

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

Lake District Green Lanes Alliance

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Our new website



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The missing link – or does the National Park have an ecology problem?

The debate about driving on fell and forest tracks is often framed by the National Park and by motoring groups as a conflict between users: 4x4 and motorbike enthusiasts on one side and walkers, cyclists, horse riders and farmers on the other. The right way to deal with this kind of conflict is to get the two parties round the table, knocking their heads together, so to speak.

And what could be wrong with that? Isn't this the country of pragmatism and reasonable compromise? Yes, the Lake District is rather special, but, as the motor lobby keeps insisting, surely the unsealed tracks used by convoys of 4x4s and motorbikes are just like any other unclassified roads in the

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country, aren't they? In this scenario the Lake District National Park Authority acts as the impartial arbiter between the two sides. Job done.

But wait a second. Isn't there something crucial missing? Isn't this treating the landscape of the Lake District purely as a backdrop, at a time when nature and climate change have become a top priority everywhere, not just in National Parks? And is the National Park Authority's job not to protect the natural beauty of the landscape, rather than trying to accommodate motorised tourism on fell tracks?

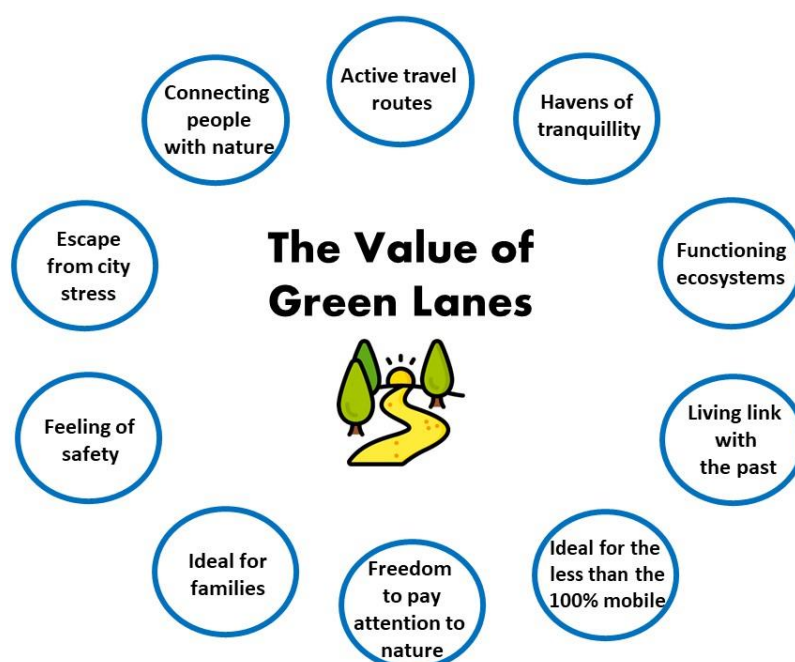
Scientists, including those at Defra, have come to look at landscape and nature not as neutral terrain, but as a fundamental necessity on which we all depend: nature as a resource providing invaluable essential services, for water, carbon storage, and vegetation on one side, and our wellbeing on the other. Green lanes are both pathways into nature and part of nature, giving us quietness, inspiration and respite.



We need to take transformative action toward nature recovery.

Madhu Rao, Chair
International Union for the Conservation of
Nature (IUCN)

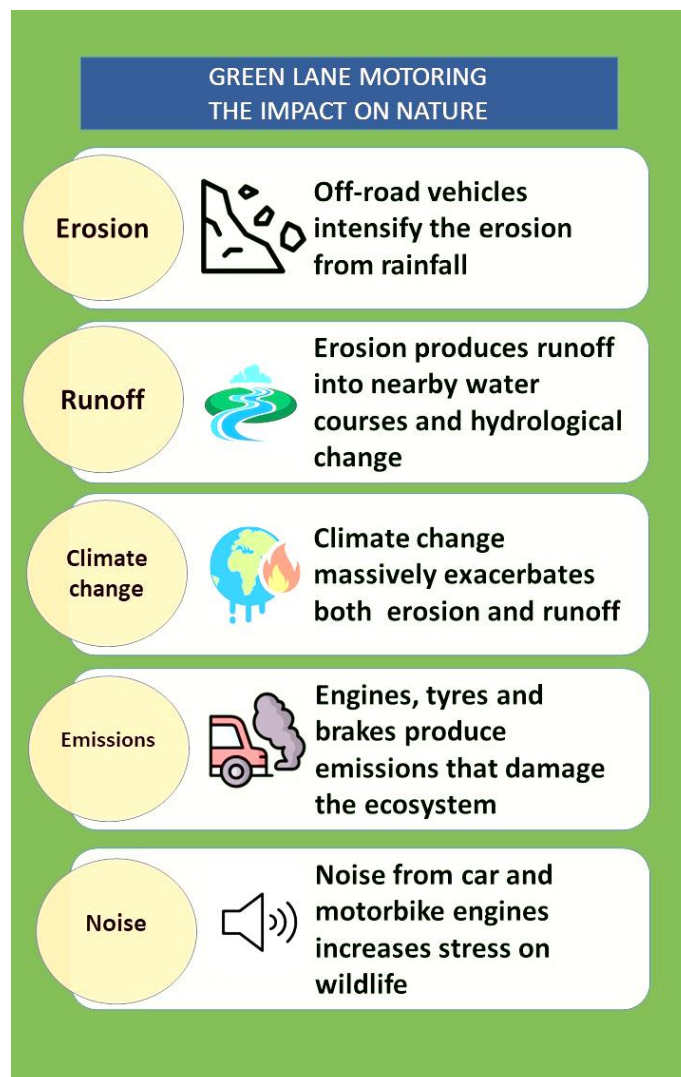
The diagram below illustrates the wide range of benefits (ecosystem services) flowing from green lanes:



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For each area of the Lake District Natural England documents the astonishing natural richness and how we benefit from it. This is an extract from the introduction to Natural England's [National Character Area Profile for the High Fells](#):

“Cumbria High Fells contains the most biologically diverse range of upland habitats in England, with internationally important fell habitats, Arctic Alpine plants, lakes, rivers, woodlands and a few species-rich meadows/pastures. Native broadleaf woodland and conifer plantations are extensive on the valley sides and bottoms, while the fells support scattered trees and scrub, plus a few small, high level and gill woodlands. Woodlands and peatlands, including blanket bog, are important carbon stores, requiring appropriate management to prevent carbon loss to the atmosphere and through water run-off.”



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Other sources, the [Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre](#), [National Priority Habitat Inventory](#) and the [Landscape Character Assessments](#) complete this picture of absolutely stunning diversity.

So our landscape is not a blank canvas at all, and driving motor vehicles on green lanes across the fells or through the forests of the Lake District has a real impact on both nature and people.



Madhu Rao, the Chair of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Travel and Tourism Council both agree: we need to, quite urgently, take transformative action towards the recovery of nature.

But we have some serious concerns:

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Is the National Park Authority equipped to do this? Does it have plans to give nature a real voice in its decision making? What representation do ecologists have on the Rights of Way Committee which makes the decisions on green lanes? And finally: for the rest of 2023 there are no more than two meetings of the Rights of Way Committee scheduled, in July and October. We now need the National Park to tackle the problems of motorised tourism on green lanes head-on.

UK NATIONAL PARKS SOUND MAP

Nightingales, mountain streams – and motorbikes: Record it! Four universities in the UK have launched a new project to document the sound we hear in National Parks. What could be more idyllic than a Lake District river, or a blackbird in full song. Or what could be more intrusive and disturbing than a motorbike at full throttle climbing up a steep hill? This is the [link](#) with details on how to use your phone to record, and where to upload the sound file.

Five years later - and no action: our recent letter to UNESCO

Mr Lazare Eloundou Assomo
Director of World Heritage
UNESCO World Heritage Centre
6 March 2023
Dear Mr Eloundou Assomo

Five years ago, in April 2018, a group of Lake District residents and visitors wrote to the World Heritage Centre about the motorised use of two unsealed roads ('green lanes') in the Central Lake District. We quote the following points from the original letter:

“Through its policy and current management practice in the area the LDNPA:

- **contributes to the destruction of the Lake District’s unique agro-pastoral landscape (criterion ii)**

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- **negates and reverses the conservation efforts of the past century (criterion v)**
- **breaks the links of this landscape to its cultural, historical and literary heritage (criterion vi)**
- **removes the opportunity for quiet enjoyment in a distinctive pastoral landscape of harmonious beauty”**

The letter concluded that the Lake District National Park Authority was **“failing to carry out its commitment to ensure the “identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage ... to the utmost of its own resources”**, as laid out in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

We are now writing to you again because our original complaint has still not been addressed. Furthermore, we have become aware of a number of other green lanes with similar problems.

1. We are grateful to the World Heritage Centre and to ICOMOS for carefully examining these concerns. ICOMOS issued two technical reviews about green lane motoring in May and October 2019. Both concluded that the use of green lanes by 4x4s and motorbikes for recreational purposes threatens the OUV of the property, and that this activity should be eliminated through the use of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). The second technical review from November 2019 focused on two routes near Little Langdale and specifically stated that the establishment of a partnership management group as proposed by the LDNPA (Lake District National Park Authority) was inadequate and that the routes should be closed to non-essential motor vehicles. This request has so far been ignored. A management group was set up with a disproportionately high representation of motoring groups. It has now met five times and been unable to recommend any closure to motor vehicles because its terms of reference were restricted to monitoring and maintenance.
2. The LDNPA’s inaction on green lanes should be seen in a wider context. Since 2006 when National Parks received extra powers to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders the Lake District National Park Authority has not closed a single green lane, in stark contrast to the

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Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District National Parks. Nobody would argue that there is less natural beauty to be found in the Lake District than in other National Parks, so the cause must lie in differing degrees of political will to protect the tranquillity and beauty of green lanes. That this should be so in the only National Park in the UK which is also a World Heritage Site is a matter of deep concern.

3. But the current position of the LDNPA is even more inexplicable when compared to its own statements in 2004. Although motorised usage of sensitive green lanes was then lower than it is today, the Authority was categorical in its opposition. In a summary on the Hierarchy of Trail Routes experiment, a voluntary restraint scheme, the LDNPA wrote:

“The Lake District National Park Authority is opposed to recreational driving on unsealed routes ('green roads'). The activity is considered incompatible with the special qualities of the National Park. The ability to enjoy the area in tranquillity is threatened by vehicle intrusion into its quietest parts. When vehicles are encountered or their physical impact is witnessed, the sense of peace and quiet is lost and enjoyment is diminished.”

4. In a position statement on green lanes issued in January 2022 the Authority declares its intention to act once there is sufficient evidence:

“Where there is unequivocal evidence that motorised vehicle use of a specific unsealed road poses harm to OUV of the WHS, or special qualities of the National Park, then we will seek the introduction of an appropriate TRO to address the defined threat in accordance with DEFRA guidance and the tests required under Highways Act legislation.”

5. Crucially, where the harmonious beauty of the landscape, its tranquillity, its status as a symbol for conservation are negatively affected, this should be reason enough to seek a TRO. And indeed, the LDNPA is in possession of hundreds of testimonies from walkers, residents and others about such a negative impact, collected in its own online survey on the two routes near Little Langdale. An

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[independent analysis](#) of these responses by an environmental psychologist is unambiguous: it shows that visitors and residents who value the tranquillity and harmonious beauty of the landscape experience recreational motor vehicles as an intolerable intrusion which seriously harms the Lake District's OUV and special qualities.

6. Many others have written to the LDNPA about the harm done to the Lake District by green lane motoring. Widespread media coverage and a [petition](#) with 389,000 signatures are a further strong indication of the public concern about this practice.

The LDNPA has said that a second, face-to-face survey is less conclusive. However, the methodological shortcomings of the second survey are so severe that it can reveal nothing about the impact of motor vehicles on the area's special qualities, in particular tranquillity. In any case it does not invalidate the hundreds of impact statements from respondents to the online survey.

7. We understand that there are constraints on the speed with which the LDNPA can act in making TROs. In 2006 the Authority, through the Hierarchy of Trails Routes, identified 28 routes where motor vehicle use was less sustainable or unsustainable. Problems include significant safety concerns, degradation of the OUV, including natural beauty and tranquillity, unauthorised repairs by motorists and potential for serious ecological impact. The World Heritage Centre should insist that the Authority now makes a start with some of the most affected routes, as listed below:

1. High Tilberthwaite (U5001)
2. High Oxenfell (U5004)
3. Elterwater/Owlet's Nest (U5529)
4. High Nibthwaite (U5051)
5. Tarn Hows or Old Mountain Road (U5015)
6. Old Coach Road (U2236/U3132)
7. Breast High Road (U3278)
8. Stile End to Sadgill (U5255)
9. Gamblesmire Lane (U5333)

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Conclusion

Destructive and intrusive green lane motoring continues unabated on a number of green lanes in the Lake District. Please urge the National Park Authority to fulfil its commitment to UNESCO and to stop this damaging activity.

Yours sincerely

Lake District Green Lanes Alliance

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Escape from the machines – an interview with Martyn Hudson, Northumbria University

The sociologist **Martyn Hudson** is associate researcher in the School of Arts and Cultures at Newcastle University, and author of a number of books. Amongst them “Species and Machines The Human Subjugation of Nature”.



How do people in the North East see the Lake District?

There have always been strong links between the North East and the Lake District - there were lots of migrant workers who came over from Cumbria and Westmorland and there are family links. They were also our closest mountains and as fellrunners and climbers many people from the North East have a great love for the Lakes -

including as Mountain Triallists and Bob Graham Rounders. As a back of the pack fellrunner I was often in Borrowdale and Wasdale training and many of us have very happy memories of the mountains - including many friends that are no longer with us.

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You've written about the relationship between humans and nature by examining our entanglement with machines.— what do you think the use of off-road motor vehicles on fell tracks does to this relationship?

Our relationships to nature are incredibly complex and indeed depopulation of rural areas towards industry and the city were often about rural poverty and distress. Far from being our tools machines have come to dominate us and make tools of us, so that we have become simply the brain or the organic appendage to machines. Mobility is of course necessary but the



Machines have come to dominate us and make tools of us.

use of leisure vehicles such as off-road vehicles is historically not in tune with the paths and mountains and indeed they are incredibly destructive of the material culture and world and often destructive of other species and flora.

Is it mainly men rather than women and their machines?

I think there is a patriarchy and machismo around machines - the louder or faster the better. This is demonstrable in gender politics but I wouldn't want to overplay that, except to say that historically humans, and men specifically, have been predatory, destructive and bombastic and often the 'display' of machine power is a display of male power.

What difference does it make for people's relationship to nature?

Well, mediating nature through a machine is very different from mediating it through other tools such as fell shoes or your hands upon a rock. The body imprints the world of rock and soil upon itself, thinking through our feet and hands, rather than through our brain or technics. It is a completely different sensory experience but also one which inflicts noise, destruction, machine-driven display upon others who are using the mountains. It can be incredibly contemptuous.

Can the expectation that you might meet a motor vehicle change the character of a track for walkers even if they don't actually meet one?

The erosion, the downed walls, the ruts and the scars on rocks, the sound of one some distance away even when we don't visibly encounter a vehicle - all of this changes our 'phenomenology' of landscape - how we receive and think about nature. I don't think there is an easy fit between nature and healing - the kind of nature cure argument but I do think that something core

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within us responds to the mountain, the hawthorn, the field and those spaces of such importance to us are radically changed by encounters with machines of pollution and indeed filth.

What is it that makes the Lakes unique and so unsuitable for leisure motoring on fell and forest tracks?

Well we know it's not the machines. Coleridge did not discern the sublime in nature in an encounter with a steam engine but in a mysterious and profound experience of quietude and beauty. The machine destroys everything in its path. The England of Walpole and Hardy witnessed the devastating arrival of the machine into the rural, and even though there can be no easy act of restoral we must make reparations to the damage humans have inflicted on our mountains and indeed on ourselves with our obsession with vehicles and machines.