



# The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

July 2005

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

## **AGMs GALORE !!! Reports from Rosie Norris**

I don't know what it is about April but it seems to bring out AGMs like rashes. The Disabled Ramblers' AGM (Maidenhead), the Ramblers' Association AGM (Nottingham) and Ramblers' Association Wales (Swansea) all jostling each other and keen to be out of the way before the rambling season really starts!

Sunny Swansea (yes, truly !) began things with a request from RA Wales to give a workshop presentation on Disabled Rambling on Saturday, 2 April. My workshop was placed opposite one on Renewable Energy (which I should have quite liked to attend myself !) so feared my audience would consist of John, me and the cat. Having promised to provide moral support the evening before, Rob O'Nions was as good as his word, turning up in his Tramper at the venue. The extra bonus was his Tramper neatly blocked the exit, so preventing any mass Gadarene swine exodus by delegates, had they felt so minded!! Happily they didn't!

The presentation covered, amongst other things, the types of mobility vehicles we use, examples of easy, moderate and challenging rambles, examples of barriers we have met, pictures of the intrepid four on their Thames Path National Trail challenge ramble and extreme places the Disabled Ramblers have reached! RA Wales is interested in supporting our aims and one of their Motions passed this year urged "all local authorities and government agencies involved in path work to use the British Standard for gaps, gates and stiles to ensure that path furniture is fit for purpose". RA Wales is also prepared to look again at rambles with our needs in mind. Following our viewing of the RA Wales website ([www.welshwalks.info](http://www.welshwalks.info)) the only walk currently without stiles was 2 miles long (giving rise to delegates' comments: "Rosie will just have to go round 5 time!!!"), and they did undertake to see if longer walks could be found and added to the site.

The Ramblers' Association AGM in Nottingham was on a larger scale – only to be expected when they have 142,085 members and RA Wales has 7,000 – but was still refreshingly informal and very welcoming. On the Friday Maria Davies, John and I joined an interesting walk around the centre of Nottingham with some of the other delegates, overcoming inclement weather with flakes of snow (and no hot water bottles !) and access problems (the others went by coach to the centre, we drove in !).



A ramble around the centre of Nottingham

One Motion also carried in 2005 and of particular interest to us says: "This General Council believes that at a time when more and more people are enjoying the benefits of rambling until later in life and the RA is actively engaged in encouraging the provision of access to CRoW land, that the Executive Committee should use its best endeavours to adopt a policy of requiring the provision of the least restrictive option, rather than stiles, on rights of way and access land. This policy does not apply to stiles and other path furniture which are heritage landscape features, such as stone squeezer stiles in the Yorkshire Dales."

Each year the RA gives a written statement detailing action taken on Motions passed or remitted the previous year. Regarding Mike Bruton's 2004 Motion (to improving access for Disabled Ramblers) it comments: "The RA's capacity to improve access for disabled ramblers has been strengthened with the creation in January of the promoting walking team and the employment of two full-time members of staff.

The aim of this team is to inspire more people from all sectors of society to walk. Specifically – more people walking for thirty minutes a day, five times a week; and more people from low income groups, ethnic communities and other excluded groups (including people with disabilities) choosing to walk. The RA aims to do this principally through outreach work, the influencing of local and national government strategies, and through publicity and information. Their team is currently drawing up a strategy for how to achieve this aim.

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

Dear Friends,

I am writing this in June 2005. We have now well and truly embarked upon our programme of organised rambles for this summer season. There is every sign that we are set fair (except perhaps for our unpredictable weather) for another great series of escorted and supported rambles.

The new support trailer is already proving its worth, with its toilet feature much appreciated particularly by the ladies, and a steady demand for use of our two loan buggies. We even arranged for the trailer to be towed behind a Pembrokeshire National Park Land Rover along the western part of the Castlemartin military range, in support of our pioneering day in an area normally totally out of bounds to the public. Its presence at various points provided much needed relief to some of our party! We are keeping up our desire to have new routes and virtually all our rambles this year break new ground, even when we visit familiar areas.

The national scene regarding access to paths and trails in the Countryside remains problematic, but slow progress continues to be made. The new Disability Discrimination Bill was passed by parliament through its final stages just before the General Election. The clarification of the responsibilities of local government should be helpful, but the status of Rights of Way as 'services' remains untested by the Courts. The insistence by many land owners and managers over the retention of stiles and other man-made barriers goes largely unchallenged and few local authorities seem prepared even to issue advice on this matter.

At the same time there is much uncertainty over how far we should expect to go with regard to disability provision. I am a member of an unofficial body called 'Countryside for All' and we are seeking funding to establish what is actually going on and how much has been achieved so far, and to what quality. The Disabled Ramblers remains highly sceptical of the usability and value of the BT 'Standards and Guidelines', accepting the very costly, very high standard approach implied as being realistic, or even advisable, only in highly visited and developed locations. Instead we recommend a graduated approach, based upon 'Zones' as described in our last Newsletter, whereby it is recognised that in less developed settings, a more informal approach is adequate, based upon, say, exiting off-road cycleways and forest haul roads.

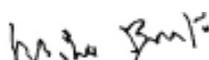
I have heard views that, for example in France, access for disabled people is seen in terms of small sites in which every conceivable aid is provided – fully surfaced and

level paths, a proliferations of seats and resting places, universal application of 'tapping' rails, board walks, interpretive signage etc. catering for every conceivable need.

We remain fearful that models of this sort will implant in policy makers' minds a stereotype of disabled access, which would lead to a view that once such places as the above are provided, nothing else need be done! Heaven forbid! This would represent the ultimate 'ghetto' mentality!

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

Signed



Mike Bruton  
Chairman,  
The Disabled Ramblers  
Charity no: 1103508  
Web-site: [www.disabledramblers.co.uk](http://www.disabledramblers.co.uk)

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In November, together with the Disabled Ramblers, the Disability Rights Commission, the RNIB and other organizations, the Ramblers' Association set up the Countryside for All National Forum. The aim of this organization is to improve the quality of people's lives by increasing and improving opportunities for people with disabilities to access the outdoors. The aims of the Forum are to raise awareness of outdoor recreation disability issues, to influence government, to do research and to offer training. In addition to this, many RA Areas and Groups continue with their work to support disabled groups to access the countryside, and with their campaigns for stiles to be removed to enable more people to enjoy access to the outdoors."

And as part of our programme this year, the RA Group from Horsham and Billingshurst hopes to arrange a ramble for us starting at Ditchling Beacon, West Sussex on Saturday, 6 August. This plans to follow some of the South Downs Way and promises to provide both challenges and seriously good views !!

**Due to lack of space, the report on the Disabled Ramblers AGM will appear in the October newsletter.**

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## Disabled Boating

Well, we made it! Two rivers, three canals, 98 miles and 104 locks in 11 days. The modifications we have had to our narrowboat have certainly been worthwhile. It all happened like this. When my wife, Isabel, and I both retired early in 1997 we bought a 52ft narrowboat. At that time I was just starting to have some difficulty with walking and the boat proved a wonderful way of getting us out in the fresh air together. Isabel could walk along the towpath as much as she liked and I followed on behind in the boat, bringing the gin and tonic with me. As the years passed I could do less and less off the boat, but continued to steer and control the boat in the normal manner while Isabel worked all the locks. By last year my disability had progressed to the point that we either had to adapt the boat or give up boating altogether. So this winter we had the gangway widened to take a wheelchair, a lift installed, remote power steering and engine control fitted, and a shower with an underfloor tray. And it has worked out well. Before the gangway was widened I could only traverse the length of the boat by having a piece of rope round the back of my neck with loops over my feet and Isabel pulling the rope to move my feet forward one at a time. Now I can get all the way to the lift in my wheelchair.



Here you see me steering the boat into the final lock on our journey from Upton-on-Severn, where the work had been carried out by Ian Cundy of Starline Marine, to Fenny Compton, just north of Banbury, where we moor her. I am sitting in my wheelchair on top of the raised lift with the steering and engine controls on my lap. In due course I will probably fit some wing mirrors to improve my view.

This shows me inside the lock, waiting for Isabel to close the gates and open the paddles. You can see the controls now. I have not yet tried to put my Tramper onto the back deck, but watch this space! I did once take a TGA Superlite with me and managed to keep its small batteries charged OK, but a Tramper would be somewhat more of a challenge. I am not wearing a life jacket here, but I do when on a river.

Canal holidays are great fun for both able and disabled people, especially if the weather is good. The blackthorn blossom this April was as magnificent as the hawthorn was last May. Kingfishers and herons are special delights. Of course it is expensive to have a boat of your own, but boats suitably adapted for disability can be hired from several boatyards. While these are fully wheelchair accessible, with lifts to get you out at the front or back, they do not all have remote powered steering and engine controls. Here are a few organisations that operate boats for disabled people, some of which are currently fitted with remote Steering & Engine Control Systems:

**The Bruce Wake Charitable Trust** (1-wide beam & 1-narrow boat - Both fitted with Steering System only).

Web site :- [www.brucewaketrust.co.uk](http://www.brucewaketrust.co.uk) . Boats kept at Upton-on-Severn.

**The Bruce Trust**, Hungerford (4-wide beam boats - Steering System only on “Hannah”)

Web site :- [www.brucetrust.org.uk](http://www.brucetrust.org.uk)

**Canal Boats for Disabled People**, Llangollen (2-narrow boats - Steering & Engine Controls on “Glas-Y-Dorlan”)

Web site :- [www.canalboattrust.org.uk](http://www.canalboattrust.org.uk)

**The Canal Boat Project**, Harlow (wide beam & narrow boats - Steering & Engine Controls on the wide beam boat “Stort Challenger”) Web site :- [www.canalboat.org.uk](http://www.canalboat.org.uk)

If you are interested you can find more photos of the modifications to our boat if you click on *Fancy Free* on my website [www.johnpowell.net](http://www.johnpowell.net).

**John Powell**

## The New Forest

The New Forest, in Hampshire near the South Coast is an ideal location for a stress free holiday and not just the for able bodied. I speak from experience, being disabled and only able to walk very short distances. The New Forest has been designated the newest National Park and has so much to offer everyone. There is nothing I like better than putting my buggy in the car and driving up to the Standing Hat at Brockenhurst or Wiverley Inclosures, and off along the gravel tracks. My husband brings his bike, we take a flask of coffee and, if we are lucky, we can spot one of the 5 species of deer. Sometimes we do not see anyone at all, and all you can hear is the rustle in the undergrowth nearby, or the birds up in the trees. Take your binoculars as there are so many rare birds and butterflies to be seen and beautiful coloured mushrooms and wild flowers.

At Christmas last year, the Forestry Commission had an open air Carol Service on a cold winter's evening. Lit by torches and lamps at the Arboretum, a small crowd had gathered. It was the most magical event, singing our well loved carols in a place of such beauty, young and old, with no accomplishment just singing along, it didn't matter if you were out of tune, and all being well I shall be there again this year.

During the year the Forestry Commission organise three or four Accessible days where you book up in advance and meet at the given place where a tractor and trailer awaits you. This is fully accessible with room for wheelchairs and fixed seats for those who can transfer or manage like me to walk a few paces and off we go. This took me through parts of the forest I had not been to before, where we saw eucalyptus trees and flattened grass where deer had slept the night before. An events book is produced by the Forestry Commission at Lyndhurst and is free on application.

In the autumn and early winter we can see the pigs cleaning the forest ground. Pigs are only let out in the autumn for so many weeks to eat the green acorns because if the ponies eat too many they are very poorly and some can even die. It is illegal to feed the New Forest Pony and you can be fined for doing so.

The New Forest Ponies wander freely through the forest but you will not find them in the Inclosures, as these are fenced off to prevent the ponies damaging the trees. You may not be aware, but the ponies in the New Forest are wild, in that they have not been broken. However, they all have owners and are marked with their initials. Also, their tails are always cropped so the Agisters can

identify them. Not everyone can put ponies on to the forest. You have to have common rights that apply to a piece of land. This attaches a Right of Common as registered in 1858, which entitles you to certain ancient privileges. In all there are five rights of Common in the Forest. Stallions are only permitted to be in the forest at a certain time of year which is why you see all the young foal in the spring.

A lot of the cycle tracks are suitable for buggies; they are gravel and may occasionally have potholes and ruts. There are now 6 accessible toilets in the New Forest and maps are currently being produced showing these. The New Forest has 144 miles of gravel track some of which are suitable for buggies, wheelchairs etc and 141 car parks. It does not matter when you visit the New Forest there is always something different to catch your eye. If you go round an Inclosure one day, and the same one again the next I will guarantee you will see something different - even if it is only the ant hill nest that's grown bigger over night.

Now we are designated a National Park lets hope the way of life in the Forest does not change but more of the forest will be accessible to us all.

Whilst in the area, come through the New Forest to the coast, where a host of lovely villages await you. Take Lymington, a Georgian Yachting Town, with a delightful quay, cobbled street and yacht haven. As Lymington is my home, I know that you can miss out the cobble streets by taking a smoother path through the parks behind the shops and along the path to the Yacht Haven where a magnificent site awaits you. You can even take a ferry trip to the Isle of Wight from Lymington to Yarmouth.

Along the coast you have Keyhaven and Milford-on Sea. Quite often I will park the car at Milford and go along the level gravel path by the river to the little bridge at Keyhaven, which is sheltered from the sea by a bank of stones, and where the grandchildren like to play and windsurfers can be seen trying their skills.

I see in this year's programme a ramble is being held in the Forest. Well, just book up and come and have a taste of this beautiful area I live in. If you are looking for somewhere to stay or camp, then visit this web site [www.newforest.demon.co.uk](http://www.newforest.demon.co.uk) where everything you want to know can be found. Or, come and stay at one of my accessible cottages on [www.ourbench.co.uk](http://www.ourbench.co.uk) and I will help you plan your visit if you would like me to.

**Mary J Lewis**

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## Conservation and the Military

### Pembrokeshire Weekend May 2005

The subject of use by the Army of beautiful countryside always attracts consternation and often some hostility, but there is another side to this story. We saw this other side on our first organised ramble event in Pembrokeshire when the Disabled Ramblers spent an entire weekend inside the Castlemartin military range area on the south Pembrokeshire coast.

The range extends for more than 10 miles along a beautiful stretch of coast characterised by limestone rocks and cliffs. Away from the cliffs the military range goes back up to two or three miles inland, across totally empty and undeveloped land except for a few military buildings, some communications towers and here and there some disused and wrecked tanks used as target practice. In effect, the entire site is a huge nature reserve, uncultivated, untreated by fertilisers or weed killers. There is an abundance of wild flowers, and the coastal bird life is rich and varied. On various rock stacks out in the sea there were thousands of nesting guillemots, razorbills and kittiwake gulls, while further out we saw many gannets dive bombing the sea in search of fish. We also saw several pairs of choughs, a rare member of the crow family, peregrine falcons, and, slightly inland, there were many skylarks and a few wheeling buzzards. The other great advantage from our point of view was accessibility! There was a gravelled military track along this whole stretch of coast, where the going is fine for heavier scooters and buggies, but hard on powerchairs. This degree of accessibility exists nowhere else in the entire Pembrokeshire Coast National Park



A ruined Tank along the route of the coastal ramble

The range is, of course, still an active firing zone and opening to the public is restricted. The eastern half is open every weekend, but the western piece, up to Linney

Head is opened more rarely, and then for access by organised and authorised groups. In fact it is necessary to have a leader who has attended a training session with the army and all visitors are signed in and accounted for individually. The purpose is to ensure that no one collects shell fragments – apparently these can be highly corrosive and dangerous to touch. Also it is possible that unexploded shells may lurk hidden in undergrowth. Several million shells have been fired along this western section over the years and not all can be accounted for! Not surprisingly no dogs are admitted to this area! We had a wonderful time – the forecast was dire, but the weather turned out quite acceptable, if cold and windy. We were well looked after with Mick, an excellent guide from Tenby as leader both days. In addition, Charles the National Park officer who is responsible for leisure and coastal trail management came on the Sunday and we also had volunteer drivers of the accompanying Land Rover each day.



The new Support Trailer in action

Once again Robin brought along our new Support Trailer, and this was towed along by the Land Rover to provide much appreciated toilet facilities in remote places! Above all, our warmest thanks are owed to David MacLachlan, the manager of the National Trail which goes right round the coast across the entire National Park. David has been very supportive, and has done a lot of earlier work surveying the coast path for accessible places for disabled visitors. He has produced a model guidebook, which can be obtained from the National Park Authority based in Haverfordwest. Apart from the Castlemartin range which has miles of accessible trackway, the rest of the coast has many sites where much more limited access is possible, usually only a few hundred metres as best. This is due to the topography and the many deep ravines that line the entire Pembrokeshire coast.

Overall impression? A wonderful place and a great rambling weekend.

**Mike Bruton**

## Rambling and Sightseeing in London

### The Margaret Ray Memorial Ramble 2005

Back in April, the Disabled Ramblers broke new ground by taking on a Sunday walk in Central London, organised for us by John Ray and his niece Delia. Delia works for Motability Operations who very kindly opened both their car park and their offices by Southwark Bridge as a start point and parking place. We also had in attendance our new support facility including two Trampers to lend out to members. We are extremely grateful for the kindness shown by the Ray family and also Robin with the new trailer!

The day represented a completely new type of venture for the Disabled Ramblers. We covered around six and a half miles of paths and roadside pavements around the Thames, going along the recently opened south bank path as far as the Royal Festival Hall, then we crossed over using either the new Hungerford footbridge or Westminster Bridge, depending upon buggy size! The Hungerford footbridges are approached on the South Bank side via stairs or rather small lifts. The lifts proved inadequate for the Trampers so the Trumper users had no option but to find a way round the longer route.



A guided tour of the reconstructed  
Globe Theatre

We met up again in Trafalgar Square before returning via Covent Garden, then the Strand, finally crossing

back over the famous new millennium footbridge to our start point.

We did some sightseeing en-route, including a guided tour around the reconstructed Globe theatre. Just as in Shakespeare's day, the reconstruction is open to the sky, with galleries rising up several floors. Apparently, the common masses used the open floor area (admission 1 penny) whereas the well to do chose seats in the galleries above (2 pence upwards). One big difference today – there are toilets there, including an accessible loo – in Shakespeare's day the only toilet was the River Thames itself, a stinking open sewer! Also, as no one washed in times past, the plays must have been characterised by a terrible smell of hundreds of unwashed bodies.

We also visited Covent Garden and the newly opened Somerset House. There are remarkable variable fountains right in the middle of the Courtyard and some of us risked a soaking by wheeling along the lines of water jets while they were low..!



Water sports in the Courtyard of  
Somerset House

Overall we had a fascinating time. London is very crowded on Sundays with so much going on everywhere we went. In fact it was so crowded in places that our walk slowed to a snail's pace as we worked through the crowds.

A final comment: the walk was quite practicable, but here and there we found an absence of dropped kerbs, but there was always a way around. Building work can be a problem, with necessary diversions here and there to get past boarded-off sites.

**Mike Bruton**

## My Favourite Ramble

### Maiden Castle

I was staying at Poole for a few days in January. It was pretty grey first thing on the Saturday but it was dry so we – wife, daughter, daughter's boy friend and I - all decided to ascend Maiden Castle. This is an Anglo-Saxon earth fortress in Dorset, and one of the few to be found anywhere. It wouldn't be too difficult, especially as there was, according to no less a body than English Heritage, a gravel path up it. And, although it was a steep climb, it was not too steep for my good but not especially powerful scooter.

We got there and parked the car. No trouble. Just as we got out it started to drizzle. If there ever was a gravel path it had disappeared. What there was may in the dry have been a firm earth path; the drizzle had turned it into a slippery mud one. The scooter still went up it all right. I just had to be careful, so I thought, not to give it too much throttle and have wheel spin to contend with. What next? We soon got an answer: the first gate was locked. Fortunately the person who had locked it had relied on a knotted cable, which the boy-friend in our party succeeded in undoing.

Things weren't easy but I made progress. Until I reached a point where the path narrowed as it went through a gate. The gate had been opened and was plenty wide enough for the scooter. But for some reason the scooter wouldn't go through. More slippery here, perhaps, or steeper. However, with all the aforementioned people pushing I got through and was soon on a plateau at the top.

It was enormous. And the encircling three banks with ditches between, observable on the way up, were astonishingly high. Even the Romans weren't able to breach these defences. Until, eventually, they hit on the idea of making their soldiers march in with shields held flat over their heads, so protecting themselves from the arrows that rained down upon them.

Some looking around, then down. What had been a path was now a mud slide. Going down required much more care than coming up. Arriving safe and sound at the car I was able to consider: 'Had it been worth it?' The answer, of course, is yes. Quite apart from seeing the fort close up I had the sense of achievement to savour.

I would even recommend it to others, if they are prepared to risk the first gate and if they go when the path is dry. Have a go - **but be prepared to turn back.**

**John Smythson**

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### The Ridgeway - Mark 2

NO, not THE Ridgeway. Back in the petrol-rationed days of Autumn 1947 I explored that with two friends, from the Thames valley near Streatley to the Kennet Valley at Alton Barnes, driving and pushing a little Ford Popular saloon. It was then a forgotten track, in the pre - 4x4 era, and we met just two other people, including the sentry who warned us against straying into army ranges !

Since then, THE Ridgeway has been, as the French say, "vulgarised". Also, my legs have failed me since then. But, I now know that about 20 miles further south, a grassy way follows a higher and narrower east-west ridge of chalk, most of which remains lonely. In July 2002, I found that I could enjoy the loftiest bits of that "Ridgeway Mark 2", on a powered scooter.

Driving from my home in North Buckinghamshire, I paused in Hungerford for an early lunch at The Tutti Pole cafe. Then onwards and uphill, to unload my second-hand Sterling scooter onto Inkpen Hill, within sight of Combe Gibbet. From there, I first headed west along the mud-and-grass ridgeway towards Ham.

It was not ideal going for a lone scooter rider, but possible with care. Sometimes I straddled a rut, sometimes I rode along the track-edge grass, or the space between ruts as it became wide enough. Views, southwards far into Hampshire, and north over the Kennet Valley to the Lambourne Downs could hardly have been more distracting !

There were tree roots projecting from mud, and eventually I met a 'soloist' who had seen nobody else along the path, so I turned back. I didn't fancy getting stuck, and wanted time to explore eastwards, back towards my parked car.

The storm-eroded earthworks on Walbury Hill were fun to surmount, and then the eastward going eased. With an accompanying walker, I could have gone even further in each direction than I did. Do try it, but please, don't tell too many people about this quieter, but higher and more scenic, 'Ridgeway Mark 2'!

OS Map 174 (Newbury & Wantage) Car parks at Ref. 370620 or 380615

**Joe Lowrey**

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## A consultant's perspective on Countryside Access

As a well known song goes – “Things can only get better.....”, but as far as access to the countryside for people with disabilities goes, I actually think things are improving. Let me tell you why I'm optimistic.

I do see legislation starting to have effect – not only the DDA ( and DRB ) but also the Countryside and Rights of Way Act ( CRoW ) and currently DEFRA/Countryside Agency's Diversity Review. Slowly, slowly countryside managers are beginning to get the message that accessibility isn't an add on to their work or a project they can 'tick the box on' and forget about. I detect a real shift in emphasis (backed up by requirements of CRoW and the Diversity Review work) away from just maintaining the resource – the paths, stiles and gates – towards meeting the needs of all people and finding out what they want and where they want to go.

Examples from work I've done recently might help to illustrate what I'm talking about. Last year Scottish Natural Heritage asked us to look at accessibility on National Nature Reserves. These are some of Scotland's most beautiful and special places and included Loch Lomond, the Isle of Rum, coastal dunes at St. Cyrus (see photo) and high mountains such as Craig Meaghaidh. They are often also difficult terrain and sensitive ecologically. However, SNH recognises that nature reserves are only sustainable if we, the public, understand, value and are able to visit them. So, rather than just doing a 'straight' access audit of the car parks, paths and information centres we focussed on *key experiences*. We were asking why does or would any visitor come to this reserve – for a walk, to birdwatch, to camp etc., - and then assessing how accessible these experiences were to disabled visitors. So, not only did we look at seats, parking, trails etc. but also information on and off site, public transport, etc. Our prioritised and costed programme of recommendations for 13 NNR's came to around £ ¼ million and included advice not only on physical access improvements but also a stress on the importance of information and working with local disabled people. We were keen that SNH looked to creative solutions to access difficulties and that, rather than putting in lots of 'so-called easy access trails', it might be more appropriate in some settings to provide better interpretive material, or have a Trampler or powered scooter for loan or even provide better guided walks and talks.

Another project for North York Moors National Park in 2003 looked at part of the Cleveland Way National Trail which forms a European route called Nortrail. The National Trail officer had already done lots of work on

accessibility of the Way. He recognised that the accessibility of a long distance route is not just to do with the gates, gradients and surface of the path itself but also the supporting facilities. So for this job we were looking at recreational and cultural facilities associated with the trail - the car parks, toilets, museums, visitor centres, transport links and promotional material. The local Disability Action Group in Whitby helped a lot with local knowledge and checking our findings and recommendations. The resulting programme of work will make a visit to Nortrail an altogether more enjoyable experience.



Coastal Dunes at St Cyrus

There are lots of other examples too numerous to mention of keen and committed individuals trying to improve access. There are others, I'll admit, who are waiting to be forced to do it or on yet more guidelines. I'm losing patience – the first Countryside Commission book “Informal Countryside Recreation for Disabled People” came out in 1981 – and there have been lots of other advisory publications since then. The latest from the Countryside Agency, called, we think, “Making it happen” is due out in early summer 2005. Research findings are confirming the views of many readers of this newsletter, I suspect, that disabled users just don't feel welcome and that managers of countryside sites need to be more proactive.

When I find myself in a room of countryside managers I'm increasingly starting to thump the table and tell them to get on with it: not to be afraid of getting it exactly right; to talk to local and national groups of disabled people; to improve physical access yes, but also include transport, information and supporting facilities; to look at accessibility as an integrated whole not “what can we do for disabled people”, and; to look for creative solutions to access issues. I think we'd be a long way down the road of a more accessible countryside if they did those 5 things. I'm trying my best to influence !

Yvonne Hosker is an independent facilitator who has worked in the accessibility field for 12 years. She can be contacted on 0161 432 5951.