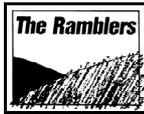


**THE RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION
CITY OF BIRMINGHAM GROUP**

Registered Charity No. 1093577

Autumn 2008
Issue No. 55



Footnotes



CITY OF BIRMINGHAM GROUP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: FRIDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2008, 7.30PM

We hereby give notice to members that the Annual General Meeting of the City of Birmingham Group, the Ramblers' Association, will be held in the Grimshaw Room, St Chad's Cathedral, Queensway, Birmingham on Friday 14th November 2008, at 7.30pm.

Nominations for Officers and Committee Members and any matters for discussion should reach the Secretary by Friday 17th October.

Our customary excellent Cheese and Wine Buffet will follow the proceedings.

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Muddy Meanderings

Editorial by David Sutton

Our biennial holiday to Sicily was a fantastic success and it's no wonder that we have not one, but two articles in this issue on the subject. However, the second piece is more of a plea for a very different holiday experience, but let's say that the sponsor, Roger Gibbs' tongue may have been firmly in his cheek as he extols us with the delights of the region (see page 5).



It will not be long before the group AGM is upon us. Full details are given at the top of this page. The committee look forward to meeting you there and reporting on this year's work.

Also, please see page 7 for details of the *area AGM*, which the Birmingham group is hosting next February. This event needs a lot of organising and so volunteers are sought. If you can help please let us know.

Millets

Social Scene 2008

From our Social Secretary, Derek Garfield

Our ANNUAL DAY OUT on 12th July saw us bowling down the charming M40 to Royal Windsor where, by and large, the sun shone benevolently on us. We toured the town including a fifty yard walk up the Long Mile, frequently stopping to admire the view which, of course, I do all the time these days. Most of us toured the Castle, although the Queen did not greet us at the gates as she had half promised to do. However, I'm sure I saw her waving to me from her bedroom window. We then did a short cruise on the Thames, enjoying the array of on board entertainment – well, the bar was open and Roger was in good voice. After an evening meal at a notable restaurant, we encoached and arrived back in Birmingham with the same number of people we started out with – this is always a relief to me. Thank you all for always being on time and thank you Ceri for your invaluable help.

Booking Forms are now available for our second WALK DAY OUT which is on Saturday 20th September and sees us visiting the Trentham Estate at



Stoke where we can enjoy the famous Italianate Gardens and the adjacent Monkey Forest where loads of monkeys roam free in sixty acres of woodland – or, if you prefer, we have a delightful morning walk instead. There is also an interesting Shopping Village if you need a little retail therapy.

Almost as exciting will be our visit to Millets in Union St for a 20% off SOCIAL EVENING on Tuesday 14th October when you can purchase any last minute requirements for our Lake District Weekend at the end of October. I mean, give your custom to our Sponsors, never mind the shops in Keswick! Don't forget you can call in at any time during the day and mention that you are from the Birmingham Ramblers but it is nice to see you in the evening for a swift half afterwards.

I'm donating my body to science. And I'm preserving it in alcohol until they can use it.

Socially yours,
Derek Garfield ■

Contribute to Footnotes: Your walking experiences, general articles associated with walking and the countryside, letters, 'Heard on rambles', poetry and other contributions are welcome. David Sutton, 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7TE. (Phone: 0121 444 6188). Email at: david.sutton986@btinternet.com.

Taking the measure of Mount Etna—The Birmingham Group Biennial Holiday

Report from David Sutton

At the end of May the landscape is full to bursting with orange, lemon and olive groves, fields of vines and woodlands of oak and chestnut, mesmerising banks and fields of wild flowers.

Butterflies are in abundance. Higher up, the grey and black of solidified lava flows and ash seem stark, with smoke and steam venting from a recent eruption. The craters at the summit emit a foaming mass of cloud.

This year's Birmingham Ramblers biennial holiday took us to Zafferana Etnea, on the lower slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily. Some six hundred metres above sea level, our hotel, Airone (the heron) was perched above the town, with the coastline and the Ionian Sea as a backdrop. Behind the hotel, another 2,500 metres to the top of the volcano. This year thirty-plus members booked for this seven night HF Holiday, very ably organised by our own Libby Hunt. HF Holidays provided three very capable leaders, Ian, Malcolm and David, and during our first evening settling in, they outlined the walking plans for our stay.

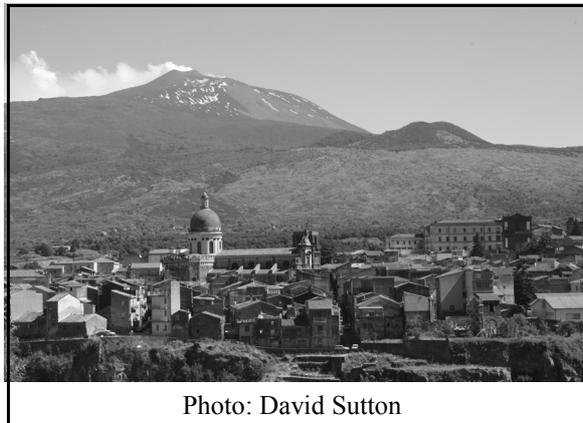


Photo: David Sutton

There was one free day and five optional walking days, each of which gave us a very different taste of Etna and its surroundings. On our first walking day we took in the countryside around Zafferana, starting at the shrine

of Capelli di Madonna di Vulcano, at the very edge of the lava flow that threatened the village of Fornazzo in 1971. In the Etna Regional Park we had wonderful views of the coast down south to Catania, and walked along and through recent lava formations to Zafferana, where we had time to explore the town before the steep ascent back to the hotel.

Our second day took us to the town of Taormina and its famous Greek Theatre. Starting at the village of Castelmola, precipitously perched on a high peak, the descent, which followed the path of an old donkey track (now a well-maintained stepped track) which gave us magnificent and unimpeded views of Taormina and the coast. A good stay in Taormina allowed us to explore the town, the Greek Theatre and absorb the atmosphere of this lively resort.

Day three saw us taken by coach up 2000 metres of the south slopes of Etna, where we were able to examine recent lava flows and interesting volcanic features such as lava tubes. The harder of the two walks went up to the Valley del Bove and its open 1000 metre gorge and further explorations of other old volcanic cones. The easier walk took a nature trail, which included lava outcrops, mixed woodland trails and splendid views. On the jumble of lava there was black moss and lichens in a microclimate, making their first headway on solidified lava, which would become many hundreds of years hence, the fertile soil on which the region grows its crops.

The next day was a free day. Our HF leaders organised a trip to Syracuse to explore the archaeological park, the town and old town on the island of Ortygia. An alternative trip took a few intrepid ramblers by taxi, by cable car, and then by four wheel drive vehicles right up to the summit of Etna, where with a local guide they explored the main crater at over 3000 metres, and then made their descent all the way back down lava slopes on foot, taking in a lava cave on the way.

On our penultimate day we began at the medieval town of Castiglione di Sicilia. It sits on a hill high above the Alcantara River and our walks took us down through orchards, chestnut groves and vineyards before walking a short distance along the river, ending at the town of Francavilla.

The final day's walking was in the foothills of the Nebrodi Mountains, north east of Etna. Staring at the small village of Santa Domenica Vittoria, the walk took in a ridge with views of Etna from the

Northern side, with the distant streaks of snowfields down its slopes. As we descended into the valley of the Alcantara, we were greeted by the dazzling views of wild flowers carpeting the slopes, before our trail went into pleasant wooded copses. Again there were more views on offer, down to the town of Randazzo, our final destination.

Needless to say, there was not much time left after these wonderful days but to enjoy a leisurely dinner at the hotel restaurant (except for an occasional dip in the swimming pool). The evening meal is taken late in Sicily and so we found ourselves, chatting to our table companions and reminiscing over the day's walk, as the hotel staff plied us with huge quantities of pasta, our main course and dessert, followed by gooey cakes! But, just to keep us on our toes, on the Tuesday, a traditional Sicilian group appeared in the dining room and to pipe, accordion and tambourine the Ramblers were invited to use their feet once more—for dancing this time!

An exceptional holiday with sunny weather, (a ten minute rain shower punctuated one day) walks of great variety, very attentive leaders and excellent organisation. What more could you ask? ■



If you would like to see a good selection of photographs of the Sicily holiday, I have put together a compilation CD of images taken by various members of our group. The disk should work equally on a computer or on TV via a DVD player. If you want to borrow a copy please contact me, David Sutton, on 444 6188 ■

Our Next Group Holiday—Rowley Regis?

Roger Gibbs makes a plea...

You may have read or heard about our 2008 Group holiday to Sicily, so I won't repeat what an excellent time was had by all. On the final night, Chairman Professor John Penny gave a more than adequate vote of thanks at which he indicated that the next holiday is already being planned. A vote was taken on two of the possible venues, namely Umbria in Italy, and Rowley Regis. John pointed out that if you liked the ash on Mount Etna you'll love the slag heaps of Rowley.

However, by a narrow margin, Umbria got the vote, but there is still time to influence the Committee and I would urge you not to cast Rowley Regis lightly aside. Just consider the facts:

- Having heard, no doubt, of our potential visit, the Ramada Hotel Group is planning to build a new luxury hotel at Oldbury – just a stone's throw from Rowley Regis. This would overcome one of the disadvantages, that the previously nominated Highfield Hotel in Rowley Regis has somewhat limited accommodation.

- The availability of good walks has been proven, as any aficionados of the Tom Clark memorial walks can testify, as can those who were happy to join us during the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Turner's Hill compares favourably with

Mount Etna from some angles, and there is usually smoke coming from the quarry.

- Travelling costs would be minimised, especially with our new passes for the over 60's. The total benefits would of course be shared with those not yet in possession of same.

- There would not be the tedious exercise of checking in at the airport, waiting two hours or more, and being subjected to impertinent security checks.

- Breakfast would involve bacon, fried eggs, sausages, black pudding, hot toast, marmalade, etc., but croissants, sliced cheese, hard boiled eggs, and salami would be available on request for a "continental flavour".

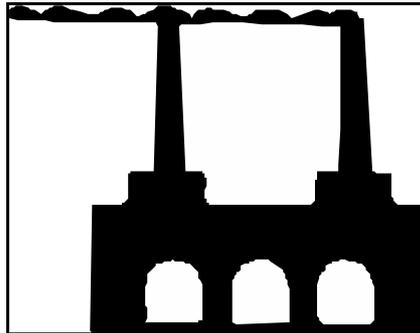
- Tea would be made with boiling water and English breakfast tea.

- We couldn't promise that the pasta would meet Italian standards, but I understand that Heinz Spaghetti Hoops in Tomato Sauce are very good.

- Beer would be at room temperature, featuring Batham's as one of a wide selection. Unfortunately we would not be able to obtain "Moretti's", our Sicilian favourite.

- Any pieces of Rowley Ragstone collected as souvenirs would not be confiscated.

- Faggot and mushy pea tasting would replace honey tasting.



- A “Black Country Night Out” would be organised in place of the wandering band of Sicilian minstrels.
- The Haden Hill Leisure Centre will provide a swimming pool, by then free for the over 60’s, so we have been promised.
- We would all save on sun cream.
- There would be no minimum baggage allowance, so ladies could take

all their best frocks.

- Our “Rest Day” could involve a visit to Dudley Zoo, the Black Country Museum, the Black Country Beer Bus Tour, or a trip on the Severn Valley Railway.

If you are considering joining us next time, please give the above your utmost attention, and have a word with Libby. I intend to – I’ve almost talked myself into it! ■

The Meercats Ramble

Report from Steve Brittain

On Saturday June 28th, we had the 10th annual Meerkats ramble, and this year’s joint ramble was on Cannock Chase. Once again Horace Marsh led a very interesting walk, starting on a new path which has been made for wheelchairs and buggies. There was only one wheelchair this year so he had all the pushers and pullers all to himself. The next section of the walk was on the old R.A.F base where the air force trained their aircrews for a number of years. Then after a short break we headed off to our next section, which has been designed with the disabled in mind. The track is about one mile long and takes in a viewing platform where you get good views over the Chase. Once we had finished the walk it was off to the pub where we had a great meal.

Many thanks to everyone who supported our annual joint ramble and helped to make it a successful day. Next year’s ramble will be on Saturday June 27th, the

venue will be announced in the January-June 2009 walks programme, which will be available in December.



The Meerkats are having a **Quiz Night** on Saturday 13th December at the Warriors Club, Lambeth Road Kingstanding, B44 9NR. The quiz will start at 7.30 and there will be a buffet. Contact me if you want to come along and join in the fun. Phone: 0121 749 1227. ■

ADVANCE NOTICE of Warwickshire Area AGM

On Saturday 7th February 2009, our Group are acting as Host for all the other Area Groups at The Grimshaw Room, St Chad's Cathedral, 10.00. a.m. for 10.30. a.m.

After the free Buffet following the meeting, we will be showing off The City of Birmingham, by leading 3 very different walks.

1. A longer walk via canals & green corridors to a hidden gem.
2. A "Blue Badge" walk around interesting features of the City Centre.
3. A visit to Birmingham's Catacombs.

We will need a lot of help to make this event a success, so **we are asking for volunteers**, as car park attendants, back markers, to meet trains & lead a "walking bus" to the venue, to "meet & greet" at the doors, to marshal queues, put out chairs & arrange the room & to clear up afterwards.

If you could offer you help, please contact a member of the sub committee - Libby Hunt, Sandra Sutton, John Penny, Derek Garfield or Fred Willits (Phone numbers in the walks programme).

We look forward to hearing from you.

EASTER YOUTH HOSTEL WEEKEND

10th—14th April 2009

The next YHA Easter Weekend will be at Blaxhall, Suffolk. The hostel will provide breakfast, picnic lunch and evening meals. If you want to join us, please book on an individual basis with the hostel direct and then let me know you will be coming.

If you require transport also contact me.

Booking the hostel contact: 0870 770 5702

Confirming your booking & transport requests:

Steve Brittain 0121 749 1227

Heard on rambles...

Approaching the lunch-time pub John Penny was heard to say, "I think hot tea is very refreshing on a warm day." Agnes thought to reply, "Well, John I've



never heard you order tea in a pub."

To which John replied, "That's because I have a certain image to maintain."

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