



Exploring the

Health and Wellbeing

Benefits of Trail Riding

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**TRAIL RIDERS
FELLOWSHIP**

Trail Riding, Active Recreation that Improves Physical and Mental Health

Trail Riding is a form of active recreation that benefits both physical and mental health. Furthermore, it has shown to be particularly popular with those in the highest health risk demographic who wish to follow government advice and embark on a more active and healthier lifestyle.

Successive governments have recognised the positive impact that adopting an active lifestyle can have on the nation's health and wellbeing by investing in various core strategies^{1/2}, and Trail Riding can evidently help to deliver on these aims by:

1. Promoting physical activity in a social environment
2. Encouraging access to the countryside
3. Providing an alternative method of active recreation that appeals to a diverse audience

Making any lifestyle change is a huge undertaking on a personal level and finding a form of active recreation that is enjoyable is a major factor when considering long-term sustainable health improvements.



Both Sport England and Sport Wales recognise that Trail Riding improves physical fitness and mental wellbeing.

The Trail Riders Fellowship supports the aim of successive governments to expand the opportunities to engage in active recreation by:

1. Educating those who are responsible for the health and wellbeing of the nation as well as Trail Riders themselves
2. Protecting the infrastructure of the Green Road Network
3. Promoting responsible and sustainable access to, and the use of, active recreational spaces

As health and wellbeing is such an essential consideration to each and every one of us in the UK, and individual improvements benefit us all as a diverse nation combined, it is imperative that we draw upon factual information.

But while the positive health outcomes of Trail Riding echo the aims of successive governments' health advice, there are two main barriers to promoting the activity – public awareness and understanding of Trail Riding and a dwindling Green Road Network where it can be responsibly and sustainably enjoyed.

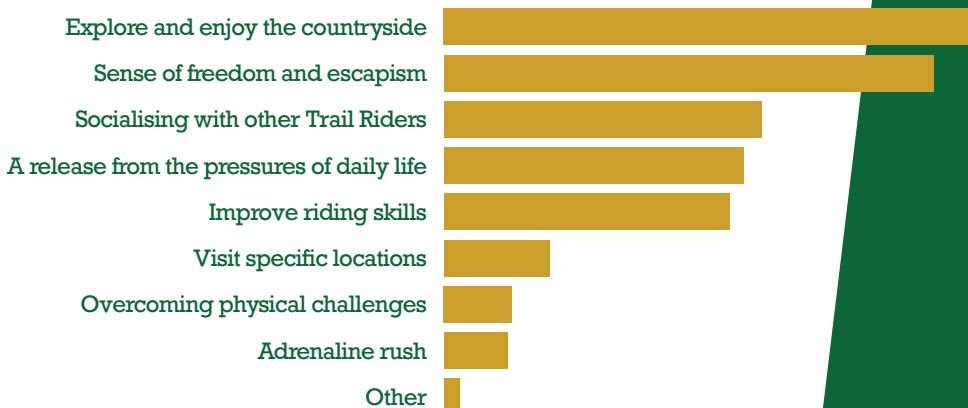
A recent report by the Sports and Recreational Alliance identified access as the number one barrier to getting more people more active, more often. Legal constraints present substantial challenges to access to green and blue spaces with only around 8% of countryside land accessible to the public under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

It is also worth noting that Green Roads provide important vehicular access for other sports and recreation that if lost, would either prevent or make it much harder for these activities to take place.

This document provides clarity on the mental and physical health benefits of Trail Riding as an under-utilised and often misunderstood form of active recreation.

Health benefits of Trail Riding = Meeting or exceeding NHS exercise guidelines + encouraging participation of the most at risk demographic + Offering diverse and inclusive opportunities.

Top reasons why people ride⁶



88%

...of Trail Riders are over the age of 40, an age considered by the NHS as one of the most vulnerable groups in society for suffering from poor physical and mental health⁶



2400

...the number of calories burnt during an average trail ride of five hours^{5/6}



99%

...of riders state that Trail Riding improves their mental health with the motivations behind why they ride closely aligning with the NHS five steps to mental wellbeing⁶



98%

...of trail riders reported physical health benefits from Trail Riding as an active recreation⁶

¹ DCMS Sporting Future – A new strategy for an active nation

² DCMS Get Active – A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity

⁵ TRF Health Study

⁶ TRF Adventure and Trail Bike Survey



The Nation's Health

When we look at recent statistics on the health of the nation, it can make for rather grim reading.

According to the World Health Authority, the UK is one of the most obese nations in Europe, while the Sports and Recreation Alliance identifies that the UK currently ranks joint 12th out of 15 comparable European nations for levels of physical activity. These statistics alone are shocking, but when broken down further we see that it costs us dearly financially, and even with our lives.

The Government's information on physical inactivity shows that 1 in 6 deaths³ can be related to a lack of exercise and comes with a cost of £7.4 billion each year. To put this into perspective, the UK has the third highest direct healthcare costs of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health disorders, attributable to physical inactivity. This figure increases exponentially when we consider the cost of mental health and wellbeing which costs the UK £118 billion annually⁹.

The Department of Health and Social Care reports that obesity alone costs the UK £6.5 billion each year, and Public Health England reports that this number

is increasing year on year. It is clear that declining health affects the overall health of the nation and has huge economic repercussions.

While the national mortality rates, levels of inactivity, and economic figures are disturbing, there are hugely positive messages that identify a solution to the wellbeing of our population on both health and economic levels.

Every £1 spent on sport and active recreation generates almost £4⁴ in return across our nation's healthcare and wellbeing, which in turn strengthens individuals, communities, and the national economy.

Previous government strategies, such as Get Active, have taken a robust stance on the health of our nation, with promises to:

1. Be unapologetically ambitious in making the nation more active.
2. Make sport and physical activity more inclusive and welcoming for all so that everyone can have confidence that there is a place for them in sport.
3. Move towards a more sustainable sector that is more financially resilient and robust.

With this strategy, emphasis is placed on self and health improvement through creating or joining communities and groups to partake in active recreation. This approach not only encourages people to engage but also brings together people from diverse age groups and backgrounds who may never have met had they not come together to enjoy their shared passion.

This inclusive message goes one step further. Encouraging active recreation in community and group settings has been shown to reduce loneliness, anti-social behaviour, and even increase employability by creating highly productive individuals. The combined outcome of this advice is three-fold, improving overall health, quality of life, and reducing healthcare expenditure UK wide.

Diverse opportunities + Inclusive engagement + Encouraging activity wherever possible = Sustainable health benefits



1 in six deaths is due to lack of exercise³



£118bn is annual cost of mental health in the UK⁹



£98bn a year estimated cost of obesity to the UK economy¹¹



£1m invested in sport generates £4 in return⁴



Prevalence of overweight and obesity among men and women by age

NHS Statistical Survey



Whilst more men are either overweight or obese than women, the same pattern of risk for those over 40 is followed (note: 88% of Trail Riders are over 40)



As soon as I started Trail Riding I realised that my fitness was going to need to improve to really enjoy myself!. On most ride-outs we are gone for the day with many hours spent in the saddle. I have since taken up cycling and started to go to the gym to help me stay in shape for my trail riding – I’m fitter now than when I was in my 30s!

LUKE R



³ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Physical activity guidance

⁴ Sport England: Social and economic value of community sport and physical activity

⁹ Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics and Political Science:

The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK

¹¹ Frontier Economics: The rising cost of obesity in the UK



Green Social Prescribing

Previous government responses to the state of the health of the nation have been considerable and multifaceted.

Along with the Get Active strategy, in April 2021, the government launched its Green Social Prescribing Programme. This initiative set out to deliver the government's commitment to improve mental and physical health care in the UK and support its 25-year Environment Plan.

The message was clear: that we need to support people in engaging with nature to improve both their mental and physical health, and that we should do so in a way that welcomes everyone.

Green Social Prescribing is delivered by connecting community groups and agencies to ensure that the diverse interests, passions and wishes of the individual are at the forefront of the process. This marries with the aim to support people in making sustainable changes to their health long-term.

This inclusive message was echoed in the Landscapes Review.

While the review primarily focused on improving the environment, the section on access to nature for all,

'Landscapes for Everyone' spoke of the importance of increasing engagement with more diverse audiences, and increasing volunteering opportunities.

Encouraging people to engage with green spaces was one of the core policies of the review:

'Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing by using green spaces.'

A recent TRF survey supported the importance of countryside access with riders ranking it as the number one reason why they rode, with the top five reasons corresponding directly with the NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing⁷.

While each government has its own unique approach to active recreation and green spaces, the core messages are unambiguous and universal:

- Access to nature-based active recreation opportunities should be maximised, inclusive and made available to everyone.
- In order to encourage active recreation, opportunities should be diverse.
- Active recreation in green spaces is beneficial to physical and mental health, the economy and the overall wellbeing of the nation.

Many mental health organisations now promote Green Social Prescribing. Mind, a national mental health charity, recommends ecotherapy as a recognised benefit to those living with acute and chronic mental health conditions, and as a means of maintaining good mental health.

At no time in our living memory has Green Social Prescribing been more important than it was during the Covid pandemic. During lockdowns, motorcycling was scrutinised globally. Several countries, even those with more restrictive lockdown policies compared to the UK, identified that motorcycling was not only a form of safe transport, but also an active recreation – a position which was endorsed by the National Police Chiefs Council⁸.

**Green Social Prescribing =
Developing diverse opportunities
+ Encouraging active recreation +
Inclusive access opportunities**





“

Trail riding is my escape from the pressures of work and gives me a chance to recharge my mental batteries. You are very much immersed in the moment and the surroundings when trail riding and are not thinking about anything else. I return from a ride tired happy and a better person to be around.”

VINCE A



8%

Only an estimated 8% of countryside land is accessible to the public under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. A recent report by the Sports and Recreational Alliance identified legal access constraints as the number one barrier to getting more people, more active, more often.

“

Green roads and trail riding enable me to escape with like-minded souls and get closer to nature in all its glory. It always amazes me – the landscapes in front of us, the special places hidden from view and the wildlife we encounter. I return from a ride physically tired, but mentally buzzing and fit to take on whatever life serves up.”

ELLIE W



⁷ NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing
⁸ Riding COVID Safe: white paper



The Physical Health Benefits of Trail Riding

The messages and advice promoted by the Government at various levels are supported by the reported outcomes of the Trail Riding community itself, with a recent TRF survey revealing that 98%⁶ of Trail Riders reported that they gained physical health benefits from their riding.

Trail Riding is a popular choice for one of the most vulnerable age groups when it comes to mental and physical health risks.

The physical benefits for those who participate have been studied, taking measurements such as heart rates and calorie burn to establish the true value of the physical exercise involved in Trail Riding. Data from a TRF study⁵ were collected over a 12-month period for subjects aged between 50 and 65. This age range was chosen as it is identified as high risk for obesity and inactivity related health conditions.

Riders significantly exceeded by 138%^{5/6} the NHS's recommended weekly level

for moderate exercise, 150 minutes, in a single average trail ride of five hours. In addition, the same ride will see the rider achieve 96%^{5/6} of the recommended level for vigorous exercise, 75 minutes, burning around 2400 calories.

Beyond raising heart rates, other benefits have been scientifically proven. One study investigated how riding a motorcycle affects sensory processing. Riding increased epinephrine levels, increased heart rate, and decreased cortisol levels – all positive benefits to health and wellbeing.

Metabolic Equivalents (METS) is a simple, practical, and widely recognised formula for expressing the energy cost of physical activities as a multiple of the resting metabolic rate. One metabolic

equivalent (MET) is defined as the amount of oxygen consumed while sitting at rest and is equal to 3.5 ml O₂ per kg body weight x time (minutes).

Using this measurement Trail Riding (6.4) uses more energy than resistance weight training (5.0), leisure cycling at 10-12mph (6.0), swimming laps (5.8) and aerobics (6.0).

Trail Riding demands a good level of general fitness, with riders often adopting new sports to gain the required level of fitness. Running, cycling and gym workouts are all commonly employed by riders to support their Trail Riding.

The two-wheel connection is particularly strong with a recent TRF survey showing that 39% of Trail Riders also enjoy mountain biking and 21% own an electric mountain bike.

Physical benefits of Trail Riding = Meeting or exceeding NHS exercise guidelines + Encouraging diverse engagement + Providing inclusive opportunities



How physically demanding is Trail Riding?

“ Trail Riding is one of the few activities that places a high demand on all ten components of fitness but particularly on cardiovascular and muscular endurance. This type of exercise contributes to healthier living and reduced risk of injury and many common illnesses and diseases as outlined by the NHS.¹

72% of trail rides take upwards of four hours, throughout most of which heart rates are consistently in zone 2. This is a zone of moderate intensity exercise, which burns fat as its source of energy and over this duration supports weight management. Often overlooked, zone 2 heart rate activity increases the number of mitochondria, which further contributes to disease prevention.²

With 88% of Trail Riders aged 40 and over, it is a great way to better sustain fitness and health for age groups which are more at risk of declining health and fitness. Exercise is linked to improved mental wellbeing so it really does support a holistic approach to health and fitness. Trail Riders need to be fit to sustain their hobby and many take up activities such as cycling or the gym.

In summary: a trail rider increases their cardiovascular fitness which decreases risk of many illnesses and diseases; they have improved strength and stability which decreases the risks of injury from slips, trips and falls especially in older age; and they exercise frequently which has a positive impact on mental wellbeing.

Robert Barrows is a former Parachute Regiment Officer now specialising in fitness for motorcycle endurance athletes as a Personal Trainer and Strength and Conditioning Coach.

Moderate intensity activity...

stimulates the body's cardiorespiratory, musculoskeletal and metabolic systems and, over time, causes them to adapt and become more efficient. People can tell when their activity is of moderate intensity because they will breathe faster, experience an increase in heart rate and feel warmer. They may even sweat on hot or humid days. The amount of activity needed to reach this varies from one person to another. An unfit or overweight person may only have to walk up a slope, whereas a very fit athlete may be able to run quite fast before he or

she notices these signs. Over time, a person's fitness level will improve so that when walking, for example, focusing on the perceived effort to reach moderate intensity may mean that their speed increases.

Vigorous intensity activity...

can bring health benefits over and above moderate intensity. A person who is doing vigorous intensity activity will usually be breathing very hard, be short of breath, have a rapid heartbeat and not be able to carry on a conversation comfortably.



98%

...of trail riders reported physical health benefits from Trail Riding as an active recreation⁶



2400

...the number of calories burnt during an average trail ride of five hours^{5/6}



6.4 METS

...the Metabolic Equivalent for Trail Riding – using more energy than resistance weight training (5.0), leisure cycling at 10-12mph (6.0), swimming laps (5.8) and aerobics (6.0)⁵



235%

...a single average Trail Ride of five hours sees riders benefit from over twice the Government recommendation for weekly exercise⁵

Calculating maximum heart rate and exercise zones = 220 – age

Moderate exercise = 50-69% of your maximum heart rate

Vigorous exercise = 70-85% of your maximum heart rate

High intensity = >85% of your maximum heart rate

⁵ TRF Health Study

⁶ TRF Adventure and Trail Bike Survey



The Mental Health Benefits of Trail Riding

In response to the £118 billion⁹ that poor mental health costs the UK economy each year, the previous government has taken steps to promote nature and outdoor active recreation as a beneficial strategy to improve individual health and reduce the cost to the nation.

Data from national mental health charity Mind makes for difficult reading: 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind, with 1 in 5 having suicidal thoughts and 75% of these people receiving no treatment.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, there remains a clear disparity when it comes to demographics and mental health. In 2018, 6507 suicides were reported in England and Wales, 75% of these deaths were men. This male-female disparity has persisted since the 1990s and is particularly prevalent in the 40-49 age range.

The government's Wellbeing Survey dug deeper and showed that men report lower levels of life satisfaction and are also less likely to access therapeutic services than women. But when we look at Trail Riding, we see this disparity reversed. Almost 88%⁶ of riders are men over 40 years of age, 99%⁶ of whom report that Trail Riding is a positive benefit to their mental health.

These findings are in line with the government's aims to provide inclusive and diverse opportunities to participate in active recreation and Green Social Prescribing. It is clear that encouraging an activity that interests those most at risk within our community is vital to improving quality of life and even preserving the lives of those most likely

to be affected by poor mental health. The NHS has published its 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing and the table opposite clearly shows how Trail Riding delivers on each. Wider research undertaken by Mental Health Motorbike also confirms that motorcycling fulfils the five criteria. Riding a motorbike really can save your life!

Mental health benefits of Trail Riding = Encouraging active recreation + Time in social or community groups + Offering diverse opportunities for those most at risk to engage

99%

...of riders state that Trail Riding improves their mental health with the motivations behind why they ride closely aligning with the NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing⁶



NHS Steps

Trail Riding outcomes

1

Connect with other people

Good relationships are important for your mental wellbeing. They can:

- help you to build a sense of belonging and self-worth
- give you an opportunity to share positive experiences
- provide emotional support and allow you to support others

- 78%¹⁰ of riders report that riding makes them feel they are part of a group
- 80% enjoy riding with friends
- 85%⁶ of trail rides are in the company of others

2

Be physically active

Being active is not only great for your physical health and fitness. Evidence shows it can also improve your mental wellbeing by:

- raising your self-esteem
- helping you to set goals or challenges and achieve them
- causing chemical changes in your brain which can help to positively change your mood

- 98%⁵ of riders reported physical health benefits from Trail Riding
- Trail Riding groups offer opportunities to engage in physical activities outside the core activity of riding. Working parties regularly volunteer to complete physical improvements to the Green Road Network

3

Learn new skills

Research shows that learning new skills can also improve your mental wellbeing by:

- boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem
- helping you to build a sense of purpose
- helping you to connect with others

- Experiencing new challenges and learning to overcome them is an intrinsic part of riding on the Green Road Network. Riders have an opportunity to practice, hone, and actively engage in riding in different situations leading to a sense of individual and group achievement and increased self-confidence
- Navigating the Green Road Network requires a different skill set compared to riding on the surfaced road network. Route planning, navigation, leading rides, and physical riding techniques are far more complex and nuanced by comparison

4

Give to others

Research suggests that acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental wellbeing by:

- creating positive feelings and a sense of reward
- giving you a feeling of purpose and self-worth
- helping you connect with other people
- it could be small acts of kindness towards other people, or larger ones like volunteering in your local community

- Trail Riders regularly volunteer for projects to improve the Green Road Network. These projects often involve working with local communities and authorities to improve access for all
- Trail Riders raise thousands of pounds each year for local and national charities and other good causes
- The TRF Green Road Mapping project is a public access project aimed at improving awareness, access and understanding of the Green Road Network

5

Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you

Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness'. Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges

- Trail Riding is a discipline that requires riders to be mindful of their body, their motorcycle, speed, terrain, the surrounding environment, and other people who share the Green Road Network
- Due to the varied terrain of the Green Road Network and the weather in the UK, riders will inevitably experience new and varied situations that require focus, thought, and a deepening awareness of their mind and body and how both connect and work successfully with the environments they travel through

⁵ TRF Health Study

⁶ TRF Adventure and Trail Bike Survey

⁹ Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics and Political Science: The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK

¹⁰ Bikesure Survey Motorcycling for Mental Health

Part of our cultural heritage

Trail Riding has been an integral part of Britain's cultural heritage since motorcycles first became commercially available in 1896. Today, motorcycling sets the public free to explore and enjoy the countryside in a way not possible by other means.

The first Land's End to John O'Groats journey by motorcycle was made in 1901, before tarmac had been invented, let alone used to cover most roads. In 1904 the first Edinburgh Trial was run, starting in London and making its way over a 400-mile route. The sporting and manufacturing heritage of motorcycling is indelibly entwined in Britain's history through famous events and brands.

Whilst electric motorcycles are not new, with the first patent appearing in 1868, electric motorcycles and cycles are now available representing a fresh opportunity to improve public access whilst better protecting the environment.



TRAIL RIDERS FELLOWSHIP

In 1970 the Trail Riders Fellowship was established to conserve Green Roads for all users to enjoy, including motorcyclists, and to promote responsible and sustainable Trail Riding.

With over 9000 members in 41 groups in England and Wales the organisation works with Central and Local Government authorities and other user groups and landowners to conserve and maintain Green Roads and to enhance the awareness and understanding of Trail Riding.

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