



BIGGAR RAMBLERS

Walking in Clydesdale

www.biggarramblers.co.uk

NEWSLETTER October 2020

The Chairman's Bit

'NORMAL' A word that, according to dictionaries, describes the usual, the standard and things that are regular. By that definition nothing nowadays is normal. We have been locked down, not able to visit our families, then bit by bit allowed out but only if we keep a social distance apart. And then we become practically unrecognisable behind face coverings. Within the Ramblers, we have started to walk again; firstly in limited numbers and then within larger groups, which means we can see our friends again and walk nearly as we used to. During that time, I have bombarded you with e-mails telling you about what the Group has had to do to keep onside with the Government requirements. But the main objective has been to keep the Group together and to get out together on walks as we used to. I know we are not back to normal and it may be some time before we are, but I know you are with me in looking forward to the end of this situation and we become a normal walking group again. In the meantime, I encourage you to stay safe, stay positive and, as best as you can, stay cheery!

Brian

The Hills are Alive - with the Sound of Ramblers

Here we are again, Happy as can be,
All good pals and jolly good companee
Never mind the weather, Never mind the pain
Now that we're together, it's just about to rain
Dumpty,dumpty doh, dumpty dumpty dee etc.etc. *(that's enough doggerel - Ed)*

Yes, the hills and dales were echoing to this dainty ditty as Biggar Ramblers got back into the mud and bogs of our beautiful countryside. The first few walks on the June programme had to be cancelled but, since mid July, walk-starved ramblers have gradually been getting back into the swing of things. We are grateful that the stringent local lockdown rules have been relaxed to allow organized groups to get out onto the hills. However the Ramblers insurers and the Scottish Government have imposed new requirements which tend to fall largely on our volunteer leaders. A "risk assessment" needs to be carried out for each walk and this is in two parts: the first relates to Covid-19 and has to conform to Government rules, the second is about physical risks on the walk. But this latter is simply what you do for any walk as part of the recce, and ticking the list is just a formality. Leaders also need to keep a list of the walk participants with contact numbers for the purposes of NHS Test & Trace. And intending participants are strongly advised **against** car-sharing. But leaders should not be worried that they are going to be lumbered with a load of form-filling – it is all quite straight forward and takes very little time. We are as ever very grateful to our band of leaders who give up their time to plan and recce and lead walks for our enjoyment. Graham, our Walks Secretary, is always looking for new leaders so go on, give it a go. We are also most grateful to Graham for producing a new programme of interesting and varied walks to take us up to January.

The AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Biggar Ramblers will take place on 16th November at 7pm to which all members are invited. The venue for the meeting is intended to be the Elphinstone Hotel in Biggar High Street but, under the current situation, we do not know if our Group will be able to meet as we normally do. Your Committee recognise that some of our members may not wish to gather inside in a group of possibly 15 people. We are therefore looking at the possibility of holding a combined online and in person meeting when members will be able to join the meeting from home. It is possible that restrictions will force the meeting to be held exclusively on line, but that will not be known until a few days beforehand. At the AGM, a discussion will be raised to determine the feeling among members with regard to the Biggar Ramblers Group seceding from the Ramblers Association and forming an independent walking group.

Keep in Touch with Lesley

Lesley begs to remind everyone that she keeps the official record of members' e-mail addresses, and uses it to send out up-to-the-minute information to members e.g. messages from Brian about current restrictions, leaders' info about walks, outbreak of World War III etc etc. Of course this information is kept entirely private and is not made public in any way. If you are not yet on her list, contact Lesley at lesleyglidden@btinternet.com. We cannot use this information without your consent and Lesley will organise a consent form for you to complete. Lesley is also happy to send messages by text to mobile phones if that is what you prefer.

On a separate matter, Lesley is also looking for photographs that can go onto the header of the Facebook page on a month by month basis. So get your pics. In quick.

From the Social Secretary

The Christmas dinner 2020 - Because of Covid 19, New Lanark Mill Hotel will not be doing "Carols by Candlelight" this year. They cannot say at the moment what their arrangements will be for Christmas. We will keep you informed by e-mail of any new developments.

Spring Away Weekend 2021 - Pam has re-booked the Craiglynn Hotel in Grantown on Spey for the weekend Friday 23rd to Monday 26th April.....3 nights dinner, bed and breakfast. We have been assured that the cost will be the same as last year, i.e. £55 per night per person with a £15 Single room supplement. Further information will be sent with the February newsletter.

From the Treasurer

Just a reminder, (although it doesn't look like we are going to have any events this year) that all our social events e.g. holidays, Christmas meal etc. should all show a "break even" position in our accounts. As Biggar Ramblers will incur a 30p bank charge on each cheque paid into our account, it would be preferable if you could pay by Bank Transfer which does not include a charge. If you still wish to pay by cheque, then we would be grateful if you would consider adding 30p to the amount on your cheque to enable us to break even. Thank you.

News from the Access Forums

Due to the current restrictions, it is no surprise that South Lanarkshire Access Forum and the National Forum have not been meeting as usual. However both bodies managed to arrange "virtual" zoom-powered meetings in June to review the outdoor access situation. The main points arising from the meetings were the greatly increased visits into the countryside after the lifting of travel restrictions, and the general ignorance of the Countryside Code. The main problems reported included gates left open, fires started, littering, problems with lambing, cattle worried, ground nesting birds disturbed, illegal parking. There have also been problems with farmers putting up illegal signs banning access, confusion over access to golf courses and a big increase in fly-tipping. Both the Forums felt that much better communication was needed with access-takers, particularly young people and those not already members of walking groups. On the other hand, it was pleasing that so many people were getting out into the country for health and recreation purposes and hopefully to discover the joys of walking. What is needed is a balance.

Ramblers Must Keep to the Straight and Narrow

According to a recent press report, hill walkers attempting to socially distance are destroying hillsides by straying off officially marked paths. The National Trust has warned that people steering a wide berth of each other are eroding hillsides at some of their flagship sites, including Ben Lomond, and the Grey Mare's Tail where areas around the carefully constructed stone route are showing severe erosion. Thousands of walkers and climbers have been pouring onto the hills after the end of travel restrictions and the NTS, which maintains a 250 mile network of upland paths, has issued an etiquette guide to maintain social distancing while minimising damage to the countryside. You should simply step to the side of the path and turn away from other users as they pass. Leaving the path wears away the surrounding ground which becomes trampled and can take years to recover. Of course this applies to all hill and mountain paths and tracks, not just NTS, so the message is:

"You will walk in the way of good men, and keep to the path of the righteous" Proverbs 2-20

The Final Page

Nature Notes

The shock headline in the last Newsletter about meeting a wolf on your walk seems to have had a reaction. We have been inundated with enquiries from worried ramblers about where we're likely to meet them and what to do if we do. There have even been some alleged sightings of woolly tails disappearing into woods and grey ears poking up behind rocks. Someone even swears they met one coming out of the "Crown" in Biggar late one Saturday night. The advice is don't climb a tree or run away or throw things at him. He will think it's a game and call all his pals to join in! We have been asked if Ramblers insurance covers being eaten by a wolf - yes it does, so you can sleep easy. This all stems from recent reports in the press that wolves are making a come-back across Europe - even the Netherlands now has at least one resident wolf pack. Is it now time to reintroduce this useful, adaptable and unjustly maligned animal to our landscape? Apparently no animal is more misunderstood and there is virtually no recorded incident of a wolf attacking a person. They are afraid of humans and do what they can to avoid us. There is no chance of meeting a wolf on Tinto as no self-respecting wolf would go near the rabble that clamber up and down there every day. In many parts of Europe, wolves are popular with farmers and landowners; they control the spread of disease and increase bio-diversity. It seems possible that they may be reintroduced in limited fenced-off areas of Scotland some time in the future, which of course will interfere with the "right to roam". So the argument rages on, but in the meantime the advice is that if you do meet a furry friend on the path, simply nod politely and stroll on. We hope this helps.

New Feature - Ask the Ed

Dear *Ed*, We keep hearing about these letters F.A.C.T.S but I can't remember what they mean and neither can any of my friends. Can you help? *F-M, Edinburgh*

*The Ed says: Dear F-M, I have the same problem and, if I had any friends, they wouldn't remember either. Forget FACTS, just use **Common sense** - even the Ed can understand that!*

"Awa' tae the hills" (sorry! - *Ed*)

The Great Outdoors



Well, that's it, Folks. The *Ed* thanks everyone for their support over the years. A new *Ed* will be in place next time, and we wish them every success. And we wish all our readers good health, good walking - and a very **Merry Christmas**.

And one final thought for the Day:

If it's raining, look for the rainbow. If it's dark, look for the stars.