“I’m a rambler from Manchester way”

John Davies

Sheetlines, 113 (December 2018), pp23-24


This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only. Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.

Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, Sheetlines, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.
# I’m a rambler from Manchester way

**John Davies**

The lyrics of one of Ewan MacColl’s best-known songs, *Manchester Rambler*, celebrate the joy of rambling on Kinder Scout – and commemorate the long struggle to achieve freedom of access.

Kinder Scout, the highest peak in the Peak District, midway between Manchester and Sheffield, is shaded yellow on OS Explorer maps (opposite). That yellow shading, indicating ‘open access land’ is a reminder of, and a testimony to, a remarkable act of civil disobedience which took place almost ninety years ago.

‘Open access’ means a walker may freely wander over the land, without sticking to footpaths or rights-of-way. This designation, the ‘right-to-roam’, introduced in the Countryside and Rights of Way act (CRoW), 2000, applies to most areas of mountain, moor, heath and downland in England and Wales.

CRoW was the culmination of a long campaign by the Ramblers’ Association and its predecessors to open up access to upland and uncultivated land previously closed to walkers, other than by using existing rights-of-way. One of the most important events contributing to this long-running campaign for open access was the 1932 mass trespass on Kinder Scout.

Kinder Scout is wilderness country; it is relatively high (636m), a vast, featureless boggy moorland plateau of peat hags cut through with deep groughs,\(^1\) making for difficult walking and tricky navigation. Its many gritstone edges provide various grades of rock-climbs, whilst Kinder Downfall, a 30m waterfall, offers an icy challenge to climbers when frozen. The hill’s close proximity to the densely-populated conurbations of Lancashire and Yorkshire made it (and makes it) an irresistible attraction to thousands of city dwellers seeking fresh air, exercise, solitude and adventure.

Frustration had been building up for years; every weekend, walkers who had been heading on to Kinder Scout would be turned away by gamekeepers protecting the grouse for shooting parties. Similar confrontations were happening elsewhere, as working people increasingly resented being excluded from the private moorlands of wealthy landowners.

On 24 April 1932, several hundred protesters gathered and approached Kinder Scout from opposite directions. The Manchester contingent of about 400 ramblers

---

\(^1\) A grough is a natural channel or fissure in a peat moor.
met near Hayfield, on the western side and proceeded via William Clough to the plateau. Here they joined forces with the Sheffield group, who had approached by way of Edale on the southern side, and became embroiled in violent struggles with the Duke of Devonshire’s gamekeepers.

On the descent to Hayfield, five ramblers were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly and breach of the peace (trespass itself was not a criminal offence). They pleaded not guilty and were remanded to be tried at Derby Assizes in July 1932. They were found guilty and jailed for between two and six months. The arrest and subsequent imprisonment of the trespassers unleashed a huge wave of public sympathy, and united the ramblers’ cause.

A few weeks later, 10,000 ramblers assembled for a rally in Winnats Pass, near Castleton, and the pressure for greater access continued to grow.

An unintended consequence of the mass trespass was greater interest being paid to ramblers’ behaviour and potential ways to regulate it. This resulted in a ‘Code of Courtesy for the Countryside’ being produced, which was a forerunner of the modern Countryside Code.

The author’s late father, Joe Davies, was a participant in the trespass, alongside his pal, Jimmie Miller, the publicity officer for the event. Jimmie later changed his name to Ewan MacColl and became famous for such songs as Dirty old town, The first time ever I saw your face and, of course, Manchester Rambler.

Above: Kinder Scout is at the ‘G’ of HIGH PEAK. The green dotted line is the Pennine Way.

Left: The author’s family were among the hundreds celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the trespass in 1982.

Lower left: Grindsbrook, on the approach to Kinder Scout from Edale.

Below: The top of Kinder Downfall, looking west.

[photos by the author]