

## General Overview

### Celebrations

This year there are two celebrations – Ramblers 80 year and the Jubilee Trail 30 year anniversaries.

After some discussion we decided to limit our direct activities to celebrating the Jubilee Trail with the various groups walking the whole length of the trail as part of their normal walks programme.

### Area Council Changes

After 4 years as Chairman Keith Seymour has indicated that he will not be standing for office at this AGM.

Area Council wish to record our thanks and appreciation to him with special reference to his leading role in setting up the 4050 Walkers Group.

Some of you may have noticed that the Area Website has undergone a significant makeover. This has in part made us decide that the duties related to the website need to be split. Previously Derek Watkinson (an individual member) looked after both the content including the design and the management of the hosting. For this effort over many years Area Council and I personally would like to thank him.

In future the design and content will not necessarily be handled by the person who looks after the hosting. The present situation is that the design and content has been done by the Area Secretary using Wordpress (it was a very steep learning curve from a position of total ignorance) and the hosting controlled by Derek.

We have therefore added the post of Web Master (to look after the hosting) to the Annexe to Constitution who will not necessarily be a member of Area Council so as to provide more flexibility.

### Big Pathwatch

Many of you will be aware of this initiative which, with financial assistance from Ramblers Holidays, aims to survey a significant proportion of the footpaths in England and Wales. The Dorset Area involvement is being coordinated by Jan Wardell – Area Footpath Secretary – and we would urge members to get involved. A starting point is the News section of the Area Website

<http://www.dorset-ramblers.org.uk/news-from-the-ramblers/>

### General Council 2015

General Council this year was held at Robinson College Cambridge and was attended by Jan Wardell and Margaret Kettlewell as delegates from Dorset Area plus Kate Gocher and Mike Heckford as guests. The full report on General Council is in the latest edition of Dorset Footnotes.

### Governance Review

As some of you will be aware there was a major Governance Review last year which went out for consultation. The responses appeared to have created more heat than light to the extent that, with a very limited timescale before General Council, the only motion put forward was “One member one vote”. This was essentially that voting on the membership of the Board of Trustees would be by a ballot of the whole membership. This motion was withdrawn as it became obvious that it would fail to get the necessary support. This was partly because of the almost total lack of information as to how it would be done and the costs involved.

The situation now is that the Board of Trustees have issued a revised proposal with a 6 month consultation period. The method and timing of the consultation has not been advised as yet but it is clear that any motions for changes will not be submitted until General Council 2017. The current proposals can be accessed here <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/about-us/our-future/governance-consultation.aspx>

## Treasurers Report

The finances in the Dorset Area remain healthy and the Area's general funding is showing a surplus of £1057.42 at the end of this financial year. 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 2015/16. The Area still keeps within the financial reserves policy imposed by Central Office a few years ago.

The Jubilee Trail Guide Fund shows a decrease of £1161.12. This is due to paying for work on the Jubilee Trail authorised in previous years and only just completed, plus payment of 50% of the cost of a new boardwalk in the parish of Stoke Abbot. 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. This has again resulted in some of the larger Dorset Groups submitting budgets for 2015/16. Budgets 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 when that time comes. Central Office has also introduced instructions to tighten up on the authorisation of payments from Area and Group funds and Treasurers will be aware of the new instructions.

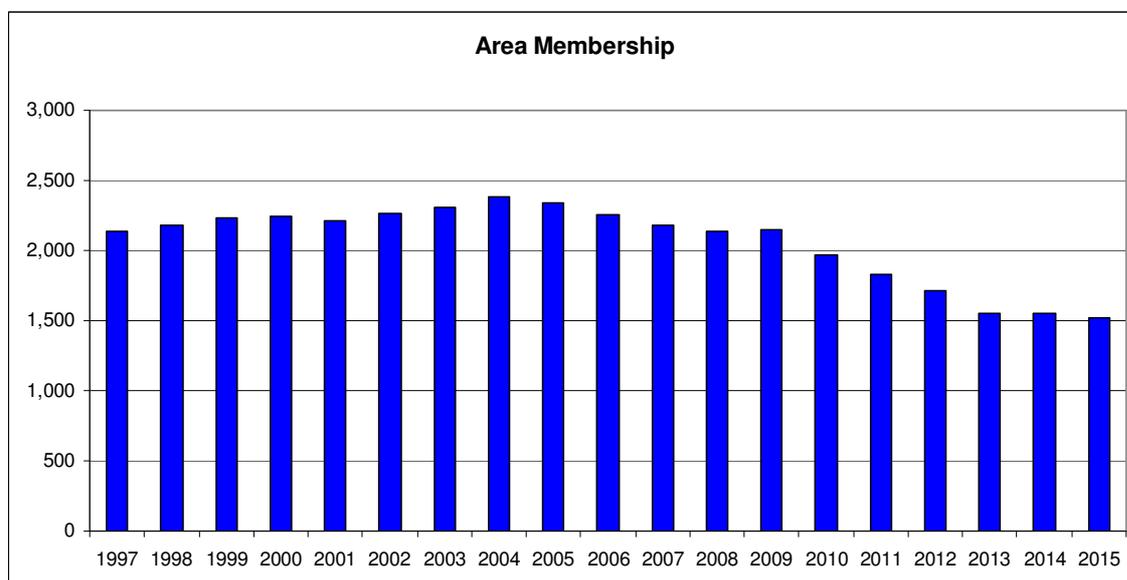
In closing may I thank all the Treasurers for their help during the year in submitting their Group's financial details and returns to me on time; also to Martin Ford-Horne for again auditing the Area's accounts.

## Membership Report

As stated in the brief report in Dorset Footnotes the rate of decline in membership has reduced but we are still losing more members than we are gaining as can be seen by the following graph. The reasons given centrally for members resigning or not renewing are – in order –

- No longer interested in led/group walks
- Poor health
- Limited personal funds
- Age - too elderly to walk
- Not enough time

My experience in Area and East Dorset Group Membership roles would point to the first one being more for relatively new members and the next three for long standing members who are getting on in years.



## **Publicity Officer**

This year's publicity effort has largely been concentrated on our attendance at the Dorset County Show and making a contribution to the new Area website. The Show was once again a success with a steady (if not very heavy) stream of visitors to the stall. Any ideas for other outdoor events to attend would be gratefully received.

The new Area website is now up and running, and contains a dedicated Publicity page with general information for the media as well as a News page that will be regularly updated with the latest information on Area and national Ramblers activities – look out for an upcoming piece on the Festival of Winter Walks.

Other events that have occurred this year include the Area's celebration of the Jubilee Trail's 20th birthday and the Gillingham Walking Festival, which the North Dorset Group attended with assistance from the 4050 Group.

I would like to finish by thanking all the volunteers who agreed to turn out and help with publicity events and leading special walks this year.

## **Editor – Dorset Footnotes**

The editorial support for Footnotes continues to be strong for the eight page issues. Contributors, old and new, continue to provide me with quality articles, so much so that I rarely have the chance to contribute an article myself.

Advertising interest continues to decline but this is not a problem as the advertising income did not make a significant contribution to the cost of producing Footnotes. I occasionally include a small free advert for walking linked publications, as well as for pubs and cafes that are walker friendly.

If you want to continue reading 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> 2016, 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 1635 printed copies of Footnotes 72. 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.

Footnotes has had a steady year and I continue to enjoy being Editor.

## **Area Footpath Secretary**

This is my fourth report as the Area Footpath (and Access) Secretary. Those who remember the previous years' will probably notice that it is on the whole a 'cut and paste' report with a few changes in the numbers. Our Committee - which is so well and fairly chaired by our President – comprises the geographical Group Footpath Secretaries, the Coastal Access Officer, Jubilee Trail co-ordinator and co-opted members. We have an open invitation to guests, but it is some time since anyone has taken the opportunity to come to one of our stimulating meetings. This last year we have considered and debated 25 applications for changes to the Public Rights of Way network and 11 pre - application consultations. In the same period 28 Orders have been confirmed by Dorset County Council and these are published regularly in Dorset Footnotes.

I attend meetings of the Dorset Council Regulatory Committee when Rights of Way matters are on the agenda, and speak when the occasion requires/allows. The applications for BOATS seem to have run dry: most of these have been granted Restricted Byway status, but there are several which have been the subject of Public Inquiries, some of which are ongoing.

The continuing 'belt-tightening' of Dorset County Council has meant yet another restructure within the Environment Directorate with more economies. 'Rights of Way' seem to have disappeared from the vocabulary, and the Rangers are now part of the "Coast and Countryside – Greenspace Management Team". Another change has been that the Definitive Map Team has been 'moved' to Highways, and is no longer part of Countryside Services. As well as Rights of Way, Trails and Countryside Sites (e.g. the Milldown in Blandford Forum) Greenspace Teams now manage 'highway vegetation' (verges) and school grounds, reducing even more the time spent on the rights of way network.

This year Ramblers Central Office announced the Big Pathwatch – rather more energetic than the Big Garden Birdwatch and possibly somewhat more troublesome. After having been rather sceptical when it was announced, I decided that if it were going to happen, then I (and hopefully Dorset area) would give it as much support as I could. With the National survey more than half way through, at the time of writing, there are still substantial gaps in Dorset with more squares to be done mainly in the north-west and west. I receive the fortnightly reports from Central Office, which at some stage I will discuss with DCC.

### **Jubilee Trail**

Rosemary Bramah has reported that there is little to report on the Jubilee Trail in terms of improvements, furniture etc. As it was the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of the JT this year, groups between them arranged their Walk Programmes to cover the full length. After a personally taxing year, Rosemary and her valued helpers continue with the on-going monitoring of the Trail.

### **Coastal Access**

I submitted Brian Panton's excellent report to Ramblers Central Office, for onward delivery to Natural England, on the consultations for the proposals for Coastal Access to Dorset Stretch 2 – Lyme Regis to Portland (Rufus Castle). The response generally accepted the proposals, indeed it welcomed those in the Lyme Regis – Charmouth area even though a truly coastal route on the seaward side of Lyme Regis golf course was not included. We strongly opposed the proposed routing of the England Coast Path to the seaward side of Burton Mere, and it is understood that both the SWCP Association and the Open Spaces Society have made similar representations. A major improvement in the alignment east of Abbotsbury has been welcomed and while it is not truly "coastal" the new path will have good sea views and is a major improvement on the existing inland route of the SWCP National Trail. This new path will however not be able to be used during the period of November to February because of wildlife restrictions. During this period the existing "inland route" of the SW Coast Path will be used and a number of minor improvements to this route and its furniture have been included in proposals. On the east side of Portland improved alignments are proposed although we commented on a double road crossing.

### **In Conclusion**

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 – a 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 has been placed on Ibberton Hill, alongside the Ridgeway and overlooking her Ibberton home. It awaits a plaque, which is currently being prepared.

### **Group Reports**

#### **East Dorset**

East Dorset Group put on over 155 walks of various lengths this year.

The Purbeck Plod was again a great success although there was a reduction in the entry to 125. We will be changing the date for 2016 to early July as it seems that it clashes with other events at the end of June. Our usual thanks are due to our many East Dorset Group volunteers, some new to the task and others who have helped year after year.

Our footpath secretaries have kept an eye on our network of footpaths including a survey of some of the Stour Valley Way and we note that signage and the surface in parts of the Stour Valley Way have now been upgraded. Work continues to get the many Poole footpaths on to the definitive map.

On the social side, our annual meal and a skittles evening were well supported. Our leaders and Purbeck Plod volunteers were invited to a meal to thank them for their support.

#### **North Dorset**

It has been a successful year for the group with a full programme of rambles and, with the calmer weather in the winter, fewer cancellations due to flood and mud. Wednesday rambles, with an average of 15 – 20 walkers, again proved to be slightly more popular than Sunday ones with an

average of 12-15. We welcomed members from other groups on several occasions due to the success of the excellent website ( [www.northdorsetramblers.org](http://www.northdorsetramblers.org) ).

Two particularly enjoyable social events were held. In May, our annual Holiday Fellowship outing was to St Ives and 22 members enjoyed sunny weather, a taxing coast path to Land's End , exciting coastal scenery as well the artistic delights of the town and nearby Penzance. At our annual supper in July, 25 members enjoyed the large portions of tasty food served in the restaurant of the Udder Farm Shop with lovely views over the summer pastures of the Blackmore Vale.

Our group has supported Dorset Area initiatives such as the annual picnic lunch which this year was close to the Cerne Abbas Giant. Our approach to the venue was from Minterne to the north and 9 members defied the downpours on the day. In September to mark the anniversary of the formation of the Jubilee Trail, all of the sections assigned to us were covered in our walks programme. Members could chatter away as the waymarking of the route and the many gates made the walking very easy. An audit of our group's archive was undertaken and a small, highly-selected portion was forwarded to the Dorset History Centre.

Many of our members were involved in the organisation and leading of the very successful 'Gillingham Walking Festival' held from 5th – 13th September. Our RA President, Kate Ashbrook, launched the festival and presented the Mayor with a Walkers are Welcome Accreditation Certificate. The group plans to contribute to the cost of a 'Walkers are Welcome' sign to greet visitors as they arrive at Gillingham Station.

Finally our members will mark, at our AGM in October, the retirement of Group Secretary, Tony Combridge. Tony was one of the founder members in 1989 and he has been an enthusiastic and erudite servant on the committee ever since. We thank him for his years of service and send him our best wishes.

### **South Dorset**

Our work this year has again been supported by an able Committee, including two new volunteers, Mike Fowler and Sally Morgan. Hazel Evans was appointed to the post of Social Secretary, and has already demonstrated the potential of this new position. All of the current Committee have agreed to stand for re-election at the AGM. Over the year, our membership has fallen by 5%, but we continue to regularly welcome significant numbers of new members on our walks.

During the year, we lost one of our oldest members, Mary Kingman, who was still walking with us until a few years ago, and is remembered by many. We held a Memorial Walk for her in August from Moreton, which included the route of her walk to school (which is now the Moreton Tearooms).

Many of us SDG members, and Mary's family, participated and shared happy memories of her.

In May, thanks to the generosity and hard work of our members Mary and Clive Walter, 23 of us enjoyed a wonderful holiday in Najac, Aveyron, France, where we were welcomed by the local hotel (Le Belle Rive), the Mayor and Town Council, and were led, by Mary and Clive on beautiful walks, each of which ended in a cafe in a beautiful village. Because it appeared that we were welcomed by the whole village, this was a very special holiday, even if it necessitated a 3am start!

Among other walks during the year were our Christmas Walk along the Fleet and lunch, an Archaeology Walk, arranged with the Dorset AONB South Dorset Ridgeway Project, our regular Leaders' Walk, a walk to celebrate the Poundbury Campaign along the paths opened up as a result of that Campaign - the precise status of these paths is, at present, the subject of further discussions. Later in the year we enjoyed our Midsummer Walk and Supper, two walks on Countryside Sculpture, and an exploration of Weymouth's Legacy Trail. We also enjoyed a walk followed by a Victoria Day Tea provided by Judy and Bill Logan, our members who live in Canada, making regular visits to Dorset. 28 of us also managed to walk the entire length of the Jubilee Trail in our area in a sort of simultaneous relay race to commemorate its 20th Anniversary, and the 80th of the Ramblers on 23 September, afterwards, all enjoying tea at Moreton, where Geoff Mercer (a founding member of the Trail) was able to show us his collection of memorabilia from the time when the Trail was first opened.

Finally, following Ken Worden's resignation as Webmaster last year, the challenge was to find a simple, inexpensive, and supported way to maintain our public and members websites, and

organise our printed and electronic Walks Programme. We believe that we have achieved this by using the Ramblers website to host the Public site, and Ramblers software to take us from submitted walks to a printable, and electronic list of walks, however, we shall have to wait until March 2016 to test whether it works in practice!

## **West Dorset**

This has been another successful year for the group, with a programme of 94 walks. West Dorset also hosted the inter-group picnic and walk in July in Sydling, and despite horrendous weather a few hardy souls participated.

There was only one new walk leader during the year and the committee would like to see other members coming forward.

The group saw 17 new members, which was an increase on the previous year. This was undoubtedly helped by continuous promotion on the website and in Marshwood Vale Magazine. However, an increasing number of lapses meant our membership has fallen from 174 to 165.

The group enjoyed two splendid holidays during the year: Hay on Wye, and the Cotswolds. 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.

Once again the Dorset Council Rights of Way Department has been further slimmed down. Applications for diversions and other changes have been relatively few and uncontroversial. We have welcomed the majority of these, as they will improve the current situation. This process is now taking several years so landowners are tending to make new routes available on a permissive basis allowing routes to be used and issues resolved before the making of any order. As in previous years, most complaints relate to the overgrown nature of the lesser used routes.

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**

Dorset Young Walkers have had a good year. Having many of the same committee members as last year, we have been able to work on a number of new ideas and bring them through to fruition. We have published a new leaflet for the group, refined the website introduced a year or so ago, and created a twitter account to expand our online presence. Andy, who established our website, and maintained it for many years, decided to step down from his role on the committee, to focus more on his own business. We wish him well, and thank him for his efforts.

Several social events have been organised: a summer camping trip near Lymington in Hampshire; visits to a Shakespeare performance on Brownsea Island; the Seafood Festival in Weymouth, the Dorset Knob throwing festival and a folk festival at Wimborne Minster. As the nights draw in the group has further evening activities planned, including watching the fireworks display in Weymouth and a Christmas dinner and disco.

It has been a successful year for the walks programme, with a wide variety of walks covering much of the county. As ever, there have been some quiet periods, around Christmas and during the busy summer holiday period, but more recently we have seen good attendance, and a number of new faces. Our new members' walks continue to be popular, and we have participated in walks with other groups, such as on the occasion of the area picnic and the Jubilee Trail Anniversary.

Thank you to all who have 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**

This year has had some challenges with regards to the committee with two non-portfolio members resigning very soon after the AGM and the Chairperson resigning in July. However, after an appeal for new committee members, the committee has been boosted with three new co-opted members and is once again up to eight, five of the committee have joined the 4050 Group in the last year. The 4050 Group has now a nucleus and impetus that will put it on a strong footing for the coming year.

We primarily walk at weekends and the dependency on a small number of experienced walk leaders has been greatly reduced by new members submitting and leading walks. The walks have been very varied in distance and difficulty, they can range from 5 to 6 miles up to 32 miles (Swanage to Weymouth) that was completed by five members in July.

We are proud to be supporting the South West Coast Path Challenge, the aims of which include setting a new world record for the number of times the SWCP can be covered in one month and most importantly raising funds to help 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 36 to 46 members.
- Trips 'abroad' to the Lake District, Devon Coast and Dartmoor have been undertaken with great success and further trips are already in the planning stage for a more ambitious programme next year.
- The Facebook social media outlet is very active with many contributors and photographs.
- Almost without fail, there is a walk or walks on every weekend, they are of various lengths, difficulty and cover the whole geography of Dorset.
- A Christmas party is being planned by new committee members, and a larger social calendar will be planned for next year.

We continue to see new faces attending our walks and we are incredibly grateful to all who have helped to provide a full programme of walks making the year so successful and enjoyable. We aim to build on our success and will continue to look at new ways to encourage more people of the benefits and joys of walking as part of the 4050 Group.

Compiled by Jim Scott  
Area Secretary