



**Cymdeithas Parc Bannau Brycheiniog  
Brecon Beacons Park Society**

[www.breconbeaconsparksociety.org](http://www.breconbeaconsparksociety.org)

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2010/2011**

**FOR THE PARK, ITS PEOPLE AND ITS VISITORS**

Registered Charity No. 1075345

## **Chairman's Report**

This is the fifth published Annual Report of the Brecon Beacons Park Society, which was formed in 1992. It contains information on some of the Society's activities during the year which it is hoped will be of interest to both existing members and potential members.

After three years as Chairman, I shall be retiring from the post at this A.G.M. Looking back over the past three years; I believe that the Society has continued to carry out its core activities successfully, whilst increasing our level of contact and co-operation (plus the odd disagreement) with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA).

To provide continuity, I shall be standing for election as Vice Chairman. I would like to put on record my gratitude to the members of the Executive Committee for all their hard work during my time as Chairman. Like all small charities, we are reliant on the generosity of those willing to give freely of their time.

At the last A.G.M. members present asked the Committee to do two things, to recruit a Press and Publicity Officer and to try and recruit more members of the Society.

We have finally achieved the former objective in the last few months, and that should help to raise our profile - and our membership - during the coming year. Meanwhile membership levels have remained fairly constant, which is itself an achievement at a time when many other Park Societies have experienced a reduction in numbers.

## **Guided Walks and Events**

The Society's programme of Guided Walks continues to be recognised as one of the best in any National Park. Anne Pritchard is now building on the legacies of former Walks Secretaries John Sansom, Nigel Phillips and Jim Wilson. The programme is open to both BBPS members and to non members.

During the year it has included a variety of guided walks throughout the different areas and terrains of the Park and surrounding areas, covering all grades of walk from moderate to strenuous. Over the past year the percentage of each grade of walk was:-

Moderate, 20%; Energetic, 57%; Strenuous, 23%.

Longer treks have included the Beacons Way, part of the Cambrian Way, the Meirionnydd Coast and a bothy weekend in the Elenydd.

The Society again contributed to the Crickhowell Walking Festival by providing a guided walk on each day of the festival.

All of our guided walks leaders are volunteers who each give freely of their time to devise, recce and lead several walks a year. Our leaders are all experienced walkers who know the area and enjoy sharing their knowledge and love of walking in the National Park with others.

The Society has continued to support its walks leaders by providing first aid kits and emergency shelters. Rescue and Emergency Care courses are arranged for walks leaders on a regular basis.

The Society continues to run its popular series of navigation courses which are open to all members.

The Walks Programme is published quarterly. In the year ending February 2011 there were 175 guided walks led by 38 leaders. A total of 2,322 walkers covered a total of 47,249 kilometres, continuing the Society's tradition of walking each year a distance greater than the circumference of the Earth (40,077 kilometres).

There were 8 events during the year, including diverse talks on archaeology, local history and legends and treks in Greece and the Earth's highest mountains.

Future plans include special interest walks on a variety of topics relating to the National Park, which we hope will appeal to those of our members who are not regular walkers as well as to those who are.

## **Rights of Way**

Rights of Way issues are monitored by the Society. We investigate proposed closures and diversions and report footpath problems to the BBNPA.

There is currently a vacancy for Footpaths Secretary – anyone interested is encouraged to get in touch.

## **Development and Planning**

The aim of the Development and Planning team is to try to ensure that the Statutory Purposes of the National Park are upheld, in particular the first purpose: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. To this end the planning team aims to monitor all planning applications submitted. We are now e-mailed the weekly list of

applications and are then able to check on-line any that give cause for concern. We also attend the PAROW meetings where planning decisions are made.

However, detailed local knowledge is important so we really appreciate members contacting us with any matters of concern. Covering the whole Park is quite a large task so we would be delighted to welcome anyone interested in joining the team particularly from the west of the Park.

We have objected to applications as varied as a small wind turbine (so sited that it would have affected an important view) and a major waste incineration plant on the fringe of the Park. We have represented the Society at an appeal over a small housing development in Llangynidr and at the public enquiry into the planned developments at Cwrt Y Gollen. The former appeal failed and the Cwrt Y Gollen decision is still awaited.

Much time and effort has been put into responses to the Local Development Plan and to the schedule of Site Alternatives: getting the overarching plans correct is much more effective than trying to object to developments at a later stage. It has been difficult to oppose the Cwrt Y Gollen development, despite almost universal opposition to it, because the site was allocated for development in the Unitary Development Plan.

Our regular meetings with the NP Planning Department enable us to benefit the Park by co-operation as well as by trying to monitor and hold to account. A current concern is the number of very large scale developments in the pipeline for the southern fringe of the Park, including wind farms, waste incineration plants and open cast mining. Fringe developments that adversely affect the Park visually or in other ways must have regard to the same Statutory Purposes that control development within the Park. We are currently working with the NP Planners, CPRW and CNP to try to find a more effective voice to protect the Park.

## **Art in the Park**

This project was initiated by the Society in 2008 with the aim of giving young people who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to visit the National Park, the chance to walk and explore the landscape and to gain some understanding of the ways in which it has helped inspire professional artists.

The National Park education service has managed the project, and members of their staff have led the walks, which follow part of the Beacons Way, each featuring one of the art works created for the Art Trail. Artists Megan Jones and Sue Hiley-Harris have accompanied groups and provided the artistic background, inspiration and assistance to the project.

This year the cuts in funding have meant that participating schools have had to be asked to pay for transport and contribute to the cost of NP staff time. The Park Society has had to consider whether to change its policy not to pay NP costs. The Society can help the NP by being a conduit for charitable funds from other organisations and we hope to be able to find sufficient funding to continue this successful project.

## **Walls of Llangynidr**

Mountain wall building has continued around Llangynidr with the completion of the boundary wall around High Meadow on Pantlywdd Farm. We have been delighted to have been able to help our neighbouring community of Cwmdu to set up their own mountain wall rebuilding programme and a first section of 10m of mountain wall has been rebuilt alongside the Beacons Way. Volunteers have “liberated” the fallen stone from a further 20 metre stretch so that it is ready for rebuilding and rebuilding of this section should start soon.

Llangynidr Local History Society have been carrying out a survey of all the stone structures along the mountain boundary in Llangynidr and this is proving very helpful in identifying new sections of wall where repair and rebuilding are possible.

Walls of Llangynidr have been helping the 'Forgotten Landscapes' which is based around an area surrounding and including the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site. Part of the scheme involves training volunteers as dry stone wallers and members of the Brecon Beacons Park Society have been keen to take up this challenge.

Our training scheme with young farmers drawn from the Crickhowell/Cwmdru YFC got off to a flying start under the guidance of Ken Jones. Eleven youngsters took part in the first course but further training over the winter had to be cancelled due to the severe weather conditions. We hope to restart the programme in the early summer.

## **The Beacon**

The Society Journal is published twice a year (in January and July) and contains a wide range of articles on topics mainly relating to the Brecon Beacons National Park. A steady flow of material is needed for inclusion in future issues and Chris Barber, the editor would be very pleased to receive contributions from members who have not previously written for *The Beacon*.

Please send your articles, poems, letters etc by email to: cbarber010@aol.com or by post to Chris Barber at Blorengge Cottage, Church lane, Llanfoist, Abergavenny, NP7 9NG

## **Geopark**

The 2010 Fforest Fawr Geopark Festival was very successful with BBPS contributing six walks, all of which were well attended and generated much interest. These included a two day linear walk from Aberdulais to Pen y Fan, retracing the route taken by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1846 and celebrating his life and work.

Unfortunately the Society is not organising any events in the 2011 Geofest, due to new National Park regulations about qualifications for walk group leaders. The problem has now been partially resolved so we hope to be involved in next year's programme.

Fforest Fawr Geopark hosted the spring meeting of the European Geopark Network in Brecon in March. BBPS helped to sponsor this meeting and also provided a display about the Society for an event at Pontneddfechan Village Hall. This generated much interest in our organisation.

## **International Dark Sky Reserve Designation**

There is an increasing awareness of the problem of Light Pollution and its effect on the quality of our night sky, the impact on wildlife and health, and the financial and environmental implications of generating large amounts of unnecessary light.

The Brecon Beacons Park Society and National Park Authority take this matter seriously and have decided that gaining International Dark Sky Reserve status for the BBNP would be a good way of focusing attention on this issue. A joint initiative has been set up to look at the feasibility of attaining this

designation, with Jim Wilson as the lead Society representative and Ruth Coulthard the corresponding lead for the Park.

This assessment is close to completion and to a positive conclusion. There are some negotiations still underway with the awarding body, the International Dark Sky Association, on how their criteria should be interpreted for European National Parks, but we are hopeful of a successful outcome.

Assuming this to be the case, a proposal for an eighteen month joint project to gain IDSR status for the BBNP will be put to the Society and the Park in the near future.

## **Membership**

The year ended with a small increase in membership, to 682 against 667, representing 539 households against 526. It was disappointing that 16 members joining between April and September did not renew. In addition to those, 2 members died and another 73 resigned or let membership lapse.

Members are invited to communicate about membership matters by e-mail when they have that facility. Please include your membership number in messages.

The Society has invested in special software that allows us to send an e-mail to all relevant members (over 400) at one time without falling foul of spam regulations. We have used it a number of times; most recently on 8 April. If you have not received the latest email about “Woollen Lines”, it indicates that the Society does not have an e-mail address for you – please provide one.

Please remember that the Walks Programme is now available from the website and will print out in date order. We will e-mail you when a new one is available, at the same time as the hard-copy mailing takes place.

## **Treasurer's Report.**

*Financial statements for 2010/11 are distributed with the papers for the Annual General Meeting.*

The General Fund shows a small deficit for the first time for a number of years, but this is of no concern. Two one-off items appear; the net proceeds of the annual Beacons Way walk in Income, and the cost of a complete revamp of the website under Expenditure. Without these the outcome for the year would have been a very small surplus.

Your Committee regards £7,000 of the General Fund as a necessary reserve. The coming year is likely to see several outlays from the excess in that Fund.

Although the gift aid tax receipt will be much the same in the New Year (being based on contributions in the year ended 31 March 2011), all donations from 6 April attract a lower rate of tax recovery (25% versus 28%). I therefore urge members who have not yet signed up to gift aid to do so – provided they are in a position to do so.



# **Cymdeithas Parc Bannau Brycheiniog Brecon Beacons Park Society**

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## **Current Executive Committee**

<b>Chairman</b>	Charles Henderson
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Jim Wilson
<b>Treasurer</b>	Ben Sladen
<b>Secretary</b>	Elizabeth Gibbs
<b>Walks Secretary</b>	Anne Pritchard
<b>The Beacon Editor</b>	Chris Barber
<b>Brecon Beacons Trust</b>	Clive Eiles
<b>Development Control</b>	Elizabeth Gibbs
<b>Walls of Llangynidr</b>	William Gibbs
<b>Website</b>	David Thomas
<b>Press and Publicity</b>	Ceridwen Coulson*

*\*Co-opted during the year.*



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