

“We are truly ramblers, although very few of us can walk more than a few yards!”

On a cold morning in January while walking with friends on Hergest Ridge near Kington, Arthur Lee, chairman of Herefordshire Ramblers, had a bright idea: “I wondered if this would be a suitable ramble for Disabled Ramblers.” This is his diary of how the idea became reality and featured on BBC’s Countryfile programme along the way

January

On that January walk I could see the terrain was fine for disabled ramblers but there was plenty more to work out, particularly distance and parking. I hit the telephone. Public Rights of Way sections at Herefordshire Council and Powys County Council were all extremely informative and most helpful. I then contacted the Offa’s Dyke Path National Trail Officer, Rob Dingle. Rob was excited about the prospect of people with mobility issues being able to ramble on the Offa’s Dyke Path which is 40 years old this year and one of Britain’s best-loved walking routes.

February

Parking could be a problem because of the space needed for the assortment of vehicles bringing the scooters, motor homes, cars and trailers, and vans. So I rang the Hergest Croft Estate. Lawrence Banks and his wife, Elizabeth, who have managed the Gardens since 1988 gave permission to use the Hergest Croft Gardens car park.

March

A small party of Herefordshire Ramblers, Rob Dingle and Disabled Ramblers did the recce for the Hergest Ridge event. No



Countryfile’s Julia Bradbury, president of The Ramblers, joined us

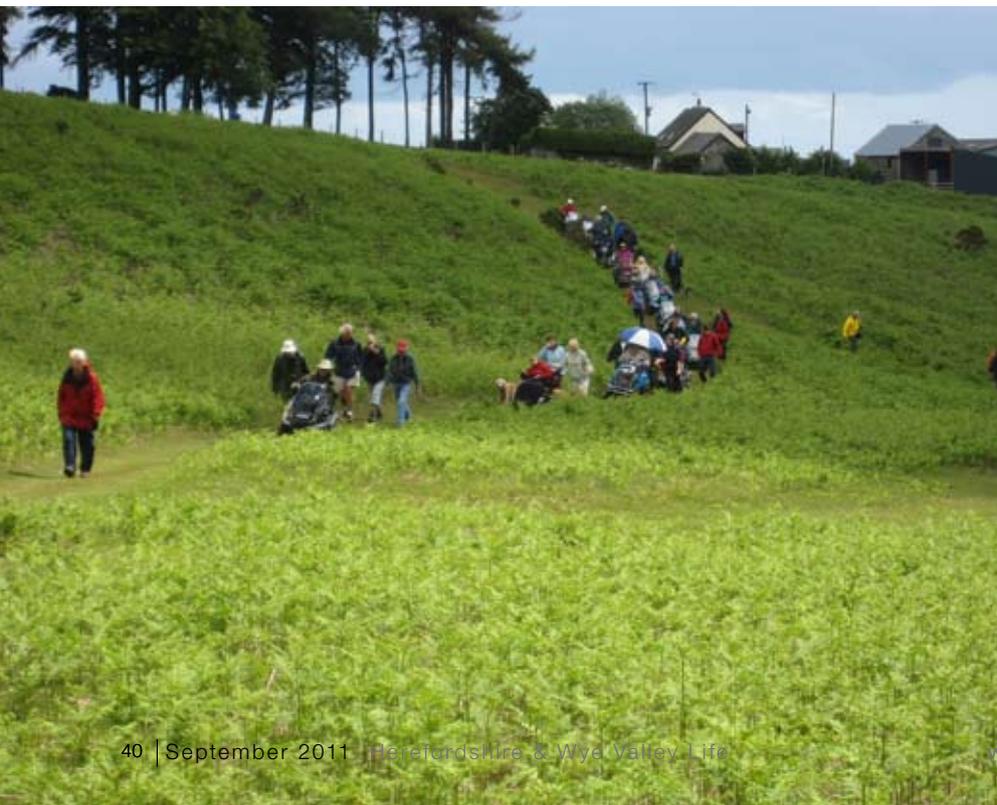
ramble gets onto the Disabled Ramblers programme without being completed by someone on a mobility scooter. The route was declared acceptable for the events programme.

May

12th. BBC Countryfile with presenter Julia Bradbury, who is president of The Ramblers, were filming in the area and met the chairman of the Disabled Ramblers Robin Helby, Rob Dingle, myself and members. 29th. The BBC Countryfile programme on the Offa’s Dyke Path is transmitted, with the section filmed around Kington, showing the recce for the Disabled Ramblers event.

June

7th. The Disabled Ramblers took to Hergest Ridge, starting in the rain from





Hergest Croft Gardens car park. The group was made up of 18 disabled ramblers on mobility scooters and 30 other walkers. There were members of Herefordshire Local Access Forum, Amey and Powys Public Rights of Way teams, trail officers for Offa's Dyke and Glyndwr's Way and a Walking for Health representative. We had a very enjoyable walk and discussed access for people with mobility issues; a day of partnership working. The ramble took in a loop of Hergest Ridge with stunning views in all directions from the top.

It is possible for almost everyone, whatever their mobility, to walk or ramble on Hergest Ridge on smooth, short grassland and be blessed, if the weather is kind to you, with spectacular 360 degree views. ■



Disabled Ramblers

Disabled Ramblers are a group of like-minded disabled people who enjoy being in the countryside, and who get about using paths and trails of all kinds. We are truly 'ramblers', although very few of us can walk more than a few yards! Our membership consists mainly of mobility disabled people and we get about through use of a wide variety of mobility aids, ranging from electrically-powered pavement buggies, scooters, powerchairs and, in some cases, manually-propelled wheelchairs. We organise rambles of varying difficulty from easy to challenging all over England and Wales, and, along with our volunteers, spouses and friends, each event provides recreation and challenge to suit every taste.

We organise and run a programme of supported disabled rambles each year. We also campaign for better access by encouraging those responsible to remove inaccessible man-made barriers, and, if appropriate, to address the surface quality of the path. Our policy is to seek access while fully preserving the character of the countryside. We have covered over 1,000 miles of off-road trail so far, and are committed to sharing our knowledge and experience gained with others.

The group holds regular rambles across England and Wales. These rambles vary from easy where the surface is level, to challenging which will be uneven, some steep gradients and probably a rocky surface. The distance covered is usually about eight miles. For further information contact www.disabledramblers.co.uk

Getting there

Start/parking: Map Ref. SO 280 567.
 On the lane above Hergest Croft Gardens.
 Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 201.
 Distance: 1 to 5 miles.
 Grade: Moderate.
 Stiles: None.
 Nearest town: Kington.
 Refreshments: Hergest Croft Gardens Teashop.
 Useful contacts: Offa's Dyke Association: www.offasdyke.demon.co.uk
 Herefordshire Ramblers: Tom Fisher, 018868 21544; email tom.fisher@virgin.net

