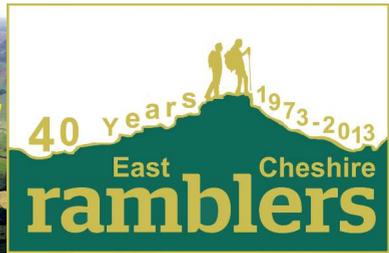




East Cheshire Ramblers Newsletter



Summer 2013

Editorial

Ralph
Atherton

In the last newsletter I gave a preliminary analysis of data for the numbers of people on walks. Now that I have all the data for calendar year 2012, I can compare them with 2011 and 2010. Short walks continue to head the attendance league with midweek walks averaging a remarkably constant 17 over the three years, and weekend walks 15. The analogous figures for long walks are 12-15 and 12 but in this case the midweek range reflects a downward trend from 15 in 2010 to 12 in 2012 which is the same as the weekend figure. Weekend medium walks have stayed fairly constant at about 11 whereas the midweek (Tue/Wed) figure of 18 in 2010 reduced to 15 in 2011 and 12 in 2012 reflecting the introduction of Thursday walks and their increasing popularity from 9 in 2011 to 11 in 2012. Thus total average midweek attendance was 24 in 2011 and 23 in 2012 significantly greater than the 2010 figure, and demonstrating that the Thursday walks have achieved their aims of reducing the numbers on Tue/Wed by sharing the load with Thursday, at the same time providing greater choice and flexibility for midweek walking. Short and medium midweek walks continue to be better attended than weekend walks, although this is no longer the case for long walks. Midweek evening walks are popular, averaging 11 attendees in both 2011 and 2012.

I would like to add that Andy Davies is doing a great job in putting together the midweek medium walk programme but please do reflect on the fact that to fill this programme he needs to find about 52 leaders every 6 months. This is not an easy task and I would beseech those of you who regularly attend walks but have not yet volunteered to lead one, to consider doing so. This applies to short and long walks too. Many regular leaders are getting older and one or two, sad to say, have died, and others currently have medical problems. If we want to continue having such a full and varied programme, we need a new generation of leaders. Don't be diffident. If you do not feel confident we will happily help you recruit and lead a walk. You will enjoy playing your part.

Thanks for your support. Do keep the photos, letters (sadly, none this time) and articles coming in.

At the “halfway” stage of our 40th anniversary year I think that it is appropriate to look back and to look forward to events that have taken place and are yet to happen.

All of the “special” events so far have been very well supported, with 70 present at the unveiling of the plaque in memory of Joyce Blanchard (*see below*), over 40 attending the Indian meal at the Swadesh, a 72 person “sell out” for the Lands End to John O’ Groats presentation by Gwen Sproston and Linda Brackenbury, full attendance for the Incident Training in Macclesfield and 65 for the week-end away at Church Stretton. That has been excellent support - thank you - please keep on attending the events for the rest of the year!

By the time this Newsletter is published we will have had our anniversary Gritstone Trail walks and the Deanwater dinner; I trust that both events are celebrated with many members, that the sun shone for the walk and the wine flowed for the dinner.

Alan Catherall and John Goodman have so far gained provisional verbal agreement for a new permissive footpath. This should enable us to celebrate the opening of the new path by linking it into the existing rights of way in the area and to walk the ridges which surround the waters of the Todd Brook, making a total distance of 15.5 miles. If ongoing discussions reach a satisfactory conclusion then this will become a significant milestone in our 40th anniversary celebrations.

Other social events still to look forward to include a walk followed by afternoon tea on the Judith Mary Restaurant boat (3 September) as well as a hotpot supper and barn dance (16 November). We also have a coach trip planned to Hawes with the usual short, medium and long walks (Saturday August 3) and a weekend away to Patterdale at the end of September. There will be three Christmas lunches too.

So far this year we have had excellent publicity in the local press. Roger Norton has been instrumental in getting our name regularly in the Macclesfield and Wilmslow Express, as well as Cheshire Independent, Inside Magazine, Bollington Live and Cheshire Life (*see below*). We trust that this publicity will have significantly raised the profile of the Group and also resulted in new and active membership.

Please do remember our AGM on 9 November at Macclesfield Tennis Club – more precise details will be made available nearer the time but I would urge all members to make an effort to attend, make their points and offer to take on a role that will help to continue the work of this magnificent Group (*see page 6*).

Joyce Blanchard Memorial Plaque

David
Gylee

Editor's note: In the Winter 2011/12 edition I published a tribute to Joyce Blanchard who died suddenly and unexpectedly on 12 July 2011. It is difficult to believe that it is 18 months since she was walking with us, as we often think of her on our walks. Joyce served ECR in numerous roles, including Chairman, Treasurer, footpath committee member, trip organiser and walk leader. Our chairman David Gylee has recalled that "Joyce worked tirelessly for East Cheshire Ramblers from its inception. It is in no small way due to her efforts that the club has grown steadily over the last 40 years to become one of the Ramblers' Association's largest and most active walking groups in the country with more than 600 members in an area that extends from Macclesfield to Alderley Edge, Wilmslow, Altrincham, Cheadle, Bramhall and Poynton."

Tuesday January 15th was the launch of East Cheshire Ramblers' 40th anniversary. It was marked with three walks from Nelson Pit and the unveiling of a plaque in Joyce's memory. Around 70 members followed a well-used path from the canal to Throstle Nest Farm, along which improvements at three locations had been funded from our Group Reserves and our Special Footpath Funds. *David Gylee addressed us all as follows:*



“Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Ramblers, welcome. You will notice (I hope) the improvements to the area near to where we are standing; to the previous gate we have all walked through and when we get there, to the next gate. These improvements were undertaken last year from our funding (so if you are a Ramblers Member, this is where some of your subscription has gone). The changes came about from suggestions made by the late Joyce Blanchard to the Footpaths Committee

and as it did not rank high enough on Cheshire East's list of footpath improvements, we undertook this responsibility.

Many of you will have known Joyce for a long time as she joined ECR soon after its formation in 1973. She was kind, conscientious and a tireless hard-working person; always with a ready smile and welcome. Not only working for our group as chairman,

treasurer, footpath committee member, trip organiser, walk leader; but always ready to help members and their families with advice of all kinds. After her retirement from the Inland Revenue she gave freely of her time to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and so helped innumerable people.

We thought, as a Committee and on behalf of East Cheshire Ramblers Group, that it would only be fitting were we to have this plaque placed here as a lasting memory to Joyce and all her work on behalf of our Group.

When Joyce died in July 2011 we were shocked and saddened by her sudden departure. At her funeral on July 21, we sang a hymn, one verse of which I would like to quote as it has some very appropriate words:-

When through the woods and forest glades I wander

And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,

And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Ramblers, could we now please observe one minute's silence in Joyce's memory?"

Barry and Melanie's Open Garden

ECR members Barry and Melanie Davy are once again opening their wonderful garden with the **National Garden Scheme**. This year on Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 July from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Teas and home-made cakes available. Admission £3 (children free). Brooke Cottage, Church Road, Handforth, SK9 3LT (01625 536511). One mile north of Wilmslow; just behind the Health Centre (parking is available in the Health Centre car park). All profits from garden entry go to NGS charities with Marie Curie and Macmillan Nurses as the principal recipients.

This is a garden designer's plant-filled garden surrounded by mature trees and shrubs with ideas for different styles of planting. The garden is divided into three distinct areas. The woodland area has an unusual water feature and a small circular patio set amongst tree ferns, hydrangeas, astrantias, hellebores, foxgloves and other shade-loving plants including 20+ varieties of fern. The main patio is a container garden fed by a watering system with lush, large leaved plants including ligularias, cannas, banana as well as hemerocallis, bamboo, dahlias and a small pond. Finally, pathways of granite setts lead through to long colourful, mixed borders and island beds planted in a naturalistic style with grasses and late flowering perennials. The garden also features several sculptures. Visitors are also welcome from May to August, by appointment

Website Report

Graham
Beech

The site is ticking along much as before, with the forum now being used by most walk leaders. It proved particularly useful in the period of bad weather earlier in the year, when walks had to be cancelled or amended at short notice.

A small number of potential new members come on "sample" walks after visiting the site. This is generally welcome though leaders may need to turn away, very diplomatically, any who are not adequately kitted out for a day's walk. The same may apply to any who come along as a result of press announcements of walks.

There have been a few additions to the photo gallery pages, so be sure to look at these from time to time - especially after special events such as weekends away and the forthcoming anniversary walks. Likewise, check the Group News and Diary Dates for current and forthcoming information,

The Group News page has information on a potentially useful site called "rowmaps" from Barry Cornelius. This can be regarded as a powerful replacement for the spreadsheet of rights of way information provided by Cheshire County Council some years ago. It can display a map (can be in OS format) showing rights of way in our area and in many others. Rights of way near to a particular place can be displayed by typing a place name, postcode or grid reference. The size of the map is easily changed, up to a maximum of A4. Worth a look.

The long-awaited interactive feature, enabling leaders to add or edit their walk details for the programme directly from the website, is still awaited! Some user acceptance trials have been conducted, so perhaps details will be announced in the next newsletter.

Why do I enjoy Hill Walking?

Tony
Walker

I have continued my search to find a good essay which defines the *why* question. It's important because it will help you to get the best out of your walking by selecting the type of walks that will achieve what you enjoy most. One approach is to decide what you don't like. I don't like long walks over 10 miles and having to walk quickly on difficult terrain where you have to keep your head down. It stops me looking around observing fauna, flora, wildlife and views. I also like to have time to hear bird sounds and to smell the countryside. Margaret Atherton sent me a short essay written by Chris Smith, the RA President, about 6 or 7 years ago, which I like because it gets right to the hub straight away. *"The reality is that walking is about the most health-giving, life-sustaining activity you can possibly engage in. It provides good exercise, it helps to keep you fit, it strengthens the body and it is an entirely natural process. Walking and in particular hill walking is not just good for physical health, it also helps lift the spirit, calm the emotions, and put calamities of life in a proper perspective. There's no doubt that a day in the hills makes you better prepared for the rest of life. The hills are there*

to be enjoyed and explored. Let us be moved, excited, calmed, challenged and delighted by what we see and do there. Let us find the health-giving stimulus that hill walking can provide. Above all let us have fun while we are doing it.” So for good health it’s important to select the right walk for you. For the next edition I have another fine Alfred Wainwright essay that he wrote towards the end of his walking career.

Annual General Meeting 2013

David
Bates

This year, our East Cheshire Group AGM will be held at Macclesfield Tennis Club (Learning Zone Campus, Park Lane, Macclesfield SK11 8AF) starting at 2 pm on Saturday 9 November 2013. However, members are welcome from 1 pm when they will be able to enjoy their own packed lunch with a free cup of tea or coffee provided. the pay bar, and chatting with friends. It will be preceded by a short walk, led by Jane and Frank Gay, starting from Gawsorth at 10 am.

The Chairman has invited Benedict Southworth, Ramblers Chief Executive, to speak and his reply is awaited. Keep an eye on the website and your emails for further news.

Papers for the AGM will be available on our website www.ramblerseastcheshire.org.uk by 28 October. These will include the agenda; nomination forms for officers and members of committee; accounts; annual report; etc. Paper copies will be available at the meeting. If any member wishes to receive paper copies in advance of the meeting, please contact our secretary David Bates. Anyone wishing to propose a motion at the AGM should send this to David Bates at secretary@ramblerseastcheshire.org.uk or by post no later than 21 October. Phone David on 01625 508251 for postal address. We look forward to seeing you there.

There will also be an AGM for the Ramblers Cheshire East Area. The Area comprises our group and the South Cheshire and Congleton groups. This year the Area AGM will be hosted by South Cheshire Group at the Hawk Inn, Haslington, near Crewe, probably in November. If you wish to attend please contact David Bates for further details.

Footpath Matters

In the last newsletter, Grenham Ireland announced in “Footpath Matters” that he had stood down as Footpath Secretary and we have yet to find a replacement. This does not of course mean that we have lost our Footpath Committee and its merry band of over 30 footpath inspectors. You will have seen tantalising glimpses elsewhere in this newsletter of the continuing hard work of these stalwarts.

Indeed, Neil Collie has emailed me to say that “the Footpath Committee continues to function very effectively - by rotating the chair - and thanks to the efforts of all its members. We also have a full quota of footpath inspectors so are on track to inspect all of the over 1200 paths by the deadline in October 2013.”

Publicity Matters

Roger Norton, our publicity officer, has sent me notes and newspaper clippings to illustrate his success in getting our fortieth anniversary events publicised in the local press. Roger is “down under” at the moment (*as you will see from his bushwalking article on pages 14-16*) so I agreed to cobble something together. As he says, such publicity is a way of boosting the club’s profile and its prestige with the membership. Thus several local newspapers and magazines comprehensively covered the Joyce Blanchard Memorial Plaque Walk including the photograph I have used above. They also published illustrated articles on the work of our footpath inspectors, and on our fortieth anniversary events with invitations to readers to join us on walks. Hopefully all these efforts will result in new members. By the time you read this, Roger is expecting further coverage in *Cheshire Life* and in *Bollington Live* illustrated with photos by Roger Fielding. I had hoped to include images of one or two of the press articles but they do not import satisfactorily. I suggest we all keep an eye on our local media to see what other articles we can spot. Roger is sometimes surprised by them appearing in magazines he has never contacted himself!

We also received welcome publicity from when David Rutley, the MP for Macclesfield, joined ECR members and Anastasia French the Ramblers Campaigns Officer last August, on a walk in the Bollington area led by Sandra Edwards. The purpose of this walk was to discuss with the MP the importance of protecting and keeping open our footpaths. In speaking to Anastasia he said “Our footpath network is what connects people with nature and the outdoors and needs to be protected to ensure that future generations will experience the many benefits of walking.” David Rutley is a good man to have on the side of ECR as he is well known for promoting outdoor activities, is a keen mountaineer, co-chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mountaineering and Vice Chairman of the APPG on National Parks. In December last year he won a Parliamentary Medal for promoting outdoor activities and on 19 December this was covered in the *Macclesfield Express* which included a piece about the aforementioned walk and this photograph taken by Anastasia.



Trips 'n' Tramps - Church Stretton

Jane
Gay

Jane omits to say that she and Frank were the highly competent organisers of this superb weekend and we are mightily grateful to them. They do add "We enjoyed organising this weekend (most of the time) and many people said how much they enjoyed it. What is really needed now is a little band of people who are happy to help organise the weekends as well as suggesting venues. Could you help?"

The three photographs were taken by your Editor on the two long walks. There are lots more photographs taken on this weekend in the website Photogallery (see page 5). If you would like a photograph of yours (rather than mine!) to appear in the Newsletter, then please send it to me. To see all 16 pages of the newsletter, including the rest of Jane's article, you need to go to our website, if you are not there already.

Just over 60 ramblers enjoyed the delights of the Church Stretton area for a weekend at the end of April. On Friday night we enjoyed the hospitality of the Ragleth Inn for a very pleasant meal in convivial surroundings. Saturday evening saw us at Housmans in the village which had come well recommended and lived up to its reputation. There were three walks on both Saturday and Sunday .

Saturday Short Walk (led by Ken Mayer)

A pleasant morning for a walk, first to the top of Ragleth Hill then along the ridge, hard work at first but worth it for the great views. Irene was most impressed that we had made it to the top of the very large hill she looked up to from her bedroom window. A zigzag route down, then on to Acton Scott working farm where we were made most welcome (and not charged to get in) for lunch and toilets, not necessarily in that order. Return over fields and via Jack Mytton Way (a local hero of days gone by?) then down through woods to be greeted by a rather heavy hail storm as we entered Church Stretton a very good reason to shelter in a local tea room. All 11 appeared to enjoy the walk though some small murmurings when the distance was measured as 8.3 miles (I hate people with GPS) and we arrived back after the medium walkers.

Saturday Medium Walk (Frank and Jane Gay)

Starting from the village the walk skirted Hazler Hill before heading to Hope Bowdler and then to the hill of the same name. As we had 36 on the walk we were glad that there were few stiles as we descended through the fields full of sheep and lambs to Willstone. A short period in The Wilderness (note - this is the name on the map rather than a comment on the leaders' competence!) preceded our ascent of Caer Caradoc (459 m). Unfortunately we had little time to survey the Iron Age fort which crowns the summit as a squally shower was bearing down on us from the north. A green lane and field paths led us back to Church Stretton and afternoon tea.

continued

For readers new to the newsletter on the website - welcome - I hope you will become a regular visitor. Here you can read the accounts of the Saturday long walk and the three Sunday walks on the Church Stretton weekend. As well as the rest of Jane's article, you will be entertained with David Gylee's account of the early days of ECR, John Handley's erudite account of his ecology walk, further reflections by Tony Walker, and Roger Norton's tales from down under (not to mention being able to see past issues of the newsletter, and many other interesting website features).

Saturday Long Walk (Linda Brackenbury)



There were 12 on Saturday's 12 miler led by Linda Brackenbury. Cold northerly winds kept us well wrapped, but we just escaped the rain which fell from glowering black clouds on neighbouring hills. We even had some sun. Climbing steeply up Caer Caradoc, John Handley explained that we were on the 570 million year old edge of Gondwanaland. We then skirted the side of The Lawley before traversing its summit ridge where we were surprised by a pole-mounted metal bird!

Willstone Hill and Gaerstones Ridge completed our excellent walk.

We were all indebted to the intrepid Brian Richardson (who was clearly keen to emulate the exploits of another Brian we know), who observing the ominous black rain/hail clouds moving rapidly towards us, and ignoring the gusting gales, at some personal risk, ascended to the summit of Willstone Rocks in order to appease the rain gods with wild dancing and eerie cries. It worked! The rain clouds veered off to wet Church Stretton and the Long Mynd instead. They appear to have got the short walkers instead of us!



Sunday Short Walk (Malcolm Combey)

Eighteen walkers enjoyed a well earned rest, on a pleasant day, at the top of the steep climb up Carding Mill Valley on the Sunday short 5 mile walk led by Malcolm Combey. Eventually reaching the summit at Pole Bank (517m) where we admired the distant views, and were joined by the medium walkers enabling a group photo to be taken. After some loss of height and the gain of one person, but before the steepish descent of Townbrook Hollow to complete the Burway Loop, a leisurely lunch with magnificent views was enjoyed by all.

Sunday Medium Walk (Sue and Chris Munslow)

The walk started in the beautiful Carding Mill Valley and took a route along the shoulder of the Bodbury and Haddon Hills. The morning coffee spot gave the group a chance to admire other high points The Lawley, Wenlock Edge, the Wrekin and the previous days walk to Caer Caradoc. Although Caer Caradoc and the Wrekin look like extinct volcanoes, they are not. They are remnants of volcanic lavas and ash formed by Pre-Cambrian volcanoes and vents have never been found. The highest point on the Long Mynd was Pole Bank 516m giving distant sightings of Snowdonia and Cader Idris. The day was cool and blustery but with fine views throughout. The last leg of the walk took the group through the pretty village of Little Stretton and along lowland woodland paths back to the Carding Mill Valley.

Sunday Long Walk (Gwen Sproston)

On Sunday Gwen Sproston and Twix led 14 of us for 11 miles from Carding Mill Valley via the Light Spout waterfall to Bridges and then along the Shropshire Way through very attractive stream-bordering woods and the Golden Valley, the ancient Post Way over the Betchcott Hills and back over the golf course to a welcome brew at the NT café. And the weather?—dry again with plenty of sun but cool winds.

Our walk leader and Gwen Sproston took us to the Light Spout waterfall.

As many will know by now the weekend was not without incident. Several people fell but the most serious was Elisabeth Cresswell She dislocated her thumb and had a deep cut to the same thumb. Fortunately she was not driving so returned to Stepping Hill to get medical attention. She needed stitches and her thumb in plaster; The news, as of today, May 22, is that the plaster is off but her thumb is still stiff and swollen.

She has visited a physio and has exercises to do. She now seems to be on the mend but it goes without saying that we wish her well.



East Cheshire Ramblers – Early Days

David
Gylee

On a recent visit to the Chester Archives, David Bates and I discovered the following interesting information:

The Inaugural Meeting of the Macclesfield & District Group took place on 4 October 1973. A Mr H. Trufit was Chairman. Its aim was clear:

“The function of the group would be to interest itself in the maintenance and preservation of footpaths with the Macclesfield R.D.C.”

Mr David Hughes became Chairman on 13 August 1974, later confirmed at the first AGM, when interestingly, there was a request for a General Secretary:

“we await a volunteer for this post which is not an onerous task, as quite a lot of correspondence is done by the footpaths secretary”

Clearly a Group focused on footpaths, rather than Rambling activities, although:

“The first year of our existence has been a promising one, and the public rambles have been attended by an average of 30/35 people. We have therefore been encouraged to produce a further programme.”

The Treasurer reported a cash balance of £1.70 on the year’s operations, while the social highlight was the Hot Pot supper at the Holly Bush in Bollington.

At the 1975 AGM there were some rumbles of discontent amongst the members:

“Subs have now gone up to £3 – your committee has protested to National Office and to the Area. Their reply was that it could be £5.”

So then, possibly as now, protests to Head Office fall on deaf ears.

The name changed to East Cheshire Group in 1980 and has remained so ever since.

In 1982 there were 184 members, rising to 599 by 1993, peaking at 863 in 2001, with a slow but steady decline to circa 640 members today.

Committee meetings were held in the Nags Head hotel, Macclesfield and there appears to have been an annual Hot Pot Supper.

I conclude that the Group’s early focus was on footpaths, although there was a Rambling interest. They were careful with money while appreciating a drink or two in the Nag’s Head. Certainly their favourite social activity was talking and eating hot pot. Not too much has changed in 40 years?

Ecology Ramble to Dane Valley

John
Handley

Longstanding ECR member John Handley holds a professorial chair in the School of Environment and Development at Manchester University. His regular ecology walks are highly popular with members and it is essential to pre-book for them because numbers are limited by the practicalities of addressing an audience in the open air and to avoid over-trampling of sensitive areas. I am grateful to John for not only meticulously planning and leading yet another excellent informative walk, but for also writing this article about it for the Newsletter. The photographs were taken by your editor.

This walk on 20 April 2013 began at Goostrey railway station where tickets were distributed for the return journey from Holmes Chapel. The walk itself headed from Goostrey down to the River Dane at the Twemlow Viaduct, then upstream along the north side of the Dane valley through Swettenham, crossing the river at Swettenham Bridge and returning on the south bank to Holmes Chapel.

The river was the central feature of this walk and we began by discussing the potential impact of intensive dairy farming on both water quality in the river and in the aquifer beneath our feet. Much of Cheshire has been declared a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone by



DEFRA in line with European Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations. The implications for farming are quite onerous but now that industrial and domestic pollution has been curbed, it is agriculture that presents the greatest threat to water quality. We viewed a former MOD fuel storage depot at Twemlow Green which has very sensibly been proposed as a biodigester plant for farm waste... the planning application to Cheshire East Council is to be decided in June.

As we walked down to the splendid Twemlow viaduct we descended a series of terraces in the valley side. These terraces reflect the landscape history of the valley. The river itself is restricted to quite a narrow flood plain which it has been working since early in the 19th century. The first river terrace above that was formed in early medieval times when it is thought that extensive woodland clearance destabilised the river catchment. The next two terraces are much older and may reflect the initial thawing of a glaciated landscape around 14,000 years ago and a second lower terrace associated with the final thawing of the landscape 10,000 years ago. Where the terraces were exposed the fine silt of the lower terrace contrasted sharply with the coarse material, including large cobbles,

which the highly energetic post-glacial river had brought down from the Pennine uplands. Because of its scientific importance this whole section of the river valley has been given national conservation status. It is also greatly prized by anglers and we received a very informative briefing about that.

The section of the River Dane upstream of the Twemlow viaduct is still very active, especially after such heavy and persistent rainfall during the past winter. A hand written notice urged ramblers to report the imminent demise of Breerton Footpath 31 on the south side of the valley where the River Dane is rapidly undercutting the footpath. This was reported at the Cheshire East Local Access Forum and hopefully action will follow to sustain this important route.



The walk coincided with the first real warmth of Spring and the woodlands were alive with bird song, including newly arrived spring migrants such as chiffchaff, and carpeted with primroses, wood anemone and golden saxifrage. We noted the prominence of mature ash trees in both woodland and hedgerow landscapes and discussed the uncertain future of this tree given the now inevitable spread of Ash dieback disease (*Chalara fraxinea*). In March the government (DEFRA) published its Chalara Management Plan in which disease reporting by ramblers has an important part to play.

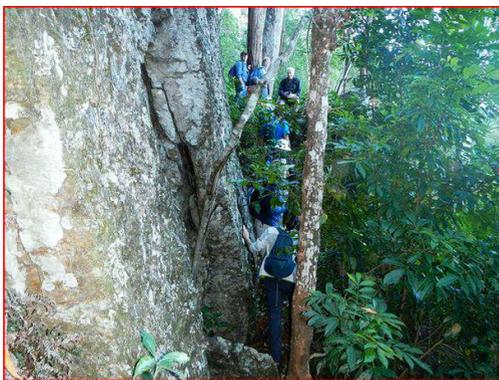
The return journey (*Editor: after an excellent pint at the Swan Inn while waiting for the train*) by rail over the Twemlow viaduct was a pleasant way to round off this walk which had opened new perspectives on a familiar landscape.

Watch your Step when Walking Down Under

Roger Norton
with photos by
Ari Afflekt

A day out with the Sunshine Coast Bushwalkers

East Cheshire Ramblers' roving reporter Roger Norton filed this report of a recent day out with a walking club in south-east Queensland, Australia.



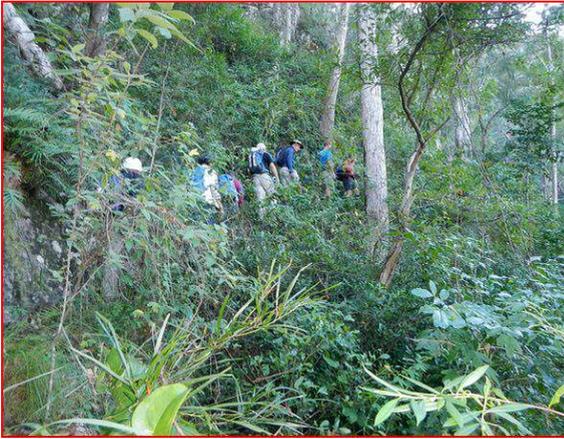
Weaving a way along the foot of the Bluff

It's not long after dawn and Kenilworth Bluff, a craggy peak in the Sunshine Coast hinterland 81 miles north of Brisbane, is swathed in dense, sub-tropical rainforest from top to bottom as it soars to more than 1,500ft (456m) above the mist-shrouded Mary River Valley below. "Ah well, it's not much higher than Shutlingsloe", I consoled myself. "After all, the Sunshine Coast Bushwalkers' programme had described it as a *medium* walk, hadn't it? It can't be that bad, surely? "

Even so, after several weeks of soft living and over-indulgence on the coast, I was feeling distinctly apprehensive as I surveyed the climb and the rather fit-looking party of bushwalkers laughing and joking around me as we waited to get underway.

My day had begun at 5.30 am in order to make sure I was ready in good time for the long drive inland through lush grazing lands for a 7.30 am rendezvous with the Bushwalkers outside the bakery in the nearby township of Kenilworth, which was first settled in 1850 when Richard Smith set up a cattle station there. At the time, his wife was reading Sir Walter Scott's eponymous novel and decided to adopt the title as the name of their new homestead. How the Aboriginals of the indigenous Numabulla people, who called the area Hinka Booma, felt about it is unknown. With its tin-roofed, clapper-board houses, solitary pub, bakery and cheese factory, still has the sleepy atmosphere of a Victorian country town, far-removed from the bustle of the tourist resorts and surfing beaches 30 miles away to the east.

Early starts are the norm in Australia, especially in Queensland where temperatures can quickly rise to 40C by lunchtime, and more. As a result, it is far better to get out and about soon after dawn before the heat and humidity get too oppressive, especially in the summer months of December, January and February. Fortunately, the ascent of Kenilworth Bluff took place on a gloriously fine yet thankfully cool day in mid-May towards the end of the southern hemisphere's Autumn.



It was easy to get lost in the dense vegetation

The conversation too, followed the familiar pattern of leg-pulling, talk of preferred brands of outdoor gear, favourite walks gone by and others eagerly anticipated.

Before we set off, leader Bernard, a wiry 77-year-old former painter and decorator who arrived in Australia from Germany in 1946, had briefly described the route and warned us to be on the look out for ticks and leeches. However, today there was no need to worry about wild dogs because “there are none about at present”, he assured us, adding tentatively, “as far as I know.” He then got each of us to sign a disclaimer absolving the club from any liability in the event of injury – or worse!

While “bush” walking figures prominently in the club's programme, it encompasses all manner of other outdoor activities, including rock hopping, creek swimming, canoeing and cycle rides. Several of those present were leaving the following weekend for a five-day, 50-mile trek on Moreton Island, an expanse of sand dunes and deserted beaches off the coast of Queensland, where they would be sleeping out in tents.

Because mobile phone communications can be haphazard in the hills, the leader and backmarker were equipped with walkie-talkie radios. As events proved, this was a wise precaution because the path frequently disappeared as the party made its way up the Bluff and people became separated in the surrounding undergrowth.

Little wonder then that members are strongly recommended to carry a comprehensive walking kit which numbers a torch, a whistle, a signalling mirror, matches and a pocket knife – oh, and a first aid kit with a compression bandage for treating a snake bite. In addition, leaders are officially advised to carry extra safety items, such as a UHF radio and an EPIRB – a satellite-controlled Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon.

All this may seem a bit over the top to British eyes but in remote areas like Australia's hinterland it is essential to be well-prepared because a seriously ill or injured walker would have to be evacuated by rescue helicopter, i.e. assuming a suitable landing site

Which for me – a not-very-fit pinko Pom – was just as well because within minutes of setting out we were clambering up a flight of 458 steps (I was cheerfully informed) leading ever onwards and upwards into the forest.

Like me, the 15 Bushwalkers present were predominantly middle-aged to elderly and closely resembled ECR's own membership in manner and appearance, the men outnumbering the women by four to one.

could be found on the steep, forest-clad slopes. If not, they would have to be carried to the nearest settlement and await transfer by ambulance to a distant hospital which could be more than 50 miles away on the coast.

Fortunately, the worst anyone suffered on the ascent of Kenilworth Bluff was minor abrasions, particularly on the final ascent which involved gingerly scaling an unforgiving granite outcrop hand-over-hand up the last 120ft to the summit where we were rewarded with magnificent views of the Mary River Valley.



Made it!



Looking out over the Mary River Valley

“All” we then had to do was descend the slopes back to Kenilworth which were potentially just as precipitous and accident-prone as the ascent of the Bluff.

The Sunshine Coast Bushwalkers club was founded in 1975, just two years after East Cheshire Ramblers, and today has around 160 members who usually walk on Sundays and Wednesday evenings. On the first Monday of every month there is a club night which is open to all members where outings and social events are planned for the next programme. Walks are graded short (under 10 km), medium (10 - 15 km) and long (15 - 20 km), and extra long (over 20 km).

Unlike ECR's three basic route descriptions, the Bushwalkers have no less than *nine* closely-defined categories of terrain that walkers might expect to encounter including, for example, 1) : *Path with smooth surface and low gradient*, or 3) : *Graded track with obstacles such as rock or root intrusions, fallen debris or creek crossings* or 9) : *Sustained climbing or descent of vertical or near vertical rock with exposure using widely-spaced or small hand or foot holds. Advanced climbing skills may be required. Upper body strength required.*

On reflection, I was surprised that the Kenilworth Bluff climb was officially described in the programme as only 5) : *Rough or rocky terrain that may require use of hands and/or creek rock hopping that requires small to moderate steps. Fallen debris possible.*

But then, I reminded myself, I'm just a pinko Pom and East Cheshire ramblers too, often disagree over route descriptions themselves.