



South Gwent Ramblers



Minutes of the AGM held on 16 November 2006

Members present – Margaret Woodward, Howard Harvey, Brian Turner, Derek Humble, Val Clark, Ken Phillips, Maureen Fee, Fred Fee, A Jones, Diana Osman, Brian Williams, Jan Wagenaar, Ian Reese, Diane Blakemore, John Blakemore, Sandra Cocksedge, Doug Cocksedge, Ted Cleveley, Margaret Nunn, Linda Westerberg, Gill Griffin, Dave Fereday, Adrian Sheehan, Kath Carter and Lorna Hall.

1. *Apologies for absence* from Beryl Beer, Christine Platteeuw and Keith Cooper.
2. *Minutes of last meeting* adopted.
3. *Matters arising from the minutes*
 - 3.1. Twenty-one took up Doug and Sandra's invitation to make a trip to Guernsey and all enjoyed a well-organised and yet relaxing exploration of the island and its culture.
 - 3.2. Good weather and beer accompanied the visitors to Pembroke. Thanks to Ken.
 - 3.3. The Barbecue was held at Cosmeston. Thanks to Chris Harris for the walk, Kath, Val and Ken for excellent organisation and to the default chef, Fred.
 - 3.4. Thanks to Kath again for organising a smashing evening of Skittles with a chance to see Doug and Sandra's prowess at the game as well as the dark horses, Arthur and Jean Butt.
 - 3.5. Fred, Christine Platteeuw and Adrian helped to produced the ready reckoner.
 - 3.6. We did not have time for the putative trip to Westonbirt and circumstances dictated that the trip to Aberglasny be postponed.
4. *Officer's reports*

4.1. *Chairman's Forward* - Ken Phillips reported:

Yet another good year for our group: membership had a hiccup in the early part of the year, but is well on the way to recovery. It was good to note the new walks leaders this year and hope many more members will follow their lead (excuse the pun). As I reminded you last year you don't have to be on our committee to organise events for our group and fresh minds often produce good results so get your thinking caps on. Having said that, we can always find a place for you on our committee!! If you feel you want to put something back into the Group please give me a ring.

2005/6 has again seen a few of our members out of action due to illness and one or two have been in hospital for surgery. It is pleasing to note that they are well on the road to good health and we wish them a speedy return to our walks.

My thanks as always to my fellow officers, committee and walks leaders for their help in making my job a lot easier.

4.2. *Secretary* - Ken Phillips reported:

Our AGM was once again well supported and my thanks to all those members who made the effort to attend. We had an excellent slide show to follow and that too was very much appreciated.

We have continued to support the Gwent Association for the Blind and at their request organised a walk in Wentwood for them. We have promised to continue our support next year.

Our Christmas Social events once again proved popular with our members and will be repeated this year. We also held a skittles evening earlier in the year and that too was so successful we are holding another one.

We continue to support the Ruperra Trust. They are having trouble with the owner of the castle, who has applied for planning permission to build eighteen executive houses on the site. The Trust and SGR have lodged an objection to this plan.

Several of our members continue their sterling work in installing and repairing the stiles and footpaths in our area and we thank them once again for their efforts.

4.3. *Treasurer* - Brian Williams reported:

The gradual haemorrhage of expenditure exceeding income has continued this year. The main reason is the cost of promoting the Group in the way of programme production, newsletters and postage. To improve this situation we have purchased a laser printer, which will reduce the cost of programme production in future years, thus justifying the one off expenditure of £209.

Our Group has an income to cover the cost of running the Group of £605. To run the Group we expend £695. Therefore, a running cost loss of £90. The basis for funding each Group, by the RA, is on total Area subscriptions divided by membership numbers in a particular Group. This is going to change as follows:

1. A reserve policy will be instituted to ensure Groups do not have too large an amount in their current account. Our £924 balance is not considered excessive, so this will not effect us.
2. In future all Groups will not receive an allocation from central funds but must submit a budget based on their likely requirements for the forthcoming year.

We have complied with item 2 above and taken into our calculations the loss factor for the year of £90 PLUS an amount based on a guesstimate of an amount for those walk leaders who incur costs in doing pre-walks. Roughly had everybody submitted expenses the bill would have been in the region of £1,100. Therefore, based on a less than 100% take up, we are going for 70%, i.e. £770. It is only right and proper that the question of pre-walk costs should be covered by the subscription of members to the RA. All Groups we know of are requesting this item be included in the budget allocation. As yet the RA central office, being in the early stages of assessing this year's accounts, have not commented on this larger than usual outflow of money to the Groups. I have here expense claim forms based on 25p per mile.

[*Note that the accounts are attached at the end of the minutes.*]

- 4.3.1. Jan asked if the committee was advising members to put in for pre-walk expenses. Brian said that we were continuing with our policy of allowing expenses to be claimed.
- 4.3.2. Jan asked if the idea of claiming the expenses was to run down the reserves. Brian and Ken said that the idea was to encourage new walks. Gill asked what would happen if the RA refused our request for funding for prewalks: would it lead to pre-walk expenses not being paid? Brian said that it could do so. Ken indicated that the new accounting system was not underway yet and advised caution until the system settles down.

4.3.3. Ian Reese asked if the expenses for coach rambles can be claimed and Ken said that they could.

4.3.4. Ian Reese asked if the RA should pay such expenses and Ken thought that they should. Ian then asked if we could make a profit on coach trips. Ken indicated that he was coming round to the point of view that we should, but the current view of the committee is that we should try to break even.

4.4. *Footpaths Officer* - Derek Humble reported:

After being initially inundated with planning applications on or near Rights of Way in the two months before Christmas, things settled down to a manageable level, then almost dried up so that I had to check that my name was still the contact for Newport City Council.

There have been no contentious issues this year and even the route through Woodward's Farm on the Usk Valley Walk has been finally resolved, waymarked and put into use.

The few complaints of blocked or difficult paths have been easily resolved with the cooperation of Newport City Council.

Quite a few semi rural well used paths have had stiles replaced with kissing gates to enable the less able bodied easier access. This has been possible due to the general demise of livestock farming.

Several blocked paths have been cleared, the most notable being from the Transporter Bridge to Solutia and Alphasteel along the riverbank. This took the volunteer group 5 weeks and allows footpath access from the City to the Gwent Wetlands and along the seawall to Chepstow.

Newport's new pedestrian and cycle bridge and associated footpaths have been completed and are in use.

Our Group has been asked by Llanwern Community Council for support in opposing a major housing development on Cot Hill. At worst two footpaths will have a different outlook so we are not greatly affected and will decline.

There is still an ongoing debate over footpath routing from Penhow to Parc Seymour, but it will no doubt be eventually resolved.

Adrian added that the Countryside Officer for Newport CC is currently digging up old walks leaflets with a view to republication.

4.5. *Rambles Officer* - Adrian Sheehan reported:

It has been another year of excellent walks to suit all tastes and levels of fitness. There have been walks from Pembrokeshire to the Cotswolds and from Somerset to Mid-Wales. In total there have been 91 walks covering 746 miles. It would not be fair to mention individual walks; they were all thoroughly enjoyable but I must mention the group that got back from Mid-Wales at 11 o'clock on Sunday night. That must be some kind of record! Thanks to everyone who has led a walk in the past year. What you do is at the heart of our group. The variety, quality and quantity of our walks is superb. Thanks in particular to those who organised trips, barbecues and other special events. Your efforts added much appreciated extras to our programmes.

The new programme format and the new walk descriptors seem to have worked well. I know we still use the old descriptors as well, habits die hard, but the new format makes it easier to link with other Ramblers Association activities by putting our programme on the RA website. There is always room for improvement and if anyone has any suggestions on how the programme is set out please talk to a committee member.

Encouraging people to take exercise is currently the thing to do. Many organisations contact the ramblers and ask for our help, for walks, for information and just for general advice. The Ramblers Association is encouraging local groups to take part in a scheme called Stepping Stones, details of which were in the last newsletter. Newport City Council is supporting a number of projects aimed at encouraging more people to walk. Members of this group have been involved in discussions and are looking for ways in which we can support the Council. It is good use of our collective expertise and a way to attract new people to walking. In the future there will be more requests for our assistance: the more of us that can do it the easier it is to respond. Anyone who would like to get involved in this type of activity then just mention it to a committee member.

We all like to be well equipped when we go out. Just a reminder that all members of Greater Gwent Ramblers (that includes South Gwent) can get additional discount from the Cotswold store in Llantrisant if they present proof of membership when they use the store.

The next programme (December 2006

March 2007) will be my last one. I am not going anywhere and plan to remain on the committee. I think it is time I gave someone else a chance to put programmes together and I am sure some fresh ideas will drive our walks to greater heights. (Nothing less than AAA grades from now on!). Thanks to everyone for their support, for all the extra walks as printing deadlines approached, for all the folding and putting into envelopes and all of the ideas people have come forward with for walks. I would like to thank in particular Fred Fee for support above and beyond the call of duty for all of the above and for sorting out the many technical near disasters that I got myself into in getting programmes published. New technology is great when it works; when it doesn't, ask Fred.

I wish my successor as Rambles officer all the best and look forward to lots more walking with all of you.

Fred asked the meeting what they thought of getting rid of the SGR grading letters and relying on the RA easy/moderate/strenuous grading, saying that we were trying to accommodate the RA's standardised format to make the use of our programme elsewhere in the RA's system easier. There was not wholesale agreement with the idea. After some discussion the meeting agreed to the grade letters being omitted in the next programme and reviewed thereafter.

4.6. *Membership Secretary* – Val Clark reported:

SGR Membership

Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06	Feb-06	Mar-06	Apr-06	May-06	Jun-06	Jul-06	Aug-06	Sep-06
208	205	202	196	192	194	191	185	190	195	195	193

Area Membership

Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06	Feb-06	Mar-06	Apr-06	May-06	Jun-06	Jul-06	Aug-06	Sep-06
940	934	933	931	925	923	913	911	923	931	939	933

SGR and Area breakdown - September 2006

	Life	Single	Joint	Reduced	Joint Reduced	Total
SGR	1	67	62	37	26	193
Area	6	295	298	166	168	933

SGR and Area membership dropped alarmingly up to and including May this year; however it is starting to rise again and with our increased publicity we hope to regain our 200 status in the near future. It is interesting to note that 46% of our total membership have been members since before the year 2000.

The RA have just announced that members who have let their membership lapse give many reasons for doing so, however the three most popular are:-

1. My group's walks are too long.
2. My group's walks take too long. (would prefer half day walks)
3. My group was not friendly or welcoming.

SGR should perhaps take this information on board

Did you know that the current GB membership is 138,380. No! - neither did I.

Adrian noted that the apparent drop in membership was due to the RA tidying up its database.

4.7. *Publicity Secretary* - Fred Fee reported:

Printer and consumables purchase

It is becoming increasingly difficult to cajole institutions and work-places to allow the use of photocopiers to produce programmes and newsletters. Using Print and Copy shops to do the copying is becoming increasingly expensive. As a result, I made submissions at the meeting of 2 February 2006, and the committee agreed that I should buy a laser printer and consumables for the sole use of South Gwent Ramblers, so that we could produce programmes and newsletters in-house. Subsequently we have used the printer to produce minutes and reports for meetings.

I made an initial purchase of a Brother HL-6250DN laser printer (£209.06), 2500 sheets of Xerox plain A4 laser paper (£13.99), 1500 C5 envelopes and 250 sheets of blue A4 card (£36.27). the printer is capable of automatic duplex (two-sided) printing.

Toner use has been more than I thought. I suspect that the toner initially supplied with the machine is the usual 'starter' toner which looks identical to the one that normally produces 3000 sheets. but is only partly filled. I say this because the initial toner only produced just over 1000 sheets. As a result I have had to buy a new toner cartridge (£51.70).

The original stock of card was used in producing a programme run and a further 250 sheets of card in each of four different colours were obtained (£37.56) to cover four future programme runs. I bought in bulk to avoid postage charges. One 250-sheet lot has already been used.

The printer was also used to print the covering letter for the questionnaire from Newport CC. To cover for when the toner cartridge suddenly empties, I bought a further toner cartridge for £31.99 from a firm that specialises in refilling them. This cartridge should last longer than the Brother one and is cheaper.

Advertising

I placed an A4 poster advertising our walks in Tourist Information Offices (TIOs) in Newport, Caerphilly and Abergavenny, sent a copy of the programme electronically to Monmouthshire CC and to Newport CC Physical Activity Directory, and sent copies in various formats to Keith for the web site.

Brian and I put up a display in the Library for a month and we have had at least one new walker as a result.

The staff at the Newport TIO are very helpful and were always asking if we could produce more copies of the programmes for them, since they disappear fast. In view this, the TIO staff now hold copies of the programme below the desk and give copies of the programme to anyone requesting one as a result of being directed to the desk by the poster. The combined effect of the poster and the new system is to attract more new interest for the use of fewer programmes.

The programme has been electronically distributed to Monmouthshire CC, Newport CC Physical Activity directory and to Keith for the web site.

I was told by Newport Library staff that libraries no longer handle local information sheets for

outside organisations and that I should approach the TIOs! I therefore can't leave any programmes or posters at any libraries. This is a change from a year ago when the Newport TIO and the Library appeared to work co-operatively.

I recently thought of obtaining a sheet folder to ease the effort of producing newsletter, but they cost more than a printer i.e. too much.

4.8. *IT Officer's report* - Fred Fee presented Keith Cooper's report:

Not a very eventful year. The website sits there on the World Wide Web, open for business 24 hours a day and 7 days a week doing most of it for us. I keep it up to date with new walks programs and late changes and answer or pass on e-mail enquiries.

Hit count is up this year, but don't get too excited, I am now part of the support team for some of the software we use and the extra hits could easily be due to people interested in the application of the software and not rambles.

The attempt encourage people to use the website interactively has not been particularly successful, members registered for the forum area and some tried to use it as intended. However, apart from myself, officer participation was sadly lacking and interest has faded away. If any members have any suggestions on improvements they would like to see, please contact me.

The hoped for development of an integrated picture gallery has not yet happened, but is still on the development roadmap for the future. I will be part of that development, as I am also one of the software alpha testers as well as a member of the support team. As soon as a stable version is available I will add it to the website/portal.

I get a significant amount of e-mail direct from the RA and RA Wales addressed to KIP, I have added most of it to the committee area of the forum. I do not print it and snail mail it as I assume the RA has already done that.

5. *Proposed activities*

- 5.1. Adrian's trip to northern France is set for the weekend of May 22.
- 5.2. The following were proposed:
- 5.3. Weekend away to Newquay ñ Ken to organise for October.
- 5.4. A trip to Tewkesbury ñ Ken to investigate.
- 5.5. Ian suggested a linear walk using the Severn Valley Steam Railway as transport between Kidderminster and Bridgenorth and will investigate either as a coach or car ramble.
- 5.6. Ian also proposed a trip to Interlaken and would provide the hotel name, maps and walks, but was not willing to organise it: no volunteer came forward to take on the organisation.
- 5.7. Westonbirt in May ñ Ken to investigate.
- 5.8. Lyme Regis was on the list last year for a possible walk and Lorna asked if it was still a possibility. Fred thought that Ray had proposed it last year.
- 5.9. Brian recalled that he proposed a trip to Wiltshire and may investigate.
- 5.10. Another barbecue was proposed and a new venue will be sought by the committee.
- 5.11. Kath Carter indicated that she was willing to organise further skittles evenings, possibly in February and/or November.
- 5.12. A proposal to go back to Dewstow Grottoes found little favour because it was too soon since the last trip there.

5.13. Colin Wallace is said to be willing to provide a long and a short walk taking in Bristol's maritime area.

5.14. Ian will organise a slide show in January or February.

6. *Election of Officers*

Chairman Ken Phillips

Secretary Ken Phillips

Treasurer Brian Williams

Rambles Officer Christine Platteeuw

IT Officer Keith Cooper

Membership Secretary Val Clark

Footpath Officer Derek Humble

Publicity Officer Fred Fee

Minutes Secretary Fred Fee

Committee Ted Clevely, Kath Carter, Howard Harvey, Adrian Sheehan, Jan Wagenaar, Lorraine Bird and Diana Osman.

We thank Adrian for the hard work that he put into the post of Rambles Officer and welcome Christine in his stead. We also welcome Jan to the committee

7. *Area Council* delegate from the Group is Adrian Sheehan. Adrian also serves on the Area Committee.

8. *Welsh Council* – no volunteers

9. *Auditor* – Alun Booth will continue.

South Gwent Ramblers

Statement of Accounts Year ending 30 September 2006

	£	£	£
Opening balance 1 October 2005			<u>1365.37</u>
Income			
Refund from Area of expenses paid on their behalf	99.74		
Christmas dinner	500.00		
RA Holidays advertisements	80.00		
Allocation from Area — Membership	494.00		
Coach ramble — Pembrokeshire	392.72		
Coach ramble — Weston-super-Mare	280.00		
Skittles evening	10.00		
Cosmeston barbecue	36.70		
Interest — Unity bank	<u>30.86</u>		
		<u>1861.02</u>	
Expenditure			
Expenses on behalf of area	99.74		
Christmas dinner	516.16		
Secretary's expenses	107.82		
Membership Secretary's expenses	10.00		
Internet Secretary's expenses	66.00		
Publicity expenses (programmes, newsletters &c)	407.37		
Purchase of laser printer	209.06		
Newport CC catering for AGM	59.48		
Ruperra Conservation Trust subscription	25.00		
Guide — Llandegfedd Reservoir	20.00		
Coach ramble — Pembrokeshire	320.00		
Coach ramble — Weston-super-Mare	290.00		
Pre-walk expenses	<u>171.56</u>		
		<u>2302.19</u>	
Excess of income over expenditure			<u>(441.17)</u>
Closing balance 30 September 2006			<u>924.20</u>

Balance sheet 30 September 2006

	2006	2005	2004	2003
Unity Bank	<u>924.20</u>	<u>1365.37</u>	<u>1214.15</u>	<u>1717.29</u>

B Williams Esq
Treasurer

T A L Booth Esq
Auditor

11 October 2006