



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 242, an increase of 18 (8%) in the last four months.

PROGRAMME DEADLINE

- **November 2011 – February 2012 programme:**
Peter Davies, Tel. 01600 711558
e-mail: eanne.davies@virgin.net

Details of walks for the next programme should be sent to Peter no later than the **15 September**. 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 Peter or any Committee member.

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

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please put a note in your diary that the next AGM will take place at the Catholic Church Hall, Coleford on Friday 4 November. Several Committee members have said that they intend to step down, so please consider nominating for one of the positions.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

There are no social events finalised at present. However, we are looking into the possibility of having another Mediterranean event at the Miners Arms, Whitecroft, possibly in the form of a walk, followed by lunch and games in the afternoon. Any other ideas would also be welcome. Watch this space!

Following an item in the last newsletter, 19 members have so far expressed an interest in going on a group holiday abroad next year. However, we still need to put a definite proposal together. If you have any ideas about where or when to go, or, better still, would like to help organise something, then please let any Committee member know.

MID-COUNTIES CO-OP WALKS

We have been invited by the Mid-Counties Co-operative Membership Department to attend their local events to promote activities for their members. These will take place at the Cinderford Co-op store on Sunday 26 June and at the Lydney Co-op on Monday 4 July, both from 10 am until 2 pm. We plan to have a display of photos, leaflets, books, social events, local history, etc. and we will also be offering a short walk from each venue. Each one-hour walk will start promptly at 1 pm, rain or shine. (Sorry no buggies.) Please spread the word to your friends, so they can drop by and find out about the Ramblers. If you are able to help with either of these events, please contact **Susan Faircloth** on **01594 517207** or **Barbara Fisher** on **01989 770976**.

RAMBLERS EVENTS

The Ramblers are organising several walking festivals in the coming year. 3–9 October 2011 is *A Walk in the Woods Week*, something especially appropriate to our Group. The public outcry over the sale

of English forests demonstrated just how much we use and value our woodland, and this event will show the world the importance of being able to walk in the woods. The annual *Festival of Winter Walks* will take place from 24 December 2011 until 2 January 2012. Saturday 5 May 2012 is *Coast for Most Day*, a one-off event to celebrate the Wales Coastal Path, which the Welsh Assembly Government plans to launch on that day. Finally, *Get Walking for the Games Weekend* takes place from 25–27 May 2012. This Ramblers flagship walking event gives people across the country the opportunity to discover the pleasures of walking with the Ramblers. Maybe we can include some of our walks in these events. Further details may be found on the Ramblers website.

INDEPENDENT PANEL ON FORESTRY VISIT

We have received information about the Independent Panel on Forestry, to be chaired by the Bishop of Liverpool. Contact had been made with Tom Franklin, Ramblers CEO and a member of the panel, regarding their proposed visit to the Forest on a fact-finding mission, and he is keen to meet us and hear our views. We hope to be able to show him part of the Forest, ideally on a walk. Members of HOOF would like to work with us and meet with Tom Franklin and the panel. Hopefully we will be able to have a say in deciding the future of the Forest and other woodlands around the country.

TORQUAY WEEKEND

Twenty-six Group members took part in a very enjoyable long weekend from 6–9 May. On Friday afternoon the group enjoyed a sunny walk from the hotel around Hope's Nose, location of a genuine gold deposit (although I bet most members were not aware of this). Saturday included a ferry trip across Torbay to the picturesque Brixham harbour and a walk back on the South West Coastal Path to Torquay. A dramatic thunderstorm provided a great firework display for us in the evening, which resulted in a fantastically clear and sunny day on Sunday. We travelled down to Kingswear to catch the ferry to Dartmouth at about 10 am, only to be greeted by the Captain over the tannoy with "Don't you lot know it's Sunday?" Wonderful cliffs, sea views, sea shanties, and lots of other music were enjoyed in Dartmouth and surrounds. Monday offered a choice of 2 walks: the undulating(!) coastal path from Kingswear to Brixham with about 1000 m of ascent, or a shorter walk around Shaldon on the River Teign. The Frognell Hall hotel were very welcoming and provided excellent value for money, good food, croquet, and even a quiz on Sunday evening. A very good time was had by all. Thanks to everyone who came on the weekend, to the walk leaders for sorting out the individual walks, and to Alan and Barbara for organising the whole thing.

SLIDE SHOW

An illustrated talk based on the book *Exploring Historic Dean* by John Sheraton and Rod Goodman was given by the authors on 25 February at the Catholic Church Hall in Coleford. This was followed by a most enjoyable 'bring-and-share' supper and a raffle. Sales of the book are still going well, with around 1500 sold to date and well over £4000 pounds in the bank.

OFFA'S DYKE PATH

Eight of us finally completed the last 29 miles of the 177-mile long Offa's Dyke Path, from Llandegla to Prestatyn, on 28 April. It has taken a while, as some of us walked the southern part, from Chepstow to Knighton, as long ago as the spring of 2004, although others have done this more recently. The northern part has been walked in three sections over the past three years.

This year, the weather was quite good, as we have come to expect, and we walked into Prestatyn in glorious sunshine. We just had time for a paddle in the Irish Sea and an ice-cream before catching our minibus back to Ruthin. And no, we didn't paddle in the sticky mud of the Severn Estuary at the start of the walk. The photo shows the group (minus the Editor who was taking the picture) at the official end of the walk on Prestatyn seafront. Many thanks to Ronnie for organising the walks.



NEW WALKS LEAFLETS

Further to the item in the last *Forest News*, the new Highmeadow and Beechenhurst Trails leaflets have just been printed. They are now in full colour and include detailed maps and walk directions, as well as brief notes on some of the points of interest seen on the walks. Philip Gray of Fineleaf Publications, who published our walks book, organised the printing for us. The old Yellow Arrow leaflet has also been reprinted in similar format and is now called the Soudley Circles Walks. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Highmeadow/Beechenhurst Trail, considered to be one of the finest woodland walks in the country. Hence, Rod Goodman will be leading a walk over the Beechenhurst Trail on Saturday 23 July (see walks programme for details). Rod has done an excellent job of organising the maintenance and waymarking of the routes, and we now have a team of volunteers to carry out periodic (twice-yearly) inspections of sections of the routes and undertake path clearance as required. Many thanks to all of you who have been involved in this work.

FOOTPATH MATTERS

Many of you will have seen the front-page news item in the 2 June issue of *The Forester*. This discussed our objections to a planning application to carry out war games, involving the use of guns firing plastic ball bearings, at Blakemore Farm, near Longhope. The area in question is crossed by two public rights of way, and we consider that such activities are totally inappropriate there, being both intimidating to the walking public and potentially dangerous, particularly to the eyes. Any such activities need to be carried out well away from public footpaths. Further details about our (and other) objections can be found by visiting www.fdean.gov.uk and entering the planning reference number P0678/11/COU.

Regarding the proposed cycle track/walking path between Chepstow and Brockweir, Sustrans have been forced to re-allocate the lottery funding, as the Monmouthshire CC has still not decided about their section of the route. This is a pity as much of the route is presently accessible to neither walkers nor cyclists. However the plans have not been abandoned.

CATTLE

Sometimes we have to walk across fields containing cattle. While this rarely presents a problem, there have been a few recent cases of walkers being injured or even killed. I had a rather unnerving experience on a recent Group walk, when a herd of cattle charged down a field and I only just managed to run clear in time. So it is useful to keep a few common-sense rules (courtesy of farmer Derek)

in mind. If you are crossing a field with cattle, the most important thing is not to get between cows and their calves. It is probably better to keep to the edge of the field where you cannot get surrounded by 'playful' cattle. Dogs can be a source of concern to cattle, so if the latter appear threatening, you could let the dog off its lead to hopefully divert their attention away from you.

BRIDGE NEAR NORCHARD

There has been little progress with solving the problem of the closed bridge over the River Lyd north of Norchard (on Walk 2 of our book *Exploring Historic Dean*). As mentioned in the last *Forest News*, before we can consider providing funding for a replacement bridge, it is necessary that the footpath involved should be dedicated as a public right-of-way. We have written to Lord Bledisloe, the land owner, about this and are currently awaiting his reply.

RAMBLERS DISCOUNTS

We have been informed that Milletts are now offering discounts of up to 15% on outdoor clothing and other gear for Ramblers members, thus matching discounts available from Blacks and Cotswold stores. So don't forget to take your membership card when visiting these shops.

DISTRIBUTION OF WALKS PROGRAMME

This is the first time that the walks programme, *Forest News*, and other documents will be distributed by e-mail to those of you who have agreed to use this method. It will save a considerable sum in postage costs, but we need to be sure that it will work well in practice. Clearly it will involve two sets of members, those who use e-mail and those who still get hard copies by post. So if you don't get your programme, etc., in good time please let our walks co-ordinator (**Peter Davies** on **01600 711558**), membership secretary (**Barbara Fisher** on **01989 770976**), or any other Committee member know as soon as possible. Also let us know if you cannot open the e-mail attachments for any reason. For example, I (and probably others) cannot open files with the extension .docx, so we need to be sure that all files are sent in standard Word format (.doc).

OLD PHOTOS OF DEAN

Both Ian Walding and Henry Burden have told me about a very interesting website containing many wonderful old photographs of people, places, and events around the Forest. The address is www.sungreen.co.uk, and the site is well worth a look.

GROUP WEBSITE

This gives a lot of information about our activities and can be reached either via the national RA site at www.ramblers.org.uk and searching groups, or directly at <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/deanforest>. The present website, so ably looked after by our webmaster, Fred Gray, has limited capacity, and so the Committee has decided to upgrade it, which will require some expenditure. After looking at several commercial possibilities, we recently learned that two of our own members, Malcolm and Sue Shergold, have skills in this area and are willing to undertake the work.

EDITORIAL CONTACTS

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Not much space left in this issue for my usual blurb, so I will just say how impressed I was with the good range of walks we were able to take part in during the four months covered by the last programme. They ranged from 4 to 12.5 miles and covered a considerable area, including the Brecon Beacons, Blacks Mountains, Malverns, and Cotswolds, as well as our own area. We seem to be getting more adventurous in our walking, while still, hopefully, catering for all tastes. I am sure that the new programme will be just as interesting, giving you plenty of opportunities to enjoy your walking.

The Editor.