



# The Ramblers' Association – Dorset Area Annual Report – 2013/14

## General Overview

### Celebrations

There are two linked celebrations next year

The Ramblers 80 year anniversary and 30 years since the opening of the Jubilee Trail

You will see from the General Council Report the proposed country wide activity and we are considering whether or how we should celebrate the Jubilee Trail opening. Suggestions or comments from members would be gratefully received.

### Coastal Access

It appears that the present government still support this with an announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg that the 3,000 mile coast path will be complete and open for all by 2020.

More welcome news in relation to the Isle of Wight – the Government announced in July that the Coast Path project would now include it.

However we are still lobbying MP's of all parties to try to ensure that this project remains on track after the General Election next year.

### Local Government Financial Support for Footpaths and Countryside Access

With the pressure on local government finances from government cut backs it is more important than ever that we help our local councils with keeping our footpaths open and usable. One thing you as individual ramblers can do is to report problems using the very helpful on line reporting system.

### Area Council Changes

With the introduction several years ago of the new integrated membership system at Ramblers Headquarters it has become possible to send weekly and monthly membership updates directly to those Group Membership Secretaries who are prepared to receive them by email.

Earlier this year we reached the state where all the Dorset Groups were receiving this information directly.

The effect of this is that the duties of the Area Membership Secretary have reduced to the extent that the Area Secretary can easily handle the limited work involved and we therefore agreed at the Area Council Meeting in October to remove that role from the Constitution.

Note that this is part of the Annexe to the Constitution so does not require approval at the AGM.

### General Council 2014

General Council this year was held at the Adelphi Hotel Liverpool and the representatives from Dorset Area were Keith Seymour (Area Chairman) and Jan Seymour (South Dorset Membership Secretary).

Of significance was that Ramblers Worldwide Holidays Charitable Trust announced a partnership with Ramblers worth £300,000 over 3 years due to begin on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. The New Project will celebrate the "80th anniversary of the Ramblers" and the project will be called "Every Path Walked" the aim is to survey every path in England and Wales.

### Treasurers Report

The finances in the Dorset Area remain healthy and the Area's general funding is showing a surplus of £219 at the end of this financial year. Although the Dorset Area has a policy that we should use surplus cash reserves to contribute to budget funding by Central Office, this has not proved necessary for this year. However, we still keep within the financial reserves policy imposed by Central Office a few years ago.

The Jubilee Trail Guide Fund shows an increase of £950 this is mainly due difficulties in getting work already authorised and paid for completed. No additional work or payments were authorised during the 2013/14 financial year. In the past few months the Rights of Way section at Dorset CC has been completely reorganised, the second time in recent years and Government cuts are having an impact on its activities. It is hoped that we can return to some normality in the coming year. The Area's policy of making payments to Dorset County Council (DCC) on a matched funding basis to effect improvements to the surface and furniture on the Jubilee Trail continues. The Area is grateful for the work carried out by Rosemary Bramah and Sue Blake in selling the Jubilee Trail Guides and for donations made to the fund by the West Dorset Group during the year.

The system of Central Office advising 'basic allowances' for Group finance has continued on a similar basis to the previous years. Where these are inadequate, budgets have to be submitted and this has resulted in some of the larger Dorset Groups submitting budgets this year. It is pleasing to note, so far, that

when budgets are submitted, these have always been accepted by Central Office without alteration, saving a considerable amount of time and correspondence.

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.

## **Membership Report**

You will be used to previous reports where we unhappily reported a continuing decline in membership. Well this year we have much happier news in that the from June 2013 Dorset Area membership has stabilised at about 1550 members

## **Publicity Officer**

2013 – 14 has generally been a good year for publicity. We increased our attendance at public events to three at an Area level: the Wimborne Folk Festival, the Dorset County Show and Healthy Happy Living, a health awareness event in Bournemouth. Though public attendance at the last was a bit disappointing I would like to thank the volunteers of all Groups who staffed the stalls – a much improved turnout on last year. The display stand was also recently loaned to the North Dorset Group for the Gillingham Walking Festival.

Publicity material has also been provided to the Deanlands phone box, which is being converted to a small tourist information kiosk. Though the formal opening of the phone box has been delayed until next year it is already in use.

The one disappointment this year was the failure of the Area walks programme, which had been intended to widen the appeal of the Ramblers and bridge the gap between Walking for Health and the main Ramblers programmes. Little support was received for it in some Ramblers Groups, and its success as a recruitment tool was limited. Ideas are invited for events aimed at recruiting new members, to start next Spring.

## **Editor – Dorset Footnotes**

The editorial support for Footnotes continues to be strong although contributions have decreased a little this year. As a result we have had fewer 12 page editions than the previous year.

Advertising interest has also declined a little. This is not of great concern as the advertising did not make a significant contribution to the cost of producing Footnotes.

A balance is still being kept between advertising space and 'feature' space. At the moment I am writing a little more copy and so if you want to read less from me and more from yourselves, then please think about writing an article. Topics can be anything that is loosely linked to Rambling. Deadline for the next edition is January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015, an ideal time for a Footnotes New Year's Resolution – Go Digital or Write and Article.

Footnotes continues to be produced as a print copy and digital copy – we send out 1650 printed copies of Footnotes 69. E-Footnotes is directly distributed by e-mail to a small number of individuals but the membership of Dorset Young Walkers and The Dorset 4050 Walkers all receive their copy of E-Footnotes via their Group Secretaries.

So Footnotes has had a bit of a mixed year but is still going strong.

## **Area Footpath Secretary**

The work of the Area Footpath Secretary changes little: our Committee, chaired by our President and comprising the Group Footpath Secretaries and co-opted members has, during the previous 12 month period, considered and debated 47 applications for changes to the Public Rights of Way network and 9 pre-application consultations. In the same period 20 Orders have been Confirmed by Dorset County Council and these are published regularly in Dorset Footnotes. The Area Footpath Committee would welcome Guests at the meetings – especially from the Young Walkers and 4050 Groups – to observe the amount of interesting and necessary work we undertake.

It is interesting to note in respect of the Definitive Map Team at County Hall, that the increase in charges for Public Path alterations has neither reduced the number received, nor increased complaints – in fact it seems that there are now fewer complaints about the cost.

The exceptionally wet winter of 2013/2014 produced an unprecedented amount of green growth, which - whilst doubtless appreciated by some - did nothing to facilitate the ease of walking! Added to which, the DCC Countryside Team had additional duties keeping certain roadside verges clear, thus taking them away from what we consider to be essential maintenance work.

The continuing 'belt-tightening' of local Councils means that yet again more economies have to be made within Dorset County Council. I hope that we in the Ramblers can do our bit to help. I look forward to receiving more information about the possibilities from our Speaker at the AGM.

## **Jubilee Trail**

Rosemary Bramah reports that 2012/13 improvements have been done on the Jubilee Trail apart from one signpost wrongly designed and installed at Winterborne Came. No other improvements have been achieved in 2014/15 so far despite a promising beginning to the year. Some sort of stalemate seems to have

developed and there is distinct lack of communication recently from DCC despite frequent attempts to get information that would lead to action. Sales of the Guide Book are steady and the condition of the Trail is variable. Some monitors have found it hard to keep up with the vegetation and one new monitor in the west has been recruited. Rosemary has unfortunately been unable to devote as much time and energy to the JT as she would like in the past few months, and therefore the work of the monitors is more vital than ever, as is reporting back to her.

### **Coastal Access**

It had been expected that the draft details of Natural England's proposals for Dorset Stretch 2: Lyme Regis to Portland (Rufus Castle) would have been published to interested organisations in the autumn of 2014. It is understood that there have been some difficulties with certain landowners that may have delayed publication. If there are any developments or further details these will be reported on verbally to the Annual General Meeting.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, a special mention for Jim McDonald, who has decided not to continue as the Footpath Secretary for the East Dorset Group (Purbeck District), a duty he has undertaken tirelessly for many years, and which he had combined with Publicity Officer, Path Clearing co-ordinator, and 'keeper of the tools' for the East Dorset Group! We shall all miss his contribution to the work of the Area Footpath Committee, and wish him all the best in his 'retirement'.

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

### **Group Reports**

#### **East Dorset**

East Dorset Group put on over 150 walks of various lengths this year.

Another very successful Purbeck Plod was held in June, where we reverted back to the original route of Houns-Tout to Kimmeridge. We had over 180 participants this year and again we were praised for our good organisation. For this we extend our thanks to our many East Dorset Group volunteers.

Our footpath secretaries have had some moderate successes during the year. In Poole, residents and visitors to Sandbanks can now legally access a small area of beach (Harbour side) from FP 82 after the access was obstructed by the developer of a nearby boat yard some five years ago. This was challenged by a local residents' society and access was claimed by adding a new footpath to the definitive map. Although there were objections, these were not progressed at a public enquiry and the new footpath was won. The Ramblers supported the application, previously having asked for the obstruction to be removed.

Another bridleway on Canford Heath has been won in 2014 after local residents made a claim to ensure the path was not swallowed up in a large and unwelcomed development project and we supported the claim.

Meanwhile, our group has found Dorset County Council provides a good response to reports of problems with footpaths and hence many of the footpaths of East Dorset are in reasonable condition.

On the social side, our annual meal and a skittles evenings were well supported.

#### **North Dorset**

This year has again been a successful one with an average of 12-15 on the Sunday rambles and 15-20 on the Wednesday rambles. The storms and floods of the winter did lead to a few cancellations, but the subsequent milder weather meant that our full programme has provided enjoyable exercise and explorations for our members.

Our website means that we welcome visitors from other groups from time to time. An unusual ramble this year was one led by a farmer around his downland farm which was arranged after he had earlier met our group eating lunch in one of his high fields. Social events have included a dinner for members and guests in March and a quiz evening raising some money for charity in August. A mini-break rambling holiday at a Holiday Fellowship centre is now an annual event in May. This year it was at Church Stretton in the Shropshire Hills. In July we remembered the last stand of the 'Dorset Clubmen' (August 1645) on Hambledon Hill by arriving on the summit from the north to meet other Dorset groups for the joint ramble. We were welcomed, not by Cromwell and his army, but by the Area Chairman. Our group has provided funding towards the cost of a bench on the short stretch of the Trailway in Stalbridge and has plans to assist with a bench at Charlton Marshall. One of our committee members regularly patrols our stretch of the Jubilee Trail to keep the Coordinator informed of any problems and our footpaths officer is very busy responding to planning applications for renewable energy schemes and to diversions that affect the footpath network in our area.

Our AGM in October 2013 followed an enjoyable pub lunch and enabled our members to oversee the work of their committee. The number of members in our allocated area has fallen a little in line with national trends. We try our best to be friendly and welcoming to all and have a busy programme.

## **South Dorset**

Again we have been supported by a strong Committee throughout the year, but are to lose John Ottaway, our Countryside Secretary, and Ken and Audrey Worden from the Committee next year. Audrey is an ex Chairman of the Group, and Ken a most capable Webmaster. We are very grateful to them for their work for the Group – they will be difficult to replace. However we do have two volunteers standing for the Committee and one for Countryside Secretary.

A highlight was our holiday in Seefeld, Austria in June, which was enjoyed by no less than 32 members. We placed ourselves again in the capable hands of Bath and West Travel (Sue and Graham Robinson) who surpassed all expectations based on our earlier holiday with them in Cyprus with wonderful scenery and weather, and excellent hospitality from the Hotel Bergland. This is all described at greater length in the current 'Footnotes'. Audrey Worden, supported by Ken made the arrangements on behalf of the Group, but these were sadly marred by the failure of the mini-bus company which was to transport us to and from Gatwick, to meet its obligations, despite all of their strenuous efforts. Last minute damage - limitation arrangements were made, and the minibus company now has an outstanding County Court Judgement against it on the public record. We now look forward to our 2015 holiday in France in May.

During the year, we again held a successful Leaders Walk and Lunch, and a guided tour of the Dorset Wildlife Trust's Reserve at Kingcombe, which was followed by lunch and an afternoon walk. This was in addition to our usual Christmas and Midsummer meals, and also the Cheshire Homes walk and Chairman's Cream Tea walk, both in a glorious September.

Sadly this year we lost Austin Knock who died in January. He had been a member for over 15 years, and had organised the Cheshire Homes walk for many of them. He is missed by all of us, and we held a memorial walk in May, which was well attended, including some members of his family.

The Family Rambling Day was not held this year as lately this had not been well supported, but we hope that it will be possible to resume this at some stage. Our membership now stands at 290 (Sept 2014). This is down on last year by about 10%, and emphasises the importance of continuing our efforts to publicise the Group which is reflected in the slow but significant influx of new members walking with the Group. We plan to run another Leaders Training Day in 2015 to give confidence to more of our members to lead walks, and may again be able to open this event to participants from other Groups in the Dorset Area.

Looking back, we have had an excellent Summer, unmarred by a continuation of the high rate of coastal landslips of 2012/13. We believe that it is vital for us to continue to raise our local profile with the aim of reversing the decline in our membership.

## **West Dorset**

This has been another successful year for the group, with a programme of 93 walks. This was a slight reduction on the previous year, partly due to a diminishing number of walk leaders. And a few walks had to be cancelled during the winter period because of adverse weather conditions.

It was encouraging to see a number of longer walks included in the programme and an increasing number of walks on Sundays.

The committee would like to see other members coming forward to lead a walk and planning new walks in the area.

After several years of declining numbers, the group saw a net growth in membership this year, from 168 to 174. There were 14 new members, and this was undoubtedly helped by continuous promotion on the website and in Marshwood Vale Magazine.

Our social secretaries organised two splendid holidays during the year: Exmoor, which attracted 19 members, and recently the Lizard, which was enjoyed by 26. 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 members are involved in monitoring the Jubilee Trail 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.

Another reorganisation of the Council Rights of Way Department and cuts in spending have resulted in a declining level of maintenance of our footpaths. Consequently our Footpath Secretary received an increased number of complaints about paths in poor condition. In terms of Path Orders, the Council has a backlog of applications dating back several years. There have been four applications for new paths and other applications have mostly related to diversions to formalise existing permissive arrangements.

The group hosted the Dorset Area AGM last November and grateful thanks are due to those who helped make it a successful day.

The hard 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**

This year has been challenging, with new committee members filling a large number of positions and a number of more experienced members of the group departing. Despite this, the year has been a positive one, with some members organising walks, social events, spreading information about the group and a number of other activities. The group has also got a redesigned website with a number of modern design features and has recently passed its tenth anniversary.

A number of weekend trips were organised to various parts of the country. The first was held during Easter, and involved walking through snow in the peak district, sharing the countryside with some skiers and photographing interesting ice formations. Another trip was organised by a new member of the group in Shropshire, where it was possible to appreciate the unique landscape and the last of the warm weather. Finally, as has become tradition, a camping trip was held in South East Dorset towards the end of summer.

In terms of walking there have been a fair number of walks held in different parts of Dorset, in areas around Weymouth, Poole, Briport, Swanage and as far north as Blandford. A majority of the walks were held by experienced leaders, though it was hopeful to see a few new faces leading and attending walks.

The group has also organised a wide variety of social events. The party held to celebrate the group's tenth anniversary was a successful event held in Dorchester, with a local band and DJ. Events during the warmer months include a beach picnic near Lulworth Cove, a visit to the Dorset Knob throwing competition and a trip to see a local Shakespeare production on Brownsea Island. As the nights draw in the group has a number of evening events planned, including a Halloween bistro at the Swanage railway, a firework display in Corfe Castle and a skittles evening in Dorchester.

Thanks to all who helped to make the year an enjoyable one. Hopefully we will be able to build on our successes next year and encourage more young people of the benefits and joys of walking as part of a group.

### **Dorset 4050 Walkers Group**

The year to date has been exciting. The group was formally created in the Spring of 2013 and an initial committee led the group through its first year. At the 2014 AGM the chair and membership secretary who had been instrumental in setting up the group stepped down and other 4050s members came onto the committee. Thus from the 2014 AGM all committee posts were filled by walkers who are members of the 4050s group. The group feels firmly established and has a stable membership of committed walkers who lead walks, organise social events and trips away.

It has been really pleasing to see walks being led by several members including relatively new members. This has really helped us to have a full walks programme.

We are particularly proud that:

- a. Membership has seen modest growth to a total of 36 members.
- b. A website has been produced which is constantly reviewed and updated.
- c. The Facebook social media outlet is active with lots of contributors...and yes we even Tweet!
- d. Almost every weekend there have been walks on offer of various lengths and covering the whole geography of Dorset.
- e. Trips 'abroad' to Cornwall, Devon and Dartmoor have been undertaken with great success and more are planned.
- f. A Christmas dinner is booked for 13<sup>th</sup> December 2014 involving a formal meal in a historic country house with dancing and perhaps a few drinks.

We continue to see new faces leading and attending walks. The challenges will be to maintain membership; and to maintain a full walking programme.

We are incredibly grateful to all who helped to make the year successful and enjoyable. Hopefully we will be able to build on our successes next year and encourage more people of the benefits and joys of walking as part of a group.

Compiled by Jim Scott  
Area Secretary