



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Publication

GOVERNMENT RESEARCH SUPPORTS USE OF TRAIL BIKES



Government research commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) concludes that: "There is no evidence of widespread damage to the byway network from motor vehicles." ¹ *Report of a Research Project on Motor Vehicles on Byways Open to all Traffic* written by consultants Faber Maunsell Ltd is the result of over a year of intensive field research along the ancient byways of England. Despite the majority of vehicular use (62%) being heavy farm vehicles and access to dwellings along byways; most byways were shown to be in good condition and well able to sustain long-term use by recreational motorcycles.

Anti-vehicle groups who would ban trail bikes from all green roads often cite the same few examples of damaged lanes, which do suffer over-use. The Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) agrees that a

few hot-spot overused trails do need repairs or even restrictions to limit recreational vehicle use. However, the general picture of byways across England is revealed by the report to be very different. Far from over-use, there is in fact only minimal use of byways by recreational vehicles. The researchers measured an average of just 1.5 recreational vehicles per day along byways in England: mainly at weekends as would be expected. On 40% of days, no vehicles of any type drive on our byways. The report confirms the experience of trail riders and says; "other users are likely to meet motor vehicles only rarely."

The research found that 10% of byways were impassable for vehicles and in some cases, for walkers and horses also: due to obstructions such as overgrowth of vegetation, streams and locked gates. The report mentions: "There was some evidence of the beneficial effect of motor vehicles on some byways where use could prevent ways from becoming overgrown and impassable by motor vehicles and other users." The report gives examples of beneficial vehicle use: "The Cambridgeshire (Chatteris) logger site with an average daily flow of 0.1 motor vehicles was close to becoming overgrown. Part of the Suffolk byway was completely overgrown."

Damage to the surface of byways is the main complaint of the anti-vehicle lobby. The report confirms, as you would expect: "Damage to byway surfaces in general increases exponentially with the increase in axle loading. Motorcycles are likely to have the lowest axle loading of any vehicle." The report concludes: "the main concern is with vehicles with heavier gross vehicle weights. The effects of land management vehicles [farm & forestry], which are generally heavy, are likely to be much greater than dwelling access and recreational traffic."

The TRF believes that were the use of recreational vehicles curtailed on byways by new ²legislation, the damaged sections would still not recover. 62% of existing traffic including farm and forestry vehicles would be able to continue to use byways perfectly legally. In the majority of cases, these heavy vehicles are the cause of the damage not the fleeting and infrequent passage of low-impact, lightweight motorcycle tyres.

The TRF are concerned to be part of the solution to any perceived problems and are working with authorities such as ³Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA). Here, a commitment between the LDNPA and trail users to address problem areas and resolve conflict is providing a lasting answer to vehicle use in a sensitive National Park. The TRF welcomes much of the recent press release (26th May 2005) by the Council for National Parks (CNP) where it follows guidelines set out in ²*The Government's Framework for Action* document. However, the TRF would also highlight to the CNP that the immediate past Minister for Rural Affairs responsible for the Framework document, Alun Michael said: "I have never sought to restrict existing use of the established rights of way vehicular network and I am pleased that the findings of the Defra research report [Faber Maunsell] support this view. There is a place in our countryside for all users of rights of way, whether on foot or on four wheels, but the use must be responsible, sustainable and appropriate"

The TRF supports government plans to encourage enforcement of existing powers including road traffic powers to eliminate illegal use. The TRF welcomes the imminent launch of the updated 'Making the Best of Byways' to provide authorities with robust advice to manage traffic on vehicular rights of way. The TRF support further government moves to bring clarity where there is uncertainty about the status of routes; the hooligan relies on doubt, the TRF wants to remove that doubt.

The TRF is a national, voluntary and non-competitive body that was established in 1970, for people who enjoy exploring green lanes by motorcycle. Its aim is to conserve our heritage of green lanes for everyone to enjoy.

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Notes for Editors:

1. *'Report of a Research Project on Motor Vehicles on Byways Open to all Traffic'* is published by Defra, product code PB10323 Defra Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX Tel 08459 556000. The document is available on the Defra website www.defra.gov.uk
2. *'The Governments Framework for Action'* is published by Defra, product code PB10362: Defra Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX Tel 08459 556000. The document is available on the Defra website www.defra.gov.uk
3. The Hierarchy of Trail Routes is an approach by the Lake District National Park Authority to manage the level of activity on green roads through voluntary restraint rather than statutory legislation. The aim of the Hierarchy is not to promote use or stop it but to eliminate irresponsible use. Between 1995 and 1997, over 100 unsealed Unclassified County Roads (UCR) and byways were identified and surveyed by Rangers and local users. They were categorised by overall condition, likelihood of conflict with other users, proximity to buildings and livestock, and narrowness to create a three-colour code system. Green routes - proceed with caution; amber routes - proceed with special care and attention and follow advice given by signs; red routes - proceed only with great care and follow advice on signs explaining special controls in place. All green use routes are surveyed once a year whilst the amber and red routes are surveyed twice each year by joint teams of National Park staff and representatives of vehicle user groups. For more information see <http://www.lake-district.gov.uk/>

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