

In the footsteps of pioneers



Keith Carter takes an historic walk on Pendle Hill with the Hyndburn Ramblers

On a Saturday in June a satellite photo of Pendle Hill would have revealed clusters of figures closing in from all points of the compass like iron filings drawn to a magnet. Zooming in, these would take shape as people on foot, drawn towards the summit cairn like ants to their nest and closer examination would show them to be ramblers, that hardy breed whose song The Manchester Rambler declares: 'Sooner than part from the mountains, I think I would rather be dead.'

The significance of this assembly was that this year is the 75th anniversary of the Ramblers Association which grew out of the mass trespass on Kinder Scout to claim back the right of citizens to walk freely on open land. Landowners refused access to the moors and fells, often employing bailiffs and gamekeepers using bully-boy methods

to keep people off and it was thanks to the courage of these early activists that we are free to wander today.

One of those present was Tom Stephenson, creator of the Pennine Way, the first of the many National Trails that now criss-cross Britain. He was himself a regular visitor to Pendle Hill and one of the first members of the North East Lancs Area of the Ramblers Association.

To mark the anniversary, the rambling groups in the area had arranged to meet up on the summit of Pendle for a picnic and the current chief executive of the Ramblers Association came along to join the party. Tom Franklin gave a speech acknowledging our debt of gratitude to those early pioneers thanks to whom we can now get out into the open countryside and without whom we would not have the freedom we enjoy today. He went on to say that lots remains to be done if the outdoors is to be protected in the face of Government



Right: 75 years of the Ramblers Association



Norman Thorpe, Pat Parrott (front) Mary Thorpe

cuts and indifference. I was with Hyndburn Ramblers who had invited me along to join them for the day and share the pleasure of a good walk. An active and enthusiastic group, they were formed in 1977 and organize walks most weekends and on Wednesdays, mostly within an hour's drive from Hyndburn.

There were two walks, both homing in on Pendle Hill, a nine-mile walk led by Trevor Whittaker, chairman of

Hyndburn Ramblers and the six-mile walk led by David Hill. I joined about 15 good men and women to do Trevor's walk starting from Pendleton where we parked at the Swan with Two Necks.

Phil Bedson, walks organiser and group stalwart was with us acting as our sheepdog, staying back to allow stragglers to catch up and seizing as many photo opportunities as he could. Phil publishes on-line reports on all the group's walks and they can be read on their website - www.hyndburnramblers.co.uk. Phil's wife Gail, the group's publicity officer and Sue Baxendale, group secretary were on the other walk, meeting up with us on the summit.

Our walk left the village by the lane to Pendleton Hall, soon joining a bridleway heading north east past Mearley Hall which has been re-built close to the site of the original building of which only faint traces still remain.

Little Mearley Hall is also passed, its bay window apparently brought from Whalley Abbey at the time of the Dissolution.

We changed direction here to begin the climb of the lower slopes of Pendle Hill, the gradient steepening until the sharp final ascent that had our party puffing and panting before reaching the pile of stones for a welcome breather. This is the steepest of the various routes to Pendle's summit and is usually avoided by all but the hardest walkers. One such is Trevor who stoutly maintained that a good hard climb never did anybody any harm. Not everyone agreed but all made it, each one of us experiencing that particular sense of achievement when completing a steep climb.

There is a nicely-built cairn around here to commemorate the Scouting Association and from this point other groups began to appear, converging >

“The Manchester Rambler declares: ‘Sooner than part from the mountains, I think I would rather be dead.’”



Above: Pendleton village
Left: Walk leaders with Tom Franklin



on the summit. As we approached, suddenly we were part of a crowd, many known to each other and all united in their love of rambling.

Mike Counter, the chairman of the North East Lancs Area, made a speech and introduced Tom Franklin who had come up from London especially. Photos were taken and the various groups prepared to resume their walks. Our route was down Ogden Clough to the road at the Nick of Pendle just up from the Well Springs Hotel and the dry ski slope.

Pendle Hill holds a special place in the hearts of people living in north east Lancashire, many of whom will have first made its acquaintance at school, shepherded unwillingly up to the top by their teachers or with their parents at Hallowe'en. One such was a redoubtable lady called Mary Thorpe who was first taken up Pendle as a ten-year-old 75 years ago. Good on you, Mary!

The views of the surrounding countryside, the associations with the infamous Witch Trials, the hill climbs and cycle races and the hill's proximity to the towns of East Lancashire all make it a favourite destination for Lancashire folk.

We made our way via field paths back to our starting point, and members of the group began thinking of the next day's walk - a 12-miler - and the following week's from Oxenhope to Keighley.

In the words of the Manchester Rambler: 'I'm a rambler, I'm a rambler from Manchester way, I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way, I may be a wage-slave on Monday, But I am a free man on Sunday.' 🌹

To join Hyndburn Ramblers, contact Phil or Gail Bedson on 01254 398670 (6-7pm) or through the website, www.hyndburnramblers.co.uk.



Photo courtesy of Karen Barden

Walk on

If you love to walk in Lancashire's countryside or you are a member of one of the many hiking groups in the county, you can share your favourite rambles with Lancashire Life readers via our brilliant new website, lancashire.greatbritishlife.co.uk. You can email the details to vijay.arogyasami@archant.co.uk and we'll include them with all the other walks to be found on the website. It's packed with great



ideas for enjoying Lancashire's lovely landscapes - so get your boots on!

Facts

Area of walk: Pendle Hill from Pendleton
Map: OS Explorer OL41 Forest of Bowland
Distance: Nine miles
Time taken: Five hours
Refreshments: Take a packed lunch.