



# Ramblers group walks

## Looking forward

### Headlines from Walk Leader Conversations (England & Wales, May 2021)

#### Introduction

There's been a lot of uncertainty this year, as we've navigated the changing restrictions across Great Britain. We're more inspired than ever by the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of Ramblers volunteers – and we want to shape the future of our group walks together. To start this conversation, we organised a series of online calls for walk leaders in March & April 2021 – attended by 82 walk leaders. And we started by posing some big questions: why do we lead group walks, who are they for, what makes a good walk... and what does that mean for how we plan our walks? This report gives a brief overview of these conversations, identifying four key themes and next steps. Thank you to everyone who joined us – we really appreciate your views and ideas. As we look to the future and beyond the pandemic, we have the opportunity to reimagine our group walks and develop a roadmap to make them the best they can be for walkers, members and volunteers. I'm looking forward to working together on this, and we'll be in touch soon about how to get involved. If you have any questions or reflections on this report, please get in touch:

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Warm wishes,  
Rebecca Birrane, Operations Manager

#### Summary - main headlines

- There is huge new interest in walking, with many people discovering the joys of walking during lockdown. How can we reach out and meet the needs of new walkers?
- We have the opportunity to do things differently, and build on the positives from the last year. For example, you told us that rolling walk programmes are working well, and that many walk leaders feel safe and supported when leading smaller groups.
- Our group walks aren't working for everyone at the moment. You highlighted the importance of stepping into different walkers' shoes, to develop a varied and dynamic walk programme – so that walkers can choose the walks which are right for them.
- A warm welcome is vital. From buddying and introductory walks, to group welcome packs and member surveys – groups are doing lots of great things! We need to do more to shine a light on good practice, and ensure that everyone receives a warm welcome.
- Some processes are creating barriers for walkers and volunteers. We need to keep things simple, be clear about the 'musts' to keep walks safe, and organise our group walks in a way which is sustainable.
- It's important to work together as one team of staff and volunteers to develop our vision and roadmap for group walks. We've made a good start, and need to keep the conversation going!



## Walk Leader Conversations, March - April 2021

- 5 online Walk Leader Conversations
- 82 walk leaders from across England & Wales
- Aim: to listen and share ideas about what we want group walks to be like in the future - for walkers and volunteers
- 4 key themes from what you told us at these workshops:
  - Walks for everyone
  - Safe & supportive
  - A warm welcome
  - Keeping things simple

### Walks for everyone

We need to reach out to new walkers, and step into others' shoes.

- Not everyone wants to walk on the same time or date – it's about giving people options that fit in with their lives
- Different walkers are looking for different lengths and pace of walk, particularly when starting out
- Planning walks accessible by public transport
- Variety is key – so everyone can walk in the way they want to!

### Safe and supportive

- Large group sizes can be intimidating and put people off – particularly new walkers and volunteers.
- Limiting numbers and using booking to know how many people will turn up has been a positive change for many walk leaders.
- Supporting new walk leaders to gain the confidence to safely lead a group is key to recruit and retain new volunteers.
- Buddying, limiting numbers and walk leader training / e-learning can all help with this.
- We need to be clear about the 'musts', and provide the right information and support for walk leaders to use tools like risk assessment.

### A warm welcome

- Going on a group walk for the first time with people you don't know, can be intimidating or difficult for new walkers.
- Making people feel welcome and included is really important.
- Running introductory walks can be a great way to introduce new people to the group.
- The role of the walk leader is vital – by taking the time and adding a personal touch, we can make a real difference to a walker's experience.
- The welcome that walkers receive on our group walks isn't always consistent.



## Keeping things simple

- Many walk leaders value flexibility, and find it difficult to commit to a 3 or 6 month programme.
- The complexity of managing a walk programme can make it a lot of work for volunteers.
- Groups that have moved to a more flexible approach are finding it easier to fill their programme.
- Online systems that allow groups to use a calendar to plan ahead and give walk leaders the option to add their own walks can help to support this.
- Let's not over-complicate things – and always come back to the reasons why we walk and volunteer!

## Next steps

- 1) Reflect on the key themes. Please share this report to start a conversation in your groups and areas! We want to hear from you about what's working well or not so well, and your ideas for the future.
- 2) Update our guidance for group walks, in line with Step 4 of the UK government roadmap. We will also share some examples of good practice, and what's working well for groups.
- 3) Work together to delve deeper into the four key themes. We will hold a series of planning sessions with groups of volunteers this summer, to agree our top priorities and the areas where we can make a real difference. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to get involved and have your say!
- 4) Publish our roadmap for Ramblers group walks. The roadmap will set out the next steps we will take together, to act on our priorities for improving group walks.
- 5) Introduce new systems which support the roadmap. We're working with volunteers to develop a new Walks Manager, to go alongside the new Ramblers website – which will support the roadmap by giving groups tools to plan and manage walks flexibly, and help walkers to find the best walks for them

## Thank you

We're looking forward to working together over the coming months. If you have any questions, please get in touch:

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