
LARA News & MFU Matters

Number 8 – March 1994

Managing the Norfolk Coastline

The remote and often bleak coast of East Anglia is not an area that is usually associated with motor sport and recreation. The recently published Visitor Management Strategy for the Norfolk Coast does mention motor sport and recreation in a more balanced way than others have in the past. While we would take issue with the logic of the section here underlined, readers may find the section informative:

“Off-road vehicles and motorbikes

“Competitive motorsport is an activity that is not known to occur in the AONB but rallies of historic cars take place occasionally. However, the real boom in interest in this sector is in four-wheel-drive and off road vehicles. The few vehicles that do actually go ‘off road’ in inland areas cause few problems at the present time, except for the impacts that are common to all vehicles. Use of off road vehicles is therefore not an activity suitable for wider promotion in the AONB. consistent with the aims of reducing traffic congestion and developing walking, cycling and horseriding on quieter routes.

“There is serious concern however about erosion of substrates and vegetation from off road (and some standard) vehicles, at the edge of salt marshes in certain areas of the Heritage Coast (called the Greens). A few isolated incidents have involved off road vehicles driving along shingle banks or across saltmarsh, with some vehicles even getting stuck in creeks.

“By their very design, motorbikes can reach more inaccessible locations, causing erosion and disturbance to wildlife and visitors. This is only a persistent problem on one site in the AONB, Winterton Dunes, and this is usually a result of deliberate rather than unintentional action. It is also more likely to be associated with local rather than visitor use.

“The co-ordinated approach to seeking solutions, demonstrated nationally by the motorsports organisations in the Land Access and Recreation Association, is to be welcomed. However, as with many sports it is the casual participant who needs to be targeted.

“R18 (suggested policy)

Reduce the impact of motorbikes and off-road vehicles on sensitive habitats by:

- promoting responsible use
- increasing awareness of the potential for damage
- exploring the potential for alternative sites to alleviate pressure.” □

No Need for User Education in Snowdonia? It's Official!

When the new stocks of Suzuki-sponsored LARA Access Guides became available we wrote to all national parks, plus the Ridgeway Officer, offering up to 100 copies (worth £200) free of charge on request. We are glad to announce that all responded positively except the Snowdonia National Park. Please draw your own conclusions.

For more detail on this publication see overleaf. □

Please Note: In order to give a better information service we will, in future, combine MFU MATTERS and LARA NEWS when the production schedules coincide. This issue therefore includes items from MFU Matters No 9.

MFU MATTERS is edited by LARA's Motor Sport Development Officer, David Kersey, and is also distributed directly to all ACU and RAC club officers. MFU originated material ends with a star: ☆

New Greenham Park

You would think that the New Greenham Park (as is, Greenham Common as was) has all the ingredients of a fantastic venue for motorsports, albeit, due to its development potential, only on a short term basis. However, if you were to ask the MFU today whether motorsports will be able to take place there, I am afraid that our answer must be: probably not. Despite all those perimeter roads, car parks, hangers, rough open spaces etc, not to mention those long runways, and a history of noise generated by various types of plane and other military uses, and the full support of the Southern Region Sports Council (who have done a lot of work on behalf of all Sports), the interest of the local authority, the local resident and English Nature (yes, you guessed it, there are SSSIs all over the place) the likelihood of regular motorsports use appears unlikely. This situation is not being helped by the estate agents, put in charge of the site by the Ministry of Defence Land Agents, only wanting to talk to commercial operators willing to lease or buy areas on a full-time basis. It should be a venue ideal for a variety of motorsports but, again, it looks as though we will miss out. Watch this space ... but don't hold your breath. ☆

Regional Officer Seminars

The MFU has written recently to all ACU Centres, and RACMSA Regional Associations, requesting assistance with the staging of a series of regional seminars which will, hopefully, assist MFU Regional Officers and LARA RoW Respondents to work more closely together for the common good of all LARA member organisations. By and large the existing system is working reasonably well but, in certain areas, it could be better. So, these seminars will undoubtedly help everyone understand their responsibilities clearer and introduce them to their local colleagues from other motorsport organisations. If anyone is able to help the MFU progress this matter, would they please contact either Emma or myself on Rugby (0788) 540519. ☆

Mersey and Red Rose Forest

The LARA MSDO recently attended a very positive meeting at the offices of the Mersey, and Red Rose, Community Forests (covering the Liverpool to Manchester 'corridor') which was organised by MFU Regional Officers Allan Dean-Lewis and Martin Pratt. The meeting identified a number of venues with potential for a range of motorsports, which will be followed up in due course, and the MFU would strongly urge other Regional Officers to contact their local Community Forest Office to establish potential sites for our sport. Remember, it's better to get in now before other sports obtain all the prime sites. ☆

ACU Environmental Working Party

The ACU Environmental Working Party met, for the first time, in September 1993 to establish its parameters. Since then the ACU Management Committee have given it the go-ahead to meet twice in 1994 on dates yet to be decided. The MFU provides the link between this ACU initiative, and the Environmental Advisory Group of the RACMSA, and it is likely that the ACU's Working Party will invite representatives of other bodies to future meetings. ☆

Health and Safety Executive

A growing number of off-road clubs are being contacted by their local Environmental Health Officers who are implementing the Health and Safety at Work Act upon our events. This is a cause of great concern as the Act is clearly intended for industrial and office implementation and its use at sporting events is, to say the least, somewhat contentious. In order to help resolve this matter, Mr. Allan Watson, has been seconded by the Health and Safety Local Authority Unit, to draw up a set of guidelines, in relation to the said Act, for organisers of motorsports events. However, this is unlikely to be ready before the Spring of 1995 so clubs might be interested to know that the Central Council for Sport and Recreation (CCPR) is of the opinion that the Act can be applied to sporting events i.e. working areas, catering areas, toilets etc but not to the sport itself. This is a vital difference and one that all clubs should be aware of if they are approached by their local Health and Safety/Environmental Health Officer. ☆

Ford Maverick Driving Guide

Ford has complemented the launch of its new Maverick 4WD leisure vehicle with the issue of an excellent driving booklet. This guide offers advice on the legalities, practicalities and ethics of countryside access, plus, of course, the basics in driving a 4WD off the surfaced highway. The Maverick driving guide uses the LARA code of conduct as the bedrock of its environmental message.

Ford have taken the imaginative step of making copies of the guide available to interested parties through their dealer network. If you ask a dealer and he does not have copies to hand, he can get some, free of charge, from the Ford Dealer Literature Service, quoting reference FA1149. Ford are also advising dealers to offer the guide to anyone interested in buying a 4WD, and suggesting that a copy should also go with every secondhand Maverick sold. □

'Green Stickers' - Do they Work?

For many years now, the American idea of 'green sticker' access permits has been regularly taken off the shelf, dusted down, and suggested as an antidote to the 'cowboys' who do motorsport so much harm. LARA's member organisations see both advantages and snags in applying such an idea on this side of the pond, but proponents may wish to consider this letter in a recent USA cycling magazine:

'Money raised from it (the green sticker) has always been earmarked for trail maintenance, trail development and land acquisition, but to date it has been routinely robbed from the off-roaders and dumped into the general fund, with never an intention to pay it back. I read a statistic once that claimed that less than 20% of green sticker money has ever gone back into trails...'

Does that remind you, in just the smallest way, of our own, dear, road fund licence? □

LARA Access Guide – Massive Circulation Boost

The latest version of the LARA Access Guide, supported by Suzuki Cars, has recently been sent out by Suzuki to all their Rhino Club members. With this distribution approaching 20,000 copies, adding to the thousands already in circulation, this must be one of the largest direct mail user-education initiatives ever undertaken. This new version of the Access Guide, aimed more at the newcomer to recreational driving and motorcycling, is available directly from LARA at £2.00. Please send a stamped addressed C5 envelope for an individual copy; clubs are welcome to contact LARA about larger quantities. □

Norfolk in the News Again!

In LARA News No 6 we reported on a RUPP reclassification case in Norfolk where the County Council threatened an objector with an application for costs because, in their view, an objection based on a claimed 15 years user was 'frivolous and without sufficient grounds'. LARA took up the case with Norfolk County Council and the Department of Environment. The DoE's reply is couched in the usual cautious and non-specific language that the civil service prefers, but we interpret it as confirming our view that such an objection would not be regarded as frivolous. Objections made and sustained on amenity grounds (e.g. 'I just do not like 4WDs') might well be held frivolous and attract costs against the complainant.

Norfolk's Assistant Chief Executive has been very open about the case and it is clear that communications, in both directions, between the highway authority and the objector(s) in this case were not as good as they might have been. That said, Norfolk County Council are obviously keen to improve the mechanisms of the reclassification procedures and to avoid such misunderstandings of this complex area of the law happening in the future.

LARA will circulate a synopsis of this case, and the lessons therein, to its member organisations to improve the recreational motoring organisations' understanding of the definitive map procedure. Meanwhile we have just received a routine letter from Norfolk in which the Assistant Chief Executive & Corporate Solicitor says:

'At the end of the consultation process, we shall decide whether to re-classify these RUPPs as footpaths, bridleways or byways open to all traffic. Our decision will be based on evidence of past public use.'

Nothing else? Perhaps we are not alone in needing our understanding of the procedure brushing up a little. □

Inclosure 'Private Carriage Roads' – New Evidence Supports Public Status

The meaning of the term Private Carriage Road used in many Inclosure Documents has long been a puzzle, and a source of misunderstanding. The DoE have advised Inspectors (in guidance note cw8/47) that it may mean 'a public road for use only by private carriages', and this is often borne out by one or more of the facts that the route serves many holdings, is a through way, or is maintainable by the inhabitants or surveyor. Sue Hogg, of the South Pennine Packhorse Trails Trust, has recently discovered more supporting evidence in the form of a Magistrates Stopping-up Order closing a Private Carriage Road. (West Riding Justices, special sessions at Collingham, Yorks, on the twenty fifth day of July, 1815.)

continues...

Private Carriage Roads continued...

Recreational vehicle users will be aware that this procedure, now represented by s116 of the 1980 Highways Act, is used to remove public rights, not private ones, and is sometimes the cause of grief, heartache, and expense. It is pleasant to discover that it can also bring joy. □

Farmers Advised – 'Lock Gates on Green Lanes'

It is clear from feedback from local officers in various parts of the country that landowners are being advised to try to have minor highways on their land downgraded or closed, or to lodge plans and statements with the highway authority asserting that tracks on their land are not public rights of way.

Now, just as the public has a right to claim rights of way, landowners have every right to deny these claims, although you might guess which will get the fastest response from highway authorities. A recent article in the influential *Farmers' Guardian* of 21 January 1994 discusses 'green lanes' at some length. Although the article states that 'green lanes' can come in a range of statuses, and may even be private, it concludes with this advice for its readers:

'if you consider it is a private right of way ... you should lock the route if there is a gate on it ...'

Experience suggests that many (perhaps most?) occupiers regard all green lanes as merely private occupation roads. Some have a rather fanciful view of historical facts, for instance according to one gamekeeper, the Maiden Way was built by the Romans as a private shooting road with no public rights at all.

The *Farmers' Guardian* might better serve its readers by explaining the subtleties of 'once a highway, always a highway', and the possible consequences of illegal obstruction of a highway, than by boosting the sales of Messrs Yale and Chubb. □

The Boys are Back

Our old friends the Ramblers' Association are back on the warpath. The winter 1993 edition of *Rambling Today* runs an article entitled '*National Parks in Crisis*' as part of their campaign to press the government to grant national parks 'independent status'. They say

'National parks should be no place for noisy, disruptive pursuits such as off-road motor bike scrambling... The Ramblers are pleased that the government has expressed support in principle for our view, and we are pressing them to legislate accordingly at the earliest opportunity.'

At risk of repetition *ad nauseam*, we remind all walkers that LARA's member organisations are just as concerned for the well-being of Britain's remote places as any set of ramblers. The level of motor sport in the national parks is low, stable and carefully organised and no more disruptive than the hordes of Wainwright groupies that are being conditioned to think that only they have any business in the countryside.

LARA also has a message for the government. Our people will do their very best to work with all groups to make the countryside a better place for everyone (see next column), but discussion is difficult when some organisations would rather put the (walking) boot in than get down to the real issues. □

LARA News News

Next copy date for LARA News is April 15. Please send copy to Alan Kind or direct to Tim Stevens, 101 Square Lane, Ormsirk, Lancs L40 7RG. We use PC format discs, either size, and prefer ASCII files – thanks!

Obstructions: Help from LARA

Following several enquiries from members who knew that they should write about obstructions in green lanes, but were not sure what to say, or to whom, LARA has come up with an answer.

Designed to fit equally snugly in the pocket of quilted waistcoat and wax-cotton jacket, pre-printed post cards are now available from LARA with a simple message and quotation reminding authorities about legal duties. Simply fill in the gaps with details of the obstruction or ploughed section and pop down to the post office. A pack of two dozen cards is available to members from LARA in return for two first class stamps. Please indicate to which LARA organisation your club is affiliated. □

*This could be your window on the world
of Rights of Way work*

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*LARA News goes to all Counties & Metropolitan Boroughs
and a wide range of readers with motoring and related interests.*

*What do you mean, nobody reads it?
You are reading it, aren't you?*

National Trust Liaison in Wiltshire

Last LARA News reported a meeting with the National Trust in the imposing Civil Engineers HQ in Westminster, at which we asked them to talk to us. They did, about a TRO proposal.

The next time we met was in the very different surroundings of a blizzard on the Great West Road, to try to find a solution to their potential concerns. Orchids came into it, and unrecorded vehicular rights on the Old Bath Road. Several aspects of the case were explored, and agreement was reached that a diversion around the 'offending' little treasures would be sensible for all concerned. How pleasant to sit round a coffee-pot and find a real answer in an hour or so, instead of slogging it out from entrenched positions for days or even weeks. □

LARA 'Secret Roads' Conference Update

LARA's conference on 'white roads', at Leamington Spa on 20 April, is receiving good support with bookings coming in steadily. Response from local authorities is slower than we hoped, but that doubtless reflects the serious spending curbs facing local government. That said, all highway authorities have 'white' and unclassified roads and this conference will assist them in better using their rights of way and recreation budget in developing and protecting the recreational highway network. We know that copies of LARA News sometimes have difficulty in finding the way from the council's postroom to the rights of way department, so it would be very helpful if our local respondents and other volunteers could liaise with their contacts at the highway authority to check that they know about the conference. If this is the first you have read of it, please contact Alan Kind at the address below for details and advice about booking. As we go to press the conference is filling up nicely...

Our colleagues in the mountain bike world are also staging a conference at Leamington Spa, this one on 23 March. It deals with the legal aspects of mountain bike use, plus good and bad practice in facility provision. Further details are available from the BMBF's access director, Colin Palmer, on 0531 633500. □

Good Sense in Northumberland

While the statutory purposes of national parks make it difficult for the park officers to say 'we love motor sports', they can adopt realistic and fair policies by utilising the discretion the system affords them. Brecon Beacons apart, national park plans are showing more awareness of the real situation surrounding motoring use of the parks, and the recently-published draft second review for the Northumberland National Park is worthy of commendation:

"If National Park areas are intended for quiet enjoyment then noisy pursuits may be unacceptable in principle and clearly every effort must be made to ensure that any existing activities do not cause undue damage or disturbance. It may be the case that management measures can be taken to ensure that potentially intrusive pursuits are sustainable. Nevertheless, the number of motor rallies or trail bike riding events in the Park remains at a low level and no evidence exists to suggest that any action should be taken to curtail such activities. Unauthorised trail bike riding in the Cheviot Hills does take place and this has contributed to the erosion of paths and disturbance to farming activities. This situation needs to be monitored. The volume of use on tracks such as Clennel Street and Salters Road is not such that intervention could be considered necessary or appropriate at the present time.

"For many activities including mountain biking and horse riding, codes of good practice are now being adopted and the Park Authority should play whatever part they can alongside the Sports Council in promoting their distribution and use.

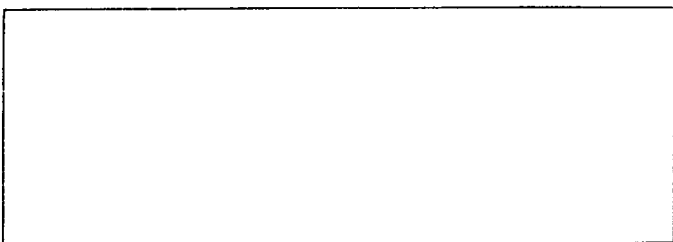
"Policy AR2: Motor sports must be regarded as inappropriate activities in the Park. Control will therefore continue to be exercised over motor rallies affecting public rights of way and liaison will be maintained with the relevant organisations and landowners to limit, on a voluntary basis, the use of the Park for organised events such as motor rallying and trail bike riding. Motor cycle trail riding and four wheel drive use of vehicular rights of way, particularly in the Cheviots, will be monitored to assess the damage caused to vegetation and disturbance to farming and other user groups.

"AR3: The Park Authority will seek, with the cooperation of the Sports Council and governing bodies, to develop and promote the use of codes of good practice.

"AR4: The Park Authority will, in cooperation with the Sports Council and user groups, commission or support appropriate research to establish the demands and opportunities for active sport and recreation in the Park." □

The Ridgeway – Part I: Policy Initiatives

As we reported in LARA NEWS No 7, the Secretary of State for Transport directed the Countryside Commission to take the lead in developing positive management strategies for future use of the Ridgeway. Here is a complete chart showing all their efforts in the 3 months since then:



The Ridgeway – Part II: Management

While the Countryside Commissioners and senior officers have been sulking quietly in Cheltenham (while spending yet more hundreds of thousands of pounds to try to throw a few waterskiers off Windermere) the Ridgeway Officer and user groups, out in the real world, have got on with the job.

The dreadful run of wet weather in southern England has resulted in the Ridgeway becoming much wetter than for many years. Ridgeway Officer Jos Joslin was concerned that even light use might cause an impact which could affect the condition of the road right into the summer (what summer?). At Jos' request, LARA member organisations agreed to a time-limited voluntary cessation of use, to be reviewed on 31 March or sooner if the weather dramatically improves. LARA's information officer produced plastic-covered A4 'Voluntary Restraint' signs asking drivers not to use the Ridgeway and explaining why. These were placed at all sealed-road intersections by Jos and the local AWDC club. Jos also approached agricultural vehicle users and horse riders, asking them too to avoid the Ridgeway, but we do not know the outcome of this. No other signs went up.

Since this initiative (which won a letter of approval in The TIMES, no less!) LARA representatives have met with Jos to discuss future management initiatives. Both sides agreed that nothing can be ratified until the Countryside Commission withdraws its *fatwah* against motor users, but we had a very useful talk about what might be done during 1994.

We were also told that local authority members of the management team are not impressed by our idea of a leaflet giving details of additional vehicular routes to help 'spread the load'. Despite this idea also being promoted by the Secretary of State and the Inquiry Inspector, they don't like it because it might mean they have to spend money on road maintenance. On the Ridgeway they could claim from the Commission, but not elsewhere. What a shame we cannot yet put this particular conundrum to the Commissioners face to face.

The Ridgeway – Part III: Recent Use

While we discuss and develop long-term management procedures for the Ridgeway, people have asked what, if any, code of conduct or voluntary restraint is currently in force. The general LARA code of conduct for green road driving applies just as much to the Ridgeway as to any other road – small groups only, the 4 'Ws', courtesy to other users, etc – but this does not address the issue of use on summer Sundays and bank holidays. Neither LARA nor its member organisations can *demand* observance of any code, but we would ask all users to do what most have done for years: realise that short-sighted official over-promotion of this one road means that summer weekends and bank holidays can lead to quite large numbers of walkers, children, dogs, grannies, etc. Please plan your visits accordingly.

On a more self-critical note, we have had reports, which we have no reason to doubt, of 'convoys' of 4wds driving the Ridgeway since the public inquiry decision. However many in a convoy, however many convoys, you can rest assured that the story will come back to haunt us at some future time. The motoring organisations may have won the public inquiry, but that does little more than put us on our mettle to demonstrate that we are responsible users now and in the future. The late-80s furore about 4WD use of green roads has died down recently as the numbers settle down to a sustainable level with good codes of behaviour. 'Convoys' driving a wet and vulnerable Ridgeway will do little to support that better image.

Please take this seriously. If it comes to a third PI we may well not win again. □