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Editorial

Countryside Recreation Network

CRN is a network which:

- covers the UK and the Republic of Ireland
- 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: Geoff Hughes

Vice-chair: Jo Burgon, The National Trust

Countryside Recreation is free and is published three times a year. We welcome articles and letters from all readers.

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People: The Real Linear Access Solution

Stephen Jenkinson and Andrew McCloy, The Access Company

STOP! This article is for you. You are the real network.

Sure, we can all talk about joined up linear access networks, linked paths, routes and trails, clusters of provision, wide area networks, and even networking networks. All these are great tools to help increase the accessibility of linear access. But in truth the real network, the most important network, is people like you. People who use access, provide access, fund access or even just dream of access.

We came to this conclusion after undertaking a recent Countryside Agency funded research project, that examined ways to better integrate all types of public access. We looked at a variety of possible solutions: technical tools, management processes, IT systems and so on. Yet overall, the best answer we found, the solution that can be the most enduring, flexible and effective, has one key area of network development: developing networks of people just like you.

Read on to discover how you can improve linear access for everyone, and in so doing attract additional external funding and good publicity, and enjoy more support and satisfaction for your work.

The York Whole Network Approach study

In 2003 we were contracted to examine the integration of all types of linear (and open) access, in and around the City of York Council unitary authority. This covers some 27,200 hectares of low lying land, from the city centre with its commerce, residents and tourism, to outlying satellite villages

surrounded by arable fields, lowland heath and flood plains.

In a nutshell, we set out to answer the two most basic questions of any potential walker, cyclist or horserider, with or without a disability: "Where can I go?" and "What can I do?" This meant initially putting aside any existing professional knowledge about: what types of access exist and where; who provides and manages the access; and the differing rules and regulations between access types.

Stage one examined the availability of existing access information. We visited or contacted local information centres, accommodation providers, access user groups, visitor attractions, bookshops and transport hubs, to find any information on linear or open public access that may exist but is not explicitly identified on Ordnance Survey Landranger and Explorer maps. Such wider access included permitted paths arising from agri-environment schemes, land held by public bodies and charities, plus unregistered rights of way, common land and *de facto* access.

For stage two we contacted wider access providers and managers, such as the Forestry Commission, British Waterways, Defra, Ministry of Defence, Environment Agency, public bodies and charities (such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, etc) that provide access to their land, plus private landowners providing permitted access with and without public subsidy.

Stage three involved fieldwork visiting the wider access identified by stages one and

two, to assess the characteristics and usage of the access provided, and evaluate how well it integrated with other forms of public access, including public rights of way.

We found that:

- Wider access provides around 50% more public access than is apparent from Ordnance Survey maps, or indeed any individual source.
- Much of this gives access to attractive areas of countryside and open space, readily accessibility from nearby communities.
- Contact with over 30 organisations was needed to ascertain information on this amount of wider access; we believe there is still more to be discovered.
- Overall, 72% of the wider access was physically open for use.
- But in only 37% of cases was all the wider access identified on site via the likes of waymarks, notices and signposts.
- In 23% of cases there was no indication whatsoever on site that any wider access existed.
- Only around a quarter of the wider access was integrated to any significant extent with adjacent rights of way or other forms of access.
- In 40% of cases, there was no apparent attempt at integrated management, information or signage.
- Given the low-lying terrain, most barriers to usage for people with disabilities were man-made structures (such as stiles), which were far more restrictive to users than needed for legitimate land management purposes.

In summary, wider linear access is of significant value to the public, but falls far short of realising its full potential since it is managed in a fragmented manner, with little emphasis on providing a cohesive public network of different access types. This seems all the more poignant when - in a significant number of cases - the public are paying for such wider access through support of public bodies and Government payments to private landowners.

To quite a few of you, we guess our findings will come as no surprise. From our experiences here and in many other parts of the country, we can see how easily this can come about by default and longstanding organisational cultures, rather than any deliberate actions on the part of access managers.

So that's all very well, but what can we do about it?

Joining up people – the real network solution

From our study in York and subsequent work elsewhere, it was very clear that the real answer rests not with any particular technical solution, GIS system or Best Value indicator.

Welcoming and explicit information about wider access increases the public's confidence, helping them to value and protect it.



Photograph by Stephen Jenkinson/Andrew McCloy

The real solution was joining up people. And yet organisational emphasis on regulations, performance indicators and the like, can distract us from what we are all ultimately trying to achieve.

Think back to the Kinder Trespassers, marching up onto the Peak District moors in 1932. As much as we try to stretch our imaginations, we can't quite see the late Benny Rothman cheering on his pals with a: "Just think of when we'll have DoE Circular 2/93", or "Imagine a time when the Best Value Performance Indicators come out!"

Seriously, though, such matters of technical detail and advice are there for us as access professionals to use as tools, to guide and support the vision of providing relevant, integrated access to the countryside and open spaces around towns. Our collective aim, we suggest, is to provide answers to the "Where can I go?" "What can I do?" questions of residents and visitors alike. And yet at present, it seems that different types of linear access management are primarily led by the demands of different administrative

Inappropriate barriers limit the accessibility of wider access and sever links with public rights of way. The gate jammed across this bridge presents both a physical and perceptual barrier.



Photograph by Stephen Jenkinson/Andrew McCloy

processes, without embracing the fundamental vision of how best to help a walker, horse-rider, cyclist and society as a whole, benefit from the access being provided.

To find out how to improve the situation around York, we interviewed 11 access managers and local authority departments, and were impressed to discover a universal welcome for this research, and an engagingly open response to making things better. In short, we found the solutions really are there for the taking.

And this latent motivation from officers for improving matters wasn't based just on acknowledging some corporate strategic vision, or saying the "right thing" to external consultants! In many cases access managers readily pointed out benefits to themselves from better integration, including the opportunities to:

- Be more effective through combined information provision and on-site management.
- Tap into external funding for access projects that go beyond any baseline statutory duties.
- Avoid bad publicity in the media, for example when wider access is overlooked in planning applications, and when duplication of effort wastes resources and clutters up the landscape with excessive signage and furniture.
- Harness the specialist skills and support from networking with the wider family of access managers.

And that's before we begin to think of the real benefits that such an enhanced approach would have for users, currently denied the fullest use of access that is rightfully theirs.



Signage is key to better integrating all access types. Here, the technically correct “no right of way” sign belies the presence of publicly-funded permitted access indicated by the small circular waymark on the tree trunk below.

Photograph by Stephen Jenkinson/Andrew McCloy

Small steps – big gains

Improving the integration and management of all forms of public access is not necessarily about major items of capital expenditure. Much can be achieved by simply adopting a truly joined up, user-focussed approach by, for example:

- Providing information to users about where they can go, irrespective of the actual mechanism that may provide the access.
- Applying least restrictive access principles to new provision and maintenance of path furniture.
- Making better use of the extensive range

of contacts, facilities and experience shared between the managers of all the many types of wider access.

Most encouragingly, City of York Council was organisationally mature enough to embrace this opportunity for an external assessment of all the access to their area. From our experience elsewhere, we know our findings can readily be applied up and down the country, and that the opportunities we found to improve things at York are most probably there for the taking where you live and work.

Of course, there will be challenges, with some individuals or rules and regulations not being as supportive or flexible as one would wish. But it's important not to let difficulties in joining up networks in some areas be a barrier to doing anything at all in any area. Making progress on integrating even a quarter of wider access with public rights of way will still be a major improvement on what we have today.

The opportunities for you

So what can you do? Whatever role you have, how the public get to and around the resources you manage is a theme common to us all – quite apart from what our shared goals of sustainable development and making the most effective use of public funds.

Just doing these five things will make a real difference:

1. Get in contact with other access providers in your area and say: “Hello, this is who I am and what I do. How can we better support each others’ work?”
2. Share information on what access you provide. In the absence of Treasury funding for the Countryside Agency’s proposed National Countryside Access

Database, just sharing internal working records with other professionals will really help start making those connections. Sharing even incomplete records can still be a significant step forward.

3. Obtain details of the policy aims and objectives of other access providers, to highlight often shared visions and opportunities for more effective partnership working.

4. Meet up, maybe twice a year, with other local access managers to look at each other's sites and swap skills, knowledge and experience.

5. Finally, take a broad view of how people truly interact with the access and facilities you provide. People rarely use a site or path in isolation. How have they got there and where are they going? How do they know where they can go and what they can do?

That's all very well for us to say as consultants, obviously removed from the daily demands of delivering front line public services. So why should you spend time following this up?

In short, a key reason is that county councils and unitary authorities now have a statutory duty to draw up strategic plans to better integrate all forms of public access with the rights of way network, and to reflect society's aspirations for everything from healthier and safer communities, through to reducing private car use and supporting local shops and services.

Such plans need to be in place by 2007; can you afford not to be involved?

Those of you who are rights of way officers or

well versed with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, will know the technical title for what we are talking about: Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs).

And if you're wondering why we have left this revelation until the very end, it's because the ROWIP pilot project work we conducted at York, and the solutions we identified, aren't really about rights of way improvement *per se*. ROWIPs are quite simply about developing better access networks for people. In many cases, making better use of the full range of access that is already there, can go a long way to achieving that.

So what is the single, most important key to developing these better integrated access networks? Quite simply, it's grasping the satisfaction and support to be had from developing your own professional networks between access providers.

Think people, and you'll not go far wrong.

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Full reports on the Countryside Agency ROWIP pilot projects, including the York research referred to here, can be found at: www.prowgpg.org.uk

The writers would like to thank all the people and organisations involved in this study for their unfailing cooperation throughout the research process.

Do walkers stay on footpaths? An observational study of Cwm Idwal in the Snowdonia National Park.

Ian Keirle and Mathew Stephens

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) once it is fully implemented will create new access rights over many areas. The impacts that this access will have on land management, conservation, erosion and the local economy will depend on the relative increase or decrease in the recreational use of areas, localised management arrangements and the behaviour of visitors. To date there is little research concerned with visitor behaviour in open access areas and in particular as to whether walkers will stay on linear access routes such as footpaths and bridleways when they have the option to exert their 'right to roam'. This research used an observational methodology to study this aspect of visitor behaviour in Cwm Idwal in the Snowdonia National Park, a popular mountain area with traditional *de facto* rights of access.

Methodology

An observation point located at the base of the cliffs of Clogwyn y Tarw (SH 6495 5960) was chosen as it afforded a good view of a large area of the bottom of the Cwm, including the main metalled path from Ogwen Cottage to Llyn Idwal. The range of vision was established by placing a red flag at the observation point and walking around the area to establish the zone in which the red flag could be seen. Boundaries of this zone once established were fixed using GPS. Coordinates of the boundary could then be plotted on a 1:25,000 base map. Figure 1 shows the survey site, observation point and linear access routes. A pilot study indicated

that the majority of users passed through the survey area within fifteen minutes, and accordingly observations were taken at

Figure 1. Map of the observation zone showing linear access routes and the observation point.

fifteen minute intervals.

Observations were recorded on a 1:25,000 scale base map that had the observation zone and linear access routes marked upon it. At fifteen minute intervals each individual or group observed was marked onto the base map as precisely as possible, with a code alongside to indicate the size of the group. Due to the nature of the landscape several locations within the observation zone were obscured by local topography. To compensate for this recording was begun at the allocated time and observation continued for a short time afterwards and any visitors who had been obscured were recorded during this time. In order to standardise results a five-minute cut-off point was used

after which no further observations were taken. Where visitors remained stationary over several time periods they were not recorded again until they moved on. For the purpose of this study an attempt was made to segregate large groups (probably of an organised nature) from smaller groups to see if there was a difference in behaviour. From observation this can be difficult but for this study an organised group was recorded as having twelve or more individuals. Such groups were recorded and analysed separately. A pilot study was undertaken on 12th January 2002 and the full survey carried out on the 3rd of February 2002 and the 3rd of March 2002 between 11.30am and 16.30pm.

Results

A total of 1,347 visitors were recorded during the two survey days. The spatial distribution of observed visitors can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The spatial distribution of observed visitors.

In terms of where visitors were observed it was found that for visitors not in large groups (in groups of twelve or less), 90.5% of visitors were observed using linear access routes. For groups of thirteen or more visitors, the

level of use of linear access routes was less, with 83.9% of groups using these routes. Therefore 9.5% of visitors observed that were not in large groups were walking 'cross country' and roaming away from managed access routes whilst for groups of thirteen and over this figure rises to 16.1%.

The results showed an apparent relationship between group size and the propensity to walk off of linear access routes. This can be seen in figure 3.

To test the strength of this relationship, a chi-squared test (Seigel and Castellan, 1988) was carried out. For this test groups of size five to twelve were amalgamated into one group and groups of thirteen and over were

Figure 3. The percentage of groups and individuals seen walking off of linear access routes.

not included in the calculation. This is because it was considered that as groups of thirteen and over made up such a large proportion of those observed away from linear access routes that it would skew the data. This test showed a highly significant relationship between group size and location observed (Chi-squared 19.15, df4, p=0.001).

Discussion

In considering the results, the nature of the

site requires consideration. The main paths on the site are surfaced with pitched stone to prevent erosion, thereby facilitating relatively easy access along them. In addition the paths lead from the A5 road and associated car parking, to specific places that the visitor will wish to go to such as Llyn Idwal and Twll Du, and the access it gives to the Glyder range of mountains. Walkers who were observed away from linear access routes were found in three distinct areas: between the cliffs at Clogwyn y Tarw and the main Ogwen Cottage to Llyn Idwal path, between the paths in the north east of the study area in the direction of the road and associated car parking, and finally around the western end of the northern limit of the study area. Most visitors observed deviating from linear access routes appeared to be carrying out specific journeys between a starting point and a destination, be it for rock climbing, partaking in scenic views or simply to take a 'short cut'. It was also noted that visitors found in open countryside were often following 'linear handrails' such as streams or undesignated and un-maintained track ways. This can be seen in Figure 2 where the location of visitors away from linear access routes appears to conform to predominantly linear patterns.

The finding that large groups (of thirteen or more) were more likely to use open countryside than other groups was interesting and may reflect the nature of the site, which is used by a large number of groups for education activities and outdoor pursuits. The nature of such activities means that groups frequently need to leave linear access routes to view geological or geomorphological features, for navigational training or to access climbing sites.

What then are the implications of this study on open access areas in general? The main finding is that walkers predominantly stay on

linear access routes. Cwm Idwal is a well known walking location in the Snowdonia National Park as well as being a National Nature Reserve. It is one of the most attractive and recognised locations within Snowdonia for walking and climbing and as such attracts a large number of visitors many of which have considerable mountain walking experience. The site is open in its nature and walkers are not confined by fences and walls. It also attracts a large number of educational and outdoor pursuits groups. As such it could be considered that Cwm Idwal is a site where the use made of open countryside should be large. However, excluding large groups (size thirteen and above), only 9.5% of visitors were observed not on a linear access route. The implications for other sites is therefore that the use of open countryside is likely to be less than this figure, provided that there are linear access routes that link specific destinations that walkers wish to travel between. If there is a good track to walk on and follow then it appears that walkers will out of choice follow it even though there is a 'right to roam'.

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Making Linear Walks more Attractive to Recreational Users

Victoria Sixsmith, Great North Forest

Image of feet if possible.

History

The present day network of paths and tracks has been developed over thousands of years, as successive generations have made their way about the land (Agate, 2001).

Historically this has been for utilitarian purposes such as hunting, fishing, trade, military venture and pilgrimage, however since the beginning of the 19th century the network has been increasingly developed for pleasure and recreation.

Today there are twin demands on our network: to provide safe utilitarian routes that are viable alternatives to highways, and high quality, scenic and accessible routes that fulfil our increasingly, multi-purpose recreational needs.

Traditionally linear routes have been used for primarily utilitarian purposes whilst circular routes have been developed and promoted for recreational use. The exception to this is the development of longer linear 'trail' types, which are primarily used by the more experienced and dedicated walker.

Circular Vs Linear

Image of people walking

Ask any recreational walker the type of route they prefer and nearly all will say circular. Indeed the qualitative evidence gathered for the Access for All Strategy for South East Northumberland (a precursor for the pilot Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Northumberland) repeatedly highlighted the lack of circular routes as an issue to be redressed (MacFarlane, 2003)

So what is it about walking in a straight line that people find so off-putting? Whilst doing the

research for this article there seemed to be little evidence to answer the question, however a quick ring round a few Public Rights of Way Officers provided enough anecdotal information to confirm what is instinctively known.

Undoubtedly there are a number of intertwined psychological and physical reasons based around the idea of the futility of the return trip, including a desire not to see the same scenery twice. Another is to do with the perceived accessibility of linear routes and in particular how to get back to your starting point if you don't want to walk.

This is where issues of transport come into play. Without making gross over-generalisations many walks are accessed using the car i.e. many people drive to the start of their chosen route. Thus the distinct advantage of a circular walk is that you do not have the added difficulty of worrying how to get back to your car. With linear walks the worry of how to get back to the start and therefore your transport is perceived as an unnecessary complication; another factor to deter you from taking a walk.

For those without access to a car walking tends to be more of a necessity than a leisure activity and therefore walking for recreational purposes is less likely, whether it be a linear or a circular route. However by linking public transport to linear routes and making improvements to both environmental and health benefits can be gained, as well as encouraging those without access to a car to participate in recreational walking (Haas-Klau, 2001).

A New Role for the Network

Given the emerging agenda for a socially inclusive and accessible network of paths and tracks that provide a free means of tackling health problems the traditional role of this network is changing rapidly. Although the physical maintenance of the network remains a

priority, making the network accessible and appealing to all groups in society is becoming increasingly relevant.

This is driving the need to fulfil the potential of the network by making full use of all the paths and tracks, and has led to a new approach in the development and marketing of the network. No longer are linear routes regarded as the preserve of the hardened walker or solely for utility journeys; innovative ways are now being sought and pioneered to encourage recreational users and potential users, to walk linear routes. One such initiative has been taking place in the Great North Forest in North East England

The Public Transport Access Project

Image of people planting trees

The Great North Forest (GNF) is one of twelve Community Forests in England and was set up in 1990 as a long term environmental regeneration project to create an attractive, well-wooded and sustainable landscape offering a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to local people. The GNF covers approximately 250 square kilometres (96 square miles) across South Tyne and Wear and north-east Durham.

With over 1 million people living within 10 kilometres of the GNF, the GNF provides local countryside to a significant and diverse population; despite this awareness of the forest was very low. This lack of awareness was compounded by very few people accessing the countryside for leisure using public transport, a significant issue for an area, which has the lowest absolute level of car ownership in England.

The Public Transport Access Project was an exciting and innovative initiative whose aim was to encourage people to get out and visit the countryside on their doorsteps, using public transport. It was a 2 year initiative managed jointly by the Tyne & Wear Rural Transport Partnership (RTP) and the Great North Forest and funded in cash and in kind by Countryside

Agency (CA), Nexus, South Tyneside Council, Durham County Council and Gateshead Council. The project also received guidance from both environmental and marketing consultants.

Using the seven objectives below the partnership organisations formed a steering group and sub groups to deliver the project on the ground:

1. Invest in producing ground-breaking leaflets and integrated website that generate confidence and excitement
2. Significantly raise overall awareness of the GNF
3. Use PR effectively and boldly to raise general awareness of the 'countryside on your doorstep'
4. Target people living close to the GNF especially those who currently use their cars for short trips or for accessing the GNF
5. Build confidence in using existing bus and Metro to the GNF through events, signage, appropriate information etc
6. Target specific socially excluded groups directly and through partner organisations.
7. Measure results carefully to track impact, apply learning and secure future funding.

Image of cover of leaflet

Objective one was fulfilled with the development of 2 leaflets, one that focused on sites to visit and the other on 3 linear walks, both in the Great North Forest The Linear Walks leaflet promoted The Tanfield Railway Path, The Bowes Railway Path and a section of the Coast to Coast route. These linear walks varied in accessibility, difficulty and length from 9 to 20km and although the more experienced walkers used them, local communities had barely heard of them.

The Linear Walks leaflet broke each of these routes into five or six smaller sections, which started and ended with a public transport node (either a bus or Metro stop). Each section contained an easy to follow map which depicted sites of interest and facilities en-route, as well as detailed public transport information and a short introductory text describing the route. A difficulty rating was also given based on gradients, length and accessibility as well as an indication as to

whether it would be suitable as a Healthy Walk based on the Walking to Health initiative. The leaflet was distributed to community groups throughout the GNF as well as libraries and Tourist Information centres.

Image of route info

At each bus stop that was featured in the leaflet a poster was put up on the bus stop post in a timetable case. This gave information about the overall walk, that section of it and how to access it from there. Branded waymarkers were also used to sign the route and these were featured on each poster.

Image of bus stop poster

To compliment the project a website was developed that provided not only the detailed information that was given for the walks featured in the leaflet but also several others in the GNF. These were also broken down into more accessible sections, again with detailed public transport information:

www.greatnorthforest.co.uk

Both the website and the leaflet were well publicised through the promotional campaigns on the public transport network (including a branded GNF Metro carriage), local radio and newspapers.

Finally two community events took place at Tanfield Railway Centre, the world's oldest operating railway, in the GNF, whereby community groups from all over the region were invited to get on the bus to the centre. Once there they could exchange their bus ticket for a free ride on the steam train, a guided walk through the Great North Forest and, of course, a free lunch. These events were a great success and spread the word of the project and the Great North Forest by the most effective of marketing tools... personal recommendation.

Image of people getting of the bus

Market Research was undertaken with baseline monitoring undertaken before the initiative began and then at various stages throughout the project. This allowed the project to be monitored and evaluated quantitatively, with some degree of reliability. Now that the project has come to an end this market research has demonstrated that the project raised awareness

of the Great North Forest. Also the proportion of respondents using public transport for leisure trips has increased over the projects lifetime from 26% in April 2003 to 36% in December. This would appear to be in part due to the project's success in marketing public transport access routes into the countryside (SQW, 2004).

However anecdotal evidence relating specifically to linear walks tells us that many more local community groups are using the leaflet to undertake linear walks within the GNF, particularly healthy walking groups, walking groups for the over 60's and refugee support groups.

Although the project has now come to its end, all the partners involved have agreed to take the principles and practices developed, forward. Indeed the Great North Forest is now involved in the promotion of the World Heritage Candidate Bid for Wearmouth – Jarrow and is developing Bede's Way, a linear pilgrimage that follows in the footsteps of Venerable Bede and which of course, integrates walking with public transport and other sustainable modes of transport.

Conclusions

There is a real need for a diverse, accessible and appealing network of both circular and linear routes if we are to tackle issues of social exclusion and an increasingly unhealthy population. For linear routes this means looking beyond their traditional uses and integrating them into the wider recreational free resource that is our network.

There is a clear need to make them more accessible to a wider audience and no single approach works well. As the Public Transport Access Project demonstrated a number of issues surrounding marketing, educating and physically improving the routes needs to happen if we are to encourage people to stop walking in circles.

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Countryside Recreation and Training Events

AUGUST 2004

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Contact details for training/events organisers

CRN EVENTS 2004

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Title _____ First Name _____ Surname _____

Address _____

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