

PONTYPOOL & DISTRICT RAMBLERS GROUP

Minutes of the AGM held on 29th November 2025 at Llanellen Village Hall.

Lew welcomed everyone to the 58th AGM of the Group.

PRESENT: P. Hulme, J. & L. Lewis, K. Renshaw, S. & A. Mackinnon, C. & C. Watson, C. & A. Tipton, H. & G. Cox, D. Adams, P. Fowler, L. & T. Beament, R. Grant, L. Thomas, G. Choudhary, I. Jackson-Johns, D. Blayney.

1.APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: C. Owen-Cousins, S. Pepper, B.Tudhope, L. Barker, B.Giles, L. Sheridan, M. Hulme and J. Renshaw.

2.CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE AGM MEETING HELD ON 16th November 2024.

These were confirmed and duly signed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

None.

4. REPORT OF OFFICERS

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The written report had been circulated to members on 1st November 2025 and was as follows:-

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report covers the period 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025. I am pleased to be able to report that it has been another successful year for the Group. We have been able to expand our activities a little, particularly with the introduction, in May and September, of short walking breaks on the edge of Exmoor and in the Cotswolds. This Report also records the fact that we are trying to expand the scope of our social events.

2.GROUP COMMITTEE

2.1 At the 2024 AGM Phil Harris and Robin Hilborne stood down as Committee members and we thank them for their services. They were replaced by Caroline Jenkins and Lynne Beament.

2.2 The Committee meets four times a year – in October, January, April and July. The meetings mainly consist of the various Officers reporting on their activities between meetings. On behalf of Group members, I would like to place on record our thanks for all the hard work put in by our Committee.

2.3 For many years the Committee has met at the Kings Arms in Abergavenny. While we have enjoyed this facility at no cost to the Group we have had to tolerate meeting rooms which were far from ideal. Because of this the Committee decided to change our venue to the Kings Head in Abergavenny. This does cost us the princely sum of £40 per meeting but the facilities are proving much more satisfactory.

3.COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS

3.1 Our main channel for communication is through our Walks and Events Programme, published monthly, via email, by our Walks Officer. In addition ad hoc emails are issued concerning matters of interest e.g. notifications regarding group holidays. In all cases we ensure that the GDPR regulations are adhered to and that all our communications are related to the core concerns of the group.

3.2 Our WhatsApp Group, started during the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020, consists of 59 members – just over a third of the total membership - and is an excellent channel for members to post photographs, views and updates regarding our arranged walks programme. Any member wishing to join this group should contact me.

4.WALKS PROGRAMME

4.1 Graeme Cox continued as our Walks Officer and we are grateful for the energy and expertise he continues to bring to the role. Providing a full programme of walks is challenging and we have decided to introduce much more flexibility into the programme so that it fits the availability of our walk leaders. We are also encouraging leaders to upload their own walks to the internet, using the Ramblers Walk Manager system, in an effort to reduce the workload of the appropriate officers. In the same vein the Committee agreed that the monthly emailed version of the Walks and Events Programme should be simplified by the simple expedient of “cutting and pasting” the details directly from the website, thus saving the Walks Officer a great deal of time.

4.2 In addition to our regular monthly walks programme, in May two walks over a weekend were organized in the Minehead area on the edge of Exmoor followed by a trip on the West Somerset Railway. In total 34 members enjoyed the walks with many staying overnight at local hotels. A similar event in the Peak District is being arranged for the Spring of 2026.

4.3 At the end of September two walks were organised in the Cotswolds. Some 26 members enjoyed the walks, again with many staying in local hotels.

4.4 The Group Committee actively supports our leaders by providing information and support. The Group Committee wishes to provide more training for leaders and a first aid course has been arranged for early November.

4.5 In July Ramblers HQ informed us that leaders are now required to record their status either by completing online training modules or by recording previous leadership experience, defined as leading 12 walks over the past 3 years or holding a Mountain Training Association qualification. The deadline for doing this is 31 December 2025. At the time of drafting this review some 65% of our leaders had recorded their status successfully. The Committee is concerned, however, that the requirement placed on us by Ramblers HQ will result in a loss of leaders and while actively encouraging those who have not recorded their status to do so, a reduction in the number of walks organised was, at the end of the year, under consideration.

4.5 Excluding walks which were cancelled, mainly due to adverse weather, some 78 walks were organised during the year. The number of walkers varied but averaged 13 per walk. The figures for last year were 84 walks with an average of 14.

4.6 Mention must be made of two leaders—Alistair Mackinnon and Peter Hulme—both of whom decided to retire from walk leadership during the year. Both have led walks since time immemorial and I'm sure all members will join me in thanking them for their unparalleled service to the Group.

5.FINANCE

5.1 Our Treasurer, Keith Renshaw, continues to keep a close eye on our finances and reports regularly to the Group Committee and of course to members at the AGM. Our reserves are extremely healthy and remain within Charity Commission guidelines.

5.2 For many years now the group has supported the Longtown Mountain Rescue Team through regular collections on our Group Walks. This year £175 has been donated to the Team. A letter of thanks has been received from the Team.

6.MEMBERSHIP

6.1 Our Membership Secretary Diana Adams monitors our membership levels. We continue to show a healthy recruitment of new members but this is largely offset by the natural wastage of existing members. The current membership of the Group stands at 165.

6.2 It is with great sadness to report that Margaret Durkin, a loyal member of Pontypool Group, passed away in August following a long battle with cancer. Margaret led many walks for the Group and at one time was responsible for entering our walks programme into Facebook. She was a cheery presence on our walks and will be much missed.

7.SOCIAL EVENTS

7.1 Our Social Secretary, Sue Mackinnon, has been active during the year in organising a wide range of social events for members. The Group Committee undertook a survey of members during the year seeking views regarding the future of our social events programme. We are indebted to the assistance provided by Juliet Barnes in compiling this survey.

7.2 Some 27% of members responded to the survey and while there was a high degree of satisfaction with the current format of our programme, a high number of responses indicated a desire for more informal events and, with regard to the holidays we organise, shorter and less expensive breaks. The Committee has responded to membership wishes. See for example paragraphs 4.2, 4.3 and 7.4 of this report. In addition many of our walks now incorporate a social element, either an informal pub/café get together or meal at the end of a walk.

7.3 In June Juliet Barnes, one of our members, gave a talk about her novel "The Slaughter Stone", a rich tapestry of life in medieval Wales set against the uprising of Owain Glyndŵr.

7.4 In September a Fish-n-Chips Supper was organized which was followed by a Beetle Drive. We are also planning a quiz night which is due to be held in October.

7.5 Our monthly coffee mornings have continued. These are held on the first Thursday of every month and normally are held at Wetherspoons in Abergavenny.

7.6 Because of stormy weather in December our annual Christmas lunch had to be cancelled but it did take place in January at the Monmouthshire Golf Club. Some 30 members enjoyed an excellent meal which was followed by our usual raffle.

7.7 Any member who has ideas for a future social event should contact Sue.

8.GROUP HOLIDAYS

8.1 In October a 7 night self-guided holiday at HF Holidays country house, Church Stretton took place. Those attending enjoyed fine walking in the Stretton Hills.

8.2 In April 14 members enjoyed a 7 night holiday at HF Holidays in St. Ives, Cornwall. The weather was ideal for walking and the guided walks were varied to suit all abilities. 7 members took advantage of the HF guided walks and enjoyed bracing yet stimulating coastal walks. The other 7 members took advantage of the HF self-guided option.

8.3 After many years of organising the Group holidays I have decided to relinquish the role. However, Sue Mackinnon and Keith Renshaw are arranging a 7 night holiday in the Spring of 2026, again with HF, in the South Downs.

9.WEBSITE MATTERS

9.1 Our Website Officer, Colin Watson, is responsible for uploading our walks and other events to the Walks Manager system introduced by Head Office. This provides a valuable supplement to our emailed programme and enables all Ramblers' members – UK wide - to join our walks regardless of which group they belong to, which is arguably one of the most valuable benefits of Ramblers membership.

9.2 This system has now settled down but nevertheless, the Committee explored the possibility of introducing a website of our own, albeit paid for and hosted by Ramblers. This became live during September and can be found at www.pontypool-ramblers.org.uk

10.FOOTPATH MAINTENANCE TEAM

10.1 We end the year with a team of 10 volunteers, organised by Colin Watson, from which we can field people on 2 days a month to clear paths, repair stiles, install gates and other essential work in Monmouthshire. This work is carried out in conjunction with Monmouthshire County Council. The necessary tools and training are provided. The Council are considering whether to fund "recognition plaques" that can be attached to the footpath furniture that is installed so that the group receives recognition for the work carried out.

10.2. As ever, new volunteers are needed and welcome.

11. FOOTPATH MATTERS

11.1 Pontypool Ramblers take a pragmatic approach to any changes to the footpath network across our area of interest. For example, a change to re-route an existing path around a private garden, rather than through it, is acceptable and we only object to a change which would be of real detriment to the walking fraternity.

11.2 Peter Fowler is our lead person in Torfaen. Peter is a member of the Eastern Valleys Local Access Forum. The Forum was set up following the Senedd withholding some grant money from the council, until a viable Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (PRoWIP) had been produced. Since then, face to face discussions have been taking place between the members of the Forum and Torfaen borough council officers. During these discussions, concerns about the apparent lack of path maintenance being carried out on the footpath network were raised. The lack of dedicated resources focused on this issue has been seen as a major contributing factor. To improve the situation Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent council

officers are working together on a shared resources basis and have produced the draft of an improvement plan. Public consultations have been held both in person and online. Details of these consultations were circulated to our members via WhatsApp and e-mail. Some members of our group attended in person to raise issues and some responded online. The public rights of way network is to be audited during the summer to confirm its current state. This will be used to estimate all associated costs allowing the improvement plan to be completed.

11.3 Andy Tipton takes the lead for us in the extensive area of North Monmouthshire and the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP), a part of which falls into our area of interest. The work mainly consists of monitoring the numerous footpath diversions and modifications to ensure no detriment. All these changes are maintained in a document published regularly to our walk leaders so that they can be taken into account when walks are being planned.

11.4 It is worth noting that Monmouthshire County Council and the BBNP operate an online system for reporting footpath problems. Unfortunately no such system exists for Torfaen. Any member who requires details of these procedures should contact either myself or Andy Tipton.

12.CONCLUSION

12.1 As well as Committee members, we are indebted to a large number of volunteers who contribute to the success of our group. Firstly, our Walk Leaders and Backmarkers, without whom our activities would be totally impossible. Secondly, many members contribute for example by providing food, setting out furniture, making tea and washing up at our social evenings. Above all, those members who turn out regularly to support our activities are deserving of our thanks.

Supplementing the above report:-

Lew pointed out that our own website is now up and running thanks to Graeme's hard work. This can be found at www.pontypool-ramblers.org.uk where all information on walks and other events can be found.

Lew mentioned that we desperately need more walk leaders and people to work with our footpath maintenance team.

Finally Lew paid tribute to retiring walk Leaders Peter Hulme and Alistair MacKinnon, both of whom had been leading walks for nearly a quarter of a century.

A Copy of the full Chairman's Report and Group Constitution is held by the Secretary.

5.TREASURER'S REPORT

The accounts refer to the 12 month period to 30th September 2025. They have been examined and signed by our Independent Examiner.

Main Account bank balance at 30th September 2025 is £448, a reduction of £626 from the previous year. Income for the year was £1,799 and expenditure £2,425 resulting in a shortfall of £626.

The forecast for 2026 is showing a bank balance of approximately £900 with a Reserves % of 66.3% at the end of next year, within the Ramblers guidelines.

Social Account current net balance is £504. For the last few years Social events have been transacted through the Main Account. Under Ramblers guidelines these should be self-funding and therefore it has been agreed that from next year we will revert to funding social events through the Social Club Account. Where necessary contributions may be requested.

Copies of the full accounts and the Treasurer's Report are held by the Secretary.

6. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM OFFICERS

Diana Adams - (Membership Secretary) pointed out that we now have 165 members although only 40 - 50 members actually walk.

7. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The following were willing to stand as Honorary Officers:-

Lew Lewis (Chairman),
Colin Watson (Vice Chairman)
Chris Watson (Secretary)
Keith Renshaw (Treasurer)

Proposed by Peter Fowler, seconded by S. Mackinnon and were duly elected by a show of hands.

The following were willing to stand as other Officers:-

Diana Adams (Membership Secretary)
Sue Mackinnon (Social Secretary)
Lynne Beament (Walks Officer)
Graeme Cox (Website Officer)
Peter Fowler (Torfaen Footpath Officer).
Andy Tipton (North Mon. & BBNP in Mon.Footpath Officer)

Proposed by Colin Watson, seconded by Peter Hulme and were duly elected by a show of hands.

8. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

The following were willing to stand as committee members: Peter Hulme and Lynne Thomas. There was a vacancy for 1 more committee member. David Blayney offered to stand. This was proposed by Ros Grant, seconded by Sue Mackinnon. All three were duly elected by a show of hands.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

David Blayney thanked all committee members and volunteers for all their hard work and commitment during the year.

The meeting closed at 1.30 pm.