

Blanchland Pleasure Ride

Sunday 5th October 2008

I was rather anxious when I arrived at Baybridge Car Park at around 9am to find part of it underwater following the previous day's thick fog and heavy rainfall. The fog had prevented us marking out the route the way we had intended and now it was obvious that careful parking was needed if everyone was to avoid having to wade through water. Fortunately the sky was blue and the sun was shining so I was extremely hopeful for a dry and pleasantly warm day.

It wasn't long before horseboxes and trailers began to arrive. Everyone was happy and cheerful, even those who had left their map with directions at home and missed the turn off for Blanchland! After a brief, friendly chat we started to prepare our ponies for the ride. Debbie Gaskin (route planner) arrived on her pony having ridden him the short distance from her home to Baybridge. Janet Brennand had kindly travelled over from Penrith to be our car park vehicle security guard and Keith and Ruby Williams with their 4x4 were to be our support vehicle and open some of the many gates on the route. I handed my camera over to Jan Grant and then we were ready to go.



I wanted to shout 'head'em up, move'em out, Rawhide' as I asked everyone to mount up and follow Debbie out of the car park, but thought our younger participants wouldn't understand what I was shouting about so decided against it. Our group of eleven ponies included the native breeds of Fell, Highland, Welsh and Connemara and were to follow a ten mile route with breath taking views over Hexham and surrounding area. We travelled north towards Pennypie House and then over Blanchland Moor to Slaley Forest before returning along Carriers Way over Bulbeck Common and Birkside Fell back to Baybridge.



I agreed to stay at the back of the group and attend to any problems. My pony, Rackwood Dawn, is 18 years old so I was sure she would appreciate a slower speed but much to my surprise she hated being at the back and was eager to be out in front with the leaders. The faster riders went out of sight as we reached Slaley Forest so she forgot about them and settled down to enjoy her new surroundings. Carriers Way was extremely boggy because of all the rain so we had to choose our path very carefully. I spent most of the ride taking to William Laws riding Honey and Sarah Pringle riding Dene Decoris. This was William's longest ride so lunch was definitely

on his mind as we made our way across Birkside Fell. Most of us dismounted for the decent to Baybridge to prevent our ponies from slipping on the tarmac. I felt sure that everyone would be back and tucking into their sandwiches when we got there, but to my horror, we were the first to return. What had happened to the other riders? The last time I had seen them was as they disappeared into the trees at Slaley Forest. I must have been about 10 minutes behind them at that point. For a brief period I began to panic that they may be lost in the forest or on the fell but before we could decide how best to look for them they came into view. They had taken a different route in Slaley Forest and had added a few more miles to the ride. What a relief!



After seeing to the comforts of our ponies we all gathered round for an open air picnic and studied the maps to find out where we had actually been. Most people had brought a raffle prize so that concluded the day.

At around 3.30pm, once everyone was safely loaded and on the road home, Shelly Whitfield and I loaded our ponies and left Baybridge feeling a strong sense of achievement having had a successful first event as group organiser.

This pleasure ride is to be an annual event visiting different parts of the North-East region each year. It will be organised for the first Sunday in October so if you live in a beautiful part of our region and would like to suggest a 10-12 mile route with suitable parking facilities, please let me know.

Eileen Walker
FPS North-East Area Support Group Organiser