



**Draft Minutes of the 33rd Annual General Meeting
of the Dorset Area of the Ramblers' Association**

Held on 24th November 2007 at Portesham Village Hall

www.ramblers.org.uk

1. Introduction

The meeting was hosted by the South Dorset Group and was opened by the Area Chairman, Laurie Fairhurst. He welcomed the members present and the guest speaker, Tom Franklin RA Chief Executive.

2. Present

There were 36 persons present.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Graham and Madeleine Hemsley, Rob and Pat White, Donald Barr, Stuart and Sue Haines, Stan and Joan Faris, Andy Hopkinson, Hilary French and John Ottaway

4. Minutes of the 32nd AGM

These had been circulated to all present at the start of the meeting. They were accepted unanimously as a true record of the meeting and were duly signed by the Chairman.

5. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts

Laurie Fairhurst referred to the Annual Report and gave a brief summary during which he mentioned specifically that membership of the Ramblers' Association was continuing to decline both within Dorset Area and nationally but that Area Council had set up a sub-committee to address this problem which will report in the New Year. This sub-committee includes the Chair of the Young Walkers Group, Alison Chant who will be giving a short presentation, which is seen as the future of the Ramblers Association in encouraging an influx of younger members.

Income and Expenditure Accounts

Mike Heckford explained the background to the Statement of Accounts

All Group grants have been increased by 25% for 2008. A special one off payment of £500 was made to East Dorset Group in 2007, as their balances were very low, and a £200 one off payment has been agreed for 2008 in addition to the 25% increase.

A payment of £1,000 to the Jubilee Trail Book Fund has been agreed to cover the cost of the printing of a new issue in 2008.

General Council 2008 – as in 2007 the Area has budgeted to cover the costs of two visitors to General Council, in addition to the Area Representatives, if anyone should wish to attend.

Area Grant from Central Office – this is no longer done on a per capita basis but against a submitted budget. In the case of Dorset Area the funds held in reserve are sufficiently large that it was considered prudent to return part to Central Office in 2007. This was done by submitting a budget request which was less than the actual budgeted requirements.

Mike thanked Jan Wardell for carrying out the audit in an exemplary manner.

The accounts were approved without objection.

Area Footpath Secretary's Report

Brian Panton gave a short presentation covering the following main points.

Sustrans Connect2

This is an application for funding to finance the building and setting up of bridges and crossings over busy roads, rivers and railways to connect people to places they want to go. Each crossing will link to a network of walking and riding routes throughout the UK. This is for a £50 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks and is one of four projects competing for the money on a series of ITV programmes. Members are encouraged to support this application.

There were originally 300 applications and the others left are the Eden Project, Sherwood Forest and the Black Country Urban Park so Sustrans Connect2 is the only national project and will benefit walkers as well as horse riders and cyclists.

Discovering Lost Ways

This a nation-wide project which will endeavour to reclaim lost and forgotten paths for the use of future generations.

In Dorset there are so far over 100 potential paths excluding urban paths. Some were found in the 1999 survey and other reported later. In order for these to be regularised there would need to be individual applications for Definitive Path Modification Order for each path – unfortunately there is a 3 year backlog in Dorset. He thought that Natural England are trying to wind down the effort but we want to maintain our contribution.

There will be a training session in Spring and if anyone would like to attend can they contact Brian Panton. Similarly if you regularly walk a route which is not on the Definitive Map can you let your Group Footpath Secretary or Brian know of it.

There is a deadline of 2026 for all paths to be added to the Definitive Map but efforts are being made to have this deadline lifted.

Presentation by Dorset Young Walkers Chair – Alison Chant

This is relatively new Group within Dorset Area created following an initiative by Keith Seymour of South Dorset Group in 2000. It was officially launched in 2003 and now has 45 members.

Alison listed the Committee Members and their duties and explained that the YWG is very forward looking using their website as the prime means of communication and being focussed on the social side of Rambling. They hope to develop from this so as to become more involved with the Ramblers' Association priority issues.

They aim to have a very varied range of activities ranging from guided walks to holidays and visits to points of interest.

One innovation which is very beneficial for a small group is the use of a Group Mobile Phone so that there is always a point of contact with a walk leader or event organiser.

6. Election of Officers

The Chairman advised that the following nominations had been received and asked if there were any further nominations from the floor. As no further nominations were made the following were elected.

Officers	Position	Proposer	Seconder
Laurie Fairhurst	Chairman	Jim Scott	Brian Panton
Jim Scott	Secretary	Brian Panton	Mike Green
Mike Heckford	Treasurer	Brian Panton	Rosemary Bramah
Brian Panton	Footpath Secretary	Mike Green	Rosemary Bramah
Peter Anthony	Membership Secretary	Jim Scott	Laurie Fairhurst

Area Delegate to General Council 2008

Jim Scott Nominated Member GC – approved no objections

Group Representatives

Kate Gocher	South Dorset Group
Ian Quarrinton	East Dorset Group
Donald Barr (temp)	North Dorset Group
Mike Green	West Dorset Group
Alison Chant	Young Walkers Group

Vacancies

Newsletter Editor
Countryside Secretary
Publicity Officer
Individual Members (4)
Publicity Officer
Affiliated Clubs Representatives (2)

7. Appointments

Jan Wardell was re-appointed as Honorary Auditor.

8. Motions from Members

There were none.

9. Other Items

Wessex Wanders Walks

Susan Blake thanked the East, South and West Groups for circulating the Wessex Wanders Walks based on the Heart of Wessex Railway Line. There were approximately 34 walks with an average turnout of 18 per walk. If there are any photographs from the 2007 walks Susan would be pleased to receive copies.

Jubilee Trail

Rosemary Bramah explained that the present stocks of the Jubilee Trail Book are almost exhausted and for this reason the book is being reprinted and also revised to reflect any changes to the walks. It is hoped that the new edition will be out by May 2008.

There are still a few sections which need to be walked to check the accuracy and usability of the text. Volunteers were asked to check the remaining sections before the end of January (South 1, West 2, East 3 and North 5 sections). If anyone can help please see Rosemary after the meeting.

10. Questions

There were none

11. Talk by the Guest Speaker Tom Franklin Chief Executive Ramblers' Association

Tom gave a short explanation of his background before joining the Ramblers' Association and how many of his previous interests matched very closely the aims of the Ramblers' Association. As he has only been in post for two months and this was his first Area AGM he gave his early impressions which were of dedicated volunteers at Group and Area level working with the 70 staff at Central Office to further the aims of the Ramblers' Association.

He then gave an overview of the history of the Ramblers' Association from the early days of trespass and civil disobedience and through to the present day and that we should take great pride in the achievements in improving access of the public to our countryside including encouraging the development of the Ordnance Survey maps into their present form, campaigning for the National Parks and the creation and maintenance of the Right of Way network, which is dependant on the local volunteers for ongoing promotion and support. More recently the Freedom to Roam Legislation for which the Ramblers' Association had campaigned strongly.

In addition to the campaigning activities the Ramblers' Association also has a social side to encourage walking and other leisure activities. This has been very successful but we now have a new challenge which is improving public health of which the reduction in obesity is of great importance. The World Health Organisation has predicted that in the future 70% of all illnesses will be the result of people's lifestyle. Only 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days per week is needed to make a significant improvement and walking is the easiest way to reach the target. He then showed slides showing the spread of obesity across the USA and the comparisons with the UK and European Union.

Physical activity can also improve mental health so the incentive should be there for all members of the population.

For the future the Ramblers' Association is presently preparing a Draft Strategy, which will be aimed at the general populace through various media but primarily through the Ramblers' Association website. The aims of this strategy are:-

1. Maintenance and creation of a good quality walking environment which is easily accessible and enjoyable to use. As part of this we would hope to encourage better access, better quality routes, maintaining our heritage routes and create new ones. Also to actively assist people who are in areas where there is least access.

2. Making walking accessible to all, which is already underway with out "Get Walking Keep Walking" promotion. For this to work it is essential that a wide range of options of varying length, difficulty and age profile are made available catering also for those who rely on public transport.

3. Communication with the general population. We have the conundrum that while walking is more fashionable than 5 years ago the Ramblers' Association aren't. We need to improve our communication and visibility with the general population.

4. Create an effective and efficient organisation, which provides the services members want and encourage people to support our aims and endeavours even if they don't formally join. It is aimed to have this strategy in place by General Council 2008.

12. Questions to the Tom Franklin

Sue Blake SDG – How are the Ramblers' Association working with the "Walking the Way to Health" initiative sponsored by Natural England.

Response – RA are working with them to avoid conflicts with the Get Walking Keep Walking Initiative and in fact the WWTH are training some RA leaders. The aim is to bridge the gap between the two initiatives.

Ken Worde SDG – People who do the least walking are people who live in the country.

Jim McDonald EDG – How does one get volunteers to organise less popular events even though they may be socially desirable. Also how does one get people interested in starting walking with the Ramblers in the Poole/Bournemouth Area when they want to walk in the country not in the town.

There were a number of contributions relating to the age profile and the image of the Ramblers' Association and the difficulty in recruiting and retaining younger members.

Response – This is fully understood and next spring an exercise will be carried out with the aim of finding out exactly what is the present image of the Ramblers' Association and how it can be improved.

The age range of the Ramblers' Association is so wide that the division into special interest/age groups may well be a way forward. For example in Sheffield there are the traditional groups but also a 20's/30's group and a 40's group.

13. Vote of Thanks

Mike Heckford proposed a vote of thanks to Tom for a most interesting presentation and mentioned specially the use of urban paths to get people walking.

This was passed by acclamation.

Laurie Fairhurst thanked South Dorset Group for organising this years AGM and thanked the ladies for the catering.

Signed

Date