

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



January 2021





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The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists Group (Group 8199)

Helping to Improve the Standard of Driving and Riding on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the advancement of road safety

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<https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM>

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New Members and test passes

With the ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 we have no new members and no test passes to report.

November Cover Picture

The November cover picture was in Scotland. It was the A832 from Achnasheen to Gairloch in the Highlands looking down towards Loch Maree. I suspected that a biker would get it but was surprised that there was only one - Norman Shearer. Congratulations Norman - is there anywhere you haven't been?

This month's cover is closer to home. Can you identify the location? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer.

Covid 19 update

In line with government and devolved administration advice, all IAM RoadSmart person to person activities are suspended until further notice. The position is kept under review both at IAM RoadSmart HQ and by the Group Committee and we will keep you advised of any changes.

Dates for your diary

With lockdown continuing the Committee has agreed to continue with virtual ZOOM meetings for our STAC nights for car Associates. In addition, the Committee is looking to arrange some Group nights through ZOOM. We have some ideas and will develop them over the next weeks and we will keep you posted. Meantime if any Members have a particular interest or passion on which they could do a presentation we would be very glad to hear from you.

We will keep the STAC events to the normal dates of the first and last Tuesday of the month:

STAC programme for car Associates and Observers (also anyone else interested)

- 2 February - Human factors and IPSGA
- 3 February - Zoom meeting for motorcycle members
- 9 February - Group Night - Is that picture photoshopped?
- 23 February - Core driving Skills
- 2 March - Bends
- 23 March - Junctions and roundabouts
- 6 April - no meeting (Easter Tuesday)

Annual General Meeting

As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions the Committee decided to postpone the AGM in the hope that by the New Year we might be in a position to hold it in the Boathouse as usual. We are able to extend the period between AGMs to 18 months and in the prevailing conditions we decided that in order to comply with IAM RoadSmart requirements we would hold a virtual AGM using ZOOM on Tuesday 12 January. We had 18 Members taking part.

Chairman's report

David's Chairman's report covered the main events of the year starting with our guest speaker in 2019 Davy Mulligan. He is very heavily involved in an organisation which rehabilitates young offenders via an off-road motorbike school. These young guys get involved in building and maintaining bikes, and competing as a team, and come to take pride in their achievements, and become less delinquent and more functional members of society.

November we were moved out of the Boathouse for a week while some work was being done and the Council relocated us in Donaghadee Community Centre. Susan Spratt of the British Horse Society gave us a talk on the horse riders' experience of being on the road. She was able to give some valuable insight into how to safely share the road with other road users of all types and abilities.

December saw us back in Carnalea Golf Club for the Christmas dinner. As ever, it was a great evening, and we had the opportunity to host a few of the examiners as a thank you for their support throughout everything we do.

Our enrolment night in January was very sparsely attended, perhaps a preview of how the year would play out. We had planned a talk on electric cars for February as these are becoming much more common on our roads and may have features and performance characteristics we're probably not familiar with. Unfortunately, this fell through due to illness and we called Guy Thomson from the reserve bench to do a meet the examiner night. In other circumstances, Guy's hints and tips would have set us up for a good year of test passes, but I think you know 2020 went downhill shortly after that.

We had a great talk in March from Valerie Millington, an older lady with an even older car, and a former member of our group. She spoke very informally about her adventures with Miss Prim, a 1928 Austin Seven in primrose yellow. No Powerpoint presentations or audio visuals, just a very engaging talk. And that was effectively the end of our group activities for 2020 as COVID restrictions took hold. we had four car and one motorcycle pass to this point, and nothing subsequent.

As the initial lockdown was eased, motorcycles were permitted to resume training for a while, but subsequently suspended again. On the car side, we had three weeks in September when observed drives were permitted, with mitigation, but stronger restrictions returned and we had to shut down again. With no real activity, no expenditure, and no decisions to be made, we skipped a couple of committee meetings, but towards the end of the year when it became apparent this GroundHog Day situation will be with us for a while yet, we began to host Zoom calls. Obviously a Zoom call is no substitute for an in-car observed run, so we allowed the presentations to run on a bit with Q&A, and got some pretty good associate and observer participation. This included specific examples of difficult junctions or ambiguous signage and road markings, and we were able to use Google Street View to view and discuss.

We look forward to a return to in-car observing, but in the meantime we intend to plan virtual STAC and Group Nights to keep our Tuesday calendar as normal as possible under these challenging circumstances.

You will have received notification that your group membership has been extended, and that remains under review with committee. We have negligible income at the moment, keeping pace with our negligible expenditure, so as a goodwill gesture we're able to extend membership until we are able to resume training. There is an option to extend membership with HQ, but that must be done by the individual and we are not permitted to make that request for all our members.

Membership report

Unfortunately Simon Beckett has had to stand down as Membership Secretary. According to the IAM RoadSmart database we currently have 96 Full and Associate members.

Treasurer's Report

The finance figures provided within this report comprise all income and expenditure between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020.

The Group maintains a strong end-of-year balance sheet despite the difficulties due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

	£
Opening balance (carried from September 2019)	- 1858.20
Annual Income	- 938.50
Annual Expenditure	- 1192.87
Annual Deficit	- 254.37
Closing Balance	- 1603.83
Fixed Assets	- 0.00

Income and Expenditure (I&E) – Significant Elements

Due to the on-going restrictions, the Committee decided that as there were sufficient club funds, minimal expenditure & no club activity, requests for membership renewals would be suspended until club activities resumed.

There was financial activity from October 2019 until February 2020, however this stopped by the time the March 2020 Bank Statement was issued.

Clubhouse rental invoices were received after this date, with the proviso that payment was not required for the foreseeable future, until pandemic restrictions were lifted. Subsequently, payment has been requested, however this did not happen until October 2020, after the 2019/20 annual accounts were closed in September 2020. These costs will be recorded in the 2021 report.

Catering expenses encompass Tuesday night tea/coffee, Committee meeting & AGM catering all encountered prior to lockdown.

The Group Lap-top, I-Pad, Light-Pro & 1-way radios were purchased in 2015. All 4 assets have completed their straight line depreciation over 5 years and now have entirely spent value, but they and other group assets remain usable.

Committee Elections

David handed over to Angela Bell to conduct the elections to the Committee for 2020/21. The incoming Committee is

Chairman: David Harcourt	Treasurer: Gareth Hughes
Secretary: Vacant	Leslie Ashe
Simon Beckett	Ronnie Brown
Lisa Carson	Ivan Greenfield
Colin Hay	Annie McFarland
Frank Robertson	Kyle Thomson
John Seawright	

Both David Harcourt and Gareth Hughes expressed their wish to step down from their roles as Chair and Treasurer at the next AGM so we are looking for Members to take on these roles. In the absence of nominations for the office of Secretary, Leslie Ashe will continue in the role of Acting Secretary and Associate Member Stephen Patterson will shadow him with a view to taking over when he has passed his advanced test.

Presentations

The Committee decided that with little Group activity the awards should be held over until the next AGM in October 2021.

Guest speaker: Becky Harcourt

Becky works for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and her talk was on “Understanding the threat of invasive non-native species in Northern Ireland”.

Aren't **squirrels** lovely? Unfortunately the native red squirrel is losing out to the greys. 12 greys were imported into Ireland in 1911 and since the 1960s they have spread over many areas. When the greys arrive in a red squirrel area the red population usually disappears with 15 years. The greys outcompete the reds for food (they can eat seeds and nuts that are not ripe enough for the reds to digest so they get food first), and they carry a disease known as squirrel pox virus which kills the reds but has no effect on the greys.

Becky asked us all to do our bit to protect the reds by respecting signage to slow down in areas where there are reds as it is estimated that 53% of unnatural deaths among reds are caused by cars. In Mount Stewart there were only 10 reds in 2015 and now there are between 40 and 50



It is not thought possible to eradicate greys but efforts are being made to control the numbers. In many instances shooting is not appropriate eg in forest parks (although a few years ago in Tollymore I was asked by a forester (complete with rifle!) if I had seen any greys. Many are trapped and disposed of by cranial dispatch in a hessian sack by trained red squirrel volunteers.



Muntjac deer are another invasive species. They are small stocky deer about the size of a labrador and can be found in the Arts Peninsula especially, Dundonald, Carrowdore and Mount Stewart. They strip bark from trees, can cause overgrazing in forests and can carry bovine TB and parasites for domestic livestock. They are a particular danger for motorists and if you are unlucky enough to hit or kill one you should report it CEDaR (linked to later).

Japanese knotweed exploits cracks in walls, foundations, drains and roads. It grows to a height of 10 feet and can be spread by tiny fragments. It has a very deep root system (up to 3 metres deep and with a spread of up to 7 metres horizontally). Removal is a job for experts. Treating with herbicides can take anything from 3 to 10 years and remains have to be buried in non-permeable membranes. There have been reports of mortgage lenders refusing mortgages if knotweed is reported. You really don't want this anywhere near your house. If you are worried about Japanese knotweed, you can contact the Property Care Association for more information.



Giant Hogweed. This looks similar to native hogweed and cow parsley but is easily distinguished by its height which can reach 3-5 metres. It's found in areas of damp soils such as river banks. Each flower head can produce up to 50,000 seeds which can be easily dispersed by flood water and can live for up to 20 years. The plant contains a sap which irritates the skin when exposed to sunlight. It can cause blisters and swelling and can leave scars for life. Do not touch!



Himalayan balsam

This can be found on river banks and it produces large quantities of seeds in pods which explode if touched and throw seeds several metres away. The plants die back in the autumn leaving soil more exposed to erosion. While it produces a lot of nectar making it attractive to bees, this leads to less pollination of native species. It is shallow rooted and can be pulled out but this must be done before the seed pods develop.



Montbretia is often seen along road verges and can block your view. Although grown in many gardens, it is regarded as Invasive non-native species. (Under NI law, montbretia isn't classed as a noxious weed).



Becky also mentioned a range of other species too numerous to mention in any detail here. They include slider terrapins, zebra mussels, floating pennywort, curly waterweed, harlequin ladybirds (much bigger than the native ladybird) and New Zealand flatworms. She also mentioned species that have not yet reached hereabouts which are carefully monitored for their spread in GB and Europe. These include the signal crayfish and the Asian hornet - the latter can arrive on fruit. It will kill native bees and hives and if agitated can may cause toxic shock if you are unfortunate enough to be stung - some people have died.

Becky worked in Mount Stewart for a time during which time when clearing rhododendrons (also an invasive species) from some areas, they cut down Lady Londonderry's favourite - oh dear!

Members had lots of questions throughout Becky's talk and we were most appreciative of her time to give us the presentation. She certainly gave us lots to think about and look for when we are out and about.

In response to specify questions which she said she would get answers for us:

- gorse (whin/furze), is native; and
- crops like potatoes or apples aren't considered invasive as they are managed by people

Finally, Becky emphasised the importance of reporting invasive species and provided links to relevant websites

<https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI> (our alert system for any invasives that are spotted/may come in).

<https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/> (can also be downloaded and used on smartphones)

The Invasive Species Ireland website is <https://invasivespeciesireland.com/> - a lot of information can be found there, including further explanation of our legislation, species accounts, and downloadable posters and leaflets.

Many thanks to Becky for an interesting and informative talk.

Sheila Palmer

Now for some really good news. Car Associate member Sheila Palmer was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the New Year honours list for her work with the Glenraig Community and the RAF Association. Sheila's late husband Bill was air-crew with the RAF during WW2.

Many congratulations Sheila from all the Members of NDAM. Sheila is an active and enthusiastic member of the Group and we look forward seeing her back in the Boathouse and out on the road again when the Covid restrictions are relaxed.



Winter



We have had one cold snap so far and the winter has some way to go. Richard Gladman, IAM RoadSmart Head of Driving and Riding Standards, has these useful tips for anyone heading out on an essential journey:

- If you do have to head out in the snow during lockdown, make sure you have cleared your windows, mirrors lights and numberplate before setting off. Use the heater settings to remove mist and condensation. Avoid using hot water to pour over your windscreen as it's likely that it will freeze up again or crack.

- Most modern locks have plastic components so never apply direct heat to a door lock.
- Keep an eye on your tyres. The legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm – but for safe travel, you should not let the depth go below 3mm. Whatever you do, avoid travelling with worn tyres as this will increase the likelihood of your car skidding. If you can use them, winter tyres do offer a grip advantage.
- If you're driving a manual vehicle, avoid using high revs and set off gently in second gear. This will improve control and reduce the risk of your wheels spinning. If you're driving an automatic vehicle, select the 'winter' mode (if there is one), which will automatically lockout first gear and reduce the risk of wheel spin. If unsure, refer to your handbook for more advice.
- If your car loses grip you should take your foot off the accelerator and point the front wheels in the direction you want them to go. All steering and braking inputs must be as gentle as possible in icy conditions. Front-wheel-drive vehicles are generally better in icy conditions, but if your car is a rear-wheel-drive always take it extra slow and steady when changing direction.
- Increase the distance between you and the vehicle in front, especially in slippery conditions. The Highway Code suggests doubling the distance in the wet and up to 10 times in snow and ice. The same applies for when you're approaching a junction or a sharp bend. Drive or ride at a steady speed that allows you to stop well within the available distance.



Richard said: "With lockdown in full force across the country, you should not go out for anything but essential journeys. In very heavy snow, you should avoid driving or riding if at all possible. Even when the snow stops and frost thaws, ice will stay around areas that are shaded or that are exposed to wind-chill. Consider how you drive and ride through these micro-climates and be prepared to slow down if you need to. Remember in extreme conditions minor routes may not have been visited by the gritting lorry."

And finally.....



Credit: Paul

For all our motorcycle racing fans - commiserations that the North West has been cancelled for the second year in a row.

You will have you find another excuse for not doing the gardening that weekend!

Fingers crossed for you for 2022.

The views expressed in the "Road Observer" are not necessarily those of the Editor, the North Down Advanced Motorists Group or IAM RoadSmart