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# LARA NEWS

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## It's the gypsy in my sole

In LARA NEWS number 2 we mentioned the problems caused by "New Age Travellers" and their tendency to park and camp on green roads and bridleways. These folk can sometimes cause serious obstruction and environmental problems. Press reports in early June also had them parking on the M5 motorway in protest at supposed police harassment – had they chosen the M25 nobody would have noticed...

The Department of the Environment has now circulated a consultation paper outlining proposals to alter the current law on the provision of gypsy caravan sites. If implemented, these proposals will do away with the requirement for local councils to provide sites for genuine travellers. The occasional overnight stop on a green lane by gypsies and "proper" travellers is not too much of a problem. Indeed, it is really a part of the road heritage we fight to protect. However, LARA is very worried that these proposals may result in many travellers finding it increasingly hard to find a permanent camp site. If they do, the nearest green road may be the best, or only, option. We have asked the Government to bear this in mind when they redraft the rules, and we now have some high-powered support. A local press report in early June states that the Member of Parliament for North West Hampshire, Sir David Mitchell, has already contacted the Home Office. Sir David suggests that section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 should be extended to include byways and other green lanes.

Motoring enthusiasts living in Sir David's constituency might think about dropping him a line expressing support, and asking that whatever measures are taken should not prejudice legitimate public use of our ancient highways. □

## A mole, or a rat? Perhaps it's *Deep Stoot*?

We in motor sport and recreation are well used to the press distorting the facts, inevitably to our disadvantage. The claimed destruction of square miles of countryside by hooligans in 4WDs is now so well documented that it *must* be true. After all, can we not believe the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Observer*? Perhaps not, see the column 2!

Now, it seems, the formerly innocent cyclists and horse riders are starting to fall prey to the fearless investigative journalist. The *Pennine Bridleway* project is a Countryside Commission plan to identify and develop a long route from Derbyshire to the Roman Wall, principally for horse and cycle riders, but also for walkers. Some of it would be on green roads and LARA has been very concerned that this will lead to calls for the removal of vehicular rights, indeed this was one of the ideas in the first proposals for the route. Even so, we are not against the project in principle and we wish our equine and velocipedal friends all the access they can get.

The northern end of the proposed *Pennine Bridleway* route goes through the 'Penrith & the Border' and 'Hexham' constituencies – both true-blue, grouse-shooting Conservative seats. Indeed, the MP for Penrith, David Maclean, was an Environment Minister until his recent shuffle to another department. Mr Maclean is, of course, the minister who thinks that the countryside should be experienced but not enjoyed, and that it is not legal to drive on Byways... The MP for Hexham, Peter Atkinson, also just happens to be a Parliamentary Advisor to a major field sports organisation. It was Mr Maclean who, in his capacity as minister, rejected the Countryside Commission's initial *Pennine Bridleway* proposal and told them to think again. Was this shorthand for 'keep it out of my constituency'? The Commission is still considering options; not long ago they told the TRF that the project had stalled, and they wanted help to kick start it! Who better to ask? Latest notion is the ludicrous idea of halting the route at Kirkby Stephen, barely out of the Yorkshire Dales, and right in the middle of nowhere.

The *Daily Telegraph* was unable to wait for the Commission to resubmit the proposal to the new minister. In an article by their political correspondent (not the environmental one, you note) on 24 May, it is reported that ministers are "concerned about obliging landowners to give access to their land, an issue which they believe is 'fundamentally anti-Conservative'". The report also says that ministers are unlikely to give the *Pennine Bridleway* the go-ahead because "people who keep horses, or buy expensive mountain bikes, do not need to be subsidised by the taxpayer".

Talk about distorting the truth! The proposed route uses existing rights of way where the public already have a right to travel. Landowners are not being forced to give access – it already exists. And that reference to "rich" riders and cyclists, well the ones I know are as ordinary as the average motor enthusiast, and the average rambler.

It seems the story did not originate from a civil servant – it came from an MP, and obviously an MP with a vested interest in denying public access to our countryside. It looks as though the landowners and their MPs are taking a stand against any increase in public enjoyment of the countryside. □

## Country Legislation: No Change – for now!

For the last few weeks the DoE has been conducting a trawl for information to back up the claims which everyone seems to be making about vehicles in the countryside. Now we are told that the initial consultations with involved bodies (including LARA) did not demonstrate a need for urgent changes in the law. The Department's review also considered possible adjustments to the Wildlife & Countryside Act but again there was no consensus to justify Parliamentary time in the immediate future. The intended wider consultation will not now take place.

It is understood that the Minister took the view that problems with vehicles are limited to local issues and should be dealt with locally. We believe that this attitude has been brought about, at least in part, by LARA finding opportunities to put stories of vehicular misuses of the countryside into proper perspective. We must now continue to do so, and to improve our codes and practices so that the next time we can be ready to take the initiative, not just to be defensive. □

## Working with the 4WD manufacturers

Since the formation of LARA in 1986 we have enjoyed the active membership and support of the *Motor Cycle Industry Association*, which gives us a two-way line of communication with the motorcycle industry. For various reasons we have never had a similar link with the car manufacturers, although a number of those selling 4WD vehicles now use the LARA basic *code of conduct* in their own driver information literature.

LARA invited the 4WD manufacturers to a meeting at the *Central Council of Physical Recreation* in early July to discuss ways of working together to assist our job of educating and informing recreational drivers. Some useful pointers came out of the meeting, which was chaired by the CCPR's George Cubitt MBE, and we hope to build on these in the near future. □

## Exmoor Restraint

The LARA system of Voluntary Restraint has been used to assist in restoration of an ancient highway across Exmoor. The route, which passes the landmark called Porchester's Post, had become washed out by a thunderstorm, and Exmoor Rangers had organised repairs. Intended to allow the 'natural healing processes' a chance to work, restraint started in March this year. Vehicle users arranged the erection of LARA signs, and agreement was reached on several details, including waymarking of a clearly usable route ready for when the period of restraint ended. At a site meeting to examine progress, it was found that many of the agreed actions had not been carried out, and there was still no clear indication of the proper route to take across the repaired ground. Restriction signs had also been put up on a length of route not covered by the agreement. Despite this, representatives of 4WD groups agreed to continue with a further three months of restraint. Local trail riders were not convinced, however.

'I thought we had a sensible deal,' said the TRF RoW officer, 'and we are disappointed that it has turned out like this. We are being made to seem churlish because the authority have not done their bit. I have to convince my members that their use would cause problems, and there simply is no evidence. The TRF is dedicated to keeping routes open, and if members feel they are being cheated they will leave, and ignore sensible agreements made elsewhere.'

The agreement by the 4WD users ends on 26.9.93. □

## Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

In the absence of any new measures to 'protect the countryside' the DoE and DTp may encourage highway authorities to use the management tools already available to them. In particular, guidance about the use of TROs may be 'strengthened'. The current advice in Circular 2/93 is for the authorities to liaise with user groups to find solutions based on co-operation and agreement before going on to consider a legal restriction. It is assumed that advice will be unchanged but with the TRO options being presented more forcefully for use where genuine problems defy the goodwill approach.

A working party of the Rights of Way Review Committee has been developing guidelines on the circumstances in which TROs might be justified. It has been difficult to make progress, but the work is to be accelerated and the LARA representative urgently needs

your help, and the help of your colleagues, about what works and what doesn't. For instance:

- Factual information about TROs imposed or rejected. What was the alleged problem? What was tried and with how much enthusiasm? What success was achieved? Could anything more be done?
- If a TRO was imposed, was there any consultation, were the initial proposals modified, were there any objections and what was the HAs reaction to them?
- Does the TRO really work? Has it solved any problems, do the 'cowboys' comply, has it put new pressures on nearby tracks or open spaces?

Answers to any of these questions should be sent to: Bill Kershaw Esq, 20 High Cross Drive, Newport, Gwent NP1 9AB

He would prefer you to include a map, or grid references, and copies of any press stories and the Order. If you are unsure about what might be useful, ring Bill, day or evening, on 0633 895241. □

## A TRO for the GAP?

One way to avoid more TROs is to stop the behaviour that provokes restrictions in the first place. But what if somebody in charge thinks vehicles are just 'inappropriate'? The latest example is the Gap, a mainly Roman road through the Brecon Beacons, where the National Park has requested Powys County Council to make a TRO even though 'use by vehicles is light' and there is 'no evidence that such use has caused damage to the route'.

This case is woven through with misunderstandings, about who might have caused damage, who volunteered to help repair it, who might have been asked to repair it instead, and who actually blew up the bridge during WW2. Anyway, the County Council is about to start consultations on the desirability of a total prohibition of vehicular traffic, even though they may not be wholly convinced that the National Park's request is justified. If the arguments against the proposal are not heeded there will be full scale opposition to the Order because it would be against natural justice and will open the door to similar measures elsewhere. Offers to discuss areas of concern have been disregarded by the National Park Officer. We must hope the County Council is more open to reason. Watch this, er, Gap! □

## Good news from the Peak Park

At the annual motoring liaison meeting in Bakewell, John Thompson, for the National Park, was pleased at the co-operation gained through regular contact with motoring groups. Several issues were resolved, and it was announced that by October the rights of way details would all be on a computer. This would speed up dealing with queries, and would be vital in 1995 when the RUPP reclassification would start in earnest. Members were also told of some good news for our sporting colleagues – two applications for planning approval for motocross circuits had been considered, only one of which had been rejected. Good news indeed! □

This issue of **LARA News** includes contributions from: Bill Kershaw, WTRA, Alan Kind, LARA MRDO, and Tim Stevens, TRF & BMF.