

Vehicles and the quiet enjoyment of our National Parks

Description



Photo credit Lake District Green Lanes newsletter

It is hard to know whether to be inspired or depressed by the battle over vehicular use of “green lanes” which I touched on a year ago in post comparing what was going on in the Lake District National Park and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park ([see here](#)) The latest newsletter of the Lake District Green Lanes Alliance ([see here](#)) is well worth reading for anyone concerned about what is happening in our National Parks, whether in England or in Scotland:

The question many people are asking themselves in disbelief is this: how have we ended up with this surreal state of affairs? How is it possible that the LDNPA [Lake District National Park Authority], the public body set up for the conservation of the Lake District, is now fighting side by side with off-road motoring organisations – against UNESCO, the National Trust, the Friends of the Lake District, the Ramblers, eminent climate and environmental scientists and over 375,000 signatories to our petition?

Inspiring that a small campaign group ended up with 375,000 signatures – approximately six times more than signed the Flamingo Land petition – depressing that they so far they have not been able to change anything. And even more depressing that the Lake District National Park Authority joined with motoring organisations opposing them in court. It is the right question, how have our National Parks sunk so low?

The Green Lanes alliance newsletter prompted me to take a look at how the LDNPA Board was operating and I across a paper ([see here](#)) from their October Board Meeting on the Breast High Rd Restoration project. The byway links Tebay, just off the M6 with Kendal, and has been seriously damaged by vehicular use. Instead of banning vehicles from a road that was never designed for them, the LDNPA is proposing to use £325,000 from the Electricity Northwest Landscape Enhancement Initiative – a fund created to compensate for the landscape damage by electricity pylons – to make the road fit for continued vehicular use. That a well intended fund has been hijacked by a National Park Authority to enable vehicle to continue to drive along green lanes tells you something about just how far it has lost its way.

The issue at heart comes down to preserving places in the countryside which we, as humans, can only access under our own steam. This is highly valued by most people who want places where they can walk without tangling with traffic, wheel ruts or diesel fumes. Hence the extraordinary number of signatures on the Green Lanes Alliance petition.



Looking down the upper part of Coire Lair, the ridge of Beinn Liath Mhor on the left, Sgorr Ruadh on

I was thinking about this last week when walking down into Coire Lair, located off Strath Carron, from Sgorr Ruadh. It's an amazing landscape, but one of the reasons it felt so special was that walking up into its lower reaches earlier in the day, after the first 200m there was no vehicle track and even more amazingly no sign of any vehicular use. A car free coire.

Unlike other parts of Scotland, the Torridon area was until fairly recently all like this but then came the spree of hydro electric projects:



Coulin hydro viewed from Beinn Liath Mhor

The landscape scar of the Coulin hydro scheme is no less than when I blogged about it two years ago ([see here](#)). But what also struck me was how completely different it felt approaching Beinn Liath Mhor through Coire Lair than walking down the road to the north east. A walking rather than a vehicular route, enhanced by the fine stalkers' path:



At the risk of falling into National Park speak, the “experience” was immeasurably superior. Something very special.

Green Lanes in the Lake District and the path into Coire Lair may be at different ends of the walking spectrum, the one through an intensively managed and the other through a wild landscape, but a value they both share is they enable us to get away from vehicles. We risk losing both unless our public authorities start to value and protect vehicle free places. Our National Parks are the bodies that should be giving a lead on this but in their different ways are failing to do so: Green Lanes trashed in the Lake District, the profusion of hydro roads in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and All Terrain Vehicles criss-crossing most of the Cairngorms, sometimes on bulldozed tracks, sometimes not.

It's hard to think of many places in Scotland's National Parks as special as Coire Lair and the landowners who have preserved such places deserve our support and gratitude. How National Parks could keep deer numbers down, enabling woodland to regenerate naturally where the ground was suitable, without relying on vehicles is an issue to which I will return.

Category

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Tags

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2. hill tracks
3. landed estates
4. landscape
5. LLTNPA
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