

CUT GATE PATH

COLLABORATION.
CONSIDERATION.
CONSERVATION.
ACTION?

PREPARED IN PARTNERSHIP BY.







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BACKGROUND

The Cut Gate path is recognised as a 'classic' in the mountain biking world. Regularly listed as a top three route in the United Kingdom, Cut Gate – the bridleway from Langsett Reservoir to Slippery Stones in the Upper Derwent Valley – holds a special place in the hearts of mountain bikers.

Cut Gate is also hugely popular with other users. Horse riders enjoy the route as part of the Kinder Loop and walkers use Cut Gate as part of the huge network of paths available to them in the area.

As such many groups have an interest in the path itself.

For much of its length, Cut Gate is passable all year round – the path is robust, rocky in the main and well armoured against most forms of traffic. However, two sections are prone to flooding.

This leads to people detouring away from the path, widening the track, damaging surrounding peat bog or simply avoiding the area altogether.

In addition, the moor is vitally important, not least for wildlife and conservation reasons, but also as a upstream element of flood control.

So what can be done? In the short term, it's about making a sensible choice when and where you ride. Maybe Cut Gate can wait until it's frozen or dry? In the longer term, there's certainly an argument for sensitive, appropriate repairs suited to a wide range of user groups.

Whatever the suggested solution for Cut Gate, it has to be done sensitively and with consideration of a huge number of influencing factors.

Ride. Repair. Care.

THE PERCEIVED PROBLEM

The path fords two tributary streams on high, remote moorland and it is this point where the path often floods.

As such, Cut Gate is often seen as a place to avoid in inclement weather.



For those who do head up there, there is clear evidence that many actively avoid travelling through the flooded sections, instead choosing to detour around the marshy or waterlogged area – at times up to 20 metres out on to the heather moorland.

The path is getting wider at this point and as Cut Gate is a honey pot for mountain bikers, they're often unfairly blamed for this perceived damage.

It's clear that other users are also avoiding the flooded section, so it is in the interests of all to consider options for user engagement and education and potential repairs.



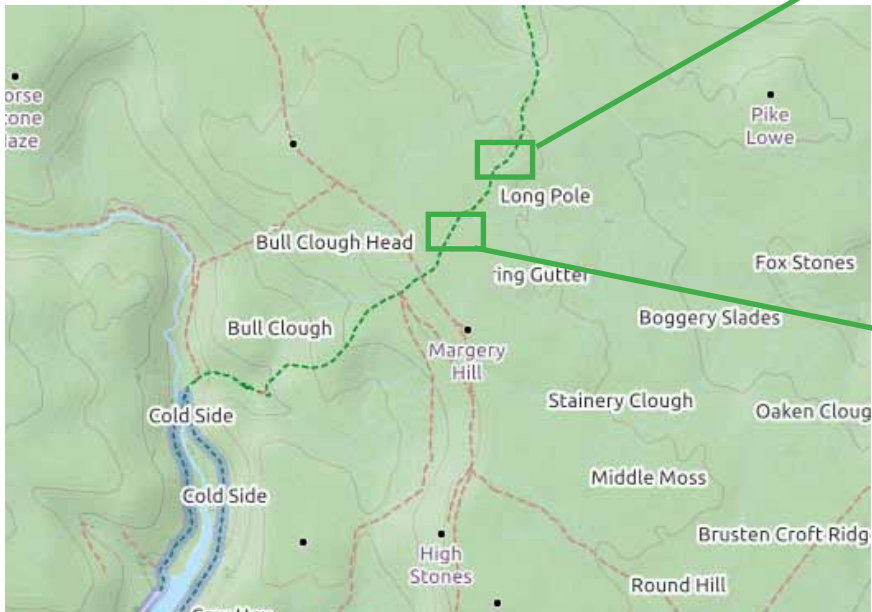
WHERE DO WE MEAN?

The main areas prone to flooding are two ford crossings on Featherbed Moss, east of Margery Hill on the Cut Gate path.

The bridleway drops to the stream crossing in a natural dip. At the bottom of the dip the stream water backs up regularly resulting in a seemingly impassable bog.

To avoid the deepest part of the flooded area, visitors will often detour around - working their way up or down the streams until they find a narrow enough section to cross.

The aerial views here show the ford areas in question. While you can clearly see a defined line from the north east towards the south west on each picture, it is also clear to see which areas are most prone to flooding.





POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

There are a number of approaches that we as users can take to help improve the condition of Cut Gate and surrounding areas.

Initially, user groups should discuss voluntary restraint when the conditions are known to be wet. Communication between end users and their respective groups could mean successful sharing of ground condition information between otherwise disconnected groups. Working together is a key point here.

If the path condition doesn't improve through restraint alone, then sensitive, appropriate repairs could be considered.

Local preservation work by groups such as Moors for the Future has set a good precedent of what can be done with a sensitive approach.

It can be expected that by improving the access there could potentially be an increase in the level of traffic in the area. Given there is a fragile, peaty surface on sections of the route, this will also require consideration as a result.

The following pages further look further at these points; firstly voluntary restraint and user communication and then at options for potential surfacing work.

INFORMED CHOICES

Both Ride Sheffield and Peak District MTB have been proactive in promoting responsible and accountable riding. Regular discussions take place around suitable routes, riding behaviours and other related topics. The community is being seen as a caring community, indeed, it is mountain bikers in the main who proactively seek to maintain trails and increase access.

Groups such as @KoftheP actively champion rider responsibility - advising on how conditions affect Peak trails and providing a channel for responsible action, while the Peak Bike Code provides a few basic steps to understand how they can do this.

Though signage on the path itself is not desirable, an education programme around best times of year to ride and recommended resilient routes is a must - with or without improvements being made on the hill.

KEEPER OF THE PEAK (@KOFTHPEP)

The simplest step to take in protecting Cut Gate is making an informed decision on when to ride there.

Locally we're lucky to have a number of groups dedicated to not only promoting mountain biking, but also minimising damage to the Peak District itself.

Keeper of the Peak (@KoftheP) is a Twitter feed for riders in the Peak District. After a ride, riders send in details of where they've been and what kind of condition the path was in, then we share it with everyone else. Much of the feedback in this document on Cut Gate conditions is kindly sourced from @KoftheP.

The intent is to minimise the impact mountain bikes have on the fragile bits of the peak. Riders can use the tweets to plan their rides too.

With a scope covering the whole of the Peak District it is a good starting point to find out about the riding conditions across the national park.

www.kofthep.com
www.twitter.com/kofthep



**KEEPER
OF THE
PEAK**



PEAK BIKE CODE

The Peak Bike Code was jointly developed by Ride Sheffield, the Eastern Moors Partnership and Vertebrate Graphics, to promote responsible rider behaviour in the Peak park.

Distributed throughout local bike shops, it was universally well received and has shown that riders and local companies are willing to take a proactive and responsible approach to consider where and how we ride.



REPAIRS - STONWORK

Slabs, rocks, stepping stones - the choice will entirely depend on the ground conditions/surface - but stone work has been used extensively in the Peak District for hundreds of years; going back to packhorse trails which still last to this day.

More recently, work on the Pennine way and other moorland routes has seen stone used to bridge boggy sections while still leaving channels for water to flow.

Locally sourced, the rocks would over time become part of the landscape.

Offering a resilient, sensitive and sustainable option, stone is popular with a large range of users and seems a good option for these small sections.



REPAIRS - AGGREGATE

Aggregate surfacing is another common approach to path construction and maintenance in the Peak District. It can be roughly grouped into two groups, using either imported or locally derived stone.

These paths are considered less “natural” than other alternatives. In the case of imported material, this type of surfacing has sometimes received a less than positive reaction from users.

Though the reputation of aggregate work has been affected by recent work on Derwent Edge and elsewhere, it is important to recognise that done well, it can be a suitable surfacing option.

A good example of aggregate used includes the recent resurfacing of Foulstone Road - using locally sourced aggregate and sensitive surfacing techniques.



SO WHAT NOW?

All we have done at this stage is highlight a perceived problem. We don't know 100% if you agree. We don't know if you think something should be done.

But we recognise that as the popularity of our sport grows so will the impact of people using paths such as Cut Gate and we must be seen to take responsibility for the impact our sport causes on sensitive areas.

Our education efforts can only go so far; and typically only locally. Riders from further afield will read guide books, magazines and websites and want to ride Cut Gate. Likewise walkers and horse-riders.

Our real task is to ensure that they can, that they have a great time when they do, and that the impact on the Peak is minimised, mitigated or simply avoided altogether. We have to consider the views of other user groups, using hiking boot, hoof or High Roller.

But we can only do that if we do that collectively.

We must take a collaborative approach - mountain bikers, horse riders and walkers use the path. Together we must work to exercise voluntary restraint to protect the fragile ground in the short term. If this doesn't work, let's engage in proactive debate on a sensitive and appropriate repair.



Picture courtesy of Dan Stone





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Ride Sheffield is an advocacy group that uses the collective might of Sheffield's mountain bike community to improve, preserve and promote access interests for mountain bikers.

WWW.RIDESHEFFIELD.ORG.UK



Peak District MTB is an advocacy group aimed at using the collective voice of the Peak District's resident mountain bike community and seeks to improve, preserve and promote access interests for mountain bikers who live and ride within the Peak District National Park.

WWW.PEAKDISTRICTMTB.ORG

With thanks to:



Keeper of the Peak.
Ride. Tweet. Update
@KoftheP | www.kofthep.com