

For readers in Scotland and Wales, it's time to vote with your feet. So we sent Paul Miles to sort promises from platitudes as Election Day approaches.

Never before has the environment and its sustainable use been so high on the political agenda. So it will be no surprise to see walkers in Wales and Scotland take time out from their usual pathways to 'stroll to the polls' and vote in May's elections. But what does each party stand for when it comes to outdoors issues? We asked each about three main topics: walking for health, access and renewables, with responses from Ramblers' Scotland and Wales.

power walking

Greens looks to encourage walking through safer and more accessible pedestrian routes.

Emphasis to be placed on encouraging children to walk to school through the expansion of 'safer routes to school' scheme. Existing rights of way to be enforced and maintained, and the creation of new ones determined through consultation with local communities. Claims it would open the whole countryside to access on foot, but notes that access may be denied at certain times, such as during lambing. Open access would apply to all areas, including beaches, forests and riversides, and relevant management bodies would be required to provide suitable facilities. Believes energy crisis should be tackled by drastically reducing consumption. Preference for offshore wind farms and community-owned schemes, but says large onshore installations may also be necessary. Would increase funding for the development of biomass, solar, wave and tidal energy. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** A promising commitment with regard to pedestrian routes, but a realistic action plan is needed. Aspiration to open up countryside access is excellent; we trust they agree that new legislation will be essential to deliver? They seem to have an excellent understanding of the value of landscape, but poor appreciation of the impact of large onshore wind turbine developments.

Conservatives keen to follow the success of coastal access in many parts of Wales with further coastal paths.

Proffers a 'holistic' agenda on healthy living through sport, cycling and walking. Keen to ensure that the existing duties to maintain rights of way are rigorously enforced and will examine ways of extending access by voluntary means. Supports renewables, saying sources including tidal, solar and biomass should be further developed. "We have probably reached the limit of large onshore wind farms." **RAMBLERS' VIEW** A coast path is only part of the answer to improving access to the wider countryside and history shows that the voluntary approach does not deliver. Quite good in general on renewables, but are they saying onshore turbine development should stop now?

Plaid Cymru wants to see further development of the safe routes to school programme.

Also keen to see road improvement projects include walking paths. Wants to see investment in public paths. Supports the concept of an all-Wales coastal path. Says access to rivers is denied to many and dialogue is needed between local residents, landowners and anglers to see how this can be improved. On renewables: "Rural Wales should not be excused any role in tackling climate change. Appropriately-located wind farms are part of the renewable energy armoury." Wants to see all planning powers on energy devolved

from Westminster to the National Assembly, so that Wales can design its own sustainable energy policy. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** Proposals not very ambitious, more specifics needed. Ideas for paths investment need developing. Interest in school-centred activity is good. Interesting ideas regarding riverside access, but walkers' rights need first to be developed through legislation. Is the party confident that alternatives to onshore wind won't deliver?

Labour aims to increase the number of people engaging in outdoors activity by ensuring 95 per cent of people have a path within ten minutes' walk of their home by 2023.

Claims it has delivered on 'aim of opening up access to the countryside'. Labour has committed to develop a national coastal walkway around Wales. Carwyn Jones says the party is "proud to have begun delivery on this pledge" and will continue to work to widen access to coastal areas. Continues to support diversity of energy supply, including cleaner fossil fuel plants and offshore wind turbines. Has published Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8: Planning for Renewable Energy, a plan for renewables development in Wales. A Severn Tidal Barrage would be the largest single renewables project in the UK, providing six per cent of England and Wales' power. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** Delivering open access to 21 per cent of the Welsh countryside was brilliant. Intentions are encouraging, but there is a huge task to get all public paths open, only 40 per cent of which are currently easy to use. The coast path is good news, but the promise was for open access on the coast: "We will further extend open access to the coast," said the Welsh Labour Manifesto 2003. TAN 8's focused approach to the location of wind turbines justifies large-scale onshore turbine development; thousands of people are anxious that they will lose clear horizons to huge turbines. We would prefer renewables investment offshore.

Lib Dems wants to encourage people to maintain health through improving walking opportunities.

Accessibility by foot "should be considered in all applications for new commercial developments". Supports access to countryside and would consider further developing rights of way. Seeks to alter the exemptions listed in the CRoW Act 2000, so it amends and increases what people are allowed to do in or on rivers and lakes. Will examine the need for statutory rights of access for everyone. Intends to introduce a duty for all public bodies to further bio-diversity. Aims for renewable energy to supply 100 per cent of Wales' electricity by 2050. In the short-term, supports use of wind power with a preference for offshore sites. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** We look forward to the Lib Dems turning enthusiasm into action. Tremendous aims with regard to access, appears to be a considered and feasible approach. Renewables targets are clear, but there will need to be strong support to get generating capacity moved offshore.

Conservatives agrees on move towards renewable energy sources but wants greater diversity, including much less reliance on onshore wind, and a more locally or regionally balanced supply and distribution system.

Campaigned for a public inquiry into the proposed Beaulieu-Denny power line and will continue to hold the executive to account. Supports the creation of a core path network and suggested that the resources allocated to supporting the 'community ownership' objectives of the act would be much better used to fund that network. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** We welcome support for less reliance on large-scale onshore wind farms and for reducing demand on the grid. Ministers need to pull the plug on the intrusive Beaulieu-Denny development if they value the Scottish wilderness and landscape. Welcome commitment to core paths but the Conservatives did consistently oppose the access part of the Land Reform Act and have talked in the past about repealing it. Would they divert money from transport spending to access?

Labour wants to see a diversity of renewable supply but believes onshore wind will have a continuing role.

Says that onshore wind developments should be sensitively sited and "has ensured that there is new planning guidance". Wants to set demanding targets for planting new forests to create carbon sinks. Introduced legislation ensuring the right to roam in Scotland and supports right to access land. Supports the development of core path networks. Commitment to the promotion of walking includes increased funding for initiatives like 'safer routes to school' and ensuring access for walkers to canals is improved. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** Fails to recognise that financial incentives are too biased in supporting large-scale wind farms and give too little support to community schemes. Renewables Obligation should be changed to support a broader range. Commitment on climate change is good but far more needs to be done to tackle energy conservation. Funds for access may not be finding their way to projects on the ground and local authorities may not devote enough resources to make it work. The Executive has said all the right things re promoting walking but in reality still puts little spending into it. Should transfer transport funding from new motorways into routes for walking.

Greens says onshore wind farms have a role to play alongside marine renewables.

"Local plans for where wind farms should and shouldn't go is the sensible approach rather than blanket bans." Claims to have pushed energy companies to revisit options for underground cabling on the Beaulieu-Denny line. Says that it is vital that a core path network is funded to improve access. Has campaigned for

more investment and support for walking and cycling, including infrastructure development, and for planning regulations to prioritise sustainable community development with protection of Green Belt land and green corridors. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** We welcome emphasis on marine technology. Need to question whether Beaulieu-Denny is the right solution at all. We support local guidance for onshore wind farm sites, but the size of modern turbines needs to be addressed. A welcome commitment to core paths and investment in walking.

Lib Dems believes Scotland can become a renewables powerhouse.

Says energy gap will require a portfolio of solutions, both centralised and decentralised, and that it is vital to look beyond large onshore wind farms. Says failure to meet statutory obligations (of drawing up a plan of core paths by February 2008) is not an option for councils. Would like to see the provision of long-term funding for developing and maintaining a core path network via land management contract incentives. Supports development of a network of paths across Scotland. Will develop a strategy to increase the provision of pathways across and between urban and suburban areas. Will encourage local authorities and partners to plan and develop path networks aimed at meeting local needs. **RAMBLERS' VIEW** Again, the Renewables Obligation needs fundamental reform if we are to see a broad renewables range. Currently, despite fine words, Scotland's landscape is compromised by industrial-scale wind turbine developments. Party talks a good game but in practice we haven't seen enough change. Walking and cycling need to become the first choice for shorter journeys and this will only happen if there are safe, pleasant routes to use. As it is, off-road routes are not being included in road upgrades or new road building, and often disappear from the final plans of new housing or commercial developments.

SNP wants to reduce carbon footprint by enabling the use of clean energy, with greater emphasis on wave and tidal power from remote north and west.

Will demand the strictest controls on transmission should it go through sensitive mountain areas. Seeks to modernise legislation in the areas of wildlife, conservation and the seas. Was happy to support the Access Code and looks to its development, including the increased funding for a core paths network. Committed to more outdoor education in the curriculum. Supports ideas about cultural entitlement: "Properly funded courses are needed on outdoor skills as will be refurbished mountain bothies where appropriate." **RAMBLERS' VIEW** We welcome emphasis on marine technology. Question whether transmission routes should pass through sensitive areas at all. Welcome support for core paths. Particularly welcome the education commitment - the outdoor access code should be built into school curriculum.

