

Bearsden and Milngavie Ramblers & Hillwalkers
Notes of Open Forum Meeting held at the Fraser Centre, Milngavie, on
Tuesday 22 January 2018 at 7pm.

There were 44 members in attendance, including Jenny Kane (Chairman), Fiona Taylor, Thea Stanton, and Dave Clark (Committee Members) at the top table.

Jenny opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming along, and explained that the reason for holding the meeting was to help the Committee ensure we have the best run walking group possible, and were seeking ideas and suggestions from the members, in order to achieve this aim. Dave would talk about Walk Etiquette, Thea on Walk Gradings, and Fiona on New Leaders.

Dave Clark – Walk Etiquette

This is an issue which other Rambler Groups feel is very important. It is accepted that Walk Leaders should lead from the front, usually with a member backmarking. Also, there can be a middle marker when there are large numbers on a walk, which can become rather spread out. The Walk Leader determines whether the walk is suitable for members to go on in front, and this should only be done with the Leaders permission, and that they keep the Leader always in sight, or to wait for the Leader and walkers to catch up at an arranged spot. This should never be too far ahead of the Leader and main group of walkers.

Walk Leaders also determine what walks they wish to lead and what category and description it should have on the Walks Programme. If a member needs more clarification then they should telephone the Walks Leader to discuss it further, along with any concerns. However, a Walks Leader cannot make a decision on whether a walk is suitable for that member, which has to be the member's decision.

At the AGM a checklist leaflet was distributed which covers a number of these points. There is also a section on the Group's website under 'advice' covering conduct, and safety.

The following issues were raised by members :-

When stops are made en route that the Leader gives enough time for those at the end to catch up and also have a short break, prior to moving the walk on.

The decision to extend, cancel, or cut short walks. - It was agreed this decision rests with the Walk Leaders as they will have done a recce and know the calibre of the walk. It may be determined by a number of factors, especially adverse weather conditions with cancellation prior to the date or even on the day itself. In respect of part of the group wishing to cut the walk short, the final decision again is with the Walk Leader. There has been occasions when agreement has been reached with the Walk's Leader that the walk splits and the Backmarker for instance, leads back the splinter group. The Walks Leader must be the one to make an informed decision. Members should never leave a walk without first informing the Leader.

Jenny – in summing up on etiquette, it was felt that overtaking the Walk's Leader is ok with their permission and to wait at an agreed point. In order to ensure the safety of a large group it may be that using a middle marker would assist. However, coordination between the Walks' Leaders and Backmarkers is essential. It was also suggested that wearing high definition jackets could be helpful. Finally, respect should always be shown to the Walks Leaders and Backmarkers, who are also members and are volunteering to lead, recce, and organise walks in their own time for the benefit of the Group.

Thea Stanton – Walk Gradings & Pace of Walks

Every programme includes the agreed basic definitions of the various gradings. Leaders are requested to give a clear, brief, description of their walk, within the confine of space available on the programme. Further clarification can be sought by telephoning the Leader in advance of the walk. In order to provide flexibility particularly in B grade walks, certain walks are described as slow hill walks, or easy Bs. This allows for walkers wishing to cross over from C walks to B walks. Also, by request, last year a number of D walks were put on the programme to assist C walkers who have health or mobility problems, and these proved very popular.

The Committee have tried to provide flexibility for our Group and cover a range of walks. However, at the end of the day the programme is determined by the walks members are prepared to lead. Ideally, we could have both C and D, or B and easy B walks. all on the same day, if there were the Leaders willing to take them.

Pace of Walks – this raised a lot of discussion. Should the pace be determined by that of the slowest member on the walk? This can be interpreted in different ways and there are various factors to be taken into account depending on the grading of the walk. Fiona Taylor felt that walkers have a natural pace and Leaders do not want to be too restrictive, which is why Leaders will give agreement to some going ahead but always keeping the Leader in sight, and stopping at an agreed point for the rest to catch up. However, a Walk Leader should be in control of the walk and not allow it to become too spread out. There was a suggestion that perhaps the walk could split into two groups, but this would need at least two leaders and two backmarkers, which is rarely practical. Though a middle marker might be the answer, if the paths are very twisty or there are more than one path. A number of members can manage flat C walks, as long as the pace is not too fast. Thea reiterated that this is determined by the Walk Leader, who having done a recce of the walk, has to take into account its length, terrain, weather conditions, possible numbers on walk, and time available in which to complete the walk, especially in winter when the time available is limited.

Coffee stops were also mentioned in relation to C walks, and whether they are compulsory. As always this is a decision to be made by the Walk Leader. It is not compulsory and in some cases it is not feasible. However, it has been a feature of C walks and one which the majority seem to enjoy. Time has to be taken into account by the Walk Leader, it maybe they can only allow for a quick coffee stop, or the coffee place can only cope with certain limitations. The Walk Leader has total discretion and will put in the walk description whether or not there will be a coffee stop. Also, at the start of the walk they would advise members if time at the coffee stop was limited.

Another question raised was the Group's policy regarding children. Moira advised that although some Groups do allow discretion on this, that our Group do not allow young children or dogs. Older children would have to be accompanied by a parent or guardian, who would have complete responsibility for them. They would not be the Group's responsibility.

Walk changes, and whether leaders have to turn up at carpark if walk cancelled on breaking news. Jenny advised that walks should not be changed on the day, but should follow what was put on the programme. However, there can be a degree of flexibility involved, if there was a problem due to weather and terrain, and those who turned up were all in agreement to a change, then that would be acceptable. Members should always check Breaking News prior to coming out on walk. If a walk was cancelled on Breaking News then in most cases the Walk Leader is under no obligation to turn up at the car park, especially if it is due to adverse weather conditions. Those members who are not on the internet should contact the Leader in those circumstances to check. However, if the walk was cancelled on the day of the walk, then the Leader, should turn up at the car park where possible.

Fiona Taylor – New Leaders

From the above it can be seen that many issues and problems could be solved by having more leaders and backmarkers, but the programme is constrained due to lack of volunteers to lead walks. The Committee is constantly urging members to come forward and put a walk on the programme. There are leadership courses provided by Ramblers Scotland, and most Leaders would be happy to mentor a member who is interested in leading walks, in order for them to gain confidence and knowledge. There is also guidance to Leaders on the website.

There is both an online library of walks, which sets out all walks lead by our Group since the year 2000, as well as a library with walk books and maps available to anyone interested.

Fiona urged those present to try and lead one walk in the coming programmes, in order to provide a more varied and diverse programme of walks, which would suit all needs. More leaders would make a huge difference to our Group and everyone is encouraged to try and lead.

End of Meeting

Jenny thanked everyone for coming along, and hoped that the meeting was useful and helped to clarify certain points. The Committee will take on board the various comments and discussions, and take action where necessary.