



# The Ramblers' Association – Dorset Area Annual Report – 2015/16

## General Overview

### Big Pathwatch

Although this has officially ended the final report hasn't been issued and isn't expected until this month.

Preliminary indications are that overall it has been a successful exercise

### General Council 2016

This year's General Council (GC) was held at the University of York on its Heslington Campus. The main business of GC was on Sunday 23rd April, although delegates were asked to arrive by 16.00 on the previous day. Delegates from Dorset were Peter Evans and Mike Heckford.

The general conclusion was that, as usual, there was insufficient time for discussion of the motions so many were remitted to the Board of Trustees

### Governance Review

The final report on this subject is that it was finally killed off at General Council this year as it had very little support among the Area and Group volunteers. This was generally welcomed by the Group and Area Committees in Dorset.

### Annual Area Picnic

The venue this year for the Area Picnic was the Mary Baxter Memorial on Knowle Hill. After last year's washout we were rewarded with a lovely day and stunning views. A record of 8 group walks took part and a total of 89 ramblers met at the picnic site.

### Treasurers Report

The finances in the Dorset Area remain healthy and the Area's general funding is showing a surplus of £1256.34 at the end of this financial year, this surplus has been mainly brought about by a one off payment of £900 budgeted for to spend on a new Area website during the year, in the end this was done in house and the money was not spent. Many thanks to the Secretary. Although the Dorset Area has a policy of using surplus cash reserves to contribute to budget funding by Central Office, this has not proved necessary during the past year; provision, however, is made to continue the policy in 2016/17. The Area still keeps just within the financial reserves policy imposed by Central Office a few years ago.

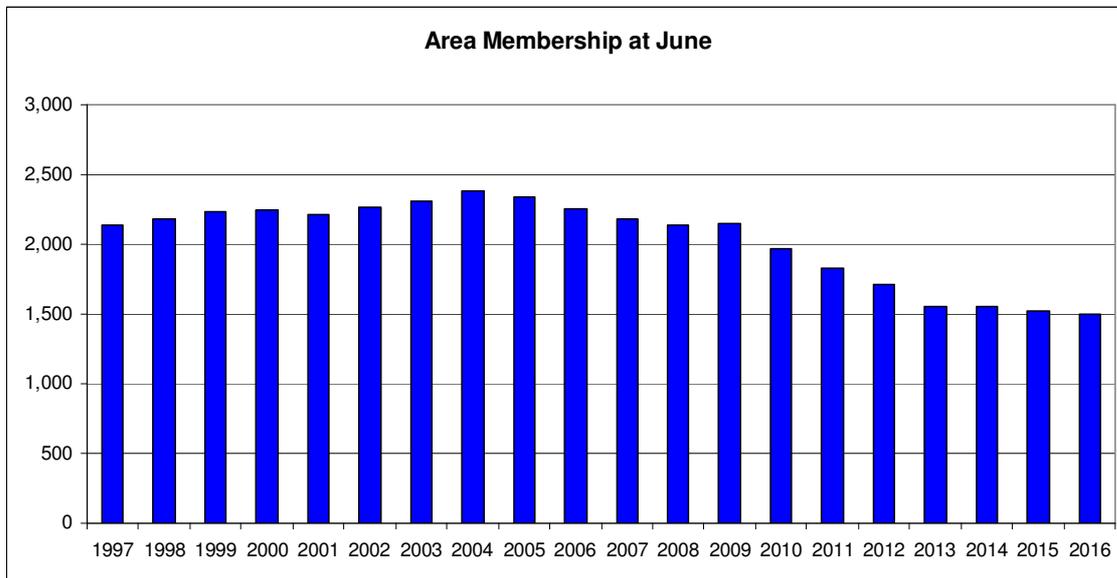
The Jubilee Trail Guide Fund shows an increase of £581.20. This is due to an inability by Dorset County Council to progress requested improvements to the Jubilee Trail, in the past these have been financed on a 50 – 50 basis but it seems now that Dorset County Council do not want our money. It is unfortunate that Dorset CC continue to reorganise [reduce] its staff dealing with rights of way and this is affecting the organisation of new improvement projects. The Area is grateful for the work carried out by Rosemary Bramah and Sue Blake in organising and following through projects and for selling the Jubilee Trail Guides; also for donations made to the fund, especially by the West Dorset Group, during the year.

The 'basic allowance' arrangements for Group finance have continued as in previous years; where these prove inadequate, budgets have to be submitted. Four groups have accepted the basic award for 2016/17 with two and the Dorset Area only making a budget request for more than the basic award. Budgets requests have up to now, always been accepted by Central Office but with ever tighter restraints on the money available, mainly due to falling Ramblers' membership, one wonders when cuts will come. We must be ready to justify the budgets claimed when that time comes. Central Office instructions regarding authorisation of payments at Area and Group level introduced for 2015/16 have recently been repeated and updated after a request by the association's external auditors.

In closing may I thank all the Treasurers for their help during the year in submitting their Group's financial details and returns to me on time; also to Martin Ford-Horne for auditing the Area's accounts.

## Membership Report

As started in the brief report in Dorset Footnotes Dorset Area Membership continues to decline but only very slowly so perhaps there is hope that it may stabilise or indeed increase in the future. Similarly the membership of the Ramblers continues to reduce slowly but if the trend continues we will drop below 100,000 members in a few years.



## Publicity Officer

As you will be aware Cheryl was unable to continue in this role and I would thank her for the valiant efforts to raise the profile of the Ramblers in Dorset and would again ask for any volunteers to take on these duties at Area

## Editor – Dorset Footnotes

Footnotes has had a good 2016 with each edition being edited to a tight 8 pages. The format of the printed edition means that the next step up is 12 pages which obviously needs a lot more copy from members and some additional content from the Editor.

Advertising interest is now based upon our regular supporters with little extra commercial advertising coming through. This is not a problem as the revenues from advertising are relatively low. In addition it leaves more space for articles, helping to keep Footnotes as a regular 8 page issue.

Footnotes continues to be produced as a print copy and digital copy. From September 2015 to September 2016 there was a reduction of 70 printed copies, 1565 copies of Footnotes 75 were sent out. This is largely accounted for by 70 North Dorset Members opting to receive E Footnotes without also receiving the printed copy. E-Footnotes is directly distributed by e-mail, via Group Secretaries, to the membership of Dorset Young Walkers and The Dorset 4050 Walkers. We now produce a website version of Footnotes which is essentially E-Footnotes without the Who' Who Section – this protects the contact information from widespread circulation.

Producing Footnotes is a team effort so a big thank you to all the contributors, you make my job very easy. I must also thank Danni Hudson who converts, usually overnight, my 'rough' copy into the different formats required by the printers, E Footnotes and the Web Version. Stewart Borrett, of Amber Graphics, organises the printing and distribution, quantities of which can vary by the month. Last but not least, the Dorset Group Footnotes distributors who fill and address all those 1565 envelopes.

So think about going digital or writing an article – if you are nervous about your writing skills, don't worry as I am there to help you edit and refine it. Topics can be anything that is loosely linked to Rambling. Deadline for the next edition is 1st January 2017 so make my new year and send me some copy and a photo or two.

In conclusion, Footnotes is still going strong and I am enjoying my time as Editor.

### **Area Footpath Secretary**

This is my fifth report as the Area Footpath (and Access) Secretary. Regrettably our Committee - which is so well and fairly chaired by our President – is suffering from the common ailment of shortage of potential successors for those hard-working geographical Group Footpath Secretaries, the Coastal Access Officer, and the Jubilee Trail co-ordinator. We have an open invitation to guests to attend our Area Footpath Committee meetings, which has been reinforced by publishing the dates in Dorset Footnotes, and appeals at Area Council. The Committee's main objective is to consider and debate applications for changes to the Public Rights of Way network, and all matters relating to Access.

I attend meetings of the Dorset County Council Regulatory Committee when Rights of Way (RoW) matters are on the agenda, and speak when the occasion requires/allows. These attendances have diminished considerably in the last year, as most RoW matters are dealt with under Delegated Authority.

The results of the Big Pathwatch project were due to have been revealed to the public in July, but due to a certain referendum and the outcome, and a shuffle at the top at Ramblers Central Office, it was thought prudent to defer it. Central Office are now

“..planning a media launch stunt during the week of 14 – 20 November to bring attention to the report, encourage people to download the new Pathwatch app, and get people signed up to our new campaign. The stunt will involve some of our path maintenance teams tackling path problems on Offa's Dyke, showcasing the wonderful work Ramblers do to protect our path network – work we want to build on across England and Wales.”

So by the time you read this.....

**Jubilee Trail** - Between March and August this year Rosemary Bramah walked the entire length of the Jubilee Trail, and reports that in general the Trail is in pretty good order and there is evidence that the route is well walked though probably not as a long distance route. Thanks go to all the monitors and their partners for keeping an eye on the Trail: there have been some recent new recruits for the 'south' section, and another in the north who will take on the full 20 mile stretch, which has been diligently monitored by one member for many years. Only the first 2½ miles of the Trail now remains without one (and has done for three years), which Rosemary is undertaking until a new volunteer can be found. Unfortunately, a proposed 'get-together' for monitors lacked majority support, and did not go ahead. It is hoped to try again next year. Improvements to the Trail have ground to a halt: despite funds being available from the JT 'pot', Dorset County Council are not in a position to 'match fund' with provision of labour. The sales of Guide Books have been very poor this year.

**Coastal Access** - By the time you read this, Brian Panton and I, and several members of the South Dorset Group, will have attended the Public Inquiry into Objections by Ilchester Estates to the Abbotsbury to Rodden Hive section of Dorset Stretch 2 of Coastal Access – Lyme Regis to Portland (Rufus Castle). The Ramblers – along with the SWCPA, OSS, and DLAF - support the NE proposed route, and object to the Objector's alternative. Brian will represent the Ramblers at the PI. We do not yet have any indication of when the Appointed Person will issue his/her verdict.

Our continuing thanks go to Rosemary and her Jubilee Trail monitors, Brian our Coastal Access Officer, and also to the Group Footpath Secretaries, who have such a wide range of knowledge, experience and abilities.

Last but not least – the Memorial Stone for the Late Priscilla Houstoun (1916-2001), who was Area Secretary in the 1980s/90s and who devised the route of the Wessex Ridgeway in Dorset was officially unveiled with an extremely successful 'event' on Ibberton Hill, in May. Several of her relatives attended, and it was deemed by all to have been a successful day.

## **Group Reports**

### **East Dorset**

The East Dorset Group is struggling a little with some long-standing Committee Members standing down, but fortunately we have a replacement nominated for the role of Secretary which, as all will appreciate, is a critical one for the successful functioning of any group.

Membership of the Group continues to decline slowly as does the national membership which is worrying for the future of the Ramblers as a campaigning organisation.

The Group put on nearly 3 walks per week of varying lengths for which we are very grateful to our dedicated leaders. It should be noted that there has been a reduction in the number of organised long walks (over 13 miles) on a Sunday.

The Purbeck Plod was again a success and not only gives pleasure (I think) to the participants but generates welcome funds for the Group. We are very grateful to the many volunteers who assist in the organisation and running of the event.

Recruitment in the absence of a Publicity Officer appears to be largely *via* the Group Website with a significant number of enquiries being received.

We were pleased to assist the LDWA with their Dorset 100 (a 100-mile challenge walk) by manning the drinks stop at Milton Abbas.

We continue to support the Poole Harbour Trail which is going from strength to strength.

Rights of Way related activities – we continue to monitor the various activities associated with this including liaising with DCC, checking the associated planning applications and in many cases monitoring the state of footpaths using our Parish Patrollers and local Footpath Officers.

There were a good number of Social Events including a well supported Skittles Evening and a number of evening and morning walks with a pub finish.

Finally, wearing my group hat, I want to say a big 'Thank You' to the committee for all the hard work they have done during the year, and a special thanks to Margaret for all the help she has given me in my first year as Acting Chairman.

### **North Dorset**

It has been another successful year for the NDRG with a full programme of walks on Wednesdays and Sundays. Several members led their first walks and there were some adventurous new destinations such as 'Hell Lane', Golden Cap, the Mendip hills, the Purbeck Coastline and a jolly tasting at the Melbury Vineyard. A ramble across the Neolithic landscape of Cranborne Chase ended with the farmer showing our group around his museum of the finds that he has made over a lifetime of archaeology on his farm.

Enjoyable social events included the annual HF walking holiday in May to Haytor on Dartmoor. 12 members managed several summits as well as the coast path south of Plymouth largely dodging the rain. Our annual supper in July was held at the restaurant of the Udder Farm shop and more than 25 members and guests enjoyed splendid food and company.

Several of our members led (and many more joined) walks in the Gillingham Walking Festival in early September. Happily, our annual 'path-clearing day' had earlier been on the outskirts of the town helping to make the paths more accessible for all.

Members have been deeply moved by the generous bequest to the group following the untimely death of a very active member, Derek Daniels. The most appropriate ways to remember his friendship and involvement are being considered.

### **South Dorset**

This has been another good year for the Group, again supported by an able Committee. Despite a slow decline over the period in the Group's membership numbers, it appears to be those who do not walk with us who leave. The numbers we have on our walks are good, and appear to be actually increasing. This is partly due to people visiting (e.g. from other groups), new members or existing members of Ramblers who join us on moving to Dorset. So, despite appearances to the contrary, the Group continues to thrive.

One of the reasons for this may be the increasing variety of the walks in our Programme. The walks are no longer an invariable 10 miles, but typically range from 6 to 14 miles, and often have a theme attached, and have included visits to Nature Reserves, a Geological walk, joint walks with the Dorchester Strollers, the Cheshire Homes and the Wessex Wanderers, an informal Ramblers Group who offer walks (often linear) along the Weymouth – Bristol Railway Line.

Thanks to our enthusiastic Social Secretary, who is always trying to fill in the time we do not spend walking, we have also enjoyed Skittles matches, a Quiz evening, a barbeque, a visit to Wolfeton Hall (not the care home!), as well as our regular Christmas and Midsummer meals. These have been popular and well attended and do offer the opportunity for those members who no longer walk with us to meet and socialise.

27 of us enjoyed our annual holiday with HF at Bedgellert, Snowdonia, one of the smaller HF properties where our party had exclusive use of the accommodation. The walks were superb, aided by the glorious September weather, and we were always confident of returning to a drink or two at the bar, followed by an appetising meal. Thank you HF, you looked after us really well, even doubling your usual order of bananas to meet our preferences.

Last year's report mentioned that our programme compilation and website management were being completely reorganised. This process was completed with the issue of the March 2016 programme, and we are now used to the new processes which are less time consuming and do not require as much specialist knowledge. We spend less on website maintenance as well!

Because our Constitution limits the term during which the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer can remain in office, we will be electing new people to those posts. In particular, we will be losing Peter Evans as Chairman, who has ably steered the Group over the last four years, although he will stand for re-election to the Committee. We are also losing John Peel, Keith Seymour, and Sue Thurley, and we thank them as well as Peter for their work for the Group. We also thank David Burgess, who has decided to stand down after many years as Footpath Working Group Coordinator.

### **West Dorset**

The group has had another successful year, with a programme of 84 walks. This is however a reduction on last year mainly due to a lack of new walk leaders coming forward.

West Dorset also participated in the Group Picnic on 17 July and our chairman led a short walk from Kingston to Knowle Hill.

Encouragingly, our membership rose from 165 to 174 in the year to end September, reversing the previous downward trend. We were pleased to welcome 19 new members, which was undoubtedly helped by continuous promotion on the website and in Marshwood Vale Magazine.

The group enjoyed two marvellous holidays during the year: Cardigan in April and more recently, the South Hams. Other social events included the Christmas lunch and the ever-popular skittles evening. We also enjoyed a number of pub lunch walks during the year, and walks followed by tea and cakes at members' houses.

A number of our members are involved in monitoring the Jubilee Trail, whose work is much appreciated, and we were able to continue to help fund maintenance work by Dorset County Council with an additional contribution from commission received from Ramblers' Worldwide Holidays.

The group thanks our chairman, Cynthia Whyte, and treasurer, Arthur Hunt, for their sterling efforts and commitment to West Dorset Ramblers, as they step down from their respective posts.

The work of the individual members of the committee during the year is very much appreciated and we look forward to another successful programme of walks and events in the coming year.

### **Dorset Young Walkers' Group**

It has been a good year, with us managing to put on a walk most weekends. The committee is fairly new, in its makeup, with a number of key positions replaced, and with the meetings now held in Poole, as well as Dorchester. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time on the committee this year, and those who have stepped down, after many years of voluntary work. Since the new committee started in April, we have encouraged greater engagement, and discussion on

social media, particularly Facebook, explored having greater ties with neighbouring groups, organised a number of joint walks with other groups, and setup a new section of the website to look at the popularity of different walks, average attendance, and who is volunteering to lead walks.

We have had many social events organised this year. There have been food festivals at Sturminster Newton, Cattistock, Weymouth and Wimborne Minster, including events specialising in Cheese, Dorset Knob Throwing and Seafood. In addition, we have had festivals celebrating film and music, at the Lighthouse in Poole, Lytchett Matravers and Wimborne Minster. Lastly, during the summer, we had a few camping trips, a picnic, and a BBQ on Bournemouth beach.

It has been a successful year for the walks programme, with a wide variety of walks, on almost every weekend. There have been some quiet periods, most notably, during the summer. Our new member walks continue to be popular, and we have participated in walks with other groups, such as a twenty mile walk around Swanage and Corfe Castle and another round the perimeter of Bath.

In an effort to encourage new people to lead walks, we had our first walk leader training event in many years, which was well attended. We also had quite a few people attend the first National Young Ramblers event, hosted by Tiger Bay Ramblers, which, as well as walking, and social events, also included discussions with other young walking groups across the country.

Thank you to all who have helped make the year an enjoyable one.

### **Dorset 4050 Walkers Group**

Our work this year has been supported by a stable and full strength Committee, with four existing committee members and three co-opted committee members being elected at the AGM. The post of Group Secretary was very quickly filled following the AGM and before our first committee meeting took place.

The Group primarily walk at weekends and there has been a walk or walks every weekend almost without fail. The walks have been varied in distance and difficulty; they can range from 5 to 6 miles up to 25 miles (a number of members completing the 25 mile Purbeck Plod).

Summary key walking metrics relating to; Dorset 4050 walkers:

Overall metrics

- 63 Walks
- 670 Total miles walked
- 10 persons on average per walk
- 11 active walk leaders 2016 (6 in 2015)

Grading of walks

- 15 Leisurely walks
- 33 Moderate walks
- 15 Strenuous walks

Distance Breakdown

- 13 Short walks
- 39 Medium walks
- 11 Long walks

Location of walks

- 11 walks outside Dorset
- 52 inside Dorset

Once again, a number of our members supported the South West Coast Path Challenge, which helps raise funds to protect and maintain the coastline which we use and enjoy for many of our walks.

The 4050 Group would like to highlight the following:

- Membership has seen an increase from 46 to 50 members.
- Alongside our Dorset walking programme, trips to Snowdonia, Dartmoor, East Devon, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight have been undertaken with great success. Further trips are in the planning stage for next year.
- A new 4050 Group Website, developed using the Ramblers web page toolkit, has been implemented and refined over the last year. The new site is fully integrated with the Ramblers Website and has attracted new members, Ramblers on holiday in the area and Ramblers from neighbouring groups to join our walks.

- The Facebook social media outlet remains very active with many contributors and photographs. Facebook is also used as one of our means of notifying members of new walks or walk updates.
- The social side of the Group has included a Burns Night, attendance at Wimborne Cider festival and a very successful “New Members” evening.

We continue to see new faces attending our walks, and we are incredibly grateful to all our walk leaders who have helped to provide a full programme of walks making this a very successful and enjoyable year. We aim to continue to build on our success and to look at new ways to encourage more people of the benefits of walking with the 4050 Group.

Compiled by Jim Scott  
Area Secretary

*Note this now includes the Area Picnic and 4050 Walkers reports*