

My membership & me



Andrew Wakelin from Powys discovered a love of the outdoors in childhood. Now he arranges walking courses in Wales for fellow sufferers of McArdle's disease, and he appreciates the benefits of going at a slower pace

What first inspired you to join the National Trust?

I've always been keen on the countryside. When I was young we used to go to Gower Peninsula, and Bishopston Valley, Swansea. I was born in Cardiff, and when I settled back in Wales in my 40s I was able to buy a Trust Life Membership. My home is next to Trust land at Abergwesyn Common, Powys, and I look at a mountain ridge every day. It has a big bank of bluebells in the spring.

It was apparent at an early age that I was different from my brother and sister. I have McArdle's disease, which is a rare genetic disorder where the body is unable to access 80 per cent of its store of carbohydrate energy. It causes muscle pain and cramping, which occurs both early in an activity and throughout, when it is intense, but with the right advice you can do all sorts of things. I've climbed all 188 mountains over 2,000ft (610m) in Wales. It took me quite a time!

What do you enjoy most about walking?

I really enjoy being up in the hills looking down, and the feeling of connection with nature and open space when I'm walking. I didn't get diagnosed until I was 30 so I had to teach myself what to do when I walk – for example, starting off on the flat and slowing down and zigzagging on slopes to conserve energy.

In 2010 I had the idea to do a 'Walk over Wales'. Four of us walked 210 miles (338km) from Great Orme's Head, Conwy, to Cardiff Bay in 32 days. It made me realise I might help other people with McArdle's. Now I run walking courses in Pembrokeshire for adults, children and parents. In non-coronavirus times, people come from all over the world to walk in the mountains. We often walk over Trust land and start at the Stackpole Centre, Pembrokeshire.

What do you think people take from your walking courses?

Many people who have McArdle's will never have met anyone else with it, so getting together for a whole week is really valuable. We swap techniques and take plenty of encouragement from being with others who understand. Often people with McArdle's wouldn't dare to adventure into places like Tryfan mountain in Snowdonia



Left Andrew striding out in the Glyderau mountains, Snowdonia.

Top He recalls family outings to beautiful

Rhosili Bay on the Gower Peninsula, South Wales.

Above Andrew's walkers often spot red kites while they're out.

as you have to scramble up part of it, but I've taken people there twice. It gives them a huge sense of achievement. We had a woman of 64 who came all the way from Australia. She thought she wouldn't be able to do the walks, but she completed a 1,400ft (427m) climb over the south ridge of Snowdon. It changed her life.

People definitely benefit from being in beautiful surroundings. We have time to chat, look at the view and point out birds, such as red kites, which many of the people on the courses haven't seen before. Having that extra time makes it so much more enjoyable. There's an advantage to going slowly. ○

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