

SIGNPOST

The Newsletter of the PEAK & NORTHERN FOOTPATHS SOCIETY

Taylor House, 23 Turncroft Lane, Offerton,
Stockport SK1 4AB Tel: 0161 480 3565
Fax: 0161 429 7279 Reg Charity No 212219

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Hello and Welcome to the all-new PNFS Newsletter, requested from the floor at the last AGM and here we are – your wish is our command! A thriving Society with almost a thousand members spread over eight counties really ought to have its own Newsletter to keep members up-to-date with our activities, ambitions and problems. We need to let our outlying members know that they are valued as part of the family and to encourage as many as possible to take an active part in what we do and feed into our information network.

We think our footpath protection business – now over a century old – provides an essential service to the public at large, but it can only be kept going by a steady flow of volunteers to help out

*at our Headquarters, Turncroft Lane, Stockport

*in your own home area as Footpath Inspectors, reporting back to HQ

*to attend and report on hearings at Magistrates' Courts or Public Enquiries where the fate of footpaths is decided.

We need people at Turncroft Lane every Monday to help us handle the volume of correspondence which pours in from Local Authorities, Inspectors and members of the public, warning of plans to divert, obstruct or do away with Public Rights of Way which may have been in use for centuries.

Each report has to be checked on a map from our huge collection, the seriousness of the threat considered. Our assessors discuss it and form an opinion so that a reply or an objection can be sent out without delay.

We need volunteer help with this interesting and essential task. Would YOU care to try?

Don't be shy – training given Friendly atmosphere Mature companions



The Nerve Centre. The COSA UNIT* where the mail comes in and each report is checked.

*Consultations, Orders, Signs, Archives

Goodbye old friend

Derek Taylor, the Society's indefatigable Hon Secretary, a man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the vagaries of Local Authorities and an abiding passion for the defence of footpaths, died suddenly on the 7th January 2000, leaving a gaping hole in PNFS affairs. How would it be possible to follow such an all-encompassing act as that? With a great deal of difficulty is the only answer. So far, much of the secretarial work has been shared between Chairman Norman Edwards and Legal Adviser Adrian Littleton, who already have a pretty full work load, with the other officers helping out where they can.

We were lucky to secure the services of Mrs June Mabon who came to us from the RA, where she is an Inspector. Unlike many of us at Taylor house she is (hooray) computer literate, but unfortunately rapidly found that the duties of General Secretary were too heavy for her to manage, running as she does, her own business. But she is willing to stay on as Minutes Secretary, a great help though we are still in a crisis situation.

Next problem: our energetic office typist Jeanne Grundy has now left us for pastures new after many years of service, which means we have another situation vacant:

Wanted - Urgently - TYPIST

We need someone with keyboard skills and a working knowledge of Microsoft Office (WORD and EXCEL) plus familiarity with typing from a dictaphone or a willingness to learn. The job is voluntary office work and amounts to one or two days (or evenings) a week carried out mainly at Taylor House. If you can help, please contact us here.



Centre & right: Derek Taylor,
Hon Sec 1978 - 2000
Left: June Mabon

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Thanks to our Vice Chairman we are now in production and I trust you will receive this Newsletter with our thanks for your continued membership. It is you, our members, who are the backbone of this Society and without you our work would be impossible. We are at a crossroads as far as our involvement with rights of way is concerned. The Society has been faithfully served by many volunteers over the years and when we moved into these new premises I thought it would encourage more to come forward. We have had limited success but there are still vacancies for more. We are in desperate need of a Secretary. An honorarium would be considered if appropriate. There are no set hours and a word processor is available. There are plenty of office vacancies from filing to collating old papers and maps. A permanent assistant to the Closure and Diversion section is required.

A pet theme of mine is that the Society requires a person to compile and then keep up

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House at a particular day or time. I have had a volunteer to compile a page but not to keep it up to date thereafter.

The need for new blood is apparent. If you can give some time to help in the protection of rights of way then please contact me. We are always in need of inspectors. How nice and efficient it would be if we had an inspector for every parish instead of one covering a number of parishes.

We are an effective and well-known Society, second to none in the north west. To keep us there we need your assistance. Don't let us get back to the old days when walking a path was an exercise likened to blazing a trail through the jungle.

Norman Edwards

....And Talking of JUNGLES

An article in the Daily Telegraph recently drew attention to the way Local Authorities (in this case, Cambridgeshire) spend their budget allocated for footpaths. Out of a total of £390,000, some £78,000 goes on legal work, drawing up the definitive map of rights of way. £29,000 went on 'improvements' such as repairing worn stiles and the remaining £160,000 is spent on maintaining paths. With this amount they have decided to attend to only 12% of the county's paths, leaving the others to the goodwill of farmers or allowing them slowly to go back to nature.

Perhaps the council of Kirklees, Huddersfield has a similar attitude. Adrian Littleton, our Legal Adviser sent them a list of 12 obstructed footpaths in their area around the Colne Valley. After six months came a reply stating "I regret to inform you that, due to staff shortages over the past year it has not been possible to investigate any of the matters you have reported".

Stockport MBC have adopted a "reactive rather than pro-active stance" on footpaths. This is current jargon which means that they will wait for complaints to be registered with them rather than go out and trim back the excessive growth you would naturally expect at the end of summer. Now where did I put my machete?

....But, to be fair

Stockport this week launched a campaign to record the status and condition of every definitive path in the borough's area. Volunteers were called for and responded nobly by attending the two training sessions organised by the Rights of Way officer and naturally some of our local members are involved. You may well wonder why training is necessary to record the details of a footpath, but when you've had a look at the complexity of the form to fill in, ensuring that no aspect is left out of the record, you begin to understand. had a look at the complexity of the form to fill in, ensuring that no aspect is left out of the record, you begin to understand. The campaign runs from September 25 to October 15, with the completed report published around April next year. We wish it well and hope the idea is taken up by more local authorities around the country. Then we wait to see what notice is taken of it.

REPORTS OF OBSTRUCTIONS AND OTHER FAULTS IN PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Enclosed is our new report form - catering for anything that might be wrong with a public right of way. You may use it by:-

1. Getting in a stock of forms from Taylor House and filling one in for each fault (or group of faults on the same path) which you report.
2. Photocopying the front page of this one every time you want to make a report.
3. Word processing, typing or hand writing each of your reports, with headings (eg "Grid Reference of the fault" etc) taken from the form.

*We are short of person-power at Taylor House and must work with maximum efficiency in order to cope. An incoming report will normally be photocopied - minus the name and address of the person reporting - and sent on to the highway authority. Re-typing a report takes much longer and a report which cannot be photocopied may linger in the pending tray! **NOTE:** If you want to tell us things not related to faults, please write a separate letter.

Adrian Littleton, Legal Adviser

JUST ARRIVED

The "Guide to Ladybrook Valley Interest Trail" by our member Bill Shercliffe is a model of small scale publishing, 24 pages illustrated throughout in colour on fine art paper and all for the knock-down price of £1.50. It describes in detail the 12 mile walk alongside the brook with four names which runs from Lyme Park to the Mersey at Cheadle. Flora, fauna and buildings of interest are all described. Recommended.

THOSE MENACING MASTS

The other day a concerned letter arrived from a group in Denshaw, north of Oldham, asking for support in opposing a scheme for a series of wind farms on the South Pennine hills close by. These would be on Crompton Moor, White Hill, Denshaw and Castleshaw Moors, comprising a total of 62 turbines and there ancilliary equipment.

The PNFS takes a keen interest in this as it would interfere with free passage on the Pennine Way, Oldham Way and Crompton Circuit. We have already opposed two other such schemes on Hogshead Law Hill, near Bacup, on the Limers' Way and on Great Hill, near Todmorden, criss-crossed with many old paths. Fortunately, both applications were refused after much local protest. But the pressure continues on the South Pennines. Wind farms are outlawed in the National Parks, so developers constantly seek hilly sites outside that protection. In addition, local councils are continually urged both by government and electors to seek economies and find ways of raisin cash other than by taxes. Council-owned open country can prove very tempting as a source of rent income. We are watching developments in this area but they have not yet reached planning application stage.

PNFS policy at the moment is to oppose wind farms where they cause interference with rights of way or spoil the visual pleasure inherent in walking them. We maintain that the comparatively small amount of electricity produced by turbines does not justify the damage they do to the landscape. We feel that a national campaign encouraging the **SAVING** of electricity would be of more use.

THE OTHER SIDE

Our member Graham Turner of Marple Bridge takes a different point of view in criticising my comments in the Annual Report:

"A report this month from the European Environment Agency claims that Britain is the worst in Europe at developing renewable energy sources such as wind power – despite being the windiest country. I believe one reason for this is not really environmemntal but the insecurity felt by other countries in not possessing energy supplies (gas and oil) of their own. The UK will be similarly focussed in 20(?) years time.

I fully share your view that a vigorous electricity waste-saving campaign would be the most cost-effective – and also agree that it is unlikely to happen! Year upon year the UK consumes 1 to 2% more electricity and this increase shows no sign of abating. The very large increase in 'Single Person' households is held to be parly responsible.

Wind energy is now supported by such organisations as the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union and it is certain that the income from wind turbines has already secured the living of a number of hill farmers who would otherwise have gone to the wall.

The scenario painted in your Annual Report of "a30-mile trail of wind farms with ancilliary buildings and roads all the way" makes it sound like Dante's Inferno – and would never happen. The Wind Industry in the UK plans to install 3000 onshore turbines in the next decade, ie one wind farm around every thousand square miles or so – although they would tend to be more loaded in the windier areas. Modern turbines seldom require ancilliary buildings and of course access for a transporter is normally only required during construction and 20 or so years later, upon removal.

As both a Rambler and an environmentalist I believe a major reduction in the use of fossil fuels to be essential. As a renewable energy enthusiast I am aware that a comparatively small number of wind farms **sympathetically sited** would enable to meet their target of providing 10% pf the UK's total electricity requirements by 2010".

Graham Turner

A last word from me. Well I **am** the Editor.

You may think that access roads and ancilliary buildings are now unnecessary, but I saw the plans for the Bacup and Great Hill wind farms and both of them would have had these accessories. I can't view them with you eqanimity, as in "20 years or so, on removal". Removal of a solid concrete base the size of a semi-detached house? I don't think so – and that's the base of every turbine. Keep them off our hills, I say.

Derek Seddon. What do **YOU** think? Contributions welcome on footpath-related topics.