

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

Lake District Green Lanes Alliance

www.ldgla.org

contact@ldgla.org



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In this issue:

UNESCO: new concerns about green lanes p. 1

Learning from the Peak District? p.4

Invasive Pandas p.5

Green lanes and water pollution p.6

George Cubiss on 70 years of walking in the Lakes p. 8

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UNESCO: raises new concerns about green lane motoring

The Lake District National Park Authority needs to look again at green lane motoring - so says UNESCO in its latest State of Conservation report, now formally adopted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at its meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia:

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“The recognised capacity of this cultural landscape ‘to uplift imagination, creativity, and spirit’ can only be sustained if tranquillity and quietness remain a trait of the property.”

Essential qualities under threat

UNESCO’s view is clear: the LDNPA should apply Traffic Regulation Orders to ban motor vehicles from ‘highly sensitive and emblematic valleys and places’. And it should “develop a comprehensive regulatory policy focused on safeguarding the attributes of OUV [Outstanding Universal Value].”

In UNESCO’s opinion the LDNPA’s current approach is uneven and “**does not appear to be based on a clear understanding of OUV-based visitor management.**”

This is a pretty alarming conclusion: the Outstanding Universal Value is what makes the Lake District a World Heritage Site. To a large extent it overlaps with the special qualities of the National Park – such as ‘quiet enjoyment’ or ‘a model for protecting cultural landscapes’.

Artistic tendencies

And you can see why UNESCO is so critical. When assessing the impact of motor vehicles on sense of place and the inspirational dimension of the landscape, the LDNPA just says: nothing to see here. To quote the assessment report on the Tilberthwaite and Oxenfell routes, there is no evidence that

“modern artists, authors, poets, photographers, or others with artistic tendencies are being prevented from gaining inspiration from this landscape because of the relatively small presence of vehicles on these two roads.”

But hold on: what about the rest of us, the majority of visitors and residents who wouldn’t claim any particular artistic talents for themselves; do we not have a right to be uplifted and inspired by this landscape? Because if we do, the LDNPA has collected plenty of evidence in its own surveys that motor vehicles produce exactly the kind of impact described by UNESCO: they erode the sense of place and the connection with the landscape. The

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

LDNPA published this evidence in an appendix to the same assessment report and then proceeded to do exactly nothing about it.

Revisiting the evidence

Over 600 impact statements, evaluated by an environmental psychologist, paint an unequivocal picture of the detrimental effects of motor vehicles on green lanes. Motor vehicles on fell and forest tracks

- **diminish beauty and tranquillity**
- **introduce stresses from city life**
- **disrupt the connection with nature**
- **threaten the cultural heritage**
- **introduce a sense of physical danger and a**
- **feeling of apprehension before and while walking the route**
- **cause harm to fauna and flora**

One of the hundreds of impact statements the LDNPA has collected:

“All motorised vehicles using this area cause noise, erosion and intimidate other users if only because of their size and speed. They shatter the peace of the area, scare wildlife and essentially destroy the very ethos we visit this area for. They damage the area and do not belong there.”

What now? UNESCO urges the State Party (i.e. the LDNPA) to

“harness the already available instruments to prevent vehicular access to unsealed roads in highly sensitive and emblematic valleys, and also requests the State Party to ensure as a matter of urgency that systematic monitoring is carried out on all unsealed roads open to vehicular access to assess the status of this activity and its impacts on the tangible and

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

intangible attributes of the property, as a basis for a comprehensive regulatory policy focused on safeguarding the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).”

Best practice: a Peak District Decision notice

All National Parks have one top priority: the conservation of natural beauty. So it's useful to look at the principles used by other National Parks for their Traffic Regulation Orders. One example is the [Traffic Regulation Order on the Washgate green lane](#) in the Peak District National Park. It becomes clear pretty quickly that all these arguments could and should be also used to introduce TROs on some of the worst affected green lanes in the Lake District.

Special qualities

The route is not only a means to access special qualities but also a valued part of those special qualities. The physical and historic nature of the track and its setting in the landscape along with natural and cultural heritage features adds to the experience of using the route.

Tranquillity

The route also gives the opportunity for quiet enjoyment and to experience tranquillity, one of the special qualities that people value most about the Peak District National Park. Noise from motorbikes in particular can carry over large distances.



The order is not being made on the grounds of preventing damage to the route but instead for reasons relating to amenity and conservation.

Peak District National Park Authority

Tranquillity is more than simply noise; it includes the landscape setting, natural sounds and visual intrusion.

Environmental damage

Evidence is available to show that environmental damage is occurring as a result of motor vehicle recreation, both directly and indirectly. The impacts on the natural beauty of the National Park, and on its special qualities, are

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

not just confined to the linear route and its character but also affect the wider environment.

Anticipation of the presence of motor vehicles

This impact and the anticipation of the presence of motorised users can detract from the experience and enjoyment by other users.

Natural beauty

*Section 5 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, covering the purpose of understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks, suggests a focus on **quiet outdoor countryside recreation** associated with the wide open spaces, wildness and tranquillity to be found within the National Park. (Defra 2007)*

And as the Peak District National Park Authority emphasises -

*“The order is not being made on the grounds of preventing damage to the route but instead for reasons relating to **amenity and conservation.**”*

Which is precisely what UNESCO is asking for in the Lake District.

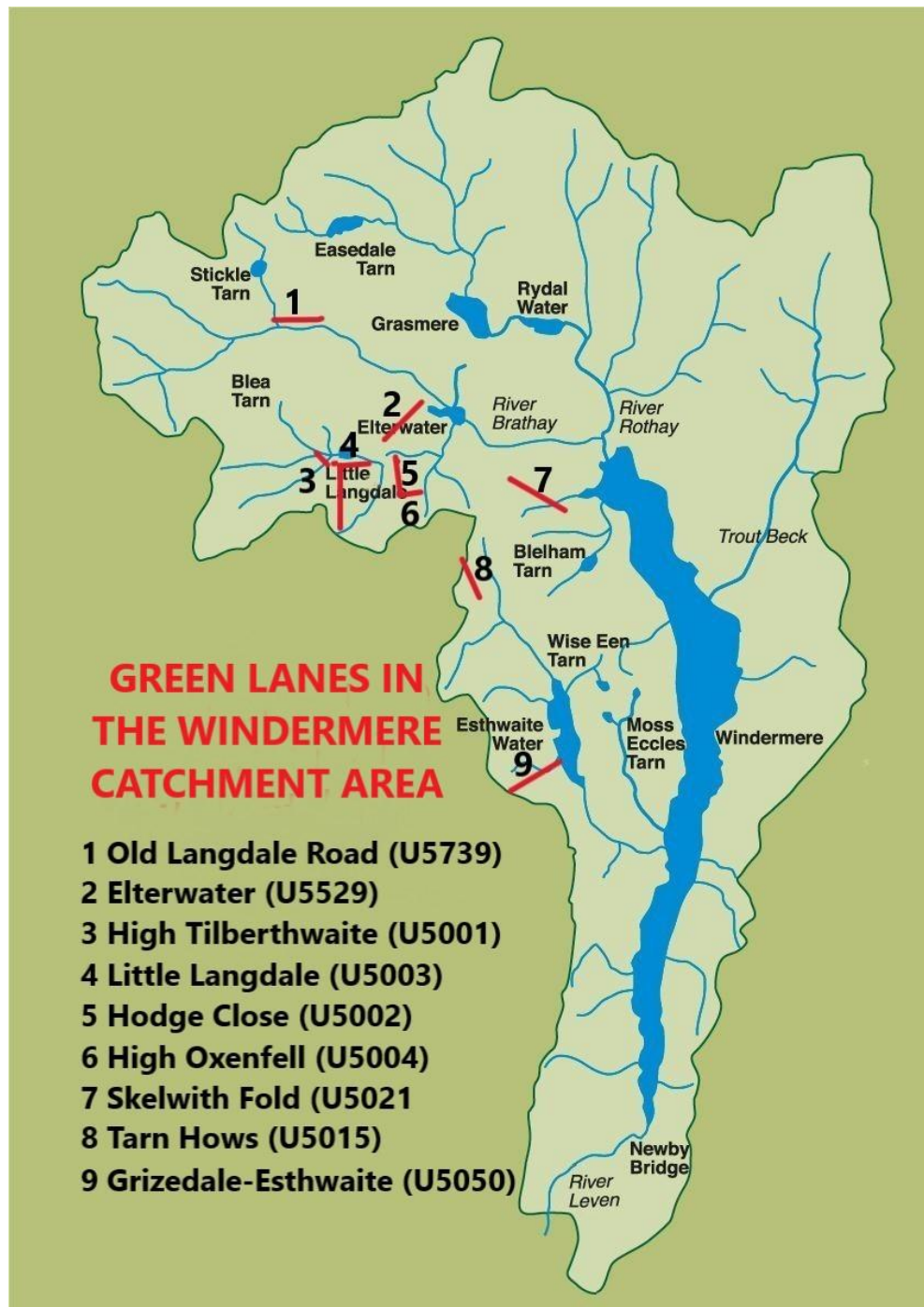
They came to conquer the Lake District

A quick search on Youtube about off-road driving in the Lake District produces rich results – both about the intrusive, destructive nature of green lane motoring and about the mindset of drivers. This [video](#) promoting the Fiat Panda as an off-road vehicle shows what happens when the National Park Authority turns a blind eye.



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Green lane motoring and water pollution: the example of Windermere



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GREEN LANES and WATER POLLUTION - WHY WE NEED ACTION

There is solid scientific evidence that off-road vehicles on unsealed roads produce

- erosion
- persistent loss of vegetation cover
- increased sediment deposits, altering downstream water quality and aquatic habitats

This means that silt and sediment are likely to end up in becks and rivers, and ultimately in our lakes such as Windermere.

You can read more in our [summary of scientific evidence](#).

For this reason alone, and in line with the precautionary principle in environmental protection, these green lanes should not be used by recreational motor vehicles.



We need to restore and revitalise the natural environment at a landscape-scale across the Windermere catchment; putting back habitats and wildlife from the top of the Langdale Pikes to Fell Foot in the South Basin."

Stephen Trotter, CEO, Cumbria Wildlife Trust

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Tilberthwaite on a motorbike? We're not doing that again!



At the age of 84 George Cubiss is still an enthusiastic Rambler, guiding walkers on tours through the Lake District.

In the 1950s he was working as an engineer in the steelworks in Barrow. He talks about the pioneering role of Barrow in steel manufacture and what the Lake District meant for the steel and shipyard workers in those days. He also remembers a lesson Tilberthwaite taught him.

You must have seen huge changes in the way people are visiting the Lake District and in the number of visitors. How did you get to the Lakes in those days?

At first I went on the train, to Coniston. The station was just up above the village. The station was originally built for bringing slate and ore down into Barrow, and then eventually they used it for passengers. It was like a new lifestyle, really, a couple of hundred people getting into Coniston, and people got off the train, everyone went off walking their own way. You never saw anyone again until they went back to the train.

They were probably mostly shipyard and steel workers. There were people with young children, eight to a compartment, it was a nice run round the coast and up through Broughton and into Coniston, a beautiful run. There weren't many executives in those days, there was one at the top and maybe two or three in between. The other 15,000 had a job.

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Barrow was a real hub for steel making in those days. Can you tell us what your job was and what you were working on?

At that time I was working in the steel works on the maintenance. We were building a new pilot plant for what they call continuous casting, trying to invent a new process from the old Victorian Bessemer furnaces. It was the very first continuous casting plant in the world, actually. They could make ingots that were 240 ft long. They were very efficient, and they still use it now, I think.

Who bought all this steel? Was a lot of it exported?

Originally when I was there they made a lot of railway lines in Barrow. In fact if you go to South America, to Chile, they still have Barrow written on the railway lines, and they're still in use, and they're not worn out.



They used to make hundreds of thousands of machetes every year for chopping the sugar cane down.

And at the end of the war there was a lot of scrap steel, they used to bring in the old ex-army stuff and melt it down and reuse it. Some were made into Y-section fencing post that went to Australia. They were very long, maybe 12 foot

long, and a few feet went underground so the rabbits couldn't burrow in underneath. They used to make hundreds of thousands of machetes every year for chopping the sugar cane down, because once they got covered up with sugar it was cheaper to throw it away than clean it. We also made a lot of metal strip, the sort of thing you strap up boxes with. We made thousands of miles of that.

What was the experience of walking in the Lake District like in the 1950s?

There was no such thing as fingerposts or signposts because they had been removed during the war. Because if we'd been invaded you wouldn't have wanted to give them a clue. So you got off the train and you thought, oh, that must be Coniston Old Man up there, and you just walked up it. And in fact, a lot of the machinery was still there, on the



And my wife said, well, we're not doing that again. And that was it. We never did it again. It wasn't the right thing to do.

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

side of the mountain, with the big wire ropes, where they used to take the buckets from the quarries down into the valley at the bottom.

In the first early days it was with friends, and then, when I got slightly older and got married, we used to go on a motorcycle, to Grasmere or Hawkshead, or anywhere and then walk. All around the southern end of the Lakes, normally. Keswick was quite a long way in those days, especially as there was no modern road. In fact if you went 30 or 40 miles, you felt you should service your car before you set off.

We went over the Tilberthwaite track once. It was all grass then, there was no stone, it was a grass, a green road all the way to fell foot. We rolled over it and then we thought, well, that was nice. But then we said, it's not really right to do this, to be riding here. And my wife said, well, we're not doing that again. And that was it. We never did it again. It wasn't the right thing to do. That was around 1962 or so.

Today you have to prepared to meet some kind of off-road vehicle on many green lanes. What was it like all those years ago?

To be truthful, once you left Greenodd which is 10 or 11 miles from Coniston you never saw a vehicle, or a person. The only thing we saw was the milk truck coming back out of the farms. Even the farmers didn't have much machinery in those days. They didn't need it, they didn't plough, not in the Lake District. They kept their sheep.

You're able to judge what the influx of 4x4s and motorbikes has done to the walking experience. What do you think are the main problems?

When we see them we don't like it because we don't feel safe. If you're on a narrow track it's not safe. I don't think they mean any ill-will, they just do what they think is right. But none of it follows the Sandford Principle, does it. *[The Sandford Principle says that if there is a conflict between conservation and enjoyment in a National Park, conservation takes priority. The Sandford Principle became law in the 1995 Environment Act.]*

And of course, perhaps until the mid-90s, the whole landscape got a rest once a year. Holiday makers stopped coming at the end of September, and they didn't start till April. So we got a break from the visitors and the environment

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

got a rest as well. It didn't get the damage it gets now. 365 days a year of wear and tear, that didn't happen until about 25 years ago.

What would you say are the worst areas for motor vehicles on green lanes?

Tilberthwaite, High Nibthwaite and the track at the back of Tarn Hows. I've seen Landrovers stuck there on the rocks. That used to be a grassy track. Now it's stones, and over the years they've added stone chips to level it out.

Tilberthwaite is now no longer a walk, the road at the back of Tarn Hows isn't. And they're creeping in round Oxen Park. We met groups there, not locals, they are a company from Yorkshire.



Those roads were for farmers and quarry workers, but they were really never intended for public use by motor vehicles.

Over the years you see this continual damage. They're all well-meaning, and nobody goes to destroy anything, it's probably a big adventure for them. I can understand it, but if it goes on, we won't have a National Park.

They dig holes with the tyres in the ground, so then even the farmers struggle to get through sometimes. When you take someone on an adventure round, he won't have a clue and be in the wrong gear, so he'll have the wheels spinning.

The other place is a road at the south end of Windermere that goes on to Bethacar. We've seen them stuck there, where they've had to tow each other off. It's that feeling, well, this doesn't seem right. Those roads were for farmers and quarry workers, but they were really never intended for public use by motor vehicles. Everyone can use the barrack-room lawyer techniques and say they can use them, but it isn't right, it's not the right thing to do.

Is there any difference between motor vehicles and other users in terms of impact on the landscape? Sometimes you hear the argument that walkers damage green lanes just as much as motor vehicles.

It's really basic engineering. A simple example: if I said well, I'll put two scaffolding boards across that river and if the Landrover drives across the

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

scaffolding boards he's going to end up in the river. And he'll convince you he's not putting any more load on the ground than you are, but he won't drive over those scaffolding boards. It's really basic engineering that they seem to overlook.

Finally, and most importantly: what do you think the National Park should do about motor vehicles on green lanes?

They should look at the Sandford principle before they start agreeing to this kind of thing. What's it going to look like in a year, or two years or ten? I'm sure if you promised most people that they could live until they're 500 they wouldn't do this damage because they would be spoiling the things they enjoy.



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