

NWG LDWA AGM 2018

Chair's report

Once again it is wonderful to be able to report on such a positive and successful year. Three years ago three of us started the group with hopes of being able to develop into a sustainable and active regional group, supporting the excellent work of the national Long Distance Walkers' Association. We set ourselves a number of targets for our first year of operation and not only met each one but surpassed our expectations with many. In our third year we have moved forward once again, introducing not only a full and varied walks programme, to a growing and active membership, but also putting on our first and very successful Walking Weekend. However, perhaps our biggest challenge to date has been developing and organising our first Challenge Event. In two weeks' time, following a successful marshals' walk we are looking forward to a well-supported Laich o' Moray 50 mile Challenge – which will not only be the most northerly one at that – but also a qualifier for the annual LDWA flagship event – the 100-mile walk.

Membership – Our Primary membership has now reached 84, which still includes a number of families, so this is a minimum – even with some folk leaving at the start of the membership year. We are also attracting more Associate members, 53 to date. These are LDWA members of other groups throughout the UK who are interested in and follow what we as a local group do. This number has increased by almost 20% so we must be doing something right.

Participation – Our original aim was for half of our members to participate in at least one event. We continue to achieve this and over the year almost 200 people have been walking with us. Numbers have been as high as 27 on an individual walk. This compares very well with other older, more established groups in more populated areas of the country where sometimes they struggle to get double figures on a walk out of a membership of 200–300! We are also still bucking the trend when looking at the make up of our members too. Our male to female proportion is still around 40%:60% – opposite to many and many more females than some which are almost entirely made up of male walkers.

Walks – Over the past year we have put on walks in all regions of our main geographical area from the Inverness-shire to Aberdeenshire and the Moray Coast to Speyside and the Cairngorm. Again we have managed to cover a variety of terrain, including two Munros and once again a 50 mile walk in the programme (though this was restricted to those marshalling at our Challenge Event in October). Our initial commitment was for one walk per month, however not only is our association with the Moray Mountaineering Club proving popular, giving us an additional event each month, we have also introduced the Walking Weekend to the Annual Programme. This years' weekend in Torridon was a great success with 11 participants. Next year we will be looking to introduce another one in April, as well as an August outing.

Social Media – Facebook has been a very important communication and marketing tool for us and we are using it increasingly to report on and record our events as well as promoting them in the first place. We now have over 450 followers to our page, a number which grows week by week. The photograph albums on the site are well worth visiting too. As our content gets more interesting and varied some of our posts are reaching nearly 4,000 people and in the last month alone almost 11,000 people have read about what we are doing. However, we do need to remember that some people do not use social media and we have made a commitment to strengthen our communications by using the LDWA email too to promote events or share important information.

LDWA Strider – We have continued to get either an article or a walk report published in each issue of Strider, complete with photographs, which in turn has raised our profile within the national LDWA and has attracted a number of Associate members. Given that there is limited space and 43 local groups we are very proud of that.

Finance – a positive balance. As our Treasurers' Report will show from the very beginning when the Committee were paying for rooms out of their own pockets, the group now has a small but healthy bank balance which will enable us to consider a wider range of options for events in the future. This year we received a grant of £500 from the national LDWA to help towards the fixed costs of putting on the Challenge event next month, however the things that we need to purchase will be available for use in the future, so although this time the event will balance the books, another time the group should make a surplus.

The Committee – It has been a pleasure to work with Pete, John, Rikky, Jenni, Bea and Dave who have all played their different parts in making this local group the success that it undoubtedly is. As well as their committee roles a number also plan and lead walks, often in addition to full time jobs and family commitments. I would like to record my thanks and gratitude to them.

And others – We were also successful in recruiting some new walks leaders this year and we are very grateful to them. This will not only ease a little pressure from the committee, but also take us to new and wonderful places where we had not yet ventured. We are always pleased to hear from anyone who would like to lead a walk. Please don't be put off by the bar which was raised when the Macdonald's provided coffee and scones at the beginning and a BBQ at the end of their walk!

And what of the future? Next month our plan to develop a 50-mile Challenge walk will come to fruition. This has already attracted some 70 walkers from all over the UK who would like to qualify for the LDWA 100 in Northumberland in 2019. This would be quite a feather in our LDWA cap and would also generate funds for the group which could help us put on more exciting events in the future. Thank you to all the volunteers who have already come forward to help with this event.

The group has also been invited to run a checkpoint at the Hadrian's 100 in Northumberland in 2019 with the Heart of Scotland group. We would like volunteers to join us at this event. One of the bonuses from helping to marshal in this way is that, if eligible, we would have the opportunity to participate in the Marshals' 100 Walk which is run the month before the main event. Again if you are interested in helping with this please speak to one of the committee.

Finally, we wouldn't be where we are without you, our members. If there were no members in North West Grampian we wouldn't have a local LDWA Group to be proud of – and our colleagues throughout the country are proud of our progress too. There are not many local groups who are not aware of us and if you ever join any of them in their walks you will hear how our name has gone before us. There was some reluctance in some parts about the formation of a new group so far north when others were struggling, but I think once again we have seen off any dissent and we are well established for the future.

But we must not be complacent and to continue the success we want to hear from you what you think would help to improve the group and make us more attractive not only to our current members, but also to new ones. Please let us have your suggestions at any time.

Thank you for your support.

Julie Cribb

Chair NWG LDWA

September 2018