

In this episode we hear from Nigel Perry from Knaresborough Lions Club. The club hosts the Great Knaresborough Bed Race, featuring 90 teams, attracting crowds of tens of thousands, drawn to experience the excitement of the high-speed bed race. Next, we listen to feedback from those taking part in the annual Lions Roar Competition. A unique programme working with schools to inspire children, to think big and dream big.

Be uplifted, be inspired. This is Step Forward and Volunteer.

Hello everybody, welcome to the Step Forward and Volunteer podcast, brought to you by Lions Clubs British Isles.

My name is Ben Mouncer and I'd like to thank you very much for listening in. If you haven't listened before, our aim is simple. We want to celebrate the positive difference volunteering makes to communities across the British Isles and beyond. To do that, we'll be speaking to those who give up their time to help others, inspiring more people to step forward and volunteer.

This month on the podcast we'll be taking a look at one of the best known and certainly most well attended events in the Lions calendar, The Great Knaresborough Bed Race.

But first, I have a favour to ask. We'd like your help in getting the word out about Step Forward and Volunteer. Tell your family, tell your friends - and if you're a Lions member, why not let other members of your club know about the podcast - and how easy it is to listen. All you need to do is either go on the website www.lionsclubs.co where you will see a link to the podcast, or you can search for Step Forward and Volunteer on apps like Spotify, Podbean, Apple podcasts and Google podcasts.

You can listen on-demand or subscribe so that you never miss an episode. We publish a new programme on the second Wednesday of each month, and we're really keen to spread the positivity and get as many people listening as we can.

Now, Lions clubs across the British Isles organise local community events during the Summer months. Many of these have a long history - one example being the Great Knaresborough Bed Race that began in 1966. It's back this year for the first time since 2019.

On the second Saturday in June, this unassuming North Yorkshire market town attracts crowds of thousands, drawn to experience the excitement of the high-speed bed race - which starts with a parade of entrants, along with marching bands and dance troupes.

To give you a sense of the size of the event, it features 90 teams comprising six runners and one passenger on the bed. Roads are closed. Streets fill up with people who make use of the free park and ride organised by Lions, or arrive on foot, by bus or take the train which crosses a magnificent Victorian viaduct on entering Knaresborough.

We're delighted to welcome Nigel Perry of Knaresborough Lions Club onto today's podcast. He is talking to Romily Broad ahead of the 2022 Great Knaresborough Bed Race, which takes place this coming weekend on 11th June.

Hello, and thanks for joining us on the step forward and volunteer podcast. Now, should someone ever be minded to race their bed through a town? Why should they pick Knaresborough?

Oh, Knaresborough is the ideal place for racing beds. The event of the Great Knaresborough Bed Race actually started in 1966, and it's spread all over the world, from here. This is the origin. It's a great town, scenic, up and down, we've got a river, which they have to swim through with the bed. It's a wonderful place.

Now I've seen some pictures. There's a lot of pictures on the website there and I'll let everybody know how to go and find those so they can have a look for themselves. But it looks exciting. It looks exhausting. It looks dangerous. It looks wet. So for the uninitiated, a Lions organised jaunt through a picturesque market town is not something that you would ordinarily associate with all of those things. It looks competitive, though. So you know, it's been going for a long time. How competitive is it now?

Well, it's Yorkshire. That's the first thing to say, Yorkshire people are very competitive. So the bed race is in two parts. The first part is that fancy dress competition, fancy dress for the racers and they're helpers but also for... they dress the beds. And they dress in the theme of the year. So each year, we have a different theme, this year 2022, it's the environment. I'll come on to that later. But there's a lot of fun with that. So the first part is sort of scenic, a pageant. It's easy. And they gather at the castle at the top of the town from the morning, and they get judged. And at one o'clock, they parade through the town all the way down to where we start and finish the race, which is in Parkland at Conyngham Hall. When they get there, all that comes off and the race starts.

And that's when people get really serious judging, judging by those photos I was talking about. There's some seriously committed faces in those photos.

That's absolutely right. And it's been going so long that everyone's got a rival. Everyone wants to beat somebody else, or they want to beat themselves - previous years. So, again, being Yorkshire people, they take it very seriously. They... the race actually is time trials. So they go off in 10 second intervals, they run through the town. They go through Parkland, and then along the water side by the River Nidd. And then they go up Castle Ings and this is very steep. It's very difficult, and they run up there. Then they go around on the cobbled streets of Knaresborough - Knaresborough's a medieval market town - and then they go down back to the river across the bridge, through some more park land - the Macintosh fields - and then the final act is to swim the river. They have to swim. So the bed has to float. The passenger has to be able to swim or float. And the six runners have to be able to swim. And it's about a 40 yard swim through the ever cold River Nidd. It never warms up!

No I bet it doesn't. Is it a fast flowing river?

It is yeah. And we are on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. So it's moving very quickly coming out of... which is why it's always cold... coming out of the Dales and it's fast flowing and it's deep. They're out of their depth when they come across the river. This year by the banks they may be able to touch the bottom because it's been dry and the river levels are a bit lower. But most years they're swimming across. We have divers, we have all sorts of safety

measures in place for the swim. Because every year we get somebody who can't swim and hasn't told their race mates and so we fish them out. And that's the final act, is swimming across the river. They climb up the bank and the more teams that have gone through, the wetter the more greasy the bank gets. So but yeah, they all take it very seriously.

Give us a sense of the scale. So obviously you've spoken briefly about all the safety arrangements that you've put in place, and you must prepare everybody with lots of information about how to stay safe and not do things like drown, ideally. But there's, there's a lot of people that take part. And there's a lot of people who come and watch. What's the scale of it these days?

Well, we've kept the number of teams at 90. So 90 teams take part and that's in agreement with the authorities. But it's also a very practical number, we can cope with that, the fields, they can cope with that, that's 90 teams, one year, we got 154 entries. We have a lottery to get it down to the 90. So 90 times six runners, and a passenger on each one is 630. So you've got 600 runners and riders taking part. And that's the race. The parade, they come along with their friends, their children, and lots of kids take part. We have marching bands, we have dance groups, we have all sorts of people taking part in the parade. So all told, probably twice the number maybe 1200 taking part in the parade, 630 of whom are runners and riders. And then you've got all the other people who help build the decorations, help build the beds, that so the fancy dress, the fancy dress is nearly always homemade.

And that's not all, is it that there's people exerting themselves in extraordinary ways. Right?

Yeah, that's right. We have some fell runners who take part in it. And in fact, it's fell running, and athletic teams that usually are the fastest teams in bed race. And some of those tell us it's harder than a lot of the races they do on the fells. So you can imagine how hard it is. It's 2.4 miles, so nearly two and a half miles long, but because it's up and down and cobbles and parkland and through the river, it's hard work.

It sounds like it. How many people typically come along to watch all of this unfold.

Between 20 and 30,000. It's a big event. It attracts people, we get a lot of overseas visitors that come to Bed Race. A lot of people hear about it because it's such an easy event to televise. We get people coming along making film providing it to television services all around the world. And as you can probably imagine, it makes great television or little parts of it as people jump into the river and squeal and scream because it's so cold or just run through the viaduct past the viaduct. There's a lot of really good opportunities for television. And so it's got famous, people around the country and abroad know about the great Knaresborough bed race and will come and watch.

I've heard tell that there might even be an international team taking part this year, right?

Yeah, normally, I'll have to have a look on the day. But Knaresborough's twin town, Bebra in Germany will send a team. In fact, on one year, about six or seven years ago, their team decided to cycle. So all the way across Germany and Holland, onto the ferry and then from Hull they cycled to Knaresborough. So they got here on the Thursday night, and then one day's rest. And then on the Saturday, they're out doing the bed race.

Wow. That's actually quite intimidating. Isn't it, as an athletic feat? How did they do after all of that? Do you remember?

Well, that year they came about 25th, which is very good out of 90 teams, but normally, they would do better than that. They get fit for... It's a big thing, a pride thing for Bebra. But we get other international sides. We've got a big army base at Menwith Hill, which is quite near to us here. And so there's always American servicemen that take part and women, and they've got a whole load of stories. They've taken part virtually. I would think in every bed race since 1966, and on one disastrous year, they got their plans wrong. And they entered the river far too early. So instead of swimming, the 40 yards, everyone else swam, they swam about a quarter of a mile, and they came last.

But they made it through alive, right, that's the main thing.

And they were safe. And apart from the divers who were in the river, we have people from the local canoe company, and they'll take the canoes out on the river. And so there's lots of ways we make that safe. First aid organisations and other things. So everyone's been looked after.

Absolutely. But there's a there's a grander purpose behind this year's race as well, isn't there, maybe you could tell us a bit more about that?

Well, there's two reasons why we organise bed race, the Knaresborough Lions. One is to put on a great event for the town, an event that all the towns people join in with. And the town's businesses benefit from all these 20 to 30,000 people that come spend money in the town, and they realise what a beautiful place Knaresborough is, and they come again. So that's one reason, but the other reason is to raise funds for charity. Now, the Lions, we have the collections on the day. And we have sponsors which are local companies, we have, we charge an entry fee to the teams, we have a programme, which is on our website, if anyone wants to see it, which earns money. And then we have an entry fee of three pounds per adult, kids are free that to come into the area where the race starts and finishes. So we have various ways that we raise money. In addition to that, we have rides and stalls in what we call the bottom field, and we allow charities to run those so Scouts, the hospice - local hospice - they've all got stalls in there, so that they can raise money as well. And the third way is that the teams, a lot of the teams will have their own chosen charity for the year. And depending on where they come, how well they'll do, how many supporters they bring, they'll be able to raise money as well. So there's quite a lot of money raised for good causes.

Brilliant. And of course, that cuts right to the purpose of, of Lions itself. And that's a big motivator for this every year because it must be extremely time consuming to organise all of this and probably quite exhausting, as well, isn't it?

Oh, yeah. The biggest event we do. We start in race September, the race is in June. So in September, we sort out roles, we form the committees, we approach the authorities, we get permissions, and that's got a lot harder than it ever was before, much harder. And once we get those by November, we've selected the theme for the year. And we publish, start the

publicity, we tell the past teams, teams that have taken part in past years, what the arrangements will be, we start producing the programme. So that's before the end of the year. And then January and February is the entry period and teams are asked to enter before the end of February. And so we process those, we bank the entry fees, there's quite a lot we have to do in that period. Because in most years, not this year 2022 is going to be a bit different because of the hiatus caused by the pandemic. But in most years, all previous years back to the sort of 90s, we've needed the lottery to decide who can run and that'll be in the middle of March, And from March onwards the teams themselves are galvanised. They are making their beds and making the decorations getting their fancy dresses sorted out and going and practising. So if you come in April/May, if you come to Knaresborough, you'll see our teams running around the streets practising, rehearsing, getting ready for the course and getting fit. And then of course, you get into the weeks leading up to the event and lots of things to do there. It's a busy event, we've got 38 members of Knaresborough bed race, a lot join because they want to help organise the bed race. We do other things. We have beer festivals, we have the sleigh, do a lot of collections. We assist a lot of other groups in the way that a lot of all Lions Clubs in Britain do. So we're no different the rest of the year. The big event, though, is bed race. And on the day, we get help from local Lions Clubs in Yorkshire. They will send teams along to help us marshal the course, and get involved in all sorts of different ways. And we couldn't do it without that help.

There's that great community spirit isn't there between Lions that's always so important for things like this. Absolutely. So you mentioned there's always a theme for the for the bed race. And this year, the theme is sustainability and the environment. And that's an enormous and important topic for everybody, for the world. You can take this topic all the way up to the UN, if you like. But that's the theme this year. What can you tell us about that? I think the Royal Horticultural Society are involved this year, what's going on? There's gonna be something a bit special happening, right?

Well, originally, it was gonna be the theme for the 2020 event. But the pandemic put paid to that, and 2021. So we've carried it on to 2022. It's a good event. Good theme. People like it, we've got a lot of people... a lot of thumbs up from the community here. But in addition to that, there's a very big Royal Horticultural Society garden, called Harlow Carr, which is

nearby, and they've come in as a sponsor, they've given us all sorts of help. And then we'd said we want to do something that will be permanent, to really mark the theme but also mark the revival of bed race after, after the pandemic. And they've responded by giving us 100 Young oak trees, which we'll plant in the, in the autumn, across the river, from where bed race starts and finishes in horseshoe fields. And that'll be a lasting we hope, lasting memory of bed race and the environmental thing. And it will also be part of the planting of what is known as the Great Northern forest, which we'll see over the next 20 years or so. Five million trees planted in a channel between Hull and Liverpool. And it includes Knaresborough and of course, it revives also the tradition of the Royal Knaresborough forest, which covered the whole area around in medieval times.

Yes, it was not, not that I'm a historian or any particular expert in this sort of thing. But it was a giant hunting forest, wasn't it? I believe back in the 1200s and beyond. And people like Henry II romping around in there, bows and arrows in hand. So just to check. So 20 years from now, the reforestation project is complete. Do we, at that point, get permission to bring our bows and arrows to the Knaresborough bed race in order to make it a bit more competitive?

Well you could, yeah, it'd fun to see how the health and safety laws respond to that. But Knaresborough has a bit of a chequered history. The forest of Knaresborough where it became very, very popular during the reign of King John. It wasn't everyone's cup of tea as we know, Robin Hood in particular, but he's a great hero to Knaresborough. He started the tradition of Maundy money, Maundy gifts. And that started in Knaresborough in 1210. And we celebrated the 800th anniversary of that 10 or 12 years ago. So it starts with King John. It goes on to about 1750 and then development, industrialisation of Harrogate and other reasons, saw it abandoned. Still a lot of trees round here, but they plan to plant a lot more and we'll be part of that.

Excellent. Now what's actually happening is that Knaresborough Lions and others, in the area are putting on a spectacular event. And it's events like those that are going to help build a sustainable future and turn Knaresborough into an even more beautiful place than it already is. Now, if anybody wants to know any more about the bed race, go to

bedrace.co.uk to have a look, I've seen the images on there, and frankly, they make me feel quite tired. But there's only one thing that's better than looking at those pictures. And that is to be there. It's very soon 11th June. And good luck with it, Nigel, and good luck to the rest of the team. And thank you very much for joining us on the podcast today.

It's been a pleasure and let me say welcome to everyone come to Knaresborough, ready for the bed race. It's 11th of June. It's always the second Saturday in June. You can't miss it.

What's next, well we've received feedback on the Lions youth programme, Roar. For those that don't know about the Lions Roar, it is an inspirational education competition run in partnership between Lions Clubs of the British Isles and 8billionideas. It's a unique programme working with schools to inspire children, between the ages of 7 to 11 years old, to think big, dream big and change the world with their ideas. Children involved in the Lions Roar gain a tremendous amount from this competition. The immediate gains come in many forms including: engaging with the world and their place in it; discovering how to use their imagination in exciting new ways, learning how to work in teams, boosting their self-confidence and self-esteem. But don't just take my word for it, let's listen to the feedback received so far

Having exposure to coming outside of school to actually hone presentation skills, speaking and listening skills. Experiences like today ensure that children get those opportunities to be able to hone their presentation skills because they are skills you need for life. The creative nature of the competition it lights a little spark in them, they get really, really excited about it.

We approached the schools and I'm really pleased that Haxey and the Trentside Federation which involved three schools actually got involved and the way we went about it, we spoke to the Headteacher and the teacher, we then had a roadshow which Terry here went to see and got involved in and it was a fantastic experience.

Well we were invited to take part by our local lions group and it ties in brilliantly to our pse curriculum because one of the things we need to look at is finance and the world of work. So it gave the children of five and six an opportunity to see a project through from start to

