
OPEN COUNTRY – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Open Country was established in Harrogate in 1990, as a three year pilot project. Its remit was to help anyone with any disability, be it learning or physical disability, sensory impairment or mental health issue, to access and enjoy the countryside. After the initial three years were over, such a level of expectation had been raised among local disabled people that we have continued ever since!

Over the intervening years, we have expanded our activities, so that we currently have 20 activity clubs. These involve Walking, Cycling, Tandems, Adventure Club (Outdoor Pursuits), Wild Things (Nature Study), nature conservation work parties, Swimming, Outings and a Carers group. We are continually finding new streams of work, and with our *Wild about Wetherby* and *Wild about Wakefield* projects, have expanded our activities into West Yorkshire. In normal times, our activities annually welcome around 400 people on over 8,000 people/activity days, most of whom have disabilities.

Through our *Countryside Advice Service*, we are involved with the dissemination of information, training and advice on countryside access. We have produced five *Breakfree* packs, detailing local accessible walks and cycles. We have also produced *Countryside Directories for Disabled People* for North, West, East and South Yorkshire, Lancashire, Teesside, County Durham and Wakefield. With these publications, Open Country truly has regional influence in the field of disability and countryside matters.

For a small charity, we punch well above our weight! For example, we have received the *Queen's Golden Jubilee Award for Voluntary Service* and also visited No.10 Downing Street!

Since 2004, Open Country has been a Company Limited by Guarantee (05155859) and a Registered Charity (1107331). We have two Patrons – Air Commodore Simon Bostock and Lord Willis of Knaresborough and a board of 7 proactive Director/Trustees. There are 7 other staff posts (6.3 FTE) – the *Chief Officer*, who is also *Company Secretary* and four *Countryside Activities Officers* - two full-time, two part-time. We also have a *Wild about Wakefield Project Officer*, a *Communications Officer* and an existing *Fundraiser*. Open Country is heavily reliant on its core of around 130 fantastic volunteers.

Feel free to ring us to ask us for further details about any aspects of our groundbreaking work. Ask for David Shaftoe, but do leave a message if we are out of the office – we will make every effort to answer your call. Why not peruse our website? - www.opencountry.org.uk We are also on Facebook and Twitter.