

MINUTES OF THE TWENTYNINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE PENRITH GROUP OF THE RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION HELD ON Thursday 3rd NOVEMBER 2011

PRESENT

There were 30 members present including Officers, committee and ordinary members who were welcomed to the meeting by Graham Allan.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Margaret Shepherd, Mike and Joan Newton, Maureen Winder, Alex Graham, John Hamer, Alan Crammack, Bill Hart, Roger Burgin, Janet Arnison, Philip Holland & Sue Tomlinson.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 4th November 2010

Approval of the minutes was proposed by Michael Cohen and seconded John Latcham. Motion carried and Minutes signed.

MATTERS ARISING

None

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS (Graham Allan)

The Penrith Group has had another successful year with four walks offered on a Wednesday and one on a Saturday, nearly every week of the year. That totals more than 250 walks.

The numbers attending walks have kept up well and it has been quite noticeable how new walkers have joined us, keen to see what the group has to offer. Several have become regular walkers with us and joined Ramblers. During the year, though, a number of our walks leaders of many years service to the Group have decided that they can no longer continue to lead. I won't name the leaders here individually but feel that we as a group must express a considerable debt of gratitude for the sterling leadership they have given us and the responsibilities they have so selflessly shouldered. For a walks leader there isn't really an option of giving the walk a miss when the weather gets wet and rough!

Special walks and walking holidays have once again taken place during the year as part of the mainstream activities of the Group. Just before Easter the Group held an 'Away Weekend' in sunny Castle Douglas (excepting as usual the Monday morning). This time we filled a complete hotel and undertook walks both along the Solway coast and amongst the Dumfries and Galloway Hills. A further weekend is planned and another hotel fully booked for 2012 – this time in Eskdale.

During June and July a second tranche of Sunday walks were organised to cover the southern and final half of the Cumbria Way between Rosthwaite and Ulverston. These attracted numbers to good as fill a 33 seater coach on each of the walks, with the coach being used this year to transport walkers both to and from the walks. On one of the weeks the walkers had to battle against a tide of marathon runners in the opposite direction along the narrow Coniston Water lakeside path. In 2012 four walks are being planned to take on the southern part of the Westmorland Way (this route will begin in Arnside). These will be part of a nine walk programme stretching over two years with the 87 miles via Kendal, Grasmere, Patterdale and Crosby Ravensworth being completed to Appleby in 2013.

The Thursday evening summer walks, now under new co-ordination (still with a Mary at the helm), have been well attended and proved to be very sociable occasions. The co-ordinator set the walks programme through an invitation arrangement whereby the leader was given a range of locations to choose from for their walk. The evenings on many of the walks concluded with refreshments.

The Group's publication 'Walks in the Penrith Area' has now sold 1100 copies and is on the verge of netting in the £8,000 which was originally loaned interest free by the Lake District area. Beyond this point any receipts from further sales will contribute directly into Group funds.

The Group, through its various walking parties, continues to provide a very worthwhile and welcoming sociable organisation that I know many people feel very comfortable belonging to and supporting. In a way the group's greatest strength lies in the simplicity of what it does. Perhaps this is an unfair test but many's the time I've asked a member whether they've enjoyed the walk – to receive not only a positive response (thankfully) but an admission that they've been talking so much that they haven't really noticed where they've been! Many's the time also when members have mentioned that they wish to take some of their friends on a particularly interesting walk they've been on to then admit that apart from the beginning and the end points they're not very sure where they've been.

The year in a way seems to have passed quite peaceably as far as my perception of the group is concerned, with one or two little problems to overcome, as always. There are concerns by some that the group might be ageing a little; from others that leaders might be in short supply; from others about whether walks in some parties are getting too easy and others too strenuous.

There remains the prospect nevertheless that the Group will continue to flourish in the next year and be able to keep itself of service to its members. It remains for me to thank everyone, on behalf of the group, for continuing to support Penrith Ramblers, whether as officers, walk leaders, co-ordinators, on the social front, or simply as enthusiastic walkers – the latter of which is what it's all about!

The Chairman suggested that he should, on behalf of the Group, to each of the walks leaders who had 'stepped down' during the year, thanking them for their contribution over the years.

This was agreed.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT (John Walker)

Having at last received a copy of the database held by Ramblers HQ in some years, it has been possible to compare our database with that of HQ. Because of this, I have been able to add 4 members to our database, who had let their membership lapse but then re-joined later. Up to now, this information has not been immediately passed on to Membership Secretaries and it was only obtained by checking address labels every 4 months. Ramblers say that this information will in future appear on the list of changes sent out each month.

Some information on the HQ database is wrong, e.g. there is a set of joint members, where only one member is listed. I have included the other joint member on our database. Also several email addresses differ from those that I have. It could be that both sets are correct but I suspect that some members have changed email addresses and not told Ramblers.

The revised membership figure is now 334. This is 2 up on the less reliable figure of last year.

In order to compare figures of previous years, it is necessary to include those in the 'payment pending' category. This gives 341 for this year, which is 2 less than for 2010, 23 less than for 2009 and 53 less than for 2006, when membership was at a peak.

At the meeting last year there was some discussion about trying to get the walks' programme and accompanying newsletters etc. sent to members by e-mail. Walk coordinators, Polly Allen, John Upson and myself have combined forces and looked into this.

I sent out e-mails to all 61 members whose e-mail addresses were on the Penrith Ramblers database, even though 18 were not on the Ramblers database, asking them if they were prepared to receive the walks' programme, newsletters etc, by e-mail. John and Polly did the same, when on Penrith ramblers walks.

I only received 11 replies. Perhaps the other e-mails went into members' spam folders.

Combining our results, while avoiding duplication, resulted in 31 members being prepared to receive the programme by e-mail. However, 12 of these were not on the Ramblers database and would not qualify until they were.

This meant that only 19 members, who had also supplied e-mail addresses to the Ramblers, were in favour of the scheme and some of these addresses disagreed with those I had on our database. Clearly it was not worth the effort of going to the trouble of e-mailing the walks' programme etc. to so few members and so I shall continue using normal post.

Finally, as mentioned in the August Newsletter, I plan to give-up the post of membership secretary by this time next year, meaning that I shall have been in the post for 7 years. However, if any body has the necessary basic computer skills and would be happy to take over before then, I shall be happy to brief them on the job and won't stand in their way.

WEB SITE REPORT (John Walker)

Statistics

The website has 2 sources of statistics:

1). 'Lunarpages', which is our present web host. This source indicates that the annual number of visits to the site continues to increase. In the last 12 months there were just over 40,000 visits, 10,000 more than the previous 12-month period and 19,000 more than in the 12-month period before that. However the web host does not produce data indicating where these visits come from.

2). 'Google Analytics', which does provide such information, as long as JavaScript code, provided by Google has been placed on relevant pages on the web site. Unfortunately, if cookies are disabled the system won't work, which means that none of my visits are ever recorded! Also anybody using a proxy server will give a false location.

Where the stats from both the web host and Google refer to the same measurement, the web host inevitably gives much larger values, probably by a factor of over 2. However, Google says its stats can be used to compare one value relative to another. To illustrate this, a selection of the numbers of visits to the site from various parts of the world during the last year, is listed below

COUNTRIES			CITIES/TOWNS in UK						
Highest	2 nd	3 rd	Highest	2 nd	3 rd				
UK	USA	Australia		London	Manchester	Glasgow	Carlisle	Penrith	Kendal
14,162	650	294		2,254	698	634	263	81	42

From this you can deduce that the UK supplies over 21 times more visitors to the site than USA. London supplies over 3 times more visitors than Manchester, as does Carlisle over Penrith. I hope that the Penrith figure of 81 is at fault. If not, it is very disappointing that, in a single year, Penrith could only muster 81 visits, according to Google (equating to approximately 200 visits in reality). This is especially so, when the web site is aimed at Penrith Ramblers and the site has a page listing the several changes to the walks' programme caused by Philip Holland and Stewart Rainbow suddenly being unavailable to lead walks in the May to August session. There were other changes to walks too.

Changes to web site.

One page has been removed. This is the page, which gave a separate list of walk leaders telephone numbers and reflects its disappearance in hard copy form.

The following pages have been added to the website, since the last AGM.

1). A 'Contents' page, which allows a visitor to see what topics are featured on the site. The name of each topic can be clicked on, taking the visitor directly to where the topic is on the web site. (For example, one can click the 'Contents' button on the Home page and look for (say) 'Grid reference checking facility' in the list. Clicking on this takes you straight to the facility.)

2). A report form, which visitors can fill in, allowing them to give the location and description of path obstructions found on walks in an area around Penrith, This is automatically sent to the Footpath Secretary once it is completed.

3). A form giving visitors the opportunity to provide feedback about the web site to the webmaster. It involves ticking some boxes, in response to questions about the website. Comments are optional but can be made, if people wish.

Because both of the forms, 2 and 3, allow, visitors to type in information, special checks for possible malware are carried out before the forms can be e-mailed. This involves using regular expressions, JavaScript and PHP code.

4). The number of sets of photos for the slideshow has been increased from 1 to 22. This has resulted in 21 extra pages with associated photos and brings the total number of photos on the site to 720, if one includes photos on the walk locality pages such as Lake District, Eden valley, The Dales, etc. (It does not include over 500 'thumbnail' photos.) The reasons for the change are as follows.:

a). When the web host was '123 Reg', the memory allowed by the host was limited so severely that only one set of photos could be displayed on the site at a time. To overcome this, each set of photos, that was replaced by a new set, was stored on the 'Fotopic' website and a link to these photos was placed on our web site, so that they could be viewed.

b). Early this year, 'Fotopic' went into administration, so the photos they stored could not be viewed. Also, before this, our web host had been changed to 'Lunatpages', which does not restrict memory usage, so it was possible to put extra sets of photos on our site.

Not all the sets are the same as before. Those, which were produced, when the slideshow facility was available, had been backed up to hard disc and were able to be placed back on the web site as before. Unfortunately, the earlier sets with their associated code had not been saved but many of the individual photos had been stored on CD. This meant that a further 9 sets, different from before have been assembled plus new code for each set. The main difficulty came when the photos had titles with no meaningful information, such as a letter and 6 digits. Hence, some descriptions to photos are rather brief, as the webmaster failed to remember, such details as, place, time, leader and was not even too sure of the sender.

Because the web site now has lots of slideshows, there is no urgency to continue adding more. This is probably as well, because the supply of photos from members has almost dried up. How we proceed depends on how many photos are received in the future.

Some people have asked if I intend to continue being webmaster. This may be in response to the fact that I had asked for volunteers to act as a back up, just in case I am unable to continue. I glad to report that Geoffrey Bennett has volunteered to help and he has since had a go at producing the walks' programme in HTML format from one in Excel. As Geoffrey has found out, this is easy if you want an exact copy of the original but is more time consuming if it is to comply with the layout of the walks page on the web site. Having a 'Linux' operating system rather than Windows meant that software I used was not suitable for him but I understand he has overcome these problems, I hope that Geoffrey is still willing to act as back-up, while I continue as webmaster. I have no plans to resign the post at present.

PROGRAMME SECRETARIES REPORT (Janet Arnison)

2011 has seen another year of a varied and interesting led walks, 4 walks offering different grades (A, B+, B and C) each Wednesday and one walk on Saturdays. In addition during the summer months there was also a weekly Thursday evening walk.

Amendments once the programme is printed are notified to John Walker who updates the web pages.

One recurring problem is that of finding volunteers to "lead" the B walks. Keith Scott the group co-ordinator would be grateful for any offers of help with this.

The other problem seems to be confusion with the grid reference being area of walk and not the walk start point. Furthermore the grid ref given to me is sometimes incorrect or has been typed incorrectly. To be listed on the national website grid references for walks are required so it is necessary for us to include them on our programme for all of our walks.

TREASURER'S REPORT AND APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS (Philip Holland)

The Treasurer submitted the Annual Accounts, which had been audited by Roger Burgin. Copies were available for all who wished to see them. Approval of the accounts was proposed by John Walker and seconded by Allan Duval. Motion carried.

FOOTPATH SECRETARY'S REPORT (Alan Duval)

Changes to Rights of Way: In the past year we have been consulted about three proposed changes to rights of way. Two were by the Lake District National Park Authority, with one being diversions resulting from the "Fix the Fells" project, which was welcomed. The other was a diversion at Naddle Bridge below Haweswater, which was acceptable. Cumbria County Council consulted us about one proposed diversion, at Crowdundle Beck north of Milburn, where the diversion would use a new footbridge, so we welcomed it.

After consultation, proposals are publicly advertised by the making of an Order. Eleven Orders have been made in the past year. Cumbria CC have made three. One was a creation at Penruddock station, the other two being diversions that we had previously agreed. The Lake District NPA have made eight Orders, mostly resulting from the "Fix the Fells" project. All were at least acceptable, with some being welcomed as an improvement, though one has now been withdrawn as the order showed the new route on the old, eroded, line.

Modification Orders: The Definitive Map is the public record of rights of way, and when there is evidence that it is wrong it is changed by modification orders. We have not been consulted about any new cases this year, and there have been no orders.

The order to add a footpath at Doddick Fell, Blencathra, mentioned last year, is still awaiting an inquiry and decision.

Obstructions: As a result of reorganisation feedback from Cumbria CC has been poor, so I am not aware of any problems on my list being cleared, though I am sure some work has been done. Also, because we are no longer doing the sample surveys of rights of way, I have reported only four new problems, leaving 161 outstanding. In the Lake District National Park feedback is also poor. I have reported four new problems, but I have not been told any have been cleared, so I have 16 outstanding.

Ease of use survey: We are now helping the Lake District National Park with a sample footpath survey (5% random sample of rights of way, half in May and half in November). We surveyed eight paths in May and will be doing another eight this month.

Sharpe legacy: Lake District Area has a fund that can be used to improve access to the Lake District fells. Late last year the Group suggested that a path on Gowbarrow Fell, from the summit eastwards, should be improved. Area agreed to fund the work and it will be done. The National Park has proposed a significant improvement in the paths between Kirkstone Pass and Brotherswater. Area has agreed that we should fund work on a replacement footbridge over Caiston Beck (currently a permissive path, but will become a right of way)

Cuts in County Council funding: Many of you will be aware that late last year the County Council proposed to cut spending on rights of way by 70%. As a result of a campaign by Ramblers, and others, including a protest walk with Ramblers chief executive Tom Franklin, the cuts were reduced to 30%. I know many members helped by responding to the consultation, writing to councillors and coming on the walk, and I would like to thank them all.

COUNTRYSIDE SECRETARY'S REPORT

As the Group does not have a Countryside Secretary there was no report this year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT (David Dixon)

None

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Election of Officers:	name	nominated by	seconded
Chairman	Graham Allan	Alan Duval	Jean Bradshaw

Secretary	David Dixon	Jude Feest	Roger Eves
Treasurer	Philip Holland	Basil Thompson	John Walker
Membership Secretary	John Walker	Jude Feest	Mary Teasdale
Programme Secretary	Janet Arnison	Jean Bradshaw	Mary Teasdale
Footpath Secretary	Alan Duval	John Walker	Sue Marshall
Social Secretary	Sarah Cantrell	Jean Bradshaw	Sue Marshall
Countryside Secretary	Charlie Shepherd	Graham Allan	David Dixon
Committee Members	Bill Mossop		
	Polly Allan		
	Christine Mc Naughton		
	John Upson		
	Keith Scott		
	All proposed by Alan Duval and seconded by Roger Eves		
	Marjorie Oakey	Christine McNaughton	John McNaughton
Area Council Members	Alan Duval	John Latcham	John Walker
Chalet Committee member	Roger Burgin	John Walker	Alan Duval
Hon Auditor	Roger Burgin	Mary Teasdale	John Walker
All of the above were elected nem. Con.			

The Chairman, Graham Allan advised the meeting that David Dixon, Secretary and John Walker, Programme Secretary would be standing down at the end of the current year ie the AGM 2012. He asked those present to help to find volunteers to fill these positions as soon as possible to ensure a smooth change over.

MOTIONS

None received

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

The formal meeting closed at 7.50pm and was followed by refreshments which were kind supplied and served by Sarah Cantrell and her team of supporters