

Facts and Enforcement - That's What We Want

The Government-commissioned report on mechanically propelled vehicle's usage of byways makes interesting reading. It yet again shows, much like a similar investigation by a former Minister for countryside matters, that recreational vehicles, especially motorcycles, have little impact on green lanes, especially where the lanes are adequately maintained.

The recent FaberMaunsell study showed that 62% of usage is not recreational but land management vehicles, for which there are no plans for curtailment. Combined with the fact that only around 5% of definitive rights of way have rights for recreational

vehicles it begs the question 'why are calls to curb recreational vehicle use being heeded at all?' Even if every BOAT were being trashed by trail

bikes then that would equate to only 3% of the rights of way network (note that not all unmetalled carriageways are BOAT). The Government has the facts – few BOATs are actually damaged by trail riders. Or, put another way, an average of 2 metres per Kilometre is in poor condition. That is way, way better than the condition of footpaths. Maybe that is why some walkers want to use the BOATs – they cannot walk the footpaths in their carpet slippers!

Seriously, though, what is really behind the drive to remove legitimate trail riders from the countryside? There have even been reports of helicopters patrolling the Ridgeway and Salisbury Plain. Although this matter is not just about the Ridgeway, it affects all vehicular rights of way country wide.

Having cycled parts of the Ridgeway near Wantage this writer can confirm that the soft sections still have significant fresh rutting with tractor tyre marks showing the cause. There were very few walkers on the open and cold hills.

It has been conveniently overlooked that for much of its length The Ridgeway winds between Open Access Land, where walkers can wander at will, without the constraints of The Ridgeway's bounding fences. In truth, the walkers could abandon The Ridgeway for this Open Access Land, leaving the old road to cyclists, equestrians and trail

riders – and those in wheelchairs who have publicly stated (Didcot consultative meeting) that they have no problem sharing the route with trail riders.

So what has been achieved other than the removal of some decent, law abiding citizens from this old

road? The TRF is supportive of temporary bans in order to maintain or improve trails for all, but not simply to satisfy some group's selfish demands, especially when 95% of RoW are vehicle-free and the new right to roam provides yet more walker only access. Vehicle use on byways does need to be controlled, like any road, but the law is already in place to control the renegade. These are public roads and as such require properly silenced, road legal vehicles driven responsibly. Enforce the current law and do not outlaw decent citizens because of a prejudiced and outdated image. **The TRF calls on MP's to examine logically and understand the underlying issues as to fail to do this will only serve those willing to operate outside the law.**



Walkers get the blame for once

"Extensive areas of the Peak District now suffer severe erosion. This is a particular problem on ... Kinder Scout and Bleaklow."

What? These blasted trail bikes again? No – the pampered rambler is behind this tale of destruction.

"Erosion on the Pennine Way will continue to be a problem as long as walking remains a popular pastime."

Use of any route causes wear and tear, although seen as legitimate in some cases, it is seen as damage in others.

Source:

www.peakdistrict-nationalpark.info/studyArea/factsheets/19.html

You can please some of the lobbyists some of the time...

Recreational motor vehicle user groups claim that the continued negative and uncooperative attitude of some anti-vehicle pressure groups is undermining the Government's *Framework for Action* proposals for the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on rights of way.

The Trails Riders' Fellowship (TRF) and Green Lane Association (GLASS) drew to the attention of the former Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, the unhelpful attitude of organisations such as the Green Lane Environmental Action Group (GLEAM), the Yorkshire Dales Green Lane Alliance (YDGLA) and the Friends of the Ridgeway (FoR) which continue to stand in the way of effective management of trail riding and driving.

Time moves on and we have a new Government and another anti-access lobby group late on the scene: Campaign for National Parks. Sadly this new body is using the same disingenuous approach as GLEAM *et al*.

Geoff Wilson, the TRF's Chairman, wrote to Donna O'Brian (CNP) asking for clarification on some of the figures used in a recent CNP press release. The response confirmed our fears that there was either gross misunderstanding of the FaberMaunsell research or that the use of the statistics had been maliciously misrepresented.

The Government's thorough consultation and research, that took almost a year to complete, concluded that there is a place in our countryside for all users of rights of way, whether on foot or on mechanically propelled vehicles (MPV), but the use must be responsible, sustainable and appropriate. When presenting the results of the studies the Minister said he would "welcome comments from those who wish to work constructively with Government to

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refine, improve and better deliver the Government's proposals. Conflicts of interest and inconsiderate or confrontational behaviour are two strands that have to be tackled by legislation and [Minister's emphasis] *through co-operation.*"

The new Minister, Mr. Jim Knight, has followed this reasoned view and this is demonstrated by his measured response to Mr. John Mann MP in a recent house of Commons debate on the NERC Bill. The misleading and inaccurate contributions made by John Mann do not, unfortunately, assist in moving forward the issue of responsible and traditional access OR the discovery of a means of curbing illegal and inconsiderate use of the countryside.

Recreational motor vehicle user groups accept the message that the Minister is giving out and regard it as helpful to have the activity better managed. They believe that the Minister's cautions are directed towards those groups and individuals with attitudes that exacerbate tensions between rights of way users and environmental interests—be they anti-access or anti-social.

In response to other ongoing negative campaigning by organisations such as YDGLA, Geoff Wilson said, "It is time that we put this unhelpful attitude behind us and now move quickly towards implementing management programmes that will enable the countryside to accommodate the demands of all users, in measured part at least."

Geoff explained that recreational motor vehicle users and representatives of the motorcycle industry have worked closely together to find ways of matching the rights of way resource with 21st century demands. "We have listened closely to what opposing organisations such as GLEAM, YDGLA and FoR have said over a number of years now. We have taken on-board the many concerns that Minister, Alun Michael, has enunciated. We have made suggestions to the Minister that will address many of those concerns. However, we are disappointed that GLEAM, YDGLA and FoR still act as if nothing has changed and appear unable to move forward with this and instead, perpetuate the tensions that, with good spirit, could be resolved."

Nic Blundell, Chairman of GLASS, supports the trail riders' views. "What the Minister has proposed is challenging for recreational motor vehicle users, but we accept that challenge. However, an unwillingness to do so by other organisations is threatening the Minister's hope of moving forward. We urge those organisations to bury the hatchet and work together with us to protect our countryside and our shared activities in a partnership way".



All too frequently the motorcycling press promote this image as modern trail riding. This is the very riding style the TRF rail against.



National Green Lane Day 2005

In February, just as in many years past, teams of recreational motor vehicle enthusiasts abandoned their wheels for bow-saws, shovels and wheelbarrows and made many tracks across the country better for all users.

National Green Lane Day is sandwiched between the frozen winter months and the nesting season of early spring. National Green Lane Day is an annual event co-ordinated by the Land Access and Recreation Association (LARA) and recreational motor vehicle user groups. Members volunteer their labour for green lane maintenance initiatives at many sites across England and Wales.

Geoff Wilson, Chairman of the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF), was one of the volunteers working on Gatescarth Pass, one of the highest old roads in the Lake District, which escaped the tarmac machines of the 20th century. Geoff said, "This weekend of voluntary work makes a direct link between trail riding and our countryside. When we ride pedal cycles, horses or trail motorcycles, drive 4x4s or even walk over an old road, we don't always appreciate the need for care to sustain these routes. But getting our hands in the earth increases our awareness of the history and the need for sympathetic maintenance if we are not to lose an important heritage."

In Hampshire an unclassified road was re-opened after thirty years of continuous neglect, turning a thirty foot wide hedge back into a good lane between hedgerows. Despite the snow, the lane visibly dried out as light and air once again got to the surface.



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Byway Applications

The TRF wish it to be known that members are are making a number of applications to modify the definitive map and statement by having many of the old RUPPs shown as BOAT. There are other examples where a BOAT has been added to the DM&S where no route was shown hitherto—thus giving benefit to all users. For clarity it must be understood that this should not bring new vehicular use to the routes as the routes thus claimed have been used by members for decades.