

## **Breast High Road – report for the Lake District Green Lanes Alliance**

### **Introduction**

Breast High Road is a byway open to all traffic (BOAT numbers 584026, 355002, 355003) in the area which was added to the Lake District National Park in 2016. It runs for 3.76 kilometres from the A6 at NY 553 035 to a yellow road at a hamlet called Midwath Stead at NY 584 047, through three parishes, Whinfell, Tebay and Orton. From a right angle bend on the A6 in Borrowdale, Breast High Road descends to a crossing of Borrow Beck, the watercourse giving its name to Borrowdale; this westernmost section has the remnants of a tarmac surface and provides access to a bridleway running along the south-western bank of Borrow Beck. After crossing Borrow Beck the route gives access to two more bridleways which follow the north-eastern bank of Borrow Beck and climbs to the watershed between Borrowdale and Bretherdale. It then descends into Bretherdale via the valley of Breasthigh Beck, to meet another byway open to all traffic at the confluence of Breasthigh Beck and Bretherdale Beck. The easternmost section (980 metres), from the last mentioned byway open to all traffic (also the access to the farm buildings of Bretherdale Head) to the hamlet of Midwath Stead, is recorded as unclassified road U3278 on Cumbria County Council's list of streets and is a tarmac road.

### **History**

Greenwood's map of Westmorland, published in 1824, is the earliest map to show Breast High Road as a through route. It is shown passing two houses named Knot and Breast High. It is shown as a cross road i.e. not a turnpike road. Greenwood's map shows other cross roads in the vicinity which now have public bridleway rights e.g. the bridleway running north-east from Bretherdale Head and the bridleway from the yellow road to Bretherdale via High and Low Whinhowe from Greenholme.

The earliest large scale Ordnance Survey map (6 inches to 1 mile, surveyed in 1858) names the route as Breasthigh Road and shows two groups of buildings on it, named as Knott House and Breast High. This map shows a ford where Breast High Road crosses Borrow Beck; by the revision of 1912 stepping stones had also been provided as a means of crossing.

The first (provisional) edition map at 1:25,000 scale published by the Ordnance Survey in 1952 shows that there was no longer a building at Knott House and that the route between the ford and the buildings at Breast High was classified by the surveyors as a footpath, not a road.

The 1 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map published in 1955 shows the westernmost section of the route by double pecked lines (i.e. an unmetalled road), from Borrow Beck to the building named Breast High as a single dashed line (i.e. a footpath or track), from Breast High to the turn to Bretherdale Head by double (pecked and solid) lines and from the turn to Midwath Stead coloured yellow (i.e. a tarred road). This suggests that the route had been improved for access to Bretherdale Head from Midwath Stead, but otherwise was not considered to need improvement by the highway authority.

In 1895 South Westmorland Rural District Council asked Joseph Bintley “to examine and report on the condition of all Parish highways”, which it was about to take over, and to make “an estimate of the cost of putting into repair any road in a Parish the condition of which was below the proper standard”. Mr Bintley’s report describes two sections of Breast High Road, which were then in Whinfall and Fawcett Forest parishes, as follows:

*“An accommodation road leaving the Heronsyke and Eamont Bridge road [now the A6] about a quarter of a mile south of High Borrow Bridge, .... it wants siding, but is of very little use.. ... as its name denotes, goes in a north-easterly direction up Breast High. It is a road that will be seldom used, except occasionally, by a cattle jobber making for Bretherdale Head; the water, however, should be kept off it.”*

He gives a total length for these two sections of 4 furlongs 100 yards and a total cost of putting into repair of £2 4s 6d (equivalent to £295 at today’s prices, i.e. £329 per kilometre) .

JF Curwen, in “*The Later Records Relating to North Westmorland or the Barony of Appleby*”, published in 1932, described the route as a track with a possible historic boundary bank adjacent to it as follows:

*“The precise position of this dyke [Borrowdale Dyke, a stockade against the Scots mentioned in a grant of about 1180] has not been ascertained as yet, but from “Hollow Gate,” half way between Kendal and Shap, there is a track some four miles across the moor eastward known as “Breasthigh,” which clearly has had a rampart on its northern bank noticeable near the ruins of Knott House and just beyond and which comes out near Tebay where there is a farm called “The Dyke.” On the other hand it will be observed that the land to the northward rises considerably so that the rampart could be of little strategic strength against the Scots, and these place names may refer only to an ancient park of 100 acres which William L’Engleys received licence to impark in Tebay and Roundthwaite by grant of 12 Edward III.”* (<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/nwestmorland-records/vol8/pp195-213>)

## **Definitive map**

Breast High Road was on Cumbria’s definitive map and statement as a road used as a public path in 1976 and 1982 and later reclassified as a BOAT.

## **Repairs to the route by recreational motor vehicle group and by Cumbria County Council**

The Green Lane Association (GLASS) published a series of bulletins about northern green lanes in the 1990s and early 2000s. The bulletin for January/February 1999 reports an encounter in 1998 with a landowner who said that “motorcycles and 4x4s were ‘churning up’ the road making it difficult for him to use it himself.” Later in 1998, the GLASS members had “discussions with the council and the land owner” which led to GLASS repairing an old bridge “at the bottom of the hill”, a bridge “made of slabs of stone perched on bridging rocks in the beck, some of the slabs had slid into the beck, and it was very unstable.” GLASS reset the slabs and fixed a railway sleeper “to stop the slabs sliding sideways in the future”.

The GLASS bulletin for May 1999 reported that a landowner had snatched the ignition key from a motorbike on Breast High Road. It also reported that the repaired bridge had been vandalised, so that it “*will be very difficult to cross the stream now (though not impossible)*”.

The GLASS bulletin for October/November 2000 reported that there was a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on Breast High Road “*to enable repairs and maintenance to be carried out.*”

A second TRO was made in late 2011. The KTM Owners Forum reported that Breast High Road was closed by a temporary TRO from October 2011. The County Council Area Manager Highways and Transport – Eden said “*our safety inspectors are now of the view that the road is unsafe for use by vehicular traffic. ... It is our intention to obtain funding from the normal County Council budget to enable the repairs to be carried out next Spring. ... the TRO is temporary and will eventually expire (in 18 months maximum) but we hope to have the road in use again well before that time.*” The Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) reported in the November 2011 issue of its magazine, Trail, that there had been “*an incident involving a 4x4 where the vehicle had to be winched out by the landowner, the vehicle’s driver was injured and the Police involved*” and noted that some motorcyclists had “*been diverting from the very rough water damaged track onto adjacent farmland ... despite pleas .. on the Cumbria HOTR website and in Trail.*”

Cumbria County Council’s Local Committee for Eden approved an estimated cost of £40,000 for the drainage work on 2.6 kilometres of Breast High Road as part of the Highway Capital Programme for Eden 2012/2013 at its meeting on 26 March 2012. Subsequent reports to this committee show that the work was carried out between April and June 2012, and that it cost £58,276, i.e. an overspend of £18,276.

The TRF inspected the repairs, which it described as “*not just resurfacing but serious drainage work as well*” and reported in the August 2012 issue of Trail that a “*deluge*” at the end of June 2012 had “*significantly damaged*” Breast High Road “*but nothing like it might have been as the new drainage did as good a job as it could.*” Cumbria “*Highways were so upset they’ve already fixed the whole lot again – already. It’s now nice and smooth, if you can say that of a surface of loose golf-tennis ball size stones!*”

A gate on the Borrowdale part of Breast High Road bears plaques explaining that it was provided by LDNP (i.e. in 2016 or later) and that the route at this point was “*repaired by motorised users*”.

### **Other evidence about the condition of Breast High Road**

Breast High Road has been surveyed by the Hierarchy of Trail Routes scheme three times, in 2009, 2016 and 2020. All three surveys classify it as amber, i.e. a route with moderate use requiring some monitoring/management, and report the surface as 40% crushed stone and 60% rocky. The 2009 survey says there is “*Potential to wash out on both Western and Eastern sides*” and warns that the “*River crossing on western side can be very deep, fast flowing & sometimes impassable during & after wet weather*”. In 2016 the surveyor noted that there was “*Some wash out on western side, washed out and rocky on eastern side. Exposed pipe very difficult for 4x4s to traverse*” and that new boulder stone laid in 2015 on the eastern side was “*quite loose*”. He commented on the crossing of

Borrow Beck at the western end of the route that it “*rapidly becomes a torrent in wet weather. If water is just topping the centre stepping stones the ford is approximately 75cm deep.*” By the 2020 survey the exposed pipe had become “**very**” difficult for 4x4s and the surveyor wrote that “*Due to increased erosion from high rainfall the concrete steps on the Bretherdale side have become much bigger Only very experienced 4x4 drivers should attempt the route until repairs are made, when this sheet will be revised Do not leave track to avoid difficult sections. .... Bypassing the track will cause severe, lasting environmental damage.*”

The concrete “steps” are concrete over transverse drains, presumably the drainage installed by Cumbria County Council in 2012. One of the photo below shows how the surface of the route had been eroded below a drain by 2017, making it difficult for a 4x4 to cross it.

In April 2019, Kendal and Kirkby Stephen Mountain Rescue Teams treated a motorcyclist who had crushed his ankle between a rock and his motorbike on Breast High Road and transported him to a land ambulance at Tebay.<sup>1</sup>

### **Repairs proposed by the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) in 2020**

LDNPA told the Cumbria and Lake District Local Access Forum, at its meeting on 16 July 2019, that a bid had been submitted “*to carry out resilience and drainage works on Breast High road*”.

Authority members were asked at their meeting in October 2020 to agree to LDNPA being the accountable body for a bid for £325,000 grant funding to repair Breast High Road, of which over £300,000 is for the repairs and the remainder for monitoring and maintenance. The work planned includes restoring and increasing drainage, surfacing and subsoiling 1.1 kilometres of the route, removing and widening culverts, installing two new bridges and four pitched fords, small-scale tree planting and dry stone wall restoration, with the aims of restoring “*the route to a surfaced, usable and sustainable ‘green lane’ to encourage users to remain within the boundary of the road and enabling the surrounding landscape to recover.*” The bid is to the National Grid’s Landscape Enhancement Initiative.<sup>2</sup>

The National Grid’s website says that this initiative is to fund “*projects which reduce the visual and landscape impact of .. overhead lines in AONBs and National Parks.*”<sup>3</sup> The funding provision for this initiative comes from Ofgem; AONBs and National Parks which contain or are impacted by National Grid’s transmission infrastructure can apply for project grants of up to £200,000.<sup>4</sup>

The National Grid commissioned a technical report assessing the landscape and visual impact of its electricity transmission infrastructure in national parks and AONBs, a report which was published in October 2014, i.e. before the land crossed by Breast High Road was included in the area managed

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kendalmountainrescue.org.uk/callout/2019-incident-10-28th-april-1654-borrowdale/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0032/355496/2020\\_10\\_21-Breast-High-Road-RestorationProject-Authority-Acts-as-Accountable-Body.pdf](https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/355496/2020_10_21-Breast-High-Road-RestorationProject-Authority-Acts-as-Accountable-Body.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalgrid.com/uk/electricity-transmission/planning-together-riio/visual-impact-provision>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nationalgrid.com/uk/electricity-transmission/planning-together-riio/visual-impact-provision/landscapeenhancement-initiative>

by LDNPA as extended in August 2016. The technical report explains that the Lake District National Park (pre-extension) is crossed by one transmission line (a double line of pylons), skirting the inside edge of the Park's eastern boundary (pre-extension) from approximately 8 km to the south of Shap to south of the Borrowdale valley, i.e. on the opposite side of the A6 to Breast High Road. (None of the land crossed by Breast High Road, i.e. in the extension area, is crossed by electricity transmission lines.) The technical report finds that the transmission line has some "*High importance landscape impacts ... together with high importance visual impacts on visitors to Shap Summit and users of the A6 scenic route*" and concludes that the "*only mitigation that is likely to have any real effect on views and on landscape character is undergrounding the whole subsection of line.*"<sup>5</sup> This suggests that LDNPA's bid for funding may not be successful because it will not mitigate the visual and landscape effects of the transmission line.

If LDNPA is successful in obtaining funding, it should consider diverting the bridleway which connects Breast High Road with the A6 at Huck's Bridge, where part of the bridleway has been lost to erosion of the bank of Borrow Beck, to a line safe from erosion. If this bridleway were open, it would provide a better route to Breast High Road for walkers, cyclists and horse riders between the layby south of Huck's Bridge than the section of Breast High Road west of Borrow Beck does. This would be a better route because the Breast High Road crossing of the beck is sometimes impassable and because the start of Breast High Road is on a blind bend of the A6, so that users waiting to cross the A6 are not visible to all drivers on the A6.

### **The landscape in which Breast High Road is situated**

When the Inspector reported in October 2013 to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the public inquiry held into Natural England's orders extending the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks, he came to the following conclusions about the applicability of the natural beauty and open-air recreation criteria to the Lake District eastern extension area (LDE), which includes Breast High Road.

*"Considering the LDE area as a whole, the upland mass of Whinfell and Grayrigg Commons, Bretherdale Common, and Birkbeck Fells Common, together with the Borrowdale and Bretherdale valleys, form the natural eastern termination of the 'extensive tract' of the LDNP. The many factors contributing to its outstanding natural beauty (as identified by NE and its supporters) combine to provide fine opportunities for quiet outdoor recreation pursuits across an area with a considerable sense of remoteness and wildness despite its easily accessibility from the A6 to the west and the Lune Gorge to the east.*

*Although there are some conifer plantations on the eastern side of the A6 and a line of pylons generally follows the road, there is no great difference in the type and quality of the designated landscape to the west of the former trunk road and that within the block of undesignated land to the east. It appears unquestioned that the LDE area would have been included in the designated LDNP if it had not been for the perceived barrier posed by the heavy traffic moving along the trunk road between Lancashire and Scotland across Shap summit. The A6 is now a very quiet road and one of*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/37291-Visual%20Impact%20Provision%20Technical%20Report.pdf>, pages 56

*its present functions is to provide an easy means of access for walkers into the remote fells alongside it.*

*..all the land within the LDE extension meets the s5(2) criteria in terms of its natural beauty and the opportunities it affords for open-air recreation having regard to its character and position in relation to centres of population. ....” (paragraphs 2.75, 2.76 and 2.83)*

A hill farmer (Hilary Fell) who supported the inclusion of LDE in the national park gave as one of her reasons for doing so:

*“The local PROW network has been subject to problems in recent years including the use by offroad vehicles of the track known as Breasthigh Road between Borrowdale and Bretherdale. The NPA is more likely to be able to address such issues than Cumbria CC who seem to accord such matters lower priority, judging by the differences between the PROW network inside and outside the current LDNP. (paragraph 3.220)*

The Inspector concluded that the NPAs were “*better equipped to deal with ... issues*” of “*disturbance in the countryside such as the damaging over-use and erosion of the PROW network or its inappropriate use ...by 4-wheel drive vehicles...*” than the county councils were (paragraph 3.265).

### **Lake District Green Lanes Alliance survey in August and September 2020 - summary**

Much of the section of the route on the open fell between Borrowdale and Bretherdale has drainage ditches at the side of the route. As well as keeping water from the fell from running onto the route, these ditches are fed by the transverse drains and bars installed by Cumbria County Council in 2012. Transverse drains were also installed where the route crosses streams. Some of these transverse drains are no longer effective and are damaged or susceptible to damage because the surface of the track above and below them has been eroded by water flowing down the route. The damaged drains no longer serve the purpose of helping to keeping water off the route, as Mr Bintley required in 1895, but instead add to the flow of water down the route. The photos below show examples of erosion and of damage caused by motor vehicles on and off the route.

The route is in a trench almost 2 metres deep at this corner. There is a broken crossdrain a short distance above this corner.  
NY 562 040



A transverse drain which took water from the drainage ditch on the right hand side of the route to a ditch on the left hand side. Now exposed, broken and bringing water onto the route.  
NY 567 045





4x4 struggling to cross transverse drain, March 2017. This is presumably the exposed pipe which the HOTR survey of 2016 noted was very difficult for 4x4s to traverse



The concrete covering of the drain and the drain itself are broken and the route surface further eroded, September 2020. NY 569 046

4x4s and motorbikes have made ruts in the pasture, as they leave the route to avoid the step caused by erosion around the transverse drain at NY 569 046





Concrete protection for piped stream crossing partially eroded away. NY 569 046



Tracks of motorbikers who have deviated from the stony route. NY 571 047

**Conclusion**

Breast High Road is no longer a route serving farms and their visitors as it was in 1895; the vehicular traffic using it now is mainly or wholly recreational. The 2012 work of surfacing and drainage done by Cumbria County Council cost much more (£26,667 per kilometre at 2019 prices) than the work required in 1895 (£295 per kilometre at 2019 prices), but has not coped with the weather and the weight of motor vehicle traffic. The repairs and improvements proposed by LDNPA will be even more expensive (between £72,000 and £107,000 per kilometre). A bridge and a repaired ford over Borrow Beck would be welcome improvements as the beck is often difficult to cross. But it remains to be seen if creating a raised route with a drainage ditch on each side (the subsoiling or soil inversion technique proposed by LDNPA) will be more resilient to the weather and to motor vehicle traffic than the surfacing and drainage work done by Cumbria County council has been.