



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 224.

PROGRAMME DEADLINE

- **July – October 2013 programme.**
Henry Burden, Tel. 01531 820354
e-mail: walks@fodramblers.org.uk

Details of walks for the next programme should be submitted no later than **15 May**, directly onto the Group website if possible (www.fodramblers.org.uk), 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 anyone who has led a walk since the last newsletter.

WALKS DEADLINE

Please note that the absolute final deadline for submitting walks for the next programme is 20 May, although please try and get them to Henry (or onto the website) by 15th if possible. This will allow Henry time to complete the walks programme before he goes on holiday.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 34th Group AGM was held on Friday 2 November 2012 at the Catholic Church Hall in Coleford, with 30 members attending. Apart from one change, both the old committee and the footpath committee were re-elected en-bloc: **Alan Fisher** (chairman), **June Burden** (secretary), **Rod Goodman** (treasurer), **Barbara Fisher** (membership secretary), **Henry Burden** (walks co-ordinator), **Sheila Constable** (footpath secretary), **Malcolm Shergold** (webmaster), **Maurice Cullis**, and **Ian Walding**. The footpath committee consists of **Sheila Constable**, **Roger Cox**, **David Mahar**, and **David Street**. I will continue to edit the Newsletter.

Among the matters discussed were the bridge near Norchard (see below for the latest), the Walkers are Welcome project in Lydney, and various footpath problems (the Coleford wind turbine, Lydney Golf Course footpath, etc.). Robin Warren asked if it was possible to find out when and where the felling of larch, oak, and ash trees will take place in view of the current outbreak of disease amongst these trees. He was concerned that such felling will affect our walks. Rod's report on his meeting with the FC addresses this point (see below). Rod reminded members that, under the *Ramblers Walking Partnership*, any holiday booked with Ramblers Holidays will benefit the group by either £10, £20, or £30, depending on destination. However, you must remember to tell them which group you belong to when booking. Further details of the meeting can be seen in the AGM Minutes. There was the usual 'bring-and-share' supper afterwards.

WYE VALLEY WALK

The next section of the Wye Valley Walk, from Rhayader to Trerickett Mill (a distance of 25.5 miles over three days), will take place between Sunday 21 and Thursday 25 April. The final 7 miles of last year's walk (rained off for most of the group) will be repeated on the Sunday afternoon, with homeward travel on the Thursday.

Accommodation will be in Built Wells. Please contact **Ronnie** on **01594 845225** for further information if you are interested.

QUIZ NIGHT

Don't forget the next Quiz Night at the Miner's Arms at Whitecroft on Thursday 28 February at 7 pm. Book with **Henry** on **01531 820354** by 19 February for the meal at £8 per person.

TONY DRAKE MBE

There are two walks in memory of the late Tony Drake in the new programme. Sheila is leading a walk from Prinknash on Wednesday 22 May, as part of an Area-wide tribute, and Rod will be leading the Beechenhurst Trail on Sunday 9 June.

Although Tony's long career covered a very wide area, mostly in Gloucestershire, the Forest area benefited greatly from his boundless energy and experience. When, in 1949, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed, definitive rights of way were registered for the first time. Tony was at the forefront of this work throughout the county. In 1960 he pioneered the idea of permanent waymarked routes in our area, the first in the country, with the encouragement of the Forestry Commission. The first of these linked the Youth Hostels at St.Briavels and Mitcheldean (the latter long since demolished). The following year saw the introduction of the Highmeadow Trail, which Tony described as one that had "few equals in Britain" for river and forest scenery and general interest. The third Area-sponsored route was in northwest Dean, which linked up the two previous routes, and added several 'spurs': this was renamed the Beechenhurst Trail shortly before Tony died last year. 2013 sees the Golden Jubilee of this route, so it is appropriate that Rod is leading a walk in celebration. It is pleasing that both the Highmeadow and Beechenhurst Trails are still being maintained by the Group, and that the accompanying leaflets are still being sold.

In 1978 Tony was at the forefront of setting up a new local group of the Ramblers' Association in the area covered by the Forest of Dean District Council. Not only did this have the object of organising regular walks (originally two a month), but also had the important duty of ensuring that the network of public footpaths was maintained in good condition and any proposed changes properly scrutinized. Like Ramblers across the county, and indeed elsewhere, we have a lot to thank Tony for during his many years of active work in the promotion of walking and ensuring the integrity of the Public Rights of Way network. (Robin Warren)

GRAHAM TURNER

It is with sadness that we report the death on 20 January of Graham Turner. Graham was a long-standing member of the Group, serving on the Footpath Committee for 18 years, ten of them as chairman. Unfortunately, poor health prevented him from joining any walks in recent years. We send our condolences to his widow, Rosemary, who also served on the Footpath Committee, being secretary for a number of years. (Robin Warren)

EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

In the unlikely event of you becoming incapacitated whilst out walking, we suggest that it would be a good idea to have on your person a note of whom to contact in an emergency, such as a spouse, partner, or other relative who will be able to cope in such an emergency. It is also advisable to have your address and telephone number in your rucksack, so that it could be returned to you if it was ever lost on a walk.

MEETING WITH FORESTRY COMMISSION

Rod met with representatives of the Forestry Commission on 7 December and several topics which may be of interest to members were discussed. Two long-standing footpath problems on the Highmeadow Trail will hopefully be dealt with by the FC, as will several fallen trees across paths. With regard to tree felling, most infected areas have already been felled. If any work affects formal trails and footpaths, then diversions will be put in place by the FC. A FC Forest Walks Map and website are being prepared and will include the 3 Ramblers walk routes and a reference to our website.

POTENTIAL NEW MEMBER?

Members assembling near Cannop Ponds for Ronnie's walk in the Parkend area on 6 January were surprised to see a boar mingling with the group. John Bevan, who took the picture, apologises for the blurring, which he "puts down to fear". However, I suspect the poor light might have had something to do with it.



CANCELLED WALKS

The recent winter weather resulted in two walks being cancelled in January. Alan and Barbara's walk from Ballingham on 23rd was cancelled due to the snow and icy roads. Then David P's walk from Ross on 30th was cancelled owing to flooding! What next - heat wave, plague of locusts? One walk which did go ahead was Margaret's on 27th from St Briavels. This must qualify as 'the muddiest walk of the year' so far. Woodland near Clanna was being harvested and the vehicle ruts were up to 2 ft deep (see photo by John Bevan)!



SUGARLOAF VIA DERI

I don't blame anyone who woke up to the pouring rain on the morning of 29 December for deciding that a day indoors looked more appealing than joining my Sugarloaf walk. Even the dog crawled back to bed when I got out the rucksack. (I almost joined him!) When I planned the walk, I had envisaged clear blue skies and perhaps a touch of snow on the top (*there's optimism. Ed.*), but I had an alternative low-level walk should it be thick snow at 2000 feet! In the event, six hardy souls were waiting in the Lamb & Flag pub car park. We decided to head uphill, which was just as well as the low-level alternative was under flood water! Three of the party left us at coffee time as two of them they were not feeling well, and the other

four decided that there would be no pleasure in climbing to the top in such awful weather. However, at this point the rain stopped and the cloud lifted, so we pushed on to the summit and were rewarded with a spectacular 360 degree view. The ascent via the Deri is pure joy, with ancient oak woods and views. We enjoyed a welcome cup of coffee or tea with Stollen cake in the pub afterwards. As it would not be fair to limit the pleasures of this lovely walk to such a select few, I have put it in the next programme (Thursday 7 March). Hopefully, the sun will be shining this time, although I won't mind at all if there is some snow on the top. Bernard took the photo of me, Ronnie, and Hilary at the summit, looking suitably pleased with ourselves. (Sheila Constable)



UPPER FORGE BRIDGE PROJECT (CONT.)

Before Christmas we were hopeful that most of the hurdles had been overcome, but not so. Because of some small alterations to the path route, the Planning Application had to be re-submitted and there are still concerns about environmental aspects. The fuss and palaver to get permission to build a footbridge and short length of footpath is just unbelievable. Anyone would think it was a 6-lane motorway or major industrial development. A lesser man than Rod would have given up in disgust by now. However, he still hopes to have it all sorted out so that work can start in the spring (see below). We are now considering writing another book entitled *The Saga of Norchard Bridge*. There should be enough material to fill a substantial volume. Oh well, remember that well-known quotation from the Classics: *illegitimi non carborundum* (translation available upon request).

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Once planning permission for the bridge has been confirmed, we will be able to start work, hopefully in March. If you would be willing to help in any way with the preparation work and/or bridge installation, please let Rod know on 01594 563817 or via e-mail (dicksdad@skv.com). Please let me know roughly when you are available, for how long, and what you can or cannot do. It doesn't matter whether you have your own kit or not, or whether you can spare a few hours or a few days. We plan to work only on weekdays, and not in very wet weather. Many thanks. (Rod Goodman)

GROUP WEBSITE

This can be reached either via the national Ramblers site at www.ramblers.org.uk and searching groups, or directly at our own site www.fodramblers.org.uk

EDITORIAL CONTACTS

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The recent inclement weather – heavy snowfalls, flooding, etc. – may have resulted in a few walks being cancelled, but it has not stopped us from getting out and about. However, it does mean we need to be sure, when leading a walk, that the route is still passable. Walking in the Hudnalls recently, I found three problems: two paths blocked by fallen trees and one by a landslide (duly reported), all requiring significant detours. Other paths are underwater. Nevertheless, it won't spoil our enjoyment. They don't call us Ramblers for nothing! Whatever the weather, enjoy your walking!
The Editor