



The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

January 2008

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

RAMBLES PROGRAMME FOR 2008

- *record breaking choice and days*
- *two new areas now included*

Autumn and Winter are the times when we are most busy planning next year's programme. This year has been no exception. We use a full network of contacts to suggest routes, then explore them and finally we decide on what is to be put into the programme. Although we frequently revisit areas we try to avoid duplicating previous rambles, always seeking some new places and new experiences. Because of the distances many members travel to get to ramble locations we try to group two or even three rambles at each location over consecutive days. Furthermore we next try to group locations which are geographically adjacent to dates following on previous ramble dates, with just a day's gap to allow some rest and time to travel to the new area. This suits members who may want say a week's break, with four or more days rambling.

This coming season we are visiting three entirely new areas. These are:

1. the Suffolk Coast. The Suffolk coastline is mainly low lying, marshy in places and wooded in other parts. An entire length of seventy miles is protected as an 'area of outstanding natural beauty' (AONB). With help from AONB staff we are spending two days later in May, visiting Rendlesham Forest and Dunwich Coast and Heath. These rambles are being organised by our member friends Tony and Dorothy Dickens.
2. the Tywi Valley in Central/South Wales. The Tywi River drains much of the Cambrian Mountain area and emerges from the hills north of Llandovery in a deeply cut valley. Quite high up is Llyn Brienne, a large reservoir in an area of gorges. The dam is very high, and we are crossing this as part of a new ramble in forested areas near the lake. Several miles downstream lies another forested area situated in a side valley below a high waterfall. We are helped in

both cases by the Llan ym ddyfri District of the Forestry Commission and we will be visiting these places at the end of June.. These rambles are being organised by John Palmer, our Treasurer.

3. the Yorkshire Dales National Park. This National Park is mainly in North Yorkshire. We will be going up high on the moors for these two days, including a visit to an ancient lead mining area. These will be the toughest of the new ramble areas with category 3 rambles on offer. Our visit will be in the middle of July. We will be helped by staff working for the National Park. These days are being organised by Robin Helby.

The full programme of 31 ramble days is developing well and we expect the leaflet with dates and booking procedures to be issued with membership renewal early in the New Year. Meanwhile the programme looks like the following:

May – two days near Windsor/Maidenhead and two days in Suffolk.

June – three days on Dartmoor. Later in the month two days in the Brecon Beacons followed closely by the new Tywi Valley two days.

July – two and a half days in North Wales (see photos). Later we have the Yorkshire Dales two days, followed by three days in Lancashire and then two days in the Peak District – a very active month!

August – one day on the South Downs near Birling Gap. Later in the month, two days near Ashridge in the Chilterns.

September – a day by the Avon Gorge near Bristol, followed by two days in the Mendip Hills. Mid September sees three days in Hampshire.

We finish the season with the Margaret Ray ramble in the London Dockland area.

(See page 2 & 6 for photos of the North Wales routes)

Letter from Mike Bruton, Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

Dear Friends,

First of all, may I wish you all a very happy New Year. We are, I am sure looking forward to the end of Winter, with increasing hours of daylight and the chance to enjoy more trips to the countryside out in the fresh air.

A lot has been happening within our organisation over the past few months and we are grateful to those of you who have responded to the letters sent out to our membership. For a start there have been changes on our Executive Committee. We welcomed on board a new Treasurer, John Palmer from Cardiff, and his first task to complete and file our accounts for 2006, both with Companies House and the Charities Commission was completed on time. Next we have noted the resignations of Carol Felton and Alan Edwards from the Committee. Carol has a career background in Public Relations and was the PR chief of a large UK based company. During her time on the Committee Carol was always constructive and has given us very sensible advice on PR issues. Regrettably we have not always been able to follow this wise advice, due to a lack of resources and we still need someone to develop this very important function. Potentially this involves a great deal of work, making contacts with the TV and Radio services and the Press, both locally and nationally. The recent furore involving the national radio and newspapers illustrated this issue very well (see article 'Time to say goodbye to the kissing gate' in this Newsletter). Alan Edwards' contribution in setting up our quarterly Newsletter and arranging for and supporting our web-site has been quite outstanding – a tribute to him and his work is dealt with in a separate feature in this Newsletter edition. We thank both Carol and Alan very heartily and wish them every success in their future lives. We are co-opting two newcomers to our Committee, Dorothy Dickens and Mary Knight.

Mary will liaise with our web-site manager, and Dorothy will assist Rosie Norris with membership administration. The Newsletter will be produced in Maidenhead, with preparation and printing locally, starting with the next issue. We hope to add one or two others to our committee in the near future.

However, please send articles and other material to Mike Bruton, 14 Belmont Park Road, Maidenhead, SL6 6HT. email: chairman@disabledramblers.co.uk.

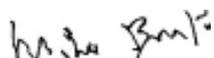
My telephone number is: 01628 621414.

I have maintained contact with my MP, Rt Hon Theresa May, and she has obtained useful information for us. I now understand that the DfT are commissioning more work from their disability team to follow their 2006 report on Class 2 and 3 vehicles. Their next step is to send out a consultation paper on various issues (including insurance?) this coming Spring. We shall be watching this very carefully and will certainly respond to it at the appropriate time. Watch this space!

The Rambles programme for the coming season is coming together nicely, though not finalised yet in every detail (see separate article). We are looking at a record of 31 ramble days – our biggest yet! An important development means that we expect to support every event with our mobile support unit, now equipped with four loan scooters, as well as the toilet! Robin Helby will be assisted in this by our friend, Mike Longbottom, who is happy to come to many events. This extra resource is a great comfort and we expect most loan buggies will be in use on every ramble. We look forward to meeting many of you on rambles this coming summer.

Do please continue to send your ideas over future rambles, or talk to me on any disabled rambling issue, using the contact methods above.

All good wishes
Yours sincerely



Mike Bruton
Chairman, Disabled Ramblers.



Old Nant Francon road above Capel Curig

Saying 'Goodbye'

A very good friend is stepping down from our Executive Committee.

Alan Edwards has been with us for over four years. In his early career he was deeply involved in the Armed Services with mountain rescue. Unfortunately this was abruptly terminated following an accident, forcing him to a change of career.

Alan came to us as an enthusiastic disabled rambler, determined to push the frontier of what is possible! He was one of three members who reached the top of Pen y Fan, which at over 2,900 feet is the highest mountain in the Brecon Beacons in South Wales. This was a very challenging expedition, which required bridging over around 40 drainage gullies on the way up and again on the way back down! Following this achievement, Alan then found a way to the top of Cairngorm! First of all, he had to persuade the administrators of the newly created Scottish National Park to allow him to try, convincing them that he would not damage the sensitive tundra at the top of this very high mountain. Eventually permission was granted, and he made the climb using, first, the track which services the restaurant high up on what, in winter, are ski slopes. Gradients on the track were a bit of a challenge, with the steepest stretch at 1 in 2 ½ !! After a cup of tea at the restaurant, Alan went on up, and reached the summit after negotiating a boulder field.. His latest trip was up the Hannibal trail in the Alps – a very rough, very high and very challenging path. He thinks it may have been easier for elephants than for his Trumper scooter!



Alan on the summit boulderfield of Cairngorm

Meanwhile Alan served the Disabled Ramblers in a number of ways. First he explored and led rambles in

both North and South Wales, next he represented us at various meetings and events, again in Wales.

Finally, we come to his finest achievements of all for us. He was able to organise and set up our very well designed web-site, and then keep it updated through liaison with our very helpful web-master, Waz Chemij. Alan also took responsibility for starting up and editing our very successful quarterly newsletter. The first was issued in the Autumn of 2004, and this one is number 14 !

Alan is passing over both the Newsletter and the Web-site, due to new, family commitments. Two newcomers will share these tasks – a tribute in itself to the effort Alan put in by himself !

Alan, we wish you well in your future work. You take the heartfelt thanks and the best wishes of the Disabled Ramblers with you.

Many, many thanks!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Bruton".

Mike Bruton

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO THE KISSING GATE ?

- *Political Correctness gone mad ?*
- *Moves to improve disabled access under attack*
- *Huge gulf in public understanding !*

My oh my! Words fail me! So the truth is out! Moves to help disabled people enjoy the countryside are in reality nonsense, ill-founded and are based purely upon an excess of 'political correctness'! Wheelchairs are completely unsuited to be used on footpaths in any case – so 'hands off' replacing kissing gates and stiles with wheelchair friendly barriers"! Leave the countryside alone!

Many of you, our readers, will have been tuned in at 7.40am to the Radio 4 'Today' programme on a Thursday at the very end of November to hear John Humphreys pour scorn on the notion of replacing kissing gates with barriers designed to allow disabled people on to country paths. He saw this as political correctness gone mad. He was interviewing our own Rosie Norris in his inimitable way, interrupting and talking over her. Rosie fought back tenaciously, trying to make the point that at least 96% of all country paths are cur-

rently barred to users of wheelchairs and scooters by these barriers. All to no avail! Rosie tells me she was phoned at 6.55am the same morning and asked to join in the broadcast. Only at 7.35 was she phoned again and by dint of questioning the caller managed to get a vague idea of what might transpire.



'RADAR' key operated kissing gate donated by the East Berks Ramblers - see article 'Breaking Down Barriers'

The next few days saw a furore as this feature was picked up by the National Dailies and then the Sunday newspapers. All were badly informed, misunderstood, and misrepresented the issue. They all seemed to take the view that as wheelchair users could not get past either stiles or most kissing gates, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is insisting that all such barriers are now illegal and must be instantly replaced at a quite horrendous cost! The reality, of course, is that the DDA incorporates the concept of 'reasonableness', and an instant replacement of all such barriers is clearly not 'reasonable'. The Disabled Ramblers' view is indeed to seek replacement of impassable barriers, but on a phased and planned basis, focussing upon paths and routes that are in reasonable condition and able to be used by properly equipped and supported disabled people. In all the furore there seemed to be no-one to make these points, and the entire coverage became a field day for prejudice and misinformation.



Easy access self-closing, self latching gate (also donated by the East Berks Ramblers)

The Times web -site received over 30 emails which were predominantly of the 'disgusted from Tunbridge Wells' type, seeing the dead hand of bureaucrats at work. It was clear that most of these writers were neither walkers nor disabled but were mostly the type of people who see conspiracies all around them. Sadly, a few wheelchair users took the same line.

The Ramblers Association was quick to respond. Their Press Office wrote to the Times and also made immediate contact with the Disabled Ramblers. Through their intervention, I was able to contribute to the following Sunday 'Observer' as an invited member of the Observer's Panel of experts (see picture on next page). I was also able to write to the 'Independent on Sunday' in reply to an article by Janet Street Porter. This lady is very countryside and ramble friendly, but relishes controversy. Her article under 'Editor at Large' contained a statement on the following lines

"The latest features of our heritage to come under attack from politically correct public servants are humble stiles and kissing gates. The Disability Discrimination Act requires "reasonable adjustments" to allow the disabled easy access to the countryside. Although kissing gates are an excellent way of allowing walkers access while enclosing cattle, they are not thought to be wheelchair-friendly. Neither are stiles, and now local councils are being urged to replace them with larger wheelchair-friendly metal gates unless they can be deemed a "historic feature". I want everyone to enjoy the countryside, but surely someone somewhere is brave enough to stand up and scream "This is bloody ridiculous"!"

No, Janet Street Porter, this is not "bloody ridiculous", if the concept of reasonableness is applied. My reply to the Newspaper was published, much reduced in length. The published précis said: "Janet Street Porter loves the Countryside and helps with conservation, but sadly she has missed the mark over the matter of possible replacements of stiles and 'kissing' gates with something more accessible. Until about thirty years or so ago, disabled people were expected then to stay in their homes and not be seen in public! Fortunately, it is now quite usual to see users of wheelchairs or electric scooters in shopping centres, pubs and restaurants. However, countryside paths and trails are still largely 'no-go', mostly closed off by man made barriers. We do not look for wholesale changes in the countryside. Our approach is analogous to that adopted by able bodied walkers who change their shoes for boots when on country paths. In our case we mostly use heavy duty wheelchairs or electrically powered scooters "

Councils want to clear rural paths of stiles and kissing gates so that wheelchair users can travel further into the countryside

**BARBARA
GUNNELL**

It should be a national ambition to make areas of natural beauty as accessible as possible to as many as possible but, regrettably, we can't all have everything. The inconvenient truth is that the countryside is not at all wheelchair-friendly. So even if all the kissing gates and stiles were replaced with wheel-friendly (and therefore quad bike-friendly) gates, there would be tussocks to level, marshes to drain, clifftop paths to make safe with rails and low-hanging branches to lop. As for those dangerously steep inclines in the Peak District... where on earth would you start?
Barbara Gunnell is associate editor of the New Statesman

**KAROL
SIKORA**

Leave the kissing gate, but make it disabled-friendly. It's possible to do this. Britain's fantastic footpath network blends into the countryside, emits no carbon, improves health and some routes are stunning. Many paths are rarely used so would not be worth modifying. Some are just too difficult - up mountains and down dales. Where it's realistic for wheelchairs to go, alongside rivers and disused railways, some forward-looking councils have already achieved much and should be encouraged to do more. Countryside access for all has to be a laudable goal. Landowners who block rights of way should be shot.
Karol Sikora is a cancer specialist

**MARY
WARNOCK**

There are those who argue that disabled people remain so only because obstacles, including kissing gates and stiles, are put in their way. And there can be no doubt that a kissing gate is the end of the track for someone in a wheelchair. But most footpaths that have such gates are narrow, rocky, muddy and sometimes on the edge of high cliffs. To render such tracks fully accessible would be to turn our national parks into parks, tout court; even if possible, this would be appalling vandalism. We must cherish the distinction between the wild and the tame, even if some are debarred from the experience of wilderness.
Mary Warnock is a philosopher

**MIKE
BRUTON**

Disabled people are seeing changes in attitudes, but mainly in towns. Countryside paths and trails are still largely 'no-go', mostly closed off by manmade barriers. The worst are stiles and most kissing gates. We work hard to improve access and have seen success in many places. Gradually, we are seeing barriers being replaced by accessible structures, enabling us to get away from roads. Are we seeking a countryside totally barrier-free? No, but expectations of improved access by disabled people are rising and, thankfully, landowners understand this and are responding.
Dr Mike Bruton is chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

The Observer 2nd December 2007

Where do we go next? News is very short lived and the entire issue is already long forgotten. But the lessons are clear. We need to seek publicity through all sources of a positive kind. We are seeking exposure to the public by targeting appropriate radio and TV coverage. This is hard work but hopefully successful in the long run. What do we seek? We want people to realize that countryside rambling is both reasonable and feasible for disabled people such as ourselves. We are already getting the message over to many key countryside bodies. Let's keep at it by maintaining a steady stream of publicity and hope that people will see we are serious and even respect and believe in us!

Mike Bruton

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

(Reproduced from 'Walk Extra' a RA publication, by kind permission of the Ramblers' Association)

Most of us have had to hoist ourselves over a stile from time to time while out walking.

They can be tricky at times, specially when they're high up, wobbly, slippery or decorated with barbed wire. But if you're not as agile as you once were, are visually impaired, have a pushchair or use a wheelchair, encountering a stile while out on a walk can often mean the end of your excursion.

East Berkshire Group has been campaigning for years to have stiles replaced with more accessible openings – usually a gate or kissing gate. The Group feels so strongly about the fact that traditional stiles are effectively a barrier to the countryside for many, that they even pay for gates on selected routes which give maximum benefit to walkers using the Rambling for Pleasure Guides published by the Group, or on other important recreational routes. The Council install the new gate with prior agreement from the landowner.

Each new gate bears a small plaque, which states "Gate donated by the East Berks Group of the Ramblers' Association." – a fantastic advertisement for the RA and confirmation out in the field that the work of our members benefits the wider public.

Thanks to the dedication and generosity of this Group, the countryside in this area is being enjoyed by more people.

(Editor's comment: this is much appreciated by the Disabled Ramblers – we have personal experience of this valuable work on actual rambles in the Thames Valley!)

Bonding with Scarlet (the Bug)

Part 2

(Continued from the October 2007 newsletter)

Next experience was a couple of months later in Chiswick, London and Goodwood race circuit, Sussex...

I was by the river Thames in west London (north side), an area well served by made up walkways (and pubs). So the next outing was about 3 miles, along Chiswick Mall, Corney Reach new build, to the Dukes Meadows playing field and Chiswick farmers market and back along the river. What did I find out? Scarlet won't go up curbs, so plan your outing or else be prepared to get off it (after turning off the power) and lift up the front and then the back...

The next day we were off again, this time a picnic in Chiswick house grounds, this was an excellent venue, with made-up paths (as is Kew Gardens). However we couldn't control the weather and the rain started (not wet, wet though), so we managed to put Scarlet under an archway by Chiswick House and we got damp munching our way through a delicious picnic!

A couple of days later we were down in west Sussex on probably the hottest Sunday of the year (so far) at the Goodwood breakfast meeting of German sports cars. I, in seventh heaven, and after last year having to walk and not seeing much, re-charged Scarlet did her job well of transporting me around so that I could have a really good look at the vehicles and talk to friends. As one of my Porsche owning friends said 'Wow Carol, she's neat...' Scarlet must be the only Stirling 'Little Gem' that has done a three point turn on this historic car race circuit... ☺ Again around the circuit's buildings area, the parking is tarmaced and this added to an excellent morning out plus some aircraft doing the loop the loop acrobatics while visitors admired the metal and had breakfast.



If you've got to have your photo taken it might as well be alongside a 1953 gull-wing Mercedes...

So all in all Scarlet is doing her job, given her restrictions. She is just a tiny shopping, pavement buggy. The family have nicknamed her 'the Bug' and are identifying outings where they live where we can take it. And I still need to go shopping with it...☺

Carol Felton

Rambles Programme For 2008 - photos of North Wales routes



Dinorwic Quarry, Llanberis, Snowdonia



Taith - old miners track above Pen y Pass

Trip to Cyprus

This year as we, my partner Frances and I, had not taken a holiday, we decided to go to Cyprus to visit her sister. In the past I had not considered flying as I rely on an electric scooter to get around, but, taking one on a plane!!!

We went to see our travel agent who assured us that as long as we passed a small test every thing would be fine. The small test was supplying the number from my blue parking badge, this we did and booked the holiday, flights, self catering apartment and airport transfer fees. The day arrived to fly. The staff at Cardiff Airport could not have been better and I was allowed to keep the scooter right up to the aircraft doors. I disconnected the batteries and that was the last we saw of it. Was it on the plane?? I need not have worried as when we arrived at Cyprus the scooter was out of the aircraft and waiting for me, the batteries were soon connected, and off we went to find the transport to our apartment. We soon found the coach, but the scooter would not fit in the boot, we were told to take a taxi, we did find one but again the scooter would not go in with us and all of our luggage, so we had to hire the second car which doubled the cost, £50 for both taxies. We arrived at the apartment tired and hoping that nothing else would go wrong, paid off the taxies and asked for a receipt as we hoped to get a refund. The hotel staff were great, a place was found for the scooter with an electric point for charging the batteries.



Visit to a World Heritage Site

Fran likes walking, so the scooter was used a lot in and around Paphos. Our apartment was about 4 miles from the harbour, so the road to it was well used by us. We normally spent the day in and around the harbour visiting the sights and eating, the restaurants were very helpful either finding a place close to the scooter or find a safe place to put it.

We hired a car for 7 days starting midweek, so the scooter took a bit of a rest as the car was too small for us all. We still used it to sample the night life in Paphos. The only trouble we had with the scooter was one puncture, wheel off, took it to a tyre fitter, repaired, wheel back on, took about an hour and cost £5. Next time I will take a puncture repair for a car as this will seal the leak and blow up the tyre without taking off the wheel.



Busy traffic in Paphos

Wherever we took the scooter, it always made friends with the locals and some times with the other holiday makers. Some times it was treated like royalty. At one point we were having a meal in the Moorings when a taxi driver came up and introduced himself. He had heard of our trouble at the airport and told us that his taxi would take the three of us. It was an old London taxi, and yes we did fit in with the scooter getting the lion's share of the taxi.

We went to Fran's sister for the day, the walk back, (about 6 miles to the hotel.) was very hard on Fran so we stopped a few time for rests and drinks.



Another rest stop

We were told to be careful of the local drivers, but we found them to be very patient with us, often stopping for us to cross the road. Never was the horn sounded in anger, always to say hello, whether it was to us or the scooter we never found out. The trip back to the airport was less worrying as the airline sent a much bigger taxi for us.

We all had a great time and would we do it again? Yes The cost of hiring a scooter in Cyprus was £170 for the two weeks, cost of airfare for one scooter £0 - so we saved

John Palmer

MND/Disabled Ramblers

Copy of a letter sent to the MND magazine 'Thumbprint' by Steve Higgins, a new member of the Disabled Ramblers.

In January 2006 after a visit to Oxford to see Mt Kevin Talbot, he confirmed an earlier diagnosis of my condition, namely Motor Neuron Disease (MND).

I had retired in late 2004 and although I knew something was not quite right, I had many plans to enjoy my hobbies of walking, cycling, golf plus some International travel. During 2006 it became apparent that a lot of my plans would have to be discarded, which was a very depressing thought – but I continue to do as much as possible, which makes life interesting at times !

In early 2007, as a result of a feature in The Motability Magazine about Disabled Ramblers (DR), I made contact with Rosie Norris, the secretary of the DR, who explained to me what the club was about etc. I joined and was invited to their AGM and was made to feel very welcome, and realised that even with my MND problem I could ramble again on wheels with other people who also had mobility problems.

The Disabled ramblers hold events from late April to mid-September in such places as Windsor Great Park, Dartmoor, Lancashire, Peak District, Snowdonia, Chilterns and Brecon Beacons. In fact, they had 16 very well organised rambles in 2007 covering 25 days.

I attended rambles in the Chilterns, Brecon Beacons, Windsor great Park and the Peak District. These

rambles had different categories of difficulty and I was able to hire from the Disabled Ramblers one of their four Tramper scooters made by a company called Beamer.

On the day of the ramble we meet at an agreed time, and a briefing of the day's activities is given by the Leader, ie. Details of the route, lunch stop and approximate time for the end of the ramble. On most rambles the Mobile Support Unit is in position at the lunch stop. This unit houses a toilet, and with care, the ramblers can make use of this facility. The day always goes very quickly, with enjoyable chats with the other ramblers and their partners and people who around to ensure that we have a safe and enjoyable day. From my limited involvement, I have met some fantastic people and enjoyed that wonderful feeling again of being on a fell taking in the views and fresh air, a feeling you only get when you are out in the countryside.

I am now the proud owner of a new Tramper which allows me again to get out in my local countryside, and I can't wait for DR to provide the details of the 2008 programme of rambles. To my amazement and gratitude, my local MNDA Milton Keynes heard of my experience with the DR, and made a contribution to the cost of my Tramper. I give much thanks to them – it's nice to know that people care.

Good luck,

Steve Higgins

Note from the Editor

If members would like to write an article for inclusion in a future newsletter, please send (together with any accompanying photos) to :

chairman@disabledramblers.co.uk

Other queries can be addressed (as appropriate) to :

membership@disabledramblers.co.uk
secretary@disabledramblers.co.uk

In order to increase the number of routes available to members on the 'Routes' page of our website (www.disabledramblers.co.uk), information is still needed on 'tried and tested routes' around the country.
