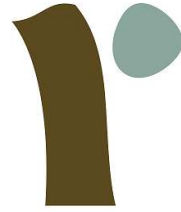


Avon



ramblers
at the heart of walking

<http://www.avon-ramblers.org.uk>

Area

Annual

Report & Accounts

2010-2011

Chairman Annual Report -

Over the last twelve months we have been busy in the local area making some changes to the local organisation. Some of these will hopefully have a long term and significant effect on the Area's local effectiveness, others will ensure that we are well positioned for any potential changes in the future. One of the more notable schemes that is now in the final stages of being set up is the founding of the local volunteer warden scheme. This will increase our ability to support local authorities in the clearing of footpaths and maintaining access to the countryside where we walk most. We now have a strong base of volunteers for the scheme, but I hope that increasing numbers of members will take part in the training and become wardens in next year or so. The programme has been budgeted to be self-funded in the future with the support of local authorities. It could well be one of the more exciting and significant changes that have taken place in Avon Area in recent years. Many thanks to David Waterstone and Ron Phelps in particular for their tireless efforts.

The local Area committee has also taken steps to improve the distribution of funding to groups. This has been designed to encourage suc-

cessful groups to use funding to promote growth whilst also encouraging other groups to look at efficiencies. We have found that some of the most successful groups in the local area are also those that operate at the lowest cost per member. Hopefully all the groups will continue benefitting from the practices of others in the future. As all members pay a fixed amount of membership to the Ramblers I have been keen to see a reduction in the amount that some members 'subsidise' others. This has, and will likely continue to be, a contentious subject which will be monitored by the Area Committee in the future. Avon Area still receives a lot less funding per member than a large number of other Areas across the country.

We have also been looking at ways to ensure that Area funding will be secure in the future if the charity's Central Office lose some of their external funding (unfortunately this looks to be inevitable at the moment). The charity has a substantial staff count and there is likely to be a temptation to cut funding to Areas (again) when tougher times hit. My main priority is to ensure that groups in the local area can continue to operate effectively if and when this happens, whilst also funding developments such as the warden scheme mentioned above. Thank you to Adrian Noyes for his work on this

subject.

We have not seen very positive news on the membership front for the local Area – a trend that is mirrored across the charity. The local Area committee is aware of this and is looking at ways to improve membership recruitment and retention. These may be small measures such as groups introducing new member walks to their programmes and / or ensuring that membership forms are available on all walks. We also have a new Avon Area Ramblers website. This has been designed to attract new members to into local ramblers groups and provide a source of ready information about our local activities as well as news from the national charity. My thanks to go Ken Mill for his invaluable ideas and support in the development of the new website before he stands down as Area webmaster this year.

It is worth noting that walking is increasing in popularity across the UK – if the Ramblers (both locally and nationally) can get the membership proposition right, we should be able to win the support of increasing numbers of people.

Finally and most importantly, it is so good to see the large numbers of walks that continue to be organised as well as the local campaigning activities. If we can maintain and increase this in the next few years, I am sure that the local Area will go from strength to strength. Our thanks go once again to all the volunteers in Area and the groups.

Tom Elson

Secretary Report 2010-2011

This year started with us welcoming Tom Elson as our newly elected Area Chairman, despite becoming a new dad a short while after taking this on, Tom has managed to support and encourage the committee members and as his report states there are lots of exciting things happening at Area level which we hope will also encourage the many volunteers at group level.

General council was a more positive event and the mood was buoyant with the gap that had previously caused the concerned ramblers to form being narrowed. The announcement that Tom Franklin is to resign at the end of 2011 has seen a mixed reaction, and with the Chair of the organisation also changing at General council in 2012 hopefully Ramblers as an organisation will be turning another positive corner in the near future.

All of the groups have had many volunteers working to achieve the smooth running of the Ramblers in our Area, it just remains to say thank you to these people and please keep volunteering with out you we would not function.

FOOTPATHS

FOOTPATH SUB COMMITTEE

The Footpath Sub-committee (FSC), comprising the three Footpath Secretaries who are elected by the Area AGM to cover the Highway Authorities within Avon Area and the officers elected by groups, including Brunel, to work on the ground, meets quarterly (thanks to David Waterstone for hospitality) reporting to the next Council Meeting (thanks to Ron Phelps for taking a note of the discussions). This year we welcomed Keith Budd (Bristol) to the Committee and invited Rose Rogers (Norton Radstock).. The February meeting was joint with the Area Planning SC, for the purposes of demarcation and mutual instruction. Reports from the Footpath Secretaries are printed below, but some topics cut across Highway Authority boundaries.

The FSC contributed to the RA's national response to a consultation on the future administration of the **canal network**, highlighting the existence of public footpaths along canals that are now dry.

The FSC supported the aspiration of the **Monarch's Way** Association to have the route adopted as a National Trail. The case was presented to Bristol City Council Public Rights of Way Liaison Group which referred it to the Joint Local Access Forum which also supported the ambition. The Government's response was predictably negative, but this not a short term project.

The **Gating problem** in Bristol is unresolved. At the end of the RA year, a few paths were still illegally gated and a review of the legally gated path in Fishponds was overdue. No policy had been adopted, so by custom and practice paths could be closed at the whim of a senior officer, instructed by a cabinet councillor (or perhaps *vice versa*). Fortunately, money for these schemes ran short and the police official whose duty it was to close paths has been redeployed. There were no new applications in S Glos, and BANES, lacking a policy, also lacks a problem.

There was significant progress towards setting up a **Practical Work scheme**, modelled on the Cotswolds Wardens, that could tender for council contracts, offering a trained and insured workforce. Meanwhile Keith Budd, the Bristol Group Footpath Officer, is attempting to organise a less formal bramble-bashing team.

Members of the **Joint Local Access Forum** are appointed as individuals, not as the representatives of Interest Groups. However, within the duly balanced membership, David Waterstone was Chairman designate and Peter Gould was reappointed as a member. Ron Phelps retired after his spell as Deputy Vice Chairman. The RA, especially Bristol Group, has been actively involved

in providing routes for the Walk West Website that JLAF is organising

Peter Gould

FOOTPATH SECRETARIES' REPORTS BRISTOL

The City Council's plan to sell off public open space, though not strictly a Rights of Way matter, precipitated some requests for help. Usually, complainants were referred to the Open Spaces Society, but a group at Lodge Hill which had a strong claim for a footpath was sent the usual advice.

The Bristol Walking Strategy, a welcome initiative by Cllr Harrison who spotted that the existing one was time-expired, proceeded slowly, subject to the electoral timetable and staff illness. Susan Carter led on this, as it was a general planning matter and I contributed on the narrow PRoW issues: between us we improved the document which ought to be swiftly implemented.

Whether the new Bristol City Stadium should be built at all, was a question for the Planning Subcommittee to consider. The officer responsible for Council's scheme of PRoW mitigation did a very good job.

Regrettably, the council department responsible for parks disregarded local representations and RA suggestions concerning the tarmac cycle

speedway between Blackberry Hill and Wickham Bridge. So long as the tar babies have a cheque book to wave, their ugly and blistering projects will be nodded through by dozy councillors and grant-hungry officials. I decided not to waste my time and public money on prolonged formal opposition.

The Riverside Paths, the Severn Way Link and the Monarch's Way at Netham, despite prolonged legal hassle and an unfortunate riparian collapse, have been BCC's two great achievements this year. The story is not ended but lengths of these routes have been legally established, cleared and physically consolidated.

BCC put forward a proposal to realign the Severn Way Link at "Smoke Lane" that the Bristol Group Footpath Officer and I responded to, suggesting a better route. Technically, this is not a PRoW diversion so the more interesting route must be maintained regardless.

To concentrate the minds of middle rank BCC officers, I suggested that an HA56 order might be made in respect of the riverside path at Hanham Abbots. Actually, the cyclists and riders ought to have done this long ago; walkers could always splosh along. Anyhow, by scraping the bottom of the budget barrel, some money was found to put the path in order without legal intervention.

We did actually serve an HA56 order

in respect of a missing non-vehicular bridge over the M5 at Lawrence Weston. As it was served on the Secretary of State for Transport, the Highway Authority for Motorways, this is probably a first, worth a footnote in legal history. Practically, it did not cause the bridge to be replaced, though it did cause the defensive, waffling, prevaricating civil servants to state clearly when this would be done. Bristol's Golf Courses can be relied on to make work. At Shirehampton, the way-marking is in order; the terms of the National Trust ownership remain undetermined. At Henbury, a scheme of footpath diversion is still in abeyance since the council officer involved departed several years ago and his job was suppressed leaving no "paper trail". There has been a complaint this year, surprisingly, only one. At Filton, a rant from the club was forwarded.

The original complainant about Dundry Hill Farm contacted me to say that the route was now open to the satisfaction of local users. Council Officers were taken aback when this was publicised in *Area News*; as they still haven't sorted out the legal mess their incompetent predecessors made.

Alderman Bill Martin, alas, stood down as Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Liaison Group. As his successor, my first duty was to express the extreme disquiet of the Group at the disproportionate level of funding cuts being applied to the Rights of Way Team. Cllr Tim Kent (Cabinet member for Transport) courteously attended the next PRoWL Group to explain there may be other sources of funding.

Peter Gould

South Glos

The role of the Footpaths Secretary is about influencing Council decisions regarding changes to the rights of way network and getting the Council to ensure that the network is properly maintained. Some changes, i.e. diversions and extinguishments, are driven by landowners and the number of these has dropped off during the past year although there has been some activity in putting right omissions of the old Kingswood Council. The Council gets quite a large number of complaints about the state of the network but the vast majority do not come through the Ramblers. I take it that this reflects a growing awareness by

the public about how to make a complaint directly to the Rights of Way Team. This must be a good thing!

The Rights of Way Liaison Group where representatives of user groups including the Ramblers' three South Gloucestershire Groups, Kingswood, Severnside and Southwold, meet with Council officers to share concerns has met four times in the past year. The tone of proceedings is generally positive reflecting a continuing improvement in the performance of the PRoW Team which fell just marginally short of its targets despite staffing difficulties.

The June meeting was addressed by

the Deputy Planning Manager who outlined plans for “savings”, a euphemism for cuts. We were constantly told that there would be no effect on front line delivery which is, of course, a complete nonsense. Since that meeting the cuts have been feeding through the system. We understand that 1½ clerical posts have been lost. It is worth noting that a lot of the PRoW Section’s work is backroom stuff but such losses are bound to have knock-on effects. Now, as I write the PRoW Team Leader is just about to take early retirement. The Team will have a new reporting line within the Transport Department. These are interesting times. We must learn how best to operate in this new environment.

At the meeting with the Deputy Planning Manager user groups, particularly the Ramblers indicated that they were prepared to put voluntary effort into maintaining the network. This met with polite scepticism. In an age of health and safety concerns and growing professionalism there is a feeling that volunteers can often cause as many problems as they solve. To counter this Avon Area has decided that we should become more “professional”. South Gloucestershire has been asked for a grant to fund our start up costs – to be decided in December 2011. I am pleased to report that a trawl for volunteers has been successful from each of our Groups. I hope to report on this positively next year!

Ron Phelps

BANES

The last eighteen months or so has been quite a time for our footpath efforts in BANES. Back in April last year we celebrated the opening the opening of the Chelscombe Farm footpath along the skyline north of Bath. This marked the end of a thirty five year long battle between us and the landowner for right of access, which had even included shot gun threats against council officers. The new path not only offers very fine views to the south west of Bath, but also makes possible an off-road circuit of up to about thirty miles round the Lansdown ridge.

A major part of the rest of the year was taken up with the fight to get the council to live up to their legal obligation to maintain the riverside path along the north bank of the Avon at Batheaston.

This struggle had gone on for nearly five years, during which the path was officially closed even though, happily, local walkers had comprehensively ignored this closure. The path is important not only as a local amenity but also because it is part of the Limestone Link which extends the Cotswold Way well south into the Mendips. We twice issued Section 56 notices and, just as the matter was about to go to court, the council backed down and agreed to re-construct the path. This has been done very attractively, using natural materials like willow.

At quite a different level of drama we also succeeded in preventing the diversion of the footpath at Brooke Lodge in Wellow. For many years this path had passed through the

garden of the Lodge but, perhaps because she wished to sell the property, the owner suddenly decided this long-standing arrangement was unacceptable and applied for a diversion. In general we try to accommodate changes designed to lessen any nuisance caused to property owners providing this does not in any way disadvantage walkers. But in this case we thought the proposed diversion, which would have brought walkers out on to a busy public road at a point where their view and that of drivers would be obscured by an old bridge structure, presented a serious risk to walkers which was unacceptable. The ROW professionals in the council agreed

with us but certain councillors, for obscure reasons, persisted with the proposal. I am glad to be able to report that the Inspector accepted our arguments and the diversion was not allowed.

Otherwise, there has been the usual minor problems to deal with. Though, as we move into the new year, the Limestone Link is being threatened again. This time by the presence of poorly controlled and savage dogs at a point near Camerton. We have spoken to the council team, who have had problems at the same spot before, and they are taking action.

David Waterstone

Planning & Countryside Protection Committee report 2011

This has been an uncertain period for our committee. We have been much concerned by the possible impact on our area of central government's forecasts of future housing requirements, which were much higher than those foreseen by the local authorities. Major new developments seemed to be in prospect round the south and south west of Bristol, round the north east at Emmersons Green and Thornbury, round Keynsham and South Stoke and Newton St Loe near Bath. At the same time we were concerned at developments, which had been refused permission by the Planning Committee, going ahead at Woolley, north of Bath, in spite of the refusal.

All hands, therefore, had to man the pumps. We were accordingly very glad that Bob Hall was able to rejoin us at the beginning of the period after a brief diversion into publicity, and the three of us were able to engage vigorously with all the developments mentioned above. As things have turned out the regular necessity of re-visiting core strategies and the impact of a new national government have together given the kaleidoscope a sharp twist and things look fairly different.

An early disappointment for us was our failure, in spite of Susan Carter's best efforts, to get reversed the decision to allow zoo visitor parking on Clifton Downs. But this battle is by no means over. Elsewhere the tide has generally been in our favour. The Thornbury proposals seem to have been withdrawn as have those to the south of Bristol; developments at South Stoke and Newton St Loe have been turned down; that at Keynsham seems at the moment to be confined to a tongue of "country" which extends into the urban area which we do not believe to be of huge importance; and Emmersons Green appears to be progressing as a fairhigh

quality and walker friendly development. Bristol's Walking Strategy concerns itself mainly with promoting short walks around the city, which may not be exactly the RA's main concern but is at least a step in the right direction. The city's policies towards green spaces is perhaps less comfortable but it is at least something that these have become a subject for public consideration.

But this apparent lull will not last. Central government have produced a National Planning Policy Framework which, while using the language of localism, seems to have a bias towards development: it is strong on the need to acquire the means of life but perhaps rather weak on protecting the context in which it is lived. At the very least concepts like "sustainability" need to be clearly defined and concern for the quality and beauty of the environment should be more evident. We contributed our views for inclusion in the RA's comment at national level.

Our effort at the moment is mainly concerned with the development of the new core strategies and keeping a wary eye for the possible re-emergence of some of the less desirable developments that are temporarily in abeyance (in particular South Stoke and Newton St Loe). The question what to do with the Filton Airport site will also be important to us as will the planned fate of the Bristol city green spaces and the Bristol/Bath green belt. It will all be enough to keep us occupied!

David Waterstone

Report of the Access Officer to the Annual General Meeting 2012

From a personal point of view the most significant thing during the reporting year 2010 – 2011 was my decision not to seek re-selection to the Joint Local Access Forum. I had been a member since its inception in 2003 and was latterly the Deputy Chairman. Local Access Forums have survived the Government cuts which I think is a tribute to the quiet work they do raising the profile of access to the outdoors. They have, though, lost their direct link to Natural England with the demise of the still-born England Access Forum. Locally walkers generally and the Ramblers specifically are well represented on the JLAF with Peter Gould and David Waterstone, the latter having taken the Chair.

Look out for OutdoorsWest.org.uk the local Councils' initiative strongly supported by the JLAF and Ramblers. This aims

among other things to provide access to an extensive collection of local walks. You might spot my short introduction to walking there. Talking of published walks I am a bit closer to getting South Gloucestershire to print a series of four walks taking in access land. It has been a long drawn out process but hopefully by next year I will be able to report success.

Last year's triumph of opening up the access land at Chelscombe Farm, Landsdown by means of a public right of way has been followed up by a disappointment in improving access around Chew Valley Lake. Complications regarding protected environments plus not all the interested parties working at the same speed meant that the project has fallen foul of Local Government cuts.

Deep in the heart of our Councils the

(Continued on page 11)

Avon Area Ramblers

Membership report to 30 September 2011

Area Membership

Area membership at the end of September 2011 was 2071 compared to 2238 at the end of September 2010, a reduction of 221. The table below shows the comparative numbers for each category of member. With the exception of the Joint Life Concession members, there have been reductions in all categories.

Category	Sept 2010	Sept 2011
Total	2238	2071 plus 79 payment pending
Annual Individual	975	938
Annual Joint	702	644
Annual Concession Individual	317	276
Annual Concession Joint	200	169
Life Individual	24	23
Life Joint	6	6
Life Concession Individual	12	13
Life Concession Joint	2	2

During September there were 20 new members to the Area.

Group Membership

The split of membership between Groups at the end of September was:

Group	Total	Payment Pending	New members
Bristol	825	26	4
Norton Radstock	97	4	0
South Wold	208	7	1
Bath	358	12	7
Sevenside	166	4	1
Kingswood	139	9	0
Brunel	253	17	9
Others	25	0	0

(membership continued)

Monthly Reports

The monthly updates are issued regularly from Central Office, and the quality of the data generally seems to be good. At the end of September full listings were sent for all Groups.

The rate at which new members are dealt with is greatly improved.

New weekly reports on new members/reinstated members

From October 2011 new weekly reports are being issued. These show new members and reinstated members. The reports are intended to enable Groups to contact new members at the earliest opportunity.

The first report was issued on 26 October and the second on 27 October. The reports are in the form of a simple Excel spread sheet, and the data has to be manually separated out for onward transmission to the appropriate Group. The first reports have related to Bristol, Brunel, Bath, Severnside and Kingswood Groups. At the moment Ramblers are sending the reports only to the Area Membership Secretaries but consideration will be given to issuing them to Group Membership Secretaries in the future.

Jean Aellen, Avon Area Membership Secretary

(Continued from page 9)

Local Development Plans are grinding through their bureaucratic process. I think it fair to say that the JLAF's contribution in past years in highlighting various outdoor aspects has significantly strengthened them. Meanwhile Coastal Access which affects our bit of "coast" up to the Severn Bridge remains in a bit of a limbo with the Government refusing to come clean on their plans after the four pilot projects are completed. Finally I have contributed to the national debates on the Governments proposals for Forests and Inland Waterways. The appalling Forestry consultation has thankfully been withdrawn. We are not experts in canal management but we do have an interest in access to towpaths and connecting public rights of way.

Ron Phelps November 2011

Annual report for Information Officer

Information officer details appear in all the local telephone directories. The year has been relatively quiet with a few phone queries.

Maureen

Statement of income and expenses for the year ended 30th September 2011

	2010/11	2009/10
Income	£	£
Grants from head office	8,650	6,545
Fundraising	-	72
Advertising	150	200
Donations, etc.	383	-
Bank interest	2	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net income	<u>9,185</u>	<u>6,820</u>
Expenses		
Grants to local groups	6,624	5,164
Access	10	30
Countryside	60	54
Footpaths	-	47
Promoting walking	88	153
Governance:		
Reports	1,430	1,793
Meetings	124	307
Secretarial	157	370
Others	-	155
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	<u>8,493</u>	<u>8,073</u>
Excess of income over expenditure/(expenditure over income) over income	692	-1,253
Funds' balance brought forward	1,325	2,578
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Funds' balance carried forward	<u>2,017</u>	<u>1,325</u>
	-	

These accounts have been audited by Geoff. Harman and are a true reflection of the financial affairs of the Ramblers Association, Avon Area.

Signed A. D. Noyes..... Treasurer date 29th December 2011.....
 G. Harman.....Auditor date 29th December 2011.....

Notes to the income and expenditure account
for the year ended 30th September 2011

1. Funds' balance is made up of: £

Bank balance	2,017.26
Expenses relating to the period but unpaid at the period end	(-)
	<u>2,017.26</u>

2. Group allocations paid during the year were: £

Bath	1,169.00
Bristol	2,684.00
Brunel	761.00
Kingswood	494.00
Norton Radstock	313.00
Sevenside	531.00
Southwold	672.00
	<u>6,624.00</u>

3. Officers' expenses during the year were: £

Secretary	39.80
Membership Secretary	72.36
Minutes Secretary	10.27
	<u>122.43</u>

4. Area was affiliated and paid subscriptions during the year to: £

Avon Wildlife Trust	48.00
Friends of Bristol Suburban Railways	10.00
Mendip Society	12.00
	<u>70.00</u>

Area Treasurer's report:

1 Area has spent considerably less than budgeted last year. As the then report pointed out there would be one less issue of Area News which would save several hundred pounds. This has proved to be the case saving over £360. Additionally, the cost of footpath work, meetings and Secretarial expenses have come in below budget by some £324. In part this is due to officers not claiming their expenses to assist the Association at a difficult time and it is also to holding fewer meetings and in more economical venues. Turning to the income side, we have had the great benefit of a donation from the Bathampton Footpaths Association in the sum of £331. Because of the great efforts on

(Continued on page 15)

Budgeted income and expenditure account for 2011/12

	Budget for 2011/12 £	Budget for 2010/11 £
Income		
Grants from head office	9,679	8,650
Donations	-	-
Advertising	150	200
Bank interest	-	-
Net income	<u>9,829</u>	<u>8,850</u>
Expenses		
Grants to local groups	6,489	6,624
Access	10	10
Countryside	64	64
Footpaths	800	50
Promoting walking	100	100
Governance:		
Reports	1,250	1,780
Meetings	450	435
Secretarial	580	120
Other	176	166
	<u>9,919</u>	<u>9,349</u>
Excess of expenditure over income	-90	-499
Funds' balance brought forward	<u>2,017</u>	<u>1,325</u>
Funds' balance carried forward	<u>1,927</u>	<u>826</u>

This budget has been approved by Central Office (“CO”) and we have had the first quarterly payment of the £9,679 we asked for. This is more than we have been given in recent years and I think represents a change of heart at CO. The loud disquiet publicly expressed by parts of the membership at the poor financial management at CO over the last few years has hopefully brought about the realization there that cutting funding to Areas in order to recoup financial losses elsewhere does a lot more damage to both membership and morale all over the Association than any financial benefit from the very small saving such cutting brings. It is a fact that the grant to Areas is less than 5% of the total expenditure of the Association. Thus a very small change in the allocation of funds at CO can have a substantial effect on the grant to Areas with potentially very bad consequences. This particular penny seems finally to have dropped at CO. Good. Let’s hope it stays that way.

(Continued from page 13)

its behalf by Ramblers members in past years and of the high regard the Ramblers is held in in the world of footpath protection, the Bathampton Footpaths Association decided when it wound itself up to give every penny of its reserves to Avon Area.

2. These factors have had a very favourable effect on our finances so, as at 30th September 2011, Area's reserves are £2,017 some £1,191 up on budget and only £561 down on what they were two years ago.

3. The budget for next year has been put together on a conservative basis. In particular we are planning to spend a lot of money on footpath work which is to be carried out with other groups and agencies. The budget for next year is set out on page 14 of this report.

Avon Area Group Reports

Ramblers Association Bath Group Secretary's Report 2011

Once again we have had a full programme of mid week and Sunday walks, therefore on behalf of the committee I would like to thank Marietta and Hilary for compiling the programme, without breaking too many people's arms! I would also like to thank all our loyal walk leaders and their helpers, for we couldn't function without them.

News: we have had some success this year obtaining e-mail addresses from our members who are willing to forego 'paper' programmes. This has resulted in halving the time the committee spend on 'licking and sticking'. Furthermore it has enabled us to contact members when walks details have changed, eg Remembrance Sunday. Consequently we would like to thank our members for agreeing to this scheme, and for Diana Smith for setting this up.

I am pleased to announce that due to the enormous amount of work carried

out by David Waterstone, the Batheaston river path is now fully repaired and open once more. (David will detail this) While Patrick has succeeded in leading at least two 'children's' walks after much negotiation with BANES and local schools. In addition, Frank, who is our web master, and chairman of the Two Tunnels Community Project, tells me that the main path should be open by August 2012. Lastly, although we received the 'Walk in the Woods' initiative from HQ after our programme was planned, those who were leading walks on that day, took up the task of 'walking in the woods' and publicised their walks, while Marilyn placed posters in the Library and locally.

Publicity: In the absence of a publicity secretary, Marilyn has had several items published throughout the year in local parish publications and the 'Local Look' which serves a wide area of east Bath. We are of course still appealing for someone to fill this post. In the

meantime it was agreed Diane would place an advert in the Chronicle with a max £100 spend.

Holidays: Marietta's Iron Bridge break was a success and Marilyn's, idea for a four day self booking, break in Portland and Weymouth, using public transport was supported by 10 members. This, included Diane Adams who helped by leading two walks and general assistance! The weather was amazing for this break and several members

went swimming at Weymouth on both the 1st and 2nd of October!! Needless to say if anyone would like to arrange a similar breaks the committee would be very grateful as nothing is planned next year, other than a proposed HF holiday in the Scilly Isles and the Cornish break

Members: last year 394 this year, despite many new members we currently have 356, which is slightly down but appears to be a an area and nationwide tend.

Marilyn Wright Sec Bath Group

Bristol Ramblers Annual Report 2010/11

Walks programme

During the year, the Group's programme included 292 walks (280 last year). This included Avon Area walks and Wessex Wanderer walks. In addition, there were trips to Stow on the Wold, the Western Lakes, the Yorkshire Dales, the Shropshire Hills, a return journey to Lucca and a GR5/52 circuit in the Alpes-Maritime.

Thanks are due to Walk Coordinators, nearly 100 walk leaders and the organisers of the trips for maintaining this outstanding programme. It would be invidious to highlight specific walks: no doubt all members will have specific memories.

As agreed at last year's AGM, Sunday half-day walks were arranged during the summer. Attendances were not enormous, but were enough to suggest that there is a market for such walks, so it is intended to do the same in 2012.

The Group participated in the Ramblers national Get Walking Day, Walk in the Woods Week and Festival of Winter Walks, gaining useful publicity and some new members.

A training course for walk leaders was arranged. Eleven people participated, and six completed the full course.

Footpaths issues

The role of the Footpaths Secretary is about influencing Council decisions regarding changes to the rights of way network and getting the Council to ensure that the network is properly maintained. The principal issues during the year were:

(Continued from page 16)

- The Council put forward a proposal to realign the Severn Way Link at Smoke Lane. A better route was suggested to them. Technically, this is not a PRoW diversion so the more interesting route must be maintained.
- Regrettably, the Council department responsible for parks disregarded representations concerning the tarmac cycle speedway between Blackberry Hill and Wickham Bridge. It was decided, with regret, not to waste time and public money on prolonged formal opposition.

The gating problem in Bristol is unresolved. At the end of the Ramblers year, a few paths were still illegally gated and a review of the legally gated path in Fishponds was overdue. No policy had been adopted, so by custom and practice paths could be closed at the whim of the Council. Fortunately, money for these schemes ran short and the police official whose duty it was to close paths has been redeployed.

An Area Footpaths Sub-Committee has been established, to share information and coordinate work across Bristol, B&NES and South Gloucestershire. Peter Gould and Keith Budd have attended from Bristol. The Area has an aspiration to establish a group of trained volunteers to undertake footpath maintenance and improvement works. This aspiration has been supported, including the offer of funding subject to final budget allocations for the year.

In the meantime, Keith has arranged some informal path clearance work.

To find out more workings of the Bristol Footpaths officers see FFSC (Footpaths, Footpath Sub Committee Annual report).

Planning and Environmental issues

Susan Carter has been kept busy, particularly by Bristol City Council's proposals in response to new Government policies. There was more information-gathering than concrete action.

Major **transport** developments included:

- *Bristol Rapid Transit*. All three stages were cleared for further development and a series of consultation meetings held. The Group submitted objections to BRT2 (Ashton Gate to Temple Meads) last year. The inquiry expected this year was delayed by a shortage of Inspectors.

- *Local Sustainable Transport Fund.* Another series of meetings about the joint bids by Bristol and three other local authorities. The initial bid (relating to key commuter routes) succeeded and includes some funding to improve the walking environment. A larger bid is being made in December.
 - *Walking Strategy.* Published in November, incorporating many of the Group's comments. These earned us an invitation to the launch. The Strategy's more ambitious proposals are dependent on the success of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid.
- A Living Heart for Bristol.* We supported a declaration and campaign by a group of voluntary organisations to pedestrianise more of the City Centre.

On **green spaces**, we maintained a 'watching brief' on:

Bristol City Council's Green Spaces Strategy. Highly controversial, with vocal opposition to proposed sales balanced by concerns about funding improvements. We reviewed the comments we had made last year and decided to continue to support a strategic approach while opposing any proposals that would clearly have an adverse effect on walking.

Town and Village Green Registration. In April the Council was forced to withdraw proposals to end independent decision-making on town and village green registration. We are currently considering their revised proposals.

On **planning**, participation in the Neighbourhood Planning Network helped us keep abreast of changes including:

- *the proposed National Planning Policy Framework.*
- *the approved Bristol Local Development Framework Core Strategy.*

proposals for major sites. Most proposals for major housing schemes in and around Bristol were withdrawn following the Government's abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies. The future of Filton Airfield is now under consideration: we are keen to protect and enhance walking routes.

Membership and publicity

Membership was 825 at the end of the year (908 last year). The decline is disappointing, but is broadly in line with the rest of the Avon Area and appears to reflect the national picture. We have surveyed leavers. The (limited number of) responses were generally positive about the Group, and cited financial pressures, pressure on time and

failing health as reasons for leaving.

Activity to promote the Group has included:

- Attendance at Redland May Fair, the Festival of Nature, Walk4Life, a John Muir Trust gathering, and a Stanfords event;
 - Local publicity linked to national Ramblers events;
 - Appearances on Radio Bristol's Summer Saturday programme and a feature in Venue;
 - Maintenance of the website;
 - Publicity material at local libraries and Cotswold Outdoor, Taunton Leisure and Nomad;
 - Inclusion of (updated) Bristol Backs walks on the new Local Access Forum website;
- Inclusion on the Active Bristol website.

Thanks are due to all who contributed to this.

Sadly, John Maher died in June. John patiently and cheerfully built the current website. Working with him was always a pleasure: he is greatly missed. Peter Gould has stepped into the breach to manage the website for the time being, and it is a measure of the quality of John's work that this has been relatively straightforward. Visits average about 1,000 a month, and major changes are not planned. Tony Kerr continues to manage the photographs: there have been more than 50,000 views of pictures on the Flickr site.

The eBoot has been established, and monthly editions were produced. Following the discussion at last year's AGM, circulation was initially restricted to members who receive their programme electronically, but it has now been decided to provide the newsletter to any member who requests it. Circulation is currently about 200.

However, it is clear that more could be done, and we hope to be able to devote more time to communication and publicity in 2011/12.

Finance

The annual accounts are elsewhere on the agenda. Administrative costs have been reduced by measures such as holding meetings in premises that do not charge. Postage costs, in particular, have been substantially reduced by the fact that approximately 25% of programmes are now circulated electronically, and 40% are hand delivered by volunteers whose help is much appreciated.

Conclusion

The Group's core activities are in good health, although the continuing decline in membership is a cause of concern. There has been progress in the areas identified as priorities at the start of the year (electronic communication; footpath works; experimental Sunday half-day walks), but there are other potential areas for development.

Severnside Group Report

October 2010 to September 2011

At the AGM on 22 November 2010 we failed to attract a volunteer to take on the role of Chairman. To ensure continuity in Committee meetings, Ken Mill was asked and agreed to act as Chairman at the meetings. Whilst not ideal the arrangement worked well.

Thanks to its walk leaders, the Group continued to put on a variety of walks for all abilities, and there were record numbers attending. The walk leaders responded well to the change in the frequency of the issue of the programme introduced in February 2011, although there was one Sunday in the summer for which no walk was offered.

2010 ended with snow and very low temperatures but regardless of this, 19 members braved a walk around Flax Bourton prior to a Christmas meal at Gatcombe Farm where they were joined by four less intrepid members who had left their walking gear at home.

Another successful social event, held at the end of January 2011, was a skittles evening at 'The King Billy' which was attended by 23 people from both Severnside and Cleve-

don Ramblers. Everyone enjoyed not only the skittles but also a tasty ploughman's supper.

In February 2011, Severnside hosted the Avon Area AGM where Tom Franklin CEO Ramblers was guest speaker. The meeting, preceded by a walk in the Easter Compton area, was very successful with approximately 50 members attending.

Membership fluctuated through the year. Following a 'peak' of 177 at the end of September 2010, there were 166 members at the end of September 2011. Fifteen new members joined the Group in the year. There were nine resignations in the year, and one member moved out of the area. There was also sadly one death.

There was steady progress with members signing up for the electronic programme. At the end of September there were 137 addresses for members: 62 received the e-programme and 75 paper copy.

The Group's finances were reasonably healthy at the end of the year thanks to the increased grant per member. The majority of expenditure was incurred for printing, postage, hire of hall and other costs of the AGM, and a two year renewal of the website name and licence.

The Footpath Secretaries continued to report problems to the appropriate authorities. Some paths at Oldbury-on-Severn were surveyed but the necessary landowner's permission to clear obstructed stiles had not been received by the end of September. The matter had not been pursued in anticipation of the Avon Area voluntary footpath maintenance teams being established.

Our walks and other activities continued to be advertised in a variety of ways, including seven local magazines. The free

newspaper Bristol Observer printed details of our walks each week in its Weekender section. This publication, together with the Library programmes, appeared to be the most successful source of recruitment of new members. The Group was promoted at two South Gloucestershire events, one of them being the 'Celebrating Age Festival' in June.

Jean Aellen - Secretary Severnside

Southwold's Annual Report 1 October, 2010 - 30 September, 2011

Another very good year for Southwold group. Membership currently stands at 208.

Our weekend away in October 2010 was to Bideford. Fifty-nine people attended and the weather was ideal for walking. One of our Committee members, Gordon Taylor organised the long walks and a skittle evening which everyone enjoyed. On the way back home he also took seven rambblers to the very top of Crook Peak. The views were wonderful.

Another weekend away was booked to Tenby in March 2011. This was not without incident. One of our members had to rugby tackle a sheep in order to remove a car tyre which she had entangled herself in. Another member (Brian) was 'adopted' by a newborn sheep much to the concern of the mother, who continually called to it. Brian was also chased out of a field by a cow who was found to have just given birth and was very protective to this new arrival. Thanks are given to Barbara and Phil Cornish for arranging these weekends which were very much enjoyed by all.

Also in October a skittles evening was held at The Beaufort Arms, Hawkesbury Upton. This event is always a good opportunity for the group to socialise.

In January, although the weather was cold and wet, 20-30 members turned out to learn the history of the Beverstone area and enjoy the beauty of Woodchester Park.

In June a coach trip to Monmouth was arranged by our Chairman, George Clark. There was opportunity to do a long or a short walk or, for non-walkers, a chance to do a bit of sightseeing. The weather was mixed with light rain in the morning but not enough to spoil the day for the 26 on the short walk, 9 on the long walk and the 5 non-walkers who visited the Outlet Centre near Ross On Wye before going on to Goodrich Castle.

Also in June, Bridget and Iain Dunnett very kindly threw open their garden to South-

wold members for a garden party. As always, everyone enjoyed the occasion. Real ales and fireworks were provided by Stephen Matthews, Iain led a walk round the garden and woods and organised boules and croquet to follow. Thanks are extended to Bridget and Iain for making the day so enjoyable.

On 19 June a joint walk was held with the Lower Wye ramblers. Southwold are always pleased to be able to meet other groups and exchange news.

On 3 July our Treasurer, Tony Harris led a Sunday walk in the Bredon area and Southwold met the Severnside Ramblers on top of Bredon Hill. Everyone enjoyed the views over the Vale of Evesham, the River Severn and the Malvern Hills.

Our Footpath Secretary, Peter Mills, and his team have also had a busy year. They have completed a survey of easy access trails for Wick, Charfield and Wickwar and carried out some clearances on The Frome Valley Walkway. They also carried out a survey on a section of The Monarch's Way which runs through territory covered by Southwold Group.

Sharifa Naqui

using material provided by

George Clark, Peter Mills and Joan and Steve Fish

Kingswood Ramblers Group report

Our AGM took place on 9 November 2011. All committee members were willing to continue in their roles, except for one ordinary member who has had to withdraw due to illness. Membership of Kingswood Group stands at approximately 144. The main concern of Committee Members was the difficulty of finding walk leaders. So far, there has never been a Sunday with no walk on offer, although we have lost around 6 walk leaders. There are on average only 6-10 walkers on the longer Sunday walks; numbers are higher on short walks. The Walks Programme Secretary has not received any comments or feedback about the range of walks on offer. It is discouraging for a walk leader after all the planning and preparation when only a few people turn up. The number of Walk Leaders is obviously also linked to the number of active members.

The Footpath Secretary said that judging by the low level of complaints the footpath network locally is in reasonable condition. The effort to recruit volunteers for footpath maintenance has led to five Kingwood members coming forward.

The Secretary participated in the Webinar organised by Ramblers Association about membership. This involved a presentation by Ramblers officers from the national Association about profile of members and research about why so many left Ramblers after one or two years, followed by a teleconference with members of Ramblers Groups around the country. Some of the points made seemed relevant to our group, and others were not. For instance, the Group feels that by having walks on Sundays and Wednesday evenings, we are doing all we can to make them accessible to working people.

Our membership has shown a slight decline over the past year, from 102 to 97. Our numbers for each walk vary from just a few to perhaps a dozen, with occasionally guests joining us from other groups. Despite a relatively small nucleus of regular walkers, we still manage to put on a walk every Sunday. During the last year, our Chairman, Tessa Wyatt, has not only initiated a series of fortnightly Wednesday walks but has researched and led them. The first series of twelve walks followed the Limestone Link and the present series has the Two Rivers Way as its theme.

David Dutton - Secretary

Our Guest Speaker this Year is Richard Colwill from Central Office

Short Profile below-written by Richard himself.

Richard C Colwill- Ramblers System Analyst/Developer since April 2008

Richard was born and bred nestled between the Abberley Hills and the River Severn on an outcrop of Devonian Old Red Sandstone, educated in the Precambrian Granite splendour of the Malverns, and slept through an earthquake in Stratford, then disappointed everybody by going and running pubs in Gloucestershire nowhere near those pretty Cotswolds.

He eventually got around to some formal studying, but unfortunately it was at the Webber-Douglas school of Dramatic Art where he particularly excelled at Voice-overs, and after narrating a multi-award-winning documentary is now waiting impatiently for at least one of Martin Jarvis or Kenneth Branagh to have the decency to retire and stop being available for those jobs he keeps getting phone calls about “in case so-and-so caaaaan’t make it...”.

In the interim, having been forced into child-labour of showing his parents how to use an Apple[] and putting together accounts on the worlds first spreadsheet program for personal computers VisiCalc by the age of 8, he has discovered that his aptitude for computing, order, pretty things and ability to speak loudly has it’s uses. A temping job with Espresso Education lasted 5 years of him running, designing and implementing the administrative databases as it grew to become a world leader in its field. More time was lost implementing and training the ICT infrastructure for the UK’s largest PFI at Bart’s hospital, followed by a stint running the Outsourced Call Centre administrative teams for BT Broadbands High Level Complaints division (Ben Vewaayen was lovely, Ian Livingston, er, less so).

He’s spent the last 4 years trying to explain to the Ramblers, staff, volunteers and members, that there may be a few things we should try doing differently...with varying degrees

AGENDA

1 Apologies for absence

2 Minutes of the AGM held in February 2011

3 Matters arising

4 Adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts 2010/2011

5 Appointment of Auditor

6 Election of Officers

- President
- Vice Presidents**
- Chairman
- Secretary**
- Treasurer
- Minutes Secretary**
- Footpath Secretary
- Access Officer**
- Planning & Countryside Protection
- Press Officer**
- Membership Secretary
- Information Officer**
- Web Master

6a Election of Representatives of individual members

6b Election of Delegates to General Council 2012

7 Any Other Business

Guest Speaker from Central Office

Richard C Colwill- Ramblers System Analyst/Developer

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