



# The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

October 2005

A charitable company : Registered Charity No. 1103508

## DISABLED RAMBLES SUMMER 2005

### My Favourite event: North Wales

Looking back over the summer 2005 disabled rambling season, we had on offer a very varied selection of rambles. I think that, of all the events I entered myself probably the most enjoyable of all was the weekend spent early in July in North Wales. There were two days of rambles spent in very different settings near the attractive small town of Dolgellau, at the southern end of the Snowdonia National Park.

Alan Edwards had carried out a very thorough check of the routes during a visit made the previous winter. He came up with two routes, quite different in character, but each very beautiful, offering very attractive days out. Alan produced very useful leaflets for each day, and an extract from these is published on page 4 of this Newsletter.



A welcome tea-break at Capel Hermon

On the first day we penetrated deeply into the area of forest and deep river valleys known as the Coed y Brenin. This was the more demanding day, involving long climbs up rapidly rising river valleys cut deep in the hillsides. The climb up the main Mawddach River valley culminated at a most gorgeous waterfall, involving a steep descent by a substantial side stream of around 150 feet. You can get right to the foot of this waterfall by going down a steep hill off to the left of the main

track, visiting the site of worked out goldmines at the bottom. This excursion off the main track is steep, and also involves climbing a short steep bank after crossing a stone footbridge, newly reconstructed after being washed away in a severe storm. This side trip is best undertaken by heavy buggies: lighter machines can cope, but best if supported by strong able bodied helpers!

After retracing our steps, we turned back down the track for a short distance, before turning left up another hill which came out among meadows at a hill top, at a place called Capel Hermon. Here there is a great surprise! Sitting at a cross roads is a modern house which offers teas and refreshments in its garden: very welcome! After leaving this idyllic spot, down a short stretch of road, we turn back into the woods to begin the long steep descent back to the car park.

The second day was down the famous Mawddach Estuary trail. This is a very easy route, virtually flat, and uses an old railway line shut in the 1960's It is peaceful and very beautiful. At the end, it is possible to cross the Estuary by the active railway which comes up the coast and crosses over to Barmouth.

We enjoyed two days of excellent weather, enabling us to enjoy the stunning scenery to the full: a truly great weekend!

Mike Bruton

## Holiday Experiences with a Powered Scooter

A suggestion has been put forward by John Smythson for future newsletter articles. John feels that members might be interested to hear about the experiences of other members when they take their powered scooter on holiday.

John's suggestion is that the writer describes how good the holiday location was to use a scooter, what type of scooter was used, and how it was transported. It would also be helpful to know about the type of accommodation used and any other useful information about places to visit. Please write to the Editor with your ideas

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

Dear Friends,

Our programme of organised rambles for the 2005 season is now at an end and we would very much like your feedback on the events organised. In this Newsletter, I have said a little about the ramble weekend which I enjoyed most. Making such a choice is difficult, partly because I did not take part in all the rambles, and, basically, I enjoyed all those I attended. However, on balance, the North Wales weekend, held early in July, came top. The reasons underlying this choice were a combination of fabulous scenery, the variety of the different places we visited, excellent weather and good organisation. We would very much like to hear your views. Which ramble, or rambles, did you like most, and why?



The Support Trailer 'in action' at the Wilmington Long Man ramble

During the year, we introduced our new ramble mobile support service. This consists of two Tramper scooters, available to lend out to members as required, and a mobile toilet facility. All this is transported on a new trailer. We are grateful to a number of friends for making donations towards the cost of this service, but above all to the Countryside Agency for funding approximately half the total cost. Robin Helby, our Vice Chairman, masterminded this new service, and, in addition did some fitting out work at the start. Robin also transported the trailer and contents to a good number of the rambles, where both the loan scooters and the toilet has been well used. Next year we would like to extend the cover to virtually all our rambles. To do this we need additional volunteer drivers able and willing to take the service to far flung rambles. We have agreed to pay expenses to volunteer drivers to ease the way! Are you, newsletter reader, able to help, or do you know someone who might? If so, please contact Mike Bruton or Robin Helby.

We are now starting planning our next year's rambles programme. Please feed in to Mike, views, preferences, and ideas for specific rambles. We would love to hear from you!

Meanwhile, do have a happy autumn and a good Christmas!

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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### **Alpine Adventure - August 2005**



With able-bodied support, one of our members reached 7,500 feet in the French Alps before having to return due to a deteriorating weather forecast. More details in the January newsletter.

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## Visiting the Black Mountains Where can you go if you have a mobility impairment ?

For wheelchair users the options, at present, are fairly limited. Firstly, there is no public transport that provides wheelchair access - so, together with powered scooter users, you will have to use private transport to get there. Most of the roads in the area are very narrow and can become congested, particularly in the summer.

Hay-on-Wye, just to the north of the Black Mountains, is well worth a visit – not just for the many bookshops, but because it has a large car park with nearby disabled toilet facilities, and an accessible riverside walk.



Part of Offa's Dyke Path near Hay Bluff

Car parking within the Black Mountains area is limited, and the only car park with a disabled toilet facility is at Llanthony Priory. From this site, a wealth of information is available on a newly installed touch screen display board that is linked to the Internet. A newly improved two and a half kilometre circular route provides spectacular views of the Ewyas Valley and the ruins of Llanthony Priory, and is suitable for robust powered scooters. The track is fairly steep and uneven in places, and is not advisable for wheelchair users.

However, work will be carried out shortly to improve a linear route from Llanthony towards Capel-y-ffin that can be used by wheelchair and powered scooter users alike. Another piece of good news is the recent agreement with Forestry Commission Wales to improve access to the Mynydd Du forest. Wheelchair and powered scooter access points will be provided at the sides of the locked barriers that prevent unauthorised vehicular access. This will open up miles of forest tracks for disabled people, and provide safe access to some of the most

spectacular views in the Black Mountains. The forest is accessible from the south along the valley of Grwyne Fawr. This valley can be reached by minor roads from Crickhowell to the south west, Abergavenny to the south or Llanfihangel Crucorney to the south east.



On-site consultation between the landowner and Brecon Beacon National Park Wardens

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### News from 'The Lancashire Lass'

Hasn't the weather been kind to us this summer? Or is it that I just struck lucky with the Lake District and Welsh rambles, both excellent venues with impressive support teams. A special thank you to Robin for letting me try out a Trampler in Grizedale.

Lancashire Lass managed to catch the eye of Lancashire County Council and they have expressed an interest in meeting disabled ramblers with the object of improving access to Lancashire's beautiful countryside. They have started with Beacon Fell Country Park where they have two Trampers available for loan. *(See article on page 6 for more information - Editor)* It is all very exciting as they have plans to purchase more and would like some advice on how best to use these resources. Anyone interested?

Contact me by email :- [etomlinson@madasafish.com](mailto:etomlinson@madasafish.com)  
signed Lancashire Lass.

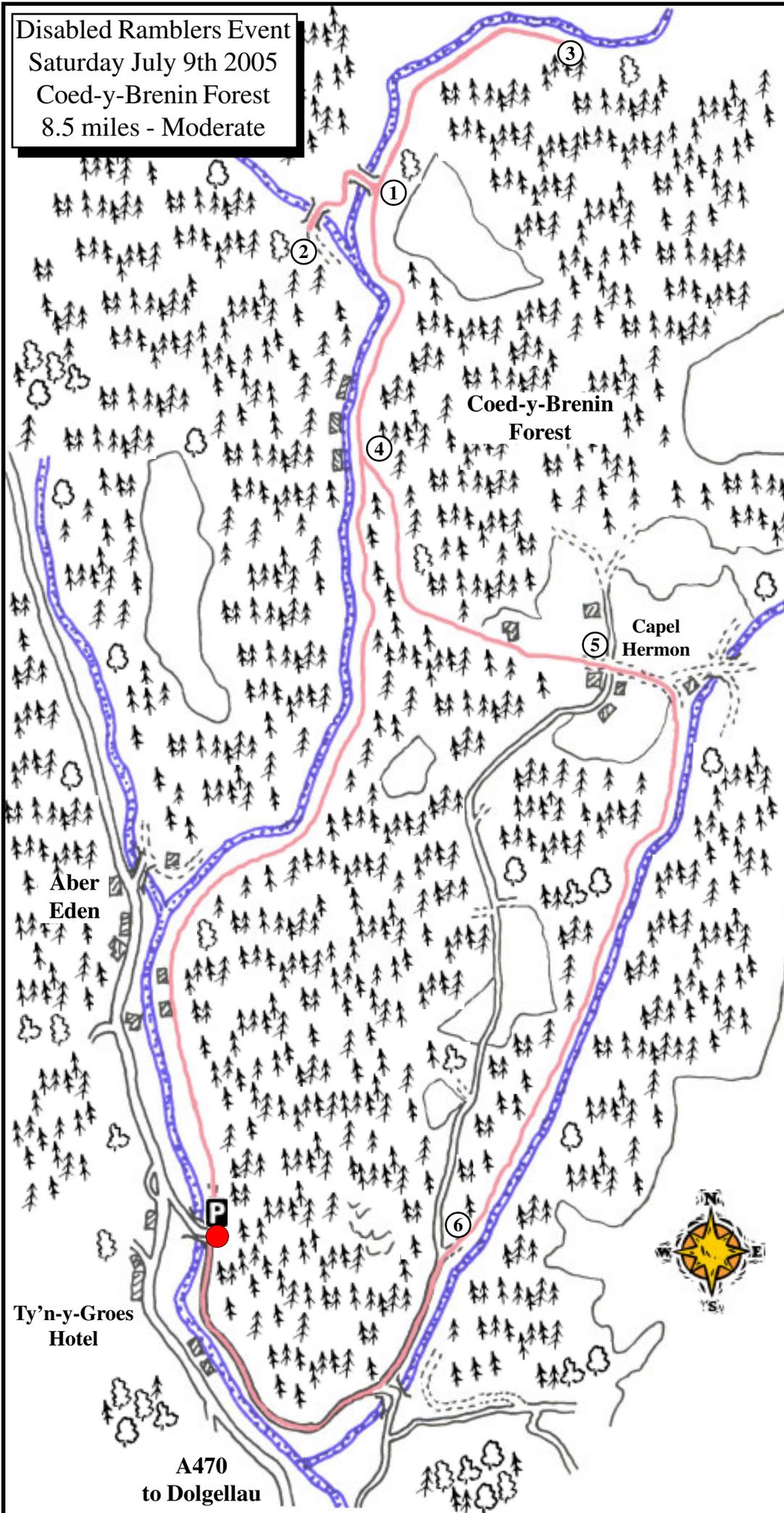
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Please contact the Newsletter Editor directly if you wish to submit an article (preferably with supporting photographs) for a future issue of the newsletter.

email to [editor@disabledramblers.co.uk](mailto:editor@disabledramblers.co.uk)  
or telephone: 01886 880145

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Disabled Ramblers Event  
 Saturday July 9th 2005  
 Coed-y-Brenin Forest  
 8.5 miles - Moderate



To reach the start point, take the A470 and head north from Dolgellau. After about four and a half miles you will see the Ty'n-y-Groes Hotel on your left-hand side. Just less than a quarter of a mile past the Hotel, turn sharp right onto a minor road and cross the river into the car park. There is a picnic area and disabled toilet at this site.

### Start & Finish Point Ty'n-y-Groes Car Park

We start by taking the forest track from the car park, heading almost due North.

Following this track, we will have the Afon Mawddach on our left all the way to Point 1, passing rapids, waterfalls and the remains of old mine buildings on the way.

For those using more robust 'buggies', it is possible to reach Point 2, by negotiating a steep track and crossing over a stone bridge. There are good views of the Pistyll Cain waterfall from here, as well as evidence of old gold mine workings.

By continuing along the original forest track, a ford across the river is reached at Point 3. This would be a good place to stop for a lunch break before retracing our steps to Point 4, where buildings can be seen on the opposite bank of the river.

Here, we take the forest track to the left, ascending through the woods until we reach Point 5 at Capel Hermon. The house at the crossroads sells light refreshments if anyone is in need of a break.

Continuing along the forest track, with the Afon Wen on our left, we reach Point 6 where we join a minor road that takes us back to the car park. If time permits, the picnic site would provide an ideal spot to finish off the day.

## A Big Step Forward

This is the story of how the Disabled Ramblers have acquired their own Mobile Accessible Toilet. The start goes back to 2003, when the money raised from a sponsored 100 mile by Sue Watson and Robin Helby along the South Down Way was put into a special fund.

The aim was to just buy one Trampler scooter which could be lent at rambles to potential new members. It was quickly realised that buying the scooter would not be enough - it had to be moved and a trailer would be needed. And not just a basic trailer, but an enclosed box trailer in which the scooter could be safely housed between rambles. We were hopeful of getting a grant, but found that we were either asking for too little or we weren't regional. We also realised that, in time, one scooter would not be enough, so the trailer should be big enough for two. But still we could not find any grants.

So time for a bit of lateral thinking. Besides finding suitable routes, another difficulty Mike Bruton faces when planning rambles is nearby accessible toilets. So why not have a mobile toilet of our own? And one that could double up by carrying two scooters! At last we had a concept that really would open up access to the countryside. It got the interest of the Countryside Agency's Landscape, Access and Recreation division. They came up with a 50% grant of £6,250 towards the Mobile Toilet and two Trampers.

Beamer Ltd, makers of the Trampler, very generously threw in another £2,000. They also offered to do the conversion of the trailer at cost, saving over £500 in VAT. And Thetford Ltd gave us a Portapotti - a water flushing portable loo - an essential component!



The inside of the finished trailer showing how accessible the toilet is. A 'privacy' curtain has now been fitted !

The grant from the Countryside Agency was confirmed early in January 2005, but one of the conditions was that we had to have paid for everything about mid-March, so they had time to pay us by their year end of 31st March. Not a lot of time!

Finding a suitable trailer turned out to be not so easy. We wanted a trailer that was just wide enough to take two trampers side by side, to make towing easier. But we found that all the single-axled box trailers had just too narrow a rear door opening. Not only did we have to buy a twin-axled trailer, but one that was 10ft long internally, 2ft longer than planned.

That gave us a potential problem with the new EEC driving regulations. If the combined maximum gross weight of a vehicle and trailer exceeds 4.5 tonnes and the vehicle belongs to a company, it has to be fitted with a tachograph. The trailer we had chosen was "plated" with a maximum gross weight of 2 tonnes, enough to include a long-wheelbase landrover and other large 4x4s. Happily, the trailer maker, Brenderup in Denmark, agreed to a one-off plate for us with a Gross Weight of 1.35 tonnes, quite enough to take three trampers and the loo.

On to fitting out the trailer. Very aware that our rambles can be quite muddy, we were worried as how best to tie down the Trampers when on the move. The conventional floor track for wheelchairs is made of aluminium and very prone to damage and jamming. So we turned to a system used in lorries, which is much more robust. Two pairs of these tracks were laid down the length of the trailer, giving complete flexibility in strapping down three scooters. There is even room for the special rescue trailer.

The next vital question was the height of the toilet seat! Discreet enquiries were made and a base made. So far there have not been any complaints. Then hygiene. We found a neat folding basin with a water tank that looked ideal. That just left suitable hand rails, coloured red to make sure there was good contrast for anyone with visual impairment. Lastly, the electrics, with circuit breakers for two chargers, plus an external socket.

The fitting out, delivery and payment were sufficiently completed in time for the March 31st deadline. Partly due to the change of trailer and the difficulty of working out all the costs in advance, the budget overran. One small example; we had forgotten to include stick/crutch holders for both Trampers. Fortunately generous donations by members have left our reserves reasonably intact.

The trailer was first used on April 14th for the North Surrey Ramble. We decided not to take a photo of the first user! Just as well, as we had forgotten we would

need a curtain to avoid having to close the rear tailgate every time! The next outing was to the Margaret Ray Memorial Ramble later in April, when both Trampers were on loan.

The trailer was next used on the Pembroke Coast Rambles, two days along the clifftops, and miles from any accessible toilets. The toilet was well used. But the basin was still not yet fitted, so wet wipes were supplied in the interim. That was fortunate, as the users much preferred wet wipes to soap and water. So exit the basin. Both Trampers were again on loan to new members, giving them a very rewarding experience of driving "off-road".



Joanna Redgwell of the Countryside Agency tries out one of the two new loan Trampers - watched by committee members Robin Helby and Kate Wass

We had the official handover on June 22nd at the Wilmington Long Man Ramble, organised with the help of Joanna Redgwell from the Countryside Agency. Lots of photographs were taken at the start, high up on the South Downs in Sussex. Both Trampers were again on loan, this time to founder members Diedre and Don Smith, who had driven down from the Peak District.

But we decided to take it slowly for the rest of the rambling season, so we got a chance to find out any snags. Even so, the Toilet and Trampers were present at Wye Valley, Bosworth Field, Rutland Water, Ditchling Beacon and the New Forest Rambles. So far there have been no problems and everyone has found the Trampers easy to drive.

Has the trailer been a success? Most definitely YES! And the Trampers have done the biz, giving newcomers a taste of rambling. It is so rewarding to see their faces when they bring their Trumper back, tired but always happy.

But we have found the Mobile Toilet does bring some complications. Both trailer and Trampers need to be insured. It has to be stored somewhere. Someone has to have suitable vehicle with a towbar, willing to tow the trailer to each ramble. Towing uses more fuel. And the toilet needs emptying regularly. And without really publicising the loan Trampers, they have both been regularly booked. Your management committee will be working hard this winter to resolve these issues, and are also hopeful that we may be able to get a grant or sponsorship to help with the costs.

Robin Helby

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## Lancashire leads the way

Countryside lovers can take a different look at Lancashire's countryside following the launch of new all terrain buggies and trails at Beacon Fell Country Park. Lancashire County Council's Countryside Service is committed to improving access to the countryside for all. As part of this programme, two Trumper buggies have been purchased for use at the country park, near Longridge.

The battery-powered Trumper vehicles are available for members of the public to borrow and use on three new Low Mobility Trails. Each of the new trails offers different views and experiences.

Lancashire County Councillor Marcus Johnstone, Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment said: "We're very pleased that bookings are already coming in for the buggies. Many people have expressed their happiness at being able to access new areas of Beacon Fell. These new trails offer the public an enjoyable and at times fairly challenging experience."

To book a Trumper contact Bowland Visitor Centre on 01995 640557.



Denise Baker from Access Lancashire trying out a Trumper

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## Disabled Ramblers AGM - April 2005

Last but not least! at our AGM, the election of Officers and Members of the Executive Committee was carried out slightly differently due to the Disabled Ramblers now being a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee. (Paragraph 29 of the Companies Articles of Association requires that one third of the Executive Committee shall retire by rotation at the first and every subsequent AGM so that the maximum term of office of a Member of the Committee is three years. If willing to act they may be re-elected or re-appointed). Phew!!

The Chairman, Mike Bruton, and the Treasurer, Maria Davies, were unanimously re-elected and a new Committee Member, David Livermore, was also unanimously elected. The remaining Members of the Committee are: Vice Chairman, Robin Helby, Secretary, Rosie Norris and Committee Members, Alan Edwards and Kate Wass. Baroness Davina Darcy de Knayth also kindly agreed to remain as the Disabled Ramblers' President.

This year the Wenman Trophy was awarded to John Symthson in recognition of his project to publicise available plans of footpaths throughout the country.

There was considerable discussion at the AGM regarding the current state of play relating to access to the countryside, and this theme was continued in Jos Joslin's stimulating presentation which followed. (Jos is a long standing friend of the Disabled Ramblers; in addition to her work as Manager of the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails she is also an associate of The Access Company, a grouping of Countryside Access Consultants with significant expertise in disabled access matters).

Jos's overview covered both the Ridgeway and Thames Path and state of play in Oxfordshire and her message, like the curate's egg, was "It's good in parts"! For example in her area over a period of three years 13 stiles/gates have been removed and 54 accessible gates installed. 44 stiles still remain. The western part of the Ridgeway has no stiles. Oxfordshire County Council is also providing information on its website relating to footpaths in the county.

Referring to the Access Company, Jos said its aims, amongst others, were to maximize opportunities for disabled people to enjoy the natural environment and to give practical advice (Policy Advice and Consultation with local communities). They also produce comprehensive Access Audits and Plans, using GPS

technology, digital cameras, gradient measurement devices and dictaphones. Even with up to date equipment however, to audit 3 kms a day costs around £100 a kilometre (1 day to audit, 1 day to write up).

Aside from this need to fund initial path audits, other key issues currently are the need to keep information up to date and to provide regular audits, and maintenance, of paths to ensure they don't deteriorate – for both of which funding is also required. (On the plus side the Mayor for London has arranged a £1.5 million allocation to Transport for London to create Strategic Walks in the capital, which may have a knock on effect elsewhere). In addition there continues to be a need for national standards for paths, information and symbols, in order to provide guidance on audit systems and on the provision of training (courses and materials) for land managers. It is hoped the Countryside Agency's Guidance on Countryside Access due to be published in 2005, will make an impact on this.

During general discussion afterwards Mike Bruton greatly welcomed the Zone approach to the countryside which is being adopted by the Countryside Agency. The audience noted the Fieldfare Trust still recognizes only Zone A: their view being that any path which does not fall into Zone A should nevertheless be made as near to Zone A as possible. As far as Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) were concerned, Jos asked whether the audience knew what their county's plans for these were. Dorothy Dickens said Norfolk County Council's ROWIP currently planned to remove only one stile over the next 5 – 10 years!

To briefly sum up this AGM report! the message seems to be: Some things have improved, but a great deal remains to be done. Campaigning still needs to be very high on our agenda, supported we hope, by our friends and allies – battle, I fear, has only just commenced!!



Maria, Mike and Rosie take a well-deserved break for lunch

## A Scottish Excursion

Ever fancy rambling in the Scottish Highlands? The opportunity came to Jo and myself last June when we took part in the special 'extra challenge' event on the day of the Caledonian Challenge which is major long distance ramble undertaken along the West Highland Way between Fort William and Loch Lomond, a total distance of 54 miles. Over a thousand walkers take part in the full Challenge, completing the entire distance mainly within 24 hours!

The extra challenge was an 8 ½ mile section of the route, suitable for wheelchairs and electric buggies. Around a dozen disabled people, all Scottish except ourselves, met up at the end of a minor road near the Bridge of Orchy, by Rannoch Moor. The day was grey, with very little wind: ideal conditions for midges, and we were each issued with midge proof nets worn over our faces, making it very difficult to recognise each other. We looked like villains making ready to rob a bank! We were sent away by a lone Scots piper: an amazing man with bare knees face and hands, who seemed oblivious of the midge swarms all around him. After two miles on the road, we came to the Bridge of Orchy Hotel where we left the tarmac at the nearby railway station. We were now on a reasonable traffic-free track which traversed along a mountainside in fabulous Scottish Glen scenery. The country was now open and a breeze was sufficient to blow the midges away. We were in true 'Monroe' territory, with 3000+ feet mountains all around us.



Mike and Jo approaching the end of the ramble near Tyndrum

For a while we were quite alone and able to enjoy the grandeur of the location in peace and quiet. The track descended slowly as we journeyed south. Once again we crossed the railway, which is the Highland line from

Glasgow to Fort William and we even saw a train go by! In places the track surface was corrugated with slate like ridges of stone. Apart from the railway, the countryside was bare, but we were always conscious of the mountains rearing up on all sides. After five miles on the track we came to a feeding station, where we gladly had a stop for drinks. Then we tackled the final 1 ½ miles climbing upwards. At one point the track was narrow and quite exposed, where the original route had been washed away in a flood. However, repairs had made the going safe. At the very end, near the village of Tyndrum, we were piped in, by the same piper who had seen us off. The photo (opposite), kindly taken by our friend David McCracken, shows our faces at this time: it was wonderful, awe inspiring and marked the end of a very worthwhile day!

Mike Bruton

Info: the Caledonian Challenge is an annual fund raising event taking place each June. We are waiting to see what arrangements there may be for disabled people during the 2006 event.

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### “Walking on Wheels”

A year ago I had hoped to have the book on the market for Christmas 2005. On this schedule there is good and bad news. The good news is that I now have a publisher, Cualann Press of Dunfermline. The other good news is that Anne Begg MP has written the Forward and Cameron McNeish President, Ramblers Scotland, the Introduction. To quote his final paragraph: “I firmly believe we all have a small smouldering glow within in us that harks back to those days before civilisation became divorced from the land. Often it just takes a small breeze from the green world to give flame to that glow and allow the fire to burn brightly within us. My hope is that this book will provide that breeze for many, fanning the flames of wild land love and appreciation for those who may have thought a living relationship with the green world was beyond them.”

The bad news is that we have missed the Christmas 2005 sales. The book is now to be called, “WALKING ON WHEELS” and will be in the shops by April 2006 with a mail-order service for disabled persons from me. The shop price, we hope, will be between £10 and £15, with a reduction plus free p&p to disabled persons. Register an interest now and I will let you know when “WALKING ON WHEELS” is on the market.

Contact me by e-mail on:

[eva.mccracken@getreal.co.uk](mailto:eva.mccracken@getreal.co.uk)

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