

Newsletter 8

September 2021



Before COP26:

A message to Richard Leafe, CEO of the LDNPA and Stewart Young, Leader of Cumbria County Council

We all agree that the climate emergency is the challenge of our time. And we all know that for the people and the landscape of the Lake District the consequences could be devastating. In 2018 the UN warned that we may have just twelve years left to limit a climate crisis. The Lake District has already seen some impacts, in particular drought, wildfires, and extreme flooding events such as Storm Desmond in 2015. Many of the things we value as special about the Lake District are extremely vulnerable to the changes in temperature, rainfall and sea level expected.

There is even agreement on the need to act. The draft Partnership Plan for the Lake District calls for action to achieve net zero carbon and for sustainable transport and travel.

More and more policy documents and manifestos are being produced nationally, the latest comes from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Here is one of the headlines:

“We need to go high nature and low carbon, tackling the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change together.”

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So we must act on both fronts: restore nature in a landscape of extraordinary biodiversity, and reduce carbon emissions.

In its Climate Change Adaptation Report the LDNPA assesses the impact of climate change on footpaths and green lanes. It is clear that erosion and other effects of green lane driving will be intensified, with an impact on the hydrology of surrounding areas. This represents a threat to the ecosystem – peatland and watercourses, the habitat of curlew and lapwing, of snakes, lizards, rare bees and butterflies, and of a whole range of rare lichens and other plants. (Read a [summary of the scientific evidence](#).)



Ruskin shows how our bid to dominate nature and bend it to our will leads ultimately to barrenness and the depletion of vital forces. Ultimately, on a global scale, this dysfunction in the relationship is catastrophic.

Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood, John Ruskin's home in the Lake District

The LDNPA says that the Lake District could become a role model to inspire wider society to make positive change in their environmental impact. Yes, it could and should be precisely that. But it could also become a negative role model if motoring as a leisure pursuit remains unchecked on green lanes.

Green lane driving sends a clear signal about our will to act: this is an act of symbolic pollution and nature depletion right in the heart of the Lake District. It leads to erosion, habitat segmentation, emissions, noise and visual pollution in some of our most remote and beautiful places. Is that what we want? (Watch [this 16 second clip](#) recently posted by Northern Greenlaners on Facebook, taken on a green lane near Colton. Sound on!)

Fine words about the climate crisis in the Lake District will serve no purpose at all if the custodians of a National Park and World Heritage site don't act. You already have a register of particularly vulnerable green lanes. You must make a start there: examine how motor vehicles affect the surface, the ecology, farmers, residents and other users of these tracks, and then decide whether they should be protected or not.

Surely a green lanes policy is now overdue.



Great attention needs to be paid by all of us – how do we care best for the natural world? Now is a time for sensitivity. In a lived-in, working landscape where habitats are in fragile condition and people value and need tranquillity, off-road driving on green lanes as a leisure pursuit does not have a place.

Harriet and Rob Fraser, writer and photographer

The Official Guide to the National Park, 1969 – extract

“There are many sports and activities, in themselves perfectly respectable and even estimable, which should be either prohibited or severely limited in the Lake District; one such is the motor cycle ‘scramble’ in the fell-dales ...In every case the criterion must be that of good manners and good ‘neighbourliness’, does the activity interfere with the prime purpose of the National Park, which is the enjoyment of natural beauty?”

Green lane motoring and the disabled

Debbie North is a wheelchair user and passionate about creating a countryside for all. Here is what she has to say about green lane driving – refuting the argument put forward by some motoring organisations that banning motor vehicles would discriminate against less mobile visitors to the National Park.



Debbie has appeared in Terry Abraham’s Life of a Mountain series on BBC4 and is releasing her own film ‘Get outside in the Westmorland Dales’. See the trailer [here](#).

This is what she says about green lane motoring:

“With the ongoing development of powered electric wheelchairs that are capable of travelling over rugged terrain, there is no need to hide behind the argument that motor vehicles on Green Lanes are the only way

that people living with disabilities can access the countryside. This view, at best, has been made through ignorance. People of all abilities access green lanes and regularly encounter damage

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and nuisance inflicted by vehicle users. Vehicle noise and fumes degrade the tranquillity of the countryside.”

Best practice from the Peak District

All TROs in the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks were made for the protection of natural beauty – of the four made in the Lake District many years ago under a previous administration, only one mentions natural beauty.

The following extracts from the Peak District National Park TRO reports on the Washgate and Long Causeway routes illustrate the reasoning behind the TROs. Most of it could be applied to green lanes in the Lake District.

On natural beauty:

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

The route as part of the special qualities of the National Park:

“**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. 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.” (Washgate)



Even the expectation of meeting a motor vehicle as a negative impact:

“The impacts on the natural beauty of the National Park, and on its special qualities, are not just confined to the linear route and its character but also affect the wider environment. This impact and **the anticipation of the presence of motorised users can detract from the experience and enjoyment by other users.** 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)” (Long Causeway)

On tranquillity:

“**Tranquillity is more than simply noise; it includes the landscape setting, natural sounds and visual intrusion.**” (Long Causeway)

Bill Birkett, mountaineer, writer and photographer, was born in Little Langdale and knows the Lake District like few others. Bill's grandfather, Tommy Birkett, introduced him to the pleasures of walking and climbing, and above all taught him never to lose a sense of wonder in this landscape. Here are Bill's reflections on how recreational motor vehicles are changing his beloved Lake District.

What are your first memories of the green lanes around Little Langdale?

I used to walk round the green lanes all the time. At primary school in Little Langdale we used to have a nature walk every week. We did the regular circuit, from the ford along the lane to Tilberthwaite Farm and then back over the top. It's quite a nice little circuit.

And I used to walk it with my grandfather, this would be in the late 50s. It was just a quiet, fantastic place then, full of nature, very beautiful. And even though the quarries were working, my father was the boss at Moss Rigg, you hardly ever saw any quarry traffic. It was a real haven of peace and quiet.

My grandfather first took me to Tarn Hows to go fishing, and later on I used to go by myself. But you never saw any vehicles on the track near Tarn Hows.

Do you remember when signs went up for the Hierarchy of Trail routes?

Those Hierarchy of Trail Route signs were a real surprise. It was a real shock in Little Langdale, these signs up saying this is a motorised trail, that was completely out of the blue. Nobody consulted me about it and I don't know of anybody else who was consulted. We just thought this is wrong, what's going on.

These tracks were never used as roads, even if officially they were called roads. They were just tracks, and even when tourism increased and there were more cars on the Wrynose road, they never went onto the track.

Does the traffic on tarmac roads mean that there is little point in banning cars and motorbikes on green lanes?

That's a ridiculous argument. You need these quiet spaces. You need these places to walk and enjoy nature. Nature needs all the help it can get. The green lanes are a completely separate world. It's supportive of nature, it's giving people peace and quiet. It's a different world that needs protection.

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And I'd extend this argument further: the Lakes has reached saturation point. It's just completely full to overflowing. It's barmy. Not only should green lanes be free for people to walk on them, and enjoy nature and support nature, there should also be traffic control in the Central Lake District. Way back in the 60s I remember the National Park started a traffic study and there was a lot of talk about controlling traffic then. Having large car parks in Kendal, for instance. And this was in the 1960s, probably about 1967, seeing that Langdale was full to capacity.



Well, that was 50 years ago, the National Park was saying that. 50 years later, it's ten times worse, and there is no plan, nobody is doing anything. It's beyond comprehension.

The Lakes needs some kind of management system, and for the National Park Authority to be promoting motorised trails on these green lanes is just so wrong. Such a massive mistake and wrongdoing that it's beyond comprehension.

You trained as a highways engineer. What's your view of how the Tilberthwaite track was resurfaced?

The Tilberthwaite track has been covered in slate chippings, which, because of the nature of slate, is totally the wrong material to use on a road anyway. They've always been rough tracks and they've always had big rocky steps. But now to ask me as a taxpayer to pay to look after those roads, treat them as roads and pay for the maintenance is just outrageous.



Damaged bridge at Bridge End near Little Langdale

There are a number of stone bridges, and they were never designed or built, or meant to take, huge loads. So if CCC and the NP want to make these green lanes into roads, then it's going to cost a huge sum of money, I mean to actually make

these bridges suitable within design parameters you're talking about millions of pounds. And at my expense, to ruin the world I love, my green environment, I and other local people are going to have to pay loads of money. It's outrageous.

As a mountaineer you have got to know many different regions. What's so special about the Lake District?

Such a diverse environment, the valleys, and the tarns, and the rivers and the lakes. And all the nature, the trees, and then the openness of the fells, a unique stonewall system. It's such a diverse world. It's fairly small compared to other mountain areas in the world but it's unique, its diversity is amazing. It's a man-made landscape. If you look at the Langdale Pikes, they are the source of stone axes, the stone axe factory was there. It started pre-neolithic times, it probably produced stone axes for 5000 years, but the effect on the landscape is minimal. And even farming and quarrying have made a minimal impact on the landscape. Industry doesn't really exist any more in the valleys or on the fells. So it's a special and unique place, and it really needs proper management.

Yesterday I had a massive walk, Wasdale Head up round Pillar Rock and Pillar Mountain and you couldn't see a road, you couldn't see any buildings, there was no industry, the air was clear, it was just wonderful. It's such a special place, but we can't take it for granted, especially when there are such ridiculous pressures from people trying to commercially develop these green lanes. It seems unbelievable to me that the very people who should protect

this environment, this special place, are promoting activities that are totally alien, and damaging to this environment. I can hardly believe it.

Why do you think the National Park is so reluctant to take action?

I can only speculate, but I think their policy has just become too commercial, with zipwires and motorised green lanes. When my Dad died, a well known mountaineer, there were obituaries in the Times, the Guardian and the Telegraph talking about adventure. This was natural adventure, exploring the hills, rock climbing. The Lake District is not a fun fair, not a pleasure park.

Bill's website is <https://www.billbirkett.com/>