

**Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area**  
**Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Monday 25 April 2016 at 7 pm**  
**Held at Jesmond Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne**

**Present**

Penny Ford (Area Chair, & Alnwick)	Alison Emslie (Gateshead)
Stephen Edwards (Area Treasurer & Ponteland)	Julia Forster (Hexham Group)
Malcolm McVey (Area Membership & Tyneside)	Mavis Harris (Hexham Footpaths Secretary)
Pauline Hawdon (Area Mins. Sec., & Affiliated Group Sec.)	Vicky Ludbrook (Morpeth Secretary)
Neil Allender (Area RoW Co-ordinator/Tyneside)	D Watson Fenwick (Morpeth)
Nuala Wright (Area Access Officer)	Gillian Darbyshire (Sunderland Secretary)
Maggie Brown (Chester-le-Street)	John Routledge (Sunderland Walks Coordinator)
M Goode (Chester-le-Street)	Rob Hutchinson (Sunderland CHA/HF walking club)
Tony Royston (Derwentside Chair)	Gill Dallow (Tyneside Secretary)
Cliff Ludman (Durham)	Judith Taylor (Tyneside/Training)

**Action**

**1. Apologies:** Richard Fletcher, Jon Davison, Irene Tweddle, Richard Carpenter, and Carol Sanderson.

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

**2. Matters Arising:**

**2.1 Publicity (Penny)** – Had obtained a “Join Ramblers” poster - 2/3 copies given to each group. Publicity material was available on the National website with a template to personalise group details. Other ideas included adding events to “Street Life” (Gateshead), “Meet up”, and “Northumberland Life” (Northumberland County Council).

**2.2 Area Vacancies:**

- (a) Secretary – even in a limited role,
- (b) Countryside Officer – Central Office had no job description as awaiting a staff appointment.
- (c) Publicity & Media – Dave Turnbull had resigned as he was unable to join walks and keep up-to-date. He was willing to help with specific tasks. Rachel Orange was also willing to help with projects but would not take on an Officer position.
- (d) Alison Emslie was willing to assist Groups with website problems.

**3. Finance**

Area Treasurer (Stephen Edwards)

Current balance was £5,727.24p. A cheque for £101 was still to clear but everything else was paid up-to-date. Payment for printing of the second Walks booklet would be due in July. All Group financial reports had been signed off and sent to Central Office and he thanked Treasurers for helping to achieve this on time.

**4. Reports from Groups**

**4.1 Alnwick** (Penny Ford) – 12-20 people on walks; afternoon tea was popular. They had a vacancy for Secretary.

**4.2 Berwick upon Tweed** (Penny) – They had met with the Groups North of the Tyne. Attendances on walks were good.

**4.3 Chester-le-Street** (Jon Davison) – membership was 85 but had recently increased to 89 – 7 left and 8 joined. Sunday attendances ranged from 4-20. The Walks Co-ordinator had suggested posting all walks on the National Website and emails the relevant link as a reminder. Their current website was being updated as and when required but they were in the process of building a new “Joomia” based website with the assistance of a moderator. Mid-week walks were well attended particularly where there was a coffee-shop en route. Social events had included crown green bowling, archery, a ceilidh, and 17 had attended indoor Kurling followed by a faith supper. Future events included various guided tours, archery, meals out, garden party (with games), summer solstice beach party, and a charity ceilidh. To attract younger members they had signed up to facebook.

**4.4 Derwentside** – membership was stable. They had good support and a variety of walks leaders.

**4.5 Durham** – membership was stable at 130 but attendances varied considerably. The Saturday short walks had been discontinued through lack of leaders. Richard Carpenter organised Wednesdays and although walks leaders had increased, they led only local walks. The Christmas party had been reasonably well attended. They had started some evening walks. Richard Carpenter and Rachel Orange had been checking for footpath problems and Rachel had won an award for the amount of work she had reported.

**4.6 Gateshead** (Alison Emslie) – An increased walking membership due to putting their walks on the website. They were including a 10+ miles walk and a shorter one, but keeping the two groups together where possible, and trying to provide more variety. The Walks database and facebook pages had encouraged new members and visiting members from other areas/countries. Facebook pages had regular contributors. £71 had been raised for Sport Relief from a “Tray bake” where people

voted for the "Star baker". Cakes were also included at the AGM which was much appreciated. They had obtained a grant for a defibrillator and were having training. Future events included training for the Durham Dales Challenge, and a coach trip to Scarborough. As coach trips were not always well attended they would welcome any additional members.

**4.7 Hexham** – membership was steady at 129, of which 20% attended walks. A coach trip to Barnard Castle and Bowes Museum (for non-walkers) was being organised. Responsibility for publicity was shared amongst Committee members. Events were being organised for their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary events and hoped the Hexham Courant might publish an article. A market stall had been booked for September to publicise events. Hexham had met up with 6 other treasurers in the north area. 24 members including some from Ponteland had had a 3 night stay at Sedbergh. Way-marking would commence in September until October.

**4.8 Morpeth** - Membership of 72 including 3 new members from Health Walks. They have more leaders volunteering for walks and attendance had risen to 14. In December they had had Christmas dinner at a Turkish restaurant in Morpeth. In January 6 members were involved in recces for a section of the Coastal path between St Mary's Lighthouse and Amble and hoped to complete this section in the next week or so.

**4.9 Ponteland** (Steve Edwards) – Membership had stabilised with a small increase recently. Walks took place on alternate Sundays with an average of 10, and two Wednesday per month in the high teens. They enjoyed a very successful weekend at Sedbergh with Hexham Group organised by Jill Bungay (Hexham).

**4.10 Sunderland** (Gill Darbyshire) – membership remained steady and walks generally were well attended with 30 on Wednesdays, and 10-15 on Sundays. They had had a holiday in Pitlochry in October.

**4.11 Tyneside** (Gill Dallow) – Things were running smoothly with no accidents to report, some new members, and some new walks leaders. They had had a holiday in Pembrokeshire. The Christmas day event was successful. Some leaders were having health problems and they needed to encourage more new leaders. The Forestry Commission had informed them that Ann Keys seat was finally in place, near Joe's Wood at no cost to Tyneside Group as it had been used as a project for Apprentices of the Forestry Commission.

## 5. Reports from Area Officers

### 5.01 Rights-of-Ways - Neil Allender (*who had recently taken over from Alan Mitcham*) and Area Access Officer (Nuala Wright)

- a) England Coast Path: It was going well and he thanked Morpeth group who had done a lot of work.
- b) Heritage Way: It had now all been walked but it needed someone new to re-walk it using the description and comments.
- c) Lost Ways – Alan Mitcham: Visits had been made to Woodhorn Records Office to look for rights-of-ways which are not on the Definitive map as they will disappear if not incorporated by 2026. If anyone was able to help, they should contact Neil Allender or Alan Mitcham.
- d) Council cut-backs: It was confirmed at a recent Northumberland Joint Access meeting that no cuts were envisaged for 2016/17. Northumberland County Council asked anyone to report any difficulties on footpaths to the Rights-of-Ways Officer via their website. The Ramblers would like to know of any problems with cattle.
- e) Coastal Access Path - Nuala Wright: Work on the Coastal path between Sunderland and Amble was progressing. Survey work had been done by Morpeth group and Richard Fletcher would draft something. Once a report had been compiled incorporating "spreading room", it would be sent to Central Office. There were difficulties around rivers and estuaries. Alan Mitcham attended and will keep Nuala informed. Once the survey work is done, reports compiled, and appeals made, it will be sent to the Secretary of State. The County hope to have it completed by 2017. A lot of the coastline had fallen into the sea. Spreading room would vary depending on the situation.

## 2. Membership - Malcolm McVey:

- a) *Membership* remained at 2,115, although there had been new and lapsed membership.
- b) *Map Library* – 342 maps were listed on the website. These were available for free loan to any groups or leader. Malcolm would post them out but would ask them to be returned to him afterwards. Most of them were Pathfinders. They may be useful for tracing Lost Paths.

## 3. Training – Judith Taylor:

Unfortunately Judith had lost her entire contact list. All group secretaries should have heard from her by now. If they had not, she asked them to contact her. Courses were being organised from the Group end and if 2 or more people could create some suitable dates she would negotiate with Richard Holmes to organise a course. Courses included Walk leadership, Navigation and Field First Aid (no certificate). All details were on the website.

## 6. Website – Tony Royston

The Northumbria Area website was about 6 years old, there had been very few alterations, and it had poor security. It was used mainly by the Tyneside Group for their walks information. The National website was being updated regularly, included a lot of features, it was easy to edit, and you did not have to be IT literate to use it. There was only one Group unable to edit it. A decision would have to be made to either buy a new website or scrap the Area website and use the Area page on the National website. Alison Emslie had been using the Area page on the National website without problems and had increased use of the

Walks & Events Database which was generally the first contact for new members or people visiting the area. On the Groups page, she advertised any changes or additional information. Sub-pages could be included for holidays, events, and walk leaders' advice. She had suggested a number of new pages to Central Office which they may build and develop. There was good

documentation on the site about using it, mostly in picture-form. The Walks database could either be downloaded individually or uploaded from a spreadsheet. As Tyneside group had 5 walks per week, the changes would affect it most, but their current website could be run in parallel until they were comfortable with it. Alison would be happy to help any groups to get their sites up and running. She had brought her laptop with her and demonstrated the site to groups after the meeting. Penny assured members that the paper version would still be continued for those without access to the website.

It was agreed unanimously to trial use of the National website for 6 months, then discuss and make a decision at the next meeting.

#### **6. General Council feedback (Penny Ford)**

General Council had been held on 2 & 3 April in York. Rachel Orange had gained an award in a "Members Event" which was a new idea. In the morning there had been a choice of 2 out of 4 workshops, and in the afternoon they had met the Chairman of the North Yorkshire National Park, Cotswold, a mountaineer who was selling his book, and Kate Ashbrook, National Park Chairman who explained the difficulties of running a national park. They proposed to run 2 "Meet the Panel" sessions, not linked to General Council, one in the North and one in the South.

The meeting was better organised than last year. Governance had been talked about and knocked back last year when they were asked to produce a report. No report was compiled and Benedict Southwick, one of the instigators, had resigned. There was a change in Trustees as nobody had been challenging ideas or costing them. There was a problem with one man one vote as congested areas could overrule less populated rural areas. There was a suggestion to devolve a lot of work to Area Chairmen which was not practical for part-time voluntary members.

There had been 8 motions put forward, 2 of which were amending standing orders and some against Governance. Groups felt isolated as when they had tried to contact other groups, no information was available on the website and Central Office would not pass on contact details. All staff were based at Central Office and of an income of £7.9 million, £3.9 million was spent on salaries. Christine Hathaway had been appointed to help Areas and had been helpful with communications. If Groups had difficulty getting a reply, Penny asked them to inform her and she would contact Christine. If not getting reply on information get in touch with me and I will get in touch with her.

#### **7**

##### **Volunteer Development Days and Walking Festival**

A Volunteer Development day was to be held on Friday 16 September at Durham University. There was a choice of workshops and Steve Edwards urged people to book one. Details were on the website.

The Walking Festival was to be held 3-11 September and it was hoped to offer a walk a day. Penny suggested that groups published the walks for that week on the September Walks Festival page (drop-down menu) of the website. An easy, short or repeated walk could be included.

#### **8**

##### **Any Other Business**

8.1 Footpath Maintenance Groups were already run in Hexham, Tyneside and Alnwick involving waymarking and clipping back. Penny would ask Berwick if they could help, but other groups could be involved if they could get a couple of people to work together. Some Parish Groups were doing a similar job.

##### **Next Meetings**

Executive Council: Monday, 24 October 2016.

Area Council: 31 October 2016.