



The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

July 2008

A charitable company: Registered Charity No. 1103508

IMBER IS GO

THE MoD has given the go-ahead to our most ambitious ramble, to follow the tank tracks around the edge of the vast Imber Firing Range on Salisbury Plain.

On August 19, eight Disabled Ramblers on Trumper scooters will set out on this 30 mile route, led by your Chairman. Only the easier bits have been checked, so much will be a journey into the unknown! Bad weather made parts into a quagmire a few years ago, so it could be very challenging.

All 3 nights will be spent under canvas, in the corner of a field! We will be supported by a team of 6 volunteers, plus a catering team. This trip is only possible

Ramblers set sights on sponsorship!

because of our mobile accessible toilet, which will provide essential facilities in the camp and at lunch each day.

We have never done this before! This expedition is to find out

whether trips like this are feasible and what else to provide. It will be a steep learning curve. If it works, it will open up new remoter areas to us.

The aim is to raise funds for the Disabled Ramblers, so we can increase our fleet of loan scooters. We want everyone to sponsor us on this unique trip – a sponsorship form is included with this newsletter.

STOP PRESS!

New dates for the Portsmouth and Hampshire rambles.

These are now reduced to two days and on different dates.

We apologise to members already booked.

23rd September Tuesday: Portsmouth/Southsea

Cat 1

24th September Wednesday: Butser Hill, nr Petersfield

Cat 2

DARTMOOR – three seasons in just one day

THE JUNE ramble on Dartmoor was 5 miles along very rough tracks to the saddle between Yes Tor and High Willhays, the highest points on Dartmoor. An ascent to 2,000 feet – a record height for a disabled ramble.

The weather started off overcast, but the further we travelled the darker the sky became. Suddenly we were blessed with driven hail, with sizeable chunks of ice! Followed by thunder and lightening and rain. It was Dartmoor at its most unpredictable.

We had a quick if wet lunch between the Tors, amid yet more thunder and lightening. Retracing our route, we safely negotiated the very rough and difficult tracks. The sun even shone for the last hour. Thanks especially to Gill & Iain Kirkman for organising the Dartmoor rambles and to the two Dartmoor Rangers for their invaluable help.

Mary Knight



□ *Last push to the top!*

Letter from Robin Helby

New Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers

THIS IS my first letter as Chairman of the Disabled Ramblers. Many of our readers will be surprised to see me writing it. Mike Bruton's decision to retire came as something of a shock. I've been on the Executive Committee ever since our formation as the Countryside Access Group, and Mike has been such an excellent chairman that it was easy to think that he would be there forever!

Mike slowly reeled me in, initially getting me involved with technical matters, then producing our literature and later developing our membership database. I was very happy being "in the back room", with Mike taking on the public roles. But latterly I've also taken over for Mike on the various consultative bodies we sit on, an important of our lobbying activities.



□ Robin to the rescue in Windsor Great Park.

And now Mike, ever the realist, has very understandably decided to concentrate his energies into his first love, organising our programme of rambles. After 12 years, he makes this look far, far easier than it actually is. He will continue to be in charge of all of this year's rambles and I am hoping he will feel able to carry on through 2009.

But he has made it very clear that he wants one of us to be his deputy, ready and able to stand in for him if and

when this is necessary. An important contribution will be to take over the essential path inspections. This means meeting staff from the National Parks, often during the winter months, as well as nights away from home.

Ideally this should be someone other than the Chairman. It needs someone willing to spend a few nights away and drive long distances, as well as being able to transport a heavy duty scooter. Though the National Parks are always willing to lay on a 4x4, there are many times when it is better to be on the ground. It also helps the Park staff to understand how versatile our scooters can be.

I made a memorable inspection this year which involved an exciting February afternoon, bumping over a wild route in Swaledale in an 8-wheeled

Argocat. That was after a morning cross country in a Landrover. If you fancy getting involved with organising our ramble programme, do please phone for a chat.

We sadly lost John Palmer as our Treasurer (see obituary on this page). John's sudden death has brought home the need to rethink the way we share out the work

amongst the Executive Committee. It means that everybody on the Committee will not just have to take on a specific portfolio, but also shadow another member. At the same time, we will be reviewing how we share information between us whilst ensuring all data is kept secure.

Post-Mike, it is going to be a big challenge just to carry on. We will certainly be thinking hard about next year's programme in the light of the enormous rise in fuel costs. A new ex-

periment for this year is the Imber Expedition, when we are mixing rambling and camping for the first time. Have mobile toilet, will travel! If it works, it opens up the possibility of many other long distance routes. It is also a great opportunity to raise funds that we badly need.

Robin Helby



disabled
ramblers

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NOTE: email address still:

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Mike bows out



□ **Dr Mike Bruton**
MBE.

AFTER BEING Chairman since our formation back in 1996, Mike Bruton has decided to retire, both from the Chair and from the Executive Committee, due to health and mobility difficulties.

Many members may not appreciate how much we owe our very existence to Mike. Following early retirement in 1991 he got deeply involved with local disability issues in Maidenhead and Windsor. This included agitating for better access along the Thames National Trail.



□ *Stuck in the mud?*

Mike and the local Maidenhead 'Disabled Mafia' were successful in making good contacts with the Countryside Commission. Mike also worked as Executive Director with the Disabled Drivers Association. In this post he promoted an annual ramble on the Ridgeway. This proved popular and Mike decided to form the Countryside Access Group, affiliated to the disabled drivers..

I attended the inaugural meeting, held in April 1996 in Maidenhead. Mike persuaded enough of us to join to get the group off the ground. Mike has an ability to persuade people to work together. He was greatly helped by Peter Field, another Maidenhead resident, who sadly died whilst our Treasurer in 2001.

Mike was appointed Chairman, and he single-handedly organised our rambles. Initially our programme was fairly limited, with a

weekend in the New Forest. Slowly the programme increased year by year, now with 31 days of rambling this year, still organised by Mike!

In 1998 four of us decided on a long trip following the River Thames from Oxford to Maidenhead. This was regarded as a major task, even by the Countryside Commission staff responsible for the National Trail. But equipped with a portable bridge, we did 62 miles in 5 days.

This trip proved highly influential as, at that time, only level surfaced paths were considered suitable for disabled people. At the end of our six day trip, Richard Simmons, then Chairman of the Countryside Commission, together with an MP, and two Mayors, met up with us. Richard, using Countryside Agency sponsorship, then set up a series of studies into countryside access, with which we were involved. Reports were produced titled 'Sense and Accessibility' and 'Paths without Prejudice'. Several years later, further studies were carried out and a new report, "By All Reasonable Means", produced, which is an excellent guidance document.

Under Mike's chairmanship, we have grown steadily. In 2000, we became an independent Charity and, in 2004, a Company limited by Guarantee. Our ramble pro-



□ *Thames trip: inspecting the bridge!*

gramme has increased, with Mike establishing increasing contacts with the National Parks, the Forestry Commission, and other bodies.

Our lobbying activities have also been important. Through Mike's networking, we have had an influence quite disproportionate to our size. We were the first organisation of disabled people with practical experience of rambling.

Mike's rambling started using a David Wenman Sportster scooter. This was re-engineered in 1998 in time for the Oxford Trip. In 2000 he bought one of the first Trampers, though he often uses a Sterling three-wheeler for easy rambles. Since 2006 he has used a Mark 2 Trampler, equipped with joystick control.

Mike announced his retirement at the Annual General Meeting in April 2008 to the great surprise of all those present. Happily we were able to persuade him to become our second President, following the recent death of Lady Darcy de Knayth. Mike has offered to oversee our programme of rambles for this year, and hopes to continue through 2009 if possible.

Over just 12 years, Mike has established a charity specialising in rambling for disabled people. We have a flourishing organisation, and a rambles programme, which reaches throughout England and Wales. A fantastic achievement: his MBE is fully deserved. Our only problem will be trying to live up to the challenge he has set us.

Robin Helby

Elected Chairman, April 2008

Farewell to kissing-

Rosie Norris of the Disabled Ramblers, sets out issues which should concern us all.

IN NOVEMBER 2007 the government issued a statement urging councils to increase countryside accessibility, specifically referring to the removal of stiles and kissing-gates. The reaction, expressed through some National Newspapers, and even on Radio 4's 'Today' programme, was as though the sky had fallen in, as a host of no doubt well-intentioned, but woefully ill-informed, people leapt to the defence of these structures.

The first misconception was that disabled people were out to ruin the countryside. This could not be further from the truth. Disabled ramblers, like, I imagine, the majority of disabled people, treasure the beauty of the countryside and worry about its fragility and vulnerability. We are fiercely keen for the countryside to remain essentially as it is, and we are not asking for tussocks to be levelled, marshes drained and clifftop paths made safe.

We recognise there will always be some inaccessible terrain, but there are many areas still open to us, and there would be vastly more if there were fewer stiles and small kissing-gates.

A second common misconception was that disabled people only try to gain access to the countryside in standard wheelchairs. Walkers expect to use boots on rough or wet going, and, for similar situations, disabled ramblers most often use powered mobility vehicles (or in some cases specially-adapted, heavy-duty wheelchairs). While we use standard wheelchairs or powered chairs on some easy routes, when the going gets tougher we turn to heavy-duty powered scooters—different beasts altogether.



□ *Rosie Norris uses Centrewire's Woodstock large-mobility kissing-gate. A RADAR key allows passage by legitimate users.*

Tramper

My vehicle, a Tramper, copes happily with 1 in 4 gradients and takes uneven country tracks, mud, streams, light snow and ploughed fields in its metaphorical stride. Machines like these find little problem with a variety of terrain and have no need therefore for any wholesale modification of the countryside.

‘ We call for the removal of stiles and modification of kissing-gates ’

We do however call for the removal of stiles, and the dismantling or modification of small pedestrian kissing-gates.

At the moment, disabled people cannot be sure that a walk they have chosen from a map will be free of such impediments. While able-bodied walkers merely grab their Ordnance Survey maps and boots and can expect to get along the paths, disabled people have to forgo this spontaneity as no OS maps or, in my experience, council

leaflets show the position of barriers. We have to rely on the kindness of able-bodied supporters checking out the route beforehand, to avoid having to turn around and to ensure there is a way through to our planned destination.

Kissing-gates and stiles have been with us for centuries and it is difficult to calculate their number. Suffolk County Council, for example, has 2,500-odd stiles and around 1,740 kissing or other gates. Multiply these by the number of counties in England and Wales and you see the size of the problem and the number of people affected—not just disabled people in mobility vehicles and families with baby buggies, but also, where there are stiles, people with visual impairment and ageing walkers and dogs who lack agility.

Barriers

The number of barriers is increasing. New small kissing-gates continue to be added to the rights-of-way network, many of which deny accessibility to legitimate user groups. The dimensions of these structures vary widely.

To be acceptable, kissing-gates need to be wide enough to cater not only for larger cross-country

gates

baby-buggies and mobility vehicles for disabled ramblers but also for the wider public (literally and figuratively). This means that the gate (the moving part of the structure) when fully open leaves a distance of 1.6 metres between the end of the gate and the stationary part of the structure.

A proportion of the funding for these smaller, inaccessible, kissing-gates comes from the public purse. It's unacceptable for public resources to be used on discriminatory measures.

However, there are some encouraging signs. Buckinghamshire has 4,000 stiles and each year 200–300 of these are removed. Hertfordshire County Council is a trail blazer, aspiring to remove all its inaccessible kissing-gates and stiles over a period of time. The East Berkshire Group of the Ramblers' Association has been campaigning for years to have stiles replaced with more accessible openings. The group even pays for gates on selected routes. The council installs the new gate with agreement from the owner.

Priorities

Realistically though, increased countryside access will only be achieved gradually, as priorities and funding allow. No one is asking for a wholesale, immediate removal of all of these obstacles.

The Disabled Ramblers seek replacement of impassable barriers on a phased and planned basis, focusing on paths and routes that are in reasonable condition and able to be used by properly equipped and supported disabled people. It makes sense to start on paths which only require the removal of a few barriers to make them accessible. These changes can be incorporated as targets into councils' rights-of-way improvement plans.

The primary purpose of kissing-gates and stiles is to contain stock. Clearly farmers and landowners



have a duty in law to protect themselves and their stock.

For a path running through grazed land next to a road, kissing-gates with a RADAR bypass key could be installed. In fields away from the road we support the British Standard 5709 (2006): Gaps, Gates and Stiles. The standard states that, if a gap cannot be left open, barriers should be considered in the following order: gates (two-way, then one-way), accessible kissing gates and finally stiles, which should only to be used in exceptional circumstances.

Unreasonable

It's unreasonable for a kissing-gate to be installed between fields in order to control stock to a higher level of security, when often the fence or hedge around the rest of the field is not secure and stock can escape at will through it. Self-closing gates here can both achieve control of stock and allow ingress and egress.

It is argued that these larger kissing-gates allow motorbikes through as well. Some bikes can get through some kissing-gates and other motorbike barriers – and

‘ Self-closing gates can control stock and allow ingress, egress ’

□ *Centrewire's Woodstock medium-mobility kissing-gate allows passage of single prams and manual wheelchairs. Photos: Tom Bindoff, Centrewire.*

probably no motorbike barrier is 100 per cent successful.

But unless these kissing-gates are fully accessible they will stop all mobility-vehicle users, who have a right to be there.

Disabled people must not be barred from the public rights-of-way network because of the misdeeds of others. Resolving motorbike access falls to the police. We know that funding, and therefore police manpower, is often limited. However, we also know these problems can be addressed by close liaison between rights-of-way officers and the local police force, where a tip-off can lead to a successful blitz of the area. But there must be a will to resolve these problems.

Summing up

In summary, we say the following.

- Disabled people aren't out to ruin the countryside.

- Our mobility vehicles are able to cope with a variety of terrain without any countryside alteration.

- Stiles and small kissing-gates are impenetrable barriers to a wide section of the public, not just disabled people.

- We seek a gradual, phased and reasonable start to the removal of these structures, or the provision of alternative, accessible ways round these obstacles, with any replacement structures complying with BS 5709 (2006).

- We want disabled people to have greater access to the public rights-of-way network than the current, pitifully low, 1–2 per cent.

We recognise with gratitude the help and support we have received over the years in achieving greater accessibility to the countryside, and we warmly welcome those who might also like to rise to the challenge of making the countryside more open to all.

Government policy

(Contained in a letter to Disabled Ramblers member, Barney Wilson, and originated by Jim Fitzpatrick M.P. Parliamentary Under Secretary at the DfT.)

Dear Editor

AS A RESULT of reading your article in the last edition of 'Disabled Rambler' about the heavy handed attitude of the DVLA regarding the registration of mobility vehicles, I wrote to my MP, Richard Benyon, (MP for Newbury) and I thought

you might be interested to read a reply letter sent to him by Jim Fitzpatrick MP Parliamentary Under Secretary at the DoT. (Ed - This constitutes the Governments view of this matter – see below)

Kind regards,
Barney Wilson, Newbury.

“To: Richard Benyon MP

Dear Richard,

THANK YOU for your letter of 11 April addressed to Ruth Kelly enclosing correspondence from

Department for Transport

your constituent Barney Wilson, regarding mobility scooters. I am replying as I have Ministerial responsibility for Government policy on this issue.

The requirement to register and license certain mobility vehicles is not new. All vehicle registration and licensing is governed by the Vehicle Excise and Registration

Obituary

John David Palmer (born 13th December 1940, died 29th May 2008)

WE ARE very sorry and sad to report the death of John Palmer, the Disabled Ramblers' Treasurer, who passed away suddenly at the end of May.

John was a relative newcomer to the Disabled Ramblers but he very quickly became an enthusiastic disabled rambler, so much so that he soon acquired a heavy duty Trumper scooter and then a converted Renault Kangoo car to carry it about! He thoroughly enjoyed the great outdoors and came on many rambles with us over the last two years.

John helped us out at a very difficult time. Our treasurer of many years, Maria Davies, retired from the post in the Autumn of 2006. The post was then taken over by a very willing volunteer who unfortunately due to a combination of accident and illness, was unable to continue in the job by early summer last year. In response to an urgent appeal for a new treasurer, John Palmer



came forward and volunteered to take on the job himself. John had been Treasurer of the Cardiff Yacht Club. He stressed he was not an accountant, just a treasurer. Nevertheless, his first task was to assemble the accounts for 2006, which had to be submitted by last October. With help from Ken Messer, an accountant friend of ours, the accounts were made ready and delivered with just 2 days to spare! Since then, John has worked hard assembling the 2007 accounts, again with Ken Messer's assistance, and a first draft was produced ready for our AGM in April.

John had a very colourful career. First, he was a bus driver,

then a painter and decorator and a street light technician. He finished his career with Air Products Ltd. where he was Production Manager. Early on, John was a Rugby player, but he continued with his major hobby sailing small boats. He first learned to sail on an Arab Dhow while doing National Service with the Royal Signals regiment based in Aden. His great love was the Cardiff Yacht Club where he helped redevelop the Club within the new Cardiff Bay setting. After his time as Treasurer, he was elected Commodore.

John collapsed while seated at his Computer and died from a heart attack.

We salute John's memory and send our condolences to his friend Francis and to his family. John was irascible and blunt on business issues, but a very good and kind friend of the Disabled Ramblers. We salute him and remember him with gratitude and affection.
Mike Bruton

on motor scooters

Act 1994 (VERA). The Act requires all mechanically propelled vehicles used or kept on the public road to be registered and licensed (i.e. display a tax disc). For the purposes of VERA, a public road extends not only to the carriage-way but also to pavements. If the scooter is not used on a public road it does not need to be registered.

The Mail on Sunday article in November 2006 raised awareness of the above requirement. DVLA received hundreds of requests from concerned users of mobility scooters and provided appropriate advice. This included an information pack aimed at making the registration and licensing process as easy as possible for customers.

While the article in 'The Disabled Rambler' is factually accurate, it does not paint a complete picture. In recognition of the difficulties annual licensing could cause for many users of mobility scooters, DVLA sends out a tax disc two or three weeks before the current one expires. They will continue to do this until they are advised that the scooter is no longer used or has been sold. As long as the vehicle is licensed, a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) is not required. (note: Editor's italics - see article back page April 2008 edition))

The Department for Transport last year carried out research into the rules and issues surrounding the use of class 2 and class 3 mobility vehicles. The purpose of the research was to identify ways of finding a balance between the needs of users who rely on these vehicles and the safety of the public generally. The research considered all aspects of the use of mobility vehicles. Issues like the provision of advice and information to users, insurance requirements, whether there should be a



“fitness to drive” assessment, and whether the requirement to register and license class 3 vehicles should remain, were taken into account. The research reports have been published at www.dft.gov.uk.

The report and recommendations from this research will be taken forward over the coming months. A Code of Practice for class 3 vehicles can also be found on the site.

Yours sincerely

Jim Fitzpatrick

Editor's comment on Minister's letter

1. paras 2 and 3: the fact is that until the Mail on Sunday article in November 2006 there was no attempt being made to fulfil the apparent legal need to register Class 3 mobility vehicles despite the requirement under the 1994 Vehicle Excess and Registration Act. Interestingly, this requirement was mentioned in the Dft Report into the uses of Class 2 and 3 mobility vehicles published in June 2006 This report questioned this apparent legal need, but indicated that this might be dropped unless proved to be of value! The Mail on Sunday article clearly alarmed the DVLA and prompted rather ill-thought through registration action, leading, in our view to unnecessary and costly bureaucratic action (Apparently each registration costs the DVLA approximately £40 with no corresponding revenue. – see a description of the procedure on previous page of this Newsletter)

2. para 3 states that the SORN requirement as described in the Disabled Rambler is factually accurate – BUT he goes on to say that SORN declarations will not be needed as the owner of a Class 3 mobility vehicle, once regis-

tered will receive automatically an updated zero rated tax disk each year, just before the old one expires. This implies that the only action needed by the owner will be to ensure the latest disk is always displayed. MY VIEW – this is a recent innovation and is obviously an improvement on the SORN procedure – but I can still see the owner forgetting to fix the new disc in place once received, and still being liable to a penalty if this task is overlooked. I can see busybodies deliberately checking fitted tax discs and gleefully informing the police if the displayed item is out of date.

3. final para – the research referred to by the Minister was carried out in 2004/2005 and published in July 2006 – NOT 2007 as claimed. I have been informed that the findings of this report will be reviewed this year and further work done. WE WOULD EXPECT FULL PUBLIC CONSULTATION before any new legal measures are put in place. My impression is that the team doing this work, which also covers areas like Blue Badge rules and laws, is not being pressurised to get on with this task.

Mike Bruton - Editor

How to register a used Class 3 invalid carriage

Members have asked us how they should register their Class 3 scooters/powerchairs – well, here goes:

YOU WILL require a form V55/5, plus we recommend an explanatory leaflet INF211

Are you any the wiser? Let's try to explain!

First of all, you need to know that the entire process is carried out by your local DVLA office and NOT the DVLA HQ in Swansea.. As implied by the name, the DVLA local offices are scattered around the UK.

You can find their addresses in one of three ways:

1. by looking at the web-site: www.direct.gov.uk/motoring
2. at the back of the booklet V100 which is available at all Post Office branches
3. by calling 0872 430 444 where you will be asked for your postcode.

You will need to ask for the V55/5 and we suggest, the information leaflet INF211. The V55/5 form is designed for all types of motor vehicle, so much of the information requested is irrelevant to scooter/powerchair users. The INF211 helps considerably by pointing to the data fields that are relevant. Even then, it may be difficult if not impossible to provide several pieces of information eg documented evidence to show date of manufacture, make,



...all these need registration.

weight, vehicle chassis/frame number, engine number. Some of these data must be found and entered, eg weight, vehicle chassis/frame number. (INF211 recommends reference to the supplier/manufacturer handbook).

NOTE:

1. NO registration fee is required
2. Insurance is not essential, but you are strongly advised to obtain cover (The Disabled Ramblers support this recommendation to provide peace of mind over personal safety, the safety of others and the value of the vehicle)
3. Class 3 vehicles do not need number plates
4. A disabled exemption certifi-

cate is not required to license the vehicle.

5. Users of class 3 vehicles are exempt from driver licensing requirements

6. The tax disc needs annual renewal – this is now covered by automatic dispatch by the DVLA of a new annual disc two weeks before the old one expires (see letter from Jim Fitzpatrick MP featured in this Newsletter.)

Once registration is complete the DVLA Local Office will issue a NIL duty tax disc, which must be displayed on the vehicle, and DVLA Swansea will issue a Registration Certificate (V5C) in due course which will explain how to notify the DVLA if you sell, or dispose of the vehicle.

Is all clear? Happy Licensing!



...and so do these??

Due to lack of space, we will publish the second part of Peter Robinson's description of last summer's Dorset Rambles in the next edition of the Disabled Rambler.

FOR SALE: OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO DISABLED RAMBLERS



Mercedes V Class 2001, CDi, Diesel, automatic, with air-conditioning. 73,000 miles only. Adapted to take large scooter and a powerchair (by hoist) Has powered rear door and ramp, plus Braun wheelchair hoist (chair only)

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