

**WrgBITM Annual General Meeting  
Stratton St Margaret Scout Hall, Swindon  
21<sup>st</sup> March, 2009**

*Present:-*

Simon Walker (Chairman), James Betteridge (Treasurer), Rachael Banyard, John Cheseborough, Adrian Crow, Barbara and Tony Hinsley, Graham Hotham, David James, Eamonn McMullan, June Paice, Charles Parker, Oliver Revel, Di Smurthwaite and Dave Wedd.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Bob and Ros Featherstone, Clive Gunner, Stella Wentworth, and Cath and Will Wilkinson.

2. Minutes of the 2008 AGM

The minutes were accepted as a true record. Proposed: James Betteridge, Seconded: John Cheseborough.

3. Matters Arising

Rachael has not yet spoken about brushcutter training.

**Action: Rachael**

Rachael's NPTC chainsaw training has been accepted by IWA and BW. Will has done his training, but has not yet been assessed.

**Action: Will**

Ring-fenced money is still being held for restoration of King's Lift Bridge on the Wilts & Berks (memorial to Kevin Angus). Rachael reported that it is hoped that the problems holding up work on the bridge will be sorted out shortly. The society is working with Oxfordshire Highways to get matters resolved. The Wilts & Berks has a new engineer who is looking after the east end of the canal, and he is working on this.

4. Chairman's Report (verbatim)

It's a pleasure to be able to report to this meeting that BITM has again had a successful, relatively incident-free year since our last AGM. This is down to both the guidance of our weekend leaders and the enthusiasm and common sense shown by everyone who comes out, whether regularly or on a once-in-a-while basis. One disappointment, for both ourselves and the people at the Mon and Brec, was our need to cancel the dig that had been scheduled there last year. The need to take that decision resulted from a combination of circumstances, including the high cost of petrol and diesel at that time, and hopefully we have now had the opportunity to learn from this and schedule our weekends so as to improve their accessibility to everyone. Following on from that, it does still concern me that we may be short-changing those projects that lie outwith central England, but I think that we have to be realistic in terms of what we can achieve.

So far as I am aware, we have also had a safe year, with the only A&E-worthy injury having occurred to a volunteer on our camp last year. That does not mean that we can be complacent, though, and I urge everyone to be especially vigilant when it comes to observing what is going on around them and their actions might affect others whilst they are working. We all have to be safety-conscious all of the time, which can be a challenge when you are wielding a sledgehammer while standing up to your chest in near-freezing water.

With regard to the annual camp, that is a separate item on our agenda today. I think that we learned a lot from last year's camp, in terms of site organisation, and the need to liaise with other WRG groups and with our project hosts, and I am sure that we can put all of this experience to good use in the future.

On matters financial, I will leave it to James to provide the details. Suffice it to say that BITM is solvent, and that we have now received the contribution promised by WRG towards the cost of the van. Thanks are due to Mike Palmer and the other members of the WRG board for that. The quid-pro-quo that had been suggested – with the van being used by WRG during one of last summer's camps – did not, in fact, materialise, although I assume that this remains a possibility if the other WRG vehicles are committed elsewhere.

With Ian having decided to retire from providing chainsaw services to us, we have contributed towards Rachael's re-certification and training for Will, so hopefully this will cover our chainsaw needs for the time being. I realise that getting trained, buying all the equipment, and all of the other aspects represent a major investment by the people involved – in both time and money – and I am grateful to them for having undertaken this commitment for us.

Lastly, the usual set of pleas and thanks. It's always great when enthusiastic young people join us, and we're keen to make them welcome. We still need more people to take over the responsibilities of leading weekend digs, though. And thanks again to everyone who has helped us during the year – sponsors, cooks, leaders, publicists – without you, we would struggle, so keep up the good work. Thank you all.

## 5. Treasurer's Report

For comparison purposes, we were provided with summaries of the accounts for 2007 and 2008.

James Betteridge reported that we had had another good year, with profits of £1,600. This included a donation of £300 from Bernard Hughes (who gives talks on canals), income from the festivals, and also June makes a profit on the catering. The major expenditure was on training courses for chainsaws (£600), replacing and repairing our tools. We obviously did not receive as much interest on our account this year. We had the option of putting money into IWA's account, but it was decided that we should not follow this suggestion. We have contacted BetaMarine, who are still willing to sponsor us. WRG provided some funding towards the van.

We have a balance of just over £9,000. The accounts have to be presented to IWA quarterly, so James asked if cheques could be cashed in promptly.

Tony proposed a vote of thanks to the treasurer for his excellent work.

Proposed: David James, seconded: John Cheseborough.

#### 6. 2009 Weekend and Camp Schedule

The Chairman reported that we are fully committed until the end of the year, apart from the December dig. He suggested that we should consider first aid training, as this needs updating. Tony was willing to organise it, but suggested that it should be held early next year. He would need at least six months' notice.

Rachael suggested Pewsham, of the Melksham, Calne and Chippenham Branch of the Wilts & Berks, where work is starting beside the main road between Calne and Chippenham. Rachael has recently found a new hall for accommodation, which used to be a school, and is very well appointed. This would be a high profile site beside the A4. There had been some discussion with WRG of this being a possible site for the 2009 Bonfire Bash, but at a meeting which Simon and Dave Wedd recently attended, WRG were now discussing whether they should support the Montgomery Canal for their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was agreed that we should hold fire on Pewsham for the December dig until Rachael has discussed with the local branch whether they would be prepared to host us. **Action: Rachael**

We still need a leader and cook for the Hereford & Gloucester dig next month. Simon is prepared to lead it, and Graham will cook if he is able to make it.

#### 7. Feedback from the 2008 Camp

The Chairman pointed out that one of our problems was that we were following on a previous week's camp, which had included a lot of inexperienced people. He hoped that we had learnt quite a lot from how things fit together or do not fit together. It was discussed at the recent Leaders' Training Weekend about the problems of communication, and setting unrealistic targets about what could be achieved. We should hold detailed discussions in advance as to what extent we could meet their expectations, as we did not want to lose face. Rachael felt that both camp leaders should have had a meeting with the local Trust, but Dave Wedd pointed out that both himself and Graham had met up with the local organiser.

One of the problems for both camps was that it was intended that the local Trust would drain the pound above the lock, but they did not get permission in time, so every day we had to cope with water constantly refilling the area where we were working.

The Chairman suggested that it might help if we had a whiteboard on which could be marked up who was doing what each day, and what we were hoping to achieve. Graham thought that as things tend to change from day to day, this would not work, but it was agreed that it could be reviewed each day, so we should give it a try.

Dave Wedd said that if any weekend dig leader needs to know who is likely to be attending, he would probably be able to give them the information well in advance.

## 8. Insurance Coverage

There was a general discussion on insurance coverage for those who have reached their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, following on from recent e-mail correspondence. The Chairman noted that Neil Edwards (IWA) had provided some clarification on the matter, as detailed in the following paragraphs:

*“So far as public liability insurance and employer’s liability insurance covers are concerned, there is no upper age limit. There is limited personal accident insurance that ceases for volunteers on attaining their 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, but this is not a restriction that prevents them continuing on past this age. This personal accident insurance is a very small ‘add on’ to the policy that provides minimal compensation (maximum £15,000) in the event of death or serious injury where the accident was entirely the fault of the volunteer themselves.*

*In the event of an injury that was not entirely the fault of the volunteer themselves (i.e. nearly all accidents), then the usual circumstance would be for a claim to be made against WRG / IWA, etc, which would then be addressed by the public or employer’s liability policies.*

*As with all activities, insurers would expect WRG to assess the risks involved and not to give duties and responsibilities to people that were beyond their abilities to conduct safely, and age should be one of the factors that should be taken into account.*

*We do not inform insurers of volunteers working aged 70 and over, and insurers have not asked for this information.*

*Volunteers aged over 70 are fully covered by the public (and employer’s) liability insurance, and the terms of this policy mean that any claims against them personally, as well as against WRG, will be addressed by the insurance.*

*In short, it is not something that the over-70s need be that concerned about.”*

In summary, the only difference is that the site leader should assess the abilities of the person involved as to whether he or she is capable of doing a task safely.

## 9. Election of Officers

Simon asked if anyone wished to put their name forward as Chairman or Treasurer. Barbara Hinsley proposed that we should ask the present incumbents to stand again. Carried unanimously.

## 11. Any Other Business

- (i) Graham reported that the van is in excellent running condition. It is due for its MOT next month, and the next service will be the big one.

- (ii) Graham asked for support for the festivals, and also whether anyone had any ideas other than selling bric-a-brac. They should be prepared to organise it.
- (iii) Graham pointed out that Dave Wedd is not getting the information soon enough re: accommodation and work involved for weekend digs so he can prepare the newsletter. All the information re: accommodation, nearest hospital, grid reference, tools and equipment needed should be provided as much in advance as possible.
- (iv) Graham asked whether we need a fourth committee member to help organise weekends. This was not thought to be necessary.
- (v) This year's camp will be held from the last weekend in July to the first weekend in August, and will be held at 7 Locks on the Wilts & Berks. Rachael reported that as Locks 3 and 4 are now finished, work is starting on Lock 2, which is going to be an exciting project involving building a new bridge and a new section of road. Initially, it will involve building new ground paddle chambers and wing walls. There will be plenty of bricklaying, and for non-bricklayers, work will involve supporting the brickies, and clearing a section below Lock 1. Two culverts have been found, which need to be investigated as to their condition and what route they are following. Accommodation will be at Bushton village hall, which has a good kitchen with two cookers, and we shall be hiring in a portable shower unit. There is a pub close by with a skittle alley.

There being no other business to discuss, the Chairman closed the meeting.

DS  
March 2009