

**Date:** 18 December 2018

**Report:** VISITOR MANAGEMENT AND THE THREE PEAKS ROUTE

### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide an assessment of the visitor management challenges and opportunities surrounding the Three Peaks of Yorkshire route, and to identify any actions for future management.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. That Members note
  - a. the work that has been undertaken to address the issue;
  - b. the new Three Peaks Code of Conduct aimed at individuals and event organisers;

And consider

- c. establishing a web-based notification scheme aimed at small groups as well as large scale charity events.

### **Strategic Planning Framework**

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
  - **Corporate Plan Actions for 2018/19**  
*Work with organisers of large-scale events to ensure they are well run, and provide benefits for local communities and businesses, and establish a fund to cover the full cost of maintaining the Yorkshire Three Peaks route.*

### **Background**

4. The Yorkshire Three Peaks walk is nationally recognised, and takes in the Three Peaks (Whernside, Pen-y-Ghent and Ingleborough), with the 'challenge' being to complete the circuit in under 12 hours. The Three Peaks have attracted walkers for many years, long preceding the designation of the National Park. By the 1960s the walk was well-established. An article in the Dalesman in 1969 on the Three Peaks of Yorkshire Club, founded by the owners of the Pen-y- Ghent café in Horton, recorded that their hospitality 'won wide acclaim for their services to hundreds of outdoor enthusiasts every week'. There is also the long-established annual Three Peaks Fell Race and Three Peaks Cyclo Cross Race.
5. The Three Peaks walk is on public rights of way and open access land, so can be accessed and walked by anyone whenever they wish. There are no definitive figures of actual numbers of people walking the route each year. Day counts show the numbers on any one day vary considerably - depending on the day of the week and time of year.

6. Use is concentrated on Saturdays. With 400% to 800% more walkers undertaking the route on this day than on the next busiest day - Sunday. The main visitor pressure takes place over approximately 20 Saturdays a year between late spring and late summer. Manual counts undertaken on 14 Saturdays between the beginning of June and end of September 2014, showed between 300 and 1800 people walking the route, with the median during this period 675. This is a combination of individual walkers in small groups and those walking the route as part of a large-scale charitable event.
7. Visitor surveys show that most people's motivation for walking the route is for personal challenge, the feeling of accomplishment, and having fun with friends. Around 1 in 5 walkers are undertaking the challenge to raise money for charity. For a proportion it is their first visit to the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

### **Three Peaks Walkers, Challenge Events and Impact on the area**

8. Over a period of more than 20 years, a number of large fund-raising walking events have developed around the Three Peaks 'challenge', primarily organised by well-known national charities. With these events there is a set pattern of use. Usually people stay in the area over a weekend to undertake the walk. Often they arrive Friday night, walk on Saturday, stay Saturday night, and leave on Sunday. People stay in the local area, but based on anecdotal evidence the limited availability of accommodation and facilities mean that they travel to Horton in Ribblesdale from further afield.
9. The influx of people, centred on Horton, have an impact both positive and negative:

#### **Positive**

- Participants are having an enjoyable experience of the National Park.
- Just under half (49%) of participants stay at least one night in the surrounding area. The route is important to the visitor economy.
- Income is generated within the local community, through the opening up of fields and facilities as temporary event hubs, and car parks. This income benefits local landowners, but also helps pay directly for community facilities.
- The route is extensively engineered and the surface can cope with the high level of use it receives (but like all rights of way still needs on-going maintenance).
- The principle of 'user pay-back' is accepted by larger events; many contribute towards rights of way maintenance through the Three Peaks project.

#### **Negative**

- Most participants come to the area by private car.
- It's a 12 hour 'challenge', but only around 60-70% of participants complete the walk in that time. This means participants arrive early but leave late, and can cause noise disturbance early in the morning and late in the evening.
- A proportion of participants have little knowledge of the countryside and the countryside code.

10. The Authority has worked extensively on the issues surrounding the Three Peaks over many years, as described in **Appendix 1**. Through the establishment of the Three Peaks project the Authority has been able to work with large event organisers (>100 participants) to minimise some negative impacts while maximising positive benefits. The route is not actively promoted by the Authority (after all, it is not 'our' route).

Information is provided on our website because of its popularity. The Authority's Three Peaks' web page received 44,522 unique page views last year (compared to the website average of 1,067) with an average dwell time of 2.5 minutes (compared to the website average of 1.5 minutes). This shows the scale of interest in the route. As well as large scale events it is used by a multitude of smaller events organised through places of work, schools, clubs and walking groups, as well as numerous individuals.

11. The main factor determining the visitor numbers in Horton is the availability of car parking (there are 78 spaces in the Authority's car park). Around 800 to 1000 spaces are made available to Three Peaks events through use of private or community land. The event organisers negotiate directly with these landowners, and do not need input from the National Park Authority or anyone else to organise their event.
12. Alternative car parking at Ribblehead and Chapel le Dale are already used and limited. Other suggestions are the quarry at Ribblehead, but this isn't feasible. The option of an alternative start at Ingleton is being promoted, but adds 9 kms to the overall walk, and while it has easy access, it is unlikely to be as attractive as the 'original' route.
13. The Authority has always engaged with Horton Parish Council and the local community on visitor management issues. Through its Sustainable Development Fund we funded a Horton traffic management study in 2013, to look at how to manage the car parking and traffic management issues. It included a residents' survey to gauge views, but the response rate was poor. The community was divided on what should be done. One suggestion was that a field within the village, used as a temporary car park, be given planning permission to open up more frequently than the 28 days under permitted development. While planning permission was granted, this hasn't been taken up.
14. The main area of recent complaint in Horton has been anti-social behaviour and noise. A new code of conduct aimed at individuals (**Appendix 2**) has been developed with a Three Peaks working group (made up of a cross section of interests) and approved by Horton Parish Council at their meeting on 12 November. The guidelines, aimed at event organisers have also been revamped (**Appendix 3**). Both are now being actively promoted in discussions with event organisers.
15. Promoting the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park is one of our two statutory purposes. People are going to continue to take on this challenge, and we need to engage with them more so they know the area they are coming to is a National Park and appreciate what that means. In addition to the new Code of Conduct and the re-vamped guidelines, It is suggested that the Authority might consider establishing an 'online' notification scheme through the Authority's website.

### **Notification Scheme**

16. Through a notification scheme people could access information that helps them plan their event - whatever the size, and the code of conduct can be promoted. Before coming to the area individuals would know what might be expected of them. As part of the process they could purchase a Three Peaks map (a corporate action for this year and currently in development), which also shows alternative starts such as Ingleton. Other National Park Authorities, with high visitor pressure run such schemes, most notably the Peak District NPA.

17. If Members agree to the setting up of an on-line notification scheme, there is a resource implication in terms of staff time. The scheme would be developed as part of the revamping of our website. There would also be admin time needed to look at the responses. However, its difficult to gauge how much time is actually required at this stage, because we do not know how many of the 45,000 people viewing our web page will run a Three Peaks events and will go on to register.
18. There are risks to establishing such a scheme. Residents may see the National Park Authority as the 'controller' of Three Peaks walkers. That would certainly not be the case. However, it will give us the opportunity to communicate more directly with users of the route and help them plan their visit and enjoy the National Park responsibly.

## **Conclusion**

19. Horton in Ribblesdale is the traditional start of the Three Peaks walk, a 24 mile walk on public rights of way and open access land. It is a nationally recognised 'challenge' open to anyone.
20. The Three Peak's route has created conflict between some visitors and some parts of the community. As most people travel to Horton from their accommodation they need somewhere to park and visitor numbers can only be managed through the availability of car parking. The Authority does not want to stop people doing the Three Peaks; the promotion of understanding and enjoyment of the area is one of our statutory purposes. Moreover increasing visitor numbers in National Parks is a Government target (8 Point Plan) and improving the public's knowledge and engagement with National Parks is an emerging theme in the Glover Review.
21. Users of the route bring income into the local economy, with many participants staying over night before and after their walk. The community also benefits directly through the revenue generated by opening up fields for temporary car parking.
22. A new code of conduct and a re-vamped set of guidelines have been developed for individuals and events, to help them understand the Park and specifically the issues around the Three Peaks Walk. These codes will be promoted through our website.
23. Members are asked to consider adopting a new on-line notification scheme. It will need to be made clear to those registering; this is not an authorisation scheme. In addition, the National Park Authority will continue to work with the community in Horton, and event organisers directly, to encourage responsible use.

**Kathryn Beardmore**  
**Director of Park Services**  
15 November 2018

### **Background documents:**

Horton Traffic & Visitor Management Plan published April (2013)  
Three Peaks balance of use survey (2014)

## The Three Peaks project and what the YDNPA has done to-date

1. In the early 1980s the area had the dubious distinction of having ‘the worst eroded path network in the UK’ (Institute of Terrestrial Ecology). There were four ‘Three Peaks’ externally funded projects between 1986 and 2004 to repair/maintain the route, with in excess of £2 million invested in the network over this period. For many years these various projects tried to discourage large events from using the Three Peaks because of the potential damage to the path network. Significantly, this showed that trying to influence people to not do the route had little effect because of its national recognition. The Three Peaks walk is on public rights of way and open access land, so anyone can walk the route whenever they want.
2. Since the inception of the Three Peaks project in 2008, the Authority has actively sought to engage with large-scale event organisers in the Three Peaks area (defined as >100 participants). In working with event organisers the Authority has:
  - Raised awareness with the Institute of Fundraisers and national charities of the impact of large scale events on communities;
  - Liaised directly with large events on dates to avoid events clashing;
  - Developed a physically sustainable route, including a new route over Whitber avoiding the fragile peat of Black Dub;
  - Raised income from event organisers to pay for the routes upkeep through the Three Peaks Project;
  - Promoted the Countryside Code;
  - Promoted the use of the train and car sharing to visit Horton.
  - Asked for donations and sponsorship helping to fund a dedicated Three Peaks Ranger to maintain the rights of way in the area.
3. In addition, there are a multitude of smaller scale events organised through places of work, schools, clubs such as scouts and walking groups, as well as numerous individuals. The Authority has engaged with this wider group by:
  - Developing the Three Peaks app (for android and apple devices). This is a GPS based app, with OS maps enabling participants learn something about the National Park, and points of interest along the route. (It is currently on sale for £2.99 and was downloaded onto 1000 devices over the last year).
  - Promoting local businesses and use of services in area through the Three Peaks app, with direct website links and contact information;
  - Developing the Three Peaks page <http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/visit-the-dales/get-outdoors-dales/yorkshire-three-peaks> where maps and information can be downloaded and Three Peaks merchandise purchased.

The Three Peaks project is based on the principle of user payback – with users helping to pay to maintain the surface of the route. In 2017, 15 event organisers made a ‘donation’ totalling £4,604 based on £1 per participant. Similarly this year, 12 event organisers have donated £4,530. The Authority also receives donations directly through its website from other events and organisations. Some businesses in the area recognise the revenue Three Peak’s walkers generate for their business, and also give to the Three Peaks project. Since the project’s inception, £150k has been received, covering the annual maintenance cost of the Three Peaks route.

## Yorkshire Three Peaks Code of Conduct



The Yorkshire Three Peaks is part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park - a very special place.

The Three Peaks has become an increasingly popular location for fundraising events. **YOU** can help us keep the area special for everyone to enjoy by following the Yorkshire Three Peaks Code of Conduct:

### Parking is Limited

- Keep vehicles to a minimum, use local transport to get here or car share where possible.
- Please park considerately and do not obstruct passing places, clearways, private roads, tracks, roadside verges, gateways or pavements.



### Be Quiet!

- **Please keep noise to a minimum.** Respect the peace of people living and staying in the area.
- Keep early morning noise (from both people and vehicles) to an absolute minimum and maintain it until you are away from the village.
- Do not use bells or claxons to 'ring home' your participants at the end of their challenge.



### Leave No Trace

#### Litter...

- **Take it home!** Litter places a burden on our small, rural communities and is a blight on the landscape. If you really want to help, pick up any odd bits you see along the way.
- **Remember**, banana skins and orange peel are litter, too – they are unsightly and take years to decompose.



#### Toilets...

- **Don't get caught short!** Toilet facilities on the Three Peaks route are limited (the only public toilets are at Horton-in-Ribblesdale).
- **Do not** use the mountains as an outdoor toilet. This has significant impact on local water supplies and ecology, and is unpleasant for other visitors. If you do need to urinate, do so at least 30m from streams and burns. If you need to defecate, do so as far away as possible from buildings, streams and farm animals. Bury faeces in a shallow hole and replace the turf.



### Stay Safe

- **Be prepared!** Make sure you are well prepared in terms of kit and have a good level of fitness. Make sure you have at least one person in your group who can navigate in difficult conditions. Local mountain rescue teams are all volunteers and should only be called in an emergency.



### Give Something Back

- **Support the local community** by using local facilities and services.
- **Donate to path maintenance.** Help us look after this special place by donating a minimum of £1 per walker - visit [www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/threepicks](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/threepicks)



Enjoy yourself – but please respect those who live and work here. Come back and stay some time soon, linger, explore and enjoy the local hospitality, and get to know the place and the people.

**Let's keep the Yorkshire Three Peaks special**

Horton-in-Ribblesdale  
Parish Council



## Yorkshire Three Peaks Guidelines for Event Organisers



The spectacular landscape of the Three Peaks, which has inspired for generations, is part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and a national treasure.

The Yorkshire Three Peaks has become an increasingly popular location for fundraising events. Yours will not be the only event taking place on the route. The number of events is putting increasing pressure on the area, with considerable negative impact on residents, rescue services, the environment, and amenities.

Please extend your charity beyond the worthy cause for which you are raising money by respecting this area and its people, and ensuring your event has a minimal impact on the mountains, the local communities, and the enjoyment of others.

### When organising your event, please consider:

#### How many people?



**DO NOT** organise events with excessive Numbers, think about logistics and impact. Although it is difficult to turn people away, it is most important that events do not become too large for the communities and environment of the National Park to cope with.

#### When's best?



**AVOID BUSY PERIODS** such as bank holidays. Remember that weekends, particularly Saturdays, will be the busiest time.

**AVOID CLASHES** with other events - particularly if your group size is over 100 people - by registering your event with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

#### Parking



**CONSIDER** how you can minimise the number of vehicles your participants bring by encouraging them to car share or by arranging transport for them.

**ARRANGE** sufficient car parking for the number of participants before the event. Parking in the area is limited and large numbers of cars cause congestion, noise and disruption to residents trying to get on with their normal day-to-day activities.

**ADVISE** participants not to park inconsiderately. Vehicles should not be parked in passing places, clearways, private roads, tracks, roadside verges, gateways or pavements. Vehicles must not be parked in a dangerous position or where it causes any obstruction to the road and pavement.

#### Noise



**MAKE YOUR EVENT A QUIET ONE** that respects residents. Without considerate behaviour, they experience noise and disturbance every weekend.

**ADVISE** participants to keep early morning noise (from both people and vehicles) to an absolute minimum, and for them to maintain it until they are away from the village.

**DO NOT** use bells or claxons to 'ring home' your participants at the end of their challenge.

#### Litter



**TAKE IT HOME!** Litter places a burden on our small, rural communities and is a blight on the landscape. If you really want to help, pick up any odd bits you see along the way.

**ENCOURAGE** recycling and the use of re-useable bottles, and make drinking water available along the way - plastic bottles are a big polluter of the Three Peaks route.

**REMEMBER**, banana skins and orange peel are litter, too – they are unsightly and take two years to decompose.

## Toilets



### DON'T GET CAUGHT SHORT!

Toilet facilities on the Three Peaks route are limited (the only public toilets are at Horton-in-Ribblesdale). Large scale event organisers should provide temporary facilities - along with car parking - and, where possible, make additional arrangements at suitable locations on the route.

**ADVISE** participants not to use the mountains as an outdoor toilet. This has significant impact on local water supplies and ecology, and is unpleasant for other visitors. If you do need to urinate, do so at least 30m from streams and watercourses. If you need to defecate, do so as far away as possible from buildings, streams and farm animals. Bury faeces in a shallow hole and replace the turf.

## Signage



### WHICH WAY TO GO?

The Three Peaks route is well signed and it should not be necessary to place additional signs

## Countryside Code



### FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE!

Make sure that your participants observe the Countryside Code - see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code) It provides good, common sense guidance for how people can respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.

## Stay Safe



**BE PREPARED!** Make sure that your participants are well prepared in terms of kit and have a good level of fitness. Make sure you have at least one person in your group who can navigate in difficult conditions. The Yorkshire Three Peaks can be a challenging place at all times of the year. Local mountain rescue teams are all volunteers and should only be called in an emergency.

## Want to help?

### SUPPORT THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Responsible event organisers ensure that their event has a positive impact on the area by supporting and paying to use local facilities and services. Encourage your participants to come back and stay, linger, explore, and enjoy the local hospitality, and get to know the place and the people.



### DONATE TO PATH MAINTENANCE

The Yorkshire Three Peaks are very fragile environments and the public rights of way network is under pressure from the thousands of visitors that come to enjoy it each year. Help us look after this special place by donating a minimum of £1 per event participant. For details, see [www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/threepeaks](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/threepeaks)



### FOLLOW THE YORKSHIRE THREE PEAKS CODE OF CONDUCT

As an event organiser, the main thing you can do to help keep this place special is to promote the **Yorkshire Three Peaks Code of Conduct** and include this with the information you send to participants and at event briefings. Making participants aware how their behaviour can make a difference is vital to the long term sustainability of challenge events.

