

News Releases

VOLUNTEERING AT THE NATIONAL TRUST

The National Trust has launched a new website for Volunteers to allow people to choose which aspects of volunteering they would like to become involved with. The site was created with much input from existing National Trust volunteers and contains personal testimonies along with details about environmental conservation volunteering opportunities and information on the Trust's Working Holidays.

*For further information, visit the Volunteer website:
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/volunteers*

FUNDING FOR RURAL RAILWAYS

The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACORP) has been promised new funding from the Countryside Agency (£161,000), the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority (£37,500) and the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust (£25,000) over the next 3 years. The grants will enable ACORP to appoint a full time development officer to promote the creation of partnerships to develop local rail services.

Community rail partnerships bring together train operators, Railtrack, local authorities, passenger groups and the wider community so providing an opportunity for joint working to develop sustainable local transport networks. ACORP is the federal body for over twenty community-rail partnerships across the UK, and is resourced by Transport Research and Information Network (TR&IN).

Two research projects identifying good practice in providing rural community rail services were commissioned during 1999/2000 by the Countryside Agency and some of the findings from the research will be fed into this project.

*For more information contact TR&IN, e-mail:
train@platform8.demon.co.uk or visit the web site:
www.platform8.demon.co.uk/*

INVESTIGATING CYCLING INITIATIVES THE UK

The Cyclists Touring Club (CTC) launched a project in February 2000 to evaluate initiatives aimed at encouraging cycling in the UK. The project will use benchmarking to assess implemented policies and identify the key elements of good practice that have created successful schemes.

The outcome of the project will be to help participating organisations develop and take forward a cycling action plan based upon policy good practice teased out from case studies and networking with other organisations.

*Contact Tony Russell for more information, tel: 0117 925 6115 or e-mail: tony.russell@ctc.org.uk . Further information is also available on the CTC web site:
www.ctc.org.uk*

INCREASED PROTECTION FOR ENGLAND'S WILDLIFE

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, announced in August that more rare wildlife species and habitats of European importance would benefit from the highest levels of protection. In addition, a new code would be developed to encourage co-operation between organisations who advise on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and the people who own or benefit from them.

The proposals are part of revisions to the UK list of candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) and will mean that in England:

- 81 new sites will be added (including cross-border sites with Wales and Scotland), bringing the English total to 228 and the UK total to 576 cSACs
- the English cSAC series will include some additional 300,000 hectares of land, and
- 470 additional habitat types and species interest will be protected in England across the proposed and existing sites.

The proposals, under European law, will ensure the long-term protection of the sites and the species that live there:

"This major step for England's wildlife should complete the UK list of candidate SACs. It is part of the UK's contribution to the European Union's extensive network of important nature conservation sites - known as Natura 2000 - all of which are prized for their rare and threatened habitat types and wildlife species." (Prescott, 2000)

English Nature has been asked by the Government to begin consultation on the revisions to existing sites and on the new sites within England. Alternative arrangements will be made with the devolved administrations for those cross border sites into Scotland and Wales. Those sites not currently designated as SSSIs will be subject to a separate parallel consultation process. Full consultation will be carried out and all views considered before any English sites will be included in the final SAC list.

*For further information visit the DETR website:
www.detr.gov.uk*

DRAFT GUIDELINES ON MANAGING AND CONSERVING SSSIs

John Prescott launched new draft guidelines "Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Encouraging positive partnerships" for English Nature and public bodies on the protection, management and conservation of England's 4,000 SSSIs, with special emphasis on the importance of partnerships between landowners/managers and English Nature.

The draft guidelines reflect new measures in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act which are expected to improve protection of SSSIs. They include advice on a variety of management and conservation issues, including;

- Notification of sites
- Establishing management schemes
- Consulting with landowners or occupiers
- Dealing with applications for potentially damaging activities

The guidelines set out English Nature's powers to ensure positive management of sites where the

condition of the site is deteriorating and a management agreement to remedy this is impossible. They also explain Ministers' expectations of public bodies in carrying out their new duties and responsibilities towards SSSIs as set out in the CROW Act.

Full details of the sites proposed for consultation will be made available in DETR libraries, and the Libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Copies of the guidelines are available from: DETR Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7NB. Tel: 0870 1226 236

OPENING OF FIRST MILLENNIUM MILES ROUTE

The first BT Millennium Miles Route was opened at Tideswell Dale in the heart of the Peak District by Roy Hattersley, former MP on 8th September. The path was audited to ensure that it met with the Millennium Miles standards and will now be included on a national database, which will be accessible on the web by the end of 2001 and as a written publication.

The Fieldfare Trust is distributing information packs to all local authorities in the UK. The Millennium Miles project aims to identify at least 2,000 miles of countryside paths accessible for people with disabilities across the UK by the end of 2001 (1000 miles in England, 500 miles in Wales and 250 miles each in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

For more information contact Graham Attridge, tel: 0114 270 1668 or e-mail: Fieldfare@btinternet.com

LAUNCH OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Nick Brown, Agricultural Minister launched the £1.6 billion English Rural Development Plan (ERDP) on 3rd October 2000. The Programme was drawn up following government department collaboration and consultation with farmers and is a major step towards switching government spending for agriculture from production support towards schemes which boost the wider rural economy.

Four new schemes are being launched as part of the Programme and are aimed at:

- developing the rural economy and the processing and marketing of agricultural products
- establishment of energy crops
- broadening the skills base of the agricultural and forestry workforce

Existing schemes will also receive extra budgets:

- to enhance the farmed environment
- plant/manage farm woodlands
- convert to organic farming
- develop support for hill farming

Expenditure for schemes are outlined below:

Rural Economy and Communities

- a new Rural Enterprise Scheme with expenditure rising from £8m in 2001/02 to £36m in 2004/05; a total of £152m over the Programme period for providing targeted assistance to support the development of more sustainable, diversified, enterprising rural economies and communities;
- a Processing and Marketing Grant with expenditure rising from £4 million in 2001/02 to £8 million a year thereafter; a total of £44 million to encourage innovation and investment to achieve added value for English primary products and to improve market opportunities;
- a new Vocational Training Scheme, with total expenditure of £22m over seven years, with £4m a year by 2003/04 for providing assistance for training activities with the objective of broadening the skills base of agricultural and forestry workforce;
- an increase, from £24m in 2000/01 to £36m in 2006/07 for the creation of new woodlands and supporting the management of existing woodlands for the benefit of rural economies and the rural environment: a total of £139m will be spent under the Woodland Grant Scheme and £77m under the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, in the plan period;

- the introduction of a new Energy Crops Scheme to provide grants for establishing energy crops and producer groups; expenditure rising to £5m a year by 2002/03 to encourage planting of miscanthus and short rotation coppice.

Rural Environment

- a doubling, from £97m in 2000/01 to £197m in 2006/07 of funds for conserving and improving the landscape, wildlife and historic heritage of the countryside and aid for farmers converting to organic farming. This will mean more than £1bn on continuing the Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme, and on expanding the Countryside Stewardship and Organic Farming schemes, with £140m of this for organics;
- from 2001, the new Hill Farm Allowance Scheme to help preserve the farmed upland environment and contribute to the maintenance of the social fabric of upland communities; a total of £239 million over 6 years.

A separate scheme to deliver advice and assistance through free access to trained small business advisers for farmers seeking to diversify their enterprises will be launched separately the Ministry.

For more information on the ERDP visit Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) web site: www.maff.gov.uk/erdp/default.htm

A short summary document can be obtained (MAFF): MAFF Publications, Admail 6000 London SW1A 2XX, tel: 08459 556000 (Please quote reference PB4864 to obtain copies)

WALKING FOR HEALTH

The Countryside Agency and British Heart Foundation (backed by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) and Kia Cars launched the initiative "Walking the Way to Health" on 11th October.

The £12 million programme (over 5 years) will help local partnerships of health, leisure and community

interests develop schemes promoting walking for health. The initiative aims to increase people's general health, quality of life and mental health by encouraging them to get more exercise and so reduce the risk of Coronary Heart Disease. The schemes will be targeting those people who do little exercise or live in areas of poor health to take up regular walking. It is estimated that 7 out of every 10 people do not take enough exercise to benefit their health.

For more information contact the WHI Team, Countryside Agency, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham, GL50 3RA, tel: 01242 533258 or visit the web site at: www.whi.org.uk

TIMBERLAND SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL

The Forest of Avon Mountain Bike Group have won an award from Timberland UK for £20,000. The funding will cover the development of a new trail close to Bristol city centre, the Avon Timberland Trail, to provide cyclists with easy-to-access good off-road facilities with a mix of exciting and challenging mix of riding for all abilities. It is hoped that the new trail will encourage cyclists away from ecologically sensitive sites in the area and reduce the risk of conflict of interests by concentrating cyclists away from other woodland users, e.g. dog walkers.

To ensure the long term success and sustainability of the venture additional funds are being sought to cover the appointment of a Trail Ranger, who will undertake ongoing trail maintenance, organise events and educate new and current users.

For further details contact Sam Burkley at the Forest Office, tel: 0117 953 2141 or e-mail: community@forestofavon.org

GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONS RESEARCH ON WATER-BASED SPORT AND RECREATION

In October Chris Mullin, Environment Minister, announced a research project to establish the current state of access to water for sport and recreation in England and Wales. It is estimated that 10 million people participate in water-based recreation.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act will open up access to 11% of the countryside in England and Wales to people on foot. There has been a much debate about whether access to water should be included in the CROW Act, with a strong campaign for inclusion being led by canoeists. In response research is being funded by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, Sport England, the Environment Agency, British Waterways, the Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales.

The research is expected to cover many forms of sport and recreation; canoeing, angling, sailing, rowing, dragon boating, waterskiing, power boating, jetskiing and bathing on inland waters in England and Wales. It will seek to address:

- Current levels of participation in water-based activities
- The scale and nature of demand for a range of water-based activities
- The scope for negotiating new access by agreement with landowners
- Which waterways and other water spaces are important to different users
- Areas of conflict between users, and how those conflicts are being or might be resolved

The project is expected to take 9 months to complete.

For further information visit the DETR web site at: www.detr.gov.uk

FUNDING FOR PATHS FOR ALL

The Paths for All Partnership has been allocated an additional £200,000 by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) this year with more promised for 2001. The Scottish Executive has also announced that it will be increasing the budget for 'natural heritage' over the next three years, £13.6 million by 2003/ 4. A proportion of this extra funding will be aimed at providing extra investment in path networks.

Paths for All are keen to show that the benefits of path networks cover many areas of policy priorities, not just

recreation but also health, tourism, land management, community, transport, economy, environment and sustainability.

For more information contact Paths for All, e-mail: info@pathsforall.org.uk

URBAN IMPROVEMENT REDUCING PRESSURE ON COUNTRYSIDE AREAS.

The Urban White Paper, 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future', was published on 16th November, highlighted the importance of improving the urban environment by provision of good quality greenspace in towns and cities.

This long-term strategy aims to invest more in urban areas making them more attractive places to live so bringing people back into towns and city centres and reducing the pressure on the countryside.

'Our Towns and Cities: The Future' includes:

- Incentives aimed at encouraging investment in urban areas (£1 billion over 5 years)
- New Planning Policy Guidance to put urban renaissance at the heart of the urban planning system
- A programme to improve the quality of parks, play areas and open spaces
- A stronger economic drive including more money and flexibility for the Regional Development Agencies, a bigger focus on skills and a new £100 million public - private - partnership for the English Cities Fund
- A drive for better education and health services and more access to jobs
- Dedicated funding for parks and greenspaces from the New Opportunities Fund (£96 million) and the Heritage Lottery Fund (£225 million), and a new green flags scheme to encourage and reward excellence in managing parks and green spaces
- 12 new Urban Regeneration Companies and 5 more Millennium Villages
- targeting crime
- creation of Local Strategic Partnerships to help local communities help themselves

- how the £180 billion 10-year transport plan fits into the improvement of urban areas

Further details can be found on the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions website: www.detr.gov.uk

Copies of the DETR report 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance (ISBN 0 10 149112 3, £28) and the Government's response to the paper (ISBN 0 10 149122 0, £6.95) are available from The Stationery Office (TSO), tel: 0845 7023 474 or online at: www.thestationeryoffice.co.uk (quoting relevant ISBN) .

YORKSHIRE DALES LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

The National Park Authority is reviewing the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan, containing detailed policies against which planning applications for new development in the Dales are assessed. The Issues Report is now available for comments prior to the preparation of the 1st Deposit Local Plan. Formal consultation will take place upon the completion of the 1st Deposit Local Plan, to be published in June 2001.

For further information visit the Yorkshire Dales National Park website: www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

COMMUNITY WOODS MARK MILLENNIUM

The Woodland Trust project "Woods on Your Doorstep" has reached its target of creating 200 new community woods across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, totalling 880 hectares (exceeding expected total by 8%). The project was run by the Woodland Trust with £10.5 million funding from the Millennium Commission. It was also supported by the Forestry Commission, Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts and Homebase.

Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport said that: "Woods on your Doorstep has captured public imagination as a fitting and lasting way of marking the millennium." The aim of the project was to provide woods to will enhance the landscape, improve biodiversity and bring recreational

and quality of life benefits for future generations to enjoy. Thousands of local people were involved in the project helping to identify sites, secure funding to buy and plant the site. The project has also created new habitats; ponds, marshes, meadows and hedgerows.

For further information visit the Woodland Trust website: www.woodland-trust.org.uk

'OUR COUNTRYSIDE: THE FUTURE. A FAIR DEAL FOR RURAL ENGLAND'

The Rural White Paper, 'Our Countryside: The Future. A Fair Deal For Rural England' was launched on 29th November 2000 by Michael Meacher, Environment Minister.

The White Paper aims to tackle the problems rural communities face with rural services, changes to farming and pressures of development, and to provide local communities with a toolkit of measures that can be applied to develop appropriate local solutions. It aims to balance the needs of rural communities with the needs of the countryside, recognising the diversity and local distinctiveness (environmental, economic and social) that makes up England's countryside.

The Government has outlined its Rural Policy Objectives, which are based on the policy evaluation set out in the PIU report and the results and feedback from the consultation "Rural England" that was first published in 1998. The objectives are:

1. To facilitate the development of dynamic, competitive and sustainable economies in the countryside tackling poverty in rural areas; including supporting and encouraging farm business diversification, and better rural services to combat poverty and social exclusion.
2. To maintain and stimulate communities, and secure access to services which is equitable in all the circumstances, for those who live or work in the countryside; including more flexible and demand responsive local transport.

3. To conserve and enhance rural landscapes and the diversity and abundance of wildlife (including the habitats on which it depends); including protection for the countryside through development redirection from green field sites, maintaining the quality of valued landscapes, and a holistic approach for assessing landscape value.
4. To increase opportunities for people to get enjoyment from the countryside. To open up public access to mountain, moor, heath and down and registered common land by the end of 2005; increasing access to land (set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill) and improving management and recreation potential on the urban fringe.
5. To promote government responsiveness to rural communities through better working together between central departments, local government, and government agencies and better co-operation with non-government bodies; including rural assessment of policy making and implementation.

Agencies involved in delivering key elements of the Rural White Paper have been granted additional funding of £35 million to help the countryside and wildlife.

- £17 million for the Countryside Agency, £10 million of which will be allocated for new initiatives including the Parish Transport Fund. The remainder amount will be divided up including £2.2 million for the Rural Transport Partnership Scheme and £3.5 million for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and preparations for the introduction of access to open country.
- £8 million for English Nature to increase conservation of wildlife, with particular emphasis on implementation of the new provisions for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill
- £8.5 million for the Regional Development Agencies, £6 million of which goes towards market town development.

*Further details can be found on the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions website:
www.detr.gov.uk*

Copies of the full document are available from The Stationery Office (Priced £28), tel: 0845 7023 474. Copies of the summary booklet (product code OORD1023) are available from The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, DETR Free Literature, PO Box No 236, Wetherby, LS23 7NB, tel: 0870 1226 236.

RIGHTS OF WAY DISCUSSION GROUP

A Rights of Way bulletin board has been set up to try and counter the problems affecting rights of way groups due to lack of contact and information between user groups and Land Owner associations. The site hopes to promote discussion and all points of view are welcome - both positive and negative.

*For further information visit the website:
<http://pub37.ezboard.com/brightsofwaydiscussiongroup>*

CLIMATE CHANGE: THE UK PROGRAMME

The report 'Climate Change: The UK Programme' was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister at the Hague and sets out the UK's programme for delivering its promise to reduce green house gas emissions and looks at the changes needed to reduce emissions in the longer term.

Copies of the DETR report 'Climate Change: The UK Programme' (ISBN 0 10 149132 8 3, £25) are available from The Stationery Office (TSO), tel: 0845 7023 474 or online at: www.thestationeryoffice.co.uk (quoting relevant ISBN).