

## **Report of Area AGM on 12 February 2011**

The chairman, Pat Crabb welcomed 41 members to the 36th AGM which was held at Urchfont Village Hall, hosted by Mid Wilts Group. Alan Roberts, area footpath secretary, reported changes at Wiltshire Council; Richard Broadhead is now head of the countryside team as well as rights of way; he had got the agreement of the NFU office in Exeter to remind farmers of their obligations to keep paths clear of crops via the NFU magazine; the definitive map of rights of way is on the Council's website. Area membership secretary, David Trease, reported that membership had fallen, as it had across the whole country. Pat Crabb said that NE Wilts Group had found that offering walks of 3-4 miles at weekends tended to attract newcomers who would become members if made to feel welcome and given an enjoyable walk. Malcolm Walsh reported that he had been involved with Bradford-on-Avon applying to be a 'walkers are welcome' town.

During the coffee break, a collection for the Wiltshire Air Ambulance raised £49.70 which was added to an existing collection to total £130.

Rodney Whittaker, chairman of the Ramblers Board of Trustees brought members up-to-date with events and campaigns nationally: -

- Finances are in a much better state and a surplus was made in 2009/2010.
- Proposing to create a special fund for court cases against landowners who deny legal access to walkers.
- Cutting Councils' rights of way budgets is false economy because walkers contribute to local economy.
- Rights of way network is part of the heritage of a nation which values its history.
- He congratulated our voluntary footpath workers who had contributed 1250 hours of work during the year to making paths more usable.

There were wide-ranging questions from the audience which Rodney answered with skill and good humour for which he was thanked by Ron Moore.

Later, Rodney told me he had enjoyed the meeting, thought the questions excellent and the atmosphere very friendly.

Pat Crabb

15.2.11