

News Releases

NEW EXPLORER MAPS FROM ORDNANCE SURVEY

From March this year, 3 new areas of the country have been covered by the Ordnance Survey Explorer Map Series. Map numbers 276 (Northwich and Delamere Forest), 278 (Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham) and 245 (National Forest) have been on sale since 23rd March.

Ordnance Survey have also started to include sites owned by the Woodland Trust on the Ordnance Survey Explorer maps. The Woodland Trust's sites can be identified by a purple border and an oak leaf symbol. Trust Chief Executive, Mike Townsend, says: "Now that our woodlands are being marked on these maps, it makes it much easier for people to see where their nearest freely accessible woods are." Woodland Trust sites are also marked on the Ordnance Survey's Outdoor Leisure Map Series.

For more information about the Ordnance Survey visit their website at: www.ordnancesurvey.gov.uk

For more information about the Woodland Trust, tel: 01476 581111 or visit their website at: www.woodland-trust.org.uk

THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT OF ENGLAND AND WALES - THE LAND.

The Environment Agency published the 4th in a series of "The State of the Environment" reports in March. The report "The State of the Environment of England and Wales - the Land" looks at the increased use of the land as a resource over the past century and asks how the land is coping with this use, whether our use of resources is sustainable and whether we are doing enough to protect the land for future generations. "We hope the new report will help cast the Environment Agency's responsibilities into the wider context of issues concerning the state of the land, and draw attention to what could be done more generally," says Dr Jan Pentreath, Chief Scientist for the Environment Agency.

The Environment Agency have identified five challenges to which the Agency feels solutions need to be found:

Development Pressures: Need to restrict development in floodplains, make city-living a magnet once more, make better use of brown field sites and bring contaminated land back into use.

New thinking on farming: Greater adoption of agri-environment schemes.

Health check of terrestrial species: Monitoring possible problems like hormone-disruption and crop health.

Human health: Understanding the links between the environment and health issues.

Soil quality: The Agency is developing new techniques and will encourage other organisations to monitor soil quality and quantity to establish a national soil information bank.

The report covers a wide range of information and research, identifying trends and also inconsistencies in the data. The following six priorities for action have been identified:

Addressing climate change. This may bring benefits in terms of a longer growing season, but could significantly affect wildlife and the risk of flooding.

Better use of land-based resources. The population and number of households are rising. As a society, we are using too much and wasting too much.

Improving the condition of soils. Soils perform many functions, knowledge of their quality is limited but improving, and there is growing recognition of their importance. Farming practices have reduced soil organic matter contents in many areas, but more comprehensive information is needed.

Reversing the loss and degradation of habitats and species. Habitats, essential for our wildlife, have been lost through urbanisation, afforestation and changes in farming practices.

Addressing the risk of flooding. This depends on many factors including land use in catchments and

the extent of developments in floodplains, as well as increasing awareness of the risk.

Enhancing urban and landscape quality. This forms a key element in people's quality of life but there is no agreed way of defining what it is and how it is changing over time. It is recognised, however, that more needs to be done to improve the quality of life in urban areas.

The State of the Environment reports are available from the Stationery Office. For more information tel: 0870 600 5522 or visit the Stationery Office website at www.tsonline.co.uk

For more information about the activities of the Environment Agency visit their website at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk or tel: 0845 933 3111.

NEW BOUNDARIES FOR THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

As of 1st April 2000 the Forestry Commission has 8 new regional boundaries in England.

The regions are: North East England Conservancy, Yorkshire and the Humber Conservancy, North West England Conservancy, East Midlands Conservancy, West Midlands Conservancy, East England Conservancy, South West England Conservancy, and South East England Conservancy.

For information on the regions and addresses contact the National Office for England, tel: 01223 314546 or visit the web site at: www.forestry.gov.uk

FREE FARMERS TOOLKIT

The Landcare Partnership, led by the Environment Agency, is working to raise awareness among farmers in the Salisbury area with the aim of improving the water quality of the River Avon. The kit provides information and advice about the problems of soil erosion and the damaging effect on rivers, and how good management can save money whilst improving the environment. It will be distributed free

to around 350 farmers in the area.

The Landcare Partners are; National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association, MAFF (Farming and Rural Conservation Agency), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Wiltshire County Council, Salisbury District Council, Wessex Water, Bournemouth and West Hants Water Co, British Independent Agricultural Consultants, Game Conservancy Trust, MOD (Defence Estates Organisation), English Nature, Wiltshire Fisheries Association, Wessex Salmon and Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency. The project is funded by English Nature.

For further information please contact Public Relations, The Environment Agency, tel: 01392 444000 or visit the Environment Agency website at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

NEW SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

On 13th April the Countryside Agency announced that it would begin the process of designating the South Downs as a National Park.

The Countryside Agency are working on developing a vision of what the Downs, as a National Park, can accomplish. Marion Spain, Officer in charge of designation, said that before the boundary for the park can be defined it is necessary to increase public awareness and identify which areas of the current AONBs would benefit most. When the draft boundary is finally drawn up it will be subject to widespread public consultation.

The Countryside Agency are also looking to the future and considering how to maximise the recreational potential of the Downs whilst ensuring that areas of downland are restored and protected.

It is estimated that the designation process will take 2 - 3 years to complete.

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board have called

for all interested parties to work together to find the best possible solution for the Downs in the light of the Countryside Agency decision.

Lord Renton, the Board's Chairman, emphasised that "what is important is that it (the body in charge of the National Park) has sufficient powers to ensure the South Downs remain the unique feature of the countryside that they are today and that it has the confidence of the local people."

The Board outlined the following points as key areas to ensure future of the Downs:

- Conservation of the Downs must be properly funded to take into account:
 - landscape restoration to protect internationally rare wildlife
 - protection of the unique historic treasures within the South Downs
 - protection and extension of the remaining 3% of chalk grassland
- Sufficient involvement in planning to ensure that at the highest level, and within a framework of local accountability, the best interests of the South Downs will be fully taken into account to prevent any damaging development.
- A mandate to help those who live and work in the area in order that there is a healthy local economy to support the South Downs and its conservation
- Proper management of the large recreation demands of the area
 - promoting opportunities for quiet informal enjoyment
 - providing the resources to ensure full understanding of the special qualities of the area so that visitors are encouraged to enjoy the area without damaging it

West Sussex County Council is concerned that the designation of the South Downs as a National Park should take into account the differing landscape types that make up the South Downs.

Ian Elliott, Chairman of West Sussex County Council, questions the need for the National Park designation saying "...the local authorities and the Sussex Downs Conservation Board have done an impressive job in managing the South Downs for recreational purposes..." and asks how it could be managed better by a National Park Authority.

Concern was also expressed by Mr Elliott over the need to consider the Downs as a part of their surroundings, especially in relation to planning issues, rather than isolating them. He said that the area "cannot be properly managed in isolation" and calls for special provisions to prevent the National Park Authority having sole planning control of the area of Downs included in the National Park

"All this could be made to work if the Government was genuinely willing to accept the challenge of a tailor-made Park for the Downs. This would ensure the protection of the proper interests of the communities by creating unique planning arrangements. These would challenge the local councils to maintain and build on their outstanding protective commitment to the Downs".

For more information visit the following web-sites:

www.westsussex.gov.uk

www.countryside.gov.uk

or contact Martin Beaton, Sussex Downs Officer, tel: 01903 741234.

Sussex Downs on the Web

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board, in partnership with the East Hampshire Joint Advisory Committee and the Countryside Agency, have developed the South Downs Virtual Information Centre. The website holds information about the South Downs including links to Tourist Information Centres and will also promote public transport links.

Find out more about the site at: www.vic.org.uk

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE BACKS COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS PROJECT

Nick Brown, the Minister for Agriculture is backing the BT Millennium Miles initiative which aims to identify 2,000 miles of navigable countryside which is suitable for access by people with a disability. It is hoped that by the end of 2001, 1,000 Millennium Miles will be identified in England, 500 miles in Wales and 250 miles each in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Nick Brown MP commented: "The Government's new Countryside and Rights of Way Bill is intended to bring better opportunities to the countryside by giving all walkers a statutory right of access to open countryside and introducing improvements to the rights of way system."

BT, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales and other Government Agencies, including the Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland and Scottish Natural Heritage, have all given financial support to the project. It is also being supported by the main organisations representing disability in the UK, including RNIB, Scope and Radar, as well as other bodies such as the Forestry Commission, the National Trust, and the Ramblers Association.

For further information about the BT Millennium Miles project please contact Phil Chambers at the Fieldfare Trust, tel: (0114) 270 1668, or e-mail Fieldfare@btinternet.com.

THE STATE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE 2000

The Countryside Agency have published the second in their annual series of the State of the Countryside reports.

For copies of the report contact Countryside Agency Publications, tel: 0870 120 6466.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

In April the Environment Agency published its

"1998/99 Annual Conservation, Access and Recreation Report" which includes case studies and information on numbers and types of sites used for recreation and/or conservation.

For copies of this report contact the Environment Agency, tel: 01454 624 409.

INCREASE IN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

The Association for Outdoor Learning (AfOL) reports a strong upsurge in use of the outdoors and adventure in schools and in youth work this year and for the future. This is a result of a telephone survey of 100 organisations who provide or use outdoor adventure to support the development of young people. Many organisations taking part reported increases in staff numbers and programme variety as a result of an increase in client numbers.

For further details contact: Association for Outdoor Learning on tel 01768 891065 or e-mail: afol@adventure-ed.co.uk.

BETTER BEACHES IN BRITAIN

The Marine Conservation Society has reported an increase in the number of clean beaches for holiday makers to visit in 2000. Kate Hutchinson, Coastal Pollution Officer for the Marine Conservation Society, said that this is a result of the extensive clean up programmes, with "fewer beaches failing the minimum water quality standard".

The Good Beach Guide, produced by the Marine Conservation Society, provides information on activities, amenities, bathing safety and disabled access for recommended beaches and is available on the web at: www.goodbeachguide.co.uk. A hardcopy is also available containing information on water quality and sewage discharges for over 1000 beaches in the UK.

For more information on the Marine Conservation Society visit their web site at: www.mcsuk.org or tel: 01989 566017

DETR CONSULTATION PAPER - GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT PAYMENTS

DETR are inviting views on the proposed revisions to the Financial Guidelines for Management Agreements, the final document of which will replace DoE/MAFF Circular 4/83. It is intended to accompany legislation changes concerning Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), on their notification, protection and management, included in the Countryside Rights of Way Bill.

Further copies of the report are available from: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, PO Box, Wetherby, West Yorkshire. LS23 7NB. Tel: 0870 1226 236.

To take part in this consultation comments or representations should be sent in writing to Mrs Jenny Wilson, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Room 922 Tollgate House, Houlton Street, Bristol, BS2 9DJ, or by e-mail to jenny_wilson@detr.gsi.gov.uk no later than 11th August 2000.

MARINE BIODIVERSITY WEBSITE

www.irishsea-mis.org is the new website for the Irish Sea Marine Information System and provides information relevant to the Pembrokeshire and Wexford marine and coastal area, including topics on biodiversity, conservation, tourism and recreation.

The project was started in 1999 as a partnership between the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), Pembrokeshire County Council (Wales), the Marine Institute (Ireland) and Wexford County Council (Ireland) to produce a demonstration Marine Information System for the coastal zone and adjacent marine area of Pembrokeshire and Wexford. The project was funded by the EU Maritime INTERREG Programme.

For further information on the MIS contact:

Chris Uttley (CCW) tel: +44 (0)1248 385660 or e-mail: c.uttley@ccw.gov.uk

Martina Hennessy (Marine Institute) tel: +353 (0) 14766536 or e-mail: Martina.Hennessy@maritime.ie

LAUNCH OF "GET BRITAIN MOVING" CAMPAIGN

An initiative to "Get Britain Moving" was launched on the 26th May. Developed by Tetley Tea in conjunction with the British Olympic Association, the project's aim is to increase the activity levels of the British public by encouraging people to build exercise and a healthier diet into their lifestyles.

This initiative follows the publication of the Tetley Activity 2000 Report which shows Britain as the "fattest nation in Europe", and is strongly supported by the Government.

Get Moving is being run through 200 leisure centres nationwide and everyone signing up receives a Get Moving starter pack and a water bottle.

Information is also available on the web at: www.sydneyesportsstuff.co.uk or tel: 0845 601 1714.

WATERWAY RESTORATION SURVEY

Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (IWAAC) has launched its new survey of canal restoration projects, including hundreds of miles of waterways and dozens of historic canal structures. It follows on from the 1998 survey and report "Waterway Restoration Priorities".

The survey was sent out in March 2000, the re-assessment process will take place from July by the Council and the review will be published later this year.

For more information on this survey contact IWAAC, tel: 020 725 31745 or e-mail: iwaac@btinternet.com

BIODIVERSITY IN ACTION

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) have been inviting Farmers and the general public to join their local FWAG on a farm walk to see how Farm Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) can encourage a rich diversity of wildlife to flourish on commercially run farms.

Biodiversity in Action was the theme for this year's National Farm Walk Week which began on 29th May and continued throughout June to allow more people to take part. Carole Ferguson of Bayer plc. said that: "the way forward in producing Biodiversity Action Plans for each county is to create a working partnership not only between FWAG and farmers but also including wildlife conservation groups, local authorities, commercial companies and individuals. Farm Walk Week is an excellent opportunity for the public and neighbouring farmers to see how action to improve wildlife habitats can be readily incorporated in to the whole farm management plan."

For further information about FWAG and its activities contact Jane Hampson, tel: 02476 696699.

THE VALUE OF DAY VISITS

On 27th May the Countryside Agency launched the research note "English Countryside Day Visits", which is taken from "Leisure Day Visits" Report of the 1998 UK Day Visits Survey.

The main findings include:

- the volume of trips in 1998 (1,253 million) is similar to 1996
- £8.4 billion spend in 1998 is a significant increase from 1996 (+25% after adjusting for inflation)
- the average distance travelled to the countryside is 17.3 miles
- 63% of visitors are in the ABC1 social grade
- 87% of visitors own or have access to a car
- each visitor spending over 3 hours in the countryside spends an average of £15.30.

The "Leisure Day Visits" full report (price £15), its free summary and the free "English Countryside Day Visits" research note are all available from Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7EP, tel: 0870 120 6466.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE CONSULTATION RESULTS

British Waterways (BW) have analysed over 16,500

responses to last year's consultation 'Partnership with the People' and the results have been summarised in their report to the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Scottish Executive.

Five recommendations have been made to the government by British Waterways as a result of the analysis of responses:

- BW should set up an improved consultative framework, both national and local. The new framework should ensure all stakeholders are represented and make special provision for stakeholders with a particular interest (such as in navigation) to discuss detailed issues.
- The Waterways Trust should be the new associated charitable trust.
- BW should launch an information based subscription service to provide local and national information to subscribers for a subscription that is less than that envisaged for the proposed membership scheme. The giving to good causes element that people wish to see should be satisfied by cause related committed giving through The Waterways Trust. BW and The Waterways Trust should respectively launch new products to be sold by the Trust as agency for BW and on its own account.
- BW should continue to give The Waterways Trust help. BW and The Waterways Trust should work to ensure the Trust establishes a clear and independent identity. The two organisations need to continue to work in partnership with each other and with other organisations for the benefit of the waterways.
- BW will make applications to The Waterways Trust to fund projects that are outside its statutory obligations for maintenance.

British Waterways is now awaiting response to the recommendations by ministers. This information was taken from the British Waterways Staff Newsletter

For more information about the consultation and the outcomes visit British Waterways website at:

HLF STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK RELEASED

The Heritage Lottery Fund has recently released its Strategic Framework for Wales 2000 - 2002. It outlines HLF's main strategic priorities which include strategic, cultural and heritage sector, and operational priorities.

For copies of the report, contact the HLF Office for Wales, tel: 029 2034 3413.

HUNTING WITH DOGS REPORT

The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales was published on the 12th June by The Stationery Office (TSO). Commissioned by the Home Secretary, the report presents the findings of the Inquiry into the following points:

- The practical aspects of different types of hunting with dogs and its impact on the rural economy, agriculture and pest control, the social and cultural life of the countryside, the management and conservation of wildlife and animal welfare in particular areas of England and Wales.
- The consequences for these issues of any ban on hunting with dogs
- How any ban might be implemented

The report is available from The Stationery Office (TSO) bookshops, cost £32.50, or on 0870 600 5522 quoting ISBN 0 10 147632 9. It is also available on the TSO website: www.thestationeryoffice.co.uk

GREATER PROTECTION FOR AONBS

Environment Minister, Michael Meacher, announced on 13th June that new measures are to be included in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill which will strengthen the statutory status for AONBs.

For more information see the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions website: www.press.detr.gov.uk/0006/0416.htm

RIGHTS OF WAY SURVEY

The Countryside Agency is calling for volunteers to join in their rights of way survey looking into the condition of England's rights of way.

Professional surveyors have already started work assessing whether rights of way are easy to follow; checking whether good signage is in place and whether obstacles obscure the paths. The survey is to find out how useable the network is and to identify the main factors that affect its condition.

The public is also being asked to take part by signing up to an area containing 9 – 15 km of paths and reporting back on the routes. Cyclists, walkers and horse riders are all being encouraged to take part, with an interactive website allowing people to register as surveyors, select a survey area and download a database, manual and forms.

For more information contact Gavin Stark on 01242 533444. Send contact details including a broad indication of the area in which you are prepared to work, to: Survey Manager, exeGesIS, SDM Ltd, Great House Barn, New Street, Talgarth, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0AH.