

Secretary's Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the new Area Newsletter. This will have the familiar sections such as reports from Groups but will not be printed. You will be reading this on-line or you can print off a personal copy. The printed newsletter was not widely read and was expensive to produce. On the other hand many members liked to read about what other groups have been doing and this has provided the main content of this edition. Contributions have varied this year but given time I am sure a house style will establish itself.

If anyone would like to contribute an article or a picture for a future edition that will be most welcome (N.B. The next edition is likely to be in 12 months' time!).

Please let us know what you think and how it might be improved.

Adrian Sheehan

Chairman's Report

I am disappointed that my plea to last years AGM for greater representation at Area meetings has gone un-headed, which means that the future of Greater Gwent Area remains fragile. A situation which is about to be further exposed, as the treasurer, Maurice Turner is to stand down this year. Can we continue without such an officer? I don't think so!! However, within its self defined administrative role, Area has worked well throughout the year, thanks ,it must be said, to the commitment of a small number of officers /delegates.who also carry out similar duties within their respective groups. A big thank you to those concerned, especially Maurice who in the the last 7 years has carried out is duties in a quiet professional manner, guiding us through the vagaries of Ramblers budgeting, managing to source the groups whilst maintaining friendship equilibrium and leaving us in a sound financial position. Maurice; we are indebted to you. As for the future, well, that will depend on the outcome of this years AGM.

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Footpath Officer:

vacant

Access Officer:

vacant

Membership Secretary's Report

	South Gwent	Pontypool	North Gwent	Lower Wye	<u>Gelligaer</u>	Islwyn	Greater Gwent
Aug '10	182	237	57	204	120	76	876
Aug '11	167	228	53	198	139	84	869
% change	-8%	-3.8%	-7%	-2.9%	+15.8%	+10.5%	+0.8%

Greater Gwent has bucked the trend with a small rise in membership over the last twelve months. Elsewhere in the country, membership has continued to fall. Because we have never been told the true membership figures from two or three years ago, we do not really know just how big the decline in membership has been.

Increasing membership is one of this year's priorities for Ramblers but how we do this is easier said than done.

Maggie Thomas

Treasurer's Report

This year's budget for Area and the Groups was submitted expecting that Head Office would cap us but after answering a few queries we were allocated what we had asked for.

I think that is in no small part due to the Groups all requesting a lower allocation than last year.

I would like to thank all the Group Treasurers for their support in the last year.

Finally, as I announced last year this will be my last AGM as Area Treasurer. After seven years I think it is time to hand over to someone else and I wish them all the luck for the future.

Maurice Turner

Group Reports

Gelligaer Group

We have no control over the speed at which we grow old, but we should not all grow old together.

So many groups in the past have failed when all of the leading members of the group give up at the same time. Gelligaer is very aware of this and, fortunately, the last few years have seen new and younger members come forward and take over the leading of walks from the older stalwarts who, whilst still keen on walking, are happier to take a back seat. This, for Gelligaer, has been a year of transition. New members have joined and new walks leaders

have emerged. Notwithstanding the changes, the group continues to thrive with 30 or so people turning up to walk every Sunday and alternate Saturdays.

The group has enjoyed its usual excursion to Port Eynon for the pre-Christmas weekend. This weekend continues to retain its popularity. The group also enjoyed its usual August Bank Holiday walking weekend – this year in the Cotswolds, staying at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester – probably the best venue yet. Day excursions included Tintern, to walk Offa's Dyke path to celebrate its 40th anniversary, and the Pembroke Coastal path. Gratifyingly for the organisers of these excursions, the group enthusiastically supports these trips with between 40 – 50 on all such outings.

Drama in this year's programme was provided by the secretary falling 30ft down a ravine during a walk on the Rhigos mountain. Thankfully, he is now fully recovered and back walking with the group. This event made the group realise the value of the Wales Air Ambulance and the Brecon Beacons Mountain Rescue Team. Both organisations provided prompt and very professional service on the day in question. Both groups are charities and at the time of writing, the group is organising a sponsored walk to raise funds for them.

With new and enthusiastic members, the future of the group looks rosy and the group looks forward to the next year hopefully – without the drama of last year.

Secretary Gareth Thomas

Islwyn

No report

Lower Wye

The group started the year heavily involved in negotiating some significant concessions for walkers from Sustrans on its proposed cycle path between Chepstow and Brockweir in the Wye Valley. The path will not however proceed in the very near future as time has run out to secure the necessary planning permission from Monmouthshire C.C. in order to use the funding within the necessary deadlines. We ended the year in on-going discussions with Monmouthshire C.C. on its Prioritisation of Maintenance and Enforcement Policy.

Our group of maintenance volunteers, The Chain Gang, work every week with the Countryside Access wardens and have so far contributed some 323 man-days equivalent to almost 2170 man hours on repairing and installing gates, stiles, bridges and generally maintaining the local footpath network. Their work is invaluable and we are extremely grateful to the team.

Our walks programme continues to provide a wide variety of well over one hundred walks a year including a season of summer evening walks which prove very popular. Thanks to both our out-going and in-coming Rambles Officers and the team of dedicated walk leaders.

We have had a number of walking holidays in 2011 – a long weekend on the Isle of Wight, a week and a weekend on the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path (we aim to complete it in 2015!), and a week on the South West Coast Path. Next year we already have planned a winter

week in Austria, a week in the Lake District, two weekends on the PCP, a week on the SWCP and a week in the Quantocks. We even have tentative plans for a two-week holiday on Samos in 2013.

On the social side we had a very successful summer barbecue and look forward to a quiz night and the very popular Christmas lunch.

The only down-side for the group is the membership which stubbornly remains at about 200 – we seem to recruit enough new members but only enough to cover those whom we lose. Our new Membership Secretary has introduced a follow-up system to those whose membership lapses in an effort to retain at least some of them.

All in all the group remains a lively and active group with plenty to keep the committee and volunteers busy.

Secretary/Chairman Dawn Davies

Pontypool

The club has had a successful year with a varied walks programme, although the adverse weather caused some cancellations.

The short walks programme has continued to be popular and is allowing us to increase RA membership.

Two coach trips were arranged, one to Cheddar Gorge in April with a meal on the return journey, also a visit to The Pembrokeshire Coast Path in June with a meal on the way home.

Two social evenings were enjoyed at Llanellen Village Hall, both being followed by our customary 'American Supper'.

The annual Christmas Dinner was held at the Glen-yr-Avon House Hotel and was well attended.

The annual spring walking week was in the Yorkshire Dales based at Scarborough, where members enjoyed a varied programme of walks and reasonable weather.

Attendances on walks have fluctuated, but overall membership is remaining fairly static.

Alun Cunningham

North Gwent

No report

South Gwent

Our membership according to RA head office at the end of August was 167. This represents a small decline so far this year, a trend which appears to be found in most areas of the ramblers unfortunately. We have managed to attract our share of new members but have lost more than we have gained. We will continue with our efforts to improve the situation.

Our walks programme continues to provide walks every Sunday. Evening walks in the summer months are also very popular with our members and are an excellent introduction to new members. We have found there is need for shorter themed walks and are looking at ways to incorporate them into our programme.

Coach trips are also popular with our members and this year we had four. The first was a visit to Westonbirt Arboretum. In June we went to St Davids in West Wales. July saw us visit Winchester, where we boarded a steam train to take us to the start of our walks. September we went to Runnymede where we visited the many memorials in that area. We have had four Weekend Aways, Newquay in Cornwall, Okehampton, Scotland and the Isle of Wight. We have also had our usual BBQ and Skittle evenings. This year we have also added Boules to our calendar. It was our turn to host the Area Walk which was well supported by all the Greater Gwent groups. Our usual Xmas events were successful and I feel we have excelled ourselves this year.

It was sad to note that the Gwent Association for the Blind had to be disbanded earlier in the year but I am pleased to advise that members of Greater Gwent are to provide a limited walks programme for them. SGR will be pleased to help in any way we can.

Our Footpath Officer has continued his good work in pursuing our aims for coastal access and is making slow but steady progress towards the opening day in May 2012. He has dealt with a number of path diversions over the year and liaised with the Celtic Manor hosting the Ryder Cup in to ensure our path disruption was kept to a minimum.

Finally as always my thanks to our officers, committee and walks leaders for their work throughout the year.

Secretary/Chairman Ken Philips