

From the letters page of the NFU publication "British Farmer & Grower" April 2005.

IN DEFENCE OF TRAIL RIDERS

SIR - I read with great sadness Charlie Flindt's article on vehicles damaging the countryside. It appears to be either intentionally misleading, promoting alarm and intolerance, or just written without knowledge of the subject.

The Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) does protect green lanes, actually maintaining them as well as researching to find lost ones, which we bring into use for all to share. A report on the recent National Green Lane Day may intrigue readers.

Let us get one important point right the TRF does not represent off-road motorcyclists, they are covered by organisations such as the ACU and AMCA. And, it should be noted, these organisations have strong links with farming as their events pay handsomely for the tire of otherwise unproductive land. Similar, in some respects, to a Hampshire farmer, probably known to Mr flindt, who has diversified into tank driving days. This, of course, causes no environmental damage.

All motorists on Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs), which represent only about 5% of the total rights of way network, must use fully road legal vehicles.

That means the vehicles have to meet the same noise regulations

as all road vehicles; be insured; display a number plate and road fund.

So don't lump us in with the tearaways on unregistered motocross bikes - try calling the police instead. The fictitious "trial" bike Charlie speaks of has always been illegal and always will be illegal on public rights of way Riding through crops or scaring other users has nothing to do with trail riding.

It is true that we are researching and claiming any incorrectly recorded highways. Unfortunately the public Has been put in the position of having to make thousands of these schedule .[4 applications due to legislation (driven by the Ramblers Association) that will remove rights that are not accurately recorded. Thus, the TRF in response to Parliament wishes, is seeking to have our heritage highways shown as BOAT, where the evidence indicates full vehicular status. We have all relied on our highway authority to create an accurate definitive map (the record of public rights of way) but most have abjectly failed to fulfill this statutory duty

So, please don't point an accusing finger at the TRF - point it at the tardy highway authorities and a government that produces rushed,

poor statutes - something the rural community is well aware of.

As to the letter, referred to in the article, that was a courtesy to keep landowners and parish councils informed. The anonymity came about as a result of the automated printing process and is an issue that has been addressed in future mailings.

We should not ignore the recent Faber Maunsell study that shows 62% of traffic on BOATs is related to land access and management. All users cause some impact on the land over which they pass and the trail rider is not completely innocent but we cannot compete with, a John Deere towing a muck spreader However the TRF has no axe to grind with agricultural use and many instances of so called 'damage we would just consider muddy It is the countryside after all.

Having identified the difference between the trail rider and the hooligan, many in the rural community will find they have an ally in the former, against the latter.

*Ian Packer
Trail Riders Fellowship*