

2022 AGM REPORTS



Agenda Item 3 - Hon. Treasurer's Report (to be read in conjunction with the 2020-2021 accounts)

The 2020-2021 LDWA accounts cover the year from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. They were prepared by the Hon. Treasurer, John Elrick, and finalised by the LDWA's accountants, RfM Chartered Accountants.

The whole twelve months' period was dominated by COVID, covering the second lockdown in late 2020/early 2021 and continuing restrictions thereafter. Our activities in England, Scotland and Wales were severely reduced. The 2020-2021 accounts reflect this difficult period, although generally speaking the LDWA's finances remained healthy (see comments below on Reserves). Turnover remained stable and Administrative Expenses fell substantially, leading to a Net Surplus for the year of £77,032 (£45,510 in 2019-2020). These areas are examined in more detail below.

- Turnover – The total figure of £177,739 was little changed from the previous year's (2019-2020) figure of £181,253. Membership subscriptions comprised by far the largest element at £158,183 and held up well compared with £156,895 in 2019-2020. In addition, the NEC continued to receive donations to the IT Development Fund (see paragraph below). Conversely, merchandise sales were down to £2,267, perhaps reflecting the reduced opportunities for Local Group activity. Advertising income was also down slightly to £586, although is expected to increase in 2021-2022 thanks to the efforts of our Discounts Officer.
- Administrative Expenses – The impact of COVID is again evident in the reduction in Administrative Expenses which were down by £25,221. Costs largely fell by virtue of Zoom meetings replacing face-to-face meetings and gatherings, notably the 2020 Local Groups' Weekend and the 2021 AGM Weekend, both of which became Zoom meetings, and NEC meetings which were a mix of Zoom and face-to-face meetings.
- Other cost areas to note were:
 - Web site costs – Down by £12,794. A key factor was that the contract with our contractor, Mobius, ended in October 2020. It took several months to find a suitable replacement, Etempa, during which time our volunteer IT Team took on the routine maintenance work.
 - Insurance costs – Rose by £2,008 as a result of our insurance now providing accident cover for formal walks leaders.
 - Publicity costs – Down by £6,025 due to less emphasis on advertising in hard copy media, e.g. outdoor magazines, and more emphasis on social media.
 - Bank charges – Down by £2,957 which is consistent with less transactions in the twelve months' period.

Reserves increased in this period to £331,200. Looking forward the NEC has earmarked these funds to four areas of priority, as follows:

- IT Development Fund (£125K) - In 2019 the NEC set up the Fund to finance the redevelopment of the LDWA web site. At 1 October 2020 the Fund comprised £91,639 and over twelve months increased to £125,241 at 30 September 2021. The funds received in 2020-2021 came from Local Groups/individual members, a bequest from the Estate of Ann Sayer Deceased and expenses saved, e.g. from having virtual NEC meetings. As at 30 September 2021 no money had been spent from the Fund. Once the IT project is completed the NEC proposes to retain a strategic development fund to finance other future projects. The fund could be kept topped up from future annual surpluses.
- Operating Reserve Fund (£125K) – This would provide a cushion against any large reductions in income or large increases in costs. These could potentially threaten our ability to meet financial obligations or to continue with services to our members. This reserve would be enough to cover at least one year's operating expenses.
- Contingencies Fund (£25K) - This would be available for immediate use to deal with the fallout from any unforeseen event which disrupted or threatened our activities.
- Unassigned Funds (£56K) - The reserves remaining which have not been allocated or committed elsewhere.

John Elrick, Honorary Treasurer

Agenda item 4 - National Executive Committee Reports

a) Chair's Report

After a very busy 5 years as Local Groups' Officer I have to admit the first thought that came to me after the AGM in 2021, when I was privileged to have been appointed as Chair of our Association was "What do I do now?" It felt odd not having a particular portfolio and did take a short while to come to terms with. However, the first NEC meeting was soon upon us and I've never had time to look back since.

In my first year there have been many challenges. At the time of the online AGM, restrictions were just starting to ease following the second lockdown, which meant frequent meetings to enable social walk activities to be started up again cautiously and safely. Getting Challenge Events back on the programme again came later in the year. We were still short of an IT Officer on the NEC and shortly after that, a Long Distance Paths Officer. Others on the NEC took up the slack as best they could in the interim and we sought more volunteers to help with specific tasks to ease that burden. The Website Replacement Project, which had been on hold due to a lack of a dedicated project manager needed to get underway. This was thrown into sharp relief later in the year when we suffered a cyber-attack. With my day-to-

day position in Project Management I decided we could wait no longer and NEC agreed a plan to start the work.

In addition to the immediate challenges and having been on the NEC for 5 years previously involved with the development of the Business Plan, I soon picked up on ongoing activities, but this time from a different perspective. Among these were the review of Charity Status, the National Executive Committee Review and working with the Treasurer to understand our financial position. As a Director of the Company this was important for me as well as understanding how we could best support our core activities while funding the IT Project.

As the year progressed there were many positives too. Although not quite what we had hoped for the Virtual 100 was a great success, among participants and spectators alike, with thanks to the South Wales Group for their work in making an accredited event happen. Soon after I was able to start my Walks and Talks with Local Groups and at the time of writing have engaged with the Lakeland and London Groups. Hopefully it will be easier in 2022 to do more. Following the excellent work we did in association with like-minded organisations during the Covid negotiations we have started a Partnership program to keep in touch with these and work together on other initiatives as they arise. And, as I write this, we are entering our 50th Anniversary year and much of my time during the last year has been occupied in working on activities to celebrate this milestone. We hope to have one of these projects launched at the AGM – the LDWA Cookbook – Walking with Cake and other goodies - a book created by LDWA members for the wider walking community. Other plans are unfolding at both national and local level and I'm looking forward to taking part in many of these.

Though not meeting as often as we did throughout the Covid years, continuing with irregular Zoom meetings did have a positive impact on the amount of work that the NEC was able to undertake over the past year, enabling many important activities to progress, in addition to the formal NEC quarterly meetings. We have also continued to hold our main meetings on occasions by Zoom, which has also reduced the cost of the quarterly NEC meetings - funds that can be transferred into the IT Project.

One of the things I have tried to do is to continue our engagement with the wider membership through the Chair's Newsletter and a regular News from the NEC email. Although Strider has remained our main way of engaging with members directly, I have felt it important to bring members up to date on a more regular basis than we are able to with the printed word.

And what of the future? Towards the end of 2021 I attended a Conference for organisers of Outdoor Activities. I was one of 70 delegates, all of whom had heard about LDWA by the end of the day – though there were a number who were already aware of our 100-mile flagship and our Challenge events. However, it was a stark reminder that we may have lost our lead in the challenge events sector as I also met a number of people who had taken over some of our established events and were now putting them on as a commercial venture. One of the things I would like to focus on is working with our own Challenge Event Organisers and Local Groups to regain some of that lost ground.

Also, as the success of our Association depends in the main on our members and our Groups I plan to drive forward the Valuing the Volunteers Strategy to support and engage with our volunteers in a more formal way. This will include working with those groups that need specific support in the short term.

Other initiatives in which we are making strides include environmental awareness and sustainability and inclusion and diversity and I will be pleased to support further activities, working with the Local Groups, in these areas.

In order to fund some of the smaller projects that we would like to carry out I will also be investigating further opportunities for income generation and will concentrate on financial growth and sustainability, so that we are not only looking to members and groups to contribute to our plans. As an NEC we will focus on several pilot activities during 2022.

2022 will also be a year of celebration. Fifty years is a significant milestone in a society which has become more fast-paced, with instant global communication. So, I want to focus my activities as Chair in ensuring our Association is well prepared to be successful in the future and to face the challenges that the next five, ten or even fifty years may bring, so that our members will have other milestones to celebrate in the years to come.

Finally I would like to thank my colleagues on the National Executive Committee for their input and support over the past year. We could not have achieved what we have without the team pulling together and making progress on many fronts. I would especially like to thank Madeleine and Graham, who are stepping down at this AGM after serving their term of office. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with every one of them.

Julie Cribb, Chair

b) General Secretary's Report

This year has been another odd year. There has been less activity around changing requirements for LDWA activities due to COVID than last year. We have continued using Zoom for committee meetings, alongside two face to face meetings. These have taken us around the country – to York and Birmingham. The plan is to continue with a combination of Zoom and face to face for the coming year. Zoom does save money for the organisation and eases travel arrangements for those who live in the extremities of the UK, but is less satisfactory in terms of getting the NEC to work together as a team.

This is my last year in post and I have spent the last few months preparing for the handover. I wish Bill Milbourne all the best for the role. The time will fly by!

Madeleine Watson, General Secretary

c) Membership Report

During 2021 membership did not appear to be affected adversely by the pandemic and looking back at the figures it would appear we did indeed have a very successful year. In 2021, 1478 new members joined (and if we include family membership as 2 that figure increases to 1704.) (The same figures for 2020 were 1166 and 1361 respectively). At the time of preparing this report we are still in the renewals period so I will be able to provide more comprehensive figures at the AGM if required.

As restrictions started to lift in 2021 I saw an increase in members renewing their membership. As events were starting to open up for registration, this coincided with members renewing their membership who had let it lapse. Also with our flagship 100 event only being open to LDWA members I saw an increase in October of membership.

The cyber-attack at the back end of the year was very unwelcome but thanks to all of our IT team the situation was quickly resolved but highlighted the need for us to ensure nothing like this happens again and we are now in the process of looking at a new membership website. Hopefully by the time of the AGM in March we will have some further news in this regard. One of the main aims would be to make life easier for all our members, whether it be for them just simply to update their details; making the renewal process a lot easier and also making it more streamlined for new members wishing to join. The icing on the cake for me would be the introduction of electronic direct debits – so watch this space !

The cyber-attack also highlighted a great number of our existing members do not have email accounts and are therefore missing out on all updates from not only the NEC but their local groups. As part of our obligation after consulting with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) we wrote to all of these members to inform them of the impact that the cyber attack meant to them as members (members with email had been informed via the website and other electronic communications). Consequently around 600+ letters were sent out at the back end of 2021, which coincided with renewal time, so an extremely busy time for myself and Ralph (who assisted greatly). We have actively encouraged these members to provide an email address not only to keep them up to date of everything that is happening within the LDWA but also to reduce postage and paper going forward. The response so far has been good and hopefully more will come forward with this information.

I had the pleasure of attending the Group Reps weekend in November 2021, at Haworth. This was an extremely successful weekend and great to see so many representatives from our local groups. I assisted with leading one of the walks and was really pleased the weather was perfect for showcasing our Yorkshire countryside. The whole weekend was a great opportunity to chat and share ideas.

As I am now entering into my last year of being membership secretary, if anyone is interested in taking on this role and joining the NEC please do let me know, happy to discuss. My role is a very satisfying and busy role, but I am certain with the proposed new membership system a lot more of the procedures will be automated and a lot of the workload lifted. The role would ideally suit someone who perhaps doesn't work full time or if they do, if they have a partner who can assist them – that has worked well for me (and Ralph).

Julia Warman, Membership Secretary

d) IT and Internet Report

IT Team

The team of volunteers, managed by **Pete Buffham** continues to do an excellent job in managing the website. **Tim Bedwell** manages the email mailbox and passes work out to the technical team as appropriate.

The team (as of November 2021) consist of:

- **Michael Headley** (Kent) – permissions, updating front banner, merchandise support, page / menu management, source of great knowledge, advice & wisdom for anything and everything.
- **Paul Glynn** (Wessex) – permissions.
- **Richard Handford** (The Irregulars) – email issues
- **Tim Bedwell** (Surrey) – internet@ldwa.org.uk email management, PACER
- **Andrew Beck** (Thames Valley) – membership

We've also had additional members over the last month volunteer to support with the website re-development project.

Monthly IT Working Group

Due to the volume of planned change and issues arising throughout the year, an IT working group meet monthly to talk through progress of work and plans for the new website redevelopment. This has enabled quick decisions to be reached when required to avoid any unnecessary delay.

IT Supplier

In April we ended our relationship with Mobius and engaged with an Otley based firm called Etempa. This decision was reached after a tendering process with Etempa based on the level of service, flexibility and price.

Current Website Stability

We have successfully resolved some of our capacity and stability issues in August by migrating our website onto a new dedicated virtual server allowing us space to develop our website safely and sustainably.

Pete and the team have also migrated to a new electronic payment provider – Stripe. This is because the old provider decommissioned their platform, so it gave us the opportunity to explore more cost effective options.

Now the strong foundations are in place we are busy reviewing some of the website content and making small changes via our IT team. Etempa have been supporting us

with management of our ISP, security and server updates as well as some software defects.

Website Redevelopment

Our IT system is not only the public face of the LDWA, it is also the engine room and the operations and communications hub of our Association. Our membership system, Local Group websites and the Long Distance Paths database absolutely depend on it.

As you will know, it is a bespoke system, written for us 20 years ago and it has been creaking for some time. We have to rely on technical and coding specialists to keep it running, but we can no longer do any of the business-critical developments and it is becoming increasingly expensive just to keep the system operational.

Work has commenced with five workshops at NEC and Local Group meetings during August and September – thanks to everyone who has taken part and provide feedback. We are busy planning and pulling together all of the feedback given to allow us to prioritise what is most important to us.

It is not the intention to have a ‘big bang’ launch of a new website. We aim to make small incremental changes frequently focusing on the key priorities based on feedback from members.

Cyber Attack

The LDWA website was subjected to a cyber attack on 26 November resulting in a change of members' home addresses using what we believe to be an automated process. We took prompt action to protect the website by closing it so that we could investigate the impact and origins of the breach.

Unfortunately, these forms of attack are common, but our volunteers and IT support company have reacted promptly and we were able to restore the website from back-ups, reversing the changes. The website was back online on the 28 November. We are pleased to confirm that there is no evidence of any data theft. We are continuing the development work on our new website to ensure that we are protected in the future.

Stuart Bain, Interim IT and Internet Officer

e) Strider Report

I am now very nearly at the end of my five year term as Strider editor. Although I am officially stepping down at this AGM, I am now in the final stages of production of the April 22 Strider, so I will be working on it for another couple of weeks before I hand over to my successor. This is the biggest – and most important – Strider of my term of office, as it is the one to mark the LDWA's 50th anniversary. It's a bumper edition, with lots of features about how the LDWA has developed over the years, including memories from some of our founder members. As with the August 2021 Strider (no. 150), it is an unashamed long distance walk down Memory Lane (although there is

much in it beside nostalgia – including some excellent features, with lovely photos, about members of one of our groups going to Everest Base Camp; the Speyside 100 in 2024; an LDWA member walking the E4 Trail across Europe; and the Capital Ring long distance path; plus the annual National Trails Register). If all goes to plan, our members should be getting it at the end of this month.

I have to say looking after Strider has been an honour and a privilege, and I will always be grateful to Gail Elrick – then chair of the LDWA – for approaching me to take the job. I retired as a local newspaper editor in 2016, and I always say that Strider has extended my career. When I first had a conversation with Gail about Strider, I told her that I would give Strider the same TLC I gave the East Kent Mercury (my last job before I retired) for 18 years, and that is what I have done. It is a wonderful job, and the best thing about it is the inter-action with our groups and individual members. I have used my professional experience to make changes which I have felt would benefit Strider, and these have (generally!) been well received. Adhering to the principle of all Strider editors that the magazine is ‘For members, by members’, I consider the Strider editor’s job is simply to try to ensure that our members’ stories, photos, letters, challenge and social walks listings and – sadly – obituaries, get into what is their magazine. And I have many people to thank for their help during my term of office.

Over the last five years I have been sent no end of tremendous stories, often accompanied by first class photographs, and I am very grateful to everyone who has contributed. I am sorry that space constraints have meant I have not been able to use all their contributions. Also, I am grateful to those members who have contacted me on the (fortunately rare!) occasions when there has been something in Strider they don’t like. In all my years as an editor, I always said that if people didn’t like something, there was nothing I could do about it if I wasn’t told about it.

I am also so grateful to Neil Smy, who has looked after Strider production, printing and distribution for well over 20 years. Neil has been a massive assistance to me, and to previous editors. Apart from being extremely helpful and very creative, Neil has also shown great patience in interpreting my instructions over the years, and he has been very understanding when I have got things wrong (as can sometimes happen when working at speed with deadline approaching). He cares about Strider as much as I do, and the LDWA is lucky to have had him doing such a fine job for us for so long.

I would also like to thank my friend from Kent, Michael Headley, who has helped me proofread Strider over the years. Michael is one of the most thorough and meticulous people I know and he has put in sterling service to the LDWA over the years (and even at the age of 80, he is still a very strong and fast walker). The LDWA Volunteers Award he received earlier this year was so well deserved.

I must thank Ken Falconer and Julie Welch, my predecessors as Strider editors, who have both been very helpful and supportive during my term of office, as well as becoming good friends. And I am also grateful to my colleagues on the NEC for their support and friendship over the years. It has been a pleasure working with them (well, most of the time!) And I am very grateful to all of them for getting their Strider copy to me on time (usually!)

Being on the NEC certainly had its difficulties during the whole period of Covid, when LDWA activities were decimated, but I think we came out of it stronger, and more efficient and better prepared to face another major challenge, as an organisation. As Strider editor, it was my job to ensure that the way we were dealing with most difficult period in our history was reported in the LDWA's journal of record, and I am very grateful to my NEC colleague Stuart Bain for checking my stories to make sure they were as accurate as they could be.

Finally, I must thank my wife Sarah – who describes herself as a 'walking widow' – for putting up with all the work Strider has involved for the last five years.

Now the time has almost come for someone else to take on Strider, as the LDWA's magazine evolves in this age of the internet and social media. I wish my successor lots and lots of luck in the hope that the job will prove to be as enjoyable and fulfilling as it has been for me. And I will try to be as helpful and supportive to my successor as Ken Falconer and Julie Welch were to me.

Thank you, LDWA – editing Strider has been one of the best and most rewarding jobs of my life.

Graham Smith, Strider Editor

f) Local Groups Report

The local groups, and their members, are important in ensuring the current and future success of the LDWA and 2021 saw all the local groups rise to the challenge of resuming social walks in a safe and responsible manner following the pandemic. Social walks are one of the activities which lie at the heart of the LDWA and, following their return last Spring, we have seen an increase in joint walks with neighbouring groups and shorter, slower paced walks whilst members rebuild their fitness. Alongside these, our local groups have continued to offer longer and more challenging walks for those who carried on walking throughout the pandemic (many taking advantage of our virtual and Anytime Challenges). Other changes which have taken place during 2021 include an increased reliance on local group websites, newsletters, social media and emails to advertise social walks and the continued use of video conferencing to stay in touch and share information, ideas and feedback. The History Group was also formed during 2021. In an attempt to increase our membership, and attract a younger demographic, several groups are piloting a new approach to advertising social walks via the Meetup platform. This all demonstrates the resilience of our local groups and their ability to respond positively and quickly to changing circumstances.

Our Business Plan will only be delivered with involvement and support from our local groups and their members and 2021 has seen good progress being made in most areas. In the role of Local Groups' Secretary, I have worked with the groups and members of the NEC in two important areas - improving the sustainability of the LDWA and ensuring we have trained and motivated volunteers available to support our association's core activities. Below are details of the progress we have made in these areas and plans for the next 12 months.

Key Area 1: Sustainability

Our future success depends on us continuing to organise and lead a wide range of social walks across the UK. In addition, at local group level, we are developing a database of GPX routes, submitted by our members, which are available to everyone who has joined the LDWA. Monitoring and reporting on our progress in both these areas requires new functionality from our IT system – something which the Local Group Officers have highlighted in a series of workshops aimed at identifying the requirements of the replacement website. The role of Social Walks Coordinator (SWC) has been developed and a volunteer has recently been recruited. The SWC will be responsible for working with local groups, where appropriate, to increase the number of social walks and to develop and manage the data base of GPX routes based on these social walks. The role also has responsibility for monitoring and reporting on our activity in these areas.

Our 50th Anniversary provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the LDWA both nationally and locally and, during 2021, we have been working closely with local groups to develop a calendar of events and activities to mark this important milestone. Details of many of the celebration events featured in last December's issue of Strider and, as the groups continue to work on their plans, further event details will appear in the April and August editions. In addition to a wide range of (in some cases 50-themed) walks, plans include commemorative memorabilia, social evenings, a family treasure hunt, weekends away and celebration lunches and dinners. Many groups are taking part in "The Big Walk" over the weekend of 18th and 19th June and a number of groups have joined forces to run events.

Key Area 2: Volunteers

The local groups organise and run our core activities - social walks, challenge events and our flagship annual hundred-mile event. It's down to all our volunteers that we are able to offer these to our members. It's important that we support the local groups to ensure they work well and are able to continue providing great walks and events for our members.

One of the ways we aim to do this is via the Toolkit on the LDWA website. This contains a wide range of information to support our volunteers in their roles as Local Group Officers, social walk leaders, challenge event organisers, check pointers, marshals, caterers....and many more. Thanks to our members, Local Group Officers and the NEC, the Toolkit has benefitted from much further development over the past 12 months and the guidance information concerning the Covid secure resumption of social walks and how to organise challenge events has proved useful and has been frequently used.

Our annual Local Groups' Weekend provides an opportunity for groups to come together and share ideas, best practice, issues and future plans. In November, 32 representatives from 23 groups attended the 2021 weekend in Haworth, West Yorkshire. Over the course of the weekend the delegates worked on important topics including how the association can rebuild following Covid-19, ways to generate revenue streams for the LDWA, the role of the NEC and improving inclusion and diversity across the local groups. It wasn't all hard work though – delegates had the opportunity to sample the stunning moorland scenery above Haworth during the

walks on Saturday and, over wonderful food and a few drinks, representatives got to socialise with old and new friends. The feedback from those attending the weekend has been positive.

I have enjoyed my first year in the role of Local Groups' Secretary – it's been a pleasure working with the local group officers, the members and the NEC. I am grateful for all the support I've received and look forward to the next 12 months.

Karen Pickersgill, Local Groups Secretary

g) Challenge Events Report

“The LDWA Business Plan indicates that LDWA organised challenge events will increase annually, where possible and practical, but unfortunately during the past, bewildering and wretched pandemic year of 2020 the possible and the practical have been sidelined in sorrowful favour of paralysis, only temporary, but nevertheless, bringing a full 12 months of stopped activity by the time the 2021 April Strider arrives.” This quote belongs to the opening passage from my 2020 AGM report, but is also appropriate to this one. Certainly, up until the end of July, when, at last, freedom returned and mass-participation challenge events, alongside unlimited group social walks, were once again permitted to take place.

Naturally, after having been shackled for 16 months, organisers did not rush in and there was no sudden deluge of challenge events altering their cancelled status or those scheduled for later in 2021 declaring themselves open for entries. Caution was the name of the game, in all respects. However, the game was once more afoot and has continued in that direction, at least, up until the time of writing, at the end of December. What happens in the new year nobody knows and whilst under the cloud of the latest Coronavirus variant, Omicron, threats of further restrictions to those already in place and even a lockdown, potentially throwing our activities back into suspended animation, again hang over us. We remain optimistic, though, that the progress within normality so far gained will continue in earnest. Should the sort of restrictions experienced between March 2020 and July 2021 surface again, the effect on organisers' damaged confidence and general inconvenience to the smooth running of LDWA would be significant. Fingers and toes crossed that we keep moving forward. My apologies for focusing so much on the pandemic, but our lives, unfortunately, are monopolised by it.

However, at the end of 2021 all is well for the LDWA, with walking unrestricted, challenge event organisation growing in confidence and no shortage of people ready to participate, with entries soon becoming unavailable as limits are reached. Extra caution around these events and their participants are also very much in evidence and in or out of a pandemic that is a positive - long may such practical measures continue. The Events Diary in Strider and its associate on the website are still lacking in numbers, with some events possibly lost forever due to the pandemic, but eventually more will return and, in line with the LDWA business plan, naturally, new ones will be developed. Non-LDWA challenge events are also promoted, where the new and previously unrecognised shall appear and be welcomed. What is on display, we are, of course, immensely grateful for and shall endeavour to enjoy to the full.

For the first time since 2019 a mass-participation LDWA Hundred should take place, at the beginning of June, whilst 2021 saw the most diverse number of routes ever presented, never to be beaten, hopefully, as a very successful virtual LDWA Hundred went ahead. Anytime challenge events supported the membership during 2021 whilst the real action was out of reach and still do, in lesser quantities. SiEntries continues to work in harmony with LDWA challenge events and members, in particular, helping to keep spirits up when despair was the only fruit in the bowl. It is worth reminding both LDWA and non-LDWA challenge event organisers alike to keep their website details up to date and finally, to conclude, a massive thank you for everything they do and all the best for 2022. Thank you very much indeed.

Tim Glenn, Challenge Events Secretary

h) Hundreds Co-ordinator Report

I began to think about standing for this post just after Y 100 Sir Fynwy had been postponed in 2020 and was elected just after the event had been cancelled in 2021 – so the first 100 I have been involved in as co-ordinator was a virtual one! The Sir Fynwy committee continued to work together and produced a sufficiently rigorous structure to enable people to walk 100 miles, on their choice of route over the bank holiday weekend, and have it recorded on the 100s register. The use of various forms of social media helped to create some of the usual 100 atmosphere. There were reports of truly heroic endeavours, whilst other people quietly and calmly walked 100 miles and enjoyed the lack of fuss. By the end of the weekend 200 people had completed 100 miles within 48 hours and another 200 had completed 50 or more within 24 hours and so had a qualifier for the event in 2022. My sincere thanks go to the committee for their efforts which enabled many of us to enjoy a weekend of walking in the company of others, even if only virtually. But I also commiserate that such a lot of planning and hard work failed to come to fruition, and we missed out on what would have been an excellent and dry Welsh 100.

The delay caused by the virus has also had a major impact on the succeeding 100 organising committees, who were well into their planning. The Trans-Pennine team now have an event running from Friday to Sunday due to the change in bank holidays to celebrate the Queen's platinum jubilee. The Elephant, Bear and Bull team are back to the normal timing but both teams have had to extend their commitment for a further year and re-book checkpoints for the new dates. All this on top of the general uncertainty about the restrictions and regulations over the coming months and years, and the changes in people's lives and perception of risk. I want to thank all the people involved for sticking with the organisation of the event and hope the level of support and appreciation from participants will make it worthwhile.

Going forwards into the coming year:

The Trans-Pennine committee is looking forward to welcoming you to a beautiful area of South Yorkshire for a hopefully "normal" 100. This will be the first 100 to use trackers to monitor participant progress and feedback after the event will be welcome. I am also hoping to update the guidance in "How to organise a Hundred" on first aid support and have identified some contacts to help with this. I am enjoying

meeting the members of the organising committees and will continue to be the main point of contact between the various committees and the NEC. As I most definitely walk on my stomach, looking at the provision of food on 100s is still a long-term aim. We have 100s in place until 2026, which seems a long way off, but I am keen to hear at any time from groups who think they may be interested in staging a 100, so that the future of our amazing event is assured.

Sara Dyer, Hundreds Co-ordinator

i) Publicity and Communications Report

A long-standing problem for the LDWA is to increase awareness amongst the wider walking community that we exist, and we continue to work on measures to improve this. We are also conscious that Project 50 presents us with an ideal opportunity to do a substantial amount of publicity work to engage with more groups and get our name out there.

We have continued to grow our social media presence with a number of Facebook groups and have a presence on Twitter, Instagram and Youtube. Facebook is an ideal way of connecting with more potential new members, with Twitter being a useful way of sharing our work with similarly minded organisations. Our social media numbers have continued to rise and there have been many interesting and intriguing debates which have taken place over the last year.

We are continuing our work with inclusion and diversity, a key part of the business plan which aims “to promote a more inclusive membership that is representative of the United Kingdom”. There was a rewarding session at the 2021 groups’ weekend where there was a discussion on what we could do to help with inclusion, including focusing on the welcome offered. A number of trial projects are now taking place, including shorter introductory walks, railway walks and seven groups are taking part in a Meetup trial.

This work on inclusion and diversity is also important in our on-going efforts to ensure that we play our part in tackling the mental health crisis. Walking is good for the body, soul and mind, which is why we want to remove what barriers we can for those who can’t easily reach out to us due to mental health issues. Reaching out to the isolated is an important part of our business plan, and a number of groups have agreed to look at the welcome process and how new members feel when they join the LDWA.

Projects such as a stronger presence on sites such Meetup also allows us to increase awareness of our existence given the existential threat that we have that so many new walking groups are being created at the moment. We offer excellent value for money given our social walks, LDP database and reduced entrance to challenge events amongst many other elements, so we want to shout about our offering.

We have reduced our magazine advertising spend over the last year and will be focusing more of that money on social media in the year ahead. This allows us to make

a targeted spend where we can easily measure the response and tailor it accordingly. However, we will be investing in some magazine advertising to ensure we publicise ourselves, and we'll also be bringing out some new merchandising to make our 50th anniversary.

I am very grateful to the members of the communications team who have helped us widen our social media presence. We need more as social media is such an important advertising tool for us, along with our plans to introduce an on-line magazine as part of our new web-site.

Julian White, Communications Officer

j) Long Distance Paths (LDPs) Report

At time of writing I have been in post for only a few days, so can provide only a summary of work by the LDPs Team during 2021-22, and an outline of what is anticipated for the coming year.

The first thing to say is that the level of professionalism shown by the Team members has, and continues to be, remarkable. It is both a privilege and a challenge to take on responsibility for what is, in my view, the world's finest online resource of walks information. Part of the challenge is that during Covid the interest in and demand for information on UK trails and footpaths has mushroomed.

However, lockdowns and restrictions have at least enabled the Team to add an impressive number of new trails to the LDPs database. By the end of 2021 the online LDPs pages listed a total of 1662 routes, of which 1272 were at least 15 miles in length. By the same point in 2020 there were 1250 LDPs of at least 15 miles. Over the past two years there have been a total of 33 new routes added to the database, so that it now encompasses nearly 90,000 miles of described walks. (The amount of work required to add just one new trail can be as much as 20 hours and sometimes several days.)

During 2022 there will be the combined challenges of a new website, into which the many threads of the existing database will have to be interwoven, and the addition of many new miles of National Trail including both the England and Wales Coast Path and, it is anticipated, preparations to give National Trail status to Wainwright's Coast to Coast. The database will not be easily disentangled - if only its difficulties were limited to adding and amending LDPs - every day throwing up new complications. I thank both Andy Clark (my predecessor as LDPs Officer) and Victoria Morris (LDPs Team member) for the tremendous work which they have undertaken for the Team in recent years.

Among the other projects to be dealt with during 2022 will, it is anticipated, be the construction of HS2 and its impact on Rights of Way, as well as more in-house challenges to do with GPX files, the Publications database and the Accommodation database.

Hillwalkers Register

After 10 years David Purchase has retired as Hillwalkers' Recorder, handing over to Nicky Wood, from Lakeland Group. Recent changes have included:

- Updated the web pages (less words, new images and enhanced links to book lists).
- Worked with the IT team to: convert the claim form into an online PDF application; create a mail chimp account to enable occasional emails to the hillwalking community; and open a google online storage area for claims, for data protection.
- Liaised with our Communications Officer to promote the Registers through social media, and with Ray Wilkes to introduce forum pages for Hill and Trail Registers; encouraging discussion amongst members.

National Trails Register

Ray Wilkes has continued to look after the National Trails Register and has been joined by Lindsay Chadwick who will look after the new England and Wales Coast Path Register.

- Prices have increased to £5 to reflect increased costs
- Parts of the website have been re-written,
- has a new online form
- is also using social media to publicise the NTR.

We've also seen an increase in traffic on the NTR website over the last month from an average of 20-25 hits a day to 50 a day. Hopefully this is translating to new submissions!

Iain Connell, LDP Officer

k) Environment, Data Protection and Risk Report

Environment

The environment and sustainability is a key focus for members of the NEC when planning new events or initiatives.

As an Association there is still much more we should be doing to understand the impact of our activities on the landscape as well as our carbon footprint. A new LDWA sustainability strategy will be available shortly (or published as you read this). This will set out trials and looking for suitable Challenge Events and future 100's to test some of the initiatives.

Data Protection (GDPR)

We have robust safeguards in place to prevent the LDWA falling foul of breaching the Data Protection Act with a Policy and User Guide (providing the practical application) on the Toolkit.

Over the next year I would like to offer my support to Local Chairs/Local Data Protection Representatives in meeting their obligations under this policy. Please contact me if you would like to discuss further.

Risk

Covid risk has been a key focus of NEC time over the last 12 months. We will continue to work with external bodies to ensure we are promoting best practice and mitigating the risk of Covid transmission.

Evolution of the LDWA risk register has allowed the NEC to focus on the key risks to the Association that require active management. The register is a standing agenda item and allowed us to focus on our key suppliers, key person dependencies on the NEC as well as emerging risks around volunteers, inclusivity and IT website stability.

Policies

The toolkit is an excellent resource for members and contains some critical policies everyone should be aware of:

- Personal abuse

LDWA members should not be subjected to personal abuse, vilification, or bad language from others

- Safeguarding vulnerable adults and safeguarding children

All members, especially local group chairs must be aware of their responsibilities under safeguarding. The reporting of safeguarding incidents is also available within the toolkit.

Stuart Bain, Environment, Data Protection and Risk Manager

Other reports:

Membership Discounts

LDWA members continue to receive a variety of member-exclusive discounts and benefits. There is now an ever-growing list of well-known brands, including Cotswold Outdoor, Rohan, Trespass, Wightlink, Craghoppers, Ordnance Survey and many more. As a result of these developed relationships, Strider has generated increasing amounts of advertising revenue in the past year. Full details can be found on the website at <https://ldwa.org.uk/discounts/discounts.php>.

Simon Gibbs, Discount Officer

Merchandise Report

The first half of 2021 saw LDWA continuing to emulate Ernest Shackleton, in reality virus-bound rather than ice-bound, but either way, well and truly stuck, with group walks stuttering and challenge events mainly a no-go area, until late July, by which time, having suffered by then for 16 months, confidence was thin and inspiration to put on walks naturally slow. That has been reflected within LDWA merchandise where, in spite of an amazing list of items on permanent display in the LDWA web shop and plenty of general enthusiasm for it the 'depression' impacted heavily on sales, which it has along High Streets the world over.

However, there have been sales, and diversity amongst them, whilst of late, proving the 'depression' theory correct, those sales have increased and not just in conjunction with Christmas, but more likely because the incarcerated were allowed out for the last five months of 2021, and hopefully 2022 will follow on in the same vein. Sales figures for 2021 can be found in the LDWA Treasurer's report.

2020, due to the horrors post 20th March, was not a good year in which to introduce new items, as it turned out, and fortunately no new products had been lined up for that year with 2021 generating little enthusiasm for investing time, energy and expense in anything new. The one exception in 2020 was Julie Cribb's aptly-timed Coronavirus multi-wrap, which, amidst a variety of special offers during 2021 has attracted further interest with sales significantly high, the latest presented in the December Strider and available via the web shop. The beauty of the multi-wrap is that it can be used in so many different ways, ten at the last count, which gives it resilience and longevity, in or out of a pandemic.

During November the LDWA IT team, guided by LDWA Risk Officer, Stuart Bain, began revamping the LDWA web shop and I re-wrote the introduction. Two sections have been amalgamated, others tidied up and a certificate section added. The operation now has a sharper look to it and is even more appealing than it was before. Further work is also planned for 2022 in respect of making the shop fit for purpose when its time comes to be incorporated into the new LDWA website, which is currently under creativity and construction.

Originally, I can only imagine, for it is now a very long time ago, I was scheduled to perform this role for 5 years, but 5 became 10 and 10 became 20 and now, in 2022, I have been the LDWA merchandiser for the past 25 years. When will it end? Will it ever end? It will; nature, at the very least, shall dictate that one day, if nothing else occurs. For the time being, however, I remain the LDWA shopkeeper and you have my full attention. Please do come in!

As is tradition, the LDWA AGM, virtual excepted, shall once again have the 'pop-up' shop at its disposal, where items old (not second-hand!) and new will be on display throughout the weekend to those in attendance, and at extremely favourable prices. Extremely! All being well, Leamington Spa will be able to receive us this time, with lockdowns locked out. 'Out damned spot!' That's it for 2021. Thank you very much indeed.

Tim Glenn, Merchandise Officer