Offa's Dyke Group
Of Endurance GB
Newsletter – April 2012
www.offasdykeegb.co.uk

Chairman's Comment

Dear members – welcome to the Spring Newsletter.

Now that we have such an informative & up to date website, perhaps the newsletter might seem less important. However, it provides a focus for information & Ride reports & general good news, so please keep us informed of anything that might be of interest to your fellow Group members!

Our Group has always proved to be a spawning ground for talent & success in Endurance, & this year has started well in this respect. There was a 'clean sweep' in the 90km 1* FEI class at Hayward Oaks, which was won by Chris Wray riding Takwenya. Sarah & Rachael Rogerson tried for a dead heat on CS Kabira & Lori (Gryphon), but were separated, despite being exactly in step at the line, to 2nd & 3rd place respectively. As far as I am aware, all Group members who attended this ride had successful outcomes! WELL DONE.

Your Committee had an extra meeting in April to plan some Training Days & talks for this year & through the winter. With the loss of several Rides from the calendar, we have made plans to fill gaps, focusing on both starting & progressing in our sport. We have some great ideas, so please see further details in this Newsletter, & ongoing on our website.

We are pleased to offer you this training & support for your continuing enjoyment of Endurance – but it takes a huge amount of work to set up & deliver – please do take advantage & ENJOY!

Also note that we are holding a BBQ in the forest in July, and have made plans to help members attend the World Championships at Euston Park in August.

Heather

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Editor's Comment

Well I did make it to Maryland and also to March Hares, though on Misty not Bonnie. Thanks to three young cyclists who shot up behind her on Painswick Beacon she shot forward on to the tarmac and did some mischief to her right hock she will probably not compete again. She does not seem lame out in the field but would certainly not pass the vet and without the incentive to aim for her last 280km.

I have lost my 'get up and go', not helped by the fact that two rides I would have hoped to do, Ludlow and Cirencester have both been cancelled. I am still riding Misty most days but find an hour or two's riding is quite enough!

Fortunately other Group members have been more active and have also sent in lots of reports for the newsletter though only after same chasing-up by Carolyn! She and Rob need much more credit for the newsletter than I do.

Margaret

Maryland Refund

For anyone who rode at Maryland Group Ride and paid the £3.50 forestry charge.

After the event, the Welsh Forestry had a change of heart and returned part of the charge to us. We only had to pay the car park & administration fee and not the per capita charge per rider. Under the circumstances, anyone who paid the fee can ask for a refund from Offa's Dyke Group by sending an SAE to Heather Evans (contact details page 2). Heather will send you a voucher for £3.50 valid for 12 months, which can be used towards the cost of entry to any Offa's Dyke Group social ride (not national rides).

Janet Bitmead

It was with great sadness that we heard of Janet Bitmead's serious illness a week ago, closely followed by the news of her untimely death a few days later. Janet had been an endurance rider, based in Devon, for some years before moving to Tillington in Herefordshire & joining our group. She was a committee member who took on procurement activities enthusiastically for the group during that time - able to spot a bargain at several paces! She & Paul became familiar faces at rides & events locally and were always enthusiastic to help as well as compete.

Janet's endurance career began in 1998, initially on a horse called 'Flo', then 'Maybe', when she competed as a BERA member. The latter combination competed in rides up to 50 miles (84km) over the next 4 years, gaining the first of two Silver Stirrup Finals at Three Rivers in September 1999. She joined the fledgling EGB as an Advanced rider, still riding 'Maybe'.

In 2003 Janet competed on a novice horse called 'Willowdell Fabio', for a single season, & then rode 'Quantum Leap' for 4 years from 2004 to 2008, again completing rides up to 80km during this time, while living in the Offa's Dyke area. She was crewed by husband Paul - a friendly & helpful partnership, & I will always remember easily spotting their appropriately registered towing vehicle: LDR 29.

I understand that she had several nasty falls, and broke her arm at one time, but that did not deter her enthusiasm. Those that knew her will remember a smiling face & happy demeanor - which was missed when she & Paul moved back to Seaton in Devon several years ago - this was Paul's home area.

It came as an enormous shock to hear the sad news of her death - she will be remembered fondly by her many friends.

There will be a Memorial Service for Janet on Saturday 26th May, at noon, at Kempsford Church, near Cirencester. This is the church where they were married 30 yrs ago.

Paul will welcome support from Offa’s Dyke members on this occasion.

Heather

Dates for your diary

'Beyond Novice' training	Sun 20 May
Novice training afternoon	Sun 27 May
'Beyond Novice' vet gate training	Sun 2 June
Ludlow	Cancelled (see below)
Blaenavon Group Social Ride	Sun 8 July
Barbeque social evening	Sat 14 July
Cranham National Ride	Sun 29 July
World Endurance Championships	Sat 25 August
Tintern National Ride	Sun 2 September
Plump Hill Group Social Ride	September TBA
Offa's Dyke Annual Meeting	Sat 8 December

More information on the website 'rides & events' page

As you will be aware Mynydd Machen was cancelled due to the bad weather. The good news is that it is now being rescheduled to fill in the gap caused by the cancellation of Ludlow:

The Mynydd Machen Challenge Incorporating the Welsh Championship now becomes the Mynydd y Crug Ride Incorporating the Welsh Championship ... Route to be announced but similar to Mynydd Machen Saturday/Sunday 16th/17th June 2012
Mynydd Machen Challenge will now be a one day National Ride, venue - White Barn Farm on 11th/12th August 2012 with the same classes excluding the two day classes. A group ride will take place on Saturday 11th August and Mynydd Machen National Ride on 12th August 2012.

Good News!

Just to let you all know that Liz Taylor has resigned as Group Treasurer & stood down from Committee….that's not the good news, obviously……what is to be celebrated is that Liz is to be married to Marcus in July! I know we will all wish her all the very best for her future.

CONGRATULATIONS LIZ & MARCUS

Further to the news that Liz Taylor stood down as Group Treasurer, please be aware that Margaretha Herman has taken on this role within your Committee. THANK YOU Margaretha!

Heather

Visit our 'Facebook' page

www.facebook.com/offasdykeegb

and keep up to date with Offa's Dyke news and gossip.
You can chat with other members, find buddies to ride with, share photos, get advice and ask about others' experiences.
(Facebook page can be accessed easily from the Home page of the Offa's Dyke website)

You don't have to have a Facebook account to view the page!

If you enjoy this newsletter, please think about sending us your contribution to the next one, due in July. We love to hear your ride reports, news, opinions, funny stories, photographs; anything you'd like to send us. It's your newsletter. It's only as good as the material we are sent!

'Beyond Novice' Training days

We will be providing training for those looking to obtain or improve skills for competing at longer distances than 40km, particularly with regard to experiencing vet-gates.

The training is currently in the planning phase and final arrangements should be fixed within a week or so and the following is the current plan:

Sunday 20th May - an afternoon at Delwyn Hall's at Holme Lacy - an indoor session to go through the factors and information that are relevant to moving up in distance and experiencing vet-gates. Handouts will be provided, but you should bring pens and pulse monitors or stethoscopes if you have them!

Probably Saturday 2nd June - likely an afternoon at Treworgan Farm, Welsh Newton - a practical session with your horse to use what you learned at the indoor session - plenty of room for cantering round field headlands and practice mock vet-gates. Bring your crew - they need to learn and practice just as much as the rider! What else to bring will be part of the indoor training!

Training will be given by experienced riders of 80km to 160km, currently arranging spaces in diaries!

Confirmation of details will be announce and updated on the Offa's Dyke website, http://www.offasdykeegb.co.uk/rides-events/rides-events.htm , which will also announce booking details.

Enquiries to Chris Wray, c_wray@tiscali.co.uk, 01600-860938.

Novice training afternoon

Sunday 27 May 1.30-4.30pm

Tump Farm, Whitchurch.

Each year we run a novice training afternoon. This is an informal event, for all our newer members and associate members. Anyone who is riding at Novice Level or doing non-competitive rides (pleasure rides) is welcome to come along free of charge. Crews also very welcome.

Would you like help & advice?

Training

Feeding

Crewing

This is your chance to meet other new members (nice to recognise familiar faces at rides). Ask any questions you like. See the equipment available to endurance riders & what we take along to crew the horse.

The session will be held at the yard of Debbie and Rachel Williams, long standing Offa's Dyke members who have ridden a variety of horses over the years. Rachel's pony Star is still competing at a grand old age and has successfully completed over 5000km. Some of their horses will be available to practice taking the heart rate, presenting to the vet etc.

If you would like to come along, please let me know to give us an idea of numbers. You are welcome to bring your crew. Please email Carolyn at carolyn@edwardsglos.fsnet.co.uk or tel: 01452 857352. I will send details of what to bring along & directions to Tump Farm.

Carolyn Edwards and Gina Harris

Blaenavon Group Social Ride

Whistle Inn, Wales, Sunday 8 July

Thanks to Belinda Stewart for kindly agreeing to run the very successful Blaenavon Ride again this year. The landlord of the Whistle Inn very generously allows us to use his field as a venue.

Plenty of cantering over open hills with fantastic views. Incorporates part of the National Cycle Network. 16km & 26km routes (10 & 16 miles). Pub open all day. Non riding members can visit Big Pit National Coal Museum within walking distance of the venue.

Entries:
Belinda Stewart, Ty Jarrett, Brunant Rd, Clydach, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP70NG.
Tel: 01873 832272 Email: belinda.stewart484@btinternet.com

Use Offa's Dyke Social Ride entry form £10 members & AMs £18 Non-Members

Directions to venue: If not local, we advise you follow the A465 pass Abergavenny towards Brynmawr. Do not turn onto the B4246 signed Blaenavon / Big Pit but continue on the A465 for about 2 miles to a roundabout. Go straight ahead to continue on the A465. As you climb through Clydach Gorge you approach another roundabout. Take 1st left signed Brynmawr & Big Pit, follow to next roundabout & turn left. Follow this road for about 2 ½ miles, crossing over 2 cattle grids. You will see a sign for Whistle Inn, turn right down to the pub car park.

See Offa's Dyke Website for entry forms & more information

Offa's Dyke BBQ Social

Saturday 14 July 6pm til 9pm- rain or shine.

Colliers View, Beechenhurst, Forest of Dean. Gazebo cover.

Group BBQ - bring your own meat/veggies, bread, booze and chair.

We provide the salads, sauces, hot BBQ's and a great atmosphere!

Nice to have a social event in the forest where we have such happy rides at March Hares & Bluebell.

We'd be grateful if you could let Suzanne Garlick know if you intend coming, to give her a rough idea of numbers (no commitment). Any queries also to Suzanne - Email: suegarlick@btinternet.com Tel: 01594861019

Please bring a contribution of £5 per couple on the night towards the reservation fee & food.

Directions: Beechenhurst Lodge is on the B4226 Coleford to Cinderford Road just east of the junction with the B4234 (Parkend to Lydbrook Road). It has a website if visitors Google "Beechenhurst Lodge" - it'll then give directions if you put in your postcode. If you want to come a bit early and take a look at the Sculpture Trail (remember the stained glass window in Rob's photo) it is worth a visit if you like walking!

World Championships to be held in UK at Euston Park on 25th August 2012

Follow the website ([www.eustonparkendurance.co.uk/WEC)](http://www.eustonparkendurance.co.uk/WEC) for news updates.

The current list of qualified horses and riders for GBR is below:

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Rachael Atkinson and Vanash
Alice Beet and Adara Sauveterre
Janice Cockley-Adams and Roxane Du Bout Du Monde
Tricia Hirst and Madjin des Pins
Rachel Ingvaldson and Nazeeka
Nikki Malcolm and Khartoum with A K
Annette Masterson and El Sabio/Millenium Chorus
Catriona Moon and Leila Lesley
Helen Perry and Wesam
David Yeoman and Haszar

Beccy Broughton-Booker and Tawmarsh Muharram
Emma Finnie and Sha-Ali
Kirsty Wiscombe and Eskar
Annie Joppe and Dilmun
Alex Tennant and CS Chimera
Christine Yeoman and LM Crazy Girl/LR Bold Greyson
Ann Parker and Velvet Echo
Nicky Sherry and Silver Zourra

Offa's Dyke group is planning to take a minibus down to Euston for anyone that would like to come along, see below for Margaretha Herman's kind offer.

Rachael Rogerson.

Minibus

Want to come and watch the World Endurance Championships on the 25th of August? I am driving a minibus up on the 24th of August to watch the championships on the 25th and will drive back down on the 26th. I have space for 10 people. I will need a diesel contribution of around £25 pp.

Margaretha

Camping

We are in the process of arranging a field in which to camp, for people wanting to attend the World Championships taking place at Euston Park in August. Camping for onlookers is not available at the venue, sadly. The proposed field will be about 10 miles from the venue, & is a contact through Karen Collier (this is the 'Kings Forest' venue). The farmer is happy to accommodate us, but we still need to check on maximum numbers, charges & facilities (if any!).

Please check the website in the next week or so for more specific details, then contact me, preferably by e-mail, to book your place for camping or minibus. We may need to take deposits, but I will check the need for this as well.

Heather Evans(see contact details page 2)

Alan Morgan has kindly taken on the role as Health & Safety officer for the group

Health & Safety

As an Offa's Dyke committee member and Health and Safety lead, I recently attended a regional meeting that was arranged by the EGB on Health & Safety. The meeting (also aimed at ride organisers) involved a presentation of 16 pages and a copy of the EGB Health & Safety general statement of policy, 46 pages!!

The main thrust of the training was:

- The need for H & S
- Legal obligations
- Ride organisation
- Roles and responsibilities
- Deadlines for rides, the key timeline
- Risk assessment – identify hazards
- Risk assessment – identify risks
- Risk assessment – evaluate risks
- Risk assessment – mitigate against risks
- Risk assessment – treat risks – containment & contingencies
- Risk assessment – review risks following mitigation and re-assess

Health & Safety is everyone's responsibility, if you have any issues regarding this area please feel free to contact me. My role is to provide advice to the group.

H & S is really just common sense practiced in a logical way; however some organisations have used it as an excuse to make unpalatable decisions. The government has recently announced a new panel of experts that will help the public fight "absurd" health and safety rulings. See attached link:

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9196760/The-health-and-safety-myth-squad.html

Alan Morgan

Young Rider Updates

Hey guys! Welcome to spring, the plants are blooming, the temperature is rising (or falling!) the competitive endurance season has started and the hair is finally falling off my mammoth (err, pony?!) Since we met in the last newsletter Team Morgan have been to all 3 of the Offa's Dyke training rides, Maisie has made a clumsy start to her novice season, Comet has achieved his target of upgrading to advanced and we've religiously been screen-shotting the league tables on the EGB website!

The noble steed and I have been enjoying our rides in the company of our mentors, shining stars and, for Comet, possible love interest- Chris Wray and Takwenya. They have pushed us to achieve and we are sincerely grateful and humbled to have ridden with them! (Un)fortunately they have also succeeded in helping us to meet our season target after 2 rides. With fairly local, fairly big and frankly fantastic rides dropping like flies from the calendar added to the stress of upcoming exams and ever so inconvenient holidays to Florida the rest of our season shall probably progress in an erratic and uncertain manner. Our new aims are to complete another 80km ride in order to be eligible for FEI registration and to test out an ER (ok when I said our I may have meant my!) Well we (I) can dream anyways! Our next ride is 84km at Mynydd Machen and in the mean time we've been out collecting placing rosettes from working hunter, eventers challenges, show-jumping, dressage and x-country events and will be topping off our 'extra curricula's' with some showing! What a cracking little pony I have been blessed with (this opinion is liable to change depending on the 'catchability' of said pony at the time!)

Maisie and Daddy's novice season has also introduced me to the dark side of endurance or should I call it crewing? From the two rides which he has done so far my interpretation of this is that I get us hopelessly lost with my map reading skills, proceed to eat my own body weight, gossip with anyone and everyone on or off horse, throw water to your horse and rider, get reverse crewed by two cute little Exmoor ponies, curse your blasted farrier when your horse loses a shoe, force your father to run 10km because his shoeless horse is still sound and then fail to arrive at the venue before him!

A season start that of course could only be experienced by Maisie! With 8 rides left to go I'm not sure who on Team Morgan is going to kill who first!

Currently, at the time of writing, it's the Easter holidays and amongst all my revision I am enjoying plenty of hacking on Comet whilst Maisie recovers from a kick injury. I hope that all of you are having a great season achieving whatever your ambitions are and most of all enjoying yourselves! Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have- I promise I'm friendlier than I may appear if you have unfortunately seen me in full stress mode at the start of a ride or the vet gate!

Angharad

MEMOIRES OF A ROOKIE RIDE ORGANISER:

When you next suffer from nerves on the morning of a ride, spare a thought for the ride organiser and the myriad of helpers and people behind the scenes who help make the event happen.

Having helped at the Christmas ride for a number of years and knowing the route very well as my local training ground, I agreed to take on the organisation of the ride when Belinda Josephi wanted to step down. Ironically, my first introduction to endurance over 20 years ago was from Barbara Bond who was the founder of this ride and whose mare Fleur I helped fitten on these rides.

When Belinda passed on to me her precious folder containing contacts, route map, ride instructions and risk assessment I thought it would be a pretty straight forward matter that wouldn't take up too much time. How wrong can you be? As I wanted to make a few changes to the route these had to be ridden and measured, and Rob Edwards produced a very professional map that I duly sent off to the Forestry Commission for approval. Consent was given but with strings attached, so there followed some negotiation with the FC and a compromise, and Rob had to amend the map.

I decided to check out the EGB website for ride organisers' resources and realised just what I was taking on. The risk assessment form had changed so I had to do a new one, and found this to be quite a thought-provoking experience. A copy had to be sent to EGB, who told me it was a 'living document' that had to be regularly reviewed and updated. The responsibility of taking on the role of ride organiser was starting to dawn.

As the entries started to trickle in, I compiled a folder to keep them in order and it was surprising how far some people were prepared to travel to do this ride. It was also obvious that almost half of the entries were unsigned which gave us a bit of a headache on ride morning as everyone on the 'naughty list' had to identified and asked to sign – otherwise our insurance wouldn't cover them.

All the 'little jobs' soon added up –booking the ambulance, ordering rosettes, finding helpers, buying the wine and mince pies, fitting out the trailer as an office and sourcing furniture and a burner for the mulled wine, checking the forestry keys, re-checking the route, collecting the bibs and ride equipment, buying sawdust, marking the route (thank you Heather for helping), cutting up fallen trees on the route (ok, Mark Holland did that bit – thank you Mark), receiving phone calls at silly hours, concerns that the ride was getting full, checking the venue parking capacity, getting the website updated to close the ride entries, more phone calls from people wanting to make last-minute entries, starting a waiting list, chasing EGB for a copy of the current public liability insurance certificate for new year, making up a new notice board for the ride as the usual one had been left in the caravan, compiling the entries, making the lists. Then on the day, up at the crack of dawn to open the venue, erect the signs and banner, set up the office and allocate jobs. Thank you lovely helpers, I couldn't have managed the day without you all – and how Belinda always managed to appear so calm I do not know!

The ride went without incident other than a couple of lost shoes and the riders soon returned with smiles on their faces – the weather was perfect, not frozen and the going had been fantastic. Fortunately every horse loaded to go home without incident and we were able to leave the venue before it got dark. That is, all except the daft member of the public who had driven through the open barrier and parked with the horseboxes – I had no option but to lock him in for the Forestry Commission Duty Warden to deal with.

Note for your diaries – the next Christmas Ride will be between Christmas and the New Year on December 30th 2012 – two in one year! I hope to book a photographer, and may even encourage optional fancy dress, with a special prize for the judges' favourite. You have been warned!

Suzanne Garlick

This Winter's Schooling lessons with Carole Broad at Huntley were well supported & greatly enjoyed by all those who took part from October to March. This year we also included optional free stable management sessions with Hayley Walters. Below are comments from a couple of the participants:

Schooling Lessons

I have been attending the winter lessons with Carole since they started. When it gets to October I am looking forward to them starting again as both Gypsy and I have picked up enough bad habits over the summer to need them.
For me personally it was the canter that still needed attention. We never yet have managed to do any canter work without bucking at some point. Not because Gypsy is naughty, it's just she finds it very hard work to canter on a circle and that is her way of expressing it.

One particular lesson I remember is practicing speed and pace, we had to count the number of walk/trot strides down a long side of the school and then play about with reducing the pace to make more strides, then speeding up the pace to make less strides, Gypsy was very good at this exercise.

Over the winter Carole worked us a lot using speed and pace, as Endurance riders it is important that we are able to control the speed and pace as we have to ride on all types of terrain.

Another lesson I remember well was practicing a perfect square halt and then choosing a hind leg to take off with and then trying to engage the quarters to have a "lift" in them. We did this at walk and trot, Gypsy seem to respond well to this but I found I did have to use the mirror to first get a good square halt and then to choose which back leg I was going to start off with. Most of the people in the lesson used the mirror, I'm afraid it does take many years to be able to do this exercise without a helpful mirror!!

Well, that just leaves the canter "without" a buck in it. We did a lot of canter work this winter which I am grateful for as practice makes almost perfect. Carole said not to worry about speed (it usually was a bit yee ha) but to just concentrate on sitting back and deep into the saddle so she would find it almost impossible to buck. I am happy to report that the last couple of lessons we had there was no bucking, the speed was still a little fast but that can be worked on. Also in between lessons I was working very hard on the canter especially on the right rein as she found this harder.

The improvement in both Gypsy and myself is tremendous, I think Carole would be the first to agree with me, we have gone from being total adrenaline freaks that couldn't control speed or pace to a calm and hard working partnership, so

the credit has to go to Carole for her excellent teaching methods and her ability to bring out the best in people and to be able to encourage and give praise when she can see you are working so flipping hard to achieve what she is teaching.
Many thanks to Carolyn for working so very hard to arrange the lessons, I know what a headache it can be sometimes. I do hope they will continue.

Ally Knight

Schooling lessons and stable management

We were lucky enough to have these brilliant classes throughout the winter and only missed one due to bad weather.
Carole Broad was excellent as ever in getting the horses (and riders :☺)) working to their best and progressing each time.
I had the opportunity to take my young horse Dawn and she surprised me greatly in her attitude towards the whole set up i.e. travelling, school, other horses, tying up in the barn for stable management. We both learned something new each time so very true the saying *never too old to learn *
So thank you to Hayley who covered a varied and interesting session each time including injuries, well fitting tack and rugs , feeding, travelling, to name just a few
Learnt about bandaging (always away from the heart horses I mean not the riders) lots of tips on horse and rider safety. The classes were fun interactive and informative
I do hope they will be repeated next year
It was a shame that the dressage test was not included this year but hopefully next and will give us another season to practice and improve
Thank you to Carolyn for organising them and to Carole.

Sue Loveridge

March Hares Ride

The day dawned. Cold with the promise of rain. Nervously Team Morgan departed from the safety of their quiet sleepy yard in the countryside and travelled to the heart of a vast dark sprawling forest. With bare branches from old gnarled trees pointing the way, the family arrived at their destination. A small clearing, deserted and silent, devoid of all signs of life. And so the family entered… the 2012 endurance season.

Actually the only truth in that opening paragraph is that the day did dawn cold with the promise of rain. We actually happened to arrive from some 'A' road following the signs to be greeted by a parking attendant and several other competitors. But what's a little fabrication in the creation of an atmosphere?! Journey aside we arrived at the venue uneventfully and proceeded to check in with the entries secretary where I made my first mistake of the day. Third season and one still forgets to fill in ones master card! Frightfully embarrassing! Cheek tinting moment over and it was time for the farrier's inspection and vetting! Comet vetted sound with a heart rate of 38bpm and an A for action and dehydration. So we returned to our trailer to tack up and set out with Chris Wray & Takwenya and Andrea Champ & Luxor for class 1- the 67km. An ambitious season start I felt as last year I started with the 40km at this ride and lamed out! By this time I was already soaked through and had ditched the idea of a colour co-ordinated photograph for the protective warmth of a ski coat. Lesson number 2 before we'd even left the venue- always bring a spare change of clothes or two.

The first part of the ride was spent at a rhythmical trot, maintaining distance from Luxor only to be interrupted by the odd mountain biker or snow shower. Yes snow. Yuck. Sadly Luxor threw a shoe and departed from us leaving Takwenya to pick up the pace and show Comet just how fast she could move! The rest of the 40km was spent in a well marked blur of forestry tracks, over taking the rest of our class with Comet's knees practically hitting his face to keep up-if only he'd replicate this action in the show ring! The ease with which the route rode and the degree to which it was marked combined with Chris' knowledge of the route enabled us to enjoy conversation as if we were merely out on a training hack, something that I think both Comet and myself found refreshing and relaxing. There were of course some 'oops' moments, for me anyways, despite holding back from Takwenya we received a complete mud bath as she cantered up the hill in front of us and I greatly underestimated Comet's agility and overestimated his common sense resulting in my knee having a very unfortunate encounter with a rather solid forestry barrier.

We arrived back at the venue, now the vet gate, promptly presented sound with a heart rate of 56 and discovered three very important things. 1. My phone had drowned in my pocket. 2. Black leather gloves are a ridiculous idea on such wet days and as a consequence I looked like I had a rare skin disease. 3. I was incredibly cold.

After half an hour we set back out in the same clothes, like the brave troopers we are to complete the last 27km. Unsure of how fit Comet really was I half expected him to fall behind and struggle home. How terribly wrong. He was fresh as a daisy and on the last hill before home both he and Takwenya thought it would be incredibly good fun to canter. Fighting for control Chris shouted back at me 'There goes our grading' as we gave in and let the horses please themselves.

Upon arrival at the venue we promptly untacked and waited our half hour before vetting. We were sound, still keen and had a decent heart rate of 46bpm with an average speed of 13.3kph. We had started our season with a grade 1. I was very proud of my little pony. We had a fabulous day and would like to thank all the helpers who ensured the ride ran smoothly both on and before the day.

Angharad Morgan

The Handy Book of Helper's Hints

Chapter 1: Secretary's Assistant

To get one's helping in early is a good thing: and, taking advantage of having a bad foot and not being able to ride, I offered my services to the March Hares organiser. They put me in as Ride Secretary's Assistant, with the promise I could "tick people off." I had thought my penchant for ordering people about and generally wanting my own way at all times was known only to closest family, but nevertheless I spent the day before practising a stern look in front of the mirror and honing a few apt phrases. I wasn't sure what I'd need but included for safety a few general purpose tickings off like " You can't put that there" , "Don't do it like that " and "What do you think you are doing? " . Confident these would at least start me off I pitched up early and got my instructions: oh right, not that sort of ticking off but the other slightly more constructive one of marking off the arrivals.

The moment the real Secretary disappeared to do some urgent task, they arrived. A plainly deranged man in the ubiquitous yellow jacket turned up , gave me a

small black box with the words " I'm Delta One, you're Delta Two : if anything happens press the grey button and call Charlie" and vanished. Obviously bonkers, so I tossed the black thing to the back of the trailer and carried on with the vital task of arranging my sticky labels in to piles. Then a 12 year old came up and pretended to be a vet: I sent him off to the organiser with a flea in his ear but they obviously decided to humour him because I saw him later waving a stethoscope about and watching trot ups.

Then the riders arrived: a plucky bunch in the freezing rain and snow and wonderfully cheerful considering it had been glorious weather all week when most of us were probably toiling in our cells, with the rotten weather seeming to be laid on especially.
The riders brought their master cards, queries and changed arrangements. I toyed with the idea of following Easyjet's example and having a "FastTrack" or "Speedy Entries" queue for the straightforward ones who were willing to pay an extra fiver. This would have the advantage of reducing the queue and also would shore up my ailing pension fund. But I resisted this innovation, had a bacon butty instead and DID NOT EAT ANY CAKE.

The Secretary's tent is, of course, more than a place to register your arrival: it's a left luggage office, meeting point, Helpdesk, and advisory centre. Queries are many and varied, including "I want to upgrade from the 18k pleasure ride to the 64k, but I've brought the wrong hat. I also have no horse: what do you advise?" to "I wonder where the nearest tack shop is ?" (poor people had come all the way from Swansea and forgotten their riding boots).
Be prepared also to be expected to know all the ride details and rules: route changes, hold times, and "Can I change my ride class once I've vetted?" I've no idea, love, ask someone who knows what's going on ….

So in a nutshell when you are next queuing at the secretary's tent, anxious to get through the bureaucracy and start the real business, and wondering what they are faffing around at, do, (obviously) have all your paperwork in order and ready: and bear in mind they are (mostly) just riders like you doing their bit. I am going to propose an addition to the EGB rule book: everyone should have a mandatory stint in the secretary's tent.

"Anyone seen the walky-talky?" Oops…..

Barbara Rees

EASTER SUNDAY BWLCH RAID RIDE

(Sandy Schott enjoys Bwlch Raid Ride)

A dry bright start on Easter Sunday bode well for Fiona Griffiths' new Bwlch Mountain ride. The venue was easy to find and only 25 minutes from Abergavenny, and with so many entries a second parking field was opened. Of the 99 entries only 10 failed to start, and we set off from the sunny sheltered lowland to pass some beautiful country houses on our uphill climb to enjoy the first lovely canter across open heath dotted with bales of mown bracken.

Passing Celia the photographer with a smile, the ride then took us down a country lane to the A40 crossing at Bwlch, impressively stewarded by a policewoman and members of the local Rotary Club who actually stopped the traffic so we could cross safely taking a route between the cottages and up a steep incline onto the mountain Cefn Moel to CP1. Once on the open mountain the views were spectacular, the going was fantastic and one could see for miles. We were joined by skylarks and several groups of well behaved mountain ponies kept their distance as we rode past the last remains of recent snowfall, and from Mynydd Llangorse we took in the view of Llangorse Lake complete with sailing

boats below . The weather was much sharper up on the mountain with a keen breeze and light drizzle, and as we approached CP2, the steep nose of Mynydd Troad loomed up across the valley veiled in drifting cloud. The green loop was closed at CP2 due to melting snow making it too slippery, so we headed back towards CP1 for a second time where the riders taking the optional red loop split off to ride the extra 6km.

Heading for home, after the 2-way section the return took a different route off the mountain and descended steeply to a quiet lane past pretty cottages before crossing the A40 for a second time. Tracing our steps back to the venue we again passed the many kind helpers who gave up their Easter Sunday to man the gates – so lovely to not have to open any gates at all on this lovely ride. Thank you Fiona for suggesting and organising this super ride, to your many helpers from the Brecon and Crickhowell Rotary Clubs and the ladies from the RDA who so cheerfully manned their posts for several hours whilst we riders enjoyed a fabulous fittening ride in glorious surroundings. A substantial amount (to be confirmed) was raised for the local RDA, including the contribution from Offa's Dyke EGB entry fees

Suzanne Garlick

Ride Report – Bwlch Raid 8th April 2012

What an outstanding ride this was! The terrain, marking, helpers and the overall organisation made it a hugely successful ride.

We arrived at the venue and thought we were first on site, we were indeed nearly first in that field but we were in the second field. This was before 10.00 in the morning and the first field was already full. What a good turnout. Signing in and obtaining the bibs went smoothly and this set the tone for the whole ride.

We started with the slow bits, walking past the houses and through the first field. After that we did a bit of a trot / canter up the hill and more canter across the flat. We then caught up with a group of riders and slowly overtook them (hopefully in a respectful way; we asked each before doing so). Down through the village where there were at least three helpers aiding our crossing of the road. Then onto some serious climbs for the horses before wide open spaces for yet more canter. The views at this point were amazing but they were to get better as we got higher. To the one side was Llangorse lake and the Beacons and to the other the snow-capped Black mountains shrouded in a low lying mist/cloud.

On approaching checkpoint 2, we wondered why on earth hikers would have decided to pitch tents at that particular point on the ridge in a bitterly cold wind, only to realise, (duh!?) it was Fiona's helpers at the checkpoint. It was incredibly cold I don't know how they managed to stay as cheery as they did. Maisie and Comet aren't keen campers; they didn't like the tents so we had to short-cut across the heather to continue on the downhill stretch to the loop.

The loop was very steep downhill so I decided to dismount Maisie and we walked/trotted through another manned gate and then remounted having gone down the lane to the next farmhouse. Angharad remained mounted – she says due to Comet's sure footedness! The next short stretch was one of the only tarmac parts that Maisie and I could not keep up with Comet who was now in full endurance extended trot mode, thankfully the road ended and another long uphill stretch ensued. Yet another gate opener, we were being truly spoilt. The saddle had by this time slipped a bit so I dismounted and went up the hill on foot and secured the saddle nearer the top. Note:

must purchase a breast plate! At the top, there were more opportunities to canter and then back to checkpoint 1.

From here it was mostly level or downhill and the horses seemed to know they were going home. We were greeted at the finish line by the organiser herself. Everyone around was congratulating Fiona for a superbly well organised ride.

Thank you Fiona – we are looking forward to next year.

Alan Morgan

The cost of stamps has risen dramatically! Could you receive the newsletter by email or by downloading from the website to save the group printing costs & postage?

The newsletter is sent free of charge to our members. In previous years everyone had to pay £5 per year to subscribe to the newsletter & this meant it was only reaching the small number of members who chose to pay. A few years ago the committee took the decision to subsidise the newsletter so that it could be sent free of charge to all Offa's Dyke Members and Associate Members.

We want to keep the newsletter free to ensure it reaches everyone, but you will appreciate that paper costs and the recent large hike in postage costs make it increasingly expensive for the group.

If you'd like to try receiving future newsletters by email (PDF) or by downloading it from our website, please email me:
carolyn@edwardsglos.fsnet.co.uk
You can always change back to a postal copy at any time if you don't like the electronic version.

Carolyn

Hard Working Horses – Tips on aftercare

It's that time of year again..... the EGB ride schedule has arrived and we flick through, noting down rides that we hope to compete in. We will be starting to think about our ambitions for our horse this season, and generally the aim is to work our horses harder than the previous year; be this competing at a multiday ride, challenging our horse to a tougher ride or aiming to compete in a longer distance class. The extra demands are obviously going to affect our athletic equine partner.

I discussed in my previous article some of the musculo-skeletal conditions which may occur with continuous repetitive over use of certain muscle groups, which are compounded by factors such as fatigue, rider ability and fatigue, etc. In general, many problems begin during heavy work. Micro-trauma in the muscles (tiny tears in the muscle fibres) inevitably occurs during heavy work. This type of strain does not cause a problem in itself and pain is not elicited. However, should heavy training and long competitions continue then the muscular damage accumulates, see figure 1. Eventually, significant acute muscle injuries occur accompanied by other musculo-skeletal conditions. Because many muscular conditions go unnoticed, we continue to work our horses hard, sometimes with very little aftercare. For example, imagine your horse has a minor strain in his hamstring. The strain is not sufficient to cause pain so work is continued. The muscle fibres surrounding the strain are subject to additional load to compensate for the loss of function in the torn fibres. The additional load causes the micro-trauma to spread during heavy training and so the problem continues, whilst your horse's body makes adjustments in his gait to help support the strained muscle. You take your horse to a competition and the work causes the minor strain to become a major acute strain, not to mention the risk of injury to other structures such as ligaments and tendons.

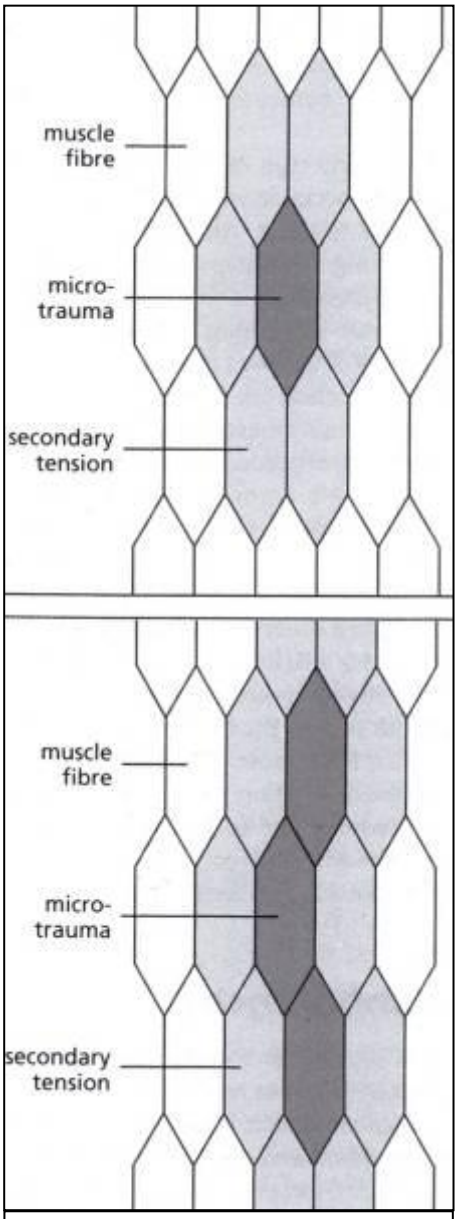

Figure 1. Taken from Cash (1996)
A – micro-trauma affecting a single muscle fibre.
B – micro-trauma spreading to adjacent fibres.

There are some general recommendations for caring for our horses during the competitive season. The suggestions in this article are aimed at the horse who appears in good physical health following heavy work, and does not show signs of lameness or pain. In cases of lameness, pain or other physical changes, rest and veterinary attention is required.

In order to be conservative, a period of **rest**, at least 48 hours, should follow heavy work. This will allow any micro-trauma and minor strains to begin healing without further strain. However, during this period, mobilisation through light work in hand or on the lunge can be extremely beneficial to the muscle due to reduced risk of adhesions and increased circulation, both of which aid healing. Lunging (if the horse is relaxed and works easily on the lunge!) is useful for allowing the handler to observe the horse's action, whilst the horse can move freely without the extra stress of a rider. Giving your horse lots of periods of rest is the best way to look after him physically as well as mentally. Be careful not to work your horse hard too regularly, ensure that you have lots of **light work sessions**. There are other aftercare strategies in ensuring your horse remains in good physical health, which can be especially useful on a multi-day ride when rest is not possible. It is useful to **inspect your horse** carefully for any signs of inflammation or swelling in the muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints up to 48 hours after work. **Ice / cold** is useful in relieving inflammation, restricting the circulation and pain relief. **Cooling the legs** (ice boots, cold water hosing, gels and clays etc) is good general practise. A **good warm up and cool down routine** is particularly beneficial to your horse at multi-day competitions and a thorough **stretching routine** is useful. A regular thorough stretching routine should not only allow assessment of changes within the musculo-skeletal system but also relieves many conditions. Obviously, **regular physiotherapy or sport massage treatments** will assist your horse throughout the season helping your horse work to his optimum.
It is worth noting, should your horse not receive the rest and aftercare treatment that the musculo-skeletal system requires, then there is serious risk of a major injury. Such conditions take many weeks to heal and many more weeks to return the muscle to full pre-injury function, but in cases with poor or inappropriate treatment, return to full pre-injury function may take 12 months or more.

Whilst the advice outlined here is general, and not specific to your horse and his training regime, careful aftercare may just keep your horse free from serious injury and fit to compete throughout the season. Consult your veterinary surgeon if you have any concerns and work with a physiotherapist or sports massage therapist to keep your horse in good physical condition.

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Bromiley, M. (2007) Equine Injury, Therapy and Rehabilitation, 3rd ed. *Blackwell Publishing,* Oxford UK.

What you hope never happens to you

8am and my heart is pounding, my stomach is churning, I have this sinking feeling that things are oh so wrong. I want to step backwards but all I can do is go forward and face this reality. I pick up the head collar found in the field, then a bridle, then a lead rope. I slowly enter the first tack room virtually empty of its contents. I slowly turn around to the double secured metal door. Please, please not the second inner tack room they can't have opened that one. Yes. .....yes they have, all the saddles bridles gadgets and gizmos gone. An 8 year collection taken over night by some fly by night thief.

The police are called and the usual conversations are made. What time? What's nicked? I answer all the questions but get very few answers back. I am informed the attack thieves are becoming more common and the chance of recovery is little to none. This is what sickens me knowing that my best saddle that I saved for will be sold down a pub over a pint and a packet of crisps for £100; when to me it was priceless for keeping my bum in place when I ride my over- boyant mare. I take the police man down the yard. He mutters mmmms and arhhhh, "professional job" "they knew what they were doing". This is not what I want to be hearing. It went through me the whys and hows of how they did it, just common battery powered tools. Then he lost me again with a few swift motions with his pen pointing at a lock. For the next day or two I got through the motions sad, angry, frustrated and then I want vengeance and trust no one. Looking back, I have seen where my security has failed me and where I need to rethink my attitude towards the yard.

Call me precious but when I buy a saddle I look after it and try not to scratch it, oil it and respect it for the future. It has no identity and this is the problem it is just another saddle on a long list of non-descript saddles that could be sold anywhere. I could have done many a thing to make it mine. Not to be over the top, like splash pink wall paint over it, which is one suggestion I had, but post code it with special stamps made for leather. Invisible pen in the gullet or a mark that you can identify it as yours, take photos of any marks on the saddle. The same can be done for the bridle. A lot of saddles have numbers which correspond with make and model, these I should have jotted down to prove I had the saddle.

The insurance company is helping but again it is up to me to say and give evidence of what I had in the tack room. While I may have hoarded gadgets for the horses I have not kept 8 years of paper work. Pictures well I had a few but I never thought of needing a photograph of every leather headcollar. Evidence of what I collected it seems it was a bit light to say the least. Each insurance company is different but reading the fine print is vital is it new for old or like for like, for example.

I hope that this makes you think of your security on your yards. Have you done everything you can to make the robbers life difficult, they do not want to be there any

longer than they can. The opportunist thief will break in in under a minute and grab and snatch. The professional will look at the job in hand. May be visiting a couple of times watching who is about and what locks are on. They will bring all the tools to break in and grab particular things, and any bonuses. You do not want to mess with these people but you do want to make things very very hard for them. You may have fort knocks already. I thought I did but they stopped at nothing to get in. Cameras, alarms that go to phones, lights, dogs, geese will all deter them. A determined thief will almost get through any security. Of course it's up to you at the end of the day to strike a compromise between security, practically, cost and what you feel comfortable. Make sure your insurance if you have insurance is in good order. If you don't have any insurance for tack check your household insurance or put any spare money in a high interest account for such needs.

Looking back this forced de cluttering has been a good learning curve for me. I was complacent and got slack, just thinking it would never happen to me. I do hope that this would help some of you out there, if only to remind you that these things do and can happen.

Anon

Volunteering – A rich experience

Angharad's novice year in 2010 was all a bit of a whirlwind. This endurance sport seemed to involve US (Nicola, Ffion and myself) with a lot more to do than replace the odd knocked pole, score or sit by a fence! Once we worked out how to fill in the paperwork, trot up, get to crew points (not sure that's entirely sussed out), cool down, take heart rates and vet we began to notice all the people involved in the ride.

Who were these people? The parking attendant, the people who took entries, the people organising who was next to see a vet and the ones holding the clipboards for the vets? Who are the people running between the vets and the caravan/tent? The routes are marked - who does this and when? Gates are manned and road crossings have stewards - where do these people mysteriously appear from?

We found out that all these people are **volunteers**, resourced from within the Group or simply friends of members of the group. There never appeared to be enough volunteers and some of the people we met had given up riding that day so that others could.

Angharad and I felt it was important to offer ourselves as volunteers. I first responded to the request for help at the 2011 March Hares ride - I sent an email offering my services and was thanked and asked how much time I could volunteer for that day. I was free all day, was thanked again and advised that I would be the Vet Steward. I was a little scared; I knew nothing about what went on other than trotting the horse up for Angharad.

I arrived at the venue on the day and was directed to the vet area. I met the vets and writers and was given a quick lesson in what I was needed to do. As you are all aware the vetting area can be hectic. It started well and I felt in control of the situation, quickly finding a system of controlling the paperwork. We were the vet gate for the longer distances; another quick lesson from experienced volunteers saw me coping with that. As often seems the case, riders seemed to finish in groups and at one point there were waits in excess of 15 minutes for the vets. I tried to ensure that all were seen in turn and all riders were advised of the delays.

The last rider vetted - I was exhausted but had found the whole experience rewarding. I learnt a great deal and met a lot of nice friendly people.

I'm not sure whether it was because I'd done a reasonable job or because of the volunteer shortage but Stevie Martin (who was the technical steward that day) asked that I help at the on-course vet gate at the Red Dragon in October.

Angharad, Nicola and I continued volunteering to help at rides: Angharad and I were road crossing stewards at Ludlow, Nicola and Angharad manned a gate at Mynydd Machen, we all provided water and manned a checkpoint for Plump Hill pleasure ride and I've done some vet writing and finally at the end of 2011 I spend three days at Red Dragon helping to physically set up the vet gate area and then recording timings.

All of these tasks have helped in my understanding of the sport and also a huge appreciation of the work undertaken by the volunteers that allow the rides to take place.

Please spare a smile and thanks for the volunteers you see at rides. It is appreciated. Don't let a lack of experience to put you off if you're new to the sport – it's a great way to meet people and learn!

Alan Morgan

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