

SIGNPOST

The newsletter of the PEAK & Northern Footpaths Society

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Summer 2001

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I moved up from Editor to Chairman (while still retaining my old post) at the last Annual General Meeting. My thanks are due to all present who voted for and put their trust in me, though I have to admit that there wasn't a lot of competition.

Derek Seddon

I have agreed to be a caretaker for one year, allowing the Society a breathing space to readjust and reorganize after the trauma of the death of our reverend Secretary, Derek Taylor and the retirement of Norman Edwards from the Chair. Being unable to bring their decades of experience on Rights of Way issues, I take heart from the enthusiastic back up I receive from all the many people at Taylor House. They generally overlook my shortcomings and chip in, unprompted, with advice and suggestions whenever they feel I need them. Since I took the job, life hasn't been dull.

Foot and mouth disease

The optimistic government claims before the election that the disease was under control have not been borne out. Cheshire County Council's announcement that all paths in large parts of the county, except those through farmyards, were now open was sadly followed by outbreaks of FMD at Knustford and Rainow.

This, I suspect, led to the confusion, which caused a



Rainow farmer to threaten three walkers with a citizen's arrest if they did not leave his land. Eventually they left, but the farmer is quoted in the Macclesfield Express with, "If you stop the ramblers you will stop the spread of foot and mouth. Most have the common sense to keep away."

The Middlewood Way is still closed but things are much better in the Peak District where "Welcome" signs have been up on the Tissington, Monsal and High Peak trails for some weeks, followed by the opening of the Limestone Way, although the subsidiary paths remain closed.

But the glorious Mam Tor Ridge is open and the path from Hayfield to Edale via William Clough, Kinder Downfall and the edges is free, though not the open fells behind where sheep roam unrestricted. Here lies the inconsistency. General instructions still advise walkers to turn back if they meet farm stock, yet in the past two weeks I have walked past "Path Open" notices through fields of sheep in Hope and Hollins and past cattle in Bradwell.



The Glorious Mam Tor Ridge - open again



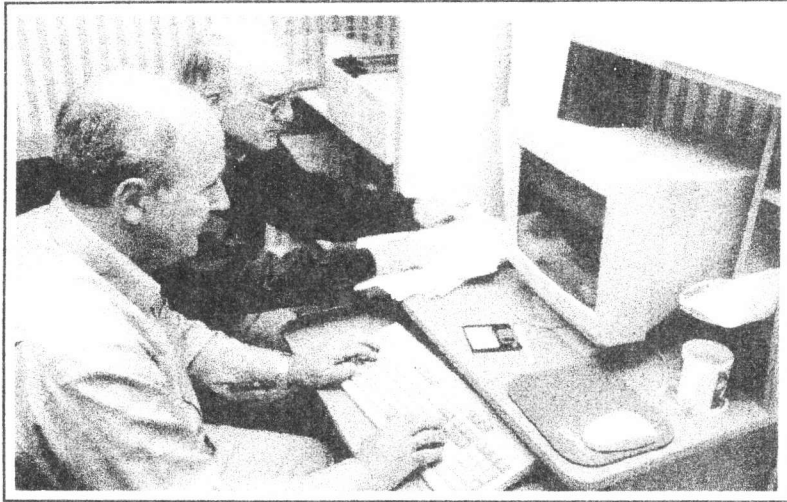
Back to normality: First came the ex-railway lines like the Monsal Trail(left), then the Limestone Way (below). The side footpaths remained closed.

MAFF and the Government are taking a lot of stick at the moment but, in all honesty, would anyone else have done any better, faced with a problem of this enormity? Criticising with hindsight is easy, but it is noticeable that none of the interested parties – farmers, scientists, vets, politicians, seem able to agree among themselves on what should have been done.

We shall have to wait for the results of a thorough enquiry before jumping to any more conclusions.

Our position in the PNFS is one of co-operation with the farmers and sympathy with all the other countryside businesses, which will not be getting compensation. At the same time, we are keeping a watchful eye on the re-opening of footpaths as quickly as possible after restrictions are lifted. We were concerned that the considerable cost of putting up the "closed" and "open" notices would have to come out of Local Authority Rights of Way budgets, thus cutting what they have in hand to carry out normal footpath maintenance. However, I have been assured that the government has set aside a sum for this, of which the North West will be receiving £300,000. What should be remembered is that there is not a scrap of evidence that any walkers have ever carried the disease or caused an infection. Three weeks ago, walking (on the road) near Flagg, we came across a large polythene bag thrown on the verge. It contained two dead sheep. What that meant I haven't yet worked out but I'm sure they weren't put there by walkers!





THE IT BOYS

Bob Dumbarton (on the left) and Peter Rhodes are hard at work on the computerisation programme at Taylor House. Our aim is to put all our path faults on a database for greater efficiency and easier access.

At the June Officers' meeting we had the wonders of the Web shown to us by Graham Sencicle, inspector for Hathersage etc, who, quite off his own bat, has assembled a demonstration website to show us how Information Technology can benefit the Society and its members. Putting together the final system entails a good deal of work, not to mention expertise and it will obviously take some time to bring it to fruition but at least we are moving in the right direction and all who saw the demo were enthusiastic.

WOULD MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE that any personal information held on computers is kept solely for the use of the Society in the maintenance of membership records and the conduct of the Society's activities. We conform to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Any member who objects to our keeping records in this manner is asked to contact the Chairman at Taylor House.

THE ANNUAL DINNER 11th May 2001

The start of the Annual Dinner, held as usual in the august surroundings of the Freemasons' Hall, Manchester, was thrown out of kilter while a horde of men in shorts, vests and wrong-way-round baseball caps shunted enough equipment to light a small town up and down stairs, along corridors and out of the windows on ropes. A film crew was shooting an episode of Johnathan Creek Investigates for TV – and running late.

Eventually, we were transferred to a larger room than the one booked and a pleasant evening ensued. Unusually for our gatherings, our guest of honour illustrated his speech with slides. Jack Burling, Chairman of Sheffield Council for the Preservation of Rural England, told us of the CPRE's original (last minute) success. Back in the 20's they saved the Longshaw Estate from being taken over for housing, when the first house sites were actually marked out on the ground.

The CPRE seeks to reduce the number of road signs in rural villages and takes a dim view of excessive advertising. A proliferation of Wall's Ice Cream signs may get the thumbs up from weary walkers but it gets the thumbs down from the CPRE. They would like farmers to wrap their silage bales in green plastic and they ask mines and quarries to landscape their spoil heaps to minimise their visual impact. To them, Wind Farms are an eyesore and an earsore. Splendid! Unfortunately, Jack believes that resistance to Telecom Masts is already a lost battle.

TIME FOR A CHANGE?

Perhaps it is now time to re-think the whole idea of the Annual Dinner. Despite all our President's efforts, only 39 people attended out of a membership of nearly 900. What should we do to attract more? Please consider these suggestions and tell us what you think:

- 1) COST. Tickets for the last Dinner were only £10. Is that too much? Were you put off because it was too cheap?

- 2) VENUE. Is the Freemason's Hall, though imposing and elegant, perhaps a little too grand? Would you prefer somewhere more down-to-earth? Still in the centre of Manchester? If not, where?
- 3) TALK. Do you like the idea of the speech being illustrated by slides? Should we abandon speeches altogether?
- 4) AGM. Would you agree to holding the AGM on a Saturday afternoon? Perhaps followed by the Dinner?

These two events are an essential part of our efforts to rejuvenate the Society. We're looking for feedback of members' views, whether pro or anti, and yours will count.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE YOUNG ONES GONE ?

As from the April AGM, all the Society's Senior Officers (except our Treasurer, Keith Wykes) are aged 71+. They are delighted that being 71+ does not necessarily imprison them in armchairs: but the implications for the Society are serious.

During the next ten years, the Society's tasks will expand excitingly - via involvement in implementing the 'Right to Roam' Act and getting as much path creation done as possible - whilst it is still permissible under the Act to claim definitive status for long-used paths.

The new appointments made at the AGM included Derek Seddon, as Chairman and myself - as Secretary. We each took on these jobs out of a sense of "no one else seems to be available, so I'd better volunteer".

Neither of us will feel in the least hard done by if someone else appears with the eagerness and ability to take over.

Indeed we should prefer this to happen sooner rather than later - in the interests of the Society and the takers over. Training of the incomers by the old hands is essential to avoid the awesome bewilderment of "I've taken on this complicated job, but no one seems to know what I've got to do, or

where the papers are kept - and while I'm trying to find out, the telephone keeps ringing with inquiries that I can't answer."

So - please - if you have the time, aptitudes and readiness to commit yourself to be, for example, (i) Assistant Secretary (tasks taken on as they materialise) or (ii) Assistant Secretary (Right to Roam and Rights of Way Creation) - telephone me on 01625 528256.

Both these appointments require general administrative aptitudes, sense of humour and readiness to spend at least half a day per week at Taylor House, plus ability to drive both a car and a word processor.

The Rights to Roam post demands commitment for at least 3 years (to ensure continuity of case handling); travel to remote site meetings; enjoyment of research into ancient maps and records (why take on such a job unless you get fun from it?) and interviewing witnesses who (during the last 30 years) have used the paths which you are trying to put on to the Definitive Map.

Adrian Littleton, Secretary

COUNCIL MEETINGS -COME AND JOIN US

ALL members and delegates from affiliated societies are welcome to take part in our discussions at Council meetings. We intend to make the meetings more accessible to ordinary members and to provide more time to air their views on the Society and how it is run.

We are introducing a new item into the agenda under the heading *Members' Interests*. This will appear early in the evening and each speaker will be allowed a maximum of three minutes to put his point forward with a reasonable amount of time for discussion afterwards.

Next Council meetings:

Thursday 19th July 2001 7:30pm Taylor House. No meeting in August.

Thursday 20th Sept 2001 6:45pm Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount St, Mcr

STILL WANTED: INSPECTORS

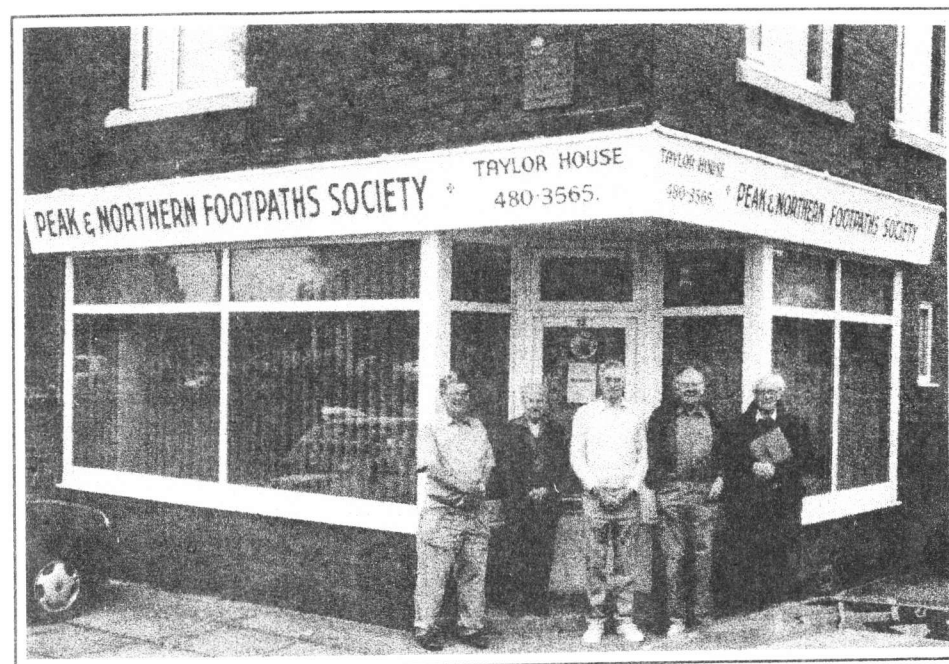
Inspectors are the life force of the PNFS. They keep us informed of the state of footpaths in their allotted areas. They are our man/woman on the spot when a Local Authority or a member of the public asks Taylor House for an opinion. Their value and importance is bound to increase as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act gradually spreads its influence around the country.

But due to the departure through illness or retirement of several valued old hands we are now dangerously short in nine areas. Is this a job **you** could take on? If you are familiar with any of the districts mentioned below and would enjoy walking there at your own pace and in your own time, we would like to hear from you.

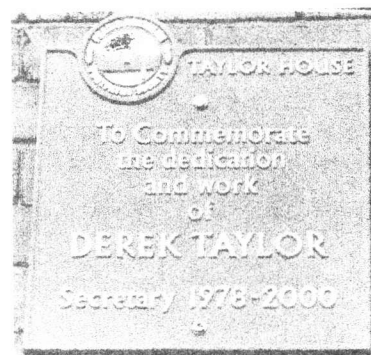
Detailed instruction is given and reasonable expenses paid. Please take your pick from the list of vacancies, some of which include rights of way in towns:-

- 1) Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale
- 2) Littleborough, Milnrow and Wardle
- 3) Bolton, Farnworth, Horwich, Kearsley, Turton, Egerton
- 4) Chorley, Bretherton, Charnock Richard, Coppull, Croston
- 5) Bacup, Haslingden, Whitworth
- 6) Wigan, Aspall, Haigh, Orrell, Shevington, Worthington
- 7) **West Yorks:** Brighouse, Queensbury, Shelf
- 8) **West Yorks:** Batley, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, Mirfield.

8.



Taylor House is now complete. The newly-lettered fascia with the dedication plaque above, guarded by officers L to R: Adrian Littleton (Secretary), Ernie Sutton (Membership), Keith Wykes (Treasurer), Derek Seddon (Chairman), Eric Kime (Vice Chairman)



The commemorative plaque to Derek Taylor 'over the shop' at Taylor House, the headquarters he worked so hard to secure.

9.

JINGLE BELLS

Chesterfield Council has asked our opinion on the topic of changing bridleways into cycleways. Taylor House feelings are generally that we have no objection to sharing rights of way with cyclists if only they didn't have this rooted objection to having 'an audible warning of approach' as is still required by law.

Many of our members, being old and frail (not least, the officers) and somewhat hard of hearing, we have the fear that when approached from the rear on a canal bank by a bell-free cyclist, one of us is going to finish up in the water. Horse riders sometimes carry the sign, 'young rider, please do not sound your horn'. Maybe we should have 'Old Rambler, please ring your bell' on our backs.

By the way, the snag to these proposals to change the status of bridleways is that if they are designated cycleways they lose their definitive status and thus their protection in law. So until that situation is changed, we will be against it.

SNIPPETS

Congratulations to member Jim Evison, universally known as Sam (don't ask me why) who was awarded the MBE for services to the community in the Birthday Honours List. He was for many years Inspector for the Poynton area with the unusual distinction of having a signpost (in Lyme Handley) dedicated to him while he was still alive and kicking.

Last week, we gained an unexpected ally on the anti-Wind Farm front. The Ministry of Defence has raised objections to the proposals for a group of 80 turbines 80mtrs high among the conifers of the Keilder Forest, Northumberland. It seems that the whirling blades interfere with the radar of low-flying aircraft. But our hope that further Wind Farms would move offshore also meets with MoD disapproval. They have expressed concern at what would be Britain's biggest offshore site near Blackpool. Its 90 windmills, they say, could affect the radar of the Eurofighters being produced at Salmesbury.

Jack Ogden has sent me this cutting from the Colonel Pinstripe column in the Sunday Express. I presume it's tongue-in-cheek, unless of course it was written by Mr Van Hoogstraten.

Filthy ramblers are to blame

TWO WEEKS ago I warned that the foot and mouth crisis was the worse disaster to affect this country since Suez and how right I was.

But are we right to burn poor animals with foot and mouth? What about turning our attention instead to the real perpetrators of the foul disease. These are the so-called "ramblers", who constantly wander across our land, depositing their mess and lit-

ter everywhere, leaving gates open and generally going where they are not wanted.

They wallow in their own filth and are far more disgusting and dirty in their personal habits than the pigs I keep in my backyard

Yet unlike my well-mannered and innocent pigs, which stay put in one place, these ramblers are always wandering about from one country area to another and spreading disease.

The foot and mouth epidemic would soon be over if we rounded these ramblers up and disposed of them.

It could all be done quite humanely. They would probably squeal a bit at first but a club-hammer to the back of the head would soon stop that.

There would be no need to burn them, as nobody in their right mind would feel the slightest temptation to eat these unsightly, revolting objects.

Bill Johnson our Signpost Officer, has begun to catch up on the backlog of 8 memorial signposts he has been unable to erect because of the foot and mouth restrictions. Four up and four to go.

For up-to-date information:

Cheshire Rights of Way Officers 01244 603237

Cheshire County website: www.Cheshire.gov.uk

Derbyshire Tel 08456 05058 Mon-Fri

Countryside Agency: www.Countryside.gov.uk

MID-WEEK WALKS

Mid-Week walks have been on hold since February but at least we can start thinking about them again. The walks listed below are led by PNFS members. The Leaders, marked (L) will meet the party at the train/bus destination. It is advisable to telephone the leader beforehand for information if you intend joining the walk.

- 27th June** Horwich Parkway to Blackrod. 09.31 train from Piccadilly, GM Day Ranger. Jeff Lewis 0161 766 4683
- 25th July** Whaley Bridge to Buxton. 09.37 train from Piccadilly Wayfarer ticket. Ken Lawson 0161 224 1049
- 29th August** Marple circular. 09.43 train from Piccadilly. Peter Crofts (L) 0161 427 1888
- 26th September** Macclesfield Circular. 09.50 train from Piccadilly. Bob Dumbarton (L) 0161 439 8720
- 31st October** Disley Circular. 09.37 train from Piccadilly. Roy Standring (L) 0161 483 3459.

COULD YOU LEAD A WALK? Ring Jeff Lewis on 0161 766 4683

– He'll be glad to hear from you.