



Save Our Paths

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### **The costs of repairing off-roader damage to the Berwyn Mountains**

Off-road motorbikes and 4x4s drivers are vandalising the beautiful landscape of the Berwyn mountains. Local farmers and the authorities are spending thousands of pounds in what may be vain attempts to stop the damage.

Some years ago off-roaders caused so much damage to the heather moorland and Iron Age hillfort on the Llantysilio hills that Natural Resources Wales and Denbighshire County Council had to use funding from the Heather and Hillforts Project to replant the heather and repair the damage, and North Wales Police had to use a helicopter to video and track down the offenders. The Llantysilio hills are part of the Clywdian Range and Dee Valley AoNB (Area of outstanding Natural Beauty), an area where local and central government are required to protect and enhance the area's natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. But now off-roaders are damaging cultural heritage and natural beauty in another protected landscape near the AoNB.

The Wayfarer track is a public right of way running from Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog to near Cynwyd and to Llandrillo, crossing the Berwyn mountain range by a high pass. The initial sections of the track are tarmaced from the villages to the farm houses served by the route, but most of it is not. It is famous in cycling history, thanks to the eponymous 'Wayfarer' (the pen name of Walter McGregor Robinson), who wrote about riding it in the winter of 1919. There is a plaque in his memory at the summit of the pass. Part of the track and the summit of the pass are within a Special Area of Conservation, a designation designed to protect the area which is internationally important for its bog and heath habitats and rare birds (including hen harrier, merlin, peregrine and red kite).

But in recent years, the farmers, mountain bikers, horse riders and walkers who use this track for their work or to enjoy peaceful recreation have found its beauty and tranquillity disturbed by off-roaders. Off-roaders have gouged ruts with their vehicles on steep parts of the track, which are then further eroded by rainwater; they also go off the track, into the adjoining boggy areas. At the summit of the pass, they leave the track to 'play' on the hillocks and bogs.

This year Denbighshire County Council has had to spend over £28,000 on repairing the route, with the help of the local farmers, so that they can continue to use the track to get to their stock. Between them they have provided and laid new surfacing material, dug cross-drains and fenced off badly rutted parts of the track. Natural Resources Wales has helped farmers with the cost of fencing their land next to the route and of replacing gates across it, and is about to provide a JCB and tractor with trailer to move boulders up to the summit to try to prevent off-roaders driving off the route there. Off-roader groups have provided some labour

and a notice at the eastern end of the track asking 4x4 drivers not to damage gates and land adjacent to the track, but the bulk of the work and all of the cost has been borne by local farmers and by local and central government i.e. by the taxpayer.

But experience elsewhere shows that some off-roaders are not deterred by fences and boulders, and that repairs do not last if recreational 4x4 and motorbike use continues.

Wouldn't it be cheaper to conserve the landscape and the track by banning off-roaders from public rights of way in landscapes which are supposed to be protected?

**Save our Paths Wales**

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**<http://www.saveourpathswales.org/>**

Photos: rutted area fenced off to right of resurfaced track, off-roader damage to vegetation and bog at summit.