

Opinion & Community

Off-roaders are to blame

Steve Pighills (Letters, May 3, 'Water is the main culprit') and Geoff Wilson (Letters, May 31, 'Erosion is nothing new') argue that the damage to the track between Little Langdale and High Tilberthwaite is caused by the weather and is no worse than the erosion on the public footpaths and bridleways which the Fix the Fells project has been repairing.

When I walked this track in January, it was clear that, because the track has been eroded in places to below the level of the adjacent land, water flowing from that land would cause further erosion. But a drain which had been installed by the National Trust to take that water away from the track has been exposed and broken by the weight of motor vehicles travelling over it.

I find it incredible that the off-roaders blame the weather and walkers for this kind of damage and ignore the effects of their 4x4s and motorbikes.

The Lake District National Park Authority should start the consultation process about a traffic regulation order (TRO) for this track and the track at High Oxenfell, not delay while it tries to organise further repairs which are unlikely to last.

I live near a track, Gorbeck Road, which was being badly harmed by off-roaders, both physically and in terms of its tranquillity, until the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) used its TRO powers to ban them in 2008.

The repairs which the YDNPA did in the 2000s have lasted, now that Gorbeck Road is protected from off-roader use by the TRO. And walkers, cyclists and horse riders can enjoy it, as part of the Settle Loop of the Pennine Bridleway, in peace.

D.J. Mallinson
Settle

Time to act

GEOFF Wilson provided an interesting account of the work undertaken by the Lake District National Park Authority and the Fix the Fells project to repair the damage caused by Storm Desmond (Letters, May 31, 'Erosion is nothing new').

It is true that erosion takes many forms, from the scouring of the land by extreme weather events, to the everyday wear and tear caused by animal and human feet.

But in terms of simple physics, the heavier and more powerful the pressure on a surface, the worse the damage. Human feet and animal hooves cause a certain amount of damage to

Fell repair works require more consultation

NO doubt fell walker and guide book writer Alfred Wainwright would have had a view about all the work going on to repair well-used paths in the Lake District hills.

An online petition has now opened up a debate about whether the amount of stone pitching work being carried out by Fix the Fells and the Lake District National Park Authority, to protect paths from further erosion, does more harm than good.

There are concerns that the work has now become too widespread and popular walks and scrambles are being turned into "glorified landscaped gardens" without any consultation.

The Westmorland Gazette

COMMENT

The petition states that this "homogenisation" of paths is against the will of many walkers and path users. This is certainly borne out by the hundreds of people who are supporting the petition calling for a stop on the "unnecessary" stone pitching in the national park.

The petition is likely to carry on gaining support from the fell purists who do not want this work to detract from the natural beauty

of the mountains. Some will argue that the conservation work takes away the challenge of reaching the summits and makes the fells more accessible to less able walkers leading to more mountain rescue call-outs.

But the good work that Fix the Fells and the LDNPA does to repair well worn paths is avidly supported by visitors to the national park who willingly give donations to ensure that the fragility of the fells is not compromised by the millions who take to the hills every year.

And the number of visitors is set to increase with the park gaining World Heritage Status. More extreme weather events are also

going to have a major impact with ugly erosion scars likely to appear unless the paths are made more robust.

Fix the Fells says that if no action is taken the damage develops in to wider and deeper scars which destroys vegetation and moves soil and stone in to rivers and lakes.

Not everyone is going to appreciate what is effectively a "stone stairway" to the top of a hill. But much of the work is essential to keep the fells in good repair.

Perhaps more consultation with bodies that represent fell users, like the Ramblers Association, should be considered before work is progressed in the future.

soft pliable surfaces like paths and trails; wheeled vehicles (ie bicycles) make it worse.

But motor driven vehicles cause infinitely more damage than either of these. There can be no doubt as to what has caused the erosion in Little Langdale and Tilberthwaite.

And there are some occasions when the normal human response, particularly when considering devastating and unnecessary damage to the natural environment, is an emotional one; but also painfully considered, and hard to describe as 'knee jerk'. Unfortunately, there are not many people 'shouting' about this issue, and not loudly enough.

Like the gun lobby in the states, defending to the last people's right to bear arms in spite of school shootings becoming a hideous commonplace, it seems the off-road vehicle lobby in the Lakes has far too much clout, even with those tasked with protecting our fragile landscape.

Gill Cowton
Grasmere

Orders needed

GEOFF Wilson's assertions about erosion on the Tilberthwaite track (Letters, May 31, 'Erosion is nothing new') cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. Of course walkers and the weather cause some erosion but, like other residents who live near the track, I can assure him that the really serious damage has occurred over the last two decades, when 4x4s and motorbikes started using the route in large and increasing numbers. A simple look at a Youtube video demonstrates how heavy vehicles are churning up the surface down to the bedrock.

Erosion, though, is not the most important issue. This has always been an area of outstanding beauty and tranquillity, and it is these qualities that the Lake

District National Park Authority must protect.

The reasons for Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) in national parks are very simple: to protect and enhance the natural beauty, including the tranquillity, of an area, and to protect the enjoyment of this beauty and tranquillity. The only way to fix these fells is through a TRO.

Geoff Wilson's praise for the national park authority is understandable: the LDNPA manages the Tilberthwaite routes on behalf of off-road enthusiasts, not to preserve and enhance the beauty and tranquillity of the landscape. In no other national park would this be acceptable.

Christine Muir
Little Langdale

● Editor's note: The Westmorland Gazette contacted the Lake District National Park Authority after receiving these three letters and here is a response from Mark Eccles, head of park management.

Regarding the recreational use of motor vehicles unsealed roads the Little Langdale, Oxen Fell and Tilberthwaite area, we are aware of the concerns and pressure on us to use Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to stop or limit vehicle use of these roads. The routes have public vehicular access rights and are subject to the same laws as tarmac roads. The routes have been neglected and are in disrepair. They were originally well built and well maintained stone roads that served agricultural and quarrying activities; as such they form part of the historic and cultural heritage of the area. Agricultural use by farm vehicles needs maintaining to allow effective land and stock management by the local farmer. And of course walkers, cyclists and horse riders need to be able to use them too.

It would be preferable if

vehicles didn't use the routes but applying TRO's is a last resort for us at this stage. We want to work with interested parties to find ways to manage the issues without resorting to legal action if we can. We're working closely with Cumbria County Council, National Trust, parish councils and various user groups to identify necessary repairs and encourage responsible behaviour to minimise environmental impact and respect other users.

We've recorded the current state of these roads and recognise they are out of condition. A funded maintenance programme has been agreed and will be delivered this autumn to benefit all users and minimise further environmental damage. We will continue to capture information about the amount and type of different users along with face to face surveys that capture insight into users' experiences, expectations and concerns.

Once repairs are completed and we have gathered facts about use levels, users' feelings, effectiveness of maintenance and actual vehicular impacts; it will enable us to inform an Authority decision about the most appropriate long term management of the routes should be and specifically if a TRO to limit or stop vehicle use is required. We hope to complete this by November 2019 for the Little Langdale/Tilberthwaite routes.

This hopefully explains our current position, the action we're taking and our commitment, with that of other partners, to manage these routes.

Sign problems

WHILE it is commendable that so many folk are now taking a stand against the proliferation of litter in the Lake District, I beg to add my gripe against that which I call 'official litter'.

This comes in many forms, from the preponderance of useless and excessive road

signage to the worst of the lot - road works signs and road cones well past their usage date.

How is it possible that detour signs for the M6 on the A590 still adorn the highway long after the works were completed?

Surely it should be part of any roadworks contract for a 'clean up' clause to be instigated? But no - cones and diversionary signs are a constant eyesore for the residents of South Lakeland.

For the tourist they must be a nightmare. 'Official litter' at its worst!

Will E. Walker
Holme

Bike solution

COMPLAINTS about local trains, poor rural buses, parking and congestion regularly appear in your letters pages, and I'd like to suggest that for many, part of the solution should be an electric bike.

The modern ones have a very usable range and make climbing hills around our area a possibility for many who could no longer use a traditional bike.

I'd much rather have an electric bike than be tied to a train service with regular cancellations or a very limited bus service, and be able to park it in Kendal very close to my destination rather than walk from the train/bus station or car park.

They are not particularly cheap, and you still need to provide some pedal power, but a neighbour of mine on her electric bike makes the hill up Yealand Rd here look an easy ride, when many fit cyclists find it quite a drag.

Alan Tyldesley
Yealand Conyers

Why has our faith declined?

ARTHUR Nicholls opens his interesting article (Nostalgia, 'Historic

Chantry', May 3) with a most debatable statement. He puts down the strong Christian faith and worship of God in the 15th and 16th centuries to the 'perilous' life in those times.

But that surely is to very much over-simplify the reasons why people in those times were far more God-fearing and devout than they are today. Indeed, it is a matter which truly and most objective comparisons with our own very recent history - our own far more 'perilous' times (a 20th century marked with horrendous world wars, etc), if the terrible decline in our once great Christian faith and practice is to be understood.

I am quite sure that I am far from being alone in wishing that such a debate could be opened, for it is chiefly in the last 50 years that this country in particular has been induced to throw aside the remnants of its belief in Christianity, and turn to such pitiful substitutes as empty-headed 'celebrities', football mania, and endless media brain-washing.

We need to step back and try to understand how and why this rapidly accelerating decline in faith and morals has occurred, and that these times are, in fact, far more 'perilous' than ever they were five or six hundred years ago.

Michael F. Bolongaro
Kendal

Look out for dogs at feet

SPOTTING rare-breeds and canine-counting is an interesting pastime for some, but that's not the reason why thousands head for Keswick.

Keswick is busy, pavements are crowded. 'Think dog' doesn't come naturally to most of us, especially tourists and locals heading for Catbells/Tripping up over a dog could soon become a recognised hazard.

R. Hall
Cockermouth