

North Yorkshire Local Access Forum Waymarking Strategic Review - Findings and Advice

Introduction

At the NYLAF meeting on Wednesday 28th September 2022 Agenda Item 6 was a Paper produced from Countryside Access Service on **Waymarking**. At that meeting it was agreed to set up a subgroup consisting of David Lepper, Dick Brew, Nick Abbey and Cllr David Jeffels to provide an overview with some strategic advice on how to best proceed with future Waymarking priorities.

Back to basics, from the Natural England booklet “Waymarking public rights of way”. The term waymarking means marking objects along a public right of way. It complements signposting which shows where a right of way leaves the metalled road and indicates its initial direction.

Waymarking enables users ,especially those unfamiliar with the area, to follow a path accurately and confidently at points where they might otherwise have difficulty.

Waymarking benefits not only users of rights of way but also farmers and landowners. It increases users’ enjoyment of the countryside and prevents unintentional trespass. Carrying out waymarking is a simple and very practical way in which a parish council, local group, or individual landowner or occupier can help to look after the rights of way in their area.

This simply outlines the national context, however waymarking is not always a precise science. There are local variations of “In House style” between Highway Authorities and sometimes not always a single right or wrong solution. There may be different ways of interpretation and implementation, with local distinctiveness and good practice agreed and implemented. To get it right and consistent to satisfy both users and land managers can be an art that requires some common-sense local flexibility. Things are not always black and white, but also yellow, blue, purple or red, with words, lettering, or symbols added as local agreed variations on some waymarking arrows.

One common observation is that some older installed waymarks have now become badly faded with the effects of ultraviolet light and weathering. Some of the poorer quality plastic waymarks also seem to become very brittle and prone to breaking. It is also helpful to have waymarks with a bit of flexibility that can be attached flush to a rounded post without breaking.

Recommendation is that good quality waymarks should be used that might initially cost a bit more but will be durable and stand the test of time, so representing better value for money longer term.

Leicestershire County Council includes taller waymark posts, 2 metres or so high, with bright yellow painted tops, so if a stile or gate in a hedge becomes overgrown, obscuring a low level standard waymark, these taller yellow tops can be seen from some distance away across the far side of a field. On promoted Recreational Paths in Northamptonshire taller white top painted posts, or larger dustbin lid size circular discs are similarly used in some locations where the route otherwise might not be that obvious with normal size waymarks from a distance. These are 2 examples of useful practical additional variations on top of the normal waymarking discs adopted by other Highway Authorities. A similar approach could be adopted locally where it would be

helpful, for instance across the opposite side of larger fields where a standard waymarking disc cannot be readily observed.

Size and cost of waymarking programme

The Countryside Access Service record the rights of way in their area on the Definitive Map. This includes details of rights of way furniture like bridges, stiles and gates. Waymarking posts and waymark discs are separately recorded on the rights of way CAMS Countryside Access Management System but are not legally required to be recorded on the Definitive Map. At 8th November 2022 there were 2598 waymarks recorded on CAMS, but there are actually many more, probably in the region of 6,000 up to 9,000+, as many are not on the system. Landowners, Parish Councils and Path Keeper groups were given bundles of waymarks to use locally whose precise locations are not recorded. There are 1865 Waymark Posts recorded on CAMS, which again is suspected to be on the low side.

Every year approximately 920 Waymarks and about 10 Waymark Posts are replaced. Waymarks cost around £1 each, and where installed by a volunteer the typical issue cost will be £30. A Waymark Post costs about £25 and installation is about £100. All new waymarks are the usual plastic disc form, but there is a retained stock of old style metal waymarks that are occasionally used to directly replace missing or damaged metal waymarks on furniture. CAS are wanting to explore the use of alternative materials including recycled products in future.

Recommendation: We feel it will be helpful to assess and deal with waymarking on a strategic planned basis by knowing the total resource base involved, the usual annual replacement or upgrade programme, with an estimate of the costs, involved. It currently costs around £8,000 to deal with the number of annual requests received, and it is estimated it will cost around £40,000 to resolve all the backlog of issues (27% of the annual maintenance budget).

Recreational Paths

National Trails on the rights of way network are the equivalent of motorways on the road network, signposted and maintained to the highest standard and instantly recognised and known and trusted by users. The simple instantly recognised black and white Acorn symbol works well and has become a unique iconic Waymark. National Trails should be the Rolls Royce end of the waymarking spectrum, the gold standard, and are supported accordingly by separate additional national funding from Natural England to be installed and maintained.

The next tier in the hierarchy of rights of way are Recreational Paths, whose routes are separately named and shown on the reverse of all the OS Explorer Maps. So, for example on the Ripon and Boroughbridge OS Map 299 there are four Recreational Paths named with routes outlined: Foss Walk; Knaresborough Round; Nidderdale Way; and Ripon Rowel Walk. Anyone who lives in this area, and tourists who visit the area, and buy and use the OS Explorer Map are likely to be attracted to try out and use the Recreational Paths shown, one step down from National Trails. There are likely to be separate guidebooks on sale in local shops and local Tourist Information Centres, or if out of print an Online version that can be used and followed. It seems sensible with their separate promotion and high profile that these Recreational Paths should be treated as the next priority after National Trails to waymark to a high standard. They are the “shop window” for

both local people and visitors to the area, and the old adage, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression” is appropriate. It is proposed that these routes should be waymarked to a high and consistent standard. (A member of the group who has walked both the Ripon Rowel Walk and the Foss Walk over the last few years reports that the waymarking is currently rather variable, and this should be a priority to address to bring up to an acceptable high standard.)

In other areas some recreational paths have been created by the County Council Countryside or Rights of Way Team, for instance in Northamptonshire the Nene Way, Grafton Way and Knightley Way. In our area some routes including the Foss Walk and Ripon Rowel Walk have been established many years ago by an individual or group, with a separate printed Walk Guide, but presumably originally in collaboration and agreement with Countryside Access Services. It would make sense for CAS to support volunteers to bring waymarking on such paths back up to a high standard, where it has lapsed into poor condition over the intervening years. CAS could also suggest that the original out of print guides are reviewed and updated as there have been various changes over the last 25 years plus to the landscape with features such as new wind turbines and solar panels being installed and large landmark trees that may have disappeared. The group is aware of recent examples of updating such routes. For example, the “Todmorden Walkers are Welcome” group reviewed the 20 year plus Todmorden Centenary Way. This included revising the text and the route on the ground where necessary, working closely with support from the local Todmorden Town Council and the Calderdale Countryside Service. Over a three year period a splendidly updated series of weatherproof maps and overarching Todmorden Centenary Way booklet were produced and launched.

Other Promoted Circular Routes

There are a variety of other circular walks across the NYLAF area that have been published as books and leaflets or are available on Parish and District Councils and AONB’s websites online. For example, at Easingwold Tourist Information Centre there are now some 25 Circular walks leaflets covering a ten mile radius in the surrounding countryside produced by a Town Councillor at a very reasonable price. There are also various books that can be bought such as Pub Walks in North Yorkshire by Leonard Markham, plus various walks guide books by Paul Hannon such as Nidderdale and Ripon; and Howardian Hills and the Vale of York which provide a range of fine tried and tested enjoyable walks across North Yorkshire which are popular and enjoyable.

Recommendation is that such published and promoted circular walks, the next level down from Recreational Paths above, should be a further priority for being waymarked. People/groups who have been responsible for producing these publications could also be asked if they will be willing to make a financial contribution to keep the waymarking up to date and in good condition for their users to enjoy. This may not be successful, but “If you don’t ask you don’t get”.

Intervillage Paths and Paths to points of interest such as viewpoints, historic and nature conservation sites

People often like to walk with a specific destination in mind. This might be to a viewpoint such as a Trig Point on a hilltop, or a lake, coastal, riverside or waterfall view. This may be a simple return walk from a town, village, bus stop or car park area. Similar popular single link journeys may be to

destinations like Woodlands, Nature Reserves, Historic Houses and Parklands. These typically are known loved destinations that have a short simple walk that links them.

People also like to walk from one village or town to another, then maybe taking in a pub, café or ice cream stop, enjoying the countryside, and putting money into the local service economy. After a walk you may typically be hungry, thirsty, wanting a comfortable sit down and looking for suitable refreshment opportunities, perhaps buying a postcard or a small gift. These types or routes are not always circular, but are destination walks in their own right and should be waymarked as a higher priority than the wider network which may not have such obvious destinations.

Specific Problem Locations

Sometimes routes pass through farmyard buildings, or also close around domestic homes and through peoples' gardens. This can create a fear of invading peoples' privacy, or if it is a convoluted route of inadvertently going the wrong way. Sometimes in such situations the routes have been diverted around or away from such buildings. This could be through official NYCC approved diversions, but other times from the landowner's initiative informally that may need to be checked and sanctioned. This can be particularly helpful to avoid users coming into very close contact with farm machinery, farm animals and agricultural operations around farm buildings in enclosed spaces like busy farmyards.

Recommendation: To create certainty and avoid conflict or upset with farmers and homeowners waymarking in these close proximity situations should be given a high priority and be more frequently used to be clear and unambiguous. This will be helpful to those who live and work in the countryside as well as those seeking recreational enjoyment.

The rights of way network is not always logical, sometimes there are defined routes that come to an unexpected and illogical dead end with perhaps open countryside such as a field beyond. Sometimes a farmer or landowner puts up a homemade sign, Private, or Keep Out, and these signs may be vandalised, destroyed, or ignored. Recreational users maybe unclear whether they can still proceed, and local farmers get upset and sometimes angry as people are technically trespassing.

Recommendation: Having an official right of way "Dead end" sign installed in such locations will be helpful to both recreational users and land managers to clarify any ambiguity. These situations are relatively few and far between. If reports are submitted highlighting this as a live issue of concern, then these signs should definitely be installed as a priority to reduce any local conflict and misunderstanding that has arisen.

Links to National Parks & Adjoining Highway Authorities

We have the two National Parks, the Yorkshire Dales, and the North York Moors, with much of the NYLAF area sandwiched between them. There needs to be effective consultation and communication on routes which cross between our area into the two National Parks, so that waymarking on such links is systematic and joined up in its approach. One of the criticisms levelled at the current Coast to Coast Recreational Path before it hopefully becomes a National Trail is the poor waymarking in places. National Parks may feel waymarking across high wild open country is

an imposition on the natural beauty of the area, and so may be deliberately stingy in waymarking provision, doing the bare minimum. In contrast around the moorland tops of Calderdale the CROWS (Community Rights of Way Service) policy is to waymark moorland paths that say curve less obviously around a hillside, so that you can see the next waymark post from the current one, so that you will not get lost. In this challenging high Pennine terrain where the weather can often be inclement limiting visibility, this is an alternative approach that has much to commend it. It hopefully avoids many call outs to Calderdale Mountain Rescue Service where walkers have lost their way, then panic and may have an accident.

The rest of the network

Special cases have been identified and prioritised above on higher priority needs for waymarking. This leaves the remainder of the network still to be tackled. The way forward for this wider network may be to use the 20 or so Parish Path Keeper Groups currently signed up to initially focus on waymarking their own patch first. Once this has been achieved, could they be encouraged to do the same for neighbouring Parishes? Once such a group is trained up and has some practical experience under their belt, then this must be one of the most cost effective and hassle-free ways of getting more waymarking achieved. There could also be a separate parallel approach made to Parish and Town Councils to ask if they are willing and able to participate. The pinch point may be the current staff resources in the CAS Team on promoting and serving Path Keeper Groups. If this is the position, could additional staff time be sought for this activity under the new North Yorkshire Council organisation? This approach both highlights great collaborative working with the local grass roots community and it also represents excellent value for money.

Going back to the 1990's during Countryside Commission days, they supported Highway Authorities such as Leicestershire County Council on a Waymark 2000 initiative to try and get all their waymarks up to date and other rights of way furniture in good condition by the year 2000. This was done in three ways. One was paying commercial contractors to blitz a Parish or Group of Parishes to bring all their rights of way up to scratch. The second was Parish Path Partnerships to use local volunteers to get the work done, with training and support. In effect a variation on the Path Keeper Scheme CAS now operate. A third strand was to pay farmers and land managers to do some work on rights of way on their patch through an agreed annual contract, such as mowing and topping headland paths to keep them user friendly and stop hedgerow scrub and brambles, nettles and thistles spreading out and making the paths unusable. Admittedly that was in a time when available grants and Local Authority finances were in a much healthier position.

Weight of reporting and geographical proximity

It has been asked if two or more customers report the same problem with finding their way should that increase its priority to be dealt with? The problem at the moment is that individuals who take the time and effort to report such issues have no way under the current reporting system of knowing whether they are the first, or one of many people to have flagged up such an issue.

Ideally an open transparent reporting system should highlight whether the same issue has already been reported and noted by others (and how many others). If several people have reported the same concern, it should certainly increase the priority for it to be dealt with, demonstrating there is more significant local demand. If only one individual takes the time and effort to report a

waymarking issue, it should still be logged, not be overlooked or dismissed, but it is likely to be a lower priority. It also makes sense if a local Path Keeper group or a member of the Countryside Access Services is going to go out to install or replace waymarks, to do several in the same proximity at the same time will be more efficient and effective in employing precious staff resources, rather than deal with a single case in splendid isolation.

Waymarks should be installed wherever reassurance on the correct way to proceed is required on the ground. This is largely a common-sense approach. If there are one or more potential issues at the same point that could cause confusion and raise uncertainty on the way forwards, such as change of direction; route crosses a non PROW; a junction of multiple paths; or a cross field path, then an appropriate waymark should be provided.

Recommendation Sometimes a waymark can be valuable on the grounds of safety, or to avoid a possible trespass where that might be an issue, say a path leading off that is not a right of way. There does need to be a justification for such additional waymarks over and above usual requirements.

Local distinctiveness and additional information

Waymarks and Signposts work together in tandem. It has previously been highlighted that some named Recreational Paths have a non-standard distinctive waymark, incorporating a logo or a form of words that make it stand out clearly. Once you get your eye in following such a route, it makes it far easier to stick to the correct way, rather than going off at a tangent following other standard waymarks. Similarly, signposts vary with the information they display. Some may simply indicate whether it is a footpath, or bridleway or byway. Some have a named location that the route leads to, some will include a distance in miles or kilometres. There are also a range of materials and styles, cast aluminium or metal signs on metal posts (some of these may become collectors' items), wooden routed signs, even stone carved signs in walls. All part of our country's rich tapestry of variety and experience. For higher profile destinations that are popular, trying to have a systematic signage and waymark presentation along a route is desirable. For other more local routes that are not likely to be used by tourists or those unfamiliar with the area having an assortment of different styles of signs that have probably been installed and replaced at different times over many years is not an issue of any real concern.

Others' Waymarking Practice

North York Moors National Park

In terms of where and when waymarks are used it is on a case by case basis depending on location, priority of the path, landowner agreement and the judgement of our Rangers. Most infrastructure items will be waymarked, as would sections that are known to cause confusion on popular routes following liaison with the landowner.

Ben Jackson Head of Ranger Services

Yorkshire Dales National Park Waymarking Recreational Routes - Criteria for way marking of long distance routes

National Trails The Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway are recognised and promoted as National Trails by Natural England. All National Trails will be waymarked to an agreed standard.

Regional importance Routes which are long enough that they are completed over several days and which attract significant numbers of visitors to the National Park will be considered favourably. For routes which have sections in neighbouring authorities, the support of those authorities will also be a factor taken into account. **Permanence Routes** must be expected to last (i.e. to be actively inspected and promoted) for a minimum of 5 years. Routes which have been in existence for less than five years would only be waymarked in exceptional circumstances. **Length of route** Routes designed to be completed in the course of a day will not normally be waymarked as long distance walks. This would not prevent shorter routes being waymarked for other reasons, such as with the Red Squirrel Trail, and short routes aimed at increasing participation etc. **Responsibility** There must be a specific group or organisation prepared to take responsibility for inspections and publicity material. **Public access** The route must be available for all members of the public to use. This could include routes with a permissive access agreement provided that sufficient longevity can be guaranteed.

The following additional factors will be considered favourably:

- economic benefit to the area,
- heritage, scenic or ecological interest,
- routes benefitting the local community as well as visitors
- routes that promote the use of public transport and green businesses

Publicity material must be:

- clear to read,
- easily available,
- give clear advice on minimising the impact on the area, and
- be kept up to date.

Material that provides additional information to promote greater understanding of the area will be seen positively. **Route alignment** The route must be checked by the National Park Authority for legal status and issues, and agreed in advance in the case of new routes. Where promoted routes use permissive paths, agreement from the landowner should be made available in writing and should confirm that permission is granted for a minimum of five years. **Road safety** Road sections and crossings, where they are not already approved, need to have been safely audited by the relevant highway authority.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Waymarking Guidance

Waymarking (arrows and fingerposts) Other than a fingerpost indicating where a right of way leaves a metalled road (a statutory requirement) any other waymarking depends on location and landowner permission:

- From settlements in the main Dales and around buildings, waymarking will be used extensively to orientate visitors, and give them confidence, in their surroundings.
- In rural lowland areas and tributary dales, away from buildings, waymarking will be used to avoid disturbance to land management and will be unobtrusive within the surroundings.
- In open upland areas, the use of waymarks will be used only out of necessity or where required as an aid to navigation on promoted routes, with the aim of ensuring that any signs of human activity are minimal.
- Open Access Symbol - The provision of open access signage will be the minimum necessary to make clear to the public the boundaries of access land and the location of access rights.