

Members present - Jan Wagenaar, Derek Humble, Denise Humble, Gary Morgan, Paul Mellor, Steven Atkins, Helen Elliott, Peter Elliott, David Page, Pam Jones, Joan Lang, Roger Binding, Sid Carnell, Ken Poole, John Kindom, Adrian Sheehan, Helen Keyhoe, Dave Fereday, Lorna Hall, Iris Buckingham, Jean Butt, Mary Raymond, Linda Westerberg, Doug Cocksedge, Sandra Cocksedge, Sheila Holmes, Charles Goodread, Valerie Clark, Colin Wallace, Fred Fee, Sue Shae, Ken Phillips.

Apologies for absence from Phyllis Clayton, Maureen Fee, Margaret Nunn, Kath Carter, Gill Griffin and Jan Lavis.

1. *Chairman's welcome* Ken Phillips

Welcome once again to our AGM. I trust you enjoyed your walk and the buffet. My thanks to Sue and Colin for organising the buffet and to Roger Binding for our walk.

2013/14 has seen SGR achieve the majority of its aims and with the exception of our BBQ enjoyed a full walks and social event programme. There is still scope for improvement and I am sure 2015 will see us do just that.

2013/14 was not kind to us all and we lost many friends this year. We will try and give the families who suffered these sad events our support where ever we can. Those of our members who are struggling with ill-health are also in our thoughts and we sincerely hope 2015 will see an improvement for you.

Finally I would thank members of our committee and our walks leaders for their continued support.

2. *Minutes of last AGM* were adopted

3. *Matters arising from the minutes* Ken noted that £50 had been received from Ramblers wWorldwide Holidays Walking Partnership.

4. *Ramblers Association Governance proposals* reported by Fred Fee

Despite being obscurely entitled "A new governance structure for the Ramblers Working group proposals for discussion October 2014", the proposals document contains some sensible proposals and makes clear that they are the thoughts of the working group only: the views of Ramblers Association members are expected to illuminate and thereby change the proposals.

The proposals arise from a recognition that the Ramblers Association is in slow decline and try to seek ways of addressing that decline. There is also a feeling among interested members that the current structure of the Ramblers Association can and should be improved. Legal constraints, for example Charity Commission regulation, must be taken into account and mean that some tightening of procedures are needed.

The proposals deal with the running of all levels the Ramblers Association, and the relationship between Head Office including the Welsh Office, the Areas and the Groups. They recognise that members feel disengaged from the running of the Ramblers Association as witness by the rising number of Officer vacancies in Areas and Groups; they seek to remedies for this. Also Groups feel that the work that they are expected to do on behalf of the Ramblers Association is onerous and some have even discussed disbanding: a remedy for this is also sought.

Examples of proposals

- Members should be allocated to an Area for the purpose of democracy and communications.
- Area will send information from all its Groups to members to encourage them to join the right Group.
- Group activities will be co-ordinated and led by Area. I don't think that this refers to social activities, but to the likes of footpaths maintenance.
- Groups will have to sign up to an "invariable group agreement" which sets out how the Group should operate so as to be able to use the Ramblers' name and receive support. It will deal with the code of conduct, dispute resolution, insurance and financial controls. Groups will have to have an elected Chair and Treasurer who will be responsible for ensuring that the agreement is upheld. The Chair is responsible to the area for ensuring that the parts of the Ramblers Association mission in the Group mission are undertaken.

- Outside the “invariable group agreement”, Groups are free to operate flexibly.
- Proposals for a funding allocation for each Group will be based on a fixed amount, an amount dependent of Group size, a further amount based on the number of members allocated to the Area who have not joined a Group.
- Groups need to report to Area once a year using a standard on-line form.
- If a Group or Groups are concerned about the operations of Area, the members can trigger an investigation by a petition signed by 10% or more of the members. (Anarchy?).

4.1. Roger asked whether the Group Membership Secretaries would be redundant since new members were allocated to Groups by Greater Gwent Area. Adrian said that this was unlikely and that Area would continue to deal with problems raised by Groups, and overall Area financial considerations.

4.2. As an added subject, Ken asked about circulating the annual Area Newsletter which some members would like to see. Fred agreed to circulate members when it is available and to remind members that Area Newsletters are located under the Archive menu of the South Gwent Ramblers web site.

5. *Officers' reports*

5.1. *Secretary* Colin Wallace

We continue to support the Ruperra Trust. The castle is still up for sale. The Ruperra Castle Preservation Trust continues to keep in touch with Caerphilly Council and the Heritage Minister to look at ways of using Ruperra for public benefit rather than private profit. The Friends of Ruppera continue their excellent work to improve the paths and woodland.

Apart from the summer barbecue that had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions all of our other events were well supported and a great success, this includes the breaks away and the daily coach trips.

The skittles evening and the boules evening this year were close and well fought in the right spirit. The winner of the skittles was Ken and a team of Ken, Jeff, Iris, Mag, Val and Ken again were the winners of the Boules.

On a sad note this year we lost two South Gwent Ramblers, firstly Arthur Butt passed away after a long illness and then later on in the year Andrew Wilmot's wife passed away, both a great loss to us as a group and further afield the Ramblers Association.

At this time it is appropriate to thank all the members who have helped out over the last year, this includes the committee, walk leaders and social events organisers. A special thanks to Roger for leading the walk today and to those people who helped to prepare the refreshments today, hopefully I have not missed anyone out.

Finally to all members please let the committee know today if there is anything you would like put down for discussion at our next meeting in January.

5.2. *Treasurer* Ken Phillips presented the accounts (see the end of these minutes for the accounts)

5.2.1. David Page asked if it were possible for the accounts to include figures from the previous year to appear in the current account so as to ease comparison between the two years' figures. Ken agreed to do this in future.

5.3. *Footpaths Officer* Derek Humble

The proposed siting of a 100 metre wind turbine at Clearwell Farm, Penrte Poeth, would ruin the countryside views to and from Ruppera and the Ridgeway. As the planning department have been so proactive in the past regarding maintaining this green belt between Newport and Cardiff I have appealed for consistency on this occasion.

Of the two main plans for solar panels at Wentwood and Llanmartin, the one at Wentwood has been passed, much to the dismay of over a hundred objections from all levels of society.

The situation concerning misdirection signs at Iron Bridge Cottage, Draethen, which looked likely to be resolved has not moved ahead and Caerphilly Council do not appear to be actively promoting the correct legal line of the path.

The claim for bridleway status on footpaths reported two years ago at Llandevaud Mill near Langstone, has been to appeal and one route has been allowed subject to no objections. I and many other parties are going to object as one footpath will be ruined by horses if this goes ahead. The introduction of new evidence of use to

the Appeal Court was not very convincing but the Inspector said he could not rule out the possibility of there having been an access for horses in the past.

The objection by myself and others to the siting of a 77 metre tall wind turbine between Langstone and Llanwern, which would detract from the fine views from the site of Llanwern Hall has been upheld. This is due to a protection covenant of the views to and from the site of the Hall.

The volunteer group have been kept busy all year with path maintenance and refurbishing and replacing steps and handrails, repair of fencing and implementing methods to prevent access to paths by horses and motorcycles.

5.3.1. Peter heard that Prince Charles was worried that the voice of rural communities was not being heard. Huge amounts of money are being spent on rural wind farms and solar farms in the face of scientific evidence that they are too inefficient and unreliable for the job. He felt that the Ramblers Association should take the scientific line on these matters. Peter added that we should get away from opposing the power farms on grounds of affecting scenic views and bring in the more informed scientific evidence. The meeting agreed. Ken and Adrian said that they would take this to Area for discussion. Adrian said that wind farms have been discussed at Welsh Council Level.

5.4. *Rambles Officer* Dave Fereday

5.4.3. Dave noted that a few walks were missing: in particular, the 18 January walk is very strenuous and missing a concurrent medium walk Dave elicited some positive response from the meeting.

5.4.4. Ken suggested that we keep the Summer evening walks and the this was endorsed by the members present.

5.4.5. In Summer walks programme, Dave had agreed to arrange alternate week's evening walks alternately on Wednesdays and Thursdays to avoid a clash with the popular Newport History Group meetings. Ken asked how the arrangement fared. Dave said that it went well and caused no confusion. Dave suggested that the arrangement remain as did Ken and the meeting agreed.

5.4.6. Ken noted that the long walks were well attended but medium and short walks were not. He asked what could be done and volunteered to supply some short walks. Joan, as she had done at the last committee meeting further observed that medium walks seemed to be better attended when they were on the same days as the more strenuous and the longer strenuous walks. Some members who did not want to go on these walks or were unable to do so were happy to go on the alternative medium walk. Derek noted that the best attendance was for a Medium walk on a day when there was no corresponding very strenuous walk, but agreed that Joan's observations usually held good. Lorna suggested a new category of very strenuous for walks and Dave responded that we follow the Ramblers Association guidelines when labelling the vigour of walks. This standardisation of the labelling was to help Ramblers Association members to assess walks in the whole of Britain if they wished to go on them. It was a good idea but hard to implement in the circumstances. Jean that two walks on the same day start together and then split into two differently-graded walks along the route.

5.4.7. Roger said that walks programme does not include walks on Bank Holidays: nevertheless unofficial walks are often mooted for interested members ad hoc near the day and take place on the Bank Holidays. He suggested that we try to fill Bank Holiday weekends with walks in the walks programme. The meeting agreed.

5.4.8. Dave agreed to try to incorporate the ideas into the next walks programme.

5.5. *Membership Secretary* Joan Lang

Joan reported that membership at the end of October was 141 (one less than last year) with at least one pending. Eight potential members were on the last walk. Greater Gwent Area recorded 842 members which figure was slightly down. Generally membership was steady over the year.

5.6. *Publicity Secretary and IT Officer* Fred Fee

A large part of publicity in olden days was the distribution of a bundle of programmes and a poster to each of Abergavenny and Newport Tourist Information Offices.

Nowadays, the ubiquitous Internet provides most of the interaction with prospective new members and others interested parties by virtue of a query form on each of our sites and a variety of features on the Ramblers Association site. I answered many queries or passed them on to the relevant South Gwent Ramblers Officers. During the year I updated the query forms so that queries are routed automatically to the right Officer.

You will also be aware that hopeful providers of holidays and other services use the query forms on the Ramblers Association site and are introduced to our members via the email circulation list.

As usual, I received filled-in Ramblers Association walks spread-sheets from the ever hard-working Dave Fereday, and produced and distributed the walks programmes with the help of volunteer staffers. I also updated both the web sites with the walks data, changes to the committee and also data about the many events that South Gwent Ramblers provide for members.

The Ramblers Association changed the walks spread-sheet to rather larger-than-comfortable proportions during the year, giving both me and Dave the joy of discovery. I revised the spread-sheet to aid programme production and sent a copy of the revised spread-sheet to Dave.

If such joy wasn't enough the Ramblers Association also introduced the joy of a challenge by totally changing the way in which walks are uploaded onto the Ramblers Association website. I look forward to using this for the first time soon.

Not yet content, the Ramblers Association then conspired to engender even more joy by introducing a new feature on their web site, namely space for each group to set up a mini web site of their own. Having digested reams on on-line instructions for entering data into our mini-site using a browser, I can reveal that South Gwent Ramblers now have a small illustrated area on the Ramblers Association site that says just how wonderful we are and refers viewers to our more wholesome sites for detailed information about every aspect of our endeavours.

Mundane events like maintaining the laser printer also took time.

Now, if that wasn't enough, and by popular demand, the South Gwent Ramblers 2015 calendar is now available.

5.7. *Area Representative* Adrian Sheehan

The Greater Gwent groups are continuing to run successful walks programmes. Membership has been static. This reflects the general situation in Wales and across the rest of the UK.

There have been no major issues affecting groups, the most significant one seems to be the development of the Circuit of Wales site in North Gwent. Thanks to those who have taken part in the consultations to try to resolve matters in the best interests of walkers.

There has been further reorganisation at the Cardiff office. Gwenda Owen has moved on. New Officers are now in post.

Peter Hedges (Pontypool) has volunteered as the Area Membership Secretary.

A proposal was passed agreeing the setting up of a consultation with the membership over how delegates from Areas and Groups should be chosen and asking WCEC to bring proposals to change the constitution at the next Welsh Council. The main difference is to alter the way representatives are selected from representing areas of work to better reflecting the size of Groups and Areas in terms of membership. There is a consultation document which has been circulated asking for feedback by 8th November.

In October there was a meeting of volunteers in Cardiff to discuss Rambler's activities. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the idea of 'progression' walks, and explain why a closer link between 'Let's Walk Cymru's' health and community walks and Ramblers groups would be desirable, to gather volunteers' ideas, opinions and experiences around this, to ask for volunteer feedback on the content and tone of draft resources and to ask volunteers how they, or their area or group think they might like to be involved with this project.

Publicising these walks will be linked with the next Big Welsh Walk. Next year's Big Welsh Walk will be held for the whole month of May. The Ramblers Cymru can advertise all group walks that will take place in May (both your usual walks and any 'extras') on the Big Welsh Walk map on the website, which they will promote as widely as they can!

This will tie in with the 80th anniversary of the Ramblers. The theme for 2015 will work with the idea of 'walkers from 8 – 80' and encourage walkers of all ages to get involved. With this in mind, groups are asked to consider holding some 'family friendly' walks during the month, particularly over the two bank holiday weekends.

Ramblers Cymru are talking to several potential partners about the Big Welsh Walk – including the YHA who may be able to offer discounts in May if groups would like to start or end any walks at a youth hostel.

The Ramblers Association has several business partners. The relationship with HF Holidays has lapsed and the tie with Ramblers Worldwide has been rekindled.

6. *Activities*

Activities already in the pipeline

- 6.1. **SGR Christmas Dinner (11 december)** is booked at the Newport Golf Club after Parc Golf Club insisted on onerous conditions for a booking and Len Sadler recommended Newport GC's new caterers. The cost is £14.50pp.
 - 6.2. **Peter's Christmas walk and lunch (14 December)** Peter has booked Weatherspoons definitely for 20, and provisionally for up to 28, and they remembered us from last Year! The cost is just over £9 - and that includes a pint. Arrive by train for the walk or dine only, Peter will collect £10 to include a tip. Arrive by train to Ebbw Vale.
 - 6.3. **SGR Christmas walk and lunch (30 December)** Fred has booked the Cripple Crrek, Raglan and has, with Ted, pre-walked a 5-mile walk. The format is as before with a choice of main courses and a choice of desserts. Pay on the day.
 - 6.4. Ken suggested another trip to Okehampton but the suggestion was not favoured and will not be pursued. Ken then through the discussion open for suggestions for March/April/May.
 - 6.5. **Buddleigh Salterton (17 May)** came out top after Linda suggested the Exmouth area where Mary had a short walk that could be readily extended. Dave volunteered to plan a longer walk.
 - 6.6. **Oxford coach trip (12 July)** The location was suggested by Joan. Ken remembered a walk there led by Derek who volunteered a walk for the trip.
 - 6.7. **Boules at the Wheatsheaf (July)** Dave will book our Boules evening when the Wheatsheaf lets him know when the rinks are available.
 - 6.8. **Barbecue at Tintern (August)** Derek still has the walk to do!
 - 6.9. **Guernsey week away (5-9 October)** Ken will try to book the Pandora Hotel (£285 each for a double, ten singles at no extra). The trip is by coach to the ferry terminal, then fast ferry, with a coach available on the island.
 - 6.10. John Kingdom asked us to consider the Masonic Hall in Dock Street, Newport as a venue for the Christmas Dinner, recommending the quality and value of the meals.
7. *Election of Officers to the Committee* The current members agreed to stand again, with Ralph Jackson and Steven Atkins volunteering as additional committee members. Steven wished to promote short walks. The meeting agreed that the current members should continue and that the volunteers should join the committee.

Chairman - Ken Phillips

Vice Chairwoman - Phyllis Clayton

Secretary - Colin Wallace

Treasurer - Ken Phillips

Rambles Officer - Dave Fereday

IT Officer - Fred Fee

Membership Secretary - Joan Lang

Footpath Officer - Derek Humble

Publicity Officer - Fred Fee

Minutes Secretary - Fred Fee

Area Representatives - Adrian Sheehan, Fred Fee

Auditor - Denise Humble

Committee members:

Adrian Sheehan, Roger Binding, Brian Turner, Ralph Jackson, Steven Atkins

8. *AOB*

- 8.1. John Kingdom noted that a recent walk finished in the dark with several walkers unprepared and without torches. He suggested a footnote in the walks programme for safety, particularly in Winter, asking each walker to pack a torch, whistle, basic first aid and perhaps a light wind shelter. Adrian thought that standards were set out in old programmes. Fred will check.
- 8.2. Peter thanked our Chairman for the organising he does on behalf of the group. On our Barmouth trip Peter made a collection from the members and purchased some restaurant vouchers. These were then handed to Ken. Ken thanked the members and said he was pleased to receive them and would put them to good use. However the members' thanks were more than adequate.

South Gwent Ramblers Statement of Accounts

2013/2014

Opening Balance & 1st October ber 2013 **1128.66**

Income

1st Half Year Area Allocation	395.00
Nov 13 Prog Advert - Ramblers Holidays	60.00
Mar 14 Prog Advert - Ramblers Holidays	60.00
Bank Interest 2014	1.44
2nd Half Year Area Allocation	395.00

Total Income **911.44**

Expenditure

SGR Annual General Meeting Costs	85.60
Prewalk Expense	130.96
Ruperra Trust	25.00
SGR Walks Programmes	142.89
SGR Newsletters & Publicity	100.00
Wales Air Ambulance	50.00
Admin	123.06

Total Expenditure **657.51**

Excess of Income over Expenditure **253.93**

Closing Balance # 30th Sept 2014 **1382.59**

Mr K.Phillips

Mrs D Humble

Treasurer

Auditor

Dated