

Ramblers East Cheshire Group

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 19th November 2016 at Macclesfield Tennis Club. (Subject to approval at the AGM 2017).

There were 44 members that signed the attendance register.

Many thanks to Jane and Frank Gay for organizing the venue and to all those who helped and who provided the splendid afternoon tea.

1. Apologies for absence

The following members sent their apologies: Peter & Georgie Everson, David Gylee, Audrey Sheen, Steve Hull, Maureen Walker, Tony Walker, Andy Davies, Brian Richardson, David & Jane Collerick, Denise Hutchinson, John Handley, Graham Beech, Heather Christiansen, Jenny Bardoli and Chris Munslow.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 14th November 2015

The minutes were accepted as a true and fair record.

Motion proposed by Dave Barraclough and seconded by Helen Richardson

3. Matters arising from the AGM held on 14th November 2015

None

4. Annual Reports from Officers

4.1 Chairman

An overview of the activities undertaken were highlighted such as the work done on the "Lost Pathways" project relating to Cheshire, our contribution to "Walk about Britain" and "Walking for Health" initiatives.

Because of our constant need to attract new walk leaders the Committee is offering a Group Training Day on February 9th 2017 led by the mountain instructors from the Lindley Education Trust. A programme and invitation to participate was sent to the membership.

Brian Griffiths questioned the need for this training and the benefit of spending any funds on it believing that the training provided by himself met the need. The Committee responded that it was entirely reasonable to provide a Training Day led by professional external instructors where members could learn in a group setting along with colleagues.

An interesting statistic from the database held in the website is the number of walks available to our membership in the last 12 months that outsiders can hardly believe. Overall, in 2016 there have been 361 walks (short, medium and long) scheduled in our programme and 113 members have led walks.

A heartfelt collective "thank you" was expressed to everyone who has contributed to our success this year as it is only by members volunteering to serve the group that we continue to thrive.

Several Committee members are standing down and were thanked for their individual contribution:

- Roger Norton has been our Publicity Officer for many years and has used his editorial skills and persistent effort to publicize our activities to the outside world.
- Mike Bull has been our Membership Secretary for several years and we shall miss his carefully considered input during our committee meetings.
- Andy Davies is standing down but is keen to assist in arranging Social events.

Roger Fielding deserves special mention for all the time he spends as our "webmaster" whose work drives most of the processes and activities we do.

4.2 Treasurer

Overall we had a surplus of £1268 at year end and the bank balance at year ends stands at £10048 (up from £8783 in the previous year).

Income was received from Central Office, donations and commission from Ramblers Worldwide Holidays. We were just shy (-£38) of breaking even this year on all our self funded activities.

We funded work costing £988 on various footpath maintenance projects and donated £75 to our local Mountain Rescue Teams (Buxton, Glossop, Oldham and Kinder).

Our budget for 2016/2017 of £2000 was approved by Central Office on 25th October 2016. We continue our efforts to keep our bank balance within the Ramblers Association guidelines so we have only claimed 50% of our budget needs for 2017.

A big thank you to Ken Hobbs for providing the Independent Examination of our Annual Return.

The Accounts were accepted and this was proposed by Ian Mabon and seconded by Roger Norton Following were raised from the floor:

- a request was made to the Committee to look for "big ticket" projects that can be supported with money in order to reduce our bank balance. The Committee does and will continue to encourage all our Footpath agents to identify suitable projects for our spend. A request was made to publicize the process to follow when booking holidays with the Ramblers Worldwide Holidays in order to get the commission paid to our group. The Booking Form for these holidays has a self-explanatory Box titled "The Walking Partnership "in which applicants should "enter the name of your Group to receive financial support".

4.3 Membership Secretary

Our total number of members in October 2016 was 624 compared **with 631 in 2015 and 620 in 2014 which has been remarkably stable over the past 3 years**. There are several reasons that encourage members to join our group such as our website and contents, the range and number of walks on offer throughout the year, the wide range of social activities (eg. Coach trips, days out , social meals) and the weekly articles and photos about our walks that appeared weekly in the local press.

4.4 Social and Events Secretary

There have been a great variety of events over the last 12 months and all have been successful and well supported as follows:

- Three Christmas meals
- New Year Sherry walk
- A walk with a Cheshire East Ranger
- The Incident Training course was full
- A Greek meal in Handforth and a Thai meal in Wilmslow organized by Andy Davies
- A Grand National Sweep Stake
- The Ecology Walk lead by John Handley which was full with a waiting list
- The Derwentwater weekend was a great success
- A trip on the Anderton Boat lift organized by Brian Griffiths with about 55 walkers joining the experience
- Ramble with a Ranger was well supported but did not attract the usual 4 – 7 from the public
- Three walks and a picnic worked really well and about 35 people participated in a superb picnic
- The coach trip was full organized by Ann Thompson
- The Evening walks were well supported by a group of regular walkers
- The Fish & Chips supper with 12 people attending in spite of the weather organised by Steve Hull and Nick Wild

- As part of the National Walk Festival we put 4 short 2 – 3 miles walks with no stiles. Lot of hard work done by the leaders Sandra Edwards, Sue Munslow, Mike Bull and David Bates as suitable walks are not easy to find
- Long, medium and short walks were arranged to coincide With the Tour of Britain race organized by Brian Griffiths and walks lead by Brian, David Gylee and Dave Irving
- A week in Cornwall planned by Steve Hull. All the walks were organized by Georgie and Peter Everson with the help of the local Cornwall Ramblers group
- Brian Richardson talk on “Atlantic to Mediterranean – The Pyrenean Haute Route” was a hit attended by over 45 members

Again a massive “thank you” to everyone who has been involved and/or organising these activities and to all those who supported these events.

If you have any ideas for an event or different activities please get in touch with the Social & Events Secretary

4.5 Footpath Secretary

The Footpath Committee currently consists of 7 people: Dave Barraclough, David Bates, Tony Battilana, Alan Catherall, Neil Collie, Peter Cummins and Graham Walker. However the full work of the Committee involves a much larger number of people with delegated tasks – including 38 Footpath Inspectors and Roger Fielding who manages the database. The original sub-Committee first met in January 1986, becoming the official Footpath Committee in 2001. Our current members have a combined total of over 85 years experience on the Committee.

Our annual inspection of the paths in East Cheshire has been successfully completed and, apart from one or two Parishes, the results have been entered into the database. This year the database has been expanded by Roger Fielding so that a photograph of a problem can be included. It has also been made more 'user-friendly' so that the vast majority of inspectors now put the results straight into the database. The provisional results show that the number of paths with serious faults has decreased from 10.6% to 8.8% which is excellent. A full summary prepared by David Bates is attached to this report.

Many of our Footpath Inspectors are authorised by Cheshire East to carry minor maintenance work such as trimming back foliage, removing overhanging branches and replacing lost Waymarks. The database also provides a vital source of tasks that can then be carried out by our Footpath Maintenance Project Group. We have 38 inspectors, surveying a total of 1276 footpaths in 33 parishes. This activity is ably co-ordinated by Tony Battilana who has also sorted out emergency cover for parishes when an inspector has had to withdraw. Tony has carried out this role for a number of years and we would like to find a volunteer to take on this role for the 2017 survey.

We are regularly consulted by the Council on proposed footpath diversions. This work can involve site visits and discussions with landowners when we may be able to propose amendments to improve the route. Over the last 12 months there have been six Consultations with 3 Orders being made. We attend the PROW Consultative Group meetings held in Crewe at 6-monthly intervals. Here, we get the chance to voice issues of concern and liaise with cyclist and equestrian groups. We have been actively involved in trying to protect a valuable permissive path between Holgate Farm and the Cat-and-Fiddle where the land has recently been sold.

We have attended meetings of the Vulnerable Road User Group for the Poynton Relief Road and are pleased that a number of our detailed suggestions have been incorporated in the scheme which has now been submitted for Planning Approval by both Cheshire East and Stockport MBC. As reported in previous annual reports the proposals have included, from the outset, two footbridges to carry walkers safely over the bypass, so we are generally in agreement. The needs of non-motorised users have been taken into account to a much greater extent, than was the case with Alderley Edge Bypass, where we fought a long battle to secure a footbridge.

The Deregulation Bill, currently coming into force, contains an important section that requires any historic paths that are not yet defined as Public Rights of Way on our OS Maps to be 'claimed' by 2026. After this date, no further new claims can be submitted to the Highway Authority. Ramblers across the UK are playing a leading role in reviewing old data, principally maps, to organise the systematic claiming of any worthwhile routes.

East Cheshire Ramblers are fortunate in having two significant advantages over many other groups. Colin Park has a career background in mapping and has been a principal member of a Ramblers Cheshire working group that reviewed the 1900 maps for possible Lost Ways. This yielded 43 possible Lost Ways in the ECR area. Secondly, as a result of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, a pilot study of Lost Ways in Cheshire covering all eras of maps and historic data was completed. These two sources of data should make the further investigation work much easier than in many other areas of the UK.

The Footpaths Committee are keen that a small group of members who have an interest in mapping or historic records should take this work forward from now until 2026 and possibly beyond. We are currently appealing for volunteers to fill this role. **Action: the Chairman with Colin Park will post a flyer on the website asking for volunteers and also send this to the membership.**

Peter Cummins has announced his retirement from the Committee after 30 years of continuous service.. We have appreciated his knowledge and wisdom. He has served as Joint Footpaths Secretary and Footpaths Secretary and the improvement of the state of our paths is due, in no small part, to his determination and tenacity over many years. We hope to find a volunteer who will join our friendly group to replace him.

4.6 Publicity Officer

In April 2014 ECR was invited to provide a regular editorial column on the group's walks for the Macclesfield and Wilmslow editions of the Express series of weekly newspapers published by Trinity Mirror PLC.

These could appear at monthly, fortnightly or weekly intervals – the actual frequency to be determined at the group's discretion depending on the number of articles and covering photographs that could be provided from within its own resources subject to the usual pressures on space and the editor's discretion.

From the outset it was decided to aim for weekly insertions – a pattern that has continued ever since with only a very few exceptions due to lack of space.

During this time the free Wilmslow edition ceased publication and was absorbed within the southern edition of the Manchester Weekly News. Thankfully, the Macclesfield Express continues in existence as a stand alone, paid-for newspaper and East Cheshire Ramblers continues to benefit each week from articles and photographs that help raise the group's profile locally as a leading

player in the world of walking and outdoor recreation as well as a key part of the national Ramblers organisation.

Such coverage has relied very much on walk leaders and ordinary members being able to keep a regular flow of stories and photographs that can be readily turned into finished articles.

It is very gratifying that the number of contributors – writers and photographers - has grown steadily over the last 2 1/2 years and now numbers some 20 individual members, not necessarily leaders, who can be relied upon to send me their articles and pictures (or obtain a photo from someone taking part in the walk).

While it is impractical to name so many contributors, a big thank you to Helen Richardson particularly for producing the most stories over the last 12 months and for collating and co-ordinating other members' articles for the newspaper when on holiday. Marion Duff, Barbara Jackson and Colin Park also deserve special thanks for their literary efforts as does Roger Fielding for his excellent photographs.

The procedure for submitting articles and photographs has been streamlined by inputting them direct to the newspaper's editorial department using a link to a central matrix system known as Jotform. The newspaper's deadline for receipt is Friday lunchtime for publication the following week, or subsequent issues depending on the number of ECR editorials available. As a general rule, stories should be 250 words long but can be a maximum 400 words or 2 x 200 words depending on their scope and the number of accompanying illustrations.

ECR has established a large, talented and enthusiastic team of correspondents. The Macc Express and its readers look forward to receiving our reports and learning more about our walks and the places we visit. It would indeed be a great shame if this has to finish. Therefore, we are looking for a volunteer to step up and take over this role. **Action: volunteers should approach any member of the Committee to obtain further information on this role. The role profile of the Publicity Officer will be placed on the website again.**

4.7 Footpath Maintenance

We were active from November 2015 until early April 2016 on 8 projects and during this period members of the Team spent 45 person days and carried out 192 man/woman hours of labour carrying out heavy, major drainage work and vegetation clearances on Disley, Rainow and Adlington Parishes paths. An accumulative list of the projects and statistics were circulated at the AGM for information.

Currently a review of our recent Footpath Inspectors reports is on going and will liaise with our Footpath Committee and Cheshire East PROW Officer to identify priority work to start in January 2017.

5. Election of Officers

The following Officers stood for reelection and were elected unopposed (proposed by Ian Mabon and seconded by Ralph Atherton):

John Edwards (Chairman), Adrian Flinn (Secretary), Colin Finlayson (Treasurer), Social & Events Secretary (Jane Gay), Sue Munslow (Membership Secretary), David Bates (Committee member), Kathryn Carty (Committee member) and David Barraclough (Footpath Secretary)

The Publicity Officer post remains vacant as no names were put forward.

6. Motions

None

7. Appointment of Independent Examiner (Auditor of Accounts)

Ken Hobbs was reappointed unanimously (proposed by Ann Thompson and seconded by Sue Munslow)

8. Any Other Business

None

9. Lost Ways Project presentation by Colin Parks

An excellent description of the methodology and processes used in the initial stages of identifying lost paths across the country and Cheshire in particular (background information on this initiative was given in the Footpath Secretary report – see 4.5 above).

The next stage regarding the Cheshire paths will be further research work that will involve a few volunteers working with Colin Park to identify and decide, in conjunction with our Footpath Committee, which paths we could claim.

10. Presentation of Ramblers Association Commendation Awards

The Chairman presented these awards to Norman Ridley and Harry Hadfield and read the accompanying citation which describes their dedicated and outstanding contributions to our group over several decades.

The meeting closed at 4 pm.

We all joined a festive afternoon tea to celebrate with Norman and Harry

Adrian Flinn – Secretary

1st December 2016

Dates of Meetings in 2017: (Venues will be confirmed in late summer)

- East Cheshire Ramblers AGM will be held on Saturday 11th November at 2 p.m.
- The Area AGM will be held on Friday 17th November at 7 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.