



Walking with Rail Rambles

Information for walkers

Welcome to Rail Rambles!

Rail Rambles are free public guided walks from railway stations in Mid-Wales and the Marches, each planned to be accessible by a day-return journey from a number of main line and connecting bus and rail stations. Our programmes are organised by volunteer members of the Rail Rambles association and produced with the support of Transport for Wales.

Here you will find information about how Rail Rambles works (which will be most useful to new walkers) and some tips to help everyone have a safe and enjoyable walk.

How Rail Rambles work

Who can come on a Rail Ramble?

- Rail Rambles are free to join and open to the public. If you enjoy walking, you are more than welcome to join us for a day out; you don't have to be a member of any organisation.
- Our programmes are designed for reasonably fit adults, but children (under-18s) are welcome too as long as they can manage the walk and are accompanied by a parent or guardian. However, we regret that we don't take dogs on Rail Rambles, except, of course, for registered assistance dogs. If you want to come out and need to bring an assistance dog, please check with us first, as some of our routes may not be suitable or safe for your dog.
- You'll need an average level of fitness to enjoy our walks, but you don't need to be an athlete. If you're a Ramblers member, you'll find our walks are comparable to many of the mid-range Ramblers walks. If you're new to walking, we'd suggest trying one of the shorter, easier walks first. See "What are the walks like?" to find out more.
- Our programmes are based on timings from Shrewsbury, but you certainly don't need to live there. Rail Ramblers come from far and wide, either connecting with the train out of Shrewsbury or meeting us at the starting point of the walk. We like to encourage people to use public transport for at least part of their journey wherever possible (and part of the fun of Rail Rambles is the train trip), but you'll always be welcome.

How to find out what's on

- Our walks are detailed on the Rail Rambles website, www.railrambles.org, where other useful information can also be found. We do sometimes make changes to walks so it's always a good idea to check the website in advance of the walk you intend to join. We also have a mailing list which you can join by emailing us at info@railrambles.org.
- If you need advice about a walk, please feel free to ask. We do not publish individual walk leaders' contact details, but are happy to put you in touch with them if you need more information about their walk or advice on how to join it.

How to join a Rail Ramble

- Essentially, to join a Rail Ramble, all you need to do is turn up (properly prepared) at the start of the walk and introduce yourself to the leaders. Walks normally start from the appropriate railway station (e.g., Craven Arms station for a Craven Arms circular walk, Wrenbury station for a linear walk from Wrenbury to Whitchurch), when the listed train from the Shrewsbury direction arrives. But please do check the individual walks for variations or additional joining instructions.
- New walkers are always welcome. Feel free to contact us if you'd like a little extra reassurance on your first walk and we will do our best to put you in touch with a buddy who can meet you at your home station or, if that's not possible, at least look out for you on the train or at the start point.

Produced by the Rail Rambles association (www.railrambles.org)
Contact us for help and advice by emailing info@railrambles.org

- Rail Rambles don't officially group up at Shrewsbury station, but you will often be able to find one or both walk leaders and several Rail Ramblers somewhere there, most likely on the platform (or in the café). You might also find groups waiting at other well-used stations, such as Wellington or (when we're going down the Heart of Wales Line) Craven Arms. Don't be shy about introducing yourself: we are very friendly.
- If you're not coming from the Shrewsbury direction, you will need to plan your journey so that you arrive at the start point in good time. If you have any concerns and would like to get in touch with the leaders beforehand, we're happy to help; just let us know.

Working out how to get there ...

- We try to make it clear in the programme which station you need to book to if you're coming from the Shrewsbury direction, where this isn't obvious. However, please be careful if you are coming from the opposite direction!
- Do make full use of your local travel office/agency (if you have one) and the various websites for advice on journey planning, but please also feel free to ask us if you get stuck or need help. It's also worth checking the online programme a week or so before the walk, as leaders occasionally give additional travel advice if they think it's necessary.

... at least cost

- The walks themselves are free, but you will need to buy your train/bus ticket as normal. Although Rail Rambles are supported by the railways there are (sadly) no specific discounts for Rail Ramblers. However, the normal railcard and other discounts apply, and it's often worth investigating whether split-ticketing might save you money. Again, your local travel office/agency (if you have one) and the various websites will help with this and occasionally leaders might post ticketing advice on the programme page.
- If we're using buses at all, remember to bring your Welsh or English bus pass if you're lucky enough to have one!
- People sometimes ask us about group bookings and small-group discounts. Because our walkers come from so many different directions, we don't usually try to arrange either group bookings (except for the odd "special", such as a steam-train walk) or small-group meetups. If there are a few of you coming together anyway, it's certainly worth seeing whether small-group discounts might save you money. But if you're on your own, experience suggests that at the moment it's probably not worth waiting for a small group of Rail Ramblers to gather spontaneously, even at the busiest stations.

What to expect on a Rail Ramble

Ethos

Rail Rambles are friendly walks. We want everybody who comes out to feel welcome and safe on Rail Rambles, but also to feel free to talk and have a laugh. We simply ask you to always be kind, behave reasonably and respect the views and sensitivities of others.

What are the walks like?

- Our walks are usually somewhere between 7 and 10 miles long, though we also do a few shorter and a few longer ones. The gentlest are almost flat, and the most challenging involve steep gradients and well over 2,000 feet (600 metres) of climbing.
- We walk from railway stations along all the lines out of Shrewsbury. Our core walking areas are the hills of South Shropshire and Mid-Wales, but we also frequently visit the meres, canals and farmland of North Shropshire and Cheshire, the rolling countryside of North Herefordshire and the coastal paths of Cardigan Bay. Occasionally we might head into Birmingham for an urban adventure or go further afield to North Wales, the Malverns or the edge of the Brecon Beacons.
- The programme will tell you where each walk is going, how long it is and what grade it is:
 - A "moderate" grade indicates some steep paths and a steady pace for people with country walking experience and a good level of fitness. This will be the grade you see most often on the programme.
 - "Moderate+" walks are similar in nature to moderate walks but have a generally greater level of difficulty.

- A “leisurely” grade means gentle climbs and some level ground for reasonably fit people.
- “Easy” means mostly level ground and a gentle pace.

If you’re familiar with the grades used by many Ramblers groups, you’ll see that ours are similar but not quite the same.

- Most of our walks use off-road, sometimes rough, hill and field paths and include minor obstacles such as stiles, but we also include quiet lanes and towpaths in some walks.
 - We often meet livestock, mostly just sheep but sometimes cattle or even horses. Our leaders may divert (if they can) to avoid cattle or horses, but will only do so if they feel it’s really necessary for the comfort or safety of the group.
 - A few walks include features which may be unsuitable for vertigo sufferers. Look out for walk descriptions including “aqueduct”, “Pontcysyllte” or (obviously) “cliff” or “bridge” and contact us if you need further advice (sometimes leaders can offer an alternative way round).
- We try to keep the pace moderate as we believe it’s important to have time to enjoy the beautiful countryside we are walking through. However, some train timings are tighter than others, so occasionally the leaders might have to increase the pace somewhat.
- If you need further information on a specific walk to help you choose, just get in touch and we’ll be happy to help.

What happens on the day?

At the start of the walk

- At the start point, the two leaders will gather everyone together, on the station platform or somewhere nearby and easily visible, introduce themselves and give a short introduction to the walk. They may also collect information on which rail stations walkers have come from (this is just to help us with our statistics – you don’t need to show a rail ticket to come on the walk).

During the walk

- Once the walk starts, one leader will be at the front of the walk, navigating and setting the pace, while the other acts as backmarker, making sure nobody gets left behind. Please try to stay between them. The leaders may swap over occasionally during the day.
- During the walk there will usually be a morning coffee stop (10–15 minutes) and a lunch stop (20–30 minutes, depending on timings and weather). There may occasionally be an afternoon tea stop too on walks with very relaxed timings. These stops will almost always be in the middle of nowhere – it is very rare indeed for us to visit a café or pub until the walk is over – so please bring with you enough food and drink for the day.
- As for loo stops, leaders can sometimes find public toilets at the start or end (or even occasionally in the middle) of the walk, in which case they will point them out and allow time for the stop (unless timing is exceptionally tight). Otherwise, there will always be options for open-air comfort stops along the way. To keep the walk “flowing”, we often stop off in groups, but if you are caught short or would prefer more privacy, that’s fine; just let somebody (preferably the backmarker) know if you’re dropping back for a moment, so you don’t get left behind!

At the end of the walk

- At the end of the walk, the leaders will (if possible) gather everyone up, declare the walk finished and make sure that everybody knows (a) where any cafés and pubs are and (b) the way back to the station. If you can help the front leader by waiting until the back end has arrived, that gives a nice sense of closure to the walk. However, we know that in practice it doesn’t always work quite like that, and leaders will understand if you’re in a hurry to get off.
- If you’ve enjoyed the walk, please take a little time to say goodbye properly and to thank your leaders. They’ll have put a lot of effort into the day, and they will appreciate being thanked!
- Once the walk has been declared closed, the leaders are officially off-duty and can relax. If time allows, people often head off in groups to a local café or pub (if available) for well-earned refreshments before going for the train home; this is a traditional feature of Rail Rambles. If you’d like to, please do come along.

Important note: what we can and can't provide

- We provide a programme of free guided walks, usually every Saturday and one Wednesday a month, all properly risk-assessed, with two leaders to each walk. The programme is arranged, managed and led entirely by volunteer members of the Rail Rambles association; many of our leaders are also Ramblers members with years of walk-leading experience. Leaders carry liability insurance and will have basic first aid equipment with them.
- However, we are a very small organisation and there are some things we cannot provide on a walk. For instance, we do not offer first aid expertise (though leaders will have a basic kit with them, very few are qualified first aiders). Our insurance covers the leaders only and against liability claims only. Ramblers members, please be aware that we are not part of the Ramblers and therefore your Ramblers insurance will not cover you on Rail Rambles.
- Please bear in mind too that, while every care will be taken to keep to the advertised programme, the routes and timings shown cannot be guaranteed. The walk leaders have the right to make changes on the day (including altering the route or getting a different train home) to suit weather conditions, the needs of the party or other unforeseen circumstances.

On walk day, please ...

Come prepared

- First, please make sure you have selected a walk which is within your capabilities!
- You will be heading out into open country, often on rough and maybe muddy paths, for the whole day. Without overloading yourself, please make sure you bring:
 - Suitable footwear – which for most of the year means robust, waterproof boots on our walks – and essential spares (laces, dry socks);
 - Enough of the right clothing for the weather – if in doubt, bring the waterproofs, gloves and woolly hat as well as an extra layer (but don't forget your sun screen and shades, just in case);
 - Enough food and hot and/or cold drink, including a full packed lunch (expect lunch in a field, and don't rely on being able to top up before or after the walk, as it's not always possible);
 - Any small items of emergency equipment (e.g., a whistle, personal first aid kit) you might feel happier carrying;
 - Trekking poles, if you use them;
 - And we also ask you to have an ICE ("in case of emergency") card somewhere easily accessible (or the equivalent information easily accessible on a mobile phone).

Leaders have the right to refuse to accept participants who in their opinion are inadequately equipped or unfit. Nobody wants that to happen!

Help the leaders

Our walk leaders are volunteers who freely give their time to help you have a good day out. Please make their life easier by:

- Respecting their advice and instructions, for your own and others' safety (they will have already checked the walk out at least once, so if they ask you to do something there will be a good reason for it) ... *However, please don't be afraid to ask questions or ask the leaders to repeat or explain anything you didn't hear or didn't understand.*
- Letting them set the pace and keep the group together, which you can do by staying (more or less) behind the front leader and ahead of the backmarker ... *However, if you need to push on up a hill, or you're struggling a bit at the back (or just need to drop behind for a comfort stop), that's different – just speak to the leader or backmarker.*
- Letting them know of any accidents or incidents, however minor.
- Letting them know if you intend to drop out of the group walk (so that nobody spends time waiting or searching for you).

Look after yourself, look after each other, look after the countryside

- Please, at all times be kind and look after each other. If you're happy to, welcome newcomers and chat to people, particularly if they've come on their own.
- Walking is inherently one of the safest outdoor activities, but no activity is completely without risk. Though we've advised you to listen to the leaders, you also have a responsibility – to come prepared, to behave sensibly and to minimise the potential for problems or accidents to happen, to yourself or others.
- Here a few specific ways you can help to keep everyone safe (based on problems we've had in the past):
 - If a walk is getting too stretched and is in danger of breaking in the middle, pass a message up the chain to the front before that happens! This is particularly helpful if visibility is poor for any reason.
 - If there is livestock in a field, hand any opened farm gates or bridle gates on to the next walker instead of letting them swing free.
 - Nothing is more certain to spoil the day than the sharp end of a trekking pole in the eye. If you are not actively using your poles, please carry them vertically, point down!
 - Please try to avoid approaching any wild or farm animals in distress which might be encountered, upsetting as this might be. Instead, make the leaders aware, and they will do their best to pass the information on to a local farm. If you insist on trying to help the animals directly, then please be aware that this will be entirely at your own risk, as our insurance does not cover Rail Rambles leaders in this scenario and we will not accept liability.
- In accordance with the wishes of most of our walkers, we politely ask that you refrain from smoking or vaping on a Rail Ramble.
- Please follow the [Countryside Code](#) at all times.

Tell us about it

On the day

- If anything makes you uncertain, uncomfortable or unhappy during the day – whether this is purely physical or something more complicated – please say, so that we can try to do something about it straightaway.
 - You can speak to one of the leaders, or
 - If you'd rather speak to someone else, perhaps someone of your own gender, please feel free to do this. There are almost always several experienced Rail Ramblers or off-duty leaders there who will want to try to help you.

Afterwards

- If there's anything you want to tell us afterwards, about
 - anything that happened on the walk or
 - anything you think we could do better or
 - anything you really enjoyed and would like more of,

please let us know by emailing info@railrambles.org (if it's a sensitive matter which you would like to be handled in confidence, perhaps by a particular person or someone of a specific gender, please tell us when you first make contact, and we will sort this out for you before you need to give any details).