



South Gwent Ramblers

Minutes of the AGM held on
18 October 2001



Members present - Ken Phillips (KP), Brian Williams (BW), Fred Fee (FF), Maureen Fee(MF), Val Clark (VC), Kath Sadler (KS), Keith Cooper (KC), Howard Harvey (HH), Beryl Beer (BB), Margaret Nunn (MN), Linda Westbury (LW), Muriel Mitchell (MM), John Durben (JD).

1. *Apologies for absence* from Adrian Sheehan, Andrew Wilmott, Margaret Woodward, Barry Mitchell, Ray Cantwell, Mary Raymond, Ann Howell and Kath Carter.
2. *Minutes of last meeting* were adopted
3. *Chairman's forward*

Where do the years go? It only seemed like yesterday I was compiling last years report.

Our year, as you are aware, has been turned on its head by the Foot & Mouth outbreak. It is sad to note that the problem is still with us. However, let us spare a thought for those people whose very existence has been threatened by the epidemic. I like to think that we Ramblers have acted in a responsible manner throughout the crisis and will continue to do until this dreadful disease is finally eradicated.

The Countryside & Rights of Way Bill has now been on the statute for almost a year, however there remains much to do before we see any real effect from the legislation. The definitive maps have to be revised and as we all know the wheels of authority move very slowly. We can all help by sending timely reminders to our Assembly Members.

This year, as well as thanking all those individuals who give so generously of their time in attending committee meetings and leading our walks, I would also extend my thanks to all our members for their continued support in what has been a very disrupted year for our group.

4. *Officers' reports*

- a. *Secretary* KP reported:

S.G.R. hosted the Area A.G.M. this year and decided to hold it at Cwmcarn Forest Drive Visitor Centre. We organised a morning walk. However the weather that day was atrocious and the few hardy individuals who participated deserve our praise. The meeting was quite well attended and the days business successfully transacted. Adrian, John and Keith were elected to serve on the Area Committee.

Our social events were many and varied this year. We commenced our Christmas activities with a candlelit tour of Penhow Castle. Mince Pies & Hot Punch rounded off an excellent night. Our Dinner at Newport Golf Club was it's usual success and I am pleased to advise that the carol singing this year was much improved. We didn't have snow on Christmas Day but we did have for our walk. Gill was our leader and those who made it to the start enjoyed a very pretty walk. The meal & drinks in the Huntsman went down well afterwards.

Keith was in charge for our visit to BIG PIT. Certainly different but well worth the visit. Meal & drinks to follow as per usual. St Fagan's Welsh Folk Museum and grounds has free entry these days and Tessa led a walk there in June.

Brian realised his ambition later in the month and took us to Flatholm island. We hired a coach and first stop was Cosmeston Lakes, where we had a short walk. Then it was on to Barry for our boat trip to Flat Holm.

Our London trip was again let by Irene & Don Dodd. This year we started at Chelsea Marina and finished in Chelsea Hospital (not literally). Two Chelsea Pensioners in full regalia conducted a tour of the buildings and grounds providing a very amusing and informative talk on the way.

We have forged a close link with the Ruperra Conservation Trust during the year. The Trust was formed to preserve the built and natural heritage of the Ruperra Estate. They are certainly a committed and hardworking group which we felt were worthy of our financial and practical support. They have also agreed to allow us to place a bench overlooking the Castle in memory of our past members.

Once again the year has seen us lose some of our most loved and respected members. Our heartfelt sympathy is extended to their families.

i. KP noted that the unusually sparse walks programme was due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. This had a silver lining in that some walks were attended by both long and short walkers, which had pulled the group together. The committee were proposing to organise coach trips from a selection including Ilfracombe by boat (RC), Dorset (BW), Slimbridge/Berkley Castle (KP), Portland (KP), London, the Eden Project, the Royal Welsh Show and the Shrewsbury Flower Show. KP pleaded with non-committee members to give committee members ideas on where they wanted to go and comments on current proposals. JD suggested going to Steepleholme from Weston-super-Mare (better than Flatholm apparently!) and perhaps Lundy.

ii. We are Friends of Ruperra Trust and have located a site for it. The seat will cost £158 including a plaque. We propose to walk the paths of Ruperra to inaugurate the seat and will inform the Argus.

iii. BB suggested that we offer to host the South West Sussex Group next year to general agreement.

b. *Treasurer* BW presented the accounts - *see* attached sheet.

i. The allocation from the RA was almost the same as last year's. We made a small profit from coach trips and small loss from the Christmas dinner. We received letters of thanks from Ruperra for donations. We made two donations to charity in memoriam of Lorraine Steele and Thomas Reg Evans.

ii. The RA has had a disastrous year financially because Foot and Mouth culled membership and because of lax financial controls while preoccupied with the Right to Roam Bill. The RA appealed to groups for funds. After a lot of debate we contributed to them to help them out and received a letter of thanks from Nick Barratt, the head of the RA.

iii. Overall we spent £420 more than we received. This expenditure was deliberate since we are holding a lot of money and the Charity Commission has urged the RA and its group to *use* its money for its charitable purpose rather than hoarding it. In two years the RA may well increase pressure to return money to them. We aim to be in a position where we are not obliged to do so. KC noted that the Area delegates' report give more information. BW noted that John Ridley, the Area treasurer was working to retain the money. FF noted that Area wanted to retain the money in the area.

iv. BW was worried that the Germany trip did not fit under the Aegis of RA support. KP said that the trip should count as an RA event so that Ray Cantwell (the trip organiser) can be assured of some support. BW understands that 20 members have firmly booked for the trip (including two non-members who are joining).

c. *Footpaths Officer RC's report was read in absentia*

Unfortunately I will be unable to attend the AGM. Since the last AGM I have received no reports of footpath problems within Newport County Borough. The pathcare scheme is still on hold as the new footpath officer for Newport has asked that it should not be taken up in earnest until the foot and mouth problem has been laid to rest. The footpath officer has attended a committee meeting and listened to our plans and suggestions and had offered full cooperation. Our first targeted footpaths are those which have been promoted on Newport walk leaflets. Individual walks have been allocated to members and some of these paths have already been walked. When the footpath officer gives the go ahead the scheme should swing fully into operation with detailed maps and reporting forms being provided.

The main dark cloud on the horizon is the Revised Newport Deposit Plan. Newport intends to reduce the green wedges within Newport. This would impact upon footpaths with green field sights being allocated for building. Detailed objections have been submitted to Newport County Borough.

d. *Rambles Officer AS reported in absentia:*

The old curse "May you live in interesting times" has come true this year. Events have conspired to disrupt the walks programme and made it difficult to plan very far in advance. It looked as though foot and mouth was dying out in the summer but the recent flare up near Abergavenny has meant changes, even to our most recent programme.

Having said that, the walks in the past year have been varied and interesting and it is worth reflecting on what has happened. The first casualty of the year was the Christmas walk which was snowed out. In spite of this an excellent lunch was had by those who managed to make it to The Huntsman. We will try again this year.

The spread of foot and mouth meant that, from February, the planned walks programme had to be cancelled although individual walks went ahead where they went through non-infected areas. A special programme was put on during the summer months which included urban walks in Newport, Cardiff and Cwmbran, a trip to St Fagan's Museum and a very interesting trip to Flatholm Island, complete with sea crossing. Thanks to Brian Williams for organising this. There was also our now regular trip to London which was well supported and enjoyed by all who took part.

The limitations on the programme we could offer meant that there were long and leisurely walkers out together in greater numbers than there have been for a long time. This variety and mixture can only have been good for the Club

Other notable events during the year have been a joint walk with Lower Wye Group and the walks specially designed for those who want a gentle introduction or return to walking organised by Alun Booth, the "walking wounded" walks.

Recently rambles officers from groups in Greater Gwent have been developing a leader exchange scheme. This will enable groups to "book" leaders from other groups and so increase the variety of walks available to members. If you would like to take part in the scheme please contact me.

The programme has been disjointed this year but there has been more variety. The committee will be working in the coming months to re-establish the walks programme. We would like to add to the ideas that have been generated in the past year. Anyone with any suggestions should put their ideas forward to me or to any committee member. I would also

make a request for anybody who would like to lead a walk to make themselves known. If you have not led a walk before then training and support is available, you would not be left on your own.

I would like to thank all those members who organised walks and other events during the year. The efforts you have made have been appreciated. I hope that we can return to a full programme in the near future and I look forward to your continuing support in organising this.

i. KP notes that Alun Booth would lead the “Walking wounded” walks and asks: do we want them? How many? In the evening? BB said that an evening walk would be better because leisurely walks are generally too long. KP suggested that the walks could come under the Walk and Talk of healthy walking schemes. **We will contact Alun before the walks meeting.**

e. *Membership Secretary* VC reported:

The membership information for our club was supplied by Ray Wensley of G.G.A. so when he did not stand for office this year I did wonder where our reports were going to be produced. Fortunately Adrian Sheenan has taken over as Area Membership Secretary and has kept me informed of the membership in 2001.

S.G.R. membership at the end of July 2001 was 158 (now 160) as opposed to 163 at the same time last year. On the face of it, this does not appear too dramatic considering the difficult year we have experienced. This appears to be the trend of things in Greater Gwent and Wales as a whole.

I have continued to send out programmes, brochures and any other pertinent information to those persons requesting details of our group. Hopefully once the crisis is over membership will increase and perhaps we should consider some sort of membership drive to make the public aware that the countryside is open once more and that S.G.R. are the group to join if they want to enjoy it.

f. *Publicity Secretary* KS continues to inform the Argus of walks and leaves material in the library and Millets. KP asked if local radio would carry information. KS said that Capital Gold has a “What’s On” spot. KC has emailed Real Radio without reply.

g. *IT Officer* KC reported:

Review of the objective of having a website

The aim of the site is to attract interest in our group, to publicise our walks program and to attract new members. It has been a very mixed year. Because of Foot and Mouth Disease restrictions it is difficult to gauge the success. It has certainly attracted interest; at this time last year we had recorded about 200 visits. Up to the time of writing we have had 1770 visitors, which I think makes the project worthwhile. Disappointingly, it is yet to result in any new members, but the R.A. as a whole has seen a drop in membership. Recent signs are that, as restrictions ease, more people are getting out again and on the 23rd September we had four new faces out with us, all of whom had got their information from our website.

I have kept the website up to date with changes forced by FMD.

Correspondence

I reply to and pass on to other group or area officers' enquiries received by e-mail. These have included footpath problems, interest in walking, information on Foot and Mouth Disease and offers of goods and services, most of which ended up in the 'bin'. Two notable request were from the Festival of the Countryside asking for R.A. Groups to send copies of walks programs for their events section, which was duly done and Country Walking Magazine who wished to have more information about Dinah's walk on the 4th November.

Significant events

The website was re-designed in October to use signposts to guide you ariund the site.

In November 2000 our website was voted Lineone (our Internet Service Provider) "Website of the Week" and was the Lineone Community featured site for a week in December.

In January the Ramblers Association redesigned its main website and started to feature Area and Local Group websites. Our website was the first R.A. Website of the Month.

Ramblers E-Groups

I continue to be a member of Ramblers E-Groups, of which there are two. Ramblers-IT for Ramblers Area and Group members, to exchange I.T. information and help each other with IT issues and Ramblers Net, where Ramblers campaigning, financial issues, rights of way issues, countryside and environmental issues are aired and discussed. Most of this is not relevant to our group, but when items of interest are raised, I pass them on to other officers.

h. Report from the Area Delegates

Of our members, John Ridley is Treasurer, AS is Membership Secretary and KC is our delegate. As noted in the report below, Area needs volunteers, particularly for Secretary.

Financial

Much of the discussion at Area Council has been about financial matters. The RA had predicted a serious difference between income and expenditure and was looking for a way to utilise the reserves of local groups and areas. A series of meetings of Area Council and Group Treasurers discussed the proposals and the Area Treasurer reported the responses back to Nick Barrett (Chief Executive as from mid-December) and the RA.

As a result of the strength of opposition to the first proposals, the RA was forced to revise its proposals and review its costs further. The current compromise position is that Areas will no longer get their financial allocations (as per the agreed formula) automatically. Areas will have to request the quarterly payments. To reduce the reserves held by Greater Gwent Area and increase cash flow to HQ, GGA will forgo the fourth quarter payment this year and have pledged to do likewise next year, subject to those funds being available. Groups will continue to get their full allocation from Area.

The use of funds is generally encouraged as follows: Groups will endeavour to use their funds on local projects (emphasis on local and use). Area Council will, when agreed, contribute to national appeals etc, eg Denbigh Moors Appeal, on behalf of Groups.

Area handbook

John Ridley has put together a handbook with the Area constitution and details of all our Area officers and delegates, which has been issued to all Area Council members.

Website – <http://www.ra-gga.co.uk>

Ray Wensley (Lower Wye) has started to build a web site for the Greater Gwent Area. It is planned to include a list of all the walks taking place within the Greater Gwent Area.

Leader exchange scheme

Adrian Sheehan and Bill Price are currently working on a scheme whereby groups will be able to exchange leaders. This could mean that “away” walks could be led by locally-based leaders with a wider knowledge of the area, its history etc. Alternatively, themed walks could be led for different groups by specialist knowledge of eg wildlife, flowers, trees, fungi etc.

Footpaths

Pentre Farm has been a continuing problem, albeit on the back burner due to Foot and Mouth. With activities returning to normal, Judy Cox (Area Footpaths Officer) requests that all area groups organise small parties to keep walking the right of way. Adrian Sheehan will be organising a group for South Gwent.

Countryside – Trefil Quarry asphalt plant

Unfortunately the efforts of the Area Countryside Officers, Gwynne and Ellen Williams, were to no avail, primarily due to errors and omissions by the now defunct Gwent CC and Blaenau Gwent CBC. The inspector allowed the proposed asphalt plant to go ahead.

Volunteers

In common with a lot of organisations, Area Council is in need of Officers to make Area work for us. If anyone can spare some of his or her time to help, particularly with administration, please contact your Area delegate.

5. Election of Officers

The Officers of the Committee remain as last year. Committee members, only three this year, are HH, Ian Reese and Andrew Willmott. KC is area delegate and there is no nominee for Welsh Council. Alun Booth is Auditor.

6. Any other business

a. HH noted that there were gaps in the short walk programme and asked if the long and short walks could be separated into two lists. KP indicated that the committee should discuss this at the forthcoming walks meeting.

b. MF asked after Jean Butt. KP said that Jean has been successfully fitted with a pacemaker and that Arthur is still improving. He is hoping to do the Christmas walk.

South Gwent Ramblers

Statement of Accounts Year ending 30 September 2001

£	£	£
Opening balance 1 October 2000		<u>1889.47</u>
Income		
Allocation from Area — membership	305.06	
Allocation from Area — footpaths	14.62	
Allocation from Area — Area AGM	52.00	
Christmas dinner	289.00	
Non-member's walks programme leaflet	2.00	
Coach Ramble — Flatholm 560.00		
Coach Ramble — London 374.12		
Coach Ramble — Germany 140.00		
Interest — Bank account 0.56		
Interest — Building Society account	<u>22.54</u>	
	1759.90	
Expenditure		
Programme expenses	209.46	
Secretary's expenses	101.25	
Area AGM	52.00	
Christmas dinner	303.57	
Labels 10.98		
Coach ramble — Flatholm 550.00		
Coach ramble — London 370.00		
Coach ramble — Germany 140.00		
Donation to Ruperra Conservation Trust	200.00	
Donation to Ramblers Association	200.00	
Subscription to Ruperra Conservation Trust	5.00	
Donation to Alzheimer's Society [†] 20.00		
Donation to MIND [†]	<u>20.00</u>	
	<u>2182.26</u>	
Excess of income over expenditure		<u>-422.36</u>
Closing balance 30 September 2001		<u>1467.11</u>

[†] *in memoriam* ex-RA members

Balance sheet 30 September 2001

2001	2000	1999	1998	
Monmouthshire BS	1372.54	1500.00		
Barclays Bank	<u>94.57</u>	<u>389.47</u>	<u>2021.05</u>	<u>2608.21</u>
<u>1467.11</u>	<u>1889.47</u>	<u>2021.05</u>	<u>2608.21</u>	

B Williams Esq
Treasurer

L A Booth Esq
Auditor

13 October 2001