



**IMPACT ON OTHER  
RECREATIONAL USERS**

## Impact on Other Recreational Users

### Environmental Statement

In the consultants opinion

*The most significant impact that will result from the use of the track by cyclists will be on other recreational activities, in particular walking. Significant impacts are predicted to occur along those sections of the route which are currently public footpaths, but which will become dual purpose routes of the cycleway. Upgrading a footpath to a cycleway will have a major negative effect on walkers currently using the route, and will certainly happen. In most areas, the impact will be restricted to the track itself although in the Highmeadow woods area, walkers may choose to move off the main footpath to avoid the cyclists, and therefore the impact could be spread across a wider area.* (p.106, 20.31)

and

*"Humans are less tolerant of disturbance, especially when the primary reason for their being in a particular location is prompted by a desire for peace, quiet and solitude, as is the case for many people who choose to walk the Wye Valley footpath. Of course the special qualities of silence and solitude are easily eroded through increasing numbers of walkers themselves. There is, nevertheless, a distinction between the experience of walking past groups of people moving at the same pace, and being overtaken by cyclists travelling more quickly, especially when they approach from behind or are travelling in a group."* (p.105, 20.23)

In discussing the issue of levels of use the consultants stated

*"The scale of any environmental, social and economic impacts arising from the use of the cycleway will be almost entirely dependent upon the level and pattern of use which is generated"* (P.104, 20.20)

Of the upper levels of use (90 cycles per hour)

*"the Consultants consider that the frequency of cycling in the peak months would definitely erode the remote character and solitude of the adjacent woodland and riverside banks, and would severely downgrade the experience of other forms of informal recreation. The risk of disturbance to fauna, including breeding birds and otter would also be increased."* (P.105, 20.45)

In discussing off route riding the consultants said

*"Off-route riding would also have a major negative impact on other recreational users particularly if cyclists were to penetrate areas of the forest which are currently described as 'wilderness' areas for reason described above."*

(P.107, 20.39)

## Forest of Dean

The pilot surveys in the Forest of Dean revealed a consistently low level of use by walkers on the cycle track which may indicate that walkers are already moving from the cycle routes to quieter areas for "peace, quiet and solitude". This appears to be supported by the anecdotal information provided in this report.

The potential impacts on other recreational users as expressed by the consultants appears to be confirmed by the many letters in the local papers and sent to the Dean Environmental Alliance.

Examples are shown on the following pages.

## RECOMMENDATION

Introduce the New consultative Committee and new Procedure recommended by the Dean Environmental Alliance. This would enable the development of consensus by **all** recreational users and local communities, based on the information provided by an Environmental Impact Assessment to best practice standards recommended by the Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment, guided by new Government Guidelines and within a statutory framework, to ensure Sustainability of development and Subsidiarity.

# LETTERS TO LOCAL PAPERS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

## Accident fear

WE both wish to register our objections to the hoards of mountain bikers invading the Forest every weekend and increasingly so now during the week.

We were members of the Ramblers Association until recently when ill health restricted our walks but were never hampered as we are now by the cyclists who do not stick to marked routes and are most discourteous if one remarks to them that they are on public footpaths.

There is bound to be an accident caused by them sooner or later and whether it is a child or a handicapped adult there is no need for it to happen.

Mountain bikers must be restricted to their own areas before it is too late.—W.M. Mumby, High Nash, Coleford.

## Permits

My husband and I like to walk through the woods on a Sunday afternoon. We enjoy the tranquility, listening to the birdsong, and often sighting deer, foxes and squirrels.

However, often this peace is shattered when, without any warning, cyclists on mountain bikes race past us. It is terribly frightening and for anyone with a heart condition, it would be enough to cause them to have a cardiac arrest. The tracks which we have to walk are being churned up by these bikers especially after all the rain that we have had.

I agree with Mike Marx of Lydney that cyclists should be charged to ride in the Forest, but John Anderson says that if this should happen, he would then have to charge walkers too.

I would willingly pay for a permit to enable us to still enjoy our woodland walks, but as I was born and bred in the Forest, I hope I would not be expected to pay as much for my permit as these cyclists who are causing all the destruction to our woodland.—Mrs Ina Hart, 168, Ruspidge Road, Cinderford.

## 'Bloody walkers'

IT is generally accepted that the Forest is for the pleasure of all groups of people but there is no doubt about the fact that mountain bikers dominate the scene. They do not restrict themselves to marked cycle tracks and never warn of their approach.

With my wife, much of our time is spent walking in many parts of the Forest and on one recent walk we were referred to by mountain bikers as 'Bloody Walkers'.—Gerald J.M. Smith, Barn Hill Road, Broadwell, Coleford.

Litter: Little has been said in previous correspondence on this subject. Even with the present modest numbers of bikers using the trail it is already a menace. Coke tins, cartons, plastic, packets of crisps, sweets etc are all thrown away at will. However, it must be admitted these parties of "back-packers", although less in numbers, are by no means innocent in this respect. It is essential that some collection scheme of all this rubbish must be organised by the trail sponsors. None of it will disappear on its own.

Safety. In the old days it was a legal offence for any bicycle not to be fitted with a bell. With these high speed mountain bikes this law should be reintroduced. It is not good enough for horse riders or pedestrians—especially the elderly—to find themselves either overtaken at speed because there is a few feet to one side of them, or a screech of brakes immediately behind as the first indication that a biker is there. One small bell is hardly going to impair the biker's performance or to send the week's budget into the red!—H.D.N. Smith, Parkend.

Last September I was walking round part of the Sculpture Trail with two of my children. On three separate occasions in less than 20 minutes we had to take evasion action as cyclists raced towards us at speed. After the third incident we abandoned our walk.

Last Sunday afternoon, my husband went to Lydney. Between Brierley and Mireystock he had to slow down for a group of cyclists riding towards Brierley, not in single file, but two or three abreast. When he got to Cannop he had to stop because there were cyclists milling about all over the road completely oblivious to traffic. As he reached Parkend he caught up with another group of cyclists riding towards Whitecroft, again he had to stop. This time the cyclists were riding four or five abreast and made no attempt to allow traffic to pass.

I am quite willing to share the Forest of Dean with visitors, and I am not an intolerant person, but I believe that everyone who uses the Forest should appreciate the rights of others to use it also. This heritage has been passed down to all of us to enjoy and to care for. If visitors to the Forest do not share our enjoyment, and have no wish to care for it, then they should be restricted. It may be that visitors might value the privilege of enjoying the Forest of Dean far more, if they had to pay for it.—Mrs J.M. Phelps, Bents Lane, Ruardean Hill.

## Cycle abuse

I read with interest the article in your paper "Barmy bikers blasted."

At the weekend we visited the Forest with the intentions of enjoying a walk and allowing our children (aged 4, 5 plus baby) to roam freely with no danger from traffic.

Unfortunately we encountered ankle to knee deep mud and groups of cyclists "churning" the ground up still further. We abandoned our walk and went elsewhere. I doubt we will return.

Five years ago I too was an avid mountain biker so can empathise with the bikers. However, the sport has grown since then and the Forest simply cannot cope with the numbers of bikers. Footpaths are being ruined and walkers/ramblers are being discouraged from the Forest and they cause fear less damage.

If we want to encourage tourists and walkers to the area then perhaps bikers could respectfully stick to designated re-enforced cycle routes.

The ground will take time to recover and will never be allowed time with repeated abuse from cyclists' tyres.

Perhaps cyclist groups can organise a weekend where they can help repair the damage they have caused.—Mrs K.A. Newell, Crossway Green, Chepstow.

# LETTERS TO LOCAL PAPERS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

## Harassed horses

WITH reference to the article 'Barmy Bikers Blasted,' I would like to take this opportunity to speak out on behalf of the many of us who ride horses in the area. It seems that since the introduction of the cycle trails, our total existence is being ignored.

It is true that horses have been an accepted part of the countryside for many years but we are now in a position whereby our routes are becoming less and less. If it is not barriers springing up out of nowhere so wide you can't pass, it is the endless felled trees which block our way, while these trails are being constructed.

There is also the added safety threat of having a large number of whirring cycles which does nothing for a horse's disposition. Remember, there are a number of children who ride.

Everyone who enjoys the countryside has a right to do so, but let it be split equally. Not all horse riders are a bunch of reckless snobs, all we want to do is to carry on riding our routes which we have ridden for many, many years, without the hassle which has become so apparent recently.

It is probably also relevant that caring horse owners do not tend to ride where the ground is particularly muddy as we do have responsibility for our horses' welfare. A lot of the mud encountered is usually created by tyre tracks of one form or another. As for scrambling up and down the same spot, we do not do this either. All we are, are ramblers but on horseback, usually on a route which ends up back where we started—that is, if we haven't had to make a wide detour to avoid the hazards!—C. Chopping, The Pludds.

## Insured?

I WOULD like to say how true the letter was from C. Chopping of the Pludds, who wrote to you regarding 'harrassed horses' last week.

I have lived here now for three-and-a-half years. Frankly, I have never seen the Forest so churned up. I came from the Mendips where again the Forestry work the area. I would say, regarding the mountain bike debate, that I have always found bike riders very polite—this coming from a person who found herself, two years ago, in the middle of the "South West mountain bike championships" is something.

There are rumblings that we will be asked to pay for the privilege of riding in the Forest. Well, that's fine, there seems to be a lot of money being spent at this moment in time on tracks for bikers. Every week riders come across wire fences with stiles for walkers and bikes, but not the horse. Why, I ask, is so much incurred for the benefit of the bike?

Horse owners are not going to churn the tracks up and we do not all charge around. The weather has been so bad that if you have any regard for your horse you do not do it. It takes great deal of money each year to insure a horse. What I would ask is how many mountain bike riders have insurance if they hit a person?

I would ask if we are to pay for a permit, how will it be enforced as the Commission is unable to man every area.

The majority of tracks are badly damaged due to the policy contracting out the tree felling.

The latest cycle track now in construction looks more like a motorway paved through the Forest. The speed will increase as the surface is smooth. Who is paying for this?

This again is another part of the Forest that walkers and horses will, I take it, have to keep off.—Elaine Rogerson, Joys Green, Lydbrook.

## Mountain bikes

AM I alone in being sick and tired of the attitude and behaviour of certain of the cyclists who now seem to swarm through our woods?

They belt along tracks with no regard for other people and if you merit any attention from them it is usually to glare which shows plainly that they think you've no right to be in their woods.

My horse has been badly frightened by them whizzing past from the rear several times and even when they see my small son on his pony they make no effort to slow down.

But, more seriously than this, on Sunday September 4, I was present when a retired couple accompanying a young man who is blind had quite literally to pull him aside as two men aged between 20 and 35 came hurtling by him, so close that they would have struck him. Neither made any effort to slow down or give the young man and his companions room. Of course I realise they couldn't know he was blind, but as he was being guided along by his companions, surely it must have been evident that he had some disability?

Now I am not against mountain bikers—everyone has the right to come to the Forest and enjoy the woods. The Forestry Commission does a lot to make it easier for people to do so, but local people have a right to walk or ride in the woods too. An elderly or less-able people, children—in short, everyone—has the right to be treated courteously by the mountain bikers they meet and not be put in fear of being knocked flying by one of them.

Not all cyclists or indeed, specifically mountain bikers, are to blame but there is an element who seem heedless of the right of others to enjoy the woods. I wonder if others have experienced dangerous or discourteous behaviour from these riders?—K.A.W., Drybrook.

## Cycle pests

REFERRING to the letter from K.A.W. of Drybrook regarding cyclists, I am quite in agreement.

For many years members of my family and myself have walked in the Forest with our dogs enjoying the peace and serenity.

Alas, no longer. One is swooped down on from behind—almost given a heart attack; and if not able to make a fast move one is treated to a mouthful of abuse—'Get out of my way.'

Little regard is paid to animals or slow movers as I have now become. These cyclists now appear to think the paths are solely for their use only.

Do they have to have a permit and if so could not someone stress that good manners and behaviour is still essential in this day and age?

I am surprised that some of them have not been knocked off their machines before now.—H.J.H., Cinderford.

AS someone who lives too close for comfort to the new family mountain bike trail, I would like to mention a few matters from past experience.

Noise: There is no argument that mountain biking is a thoroughly healthy and worthwhile pastime, especially for townspeople confined to shops and streets. The majority, say 80 per cent of riders, are considerate and well-behaved, but there is a small element of "macho-man" who must keep up a non-stop barrage of shouting and hollaring among themselves out of sheer bravado. Add to this in future the normal cries and yells of small children, and one cannot blame the Forest wildlife retreating further and further away from the nature reserve. The ultimate in rider noise so far has been two or three incidents where "trans-nies"—transistor radios—strapped to the chest have blared forth rock music, obliterating all birdsong along the route.

# LETTERS TO LOCAL PAPERS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

*June* Bikers [1997]

SUMMER has returned and so have the bikers! Like a plague of locust they swarm all over the Forest, charging around our woods without a thought for other people, or for animals. At your peril do you get in their way!

My six year-old son and I tried to take a peaceful walk in the woods yesterday. Some hope. I was continually looking over my shoulder and having to push my little boy and our dog off the track to avoid crowds of up to eight or ten bikers belting up from behind, not even having the good manners to slow down. We had to choke on their dust.

My little boy was subjected to a mouthful of abuse by a man of about 60 who shouted at him to 'get out of the way' recently.

My friend and I have to constantly watch our backs when out walking for fear of the loonies who think the woodland tracks are olympic training facilities.

Add to this the glares, abuse, and litter and summer in the Forest is fast becoming a nightmare time, not that we get much respite in the winter.

The bikers are here even then, tearing along the tracks and paths throwing up mud and making the lives of walkers a misery. Today whilst out I encountered around two dozen at least on the main track in Brierley woods.

I took a stroll down to the cycle track and, guess what? Not a biker to be seen!

Please, Forest Enterprise (or whatever you are calling yourselves this week) do something!

Yours in utter fedupness.—K.A.W.,

## Not so nice

THE Royal Forest of Dean was once a beautiful place to visit—few signs, no hard footpaths, just lovely green grass to walk on.

Now you see more and more stiles and fences everytime you pass through. So much is being spoilt.

We don't need it all to be happy in the Forest. There are cycle tracks everywhere and nowhere is now safe to walk. What we want are more good footpaths round the outside of the Forest before another is made inside.—A disgruntled Forester.

21 Feb 1997

*They be 'a' comin', they be,  
Just look out ol' booty,  
An you'll soon see,  
Over them hills, they'll come like a train,  
Yep, summer's brung us them bikers again.  
They byn't gonna stop for thee or me,  
They be hell bent on gittin' from 'A' to 'B'  
An to git there as quick as ever can be,  
Is what they be about, if you'm askin' me.  
Last wick one poor devil what lives down our lane,  
Got knocked ass over tip and wuz left lyin' in pain,  
No bugger helped him to git to his fit,  
Him was left lyin' in a pile of sheep...dung.  
They got no manners, them buggers on bikes,  
They thinks they can do just whatever they likes,  
Splash we with mud if the weather be wet,  
Or in the dry, choke us w/ dust, an' thais better yet.  
Run over our dogs, not to mention the kids,  
Slam on their brakes to show off their skids,  
Scare off the deer and chuck litter about,  
Make life so bad we be scared to go out.  
But cheer up ol' booty, cos I've got a plan,  
The next biker I see, be it wuman or man,  
I'll take me old stick with the pointy steel tip,  
And shove it right up where it'll make the bugger  
yip!—K.A.W., Name and address supplied.*

## Stop now

SOME of the recent correspondents to your newspaper extolling the virtues of cycling in the Dean seem to me to be living in 'Never Never Land'. In other words, carry on regardless; the proliferation of gravel tracks, sometimes within feet, and parallel with, existing hard forest tracks, followed by fences, and signs will never alter the character of the Forest.

Meanwhile, those who question the policy are accused of being environmental cranks or anti-cycling, when nothing could be further from the truth. However let's face it, cycling in the Dean is not a green pursuit. Cars bring cyclists in and out. It is not an alternative transport from A to B.

We have just beaten further opencast mining with a restoration programme familiar to a country park theme. (Forest Enterprise approval for the scheme suggested financial benefits to them).

Taking a broader view we see housing developments whittling away trees, and hedges at Lydney, Mile End and Milkwall etc.

Picnic Sites at Wenchoford etc, with tree felling to prevent further erosion. Water extraction, St Anthonys Well, with fencing to keep cyclists out, or to keep sheep from contaminating the water supply? (Again Forest Enterprise admitting "if the price is right, they would be foolish to refuse!") They must say this, for they are under pressure to be self supporting.

They also have the responsibility to ensure that our woods are conserved for this future generation. Which begs the question "is any price right" when our heritage is at stake, for the Dean is still publicly owned?

At the same time we have a Government that is continuing to dispose of woodlands by stealth (ie in November 1995 over 100 woods for sale, which despite assurances to ensure public access to such woods when sold, only eight have agreements which will guarantee this...135 square miles sold since 1991 with only two square miles of preserved access!

All we have is 35 square miles!

The loss of further woodlands will put more pressure on the Dean, more tourism, regeneration, with the prospect of "Next Steps Agency" status for both Forest Enterprise and the Forestry Authority in the Spring. Will this mean more commercial pressures?

For these reasons I feel we have reached a crossroads in the Forest of Dean. Surely it is imperative that we stop now and look at the whole of the Dean and plan sensitively for the future?—We will be judged on the results by—future generations.—Philip Horsley, 'Amble-side', Elton.

## Keep going!

I HAVE followed the "great cycle-track" debate with keen interest, and as a Forester born and bred, I am pleased to read that there is an increasing preference for less urbanisation. No doubt this majority confuses indigenous Foresters.

The Forest of Dean is renowned for natural peace and tranquility, for its manifold flora and fauna, which has been respected by its inhabitants. It is unfortunate that we have been invaded by these high-salaried yuppies who come for the beauty of the countryside, and on arrival, set about making the Forest into an extension of the urban sprawl they have left behind.

In this, they are aided and abetted by that destructive pack of civil servants calling itself Forest Enterprise, once again run by strangers, intent only on catering for urban visitors who are only out for the day.

The cycle tracks are already an abomination, and the helmeted louts who ride them so aggressively in the name of exercise have no consideration for walkers or wildlife. Neither will they be policed into keeping to these tracks, preferring to mash pleasant pathways

into a mess.

I would like to endorse those petitions, seeking to abolish these countryside idylls and send the yuppies home. R. Preston, one of the strangers amongst us, asks where the bikers can go. I suggest that there is already, a well-maintained throughway, which goes up hill and down dale through the most beautiful scenery, over bridges through woodland and pastoral visitors, which afford lovely, heart-inspiring views of the Cotswolds, Malvens, Wye Valley, the Forest and the Welsh hills. It is very under-used. It's called the M50.

And when the bikers reach the Northern end—keep going!—C. Roberts, 8 Forsdene Walk, Coalway, Coleford.

# LETTERS TO LOCAL PAPERS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

Sir,—Like many other readers of your journal, I was astounded to learn of the drastic cuts to the most popular tourist attractions proposed by Forest Enterprise. Where did they get the name from?

When I came to the Forest very many years ago, I had very close working relationships with the senior Forestry Commission personnel. There was no doubt whatsoever in those days that tourism was equally important to the Commission as to growing and harvesting trees.

It was intended to make the Dean as attractive as possible in order to relieve the pressure on other National Park areas. In order to promote the area the Commission led the field. Camp sites, tourist waymarked trails, scenic drives, vantage points, car parking, picnic areas and toilet blocks were rapidly provided and properly maintained.

It was effective with a million day visitors a year and thousands of campers and hotel visitors coming in. Much needed jobs and income resulted and it is clearly one of the areas where growth could be achieved if properly promoted. It is not good enough for Forest Enterprise to decide to eliminate some of the most popular amenities with visitors.

Has there been a change of direction by Forest Enterprise or are they still charged with supporting tourism?

Mr Westlake blames a limited budget and denies any motive to restrict tourists from the Forest. I do hope this is the case. If so we should perhaps enquire whether it is a fact that Forest Enterprise have failed to manage that budget properly.

In the past couple of years they have joined the ranks of the brain-washed pro-cycling movement. Tens of thousands of pounds appear to have been poured into these new and often unsightly cycle tracks. Was this at the expense of routine maintenance of facilities so much loved and appreciated by the vast majority of visitors?

It has appeared that the only efforts being made to increase tourism have been to encourage hundreds of cyclists to bring their machines tied to the roofs and boots of vans and cars and to ride around in massed groups, causing road safety hazards and a nuisance to pedestrians on the forest tracks.

There are of course the small groups of lycra knickered youths who treat the central forest as a race track. The activities of these visitors caused me to abandon use of the Mallards Pike area last summer.

Perhaps we could see this particular attraction put on hold this year and the entire budget directed towards restoring the much appreciated facilities that Forest Enterprise are so casually writing off. Let us not drive out the family visitors. We may then have confidence that there is no danger to public access to our woods.

A. R. TAYLOR  
Palmers Flat, 26 Mar '96  
Coleford

## Peace pollution

It is inevitable that the advent of thousands of cyclists annually will have a dramatic effect on a small area like the Forest of Dean. Cycling has, of course, gone on in the Forest for many years, but previously involved only very small numbers and caused no concern to anybody. The situation we have now is quite different. The construction of the Cycleways and the publicity which has brought in cyclists from all over the country seems somehow to have changed the whole scale of the place. The Forest is being tamed, cut down to size. Whereas we used to think, as we toiled our way on foot between the trees, in slow Hardy-esque fashion, that the Forest was a place of grandeur, mystery and magic, with more than a touch of wildness, we now see, as we watch cyclists dash round it in no time at all, that after all, it is quite an insignificant place, in fact, rather an unimpressive little Forest. This, to me, is an enormous loss.

There is not even the consolation that the cyclists all acquire a love of the Forest during their whirlwind tours. Some may, but I was impressed by the remark of one of their own number during a meeting at Bank House, who observed: "Of course, you've got to realise that the lads don't come for the Forest—they come for the bikes."

Allied to the apparent reduction in size is a great reduction in peacefulness. I find myself walking far less than I used to simply because I don't know where to go to avoid the cyclists—and a walk where people constantly shoot by at speed of up to 30 miles an hour is no pleasure to me. There is nothing peaceful about it. (Cheery greetings shouted by the cyclists don't actually make it more peaceful). Forest Enterprise policy states that cycling is to be excluded "from the grass rides and paths," but this is frequently ignored. We are told that a ranger has been appointed to help to implement the new policy, but Forest Enterprise admit that for the ranger to cover weekends is difficult—and that, of course, is when the problems occur.

We have become familiar with various types of pollution and it is generally accepted that they (1) are detrimental to the quality of life and (2) need to be controlled and reduced to the minimum possible. We all know about air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution and, on a slightly more abstract plane, noise pollution. But there is another, more subtle form of pollution which occurs when there is eg "a massive loss of woodland tranquility." (Editor's note, *Review*, December 8 1995). I don't think there is as yet a name for this—might I suggest "peace pollution"?

"Forest Link," in its October issue, expressed itself as glad to welcome those who visit the Forest for outdoor activities (of which cycling must now be the major one) but observed that "the contribution they make to the local economy is, at best, marginal." I would like to add that there is already some evidence that increasing peace pollution will effectively drive away another sort of visitor—those who come seeking quiet and tranquility, and often contributing much more substantially to the local economy.

These various factors make it imperative for the situation in the Dean to be thoroughly assessed before the process of change goes any further.—E.S., Coleford. *As a Forester*

## Who pays?

I would like to reply to R. Preston's letter of last week headed "Room for All."

As a Forester born and bred, I firmly believe there is not room for all in the Forest, and the sooner this is realised by people who have little understanding of the Forest and its ways, the more chance we have of preserving our unique area.

## Spoilt

I WOULD like to reply to Mr Westlake regarding cycle-tracks.

As a visitor to the Forest of Dean over many years as a caravaner and now a resident for the last eight years, most people come to the Forest for its beauty and tranquility, peace and quiet. It doesn't lend itself to try and turn it into a theme park.

People bring mountain bikes because they are designed for rough terrain not for riding along miniature motorways—which the tracks look like.

The Forest is rapidly losing its natural look and will be spoilt eventually for everybody—walkers and cyclists alike. The Forest will never look the same again.

I wonder if Mr Westlake has given a thought to the liability he might be saddled with if some cyclist injures him or herself because the tracks are not being properly maintained?

And couldn't a more sympathetic material have been used. The present material sticks out like a sore thumb.—R.H. Vandett, Sling, Coleford.

Local people don't want the Forest sliced up for the benefit of self sufficient day trippers to cycle deeper and deeper into the woods, disturbing the wildlife and desecrating the natural beauty. No survey is necessary to discover the logic behind encouraging prosperous tourists in to enjoy the natural serenity and learn the ways of the Forest during a tranquil long stay, and encouraging mountain bikers to stay out.

We are privileged to live in these ancient woods and people who don't fully comprehend them should never be allowed to change or interfere with our birth given heritage.

One question I have not seen answered yet is "Who is responsible for any injury caused by a cyclist on a designated track?" This question needs an answer as, unfortunately, it is only a matter of time.—Malcolm Gwilliam, 108 St Whites Road, Cinderford.

## LETTERS TO THE DEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

A recent documentary on the New Forest depicted growing fears that the increased numbers of people treading through was doing untold damage to the ancient woodlands and yet more and more people are encouraged to the Forest and we are brainwashed that the Tourist Industry will be the saviour of the Forest - How?!

Every weekend dozens of cars pass our front door with up to 6 clean mountain bikes strapped on. When leaving, the bikes are covered in mud - what irreparable damage have they caused?

We walk every day with our dogs and where, until a year or two ago, we could know they would come to no harm, we now have to keep on the watch for cyclists appearing suddenly and at speed.

It would be interesting to know how much of the countryside they actually see and appreciate with their eyes fixed on the road or path just in front of them - do they ever stop to look at the beauties around them or to listen to the quiet of the Forest?!

On a final note it is a very frightening experience for a horse to have a large number of bicycles whizzing past it at speed, there are many children who ride ponies as well as our ageing riders and this is a serious safety threat.

We have been holidaying in the Forest for 25 years and such is our interest in the area that we have the Forester sent to us and we are in complete agreement with the letter "Cycling hazard" in the 21st April edition. Walking through the Forest will soon be a case of concentrating on whether cyclists are in the area instead of the peace and quiet that we and many others enjoy.

Although I do not yet know enough about what Forest Enterprise are doing, it must be obvious to anyone that cyclists and pedestrians cannot be safely mixed, and that thus the establishment of cycle tracks along paths used by pedestrians destroys this amenity for them. Since many of the local people walk in the Forest, and few ride bicycles, especially the small children, they are probably considerably worse off for this "initiative".

I am writing to appeal most strongly against any part of our beautiful Forest of Dean being used for cyclists AT ALL

Having lived in the forest for nearly 25 years and revelled in the peace and tranquility and joy of wandering anywhere on unspoilt grass tracks I was appalled last week to see the devastation caused on the slopes from Speculation picnic site to the top of Serridge Ridge, obviously caused by irresponsible cyclists tearing up and down on the slopes. All the grass and little paths not listed in the bicycle tracks are a sea of mud and churned up by the bike wheels. The whole of the ecology of the forest is being ruined and wildlife and plants destroyed. Hordes of people on bikes are obviously going to create a noise problem which is unwelcome to the true lovers of the peace of the forest. The old railway tracks which used to be a joy to walk on are now full of cyclists who expect the walkers to make way for them forcing them into the side.

The forest should be left for the enjoyment of peaceful pursuits, such as birdwatching, fishing and botanical studies.

I have always ~~xxxxx~~ had the greatest respect for the Forestry Commission and the work they have carried out to make the forest a pleasant place for all, but to allow these hordes to descend on their cycles seems a very retrograde step. Maybe it is the old story of "Money" as obviously someone is making this to the detriment of the true lovers of this unique forest, rapidly being utterly spoilt.

## LETTERS TO THE DEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

As for the incident at Camp with the walkers who wouldn't let the cyclists pass, I can understand their feelings. We made the mistake of walking that route two years ago during a summer evening.

An elderly couple cut for a stroll told us that during ten minutes they had heard 60 bikes go past them. They weren't exaggerating.

We have always walked and rained the woods and so have many visitors, but the mountain bikes are a very delicate threat and needs sorting out urgently.

As a born and bred forester, any destruction of the woods goes straight to the heart, and this is definitely just that.

My family and I walk the woods every day with our dogs, and usually we go to Mile End and Edge End. This has got to be one of the most

popular routes of the mountain bikers, and there are now many churned paths where none existed before.

I used to grab my dogs and children out of their way, but since they rarely say thank you, I don't bother any more.

I have lived in the Forest of Dean for almost eighteen years. During this time, I have appreciated and regularly used this beautiful area for many recreational purposes including walking, picnicking and exercising my dogs. The major attraction of this area for myself and my family was the peace and tranquillity to be found in most areas, coupled with easy access for all, including those of us who are less athletically inclined.

One of my favourite beauty spots over the years has been the area surrounding Cannop ponds. This location always provided easy access by car to many sites appropriate for just sitting and watching waterfowl and other wildlife, picnicking or safely walking small children, elderly people and dogs. I was even, once, privileged enough to catch sight of a purple emperor in these woods.

Over the past two to three years, since the introduction of the cycle paths network, this area has become a nightmare, especially in the Summer. Hoards of cycles, travelling in all directions, often at breakneck speed, make it almost impossible to walk the paths safely, and absolutely impossible to ensure the safety of young children and dogs without holding on to them at all times.

How can our future generations learn to appreciate the joys of the countryside properly if they are unable to run free to kick the leaves, pick up sticks, discover wild flowers and trees and identify birds ( most of which have been long since disturbed ), when their walk is constantly interrupted by cyclists forcing them to stop, move to the side in single file, and disturbing their train of thought and observation?

Although always under tight control by voice, my dog does not enjoy her exercise until she is free to run loose, sniff interesting smells, chase sticks, and, of course, run four times further than I can walk. On these paths her freedom is no longer possible, as I fear not only for her safety, but any compensation claim against me for damage to person or valuable cycle if a collision occurs.

I realise, of course, there are alternative areas in the Forest for me to use, and I have, over the years found many equally beautiful spots, but I am now finding that the increasing attraction of cycles to the Forest has also increased those numbers not prepared to stick to the designated tracks (despite signs to deter them). It seems to me that "off-track" cycling means just that! I am increasingly startled and endangered by groups of (usually) young men hurtling uncontrollably over rough terrain totally unable to stop in an emergency. They are obviously attracted, like myself, to the knowledge they will not encounter a family group cycling round the next corner. Apart from the obvious hazards when these groups meet pedestrians, these cyclists are causing damage to footpaths, and churning up mud patches, making walking much more difficult.

While not wishing to deny visitors and local people the opportunity to take healthy exercise and to enjoy the beauty which I have the privilege to see every day, I do feel that unless the abuse of these areas can be controlled, both by curbing of speed and by restriction of numbers in the more popular places, there should be a halt to the expansion of these pathways, and resources concentrated on policing the existing facilities.

As we live and work in the Forest of Dean, we have first hand experience of the daily problems initiated by the ever increasing numbers of cyclists.

The following points support our fears of cyclists spoiling our beautiful forest:

- unsafe for walkers especially with children and for the elderly using stoned tracks. Bikes are so fast and quiet they are upon you before you know it.
- incompatible with sheep and deer. Sheep badgers are continually fighting to keep their flocks together as an 'entertaining' trend is developing to scatter sheep as far apart as possible. Deer are being frightened out of the woods and on to the roads by scores of cyclists tearing through the forest disrupting their habitat.
- surfaces being ripped up - dozens of clean bikes pass our house daily, ALL are covered in mud or dust on their return journey. These deposits are not from the stoned roads allocated.
- litter is left all over the place for us to clear up - a weekend job - every weekend.
- the narrow twisting forest roads are not suitable for cyclists who seem duty bound to ride two abreast. On Wednesday last (2/7/97), a teacher and 20 students were on bikes, leaving the linear park - local walkers didn't stand a chance, they were then all over the main road. With the Summer holidays coming up, there will be more and more youth groups invading the roads and tracks with little or no regard for locals.
- visiting cyclists bring nothing to the area, except litter. Their demands are getting louder and louder, Cannop bottom is a classic example where motorists are faced with a road sign warning of 'cyclists crossing'! This is in direct contradiction to the Forestry Commissions' pledge (when referring to cycle routes) of '..... This is not intended to challenge the status of any existing public rights of way' - see back page of enclosed leaflet. Recently we were confronted by a group of cyclists using the crossing with one member of the group holding up the traffic - we were on our way to work in our long wheel base landrover towing a fully loaded 14ft trailer but they had precedence over us!
- outsiders don't understand the Forest and abuse the privilege of entry treating the whole area as a playground, their numbers MUST BE curtailed to preserve these ancient woodlands. The cost of putting petrol in their tanks to get here seems to afford them the right to behave exactly as they please, cycling wherever they wish.

We feel culturally threatened by the constant stream of cyclists speeding through our lives, although at present we are only experiencing the tip of the ice-berg. What will we be expected to endure in 10 or 20 years time?



## IMPACT ON FLORA AND FAUNA

# IMPACT ON FLORA AND FAUNA

## Ecological Setting

The Wye Valley is nationally and internationally important for nature conservation. The River Wye and the woodland habitats of the lower Wye Valley have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), National Nature Reserves and meet the requirements for designation as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's) under the terms of EC Habitats Directives.

The Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean provide a varied habitat supporting diverse flora and fauna including a number of rare species.

The Forest of Dean is Britain's premier oak forest. In 1977 the Nature Conservancy Council classified the Dean as a grade one site of National importance. The designation refers to all the wooded areas including the general forest areas as well as S.S.S.I's nature reserves and sites of conservation importance. Therefore, all of these woodlands in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley are considered to be of national ecological importance and some woodlands, with the River Wye, of international importance. This must be borne in mind when considering any proposals which might affect these areas.

### **General Requirements for Engineering Works for Construction and Upgrading of Cycle Routes in the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley.(1994)**

- The construction of the cycle route require that all growth be cleared to a width of 4.5 metres and all tree stumps removed.
- The cycle track to be 3.5 metres wide with M.O.T. type sub base 2.5 metre width depth 150mm. with geotextile membrane topped by dust to depth of 12mm. camber 50mm rolled.
- Clearance of growth 5 metres from each side of track.
- Drainage culverts of 45mm deep where advised in specifications.

### **Guidelines for Baseline Ecological Assessment by the Institute of Environmental Assessment (1995)**

The guidelines outline the level of baseline data required

- to assess adequately the ecological impacts of a proposed development
- to guide managers and clients in setting appropriate briefs and budgets,
- to guide ecologists in best practice and to guide determining authorities in assessing ecological statements accompanying Environmental Assessments.

It emphasises -

*"All ecological field surveys must be carried out by appropriate qualified ecologists with relevant field experience of the survey method being used and of the species or habitats under study. In view of the broad range of specialism inherent in ecology, it is of paramount importance that individuals only undertake survey work that is within their area of competence.* (P10. 2.4)

(Professional competence is gauged by academic qualifications, membership of appropriate professional body, proven track record in ecological field surveys etc.)

## **Scoping for Key Issues**

The importance of good scoping techniques for selecting species and areas requiring further study is emphasised by the following points:-

### **1. Desk Survey**

Environmental Statements should state clearly date, survey method reliability of existing information and the necessity to update or verify that existing information.

### **2. Statutory and Non-Statutory Sites**

Identify National Nature Reserves and SSSI's likely to be directly or indirectly impacted with a view to exclude at site selection stage of an Environmental Assessment. Note and evaluate presence of Red Book Data Species, Local Nature Reserves and existing information from local naturalists.

*"For both statutory and non-statutory sites, an important consideration in the evaluation of baseline data is the presence of undisturbed ancient semi-natural habitat (eg. ancient woodland)* (P25 3.18)

### **3. Radius**

A minimum area of 2Km radius search around development site is appropriate for obtaining information

*"This is because wildlife conservation is reliant upon the protection of the wider countryside in conjunction with a system of individual site designations"* (P15 2.16)

*"Moreover there needs to be sufficient information presented to identify important communities outside the boundary. For example, noise disturbance/hydrological impacts might effect important breeding bird communities some distance from the site boundary\*\*\*\*schemes might intersect badger feeding areas. The existence of these communities adjacent to the development site needs to be determined as part of the initial assessment"* (P16 2.21)

### **4. Local Communities**

*" Consultation with the general public are also beneficial for identifying issues of local concern and can on occasions reveal different issues from those identified by technical experts"* (P15 2.11)

*"The consideration of community factors was originally associated with the evaluation of urban wildlife habitats (eg. locations in areas of ecological*

*deficiency, wildlife corridors, networks), but now includes criteria that relate to social and amenity uses and is increasingly relevant to rural situations"*  
(P25 3.19)

#### **5. Site Visit**

From the site visit(s) maps of the habitat structure of the whole site should be drawn up and accompanied with target notes which identify habitat features of particular value to different ecological groups (such as plants, lichens, fungi, mosses, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and mammals) with a view to further survey work.

*" the habitat requirements of different groups and species of flora and fauna are highly variable and not always deducible from a purely botanical habitat survey. For example, habitats supporting species rich invertebrate communities can be of low botanical interest."*  
(P16 2.19)

*"Even though simple Phase 1 habitat information for the site may exist on file, it is unlikely that these data will contain the necessary target notes highlighting the value of the various habitats for different fauna and floral communities. In most cases, therefore, a site visit will be necessary to gather the required information."*  
(P16 2.20)

*For most ecological groups, the time of year when a survey is undertaken can also significantly affect the quality of the collected data in terms of its coverage, level of detail and accuracy. The importance of carrying out field surveys for different species at an appropriate time of year is illustrated in Figure 1"*  
(P23 3.12)

*"Although the guidelines consider separately the various ecological groups, an ecological assessment should always adopt an **ecosystem perspective** and highlights any key relationships that exist between different species and the surrounding environment. Critical factors may include, for example, soil series, hydrology, topography (aspect and slope), microclimate and management regimes (e.g. grazing, seasonal mowing, coppicing), for terrestrial systems."*  
(P22 3.6)

### **Monmouth to Lydbrook Environmental Statement**

*"No ecological surveys have been undertaken as part of the environmental assessment. The brief for the study recognised that as the environmental assessment was being undertaken during the Autumn/Winter period, any biological surveys would be incomplete. Instead, the brief required the consultants to undertake a comprehensive desk based study, and to make recommendations on the need for an early summer field survey"*  
(p55 8.26)

Thus the evaluation of impacts and scope for further investigation for flora and fauna is based on a desk top survey and the Environmental Statement recommends

*"A full ecological ground survey should be undertaken before any work begins".*

(p80 11.26)

It should be borne in mind that full ecological surveys should also cover adjacent areas to the cycle track as recommended by the Guidelines and the Project Appraisal and be undertaken over a period of time to cover migratory and seasonal species. It is also important to ensure that transmigratory linear lines of habitat and feeding areas are not disturbed by construction or inadvertently create islands of isolation for species. Thus the value judgment of impact on flora and fauna can only be fully ascertained after an up to-date full ecological survey as recommended by the Environmental Statement.

The Environmental Statement points out the effect to flora and fauna by the development of a cycle route could result from damage to vegetation and disturbance to wildlife which could occur during the construction of a route and once constructed the impact would be dependent upon the level of use and on the behaviours of users.

*"If however, cyclists and other users do move away from the waymarked paths, the impact on flora and fauna are likely to be of major significance and adverse"*

(p80 11.25)

Construction and upgrading has the potential to alter the original habitat and maintenance ensures that the habitat change is permanent.

The Environmental Statement states that

*"the presence of the railway could also have created new habitats which could support rare or interesting species which is an additional reason for requiring a full ecological survey"*

(p77 11.5)

### **"Wildlife in Gloucestershire - A Habitat Survey" (1981) by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust**

The Survey includes a section on the importance of cuttings and embankments of disused railway lines which have provided good habitat features after colonisation by vegetation.

In general, in the Trust's opinion,

- disused railway lines are richer than used ones because the vegetation on or near a used line tends to be rigorously controlled
- cuttings are better than embankments for wildlife and that variations in geology increase the diversity of wildlife, limestone areas being particularly rich. e.g. the

Cheltenham to Bourton-on the Water Disused line where more than 200 species of plants have been recorded along the line.

- Furthermore, railway lines can provide several wildlife habitats along short sections of track. e.g. Notgrove has at least 7 distinct habitats (grassland, rockface, scree, ballast, ditches, scrub, and woodland) -
- cuttings and stone debris provide habitats for plants favouring rockface and scree, areas often colonised by ferns and lichens, eg 18 species were recorded along a 1 mile stretch of disused line at Chedworth.
- Wet rock surfaces can be covered by moss favoured by invertebrates eg Notgrove has several rare beetle species,
- Ditches can provide a range of wetland plants eg reeds, rushes and sedges
- Ballast provides a habitat for dry loving plant species whilst if limestone ballast is present the richer the flora; eg kidney Vetch and their dependent fauna the Small Blue Butterfly).

### **Forest of Dean**

In the Forest of Dean baseline ecological assessments to the standards recommended by the guidelines drawn up by the Institute of Environmental Assessment, have not been undertaken before the construction of cycle routes, but simple surveys denoting type of tree, boggy ground etc. Because of a lack of a full ecological survey it is not possible to develop a full picture of the possible ecological losses as the base-line data is incomplete.

The omission of adequate base-line data combined with the lack of adequate consultation before construction and upgrading works appeared to have led to the following occurrences.

1. **Mireystock** In 1995 it was planned to use a disused railway tunnel as means of channeling cyclists underneath a road. This tunnel is an important roosting site for bats, a protected species. It was only after the construction of the cycle route to the vicinity of the tunnel was the routing actually diverted after raised objections.
2. **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary Butterfly Site** Damage to the site during construction and upgrading works. (details overleaf)
3. **Community Concerns** It may be that a full ecological survey would have revealed a variety and diversity of common species and not critical ecological stock of a rare or endangered species. To local communities it is often the variety and diversity of common species that local communities treasure in terms of enjoyment of their local environment and landscape which they wish to retain. This is the character and sense of place invested in the varied composition of common species making up their landscape. Anecdotal information refers to the loss of biodiversity; the common lesser spotted orchid from the Barracks area, that at Cinderford a slow worm and at the Barracks, Parkend an adder, have been found dying or dead on cycle routes with cycle tyre marks over them. The following Report is an example as to how a local parishioner feels that the general ecology of his local walk near Cinderford has been effected by the development of the cycle tracks. (details overleaf)



DEAD ADDER RUN OVER BY A CYCLE AT THE BARRACKS

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE BRANCH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION



President: Gordon Beningfield

DEDICATED TO SAVING WILD BUTTERFLIES, MOTHS AND THEIR HABITATS

### The Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly *Boloria selene* in the Forest of Dean

This is primarily a butterfly of woodland keeping close to clearings, rides and woodland edges where there is space in which to fly; and its caterpillar food plant (*viola* Sps) mainly grow. This type of habitat is vulnerable to management regime changes which can be quite insidious over a period of years. This species has been declining across England for the last forty years and the strongholds are now primarily in the west, with the Forest of Dean still holding an important population.

Butterflies Conservation has been monitoring a colony near the Barracks for a number of years. In the spring of 1995 Forest Enterprise built a cycle track across the northern end of the colony without consulting any of the conservation organisations with regard to minimising the impact.

This resulted in localised damage and increased use of the area by visitors. The colony appeared to survive without too much disturbance although the work was considered by locals and conservation groups to be unnecessary as there was already an adequate existing track alongside where the new one was built.

In the spring of 1997 despite advice by Butterfly Conservation of the importance of this site following the initial damage, there was an "upgrading" of the track and road crossing again without consultation. On this occasion heavy road building equipment was used, drainage installed and the surface vegetation removed with a bulldozer blade for a considerable area around the cycle track. This additional scraping and drainage resulted in the main butterfly roosting site at the northern end of the colony being destroyed.

Forest enterprise have been advised of this damage in writing and a site visit with Butterfly Conservation is to be undertaken. The butterflies are now on the wing and still in the area although where they are roosting has not yet been ascertained. Luckily the colony covers an approximate area of 150 metres by 40 metres and only about 10% to 15% of the site has been disturbed.

The butterfly is reliant on damp flushes and boggy areas and there is some concern that the drainage and land raising by the works may change the localised area and make the area already damaged unsuitable for this species. Forest Enterprise have indicated that they will help with improving the habitat where possible.

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THE BRITISH BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SOCIETY LTD.

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REGISTERED IN ENGLAND No. 2206468 · REGISTERED CHARITY No. 254937

# REPORT ON THE IMPACT ON FLORA AND FLORA ALONG A SECTION OF THE FAMILY CYCLE TRACK

(Grid references given here are taken from the Ordnance Survey Landranger 1 and 1/4 inch to 1 mile map, No. 162, 'Gloucester and the Forest of Dean'.)

## 1 Area under consideration

The area covered by this report is that stretch of the former rail track beginning near the old Crabtree Hill Colliery workings west of Cinderford (grid ref 136640) and running roughly SSE to the point where it passes under the main Cinderford-Speech House road immediately west of the Dilke Hospital (grid ref 126643), a distance of about 3/4 mile. The conversion of this rail bed into part of the main Family Cycle Track loop began in about 1995, when a narrow cinder-lined track for cyclists was laid in the centre of the existing grass-covered rail bed. This initially had little detrimental impact on the flora and natural vegetation that for years had colonized the length of the old rail lines, since broad strips of such plant cover were left in place on either side of the cindertrack. However, in late summer/early autumn 1996 the JCBs and construction crews moved in and the Family Cycle Track proper was put in place a 2.5 metre wide strip of hard-packed scalplings and gravel whose installation entailed the destruction of much of the natural vegetation covering the old rail bed and a consequent loss of habitat and food options for the local insect, bird and mammal life. This was exacerbated by the thinning out and in some cases complete clearing of sections of the tree cover on either side of the track, possibly as a result of a policy of 'opening out' the woodlands into a more park-like aspect, so as not to appear too intimidating to cyclists unused to deep woodland. Again this obviously has had a major impact on the wildlife and flora of these areas.

## 2 Damage to flora

The first stretch of the cycle track, near the Crabtree Hill workings, suffered the least in terms of harm to the indigenous flora, chiefly because the tree cover here had been of closely-spaced conifers, with consequently restricted light penetration and a thick layer of old pine needles carpeting the ground, thus largely preventing wild flowers from growing. The real problem occurred about 1/4 mile further south, where the track begins to run through deciduous (mainly oak and birch) woodland, from the point where at present two small wooden gate-barriers are placed to keep cyclists on the cycle track at the point where the latter curves sharply. Here, for a distance of about another 1/4 mile (up to the point where the signpost and safety fencing stand to mark respectively the side cycle track running down to Cinderford's Linear Park, and the continuation of the main cycle track towards the Dilke along a stretch where the ground drops steeply away on either side), the original rail bed was quite broad and enjoyed excellent light penetration. Consequently the grass and flora cover was very well developed, with a number of both smaller and larger wild flower species growing, both in the central, short-grassed part of the rail bed and in the taller grass closer to the trees on either side. The placing of the scalplings

and gravel of the Family Cycle Track precisely in the centre of this stretch of rail bed has resulted in the complete loss of the following species of wild flowers from this stretch:

wood anemone	dandelion	silverweed	wild strawberry
lesser celandine	coltsfoot	yellow rattle	various grasses
shepherd's purse	ragwort	hemp agrimony	
deadnettle	herb robert	lady's smock	
daisy	torinentil	violet	
groundsel	self-heal	bird's foot trefoil	
clover (red/white)	cranesbill	red campion	
buttercup	thistle	vetch	

Further off to the sides, losses were also sustained to the following (although in future these may possibly return, since here a grass strip has been left bordering the cycle track on either side):

dock	great mullein	spurge
nettle	rosebay willow herb	dog rose
bramble	foxglove	puff ball fungi
fern spp.	bluebell	shaggy ink cap fungus

Along the final section of track (running along the raised embankment part of the old rail bed past the Dilke Hospital and under the Speech House road) the original natural vegetation tended to be more muted due to the general dankness of the surroundings (thick overhead foliage reducing the amount of light able to penetrate to the floor, a process exacerbated by the track running through a gulley' with steep banks on both sides, helping to increase the general gloom). Here there has been less damage done by the construction of the cycle track, although the cutting down of some of the lateral branches of the overhanging trees has meant a reduction in bracket fungi and mosses.

Consequently it can be seen that the heaviest losses inflicted on the wild flower cover of the original rail bed occurred in the middle part of the section of track under consideration, and affected precisely those species of wild flower (chiefly Compositae) which had formerly provided both habitat and food for a rich insect population.

### 3 Damage to insects

In the year or so since the Family Cycle Track proper has been in place, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of insect species seen along this section of track, particularly along the aforementioned central stretch, which possessed a notable richness of flora and good access to sunlight and consequently provided fine habitat and food options (as well as, in the case of the butterflies, excellent resting places for sunning themselves). Even in the fine summer weather of 1997, insect life along the track was muted, to such a degree that often only the occasional butterfly and the odd dragonfly (straying over from Cinderford's Linear Park ponds) were to be seen.

## Species affected include:-

### Butterflies

Peacock  
small tortoiseshell  
red admiral  
comma -

all greatly reduced in number due to lack of flower cover for nectar gathering (although the survival of nettles along the final section of track would, in theory at least, provide food for the caterpillars of these species).

Fritillaries -

none seen all summer (due to loss of violets, or the brambles on which these butterflies love to bask?)

Speckled wood/meadow brown-

vastly reduced in number (due to reduction in brambles, grasses?)

Clouded yellow -

none seen (due to removal of vetches?)

Painted lady -

none seen (loss of thistles?)

Orange tip -

none seen (loss of flowers, particularly lady's smock?)

Ringlet -

reduced in number (reduction in grasses?)

### Moths

Cinnabar -

reduced in number (loss of ragwort/groundsel?)

Six-spot burnet -

reduced in number (loss of bird's foot trefoil?)

Tussock moth -

reduced in number (removal of brambles?)

### Other insects

During summer 1997 there was an extremely marked reduction of the various beetle, bug, grasshopper, ladybird and bumble bee species normally found along the central section of the track. The overriding likelihood is that this is attributable to the removal of the wild flower cover, particularly the clover and sweet vetches which provided excellent pollen and nectar for such insects.

### 4 Mammals and bird life

Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the sudden imposition of the Family Cycle Track in this part of the Forest has been the reduction - in some cases to near non-existence - of the formerly abundant wildlife and bird population that lived here.

Prior to the creation of the cycle track, the woods on either side were a presumably permanent home to a small herd of fallow deer (I was able to observe these regularly for a period of nearly 3 years, and can confirm from details of coat coloration that they were the same individual animals at all times, namely a mother and two young from successive years). Since the main cycle track was laid in place no deer have been witnessed by me anywhere in the woods to within half a mile on either side of the track. Effectively the track and its environs represent a 'no go' area for these shy creatures due to the noise and distraction caused by the cyclists, particularly in spring and summer when use of the track is at its peak.

Reptile life has also been affected - in a period of a year I have seen a slow worm with its back broken (yet still alive) by one of the speeding cyclists, have had to rescue young frogs trying to cross the dry, abrasive gravel of the track (I suspect the track may possibly interrupt an amphibian migration route between the damper woodlands west of the Dilke and the streams and ponds of Cinderford's Linear Park), and have seen no sign of the common lizards occasionally to be found on the old rail bed. Again, there would appear to have been an adverse effect on these creatures as well.

Worst affected of all has been the bird life. Previously, approaching this stretch of woodland from the direction of Cinderford's Valley Road/Linear Park, one entered a veritable paradise for ornithologists, since the young and medium-sized oak trees in the 600 or so yards leading up to the site of the present cycle track were alive with bird song and activity and were obviously vital for nesting. Since the imposition and use of the cycle track, bird life in these woods (and in the woods on the other side of the cycle track for a distance of about 400 yards) is so sparse as to impart an eerie, graveyard quiet to these once melodic woods. Species I have witnessed in this stretch of woodland over some 3 years immediately prior to the coming of the track include:

redstart	blue, great, coal and	goldcrest	carrion crow
song thrush	long-tailed tits	brambling	siskin
wood pigeon	great spotted woodpecker	fieldfare	sparrowhawk
treecreeper	green woodpeckers	wren	blackcap
mistle thrush	yellowhammer	nuthatch	cuckoo
redwing	hedge sparrow	robin	willow warbler
blackbird	common buzzard	chaffinch	greenfinch
bullfinch	(possible) waxwing	chiffchaff	tawny owl
long tailed tits	(possible) nightjar	jay	magpie
pied flycatcher (a Forest speciality)		wood warbler	

In the past year or so, since the advent of the cycle track, the number of individual birds has plummeted, as has the number of different species. For the year, sightings have largely been restricted to:

magpie	wood pigeon	jay (fewer in number)
carrion crow	robin (reduced)	blackbird (reduced)
green woodpecker (reduced)		tits (all four species previously seen, but greatly reduced)

While I accept that there are other possible causes for this decline in both numbers of species and of overall individual birds (for instance, climate change starting to create food and breeding difficulties), it is difficult not to view the coming of the cycle track - and in particular its period of peak usage coinciding with the nesting season - as having had an extremely detrimental effect on the bird life of the formerly peaceful woods through which it passes.

### Conclusion

In regard to the highly visible detrimental effects wrought upon the plant and animal life of the adjacent woodlands, I would contend that the conversion of the disused rail lines penetrating the deep woodlands of the Forest of Dean into tracks for mass cycling activities has had - and will continue to have - a markedly harmful effect on our natural environment and its wild inhabitants.

ANDREW STEPHENS B.A. (16 NOVEMBER 1997)

(Please cross reference with "Impact of Landscape")

## **Off-Track Cycling**

Cycling being an all the year round activity any physical damage by off-route cycling to surfaces has difficulty in recovering as there appears to be no resting period. Cycling off hard roads and prepared cycleways can result in general degradation of ground surface, and damage to vegetation. Any physical damage to surfaces and vegetation has difficulty in recovering if there is no resting period.. To avoid rutted areas cyclists use edges of paths which gradually become wider and wider. Off-route riding in wet weather can be particularly damaging to surfaces and flora. The Cannop Valley is a good example.

**Cannop Bridge Marsh Nature Reserve:-** This is situated in the centre of the Forest Oakwoods Nature Reserve Trail and is managed by Gloucester Wildlife Trust. The walkers path was used in the early days by the cyclists before their own routes were established and usage has not entirely ceased even though there are now dedicated cycleways and signage requesting no cycling.

**Woorgreens Lake and Marsh:-** Suffering from limited damage after rain to the footpath around the western side of the lake.

**Nagshead Reserve (SSSI):-**

Off track cycling has not ceased despite dedicated cycleway and signage requesting no cycling.

**Cleddon Hill Reserve:-** Contains a steep zig-zag path with noticeable gullied degradation. degradation evident in other areas of the reserve.

**General Degradation:-** Details in the "Impact of Off-Track Cycling"

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Detailed unbiased scientific research, including further survey work, and/or at the very least similar to best practice standards set by the Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment for Environmental Impact Assessment be undertaken by the Countryside Commission and the Department of the Environment with the support of the Forestry Commission into the perceived impacts in the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley from the development of recreational cycle routes in the Forest of Dean.

The new issues raised by the Environmental Statement and demonstrated by this Report, underlines the importance of detailed scientific research in the Forest of Dean, the need for pre-project assessment and new Government Guidelines for the strategic management of cycle tracks incorporating the requirement of a full Environmental Impact Assessment, to best practice standards recommended by the Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment, if the development of cycle tracks is in/near environmentally important areas in terms of their landscape, ecology or cultural heritage.