



Annual Report 2008

Cumbria
Local Access
Forum

Chairman's Introduction

This should have been my valedictory report after six busy years as Chair during which, thanks to the efforts of colleagues, the Forum has grown immeasurably in reputation, influence and achievement. It is a commentary on what is now expected of volunteers in terms of time and effort that in the absence of a successor I have had to carry on for another (and final!) year. We decided to spread the load by setting up two major working groups shared with our partners in the County Council and these are now proving to be very effective indeed.

One deals with Rights of Way and is chaired by Mike Murgatroyd and the other with Coastal and Open Access, chaired by my Vice-chair John Bevan. The former is much engaged in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan where we seek, without loss of our heritage to make a basically 19th Century network fit for purpose in the 21st.

A Coastal Trail is coming and indications are that when the Bill becomes law Cumbria will be in the first tranche for implementation. LAFs by virtue of their breadth of membership and constitution are well placed to act as 'honest brokers' when the interests of users, landowners and managers, and environmentalists have to be reconciled, and with all the experience we gained in introducing open access we stand well-prepared – there is almost always a way forward which everyone can accept.

We have had a standstill year as far as the budget for access has been concerned. While this is frustrating in the light of historically low funding, at least there have not been cuts: the year to come looks like another of the same. Our ambitions remain as high as ever and we intend to bend the ear of the new administration which will follow elections in June 2009. We are exhorting colleagues in the County Council – and they are listening – to seek additional funds and grants from every available

source particularly in connection with the health and obesity agenda and the development of 'urban lungs'. All this ties in neatly with the government's green agenda.

Plans to involve more volunteers in access work are bearing handsome fruit with many parishes taking up the support offered by the Parish Paths Initiative and upwards of 20 trained countryside volunteers out there augmenting the work of our four rangers on the ground and meeting people. We need more of both.

One of the exciting developments during the year has been the establishment of an England Access Forum which works at national level with DEFRA and Natural England to make known the views of some 85 local forums and advises on the front-line implications of policies and ideas. It is no accident that Natural England will shortly produce its first ever national access programme. The downside of all this is that as Chair of the new Forum, I seem to spend most of my life on access work here and more widely!

As I said earlier, the Forum is increasingly seen as effectively representing the views of all who work, live in or visit the countryside of Cumbria and equally its urban gems. Our emphasis continues to be on responsible and healthy enjoyment of our priceless assets, and in doing that I am deeply conscious of the work done by colleagues who continue to give unstintingly of their time and expertise – and all without reward other than service to the community. They work in an effective partnership with our esteemed colleagues in the Countryside Access Team to whom go our grateful thanks.



Duncan Graham, CBE - Chairman

What is the Cumbria Local Access Forum?

Now completing its sixth year the Cumbria Local Access Forum was set up by Cumbria County Council in 2003 under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

The Forum is an advisory body and in this capacity can advise on the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the countryside. They may also advise on other forms of lawful public access, which might include using land (or a right of way) to get to work, school, shops, or local amenities.

The Forum aims to provide strategic advice and, in doing so, strives to achieve a consensus voice, taking into account statutory guidance, the needs of both landowners and access users, as well as wider conservation, landscape, social, economic and educational factors.

The Forum covers the whole of Cumbria, excluding the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

Who is on the Local Access Forum?

The Forum, when all vacancies are filled, has 22 members, all appointed by Cumbria County Council. The members of the Forum represent:

- owners and occupiers of access land or land crossed by local rights of way, or
- any other interests especially relevant to the authority's area, or
- users of the new right of access introduced by Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (principally walkers) and users of local rights of way (walkers, horse riders, cyclists and carriage drivers).

The membership is balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group or coalition of like interests and includes a cross section of local interest in the countryside. The Chair, Vice Chair and members other than County Councillors (3) are independent of the County Council.

Name	Area of Interest	Interest Detail
John Bevan Vice Chairman	User	Walking, Youth Work, Adventure Activities
Douglas Chalmers	Land	Director of the Country Land and Business Association
Charles Ecroyd	Land	Land management and conservation
Elisabeth Fell	User	Conservation, equestrian recreation, walking
Duncan Graham Chairman	Other	Countryside, environment, recreation, rural transport and deprivation
Helen Kerry	User, Other	Education, land use, biodiversity, equestrian access
Nicholas Lloyd	User	Natural history, recreation (both walking and equestrian)
Jim Loxham	User, Land	Conservation, recreation, access, rock climbing and mountaineering
Jim McQueen	User	Countryside, access and recreation
Jonathan Morley*	User, Land	Land management and conservation
Mike Mills	User	Recreation, education and conservation
Mike Murgatroyd	User	Conservation and recreation
Jean Rogers*	User, Land	Conservation, equestrian recreation
Mark Tennant	User	Conservation and recreation
Hilary Wilson	Land	Traditional extensive farming, orchard conservation
Sylvia Woodhead	User, Other	Countryside management, landscapes, tourism, sustainable transport
Chris Woodley-Stewart	Other	Conservation, recreation, walking and bird watching
David Young	User	Walking, mountain biking and driving

* Thanks and farewell go to Jean and Jonathan for their respective contributions up to March 2009.

The Forum has 3 members appointed by Cumbria County Council: Elizabeth Barraclough, Duncan Fairbairn and Jeff Garnett (Jeff replaced Roger Bird in November 2008). Three new members were appointed during 2008: Sylvia Woodhead in April for a three-year term; and in July Helen Kerry also for a three-year term and Hilary Wilson for a one-year term.

What Cumbria LAF achieved during 2008

During 2008 the Cumbria LAF held four formal meetings and achieved much project work between those meetings.

- The Cumbria Local Access Forum successfully lobbied the Secretary of State for Defence to ensure that members of the public would still be able to enjoy walking down to the waterfalls at Crammel Linn on the River Irthing within a small parcel of the land holding at RAF Spadeadam.
- The River Access Working Group established by Cumbria LAF brings together riparian landowners, anglers, river user groups such as canoeists and statutory bodies like the Environment Agency to look at how access to and along rivers can be improved. Four positive meetings were held in 2008, concentrating for the time being on the River Eamont and River Eden. The provision of web-cams to monitor river levels and how to set up a website with a booking facility (to benefit all interest groups) was looked into, with a view to a simple trial being commenced.
- Providing strategic level guidance and scrutiny of countryside access functions and operations through the establishment of a Partnership Steering Group comprising members of the Cumbria LAF together with officers and members of the County Council.
- Supporting the work being undertaken to implement a range of projects set out in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This has included helping build the policy framework for considering ROWIP projects, helping assess individual projects on the ground, and pressing the case for core / match funding to deliver projects.



The Forum has received some very informative presentations:

- Andrew Forsyth on the work of the Friends of the Lake District
- David Gibson on the Integrated Countryside Management System
- Jim Loxham, National Trust, on the history of the Public Rights of Way network in the Coniston area
- Peter Ashcroft on Natural England's National Trails Review

Cumbria LAF Consultations

The Cumbria LAF has responded to a number of consultations including:

- **Draft Marine Bill**

The Forum and Cumbria County Council responded to the consultation on the coastal access provisions of the draft Marine Bill published by DEFRA. The forum supported the Government's vision for coastal access and the introduction of new legislation as an effective means of enabling increased access to the coast.

- **Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service Integrated Risk Management Plan – Annual Action Plan 2008/09**

The Forum supported the development of a Wild Land Fire Strategy and applauded the acknowledgement of the effect of wildfires and the significant environmental and expensive damage they cause. The Forum urged CFRS to consider not just fell and heath-land fires, but also those on peat and heather moor-land.

- **Cumbria County Council Footpath Modification and Diversion Orders**

Representatives of the Cumbria LAF have visited and submitted observations (if required) on modification and diversion orders.

- **North Pennines AONB Management Plan**

Forum members attended a special meeting arranged to discuss the North Pennines AONB Management Plan.

- **Arnsdale & Silverdale AONB Management Plan**

The Forum made a joint response with Cumbria County Council through the newly formed Rights of Way Joint Working Group. This was generally supportive of the plan but advocated that in addition to the Northwest Coastal Trail, the plan should also give consideration to the English Coastal Trail.

- **Access to Kershope Forest**

The Forum responded to a consultation on a proposed long-term direction to restrict access due to forestry operations. For a second time they successfully argued that at least 5 days notice must be given.

Cumbria LAF Pending Issues

There are a wide number of issues which the Cumbria Local Access Forum will deal with during 2009. These will include Natural England's pilot for the implementation of the National Coastal Trail. The Forum also hopes to broaden its interest in cycling-related access issues. It will continue to support the expansion of the Parish Paths Initiative, the ranger service and the volunteer programme as well as working in partnership with Cumbria County Council and other bodies within Cumbria.

Contact Details

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Cumbria LAF meeting dates, agendas and minutes can be found at www.cumbrialaf.org.uk.

The website also includes details of members, the Forum's terms of reference and other information. Please contact the Secretary if you require any documents on paper.

Cumbria LAF meetings are advertised in advance. Members of the public are welcome and may ask questions, make Statements or present Petitions to the Forum, provided these reach the Secretary 7 days before a meeting. The Chairman, at his discretion, may invite members of the public to comment or ask a question during a meeting.

