



The Disabled Rambler

The Newsletter of the Disabled Ramblers

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Editor's Ramblings



Like all voluntary organisations, Disabled Ramblers relies on its Committee to organise events and administer the day to day necessities of a charity. However, to ensure the future of DR, input from members is necessary and readers will recall that a Kitchener style poster asking for your help was included in the last newsletter. There has been some response to this but the committee feel that more is needed and to this end a session intended to glean ideas was included after the formal part of the AGM, both of which are reported in this edition.

We also had a reprint of our general publicity leaflet "Rambling on Wheels", which we are asking members to help distribute to anywhere potential members might see them, such as mobility shops, and doctors or hospital waiting rooms. Chris and I always have a few leaflets to hand in the car and the bag on her scooter. A4 and A5 sized publicity posters are also available. Supplies of the leaflet and any other publications can be obtained from myself at the address on the back of the newsletter.

We are continuously looking for ways to help members. A publication by John Cuthbertson, Rambles Organiser, on safety when rambling alone was circulated to members earlier in the year which contained a number of references to modern electronic safety aids. This prompted Robin Helby, our Technical Officer to relate his own experiences and advice which has a slightly different approach and is published in this newsletter. Other contributions were also received but have been held over to future issues to preserve the balance of this edition.

Another publication currently in development has the working title "Some considerations when choosing a scooter for rambling". As the name suggests we are hoping to give guidance on the *questions* you need to ask when deciding on what to buy. Anyone currently in this position who thinks that such a document would be helpful can obtain a copy of the draft for their personal use from me as, with the sun shining and rambling under way, it may be a little time before the final version is released.

There is a suggestion that we might review the suitability and performance of scooters for rambling in the way publications often review cars. Whilst people may feel this would be of value, it has a number of pitfalls, both legal and technical for our organisation and further debate in Committee is needed. However, we are happy to put prospective purchasers in touch with members who have used the scooter they are thinking of buying by passing on the buyer's contact details (with no guarantee of a response). Use the contact form on the web site in the first instance.

The first "Letters to the Editor" (during my watch) are published inside, relating to problems with accommodation. The Disabled Rambler is *your* publication, please use it to express an opinion on any relevant topic or draw attention to something. Maybe you'd like to share your ideas on kit or rambling safety? Whilst the web site may offer a quicker response, not everyone can or wants to visit it regularly.

We have another article from our intrepid adventurer, Terry Taylor, in this newsletter, describing his recent visit to Yellowstone National Park in the USA. He admits to some pre-flight concerns - that proved to be unfounded - which inspired me to pass on some tips on how Chris and I tackle flying in an article after Terry's. We hope this will be informative and allay some fears.

THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND ACTIVITIES

This year we had a new venue for the AGM - Kingsbury Outdoor Education Centre near the NEC, Birmingham - where the committee holds its meetings. It is very centrally located for those travelling a distance with reasonable facilities and local accommodation. A separate meeting of Regional Representatives was also held.

THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Chairman's Report

Retiring Chairman Tony Dickens began with an account of the changes in DR over the 16 years that he and Dorothy have been members. From Mike Bruton's small beginnings in the early 1990s, when the group was part of the Disabled Drivers Association and running one weekend a year, DR grew slowly until, by 1999, there were four members with Trampers and nineteen days of rambling. The opening of the Thames Footpath with all its new stiles being crossed by Robin Helby's specially designed ramps led to the publication of 'By All Reasonable Means', the Government's guide to providing access to the countryside. This was 'Phase 1' of the Disabled Ramblers.



L-R Arthur Lee, Eileen Tomlinson, Tony Dickens, John Cuthbertson, Liz Cuthbertson

'Phase 2' began with a major DR Conference 'New Millennium, New Horizons'. As a result of workshops during the conference, Robin developed the Mobile Support Unit (MSU), to provide an accessible toilet at the start and end of a ramble and then the Field Support Unit (FSU), which provided an accessible toilet during the ramble and a means of rescuing a faulty scooter. Robin also handled all the memberships and ramble bookings on Lotus 1-2-3, a little used computer program today, which could have left the DR rather vulnerable if he could not continue. At this point Dorothy Dickens came onto the committee and set up a parallel database to handle membership and bookings on the more widely available MS Access software.

Tony called 'Phase 3' the *IT Phase* when John Cuthbertson joined and rebuilt the website which has since grown and grown. This was just the start as John took over many of Robin's other roles when Robin's wife had a stroke and now organises the rambles, looks after the equipment and represents the Disabled Ramblers on national committees.

At this stage we had no one to tow the MSU so Veronica Jones stepped in. Last year she bought a car especially to enable her to tow the MSU and so supported most of the 2014 rambles. Now she has committed to attend all the rambles this year.

Throughout his talk, Tony emphasised that the Disabled Ramblers depends completely on a few dedicated members to run the organisation and relies on new members coming forward to take their place on the committee in due course.

So what next for the Disabled Ramblers? We have seen the start of a network of Regional Representatives who, starting with Val Rawlings, are running their own local rambles. Although these are not supported by loan scooters or field toilets, they are a great way of running more rambles and saving expense.

In conclusion Tony said "Our time in the Disabled Ramblers has brought great pleasure to our lives. Not just all the rambles but all the people we have met – many of whom are no longer with us. Thank you all for enriching our lives".

Receipt of Annual Report and Accounts

Eileen Tomlinson, our Treasurer, said that we are balancing our income and expenditure thanks to donations and legacies. In particular she thanked long-time member Antony Bennett who left £3,500 to the Disabled Ramblers in his will. There was also an unusual, and very welcome, donation from the friends of a Rambler (not a member of the Disabled Ramblers) who asked for donations to be given to us instead of flowers at the funeral. £260 was raised in this way. The accounts were approved.

Changes to the Committee

Val Rawlings stepped down as Secretary at this AGM but continues as a Regional Representative. Ron Lyon stepped down during the year. However, he continues in his role of Editor and Regional Representative. They were thanked for their contributions to the Disabled Ramblers.

Arthur Lee joined the Committee during the year and has agreed to take on the role of Chairman. At this point Tony Dickens handed over to Arthur who thanked Tony for all he has done for the Disabled Ramblers; it would be a hard act to follow.

During the year the Committee has also been strengthened by the addition of Paul Stanton, Rhiannon Robinson and Elizabeth Cuthbertson.

The new committee can be seen on the last page of this newsletter.

Award of the Wenman Trophy and Life Membership



Life Membership was awarded to Tony Dickens.



The Wenman Trophy was awarded jointly to Dorothy and Tony Dickens

In presenting these awards, John Cuthbertson said that Tony and Dorothy had dedicated many years of voluntary service to the Disabled Ramblers; Dorothy as Membership and Bookings Secretaries and Tony as Treasurer and Chairman.

(A.O.B) Discussion on Sustaining and Growing the Disabled Ramblers.

Since we need the help of the membership in running the Disabled Ramblers, Arthur asked those present what aspects of DR were important to them. In the main, members wanted DR to continue doing what it currently does:

Provide reconnoitred rambles, MSU, Field Toilet, Rescue Trailer and Loan Scooters - all of which provide opportunities to be with friends old and new.

Other ideas were:

- Facebook could increase membership.
- Work more with the Ramblers Association
- Lobby Government to improve access
- Meet with your local Footpaths Officer
- Join your Local Access Forum (LAF)
- Monitor the closure of Level Crossings by Network Rail, ensuring that ramped access to bridge crossings is provided

MEETING OF REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

This meeting had been organised by Terry Taylor to help representatives get to know each other and share experiences. A number of areas were covered, ranging from why RRs are needed at all to the basics of running regional rambles. There was significant exchange of ideas and experiences, mainly of a local and personal nature which most said had been worthwhile. The logistics of getting RRs together meant that the AGM was likely to be the only time that such a meeting could be convened but this should not prevent assistance and dialogue taking place by other means in the interim. Any RRs that were not present can obtain details of the discussions from John Cuthbertson.

AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

As an experiment it was decided to take advantage of the skilled instructors available to allow members to try archery and abseiling in the afternoon, which proved very popular. Others explored the adjacent Kingsbury Water Park on informal, personal rambles. The day was rounded off with a fish and chip meal.





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PROBLEMS WITH ACCOMMODATION ON RAMBLES

Here we have problems relating to two aspects of accommodation that many of us perhaps have no reason to think about. Please contact the writers directly if they are relevant to you. Note that Shirley is offering a service to members which may help *you* to improve your enjoyment of rambles.

Dear Friends,

I believe that we have a problem creeping up on us which has not been recognised. Many of our single members, both male and female (I know of at least four), are feeling 'excluded' from rambles by the prohibitive cost of accommodation. How is this possible? How sad, when one of DR's 'founding principles' must have been "Inclusivity for All".

One solution may be to offer a 'costs-only' stay with a fellow member in the area. Might you be able to help? Could you perhaps ask your own friends, to help? We have proposed the concept in North Wales and there has already been a positive response, With even moderate success here, could this not be of value in other areas, thus being of benefit for both Regional and National Rambles? Please can you help,?

Terry Taylor (theterrytaylor@yahoo.co.uk)

Accommodation a problem?

For some of us Disabled Ramblers finding accommodation can be difficult! Finance or needing a bit of mutual support, or just not wanting to sit by one's self in a b & b. You are not alone. Maybe you can offer to include another member in your arrangements? I am offering a 'matching' service for accommodation.

Please let me know if I can help! Sharing accommodation can be a mutual beneficial experience!

Shirley Keeble (essexshirl@hotmail.com)

Correspondence on any aspect of Disabled Ramblers or associated topics is welcomed using the contact details given on the last page of the newsletter. - Ed.

DR is now on FACEBOOK at www.facebook.com/disabledramblers There is a closed group which can be joined by emailing fb@disabledramblers.co.uk.

"Sticky" self adhesive **DISABLED RAMBLERS STICKERS** for your scooter and film ones for your car can be obtained free from Jan Kemp, Membership Secretary, at: disabledramblers.memsec@gmail.com .

BEING PREPARED FOR RAMBLING

By Robin Helby

As a scooter user since 1996, I have a little experience of what may go wrong when going rambling, often on my own! I have learnt that disaster strikes at any time. A second of inattention and you are stopped, maybe only half a mile from the nearest house until someone uses the footpath. Even in Surrey you could wait for days.

Recently I was on a local, heavily wooded common just a ¼ mile from home. Whilst checking an old bird's nest in a hedge I slipped and fell very heavily, so painfully that I thought I had broken a hip. It took me nearly an hour to get out of the wet mud and back onto my Trumper. I was very lucky. No phone signal and no-one around that late on a cold winter afternoon. Was I prepared? No, but if my hip had been broken, it could have been the next day before anyone walked their dog that way!

But my worst time of getting stuck was on a bridle path beside a small river in Yorkshire. The path was quite level but became wet sticky clay. It was much used by horses and eventually I got stuck with the wheels in hoof holes. Pulling or pushing was useless and I repeatedly fell over until I was coated with mud, head to toes. All I had with me was about 80 yards of 5mm rope and a folding saw.

Fortunately there were some small trees in the mass of brambles alongside the path, but only going forwards. I used the saw to cut a 24" long stick, then I pulled the rope from my Trumper round a tree and back again, tying it as tightly as possible. I inserted the stick between the ropes and then began twisting it. After what seemed like a million twists the rope shortened by all of 8". Then I let the stick go, tightened the rope and twisted again. I had to do this about 8 times before my Trumper was beyond the holes. Smothered with mud, I was not a happy Rambler! But at least I could turn round and attempt to get back home!

Another time I was on a recce of the Settle Loop with a Yorkshire Dales Ranger. I successfully climbed the steep rocky section but on the top, on the hard track, the bolt holding my offside front wheel had had enough. I had come prepared with a spare bolt but forgot the vital extra-long 6mm allen key. The super fit ranger cycled the 13 miles down to Settle and back with one - she was hardly panting. So very embarrassing!

There have been other close calls, but most times I have been better prepared to get home. I have learned the hard way what I need in my survival kit! Scooters may give fantastic mobility, but that mobility may vanish at the very worst moment. It really is worthwhile to be prepared, unless you like the thought of a night on the freezing ground. I strongly recommend that all members make up their own kit, particularly for when you are on your own.

Emergency Kit for Ordinary Rambling

The basic kit:

- Reserve Waterproofs - such as a large, long plastic mac, ex-military cape or even a small tarpaulin, plus something to sit on and shelter under.
- Whistle - Acme Thunderer or similar football referee type.
- LED torch - a head torch if possible to leave your hands free.
- Space blanket - but a large size to cover all of you.
- Tow Rope - 4 metres of about 5mm cord, with the ends tied together to make an endless loop, plus 10 to 12" length of broomstick handle (or similar). Useful for being pulled without having to tie - or undo - any knots.
- Drinks - especially during the summer.

These are the items that you should always have with you, some packed away for use in an emergency. The airtight/waterproof Lock & Lock type boxes are recommended, even if pricey.

Optional basic extras

- Anti-puncture sealant in all tyres. Strongly recommended!
- Puncture repair kit & small pump - a passer-by will usually help. You can drive on a flat tyre but it is hard work and not recommended.
- Mobile phone - with a fully charged battery, of course. (NB Mk2 Trampers can be fitted with a 12 volt socket for charging, but bring the charger.)
- First Aid kit - just basics, i.e. scissors, some plasters, a bandage, paper hankies, sting ointment, (unless you are a trained First Aider and know better).
- Secateurs & small folding saw - enough to remove brambles and branches if the route is blocked.
- Tool Kit - enough to take off wheels and battery covers.
- Map & simple compass - even a compass from a Christmas cracker should show north.
- Snack bars, nuts or similar that will keep in the summer heat.

Additional Desirable Precautions

Best of all is to have one or more companions – especially if going into the wild when even more care and additional quantities of the basics are advisable!

If you are alone, precautions are more recommended as your mobility is more restricted.

- Itinerary - leave details of your start and likely routes with someone.
- Emergency Call - if you don't contact them by an agreed time, prearrange they will call the emergency services.
- Leave them with a (sealed) envelope with details of your disability and any urgent medication, plus contact details for family or friend.



Sutton Park



Cannock Chase

AGM RAMBLES



ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

by Terry Taylor

Celia had the original idea for a Big Adventure, after five years of our new, restricted, 'normality' due to my condition. We had always loved travelling, having visited many outlandish places, before and during our married lives, but there was one place came to mind immediately, **Yellowstone**, the World's first National Park, established in 1872. Perfect!

Decision made, we investigated the practicability of my flying to America, my first flight for six years or more. We could see no *real* problems, other than my 'mobility' and our travel agent assured us that there would be help available from the airline staff. I have to say that I was somewhat cynical as to what *help* would materialize. Eventually Departure Day dawned, and my apprehension was high. Our daughter, Anna, met us at Manchester's Terminal 3, as a vital support for both Celia and myself on this trip - not least by sharing the driving. We checked in, got rid of the bags and were told that help would be available "inside."

I should not have doubted their system as our whole family was escorted to our departure gate through all formalities with no hesitations. With minimal fuss, and great support, we were soon on our way to JFK, New York. JetBlue's excellent Kristina who did an exemplary job of getting us to the correct terminal at JFK for our connecting flight to Salt Lake City, Utah. Eventually, after a 30 hour day, we fell into bed extremely tired, but pleased to be in the US again.



The spectacular Tetons, in Wyoming. The highest point, Grand Teton, is 2100m, 3rd peak from the right.

Next morning we were undecided whether to rest at our hotel or travel on in the hire car we'd booked. As Celia and Anna felt ready to hit the road, we did just that, with me in the back, watching the beautiful scenery on the drive north. Forests, rivers and mountains passed on all sides, into Wyoming through Logan Canyon and into **Grand Teton National Park**. Wow! By the time we'd got to Jackson, Wyoming, the ladies had had enough, so we decided to stay a night or two before moving on to Yellowstone, just over 100 miles away.

Our first local trip was on the aerial tram (cable-car) from Teton village to Rendez-vous Mountain, a magnificent view-point of peaks and snowfields, with many skiers and parapenters in action under

a spotless clear-blue sky. Wonderful! This was followed by a scenic drive through the Teton National Park, giving us a fantastic view of the Grand Teton (2,100m), the highest mountain in the area. The day after was a float trip down the Snake River accompanied by a wondrous variety of wildlife, including Ospreys and Bald Eagles.

Then we were on the road again, but not for long, as the distance to Yellowstone came down steadily and we entered the Park at its South Gate, to be met soon after by what we found to be the essence of Yellowstone, it's hydro-thermal odours - not actually too unpleasant if you could only escape them. The scenery, rivers, canyons and wide-open spaces, just what you'd expect in Wyoming, "Cowboy Country" with buffalo roaming the range free - though very wild at times - and weighing in at up to a ton in weight!



"Oh! Give me a home, where the Buffalo roam, and the scent of sage-brush fills the air." Peace and tranquility in Hayden Valley.!

We drove steadily, the speed limit being 45mph, but we were forced to stop, more than once, by the incredible views in all directions. Distant mountain ranges, roaring white water in rocky canyons, the immense Yellowstone Lake, and the ever-present mists and fumes, of thermal springs, vents, fumaroles and other alien curiosities, all new to us. We were keen to reach our little log cabin in the woods, near Silvergate, which would be our home for the next week. Though "un-adapted", this proved to be very comfortable indeed. Another big concern answered!

For our first day in Yellowstone we decided to visit Mammoth Springs, a major centre of hydro-thermal activity, not the only, but without doubt, potentially the most active hydro-thermal area on Planet Earth. It was our first close-up view of this phenomenal scene and it was literally an 'earth-shaking' experience, on the Upper Terraces Drive - an easier option for us than the all-walking Lower Terraces. On this our introduction to the 'Wonders of Yellowstone', the beauty of the Orange Mound Spring, it's orange thermo-philic ('extreme-heat-loving') primitive microbial organisms building new terraces before our very eyes.



"Orange Mound Spring", Mammoth Springs, our first close-up of this amazing place.

During the next couple of days we were visited by Mark, a friend I'd met via ice climbing in Canada, who lives in Bozeman, Montana, a mere 50 miles away, whom we were keen to meet again, after several years. He would stay a few days before setting off on a tough cycling trip, subsequently returning for a second spell. His idea on our first day out was to visit the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River, not as deep as it's namesake, but with two impressive waterfalls that I was keen to see, as close up as possible, naturally. We were on the road to Canyon Village at 8.00am and it was another beautiful day! To reach the falls required two short walks from the North Rim trail, and one longer, steeper descent to the top of the

Lower Falls. Very exhilarating! We also went to Artist's Point, a South Rim trail view-point, on the stunning 'Painted Wall' of the Canyon.

Next morning, after Mark's first departure, we were off to see the World-famous, "Old Faithful", the Geyser of all Geysers! Despite the area being very commercialized, we had a very good day, going round the various board-walk circuits from where we had close-up views of the amazing geysers on Geyser Hill, I from the 'comfort' of a huge, borrowed wheelchair, (for free), capacity 50 stone, I believe! 'Old Faithful', predictably erupting to a timetable of plus-or-minus 10 minutes was slightly



"Old Faithful", still erupting on time, after all these years.!

late, but like buses, another one came along before too long, which amazed onlookers in the seating provided for the *performance*. Many of the Upper Geyser Basin's 'celebrity' geysers look remarkably innocuous, but in fact they are anything but, due to breakable ground surfaces, etc. etc.. This accounts for the number of 'warning' signs, everywhere you look, for things which have caused many painful deaths over many years, and continue to do so.

Today was to be a semi-rest day, as Mark had suggested a good Scenic Drive, outside the park, a circuit in the Beartooth Mountains of Montana, an area of immense forests and mountains, alive with grizzlies and other wild-life, and far more remote than Yellowstone. Starting from our cabin, we drove to Cooke City, little more than a village, to join the 'official' Beartooth Scenic Highway, apparently declared "one of the best in the USA," by those who know about these things. It did not disappoint! with its views and distant panoramas of majestic mountains in the "Big Sky" state. We saw ski-ers on the high Beartooth Pass, at over 10,000 ft., with snow banks way higher than our car.

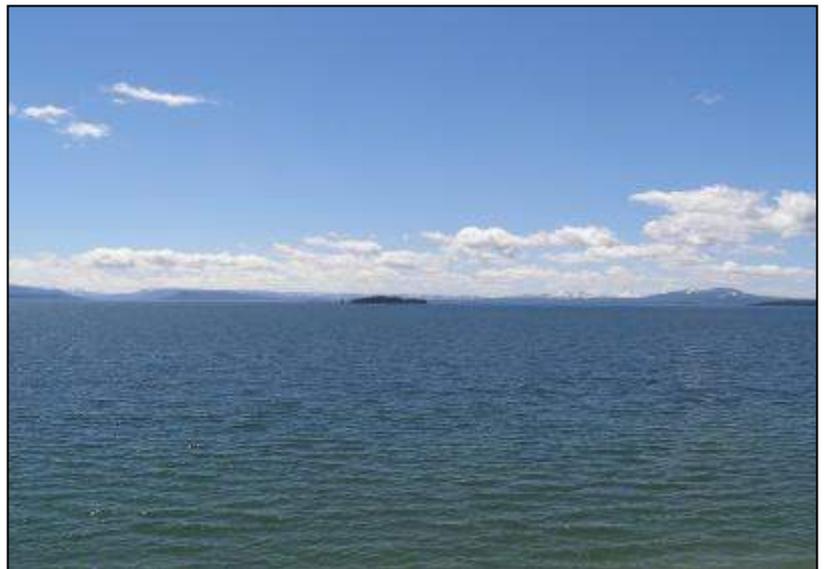


The impressive Yellowstone River Canyon. Kayaking definitely NOT advised.!

We stopped for a while in Red Lodge, then returned to our cabin via the Chief Joseph Highway, so named for the Nez Percee Indians, whose tribe were persecuted by the US government, in the last years of the 19th , and early 20th century. Beautiful wide-open vistas galore, especially of Pilot Peak in the Beartooth Range, looking like a smaller, sharper, Matterhorn. Wow! Next day, with Mark's return from his strenuous cycling trip, for his final day with us, he chose to take me to see what for many *experts* is the *perfect geyser*, the "Grand Prismatic Spring", near Norris. This is a multi- coloured "wonder of wonders" which, with it's techni-coloured beauty, does not disappoint. The infinite variety, of these hydro-thermal reminders of our

volcanic origin is, totally mind-blowing to me.

We took a short diversion here, via Firehole Canyon, very peaceful, with many anglers having fun In the fast-flowing river. On arrival, we warm up with the Porcelain Basin circuit, not too difficult, but very interesting. We then headed towards "Old Faithful" and Mid-way Basin, for another boardwalk tour. The very next one was, for me, my all-time favourite, a huge clear-blue lake rippling gently, like a hot-tub, but very deep and mysteriously inviting. (I refused the invite!) this was "Excelsior Geyser Crater", a real beauty, at least the size of an Olympic Pool! Wow x10! I am so pleased, that I was able to see so much, as I did have nagging doubts, before departure.



Our first view of the truly enormous Yellowstone Lake, 7,732 ft. above sea level, area 136 squaremiles and 110 miles of shore-line. It has even got 'underwater' geysers!

The only thing we did on our last day at the cabin was to walk down to the Trading Post, to send emails and take a look at the creek where a Moose Mother and calf had been seen - but we didn't. Setting off early next morning, on our way to Jackson and the comforts of the Lexington for another night, we took a circuitous route as we had more to see in the south of Yellowstone. This time it was the mud volcanoes of West Thumb, on the shore of Yellowstone Lake, 'en route' to the South Gate exit from the Park. Very interesting too, as we saw Hell's Gate, a river of molten mud, gushing from a rock-face tunnel.

Many hotels who claim to being 'disabled accessible', don't provide truly adequate facilities, for example, for those in wheelchairs who can't climb over even a small sill into a bath. Often it's one, totally inadequate grab-handle and no hooks for clothing at all! I don't think they ever *road-test* them, on real disabled persons. However, the 'Lexington' of Jackson Hole, Wyoming has got it absolutely right with a wet-room with rails all round, very rare in my experience and I am more than happy to give credit where it's due.

Logan Canyon was again both beautiful and impressive, with its towering rock-walls, and its roaring white water. We pulled off the road at the canyon's end at a scenic overlook onto the Great Salt Lake Basin, much as the early Mormon settlers may have done. Quite a view, but could it really be the *Promised Land*? They must have been very tough Men, but they were certain that God was on their side, which must have been a great comfort to them, in their time of need.

Next morning, our last full day in America, we decided to have a look at the Salt Lake itself, a few miles up the road. It was a rather disappointing experience, I regret to say, with industrial detritus everywhere. The Salt Lake itself was rather squalid in appearance, and we came back fairly *underwhelmed*.

The return trip, this time via Chicago was generally uneventful, if a bit bumpy, with only a minor problem due to the lack of availability of loan wheelchairs. The in-flight choice of American TV channels for "entertainment" made the final leg endlessly boring. What a relief it was to get outside, and feel the cool, Manchester air, with a hint of rain in the air.

Recommended viewing for those wishing to learn more, about this area and its wildlife:

The BBC-2 DVD, "Yellowstone" for the stunning photography of it's beautiful scenery.

"Beavers behaving Badly", a programme about the busy beavers of Teton NP, causing mayhem and havoc, in their natural habitat.! First shown on BBC-1 on 31.7.14. Look out for the DVD.!

TIPS FOR THE DISABLED TRAVELLER

By Chris & Ron Lyon

Terry Taylor's anxieties in his article made us think that our own experiences may help members gain the confidence to fly. Chris had a severe stroke in 2006 which resulted in her being paralysed down one side, confining her mainly to a wheelchair (but she can walk a few paces with help). She also has breathing and continence problems, reduced memory and poor eyesight as a result of the stroke and is easily fatigued. She can't drive, get on a coach or into an SUV car and travelling can present special problems, not least of which is using the loo, both during the flight and overnight in a hotel. However, with a little effort and planning it is possible to take relaxed, long-haul fly drive holidays in relative comfort. Develop and use check lists. Use any help offered by friends and family!

START EARLY, PLAN, PREPARE, ASK FOR HELP AND GET THINGS IN WRITING

First, find a good travel agent. We have found that an independent is more likely to be sympathetic. They have the knowledge and contacts to help you on the way but you need to have confidence in them, work with them and do your bit.

Know your limitations. Be honest and don't struggle, there's nothing to prove. Can you manage aircraft steps and how far can you walk to an aircraft seat – or will you need a "carry on" chair? Can you use a coach transfer to the resort? Do you need a disabled room and what if there aren't any – what do you *need* to manage? Make a list and estimate the weight of additional things that you have to take because of your disability. Remember, if you need *personal* help you will have to travel with a carer.

Involve your GP at the start of the adventure. Ensure that you get any necessary inoculations in plenty of time to have any reactions to them. Establish what you need to declare to your insurers, plus the cover you need – and DON'T travel without it.

Draft a letter, for your GP to sign, outlining your condition and medication, starting with a statement that you are fit to fly (there may be a charge for this). Your GP should add the necessary medical terms which can be a godsend in a medical emergency. Include how your condition restricts your mobility (e.g. can't do steps, able to walk five paces only) and indicate what equipment you need to take. We found a "flat pack" commode that only weighs 6kgs and goes in a suitcase. We also need an adequate supply of special continence pads which can be difficult to source abroad. A GP's signature on Practice notepaper validates your needs and opens many doors. Plan to take a few days' extra medication in case of delays and a prescription counterfoil or copy should you run out. You may need additional documentation to take certain medication (e.g. Opiates) abroad.

How can the airlines help? Disability legislation, especially within the EU, means that airlines are obliged to help – and they genuinely want to - but they do need to know your requirements. Terry was sceptical but discovered that this help is there, mainly after check-in. Most airlines have a Welfare Department that your Travel Agent can access on your behalf, armed with your GP letter. Ask for extra luggage allowance for both hold and cabin bags. Keep medication in hand luggage. Extra hold luggage allowance may be only on the outbound flight. Try and book a seat close to the loo if you have mobility problems – though there are restrictions on where a disabled person may sit and the plane may be changed!

Get it in writing! We can't over emphasise the importance of getting all special arrangements and allowances in writing – preferably on the note paper of the airline or tour operator, but emails are better than nothing. It can be useful if your travel agent also confirms the arrangement on their notepaper. We regularly arrive at check-in and hotels and they deny all knowledge of our arrangements until we wave a confirming letter at them – but don't let them take the original – **copy it si, keep it non!**

Arriving at the airport. For us, the hardest part of a flight is parking the car and getting to check in with a manual wheelchair and luggage trolley. Some airports now have "help points" near drop-off areas – use them! Security measures mean that you will not be able to leave your car or luggage unattended. If you are parking your car whilst away, establish beforehand if the transfer buses are wheelchair accessible and, if so, go to the parking first and take your luggage to the airport on the bus. We find a "meet and greet" service is the answer, though it is more expensive and not always available. We go to the parking and they drive our car plus us and luggage to the airport and the reverse when we get back. We have still to take a large scooter like a Supersport on an aircraft – any experiences?

Check in and security. Have copies of all your paperwork to hand for when they deny all knowledge of your allowances and medication. Be polite but firm as its not the fault of the person using the monitor! If necessary, say that you need help, though it should be obvious.

During the flight. Ask the cabin crew in good time. Say what help you need and keep essentials accessible. They keep a "carry-on" chair on board and they need to ensure that you are safe. Some new aircraft have special disabled loo provisions but on most it is still a cramped affair – especially if you need personal help from a carer.

Transfers. With fly–drives you usually pick up the car at the airport, but jet lag on long haul flights can make driving dangerous, especially if you are disabled. Try and sort out some way that you can collect it the following day. If you can't use a coach, ask for a taxi transfer. Some companies will pay the taxi one-way, but get it confirmed in writing!

At the hotel. They *should* expect you and know your requirements so, easy peasy? – usually yes, but not always. We find many "accessible" rooms poorly designed, especially if a carer has to help. We can operate in a sparsely-furnished ordinary room but often have to ask for some pieces of furniture to be removed. There are stick-on grab-rails with sucker attachments which are OK on a tiled surface for a balance point but may not hold weight.

PLAN TO ENJOY YOUR ADVENTURE! If we can help - ask, and send us your tips! We'll gladly circulate them to anyone interested.

THE VIRTUAL RAMBLER

By Eileen Tomlinson

We sit and plot and pour over maps and magazines, we surf the net and fantasise where we would go. If only we had the money...or the time...or the stamina, support, or our old life back.

There is a calming effect looking at pictures of lakes and mountains, perhaps reminiscing about past times or wistfully thinking 'I would love to explore the Highlands'. In reality some of us will not get past this virtual world of checking out websites and reading the outdoor mags. The pleasure is in the hope and for some this is enough – just in case the reality doesn't live up to expectations. Judging by the number of hits on our website there are many armchair ramblers. What are we hoping for? Is there a scooter or car for sale that would suit me? Is there an article that will take my breath away and transport me to that idyll with fresh mountain air and a light breeze. I wonder, given the British weather, the traffic, the distances and accommodation – should we pay more attention to this virtual world?

Webcams, head cams mean we can see it all with a cup of tea at our elbow and a biscuit in our lips. Well you may have to pop out for the biscuits but we still need *some* exercise. What we lack here is the social interaction - a bit of banter - so what do we do? Should we have a Facebook group? Letters to the editor are always welcome. If you see something interesting let us know. Here is a gate design that did not pass the bridleway test.

There is always someone there with a camera when you are just horsing around!Your Virtual Friend.



COTSWOLD REGIONAL RAMBLE - SNOWSHILL TO LAVINGTON



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