

Meeting of Stalham Farmers' Club

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

Norfolk Mead Hotel, Coltishall.

Exploring new horizons

A large gathering of members and guests filled the four rows of chairs at the Norfolk Mead. A total of 33 members signed the attendance book.

The chairman, Luke Paterson, asked members and guests to stand in memory of two good supporters of the club, who had both died last week - Gavin Paterson, who had been a member, and his younger sister, Marion, who was the widow of former club president, David Ritchie. At the last meeting, Mrs Ritchie had given a new chairman's engraved gavel to the club.

Earlier a total of 21 members and the guest speaker, Rob Ferguson, and his parents, Murray and Julia, had enjoyed a steak & kidney supper and chocolate torte – much appreciated.

Minutes – the full minutes had been available on the club's website for almost a month. It was agreed to note the contents.

Apologies – the following had notified the secretary – Greg Smith, Graham Duncanson, Jim Holt, Alex Dinsdale, Roy Houlden, Jon Lowe, Thomas Love, Andrew Spinks, Louis Baugh, Frank Read, David Hughes, Peter Gardiner, Nigel Wright, Chris Borrett, Robert Cook and Sally Lomax.

Secretary's report – Michael Pollitt said that the club had been fortunate to secure an invitation to tour the Stanford training area in the Brecks on Thursday, July 14. The three-hour visit, which would be by coach, would be limited to 50 members/ guests and would also involve East Norfolk NFU. A possible farm tour of a nearby enterprise was a possibility and details of what could be a half-day trip would be proposed and discussed soon.

Vice-chairman's report – Jonathan Deane said that plans were well advanced for the 175th anniversary year. It was also planned to hold the December 2016 meeting on or near the precise 175th anniversary, again details to be finalised.

Mr Deane said that the club was extremely grateful to club member, Peter Boardman, who was also present, for agreeing to host a drinks and garden party at How Hill Farm on Saturday, June 18, from 7pm. He hoped that as many members/ guests would attend and invitations would be sent in plenty of time. Further, he would like to have a fund-raising auction and would appreciate some offers of good quality and unusual lots.

Finally, he suggested that the club could also mark the 175th with a foreign foray, probably to Normandy, in spring/summer 2017. Given that the club had last visited that part of France under the leadership of Hubert Sands in the early 1970s, it was time to consider a return visit. He would start looking at potential ideas.

New members – Jane Downing, proposed Michael Pollitt and seconded Jonathan Deane.

Guest speaker – The chairman introduced award-winning tour operator Rob Ferguson, who had travelled from his home in Norfolk at Happisburgh, to address club members.

Mr Ferguson said that he had first been hooked on holidays at the age of seven when staying with his grandparents in Portugal. He has now developed an extensive, specialist holiday enterprise – www.realafrica.co.uk – over the following years. He was now writing a your guide to Nepal, which was due to be completed by the end of April. He talked for almost an hour without any note – about firstly, the appeal of destinations including Nepal. Highlights (!) included falling into an 80ft deep crevasse (very clear blue ice!) and surviving a high-level encounter with four determined Yaks also crossing the rope bridge at the same time. Evasive action involving climbing out and hanging on to the ropes.

He said that Nepal had been devastated by the earthquake but gradually tourists were starting to return. For a combination of scenic beauty and remoteness, it was hard to beat.

Other attractive destinations included Burma (set to be one of the original and inspiring countries) with wonderful landscapes and history while other regions of the Far East also had appeal too.

He showed a great collection of slides, especially of destinations in Africa and his own favourite was probably Ethiopia. His descriptions of some of the real challenges – three kinds of leeches in Borneo – and ferocious fleas in Ethiopia – and (not) sharing his Maynard's Wine Gums with a brown bear with a sweet tooth – added a distinct flavour to the evening.

He rounded off his Africa tales with hints about where and when to see the best wildlife (avoid the herd and travel in February to see migrating wildebeest) with a serious message about the threat of large-scale poaching. In some parts of Africa, Tanzania rhino populations have been fallen sharply because of poaching – and likewise with elephant numbers elsewhere. It was a sobering thought to end a fascinating and light-hearted evening. Safari anyone?

Ken Leggett, who had trekked in Nepal and even talked to the club some years ago, gave the vote of thanks.

The chairman presented Mr Ferguson with a club tie and asked members to contribute towards the flood appeal to help farming's victims in north-west England. A total of more than £500 has since been sent to RABI (Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution).

The meeting closed at 8.45pm with a reminder about the next meeting on Wednesday, January 13 when William Kendall would be addressing the club.

