

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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**A very Merry Christmas to all
the readers of Ramblers Gems.
and a Happy New
Year to everyone**



This is the last of our Ramblers Gems for 2020 and what a year it has been. So much has happened and we have all had to make changes to our lives and the way we walk. This Christmas period is not the one we were all expecting, but things will get better.

A big thank you to all the members who have contributed to these small weekly publications and I do hope that you have found the articles both interesting as well as informative, it was never envisaged that we would ever get to issue 33.

I want to send my very best to you and your loved ones for the festive season and wish you all a very happy New Year.

The good news is that several vaccines have now been developed and are currently in the process of being rolled out so hopefully we will be back walking as a group soon.

Michael C

Christmas Away Walks

I always enjoy walking in all seasons, but due to many visits to family at Christmas, I have been able to walk in various places away from home at this time of year.

In 2000 this was in Cyprus thanks to a local walking group, established for many years by British people living and working there. After receiving an invitation, I decided to join them for a Cypriot walking experience. Normally they would hire a coach which would transport the party up into the hills, then walk down passing through one village after another, ending at a Taverna for drinks after completing about 8-10 miles. However, on Boxing Day it was a tradition to hold a more circular local walk and this year it was to set off from the village of Erimi, west of Limassol. The day was a local holiday and there were many families with young children out for a walk. We followed along rough, dusty tracks between orchards and fields, where gnarled olive trees grew. Orange trees laden with small fruits were abundant along the route. The vines stretched off in long straight rows looking very dead with only their black stumps poking out from the hard ground (hibernating really). It was a sunny and warm day with a temperature of about 16 degrees. Most people were in shorts and t-shirts and all were carrying water bottles which were in constant use along the way. Soon we came to Kolossi, an 13th C castle once home to the Knights of St. John and the Knights Templar. Nearby was Kurion, a Greek and Roman settlement, destroyed by an earthquake in 365 A.D. but still having many surviving features. We were soon back at our start point, a short walk, but had travelled a long way back in history.



Christmas. This time it was a solo venture into the unknown (except for the trusted OS Landranger 196 map). I parked at Beaulieu Road Station and walked through the forest on good defined tracks to Denny Wood. After turning south to cross the railway line, then

east and finally northward via Bishops Dyke back to the station. Some parts were very boggy and open heathland as the New Forest is by no means 'all trees'. There were lots of ponies, of course, but they were wary of humans, some having yearling foals with them.

There followed several Christmas visits to military locations in 'the South'- Odiham, where I took two of my grand-daughters walking to visit a bat roost in a tunnel on the abandoned Basingstoke canal. Then Lyneham, with walks to Royal Wootton Bassett, where I bought bikes for my daughter and two granddaughters. At that time, they lived in a farmhouse at Christian Malford, which I always thought was a fabulous placename! Carterton near Brize Norton, provided some excellent walking days along routes using paths along the Windrush River, there was also a visit to the picture-postcard village of Shilton with its ford and 16th century Inn.

More locally, there have been Christmas time walks around Ingleton, Giggleswick and Winton, a small village near Kirkby Stephen. At Giggleswick we awoke to a winter wonderland of snow and there is one occasion that stands out more than the others.



In 2017 it was decided to have walk from Settle over Stockdale Lane and Kirkby Fell dropping down into Malham and then to return on the reverse of the route. It was a very frosty day with a keen north wind constantly blowing at our backs for the full duration of the outward journey. My granddaughter, her partner and I chickened out of the return walk into that wind and it was a unanimously decision for us all to catch the local bus to Coniston Cold, then we took the Skipton-Kendal bus to alight at Settle. The final climb out of Settle back to the car which I now realised foolishly I had parked near Stockdale Lane, finished me off for the day.

I hope you can get some walking in, over this hugely different Christmas time.

Alan R

The Little Fir Tree

This is the story of a little fir tree who dreamt of growing up so that he could go and be a Christmas tree amongst the Humans. The other older trees knew more about life and they told him that being a tree with Humans was not as good as all that.

But the little fir tree didn't want to believe the other trees and he didn't have long to wait. He was so pleased when one day some children came with their parents to choose a fir tree to decorate their living room. The children adored him at first sight.



So he was dug up then brought into the living room where he was hung with decorations. After they had finished decorating him, the little fir tree shone with a thousand lights. Christmas was getting closer and everyone admired the little Christmas Tree. The young fir tree thought all the bigger fir trees were wrong and he lifted his branches even higher so people could admire him better.



Up until January he was the prince of the living room, but then he started to lose his needles. Now nobody looked at him or even bothered to pick up the tiny needles that fell. Then the whole family decided to put him down into the cellar. The fir tree started to feel incredibly sad that he had even been chosen by the family.



After several days wait – it seemed never ending to him – the little fir tree was replanted. He was so happy to be back in this good old earth that he'd missed so much during those endless days when he was shut up in the cellar!!

Each year, the family dug him up again to put him back into the living room. He was very happy with his new family. And yes, in the end the bigger trees were wrong about something – some humans are good after all.



Kissing under the Mistletoe

Mistletoe is a familiar Christmas essential which is soaked in folklore and midwinter tradition. It is an evergreen plant with distinctive forked branches and pairs of symmetrical evergreen leaves. In winter it produces clusters of pearlescent white berries which are favourites with hungry birds such as thrushes. The plant is 'hemiparasitic', which means it takes some of its food from another plant. It grows on the branches of trees, pulling water and nutrients from its host, while its green leaves also photosynthesise. Mistletoe grows in the branches of trees such as hawthorn, poplar and lime, although in the UK the most common hosts are cultivated apple trees.

Despite growing on trees, mistletoe is not generally found in a woodland setting, preferring hosts in open situations with plenty of light. You're more likely to see it in gardens, orchards, parkland and even churchyards. Mistletoe is widely scattered in England and Wales but is rarely seen in eastern and northern England and Scotland.

Mistletoe was a symbol of peace in ancient Greece and throughout history it has been used as a curative and aphrodisiac. The Ancient Britons hung mistletoe above doorways to ward off evil spirits, but its romantic uses came later when Anglo Saxon men would peck the cheeks of unwary young women, taking their cue from the Norse goddess Frigg. Mistletoe survived a Christian crackdown in medieval times to enjoy an 18th century revival when today's quaint customs arose. Bringing luck to lovers, etiquette dictates a berry is removed for each kiss taken until the plant is bare. If you are lucky enough to find this parasitic plant out in the wild, only cut a small sprig and ask the landowners permission. It is more likely that you will buy a piece off your local market.



Festive Trees

At this time of year, it has become a bit of a tradition for walkers and families to decorate some of the trees and bushes around the Entwistle Reservoir with a little bit of festive cheer. The trees are adorned with coloured baubles and sparkly tinsel as well as personal messages to loved ones and fellow walkers written on cards and wooden logs. All these messages just to pass on that Christmas spirit.

It is well worth a walk around the reservoir to admire this festive treat. If you decorate a tree and leave a message, then please carry out a follow up visit and remove all trace of your efforts after the Christmas season.



The Holly and the Ivy

Holly

This extremely prickly shrub is adorned with bright red berries at this time of year. It was used to decorate pagans' homes long before it came to symbolise the blooded crown of thorns worn by Christ. Holly is said to ward off demons and is a symbol of fertility. The older the holly tree the smoother will be the leaves. The red berries provide a vital food source for bird, so only collect a small amount from nature and leave the rest for the birds.



Ivy

Ivy is a very prolific plant that can climb to great heights, using its aerial roots to create strong attachments to its support as it ascends. When an ivy plant grows undisturbed, its older stems can become as thick as those of some trees. The English ivy isn't a parasite its roots attached to the ground to absorb nutrients. The aerial roots form an attachment for support, not absorption.



In the Middle Ages, holly represented the masculine element, perhaps because of its prickles and harder leaves, while ivy represented the female element. Both plants were appreciated as winter greenery at a time when many other plants were bare of leaves, especially as holly and ivy had attractive berries. The Ivy plays second fiddle to Holly in the famous carol as after the first verse it is hardly mentioned again.

A Dales Christmas Walk

As a walking group the Spring Vale Rambling Class has not arranged a walk around the Christmas period, but that is not to say that I haven't been out walking during this festive time.

As a regular event, it became a tradition to organise a family walk into the Yorkshire Dales. A favourite walk was from Arncliffe to Litton along the River Skiffare and return along a similar route. At 5 miles it was long enough to burn off the excess of mince pies and Christmas pud, but short enough to fit into the brief sunshine hours of December. The walk doesn't involve any hill climbing so was always popular with the 'seldom walkers' who I had managed to coerce into joining us on this what I had called 'a short stroll'.

Along the way it is full of interesting features for kids and big kids alike. The younger children enjoyed the caves and high limestone cliffs that follow along the Dale. On freezing December days, the waterfall would be frozen solid, while on normal winter days the roar of the water could be heard fields away. The river banking with its rocky sides and smooth, still water provided ideal terrain for river stone throwing. On the really cold days the numerous water-filled hollows would be frozen over and provided the opportunity for impromptu ice skating.

The main big kid feature on this walk was the village pub at Litton, the Queens Arms. This was reached after an hours' walking and playing along the way and served up warm soup and sandwiches followed with a pint of fine ale or two. The roaring log fire was a welcome bonus and we took it in turns to stand warming our rears.

The return journey was along the river banking again but was a more serious walking affair as we now had our sights on the village pub in Arncliffe.

The Falcon Inn served beer straight from the barrel where it was poured from a porcelain jug. I believe it still carries out this tradition to this day. The Falcon Inn's other claim to fame is that it was the set for the original Woolpack, the pub in Emmerdale before it was relocated to Esholt near Bradford.

A most enjoyable family day's walking.

Michael C