

# Newsletter 4 December 2020

**Lake District Green Lanes Alliance**  
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## **2020: the year of Covid and new off-road peaks**

Any hopes that the coronavirus lockdown would bring a change in attitudes and a new determination to protect the World Heritage Site quickly evaporated: as the graphs below show, levels of off-road traffic reached new peaks on the three green lanes for which we have official data.

Traffic volumes on the track from High Nibthwaite to Parkamoor on the eastern side of Coniston Water are particularly troubling. Although in 2007 there were fewer 4x4s and motorbikes here than at High Tilberthwaite, by this year their number had more than tripled. Just in one year both High Oxenfell and High Tilberthwaite have also seen a sharp rise in traffic (over 30%).

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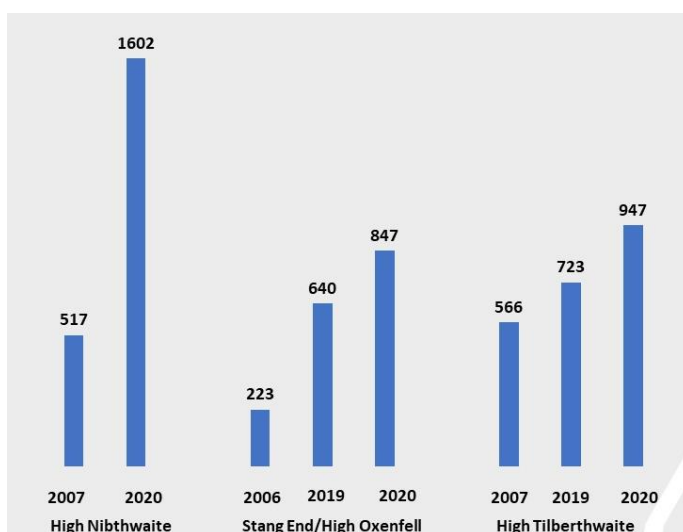
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**[Download our leaflet here](#)**

**Vehicle numbers at High Nibthwaite\*, High Oxenfell and High Tiberthwaite (quarter ending 30 Sep)**  
 \*no 2019 data available for High Nibthwaite



## LDNPA Restructuring

In November the LDNPA announced a restructuring of the Authority in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Of interest for anybody concerned about the future of green lanes is the merger of strategy and park management services. The LDNPA’s press release says the intention is to “create a new, more efficiently aligned operation on the ground. The new service will provide specialist expertise to look after the National Park’s 3000km rights of ways, patrol the largest lakes and landholdings, deliver improved access and support the Park’s visitors and communities.”

Green lanes as part of a wider environmental strategy? How else to interpret what Richard Leafe, the CEO has to say about the National Park’s new direction: “a sharper focus on climate change, ambitious scale nature recovery, supporting the future of farming and sustainable smarter travel.”

## Mary Shaw: Bletchley Girl and green lanes advocate

Mary Shaw, who died at the age of 98 in July this year, loved Little Langdale where she lived for many years. Where else could you have so many beautiful walks in such amazing surroundings right on your doorstep? About the walk to Elterwater she wrote in a Langdale Valley Newsletter in 2000:

“The surroundings are visually pleasing, with lichen-encrusted stone walls, long-abandoned slate quarries, now colonised by an abundance of variegated ferns. There are wooded slopes, flower filled meadows and upon attaining the crest of the hill, one sees the backdrop of the mountains surrounding Little Langdale.

There are no noxious car fumes along the whole length of this walk, just the pure fresh air with a hint of blossom of honeysuckle in season. The rare commodity of silence is ever present, broken only by birdsong or the rustling of leaves in the wind.”

She was passionate about this little corner of the Lake District and wanted to do everything she could to protect it. In 2000 she noticed signs going up on her beloved tracks, announcing that they now belonged to a Hierarchy of Trail routes and could be used by motor vehicles. To Mary

Shaw's great disappointment, the scheme had been agreed by the Lake District National Park, although the only people who could benefit from it were the off-road motorists.



*Mary Shaw with the Wetherlam horseshoe in the background*

*all National Parks in England and Wales ...in calling on Government to prohibit recreational vehicle use of unsealed roads."*

Together with other residents and the Langdales Society, Mary warned that this would be seen as an invitation by off-road motorists, both private and commercial, a view which was shared by the Cumbrian Association of Local Councils and which, unfortunately, turned out to be true.

When she wrote to the LDNPA, she must have been encouraged by the response. The National Park Officer, Paul Tiplady, assured her in a letter in September 2000:

*"The National Park Authority is ... supporting the umbrella organisation for*

In a leaflet the LDNPA said in 2002 that green lane driving was incompatible with National Park purposes. Mary Shaw wholeheartedly agreed: during the war Mary had worked at Bletchley Park, and realised the value of National Parks for a nation consumed by the war effort. These were precious places where nature could comfort and heal.

So when in 2006 Government did bring in legislation that made it possible for National Parks to ban non-essential motor vehicles on green lanes, Mary Shaw must have breathed a sigh of relief. This is what campaigners in the Langdales, the Ramblers, the Friends of the Lake District, had been waiting for.

But the LDNPA had other ideas. Whereas in the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District National Park Authorities decided to take stock of their green lanes and ban motor vehicles on their most vulnerable tracks, the LDNPA insisted on consensus management – consensus between the National Park and off-road motorists. It was as if the good ship LDNPA had been taken over by pirates and was now under their command. Mary Shaw would have been horrified by the Authority's Assessment Report published in 2019. It defended the use of the Tilberthwaite and Oxenfell tracks by 4x4s and motorbikes with the most specious of arguments. This report then became the justification for the Rights of Way Committee not to consult about a ban.

**“***There won't be much chance to admire the scenery as walkers scuttle into the ditches to make way for the four-wheel drives, nor will the scent of the country air compete with diesel fumes. It will be a strong bird indeed which make its notes heard above the revving of motorbikes.*

*Mary Shaw*

In September 2000 Mary Shaw told the Westmorland Gazette: "I am nearly 80 years old. This is not for me, it is about future generations." That a generation later the conservation battle has still not been won tells us something about the National Park's failure to fulfil its primary duty: the protection of this very special landscape.

## Breast High Road – a scenic track and off-road destination

Breast High Road is a byway open to all traffic (BOAT) in the area which was added to the Lake District National Park in 2016. It runs for 3.76km from the A6 in the valley of Borrow Beck to the valley of Bretherdale through three parishes, Whinfell, Tebay and Orton.



In 1895 it was described as a “road that will be seldom used, except occasionally, by a cattle jobber making for Bretherdale Head”. Today the cattle jobbers have been replaced by recreational 4x4s and motorbikes, with dire consequences. The photo shows part of the track which has become a trench almost 2m deep.

Elsewhere drains have been exposed and broken, which doesn't prevent 4x4s from using

the route.

At the LDNPA meeting on 21 October 2020 Members discussed a proposal for the LDNPA to be the accountable body for a bid for £325,000 funding to repair Breast High Road, starting in 2021. The bid is to the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

These repairs will be only 9 years after Cumbria County Council repaired the route in 2012. The County Council's 2012 work of surfacing and drainage has not withstood the weather and the weight of motor vehicle traffic. It cost much more (£26,667 per kilometre at 2019 prices) than the work required in 1895 (£295 per kilometre at 2019 prices). The repairs and improvements proposed by LDNPA will be even more expensive (between £72,000 and £107,000 per kilometre).



A bridge and a repaired ford across Borrow Beck would be welcome improvements as the beck is often difficult to cross. But it is more than doubtful if creating a raised route with a drainage ditch on each side (the subsoiling or soil inversion technique proposed by LDNPA) will be more resilient to the weather and to motor vehicle traffic than the surfacing and drainage work done by the County Council has been.

A more detailed description of Breast High Road can be found [on our website](#).

## TROs in the Yorkshire Dales National Park: a stark contrast with the Lake District

The most striking contrast in the approaches taken by the National Park Authorities in the Dales and in the Lakes, is in their interpretations of the statutory purposes governing national parks. The Dales Authority evidently believes that its duties to conserve natural beauty and to promote enjoyment of the Park's special qualities entail a presumption against the use of its green lanes by recreational 4x4s and motorbikes. The Authority knows, however, that it cannot simply prohibit motor vehicles, in one grand sweep: green lanes have to be considered case-by-case. The rights

accorded to vehicle users by highway law may not lightly be set aside, and those rights will be tenaciously defended by vehicle users.

When what became the Natural Environments and Rural Communities Act (NERC) was going through Parliament, the Dales Authority successfully lobbied to have TRO-making powers conferred on national park authorities, and when, in 2006, NERC became law, it lost no time in making use of its new powers, in sharp contrast with the Lakes Authority, which declined to use the self-same powers.

In 2008, ten TROs, prohibiting 4x4s and motorbikes from some of the Park's most beautiful green lanes, came into force. These TROs were the culmination of at least 5 years of background work. The routes had been identified as highly sensitive to the impact of vehicles. The chosen routes were then minutely surveyed. Consultations, initially with groups that had interests in the matter – including the Yorkshire Dales Green Lanes Alliance - and subsequently with the general public, were meticulously carried out. One feature of the background work was an evaluation of the effectiveness of TROs in green lane management programmes. The evaluation also considered responses to a questionnaire, designed by Park officers and conducted by Park Rangers and a team of volunteers. The questionnaire sought to capture the experience of users of green lanes while they were actually on the lanes. For purposes of comparison, some of the selected lanes had rights for vehicles and some did not. (Experimental TROs had been imposed on a sample of lanes.) This meant that an open question such as 'Could anything have improved your experience today?' enabled the surveyors to see if anybody spontaneously mentioned the presence or absence of vehicles. Most respondents who had encountered vehicles or their impact said that their enjoyment had been diminished. Unsurprisingly, vehicle users who responded said that their 4x4s and motorbikes were an essential part of their enjoyment.

Voluminous reports on each of the lanes that had been surveyed were prepared and presented first, to a group composed of representatives of interested groups (eg the Trail Riders Fellowship, English Nature, farmers), then to the Local Access Forum, and finally to the Authority's Access Committee. Ten of the surveyed lanes were considered by the Authority's officers to be in need of permanent TROs, and these orders were duly imposed, following the statutory consultations.

#### Mastiles Lane in the Yorkshire Dales ...



before....  
the introduction of a TRO banning recreational motor vehicles



and after

If a national park authority is not disposed to start the process of consulting interested groups and the general public about the advisability of imposing TROs, or some other form of green lane

management, it is difficult to persuade it that it should. But if, as in the Dales, an Authority believes that recreational vehicles on some, or all, of its green lanes are a serious problem, and that TROs might need to be considered, a properly-conducted, two-stage consultation, is the first, essential step – a step that the Lakes Authority seems determined not to take.

*Michael Bartholomew, chairman, Yorkshire Dales Green Lanes Alliance*

## A view from Istanbul

I am not among the lucky few who can call themselves Lake District locals. In a world of uncertainty, chaos and risk, being a local of such a paradise seems an enviable position. But that's not possible for me, so I have to be satisfied with memories about my visits there while I was doing research at Lancaster University.

When I was a student, I visited the Lake District regularly. I felt lucky to be there in this landscape. It was the pleasure of getting mud on my shoes, being showered by the rain, hearing nothing but the wind, water, and maybe people from afar. I travelled by train and within the national park took a bus between places. My favourite season was late autumn or winter, due to the varied colours of trees and plants and more isolation and fewer people around. Also, the colder it gets the better for me. This really was experiencing the outdoors, by walking, and hiking, in stark contrast with my everyday life.

“*To drive on these green lanes in 4x4s and trail motorbikes feels like a sacrilege to me.*”

Usually I just went for simple walks and that is when I discovered green lanes, a beautiful and functional part of the Lake District's cultural heritage. What could be more evocative than the names “Roman roads”, or “coffin roads”? They transported me back into a Lake District not imaginable if you are sitting in a car or riding a motorbike. This really is palpable history.

Watch dusk fall over the Langdale Pikes in the [latest immersive video](#) by Ben Dickey.



It also made me think of the definition of “adventure”. There are some attempts currently to introduce motorised, high-tech adventure into the Lake District, to make it an “adventure capital”. But this is to misunderstand completely what the Lake District really has to offer: the adventure of green lanes for instance, explored on foot, across some of the most exquisite landscape of Europe; abandoned quarries and copper mines, an axe factory and dry stone walls, looking like mini rivals to the Great Wall of China, in the way they follow the contours of the mountains.

To drive on these green lanes in 4x4s and trail motorbikes feels like a sacrilege to me, like carelessly throwing away one of the most precious things we are left with in these times of ecological disasters and COVID-19. Surely the National Park Authority will listen to UNESCO. Surely it can't let this happen.

*Dr Basak Tanulku, Lancaster University alumna*