

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Winter 2018

Letter from the editor

Dear Unlimited Oxfordshire member,



Since becoming disabled and unable to walk more than a few steps, I have not enjoyed travelling as much as I used to. All the planning and organisation that has to be done to make sure the right assistance is available when it is needed, and never being certain if it will actually work, does rather take the gloss off the experience. We probably all have our horror stories. Being left alone sitting in a wheelchair on the runway in the pouring rain by the airline whose staff decided I would have to wait for everyone else to board first because 'I would get in the way' wasn't a great start to one of my holidays! So I am full of admiration for people, like Tony Giles, featured in this newsletter, who undertakes some real travel adventures despite having severe sensory impairments.

At this time of year the papers are full of holiday ads so it is useful to discover some good websites to find accessible accommodation or places to visit. Knowing that the reviews have been written by disabled people with direct personal experience gives one more confidence to try them out. And closer to home we have the opportunity to influence and improve the travel experience of disabled people if we can take a few minutes to provide feedback with our own stories.

Following on from MIGWALL's great access map of Wallingford, Unlimited Oxfordshire has wanted to conduct an access survey of Oxford City centre for a long time and this now seems possible working together with some Oxford University students - an opportunity too good to pass up. So please see the back page for information and do help out if you possibly can.

Diane Sider, Editor



Blue Badges Could Be Extended

People with dementia and autism could get Blue Badge parking permits in England under new government proposals. It is hoped that providing the permits for those with hidden disabilities will create equality between the treatment of physical and mental health. The Department for Transport said that at the moment only certain councils were recognising hidden disabilities. If the proposals go ahead, it will be the biggest change to the Blue Badge scheme since it was introduced in 1970. Around 2.4 million people have Blue Badges in England, which allows them to park for free in pay and display bays, use disabled parking bays, and stay for up to three hours on yellow lines. In London Blue Badge holders are exempt from paying the congestion charge.

Transport minister Jesse Norman said: 'Blue Badges give people with disabilities the freedom to get jobs, see friends or go to the shops with as



much ease as possible. We want to try to extend this to people with invisible disabilities.'

The Department for Transport said about 75% of badge users said they would go out less often if they didn't have the flexibility to park with a Blue Badge. The changes have been put out to an eight-week public consultation. The National Autistic Society has been campaigning for this change and its head of policy, Sarah Lambert, said it could provide a lifeline to many autistic people. She said, 'There are some families that sometimes don't go out because they're worried about the stress that is going to be caused if it's very busy and very crowded.'

Get Out and About!



Tourism For All charges individuals £25 per year for membership but will help you plan and arrange your holiday. This allows you to create the perfect holiday for you, tailored specifically to your access requirements, whether this means wheelchair access or just having good lighting. All of the properties on their site are self-assessed. However if you are looking for some extra assurance look out for the VisitEngland logo on venues that have been professionally assessed. They also offer discounts to specific locations.

Tourism for All UK
Pixel Mill, 44 Appleby Road
Kendal, Cumbria LA9 6ES
Tel: 0845 124 9971

info@tourismforall.org.uk
www.tourismforall.org.uk

Tourism For All also runs the Open Britain website:

Open Britain

Open Britain is your one-stop shop for accessible tourism in the UK providing you with a simple way to find accessible destinations and places to stay. Open Britain has details of over 10,000 tourism businesses to help you plan your perfect accessible holiday or break. Open Britain is completely free to use and you don't need to be a Member of Tourism for All, so if you know where you want to go and what you want to do, just click on the link to start searching and planning.

www.openbritain.net/

Euan's Guide

Euan's Guide features reviews by disabled people of venues both in the UK and abroad. Euan's Guide is a charity that was created in 2013 by brother and sister Euan and Kiki MacDonald. The free listings include information about accessible toilets, wheelchair access, hearing loops and multiple other access features that exist at any one particular venue. The cornerstone of Euan's Guide however is its community of independent reviewers, who share their photos and experiences of restaurants, hotels, train stations, tourist attractions and anywhere else they may have visited. By sharing their experiences people can give others an idea of what to expect when they visit somewhere new for the first time.

Tel: 0131 510 5106

hello@euansguide.com
www.euansguide.com

Tony Giles - blind and deaf traveller



Tony Giles has the ambition to visit every country in the world and he has been to 125 countries so far. Tony is totally blind and 80% deaf and uses hearing aids to help cope with his deafness. He prefers to travel alone as this is the biggest challenge he can get and it gives him the opportunity to interact with more people. He says travelling with a companion, especially someone sighted, would mean they would do all the work, guiding etc., and he wouldn't get the chance to touch as many things or find as many things as he does by himself. He admits he has to be patient and he gets lost all the time. Ten people might walk by but eventually someone will stop and help him find the places he wants to reach. 'New Orleans was the first place I went to by myself and I just froze. But I took a couple of deep breaths and said to myself - "Tony this is what you want. If you don't want it go home". More deep breaths, turn left, walk down the street and the rest is history.'

Tony has also bungee-jumped 16 times and sky-dived 3 times, been Zorbing twice (where you travel downhill in a large clear plastic ball), both times in New Zealand, driven jet boats and a large jeep, ridden motorbikes, jet skied and water skied, to name a few activities.

Tony has a BA in American Studies from Nottingham University and an MA in Transatlantic Studies (History of US Foreign Policy) from the University of Birmingham. He had learnt Braille as a child but now 'I have a scanner with speech software, which allows me to read any typed text including my post. This vital piece of equipment enabled me to function at university at the same level as sighted students. I had to scan the books myself and then listen to the entire text. This took twice as long as a student reading with sight, but it made me more determined to learn.'

Tony has published two books *Seeing the World My Way* and *Seeing the Americas My Way* available from Amazon as Kindle editions. The third instalment, *Wanderings around Africa*, will come next.

You can read more about Tony on his website:
www.tonythetraveller.com/.

Meet the Member - Bill Lipscomb



Bill Lipscomb and his wife Pam have been Unlimited members for about three years. They live in Wantage in the south of the county. He has two grown-up 'girls' (in their forties!) who have both got professional careers. Bill is very proud of them and his grandson too. Bill had a Cerebrovascular accident, known as a CVA or stroke, in 1994 leaving him with left-sided paralysis, but he has a philosophy of turning problems into opportunities so in 1995 he was part of a working party which researched the issues faced by disabled people in the area and set up the Shopmobility scheme for Windsor and Maidenhead. He helped Oxford Shopmobility founders on how best to launch their scheme using his expertise and knowledge from that first experience. Late last year Bill wrote to the new Shopmobility company at the Westgate urging them to allow use of their scooters outside the precinct which they have now done. He is still frustrated that they only have one smaller vehicle for hire, leaving all customers to handle the larger machines.

With a work colleague in 1998 Bill started a limited company producing packaging for the food industry, many products finding their way to big-name high street outlets. He developed many of the skills necessary to run a medium-sized business.

Like Bill, Pam uses a large mobility scooter and also has a CVA, leaving her with right-sided paralysis. They both use buses to get around the county although buses only have space for one mobility chair so they usually have to travel separately. They both attend Wantage Parish church and are often involved in many of the extracurricula events that are held there. The Church is part of the Oxford Diocese and Bill appreciates the Anglo/Catholic liturgy and finds the congregation is a generous mix of C of E and RC.

Bill and Pam's main hobby is going to the theatre and they are both members of the University of the Third Age. He says, 'As Pam and I were both teenagers in the Sixties, we are both still addicted to the music of that decade.' As Bill says 'It's about what you can do not what you can't. Ability not disability.'

Oxfordshire Transport and Access Group

We could do with your help please! **Oxfordshire Transport and Access Group (OXTRAG)** have for three decades acted as the voice of people with mobility or sensory difficulties on transport & highways issues. For this we receive a small annual grant to cover meeting expenses on the understanding members encourage disabled and older people to report their travel experiences (good, bad or indifferent). *In order to meet our required number of submissions for 2017-18 we need the feedback from disabled or older people about bus services they have used in Oxfordshire.*

On our website we offer guidance notes and a form (in electronic or paper format) to complete and return to ShirleyMcAneny@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Also, we are happy to hear more about transport and access improvements you think would benefit disabled or older people. Please call our Secretary, Lynne Hooper on 01869 601576, email oxtrag@gmail.com or join one of our quarterly meetings. The next is at 13.30 on Wednesday 28th February in Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford.

Our aim is to make Oxfordshire a county where highways and transport are easily accessible by all. You are welcome to support or join us via oxtrag@gmail.com, www.oxtrag.org.

No experience is needed – just an interest in making things more inclusive. Membership is free and others will support you. You will meet a friendly group of people, gain experience, which could lead to a career path and appreciation for your knowledge and skills.

We link with other groups and we report faults on highways through fixmystreet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ and much more....

What's in it for you? Knowledge of a job well done & help given, an opportunity to meet like-minded people and enjoy our tea and cake.

Deborah Whelan – Chairperson



S'up Spoon



'I don't let having cerebral palsy get in my way. I live independently and enjoy spending time with my friends. However, one thing has bothered me, I struggle to eat cereal or soup! I looked on the internet and although I tried a few things, nothing worked for me. Then I had the eureka moment; I decided I needed a spoon with a lid! A friend introduced me to 4c Design, a product design consultancy based in Glasgow. 4c agreed to take on my project and they assigned it to their graduate industrial designer, Mark. My idea was actually being taken seriously.

Mark & I looked at what was feasible; we built prototypes and soon decided anything with mechanical buttons was too cumbersome. I wanted the spoon to be discreet enough to use in a restaurant without other diners staring at this novel piece of cutlery. I visited 4c Design and they gave me two prototypes of what has now become the S'up spoon. Since that early prototype we've worked hard refining the design to make it ambidextrous, food safe and dishwasher proof. Realising the difference the spoon has made to me, we built a new company (S'up Products) and we're delighted the S'up spoon is now available to anyone who could benefit from its ability to help those with tremor and shaky hands.

Unlike a normal spoon, which normally requires your upper lip / teeth to pull content off, this requires you to tip food into your mouth.'

Grant Douglas, The Creator



The spoon weighs just 25gms and costs £12.50 ex VAT for one or £10.00 ex VAT for extra spoons ordered at the same time plus £3.00 postage UK.

To order Tel: 0131 343 6821 or see

www.sup-products.com

Accessible beaches in England

When you consider the length of England's coastline, and the amount of seaside towns along it, you'd be forgiven for assuming that many of the popular beaches would be accessible. But there are places that take access much more seriously than others:

- **Cornwall** is a beach lover's paradise. Cornwall Council, along with Cornwall Mobility, Cornwall Disability and other charities, have worked together to create a map of accessible beaches across the county. The map also lists where Sand Chairs (beach wheelchairs) are available to hire. You can find the map here: [Sand Chairs in Cornwall](#).
- **Devon**. There are quite a few that advertise beach wheelchairs for hire, which you can find on the website [Accessible Countryside](#).
- **Brighton and Hove** beach in East Sussex has won numerous accolades. Two beach wheelchairs are available to hire from www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/seafront/seafront-office
- **Great Yarmouth**. Miles of sandy beaches and, of course, a few beach wheelchairs available from the Great Yarmouth tourist office <http://www.great-yarmouth.co.uk/visitor-info/beach-wheelchairs.aspx>
- **Skegness**. It has sandy beaches, a wonderful promenade for a wheelchair walk, and beach wheelchairs for hire. Find out more about its wheelchairs for hire by scrolling to the bottom of the page on the Skegness tourism website.

Accessible beaches in Wales - The Welsh coast is home to many accessible beaches, some of which have beach wheelchairs available for hire. For a full list and to check availability of wheelchairs, take a look at these two guides: [accessible beaches in Wales](#) and www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales

Beach wheelchairs in Scotland - Beach Wheelchairs is a Scottish charity in North Berwick that believes everyone should have access to the country's beaches. It has four beach wheelchairs available for hire from the beach hut in North Berwick, East Lothian. Apart from this though, unless I'm missing something, Scotland doesn't seem to have many accessible beaches or other beach wheelchairs for hire.

Thanks to Robert Obey, Disability Horizons



Public Transport UK Travel Tips

Joanna Matthews (Unlimited Chair) travels by public transport for work and leisure. She works as a support worker for a blind client and commutes to and from London and other cities for meetings and around about the capital on the underground, buses and in taxis. Most of her journeys go smoothly but sometimes there are hiccups. These are her top tips:

1. If you haven't already got one then a disabled rail card saves money. You do not need to be on DLA/PIP to qualify for one. A companion can travel with you on the same fare. You may be eligible for a disabled coach card too and a free bus pass for all non-coach travel.
2. You do not need a disabled rail card to book travel support for a train journey. You can book assistance (24 hours notice by phone or email) with any train company - it does not matter which company your journey is booked with. Virgin Assistance is very helpful.
3. For unplanned London train journeys from Oxford and Oxford Station you can book assistance on arrival at the station to be met on the platform at Marylebone or Paddington. You can turn up at a London mainline station and book assistance home.
4. You do not need to book assistance to travel on the London underground - just turn up. All staff are trained and helpful. However most of the underground network is not accessible to wheelchair users. The Jubilee line is the best.
5. Assistance dogs can travel on all forms of transport; they cannot be refused.
6. For stations with loos there will be an accessible loo. For some of these you need a Radar key.
7. Many London trains and inter-city trains have at least one accessible loo.
8. Inter-city trains have staff who pass through the carriages but there are no guards on trains to Marylebone and most Paddington trains.
9. All London buses are accessible from the pavement; they lower on request if the driver has not spotted you need level entry. They have ramps for wheelchair users to get on and off. Stops are announced by voice and display.
10. Public transport is covered as a service by the Equalities Act 2010, and all providers have to make a reasonable adjustment for you to travel. Some are better than others. If you have the energy, make a fuss if you are not happy with the service you get.

Help for Air Travel



The UK Civil Aviation Authority provides very helpful information for passengers on its website - look for the heading 'Special Assistance' for help in organising what you need to make your journey easier and more enjoyable. For details of phone numbers and special assistance services provided by all airlines and UK airports see:

www.caa.co.uk/Passengers/PRM/Special-assistance-guidance-from-airports-and-airlines/

Your rights in the EU

If you're a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility you are legally entitled to support when travelling by air. This means airports and airlines must provide help and assistance, which is free of charge, and helps ensure you have a less stressful journey. Using the assistance service gives you priority through security so much less hassle!

Your right to special assistance is stipulated in EU law and applies when:

- You fly on any airline from an EU airport
- You fly on an EU registered airline to an EU airport

Passengers who want special assistance should aim to give their airline 48 hours notice of the help they require. Help is available from the moment you arrive at an airport and can cover:

- your journey through your departure airport
- boarding the aircraft and during the flight
- disembarking the aircraft
- transferring between flights and travelling through your destination airport.

Outside the EU - Similar passenger rights apply in other countries including the United States. However, there are many parts of the world where similar rights are not available. Assistance may require a fee or not be available at all.

Library Lifts Not Renovated in £6M Makeover

In spite of spending almost £6 million renovating Oxford Central Library as part of the Westgate development, the library lifts were not upgraded. The lifts are too small to take wheelchairs and so many disabled people still cannot access the library. According to Oxfordshire County Council's spokesman, Owen Morton, 'We wanted to get them replaced during the recent closure but this wasn't possible at the time due to major demand on lift products within the construction sector'. This does seem to be a very lame excuse considering the refurbishment took eighteen months to complete and lift contractors were fitting lifts into the main part of the Westgate Centre - could they have not added the library lifts to their schedule? It will take six to nine months before bigger lifts are installed. In the meantime wheelchair users are denied access to the library in spite of their paying Council tax like the rest of Oxfordshire's population.

Oxfordshire Wheelchair Service

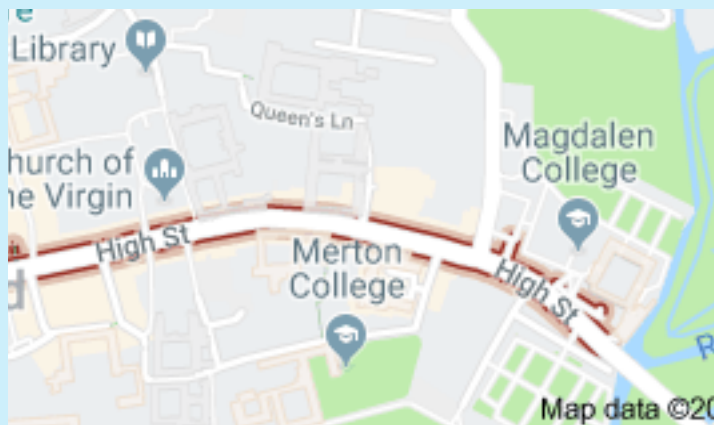
'I recently chose and got a wheelchair through Oxfordshire's Wheelchair Service, based at The Oxford Centre for Enablement, and only had to pay £15 because I was issued with a voucher that covered the rest. I bought the wheelchair from Ability Matters in Oxford. If you can't afford to buy a wheelchair you may qualify for a voucher, and might not need to pay anything, or at least not much, depending on which one you choose. It's worth finding out about the scheme.'

Dorothy Warner

February Over 50's Transport Meeting

Members of Unlimited Oxfordshire attended a meeting of the Over 50's Network. We heard from Cllr Gill Sanders (County Council) on issues she had been asked to raise with the management of the Westgate Centre about the lack of seating, the placement of toilets, poor signage and lack of public art. These issues are being looked into. The rest of the meeting was about bus transport. Cllrs Yvonne Constance and Martin Krafti from OCC spoke and there were presentations from Phil Southhall, MD of the Oxford Bus Company and Martin Sutton, MD of Stagecoach in Oxfordshire. A decision has yet to be made about any future experimental bus routing on Queen Street. Thanks to our members who emailed problems; Joanna has raised them with the bus companies and the council.

City Centre Access Mapping Project - Volunteers Needed



Unlimited Oxfordshire is planning to collaborate with students from Oxford University to conduct an access survey of the city centre. Last year a group of 120 Oxford University students surveyed all the colleges for accessibility - an impressive piece of work. The survey was initiated and led by Australian student Matt Pierri, himself a wheelchair user, who found when he applied to the University there was a lack of detailed access information available.

For the City access mapping project Matt plans to recruit another group of students to survey the 'social' spaces in the City centre - cafes, restaurants, bars, clubs, cinemas etc. Unlimited Oxfordshire has agreed to survey the retail venues - shops, banks, supermarkets, hairdressers etc. This is a fantastic opportunity to get really useful information for disabled people living in or visiting Oxford.

Can you help? You will be given a form to complete for each venue, which is a checklist of things to look out for. We need both people who use wheelchairs or mobility scooters and those without mobility impairments, although you may have other impairments - or you may be non-disabled but be an interested carer or friend. Ideally you will work in pairs as this will make it easier. One good thing about this project is that it can be done at your own pace, in your own time, at any time between now and June. The results will be put up on a website and examples of poor access will be raised with the council.

We encourage as many Unlimited Oxfordshire members to volunteer as possible as the more people involved the less work for any individual.

If you can spare some time to help please contact Diane Sider on 01865 308746 or email: diane@sider.co.uk.

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