



The Disabled Ramblers Association on Dartmoor

David Guiterman joins members of the Disabled Ramblers Association on a ramble from Princetown

PHOTOGRAPHS © DAVID GUITERMAN





Listen to the sound of seventeen motor vehicles starting up in Princetown car park. Listen carefully; hardly anything can be heard. I am with The Disabled Ramblers Association as their guest while they experience the eight mile journey along the trackway of the old railway line that used to run from Yelverton to Princetown. The motors power Trampers, the Land Rover equivalent in the disabled vehicle world.

These go-anywhere vehicles (they do have their limitations) provide access to open country for those who are unable to walk any great distance. Many Trampers are differently equipped to suit the owner. There was even one four-wheel drive wheelchair, a Fieldmaster Trek, with an electric motor powering each wheel to provide greater cross-country ability.

Everyone I met was keen to tell me just how important these rambles are. Many of those on this trip used to be keen walkers and runners. Peter, the Regional Organiser, had fifteen years ago, run in the Lustleigh 10k event that I had experienced recently. One of the Ramblers used to be a mountain guide in the Himalayas. Without the Disabled Ramblers Association and Trampers they would not have been able to enjoy the open air; something so important to all of them.

Everything must be carefully organised. The Association decides on a location for a series of rambles and carefully surveys all routes. A boggy patch of ground, a set of steps or a stile is all it takes to make further progress impossible. Gates have to be carefully designed to be negotiable by Trampers. Many alas are not suitable. Dartmoor National Park Authority takes access for disabled rambling very seriously and as a result there are a large number of routes possible on the moor.

Dartmoor National Park has much to offer for people of all ages and abilities. A series of Easy-Going Dartmoor routes have been developed by the Authority with help from disability groups to enable access for visitors with limited mobility. Each route provides detailed information on what to expect including gradients, surface type and any path furniture. For more information, visit www.dartmoor.gov.uk/visiting/accessible-dartmoor

Ramble routes are graded into 4 categories using Association criteria. Category 1 rambles are on level routes with nothing rougher than a metalled farm track or forestry road whereas Category 4 involves routes of significantly greater difficulty. Category 4 routes require a high degree of skill and endurance and are only for experienced, adventurous users of very powerful off-road scooters.

The ramble we followed was largely Category 2 with a small rough section which was graded Category 3 and provided a considerable challenge and a high degree of skill in Trumper handling.

Full back-up was provided by a support unit which carried not only a tent with toilet but also equipment to be used for running repairs on any of the Trampers.

We all arrived safely back in the car park after a great day out with spectacular views and convivial company.



The Disabled Ramblers Association

This national association exists to help mobility-challenged people get back out into the countryside. Able-bodied helpers are welcome to support members and to help with loadings scooters and other jobs. They ramble in all weathers and over a variety of terrain.

If you would like to find out more about their activities, please visit their website at: www.disabledramblers.co.uk. For events on and around Dartmoor please contact Peter Flick, the Regional Organiser. Tel: 01837 840670, Email: prflick@dartmoor-it.co.uk

Look out for the national newsletter edited by Ron Lyon who joined us on this ramble. He can be contacted by email: editor@disabledramblers.co.uk. Newsletters can be read at: www.disabledramblers.co.uk/newsletters/

For full details and a map of the route followed please see the Classic Walk/Cycle Ride on page 20. ■