

Ramblers Gems



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For further information or to submit a contribution email: svrcramblers@gmail.com Web Site <http://www.springvaleramblers.co.uk/>

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Nordic Walking

Nordic walking (originally Finnish *sauvakävely*) is fitness walking with specially designed poles. While walkers, backpackers and skiers had been using the basic concept of poles for decades, Nordic walking was first formally defined with the publication of "*Hiihdon lajiosa*" (translation: "A part of cross-country skiing training methodic") by Mauri Repo in 1979. Nordic walking's concept was developed on the basis of off-season ski-training activity while using one-piece ski poles.

Nordic walking uses two poles and works the upper body while walking. Like skiing, your arms use these poles to match each step the person takes. However, rather than using these walking poles for balance, the poles remain behind your body and point diagonally backward at all times.

Nordic Walking provides an extremely efficient form of workout, combining both cardiovascular training with strength training.

Why Walking Poles?

Using walking poles on a ramble is not Nordic walking. Walking poles are often overlooked and undervalued, but they offer a whole host of benefits for the Rambler:

- They help protect your knees, ankles, hips and spine; especially when walking down hills (with each pole plant, walkers remove roughly 3% - 5% of the impact from each step).
- Protect existing injuries or when you are recovering from knee or hip surgery.
- You can travel across terrain at a quicker pace, particularly when going downhill.
- Poles improve your uphill walking technique, encouraging an upright posture that decreases the chance of a fall or slip promoting an efficient breathing position.
- The poles aid balance on uneven trails, (four points of stability rather than two) reducing the risk of injury and spreading the weight of a backpack.
- Reduces fatigue, improves efficiency and strengthens core muscles, arms and shoulders. The improvements in the upper body will assist when walking with or without the poles.

Michael C

The Ogham Birch

Birch is the Celtic Zodiac Tree for December 24 - January 20. For six months, light has been decreasing, leading up to the solstice, the darkest time of year. Some of us have perhaps spent a few days reflecting upon the essence of what has been garnered over the past season. Now we move from the Elder tree to Birch.

The Celtic Tree Calendar is **based on the ogham alphabet and its association with trees**. It consists of 13 months, each 28 days long, following the lunar cycle, as Roman accounts have suggested the Druids did, with one extra day representing the 23rd December, the 'Day of Creation'. Each of the 13 months is represented by a tree together with its ogham letter. Ogham is an alphabet which was traditionally used to write Primitive Irish -1,600 years ago, the earliest known form of Gaelic.

The Birch was seen by the Druids as the tree of birth – a symbol of new beginnings. Beth, meaning birch, is the first letter in the Ogham alphabet and the first month in the Celtic Tree Calendar. Known by the Celts as Beith (pronounced 'bay').

It is a hardy and adaptable tree, able to grow where many trees cannot. It seldom grows alone and is often found in groves. The birch tree has many uses both medicinal and practical. Birch wood is durable but quick to rot, making it a good home for insects and birdlife.



Downy Birch – smooth horizontal lines

It was often used to make May poles and start the fires at Beltane, the festival of new beginnings, due to a highly combustible tar in its bark. This tar is believed to be good for the skin and can be used to treat eczema.

Birch is also associated with purification and protection. The leaves of the birch can be brewed into a tea that treats infection, stimulates the gall bladder and kidneys and is said to dissolve gravel and kidney stones. These days, Birch Water is considered a fine tonic after winter weather and darkness - and is useful in controlling cholesterol levels and supporting the immune system. You can buy bottles of pure Birch Water from some supermarkets and health shops. It is very refreshing and light, a bit like coconut water but less sweet.

Birch Leaves



In Scandinavia birch is used in saunas to stimulate the purification process and in Russia birch branches are beaten against the skin at steam rooms for the same purpose. This practice was also used as a punishment in old England to purify a criminal of evil.

Brooms were often made out of birch twigs as birch was believed to have protective qualities. The birch brooms were used to drive away the spirits of the old year in a protective ritual called 'beating the bounds'. Babies' cradles were often made of birch for these same protective qualities, and it is said that carrying a piece of birch will protect you from fairies.

There are two relatively common birch trees in the UK – Silver and Downy. The dwarf birch can be found in the Highlands of Scotland. Birch trees have separate male and female flowers that appear at the same time as the new leaves in the spring. The easiest way to identify different birch trees is by their bark.



The Ogham Symbol



Silver Birch – black diamond shapes

Jean G

A Walk to the Cape Florida Lighthouse

I know! It is an unusual subject for the Ramblers Gems, but the more time I spend around south Miami the more I discover and some of that I want to share. The winter weather is ideal for exploring, dry and nice temperatures. A favourite walk of 4 miles is around a historic lighthouse, Key Biscayne at the north end of the Florida Keys, which is home to some wonderful wildlife and stunning views.

The lighthouse is actually difficult to spot from any point on the Key but picking up one of the excellent little maps will soon get you heading in the right direction. In my view it is best to ignore the signposted directions to the lighthouse and walk about ½ mile south to the southernmost tip of the Island to take in the view across the clear turquoise sea.

Turn East and follow the well-marked path along the edge of the ocean, walking just inside the tree line the shade is very welcome. After about ¾ Mile the first indicator that you are close is the Lighthouse Keepers cottage coming into view through the tree line with the very top of the lighthouse peeking out from above the cottage roof.



Passing by the cottage the lighthouse comes into full view, standing tall and majestic at the southern end of the Key Biscayne shoreline. The area in which you are standing is beautifully covered with Palm Trees and the wildlife, scurrying lizards, small warblers and many other birds are all around you.

In the midst of all this beauty, the occupants have endured their fair share of troubles and a not-so-kind history. The structure has sat here for 200 years and has been refurbished several times since its construction, surviving attacks from Seminole Natives; Pirates; American-Spanish war, later use as a safe haven for slaves crossing to The Bahamas, Civil War, Hurricanes and an explosion of lantern oil.

Passing the Lighthouse you cross the island to a semi-tropical area full of bird calls, lizards and if you're lucky a 2 foot long Green Iguana basking in sunshine. As the path turns North you may spot Ibis with their long-curved beaks, a Palm Warbler searching for insects in the lower shrubs and overhead Broad Winged Hawks circling on thermals.

This is the Keys and is only one of four "worlds" within the Park.

The mangrove shoreline acts as a nursery for all types of land and marine animals. The mangrove swamps also keep the waters of Biscayne Bay clear and sparkling by trapping eroding soil.

The shallow aquamarine waters of the bay are teeming with starfish, sponges, soft corals and other marine life. I was lucky to spot one of the very special residents of Biscayne Bay, a Manatee, unfortunately now an endangered species.

The Keys Coral Reefs created by ancient coral which is the work of billions of tiny individual coral animals called polyps. These soft-bodied animals live in small cups of calcium carbonate that they secrete around themselves as exterior skeletons.

Biscayne National Park is 95% water, so the majority of animals live in ocean or shoreline habitats including 500 varieties of fish in or near the coral reefs. Being so crowded partially explains their brilliant colours and patterns. Survival means instantly identifying potential rivals or mates. Also in residence are five species of turtle. If you look offshore, you will almost certainly spot North America's largest bird, the American White Pelican which, due to its size may take a while for you to believe that it is a bird, as it can be up to 1.5 metres long and with a wingspan of 3 metres.

Following the Shoreline Mangrove, the trees clear and you are back on a sandy beach and looking over the turquoise sea. Time to paddle the shoreline until you reach the car park. If you visit Florida, it is not just man made amusements of Disney or Universal studios. The Keys, Everglades, and many other national parks are the real Florida. Find the well mapped footpaths, extensive cycle tracks and huge areas of semi tropical wetland and see the real Florida.

I am smitten.

Michael Mc

Memorable Walks (The Crummockdale Round)

There have been many memorable walks amongst my walking exploits, too numerous to mention. Apart from superb walking in the UK, Ireland, Isle of Man, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, France etc a vast number have been in the UK and in particular the Yorkshire Dales which I love with a passion. Back in 2006 the editor and myself decided to embark on a Thursday walk routine and over the next few years covered most of the 'Dales', although we did sneak in a few 'Lakes' routes. I have images of many of the walks undertaken and in retrospect I should have kept a more detailed account journal, however just seeing an image can often transport me back in time and I can recollect details of many of the walks.

One such memory would be of March 2006 when MCC myself and my late wife Josie completed the Crummockdale Round, a walk of 8.6 miles. The day was crisp bright and sunny as we set off from Austwick. Crummockdale is a typical glacially formed valley with limestone terraces, the route can be started from either side of the valley, I believe we took the west side which takes in the 'Norber erratics', glacially transported sandstone and silurian slate boulders that were carried from cliffs one mile away by retreating ice. They stand on plinths of limestone, many eroded by weather have toppled over.



One of the Norber Erractics

At the end of the 'Norber' plateau we reach Robin Proctor's scar, so named after the person who rode his horse over the edge, he survived the horse did not. I must point out at this stage that Crummockdale is popular amongst student geologists who indulge themselves poking about between rocks and nooks and crannies hoping to find some hidden gem.



At the head of the valley, we reach the trig point of Moughton scar and clints and grikes with views of Pen-y-Ghent in the distance, the background is one of the most inspiring landscapes in the Dales and is the equal of the American National Parks of Yellowstone, The Grand Canyon or Monument. On this day the views from the 'Sulber gate' were fantastic, as the photos show.



The walk back from Moughton scar is a gentle meander down grassy then stony path to Austwick and tea and cake.



A memorable walk.
Alan S

Ed *This walk has been planned for the 2022 syllabus.*

Hoof Prints Through History

At the beginning of the year I was due to lead the Spring Vale Rambling Class' first ramble of the New Year to the south of Darwen. Due to very bad weather the walk had to be abandoned even before we set off. Prior to the arranged date for the walk whilst I was exploring the area to find a good walking route, I decided to try out the old pack-horse trail which leads out of Darwen. It is still a Public Right of Way and some sections are easy to walk along offering good scenic views. However, one part was along a sunken lane which was very tricky to negotiate, and I decided that it was too risky for members of the Class to walk along.

It is interesting from a historical point of view that the main road through Darwen (the A666) is relatively modern in historic terms. Prior to the new roads construction, the main routes through Darwen were the pack-horse trails. The one going out south of Darwen runs parallel with the A666. Branching off from a trail running east-west towards Darwen Moors at Pickup Fold in the Sough area, it then travelled south, crossing the future route of the A666 by the little row of terraced cottages just past the Darwen Eastern Cemetery.

Many people of a certain age will remember Bull Hill Maternity Hospital - I was born there - and the old pack-horse trail runs past the rear of the site. It is now, of course, a modern housing development (there was a big protest movement in Darwen at the time after the announcement of the proposed closure of the hospital and after that, unless you were born at home, you could no longer claim to be born in Darwen.)



The visible route of the pack-horse trail starts to disappear shortly after passing through the Cadshaw Farm area, but apparently, its route runs parallel with the current line of the A666 all the way to Bolton.

Evidence for these early routes can still be seen in the form of 'hollow-ways' descending from the moors into the valleys, deeply scored into the landscape by centuries of packhorse traffic. River crossings were vitally important, from fords and narrow 'clapper' bridges to more substantial arches. There are remains of the old bridge across the Cadshaw Brook.



The amount of pack horse traffic was large for such a small local population, but the loads they carried were a diverse mix, from fish and flowers, lime and leather, bricks and barometers, carrots and coals. All this was carried by strings of pack-animals. The tracks were also used to drive herds of cattle, sheep, pigs, geese, turkeys and other livestock along the roads on their way to the market in Bolton or Blackburn.

The description of 'strings of pack-animals' provides the idea of how a 'train' of packhorses would have looked crossing this landscape. Each team consisted of between twenty and forty horses. The individual animals each carried a pair of panniers hanging low across their back. The pack horse is characteristically a small but sturdy breed of about fourteen hands high. The whole train was under the charge of a driver (usually on horseback) and a couple of his attendants following on foot.

The leading pony carried a bell which helped keep the whole entourage together and gave a warning to travellers from the opposite direction - particularly important at narrow bridges.

Tony C