

Yorkshire Dales Access Forum – 18 May 2021

Access for All - Miles Without Stiles

Purpose of the report

1. To update members of the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum on accessibility in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Background

2. All visitors to, and residents of, the National Park should be able to enjoy its special qualities, no matter what their level of physical ability. As individuals they should be provided with a variety of suitable routes and infrastructure, clear orientation the appropriate information to decide whether or not a public right of way or recreation opportunity is suitable for them. This is given the shorthand term of Access for All.
3. 13 million people (or 1 in 5) in the UK are disabled. Under the Equality Act 2020, a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. This can include physical disabilities which are easy for us to spot but also conditions such as dementia and autism that have their own specific needs but are not easy for us to identify.
4. The Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) visitor survey (2017) found just over one in ten (12%) of respondents where in a party where a member of the party had a long-term health issue or disability that limits their daily activities. A similar figure was recorded in the 2013 survey.
5. Access for All is a priority programme for the YDNPA and we have been making improvements to the YDNP for many years. This has included work to make the public rights of way network more accessible, provision of information to allow visitors to make an informed choice about where they can access and working with businesses to make tourism providers more accessible. In 2006, Yorkshire Forward funded a project to provide more information for businesses within the Craven area of the National Park. The result was a series of workshops and a guide for businesses titled 'Access for All to Services in the Yorkshire Dales'.

What is miles without stiles?

6. Addressing Access for All issues is an integral part of our rights of way management. Improving access for people with limited mobility can also benefit the able-bodied by making routes easier to use, for example families with pushchairs and young children, and dog walkers. We call these routes 'miles without stiles'.
7. Special Qualities Special Experiences (our recreation and tourism strategy) sets out the following guiding principles for this work:

❖ *In each area of the National Park, routes suitable for all user abilities will be identified and upgraded, (or where a need has been identified new routes will be created and promoted). Where practicable, routes that loop from villages (especially those with visitor centres, or public transport interchanges and RADAR toilets) will be provided as a matter of priority.*

❖ *Wherever an existing right of way is being maintained, every opportunity to replace difficult barriers with more accessible features will be considered, e.g. replacing a wooden ladder stile with a gap or gate. The less remote a route, the more stringently this criterion will be applied.*

❖ *The creation and upgrading of Access for All routes must safeguard the historical, scenic and environmental value of the National Park.*

8. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2019 – 2024 sets the following target:
- B3. Carry out works to improve access on appropriate public rights of way and established permissive routes, so that 262km (10%) are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024**

9. To meet this target 15 km of path must be improved in 2021/22.

What have we done so far?

10. A complete audit of the rights of way network within the Yorkshire Dales was undertaken in 2007, using the criteria based on Countryside Agency *By All Reasonable Means: Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people* guidelines. An additional audit of the extension area was begun in 2018.
11. As a result of these audits, on-going surveys undertaken by the National Park Authority's Access and Recreation Officer and work to change infrastructure and improve routes, there are now 215km of public rights of way that are accessible to people with limited mobilities in the National Park.
12. 19 routes are specifically promoted as 'miles without stiles' routes. These can be enjoyed by a wide range of users and the terrain and any potential obstacles along the route are clearly described.

Promoting Miles without Stiles Routes

13. Research shows that 93% of people with disabilities will look for access information using websites and that 42% of those people will not visit an area if they can't easily find the information they are looking for. Therefore, the suite of miles without stiles routes have been designed to be user friendly and show points of interest along the route. Information that may be an obstacle to users (such as slight gradients and surface) are highlighted to allow people to make an informed decision as to whether they can manage the route. They can all be downloaded on the website (<https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/plan-your-visit/essential-information/access-for-all/miles-without-stiles/>) as pdf documents. Some of the routes have been filmed to give users a better feeling for the route before they visit. The routes are surveyed on an annual basis by the Dales Volunteers (Debbie North) to ensure they are maintained as accessible routes.

14. The miles without stiles routes are also used within the events programmes to open up events to people with limited mobilities. Examples include the dark skies walk at Grimwith Reservoir, an adapted bike event in Sedbergh and a showcase of accessible equipment at Grimwith Reservoir.

Working with others

15. The Access for All Advisory Group, set up by the Yorkshire Dales Access Forum in 2007, meet annually to discuss improvements that could be made to the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Partners invited to the group include the National Trust, Open Country and the Outdoor Guide.

16. We have also worked with numerous partners and provide funding through the YDNPA's sustainable development fund. Some examples are described below:

- Experience Community bid successfully to the Sustainable Development Fund to purchase Mountain Trikes to be used in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. A series of events took place to promote the Mountain Trikes within the area.
- Access the Dales bid successfully to the Sustainable Development Fund to purchase a Trampler (all terrain wheelchair) to be based at the National Trust at Malham Tarn.
- As part of the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust's Stories in Stone project, six new miles without stiles routes were promoted. This included the filming of two of the routes using the Outdoor Guide.
- Debbie North; local resident, Dales Volunteer, the Outdoor Guide and Access the Dales, has been a constant font of knowledge and support for accessibility work.

Next Steps

Meeting the target,

17. Currently 215km of route in the park is classified as being accessible to someone with a limited mobility, meaning we have a further 47km to complete before 2024. We are confident that this target can be achieved through identifying accessible routes which already exist.

Other Ways to increase the accessibility of the Yorkshire Dales National Park

18. As well as the creation and identification of accessible routes, there are other areas of work that should take place to improve the Access for All product:

- A feasibility study is looking at the installation of Changing Place in the National Park. People with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis often need extra equipment and space to allow them to use the toilets safely and comfortably. These needs are met by Changing Places toilets.

- Other ways to promote the Yorkshire Dales for other needs, such as sensory needs, should be considered e.g. the creation of a sensory story for the National Park.
- To encourage more people with limited mobilities to come and enjoy the area, more work needs to be done to promote what is available. This could include the use of social media, the website or more accessible events.
- Continue to work with businesses and partners to ensure that accessibility is joined up e.g. miles without stiles routes linking with accessible attractions, accommodation and cafes and pubs.
- Include all survey information from the access audit via an online map of the YDNPA website to allow users to make an informed decision about where they can visit.

Conclusion

19. From 2024 it will become increasingly difficult to identify new accessible routes as, it is envisaged, the audit in the extension area will be completed and all routes will have been identified. It is from this point onwards that new routes will need to be created by surface improvements and/or engineering work. This may require additional funding to make route improvements.

20. Members are encouraged to make suggestions for potentially accessible routes, and ways to encourage use of the ones we already have.

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May 2021