Mole Valley Ramblers Annual Report

October 2020 – September 2021

In spite of another year when MVR's activities were hampered by the pandemic we managed to keep walking, restart path maintenance, have some fun and even grew our membership. Our thanks go to all those who pulled together to make these things happen.

Overall, our Membership during the past year has shown a rise in numbers in line with increased interest in walking generally and increasing confidence in those renewing their membership as our walks programme has gained momentum following the easing of Covid restrictions. At 474 *(September 2021)*, membership is at its highest level since records began. Overall, in this reporting year we have gained 75 members and lost 57.

When we started our booking system for group walks using Google Sheets last October, none of us were expecting to have to lockdown again in November, nor to stay locked down, apart from a brief resumption for two weeks in December, right through to May 2021. To help sustain our members, we had a scheme of Local Walking Adventures in which we posted three suggestions each week for people to look for on their walks, and post photos of their findings, along with their What3words locations, on our Facebook Group. Then we had an Anytime Walking Challenge, a 15 mile navigation to specific way points over the North Downs, and further outdoor navigation workshops. All were schemes that we hoped would be fun, as well as providing an educational element.

Having surveyed all our leaders in March (with an amazing 92% response rate) we continued our booking system using Google Sheets, gradually increasing group sizes from 6 to 15. In August we began a hybrid system giving leaders the choice of returning to the spontaneity of Open walks, for which people turned up on the day, or continuing with booking.

It has been difficult planning social events during the year, but the multi-walk picnics we held in July and September proved a successful way of allowing more people to meet up safely outside; and several members enjoyed the chance of a wine tasting at High Clandon vineyard in August. Our members are looking forward to the chance of a group holiday in August 2022, plans for group holidays in both of the last two years having had to be cancelled.

The changes brought about by the pandemic have caused us to re- think many aspects of walks planning, leading us to plan our programme on a monthly basis, with walks being on offer any day of the week, and a range of grades and lengths from 4 to 14 miles. Members appear to have welcomed these developments, although the popularity of Wednesday mornings for walking is now showing through.

Lessons learnt from the year have been: be ready for the unexpected, be ready to adapt your walk programme planning month by month, and allow for leaders to return to leading as and when they felt ready, with group sizes of their choosing.

Publicity has, for obvious reasons, been low key. We have moved away from sending articles to parish magazines etc. whilst everything was so uncertain. However, we have been pro-active in submitting articles to South East Walker, and making more use of social media. We have both a Facebook MVR Social Group, whose membership has grown to 67, and a public MVR Facebook page. Thank you to Louise Stilwell-Stage, our Publicity Officer, for ensuring that both have many lively and amusing posts.

Our Local Footpath Secretary, Jayne Lindsell, has had a busy year, with many planning applications to be checked out as to whether they would impact on rights of way. There have also been many path

problems filtering back through Ramblers Pathwatch that have been in our patch. One thing we learnt was that path diversions do not always get forwarded to Ordnance Survey so that there can be discrepancies between the definitive SCC map and OS maps.

We encouraged our members to respond to the Mole Valley District Council consultation about the future restrictions on motorised vehicles on the BOAT between Wotton and Coldharbour (Wolvens Lane) and Jayne spoke on our behalf at a Council meeting. The outcome was to extend restrictions but only to 4-wheeled motorised vehicles, not to motor bikes. The Lane had been re-surfaced as part of an initiative to provide a Greenway multi-user route between Denbies vineyard and Leith Hill. We were invited by the Surrey Hills AONB to attend its official opening in September, along with representatives of Cycling UK and the British Horse Society.

Our Footpath Maintenance Coordinator, Pauline Butcher, was pleased to rally volunteers together for the resumption of working groups in August 2021, and work has continued monthly since then, installing kissing gates and clearing vegetation under the supervision of SCC.

Over the past 12 months, many website changes were made in response to the various levels of Covid restrictions, which played havoc with our walks programmes. Our aim was to keep members informed of MVR's policy and plans at each stage. Overall website activity increased from the previous year, with the number of page views growing by 28% to 25,700 with notable peaks on the days when walks were opened for booking. Our MailChimp email distribution list grew to 341 members (up from 311 last year) and 29 associates from other Ramblers groups. 31 group emails were delivered during the year.

On the Committee we have been without a Chairman, but we shared out duties between other members and somehow got by! We are delighted to have a full set of officers following our recent AGM, and even have a new post of Vice-Chairman filled. We shall do our best to promote the Ramblers' objectives in the coming year, and adapt to whatever new Covid-19 restrictions may prove necessary.

Fiona Spencer

On behalf of Mole Valley Ramblers
27.11.2021