

Craig Grimes

Craig Grimes founded a CTC-affiliated club that helps disabled people explore the countryside. He spoke to Dan Joyce

You may have seen Craig on a Mountain Trike on BBC1's Countryfile earlier this year. 'It came about through work we've been doing with the RSPB to get more disabled people onto their reserves,' Craig said. It was good exposure – and apt: Craig got started in outdoor pursuits by producing short films. 'I'd been to a conference on access in the countryside. I thought the best way to answer the question about how to access trails was by making films about it.'

Initially, he made films for Natural England as a volunteer. When that project ended, Craig founded Experience Community CIC and made films for Leeds City Council and Leicestershire County Council. 'Then last year, we put in a funding application to Kirklees Community Partnerships to start a project getting disabled people into the outdoors.'

Last year was also when Experience Community became a CTC-affiliated Inclusive Cycling Centre. 'Gavin Wood came to one of our taster sessions with the Mountain Trikes. Then he helped me recce different routes. CTC gave us money towards a trike and also provided us with the Mountain Bike Trail Leader course, which we adapted.'

The Mountain Trikes have as much in common with cycles as wheelchairs. 'A lot of the parts are standard mountain bike parts,' Craig said. 'The wheels, the chains that drive the wheels, the hydraulic disc brakes, the Monarch shocks. The cables for the steering handle are just brake cables. But then you've got the lever-operated clutch-drive system.'

Compared to a normal wheelchair, the



● With their stability, mountain bike tyres and disc brakes, the trikes can go where wheelchairs would struggle



● Craig reconnoitres routes to make sure they're manageable by other Mountain Trikers

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Mountain Trike has an obvious advantage: 'The terrain it can tackle,' Craig said. 'It's front wheel drive, and your bodyweight is over the wheels more, which helps with grip. With the extra wheel on the back, you can't fall backwards on a steep slope. And it's got two wheels on the front footrest to stop you tipping over coming down. It's also got an emergency failsafe: if you drop the levers going up a steep hill, it won't roll backwards.'

Experience Community organises off-road rambles – led rides – in the countryside across the north of England, ranging from the Peak District to the Yorkshire Dales. There are demonstration days every Tuesday at Oakwell Hall in Birstall, West Yorkshire. 'People have to do an induction before we take them out,' Craig said, 'to ensure they can handle the trike and will get around the ramble safely.'

The trikes are suitable for most manual wheelchair users. It's possible to crank one along the flat with one hand. Participants range

from their teens to their 60s. The common denominator? 'They love it,' said Craig. 'You're giving them the ability to go places they can't reach normally, such as woodland tracks. And there's the massive benefit of reducing social isolation with the group.'

When I spoke to Craig, he was just back from a recce for another ramble. He was busy with work for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and planning to develop similar links with the Peak District National Park and the National Trust.

Expansion will require more volunteers. 'We'd really struggle without them,' Craig said. 'I'd like to give a big shout out to them to say thank you very much.' ●

To volunteer or find out more, visit experiencecommunity.co.uk. For more on inclusive cycling, visit ctc.org.uk/inclusive



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