

Ramblers Volunteer Section Round-Up 10 July to 6 October 2009



This round-up contains the text of all items posted on the Ramblers Website Volunteer Section since it went live on 10 July 2009. Some of the items had deadlines which have now passed. These are included for interest only.

In some items as originally posted, website hyperlinks gave access to more information. Where possible, we have included the full linked text. Where this is not possible we have provided the full link location.

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General

New Insurance documents

The new insurance guidance and forms for 09/10 are now available (New resources - posted 5 October 2009)

The insurance guidance for 09/10 is now available on the volunteering section at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/AreaGroup/Basics/Insurance.htm>

The Ramblers takes out insurance to cover Area and Group activities. The insurance covers activities from committee meetings to publicity events: however it is most relevant to led walks.

The cover this year contains some changes, so please ensure you read the guidance in full to ensure you have an understanding of the changes. Read the 09/10 guidance notes at: <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Resources/Ramblers%20Association/Website/Volunteering/Documents/Insurance09-10.pdf>

One of the key changes is a new Incident Report Form. If an incident occurs on a Ramblers activity it **must** be recorded and an incident form sent to Ramblers central office. All related forms are available individually below.

Following consultation new policies have also been introduced to safeguard leaders and the organisation in relation to led walks. Personal Accident cover is now available to members undertaking practical work. Please see the guidance for further information.

The guidance also sets out good practice that should be followed. Further information on leading walks can be found at: <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/AreaGroup/Resources/WalksLeader.htm>.

Please note this civil liability insurance covers the activities of our Areas, Groups and staff. It does not cover the activities of individual members or affiliated walking clubs.

Any queries about insurance from Ramblers Areas or Groups should be sent to the [Led Walks Team](#). Affiliated and independent clubs should contact Perkins Slade directly on 0121 698 8000 or email info@perkins-slade.com.

If you require a copy of the certificate please email ramblers@ramblers.org.uk or ring 020 7339 8500.

All incidents should be recorded on the incident report forms and sent to the Led Walks team at ledwalks@ramblers.org.uk.

Any queries should be sent to insurance@ramblers.org.uk or ring 020 7339 8519.

Tom's Blog October 09

Thoughts and reflections from the Chief Executive, Tom Franklin (News - posted 2 October 2009)

We're the Ramblers – standing still is not an option

There's been lots of talk recently about the 'new' work that the Ramblers is doing - urban walks, encouraging new walkers, working with children and families. Some people have got the impression that this means we're neglecting the traditional work that the Ramblers is famous for. It's been suggested that we should just focus on what we've always done.

Firstly, the 'new' work isn't actually that new. We've always been involved in encouraging people to walk. (The other day, I was reading a pamphlet that the Ramblers produced in 1939, called 'Why Walk?' which was extolling the health benefits of walking. It was a document ahead of its time – it could have been written yesterday!) Many groups have been putting on urban walks for years.

Secondly, it's not a choice between doing 'traditional' work or 'new' work – it's all about achieving the same goal. We're the national walking charity for Britain – and we campaign for better places for people to walk (footpaths, access land, rights to the coast, good walking routes in cities or along rivers). We also get people out walking – either through our fantastic programme of group walks or through special projects like Get Walking, Keep Walking. It is not a question of either/or. We need to do new **and** traditional. And we need to attract funding from new sources – including from grants – to help us do so.

Standing still might sound attractive at first – but it is not a realistic option. We need to attract new members, new volunteers, and we have new campaigns to wage. We have to keep moving forward.

Areas and Groups will continue to campaign to protect and improve the public path network, with the support of staff from central office. One example of many: a path has been added to the map in Shiplake, Oxfordshire, with clear benefits for local people, after a local campaign supported with advice from central office staff. This coming year, our ambition is for 500 public paths to be unblocked, created, or added to definitive maps! We're currently installing specialised computer software, so we can track our public path work better.

We will continue to show courage in our campaigning. One example – this week, we've sent out a press release for our South Dorset Group, which is opposing Prince Charles' plans to expand his Poundbury estate, because we believe the plan reneges on earlier agreements for rights of way.

And we will still use legal action as a last resort. The money set aside for potential legal costs in the coming year is greater than that spent on legal fees in each of the past three. Legal work should never be our first option - we can often get further by working collaboratively. But we are prepared for it if we need to.

The vast majority of Ramblers walks have always been - and will continue to be - in the countryside. This is not going to change. Where groups want to, we support them putting on urban walks too. With so many people living in towns and cities, we want to encourage more urban walking groups to form. We also want a greater variety of walks, to suit different tastes. Led walks staff are there to help groups, if they want it, and to provide advice on safety and insurance matters.

One of our big successes over the past year has been getting the coastal access legislation through Parliament. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill is about to become law. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) Section 3A Order (to amend the CROW Act as it applies to coastal land) is now out for consultation, earlier than expected - as we argued it should be. Over the coming year, staff will be helping gear up local volunteers to make sure we get the best route possible around our coastline.

It is a difficult time for the Ramblers, as for many other charities. We've had to cut back spending, there's been redundancies, and we're having to do things in different ways. With less money at the moment, we have to be more creative. We're also making some mistakes, which are annoying people, and which we need to learn from.

But standing still is not an option.

Communicating electronically

We've moved wholesale to electronic communication over the past few months. This has not been popular with many volunteers, I admit. There again, we used to receive many complaints from volunteers about the old circular system - they complained were flooded with paper!

We've changed to electronic communication to help save money - over £100,000 a year. It also means that we can communicate better - faster, more direct. From October, as well as the information on the volunteers section of the website, we'll be sending out an email with a list of recent news items - to all volunteers who we have email addresses for.

Some volunteers said that they wanted the archive of old circulars restored, as a reference - we've done this (on the Secretary's page). We also know that there are a minority of volunteers who don't have access at all to the internet - we're going to find a way to provide a paper update for them. I also know of volunteers who are getting online for the first time, and enjoying the experience.

I know it's caused a lot of upset, but I think in the long run it'll be worth it.

Thank you

I can't say it often enough. The Ramblers wouldn't be the Ramblers without our thousands of volunteers. Thanks for making a difference for the Ramblers.

Enjoy some great Autumn walking.

Tom

Update on motions passed at General Council 2009

Since the Ramblers General Council meeting in April, we've been busy taking action on the motions which were passed. This gives an update. (News - posted 2 October 2009)

Motions below cover the following topics: South Downs National Park, Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Health, Definitive Statement, Work Priorities, Membership System, Members Day

[1] South Downs National Park

This Council thanks the Government most warmly for announcing its intention to confirm the designation of the South Downs National Park, and to include the Western Weald and the market towns of Midhurst, Petworth, Petersfield, Lewes and Ditchling.

Council resolves to campaign for the best possible new National Park Authority, to ensure that the area is given maximum protection so that it is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Action so far:

The Ramblers continues to be an active member of the South Downs Campaign, with national and area level seats on the Campaign's Executive Committee. This is currently responding to a consultation on the structure of the National Park Authority. We have responded positively to the consultations on additional areas to the Park as well as working hard with the South Downs Society (SDS) to help it to become the National Park Society once the Park Authority is set up in 2011. We are also considering plans to create a local forum of interested parties and experts to share information and capacity on specific issues to the Park, which should aid the SDS during its formative months.

[2] Rights of way improvement plans

In view of the general lack of progress in the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) in England, this General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees, to authorise a major campaign to persuade DEFRA to remedy this situation through the provision of structured funding for action plans, incentives for landowner cooperation and a system of appraising progress on the opening of new routes on the ground.

Action so far:

Our ROWIP Campaign (entitled "From Paper to People and Places") is building momentum. An agreed campaign plan has been drawn up for the next 12 months, setting out our objectives and actions. Amongst these is the creation of a consortium of concerned local authorities who support the Ramblers' call for increased and sustained funding for rights of way improvement work. We have built strong relationships with Natural England (who will act as our advocate at future ministerial meetings on the

subject); the Local Government Association (LGA) (which is helping us to reach all English local authority Chief Executives and relevant cabinet portfolio holders to gain their support); and the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management (IPROW) (which raised this issue as its national conference in September) as well as giving us space in its membership magazine to raise the campaign's profile with rights of way officers. Communications were sent to all local authorities as well as to national park authorities in mid September, and in the first three days we had positive responses from four local authorities, which is a very encouraging start.

[3] Health

General Council welcomes the progress being made in England, Scotland and Wales in promoting walking as a key ingredient in the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Not only has walking been recognised as possibly the perfect form of physical exercise in helping to combat obesity and related illnesses, it also brings significant benefits to social and emotional health.

General Council does, however, have concerns that the level of funding to promote and facilitate walking, from both public and private sectors, is not sufficient to meet the health needs of the British public or to take advantage of the opportunities available in the next few years to establish the UK as a leading force in the worldwide need to promote walking as an integral part of health policy.

General Council therefore calls for the following action:

- a. for the governments in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Westminster to reassess the public funding currently committed to the promotion and facilitation of walking and to increase such funding in order to achieve public health objectives at national and local levels;
- b. for private sector interests, including grant awarding bodies, to recognise the enormous benefits that could flow from a sustained effort to increase walking by the population as a whole and to adjust their priorities for funding to reflect these needs as necessary.
- c. for private sector interests to recognise and act upon the huge opportunity that UK organisations have in promoting walking along with other forms of physical activity as a result of three major events in the next few years and to note that the juxtaposition of these events is a once in a lifetime opportunity for promoting healthy lifestyles amongst UK citizens and to set examples for the rest of the world. These events are:
 - the celebrations, in 2010, of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Ramblers;
 - the 2012 Olympic Games, in London;
 - the 2014 Commonwealth Games, in Glasgow
- d. for Ramblers staff and volunteers to (1) monitor progress in all three countries in persuading public and private interests to invest more resources in the promotion and facilitation of walking, consistent with the above opportunities, and to report progress to the General Council 2010; (2) conduct a campaign to promote the value of walking for health improvement amongst the public and the usefulness of membership of the Ramblers in helping to achieve this; (3) highlight the link between an accessible, welcoming and user-friendly public path network and the ability of large numbers of people to use the network so as to feel healthier.

Action so far:

We have been working on building a strong relationship with the Department of Health (DoH). We have run a pilot family walking programme in Barrow in Furness, paid for through a £90k fund from the DoH. The programme is currently being assessed for its effectiveness in encouraging families to walk by Oxford University. We have ambitions for the family walking programme to be rolled out nationally. We have also worked closely with the DoH's Change4Life campaign team on child-friendly walking materials (to encourage children to see the fun in walking); and we are joining the DoH's Walking Panel.

We are working with a number of partners on the physical activity and walking agenda within the Physical Activity Alliance (PAA) and the Outdoor Health Forum (OHF). Through these channels we have contributed to the Government's national consultation on physical activity. We will be attending a

national consultation feedback event with the DoH next week. We are also in conversations with the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) and the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) regarding funding for walking programmes.

We've recently been encouraged by a major policy speech made by Andy Burnham, the Health Secretary, in which he has made it clear that he wants to ensure that during the next decade the UK moves from being 21st in Europe to 4th as far as physical activity goes. In his policy speech, the Health Secretary identified walking as being a key cornerstone in the Government strategy.

Ramblers Cymru has been working to secure funding from the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Let's Walk Cymru' programme and have recently secured £20K for walking programmes. These will be delivered in Carmarthenshire, Newport, Cardiff, and Blaenau Gwent. Ramblers Scotland continues to work on both the Homecoming and the Glasgow Commonwealth Games themes, both of which have a strong health message.

[4] Definitive statement

General Council is concerned about problems arising as a result of discrepancies between the Definitive Statement and the Definitive Map and instructs the Board of Trustees to campaign for a change to the rights of way legislation to provide a more cost effective and less time consuming solution to the problem.

Action so far:

Natural England's Stakeholder Working Group (SWG), which is examining the problems surrounding definitive map processes as a whole, is still sitting, and in that circumstance it was not considered appropriate to launch an active campaign on this particular piece of definitive map work. However a Ramblers member of staff sits on that Group and they report that the anomalies issue has been discussed and that the need to address it should feature in the SWG report to the Secretary of State later this year. Whatever the outcome of the SWG's recommendations to the Secretary of State, Ramblers will include this matter in its own list of legislative changes required, and a means of achieving a suitable change in legislation will be sought whenever the opportunity arises.

[9] Work priorities

General Council strongly disagrees with the significantly reduced priority assigned to the protection of Rights of Way in circular 08/83.

General Council therefore calls on the Board of Trustees to reconsider the policy implications of circular 08/83 and to instruct the Chief Executive to draw up an operational plan for the organisation that properly and expressly prioritises all RA objectives, said plan to be submitted to General Council 2010.

After a full debate the amended motion was lost. There were 54 votes in favour of the motion and 57 against, with 6 abstentions.

Action so far:

Although this motion was lost, it was only narrowly so, and the Board has therefore listened to all the points made and wishes to respond. Since General Council a number of discussions and meetings have been held with volunteers working on walking environment issues. These followed on from the further explanation of the new structure offered in the circular 'Walking Environment News, issues 1 & 2. A number of concerns have been addressed, and the 2009/10 Business Plan establishes the priorities for walking environment volunteers more clearly. We continue to support volunteers working on rights of way, and rights of way projects form a substantial part of our work for the coming year - for example, the RoWIP Campaign entitled 'From Paper to People and Places' (see Motion 2), the planned Manifesto for the Walking Environment, casework support with the intention that 500 paths are unblocked, opened, or properly recorded, and a programme of volunteer induction and training.

Most of the time, we can achieve more if we work collaboratively with local authorities to protect and improve rights of way. We are giving volunteers advice on how to approach rights of way cases

differently so as to avoid unnecessary expensive legal fees, if other options exist. But the threat of legal action as a last resort is an important one to have. The money set aside for potential legal costs in the coming year is greater than that spent in each of the past three years.

[10] Membership system

The General Council notes the significant problems over the past 18 months with the Association's membership system, and the inadequacy of the service provided to Area and Group Membership Secretaries, and therefore instructs the Board of Trustees to report back to Areas and Groups on:

- a. fitness for purpose of the operation of the membership system as a whole, including the involvement of volunteers;
- b. the accuracy of current membership records;
- c. how RA Central Office proposes to restore relations with volunteers, in particular Area and Group Membership Secretaries;
- d. lessons to be learnt for future major changes in RA's systems that impact on the work of volunteers, including involvement of, and consultation with, volunteers.

This Council, further strongly recommends that the Board of Trustees and management of the RA should concentrate on resolving problems with the system and membership records before starting any new initiatives affecting volunteers and members.

Action so far:

There has been significant progress from a 'member' perspective since General Council 2009. We are particularly grateful to the help of volunteers, including from the London Metropolitan Walkers. We have also restructured the membership services team, with additional resources, and recruited a new manager, Iain Johnston. Progress has included:

- A successful update of the CRM software. This has improved its functionality and the support that we can receive from the suppliers.
- Improved mailing extractions (for example, for Walk Magazine).
- Updating all awaiting 'changes to addresses' notifications from members, which are now completely up to date.
- Submitting monthly gift aid claims for the first time (previously quarterly), helping with cash flow.
- September-December have been submitted, and we will shortly be submitting monthly claims.
- Fixing the problems with 'joint members' data problems, which had originally affected about 45,000 records.
- Fixing the problems with individual subscriptions (e.g. people getting several renewal letters, or their money not being debited, etc). This had affected about 4,000 records.
- Automatic bulk uploads of new web joiner information (rather than their information being re-typed). This has reduced the processing time for this type of joiner by c50%, thus freeing resources for other processing work.
- Backlogs of renewal/joiner applications have now largely been eliminated. The position as at 17 September 2009 was: new member applications – 41 outstanding, all received in the last week; member renewals – 7 outstanding, all received after 14 September. In essence we now have no financial processing backlog.
- A significant reduction in complaints from members, due to the above improvements.

The most pressing outstanding issues are:

- Reports to membership secretaries, which still contain inaccuracies and anomalies. We have been working on improved reports, but these have not yet been rolled out.
- Problems with member label runs for membership secretaries (with some members being printed more than once).
- Responding to complaints and enquiries. Whilst we have made improvements to response times, we are not yet hitting our target of a response to all complaints and enquiries within ten working days.
- Resumption of mailings for lapsed members, to encourage them to re-join. These had been suspended whilst we sorted out the integrity of the data, and are due to re-start in October.

Through the volunteers section of the Ramblers website, we are keeping membership secretaries informed of progress. Despite the current financial pressures, the Board of Trustees has agreed to invest modest extra resources in increasing technical support for the CRM system, so that we can develop its capacity to help with fundraising.

[11] Members day

General Council welcomes efforts to engage all members of the Ramblers' Association more in the Association's life, activities, and campaigning. It notes that a Members' Day is planned for Autumn 2009, on a pilot basis with this aim in mind.

It calls on the Board of Trustees to ensure that the day is attractively programmed, with a full range of workshops, presentations and activities of interest to members across our age range in order to make the day one of real value.

It calls on Areas and Groups strongly to encourage members to attend.

It requests the Board of Trustees subsequently to assess the experience of the day carefully in order to decide whether this innovation should be maintained and developed.

Action so far:

The work that needed to be done in order to deliver Members' Day was carried forward and there was a positive line-up of workshops, presentations, and interesting activities, and the marketing of the event was thorough. However the numbers of people who had signed up to the event by late July was poor. As a result of this the Campaigns and Marketing Sub-Committee recommended to officers that the event be cancelled. Because the event was being organised on a very small budget, this did not result in much lost expenditure. The commitment to wider member engagement remains, and we shall review this and consider the wider issue of member engagement over the coming months.

Circular Archive Reinstated

In response to feedback an archive of old circulars has been reinstated on the Volunteer Section of the Ramblers website. (News - posted 25 September 2009)

Archived circulars from 2006-2009 can now be downloaded from the Factsheets page of the Volunteer Section. There are also links from the Secretaries page. The files are in .zip format to reduce their size.

The ZIP file format is a data compression and archive format. A ZIP file contains files that have been compressed to reduce file size.

For a comparison of zip software and links to download them see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_file_archivers

The circular archive has been located with the factsheets as it is through these documents that guidance materials and information will be made available from now on. Rather than searching through a series of old circulars to find the most recent version, you can now visit this page for the latest advice and guidance in the relevant factsheet.

If you have any questions or suggestions about circulars or the new factsheets please let us know.

75th Anniversary

Details on plans for the Ramblers 75th Anniversary and how Areas and Groups can get involved. (Consultation / action request - posted 4 August 2009)

The Ramblers celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2010. The year will provide a wonderful opportunity to raise our profile; highlight the important work of volunteers and generate income for the organisation.

Events will be organised throughout the year - both centrally and by Areas and Groups - to showcase the important work of the organisation from walking events to specially targeted media initiatives and a special edition of 'walk' magazine.

Each quarter throughout 2010, the 75th Anniversary year, has a theme. We invite you to take part in as many themes as you would like by organising activities. Centrally, Ramblers will be highlighting existing and new projects to contribute to the coverage for each theme.

We hope that Areas and Groups will select a number of themes to support throughout the year.

The themes are:

- History
- Getting people walking
- Places to walk
- Volunteering

How you can get involved

There are lots of ways you can get involved. The press office needs case studies to generate press coverage as well as walks to help the general public engage in the Anniversary. There will be a special edition of walk magazine so if you or a volunteer you know has done sterling work for the organisation please send details to: 75anniversary@ramblers.org.uk. Likewise, if you know of a walk that highlights disabled access, coastal access, a footpath problem or is a short healthy walk please let us have the walk details. The press office plans to 'sell' 12 'special' walks to the media and is currently working on a supplement with a major national newspaper.

If you were to choose three activities to get behind we'd ask you to focus on the flagship events – the Baton Relay, Get Walking Day and Festival of Winter Walks.

It's more important than ever that we recruit members so we are offering a special prize to the group that recruits the most new members.

How will the baton walk work?

The baton walk will start with a walk in South West England in early January and end with a walk in the South East of England in December. In between we hope that as many Groups as possible will take part in the Baton Walk as the baton goes on a passage from north to south passing through Scotland, Wales and the nine English regions. The baton won't directly be passed from group to group – the emphasis is on its passage through Britain.

When?

To facilitate the passage we ask that you organise your baton walk on any day of the month which relates to you.

Places	Months	Theme
South West	January	History
West Midlands	February	
Wales	March	
North West	April	Getting People Walking
Scotland	May	
North East	June	
Yorkshire & the Humber	July	Places to walk
East Midlands	August	
East	September	
London	October	Volunteering
South East	November	
	December	

If you are unsure which English region you fall into visit www.gos.gov.uk

Do you need to put on a special baton walk?

Not unless you want to. Your baton walk could be a walk that you already have in mind for your particular month. We just ask that your walk includes somewhere photogenic. This could be rural or urban – with a backdrop of a great view or a landmark for example. It would be ideal if your walk highlights a local campaign issue, to help the press office publicise the campaigning aspect of our work and get good coverage. We ask that the photo of the group with the baton (we will send you a baton) is sent to central office by email so that we can chart the baton's progress on the website. You may choose to link your baton walk to the theme but it's not essential.

What extra work is involved?

Ramblers centrally will look to generate media coverage from month to month to coincide with the passage of the baton. Your Group's Baton Walk is likely to be of interest to local media.

We will provide you with a press template to send to local media ahead of the walk, and one to send with the photo, immediately after the walk.

What next?

1. If your Group would like to take part in the Baton Relay please email 75anniversary@ramblers.org.uk with your name, your Group's name, your country/region, and any other details about your Baton Walk that you may have agreed. Please title your email 'Baton Walk'.
2. Please start planning your walk with a nominated Leader and ideally a backmarker. The walk may be as long or short as you like, as easy or as hard.
3. Once the walk is agreed publicise it in your programme and/or on your website.
4. Ensure that your Area or Group puts it on the Group Walks Finder and tags it as a Baton Walk by adding the code R75 in the "Themed Walk" field (if you don't know how to do this, please contact our Walks Finder support volunteers at volunteer@ramblers.org.uk). The advance notice of walks is vital to enable the Media Team to ensure good media coverage. The Group Walks Finder will act as the central database logging Baton Walks so it is essential that your Group enters your Baton Walk here. The majority of Groups now use Group Walks Finder, and so unlike the Festival of Winter Walks 09-10, paper submission forms are not being provided. For support including start-up help, email volunteer@ramblers.org.uk.
5. We will reply to your email nearer the time of your walk to arrange delivery of the Baton and provide template press releases.

Get Walking Day

Get Walking Day 2009 was supported by over 100 Groups and attracted 1500 new walkers out of a total of 3000 participants. Look at your autumn edition of Walk for a full report.

We'd like to build on this success and hope that more than half of Ramblers Groups will take part in 2010, giving the day greater coverage. Based on feedback, Get Walking Day 2010 will avoid the bank holiday weekend and take place on **Sunday May 24th**, with the option of holding walks on Saturday May 23rd.

The focus of Get Walking Day will remain on shorter walks. Year-round feedback from Groups shows that short walks are particularly popular in attracting new people. Get Walking Day walks should be less than 5 miles in length, and can be as short as you like, but it should be as welcoming and as accessible to as many people as possible. Please consider starting from a town centre or transport hub.

What next?

1. Start planning your walk with a nominated Leader and ideally a backmarker. The walk must be less than 5 miles and offer as many people as possible the opportunity to take part.
2. If you would like to take part in Get Walking Day please email 75anniversary@ramblers.org.uk with your name and your Group's name and brief details about your Get Walking Day walk. Please title your email 'Get Walking Day'.
3. Once the walk is agreed publicise it in your programme and/or on your website.
4. Ensure that your Group puts it on WalksFinder, as early as possible, tagged as '**Get Walking Day**'. The advance notice of walks is vital to enable the central Media Team to get good media coverage. The Group Walks Finder will act as the central database logging Baton Walks so it is

essential that your Group enters your walks here. The majority of Groups now use Group Walks Finder, and so unlike the Festival of Winter Walks 09-10, paper submission forms are not being provided. For support including start-up help, email volunteer@ramblers.org.uk.

5. We will reply to your email with occasional updates and in March will provide you with template press releases and media briefs, promotional leaflets and poster blanks.

Festival of Winter Walks

The Festival of Winter Walks is now well established and will effectively top and tail our 75th anniversary celebrations.

The 09-10 festival will run from Dec 26th to January 3rd. Please enter your own walks onto WalksFinder as far as possible. Entering your own Group walks ensures that you have the ability to update details if they change before the walk.

Details of the Festival of Winter Walks 09-10 has been included in Group News Spring 2009. You can order 20% off joining forms and other festival publicity materials from mariusz.wilczynski@ramblers.org.uk 020 7339 8536.

Merchandise

We are looking into selling merchandise for the 75th anniversary and would like to know what you think. Would you be interested in buying a Ramblers t-shirt, hat, mug or walking stick? Please e-mail your request and comments to lucy.courtney@ramblers.org.uk We would also like to know if your Area/group would be interesting in selling merchandise.

Keep an eye on the website for further information on Anniversary events. And please let us know of your plans for the 75th anniversary. Again send your information to 75anniversary@ramblers.org.uk

Tom's August Blog

Thoughts and reflections from the Chief Executive (News - posted 1 August 2009)

Bayham Abbey Appeal

We're about to launch our Bayham Abbey Appeal. This is a really important appeal for us – the Tunbridge Wells group, supported by Kent Area and Ramblers staff, have been campaigning for over 50 years to get paths legally recognised on the Bayham Abbey Estate. We're now facing a Public Inquiry, and we need your help. As well as an appeal letter to members and supporters, we'll be having information about the campaign on the website.

75th Anniversary Celebrations

It's the Ramblers 75th Anniversary next year. That's a great time to celebrate all the things we've achieved over the years - from freedom to roam, to long distance trails, to national parks. It's also a time to look forward - getting the best coastal access that we can, improving the footpath network, and helping to get new generations on their feet in the countryside. Keep an eye out on the volunteer section for information about our plans to celebrate - and ideas for local celebrations.

New Volunteers Website Section

If you're reading this, you've already made your way to the new Volunteers section of our website. In a bid to improve information to volunteers, as well as save money and trees, we've made a wholesale change to the way that we communicate. From now onwards, the main way will be through the website. Not everybody likes it, but we've also had volunteers say "about time too!". The advantages are that all volunteers can see all of the information (rather than only the bits they were sent), and we can update it more frequently than the previous monthly mailings. It also means that you know where all the information is kept, if you need to refer back. The 'RSS feeds' means that you don't need to hunt through the website when new information is added (there's a separate description on RSS feeds). We'll be adding and improving to the website as time goes on. Let us have your thoughts. What else would help you?

Walking 09 – Members Day, 5th September

We've had to cancel this event, as bookings were disappointingly low. It was a new attempt to involve more members, but it hasn't worked this time. Luckily, by cancelling at this stage it hasn't cost very much at all. Our quest of trying to involve more members will continue – we do need to keep trying new ways. Some will work, and others won't.

Financial situation

Rodney Whittaker (Ramblers Chair) and myself have just written to all Area Chairs to update them on the Ramblers financial situation. Like most charities, we're being buffeted by the recession. As most of you will know, we've had to make big cuts in our spending because our income has gone down. This has involved redundancies, and staff have left the Ramblers. It's been a difficult time, and we're all grateful for the support and understanding which many volunteers have shown. I'd like to pay tribute to the work of the staff who have left the charity, many of whom worked with us for many years. We're monitoring the financial situation very closely, and making sure we are living within our means.

Surrey Area 25th Anniversary

Earlier this month I was delighted to attend the Surrey Area's 25th Anniversary celebrations. About a dozen walks took place across Surrey, with them all congregating at the same place. I went on a walk along the base of the magnificent Box Hill. About 250 people took part in the day in total – and there were quite a few people present who had been involved in the founding of Surrey Area, 25 years ago!

Thanks for all the volunteering you've done for the Ramblers over the past month. We wouldn't be the Ramblers without it. Have a great August, with lots of good walking!

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy

Updated guidance. (New resource - posted 10 July 2009)

Updated to include vulnerable adults and a combined consent form -

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/AreaGroup/Basics/ChildVulnerableAdults.htm>

Financial situation

(News - posted 10 July 2009)

Important information for members.

Like lots of charities, the Ramblers has seen a drop in income since the start of the recession. Membership recruitment, legacy income, and sponsorship opportunities have all been severely affected.

The Board of Trustees has decided that over the coming year we will be keeping up our campaigns to secure coastal access, ensure a successful outcome to the review of access legislation, and provide continued support to volunteers in their rights of way and access work. We will also continue to develop the Ramblers walks programme and develop programmes for those new to walking.

But, whilst protecting these priority areas of work, we need to reduce our spending to match our reduced income, as we don't see that the economic situation is going to change for the foreseeable future. Taking action now will maintain our reserves and ensure our future viability.

The re-organisation is now almost complete, and more details of changes will be available for volunteers shortly - including who to contact for different issues.

Whilst we cannot answer each question from volunteers individually, we will try to answer the main questions which are asked.

The Ramblers is a vibrant organisation of thousands of members and volunteers, but we are not immune from the recession, and we need to respond to the challenges it throws up. Our work to create a better walking Britain for all is as important as ever.

Frequently Asked Questions - Updated 10/07/09 - new answers added at the bottom

Here are the most frequent questions which have been asked by volunteers:

Did the Ramblers look at reducing expenditure earlier, when it was clear that the recession was likely?

We could have reduced spending earlier than we did, but it was not clear what effect the recession would have on the Ramblers and other charities. As soon as it became clear that our income was being affected, we started to take action. Many other charities are taking similar action at this time.

Why not cut the amount that you spend on stamps and magazines when much more cost effective alternatives are available thanks to technology?

Apart from Walk Magazine, which is sent to all members, we are switching all other national communications to electronic means. We are currently re-vamping the Areas and Groups section of the website, which will be the main method of communication in future – replacing the very expensive monthly circular mailings. It will also mean that the information can be kept up to date, and is available to everyone.

Has there been consultation with members on the radical measures you are taking?

Not specifically on these measures. It is important to act quickly and decisively in a recession, to respond to the situation. There has been widespread consultation on our strategy, and the Board of Trustees is elected at General Council by representatives of the membership to ensure that good and timely governance decisions are taken. The Board is taking difficult decisions whilst protecting (and investing in) those things which it believes are most important to our future.

Have you considered other funding sources?

A key part of our strategy is to diversify funding sources, to reduce risk. We're carrying on with this work, so that we emerge from the recession stronger. However, that all takes time - until that work bears fruit, we can't rely on other sources of income.

Are there reduction in England as well as Scotland and Wales?

There is not an 'England' office in the way there is a Scotland and Wales office. Many of the services provided by central office are provided for the whole of Britain. There are proposed reductions in spending and staff at central office.

When was the budget approved?

The budget was approved in the 3rd quarter of 2008. It became clear about five months into the financial year that our income was going to be lower, and we started taking action to reduce spending in the sixth month (April).

What about Area and Group funds?

We will be asking Areas and Groups to look for savings in their budgets for the year ahead, including whether they can cut costs through more use of electronic communication, to help us through the recession.

When will Areas get more detailed information?

Trustees are contacting all Area Chairs during the next few weeks, to provide a fuller briefing and to answer questions. After the consultation with staff has been completed, we will report on changes to the staffing structure. This is likely to be during July. Keep an eye out on this page for any updates.

When will the Trustees next meet?

The next full Board of Trustee meeting is due to take place in September. Sub-committees of the Board of Trustees will be meeting in July and, as is usual, trustees will meet in the meantime if and when necessary.

When will the re-structure be completed?

The intention is for changes to be completed in July.

How big is financial problem?

During this year, our income has gone down, and we have been spending more money than we have been getting in. The gap between spending and income has been met by our reserves. We don't think our income is going to increase while the recession lasts. Therefore, the Board of Trustees has decided that we need to make sure that our spending is reduced to match our income, to protect our reserves from further depletion.

Was this brought up at General Council?

We made it clear at the time of General Council that our income would be down for this year, and that we were likely to have a deficit. Over the past few years, we've been lucky in having either surpluses or very small deficits. At the time of General Council, we were taking action to reduce spending and boost income in the short-term. But it has since become clear that further action is needed to bring income and spending into line, particularly for our next financial year (which begins in October).

Did the trustees make the decisions?

The trustees met at the end of May, and agreed that for the coming financial year (beginning in October), our spending should be no greater than our income, and that our spending should be focused on our priorities for the coming year. The trustees set limits for spending for different parts of our work. The Chief Executive is leading the consultation with staff, which is within the parameters of the decisions of the Board of Trustees, and will be making decisions following the consultation.

New questions added 26th June:

With the changes that are proposed, how will an effective handover of duties to colleagues or volunteers be managed?

It will be a difficult period as people get used to new roles, and we adjust. Managers are working hard to make sure that we know where the gaps are, and what we are going to do about them – but there will always be the unexpected – so please bear with us.

One of the biggest changes that volunteers will notice is our switch to electronic ways of communicating, to replace the previous 'circular' system. Volunteers will be receiving a letter within the next two weeks with details on this – the 'switch-on' date for the new volunteers section of the website will be 10th July. Not only will this save a large amount of money in postage and printing (about £120,000) but it will also be more flexible, with volunteers being able to see all of the information which is available.

Are you also going to cancel the members day arranged in September. This must be costing a huge amount of money?

No, we're not planning to. The cost is very low, because most of the publicity is being done electronically, and bookings are being taken over the web. Despite the recession, we still need to try new things because it is through trying out new things that we'll keep ourselves relevant.

Why not a link to this page from the main home page? At the moment it is not the easiest page to find.

The vast majority of people visiting the Ramblers website are not volunteers, or members, or involved in running the Ramblers in any way. Information which is specifically for volunteers is kept in this section of the website. Most Areas and Groups know to look here for information.

Are the minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting of 30th May 2009 available?

No, but there is a summary of the Board meeting in the password-protected section. This sets out the discussion on finances. In summary, we believe that a prudent estimate is that we will have about £5m of income next year, including grant income. Our aim is to spend no more than the amount of income that we are likely to get, to protect our reserves. Our aim is to protect those things that are most strategically important. They include:

Strategic Aim 1 (Good Quality Walking Environments):

- * Keeping at the forefront of the coastal access campaign, ensuring that the coastal access legislation is delivered by Natural England;
- * Devoting resources to the review of access legislation;
- * Providing targeted support to volunteers in their rights of way and access work;
- * Engaging in urban walking environment policy development.

Strategic Aim 2 (Making Walking Accessible to All):

- * Delivering Get Walking Keep Walking and other grant-funded projects;
- * Continuing to develop the Ramblers walks programme – safe, varied and fun;
- * Continuing to develop relationships with potential grant funders.

Strategic Aim 3 (Communicating our Work):

- * Organising high profile PR campaigns, linked to our 75th anniversary;
- * Developing our website and e-campaigning, to attract new campaigners and supporters.

Strategic Aim 4 (A well-run organisation):

- * Delivering good service to existing members – especially through utilizing the CRM;
- * Developing/refining the member package and testing alternatives;
- * Developing our other revenue streams e.g. merchandising and partnerships.

Is it right blame it on the recession?

The recession is hitting lots of organisations, including charities, at the moment. Lots of charities are taking similar actions to ours. The important issue is how we respond to it, and how quickly. Lots of organisations emerge from recessions stronger, because they've been able to adapt.

New questions added 29/6/09

Will resources be maintained in the membership services team, to help with processes new member and renewal applications?

Yes, resources have been increased in this team, and applications are being processed faster. The extra resources will be maintained.

How are we going to help those volunteers without a computer, when we switch over to electronic communications?

Free internet use is available in all public libraries, and free help to get on-line is available. We'll be sending advice to volunteers within the next two weeks. Within groups, we would ask volunteers to help each other out by sharing information. Because all volunteer information will be available to all volunteers in future, the need to print things out should be reduced.

Is there a bulletin from the Board meeting in July?

Yes, it is in the password protected section of the website, as usual.

New questions added 10/07/09

Are we becoming an urban walking charity?

No, we are – and have always been – a walking charity. Most of our walks, by most of our groups, take place in the countryside. But many groups also organise walks in towns and cities too. We are the charity which promotes all types of walks (short and long, easy and difficult) in all types of places (along hills and mountains, in flat countryside, along city canal towpaths, for example) for all types of people (the life-long walker and the complete novice).

What are the proposed e-campaigns targeted at?

E-campaigning is a method of campaigning which is particularly popular amongst younger people and those used to using email and the internet. Many charities and campaigning organisations are using the power of the internet. If we don't as well, it'll become harder and harder to recruit new campaigners.

I note that we will be spending money on high profile PR campaigns to promote 75th anniversary. Will any of these campaigns be in Wales or Scotland?

Yes, we hope so. Wales and Scotland have begun to plan events for 2010, and there are lots of Areas and Groups that are putting on events. It is a celebration for the whole organisation, in all three countries. We'll be sending out more details to volunteers shortly.

How are the costs of the Senior Management Team being reduced?

The size of the Senior Management Team has been reduced from 7 to 4 over the past year, and there have also been reductions in the number of middle managers. Some senior members of staff, including the Chief Executive, have voluntarily decided to take a temporary reduction in pay, to help with the financial situation.

I am a membership secretary in a group and would like to receive membership reports electronically rather than by post. This would save money and make life easier. Can this be done?

At the moment, it is up to the Area membership secretary whether they will accept electronic reports, which are then passed on to Groups. In future, we aim to be able to send electronic reports to all Groups directly. Please bear with us, it will take a while before the technology is ready.

Why are you only communicating with Area Chairs when it is the Area Secretary's job to liaise with area officers and groups?

In different Areas, different people take on responsibilities for different roles. The Chair is generally the person with a specific leadership role, and it is therefore right that we communicate with them on issues as important as this. It does not mean that we won't be communicating with other Area officers.

Briefings from the Board of Trustees meetings 2009

(News - posted 10 July 2009)

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MAY 30 2009

Communication

- After discussion on the Friday evening, and in response to a number of comments made at General Council, the trustees decided on a new communications initiative with volunteers. Each trustee would take responsibility for 3 to 4 Areas and hold a briefing/dialogue with the Area chair at least after every board meeting. The Area chair in turn would cascade the briefing to their Area management and groups. The board would review the feedback on the scheme at its September and December meetings.
- Surrey Area had written in with various points including communication and consultation. It was hoped the new initiative would answer some of these and Rodney Whittaker would be attending the Area Council meeting to give a fuller response.

- There would in future be a single Board meeting, rather than separate meetings for confidential and non-confidential items. Board minutes would accordingly no longer be posted on the website but volunteers would continue to receive the same account of the non-confidential items discussed at the meeting. This will avoid the situation where volunteers had previously received two accounts of the same items, one soon after the meeting in a circular and a second in the more formal language of the minutes several months later after the minutes had been formally approved at the next board meeting.

Announcements

- We welcomed the new vice-chair Tom Fisher, treasurer Jonathan Kipling and the newly elected trustees Eleanor Harris, Kate Ashbrook, Gus Halfhide and Len Banister. All except Tom and Kate were attending their first full board meeting.
- We noted with sadness the deaths of Harry Comber, a long standing footpath campaigner in East Sussex and the first East Sussex Area footpath secretary; of Larry Paul, the president of the Herts and North Middlesex Area and former president, chairman and access officer of Leicestershire and Rutland Area; and of Rosemary Archer, the Hammersmith, Fulham and Wandsworth group programme organiser and walks leader.

Chief executive's report

- We received an update on the CRM system which showed that major progress had been made and the level of complaints from members reduced. The board thanked volunteers from the Rambler's Metropolitan Walkers group, who had been helping with various tasks. Important work was continuing on the accuracy of the membership analysis information and also on automatic bulk uploads. The backlog had been reduced to 4 weeks and was expected to be reduced further.
- The board meeting took place on Get Walking Day and 150 groups had organised walks of 2 miles or less. The board itself managed a 30 minute walk in Kensington Gardens during its lunch break.
- Every opportunity would be used to publicise the Walking 09 event which was taking place in Sheffield on September 5. The agenda had now been agreed and the latest Walk magazine contained a flyer for the event.

Finance

- There was a lengthy discussion of the financial position since the latest monthly figures had shown that, in common with nearly all other charities, commercial organisations and governments, Ramblers income had been badly affected by the worldwide recession. It was necessary for the trustees to authorise significant expenditure cuts in order to balance the budget in 2009 /10. The board agreed (with three trustees those from Scottish and Welsh councils voting against) a package of measures including the replacement of paper circulars with electronic communication (which would save about £120,000 a year), the deferral of the next issue of the Walks Guide, and a reduction in Area, Group and Council funding. Consultations with staff would be necessary as to the means of achieving other reductions in expenditure.
- The board also decided on a modest subscription increase though the individual subscription (up £2.50 to £29.50 from October 1) would still be under £30 which compared us well with other similar organisations. The last increase was two years ago. We have asked for a further report on other aspects and types of membership in September.
- The board agreed to a new system for Area and group funding which had been the subject of extensive consultation with the Area and group treasurers. This would change the timing of the funding exercise and would no longer require budgets from groups.

Sub committee matters

- Most major matters are now reviewed by the three subcommittees of the board which then makes recommendations to the full board meetings. We noted the minutes of the 3 subcommittee meetings and agreed minor changes to their terms of reference.

General Council

- The intended venue for General Council Keble College Oxford had unfortunately made a double booking so we would need to find another venue. It would again be a two day event and we agreed to try it this year on Saturday and Sunday.

- We discussed the results of the board skills, diversity and experience audit and agreed on a statement for board candidates to be used at GC in 2010. The board would also be considering possible co-options.

M&A working party

- The board asked the chairman to write to the Memorandum and Articles working party (John Esslemont, David Hunt, Sylvia Popham, Barry Pottle and Brian Reader) to thank them for all their work and particularly for the report which they had submitted to the board.

Led Walks

- The board considered a report on an incident which had arisen on a mountain walk and which would be publicised in due course to emphasise the lessons which had been learnt.
- The Led Walks team is keen to support our volunteers in improving the quality of our led walks. Voluntary training for walk leaders is one aspect of this, and there has been a very encouraging level of interest. However it is important to emphasise that the focus for required training is only on the very top level of walks (mountains, or high ground in winter), and even here, as for all walks, full account will be taken of existing knowledge and experience of leading in such conditions.

Reports

- We received and noted reports from Ramblers Worldwide Holidays and from the Scottish Council, and also noted the Scottish Vision statement.

Campaigns

Visit a farm on Open Farm Sunday

Visit a farm on Open Day Sunday 13th June 2010 (News - posted 5 October 2009)

Visiting a farm provides a fantastic opportunity for everyone, young and old to discover the story behind your food and it's link with nature. Each event will be unique with its own activities - based around the farm's own individual story. Activities during the day may include a farm walk, nature trail, tractor & trailer rides, pond dipping, activities for kids, mini farmers market or picnics. Please be aware there may be a charge for some events or activities. To find a farm to visit go to www.farmsunday.org or telephone 02476 413911

Footpath Worker mailing

The latest edition (Volume 26, No.2) of the Footpath Worker bulletin has been sent out by post. (News - posted 1 October 2009)

If you are an Area or Group Footpath Secretary, or Path Order Recipient, and have not received a copy of the latest edition, please let us know.

We will be uploading an electronic copy of each edition to the Volunteer Section approximately 4 weeks after mailing out paper copies.

If you are a footpath worker who does not hold an Area or Group footpath post, and would like to receive a paper copy of the Footpath Worker bulletin in the future, please let us know at walking.environment@ramblers.org.uk or 020 7339 8584.

Consultation on amending CRoW Act for coastal land

Comments are invited on Defra's proposals to amend the CRoW Act. (Consultation / action request - posted 9 September 2009)

On 8 September the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published its consultation on proposals to amend the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 for coastal land.

This is the first step in putting in place the secondary legislation and documents which Natural England will need to start the ten year implementation process to deliver the coastal access provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill.

The closing date is the 1st of December and all the documents can be found at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/coastal-access/index.htm>

Staff will consider the documents released as part of the consultation and email a draft response to Area Access Officers as soon as possible. In the meantime Ramblers volunteers are invited to send any comments to the Walking Environment Team.

The new section 3A of CRoW, which will be the end result of the consultation, allows for access land to be designated alongside the new coastal national trail. How the trail will be implemented will be covered in a second consultation on Natural England's Coastal Access Scheme shortly. A draft version of the scheme has already been published as part of the Bill process and can be found on the Natural England website:

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/Product.aspx?ProductID=637c346e-17ab-44a9-9c34-a2e491c67025>

The Bill itself should receive royal assent in November after it completed its committee stage in the House of Commons before the summer recess.

Walk4Life Toolkit

A family walking toolkit. (New resource - posted 10 July 2009)

Supported by the Ramblers, the Department of Health has launched a family walking toolkit as part of Change4Life. Full of tips for independent and Group walks, get your copy from

<http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/PartnersC4LWalk4lifeToolkit.aspx>

Consultation on CRoW Access Restrictions

(Consultation / action request - posted 10 July 2009)

See Natural England's consultation here: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/policy/consultations/>

Let us know if you have any comments by 3 August.

Get Walking Day 09

News on our event held on 30 May. (News - posted 10 July 2009)

A big thank you to over 150 groups who organised short introductory walks for this year's Get Walking Day on 30 May. The weather was glorious and around 3000 people got involved in special Ramblers events nationally, with at least 1500 of these people walking with the Ramblers for the first time!

We received excellent media coverage both nationally and locally, with pieces in the Times and Independent newspapers, on numerous websites and through many regional radio stations, newspapers and magazines. In addition, over 100 MPs signed the Early Day Motion in support of Get Walking Day.

Walks Leaders

New Walks Leaders Checklist

Check out the new Walks Leader's checklist. (New resource - posted 7 September 2009)

The Led Walks team has just produced the new Walks Leader's checklist, a handy A6 pocket sized laminated card for leaders (and others) to carry with them. The card is a quick and easy guide for walk leaders – old and new – on what to do before, during and after a walk. The guide also incorporates a new section on what to do in an incident, with basic first aid and advice on contacting the emergency services, should you ever be unfortunate enough to have to call them out.

Colourful, waterproof and full of invaluable advice, the checklist is available by emailing ramblers@ramblers.org.uk or by phoning 020 7339 8500. Get yours now!

Led Walks news

Read the latest newsletter for walk leaders and programme co-ordinators. (News - posted 10 July 2009)

The July 09 newsletter for walk leaders and programme co-ordinators is available now.

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Resources/Ramblers%20Association/Website/Volunteering/Documents/09-July-LW-news.pdf>

New items will be added directly to the walk leaders and programme co-ordinators pages respectively.

Publicity & Marketing

New publicity materials

New recruitment leaflet, dispenser and TAKE A HIKE poster now available. (New resources - posted 24 September 2009)

We have produced new publicity materials for Areas and Groups and these are now available to order from central office:

Recruitment leaflet with new membership rates valid from 1 October 2009

Leaflet dispenser holding a batch of recruitment leaflets

Take a Hike A4 poster for publicising 20s and 30s groups

The order form can be found:

http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Resources/Ramblers%20Association/Website/Volunteering/Documents/Publicity_Order_Form_Sep2009.doc

Or contact: mariusz.wilczynski@ramblers.org.uk 020 7339 8536.

Festival of Winter Walks 26/12/09 - 3/1/10

Details on Festival of Winter Walks and ways in which Areas and Groups can get involved. (Action request - posted 12 August 2009)

The aim of the festival is to provide a nationwide selection of walks between Christmas and New Year which appeal to non-members as much as members. The festival is part of the Ramblers' commitment to promote walking and we would particularly encourage Areas and Groups to see this as a real recruitment opportunity.

Themed walks are the single best way to promote our walks to the public; they are interesting, people-friendly, and the media like to cover them. Apart from listing basic information (date, starting point, time, length etc.) it is very important to describe your walks in the most appealing way you can.

How to take part

All walks need to be submitted by 30th September 2009 but sooner if possible. There are two ways to submit your walks:

* Group Walks Finder – add your Festival walks to the Group Walks Finder. All walks listed on the Walks Finder between 26 Dec 09 and 3 Jan 10 will automatically be classified as Festival walks.

* By post – please fill in the form , post it to us and we will list your walks online on your behalf.

Publicity materials

You can order Festival poster blanks (A4), A5 flyers and 20% discount forms here. Please ensure all walks leaders have a supply – it's a great incentive for newcomers to join the Ramblers after attending a festival walk.

Free Nature Valley cereal bars

Festival is once again sponsored by Nature Valley, snack bars' producer, and we will have free Nature Valley Trail Mix bars available to hand out on festival walks. You can order your snack bars here - each box contains 18 snack bars (please include your name, address, Group name, number of boxes you require). Bars will be distributed at the end of November 09 in time for the festival walks. We sampled similar products on selected walks last year and they proved to be very popular with participants.

Publicising your walks

We'll promote all festival walks on our website www.ramblers.org.uk/winterwalks. This is one of the most important ways we can spread the word about the festival. Many members of the public will visit the site to get information about walks local to them.

Ramblers' Press Office will be sending press releases to all national and regional papers and magazines. You may also want to send your own local press release with details of festival walks in your area (for help on how to do this, or to be sent a sample press release, please contact our Press Office – ruth.somerville@ramblers.org.uk)

If your Area/Group has its own website, we would really appreciate it if the festival could be promoted on your home page with a direct link to www.ramblers.org.uk/winterwalks. The festival logo and sample text are available on request. This information can also be included in your local newsletters and walks programmes.

For further information please contact: Mariusz Wilczynski – mariusz.wilczynski@ramblers.org.uk / 020 7339 8536

Pull-Up Stands and Banners

Sets now available to buy. (New resource - posted 23 July 2009)

Areas and Groups can now purchase a set of pull up stands and banners. Contact mariusz.wilczynski@ramblers.org.uk / 020 7339 8536

Finance

Area and Group annual returns 2008-09

Annual return packs for 2008/09 have been distributed to Area and Group Treasurers. (Action request - posted 7 September 2009)

Most packs were sent by email via our Area Treasurers but a number of packs were also sent in hard copy. Group submission deadline: 24th October 2009, Area submission deadline: 7th November 2009. If you have not received your pack, please contact us.

New Treasurers Budget System

Budgeting packs for 2009/10. (Consultation / action request - posted 10 July 2009)

Budgeting packs for 2009/10 have been distributed to Area and Group Treasurers, via email. If you require a hard copy pack please contact us.

Membership

Membership Services Update

Information on the errors found in September renewal mailing can be found on the Membership Secretaries page (News posted 28th September 2009)

September Renewal Letter Mailing Update

You may have been contacted by members who have noticed errors on the renewal notices that we sent out for September Renewals, which were the result of human error when arranging the printing of this letter. The expiry date on the membership card we enclosed stated August 2010 when it should have read September 2010.

An additional error on the letter stated that if paying by Direct Debit, the payment would be claimed on 26th August. This should have said 30th September. Please note that no money was taken out of members' accounts in August. All direct debit payments will be taken on the 30th September.

In the unlikely event that the members may have been reconsidering their membership, our letter, which said that the payment had already been taken, may have been given the impression that it was too late to cancel their membership.

We will be sending apology letters to all those members affected, enclosing a new membership card. Notwithstanding our best efforts, this letter will arrive after the September claim date, again denying the small number of members who may have wished to cancel their membership an opportunity to do so.

We are committed to providing the highest levels of service and we regret that we were unable to do so on this occasion. If a member was wishing to cancel their membership and feel that this error denied them this opportunity, please advise them to contact Membership Services to be issued a full refund.

Of course, for the vast majority of members, there is no need to do anything other than retain their new card and continue to enjoy their membership to the Ramblers.

Once again, please except my sincere apologies for the trouble this error may have caused you.

Iain Johnston
Membership Services Manager

Membership Services News

Check here for updates and news about Membership Services. (News - posted 2 September 2009)

Membership Services Update for 2nd September 2009

We are beginning to see some benefits of the restructuring that has taken place in the Membership Service Department in recent months. Although the department is not yet fully staffed, we have made considerable efforts in reducing the response times for processing membership subscriptions.

We are now focusing our efforts on reducing the backlogs of email enquires received in membership. We have made some headway already and you should expect to see further improvements in response times in the coming weeks.

Membership Subscription Fees

Membership subscription fees will be increasing from the 1st October, we appreciate that any increase is a concern to members. However, although overheads for the charity have risen, members have benefited from static subscription fees for the past two years, as the Ramblers membership rates have not seen an increase since 2007.

The Board of Trustees have therefore decided that it was necessary for a slight increase to cover increasing costs over the past two years.

The new rates and categories are as follows:

Individual Membership £29.50

Joint Membership £39.50

Life Membership £650 (or £325 if aged 60 or over)

Joint Life Membership £775 (or £400 if both members are aged 60 or over)

Individual Concessionary* £17.50

Joint Concessionary* £23.50

Affiliated Club £40.50

*Concessionary rates will be available for students, people on means tested benefits or solely reliant on the state pension. These rates do not apply to overseas members.

We are in the process of producing a new recruitment leaflet valid from 1st October 2009. Beginning in the last week of September, we will send new leaflets to Area Publicity Officers (or Area Secretaries where there is no Area Publicity Officer), Area Recruitment Contacts, Group Secretaries, Group Publicity Officers, Group Recruitment Contacts.

To order additional copies of the leaflet, contact publicity@ramblers.org.uk or call 020 7339 8500.

1. Monthly Membership Reports

We continue to work on developing the new and improved monthly membership reports; unfortunately we have been unable to meet the August deadline proposed in the previous CRM updates.

We are committed to supplying accurate information in these reports and hope to have a revised time line for you as soon as possible.

2. Email Responses

We are currently processing emails received in Membership Services from the beginning of August.

As indicated in the previous CRM update, we have been concentrating our efforts on updating individual requests from members who asked for changes in their area and group affiliation and/or addresses to ensure the information we do provide is as accurate as possible. We are now processing all emails regardless of their subject matter from the above date.

3. New Membership Applications

We are currently processing membership applications types from the following dates;

- New Members cheque – 29th August
- New Members Direct Debits – 25th August
- Renewal Chq applications – 21st August
- Renewal Direct Debits applications - 17th August

4. Tesco Vouchers

Following further discussions with Tesco as of the beginning of September we are accepting Tesco vouchers as a method of payment for renewal membership. The success of this promotion will be monitored in the coming months and a full review in the new year.