

Report from the meeting of the Moorland Access Group Representing the CCAF at Carnyorth Moor on 15th December 2010

Present

Julie Bate	User Representative Cornwall Countryside Access Forum (CCAF)
Adrian Bigg	Landowner Representative CCAF
Mike Eastwood	Cornwall Council CC
Jane Kiely	User Representative CCAF
Jeremy Varcoe	Landowner Representative CCAF
Steve Warman	Natural England NE

Background

The Heath Project (Heathland, Environment, Agriculture, Tourism, Heritage which finished in 2008) was set up to protect and re-generate areas of Heathland in Europe. Carnyorth Moor was one of the areas under the scheme administered by Natural England. The tenant farmer has since been paid annually under agri-incentive schemes to graze the moor. He has chosen a rare breed of cattle known as Longhorns. Parts of the moor have been fenced to contain the cattle and new gates and a cattle grid have been installed.

The Save Penwith Moors Action Group has been set up to campaign against this project. They are against fencing and grazing of open areas, and this area in particular, claiming that access has been compromised. It will be useful for CCAF to look and comment on these issues, as they are arising on many sites in Cornwall and elsewhere.

Site Visit

The group walked around Carnyorth Moor and looked at the grazing regime, fencing, gates, information boards and cattle grids.

The Issues Discussed

1. The bridle gates/cattle grids
2. The grazing by Longhorn Cattle
3. Fencing
4. Notices

The CCAF Observations

1. Bridle gates/cattle grids

The gates that were seen would appear to have been erected (by NE) in such a way as to make it difficult, and potentially unsafe in some instances, for horse riders to access the moors. Modifications have been carried out but further improvements do need to be made. The issue has been raised over the last two years with NE but with no agreement on whose responsibility it is to make the access safe and convenient. NE (Stephen Warman has now indicated that NE will make necessary improvements.)

One option being explored by NE is that all gates should be fastened open when cattle are not present on the moor, this would have the advantage of easier access by all, and comfort for those visitors who don't like encountering cattle.

It must be noted that there is no legally recorded right of access for horses riders, but at an early stage in the project it was accepted by NE and Cornwall CC that horses riders regularly use the moor and that full specification bridleway gates should be provided at most access points.

Recommendation

That the gates are replaced or modified to facilitate horse riders. Discussions should take place between NE and CC and BHS to look at British Standard Gates or other more suitable designs, and if possible consider erecting metal gates more in character with the area.

2. Grazing by Longhorn Cattle

There was general agreement that grazing could be a useful tool in the management and enhancement of this unique environment. The group however thought that this was a poor choice of livestock to put on a moor where there is existing extensive public access. Their appearance was thought to be intimidating, and the breed seemingly is not known for liking, or being suitable for grazing in a heathland environment. The Moor is crossed by a series of paths and firebreaks and between these the vegetation makes it impossible to walk freely. It is understood therefore that the cattle graze along these paths, congregate around stiles and are fed where people are trying to walk. The farmer is being paid to graze this herd with an enhanced payment for using a rare breed. Some of the group felt this is yielding very little perceivable public benefit and causing ill feeling in the community.

Recommendations

Other breeds or types of stock should be investigated e.g. hebridean sheep/ ponies were suggested or a breed of docile cattle without horns. Rare breeds that are seen to be intimidating to the public should be taken off the list of possible breeds for enhanced payments when areas are also subject to public access. Shepherding was also put forward as a possibility swaling and cutting could be used to supplement the grazing. A sensitive management regime which will not drastically alter the appearance of the moors should be published, implemented and monitored so that people can see what they are paying for.

3. Fencing

The group has some sympathy with the view that open moors should not be fenced as this takes away the feeling of wilderness. However this view is tempered by the need to provide good habitats for our native flora and fauna. The group observed very little new fencing on the section walked and it had been kept to the perimeter. It was noted however that temporary electric fencing had been used in other areas to good effect.

Recommendations

Whilst the group accepts that in many circumstances fencing is necessary, for containment of stock, the group recommends that all other avenues are explored before permanent fencing is installed where grazing is being contemplated for moorland management. If it is needed then it should be kept, as far as is practical, to the edges of the moor and not across it or near/adjacent to public rights of way.

Electric fencing should be investigated as an alternative. Provision for removal of fencing in the future and/or proper maintenance of all 'furniture' should be included in the project.

4. Notices

Some of the notices had been defaced but the ones observed by the group were felt to be intimidating as they looked like they were showing a bull at large.

Recommendations

Remove the signs altogether. If absolutely necessary, produce some more user friendly signs but due to the remote wild atmosphere it would be better not to have any.

Conclusion

On balance the members of the Cornwall Access Forum felt that the above recommendations need to be taken on board to ensure that easy access and enjoyment of the moor is safeguarded. The group were very pleased to welcome Stephen Warman of Natural England to the meeting and tour of the moor, and to hear that he was working towards finding solutions to the mistakes that had been made throughout the project. These are very small areas of moor but ,never the less, are obviously very important to the local population as well as for wildlife and should be sensitively managed accordingly.