

Rail Rambles 30th Anniversary July and August 2019

In July and August 2019 we held a series of special walks and events to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Rail Rambles

A bit of history

Rail Rambles was established in 1989 by the late Alan Howard, a keen walker originally from Lancashire who had relocated to Shropshire. Alan had already helped create Lancashire Rail Rambles (which are still going) and his enthusiasm for helping people use public transport to access the beautiful countryside he saw around him was as strong as ever after his move south. A chance meeting with a Welsh railway executive in 1989 encouraged Alan to set up our Rail Rambles scheme, based on Shrewsbury and serving Mid-Wales and the Marches, in the belief that the support would be there, from the railways and from local walkers. Happily, he was right!

"Please offer my sincere congratulations on the 30th anniversary of the rail rambles. I have such lovely memories of Alan, the man with the umbrella."

*Kate Ashbrook,
Chair of the Ramblers**

"Congratulations upon reaching your 30th ... we reach our 45th anniversary next year."

*Craig Ward, Chair of
Lancashire Rail Ramblers*

* Alan was a prominent Rambler, and served as the Chair of the Ramblers Association from 1993 to 1995, while he steered the early development of Rail Rambles. Many people connected with the Ramblers remember him as fondly as we do.



Alan on Rail Rambles at Chirk marina in November 2000 (above) and at Nantwich in July 2007 (left)

In the early days of Rail Rambles, walks were once a month, then fortnightly, then every week. Eventually two programmes of longer and shorter walks grew up and now there are two separate Rail Rambles groups, each offering walks every Saturday and on some Wednesdays. We (Mid-Wales and Marches Rail Rambles) tend to offer shorter walks of up to 10 miles, while Rail Rambles Cymru tend to have longer walks on their programmes.

And a few memories

Oh what fun we've had! Over the last 30 years, Rail Rambles has run literally thousands of walks, and a few trips away, including not only countryside and seaside walks, but also town and industrial heritage trails. There are so many memories and the following two pages will give you just a tiny taste of them





And there are so many more memories we can't fit into this small space!

The anniversary walks

Leading up to the anniversary celebrations on the 27th of July 2019, there was a special series of four walks which, in total, came to 30 miles in honour of the anniversary. Each of these walks used a different line and took us in a different direction out of Shrewsbury. We are very fortunate to have such an abundance of paths and beautiful scenery that can be accessed so easily by rail.

The first walk (17th July) was at Dolau. It took us up onto the edge of Radnor Forest and past the foot of Llandegley Rocks (9 miles).

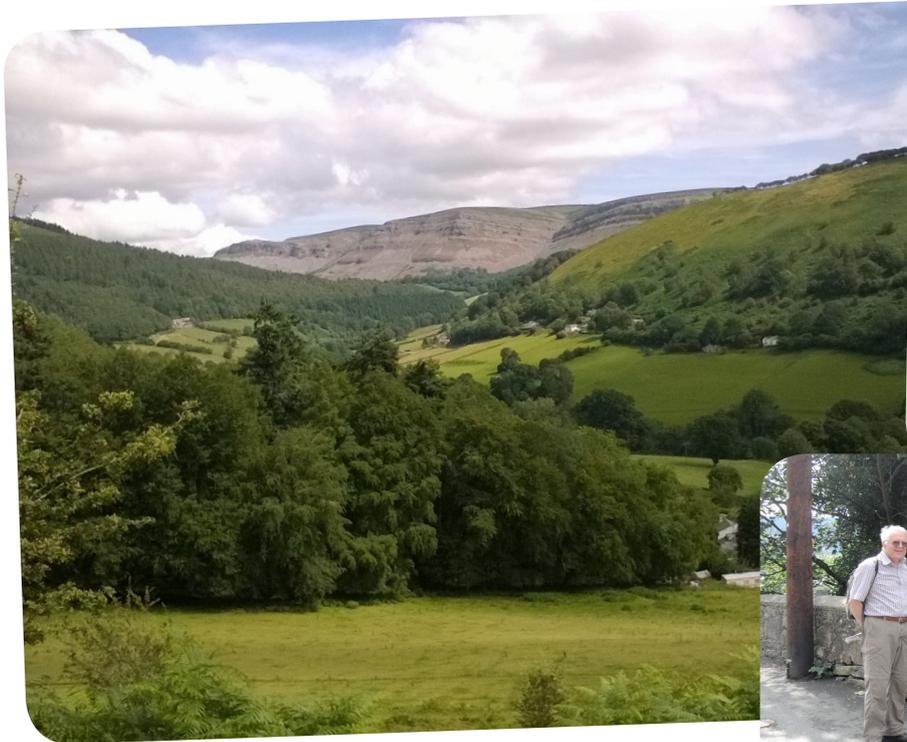


At Dolau Station before the walk, and a view of Llandegley Rocks.

Then came the Fairbourne to Barmouth walk (24th July), following the low-level coastal paths (6 miles). This was the easiest of the four walks and one of the easiest walks we do. It was put on for the anniversary in honour of Alan Howard, as it was one of his favourite walks and the one we chose as his memorial walk in 2009.



The 2009 running of the walk (top right), the 2019 crowd about to set off from Fairbourne Station (bottom right), and an old shot of the iconic Barmouth Bridge crossing.



View up towards the Horseshoe Pass, and the walkers about to set off from Llangollen Bridge.

The Llangollen walk (24th July), one of our rail/bus walks, was the hardest – and the hottest! – of the four walks. It took us past the foot of Dinas Bran then right up to Berwyn Quarry and back past Horseshoe Falls (9 miles).



On the 27th of July there were three walks on offer at a wet Church Stretton – a short walk for the less energetic (3.5 miles) and our main walk (6 miles), both on the Long Mynd, and Rail Rambles Cymru's rather longer anniversary walk for the more energetic!



The combined forces for the main and longer walks at Church Stretton Station (left) and the shorter walk on the Long Mynd (above).

Over 100 people came out on these anniversary walks overall, which was terrific. You might be able to see from the group photos that there was some overlap, but not that much (there were over 50 people out walking on the final Saturday alone). Two people, Clare and Mick, did all four walks and the full 30 miles, so well done to them!

The anniversary bash



"The anniversary represents a wonderful opportunity to bring together all those who have been associated with Rail Rambles over the years to mark this special occasion, as well as to thank our supporters in the rail industry. Perhaps in another 30 years we will be able to say that we have not only helped to support rural railway lines – and maybe even encouraged the provision of new services and stations – but also helped hundreds more people use them to access all the joys and benefits of walking in our beautiful countryside."

From the official anniversary press release

On the 27th of July 2019, we celebrated our 30th anniversary in style with an afternoon buffet – and cake (above) – at the King's Arms in Church Stretton. Despite the weather trying to dampen our spirits, over 60 people – Rail Ramblers past and present from both groups, guests and visitors – turned out to either walk with us or meet with us at the pub afterwards. It was a very sociable occasion! We were delighted to welcome Angela Charlton, Director of Ramblers Cymru, and it was lovely to see some old friends who haven't been out with us for a while and to hear from other friends and supporters of Rail Rambles who couldn't make it on the day.

"Unfortunately I am unable to make the event but I do wish you every success. You and your colleagues are doing a great job and long may it continue."

*Hugh Evans,
Head of Community Rail (Interim),
TFW Rail Services*

"Many thanks for keeping me informed about Rail Rambles. Unfortunately, I cannot come to the walks anymore but I am interested. How amazing that it is 30 years! I do hope that you all have a lovely time. Please remember me to anyone interested!"

Barbara B., former Rail Rambler

It was an occasion for paying tribute to Alan Howard's vision, and it was great that at least three of the original ramblers who started with him 30 years ago (including Pat, seen right cutting the cake) were there and are still walking with Rail Rambles. Their boots have surely clocked up a serious number of miles!



Walkers at Church Stretton in November 2007.

Insets from the King's Arms, 2019: The cake (top) and the speech and cake-cutting (above right).

Radio Shropshire gets involved

And just to round things off, soon after the anniversary, in early August 2019, we were featured on BBC Radio Shropshire's "Summer of Walking", after Eric Smith and Clare Ashford joined us on a special walk on Wednesday 7 August, again at Church Stretton.

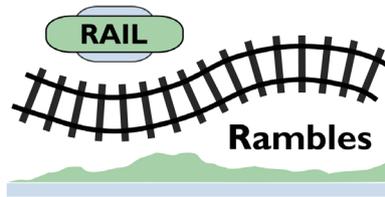


"We were very warmly welcomed and you will be too."

*Eric Smith
BBC Radio Shropshire*



Top left: Eric Smith and Clare Ashford of Radio Shropshire's Breakfast Show. Top right: the party about to set off from the Station. Above: a viewstop in the shadow of Caer Caradoc, and interviews in progress. And left: the view from the top.



And finally, this is a very good place to acknowledge the generous support Rail Rambles has had over the years from the rail industry (most recently Transport for Wales Rail, but before them Arriva Trains Wales, Wales & West and British Rail), the Ramblers (especially Ramblers Cymru and Powys Area Ramblers), and many individual well-wishers, walkers and volunteer leaders. You have all contributed to our 30 years of walking, so



Thank you!!



We'd particularly like to thank everybody who contributed to the success of the anniversary celebrations, including: all who came on the walks or to the King's Arms; Rail Rambles Cymru, for promoting and supporting the events; all the walk leaders over the two weeks (Graham, Pam H, Pat, Marion, Clare, John, Peter, Mick and Pam S from Mid-Wales and Marches Rail Rambles, as well as Mike and Dennis from Rail Rambles Cymru); Peter (again) for organising the splendid cake; the King's Arms, Church Stretton, for hosting us; everyone who donated prizes and/or bought raffle tickets on the 27th (the raffle raised £100, which was brilliant); all the photographers and writers who contributed to this document; John (again) for arranging the Radio Shropshire interviews; and, last but very definitely not least, Bob, for programming, booking and arranging all the main anniversary events for us, at the cost of a few sleepless nights.

**Here's to many more
years of Rail Rambles!!**

Find Rail Rambles at:

www.railrambles.org (Mid-Wales and Marches Rail Rambles)

www.railrambles.cymru (Rail Rambles Cymru)



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