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TRANSPORT/THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL: PROPOSED RESTRICTIONS
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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT PN NO. 493 7 December 1993

THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL
PROPOSED RESTRICTIONS ON VEHICLE USE NOT TO GO AHEAD

The Secretary of State for Transport has decided not to go ahead with proposals which would have prohibited the use of vehicles on the western part of the Ridgeway National Trail on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

The proposals were the subject of a Public Inquiry last year. The Inspector found that the evidence presented to him was insufficient to justify curtailing the long-established rights of vehicles users as proposed. The Secretary of State agrees and has decided not to confirm the proposed restrictions.

Commenting on the decision Robert Key, Minister for Roads and Traffic, said:-

"This was a very difficult decision to take, and one which I know will disappoint those who are in favour of restricting the use of motor vehicles on the Ridgeway. However the fact remains that motor vehicle drivers also have rights to use the western section of the Ridgeway, and those rights cannot be curtailed without good reason. The Public Inquiry was held so that all parties concerned could state their case and have their views considered by an impartial Inspector. The Inspector thoroughly considered all the evidence presented to him and concluded that the arguments put forward in favour of banning vehicles on Sundays and Bank Holidays were not sufficiently strong to justify such restrictions. After reviewing both the evidence put to the Inspector and his report we accept that his conclusion is well-founded, and consequently we have decided not to confirm the proposed restrictions.

"Although the decision is entirely one for the Secretary of State for Transport, as the Ridgeway has been designated as a National Trail we have consulted the Secretary of State for the Environment. He too accepts that the evidence presented was insufficiently strong to justify the proposed ban.

"I would like to emphasise that the decision has been taken purely on the basis of the facts of this particular case. It has no implications for any other cases which may come forward. Nor does it mean that the Government has given the go-ahead for recreational vehicle users to take over the western part of the Ridgeway. The Ridgeway is a National Trail. This recognises that the route has particular importance for walkers, horseriders and cyclists, and that it should be managed so that they find it attractive to use. With that in mind we believe it is essential that all parties should now get together to develop a package of management measures which will minimise the potential conflict between the various kinds of users. We are looking to the Countryside Commission to take the lead on this, and in due course we expect them to report back on the action taken."

Note for Editors

1. The Ridgeway is an historic route running from Wiltshire through Berkshire and Oxfordshire to Buckinghamshire. It has been designated as a National Trail and it is used extensively by ramblers, cyclists and horseriders. Most of the eastern section is classified either as bridleway or footpath and may not be used by motor vehicles, but such vehicles have historic rights to use most of the western end.
2. Responsibility for the management of the route lies with the County Councils although, as it is a National Trail and runs through an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Countryside Commission also has a role. Under section 22 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 the Commission may make submissions to the Secretary of State for Transport proposing traffic restrictions on a National Trail or any road in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If the local authority or authorities responsible for the route then notify the Secretary of State that they do not intend to make a traffic regulation order imposing the proposed restrictions, the Secretary of State may make the order.
3. In 1992, following such a submission from the Countryside Commission and notification from the County Councils concerned that they were not prepared to make orders banning vehicles from using the western section of the Ridgeway on Sundays and Bank Holidays, a draft traffic regulation order was published on behalf of the Secretary of State. If confirmed it would have given effect to the proposed ban.
4. The draft order attracted numerous objections and representations, and the Secretary of State ordered a Public Inquiry to be held so that the matter could be considered

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thoroughly by an impartial Inspector. The inquiry took place between 20 October and 4 November last year.

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News Release

1st September 1989

PART-TIME TRAFFIC BAN ON RIDGEWAY

The Countryside Commission is asking the Secretary of State for Transport, Cecil Parkinson, to restrict motorised traffic on the Wessex part of the 5,000-year-old Ridgeway, a national trail often described as 'Britain's oldest road'. Following a recent survey of Ridgeway users, it is proposing a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) which would ban motorised traffic from the route on Sundays and Bank Holidays throughout the year.

The ban would apply to all 40 miles (64 km) of byway between Streatley in Berkshire and Overton Hill, near Avebury, in Wiltshire. The TRO will control vehicular use on the 60 days of the year when pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists are out enjoying the countryside in peace and quiet at the most popular times. The Commission believes that the majority of people using the Ridgeway will regard this as a fair compromise between no ban and a total ban on vehicles.

"The use of the countryside for quiet recreation is at an all-time high, and especially so on our national trails, such as the Ridgeway," says Duncan Mackay of the Commission's south-east regional office. "Between 210,000 and 250,000 people use the Ridgeway each year. The vast majority of them simply want to enjoy a peaceful day's walking in beautiful countryside, and we cannot ignore the annoyance, disturbance and physical damage caused by the 8 per cent in cars and four wheel drive vehicles or on motorbikes".

"After 10 years of seeking to resolve the conflicts on the Ridgeway, the Commission has come to the conclusion that a TRO is the only effective way of controlling the problems".

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Ridgeway runs for 85 miles (137 km) from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Overton Hill in Wiltshire. It was officially opened in September 1973. Some 40 miles (64 km) of the route are legally designated as byway west of Streatley (Berkshire), over which four-wheeled vehicles and motor cyclists have a right of access. The Commission would like a TRO imposed on this section. In 1986 it asked the Secretary of State for Transport to effect a partial ban on motorised users via a TRO. This has not yet been made but the results of the recent survey (see attached summary for details) should help the Secretary of State to reach a decision.

2. The Countryside Commission is the Government's adviser on landscape conservation and countryside recreation issues. Its duties include designating long distance routes (now known as national trails) for walking, cycling and horseriding.

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A TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER FOR THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL:
A SUMMARY OF THE COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION'S POSITION.

BACKGROUND

1. The Ridgeway National Trail is some 137 km in length. The section with which this summary is concerned lies entirely within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is popularly known as the 'Wessex' Ridgeway. It is some 68 km of the total, with status as follows (in km):

	BYWAY (INCLUDING COUNTY ROAD)	BRIDLEWAY	FOOTPATH	TOTAL
Wiltshire	27.5	1.5	3.0	32
Oxfordshire	30	-	-	30
Berkshire	6	-	-	6
TOTAL	63.5	1.5	3.0	68

Some 64 km of the Wessex Ridgeway is open to all vehicular traffic. It is used for recreation by motorists who park on the Ridgeway to allow their occupants to admire the view or to reach the National Trail without walking. It is also used by four-wheel drive vehicles and trail-rider motor bikes which proceed along parts of the National Trail. Agricultural vehicles use the National Trail as a means of passage between one part of a farm to another and it is also used as an essential access to certain adjacent properties. The Commission has been concerned since the creation of the Ridgeway National Trail (approved by the Secretary of State in 1972 and formally opened on 29th September 1973) with the conflict of use between vehicular traffic and walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

2. The Commission has always considered it extremely important to preserve the essential historic character of the Ridgeway and to safeguard the unique experience provided to walkers, cyclists and horse riders using it. Use by motor vehicles both for uncontrolled parking and for recreation along the route is incongruous and reduces the enjoyment of some users. A number of people wishing to walk the route in peace and quiet are annoyed by motorcyclists (either scrambling, cross-country or trail-riding) and the increasing use of four-wheel drive vehicles for recreation.

MANAGEMENT MEASURES 1980-1984

3. The Commission approached the Secretary of State in 1980 seeking a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to try and control the rising conflict between users on the Wessex Ridgeway. We were asked, however, to try first a series of voluntary and management measures in order to attempt to resolve the conflicts. A Code of Voluntary Restraint was agreed with the motoring organisations and a Ridgeway Officer was appointed alongside a team of voluntary wardens monitoring use on summer Sundays and Bank Holidays. The Ridgeway Officer produced reports for 1982 and 1983 which showed continuing conflict between user groups. Commissioners considered the reports and public responses at some length at their meeting in April 1984. They were aware that an Order would mean restricting the rights of access of some groups. They were also aware though of the discomfort and annoyance that was caused to many users of the Ridgeway by a small number who wanted to drive along it on motorcycles or in four-wheel drive vehicles. Although the

voluntary code had led to some reduction in levels of use, it was decided that a Traffic Regulation Order, limited to those times when the use of the Ridgeway was at its highest, would significantly reduce the conflicts and ensure that the Ridgeway could be enjoyed in peace and quiet at peak periods. It was considered that a modest measure of this kind would not represent a major encroachment upon the rights of motorised users.

THE PROPOSED ORDER (1986)

4. The Commission consulted the highway authorities of Wiltshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire County Councils but only Berkshire supported the proposed action. In August 1986 the Commission reviewed the situation and agreed to ask the Secretary of State to use his reserve powers to make a TRO effective on Sundays and Bank Holidays from 1st May to 31st October inclusive. The Department of Transport, however, felt that it could not advise the Secretary of State on the basis of the 1983 survey results. Accordingly the Commission was asked to undertake a comprehensive survey especially during the peak periods of use on summer Sundays and Bank Holidays to assemble evidence robust enough to withstand cross examination at a public inquiry.

THE RIDGEWAY USE AND USER-ATTITUDE SURVEY 1988-89

5. Survey Research Associates (SRA) successfully tendered for the survey and a programme was devised to cover 30 access points on a 10 per day rotation in a 3 phase cycle over a period of 30 survey days. A sampling system was devised to collect data on peak summer Sundays, peak Bank Holidays, summer off-peak days, winter off-peak days, and off-peak Bank Holidays, (ie Easter), to ensure a good spread of data for purposes of seasonal and weekend - weekday contrast. The survey ran from 1st April 1988 (Easter) to 1st January 1989 and the weather was cool/wet in the summer and mild in the winter. No major problems were encountered and the refusal rate was considered low by SRA.

SURVEY RESULTS

6. The total number of persons counted using the Ridgeway was 20,328. The total number interviewed was 3,649. Among those interviewed the greatest use of the Ridgeway is made by walkers out on a day (or part day) trip (70%), followed by long-distance walkers (12%), cyclists (4%), horseriders (4%), cross-country vehicles (3%), motorcyclists (3%) and private cars (2%). The most direct evidence of users' feelings towards motorised use came from replies to an unprompted question about what interviewees disliked about the Ridgeway :

- 32% of day walkers disliked motorcyclists
- 39% of day walkers disliked some aspect of motorised use

As the 'day walkers' category of user was by far the most numerous (70% of total interviewed) this is a significant number of people. The 20,328 total count figure (30 days) when extrapolated to a whole year figure gives c.210,000 - c.250,000 users per annum. By the same crude extrapolation there are c.150,000 - c.175,000 day walkers using the Ridgeway per annum. Although there were many things users could have found to dislike about the Ridgeway the main dislikes were some aspects of motorised use and surface conditions. Only long distance walkers (10%) had a substantial complaint about lack of toilet and watering facilities. It was anticipated that the time of greatest conflict would be either peak summer Sundays or peak Bank Holidays. However, it was the winter period which attracted the greatest percentage of

complaints about some aspect of motorised use (38%). Surface dislikes also rose to a maximum (27%) during the winter period. People mainly disliked motorcyclists because of noise (74%) followed by damage to the Ridgeway surface (37%). People mainly disliked cross-county vehicles because of the damage to the Ridgeway surface (63%) followed by noise (36%). Nearly half (49%) of those disliking cars on the Ridgeway thought they damaged the surface and a quarter (25%) said it should be for foot users only.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

7. The results of the 1988 survey correlate closely with the much cruder attitude survey results obtained by the voluntary wardens in 1983. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this:

In 1983

- 52% of users found nothing to dislike about the Ridgeway (40% in 1988)
- 18% of those disliking something, mentioned motorcyclists first (22% of all interviewees mentioned motorcyclists as the element they disliked the most in 1988).
- 9% of first time visitors objected to motorcycles compared to 22% of people who had visited previously (30% of occasional visitors and 41% of frequent visitors objected in 1988).
- day walkers were more likely to object to motorcycles (25% put it as a first dislike in 1983 whereas 32% mentioned it as main dislike in 1988) than long distance walkers (12% in 1983 and 22% in 1988).

The results of the two surveys (1983 and 1988) cannot be taken as directly analogous because of the differences in sampling and the form of the questionnaires. They lead, however, to the conclusion that the level of apparent conflict is at least as great despite the 5 years of voluntary measures aimed at reducing conflict. The problem has also moved into the winter period. The degree of conflict revealed by the 1983 survey led the Commission to propose the time-limited TRO to the Secretary of State. The results of the 1988 survey do not provide any arguments to change that view.

8. The overall context of vehicular recreational use of the countryside has significantly altered since 1986. There is more public and political awareness of 'green-laning' as a problem, it has moved up local authority agendas for action, and the media have seized upon it for scrutiny and (almost) complete condemnation. (See Sunday Times 21.8.88, 'The Last Word on Downland').

THE PROPOSED ORDER (1989)

9. The 1988 survey confirms that the problems caused by motorised use of the Ridgeway are on a similar scale to those found in 1983 on which the Commission's call for a TRO was based. However the more comprehensive 1988 survey shows that the problems are just as severe during the winter months.

10. The Commission, therefore, decided at its meeting of 3rd August 1989 to request the Secretary of State to use his reserve powers under section 22 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to impose a time limited TRO on the Wessex section of the Ridgeway National Trail. The TRO would be effective on all Sundays and Bank Holidays throughout the year.