



Somerset Area Groups : *Clevedon, Family Countryside Walkers, Mendips, Sedgemoor, Somerset Walking & Activity Group, South Somerset, Taunton Deane, West Somerset, & Woodsprings*

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TAUNTON DEANE GROUP HELD AT THE MEMORIAL VILLAGE HALL CHEDDON FITZPAINE ON FRIDAY 26th NOVEMBER 2004

The Meeting opened at 7.15pm.

PRESENT : 40 members of Taunton Deane Group.

APOLOGIES : Eileen and Patrick Brown, Joyce Leonhardt, David and Brenda Orr

Opening statement. The secretary apologised for the fact that although the minutes of the last AGM had been published on the Group's website for at least three weeks prior to the Meeting and copies had been circulated to committee members they were not available for those present. The Chairman therefore read out brief extracts of the minutes to the meeting.

1. MINUTES OF LAST AGM

Mike Whitmore stated that there were two errors in the minutes, namely

(a) para 8 Election of Officers and Committee

The 2003 AGM Agenda showed ten members willing to stand for election to fill ten committee posts, plus 'up to three individual members'. The minutes should have read that the ten committee posts referred to in the Agenda were elected en bloc but Roger Conway was elected as one of the three individual members being proposed by Mike Whitmore and seconded by Dave Orr. As no members offered to fill the other two posts they remained vacant.

The debate arising out of the above, relating to constitutional matters, was deferred for further discussion under para 8 of the agenda

(b) para 9 Appointment of Auditor

Ralph Faulkes was appointed auditor, not John Calascione.

After accepting these changes the minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING

There were no other matters arising.

3. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

Welcome to the 2004 Annual General Meeting.

Another splendid year has passed and what a variety of walks we have been able to choose from over the last twelve months. Walks every Wednesday afternoon, all day Sunday, every Sunday afternoon, and the Friday walks starting in April and continuing into October, all be it the earlier and later ones were shorter and at the end starting later.

An excellent group holiday in Austria, though some managed to walk a bit further than others, we all enjoyed ourselves and I hope our choice or even choices too tight for next year's holiday will be a success. A second walk of the South West Coast Path was completed in the Autumn.

Well done everyone, leaders, organisers and walkers.

As usual, our walks have taken us just about everywhere – it would be easier to talk about where we haven't walked than where we have.

What a great success our second walks booklet has been, in to its second print run hardly before the ink was dry - well done to all who contributed and put the book together.

The Committee's thanks go to all our walk leaders for their sterling work. Where would we be without them?

Also a very busy social year, well done Babs. The Barn Dance was a great success and even made a small profit, I believe, and we have a post and pre Christmas meal to look forward to as well as a beetle drive.

My thanks go to Mike and Tony, the officers and members of the committee, to our walk leaders; our postmen; the holiday, weekend and social event organisers so that you, the ramblers, have such a wide choice of activities.

You have your new Winter Programme and have seen the results of John, Susan and Mike's efforts. Please continue your support by offering walks on a regular basis. Remember, help is available for those who would like to try their hand at walk leading, you only need to ask.

Our Footpath Secretary continues to check and object on our behalf, when the many diversion requests, and planning applications, are not in the best interest of ramblers.

Our Access Officer is waiting for publication of the Freedom to Roam Access Maps for this area. Thanks to Paul and Ken for keeping an eye on things.

The bad news is that Taunton Deane are handing back the footpath responsibilities to the County, on the basis that the Borough has no statutory requirement to maintain the Rights of Way network - the County has, but does not cover Taunton Deane's costs. We are therefore likely to lose Trevor Noyes and Tamasyn at the end of March 2005. You should realise that their record was something like 90% paths clear and signed; we will have to put up with the County's abysmal 35%. So let us keep them on their toes and report all path problems to them, as well as your hard-working Footpath Officer.

Our Web site continues to go from strength to strength. Roger has created the Area web site and this links all of the Somerset groups and the RA web site. How many of you here have accessed the site and noticed the changes? *(a show of hands indicated that a reasonable number of those attending do visit the websites)*

You will have noticed that the name John Ollerenshaw, one of our longest serving committee members and our last founder member in the formation of this group, is missing from the agenda. John is resigning from the post he has filled from the beginnings of this group as Programme Secretary. He has changed the programme to what must surely be the best walk programme in the Area. We have a lot to live up to and a lot to thank him for.

Keep on walking, and leaders, please continue leading.

All the reports had been distributed prior to the meeting.

4. ANNUAL REPORT - Presented by the Secretary

The past year has been another very successful year in all respects.

The membership continues to grow – around 420 at the moment, the walks programme continues to expand and our social programme has been very successful.

The Walks Programme team has done an excellent job, providing a varied selection of walks, three times a week during the winter months and four times during the summer. The Friday evening walks were again very popular and for the first time, the programme extended well into the autumn which meant some walks were completed by torch light. As well as the usual full and half day walks we also had a Train Walk in May, a walk in the Black Mountains in July and a walk in the Malverns in August.

The main walk item of the year was the successful completion of the South West Coast Path. The project started in 2001 and took place on an all day or a weekend trip and covered 630 miles in all. Some of the group completed the walk in its entirety; that is the whole 630 miles – our congratulations to them all.

The group also had a very successful walking holiday in the Telfes Stubai Alps in Austria.

Another highlight of the year was the production of our second walks booklet. The team, after much research and time produced a really excellent product, which after its launch in April sold very well – again congratulation to all those involved.

The social programme, thanks to our social secretary has been generally well supported and again, we were offered a wide variety of events including a Skittles Evening, a Pre-Christmas Dinner, a Post Christmas Walk and Lunch, an American Welcome Supper, a Canal Cruise and Walk, a Barbeque and Treasure Hunt and a Barn Dance. Our Social Secretary has already got a new programme mapped out for the early part of next year.

The Groups Website has been very successful managed by our Website coordinator and it is accessed by many, both within and outside the group. During the past twelve months several visiting walkers have joined a walk having found the details on the Website. It has also allowed us to post notices, make amendments to walks and show photographs taken by members on group walks.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

General Account

2003/3 £ p	EXPENDITURE	2003/4 £ p	2002/3 £ p	INCOME	2003/4 £ p
204.74	Postage and Stationery	387.57	836.09	Balance B/F	684.72
183.75	Travelling Expenses	136.18	274.52	Annual Allocation	556.24
133.61	Printing	117.08	13.23	Bank Interest	27.75
67.22	A.G.M. Expenses	204.08	50.00	Advertising Income	52.50
-	Social Events and Holidays	7061.15	-	A.G.M. Income	90.00
-	Miscellaneous	25.99	100.20	Social Events and Holidays	7017.50
684.72	Balance C/F	513.16	-	Miscellaneous	16.50
1274.04		8445.21	1274.04		8445.21

Walks Booklet Account

2003/3 £ p	EXPENDITURE	2003/4 £ p	2002/3 £ p	INCOME	2003/4 £ p
	Printing, etc Costs	1985.00	200.00	Balance B/F	200.00
	Ordnance Survey Licence	94.00		Donations / Grants	400.00
	Miscellaneous	87.39		Sales	2745.85
200.00	Balance C/F	1179.46			
200.00		3345.85	200.00		3345.85

BALANCE SHEET

As at 30th September 2004

	£ p		£ p
GENERAL ACCOUNT	513.16	BALANCE AT BANK	1466.57
WALKS BOOKLET ACCOUNT	1179.46	CASH IN HAND	226.05
	1692.62		1692.62

I must first of all apologise for the missing figure on the circulated accounts, but unfortunately the computer decided to hide it. (That's my excuse anyway). By now I'm sure you will have calculated that the figure for sale of walks booklets should be £2,745.85.

You will probably have noticed that for the third year running, the General Account has made a loss. In the past, the sale of the first walks booklet kept the group solvent, but at the present rate the balance will be used up in three years. We are unable to use the profit from the new walks booklet to bail out the General Account, as your Committee decided before publication, that any profit from it should be used for specific projects, either for the benefit of our members or for the benefit of walkers in general in our area. We, therefore, need to find other ways to balance the books. Your committee are currently looking at possible ways of fund raising and would welcome any suggestions, or offers of help, from members. I have also been given Committee approval to write to head office, pointing out that our annual allocation falls far short of the amount required to cover essential administration costs and to ask them for clarification on how allocations are calculated centrally and how they consider that they should be distributed within areas.

It should be noted that we now have in excess of 420 members who probably pay between £5,000 and £6,000 of subscriptions to head office, of which we received £556 last year.

In response to a query the Treasurer elaborated on the committee's decision to keep the Walks Booklet profits in a separate account, that is, to keep it for a specific purpose yet to be decided by the committee and not to let it be 'lost' in a general account.

6. FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT

Section 63 Notices

The most interesting happenings this year have been a direct result of the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW). Part of the Act handed certain powers to the general public to force Highway Authorities to reopen blocked footpaths. As a direct result of this Section 63 Notices have been served on two occasions on Somerset County Council. One of these concerning a footpath at Clivehays, Churchstanton has been completely successful and that footpath is now open. The second one concerning a footpath at Oake, deliberately blocked by a landowner wanting to make paddocks for his horses, was only served on 21 October so it is too early to predict an outcome.

The effect that these powers give to bodies such as ours can only help to ensure that landowners realise that footpaths can not be closed off or blocked willy-nilly. They are part of the total highway network of the country and must be treated in the same way as a country lane or Motorway.

East Deane Way

A small working party is preparing an East Deane Way for Taunton Deane BC. This is complementary to the West Deane Way and will be a 40 mile path around the eastern side of the Borough, taking in West Monkton, Burrow Bridge, Stathe, Hatch Beauchamp, Castle Neroche and Corfe.

Footpath Clearance

The amount of footpath clearance work that we have done this last year has been less than previous ones. However Somerset CC have asked us to help with the erection of fingerposts and waymarkers which should give us something to do this winter.

Footpath Diversions

The more mundane footpath diversions still occupy most time.

The following Diversion Orders have been confirmed since the last AGM

T 10/21 at Creech St Michael;

T 21/49 at Little Howleigh, Pitminster

WG 9/26 Harnham Farm, Norton Fitzwarren.

WG 7/6 Bickley Cottages Milverton

WG 9/15 Pontispool Farm, Oake

WG 16/11 Maundown, Wiveliscombe

T 29/14 Trull Abattoir; extinguishment of a short length of footpath

Orders have been made but not yet confirmed for diversions at

T18/21 &22 Webb Hill Farm, Norton Fitzwarren

WG 2/3 Bathealton - Pool Court

WG 4/6 & 6a Chipstable, Trowell and Halsdown Farms

Planning approval has been given for the Inner Relief Road which affects FP T33/30. However as the Third Way will need Planning Approval if it is to proceed the matter will need to start again.

Further to his report, the Footpath Secretary asked that members report to him all missing or damaged fingerposts in the Area as Somerset County Council had announced that they had money still available for this requirement in the current budget.

7. PROGRAMME SECRETARY'S REPORT

The group enjoyed another successful year of walking from programmes of walks that offered a good and varied choice of walks both within the county and beyond.

Especially noteworthy was the variety of social activities on offer - the product of a hard-working and imaginative Social Secretary. I believe it is little wonder that membership totals have continued to climb above the four hundred mark !

A successful skittle evening ended the old year, and a well-attended post-Christmas lunch begun the new. Over fifty members attended, many attempting the morning walk which had a memorable ford to negotiate.

Our group hosted the Area AGM in February, and the event was perhaps memorable by no chairman being chosen. With the absence too of a Footpath Secretary, it is a matter of some concern. Aspects of the Area's finances also came under some scrutiny.

Friday evening walks started in early April and immediately attracted good numbers, and speaking of numbers, I was doubtful about putting on a couple of walks at Hartland Quay as a May Bank Holiday special. Thankfully, my fears proved groundless as we were blessed by good weather and a respectable turn-out.

Another new venture was a day's walking in the Welsh Black Mountains, but, like last year's visit to the Brecon Beacons, there was a good attendance despite rather indifferent weather. The conclusion of the group's second walking of the South West Coast Path in September had, by contrast, excellent weather and proved without a doubt that there is strong interest still in coastal walking.

A canal trip in August was well supported as was a rather ambitious Friday evening venture which staged a treasure hunt, walk and barbecue at the same venue a good time was had by all, but unfortunately the weather had the final word.

Seven special walks were staged for the Welcome to Walking Week in September and it was again encouraging to see many new walkers turning up and subsequently taking up the discounted membership offer.

Friday evening walks concluded finally in October, and the extension certainly seemed worthwhile as some members seemed quite happy to walk by torchlight.

Torchlight certainly wasn't needed in the bright lights of Hatch Beauchamp village hall for the group's eighth Barn Dance in October. Despite a few crises in the kitchen, and earlier worries about ticket sales, the event again turned out to be a good success.

That concludes my review of the year 2003-2004. You will all by now be in possession of your copy of the Winter Programme that starts next week. It is my fortieth and last programme for the group, as at last, after eleven years, someone has come along prepared to take over. I hope you will give her plenty of support.

Reminiscences of the group's high and low points and thanks conclude the report.

*At this point, in response to a request from the Chairman, Michael Bennison proposed,
seconded by Ken Burgess, that all the reports be accepted. Agreed Unanimously*

8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

The following members declared themselves willing to stand for election :

(a)	Chairman	Jim Hurst
(b)	Secretary/Area representative	Tony Welsman
(c)	Treasurer	Mike Whitmore
(d)	Footpath Secretary	Paul Wright
(e)	Membership Secretary	John Lowe
(f)	Access Officer/Area representative	Ken Burgess
(g)	Programme Secretary	Joan Gubbin
(h)	Assistant Programme Secretary	Susan Cole
(i)	Publicity Officer	Wendy Camp
(j)	Social Secretary	Barbara Tester
(k)	Individual Member/Website Coordinator	Roger Conway
(l)	Area Representative	Group Secretary & Ken Burgess

It was proposed by Evan Lewis and seconded by Mike Whitmore that all be elected en bloc.

Agreed Unanimously

The meeting then went on to consider the implications raised in para 1(a).

No agreement could be reached about the meaning and/or the wording in the Group Constitution regarding the composition of the committee taking into consideration Mike Whitmore's belief that the agenda for the 2003 AGM constituted an established committee of thirteen.

The Chairman asked if there were any two members who would be willing to fill the two individual members posts.

Proposals :

Maureen Sharp was proposed by Glenys Murray seconded by Linda-Ann Conway, and John Ollerenshaw was proposed by Steve Barnard and seconded by Stewart Owen

Before a vote was taken the discussions continued about the problems about having a large committee of thirteen and the merits or otherwise of having committee members without specific tasks. The meeting was unable to reach a satisfactory agreement about this matter and at this point the Chairman stood up, gathered up his papers and stated that he resigned. However, he then sat down again and said that if the two nominees were elected to the committee he would resign. He then asked for a show of hands : 17 were for and 16 plus himself were against. No abstentions were noted. The Chairman then stated that as the vote was tied, he would use his casting vote as Chairman to vote against the proposals. The two nominees were therefore not elected to the committee.

Proposals not carried

The meeting then voted for Paul Wright's proposal that we ask the Past Chairman and the Past Treasurer plus one other to look at constitutional matters and to report back to the next AGM. *Agreed Unanimously*

9. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR

The Chairman proposed that Ralph Faulks be again appointed auditor.

Agreed Unanimously

10. GROUP HOLIDAY(S) 2005

Joan elaborated on the holiday options under consideration as displayed on the notice board at the rear of the room.

The three options being :
Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion Coast Paths
Isle of Wight
Picos de Europa, Northern Spain

Members were invited to indicate their views on the proformas provided.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A motion, dated 4th November 2004 had been received from John Ollerenshaw seconded by David Patten, the wording of which had been distributed immediately before the meeting :

With the recent increase in Membership fees, and, thus with an even smaller proportion of this returning to our group for its members, we believe that Somerset Area should be pro-active in taking its full entitlement from Head Office, and then distribute this evenly amongst the groups where it can be better spent for the benefit of its members.

After the proposer and seconder further elaborated on the proposal a vote was taken and the motion carried.

Motion Carried

The meeting was concluded by the Chairman presenting John Ollerenshaw with a retirement gift in recognition of his eleven years dedicated service for the Group.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN :

DATE :

Ref : AGM-2004-B