

DOUBLE.LL

Your hyper local magazine for Chirk & the Ceiriog Valley

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SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

The Guardian's former Environment Editor, John Vidal, writes exclusively for Double.LL on the local experts contributing to Oswestry's inaugural Nature Festival this summer.

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THE VALLEY

BIG ISSUE

How irresponsible off-roaders are impacting on the valley's livestock and landscape

CHIRK

Big 'splash' on Chirk Trout Farm

NATURE NOTES • PERSONALITY PROFILES • COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

DAMAGE

As rogue off-roaders create damage and distress with their cavalier attitudes, those who are paying the price for their actions unite and stand ready to tackle their damage. Trevor Bates explores locals' determination to protect our historic landscape.

The Ceiriog Valley attracts visitors from across Britain and all around the globe. Most come to enjoy the beautiful landscape, outstandingly adorned with flora and fauna, and the combination of rugged mountaintops with lush pastures and leafy greenery at lower levels. Add to this mix the fastest flowing river in Wales, villages and hamlets steeped in history, tradition and culture and we can see why Lloyd George described this area as "a little piece of heaven on earth".

Endless footpaths through magnificent scenery are a magnet to walkers. Sadly, the large number of byways badly neglected by the Local Authority are equally a magnet for drivers of off-road vehicles, normally 4x4s and motorbikes, many of which are specially adapted for challenging terrain. Whilst some drivers are members of responsible organisations like the Green Lane Association (GLASS) and the Trail Riders Federation (TRF), there are greater numbers who are not. It is they who are becoming more of a threat to the peace and harmony of our area and its landscape.

The route over the Berwyn mountains from Llanarmon DC to Llandrillo is the longest of the local green lanes. Its present state of neglect attracts more thrill seekers and extreme motorsports vehicles than any other in the area. The spring edition of *Landrover*

Magazine awards the Wayfarer five stars in a feature titled 'Greenlaning from North to South Wales'. Descriptions like "one of the great mountain drives", "Wales at its wildest" and "one of Wales' must drive routes" serve to encourage more laners to visit.

The Wayfarer was originally a drovers' route used by farmers to walk their animals long distances to far off markets. It was never designed to carry the weight and number of vehicles experienced today. In March 1919 the

surface is down to bare rock, it quickly becomes a watercourse when it rains, funnelling surface water straight off the mountain into the nearest point of the River Ceiriog, adding to flood issues further downstream. Freshly dug gullies to drain the water off the road are quickly closed off by the aggressive tyres of large vehicles.

Increasingly, groups are travelling the relatively short distance from Merseyside, Manchester and the Midlands to the Ceiriog

Valley to seek the thrill of extreme driving. They do so with no regard for those who live and make their living in the valley. Of late, there are more vehicles driving the lanes after dark. Many gates along the route now bear the scars as a result of attempts to open them with the vehicle's front bull bars. Gates are frequently left open and sheep are quick to look for new pastures... some ending up miles from their

home. Glyn Jones of Llanarmon DC told me: "I just do not understand why there is a need to travel these routes in the middle of the night. It is annoying having these country lanes overused during the day when you can see what is going on, but having them about during the small hours when rural theft is on the increase is a real concern."

This scenario is repeated across Wales and England where frustration is causing locals to react. Large rocks or concrete blocks have suddenly appeared at strategic positions on

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route was negotiated in a snowstorm by three friends, one of whom was cycling journalist Walter McGregor-Robinson who used the pen name, Wayfarer. He left his name on the mountain pass for what was then a peaceful journey through unspoilt countryside. A plaque in his memory sits alongside the track with a visitor's book inviting a record of those who stop there to admire the view. Today, the track is blighted by huge puddles and ruts where vehicles have to founder off-track in order to continue their journey. In other places, where the road

THE BIG ISSUE

Main picture: Glyn Jones, Kevin Edwards, Martin Howarth, Sion Roberts and Michael Crawshaw view the damage

Clockwise below (l-r): Drain damage, hidden dangers, ruts and root damage, local farmers meet with Wrexham Council officers to view damage on the Wayfarer, and Pheasant Steps scarred and despoiled

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the Green Lanes preventing access. More seriously, puncture traps have been laid in deep puddles to cause tyre damage. Fortunately, no reports of injuries have been received, possibly because although the lanes are also open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders many of these groups are now unable to negotiate them because of the state of the road surface.

The green laners even have pet names for individual sections such as Whitestones, Pheasant Steps, The Splash, V Gully and Dog Leg. In fact, Dog Leg, the track from Pandy up towards Nantyr, is listed by Wrexham County Borough Council in the Ceiriog Trail recommended for horse riding. Sadly, sections of bare and jagged rocks are presently very dangerous for horse and rider. It's no surprise the Local Authority has major difficulty maintaining the 90 miles of rights of way in the Ceiriog Valley in these times of austerity, but the domination of motorised

vehicles is making the lanes a no go area for walkers and horse riders.

The North Wales Police service is committed to tackling the unsociable behaviour involved using Stop & Check Operations. Some vehicles have been seized. This has led to a noticeable drop in such traffic.

Ceiriog Uchaf Community Council has responded to the situation by installing CCTV and ANPR cameras. Local landowners have formed a working group and are holding discussions with Wrexham Council Highways Department, North Wales Police, GLASS and National Resources Wales. So far, GLASS is the only organisation offering funds, manpower and machinery to effect track improvements. Some local landowners are dipping into their own pockets to maintain access to their land on public routes, and representations to politicians have thus far achieved nothing.

The fact that most of the upland Green Lanes are in SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) areas means that any road repairs need to be approved by both Wrexham Council and National Resources Wales. At last these organisations are starting to communicate with each other and the road users.

I hope through future editions of Double.LL magazine to be able to report positive progress made on improving the tracks and a reduction in misuse by the more cavalier and selfish thrill seekers responsible for causing such damage and distress.

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North Wales Police descended on Llanarmon DC recently when aggressive and abusive off-roaders from the Liverpool area caused chaos and criminal damage.