

Last Area AGM .

Some of you will have found a report of the AGM held on 23 January 2010 on the area website www.ramblers-wilts.org.uk drawing attention to the fact that we no longer have an Area Secretary because Joan Crosbee had resigned and nobody had been found to replace her. She was thanked for carrying out that role and the editorship of Write of Way for five years.

Luckily a new Area Membership Secretary had been found (David Trease) and Rob Dawson was able to retire after 12 years in the role, two years after he had expressed a wish to do so.

Why do we need Area Officers?

Like most other organisations, there is a level between the head office and local offices or groups in order to ensure common understanding and interpretation of actions needed. In the Ramblers, this is the Area. Area officers have guidelines and occasional training for carrying out their role. They provide a report to the area committee meetings at which problems can be discussed with group representatives.

Desperately Seeking - an Area Secretary – Susan or Stephen!

If you are computer-literate, have experience of preparing agendas and minutes of meetings and are prepared to take on a chief executive-style role, then please contact me, Pat Crabb, Area Chairman, on 01793 740450 or email frenshams@ukonline.co.uk. A role description can be found on the main Ramblers website by starting at www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer/areagroup/resources/sec.htm. Also note that there is an Area Secretary's Handbook. The job could enhance your CV or provide a focus if you are retired and feel a lack of purpose.

Are you missing **Write of Way**? Do you think we ought to have an area newsletter which is more interesting than this? If so, would you be prepared to be the editor? It would involve gathering articles and supplying them as Word documents to Rob Dawson who would put them into booklet format and send for printing. Again, contact me to find out more.

Area Website: let it help you to find local walks

Mike Hayter has taken on the role of Area Webmaster, following the redesign of the site by Clive Frankham. Those of you who have said that you miss the chronological list of walks which was on the former site can find an alternative which Mike has provided. He has created a link from the main page on the Area website to the Ramblers Walks Finder. It will show all walks in an area around Devizes and extending a short way outside Wiltshire so that you should find walks within travelling distance. Give it a try, if you haven't done already.

Liaison Meeting with Wiltshire Council's Rights of Way Staff

The Ramblers in Wiltshire had one of the twice-yearly meetings to exchange information and concerns with the Rights of Way Manager and three of the staff on 30 March. Alan Roberts, Malcolm Walsh and I attended. At that time, the budget for 2010-2011 was not known but the £30K for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan would continue. A review of this plan is overdue. Permission had at last been given for advertising the three vacant posts. They agreed to supply us with details of the back-log of work such as missing bridges, outstanding definitive map modification orders etc for a campaign Central Office is running. It was agreed that the wardens would keep records of crop obstructions reported to them, so **please report any crops problems** you find by going to www.ramblers-wilts.org.uk and look for 'Problems on RoW' heading at the top of the main page. Long-standing path problems were also discussed and reviewed. The wardens are trying out portable equipment to record their findings when surveying rights of way.

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Grassroots Direct Action

If you are frustrated by footpaths, bothered about bridleways or baffled over byways – then read on. With the current under-resourcing of RoW maintenance, there may be another route to problem resolution without having to wait for the next visit on Wiltshire Council's Parish Maintenance Schedule – which should be a five-year cycle.

How about stirring the relevant parish/town council into action, by harnessing their local knowledge and encouraging self-help by volunteers? For simple tasks such as cutting back overgrowth, 'stitch-in-time' repairs to RoW furniture (stiles, gates, fences, bridges). The steps to follow could be:-

- Contact parish/town clerk (details on internet if required) to check whether the council has an RoW sub-committee or an RoW contact; if not request that problem be raised at next council meeting.
- Public can attend council meetings and press for action on RoW during public question time, which is usually at the start of meeting.
- Volunteer involvement could be formalised by an 'Adopt-a-Path' scheme, whereby residents undertake to check specified paths two or three times a year and report problems to the scheme organiser for action.
- Crop and ploughing obstructions could be sorted out through parish/town councils, with their local contacts, liaising with the relevant landowners.
- If no volunteers are available, parish/town councils can carry out RoW repairs/maintenance on behalf of Wiltshire Council after checking with the local RoW Warden, who can often provide the necessary materials. Councils can also use their own budgets to pay for regular path clearance around the parish.
- For further RoW information there is a useful leaflet produced by the Ramblers 'Paths for People' specifically for parish/town councils, available free from Central Office.
- If the parish/town council approach fails, then please report the RoW problem(s) to Alison Stewart, RoW Section, County Hall, Trowbridge, BA14 8JD; email: alison.stewart@wiltshire.gov.uk - alternatively notify your group footpath secretary.

Please contact me should there be any queries and certainly inform me of any successes!

Alan Roberts
Area Footpath Secretary

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