

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

11th November 2004

Open Access Volunteers

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the County Council and Nidderdale AONB's plans to introduce an Open Access Volunteer Service.

2.0 Background

2.1 Nidderdale AONB has large areas of land, which will be open for people to walk across when the new rights in Part 1 of CROW Act 2000 are confirmed by the Secretary of State in May 2005. The new access right will have many implications for both users and landowners. One of our principle roles as the access authority is managing the new rights on the ground and a large part of this will be providing information to users on how to use their new right responsibly.

2.2 There are already areas of moorland across the county, such as Barden Moor north east of Bolton Abbey, which already have a formal open access agreement under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. On Barden Moor, access is managed through an agreement between the County Council and the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It has been invaluable to have a team of volunteers organised through the Park Ranger Service patrolling the known popular access points in order to be able to assist and inform visitors. This has helped reduce conflict with the people who work on the land.

2.3 The County Council has agreed proposals to establish a county-wide Voluntary Ranger Service and has recently appointed a Volunteer Co-ordinator, David Ranner, to develop the new service. David will be in attendance at the meeting to outline some early thoughts on how the service might be rolled out. The wardening proposals for the open access areas are being evolved as part of the new service but jointly with the Nidderdale AONB Team, in view of the heavy concentration of access areas in the AONB. Chris Jones has therefore been leading on this area of work. The open access volunteers will be administered locally but will follow overall guidance developed by the County Council's Voluntary Ranger Service.

3.0 Volunteer Duties

3.1 The volunteer's role will be varied and to a certain extent can be tailored to suit the individual. There is still a lot of confusion about the new access rights and an important role will be to provide information and advice to visitors. This aspect of the role will be guiding rather than policing. In reality, volunteers will have no more powers than a member of public, what they will have however is the knowledge to assist people to help them enjoy their visit and reduce potential conflict to a minimum.

- 3.2 Another main duty of the volunteers will be to gather information to assist with the on-going management of access areas. A lot of work has been put into predicting where people will want to go. Volunteers will be ideally placed to monitor and record where people actually go. This information will be useful to refine the management measures already in place or to add new ones if necessary.
- 3.3 Volunteers will also be asked to monitor specific sites that have been identified as potentially sensitive areas in relation to conservation or archaeology. This information will be important to ensure that the new right will not have a detrimental effect on important conservation or heritage sites.
- 3.4 We are aware that after the initial interest in the new right of access has reduced the role of the volunteers may become less critical especially in the winter months. This gives us the opportunity to use the volunteers to do other tasks such as rights of way surveys or guided walks.

4.0 Volunteer Numbers and Rota

- 4.1 The table above shows Nidderdale split into four areas. We aim to have two volunteers in each area every weekend and on Bank Holiday. In order to achieve this we are looking for a core team of 40 volunteers, assuming that everyone will do at least one day a month. As volunteers come forward we are asking them to commit to at least 12 duties per year and so far no one has been unwilling to agree to this.

Area	Moors in Area	Access points
1	Dallowgill Sigsworth Longside Brimham	Tom Corner North of Skell Gill Bank Harper Hill
2	Swinton Jervaulx Summerstone Scar Middlesmoor	Scar House Reservoir Middlesmoor car park Pott Moor/High Cattle Grid
3	Stean Hardcastle Ramsgill Gouthwaite Heathfield	Greenhow (Duck Street) Lofthouse
4	Pockstones Heyshaw Blubberhouses Langbar & Denton Askwith	Blubberhouses YW Thruscross Askwith Moor Road Manor House

- 4.2 It is too early to be sure exactly what areas will be popular but the table above covers the main moors in Nidderdale and some existing car parks, which are likely

to be used as access points on to open country. Some other access points may become popular and some landowners may want to provide formal access points to try to manage visitors.

- 4.3 The administration of the volunteers is yet to be fully finalised. We will however adopt a fairly standard procedure whereby the volunteer indicates a month in advance when they are available for duty the following month. We will then allocate each volunteer with a patrol area for the day they have chosen. There will be a need to set in place a procedure to ensure we know when volunteers have started and more importantly that they have returned safely from their day's duty. We are looking at various ways of doing this, one option being partnering with the Dales National Park to use their existing system.
- 4.4 Although the focus for the initial volunteer service is on Nidderdale, there are opportunities for Open Access Volunteering in other parts of the county. As the county-wide volunteer service develops and if people show interest or there becomes a need, we will be able to mirror the service elsewhere in the county.

5.0 Training Requirements

- 5.1 We are working with BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) to put together a training program for the volunteers. The training will start in January and run until April, ready for commencement in May. The training will be thorough and aims to give volunteers the confidence and knowledge to deal with any situation they come upon. Below is the draft syllabus split into five daylong sessions.

Session One:

Why are we here - Access legislation
Short history of access legislation in UK
CROW Act
Mapping of Open Country
How it affects AONB's
Specific issues affecting Nidderdale
Problems associated with open access/Land use conflicts
Objectives of Open Access Volunteer Service
How objectives can be achieved

Session Two:

Role of the access warden
Recap on objectives defined in session one
Management of Open Access Volunteer Service
Legislation affecting the role (CROW Act, H&S Regulations)
Countryside safety
Do's and don'ts - how to handle situations
Incident reporting/notebook
Requesting assistance (colleagues, managers, search & rescue, emergency services)

Session Three

Navigation/hillcraft theory
Maps/scales/appropriateness of use
Grid references
Map symbols

Compass and its use
Route planning and its importance
Contents of rucksack
Clothing/equipment
Planning of route for practical navigation training day

Session Four

Practical Navigation Training Day

Located in an access area

Pre-planned route of patrol to be followed which requires use of a variety of navigational techniques

Teams to be made up of mixed ability with one experienced navigator per group

Each team will be given a card in an envelope which will have a potential scenario to act out during the patrol

Session Five

Roll out of an open access volunteer practical development day.

A patrol route to be set up in which several scenarios have to be dealt with:

- Erecting a no access sign on access land
- Dog off lead during nesting season
- Damming of water course
- Camping/camp fire on access land
- Damage to fence/wall
- Mountain bike on footpath
- First aid incident
- Car crime incident

5.2 The programme will be accredited via the BTCV Institute for Environmental Conservation/NCFE Awarding Body and as a result be eligible for funding through the Learning and Skills Council.

6.0 Funding and Costs

6.1 We can bid for funding through the Access Management Grant Scheme for the volunteer service. We can claim up to £15 a day available for each volunteer day. The funding will help cover equipment and travel costs.

6.2 There will be a number of on going and one off costs involved with the volunteer service. Looking at other volunteer services it is standard to provide travel expenses from home to where the duty starts and back home. In order to keep costs down there will be an upper limit to the amount of miles a volunteer can claim in one day, again this is standard practice.

6.3 We will be providing the volunteers with a basic amount of navigation and communication equipment. We are looking at the cost of providing mobile phones to the volunteers. Compared to other forms of communication mobile phones seem to be the most cost effective and reliable.

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 It is recommended that the report is received for information.

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