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**Lake District and Yorkshire Dales:
a shocking conservation fault-line**

Not much more than the M6 separates the Yorkshire Dales from the Lake District National Park, but it feels as though they are divided by an Iron Curtain. In the Yorkshire Dales, a conservation-led policy deals with the environmental and social impact of green lane motoring. It has resulted in a 97% reduction on 11 of the most affected tracks since 2006, according to the [YDNPA Management Plan](#). As David Butterworth, the CEO of the Yorkshire Dales National Park said in a recent interview on Radio 4, the process hasn't always been straightforward:

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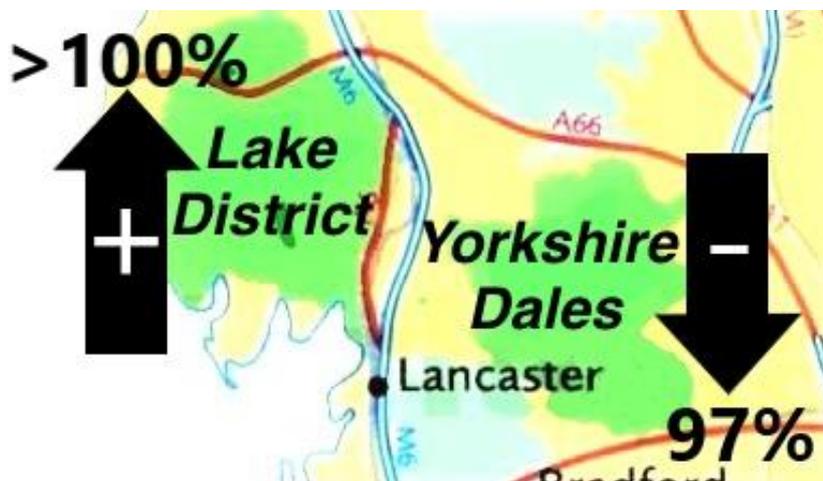
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“If you get it wrong, it can cost you badly, and we were burnt quite badly in the early days, where the Court overturned decisions that were made in relation to Traffic Regulation Orders. Not because the kind of policy was wrong, but just simply because we got some of the process wrong. And we learnt a lot from that.”

Move a bit further west and you find yourself in a National Park and World Heritage site where nothing at all seems to have been learned from the Yorkshire example. Yes, in 2003 the LDNPA was adamant that green lane driving is indeed incompatible with National Park purposes. But now, despite exponential growth in the number of vehicles and increased pressure on the landscape, the Authority is firmly backing the cause of green lane motorists, to the extent that it is willing to fight for them in court.



The result is truly shameful: a huge increase in motor vehicles on fell tracks such as those at High Nibthwaite and High Tilberthwaite, loved by walkers because of their exceptional beauty and remoteness.

TROs in the Peak District National Park: a will and a way

Most green lanes in the Peak District are like High Tilberthwaite, Elterwater and High Nibthwaite – unclassified roads on which the legal rights of way are currently unknown. So far, the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) has put Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) on seven routes, and one was made by Derbyshire County Council. The National Park Authority publishes separate yearly figures for each of the green lanes with TROs. [The report](#) shows that, as in the Yorkshire Dales, these TROs have been highly effective in drastically reducing the volume of off-road vehicles.

How and why did the Peak District National Park do it?



The PDNPA was seen to be tolerating, even welcoming, off-roading. Local communities became enraged.

In one way, PDNPA was quick off the mark. As soon as the National Parks got their TRO powers (2007), PDNPA adopted a strategy for the management of motor vehicles and it put in place assessment criteria and a scoring system for deciding whether motor vehicle use of a track is sustainable. The assessment criteria were physical sustainability, conservation issues, levels of complaint,

whether the character of the route is being damaged, and whether the free passage of non-vehicle users is being prejudiced. Using these criteria, it created and prioritised an initial list of 23 routes in the Derbyshire part of the National Park which were causing the most concern. (The list was subsequently updated and expanded and now includes the most abused routes in other counties within the Park.)

After that good start, nothing effective happened. In fact, things moved in the wrong direction and the Peak District became the UK's off-roading Mecca. The senior leadership of the Park was opposed to using TROs. The PDNPA was seen to be tolerating, even welcoming, off-roading. Local communities became enraged. Lobbying was intense. There were angry public meetings with Park officials and national media coverage of what had become a huge row. (Sounds familiar?)

The only significant thing that happened between 2007 and 2012 was a misguided and badly mismanaged attempt at an Experimental TRO, an attempt which landed PDNPA in the High Court and with a large legal bill.

It was the Authority Members who came to the rescue. They began to see that they were being given poor advice, advice that was leading them to preside over the destruction of parts of the Park, the Park which it was their duty to protect. They started to listen to what their local communities were saying, they asked for and adopted a [new strategy](#) for managing motor vehicles and a [procedure](#) on making TROs, and they created a new post specifically to manage the Park's green lanes and the TRO process.



The critical moment came in 2012 when the Members threw out a futile officer recommendation for a partial, part-time TRO on a lane where the problems were clearly full-time (impacts on natural beauty and severe issues for walkers, equestrians and residents). Thereafter, the Members started to get better advice and worked their way through the seven full TROs which the PDNPA now has in place. The whole process has been assisted by a change in senior staffing which removed internal, officer opposition to proposing or using TROs.

What determines whether or not a National Park Authority decides to use a TRO is the capacity and readiness of the Authority's Members to question and, where necessary, challenge what their officers are telling them.

One of the earliest Peak Park TROs was on a route called Long Causeway. It is an instructive comparison with the Lake District. Like High Tilberthwaite it is an unsealed, unclassified road, had been severely damaged by motor vehicles and passes through an area of exceptional natural beauty. Also like High Tilberthwaite, it has been repaired at great expense by the highway authority. The Peak Park made its TRO on Long Causeway after repair and on the legal grounds of conserving natural beauty and restoring the track as an amenity for non-vehicle users.



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and after repair and TRO

The PDNPA has made some good progress but more Peak District TROs are needed. The Peak District Green Lanes Alliance is asking the PDNPA to turn its mind soon to these and other routes. Meanwhile, the lesson is that what determines whether or not a National Park Authority decides to use a TRO is not any constraint in the TRO or National Park legislation but the capacity and readiness of the Authority's Members to question and, where necessary, challenge what their officers are telling them. As they say, where there is a will, there is a way.

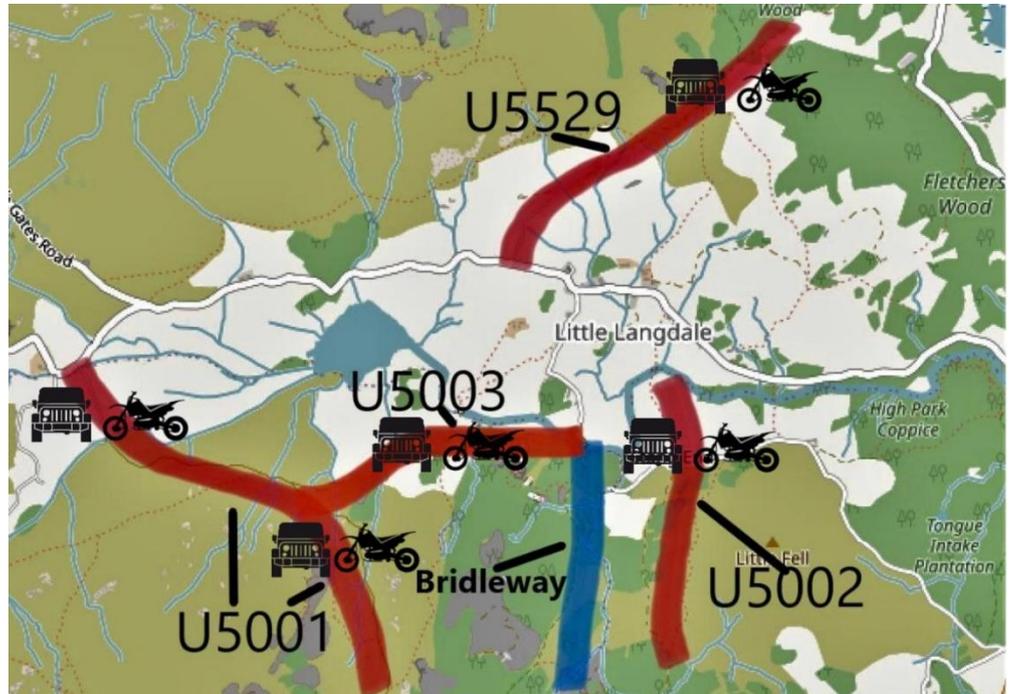
Little Langdale: the centre of an off-road network



For many people, residents and visitors alike, Little Langdale is the epitome of the Lake District – surrounded by Lingmoor, Greenburn and Wetherlam, it is the ideal place for walks. But it has also become the epitome for some of the things that have gone wrong in the Lake District. As if the often busy tarmac road through the village wasn't enough, Little Langdale is encircled by four green lanes that are heavily used by off-road motor vehicles. Only one (marked in blue on the map below) green lane is classified as a bridleway and so forbidden to motor vehicles.

If you want to climb one of the mountains, you always start on a green lane. And these green lanes are the best walking routes for families with smaller children or for those who can't manage more challenging walks. To have them spoiled by the overbearing presence of motor vehicles, or even the threat of meeting a convoy of 4x4s or motorbikes, is the exact opposite of what the LDNPA calls "spiritual refreshment". As the mountaineer, writer and photographer Bill Birkett who was born in Little Langdale put it: to see the valley damaged in this way "is a very singular and continuing sorrow."

That is the local context for the claim made by the LDNPA in its Assessment Report on High Tilberthwaite and High Oxenfell (1.4.1): that only a tiny percentage (3.7%) of the “linear network” including footpaths (!) can be used by off-road motorists.



In the case of Little Langdale 80% of green

lanes are accessible to non-essential motor vehicles. The impact on residents, particularly farmers, and visitors is summed up by one of the over 500 comments the LDNPA received in response to its survey:



Recreational 4x4 vehicles and motorcycles ruin these tracks and destroy the enjoyment for everyone else. The area is too small, special and fragile to support these destructive activities.

Professor Saeko Yoshikawa writes about the impact of off-road vehicles on Wordsworth’s landscape

On a sunny day in late September, I walked from Coniston to the Duddon Valley via Walna Scar. This was the route William Wordsworth recommended as the best approach to the valley: he walked it as a schoolboy, with Coleridge and Sarah Hutchinson in 1808, and again with his wife Mary in 1811. Offering magnificent panoramic views, it is indeed a fantastic route, but as the path gets steeper it becomes more and more stony and broken —more like a line of rubble than a mountain track. The cause of this damage was revealed on my return walk—four off-road motorbikes. At first I was amused by the bikers’ struggles, but then realised that their wheelspin and skid was literally tearing up the path beneath my feet. When they gave up on one impassable stretch, they set off across a less-damaged route, tyres gouging ruts as they went. The noise and stench of two-stroke exhaust fumes were appalling.

‘Truly now there is “no spot of English ground secure from rash assault”’: evoking Wordsworth’s 1844 sonnet on the Kendal and Windermere Railway, S. H. Leeder lamented in 1907 how ‘the motor-car [had] taken possession of the English Lake District’. While strolling along the road by Windermere—‘one of the most beautiful in the country with its moss and fern-grown walls, its peeps of mountain and lake’, he and his wife were knocked over by a speeding car. To early motorists the Lake District mountains seemed ‘to be only another challenge to the “horse-power” of new cars’, remarks Leeder, ‘and a winding narrow road seems to offer nothing but added thrill of rushing ahead’ for those who ‘seem to cultivate mere speed to the exclusion of every other consideration’ (*The Times*, 9 September 1907).



Here Wordsworthian values like ‘silence’ and ‘loneliness’ were regarded as vital recreational resources.

60 years after Wordsworth’s lament at the ‘rash assault’ of railways, the Lake District was threatened by motorcars and, as Leeder said, ‘the character of the country’ was altered to such an extent that ‘the pedestrian and the cyclist [were] being driven away’. The end of the First World War brought a further ‘inundation’ of motor vehicles, particularly charabancs, onto the Lake District roads. ‘What Wordsworth or Ruskin would think’, one article wondered in 1925, ‘if they could see the procession of motor vehicles passing through Lakeland on a fine week-end’. But this mid-1920s article was not entirely hostile. So long as they ‘keep to the roads’, it argued, ‘in the Lake District it is not difficult even now to find byways among the hills where one can be as secluded as one wants to be’. As long as ‘the rights of the public in these out of the way places can be secured’, motor vehicles might be tolerated (*Northern Daily Mail*, 24 August 1925).

But for how long would such ‘out of the way places’ survive? One hundred years on, some of the most beautiful tracks are still being invaded by off-road bikes and 4x4s. That being so, perhaps we should recall what was said when a projected road across Styhead Pass was rejected in 1919. A *Times* correspondent remarked, ‘a much larger public than was supposed is deeply interested in preserving the silence and the loneliness of the Scafell group for rest and inspiration’, adding that ‘real recreation of the mind and body, with each year’s added pressure of work, makes this national playing-ground a more important asset to the people’s welfare’ (*The Times*, 7 August 1919). Here Wordsworthian values like ‘silence’ and ‘loneliness’ were regarded as vital recreational resources. From silence come rest, inspiration, and ‘recreation of the mind and body’— a ‘public welfare’ that we all now sorely need after the long difficult period of Covid pandemic.

Even adventurous G. D. Abraham, the first motorist who drove over Wrynose and Hard Knott Passes in 1913, recommended switching off the engine and taking to your feet in order to find 'a peace seldom stirred by the whirr of motors' ('Motors and Mountains', *Autocar*, 29: 877, 10 August 1912). Open-air activities such as hiking and mountain climbing will unquestionably help to heal some of the traumatic after-effects of the current pandemic. And as we look forward to vaccines that will help cure the Covid curse, it is all the more necessary to protect the physical wellbeing of Lake District mountain paths from the ever-more damaging disease of motor vehicles.

Saeko Yoshikawa, professor of English at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, Japan, Author of *William Wordsworth and Modern Travel: Railways, Motorcars and the Lake District, 1830–1940* (Liverpool University Press, 2020).