

4x4 invasion ‘ruining’ Lake District

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People are petitioning for 4x4s to be banned on certain routesALAMY

Recreational off-road vehicles could be banned from dozens of farm tracks in the Lake District after the national park authority was criticised by a world heritage body for allowing them to destroy the tranquillity of the area.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites, which advises Unesco on protecting world heritage sites, said that the huge increase in the vehicles was damaging the “aesthetic and historic qualities” of the landscape.

In a report on the issue, the body was scathing about the Lake District National Park Authority’s response to complaints about 4x4s. It accused the authority of underplaying the disturbance to the Lake District, which was declared a world heritage site in 2017.

It suggested that too much focus had gone into the commercial benefits of allowing companies to offer tourists trips to remote beauty spots in 4x4s.

The authority responded to the report by saying that it “greatly respected” the international body and would consider its call for a blanket ban on 4x4s on tracks known as green lanes.

The report quoted figures from farmers who said that the number of 4x4s travelling between [High Tilberthwaite](#) and Langdale, in an area once owned by the author and conservationist Beatrix Potter, had increased from 30 a month in 2004 to up to 400 a month in 2017.

“The constant use of these green roads is leading to considerable surface erosion,” the report said. “Of much more concern is the impact of the noise of these vehicles and the resulting disturbance they inflict on tenant farmers and overall on the quiet enjoyment of residents and visitors, as well as the ability of the landscape to reflect its aesthetic and historic qualities.”

The national park authority investigated the impact of 4x4s after previous complaints but concluded that the physical damage was “negligible”, the disturbance was “localised and temporary” and insisted that there was a legal right to drive motor vehicles on the tracks.

The international body said that the authority had failed to consider fully the impact of 4x4s of the special qualities for which the Lake District gained world heritage status.

The report also said that the authority underestimated the impact of 4x4s on the legacy of Beatrix Potter, who helped to preserve the Lake District and left 4,000 acres of land to the National Trust. The authority’s assessment described the impact of 4x4s on Potter’s legacy as negligible.

The report recommended that the park authority should “consider the banning of the use of 4x4 vehicles on green roads within the world heritage property. It is understood that there is already a tool in place in the form of a TRO [traffic regulation order] that is precisely tailored to this need.”

The orders had already been used effectively in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, which had imposed them on 13 routes to restrict the vehicles, the report pointed out.

More than 300,000 people have signed a petition calling for a 4x4 ban on two routes near Little Langdale, north of Coniston Water. The authority is due to consider banning the vehicles on these routes at a meeting in October.

Stephen Ratcliffe, the Lake District National Park’s director of sustainable development, said the request for a blanket ban “across the Lake District National Park as part of our management plan review, which has recently commenced” would be considered.

He added: “Legal intervention to restrict vehicles on green roads is possible through the National Park Authority’s powers to create a traffic regulation order; however, applying TROs is a last resort for us, following guidance from government.

“Any challenge to the law needs to be thoroughly evidence-based, examining various types and levels of use and various impacts, not just opinions or perceptions.”