

# Ban 4x4s from Lake District, UN urged

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High Tilberthwaite farm was once owned by Beatrix Potter; campaigners say 4x4s have ruined the landscape

To Alfred Wainwright, the greatest connoisseur of walking in the Lake District, a small patch of land just north of Coniston Water was perhaps “the loveliest in Lakeland”.

Today that same square mile, once owned by Beatrix Potter, is at the centre of a complaint to the United Nations over claims that the national park is violating its status as a world heritage site by failing to crack down on cavalcades of 4x4s which clamber up and down the fells.



Campaigners said that the cars had devastated farm tracks, stripping back tons of soil to expose the bedrock beneath, and leaving them largely impassable to essential farm vehicles. The drivers insist that they have every right to explore the park, like hikers and mountain bikers, as long as they stick to 78 miles of so-called “green lanes”.

Save the Lake District, a campaign group, has written to the UN’s cultural organisation, Unesco, accusing the national park authority of neglecting its responsibility to protect and conserve. “Through its current management practice . . . the Lake District National Park Authority contributes to the destruction of the Lake District’s unique agro-pastoral landscape,” the letter said. The complaint, backed by a petition of more than 6,000 signatures, is focused on two tracks near High Tilberthwaite farm, which Potter, the children’s author, bought in 1929 and was later acquired by the National Trust.

“The number of 4x4s using the road has increased terrifically, causing massive erosion to the road and it has become virtually impassable with a quad and trailer,” Dorothy Wilkinson, whose family have farmed High Tilberthwaite since 1960, said. “We have given up the tenancy and will leave in November after the family have farmed here for 58 years. The road is a major factor in our decision to leave.”

Nick Fieldhouse, whose off-roading company Kankku regularly sends clients through the Wilkinsons’ farm, dismissed the complaints. He said that the couple were leaving because they could no longer make money from “counting sheep”. “Everything does damage,” he said, when asked about the impact of his cars. He added that his company was willing to repair the track through High Tilberthwaite but was not allowed to. He blamed the council for not doing more. “In the same way you can’t go out and repair the M6, we can’t go out and repair that lane,” he said.

Campaigners said that the park had encouraged 4x4s by posting notices on the tracks they were allowed to use.

“It’s scandalous that in such a short time that valley has been transformed from a place of peace and quiet and beauty to a sort of funfair,” Dame Jinty Nelson, a medieval historian, whose family have had a cottage in the area for more than 60 years, said. “People in these heavy duty jeeps damage the path terribly, screaming and shouting as if they were on the Big Dipper in Blackpool.” Lord Clark of Windermere, a former Labour MP and chairman of the Forestry Commission, said that the national park was biased towards businesses at the cost of conservation. “The bottom line is these 4x4s make a mess of the green lanes and they make life very difficult for the farmers,” he said.

Mark Eccles, head of management at the park authority, said it would be “preferable if people did not take vehicles on these routes” but there were no plans to restrict the traffic. He said off-roading was legal and there was no breach of the world heritage rules.

Unesco said that it had referred the complaint to its London office, which said the letter had been passed to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. A department spokeswoman said: “We are aware of this issue and are working with the Lake District National Park Authority to ensure the continued protection of the world heritage site.”

The national park was granted world heritage status in July last year.