

YOUR VIEW

Letters on all subjects of interest to walkers are welcome. They may be edited so we can publish as many as possible. We are not able to acknowledge letters. To be considered for the spring edition, letters should arrive by Friday 9 January. Send them to: **walk**, Ramblers' Association, 2nd Floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW or email denise.noble@ramblers.org.uk. Please supply your full name and address.

Frozen out

Reading about Tom Franklin's experience of the Sheffield Ramblers Group (*autumn, p7*) and how they encourage people to experience the fun and excitement of walking, made me think of my one and only experience of a Ramblers group. My wife and I are inveterate walkers but not joiners, and are Ramblers members because we support what it stands for. However, when we moved to Sussex, we didn't know anyone and decided to give the local Ramblers group a go, hoping we would meet like-minded, friendly people.

We joined a large number of walkers for a New Year's Day walk on a beautiful cold, crisp morning. Throughout the entire walk not one member of the group approached us. We sat and ate our lunch alone. Needless to say we have never walked with the Ramblers again although we remain committed members. While I am sure that many groups are far more welcoming to new members, it seems to me that the Ramblers should carry out a survey to flush out those – hopefully a small minority – that are not.

Arnold Simanowitz, Lewes

Nanny state

What a lot of positive messages there were about encouraging more people to walk in the autumn edition of **walk**. As a recently recruited Get Walking Keep Walking volunteer, I was pleased to see this Ramblers' Association initiative mentioned several times. What a pity then that Janet Street-Porter did not keep her opinions to herself when, under the heading 'Nanny State', she undermined all of the above by deriding the government's attempts to encourage more walking and ridiculing the target of five half-hour walks a week as a bit of 'babble' – the very concept that the Ramblers is promoting with its Get Walking Keep Walking project!

Stewart Ramsden, Cheshire

Celtic cross

I too experienced the frustration of taking a group to Ireland only to find a total absence of footpaths (*letters, summer, p8*). Scotland is similar. The guidebooks never mention the many miles of deer fences evident in the most interesting areas. The so-called 'right to roam' is not available there, and appears to be becoming even less so as rich landowners fence off huge areas of land for their new wildlife parks.

Ken Ward, Derbyshire

Holiday memories

I found the autumn issue of **walk** excellent, especially the history of tour leaders for Ramblers Holidays. This recalled to mind an incident in 1947 when I was leading a party in the Ardennes as one of Ernest Welsman's original leaders. In those days the unpredictable was an integral

ingredient of the tour. On the penultimate day, we were due to return from Luxembourg to Brussels. A number of the party were at a low ebb financially so were given the option of having their train fare and hitch-hiking the last leg. They did so and met up at Brussels for a final meal well ahead of the less successful leader.

Len Clark, Godalming

I was on the Bernese Oberland holiday in 1948, lead by John Chapman. It cost £35, paid for with my gratuity on demobilisation from the Navy. Because of the war I had done little walking, so it was a real treat. I also went on the Arctic Lapland trip. Travelling the length of Sweden was in itself a thousand miles or so and took a day and a night, arriving at Kiruna after breakfast. I went on Ramblers Holidays every year for 15 years or more until I had a family, then started going again later on.

Geoff Alderton, Chester

Crunch points

To a certain extent the current 'credit crunch' benefits walkers. The rising cost of fuel means that our Ramblers Group tries to organise walks nearer home and, if possible, by public transport – especially beneficial for those who qualify for free travel. It is quite surprising what walks can be achieved in this way. Also, the worry of leaving your car unattended for long periods, sometimes in remote places, is eliminated. Being a pensioner, I have to try to economise. But one thing I will not give up is my Ramblers' Association membership, as I have met very interesting people over many years and consider it very good value.

Richard Parrott, Aberystwyth



Mick Firth sent in this picture taken near Brushfield Hough, above Monsal Dale, close to a track designated 'other routes with public access' that is used (and abused) by motorcycles and 4x4s.

Cracking up

I wonder how many people realise that insistence on a coastal path is actually contributing to coastal erosion. I live near part of the South West Coast Path and it is easily seen that where the path is worn and the grass cover destroyed, the ground cracks, water enters, seeps down the cliff and huge pieces break away. The path has had to move inland at least 30 metres in the 16 years I have lived here.

Anne Sparkes, Bridgwater

Give and take

While appreciating that the Ramblers is a registered charity, and as such welcomes new members to attend a few walks before they commit to joining, why is it that groups are told they cannot hold 'members only' events? We have people who walk regularly with our group, attend holidays and social events, yet despite being invited to join over the past years, make no effort to do so. It seems there is little difference between becoming a member and just joining all the events that are arranged without making any contribution to the organisation.

Barbara Stead, West Malling

Stile trials

Recent letters highlighting the problems that disabled people have in negotiating stiles leads me to point out that many able-bodied walkers don't find them user-friendly. On a walk in the local countryside with a group of experienced walkers, we encountered over 15 stiles. More than half were uncomfortable or even dangerous due to their being too high to climb over for shorter or less agile walkers, or lacking any form of tread on wood that became treacherously slippery after the passage of a few muddy boots. Metal wire across stiles was another hazard. Is there a



nationally accepted standard for stile construction? If not, perhaps the Ramblers could initiate one, taking into consideration that we are not all agile six-footers with long legs!

Rene Battershall, Colwyn Bay

EDITOR'S REPLY

There is a British Standard for 'Gaps, Gates and Stiles' (BS5709:2006).

It covers gaps, pedestrian gates, bridle gates, kissing gates, dog gates, horse stiles, Kent carriage gaps and pedestrian stiles. Particularly important is the fact that choosing which type of structure is suitable for a given location is itself a requirement of the standard. The words used are 'The selection of a gap, gate or stile, which permit people to use a path crossing a field boundary such as a hedge, fence or stone wall, shall result in as little restriction as possible for potential users, while meeting the actual agricultural needs of the landowners (principle of least restrictive option).' The Ramblers fully supports this principle, and urges local authorities and landowners to comply with it. The full standard is available to download at www.pittecrofttrust.org.uk.

Sick leaves

When walking in Buckinghamshire, I am concerned to see every horse chestnut tree dying and covered in some sort of blight. It's heartbreaking to see our wonderful trees in distress. Is this happening nationwide and is anybody doing anything to save these magnificent trees?

Peter Buckle, High Wycombe

Lowest trig point?

The common perception is that trig points are put on only hills and high levels. However, we came across one while walking around the peat workings and levels of Westhay and Meare in Somerset. It sits at the grand height of four metres. Is there a lower one?

Phil Searle, Bristol



Gearing up for war

Your article on walking in the 1940s both surprised and amused me (*autumn, p44*) – if only I'd had a fraction of the £535 quoted to spend at the time! During the war years, clothing was rationed. Twenty coupons had to last six months, and I remember clearly that a pair of shoes or boots cost seven coupons. For my first ascent of Helvellyn in 1940, aged 14, I wore black lace-up shoes, school gym shorts and Aertex shirt, and a woollen jumper. My waterproof was an oilskin cycling cape.

In 1947, my first job paid £5.50 per week, and my priority was to save enough to buy a pair of walking boots from the Army & Navy store, priced £5. For many years I made do with the clothing I already had, and acquired no special gear until many years later when outdoor clothing became easier and less expensive to buy.

Maureen Watson, Ambleside

Maureen wins a Berghaus Shadow 4-in-1 jacket which combines four jackets into one versatile product. The waterproof breathable outer jacket can be worn on its own or zipped together with the inner jacket that is also a reversible windproof shell with fleece inner (RRP £150). All other letters printed win a Berghaus flask.



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