

The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

January 2005

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

2005: Unveiling our Summer Rambles Programme!

- *Fifteen events so far planned, over twenty one days*
- *First visits to Pembrokeshire and Rutland Water*
- *Finalised programme to be ready early February*

The Disabled Ramblers Summer programme for 2005 is advancing very well, with 15 separate events so far organised, covering a total of 21 days, and visiting many popular areas in England and Wales. As usual, we are planning rambles to suit all tastes with different degrees of challenge!

We are starting with a challenging day in Surrey on Thursday, 14th April. After this, spaced approximately fortnightly, we get into our stride, as we move about the country.

There are a number of new events through the season. The Margaret Ray Memorial ramble is taking us into Central London on Sunday 14th April, with a trip along the South Bank visiting the Globe Theatre, before crossing the famous new millennium bridge to go to the north side of the Thames.

Our visit to Pembrokeshire for a weekend on 14th and 15th May will be our first visit to this coastal National Park, and we shall be journeying in excess of eight miles along the spectacular limestone coastline within the Castlemartin Military area. We are greatly privileged to be allowed into the 'range west' area, which is usually completely banned to visitors because of its high military usage. We are assured we will not be fired upon during our visit!

On Wednesday 22nd June, we are being led along a beautiful stretch of the South Downs Way by one of our members, Sue Watson – we are grateful to Sue for all her work and efforts – featured elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Later on, on Thursday 28th July, we are paying our first ever visit to Rutland Water, which is a beautiful lake in the Midlands, in the ancient County of Rutland. It is the biggest reservoir in England, with a total shoreline of 27 miles. (We shall cover only a limited section during our one day there!)

Other than the above, we shall be revisiting old haunts, except, of course, we always aim to use different paths and trails each time.

As always, we will publish our detailed, finalised programme in a separate leaflet, which will be sent to members as part of our renewal process, when we send out letters to current members early in February.



Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

STOP PRESS

Mike Bruton, Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers, has been awarded an MBE in the 2005 New Year's Day Honours List.

Mike has campaigned tirelessly for the Group since its inception. Thanks in great measure to Mike's diplomatic and networking skills, together with his technical expertise, the Group's views are regularly sought by the shakers and movers in the rambling world. This in its turn is resulting in increased countryside access for disabled rambling, allowing us to continue onwards and upwards!

We send our warmest congratulations to Mike and Jo on this richly deserved award.

(Pictures of the presentation will be shown in a later Newsletter)

Letter from Mike Bruton, Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

Dear Friends,

I must start by wishing all our members and friends a very happy and successful New Year. I must say I am looking forward very much to this year, with our Disabled Ramblers Organisation now reaching maturity, functioning now as a Charitable Company (Charity number 1103508), and with new ventures underway which include regular Newsletters and our up-dated web-site.

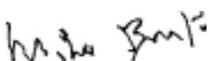
Our programme of summer rambles for 2005 is nearing completion, and will be finalised early in February, when we issue our annual leaflet and booking form, as part of our membership renewal processes. In the meantime our preliminary programme can be viewed on our web-site. For those without access to the web, we have enclosed our latest preliminary plan with this Newsletter. I hope to meet many of you on rambles during the season.

In addition to providing information and organising rambles, we remain, of course, a campaigning organisation. We are here to help you! If you come across particular problems accessing the Countryside near your home, do tell us. Send details of location, describe the problem and send, if at all possible, photographs to show the problem. We may be able to make representations to land owners or managers on your behalf.

The issue of providing guidance on countryside access is taken very seriously by the Countryside Agency. After some delays, we are hoping to see new guidelines on disabled access published early in 2005 by the Agency. This should inform Land Managers and Owners, Rights of Way Officers and path users what is a reasonable expectation of access and help clarify the present very varied and woolly thinking on this very important subject!

Meanwhile, do get in touch with us.

Signed



Mike Bruton
Chairman,
The Disabled Ramblers
Charity no: 1103508
Web-site: www.disabledramblers.co.uk

Obituary – Phil Ingold

Long established members of the Disabled Ramblers will be sad to learn of the death of our old friend, Phil Ingold.

Phil had severe MS but, accompanied by his wife, Helen he came on many of the earlier rambles held in the mid 1990's. Phil was full of fun and laughter, and enjoyed adventurous living.



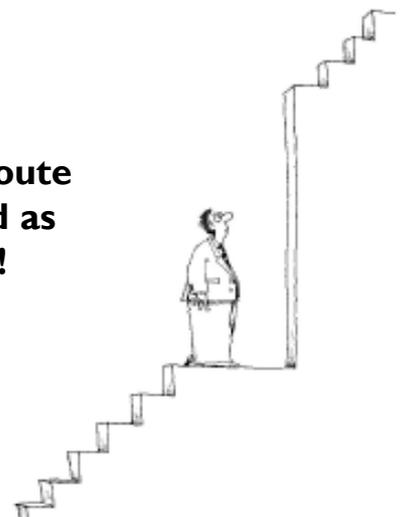
Mike Bruton has an enduring memory of a New Forest ramble, when, deep in a wooded section, we came across a tree with a lookout built fairly high up, and approached by rudimentary steps up the trunk. Phil was determined to climb this tree, and he set about this task

with his usual gusto! People around helped guide his feet on to holds, there was much cheering, and he got up around eight feet above the ground before he decided to come down. With a broad grin, he then resumed his normal progress on three wheels driving along sensible paths and tracks!

As Helen says: 'He is now at peace with the angels (hopefully behaving himself, well, maybe not too much) and we wonder what the beers are like up there?'

Our sympathies go out to Helen and Simon at the loss of this wonderfully warm and funny man.

**I'm sure this route
was described as
accessible !**



A Ramble in the North York Moors National Park

Just north of the main moorland mass which dominates the North York Moors National Park is the quiet and secluded valley of the River Esk. This flows down to the sea at Whitby, passing on the way some lovely villages, such as Comondale, Castleton and Danby.



Mike Bruton makes his way along a National Park bridleway

I recommend a beautiful easy going walk from Comondale to Castleton, which uses a delightful bridleway recently repaired by the National Park Authority, with disabled users in mind. This trail is now in a condition quite suitable for users of power buggies, or even wheelchair users who have either strong assistants or very powerful arms to manage the hills en route! For the return, I used a very quiet minor road. The scenery is wonderful, with varied views of moorland and river valley. Total distance - 4 to 5 miles.

Disabled Rambler Reaches Summit Of Cairn Gorm

Originally, the plan had been to find a route to the summit of Ben Nevis that was suitable for an ascent by Trampers. Disabled Rambler, Howard Brunton and Chris Goddard did the initial planning, and Alan Edwards arranged able-bodied support from the Royal Highland Fusiliers, together with an offer from the Royal Air Force to transport spare sets of batteries by helicopter. However, due to recent 'improvements' to the track, that included a hundred metre section of 18" high steps, an ascent of Ben Nevis was finally ruled out.

Howard and Alan were still very keen to reach the top

of one of the Highland peaks, and decided to investigate a route to the summit of Cairn Gorm in the Grampian Mountains. After lengthy correspondence between Alan, The Highlands and Islands Enterprise Board and Cairn Gorm Mountain Co., permission was finally granted for an attempt in May 2003. This date was put back to September 2004 when the support that had been offered from the Army was withdrawn due to 'operational requirements overseas' !

It was then decided to arrange our own able-bodied support, with Howard enlisting help from ex-mountaineering friends, and Alan being supported by friends from his days in the Royal Air Force Mountain Rescue Team at Kinloss in the north of Scotland.

The date for the ascent was set for the first week in September, with availability of able-bodied support and the weather determining exactly when. Regrettably, due to circumstances beyond his control, Howard was not able to take part. On the morning of September 4th, with a reasonable weather forecast, a small group assembled at the Corrie Cas car park to start the trek to the summit.



Down to his last Sherpa, and without oxygen, Alan presses on for the summit

The route started off as planned, and after a climb of 1510 feet, with gradients steeper than 1:3 in places, a toilet and coffee break at the Ptarmigan restaurant was most welcome. From the restaurant the track narrowed, and ramps had to be used to negotiate large granite slabs placed across the route to divert rain water. The going became particularly interesting when Alan and his support team arrived at the summit boulder field ! However, all went well and the 4085 foot high summit was safely reached - with a celebratory 'tot' of local whisky to mark the occasion. With the weather taking a turn for the worse, photographs were taken and the group beat a hasty retreat back to the car park.

A good day was had by all who took part, but thanks are also due to Chris Goddard and 'the team' from the Beamer Company who manufacture the Trampler scooter, for their help and support.

As a postscript, the day after the event a freak storm struck the mountain, and in the worst flood in the area for 17 years, heavy rain turned the Allt Mhor burn into a raging torrent. Boulders and rocks were washed downstream and jammed beneath the Coronation Bridge. A natural dam built up and eventually the water took a new path across the ski road, washing away about 30 feet of it - and this was the road that we had used the day before to reach the starting off point !

Out rambling again !

Of the many things I've lost due to MS, what I've missed most has been walking in the countryside. Growing up in a Chilterns village and walking across the fields to school in all weathers, it was something I took for granted from early childhood and assumed I would keep into old age.

Before MS symptoms began in 1986, and for a few years after that, I used to take any opportunity possible to jump on a train with my rucksack and head for the hills, mountains or moors. The more wild and remote the destination the better! I particularly used to love the sense of a journey or quest that you get on long trails. Even as recently as 1993 I walked with a friend from the north to the south coast of Wales, from Snowdonia to the Gower, through the high mountains wherever possible. I will never forget the beauty of the scenery and the sense of freedom we had - indescribable.

As time passed, I began to experience more and more problems being in the countryside. This was partly due to MS - I couldn't walk so well or so far - but I also began to see how many barriers there were for disabled people to gain access to the countryside. This was really brought home to me when a close friend and walking companion from Sheffield developed ME and needed a powerchair to go anywhere. She asked me to try and search out accessible footpaths with her in the Peak District.

We found a few lovely paths along the rivers Derwent and Wye (Miller's Dale was especially beautiful), old railway trails and even tracks across the moors; but I was very shocked to discover that the vast majority were out of bounds for anyone in a wheelchair. This was mainly because of physical barriers like stiles, steps and gates - I remember thinking (around 1987) that it was like a form of apartheid. Only able-bodied people were allowed to enter the real countryside, the rest of us were confined to a ghetto of tarmac and easy access paths.

As I became progressively less ambulant, I experimented with a variety of buggies, from Shopriders

to quad bikes. All had their merits but none allowed me to go where I wanted to go, to the wilder, more remote places.

Things changed when I went to the Mobility Roadshow in 2001, I had heard of a new buggy called a Trampler, designed specifically for rough terrain, and was keen to find out more. Arriving at the Roadshow, I was overjoyed when the first stall I saw brandished the sign 'Disabled Ramblers'. I discovered a group which for several years had organised rambles of varying difficulty and campaigned for better access to the countryside! So I promptly joined, and also bought a Trampler about 18 months later - as soon as I could afford one.

Tramping over the South Downs

The South Downs Way Challenge happened last summer. I had done an 85-mile Trampler ride along and around the Sussex Downs in June to raise money for the Sussex MS Treatment Centre. I was really pleased and surprised when Robin Helby, the vice-chair of the Disabled Ramblers, said he'd like to do the whole thing with me.



Robin Helby and Sue Watson
on the South Downs Way

I also thought, "Is he mad?" I had only possessed my Trampler for a few months and, despite having taken it to some fairly terrifying places, was still just learning how to drive it; whereas Robin was a much more experienced Trampler rider who had been up Welsh mountains on his! Still, what an opportunity! We did our planning swiftly. The idea was we'd get along the whole trail alone, without any helpers or carers to carry luggage, push us out of ruts, mend punctures or whatever. We wanted to publicise where and how far it is possible to go with the right equipment, and also to raise money to buy some more Trampers to loan out to disabled people.

So what happened? Well first of all we did complete the trip - about 130 miles in total, including travelling to and from where we stayed overnight and recharging the batteries. And we succeeded in raising over £2000. But there were certainly some challenges along the way. Like the day we had four punctures. And being chased off the path by a man muttering things about "motorised vehicles" (In fact Trampers, as class 3 disability vehicles, are legally allowed anywhere in the countryside where a pedestrian can go.)

This forced us to take a very steep (at least 1 in 3) path over Old Winchester Hill with a flight of big steps at the beginning. I couldn't possibly have done this bit on my own and was very glad of Robin's technical expertise. (He rigged up an ingenious system of ropes and pulleys to get us up the hill.)

Accommodation was a big stumbling block. Though most proprietors did their best to help, it was on the whole all pretty inaccessible. I did mostly manage to stick to the Best Bet Diet. But then there were the toilet problems - there aren't many toilets, or sometimes even bushes, on the South Downs. My Pipinette (see *New Pathways* Sept/Oct 2000) was a very necessary piece of luggage!

There were many great moments though too. Miraculously we had perfect MS weather - gloriously sunny without being too hot - and not one drop of rain. Fabulous scenery unfolded day after day. At times we felt far, far away from civilisation, even though we were only in the south of England. At one B&B there were 23 steps up to the bedrooms, and an hysterical time was had by two disabled people trying to climb these after a visit to the local!

All in all it was a fantastic experience that I am very grateful to have had. It was mentally and physically arduous for sure, but so exciting to go on a long distance

trail, something I'd honestly thought I'd never be able to do again. Now it's just a matter of where next?!

Written by Sue Watson, this article first appeared in the March/April 2004 edition of 'New Pathways' - published by The Multiple Sclerosis Resource Centre, 7 Peartree Business Centre, Stanway, Colchester, Essex, CO3 0JN Tel: 01206 505444

Accessible Walks in Scotland

Many of you may know that five years ago Scottish Disabled Ramblers was set up by a group of disabled ramblers to help less mobile people visit the beautiful Scottish countryside. Information on access and facilities was needed. They began to collect information on paths and trails, accessible by scooter and wheelchair, in Scotland.



Eva McCracken auditing a ramble using audiotape

With the help of a Seed Corn grant from Scotland UnLimited, Eva is hoping by December 2005 to publish a book of 50 Wheelchair Accessible Walks in Scotland of 2-12 miles. Eva would like to invite you to share with her your knowledge of any paths and trails accessible to wheelchairs in Scotland. If you have visited any in the last 2 years please let her know. Contact Eva at: Tel: 01592 758149 or email at mccracken@markinch.freserve.co.uk

The Extra Challenge 2005

Scotland hosts a disability challenge with a difference

18th June 2005, stunning West Highland scenery, glorious sunshine (!) and a warm welcome. In it's second year the Extra Challenge, part of the State Street Caledonian Challenge, will invite people with disabilities and those overcoming recent medical conditions to tackle 8 rugged miles to raise funds for the Scottish Community Foundation which will make grants to disability and disability sport organisations across Scotland.

Part of the 8 mile route will be shared with the full 54 mile Caledonian Challenge which in its 8th year is aiming to raise £1 million for the Scottish Community Foundation. With a combination of tarmac and rougher terrain the organisers recommend scooters or sturdy wheelchairs with suitable tyres. Last year's event was praised for its warm welcome and the care and attention paid to participants. Disabled toilets are provided at the start and finish and participants receive a goody bag, medal, t-shirt and a hearty meal at the finish, along with the all important prize giving. One of last year's participants Eva McCracken has fond memories of the Extra Challenge and hopes to be back this year; "We were rewarded with fair weather, pleasant company and a reception fit for kings!"



Glen Etive - 18th June 2004

2005 sees a different route to bring the Extra Challenge and the Caledonian Challenge together and provide a challenging but great day out for those taking part. The organisers at the Scottish Community Foundation are hoping to mirror the success of the more senior Caledonian Challenge by attracting participants from across the UK and hope it will become a permanent fixture in the disability sport calendar.

Call Fiona Lindsay on 0131 524 0354 or visit the website at www.caledonianchallenge.com/extra or email extrachallenge@scottishcommunityfoundation.com

Cross Border Co-operation for Managing Public Access

The Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales have joined forces with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Herefordshire Council (as access authorities) to support an important initiative that aims to demonstrate effective management of public access on open country that straddles the England - Wales border.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Eastern Area Local

Access Forum and the Herefordshire Local Access Forum are also members of the project Steering Group. The Black Mountains Cross Border Demonstration Project is a two-year project to help the cross-border management of open access on the Black Mountains. It was set up to ensure that all those affected by the new rights are given guidance and advice, and that suitable information is provided to enable the public to access and enjoy this area of rugged natural landscape. One of the identified outcomes of the project is "Improved access for disabled people".



The view of Llanthony Priory from a proposed 'easier access' route

The project area includes the open moorland of the easternmost ridges of the Black Mountains and lies partly within the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is an area of high scenic value, and of important biodiversity and archaeological interest, as well as providing essential common grazing rights for farmers and landowners. Traditionally a popular area for outdoor recreation, implementation of the new Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act will legalise what has formerly been a 'de facto' right for people to roam these hills.



The rugged landscape above
Grwyne Fawr Reservoir

In his capacity as a member of the Herefordshire Local Access Forum and the Cross Border Project Steering Group, local member of the Disabled Ramblers, Alan Edwards, is actively involved the preparation of guidelines on access provision within the project area.

Walks Information for Members

In the last issue of the Newsletter, a short article outlined the work that John Smythson has been doing in collecting information on disabled rambles and easy-going paths. John has now turned much of this information into what he calls 'ramble sheets' that describe definite and possible scooter rambles of various lengths all over the country.

These sheets are available to every member of the Disabled Ramblers. Just write to: John Smythson, Claremont, Holland Lane, Hurst Green, Oxted, Surrey RH8 9AS and ask about ramble sheets for your area - there is a small charge: 50p for 1-20 sheets, £1 for 21-40 sheets and £3 for the lot.

The production of sheets continues and, in later issues, John expects to be adding to the list. You will find there is a 'reference' for nearly every ramble.

John says "The aim of this collection (which is confined to England, Scotland and Wales) is to inform scooter riders where and what sort of rambles there are in whatever part of the country they happen to be. (There may be others but at least you should find some that are not too far away.)"

The word "scooter" means the type of scooter disabled people use; "ramble" means an excursion into the countryside - the sort of route you might walk if you could. A "long" ramble is defined here as one which is 5 miles or more in length; a "short" one as less than 5 miles. A "possible" is a route that sounds from the literature about it to be OK for a scooter but which has an element of uncertainty about it.

Strictly speaking, any ramble not tested for scooters is a possible; the word is used here to indicate that there is not all that much evidence that a route is OK for scooters (though it is certainly worth a try).

The document is an unsophisticated one (particularly in presentation) but the essentials are there. You may be able to find out more about a ramble from the reference or the local Tourist Information Centre; start by getting the reference - you're certain to need that.

You may think that every scooter can do every one of the rambles in here. Be careful: scooters vary a lot. Significant variations are in the number of wheels, weight, ruggedness, length and width. There are those that are prone to tip over and those that have too wide a

wheel base to get through gaps or along paths which are OK for another scooter. They vary a lot in the type of terrain, upward slope and camber they can cope with. Another factor is the weight of the rider: the heavier the rider the higher the centre of gravity. An important factor in whether or not you go on a particular ramble is whether or not somebody accompanies you and how strong that person is. And, of course, you must know your scooter's capabilities. But unless you have good reason to believe you can't do a certain ramble, **give it a try** but be prepared to turn back.

Don't take it for granted that a toilet labelled "disabled toilet" will accommodate a scooter; it will have the adaptations and accessories you expect but may only be big enough for a wheelchair. Experience has shown that if you see one then even if you aren't really ready see if you can get in and, if you can, use it.

Because it concentrates on countryside rambles this collection contains no town ones (though they are generally easy - and good - when following a town trail, which you can always get from the TIC). Nor does it contain seaside town promenades (though these, too, are generally easy - and good.)

Do note that this collection is probably out of date already. There is increasingly good provision for the disabled. In particular, some bodies are busy removing stiles and other obstacles.

What isn't in it - and this is where you can help - is every suitable ramble there is; also the reassurance that a ramble has been "tested for scooters" is often notable by its absence. Being able to ramble has transformed a lot of people's lives. So please test what rambles you can and send me your comments and missing details about those I have included."

Address them to The Disabled Rambler, Claremont, Holland Lane, Hurst Green, Oxted. Surrey RH8 9AS or to johnsmythson@aol.com.

A typical data sheet contains information about the original source of the data, start and finish points, distance, gradients and path surfaces - as well as information about disabled toilets, places to eat and drink and parking. As with all of the information supplied by a third party, The Disabled Ramblers cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the presented data.

In memory of Maurice Barker



In memory of Maurice Barker, a former member of the New Forest Group of the Ramblers Association, who died in 2003. The footbridge was presented by the New Forest Ramblers and formally opened on November 13th 2004. In the picture is John Thackray, Group Chairman (left) and also Maurice's widow, Anna, next to him. Maurice was a great friend of the Disabled Ramblers and led us on many organized rambles through the New Forest in the 1990's. We are doing our own memorial, with a plan to publish a booklet of 10 accessible rambles in the New Forest during the coming year.

Access to the Countryside Conference

On 23rd November 2004, the Chilterns Conservation Board organised a conference about 'Access to the Countryside' at Stokenchurch in Buckinghamshire. The conference was well attended by representatives from the Countryside Agency, DEFRA, National Trust, English Nature, Forestry Commission and many County Councils and members of their Local Access Forums. Mike Bruton, Rosie & John Norris and Alan Edwards represented the Disabled Ramblers.

The speakers gave talks ranging from 'Improving Access for the Less Mobile' to 'Open Access – how much and where?' and 'Healthy Walking Programmes' to 'The Needs of Horse Riders'. Mike Furness, a member of The Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW) gave a fascinating talk on 'Access to Woodlands', and kindly gave out a number of copies of the IPROW magazine 'Waymark'

The Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW) is an organisation that was formed in 1986 to represent access management practitioners in Great Britain, and in a recent edition of 'Waymark' (Autumn 2004) they

addressed the issue of 'What is Reasonable?' - in the context of improving access to the countryside. Articles for the magazine were contributed by the Countryside Council for Wales, DEFRA, The Disabled Ramblers, The Fieldfare Trust, Centrewire, The Access Company, IPROW, The Kennel Club and various County Council Rights of Way Departments.

Apart from Mike Bruton's excellent article on 'Disabled Rambling and the Disability Discrimination Act', Tom Bindoff of Centrewire wrote about 'The Challenges for the Gate Designer' – an article about the difficulties of trying to reconcile the interests of rights of way users and land managers when designing accessible gates. He summed up his thoughts by saying "I feel sometimes that I am trying to reconcile some irreconcilable interests".

Jonathan Clark, a Rights of Way Officer at Buckinghamshire County Council wrote in his article 'Gaps are the New Stile' that "Stiles are one of the most common features in the countryside, yet they are one of the worst offenders when it comes to limiting public access." Something that Disabled Ramblers know only too well!

The article by Alan Bowring, a Rights of Way Officer at Cheshire County Council covered the subject of 'Powered Wheelchairs – where can they go?' – and posed an interesting set of questions about the increasing use of powered wheelchairs in the countryside.

Jacqui Stearn and Simon Blake of the Countryside Agency previewed the Agency's forthcoming guidance on accessibility. This guidance will cover all disabilities – not just mobility impairment – and will act as supplementary guidance on meeting obligations covered by Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) and Section 69 of The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Disabled Ramblers know only too well that it is not possible to make all of the countryside fully accessible, but it should be the aim of land managers and rights of way departments to make reasonable efforts to provide access to as many people as possible. What constitutes reasonable provision will vary in different situations and according to the needs and capabilities of visitors - as well as the results of future case law.

Editor's note: If you would like to read the 'Waymark' articles, I have a few copies of the Autumn 2004 edition if members would like a copy of their own. Please email your contact details to editor@disabledramblers.co.uk