



The Ramblers' Association of Malta

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WALKING THE LOIRE VALLEY: This tour during the first week of June took some 26 members to France, to visit this region which is famous for its chateaux rising from the river Loire and its tributaries. For most of the ramblers it was a first time to the Loire valley, and it could as well be the last because all have had their fill of the most renowned chateaux with their parks and exotic gardens. The Chateaux at Azay le Rideau, Chambord and Chenonceau will certainly remain impressed in their memory, as will that at Le Clos-Luce' – the house with large gardens where Leonardo da Vinci lived during his sojourn in France as guest of the French king. Today it has been converted into a museum, and his experimental drawings and works are displayed lifesize in the gardens.

Every morning we admired the palatial rooms of a different chateau with their splendid period furniture and then the walks followed in the afternoon. Again we had a programme of alternate excursions organised for non-walkers and for those who did not feel like walking every day. This proved very welcome to many especially when the weather was too warm.

Members Hendrik Kalka and Marie Louise Muscat Azzopardi helped in the organisation of the tour, and they also led the walks every day. On behalf of all participants I thank and congratulate them for their good planning and commitment. Gratitude is also expressed to all members for their full co-operation and camaraderie. Next stage: Eurorando Andalucia 2011 in October.

EURORANDO ANDALUCIA 2011: 10-day Ramblers' Tour to Almeria in Spain: 8th to 18th October 2011

It has become customary for our Association to take advantage of the splendid walks programme that each year are organized in different countries in connection with the AGM of the European Ramblers' Association(ERA).

This year is a special one because the ERA is organising EURORANDO ANDALUCIA 2011, during which walkers from all over Europe will gather in this region of Spain, after having organised their own walks on various E-paths in connection with the event. EURORANDO is organised every 5 years and this is the third event of its kind.

From the 8th to the 15th October walking paths of the Southern border of Europe will be open for anyone who wishes to use them to learn about the culture and traditions of the ex-muslim Andalusian provinces. Itineraries run through diverse scenery, from sea to mountain and pass through unique towns and communities. Exhibitions, night-time festivities on the sea-front and walks through natural parks and places as unique as the Generalife Gardens of the Alhambra will celebrate walking in Europe and promote the vital significance of WATER. The grand finale on Saturday 15th will see all European delegations transferring amphoras of water that they will have carried with them from their own country to the Alhambra, where they will all be mixed. This will be followed by a final closing party that starts at 2200hrs.

Every day is packed with walks and activities, and for the more energetic, the evenings will be provided with live music at different distinct sites.

Except for the last night, the Accomodation will be in a 4-star hotel at Cabo Gata (Murcia)on Half Board basis, with all other charges of transfers, transport, Gala dinner, evening entertainment and

visits/cultural events all included. The last day will be spent in Valencia because of the early return flight, so the opportunity will present itself to roam around this beautiful city before returning home.

The price for the whole tour inclusive of flights and all the above will be €770.00.

All those who are interested in coming along are invited to express their interest immediately, before the 15th July, as it is intended to limit the number to 18 members. The tour is not open to non-members, and first come will be first served. Kindly express your interest to Alex by email or sms on 99497080.

SUMMER BUFFET DINNER: The walking seasons have once again come to an end with the beginning of the summer season still seeing some ad hoc walks. At this time of the year the active members will start asking for the venue for the summer dinner and this year we are happy to announce that the Coastline Hotel has accepted to host our event as it had done for the first four years. A mouth watering menu has been prepared for us and the Coastline Suite put at our disposal for the Buffet dinner. At the price of €23.00 (less than the old 10 quid) it promises to be good value for money, especially considering that wine or soft drink has been thrown in. The date set for the dinner is Friday 15 July at 8.00pm and all members are urged to come along and bring their friends with them so that we will make the evening another merry memorable milestone in the story of the RAM, and a worthy closure to a successful series of walking programmes for 2010-11. The appetizing menu is attached with all details. Kindly fill in the attached form and send it to our address with your cheque payment addressed to the Ramblers' Association of Malta. Since the date is close at hand please give it your immediate attention.

WALKS: As you know, we had a varied programme of walks for the second quarter. Apart from the published programme, we had an additional four walks for a total of 18 walks up to the end of June. This is an average of more than a walk per week, something like 4 walks every three weeks. Up to now all walks were held successfully and none were cancelled due to bad weather or any other reason. This was thanks to the increasing number of walk leaders, to whom we must express our thanks: Sam, Simon, the indefatigable Gunter, Mike, Steve, Elaine, Nancy, Josephine, Antonia, Ian, Godwin and Mario. We hope that more leaders put themselves forward for the autumn programme so that we can continue in this successful vein.

We should also mention that, apart from the above walks, we also have walks planned for July and even in August, for the die-hards. These walks will be held in the early morning, late afternoon or at night, to avoid the heat. The confirmed walks are:

Wednesday 6th July: Zebbiegh – Ta' I-Imselliet – Victoria Lines – Bidnija – Zebbiegh (Scenic, historical, geological)

From our meeting place we will make our way to the Ta' Skorba ruins of a Neolithic temple (about 4000 years old). This area is well known for the Skorba pottery that was found there. We will then make our way along country tracks towards I-Imselliet, from where we will head towards the Victoria Lines. This fortification, built along the Great Fault, forms part of our walk until we descend in the direction of Burmarrad. We will then cross Wied ta' I-Arkata and make our way through the landscape to the hamlet of Bidnija. From there we will walk back to our starting point.

Duration: About 3½ hrs
Rating: Moderate with some steep inclines and rough ground
Meeting Place: Zebbiegh Church
Time: 1600

Saturday 9th July: Zebbiegh Mystery Walk (Circular)

From our starting point we shall use country lanes, foot paths and secondary roads to discover this beautiful area in the north of Malta. Some rural features, curiosities and historical sites will be explained during the walk.

Duration: Approximately 3 to 4hrs

Rating: Easy to Moderate

Meeting Place: Zebbiegh Church

Time: 0500

Saturday 16th July: The Four Santa Marias - by night

From our starting point we walk towards Attard, passing by il-Palazz ta' Kaspru and Hal Mann. Eventually we reach Dingli passing by il-Wied tal-Isqof and other country lanes. Then we descend towards Mgarr. From Mgarr we can use public transport to get back to Mosta. Rural features, curiosities and historical sites will be explained during the walk.

Duration: Approximately 6hrs with breaks approximately every 1 ½ hours

Rating: **Moderate but quite long**

Meeting Place: Mosta Parish Church

Time: 2345 to start walking at midnight

Wednesday 20th July: Marfa Quay-Paradise Bay-Roman Road-Radar Installation-St Agatha's Tower-White Tower-Little Armier – Armier (Scenic, historical, geological)

This Marfa ridge walk is very variable and interesting. The walk will take us along the coastline, over flat beaches and rocky cliffs and through woodlands and fields. We will experience great views of Gozo, Comino and the Maltese countryside. We will also see watchtowers, batteries, redoubts and fortifications built by the Knights of St John. As we pass along country lanes and paths we will also come across farms and ghirnas that dot this lovely landscape.

Duration: About 3½ hrs

Rating: Moderate with some steep inclines and rough ground

Meeting Place: Riviera Hotel, Marfa.

Time: 1600

Wednesday 3rd August: Zurrieq-Hal Far-Birzebbuga-Safi (Scenic, historical, geological)

This very interesting walk leads us through a landscape of rural and industrial character bordered by the sea. We will walk from Zurrieq centre via Hal Far, the outskirts of Birzebbuga, Hal-Safi and then back to our meeting place. During our walk we will see many places of historical, geological and agricultural importance – such as the Xarolla windmill, the ruins of the church at Tal-Baqqari and Qoton valley, to name but a few.

Duration: About 3 hrs

Rating: Moderate

Meeting Place: Parish Church, Zurrieq.

Time: 1600

MEETINGS with:

(a) Parliamentary Secretary Dr M. de Marco – We attended the 3 monthly meetings. Our proposal to receive power-point presentations beforehand was accepted. These presentations usually take some 40 minutes and present a mass of information which officials will have been working on for long months and which is impossible for us to digest there and then. In future we will therefore have the time

necessary to go through the information carefully, and go more prepared for these meetings. This arrangement will also leave more time for clarifications and discussion.

(b) MEPA officials – we participated in the now usual monthly meetings for NGOs and though we find them interesting enough here too we have made the same proposal made above. This should make these encounters, meant to forge better understanding between MEPA and NGOs, more meaningful.

(c) Parliamentary Secretary Dr Jason Azzopardi – we are waiting for an answer to our request to meet the PS with whom we have a long list of complaints on which discussions have been going on for too long and achieving no progress at all on most issues. During our last encounter we took Minutes of what was said, which were then copied to the Parliamentary Secretary in the hope that they would serve as pro memoria. Surprise surprise – when we asked for this other meeting to review progress made on the subjects discussed as per our Minutes, we were told to re-send the Minutes as they were untraced : Fomm ir-Rih, Simblija and Wied Hazrun, il-Qlejja tal-Bahrija and Ras ir-Raheb, Xrobb l-Ghagin, l-Ahrax tal-Mellieha, Bingemma Fort and Ta' Muxi at Qala were the places highlighted for some action. We get the feeling that our efforts for justice are getting nothing but short-shrift, and once we step out the door all is forgotten.

THE BAHRIJA COURT CASE – Our lawyer has submitted the final submissions in answer to the submissions put forward by Dr Victor Scerri regarding the preliminary objection of judicial interest. The judge is expected to pass sentence (regarding judicial interest only) during the session of July 7th.

MEPA MATTERS: As usual we have been busy making enquiries, complaints, objections and investigations on various issues. I will just list the more important items:

(a) After our requests to Mepa to take steps on the issue of a permit for a Winery at Tas-Salib were ignored, on April 13 we referred the case to the **Commissioner of Police for him to investigate**. The Prime Minister, PS Dr M. de Marco and Mepa Chairperson Mr A. Walker have been copied in. So far we have only received an acknowledgement of receipt from the office of the Police Commissioner.

(b) Objection to yet another **church school in an ODZ** at Hal Ghaxaq (PA/06738/06) when there are so many underutilised religious complexes, new schools recently built and a decreasing student population.

(c) In May we participated in the hearing on the **ARRIVA Zebbug bus-depot in ODZ**. The permit was refused, thanks to Mr Walker's casting vote. Of course, there will be an appeal.

(d) **The Lippija case:** following a complaint by two members we made enquiries about the area around Lippija tower. To our great surprise the Govt Property Division (GPD) informs us that this huge tract of land is private property save for a servitude path which from the Mgarr end leads to the tower.

(e) **Wardija hill top:** here too, having seen PRIVATE PROPERTY signs at the entrance of the path leading to the gun emplacements we made enquiries with the same Govt Division. We have thus come to learn the unpleasant truth that such panoramic land, some 7 tumoli of it, instead of being left free for the public to enjoy, is leased out by Govt to third parties. To add insult to injury when we asked whether we could have access to the contract of lease we were informed that "a lease between two parties is a private document and is covered by the data protection act", i.e. the information is confidential. We ask if this is right when public property is concerned? Lip service TRANSPARENCY?

The officer answering our query was courteous enough to add: "If you feel that properties like this one should not be leased, I suggest you present your suggestions in writing and present your case. On my part I would be prepared to present your case to higher authorities"; and for this I feel I have to thank

him publicly. However, it does seem very odd that Government needs to be told that places like these should be left for public enjoyment.

(f) **Battery at Tat-Targa, Victoria Lines.** On the report of one of our members, we informed the GPD that this battery is being occupied. GPD informed us that these people have no right to be there (i.e., they are squatters) and that the GPD enforcement section should take action. To date no action has been taken.

(g) There were of course **other enquiries and complaints** both with MEPA and GPD; in some cases we are told that the sites indicated by us have been under Enforcement Orders, or even Direct Action, for some time and, in one case, that following our complaint and action by the Enforcement Officer, the site was reverted to its original state by the offender. I must add that offenders under Enforcement Orders still pay no fines at all; why? Because the relative Legal Notice has still to be published even though the law was passed nearly six months ago. The procedure is indeed a longish one, but certainly something can be done to expedite it. This would greatly help Mepa Enforcement Office not only in dealing with its huge backlog but also with not having to deal with new infringements.

We shall of course be taking up issues (d) and (f) above with Parl Sec Dr Azzopardi at our next meeting, together with the other long-standing ones.

RAM in the MEDIA

a) **PRESS:** our monthly contributions to ILLUM, are on-going, as is Lino Bugeja's contribution to the online paper IIGENSillum. Unfortunately we had to forfeit our monthly space on the MALTA INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY and L-ORIZZONT

b) **RADIO:** our slots with Lilian Maistre's popular programme 'Familja Wahda' on Radju Malta at 11.15 on Friday, every fortnight are also a regular feature. Next slots are due on July 8 and 22. Your occasional phone-ins will be appreciated.

SCHOOLS PROGRAMME: This has now been completed and we hope it can be repeated next year, for it has become manifest to those giving the talks and leading the walks that our students (and most teachers) sorely need education of this sort.

Joe Agius
Hon. Secretary

Application Form for the
SUMMER BUFFET DINNER AT THE COASTLINE HOTEL
15 JULY 2011

Please reservecovers at €23.00 each in the name of.....

I enclose payment by cheque #.....for the amount of €.....

NameTelephone #.....

Please address your payments in the name of the Ramblers' Association and post to PO BOX 108, SLIEMA, SLM1000