

IOW Ramblers Annual Report 2010/11

From the Area Chairman, David Howarth

There has been much progress this year. Our communication with Members and the wider world, has improved significantly. The newsletter has been completely overhauled and we now have a full colour publication which has been received favourably. The web site has gone from strength to strength and is now truly a one stop shop for island walkers. The County Press continues to publish our monthly walk and the walks programme. Several articles have been published in the newspaper this year.

We were honoured indeed to receive the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service at a ceremony at Carisbrooke Castle. The Earl of Wessex presented the award and chatted to Members.

Our Access for All campaign continues and our second easy access trail at Alverstone has been opened. The Donate a Gate Scheme is now firmly established on the Island. We continue to work with Hampshire Roamability to identify accessible walks for the less mobile.

Our financial situation has been improved recently. Although we are receiving less book sales, we have introduced gift aid for our donors. We have also received sponsorship from Wightlink and Donate a Gate suppliers.

Our membership numbers have fallen in line with a national trend. We have introduced a Walker Friendly pub scheme to publicise the IOW Ramblers. However with over 90% of our members above 50 years of age, we do need to explore more opportunities to generate enthusiasm for walking amongst all social groups.

Access for All - Alverstone Easy Access Walk

A major project was undertaken throughout the year to improve access at Alverstone Mead and Youngwoods Copse Nature Reserves. This was a joint project with Wight Nature Fund. 80% of the funding was from The Leader Fund – a joint EU and Defra initiative.

New boardwalks, gates and steps have been installed to improve access for the less mobile person and to encourage walking by all. A new footpath has been created at Youngwoods Copse. A trail leaflet is widely available.

The new trail was opened recently by our High Sheriff.

Access for All - County Press Walks

Monthly walks are being published in our local newspaper. These walks are easy going walks designed to generate enthusiasm for walking. 21 walks have been published.

Website www.iowramblers.com

Further improvements have been made. It is now possible to download trail leaflets, Donate a Gate leaflet, County Press walks and to purchase our guide books directly using paypal. Numerous queries have been answered via the web site.

Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

We were presented with this prestigious award by Prince Edward at Carisbrooke Castle. The award citation reads "Isle of Wight Ramblers – Campaigning for greater access to the countryside and encouraging community participation in walking activities". The award is the MBE for charities and the Isle of Wight is the first Ramblers area to win this award.

A celebratory event was held for all members and guests. This was attended by the Lord Lieutenant, Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Island MP Andrew Turner, and Ramblers Chairman Rodney Whittaker.

Access Officer Report – Mike Slater, Area Access Officer

Donate a Gate Scheme

As of Sept 2011 our innovative Donate a Gate scheme has been operating for 18 months. We have received 34 donations providing nearly £14,000 to replace stiles with gates and improve access to IOW footpaths. Gate donations can provide matching funds as part of grant aided larger footpath development projects. Also many of the donations qualify for gift aid which will support other IOW Ramblers charitable activities. Initial problems with getting gates installed have now been overcome and all these 34 gates have now been installed. We are now more actively promoting the scheme with the help of a leaflet and 40 plus display points around the Island.

Access Land

During the year we have become aware of two instances where landowners have tried to restrict public access to open access land (designated under the CROW act). The two problems at Northcourt Down and Woodhouse Copse have been brought to

the attention of both the ROW department and the LAF. We will need to monitor these cases to ensure that in the future similar infringements are discouraged.

Coastal Access

In spite of several representations to relevant politicians and civil servants we have not received any commitment that the Isle of Wight will be included under the provisions of the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act. The IOW Ramblers are therefore launching a CA campaign to gather support from both business and community groups across the Island. We will need to lobby and persuade decision makers in DEFRA, Natural England, and the IOW Council that the Island should be included in the next stage of Coastal Access implementation.

Walk and Talk Events

With a view to involving IOW Rambler's members more actively in walking environment issues, a programme of three 'Walk and Talk' events are underway.

These comprise a walk combined with a short talk and discussion over lunch. Topics being covered are-

- Nature conservation
- Coastal Access
- Footpath improvement work

Twenty plus people have attended each of the first two events.

Footpath Issues - Mike Marchant, Area Footpath Secretary

With quite a few outstanding problems on the Isle of Wight footpath network, it was a year when an effort was made to get some of them resolved. To help us in achieving a reasonable target of success, a regular meeting (every three months) was held with a representative from the Rights of Way (RoW) Department as well as meetings of the Footpath Sub-Committee (FSC) (six times a year) and Footpath Representatives (FRs) (twice a year).

It was decided to try and 'tidy up' the footpaths criss-crossing Sandown and Shanklin Golf Course to minimise any problems which might occur when walkers cannot see golfers and vice-versa. To do this representatives from the Ramblers and the Golf Club walked all the footpath on the course and it was agreed just the main footpaths would be better identified to encourage footpath users away from some of the other footpaths which in some cases are no longer useable. The task of way marking these footpaths has been left for the RoW to direct and the Golf Club to implement.

The riding of horses on the footpaths around Binstead, near Ryde, has been a 'thorn in our side' for some while and progress to sort this problem out has been slow but it has not been forgotten.

Planning applications are being carefully and quickly looked at now that you have only one week to look into some applications like reservoirs with three weeks for others. Banks of Photo Voltaic (PV) cells to generate electricity from the sun mounted on farming land come under the three weeks category and there were six different applications in during the year for these although to date only two have actually been installed.

We welcomed Charlie Davidson onto the FSC this year and with Charlie's knowledge of the West Wight footpaths, it is hoped problems will take less time to resolve.

The new mapping officer at the RoW very soon had another task to do due to the person responsible for any footpath problems leaving the RoW. Fortunately he was able to pick up the task quite quickly and footpath problems did not suffer any delay in being attended to.

We are always looking for additional members for the FSC and FRs so please make contact with any member of the existing FSC.

Work Parties - Mike Marchant, Area Footpath Secretary

We have been reliant on suitable tasks for our Work Party from the RoW and for one reason or another there have not been too many.

Two Ramblers installed about 350 off fingers onto posts all around the Island at positions where footpaths come onto roads.

We completed five long boardwalks on footpaths BB6 and BB7 during the year to provide a dry walk in wet areas of land although these footpaths are mainly used at high tide as the beach is then impassable.

Finance was provided by the loW Ramblers and others for a professional company to completely remake the boardwalk which goes from the road over Alverstone Mead Nature Reserve and we completed the project by installing some steps to provide an easier walk up to the gate at the entrance to the wood.

Area Membership Report - Susan Oldham, Area Membership Secretary

Membership figures as of 1st October 2011 are:

Main group	518
Wight Sole	31
Not in a group	1
TOTAL	550

The total membership figure is about 50 lower than that reported last year. This is disappointing in view of the Ramblers' objective of increasing membership over the year, but is reflected nationally. The good news for the Isle of Wight Ramblers is that membership of Wightsole, the group for younger walkers, has bucked the trend and is rising steadily.

Efforts to improve membership levels have continued nevertheless, with more publicity in the media, wider distribution of the new magazine and the introduction of walker-friendly pubs.

Membership Services at Central Office are now able to provide a weekly list of new members so that welcome letters can be sent out more expeditiously, rather than waiting for the end of the month.

Membership rates remain at £31 for individual membership and £41 for joint, with a £10 reduction on the first year's membership if paying by Direct Debit.

I am now standing down as Membership Secretary after three years in the job. I would like to thank people – especially David Howarth and Jackie Hough - for their help and support, and wish Bobby Carlin all the best as she takes over from me.

Isle of Wight Group Report –Derek Corke, Chairman

The committee held six bi-monthly meetings during the year and I am most grateful for all the hard work undertaken by the committee.

The main responsibility of the group committee remains to plan, organise and conduct walks and the social programme of events. During the year under review the total number of walks held was 208.

Our group was involved in the organisation of the Isle of Wight Walking Festival and this involvement will continue in 2012.

Brian Ould successfully led the annual holiday to Dartmoor. The summer shows were again co-ordinated by Pam Dana who is to be congratulated on the improved presentations.

The group desperately needs new leaders to come forward. Please do consider if you can volunteer to help.

Linda Sheasby is currently in the process of organising a First Aid course for established and potential walks leaders. Please contact her if you are interested in partaking. The Group is trying in every way to encourage new members to join the Ramblers and I would ask all current members to make a special effort to speak to any new faces who attend walks. Various new Social Activities will be organised in 2012 and I ask everyone to participate as much as they can.

Some new members of the group committee are needed. Please consider seriously if you can help and if you can, contact me on 01983 523456

Wight Sole Report – Gary Clarke, Chairman

Wight sole was officially formed in May 2005 after initial gatherings late in 2004. Despite some turnover (due to members leaving the Island), membership numbers have remained fairly stable at around 30-40. However we have a contact list of over 40 and many of our walkers are members of Island group one or mainland branches of RA. Members of both IOW groups to join each other's walks.

We have continued to walk every two or three weeks at the weekend (usually on Sunday) to try to fit with most people's working and home life. Saturday walks have been more or less stopped due to their lack of popularity. Walks are various lengths and across the Island (ranging from around 4 to 16 miles) as well as occasional mainland visits, and usually start at 10.30. During the summer, we hold midweek evening walks. These have proved more popular this year than in 2008 & 2009 when the weather was poor. We are still experimenting with a start time that is convenient /attractive for evening walks. We had also to cancel a number of walks on the programme due to torrential rain on the Sundays during the autumn. However, we have completed over 20 beautiful walks since the last AGM and we continue to find new pathways and areas of interest that we have not previously encountered

Walks are well attended (averaging at around 12- 14) and there has been a decision to not meet more regularly for risk of diluting attendance rates. However the number of new recruits seeking to lead walks has been somewhat limited so far.

Links with similar RA groups on the mainland (Wessex Weekend Walkers & Dorset Young Walkers) have been less fruitful this year and we endeavour to re-establish links.

Members of Wight Sole also continue to help staff the RA stalls at the summer shows which raised our profile and helped generate interest. The most successful means of attracting interest or membership has been the simple listing of all our walks in the County Press what's on section by Alison Cardy.

Our programme is decided by the committee about 3-4 months ahead, and is viewable on our website www.wightsole.org.uk. We have continued to list the approximate duration of the walks after requests to do so by the membership. Anyone can look at the website, but group members have a password to see the contact details of the walk leader and the start location.

We endeavour to have representation at Area meetings but this is not always possible due to other commitments. For example the present Chair is a school governor and has to attend meetings held at the same time as Area meetings