

Members present - Margaret Nunn, Derek Humble, Fred Fee, Linda Westerberg, Roger Binding, Robin Hilhorne, Rowena Adams, Denise Humble, Dave Fereday, Iris Buckingham, Helen Elliott, Peter Elliott, Margaret Woodward, Ann Sandford, Arthur Butt, Jean Butt, Ted Clevely, Paul Coleman, Janet Gillum, John Kingdom, Dawn Bishop, Tony Phelps, Maureen Fee, Brian Turner, Steven Atkins, Sidney Carnell, Lorna Hall, Brian Williams, Ken Phillips, Val Clark, Kath Carter, Koiran James.

1. *Apologies for absence* from Christine Platteeuw, Phyllis Clayton, Joan Lang, Charles Woods, Rod Griffin, Dave Page, Colin Wallace, Sue Shae, Paul Mellor, Richard Attack.

2. *Chairman's welcome* Ken Phillips

Welcome to our AGM. A new venue this year. We held the Area walk here earlier in the year and it proved a success and so we opted for holding our AGM here. We also have a new member in charge of our buffet. When Kath asked to step down from organising our BBQ this year. Koirin kindly offered to step in and has done a first class job. My thanks to Koirin and Val.

2010/2011 has been another good year for South Gwent Ramblers. We could do with a few new members but our hardcore of members remain and have done us proud. Those of you who have suffered ill health during the year we wish you a speedy recovery.

Finally my thanks to the Officers and Committee for their help throughout the year.

3. *Minutes of last meeting* were adopted

4. *Matters arising from the minutes* All matters covered elsewhere in these minutes

5. *Officers' reports*

5.1. *Secretary* Ken Phillips

Last year I had to inform you that The Gwent Association for the Blind was disbanding in December and therefore we would not be able to continue to lead walks for them. I am pleased to be able to confirm that Tony Bayliss has reintroduced them albeit on a smaller scale. You can contact Tony by email at ken.bayliss@gmail.com

The Ruperra Trust are another organisation which we support. The castle is still up for sale and will probably remain so in the near future. The Friends of Ruperra continue with their excellent work in the grounds and we must find time to visit and check on our memorial bench.

Our social events were a success once again. Our Boules Evening took place this year up at the Wheatsheaf, Llanhennock and that wily old fox Arthur Butt took the honours with team of Iris, Dinah and Val. It was a good night and will be repeated In 2012. If anyone has any other ideas on future social events (other than bog snorkelling) please let me know.

Ken Added that it is 10 years since the memorial bench was placed at Ruperra.

5.2. *Treasurer* Brian Williams (for accounts - see the end of these minutes)

We receive payment for our expenses from the Area Treasurer, based on a budget figure we submit prior to the 30th September. Whilst this involves a certain amount of guesswork, as exact income and expenditure figures are still unresolved, in general the amount requested meets our annual expenditure. This year we will be working on an amount of £866.

You will note the various coach rambles all balanced out exactly. The Westonbirt trip had £72 banked in the previous year's account, hence the discrepancy.

The Area Ramble, which our Group organised, plus refreshments on conclusion, cost us £71.85 which we are endeavouring to reclaim from the Area account.

5.3. *Footpaths Officer* Derek Humble

Fortunately, the past twelve months have been relatively quiet with regard to footpath problems.

Of the few queries which have arisen, reported either through our website or from Ramblers, London, they have mostly been resolved.

A well used path on the sea wall at Goldcliff has been incorporated into the PROW system via a Definitive Map Modification Order and will become part of the Wales Coastal Path. Two other paths in Nash and Peterstone have been created in furtherance of this objective.

Our Group has objected to a proposed site for wind turbines at Redwick due to the enormous size of the towers on such a flat site which is on the flight path of wildfowl accessing the Wetlands and surrounding areas.

Newport City Council's Countryside Department has been a victim of recent cutbacks and no longer has a PROW Officer. Subsequently, correspondence from the 'now known as' Green Team in the Street Scene department has all but dried up.

However, good use is still being made of the volunteer groups, the Tuesday group alone having installed 52 stiles and 74 kissing gates plus other sundry work since the onset of ROWIP funds two years ago, saving about £32,000 in contractors fees.

The Old Iron Bridge at Draethen was officially reopened in September by the Mayors of Newport and Caerphilly, on whose borders it sits.

5.3.1. Ken thanked current walks leaders, especially those long walkers who led short walks for us, and made a plea for new walks leaders. Short walkers have for many reasons been short (no pun intended) on the ground. It must be pretty disheartening for the leaders when they have given up their day and find that no-one turns up for them to lead. Let us hope that 2012 will have better turnouts.

5.3.2. Ken also noted that we have changed the designation of our walks to read Long, Medium and Short. What this means is that Long walks will be 9 or more miles, Medium 6-8 miles and Short 3-5 miles. The Short walks will usually be easy walking and possibly with a theme involved.

5.3. *Rambles Officer* Dave Fereday

Since the AGM in November last year we have completed, or about to complete, three programmes. We have walked a total of 669 miles. This was split as follows:

- 451 miles for the long Sunday walks
- 156 miles for the shorter Sunday walks
- 62 miles for the Wednesday evening walks

In addition we had day coach trips to St Davids where members of the Pembrokeshire Ramblers led on the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, our traditional trip incorporating a ride on a preserved steam railway to appease Ian and myself which this year was to the Mid Hants line and a return visit to the Windsor area. Additionally there were trips to the sporting Manor at Oakhampton on Dartmoor in February and the recent trip to the Isle of Wight. Also a group ten hardy souls spent 10 days in Glen Coe and Torridon bagging a few Munros on walks led by Fred and myself.

The total mileage walked was up by approximately 16%. One explanation for this was due to the fact that during this past calendar year for the summer we introduced our new look programme. This in short meant we had two walks every weekend.

It meant that for the long walkers, as before, they could walk every Sunday. Similarly, for the shorter walkers, as on previous programmes, they can continue to walk every other week. What the new innovation was that on the previously blank weekends for the shorter walkers, a new shorter walk was introduced. This filled a void for what Ken affectionately calls the elderly and the infirm. Consequently, we now offer three distinct types of walks namely:

- Short 3 to 5 miles easy or leisurely
- Medium 5 to 8 miles easy or moderate
- Long 8 miles plus moderate or strenuous

It was generally agreed that this revamp was a success. However, to have a similar successful programme in the future it needs participation by Group members to lead the walks. There have unfortunately been some unforeseen circumstances, particularly effecting the shorter walkers in respect of both illness and injury, and a consequence there is a dearth of leaders able to lead the shorter walks. I am perfectly happy to continue with the role of Walks Coordinator. However coupled with the fact that I no longer live in Newport and often drive direct to the start of the long walks and consequently very rarely see any of the shorter walkers, I would

suggest that a regular short walker acts as a short Walk Coordinator to encourage new leaders. Alternatively there could be regular gaps in the programme.

5.4. *Membership Secretary* Val Clark

South Gwent Ramblers membership

Oct 10	Nov 10	Dec 10	Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11	Sep 11
178	176	177	175	179	176	174	174	170	167	167	158

Area membership

Oct 10	Nov 10	Dec 10	Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11	Sep 11
890	885	876	872	879	871	857	857	876	871	869	859

Our membership figures are not great, but it appears that Ramblers Association Membership throughout the country is also falling dramatically. The economic downturn is partly to blame but not the underlying factor. The Ramblers Association have recently formed a partnership with HF Holidays in the hope this will help to increase our membership. They will continue to do business with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays but not to the same extent. I think this is more of a financial deal rather than a membership one.

We have had our share of new members during the year but this has been offset by loss of quite a few of our older members. We must continue our efforts to attract new members and at the same time keep hold of our existing ones.

- 5.4.1. Kath Carter wondered if the the rise in membership fees was to blame for the decrease in membership. Ken said that it was a factor, but not the main factor.
- 5.4.2. Lorna Hall asked whether the Ramblers Association sent membership reminders. Ken answered that they did.
- 5.4.3. Koiran James asked if it was possible to to put posters in supermarkets? Fred replied that the space for advertising in supermarkets is limited and usually provided for one-off events.
- 5.4.4. Koiran also asked if South Gwent Ramblers could arrange evening walks like those of the U3A. Ken said that we have evening walks on Wednesdays in the Summer.
- 5.4.5. Ken noted that the walks are largely lead by older members. Members had brought to Kens attention the fact that the average age South Gwent Ramblers is going up. There ensued a discussion about the latter topic. Ken noted that, no matter what the starting age, groups seem to age together without attracting an adequate number of younger members. The difficulty with attracting youngsters is that they have other interests, for example sports, cycling, boarding. Dawn suggested that the Ramblers Association should go to the U3A, the Women's Institute and like organisations so that at least their members could join the Ramblers Association to help pay for the footpath maintenance done by the Ramblers Association. Arthur suggested that we could lead walks for Local Councils, to which Derek replied that the system is now different with Council walks being lead by footpath Volunteers. However, Newport had their own walks and we could consider volunteering to lead them. Peter Elliott suggested thinking about our unique selling points and asking the Ramblers Association for advice.

5.5. *Publicity Secretary* Fred Fee

Fred said that he had, as usual got walks from Dave, made programmes, printed and distributed them to members and to Newport and Abergavenny Tourist Information Offices. Got newsletter and mini-newsletter from Ken, typeset and distributed it with the programmes.

- 5.5.1. Fred will look into libraries, Tourist Information Offices and supermarkets as a source of publicity.

5.6. *IT Officer's report* Fred Fee

The Ramblers web site now uses a map-based Walks Finder. All our walks now show up with an icon at the point of interest of the walk.

I built a new South Gwent Ramblers web site since I could not update the old site myself and since the software used for updating the old site is now obsolete and not being updated to keep up with changes in the structure of the web.

Keith Cooper has now agreed that the new site will supersede the old site and that it will revert to the old web address. He is busy at the moment and will get in touch when he has the time to investigate the changes necessary to make this come about. The Ramblers site has been updated to reflect the new address.

6. *Activities*

- 6.1. Sunday 26 February. Dawn Bishop said that Newport Outdoor Group will organise a trip to the **Outdoor Show** at the NEC and invite South Gwent Ramblers. Ken offered to find a bus and Dawn offered to liaise. Jean Butt said that Pontypool Ramblers members may be interested and Dawn said that she would be happy to accommodate team.
- 6.2. 5-9 February. Ken reminded the meeting of the trip to **Okehampton**.
- 6.3. Thursday 16 February. Fred has organised a **slide show** of South Gwent Ramblers photos from 2011 — Newport Civic Centre at 7pm.
- 6.4. Thursday 22 March. A **skittles match** is booked for 7:30pm at Whitehead. Ring Ken to book.
- 6.5. 11-15 June. Derek Humble can organise midweek walking at **Llangollen** for with four days of walks (6 to 10 miles) and possibly a walk on the way up. No major events conflict on that week. Ken asked if there was a chance of group deals on hotel rates. Derek said that he had approached local hotels, but the ones with suitable rates were too small. However, Derek could book at a local private hostel at good rates. In any case, members were free to organise their own accommodation which was plentiful in the locale of the hostel.
- 6.6. 16 June for a week. Dave can organise a week of harder walks in Scotland, north-east of Loch Lomond at **Crianlarich**. Stay as a group at the Youth Hostel or organise your own accommodation.
- 6.7. Ken noted that we normally organise two coach trips with the first in June. He asked the meeting if it were OK to miss out the June trip in view of the Derek and Dave's proposed events. The answer was "Yes".
- 6.8. Sunday 8 July provisionally. Dave suggested a trip to **Dartmouth** with long and short walks. Ken will contact the Palace Hotel about an evening meal.
- 6.9. Thursday 19 July. Dave will organise a **Boules** evening at the Wheatsheaf, Llanhennock and hope for better weather this time.
- 6.10. Sunday 5 August. The **barbecue at Tintern** after a short walk.
- 6.11. Sunday 9 September. Coach trip to the Long Mynd at **Church Stretton** for long and short walks organised by Paul Mellor **OR** to **Bosherton**.
 - 6.11.1. Linda said that she had been to Bosherton and was impressed with it. If we went to Bosherton, Dave suggested that we invite Pembroke Ramblers to join us. Ken will look into it.
 - 6.11.2. Derek suggested that we could do both trips with Church Stretton in May.
- 6.12. October coach trip (but not half term). Several venues were suggested and discussion narrowed the choice to Newquay or Weymouth. A show of hands clearly showed a preference for Weymouth.
- 6.13. Members suggested other suitable destinations for future events: Elan Valley, Slimbridge, Aberglasny Botanical Gardens, Westonbirt at Christmas (beautiful lights). Margaret Woodward has been on 23 HF holidays which were generally excellent and suggested that we go on one as a group.
- 6.14. Fred acting as Devil's Advocate noted that the events will occur when otherwise up to ten local walks would be offered. Is that too many? Ken said that we provide events that are popular with

the Group. Dave said that there were not many weeks when new members turned up and existing members were not put off by the current arrangements. Tony was pleasantly surprised at the scope of events. Adrian said that we could arrange walks for when other events were on if there were a demand.

7. *AOB*

Koiran proposed that we should apply for lottery funding along the lines of the U3A who receive grants for coach trips on the premise that they are saving fuel by not using cars. Linda said that the Horticultural Club received a grant and did not know what to do with it. Dawn will look into the rules, regulations and provisions which constrain applying for such a grant.

8. *Election of Officers to the Committee*

Chairman - Ken Phillips

Secretary - Ken Phillips

Auditor - Alun Booth

Treasurer - Brian Williams

Rambles Officer - Dave Fereday

IT Officer - Fred Fee

Membership Secretary - Val Clark

Footpath Officer - Derek Humble

Publicity Officer - Fred Fee

Minutes Secretary - Fred Fee

Area Representatives - Adrian Sheehan, Fred Fee

Committee members:

Brian Turner, Adrian Sheehan, Dawn Bishop, Tony Phelps