

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

24 NOVEMBER 2005

OPEN ACCESS VOLUNTEERS

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update and inform members of the forum about the progress of the Open Access Volunteer Service.
- 1.2 The report also summarises feedback from the volunteers after they have completed their patrol.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 At the beginning of January this year 40 newly recruited volunteers started training to become Open Access Volunteers. The training was given over six sessions equipping the volunteers with all the skills and knowledge they would need to carry out their duties.
- 2.2 Since the 28th May 2005 the volunteers have carried out 169 duties in the Nidderdale AONB. The volunteers start from one of eight designated areas and spend the day patrolling that area. Each time a volunteer completes a duty they fill out a feedback form.
- 2.3 The County Council has attracted £16,200 of funding over two years through the Countryside Agency's Access Management Grant Scheme. This money has helped us set up the service and supply the volunteers with the equipment they need carry out their duties safely.

3.0 Open Access Volunteer Service

- 3.1 Of the 40 volunteers who started we have only had 3 people leave. This is a good retention rate for volunteers and the existing team seem to be well motivated and enthusiastic about their new role. We are currently enrolling 10 more volunteers to bring the numbers back up and expand the service slightly. The new recruits will be trained by officers and existing volunteers.
- 3.2 We are aware that fatigue could set in if the service does not develop. In response to this we are currently setting up some groups focusing on specific roles. We are setting up a working party to meet up once a month to tackle some practical footpath issues. We have a small team of volunteers who have been trained to run guided walks, the team have some winter walks planned and are contributing to the AONB's events programme next year. A team of volunteers have shown an interest in carrying out some rights of way condition surveys to contribute to the counties rights of way improvement plan. Finally we have a team of volunteers who are going to be trained by English Nature to carry out basic vegetation surveys. They will be monitoring the recovery of the routes over Blubberhouses Moor now they have been protected by a Traffic Regulation Order.

4.0 Feedback Summary

4.1 Attached to this report is a copy of the report form volunteers fill out after completing a duty. The information we have received has given us a great insight into how the new rights are being received and if they are having an effect on the land the right covers.

4.2

Access Point	Average Number of people seen on Access Land during a patrol.	Average number of those people seen on tracks and paths.
Scar House	27	23.3
Tom Corner	10.5	10
Middlesmoor	13.7	13
Heyshaw	14	13
Gollinglith Foot	6.3	4.3
Blubberhouses	4.7	2.6
Greenhow	9.6	9
Askwith	6.7	5.6

The table above shows the average number of people seen out walking on access land throughout the day. The figures reflect the popularity of different areas in the AONB. There are no surprises, the head of the dale and Heyshaw being the most popular. What is worth noting is that the next question asks, out of those people how many were on a track or path. The results show that without exception throughout the AONB over 90% of the people seen are on a path or track and not using their new right to the full. This should be reassuring to the minority of landowners and conservationists who predicted that Open Access would have a devastating effect on the countryside especially open moorland .

4.3 There is a section where volunteers record sightings of illegal use of routes. Two types of illegal use have been reported, dogs on access land where they are excluded and by far the most common, motorised vehicles on illegal routes. Without exception every weekend a least one volunteer has recorded sightings and often number plates of off-road vehicles using illegal routes.

4.4 Other general feedback has been in the form of Rights of Way issues, misleading signs and fly tipping. Appendix two is a spreadsheet with all the issues logged and the course of action taken. Many volunteers record sighting of the bird life they see while they are out. The table below lists the species seen so far.

Curlew
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Skylark
Fieldfare
Buzzard
Sparrowhawk
Common Sandpiper
Meadow Pipit
Golden Plover

Stonechat
Reed Bunting
Barn Owl
Canada Goose

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The first five months of the volunteer service have been a great success. There have been at least 2 volunteers out every weekend since the launch of Open Access back in May. From the excellent feedback we have received the first few months have been quiet in terms of the number of people using Open Access. This was expected, although we have been surprised how quiet it has been.
- 5.2 There have been a small number of incidences often involving dogs on restricted access land. These incidences have been dealt with involving the landowner and in some cases the volunteers have contacted the landowner directly and sorted out the issue on the same day.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that this report be received for information .

Author of Report

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Appendix 1

Open Access Volunteers Report Form

Please fill out a report form for each day you are on duty and return within 7 days.

Illegal use of Routes

Describe any incidences of illegal use of routes, including a grid reference.

Description	Grid Reference

Conservation and Archaeology

From time to time you will be asked to visit a specific site to monitor any impact Open Access is having. Each site will be named for easy identification. We are looking for evidence of over use which could lead to possible erosion or disturbance.

Name of feature/ Grid Reference	Comments	Time	No. of people

General Feedback

Please use this space to feedback any information or describe any incidents you happen across, for example, dogs off leads. If reporting a specific site always give a grid reference.

Description	Grid Reference

Appendix 2

<u>Description</u>	<u>Grid Reference</u>	<u>Notes</u>	<u>Action</u>
Misleading signs	Dallowgill Moor	Private Land	All signs have been removed
Private sign on gate	SE0883 7470	Swinton Estates - Private Road	Sign is OK, it's a private track
Misleading sign	SE1152 8003	Swinton Estates - Private Road Keep Off	Site Visit writing letter to estate
Misleading sign	SE1128 7920	Swinton Estates - Private Road Keep Off	Site Visit writing letter to estate
Misleading sign	SE1386 8129	Swinton Estates - Private Road Keep Off	Site Visit writing letter to estate
Heyshaw sign print fading	SE162 622		Sign to be replaced
Broken Ladder Stile	SE149 525		Reported to PROW Skipton
Burnt out car	SE1070 6050		Landowner aware
Misleading sign	SE095 612		Site Visit writing letter to estate
Poor surface on Bridleway	SE138 818		Reported to PROW Skipton
Pile of Clothing at access point	SE175 506		Harrogate Borough Council notified
Path in disrepair	SE114 642	End of new fencing behind Miner Arms	Reported to PROW Skipton
Path blocked by rubble	SE113 639	No finger posts at road side	Reported to PROW Skipton
Water logged surface	SE141 526	bridleway	Reported to PROW Skipton
Broken Stile	SE150 526		Reported to PROW Skipton
Dangerous ladder stile	SE134 530		Reported to PROW Skipton

Access sign removed	SE128 594		Reported to Police, new sign on order
Defective Stile	SE112 644	Complaint from resident	
Loose stile	SE150 611		Reported to PROW Skipton
Highway blocked	SE149 574		Looking into status of route
Finger post missing	SE161 556		Reported to PROW Skipton
Incorrect sign	SE1523 6179	Footpath Only' sign on a bridleway Swinton Estates - Private Road	Reported to PROW Skipton
Misleading sign	SE113798	Keep Off	Site Visit writing letter to estate
Poor waymarking	SE154 810	bridleway	Reported to PROW Skipton
Poor waymarking	SE074 759	footpath to Middlesmoor Parish caretaker doing it (Heritage trail)	Reported to PROW Skipton
Overgrown vegetation	SE139 638		Parish caretaker taken on job
Litter at access point	SE175 506		
Finger post broken	SE044 763		Reported to PROW Skipton
Stile Missing	SE109 622		Reported to PROW Skipton
Litter	SE109 635		Harrogate Borough Council notified
No notification of fire closure	Nidderdale 8		Putting a system in place to deal with fire closures.
Misleading sign	SE162 625		Site Visit writing letter to estate
Overgrown vegetation on footpath	SE171 632		Reported to PROW Skipton
Car park blocked by gravel	SE113 638		
Barbed wire across stile	SE101 760	Stile too high for ladies, approximate grid ref	

Broken Stile

SE133 553

Reported to PROW Skipton