

Made for walking

Exercise is as good a medicine as pills, so why not join your local rambling group?

Guildford Ramblers are looking for new members who wish to explore the beautiful countryside on the doorstep. A recent BBC report revealed that being physically active decreases the odds of heart problems and stroke and can make a difference in conditions such as Type 2 diabetes. The ramblers well-organised walks really do make the heart beat faster while still being able to readily have a conversation with fellow ramblers.

"I joined the group 18 months ago and can say that it was one of the best decisions I have ever made," says publicity officer Kay Hiatt. "I was a full time carer at the time and was beginning to feel increasingly stressed and tired with a limited social life because of my caring role. Due to the generosity of a charity called 'Crossroads Care,' I was offered three hours free care every week, on Wednesdays. I went online and put in 'walking on Wednesdays' on Google and immediately found the Guildford Group of the Ramblers Association. This website was really easy to navigate and clicking on the 'Walks Programme' I found a list of walks for Wednesdays and weekends."

The website gave Kay some general information – "We organise walks within an area covering Surrey and parts of West Sussex and Hampshire. Either Saturday or Sunday there is at least one walk with a lunch stop, averaging eight to nine miles and occasionally longer. During the week the walk is most often a morning ramble of five to six miles on a Wednesday, with an option for lunch at the end."

Kay contacted the local contact and expressed her interest in joining: "I was warmly welcomed and chatted in general about my experience of walking, what I needed for my first walk, and whether there was a charge – there was no fee and I tried out several walks before I joined the Rambling Association. At £33 for a year's membership this was excellent value for money."

On her first Wednesday Kay was a bit nervous as she had never walked for more than a mile: This walk was five miles long! But I had my walking boots, an anorak, backpack and a pole and was determined to have a go! From the beginning, this group was very friendly and welcoming. After a short introduction from the walk leader we set off. The pace was fast but manageable and I was able to chat to several long-time members about walking in general and this walk in particular."

The group stopped a number of times to look at views, talk about interesting landmarks, and anything else of interest. "I noticed that some members of the group were walking by themselves and felt no pressure to have to chat as they walked. I too broke away several times just to breathe in the lovely fresh air, touch the new soft leaves of young beech and just enjoy being out and about in an area I had never before visited," she says.

If you would like to find out about the rambling group why don't you join them for one of their walks?

You can discover more information by visiting their website too, at www.guildfordramblers.org.uk