

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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Nature for Everyone

A detailed study has shown that even observing nature through a window has a positive impact on our health. Creating more, and better, natural spaces and protecting and improving those we already have, will boost the mental and physical wellbeing of the whole nation. It will also deliver billions of pounds in cost savings to the NHS and creating thousands of jobs.

The pandemic proved how important spending time in nature is to people's health and wellbeing. But it also highlighted the inequalities in access to thriving natural spaces.

One in three people in England do not have nature near their home, with little or no greenspace at all in some of the most disadvantaged areas. Ethnic minorities are twice as likely to live in a neighbourhood without nature-rich spaces.

The Government has promised to create equal opportunities and quality of life for everyone across the country through its 'Levelling Up agenda'. The Government will introduce new laws. These 'Levelling Up laws' will include changes to the planning system, making this a key opportunity to secure a "right to nature" for every community.

The Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of over 70 different organisations who have come together behind this issue. They are asking us all to support the call for the Government to:

1. Make equal access to nature a core test of levelling up
2. Make it a legal requirement in new Levelling Up laws for developers and public bodies to provide access to nature-rich local spaces for everyone.
3. Provide funding for locally-accessible nature-rich spaces by extending the Levelling Up Fund to green infrastructure projects.

Show your support by adding your name to the call for Nature for Everyone. Click on the [link here](#) or go to the <https://wcl.org.uk/nature-for-everyone> for more information.



Ashton Park Darwen

Six Miles of Water Lost

Spring Vale Rambling Class walks often include stretches of canal towpath but what happens when things go wrong? In 2021 ‘things did go wrong’- there was a major breach in the Leeds-Liverpool canal at Rishton on a section of the canal known locally as the Ossie Loop.

On Sunday 10th October there was a report of ‘quite a bad leak’ and the local C&RT Operatives attended the site. The severity of the leak meant that contractors were called out immediately to install temporary dams. On the Blackburn side six miles of water was lost. On the Burnley side more than 18 miles of water became low. The water had broken through the towpath and the embankment at a culvert and a huge hole was created. This resulted in a six-month £1.7 million project to reinstate the canal. The repair was particularly challenging as the site of the breach was away from local roads and required a temporary access track to be built along the bed of the drained canal so that materials could be brought onto the site.



View of the almost empty canal 19th January 2022

The local C&RT operatives worked constantly to get water back into the canal to allow boaters to float again. They used the reservoir at Rishton and emergency abstraction powers to get water from a local brook. After a week there was enough water to get the boaters off the canal and out through Blackburn locks. A lot of pipework was laid by hand along the length of the towpath affected and pumps were installed to get the over pumping in from the east pound to the west pound. An access to the site was formed to get into the bed of the canal itself. Two more dams were built, finally the porta dams were removed, so work could take place behind solid structures, creating a safe working environment for all of the work teams involved.



The breach below the towpath 6th April 2022

Construction work started in November 2021. The C&RT Environment, Ecology and Heritage teams now became part of the team. They looked at what was there, what they needed to keep and what was needed to safeguard the area. Keir, the main contractor, started to recover the site and get rid of all the damaged bits of the canal and culvert. Discussions took place on how to start the repairs. Design teams got involved and came up with a design to replace the structure with a new culvert, a new head wall and a way of returning the canal back into operation.

A new canal bed was put in place and then the embankment was replaced. 1800 tons of clay was used to repair the canal bed. More than 6,000 tonnes of stone were needed to rebuild the canal embankment and reinstate the culvert. About 1.5 billion litres of water was pumped past the site to keep the canal in water down towards Blackburn. All this work was completed by April 2022 so the canal could re-open to boaters again. Between the culvert and the River Hyndburn detritus was removed from the bed of the stream by Hyndburn Taskforce volunteers. The volunteers also helped to repair part of the towpath from the railway bridge to Bridge No 110. Stream repairs were undertaken, there was a lot of masonry work completed. The C&RT apprentice stonemasons worked on repairing Bridge 109 parapet. A job that had been outstanding for a couple of years. Contractors remained on site until June to construct the rest of the towpath, the embankment and to carry out other restoration works such as boundary fencing so the towpath could open and finally the access road to the site was made good.

The work completed 1st June 2022



Barbara

Questions Answered

On the Spring Vale Ramblers' recent walk in the Blacko area several questions were raised but answers were not forthcoming. Why was Blacko Tower built? Who was Fanny Grey? and who or what is Lister Well? Thankfully Google has some answers and the story behind Blacko Tower can now be revealed. The other answers I will save for future editions.

High above the Gisburn to Barrowford road a simple castellated tower dominates the skyline. The tower is named on the OS map as Stansfield Tower on Blacko Hill, but most people calls it Blacko Tower. It was built by Jonathan Stansfield in the late 19th century, but no-one is quite sure why, although there are of course the stories...

A modern plaque on the tower records that it was built in 1890, and it first makes an appearance, as the 'Stansfield Tower', on the Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1891-92. Stansfield is *said* to have built it so he could see Blackpool tower under construction, or alternatively to give a view into the Ribble Valley. Working without plans, he was apparently gravely disappointed when he found his tower was not high enough to see far at all, for the view was blocked by the mighty mass of Pendle Hill.

Another theory has it that it was built as an observatory for his son William, who was 'a great student of astronomy'. Or was it a tribute to Stansfield's first love who jilted him? A final no-nonsense answer is supposed to have come from Stansfield himself: 'I have never drank or smoked in my life so I am taking this as my hobby.'

Jonathan Stansfield was a 'manufacturer and grocer' according to the 1871 census return, and lived with his wife, children and a boarder in Back David Street, an ordinary street of terraced houses in nearby Barrowford. Did he really save enough money to build a tower just by abstaining from cigarettes and alcohol? There is a poem written by one of Stansfield's contemporaries, the Rev. Gough, published in Jesse Blakey's *Annals of Barrowford* in 1929 which suggests that Stansfield was unable to complete the tower, and legend has it that the building project foundered when he went bankrupt.

But Stansfield went bankrupt owing £2,300 to his creditors in 1873, and he didn't die until 1894. So, did he bounce back with great success in the last twenty years of his life, enabling the construction of the tower? The 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows 'Stansfield House' close to the tower – was this his new home and the tower an eye-catcher in his garden? This very prominent tower keeps some of its history well hidden.

By 1933 the tower was described as 'somewhat decrepit' and in 1948 'an enterprise for the restoration of Blacko Tower', as it was now known, was launched by Mr Frank Barritt of Colne. Parts of the tower had collapsed, only one of the castellations remained intact, and the floor of the viewing platform had rotted away. Local craftsmen gave their time, and with the help of the Scouts the tower was renovated. A plaque was erected which reads:

BUILT BY
J. STANSFIELD
1890
RESTORED 1950
PS.127.v.1.

It's not clear if the original tower also carried the building date and this biblical reference, or if it was added during the restoration (Barritt was active in the Methodist church). The text it refers to reads:

*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain,
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*

Repairs to the Blacko Tower



Jane C

New Country Park

The countryside on the outskirts of Oswaldtwistle in Hyndburn is about to get a new status. The local authority has recently revealed that 87 acres of land, adjoining a former chemical works site at Nook Lane off New Lane Oswaldtwistle will be used as a Country Park for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. The council has bought the land known as Bury Meadow - near to the site of the former NIPA and then Cocker Chemicals site - for £140,000. The site is also known as Brook Side.

This acquisition is part of the boroughs bigger plans revealed in the £22million bid for cash from the government's Levelling Up fund which has been boosted by a 'windfall' of £1m from Lancashire County Council and other match funds from private investments.

This new country park development will support biodiversity and safeguard this outdoor space for future generations. The area has several small reservoirs and sightings of Little Grebe, Willow and Sedge Warblers have been reported and roe deer within the wooded areas. The surrounding woodland was founded back in 2005 when the borough supported 18 woodland projects, when more than 130,000 trees were planted. This area has become well established and the trees are maturing and support a whole variety of wildlife.

A bridleway and several footpaths already criss-cross this area and it is hoped that new routes are created, and these existing paths are well maintained. These paths form part of a larger walking route that encompasses walks around Peel Fold, Stanhill and the home of James Hargreaves the inventor of the Spinning Jenny in 1768.



Looking across to Bury Meadow from Stanhill

Michael C

New Use for Walking Poles

When out rambling, my dad always carried a pair of secateurs in his rucksack in case he needed to make a few stiles more negotiable, by cutting back any brambles and the like. I too always carry my cutters with me for the same purpose. In fact, I usually have a folding pruning knife in my rucksack, in case there are any thick branches. Someone made the point, that if everybody cut a little bit off when they came to a stile, it would make life better for everyone.

Sometimes the problem may be along a stretch of footpath rather than at a stile and I sometimes get a bit carried away, stopping for quite some time while attempting to make the route easier by cutting back ly brambles. This is okay if you are on your own and you have plenty of time though even then it can become a bit overwhelming, and you just decide to struggle through, or give up and try a different route.



Strictly speaking, it is the responsibility of the landowner to keep stiles and footpaths passable. Our Highway Authority gets involved by carrying out a bi-annual strim on certain paths. Even the local parish council can carry out this work, if they have a good working relationship with the local authority. Parish councils can apply for grants from the Peak and Northern Footpath Society to look after and repair stiles and keep footpaths clear, if the landowner's circumstances mean that they are unlikely to carry out the maintenance.

Sometimes when on walks with my wife, she waits patiently while I start cutting away. On other occasions, she tells me to stand aside and simply bashes the brambles into submission with her walking pole.

It certainly saves time.

Tony C

Walking with a Friend

There is nothing better than walking with a good friend. It doesn't matter if you have been out walking with them a million times before, you can always find something new to chat about - a television programme you saw last week, a hobby you have in common, a story to tell about last time you were here or information from a book that you have just read. But more than anything, what you enjoy most is sharing knowledge about nature and quirky facts. They amaze you as they are always telling you things which just make them a really interesting person to share a good walk with. They seem to see things before you do, like the group of long tailed tits in the hazel trees or the continually changing shapes of the cumulus clouds or sometimes they suggest a detour from your usual route which offers you a new view of a familiar landscape. But how can you find such a friend and ensure that you too become such an individual?

I have discovered an example - Henry David Thoreau and his many books where he outlines the virtues of living remotely. His experience and knowledge of all things countryside make him an ideal friend to take on a walk. He was born in America over 200 years ago and at a time when wild, forest areas were being shaped into civilised settlements. The number of sawmills, libraries schools and trains never mind roads, were changing everything including the way in which people needed to question even the relationship between man and nature!

He wrote a book "Walden" and at the time readers thought he was just an eccentric hermit but some people now just think that he was a man born before his time. People today may think that he lived the life of a modern nature writer! He was just an explorer of what was happening on the edge of modern expansion but as an obsessive walker he was fanatical, keeping an eye on what was happening with nature and mankind.



His books gave details of hikes, canoe trips, camping trips or night walks around New Hampshire countryside. He included many opinions on society at the time. After "borrowing" a piece of land from a friend he built a simple stone and wood cabin where he lived for 2 years, 2 months and 2 days in a very simple way. He worked occasionally to fund his needs but planted beans to eat, chopped wood for heating and spent his days walking and writing. The length of his walk usually dictated the length of the article he wrote. If he was shut up in the house, he did not write at all.



He was not too far away from his neighbour, could hear the village church bells and farmers or loggers passed his door but as Thoreau walked in all weathers and very often in the dark it gave him plenty of opportunity for solitude and time to firm up his relationship with nature. The perfect book for a long trip to just dip into and relevant today. This book is regarded as the original mindfulness book involving us in wildlife, rock shapes around a shoreline or the thawing of ice shapes or changes to the seasons.

In reality people may have found Thoreau a difficult companion due to his quirky nature, but his enthusiasm and observation skills give us examples of seeing and experiencing things in a different way. Even writers like John Muir have said they were inspired by Thoreau.

So, what lessons can we learn from Thoreau? Make more time for walking. Instead of working for 6 days and having just 1 day for walking, is there not a better way to enjoy your leisure time? Read up before going out so that you are well informed. Local history, geology, natural history Share your experiences with others. See with fresh eyes, at nighttime or in different weather. Wear the right clothing and always anticipate a change in the weather.

He would surely make a most interesting companion.

Glenda B