



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: Eileen McKeever, Environment Agency

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 **13th July 2001**.

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Editorial

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) has served to focus attention on the countryside like no other issue. For weeks the UK media was full of reports of a 'crisis in the countryside', illustrated by emotive images of burning animals and the 'killing fields' of Cumbria, Devon etc.. Despite Government protestations that the countryside was open, only vets, slaughtermen and the army walked where ramblers would have tread. The hardship inflicted by this disease has been real but is has also served to highlight the many environmental benefits offered by our countryside and the economic advantages of a high quality countryside. The Financial Times, for example, reported that the English Tourism Council had advised Whitehall that businesses were losing £100m a week as a result of FMD (14/3/01).

We have resisted the temptation to devote this issue of 'Countryside Recreation' to FMD but are keen to ensure that the next issue includes a series of articles reflecting on the experience of government agencies, the voluntary sector, local authorities, private landowners and businesses. What are the key lessons to be learnt, from a recreation perspective:

- How can our experience of closing and opening rights of way during the FMD outbreak help us in implementing the provisions of the CROW Act?
- Have users been responsible?
- How come footpath closed signs could be posted, in a matter of days, when, in some instances, local authorities have been unable to sign footpaths despite having a legal duty to do so and over 50 years to implement it?
- What can we learn from risk assessment procedures?
- What lessons are there for 'joined-up government'?
- To farm or not to farm? etc.

If you would like to contribute to this discussion please contact the CRN office.

The most notable beast to be culled as a result of FMD was MAFF itself. As DEFRA (the new Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) rises, phoenix like, from the flames that engulfed MAFF, it is to be hoped that the new Department will be able to champion a process of fundamental change that implements a transition to rural sustainability and one that extends from Whitehall to the village hall.

Given the above it is perhaps ironic that this issue of 'Countryside Recreation' contains articles looking at: the growing importance of health and well-being tourism (will FMD lead to an increase in stress related illness?); the development of visitor pay back initiatives; and countryside access through agri-environment schemes. Plus, the obligatory letter on Windermere!

Dr Kevin Bishop, Cardiff University