



Chairman's Notes

Alison Parker

In February of this year we celebrated our 25th AGM. Importantly we also welcomed two new Area Officers, Peter Carr took over the membership and has been busy since trying to get this up to date, and Susan Sharp has taken responsibility for the website. **Are there any more volunteers out there?** There are opportunities to join Area Council as an individual or a co-opted member, and every Group is entitled to two representatives.

The Big Event of 2009

In April we hosted the General Council of the Ramblers in Shropshire at Harper Adams University College. It was a great opportunity to blow the trumpet for Shropshire and its delights to a wider audience. Trevor Allison has written a more detailed account of the event elsewhere in this newsletter. It was also good to meet members from other parts of the country, and also to put faces to some of the shadowy figures who reside in Central Office.

Next year the General Council will meet in Oxford. We are advised that one of our delegates should be someone who has not previously attended. If you might be interested let me know. This is an excellent opportunity to 'network' as they call it nowadays, and to find out more about the wider workings of the Ramblers.

Money Matters

Many of you will by now be aware of the financial difficulties currently being met by Ramblers. There will be cuts throughout the organisation to deal with new budgeting.

There is an urgent need to reduce costs in the

Groups and Area as well, which can be done almost immediately by the much wider use of email among members.

Printing and distribution of programmes is our largest expense. Every one of our members is entitled to receive a programme and so be kept in touch with their group. **Please use your email facility to receive your group's programme**, if you have this. Included with this newsletter is a **returnable survey** to try to ascertain members' priorities, and an **opportunity to send your email address to your group**.

All communication from Central Office to Areas and Groups has already gone electronic. The production of the next walks book has also been delayed pending further discussions.

Contact with the Board of Trustees

Following from discussion at General Council the Trustees of the Ramblers have decided that they should be better informed about the local areas and groups and have set up an arrangement for each Trustee to have direct contact with a small number of groups.

It so happens that the new **Chairman of Trustees, Rodney Whittaker**, already has family in Shrewsbury and he will be our contact, so it seemed a good idea to invite him to speak at our AGM in February, an invitation that he has already accepted. The subject of Ramblers finances will be foremost in many people's minds and this will be an opportunity to ask him questions.

Looking ahead to 2010

Next year will be the 75th Anniversary of the Ramblers. When we were 60 in 1995 our members walked the whole of the Shropshire

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General Council 2009

Trevor Allison

As you should recall the General Council of the Ramblers was held at Harper Adams University College near Newport on April 3rd and 4th and our Area was the host.

Firstly, many thanks again to all those volunteers who helped in any way to make the gathering a success; there were several expressions of thanks from Central Office staff and others for the welcome, and the work done by the Area.

This year was a bit of an experiment as the length of the Council had been cut by almost a day, mainly in order to reduce costs. So the atmosphere was more business-like and less of a social gathering/party.

Our chairman, Alison Parker, gave an excellent welcome and was followed by Neil Willcox of Shropshire Council who spoke in a fairly positive way about what Shropshire is trying to achieve.

After dinner Tom Franklin, our Chief Executive, gave a thought-provoking, at the time, talk on 'The year behind – the year ahead'. However I can remember little of it now, except that the Ramblers do need to be at the heart of walking!

The next morning, after several other short reports, the election of officers took place, the main interest being in who would be elected as the new Chairman to replace Kate Ashbrook, and the ordinary board members for 3 years; we ended up with Rodney Whittaker as Chairman, and Kate Ashbrook, Gus Halfhide, a 57 year

Chairman's Notes continued

Way. With so much time and commitment having so recently been spent on the southern section of the Shropshire Way where the needed renovation is now complete, we now plan to shift the emphasis to the north of Shrewsbury. Council officers have already planned a route for the renovation and extension of the existing route throughout north Shropshire.

To celebrate **75 years of achievements by the Ramblers**, plans are now being made for

old from Somerset, and Eleanor Harris, a 20 something year old from London, a bit of an activist and city person! It might make for a more interesting board if we do not have to spend all year worrying about finances.

Then came the first session of six policy motions, 3 of reasonable significance, were passed and 3, all about matters on the 'fringe' of rambling were defeated, and there were no great long debates about any of these. Then came a working lunch with sandwiches, when the delegates took part in one of 4 workshops, I do not know how many of the delegates found these of real value, but I was not impressed by what I heard from the staff of Central Office about the problems with our membership system.

In the second session of debates on motions, 5 of the 6 'domestic' motions were dealt with, and one of these, about the 'Work Priorities' of Ramblers' produced a spirited debate and a close vote, our tellers coming up with the result that it was defeated by 3 votes, 54 to 57. As a result the Board did then admit that the matter should have been better communicated to members. One other somewhat unimportant motion was lost; my feeling was that most of the delegates wanted the Board to concentrate on matters at the heart of walking!

Kate Ashbrook, as retiring chairman, then wound up the Council, again with copious words of thanks to Shropshire; and so to next year at Keble College Oxford over the second weekend of April, and at least one of our delegates must be new to attendance at Council!

a series of walks using the provisional route which we will ask you to include in your Group's summer programme. Details will be available in time for you to do this.

I hope that they will serve as an introduction for some members and groups to the north of the County and as a reminder to the Council's Countryside officers that we still need the Shropshire Way to cover all of the County. Please support these walks.

News from the groups

RA Mid Shropshire Parish Paths Partnership

Bill Hodges

For years Shrewsbury Group was conscious that we weren't doing any useful footpath work apart from the occasional path clearance. About seven years ago one of the frequent mid week walkers, John Evans, a retired GP, offered to do something about it. We met with County Council staff who explained that they could take us into the Parish Paths Partnership scheme even though we were not a Parish organisation. We worked out that our remit should be footpath work in any Parish close to Shrewsbury where there was no local 3P scheme (virtually all of them). Fortunately we knew the wife of a Parish Councillor in the large Parish of Condover where there were a lot of path problems and this gave us access to local knowledge and contacts for a start. John got to work, enlisting his walking friends and quite soon got things organised with regular working parties and liaising with Council staff, farmers and landowners. A lot of work was done, not only in Condover, but in Bayston Hill, Great Hanwood, Longden, Pitchford, Pimhill, Church Pulverbatch, Great Ness, Bicton, Shrewsbury Town, Berrington, Wroxeter, Leebotwood, Smethcott, All Stretton and Pontesbury (until Pontesbury got its own local 3P scheme).

It was a setback when the County decided that volunteers should not work on roadsides without their supervision (in effect stopping this work). However over the years it became clear that a lot of the easy accessible work had been done and John spent ever more time looking for work for the team and making the arrangements. It became harder to schedule work for regular working parties and any long periods of wet weather made ground conditions unsuitable for work away from hard surfaces.

Age catches up on us all and this year John decided he should retire as our team 'foreman'. He is leaving us a few identified jobs and promises to help with his considerable knowledge of who is who in the great rural area. His work will be hard to match. He has brought great credit to our Association.

In the Ramblers we enjoy our walks, we are a pain to officialdom in nagging about what they should be doing for the public benefit, but we also put in voluntary manpower to ease the burden of public expenditure, thanks to people like John. We can all be proud of his work.

Telford and East Shropshire Group

Bob Alton

A make-over for the walks

pro-gramme: The group now has a bright new-look newsletter and walks programme. New Programme Secretary, Paula, has redesigned the six-monthly format which is now much smaller in overall shape, but with several more pages, and is considered to be easier to handle and is certainly more attractive. The programme also incorporates the Ramblers new branding and logo. With the help of Assistant Programme Secretary, Jo, the group has once again produced a comprehensive and varied set of walks, although with fewer numbers on the Sunday outings there is a desperate need for new leaders. To help new volunteers the group has produced a set of guidance notes.

New leisurely walks: Two of the regular leaders Anne and Gwyn are leading a series of new 'shorter walks' aimed at people who may not always want the longer excursions. So routes will tend to be shorter and taken at a more leisurely pace and it is hoped to combine the walk with the chance to visit a place of interest at the end. If you do not receive the T & ES Group programme and would like a copy please email arsumner@googlemail.com.

Shropshire Young Ramblers

The last year has continued in the usual SYR trend – lots of lovely varied walks followed by lots of lovely cake!

Further sections of Offa's Dyke have been trodden and Cadair Idris conquered. The Stiperstones has been a popular destination as ever (nothing to do with the 'Bog Tearoom' – honest!) and we've headed to new territory around Welshpool and Newport. Now that summer's here we've also managed to squeeze in a few evening walks through Ironbridge and Pontesbury with more planned.

A weekend away earlier in the year enabled us to explore Northumberland – with some taking a rather chilly dip in the sea – hopefully the weather will be warmer for our weekend on the Llyn Peninsula in September.

An invite from a former member to visit him in France led to many magnificent snowy scenes and an interesting experiment in walking in snowshoes!

Our numbers are steadily increasing with 'New Member' walks proving as popular as ever.

Away from two legs we've taken to two wheels and explored Cannock Chase with a further ride around Ellesmere planned for the summer.

The more buoyant members of our group took to the water and canoed a section of the river Severn – although the return trip was much drier and less energetic on the steam train! White water rafting has been mentioned as the next challenge... !!!!

There have of course been the numerous meals out and trips to see plays and planes and whatever else takes our fancy!

If you would like to find out more about SYR then please look at our website www.syr.org.uk or contact us at syr.update@googlemail.com.

Get Walking Day

**Saturday
May 30th, 2009**

John Newnham

Members of the public looked on in bemusement as a horde of ramblers from the Shrewsbury Group, complete with banner, thronged the town's market square for the start of this event. After a few short words from chairman, John Newnham, they were soon led away on three separate walks ranging from 2 to 5 miles in length.

This was an opportunity to discover the urban footpath network as well as to demonstrate that the countryside is never very far away. Points that were audibly made in an interview on Radio Shropshire on the previous day when their 'anchor man' Eric Smith was commandeered to accompany us on a short walk from the BBC studios on the north side of Shrewsbury. We may have gained some members from this event; it certainly made people more aware of the existence of our Group, and we aim to replicate it next year, with perhaps more forward planning to persuade non-members to participate.

Favourite Walks around Oswestry and the Borders

A book of walks published by the Oswestry Group

In the far north-west of Shropshire, the historic border market town of Oswestry nestles against the Oswestry Uplands in an area that has Wales to the west, north and south. The area was once in Wales and still is true border country where many villages in England have Welsh names and Welsh is commonly heard spoken, particularly on market days. It is a very special area, where Wales meets what we think of as 'our forgotten bit of Shropshire'. This is wonderful and very varied walking country. Immediately to the east of the town lies the relatively flat Shropshire plain, where, in addition to quiet country lanes and a network of field paths, there is ample opportunity for leisurely rambles along the towpaths of the Montgomery, Ellesmere and Llangollen canals. The Oswestry Uplands to the west of the town stretch from Llanymynech Rocks, in the south, to Chirk, just over the river Ceiriog into Wales; the long distance Offa's Dyke Path follows the line of these hills. There are some spectacular distant views across much of Shropshire and into Wales from the high points on this ridge. Then there are the two little-known but beautiful river valleys close by in neighbouring Wales. To the south, the Tanat valley wanders through farming country from the foothills of the Berwyn Mountains. The narrower Ceiriog valley stretches from the village of Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, deep in the same foothills, downstream to Chirk, and on to join the Dee.

This book was born out of an idea to record some of our members' favourite walks in this outstanding walking country for posterity. The result is the 18 walks described, they are all



between 4 to 6 miles in length and range in difficulty from leisurely to strenuous. They cover the area from the Ceiriog Valley in the north to Rodney's Pillar in the South. We hope the book is of interest to both residents and visitors.

The book will be available at a price of £4.95 from local retail outlets or can be obtained from:

Peter Carr
Secretary to the Oswestry Group
of the Ramblers
(Tel 01691 780722)

Cleobury Country Walks

Susan Sharp

Cleobury Mortimer Footpath Association (CMFA) is a P3 group who carry out footpath work in the parishes around Cleobury Mortimer, an area now known as Cleobury Country which stretches from the south and east county boundary to Clee Hill in the west and Stottesdon in the north.

I am the Ramblers Footpath Secretary for this area and also the co-ordinator for the P3 group. In this second role, for the last 18 months I have been working on a set of leaflets describing walks in the area under the title "Cleobury Country Walks".

I obtained funding from Shropshire County Council under their Walking for Life Initiative and from Awards for All (the National Lottery). By producing these leaflets, CMFA hopes to encourage both locals and visitors to explore the glorious but little known countryside of Cleobury Country. The main emphasis of the leaflets is on short walks to encourage people to get out into the countryside, but we also see them as a tourist resource.

When finished, the complete set will be 24 leaflets with walks of between 1.5 and 6 miles. Some leaflets have a short and long option so there are more than 24 walks. 20 leaflets have now been completed. There is a secondary leaflet to provide guidance on how many stiles there are on walks and whether they have dog gates.

Also, a further leaflet explains how to combine individual leaflets to create walks of 7 to 12 miles. As a keen walker myself, this is my way of catering for stronger walkers.

The leaflets are also useful for people who like to plan their own walks as they identify which footpaths in this area are clear and easy to walk. Between them they use nearly all of the walkable footpaths in the area, thanks to the recent Parish Action Project and my P3 group.

Many of the walks start from the centre of Cleobury Mortimer, but there are also walks starting from the neighbouring villages of Neen Sollars, Milson, Neen Savage and Hopton Wafers. They explore some of the best rural landscapes in Shropshire.

The leaflets are available at 50p each from local outlets and also as PDF files free from our website www.cmfa.co.uk

The remaining 4 walks will be developed over the next year. These will be to the north east, where there are some diversions pending following Parish Action Work in the area.

Membership Survey

Your group knows exactly what sort of walking you like and the sort of social events you want them to organise, but they never put anything on that you want to participate in. Do they know? Now is your chance to tell us.

The membership survey enclosed with this newsletter will help us find out what the majority of members want from the Ramblers in terms of walks and social events. The statistical trends identified via the survey will be given to the groups so that they can determine how their programmes and social events match with member requirements. Then over the next few months groups will use the information to adjust programmes, or even add different walks to the programmes to meet what you tell us you want.

Where you specify that you are prepared to receive programmes and other Area and Group information by email, your email address will be forwarded to your Group Secretary. Please rest assured that you will NOT be deluged with information from the Ramblers, you will only get the Group and Area information that you currently get by post. Your email address will NOT be passed on to any third parties.

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Area Constitution

The Board of Trustees has asked Areas to update their constitutions to reflect some minor changes. We attempted to bring these to the Area AGM in the past but inadequate notice had been given to members to see the proposed changes.

We therefore propose to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting on Saturday 3rd October 2009 at 10am at The Gateway, Chester Street, Shrewsbury, to carry out the proposed changes. Any paid up member of the Ramblers is entitled to attend. The meeting will be followed by a scheduled Area Council at 10.30 am to which visitors will be welcome.

Below is a summary of the changes. If any member would like to see the detailed constitution please contact the Area Secretary, Marion Law on 01952 462855 or email marionlaw@tiscali.co.uk.

- 1 Some terminology brought up to date and standardized, eg "Executive Committee" becomes "Board of Trustees", "auditor" becomes "independent examiner".
- 2 Management of Area invested in Area Council, and stipulation to have an Area Executive Committee (EC) removed. The appointment of an Area EC now becomes an option rather than a compulsion.
- 3 Area AGM to be held before the end of February, or before the deadline date for General Council motions, whichever comes earlier.
- 4 Reference to Areas appointing staff and Area trustees, and to charging subscriptions removed as these functions all now belong to Board of Trustees.
- 5 Reference to need for Area Treasurer to prepare a budget and for Area to use bank approved by the Board.

Rail Rambles

Marion Law

The Rail Rambles recently celebrated 20 years of providing walks from stations on the border with Wales and out to the West Wales coast. Originally established by Alan Howard, they have gone from strength to strength in popularity and now attract a large number of walkers to two or three walks each Saturday. Of recent years they have been financially supported by Arriva Trains and by Ramblers Cymru and an attractive brochure has been widely available at stations and information centres.

This year, sadly, at very short notice the Ramblers' contribution, both financial and practical, was withdrawn and the volunteers left to produce a makeshift programme in much smaller numbers than previously. This is available on the ArrivalTrainsWales website and on the Ramblers group walks finder, and it is hoped shortly to have a dedicated website. Meantime it is available by email from marionlaw@tiscali.co.uk, who is collecting email addresses so that these can be used for future programmes.

Membership Survey continued

Please tell us what you want from your group by completing and returning the member survey form to:

Peter Carr, epc@uwclub.net
Area Membership Secretary,
Tre Tylluan, Dolybont,
Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant,
Oswestry, SY10 0LJ

Area Annual General Meeting

This will be held on Saturday 13th February 2010 at 2pm at The Gateway Centre, Shrewsbury. The speaker will be Rodney Whittaker, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, who will be available to answer questions.

Acknowledgements

My thanks as always to the contributors, and to Jane Hadlow of the Oswestry Group, who has this year put the newsletter together.

Marion Law, Area Secretary

Area Officers

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Area Secretary	Marion Law marionlaw@tiscali.co.uk	01952 462855
Treasurer	Jeff Vaughan jeffivaughan@googlemail.co	01630 673685
Area Footpath Secretary	John Newnham john.newnham@btinternet.com	01743 353858
Publicity Secretary	Trevor Allison eta-06@tiscali.co.uk	01939 260899
Campaigns Officer Acting	Alison Parker (Dennis Nisbet has recently resigned)	
Membership Secretary	Peter Carr epc@uwclub.net	01691 780722
Countryside Secretary	David Shelley	01746 861462
Exhibitions Secretaries	Graham Baker & Pat Morgan bakermorgan@tiscali.co.uk	01743 244922
Website Co-ordinator	Susan Sharp susan@eaglelane.co.uk	01299 271099
Area Access Officer	Vacant	