

Walkers' Day, Sunday February 18, 2007

held to mark the launch of Hebden Bridge as Britain's first
Walkers are Welcome town

Report



www.hbwalkersaction.org.uk

The event

Hebden Bridge became Britain's first 'Walkers are welcome' town on Sunday February 18th 2007, when a national Walkers' Day festival was held in the town. Both local people and visitors took part in the event, which received widespread national and local media attention. The event took place at Riverside school in the centre of the town.

The full programme for the day included stalls, exhibitions, workshops and short guided walks.

The opening:

Well before the published opening time of 10 a.m., the hall at Riverside School was healthily heaving with expectant walkers; by 10.30 when the Launch was scheduled to begin, it was packed solid with people who had come from all over the district and as far away as London. The weather was perfect: glorious sunshine making our surrounding countryside look its very best. The stall-holders, representing local and national countryside and civic interests, were attractively laid out, staffed and ready.

Northern Rail had done a great job with banners, one outside the station forecourt and one on the Manchester-bound platform 'Welcoming Walkers'. Two trains were signed with 'Walkers are Welcome', both on the front of the trains and on the windows of the coaches. Signs were also placed on fences, trees and hedges as well as on litter bins and at traffic light posts.

The proceedings opened with a few short speeches of welcome: from Andrew Bibby, Cllr Betty Ward (mayor of Hebden Royd Town Council), Pam Warhurst (of Natural England), Kate Ashbrook (national chair of the Ramblers' Association) and Chris McCafferty MP.



Above from left: Andrew Bibby, Chris McCafferty MP, Pam Warhurst and Kate Ashbrook

Pam Warhurst stressed the importance of making walking available to people from all different backgrounds, and envisaged a network of Walkers are Welcome towns throughout the South Pennines. She said that what we were doing here in Hebden Bridge was 'fantastically inspirational'.



Kate Ashbrook said that the Ramblers' Association saw the idea of walker-friendly towns, pioneered by Hebden Bridge, as a model which could be copied by other places all over the country. She remarked how impressed she was with the new waymarked routes, saying that there were few other towns or villages with them. Kate Ashbrook also commended the work of Chris McCafferty in helping to bring about the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which had opened up so much extra countryside in the hills around Hebden Bridge. However, she pointed out that Calderdale had a lot of work to do in establishing footpaths – 45 per cent of the paths in the area remain not easy to use; Hebden Bridge was the exception.

The morning sessions:

A Short Walk in Nutclough Woods

This was led by the enthusiastic and engaging Kate Berridge (below) of the Friends of Nutclough Woods (who also had a stall manned all throughout the day). A group of about 25 – including a dog, children, locals, visitors from Leeds and Wakefield plus Kate Ashbrook and Pam Warhurst – were led up into the woods which are currently owned – in separate chunks - by three groups: Pennine Heritage, Calderdale Council and a mystery landowner.

Kate showed her group the work already done by the Friends of Nutclough - a group of local volunteers who work with virtually no financial assistance but with much goodness in their hearts - in clearing the mill stream, erecting new fencing and generally making the area a more attractive habitat for wildlife and access area for walkers. Several returned species have been spotted recently (kingfishers, dippers et al), the duck population is increased and the heron is a regular visitor.



For the mid- and long-term future, some of the Friends' plans are:

- making the site more visitor-friendly by providing various seating areas, some using sustainable materials such as willow;
- reducing the number of beech and sycamore trees to encourage a more varied plant profile for the woodland floor;
- encouraging grasses to prevent erosion of the clough sides; and
- major work on the mill pond, including the installation of silt traps on the stream above.

Overall, the Friends have developed a management plan to restore the woods to a much healthier balance of flora and fauna and improve accessibility for people.

Kate accomplished her tour with great panache and humour, and she was given a warm round of applause at the end. It was a very enjoyable walk and shows that there is a lot of potential in linking our own campaign with other environmental improvement with groups such as the Friends of Nutclough. At the end of the day, Kate reported much new interest from local people in becoming volunteer workers for the monthly Saturday working-bees held by the Friends.

How Safe Are You on the Hills?

The Calder Valley Search and Rescue Team brought two of their rescue vehicles and a team of eight of their team members, led by Anne Ogden, to the Launch Day, to support our campaign for wider – and wiser – use of our local walking routes.



In addition, Anne Ogden led a popular talk on safe preparation for walking, dealing with injuries that occur to walkers and giving some reassuring insight into the work of the local Search and Rescue Team.

About 20 people attended the talk which began with a series of slides on what CVSRT do and on basic safety guidelines for walkers. It became 'hands-on' when the group moved outside for an exploration of the specially equipped Land Rover and ambulance, and trialling of the stretchers. Back indoors, a wide array of bandages and techniques on the simpler way of applying a sling was exhibited.

Anne Ogden was voted an ebullient, confident and knowledgeable speaker. She and her team made everyone feel at ease, told them what they wanted to know, and introduced them to new approaches. Their lively professionalism meant that the session was a great success and those who attended were most appreciative.

Riverside to Redacre Walk

Angie Cairns led a short walk towards Mytholmroyd as a means of showing walkers at least one of the easier, yet still very interesting, walking options from Hebden Bridge to its neighbouring towns.

Twenty people joined the walk for which we, thankfully, had gorgeous conditions (a trial walk conducted two days previously had revealed muddy, boggy stretches that challenged the best of boots). We strode out cheerfully across Calder Holmes Park to pick up the bicycle path along the river to old Walkleys Clogs. Crossing the A646, we then took the canal towpath as far as the second bridge (already in Mytholmroyd), then headed up to Redacre Mill. A broad track through the woods cut us back, passing the filter beds on our right, to the foot of Redacre Clough. Here we peeled off to Broadbottom farm, stopping to appreciate the age and beauty of the historically rather hotch-potch house (the roof of a fourteenth-century aisled barn remains), before stepping over stiles into Fallingroyd Woods and making our way back down to the A646. The canal towpath took us back into town.

We set off promptly, the group sticking well together and making good progress. There were few stragglers and the walkers all seemed to enjoy a brisk pace and the generally flat, dry conditions. Happy conversations were had along the way, and most people made themselves known to the walk leader: most were from out of town, many were agreeably amazed by what Hebden Bridge had to offer and equally many expressed a real keenness to return to our area to seek out many more interesting and beautiful walking routes.

Local Legends

John Billingsley decided to start his session on Local Legends slightly early, given that 20 people were all ready and waiting in the classroom. Five more people turned up after he had started. In all, a third of the participants came from outside the local area. Diana Monaghan from the Hebden Bridge Historical Society was also present and able to add her contributions to the historical background we were being offered.

It was an extremely interesting session. John talked of the discrete communities that existed around Hebden Bridge, communities with their own identities and people able to discern the slightest variations in accent. There has been a healthy folklore environment around the area but which has inevitably been dissipated by the growth of newer residents who tend not to hear, let alone pass on, the traditional stories. Nevertheless, traditional stories are still going and can at least be recorded.

John took us through stories about Horsehold, Pecket Well, Stoodley Pike, Cragg Vale, Great Rocks, Devil's Rock and Bride Stones. We heard about mummified cats, witches, earls' daughters, slaughterings, murders with millers, marriages and UFOs, brides and Robin Hood all playing a part.

By the end of an hour and half, we all knew a great deal more about local legends. While the session may have felt a little long for some of the participants, even the children present asked questions and were clearly intrigued by what they had heard. All in all, a successful session.



The afternoon sessions:

Our Footpath Network

Only 5 people attended this session, walks in the sunshine and Kate's session (Pressing Issues for Walkers) having seduced everyone else. Tim Edge of the Countryside Service, and Mike Bartholomew, West Riding RA's Area Footpath Officer, nevertheless did a splendid job.

Tim gave the local authority context, Mike the regional picture. Points covered included responsibility for rights of way; the 1800 km we have in Calderdale; footpath maintenance and the role of the volunteer; the relative roles of the local authority and voluntary bodies; insurance, planning applications, closures, diversions and public inquiries; reporting of obstacles, registering paths, the definitive map and horses on paths; urban paths and alley gating; and even more.

All participants joined in the discussion which could have gone on for another hour as the particular – and extremely interesting – issues were analysed in detail. It was all very informative and thought-provoking.

Footpaths at Risk – Discovering Lost Ways

About thirty people took part in the afternoon workshop which was led by Andrew Bibby and took the form of a guided walk of about 2 kms from Riverside School along a number of recognised footpaths which are not in fact on the definitive rights of way map.

Andrew conducted a walk through Eaves to Hell Hole Rocks and back to Hebden Bridge. Much of this walk was along well-established paths which are not yet recorded on the official definitive maps. They could easily be lost for ever under recent government legislation unless we ensure that they are recorded. Andrew explained that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 had introduced a cut-off point of 2026 beyond which historic public paths and rights of way would no longer be able to be added to definitive rights of way maps. He said that, although this seemed like a long way off, in practice it was important not to leave it too late to identify possible unmapped historic paths. One of the problems is that Calderdale takes many years to organise the paperwork to establish a new path, and those present endorsed the need for Calderdale to put more resources to this important work.

Natural England has created a 'Lost Ways' project team, and is currently piloting work in two English counties (not W. Yorkshire). In its (somewhat irregular) newsletters, it appealing for volunteers who would be willing to work with the paid consultants researching old record offices. Calderdale has a member of staff dedicated to undertaking archive research on possible Lost Ways; he is looking at areas of the borough in turn and is currently focusing on Barkisland and Stainland.

The Ramblers' Association is encouraging volunteer activists with an interest in local history to undertake their own archival research on lost ways. The RA booklet on its Forgotten Paths Project was given to all participants on this workshop/walk.



The paths followed included:

1. A646 near Fox and Goose – Mytholm Eaves (above St James’ churchyard and school);
2. the terraced paths in Eaves Wood
3. the path from Albion Terrace – Buttrass (while a formal claim for this path to be registered as a right of way was submitted to Calderdale in 2001, it might yet be several more years before this claim can be assessed).

As a result of the workshop, it was agreed to make immediate efforts to have paths in the part of Eaves Wood owned by Calderdale dedicated as rights of way. Discussions will be held with HB Local History Society on a possible lost paths project.

Pressing Issues for Walkers

This session, conducted by Kate Ashbrook, national chair of the Ramblers’ Association, took the form of a 20-minute talk, followed by an hour of questions and discussion, on the subject of the general state of footpaths in England and Wales. 13 people attended this session: 11 were Ramblers’ Association members.

Kate outlined to her small but committed group matters such as relations with local authorities, the CROW Act and its aftermath, the new RA initiative to extend CROW to coastlines, and RA involvement in fighting wind-turbine planning applications. There was a sense of ‘preaching to the converted’ which perhaps may have been just as well in the light of the technical and perhaps ‘esoteric’ material under discussion; however, it also meant that there was lively participation from the audience in the question-and-answer session.

The questions put to Kate were wide ranging and covered such issues as:

- rights of way on city towpaths;
- legal issues re Nutclough Woods;
- provision of more public toilets and public transport for walkers;
- sharing of footpaths with walkers, cyclists and horse-riders;
- the focus of RA campaigns in future years;
- encouragement of younger walkers;
- comparison of legislations governing the right to roam in Scotland and England respectively;
- RA's public image;
- RA's need to remind the public of the history of dispossession of land in England;
- consideration of a change to RA's name to reflect the activities of the organisation.

Overall, the session covered Pressing Issues for Walkers most comprehensively. Perhaps some visual aids would have better elucidated speakers' points, and certainly a larger, younger, non-RA members' audience would have been more in the spirit of the day.

The Hebden Bridge Town Trail

This session took the form of a walk in the sun around Hebden Bridge, conducted by David Fletcher. In a somewhat truncated version (time being at a premium) of the published original of the Heritage Trail, David led a willing band of 13 people, firstly, up Bridge Gate to the Packhorse Bridge and, secondly, up the very steep first third of the Buttress (a bit of an unwelcome surprise to some people, but they all managed it). David proposed some interesting theories about original and second bridges, and original and second routes and diversions, and gave the group plenty of food for thought about Hebden Bridge as it might have been in the seventeenth century.

Then it was along the Keighley Road to the Nutclough Mill, partly to demonstrate the peculiarity of our double-decker housing and partly to expound upon the fustian trade as it was in the nineteenth century, including routes to and from the mills. Up – once again – to Birchcliffe and from there to the top of the steep path of Bankside, to talk of the nineteenth-century buildings regulations and patterns of the lower Birchcliffe/western Fallingroyd areas. Down, thankfully, the 100 (or is it 106?) steps to the road, we returned via Crown Street to Riverside.

David laid the emphasis very much on the building – the pioneering days - of Hebden Bridge, which the group found most thought-provoking.

Local Flora and Fauna

Ian O'Leary of the National Trust gave a fascinating illustrated talk on the natural history of the south Pennines area. Ian described the NT's work both on its Marsden estate and, nearer at home, at Hardcastle Crags. This was a packed workshop, and Ian's talk was much appreciated.

Final session

Following a most welcome tea, with cakes and slices provided by the Woodcraft Folk – for which our thanks – a few final reflections were expressed, with nearly all our visitors still with us in the hall.



Feedback

One of the ways in which people could best express their views was on the Opinion Boards erected in the hall, to which were attached Post-It pads for folk to write down and record what they wished to suggest. Below is a summary of those views under their headings. Whilst they have been collated from hand-written slips, they remain more or less verbatim. The views expressed are not necessarily those of HB Walkers' Action.

Has Hebden Bridge got it right?

What we need:

- more involvement of shops & businesses;
- (what sort of involvement from shops & businesses? Nothing is free: people must be prepared to do their bit);
- remove all cars and just have buses and trains;
- more trips for walkers to other places like the Ribblesdale Valley;
- more mountain gear shops;
- some lockers to leave rucksacks in for a few hours;
- (the last time I saw it, the gents toilet at HB station urgently needed renovation);
- more walking guides like the Kirklees Rambles;
- accommodation info on the website: B&Bs, guest houses, hostels, walker-friendly / dog-loving / veggie places etc.;
- 'stepping out' postcards;
- more places to eat / drink where you can take your dog;
- easier car parking; space in Hebden Bridge to park a coach;
- bus service to Hardcastle Craggs reinstated. It could bring money into the town (Peter Hitch: hitch@hitch.charitydays.co.uk);
- on the WaW website, mention the non-accredited B&B on the tops: 4 Causeway Fold, Blackshaw Head, HX7 7JF (01422) 846677 (Judith Appleton);
- link walks / walking with natural history:
 - provide guides for each month showing flora & fauna and places to see them;
 - have binoculars and magnifying glasses for loan / hire at the TIC, Gibson Mill, etc.;
 - introduce guided walks with a natural history theme, including early- morning and late-evening walks (best times for birds in summer).

Adopt-a-Path:

- from Banksfield to Heights Road – Mo;
- Bankside (the access snicket to Sandy Gate & Calderdale Way) to left of Stubbings School – Angie
- the path through the woods above Burnley Road – east of Osborne Street – Jude;
- Heptonstall, Hell Hole – Lumb Bank – 5 lanes and through to Slater Ing, then up to Popples Common; Popples Common back to Heptonstall via defences overlooking Hardcastle Craggs – John

Further comments:

- Do I just report a fault or do I fix it? (RA Footpath guardians);
- I have reported problems and nothing has been done.

Walkers' gripes:

- Rubbish and dumping in areas of conservation – higher fines / bring back more countryside wardens;

- dog poo on paths;
- fading waymarks (e.g. Calderdale Way);
- vandalised waymarks;
- barbed wire – use secateurs or wire cutters;
- paths near farms that are turned into lakes of liquid excrement;
- uncleared, unmaintained sections of track, to include puddled towpath;
- the view from the viewing point at Horsehold is obscured by wind-seeded birch trees. Can these be cleared / reduced in height to open up the view?
- barbed wire up hill behind Banksfield;
- no coach parking for walkers coming in from a distance;
- some of the stiles are difficult for older walkers;
- risers are needed to grip on stiles for those with poor balance;
- are there any wheelchair walks in West Yorkshire?
- farmers who take down footpath signs and then wonder why walkers are roaming around the farm;
- landowners who buy a property with a footpath on it and then try to reroute the path;
- unrestrained dogs – either other walkers' or riparian. Is there a legal aspect?

Young walkers:

- Encourage family walks – some will be the same as gentle walks as young children need less demanding routes.
- More leaders needed (trained).
- We want 'wicked walks'.
- The young think it takes too much effort to get to places that are nice and the public transport is ineffective. Vote Green Party for free reliable public transport.
- Walking gear to borrow?
- Why don't they walk? Uncool. How to get them walking? Work with schools.
- Ref: urban youth – focus on the fact that countryside is not dangerous (despite bird flu, BSE etc.) but is fun, magical, etc.
- There is still a lot of encouragement needed for schools to bring groups into countryside.
- Children's walks – do we have to be police-checked?
- Is walking a typical young person's activity? I think not. They want noise and excitement.
- Many kids are put off because they are not prepared or appropriately dressed for the conditions.
- Something about the sticks and gaiters and grey hair seems to deter them from joining us. What about less clutter and bottles of hair dye?
- I suggest challenge walks for teenagers along lines of Ten Tors on Dartmoor. Maybe someone from Calder High could get something going.
- With my own kids, I find walking with a purpose helps: e.g. looking for elves' houses (!), collecting kindling wood for the fire, taking photographs of local flowers, etc. Could this be adapted for more organised, larger groups of young people?
- Encourage schools to get involved in 'Walk to School weeks' (April & Oct., I think). Lots of materials are available from the Council. 'Safer routes to school' materials are also available.
- Working with schools on walking programmes projects across the UK. Interested?
Gary@cstheday.co.uk
- Singles walking – set up walkers' coach singles group – www.walkerscoach.com
- Don't underestimate the degree of challenge or distance young people can cope with.
- Take them when they are young – don't worry if they go off walking in teenage years; keep walking yourself (providing a role model) and they will come back to it. There are lots of walkers out there in their '20s.
- RA NE Lancs started a Young persons walking group – failed. Need a University.
- When I were young in them days, we occasionally went with Brownies or Guides or with family. Our friends were also into walking, so we would go with them and explore local housing estates, alleyways and public footpaths.

- Year 8 students at Calder High School feedback on leisure time:
 - many do go walking or running with their families;
 - many more would like to do it (especially walking in the hills locally) but would like organised walks;
 - transport would be a problem for many young people if walks were not easy to get to;
 - keen to hear about any developments for young walkers. Contact details: Lucy Cockburn, Community Development Officer, Calder High School
Lcockburn@calderhigh.calderdale.sch.uk

Gentle walks:

- the canal from Sowerby Bridge to Rochdale;
- the towpath towards Todmorden: return by bus or train;
- HB to Woodtop, down to Walkleys Clogs and back along towpath;
- Oakdale Road – Calder side;
- Nutclough Woods;
- Broadbottom Wood to Redacre;
- Hardcastle Craggs;
- Hardcastle Craggs to Crimsworth Dean;
- Mytholmroyd around Redacre and canal;
- canal towpath to Brearley;
- to Stubbing Wharf for a pub lunch;
- around Dodd Naze where they have done great work creating a route;
- Centre Vale Park, Todmorden;
- a circuit to Mytholmroyd using cycle track and Caldene Avenue, then back along the canal.

Further comments:

- Gentle walks can be up high (bus or car to get to them).
- How do you grade gentle walks?
- Join Friends of Nutclough Woods, the grass roots project: £5 per year. Site manager: 847334 – email: mail@fonw.greenisp.org

What next?

- practical involvement in such groups as Friends of Nutclough and Countryside Rangers;
- single list of all the organised walks in Calderdale (and on website);
- ethnic groups – how can we involve members of new communities within the population to enjoy the countryside / walks / and all the heritage involved for all of us?
- map-reading classes and using a compass; also basic survival (what to take on every walk, what to take in winter, etc.);
- schools' involvement;
- provide a pool of volunteer walk guides for groups visiting the area (e.g. staying at Height Gate); list of contact details made available with hostel booking forms;
- virtual walks on the website;
- parking for coach parties.

Hebden Bridge Walkers Action has written to and thanked all the speakers, leaders and stall-holders who helped make the Launch day of Walkers are Welcome such a resounding success. Similarly, we have received thanks and congratulations aplenty on the overall success of the day from many, many quarters.

Report compiled by Angie Cairns 22/02/07.