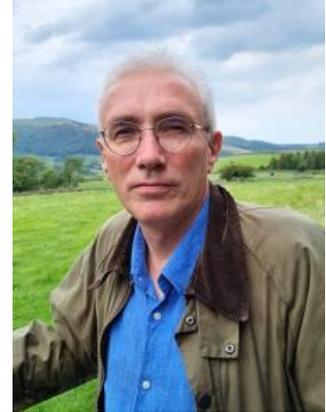


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Lonnings, corpse roads and green lanes

I moved to Cumbria in 2005 and, having always been a keen walker, quickly became interested in the county's network of ancient paths. But even I spotted early on that deciding the difference between a trod and a lonning, a drovers road and a packhorse trail, a corpse road and a church path, a green lane and a footpath was impossible. There's no helpful dictionary definitions and what one village calls a lonning, another calls a lane. And the definitions also change over time. At the start of the 20th Century we had tramps and meanderings but you don't hear so much about them now.



Lonnings were the first type of path that attracted my attention. Lonning is essentially just a dialect term for 'lane' but in Cumbria most people seem to accept a lonning is a term for a low-level track about a mile long, sometimes but not always leading to a farm. This may be because one suggested origin of the term is from an old word 'loan', meaning 'the quiet place by the farm' where villagers bought milk, eggs etc - so the path to the loan became the lonning. Many lonnings have specific names: Bluebottle Lonning, Dynamite Lonning, Boggle Lonning, Lucy Gray Lonning, Miry Lonning etc. Only a handful are named as such on OS maps. These are usually local names. And they vary from being very narrow trods to tracks on which farm vehicles often travel (and on occasion have developed into tarmacked roads).

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For the most part they are quiet country paths crammed full with wildlife. Walking on Tannery Lonning at Caldbeck my bird identification app, Merlin, picked up 12 different species of birds in just 90 seconds. When we are driving everything to the edge of extinction, it seems lonnings are the 'edges' where wildlife is hiding out.

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I have seen some of these lonnings slowly changing for better or worse. Billy Watson Lonning at Harrington is at least 200 years old but is slowly being nibbled away at by development. I've seen some 'grow' into tracks or even roads. And I have seen a road (Wardle Lonning at Lowca) return from being a busy tarmacked road into a grassy lonning, thanks to the Distington

bypass cutting the road in half. With no traffic travelling on it any more, Mother Nature has been quick to reclaim it. And I've also seen lonnings become hedgerows through lack of use. Squeezy Gut Lonning at Hallsenna, near Gosforth did, in living memory, have cattle driven down it daily. It is now so overgrown, it is impassable. But I'm OK with that. I take a longterm view. If man isn't using a path, then Mother Nature should claim it back.



My map of lonnings can be found [here](#). It shows only named lonnings. Since lonning is just a dialect term for 'lane' then every lane in Cumbria is technically a lonning. But you might enjoy exploring some of the curiously-named ones. You'll notice most are in the north and west of the county. That may be because lonning was more of a Cumberland than a Westmorland term. It might be just because I live in Whitehaven and have found

it easier to research lonnings in my part of the world.

So should motorised vehicles use green lanes? My instinct says no, and I hope the Lake District National Park Authority will protect at least the most fragile lonnings so that walkers and cyclists can enjoy them without being disturbed by hobby motorists.