

Chair's Report for 2023 AGM

This is a brief overview of the Group's activities for our reporting year - 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023; more detailed reports have been written by those directly involved in specific aspects of the Group's activities during the year.

The headline is that we've returned to normal functioning following the Covid pandemic and we celebrated our 40th Anniversary in fine style!

A slightly disappointing turnout of 19 members attended the 2022 AGM held at Ickwell village hall in November where the venue, walk and lunch were organised by Alan Leadbetter. The current Officers, myself - Chair, Gill Bunker - Secretary and Peter Engledow - Treasurer, were re-elected, as were Committee members - Sara Waldron, Mary Knight, Roy Carter, Mike Hyland and Sarah Feal. Chris Burns and Nick Emery were elected to the Committee for the first time. I extend my thanks to them all for their support and commitment this year.

Two long standing Committee members, Alan Leadbetter and Norman Corrin, didn't seek re-election at the AGM and Mary Knight stood down during the year; we thank them for their valuable work on the Committee over the years. I'm pleased to say that Alan has agreed to continue organising the Hannington Hike and our AGM venues, walk and lunch arrangements, Norman did carry on with the new member welcome for a short while but see membership matters further on in this report, and Mary agreed to carry on as our LDWA Hundred BBN Checkpoint lead and was part of the 40th Anniversary Working Group.

The Committee met formally four times during the reporting year. We continued to meet virtually using the BBN's Zoom account; this is convenient, saves personal time and travel costs as well as being environmentally friendly; the Committee feel this is a justified use of Group funds. We also conducted some general business and decision making between meetings using email and a newly set up Committee WhatsApp Group. This meant that we could react quickly to queries and issues, it also reduced the length of Committee meetings!

Gill, our Group Secretary, continues to do an outstanding job. In March I was extremely pleased to be able to nominate Gill, in our 40th year, for an LDWA Volunteer Award for Inspiration and Encouragement which she was successful in being awarded. My citation showed the breadth of Gill's involvement with BBN over the years and it was 'top and tailed' by the following sentences:

It's difficult to decide which category to nominate Gill for – 'Super Hero' would be better!

The positive impact Gill has made can't be underestimated; she has significantly contributed to make BBN the successful group it is today.

Gill keeps all our meetings on track and also looks after BBN's WhatsApp Group, Facebook page and website. We extend our grateful thanks to Gill for all she continues to do for us and the LDWA.

It's been a busy year for Treasurer Peter Engledow. As well as the 'normal' annual financial aspects of challenge events transactions and donation payments, Peter handled a large number of BBN 40th Anniversary transactions - payments for coach transport, venue hire and food, and deposits from members for the various events. Thank you, Peter, for this year's work and for your 6 years as our Group Treasurer.

As well as being our Treasurer, Peter was also our rep at the National Local Group meeting; he also looked after our Twitter account and the Peco online BBN shop for Group badged gear.

Donations made this reporting year:

£130 to the **Thames Valley Air Ambulance** (donations at the Sundon Saunter)

£50 to the **Warwick & Northants Air Ambulance** in memory of early BBN member Janet Presland

£100 to the **Thames Valley Air Ambulance** (donations at the Pick & Mix)

£25 to the **John Colet School, Wendover** - Pick & Mix parking

£50 to **The End Point Walk** - LDWA David Morgan and Alan Warrington walking 580 miles to raise money for the **British Heart Foundation**

Please let the Committee know if you have any ideas for donations we could make – they must reflect the activities of our Group and the LDWA.

Sara Waldron, Social Walks Secretary, co-ordinated our social walks programme which this year was taken up with 40th anniversary projects, of which more later.

However, as our programme returns to 'normal' we need leaders, new and experienced, to fill up our available walk dates for the coming year. If you haven't led before we can give you help and guidance to do this – just ask!

Sara also inputs our walk details onto the website and keeps our Group's social walk information in Strider under review. Thank you, Sara, and everyone who led a walk during the year, especially those who led for the first time, and thanks to everyone who came out to walk.

Sarah Feal continued to add Group social walk GPX files to the website Walks Database. There are still relatively few GPX files submitted and walk leaders are encouraged to pass on their GPX files for upload.

Sarah also created the *In Case of Emergency* (ICE) form which is on the website and which we encourage members to carry with them.

Membership matters – we've continued to get a steady stream of new Primary and Associate members throughout the year. Dee Brockway offered to look after our new member welcome as Norman Corrin had to give this up to take on the LDWA Membership Secretary role – thank you both.

We believe the personal touch is important; Dee makes an initial phone call and has a general chat about what we do and where to find information about our walks and challenge events. She often finds out why people have joined the LDWA which is interesting information. New members seem to appreciate this approach.

BBN 40th Anniversary - Myself, Gill Bunker, Mary Knight and Sarah Feal formed a sub-committee to organise and co-ordinate the programme of events to celebrate the Group's 40th Anniversary year.

The first event was the 63mile Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, a route that was the inspiration of Chris Meredith, one of the Group's founder members. This was completed as three Saturday social walks in March (Newton Longville to Ravenstone 22.9 miles, led by Gill Bunker), April (Ravenstone to Astwood 19.2 miles jointly led by myself and Nick Emery) and May (Astwood to Newton Longville 21.1 miles led by Mary Knight).

The year's longest running project was a series of seven circular day walks covering the 51-mile Northampton Round, started in May and finished in October.

Like the Milton Keynes Boundary walk some members completed the whole route but many others came for one or more of the seven walks which were all planned and led by Dave Findel-Hawkins.

In June 19 walkers attempted all or some of the 42-mile, across Bedfordshire, Greensand Ridge Walk which was completed on one of the hottest days of the year! The route was led by Roy Carter, Alan Leadbetter, Dee Brockway and myself. The breakfast stop at Northill was organised by myself helped by Norman Corrin and Gordon Shaughnessy and we also provided on-route support and were joined later by Roy Carter and Sarah and Daniel Feal. Lunch and tea were provided at Amptill and tea at Woburn by Mary Knight with Sarah and Daniel assisting. We had great feedback for the walkers who completed the walk, some at this distance for the first time. Congratulations to them all.

In July, 64 past and present members came to our 'Ruby Doo' in Woburn with a choice of three different length walks, led by Dee Brockway, Gill Bunker and myself, culminating in a celebratory birthday tea in the village hall which was suitably decorated with red balloons and bunting. Our star caterers, Mary and Dennis Knight, worked their magic again to produce a marvellous spread including an amazingly decorated birthday cake which was cut by Brian Graves, the lowest LDWA membership number present. Norman Corrin made a wonderful speech summarising the Group's history, its characters and events.

Unfortunately, a 25-mile night walk along the Knightley and Grafton Ways planned for August had to be cancelled at the last minute for safety reasons due to a very poor weather forecast for heavy rain and thunder storms. Thanks to Chris Bent for planning and organising this event which we hope can be rescheduled at some point in the future.

On a hot and sunny day in September we had a Walk and River Great Ouse Cruise event at Bedford expertly organised by Sarah Feal. Three walks were available - a six-mile easy amble led by Chris Burns, a heritage trail along the river and the Bedford Embankment led by a tour guide from The Higgins Trust and a 'treasure quest', around the town centre and embankment, to solve the clues and find the tiara! The cruise was on the Narrow Boat John Bunyan owned by the Bedford-Milton Keynes Waterways Trust. With drinks and preordered food served by the efficient crew, we travelled upstream through the town and back down to Cardington before returning to Priory Marina.

Our final event was an Autumn walk and a lunchtime visit to Wetherspoons in Milton Keynes for a Ruby Murray (curry). This was organised and led by Gill Bunker.

All of these events have brief reports and links to photographs on the BBN website – please take a look in the 'Special's' section if you haven't already done so. Thanks to Steve Clark and Sarah Feal for being 'official photographers' and to those who wrote reports of the events.

My thanks to everyone who came along to our big birthday events and helped in any way to make them all such a success. I think it's fair to say we celebrated in great style with events to suit as wide a range of both past and present members as possible.

Challenge Walks - we put on three challenge events during the year – the Sundon Saunter in November, the Chiltern Kanter in March and the Pick & Mix in June. All

were very well supported and, as ever, we received a lot of encouraging and positive feedback. Huge thanks to all the organisers, route checkers and marshals for making these such good events. Full reports of these events are available to read.

Mike Hyland, our Challenge Event Coordinator, has worked hard liaising with our Challenge walk organisers, the SiEntries team and event entrants to make sure this year's events were advertised and well managed. Mike's event waiting list management is amazing and makes sure that our events are as full as possible, giving minimal 'no-shows' on the day. Thank you Mike!

Dave Findel-Hawkins has looked after the Group's equipment, ensuring that all the necessary equipment was in good order and ready for the various events held during the year. Thank you Dave.

In May we ran a BBN Checkpoint (CP) for the LDWA Elephant, Bear and Bull (EBB) 100 event. Huge thanks to Mary Knight, our 100 Checkpoint Organiser, and team who saw 500 walkers though a very well run CP3 at Alvechurch. The team coped well with some food supply issues on what was a very hot afternoon.

Thanks also to Dave Findel-Hawkins and Merrian Lancaster who, as well as being part of the CP3 team, ran the last CP which is open for 24 hours! They were also joined by BBN's Knight in Shining Armour - Alan Leadbetter!

Dave also provides the first point of contact between future 100 event organisers and the Group about possible checkpoints – many thanks to him for doing that job.

Congratulations to all BBN members who took part in the EBB on the main or marshals' event whether they finished it or not. On a personal note, it was a milestone for me to complete my first (and possibly only!) 100 and I'd like to thank everyone who supported and encouraged me to enter and complete it!

And last but not least, Roy Carter organised another one of his very popular Group holidays at the end of August. This year it was based in Wales in Criccieth and as ever the trip was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who went.

Thanks to everyone who has participated in any way in a Group activity or event and for your support in the last year.

Terry Brown
BBN Chair