

RAMBLING: NOMAD MAVIS, 90, HAS ALWAYS LOVED TO GO A-WANDERING

Just two years ago, Mavis Burton hung up her boots after 85 years of rambling both in this country and abroad. Over the years, she has championed the right to roam of walkers in the UK and inspired hundreds to lace up their boots and get walking. Still president of Derby Nomad Ramblers Club, on Sunday members will join her for her 90th birthday celebrations. Pat Parkin reports.

EVER since 1919 when she first perched on her father's shoulders at the age of three and went rambling in the Derbyshire countryside, Mavis Burton has been walking.

And for 85 years she has kept on going, spending every spare moment tramping the hills and dales of British beauty spots, as well as visiting 21 other countries, covering many thousands of miles.

She has championed the cause of ramblers to have the right to roam in the countryside and inspired hundreds of local people to lace up their boots and get walking.

Sadly, her own days of taking to the hills came to an end two years ago when she suffered a trapped nerve in her spine.

"Now I can only look at those wonderful hills," she said, "but I've been pretty lucky really; it has only been the last two years when I have had to give up."

These days Mavis finds walking very painful but is looking forward to her 90th birthday next week when her pals in Derby Nomad Ramblers Club will return from their regular Sunday morning hike and meet up with her at their favorite countryside watering hole so they can raise their glasses to wish her a very happy birthday.

Said club member Geoff Barker, of Allestree: "Mavis has done so much for walkers in Derbyshire. She is quite amazing. She is a very special lady whose enthusiasm for the club has never faltered. She loves it with a deep passion and I can unhesitatingly say that everyone who can be, will be there to wish her a very happy birthday and many more of them."

Though she can no longer pull on her boots and take to the open road, Mavis still recalls how her love of the countryside, flowers, trees, birds and wildlife were inspired by her father, Sidney Burton, during those early walks in Derbyshire – and she continues to encourage others to follow suit.

"It's been my total life. Nothing can make you feel better than being out there in the fresh air and the beautiful countryside. We are very fortunate in Derbyshire to have such fantastic scenery and I can honestly say I have enjoyed every minute of my very active life," she said.

In her youth, she became embroiled in the landowners versus ramblers' debacle which raged for many years, campaigning unstintingly for the freedom to roam and fighting numerous cases where rights of way and free access were threatened.

In many cases, she won the respect of her adversaries for the way in which she went about her business.

Farmers, landowners, gamekeepers and agents have all come under her scrutiny but, she says, though some could be aggressive and nasty, not all were anti-ramblers.

"I remember the Duke of Devonshire, who died earlier this year, being a very kindly man who understood our cause and who wanted everyone to share in his inheritance."

In her early days with Nomad Ramblers, Mavis would join members on walking, climbing and mountaineering trips. She clearly remembers her first time out with them when they covered 26 miles.

"I felt as though I had been under a steam roller. We went out at 7am and didn't get back till after 10 at night – and I loved it," she laughed.

On Sundays, they would catch the 7.10am milk train, which stopped at every tiny village on its way to Buxton, and, after a long ramble, would return on the 10.02pm back to Derby.

Other times, they would go by bus to Ashbourne for a fare of 1s 4d (7p). Whatever the weather – rain, snow or sunshine – they would all turn up.

When the war ended, they were able to travel further afield and went to Wales, Scotland and Ireland to climb mountains, as well as to Austria, Bavaria and Switzerland to walk and climb in the Alps.

All the members belonged to the Youth Hostel Association, paying 1s (5p) for a bed and doing chores like washing-up and mopping floors to subsidise their trip.

"It was pretty primitive in those days," said Mavis, "but I still think that the YHA was better than it is today with all its mod cons."

Mavis has been a Nomad for 65 years and is the club president as well as vice-president of Derbyshire Ramblers' Association. One of her most lasting memories of her youthful outdoor life is of soon after the war, when she and friends were desert trekking in North Africa and accidentally strayed into a minefield to set up camp.

"Next morning, a Frenchman came and asked if we were aware we were in a minefield.

"We nearly fainted and I can tell you we drove our van very, very carefully along the same lines we had followed the night before. It was pretty scary but we had lots of laughs later."

Despite being a great country lover, Mavis is a true townie at heart – born in Cotton Lane, a pupil at St Dunstan's School and an employee for most of her life at Rolls-Royce where she was a typist until retiring 30 years ago.

She still lives in the Osmaston Road area with her good friend, Eunice Bardill, who used to lodge with her parents and is now her carer.

"Without her I would be in a home, so I am very lucky to have such a good pal," said Mavis.

The pair used to ramble together and still enjoy trips out into the countryside but, these days, it is only on four wheels.

Mavis is well-known to many Derby people as a lifelong and devoted supporter of the St John Ambulance Brigade. She joined as a young girl, carrying out all sorts of duties at local events.

Her most memorable times were when she helped look after wounded soldiers in the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, when they had been shipped back from the First World War battlefields in France.

"Because we were not proper nurses, we had a bit more time to chat and have a laugh with them. I remember one young chap getting a bit cheeky, saying to me: 'You have a lovely leg'.

"I replied: 'So what's wrong with the other one?'.

"It was that sort of banter which kept up their spirits, but it's a good job I wasn't wearing a pair of the short shorts we all wore when we were out walking," she laughed.

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