

Lake District Green Lanes Alliance
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STOP PRESS++++STOP PRESS

The judicial review brought by GLEAM against the LDNPA was unsuccessful. But our central claim stands: off-roading on the two fell tracks near Little Langdale degrades the landscape and is socially unacceptable. We shall continue our campaign with renewed energy.

Gamblesmire Lane (U5333): unsafe

Describing an event as a 'wake-up call' has become something of a cliché, but in this case it seems justified:

In mid-June 2020 a family on a walk/cycle encountered two motorcyclists as they drove over the brow of the hill on the narrow, hedged section of Gamblesmire Lane. The first motorcyclist rode very close to the young daughter who was stationary on her pedal cycle. She says that she was 'traumatised' by

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his speed and by him riding so close; his wheel almost went over her foot. The second motorcyclist braked and lost control of his motorbike. He and his bike fell to the ground and collided with the mother, knocking her to the ground, so that she had him and the motorbike on top of her. This crash happened because the trail riders were going too fast round a blind bend and could not control their motorbikes when they saw the mother and daughter.



Map from the Hierarchy of Trails webpage

It is impossible to climb the hedge banks which border this section of the lane. The mother says she felt like a 'rabbit in the headlights' but with nowhere to run, as she heard the motorbikes approach. She was badly bruised but did not go to hospital because this collision happened while there were still high levels of coronavirus in Cumbria. She reported the collision to the police and then to the highways department of Cumbria County Council (CCC). The police asked the mother to pass on a warning to motorcyclists about the risk to walkers, cyclists and horse riders of using this lane as a motorbike racetrack. But they and highways were unwilling to do anything further because they said the motor cyclists had the right to use the lane. The family will not use the lane again because of this collision.

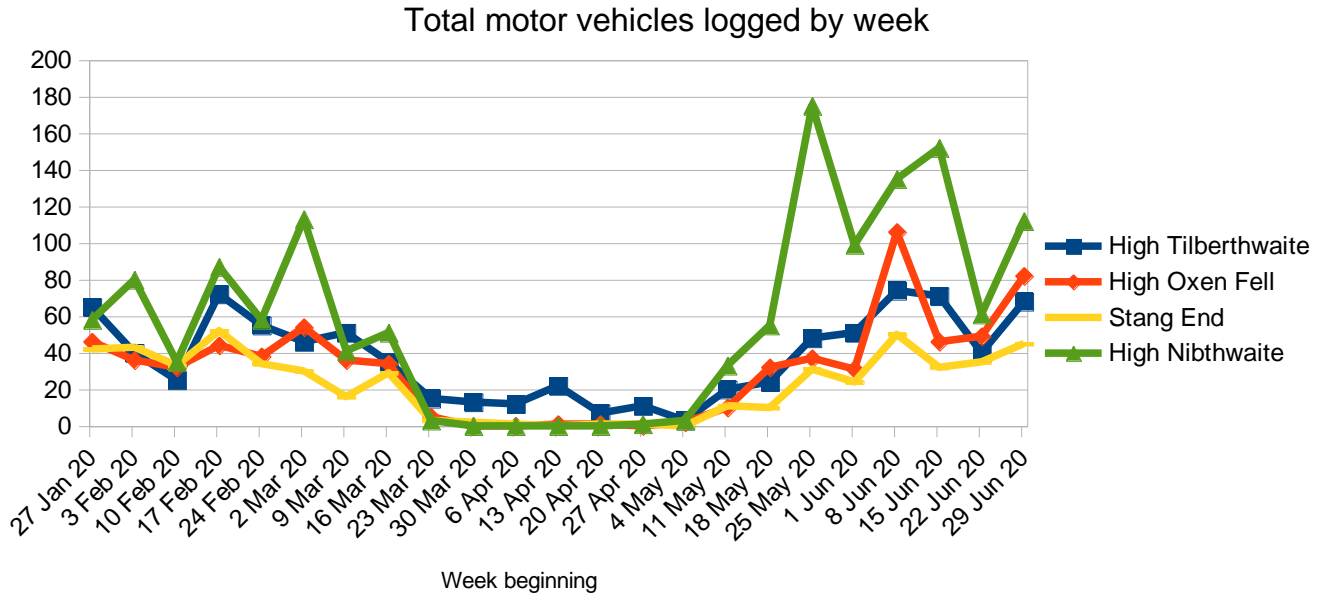
This incident is a clear indication that the LDNPA and CCC urgently need to rethink their green lanes policy. At present the only people who decide about the suitability or otherwise of a green lane for off-road motor vehicles seem to be the motoring groups themselves – hardly a neutral arbiter.

How did the lockdown affect motor vehicle use of Lake District green lanes?

During the coronavirus pandemic the UK government prohibited non-essential travel in England for the period 26 March 2020 to 12 May 2020 inclusive. It then modified the regulations relating to travel, first to allow people to visit public open spaces for open-air recreation to promote their health or wellbeing, and then (from 1 June) to remove all restrictions on travel other than the prohibition on overnight stays.

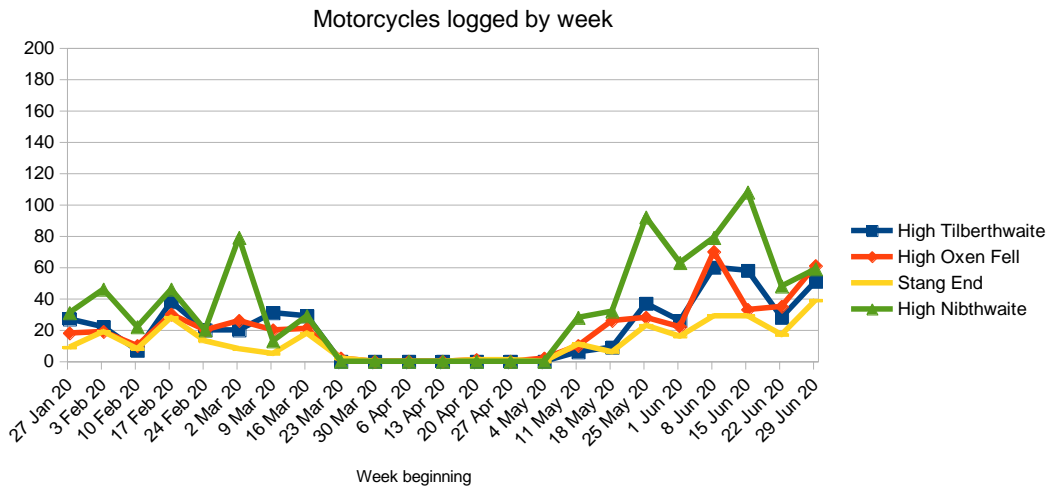
The Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) and partners such as Cumbria Tourism asked people not to 'rush back to' the Lake District when the restrictions were eased in mid-May, to keep local communities safe.

We now have the figures for motor vehicle use of four sensitive green lanes in the Lake District during the first half of 2020.



The graph covers the period before, during and after lockdown. It is clear that usage bounced back quickly on all 4 tracks and on the High Nibthwaite track to much higher levels than before. The small number of motor vehicles on the High Tilberthwaite track during lockdown were mostly farmers on essential travel.

The graph below shows motor cycles only rather than total motor vehicles. Comparison with the total motor vehicles graph indicates that motor cycles were the main contributors to the increase in motor vehicle use on the High Nibthwaite, High Oxen Fell and High Tilberthwaite green lanes, compared with levels before lockdown.



The

evidence from these four sensitive green lanes is that the LDNPA's request not to rush back to the Lake District in May 2020, when travel restrictions were relaxed, was ignored by recreational motor vehicle users. **This rush back, and subsequent recreational motor vehicle use in June 2020 has resulted in greater numbers on three of the lanes than before lockdown, and to anti-social and illegal activity on Bethacar Moor, in Grizedale Forest and in the Stang End area.**

A National Park for everyone – but not for everything

'National Parks were created in part to provide a healing space, both mentally and physically, for the many who had given so much to protect our country during the Second World War. They were meant for everybody.' *Glover Landscapes Review, 2019*

As the Covid crisis has made even clearer, National Parks have become a kind of 'Natural Health Service'. In the Lake District it is the unique landscape with its beauty and tranquillity that provides 'important opportunities for spiritual refreshment: a release from the pressures of modern day life and a contrast to the noise and bustle experienced elsewhere.' *LDNPA Management Plan 2015-2020*

But right from the start it was clear that this does not mean that everything should be allowed. As the official guide to the Lake District put it in 1969:

'There are many sports and activities, in themselves perfectly respectable and even estimable, which should be either prohibited or severely limited in the Lake District; one such is the motor cycle 'scramble' in the fell-dales; another is the use of fast motor boats on any but the very largest lakes. In every case the criterion must be that of good manners or 'good neighbourliness', does the activity interfere with the prime purpose of the National Park, which is the enjoyment of natural beauty?'

And the same guide, almost 20 years later, in 1987:

"Freedom is the essence of countryside recreation: but the individual's share has to be limited to the extent that he will not be a nuisance to others."

Activities that degrade the essential characteristics of the National Park, in particular its beauty and tranquillity, should not be allowed: they would undermine what people value most.

In the past the National Park Authority has recognised this principle, for instance by restricting speed boats on Windermere (2000) and regulating the use of off-road motor vehicles on Gatescarth Pass (2004). Since then off-roading has increased massively, which means that the LDNPA should constantly monitor the effect of this activity on the environment and on other people. We should be able to expect the same kind of logic from the LDNPA as, say, from the Peak District National Park Authority. **The PDNPA gave these as reasons for TRO banning recreational motor vehicles on a route known as Washgate:**

'National Parks were designated on grounds of their scenic value and recreational opportunities.

The route is not only a means to access special qualities but also a valued part of those special qualities. The physical and historic nature of the track and its setting in the landscape along with natural and cultural heritage features adds to the experience of using the route. The route also gives the opportunity for quiet enjoyment and to experience tranquillity, one of the special qualities that people value most about the Peak District National Park.

Noise from motorbikes in particular can carry over large distances Evidence is available to show that environmental damage is occurring as a result of motor vehicle recreation, both directly and indirectly. The impacts on the natural beauty of the National Park, and on its special qualities, are not just confined to the linear route and its character but also affect the wider environment.

This impact and the anticipation of the presence of motorised users can detract from the experience and enjoyment by other users. Section 5 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, covering the purpose of understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks, suggests a focus on quiet outdoor countryside recreation associated with the wide open spaces, wildness and tranquillity to be found within the National Park. (Defra 2007)

The definition of natural beauty recognises that England has a landscape that is formed through the interaction of man-made and natural processes. It includes the wildlife and cultural heritage of an area as well as its natural features.

Tranquillity is more than simply noise; it includes the landscape setting, natural sounds and visual intrusion.

The Lake District should not be aiming to become the least protected National Park, where environmentally harmful and anti-social activities are tolerated - with the excuse that otherwise certain groups would be excluded. They are not – as long as they pursue activities that do not degrade the Lake District.

Attracting visitors from underrepresented groups should not be done by changing the landscape, but through outreach programmes such as the successful MOSAIC scheme used in other National Parks.

Cumbria - a pilot area for landscape recovery

The government has chosen Cumbria as one of five areas to pilot landscape and wildlife recovery. Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

“Coronavirus is shining a light on the importance of our natural world, and the positive impact nature can have on our health and well-being.

These first pilots will be a key part of our green recovery and help kick-start the creation of over a million acres of joined up habitats that people can enjoy across the country.”

It is difficult to see how the continued use of green lanes by 4x4 and motorbike enthusiasts in some of the most beautiful areas of the Lake District is compatible with these aims.

More on the [Cumbria County Council website](#).

Ambleside Action for a Future

This group is a network of local residents and businesses working together to mitigate climate and environmental breakdown and build community resilience. In an open letter to the LDNPA, Cumbria County Council, South Lakeland District Council and Tim Farron MP, Ambleside Action for a Future called for a more sustainable, more environmentally-friendly transport policy.

The aim of the Lake District Green Lanes Alliance – to protect our fell tracks against the impact of recreational motor vehicles – is only one aspect of this overall vision, but an important one.

Off-road motor vehicles on green lanes have a direct effect on the landscape and on other people, both visitors and residents. They are also more polluting than ordinary road vehicles.

South Lakeland District Council's (SLDC) Climate Conversation

The LDGLA took part in an online Climate Conversation organised by South Lakeland District Council. Cllr Dyan Jones, portfolio holder for the climate emergency and localism, said in an interview with the Westmorland Gazette: "SLDC was the first council in Cumbria to declare a climate emergency and we committed then to tackle this issue head-on.

With our new action plan we now have a clear direction and focus on some ambitious but, we believe, achievable targets that we hope will inspire and encourage others.

We want to support community initiatives and work with our residents to think globally and act locally."

All these initiatives illustrate the growing movement towards a greener environment. The protection of our green lanes is an essential part of it.