



Offa's Dyke Group
Of Endurance GB
Newsletter – June 2015
www.offasdykegb.co.uk



Chairman's Comment

Hello Members,

Last newsletter was in March, the first ride of the year had just been held – well I blinked, and now it is already mid-season! I hope your year is going well, with some great rides – on balance, haven't we had some wonderful weather!

Offa's Dyke have had some great days of riding so far, with more to come. We had over 130 riders at March Hares, 59 at Bluebell PR, and 96 at Bluebell national ride – all of them more than recent years, I hope this is a reflection of the great events these are!

Nicola has continued with schooling lessons through the summer – many thanks to her for the organising, and to Lesley Dunn for hosting us at her beautiful new school. The sessions have been popular, but there are some spaces – so please let Nicola know if you are interested.

After a gap, Belinda was able to this year again put on the ever-popular Blaenavon social ride, which was near-perfection last Sunday in the beautiful weather – thank you Belinda, I hope this ride can continue!

Away from our patch, our members have been doing very well – most of all - GILL TALBOT and her homebred mare SA'DA SEKORA – EGB NATIONAL CHAMPIONS 2015 !! Won through their Silver award at the UK's toughest ride – the 2-day 160km Golden Horseshoe held on Exmoor in mid-May. Congratulations Gill, we are all in awe of you huge success over many years at the Horseshoe.

And FIONA GRIFFITHS on OLIVER TWIST IV – qualified at Kings Forest FEI 3* for September's European Championships in Slovakia, and the 2016 World Championships in Dubai !! Very many congratulations Fiona, from all your fans, we know how hard you have worked for this!!

To leave the riding for one moment, congratulations to an ex-National Champion, who justified her break from riding on the 6th May by producing the beautiful Ivor Cratchley – congratulations Rachael and Tom!

We have plenty planned for the second half of the season as well – Schooling lesson continue, we have Carolyn's national Cranham Ride on the 26th July, Nicola's Govilon fun ride on the 16th August, and Fiona's Bwlch Raid fun ride on the 27th September – plenty of opportunity to fill up your Trophy card for the annual awards in the winter! You will find full details for all these rides, and those of other local Groups, on the "Dates for your Diary" page, and on the Website.

With best wishes for enjoyable and successful rides for the remainder of the season,

Chris.

HUGE CONGRATULATIONS to our Chairman, too modest to mention that he won the 3* 160 at Kings Forest at the end of May, riding his homebred mare Takwenya. They were in first place the whole way round I believe. I'm guessing that Chris's comments above regards Fiona also apply to him!

Heather

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Editor's Comments

I hope you are all enjoying the summer weather and having fun with your horses. The season has got off to a fine start with rides well supported and lots of happy riders. Offa's Dyke Group has had some very notable successes already this year as Chris mentioned in his intro. Robin and I were lucky enough to be present to witness one of them when Gill Talbot and Sekora won the National Championship at this year's Golden Horseshoe. To say the Offa's Dyke supporters got a bit over excited at the award ceremony would be rather an understatement!! Much celebrating went on in the pub afterwards.

The GHS has always been Rob and my favorite ride and it is so sad that this year was the final time it will be held in its original format after 50 years. We will miss our annual week's holiday there with OD friends. Prophet is retired from competitive endurance now – but we managed the pleasure ride on Sunday and a couple of other long hacks out by ourselves later in the week. The beauty and challenge of Exmoor is to me what endurance riding is all about.

Thanks to all the contributors to this newsletter. We have lots of information about forthcoming rides and events as well as some lovely ride reports. Please keep your articles and thoughts coming for future newsletters.

Carolyn

Cranham Ride Sunday 26 July

As some of you will know I'm also ride organiser of the Cranham National ride. So I will be very busy over the next few weeks with final preparations.

We are lucky enough to have the same venue field and route this year thanks to the generosity of local landowners. Many of our tracks are away from official bridleways and some of the new parts of the route replace road with grassy field margins. Last year we were lucky enough to have every single gate open. I have yet to confirm with landowners about the stock in fields at this year's event. If we do have any gates closed, I'd be grateful of volunteers to man them for a few hours.

Last year's ride was very well received and I had over 45 messages of thanks from riders, including one at Christmas who suddenly thought about it & wanted to thank me! I always make a compilation of some of the messages and include it in the thank

you cards I send to landowners after the ride. It's good for them to see how much pleasure riders get from riding in our beautiful Cotswold countryside.



Route: If any of you haven't ridden at Cranham before I'd urge you to come along and try the ride. We have a spacious venue and a very varied and interesting route with lovely views in places. As we are the Cotswold escarpment it is a proper endurance ride with ups and downs. We have a mixture of open fields, field margins, tracks through ancient beech woodlands, some quiet lanes and only one short section on a B road. Much of the route is by permission through privately owned estates such as Witcombe, Miserden, National Trust and others.

Water points We have drinking water for the horses at all check points, along with water and sponge if you want to wash them down. The 50km route passes back through the venue if you want to crew at your trailer. This makes Cranham a good choice of if you want to ride without a crew.

Enter early! We've been full before the closing date in the last 3 years, so please enter early to avoid disappointment! I'd like to see as many Offa's Dyke members as possible at this year's ride either riding or helping.

For more information see the website [Cranham Ride Page](http://offasdykeegb.co.uk/rides-events/cranham.htm)
<http://offasdykeegb.co.uk/rides-events/cranham.htm>

Govilon Fun Ride

Sunday 16th August

Venue: Govilon Car Boot Field, Near Abergavenny, NP7 9PT

A lovely ride with a mixture of mountain tracks, quiet country lanes and a lovely stretch of forestry on the longer route. Fantastic views from the Bloreng with a few steep hills.

Route options of approximately 20km and 28km (12 & 18 miles).

Start times between 9:30 and 11:30

Entries to-

Nicola Davies
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Twyn Allwys road,
Govilon,
Abergavenny,
Monmouthshire,
NP7 9RT

Enquires: 07968928870
n.davies91@yahoo.co.uk

*Please send entry along with a large
SAE to receive maps and ride details.*

I will accept entries on the day 😊
but pre-entry preferred.

Entries-

Entry fee £15 for non members or £10 for Associate or EGB members. Cheques made payable to Offa's Dyke Group of EGB

If anyone is not planning on
riding I need helpers please 😊

Bwlch Raid Fun Ride

*******NEW DATE*******

Sunday 27 September

Same great venue as last year with 'proper' toilets and hot food!

Fiona has added some new parts to the route this year. All gates will be manned again by the lovely volunteer ladies from the local RDA group (which receives part of the ride proceeds). There is very little road work.

The route is very beautiful with fabulous views over Llangors lake, Pen y Van in the Brecon Beacons, the Black mountains and Abergavenny. Some paths are used by the trekking center and there are some lovely grassy tracks for cantering on. There are some steep climbs and descents, but worth it for the views and canters. We are hoping to become a graded ride next year so there will be some new sections and distances available.

Entries to Fiona Griffiths. Entry forms and details on the Offa's Dyke website 'rides' page

Schooling Sessions

I have organised some schooling sessions over the next few months with Carole Broad FBHS. They are going to be held at Lesley Dunn's in Trellech, NP25 4QN (by Maryland venue). Directions will be provided with booking. Lesley has a lovely new 42 x 27 arena with parking in her field (with the exception of severe weather) and if not in the local forestry. You are welcome to go for a hack in the neighbouring forestry after your lesson.

The sessions will be in groups of 3 and cost £23 for an hour.

The remaining dates are-

Saturday 18th July

Saturday 29th August

Saturday 19th September

For more information please don't hesitate to contact me.
Nicola- 07968928870 or n.davies91@yahoo.co.uk



Winter Schooling Sessions

Our usual winter schooling sessions have been scheduled with Carole Broad FBHS at Usk College. Usk has a fabulous spacious indoor school, ideal for the cold winter months.

Sessions will be in groups of 4

Dates are-

Sunday 18th October

Sunday 22nd November

Saturday 12th December

Sunday 10th January 2016

Sunday 7th February 2016

Sunday 21st February

For more information please don't hesitate to contact me.
Nicola- 07968928870 or n.davies91@yahoo.co.uk

More info will be published in the next few months

50th Golden Horseshoe Ride



What a fantastic result for members of Offa's Dyke group at this year's final Golden Horseshoe ride. The picture gives an idea of the euphoria following the awards ceremony where Gill Talbot won the National Championship with Sekora. She's seen here with Ally Knight and Kerri Costello also clutching their awards as we make our way to the pub to celebrate.

Below are reports from Gill, Ally and also Ann-Marie about their experiences at this year's GHS.

From Gill Talbot

National Champions..... now how fantastic does that sound?? Sa'da Sekora appears unimpressed, but Rob and I are over the moon!

Taking Sa'da Sekora to compete in the 160km Golden Horseshoe in 2015 seemed an impossible dream. Back in May 2014 it was decided to retire Malabar Storm and after issues in 2014 Sekora would be in her first season as an Advanced Horse in 2015. But after romping effortlessly round March Hares 67km and then giving me the most wonderful, well balanced and powerful ride round the 50km at Tresham, well, Horseshoe started to seem a real possibility – but not the 160km.... “But if you don't

try how will you ever know whether she could do it?" said Rob..... "And if she romps round the Exmoor Stag you will be wishing you'd entered the Horseshoe!"

Lots of restless nights, many hours spent assessing her fitness and then the entry was submitted..... well, if things start to go wrong we can always stop.....but this could be her one and only chance to compete in the iconic 160km Golden Horseshoe on Exmoor – the ultimate UK endurance challenge - and I decided the huge question just had to be asked. Completion would be fantastic and anything else an absolute bonus. At this point the National Championship is not even on my radar.

The weather forecast looked grim for the Monday and Tuesday of Horseshoe, high winds and torrential rain. Sekora had proved at Tresham that she was not just a fair-weather horse, so at 6.30am on the Monday morning in torrential rain, gale force winds and biting cold, we start the 45 minute hack up to the start from Withypool. Linda Kidd and Gnocchi (entered in the Exmoor Stag) join us for our morning hack, we both laugh and joke about the wonderful weather conditions and how totally mad we are! It is freezing up at the venue, the rain is relentless and I am so pleased to get started.

After a night of torrential rain conditions are very tricky under foot. Sekora is keen but inexperienced over rough terrain so I need full concentration to keep her out of trouble – this is where the hours of schooling pay dividends as we negotiate the ruts, mud, puddles and bog whilst all the while battling against the wind and rain. We miss hitting 'the tree' branch that manages to claim 3 victims during the weekend by a matter of seconds as Lorna Hogg overtakes us as we stop to be crewed - she and Spangle crash into the hidden branch breaking her collar bone. Sekora and I just seconds behind her, skid to a halt, slither onto her backside and make a miraculous recovery unscathed in our attempt to miss Spangle and Lorna on the floor. The sad end to Lorna's ride, but luckily, not the end of ours.

At halfway the rain is lighter but the wind is stronger and it's biting cold. Alison Amey joins Rob to help with the crewing (thank you Ally!) We leave Sekora tacked up and fasten her thickest winter rug around her as she grazes and drinks. After 10 minutes we check the pulse, strip off the saddle without disturbing the rug and present to vet, heart rate of 44 and 'A's' across the sheet – excellent! Sekora is fed, tacked back up and kept warm. I am told our first loop now completed (the South Loop) is the easier loop and the second loop will be more challenging.....really!?

Sekora bounces out of the halfway and I struggle to keep her focused and at a sensible pace as we re-trace our steps through the now deep and well churned up mud back to CP1, someone thinks they know the way. When we turn left at the CP

toward the North Loop instead of right there is slight confusion, a couple of hesitant steps as she thinks I've got it wrong! We collect a companion in Nic Wigley & CFS Astreled (Fred) competing in the Exmoor Stag and the two horses enjoy the company for the next 15 miles or so over some of the roughest, stony tracks where a branch tries it's hardest to break my neck and drag me off my horse.

The going improves and we manage some good canter stretches over undulating fields until we lose Nic on the steep climb up to the top of Porlock as Fred needs a breather. Sekora powers up the steep climb as I struggle to keep my stirrups from blowing away. It starts to hail and the wind is vicious once on the top. We fight with the gates then canter over the bog to CP9, pick our way gingerly to CP10 and then it's a power trot down to Exford village, up the steep climb from Manor Farm where we are glad of the company of Ally Knight and Gypsy for a short spell and we are soon back into the venue. 80 tough Km's completed. We once again rug up warmly and only untack when ready to present for vetting. Two good pulses 44/42 and we pass the vet on Gold time.



Gill approaching CP at Withypool common day 1 (manned by Rob and I – boy was it rainy and windy!)

Tuesday morning – surprise, surprise it's raining, windy and very cold. Sekora seems very bright, she clears her breakfast and we are soon marching the 45 minutes up to the start and once again on our way round the stony tracks of the North Loop. This

time I have the company of the Scottish contingent, Francis Bakker and Rachel Sykes - and for a brief spell, Candy Cameron and her riding partner Georgina Hirst. We have hail and sleet as well as the obligatory rain and strong winds but the gates are so much easier with the three of us wrestling with them against the storm force gusts – and the ‘Horseshoe hunting stick’ proves it’s worth yet again!

Back into half way and we have our highest pulses of the ride 45/44 and a ‘B’ for gut sounds, I am a bit concerned but she looks bright and wants to eat, so we get her back to the trailer and Ally ensures she eats - but we have to do a 10 minute recheck at this vetgate before leaving so we have to disturb her feast to vet again - 40/42 – she is still chewing on a mouthful of food as the second pulse is taken and we have straight ‘A’s across the board again. The vets are suitably impressed. Sekora eats, drinks, stales and off we go again for the last loop of our 160km mammoth challenge.....

Rob tries to feed Sekora at every crew stop, she wants to eat but she also wants to stay with her new friends so we struggle to get her to eat as much as we would like..... this is where her inexperience starts to show and then approximately 15km’s from home and at the most difficult part of the route for crewing, she starts to search the hedges and pulls frantically at the grass at each gate we pass through. She is still willing but I know she has to stop and eat if I want to get her home – this is Horseshoe and horses need to eat at Horseshoe. We let our companions go, I remove the bit and we stop and graze a lush patch of woodland grass. After 10 minutes I replace the bit and we trot on until we meet up with Jo & Andrew Chisholm, they have some ‘Instant Energy’ feed which they happily offer to Sekora and she tucks in.

We trot on until we meet Rob at the next crew stop where we once again remove her bit, rug her up and let her eat.....at this point I am thinking, Ok, so now we have to ignore the watch and concentrate on getting her home. The bit is replaced and we ride on to the next crew stop and repeat the feeding. We push on to the toughest, steepest climb of the South loop, up to Comer’s Gate and toward home. I get off and lead Sekora up this incredibly steep climb where she takes every opportunity to pull at the rich, green, calf length grass as we climb upward to find Rob anxiously waiting.

We start the 4km loop out onto open moor then back round to Comer’s Gate before heading the short distance along the road home – Sekora knows where she is and that the finish is a matter of minutes away, she gamely canters over the moor and the power trot is produced for the homeward stretch along the road. We canter over the last muddy moor section, across the last field and trot the final section over the

finish line..... where I burst into tears! So grateful to get my lovely girl home! Sekora immediately drops her head and eats.

As we wait to vet we are joined by John Jones, Gina & Paul Harris and between them they stuff Sekora with hay and grass as we work hard to keep her and I warm in the bitter wind. I check her pulse after 10 minutes and it's dropped nicely into the high 40's – we decide to get her into vet so we can let her eat more hard feed. Final pulses 44/44 and straight 'A's across the sheet – we are ecstatic! We've completed in Silver time with no penalties. The vets are very complimentary - Sekora just wants to eat.

At the Prize Giving that evening the Village Hall in Exford is buzzing with people. There are so many bodies in that hall with many having to stand outside – it was just like the 'good old days' of the Golden Horseshoe. Lots of familiar faces, everyone collecting their awards with big smiles; so pleased with themselves for surviving one of our toughest rides to claim a prize – lots of Offa's Dyke members smiling and being enthusiastically clapped as they collected their rosettes and awards. Completion is such an achievement in all classes this year.

When it comes to my class I am so pleased with my Silver Award. I feel very emotional as I proudly make my way to collect Sekora's lovely rosette - it was far more than I had hoped for, we just wanted to get round with a sound horse – mission accomplished and anything more an absolute bonus – and then comes the extra bonus.....Sekora wins the Showgirl Trophy for the best mare.....a wonderful silver rose bowl.....and more.....she also wins the best registered Arab horse and I am once again proudly strutting up to the stage to collect a lovely rug presented by Judy Philips and the Arab Horse Society. My face is now starting to ache with all the smiling and my hands are sore with clapping!

The hall then fell silent as Liz Hining went on to explain that the National Championship would also be awarded at Horseshoe this year and she was very pleased to announce that the winner was.....ME! She said my name.... she said ME! and my wonderful, wonderful home bred mare Sekora! How amazing was that! I was just so surprised, it had not even entered my head that we could even be in the running for the EGB National Championship – I had forgotten all about that unattainable title...I was suddenly very aware that I was so surprised I hadn't stood up, everyone was looking at me, smiling faces everywhere all looking at me and clapping and cheering.....and I suddenly realised I was going to cry! Oh no, my eyes are leaking....I could hardly walk down to collect the HUGE rosette and I couldn't see where I was going – if only I'd put waterproof mascara on.....no tissues, my nose is running and my eyes are definitely leaking and they are taking photos!!! Aaaaarrgh!!! - but what a result!



Sekora looking fabulous the next day with some of her awards

What an amazing mare to win a silver award and such a prestigious title at her first attempt (and in her first Advanced season), at Golden Horseshoe in such difficult conditions! Rob and I are so very, very proud of her.

The evening was rounded off beautifully with a standing ovation for Barbara Wigley and her amazing team followed by dinner in the local pub with some very supportive friends.

For a whole year The Talbots will be the EGB National Champions - and we shall enjoy every second of it!!

Report for GHS first timer Ally Knight:

Every season we set a goal for me and Gypsy ... in 2015 it was between 100km at Cirencester or the Golden Horseshoe. As it was rumoured to be the last Horseshoe then it was no contest. In over 20 years of competing at Endurance we had never been to the Horseshoe. So it was decided and the planning started after Christmas. We did not do too many competitive rides leading up to the Horseshoe ... mostly just training rides and training at home and on the gallops. So having done all we could to prepare for the Horseshoe and with animals at home sorted and B&B booked, we looked forward to the travel day.

All loaded up and ready to go down to Exmoor on the Saturday ... the trailer brakes

seized on and we had to unload Gypsy and do a quick repair and load up again and off we went. We had a really good 3 hour journey down ... mostly motorway ... until we got closer to Exmoor. We stayed with Barry and Susan Turner near to Dulverton. Susan was a former Endurance British team member ... it was a super place with indoor stables (which came in handy with all the rain and wind) there were also separate paddocks to turn out. Sunday dawned a lovely dry sunny day ... we went off to be vetted ... It was very busy at the venue with classes already happening but Gypsy was chilled and vetted with a HR of 40 then back to the B&B for a short hack out.

Monday was my first ride day and it was pouring with rain with very cold strong winds. The venue was very exposed so we kept an outdoor rug on Gypsy at all times. 10.56 a.m. we set off on the North loop 41km ... after a short distance there was a river crossing that I was quite nervous about as Gypsy really had not done deep water before we were on our own and she was great and went straight through ... the rest of the route was very similar to our welsh rides so we didnt have any trouble ... the only place that slowed us down was on the moor which was boggy in places. The wind was savage on the top of the moor and gave me a headache by the end of the ride. The finish soon was in sight and just the vet to get through. It was very cold so we vetted in a thermatex and an outdoor rug ... we need to be 55 or under not to get any penalties ... HR 54/52 trot up good and all other checks good she was her usual "marsh" self which did not impress the lady vet who wrote it on our vet sheet !!!

End of day one our time was 10.4kph and a Bronze Award. Tuesday second day south loop 40km ... start time 10.56 the vetting was on mass between 10-10.30 a.m. with everyone trotting up in front of all 4 vets ... there was a big queue but they were very efficient to have you ready with rugs undone ready to pull off and go. It did mean tacking up had to be done swiftly to get to the start on time as the clock starts whether you are there on your start time or not.

So again we had to cross the river to get out onto the south loop ... not quite so nervous about it this time. The south loop had been ridden on Sunday and Monday by a lot of riders so it was very muddy with all the rain from Monday. So we had to work hard on the moor and push on wherever possible. The wind was so very cold and every time hubby met us to crew we had to cover Gypsy with a Thermatex rug so she could eat and drink without shivering.

We were travelling well and we worked as a partnership ... lots of gates on both days ... we had two attempts and if we could not do it then I got off to save time. Gypsy is

great at standing close to the gate afterwards so I can get back on. Luckily no one mentioned the second river crossing near to the end of the route!!!



A few km from the finish was a steep uphill through a field ... it was hard going for us with Gypsy's little native legs but we made it to the top and had a walk for a while then set off on the home ward trail still pushing all the way home to make the time and keep our Bronze. I was quite relieved to see the Finish line Again a very cold wind at the venue but with a bit of sunshine too. So on went the Thermatex with the outdoor rug on top again.

Just to pass the vetting to go. Again 55 and under needed. HR 54/54 trot up good ... all other checks good and not too "marish" for the nice male vet. Its hard to describe the feeling of relief to make it round the second day and hang on to the Bronze Award.

My hubby and crew Andrew Knight was amazing not only over the two days competing but doing all of the driving ... and believe me there was a lot of it. Many thanks to Barbara Wigley and Liz Hinings and so many helpers that made this wonderful ride run like clockwork. Also a huge congratulations to Gill Talbot on her 160km National Champion amazing result.

Ally Knight and Chica Gitano (aka Gypsy)

From Ann-Marie Pelc:

I can just say that going to the Golden Horseshoe has always been on my bucket list, although we only did the Exmoor 40 it was an amazing experience, we loved every minute of it and I can only hope the ride is held again as I would like to attempt the longer distances. We got a silver award (8 mins short of gold but we stopped to try and round up a loose horse) the highlight for us was



receiving the handler and presentation award. For anyone that knows Royal they will know what a feat that is- his vetting comments and master card reads like a bad boy rap sheet!!

[Training around the County.](#)

There are some super Fun Rides for quiet weekends, as I'm sure we all know. However, many of the 'about 10 milers' fail to deliver the required distance, & getting some speed, or at least a decent rhythm over distance is often difficult.



Not so at Garnstone FR near Canon Pyon (or near Kings Pyon, if you believe the photographers!) – this was nearer 14 miles according to someone riding with a gadget, & had wonderful wide mowed field margins for a majority of the route. It also incorporated super inviting jumps along the way. The accompanying photo demonstrates not quite the best style, but

it shows enthusiasm!

Don't forget to check the 'Hereford Equestrian' website for more.

Heather

Sitting by a gate

Oh no, overslept! Don't often have chance to switch off the alarm and as I didn't have to be there till 9.30 it seemed ok. 10min past 8 - run, horses in, horses fed, muckout and gone by 5min past 9. Rockup at the venue and people are already booking in. It's great to catch up with loads of friends, help count people out, then get my instructions on how to find my gate. As per usual Belinda's instructions are spot on and I find my gate, park up and let the dogs have a run. Fabulous views-I think I can see the Severn. The path is steep up to the gate so everyone slows down and has time for a chat, lots of smiling faces happy people and some fab horses. A small worry at the end of my shift when two riders go AWOL but they soon turn up.

The dogs had a great day and I had a wonderful time catching up with so many people. Thanks Be for putting on the Blanavon ride - almost as good as riding it and home by 2.30! Time to spend with my hubby on his bike.

Fiona Griffiths

Thanks to Piers Geddes for the following thoughts on his novice horse:

The great thing about starting a horse's endurance career - any career, even - is that you don't yet know that the horse in the trailer isn't a world-beater. That's why it's exciting. No evidence yet that it isn't the brilliant international performer we've all dreamed of, and secretly wondered if we own. Although reality will soon intrude - the high heart rates, the reluctance to drink, that dodgy back leg - your little novice is still amongst the immortals, or could be.

At Wentwood's pleasure ride in March, her second ever outing, she was the star of the show. Our show, anyway. "You forget who my parents were," she says. Both were advanced endurance horses, giving her speed and sanity and even a bit of comfort in the saddle. A dry day saw us round the 28km in a little under three hours, and it was as though she'd been doing all this for years. Over time, Wentwood itself has become more and more of a public park, which is great for the public but a bit more awkward for horse riders. But she never worried about the walkers, runners and cyclists, nor those two curly-coated retrievers who followed us for a bit until we turned round to deliver them back to their (rather ungrateful) owner. At leaving time we dropped the back ramp together as usual - a nervous half-second - and then the two of us walked aboard. Home James. Our day belonged to her.

April now, and time for Hilary's Easter Bonnet (which some of us regretted not seeing her wear). Valleys rides bring such variety and unexpectedness, and as always one's taken aback by the pastoral beauty of the hills above them - the farms and fields, the views across near and distant slopes rolling away to the horizon. Far off stood the Brecon Beacons, sharp and glimmering in the sun. The venue was a swish shooting range just across from St Islwyn's church, and the ride organiser's first duty, a beautiful morning, successfully fulfilled. Off we go on foot. Into the saddle. Trot trot and we catch up others. Down a track and into the forestry - canter! Away she goes. Now a bridleway running behind houses, with cars, dustbins, a barking dog on a bank, industrial units and a metal works. Lovely stuff and lots of variety, so fun to ride and ideal for the beginner. Long forestry section now, and a bit of a fight not to race that horse up ahead powering along. Later, a bridge over the busy A472 dual carriageway. A first for her! No trouble, to the rider's surprise and great relief. And back over on a second, narrower and still higher bridge. Look ahead, ride in the middle and keep trotting! Safely across. A very intense ride, this; hard to believe our short route was just 16km.

Third in the trio was Mynydd y Crug on Pleasure Ride Saturday, where the bullocky numbskull in the saddle didn't turn left and rode the circuit backwards, before doing it a second time forwards. Forestry, common, hard tracks, mixed in with slag heaps, black cattle, and scrambler bikes. Never a dull moment! Miss Novice went keenly as usual, brisk and responsive if rather argumentative on the second circuit. But she does like to push on. Back at the venue, organiser Hilary approached with a mallet. First time, I thought, I've been mistaken for a tent peg. Did I need beating down? Almost certainly.

So thank you, De Cymru, for our three pleasure rides, for a pleasure they were; and, now that it's July, may I say how proud one feels, as an Offa's Dyke member, to belong to a group whose members are doing so well. As always, it acts as a spur to one's own faltering ambition. I won't mention what happened on our first graded ride because it's too embarrassing. But foothills first, summits later. Nowhere to go but up now!

March Hares - as seen from The Other Side by Cecilia Lindberg

It's now June, and March Hares seems a distant, muddy, cold, rainy memory, but I've been asked to provide an organiser's view of this ride so here's a brief look at our first ride of the year.

Planning for MH starts in September, when forms are to be filled in, bookings of vets, venue, and so on commences, and details provided to EGB for the ride schedule. This

is a long established ride, so to some extent it's a question of doing what has been done before, updating what needs updating and tweaking the route (thankfully not my job, as Chris Wray bravely takes responsibility for this), deciding what needs to be ordered and how much of it. Then the countdown begins and each month sees a few more pieces put in place by the organising team of Andrea Champ, Chris Wray and myself. As rookie organisers, Andrea and I bombard OD committee members, experienced local endurance riders and anyone else we think know the answer to a question, with endless emails, and we gratefully receive much guidance, opinions, counter-opinions and the occasional telling-off. This year, I began to feel a little more comfortable under my Organiser's hat, but only a little.

In January, things start to hot up and my To Do list grows to several pages. Andrea is abroad working, but gamely replies to every single email and is super helpful and supportive as I work my way down the list. Have I contacted the caterer? Did I tell her how many people to expect and how many packed lunches to provide? Did I get a police incident number? Forestry Commission keys for the barriers? Knackerman? Enough vets? EGB ride stationery? Fund for the ride account? Tractor man to pull people out of the inevitable quagmire?

There are so many details, but, fellow OD members, there is ONE overriding worry and that is... volunteers! I have sleepless nights and many long fretty evenings by my computer, asking and begging, facebooking and emailing, chasing and cajoling. Having lost most of our large and supportive number of Associate Members, carefully nurtured by Carolyn Edwards over the years, we are really struggling to find people to help. Understandably, most people want to ride (yes, so do I!)... It takes many weeks and many hours, but finally, in the very last 36 hours prior to the ride, I fill all my volunteer slots. Some are coming a long way, bringing dogs or children, some are coming because of other mishaps (broken legs, lame horses, there can be many sad stories behind a volunteering effort) and many come just because they are local and like to help. We fret over timings and whether to have an extra vet (and whether, indeed, we can even GET an extra vet at this late stage). The day before the ride, I'm out late with several volunteers who generously offer to help put up the many road crossing signs required on this ride, and we scoot back and forth through the forest, bashing the posts in and hoping they will stay up (some did blow down!) and praying that all horse riders and car drivers will be considerate and alert to each other on the day.

And finally: ride day is here! I'm up early to do my own horses, and then set off for the venue, which thankfully is only a couple of miles from my house. The people are there, the OD caravan is there, the catering seems to be simmering along nicely (and the tempting bacon smells bode well for the break I'm already looking forward to).

My farrier looks cheerful, the TS is as organised as always, the entries secretary has done her job and can enjoy her day competing, all vets and vet writers have turned up and the venue begins to take shape. We mark the vet area and set up timekeepers, the secretary is super busy in the trailer and paperwork begins to move around the venue as people check in, vet their horses, set off and so on.

The rest of the day passes in a blur, and Andrea and I spend most of it responding to minor queries, getting volunteers briefed and provided with papers/packed lunch and sending them out on course, dealing with non-flushing portaloos (sorry, folks, we did manage to negotiate a discount as a result, but I realise that didn't help you much on the day), and ensuring vets and other officials have what they need and are adequately bacon rolled, tea'd and biscuite'd, as the weather gets worse and worse. We have a moment of complete panic when we realise there is something badly wrong with the EGB stationery order, and the poor timekeepers have to resort to making their own time cards out of crew cards. I really wanted to sink into the mud and disappear at that point...!

Towards the end of the day, I set out on course and start collecting the road signs again, and ensuring road stewards know that they can go home, once the trail bikers have done their sweep behind the last rider. This takes me till it's nearly dark, so I don't see anyone else, although am super grateful to Andrea Champ and Heather Evans who stay behind at the venue and wait for my return... It was inevitable that I would need help to tow my trailer out of that mud, wasn't it?!

And so March Hares is over for 2015, and I'm now a fully fledged RO who has actually been there on the day and survived. In the ensuing days we get many messages from happy riders thanking us, and quite a few from unhappy people who have various complaints - many merited (thank you, we have made notes and will do better next time, and your comments proved useful for Bluebell in April, which ran more smoothly as a result) and a few that don't seem to be (or referring to problems we could not have foreseen/fixed).

There are far too many people to thank, but please know that we are super grateful to each and every one of you for your help in turning some trails around a muddy field in March into an enjoyable endurance ride!

Sadly, this is likely to be the last year that we have access to the venue at Worcester Lodge, which is to be turned into a community farm.

We don't currently know what venue, we will be able to secure for March Hares and Bluebell next year.

Thanks to Fiona for excerpts from her press release following her success at Kings Forest Ride (the full release and more photos on the website news page):

Local Rider Conquers the King's Forest to Qualify for the 2015 European Endurance Championship

Bwlch-based endurance horse rider Fiona Griffiths secured second place on Oliver Twist IV at The King's Forest, Suffolk, international ride, 30th May. Fiona completed the 160km course at 15.7km/hr and qualified for selection to the British team who will compete at the European Endurance Championship in Slovakia, September 2015.

Fiona started a riding school business near Crickhowell in 1988, now run by her daughter



Sam. She started endurance riding 8 years ago, competing with her endurance horses in the UK, Belgium, France and Luxembourg, and has supported TeamGBR riders at the European Endurance Championship in the Czech Republic in 2013 and at the World Equestrian Games in France last year.

Fiona's "team" (the crew) include her daughter Sam, grand-daughter Alex, Emma, Lesley and Martin, a former TeamGBR logistics manager. The team's age range spans 6 decades, and includes experience from World and European Championships in Czech Republic, France, GB, Ireland, Spain, UAE and USA.

The King's Forest international (Fédération Equestre Internationale) ride, near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, has been a feature of the GB endurance calendar for many years, and is a popular ride for those wishing to compete in both international and national classes. The ride takes place almost entirely within the forest, which was established in 1955, and encompasses historical paths such as the Icknield Way but is mostly on forest tracks and rides. Over the years the ride has been held in weather conditions from sub-zero to heat-

wave, and going from bone-dry to standing water. The highest international class of 160km in a day, at a minimum speed of 14km/hr, is not for the faint-hearted. Conditions for the 2015 ride could not have been better; there were heavy showers the day before the ride, but it was partly cloudy with cool breezes and temperatures only getting up to mid-teens on the main ride day. The breeze helped keep humidity down in the forest, and the previous day's rain helped with the going. This is a course that need to ridden with care to get horses round safely and sound. The sandy soil contains many sharp flints requiring the horses' feet to be padded, and the many twists and turns and different going on the forest tracks require a rider's full concentration. Such a ride of 160km covering an elapsed time of about 14hrs, including compulsory holds and veterinary checks, is a true test of endurance for the horse, rider and support crew.

After success at The King's Forest, Fiona and her team are preparing the next few months of training and fitness programmes leading up to the final TeamGBR selection for the Championship in Slovakia.

Updates from the committee

1. Winter/Social Programme 2015/16

The winter/Social program is now being developed so that as well as the successful winter schooling and the BAM (Branch Annual Meeting) we are also planning the following but dates and venues have yet to be confirmed:-

- Talk on Rider Nutrition – with Kerry Costello's daughter
- Abbey Vet's Talk: First Aid for Horses
- Nick West, Endurance Vet: subject of talk yet to be decided

All the speakers have agreed to help with the above and we will confirm times, dates and venues nearer the time.

We are also hoping to co-ordinate a really interesting yard visit and talk but we need to confirm the details of this and this is underway.

2. Team Quest

For those that may be interested too, Team Quest training may provide some diversion in the winter! We know you are out there.! As the winter schooling programme has been so popular and there are members who are enjoy the blinged-up world of 'posh trotting' as well as their endurancing we wonder if anyone is interested in British Dressage's Team Quest for next year?

Now in its second year, Team Quest is taking riders from all over the country by storm and providing a fun and more informal way to enjoy being part of a dressage team.

Information about team Quest can be found on the British Dressage website

http://www.britishdressage.co.uk/competitions/team_quest

but in brief Team Quest is for teams of 3-5 riders who want to compete at intro, prelim and/or Novice dressage in a slightly more informal way (formal dress optional). Riders can train or compete together or apart and each rider can compete at whatever level they like (unless you are really good already!) but the team score could mean you could be at a regional or even national championship.

There are lots of venues which Offa's Dyke members could access and it could be a great way to continue the good winter work throughout the year and provide a variety of work and competing during the season. You are not restricted to the number of qualifiers you enter and up to 3 team members can be substituted. If there were more members interested then we could even field 2 teams!

Obviously this is forward planning but interested members can contact Fenella Lloyd either by phone on: 07549152708 or by email at: fenella10@gmail.com to register an early interest or for queries.

3. Merchandise

Just a reminder for members that Offa's Dyke Merchandise is still available: we are hoping to promote this a bit more. Kerri Costello is now the contact for any of the merchandise.

4. Health and Safety Item

A reminder for Ride Organisers: if any Ride Organiser would like help or advice with Health and Safety arrangements at rides they should contact Fiona Griffiths.

5. Branch annual meeting and awards evening

BAM to be held on 5th December at the Star at Llansoy. Time to be confirmed and hot food planned.

Dates for your diary

National Ride	Sunday 26 July	Cranham
Group Fun Ride	Sunday 16 August	Govilon
Schooling Lesson	Saturday 29 August	
Group Fun Ride	****Sunday 27 September****	Bwlch Riad
*** Note date change***		
Schooling Lesson	Saturday 19 September	
Schooling Lesson	Sunday 18th October	
Schooling Lesson	Sunday 22nd November	
BAM & Awards Evening	Saturday 5 December	Star Inn, Llansoy
Schooling Lesson	Saturday 12th December	

More information on the website 'rides & events' page

Web site: www.offasdykeegb.co.uk

HELP!

With the rising cost of printing and postage it would be a great saving for the group if more people could receive the newsletter by email PDF or download it from the Website. If you'd like to try, please email me. If you try and don't like it you can always change back to a paper copy at any time.