



RAMBLERS

Staffordshire



STEP OUT

THE STAFFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS MAGAZINE

Spring 2023

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FROM THE EDITOR

After a cold and recently damp Winter, I am
looking forward to some 'shirt-sleeve and
shorts' rambling! This Spring edition has lots of
interesting articles for you. The lead one is by a
good friend of mine, Ned Edwards, who writes
about Cannock Chase in the First World War
(WW1). He also provides a six mile ramble that
takes in some of the atifacts from the period.
Even if you are not very interested in the
history, the walk itself is a good outing. Area
Officers provide us with their latest news and
there is a facinating article on the 16 land
islands in Staffordshire.

The group reports present a very
encouraging picture. Numbers on walks are
increasing and members are keen to become
walk leaders and committee members. Most
groups write positively about social events
and group holidays. I wonder if it might be
possible to set up a Staffordshire data base of
accommodation that groups have used,
showing the price, facilities etc. Any ideas?

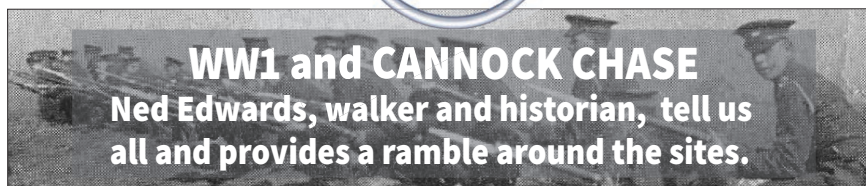
This Step Out is a slimmer volume than last
time largely because of costs. I have had to
leave several planned articles out, although I
hope they can be included in the Autumn
edition. We desperately need advertising to
help finance Step Out. I do not have the time or
skills to go and find advertising but I am sure
someone amongst our readers would see it as
an enjoyable challenge. Please let me or Peter
Matthews know if it is you! Thank you to all
contributors and to
Angie Spencer for her
sterling proof reading.



Gerald Griffin



→ In this **STEP** OUT



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CANNOCK CHASE AND THE GREAT WAR

**Ned Edwards tells us
the story behind the walk.**

Due to its central location with vast areas of open space the Chase has been used for military exercises since Napoleonic times, non more so than at the end of the Franco Prussian war in 1870. The British government were wary of the formation of the new German Empire and their possible desires for European expansion. As a result, from 1873 large military exercises were carried out on the Chase. The troops would have been accommodated in tents which, depending on the time of year, would not be the most welcoming or hospitable place to be!

In 1891 Lord Lichfield agreed to have plans drawn up for two camps on the Chase which encompassed his grouse moors, one at Brocton and one close to Rugeley, bordering Penkridge Bank Road. Each camp was designed to accommodate a complete division; a capacity of 20,000 troops split into 20 battalions. The camps were planned to be self-sufficient with an infrastructure that included telecommunications, road and rail links.

August 1914 with Britain declaring war on Germany, hundreds of thousands of men signed up to 'Kitchener's Battalions'; probably on the premiss that they would have their own bed, three square meals a day and a new pair of boots. Anyway it would all be over by Christmas! The camp plans were dusted off and work began in September on Rugeley Camp. A total of 10 miles of sewers were installed and the railway link from Brocton and Milford station to Hednesford was constructed comprising 13 miles of track and sidings. This line became known locally known as the 'Tackeroo', servicing both camps with 0-6-0 locomotives and rolling stock requisitioned from the Cannock collieries. Soon a





Opposite, The Rifleman poses. Above, a training platoon.

cinema, a theatre, YMCA huts, banks, a Post Office, and branches of W. H. Smith and Boots the Chemists were added for the troops.

With a workforce of about 1000 men, 500 huts were finished by March 1915. At Rugeley Camp, each hut was constructed from wood fixed onto concrete piers. At Brocton the huts were fixed onto wooden supports due to the undulating nature of the ground. Internally the huts were lined with an asbestos type of material as insulation, heated by a single coal burning stove. Each hut usually housed 28 men. In contrast officers were housed 11 to a hut with partitioned rooms, each with its own stove. By March 1915 the first troops from the East Lancashire & York and Lancashire regiments moved in.

Supplies were brought in via the 'Tackeroo' railway to the camp depots which included ordnance cold and grain stores at the Glacial Boulder for Brocton Camp and what is now the Tackeroo camp site for Rugeley Camp. There was also a coal depot along with a

weighbridge at Chase Road corner at Brocton, the remains of which can still be seen today.

Roads and tracks around the camps were constructed from foundry slag as this angular by-product knitted together well with the indigenous pebble bed gravel.

Electricity for Brocton Camp was supplied by the camp's own power station situated near to the glacial boulder. Rugeley Camp was powered from the local collieries. Water for Brocton Camp came from boreholes and stored in a 30,000-gallon tank situated near the glacial boulder. Its foundations can still be seen today. Rugeley Camp's water supply came from two huge 50,000-gallon tanks situated close to the current Tackeroo campsite, being fed from Moors Gorse Pumping Station.

Both camps had two sewage treatment plants. Rugeley's were situated in Brindley Bottom at the Rugeley end of Kingsley Wood Road. Brocton had facilities at Mere Pits and Oldacre valley. The remains of all treatment plants can still be seen. At the end of hostilities,



Above, Brocton Camp. Opposite, Rugeley Camp. Below, Tackeroo Railway.

the clinker from the settling tanks was used locally as road foundations.

TRAINING

Basic training usually lasted 14 weeks. Marching, field entrenchment, musketry, bayonet drill, gas warfare, grenade practice, trench raiding and navigation courses took place outside. Indoor training included map reading, signalling and reconnaissance.

Everyone was taught entrenchment. The practice included digging scale size trenches in all weathers and sleeping in them to give them a taste of the front line. Many of these trenches can be seen today as can parts of a complete model trench system that was constructed close to the Tackeroo camp site and only unearthed in the last 20 years or so. This was such an important find that it has been granted ancient monument status.

Every man had to be proficient with the Lee Enfield .303 rifle. Initial training was done in indoor rifle ranges with .22 rifles. When proficient they would then continue their training on one of the eight outdoor rifle ranges with targets

between 100 – 600 yards. There were also several pistol ranges for officers. To get their full rate of pay a soldier had to discharge his rifle 15 times in a minute 'in the general direction of the enemy'. If you were found to have an aptitude for this you would be posted to the sniper school at Brocton Camp. Here the snipers had their own 1000 yard range shooting from near the glacial boulder across Sherbrook valley. By 1916 Cannock Chase was training 16,000 men at a time and was Britain's largest training camp.

BRINDLEY HOSPITAL

Inevitably war brings casualties, and whilst Sister Dora at Brocton and Ravenhill House at Brereton could accommodate the wounded in 1916 it was decided to build a dedicated hospital at Brindley Heath. It was to have 1000 beds, in 12 wards. This hospital served the camps for the remainder of the war and was still in commission until 1924 treating victims of shell shock and gassing. Later, half of it was demolished whilst the other half was converted into housing for the local mining community. This became known as Brindley



Village. It had a school, a shop and a social club and was inhabited until 1956.

REGIMENTS

Over the entirety of the war it is estimated that over 500,000 soldiers, spread over 30 or more different regiments passed through the camps, either in transit for overseas posting, volunteer and conscript training duties, reserve battalions and towards the end of the war, Young Soldier Battalions. Pals battalions like the Accrington Pals were in residence at Rugeley camp and Brocton camp hosted

troops of the 5th. Reserve Regiment New Zealand Rifle Brigade from September 1917. The New Zealanders were very experienced fighting men having been successfully deployed at the battle of Messines. Their role at Brocton was to impart their knowledge of modern warfare techniques. They were on a rolling posting of four months and in total over 1950 NZ troops visited the Camp. They had a mascot, a Great Dane called Freda. She died in 1918 and is buried in 'H' lines. Her collar was returned to the National Army Museum in Waiouru, New Zealand.



PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

A prisoner of war camp was set up at Brocton Camp for 9000 prisoners. The guards were mostly serving soldiers who had been deemed unfit for front line duty. Training was also given here for officers of other camps. Wounded prisoners deemed not a risk would be routinely moved to other camps and then transported to the Netherlands until the cessation of hostilities. It is thought that over 29,000 POWs passed through Brocton Camp.

CEMETERIES

There are two cemeteries at Broadhurst Green. The Commonwealth Cemetery that is visible from the road is the final resting place of mainly British Soldiers. However 286 German and 73 New Zealanders are also interned there, most of whom died from Spanish Flu in 1918.

Further down the track that runs alongside the Commonwealth Cemetery is a further cemetery. This was a joint venture between the British and German governments to establish a centralised cemetery containing the re-interred remains of almost 5000 German prisoners and internees from both world wars who died in Britain. This cemetery was consecrated in the 1960's. It contains the remains of many German women who again died in Britain of Spanish flu.

FURTHER READING

A Town for Four Winters by C. J. & G. P.

Whitehouse

A Long Slow Walk from the Station by Beryl Holt

Prisoners on Cannock Chase by Richard Pursehouse

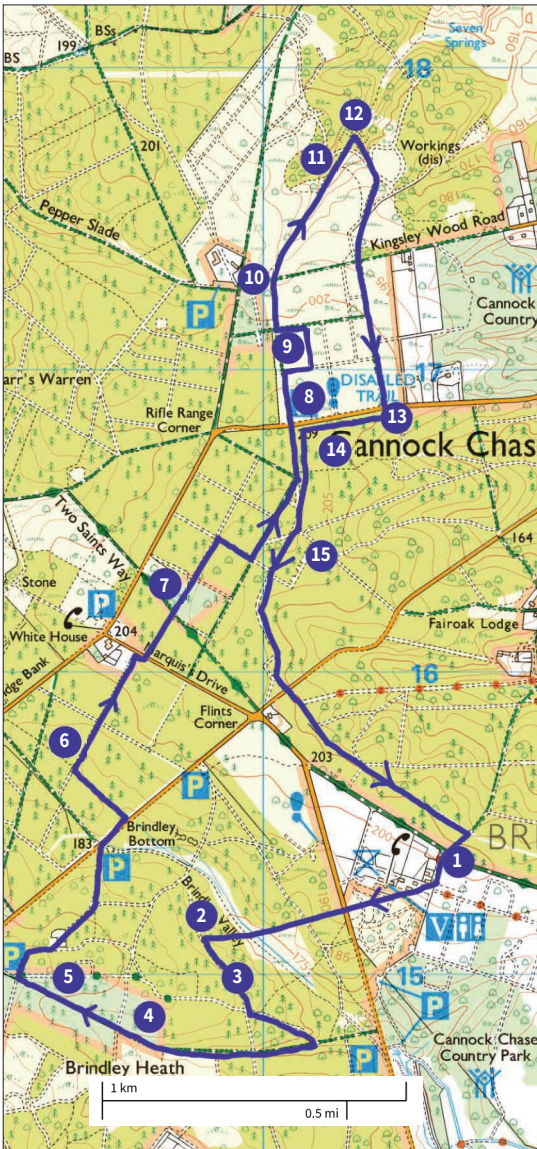
Brindley Village a Legacy of the Great War by Linda Barrett and Phil Grainger



The interior of the WW1 hut at the start of the walk.

THE WALK

This is a six mile, self-guided walk for individuals and groups. The terrain is hilly but not steep. The walk features the Rugeley Camp which was built on concrete foundations, some of which remain. Brocton Camp was built on wood which has long disappeared.



1 The walk starts at the WW1 hut next to the café at the Marquis Drive Centre. The hut is a fascinating museum of WW items, and is well worth a visit. It is open at the weekends. If a group wanted to walk during the week, it may be possible to arrange for the hut to be open by calling Ned Edwards, in advance, on 07887 931988. He may also be able to provide a leader for the walk. Start by walking from the hut, with the café on your right. Pass the red and blue topped post (RB) no. 1 and follow the path over two roads to a small car park. Go diagonally right to RB post 4 and right down hill. Ignore post RB 5, continuing to valley floor and RB post 6. Turn left.

2 On the right you can see the concrete remains of a WW1 sewage plant, shown below, one of two on the Rugeley camp.



3 As you walk south you soon cross the path of the Tackeroo Railway, which a keen eye will see ran in a cutting by RB post 7. Continue uphill keeping straight on the main track leading to the woods. Just before them, turn left. After some distance take the first path on the right. At the next path junction, turn right.

4 You are now in the WW1 hospital grounds. Nothing remains of the buildings, which were converted into dwellings in c1926, and named Brindley Heath Village. Along the route you will see many moving memorials to people who lived in the village. The WW1 hospital, shown below, had many 'Shell Shocked' patients. The Rhododendron walk was planted as a quiet place for such troops to recover in WW1. After the Rhododendrons the nurses quarters were on the left. Continue straight.



5 On the right, there is the concrete base for a WW1 flag pole, next to an information board. This was the main entrance to the hospital. Continue to the end of the track, where there is another information board. Turn sharp right and continue to RB post 10. Here turn left onto the metalled track and bear right to go down the hill to a car park. Cross the busy road.



Left, the Rhododendron walk and an old photograph of the hospital. Above the flag pole base with some memorials. Below, another Brindley Village memorial.



6 Turn right after crossing the road and follow the path between the fence and the road. At the end of the fence turn left onto a well-worn path. Take the second path on the right and soon you will see, on your left, a large concrete slab. This is the remains of a 'Destructor' (see picture below) one of many in the camp where waste was burned and recycled.



7 Many of the paths you are following were established in WW1. Slag from the steel works at Bilston was put down on paths to stop soldiers' boots from slipping on the natural bunter pebble bed. Look for the blue colour and sharp shape of the Bilston slag amongst the natural pebbles here. You can spot them along many of the paths you are using. Follow the path to Marquis Drive. Cross the road and follow the worn path right, where you can see the upturned remains of concrete hut footings. Take the first path on the left and follow the straight track. Here again you can see the Blue Bilston Slag. This path was the heart of the Rugeley Camp. Take the fourth turning on the right, which leads to the original Ordnance Depot, now the site of the Tackeroo Camp Site. Turn left and walk to the camp site gates.



8 Cross the road to the much used car park, opposite the Tackeroo Camp Site entrance. This is the remains of a much bigger WW1 parade ground for No.2 Battalion. Keep on the left hand side of the car park and follow the Bridle Way pointer. Immediately on your left is the concrete base of a guard house. Later, look for a second telegraph pole on your left (No 29) and take the turning on the right. Take the first path on your left.

9 This diversion is to see some of the best remains of WW1 hut footings. Immediately on the left is the complete concrete base of an ablution block with cubicles for showers and toilets. (See next page.) At the northern end you can see indents in the concrete for wooden posts, which would have held doors. Also at the northern end, next to the path, is the exit of the drainage pipes from the showers, shown below. Continue to the 'T' junction, turn left. Take the first path on the





Top, The bathhouse foundations and above, a WW1 photograph of a bathhouse.

10 The point at which the path crosses the Kingslet Wood Road is the top of one of the eight WW1 600 yards shooting ranges down the natural valley. These outdoor .303 ranges would have been used by those soldiers who showed their proficiency with a small bore .22 rifle. In

1914 the trees would have been cleared to give a clear sight of the valley bottom and the Stop Butt. As you walk down the valley a keen eye will identify the raised man-made shooting positions at intervals of 100 yards. The mounds on the path show where some were. A WW1 drainage ditch follows the path down the valley.

11 The best preserved of these shooting positions is near the bottom of the valley at 200 yards, shown below. Continue down the valley to its end.



12 In front of you is a massive man-made soil wall; the Stop Butt. Targets would have been positioned on the raised ledge in front of it, the trench behind being the safe haven for men raising the targets. The Butt would have absorbed the spent bullets. It is easy to find the black remains of bullets on the left of the Stop Butt, as the photo below shows, although few have retained their 'bullet' shape after impact. Turn right below the Butt and follow the path uphill and a view of the water filled quarry. Keeping the quarry on your left continue to the top of the hill and turn right. Walk to Kingsley Wood Road. Turn left at the barrier and immediately right. Continue to the main road.



13 Cross the main road and turn right onto the path running parallel to the road. On your left are the remains of WW1 training trenches. They were only discovered in 2009 and are now a listed site. However, although they are very near the path, the terrain to see them is undulating and difficult. So if you choose to visit, please take extreme care!

14 Turn left onto the access road to the camp site. Ignore the path on your right, then veer right where the paths bifurcate. On your left is the camp car park. This was a WW1 storage area and the large concrete plinth is the foundation of storage huts for items such as food delivered from the railway. At this stage the path follows the route of the railway. Take the track on your right at the path junction just past the end of the relic and turn left at the barrier.



15 The remainder of the walk is along WW1 paths. Notice how 'army' straight they are! Huts, similar to the Museum one, were placed on either side of the tracks. Take the second track on your left and then second left again. At the 'T' junction turn right and cross the road. Go through the barrier and soon bear right. Continue straight at the wide convergence of tracks. At the next path junction turn right, cross the road and continue the short distance to the WW1 hut.

Ned Edwards

Area Secretary

Peter Matthews

Writes.....

Prior to our AGM it was agreed that 5 questions would be presented to Central Office for their response. Whilst not all of the answers were provided there was a partial response which is reproduced below.

How much was paid by Ramblers to the agency given the task of devising our new branding? What pay-back period was assumed for this project to recoup this investment? What measurements, if any, were defined to monitor the benefits? Is the Board satisfied that the money was well spent?

The ultimate aim of this brand refresh is to make the Ramblers stand out and reach more people, so we have a new logo and a new look and feel to our website and resources. Our mission is still as relevant as ever, the brand refresh will give us a more contemporary and distinctive look to help us reach more members and raise awareness of our work.

In April this year, the General Council unequivocally expressed its view that the arbitrary imposition of a requirement for walk leaders to complete a tick list before a walk was practically useless as a Risk Assessment was having an extremely negative effect on walk leader retention, and should be immediately withdrawn. Why has this recommendation not been implemented?

The board is meeting early December to discuss this subject. The main focus is understanding our role as a board in satisfying our obligations as an organisation when it comes to managing

risk across our activities and what are the various options going forwards. It is a complex area which is ever evolving and there is no one way of approaching things. It will be important that we give time to listen and work with our walk leader community in determining any changes to our approach to managing safety and risk on group walks. This is also being discussed in December with the intention to look at options such as a short survey and focus groups to gather views. More news on these to follow later.

A decision was taken to move resources and documentation away from ramblers.org.uk onto Assemble. As a result, members no longer have access to any resources unless they are registered as a volunteer. When the decision was taken, was it appreciated that many members would be adversely affected? With hindsight, does the Board now acknowledge there is a problem? What actions are planned to remedy the fact that many members have no access to information they need?

If a well-run company were to invest heavily in a computer system like Assemble, they would first prepare a business plan to estimate: the initial set up costs, the on-going running costs and the tangible annual benefits. Furthermore, they would identify Key Performance Indicators and monitor them over the

lifetime of the project. Did the Board or Staff take this approach? What were the estimated figures? What are the actual costs and benefits so far?

Many members, especially IT professionals, consider the current system to be unfit for purpose. What is the view of the Board? What are the future plans to remedy the shortcomings or introduce a replacement?

A With the formation of the new website we are looking at what information is kept and held where and for whom. The old website had become cluttered with lots of content which was out of date and hard to find. Alongside this we also introduced Assemble, an online database and portal for all volunteers and volunteer managers which should be seen as the one stop shop to go for info to support people's volunteering. We appreciate that this has meant that some members, not registered as volunteers, may no longer access certain information and we will continually review what is placed where. We are also reviewing the role of Assemble alongside other systems such as Salesforce.

Q What are the Area's guidelines in relation to local groups organising holidays for members?

A Group holidays do not form part of the Ramblers charitable activities (as they are not open to all and are not promoting walking as such). This means that ramblers funds cannot be used for holidays but the treasurer's guidance allows for holidays to be self-funded from an account other than the rambler main account. Groups must adhere to the guidelines which can be found in the Finance Guide for Treasurers.

Q An additional question was raised.

Would you agree, with hindsight, it would have been courteous to send an email to General Council representatives to inform them of the Board's conclusions? Or do you think that posting them on the website is in line with the stated objectives of improving communications?

A Yes, everyone has been updated.

It seems that when the Board met in December they decided to send a questionnaire to walk leaders (closing 5 February) from which they will evaluate their response and present it at General Council in April. It is expected that the revised version will be introduced in September. More support for walk leaders, including training will be available.

If any individual or Group would like further information then please contact me, Peter Matthews who can provide further information.

peter.matthews20@ntlworld

Peter Matthews, Area Secretary



Spring brings Daffodils!

Claire Watkins

**Our new Ramblers
Regional Engagement
Officer for the
Midlands and East
writes:**



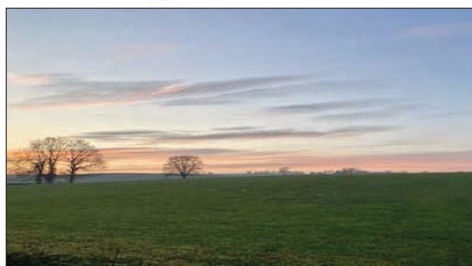
HELLO

I've had a fabulous welcome from staff and people who volunteer across the region and especially on local walks. Being in this role ensures we continue to open the way for everyone to enjoy the pleasures of walking and meet everyone who shares the same passion for walking. It's a great time to spring forward with Ramblers as we have been removing barriers and campaigning since 1935. Together we are doing everything we can to make sure everyone can enjoy walking everywhere and this is something that I'm passionate about.

It's great to support everyone in the Area and groups as part of a community of over 100,000 walkers.

My team and I work with Area/Group leads to promote good practice and share learning across the region. We also develop new ways to encourage more people to ensure walking is truly available to all.

CLAIRE



Taken out walking in my local area – Worcestershire.



Staffordshire County Council is pleased to announce that they have appointed a new Rights of Way Manager. Becky Fuller joined the team in September 2022 filling a role that had been vacant for a while.

Becky writes:



I have eagerly taken on the challenge of maintaining and improving Staffordshire's incredibly valuable Right of Way network. My career to date has been as a specialist in 'road' management and I don't mind confessing that I've much to learn and many, many new people and organisations to build relationships with over the coming months. Initially I've been finding my feet and understanding where we're at as a service but I'm keen to start focussing on building strong networks and connections with all path users. I'm confident that with the extensive knowledge and passion that exists within our Rights of Way team, coupled with that of everyone we'll be working with, we can deliver real and lasting benefits to the network and path user community.



Becky will be keeping us updated on her plans over the year ahead that include plans to reinstate a Local Access Forum. In the meantime, the team can be contacted via rightsofway@staffordshire.gov.uk and path issues can be reported to the team via <https://prow.staffordshire.gov.uk>



Our Area Footpath Secretary

Rosemary Morton

reports a few initiatives that members need to be aware of or maybe comment on.

Cross field footpaths that are not reinstated after cropping, continue to cause problems nationally. The Paths team are trying to understand the extent of this problem. Some areas have carried out surveys of every parish to determine numbers of 'cereal' offenders, particularly those that have refused to reinstate cross field paths for many years. If anyone has thoughts and ideas for how to deal with the problem or would be interested in coordinating

Council (SCC) have a similar fund, Community Paths Initiative Fund. Again, landowners' permission is required and the requesting group must raise at least 50% of the funding themselves. This could be a fitting memorial to someone or in celebration of an event or just a local project.

Finally, SCC are planning to re-establish an improved volunteer system to assist with path maintenance. This is over and above the great

work achieved by Rambler's path maintenance teams. Individuals or groups



Staffordshire County Council are planning to re-establish an improved volunteer system to assist with path maintenance.

a similar survey in Staffordshire, please contact paths@ramblers.org.uk

The ramblers Path Accessibility Fund aims to replace inaccessible furniture (stiles, narrow kissing gates etc) by accessible structures like gaps and self-closing gates. Central Office will be sending out information on the next round of funding available and expressions of interest will be submitted in the Autumn 2023 (date to be confirmed). All bids will be considered, but they must have landowner and local authority permission in place. Staffordshire County

will be able to sign up then the Rights of Way team (ROW) will liaise with them. Hopefully there will be further details in the next Step Out magazine. Please note that while all reported path issues are logged by the ROW team, they have limited funding and personnel so have to prioritise the work depending on the category of the footpath and severity of the reported issue. Hopefully the volunteer scheme will allow easier work to be completed by volunteers, allowing the funding and qualified teams to address the more difficult issues.

Open Access

After a long time trying to get some enthusiasm from the groups in extending areas still prohibited to ramblers, it appears Head Office is now promoting a campaign for further access to private woodland, open water, riverside and areas we were denied at the very beginning. I would ask all group secretaries to restart this quest to identify these places and, once more, get active in getting these areas open of which we should have previously had in the first place. This land is ours!!

Eddie Dawson, Staffs Access Officer

FROM THE GROUPS



Biddulph Ramblers

At our AGM, Derek Lowe took over the Walks Secretary role from Eddie Dawson who has done a superb job for many years. Derek has tackled the job with gusto and we are now piloting a few Thursday walks in addition to the usual Wednesday and Sunday outings.

Numbers on the walks are on the up, particularly Wednesdays. We recently had a short pub walk around Alsager and 43 turned up. Luckily, there were no stiles!

On the holiday front, things are progressing nicely with a weekend trip to Llandudno being overseen by Lesley Booton. We have a Tenby holiday in May and a short break in Grange over Sands during October.

Our holidays and outings guru, Dave Martin, has planned two coach rambles in addition to the holidays. Dave has been ably supported by Karen Newsome who has collected the names and taken the dosh.

Karen has also organised the annual dinner. We are all going to meet at the Ash Inn at Mow Cop, for a buffet. Karen thinks the buffet will allow members to mingle easier than with a sit down meal.

We are running our usual evening walks in the summer that are open to the public and will be part of the annual Biddulph Festival. Let us hope we continue to progress for the rest of the year!

Frank Simpson

Chase and District

An overdue first for Chase & District recently with some organised footpath maintenance work on behalf of Hammerwich Parish Council. A few of our lot spent an enjoyable time slashing away albeit with a few aches afterwards for those not having the luxury of power tools. And nobody managed to stab themselves in the foot with a machete on this particular occasion!

Elsewhere within the group Kris, our new Social Secretary, is off to a flying start with a well-supported curry evening in Hednesford. We all enjoy the walking of course, but it is great to throw some extra social activities into the mix as well.



Left, our path maintenance team hard at work!

Our walk programme volunteers continue to find venues in new areas with most events attracting a good turnout. The group also organises a couple of walking holidays every year. However, trying to find suitable hotels has become challenging these days. As well as being our Membership Secretary, Eve does sterling work on our behalf organising everything from negotiating hotel tariffs, collecting deposits, issuing rooming lists etc. Ideally, we aim for self-drive Friday, Saturday, and

Sunday night breaks. We will consider midweek dates too, or a four night stay if we are travelling some distance to make it more worthwhile. Numbers in the 30s mean we are effectively similar to a coach operator; we are having to book accommodation over a year in advance and usually under contract. Next holidays are at Ravenscar, North Yorkshire in May (walk reconnaissance parties departing shortly for this one), Tenby, Pembrokeshire in September, Weymouth for April 2024, and then hopefully the Lake District sometime in Autumn 2024. Lots to look forward to - bring it all on!

Barry Collis, Chair

East Staffordshire Group

East Staffs Ramblers enjoyed a busy 2022, seeing an increase in both numbers of walks on the programme, and those attending them. Our varied programme offered something for everyone including short health walks, half days, and our longer day walks of up to 10 miles.

April saw sixteen of us complete the Peak Pilgrimage, a great four day walk from Ilam to Eyam. We based ourselves at the Newton House hotel just outside Ashbourne, where we were looked after extremely well.

In May, fifteen members of the group had seven days in Guernsey. Five members walked the forty-three-mile coastal path, and others enjoyed some shorter walks around the island as well as some site seeing. The weekly walks programme continues to be healthy. In July our annual High Peak weekend provided three good walks around the Castleton area. Into November and the AGM. Sadly some very valued





committee members decided to relinquish their roles, including our chairman, social committee secretary, and footpath secretary. These were all big shoes to fill, and we are delighted that members of the group have come forward to volunteer for these roles. Our final events of the year saw several Christmas walks of varying lengths along with meals, including a Christmas weekend in the Peak District with two glorious walks in the area. Let's hope 2023 can be as productive.

Wendy and Eddie

Leek Flexigroup

I am pleased to report that the group continues to provide enjoyable Sunday walks every week which is entirely due to the enthusiasm of its small band of hardy walks leaders. I should like to offer my thanks and appreciation to these stalwarts as without them the group would be unable to survive. In particular, I would single out Barry, our walks co-ordinator, leader and Facebook administrator, for his tireless dedication to the cause. Last December several group members enjoyed a meal at the Lazy Trout in Meerbrook, and later this year a walking weekend has been arranged in Wales. We will be revisiting the Elan Valley, the scene of a wonderful walking break in 2019.

Our page on the Ramblers' national website is attracting new members, with the group membership currently standing at around 80 - an increase of 50% until fairly recently. Unfortunately many of our members had become "lost" in the system only to be eventually discovered as incorrectly allocated to Staffordshire Area.

Kevin Andrew

Mid Staffs

One of the events beginning the year was our New Year Walk and Lunch. Thirty-three of us set out on a lovely blue-sky day where the countryside was covered in snow. Following the four mile walk from Eccleshall, we returned to the village where forty of us enjoyed a meal at the Royal Oak pub. Thanks to Geoff for leading the walk and to Carol for organising the meal.

Our programme for both Wednesday and Sunday walks looks healthy and we are grateful to those members who come forward to lead them. The programme currently goes into May and June. Numbers on walks have also increased with typically up to 20 people becoming the norm. A number of our members have been provided with whistles, when back marking, because radios proved to be unsuccessful due to outside interference.

On our website, the Gallery page has been updated to include recent photos of both Sunday and Wednesday walkers. This Gallery also now links to our Facebook Page where there are more photos. Thanks to Geoff for administering the website.

Our social events have already started with a theatre trip in January and there are more socials in the pipeline including two holidays; a weekend in the

Elan Valley in June and a HF holiday at Keswick in October. Both holidays are already near to being full. Thanks to Nicky and Jane for organising these events.

Regarding a First Aid course, there are a number of people willing to participate in a course run by Staffordshire First Aid Training. We hope that it will go ahead when funds allow. A number of our walk leaders have recently acquired First Aid kits, so a course would be invaluable in helping recipients to use the kits effectively.

Our Footpath Secretary, Margaret, has been out and about checking paths requiring attention. She has acquired a set of foot path clearing tools and is trying to arrange training with the council. She has been alerted to one particular path which was identified due to its inaccessibility for walkers. Hopefully, her efforts will lead to a good outcome!

Angie Spencer, Chair



A snowy walk before Mid Staffs New Year's Lunch!

Sandwell

Since the last report, Sandwell Ramblers have continued to run a regular Sunday walks programme of around ten miles in distance. These have covered our surrounding counties and stretched as far as Chatsworth, Derbyshire and Gloucestershire. Numbers have varied from single figures to the 30s, but we have continued the trend of attracting members from other groups who join us on a regular basis

Our membership secretary has taken a sabbatical in New Zealand for five months, and returns in April. Therefore it is not possible to say how our membership is holding up.

The atmosphere in the group remains welcoming and encouraging, and we continue to benefit from the support of our regular walk leaders plus a few who are new to the task. I would like to thank them all for their effort and to Ray for managing the walks programme so efficiently.

At Christmas, the committee organised an 'impromptu celebration' during the walk which fell nearest to the Christmas break. It was a great success with 'bubbly', mince pies, and Lebkuchen, to bring 'Season's Greetings'.

We all look forward to enjoying walking in 2023 and the return to normal behaviour as much as possible. Plus, hopefully, some new experiences which are being planned.

Mary Geach

Staffordshire Walkers

Staffordshire Walkers has seen something of resurgence in the last few weeks with walks early in the New Year seeing the number of walkers back to pre-Covid levels. This has been a real positive for the group and we have welcomed many new walkers to the group too, and we look forward to them becoming official members in due course.

Our calendar of weekly walks is looking equally healthy too, with a good range of walk leaders committing to leading walks all the way through until May. Predominantly based in Staffordshire, these will vary between 8-12 miles and will offer a variety of different terrains and challenges to cater for all abilities.

The group also has a number of weekends away scheduled throughout the year. Weekends confirmed so far are: Hebden Bridge at Easter, Snowdonia in June, the Lake District in July and the Cotswolds in August. We are also organised enough to have a date in the diary for the Christmas 2023 weekend away! These weekends offer a great combination of socialising, meals out and walks (in no particular order of preference!) and are open to all who are signed up as members of the group.

The December 2022

Christmas weekend for the group took place in a festive Bakewell, see photograph, with members having the opportunity to join three walks, two meals out and numerous opportunities for fun and laughter over the course of the weekend. We also celebrated Chinese New Year in January with a meal at The Arch restaurant; poignantly remembering a former much loved member of our group, Peter Wager, who previously organised the social event annually. Peter was a wonderfully caring member of Staffordshire Walkers and is very much missed by the group.

Further details can be found through Facebook- just check out our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/staffwalkers/> to see the latest schedule of walks, and to view past activities from the group. Anyone new to the group is welcome to join us for up to 3 walks before being required to join through membership of the Ramblers.

Matt Stanlake, Staffordshire Walkers Media and Publicity Office



Stoke and Newcastle

We successfully hosted the Area AGM at Fulford Village hall on 27th November 2022. It was well attended, and two members from The Canal and River Trust gave a very interesting presentation. Representatives of Central Office were also present and well received. Our thanks go to all the volunteers who made the day such a success, especially Alan Wheatley and Julie Tilstone.

Our own AGM was held in December. First a morning walk, the AGM itself and then a meal, all held at Keele Hall. Many thanks to all the organisers, especially Brian Lewis, for such a successful day.

We elected a new Group secretary, Membership secretary and other new committee members. All other offices remain as previous.

Our group continues to provide Sunday Full Day, Sunday Half Day, fortnightly Wednesday Half Day and fortnightly Thursday Half Day walks; all of which are proving very successful. Walk secretaries and walk leaders receive the groups thanks for all their hard work.

We have two groups of footpath maintenance volunteers who continue with repairing and building stiles etc.

A very enjoyable quiz evening was held in January, with some quite clever members. Thanks to Sue Ramm.

A social evening was held in February, was well attended and will hopefully lead to more events in the future, thanks to Barbara Farrington. We are also trying to organise, with other Staffordshire RA groups, first aid training for walkers. More details later.

Tony Adair. Group Secretary

Stourbridge

On the 16th October 2022 we celebrated our 40th anniversary as Stourbridge Ramblers. To start the day we enjoyed a 5 mile walk around Kinver led by Maureen Smith, who has been a member since August 1997. Kinver was the area that our first ever group walk took place. Forty plus members joined the walk



which was followed by a celebratory lunch at Kinver Constitutional Club. We were also treated to a slide show of photographs from across the years. It was great to see members, old and new, joining in the fun. (See photograph on previous page.)

Group walks continue to be popular including the introduction of our Friday walks. Led by Margaret Darby, these shorter walks came about for recuperation purposes and are being well supported and enjoyed by all who attend.

We are looking forward to our annual holiday on the Isle of Wight in April and have day trips planned to including Chester in June and London in July. In July, we also see the return of our family fun day, following its success last year, with a walk in the morning and a kayaking session in the afternoon. We are hoping for the weather to be as kind to us as it was last time.

Social events include a skittles night, a summer evening meal and more 'Ramble and Roasts' and 'cob stops'.

We continue to strive to deliver a full walks programme and would like to thank our walk leaders for their commitment and hard work. Without these volunteers there would not be a programme to enjoy.

Also, a big thanks to our members for their continued support. Let us all look forward to a great year ahead of us.

Elaine Davey

Tamworth & Lichfield Group

It has been quite an eventful year for our group! First of all, you may have noticed the change in our Group's name; formerly it was 'Lichfield & District'. Whilst we knew that the 'District' included Tamworth, we felt that this lack of clarity for the outside world had resulted in a significant under-representation in the proportion of our membership from Tamworth, which actually has a population more than double than Lichfield itself. We expect that this change of Group name will increase our opportunities to attract people from Tamworth who are searching to join a local walking group.



Also, September 2022 saw us celebrate our group's 50th anniversary with a short walk around Hints, followed by a buffet and get-together of 40 members past and present at the Red Lion in Hopwas. (See photograph.) The event included a display of photographs and other memorabilia. Addressing those present, Group Chairman Tony Grady, talked about the changes that have taken place over the last 50 years and pointed out that, over the years, members have climbed every significant mountain in England and Wales.

In addition to anticipating a full walking programme for the year, we are continuing to organise our annual midweek break; this year, we are returning to the Holiday Fellowship house at Derwentwater in early June. In May we also have a planned weekend break to the Stroud area.

Tony Grady, Chair

Walsall

One of the many advantages of living in Walsall, besides being a member of Walsall Ramblers group, is the ability for us to use the motorway network on our door step. This gives us the opportunity to get out of Walsall as quickly as possible, to visit Shropshire, the Welsh borders, the Cotswolds or the Peak district in no time at all. I am sure we will be doing every Sunday throughout the spring and Summer season. Walk leader availability permitting!

We will still be doing our shorter 4 to 6 mile local walks every Saturday. Walk leader availability permitting! We are lucky to have a lot of open space around Walsall to explore; Chase Water, Sutton Park, the Sandwell Valley and the local canal system that connects a lot of open green areas around Walsall.

We have organized our summer walking holiday to the Neuadd Arms Llanertyd Wells, Mid Wales, in mid June. We should be starting our path maintenance programme up again now the spring is here.

The only problem we still have is a shortage of walk leaders, so I urge anyone who wants to commit to a Saturday or Sunday date, to take up the challenge and lead a walk.

Peter Turner, Chair



This picture is a local walk along the abandoned Hatherton canal which is soon to be renovated. This canal runs along the side of the A5 as it runs South of Cannock.

Wolverhampton

Our Group has continued to provide a programme of walks despite having a limited number of walk leaders. Yes, we still need more walk leaders, so do offer to help with our walks programme, even if it is only one walk every few months. There is plenty of support within the group to help plan walks if required. Do get in touch with us through Andrew, our new volunteer walks co-ordinator at: walkswolvesramblers@gmail.com. It is really good to have his help and support.

We continue to do joint walks with our neighbouring groups here in South Staffordshire which is why we can provide an enjoyable, varied programme. Do keep looking at our web site: www.ramblers.org.uk/wolverhampton as many walks can appear at short notice. We hope to restart our evening 'pub walks' as they have proved very popular in the past. So do look out for these.

Our membership numbers remain healthy at 233 with new enquiries each week. Sometimes even our short walks can be challenging for new people and it is good to have Ramblers Wellbeing Walks to refer them to.

Wolverhampton members continue to send our Footpath Secretary details of problems they have encountered on walks. These are mainly in Staffordshire with some in Shropshire. Members' feedback is very positive when they find that the issues they reported have been attended to.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our walk leaders and committee members for keeping us going. You are the mainstay of our Group. **Judith Rose, Chair**

Stone Ramblers

Spring is on the way and here at the Stone Ramblers, we are making the most of it! Our annual New Year Meal was a great success, giving us all a chance to meet up without the walking boots!

In addition, we have had short breaks to the Lake District in October, Betws-y-Coed in November and Shropshire in February, with forthcoming trips to Malta and Gozo and Malhamdale in North Yorkshire.

Our working party, working with Staffordshire County Council, continues to mend stiles and improve local footpaths.

We have launched our new website www.stoneramblers.org.uk where you can see our forthcoming varied walks, including our well attended Wellbeing Walks. Our walks cover a wide area including the Peak District, Wales, Cheshire, Shropshire and of course, Staffordshire. Many thanks to John Spriggs who has worked tirelessly over the past twenty years setting up and maintaining our website.

We are always looking for new members and our recent stall at Stone Farmers' Market earlier in the month proved to be very popular.

A huge thanks to all our volunteers and bring on the good weather!

Penny Meakin



Stone Ramblers in Cathedral Cave near Little Langdale.
The photograph was taken by Rob Shuttleworth.

Obituary

David Hewitt

It is with great sadness to inform you of the death of Mr David Hewett. Dave was co-opted on to the East Staffs Group first committee after their inauguration in February 1994, where he served as Footpath Secretary for the Group until he retired in November 2017. His hard work regarding the footpath network in East Staffordshire is there to see for those of us who have walked the area for years – the improvement and safe-guarding of the footpath network has in no small part been due to him. In the early years he led numerous walks for the Group, usually over areas that needed work, or had work carried out. In addition he ran a work party putting in stiles, gates etc for over 20 years.

His work for the Ramblers was not just at group level. He was District Footpath Secretary for Lichfield for around 15 years as well as Area Vice Chairman in 2000 and 2001. He had also been a mine of information on the Ramblers Association and its work and history.

Peter Matthews

Dick Turton

gives an update on plans for

CANNOCK CHASE

As we know Cannock Chase's 26 square miles of outstanding natural beauty are already heavily visited and this is likely to continue or escalate in the coming years. This necessitates the continual reviewing of management plans and other initiatives for the area in response to local changes or those imposed by government, (Defra). Briefly as Ramblers we can expect to see the following in the coming months:

Visitor Welcome.

In recent times new interpretation panels have been installed at the RAF Hednesford trail, and Brindley Heath Hospital site. The information shop at Milford has had an uplift and will be open at weekends. A new Cannock Chase welcome booklet has been produced, and several sponsored walks and their leaflets are under review.

Car Parking.

The Punch Bowl Car Park remains the intended site for the first development of the CP strategy, but many issues have been faced, the latest of which is a study by the highways department into the entry and exit routes to the car park from the main road. No time frames for this have been indicated.

Footpath Signage.

Funding is becoming available to improve signage and other aspects of the Heritage Trail, (linking Rugeley, Hednesford and Cannock). Keep an eye open for this if you who fancy a linear 10-mile trek sometime. See <https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/custom/HeritageTrail/index.html> for more information about the Trail.



The review of some of the sponsored walks on the Chase is prompting a spin-off project to replace and repair some signage along these routes, some of which has been in place for many years. You may soon see some evidence of this around the Punch Bowl Car Park, where this type of work is being planned ahead of any decisions about the wider development of the site.

Cannock Chase Newsletter.

Keep up to date with activities in Cannock Chase AONB by signing up to the Newsletter that is now being produced by visiting : <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSTAFFORDSHIRECC/signup/16990>

AONB Annual Conference.

The AONB Annual Conference is due to be held in early March, 2023, (unfortunately after the deadline for this article), but I will report any significant outcomes back to Area Council and in the Autumn edition of Step-Out.



Broken signage on the Chase.



Charlie Bigley

Webmaster, Staffordshire Area

tells us the latest news.

WalksManager

Publicising our walks is critical to all of us, and most of our Groups rely on them being available to members and the public from websites. The first step is to record details of the walks in the Central Office database; once the details have been stored there, it is available from the Area and Group websites, and also from the national Walks Finder on ramblers.org.uk. The current method of data entry for walks co-ordinators is to use GWEM (Group Walks and Event Manager). A project has been underway to replace GWEM with WalksManager, but this has run into serious difficulties. The release date of Autumn 2022, was missed. It became available in April 2022 for testing. The reception to the first release was scathing. "Unfit for purpose" was the polite view.

In October last year the development team eventually wrote a second version for evaluation. Staffordshire Young Walkers were selected as one of the groups to test it, and Jimmy Poole was successful in entering some walks, and use the new website to view them. However, other groups involved found functionality was missing in certain key areas.

For example, the development team assumed that walk leaders will all be able and willing to log onto Assemble and register their preferred name and contact details for displaying on websites. For many groups this is not the case as many of their walk leaders want nothing to do with Assemble.

I created a questionnaire, listing various areas of functionality, and asked whether they were considered essential. This questionnaire was posted on our website, and I asked for the views of different groups, firstly from groups in

Staffordshire, then from groups nationally. Over 120 replies have been received, from about 140 Groups out of 400 in total. The responses confirmed the absolute necessity for groups to have full control over the details of walk leaders, and highlighted other serious concerns too. Full details of the questions asked, and of the responses received, are available on our website via a link on the front page.

The results of the survey have been passed on to Central Office, but I am still seriously concerned that their next prototype will fall short of what we need. At the time of writing (27th Feb 23) there is no statement about when the next release of the software will be, or what features it will include.

MailMan

Our website includes functions to manage the sending of emails, and this has been in use for 12 months. Several overlapping lists have been set up for Committee members and officers. Most group officers get messages from the MailMan software. The early teething problems have been resolved, and the creation of a mailing list of 115 members for reporting on the WalksManager survey was a useful stress test.

I am now confident it can be used on any of our Group websites as a secure alternative to Mailchimp as it is a more flexible solution to communications with members. To enquire about implementing it, just drop me a line.

Charlie Bigley

webmaster, Stoke Newcastle Group
www.stokeandnewcastleramblers.org.uk
webmaster, Staffordshire Area
www.staffordshireramblers.org.uk

 Any area of land entirely surrounded by water. 

Staffordshire has 16 islands of land. How come?

An island is normally thought of as a body of land surrounded by water, so how can an Island be inland? Well the answer is simple. In this case an island is an area of land that has open access to all but is surrounded by land that is privately owned and therefore the public are not able to get to it. Paul & Rebecca Whitewick were the inspiration of this piece after I watched their You Tube Video titled the 'UK's Mystery Inland Islands', which is well worth a watch. Wiltshire, it seems, has many more of these 'Islands' than Staffordshire but I wonder what the position is in our adjoining counties of Derbyshire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire & Worcestershire.

Depending on how you count them, we have 108 areas of open access land in Staffordshire. (There are areas such as the Roaches where several bits adjoin one another so I have counted such areas as one.) Of these there are 75 pieces of open access land which have footpaths going through them and a further 12 where there is a footpath adjoining them so it could be possible to step off the footpath to enter the land. Whether it would be physically possible to do so in some cases, i.e. fenced off, may be another matter altogether. There are a further 16 areas which have no footpath through them but are by a road so, in theory, access can be gained to them.

And that leaves the five areas of access land but no access to them. Four of these are in the Staffordshire Moorlands; Blackshawmoor Reservoirs (SK022 602), near Thorncliffe, Hinkley

Wood (SK130 504) near Ilam, Jacksons Wood (SK035 4552) near Oakamoor and Thorswood (SK12 472) near Stanton. The remaining one is at Mease Meadow Wood (SK227 116) near Haunton.

Blackshawmoor reservoir is an area of land which is very close to a path, maybe a matter of yards but technically it comes within the definition.

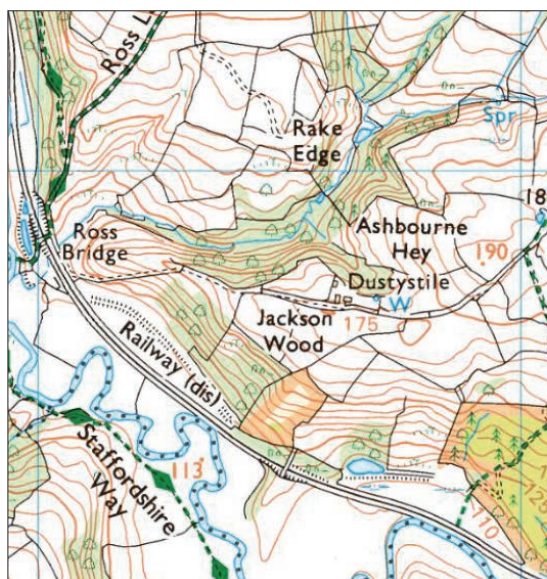
Hinkley Wood is perhaps a slight false positive but it is an interesting case study. The 1:10000 scale map shows a short footpath which adjoins the river as well as a bridge from Ilam Hall as well as another path to Wood Lodge and continuing to the road leading down to Ilam. However, neither of these appear on the 1:25000 map as a rights of way (nor on the Staffordshire Right of Way map), though they are shown as a track. Taking proximity to a path, there is a broad track leading from Upper Marsden (Farm) which passes close to the wood, similar to many other areas. However if the small valley is followed leading to the closest point it is fenced off so access is not possible. So access is only via the bridge.

Jacksons Wood is a small area of land, adjoining the wood, which is truly an 'Island' as there are no paths or roads close by. Whilst some locals do reach it by walking along the disused railway line it is not a right of way. The final area within Staffordshire Moorlands is Thorswood which is actually a hill top. However, like Blackshawmoor reservoir it is close to a track but again access to it would mean a good few yards of trespass.

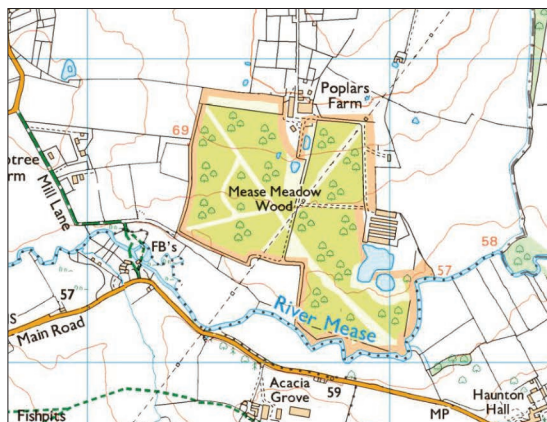
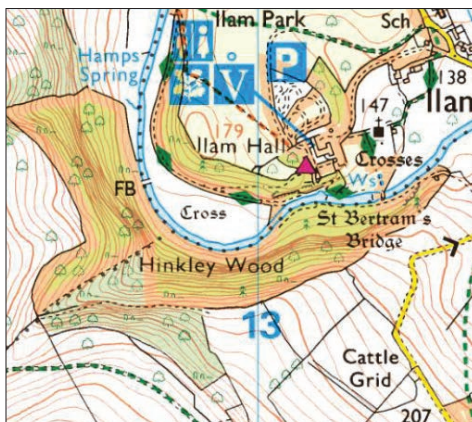
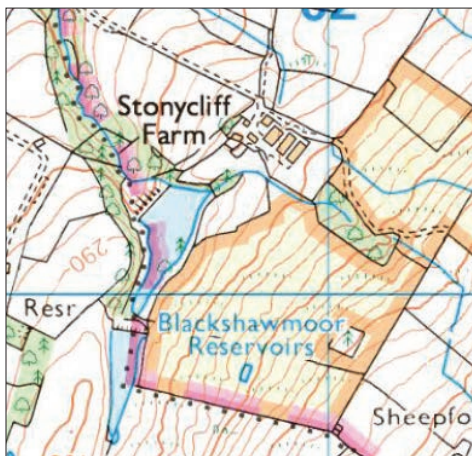
Mease Meadow Wood is an interesting case. Again it is an 'island' as there is no road or footpath adjoining it and a river to the south. However the 1:10000 map shows a track entering from Mease Meadow Farm to the north and Crab Tree Farm to the west. However these are not shown as rights of way but whether the landowners allow access I do not know.

So one way of looking at it is that a tad under 5% of our access land areas are technically not available for walking. Fortunately in terms of area it is a much smaller proportion as none of these is particularly large. And all that is assuming that access to the 16 areas of land that has no path but a road adjoining is actually accessible. One day I will go and look!

Peter Matthews



Maps of the five areas





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