

## **DALES WAY ASSOCIATION AGM 2012 REPORTS**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

At our AGM held in Linton in May last year, just nine members of the Association were able to attend, basically most of the committee and three others.

Though small in numbers we had every reason to hope that the Association was in good heart and we were on something of a roll. A small but keen team had enjoyed a very successful year. Membership numbers were holding up, we had a reasonable bank balance, and had just enjoyed a superb day on the new Watershed high level Dales Way link route between Dentdale and Cam Fell. A new edition of the original Dales Way route guide had been issued and we had enjoyed some excellent publicity for the Association.

And the year started well. Alex continued to do some outstanding work on the Dales Way footpath itself, dealing with the occasional complaints, most commonly when people got lost being too busy talking and not looking at either map or waymarks. But also he was continuing to developing his excellent relationship with the National Park, Cumbria and other local authorities along the route. This has secured various improvements to the route over the year, the highlights perhaps being the proposals for the erection of the fine new footbridge at Crosedale in the Lune valley. Yet another excellent edition of the Dales Way Handbook was produced and our webmaster Chris Musson was coping well with our website which was becoming ever more important part of our work, though we needed to get further improvements to deliver all we needed. And last summer we also had a memorable joint walk with the Friends of A Dales High Way between Saltaire and Ilkley.

But as so often has happened with the Dales Way Association, just when we believed all was going well, we had an unwelcome surprise awaiting us. This came at the beginning of the year when our hardworking Secretary and Membership Secretary Carol Crossland announced that owing to pressures of work, she could no longer cope with the tasks for the DWA which were now taking up too much of her time and she gave notice that she wished to resign.

It was clear that without the kind of input that Carol had given us, the Association could not survive, and with no obvious candidate to replace her, closing down the Society seemed like the only option. But then came salvation in the form of Chris Grogan who had recently joined your Committee. Chris offered to handle the core tasks of being Secretary to the Committee and handling membership matters. We all felt that there had to be major changes if the Association was to survive. Dealing with literally hundreds of membership enquiries, and posting out of certificates, newsletter and handbooks had become too big and time consuming a task.

Whilst it was agreed that some of various tasks could be shared with other members of the Committee, a fundamental rethink in the way the Association operated was needed if we were to continue in being.

It was pointed out that we were in fact spending a huge percentage of our members' income in merely serving members. Escalating costs for printing and postage of both the magazine and the Handbook now meant that resources were being used for this, and not for our prime purposes of protecting the Dales Way, and we no longer had the pool of volunteers we need to carry out these tasks. Tony Grogan who early in

the year had taken over as website administrator from Chris Musson, was also able to suggest that we could run the Association far more cost effectively and keep in closer touch with our members if we were entirely a web based body, thus saving huge amounts of money and time and yet still providing a service.

So your Committee took the brave decision to change the organisation from a traditional postal-based voluntary society, to an on line Association which could still have regular meetings, but by saving time and money could focus on the footpath and campaigning work. Central to this has been the outstanding work on the route which has been achieved and the ever better relationships we have with our local authority partners.

We are also in the process of becoming a small charity, which will allow us to reclaim tax on donation and subscriptions, as well as making it easier to receive grants from external bodies and funding agencies. Special thanks to Chris for doing such splendid work on this, and also to Don Holliday for stepping into the breach as our Honorary Treasurer during this period of change

This new structure represents a fundamental change for the Association.

2012 is actually our 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary year, but instead of looking backwards we are now in a position to look ahead to the future – a small but hopefully effective environmental and access charity, leaner and sharper for the challenges ahead to protect and improve one of Britain's finest and most popular long distance walks.

But it would be wrong not to conclude with some heartfelt words of thanks – first to Carol who did such sterling work for us for two years as our Membership Secretary and treasurer, but also to Chris Musson who did the best part of 10 years as our webmaster, and finally to our small but dedicated team of Committee members who perhaps against all the odds have enabled, the Association not only to survive our latest crisis, but to enter our 22<sup>nd</sup> year in a position of strength able to deal with of what we hope will be an exciting period of growth and positive change.

## **FOOTPATH OFICER'S REPORT**

2011 to 2012 has been an eventful year. I have walked from Buckden to Bowness [and back] replacing broken waymarks, reporting various problems and re-acquainting myself with details of the footpath ready for future walkers comments.

### **May Day Walk 2011.**

5 committee members and 2 association members walked the Watershed Alternative in excellent weather from Dent to Ribblehead, confirming that this was an excellent alternative, in reasonable weather, to reduce road walking on this particular stretch of the footpath.

### **Proposed “off road walking” along Sprint Bridge road.**

In the Spring 2011 Newsletter, I said that the Burneside Parish Council did not have the will to affect a change to get walkers off this dangerous road. They objected to my remarks and I got a robust response. [Correspondence **had** started in **2006**.]

The District Councillor got involved along with representatives from Cumbria County Council (CCC). Cropper Estates who own the land south of the road were contacted, but no agreement could be reached with the tenant farmer. On the north side of the road, no agreement could be reached with the 3 landowners. An alternative route is

available from Sprint Mill cottages to Garnet Fold Road, but this requires waymarking by CCC.

### **Autumn Walk. October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011. The Bradford Link.**

This walk followed the Bradford link from the centre of the city to the start of the walk proper in Ilkley in glorious weather. Amongst the group of walkers was the head of Bradford Council's countryside service and two of his colleagues. At Saltaire, the group was joined by Friends of A Dales High Way who followed the "High Way" path and met the other group on Rombalds Moor and proceeded to the pub in Ilkley.

### **Bridge over Crosdale Beck.**

Construction of the bridge was delayed by the extreme [wet] weather in September but was completed by the volunteers in October 2011. A valuable contribution for walkers along the footpath. The Dales Way Association made an appropriate contribution.

### **The Dales Way and Cumbria County Council.**

The wet weather in September certainly made parts of the footpath very difficult to walk, especially in Cumbria. The Association received letters about the conditions. Some were sent to CCC. Members living in Cumbria sought the help of their local Member of Parliament, who subsequently wrote to the Chief Executive Officer of CCC. The Dales Way Association did likewise. Jill Stannard, the CEO of CCC, ordered a survey of the Dales Way footpath and a programme to bring it up to standard. A Countryside officer and a Ranger were assigned to this task.

The survey was completed in April 2012 and 2 committee members met up with them in May at their headquarters in Penrith. In June with an additional committee member and the 2 representatives of CCC we walked the most troublesome section of the footpath [Lambrigg Head to the A6] looking at specific problems and their solutions re labour and finance.

There is now a detailed plan to follow as and when finance and resources allow.

Steps at Lambrigg Head and 5 new fingerposts have already been erected.

As a further step forward the 2 CCC representatives were invited to our annual liaison meeting with the YDNPA in October. A meeting to discuss progress and ongoing improvement plans will take place in Cumbria in Spring 2013.

### **Cam woodlands.**

I was informed by a walker on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012 that the path through Cam woodlands was now dangerous. I found out that approximately 50 trees had been blown down and a path had to be "chain sawed" through. At the same time Cam woodlands had started to be harvested, i.e. cut down. The north east corner of the woodlands is now an area of tree stumps. The footpath is diverted up the side of the felled trees and continues along the service road then up the fell side to the summit cairn.

The contractors have agreed to carve a proper footpath through the stumps, which will be enhanced with work by the YDNPA volunteers.

### **Thursgill Beck.**

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012 we were told that **Thursgill farm** service bridge had collapsed. Working with CCC a diversion route was agreed, and maps and instructions posted East and West of the collapse. A temporary bridge was built by

the farmer up stream and he has allowed walkers to use it. It is not however a right of way. Building a new bridge is not clear, clouded by planning permission and finance.

### **Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.**

We held our annual liaison meeting with the Parks Authority on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2012. Two representatives from CCC were invited thus cementing the relationship with the Association and Authorities along the route.

### **Complaints.**

Complaints were made by 2 women walkers about being harassed by the alpacas at New Towne. There was also a complaint made by walkers near Hubberholme about excitable cows and a bull in the field.

Both complaints were forwarded to the appropriate rangers in the YDNPA who will deal with them as appropriate.

Alex McManus  
Footpaths Officer  
21<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

**Newsletters.** 3 issues have been distributed since the last AGM.

**DVD's.** 60 DVD's have been sold to date with no returns.

### **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT**

There were 397 members of the Dales Way Association at the end of March 2012. Thirty eight of these had joined during the year 2011-12. This is down on 2010-12 when 43 new members joined and total membership stood at 425.

Of the current membership 50 subs are now more than 3 months overdue.

One person resigned when he got the last newsletter with news of the proposed changes.

The Dales Way Association Facebook page has 228 "likes".