

Chairman's Report

(Roger Conway)

One of the effects of climate change is that we need to re-adjust our perceptions from those we gained during our formative years. My view of the seasons is based on my memory, but this year things have been very different. After spending mid January to mid March in the New Zealand summer I returned to almost identical weather here, but when we reached the traditional summer time for 'our patch' we had conditions that I expect during autumn and yes, when autumn arrived so did the summer weather. As I write this in early November we still have clear skies and on last Sunday's half day walk there were 39 people; showing that the membership are appreciating the extended season.

We have had another very good year, with full programmes of walks, an excellent group holiday and the 56 mile, 2 Counties Way from Taunton to Starcross; walked in 8 linear stages on selected Sunday afternoons. This was a great success and next year's Sunday half day project is already planned, with the members taking on the Coleridge Way from Nether Stowey to Porlock. For those who like the all day projects the Group will be walking the Channel to Channel route from Seaton to Watchet (details of both linear walks are in the Newsletter) There will be a Group holiday which is well into the planning stage. So on the walking activities front the Group is in excellent shape.

The Committee has met on 4 occasions and is meeting its obligations efficiently and in an atmosphere of friendship and co-operation. Many thanks are due to Wendy & Bob Camp for letting us use their home for the meetings and for their kind hospitality. I am very grateful to all the Committee for the time and commitment they all put into their various roles and also wish to extend my thanks to John Lowe and Babs Tester for their efforts in Membership records and Social activities respectively.

We continue to keep a good watch on those aspects that affect our walking and footpath maintenance, access issues and the perennial problems of Local Authority funding have not diminish our need for vigilance. SCC have an interactive mapping and footpath fault reporting section on the their website; which has gone through some updating of late and is now much more 'user friendly'. Using this system will help to improve the way that the Rights of Way Officers deal with footpath problems and maintenance and SCC have established a Footpath Warden scheme to encourage Parish Council to be more proactive. We will continue to be active here and our members have already joined working parties on footpath maintenance, so watch the programme and our website (www.tauntonramblers.org.uk) for details.

On the issue of influence; I am please to tell you that I have been appointed to the Somerset Local Access Forum (SLAF), which is a statutory body that exists to advise the County Council on rights of way matters and to monitor how they carry out their tasks. The current membership of the Forum is strongly land owning and horse riding groups but I am not alone in seeking to articulate the walking interest and I will continue to push the Rambler cause.

But it is getting out walking that is our main interest and without the dedication and hard work of our walk leaders it would not be possible to arrange such an interesting and diverse programme. My heart felt thanks to you all. If you are one of those who would like to try leading a walk, there is plenty of help available for you, from tried and tested routes for you to 'pick up', to people happy to help you with planning and checking or just keeping you company on your reccy. All you need to do to get started is to give Joan a ring (490201).

Sadly we have suffered the loss of Tom Robson, one of our most popular members. I am particularly grateful for his friendship and kindnesses to Linda and me when we first joined the Group and his sage advice when I first started leading walks.

Treasurer's Report

(M. Whitmore, Treasurer)

Not very much to report this year. I submitted a budget to Area as reported last year and received an allocation from them for the full amount requested. As we did not spend as much as expected and therefore finished the year with an increased surplus on the General Account, I have requested a slightly lower amount from Area for this year.

The agreed projects to be financed from the Walks Booklet Account are progressing and by the end

of this financial year I anticipate that the balance on this account will be considerably lower.

I would, once again, like to thank Jeremy Corke for auditing the accounts so speedily, which meant that I was able to use the audited accounts for the preparation of the Annual Returns.

Programme Secretary's Report

(Joan Gubbin, Programme Secretary)

Over the last year the walks that have been offered have been varied and seem to have been enjoyed. The Friday walks organised by Mike Whitmore have continued in popularity and the Wednesday walks ably organised by Sue Hurst attract a good number. It is sad that Sue feels it is time to hand on the organising of these but I am delighted that Glenys Murray has been prevailed to take on the work and I am sure everyone who walks on Wednesdays will continue to support them and her by offering to lead a walk from time to time. In fact one new walker on Wednesdays recently told me that in his first year of walking he had not repeated a walk! I would like to thank both Roger Conway and John Lowe for offering to lead a series of walks based on long distance trails - both the Two Counties Way and the Parrett Trail were well supported and completed.

Eleven members walked Hadrian's Wall in July and the weather was good apart from a torrential downpour after lunch one afternoon! We stayed at Saughey Rigg B&B and were treated wonderfully with substantial breakfasts, packed lunches, tea and cake when we came in and a four-course meal each evening. What made it particularly organisationally easy was the transport to and from the start and finish of each day's walking.

The Area holiday despite a change of venue was well supported and reports which have filtered back to me of a free bar and dancing in the evening as well as a good choice of walks and good weather makes me think it must have gone well. We owe Owen Starr a vote of thanks.

I still hope someone will come forward to organised the Sunday afternoon walks - but in the meantime my thanks are due to all those who offer walks, are persuaded to lead walks and in doing so give us so many delightful hours walking in our area.

Footpath Secretary's Report

(Paul Wright, Footpath Secretary)

Progress has been made on several matters this last year from the creation of a new long distance footpath around Taunton Deane to the setting up of our own working party to assist the County Council to repair and replace old stiles and other footpath furniture. There has been progress on the re-opening of blocked footpaths and the recording of other blockages and other faults on the extensive network of paths in the Borough.

Projects such as the Neroche Project are improving existing paths and hopefully will open up new routes. It is hoped that this co-operation with the County Council and the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership will prove to be of increasing benefit to all ramblers in the area.

East Deane Way

Final details of this 40-mile footpath around the eastern side of Taunton Deane via West Newton, Burrowbridge, North Curry, Hatch Beauchamp, Castle Neroche, and Cone have now been agreed with the Borough Council. It will have its own distinctive waymarker and it is hoped that the launch will be at Easter 2008.

Inspection of Circular Walks

Although there have been no inspections this summer Ian Clark of TDBC has said that he wants the Group to continue to inspect the circular walks, now numbering 21 plus the West Deane Way and soon the East Deane Way. Claire Montlucon has agreed to help me organise the current round of inspections, which are to be completed by Spring 2008, and more inspectors are needed.

Grid Squares Challenge

The deadline for the completion of this Challenge has been extended to 31 December 2007 and it is hoped that more members will walk some squares and help to complete the remaining 190. The committee has offered two prizes of £25 and these will chosen by raffle at the Post Christmas Lunch.

Working Parties

It has now been established that a working party will meet on the last Tuesday in each month to carry out stile renewals and other repair works to the Deane's footpath system. John Ollerenshaw has agreed to lead these working parties.

Other Matters

Following my correspondence with the CEO of Taunton Deane and the Wellington Town Council, I am pleased to report that the access from Farthing Pits into the play area on Rope Walk has been reinstated. This means that, as well as giving them easy access to the play area, children in that area again have the opportunity to walk to school avoiding the A38

The County Council have now taken the next decisive step to reopen the blocked footpath at Yallands Hill, between Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton. An Order to correct the line on the definitive map has been published and although there will almost certainly be a Public Inquiry, it is expected that this will result in the path being re-opened.

During the last year

Orders have been confirmed for the diversion of the following: -

T15/48	Higher Illbeare, Kingston St Mary	T17/23	Orchards End, N Curry
T4/22	Norton Dam, Bishops Lydeard	T22/14	Thomwater Farm, North Falcon
T11/1	Crosses Farm, Curland		

An Order has been confirmed for the extinguishment of the following:

T18/3, Hilly Park, Norton Fitzwarren, Extinguishment.

Orders have been made for modifications at: -

WG12/2 & 9	Incline Farm, Wellington	T5/17	Cheddon Fitzpaine/West Monkton - blockage of FP
WG 16/11	Maundown Treatment Works		

Comments have been called for on the following proposed modifications

T5/12	Cheddon Fitzpaine & T33/8, Taunton	T33/27	Roughmoor, div. proposed - erosion
T6/30	Clivehays, Churchstanton.		Norton Fitzwarren on the old Cider Works:
T11/1	Cross Farm, Curand		Off Scott's Lane, Wellington, behind the old
T11/6	Orchard Portman		Quicksave: proposed stopping up
T15/48	Higher Illbeare, Kingston St Mary	WG10/19	Further proposals made regarding
T22/14	Thomwater Farm, Thomfalcon		this anomaly on the definitive map
T23/19	Staple Lawns, div.due to boggy ground	WG17/25	proposed extinguishment due to
T29/35	Trull Junior School		security fears

Comments have also been requested on planning applications affecting the following footpaths
T12/7 Durston.

Area Representative's Report

(John Ollerenshaw, Area Representative)

- SCC's ROWIP caused many to believe that footpath maintenance would be prioritised. This was confirmed by a letter from Footpath Campaign leader, Sarah Perry to all Taunton Deane Parish Clerks. This was denied by SCC officials at recent PPLO's meetings.
- February's AGM saw Rod Porter (Taunton) switching from treasurer to secretary, and Jean Mantle (Sedgemoor) from minute sec. to treasurer, and Mary Henry taking on publicity as well as footpaths after JO's resignation.
- The AGM speaker revealed the startling fact that 46% of all new members did not renew their membership after the first year.
- Tony Goverd (President) delivered a paper revealing that SCC had no historical record of many existing byways, so, in effect they are not being maintained.
- The ongoing Footpath Campaign in Somerset sought to make councillors aware of the many footpath problems in the county by organising councillor walks. Unfortunately only portfolio holder Rachel Prior-Sankey attended a walk led by JO in Sedgemoor. A useful dialogue ensued!
- The Area holiday, switched from the Cotswolds to Ilfracombe attracted over forty members and went off well.
- In October TDR agreed to explore the possibility of compiling a further walks booklet, and to give other groups the opportunity of contributing and to buy into the scheme