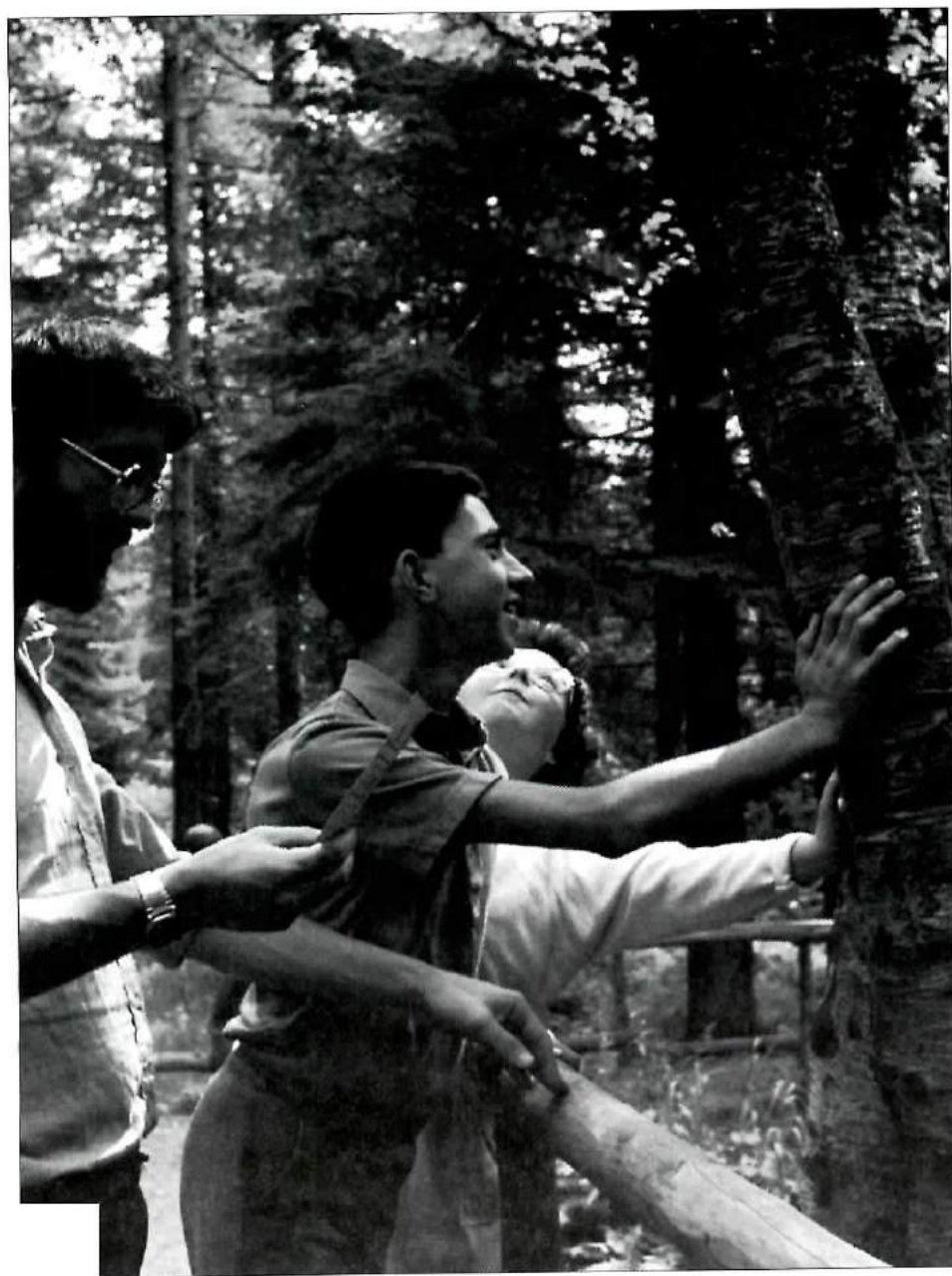


# COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION



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## - National walking strategy

Visual-impairment

National Parks and disability needs

Visitor Surveys

Access and agri-environment schemes in Scotland

## - *Exchanging and Spreading Information to develop best Policy and Practice in Countryside Recreation*



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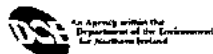
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Photo: Forest Life Picture Library

Cover: Afon Walk for the partially sighted and handicapped, Penllergaer Wood, South Wales. The issue of access to woodlands is well covered in a video 'Woods for All'. The video, produced as part of the Millennium Forest for Scotland project, which was given its English premiere at the 1997 Annual CRN Conference, will be available £10.00 (inc. of postage & packaging). Please send your cheques (made payable to 'Reforesting Scotland') to Woods for All, Reforesting Scotland, 21a Coates Crescent, Edinburgh. EH3 7AF.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of CRN member agencies.



## Countryside Recreation Network

CRN is a network which:

- is UK wide
- gives easy access to information on countryside and related recreation matters
- reaches organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- networks thousands of interested people

The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals in three areas:

### *Research:*

to encourage co-operation between members in identifying and promoting the need for research related to countryside recreation, to encourage joint ventures in undertaking research, and to disseminate information about members' recreation programmes.

### *Liaison:*

to promote information exchange relating to countryside recreation, and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues.

### *Good Practice:*

to spread information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of countryside recreation.

Chair: Richard Broadhurst,  
Forestry Commission

Vice-chair: Glenn Millar,  
British Waterways

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# Editorial

From the provision of facilities for disabled users at countryside sites to a discussion about access in Scotland this issue covers a broad spectrum of topics. A fundamental aspect of all these issues is the need to ensure fair opportunity for all in the community to enjoy the countryside. The promotion of greater equity in society is a crucial strand in the sustainability agenda. With the current debates on access legislation in England and Wales and the likelihood of further work in Scotland and Northern Ireland it is timely that these issues should be discussed. Many questions will need to be resolved such as how greater access opportunities can be made available whilst safeguarding areas vulnerable to ecological deterioration from impact and disturbance. How should greater access rights be managed? How will access be controlled to ensure minimum disturbance to crops, livestock and the immediate environment? Co-operation, co-ordination and communication between all interested parties will be of paramount importance in ensuring a workable form of any new access legislation.

Access is just one strand of many to which the ideals of sustainability will have to be applied. By increasing or favouring certain forms of transport such as cycling and walking in cities and surrounding countryside, we can reduce the current mass dependence on private motorised transport. There is an urgent need to maximise local self-sufficiency and promote the redesign and improvement of urban environments for walking and cycling. In this we have much to learn from certain European cities. The proposed 'National Walking Strategy' is a timely reminder of the need to focus on this most basic form of transport.

Edmund Blamey

If you really want to make a difference and contribute to Making Access for All a Reality, the topical message of last year's conference, try this. Tell at least two people, one good tip for increasing accessibility. Tell them they must each convey these tips, to another two people who have not heard them previously. By the end of the week, if your two friends had played the game perfectly you would have reached  $64 [x \rightarrow 2^{x-1}]$  people. By the end of the month if we had specified that you could only speak to people in the UK, the whole population would have a tip (theoretically 1,700,000,000 people or so in a month). By the end of the year  $3.8 \times 10^{109}$  could (if so many existed) know. The world's population was estimated in 1990 to be  $5.3 \times 10^9$ . If all 3,500 who receive this newsletter take part, we could easily reach the world within the month, but everyone must play their part! Oh, the power of networking... ..and a Happy (accessible and iterative) New Year to you!

Richard Broadhurst

# *Countryside Needs for the Visually-impaired*

*Jane Young, Ecological Consultant*



*Touch and smell are important senses to use, not just for the visually-impaired, but for everyone.*

*Photo: Jane Young*

Disability awareness is much more than improving access arrangements, particularly when providing for the visually-impaired visitor. So often the blind or partially sighted are denied the same chance as other disabled visitors to appreciate the countryside around them.

The work of Joseph Bharat Cornell, the pioneering naturalist-teacher, brought an empathic approach to the countryside which tapped a child's insatiable appetite for experiencing the natural world by using complete sensory awareness. As adults we have become very dependent upon sight and often blot out the use of touch, smell and hearing or become inhibited in our use of these senses. Television and videos contribute to our dependence upon sight and we could even be slowly conditioning ourselves to assuming that it would be inappropriate for the visually-impaired to experience the natural world. As Joseph Cornell stressed, there is no substitute for

experiencing the natural world at first hand.

Several years ago I had the privilege of teaching wildlife conservation to a woman who had been totally blind since birth. Through this experience I realised that the imaginative ideas of Cornell could benefit not only children but also the visually-impaired and ultimately every one of us who provides and receives interpretation of the countryside.

Any heuristic approach should include the opportunity for everyone to participate fully in enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside. A recently opened historical visitor attraction was described to me as being unsuitable for the visually-impaired because it was "all action". This 'atmospheric' attraction had not been considered suitable for the visually-impaired by the designers. Audio tapes in several languages had been provided for the use of foreign visitors in the quiet season when actors were unavailable to provide live interpretation but there was no provision for the blind.

Great strides have been made in recent years to enable the partially sighted visitor to enjoy the countryside. Many sites provide audio taped commentary, touch maps and models, Braille and large print guides, improved sign legibility, tapping rails and features to indicate stopping places, hazards and changes of direction.

Thankfully the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been designed to ensure that people of all abilities, including the visually-impaired, are offered a service of equal quality for their needs.

Putting this into practice is highly specialised when considering the needs of the visually-impaired. The practitioner needs not just an intimate knowledge of the features to interpret, but a deep understanding of what it is like to be unable to see. Visual impairment is more than the experiences of a sighted person when blindfolded. It is essential to work with the visually-impaired themselves to understand that their perceptions of, for example, space, tree canopy, undergrowth, can be very different from our own.

Once the practitioner has acquired the sensitivity of understanding the needs of the visually-impaired, it is important that any interpretative or habitat creation scheme is designed correctly.

A nature trail or visitor centre must be made 'alive' for the partially sighted or blind visitor. A self-guided trail designed for the sighted visitor

which is merely 'translated' into Braille or audio facility can be a very boring and limited experience for a visually-impaired person. A trail for a blind person must combine the experiences of touch, hearing and smell and be full of variety, preferably incorporating contrasts within one sense e.g. rough and smooth bark, dry crispy leaves and wet soft leaves, sweet and unpleasant smells, warm sunny places and cooler shaded areas. An ecologist with a wide knowledge of flora and fauna characteristics and a clear understanding of the relationships of organisms within the habitat can produce an interpretation package which provides imaginative and authoritative information. Points of interest should be featured at more frequent intervals than usual in order to give a visually-impaired visitor confidence as well as information. Large featureless open spaces can be very disorientating. Features of interest can be identified by touch, smell and hearing and related to the environmental factors which influence them e.g. the effect of light and shade, moisture and wind on plant growth; the relationship of tree species on birdlife; management practices which benefit certain species. Although it cannot be seen, a description of a view can be important too. In this way a mental picture of that piece of countryside can be built up.

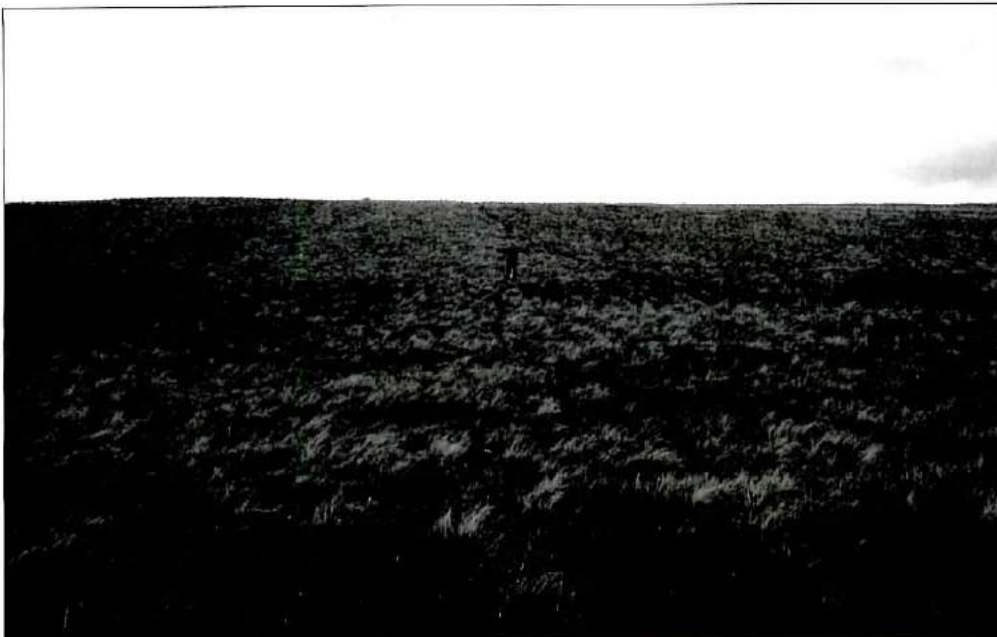


Photo: Jane Young

*Vast open spaces can be a disorientating experience*

As mentioned earlier an empathy with the visually-impaired must be developed by the ecologist or countryside practitioner in order to progress and refine ideas to be incorporated in an interpretative or habitat creation scheme. This includes a knowledge of the hazards of touching or smelling unpleasant or potentially dangerous specimens. For example, touching thistle down, elm leaves or lichen covered birch bark is a harmless and rewarding activity but touching stinging nettles, Scot's Pine resin or blackthorn is not. Scent from honeysuckle, meadowsweet, thyme, hedge woundwort or stinkhorn is distinctive but it is usually necessary to direct a person's attention to the source of the scent. General smells of a fox which has passed by or decaying leaf litter can also add to the enjoyment of a countryside visit.



Photo: Jane Young

In particular, hearing helps the visually-impaired with orientation and any permanent features such as running water should always be included in an interpretation scheme. Other more seasonal or transient features should also be identified if possible e.g. bird song, fish jumping, water voles 'plopping' into the water, the wind blowing in tall grass, willow, poplar or aspen trees, the squeaking of shrews, the rattling of seeds in a pod before dispersal can all add to the appreciation of a visit.

It is important for visually-impaired visitors to be allowed to experience the same facilities as everyone else and to interpret them in a way which is best suited to their needs. Nobody wants to feel socially isolated by being provided with separate places for his or her exclusive appreciation. Habitats designed specifically for the partially sighted or blind person can do this. An area with strong vibrant colours, lots of rustling leaves and waterfalls and highly scented plants growing together can be both isolating and confusing. Scented plants are better used as markers along a route.

Everyone, including the estimated 1.75 million blind or partially sighted individuals in this country, has a right to an equal opportunity of access not only to places but also to the experiences taken for granted by the sighted population. Habitat creation and interpretation in the countryside and in visitor centres which have been designed with the visually-impaired in mind can increase environmental awareness and a spirit of receptivity to nature for everyone, even those who believe that we live in a sight-orientated world.

### Reference

Cornell, J.B. 1979. *Sharing Nature with Children*. Exley Publications.

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# *'You cannot be serious! A national walking strategy that omits leisure walking?'*

*Peter Ashcroft, Countryside Commission*



*Photo: Countryside Commission*

Not many readers of Countryside Recreation will realise that the Government is in the midst of preparing a national walking strategy. Glenda Jackson, Transport Minister in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, is chairing a Walking Steering Group of representatives from a wide range of organisations. The group's aim is to reverse the current decline in walking and encourage people to become less dependent on the car. However

*Leisure walking must be an essential component of the Government's National Walking Strategy*

their scope seems to exclude walking for leisure. The tone of a discussion paper issued early in 1997 puts the focus clearly on pedestrians in urban areas. Important though that is, it is clearly not the entire picture.

To walk is not just a pedestrian experience! As we enter a new age of integrated thinking on transport, with a promised transport white paper this May, it seems only logical that we should apply the same integrated thinking to walking. Walking is considered by many to be the Cinderella of transport policy, and will continue to be so unless there is a rapid shift in thinking.

## **Conference Puts Leisure on the Agenda**

A recent conference about the walking strategy hosted by Staffordshire University and Stoke on Trent Council explored the role of leisure walking in the context of utilitarian walking, that is walking for everyday reasons such as going to the shops, to school or to work. It defined the contribution that leisure could make to a walking strategy and identified solutions to advocate to the Government and others.

The conference heard that embracing leisure walking within a national walking strategy could:

- boost the importance of walking as a mode of transport and a lifestyle activity;
- add to economic development in critical places such as rural areas and inner cities;
- encourage healthy lifestyles.

Discussion evolved around the following issues: The National Travel Survey (NTS), the main source of information about peoples' travel patterns uses the label of 'just walk' for leisure type walking but defines it as walking which has 'no purpose other than to walk itself', as if people are aimlessly wandering about with nothing better to do with their time! A big flaw of the NTS is that it only measures walks when they take place on the paved highway, not on grassy rights of way, commons, country parks, woodlands, tow paths or any other surface where the majority of leisure walks actually take place. This had led to a serious underestimate in official Government statistics on the scale of leisure walking, and makes even more indispensable new sources such as the UK Day Visits Survey which measures leisure walking in town and country, along with all out of home leisure activities.

According to the NTS the volume of utilitarian walking has declined by 12% between 1985 and 1993. By contrast, leisure walking is substantial and growing. The UK Day Visits Survey shows that in 1996 there were 850 million leisure walks across Great Britain, with 475 million taking place in the countryside, 335 million in towns and a further 40 million on the seaside and coast. As leisure becomes a more substantial part of the walking scene it will make even less sense to ignore it.

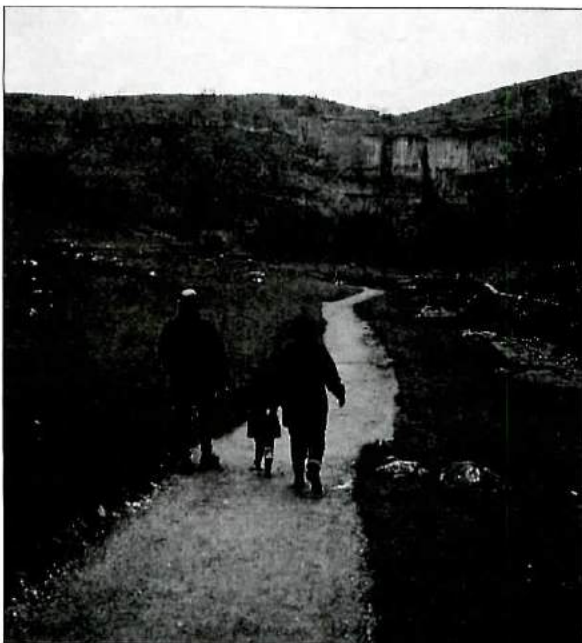


Photo: Kevin Bishop

A day out at Malham Cove, North Yorkshire.

The economic value of leisure walking is also significant. In rural areas, where walking accounts for 30% plus of leisure activities, it is a generator of up to £2 billion of visitor spending for the local economy. For example, the South West Coastal Path is the biggest tourist attraction in the South West, generating over £15 million every year. Similarly part of the solution to re-generating inner city areas and making them safer places is to get people walking for leisure there.

In many cases the same types of infrastructure can serve leisure and utilitarian walking. Take, for example, the London Walking Network which consists of two concentric walking routes created by linking together and waymarking urban green spaces. This concept was originally developed as a leisure route but now there is increasing interest in using it for commuting and social walking by creating better links into the urban fabric. To consider new facilities on the basis of a single use is to play down their potential for all types of use.

Faced with a decline in walking how are people going to be motivated to walk more? Tighter land use planning, better walking infrastructure and more restrictions on the use of the car are likely components of a walking strategy but motivating forces are also likely to be needed. Leisure (because people want to) and health (because people know they should do) are two strong motivators. The National Cycling Strategy found that promoting leisure cycling was a precursor to encouraging a daily cycling habit. Is the same true for walking and what about the promotion of health? We are an increasingly inactive nation where 80% of women and 70% of men do not take enough exercise to benefit their health [Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey, 1992]. GP surgeries are teaming up with rights of way staff and park rangers to develop 'Health Walks', aimed at people with sedentary lifestyles. One scheme, in Sonning Common, Oxfordshire, found that people who take part in health walks become more aware of the sense in choosing to walk more in their everyday lives rather than always using the car for short journeys.

Another issue is funding. Utilitarian walking is funded from main stream local authority highway budgets, boosted in England by DETR transport grants in the form of Transport Packages and Programmes. As a result every day walking can benefit from having a small slice of



big transport budgets. By contrast, leisure walking is often funded by smaller leisure departments, occasionally aided by discretionary grants from countryside organisations. These different funding sources and the different professionals providing for the same activity can deter effective integration of facilities.

A concentration on utilitarian walking can overshadow other places where people could walk. For example edge of town housing developments are often orientated towards the town centre, thus ignoring potential links outwards using rights of way.

### **Ideas to Boost Walking**

The conference considered a number of ideas to demonstrate how leisure walking could be an important and practical part of a national walking strategy.

Make urban parks and green spaces safer and more attractive and pleasurable places. In recent years many have deteriorated. City crime, darkness, feeling vulnerable and anti-social behaviour all risk keeping people away. Yet new approaches can make a difference. For example, the new Park Ranger Service in the London Borough of Southwark is showing how to promote walking as one way to rejuvenate people's interest in public open spaces.

Putting rights of way in good condition is probably the single most significant action to promote leisure walking in the countryside and the urban fringe. Michael Meacher MP, Minister for the Environment, recently acknowledged that good progress is being made towards the target of opening up all rights of way but that many areas will fail to hit the target by the year 2000. He has asked the Countryside Commission to pursue the target beyond then.

There is a case, especially around towns and cities, for treating rights of way and the paved highway as a single network, even if each element largely retains its own character. If we could see all walking surfaces as one walking network and set about the task of improving its appeal in a unified way we could make real improvements in opportunities for leisure and daily walking.

More bold is the plan to create new car-free corridors, 'Greenways' designed for work, rest and play, which link residential areas to countryside, schools, commercial districts and business parks. There are 17,000 kms of planned

or existing routes which could become multi-use and multi-purpose green travel corridors.

Traffic speed and volumes deter walking. Reducing traffic speeds on residential and minor rural roads could turn them into 'Quiet Roads' and 'Quiet Streets', making them safer and hence more conducive to walking.

Greenways and Quiet Roads are two new concepts currently being championed in England by the Countryside Commission. Announcements are expected shortly. One of the messages that the conference heard was that switching a small slice of funds from the road building programme to support better facilities for leisure walking in town and country could make enormous improvements in the prospects for walking.

If readers have any ideas about how we can boost the prospects for leisure and everyday walking they should get in touch with David Williams at the DETR who is writing the walking strategy and turning the words into action. I wish him the very best of luck, in a strictly non-pedestrian way!

*Peter Ashcroft is Senior Countryside Officer at the Countryside Commission.*

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# Forestry Commission Visitor Surveys

Amanda Bellringer & Simon Gillam  
Forestry Commission



*Family enjoying a forest trail, Dornoch, Scotland*

*Photo: Forest Life Picture Library*

The Forestry Commission believes that recreation is one of the most important benefits that woodlands provide and has a long history of welcoming people into the forests that it manages on their behalf. It provides a broad range of facilities to enhance the enjoyment of these forests and its management policies aim to cater for both active and relaxed uses. This report describes the Commission's current visitor survey programme, which has been running since 1995.

## **UK Day Visits Survey**

In 1996, the UK Day Visits Survey (UKDVS) found that there were around 350 million leisure day trips from home to all woodlands. Around one in eight adults had made such a trip in the last two weeks (13% in summer, 10% in winter) and around 41% had done so in the last year.

The UKDVS does not provide information on trips made while away from home, nor on trips that are not seen as being for leisure (e.g. daily dog-walking), and it is not designed to tell us

which woodlands are visited. The 1997 Public Opinion of Forestry Survey found that 75% of adults had visited woodlands in the last few years and that about half of those who had visited woodlands had been to at least one Forestry Commission woodland.

Based on the UKDVS, and similar surveys in earlier years and adding in estimates for trips made while away from home we estimate that each year over 50 million day visits are made to Forestry Commission woodlands. Many of these are longer trips than the walks in local woods that make up a large proportion of the woodland trips in UKDVS.

## **Forest Enterprise Survey Programme**

Forest Enterprise (an executive agency of the Forestry Commission) is responsible for the efficient and sustainable management of the public forest estate to deliver multiple benefits. Environmental and social targets were included in the Agency's Framework Document and

annual performance measures. To provide these measures, Forest Enterprise established a national programme to collect more detailed information about visits to public woods and forests.

The national programme, designed and run with the help of Forestry Commission HQ Statistics, includes monitoring visitor numbers at sample sites and using surveys to measure visitor satisfaction and also to assess the provision for specialist users. With regard to specialist provision, surveys in 1997 looked at cycling in forests and in 1998 it is intended to focus on provision for disabled visitors. Every year the programme is supplemented by local surveys to assist Forest District managers to look at specific local issues.

Since 1995, the first full year of this programme, interviewer administered surveys have run at forests throughout Great Britain; from Culbin forest in the north of Scotland to Thetford forest in the east of England to Nant yr Arian Visitor Centre in west Wales to the New Forest in the south of England. Around 20 surveys are organised each year.

### Organising the Surveys

Most visitor surveys run in the summer months. The Forest District finds suitable interviewers - usually students or local District staff - and briefs them on how to administer the survey.

The number of hours of interviewing varies from forest to forest. Typically a survey runs for more than 50 hours, spread out over several weeks in shifts of 2-4 hours. Each survey aims to interview at least 150 visitors, more at busy sites.

Most questionnaires are designed to be asked in forest car parks. Groups are interviewed as they return to their cars, selected on a "next to pass" basis.

Questionnaires are designed by HQ Statistics, in consultation with the local Forest District, based on a standard set of questions so that comparisons between forests are possible. Also, comparisons are possible in the cases where surveys are repeated the following year.

### Survey Questions

Information collected in all visitor surveys includes:

- the number in the group
- day visitor or holidaymaker
- frequency of visits

- how first found out about the forest
- the main purpose of visit
- home postcode

The postcodes not only provide a useful source of information on where visitors to particular forests live but they can also be assigned an ACORN code. The ACORN classification was created by CACI Information Services using cluster analysis of the 1991 Population Census data to divide almost all postcodes in Great Britain into 54 "types". Addresses in postcodes in any "type" will therefore tend to have a lot in common and can be given a label that describes the typical member of that "type" e.g. "Wealthy suburbs, large detached houses".

This information gives a better picture of the sort of people who visit a particular forest.

Other questions in the questionnaires are more specific to a particular forest. For example:

- which waymarked walks visitors have used that day?
- how do they rate the route marking?
- have they used the Visitor Centre?
- how do they rate various facilities at the site (shop, café, picnic area, play area, information boards)?
- would they like more information at the site and if so which topics?
- do they belong to any environmental organisations?
- what improvements would they like to see to the site?
- what was the main attraction for the visit to that forest that day?

Some of the surveys have been aimed at cyclists, collecting information on how often they cycle in the summer months, where else they cycle and also seeking their views on the cycling facilities provided in the forest.

### Survey Results

So, what are the results? Well, generally most visitors to Forestry Commission forests tend to have first found out about them through friends or relations or have just always known about them. Few first find out about them from leaflets or guide books or through the media.

Most visitors come to Forestry Commission forests mainly to walk and are attracted by the beauty, peace and quiet the forests provide.

Generally, the facilities at Forestry Commission sites are rated highly. Suggestions for improvements are usually for more toilets or litter bins, but we occasionally find more unusual requests. One visitor wanted a Chinese takeaway at one of the Visitor Centres and another thought that a pub in the middle of the forest half way around one of the longer waymarked walks would be a good idea!

### Survey Reports

The results from most of the visitor surveys that HQ Statistics has helped to organise in 1995 and 1996 have been published. Each survey has its own report.

In addition to these, three reports have been compiled summarising the results of forest visitor surveys over the years. The first report summarises surveys held in 1994 or previous years, the second summarises surveys in 1995 and the last summarises surveys held in 1996. The reports include summaries of national omnibus surveys and surveys that may have been run locally at a Forest District without the help of HQ Statistics.

### Further reading

Bellringer A.J., (15 reports for Forest Enterprise visitor surveys in 1995), October 1996, £5 each.

Bellringer A.J., (17 reports for Forest Enterprise visitor surveys in 1996), June 1997, £5 each.

Bellringer A.J. and Gillam, S.R., *Forest Visitor Surveys* (3 reports), November 1997, £2 each.

Benson J.F. and Willis K.G., *Valuing Informal Recreation on the Forestry Commission Estate*, FC Bulletin 104, 1992, £7.50.

Gillam S.R., *Public Opinion of Forestry 1997*, October 1997, £2.

SCPR, *UK Day Visits Survey 1996, Summary Leaflet*, September 1997, free.

SCPR, *UK Day Visits Survey 1996, Report*. November 1997, £15.

*Simon Gillam is Head of Statistics in Forestry Commission HQ. Since writing this article, Amanda Bellringer has moved from HQ Statistics to work on Population Statistics at the General Register Office for Scotland.*

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*For more information or copies of individual visitor survey reports or the 3 summary reports, please contact the address below.*

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Photo: Forest Life Picture Library

*Bikers taking a well earned rest at Lewisburn picnic site, Kielder.*

# *Provision for disabled users in National Parks in England and Wales*

Ken Haynes & Andy Cope  
University of Sunderland



*A well laid path in the Lake District National Park. A good surface, tapping rail, protection to the outside of the bend and no obstructions from overhanging branches.*

*Photo: Ken Haynes*

*This is not just a Bill. It is a people's charter – a people's charter for the open air, for the hikers and the ramblers, for everyone who lives to get out into the open air and enjoy the countryside. Without it they are fettered, deprived of their powers of access and facilities needed to make holidays enjoyable. With it the countryside is theirs to preserve, to enjoy and to make their own."*

Rt. Hon. Lewis Silkin, MP  
Hansard, 31st. March 1949

To what extent have Silkin's sentiments been incorporated into provision for recreation in the National Parks of England and Wales as we approach the end of the Millennium?

National Park Plans often emphasise their intention to enable visitors to expand the breadth of their experiences. An example would be the North York Moors NP Plan which states that: *"The freedom to roam...was a major impetus behind the creation of the National Parks and for many visitors this ability to get away from the roads and*

*traffic is a vital part of their visit"*. In addition to general statements National Park Plans also highlight a commitment to the provision of access facilities for the disabled -

*"The National Park Authority will encourage increased access for disabled people to the Park and its recreation resources"*

(Brecon Beacons National Park)

*"...to enable disadvantaged and disabled people to enjoy the countryside and facilities of the National Park, as extensively as possible"*

(Peak District National Park).

This article discusses the results of research undertaken by the authors in an attempt to ascertain what provision has been made for the disabled within the National Parks. This research included:

- scrutinising National Park Plans to identify policy statements;

- declared objectives and other related statements;
- undertaking field visits to assess the extent of adoption of these principles in the recreational environment;
- contacting disabled groups and their umbrella organisations to assess their perceptions and aspirations in recreational terms;
- distributing of questionnaires to National Park Authorities with a view to acquiring detailed information concerning provision for disabled access in National Parks.

The following results were gained from responses provided by the 11 National Parks [NP's].

### Staffing

Half of all NP's have a designated "Disabled Access Officer". Three Parks have trained all of their full time staff and a large proportion of their part time staff. Three NP's state that none of their staff have received disability awareness training despite two of these having a designated "Disabled Access Officer".

### Infrastructure

Four Parks stated that all of their visitor centres have adaptations to facilitate disabled access, the most frequently cited features being access ramps and handrails. Five of the Parks used some form of guidelines relating to disabled access [i.e. "Tourism for all. Providing accessible visitor attractions". Glaxo/ National Tourist Board. 1994].

Most NP's have designated car parking allocated for disabled users, although most do not have an allocation at every location and the proportion of spaces varied widely.

Six Parks have all their toilet facilities suitable for use by the disabled, whilst three have some toilets that are not suitable. One Park considered the question on toilet facilities "not applicable".

### Information and interpretation

Eight Parks offer access guides, with others having guides either "under discussion" or "being compiled". Four Parks stock publications

in large print but only one offers a Braille or audio alternative.

Nine of the Parks offer audio-visual presentations at their centres, none of which are sub-titled. None of the visitor centres are served by an induction loop. Touch screen technology, an information medium which offers increased independence for the disabled visitor, is available in visitor centres in six of the Parks, although the scope of the information provided is somewhat limited. None of the National Parks use a Minicom system to provide information.

### Trails and routes

Eight National Parks offer trails suitable for use by the wheelchair bound and ambulatory disabled. Two trails exist for the visually impaired. Most of the routes are not marked by a symbol indicative of their dedicated use status.

### Discussion

This exercise indicates that in the majority of cases the NP's are not providing the level of access for the disabled visitor to which they aspire in their Park Plans. Given the NP's position concerning the provision of quality recreation and the high profile that they adopt as providers of recreational experience this seems to be an area of significant under achievement.



Photo: Ken Haynes

Currently, there are some 6.5 million individuals registered disabled: more than 10% of the population of the UK. Whilst there is no suggestion that all disabled persons would want to visit National Parks, personal interviews have indicated that there may be a significant number who do wish to visit but are deterred due to the poor provision of adequate facilities, which inhibits the independence of the disabled user.

Ensuring that infrastructure is appropriate at all Park facilities, particularly visitor centres and toilet facilities, would serve to enhance the independence of the disabled visitor as would improved information provision. Producing disabled access guides and displaying them alongside other information leaflets, is an obvious step towards addressing this problem. A Minicom system would assist many of the 8.4 million people in the UK with a hearing impairment, in the acquisition of information.

Advertising the fact that disabled access guides exist is often overlooked as a means of information dissemination. Disabled people interviewed at one location highlighted in an access guide, were not aware of the existence of the guide for that particular National Park, despite frequently using the visitor centres. At least two of the Parks which declared that they provided disabled access guides kept them beneath the staffed information counter.

Providing accurate information is a prime requisite for any organisation operating in the recreation environment. One National Park, which did not produce a guide, provided information for the suitability of a short section of a longer route within a leaflet obtainable from their visitor centres. The works which had been undertaken to aid disabled visitors in their enjoyment of this particular route, were to a very high standard. Tapping rails had been provided, handrails and resting places were in place, the surface was well compacted, and designated car parking was located immediately adjacent to the route. All this good work which provides for many types of impairment has been mired by a printing error concerning the location of this site. An amendment is promised but has not yet been forthcoming.

The main obstacle to increasing access to the countryside for disabled users is almost inevitably the high cost. The prime objective of enhancing visitor independence requires expensive



Photo: Ken Haynes

*This route offers a good surface, width, handrail and resting place. The picnic table has an overhang to accommodate a wheelchair.*

infrastructure provision and information dissemination technology. This research has shown that National Parks have made allowances for disabled users, but implies not only that further expenditure is needed but also a more proactive approach is required before this significant section of the population is adequately served.

This work was carried out prior to the National Parks becoming "stand alone" authorities, rather than departments of County Councils. However, further research is being under-taken to determine the effects that this change has had, and what effect, if any, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has had upon access provision.

#### Reference

Silkin, L. 1949. Hansard, 31/03/49. p. 1493.

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# Access and Agri-environmental Schemes in Scotland

Bill Slee, University of Aberdeen



*Going somewhere? A path across farmland... Borders, Scotland.*

*Photo: Scottish Office, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries.*

This article examines recent attempts to enhance access opportunity in Scotland, paying particular attention to enclosed farmland. It reviews the reasons for the relative absence of access opportunity, examines the factors behind the recent major review of access, outlines the initiatives taken and explains why agri-environmental policy has made such an inconsequential contribution to access enhancement in Scotland.

In Scotland rights of access over land are significantly different from those in other parts of the UK. To most tourists from outside Scotland the abundance of open country and the outstanding quality of much of its scenery create a sense of freedom and largely unimpeded access, which is bolstered by the oft-quoted but ill-understood notion of 'freedom to roam'.

Paradoxically, the Scottish resident faces far more access restrictions in most areas near centres of population than those faced by people in other

parts of the UK. With its different legal framework, Scotland lacks statutory rights of access over most enclosed farmland. Furthermore, when potentially access-enhancing provisions were introduced in the 1967 Countryside (Scotland) Act they were little used, except in creating long-distance footpaths.

John Mackay, Head of Recreation and Access at Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), noted recently that 'we have not done nearly as much as we should have in the past in promoting and managing local access', (Scotland's Natural Heritage, March 1997). This apology for neglect is followed by a commitment to access enhancement through the Paths for All Initiative.

Well-intentioned though this and other new initiatives are, they are most unlikely to achieve real progress in access over enclosed farmland and it is rumoured that the targets for access enhancement in the policy statements of SNH in 1994 have already been adjusted downwards.



### Causes of low levels of access on enclosed land

The principal cause of the low levels of access opportunity on enclosed land in Scotland is the absence of a satisfactory network of statutory public rights of way. The density of rights of way is very low compared to England and Wales (Shoard 1987). Historic differences in the behaviour of the rural population north and south of the border cannot explain the paucity of access opportunity, for access on foot was the principal form of mobility, and footpaths must have existed for this purpose. Although differences might be partly explained by the low population density this at best offers a partial explanation for access opportunity is still very limited even in areas where there is (or was) a relatively high density of population. Neither can access to available pieces of open country in the neighbourhood of built-up areas be seen as a substitute for linear access. Low levels of linear access on enclosed land thus point to either legislative weakness in creating and/or sustaining access opportunity in Scotland or weakness in implementing extant legislation.

There is no definitive map of rights of way in Scotland, such as was laid down in the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in England and Wales. It is highly probable that historic access rights over enclosed land have been eroded by a combination of factors, including neglect of use, timidity by potential users and landowner obstruction.

The 1967 Countryside (Scotland) Act includes provisions that match those of the 1949 Act in England and Wales to enable Access Agreements and, where necessary, to fall back on Access Orders for area access. In addition, there is scope for public path agreements and orders for linear access. However, these powers have been used mainly on long-distance footpaths and outside this form of access only about half a dozen public path creation agreements have been made, approximately one every five years. Further, access or public path creation orders have only been used on four occasions in thirty years (Rowan Robinson, 1991).

The 1967 Act contains a provision for local authorities to 'assert' the existence of rights of way. However, the lack of any clear definition of the term 'assert', the non-confrontational approach of most local authorities and the high legal costs of the process mean that assertion of

rights of way has been largely ineffective in enhancing access opportunity.

### Factors behind the access review

The Countryside Commission for Scotland initiated an access review during 1990 and 1991 which the new successor body, Scottish Natural Heritage, completed. A series of research projects were initiated, a discussion document circulated and a policy paper produced in 1994.

The review presents basic information on the Scottish situation. The number of trips to the Scottish countryside has doubled since the 1970s and more active pursuits tend to be engaged in than in the past (SNH 1992). This increase has put pressure on certain areas, both through physical wear and tear in fragile areas, and through disturbance of land-using activities, especially game fishing and hunting. New technologies have created new opportunities, extending the range of activities and the seasons in which activity occurs. However, in spite of the growth of access-related recreation many countryside visitors are deterred by intimidatory signs and uncertainties regarding rights. Furthermore, investment by public-sector bodies is seen to have been insufficient to meet both the demands of users and the problems created by access for land managers.

### The programme of access enhancement

This SNH programme of access enhancement included:

- an access strategy underpinned by the principles of sustainability
- a 'Paths for All' Initiative
- a recommendation to government to review the law relating to 'asserting' rights of way tolerance and co-operative working to enhance access arrangements in open country an access forum
- an assertion of the right to free access to the countryside

In addition, the review examined the access management needs of specific areas such as forests, coastal and open water. Some of the

proposals were remarkably ambitious, such as the target that by 2005 '*...properly mapped, promoted and managed networks of local paths to be available for all towns and settlements*' (SNH 1994). A partnership approach was seen as the means to achieve these targets and to deliver enhanced local access a 'Paths for All Partnership' was formed.

### **Agri-environmental policy and access**

Although agri-environmental policy has been developed in the UK under the umbrella of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the policy development in Scotland has been somewhat slower than in England and Wales. And while Environmentally Sensitive Areas were introduced in Scotland at the same time as elsewhere in Britain, no equivalent to countryside stewardship existed in Scotland until 1996 to parallel the schemes launched in the early 1990s in England and Wales. Consequently, apart from the various habitat schemes launched in the wake of EU Regulation 2078/92, Scotland has not had a country-wide policy for amenity provision and enhancement on farmland to match that elsewhere in the UK.

The possibility of grant-aided access enhancement was built into the 1992 CAP reforms (Regulation 2078/92) and implemented through the set-aside access scheme and the 1993 revisions of ESAs, which created an access option. Farmers were offered grants for the creation of new access on non-rotational set-aside of £90 per hectare per annum on the basis of 10 metre-wide strips for linear access and £45 per hectare per annum on area access. Under the modifications to the ESA scheme in 1993, payments of £170 per hectare per annum were offered for new access on enclosed land for linear access and, in exceptional circumstances, payments of £50 per hectare per annum for area access.

The opportunity for new access creation on farmland has been enhanced by the launch of the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS) in 1997. This scheme, which includes provision for payments for access, is offered to farmers throughout Scotland outside the ESAs, with regionally specific preferences for habitat- and landscape-enhancing actions. A press notice has recently been issued suggesting the possibility of a merging of the ESA scheme and the SCPS

(Scottish Office 1997).

The uptake of all access schemes has been extremely low, with five agreements in total since their inception (three set-aside and two ESA schemes). It is possible that the SCPS will increase the provision of access under agri-environmental schemes, although this seems improbable in view of the low level of uptake on the existing schemes.

This low uptake requires explanation. Farmers' antipathy towards access without permission is correlated with an absence of a history of access rather than with frequent access (Vink 1995). Two thirds of a sample of farmers with access on their land considered that, in general, access in the form of quiet recreation was compatible with farming, whereas two thirds of those without access were either unsure or believed that quiet recreation was incompatible with farming (Vink 1995). It would appear that the antipathy of most farmers to access is based on ignorance or irrational fear rather than substantive fact. Higher levels of payment are considered by Scottish Office officials to be unlikely to increase farmer involvement, a view with which most interested parties would concur.

### **Conclusions**

Farmer resistance to access enhancement on enclosed land thus clashes fundamentally with the desire of SNH to create new access around communities, the bulk of which are surrounded by areas of enclosed farmland. That new access around communities would be used and valued by the general public is beyond doubt, although the sheer absence of current opportunity would necessitate a process of public education. Proper signing and appropriate countryside furniture are a prerequisite for any future developments. Virtually the only places where access around communities can be expected to be enhanced without fundamental policy change is where public ownership (usually in the form of public forests) abuts the built-up area.

The real need is for the creation of a network of paths across enclosed land, planned in a way that meets contemporary needs for recreational access and recognises and responds to the legitimate, but not the irrational, fears of farmers. This can only be achieved by radical action. New initiatives might take two forms. Firstly, through cross

compliance in agricultural policy which requires the provision of planned access if the farmer receives environmental payments of any kind (House of Commons, Agriculture Committee 1997). This could be extended to all farmers who receive public support. The proposals for the reform of the CAP in Agenda 2000 allow for national-level introduction of cross compliance in environmental measures, creating the scope for a 'no payment without reasonable access' approach. Second the creation of an official definitive map, building on the Scottish Rights of Way Society's Catalogue of Rights of Way (CROW) which ensures that existing access opportunity is not further diminished. If these two approaches fail to deliver sufficient access then new provision with compensation for loss of property values should be imposed to create a basic network.

The carefully crafted and emollient verbiage of agencies cannot be expected to create significant new access opportunities close to people's homes, where it is both needed and wanted. It remains to be seen whether the Scottish Parliament will have the desire to act positively and push agencies and local authorities into overcoming the legacy of inaction that has characterised their performance in relation to access enhancement on enclosed farmland for the last fifty years.

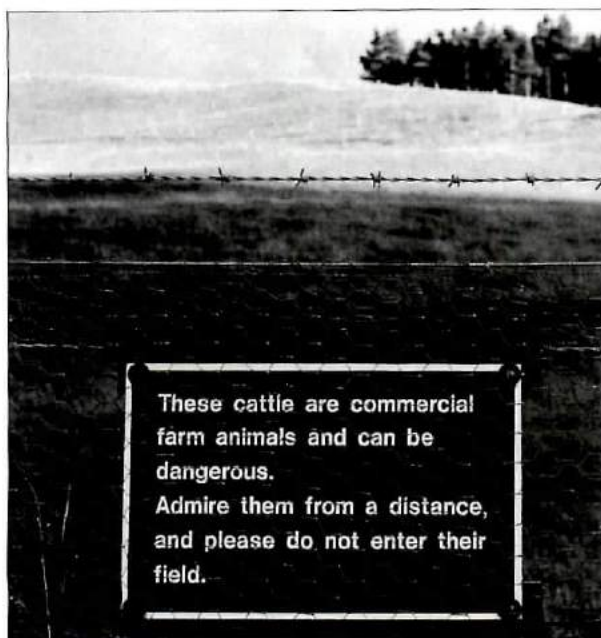


Photo: Scottish Natural Heritage

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*Janet Egdell and Ken Thomson are thanked for their helpful comments.*

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# Publications

## 'Along and Around the Elham Valley Way Hythe – Canterbury'

**Elham Valley Way Guidebook**

Step outside and explore the Kent countryside with the updated Elham Valley Way guidebook, one of the most popular recreation routes from Kent County Council. This 22-mile route gives the walker the opportunity to explore the delights of the Elham Valley, between Hythe and Canterbury.

The fully waymarked route is easily accessible from towns and villages along the way and benefits from excellent public transport links from across the county. The quiet countryside reveals its hidden delights as the route crosses and recrosses the long abandoned Elham Valley railway line.

Like all Kent County Council publications the Elham Valley Way is beautifully illustrated. The revised guidebook has additional illustrations and photographs the much praised detachable laminated route guide.

Everyone from family groups to seasoned walkers will enjoy discovering the rich history and beautiful scenery of the Darent valley thanks to the Elham Valley Way.

*Copies of the guidebook, priced at £4.45 are available from bookshops, selected libraries and tourist information centres or (post free) from:*

*Judith Roberts  
Planning Department  
Kent County Council  
Springfield  
Maidstone  
Kent ME14 2LX*

*(cheques payable to KCC).*

## 'Urban Nature Conservation'

*Landscape management in the urban countryside*

**Tony Kendle and Stephen Forbes**

Urban nature conservation is a field that has grown rapidly in importance over the past 20 years and will continue to do so in the coming years as landscape ecology and greenspace planning become established disciplines. A widespread concern and interest in the wild plants and animal life found in urban areas now influences the policies and practices of land management organisations. This book provides a comprehensive overview on the subject. It will assist professionals to formulate strategic management policies that intergrate urban nature conservation into the wider context of landscape management and urban planning.

- relates theory to practice so helps practitioners approach landscape management problems with confidence
- includes current thinking on 'green space' as well as latest legislation and provides practitioners with an up-to-date sourcebook/guidance.

*Copies of this book are available, price £35.00 plus £2.74 postage and packaging from:*

*Direct Response Team  
E & FN Spon  
Cheriton House  
North Way  
Andover  
Hants SP10 5BE*

*Tel: 01264 342 797  
Fax: 01264 342 787*

# Letters

## *The Interactive Footpath - Website*

*Developed by the Land Use and Rural Management Department, Seale-Hayne Faculty, University of Plymouth.*

### **Introduction:**

The Interactive Footpath website is the work of a team based in the Land Use and Rural Management Department at the Seale-Hayne Faculty, University of Plymouth. It has emerged from their teaching, learning and research interests in public rights of way and access to the countryside. The interactive footpath seeks to make full use of new technologies, in particular, the Internet, to provide and facilitate an exchange of information between the many individuals interested in this area of rural management and law.

### **Aims:**

The Footpath website seeks to provide

- An interactive learning approach
- A research and communication facility
- An identifiable and coherent Web Site with regard to countryside access in England and Wales

The site has been designed for the use of professional users, community groups and academic groups.

### **What you will find in the site!**

You will be able to take a leisurely walk through the Devon countryside which will allow you to discover:

- The legal principles relating to public rights of way
- Techniques for maintaining those rights of way
- Useful links will allow you to travel to other websites related to: Countryside Access; Access Policy; Legal Developments; Partnership Initiatives; User Groups; Latest Initiatives; Maintenance; Academic Articles

A bulletin board will allow users to interact with other visitors to the site in order to discuss current issues and find answers to outstanding problems.

*The website can be found at*

*<http://sh.plym.ac.uk/footpath/footpath.htm>*

### **Further Enquiries**

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### Editor's note:

If you have comments to make on these articles, the newsletter itself, or about topical countryside issues then please send your details to the:  
Network Manager  
Countryside Recreation Network  
Dept. of City & Regional Planning,  
University of Wales Cardiff  
PO Box 906  
Cardiff CF1 3YN

Tel/Fax: 01222 874970

Email: [cplan-crn-l@cf.ac.uk](mailto:cplan-crn-l@cf.ac.uk)

# Countryside Recreation Training and Events

## February

### 2 – 5 February

*A Way with Words*  
(Plas Tan y Bwlch)

Snowdonia National Park Study  
Centre

Cost: £325

Tel: 01766 590324

### 3 February

*Law in the Countryside: Handling  
Incidents, People and Property*  
(CMA)

TBA, North London Fringe

Cost: £30 CMA Members: £20

Tel: 01565 633603

### 4 – 6 February

*Fundraising for Local Authorities*  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £385 Subsidised: £192.50

Tel: 01433 620373

### 9 – 11 February

*People and Place – Working  
Creatively with Communities*  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £385 Subsidised: £192.50

Tel: 01433 620373

### 9 – 12 February

*Management Planning Workshop*  
(Advanced)

(Plas Tan y Bwlch)

Snowdonia National Park Study  
Centre

Cost: £370 Subsidised: £220

Tel: 01766 590324

### 10 February

*Parks for Profit*  
(ILAM)

Loughborough

Tel: 01491 874800

### 11 February

*Interpretation on a Shoestring*  
(CMA)

Risley Moss, Warrington

Cost: £30 CMA Members: £20

Tel: 01565 633603

### 11 – 13 February

*The Sea Empress Oil Spill  
Conference*

(The Chartered Institution of  
Water and Environmental  
Management)

The National Museum of Wales,  
Cardiff

Cost: £200

### 16 – 20 February

*Landscape Conservation and  
Management – The Historical  
Dimension*

(Plas Tan y Bwlch)

Snowdonia National Park Study  
Centre

Cost: £400 Subsidised: £200

Tel: 01766 590324

### 17 February

*Visitor Safety and Risk Assessment*  
(CMA)

Ashton Court Estate Visitor  
Centre, Bristol

Cost: £30 CMA Members: £20

Tel: 01565 633603

### 18 – 20 February

*National Forum – Grounds  
Maintenance*

(ILAM)

Southampton

Tel: 01491 874800

### 26 February

*Urban Park Rangering...and how  
to do it*

(ILAM)

Loughborough

Tel: 01491 874800

## March

### 3 March

*Involving the Community in Parks*  
(ILAM)

Nottingham

Tel: 01491 874800

### 4 – 6 March

*Communications 1;  
Communication and Presentation  
Skills*

(SCRA)

Cost: £240 Subsidised: £120

Tel: 01250 881286

### 9 – 13 March

*Access and Public Rights of Way  
Law and Management*

(Plas Tan y Bwlch)

Snowdonia National Park Study  
Centre

Tel: 01766 590324

### 12 – 13 March

*A.O.N.B.'s Providing for the  
Future*

(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £240 Subsidised: £60

Tel: 01433 620373

### 17 – 20 March

*Design for Outdoor Recreation*  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £420 Subsidised: £210

Tel: 01433 620373

### 23 – 27 March

*Education in the Countryside*  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £470 Subsidised: £235

Tel: 01433 620373

### 30 – 31 March

*Access for All*  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £320 Subsidised: £160

Tel: 01433 620373

# Countryside Recreation Training and Events

## April

27 – 29 April

Site Management Planning  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £480 Subsidised: £240  
Tel: 01433 620373

30 April – 1 May

Grassland Management by  
Grazing  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £210  
Tel: 01433 620373

## May

11 – 15 May

Environment for All; Special Needs  
in the Countryside  
(SCRA)

Cost: £380 Subsidised: £190  
Tel: 01250 881286

11 – 15 May

Woodland Management  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £420  
Tel: 01433 620373

## June

2 – 5 June

Visitor Safety  
(SCRA)

Tel: 01250 881286

6 – 14 June

National Bike Week  
Tel: 01483 419556

22 – 26 June

Grassland Management  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: 420  
Tel: 01433 620373

25 – 26 June

Site Management Planning  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £480 Subsidised: £240  
Tel: 01433 620373

## July

1 – 2 July

Analysis of Social Network Data  
(CASS)

Chilworth Conference Centre,  
Southampton  
Tel: 01703 594548

13 – 17 July

Moorland & Heathland  
Management  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £420  
Tel: 01433 620373

## August

17 – 21 August

Introducing Rights of Way  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £480 Subsidised: £240  
Tel: 01433 620373

## September

7 – 9 September

Map and Surveying Skills  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £430 Subsidised: £215  
Tel: 01433 620373

14 – 18 September

Wetland Management  
(Losehill Hall)

How Hill, Norfolk Broads  
Cost: £48  
Tel: 01433 620373

28 September – 2 October

Woods that Work! Sustainable  
management of multiple-use  
woodlands  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £480 Subsidised: £240  
Tel: 01433 620373

## October

5 – 7 October

Involving, Not Just Informing –  
helping visitors relate more deeply to  
historic and natural sites  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £390 Subsidised: £195  
Tel: 01433 620373

9 – 11 October

Leading Animated Guided Walks  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £250 Subsidised: £125  
Tel: 01433 620373

14 – 16 October

Developing Cycling and Walking  
Routes  
(Losehill Hall)

Cost: £390 Subsidised: £195  
Tel: 01433 620373

# Countryside Recreation Training and Events

## November

**11 – 13 November**

*Community and Environment  
(Losehill Hall)*

Cost: £390 Subsidised: £195  
Tel: 01433 620373

**30 November – 1 December**

*Organising Programmes of Guided  
Walks, Rides & Events  
(Losehill Hall)*

Cost: £190 Subsidised: £95  
Tel: 01433 620373

## December

**7 – 9 December**

*Education for Sustainability  
(Losehill Hall)*

Cost: £390 Subsidised: £195  
Tel: 01433 620373

**8 – 10 December**

*Sustainable Tourism Master Plans  
(Plas Tan y Blwch)*

Price to be confirmed  
Tel: 01766 590324

### **PROVISIONAL CRN WORKSHOPS FOR 1998**

Topics uppermost in our thoughts are: Sponsorship, Safety, Access & Wildlife and Protected Landscapes. Provisional venues and dates are:

April	Sponsorship, Cardiff
June	Safety, York and Edinburgh
June	Northern Ireland
October	Access & Wildlife, York
December	Protected Landscapes, Buxton

For further details please contact  
**Siân Griffiths**  
Network Assistant  
Tel: 01222 874970

### *Training/events organisers:*

#### **CASS**

Centre for Applied Social  
Surveys  
Tel: 01703 594548

#### **CEE**

Council for Environmental  
Education  
Tel: 0118 975 6061

#### **CMA**

Countryside Management  
Association  
Tel: 01565 633603

#### **ETO**

Environmental Training  
Organisation  
Tel: 01452 840825

#### **FSC**

Field Studies Council  
Tel: (Head Office) 01743 850 674

#### **IEEM**

Institute of Economic and  
Environmental Management  
Tel: 01635 37715

#### **ILAM**

Institute of Leisure and Amenity  
Management  
Tel: 01491 874800

#### **Losehill Hall**

Tel: 01433 620373

#### **Plas Tan y Blwch**

Tel: 01766 590324/590334

#### **SCRA**

Scottish Countryside Rangers'  
Association  
Tel: 01250 881286

#### **SFSA**

Scottish Field Studies  
Association  
Tel: 01250 881286

CRN is keeping advance information of training events, conferences and workshops, in order to act as a clearing house for those who are planning events and wish to avoid clashes. For further details please contact Siân Griffiths at CRN. If your organisation has event details please forward them to CRN:

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