
Staying on the Right Track

Vehicles in the Countryside in the Peak District National Park

Update – November 2009



Management of Routes Update

We thought it would be useful to reflect in this issue on the progress made since the Peak District National Park Authority approved policies in October 2007 on the use and management of unsurfaced highways.

Illegal Use

The Peak District National Park Authority reacts to every single complaint about illegal use, and our work in identifying and preventing illegal use has resulted in many sites being used by 90% less vehicles than before. Our approach of providing better information for all users and carrying out intelligence-led operations with our partners in the various police forces across the National Park – under the banner of Operation Blackbrook - has led to significant successes. In many cases, simply informing users about problem areas has brought about a significant reduction. Many routes have been, and continue to be, reclassified,



and it's our view that we must be sure that everyone has the latest information. We have replaced as quickly as possible damaged signs informing users about illegal routes. We have put in logging machines to count activity on routes where illegal use has been brought to our attention. At 80% of the illegal sites monitored we found less than 10 vehicles a month are using them - but these users can cause significant damage to sensitive sites. This information is always passed to the police. We thank responsible vehicle users for working with us to ensure that illegal use does not occur accidentally and are delighted that many vehicle user group members are now reporting illegal use - this can only help in managing the situation. If you are aware of any illegal use please let us know, we will always take action.

Reductions in illegal use at key sites

Moss Road

Before – 145 users a month. Last Logged Use - 23 Reduction **80%**

Abney RB 5

Before - 229 users a month. Last Logged Use - 17 Reduction **95%**

Silly Dale, Foolow

Before – 70 users a month Last Logged Use - 12 Reduction **80%**

Washgates

Before – 210 users a month Last Logged Use - 18 Reduction **90%**

We are also currently taking action at sites including Hassop thirteen bends, Monksdale near Tideswell, Taddington village and various illegal routes around Great Longstone and Holmesfield. In all cases we will continue to count use and, if illegal use increases, work with partners to take direct action.

Advisory Signs

Derbyshire County Council is responsible for determining the legal status of routes. Because of this duty the council cannot put up advisory signs about routes in case this is seen as supporting a particular claim for vehicle rights. The Peak District National Park Authority is able to put up advisory signs in places where issues have been raised and the legal status has still to be resolved.

Please do heed these signs as they are only installed where there is a genuine need.

We have also erected many advisory signs warning where illegal use should not take place, and have been assisting Derbyshire County Council in putting up and maintaining signs on routes where the legal status has been determined.



Information

Our website – www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/vehicles continues to evolve and expand, and with links to the Trailwise website (www.trailwise.org.uk), we now have a facility to make it easier for users to determine which routes have legal rights and which do not. We have introduced this newsletter – *Staying on the Right Track* – which is emailed to people who have requested information updates. Our *Stay on the Right Track* leaflets are in their fourth reprint, and continue to be in demand at cafes, garages and other locations across the National Park, as well as being handed out on Operation Blackbrook days.

Legal Status

We are continuing to press for a legal resolution on the status of many contentious routes in the national park. Such routes arouse strong emotions on both sides so it is likely that many decisions on the status of green lanes will go public inquiries. These legal processes take time to organise and resolve so we will continue to install advisory signs on appropriate sensitive routes while we await a final legal decision.

Sustainability

Derbyshire County Council will soon present the findings of sustainability reports they are producing on eight routes that have been identified as the highest priority for the management of sensitive sites.

Each report will look at all the issues at a particular site and suggest how the routes should be managed in the future. Where a Traffic Regulation Order is being considered as an option, a full public consultation will be held before any decision is made.

The reports will be presented to both the Derbyshire and Derby Local Access Forums. Under each plan the eight routes will be inspected regularly to ensure the work to improve the condition of the routes succeeds.

Routes will be reviewed again by all the partners if the management plans don't achieve the desired results.



Partnership Working

The National Park Authority has a key role to play in this issue, but it is also down to the Highway Authorities and Police to carry out their statutory duties. We continue to bring together interested parties – from police to locals, vehicle users to landowners – to progress this issue and manage the use of vehicles on unsurfaced routes. No one body can resolve this issue, and it is imperative that

user groups are pro-actively involved. We are pleased with the contacts made and the progress achieved, but there is always more to do. While it is understandable that this issue polarises views, past confrontation has achieved very little. We trust that everyone involved will take time to under the complexities of the debate about the use of green lanes and seek to work together for a solution.

Police Operations



Ranger staff and Derbyshire County Council Officers continue to support police officers taking part in Operation Blackbrook, and will continue to do so. Regular Operation Blackbrook days are guided by intelligence-led policing. Where illegal use is found we pass information on the police to act, giving precise times and days of activity.

Evidence based

We will continue to log the use of routes. This provides us with accurate evidence to judge the success or failure of actions taken. So far this year the use by vehicles of more than 40 sites (legal and illegal) has been counted. We will be aiming to expand our work in this area even further next year.

Summary

- The first eight route management plans are ready for publication. Work will start shortly where appropriate to improve the condition and management of routes.
 - Illegal vehicle use at numerous sites is being significantly reduced
 - Progress is being made to determine the legal status of routes, provide clear signs for all users on disputed routes and ensure action is being taken to manage routes
 - Repairs are taking place to routes
 - Use counts are taking place across a substantial part of the routes network, enabling partners to take informed views on dispersal issues, success of actions and seasonal patterns of use
 - Police taking pro-active action on illegal use
 - An increasing amount of clear information is being provided for all users of routes – this is being done through websites, as well as on site through verbal advice and handing out information leaflets.
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- Regular multi-agency operations, led by the police, are taking place to inform the public about the issues and to stop illegal use
- Partnership working between parties is increasing (see next story for an example)

The demand to take more action on more routes will always exist from all users. However, we believe that the action we are taking with our partners to inform users, manage routes and take action against illegal use is working. While there is still much to do, the situation is vastly improved on many sites to how it was a year or two years ago. It is important to keep this momentum going for the benefit of all users of routes.

Partnership working helps to protect Water Vole habitat in the Peak District November 2009

Police, Peak District National Park rangers and representatives from vehicle user groups have teamed up to take steps to help protect a water vole habitat which had been damaged by irresponsible 4x4 drivers and motorbike riders.



The work took place after serious damage was caused by an off-road vehicle to both sides of the track along Long Causeway at Stanage, near to the village of Hathersage.

Damage caused to the track

The project team included PC Kevin Lowe, of Derbyshire Police and Peak District National Park Authority rangers Bill Gordon and Andy Carson. They worked with representatives from the Buxton and District Land Rover Club, Trail Riders Fellowship, Peak District Vehicle Users Group, Green Lane Association, Peak and Dukeries Land Rover Club, and the Northern Monkey's Off Road and Green Lane Club.

They visited the area on 22 November and put up a fence at two locations on Long Causeway, which had been damaged. Wood and tools for the fence were provided by the Peak District National Park Authority.

Water voles are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and one of the most threatened species in the national park. Long Causeway is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and a special area of conservation for water voles.



Building the fence

PC Lowe said: "During the last few weeks the water vole environment at Long Causeway has been under attack from irresponsible off road users who have gone off the main track and churned up the boggy area which is the home of the water vole.

"I hope this will help protect their habitat and also prevent offences like this in the future."

A further partnership project is planned in January 2010, when the team will visit Pindale, near Hope, to ensure riders and drivers who use unclassified roads in the area only use lawful unsurfaced roads and byways, and understand the impact of their activities on the lives of local residents.

Under the legislation vehicle users can be prosecuted for

- Intentionally or recklessly, destroying or obstructing access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection by water voles.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturbing water voles while occupying a structure or place used for that purpose.

Prosecutions can be brought by Natural England. Anyone convicted of the offence faces fines of up to £5,000.



What a team: (l-r) David Robinson and Mike Royston Hunter (Buxton and District Land Rover Club), Matt Guy (Trail Riders Fellowship), Barry Wilson and Len Riley (Peak District Vehicle Users Group), Mike Charman (Green Lane Association), Stephen Smith (Peak and Dukeries Land Rover Club), Phil Pownall (Northern Monkeys Off Road and Green Lane Club) and Peak District National

Park Rangers Andy Carson and Bill Gordon, who carried out the work at Long Causeway.