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SASPs BETTER PROTECTION FOR IMPORTANT MOTORSPORT SITES

Significant Areas for Sport – SASPs for short – is a new initiative from Sport England designed to acknowledge and protect long-standing nationally and regionally important sports facilities. SASPs will not just be about ‘built facilities’ like running tracks and sports halls; this programme can also include ‘natural sites’ like moto-cross tracks and occasional-use sites like hill-climb courses on stately home drives.

Sport England is developing sets of criteria for the different grades of SASP and is looking for suitable sites to include in a pilot scheme later this year. Once potential SASPs are identified, evaluated, and formally listed, Sport England (and individual sports organisations) will be able to push for all SASPs to be given appropriate recognition in the land use planning system. In this first phase the SASPs designation will be restricted to sites of national and regional importance. If the scheme is proved to work then expect expansion to cover sites of sub-regional value too. And, in the longer term, LARA sees no reason why larger areas of importance for, say, trail riding, should not be designated SASP.

To help Sport England make the most of the pilot scheme LARA will circulate to all LARA member organisations a set of the criteria for sites. It is then up to clubs and regional associations to nominate suitable sites for the SASP pilot scheme via the LARA MSDO’s office.

ARGUING THE BILL

The *Access to the Countryside Bill* is making slow but steady progress through the committee stage in the House of Commons as we write. LARA and its member organisations have made further representations and submitted amendments to try to sort out a limited number of points where we think the draft legislation will, if passed unamended, have a negative effect on motor sport and recreation. With the Parliamentary know-how and assistance of Lord Michael Jopling, a keen motorcyclist, we have had a very useful meeting with Kate Hoey, the Minister for Sport, and opened-up a useful dialogue with the Michael Meacher, the Countryside Minister. Meanwhile LARA officers continue to liaise with Sport England, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the Countryside Agency, and other sport and recreation organisations.

Because of the timetable for the legislation it is still important that individuals and clubs lobby their own MPs about those parts of the Bill that cause us concern - and ask too that the opportunity for including changes for the good is not missed. LARA has a briefing paper on the Bill that clubs and individuals can use when meeting, or writing to, their Member of Parliament. Contact any LARA officer for a copy.

SPORT ENGLAND CONTINUES VITAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LARA'S PROGRAMME OF WORK FROM 2000 UNTIL 2004

LARA's third *Forward Plan* was formally accepted by the Association at its annual general meeting in April. All ten member organisations committed themselves to another year of LARA's rolling work programme. The meeting heard that Sport England, after a probing examination of LARA's track record and future plans, has generously committed to another four-year period of significant financial assistance. LARA is not immune to criticism and the preparation of the new *Forward Plan* took on board suggestions on where we have fallen short against expectations, and how we might refocus in some areas.

The new *Forward Plan*, operational now and until 2004, recasts the principal work areas into four programmes:

- **Training and Materials**
- **Liaison Roles in Outside Forums**
- **Planning Services**
- **Special Partnership Projects**

These changes are intended to achieve more of a 'tangible product' in terms of the provision of training courses and standard materials and publications. The LARA Steering Committee needs to know from the grass roots members of each organisation the type of training and other assistance they feel they need, so please tell the officers just what you need and why. We will do our best to provide it.

The *Forward Plan* is not a confidential document. Each LARA member organisation has a copy and is free to show it to their own clubs and members.

LARA wishes to thank Sport England and its officers for their continued and invaluable support and will make best use of the grant aid, without which our job would be very much harder and our scope a lot smaller.

English Nature cracks down - again!

Following the case reported in *LARA News* #26 where English Nature gained the conviction of five illegal motorcyclists at Windlesham Allotments, a quad-biker has now found himself in court. Jonathan Ashdown was convicted of damaging the shingle beach at Dungeness - a Site of Special Scientific Interest, described by English Nature as an 'internationally important wildlife site'.

Mr Ashdown was fined £400 and ordered to pay £600 costs. English Nature says that damaging vehicle use of this beach by anglers and scramblers has been a problem for a long time. Illegal riders and drivers should be aware that when the Access to the Countryside Bill becomes law it will be much easier for English Nature to bring charges and secure convictions for damaging SSSIs - and at £1000 a time it makes for an expensive practice session. The moral is obvious: join a club and ride or drive legally!

Dere Street - it's crunch time!

LARA is part of the long-term project to manage motorcycle access in the Cheviot Hills. One of the partner organisations in the management project is the Scottish Borders Council, whose rangers participate in the strategic approach to educating illegal riders about where they can and cannot go. Some years ago the SBC made a resolution to remove public vehicular rights from a length of Dere Street, the magnificent Roman road that crosses from Northumberland into Scotland, and is a vital part of the green lane network.

This order is finally going to public inquiry in Kelso on 13th June, although any ban on legal trail riders will obviously deal a serious blow to the Council's prospects of having any sort of rational management initiative in the future. LARA's member organisations have not directed that LARA officers should participate, so it is up to individuals to go along and object if they value their use of this old road. Further details of the public inquiry are available from the MRDO.

EGG-SIGHTING ENDURO EVENTS!

Following a scare that their highly popular *Cambrian Rally* would have to be cancelled, representatives of the Welsh Trail Riders Association (WTRA) were able to reach agreement with the Forestry Commission in Wales for the event to go ahead with only minor route changes.

The problem was a decision to ban motor sports in the forests around Llandovery during the months of March to June each year as a precaution against the possibility of 'noisy' activities discouraging nesting of at-risk breeds of birds and the rearing of their young. WTRA's representatives had sympathy with the objective but questioned the need for a blanket ban. Not only would it be a major blow to motor sport, there would be a significant financial loss to the local economy. The club had run events for many years in the Crychan and adjacent forests in close liaison with the Commission in Aberystwyth and with the District office. It was believed the events, and the day-to-day forestry operations themselves, had not adversely affected the population of rare breeds and indeed that there had been growth in recent years.

The outcome of a meeting called to discuss the issues was that some less-noisy events, using mainly forestry roads, would be allowed to take place subject to avoidance of areas indicated by the local forestry officers. As the *Cambrian Rally* is a

'relaxed enduro on trail bikes' it met the description and was therefore put back on schedule with a few adjustments to the previously authorised route. However most motorcycle enduros use many tracks off the forest roads and, in the Llandovery area at least, the March to June ban is to remain in force for such events..

The opportunity was taken to re-state and strengthen some of the other 'on site' conditions placed on organisers and to clarify that the Commission's forests are closed to vehicles other than on BOATs or equivalent rights of way. Time has moved on from the (relatively) easy-going ways of organising motorcycle competitions in the past.

It is now a semi-professional job but still undertaken by enthusiastic, unpaid volunteers. In addition to the paperwork - of which there are reams - and the financial worries, clubs like the Welsh Trail Riders Association have become fully aware of the environmental and ecological issues. They are happy to work with knowledgeable bodies who recognise the legitimacy of sporting activities and are willing to arrive at practical solutions to new problems as they arise. Perhaps the big change for clubs like WTRA is the way they have adapted to, and become part of, the widespread wish to protect the environment of the countryside while enjoying their chosen pastime.

NETWORK Q RALLY PROMISES BETTER FACILITIES AND SAFER SPECTATING

Spectator numbers on the *Network Q Rally of Great Britain* (23-26 November 2000) will be limited for the first time in the event's history, in a bid to improve safety on the special stages and to offer far better facilities for paying spectators. After detailed consultation between the organisers (Motor Sports Association), the Forestry Commission and the Police, it has been decided that admission to all special stages will be restricted to pass-holders.

Jonathan Ashman, MSA Director of Major Events, explained: "The increasing popularity of World Championship rallying means that, for safety reasons, we can no longer allow unlimited spectator access to our stages. We must limit numbers according to the capacity of each venue and the availability of officials.

"The Forestry Commission will therefore close the forests to normal public access throughout the rally,

with admission only at official rally entry points and only to pass-holders. We also recognise that today's spectators expect value for money, so we are devoting a great deal of time and money to improving facilities for the paying customers. We intend to supply clear signposting, organised car parking, toilets and catering at more venues than ever before."

The most popular venue is expected to be the final stage in Margam Park on Sunday 26 November, when the last timed section of this year's FIA World Rally Championship will be covered live on BBC Television.

Three types of pass will be sold, with only a limited number of tickets available at individual venues on the day (price £10). If advance sales at any venue prove popular, MSA reserves the right to offer no tickets at that venue on the day.

MARSHALS AND THE LAW

Motor sport events using the public highway have a good track record when it comes to marshalling and dealing with other members of the public. But a case involving a bicycle race in Northumberland flags up some serious issues that all organisers should take note of.

Back in 1995 an established bicycle race was using public roads west of Morpeth. This is quite legal for cycle races if the right authorisations have been obtained, and there is no suggestion that, in this case, they had not been.

At a point where the race crossed a dog-legged cross road, a race marshal prevented a local lady on a horse from entering one side road from the busier road she was on, telling her "You can't go down there, there's a race on." Although the marshal had no power at all to stop any member of the public, the rider naturally did not argue, and turned instead down the other side road where there was no marshal. A distance along she met the cycle race coming towards her at speed, with no advance warning.

The horse shied, threw the rider, who was seriously injured, and itself received fatal injuries. The rider and horse owner sued the cyclists and the organisers for negligence including: cycling too fast, failing to give way to the horse, failing to give adequate warning of their presence on the road, and failing to warn adjacent landowners and the public about the race.

Although the organisers never admitted liability, they finally settled just as the injured parties were about to go to court. The implications for all competitive events are obvious: the organisers and competitors owe a duty of care towards all the other road users they might meet along the way - and marshals should be properly briefed on how to advise members of the public - for everyone's safety.

In a press release the British Horse Society advises: "A simple warning of... approach, such as a bell, a whistle or even a shout, is enough to alert horse and rider. Horse riders and cyclists can happily share routes, as long as each is considerate to the needs of the other."

GREEN LANE DAY BRINGS (MOSTLY) GOOD NEWS...



The **East Hampshire** Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's project officer, Alison Tingley, co-ordinated a dozen volunteers, including members of: the Green Lanes Association, LARA, the BHS and the Hants & Berks Rover Owners Club, to hack-back obstructing vegetation on an unclassified road called *White Lane*, near West Meon. Alison says "We are so grateful to people who are willing to give up some of their spare time to help in projects like this ... With the aid of volunteer help we can significantly increase our clearing programme, and open up the countryside for the enjoyment of everyone." [pictured, from the left: Alison Tingley, LARA's Dave Tilbury, Hannah Thomas and Simon Thomas, GLASS representative for Hampshire.]

In **County Durham** the North East Rover Owners Club tackled essential maintenance on the (very) ancient highway at Doctor's Gate, near Wolsingham. DCC's Malcolm Kay wrote to NERO's Fred Wright "... This speaks volumes for their dedication and generosity of spirit and reflects great credit on your club as well as on themselves."

But in the **Yorkshire Dales National Park** the same human spirit is still sadly lacking. The head of park management Jon Avison told local vehicle enthusiasts keen to undertake co-operative tasks in the Park that "[National Park Authority] Members decided that work on a 'trial solution' for the practical management of vehicular use on green lanes should cease... Members feel that a conflict exists between the pursuance of a management 'trial' and the Authority's stated aim to seek legislation to prohibit recreational motor vehicles from using 'green lanes'..." Meanwhile excellent progress is being made on volunteer-led repairs to the old road over Deadman's Hill (see LN #26), just outside the National Park boundary.