

THE TRECKER



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Editor's Corner

We Brits have always found the vagaries of our weather an interesting talking point and this year seems to be no exception. However I'm writing this in the southwest of France, where we'd normally expect a good share of blue skies and sunshine by now but as you can read on page 5 it felt like we'd brought the worst of our British weather with us.

Maybe we'd headed over to France a bit too early in the year but it's becoming ever more noticeable that weather patterns are changing and becoming more and more unpredictable. We still have several UK rallies to look forward to including of course the Gala in July, so fingers crossed for a sizzling summer, even if there's not much sign of it yet!

Geoff Heyes
Editor

Chairperson's Chat

I was just beginning to think that summer had finally arrived and then it turned cold again! That wind this week is bitter.

We have been to a few rallies so far this year but since January I have been plagued by ill health and hospital. I must say it has been dealt with very quickly and I am about to have surgery very soon. May that then be the end to it, although still no lifting for six weeks.

I am looking forward to the Gala Rally for which I am the Rally Officer along with Terry Gascoyne. It seems ages since the planning began, but next week I will be starting to put the plans in action.

So if you haven't booked you still have time to enjoy all the fun of a circus.

Sylvia Caldicott
Acting Chairperson

Some food for thought

Who remembers the years when Suntreckers regularly held 85 plus summer rallies? Many of them ran at capacity and if you didn't book early you missed out. It was also rare for a rally to be cancelled.

Just to be clear, what follows is not a criticism of any individual. It is simply some ideas on a way forward to help Suntreckers survive and prosper. This year we have less than 60 rallies in the calendar and already several have been cancelled and there could be more to come.

The rally organiser has quite a task to put the programme together and while it is far easier than the old days of snail mail and odd telephone call it still takes time and effort and must be somewhat disheartening with the attendances declining and rallies being cancelled.

Following on from a recent Facebook post where it was said that we have too many rallies what do we, as a club, do to address the problem? Does it make sense to reduce the number of rallies year on year until all we have left is the Gala? Surely not. Rather than reduce the number of rallies to meet our current membership a more positive action would be to increase the membership along with making Suntreckers more vibrant. I know it's a big ask and unlikely that we could get back up to a membership of around 700 like we had many years ago. That said we do need more members coupled with a more active membership. I believe there are two things we need to consider. Firstly there is anecdotal evidence that the number of naturists in UK has increased post Covid and secondly that there is still a huge demand for caravans and motorhomes as well as tents.

Put these two things together we have our target membership. We do get new members but how many stay longer than a season or two? Add to that the members we do have are getting older and don't rally as often as they used to.

Suntrecker could be likened to an organisation which is open for business without actively promoting itself. We need to do more to raise awareness and encourage more of our target audience to come and join us. We have huge cash reserves, which will be of no benefit to the members should the club cease to exist. (Section 6.3 of our Articles of Association tells you what happens if Suntreckers dissolves). Traditional magazine advertising yields almost nothing these days so alternative solutions need to be explored. Who remembers the invitation rallies we used to have? They used to create awareness and help to recruit new members, both during the rallies as well as later on.

The Suntrecker membership has a wealth of knowledge and backgrounds which I feel confident could offer suggestions and ideas for the committee to explore and act on. Members could even assist should they wish but there is no compulsion. The committee are just a few in number and need the greater thinking and ideas the membership can offer – but they are not mind readers so tell them what you are thinking now.

Suntrecker has had a good 40 years but urgent action is needed now if it is going to survive another 10 and beyond. So come on everyone, what can you do? If you have an idea why not talk to the committee about it to see what can be done. It's no good Suntrecker being a best kept secret!

Alan Ingram

UK Rally Reports

Rally 7 – Telford

Telford is always a very popular rally and with a limited number of pitches available to us it gets full quite quickly. We had missed out a few times recently so we hit on the idea of volunteering to run the rally, ensuring we would have a place. Sure enough bookings started to come in as soon as the new rally programme was released and it wasn't long before we had a waiting list.

We'd planned to arrive and set up the day before the rally started and were packed and just about to set off when I got a phone call from the club to tell us that some nearby builders had damaged a water supply pipe and they now had no mains water! I was asked if I could inform the other ralliers and warn them of the need to bring as much fresh water as possible with them, causing us a bit of a delay to our departure.

On arrival we found out that the water supply had been restored, meaning we could use the toilets and showers, but that it was still not safe to drink or use for washing up. However Severn and Trent Water had provided an ample quantity of bottled water for us so there was no longer any problem obtaining drinking water.

Most of the group arrived on Thursday and the club opened the bar for us to have a welcome drink together in the evening. We had our first coffee morning in the clubhouse on Friday – normally at Telford everything is provided for us but because of the water problem, the usual facilities couldn't be used so we had to improvise and make the drinks ourselves, like we do elsewhere. As usual on Friday evening we joined in the fish and chips evening, for the princely sum of £4 a head plus and extra £1 for dessert if required.

The weather improved sufficiently on Saturday for us to have an afternoon tea together outside, in pleasant sunshine but with a rather cool breeze. Some of us took advantage of the heated indoor swimming pool and jacuzzi before we all gathered again in the evening for baked potato and chili-con-carne or the vegetarian alternative.

We had our final meal together at lunchtime on Sunday, roast beef followed by dessert for those who could manage it and got together again in the clubhouse for bingo in the evening, where a few of us walked off with some of the prize money.

Eileen and Geoff Heyes

Rally 11 – Sungrove

We were welcomed by Richard and Stella our hosts for the rally, shown to our pitch and provided with a very welcome mug of tea whilst settling in. After that we had a quick look around the site to see if anything had changed since the last time we were there. Next morning, in fact every morning, we met for coffee in the clubhouse and were told of the events for the week. Later in the rally we also had an afternoon tea. On Saturday night we joined the members for a lovely communal BBQ meal. The clubhouse was very full indeed. On Monday we had another communal meal at a pub away from the site, thank you to Richard and Stella for organising it all.

Rally 15 – East Midlands Sunfolk

David and Shirley welcomed us to the East Midlands site and we were pitched so that everyone could look to a central point. The weather was lovely with coffee mornings either outside around the units or the patio of the huge clubhouse. A meal was arranged by the members and I must admit we were well satisfied when the last course was eaten. It was a nice relaxing rally, chatting with old friends. Thank you to David and Shirley for organising.

Rally 18 – Cambridge Outdoor Club

We eventually arrived at COC a little later than expected, having taken the easier but longer route. The weather was perfect with a lot of warm sunshine. The following morning over coffee we were informed about what would be happening during the rally. A relaxing Friday evening, a communal meal with COC members on the Saturday, (a wonderful 5-course affair). On Sunday we had a late lunch BBQ under the large gazebo and on Monday a fish and chip supper. Jeff did an excellent job as a first-time rally officer, well done to him.

Julie and Dick Farthing

Rally 20 – Woodside Field

We would like to thank everybody who helped us celebrate our 50th time as rally officers, both from the 16 units who joined us and for the cards we received. It was great to see everyone joining in with the activities we had planned, some sillier than others. The weather tried to dampen our spirits but overall it was pretty good, especially for the pétanque. It was great seeing everyone out taking part, with up to five games being played at the same time.

The site owners did us proud again, supplying us with a 6 x 9 gazebo for our very successful indoor events. We were gobsmacked when Brian and Helen presented us with a card (pictured), made during the rally by Helen, as they didn't know what we were celebrating until we arrived for the rally.



From the feedback we had, everyone who went home at the end of the rally had a good time.
Terry and Lesley

Continental Rally Reports

Rally 16 – Devèze

We were disappointed not to be able to get to Devèze the last time Suntreckers visited a couple of years ago, so we volunteered to act as rally officers this time to make sure the rally could go ahead. We have run a few UK rallies before, but this was to be our first time overseas.

We opted to arrive in France ten days before the start of the rally, to give us a leisurely journey and to allow for some sight-seeing on route, including the Normandy landing beaches, the D-Day museums and the Bayeux tapestry. The weather was a bit miserable, cool and wet, but that didn't worry us unduly as it was still only the beginning of May and we hadn't left the north of France yet.

We spent our first weekend in Rennes, where we encountered some pleasant sunshine on the Friday afternoon, but it was much cooler the next day when we used the bus to travel into the centre. On Sunday we headed south, aiming for Cognac, but the campsite near the river was closed due to flooding. The owner directed us to a nearby site at Jarnac, where the main site was also waterlogged, but we were able to stay on an aire just outside.

A quick look at the weather map told us that rain was following us on our journey south, and the weather was clearing up behind us – not a good sign. Fortunately, it cleared up on the Wednesday, when we reached the aire at Saint-Clar, only about four miles from the site at Devèze. This allowed us to visit the Thursday market before arriving at Devèze the day before our rally was due to start.



Yes the sun did shine on us, just not often enough!



Happy campers!

All the signs were good. It was warm, the sun was shining and the new owners Fabrice and Carole immediately made us feel welcome. Our arrival coincided with the start of the annual naturist bikers weekend (yes, really!), so the place was buzzing. We were a bit concerned when we reached our pitches, which were all slightly sloping and more than a bit damp. We took a long time trying to work out which one to go for, but eventually got settled without too much difficulty and were confident that a few days of sunshine would soon dry things out.

We were six units in total and all the other five had arrived by Friday evening, when we gathered outside for a welcome drink and natter. The site is lovely, with pleasant views over adjoining farmland and we were all in good spirits when we gathered again for our first coffee morning on the Saturday. Unlike on previous visits, we were unable to join the bikers for any of their evening communal meals, as the new chef told us they were already fully booked. We decided to book a lunchtime meal on the Tuesday for our group as the weather forecast wasn't too promising – a good decision as it turned out.



Not a bad way to spend a wet day!

After a sweltering Saturday, we had a bit more cloud on the Sunday but Monday turned out to be a much better day than forecast. Tuesday however, was a different story, much cooler with persistent rain pretty much all day so just as well we could all get together for an enjoyable lunch. The weather for the rest of the rally could be described as “mixed” at best, occasional sunny spells but far too much rain. We did our best to meet up for morning coffee or afternoon / early evening tea or drinks whenever we could, but it wasn't always possible. Two units left on the Friday and both needed help from Fabrice and his tractor to get off their pitches and it was the same story when the rally finished on Monday with three more of us needing assistance to get out of the mud.

We have never run a continental rally before and never seen so much rain on any of our many visits to France. I don't suppose the two are connected but I wouldn't be surprised if we're never asked to run another one!

Geoff and Eileen Heyes

Upcoming Rallies

Rally 37 - Valley Club Harrogate, 11 – 17 July

Immediately prior to and just an hour's drive over to the nearby Gala Rally & AGM at Candy Farm, Doncaster. We currently have just a few pitches remaining.

The club is considerate and dog friendly. Whilst it's off mains electric, they have instant gas hot water for the two shower and toilet blocks and creative solar power solutions for communal lighting areas and re-charging etc. It's also fine for us to use one of the quieter generators for re-charging (230V available if required).

The Valley Club is peacefully situated in a spacious, bright and airy field (with some light shade), with a few trees to the perimeter. Our allocated visitor pitches include a tarmac area for four motorhomes, with an adjoining grass area for tents and caravans, ensuring we can all be sited together. It's located just outside Harrogate and Knaresborough – both popular towns are a pleasant, modest walk away and you can explore more by cycling the Sustrans routes 636 and 67, which adjoin the site.

The clubhouse will be open on Friday and Saturday, with a very low-priced bar, where there will be a group meal on the Saturday evening. The site has pitch-and-put and mini golf (putters provided or bring your own) and there'll be plenty of chance for some pre-gala boules practice.

We're planning to host the usual coffee mornings as well as a bring your own wine tasting as well as a sociable "cook and bring your own" communal evening meal or two.

Richard & Rachel

Please email any enquiries to mon315392@yahoo.co.uk

NB Further details to follow for those pre-booked.

Rally 39 – Candy Farm – GALA & AGM!! 17 -22 July

Roll up – Roll Up for all the fun of a circus

This should be a great Gala Rally with lots to do, music and laughter with friends old and new.

It's not too late to book up and come and join us although the early bird discount has now finished, but it's still just £70 for all 5 nights camping!

All EHUs have now been booked.

Here is a quick memory jogger of some of the things going on that you may wish to prepare for:-

Super Raffle – tickets will be on sale throughout.

Photo competition - set subject is "Wheels" plus the open competition. See Yearbook page 55.

Best decorated caravan or motorhome

Saturday afternoon pet parade, Saturday evening fancy dress.

Cake competition

Craft and hobby – show and tell

Three evenings of entertainment, music, etc

The usual pétanque competition

Plus the AGM for you to attend and see for yourselves what we do for your club.

We will again have use of the grain store for our evenings but don't forget no glass permitted.

So roll up, roll up and don't miss this annual spectacular.

Sylvia & Terry

Your Gala Rally Officers

BN National Pétanque Competition 2024

The BN National Pétanque Competition was held at the Nourist Foundation in Kent over the early May Public Holiday weekend. A total of 26 pairs from eight clubs took part, with 4 teams representing Suntreckers.

The Nourist Foundation organisers and BN's Ian Munt had done an enormous amount of preparation for the event, including moving 6 existing pistes and building 7 new ones. The whole weekend was full of other events, including music, a French-themed naked disco and a quiz. A good selection of hot and cold food was available in the café and from a visiting food van, with the indoor and outdoor bars also doing brisk trade. Bar prices were very reasonable with a pint of beer at £3 and a bottle of wine for £10 (which was rather better than the £10.65 per glass I paid for Mrs Furley's drink when we did a 'free' overnight stop at a pub in Leatherhead on the way).

The competition was excellent with a range of people competing, from novices to semi-professional players, but all the games were enjoyable, whether we won or lost (mostly the latter for Lyn and me to be honest). Everyone played 7 games over Saturday and Sunday with the overall winners decided in a final playoff between Karl & Carole (the eventual victors) and Sue & Edd on Sunday afternoon.



Team Suntreckers

Rae Argent & Ken Vogl were presented with the Reg Wellings shield as the best Suntreckers (5th overall), with David & Trudi, Gail & Billy and Lyn and me in supporting roles. Team BN won the Club Shield, with hosts Brocken Hurst in second place. Third place went to Springwood, followed by Suntreckers, Heritage, Arcadians, Broadlands and Blackthorns.

This year, the International Pétanque competition will take place in Hanover, Germany 9-11 August, when a total of 64 teams from various national federations will compete over three days of sports, food and friendship.

John Furley

A warm welcome

Let's give a warm welcome to the following members who've joined us since March:-

Carl and Angela G	Lincolnshire
Sarah J	Sussex
Paul and Michelle J	Mid-Glamorganshire
Kevin K and Maureen H	Suffolk
Neil T	Wiltshire
Shaun and Sallie M	Dorset
Peter C	Anglesey
Kenneth and Barbara J	Yorkshire

Committee Vacancies

The AGM will soon be taking place at Candy Farm during the Gala Rally and although we have received some nominations, there is a vacancy for a Webmaster to replace Clive Allen, ideally someone who understands WordPress, but support and advice can be given by a former holder of the post. This job is critical to the smooth running of Suntreckers, particularly for online bookings of rallies, which is very much the most popular way to book.

Please volunteer for this essential post!

And finally...

Members' contributions for *The Trecker* are always welcome, as are photographs, which should be sent as separate files and not embedded in a document. Please remember that you need permission from everyone in your photograph.

Please send all contributions to thetrecker@suntreckers.org.uk

Thank you to John for sending this newsletter by email, as well as to John and Lyn for printing and sending out the paper version. Also, thanks to Clive for putting it on the website.