

# Forest of Dean Group

## MINUTES OF 37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 6th NOVEMBER 2015

**PRESENT:** Mike Ingleby in the Chair – plus 29 attending (list attached).

**APOLOGIES:** David and Alex Pollard, John and Ann Slater, Henry and June Burden, Robin and Sue Warren, Peter and Jenny Robbins, Fred and Sheila Grey, Philip and Lynn Stockley, Pete and Janet Ellis, Anne Ochala, Roy Emes, Sheila Constable, Dilys Brown, Margaret Powles.

**MINUTES:** The Minutes of the AGM held on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014, which had been circulated earlier in the year, were approved, adopted and signed.

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

**1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Mike Ingleby commenced his report by noting it had been a busy year for the Forest of Dean Ramblers on the walking and social fronts. In December 2014 a Christmas lunch had been preceded by a choice of two walks whilst March saw the Group's first holiday of the year based in Dunster offering some 30 members a choice of 3 walks on each of the 3 full days. In May a social evening had been held to plan several activities including holidays and the inauguration of the Upper Forge Bridge. Mike expressed his thanks to Kate Ashbrook (National President of the Ramblers) and Bob Berryman (Mayor of Lydney) for officially opening the Upper Forge Bridge on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2015. He went on to give special thanks to Barbara Fisher for organising the event and its associated publicity.

In July members were involved with the MonDean Walking Festival. Over the 9 days 7 walks were offered, a very credible performance and one from which lots was learnt about dealing with the walking public. This was followed in September by the Group's second holiday of the year in the Lake District when once again a varied choice of walks was offered. Following this holiday 3 new members were welcomed into our Group.

Mike continued his report by remarking on the full programme of varied walks in the Forest and beyond, thanking all those who had supported our activities, our walk leaders, our Newsletter Editor and members of the committee who have made all this possible.

Mike concluded his report by looking forward to the challenges for the year ahead. Our footpaths are under severe threat as Government cuts and privatization have effectively resulted in the withdrawal of county council maintenance of footpaths. He considered we needed to decide if we are going to allow our public rights of way to fall into neglect or if we are going to take an active lead in saving them. For the latter course to be taken, a small team would be needed to cope effectively with all the work involved in scrutinizing planning applications and challenging obstructions and for our small Footpath Maintenance team to be boosted by more volunteers.

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Mike stated further challenges included filling all vacancies on the committee and engaging with Ramblers as an organisation at regional and thereby national levels.

In summary he raised the question, in going forward should the Group continue simply as a walking group or become once again proactive in dealing with local Public Rights of Way issues and engaging at regional and national levels of the Ramblers organization.

**2. SECRETARY'S REPORT:** Jackie Huck reported on her first year as Secretary referring to general secretarial duties undertaken in support of committee meetings and activities. She thanked June Burden for taking the 2014 AGM minutes as her last task in role and for June's effective handover. Jackie went on to thank Malcolm Shergold (Webmaster) for his support to committee officers in ensuring emails are correctly routed and for his work to maintain and develop the Group's website. She also expressed her appreciation of the support she had received from Pam Cullis throughout the year and extended special thanks to both Pam and Maurice Cullis for hosting committee meetings.

**3. TREASURER'S REPORT:** In his absence, David Pollard had submitted his report and audited accounts for 2014/15 prior to the meeting. The report confirmed the accounts had been audited and signed off on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015 by Ronald Walker as independent examiner. The required return had also been submitted to Area Treasurer. Copies of the Income, Expenditure and Balance Sheets for both the general running of the Group and The Publications and Projects Account were made available to members. The Chair offered to take any question on this report. No questions were raised therefore the financial accounts were accepted. Further full copies of these accounts may be requested from the Secretary.

**4. ACTING FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT:** John Slater had been co-opted into this post following Sheila Constable's resignation due to ill health. John was unable to attend the meeting however had submitted a report in which he paid tribute to Sheila's diligence over many years in preserving the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network for the enjoyment of all. The report went on to outline John's actions which included attending a PROW workshop run by AMEY in Northleach, scrutinising countless planning applications and making objections to a number of these on behalf of the Group, he had viewed and discussed a number of footpath diversion applications and he had personally completed some 30 OS squares for the Big Path Watch. John had also attended a group Footpath Secretaries' meeting in Dursley and met with the Forestry Commission in Coleford.

The report highlighted significant changes at AMEY which continue to shrink their office staff having not replaced Peter Maunder (our local footpath officer) following his retirement.

It was with regret that John felt unable to stand for re-election and in his report suggested that the role of Footpath Secretary as currently formulated was untenable for any one person and that the job needed an active group of at least 4 people to subdivide the tasks involved. This point would be further discussed under AOB.

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Roger Cox was thanked for his continued work to look after the north of our patch through his group made up of parish representatives.

**5. WALKS CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT:** Maurice Cullis reported on the last 12 months which had delivered an active walks programme of 116 walks. In addition, there had been two walks before the 2014 Christmas Lunch as well as walks undertaken during the organized holidays. Maurice commented this was all due to the efforts of our walk leaders whose enthusiasm never fails to give the Group a varied and interesting walks programme.

**6. MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT:** Babs Jones reported membership of the Forest of Dean Ramblers at 31st October 2015 stood at 229. The number of new members joining since the last AGM was 29, made up of 9 members transferred from other Groups, 14 members new to Ramblers and 6 re-instated members.

Babs had circulated members throughout the year with newsletters and programmes, information about various activities and holiday details.

**7. PUBLICITY OFFICER'S REPORT:** Barbara Fisher reported on an extremely busy year with significant amounts of effort going into the inauguration of Upper Forge Bridge on 9<sup>th</sup> June. In addition to taking a lead role with the Chair in organising this event, the attendant publicity she had achieved included an interview between Rod Goodman and BBC Radio Gloucestershire's Kate Clarke for her "Weekend Walking" broadcast, a banner headline on 9<sup>th</sup> June on local TV and an article published in the autumn 2015 edition of Walk Magazine. Barbara expressed her thanks to Kate Ashbrook, National President of the Ramblers, for formally opening the Upper Forge Bridge.

After the inauguration, Kate Clarke had broadcast two further interviews on separate occasions, one with Mike Ingleby and the other with Ronnie Walker about their respective walking experiences.

Barbara went on to report on the 2015 New Year joint walk with Walking for Health which she had organised and her intention to invite them to join us to welcome in 2016.

Barbara concluded by explaining that actions to promote our Group through social media remained work in progress.

**Full copies of officers' reports are available on request to the Secretary**

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## 8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Position:	Nominee:	Proposed by:	Seconded by:	Voted:
Chair	Mike Ingleby	Jackie Huck	Rod Goodman	unanimously
Secretary	Jackie Huck	Mike Ingleby	Rod Goodman	unanimously
Treasurer	David Pollard	Alan Fisher	Rod Goodman	unanimously
Membership	Babs Jones	Mike Ingleby	Jackie Huck	unanimously
Footpaths	vacancy			
Publicity	vacancy			
Walks coordinator	Maurice Cullis	Mike Ingleby	Carol Lambert	unanimously
Webmaster	Malcolm Shergold	Mike Ingleby	Alan Fisher	unanimously
Committee members	Pam Cullis John Bevan Ian Walding	Barbara Fisher	Jean Sheraton	unanimously
Area Representative	vacancy			

In agreeing to continue as Membership Secretary, Babs Jones wished to have another member volunteer to shadow her for succession planning purposes. Anyone interested was asked to contact Babs for an initial discussion about the role.

9. **APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR:** Ronald Walker was appointed independent auditor for 2015/16

## 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

- Margaret Walker suggested footpath maintenance walks to be scheduled into each programme. This was agreed as a good way forward and that our Trails needed a specific focus for maintenance. This would be further discussed as part of the “footpaths” challenge.
- Mike Ingleby initiated a discussion on how the Group might approach the “footpaths” challenge calling for volunteers who are prepared to work as a small team linking in with the Footpaths Maintenance Team. Barry Lowther, John Baker, Carol Lambert, Sarah Lattimer, David Warren and Roger Cox responded and it was agreed for Mike Ingleby to arrange a first meeting.
- John Sheraton enquired about progress with distribution of Exploring Historic Dean to local retailers and tourist attractions. Mike Ingleby explained the current position and actions still to be taken to establish processes and paperwork which the Treasurer felt compliant with appropriate financial governance. John Sheraton expressed concern about the missed

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opportunities for sales over the summer period however he was currently unable to offer help to progress the matter.

- Ray Chaney, Area Chair, thanked the Group for the opportunity to speak at the AGM and went on to explain how Area works, its links with local groups and nationally and the struggle to recruit to key roles. In particular he required assistance in delivering his role and asked for anyone interested to talk to him after the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm