



The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

July 2007

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

Summertime – The Joys Of Rambling



Enjoying the Peak District



A pause in the Brecon Beacons



A rainy start in Windsor Great Park



Hill climbing in Lancashire



In the big city – near Putney Bridge



How about going by boat ?

Disabled Ramblers ? We go out and have fun !

Letter from Mike Bruton, Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

Dear Friends,

Need for Additional Helpers

Hopefully Members and Friends of the Disabled Ramblers will have seen the letter sent out with this edition of 'The Disabled Rambler'.

From the very start, the Disabled Ramblers has been run by its members on an unpaid basis, both the elected Executive Committee and other volunteers.

The Executive Committee currently has seven members, five of whom have specific responsibilities. These five specific posts are: Chairman, Vice Chairman (who also deals with membership administration & ramble bookings), Secretary, Treasurer and Newsletter Editor (who also serves as web-site co-ordinator).. The committee members are also involved in planning and supporting the summer rambles' programme and other specialised tasks.

Happily our numbers of members are rising, and attendance at our rambles is also increasing. We are also becoming better known and are increasingly consulted upon major national or local initiatives concerning access by disabled people to the Countryside.

This means the extensive work undertaken by our Executive Committee is steadily increasing.

The fact that we are all disabled also makes us vulnerable to health and stamina constraints. This vulnerability is clearly illustrated by the difficulties encountered by our Treasurer early this year. Gill Kirkman accepted the role after Maria Davies retired after five years of excellent service. After a promising and committed start, Gill sustained an injury and is unfortunately unable to continue.

A Treasurer is essential and luckily we have been able to co-opt John Palmer, a Cardiff resident and member to the post. Until recently John was Treasurer of the Cardiff Yacht Club at a very busy time, including moving the club base to a new site in Cardiff Bay. I am sure all our readers will join me in wishing John well with this important job, and also wishing Gill a speedy return to good health.

Fundamentally, we need to grow our Executive team. We need more members to become involved in running the Disabled Ramblers.

Do please read the enclosed letter and respond if you can !

With this year's membership renewal, we asked for volunteers to help with meeting National Trust warden and other land managers, and also to check out Rights of Way paths and trails. We are touched and delighted to have received offers to help from 44 members. We have already found this support to be very useful, especially when planning our summer rambles programme. However, 44 volunteers is a large number and it may be some time before we call on many of this willing band. In the meantime, we are very grateful for all this support.

Meanwhile, friends, happy rambling!

Mike Bruton

'John Smythson has a number of leaflets offering rambles (most contain several) and other countryside things going spare. For a small cost he will post any of them to anybody who sends their request (and the money - in stamps if preferred - to him at: Claremont, Holland Lane, Hurst Green, Oxted, Surrey RH8 9AS

The leaflets are:

Devon - 'The Granite Way' an 11 mile cycle/walkway from Okehampton to Lydford' (75p)

West Sussex - 'Wheelchair walks' (75p)

Kent - 'Walks for all in Kent and Merdway' (75p)

Mid Suffolk - 'Access to the countryside' (75p)

Shropshire - 'Countryside access in Shropshire for Disabled people' (50p)

Derbyshire, Peak District - 'Monsal Trail' (50p)

“ “ “ - 'Longendale: Visitor's guide to the Land of Long Views' (75p)

“ “ “ - 'Access for all'

Lancashire - 'Low mobility access to countryside sites' (75p)

North Yorkshire - 'Easy going North York Moors'

Cumbria, Lake District - 'Countryside access for people with limited mobility' (75p)

Durham - 'Ways to wander' (75p)

Caithness - 'Follow the Castlehill (flagstone) trail (50p

To Move or not to Move ? That was the question...

Me

I am single and have had MS for 14 years. I walk badly with a stick. My disability has only become apparent in the last seven years. Before I was fine with two hits of optic neuritis to start with. Now stiff, tired, the usual. Ugh.

Decision

After having worked 33 years and led an active life I found myself in 2003, retired living in Putney under the flight path into Heathrow. OK, but existing. Time to move. I procrastinated about the area – came up with three – until Jan 2005 my 55th birthday.

Findings: I underestimated the stress, fatigue and commotion moving would entail.

*It requires careful consideration and detailed planning
Can you afford to move? Do your sums...*

Buying

I took stock: 55 and I had MS, what would the future hold? If I didn't do it then I never would. I had made a list of what I wanted in a house/bungalow and I had spent hours on the computer - estate agents' dreadful websites - to find it. No luck. Then I got the local weekly newspaper of the area in Dorset I was interested in and at last I struck gold. One wet Sat last Jan I went down to Dorset, saw two properties and knew in about 10 mins I had found my next home. OK it's got stairs but at present I can manage, AND it also has a downstairs loo and a double garage, faces south, has gas central heating and is level. After about 10 days my offer was accepted.

Write yourself a wish list of things you want in your new home

Can you afford to run your new house?

MS back-up in the area?

Out of interest, bungalows seem at least £30K more...

Find a good surveyor

Understand the buying/selling process and jargon.

Find yourself a good lawyer who recognises what a timetable is. Mine looked after both buying and selling for me. OK I did hassle him a bit, but shucks, I was the customer.

Make sure your new home is manageable including the garden. (This one looks ancient but is in fact 7 years old.)

Have you friends in the area?

Will your furniture fit?

Shops/post office/post box/pub?

Public transport? If not for you for your visitors.

Selling

To begin with I went with a 'nice' estate agent. We started marketing early Feb. Six weeks in, lots of views, dropped the price some £25K to a sensible figure (£1 into the lower bracket for the website) more hits. No confidence in agent decided to ditch and then put house on with four estate agents at the same time! All required different fees but the element of competition was there – healthy. After 31 views and lots of stress, I got an offer from a cash buyer early May and completed 27 May.

Estate agents are rogues. They will overprice your house and then you'll waste time having to reduce the price to get people through the door. Do your homework; get the right asking figure and the right assertive agent who is working for YOU.

Do not try and sell your house in winter – aim for April onwards.

Chuck stuff away before you decide to sell and chuck more stuff before you move. Buyers don't like clutter.

TV programmes have ruined selling one's home: it should be white, nothing in it, chrome and twigs, 22nd century kitchen etc all for under £250K. Mine wasn't.

Make the best of the property for sale. Mine looked its best empty!

Adopt a siege mentality at home, each view you'll have to tidy up. Chuck the drying washing back in the machine, stuff things in cupboards. It's Hell!

Don't underestimate your tiredness. One Sunday afternoon I was bending over collecting things on the floor I stood up and overbalanced backwards, hit my head on the desk and promptly bled all over the carpet. My only worry was the carpet: people were coming to view the house the next day...



My house, it is 7 years old, looks 150...

Moving

Whenever anyone came over I asked them to do a small job: move the ladder; take down a picture. Eventually

everything was where it needed to be for the move.

Be organised with lots of lists, write things down

Choose a good removal firm –THEY did everything packed and unpacked

Label everything

Will the curtains fit, if not chuck and get new ones/blinds

Decide where you want things to go – do a floor plan for each room

Separate security items/documents - either you look after them or some trustworthy person

Take lots of passport sized photos of yourself – basically the State thinks you are a villain. Your passport is your identity!

Change of address - begin your list early – it's difficult to remember everyone, inc Post Office/NHS/driving licence/tax/NI/bank/cards/pension/utilities/insurances/car reg documents/work and of course friends and family!

Start/close the utilities etc

Have your mobile phone with you at all times during the move: there is one point when you are between homes

Settling in

The new house was odd to begin with. It took me time to work out my patterns for living. It was odd seeing all my stuff in a new place. BUT I was here so I could take time to arrange things properly (two weeks actually but still no pics on the walls). And my routine of (normal) exercising had gone out of the window. Three months in and I was beginning it again. My garden is slightly bigger. It is level, I am learning how to get around it with one hand free to do jobs, difficult, ie I prune sitting down...

Familiarise yourself with the new layout and work out how you are going to move around.

My garage area is covered with small stones – lethal to walk on, have to take it slowly

Change the locks

Get a list of tradesmen from neighbours + from the local post office. Budget for them to do jobs which may need doing.

Worth it?

Yup. 20 months in and it is a gentle and peaceful way of life in a good, clean environment. And as MS goes I'll probably have to move again. But for now it is just, well LA...☺

Carol Felton

Gentle Ramble

Reading the last issue of Disabled Ramblers and the new designations for the 2007 walks gave me a nostalgic

longing for the Dolomites. Richard and I were students spending a year in Germany and when the year was up we wanted to see more of Europe before coming home. I had been invited to a fondue, where I watched slides of the host family's holiday. Fondue? Holiday slides? Bee Gees? 1977 of course! Their holiday was my introduction to the fantastic mountain ranges of the Dolomites. Add to that Richard's dissertation on a forgotten medieval German poet, Oswald von Wolkenstein, whose origins were in the Tyrol, and we had a destination. We also each had language skills in both German and Italian.

We bought a little book of walks, designated from "gentle ramble" to "challenging". The first challenge was to reduce the weight of our rucksacks as we'd taken far too much stuff! I remember puffing and panting to get to the first hut, or hostel, but once up there we were able to stay at a high level because the huts were dotted all over the Dolomites. First walk from there, a "gentle ramble", we thought. Only the weather in July 1977 hadn't read the book and there was a thick covering of snow everywhere.

We had to climb over a pass to get to the next hut. I have never been closer to death. The deep snow, heavy rucksack and lack of experience sent me sliding down the steep slope. Luckily we had met a couple of men who then overtook us and stamped their feet in the snow, Good King Wenceslas-style, for us to follow.

The rest of the holiday was brilliant, apart from us not having enough money to eat in the huts. I remember crouching outside with a little burner, trying to keep it alight so we could boil up a packet of something. Happy days and the best holiday of my life!

Now I'm unable to walk/run/climb with my own two legs, Disabled Ramblers is the place for me. Last year I went on the Avon Gorge walk and experienced once more the **EXHILARATION** which is lacking

Marian Martin

'Illegal': Britain's 250,000 Mobility Scooters !

As I reported in our April Newsletter in my article on the newly activated requirement to register Class 3 mobility scooters, my MP, Rt Hon Theresa May, posed a series of parliamentary questions to the Secretary of State for Transport. Replies have now been obtained from Junior Transport Ministers and these follow, below:

14 Mar 2007 : Column 348W

Motor Vehicles: Registration

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the requirements are for the registration of Class 3 vehicles with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA); what factors were taken into account in deciding those requirements; and what steps have been taken by the DVLA to convey this information to the owners of Class 3 vehicles. [127344]

Dr. Ladyman: All mechanically propelled vehicles, including class 3 invalid carriages, used or kept on public roads are required by law to be registered. DVLA has been liaising with suppliers of class 3 vehicles to inform them about the registration requirements for these vehicles. Special information packs, which provide guidance on how to complete the first registration application forms, are available to suppliers and members of the public. Information about the registration requirements for class 3 vehicles is published at: www.direct.gov.uk/motoring.

14 Mar 2007 : Column 349W

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what proportion of Class 3 vehicles have been registered. [127345]

Dr. Ladyman: Official statistics indicate that at the end of September 2006, fewer than 100 class 3 vehicles were registered. Since then, it is estimated that the figure now exceeds 1,500. The proportion of registered vehicles to unregistered vehicles is unknown.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the annual administration cost to his Department is of registering Class 3 vehicles, including the cost of issuing literature and advice. [127346]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department does not record separate administration costs for registering class 3 vehicles. The unit cost for processing registration applications for vehicles of that type is £33.61. DVLA issues advice and literature about the registration and licensing procedures for all types of vehicles generally.

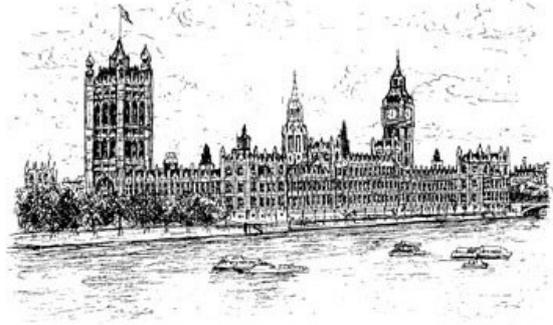
15 Mar 2007 : Column 470.

Wheelchairs: Pedestrian Areas

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been carried out on the risks associated with (a) motorised wheelchairs and (b) other pavement vehicles; what results were shown for Class 3 vehicles; and what representations have been made to his Department on this issue. [127700]

Gillian Merron: The Department has published a review of these vehicles, including research into the number of related incidents categorised by severity. The findings are available on the Department's website. We are currently reviewing this evidence in conjunction

with the representations received on general use of such vehicles, which have included some on safe usage."



These statements, clearly, must be regarded as definitive, and we have no option but to approach the DVLA to register our own Class 3 machines.

However, I find these responses do not clarify the reasoning behind this recent decision to require registration now. For example:

1. The requirement to register was included in Invalid Carriage regulations set out at least 12 years ago. This regulation was not enforced until the recent sensationalized publicity and criticism published by 'the Mail on Sunday' put this item firmly into the open! Following this publicity the DVLA apparently noted that they should all along have registered Class 3 vehicles and have now set about doing so, in a half-baked manner, causing inconvenience and confusion to many disabled people.
2. In parallel the DfT disabilities team (who also deal with Blue Badge matters) have recently (Feb 2006) published a report into Class 2 and 3 mobility vehicles which follows up to 2 years of research into all aspects of use of these vehicles. In this they suggest very little concrete evidence exists of any high accident risk for either vehicle class. They do, however, mention the registration requirement acknowledging that this had not been enforced after many years! They suggested this matter should not be enforced currently but be further studied and the registration need possibly removed altogether. The upshot of their report was that all the issues they raised needed further study and report. No action has yet been formally taken in this respect and no evidence of any urgency yet shown.
3. However, Gillian Merron's reply refers to this DfT report and suggests the team is indeed already carrying out review tasks - though no announcement of any such activity has yet been made.

I am seeking to probe more deeply !

Maybe we should ask why the DVLA decision to start the Class 3 registration was taken now, in an apparent hurry, and poorly prepared with an inadequate procedure based on use of inappropriate forms, when they had around 12 years both to explain the need and do the job properly?

Another question could then refer to the DfT Class 2 3 report, asking why, in the light of the DfT team's acknowledgement (Feb 2006) of the apparent registration need but their recommendation that this area was but one of several that merited further study, did the DVLA nevertheless press ahead with the registration need at this time. What consultation had occurred between the two DfT departments on this issue? We might also ask (following my comment 3 above) what terms of reference have been set to the DfT disabilities team in following up their Feb 2006 report. When is a further report due? Has a timescale yet been set?

We will continue to monitor these matters most closely!

Mike Bruton

Planning a "Disabled" Ramble

Members of the Disabled Ramblers may wonder how your Committee sets about planning our routes' programme each year, and how we check out the classification and suitability of each published ramble organised by us.

The truth is that we use various means and procedures. First we identify possibilities, then we check them out, usually by visiting the site and going along the paths and tracks proposed. We must be aware of every part of the route, and we check out surface quality, steepness and extent of all hills, any possible side cambers, and, last but not least, the availability of parking and toilets at the start, the end (usually this is also the start point) and at lunchtime. Presence of a pub, or café, is a bonus, if available for lunch!

Recently Jo, my long suffering wife, and I visited Ashridge, a large National Trust site in the northern part of the Chiltern Hills, and soon after we paid a visit to the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales. In the case of Ashridge, following an earlier visit, there were a number of options I wanted to try out. In the case of the Brecon Beacons our National Park advisor there had done the preliminary work and identified two possibilities for us to review.

In both cases we were able to try out the routes riding in Landrovers provided by our hosts, which saved a huge amount of time! At Ashridge we were driven along a beautiful terrace route, past a kennels establishment until we reached a fork with a rougher track off to the left. Going along this more demanding option from here, we found fabulous scenery with sweeping views near the point where the Ridgeway National Trail joined us, and soon after we crossed over to tackle the steep open grassland of the Ivinghoe Beacon, a high and beautiful spot with open views in all directions. The verdict? This route is a definite goer but quite rough in places, meriting the Category 3 rating in our programme.

In the Brecon Beacons we went along a track leading south from the National Park Visitor Centre at Libanus eventually getting to a remote combe which had been used to film parts of the film, 'Lorna Doone', as it fitted the description of Doone Valley described so well in the Novel. It is a wonderful utterly remote spot, but we decided the access was just too rough and did not fit the category 2 rating already published in our programme. Instead, I am proposing to use this route in 2008, properly classifying it as category 3! Along this trail we saw a trackway off to the left which climbs steeply up to a mountain ridge, before going up to a summit at around 2,300 feet above sea level. Maybe we could try this as a category 4 route, also next year? Our National Park Host has offered to explore this for us as a start, using his mountain bike.



Mountain views near Usk Reservoir

Having rejected the Lorna Doone option, we soon settled for an alternative, clearly category 2, close by the Visitor Centre. During the afternoon, we were driven 12 miles west to the Usk reservoir, and shown a trail right round the lake, also category 2. The Usk reservoir is quite high up, and has a moorland aspect, though with many trees.. On the way round the Landrover negotiated a deep ford across the infant River Usk, but we were high above the ground and our feet remained dry! (There is a good footbridge at this point so we won't need to swim for it on the day). It was not possible to complete the route around the lake due to a fallen tree,

but we went back round and visited the other side. I am assured this tree will be removed well before we make our visit. Lastly we inspected car parking spaces and planned suitable access routes and locations for our mobile support unit, allowing this to be re-positioned as needed for our lunch stops. A lot of work? Yes, but essential to ensure high levels of safety and support for disabled participants 'on the day'. Why not come along and see for yourselves?

The rambles described above are scheduled:

Tuesday, 23rd August:

Chilterns Ashridge day. (category 3)

Wednesday 12th September:

Brecon Beacons Usk Reservoir (category 2)

Thursday 13th September:

Brecon Beacons, Visitor Centre, Libanus (category 2)

Mike Bruton.

First Rambles 2007 – A Great Start !

Our opening rambles for 2007 set us off to a good start for our summer season.

15 disabled members came down to the London Riverside near Putney for our April start-up and enjoyed remarkably warm and sunny weather. After a short 'stroll' along the Thames Path into Putney for morning coffee, we spent the afternoon touring the London Wetland centre - a fascinating place home to many water birds. Thanks to John Ray for excellently organising this event, held annually in memory of Margaret Ray, who did so much opening mainly Thames-side paths in the London area.



Windsor Great Park in bloom

Numbers climbed to 18 for our Windsor Great Park trip in May Thanks to Aistair Niven, Principal of

Cumberland Lodge, we were able to start right in the centre of the Great Park. This time the weather was less kind, but nevertheless we completed 7 1/2 miles visiting the world famous Valley Gardens on the way, where we saw a wonderful display of Rhododendrons and Azaleas in full bloom. Thanks also to Bill Cathcart, who gave us permission to hold the event, and to the East Berks Ramblers for supporting us !

Mike Bruton

Beautiful Barry !!

John and I were very fortunate to again be invited to Ramblers' Association (RA) Wales Welsh Council this year. The venue was at the Best Western Hotel in Barry on the final full weekend of March. We arrived Friday afternoon to set up the Disabled Ramblers publicity/photo stand and then set about meeting old friends and acquaintances – that's the nice thing about hotel gatherings you always meet at the bar !!



Not again !!

Saturday morning the serious business began with a welcome from the Mayor of the Vale of Glamorgan Council. This was followed by the Chairman's Address, Minutes of Welsh Council 2006 and a Report on action taken on motions passed at WC 2006. Kate Ashbrook, Ramblers GB Chairman, then gave an Explanation of election procedure and the Treasurer talked us through the Annual Report and Accounts for year ending 30 September 2006. The last item of the morning was the Election of Senior Officers 2007-2008. These were: President – Richard Lloyd Jones, Chairman – Ron Williams, Vice Chairmen – Alex Marshall and Malcolm Wilkinson and Treasurer – Colin Yarwood.

Immediately after lunch delegates split up into 2 groups for 2 site visits arranged by Valeways Partnership and RA member, Barbara Palmer. The first was to the Coast, to look at coastal access and impacts of the potential development of the Severn Barrage and the second to public paths north of Barry. John and I went for the

former and set out separately with the Trampler with the intention of meeting the others later. On Barbara's suggestion we first quickly visited the local Cosmeston Country Park – blessed with a medieval village, 2 lakes and level gravel tracks, and, sadly, just as the countryside got more interesting, 2 kissing gates too small for a Trampler, plus a wooden barrier too low for me to go under !

The coastal path however between Barry and Penarth at Lavernock Point is a delight: a narrowish cliff trail overlooking the Severn Estuary/Bristol Channel with marvellous views and a few challenges underfoot/wheel! By now however it was 4.00pm and we were supposed to be back at the hotel by 4.30pm. We had been warned the path became pretty muddy as it continued (as John also confirmed having done a recce). We decided this time to give Penarth a miss, especially as the path got even narrower further on, making it difficult to turn the buggy round without going over the edge, and I couldn't face reversing all the way back to the car park! We then turned our attention to the Nature Reserve at Lavernock Point, another venue suggested by Barbara, as she thought there might be problems.



The Coastal Path

There certainly were! The entrance to the Reserve is in the form of a kissing gate - apparently recently installed and it would seem with Heritage Lottery money involved. The gate itself is so neat that even stout able bodied people might experience difficulties negotiating it! Venturing inside with digital camera at the ready, John was amazed to find 3 robust stiles within about 200-300 yards of the entrance. Unable to investigate further – we really did have to get back! – he reluctantly called it a day. The Reserve belongs to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, so I have written to ask what their plans might be to also provide access to it for the mobility limited and the visually impaired.

Finally making the Feedback/Tea session at the hotel, we caught the last part of a discussion with members of the Valeways Partnership. This is a voluntary organisation committed to working creatively with the Vale of Glamorgan Council and other partners to maintain and improve public paths in the area, and I was invited to relate how we had fared that afternoon. A delightful dinner followed, accompanied by 2 speakers: Jane Hutt, AM Business Minister for Welsh Assembly Government, and Gwendoline Goddard, Trustee on Walkers are Welcome project.

Sunday morning was a double whammy! – the hour went forward the night before and we also had to check out of rooms before the first session began at 9.30am. Business today began with discussion of 5 Motions submitted to Welsh Council 2007, all approved. One of these concerns the Forestry Commission and public rights of way and seeks to encourage the Forestry Commission not only to clear obstructed paths, but to maintain stiles and gates proactively, rather than reactively as they do at the moment. I am hoping the Chairman, Ron Williams, will be able to clarify the future position for me.

Election of the WC Executive Committee and Appointment of Auditor followed, together with Reports from RA members of WC on allied bodies in 2006 and Appointments of representatives to those bodies in 2007. Onwards then to the final Session entitled: Ramblers - the next 5 years? - Discussion of Strategic Plan. Here we all split into groups to discuss 4 topics, each one lasting 20 minutes, with time called by John. (He said later had he known he would have asked to borrow Robin's whistle)!! The topics were very interesting relating as they did to how organisations focus on their central aims, how they retain new membership, how they grow the membership in a competing world and how communications are best kept open between General Council and the local rambler, via Areas and Groups. As an indicator, the current number of UK walkers is thought to be around 6 million, only 137,000 of whom are members of the RA.

Following a general discussion on the groups' suggested ways forward, Ron Williams gave his final remarks and formally closed the Meeting. Lunch was an opportunity to say goodbye and to make arrangements to meet friends later in the year on DR rambles in Wales. We began the homeward path too, but not before first saying farewell to Wales by visiting the remote and beautiful Southerndown beach near Bridgend.

Rosie Norris
