**EARLSTON PATHS GROUP AGM 29 JUNE 2023 - CHAIRMAN’S REVIEW**

**I**t would be somewhat misleading to say that the past year has been a “normal,” “business as usual” period for the Group.

However, compared to challenges faced over the past couple of years e.g., Covid and serious weather events which impacted on the path network, I think we are all more than happy to experience fairly normal times.

The P.R.A.T.S., as they affectionally known (and there are more of them than you think) had a busy time grass cutting well into late Autumn 2022 before moving on to more general maintenance work over the winter months. A few fallen trees that caused minor problems were quickly dealt with and we are extremely grateful to our “chainsaw volunteers” for their continuing support.

Highlights of the past year include installation of the “Fox” seat on the Diamond Jubilee path in August 2022. It was a challenging task, however, once again our extended family of volunteers, landowner, farmer and other unsuspecting helpers ensured that it was safely installed. Now in place, it has become a special point of interest for walkers on that route.

Another major event for the Group was an invitation from ITV Borders to feature in an edition of the Border Life magazine programme in March 2023. The broadcast film which also contained a short piece about Thomas the Rhymer provided positive publicity for our community and of course was mainly focused on the work of the Paths Group and showcased the walking opportunities along the Leader water. Well done to everyone who took part (nice wellies and blue overalls Tom!) and to Sheila for her perseverance in getting it out on-line.

Path maintenance to ensure we deliver the best walking experience for everyone using the network never stops and having completed most of the winter jobs the grass cutting season is upon us once again.

A change of landowner and subsequent forestry work mean that, for the moment, we have lost the route through the Packman’s wood area; hopefully a path will be reinstated later this year.

The review of our Walks booklet and other publications is underway, and we fully appreciate and understand why this will take some time to complete.

We would be unable to provide so much countryside access without the ongoing support of the many landowners and farmers who enable our footpath network. Although never taken for granted, our thanks to them is often unsaid.

In conclusion, I extend a big thanks to everyone involved with the Paths Group, at whatever level, in delivering another successful year.

Luke Comins Chairman EPG 29 June 2023