

The Ramblers' Association of Malta

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Introduction

Spring has sprung upon us once again. Since it offers the best time for rambling we are sprinkling a shower of interesting walks on our members, with novel ideas and educational twists to boot. Without bird hunting ramblers will have the countryside all for themselves to enjoy. It's their turn to shoot with their cameras at will, catching that instant of natural and cultural beauty, without spoil or harm, and to the detriment of nothing and nobody. However it is about time too that ramblers increase efforts to offer back a much-needed helping hand to the countryside, to remedy wrongs committed by the careless few who are not appreciative of nature. RAM efforts with the higher echelons in Government must now be matched with 'hands-on' efforts on the ground.

Membership

The RAM must continue to act from a position of strength. This requires a strong membership base, which the Association always boasted about. By taking one minute of your time and €10-00 from your pocket to renew your membership you will manage to keep up the momentum. You may not find the time later. You may forget as it is so trifling. So do it **NOW**. Get it over and done with. It is the least you can do to save your Countryside and safeguard access to it.

Update

The executive has been stirring the pot tirelessly these last few weeks.

- ❖ The legal commission has drawn up a **Petition** on the subject of accessibility and right of way in the countryside and along the coast, which was presented to the Speaker of the House as Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Amendments. A copy of our petition appears on our blogspot.
- ❖ We have joined forces with Bird Life and other NGOs to oppose Government's intent to meddle with the **Ghadira road** before scientific studies have been concluded as to what is the best solution there. RAM sees the need to upgrade Mellieha Bay and to do what is best for the safe enjoyment of the sandy beach by Maltese and tourists alike, but for Pete's sake, let the matter be decided after scientific consideration is taken of all relevant factors, and not because there are EU funds readily available! At present the Government has proposed three options for a road without any backing studies at all, which is not in order and insensitive.
- ❖ RAM has given its contribution to the present debate on the issue of **Waste Treatment**. Our position is that incineration of waste should not be resorted to. True, it is the easiest way out of the problem but it is not sustainable in the long run. The attitude is escapist. Government must take the bull by the horns and go about educating the people that it pays to manage waste properly. Those who do not want to

learn should pay the price of their carelessness or spite. In all spheres of government enforcement is severely lacking, which accounts for bad governance. That incineration of waste is now preferred to enforcing good sense is highly irresponsible. Moreover, location of waste treatment plants has to be determined after examining all the relevant criteria, and not just by the criterion of public ownership of the land. RAM is opposing for the second time the utilization of the good agricultural land between Sannat and Xewkija for a different purpose that is evidently not suitable. The little agricultural land and the open spaces that remain need to be protected from development at all costs, more so when such development can be avoided..

❖ Pressure is being made again on the issue of accessibility at **Fomm ir-Rih**. The initial enthusiasm of the Parliamentary Secretary Dr Jason Azzopardi seems to have fizzled out for reclaiming this public path unashamedly usurped by private interests. We have it black on white, on a public deed, signed and delivered..... yet what stops Dr Jason from sending in his men to execute and accomplish a public right of way is a mystery. RAM is frustrated with the unwarranted bureaucracy when it comes to dealing with the wealthy and the mighty.

Editorial

The concept of a RAM Task Force seems to be gaining ground and taking hold with the Executive and members of the Association. The idea will be developed as the need is being increasingly felt for RAM to back its words by action. It was stated above that efforts to offer a helping hand to the countryside and to remedy wrongs committed by the careless and spiteful few, requires a 'hands-on' attitude every time this is called for. For instance, the Association applauded the decision of the Prime Minister to ban bird hunting and trapping in Spring. But does it stop there? But what with the shabby hides that offend the landscape through the insensitive use of concrete bricks, corrugated metal, and all other jettisoned material imaginable? What with the thousands of rusty metal drums obstructing and offending the views of walkers in the countryside and posing a threat to their safety? There are major repairs to be done on rubble walls in the countryside which one expects their owners or the Government to undertake in time. But who will mind to minor repairs that can be handled without expert knowledge, to stop further deterioration? What about natural overgrowth on public pathways and trees that need pruning?

Then there is the scouting to be carried out for reporting dumps, carcasses and other offensive and alien matter in the countryside, besides for the reporting of any illegal buildings sprouting out.

In truth you may question this line of reasoning, arguing why RAM should be undertaking work that it is the Government's duty to carry out. The reply is that what falls high on our priority list does not necessarily figure on the Government's list at all. To start the ball rolling will certainly help and may yet have a snowballing effect. We have put our minds to it...time for "hands on" now. RAM will show public-spiritedness at grass-root level. After all why should the Ramblers' Association of Malta not qualify as a "charitable society" as its British counter-part?

Alex Vella
Hon. Secretary

27th March 2009