

RAMBLERS

GREATER MANCHESTER AND HIGH PEAK AREA

ANNUAL REPORT

2009

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www.manchester-ramblers.org.uk

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AREA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Terry Perkins

Sunday Walks Officer

Jeff Lewis

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Dr Edgar Ernstbrunner

Wednesday Walks Officers

Peter and Caroline Ball

General Secretary

Salle Dare

Short Walks Officer

John Needham

Treasurer

Peter Ball

Social Secretary

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Minutes Secretary

Janet Cuff

Elected Members

Gloria Gaffney

Joyce Tyldesley

Membership Secretary

Harry Billington

Co-opted Member

Lilian McManus

Countryside Officer

Janet Cuff

Footpath Co-ordinator

Dr Edgar Ernstbrunner

The views expressed in this report are the responsibility of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of either Greater Manchester and High Peak Ramblers or the Ramblers nationally.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2009 may have proved to be the most uneasy and controversial year ever, for the RA. Symptomatic of its malaise must surely be the number of Chief Executives, six in as many years, who have come and gone, including one allegedly, who worked for MI5! Having found no 'reds' under the bed', she departed with knowledge of our dire financial position. While the 'credit crunch' and crony capitalism have given us a rerun of the Wall Street Crash in 1929, the year of my birth, it cannot be made a reason that has created the deepest alarm and distrust of the Chief Executive and the Board of Trustees.

So often dismissive of the efforts and concerns of the many voluntary officers in the Areas of the R.A., it seem to be a case of 'hand over your subscriptions and mind your own business'. Letters to the Editor of "Walk" magazine are ignored. Telephone calls to the Editor are not returned. Proceedings of General Council are marginalized or left out of our quarterly magazine, or as an afterthought a sheet of paper stuck in as if it was a flyer – plenty of those! No mention whatever of the motion on quarrying carried at G.C. calling for the ending of this violation of National Park purposes. This is unbridled censorship and is unacceptable.

I have little difficulty getting many letters published in the media but run into a brick wall with the bureaucracy of Central Office. The £37,000 spent to create a new logo that resembles a drunken version of the logo found on Tourist Information Centres typifies the arrogant and cavalier attitudes of our 'rulers'. Whatever doubts that some of our members may have about the seriousness of our concerns, the special meeting of Concerned Ramblers on 26th September in Leeds was more than a knee jerk response to the growing unease of our members. Hopefully G.C. 2010 might clear the air and put the R.A. firmly back on track....

It was most gratifying to learn that because of our objections, the Rochdale Council have put the application to develop the former asbestos factory site in the Spodden Valley for housing, on the back burner for 3 years. They may then take our proposals to extend the Healey Dell Nature Reserve down to Spotland Bridge and erect a suitable memorial plaque to commemorate the hundreds of workers who died horrible deaths from working with asbestos, and others who are still dying!

My thanks to all our dedicated officers who have given unstinted support to the work of the Greater Manchester and High Peak Area. **Best wishes for a Prosperous New Year!**

Terry Perkins, Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

This year has been mixed. The highlight for me was the Manchester International Festival where we took part in Jeremy Deller's PROCESSION with our own banner, which was specially designed for us. The Area continues to thrive and meets regularly to discuss issues affecting the Area. The main problem facing us has been the deficit at Central Office which led to a number of redundancies at Central Office and concern amongst many members that our highly important campaigning work on footpaths and access would suffer. The Area put forward a motion to General Council asking for a commitment to campaigning. This generated considerable debate and was only very narrowly defeated. The Board of Trustees noted the feeling of the meeting and have made more effort to improve communication by building more formal links with members, so we have had meetings with our nominated board of Trustees member Kate Ashbrook, and the team from Central Office came to Manchester to meet members in January. As yet we have no evidence that campaigning is suffering. Nevertheless, Greater Manchester and High Peak Area has had a cut in its funding so our annual report this year is shorter and is available on our website www.manchester-ramblers.org.uk/pubs.asp or on request from the Secretary.

Looking forward to 2010 we will be celebrating our 75th birthday of the Ramblers with an exhibition in Central Library, a celebratory walk up Kinder and other local events organised by the Groups. So let us celebrate the Ramblers with another year of great walks and vigorous campaigning.

Salle Dare, Area Secretary

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

I am pleased to be able to report that the membership for 2008/9 has shown an increase. There is an increase of 59 members, or 1.4%. After 4 years of declining membership any increase, however small, must be welcome news, especially in the current difficult economic climate. The total area membership at 30 September 2009 was 4,240, compared to 4,181 twelve months ago. The following table gives a breakdown of membership according to group etc:

Bolton	524	a decrease of	7
Bury	376	an increase of	18
Rochdale	251	an increase of	26
New Mills	427	a decrease of	9
Oldham	564	an increase of	8
Stockport	686	an increase of	11
Wigan	233	a decrease of	1
MAD Walkers	327	an increase of	56
Coach Rambles	20	an increase of	4
M&S Ramblers	443		
MR98	<u>6</u>		
Group totals	3,857		
Non Group	<u>383</u>		
Area total	<u>4,240</u>		
Affiliates	40		

The Manchester & Salford Group had not been fully established when last year's report was prepared, hence no comparative figure is available. The M98 Group, or to give its full title of "MR98 Manchester & High Peak Non-Group Test-Group, is a mystery. It has been set up by Central Office and first appeared in the membership report for February 2009. No explanation has ever been forthcoming as to its purpose. My requests to Central Office for enlightenment have so far drawn a blank.

I am still not able to report what the total RA membership is, or how this Area's membership compares with other Areas. A monthly report which previously gave this information was temporarily withdrawn in August 2008, with a stated expectation that it would be reintroduced by December 2008. Currently (December 2009) we are still without it. Regarding our affiliated Clubs and other bodies, Central Office tell us that these total 40, a decrease of 2 on the previous year. However, since the introduction of the CRM system in January 2008 there has been a total lack of information about changes occurring in this class of membership.

On the positive side, in the past twelve months there have been some marginal improvements in the quality of the membership reports. However, many of the problems and concerns I wrote of in the last report still remain. Any improvements seem to be at a painfully slow pace.

Harry Billington,
Area Membership Secretary

FOOTPATH CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Crime & Antisocial Behaviour remains a major Rights of Way issue in the Area, some authorities acting more circumspectly than last year, others less so. The legislation (S.129A Highways Act) is biased against user groups, but there seems little chance of getting it reviewed any time soon, even though the England Access Forum shares our strong concerns. For the time being we must maintain a dialogue with each authority (emphasis on a responsible Alleygating policy), and we need to get local residents involved in opposing specific Orders.

Even two years after the due date, not all our Authorities have formally approved their **Rights of Way Improvement plans (RoWIPs)**. In practice, it makes little difference, as adopted plans are no more likely to be implemented than draft versions. Resources remain the key issue, and times are hard.

Co-ordination with other user groups has been fine this year. Whilst positions on individual cases differ occasionally, there have been no significant disagreements. Of course, concerted action is a different matter – this will need exploring.

The **Bridges & Stiles project** continues – part-funding of projects to assist our Local Authorities in complying with their duty to maintain the network. So far, we have sponsored repair/restoration jobs in the High Peak, Oldham and Rochdale. The idea is to reward our more deserving authorities, and we would welcome further proposals.

The **Definitive Map** problem (some authorities refusing to issue hard copies) remains unchanged. Moreover, not a single GMC authority has produced an updated Definitive Map & Statement in 2009 (although they are all – supposedly – working on it, and they keep promising it “within the next few weeks” – resources again.) Online maps are now available for Tameside, Bolton and Salford (the latter much less user-friendly than the other two); Oldham is supposedly imminent.

A summary of what has been happening over the last year in our ten Highway Authorities shows some interesting differences, not only in their current attitude to Rights of Way, but also in how their performance has changed over the year:

City of Manchester

A few more Gating Orders we objected to have been confirmed. MCC are meticulous in consulting and notifying us; so the fact that in three instances where we supported strong local opposition to Orders we have not been notified of confirmation provides encouraging (albeit negative) evidence that consultation is being taken seriously. Also, none of the proposals to gate definitive footpaths have been progressed so far – other authorities are less respectful.

On the other hand, there are worrying signs that MCC are assigning a lower priority to Rights of Way than before: recent reorganisation has eliminated the post of RoW Officer (MCC are the only GMC authority not to have one), and our only contact now is the head of Highways, who has many other responsibilities. This probably means that the only effective way of drawing MCC's attention to specific problems is the legal process – not necessarily actually going to court, but certainly serving at least initial notice. That this can work is shown by the case of Manchester 181, a footpath in Chorlton obstructed for 65 years: After we served notice, there was a very positive response and apparent agreement that it was in everyone's interest to restore this link along Chorlton Brook. Unfortunately, it has gone all quiet again, and we may have to recommence the process to prod MCC into action.

The other three cases of obstruction remaining from last year remain unresolved. There too we shall have to take legal action to get any progress.

There has been at least one creation order for a new definitive footpath – one we had been promised many years ago, but were only told about recently after repeatedly enquiring about this apparently unfulfilled commitment. There may be others we don't know about. The Manchester Definitive Map is a mess (as MCC indeed acknowledge), and its consolidation should be the top priority in the RoWIP (which hasn't been adopted...).

To end on a disappointing note: the Chamberhall Farm case was lost on appeal in the High Court, even though the Council eventually agreed with us against the landowner. We weren't helped by having, at each level, a judge inexperienced in highway law, and by the landowner engaging a particularly skilful and persuasive advocate. This is likely to be the end of the matter.

City of Salford

Some improvement over the last year: There have been fewer contentious Gating Orders, we have achieved a positive resolution, by negotiating with Legal Services, of specific modification proposals without having to go to court or Public Inquiry, and there is progress on some enforcement and maintenance issues. The Definitive Map can be viewed online, albeit not very effectively. Still, Rights of Way are clearly under-resourced, and our next move should be to survey the entire network and present the results to the Council, with legal action as a last resort.

The Local Access Forum will provide a useful platform here, and our new Manchester & Salford Group could be very effective by getting involved in the Forum.

Tameside

This, unfortunately, has become one of our main "problem authorities":

1. Communications appear to have broken down completely – there has not been a Rights of Way Forum meeting in the last 6 months, e-mails to the Rights of Way Officer go unanswered, and we have been unable to reach him by telephone. Nor have we received any consultations on Gating Orders. It seems unlikely that this is due to TMBC not making any (they have been quite forward with gating even Definitive Footpaths).
2. The many problems we have reported remain unaddressed, and the apparent abandonment of the Rights of Way Forum removes one of the mechanisms we had for presenting these issues.

There is currently no Local Access Forum for Tameside, the Pennine Fringe LAF having been dissolved and the joint Tameside/Oldham/Rochdale LAF not yet having been established. Our top priorities in Tameside will have to be:

- Push for the new LAF to be an effective body (which will require us to be represented)
- Complete a survey of the Tameside network
- Start legal procedures on the worst cases of obstructed or out-of-repair Rights of Way (preferably in co-operation with other user groups)

A Tameside Group would help – currently Oldham Group are trying to include Tameside in their efforts, but Oldham is presenting us with quite enough problems as it is.

One footpath claim we are assisting with (it was rejected on a technicality) is being resubmitted; this may give us some useful publicity and perhaps local support.

Trafford

In recent months there have been indications that our Trafford Footpath Team's unrelenting efforts are paying off, with some commitments made to improved maintenance and repair and generally better communication. We shall see.

There is one definitive footpath Gating Order (made against our objections at the time) now up for review. We have asked for it to be rescinded, but have not had a decision yet.

There is also some movement on claims for the Definitive Map: One Order we applied for has now been confirmed, and others are being processed (we're told).

Oldham

Covered by Oldham Group. Despite their dedicated efforts, the picture here is less bright than last year.

1. A number of Gating Orders on definitive Rights of Way have been made or are in the pipeline. Our objections are simply ignored (and there is no Local Access Forum, normally a statutory consultee).
2. The many problems reported in the Use your Paths (UYP) project conducted by RACO in 2007 have not been properly incorporated in the list of works regularly discussed at the RoW Forum. That means that they have not been officially acknowledged, and nothing much is happening about them. The RoW Officer is dedicated, but is working with inadequate resources.

There is progress in other respects – signage is being improved, and the Definitive Map should go online any time soon. But overall we need to consider our position. There is now a case for initiating legal action on the most serious problems found in the survey, thus refocusing the authority's attention onto their legal duties. Also, we need to reassess Oldham MBC as a worthy recipient of Bridges & Stiles funding.

Stockport

Covered by Stockport Group. Overall the position has improved:

1. The RoW Team remains very active and positive (but of course has had to face spending cuts). Review of the Definitive Map is still not quite complete, and anomalies are still being discovered.
2. There has been positive consultation on the Stringer Street Steps restoration (due to be completed by August 2010). Existing materials will be re-used as far as possible, and missing material will be replaced in keeping with the period character.
3. The re-revised alleygating policy ("Positive Management") is generally acceptable, the concerns we and other user groups had expressed having been taken into account.
4. This more positive climate is illustrated by the Council's decision not to proceed with the gating of Cheadle & Gatley 88 (in Heald Green) and to gate an important shortcut in Gatley on a timed basis only.

Bolton

Covered by Bolton Group. Here too, the position is not quite as good as last year, the main problem being Gating Orders. Whilst not that many are being made in Bolton, the proportion of contentious ones is far higher than in any other GMC authority, and definitive Rights of Way are not exempted. We do have good communications and a very positive attitude from Officers. The Definitive Map is now online.

Limited resources are a serious problem here, however: Some expensive repairs are having to be deferred even though they affect important links currently unusable. Imaginative solutions will also be needed to resolve some of the long-standing anomalies (notably Westhoughton 26, recently re-emerged).

Bury

Covered by Bury Group.

No significant change. A draft alleygating policy has now been published, but no Gating Orders have been made yet as far as we're aware. The copy of the Statement to the Definitive Map we were promised a year and a half ago has still not been received. This is one of the authorities refusing to provide the Definitive Map.

Wigan

Covered by Wigan Group.

Gating Orders: There have been a couple that we and other user groups objected to but that were made nevertheless. These will result in inconvenience rather than hardship, but still are questionable.

The new Definitive Map & Statement promised for last year has still not been produced (resource shortages, IT problems), so the issue of providing them on-line or as hard copies has not yet arisen.

There is still no proper Claims Register, and Legal Services are still not handling the backlog of claims more effectively than before. Wigan does have its own Local Access Forum (as well as an effective Highway User Group), so at least these problems are kept on the agenda.

Rochdale

Covered by Rochdale Group.

One potentially negative development is the decision to consider Gating Orders as an option, the very first proposal relating to a Definitive FP (admittedly on a timed basis). But at least, consultation is punctilious.

Co-operation with the Rights of Way team, on the other hand, remains very positive. Resources, of course, are shorter than last year, but we try to help with "Bridges & Stiles" funding.

A compromise has been proposed on the Definitive Map: Rather than providing us with a hard copy, they proposed to put the working copy on-line. That was acceptable to us, but there have been delays (IT problems). The Statement is trickier – RMBC intend to review the entire document (a process expected to take years) and are unwilling to provide a copy of the current Statement.

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High Peak

The RA Derbyshire Footpath Committee is continuing its co-ordinating role among the three RA Areas involved. Offroading remains the most intractable issue, certainly within our Area. Bob Kelly (of our New Mills Group covering the High Peak) is continuing his efforts to persuade DCC to take effective action.

To summarise:

With most of our Highway Authorities we have a good or at least decent working relationship. Oldham and Tameside, however, would appear to require the incentive of legal action to put their networks in order, patient negotiation over a number of years having proved ineffective. In neither case, incidentally should blame be attached to the Rights of Way officers – they are doing a good job within the resource constraints imposed on them.

Edgar Ernstbrunner
Footpath Co-ordinator

SUNDAY WALKS OFFICER'S REPORT

As Sunday Walks Officer I would like to say thank you to all the people who have led over the past year and volunteered to do so again in the 2010 Summer Programme. I wish to make special mention of Ken Lawson, a stalwart of many years, who will not be leading Sunday Public Walks in future, having done more than his fair share for many years.

There was just one minor problem, to my knowledge. I had to curtail my walk on 27th December due to conditions underfoot. Finally, I would just like to invite any member who has not yet done so, to let me know if they would like to consider leading on the Winter 2010/11 programme.

Jeff Lewis

COUNTRYSIDE OFFICER'S REPORT

All communication between Head Office and volunteers is now on-line and, partly due to my own inexperience in searching the site to find information relevant to my role, my relationship with Head Office has been less satisfactory than in previous years. Also, perhaps due to the fact that David Murray's remit has been extended from Countryside Campaigns Manager to Campaigns Coordinator, my email to him requesting advice about incursions into the Green Belt received no response.

One of the worst planning decisions of the year, although not unexpected, was the approval by 5 votes to 4, along party lines, of an air freight transit unit at Manchester airport, which will destroy an ancient field, a pond containing great crested newts, and 2 rights of way. It seems that not even the recession can put a brake on the Airport's expansionist plans.

I have been commenting on some of the Councils' consultations on their Core Strategy, which is a document that sets the strategy for council policy for the next 15 years or so. A common theme is to propose incursions into the Green Belt for various reasons. Bolton are proposing a 209 acre industrial zone on land that has been restored following opencast mining at Cutacre (Over Hulton), whilst Salford are proposing to take 98 acres of Green Belt at Barton Moss for industrial use. Stockport has perhaps a more acceptable proposal to take small areas for affordable housing, but I have nevertheless objected to all the proposals to develop in the Green Belt, urging that brownfield sites be more thoroughly explored first. River valleys and parks are also under threat, with councils looking to these areas to develop formal sports facilities, which often means fencing and lights and, of course, parking provision. Informal recreational open space will be lost to the public and I have objected to these proposals being included in the Core Strategy. I have in fact already objected to 2 specific proposals: one for football pitches on Chorlton Meadows, and another for 5-a-side sports, multi-use games areas, and other facilities in part of Heaton Park. We await the decision on these.

It's not all bad news, however. The proposal for the Mottram-Tintwistle bypass has been withdrawn by the Highways Agency, albeit for financial rather than environmental reasons, and although the A555 Relief Road is still in the roads programme, funding is now by no means certain. Probably the best news this year was that the House of Lords has refused to hear an appeal by Bleaklow Industries against the Peak District National Park Authority's enforcement action at Backdale quarry on Longstone Edge. The current operator, MMC Midlands, may still work under the 1952 permission, but this is likely to be the end of the long-running legal action over excessive limestone extraction at the quarry, which has been damaging the landscape of the National Park.

Janet Cuff

WEDNESDAY WALKS OFFICERS' REPORT

Our walks are open to all and are based on public transport, usually trains, from central Manchester. The train ride is an important part of the day as it gives us the opportunity to talk and introduce ourselves to any new walkers. Our walks have covered the whole area around Manchester going as far afield as Buxton, Clitheroe, Edale, Marsden, Hebden Bridge and Congleton.

We still offer the additional 7 to 8 mile walk, totally separate from the standard one, on the last Wednesday of the month. This extra choice has been appreciated. There have not been problems getting the extra leaders needed; we have even managed to recruit some new ones. Advice to new leaders has been kept simple. The aim is to produce a safe enjoyable day out. Existing leaders have offered their help with surveying.

We thank our walk leaders, new and old, for their careful preparation and surveying of the walks. This time is well spent and ensures that the routes planned on the map are possible on the ground! We have had many memorable days out in all weathers and during the year we have welcomed new walkers who have continued to walk with us. We are planning to hand over. We have enjoyed our time in office and hope that our successor will receive the full support of all the regular walkers.

Peter and Caroline Ball

TREASURER'S REPORT

1st October 2008 – 30th September 2009

After troubles bringing our finances back into the RACO fold last year, I had hoped for an easier ride this financial year. These hopes were dashed when RACO awoke to the fact that they were running out of money and started to make drastic cuts to their spending and our funding. This has resulted in a reduction of £3,000 to our Area Budget. This will affect the current financial year 2009/10 and so is outside the scope of this report, but I feel that it should be mentioned.

Now, to the financial year 2008/9. Our accounts were selected by RACO's external auditors for special scrutiny. I had to answer many questions raised by Kevin Edwards at RACO as he tried to anticipate the questions which the Auditors might raise.

There were no further queries on our accounts and we received our first quarterly payment from RACO in mid January, followed by another in early February. These were our first payments since December 2006.

Late in January RACO told me that 5 of our Groups had reserves which were too high. RACO says that reserves except for restricted funds should not exceed 20-40% of the year's expected expenditure. These Groups were Bury, Coaches, Mad Walkers, Stockport and Wigan. I asked these Groups to discuss this directly with RACO. Coaches resolved their problems by paying Area £5,000 and this has been carried forward into next year's accounts as Dedicated Funds. I hope that we can soon spend this on some fairly large project such as a bridge or a boardwalk. Mad Walkers, Stockport and Wigan agreed to forego the final 50% of their funding and Bury persuaded RACO that their reserves were reasonable.

In June RACO introduced their Basic Allowance for Group Funding for the 2009/10 financial year, calculated as £80.00 + 0.60p for each Group member. Any Group who needed more than the Basic Allowance had to submit a budget. Mad Walkers, Rochdale, Stockport and Wigan were happy to receive only the Basic Allowance. Bolton, Bury, Manchester and Salford, New Mills and Oldham did submit budgets. Coach Group was happy to receive no funding. Area then submitted its own budget incorporating the Group Budgets without amendment.

At the same time RACO said that they would only pay half of the final payment for the year 2008/9. The excuse being that because the first payment in 2009/10 would be made earlier than before there would be an effective overlap for double payment for the first 2 months of 2009/10. For once RACO did keep their promise and the first payment was made in October 2009. The Groups were not penalised because they had been paid in full before RACO made their decision.

The final annoyance from RACO was to change the way in which our expenditure had to be shown in the Annual Return. This in the final month of the year and without any apologies for the additional work this entailed. By the time we hold our AGM our funding for the year 2009/10 should have been resolved and I will be able to give you the details then.

Peter Ball
Area Treasurer

Balance Sheet for the Year Ending 30th September 2009

Assets	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	Last Year
Investments				
1) RA Services	500	-	500	500
2) M& G Charifund	3,621	-	3,621	3,783
3) Hendersons	5,191	-	5,191	5,033
4) N S & I	60,607	-	60,607	65,277
Bank Accounts				
Co-op No. 1	-	-	-	11,915
Co-op Legacy Fund	-	-	-	736
Unity Trust Bank	3,547	14,061	17,608	617
Total	73,466	14,061	87,527	87,861

Notes on the Balance Sheet 2008/2009

The valuation of M & G Charifund and Henderson investments are due to stock market fluctuations.

N S & I account has been used to fund footpath repairs.

Funds previously held in the Co-op Bank have now been transferred to the Unity Trust Bank.

Income and Expenditure Account for year ended 30.9.09

Again this year RACO have changed the headings under which our income and expenditure has to be allocated, making an accurate comparison with last year's accounts difficult. This means that the figures shown for last year are not as accurate as I would like, but they do allow an approximate comparison.

Restricted

Receipts	Current year	Last Year		Payments	Current year	Last year
Internal transfer	4670	-		Campaign/case work	1500	-
Deposit interest	2541	2887		Practical work	3170	208
Investment income	268	276				
TOTAL RECEIPTS	7479	3163		TOTAL PAYMENTS	4670	208
Surplus (deficit)	2809					

Unrestricted

Receipts	Current year	Last Year		Payments	Current year	Last year
From CO(funding)	11919	3000		To CO	196	157
From CO(other)	200			To Group (funding)	5219	5303
From Group	5000	78		To Group (other)	2032	1335
Deposit interest	51	368		Walks programmes	1949	1594
				Newsletters/publicity	923	854
				Campaigns/casework	380	-
				Meetings (inc. AGM)	975	803
				Admin	3772	3636
				Other	193	68
TOTAL RECEIPTS	17170	3446		TOTAL PAYMENTS	15639	13750
Surplus (deficit)	1531	(10304)				

(6.12.09)

Peter Ball
Area Treasurer

GROUP REPORTS

BOLTON GROUP

The two teams of Walks leaders have arranged varied and interesting Walks Programmes over the past twelve months, and they have received a good reception by our supporters. Where possible, both the Saturday and Sunday rambles have also provided short walks for our "walking wounded", who vary in number. These walks are much appreciated.

During the year, we became aware of the need to improve our ability to deal with basic health and accident problems which might arise on a ramble. The committee therefore arranged a St John Ambulance first aid course for walk leaders and other some members who are regular coach ramblers. We have also bought four first aid kits for the "A" and "B" walks on both coaches.

The committee have also introduced the "accident and emergency" card which we ask each coach Rambler to complete and carry in their rucksack. These provide valuable information in case of emergency.

During the year we had two emergencies on coach rambles which involved calling out mountain rescue teams and the air ambulance, and on another occasion, a Rambler had to be taken from Grasmere to Lancaster Hospital by ambulance. The committee approved the payment of donations to the rescue organizations involved, all of whom rely on voluntary funding.

The cost of printing and posting the walks programmes, the cost of footpath work, and group administration costs have always been financed by Central Office. Our Treasurer has submitted a budget for 2009/2010, but we have been told that because the R A's has fallen significantly since January 2009, the amount to be paid to Areas and Groups for 2009/2010 is to be reduced substantially, and therefore our expenditure for the coming year will not be fully funded.

The R A is working hard to make all coastal paths accessible, and recently a government agency has been given a budget of £50 million to open a continuous coastal path around England in the next decade.

In conclusion, I am happy that we have a thriving membership here in Bolton, and this is due to the hard work of the Committee and Walks leaders, and I thank them all. I am grateful to be able to chair their meetings, which are always conducted in a cheerful and helpful manner.

Doreen Wilcox
Chairman

BURY GROUP

The past year has been one of progress for the Bury Group. A full programme of weekend walks has been arranged with at least one walk every Sunday, but with two walks of different grades on the majority. On the weekends where coach trips have been organised there has been a choice of three. Also, we have had a full programme of Wednesday evening walks in the summer months. Overall, there have been more walks provided than in previous years. This has arisen because, over the past few years, the number of members walking regularly with the group has increased steadily and, as a result, there is now a larger pool of walk leaders. This is very encouraging because, in common with what has been happening nationally, our membership had been decreasing each year until, in September 2008, it stood at 358. However, over the last twelve months there has been a pleasing increase to 376. It is hoped that this reversal of fortunes will continue in the future helped by our raised profile resulting from the launch in 2009 of the group website www.buryramblers.com.

On the subject of local footpaths an application has been made to modify the definitive map, in other words, to add a footpath which was omitted when the map was drawn up. The local authority has accepted the 'reasonable allegation' about the omission and the next step will be to advertise its intention to make a modification order. If there are no objections, the path should be added in 2010. All of this has come about because of the tenacity of Geoff Holt from Ainsworth (the process began in 2002). In addition, the footpath through Bradshaw Hill Farm has been officially diverted and waymarked (after 30 years of problems). The new line is an acceptable alternative to the original. For anybody who wishes to walk it, the grid reference is SD 818128 and it is just over a mile north-east of Bury centre on the way towards Birtle Dean. Other diversion order applications have been considered on their merits and, after consultation with Edgar Ernstbrunner, submissions made to the local authority. One disappointment is that the regular Rights of Way meetings of interested parties, chaired by the authority, have not yet restarted. They were suspended as a result of problems relating to revised job descriptions and salary restructuring.

Ian Pickup

MANCHESTER COACH RAMBLES GROUP

The usual programme of fortnightly coach-based rambles has been maintained. Since the last AGM four National Parks have been visited (the Peak District, the Lake District, Snowdonia and the Yorkshire Dales). Surprisingly however, the only Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty visited has been the Clwydian Range. New destinations have been tried – Knaresborough, Bridgnorth, and Malton. Perhaps not all proved a triumph so it may be some time before we revisit them. Malton, however, did allow walking on the fringe of the Yorkshire Wolds, albeit accompanied by thunder and lightning. Also new routes to traditional destinations have been adopted, notably Holmfirth via Marsden and Ruthin via Pen-y-Stryt. Invariably walk leaders respond imaginatively to the new walking opportunities provided.

'A' walks now appear on an 'ad hoc' basis, depending quite simply on whether anyone is prepared to lead them.

A particular frustration has been members not being able to secure a ticket for our trips, though never enough of them to warrant a second coach. One solution might be to take up the offer of a 59 seater coach on a permanent basis, though the greater length of this vehicle might reduce the range of destinations currently enjoyed. Walking destinations reached in part by minor roads (Alstonefield, Barley, Meerbrook, for example) might have to go off our agenda.

Coach Rambles are now the responsibility of a Group rather than the Area E.C. Although producing a number of benefits this arrangement is not without its costs – notable the increased workload of its Officers and the increased administrative costs of servicing the Group. The constitutional status of the Group must be kept continuously under review.

Finally it would be very wrong not to express very considerable thanks to those Group members prepared to devote their time and energy (and money too when they pioneer walks!!) to leading walks and helping in the general running of the Group. Without their efforts the Group would simply not be able to function and an important Ramblers service to its members lost. Let us hope that all members realise not only this but also that new faces in both these tasks would be most welcome.

John Nicholson
Secretary

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD GROUP

It has been a very good first year for the Manchester and Salford Ramblers. The membership has grown steadily, many contacts coming from local and various other sources. Our Tuesday and Saturday walks continue to be a great success. These short easy walks are mainly in areas accessible in the Manchester and Salford with an occasional long walk. We have had a weekend away in the Peak District which again was a huge success. We also have planned a great programme of walks for 2010, again including a weekend away in April in Slaidburn. We have also teamed up with Get Walking Keep Walking to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Ramblers in April and Get Walking Day in May. We are also hoping to have our own website up and running from January 2010, with the help of Andy Barclay from the MAD walkers. We now have a footpath officer for the Salford area who is keen to undertake access work for which the Ramblers are well known. Thank you to our Chair, Salle and all the committee members who have given their time and support to the success of this Group.

Margaret Metcalf

NEW MILLS & DISTRICT GROUP

As is standard practice for the Group, it continues to offer a wide variety of walks in terms of distance and terrain to satisfy the needs of all of its members. We continue to provide up to two walks every Sunday and two Wednesday walks per month, including a few on a Saturday. On the current programme thirteen of the walks make use of public transport. Our thanks go to Joyce Tyldesley for her continued efforts to ensure that a full complement of leaders and walks are available.

The club has a new social secretary, Jenny Fairbanks, who has provided a very full and interesting programme of activities for the winter programme including speakers whose subjects range from the Snows of Kilimanjaro to Lead Mining in the Peak District. The annual dinner has been arranged to take place at the Bistro, Chapel-en-le-Frith in February 2010, and for good measure Jenny has arranged a New Year Hot-Pot at the Fox, at Brookbottom. Jenny is following in the footsteps of Rosemary Kellock and we are confident that she will maintain the standards established by Rosemary.

Last October club members enjoyed a weekend at Plas Tan y Bwlch, and the location for the planned weekend for Spring 2010 is Glaramara at Seatoller, always a club favourite. Once again our thanks must go to the social secretary.

Our thanks to Jane Hughes for organising the Christmas Dinner; this year venue is the George at Hayfield. As on previous occasions two walks will precede the dinner. Thanks are also due to Alan Kendrick. His coach outing to Betws-y-Coed was, as usual, a great success.

Bob Kelly, our Footpath Officer, has had another busy year and reports as follows:-
Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and the Peak Park have repaired a number of bridleways around Mam Tor. DCC have published the first draft of a charter detailing what the public can expect from their maintenance operations.

The Peak Park's reports on the eight high priority routes used by offroaders have been published. They can only be described as very disappointing. The only TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) proposed for High Peak is a ban on 4x4s but not motorcycles on Washgates, a track to the SW of Buxton. DCC have agreed how to implement the Winchester Judgement but need to actually do it.

A poorly conceived diversion of Glossop 17 put forward by HPBC was rejected at a public inquiry.

The Group continues to contribute to the Local Development Frameworks for both High Peak and the Peak Park. Traffic and parking are the major issues.

Thanks are again due to all members of the committee and our walks leaders who have helped to ensure another successful year.

Roger Hartley
Chairman

MAD WALKERS

This year was the 5th anniversary of the MAD Walkers and to celebrate this milestone we held a number of events, of which the 'Jewel in the Crown' was the Summer Ball held at the beginning of August 2009, a glittering occasion attended by many members both past and present.

Yet again, the MAD Walkers have had a very active year, with the same mix of walks, weekends and socials as in previous years. There has been a choice of walks available on most weekends along with midweek walks during the summer. We have seen a real surge of enthusiasm for our weekends away, with almost all becoming fully booked straightaway. As usual, our walks programme has been complemented with our formal and informal socials, making sure members never found themselves at a loss for things to do!

As at the end of September, membership stands at 327 members – a significant 18% increase from last year's 278 members. About 58% of our membership are female, the same as last year, not too much of a disparity to require any action. Membership has continued to grow at a steady rate over the last couple of years, a result of the group's broad appeal to a wide range of members.

Membership Statistics as at September 2009, compared with last AGM (April 2008)

Geographic Spread (postcode area)	2008	2009
M	167 (61%)	194 (59%)
SK	49 (18%)	69 (21%)
BL	15 (6%)	18 (6%)
OL	11 (4%)	12 (4%)
WA	15 (6%)	15 (5%)
WN	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
other areas	13 (5%)	17 (5%)
total membership	278	327
Gender Spread		
Male (Mr.)	116 (42%)	138 (42%)
Female (remainder inc. Dr.)	161 (58%)	189 (58%)

Walks-wise we have had 87 walks over the year up to September 2009 with an average distance of 9.4 miles. We have had a healthy attendance with an average of 22 people per walk – comparable to last year. The most attended walk was Alastair's Chorlton Ees evening walk on 12th August, with 50 walkers attending, so congratulations to him. Again, a significant proportion of our walks use public transport. We would like to thank all of our walk leaders and the drivers that got us there.

It has been another fantastic year for weekends away, with a diverse mixture of trips ranging from camping, youth hostelling and city breaks. Worthy of separate mention is the Mad Walkers' flagship New Year's Eve trip with the infamous fancy dress party, which was held this year in Great Hucklow in the Peak District. Various new areas have been explored and visited by the group, including the much-loved regions of the Lakes, Snowdonia and Scotland. Amongst the many highlights, was a week-long expedition organised by Nardia exploring the vast volcanic regions of

Iceland. A sample of our other trips included winter walking and Munro bagging in Scotland, Welsh scrambling, and of course Black Sheep beer tasting to finish off a hard day in the hills. A much needed relaxing weekend was spent over at Beverley folk festival where plenty of folk music and local beer helped us recover from the days' walks. Weekends are always a great experience for members, allowing more time to get to know each other and make new friends. Thanks to all the volunteers who have helped to make this a great year for weekends away. Plans for next year's trips are well under way and are looking just as exciting!

It has also been another active year for socials. Our Socials Secretary has worked to organise events that feel welcoming to new members. We have had the usual mix of meals, nights out and trips to the theatre and other cultural events. Chris Morris's 'sociambles' have also been popular, giving members the opportunity to spend a relaxing Friday evening in the countryside on short walks from pub to pub. New for this year have been the days out to nearby cities. These have proven popular with members new and old, where people have had the chance to take in some of the cultural highlights of our neighbouring cities in the company of fellow walkers.

This year, the financial year has been extended this year to run for 17 months in order for the group to align with The Ramblers' financial year. During this period all but one weekend ran at a small profit and the Mad Walkers ball made £29 profit. Currently the interest rate on the Unity account is very low approx. 0.1 % per annum and in the next financial year accounts yielding higher interest rates will be investigated. The group did not submit a budget to Area this year as our 'main' outgoings are fully covered by the membership payment the group receives. The accounts were audited and approved on 21 October 2009. It should be noted that one transaction which the bank have treated as a September transaction shows a date of 1 October – this relates to the bank reporting.

Looking to the future, we have a full walking and socials programme stretching though the winter months, as well as more weekends away planned for this year. Much of this would not be possible without the considerable efforts of the many members of the group, and the committee wish to thank them wholeheartedly for their efforts. We hope and expect that the following year will be just as successful.

Finally, at our AGM in November 2009, our chair for the past few years, Richard Washington, stepped down after four years in the role during which time the MAD Walkers matured as an area group, and we would like to thank him for all his work over the last few years and wish him and Kirsten well with their move to Canada.

MAD Walkers Committee.

OLDHAM GROUP

The committee has worked very hard on your behalf over the last year and so I offer my most sincere and heartfelt thanks to all members of the committee for their efforts and regular attendance at the monthly Thursday meetings.

John Foster and Shirley Hardman have had their patience tested by the software introduced by the Ramblers' Association! We are advised that individuals are no longer members when they have not paid their fees. This has caused problems for us ensuring that our members are recorded as such if they lead walks. Be assured that we make every effort to ensure that our leader's membership records are up to date because of insurance implications. John has mastered the accounting procedures. We are fortunate indeed to have an accountant working with us!

It is very much appreciated that committee/non committee members and leaders give their own time freely to ensure the continued existence and smooth running of the Group.

Oldham Ramblers' enjoy an excellent programme of social events. We have, this year, had;

Two youth hostel weekends	Flat earth walks programme
A hoe down	HF weekend
A walking week	The Pink Palace experience
Chinese meal	Italian meal
Social evening	Two coach trips
Wednesday pub walks	Dinner dance

All these events have brought a lot of enjoyment to our members. Much planning and hard work goes into the making of these events which I am sure is appreciated by all.

Although we have such a robust social element to our group there is a serious side to rambling and we must keep in mind the reason that Oldham Ramblers exists. We exist primarily to promote walking and to keep our footpaths open and fit to walk. I think that our future walks programme should reflect this aim more, linking in with the local footpath work being engaged in by our own footpath secretary, John Walton. At least one walk per programme should be considered to be linked in this way.

I have saved John Walton to the last as he deserves a special thanks for his outstanding contribution in his capacity of footpath secretary of the Oldham Ramblers. John really does an inordinate amount of work for us. It must sometimes feel like having a full time, unpaid, job?!! His work is invaluable to our group, the Ramblers' Association and to the local community. Once again, thank you John for your outstanding contribution.

From time to time members pass on comments, ideas, problems to the committee. I can assure you all that these are discussed at committee meetings. Problems cannot always be solved or wishes met especially when most things involve having money! Simply, we don't, as a Group, have much to spare.

It has been suggested, from the membership, that getting leaders is problematic due to the rising costs of petrol and parking fees; walks being too far away; no training in map and compass use available for would-be leaders. We do not have funds to re-reimburse leaders for costs incurred whilst undertaking recces or to pay for training so what can we do if these things are having an effect on our ability to function as a walking group?

Fund raising for training? Would you like more coach trips? Would you support them? They have to be self-financing. Could the more experienced leaders give classes at the weekends away? Could they let someone shadow them on walks? Would you support a public transport walks programme? Alan Forster is keen to get one off the ground. Anyone interested please see Alan. Do you want walks closer to home? Please let the committee know what you want together with your ideas of how to achieve your goals. Come to the committee meetings. I will ensure that you are given time to have your say.

Sue Liptrot

ROCHDALE GROUP

On the whole, we have had a good year with some new members and it was good to see some younger walkers joining us on some great walks. There was a point during the summer that some officers were stepping down from their duties, for different reasons, and it looked like the Group was going to be in disarray. But, thankfully, at our AGM in November, everything just seemed to come together and a new group of officers was elected, including myself as new Chairman. It was with regret that we had to say farewell to our Secretary and Walks Co-ordinator, Suzanne Blatcher, who has emigrated to Australia. Looking forward to a new year and doing what the Ramblers do best, and that's getting out there walking come rain or shine.

David Kay

STOCKPORT GROUP

2009 has been a very successful year for our Group. We are lucky to have such an active participation from our members in leading the walks.

Most weekends we are able to offer A, B and C walks, so we usually have something to suit everyone. Our local footpath walks on Saturdays are very popular but we need more of them to satisfy demand. We ask that those who enjoy these walks consider volunteering to lead the occasional walk for us. Our B walks on the first and third Tuesdays of the month are very well attended. The C/C+ walks on the second Tuesday, however, have not so there is now some doubt whether we will get enough leaders for these to continue.

We are very proud of our new website which Kay Pell has constructed and keeps completely up to date. It has a link to the Walksfinder, gives full details of our weekends away and other social events, shows photographs from recent walks, and an online notice board is proving very popular for our members. There is also an enquiry form for interested parties.

We have had four weekends away. In late March we rented a private farmhouse in Acton Scott, Shropshire for a long weekend. In June we stayed at Coniston Youth Hostel and again, we were very lucky with the weather and enjoyed good walking conditions. In early September we went to Duffton. The weather was rather wet and misty but we were rewarded with a fabulous view from High Cup Nick. The YH was very welcoming and the food at the pub was great! All in all a wonderful weekend away.

At our recent AGM we said goodbye to Nigel Sangster as our Chairman, also to Barry McCabe and Edgar Ernstbrunner. Thanks to all of them for all their hard work and input. We welcome Nancy Morse to the Chair. We are looking forward to some dry weather in 2010 and we wish all Groups an enjoyable year's walking.

Stockport Group Committee

WIGAN AND DISTRICT GROUP

For the first time since 2000 I am pleased to report that we had a full complement of the Group Committee with all key officer positions filled. At the AGM in 2008, I said that I would be standing down as Chairman at the 2009 AGM as by that time I would have served in that role for a continuous period of eight years.

I am pleased to report that Peter Wilson who has served as Vice Chairman for a number of years has taken over as Chairman. Peter has been our principal walks leader for the past nine years and he brings with him to his new role a wealth of experience. We know that the Group is in good hands with Peter at the helm.

All the walks during the past year have been very well supported and the annual Spring weekend walking holiday, which we have organised over the past nine years, is now a well established part of our programme.

Wigan Council having formally published and launched its Rights of Way Improvements Plan has made good progress in implementing the plan. This has resulted in the upgrading and resurfacing of over 5 km of footpaths and multi-user routes to a very good standard and replacing an old bridge over the canal adjoining Pennington Country Park with a new 3 metre wide bridge. The total cost of these works is in the order of £200K. Funding for this work comes primarily from the Local Transport Plan and priority is being given to footpaths near schools and places of work to create safe walking and cycling routes.

The future does not look so encouraging as two members of staff of the Rights of Way Team have left to take up other appointments and this has resulted in a 50% cut in staff working on rights of way work. There is no indication when, or if these posts will be filled and to add to the gloom, funding for projects is becoming increasingly uncertain with some major projects now being mothballed.

Enforcement work on obstructed or overgrown paths tends to be frustratingly ponderous and legal work on claims for footpaths has come to a standstill as the legal team are giving priority to gating orders which, I am pleased to report, have in general been non controversial.

Finally I would like to say a sincere thank you to all my Committee colleagues for all the help and support they have given during my eight year term of office as Group Chairman.

John Pimblett
Access Officer and Immediate Past Chairman

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