

Piece on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, 31 October 2011

The following is the transcription of a piece on the Brenda Parker Way recorded at St Mary Bourne in July 2011 and broadcast on Monday 31 October 2011. Present were Janet Davis from Rambler HQ; Michael and Judith Borsay, Judith was Brenda's cousin; Fiona Clampin, reporter and producer of the piece, Owen Plunkett, Chair of Hampshire Area Ramblers, & Stuart Shurlock, Rob Hannah and Peter Davis from the North Hampshire Downs Group of the Ramblers. Over most of the day recording were made while walking in the area and then these were edited down to six minutes for the programme. To assist with its production, not all those present contributed to the recordings.

Jane Garvey, presenter of Woman's Hour

Of the hundreds of footpaths dotted all over the UK very few are named after women, and those that are, such as Boudica's Way in Norfolk and Lady Anne's Way in Yorkshire and Cumbria tend to mark historical figures. But earlier this year, a long distance trail in Hampshire was created named after a woman called Brenda Parker. She was a volunteer for the Ramblers Association and campaigned for decades to keep rights of way open in the county. Brenda Parker died in 2008 and the 78 mile trail has been set up in her memory by some of her Rambler friends.

Fiona Clampin met Rob Hannah, Stuart Shurlock and Janet Davis from the Ramblers as well as Brenda's cousin, Judith Borsay in the village of St Mary Bourne as they were getting ready to set off on their walk.

Stuart

She made such an impact on the paths of Hampshire and the people she worked with as well. And the appropriate thing to do with walking seemed to be a path named after her.

Janet

A vital part of all Ramblers' campaigning is being able to use our knowledge, in particular in Brenda's case, knowledge of the intricacies of rights of way law.

Rob

She was obviously someone who liked to walk and use the footpaths all through her life, she valued that and she wanted that for others.

Fiona

So where are we going to be going on our walk today?

Stuart

We are starting in St Mary Bourne which sits in a wide valley in the Hampshire Downs, and then we're going to walk up through the village past the school and start to climb out of the valley over the fields and through the woods and then we're coming back in a figure of eight back across the valley itself, and doing a similar sort of walk along the far side of the valley where you get fabulous views northwards to the top of the Downs.

Janet

Brenda was a really meticulous person and she did a job for the national Ramblers in addition to all the work she did for the Ramblers in Hampshire. Before I knew her, in the early 1980s and 1970s she used to monitor something called the London Gazette and at that time it contained official notices of all the changes to the public rights of way network right across England and Wales and Brenda monitored this every day for us and kept meticulous record of all the changes to the public rights of way network. That system has changed now and the Ramblers is automatically notified of all changes

to public rights of way network so we don't have to do that. But it was just the care with which she did that job for us, in addition to everything else she did that sticks in my mind.

Fiona

We're just going up a lovely grassy path now, with fantastic views over barley fields on either side.

Judith

After Brenda's parents died, Brenda came to my family for Christmas and she certainly made her mark. She was very dogmatic; she tended to think she was always right, even if she was wrong and my elder daughter used to do a very good imitation of me over the Christmas lunch table saying "Oh I don't quite think so Brenda". She didn't have any children of her own; I think she was quite nervous of having a family Christmas and in fact when I invited her she said "Ooh I'll come and I'll do anything, I'll peel the potatoes, I'll deal with the sprouts, but don't ask me to look after the children". But as the years went by, she really took an interest in the children and watched them with pride and interest as they grew up. After she died and I was sorting out her house, I found that she kept all their thank you letters for the birthday presents.

Fiona

What was her funeral like?

Judith

Oh that was amazing. We were just expecting, sort of, you know the local Rambling group to turn up. And as the days went by I was contacted by more and more Ramblers and in fact I think 80 to 100 people turned up at her funeral. And I do apologise there wasn't enough food at the pub for them all because we just seriously under estimated the amount of people who must have held her in great respect.

Fiona

Why did you decide to set up this trail in Brenda's memory?

Stuart

We've done what Ramblers do and had a walk in memory of Brenda but we thought there should be something more permanent. There's a gap as well, if you like, but there are other long distance paths in the county but there's nothing much across the north of the county. It fitted exactly with the areas where Brenda had been working mostly so that's what we set out to do.

Fiona

We're dropping down now into the village of St Mary Bourne, which is where we started our walk. What do you think Brenda would think of this and what you've done?

Stuart,

Ooh, I don't know, I hope she would be very pleased actually. She'd be very pleased at several of the spin-offs from this. One is, we have to work with the county council on this and our working relationship has improved no end. They didn't trust us to lift a small hammer before but now they are quite happy for us to put in marker posts and put on the waymark disks and so on. That's worked tremendously well.

Rob

She certainly wasn't looking for reward or glory at all, that just wasn't Brenda.

Judith

As a family we see her legacy in persevering with what means a lot to you and to do it for the benefit of everybody in a selfless way. And what better way for somebody who loved the countryside and loved walking and devoted the latter part of her life to rambling and footpaths in Hampshire, what better way can there be to create a long distance footpath in her memory.

Jane Garvey

I think she would have loved it wouldn't she. That was Fiona Clampin reporting from St Mary Bourne.