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For immediate release

Rights of Way not fit for purpose finds Off-Road cycling survey

Cycling UK and Open MTB today (Friday 17 November) issued the preliminary results from their Off-Road survey which found 74% of the participants consider the current rights of way unsuitable for off-road cycling.

The survey ran from 24 August until 31 October, during which time 11,482 people completed the survey. The results are currently being analysed by Cycling UK and a full report will be released in early 2017.

Initial findings show the off-road and mountain biking community back Cycling UK's position that the archaic rights of way in England and Wales are not suitable for the 21st century. Over 50% of participants chose their number one off-road campaign goal to be on "increased access".

Under current laws cyclists have a right to use a mere 22% of England's rights of way network, and 21% in Wales. Whether a route is a footpath, a bridleway or a byway is generally determined by its history of past usage, and not at all by its suitability. This can mean cycling may be permitted on an unrideable muddy bridleway but not on a tarmac-surfaced footpath, even where it is used privately by motor vehicles.

Cycling UK argues responsible access laws would not just benefit tourism and the leisure industry, but would also enhance the opportunities for motor traffic-free cycling (52% said they use footpaths "to avoid traffic danger").

The survey has also revealed the importance placed on off-road cycling for both physical and mental health, with 90% considering it fairly or very important for their physical health and 91% fairly or very important for their mental health.

Other findings include:

- 66% of rights of way rides are local, beginning at the rider's door
- 65% of those using footpaths quote "lack of choice"
- 62% say off-road cycling is their primary form of exercise

Paul Tuohy, Cycling UK's CEO, said:

"While the national media might see cycling in terms of gold medals, the unprecedented interest in our survey shows there's a lively and vibrant off-road community that has real concerns which Government is not listening to or doing anything about. This must change.

"The rights of way system harks back to the era when the horse and carriage was the height of transport technology, and unfortunately it hasn't changed much since then while the rest of the world has moved on.

“So many responses extolled the mental and physical health benefits of heading out on to the trails, and Cycling UK wants to make it easier for more people to enjoy the benefits of cycling away from traffic in the beauty of our extensive countryside.

“It’s going to be quite a battle to change the outdated laws and attitudes which have prevented progress so far, but we managed it in Scotland, and with the off-road and mountain biking community’s help, we can do it too in England and Wales.”

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Notes to editors

1. Cycling UK, at 138 years old, is Britain’s oldest transport organisation and until recently was known as CTC, the national cycling charity.
www.cyclingsuk.org
2. Open MTB is a campaign group formed to represent the views of mountain bike enthusiasts. For further information go to: www.facebook.com/OpenMTB
3. An infographic of the findings is available for download at:
https://www.cyclingsuk.org/sites/default/files/media_library/users/SamJones/off-road_survey_findings.jpg
4. Cycling UK has a long established history of facilitating better access to the countryside. In 1968 Cycling UK secured access for cycles to use bridleways. The organisation later fought successfully for a presumed access policy in the Scottish Land Reform Act (2003), and ensured that the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) included provision for restricted byways rights to be claimed on the basis of past cycle use.
5. Cycling UK most recently called for England to adopt an open access policy similar to Scotland in its response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry: <https://www.cyclingsuk.org/press-release/2016-09-07/%E2%80%9Ccopy-scotland%E2%80%9D-benefit-rural-economy>
6. Cycling UK have also campaigned for increased access in Wales with its Trails for Wales campaign, www.cyclingsuk.org/campaign/trails-wales following the Welsh Government consultation: ‘Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation’
<http://gov.wales/consultations/environmentandcountryside/improving-opportunities-to-access-the-outdoors/?lang=en>. The Green Paper received 5,796 total responses, with over 4,000 responses backing Cycling UK’s calls for adoption of Scottish-style access laws.
7. For Cycling UK’s full policy on off-road issues use the “Off-road access” filter on this page: <https://www.cyclingsuk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings>