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TRAIL

The Bulletin of the TRF, the National Club for
all who wish to ride Legal Motorcycles on
Legal Carriageways. EDITOR: Fred Ellison.

FEBRUARY 2004 No. 306



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Letterheads & Compliments Slips, Fred Ellison. *Editor.*
- DISPLAY EQUIPMENT** Leo Crone, Tel: 01325 463815 (7a.m. - 5p.m.). Display boards held at
- CO-ORDINATOR** Unit 10, Red Barnes Way, McMullen Rd., Darlington DL1 2RR.
- EQUESTRIAN EVENTS LIAISON OFFICER** NP16 6NS. Tel Mobile: 07941 427774 (evenings).
- RoW CO-ORDINATOR** Roger Peters, Rose Bank, East Lane End, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 3JS. Tel: 01670 519432.

TRF Website <http://www.trf.org.uk>

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But now it's FUN TIME or to put it another way Coast-to-Coast time.

Coast-to-Coast 2004

This year will be held on Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th May leaving Scarborough 9.00 a.m. Saturday morning and arriving in Morecambe Sunday afternoon around 4.00 p.m.

Phil Fawcett, the man who does the organising, is not happy that last year a number of riders chose not to ride all the way to Morecambe. In fact he said it is unfair to deprive another rider of the opportunity to complete the whole journey when places are in big demand.

Big Trail Bikes

He has also said that if there is sufficient demand Leo Crone will lead a group of big trail bikes. If you're interested ring Phil on 01287 634972.

The journey from Scarborough to Morecambe passes through some breathtaking scenery and includes every kind of terrain imaginable: rocky climbs, river crossings, sunken lanes, Roman roads, bogs, etc, etc, some of which can be challenging particularly if, as last year, there is a lot of rain so when you fill in your entry form please think before you fill in the bit where it says skill level. After all two trail rides and a KTM does not mean 'experienced' but miss it? *Fred Elton*
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ENTRY FORM FOR Coast-to-Coast 2004

The weekend's ride runs from Scarborough to Hawes and from Hawes to Morecambe on the weekend of 8th and 9th May 2004. The ride covers varied terrain, therefore a degree of competency is necessary. All riders will receive a T-shirt and run leaders will receive a free sweatshirt. Anyone else requiring a sweatshirt can buy one for £14.

- Places will be limited and will be on a first come, first served basis.
- This ride is intended for those whose aim is to ride the full two days and not to finish part way through day two.

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(NOT MOBILE)

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T-shirt size Large (40-42) XL (42-44) XXL (44-48)

I am willing to lead Day One Day Two

I am willing to back-up Day One Day Two

Please indicate skill level and type of riding preferred
It is best to be realistic as your weekend might not be as enjoyable if you end up in the wrong group.

Accommodation information required? If so, please tick the box
Scarborough Hawes

Entry Fee 25.00

Sweatshirt 14.00

Only cheques made payable to TRF accepted, no cash. Please send this entry form along with your cheque and S.A.E. to:

Phil Fawcett, 15 Taunton Vale, Guisborough, Cleveland, TS14 7NB

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INDEMNITY

I declare that I am physically and mentally fit to participate and am competent to do so. I confirm that I understand the nature and type of event and the risks involved and agree to accept these risks even if such risk may involve negligence on the part of the organisers or officials, the landowners, or other bodies or individuals connected with the event in respect of any damage to my property regardless of the cause, I confirm that my motorcycle is road legal and effectively silenced. **RIDERS OF NOISY MOTORCYCLES WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE.**

Signed: Date:

MINUTES OF TRF EXECUTIVE MEETING

Held at: Nottingham Water Sport Centre, on 17 January 2004

Present:

Principal Officers: Geoff Wilson (Chair), John Gardner (Treasurer), Ted Lowres (Secretary), Fred Ellison (Editor), Roger Peters (RoW Co-Ordinator), Tim Stevens (Vice Chair), Mary Stevens (Membership Secretary)

Co-Opted Officers: Richard Fordham (LARA Rep), Dave Giles (BMF Liaison), Richard Stiling (MAG Liaison)

Groups Represented: Bristol, Cumbria, Cambridge, Dorset, East Midlands, Essex, Gloucester, Herts, High Peak & Potteries, Peak District, Kent, Lancs, Lincs, Loddon Vale, Northumberland, Norfolk, Oxford, Peak District, Ribble Valley, South London & Surrey, South Northants, Sussex, Swindon, Teesside & N Yorks, Thames Valley, West Midlands, Worcester.

Welcome:

The chairman opened the meeting and explained that the major topic today is the DEFRA Consultation on the Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way. He hoped to get through the normal business and Officer Reports quite quickly, so that there is ample time for discussions.

Apologies for absence:

Roger Harris, Robert Wilson, Mark Holland, Ron Carter.

Approval of the Minutes of the 27 September 2003 meeting:

The minutes were accepted as a true record, and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising from the above meeting:

Economic Impact Report: The Chairman noted that the advice of the BMF was to be sought as to how to present the report's findings properly. Dave Giles reported that he had taken advice from a PR Consultant who had agreed that it was all right.

Videos for Archiving: Richard Fordham had offered to compile an archive of any publicity material from TV or Radio concerning green laneing. He had only received one video since the last meeting. John Gardner asked members to do this as there will be an opportunity to show them at the BMF's National and One Make Clubs Forum. The Chairman asked all groups to let Richard have any videos.

Action: All Groups to send videos of TRF material to Richard Fordham.

Travel Expenses: This item was referred to the next meeting.

Action: Agenda Item for next meeting.

Paid PR and RoW Officer Post: The Chairman explained that he and the Editor had liaised over putting a notice in TRAIL seeking members for the PR and RoW working groups. There had been little response from the general membership which is disappointing for an organization with over 3,000 members. But as a result of volunteers that had come forward at the AGM the PR working group was now functioning. The Chairman also referred to the notice the Treasurer had given at the

AGM that this was to be his final year in the post and advised that he had received an offer of help from a member who was an accountant which he hoped may be developed.

Elected Officers' Reports:

Chairman: The Chairman reported on the response he had from the Green Lane Association (GLASS) regarding their 'Wayfinder' database system. This would be reported on by the Secretary later in the meeting. The Chairman also expressed concern over the amount of e-mail traffic generated within the TRF and the time consumed in reading it. He hoped that committee members would try to be more discerning when addressing e-mails, and when resorting to the Reply to All key. The meeting discussed the number and quality of e-mails and the best use of this medium.

Secretary: Ted Lowres reported that there have been 17 applications to the Byway Bonus scheme since the last Executive Meeting and he asked groups to keep them coming in. There was also a report of 3 successful Byways from claims put in years ago.

Ted asked groups to let him have their e-mail contact. He also asked groups to collect the e-mail addresses of their members, as he feels this will be an important way to keep members informed.

Ted confirmed the discussion with GLASS over its Wayfinder system. The Chairman reminded members that this system had been restricted to GLASS members, but GLASS now appreciated that lots of information had been supplied by TRF members and it was agreed that reciprocal Associate Membership would overcome the problem of access to this system. The Chairman asked if members agreed that GLASS be accepted as Associate Members. **All Agreed.**

Concerning supplying of membership data to GLASS it was accepted that this was in the direct interests of TRF members and in direct pursuit of the purposes of the TRF.

Treasurer: John Gardner gave the brief report on the finances, noting that he is receiving regular cheques from the membership renewals. He also noted that he is in the process of drawing up expenses claim forms for Officers expenses. He reminded group representatives that they could claim travel expenses from the National Fund for travel to Executive Meetings on the basis of the first 100 miles being claimed from the group, and anything over 100 miles will be paid from national funds.

Membership Secretary: Mary Stevens reported membership stands at 3287 of which 1951 are fully paid up, the rest being renewals hopefully to come. This is a slight increase from last years total of 2990. She also noted the total taken in Membership fees and donations since the new year started on 1 October 2003. Mary also asked members if she could go ahead and get the database updated as per the quotation received for this purpose and circulated to the Treasurer and Secretary. **All Agreed.**

Right of Way Co-ordinator: Roger Peters gave his first report, having taken over from Dave Tilbury at New Year. Roger was anticipating a more informed hand-over but only received a brief resume of which groups are active. He went on to explain that his time had been taken up with trying to fend off a prosecution in Northumberland, where some TRF members have been stopped riding on a lane which has a Byway claim in. It looks as though the Crown Prosecution Service will take this all the way, and Roger asked for National TRF backing for this case (The Broadway Case). **All Agreed.**

Roger went on to discuss RoW in general and the principle that the TRF will only support its members when riding on lanes which have really good evidence of Byway and who are riding to our Code of Conduct. He also discussed the need for assistance and suggested an advertisement in TRAIL to find professional people. He felt that there is a need for Regional support, maybe two or three paid RoW people.

Action: The Chairman, Roger Peters and Alan Kind to liaise regarding the court case.

Roger Peters to advertise for RoW professionals.

Public Relations: Andrew Prince felt our focus now was on how to respond to the DEFRA Consultation. He would also be looking for a paid person to help with TRF publicity in general. He noted that he has had no information from the previous PR Officer, but he welcomes e-mails as a quick way of getting information round to groups and members. Andrew advised that he would have more to say during the DEFRA consultation discussions.

BMF: Dave Giles reported that the BMF is ready to help.

MAG: Richard Stiling reported that MAG is also willing to help, but they need the TRF to feed them the information to make the case properly, as they don't have enough RoW knowledge in house.

LARA: Richard Fordham reported the message from LARA is that there is a need to work together, Sport, Recreation, motorcycles and cars.

Presentation on the DEFRA Consultation:

The Chairman introduced the presentation on this consultation. He commented that the TRF is good at identifying what needs to be done, but not so good at knowing how to do it. He asked Tim Stevens to present the Consultation Proposals prior to the meeting discussing how to respond.

Tim gave his presentation focusing on what the consultation document says, what it means, and what may be the implications. He explained that these proposals are not a bit clear, and so the consequences may not be clear either. The presentation was very clear and well received.

Following the presentation the meeting discussed what can be done now.

The Chairman asked Dave Giles what he had learned from a telephone conversation with a DEFRA officer and the Ridgeway Management. Dave had asked where the Minister had been and what he had seen. The Ridgeway people say he was not in company with any of the Management Team. Also DEFRA was asked where the Minister had gone and who with. DEFRA said the Minister wanted to see certainty which would have been the amendments to S34A RTA contained in the CROW Act 2000, but which was now to be repealed due to Human Rights considerations.. This paper is their reaction to loss of S34A. He felt they do not want to ban the use of BOATS, but they do not want to have any more BOATS put on the Map. Dave also thinks the 1 year cut-off proposed is because they don't think we can get all the claims in.

The meeting discussed unity with other motor vehicle users and the feeling that some routes are simply not viable for cars when they would be for motorcycles, for instance where they are narrow, or if they would be affected by the weight of the vehicles. Tim Stevens felt it is the rights that are affected not just the vehicles.

The Chairman thanked everyone for a very thorough and helpful discussion from which he had gained a lot of useful advice. He summed up by listing the actions needed by the TRF to proceed.

Lobbying:

1. That TRF would contribute to LARA's overall response to the consultation.
2. The need to prepare the TRF response to the Consultation
3. Appeal to individual members to write to their own MPs, so that he / she can take the message to the Minister.
4. Members' letter direct to the Minister in response to the Minister's ill informed foreword to the consultation document.
5. TRF Members who are also members of Local Access Forums should encourage the forums to make responses that are in line with TRF responses.
6. TRF Members should lobby LAF members to seek responses in line with TRF responses.
7. TRF Groups should make responses to the consultation reinforcing national responses but also introducing some "local" flavours and information to the responses.

All these points were agreed as a correct summary of the discussion. The Chairman advised that groups and members would be assisted in their responses and letters by a supplement that would be mailed with the imminent issue of TRAIL magazine. (Note: See ACTION PACK document attached to these minutes).

Action: Chairman

Media: There is a lot of interest from the media about these proposals and the Chairman asked how best to use the media in this process. Andrew Prince reported his discussions with a company which GLASS uses (*Apple Tree*) and he would approach them to help us as well. The meeting discussed how to get our message across as it is a complicated subject, which the general public doesn't seem able to comprehend. The Chairman also reported that through a Member contact at their Cardiff shop Hein Gericke (motorcycle clothing retailers) had offered the services of their OR Agency free of charge to the TRF. **It was agreed to contact both these organizations.**

Action: Andrew Prince

The Meeting then anticipated what may result from the consultation proposals discussed necessary actions.

No matter what concessions are obtained we need to be ready with our claims; this will mean lots of research. The meeting heard from the Peak Group who already have in place a paid research team, and have put in a batch of claims. They explained that they had used a bit of trial and error putting in the claims, to try to assess what the Council would accept and what they wouldn't. The Chairman asked if the Peak Group had identified the minimum information that the Council would accept. They said they had not, it does seem quite difficult to know exactly what is needed, as some cases are different. Ken Stepney noted that Warwickshire was quite happy to let him have a copy of the Definitive Map, and are happy to process claims. Members felt concerned about Wales, where there are lots of lanes which people use, but not many TRF members living there to do the research and claiming. Tim noted that there does appear to be a different attitude in Wales, and he is talking to various people and getting a different message from that Regions than that put out by the Central Government.

The Chairman encouraged debate on what needs to be done Nationally. Alan Kind expressed interest in what the Peak Group is doing and felt there is a need for a TRF

paper on how to research properly and claim byways. Describe the process in more detail and explain that if we are up against a time limit Inclosure Awards are the most important first step, and each piece of evidence leads to other evidence, step by step. The meeting also discussed how to co-ordinate all users' efforts, so as not to duplicate claims. Roger Peters asked Groups to let him know what they are doing, as he will need to know as RoW co-ordinator. The Norfolk Group asked for an 'idiots guide' on what is needed.

The Chairman felt we need to engage people to write the model process, and make up a start up pack on research and claiming. Tim felt that once a template exists it may be useful to other vehicle users. It will also be necessary to help members when attending Public Inquiries. **It was agreed** that in association with the RoW Coordinator he should progress the recruitment of one or more Rights of Way Project Coordinators on a self-employed basis, without delay (See recruitment advert attached to these minutes).

Action: Chairman

Any Other Business:

Dave Giles announced the LARA Workshop taking place in Derby on 1 February. If members are coming they have to inform him because space is limited. Tim also announced the event which the Black Country Groups are organizing on the 7 February at Tong. He asked that Groups organizing these workshops also invite other users as there is a lot of knowledge within these groups.

Date and Place of next meeting:

The next Meeting will be on the 20 March at the Lilleshall Sport Centre, Newport, Shropshire. Start at 10.30 am.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16.45 and thanked members for a very productive and helpful meeting which he thought had guided the TRF well at this especially important time. He apologised for not meeting his target closing time of 16.00 but hoped that members present would appreciate the need to not cut the meeting short.

Future Executive Meeting dates are:

Saturday 20 March 2004 at Lilleshall Sport Centre, Newport, Shropshire.

Saturday 26 June 2004 at National Water Sport Centre, Nottingham.

Saturday 25 September 2004 at Lilleshall Sport Centre, Newport, Shropshire.

The AGM will be on Sunday 31 October 2004 at the Heritage Motor Museum, Gaydon.

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NOTICE BOARD

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As Llanerchindda Farm (the best trail riding centre in Wales) is now full every weekend in March for their guided trail riding programme over the Gap Road they have arranged for guided trips nearly every weekday throughout the whole of March.

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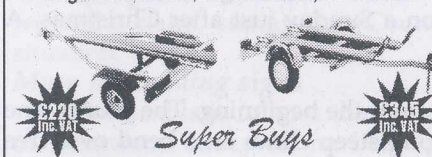
There is a £2 levy per guided rider towards the TRF Fighting Fund to claim Rights of Way.

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Richard Fordham & Dave Gibson are trying to build up an archive of video clips/TV & radio news reports relating to the TRF on either a national or local level.

If you can help please send videos/VCDs/CD-ROMs/audio cassettes/any format of any media articles, preferably originals, to:

Richard (address on inside front cover) or Dave, 67 Holly Avenue, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE2 2PX

Originals will be returned after digitisation.

Dave Gibson

Monmouthshire Trail Ride - New Friends?

My aim on this and any ride is to finish the day with more friends of trail riding. Remember the old adage: "true friends can be difficult to make but enemies quickly accumulate"?

Careful preparation

The ride was listed in the Gloucester group newsletter with date, area and 'phone number only. I can ask enquirers unknown to me about their experience and motorcycle. I would not turn away inexperienced members but would adapt. However, members very new to riding on un-sealed roads are best to start with a local half-day session. I can ask about their gearing and tyres. I can also describe the types of lane and recommend clothing e.g. good over-trousers and waterproof boots/socks for the stream crossings.

Knowing who is coming allows me to call the ride off if the weather turns very unpleasant. In this area the weather will not affect sustainable use of the lanes but may make those with stream crossings impassable. It threatened heavy rain/snow and sub-zero temperatures. On the day it was about 3°C and the rain held off.

Into the public eye

So on Sunday 28th December 2003 we set out - me on a KTM 400 LC4 EGS-E, Graham Hutton on a Suzuki DRZ400-S, Jim Knight on a Suzuki DR400, Vic Lodge on a Honda XR200, Simon Roberts on a Honda XR400, and Paul Smith on a new British CCM with the Australian specification DRZ400 engine. Our tarmac cruising speed was limited to below 45-50 mph by Vic's modestly-engined, low-g geared motorcycle.

Our opponents claim that the countryside is swarming with foot traffic, ramblers, and walkers with dogs: especially on a Sunday just after Christmas. A myth - as we'll see.

Maintenance by the motor users

The first lanes are in a network 1/2 mile from the beginning. The fourth lane has cobbles near the start and then a challenging steep climb on a bend over tree roots - changing little over many years. Twin-track vehicles occasionally enjoy this lane, and they trim away impinging holly branches and brambles, keeping it open for horse-riders. I have personal experience of horse riders' reluctance to trim overgrowth: they prefer to travel light and keep moving. If a route becomes difficult many just ride elsewhere.

"Hello ... we are people like you!"

On a later lane near Earlswood we waved to a man and a woman feeding a few chickens in a field. Half our group (one more if warmer weather) had open-face helmets so could be seen as people and not faceless "bikers". It can make the vital difference.

The day before I had trickled along with a lady driving a Range Rover on a forest track popular with foot traffic and walkers with dogs. We were going to

move some of a rotten fallen tree blocking the route of their twelve-mile horse ride. It is astounding yet sad that fellow humans on meeting "vehicles in the countryside" then pull such unpleasant faces, wind themselves up and ruin their day.

Little sign of use

The next green lane went steeply uphill and then continued as ribbed concrete house drives. As leader I loosened some leaves but the lane showed no sign of use. The full-width concrete addition would likely be an effective deterrent to horse-riders. Did the households ever have permission to do this to the lane?

Mobile maintenance and black piglets

Trail riding on the next lane, a County Road, keeps the weeds down. Local horse-riders don't seem to bother with it until we've made a way. I once spent an hour cutting a bad patch of brambles with secateurs.

Further on we passed many pheasant feed bins to the sides and later enjoyed the lovely sight of tiny black piglets scuttling back through the hedge into their field.

Road or footpath?

A footpath runs from the end for only about 20 metres along the lane. You guessed it ... a "footpath" sign deters all but foot traffic and knowledgeable users. Most ramblers will be unaware or don't care about higher rights so will complain about or even campaign against other users.

On more recent Ordnance Survey maps the lane is indicated as "other route with public access" (ORPA). The OS won't state what rights exist, leaving this to each Highway Authority. Gloucestershire County Council declined to answer queries on their ORPAs.

The OS add to the confusion by giving priority to the 'Definitive Map'. So if footpath claims along (un-tarred or very minor) County Roads have been confirmed, then the OS will depict them as footpaths. Yet if we claim such routes as 'Byway Open to All Traffic - BOAT' as a protection, most Highway Authorities will reject the claim, stating that County Roads have a higher status. What a sorry situation.

More misleading signs

For next lane follows the contour around Gray Hill with tantalising glimpses of Wentwood Reservoir far below. This lane has suffered from high use by the commercial horse-riding stables using it for access to the hill-top. A 20-metre stretch used to have horse leg prints 1/2 metre deep in sticky mud. With a motorcycle one had to gain a little momentum and maybe get off and push. There was talk in some circles that it was 4x4 erosion. Now it's all gone - most likely because the downhill edge has dropped sufficiently and wheels running across the hoof-holes have allowed the water to drain.

On this lane unless we go over the top with the cheeriness of our waves, smiles and "good morning's" we are treated as though we should not be there.

Firstly, the Forestry Commission signs include "no motorcycles" text but don't say where this applies.

Secondly, to onlookers who have studied the key on their OS maps but are not RoW experts, the term 'Road Used as a Public Path' implies it is a footpath.

Thirdly, in common with about half of the RUPPs in Wales, despite it having at minimum bridleway rights, it is signposted as "footpath". No wonder walkers complain about horses on footpaths. (The other half are signposted "bridleway").

Fourthly, the present OS symbol for a RUPP is barely distinguishable from a bridleway or even a footpath symbol, especially where other detail is nearby. Why did they change?

Obliteration of historical routes and hell

The next two lanes are County Roads but have the appearance of the universal Forestry Commission access track. The continuation is a beautiful sunken lane, some of which the motor users skirt to avoid pools rich in aquatic wildlife. Who authorised the obliteration of the historic road? The public have the idea that "bikes are not allowed in the woods" and there are no signs giving status. A recipe for complaints.

A former house resident near the end of this lane used to come out and play hell with motorcyclists - real heart attack behaviour. All based on his assertions that "bikes are not allowed in the woods" and the sign on the road saying "no through road" (we know this means "not actively maintained").

Promoted walks, Government advice, quiet motorcycles, and complimentary use

The next lane near Cats Ash is a County Road but is signed "Usk Valley Walk". There are no signs saying that vehicles may be met, as recommended in Government and Welsh Assembly advice in 'Making the Best of Byways'.

Going down this sunken lane in second gear, it was not until we were about 8 metres behind three pedestrians, that the woman at the back quite apparently heard us because she started then looked behind. Six motorcycles in a sunken lane, but obviously not the mythical "roaring" and ruination of "quiet enjoyment".

This is the first time I have seen obvious horse hoof-prints over this entire lane, not just on the damp stretches. This damage is worse than any erosion caused by motorcyclists. Our passing will roll over the uneven surface and help to drain off water.

Money and gangs

We stopped at Caerleon to make a significant contribution to the local economy. As we chatted a gang of some 30 rambblers passed on the footway. An intimidating sight - it certainly disturbed our quiet enjoyment. Why such fearsomely large groups? Are they touring the town or are they off-roaders?

Erosion

The next lane it is severely eroded...by surface water. It is anyway a deeply sunken vee-shape. Badger diggings now disused used to block the lane in one place with piles of soft earth. Motorcycle use has made this section passable. This lane is a County Road and perversely entertains a footpath on the 'Definitive Map'. While it is interesting to trail motorcyclists, I venture it is unsuited to the casual, ill-prepared walker.

More erosion and physical exertion

We all had to team up to manhandle our motorcycles up part of the next lane. The stream has gouged the carriageway and the remaining strip is steep, narrow and slopes towards the stream. Hard work indeed and putting paid to the myth that we just sit on the motorcycle and twist the throttle.

Onward

After the next lane, crossing Candwr brook, we are into the urban sprawl around Cwmbran.

Unseen and not heard

We next enjoyed four lanes near Henllys and towards Risca. The first was a beautiful sunken lane, uphill then flat and passing a tiny quarry. So near to the housing estates, but I bet the residents don't even know of its existence, let alone of our enjoyment.

Illegal users?

Travelling along the grassy lane on Mynnydd Henllys above Cwmbran and Risca we saw two youngsters on motorcycles, supervised by adults. Over the years such people have created a modest circuit on the bracken covered mountain-top. The people on motorcycles at this location are doing little harm.

Using a loophole in the law, landowners have ploughed out more bracken to evade 'open access' by walkers under the CRoW Act than ever these people will tread down.

Over a brow and downhill on an un-fenced, stony track we met two youngsters about 15 years-old on small quad ATVs. (The media has spread the name "quad bikes" to link them with existing demonic images of motorcyclists to jazz up their stories and thus sell more papers). Even under their safety helmets I could see one of them was a girl! Our opponents perpetuate the myth of teenage testosterone tanked-up tearaways.

Further on where the tarmac ends at a gravel area were parked a couple of vans, apparently used to bring the motorcycles or ATVs. The Police have powers to seize these vans. The Police know all about activity here, and may have even talked with the participants. Monmouthshire even has a Police team equipped with dual-purpose motorcycles capable of reaching such sites. The "problem" is simply very low priority. Or do they let the "problem" escalate until even MPs get involved so they get ring-fenced resources? Or are they told to let this "problem" escalate so it can be used as a reason to ban all motorcyclists?

The riders may well have landowners' permission - has anyone asked them?

Review

In Risca we again stopped and spent more money. We also considered where else we could go in the time remaining before dusk.



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More confusion

We then enjoyed the long ridgeroad between the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys. The gravel and stone un-tarred County Road mid-section quite clearly joins up tarmac roads heading up to the mountain. Before tarmac this route would have been the shortest and best way to travel - avoiding the longer, wetter and torturous valley bottoms.

Perversely the road is recorded also as a footpath and the "Sirhowy Valley Walk". Even carriage drivers will be unable to legally enjoy this route unless they claim it at minimum as a 'Restricted Byway'.

There are puddles in the stony track, and even if the road were to be maintained at public expense, the farmers' road vehicles and heavy tractors could still cause puddles.

Youngsters and conservatories and more illegal use

Further on towards the former coal-mining conurbations of Ystrad Mynach, Pontllanfraith and Blackwood we saw about eight youngsters on low-powered enduro-style and trials motorcycles. Again, accompanied by adults and with vans further along the track. One van even belonged to a conservatory company. Are the owners of houses with conservatories more likely to complain about illegal use?

Disappointment, tarmac and more money

So much to enjoy, so little time. We would like to have enjoyed the historic Aberbeeg zig-zag road and the mountain road with a halt to look down over the incredibly steep mountain-side to Blaina hundreds of metres below. After this we could have enjoyed the difficult climb from Cwmavon and over the beautiful mountain. No time: better to warm-up our tired bodies enjoying a few lanes nearer to our dispersal point. So we cruised on the A472 to Pontypool, where we spent even more money.

Favourite Lane

The next lane is almost continuous for 4 1/2 km and mostly sunken deep below the surrounding fields. Some of it runs along the stony streambed, ideal going in times gone by, rather than struggle through red sandstone earth. Passing the golf course the lane is littered with golf balls and drinks cans. Trail riders don't drop litter.

In one place we climb a slope washed down to tree roots, with barbed wire to the side. Both DRZ-based riders struggled. Motorcycle or rider? At the end, as there are no houses, I waited for the group to gather. They said "what a fantastic lane!"

The mythical carriage

Riding 10 metres against the flow of the very swollen Sor Brook took some composure. I waited to ensure everyone was across safely and then continued up the stony, sunken lane with mature tree hedgerows, mostly beech and spiky holly. Like a few lanes on our ride, water flow after heavy rainfall has taken the centre down to bedrock, leaving a hollow-way shape. I doubt if this and similar lanes would be passable by traditional horse-drawn carriages. A modern, stand-up, chariot style vehicle barely one metre wide may be practical. Sat up high on a traditional carriage or cart or even on a horse, the driver or rider would need to constantly duck branches and battle with face-level twigs on the mature trees. While many boundaries are beech, many are spiky holly. Who is going to bring these lanes "up to standard" for high users by cutting out the characteristic overhead canopy? What will this do for biodiversity of the flora and fauna that need the dark and damp conditions?

Halfway up the hill the farmer has made a track across the lane to link adjacent fields via gates. There are a few routes up this obstruction, involving variously tree roots, half bricks or fallen branches. Not all of us made it "clean" but had to get off and push or be helped. Meeting tarmac past the farmhouse we waved to a man looking like "the farmer".

The muddiest lane

The next lane starts on a forestry-type track through evergreen woods, then leads onto a twin-hedged lane, with enchanting views of the rolling landscape typical of the lower reaches of the Usk valley. There are puddles and a 100 mm cover of mud caused solely by field access by farm tractors.

Illogical depictions on the Ordnance Survey map

The lane then forks and we took the interesting branch into a lane with a flat bottom washed down two metres to bedrock and twin hedges rooted at shoulder height. Possibly because aerial photography cannot distinguish twin hedges because they meet over the top, it is shown on a 1:50,000-scale OS map as nothing except a red dotted footpath. Sounds like a good excuse? Further on where the hedges are slightly further apart, fully trimmed and the lane is grassy, the OS show dual solid lines, ORPA in the lane and footpath beside in the fields.

On a 1973 OS map, where Monmouthshire County Council have not even completed their 'Definitive Map', the earlier muddy part of this lane is shown as a fenced "drive or track (un-metalled)". On the current 1998 OS map some of this part is now shown as "path". It has remained exactly the same, albeit a bit muddier with heavy tractors, since I first enjoyed it in 1978. Who is behind this downgrading of our heritage?

The farmers' friend

While we stopped for a chat near a gate we noticed a very sick sheep in the field. We found the nearest farm but the person in the house "just rented it". We found a woman in a barn who thought she knew the sheep's owners, and after some persuasion she promised to 'phone them.

After this delay the light was failing and Jim's sole was detaching, so we decided to omit the last few lanes.

All said they had a great day and look forward to enjoying similar again.

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More friends?

I think my aim was achieved. I hope, too, that this ride report has given you a few ideas for your response to the DEFRA consultation or for when you speak to your MP.

Ride Data and Analysis

Number of lanes: 36 ('links' from TRF South Wales group's lane recording system, which references each 'link' where the County Council give it a different reference).

Number of lanes with correct signposts or waymarks: 0 - not even one single 'RUPP' sign.

Time: 6 hours

Distance: Not recorded - it's smiles not miles that matter.

Number of pedestrians on lanes: 8 - 5 is typical for similar trail rides.

Number of horse-riders: 1 - typical.

Number of motorcycle riders: 14 - not typical, I have never seen this many on similar trail rides. May be perceived by some as riding illegally, may have landowners' permission. All had safety helmets.

Motorcycle trail riders: 3 - typical.

Farmers on lanes: 0 - typical or 2.

Carriage on lanes: 0 - typical.

Cyclists on lanes: 0 - typical.

Twin-track motor vehicle: 0 - typical.

Piglets: 6 - typical 0.

Number of lanes damaged by agricultural vehicles: 1.

Number of lanes eroded by mechanically propelled recreational [sic] vehicles: 0.

Number of sites where perceived illegal motor users come into conflict with walkers: 0 - these users only seen in open areas (not narrow, not bendy, etc).

Number of lanes eroded by water: 10 approximately - but none serious.

Sustainability of mechanically propelled recreational vehicles on lanes: No significant deterioration over 20 years from this use.

Recommended status for all lanes: 'Byway Open to All Traffic' with "byway" sign and appropriate waymarks. Also very beneficial for horse-riders. Essential to be at minimum 'restricted byway' for horse-drawn carriage drivers where County Roads are footpath on the 'Definitive Map'.

Mark F. Holland,

Public Relations Officer for Gloucester group.

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✉ letters

CUT-OFF DATES - RULES FOR ONE, RULES FOR ANOTHER

With reference to R. Comley's letter in TRAIL - January 2004, this is another example of one rule for one, one rule for another when it comes to cut off dates.

I recently submitted a Planning application on behalf of a client and late on the day of the Planning Committee meeting one of the adjoining owners submitted a document in support of his objections. This document was accepted by the planning officer and presented to the committee. I won't bore you with any further details but the upshot was that the planning application was refused, with the document seeming to strongly influence the decision even though it contained inaccurate and misleading information. It didn't make any difference of course that the objector is a retired QC!

So the decision of Wiltshire County Council to refuse to include R. Comley's letter, even though received well before the date of the meeting is a bit ripe! I thought that this is what addendums to reports were for?

On another tack I've only been a member of the TRF for a few months and only done a little trail riding so far and so only have a limited understanding of the issues.

The pressures on trail riding make depressing reading but to put things in perspective what is the current state of play? Have all the important/well used byways etc. already been claimed and can any number be put on those still needing to be claimed? I take it that some are so minor/short that claims won't be submitted for them?

Chris Fellows

Ed. There is much to be done and we must all do what we can. Make a start by writing the letters suggested in the action pack enclosed with your January TRAIL. I think we can still prevail. The TRF was formed in 1970 because it was felt that the lanes were under threat, and still the fight goes on.

FRUSTRATION

The Lake District is probably one of the most spectacular places to ride in the UK but is being abused by off road motorcycles and not by TRF members I may add. I ride in the Lakes ten to fifteen times a year and in the last three years have only met two groups of riders that were actually in the TRF. I have never seen so many miserable, unsociable offroaders as in the Lakes with so much disrespect for

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rights of way. One group of twelve riders (I do not have an issue with group size) from Blackpool (one on a PE175) have made a motocross track at the side of one green lane.

We have problems with our countryside activities throughout the UK and its not just people abusing rights of way, its the national park authorities, its the ramblers and the government. I believe in LIBERTY and marched in London on the countryside march as I believe did a small TRF group from the North West. I shoot, I hunt with dogs and I ride a converted mx er on green lanes. My whole life revolves round the countryside and the government want to take it all away. WHY DID THE TRF NOT SUPPORT THE COUNTRYSIDE MARCH? After all it was not just about hunting it was about liberty and our rights.

Through my hunting activities I come into contact with lords and ladies, game keepers and land owners none of which treat me any differently when they find out about my trail riding activities. Whilst out with the hunts in the Lake District I constantly ask the land owners and hunts people what they think about trail riding and none of them are bothered as long as the bikes stay on the correct route and riders close gates after them.

Whilst out riding in the North Yorkshire moors two friends and myself came across two people on horseback. We duly stopped our engines and beckoned them forward. As they got close we spoke and I noticed the lady was wearing a LIBERTY AND LIVELIHOOD badge and commented on it and told her I also was wearing the same badge. She was puzzled as to why I was wearing one and when I told her that we all need to make a stand for our rights she agreed and we had a friendly conversation.

WHY DOES THE TRF NOT SHOW MORE SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE?

I WOULD LIKE TO SEE A MASS DEMONSTRATION OF TRAIL BIKES POSSIBLY IN THE LAKES ON A BANK HOLIDAY.


I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE TRF ADOPT A BADGE SHOWING SUPPORT FOR LIBERTY & LIVELIHOOD.

We have cowered down to the national parks and the government for too long, its time we made a stand. I'm sure I speak for many of our members. Where do our leaders stand on this?

I signed a declaration that I am prepared to carry on hunting and take the consequences should a hunt ban go ahead, I will also declare that should a ban be imposed I will continue to ride on green lanes.

TOGETHER WE STAND, DIVIDED WE WILL FALL.

*P. Fawcett
Teeside & North Yorks, The Pro-active Group*



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CALL TO ARMS

The onslaught against us and our activity continues. No sooner is the government thwarted, due to human rights issues, than the pressure groups who have access to those with political power, and are obviously intent on vanquishing us, find their cause championed by Alun Michael and his new consultation document "Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way".

Order a copy from DEFRA, ref PB8923, ADMAIL 6000, London, SW1A 2XX. Then write in to Alun Michael and show your anger as I have done.

Rob Stephens

At the risk of being a boring old git - this is my second letter in a week to TRAIL concerning Mr Alun Michael's latest proposals. But I think it deserves an answer from the Minister. I shall post it off to him; hot on the heels of my thoughts on his Mechanical Vehicles Consultation Paper. Perhaps other members would like to write along similar lines - namely why in two separate letters from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions were we promised "25 years for the recording or rights based on historic evidence" (taken from letter dated 20/06/00) and "funding will be available through the Countryside Agency, from the beginning of the next financial year, to voluntary organisations which are able to assist with the necessary research" (taken from letter dated 28/02/01).

Do politicians ever tell the truth? Are they held to account?

Rob Stephens



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SUZUKI DRZ400S 2001, good condition, 2950 miles, taxed until Nov., new tyres, loads of extras. £2,900 o.n.o. Tel: Paul 07831 179418 (Long Eaton, Derbyshire).

1993 K REG HONDA XLR200R Electric start, white/red, good condition, new chain, sprockets & brake shoes, 6500 kms. £1,400. Lady rider. **2001 Y reg BMW F650GS** Dakar, blue/white, mint condition, panniers, engine bars, heated grips, aux socket, tank bag. Taxed May 2004, new tyres. £4200. Lady rider. Tel: Don 01635 864808 (Berkshire).

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1 & 3 Tues, 9pm, *The Mitre, Church Road, Bradmore, Wolverhampton*

BRISTOL Bob Chapman, Tel: 0117 960 9660
4th Mon, 8pm, *Keynsham Rugby Club, Bristol Road, Keynsham*

CAMBRIDGE John Brooker, Tel: 01767 692805
1st Thurs, *Golden Ball, Boxworth*

CORNWALL Sally Madgwick, Tel: 01208 74411
3rd Thurs, 8pm, *Pencaron Club, Bodmin*

CUMBRIA Anthony Hayhurst, Tel: 01539 721115
2nd Tues, *Derby Arms Hotel, Witherslack, Nr. Kendal*

DERBYSHIRE & SOUTH YORKSHIRE
Kevin Marsh, Tel: 01246 811949
2 & 4 Tuesdays, *The Angel Hotel, Sprinkhill, Eckington, Nr. Chesterfield, Derbyshire*

DEVON Rob Williams, Tel: 01626 364564
2nd Tues, 8pm, *The Welcome Stranger, Bickington, Nr. Newton Abbott*

DORSET Martin Diamond, Tel: 01202 571325
1st Tues, 8pm, *Greyhound Inn, Winterbourne, Kingston, Nr. Bere Regis*

EAST MIDLANDS Graham Chinnery, Tel: 01332 863433
2nd Wed, *The Chequers Inn, Main St, Breaston, South Derbyshire, J25 on M1*

EAST YORKSHIRE Peter Hall, Tel: 01405 862616
1st Tues, *The Plough, Snaith*

ESSEX Dave Anderson, Tel: 01277 657783
2nd Wed, *The Wheatsheaf Public House, Hatfield Peveral*
4th Wed, *The White Hart Public House, High Street, Billericay (social meeting)*

EXMOOR Ian Sadler, Tel: 01884 821547
2nd Wed, 8pm, *The Hartnoll Hotel, Bolham, A396 1 mile north of Tiverton*

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HIGH PEAK & POTTERIES
Graham Till, Tel: 01782 776338 or 01782 833222 (work)
1st Tues, 8.30pm, *Black Horse at Endon (A53, about 3 miles west of Leek, Staffordshire)*

ISLE OF WIGHT Andy Hawkins, Tel: 01983 617232
1st Wed, 8pm, *The Eight Bells Inn, Carisbrooke, Newport, IOW*

KENT Anthony Evans, Tel: 01732 360884
2nd Wed, 9pm, *Pied Bull, Farningham, Off A20, Nr Brands Hatch*

LANCASHIRE Keith Westley, Tel: 01704 893215
1st Tues, *Hindhead Pub on A49, Charnock Richard*

LINCOLNSHIRE Paul Vernon, Tel: 01522 889079
4th Thurs, 8pm, *Manvers Arms, Monks Road, Lincoln*

LODDON VALE David Cook, Tel: 0118 901 4481
2nd Thurs, *Inn in the Park, Woodley Centre, E. Reading*

NORTHUMBERLAND Chris Moody
Tel: 0191 387 3507 6-10pm or 07860 302001 (mobile)
1st Tues, 8pm, *The Swan, Heddon on Wall*

NORTH WALES Richard Hughes, Tel: 01244 533855
1st Wed, 8pm, *Cross Keys, Buckley, OS 117 290 637*

NORWICH John Jenkins, Tel: 07721 880463
2nd Wed, 7.30pm, *White Horse, Trowse, Norwich*

OXFORDSHIRE Peter Cole, Tel: 01844 214075
3rd Thurs, *The Red Lion, Cassington*

PEAK DISTRICT Neil Walker, Tel: 01788 811919
1st Thurs, 8pm, *Travellers Rest, Ashbourne Road, Derby*

RIBBLE VALLEY
Mark Wolstenholme, Tel: 01282 432088
2nd Tues, *Pendle Hotel, Chatburn, Clitheroe (off A59)*

SHROPSHIRE Rob Latham, Tel: 01952 592324
2nd & last Wed, *White Horse, Shrewsbury*

SOMERSET Greg Hughes, Tel: 07887 821472
2nd Thurs, 8pm, *The Bell Hotel, Curry Rivel, Nr. Taunton*

SOUTHERN Lee Wildsmith, Tel: 02380 611110
3rd Thurs, *Southampton & District MCC, Woodside Ave., Eastleigh, (opposite Halfords)*

SOUTH LONDON & SURREY
Steve Sharp, 0208 773 4204
9pm 1st Wed, *Carshalton United Ex Service Club, West Street, Carshalton, Surrey*

SOUTH NORTHANTS
Trevor Gardiner, Tel: 01788 815927
2nd Mon, 9pm, *The Live & Let Live Pub, Harpole, Nr. Northampton*

SOUTH WALES Stuart Dodwell, Tel: 01446 710851
1st Thurs, *Welsh Institute of Sport, Cardiff, 8pm*

SUFFOLK Richard May, Tel: 01787 374073
Last Wed, *Manger Pub, A134 Sudbury Rd, Bury-St-Ed*

SWINDON Phil Male, Tel: 01793 731777
1st Wed, 8.30pm, *The Carrier's Arms at South Marston, Swindon*

SUSSEX Nick Harris, Tel: 01798 344594
Last Thurs, *Ashington Social Club, Rear of Red Lion, A24, 9 miles North of Worthing*

TEESSIDE & NORTH YORKS
Roger Preston, Tel: 01429 837093
3rd Tues, *The Ranch House, Thoraldby Farm, Nr Stokesley, map ref 93...493074*

THAMES VALLEY Gary Hiller, Tel: 01932 851291
3rd Mon, *District Arms, Woodthorpe Rd, Ashford, Middlesex*

WEST ANGLIA David Knight, Tel: 01933 313816
1st & 3rd Thurs, *Scott Bader Social Club, opp. Parish Church, Wollaston, Wellingborough*

WEST MIDLANDS Simon Mills, Tel: 01926 332982
1st & 3rd Thurs, *Wilmcote Mens Club, Stratford on Avon*

WEST YORKSHIRE Gordon Carr, Tel: 01729 830569
1st & 3rd Thurs, *Bankfoot Cricket Club, Wickets Close, (off Cleckheaton Rd), Odsal, Bradford*

WILTSHIRE Vic Price, Tel: 01380 724651
1st Tues, *The Bell On The Common, Broughton Gifford*

WORCESTERSHIRE
Steve Hobby, Tel: 01562 820121 Mob: 07970 929029
1st and 3rd Tuesday, *White Hart, Fernhill Feath, Worcs*

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