



# FOREST NEWS

Editor: John Sheraton

Forest of Dean  
Group



## NEW MEMBERS

*A very warm welcome to new members who have joined the Group since the last Forest News.*

Membership is now 229.

## PROGRAMME DEADLINE

- **July – October 2012 programme.**  
**Henry Burden, Tel. 01531 820354**  
**e-mail: ghuburden@mypostoffice.co.uk**

Details of walks for the next programme should be submitted no later than **15 May**, directly onto the Group website if possible, or to Henry. Any member, whether old or new, is welcome to lead a walk. Anyone who wants to borrow books of walks or who needs help to organise a walk, please contact any Committee member.

Many thanks to everyone who has led a walk since the last newsletter.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 33<sup>rd</sup> AGM took place in the Catholic Church Hall, Coleford on 4 November with 34 members and 2 Area representatives attending. The new committee is as follows: **Alan Fisher** (chairman), **June Burden** (secretary), **Rod Goodman** (treasurer), **Barbara Fisher** (membership secretary), **Alan Gillespie** (walks co-ordinator, but see below), **Sheila Constable** (footpath secretary), and **Peter Davies, Malcolm Shergold, and Ian Walding**. The footpath committee consists of **Sheila Constable, Roger Cox, David Mahar, and David Street**. I will continue to edit the Newsletter.

Details of the various committee members' reports can be seen in the AGM minutes, but a few highlights will be noted here. Group members have supported several petitions and campaigns of importance to our area, including 38 Degrees and HOOOF, as well as contacting Tom Franklin (Chief Executive of Ramblers), who is a member of the panel considering the future of forests in the UK. A new expanded group website has been developed (see separate item). Barbara reported that the slight decline in our membership reflects a similar national trend, membership of the Ramblers having dropped by 5139 to 101 911 over the year. Nevertheless, we continue to recruit new members (5 in January) and attendances on walks have rarely, if ever, been better. For example, 41 members and guests took part in Alan's recent walk from Ledbury!

Sheila's footpath report mentioned two successful campaigns during the year. One involved a sewage overflow affecting a footpath which promised to get worse. However, we were able to get a condition put on the planning permission which ensured work was done on the outfall to alleviate the problem. The other involved a proposal to use fields near Longhope for 'war games', which would be potentially hazardous to walkers using a footpath across one of the fields. After publicity in a local newspaper, the landowner will be submitting revised proposals which we think will remove the problem. We owe a debt of gratitude to the PROW Department in Gloucester who do a sterling job despite a lack of funds, so the proposed closure of this department is clearly of major concern to us. The following letter (slightly abbreviated to save space), having been endorsed by Group members at the AGM, was therefore sent to the County Council.

To Mr Peter Bungard

Chief Executive, Gloucestershire County Council.

**Re: Threat of closure of the Public Rights of Way Department at Shire Hall**

Dear Sir

At our 2011 AGM we unanimously passed a motion on behalf of our 227 members to urge you to reconsider the proposed re-organising and possible closure of the Public Rights of Way Department. We are deeply concerned that if the footpath and bridleway responsibilities were to be incorporated within Highways, with the inevitable loss of trained PROW Officers, the footpath network will quickly deteriorate, perhaps irrevocably so. The PROW Officers and staff have a wealth of experience and knowledge which is vital in keeping our footpath network open. The County Council may not be able to fulfil its legal obligation to this community unless it retains its PROW expertise. We do all that we can as volunteers to assist in footpath work but we and the walking public rely heavily on the support of the PROW department. At a time when health issues promote walking and the domestic tourist industry is on the rise, it is imperative that the footpath network is kept fully useable throughout our county. We hope that you will take our views into consideration.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Sheila Constable, Mr Alan Fisher

On behalf of the members of the Forest of Dean Ramblers Group.

The response said little except that it is all in the interests of efficiency and savings.

A vote of thanks was given to Pat Williams, who is retiring from the footpath committee after 14 years, 11 of them as secretary. Recent improvements to the signage of the High Meadows and Beechenhurst trails and the new leaflets have been well received. Thanks to Rod and his volunteers for doing all the hard work of post-hole digging, etc. The meeting ended with the usual 'bring-and-share' supper, which was enjoyed by all.

## WALKS CO-ORDINATOR

After being voted walks co-ordinator at the AGM, Alan Gillespie has unfortunately had to step down from the position for health reasons. He was also unable to lead some of his walks in the current programme. However, other members volunteered to lead these walks (or at least very similar walks), so that they were still able to go ahead. Alan's walks have become legendary, and are certainly one reason why our attendances have been so good recently. We give him our very best wishes, and sincerely hope that he will soon be back leading many more such varied and enjoyable walks. As Alan is unable to continue at present, we are fortunate that Henry has volunteered to stand in for now. Development of our new website has meant that it is now very easy for members to submit their own walks online, thus considerably reducing the amount of work needed to put the programme together. However, members without internet access should not be put off submitting walks, as they can still be given to Henry in the traditional way.

## QUIZ NIGHT

There will be a quiz night at the Miners Arms, Whitecroft at 7 pm on Wednesday 18 April. Please bring your sense of humour and a pen. The cost for the meal will be £8 and booking is essential to allow catering numbers to be advised. Please contact **Henry** on **01531 820354** by 9th April.

### ZANTE HOLIDAY

To date 11 members have booked for this Greek island holiday from 17 – 24 May 2012. It has been organised with Way2Go4 (including accommodation and self-led walks), and direct flights from Bristol airport have been booked. It should still be possible for other members to join this holiday if they wish.

### WYE VALLEY WALK

Having successfully completed the Offa's Dyke Path last spring, our new mission is to walk the Wye Valley Walk from the source near Plynlimon to the sea (well, Chepstow Castle). The plan is to walk the first 26.5 miles from Rhyd-y-benwch to Rhayader over three days. This will take place between Thursday 26 April and Monday 30 April. There will be an optional 6-mile walk in the Elan Valley on the Thursday afternoon, with homeward travel on the Monday. Accommodation will be in Rhayader, either B&B or camping. Please contact **Ronnie** on **01594 845225** for further information.

### NEW WEBSITE

The site ([www.fodramblers.org.uk](http://www.fodramblers.org.uk)) has now been working for several months and favourable comments have been received from many members. It is currently being used for the first time for the input and development of the next walks programme from March to June. Allowing walk leaders to add their walks online should simplify creating the programme and improve accuracy, as well as making the walks co-ordinator's job much easier. It should even be possible to provisionally enter walks beyond the period of the next programme. Including an OS map for each walk showing the starting point, will enable the entered grid reference to be more easily checked, a very useful feature as there have been several errors in the published grid references in recent months.

We are able to develop the site further, so please send any feedback and suggestions you may have to webmaster Malcolm Shergold. We already have a publications page so website visitors can buy our walks book and leaflets online. However, links to other sites, such as the Forest Bookshop, Beechenhurst Lodge, and perhaps tourist accommodation would be useful. It should also be possible to add photos taken on walks or otherwise relevant to the Group. So keep looking at the site for any new developments, as well as to check out details of forthcoming walks.

### WINTER WALKS

There was an average attendance of 22 people on Group walks in the winter programme, a very encouraging number. The highest was 41 on Alan's walk from Ledbury towards the Malverns and back through Eastnor Park. The walks varied from 4.5 miles, mainly 'Winter Walks' in the Forest of Dean, to 12 miles in length, the latter being one of the Cotswold Way circular walks. The group is steadily working along the Cotswold Way, but doing circular, rather than linear, walks. This has provided the Group with some stunning views and plenty of variety, as well as a few challenges.

Unlike last year, on the whole the weather (so far) has been mild and fairly dry. Barbara and Alan's walk from Llangrove, through Lewston, to Welsh Newton was enhanced by a hard frost, mist hanging in the Wye Valley, and sunshine, resulting in some superb views. On the other hand, Alan's planned walk over Hay Bluff and the Cat's Back on 29 January was justifiably cancelled in view of a dire weather forecast: heavy snow at all levels with blizzard conditions and hill fog! The group has already been on the starting blocks with an early Olympic event: 31 people enjoyed a short walk round the Sculpture Trail, courtesy of Ronnie. Everyone entered a 'guess the timing competition' and at three points around the trail a bronze, a silver, or a gold medal was presented to the person closest to the correct time. All three medals were won by ladies (it was obviously rigged, Ed.). (Barbara Fisher)

### BRIDGE NEAR NORCHARD

Replacing the closed bridge over the River Lyd near Norchard came a step closer with the offer by the PROW Department of an 8-metre footbridge at the bargain price of £1500. Amateur surveyors Goodman and Sheraton recently measured up the site and found that the bridge (a substantial metre-wide structure) could have been 'made-to-measure'. Access to the bridge from the road will require about 20 steps down a steep bank. Materials to construct these steps and the bridge abutments, together with the cost of dedicating the path as a PROW will bring the total cost to about £2500, well within the amount we have available from book sales. Rod is currently liaising with the PROW Department over matters such as maintenance, safety, and liability, and we hope to soon have a detailed proposal to present to the Lydney Park Estate, the landowner.

### WINTER HILL

The following poem, submitted by Daphne, foreshadows the better-known mass trespasses of the 1930s, which ultimately resulted in the 'right-to-roam' legislation of today. Winter Hill is in Lancashire, and the poem records a very early mass trespass when 10 000 Boltonians marched to reclaim an ancient right-of-way on 6 September 1896!

Will yo' come o' Sunday morning  
For a walk o'er Winter Hill?  
Ten thousand went last Sunday  
But there's room for thousands still!  
O the moors are rare and bonny  
An the heather's sweet an fine  
An the road across the hill tops  
Is the public's – yours an mine!

### PLAY

Our very own Bob Constable is directing a great comedy play called "Old actors never die, they simply lose the plot". This will be performed at the May Hill Village Hall at 7.30 pm on 29 – 31 March. Tickets are £7 each and can be ordered from **Sheila (01452 831868)**.

### INK CARTRIDGES

I have a number of ink-jet printer cartridges (Epson compatible black and three colours: T0611/2/3/4), free to a good home. I can no longer use them since I replaced the printer. Please contact the editor.

### GROUP WEBSITE

This can be reached either via the national Ramblers site at [www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk) and searching groups, or directly at our own site [www.fodramblers.org.uk](http://www.fodramblers.org.uk)

### EDITORIAL CONTACTS

01594 531096 [sheraton@stoneacre.orangehome.co.uk](mailto:sheraton@stoneacre.orangehome.co.uk)



*A reminder that not all winter walks are done in cold and dull conditions. This is the view of the Wye Valley from Penallt churchyard taken on the walkover for Barbara and Alan's walk from Redbrook last November. Whatever the season or the weather, enjoy your walking!*

**The Editor**