

## **RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION BARNARD CASTLE GROUP NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2010**

### **Appointment of new Group Secretary**

We are pleased to report that Jo Bird has been appointed as Group Secretary. We wish Jo well in her new post.

### **Winter walking**

The snow may have caused lots of walks to be cancelled due to the difficulty of travelling to starting points. However, short local walks in the snow can be wonderful for anyone with a public path near their home, and I for one had some splendid hours outside on glorious sunny days when everywhere looked as good, if not better than a Christmas card, which I wouldn't have missed for anything! (Jo Bird)

### **Slide shows**

These are public slide shows and **everyone** is welcome to attend. We show some wonderful photographs from travels all over the world and serve tea/coffee and biscuits as refreshments – often with home-made scones – all included in the price of £2.50. Please do come along and join us for a very informal evening event. No need to book – just turn up on the night. (Judith Baker)

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> April:** 7:30 pm in the Methodist Church Hall, Barnard Castle  
'The High Andes', by Dave Williams

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June:** 7:30 pm in the Methodist Church Hall, Barnard Castle  
'From Africa to Borneo', by Judith Baker

### **Ramblers' Association 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

'Britain's walking charity is 75 this year. Since its 1935 inauguration, it has helped coax, campaign, and path by path build England, Scotland and Wales into some of the most walk-friendly countries in the world. It is at the heart of walking in Britain.' ([www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk))

In order to celebrate this important milestone, the RA has promoted a national series of Baton Walks - an actual baton is not being passed around, but groups taking part will each receive one as a keepsake. The north east region will organise these walks during June and we are celebrating in Teesdale on **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June**, with two walks from Bowlees, followed by a meal at Newbiggin Village Hall, cooked by the WI. Local is good and we hope also to promote Teesdale and the Barnard Castle Ramblers' Group as part of this campaign. Details of the national picture can be found on the main RA website (address above). As always, new members are always welcome, so please see details on the walks programme if you would like to join us on the day. (Donna Harris)

### **Photographs for Joan's scrapbook**

Please remember to send Joan copies of any photographs from walks for entry into the Scrapbooks. Hard copies would be much appreciated, where possible, or email to:  
[ijmar8@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ijmar8@tiscali.co.uk). Many thanks. (Donna Harris)

### **Food for thought**

As this is the 75th Anniversary of the RA, we are trying to promote the RA as much as possible. Ian wondered if we could try the 'Potter and Pint' again. Clearly it is too late to have anything in June (except maybe the last week in June added to the start of the next programme). Perhaps we could have them in July and August? It doesn't even have to be the same day every week, but would maybe suggest a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Maybe we could alternate with a morning walk ending up at a pub or cafe for a snack. Perhaps 4-6 miles would be ideal. To make it work we would need a few leaders. Ian and I would be prepared to do one evening and one morning walk. We need some feedback from both leaders and members before the committee meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup> so do please get in touch with your views. (Joan Martin)

### **Membership**

After nearly two years, Head Office have got the new membership database sorted out and the system simplified considerably. The downside is that we now have a true picture of our membership. The figures have been masked for several years with members still being 'active' even when they are several months overdue with their payments. The biggest downside is that, instead of a membership of around 100 (which we have had for several years), we have dropped down to 87. This more than a 10% loss, when the national average loss is around 2%, so clearly we aren't doing very well. I have tried to contact as many 'lapsed' members as possible to see if I can find out why they are not renewing their membership. As you can imagine, the answers were very diverse. Some don't like the aggressive campaigning by Head Office and others are annoyed at the mismanagement that has gone on this past year. Thankfully, this issue is being addressed at the present moment. Others state that they are cutting down on

expenses due to the recession and the fact that the membership fee has gone up. The other reason is family commitments. I have got to say that we are not the only organisation suffering. So many people nowadays do not seem to want to 'join' any organisation. We also have lots of competition from many other 'walking groups'. Unfortunately, most of these walking groups make no contribution to the constant fight to keep footpaths open and in good order. Hopefully, as 2010 is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the RA, we may get a bit more publicity and hopefully some more new members. **If anyone has any ideas of how we can boost our membership, the committee would like to hear from you.** (Joan Martin)

### **Area AGM**

Several members of the Barnard castle Group attended the Area AGM at Heighington recently. This was a very interesting meeting as the guest speaker was Andrew Bibby, who is one of the RA Trustees. His talk was mainly in 3 parts, the achievements of the past, the present situation, and the hopes for the future. After his talk there were many questions, which he answered frankly. Several of them were about the fact that the 'rank and file' were very unhappy about the way Head Office have been running things in the past few years. He acknowledged the shortcomings and said that drastic measures have been taken to rectify the situation. It had also been acknowledged that in the past there hasn't been enough appreciation of the rank and file. Thankfully, at long last the membership database was now sorted. The outcome meant that we now had a true picture of the membership situation (see above). At the election of officers, things remain the same except that Mike Collier resigned as Area Membership Secretary and no one took his place. (Joan Martin)

### **Footpaths and access**

(Jo Bird, Group Secretary and Access and Countryside Officer)

#### **Coastal Access**

What good news that coastal access is now on the statute books! Now the detail has to be worked out, starting with some pilot areas, but part of the Dorset coast and Cumbria are high on the list. Meantime, Durham's eleven miles of coast is reasonably accessible, and very interesting from the point of view of geology, archaeology, history and plant life. I know that just south of Seaham in June the cliff top is scattered with orchids. The north Yorkshire coast has good access for much of its length, and summer is a good time to visit. But some improvements will be welcome in due course.

#### **Restrictions of access land**

Natural England consulted the Ramblers on proposals to continue restrictions near Langdon Beck, where the black grouse lek, to which we agreed. We also agreed to their proposals, in the interests of the statutory 'least restrictive option', to reduce restrictions at Foggerthwaite, where an area of moorland is so difficult to access that it is rarely if ever used. Consultations from national bodies are responded to by the Ramblers' central office following consultation with local access officers.

#### **Mapping Review of Access Land**

Access land is coming up for decadal review as a requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. I submitted some suggestions to central office as part of the review process, namely that there is some semi-improved land not included on the map that has the characteristics of uncultivated land that could well be included. Also that consideration should be given to including land that was previously excluded due to being classified as improved following aerial inspection only. If such land is limestone and grazed by sheep, it will have appeared as green as improved land. I also supported ideas for the south of England, for the inclusion of more downland and for more attention being paid to provision of access to reach access land where sometimes there is none at present.

#### **Proposed Railway Path**

Provision of a path for all non-motorised users along the old railway line from West Auckland to Barnard Castle was considered a few years back, but dropped due to lack of funds. Now there is a Management Plan 2008 – 2018, produced by the South West Durham Heritage Corridor Partnership, on a smaller scale. There are still funding problems, and much of the Plan is unlikely to be carried out in the foreseeable future, but work is to start, section by section, on short lengths of this route, as funds become available. But don't hold your breath, as there has been no indication of any funds being made available, or from where they might be obtained. In fact, rights of way and public access is already threatened by cuts in funding.

#### **Definitive Map**

Durham County Council has announced that the whole of its definitive map will become available on its website on 14<sup>th</sup> February, which is very commendable. But it should be noted that no part should be downloaded, for copyright reasons, and it still has a number of mapping errors to be corrected by legal processes at some time in the future.

[www.barnardcastleramblers.org.uk](http://www.barnardcastleramblers.org.uk)

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