

The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

Autumn 2004

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

Disabled Ramblers Have Covered 1,000 Miles Of Track And Trail

This year, 2004, has seen the Disabled Ramblers go past a significant achievement milestone. Since starting an annual programme of rambles twelve years ago we have now covered a total of 1,000 miles of track and path as part of our organised and supported events!

The first rambles were organised as a special interest activity of the Disabled Drivers Association and took the form of an annual summer weekend during which we strove to cover 40 miles over two days, initially along the very challenging byway section of the Ridgeway National Trail. This was an exceedingly tough undertaking, requiring extensive back up usually with spare batteries for the scooters and rotating through a supply of able bodied helpers. The late Roy Thompson obtained help from the AA who came along with us in 4 x 4 support vehicles. In 1995 we moved the challenge to the New Forest, over easier ground but still seeking to cover a 40 mile challenge course.

Soon afterwards we formed the Countryside Access Group, which then was reconstituted as an independent charity affiliated to the Disabled Drivers and the Ramblers Associations.



Thames Ramble - 25th May 2004

With our own fully active Executive Committee we then launched out on a gradually increasing and ever more ambitious programme, increasing the number of events up to the present level of fifteen or sixteen each summer season. These events are now a mixture of one and two day rambles, averaging however a modest eight to ten miles each day. This format allows us to enjoy a day's ramble which is within the range of our scooters and buggies, and can be covered fairly comfortably by

our wheelchair riders and able bodied helpers who walk with us. Breakdowns have now become uncommon, with most participants able to complete each day as planned.

The summer season of 2004, just ended, provided for 16 events, spread over 23 ramble days, with a total distance of approximately 190 miles, mainly off-road. Our rambles were held in many areas of England and Wales, ranging from the New Forest and Exmoor in the South, right up to the North York Moors and the Lake District. In addition we organised six days in Wales.



Carsington Reservoir
Peak District Ramble

What of the future? We are already busy planning for next year, and we plan to issue next year's programme, of about the same size as this year's, early in the New Year of 2005.

Watch this space!

Mike Bruton

Your Favourite Disabled Ramble

Now is your chance to share with our readers, information about your favourite ramble. Can you send us, with a photo if possible, a brief article of up to 300 words describing a disabled ramble you particularly like. Tell us where it is, what you like about it and how you travel along it.

**Letter from Mike Bruton,
Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers**

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to send greetings and good wishes to all the members and friends of the Disabled Ramblers. This Newsletter marks the beginning of a new era for our organisation, as we relaunch ourselves, not just as a Registered Charity, but now incorporated as a Charitable Company. Officially, we have become an organisation with the status and authority of a limited company, but one which has the legal status of a company 'limited by guarantee.' This means that, like all companies, we are owned by our members, as shareholders, but in our case, we are a non-profit making concern which does not pay dividends. Our members, as shareholders, own the company through payment of an annual subscription, and make certain decisions at the AGM, including appointment of Officers and members of an Executive Committee who are responsible for day to day matters concerned with running the organisation. In the very unlikely event of a financial disaster, members liability is limited to a sum of £1.

We have decided to mark the beginning of our new era as a Charitable Company with two new, or extended activities.

The first is to start up a regular Newsletter, called 'The Disabled Rambler' which we plan to publish four times every year. This publication is the first of this new series. In each edition, we plan to include articles that cover aspects of our role and function. These are described in more detail in a separate article included in this issue, but include organising a programme of disabled rambles each summer, campaigning for better access, information about rambling opportunities across England and Wales, technical data about our rambling aids and general awareness raising about the difficulties and opportunities we face.. .

Our second, extended activity concerns our web-site, (www.disabledramblers.co.uk) which we are re-organising and extending with some professional help. We very much need YOUR help, as members and friends. Please write or email us with articles for publication, your views and queries. These ventures are for you, and we need your contributions!

Please email to: mike@thebrute.freeserve.co.uk, or write to: The Disabled Ramblers, 14 Belmont Park Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 6HT. You can also phone Mike Bruton on: 01628 621414.

Signed

Mike Bruton

Mike Bruton
Chairman,
The Disabled Ramblers
Charity no: 1103508



**Countryside Mobility Scheme in
Monmouthshire**

The Countryside Mobility scheme in Monmouthshire offers independence and freedom in the countryside, for people with limited mobility in a similar way to that which Shopmobility provides in towns.

Ian Smith, Head Warden with Monmouthshire Countryside Service explains the Countryside Mobility Scheme, which offers Scooters for hire at popular visitor sites in South-East Wales

Started in 2001, the Countryside Mobility scheme is just one part of an integrated process of removing barriers to access and services by the Monmouthshire Countryside Service. This commenced in 1996, with audits of our Countryside visitor sites carried out by disabled people. Amongst the first to start this process in Wales, we found the results startling, but Council was very supportive, willing to act on the findings and make finance available to correct matters, ultimately including the purchase of scooters.

During this time, my wife Jill was an active user of various Shopmobility schemes and purchased a pavement scooter to enjoy countryside walks. That scooter really opened eyes to the cross-country capability of 'off the shelf' electric pavement scooters. That and 'The Way Ahead' conference at Ascot arranged by those who were to become the founder members of the Disabled Ramblers.

The Countryside Mobility scheme even helped launch Shopmobility in Abergavenny. Local people could not understand why a scooter was available for use in the

countryside and not the town and made their views known! Now David Overland and his dedicated team, operate scooters for both Abergavenny town and nearby expansive fields next to the River Usk. This has left the Countryside Section to spread the scheme elsewhere – Monmouth being the latest place to benefit.



Opening of the Scheme in Monmouth

Countryside Mobility can often be linked to our 'Organised activities, events & walks', which now often start from a scooter hire venue and most importantly make this fact known.

The result is that mobility in the Countryside is fast becoming the 'normal' situation here.

Whether you have your own scooter or not and wish to enjoy the countryside, Monmouthshire can offer access to a wide choice of beautiful countryside which includes the internationally famous Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. You will be assured of a warm welcome and a true willingness to help and listen to any feedback – so we can continue to improve.

Shopmobility and the Disabled Ramblers should take the credit for much of this as it was the inspiration behind Countryside Mobility.

If you are interested in using a Countryside Mobility scooter, it is very important to first complete registration with the scheme. Then future booking of a scooter is very easy. The scheme currently operates at:

Abergavenny Shopmobility next to Castle Meadows alongside the River Usk. Tel: 08002 983 656

Caldicot Castle, between the two bridges over the Severn Estuary for use in the Country Park and the enclosed Castle grounds. Tel: 01291 425241

Monmouth Tourist Information Centre / One Stop Shop for use at sites such as: Vauxhall Fields,

Chippenham Green and Drybridge Community Nature Park. Tel: 01600 713899 / 775200

Old Station Tintern, 1 mile north of Tintern Abbey for use around the visitor centre grounds and River Wye meadows. Tel: 01291 689566

To find out more, visit our web site above or contact:

Monmouthshire Countryside Service,
County Hall, Cwmbran, NP44 2XH.
Tel: 01633 644850

Disabled Ramblers Conquer Pen Y Fan

Members of the Disabled Ramblers have successfully climbed Pen y Fan, at over 2,900 feet the highest mountain in South Wales.

Six disabled ramblers, using 'Tramper' electrically powered pavement buggies, made up an expedition to the mountain, which took place on the 14th September 2002. Taking part were: Howard Brunton, Mike Bruton, Alan Edwards, Robin Helby, Rosie Norris and Kate Wass. This climb followed a pioneering event when Bob O'Nions, himself a member of the Disabled Ramblers Group, made the first successful ascent earlier in the summer. Bob is disabled and also used a 'Tramper' buggy for the climb.



Howard Brunton gets a helping hand to negotiate a drainage gully

Three of the six disabled members of the expedition reached the summit after a four hour climb up a continuously steep and rough path. Gradients varied between 1 in 3 and 1 in 7, often over rocks and loose gravel. In addition, over 20 drainage gullies needed to be crossed, most of which required the laying of bridging ramps to enable the scooters to pass.

The three disabled ramblers who reached the top were Howard who comes from Somerset, Alan from Herefordshire and Robin who lives in Surrey. None of the three can actually walk more than just a few yards!

Mike Bruton said: 'The climb was a great success. It was right on the limits of what is possible for a pavement buggy, all of which are classed in law as wheelchairs. The Trampers proved up to the task, although progress was extremely slow due to the terrain. Six of us set out up the mountain, but it soon became clear that getting all of us to the top would be simply too slow. So, after climbing up about five hundred feet, we reduced the party down to three disabled people, with the other three, including myself, parked by the path side waiting for the summit group to return.'



The final approach to the summit

The event was superbly supported by Chris Goddard and others from the Beamer Company who manufacture the Trumper scooter. We arranged for sponsorship. Over £1,350 was raised from the event for the Disabled Ramblers which very much helped fill our coffers!

Logo Design

The Disabled Ramblers are looking for a suitable logo. We have a choice of two in mind, so far, illustrated below. Do tell us if you prefer one or the other, or submit your own design. The Executive Committee will be making a decision early in the New Year.

We are offering a prize of £50 for the designer of the winning submission.

Design 1



Design 2



The DDA Disabled Ramblers – What Are We About?

A registered charity, the Disabled Ramblers is run entirely by disabled people for disabled people. The objective is to enable disabled people to take part in a ramble as enjoyed by able-bodied walkers, along footpaths, bridle-ways and trails of all kinds in the countryside. A key purpose is to get disabled people out of, and away from, their motorcars! Members mostly use wheelchairs, adapted as necessary, and a wide variety of battery powered scooters and buggies.

The countryside can often seem intimidating to disabled people; all too much is inaccessible due to man-made barriers like stiles and to bad surfaces, plus the worry about getting stuck or the batteries going flat. Our rambles are very popular because careful advanced planning ensures the route is accessible, and able-bodied assistance is available if needed, as well as rescue for the occasional breakdown, even in the most awkward places.

The ramblers are all disabled and most are virtually unable to walk. Consequently most bring a wide variety of powerchairs and scooters. Some even use manual wheelchairs or adapted cycles. Sometimes a scooter can be provided on loan for newcomers at specific rambles. With many ramblers accompanied by helpers and friends, everyone has a thoroughly good time.

The Disabled Ramblers was originally formed as a special interest section of the Disabled Drivers' Association. It became an independent registered charity in 1998. It also enjoys a close relationship with the Ramblers' Association, with whom the Group also has affiliated status.

The summary of our main objectives is as follows:

1. Social Activities:

Includes the organising of meetings and gatherings around the country, usually incorporating a ramble, to be undertaken with the help of various types of wheelchair and powered pavement vehicles as appropriate

2. Campaigning:

Locally and nationally to establish better access, underpinned as necessary by laws including the 2000 CROW Act and Disability Rights Legislation.

3. Education:

To raise awareness of the need and opportunities for country access locally and nationally, to planners, landowners, and to disabled people themselves.

4. Information:

Establish information on standards, contacts, accessible places and walk opportunities available and suitable for disabled people. To keep track of equipment (including wheelchairs, powerchairs, scooters and buggies). To produce a regular members newsletter

5. Technology:

To review existing equipment (including wheelchairs, power-chairs and scooters) able to help disabled people in the Countryside and to promote new technology solutions better able to cope with the range of conditions encountered

For more information, please contact:

Dr Mike Bruton, Chairman, Disabled Ramblers,
14 Belmont Park Road, Maidenhead, SL6 6HT.

Tel/Fax: 01628 621414.

E:mail: mike@thebrute.freeserve.co.uk

The Royal Forest of Dean

The Royal Forest of Dean is an ancient forest. Once it covered an area south of a line between Ross-on-Wye and Gloucester, and between the rivers Severn and Wye.

The history of human activity and extraction in the forest is fascinating. There is archaeological evidence of Bronze Age people in Clearwell Caves, probably looking for the coloured pigments that are still mined to this day. The Romans mined iron ore. The Elizabethans used the oaks for ship-building, and had gun factories in the forest. The Victorians mined extensively for coal and iron. Timber is still an important product today in this working forest.

The modern Forest is beautifully kept, even manicured by the Forestry Commission. The area of the Forest is about 36 sq miles, with 20,000,000 trees, with 52%

hardwoods. There are 300 miles of gravelled roads, and 2,000 miles of green roads and footpaths.



Rosie & John Norris crossing the River Wye at the Biblins - October 8th Ramble 2003

Amenities for disabled people in the Forest are excellent. Parking is free to those with Tax Exemption Discs. There are three Forestry Commission Disabled Persons' toilets, one at each of the much-visited venues of Beechenhurst Lodge, Wenchford and Mallards Pike. Further toilets are to be found in the Heritage Museum, 'Pedal a Bike Away' and local pubs etc.

Apart from the roads mentioned earlier, there are fine, all weather gravel footpaths, suitable for pedestrians pushing wheelchairs, as well as scooter and buggy riders. These are at Mallards Pike, Soudley Ponds, along the Family Cycle Trail and at some of the picnic sites with barbeque ranges. Much of the Sculpture trail, and all of Symonds Yat Rock are available on easy walking paths.



Lunch break at Near Harkening Rock
October 8th Ramble 2003

Over the years the Forestry Commission have created and maintained a wide range of habitats for wild life and the free roaming sheep. Many of the country's indigenous mammals, together with birds like Ravens, Nightjars and, of course, the wonderful Peregrine Falcons, can be seen and heard.

There are some spectacular views in the Forest. Symonds Yat Rock, an Iron Age Fort, and Blaze Bailey have breathtaking views of the rivers Wye and Severn.

Article submitted by Clifford Hudson, a member of the Disabled Ramblers, who lives in the Forest of Dean.

(Chairman's footnote: over a period of two years, the Disabled Ramblers held and enjoyed four days of superb and varied rambles in the Forest of Dean using the Forest tracks and cycle ways. These trips were planned and led by Clifford Hudson and Alan Edwards)

The New Forest Project

Last year, we were told that an old friend of the Disabled Ramblers, who had led our walks there in the 1990's had passed away. Maurice Barker was 83 and playing Badminton when his heart finally stopped and he died quickly. Maurice, a member of the New Forest Ramblers Group for very many years quickly learnt about our aspirations and capabilities and was able to plan and lead us over miles of trackway across heathland and through woodland, all over the New Forest area.



Bolderwood Ornamental Drive

As a tribute to our long standing friend, we decided to set up a working party to spend a week in the New Forest back in June, to carry out some detailed surveying of some of the routes shown to us by Maurice. The purpose is to publish a brief pack of route information to be made available to all interested visitors with mobility limitations.

Our Group included my wife Jo and myself, John Smythson and his wife, Rosie and John Norris, David Livermore and Robin Helby. The party was big enough to split into two, and we were able to do

detailed surveys of approximately ten routes, up to four or more miles long.



John Norris measuring gradients

We hope to prepare this new Guide for publication over the coming Winter Period.

Watch this space!

The Executive Committee – Who's Who?

Policy matters concerning the Disabled Ramblers are administered by an executive committee appointed each year at the AGM.

Day to day matters are the responsibility of the Committee members serving on an individual basis.

The Committee members serving at the moment are:

Dr Mike Bruton	Chairman
Robin Helby	Vice Chairman & Technical Officer
Rosie Norris	Secretary
Maria Davies	Treasurer
Alan Edwards	
Kate Wass	

Members of the Executive Committee are widely scattered across England, which reflects the National nature of our organisation. Mike lives in Maidenhead, Robin resides in a village near Guildford. Rosie lives near Leatherhead, Maria's home is in Sutton Coldfield, Alan lives in Cradley village near Malvern, and, finally, Kate recently moved to live near Exeter.



No Comment !

Walks Information For Members

John Smythson has been researching information on disabled rambles and easy going paths. He has done this by writing off to very many organisations and bodies concerned with countryside access. Over the last year, he has assembled a great deal, which he holds in list form.

We aim to bring John's data to our members' attention, either within future Newsletters or on our expanded web-site.

John stresses that we have not carried out checks or audits on the paths listed, and so readers must take the information as presented. The Disabled Ramblers can in no way accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of presented data. Readers use the information we will provide entirely at their own risk!

However, we will look for feedback from members on any routes actually tried out. Do tell us in due course of your experiences!

Look out for a start in presenting this information in future newsletters.

The Disability Discrimination Act The Sum of its Parts ?

Part 1 of the DDA came into effect in December 1996, and made it unlawful for service providers to discriminate against disabled people for reasons related to their disability.

Part 2 became effective in October 1999, and since then service providers have had to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people.

Part 3 came into effect from October 1st this year, and required service providers to make additional 'reasonable adjustments' to overcome physical barriers to access.

However, some service providers are exempt from meeting the requirements of the DDA. Principally, these are the service providers who do not operate from a fixed site - eg. the transport providers - including aircraft, buses, coaches, ships, trains and taxis.

With at least five years advance notice, service providers have little - if any - excuse for not having made the place where they provide a service accessible to disabled people. What has been your experience ? Do you now find that your local services are accessible ?

Like most laws, the DDA operates on what is deemed to be 'reasonable' - and that is open to interpretation ! If you have come across instances of unreasonable access provision by a service provider, please let us know - preferably with a photograph - so that we can include it in a future edition of the newsletter.

Shoot-out at the O.K. Corral – Oh, OK, at the Ramblers' Association AGM, Exeter University, April 2004

"Go west" said Mike Bruton "and kindly present the following motion at the Ramblers' Association AGM", on behalf of the Disabled Ramblers".

The motion was:

“This meeting welcomes and approves of the work of the Disabled Ramblers, seeking to improve access for disabled people using countryside paths and trails. It notes with approval the need for very high quality access only in highly visited and developed places and also welcomes the more informal approach proposed elsewhere, which recognises the need to avoid urbanising the countryside with unsuitable surfaces and treatments.”

So off John and I went, with me mulling over the chances of winning, or even – heaven forbid! - losing the motion.

It seemed innocuous enough on the face of it, initially seeking Ramblers' Association approval for the work of the Disabled Ramblers and the Group's attempts to improve access for disabled people using countryside paths and trails. The rub came in the second paragraph. Essentially we were asking General Council to support the Group's attempts to leave the countryside mainly as it is, but to seek the removal, on selected paths and trails, of stiles and kissing gates, replacing them if needs be with gates wide enough to accommodate buggies, with path surface improvements only where necessary to remedy rutted, very rough or very wet sections. Well, we would see.

Members of the Devon area of the RA acted as the welcoming committee to the AGM and were very helpful in assisting the four of us (we had been joined by Kate Wass and her daughter, Ellie) to get the Group's stand ready the first afternoon. One of the Devon members observed to me that she had presented a very similar motion to her Parish Council. How had she got on? “Oh, the motion was lost”!!

We were greatly helped by Nigel Sloan, Area Organiser for West Sussex RA, who had very kindly agreed to second the motion (all motions must be seconded by a member of the Ramblers' Association before they may be discussed).

Our turn to speak duly arrived - 9.40am Sunday morning – a most unkind cut, given J and I, as some of you know, are not the earliest of risers (we raced through the city centre around 9.00am, hoping we wouldn't get caught in a speed trap). All the other motions had shot through in a brace of shakes, but our motion took the delegates around 45 minutes to debate!! The general lay-out of these things, as I'm sure you all know, is the presenter and seconder present/support the motion, comments on

the motion are received from the floor, the proposer has a right of reply and then the vote is taken.

Once Nigel had very ably acted as seconder, speakers laid in with enthusiasm. The first speaker said the motion hadn't actually asked the RA to do anything practical/positive and he was against it. There were several speakers in that vein, before someone magnanimously said although the motion had not perhaps been correctly presented, he nevertheless supported the general aim. Another speaker asked whether the Group wanted to remove all stiles – he personally was very attached to some very old stiles in his locality and would hate to see them go – they were part of his life.

Following some more generally adverse comments, a member of the Executive Committee proposed remitting the motion, seconded by another member of the Committee. General Council treated this with some caution, several asking how long it was proposed to leave the motion in remittance, what plans the Committee had for the motion if remission were approved and so on.

At this point, with the situation apparently in danger of going against us, Kate Wass was given permission to speak. She began by saying “I don't think you quite understand” Her speech was amazing - a mixture of Queen Elizabeth 1 at Tilbury exhorting the troops to valorous deeds and of the cavalry coming over the hill. There was a slightly stunned silence at the end, but the vibes were suddenly much better!!

After Kate's intervention, comments became far more favourable. Finally one speaker pointed out that one of the Ramblers' Association's aims was social inclusion and that to vote against the motion would go against that aim. Yet another reminded those listening that any member could become disabled at any time, so it might be prudent to support the motion!

After the proposer's right to reply, the motion went to the vote. First, the vote on remission was lost and then the vote on the motion was overwhelmingly carried!!!!

We do thank the Ramblers for supporting our case now so widely: support for us both at national and the already existing local levels is very encouraging and we are most grateful for the way things turned out! Long live the RA!!

Rosie Norris
Secretary, The Disabled Ramblers