

Membership

On 30 August 2011, Lake District Area had 1752 members, 56 fewer than last year: Carlisle group had 205, Furness 179, Grange 138, Kendal 388, Lancaster 319, Penrith 337, Summitt Good 35, and West Cumbria 140. There were 11 members not in groups.

Funding access to the countryside

A major preoccupation in the past year has been effect of cuts to local authority budgets. Lake District Area is involved with three authorities: Lake District National Park, Yorkshire Dales National Park, and Cumbria County Council.

The national parks will be subject to funding cuts of around 30% over the next few years, so there has inevitably been some restructuring and slimming of their countryside services and a reduction in activity relating to the Definitive Map. However, their rights of way networks and access arrangements generally are in good shape, and it is hoped that they can survive the next few years without much deterioration.

Cumbria County Council had made great improvements in recent years, but a threatened cut of two-thirds to the countryside service budget was potentially disastrous. A vigorous campaign by the Ramblers and others changed this to one-third, but the effects of a major restructuring of the service have yet to be seen.

Rights of way

Significant cuts in Cumbria County Council staff numbers and budgets have led to a reduction in the scope of the rolling improvement plans and the prioritisation of general rights-of-way work. There is now no budget for the Parish Paths Initiative, and access work has been given low priority. Work on digitising and updating definitive maps will be slowed, or may even cease for a time. Meetings of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Task Group have switched from being scheduled to an "as required" basis.

Lake District National Park achieved spending cuts by reducing rights-of-way office staff and reorganising field teams. We were asked for volunteers to carry out ease-of-use surveys, and 23 members have attended training sessions. Some 130 rights of way will be surveyed this year.

We now have volunteer lengthsmen for the Cumbria Way who will walk their sections once or twice a year and report on ease of use, including waymarking.

English Coastal Route (ECR)

While we hear very upbeat reports from Natural England on the ECR pilot project in Cumbria, there is unease about a reluctance of Government to make a commitment to take development forward..

Work has begun nationally on the first stages of the ECR, including the Lake District section from Whitehaven to Allonby. We have submitted a paper to Natural England on this section of the route and have held positive liaison meetings with them. We expect to see some progress on this section in 2012.

Our groups have been very supportive, and some members have completed, or are completing, reports that will form a

basis for a further submission to Natural England with respect to our desired line for the remainder of the route through the Area, a long-term project. We hope to have this in draft form in the early New Year.

Finance

The accounts for the year are now complete subject to audit. There was a deficit on the income and expenditure account of £1,230, which was in line with our budget and reduced the Area Reserves to bring them closer to the national guidelines.

The Area continued to support local projects in accordance with our charitable objectives, including donations of £2,500 towards the cost of improving the Cumbria Way and £2,000 towards the cost of a new Miles Without Stiles footpath at Staveley.

We also made donations via the 2011 Fix the Fells project towards the rebuilding of a footbridge and improvements to the Cumbria Way near Caldbeck.

Other planned practical work was still in progress at the end of the financial year, and the costs will be carried forward to the 2011/12 accounts.

We are pressing the Lake District National Park to agree to Ramblers' plaques on furniture that we fund.

Gordon Walker Chalet

Bed nights booked October 2010 to October 2011 were 1,482 (last year 1,601). Booking fees for that period were £10,576 (£10,218). Donations to Lake District Tourism & Conservation Partnership were £205 (£231)

Several concerns were discussed at a meeting with the Ramblers Finance Director. Indications are that moving governance to a community interest company would unnecessarily complicate matters. The independence of the chalet could be achieved by advertising to a wider clientele. Difficulties with the rebuilding fund under the charity rules could be avoided by transferring the fund to the Ramblers accounts as a capital asset. The balance of the costs might be covered by a loan from the Ramblers. Following advice from the Finance Director, a much more detailed and expanded business plan for the project has been submitted for consideration.

Publicity (media contacts)

Our contacts with the media have been more than usually frustrating this year. It is natural for the press and radio/TV to want an immediate response to news items. However, if our Publicity Officer is not available when they call, things may already have moved on by the time he makes contact. Even more annoying is the media leaving it to the last minute to approach us about a planned programme when we are unable to respond at once or at the time and place they have set. However, we have been able to put a Ramblers viewpoint to reporters on several topics, and have been able to take part in a couple of telephone interviews with Radio Cumbria.

Lake District Area group reports (2011)

Carlisle

Group membership has continued to decline and now stands at 205. The Tuesday walks on our programme proved to be the most popular, with only small numbers going on the generally harder Saturday walks. This probably reflects the age profile of our active members. A short urban walk preceded our annual Christmas lunch, which was held in Carlisle. Our annual residential walking week was based at the Raven Hall Hotel in Ravenscar on the Yorkshire coast. There was a varied walks programme and members provided the entertainment in the evenings.

During the year our longstanding footpath secretary relinquished the post and his replacement was unfortunately forced to stand down owing to unforeseen circumstances. Thanks are due to both for the effort they have put in. At the present time the post remains vacant.

Thanks are also due to members of our social committee who stood down at the start of the year. A new social committee was successfully established.

Furness

Furness Ramblers is happy to report another successful year of walking in our countryside. We have managed to organise walks for every Sunday of a variety of terrains and difficulty. Sometimes an alternative walk on a Sunday has been possible when there has been a particularly strenuous walk planned. This is despite the absence of some of our most experienced leaders due to illness or family circumstances. We have made use of the chalet at Stair twice in the year and the people who went had an entertaining weekend, whether the weather was good or not. We also held our annual garden party, although the rain was torrential. We had to cancel the actual walk but still enjoyed the tea, cakes, and sandwiches from the living room of our host's house!

Grange-over-Sands

2011 has been a very active year in spite of a bitter winter and mainly poor summer weather. Footpath secretaries, area representatives, and committee members attended quarterly meetings. Nine members attended an English Coastal Route training day and several meetings, and produced maps outlining preferred routes. Five members were trained to perform Lake District Ease of Use surveys. One member attended Ramblers General Council.

The Christmas lunch was followed by a walk memorable for enormous ice floes on the River Leven. A full walks programme was enjoyed, one event being a coach trip and walk starting at the Blencathra centre, in dreadful weather which nobody seemed to mind. A coffee morning in August followed, and a pie and pea supper is scheduled for October when a member of Natural England will be present.

Meanwhile, individual members were attending rallies, as at Grizedale Forest, lobbying online and petitioning the local MP about issues potentially affecting access and rights of way. The good news is that the Clare House bridge over the railway line has at long last been restored, in large part due to the tireless work of a Grange Ramblers member.

Kendal

No report received.

Lancaster

The group organised twice-weekly walks throughout the year, only a small number being cancelled due to the weather. The popular evening walks took place during the summer. In June, two walks were organised as part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Walking Festival. We helped to fund numerous seats and gates on footpaths.

A small team was formed to survey possible coastal routes and access for the Ramblers response to the English

Coastal Route proposal. The usual monthly parish footpath surveys were carried out, albeit by a smaller number of participants, and footpath complaints from members of the public were relayed to the relevant authority. Three members took part in the Lake District National Park Ease of Use surveys. Orders for diversions, creations, and closures were monitored and commented upon.

As most of our parishes are in Lancashire, representatives went to the Ramblers' Lancashire Footpath and Access Council meetings and the Lancashire County Council's Public Rights of Way and Access Forum. Three of our parishes are in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and we have representation on its Access on Foot forum too.

Penrith

Each Wednesday Penrith group has four walks graded from very strenuous to easy; on Saturdays, there are walks of varying grades; and on summer Thursday evenings there are short social walks. There were just under 300 walks and the average Wednesday saw about 90 members participating. The new-style walks programme has been slightly modified since its introduction and has been well received by members. The group also organised four walks covering the second half of the Cumbria Way

The social side of the group continues to flourish with a walking weekend in Scotland being fully subscribed, Christmas lunch fully booked, and a dinner at the Purple Sage The C group also arranged several social events.

The book "Walks in the Penrith Area" has now passed the breakeven point and the loan from Area has been repaid.

Committee meetings were all well attended.

The group web site, penrithramblers.org.uk, continues to improve and expand and is a great source of information for members and visitors alike. The group newsletter, with its broad mix of features, helps keep the membership informed of the group's activities as well as covering Ramblers topics.

Summitt Good (20s and 30s)

First a correction: last year we said we had the first marriage in the group; well there were two. Since then we've had a further two marriages and three children born into the group. We managed to have a walk for virtually every Sunday this past year and we have continued the tradition of plenty of socials. The trip away this year was a weekend in York with an obligatory ghost walk, and on the Sunday a walk to the Kilburn horse. One trend we have noticed is the diminishing number of people coming out on our walks. Our membership numbers have stayed constant: it's just that people are getting less time on their hands to come out on the walks. So if you have any adult children or new members who would be a good fit for our group, send them towards summittgood.blogspot.com for details; we have the next six months of walks, leaders, and socials on there now.

West Cumbria

The West Cumbria Group has about 140 members, virtually none of whom, unfortunately, have shown any interest in the activities that are carried out. A dedicated team of eight officials/members continues with important rights-of-way work, checking and responding to orders and attending hearings with planning inspectors.

Important work during the year included objecting to the Honister Zip Wire proposal, supporting the Save our Forests campaigns, and opposing cuts to Cumbria County Council's Countryside Access Team.

This year, for the first time, we carried out Ease of Use surveys on rights of way for the Lake District National Park and all who participated enjoyed and valued the work.

The group hopes that during 2012 more local members will show an interest in our work and get involved.