

**Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area**  
**Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Monday 31 October 2016 at 7 pm**  
**Held at Jesmond Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne**

**Present**

**Action**

**1. Apologies:** Kathleen Tweddle, and Jon Davison (Chester-le Street), Rob Hutchinson (Sunderland CHA/HF)

**2. Minutes of last meeting:** Having been circulated, were taken as read, and approved.

**3. Matters Arising:**

**3.1. Heritage Way (Judith)** – An 80-mile footpath set up in the 1980's around the Tyne & Wear Metropolitan boundary, was to be relaunched in Spring 2017. Routes had been walked, and directions written, which were being checked out. It was divided into 9 sections; all accessible by public transport. The route included Seaton Burn, Holywell Dene, Ponteland, Wylam, Beamish, Kibblesworth, Winlaton, Roker, Cleadon Hills and South Shields. Although Tyneside group had largely dealt with it, it belonged to all groups. Way-marking was still to be completed, and it was hoped people might report any necessary clearance of vegetation (or clip it themselves) or any problems they came across. Additional volunteers would be welcomed – contact David Dallow or Judith Taylor. Judith would write something for the website with a link to a map.  
*Judith to send article to Alison*

**3.2. Lost Ways** (Neil Allender) – See Rights-of-Way report below.

**4. Area Vacancies:**

(a) Secretary – If someone was willing to book the meeting rooms, this would be a great help.

(b) Countryside Officer – Central Office was rewriting the job description.

(c) Publicity & Media – Rachel Orange was dealing with the Pathwatch initiative. If groups had anything they wanted publicising they should contact Penny Ford.

**5. Finance**

Area Treasurer (Stephen Edwards)

Current balance was £3,021.36p. Groups had been paid from Central Office. All Annual Reports went in on time.

Central Office had cut the budget to the level of last year at £3,240 even though last year's budget was low because we used up some surplus. A grant of £6,000 had been requested against £10,000 spent. Major items included were Walks Programmes, Training Courses, £500 for Lost Ways, £2,500 for Heritage Way, £3,200 for Groups. He had sent an appeal to Central Office but would not know the outcome until November.

Richard Fletcher commented that if the Groups' grant was affected and they were struggling, there may be an unfavourable reaction to the 80+ people employed at Central Office.

It was mentioned that the appointment of Christine Hathaway, to improve communications between Groups and Central Office, had been very successful.

**6. Reports from Area Officers**

**1. Rights-of-Ways - Neil Allender**

a) He had been in post 6 months and was still learning.

b) Alan continued to work on the Heritage Way, with the assistance of Judith Taylor and David Dallow (Tyneside Group), and many other volunteers. The Way had been walked and re-walked; the route altered in places; meetings had taken place with local authorities and the guide had been re-written. David Dallow and his team had started clearing some of the more overgrown sections. It was hoped the Way would be re-opened in 2017.

c) Work on the English Coastal Path continued – the next section to be opened was from South Bents to Amble. Nuala Wright and Richard Fletcher were working on this. Morpeth Group had walked and reported on a large part of this section.

d) Alan Mitcham continued as Ramblers' representative on the Northumberland joint Local Access Forum.

e) Alan, Neil, Margaret Anderson (Berwick's Footpath Officer) had had meetings with Network Rail to discuss proposals to close 5 level crossings in Northumberland. Northumberland County Council was considering the proposals.

f) He had attended the Stakeholder Group Meeting in Morpeth to learn more about the proposed dualling of the A1, and its impact on rights-of-way. A second Stakeholder meeting would take place in November.

g) He had had a meeting with the developers of the proposed opencast mine at Druridge. Plans for replacement footpaths were presented to them. The Secretary of State had called in the planning application, so the mine may not proceed.

h) The next major project was the Lost Ways, ie footpaths which will be lost forever if they are not recorded on the Definitive Map by 2026. A small group of Tyneside members had made a tentative start, and he hoped to meet some Alnwick members to see whether they could establish a group to do the necessary research. He intended to contact other groups to find out whether they would like to become involved. There were funds available if anyone was interested in doing research.

i) Footpath maintenance continued in the Hexham and Tyneside groups. He hoped that other groups (perhaps acting together) might be interested in forming working parties.

j) Morley Hill – A developer had acquired a strip of land that might be offered to the City of Newcastle to establish an alternative footpath to the footpath built over.

k) He intended to have meetings for group rights-of-way officers in 2017.

l) He had provided Alison Emslie with some content for a new rights-of-way page on the new website.

- m) Motor Vehicles on Rights-of-Way. Central Office were asking for experiences and problems – let Neil know. Northumberland National Park was doing a survey for the local plan which would be a basis for future planning decisions and they needed comments by mid-November. 48% of people who visited Northumberland were walkers.
- n) Hadrian's Wall path – Because a bridge on the route had collapsed, it was proposed to divert the path permanently through Gilsland village and a trial period was taking place. He asked that comments be made directly to Northumberland Council

#### Neil to draft a comment for website

- o) Regarding Banks Group quarries at Cramlington (Northumberlandia) and Amble, Neil confirmed that their contract would include reinstatement of any damaged footpaths.
- p) It was commented that it would be useful to have a Countryside Officer who could check any Planning Applications in the area.
2. **Area Access Officer (Nuala Wright)** – Coastal Access: section south of Scarborough up to Sunderland and South Tyneside border had opened and a report had been done on Whitburn to Amble. Amble to Bambrough, and Bambrough to the Scottish border were being discussed with Natural England; volunteers were needed to check out Amble to the Borders, including spreading room and she would be interested to know where people walked at present, even if it was not a right-of-way. **Nuala would write to Groups (Berwick & Alnwick).**

**6.03 Website - Tony Royston** He had been transferring information from the old website to the new one and asking groups to move their information to the new website. Footpaths and some personalities (Jo Rossenburgh and Ann Keys) had been included. He congratulated everyone and thanked Alison for co-ordinating things as it was all going very well. The closing date for the old site would be 4 February at the AGM with some fading out time.

The Tyneside Group was the most complicated but all Tyneside groups had managed it.

Walks book – It was suggested a working party be formed to make the Walks booklet more “corporate” and improve its advertising space. There were templates available so no cost should be involved. Alison Emslie, Penny Ford and Tony Royston were willing to be involved

**6.04 Training** (Judith Taylor) – There were no courses in Autumn. Small Groups (2-6 people) proposing a date and then arranging it with the trainer had worked better. Internet banking had proved useful. The Tyneside group were interested in future courses but she had no enquiries from other groups even though Blanchland had been used for the Southern Groups. All information was on the website.

## 7. Groups Reports

### 7.1 Alnwick (NN01) - Elidh Gardiner

The group had 71 members. They had a full walks programme in North Northumberland this year with a Sunday walk every two weeks led by a variety of members; also shorter walks on Tuesdays during the spring, summer and autumn. The walks had been entered on the Walks Finder, Alnwick page, of the National website. They spent £142 on first aid kits for all walk leaders.

### 7.2 Berwick upon Tweed - Annie

Berwick Ramblers featured in the Berwick Advertiser in October as a result of agreeing to contribute a sum of money towards the re-opening of Askew's Walk, which was a popular local footpath linking the riverside path on the northern bank of the Tweed to the road to Paxton. The path had been badly damaged by flooding and erosion; the money contributed by Berwick Ramblers provided for new drainage, gates and fencing. To quote from the paper "Berwick Ramblers said 'the money was raised through the sale of local walks books, researched and written by the late Arthur Wood, a long-time member of the group. The group wanted to see the proceeds from the sale of the books used on a local footpath project, and this one was ideal as Askew's Walk was one of Arthur's favourite routes'".

Members of the group continued to organise one led-walk each week, normally on a Sunday, although Saturdays featured occasionally if local buses permitted. There was a bi-monthly coffee morning where members who no longer walked, met with regular walkers. Their annual “mid-week” holiday was to Callander, where the weather was indifferent (fog on Ben Ledi), but enjoyable nonetheless. Committee meetings were held three times per year, in addition to the AGM, with the exciting innovation of a quiz night.

### 7.3 Chester-le-Street (NN02) - Kathleen Tweddle/Jon Davison

Since the start of the February 2016 programme, Chester-le-Street Ramblers have had fortnightly walks as advertised. Most had been spectacular with 9-12 mile walks, some within a 20-24 mile radius of home, and some within a 40-60 mile radius. They often had a shorter alternative walk. The summer Wednesday evening fortnightly walks were much appreciated and well attended and also the shorter “coffee shop” walks held on the first Thursday morning of every month.

Being introduced on a 6-month experimental basis was a walk on alternate Sundays starting 10.30am rather than 9.30am. If popular these would be incorporated into the official programme.

A very successful venture was the monthly social event, which may be a meal out, an educational visit (local sewage works), a games afternoon (archery or curling), or attendance at a ceilidh or garden party. These events cemented companionship and gamesmanship skills and were much enjoyed.

All walks/ social events appeared on the new website, ([ramblers.org.uk/chester-le-street](http://ramblers.org.uk/chester-le-street)) which was updated regularly, with hints/tips/info; walk leaders were encouraged to upload their walks directly, and events were added when information became available. They expressed appreciation to Alison Emslie, for her assistance/guidance in setting up their site. A facebook page had been set up, advertising/promoting the group with reminders, and walk photos.

Membership: 85 members at Oct 2015; 89 at Sept 2016; average of 87 members per month. 14 members had left; 12 new members had joined.

### 7.4 Gateshead - Alison Emslie

They had had a number of visitors from other groups. Their walks varied in lengths and choice of walk. They had had some weekends away, Summer meals, and a joint venture with Natural England to High Cup Nick. Their Facebook page was very popular and they continued to send a Calendar of Walks electronically.

### 7.5 Hexham – Julia Forster (Secretary)

Since the April meeting, membership continued at 130, plus some new people. They had set up a Facebook page with Alison Emslie's invaluable help to post photos and brief walks details every week. The number of “visits” was growing slowly.

Their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations included a market stall in Hexham on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, which was rained-off after 2 hours but several people showed interest and took away printed programmes and RA information with them. The following day the regular Sunday walk started in Hexham and was followed by an anniversary tea in the Great Hall of Hexham Abbey. Topsy Dickson gave a talk on walking The Pacific Crest Trail, a boot-shaped cake was cut, and prizes presented to 2 of the Treasure Hunt Walk winners. Some of the oldest members of the group were present, 2 of whom Julia Forster was planning to interview to record their memories of the group's early days.

6 Treasure Hunt walks, devised by Mavis Harris and Julia in an effort to attract new members, had had a low response, but they learnt a lot about publicity, producing leaflets cheaply etc. so felt it had been worth trying and enjoyed planning the walks and looking for the clues. Again, Alison helped enormously with the production of the leaflets and putting the info on their web page.

They hoped to put on a monthly 5 mile walk, starting in spring, probably on the same Sunday as the long walk. Julia had met with the Health Walks regional co-ordinator who was keen to strengthen links and some members of the Hexham Health Walks group were interested in doing longer walks. They hoped this may attract new members to their regular programme and others who had done little walking but did not need the Health Walk programme.

The Waymarking group continued on a monthly basis with a steady turnout of between 6-10 people. They were working in Matfen and Gt. Whittington Parishes. Their last outing would probably be 25<sup>th</sup> October. In the summer on their annual inspection of a 10 mile stretch of the trail, they were joined by a journalist who was writing a blog on Isaac's Tea Trail. She wrote a great report and had since given suggestions about achieving more publicity for the group.

In a phone call from another journalist, writing an article on Hadrian's Wall Trail for Walk magazine, they were asked for comments on their experience of the trail. They hoped this would give the group some publicity whenever it was printed.

The HF house at Coniston had been booked for the annual week-end visit next April – numbers grew each year.

Weekly walks generally attracted 8-15 people but more walks leaders were needed.

## 6. Morpeth -

Membership was 70 with 3 new members although currently only one was walking with them. Attendance on walks continued to be good although a few regulars had been absent due to ill health or injury. They were planning their twice yearly meetings earlier in the evening which enabled them to have a meal together afterwards. They had a very pleasant summer meal at the Turkish restaurant in Morpeth in July and continued to try and meet up for a cup of tea after walks where possible. Many were involved in doing some reces of the proposed England Coast Path between St Mary's lighthouse and Amble earlier in the year. They did 10 sections totalling around 30 miles of the Coastal Path. They enjoyed the experience and hoped that they provided some useful information and photographs. They thanked all those who volunteered.

## 7.7 Northumbria Short Circuits

Membership remained steady at 89 and continued to attract new members on a regular basis. A very busy 6 months since the last report included:

- The Ray Hemmings Memorial Walk at Rothbury in early August with beautiful weather and a beautiful walk, thanks to Ian Dawson for organising and leading the walk.
- A Walks Leaders Meeting & lunch was held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at Badger Inn, Ponteland, to discuss all aspects related to leading walks – footpath problems, first aid etc. Eighteen walks leaders and committee members attended – very interesting and successful on a number of levels.
- The Summer Walks Festival September 2016 worked very well and members seemed interested in doing it again next year. David Moore organised 4 walks, to Stannington, Corbridge, Durham and Penshaw. He already had ideas for 4 walks for next year's Festival. However he noticed that we had not received any money from the Postcode Lottery, despite being told that we would benefit. During their "Summer Walking Festival" they welcomed some recently joined members and some potential new members.
- The Group's Away Day to Grasmere. 27 Members had a wonderful day out on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Perfect weather, a fine walk, and the Lake District at its very best.

Walks: David Moore and a Pathfinders sub-committee, were working on the next 6-months programme of walks, starting in February 2017. They would ideally like to have a structured, flexible 3-year rolling programme for future groups to work on. All leaders (& potential leaders) had been asked to submit possible walks and dates for inclusion.

- Away Day 2 September 2017 - Derek Coleman had already researched this and was willing to take them to Holy Island. More details would be circulated when planning completed.
- Weekend Away. Following a successful weekend in Melrose last year, Owen Oliver was organising a Weekend in Windermere - 21 people had expressed an interest. It would be held at The Windermere Hotel, from 23-26 June 2017 inclusive.

Apart from the above future social events included:

Post-Christmas Meal - to be held at the 'Millstone', Gosforth, on 21st January 2017. This would be a non-walking Saturday, so they could get dressed in their finery. James All, the manager, would provide a two course fixed price menu.

They planned to visit 'The Running Fox' after a walk at Felton next April.

Website - There was no change with their internet presence of two web pages. Having their own Group Website was being examined and would be discussed at the AGM in November.

After hearing of deaths on recent walks they were looking at ways of improving contingencies for such an event occurring and were interested in a Ramblers suggestion of registering mobile phones for Emergency SMS.

Northumbria Short Circuits AGM, would take place on Saturday November 5<sup>th</sup> 2016 at The Quaker Meeting Rooms in Gosforth from 2pm until 4pm.

## 7.8 Ponteland – Steve Edwards

Their Chair and founder member, Marjorie Scarlett, had endured serious health problems but was recovering and they hoped she would be joining their walks again soon. The established walk pattern of alternate Sundays and two Wednesdays per month had continued through the year. The Wednesday group was the better supported. They were short of leaders for the Sunday walks but had still managed to complete a full programme.

Total membership had risen from 91 to 100; about 40 supported the group walks.

Progress had been made on a claimed path at the western end of Darras Hall and on the blocked path at Morley Hill. They continued to work with the local council footpath users group.

They had 2 very successful group annual dinners around the turn of the year. They had joined Hexham group for a weekend away at Sedbergh in April and thanked Jill Bungay of Hexham for organising this.

### **7.9 Sunderland – Gillian Darbyshire**

Membership was down slightly at 142 but attendance at both Wednesday and Sunday walks had not fallen by many. Their AGM was being held on Wednesday 2 November, when it was hoped to discuss methods of publicising the ramblers with the aim of attracting new members.

Recently some members had found long walks a bit difficult and one of their very experienced members often led shorter and easier paced walks from the same starting point. Where possible, with the help of the walk leader, copies of the route were distributed around the group hoping that familiarity with following a route and gaining experience with map reading would encourage more walks leaders to come forward. They were meeting in early November to plan the next programme.

A 5-day holiday to Ireland took place in October when 43 walkers and friends travelled by coach and ferry and had a very enjoyable time visiting Dublin, Wexford and the Wicklow mountains.

A Christmas walk had been arranged for 14 December which would be followed by a buffet and a few silly games.

### **7.10 Tyneside -**

Barbara Dickson, their former Chairman, had sadly died. She became Chairman in order 'to put something back' as she felt Ramblers had helped her so much; she would be missed.

Since the April Area meeting, the overriding topic had been the website. Whilst the majority of members understood the potential of the new site, the complexity of successfully combining the needs of the 4 groups, was daunting. Meetings had been held, many website access permissions had been requested and they had been very ably assisted by Alison Emslie (Gateshead). An enormous amount of hard work had now got them to the point of having attractive, informative pages. Unfortunately the main purpose for which ordinary members used the website - to print off their weekly walk sheet - was still proving to be one of the trickiest features to achieve easily but special thanks were due to Michael Manwell, who had spent hours trialling different approaches and exchanging many emails with HO. Michael had now been appointed Web Manager and co-opted to the committee.

The new website was not designed for groups who travelled to different starting points and planning walk routes of differing lengths. At present this had meant that it had not been possible for these walks to be added to initiatives like the Walking Partnership automatically. Efforts were being made to solve this.

The summer had passed well. A number of members attended the Development Day in Durham and found it very useful.

There had been group holidays, particularly one to Pembrokeshire and there had been the usual range of walks.

A bench in memory of Ann Key was dedicated at the beginning of October. Partly because of Ann's work with Rangers, the Forestry Commission had helped greatly. The bench was situated on the edge of Joe's Wood NZ 0317 9889, backed by the Simonside Hills and looked down on to Rothbury - a beautiful position.

## **8. Annual General Meeting**

Durham City Ramblers were hosting the AGM on Saturday 4 February 2017, at the Community Centre, Croxdale. There would be a walk in the Area and refreshments had been organised. As the Coastal Path was due to be opened, someone from Natural England and Central Office would be asked to give a talk. **Penny would circulate information to Groups.**

## **9. Volunteer Development Days**

One was to be held in Durham – details were on the website if interested. Volunteer Welcome booklets were available.

The Walking Festival had been promoted on the Website but poor take-up. Letter from Central Office about PPL and lottery funding. The information came too late to circulate so Group Secretaries would be contacted.

## **10. Any Other Business**

1. Penny asked if anyone had ideas or requests for training for their group to let Judith or Penny know.
2. Ramblers Central Office was asking for nominations for their National Volunteer awards. See the website for details.
3. Footpath Maintenance Groups – It was hoped to start one in the North with Morpeth, Berwick, Alnwick.
4. At the beginning of walks on a Sunday morning the Morpeth group all sign a sheet to say they are in good health. Other groups did not do this.
5. Alison Emslie was presented with a National Volunteer award for her work with maps.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 9 pm.

**AGM - Saturday 4 February 2017 at Croxdale Community Centre.**

**Next Area meeting - Thursday 6 April 7 pm.**