

Walking the coast in Wales – the news is encouraging



Marloes Sands, Pembrokeshire
© Andrew Davies

Does the prospect of being able to walk the coast of Wales excite you? It will be a bit of a leg stretcher to walk the full 800 miles but securing high quality access around the edge of Wales would be quite a prize.

But there is a long way to go as only 60% of the Welsh coast has secure access, the remainder being insecure or inaccessible¹ despite 94% of the people of Wales (and England) saying they want a legal right of access to the coast². What a challenge!

There is encouraging work happening with the Welsh Assembly Government developing the Wales coastal improvement programme. This aims to build an all Wales coastal path plus path networks around coastal communities and better access for cyclists, horseriders, those with young children and people with disabilities. £1.5 million has been provided for year 1 and all 16 coastal local authorities have bid for funding. The first year bids will fund plans for the development of

coastal access in each local authority plus some works on the ground.

Is this enough? Paths alone do not properly provide the full framework for people's quiet enjoyment of the coast. We have been lobbying for support for a wider corridor for access. We are pleased to hear of Welsh Labour's 2007 manifesto commitment to "investigate creating a statutory right of coastal access". The other parties have also said warm words about access although nothing so specific but crucially, statutory access remains on the political agenda. Ramblers Cymru say it is essential to have legislation to create this new access. It will also need, political will and sufficient new money, all vital for high-quality access.

The early signs are encouraging but the real prize will be setting both the all Wales path and improved linear access within a corridor designated for access, wildlife and landscape benefits, which should of course

include beaches, cliffs and adjacent land. This is what we are seeking on behalf of the public and is, we believe, the best way to deliver all the potential health, community and economic benefits that this wonderful opportunity raises.

Ramblers Cymru are also seeking agri-environment measures to improve both the quality of the access and biodiversity value. Wales should aim for the best coastal access in the world - even better than that enjoyed in Scotland, Scandinavia, France, Denmark and Portugal. With your help we will achieve this.

1. Countryside Council for Wales. Feb 2006
2. ICM opinion poll. May 2006

Jane Davidson, Assembly Minister for Sustainability and Rural Development, says we are keen to deliver statutory coastal access and are looking at the coastal corridor model. If you would like to play your part locally please contact us **029 20 644 308** cerddwyr@ramblers.org.uk

Hello Again ...



Beverley Penney

Hello again, Ramblers have been having a good time. We have been developing our ideas on coastal access, are really stuck into case work on paths and working with local communities on understanding the issues around the many more wind turbines which are set for particular landscapes in Wales. The Carreg Camu /Stepping Stones project is growing well too. We have also enjoyed a tremendous Welsh Council 2007 in Barry with Jane Hutt AM speaking to us. At the meeting we suggested that we might start to use Ramblers Cymru as a friendly title, this found favour and we hope you like it and will tell us if not!

We are keen that you build Use Your Paths into your ordinary walking, so when you have walked the paths in a km grid square click on the website to say you have done so at www.useyourpaths.info

The recent 75th anniversary of the Kinder Scout mass trespass was an occasion for quite some celebration as the Westminster Environment Minister David Milliband came to confirm his announcement of a coastal access framework for England in line with the RA's proposals (as on page 1).

Election time has come and gone and we will of course work with whoever takes power in the Assembly and let you know what we and they are planning. This thinking together with that from Welsh and General Councils will feed into our plans for the future.

Enjoy walking!
Beverley
Director Wales



Cerrig Camu / Stepping Stones UPDATE

Promoting Walking

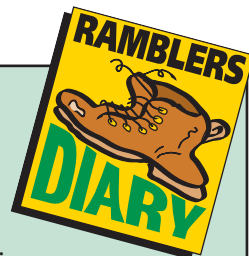
Our commitment to short walks remains and there will be an annual grant offered of £150 to groups who are able to meet the Cerrig Camu/ Stepping Stones criteria (details from the office). We are developing further promoting walking projects and are in touch with groups over these. Sports Council for Wales has taken over the lead for promoting walking from Countryside Council for Wales. More news soon.

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Photos show Welsh Council Members and guests at Barry (above), with Vale of Glamorgan Mayor and Mayoress Nic and Shirley Hodges (right)



2007

JULY
23rd - 26th – Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells. Volunteers welcome.

AUGUST
4th - 12th – National Eisteddfod, Mold. Volunteers welcome.

13th – Powys Area AGM.

SEPTEMBER
16th – National Day of Walking

DECEMBER
26 Dec - 2 Jan 2008 – Week of Winter Walks.

APRIL 2008
12 - 13th – Welsh Council



Access the Way Ahead

The success of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 in delivering 21% of Wales as mapped access land was a credit to Ramblers for having developed the idea, to the Assembly for sharing the vision and to Countryside Council for Wales for delivering the mapped land.

Ramblers have worked to maximise the benefits for the walking public over the last decade and more. But what next? Over the last eighteen months the RA has been developing a new approach to securing access and has adopted a working approach of seeking access gradually so first coastal access, then considering waterside access and we will review progress to see next where we should develop access. Ramblers admire and see many pluses to the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003 achieved with huge input from Ramblers' Scotland but Ramblers in Wales and England have to consider how best to develop access and footpaths together and so the gradual approach has been adopted. Further work is being done on our future footpaths strategy and there will be a consultation in the autumn.



2nd Annual Heart of Wales Walking Festival

Llandrindod Wells, Powys
14th - 16th September 2007

This is 'Red Kite Country', the terrain varies from gently rolling countryside to moderately rugged terrain, incorporating narrow valleys, ancient hill forts, some riverside walking, traces of Roman occupation, and many items of historical interest in this little known region of Wales.

Each day there will be a choice of all day walks, two or three half-day walks with a theme such as churches, natural history, geology, general history, and a short town heritage walk designed for families.

There is a £5 registration fee, plus £1 per walk. Accommodation can be booked by visiting www.gomidwales.co.uk. For further details - www.llandrindod.co.uk

PROMOTING WALKING >>>

The Coast Path in Ceredigion

by David Bateman Footpaths Officer Ceredigion Area

As the Assembly's proposals for an all-Wales coast path are just beginning to move ahead, Ceredigion County Council's own coastal path scheme is nearing completion.

Despite its magnificent coastal scenery, Ceredigion has always lacked an adequate continuous path, particularly in the south of the county. Very soon now, after a major Objective 1 scheme, a continuous path will at last be available.

Key features are:

- ❖ Most of the gaps have been filled by agreement following patient negotiation by Nigel Nicholas, the Council's Coast Path Project Officer.
- ❖ The route provides access throughout which is permanent and legally defined rather than permissive.
- ❖ For most of its length the path is close to the coastal edge.
- ❖ Wherever possible, arrangements have been made to take account of expected coastal erosion.
- ❖ Very little of the route is on road.
- ❖ In the few cases where negotiation was not possible, the Council were prepared to use their compulsory powers to create paths. Objections led to a three-day public inquiry with RA involvement.

The Inspector has now confirmed the Council's proposals subject to minor modifications.

- ❖ The Footpath Working Parties of Cardigan and Aberystwyth RA Groups have contributed significantly to the work that has been done with a mass of stiles, gates and bridges.

There remains just one snag. Near Cardigan Island Farm Park the County Council,

perhaps fearing that a route on the coast edge might involve compensation costs that they could not afford, chose a less attractive route. Despite an RA appeal for a coast edge path, the Inspector ruled in favour of the Council proposals.

RA members involved in the new coastal access partnerships in other parts of Wales could well benefit from a close study of the Ceredigion case.



Aber Ramblers, Ceredigion



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Photo Competition #2

in association with:



Calling all photographers! We are looking for your original images showcasing the beauty and diversity of the Welsh countryside for a photo competition. The winning entries will each receive a fantastic rucksack worth between £35 and £65 courtesy of Cotswold Outdoor and have their photo published in a future edition of Welsh Rambler. There are four categories:

- ★ **Splendid Vistas** – our amazing countryside;
- ★ **People and Places** – showing the wide range and variety of people who enjoy walking in Wales;
- ★ **Blot on the Landscape** – anything from litter to a badly designed building;
- ★ **Obstacles on my Path** – things that get in your way.

Dead line: 30th September 2007

- Files can be supplied digitally or hardcopy (prints, transparencies).
- Include a short caption describing the exact location of the photograph (including a Grid ref) and some background (why something caught your eye, why the image is unique etc).
- Winners will be announced and published in the next edition of Welsh Rambler.
- You give us permission to use your photographs.

Please send entries to: The Ramblers' Association, 3 Coopers Yard, Curran Road, Cardiff, CF10 5NB or e-mail to cerddwyr@ramblers.org.uk

COASTAL ACCESS >>>

What do you think?

Local Authority consultation on draft Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)

What are Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)?

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) are important documents currently being prepared by all the local highway authorities in Wales. ROWIPs should assess the state of rights of way and construct coherent plans to improve management over the next ten years. All local authorities are required to have their plans completed by November 2007- this will follow public consultation on the final draft ROWIPs. Some local authorities have published their draft documents and others are on their way (check local authority websites for info).

The importance of the rights of way network is such that ROWIPs should be fundamental plans for improving recreation in the countryside and improving the situation in town too e.g. Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr have missing or incomplete definitive maps.

The last chance to contribute

The RA has already played a key role in the whole ROWIP process as a consultee and source of expertise on the path network. Ramblers have lead people in place for each ROWIP. *Please liaise via the office.*

Things to look out for

When considering a ROWIP draft there are a number of important things to remember. The key question to ask is what do we, as users, want from the ROWIPs? Think strategically and try to fit your response to the ROWIP objectives. ROWIPs are about rights of way locally, they should assess their condition and consider existing and future needs, gaps and deficiencies and mobility needs too.

Then they should offer a statement of action setting out clear details of planned action. The example in the Assembly's guidance for ROWIPs suggests, "maintain the network of paths in the County such that they are "easy to use". So this statement of action is vital to the document and the future improvement of rights of way. It should include maintenance, definitive map management, enforcement and protection, accessibility for different users, path improvements, promotion, publicity and monitoring and reporting. This is the section



where the authority will outline what it plans to do and equally important, how it will do it. Remember to look at how the authority intends to prioritise its work schedule and whether this fits with the needs of walkers. This is also the section where prioritisation plans for rights of way may appear and do check that these don't amount to rationalisation.

Authorities need detailed local input to really make their ROWIP relevant and local walkers know what needs doing! If a particular access issue isn't mentioned in the ROWIP and you think it should be, tell them about it. These specific details will make all the difference to local people and bring the targeted improvements that will be of greatest benefit to users.

If you want more guidance, Welsh Assembly Government sets out its expectations of each highway authority (i.e. County Council) in preparing the ROWIP for their area in a document called Rights of Way Improvement Plans: Guidance to Local Highway Authorities in Wales. A full copy is available from the Countryside & Coastal Policy Branch of the Welsh Assembly on (029) 2080 1398 or online at: <http://www.wales.gov.uk>

Mike Mills Rights of Way Officer

Footpath Training in Wales

Following on from the successful basic level training days run by Ramblers Cymru during 2006, a further three days have now been scheduled for 2007. Sessions are open to everyone and we are particularly keen to hear from new and existing members or volunteers who would like to become more involved in the process of keeping our footpath network open and well maintained. Dates and venues are shown below:

- ❖ **North Wales Training Day** - 14th July 2007 at Glasdir Centre, Llanrwst.
- ❖ **South Wales Training Day** - 22nd September 2007 (venue to be confirmed)

For more information or to book your place please contact Mike Mills at Wales office on 029 20 644308 or email mikem@ramblers.org.uk



Members at one of our successful Footpath Training Days

Use Your Paths Challenge

Have you completed a square?

Play your part in the Use Your Paths Challenge – to walk all the public rights of way in England and Wales by September 2007. It's the biggest ever walking project in the UK!

Anyone can join in – as individuals or as part of a group.



What to do...

1. Choose a grid square (or squares) to walk. You'll find the national grid on most maps.
2. Walk all the public rights of way (see map key for information) in your chosen square(s).
3. Report any problems you come across (obstructions, missing signposts etc.) to the relevant council
4. Submit your completed squares and these will be turned green once entered into the interactive 'Use Your Paths' map at www.useyourpaths.info

And that's it – simple and fun...

As an added incentive for summer 2007, each square completed will be entered into a prize draw giving you the chance to win one of five prizes. Simply complete and register you chosen square or squares as shown above, when your square (or squares) have been turned green, notify Wales office and each one will be entered into a free prize draw.

Remember... there is no limit to the number of squares you can submit and the more squares you complete... the better chance you have of winning a prize!



COUNTRYSIDE >>>

Clear Horizons for the Welsh Valleys?

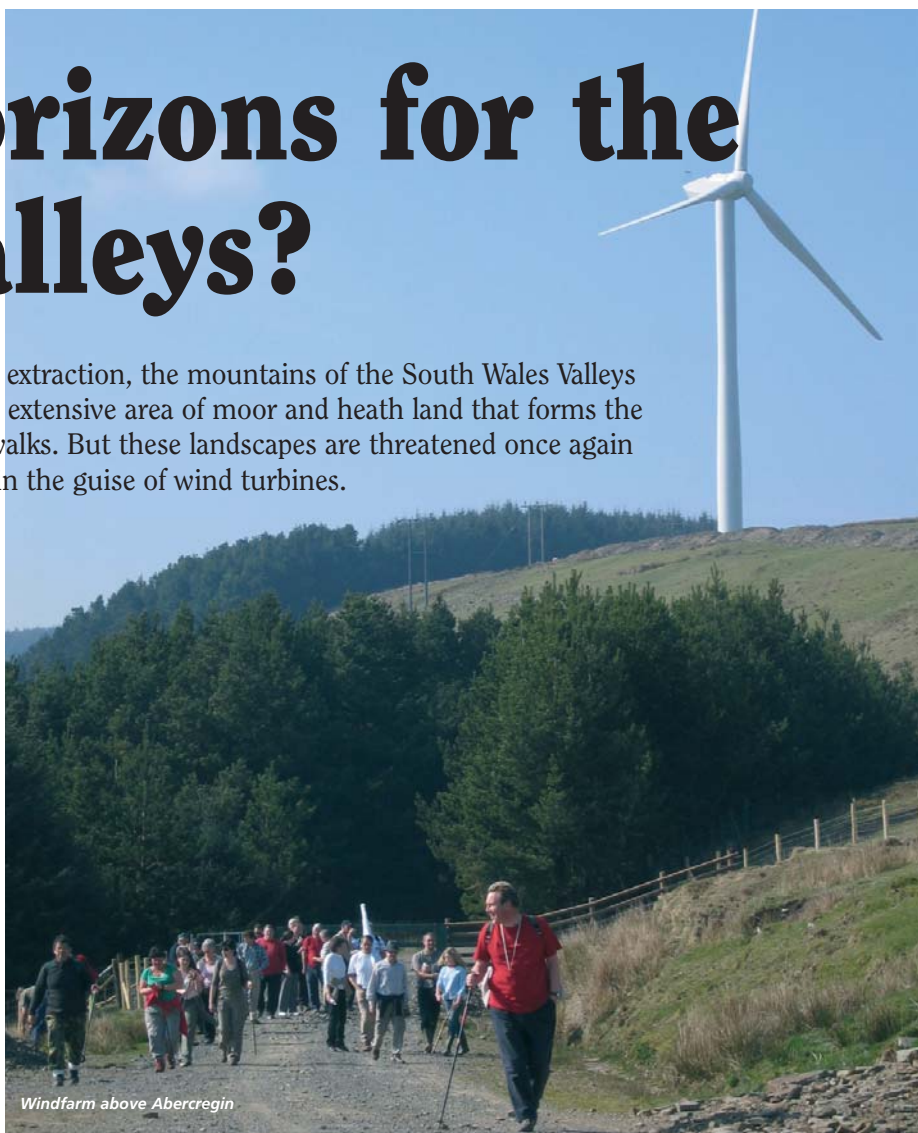
Once tarnished by large-scale coal extraction, the mountains of the South Wales Valleys are now green again, offering an extensive area of moor and heath land that forms the heart of many of our Ramblers group walks. But these landscapes are threatened once again by large-scale development - this time in the guise of wind turbines.

Public knowledge about these developments is not widespread. In frustration, Glamorgan Area Ramblers have been active in raising awareness in their communities to get people involved in responding to planning applications and lobbying their councillors, AMs and MPs. A series of six walks – ‘Gorwel Agored’ or ‘Clear Horizon’ – were designed to take people, members and non-members, onto the mountains to see the views that are threatened. With almost two hundred people turning up for the first walk, the strength of feeling over this issue is clear. The walks have been led by Ramblers’ leaders, in what has become the centre of a truly locally-owned campaign.

Media interest has been strong, with journalists attracted to the walks. David James, (Cynon Valley) and Neil Perry (Maesteg) were interviewed on local radio programmes. ITV Wales also featured one of the ‘Clear Horizon’ walks on their renewable energy special on ‘Wales this Week’ in February.

Letters to the local press have joined a region-wide exchange of views on the issue. Terry Griffiths, Neath-Port Talbot group, has used his MP surgery (with Peter Hain, no less) to put across the Ramblers’ perspective on the value of open landscapes for health, recreation and tourism. Terry has noted a softening in politicians’ stance over the last year. As the poor efficiency and environmental impacts of on-shore wind turbines have been recognised – so have the better opportunities from energy saving and conservation, and the feasibility of a wider range of renewable options become clearer.

It has been fantastic seeing this campaign grow, particularly the networks it has created with local communities. The walks have attracted new membership, as participants realised that Ramblers’ walks were in their capabilities after all. Whether you feel strongly about wind farms or not, the way this project developed is a model for us all to follow. Ramblers really can be campaigners for the countryside!



Windfarm above Abercregin

Disappearing Wild Wales

by David Bellamy, Landscape artist

Tumbling and sparkling, the Afon Diluw is forced through a rugged defile between Bryn Diluw and Mynydd y Defaid, framed by a backdrop of dark conifers. Once out of the short gorge it slowly winds its way down the peaceful valley before turning sharply west to become the Afon Ystwyth. This is Mid-Wales scenery at its best, typical of these Cambrian heartlands, the glorious backbone of Wales. Scenery that would proudly grace any national park. Then the bulldozers arrived. Trees were torn out. Tracks wide enough to drag along the fuselage of an airbus were gouged out of the hillsides, a brutal scar visible for miles. Thirty-nine wind turbines, up to 328 feet high were sunk into slabs of concrete, completely dwarfing the remaining conifers and completely out of scale with the environment. The Diluw now flows against a background of an industrial wasteland.

Why are these places so important to us? For a great many, especially those with stressful lives the peace, solitude and open spaces enrich the sense of freedom and escape. Most of us have a strong need to recharge our emotional and spiritual batteries in a healing environment. The social and economic benefits conferred by these regions should not be underestimated. When built en masse across the mountain ridges of Wales turbines become an intolerable degradation, discouraging walkers and tourists from visiting the area.

Of course, it's not just visitors that are affected by such industrialisation: locals have to live beside the turbines all the time with the added blight of diminishing property values and noise. The RA has taken the initiative in arranging walks in some locations threatened by such development, to

COUNTRYSIDE >>>

Paths and Plans

by Martin Dowson, Countryside Campaigner

As I often relate to my colleagues here in the Cardiff office, you can have the most perfect footpaths and all the best access in the world, but if there is nothing worth seeing from them, nobody will use them. That crudely is the essence of countryside work

This was also brought home during some recent footpath training courses that Mike Mills organised. Having been invited to deliver a session on planning, we realised that new buildings, especially residential properties, often go ahead without the consideration of

the humble footpath. And by the time anyone has realised what is going on, the right of way is lost beneath the foundations.

The importance of having someone keep and eye on planning applications and get involved in local authority development plans is vital. "But planning is boring!" I hear you cry. A matter of opinion maybe, but at the end of the day it will be the one thing that will really make a difference in protecting the places we walk in.

A case in point recently concerns a major planning application in South Wales. 'Merthyr Village Company Limited' (a slight misnomer!) sought to introduce large-scale retail and business developments at Rhydyicar, on the outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil – a site, which despite being the site of a former coal mine, had over many years greened over. Indeed it had developed into a wildlife haven, with mature woodland, heath land and numerous ponds. It also offered valuable doorstep walking to local residents, with easy access from the town.

Following a public inquiry, the National Assembly's Planning Committee has finally turned down the developer's application. Says Alun Dymont (Merthyr group), who represented the Ramblers' Association at the Public Inquiry last year, "As I explained to the Planning Inspector, we have been walking this area for many years and to build on it would have pushed the countryside even further away from the town. The decision shows that local people can challenge developers and defend our rights to access to the countryside".

Carwyn Jones AM, chair of the Planning Decision Committee confirmed in the decision letter that impacts to the "visual quality of the landscape and to the public amenity of the site" as well as its nature conservation and historic interests were unduly harmed by the planning application. This has been a significant recognition that public amenity can be indeed be defended if we get our arguments right.

It is really important then that Countryside Secretaries or Footpath Officers register with the local authority to receive planning applications affecting footpaths. Forewarned is forearmed!

Rhydyicar site, looking towards Merthyr



*David Bellamy is a landscape artist specialising mainly in wild coast, mountain and desert scenery. He has written eleven books and his latest, *Painting Wild Landscapes* was published by Harper Collins in October 2005. See his website: www.davidbellamy.co.uk*

encourage both ramblers and locals along. Gilfach Goch, for example, will be surrounded on three sides by a horseshoe of wind turbines if the proposed development goes ahead. Walking the tracks across the surrounding hills would have diminished appeal. In South Wales communities, where the coal industry ravaged the landscapes for so many decades many feel that once again the area is being exploited for profit, bringing a tragic loss of a sense of belonging to the landscape.

All the turbines in Britain have failed to shut down even one power station. Construction of the turbines and associated infrastructure adds pollution, particularly in the case of the concrete bases. Where peat bogs have been disturbed, as at Cefn Croes a

considerable amount of CO2 emissions is released into the atmosphere, the very thing the turbines are supposed to be reducing! Far from symbolising good, these structures to many evoke a threatening sense of imprisonment and oppression.

Natural scenery encourages a sense of well-being, and can turn thoughts of depression or a foul mood into feelings of euphoria, one of the most powerful stress-removers known to man. Only in these places can we feel a true sense of freedom, to have our spirits uplifted by the song of the skylark; or the murmuring stream tumbling down a rocky cwm, the rowan bent in the breeze. The wholesale intrusion of wind turbines would eliminate all these benefits and completely destroy any sense of wildness.

NEWS >>>

A Victory For Walkers Everywhere

The Ramblers' Association has recently (20 June) won a major victory for walkers in a landmark House of Lords ruling. The RA took the case to the House of Lords and challenged the iniquitous judgment which made it unjustly easy for landowners to deny the existence of rights of way by using hidden evidence to make them private.

The House of Lords agreed to overturn a ruling, which allowed landowners to use evidence, which had not been made public, for example letters to solicitors or even private conversations, to imply they intended the footpaths to be private. This meant that members of the public could waste months proving the existence of a public right of way, only to be defeated by evidence about which they knew nothing.

So even after 20 years of public use, hidden or private information often defeated important footpath claims.

Janet Davis, Rights of Way Policy Co-ordinator, at the RA, said: "This is a landmark ruling which will mean that actions to stop paths being recognised as public rights of way must be transparent. Their Lordships have thoroughly re-examined the law on how rights of way are established, reverting to Lord Denning's statement of the law which had stood for more than forty years unchallenged. Recent interpretations had meant that members of the public were wasting months making claims for paths which were defeated by evidence which was not in the public domain."

She added: "Many footpaths are heavily used but we only appreciate them when they are under threat. Some are key links in the transport network, many are our escape routes when we want to get out into the countryside for some peace and quiet and are the cheapest gym in the country. It is very important that they are protected for everyone to use."

AREA NEWS >>>

The old **Dyfed Area** has been replaced by new Areas for each of the local authorities. Both **Pembrokeshire** and **Ceredigion** have new secretaries see below. **Carmarthenshire** is rebuilding its area structure; the Chairmen of the groups are taking the lead. The contact is David Murfin, 01269 850914.

Pembrokeshire Area Secretary, Rose Taylor, 17 Gaddarn Reach, Neyland, Pembs SA73 1PW stratocu@waitrose.com

Ceredigion Area Secretary: Anne Macmillan, Maes y Wawr, Lon Rhyd y Gwin, Llanfarian, Aberystwyth 01970 624475 amacmi2606@aol.com
Many thanks to the work of their predecessors Chris Morris, Sue Johnson, Eileen Beaumont, Andrea Matthews and their fellow officers.

Greater Gwent Area Secretary, Mike Williams, has been replaced by Adrian Sheehan, 6 Wood Crescent, Rogerstone, Newport NP10 0AL. 01633 89625 adrian.sheehan@btinternet.com
Many thanks to Mike.

BOOKS >>>

Beloved Tywi

by Ken Day

Reviewed by David Bush

This book shows photographs of beauty spots along the river Tywi's sixty seven mile journey from its source in the Cambrian mountains to the sea at Carmarthen Bay.

Ken's passion for the Tywi valley is recorded in the wonderful photography but the photographs are well supported by articles of the area by twenty-one guest writers.

Whilst the book does not detail any walks it certainly plants plenty of suggestions in the mind of the reader and details map references for anyone who would wish to visit the site from which the photograph was taken. For example Rhobert ap Steffan relates Welsh history and the extremely gory details of why and how Llywelyn ap Gruffydd dies and why there is a seventeen tonne 16ft high stainless steel sculpture in Llandovery.

It's the kind of book which would go down well as a gift or something of interest that you could leave on the coffee table for guests to browse through, but would probably appeal more to the photographer than the walker.

Gwasg Gomer, 2006, £19.99

Hill Walking in Wales, (second edition)

by Peter Hermon

Reviewed by David Bateman

Those familiar with the first edition of this guide to the 2000 footers of Wales will know what to expect: a well-written exposition to a variety of routes up every one of the 166 peaks. The main difference from the first edition is the inclusion of a large number of excellent colour photographs.

Grumbles are few and minor: the two-volume alphabetic arrangement leaves Glyders and Carneddau in different volumes; no reference to meters; nor to public transport; and Cadair Idris spelt in the old anglicised manner. None of this will prevent me from buying myself a copy.

Cicerone, 2006, £12 each volume (2 volumes).

Aerial Britain - The Pembrokeshire Coast Path

DVD, narrated by John Woodvine

Reviewed by B.Penney

John Woodvine narrates a DVD showing helicopter filming of the Pembs coast, the views are a treat. The sound is a combination of classical music and John Woodvine's voice, which is occasionally too much. It's a broad brush treatment with e.g. military history featuring in the South; MOD Castlemartin is mentioned with its frustration for walkers excluded from the coast path unless prearranged. This is an armchair perspective which whilst beautiful inevitably misses both the mud, rain and sweat experienced by the walker on the ground and the real character of the coast path.

www.beckmanndirect.com, 01624 816585, £12.99

Blaenau Ffestiniog:

Images by Jeremy Moore,

Words by Gwyn Thomas

Reviewed by Celia Parry

This coffee table book gives us nearly 90 pages of glorious photographs, complemented with the poems of Gwyn Thomas in Welsh and English. Jeremy Moore has chosen to show the industrial scars on this area of Snowdonia as well as the natural beauty, whilst Gwyn Thomas, a native of Blaenau, pays tribute to the town and its people. An ideal present to give or receive.

Gwasg Gomer, 2007, £19.99

Our Common Land

By Paul Clayden MA, Open Spaces Society

Reviewed by B.Penney

Wales' common land extends to 8.4% of Wales' land surface. This wealth needs careful protection and management to protect its wild open landscapes, access opportunities and wildlife richness. Wales' village greens perform a similarly important role. This book is for the enthusiast for either or both.

Updated for the Commons Act 2006, it covers the role and history of common land as well as important recent legislation affecting the registration of and access to common land.

Published by The Open Spaces Society, 2007, £19.95

