where the group followed the canal into Llangollen and opportunity to relax with refreshments.

Seventeen ramblers joined the shorter walk of 6.5 miles led by Tony; the route included sections of Offa's Dyke Path and the Llangollen Panoramic walk. From a steep start the walk levelled off with woodland paths and tremendous views of the River Dee valley. The walk finished with a descent into Llangollen where walkers enjoyed refreshments in the town.

With Llangollen offering a wide selection of activities a group also took the opportunity to visit Plas Newydd - a fine historic house and gardens.



The Via Francigena - June 2025 Jubilee Year

In June six SCR members followed the Via Francigena from Siena to Rome over 16 days. Below John T and Mike F share some recollections from their Italian adventure.

Our party for the Via Francigena consisted of June, Christina, Tom, Rob, Mike and myself. This Camino had been originally planned a few years ago, but Covid dashed all our arrangements. It is worth pointing out that this was the first time I have used a specialist travel company (SloWays) to arrange accommodation and luggage transfer; and in retrospect we were glad we did, as the logistics for independent arrangements were too complicated. We booked our own flights.



Siena to Rome is the final stage of the Francigena, walking through the regions of Tuscany and Lazio. It goes without saying that the Via Francigena in Tuscany is among the most walked and celebrated stretches of the entire route. Its scenic beauty, rich historical legacy, and exceptional artistic and cultural heritage have attracted travellers since medieval times. While in the past it was primarily merchants who passed through —many of whom settled here, contributing to the region's prosperity—today the Tuscan stretch of the Francigena welcomes visitors from across the globe, all drawn by this perfect blend of landscape, history, and culture.

Recollecting our walk, two factors come to mind. First, the weather - it was very hot even by local standards. Second, although the route was well signposted, there was very little in the way of cafes or resting points - it is a very rural saunter in beautiful surroundings and we were prepared to carry larger amounts of fluids and snacks each day. Occasionally, there might be a water fountain though rarely anywhere to sit. All properties - farmhouses and villas were gated - at least it kept the dogs in! It made us realise how much we appreciated and missed the small hamlets and bars we were used to on the Caminos to Santiago de Compostela. However, we adjusted to this regime and the group kept up their cheerful demeanour throughout.

Much of what follows is taken from blogs and notes written along the journey. Given the region's extraordinary beauty, narrowing down the list of noteworthy places is no easy task.

Siena is well known for its beautiful shell- shaped square and Palazzo - its distinctive hue, a rich reddish-brown found in its façades and rooftops, gives its name to the globally recognised “Terra di Siena” pigment.





Tuscany is an open-air art book. Every village, every church, every hill tells a story of centuries of civilisation and creativity. The Val d'Orcia, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, enchants with its lush vegetation dotted with vineyards, beech forests, olive groves, and chestnut woods, as well as charming medieval hamlets, castles, and rural farmland. There was so much to enjoy and learn along the way.

The quintessential landscape, sculpted by erosion, features unique geological formations such as gullies that we walked through and bare, rounded hills of clay. Some of the villages and towns were remarkable for their medieval streets and the cordiality of the locals - Montalcino, Castiglione d'Orcia and San Quiricio. Wandering their historic streets also meant indulging in local flavours, from local wines and traditional cheeses to dishes steeped in rural tradition and heritage. Spaghetti a la Carbonara was a favourite for many of the group and I became fascinated with the range of tasty bruschettas. There were also humble soups such as ribollita - made from stale Tuscan bread, white beans, mixed greens and vegetables, sometimes with a touch of tomato - based on the philosophy of not wasting anything. As a Tuscan saying goes: "With a soup, the farmer smiles—even without meat."

Tuscany has many thermal pools and which are wellness resorts and we had coffee, I remember in Bagno Vignoni, a unique medieval village where a thermal pool occupies the very centre of the main square.



Much of the walk follows gentle ridge lines and white gravel roads, with towns and villages framed by iconic cypress trees. For part of the way, we followed the old Via Cassia, which soon became a remote and unpaved track. This is one of the most rugged sections of the Via Francigena. Upon reaching Radicofani — perched atop a hill visible from miles around — we arrived at one of the most striking and unmissable spots on the Via.



Other stand out destinations were Viterbo and Bolsena where we had a day's respite. Bolsena is renowned for its lake, and our hotel that evening offered beautiful views from a setting we chose for a memorable *Al fresco* dinner.

Viterbo was a city of contrasts, with its busy traffic dominated streets and its tranquil historic centre and alleyways. From here Vetralla was our next stop. The municipality of Vetralla, (province of Viterbo, Lazio) is located along the Via Francigena at 300 metres above sea level. Known for its characteristic medieval village and the woods of the Cimino mountains – the green lung of Tuscia – it is a land of important Etruscan, Roman, and Barbarian settlements and has a rich artistic and archaeological heritage.

In this village, along this stage the mural 'Il Cammino' (The Way) created by painter Alessandro Ridolfi had just been completed. The artwork was created on the initiative of a committee of local volunteers to enhance the places crossed by the Via Francigena in Vetralla. There are a number of murals, all depicting different aspects of the Via.



My other abiding memory is a culinary experience - no, it's not a cake - it was young heifer with tuna sauce and caper berries, and the red cabbage was a bonus.

By now we had entered the Lazio region and were bound for Sutri, via Capranica, a walk of 11.5 miles, through forest trails with welcome shade, like Sutton Park but without the dogs. Sutri was in festival mode - jovial atmosphere - dancing and feasting. On route to Campagnano we approached Monterosi in search of a refreshment and we were not disappointed, then in Campagnano we had a welcome visit from a former SC Rambler, Caterina Cattel, who is now back living in her home city .



The next day, to avoid a long, knee-testing descent, we took a short bus ride to Formello - the guide book informed us that it would be the last place of any real interest until we reached Rome. And so into the suburbs and La Giustiniana. From there, the following day we reached the Eternal City and the Vatican. The city was rammed with tourists and it took an age before we found the office to obtain our testimoniums. Our hotel in Rome for two nights was a former seminary and in a quiet suburb near parkland. I'll not go into too much detail about the final two days as the group did their own thing, varying from an open top bus ride to a guided cycle tour.

Through the heat and up and down a few hills, through places you can only find on foot, we sauntered for fifteen days - it was a memorable Camino and much laughter, good food and wine were enjoyed along the way.

Arrivederci Francigena

John Twort

Continuing with the group's adventures on the Via Francigena Mike shares his reflections on some specific days.

Day 4. We stayed in San Quirico d'Orcia, one of the most beautiful and charming medieval towns of the Orcia Valley in Tuscany. John had booked a table for six at a restaurant in a piazza opposite a church in the old town. Little were we to know that before we had finished our main course, we had front row seats to observe a Medieval Pageant. It involved a series of five processions of people dressed in colourful outfits arriving in turn from different parts of the town into the piazza. Each procession was led by a drummer along with men carrying large flags exhibiting their magnificent skills in twirling and waving.

Day 5. Our journey on this day involved five of us taking a bus ride to a location which was a bit off the beaten track. The Mapy Navigation app suggested more than one possible route to our next accommodation. The shortest route was chosen and that proved to be a mistake. It was one of the toughest day's walking that I have experienced.

Day 6. Our accommodation on this evening was at Agriturismo la Selvella, a farm that had diversified into providing facilities for tourists. By doing this they got grants from the government. The facilities at la Selvella were very good and included an excellent swimming pool. The evening meal was held outside with the guests' tables arranged in a circle around a giant tree. The three-course meal was served by the very amiable chef.

Day 8. We arrived in Bolsena, a city rich in history, art and culture. It is located on the shore of Lake Bolsena. This lake is the largest lake of volcanic origin in Europe. Our accommodation here was Agriturismo le Vigne. Our twin bedrooms were very large. We each had a king size bed. Christina suggested we should have a group self-catered evening meal. So off we trotted to find, eventually, a small Carrefour from which we gathered a trolley full of food, cans, jars and bottles. We all enjoyed a veritable feast out in the warm evening air. We also experienced a magnificent sunset out over the lake.

Many thanks to all the group for making the whole adventure an extraordinary experience.

Mike Fowler



Thank you to John and Mike for sharing their thoughts and capturing the spirit of the Via Francigena. You can also follow the group's adventure day by day on John's blog <https://ensuitepilgrim.blog/>

In Memoriam Geoff Stott

We have been advised that former longstanding member Geoff Stott has passed away - he would have shortly been 97. In his younger years Geoff was a runner and long distance walker - he had completed over 50 marathons. He was an enthusiastic traveller with Ramblers Holidays and had been to many parts of the world with them.

Dates for the Diary 2025

Warwickshire Area Ramblers Celebrate Ramblers' 90th Anniversary - Saturday September 27th at the Friends' Meeting House in Warwick. There will be further details nearer the time.

SCR AGM - this will be held on the evening of November 19th, further details to follow.

Christmas Walk and Meal - Sunday December 7th at Fishmore Hall near Ludlow.

Thank you to all who contributed to the newsletter. Contributions are invited for the next Newsletter, please send these to suttoncoldfieldramblers-sharon-freedman by October 20th.

hf holidays

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