

Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area
Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Monday, 22nd October at 7 pm
Held at Trinity Church, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne

Present

Mike Webber, Area Chair, & Chester-le-Street)	Malcolm McVey (Area Membership, & Tyneside)
Stephen Edwards (Area Treasurer & Ponteland)	Nuala Wright (Access Officer)
Pauline Hawdon (Area Mins. Sec., & Affiliated Group Sec.)	Judith Taylor (Training Officer)
Julia Forster (Hexham Secretary)	Rob. Hutchinson (Indendent & Sunderland Walking Club)
Carol Sanderson (Hexham)	Gillian Darbyshire (Sunderland)
M Pearson (Independent)	John Routledge (Sunderland)
Bill Gallon (Independent)	Ben Brown (Webmaster, NWG)
A Emslie (Independent)	Barrie Russell (Chair, Tyneside)

Action

1 **Apologies**
: Mike Webber welcomed everyone and then gave apologies for Neil Allender, A Dickinson (Short Circuits), Peter Blaylock (Gateshead), Josie McCrystal, Vicky Ludbrook, and Gill Dallow.

2 Minutes of last meeting: Having been circulated, were taken as read; approval proposed by Carol Sanderson (Hexham), seconded by Julia Forster (Hexham), and agreed.

3 Matters Arising:

3.1 Data Protection – Several groups had attended the training session organised by Alison Emslie.

3.2 Ramblers' Road Show -.This had been a good training day, had run very smoothly, and feedback from Central Office had all been positive.

1. Area Secretary Vacancy – Mike had emailed every Group Chair and Secretary. He emphasised that the Area had been without a Secretary for 4 years, which was not fair on other people who had covered these duties. He appealed again to Groups to ask for nominations ahead of the AGM. He would email again with other suggestions and hoped that out of 2,120 members in Northumbria Area, a Secretary could be found.
Mike to re-email groups

2. Area Achievements in 2018

5.1 Heritage Way relaunched

5.2 Coastal Path

5.3 Introduction of Longer Walks Group – organised by Neil Allender, held on the last Saturday of the month, of 15+ miles; details on the website. At present around 12 members attended.

3. Annual General Meeting – to be held on Saturday 2nd February 2019 at Chester-le-Street Cricket Club.

6.1 Jack Cornish, Ramblers' Central Office's new co-ordinator would be our main guest speaker. His topic will be 'Lost Ways' (footpaths that have been missed off upgraded maps and almost forgotten.) It is hoped he will be able to get people enthused about saving these footpaths and training is planned for the Spring. The Government have set a deadline for finding and registering these footpaths of 2026.

6.2 Malcolm McDonnell, Trustee, - is our second speaker and would be able to bring us all up to date with Central Offices projects and plans for the coming years.

6.3 Chester-le-Street Group would be leading a 10.30 a.m. walk in the morning along part of "Cuddy's Corse", passing the church of St. Mary and St. Cuthbert, where people would be able to see the only copy of the Lindisfarne Gospels. Then into the Riverside Park past the resident swans in the River Wear. Also on the route will be Lumley Castle. Directions to the AGM venue would be included with the notice of the meeting.
Mike

4. Treasurer's Report – Steve Edwards

Current balance was £5,686.07; all invoices had been received and paid. The year-end process was underway.

A budget request for £5,000.00 had been submitted, against a planned spend of £6,300.00 for 2018-19; the request had been approved and the first payment of £1,250.00 had been received.

5. Reports from Area Officers

8.1 Membership (Malcolm McVey) – membership was down from 2,103 to 2,049, although there had been 114 new members, which meant an overall loss of 168. He was concerned about "Life" members who no longer paid annual fees, as there was no way of checking whether they had died or moved away.

8.2 Training (Judith Taylor) – 23 members of Northumbria Area had taken part in Training Courses with very positive feedback. Most requested courses were in Field First Aid and Navigation (basic, intermediate and advanced levels). Two members also undertook Benightment and Night-time Navigation. There were inquiries about Walk Leadership but it had proved impossible to fix a convenient date.

As an Area, we benefited from the expertise of the Trainer, Richard Holmes, who had many years of experience as leader of a Mountain Rescue Team. All courses were delivered in the field giving a level of valuable experience unavailable in classroom based courses.

New Training – Central Office wished to update Walk Leadership training and intended to train Trainers, who would, in turn, train their local members. New Walk Leadership training would include, First Aid, Navigation both in the classroom and in the field, Incident and Accident reporting and follow-up' Membership Recognition (using a mobile phone APP). This had been trialed in Scotland and would be rolled out in England in the coming years.

8.3 Rights-of-Way (Neil Allender) – Apart from re-opening the Heritage Way, the main event of the summer has been establishing a longer walks group for the Area in the hope of attracting younger members. As members aged, fewer walks of 12+ miles were being offered. The Longer walks were being held on the last Saturday of each month (excluding December). Neil appealed for members willing to lead a longer walk in any part of the Area (and beyond), or for anyone willing to try a longer walk. He intended to continue into 2019, and was now working on next year's programme.

Next year's main focus would be on Lost Ways in conjunction with Jack Cornish, Ramblers' Central Office's new co-ordinator, who would be the main speaker at the AGM in February. After that they intended to organise training sessions with Groups. Footpaths not on the Definitive Map by the end of 2026 would be lost for ever. Skills needed – historical research in archives, map reading, and comparing old maps; photography of archives and location; industrial archaeology (e.g. researching old railways); local footpath knowledge; IT skills in data storage and access; applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders; and co-ordination with other interest groups - interviewing people with long memories of local paths could unearth unrecorded ways. He asked that any Group members with these skills or willing to acquire them, be encouraged, or perhaps set up a Group team.

"Pathwatch" continued to be little used in the Area, though individuals did report problems to local authorities. He encouraged members to tell their own Group Footpath Secretary plus Ramblers' Central Office. Ramblers' Central Office send reports to local authorities every fortnight listing problems they have been told about.

He pointed out that there were only two footpath maintenance groups in an Area stretching from the Border to Durham City. Local authorities do not always welcome footpath volunteers, but he would like to see more Groups looking after footpaths, and suggested two or more groups could co-operate to establish such a group.

Shared use footpaths – horse riders cyclists and others are making applications to modify the Definitive Map to "upgrade" footpaths to bridleways or BOATS, based on historical evidence. This may result in a better footpath but could produce potential problems with degradation of paths (by horses, off-road vehicles etc.). He encouraged members of Groups to report any problems they encounter from other highway users (legal or illegal).

Neil had attended meetings about A1 dualling and the joint Local Access Forum.

9 Group Reports

Mike showed a colourful "Impact" report from the Devon Area which was an A3 double sided pamphlet, folded into A4 then again into a size of approx 8"x4". This included a standard concise report from each group, which would be condensed into a small section of the main report. In Devon this work had cost approx. £25 to design; 250 copies were printed and were used as promotional material by Group in that area throughout the following year. Paul Roberts and David Crowe were hoping to produce something like this next year for our Area. **Mike, Paul, David**

10 Coastal Path – Nuala Wright (Access Officer)

The official opening from South Bents to Amble had taken place earlier in the Summer. Work was progressing for the route to the Scottish Border; Groups had been surveying the area and Natural England was in discussion with land-owners. It was hoped to have it opened by 2020.

Richard Fletcher had proposed plaques or sculptures be placed at the borders of England with Scotland and Wales to commemorate their Union and the Executive Council had approved a letter which he intended to send to the Environmental Minister, Prime Minister, and possibly The Crown.

11 Heritage Way Stewardship – Judith Taylor

Judith thanked all who helped and took part on the launch week, which went well. There had been a small number of problems with way-markers. Groups were being invited to take 'Stewardship' of a section of the Way in order to keep it maintained. Ideally it should be walked once or twice a year, and could be incorporated into the Group's Walks Programme. Some Groups have already volunteered and others had the subject on the agenda for their AGM at the end of the month.

David Dallow would put Groups in touch with the relevant Rights of Way officers. Any problems in urban stretches, particularly around Sunderland, could be reported but work must be carried out by the Highways Authority.

Judith suggested the stewardship of the route should be reviewed every 2 or 3 years.

Mike said that the previous 'Walk' magazine editor had promised to include a long article in last year's magazine, but had resigned and the new editor had not had the photos passed on nor the article that Mike had sent him. Mike had resent photographs and details and the new editor said it would be included in the Spring edition, issued at the end of February covering March, April and May with reference to the Anniversary of the launch.

12 Initiatives to Increase Membership

Mike was concerned about falling membership and suggested the following initiatives:-

- Pass on your copy of the 'Walk' magazine to non-members and/or leave it anywhere you visit which has magazines available such as Doctors' surgeries, Hospitals, Dental practices etc. Members can visit the Ramblers' website and read back issues for the last eight years so no need to store them. Sections can be read or printed out.
- Reinstate the Great North Walk with the Ramblers as a large part of it. He had contacted Charlotte Allen, at Greatnorthwalk Ltd, who was passing this to their Commercial Section. Awaiting their thoughts on the idea.

Park Runs - targeting those inactive people watching the Park Runs, by displaying our "Impact" leaflet, handing out promotional leaflets and encouraging people to join us. This would require permission from the owner of the Parkland where the Run was being held. Durham County Council had given Mike written permission to do this in all their Parks. The participants of the actual Park Run should not be approached.

13 Any Other Business

- 13.1 At the last meeting, Mike mentioned that Central Office had written 1, 3, 5 and 10 year plans with Objectives etc. (see website) and suggested Groups could do their own form of these plans. Ideas for our Area can be passed to him.
- 13.2 He mentioned possible changes to the Agricultural Policy following Brexit with reform of agricultural payments. Ramblers are meeting with ministers to require farm owners to exchange "Public Funds for Public Goods" meaning doing specific requirements that benefit the public including footpath and stile maintenance and improvements.
- 13.3 Mike had met Charlie Shepherd, Chair of Lakes & District Ramblers, who was interested in Lost Ways and Mike had invited him to our AGM. He said their group owned a chalet near Keswick which could be rented for £10 per person per night. It had 2 bedrooms with 8 bunks in each. Details were available on our website under "Gordon Walker Chalet".
- 13.4 Steve Edwards asked what the purpose of Area Council meetings was, and the following comments were made:-
 - A decision-making meeting (according to Central Office)
 - Executive Committee Meetings were held before Area Meetings, but the Area could not make a decision unless they had the information beforehand.
 - Sharing information (could this be more effective using video conferencing?);
 - Would more people attend if it was held alternately North and South of Newcastle?
 - Would paying petrol expenses for those travelling 10+ miles encourage attendance?
 - Having refreshments encouraged groups to mingle.
 - Group reports which included different programme ideas were often discussed between groups after the meeting.
 - Most members were not interested in anything more than their walking programme and didn't see the need for Area meetings
 - Less people attend meetings when they don't have a problem.
 - The less-formal set-up of the meeting room in a circle was preferred.
- 13.5 Berwick group sold small walks books; the money raised was used for path maintenance
- 13.6 Mike mentioned that wildcats were to be released in woodland this side of the Scottish Border.
- 13.7 Mavis Harris (Hexham Group) had recently died. She had been very active in footpath maintenance, helped form Prudhoe Path Force Group in conjunction with Tim Fish, had a great knowledge of footpaths in the Hexham area, was very supportive of any initiative, had been a member for 40+ years, a Walk Leader, and involved in Isaac's Tea Trail. Hexham group would discuss at their next meeting how to create some sort of memorial for her. Sponsoring a gate and a tree planted in her memory was suggested.

11 Date of Next Area Council meeting – 7 pm on Monday 15 April 2019.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.50 pm.