

Hunts Post Q&A

When did the group form and how quickly did membership grow?

Sadly, there are no archives available to chart Huntingdonshire Ramblers Group's beginnings or subsequent growth. According to information gleaned from longer-standing members, I understand that the Group was set up some time in the 1970s, no later than 1974. The founder is given as Dr Willem Hertzog who was noted for treating Josef Jakobs, the last German spy to be executed in the Tower of London. Jakobs was captured on a farm near Ramsey. He had a broken ankle and Willem was called to Ramsey police station to examine him. See:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Jakobs

Tell us about the current makeup of the group – age range etc.

Our Group does not keep details of members' dates of birth or gender but the mix of active participants appears to be a fair representation of the local demography. We currently have 219 members but not all of them join us on our walks. (If they all did, it would be something of a challenge for our Walks Leaders)! We usually have around 20 to 30 participants at our weekly rambles but the number of regular or occasional walkers is much greater. We are often joined by members of other groups from around the country. Most of our walks occur at weekends which we believe allows a greater range of people to take part.

People can be nervous about joining established groups, where they don't know anyone – how would you persuade them otherwise?

People interested in trying out a walk with our Group usually find us (if not through word of mouth) via a number of websites: national Ramblers, Cambridgeshire County Council, or the one our Group manages. They are directed to contact us by email but the phone numbers of our committee members are also made public. Our responses aim to put the enquirer at ease and to clarify what is to be expected on the day. We would usually go over the normal meet-up arrangements but refer them to the particular Walks Leader for any further details. Other information is readily available on the Group's website.

Once at the walk, the Leader provides a briefing of the route and any hazards. Any new walker is introduced at this time and once under way they inevitably find themselves attached (socially) to a regular walker or a small group. Of course, many find comfort in a group walk without the need to join in a conversation: this freedom to walk alone develops organically throughout the ramble.

You obviously do a lot more than just ‘walking’ as a group - your website for example is a brilliant shop window for the group and it seems very much a community and a group endeavour to provide content – can you tell me a bit more about how things have evolved from ‘rambling’ to what you are now?

The Group’s website has been live since 2012 and initially just included our Walks Programme together with some general details about rambling and the committee. In the absence of a dedicated member to maintain it, the website was not developed further. This changed in 2019 and it has since become a useful tool to attract new members, provide helpful advice and information, and to entertain and amuse. A major feature is now the mapping facility, allowing walkers to plot their own routes anywhere in the country. We also write up accounts of our adventures and present them with a video of pictures taken on the day. The website has continued to grow in popularity, with over 45,000 hits recorded over the last year. We also have a Facebook page.

It is worth stating that our Group’s website, along with over 200 like it around the country, is supported by a small team of technically-minded volunteers, in addition to local web editors.

Obviously, walking is great for the heart and soul, but do you feel it has wider benefits in terms of protecting the local open spaces and countryside? Are organisations like the Ramblers, and even just solo walkers and families, helping to protect and preserve the environment by getting out in it, and using it?

Ramblers GB fights hard to ensure that pathways are identified and kept open. Their current campaign “Freedom To Roam” seeks to increase the areas available to walkers. <https://beta.ramblers.org.uk/support-us/expand-freedom-roam>

At a local level, we have a Footpaths Secretary who liaises with landowners and the County Council on pathway issues. When out walking, we ensure that we respect the land that we cross, using only authorised paths and not disturbing livestock. All we should leave behind is our footprints.

What are your favourite places to walk in the area?

We are fortunate in Huntingdonshire to have so many paths open to us. My favourite walks are near water, along the Great Ouse in areas such as Paxton Pits, Godmanchester and St Ives. Hinchbrook Park is also a short walk from where I live. There is so much to see in these places, and a variety of wildlife, at all times of day and every season.

Anything else you would like to add?

Anyone interested in taking part in one of our walks is welcome to come along and try one or two for free before becoming a member. Membership is currently £38.50 for one adult per annum. Members can also join walks organised by affiliated Groups across the country for free. For more information, please visit our website <https://huntsramblers.org.uk/> or email huntsrambler@gmail.com.

For those who aim for shorter and easier walks, I can recommend Wellbeing Walks which is operated locally by Huntingdonshire District Council. Visit: <https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/leisure/wellbeing-walks/>

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