



Minutes of Herefordshire Area Ramblers AGM

1.30pm on 23rd November 2024 at Withington Village Hall

Present: Mike Goodwin (Area Chair and Secretary), Tom Fisher (Area Vice-Chair), Howard Jones (Area Treasurer), John Wride (Area Footpath Secretary), Ruth Wride (Area Minutes Secretary), Lynne Crowfoot (Leadon Vale Group Area Rep), Satish Barot (Ross Group Area Rep), Margaret Panter (Mortimer Group Area Rep), Jen Atkins (Mortimer Group Area Rep).

Additional attendees: 22 Leadon Vale Group members; 4 Ross Group members; 3 Mortimer Group members.

1. Welcome from the host, Leadon Vale Group.

Lynne Crowfoot welcomed members. She thanked Sandy and Phil for leading the morning walk and the volunteers who made the soup and cake for lunch.

2. Apologies: Martin Shepley, Jenny Jones, Malcolm and Thelma Gardner.

3. Approval of minutes of 2023 AGM. The minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising not covered by the following items. (Min.5 Chair's report, Herefordshire Trail, 2023 AGM) Margaret asked if funding had been provided for gates and stiles on the Herefordshire Trail. Mike replied that it had not for Herefordshire Trail specifically, but Herefordshire Council had asked parishes with a lengthsman to apply for funding to replace gates and stiles within their parish.

5. Chair's Report.

Mike presented his report:

Welcome our AGM hosted by the Leadon Vale Group, and thanks go to Lynn and her team for the walk and the excellent lunch.

This last year has seen several structural changes within Herefordshire Ramblers. At the last AGM I reported that Hereford group were in a precarious position, with not enough walk leaders, poor support for attending walks and the inability to fill committee positions. Last December a special AGM for Hereford group was held in which it was agreed to close. Hereford members were allocated by postcode to one of the remaining three groups. The new members were all welcomed into their respective groups and those active members have been well integrated into their new groups. Present membership numbers stand at Leadon Vale-151, Ross-189, and Mortimer-171.

Changes have also been made in respect of managing the Herefordshire Trail, Mary Howcroft the Co-Ordinator has stepped down and the Trail has been divided by Group areas. Managed at the moment by the Chair of each group. Some of the sections which were too long have been reduced in length mainly to between four and five miles with new volunteers having been appointed. I am sure when the spring comes, they will be keen to get out and survey their stretch of the Trail.

The leaden Vale Group as some will know has taken on the management of Three Choirs Way in Herefordshire. Volunteers have been appointed and the Herefordshire section has been re-way marked. The Trail has been somewhat neglected, but the volunteers have already been out reporting problems, broken stile, blocked path etc. This has kept the Working party busy all summer doing remedial work on the trail, already making a difference.

On the Mortimer Trail, the Trail Blazer volunteers continue to keep the path in order.

It is planned to have another get together lunch for all volunteers in March of next year when tools will be supplied to the new volunteers.

Tom has given me a report on his work on the "Don't lose your Way" project. Over the last 12 months 11 more applications to modify the Definitive Map have been submitted by Herefordshire Ramblers. Nine are for restricted byways and two bridleways. One of these, M534 near Kerne Bridge, has been fast-tracked by Herefordshire because it is holding up some planned development. Herefordshire council have appointed consultants Robin Atkins to research this application. They are recommending refusal. Otherwise, 157 applications are still pending. The only confirmed application is in Whitbourne, close to Bringsty Common. This is now a restricted byway WR26. We continue to benefit from the British Horse Society by paying Herefordshire Rambler £75 for each application submitted.

This leads me onto finances. Howard will explain in his report that Area has a healthy balance of £9000. Some would say to healthy! We clearly need to spend a good proportion of this money in line with our philosophy of promoting walking in the countryside. We are looking to you as members for ideas. I would ask you to pass these ideas to your respective committee. At our next Area meeting in February, these ideas will be fully discussed. If you already have anything mind, please bring it up under AOB today.

We look forward to another year of walking in the countryside.

6. Treasurer's Report and Adoption of Accounts.

Howard presented his Report on the accounts for the year ended 30th September 2024.

This has been a year of change for the Area beginning with the closure of the Hereford Group and the subsequent transfer of funds to the Area account. This amounted to over £4,600 and represented a significant boost to the total Area funds held at the year-end amounting to just over £9,000.

There were several sources of funding in the year:

- £1,500 was received from Ramblers Central Office toward the cost of publication of a new Mortimer Trail guide. The overall cost of publication amounted to over £3,000 against which over £1,600 was received from sales of the guide by the year end. Future finances will benefit from further sales in due course.
- Over £700 was also received from sales of the Hereford Trail guide. This income was previously accounted for within the Hereford Group accounts.
- Further funding of £600 was received from British Horse Society towards the 'Don't Lose Your Way' project together with £550 from Central Office towards incidental costs. Whilst these costs appear to have been minimal this year they largely related to 2023. Claims for costs more recently incurred can be expected in the current year.
- The Area also benefitted from nearly £900 from Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust toward a brushcutter and Ludlow Information Board.

Expenditure in the year is mainly associated with the costs of maintaining footpaths and investigating connected issues. Volunteers who install gates and stiles supplied by the Council are able to claim their travelling expenses which are then recovered from the Council.

There were additional meeting costs compared to the previous year associated with the Mortimer Trail, closure of the Hereford group and meeting of volunteers.

7. Footpath Secretary's Report

John Wride presented his report:

It's been a busy year on the Public Rights of Way side of things. Members reported 330 problems. Top of the list is Missing Finger Posts at 134 followed by Stiles at 58. I would like to see this number increased by the reporting of problems by walks leaders when they carryout they're recces. If we know about the problems, we may be able to correct the situation prior to the intended walk. I've recently seen a walks description include the phrase 'one quite difficult' when describing the number of stiles to be encountered on that walk.

The footpath secretaries have between them dealt with 137 Planning Applications.

There have been 10 Diversions Completed and 19 now in process of being actioned.

Currently there are 47 footpaths closed mainly due to 'damaged footbridges' (31). There are 5 paths closed due to erosion or landslip.

I've served the Council with three Section 56 Notices this year all concerning a footbridge in Fownhope. A Section 56 Notice just requires the Council to confirm whether or not it is responsible for the maintenance of a particular piece of footpath furniture. Not once did the council reply to me so RA Central Office took up the case and wrote to the council again with no success. So, a Freedom of Information request was made, this did bring results which basically said that this bridge had got overlooked, so if they've missed that what else are they overlooking?

On a personal note, I would like to retire, I've been on Ramblers Committees since 1998 in one capacity or another, so I think it's time someone else took over the reins. So if anyone fancies the role of AREA Footpath Secretary then please make yourself known. Also, we do urgently need another Footpath Secretary for the Mortimer south area of the county and ideally all three groups could do with a third secretary.

8. Appointment of Committee.

The current committee were all willing to stand for another year with one change – Andy Lauder will be a non-committee member but remain as Web Master

Proposer: Margaret Panter

Seconded: Jen Atkins, and the following Committee was appointed enbloc.

Area Committee 2024-2025.

Chair – Mike Goodwin.

Vice Chair – Tom Fisher.

Secretary – Mike Goodwin.

Treasurer – Howard Jones.

Don't Lose your Way Officer – Tom Fisher.

Footpath Secretary/Co-ordinator – John Wride.

Non committee member Web Master – Andy Lauder.

Minute Secretary – Ruth Wride.

9. Appointment of Representative to General Council 2024.

It was agreed that Lynne Crowfoot and Gwen Dumbleton be appointed representatives at the General Council 2025.

10. Appointment of Examiner of Accounts.

Mike Hufton was willing to stand again, and he was duly appointed Examiner of Accounts.

11. Any Other Business.

Mike reminded members that there were a number of walks book for sale at a discounted price.

12. Date of next AGM. 22nd November 2025.

13. Close of Meeting. 2.15pm

Signed:

Date: