

**50 YEARS
OF RAMBLING**

with the

**TORBAY
RAMBLING**



CLUB

This booklet has been produced by the Torbay Rambling Club with information from the books and records of the club as well as personal anecdotes and comments from past and present members.

It details how the club started and where it has been, so that it is both the PAST and the PRESENT, but what of the FUTURE? This is for present members and those yet to join us and learn the wonderful world of RAMBLING.

We hope that by reading this booklet you will want to join us, and the many thousands of other walkers, not only in this country, but all over the world, who enjoy getting out in to the big wide yonder and just walking for the enjoyment of it.

This publication was written and edited by Mary CARTER who, with her husband, Philip, joined the club in 1954.

The club extends a great vote of thanks to her for her time and effort. The club also thanks those members who have kindly loaned photos for use in this publication.

The type was set by the Secretary, Dennis Samuel and the publication was printed by Aaron Printers of Newton Abbot. Devon

We do hope that you will want to join us on our walks. For more information, please contact the Secretary or look us up on the web:

<http://easypath.to/TorbayRamblers>.

2025 update by David Lamb: Torbay Rambling Club Webmaster

N.B. The website above no longer exists. Please visit our current website at: <https://torbayramblingclub.org.uk>

The booklet has been scanned in from a printed copy using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology. If you notice any typos or inaccuracies, please email me at webmaster@torbayramblingclub.org.uk.

FOREWORD BY: Mary Flegg (formerly Woods)

As one of the Founder Members, I have been asked to write an introduction to your booklet to explain how the Torbay Rambling Club came into existence.

To do this I have to go back a long way in time and a fair distance from Torbay: In the early 1900's. So, the story goes, a Non-Conformist Minister in the North country was unhappy with the way the coal miners spent their leisure time, so he organised a walking holiday in the Lake District. Later he acquired a redundant 'stately home' as a centre (non profit making) from which rambles could be organised, together with other social activities. A number of other centres were gradually added throughout the UK and Ireland. One of the first was Follaton House, Totnes. now the Headquarters of the South Hams Council, and another at Brunel Manor (then Watcombe Park) Torquay.



I was living at Totnes at the time and decided that when I was older I would like to visit one of these jolly holiday guesthouses. Eventually I went to quite a number in beautiful parts of the UK and Ireland and greatly enjoyed them. I met many people from the larger towns and cities where Rambling Clubs had been formed to continue the holiday atmosphere, at weekends on their home ground. I was by this time working in the Borough Engineers Dept. at Totes, so Barbara, my friend and colleague in the Town Clerks Dept. also a walking addict, and I, felt that we should have a club too.

We wrote to the Headquarters of the CHA (Cooperative Holidays Association) and its sister organisation The Holiday Fellowship, asking if they would kindly forward the names and addresses of people in South Devon who had taken holidays with them recently. They replied with the names of twenty or so people whom we contacted asking whether they would be interested in forming a local Rambling Club. Most were in favour, so a meeting was called at the Balholm Hotel on Paignton Sea Front and so the Torbay Rambling Club was born and has prospered for fifty years.

The coal miners appear to have been somewhat lukewarm, (understandable perhaps, considering the nature of their work) but the idea was warmly welcomed by people in many other walks of life, including office workers. teachers, local government officers, some clergy and doctors and nurses, and many others.

Unfortunately, the increase in motoring holidays and foreign and many other forms of recreation, seem to have made the two associations redundant, although I believe that the Holiday Fellowship still runs Hotels with the accent on Rambling.

I am relieved that there are still enough people in Torbay who prefer legs to wheels to carry on the good work.

I wish the club continuing success over the next 50 years.

How the Torbay Rambling Club started 50 Years ago

Mary Woods and Barbara Evans of Totnes had enjoyed walking holidays with the Co-operative Holidays Association and Holiday Fellowship. They both felt that there was a need in the Torbay area for a CHA/HF Group so that the walking and friendship, which were a feature of the holidays, could be enjoyed with like minded people in Torbay.

Most people would have simply bewailed the fact that there was no such group and there the matter would have ended but the two friends were undaunted. They wrote to the Holiday Fellowship in London and to the Co-operative (later known as Countryside) Holidays Association in Manchester for guidance in setting up a local group. Both organisations sent a list of people who were members or who had been on one or other of their holidays. Then Mary Woods and Barbara Evans wrote to all these people in September 1950 asking if they would be interested in forming a group in Torbay.

The general secretaries of the two organisations welcomed the proposed rambling club but stipulated that the title should be The Torbay CHA/HF Rambling Club and further that a copy of the club rules should be sent to the London Headquarters. This showed confidence in a successful outcome as there had, at that point, been no meeting at all!

EARLY TORBAY RAMBLERS at BELLEVER YOUTH HOSTEL



Tony Milward, Millicent Edwards, Pam Howard, Joy Howard, Geoff Patching, Joan Westaway, Margaret Wisbey (Force)

However, of the 42 CHA/HF members invited to the inaugural tea at the Balholm Hotel, Paignton, at a cost of 2 shillings each, fourteen people attended on 11th November 1950. In the invitation letter the hope was expressed that they would 'have a jolly and useful afternoon'.

It certainly proved to be so. The first ever walk was planned for the following Sunday 19th November from Bolton Cross in Brixham, to Berry Head, Mann Sands and Kingswear. Volunteers agreed to lead a further seven walks at fortnightly intervals. The February 1951 Walk leader was Miss Joan Westaway who later served as Treasurer and then as Secretary of the Club for 30 years. She is now a life member. In addition to the walks a YHA weekend was proposed at Dunsford Youth Hostel for April 1951 as several people were youth hostellers.

Ten walkers were on the first walk of the Torbay CHA/HF Rambling Club of 19th November 1950 and they 'had a very happy ramble in spite of the unfriendly weather' proving that nothing has really changed in 50 years! One story goes that although they walked all day in the rain, starting in Brixham, they only managed to reach Higher Brixham by the end of the day,

A WEEKEND on EXMOOR with DORSET RAMBLING CLUB



In the middle, standing: Joan Westaway, Margaret Wisbey (Force), Neville Johnson (With hat), Joy Howard

The grass certainly was not allowed to grow under their feet. A second meeting was arranged, again at the Balhorn Hotel, now called The Mermaid Hotel. on Saturday 16th December 1950.

Eighteen people 'turned up and an enjoyable couple of hours was spent. Mary Woods asked those present if they wished to proceed with the forming of the club and an affirmative being received', they were in business!

Officers were elected:

Mr J Sayner – Chairman

Mr Vian - Social Secretary

Mrs R Faulks - Rambles Secretary

Miss M Woods - General Secretary

Mr Paul D Cavanna - Treasurer

The above to form the committee

The Rules were decided

1. The Club shall be called "The Torbay CHA/HF Rambling Club".
2. The Committee shall consist of the Chairman, Secretary, Social Secretary, Rambles Secretary & Treasurer.
3. The Subscription shall be 2s.6d. per annum.
4. Where tea is obtained at a cafe, a levy of 1d per person shall be made to cover the cost of arranging such tea, and to go towards the general fund.
5. The Committee shall meet four times a year.
6. The Annual General Meeting shall be held in the autumn.

CHRISTMAS DINNER. POSSIBLY 1955



PUBLICITY

It was decided to ask the Herald Express and South Devon Journal to include an item about the club being set up. Thereafter members should take turns submitting articles about the rambles. Miss Joan Westaway arranged to insert the name of the club in the leaflet 'Principal Attractions and General Information' issued by Torquay Publicity Department.

A proposed weekend on 30th to 31st December at Holcombe Hall, the CHA Centre, that would cost 35 shillings per member was discussed but turned down as being too expensive. 'After a lengthy discussion' eleven members arranged to go to Brent Moor Youth Hostel instead. It was agreed that some Saturday afternoon rambles might be arranged from April onwards when the days would be longer.

There was a suggestion that 'equipment' should be taken on the rambles for the making of tea, but it was felt that these arrangements would be more practical during the warmer weather and that meantime members should provide for their own requirements. (thermos flasks, sandwiches, etc.)

NEW MEMBERS, NEW OUTFITS



From the Left: Mike Deeley, Dudley Best, Bob Cranage, Mary Carter, Unknown, Mary McHolm, Sheila Hart, Unknown, Brian Montgomery, Mabel White, Arthur Hart. Standing: Joan Nutt, Fred White

It was thought that social events, club weekends etc. involving CHA or HF Centres, youth hostels or farms should be a part of the programme. The Social Secretary informed the meeting of a St Patrick's Day Old Time Dance to be held on 1st March at the Hydro Hotel. Paignton, and suggested that members might like to go as a group.

And so, thanks to the initiative of Mary Woods and Barbara Evans, and the unbounded enthusiasm of those walkers of 50 years ago, the Torbay CHA/HF Rambling Club that we know so well was born Incidentally, although the available records have been searched the use of CHAXHF as part of the title was somewhat arbitrary. Since 1956 the club has been referred to simply as the Torbay Rambling Club; perhaps the original constitution has been lost.

On January 21st, 1951, the first of the regular Sunday walks took place. and have done so ever since. Originally at fortnightly intervals. but since 1986 held every week: there have been at least 1664 planned walks. If the average distance of each walk is assessed at a moderate eleven miles, (though undoubtedly the mileage is higher than this). then 18,304 miles, yes eighteen thousand three hundred and four miles, have been covered. A great many pairs of boots have been worn out. and that's for sure.

DISTANCES

Interestingly no distances were given on the early walk programmes; leaders were presumably trusted not to walk them too far! The walks were described as 'easy', 'moderate', 'fairly rough' or 'long'. Every ramble meeting time had to fit in with a timetabled bus as few members had cars and walks should be within a reasonable radius of Torbay so that fares should not be too expensive. The leader had to keep an eye on the time for getting the bus back again. Joan Westaway recalls once racing back to catch the bus home from Brent Tor - and having to wait for an hour for the next one as they had missed it, and dancing or jigging around to keep warm whilst they waited. Certainly waiting for buses on the outward and homeward journeys on the walks resulted in a great deal of camaraderie within the group, which does not happen when walkers simply arrive in their cars and drive home again at the end of their walk.

WALKING GEAR

The improvements in clothing for walking have been spectacular. In the early days stout shoes or army boots were the usual footwear together with plastic raincoats to, hopefully and perhaps in vain, keep out the wet. The women generally wore skirts as shorts or trousers were considered very daring! Colours were muted. grey and khaki predominating. In these modern times it is possible to buy attractive clothing and equipment especially designed for walkers, in bright cheerful colours. Fleece jackets for warmth, waterproof cagoules and over trousers, gaiters that fasten securely over the boots to add greater protection against puddles, rain and mud. Inside the boots thick fabric socks cushion the feet, Specially designed multi-pocketed shorts and trousers which allow the skin to 'breathe' and similar fabric for short and long-sleeved shirts which 'wick away' the discomfort of perspiration. Rucksacks are a world away from the army surplus khaki ones of early days. These days bright colours, many different sizes and styles make choice difficult.

THIS IS NOT HOW THEY USED TO DRESS



Taken in the late 1980s Three leading ladies: Mary Carter, Helen Wills, Mabel White

INTERESTING SNIPPETS FROM OVER THE YEARS

At the second AGM in 1952, attended by twenty members. a Balance of £2. 6s. 5d was recorded. The following were elected:

Chairman - Mr E Weal

Treasurer - Miss J Westaway

Secretary - Miss M Woods

Rambles and Social Secretary - Miss J Hudson

A suggestion was made that a Clubroom in combination with the Cyclists Touring Club sharing one evening a week would stimulate the social side but the difficulty of finding such a room was envisaged so the matter was shelved. Discussion on a Social Evening at Watcombe Park, a coach trip and possible YHA or HF Weekends were similarly left to the Committee to explore.

The Balance at the 1953 AGM had increased to £3. 2s. 1d and at this meeting the subject of Car Rambles was raised. 'It was agreed that two car rambles should be tried and Mr E Weal agreed to organise one in the New Year. It was agreed that the principle to follow was that of first come first served, and anyone who came too late to be

accommodated in the cars available must expect to be refused. Another possibility was that cycling and walking could be combined'.

A personal note here by the writer of this account! To finally settle a private and long, ongoing, and boring argument between Carter and Force nee Wisbey: On the membership list of 1954 a Mr & Mrs P Carter are included: to be followed on the membership list of June 1955 by Miss M Wisbey. No comment!

At the 5th AGM in December 1955 the balance was £6. 18s. 5d. Amongst other business 'the Cycling Club should be asked whether members of the Rambling Club may join their Club Room evening, with a view eventually to the Rambling Club having their own Club Room evening. It would seem that nothing came of this idea.

At the AGM in 1965 'comments were made by one or two members that on occasions ramblers had outpaced the leaders and this had caused various problems'. The subscription was increased to 4 shillings and, no connection with the previous statement, Miss Margaret Wisbey became Treasurer, a post she has cheerfully and industriously continued to this day, though, since 1971, as Mrs Margaret Force. In that year it was concluded that, as public transport was becoming most impracticable for use when rambling in the area and car owners expressed their willingness to help get ramblers off the beaten track, so making the task of planning the programme easier, then car rambles should be planned.

50TH ANNIVERSARY WALK FROM BRIXHAM



The first ramble to incorporate footpath clearing was held at Wrigwell one summer evening followed by a 'cook-up' in 1973: possibly the first TRC barbecue? Other paths cleared were the Hunters Path at Drewsteignton and one by Teignmouth Golf Course.

In 1973 an enjoyable Club Weekend had been held in Penzance HF Centre. Over the years weekends away in other parts of the Southwest in May and/or September were to become a regular feature. One year the club walked in Snowdonia at Easter time thus spending four nights away.

In 1972 it was decided not to continue to have special path clearing walks, but leaders on all walks should carry secateurs for cutting back obstructions.

During 1956 the Foot and Mouth disease of cattle meant that several walks had to be curtailed.

In 1968 it was agreed that the Torbay Rambling Club should lend their support to the Ramblers Association and Dartmoor Preservation Association in opposing the Swincombe Reservoir.

In 1969, an all-night walk on Dartmoor was arranged; apparently the moon was full and conditions were excellent. In the same year the subscription went up to 8 shillings and a bird watching walk, a slide evening, theatre trip and a second Mountain Safety course was to be arranged.

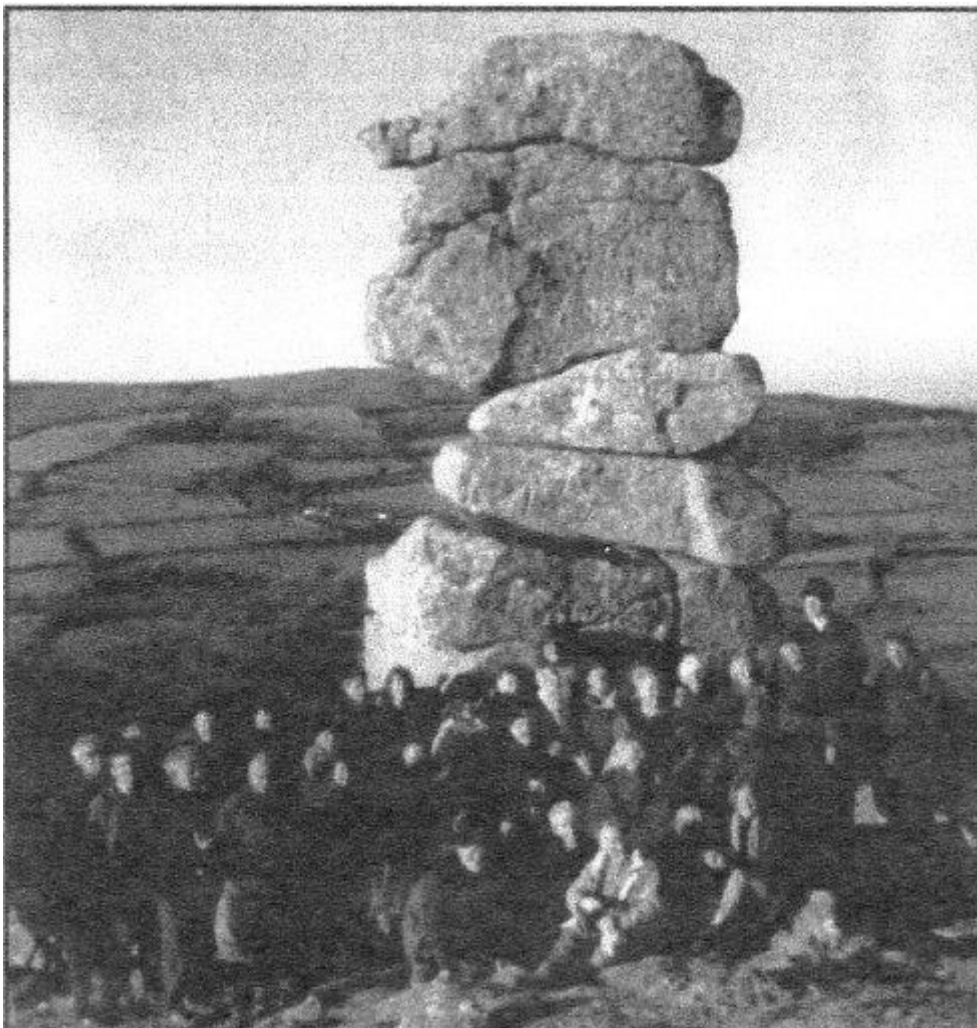
AGM 1978. Three evening walks to be put on to the next programme to support the R.A. 'Sport for All', to which members of the public were welcome. A map and compass instruction walk would be arranged in the next year's programme. A coach walk in order to do the Two Moors Way proposed. As support for long hard walks was on the wane a long easy walk was proposed.

AGM 1979. A discount for club members purchasing walking gear at Percy Hodge Sports Shop in Newton Abbot had been secured. A social evening at a pub and three evening walks to be arranged. The theme for the walks to be the South Devon Coastal Path.

AGM 1980. 32 walks had taken place during the year; of these 12 were country, 11 coastal footpath and 9 moorland, 3 weekend events plus 6 social events.

At the **1982 AGM.** Philip Carter offered to lead a 35-mile walk covering Ten Dartmoor Tors on 19th June. At the same meeting Joan Westaway stood down as Secretary of the Torbay Rambling Club. She was heartily thanked for her 30 years of continuous service to the club.

MEMBERS AT "OUR ROCK" BOWERMANS NOSE 2001



Currently (2001) the membership of the Torbay Rambling Club stands at over one hundred. Groups of members regularly take holidays abroad together and the May and September weekends in other parts of Britain are a regular feature of the annual program. Some members belong to the Long Distance Walkers Association and over the years, twenty one have completed the LDWA's annual one hundred mile challenge walks; these tough walks have to be completed within forty eight hours, walking day and night; they are organised nationally and take place in different parts of Britain. Indeed, some of these stronger walkers have completed several 'Hundreds'.

The social side envisaged by the committee of 1950 is still an integral part of the programme; two theatre visits, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestral Concert held in the grounds of Powderham Castle, a beach Barbeque and swim and a Christmas Dinner are held every year.

In other words, even after 50 years, the Torbay Rambling Club is alive and well, striding into this new millennium with vim and vigour! A good time to look back with nostalgia and wry smiles as well as gratitude, then, as now, to the good people who have served on past and present committees and who will serve in the future on our behalf to keep us going for the next 50 years.

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