

# Forest of Dean Group

## MINUTES OF 34<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 2012

**PRESENT:** Mr A Fisher in the Chair - plus 29 Members attending (see list) including Mr R Davis (Area Chairman), Mrs J Byrne (Area Footpaths) and Mr B Gill (Area).

**APOLOGIES:** I Walding, P & A Davies, M Rear (Area), C & J Walker, F & S Grey, M Fisher.

**MINUTES:** There was some discussion on this subject as it appeared that some members had not received a copy of last years minutes. There were copies available at this meeting. The Chairman asked if members would like time to read the minutes before they were adopted and signed, but this proved unnecessary and they were duly signed.

**MATTERS ARISING:** There were no matters arising.

- 1. CHAIRMANS REPORT:** (A Fisher) The group enjoyed 37 walks through the summer period, but we had some difficulty when the current programme was due to go to press with very few walks in December and January 2013. We need to expand the number of members offering to lead and there is an initiative led by H Burden to improve this. I also think that the number of walkers per walk is reducing and I would appreciate any comments on this.

**a - Group Holiday – Zante, Greece.** Members enjoyed a week in May with some excellent walking around the olive groves, mountains and coast of the island as well as excellent accommodation and food.

**b - Rambler's Routes project.** This project commenced recently with the aim of compiling a database of walks to be used by everyone. There were a few details in the Forest News and there is an information board at the back of the room. I would urge everyone to sign up and contribute to this programme to capture the vast store of walks that we have within our Group. Please speak to me if you're interested.

**c - Future Committees – volunteering.** I would like all members to consider nominations for this year and next as a number of vacancies are and will be available (particularly next). Unfortunately the group does not run itself and if you wish it to continue you need to contribute.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for their hard work, all our enthusiastic walk leaders, without which we would not have such an enjoyable time and everyone who has supported the group over the last year.

- 2. SECRETARY'S REPORT:** (J Burden) The Secretary asked for volunteers to assist a small school helping emotionally disturbed youngsters in Lydney. They hoped that one of our members would volunteer to lead short walks of 3 - 5 miles from next September. The school would do a risk assessment and their insurance would cover anyone willing to help. The walks would be fully staffed and no

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responsibility would fall to the leader at all. It was felt that this could be a shared responsibility and that one person need not do all the walks, anyone interested to speak to her later.

Details of the holiday at the Gower next April were given and those interested were again asked to speak to her later. The date and time of a memorial walk organised by Area was also announced, this is for Tony Drake who died recently after 50 years of Ramblers footpath work. The date and venue for the Area AGM 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 was also mentioned.

**3. TREASURER'S REPORT:** (R Goodman) The Treasurer gave a full report of finances to date saying that we currently had £7,000. He had moved £1,000 into the current account to cover expected planning expenses on the Norchard Bridge project. The required Ecological Survey for the bridge alone cost £165 and planning permission from the Forest of Dean Council was predicted at a further £350. M Walker asked if the website should be listed under assets and was assured that for this year only it was, she also queried the amount of interest being received after the transfer of funds to the current account.

**4. MEMBERSHIP REPORT:** (B Fisher) It would appear that overall our numbers are down from the beginning of the year by thirteen. Although individual memberships are up, joint memberships are down. Some members pay late therefore figures are variable at any given time but we do not seem to be retaining new members. We do not have a publicity officer at the moment which may account for some lack of interest. However the Co-ops in Lydney, Cinderford and Coleford are willing to allow us to advertise in their stores.

D Mason asked how many members receive programmes by e-mail and was told approximately 90 which saved a lot of postage.

**5. WALKS CO-ORDINATOR REPORT:** (H Burden) There was much concern at the lack of walks for the winter programme but after some phone calls enough had been forthcoming to make a decent show. However, it is the lack of new leaders coming through which makes for the most worry. There was some discussion on what stops members wanting to lead a walk. There is a lot to consider when leading a walk, such as is there enough parking and where to have a coffee stop. But it is now proposed that the Walks Co-ordinator will assist or mentor anyone with all the above details of assembling a walk if they would like to get in touch with him.

We have also had contact with the Mendip group of Ramblers who are requesting assistance in finding short (approx 6 miles) and long (approx 9 -12 miles) walks for their planned holiday in the Forest next September. The Walks Co-ordinator asked if anyone would send him details of walks they thought might be suitable.

**6. FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT:** (S Constable) It was reported that one member of this Committee had been unwell and was likely to be so for some time, a volunteer from the South and West of the area with local knowledge would be greatly appreciated. Since the last AGM SC has attended a meeting at Shire hall with all the County Footpath Officers. SC has also attended 3 Area Footpath meetings where it is useful to meet the other Area Footpath Secretaries to exchange information. We continue to be an official consultant for the Forest of Dean District Council They are now fully web based and SC receives automated emails on each application which has a footpath on the site. Last year SC

The Ramblers Association promotes rambling, protects rights of way, campaigns for access to open country and defends the beauty of the Countryside.

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registered Ramblers concern about applicants not showing routes of footpaths on their planning applications. They are legally obliged to show other less important aspects. SC will continue to lobby for evidence of a public right of way to be the applicants responsibility We are also edging along the idea of the large estate builders who take over a rural site to be forced to create green corridors where Footpaths are existing.

Wind turbines - we were one of the many objectors who opposed the application for an 85m high wind turbine at Coleford which was next to 2 public footpaths, we objected on safety grounds as some of these large turbines do have electrical fires. Our battle continues with both the Forest of Dean District Council and the County Council over the complete blockage of the footpath over Lydney Golf Course. Huge mounds of earth, called bunds are being dumped alongside the golf course by a Bristol based contractor who has leased the land for 2 or 3 years. Eventually we hope the footpath will route over the top of the bunds but at whose expense has yet to be established. The alternative is a footpath which will be narrow and unpleasant between a barbed wire high fence and the bunds. Please report all Footpath blockages which you are not able to clear. Go on the GCC webpage then Highways, then Footpaths 'reporting problems', your complaint will automatically get a reference number which can then be monitored. Finally we successfully persuaded an applicant in Dymock to revise a diversion of the footpath to an acceptable route for walkers.

**7. NORCHARD BRIDGE:** The Treasurer then gave a brief overview of the situation regarding Norchard Bridge for the benefit of all those present. This included details of his work with the Lydney Park Estate Trustees, the Environmental Agency, Gloucestershire County Council, Forest of Dean Council, the Ecological Survey before mentioned and others. He is now awaiting PROW permission and a deed of ownership from Lydney Park Trustees to enable this, before the paperwork can be concluded and the actual work begin, but as it has taken a year to get this far we are hopeful that the end is now in sight.

When this work has been completed we would then have £2,500 remaining to spend on another general project that would be useful to all walkers, and he would welcome suggestions and ideas. The Treasurer was swift to add that way marking was already covered.

**8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** As the Committee were all willing to stand again bar one members rep (P Davies), the Chairman suggested that they be voted in en bloc. This was accepted by those present and Maurice Cullis joined the Committee as members rep. It was suggested that the Footpaths Committee also be elected en bloc under the same vote and as there were no dissenters this was agreed. Proposer: D Fisher and Seconder: D Mason. Both committees were unanimously elected.

**9. AREA REPRESENTATIVE :** The Chairman again appealed for members to come forward, there are two vacant positions and only four Area meetings to attend, but there were no volunteers to fill this position. It was noted that S Constable (Footpaths Secretary) often attends these meetings and she agreed to report back when necessary.

**10. ELECTION OF AUDITOR:** R Goodman offered a vote of thanks to H Burden for his services as Auditor this year and proposed him again for next year. A Fisher seconded. There were no objections and the vote was carried.

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**11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:** R Warren asked if it was possible to find out when and where the felling of Larch, Oak and Ash trees might take place in view of the current outbreak of disease amongst these trees, he is concerned that such felling will affect our walks, and could this information be placed on our website? R Goodman replied that he had a meeting with the Forestry Commission next week and would endeavor to establish the relevant facts and place them on the website.

R Goodman went on to say that the way marking and clearing of paths was well in hand and only needed minimalist attention, and he thanked everyone who had helped in this enterprise.

R Goodman then informed those present that a holiday booked with the Ramblers Walking Partnership could now benefit the group by either £10, £20 or £30 according to destination, and to remember to alert them as to which group you belong to when booking.

B Fisher then spoke about the Walkers are Welcome being organised for Lydney and how she thought it would benefit Ramblers because they hope to link up odd paths to make a decent walk. They are also proposing to look into the problem of the Bund on Lydney Golf Course previously mentioned by the Footpaths Secretary. Everyone is invited to attend their meetings and the Chairman suggested that D Street (not present) of the Footpaths Committee might like to attend on our behalf. S Warren said she would speak to him about it. D Mason said that Walkers are Welcome was a great help to walkers in Ross-on-Wye and thought we should keep in touch with this new group.

The Area Chairman made a short speech concerning volunteer footpath work in Gloucestershire.

The meeting closed at 9.05 p.m. and was followed by a Bring and Share Supper.