

## National Parks England

### Miles without Stiles

#### The vision

There will be a consistent brand, Miles without Stiles, across all of England's National Parks so people will know what they can expect and look for wherever and whenever they visit. We will develop additional Miles without Stiles routes and associated infrastructure, provide the promotion and guided experiences to develop their use, and encourage people to continue to benefit from activity in the outdoors through independent activities.

#### Introduction

The ten National Parks in England are the country's most stunning and memorable landscapes. They cover 10% of the land area, are closer than people think with over 50% of the population living within an hour's travel of a National Park. We welcome more than 90 million visitors each year to the National Parks and the surrounding areas. These cherished areas contain our finest and most inspirational walking and cycling. This project aims to use accessible and well-maintained networks to get more people, more active, more often.



Miles without Stiles, Latrigg Fell, Lake District and family walk, Dalby Forest, North York Moors

This project will respond to those who find access more difficult for a variety of reasons, including physical difficulty, being on low incomes or without their own transport, or facing cultural or physiological barriers. It will provide the paths and associated infrastructure for inclusive access to appeal to people and groups who are currently inactive, or have low activity levels. It will provide the support to enable people to access and use these networks and provide a pathway through to independent use. It will also promote routes using a variety of media to encourage exploration and challenge. This work helps deliver our purpose to provide opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of our National Parks and to meet the objectives of the Government's *8 Point Plan for National Parks* to encourage more diverse visitors to National Parks and promote innovative schemes in National Parks to improve our national health and wellbeing.

## Background

The National Parks in England have two clear statutory purposes which direct their work:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the national parks;
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the national parks by the public.

In pursuing these purposes the National Park Authorities have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of communities living in them.

National Parks were born out of the desire of the public living in surrounding urban areas to access the countryside for recreation. They are seen as the green lungs of the nation and as 'national treasures at the heart of our national identity'<sup>1</sup> with 90% of the public saying that National Parks are important to them. This ethos underpins our work in making opportunities for access available for everyone.

National Parks are an important recreation resource and many people are happy using the rights of way network in these invigorating spaces without any assistance. However, there are many people who are unaware of what is on their doorstep or are lacking the confidence to visit. This can sometimes be due to a change in circumstances. It is these people that this project will target by addressing physical, cultural and psychological barriers to outdoor recreation. The target audience will vary depending on the local needs and opportunities in each National Park, but will include:

- People with physical disabilities or mobility issues;
- People with mental health issues or learning disabilities;
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups who are underrepresented in our visitor profile; and
- People from lower socio-economic groups who are also underrepresented in our visitor profile.

This work is not new to National Parks – we have a proven track record of delivering these kinds of interventions working in quality partnerships with other organisations and community groups. However, this proposal would allow us to scale up our work, apply it across the country and enable us to reach out to more people and new audiences. We will also be working with our Welsh and Scottish colleagues to co-ordinate an approach to increasing access and activity across all National Parks in the UK.

## Miles without Stiles routes

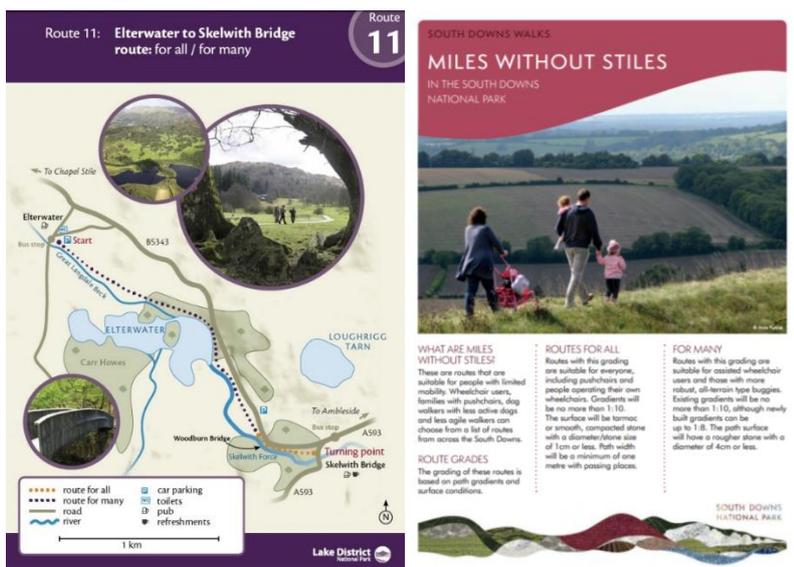
Many people think of walking in National Parks as being rugged tramping over fells and moors but we have offers to suit all abilities and interests. This project is about providing and promoting experiences in the same iconic scenery on reasonably flat routes in valleys and woodland, around lakes and reservoirs and along old railway paths. All without steps, stiles or steep gradients. Although these routes are billed as being for people with limited mobility, they have wide appeal. In addition to wheelchair users they are ideal for families with pushchairs and young children, older people with limited mobility and people with visual impairments or to put it another way - anyone at any stage of life or level of activity -

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<sup>1</sup> Rory Stewart MP, Defra Parliamentary Under Secretary of State 2015-16, speaking in 2015

thus helping to promote lifelong activity and adventure. Miles without Stiles routes will provide a welcoming approach which will showcase each National Park and its inspirational landscapes.

Initiated by the Lake District National Park Authority, 'Miles without Stiles' has already been adopted and promoted in some other National Parks. The Yorkshire Dales have developed routes and produced guides to Miles without Stiles routes. The Peak District is presently undertaking work on both infrastructure and promotion of Miles without Stiles supported by a donation from Yorkshire Water (Case study 1). The South Downs are developing and rolling out a series of Miles without Stiles routes. The aim of this project is to accelerate development and standardisation of accessible routes and activities across the English National Park family and deliver the benefits of outdoor activity to more people.



We have devised a grading system which all National Parks will use to ensure a consistent visitor experience and facilitate wider promotion of and engagement with outdoor activities by the target audiences. The route grades are: 'for all', 'for many' and 'for some'. These are based mainly on gradients and surface conditions.

<b><i>Paths for all</i></b>	Gradients will be no more than 1:10 and the surface will be tarmac or compacted stone with a diameter of 10mm or less.	Suitable for everyone, including people operating their own wheelchairs and pushchair users. Path width will be a minimum of 1m with passing places.
<b><i>Paths for many</i></b>	Existing gradients will be no more than 1:10, although newly built sections may be up to 1:8. The path surface will be rougher stone of 4cm diameter or less.	Suitable for assisted wheelchair users and those with more robust, all-terrain type buggies and trampers.
<b><i>Paths for some</i></b>	Gradients are not limited but slopes over 1:8 will have improved surfacing, or handrails. There may be some low steps or breaks in the surface up to 10cm in height. Stone surface material may also be up to 10cm in diameter.	Suitable for more robust all-terrain type buggies and trampers.

All routes will be well signed and waymarked, having resting places along the path and will be supported by a variety of media including handbooks, films, interactive mapping, audio trails and other high quality promotional materials. The experience may also be enhanced by art works and interpretive materials along the route such as tactile carvings, sound installations and activity trails for adults and children.

### **Supporting people to start becoming active**

Even with great routes, people who are currently inactive will not just appear and start using them so a major part of this project will be a programme of supported visits to get people started. We will work with our nearby communities and focus on those groups with low activity levels: people with health referrals, women, older people, people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic groups. The targeted communities and groups will vary from National Park to National Park and we will work with colleagues at Public Health England (with whom we have an Accord) to ensure that we focus on the key groups who will benefit most for example see Case Study 3 Dartmoor's Naturally Healthy project.

Many of our National Parks already provide the support through guided activities and already work in partnership with key accessibility groups and landowners. This project allows for this work to be more targeted and linked to Miles without Stiles routes. The development and promotion of Miles without Stiles routes and the supporting programmes provides the inspirational activity for people to be motivated to do more, more often and to progress to independent activity within any of the National Parks where they live, work or visit.

National Park staff and volunteers will look to remove the barriers that prevent people visiting whether these are physical, cultural, emotional or logistical. Our work will focus on groups to allow us to work with more people and ensure that there is a support network for the individuals involved. However, we will also ensure that all our information is available and accessible to everyone to ensure a wider audience and the inclusivity of this work.

### **Developing the activity habit**

The guided walks are intended to provide the encouragement for people to become independently active. The programme will therefore be designed to increase peoples' confidence and abilities so that they feel comfortable to continue being active without support. We also understand that friendships will develop through these activities and that this in itself can help foster continued activity. Our work will therefore involve developing the support we give to groups such as the Disabled Ramblers and Experience Community to develop community champions. These are people within their own communities who will receive the training and support needed to run their own activities and events. We will also develop a network for the community champions through residential experiences and social gatherings so that they can mutually support each other in the longer term. This is a model we have used successfully before, particularly in the Mosaic project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (see case study 2). We will also work with accessibility groups, Local Access Forums and tourism providers to establish Accessibility Ambassadors.



Using the Access for All path, Shipley Bridge, Dartmoor

### **Case study 1: Accessible Peak District**

The Peak District National Park has been working closely with Accessible Derbyshire and others to foster and promote accessibility within the National Park. In 2016, in recognition of its efforts to help a wide variety of people to enjoy the National Park, it received an award for 'Organisation of the Year'. This work has been summarised in the Peak District National Park Authority's first annual [accessibility report](#).

Partnerships include sponsorship by Yorkshire Water for the development of Miles without Stiles work which will allow for further training of National Park staff in accessibility needs and the design and production of a Miles without Stiles handbook which will be freely available. This work is endorsed by Karen Darke, Paralympic gold medal cyclist who appreciates how important routes like this are for people to make their own adventures and who has shown what a difference routes like this can make.

As part of this work, which is due to be completed by Autumn 2017, the National Park Authority will be working closely with landowners to select Miles without Stiles routes and developing ways to support for the promotion of these routes with the help of volunteers from the Peak District Local Access Forum and groups including Accessible Derbyshire, Disabled Ramblers and Experience Community. It is anticipated that this will allow for further opportunities for the development and promotion of routes and for the engagement of a wider audience.

### **Outputs and outcomes for the Miles without Stiles project**

*Targets will depend on the level of funding secured*

Increase in length of km of Miles without Stiles routes and increased number of routes developed during the funding period (and as a percentage increase from existing provision)

Number of physical barriers removed – stiles, steps, etc.

Number of inactive people taking up introductory activities – with case studies

Number still active 6 months and a year later - with case studies

Data on health and wellbeing benefits of projects– to be measured in collaboration with partners such as health commissioning bodies or medical researchers.

Total number of people using the new routes (for those where people counters are installed or using data from GPS trackers) to show scale of usage outside introductory and guided activities

Increased media profile of Miles without Stiles routes in National Parks

Increase profile of National Parks as destinations for 'everyday physical activity'

### **Case study 2: Mosaic community champions**

The 'Mosaic Project' was initiated in 2001 and in a number of guises ran through to 2012 with a focus on Black and Ethnic Minority groups who lived close to different National Parks. The initial project ran in four national parks, but by the end all of England's national parks were involved. The project was a collaboration between National Park Authorities, the Campaign for National Parks and the YHA.

The aim was to cement long-term sustainable engagement between BME communities and National Parks. Working with deprived communities in 20 cities in the top 5% of urban deprivation, Mosaic aimed to create sustainable leadership capacity in the BME voluntary sector.

A key part of the project was to reach out to these groups through Community Champions; key leaders residing within various identified ethnic groups. In the case of the Yorkshire Dales, this featured primarily the Asian community within Bradford and the largely Afro-Caribbean community in Leeds and Keighley. These representatives were charged with internally promoting the benefits of rural recreation with measurable outcomes to increase visits and raise awareness. Working closely with the Black Environment Network (BEN) and the Campaign for National Parks (CNP), the objective was to promote the benefits of visiting the National Parks.

An evaluation of the Mosaic BME programme found that:

- By March 2012, the Mosaic project had recruited 208 people from ethnic minority communities and supported them to become Community Champions. 112 Community Champions were known to be currently active in promoting the National Parks within ethnic minority communities at the end of the project and committed to continue to do so.
  - Mosaic had enabled partners to identify and start tackling the barriers to BME communities visiting National Parks such as lack of awareness, issues of relevance, concerns and worries, and problems of accessibility.
  - Mosaic has clearly enabled Community Champions to feel confident about promoting the National Parks. The evaluation survey of current Community Champions found that 90 per cent of respondents felt confident in their role.
  - The Mosaic Community Champions have introduced at least 28,000 people from ethnic minority communities to the National Parks during the project period. This includes at least 9,000 people who have been taken on visits to the National Parks for the first time and thousands more who have been engaged in formal or informal talks and presentations about the National Parks.

### **Case Study 3: Dartmoor's Naturally Healthy project**

The Naturally Healthy Project is a three-year social action project part funded by Devon Public Health looking at developing "green prescription" processes, working with local health providers and community groups and individuals to deliver activities by championing Devon's natural environment as a way of promoting health equality and improving health and well-being and increasing physical activity.

The project is focused on the town of Buckfastleigh, on the edge of Dartmoor National Park. The town was selected as it has been identified for its health inequalities and has worked with doctor's surgery and other community groups.

Naturally Healthy activities have included:

- The development of processes of "Green Prescription" working with Buckfastleigh Medical Practice
- Introduction of a 10 week programme for local Buckfastleigh people with low physical &/or emotional well-being
- Delivery of physical and social activities, such as informal walks, visits to places of interest, picnics, Buckfastleigh Community Garden, Waycott Orchard, Forest Tai-Chi, Arts activities, Electric Bikes
- Introduce positive ways to improve life styles
- Linked in with *Walking For Health* and other opportunities, for example: Volunteering Gardening, DNPA ecology & conservation walks
- Use of Social Media (Facebook & Twitter) to raise profile of project, Dartmoor National Park and to develop relationships with organisations

The Project is now entering its final year which will see development of a sustainability strategy with local delivery partners, beneficiaries and medical stakeholders. There will also be an independent evaluation carried out by researchers from Plymouth University. The *Naturally Healthy Project* was always conceived as an action research project – specifically to understand the barriers to accessing green space for health from a variety of viewpoints – (potential) beneficiaries, medical practitioners and green-space providers – the researchers from Plymouth will report specifically against these.

In addition, the *Naturally Healthy Project* has contributed to Devon Local Nature Partnership's annual conference and a Devon LNP working group with a focus on health in greenspace. This has resulted in stronger links with *Walking for health* locally with a proposed 'Dartmoor consortium' approach to supporting volunteers to promote walking as a means to better health and wellbeing.