

RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST WILTSHIRE GROUP
MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 29TH OCTOBER 2009
GORSE HILL COMMUNITY CENTRE, SWINDON

22 members were present.

1. Chairman Pat Crabb welcomed everyone present. She introduced Katie Hinds from the Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum who gave an illustrated talk on the Portable Antiquities Scheme and objects of archaeological interest found by members of the public in Wiltshire. After thanking Katie for a most interesting talk, Pat formally opened the meeting.
2. **Minutes** of the 2008 Annual General Meeting were approved as a true record.
3. **Matters Arising.**
 - Ken Stimson, Footpath Secretary, said no move had been made to hold a public inquiry regarding Mud Lane, Purton.
 - Pat Crabb reported that Wiltshire Council had declined to pay footpath workers' travel expenses and Swindon Borough Council had not reprinted the Heritage Trail leaflets, presumably because of lack of funds. She thanked volunteers who had checked walks for "*12 Walks around Marlborough*"; the new book had now been published.
4. **Footpath Secretary's Report.** Ken Stimson reported that the group had been asked to comment on 12 proposed changes to Rights of Way in the past year. Although we had only lodged a formal objection in one case, in several other cases we did not favour the original proposals and had suggested alternatives which were accepted. These included a crossing of the main railway line near Blagrove where Swindon Council had obtained funding for a new footbridge. Some of the changes were "tidying up" applications arising from Swindon Council's digitisation project.

Ken also reported that during the year the two footpath working parties had completed 414 hours work, cleared 12.3 km of path, surveyed or waymarked 47 km and erected or repaired 33 stiles and 8 bridges.

Pat Crabb thanked Ken for his work. She referred to his involvement in the Swindon Rights of Way Liaison Group and to the "Big Hit" campaign which had now been running for 3 years and would probably be discontinued. This had been partly successful in that Wiltshire Council had not reduced its Rights of Way budget.
5. **Treasurer's Report.** Carole Marsh introduced the receipts and payments account and balance sheet. She commented that the Group continued to hold a healthy balance and book sales had held up well in the recession. The increase in Programme Secretary's expenses compared with the previous year was a result of the timing of claims, while the reduction in footpath clearance expenses had occurred because one volunteer had chosen not to submit claims for the time being. The £90 "donation" included £70 paid for checking walks in an external publication.

The accounts were adopted. Pat Crabb thanked Carole for her work as treasurer.
6. **Appointment of Independent Examiner.** Samantha Glennerster was re-appointed.
7. **Membership Secretary's Report.** David Trease reported that membership had increased from 375 to 397 during the year. We were now the largest group in Wiltshire. 54 new members had joined during the year compared with 36 in the previous year. He hoped that the increase in subscriptions from 1 October would not deter new or renewing members.

Pat Crabb expressed her great pleasure at the increase in numbers and thanked David, Janet Moore and Jane Baldwin for their roles in contributing to it.

8. **Programme Secretary's Report.** David Trease reported a total of 46 short, 10 evening and 44 long walks had been offered during the year. Because of a shortage of leaders, a choice of walks had only been offered on 4 days (Pat Crabb pointed out that walks were offered on both Saturday and Sunday on 67% of weekends). The average number of participants was 16, the same as last year. Six walks used public transport. The Ridgeway and White Horse themed walks had been completed. Four group holidays had been organised. He thanked all walk leaders.

Thanking both David and Janet Moore, Pat said that Janet would like to stand down as Short Walks Co-ordinator. She also mentioned the training event for new walk leaders being held on 7 November.

9. **Publicity Officer's Report.** Jane Baldwin said that in her first year in this role she had attended a training course in Cardiff and several local meetings. She had produced a publicity plan and a target had been set of a net increase of 10 members by September 2010. Our walks now appeared in the local "What's On" publication. She asked all members to let her know of any new outlets where publicity materials could be placed. Pat Crabb thanked Jane for her hard work.
10. **Secretary's Report.** Peter Gallagher reported on: the new Area website; comments made on the proposed Swindon Eastern Development Area; an objection to a planning application concerning microlights at Lower Upham Farm; the current situation at Wichelstowe; new guidance to walk leaders from Ramblers' insurers and new requirements relating to children and vulnerable adults on walks. He answered questions on the proposed country park at Wichelstowe and recording information about walk participants – the committee had agreed that recording of names should be voluntary, and to record any other information was inappropriate.

In response to a question about dogs on walks, Peter said the committee had reviewed and re-affirmed the policy of "no dogs" (except assistance dogs) during the year. If a walker brought a dog to the start of the walk without prior warning the walk leader could exercise discretion to allow the dog if he/she felt it was unlikely to cause problems (e.g. no livestock en route). Several members present endorsed the "no dogs" policy. It was suggested that this should be made clearer on the website.

11. **Chair's Report.** Pat Crabb reported on the repercussions of Ramblers' financial position, resulting in Central Office no longer sending circulars by post and asking all Groups to cut costs by 25%. She asked members to consider agreeing to receive our programme and group newsletter electronically. Pat also referred to the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, which had been due to complete its 3rd Reading in the House of Commons earlier that week, and to the closure of the café at Barbury Castle. She had raised this with Cllr Eric Shaw and encouraged members to contact their own ward councillors.
12. **Election of Officers and Committee.** It was agreed to take the elections en bloc. The following were then elected.

Chair:	Pat Crabb	Membership Secretary:	David Trease
Secretary:	Peter Gallagher	Footpath Secretary:	Ken Stimson
Treasurer:	Carole Marsh	Publicity Officer:	Jane Baldwin
Programme Secretary:	David Trease	Committee Member:	Janet Moore

Pat Crabb then said that the group was seeking additional committee members and asked those present to consider volunteering.

13. **Appointment of Representatives to Area Committee.** Pat Crabb said that a new person was needed in this role as Peter Gallagher did not wish to continue. No volunteers were forthcoming.

14. **Any Other Business.**

A member said that the Swindon HF Group had experienced problems with cross-field paths being covered by crops and asked what had resulted from the discussion at the last AGM about farmers' responsibilities to keep paths open. Pat Crabb said that anyone encountering a "cropped path" should report it to the Highway Authority. She also said that misleading "Bull in Field" signs were appearing more frequently because farmers' insurers had advised them to put them up.

In closing the meeting, Pat Crabb thanked all the group officers for their hard work and thanked everyone for attending.