

FRED MATTHEWS REFLECTS....

On the first day of this year's Essex Hundred Mile Walk and with the thought that next June the Area is holding walks and demonstrations to mark its 21st Anniversary, I began to reflect on the various achievements we had made over a relatively short time.

As a result of the efforts and hard work of our very efficient working parties and Footpath and Countryside Secretaries, local Group Committees, Parish Adopters and other Volunteers, it has been possible to reach the present excellent but not yet quite perfect state of our Public Rights of Way (PROWS).

In the 1970s it was common to see walkers leaving London to ramble in Surrey, Sussex and Buckinghamshire, but how many were seen leaving Liverpool Street to walk in Essex? Today most, if not all, of our paths in Essex are walked and enjoyed regularly.

Indeed with the present number of local groups, one can go on a led walk in Essex almost every day of the week. In addition, we also regularly see walkers from adjoining Counties on our Area 100 mile walk and other Essex Area events. So the word has got around that Essex is now the place to walk in Southern England.

At the inception of Essex Area most paths in Essex were obstructed by crops & barbed-wire fences, had unwalkable headlands, the green lanes were completely overgrown and often gave headroom of a foot or less. There were few local groups as compared to the present 19 we have now formed, including the Friends and Young People's Groups. This is a sure indication of how far we have travelled.

Our working parties have, I believe, cleared all the green lanes of Essex and reopened some tens, if not hundreds, of miles of lost walks. They have

also built hundreds of bridges and stiles, and installed waymarker posts etc. Today there is a Footpath Secretary representing and looking after PROWS in every district council area in the County. Many parts of the County also have Parish Adopters. We hope in time to appoint an adopter for each Parish in Essex.

When the 'Adopt a Parish' scheme was first introduced in Essex, Gordon Ayres, then Area Treasurer, devised a computer program for the adopters to use in recording and surveying the state of the paths in each Parish, named ROWDAM. This informed the County of the outstanding work required and is still used in some parishes. More recently a newer computerised programme is used together with regular audits of the PROW network carried out by Area surveying parties.

The Ramblers achieved further success in the maintenance and use of PROWS by creating the first long-distance footpaths in Essex, the Essex Way, the Harcamlow Way and the Three Forests Way. These paths are now managed by the County, not only for their maintenance and waymarking etc, but also for the production and sale of guidebooks that enable walkers to enjoy recognised long-distance routes from the London suburbs to Harwich, Cambridge and Bradwell on Sea - another outstanding achievement of the Essex Area.

Our Area is now working on establishing the Essex section of the coastal path between Kent and Suffolk. This will contribute to the long-distance footpath, proposed by the Ramblers' Association, around the whole of the country, many parts of which are already in existence.

The fight for better standards continues. The situation is becoming even brighter with the introduction by the government of the four-metre strip between

crops and hedges and the introduction of Cross Compliance where the farmer is brought to book for the poor condition of paths and his farm subsidy threatened. Essex Area is not, of course, solely responsible for all these improvements, but we have certainly played our part in the recent acceptance of Government policy

Two physical achievements in the Essex Area also come to mind. One is the building by the County of a 50 ft bridge over the River Roding at Stanford Rivers, which has opened up paths on both sides of the river. The other is the success in 1996 when the Ramblers won a public inquiry on the grounds that the County had not given sufficient consideration to providing grade separated crossings for PROWS, which were cut by the *new* road scheme to build the A120 bypass. A second inquiry resulted in the County agreeing to grade separated crossings for all affected PROWS and Area was asked to draft guidelines setting out how such problems should be treated in future. These guidelines were agreed and the problems solved. However we are still seeking funding to apply the guidelines to *existing* major roads.

These achievements show the value of the work that we have done for walkers in Essex since the Area was set up. There is still much to do, monitoring and maintaining the footpath network, protecting PROWS from future developments and securing a pleasant future so that our members and all walkers may enjoy the beauty of the Essex countryside.

I wish Essex Area well for the future.

Fred Matthews and Budgie.
Cheep Cheep

The newsletter of the
Ramblers' Association
Essex Area —
email version.

Your friends and
colleagues can get
this version simply by
emailing:
talkingwalking@aol.com

Inside this issue:

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the books!

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website

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for first aid

You write to EAU

Dates for your
Diary

WORKING WITH ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL (ECC) is not always straightforward as **John Dowding** our indefatigable **Footpaths Secretary** explains.

Just over two years ago, we wrote to County Highways requesting a meeting to discuss the quality of the rights of way service. We were getting worried that some agency districts were not performing as well as they had, while ECC themselves were improving, although their area offices varied. There were new faces at County Hall, a new chief highways officer and a new portfolio holder.

We said that we thought it would be better if it were run centrally to avoid variations in performance. Remarkably this came about, although I suspect they were thinking along the same lines, as they have stopped all their agency agreements for all highways from April 2005.

The survey figures from the audit commission surveys (BVPI) were discussed and we pointed out that our members were frustrated to see that faults found in them were not put right, some turning up again a year later! Three things happened. A one year blitz on the previous survey faults was carried out, a lot of waymarking was done, as this, although not a statutory duty, was failing a lot of paths and thirdly, they started this year a five year rolling programme to work through the entire network, 20% each year, surveying and putting problems right.

They, and we, realise that the more serious problems may take time to solve, but a start will be made. At the end of the five years, they intend to start again.

We have met annually and at this year's meeting they are still worried about low BVPI figures. One problem is that paths are randomly selected, 2% of the network twice a year and random selections come up with strange results!

We have made the point this time that a campaign on ploughing and cropping would pay off. They suggested a yellow/red card system for offenders. We have said that our volunteers would be happy to co-operate in reporting problems, but that we would need to be assured by statements from their computer system that our reports were being acted on.

KEEP US INFORMED - John Dowding wants to know about your complaints

The RA website suggests reporting problems directly to the Highway Authority (HA), County, Unitary Authority or London Borough. This advice is intended for non-members who go to the website for advice.

However, we have a dedicated team of footpath secretaries waiting for these reports, so either send them to our folk, or if you report them directly to the HA, **PLEASE** do copy them to the appropriate footpath secretary, as they need to know. If there comes a closure attempt in the future for a "little-used" path, they then have proof that there had been problems, and that there is a need for it in the future. Preferably report it to the Footpath Secretary for the district in which you were walking. They are in the Area directory. If in doubt send it to any FP Sec, to me or the RA HQ - it will then automatically come back to me.

NOW IS THE TIME

Councillors are just starting to put together next years budget – now is the time to mount a little local agitation so that your members know that you are concerned about the state of footpaths right across Essex.

KEEP TO THE RIGHT

There is a rumour going round that the RA advises groups to walk on the left hand side of roads. This is incorrect.

RA advice is as follows: *Groups to continue to follow the advice in the Navigation and Leadership manual: where there isn't a footway, walk facing oncoming traffic, temporarily crossing only to see round bends, as the Highway Code advises for individual pedestrians.*

Remember that **Area**, via the Chair - **Dave Cullington**, is sponsoring a

FINANCE MEETING on 27th October at Trinity Methodist Church Hall, Chelmsford

at which **Annette Cotter**, a member of the Board of Trustees and Chairman of the National Audit and Finance Committee will address these and other issues.

If you would like to attend this meeting, please get in touch with Len Banister and he will send you a map showing the location. ***You may also like to send him questions in advance of the meeting.***

RESERVES POLICY MARK 2

A second consultation draft of the proposed Reserves Policy which will apply to all parts of the RA has just been issued to Treasurers. Responses to the consultation are required by 31 January so Groups need to make sure that they include the item on their committee agendas.

The proposal which is likely to have the greatest effect on an individual Group's ability to finance its charitable objects is that which requires Coach Rambles, Holidays and Socials to be run as financially neutral activities in aggregate.

A MAJOR PUBLISHING EVENT

After about three year's of cogitating, the Area has a website. Ian Hynd, our new IT Officer on the Executive Committee has done a tremendous job in putting together a very smart site which should enable the Groups and the Area to improve communications with each other.

We will of course use the website primarily as a notice-board for Area events and a means of putting potential members in touch with appropriate Groups.

See the site for yourself on
www.essexarearamblers.co.uk

ESSEX AREA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held at:

Spring Lodge Community Centre
 Powers Hall End
 Witham

and start at 9.30am on Saturday 4th February 2006

The AGM will finish at 12.00 and be followed by a 15 minute meeting of the Area Council
 There will be a short and a longer walk in the afternoon.

A simplified agenda is given below:

1. Minutes
2. Address by Andrew Chadwick, the RA's Volunteer Development Manager
3. Treasurer's & Secretaries' reports
4. Reports from Officers (reception of written reports)
5. Election of Officers
6. Election Group Representatives for Area Council
7. Election of Delegates to General Council
8. Election of Auditor
9. The Constitution
10. Motions from Groups or Individuals

All Groups should be starting to think about the AGM. We really do need some new blood on the Executive and the Area Council and hope that we get many more nominations in February. We particularly want to fill the vacancy of Publicity Officer – we are quite willing to provide training for anyone willing to do the job but lacking in experience.

We also hope that there will be some motions going forward from this AGM to General Council.

A full agenda will appear in the January edition of **EAU** and each group will be sent 5 copies of the complete agenda papers in early January. Group Secretaries can order additional copies by 1st January 2006.

COMPLETE ACCESS

On 31 October regions 8 and 7 (which includes Essex) become fully CRoW operational and with them comes the complete implementation of the Act for the whole country. The effects in Essex will be minimal but many of you who have visited the Peaks or Lakes this year will have already noticed the fantastic benefits brought to walkers by the new legislation.

FORGOTTEN PATHS

Sarah Clements, Volunteering Innovations Manager for the RA, is heading up a 'Forgotten Paths Project'. She wants to add to the number of highly dedicated and knowledgeable members who have already given their time for many years to researching and sometimes discovering paths which should appear on our Definitive Maps. If you would be interested in hearing more about the work which **does not** involve travelling around, meeting anyone in person or taking telephone calls, please contact Sarah on 020 7339 8541 or SarahC@london.ramblers.org.uk

THE AREA QUIZ will be organised by:

**Maldon and Dengie 100 Group
on Saturday 18th March 2006, in Wickham Bishops Village Hall**

Jim McWhirr and Mike Richards will be providing the questions and Sue and Bruce Heath organising the supper.

NIGHT FLIGHT

The Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) campaign tells us that the Government wants to allow 40% more night flights at Stansted Airport by 2012 and, as a local community, we need to say loud and clear that this is simply not acceptable. This proposed increase directly contradicts the Government's promise in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper to 'bear down' on the problem of night noise from aircraft operations.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mark Lazarowicz has a private members bill in parliament at the moment which calls for a fiscal and economic strategy to promote microgeneration and energy efficiency and an annual report on emissions of greenhouse gases in the UK.

The RA is keen that members get their MP to provide support. More information on Mark's website:

www.marklazarowicz.org.uk

WHERE THERE'S A WAY...

Paula Cheesman, Essex County Council's Public Rights Of Way Team Leader has written to tell us that a replacement for the late lamented Ways & Means should be up and running by Christmas. It will be posted on the Essex County Council's Website.

If you have any items you think might be appropriate, please send them to her. She would particularly welcome: Current Topics - newsworthy items regarding rights of way; Contacts - if you want your group featured; Feature Walks - if you have any; Facts and Rules of the countryside - relevant to your group; Links to farm schemes; Human interest stories; Diary dates.

Paula can be reached on Paula.Cheesman@essexcc.gov.uk

NEWS FROM THE SECRETARY — Len Banister

Festival of Winter Walks

If you haven't done so already, please ensure that your programme has been passed on to headquarters, this will ensure that it appears on the National Website. As usual, you can get posters printed in any number, free of charge provided you send or email Len with a typed text.

More Opportunities to Volunteer

Anyone who lives in or near Waltham Forest and would be willing to assist an East Asian Health project by leading short walks should contact Len.

New Recruitment leaflets produced

Secretaries and Membership Secretaries will be receiving the new leaflets in the next few days. When you do so, destroy the old versions. Additional bulk supplies are available from Len.

Deadlines for General Council 2006

Last date for motions	11 th March
Nominations to Council	17 th March
Council at Keele	21 st to 23 rd April

Publication from ExDRA, the Essex Development and Regeneration Agency.

Some of us have been lucky enough to receive a copy of '*350 Miles, An Essex Journey*'. One of the best, most honest and superbly written books about Essex I have come across in recent years. It comprises a series of photographs by Jason Orton, accompanied by an essay written by Ken Warpole.

It deals with the Essex coastline which tells it like it is, but also evokes what the writer Norman Lewis describes as the 'sour poetry of the landscapes (and the) settlements where they reared chickens and sold car spare-parts by the stick wilderness of the estuarial wilderness of this country'.

You can get a free copy of this book by contacting Elli Constantatou, Tourism & Marketing on **01245 702453** or elli.constantatou@exdra.co.uk

COMING TO YOUR AID

The Area Executive has agreed to run some **First Aid Courses** for Walks Leaders at a subsidised rate next year.

Watch **EAU** for details.

You write to EAU and the temperature rises...

Richard Paternoster's comments about **RA financing** in the last edition of **EAU** have provoked a good deal of comment. Below we give examples which support both sides of the argument.

From Maureen Taylor, Membership Secretary L.V.F.

I have read with interest the article written by Richard Paternoster, Chair of Rochford & Castle Point in the October EAU and agree with everything he has said.

The majority of the Lea Valley Friends, indeed I would go further and say all of our members, join to walk and socialize with like minded people. A few may in the fullness of time become interested in other aspects of the RA's work, but I would say they are in the minority.

Most of our members have been recruited via the local newspaper or by word of mouth.

I do not feel Head Office fully appreciates that we who help to run the groups are all volunteers.

If we did not lead walks the members would leave the RA in droves.

and

From Gordon Hands, Footpath Secretary, RA, Uttlesford District.

Your contributor Richard Paternoster is to be congratulated on chairing an active Local Group.

Only a minority of RA members join Group Walks, most prefer walking with one or two friends at most.

How embarrassing if several hundred turned up for an organised walk.

Most of us join the RA because we support the national aims and objectives and would prefer our membership subs to be used for this work for the benefit of us all.

Incidentally for the last forty years, I have supplied stationery, a typewriter, computer, printer, photocopier and the rental and running costs for my work as a Footpath Secretary.

Keep up the good work – at a reasonable price though.

Lastly our apologies...

Mags Hobby reminds us that not everyone is on broadband and that our inclusion of adverts in the last issue made downloading an interminable affair – one which we will avoid repeating for a year.

PS

By the way, you may like to know that **EAU** shows up on the editor's spell checker as Eau de Cologne – you may like to comment on that!

**ESSEX AREA
RAMBLERS****CONTACTS:**

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Diary Dates

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|-----------------|--|
| 11 Oct: | Area Council |
| 15 Oct: | Ann McLaren's 30th Anniversary walk |
| 27 Oct: | Finance Meeting, Trinity Methodist Church,
Chelmsford |
| 31 Oct: | Final Commencement of Access Rights under
Crow — East & West of England |
| 23 Nov: | Footpaths Committee |
| 6 Dec: | Executive Committee |
| 26 Dec-2 Jan: | Festival of Winter Walks |
| 2006 | |
| 9 Jan: | Area Council |
| 31 Jan: | Executive Committee |
| 4 Feb: | Essex Area AGM (followed by AC)
in Witham Community Centre |
| 18 Mar | Area Quiz at Wickham Bishops Village Hall |
| 4 April: | Executive Committee |
| 12 April: | Footpaths Committee |
| 21-23 April: | General Council – Keele University |
| 8 May: | Area Council |
| 24 June-2 July: | Use Your Paths Week and Area Campaign |
| 18 July: | Executive Committee |
| 16 Aug: | Footpaths Committee |
| 18 Sept: | Area Council |
| 28 Nov: | Executive Committee |
| 29 Nov: | Footpaths Committee |
| 2007 | |
| 15 Jan: | Area Council |

Please, please, please

Make sure that every member you know with an email address receives a copy of **EAU** by contacting: talkingwalking@aol.com

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4458492