A friendly, open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities

Facts, figures and trends

- There are 2,637 km of rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, byways open to all traffic, and restricted byways)[1], including 174 km of National Trails[2]. In addition, there are around 120 km of unsurfaced, unclassified roads, which provide complementary links.
- On average, 91% of rights of way are 'easy to use' (up from 84% in 2018/19)[3]
- Walking is the most popular activity. Over 80% of visitors go for a walk, and 61% go for an hour or more. Cycling and mountain biking are the next most popular (3%).[4]
- 'Multi-day routes' include: two National Trails (Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway), and the forthcoming 'Coast-to-Coast' path; significant regional walking routes, like the 'Dales Way'; and, promoted cycling routes such as 'The Way of the Roses'.
- The busiest sections of rights of way (e.g. at Malham Cove) are used by an average of over 9,000 people per month at peak times[5].
- The 'Yorkshire Three Peaks' continues to be attract visitors, particularly younger people often on their first visit to the National Park, through large and small events, including a number of high-profile 'challenge walks'[6].
- 248 km (9.5%) of rights of way are suitable for users of all ages and abilities.
- Many bridleways, byways and unsurfaced unclassified roads are accessible by 'all terrain' mobility scooters. These are available to hire at several locations, providing more opportunities for people with disabilities to access parts of the National Park.
- 60% of the land (120,000 ha) is designated as 'open access'[7].
- Limestone areas in the south and west hold many cave systems, including the longest in the UK (the 89 km long Three Counties system) and others of national significance.
- Rock-climbing crags are located mainly in the south, on both gritstone edges and limestone. Many of the limestone crags include bolted 'sport' climbs. Some crags are of national and international quality, including Malham, Gordale and Kilnsey.
- The Dales provides a range of opportunities for targets, clays and game shooting (pheasant, red grouse, partridge), and attracts significant numbers of overseas visitors.
- Sailing takes place at Grimwith and Embsay Reservoirs and at Semerwater. There are no rivers with a formal canoe access agreement but many of the 'white water' rivers – the Rawthey, Lune, Dee and Wharfe - are kayaked when in spate.

---

1 Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2023)
2 Natural England (2023)
3 Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2023)
4 YDNPA Visitor Survey (2022)
5 Pennine National Trails Partnership (2023)
6 YDNPA 2019 Three Peaks Survey
7 Publicly accessible land in National Parks and AONBs, Natural England (2022)

- Many opportunities for fishing through private clubs or on a day ticket basis, including Salmon on the River Ure.
- Whilst motor vehicles are legally allowed to use byways open to all traffic (62 km) and have possible legal rights on unsurfaced unclassified roads (around 120km), use of motor vehicles on the 10 most sensitive routes in the National Park area is prevented by traffic regulation orders. Compliance is very good (97%)[8].
- There is a wide variation in visitor demographics between individual locations. Malham has a particularly young and ethnically diverse visitor profile reflecting that of the surrounding region. However, across the National Park as a whole, 77% of visitors were over 45 years old; 70% were in A, B, C1 social grades and 97% were from a white background. 10% of visitors had a long-standing health issue or disability [9].
- The most frequent regions for visitors to come from were Yorkshire and Humber (35%) and the North West (27%). 5% of visitors were from overseas. There is a high level of repeat visits – with only 15% of people on a first visit. 82% of visitors travelled to the National Park by car (down from 87% in 2017).
- The big draws for visitors continue to be the natural beauty, the open space/freedom, the peace and tranquillity of the National Park, and its opportunities for outdoor recreation and connecting with nature[9].
- There are high levels of visitor satisfaction. 80% of respondents were very satisfied (a score of 5 or 6 out of 6) with all facilities and services used.
- In 2022, there were 5 million visitors to the National Park spending 6.6 million days here, compared to 4.6 million in 2017. 88% of people were day visitors. The economic impact of these visitors was £427 million, supporting 5,100 jobs (FTE)[10].
- Total visitor bed-space is estimated to be 12,900. Most hotels, pubs and B&Bs are small (fewer than 10 bedrooms). Most bed spaces are provided by self-catering holiday cottages (2,500) and touring caravan/camping sites and hostels (7,500).

Issues and opportunities

Rights of Way

- Is it realistic to maintain the high standard of the rights of way across the National Park? Should resources be focused only on priority or popular routes?
- The Pennine Bridleway northern extension still needs to be completed.
- How can we support the development of more family-friendly, multi-user routes such as the former Wensleydale railway line connecting Hawes and Garsdale Station?

Tourism

- The National Park is an internationally recognised tourism destination. Can international tourism be compatible with the imperative of tackling climate change?

---

8 Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2022)
9 YDNPA Visitor Survey (2022)
10 STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) report (2022)

- How do we use the new destination management plans to ensure the local visitor economy is boosted at the same time the National Park is safeguarded?
- How can local food and other products be used both to help promote understanding of what makes the National Park special, and to support the local economy?
- What more could be done to strengthen the links with the surrounding settlements that are important 'gateways' into the National Park?
- Does more need to be done to ensure the availability of affordable overnight accommodation (camping, hostels, bunk barns etc) to support a wide range of visitors?
- Are there opportunities to create more 'Regenerative Tourism', developing activity that will generate 'net-positive' impacts in carbon reduction and biodiversity, as well as enhancing the vitality and integrity of local communities?

Visitor Management

- How can more visitors be encouraged to travel here by means other than the car?
- How can we enhance the visitor experience to encourage visitors to stay longer, as well as reducing the need to travel or encouraging them to cycle, walk and use public transport whilst they are here?
- Ensuring that visitors have access to clear and easy to understand online information about where to go and what to do in the National Park before they visit.
- How to respond to the impacts of climate change on visitor management (e.g. higher risk of fires in summer, more damage to rights of way from wetter winters).
- The beauty and challenge of completing the 'Three Peaks' continues to draw large number of individuals, small informal groups, and large-scale charity events.
- How could seasonal parking issues be alleviated at hotspot locations like Malham and Horton-in-Ribblesdale? Are radical solutions required?
- How important is tranquillity to the visitor experience of the Yorkshire Dales? Are more measures needed to reduce the effects of traffic speed and noise?

Recreation

- How to encourage more sustainable outdoor recreation activity and make those opportunities accessible to a wider range of people.
- How can the desire to provide better access to caving opportunities be balanced with the rights of landowners to withdraw access and/or the vulnerability of some sites?
- How can the desire to access rivers in the National Park for wild swimming be balanced with the rights of landowners?

Engagement and inclusivity

- How could the National Park be used to help address health inequalities, particularly for communities in the surrounding urban centres (e.g. Leeds, Bradford, Darlington)?
- What more could be done to increase the use of the National Park for informal education and outdoor learning by a range of providers?

- Whilst it is changing slowly, the visitor profile is relatively old, white and middle-class. What can be done to create meaningful, sustainable engagement with other audiences, so the visitor profile better reflects that of the wider population?
- Is there scope to increase the type and diversity of opportunities for volunteering in the National Park, and to 'join up' the work of different organisations? Can this be done in a way that doesn't increase car journeys to and from the National Park?
- People visit from many different places, with different interests and levels of knowledge about the area. How do we help them to increase their understanding of the special qualities of the National Park?
- How can tourism businesses be helped to develop their offer for 'non-traditional' audiences, particularly people with disabilities or from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

Policy context

Some of the key international, national, regional and local strategies that provide important context for updating the Management Plan include:

- **Equality Act 2010** – requires public bodies to exercise their functions to have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- **Delivery Plan for National Parks as Landscapes for Everyone**, National Parks England – sets out how National Park Authorities will work with others to ensure everyone is able to discover and engage with protected landscapes.
- **Moving Cumbria Forward – Cumbria Transport Plan Strategy 2011-2026**, Cumbria County Council; and, **North Yorkshire Local Transport Plan 2016-2045**, North Yorkshire Country Council - set out what the former County Councils and their partners intend to do to address the transport related issues faced by local people.
- **Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives**, North Yorkshire County Council – sets out priorities and actions to achieve the ambition of reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity across the population of North Yorkshire.
- **Special Qualities, Special Experiences**, YDNPA (2019) – sets out the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's policies and principles for access, recreation, diversity, visitor management and sustainable tourism in the National Park.
- **Management of the use of green lanes (unsealed routes) in the Yorkshire Dales National Park**, YDNPA (2023) - considers the legislation and government guidance on the management of recreational motor vehicle use of unsealed routes, and what actions should be taken to implement the policies of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
- **Volunteering Strategy**, YDNPA (2021) - sets out the Authority's approach to volunteering on a range of programmes and projects, including how to engage those from under-represented groups, like young people aged 16 to 18.
- **Education and Engagement Strategy**, YDNPA (2021) – sets out the development and delivery of information and opportunities to educate, empower and encourage everyone (regardless of their background) to experience, learn about and benefit being from being in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.