

The Poly Rambler

Members' Newsletter of the Polytechnic Rambling Club

www.polyramblers.org.uk

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Chair's Message Jan 2026

This is my first year as Club Chair following Hilary's decision not to stand for re-election to the Committee. We owe her an enormous debt of gratitude for all her hard work over 10 years on the Committee and seven as Chair. She is a tough act to follow.

2025 was of course our 140th anniversary and Gillian has written an article in this newsletter describing the Club's history from its inception to our recent celebratory events. It was also a very successful year for the Club the total membership at the end of 2025 was 138 the highest since Danny became treasurer in 2001 and we had 23 new members, the second highest figure for the same period.

A diverse programme of 75 walks was offered during the year and 84% of us walked at some point. Written risk assessments for all walks were introduced and we thank leaders for engaging with this important safety measure. We are as ever very keen to welcome new leaders, please get in touch if you are willing to help.

Material for this edition collated by the committee.
Printing and production by Kim Chowns

We completed the London Loop with Jackie McCartan and enjoyed five well attended trips away. In January Dominique led 11 members on our 14th snow walking trip to Bad Reichenhall in Germany. A highlight was using the Jennerbahn cable car to access a short walk to the summit of Mount Jenner (1873m) with wonderful views of the surrounding mountains.

In April 40 Poly Ramblers crossed the Irish Sea to explore the beautiful and hilly Isle of Man. Both the hikers, led by Jo who grew up on the island, and the strollers, led by Danny, enjoyed scenic and sometimes challenging walks and the use of the island's unique heritage transport.

In late June 25 members braved a heatwave to walk the lovely Norfolk coastline from Sheringham to Happisburgh. 17 miles in total. In late August we stayed in high-quality student flats in Canterbury and participants enjoyed the opportunity to explore the city and surrounding countryside and coastline.

Our autumn trip took us to Castleton in the Peak District National Park, another extremely hilly area. Hilary, Janet, Danny and Geoffrey put enormous effort into planning three levels of walks together with fallback options in the event of inclement weather. These were sadly needed. We all fell in love with the area and hopefully we will return to undertake the planned walks.

Thanks to Mary and Rochelle for their articles on their own walking trips.

This newsletter includes an appreciation of Rosie Binnie a valued member for around 50 years. Her last walk with the Club was to the Isabella Plantation, Richmond Park, in April 2022 at the age of 88. Patricia and I will be repeating this walk in her memory in the Spring.

For the past 10 years we have enjoyed Christmas lunch at the Freemasons Arms in Covent Garden. A change of management, however, necessitated finding a new venue and we chose the Thatched House in Hammersmith where we enjoyed a warm welcome and tasty food.

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The Polytechnic Rambling Club

(in association with the
University of Westminster)
Founded 1885

Affiliated to the Ramblers'
Association (Inner London Area)
Affiliated to HF Holidays

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Honorary members

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Rosemary MacLoughlin
David Stevens
Mary Stevens
Lucy Wee
Peter Wee

COMMITTEE

CLUB OFFICERS

Chair

Jennifer Mackenzie

Secretary

Gillian Swan

Treasurer

Daniel Duffy

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Pam Beach
Rochelle Bloch
Kim Chowns
Susan James
Christopher Maslen
Sunita Shah
Geoffrey Waters

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*Articles for inclusion in the
newsletter are welcome from all
members. They should be walk
related, but do not necessarily
have to be about a club walk, e.g.
walking holiday or past memories
of the club.

Chair's message (continued)

Finally I want to thank the Committee for delivering a varied, fun and safe programme of activities. Two members have decided not to stand for re-election this year and we thank them for their contributions to the Club. Kim has served for 12 years and has conscientiously produced our newsletter for 10 of these together with leading walks in the beautiful Kentish countryside. Chris has served for three years. Always an extremely engaged contributor to Committee business he has made significant improvements to our website. We will miss them both.

Best Wishes

Jennifer

Rosie Binnie

Rosie Binnie passed away last July at the grand old age of 91. She joined the Club in the 1960s and was an active member leading walks over several decades, attending Club weekends away and social occasions until a few years ago.

Geoffrey recalls one weekend away where Rosie was sandwiched in the back of a car between Geoffrey and Gerald Kremenstein en route to Truleigh Hill YHA. Gerald cheekily said to Rosie, "We're on our honeymoon!", with Rosie jokingly replying, "Oh yes darling!".

She served on the Committee in the late 1970s and early 1980s and as programme coordinator. She also organised quite a few coffee evenings and a few cheese and wine evenings for the Club socials in Riding House Street, which took place once a month back in the 1970s and 1980s.

During the 1990s she frequently featured in our Rambler of the Year results, often taking 4th or 5th place.

Rosie was delighted to be made an honorary member at the 2022 AGM in recognition of her service to the Club. She was also active outside of the club with her local church activities and giving talks about her former working life and enjoyed music and dance.



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Rosie wrote a poem about walking with the club:

We will remember Rosie as a cheerful, positive person who loved to be out on walks in nature with her Rambling Club friends.

She will be sadly missed. **Various contributors**



Walking with The lovely polytechnic rambling club.

ONE TO FEET

When I look down what do I see?
Two things called feet which stare at me.
One is left and one is right,
At times they're not a pretty sight.

In life, they have a humble place
Compared to - say a lovely face.
They have few aspirations to
Compete in life as humans do.

But as the weekdays move along
A certain something draws them on.
Anticipation starts mid-week
Excitement builds, no longer meek.
They're getting ready to support
The ramblers on their country walk.
They know they have a job to do
And they are going to SEE IT THROUGH.

Friday's here, oh brave brave feet
What mighty challenge will they meet?
The weekend comes and off they set
Will their little toes get wet?
But stepping out through field and lane
How lovely! All that mud again.

A few hours on, they just desire
To rest, and modestly retire.
Oh what courage, no one knows
The trials of their heels and toes.
Bathed and creamed they settle down
Upon the owner's eiderdown.

So HAIL TO FEET! 'Oh Noble Pair
Who journey with us everywhere.

by Rosie

*14
Summer 2001*

140 years of the club

In 2025 the Polytechnic Rambling Club marked the 140th anniversary of its founding in 1885. For those of you who haven't read your Club history recently, the Club originated in the Regent Street Polytechnic as a means of keeping young men gainfully occupied, and so out of the pub, on a Saturday afternoon. The activities of these pioneers were recorded in the Polytechnic Magazine and we know that they covered impressive distances in a few hours and sometimes did trips abroad. At this time the Club was a male domain although ladies were invited for special occasions. A parallel club was set up for women in 1910 and the men's and women's clubs finally merged in 1955.

The first anniversary commemoration we have a record of was the Club's centenary in 1985. At that time the Club was much smaller than it is now and was struggling to survive. A special Centenary programme was devised with family events and the Club walked the North Downs way in 12 stages. Celebrations culminated with a formal dinner and dance at the Regent Crest Hotel, Carburton Street W1 in 1986. At least three of our current members attended that event – Geoffrey of course and David and Mary Stevens.

In 2010 we marked our 125th anniversary. The main celebratory event, which many of our current members will remember, was a river trip on the Thames at Windsor in June. We were delighted that 81 members, ex members and guests were able to enjoy an afternoon cruise on the Windsor Sceptre with a buffet lunch and anniversary cake. The only downside was the unseasonably chilly weather.

Earlier that year 24 members had swapped walking gear for formal attire and enjoyed afternoon tea at the Ritz. We sat in the elegant Palm Court on Louis XVI chairs under the frosted glass ceiling and pink capped chandeliers and ate sandwiches, scones and cakes with a choice of teas. The cost of afternoon tea at the Ritz in 2010 was £38 per head. I dread to think what it costs now.

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140 years of the club (continued)

Fifteen years on the Committee decided to mark our 140th anniversary rather than waiting another ten years for the 150th. Rather than a single large event we decided to go for a couple of smaller ones (see photos below). In June 35 members enjoyed afternoon tea at Missenden Abbey in Great Missenden, after a short walk in the Chilterns countryside. While it was not as fancy as the Ritz the food was good and plentiful and the surroundings lovely. Jennifer recounted some of Committee members' stand out memories of their time in the Club, which ranged from trips abroad, to long distance paths, being made to feel welcome on their first walk and, more prosaically, getting soaked to the skin on a particularly wet walk.

Later in the summer we enjoyed another river trip, this time on the Grand Union canal. The Sheldrake 3 took 35 members on a lovely afternoon cruise from Kings Langley to Hunton Bridge, watching the scenery go by and helping with the lock gates. Danny also organised an anniversary walk and picnic in Regent's Park by the bandstand, listening to a community choir and band music. Unfortunately though both picnic and music were curtailed by rain and most of the group adjourned to Wetherspoons!

As a lasting memento of our 140th anniversary Pam arranged to produce some embroidered cloth badges, perfect for attaching to your pack. These follow the same design as the original produced for our 125th anniversary. There are a few badges left for sale. Contact Pam if you would like one.

I very much hope to contribute to our 150th anniversary celebrations in 2035 but will have to leave the 175th anniversary to our successors!

Gillian



A week walking In the Cinque Terre

In September 2025 Gini, Hilary and Rochelle went on an HF walking holiday to the Cinque Terre along Italy's Ligurian Coast. This UNESCO World Heritage region is famous for its five vibrantly coloured, cliffside fishing villages connected by scenic hiking trails offering dramatic sea views, sunshine and fantastic local produce.

There were 22 people in our group with the quite unusual combination of 21 women and 1 man, who was half of a Canadian couple. Fortunately, there were also two male guides, so he didn't feel completely outnumbered. The age range of the group was roughly between 45 and 86 and everyone mixed, mingled, and got along very well.

Our base for the week was a lovely family run hotel in the charming town of Bonassola, just to the North of the Cinque Terre 'proper'. Although married to the hotel owner, our main HF local guide Rebecca was originally from Scarborough - so language was not a problem, and she provided some interesting insights into the local culture and history. Our other walking guide was Tomaso who was Italian and a mine of information particularly about the local flora and fauna.

The majority of paths in the area entailed steep rocky climbs and descents quite frequently with rough-hewn steps or sloping cobblestones. Therefore, although we were offered choice of longer or shorter walks each day, due to the terrain the level of technical difficulty was similar in both options.

The first walk took us directly from Bonassola to either explore the villages above Bonassola, or the neighbouring resorts of Levanto and Monterosso. Both walks took in narrow streets, mule tracks and woodland, with splendid views down the sweep of the coast below. The shorter walk of around 4 -5 miles headed up to the hillside village of Montaretto via a spectacular headland and on through olive and vine terraces, before returning via waterfalls, a church and Bonassola's castle. Our group of enthusiastic walkers quickly became alarmed when confronted with the reality of uneven steep paths, as some of us were not as walk fit as they had thought!

The longer walk started with a train to Monterosso, which is the first village of the Cinque Terre from where we climbed steeply to the headland to follow the Cinque Terre high level route with great views. From the saddle between Monterosso and Levanto we went down to the medieval quarter of the resort of Levanto, where we stopped for a drink. After this we walked the 3 km sea wall interspersed with tunnels to reach Bonassola and our hotel. It had been a hot sticky day reaching 90% humidity so a few

of us took the opportunity to have a refreshing dip in the cool sea before changing for Dinner.

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A week walking in Cinque Terre (continued)

The next day we took a train to our walks within the official Cinque Terre Coastal Paths. The shorter route of 5 miles went from Vernazza to the charming village of Corniglia on the headland and then on to Manarola, brightly coloured houses set above the rocky cove. This route along the famous coastal path proved very popular for walkers this resulted in our group joining a long queue of hikers who were keen to pass us slightly slower walkers. However, the wonderful views made any difficulties well worth the effort.

The longer walk of 7.5 miles started from Manarola heading up to the medieval hillside village of Volterra, contouring through terraced vineyards with stunning views over the sea. We saw the cradles which travelled up and down tramlines through the vineyards to be filled with harvested grapes, the workers were prohibited from using them, but we were told that sometimes they did at great risk. We had lunch buying slices of delicious local vegetable pies from a small village shop. We then dropped down to Corniglia and stopped to enjoy a welcome beer and /or gelato in one of the many cafes before taking the train on to Vernazza to explore the harbour and shops before heading home.

The following day we started back in Vernazza – arguably the prettiest of the five Cinque Terre villages with its colourful houses winding down to its natural harbour, protected by a rocky headland. Both walks headed back Monterosso using the final section of the coast path which links the five villages. The shorter walk was 4 miles Vernazza to Monterosso ascending via woodland onto a section of the elevated coastal path to enjoy superb viewpoints before descending through the famous lemon groves to Monterosso old town. The shorter walker group had by now become fewer in number as some of our less fit decided to travel by train to meet us at our destination. Today we enjoyed elevated views of the coast and a visit to Monterosso old town where we relaxed sampling the locally made ice cream.

Each village of the Cinque Terre had its own high-level sanctuary where villagers could flee from invasion and the longer walk of 6 miles went up from Vernazza to the Sanctuary of Madonna di Reggio and the Monterosso Monastery. After a rest in the shade, we continued up to the Sanctuary of Soviore for a picnic lunch, before descending to the old town of Monterosso.

We then had the next day free to explore the area at a more leisurely pace. A few of us visited Sestri Levante to the North with its restaurant lined beach front. After a relaxing lunch some of us went back to Bonassola to have a swim and others took the train on to Levanto to explore the market and shops.

After our day off we tackled the longest walks going south to enjoy spectacular walking with views over the naval port of La Spezia, the Gulf of the Poets, ending down at the village of Portovenere at the tip of the peninsula. The shorter walk of 6 miles went from the village of Campiglia heading through beautiful woodland to a picnic spot high on a ridge. The route then wound along the peninsula for more fine vistas, followed by a long steep section of rugged path and steps down to Portovenere to join the longer walkers for our coastal trip back. The longer walk of 8 miles started from Riomaggiore ascending to the 14th century Sanctuary of the Madonna of Montenero following the ridge to Campiglia for lunch. We then took the spectacular high coastal path before descending steeply down the ridge to Portovenere. From here we all took the boat back along the coast seeing the colourful, tumbling villages of the Cinque Terre from a different perspective. Although the sea appeared very calm, Hilary was relieved to have taken sea- sick tablets! Our views included tourist's wending their way up an impossibly narrow cliff path for a spot of sunbathing.

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A week walking in Cinque terre (continued)

Our final day took us to the world-famous Portofino, starting with a coach trip with winding narrow roads and steep bends to the little fishing village of Camogli where we strolled through the narrow alleyways before departing by boat for the small Bay of San Fruttuoso. From here we hiked 4.5 miles into opulent Portofino with its luxurious yachts and picturesque fishing boats. Those who did not want to walk stayed on the boat directly into Portofino. We treated ourselves to an overpriced gelato and/or drink in the Dolce & Gabana cafe and strolled around the elegant harbour and our guide pointed out ex - Prime Minister Berlusconi's summer residence. We then took a boat to our final destination. the chic resort of Santa Margherita, with its old-fashioned charm, colourful buildings and lively waterfront promenade, before returning to Bonassola by coach for our final evening.

As usual the group met for an aperitif on the hotel terrace before dinner and this time we were treated to the most spectacular sunset over the bay. What a lovely end to a fantastic holiday!

Rochelle Bloch



Walking the Pembrokeshire Way

My sister Anne and I began walking national trails together in the summer of 2022 when we started walking the Coast to Coast trail across the north of England. We enjoyed it so much we decided when we completed this trail to do another one and this time we chose the Pembrokeshire Way which we began in August 2024. The Pembrokeshire Way is the oldest of the Welsh coastal trails. At 186 miles in length it has now been absorbed into the 870 mile long coastal path that circumnavigates the entire coast of Wales.

In two years, we have completed two thirds of the trail and the remainder we will complete in July 2026. The Welsh coastline in my view is a highly underrated beautiful stretch of coastline. With dramatic rock structures such as stacks, blow holes and natural arches, punctuated by fabulous sandy beaches (my favourite being Barafundle) it is remarkably unspoilt and little developed, probably because of its distance from centres of population. Apart from Tenby, probably the best known of the Pembrokeshire seaside resorts, and in what was the peak month for summer visitors, the beaches and villages never felt over crowded. I was transported back to my days as a child on family holidays, seeing families with their young children enjoying the beaches in the way I did, building sandcastles.

We began the trail in Amroth, a small seaside village about 10 miles from Tenby. It was a typical wet summer's day in Wales and we started out on our expedition clad head to toe in waterproofs. As luck would have it, this and one other day were the only days in the week when we had rain and in true Welsh rain style, they were real 'soakers'. The longest day of our 2024 trip was 16 miles and that was one of these two wet days. Unfortunately, because of the mist caused by the heavy rain we were unable to see much of the beautiful Freshwater West beach which is a favourite with wind surfers. We were very glad however to get to the end of the trek where we stayed in an isolated sixteenth century inn steeped in history of pirates and smugglers. We were given a very warm welcome, had an excellent meal and managed to dry off all our wet clothes.

The next day there was a complete change in the weather with a bright sun shining in a blue sky over a calm sea. This day was the start of our last day's walk that would take us along an estuary into the historic town of Pembroke. Just a bit further on was Milford Haven, an oil and gas port with one of the deepest harbours in Europe. We finished this stage of the walk in Pembroke where there is probably the best of a number of medieval castles that are dotted along the Pembrokeshire coast built to provide protection from invaders and pirates.

From this point on, around Milford Haven, the hinterland of the trail becomes very industrial. The town's population significantly expanded in the 60's and 70's as a result of the oil boom attracting people to work in its port and refineries. Now, apart from a new marina development built to attract new money, the town is like so many of our coastal towns, in a rather depressed state. The oil refineries have long since closed but the oil tankers still come and go 24/7 bringing in LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) from Qatar and the refinery capacity is used to convert LNG to natural gas that is then distributed to homes around the UK.



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Walking the Pembrokeshire Way (continued)

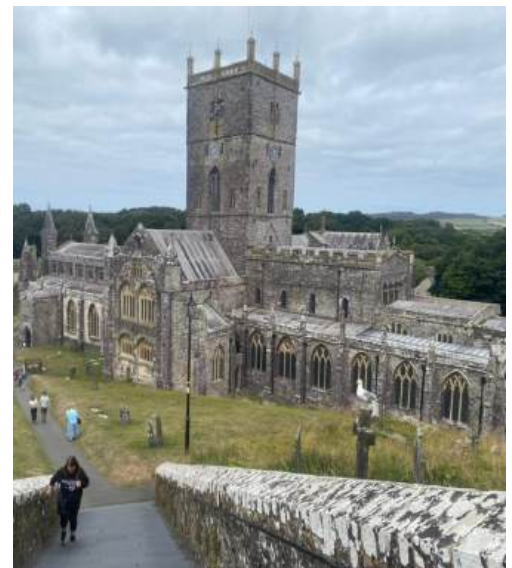
In August of this year, we decided Milford Haven was not a section of the path we would miss if we left it out. So we resumed walking the trail some way beyond the town. It took us a long time however to lose sight of the stacks of the refineries in the distance. That didn't happen until we got beyond St Anne's headland and the magnificent large beach of Marloe Sands. At this point we could look out to the islands off the coast, one of which was Skomer. Skomer is a marine nature reserve where I was lucky enough to work as a volunteer for a week with Penny Taylor (another polyrambler) 8 years ago, and was able to see close up nesting Puffins and Manx Shearwaters, incredible seabirds who travel hundreds of miles to have their young on our shores. It was at Martin's Haven, where the day trip boats set out for Skomer Island, that I saw for the first time this year swallows nesting. This made my heart sing as I had thought that these amazing summer visitors, such an important part of my childhood, were no longer frequenting our country as I had not seen them in any of the places I had visited last summer. In fact, another surprising and wonderful aspect of walking the Pembrokeshire Way is its rich bird life. Apart from swallows, we saw Sand Martins, and another bird not often seen, the Chough. This bird is a member of the Crow family and has a red beak and red legs. We noticed that often a little group of three to five of them would accompany us along the path with their distinctive call.

After Newgale, with its long pebbly bar and water sports activities, the path became tougher going, with a series of steep steps both ascending and descending. This day was also the longest walk of our 2025 holiday and coincided with one of several excessively hot spells we had last summer. The upside however was, unlike the previous year, we had an entire week of unbroken sunshine and no rain. This is most unusual for Wales. We decided to cut the walk short from 14 miles to 11 miles and finished our 2025 holiday at the charming little seaside village of Solva which sits on a steep inlet. Its harbour, charming old cottages and remains of kilns are signs of its once thriving fishing industry and industrial heritage. At Solva we ordered a taxi that took us to our last night's accommodation at the town of St David's.

St David's is the smallest city in the UK, deriving its city status from having a cathedral that was built in the twelfth century and is dedicated to the patron saint of Wales. We decided to spend the morning of our last day looking around the cathedral and learning about its rich history, before getting into the car and driving back to my sister's home in Bristol.

We have been told that the remaining 62 miles of the path which we will be walking next summer, are more remote and challenging than the trail we've walked thus far. It will start at Solva and finish at St Dogmael's, near Cardigan that is in the next county. We are looking forward to it.

Mary King



Some photos from walks over the past year



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