

Wiltshire & Swindon Area



Cherhill
Judy Hible © 2009



ramblers
at the heart of walking

Annual Report 2008-2009

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

to be held on Saturday 23 January 2010

All members and delegates of affiliated organisations are invited to attend the 35th Annual General Meeting of The Ramblers, Wiltshire & Swindon Area, to be held at:

**The Woodlands Club, Woodland Park (off Station Road),
Calne, SN11 0JX**

(OS Explorer Map 156/157, Grid Ref. ST 9982 7068)

starting at 10am

How to get there – please see page 5

Programme

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 09.45 | Coffee available |
| 10.00 | Business Meeting – see agenda below |
| 10.45 | Break |
| 11.15 | Speaker – Simon Smart of Black Sheep Countryside Management <i>'Biodiversity in the countryside in relation to farming and wildlife'</i> |
| 13.00 | Depart for walks |

There will be circular walks of approximately 2, 4 and 5½ miles depending on the weather.

Participants should bring a picnic lunch which can be eaten in the hall.

Agenda

- 1 Welcome by Chairman.
- 2 Apologies for absence.
- 3 Approval of minutes of AGM held on 24th January 2009.
- 4 Adoption of Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 30th September 2009
- 5 Questions to and comments from Officers, including Rights of Way maintenance and Wiltshire Council resources.
- 6 Secretary's Report
- 7 Election of Officers and individual members of Area Committee.
- 8 Appointment of Independent Examiner.
- 9 Proposed Motion(s) to put to General Council. Motions for discussion should be sent to the area secretary one week before the meeting. One has already been received relating to the appointment of Trustees.
- 10 Any other business.

Election of Officers

The following people have indicated their willingness to stand for election:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Chairman: | Pat Crabb |
| Treasurer: | Malcolm Walsh |
| Footpath Secretary: | Alan Roberts |
| Membership secretary | David Trease |
| Countryside Secretary | Angela Womersley |

Alternative nominations for the above posts may be made at the meeting.

There are vacancies for:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Secretary | } see chairman's report |
| Access Officer | } for information |
| Newsletter Editor | |

Area Chairman's Report

This year has been notable for the difficulties in managing the finances of the organisation at national level. To reduce post and paper costs, area and group officers no longer receive circulars by post about current issues but are expected to search the volunteers' section of the national website. This arrangement left some officers without the tools for their job. Although this concern was taken to a meeting of the board of trustees, a solution hasn't emerged yet.

Other difficulties arose because of a new and unsuitable membership record system at Central Office. Most of these problems have now been corrected.

The area website has undergone a dramatic change too, master-minded by a new webmaster, Clive Frankham. He lives within Wiltshire but has strong links with Andover. The changes have meant that groups have to take more responsibility for inputting information and creating their own section of the site.

My thanks to all of you who have remained loyal to the Ramblers through all this and believe, as I do, that the objectives of the organisation are as important as ever and remain unchanged viz. promoting walking (mainly in the countryside), protecting rights of way, defending the beauty of the countryside and campaigning for access to open country and coast. Our campaigning staff and volunteers have recently secured the latter with the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

Soon there will be the opportunity of reviewing the areas of open countryside available for 'roaming'. Not all of Wiltshire's open countryside was recorded on OS maps when the CRoW Act 2000 came into force so we need an **area access officer** to put forward the parcels of land which were overlooked in the earlier assessment. Jon Gambles documented these in detail so the task is not too onerous. It needs a good map-reader who believes in the principle of 'freedom to roam' and is, of course, computer-literate.

Sadly Joan Crosbee has resigned as **area secretary**, so that is another post which needs a computer-literate person in order to keep an eye on the national website and bring to the attention of the area committee the issues to be addressed locally. The committee meets every two months and needs an agenda and minutes written and circulated, although the latter job could be undertaken by a minute secretary if there were a volunteer to do that. Joan was also **editor of the area newsletter *Write of Way***, so there is another opportunity to help us. Please get in touch with me on 01793 740450 or at frenshams@ukonline.co.uk if you have the interest and skills for any of these posts. I do hope you have!

Pat Crabb

Area Footpath Secretary's Report

As usual there has been a steady trickle of footpath problem reports to process from Ramblers and the general public within Wiltshire and visitors to the county. Wiltshire Footpath Campaign Team has held five meetings where we have worked hard to keep pressure on Wiltshire Council for increased funding so that our RoW are better maintained. Unfortunately there has been no inflation to the RoW maintenance budget for 2009/10, the 7% increase being due to departmental changes. The next year looks rather grim as Wiltshire Council has a cash crisis with an £3.8m overspend. Wiltshire Council's new interactive database is not fully operational so that on-line reporting of path problems is still unavailable.

Wiltshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is due for its first annual review and the Delivery Report will go out to user groups. This will restate actions, what has been done, what is going to be done and include partners to work with.

Area Officers have continued the twice-a-year liaison meetings with Wiltshire Council's RoW section where there have been useful discussions on a range of RoW issues. At September's meeting the RoW section acknowledged that while crop obstruction is a concern to them, their practical approach would be to not prioritise it if there is a convenient alternative route available around the obstructed field. So we should still be reporting all crop obstructions to the RoW section as each one must be judged on its merits. Also, to replace the faded and flimsy access land signs, a new supplier will be found.

I have taken over from Pat Crabb as a member of the Wiltshire & Swindon Countryside Access Forum attending three meetings during the year. This is an independent advisory body providing guidance on ways to improve public access, open air recreation and use of the public RoW network to bodies such as Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Defra, Natural England, AONBs, Forestry Commission, English Heritage, parish and town councils.

Finally, just remember that despite all our woes, Wiltshire is still a great place for walkers with some stunning views. So enjoy!

Alan Roberts

Footpath Working Parties

A huge 'thank you' must go to our volunteer workers who have again been very busy, putting in 1266 hours this year. They provide invaluable support to the RoW wardens in maintaining our footpaths and bridleways.

Other statistics which give an indication of the scope of their work: -

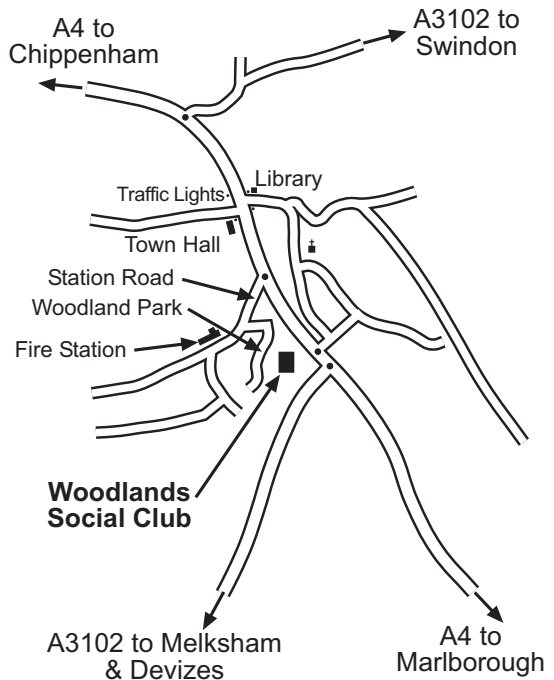
- paths cleared – 15 km;
- paths waymarked/surveyed – 60 km
- stiles – 39
- gates – 34
- bridges – 15
- steps – 7

Alan Roberts

Directions to The Woodlands Club, Calne

The Woodlands Social Club is reached via Station Road which branches off the A4 in the centre of Calne. There should be plenty of parking but if there is a problem, park by the roadside in Station Road.

Approaching from the east (Marlborough), you arrive at a double mini-roundabout; continue straight on downhill and very soon turn left at the next roundabout into Station Road. Take the first left (Woodland Park) and the club is at the top of the rise, on the left. Approaching from the west (Chippenham) drive down into the town centre, continuing straight on at the traffic lights (Town Hall is on your right, Library on your left). At the next roundabout turn right into Station Road, first left into Woodland Park and the club is at the top of the rise, on the left.



Abbreviated Area Treasurer's Report for the Year 01 Oct 2008 to 30 Sep 2009

The accounts are on a cash basis. Future accounts will be on an accruals basis (i.e. allowances made for income or expenditure appropriate to the financial year, but which occurred outside of the year).

Income:

The main change in income, £4812 cf £4000 (2007/8) was that the fourth transfer from Central Office was halved to cope with their cash flow problem. In line with the national financial crisis, bank interest fell from £74 to £10. Restricted and general funds are held in a common bank account, so in fairness I have allocated interest to the funds according to the balances held.

Expenditure:

Central Office has required a different classification of expenses in line with the budget request for 2009/2010. For comparison purposes I have reclassified all the expenses for the previous year. Some uncertainty in this reclassification may account for changes between the years under the meetings, admin, and other headings.

Group funding remained comparable to last year, as Groups did not take up their forecast increased funding requirements (£1949, cf £1979 for 2007/8).

The small expenditure in the Restricted Fund (Toomer Memorial) was for the maintenance of the memorial seat.

Balance Sheet at 30/09/09:

The only assets are the one bank account. The fall in take up from the groups means that despite the fall in allocation, the area showed an increase in its fund balances to £2096 from £1648.

Statement of Change in Funds:

This is self explanatory.

Malcolm Walsh
6th December 2009

Independent Examiner's Statement

Having carried out the procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination Guidelines I consider the Wiltshire and Swindon Area accounts to have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year to 30th September 2009.

Signed on 28th October 2009 by:
Kevin Gowen
22 Helmdon Rd., Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Area Membership Secretary's Report

The new membership database introduced at the beginning of 2008 still has some problems in the presentation of data to Areas and Groups but central office hope to have these totally sorted out in early 2010. This year the Area's total membership has increased.

| Group | 2009 | (2008) |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Chippenham | 233 | (233) |
| Mid Wilts | 153 | (158) |
| South Wilts | 389 | (403) |
| N E Wilts | 397 | (375) |
| West Wilts | 332 | (316) |
| Wiltshire Wanderers | 26 | (21) |
| Non group | 18 | (15) |
| Affiliated Clubs | 9 | (9) |
| TOTAL | 1548 | (1530) |

Rob Dawson

West Wilts Group Report

A full programme of walks has again taken place this year with walks offered on most Wednesdays and Sundays. The ingenuity of the walk leaders to always make a full and interesting programme that enables this group to thrive is appreciated. The group is indebted to Sonia Heywood who has cajoled everyone for their support. Sonia is standing down from the position of Programme Secretary but hopes to remain active within the group in another capacity.

The committee has been well supported in its "social" functions.

Two weekends of walks were held during the year, in Derbyshire in April and in Sidmouth in September. Both had around 30 attending.

We continued with just one coach trip, this time to Abbotsbury in Dorset. Two walks were led by Richard Coward and Carol Cockerell.

The Christmas Lunch was held at the Horse and Groom, East Woodlands preceded by a 5 mile walk. A further social event which involved eating was held in Trowbridge College's Catering Department.

Angela Womersley has maintained her verve for sales of walk books. There is still a stock of *Walking in West Wiltshire* but it may be time to commission a second book.

Mike Wood has continued to lead the working party on Tuesdays. Steve Leonard, the Rights of Way Warden for Wiltshire Council has moved on and his successor is still finding his feet and productivity may have fallen away. This invaluable work helps us all enjoy the countryside.

The committee meets every two months. Each committee member gives his

(her) time freely to the well-being of the group. Malcolm Walsh is standing down from the committee, after several years, most of those years as Footpath Secretary. His dedication to the task and contribution to the group is admired. The strength of any club or society is dependant on its members putting themselves forward to take on posts and responsibilities. The committee has realised that there is a need to increase awareness of the group's activities and hopefully there is someone who will be able to take up the role of **Publicity**.

Peter Mundy, *Chairman*

Chippenham Group Report

We were greatly saddened by the death of long-time rambler and committee member Daphne Damery, who had led many fine walks before cancer took her from us. To date we have been unable to fill her place on the committee.

We achieved our usual programme of fortnightly walks, tending this year to offer more shorter walks to cater for the ends of our age range (from under 8 to over 80). Again we have offered RA themed and family walks at Hallowe'en, Christmas, Easter and the summer solstice, but we have failed to stop our local paper deleting mention of this aspect from our regular press reports. A coach trip to the Forest of Dean was organised by our indefatigable footpath secretary Judith Hible who, with Alan Roberts and her family, has undertaken footpath clearance and indeed has rescued a path near Rudloe from closure (by walking it on all fours through the overgrowth, and recording the junk dumped on it by its neighbours). Numbers of walkers have remained stable, generally in double figures, and including visitors. As well as some new walks in the Swindon area, we have been rewalking routes in our first, out-of-print, walks book, with a view to reprinting in 2010. Meanwhile we still have *12 More Walks around Chippenham* to sell. Our group lunch proved popular, attended by a number of members who through age or illness no longer walk but wish to stay in touch.

Gill Minter, *Vice-Chairman*

South Wilts Group Report

It's been the usual year with a full walks programme comprising walks every Tuesday and Thursday, most Sundays and some Saturdays too. Our footpath gangs have been very busy too with both light gang and heavy gang out just about every month. A post Christmas lunch, a winter skittles evening and a summer barbecue were all well attended and covered their costs.

The committee has met regularly and has adopted robust methods to reduce our programme printing and distribution costs. This has included asking members to choose between postal or website access to our walks programmes, results of which are not yet available.

The reason for this cost cutting attempt is in response to a request from RA headquarters to reduce all group budgets. Rather than curtail essential footpath work we have concentrated on reducing programme costs but submitted a realistic budget forecast until the result of the cost cutting is known.

There has been much dismay at committee level that this course of action has been forced upon the group because of the apparent ineptness of the RA finance department to manage its resources properly. Falling membership and other revenues have resulted in a shortfall of income which has forced closure of some offices and staff redundancies at Central Office and elsewhere. That, in a time of severe recession, this wasn't foreseen nor indeed known about until too late says a lot about the RA management, financial efficiency and professionalism.

This in turn has resulted in such concern among members that special meetings are being held around the country by the RA management in an attempt to answer the disquiet felt at grass roots level. The RA management have kept a very low profile on its predicament and for a democratic organisation the fact that so few members are aware of the true situation and its causes is nothing short of shameful.

I am optimistic that things will eventually be sorted out, perhaps with some reputations and blood left on the floor, but if it makes RA management more cognisant of members real interests then that would be worthwhile. Any reduction in the many non-essential initiatives taken by the Staff at HQ and a reversion to plain English communication would be a great improvement on the present situation.

Philip Wilson, *Chairman*

Mid Wilts Group Report

As outgoing Chairman of the Mid Wilts Group this is my last report. I therefore take this opportunity to thank everyone for his or her support over the last three years. Thanks to all those volunteers who have enabled the Group to continue to provide a walk every week throughout the year, organised activities, publicised events or have represented the Group at Area level. Our publication *10 Walks around Devizes* continues to sell; most copies are bought through the local Tourist Information Office.

The trips away were much appreciated and we enjoyed a walking week in Derbyshire, a weekend in the Cheddar area plus a coach trip in June to Swanage.

The walks in the summer are proving to attract walkers from other areas particularly when walks are held on the edges of the county. The more intrepid members of the group have ventured on forays outside of our immediate area. A figure of eight format worked particularly well so that morning and afternoon walkers could enjoy part or the whole day walk in one given area. We will

continue to offer variety and choice in our programme to enable walkers of all abilities to join walks.

Last year we enjoyed a pre-Christmas roast lunch in Devizes and as this proved popular we are once again visiting a local hostelry in December.

The AGM took place in November and we welcomed Catherine Sharples onto the committee. Unfortunately no one has come forward to take on the role of **Chairman**. Paul Rayner and Geoff Pritchard stood down and we thank them for their work.

The group would particularly welcome new members on the committee to ease some of the pressure on the existing long-standing members.

Lynne Rayner, *Chairman*

NE Wilts Group Report

The committee is pleased that its efforts to increase membership have resulted in 54 new people joining (compared with 36 last year) giving a 6% increase, thus making us the largest group in Wiltshire. Jane Baldwin became publicity officer during the year and attended a course for Ramblers publicity officers in Cardiff, as well as local meetings of various bodies trying to promote walking in the Swindon area. She has produced a publicity plan along the lines suggested by Clive Frankham at an area committee meeting.

The programme of walks organised by David Trease and Janet Moore provided a choice of walks ranging from 3 to 16 miles on 66% of weekends, plus 10 evenings. The average number of participants was 16 on shorter walks and 14 on longer ones.

Six walks used public transport to reach the start. Themed walks have been The Ridgeway, Mid Wilts Way and the White Horse Trail and holidays, organised by David, have been based on Clyro, Monmouth and Shanklin.

Our finances have been watched over by treasurer Carole Marsh resulting in a bank balance at the end of the year of £259 with an operating deficit of £58.

We have been consulted by Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council about changes to 12 paths. After initially objecting to three, Ken Stimson, footpath secretary, put forward alternatives which were accepted. Our footpath working parties spent a total of 414 working hours clearing vegetation, putting up waymarks and erecting or repairing 33 stiles and 8 bridges.

Peter Gallagher, group secretary, keeps a watchful eye on the national website for actions we ought to be taking and has taken an active interest in planning proposals for housing developments to the west and to the east of Swindon. He has also been overseeing our group's part of the area website and aiming to contribute news items and photographs.

Pat Crabb, *Chairman*

This year, the group entered its 6th year of existence and enjoyed many interesting walks across the width and breadth of the county and beyond. The group has seen many new walkers and a few new members. Encouragingly, a few new potential walks leaders emerged. By October 2009, our membership stood at 26, a rise from 20 the previous year.

We held our Christmas meal at the Quarrymans Arms, Box and a few days after we enjoyed a walk from Silbury Hill to bring in the New Year.

In May, 4 members of the group enjoyed a challenging week, walking along the length of Hadrian's Wall. In October this year, 4 members spent a week's walking holiday in Corfu and Albania, organised by Lucy. The group now feels confident to organise walking breaks in a wide range of places abroad.

As well as walks on the programme, we have held a few long weekends throughout the year to places including Dorset and Cornwall. These are often in conjunction with neighbouring groups like Berkshire and Wessex, with both of whom we have formed close relationships.

We still continue to hold on average 3 walks a month with the majority of walks still starting at 10.30 to give people who travel from opposite ends of the county more time to arrive. This has proved very popular.

The updated website has had very positive feedback and this is the most common way potential walkers make first contact with our group. The vast majority of correspondence with walkers and members is now done online through channels such as email, though we always provide the option to do things through paper mail for those who aren't online

Finally, many thanks to everyone who has joined us on walks this year and who have contributed to the group.

Martin Lucas, Secretary

*Printed by Avon Printing Services Limited,
Rounponds, Melksham, SN12 8EB
www.avonprintingservices.com*

*Editor: Pat Crabb
Production: Rob Dawson*