

# Opinion & Community

## Dismayed by 4x4 convoys

THE Podium article by Richard Leafe (November 1, 'All Interests have to be taken into account') suggested that public concern was restricted to one particular track from Tilberthwaite to Little Langdale. The reality is that many of us watch with dismay the daily convoys of 4x4s destroying these ancient lanes right across the national park.

Our local green lane is just one of many. Running from Nibthwaite to Parkmoor, there are sometimes three or four large convoys of 'adventure' vehicles every day, ploughing up this route. These 'roads' that Mr Leafe refers to are part of the archaeology of the landscape, having woven farms and communities together over hundreds of years. They should be treasured and protected. They were designated as 'roads' when the heaviest imprints were left by horse and cart, or later, by occasional farm vehicles.

Considerable funds must have been allocated to the repair of the Tilberthwaite track; funds that will not be coming from the pockets of those off-road companies who build their lucrative businesses upon the broken slate land drains and gouged bedrock of these unique networks.

If the LDNPA is custodian, as the article states, then there is a heavy responsibility to protect for future generations. And that should mean being wise and discriminating about different users and whether this World Heritage site is a suitable place for some activities.

Brenda Fishwick  
Nibthwaite

## Comments ignore duty

RICHARD Leafe's article about the Tilberthwaite track is disingenuous. It ignores the primary statutory duty of all national park authorities, which is to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage'.

He talks only about damage to the surface of the Tilberthwaite track.

'Offroading' on this route is on such a scale that it has destroyed not just the surface but the special qualities of the area. Other park authorities faced with this problem have not hesitated to use Traffic Regulation Orders to exclude all types of recreational motor vehicle. They use legal grounds available to them under the 1984 Road Traffic Act which have nothing to do with the state of the surface,

## Unitary authority issues have not gone away

THE idea of whittling down Cumbria's two-tier system of local government to just one or two unitary authorities was last considered seriously a decade ago.

The preferred route then was creating two authorities to replace the one county and seven district councils. However, the proposal floundered because councillors could not agree on how the county should be divided - either on a north-south or east-west split.

Today, the subject is being revisited by local politicians - but the divisions from ten years ago won't have gone away.

One factor, however, may make a crucial difference. When abolish-

### The Westmorland Gazette

#### COMMENT

ing the district councils was first proposed, local government was reasonably well funded after years of relative Labour largesse. The status quo was an easy option. Today, authorities have seen the support from central government drastically cut and, therefore, need to urgently seek ways to balance budgets.

Counties such as an Oxfordshire, Dorset, Northamptonshire have all tabled proposals for a unitary

switch.

In Cumbria's case, it is suggested that having a single unitary authority would save almost £30m a year. If the county was to be split into two unitary areas the savings would only be half that, but still a useful sum if used for frontline services.

Among the benefits being suggested by the county council is increased efficiency of public services, simplification of the public service map for Cumbria and the county having a single voice to attract funding and investment into the county.

That said, there are major stumbling blocks to overcome if such a

huge reorganisation were to take place, not least as Cumbria has to provide services across the third largest county in England.

In this regard the north-south, east-west problems have not gone away. This matters because Cumbria is also one of the country's least populated counties which drives up the costs of delivering services to remote and often mountainous areas.

The Government criteria on reorganisation specifies that the idea must 'command a good deal of local support'. In that case, perhaps the best way forward would be to ultimately put the various options to a county-wide referendum.

namely 'preserving or improving the amenities of the area through which the road runs' and 'conserving or enhancing the natural beauty of the area'.

The Lake District National Park Authority should be doing the same.

Patricia Stubbs  
Sheffield and Chapel Stile

## Park faces a conundrum

RICHARD Leafe's Podium is especially valuable because it encapsulates the administrative policy, practice and philosophy that has determined the way the Lake District National Park Authority has run the national park for more than 30 years.

The headline captured it just as neatly - 'All interests have to be taken into account'.

Mr Leafe tells us that the Lake District is a 'special place'.

The conundrum, then for the LDNPA, is to keep the national park special while at the same time maintaining the view that all interests must be taken into account and are to be given the same administrative weight.

The act of national discrimination which declared the Lake District to be special and the practice of continuing sensitive discernment and discrimination this national act has entailed is thus at odds with current practice. Mr Leafe is managing a glaring contradiction - or rather several glaring contradictions.

For example, in what sense is making it virtually impossible for a local family to stay farming Herdwicks at High Tilberthwaite a contribution to keeping the Lake District 'special'?

Herdwick hill farming is the major contributor to that specialness. In what way does 4x4 activity contribute to the 'enjoyment and understanding' of the Lake

District's 'special qualities' for which Mr Leafe is a fervent evangelist?

Mr Leafe speaks of access by a range of different users but hill farming is not merely another 'use' to be set alongside driving a vehicle around for fun.

Peter Wood  
Stainton, Penrith

## Time to grasp the nettle

I WAS interested to read Richard Leafe's article on the Lake District National Park Authority's ways of balancing its primary purposes of protecting the landscape while the enjoyment of its special qualities by residents and visitors alike.

He used the recent controversy over what is commonly known as a 'green lane' at Tilberthwaite as an example. As he points out, this route is part of the highways network and, technically, is an 'unsealed Unclassified Country Road', one of many in the Lake District. In the late 1990s, more than 100 were identified and surveyed in the national park.

In 2011, Colton Parish Council initiated a project working with Cumbria County Council, the LDNPA and others, using two of the eight green lanes in the parish as the basis of a pilot study to identify the costs and implications of repair. One aspect of this was to be the costs of maintenance once repairs had been completed.

Unfortunately, the county council withdrew its support after only one route had been repaired and no budget was identified to carry out monitoring and maintenance. Readers will not be surprised to hear that continuing vehicle use, in combination with the usual weather conditions and subsequent flash-flooding, have now reduced much of the track to its earlier poor condition. What a waste of

money!

The message here is that for all the fanfare of the successful repair of the Tilberthwaite road, this will all be thrown away unless a programme of future maintenance is costed and funding set aside. And it is not just the high profile routes that need attention. If landowners and farmers are to continue to have reasonable access to their fields and stock, then something has to be done to repair and maintain all of these routes.

What happens if nothing is done? In terms of the causes of erosion and subsequent damage, the perceived wisdom is that over-use by vehicles leads to opening of the surface and that torrents of water finish the job.

So, how to tackle over-use? Surely access which is essential for sustaining traditional agricultural livelihoods should take the ethical high ground over non-essential recreational traffic which contributes nothing to our cultural landscape.

As Richard Leafe points out, Traffic Regulation Orders can be used to restrict use and the LDNPA has the power to bring these in. However, the authority has been reluctant to take this course of action for reasons that are unclear.

Come on LDNPA, grasp the nettle before these important routes are lost forever.

Colin Barr  
Ulverston  
(Ex-chairman, Colton Parish Council)

## Peace is issue

REGARDING Richard Leafe's comments on repairing the tracks at Tilberthwaite - can he now concentrate on the main point at issue, that is the interruption of peaceful walks in lovely scenery by noisy and intrusive 4x4s?

David and Stella Collard  
Usk, Monmouthshire

## TROs work, so use them

RICHARD Leafe's Podium article says the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) will only consider a traffic regulation order (TRO) on the green lane between High Tilberthwaite and Little Langdale to stop off-road motorbikes and 4x4s using the track 'in extreme circumstances'.

LDNPA (together with other national park authorities) asked the Government for powers to make TROs on green lanes in 2005.

The authority said it had a significant problem with some green lanes, for example in the Langdales, being regularly used and that 'thousands of off-road vehicle drivers [were] coming to the Lakes each year'.

The Government responded by giving park authorities the powers to make TROs in 2007, advising them that levels of off-road use which might be acceptable elsewhere would be inappropriate in the parks and incompatible with their purposes.

But since then, LDNPA has not even tried to use the powers it thought were needed in 2005 - despite increasing numbers of off-road motor vehicles using this track.

Mr Leafe hopes that the repaired surface will be less appealing to off-rovers. However, he does not seem to realise that most people think that any recreational motor vehicle use of green lanes is incompatible with LDNPA's purposes of conserving and enhancing natural beauty and the amenity of quiet recreation for residents and visitors.

Nor does LDNPA seem prepared to learn from the practice of Peak District and Yorkshire Dales park authorities, which have both made several successful TROs, some on similar stoned tracks, since 2007.

For example, LDNPA could use the three months from

this November to January 2019, while the track remains closed by a temporary TRO to recreational motor vehicles for the repairs to bind and settle, to monitor compliance with the TRO, and survey the views of walkers, horse riders and cyclists using the route, for comparison with the user surveys it did over the summer when off-rovers were also using the route.

Evidence from elsewhere is that TROs work in improving the experience of non-motorised use, allowing the surface condition of green lanes to be maintained or improved; they are not just for use in 'in extreme circumstances'.

Diana Mallinson  
Settle

## Transformed in a lifetime

THE track from High Nibthwaite to Parkmoor may well have been a medieval route for herders and those gathering materials for local small scale industry; but however long ago it was established, in a few short decades it has been totally altered, and made virtually impassable for many legitimate users.

In my lifetime, it has been dramatically transformed by wheeled vehicles of a type for which it was never suitable.

First came the scrambling motorcycles and then the 4x4 vehicles 'on safari' in groups or singly have eroded the surface, exposed the underlying rock, and widened the track to as much as 10 times its original width.

While accepting that one user type may not have more rights than another to use a public road, it must also be accepted that one user type does not have the right to make the route impassable and dangerous for other user types.

Joanna Eley  
High Nibthwaite