

SIGNPOST

The newsletter of the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society

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From the Chairman

We have suffered another grievous loss in the sudden death of our President, Leslie Meadowcroft at the age of 79. The report below is from my speech delivered at his funeral on 5th June 2002:



LESLIE GORDON MEADOWCROFT
10th Jan 1923—25th May 2002

Leslie was a driving force of the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society since he joined in 1965. His passing leaves an enormous gap both in our ranks and in our reserves of knowledge of the arcane lore of rights of way. It will be difficult, almost impossible, to fill.

At the age of 8 he was introduced by his uncle to the joys of the countryside and the paths that run through it and was to become dedicated to their promotion and protection.

In the early part of the last war, then in his late teens, he was already a keen member of the Ramblers Association and the YHA, but military service intervened. He joined the Royal Signals, was posted to India with the 17th Indian Division and was one of that dwindling band who served in Burma all the way from the north down to Rangoon in the far south. By the time of the Japanese surrender and the war over, he was sent first to Java, to set up communication connections, then, on his own, to Sumatra. Faced with a murderous revolt by Indonesian nationalists (freedom fighters) who had risen against the

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Dutch colonists, he was given an escort of Japanese soldiers under a Japanese officer, to protect him. He carried a hand grenade to protect himself from the Japanese should they forget their instructions. A bizarre situation which he took in his stride.

Returning to India and waiting to be sent back to Britain, he persuaded his superiors to allow him to lead a trekking party, complete with porters, to Sikkim in the Himalayas, an early appearance of his renowned powers of persuasion.

Back home in Blighty he lost no time in joining the push for greater access to open country and was among the leaders who organised the great rallies in Cave Dale, Derbyshire, to promote that idea and for the setting-up of National Parks. The Peak District became Britain's first National Park as a result of the efforts of Leslie and like-minded enthusiasts. Now we all reap the benefits of that wonderful, liberating concept. Leslie served on the Peak Park Advisory committee and on the National Trust until his death. He was the YHA's Countryside Officer for the Peak region.

Probably the achievement which pleased him most was his co-operation with Frank Head and Frank Mason of the Peak and Northern and RA in creating the Cown Edge way, an 18 mile circular walk into the Peak District which starts from Nelson Street, across the road from his home. If we are looking for a way to commemorate his life and work it seems to me that a signpost somewhere along that attractive route would be ideal. Both the Peak and Northern and Stockport YHA are looking into the possibility.

Leslie became Chairman of our Society, serving in that post for 15 years. He retired to become a very active President 4 years ago, still riding his pet hobby-horses, serving on committees around the north-west, fighting for the preservation of footpaths needling reluctant local authorities through the mail, at magistrates courts or public inquiries; lecturing, fund - raising from impossible sources (his abilities in that direction were legendary). He originated the Society's Annual Dinner and ran it up to our latest one in April. He edited our Annual Report and

made it self-sufficient by badgering advertisers to cover the production costs.

He gave his time and his life over to the furtherance of his ideals and those of this Society. Perhaps he found it difficult to understand how others could not be as dedicated nor as deeply involved as he was. Certainly, if he found you could carry out a task, he was never backward at asking you to do two more at the same time.

At Taylor House, we were unaware of the pain and discomfort he must have been in during his final months. We knew of the inconvenience caused by his glaucoma which prevented him from driving, but which was mollified to some degree by his wife Lorna's unfailing assistance, though she herself has her own range of disabilities. But we didn't know the daily struggle he must have against pain.

He was a fighter to the end - keeping a watchful eye on the workings of the new Right to Roam Act. He was determined to see that it fulfilled its promise to give us all the access to open country he had fought for all his life. Rest well, Leslie, you have deserved it.

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There is no doubt that the Society is in difficulties at the moment and will struggle to keep going, but the officers are determined to do so.

Compounding the loss of Leslie and his vast experience, we are very sorry to have to report that our energetic Secretary and Legal adviser ADRIAN LITTLETON has paid the price of his workaholic lifestyle and has suffered a mild stroke. He remains as cheerful as ever but has to take this as a warning to reduce his work load, which he will do from 30th June. He will still be in charge of the Footpath Practitioners Conference on June 21st and looks forward to seeing the 48 Inspectors and friends who are booked in, but from then on will wind down his PNFS activities.

Finally, to add to the gloom, BILL JOHNSON, our craftsman Signpost Officer, has had to withdraw for health reasons from the business of erecting signposts on heath, meadow and moor. Very kindly he has offered to continue providing his skills in carving and fitting the posts, but we will have to assemble an emergency team to erect them as each one becomes ready. Let us know if you are willing to make yourself available for occasional labouring.

We are pleased that our last appeal for help (to replace David Frith as Signpost Officer, Admin) bore swift fruit in the shape of FRED OGDEN, who has previous experience in the job. He has been initiated into the mysteries of the job and is already at work. His address is: 11a Compstall Rd. Marple Bridge, Stockport SK6 5HH Tel: 0161 449 9674. Please amend your Handbooks.

THE MEMORIAL SIGNPOST TO DEREK TAYLOR, the work of Bill Johnson, was finally dedicated on Sunday, May 12th, a year late due to Foot & Mouth preventing us from getting to the site. This 7ft long, 6 inch square post was carried, single handed, over the moor to the site by a very fit fell runner, Steve Furness. Our thanks are due to FP Inspector Ken West who found the site and made the arrangements. It was a lovely day, the ground was dry underfoot and we were pleased to have Betty Taylor with us. The dedication was carried out by Leslie Meadowcroft, less than a fortnight before his death, seconded by Adrian Littleton.



The signpost in place on Anglezarke Moor



After the dedication: A happy group

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THE BENNY ROTHMAN MEMORIAL

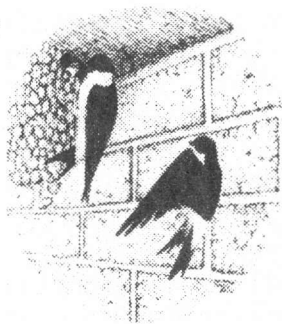
Following our report in the last *Signpost*, we contacted the National Trust, the owners of Kinder Scout, about the possibility of a memorial to commemorate Benny and the Mass Trespass. Back came the word from Steve Trotter, their Buildings Manager, that an approach had been made to Benny's family, who were adamant that Benny would not have wanted any kind of memorial. We can, therefore only bow to their wishes and go no further with our proposal.

FOOTPATH CLOSURES

Members should note that several footpaths in the Rivington area (incidentally, quite close to Derek Taylor's signpost) will be affected by the cycling events of the Commonwealth Games. Ten Horwich FPs will be temporarily closed during the period 16th July to 3rd August from 7am to 9pm. If you're thinking of visiting that district you'd be wise to check first with Bolton Council.

LIFE GOES ON

Our in-house house martins who live under the eaves of Taylor House, returned in late May after an anxious wait by bird-watching residents here. Perhaps they had been delayed by bad weather over Spain but these agile little birds found their way to us from tropical Africa without the benefit of a single Peak & Northern signpost!



CORRECTIONS

Society's web site address:

Eagle-eyed readers of the latest Annual Report will have spotted the mistakes in the Society's web site and e-mail addresses on page 2.

The web site should have read:

www.peakandnorthern.org.uk

and e-mail address should read:

mail@peakandnorthern.org.uk

Norman Edwards

We regret that Norman's name was omitted from the list of Vice Presidents in the Annual Report and accidentally inserted in the AGM Agenda as a Vice Chairman. Apologies to Norman, who is a Vice President.

LEGAL EAGLES WANTED

Are there any members out there with even a little legal knowledge who could represent the Society at public enquiries and magistrate courts? Training given. Expenses provided. Please contact Taylor House or Adrian Littleton on 01625 528 256.

FOOTPATHS INTO CYCLEWAYS — A CLASH OF INTERESTS

Lately, the assessors at Taylor House have been struggling to find a way of handling the increasing number of proposals to convert some (mainly urban) footpaths into cycleways. Local Authorities are being encouraged by the government to set up cycleways in the drive to get more people to take more exercise and away from their cars. We have already had several notices of intent from Lancashire CC and Chesterfield, though Stockport for one has decided against it. This indicates the first problem: there is no nationally approved approach to the idea and different authorities will each have their own rules and requirements. The big snag as far as the PNFS is concerned is that once a footpath is deemed a cycleway it loses its definitive status. Furthermore, the authority does not have to inform us, as they do now, of any proposal to close or divert it. Our letter to Lancashire CC, suggesting that the answer might be to convert appropriate footpaths to bridleways, allowing cyclists to use them but retaining their definitive status, brought the following reply: "the reason for making the footpath a cycleway rather than a bridleway is so that it can be adopted as a public highway and then can be maintained from the highways budget. This enables the County Council to maintain it to a far higher standard than if it was a bridleway. Street lighting can be provided, the cycleway can be regularly inspected and any potholes filled in, with surfacing carried out when needed. Though the path will not appear on the Definitive Map, pedestrians will still have the right to use it, and, as a publicly maintained highway, a stopping-up order would be required to close it".

We argue in return that a footpath is already a highway, with a duty of maintenance on the local council.

We consulted the RA's legal officer, who replied agreeing with us about the preference for a bridleway but wondering if the reason that local authorities did not want this is because they don't wish to mix horses with cyclists and walkers. The RA also recognises that sometimes a conversion to a cycleway could

mean improved facilities for walkers, but that these may require engineering or surface works (which walkers may not like). They accept that each proposal will have to be judged on its merits. We agree that cycleways in the countryside could spoil the natural beauty, but that we might not have a valid objection to an urban cycleway which would enable people to get to work in safety. What do you think?

CHANGE OF INSPECTORS

Frank Hackney, our man in Bagnall, Biddulph etc etc has retired from Peak & Northern service and his place will be taken by Ian Ray. Thanks to both.

A COUPLE OF HONS

Two long-serving members have qualified for Honorary Membership. Stanley Wraith, who has been with us for 26 years, and Sam Evison MBE. At the age of 92, Sam writes to say how much he enjoyed working with Leslie Meadowcroft when the Society was based at Leslie's house at Nelson St, Hazel Grove. Sam was an Inspector from 1953 to 1999 and has organised a monthly walk for the Scouts every month since 1958.

COME FLY WITH US

Marple District Rambling Club are arranging a 14-day holiday to the GRAND CANYON and other American National Parks commencing 26th April 2003. Cost £1049 (single supplement £390). For further information contact Fred Ogden on 0161 449 9674.

THE END OF THE ROAD

It's sad that two more long-established societies have decided to close down. The ITT (International Tramping Tours) Rambling Club, founded by Quakers in 1930, has come to an end forced by the advancing years of their members. They have sent us a

cheque for our signpost fund from their remaining accounts and a sign commemorating their 60 years will be erected by the PNFS. Similarly, the Longdendale Amenity Society has been wound up and their outstanding balance has been directed to the signpost fund. We are grateful that their loss is our gain, but it's always a cause for regret when yet another group of dedicated people finds it can no longer continue what they once enjoyed.

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THE REVISED CONSTITUTION

was passed by vote at the Extraordinary General Meeting on 27th April 2002 and is as printed in the latest Annual Report and Handbook 2001 with the amendment that "The quorum for an Officers' Meeting shall be three Officers."

INHERIT THE WIND FARM

How wrong I was to suggest that the drive for wind turbines seemed to be moving to sites along our coastline. True, Britain's biggest off-shore wind farm, 2 miles off Yarmouth, has just been approved, but look what else is blowing in the wind.

Back in February the Government published its energy review proposing a massive expansion in wind generated electricity. Coincidentally, the Government's new proposals for the wholesale reform of the planning process will conveniently provide a fast track for schemes deemed to be of 'national interest'

So here come the proposal for Europe's biggest wind farm: 165, yes one hundred and sixty five turbines, each 400 feet high, to be sited at Cefn Croes in the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales. Already 39 smaller turbines have been passed for installation this summer by the Ceredigion county councillors who ignored the recommendation to refuse by their planning

officer. A few miles away in Montgomery two out of three large proposed wind farms were rejected, but the Government's new planning bill will remove such decisions from local councils and settle them in parliament.

Yet Denmark, the world leader in wind energy, has called a halt to its development programme, having realised that its electricity costs almost twice as much as Britain's. The wind generation process there, as it would be here, is inefficient and the true costs masked by subsidies.

Kate Ashbrook, of the Open Space Society, said "A national tragedy is unfolding. The government has to reconsider its wind strategy" We would second that. The menace to footpaths in the upland areas of Britain is a matter of deep concern.

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FORTHCOMING MIDWEEK WALKS

May we remind all members of the Walks list on pages 34 and 35 in the Annual Report which gives the program for every Wednesday walk for the next three months. If you haven't tried one before why not give it a go?

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MID-WEEK WALK - WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL 2002.

Bromley Cross to Blackrod

Distance 10 Miles

Twenty-nine walkers emerged from the train at Bromley Cross, on what promised to be a fine day, as it indeed turned out to be, with sunshine all the way. I had led walks between these two points twice before, but a change of route was made necessary,

owing to problems with the paths around Springfield Paper Mill, Belmont, which were the subject of a Public Enquiry last month.

We accordingly set off in a northerly direction, turning west to pass Cox Green Quarry, then skirting round the built-up area of Egerton, to join a section of the "Witton Weavers Way" at Dimple. For much of this section, our objective, Winter Hill was in view, but the usually prominent TV mast was hidden in mist. By the time we reached our lunch stop on the edge of Longworth Clough, this had lifted, and we were able to view our way ahead as far as the mast.

Lunch over, we descended the valley, crossing Eagley Brook, to commence the two mile climb to the top of Winter Hill. It had become warm in the valley below, so the gentle breeze blowing across Smithills Moor was very welcome. We took a tea break on Crooked Edge Hill, before descending to Pike Cottage, and on towards Horwich. Passing through the park which now occupies the site where Horwich Railway Station once stood, we then followed the route of the old branch line which connected with the main line at Blackrod. This is not a definitive right of way, which is a pity, as it has evidently been used as a walking route for some time. No faults were encountered on any of the paths used on this walk. The photograph shows some of them awaiting the train at the end of the walk.

Geoff Daubney

