

Review of NYCC Webpages Relevant to NYLAF

Carried out by NYLAF Website Sub-Group - Will Scarlett, Janet Cochrane & David Lepper

1. As a result of suggestions at a NYLAF meeting, a sub-group was formed to look at two relevant pages on the NYCC website:
 - 'Walks, Horse and Bike rides' - <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/walks-horse-and-bike-rides>
 - Information on the Local Access Forum on the rights-of-way information and advice page - <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/rights-way-information-and-advice>
2. By email and video-conferencing, the sub-group agreed some actions to review the two pages, namely:
 - What did we think about what is currently on the webpages?
 - Were the pages fit for purpose?
 - How interactive were they and is there enough information on them?
 - Who 'owned' the pages, and can we liaise with them?
 - What recommendations could we make?
 - To individually look at the pages.
 - Will Scarlett emailed the Countryside Access Manager.
 - To look at what other LAF's had in terms of websites, etc.
 - To research where information on other walks and rides in North Yorkshire could be found on the internet.

Observations

3. NYLAF webpage:
 - The current page does not offer much information about what NYLAF does, and could be better used to highlight its work. The description of the role of the LAF is dry and dull, covering the background legal context but not informative on what this group actually does. In some places the spacing and punctuation are careless.
 - The geographical coverage of the NYLAF is NOT the whole of North Yorkshire. The separation of geographical responsibility with the two LAF's covering the National Parks needs to be highlighted, and a map should be added, clearly showing the precise area each forum actually covers.
 - There is no 'sense of place' or the locality we cover from an access perspective, i.e. what is interesting or special about our area, for instance the proposed Coast to Coast National Trail, or on long-distance recreational routes in our area such as the Ripon Rowel Walk, Nidderdale Way, Foss Walk and Knaresborough Round.
 - There is no information on the interests and responsibilities (within NYLAF) of each member.
 - The current page has nothing on achievements, projects, or an annual report on what the NYLAF has done. Some case studies on initiatives, issues, or recent consultations that the forum has dealt with would be useful.

- There are no current news items apart from a request for new members to join NYLAF, with no clarification on gaps in expertise or interests required; this section could stress the need for farmers, landowners and other land managers to achieve a better balance in this group.
 - No indication of future issues or priorities for this group, giving the impression of not being forward-looking or proactive with a clear vision.
 - There are no contact details other than for NYLAF's Secretary.
4. Walks, Horse and Bike Rides page:
- The concept of the page was liked by all.
 - Having downloadable pdfs was thought to be a good idea, particularly for horse-riders.
 - It also provided reminders about the Countryside Code, the health benefits of countryside access, the classification of different public rights-of-way and their markings, and contact info for NYCC.
5. The sub-group wondered how many 'hits' on the page there had been and when the page was last updated, as there didn't appear to be many routes shown for a county the size of North Yorkshire. They also noted that all the horse-rides were only in the northern Yorkshire Dales.
6. The sub-group agreed that providing links to already published content would be a more efficient way of providing information to the public, creating less of a burden on NYCC.
7. Further Findings:
The Countryside Access Manager confirmed that as Head of the Service he is responsible for both the Walks, Horse and Cycle Rides and NYLAF webpages, and in the first instance it would be him who would receive feedback on them.
8. As a general rule, both pages are reviewed annually and/or when there are any significant changes. In addition, there are links to information / data that is routinely updated and not saved directly in the pages themselves, as well as links to third party websites (particularly relevant for the walk, horse and bike ride pages).
9. He also confirmed that since the last LAF meeting, he had been made aware of a corporate drive to review all the Council's webpages to ensure the website meets new accessibility laws. The fundamental change is that they are no longer able to have downloadable documents on the website, including pdfs; the information in these will need to be embedded in the pages themselves. The team is undertaking a review to understand the ramifications of these changes. Given current limited staff resources this will fall short of a wholesale review of the webpages, but nonetheless it is an opportunity to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and thus any feedback from the LAF will be welcomed and will inform the Corporate review.
10. He later clarified that there was a way to measure the number of hits on any webpages but he did not have any figures at that time. The sub-group agreed this could be of benefit to show how useful the relevant pages were for the amount of effort put into them.

Review Recommendations

11. Having considered their findings the sub-group has drawn up a list of suggested recommendations for NYLAF's consideration.
12. In regard to the NYLAF webpage, as NYLAF has no dedicated website of its own, this page should:
 - i. Become the main place where information regarding the LAF is held
 - ii. Explain the purpose of the LAF, including strategic vision and aims for the future.
 - iii. Highlight the need for recruitment from a diverse background, to ensure representation of as wide a range of user-groups as possible.
 - iv. Make clear links to the health benefits of countryside access, particularly in light of the pandemic and the Government's 'active travel' agenda.
 - v. It was felt that an independent website for the LAF was not worth pursuing at this time.
 - vi. The page should also include:
 - A visual representation of the area covered by the NYLAF and outline information giving a sense of place and pride in the area from an access perspective.
 - Contact details for the rights-of-way team as well as for NYLAF's Secretary.
 - A list of who sits on NYLAF, with a biosketch and photo of each member (see Note 1 for examples).
 - News items with examples of the type of work done, advice given and achievements.
 - Links to other websites relevant to countryside access in North Yorkshire, including TIC's, the National Trust, and any local information on bodies such as the Ramblers Association, British Horse Society, Cycling UK, Sustrans, etc.
13. In regard to the Walks, Horse and Bike Rides webpages:
 - vii. The pages could be further enhanced by reviewing what walks and rides are on there and revising them if necessary, and by sourcing further examples, particularly in light of the increased use of the rights-of-way network during the Covid pandemic.
 - viii. Pdfs of walks and rides should still be available so that they can be printed and taken out by the public, as well as being available on smartphones and other devices.
 - ix. Since NYCC's resources are limited, a student researcher or volunteers could review reputable sites where other information on walks and rides could be sourced and look at linking them to those web pages, e.g. National Parks, Ride Yorkshire, Yorkshire Water, Yorkshire Post, Craven Herald (see Note 2 below for examples).
 - x. The health benefits of countryside access should be better integrated with other relevant schemes or projects run by NYCC or partner organisations, particularly post-pandemic.
 - xi. Further work could be done by a working group to plan and implement the above recommendations jointly with Ian Kelly and in consultation with NYCC IT support.

Report Recommendation

14. Having considered the review findings, the sub-group recommends that NYLAF agree the draft recommendations listed above so that they may be submitted to NYCC's Countryside Access Service to inform the ongoing corporate review of the Council's website.

Author: Will Scarlett - Chair of Sub-Group

Note 1: Sample Biosketches

Will Scarlett: After 30 years in North Yorkshire Police, a career which saw him serve across the county, finally retiring at Skipton as Craven Inspector, Will took on a new challenge: learning to ride and drive carriages. Taking his horse out for rides and drives opened up the challenges of understanding the rights-of-way network, planning routes, and finding places to park horseboxes. This led to further involvement as the Yorkshire and Cleveland Access Officer for the British Driving Society, as well as helping to research local rights-of-way in the southern part of the Yorkshire Dales. Sitting on the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum is an opportunity to use these experiences to help the County Council and other bodies improve access for everyone within North Yorkshire

David Lepper: After a 30-year career working for the Countryside Commission through to Natural England, David has a good working knowledge of ROW law and issues. He is a keen walker, having completing 15+ long-distance recreational paths including the Coast to Coast and the Ripon Rowel Walk. He was previously an active member of the Todmorden 'Walkers are Welcome' group, for which he reviewed key recreational paths and links around the town. He has previously served as a Parish Councillor, taking the lead on rights-of-way in his local area, producing a new Parish Walks leaflet, and chairing a Parish Plan Group. He is well aware of the needs of other rights-of-way users, including through accompanying his partner, a horse-rider, on countryside rides.

Janet Cochrane is often to be found exploring the bridleways and byways of North Yorkshire from the back of a horse, and occasionally on foot and bicycle. Her career has principally been spent in the travel industry, academia and consultancy, with a particular interest in responsible tourism to national parks and other rural areas. She is keen to ensure that public rights-of-way remain both usable and used, and runs a small social enterprise encouraging people to get out on their horses to ride the traditional paths and tracks which are an important part of our heritage. She is an Access and Bridleways Officer for the British Horse Society, and also General Secretary of the North York Moors Association.

Note 2: Where to Walk, Ride, Cycle and Wheel in North Yorkshire

All public rights-of-way are recorded by the County Council on a map which is a legal record – this is the Definitive Map. You can view the map online through NYCC's website: it is called the 'Out and About Map' and it shows Footpaths, Bridleways, green lanes, and more. The link to the map is: <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/rights-way-maps>

This brings you to a page with several links. The one you need is 'View Public Rights of Way'. Although this shows the official routes, there is no indication of whether they are in good or poor condition, or where to park, or good circular routes. To get you out and about, the websites below are helpful.

Walking

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/walks-horse-and-bike-rides>
<https://www.walkingenglishman.com/northyorkshire.htm>
<https://www.komoot.com/guide/47703/hiking-in-north-yorkshire>
<https://www.alltrails.com/england/north-yorkshire>
<https://www.go4awalk.com/walks/uk-county-walks/walks-in-north-yorkshire.php>
<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/enjoy-outdoors/walking>
<https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/walks/best-walks-in-the-north-york-moors/>
<https://nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/visiting/outdoor-and-active/>

Horse-riding:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/walks-horse-and-bike-rides>
<https://www.yorkshire.com/inspiration/outdoors/country-pursuits/horse-trails-and-loops>
<https://www.rideyorkshire.org/self-guided-rides/>
<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/enjoy-outdoors/horse-riding>
[Out and About | Howardian Hills](#)

Cycling:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/walks-horse-and-bike-rides>
<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/find-a-route-on-the-national-cycle-network/>
<https://www.komoot.com/guide/47705/road-cycling-routes-in-north-yorkshire>
<https://www.epicroadrides.com/destinations/cycling-uk/yorkshire-dales/>
<https://www.discoveryyorkshirecoast.com/discover/outdoor-adventure/cycling>
<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/enjoy-outdoors/cycling/our-cycle-routes>
<https://www.yorkshire.com/inspiration/outdoors/on-wheels/leisure-and-road-cycling>
<https://pedalnorth.com/north-yorks-moors-road-cycling-routes/>

Wheeling

<https://www.alltrails.com/england/north-yorkshire/ada>
<https://www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/yorkshire>
<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/enjoy-outdoors/walking/easy-access-walks>
<http://www.opencountry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/North-Yorkshire-Directory-2018.pdf>