

Feature

NO

CYCLISTS AND HORSE RIDERS ARE EXCLUDED FROM ENGLAND'S NEWEST NATIONAL TRAIL. CYCLING UK IS CHALLENGING THIS, AS DUNCAN DOLLIMORE EXPLAINS

WAY!



DUNCAN DOLLIMORE

Head of campaigns

There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing. You'll often hear cyclists say this. The source of the quote is that famous fell walker, author, and creator of the coast-to-coast (CtC) route between St Bees in the Lake District and Robin Hood's Bay on the Yorkshire coast, Alfred Wainwright. Perhaps it's not surprising that many of Wainwright's famous walking quotes can equally be applied to cycling – leisure cycling, particularly mountain biking, is in many ways just rambling on wheels.

You might think we'd celebrate the decision to create a new national trail in England, broadly along Wainwright's existing route. Many Cycling UK members enjoy rambling on foot, and Cycling UK is keen to promote the benefits of outdoor access. But there's a problem: the new national trail is solely for walkers.

“ DIRECTING NATIONAL TRAIL FUNDING ONLY TO WALKERS IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY ”

Cycling UK wants to see more national trails. When a route is designated a national trail, it gets additional funding for maintenance and promotion – £5.6million in this case. Directing that funding only to walkers is a missed opportunity. It could have been a multi-user trail. Just two of England's 16 national trails are multi-user ones that cyclists and horse riders can also enjoy.

ACCESS FOR ALL

Now I know this is a sensitive issue, so I'll accept straight away that not every section of every national trail is suitable as a multi-user route. However, in addition to the Pennine Bridleway and the South Downs Way, which are both multi-user, there are national trails like the North Downs Way that already have multiple sections of bridleway which cyclists and horse riders can use. Yet they just don't link together to create a continuous trail.

That's why, four years ago, we found a workaround on the North Downs Way, showing that it was possible to create a 'braided route'. On our North Downs Way alternative route, cyclists are diverted from the walked route for short sections to create a continuous, rideable route.

That route on the North Downs Way exists only as GPX file. It isn't signposted on the ground, hasn't been promoted as a national trail, and doesn't attract national trail funding. But the fact that we could come up with an alternative route shows that it's straightforward to cater for cyclists and horse riders when creating new national trails or re-imagining an existing one. All it really takes is some creative thinking, the upgrade of a few footpaths to bridleways, and the inclusion of some 'braided' sections.

That's why Cycling UK and British Horse Society (BHS) are so frustrated by the actions and decisions of both