

WALKERS ARE WELCOME TOWNS NETWORK

Towns and villages with something special to offer walkers



Newsletter April 2014

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Annuals Return and Subscriptions

I am sorry to report that only 50 per cent of members had submitted their Annual Return to Robert Talbot and their subscription to the Treasurer, Geoffrey Kitt by the 31 March deadline. However, we have received quite a few since then and the committee are busy reading and marking returns. If you have not completed these annual formalities **please do so urgently**. It is imperative to complete these two stages to remain accredited for the following year.

Chepstow Get-Together 18-19 October

We received more news of the exciting programme being prepared by Chepstow but I won't let all the secrets out yet, details will be updated on the website [page](#).

There will be an introduction to 'Funding' led by Shelia Talbot from Winchcombe who will look at getting your group funding ready, touch on grant processes and more importantly sustainable funding for your organisation's future.

One main session will be entitled 'Keeping Walkers and Organisers Safe'. We all worry that in today's litigious society we must do as much as we can to protect our organisations, walk leaders and walkers in preparing our events properly. We know that not all groups are as skilled as they should be and we want all our WaW towns to be protected. A new set of Handbook pages will also be prepared from this workshop. If you are thinking of Public Liability Insurance at all for either every day activities or special events, see our special offer [insurance](#).

Charity status

A national executive sub-group have been working on the new constitution document necessary to turn WaW into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and this will be shared with all members once the finishing touches are complete.

As part of this process it has been necessary to give all members equal voting rights. 'Associate Members' will become 'Provisional Members' and permitted up to 18 months to become accredited. Membership and mentoring will be compulsory before accreditation which will ensure that each and every town receives experienced advice during this process and the quality is maintained.

OS Maps

Ordnance Survey Map has put together a pack for organisers of walking festivals to help them make their event a success and encourage those attending to continue walking throughout the year. If you are organising a walking festival this year and have not been contacted already please see our news [item](#).

You may have a need to look at historical Ordnance Survey maps. This is particularly useful if you are researching a lost footpath (see last month's article). The free ['Explore the map series'](#) website from the National Library of Scotland is particularly useful with historical maps that are clear and easy to use for England, Scotland and Wales. Multi-layered 'Definitive Maps' with Rights of Ways for England and Wales are usually available online through your Rights of Way Authority.

It is illegal to copy current Ordnance Survey maps for walk booklets etc. and licence agreements are available to buy, please see their [website](#) for further details.

The ultimate is to have your new long distance trail or new footpath added to the OS Map, we'll talk about that next month.

Footpath Monitoring

Many WaW towns have different ways of monitoring their miles of Rights of Way and permissive paths. [New Mills](#), accredited in August 2013, for instance, are now embarking on a full audit of all their 100's of footpaths which will they think will take many many months to complete the task. They believe that this is an important exercise in maintaining one of the town's most valuable assets.

Please remember that whilst your Rights of Way Authority have some responsibility, it is unlikely that they will survey Rights of Way more than every 6 years and never in different weather conditions to highlight further problems. At WaW we like to see some sort of monitoring and reporting system and you will gradually get to know every foot of the Rights of Way in your area. So when someone says "*the muddy bit by the station stile*" the whole committee knows exactly what they are talking out.

Kirkby Stephen have a Rights or Way reporting system on their [website](#) and paper copies are available as a postcard at their Visitor Centre, Town Council office and accommodation providers. This enables walkers to feel that they have done something about a difficulty they have experienced and feel better and that someone cares. The Kirkby Stephen group submit and monitor all new problems reported. They also give feedback to the walker if they leave contact details. [Marsden](#) encourage their walkers to report directly to their council.

In today's changing financial climate you will find your Rights of Way authority cutting their budgets and doing less routine maintenance. Many authorities have moved to undertaking only their legal requirements leaving landowners and volunteers to make necessary improvements. WaW towns can help in identifying problem spots and helping to raise money for projects that would otherwise not be done.

Our Threatened Greens

Our Patron, Kate Ashbrook has kindly agreed to do a regular column, this is this month's important subject.

Green spaces in England are under threat as never before. First the government passed the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 which made it much more difficult for communities to register land as a town or village green, by outlawing registration of land which had been earmarked for building. Village-green status protects land from development and can be attained after local people have enjoyed the area for 20 years' informal recreation, without challenge or permission.

Next the government enabled landowners to deposit statements challenging people's informal use of land; once such a statement has been deposited, local residents have only one year in which to gather evidence of use and apply to register the land as a green. Although notices are supposed to be posted on the land for six weeks, there is no requirement for the owner to replace them if they are removed. So people might not know of the challenge until it is too late.

The registration authority (county or unitary council) is required to notify anyone who requests to be told of such statements. *We recommend that WAW towns ask their registration authorities to let them know of any statements.* You should then check the land to see if it is important to the community. If so, is it eligible for registration as a green? The Open Spaces Society's book *Getting Greens Registered* will help you through the process. If it is not eligible you may like to consider an alternative means of protection. For instance, if there is a neighbourhood or local plan in preparation you could ask the planning authority to designate the land as Local Green Space, which protects it from development.

Wales has so far escaped this clampdown on green space but, in the draft Planning Bill, the Welsh Government proposes to copy England and make it much harder to register greens. For further information see the Open Spaces Society's [website](#)

Till next time.....

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