

#### **d. Off Road Wheeling Weekend in the Wye Valley**

During the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of September the Wye Valley National Landscape Team hosted an off-road wheelchair weekend. Over the past couple of years, we have been working with Craig Grimes from Experience Community to audit routes around the Wye Valley and advise us on how to help disabled users access the countryside safely.

##### **Day 1: Have a Go at Whitestone**

With Craig's expertise we organised a Have a Go day where disabled users could try out the different types off-road wheelchair equipment available. Around 60 people attended as we brought together disabled wheelchair users and their support networks, our 3 local authorities, Natural Resources Wales and local charities. Laura Anne Jones, the Minister for sport in the Welsh Senedd also attended. Three off-road wheeling equipment providers brought their wheelchairs - Mountain Trikes, the Over lander and Flatlander from Terrain Hoppers and a Tramper TWS scooter from the Disabled Ramblers. Participants were free to try out the equipment after a quick demonstration and our volunteers led them on a short ramble along the forest tracks at Whitestone, giving users a chance to get out into the Wye Valley National Landscape and enjoy what most of us take for granted.

The day was a huge success with everyone asking for more rambles and opportunities to use off-road equipment.

Welcome to Off Road Wheeling Video: [C:\Users\Lucinda\\_James\Videos\copy\\_1DC6EEAF-CAD2-4A00-822B-C158335504C5.MP4](C:\Users\Lucinda_James\Videos\copy_1DC6EEAF-CAD2-4A00-822B-C158335504C5.MP4)



**Photo 1: Duncan test driving the Flatlander by Terrain Hopper**



**Photo 2: John from the Disabled Ramblers Explaining how to use the TWS Trumper Scooter**



**Photo 3: Harry (aged 16) Testing the Terrain Hopper's Overlander full off-road capability.**





**Photo 4: Bethany Hadley MCC LAF Member, disability activist & writer testing out a Mountain Bike with Craig Grimes, Experience Community (also pictured)**



**Photo 5: Bob Campbell from NRW and Bethany Hadley**





**Photo 6: Laura Jones MS, Sam and Debbie designers & developers of the Terrain Hoppers, Craig Grimes from Experience Community and Lucinda James WVNL Community Links Officer**



**Photo 7: Disabled Users enjoying the beauty of the Wye Valley at Whitestone Viewpoint**



## **Day 2: Off Road Wheelchair Ramble at Whitestone lead by Craig Grimes**

The second day was the first of our off-road rambles with Craig Grimes (Experience Community) leading the walk with NL staff, volunteers and SARA supporting.

We had 6 participants join us for the 10-mile ramble, unfortunately ill health and the previous week's wet weather meant we had 7 cancellations. We started from Whitestone Carpark and headed up towards Cleddon on the Wye Valley Walk, then into Beacon Hill and over to Trellech Common and back through Beacon Hill to the viewpoint and then continued back to Whitestone.

As part of the project, we were able to replace a narrow kissing gate on the edge of Trellech Common with an accessible gate (2-way bridle way gate) allowing us to safely reach The North Village Hall for lunch and facilities. The new gate will have lasting benefits for visitors and local residents alike, creating a safe route into the woods for wheelchair users and creating a link to the existing routes such as the Tread & Trot Trails.



**Photo 8: Rest Stop in Beacon Hill**





**Photo 9: Nothing is too much for a Mountain Trike!**



**Photo 10: Quick History lesson from one of our volunteers on Trig Points and in particular Beacon Hill Trig Point.**





**Photo 11: Gordon a Disabled Rambler from Devon & Rik from Experience Community**



**Photo 12: SARA supported us throughout the weekend's events**





**Photo 13: New Accessible Gate at Trellech Common leading to The Narth**



**Photo 14: Last view of the day after a 10miles Ramble**



### **Day 3: Off-Road Ramble Willow Walk / Townsend Farm**

The third day's ramble was part of the Ross Walking Festival, taking in the new barrier free Willow Walk. However, at the last minute we had to change the route due to the weather forecast and ground conditions following extremely wet weather. The original plan was to start at the Rope Walk in Ross on Wye and travel along the river path to Townsend Farm and back. Responding to wet weather in the forecast we made a circular ramble around Townsend Farm taking in a section of the Willow Walk and farm tracks at Townsend. Led by the Taylor-Davies family who farm at Townsend, we had a fantastic ramble, with 33 people joining the walk including wheelchair users & family members, volunteers and NL staff. We heard about Regenerative Farming, admired the views and looked at the recent access projects the WVNL have been involved with around the farm. To finish, Ben generously put on a delicious hog roast washed down with his home-grown wine and juices!



**Photo15: Farm talk from the Taylor Davies Family**





**Photo 16: Phil using the Overlander, that smile!**



**Photo17: Wheelers heading down to the river.**





**Photo 18: New accessible bird hide funded through DEFRA's Access for All Fund.**



**Photo 19: Enjoying Ben's hospitality!**

### **Off Roding Weekend Feedback**

As part of the funding requirement, we ask attendees to give us some feedback, here are just a few positive comments:

*Sheila: 'I found the try out day really useful and informative. I have secondary prog MS and live on the borders of Monmouthshire and the Forest of Dean and feel constantly frustrated that I am not able to get out into the wonderful landscape that is on my doorstep. It was so useful to be able to try a variety of equipment and assess what is the most suitable for me at this present time. I found it truly liberating to be able to get into the woods independently and safely. I had the time of my life. Thank you so much.'*



*Duncan: 'Had no idea these these products were available. To trial several products on a decent length off-road route was amazing! I've really missed being in the outdoors like this!'*

*Marie: 'I enjoyed the Whitestone Ramble for a few different reasons. The views were beautiful. The terrain was good and definitely required my E-Trike. I could not have managed this route without it. This was my first adventure to Whitestone so I do not really know what could have been improved. To me personally, it was all fabulous and the support teams were outstanding.'*

Glen 'it was very enjoyable. It was great to have access to farmland thanks to Townsend Farm and see parts of the countryside that would not normally be accessible'

## **What Next?**

There is an unquestionable appetite for more wheelchair rambles. We will be working through some of the issues involved – finding a suitable venue to be a 'hub', where you can hire an off-road wheelchair, receive training on how to use the different types of equipment and have technical backup and support if there is a mechanical issue and most importantly have easy access to accessible paths and tracks. We are also looking at the possibility of setting up a regional off-road wheelchair rambling group.