

## **Ramblers Association South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire Area**

### **Minutes of the AGM held on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 at Totley, Sheffield.**

These minutes will be submitted for approval at the 2012 AGM.

#### **Welcome**

Julia Evison, Chair of the Sheffield 20-30s Group, welcomed everyone to the AGM. She introduced Lee Farmery, Area Chair, David Gadd, Area Secretary, Gavin Johns, Area Treasurer, David Hey, Area President and Janet Davis, Senior Policy Officer, Ramblers.

#### **Present**

Forty-nine members.

#### **Apologies**

Roly Smith, Cath MacKay, Neill Schofield, Jennifer Matkin, Allen Pestell, Ruth Law, Ivor Wilson, Wendy Atkinson.

#### **Notification of any other business**

The Rotherham Group requested an opportunity to speak.

#### **Appointment of Tellers**

Mike Pye and John Harker.

#### **Area President's Address**

David Hey said that last year we celebrated an important anniversary, the 75<sup>th</sup> year since the foundation of the Ramblers, and that in 2011 we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peak District National Park, the first in the country.

He said that it was appropriate that we should recall this Area's influence on these great events. In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the role of Bert Ward in the success of the rambling movement. In 1900 he founded the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers, the first rambling club in Britain for ordinary men and women, and in 1926 he was the inspiration for the creation of a federation of 15 Sheffield rambling clubs. This federation played the leading role in the foundation in 1931 of the National Council of Ramblers Federations at a meeting at Longshaw Lodge. This meeting was convened by Bert Ward and Stephen Norton, the Secretary of the Sheffield Ramblers Federation. This event was the real beginning of the Ramblers Association. The title – the National Council of Ramblers' Federation – was unwieldy and unattractive, and so in 1935 it was changed to the Ramblers Association. So in 2011 we should really be celebrating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our national organisation.

David said that Longshaw was an appropriate venue. The Duke of Rutland was notoriously hostile to ramblers. In 1924 he reneged on an agreement to allow limited numbers of ramblers to walk on Froggatt Edge and he even stopped one of his gamekeepers from earning a little extra money from selling refreshments to ramblers. So, when he was forced to sell the Longshaw estate in 1927 to pay off death duties, the news was greeted with delight and a fund-raising committee was formed to purchase Longshaw Lodge and park. Bert Ward described this as 'essentially a ramblers committee', which included Stephen Morton and Phil Barnes. It also included Ethel Gallimore, the future Mrs Haythornthwaite, the first secretary of the Sheffield Association for the Protection of Local Scenery, founded in 1924 and absorbed three years later in the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Ethel and Gerald Haythornthwaite led the campaign for the creation of National Parks in Britain, and of course the CPRE and the Ramblers were prominent in the national movement which led to the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and to the opening, on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1951, of the Peak National Park, the first of the original ten.

David concluded by saying that we are going through a difficult period and we will naturally be concerned with pressing problems today, but we should start our proceedings with a celebration of these two magnificent achievements in which our local area played such an important part.

#### **Approval of minutes of 2010 AGM**

It was proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Philip Ryder that the minutes be accepted. Agreed unanimously.

#### **Matters Arising**

Lee Farmery said that the Dearne Valley Green Heart Project, described last year by Nicola Scothern, from the RSPB, was now up and running.

Lee also reported that Area's motion to General Council re dissatisfaction with the Concerned Ramblers group had not

been taken up but that the Board of Trustees had noted our concerns.

### **Approval of Annual Report**

Copies of the report had been distributed. Les Seaman, Access Officer, noted that a concern at the moment was whether access to woodlands would be maintained if they were sold-off or leased, as the government is intending.

John Harker, Footpath Officer, reported that the Dearne Bridge replacement had been put on the back-burner because of the cost implications to Barnsley MBC, that the missing bridge over the Torne in Doncaster MBC was due to be replaced by the end of March (the Doncaster Group are holding a celebratory walk from the bridge on 10<sup>th</sup> May) and that the locked gates on Dunford footpath 6 had been overcome with separate access for walkers.

Terry Howard, Publicity Officer, pointed out that the Ramblers are still seen as an old person's organisation and that we should all, including young members, be proud to be Ramblers. He said that it was important to maintain a high profile, with events such as that at Longshaw, the excellent walks Programmes being published by Groups, etc and that we should look for other ways of increasing our profile such as the Walking Out Project, Get Walking, etc.

S Chandler congratulated Area Council on producing an Annual Report that was concise but detailed and proposed that it be accepted. This was seconded by J Gathercole and carried unanimously.

### **Approval of Annual Accounts**

Gavin Johns briefly went through the accounts and said that he would be happy to answer any questions now or later. Gavin Johns proposed and Les Seaman seconded that the accounts be accepted. This was carried unanimously.

### **Vote of Thanks to the Auditor**

Gavin proposed a vote of thanks to the auditor, Eric Copley. This was seconded by David Gadd and carried unanimously.

Gavin then said that Eric would like to cease auditing our accounts and that if anyone knew someone who would do them then please let him know.

### **Membership Drive**

Lee Farmery said that central office aimed to increase membership and that this was mainly up to Areas and Groups to achieve. Central office had agreed that subscriptions from any new members recruited in March, and paying by direct debit, would be reimbursed to the Groups.

Terry Howard (Sheffield Group) pointed out that the real membership growth was coming from the younger groups. He said that we needed to maintain a high profile, to continue campaigning and lobbying, etc. A concern, however, was the high membership fee in comparison to other walking groups.

David Gadd (Doncaster Group) said that their Publicity Officer had recently sent a press release to local radio stations and the press. This had resulted in an immediate response from one radio station, leading to an interview and a 1-2 minute clip after the news throughout one day – of negligible value? A few days later another radio station offered a 30 minute live interview (interrupted by music and the news) which gave a good opportunity to describe the benefits of walking to physical and mental health (see 'Walking facts and figures 1: the benefits of walking' on the Ramblers website) including, for example, that active people spend 38% fewer days in hospital, and an opportunity to promote the Group's website, which now includes a link to GetWalking.org. The Doncaster Group also provide walks as part of Doncaster's Walking Festival, which provides excellent free publicity for the Group.

### **Elections**

Area President: David Hey Proposed Lee Farmery, seconded by David Gadd. Agreed unanimously.

At this point the Chair expressed his condolences to the family of Ken Gibson, who had served the Doncaster Group, and Area, very well for many years.

Area Vice Presidents: Roy Cannon, Roy Bullen, John Bunting, Cath MacKay, Mike Pye and Roly Smith were proposed and seconded, en bloc, by Gavin Johns and Terry Howard. Agreed unanimously.

Area Officers: Lee Farmery, Chair, (David Gadd/Terry Howard); David Gadd, Secretary, (Les Seaman/Terry Howard); Gavin Johns, Treasurer, (David Gadd/Neill Schofield) were re-elected.

Area Sub-Officers: Neill Schofield, News Editor, (David Gadd/Lee Farmery); Les Seaman, Access, (Neill Schofield/Terry Howard) were re-elected.

Carol Whittaker, IT Officer, (Lee Farmery/David Gadd) was elected.

Jennifer Matkin, Membership, (Lee Farmery/David Gadd) was elected.

There were no nominations for the positions of Countryside Officer, Footpath Officer or Publicity Officer. These were

referred back to Area Council.

Thanks were expressed to John Harker for his work over footpath matters for the past years.

Members Without Portfolio Cath MacKay (David Gadd/Les Seaman) and Terry Howard (David Gadd/Les Seaman) were elected as Members Without Portfolio.

Election of Groups Affiliated to Ramblers The Co-operative Ramblers (Terry Howard/Les Seaman) and the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (David Gadd/Terry Howard) were re-elected.

Election of delegates to General Council Lee Farmery (David Gadd/Philip Ryder) was delegated to attend. One or two other vacancies would be dealt with by Area Council.

### **Affiliation to Kindred Organisations**

Les Seaman proposed and Mike Pye seconded the continuing support of the Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland (SCAM), the Open Spaces Society, the Peak and Northern Footpath Society (PNFS) and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE). Agreed unanimously.

### **Speaker's Address**

Janet Davis, Senior Policy Officer from Ramblers central office, expressed her thanks for being invited to address the AGM. She said it was a pleasure to come to Sheffield, the real heartland of the walking movement. She had been employed by Ramblers for 27 years but said that there could be no denying that the last couple of years had been turbulent for Ramblers. But despite these problems the real work of Ramblers had been able to continue, due mainly to the work of volunteers, and her feeling is that the organisation is re-gaining its balance now. To regain our strength the organisation needs to increase its membership. There is no doubt that the cuts in the next few years will make it difficult to protect our interests. Ministers have made it clear that rights of way budgets are simply not on their radar.

Janet said that there was some dismay a couple of years ago when the traditional rights of way, countryside and access teams at central office were re-organised into what is now called the 'Walking Environment Team'. She re-assured the meeting that despite the name change there are still staff working on core issues relating to rights of way, access and the protection of the environment. There are now nine people in the team: Adrian Morris (team leader), four senior policy officers (herself, Eugene Suggett, Justin Cooke and Kate Conto), two campaigns officers (Rachel Alcock and Anastasia French), an administrator (Amy Cook), and the volunteer support and development officer (Ed Wilson). All problems reported, whether by letter, email, phone call, are forwarded to the right local volunteer.

The team process path orders. Regulations require that all path orders making changes to the network must be served on Ramblers. Details are recorded on the database before being sent out to the local representative. Central Office sometimes objects to orders because of technical or drafting errors but never because of the substance of the change – that is up to the local representative.

Janet said that an important part of the work of senior policy officers is assisting local volunteers with their case work. Case work covers a huge range of issues and she gave a few examples. Twelve Quays, Wirral – This is a fight which has gone on for more than ten years. A planning application for a roll-on/roll-off ferry on the Wirral prompted a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) to try to protect the riverside path which would be lost. The path in question gives tremendous views over the Mersey to the World Heritage Site Liverpool frontage. The council refused to make the order citing insufficient evidence. Ramblers appealed to the Secretary of State but had to have the assistance of a barrister to help with the interpretation of complex legal documentation relating to the creation of the docks. The Secretary of State directed that an order be made, but Wirral MBC did nothing. Eventually Ramblers entered into negotiations with the council and the dock company for a path creation agreement on a line on which we could all agree. This obviated the need for a public inquiry into the order, which would have cost all sides a great deal of money and which there was no guarantee we would win. The final agreement is still the subject of exchanges between solicitors but we are nearly there. Look out for news of the opening ceremony this year.

Bayham Abbey, Kent/East Sussex, DMMO – For more than 30 years Ramblers on the Kent/East Sussex border have been trying to re-open two footpaths over the former Bayham Abbey Estate near Tunbridge Wells. Back in the mid-70s well-used paths were closed off and 'keep out' signs appeared following the sale of the estate. The local volunteers' DMMO applications were refused by the local authorities so they appealed, with much help from Eugene, to the Secretary of State. Thanks to the Dorset case (which Ramblers took to the House of Lords), the Secretary of State ruled that there was enough evidence to suggest that the footpaths existed, having been used by the public for many years. He directed the authorities to make the orders and objections have led to a public inquiry last December. The result is awaited.

Over-turning the 'Andrews' case – there is a High Court ruling which is presently preventing the addition of a considerable number of routes to the definitive map. John Andrews was for many years the Suffolk Area Footpath

Secretary. He has claimed many paths for addition to the definitive map, largely because so few paths were recorded in parts of that county when the original definitive maps were prepared. However, in the early 1900s, he came unstuck with an application which relied on enclosure award evidence. The order made in respect of his application was thrown out by an inspector and when we appealed against the decision in the High Court we ended up with a judgement which misinterprets the Enclosure Act of 1801 and so is preventing a significant number of paths being added to the definitive map. Ramblers are now seeking to show by way of research being carried out by John and a leading academic in this field that the judge was wrong and hope to be able to bring a new case which will overturn that judgement.

Mud Lane, Purton, Wiltshire – This is an ancient footpath (possibly actually a bridleway), long obstructed by natural vegetation and the activities of Thames Water, and neglected by the local authority, and which the landowner wants to see diverted. The local authority is completely behind the diversion and had encouraged the landowner to create an alternative permissive bridleway. The authority refused to do any work on the path because they say it will cost too much or to let volunteers do any work on the path. The first attempt at a diversion was thrown out by the planning inspectorate because the order tried to close the footpath and replace it with a bridleway, which the legislation doesn't allow. They are now dealing with an outstanding DMMO to upgrade the way to bridleway status and then a further attempt will be made with a diversion order.

Vixen Tor, Devon – This is another DMMO which Ramblers have had to pursue public inquiry and to which we have given much national support because of its iconic status. Vixen Tor is the spectacular granite landmark once popular with walkers but put out-of-bounds by new owners in 2003. It's one of the most strikingly interesting features of Dartmoor, has been visited by walkers and climbers for at least well over a century. Devon Ramblers had pressed for the last 7 years to have public access to Vixen Tor restored but neither the CRow Act nor negotiations by Dartmoor National Park produced the desired result. Janet said that a DMMO was the only way forward.

Limestone Link, Batheaston, Avon. Bits of this riverside path are being eroded. Fearful of being sued, the council has stuck a traffic regulation order (TRO) on the path to stop people using it. They say it will cost a huge amount to repair so Ramblers got their own expert opinion on this. Those experts came up with a much lower figure. The council conceded that Ramblers' experts suggestion was feasible and promised action. None has been forthcoming so legal action by way of section 56 of the Highways Act 1980 will follow.

Missing bridges on Barnsley 159 and Rossington BR14, Doncaster. These are two local issues which John Harker has brought to central office as candidates for section 56 action. The former presents a dilemma because the highway authority say that if forced to repair it their entire rights of way budget for the year would be used up. John Harker reported on these issues earlier in the meeting.

Gloucestershire – a haulage company has built a massive steel fence along the line of a right of way, reducing its width by at least half. The Area has served notice on the council to oblige it to remove this obstruction. This is the process which John Harker recently used on Dunford FP6 in Barnsley, where massive ornamental gates had been installed on the line of a right of way. In that instance the authority has taken action and the landowner has, somewhat reluctantly, installed a pedestrian bypass gate.

Icknield Way – This final case again involves John Andrews. In November of last year he wrote to central office to say that he had just had a 'red letter' day. He said that about 35 years ago he had begun to investigate a large black hole in the Suffolk Definitive Map. He had discovered that virtually the whole area was the property of two wealthy and influential men, the Earl of Iveagh (family name Guinness!) and the Duke of Grafton. Searches of important 18th and 19th century documents soon revealed powerful evidence of a network of historic public routes criss-crossing the area in former times, many of those tracks still in use by the occupants of those estates and their workers, but zealously guarded against outsiders. An unsurprising subsequent discovery was that, such was still the feudal stranglehold of the Estate owners, that great care had been taken to prevent local people from claiming that their villages had any rights of way when the County Council prepared the definitive map. When John presented the Estate representatives with the documentary evidence, he was in effect told to go away and do his worst; they would fight him all the way and their lawyers would make sure that his efforts would come to nothing. The situation is now dramatically different because of the addition of a significant number of historic 'byways' to the map of the area following a succession of public inquiries during the 1990s. Probably the most important of these routes was a 7-mile, still unmetalled, length of the ancient Icknield Way. In 1991-1993 most of this route was added to the Definitive Map after local public inquiries, but an inspector refused to confirm the order for a 500 metre length in the centre of the route which had been destroyed in the creation of a large arable field. After a long period spent in fighting the refusal of Suffolk CC to make a further order based on new evidence and in appealing against that rejection, a new order was published in June 2008. Finally, nearly 2½ years later and following a lengthy 2-stage public inquiry, the order was confirmed. That was why it was a red-letter day for John. However, that's not the end of the story. The landowner's solicitors have kept their promise of fighting John all the way and the reason that central office has become involved is that the landowners are appealing against the Inspector's decision in the High Court so this last week we have been instructing a solicitor so that we can be a party to this action. Janet pointed out that you have to be in it for the long-haul to be a footpath secretary.

The second limb of what the senior policy officers do is national campaigning: most commonly this is in the context of legislation, either campaigning to get legislation that we want, the most recent example of this being the coastal access provisions in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, or making sure that new legislation which Government seeks to introduce doesn't impact on the interests of walkers. In this latter context it seems that Ramblers are going to have their work cut-out. For example, recently there has been a lot of news about the potential sale of Forestry Commission land and the threat to the access that people have to English woodlands. The Public Bodies Bill currently being debated in the House of Lords will determine powers which could enable the potential sale of the public forest estate. Woodland habitats are some of the most magical places to walk, full of diverse wildlife and history. The sale of Forestry Commission land is not necessarily negative but it is essential that public access is improved and enhanced before any sales are considered. Ramblers have formulated five tests which we think should be met before any sales are considered. These are:

- 1) Public access is maintained and enhanced;
- 2) Public rights of way and access land are properly managed;
- 3) No sale or transfer is completed until the purchaser has committed to preserving and maintaining access;
- 4) Where access is currently not secured in law, this is remedied through CROW Act dedication;
- 5) The local community is consulted and given the opportunity to play a full and active part in woodland management, including first-refusal on purchase.

There is little doubt that there will be plenty of other legislation which is going to require Ramblers attention in the next few years.

The third prong of the Senior Policy Officers work is Volunteer Training—ad hoc training, as requested by Areas and Groups on specific specialised issues; induction days for new volunteers and, at the moment, coastal access training to help volunteers who are carrying out survey work on the routes of the coastal path and its spreading room.

Central office also produce a range of publications: The Blue Book, Footpath Worker, Advice and Guidance Notes, Guidance Notes (we have 15 in total from How to claim a PROW to gaps, gates and stiles). Research Papers: very useful Economic and Social Value of Walking and New Road Building guidance.

In addition to all of this, there is a vast amount of general campaign work which at the moment is concentrated on the cuts to public spending. Ramblers are hearing very worrying news from across the country, about councils appearing to consider rights of way and access land budgets as easy targets for cuts. Examples of cuts information we have received include an entire Rights of Way team being made redundant, a rights of way budget being cut by 50 to 75% this year, over 3 years an 85% cut in a rights of way budget, and Devon County Council have announced 'The highways service budget will be reduced by £8 million. This will mean reductions in the standards of maintenance for bridges, footpaths and public rights of way.'

In the face of these cuts central office have run a series of workshops for volunteers where campaign ideas have been shared and people have been encouraged to think about how they can lobby their councils to best effect. All of the information gathered is on a special section of the website. Ramblers have written to all relevant portfolio/budget holders in English highway authorities urging them not to see rights of way and access as an easy cut, explaining why rights of way are so important for health and sustainable transport reasons, and Ramblers are encouraging everyone to write to highway authorities to actually thank them for enjoyable walks to show how much walking is valued (this can be done via the website). A lot more support to practical work (insurance cover improved, copy of BTCV book, signs to say that we've done the work) is being given and central office is talking to the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW) about best practice in the use of volunteer labour in rights of way work. Janet said that it's ridiculous that local authorities are still turning away offers of voluntary work in present circumstances. Our volunteers have long been playing their part in Mr Cameron's 'Big Society' by helping councils keep paths open and accessible. But in order to conduct this work our volunteers require the guidance and support of qualified rights of way officers. Ramblers are not saying that volunteers can take over the work of highway authorities, just that they can make their money and effort go further.

Central office are talking to IPROW about lots more than that. Their members are actually turning to Ramblers for support when their jobs are under threat and asking us to campaign to help save them. We've even had anonymous tip-offs from local authority RoW officers giving us advance warning about impending cuts. This has meant we can target our efforts.

The Ramblers Business Plan for the current year sets out what we will be doing to help achieve our long-term aim of a vision of Britain where people choose to walk, and where it is easy and enjoyable to do so. We had a difficult time in 2009 but our 2009-2010 financial year was relatively stable. However in the face of external pressures in the form of budget cuts and a very different attitude towards the provision of public services there is no room for complacency. That is why the Board has made its number one priority that we should end the year with more members than we started with. The second priority is to increase our charitable income, not just membership subscriptions and donations but grants and sponsorship. It is only by making progress on those two priorities that we will have the support and money to carry our priority three which is protecting and improving the path network – all of the work which she has been talking

about today plus all of the work which is done to encourage and support walking (Get Walking Keep Walking and Walking for Health initiatives). The final priority for Ramblers is to be more efficient and effective in our operation so that we make the most of income.

So, in saying goodbye to the Ramblers 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year Janet said that we find ourselves faced with very big challenges. In the 26 years since she started at Ramblers, the rights of way network has undoubtedly changed for the better with the attitude of many highway authorities changing beyond recognition, and the condition of many paths vastly improved. In addition to this, we have achieved the holy grail of access to open country, with access to the coast well on its way. With the sheer determination and commitment of our members, and in particular, our active volunteers, she remains optimistic that the situation for walkers will not regress too far in the present situation, although there is no room for complacency. She said that Ramblers did make a difference to the lot of walkers in our first 75 years and it is in our hands to carry on making a difference as we move towards our first century.

Following the presentation Terry Howard asked what central office could do to support the use of public transport. Janet Davis said that she used public transport as much as possible and that central office encouraged this.

John Harker said that if RoW officers were to become redundant it was possible that organisations such as Ramblers could benefit. John had recently assisted a RoW officer, being made redundant, to be employed by PNFS.

#### Motions

Terry Howard proposed and Les Seaman seconded the following motions:

'This AGM, knowing that 2011 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our first National Park, the Peak District, calls on the Area, Groups and members to support and initiate activities which celebrate this milestone anniversary. It further calls on Areas, Groups and members to support appropriate action and raise public awareness of the effect of financial budget cuts which threaten the very purpose and existence of our National Park'.

'This AGM recognises that 2012 is the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kinder Trespass and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the acquisition of Kinder by the National Trust for the nation. It therefore calls on Area, Groups and members to start working towards celebrations of these iconic events'.

These motions were passed unanimously and Groups were asked to take them up.

Terry Howard pointed out that on 20<sup>th</sup> February there was an 8-mile walk from Sheffield Town Hall steps to the Eastern Moors Estate and on 24<sup>th</sup> April Ramblers and the Friends of the Peak District will do Ward's Walk.

#### Any Other Business

Philip Ryder informed the AGM that the Group formerly known as the Ramblers Association Rotherham Metro District was changed its name to Rotherham Metro Ramblers.

The Group's website address is: { HYPERLINK "<http://www.rotherhammetroramblers.btck.co.uk/>" }

The meeting closed at 4.10pm.

Area Council meetings are on the following dates, all meetings start at 7.30pm:

7<sup>th</sup> February 2011  
13<sup>th</sup> June 2011  
12<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
28<sup>th</sup> November 2011

General Council: 16/17 April 2011

Area Website: { HYPERLINK "<http://www.synedramblers.org.uk/>" }

