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In June 1932, 10,000 ramblers gathered in Winnats Pass, ‘a wild place removed by several inconvenient miles from a railway station’, to assert their right to ramble across the Derbyshire moors.  

For philosopher and rambler C. E. M. Joad, who was a regular speaker at these annual demonstrations, ‘the modern cult of walking imparts at its best a new conception of life and how life should be lived.’  

David Matless’ work on ‘the art of right living’ and redemptive rural landscapes has already explored how rural landscapes in England offered utopian spaces for urbanites.  

Planners and preservationists such as Joad, saw these Northern

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1 This paper arises out of my MA Thesis (Manchester, 2007), and Dr. Max Jones proved to be incredibly supportive during a period when writing a thesis was not a top priority. Likewise also family, friends, and particularly Peter and Vera for their understanding. Finally, Dr Leif Jerram has had an important hand, along with Dr. Jones, in the production of this paper.


Uplands as sites for a ‘moral practice’, in which modern English citizens would be produced through performances inscribed onto bodies in the outdoors. The male, middle-class leadership of the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation certainly agreed with this vision of redemptive rural activity. By leaving the ‘city’ behind, ramblers could participate in a performative dialogue on what a ‘legitimate’ modern society might be, and how it should be regulated.\(^5\) This paper uses the literature produced by members of the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation to map how British, middle-class men of the 1930s navigated themes of freedom and order in modern, urban life. It will further explore how this group saw these themes as related to appropriate technologies for disciplining behaviours. It finally considers how versions of the city and the urban citizen might have become constituted through extra-urban spatial practice and representations.\(^6\)

The Manchester Ramblers Federation possibly contained as many as 10,000 ramblers, and positioned itself as the mouthpiece of ‘respectable’ Manchester rambling clubs.\(^7\) Ramblers in the North of England, and the Federation membership, were predominantly from the lower-middle and upper-working classes, but the Federation leadership was unapologetically middle-class.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Statistics from 1936 allow a rough estimate of average numbers in rambling clubs, which averaged 105 in the North. Overall membership of the Federation where statistics are available (and including also associate members) is therefore very approximately: 1929 – 11340, 1933 – 12950, 1934 – 10607. This excludes multiple memberships, which may have been common. Royce ‘Federation Notes’, in Royce *MRF Handbook* 1929, p. 12; Royce ‘Federation Notes – Rambler and Motorist’, in Royce *MRF Handbook* 1934, p. 173; A Smith ‘The Manchester Federation and the Ramblers’ Association’, in Royce *MRF Handbook* 1936, p. 15.

university education and relatively expensive trips abroad are described. Similarly I have found just one female authored article in 16 years of publications, despite evidence that many women rambled. This is a history, then, of middle-class men who felt they could represent both the opinions of female, and club based working class ramblers. Edited by insurance broker Edwin Royce (1880-1946), *The Ramblers Federation Handbook being the Official Yearbook of the Ramblers’ Federation (Manchester and District)* (the Handbook) records how this group attempted to manage both the wider federation and other visitors to the outdoors between 1923 and 1939. In the early 1930s, the Federation reacted to a rapid increase in numbers visiting countryside space during the ‘hiking craze.’ At this time, its members sought to disseminate their message of ‘complete rambling’ to the wider public and to regulate performances in the outdoors.

Along with many other ramblers, planners and preservationists, The Federation portrayed upland areas as sites for the development of citizenship through rational, ordered and self-controlled performances in the outdoors. J R Ashton, who along with F A Stocks authored the *Open Air Guide*, noted in the 1930 handbook that ‘Going out with congenial companions to engage in a mutually attractive sport should be helpful to every member of the club. The interchange of ideas, the clash of minds, should enliven the day and heighten the perception of each.’ Royce, editor of the *Handbook*, similarly proclaimed rambling as a ‘social readjustment’ that should receive official backing through the creation of national parks.

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10 Holt ‘Hikers and Ramblers’, pp. 56-67; Royce ‘Federation Notes – The Warden Guides in 1935’, in Royce *MRF Handbook* 1936, p. 9. There were also numerous clubs run by women listed in the *Handbooks*, some of which appear to be all female.


Themes of freedom and order were crucial to the middle class men involved in rambling.\textsuperscript{14} ‘The rambler camper is freest of all’ claimed VG Billier in the 1931 \textit{Handbook}.\textsuperscript{15} Freedom was a theme that could also be found stretching across the wider rambling community. It formed a key refrain in Ewan MacColl’s urban folk song on rambling where ‘I may be a wage slave on Monday/But I am a free man on Sunday.’\textsuperscript{16} P J Monkhouse, from the more elite Manchester based ‘Rucksack Club’ noted that ‘no wonder if they find, in the freedom from walls and roof, freedom from other restrictions and bonds which lap them round in everyday life.’\textsuperscript{17} Order was the key to how ramblers explored these spaces however, emerging from urban ideas of ‘rational recreation.’\textsuperscript{18} Many articles in the Handbook are scientific, quoting academic texts, finding evidence, questioning popular belief and engaging with debate.\textsuperscript{19} Readers were provided with prolific reading lists, compiled by E. Ogden of Manchester Public Libraries, and with lists of Ancient Monuments that could form the focus of walks.\textsuperscript{20} Jasper E. MacDonald, the amateur antiquarian who regularly wrote for the \textit{Handbook}, made a point of quoting academic authority, and, along with other contributors,
used diagrams (figures 1 and 2) to rationalise geographical forms and to abstract views.\textsuperscript{21} The rambler was a figure in control, even when faced with exciting stimulus:

I run, jump, sing, and with a wild “Hallo,” sprint across the sandy level shore. Then soberly, solemnly, my stockings are tucked into my empty boots…\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Fig 1}

Rational views – Lantern Pike Direction Indicator.


**Fig. 2**

The Kettleshulme Valley.
During the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, the Federation witnessed a sudden increase in trips, walking or otherwise, in the countryside. Paid holidays, a shortening working week and a slowly increasing recreational weekend period both increased overall leisure time and released unprecedented numbers of predominantly working-class people into the world of leisure. Cheap rail fares and the relative inexpense of ‘charabancs’ now made the countryside a viable recreational option, and the media quickly turned hiking into a fashionable ‘craze.’ The Manchester Ramblers’ Federation could now be advantageously compared with the irresponsible and threatening figure of hikers moving around the country in chaotic destruction. Nora Willington, the Federation secretary for much of this period noted that, ‘In the country some feel that the restraint of the town is cast away. They treat the country like a fair ground and miss everything worth having.’ Self restraint and control were seen as absent from these new visitors. For regular contributor to the handbook H. E. Wild, a ‘misuse’ of ‘one’s freedom over the Derbyshire Hills’ resulted from ‘noisy young folk

“letting off steam’’ and who were ‘thereby to a large extent shutting out for themselves, as well as for others, the sense of impressive solitude, the quiet majesty of the hill country… Mentally, they have not left the town at all… most have yet to learn – to ramble.’25 At times this imagery verged on themes of racial and cultural degeneration, but always emphasised notions of primitive hysteria which could be contrasted to the modern ramblers’ emotional control. Handbook editor Royce described one group in 1932: ‘Seven of the tribe looking at one map fully spread, hanging in ape-like festoons on (apparently) precipitous crags moaning – with ukelele distractions – the latest banality in the approved whining tenor style, happy hikers (the authenticated happy man had no shirt), open-air girls, care-free girls etc.’26 Whilst ramblers could benefit from the freedom of outdoors space, these ‘youths’, ‘troubadours’ and ‘jazz-band larrikins’ could not experience the freedom of the countryside because their behaviour in it lacked the necessary control.27

This imagery within the handbook sits squarely within the ‘anti-citizen’ that Matless has found portrayed in preservationist literature, and demonstrates how much the ramblers may have played their own part in its production.28 By portraying errant groups of visitors as responsible for destroying the countryside, ramblers could cast themselves as legitimate and above reproach, whilst providing a platform from which to assert their own version of countryside leisure.29 This portrayal of the ‘anti-citizen’ was a rejection, however, not just of certain behaviours in the countryside, but of a modernity of mass culture, popular music, the

28 Matless Landscape pp. 62-73.
crowd, and a vocal feminine public. Indeed, it was because these bodies lacked both freedom and control that they were portrayed as primitive, degenerate and uncivilised. In contrast, the rambler combined freedom with order, in a modernity that emphasised tropes of rationality, self control and respectability.

In the mid 1930s the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation leadership began to take steps to coerce the non-ramblers into more acceptable modes of behaviour. Rather than seek to chastise, punish, or limit the movements of the new visitors to the outdoors, the Federation sought to turn them into ramblers. The policy was to circulate Federation views on ‘correct’ behaviour in the outdoors, and then to use regulative technologies derived from the urban environment to instil a spirit of self regulation. The leadership of the Federation hoped that this would then enable all visitors to experience the redemptive qualities of ‘wild spaces.’ Far from limiting access to this space in order to safeguard it, the Federation’s policy was to introduce people to it, allowing the uninitiated to take part in the performance of ‘rambling.’

As Royce pointed out ‘it is not obvious how the tripper is ever to appreciate the sanctity of natural beauty if he is forever barred from it.’ However, the Federation saw developing a culture of self-discipline as an important part of this apparently egalitarian response.

Some in the Manchester Ramblers Federation saw the Handbook itself as playing a major role in instilling respectable performances. It was on sale externally, and Ashton complained bitterly that it was ‘only’ reaching a fifth of ramblers. Even in 1929 Royce wrote that ‘it has been the continued policy of the “handbook” in its “Ramble Outlines” to encourage the walker to try new pastures’, in order to prevent overcrowding. The Handbook was also occasionally used as advertising space for cartoons and poems which more explicitly

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32 Ashton ‘Plague’, p. 28
denounced specific modes of behaviour.\textsuperscript{34} Descriptions of rowdiness, destructiveness and other irresponsible behaviour within the \textit{Handbook} were attempts to promote a culture of self-regulation, disseminating a discourse of what rambling entailed, from the established expertise within the club structure. Behaviour in the wilderness was to be regulated by urban experts.

The \textit{Handbook} was not widely enough circulated to have the impact that the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation leadership desired, and in any case was likely to be read only by those already initiated to rambling codes of behaviour. Further suggestions for regulation and discipline culminated in 1931 with the ‘Oldham Moorwardens,’ the first of a scheme that was regularised by 1933.\textsuperscript{35} The ‘Ramblers’ Federation Warden-Guides’ was split between three districts, each of which was run by a ‘District Warden’. Applicants to the scheme were ‘strictly’ from within the Federation, and, after being proposed by a club secretary, were questioned on their ‘capacity’ by the District Warden. Attributes included ‘a thorough knowledge of the district, tact, anxiety to preserve rambling status, rural amenities and rural livelihood and activity in the prevention of litter, damage of all kinds and conduct derogatory to the rambling movement.’\textsuperscript{36}

The wardens, with their badge bearing the logo of the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation and their title of ‘Warden Guide’, were intended to introduce new people to rambling, protect ramblers’ rights, and communicate ‘good’ behaviour by example.\textsuperscript{37} Of course there was an element of surveillance within the Wardens scheme as well: ‘The real article cannot be everywhere, particularly in the rough country’, Royce pointed out in 1929, ‘but the knowledge that the law has a thousand “eyes” may cause some of the delinquents to

\textsuperscript{34} See Anon. ‘Are you Clean or Dirty’, in Royce \textit{MRF Handbook} 1931, p. 40b; Daily Express ‘“How Nice it is to get into the real country”’, in Royce \textit{MRF Handbook} 1929, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{35} Royce ‘Federation notes [1932]’, p. 11; Ashton ‘Plague’, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{36} letter from A W Hewitt to National Council of Rambling Federations 27/02/1933, in LMA/4287/02/447.
\textsuperscript{37} Hewitt to NCRF; Coward ‘Ramblers’, p. 21.
be more circumspect in their behaviour. More often, self-regulation was encouraged by the
direct, but tactful ‘word’ with those committing the cultural trespass. The policy of guides
was to reason with the ‘delinquent’ or ‘troubadour,’ to instil a liberal sense of self-regulation
of the type the Patrick Joyce’s work on the modern city has made widespread.

This was combined with urban based education as preparation for a visit to the
‘outdoors.’ The ‘Standard of Rambling’, according to Ashton, could be increased by holding
lectures in Manchester on outdoor topics and if ‘a little use is made during the week of the
fine collection of open air books in the Reference and other libraries.’ Another pursued was
to lobby Local Education Authorities to hold classes ‘in map-reading, compass reading,
topography and other subjects appertaining to rambling skill.’ Ashton and Stocks’ Open Air
Guide, first published in 1928 but running to a second edition in 1929, emphasised the
importance that ‘before setting out, mayhap months before if a holiday is involved, the map
will be studied.’ The Guide was a series of short introductions to the ‘key’ topics of rational
interest – geology, astronomy, wild animals and flowers, photography, architecture – each
followed by a bibliography of more-or-less scientific books. As the authors put it, ‘the
beginner who gets hold of the skeleton should find the filling in a simple business of
acquiring facts, using the bibliography at the end of each chapter… We want to point the way

39 See for example Marsden ‘Help Nature’, p. 43; Symonds Lake District, p. viii. Ramsbottom ‘Countryside
Wardens’, p. 60. This article refers to a scheme run by Derbyshire Rural Community Council in the 1930s, with
wardens recruited from ‘workers who love the countryside’.
41 Ashton ‘Plague’, p. 29; Royce ‘Countryside Conference’, p. 76. In 1933 the National Council of Rambler’s
Federations attempted to obtain special terms for the use of library facilities – See Anon. ‘Draft Annual Report,
1933-34’, LMA/4287/02/498, p. 5. Also in 1933, the MRF held a series of ‘Introductory Lectures’, on History,
176.
42 National Council of Rambling Federations, Minutes of Meeting 01/10/1932, p. 2, in LMA/4287/02/498; A W
Hewitt ‘The Ramblers’ Federation Manchester and District – Delegates’ Report, National Council of Rambling
Federations’ Conference [draft’], n.d., p. 2, in LMA 4287/02/498. The conference is datable by cross reference to
1933.
43 Stocks and Ashton Open Air, p. 12.
to a full appreciation of Nature, to guide the beginner to the right sort of paths, to give him the keys that will open gates, but not to open gates for him.’

Alongside these attempts to encourage a spirit of self-regulation by an accepted behavioural code, wild space was seen as playing a pro-active role by introducing new ramblers to the freedom, liberty and aesthetics of the hills, and thus leading them to constrain their own behaviour for the benefit of that freedom. As the reverend H. H. Symonds put it, ‘the freedom of the open air and of the fell side is a civilising thing: it is a needful part of our self knowledge, and of our knowledge of one another.’ In terms of action, this belief in the redemptive value of these non-urban spaces manifested itself in organising rambles led by Warden Guides along some of the less well known paths in the Peak District. As Arthur Smith claimed in 1935, ‘Future developments will find wardens on tracks that are too well known, urging those who adopt a sheep like attitude to rambling to become more venturesome and suggesting routes and areas hitherto unknown. Folk who walk on the roads will be shepherded on to the paths, and gradually the whole of the walking public will become moorland conscious.’

The Manchester Ramblers’ Federation hoped that order would be produced through a system of power relationships built around the authority of the rambling tradition, a panoptic system of control, the ordering effects of the landscape itself, and a rational, self-improving discourse on education. These were all absent from the object of improvement, the ‘troubadour’ anti-citizen, who was outside the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation fraternity, disordered, spatially segregated, irrational and uneducated. To a certain extent, and along with literature emanating from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, this policy of regulating behaviour can be seen as successful, leading to state sponsored regulation in the

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44 Stocks and Ashton *Open Air*, p. 6, my ellipses.
shape of the country code, and more generally perceived codes of conduct in ‘wild space,’ which proscribe noisy or crowd based activities. What I want to emphasise, however, is how this entire power ‘grid’, was shaped through ideas of legitimate and illegitimate modernities, and through technologies of regulation that were tied to urban life. Whilst mass culture, popular culture, consumerism, the crowd and particularly American ‘jazz’ culture, were proscribed, liberal individualism, self-improvement, rationality, planning, expert knowledge and contemplative walking were prescribed, along with the control structure itself, liberal governmentality, lifted straight from the city.

These ‘mountains and moorlands’ were the absolute opposite of the ‘city’, yet, precisely because they held this attribute, urban people could adopt them to experiment with different versions of how life could, or should, be lived. Crossing this boundary, then, between the urban and the rural can be seen, for those middle-class men of 1930s Britain, as constituting an important part of lives lived through both rural and urban space. This suggests that urban historians should focus more readily on the uses urbanites made of rural space as having an important role in the production of the city. Furthermore, it shows that historians wishing to use theories which prefigure space both as a producer and a production of culture (such as Levebre and de Certeau’s) might prefigure the relationships between spaces as an important element in understanding how space operated in this way.48

48 Lefebvre Space; Michel de Certeau The Practice of Everyday Life (London, 1984).