



2017 Newsletter

A belated Happy New Year to everyone and good walking throughout the year.

It's two years since our last newsletter and there have been some changes. Cheryl retired from producing the walking programme, appropriately accompanied by several bottles of champagne presented at last year's Christmas lunch. The role has been taken over by Mike D for the longer walks and Bob O for the shorter walks. Also, Aisling has produced a new-look website (<http://www.railrambles.com>) where we have our programme and more besides. It is an excellent way of showing potential new rail rambles what we do and where we go as well as keeping existing walkers informed - do have a look if you haven't already.

Again, we've looked at the figures that Chris Jenkins keeps, providing a statistical snapshot of our activities. During 2016, we estimate that over 2,000 people have enjoyed our Saturday and Wednesday walks. Anecdotal reports tell us that even when people have got half-drowned on the hills of North Wales, they still enjoyed it and come back for more! We've breached the £15,000 ticket income figure mentioned in the last Newsletter, so we must be doing something right. But we are always happy to hear of new walk ideas and ways of attracting new walkers.

Our thoughts have recently turned to the possibility that, in 2018, Arriva Trains Wales may not be the franchisee for the lines we use. At Alan's instigation, we have met with the four bidders for the next franchise to make our case for the all-important free passes for the leaders to create, recce and lead the walks which are so much enjoyed by all the walkers. Experience so far suggests that our set-up, with a wholly public transport ethos, combined with healthy exercise and some spending in local pubs and teashops, appears to provide the right criteria to appeal to the wider aspirations of any franchisee beyond the basic provision of train services.

The fact that our walks are open to all without the need for any payment or membership requirements is another important factor in discussing our future with the four companies, one of which we hope will support us and even work in partnership with us on specific initiatives.

The ticket income figures are really important to demonstrate that we truly are a rail-based or, more accurately, a public transport-based walking group. We cannot stress enough the importance of using trains and ensuring that leaders have all the outward tickets for reporting to Chris. Without the support from the next franchisee, Rail Rambles could cease to exist.

On a lighter note, we had a successful walking weekend, based in a Coventry hotel in 2015. Maybe not one's immediate choice for good walking, but walks were offered in the Cotswolds and the Chilterns as well as pleasant countryside nearby. We hope to replicate the success of previous years - this year based in Llandudno. Our thanks to Pat Neal for setting up and running previous events. He has stood down and I am organising the bookings and Alan the walks for this year's event. We've also offered more challenging walks including a four-day expedition across Snowdonia from Criccieth to Bangor and a hostel-based trip in mid-Wales.

And finally, very grateful thanks to all the leaders, organisers and walkers for supporting Rail Rambles and a special thank you to Alan for his expertise and knowledge of the way rail companies work which is proving invaluable in our negotiations with the potential franchisees.

And an afterthought, is there anyone who would be willing to take over, gradually, my role in overseeing the organisation of Rail Rambles? I don't walk as much as I did, so I'm not so closely in contact with the walkers. No rush, but an orderly handover would be good.

Best Wishes,

Marion

