



# The Ramblers' Association – Dorset Area Annual Report – 2016/17

## General Overview

### Personal Note

I took over as Area Secretary in July 2006 after we failed to find a nominee at the 2005 AGM and was first elected at the 2006 AGM. I have enjoyed my time in that role where I have seen many changes with a greater reliance on electronic communications both within Area Council and communications from Ramblers Headquarters.

Unfortunately due to ongoing ill health I will not be able to continue as Secretary as I will be unable to attend the Area Council Meetings so I would ask that we have a volunteer to take over this role at the AGM.

I would like to thank not only the Members of Area Council during my time in office but also the Officers of the Groups in Dorset who have all been very supportive.

It will be noted that we have changed the Annexe to the Constitution to include a Membership Secretary (not necessarily a Member of Area Council) and I have indicated my willingness to take on that role. Also, although not specifically listed, I will continue to maintain and update the content of the Area Website (this is separate from the Web Master Role which has rather wider responsibilities)

### General Council 2017

Jan Wardell and Steve Ryder attended GC 2017 as Area Delegates. Des Garrahan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, opened GC and chaired it adeptly throughout. Our new Chief Executive Officer, Vanessa (Van) Griffiths, impressed all with her presentation, which included highlights from 2016 and future strategic direction. Van sees her priorities for the future of the Ramblers being a shift in focus from the introspection of recent years, to working together in the wider context, which included the impact of Brexit.

In contrast to previous years, all scheduled motions were presented, and debated in an unhurried and perceptive way, raised important points which were thoroughly aired and allowed the decisions to be made on an informed basis. GC was on the whole enjoyable, and mostly non-confrontational.

### Annual Area Picnic

The venue for the Area Picnic this year was Eggardon Hill in West Dorset. We enjoyed lovely views from Eggardon but perhaps the humid weather and clash with the Wimbledon Men's Final accounted for the lower than usual turnout of 51 ramblers.

### Treasurers Report

The finances in the Dorset Area remain healthy and the Area's general funding is showing a surplus of £922.04 at the end of this financial year, this surplus has been mainly brought about by a reduction in the number and expenses claimed by Area Council members. For the first time ever, the Area has just exceeded the financial reserves policy imposed by Central Office.

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 year; provision, however, is made to continue this policy in 2017/18.

The 'basic allowance' arrangements for Area and Group finance has continued as in previous years; where these prove inadequate, budgets have to be submitted. Four groups have accepted the basic award for 2017/18 with two and the Dorset Area 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 and it may be it has already happened. At the time of writing I have been advised that our budget for 2017/18 has not been approved and I am asking for detailed reasons for the substantial reduction that has been imposed.

The Jubilee Trail Guide Fund shows an decrease of £98.27. Dorset County Council being a bit more proactive in their approval of requested improvements to the Jubilee Trail this year. These are financed on a £1 for £1 basis but it continues to be difficult to persuade Dorset County Council

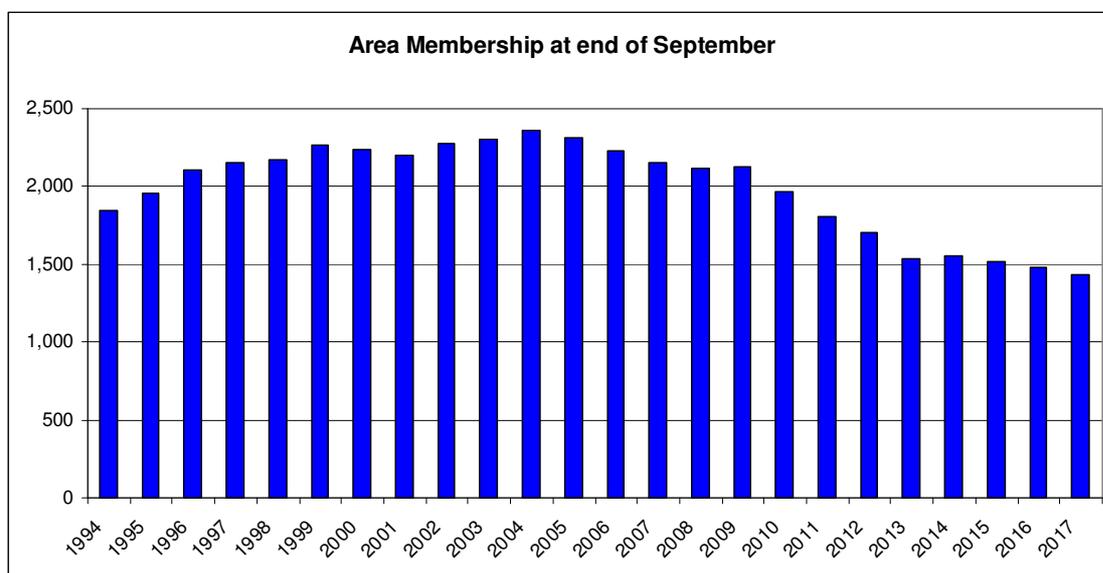
to spend the money available. It is unfortunate that Dorset CC continue to reorganise staff dealing with rights of way and this is affecting improvement projects. The Area is grateful for the work carried out by Rosemary Bramah and Sue Blake in organising and following through projects and for selling the Jubilee Trail Guides; also for donations made to the fund, especially by the West Dorset Group, during the year.

I have again been asked to take on the treasurer's role for Wessex Wanderers, who successfully organise walks during the summer period using trains on the Weymouth to Bristol railway line. Wessex Wanderers are supported by the Ramblers' Avon, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire Areas and from time to time grants come from local authorities along the route of the railway line.

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 can be seen from the following graph Area Membership continues to decline slowly. It should be noted that over the last two years the membership of the 4050 Walkers and Area only membership have increased. The increase in Area Only membership is a direct effect of changes to the joining system where it is now a specific option.



## Publicity Officer

As this post is still vacant the publicity activities have relied upon the Groups

## Editor – Dorset Footnotes

Footnotes has had another a good 2017; we even had a 12-page edition of Footnotes. The format of the printed edition means that the step up from 8 to 12 pages needs a lot more copy from members and additional content from the Editor.

Advertising interest remains constant from our regular supporters with little extra commercial advertising. The low advertising content is not a problem as the generated revenues are relatively low. Also, 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 2016 to September 2017 there was a reduction of 110 printed copies, 1455 copies of Footnotes 78 were sent out. This reduction in printed copies is accounted for by North Dorset Members opting to receive E Footnotes without also receiving the printed copy and a reduction of 50 printed copies to the South Dorset Group.

E-Footnotes is directly distributed by e-mail, via Group Secretaries, to the membership of Dorset Young Walkers and The Dorset 4050 Walkers. We continue to 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, 'lick' and address all those 1455 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 2018, 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**

Unbelievably this is the sixth year that I have presented this report as Area Footpath Secretary. We are still hopeful that we might recruit members for our committee from the non-geographical groups. For those tempted to join us on the Committee, part of what we do is to consider all applications for changes to the Public Rights of Way network, and to do this members have to be aware of any changes to legislation relating to Highways (in the broad sense) and Planning matters.

I am very pleased to report that we have been fortunate to be able to co-opt Dr Janet Davis as a member as advisor on Rights of Way matters.

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 two years, as most RoW matters are dealt with under Delegated Authority.

Too late for last year's report were the results of the Big Pathwatch published in November 2016, together with the next phase of the Pathwatch campaign. The Big Pathwatch survey was the Ramblers largest ever survey of rights of way, and took place from July 2015 – January 2016.

- 3,000 participants surveyed all the rights of way in 45% of the area of England and Wales.
- 59,000 path problems were reported – the biggest problem was missing signs.
- Mostly problems made walking inconvenient, not impossible.
- Only 9% of paths were recorded as poorly kept – so the problem is not insurmountable.

The results from across the country varied enormously, which is one of the reasons that direct county comparisons were not considered valid. Dorset had 2,793 grid squares, 1,382 of which were completed - equating to 49.48%.

Countrywide, over 14,000 people 'signed up' (registered or downloaded the app), of whom 3,244 adopted and surveyed paths; but the others didn't do nothing – they reported features and photos, found out more about the project from the website, or promoted the project through social media (Facebook and Twitter).

The ongoing Pathwatch campaign aims to get all rights of way in England and Wales well maintained by 2020.

A vast amount of information was received during the Big Pathwatch survey period, which was overwhelming, and apart from spot checks on some of the reports, it was not possible to follow up the problems. However, the ongoing reports are much more manageable, and it is possible to check each report – not least to see if they have been reported on Dorset for You. The intention is that all rights of way in England and Wales are in good repair by 2020. To quote from Central Office "To achieve this Ramblers will be working with local highway authorities to improve their path monitoring and maintenance practices and increasing Ramblers' path maintenance work."

Jubilee Trail: Furniture and surface improvements have been made in the west, north and east section of the Trail, with hope for further improvements in the coming year. The sales of the book had a sudden spurt in the spring, but have tailed off again since.

Coastal Access: At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the result of the Public Inquiry into the stretch of the proposed route of the England Coast Path (ECP) from Abbotsbury to Rodden Hive. The Inquiry concluded in December 2016, and the planning inspector has made a report and recommendation to the Secretary of State. He will take these into account when he decides whether to approve Natural England's coastal access report for this stretch of the coast. The proposals for the last stretch of the ECP in Dorset from Kimmeridge Bay to Highcliffe were published by Natural England (NE) in June and we submitted our representations to NE, which included two short alternative route suggestions, before the deadline in August. The route from Lulworth to Kimmeridge will be published once negotiations with the MOD have been completed. Our continuing thanks go to Rosemary and her Jubilee Trail monitors, Brian our Coastal Access Officer, and to the Group Footpath Secretaries, who have such a wide range of knowledge, experience and abilities.

## **Group Reports**

### **East Dorset**

The group has put on more than 140 walks this year as well as the ever successful Purbeck Plod which attracted 135 entrants, of whom 118 participated. In addition, the area walk and picnic were well supported by our members who are looking forward to the next one on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018.

In July the Group ran a coach walk, the destination being Avebury in Wiltshire. 44 people took part, mostly members but a few friends and family. Walkers had a choice of a short or medium length walk, leaving time to explore Avebury Manor [National Trust] and two fascinating museums plus of course the Avebury Stone Circle. We hope to put on a similar walk next year, volunteers being willing!

There have been a number of social events including a well-supported Skittles Evening and a number of evening and morning walks with a pub finish.

### **North Dorset**

It has been another successful year for the RNDG. Once again we have provided a full programme of walks which included new walks in the Polden Hills and near Stonehenge, among others. Several members have also led walks for the first time.

In November 2016 we took full advantage of the excellent facilities in Stourpaine Village Hall to host the Area AGM.

Our annual HF holiday took place in May on Exmoor with mainly fine weather, interesting walks, good food and a heated outdoor pool. In July we once again had an excellent supper at the Udder Farm Shop, where members and guests enjoyed excellent food and company.

In July some intrepid members undertook footpath clearance near Winterborne Kingston, south of Blandford, despite being challenged by the usual Dorset summer road closures.

In August we held a successful coach trip to Wells, where we offered three walks of different lengths. The threatened rain held off and everyone arrived in Wells with time to enjoy a cuppa and cake before the journey home.

Once again we were pleased to support Gillingham Walking Festival and have gained two new members as a result. Overall, membership has remained steady through the year; we have just below 200 members, 10-15% being regular walkers.

As mentioned last year, we received a very generous legacy from Derek Daniels. We have started putting it to good use. It subsidized the coach trip to Wells as well as walk leader training. Later this year we will be running two sessions on First Aid and we hope to provide three self-closing gates on footpaths in the area.

### **South Dorset**

Our work this year has again been supported by a hard-working Committee although there were several changes. All three main officers had to stand down since our constitution limits the number of years an officer can serve. Steve Ryder took over as Chair, John Pennington as Treasurer and Sally Morgan as Secretary (with some background support from Peter Evans). We have a strong set of nominations for officers and committee at our AGM so support for the group is good.

Whilst our net membership is still in decline (albeit more slowly than in previous years) we are attracting new members. Support for our walks is still strong and we put on three walks almost every week of the year. This is in addition to the Wessex Wanderers walks in our area and the Dorchester Strollers walk (part of the Ramblers "walking for health" initiative). Both are included in our published programme. We are very grateful to all our leaders, without whom there would be no programme, and especially Mary Walter who has been our Programme Secretary for the past five years. Mary is standing down this year but we are pleased that the role is planned to be taken on by Inger Barnes. Our thanks also go to Julia Mathews, who has also worked hard to raise our profile as Publicity Officer and is also standing down at the AGM. We are also appreciative of the hard work put in by our membership secretary (Jan Seymour) and her band of volunteers who help distribute our programme, thereby keeping postage costs to a minimum.

Our annual group holiday was in Mallorca during April and was supported by 38 of our members – a record. The holiday itself was organised by a company called "Secret Hills" who we have used in the past. We were based in the north of the island at Port Soller and our hotel fronted onto a beautiful bay. Secret Hills provided 4 walk leaders, who were very helpful and professional, and there was a choice of at least 2 walks each day. There was a mixture of mountain, hill and valley routes and the weather was mostly kind to us so a thoroughly good holiday all round. We are

grateful for the coordination and organization provided by John Pennington. Next year we are off to sunny Whitby in north Yorkshire!

In addition to our full walks programme our Social Secretary, Hazel Evans, has been busy organising skittles matches, quiz nights, a barbeque and, in September, a trip on the Waverley Paddle Steamer. Because of stormy sea conditions, this, very unfortunately, had to be cancelled. All our social events are well supported and we look forward to our Christmas lunch in December

### **West Dorset**

The group has had another successful year with a programme of 93 walks. This is a small increase on last year's total of 84.

West Dorset also participated in the Dorset Area Inter-Group walk on 16 July and Cynthia Whyte led a walk from Powerstock to Eggardon.

Despite 13 new members joining during the year to end September, our overall membership fell significantly from 174 to 154, continuing a previous downward trend. It would seem that many of the reductions are from members who have not been walking for some years but maintained their membership in order to support the national organisation.

The numbers attending walks have increased a little, as a result of new members who have recently moved to West Dorset, and also from Ramblers members who are on holiday and have checked out our website. We also advertise monthly in the free Marshwood Vale magazine and do get a response.

The group enjoyed two marvellous holidays during the year: St Ives in April and, more recently, the Wye Valley each attended by around 20 members. Again some of those attending are from other Ramblers groups which we welcome but do wish to encourage more of our own group to join in.

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.

The group provided a map reading course in October instigated by our chairman. We are also considering how we can increase the First Aid awareness of our leaders, without discouraging them from wanting to lead.

A number of our members are involved in monitoring the Jubilee Trail, whose work is much appreciated.

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

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

#### **Committee**

This year Mat Benfield stepped down as chairman, after having held the position for four years. He was replaced by Anna Lee, who joined the committee last year, as treasurer. We thank them both for their past and continuing commitment to the group. In addition, Shaun Miles joined the committee, to take over the role of webmaster from Laurence Whittle, who found himself busy with work and family life. We feel fortunate that, since the group's creation almost 15 years ago, we have had people with such good technical skills. Thank you to everyone else on the committee who volunteered their time for another year.

#### **Advertising**

Much committee time has been spent discussing how best to advertise the group and increase membership. We have continued to hand out leaflets from the Ramblers central office, as well as postcards describing our own group. We have started to use the Ramblers website, as well as our own website, in an attempt to attract a wider membership. Use of some of the group funds for online advertising through Meetup or Facebook has also been suggested, as has encouraging new and experienced walk leaders with more interesting prizes, which we hand out at our AGM.

#### **Social events**

The group has held several successful social events. Thank you to all the organisers. There were three cinema events: the Ocean and Banff Mountain film festivals, and Monty Python at Lulworth Castle. Some other social events are becoming annual affairs, including our Christmas party, celebrating Halloween at the Swanage Railway, Bonfire Night on Weymouth Seafront, Dorset Knob Throwing and Wimborne Minster and Cider Festivals.

## Walks programme

It has been a good year for the walks programme, with there being an average of three walks a month. Over the last few years the leadership of walks has been spread fairly evenly amongst many members. We have had 16 members leading walks in the last year, with no one person leading more than five events. We have also had a shared walk with the Hampshire Young Walkers, and hope that such shared events will continue to supplement our own walks programme.

## National Young Ramblers

Several of our members attended the National Young Ramblers event this year, which was held in Edinburgh. It's only the second year such an event has been held, and has proven to provide a good mix of interesting walks outside of our normal geographical range, as well as information on helping our group to grow, such as through map reading events, advertising and the general exchange of ideas.

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

## Dorset 4050 Walkers Group

This year the group has been supported by a full committee. At the AGM two new members were voted onto the committee to replace two people that could no longer stand. They have since been welcomed at meetings and are taking an active role.

The group continues to walk almost every weekend, with shorter walks on a Saturday and longer, more challenging walks on Sundays. The walks vary in distance and difficulty, and range from 5 to 6 miles up to 20 miles.

The following is a summary of the year for the group:

1. The group has a healthy growing membership, currently at 59, which represents an increase of some 20% from 49 at this stage in 2016.
2. The group walked The Stour Valley Way from Hengistbury Head in Dorset to the river's source, which was completed in 5 walks over different seasons of the year and culminated recently by providing an opportunity to view the autumn colours at Stourhead in Wiltshire. It was well attended by members, as well as several new faces, either as visitors from other groups or new walkers, some of whom became members over those months. It was a challenge for many, especially with very changeable weather en route to the finish!
3. Over the last year the key walking statistics for the group are:
  - a) 55 walks covering 488 miles;
  - b) 8 walkers on average per walk;
  - c) 20% short distance, 65% medium (8 -14 miles) and 15% long;
  - d) 8% graded easy, 15% leisurely, 62% moderate and 15% strenuous
4. Walks continued to offer a good variety in terms of distance and grading and on Saturdays as well as Sundays; short/ half-day walks on Saturdays were popular and effective in recruiting new members and attracting walkers from other groups.
5. The group continues to keep an up-to-date web page, which has helped attract walkers on holiday in the area as well as new members. At a new members night many commented that the information on our web page was informative and welcoming.
6. The group has continued to post many photographs on our Facebook page, thus sharing the beautiful sights on our walks.
7. The social side of the group has been quieter recently. However, events are being planned for the autumn and winter months.

This year's walks have been led by a small number of walk leaders. In the coming year the aim is to increase the number of leaders within the group. Existing walk leaders will offer encouragement, advice and support to those that want to step up to the role. An event designed as a 'thank you' to existing walk leaders is planned, in recognition of their notable voluntary contribution of time and effort for the benefit of all walkers.

The group is discussing a potential change of name to potentially broaden its appeal, while still promoting an age-specific range. The committee plans to consult its membership as part of this process and is an ongoing initiative. It is recognised that any such proposal will involve liaison in advance with Ramblers at Area level.

Compiled by Jim Scott  
Area Secretary