



### Countryside Recreation Network

CRN is a network which:

- covers the UK and the Republic of Ireland
- gives easy access to information on countryside and related recreation matters
- reaches organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors networks thousands of interested people

The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals in three areas:

#### **Research:**

to encourage co-operation between members in identifying and promoting the need for research related to countryside recreation, to encourage joint ventures in undertaking research, and to disseminate information about members' recreation programmes.

#### **Liaison:**

to promote information exchange relating to countryside recreation, and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues.

#### **Good Practice:**

to spread information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of countryside recreation.

**Chair:** John Thomson, Scottish Natural Heritage

**Vice-chair:** Geoff Hughes, SportEngland

**Countryside Recreation** is free and is published four times a year. We welcome articles and letters from all readers. The copy date for the next issue is **17th May 2002 with the theme of International Year of the Mountains.**

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## Editorial

### ACCESS FOR ALL RESOLVING THE DILEMMAS

The articles in this issue of Countryside Recreation illustrate many of the dilemmas thrown up by efforts to improve the opportunities for countryside recreation and to open them up to a wider range of people. Some of these relate to the environmental impact that even quite small numbers of visitors can have in remote country with delicately poised ecosystems. Others concern the effect that recreationalists, and notably their cars, can have on the enjoyment of others, and indeed on the environment itself. Yet another – arguably better-rehearsed – set surrounds the interaction between recreational use and land management activities.

Even trickier, perhaps, are the issues involving matters of perception and even of ethics. One initial consequence of current legislation to improve access opportunities may well be to increase wariness between land managers and recreationalists. Stereotypes may actually be reinforced as each looks out even more keenly for examples of the types of unhelpful behaviour of which the other has always been suspected. And how far will the new opportunities simply be taken up by those best-equipped, financially and educationally, to do so – leaving the less affluent and well-informed little better off, despite the best intentions of the legislators?

None of these problems is easy to resolve. But their existence cannot be the excuse for abandoning the goal of better access for all. If we believe that the experience offered by countryside recreation is a truly life-enhancing one, then surely we must make it more widely available. Rather than retreating, we must search out ways of increasing participation that do not diminish the quality of the experience itself, or mean that some enjoy it at unreasonable cost to the pleasures or livelihoods of others.

The article on the future role of ranger services by Elwyn Owen and Edward Holdaway holds out a ray of hope. It offers practical suggestions, grounded in experience, as to how some at least of the challenges may be overcome. It illustrates the sort of forward-looking, creative but realistic contribution that CRN can make in a field where it can be all too tempting to assign problems to the “too difficult” category. There is of course a cost attached to its prescription of a more comprehensive coverage of countryside management services. But that price is surely one that we can afford – and which is amply justified by the wider benefits on offer. What price a healthier (in all senses of the word) and happier population at large?

John Thomson, Chairman, Countryside Recreation Network