

MID LANCASHIRE AREA ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



The year has been dominated by Covid-19 which has severely restricted activities. Some footpaths have seen increased usage, but other footpaths appear to have been used less.



Footpaths near urban localities have seen an increased usage as many gyms and other recreational facilities have either been closed or have been restricted. The walking of footpaths more or exercising at home has become the new normal.



Some rural footpaths have seen less usage this year, like this footpath on Leyland Moss. The inference is that Covid-19 has affected where people walk.

Introduction

While the year started normally, clearly the most significant feature of the year has been dealing with the effect of Covid 19. During the whole covid period Area has endeavoured to keep members advised on how they are affected and what they might do to continue to walk.

During lockdown many of our members actively explored their local paths often finding unfamiliar routes, some being converted into walks for later use.

Once lockdown was released, walk programmes started building up again. See Walk Programme below.

Despite these difficulties most groups have either increased membership or at least held level, which is believed to be due to the focus on walking as an exercise during lockdown. Offering active walk programmes possibly benefits membership.

Sadly Covid has not helped attention being given to our footpaths as interactions with councils etc and workgroups/committees became impossible. See the footpath section for more details.

The Area Council meetings had to be cancelled but we are now using Zoom to enable both Area meetings and Groups meetings. The Area AGM will be a zoom meeting.

Hopefully a vaccine will appear and some level of normality can return in the medium term.

Eric Crichton
Acting Chairman

Secretary

2020 will be remembered as the year when Covid-19 struck which effectively stopped all RA activities in March as a result of the lockdown. As the summer progressed the restrictions were gradually eased, and in Aug a limited resumption of led walks took place with very restricted numbers, but some groups and walks leaders were reluctant to resume group walking. It is to be hoped that sometime in 2021 that all RA activities will be able to be resumed either as a result of a vaccine being approved and/or a means of controlling the virus has been developed.

PUBLIC FOOTPATHS IN LANCASHIRE

The period of austerity in local government started in 2010, with cuts to many budgets. Trying to quote a percentage figure for the size of the cut is not easy because of the various re-organizations that have taken place in LCC (Lancs County Council). However we do know that the number of staff dealing with rights of way has reduced significantly, for in the year 2009/10 seventeen staff was shown as being on rights of way work, whilst by 2017 the number of staff employed on footpath type work had fallen to ten. In 2018 the number of staff had fallen to nine, but in 2019 it increased back to 10,

In previous years every four months the staff at LCC normally meet representatives of the various outdoor recreational groups at which the state of the public rights of way was discussed. In 2010 the number of outstanding faults was less than a thousand, but by Jan 2018 it had grown to 5,180, and then LCC stopped providing these statistics, which tells its own story. Then in mid 2019 LCC decided to cut the number of meetings with outdoor organisations to two per year. The DEFRA guidance is that 4 meetings should be held each year, but the regulations state that a minimum of 2 meetings will be held each year, so LCC will now only be holding the minimum number of meetings each year in order to comply with the regulations. A meeting took place in Jan 20, then Covid-19 struck. The meeting intended for July was cancelled without any updates or other information being provided, which is not a good omen. We now wait to see what 2021 brings.

When LCC receive a complaint about a public footpath they allocate a priority to it, which can be summarised as follows – 1 health and safety, 2 completely blocked, 3 difficult to use, 4 inconvenient and 5 other (low). If a report is classed as being category 4 or 5, then the probability it that it will simply be added to the backlog and it is then unlikely to see the light of day again, unless the situation further deteriorates so that it can be placed in a better category.

The suspicion is that LCC no longer responds to a single report about a footpath problem unless health and safety is thought to be an aspect of the issue. If LCC are now only responding when multiple reports have been made about an issue, then it raises questions about what the RA tactics should be ? The inference appears to be to request that all members should report the issues they observe whilst out walking, using the various systems that are available.

It is possible to make reports about public footpaths using LCC's Highways Web Site but the snag with using this method is that it does not provide any intermediate reports about progress being made i.e. the system sends an initial acknowledgement of the report and then nothing further is heard until the issue is cleared. LCC during the year also stopped sending update reports when using other methods of making a footpath report. An electronic system that allows for progress reports is desired.

The other snag with LCC's Highways Web Site is that it is not possible to easily associate a digital photograph with the report, which then means a separate email to Lancashire CC with a photograph. The staff in Rights of Way section at LCC are very appreciative of the photographs that are supplied by RA members, for a good photograph can potentially save an initial site visit. (If making a report about a pothole the highways web does allow for a digital photograph to be associated with the report, but this facility does not extend to public footpath reports.)

Presently LCC's preferred way of receiving a report about a footpath issue is now for the public to send an email (to proreports@lancashire.gov.uk), using an Excel spread sheet and a digital photograph.

In 2013 LCC modified MARIO (Maps and Related Information Online), possibly in an attempt to save money by having fewer licences, for it is no longer possible to display a map at a scale of 1:25,000. However, it is still possible to see good maps between the scales of 1:1,000 and 1:10,000 on MARIO, which provides good detail when checking the details about a footpath before making a report about a footpath issue. Most walkers however would also like good maps to be displayed at a scale of 1:25,000, for this is the scale that they use.

A further problem with MARIO has been observed with MARIO is that the maps between a scale of 1:3,000 and 1:10,000 do not seem to be getting updated, for the Lancaster Bypass which opened in Oct 2016 is not shown on MARIO at these scales and neither are many new housing estates. Maps on MARIO at scales of 1:1,000 and 1:2,000 are being updated, but these are very detailed maps. (Note- Some LCC staff are now using other mapping systems for their work. LCC are intending to review the various mapping systems that they are using.)

When using LCC's highways web site it has the advantage of showing new roads and other developments but this system does not show temporary footpath closures. For temporary footpath closures users need to refer to MARIO.

When in contact with the authorities the point is regularly made that money spent on footpaths is money that is well spent for it enables people to go walking, which ought to bring benefits in helping to tackle issues like obesity. Unfortunately the RA receives sympathy, but not the actions that the RA desires.

COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

In 2016 LCC stated that the running of the Ranger Service is not a statutory duty and would therefore like to cease it at the end of 2017, with the aim being to have nil spend on this item in 2018/19. The target was to make alternative arrangements for 90 sites that were then owned by LCC's Countryside Unit.

In Summer 2016 LCC invited charitable and voluntary organizations to make submissions about taking over the running of these sites. Access to these sites on foot was to remain free but they would be able to charge for other items e.g. car parking, games, other activities. LCC were underwhelmed by the response to this exercise with only

12 sites receiving a positive response, which means that 78 sites (including the country parks and picnic sites) are to remain with LCC. LCC are now going to retain a manager with one ranger to look after these sites, with contractors being employed to empty bins and to do other maintenance type tasks.

Volunteers will be capable of doing low level tasks like litter picking and vegetation clearance, but the number of adverts to assist with tasks has been few. However the felling of trees and other high level tasks is likely to be beyond the abilities of the typical volunteer, so questions are being asked about what is going to happen when trees suffer wind damage etc.

PATHWATCH

Pathwatch at the present time seems to have a low profile, with only a few reports being received via Pathwatch each month during the past year.

Pathwatch is scheduled to be re-launched, but the details at this stage are vague. Pathwatch has the potential to be an important campaigning tool in trying to get better footpaths, which ought to provide the RA with good quality information. Presently it is not known how RA's Central Office are intending to use the data now being input to Pathwatch, beyond copying the report to the highway authority concerned.

The RA probably missed an opportunity when Lockdown commenced in March when many activities were severely restricted, for the message could have been please use your local footpaths responsibly and to use Pathwatch to report any problems encountered.

ACCESS TO THE COAST

In late 2009 the Maritime and Coastal Access Act was passed, which included clauses about improving coastal access. In the North West the first section to be opened was Whitehaven going north to Allonby which was opened in April 2014, that was about 36km long. Staff at Natural England have admitted that this was a relatively easy section to do, for public access already existed on most of this section of the coast.

In late 2012 staff on Natural England started work on the section from Whitehaven to Silecroft, which is about 55km long. Then in Sept 2015 the Secretary of State gave approval for the route, which included some detours because of the rivers at Ravenglass, for which suitable footbridges were not available. The initial expectation was that implementation would be done by early 2017, but this date has kept slipping with the latest date being late 2020, so what should have been an eighteen month task is now going to take five years to do, assuming no further slippage. This does not inspire confidence about the provision of the Coastal Way, which was originally intended to be completed by 2020, but completion is now likely in 2022 or 2023.

It has become apparent that Natural England only has the money to erect stiles, facilitate notices, provide drainage and to erect footbridges over streams. However Natural England's budget does not allow for the provision of footbridges over rivers, with the most serious issue in the NW so far being the detour that is going to be needed to go round the estuary of the River Esk.

Then in May 2014 work started on the section from Allonby to Gretna, which is expected to be 98km long, with the target of opening this section in 2018. The path from Allonby to the estuary of the River Waver (Abbeytown) effectively already exists. Work will be needed to create a path around the Solway Firth. A Public Inquiry was held in Dec 2017 to consider 9 objections that have been made, but at the time of writing the result remains outstanding. It is likely to be 2023 before this section is opened.

In Aug 2015 work started on planning the section around Walney Island, for the rules state that islands are to be planned separately. This section will be about 33km long and was expected to open in 2018, but this then slipped to Feb 20, which is the second section in the NW to be opened.

In early 2016 work started planning on the next two sections of the Coastal Way in the North West, these being – Silecroft to Silverdale – 101km

Silverdale to Cleveleys – 82km.

A report on the proposed route had been expected in Autumn 2017, but this has now slipped in stages to Jan 20. Comments were made in conjunction with the Open Spaces Society. Originally when reports were published about the intended route for a section of the Coastal Way the route was written up as a long narrative. In 2019 Natural England changed their policy so that a section would be split into a small number of chapters, with each chapter effectively being a subsection. The Silverdale to Cleveleys section contained six chapters, with comments being made about 4 of the chapters. The other 2 chapters were agreed without any comments being made. We are waiting for an announcement from Natural England regarding what happens next.

The remaining sections in the North West (Cleveleys – Liverpool – Wales Border) officially started planning in early 2017, which is thought to be a nominal date, with the actual planning starting Spring 2018. A report was previously expected in early 2019, but this date has slipped in stages to late 2020, with no dates presently being quoted regarding implementation.

However those opposed to coastal access have continued to state that a good way to save money would be to abandon coastal access, which coupled with this Government's continuing austerity drive could make for potential problems. The RA needs to be prepared to do further campaigning to get coastal access implemented if the expected timetable continues to slip.

Places in Lancashire where issues with access to the coast are as follows –

- a) Pilling Embankment, where the whole of the eastern part is without public access and the western part is restricted to the period from Easter to Christmas.
- b) North Bank of the River Ribble between Freckleton and Preston for the area bounded by the River Ribble, Freckleton Pool, A584, A583 and the former Preston Docks is a desert as far as public footpaths are concerned.
- c) Estuary of the River Douglas.
- d) On the North Bank of the River Lune between Lancaster and Overton, plus also the section at Middleton.

PRE CROW ACCESS LAND

Prior to CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) becoming operational in 2004 some moorland areas were available to walkers as a result of access agreements (in accordance with the 1949 Act) or by tradition. Reports have been made about excessive mud, especially at pinch points (stiles).

Concerns have been expressed about the path from Fiendsdale Head to Fair Snape Fell, for previously the Ranger Service arranged for two jobs to improve sections of this path. The opinion has been expressed that a third job is now required to improve another section of this path, but with the rundown of the Ranger Service it is not clear who will arrange for such a job.

Also, concern has been expressed about Spitlers Edge where two jobs have been done to improve the path. But a further job is now desired because some flag stones are now sinking and some of the soil inversion work is giving cause for concern. Soil inversion work is normally only used on shallow peat, but in some parts was used on deeper peat but it does not seem to have worked.

ACCESS TO THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE – FELLS & COMMONS

As a result of CROW access was to be provided to mountain, moor, heath, down and common. Access commenced in Sept 2004.

It is apparent that the usage of the access areas continues to be mainly light. When you ask many walkers why they do not use the access land, the frequent reply is that they do not know where the access points are located. This is unfortunate because the ranger service has provided some additional stiles in open country, these being where the landowner concerned is enlightened.

We continue to mention to Lancashire CC that the signs to be found at the main access points need to be replaced, for many of these do not show the access points, although the key does include a symbol for a stile, but none of these maps show any of the walls / fences, which is an essential piece of information. LCC state that they do not have the money to replace these signs.

A further problem is that some of the signs provided in 2004 are now beginning to fade, especially those that face south. Some of these signs are now virtually useless, and have therefore been recovered, for as stated previously LCC state they have no money to renew these signs.

Whilst discussing this issue with other areas it is apparent that LCC is no worse than any other authority, and is better than some other authorities who have made no attempt to provide information regarding access points. When examining the provisions of CROW a duty exists to map the extent of access land, but little is stated about providing and the recording of access points. This is something that needs to be changed, which is something for a future countryside bill. Presently all that we can do is to exert pressure on local authorities and others to provide more access points, plus better information as to where the access points are located.

Whilst staffs at Lancashire CC have attempted negotiations with the various estates with open access land for the provision of more access points; this was both to gain access to the access land, and also to be able cross walls or fences within access land. As probably could be expected the results were mixed ranging from the good, some limited progress, to no progress being made. Pressure will be maintained for the provision of more access points, so that walkers can make full use of the access areas. For instance on the Bleasdale Estate no access will be possible from Calder Side to the Arbour, or along the main shooting track near Briggs Barn.

In Sept 2019 the Glover Review about the future of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was published that acknowledged that the finest landscapes need improving and made several proposals, which included the statement - *'In the meantime, AONBs need an uplift. We believe their total funding should be doubled from the current £6.7m to £13.4m'* Nothing further has been heard about this and it is wondered if this has been kicked into the long grass.

OTHER MATTERS

In the modern era more use is being made of the internet, whilst newspaper circulation figures and the printed word are in decline. The Area is very fortunate to have its web site again, for which thanks go to Eric Crichton for the work he has done. This is an ideal place to highlight local footpath issues and to mention the access campaigns. One of the problems is that these issues are often slow moving, so the problem arises of how to maintain user interest. It will also a requirement to avoid repeating information that is shown on the National RA web site and also what the groups are displaying. Besides the traditional type web sites the RA needs also to be looking at social type media (e.g. facebook, twitter).

The walks programme was suspended in March and was partially resumed in Aug. Lancashire and the North West of England are without doubt good places to walk and we are fortunate to have such wonderful locations on our doorsteps and it is hoped that a full walks programme will be resumed sometime in 2021. Whilst we will continue to campaign for better footpaths, we should also allow time to go out and appreciate the countryside.

Roger Brickell who served the Area as the Treasurer for decades and also for a period as Chairman and Membership Secretary died during the year.

Discussions have taken place regarding the future of Garstang, for the Group has lost a few walks leaders as a result of the effects of advancing years, which has reduced the number of walks being arranged by the Group. The favoured option is for the Group to continue as a flexi type group.

Finally I wish to thank all who have helped in the running of the Mid Lancs Area. The work of the active volunteers is one of our strengths, but a few more active members would enable the Association to become more effective. Whilst we are not seeking a large number of people to help with running the Area, we definitely need a few more

members to assist, for some of the present active members are having to reduce their commitments, for the effects of the passing years is beginning to show its effects. Opportunities exist to help at both Area and group level exist, with options to serve on a committee, or maybe to walk the footpaths in a couple of parishes, or perhaps in some other capacity. If anybody would like more information about what may be involved, then please contact me. Should you be unable to help e.g. working unsociable hours, problems with an injury, then we thank you for remaining a member of the Association.

Besides looking for members to serve on committees, the RA also needs more members who are able to lead the occasional walk, or maybe periodically to walk the footpaths in a couple of parishes. If you would like to know what is involved then either contact me or one of the group secretaries.

David Kelly
Oct 20

Area Footpath Secretary

On a weekly, sometimes fortnightly, basis PATHWATCH reports are being sent from the Pathwatch team.

The numbers of reports have varied, from 4 or 5 per report, to 20+ but this many only occasionally.

It is clear that certain individuals are much more familiar with the reporting routine, as there have been a lot of single reports as opposed to over 20 from one regular "RAMBLER" over the past few months. I wonder if the process for reporting obstructions is clear enough for everybody to use.

Just recently there has been a series of emails headed "New message". These have been mostly the stopping up of the Highway, usually for the installation of services to new housing.

The forwarding of objections to many of the new housing developments seems to have not the slightest effect. The developments, which often affect a footpath, seem to be ready go ahead with the footpath being integrated on the footpath/cycleway through the housing estate.

Let's hope that 2021 can be the year our usual activities can start to go ahead as usual.

Joe Howard

Walks Programme

We normally provide a 4 monthly walk programme containing around 30-40 walks/month, and that was the case Oct-Feb.

Clearly there was no walk programme during lockdown but as soon as permitted, two groups restored a walk programme.

Chorley generated significant numbers of walks, often more than one on a day to compensate for limited numbers and soon approached something similar to their normal programme.

Ribble restored their Thursday walks and have sustained that programme.

After a time other groups began to offer walks.

West Lancs has been actively providing walks and Preston and HikeOn have offered an occasional walk.

Numbers of walkers built up slowly commonly now 6-12, but in a few cases it has reached 22.

Most leaders have now placed limits on numbers, especially as Tier 3 came into play.

Inevitably many leaders have been unable to lead due to personal or family considerations so we are very grateful to those leaders who have given so much of their time.

At the same time, a lot of members formed friends' groups to walk independently, some of our walk descriptions being used for that.

For the time being walk programmes are being planned on shorter timescales, perhaps 1 or 2 months.

Looking forward it is anticipated that walk programmes will continue at a significant level and adjust to whatever restrictions are in place.

New "Special walks" have been added to explore different services we can offer, and perhaps encourage recruitment. To date this has included Wildlife Walks, Family Walks and Navigation Practice and these appear to be valued.

Until Covid is under control, it is unlikely that we will return to our previous 4 monthly programme.

Eric Crichton

Membership

At the request of David Kelly who has handled the Membership Secretary in recent years, we have appointed a new Membership Secretary namely, Joy Taylor as of Oct 20. We are enormously grateful for the effort David has put into this role and pleased that he continues holding other roles.

Over the last year this role has changed in the sense that it is now primarily supported on the Insight Rambler website rather than by emails. As with most changes there have been some hiccups but these are easing.

The local membership figures are as follows –

	Sep 15	Sep 16	Sep 17	Sept 18	Sep 19	Sep 20
Chorley	291	282	286	313	341	351
Fylde	276	271	259	242	237	225
Garstang	63	62	57	53	56	59
Preston	142	137	133	129	134	132
Sth Ribble	148	148	142	125	134	134
W Lancs	153	150	148	141	139	153
HoL	78	75	66	53	60	71
LWW	54	53	41	35	38	38
Others	24	24	32	43	48	30
Total	1,229	1,202	1,164	1,134	1,187	1,193
National RA	107,371	105,990	104,694	102,821	102,041	101,811

Eric Crichton

Websites

There are four Rambler supported websites in the region for:-

Mid Lancs

Fylde

Garstang
South Ribble.
And Chorley has a separate site.

The substantial Mid Lancs Area website provides all the usual group and walk programme information and a range of other educational and service functions.
It has been used as a central point of information on Covid related matters.

It's collections of walk tracks, walk descriptions and some walk videos have been converted to a map based system and further descriptions added.
Functions to help plot or display routes are provided.
Guidance on how and where to report footpaths is provided along with a map of known issues.

There is material on Navigating with paper maps, and two phone apps.
There is significant traffic to the site much of it from people searching for some related topic and so making Mid Lancs Ramblers more visible.

The other sites are managed by their group.

Eric Crichton

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations)

This has not been an issue this year though issues with the Insight membership system have meant we have not been able to properly update email lists.

Eric Crichton

Treasurer

The treasurer, Carole Chandler, for the last 3 years is moving on and we are thankful for all the time and effort she has applied particularly during some difficult covid times.

Our New Treasurer, Hilary Jane, has taken over in 1st Oct and is completing year end 19-20.

(We also have expert on tap from Paul a qualified accountant)

Naturally the finances have been affected by Covid, mainly in the sense that we have had lower expenses.

There was only one walk programme produced, not three. Quite a few meetings of Area and Footpath committees did not happen and some plans for recruitment activity couldn't happen.

As a result there is a surplus of £1,324.

Similarly most groups have had reduced expenditure and have made reduced budget claims for the new year.

Area has allocated a significant amount of reserves to focus on recruitment and other activities next year.

Prior Yr	Receipts	This Year			Payments	This Year
£4,598.00	From CO	£5,084.00		-	To CO	-
-	From CO Other			-	To Area	-
-	From CO via Area			£4,304.50	To Group (Funding)	£2,639.55
-	From Area (Other)			£0.00	To Group (Other)	-
-	From Group			-	To S/W Council	-
-	From S/W Council			£1,075.29	Walks Programmes	£233.93
-	T/fer from Self-funded			£124.38	Walks Related	-
£67.45	Donations	£181.05		-	Walk Leader Training	-
-	Legacies			65.42	Newsletters /Publicity	£15.99
-	Grants			-	Publication /Goods	£43.92
-	Fundraising			£221.18	Campaigns	£282.38
-	Deposit Interet			-	Practical Work	£52.98
-	Investment Income			-	Fundraising Costs	-
-	Publication /Goods Sales			£548.55	Meetings (Inc AGM)	£651.38
-	Advert Sales			£20.24	Admin	-
-	Other.			£29.64	Other	£20.00
£4,665.45	Main FundsTotals	£5,265.05		£6,389.20		£3,940.13
-£1,723.75	Main Funds Surplus/(Deficit)	£1,324.92				

£4,665.45	Overall Total	£5,265.05
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£6,389.20	Total Payments	£3,940.13
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-	Overall	
£1,723.75	Surplus/(Deficit)	£1,324.92

£4,338.25	Overall Assets	£5,663.17
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Prior Yr	Main Funding	This Year
	Opening Balance	£4,338.25
-	Surplus/(Deficit)	£1,324.92
	Closing Balance	£5,663.17
£5,926.09	Actual Bank Balance	£5,663.17
	Uncleared Items	
	Cash	
£4,338.23	Final Balance	£5,663.17

GROUP REPORTS

Chorley

When coming out of the COVID-19 lockdown we were struggling to restart the Chorley walk programme when an unexpected phone call from Helen Oliver offering us 8 Tuesday walks for a two month period. We quickly drew up and emailed this out to our Chorley members. Straight away other walk leaders began to offer walks and very shortly we had more walks on our programme than in normal times. Sid Calderbank even completed the same historical walk six times in six weeks and most of the time he was oversubscribed.

This year has given us the opportunity to revolutionise the way we collect and produce our walk programme by Email, Website and Social Media. Our website was developed using a commercially available programme which is now no longer supported. Website Developers now mainly use Wordpress Software which is more suitable for viewing on Smart Phones and Tablets. We therefore may move over to this system in the near future.

Over 600 people have joined our Facebook Site. Members are regularly posting details of the walks they have been on.

For the year ending 30th September 2020 Chorley Ramblers have increased their total membership by 10 to 351. In actual fact the group gained 48 new members during this period but 38 existing memberships lapsed. In all probability this is due to the current Covid-19 situation.

This year (55%) of the 904 PROWs in the Borough of Chorley have been checked by the Chorley Ramblers Footpath checking team. This is an excellent achievement against the background of the corona virus.

Two Miles without Stiles routes in Chorley Borough, (a) Duxbury Circular and (b) Anglezarke Circular have been published on the Ramblers Association's application, "Ramblers Routes". These routes are free for members to download with the option to print the route or download the GPX data to your phone.

Mike Wisdom

Fylde

As we approach the end of another year in Fylde Ramblers' calendar, we have the chance to reflect on what a unique time this has been and will no doubt be a discussion point for future generations.

The global Coronavirus Pandemic: isolation, lockdown, furlough, face masks, social distancing, protect the NHS, social bubbles, rule of six, 'hands, face, space' and the new normal to be COVID-secure.

The endless terminology, rules and guidance issued by government and scrutinized by the media left many of us dazed and confused as our daily lives were changed and we adapted to new restrictions on family life and recreation.

As members of the Rambling community, the initial guidance was to stop all group walks and Rambler activities. We could only exercise from our front door. I was and still am working from home and, like many people across the country, I explored my local patch, finding footpaths and places of interest that I had never come across in the 25 years that I have lived there.

The wonderful sunny and dry months of early lockdown gave way to summer and the devastating consequences of the virus began to ease and restrictions relaxed, enabling our walking community to travel further afield and walk together in small 'friendship' groups. These were difficult months and I would like to recall all those members, friends and their families who suffered during this unprecedented time.

We all wondered when group walks would recommence, given the guidance from Ramblers that up to 30 walkers could legally meet for a group walk, conditional on compliance with many new rules in respect of protecting the members; booking systems, risk assessments, registers, distancing measures and lots of additional responsibilities for walk leaders. The Ramblers organisation accepts and

acknowledges that the restarting of a Group Programme is a decision for the local club. A recent online meeting of the committee unanimously agreed that the Fylde Group is not currently in a position to consider the responsibility of restarting group walks or activities.

Now in the grip of a second wave of the pandemic and Lancashire being designated an area of very high risk, I firmly believe our current stance on group walking should continue. We await a safer time before restarting group walking. I applaud the fact that many members and friends have formed small social groups and walk together, enjoying the multitude of benefits, body and soul, of being out in the fresh air and experiencing the natural beauty of the Lancashire countryside.

Robb Radford

Garstang

Going back a few years the Garstang Group was an active group within the Ramblers Association with typically three led walks per month, with several walks leaders, plus some social activities and well attended Annual General Meetings. The Groups' walks programme consisted of a mixture of short easy walks and moderate walks typically of 10 to 12 miles. It was commented that for the size of the Group that they did very well for the activities that they arranged.

Earlier this year before Covid-19 struck the Group only had two regular walks leaders, with some months only one walk being arranged. It is a sad fact of life that as we grow older our walking ability declines, which has meant that the Group has lost leaders with little in the way of replacements coming forward. In recent years the attendance at Group AGMs has been noticeably fewer in number than it was previously.

At Group's last AGM in Nov 2019 David Walton gave the Group notice that this would be his last year as the Chairman of the Group. Nobody in the period since has expressed an interest in being the next Chairman of the Group. We thank David Walton and the other members of the Group for their contributions over many years.

It was therefore proposed that the Group changes to being a flexi group. The main change is that requests for repayment of expenses will be sent to the Area Treasurer.

David Kelly

Preston

Preston has maintained a fairly constant number of members, at 133.

One of the members has volunteered to put on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday walks a month with approximately 9 walkers attending, though these have stopped for the moment. Other members either continue to walk in small groups with friends or their families. A second member also walked some of the local footpaths earlier in the year.

The committee held a zoom meeting that everyone managed to connect with. It was decided to hold a zoom AGM in January, opening it up to other members.

Due to the current situation there was no other action to report.

Joan Smith

South Ribble

Before Covid hit, South Ribble had started to experiment with Monday and Friday walks in addition to its core programme of Thursday walks. These additions were proving popular.

As soon as was permitted South Ribble recommenced the core Thursday walk programme recommenced and there has been a walk every Thursday since.

However as 50% of leaders feel unable to lead at this time for personal and family reasons, there is quite a load on the remaining leaders so additional walks are not feasible for the time being.

Membership has held up well and numbers on walks are growing though have rarely been under pressure.

We are grateful to Dave Walsh who acts as Walk Coordinator and to the efforts our leaders put in.

Our website draws a steady, if limited, number of viewers including non members.

Eric Crichton

West Lancs

From October, 2019, until early March, 2020, we organised and led 17 walks. An average of 16 members and guests joined each walk. One walk was cancelled due to flooding. Our programme included a walk using Merseyrail. Our last walk before the coronavirus lockdown was on Wednesday, March 11th. The programme was then suspended until restrictions were relaxed to allow for groups of up to 30 to walk under social distancing conditions and the requirement to book a place in advance. We resumed with a walk from Tarleton on Sunday, September 6th with a party of 12 members.

Group membership is 152 (138 in September, 2019). It is pleasing to report this increase in membership. Non-members are made welcome as guests on our walks. However if a non member joins our walks regularly then he or she is asked to consider becoming a member.

We published just two walk programmes. These were distributed to members either as email attachments, by Royal Mail or by handing out on walks. All our walks were listed on the web pages. Walks from September were added to the website but no printed programme was published.

We have held three Group Committee meetings, and have had a representative at Area Council meetings. The annual Green Fayre at Beacon Country Park planned for late July at which we always have a stand was cancelled. Our Christmas meal at the Rufford Arms was enjoyed by all present.

Members report footpath problems to LCC or on the Ramblers Pathwatch.

LCC have responded to our reports on at least two rights of way by replacing or repairing stiles and footbridges. Our Footpath Officer has monitored planning applications affecting rights of way. Our Countryside Officer has carried out strimming on some overgrown paths.

As ever we thank our walk leaders for planning and leading our walks so conscientiously. From September leaders have been responsible for taking bookings for their walk. We have had no serious incidents or accidents. This is due, in no small measure, to the care that leaders have taken in choosing safe routes, setting a suitable pace and avoiding potential hazards. Leaders have completed a detailed written risk assessment for walks under coronavirus restrictions.

We have worked within our budget. Our Treasurer has kept the Group Committee up to date with our spending.

Geoff Wright

Hike on Lancashire

The year 2020 has been a difficult one for everyone including Hike on Lancashire. Prior to the first lockdown we had a robust walks and socials programme in place building on recent improvements in numbers of walkers we were seeing.

Since March we have continued to offer a limited walks programme but insisting that walkers are members of HoL. This has helped ensure that we can operate safely within Covid restrictions and has resulted in an increase in our membership from 52 in March to 84 at the end of November 2020.

John Hutchinson

Lancashire Weekend Walkers

No Report