



Cymdeithas Parc Bannau Brycheiniog The Brecon Beacons Park Society

TRANSCRIPT

of the 18th Annual General Meeting held at Garwnant Visitor Centre
on Saturday, 12th June, 2010 at 10.45am.

1. Attendance.

The meeting was attended by 32 members of the Society and 3 invited guests – names on file.

Apologies for absence were received from 23 members and one invited guest – names on file.

The Chairman, Charles Henderson, welcomed members and our invited guests – Mary Taylor (Chair of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority), Norma Barry (the new Director of Welsh Affairs for the Campaign for National Parks) and Julian Atkins (Director of Countryside and Land Management at the Brecon Beacons Park Authority).

2. Minutes of the 17th Annual General Meeting.

- held on Saturday 13th June, 2009 at Llangasty Village Hall, (previously circulated to all members) –

The Minutes were approved, subject to a correction of the spelling of the name of Howard Dray in item 4.

3. Annual Report, including the Chairman's Report for the year ended 31st March 2009.

(previously circulated to all members) – The Report was accepted without comment.

4. Treasurer's Report and Statement of Accounts for Year Ended 31st March 2009.

(previously circulated to all members) – The Treasurer, Ben Sladen, spoke to this and to the expansion of some items in the Statement of Accounts, which had been requested at the last AGM. He indicated that our financial situation is healthy and shows every sign of remaining so. In reply to a question, he said that we now have 682 members in 570 households. Ed Broomfield, noting an apparent bank balance of £25,661, asked why it is kept in reserve and not spent, particularly as it is not gaining significant interest. Ben explained that it is felt to be appropriate to regard £7000 as a necessary reserve and that we have only £13,762 in the General Fund, of which the Life Fund can be spent as necessary, but the Restricted Fund can be spent only on items which have been specified by those from whom the money has come. He indicated, further, that monies have been ear-marked for items which have been identified during this year.

The Chairman pointed out that we cannot be certain that membership numbers and income would remain the same in future years and that we do need a reserve to cover possible eventualities.

Sean O'Donoghue (slightly tongue-in-cheek) suggested that Walks Leaders might be sent on courses to improve their leadership skills, including education in the flora, fauna, landscape and geology in the Park. He asked that First Aid Kits be provided for all Walks Leaders and was informed by Jim that this is already in hand, as regards both provision and replacements where necessary. There being no further comments on the Financial Report, The Chairman thanked Ben for his work throughout the year and acceptance of the Report was proposed and seconded.

5. (i) Election of Officers.

The following Officers (having been proposed and seconded) were elected:

<u>Honorary Chairman</u>	– Charles Henderson
<u>Honorary Vice-Chairman</u>	– Jim Wilson
<u>Honorary Treasurer</u>	- Ben Sladen
<u>Honorary Secretary</u>	– Elizabeth Gibbs

5. (ii) Election of Other Members of the Executive Committee.

The following Executive Committee Members (having been proposed and seconded) were elected:

Chris Barber
Clive Eiles
Stephen Flynn
William Gibbs
David Thomas
Anne Pritchard

6. Appointment of Honorary Auditor.

Peter Roberts was re-appointed as Honorary Auditor.

7. Any Other Business.

Sean O'Donoghue asked whether or not any further thought has been given to his suggestion, at the last AGM, of setting up a car-sharing 'pool' by means of an emailing list. His concern was not with the 'carbon-footprint' but with the over-filling of limited car-parking spaces. The Chairman stated that this has been discussed in the Executive Committee but that the terms of the Data Protection Act have prevented implementation so far. Clive Eiles explained that, following advice from the Information Commissioner, it was agreed that, when renewal forms are sent out at the end of the year, members will be asked whether or not they agree to their contact details being published within the membership. A list of those who have agreed will then be circulated to all members of the Society.

Sean felt that a simple emailing list of members who agreed to join a car-sharing scheme would suffice.

Roger Austin suggested that, as we already have the contact details of the Walks Leaders, it should not be a problem to also have a list with the contact details of people who are willing to car-share. David Thomas indicated that it has been difficult, as with management of the web-site, to find someone to manage such a list. Sean stated that he had offered to do this. The Chairman said that, after the list has been obtained in December, the Committee would take up this offer. Peter Beynon agreed with Sean's proposals and asked why this hadn't been done during the past year. He also suggested that, as all emails are sent out as 'blind copies', no-one else would know, or need to know, other people's email addresses and, therefore, this would not transgress the law on Data Protection. The Chairman apologised that the matter had not been resolved during the past year and indicated that it is hoped that it will be resolved in the near future. Anne Pritchard suggested that she would include a note in the next Walks Programme asking people to get to know other members in their local area and to contact each other with regard to possible car-sharing. Anne Wilson suggested that intending walkers should contact the Walk Leader and that the Leader could send out an email to those people to suggest car-sharing, where appropriate.

Monima O'Connor indicated that she might be interested in managing our web-site.

William Gibbs informed the meeting that the Beacons Way Artwork plaque at Carreg Cennen had been ripped out and stolen. However, the original mould had been retained and another plaque has been cast and it is thought that it should be replaced as it was. William suggested that members should take a free copy of the Art Trail Booklet today and leave a donation towards the cost of the replacement of the plaque. Wendy Sladen agreed that it should be replaced in its original form but thought that serious consideration should be given to other options, if it were stolen again. It was suggested that the back of the new plaque should be engraved with the Society details but it was thought that it had been stolen for its scrap value rather than as a work of art.

Elizabeth Gibbs spoke about the aims and activities of the "Art in the Park" project and indicated that this is to be expanded and is something on which the Society will be spending some of its financial reserves.

Sean O'Donoghue asked whether or not we still wish to recruit new members, as had been agreed last year. He suggested that we should have a presence at University Freshers Days and in Student Union Newspapers, etc. He suggested, also, that we should have a Press Officer – something which he had suggested last year and which he had offered to take on. The Chairman stated that we have, in fact, recruited a hundred members during the past year, though we have lost a similar number.

He also explained that the Committee had looked at the experience of CNP, which had expended a very great deal of effort and expense in an endeavour to recruit members but had succeeded in recruiting only a very small number, relatively speaking, and we don't, anyway, have the same resources to undertake such a campaign.

Sean responded that he would willingly take on the task of recruitment along the lines which he had outlined and that it would not cost anything to the Society.

Helen Trevor Davies suggested that we would attract more members if we were to offer more moderate walks and asked if more moderate walks are not offered because it is feared that there would be too great a number of people on them. The Chairman explained that we do have very many people who walk in the Society and that, a couple of years ago, increasing numbers on individual walks was becoming a problem with too many on any one walk with regard to enjoyment and to health and safety issues. He explained that increased numbers of walks had been arranged but that we have only a limited number of about forty walks leaders. More importantly, he said, the Society is looking to recruit members who would not join simply because of our walking programme but in order to support the other aims and objectives of the Society in terms of the well-being of the Park.

Jim Wilson explained that the walking programme is tuned to the current membership, whose wishes and requirements are known and that, if it were to be used to aid in a recruitment drive, then it would have to be changed in some respects.

Monima O'Connor suggested that we could engender a lot of interest in the Society, particularly in its walking programme, if we were to target the charities who are involved with sponsored treks to foreign mountain peaks, etc.

Anne Wilson asked if the Society ever has a presence in the Mountain Centre to promote itself and its aims. Anne Barber said that she and Chris will be attending the August Fair for three days and that they will take leaflets and membership application forms with them. They will also do this at the Usk Show. The Chairman drew attention to the fact that there are proposed changes to the Mountain Centre and felt that we might then be able to have a permanent presence. Julian Atkins said that this is still in the planning stage but agreed that the Park Authority would welcome our presence there, in due course.

Howard Dray suggested that we should advertise ourselves through other organisations and groups, such as the Brecknock Wildlife Trust. Sean informed us that Hay-on-Wye are going to have a walking festival in September of this year and that this would be another opportunity to promote ourselves.

Ben asked how many members present felt that there is any benefit to having a membership card, since these have to be posted to all. Sean O'Donoghue stated that he found it very useful in obtaining discounts in Outdoor shops, though others said that they were able to obtain discounts without showing their card. Wendy Sladen reminded us that one reason for the card was for members to demonstrate their membership on Society walks, though this appears never to have been used. She was of the opinion that very few non-members, who state that they intend to join, actually do so.

She also felt that most Walks Leaders do not ask about membership or ask for money and that some feel that the fee of £5 is too much.

The Chairman informed us that Dilys Harlow, who was our representative on the recent GeoPark Festival, had asked for the topic of qualifications to be raised. Our Society led a number of walks in conjunction with the Festival, as we did last year, but on this occasion a problem arose with regard to the requirement by the Park Authority for Mountain Leadership qualifications.

Jim Wilson said that it was felt by the Executive Committee that a reasonable balance has been struck in that they do not mandate that Walks Leaders have qualifications but strongly encourage it, particularly with regard to a First Aid qualification, which is paid for by the Society. He indicated that a mechanism is at present being looked at by which all of our walks leaders can be encouraged to get, at least, a 'Walking Group Leader' qualification. He stated that it is felt that a significant number of them would cease to lead walks if they were forced to obtain qualifications and that the Society would suffer thereby.

Allan Gibbs stated that he undertakes training for remote care and also works, professionally, in the outdoors. He pointed out that the requirements of 'leadership' on walks are quite different from doing them recreationally. He felt that it would be advantageous for some members of the Society, if they so wished, to obtain a professional qualification. In his opinion, the most appropriate qualification would be "Walking Group Leader" and he and Pav Vitek will be giving a short talk on this on 23rd June at the Crickhowell Resource and Information Centre. However, he stressed that no-one has to have a formal qualification to lead a walk in the mountains in Britain and that they are not attempting to change that in any way.

Julian Atkins explained that because the Park Authority delivers programmes of activities to young people, it is required to be registered with and hold a licence from the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority. A recent review into their current licensing arrangements has highlighted an issue about 'best practice' in the hills. Advice from their technical assessor and lawyers has been that they should deliver walks to the highest professional standard and this means that they are having to change their stance on leaders' qualifications. They are trying to get through this year and to arrive at a firm policy for next year. Julian said that he appreciated the difficulties which this caused during the GeoPark Festival and said that they would be happy to work with us in formulating that policy. The Chairman agreed that it is very important that we should have such discussions.

Sean O'Donoghue asked again whether or not we want more members, want to recruit more members, and whether or not we want him to undertake press-releases and attend Freshers Day Fairs. The Chairman replied that the Executive Committee would have to discuss the matter of attendance at Freshers Day Fairs, unless this meeting were to vote for it.

It was agreed that we need a Press Officer. Anne Wilson proposed Sean for the post; this was seconded by Monima O'Connor and he was elected, *nem con*.

Wendy Sladen then asked why we wanted to have so many new members. She made the point that there is always difficulty with finding sufficient new walks leaders, that this might be prejudiced still further by the possibility of their needing to have qualifications, and that more members will increase the need for more walks and, thus, still more leaders.

The Chairman stated that we are not really looking to recruit more walking members but members who would have an active interest in the environmental aspects of the Society's aims and activities with regard to the well-being of the National Park. He made the point that some Park Societies do not have a walking programme at all, their activities being concentrated entirely on environmental issues.

Peter Beynon wondered whether or not we would have to have a different category of membership for those who do not go on walks, possibly with a lower membership fee, as one could not expect one to pay the full fee but be excluded from walking with the Society. He made it plain that he was not suggesting this course of action. It was agreed that two-tier membership would not be in the interests of the Society.

Robert King pointed out that we are not a 'Walking Society' but a Society set up for the benefit and preservation of the National Park, and asked for more discussion about these aims rather than about walking. The Chairman agreed and responded that the Annual Report demonstrates that the Executive Committee is very active in this regard.

David Murfin stated that two-thirds of members of the Ramblers Association do not go on walks but are active in supporting the principles of the Organisation. Anne Hemingway felt that it all comes down to presentation to potential members in seeking to recruit them.

Anne Wilson pointed out that the majority of the content of "The Beacon" relates to walking rather than to issues relating to the other aspects of the Society's activities. She felt that there should be a lot more information about these other activities. The Chairman pointed out that he has tried to re-dress the balance in his report at the beginning of each edition. The Chairman reminded us that we used to have a Newsletter twice a year between editions of the Beacon. He suggested that, if anyone were to volunteer to edit and produce a newsletter, it could be started again.

Sean O'Donoghue then stated that his offer to be Press Officer was for the Walking Group and that he did not want to be involved in the environmental aspects of the Park in that function.. Discussion ensued during which a number of people spoke to the need for us to have a Press Officer and, particularly, one to represent the total interests of the Society.

Jim Wilson then turned to a topic, which had been discussed in Committee, as to whether or not the membership should be canvassed to get some guidance on what should be the priorities in what the Committee is doing on their behalf.

He felt that they had got most, though not all, right. He asked the meeting, on a show of hands, whether or not this should be done, after Roger Austin had stated emphatically that it should not, and it was unanimously agreed that it was entirely the function of the Committee to make decisions on their priorities.

Elizabeth Gibbs spoke to the Planning and Development function of the Society, which she undertakes almost single-handedly with the input of a great deal of time and effort. She made a plea for volunteers to help with this. She spoke of the up-coming Local Development Plan and urged all members who live in the Park to read the document and to make comment on how it will relate to and affect their local community.

Ed Broomfield asked why lists of volunteer requirements are not published and the Chairman indicated that he does make reference to these in the Beacon. On a further question, he explained some of the functions which volunteers could become involved in.

Wendy Sladen, somewhat rhetorically, wondered whether the Society is, in some ways, trying to do the work of the National Park Authority for them. The Chairman replied that we are defined as a 'critical friend'; we represent outside independent views and make comment on the activities of the Authority. Wendy was of the opinion that we should not expend so much effort in doing what the Park Authority is paid to do.

Norma Barry, as a recently appointed officer of CNP, was invited to speak on this. She was of the opinion that the primary objective of a Park Society should be the preservation of the well-being of the Park and not as a walking group. She also felt that an important aspect of the function of the Society should be to monitor the activities of the Park Authority and to exert pressure upon it when and where appropriate. She made reference to Cwrt y Gollen where CNP and our Society worked hard together to influence the decision-making process and to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Sean O'Donoghue, while agreeing that the activities of the Authority must be monitored, was very greatly concerned that there appears to be far too much opposition and objection to proposed projects. He pointed out that people who live and work in the Park depend on the Park Authority to plan and administer on their behalf and he felt that we should not be hindering them in what is important to living and working there. The Chairman responded that we do not object for the sake of it but only where proposals are unsuitable.

Sean pressed the point of what would be regarded as suitable for new housing development. Elizabeth Gibbs replied that it is felt that such development should be sustainable and should be concentrated in existing towns in the Park, where housing and employment can go together, and not isolated out in the countryside; that there should be emphasis on local-needs housing and that this should be situated in the villages where it is needed; and that the Park, which is a very beautiful area, should not be spoiled by the development of dormitory areas for people who live in the Park but work far outside it. The Chairman made the point that the percentage of planning applications to which we object is very small.

Mary Taylor, Chairman of the Park Authority, said that it is important that we work together on many issues, as it is not only affordable housing applications which come to the Authority, citing the recent problems of the pipeline, applications for the extension of open-cast coal-mining within the Park, and wind-farms on the edges of the Park.

The Chairman referred to applications for wind-farms and said that we do not, necessarily, object to small-scale local applications, particularly from local communities, but that it is felt that we should object to all large-scale developments on the grounds of their adverse impact upon visual amenity within the Park.

Richard Chandler told the meeting that the Committee has, following the successful social event in the form of a Dinner last year, asked him to arrange a ceilidh this year. As this will involve making a financial commitment up-front and in order to avoid making a loss for the Society, he needs to know whether or not members would be interested in attending such an event and, to that end, the Committee has asked Ben Sladen to send a mass email to discover the level of interest. Members were asked to respond to that email as soon as possible.

Sean O'Donoghue opined that the Society should underwrite such an event in the case of shortfall. Richard stated that this had already been agreed by the Committee but he was not prepared to set out to make a loss for the Society.

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 12.10pm.