

REPORT OF ACCESS & RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGER

SUBJECT: PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY VISITOR COUNTERS REPORT

Purpose of Report

For information and to bring Members' attention to the use of digital path counters in monitoring the usage of Public Rights of Way in the National Park and provide a review of recent trends.

Introduction/Background

Visitor counters have been used on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path since 1990 to monitor the numbers of walkers using the National Trail. In order to determine the volume of use of the wider network of public rights of way in the National Park, seven electronic path user counters were installed on various public rights of way in June 2006. The counters were distributed across the National Park at a range of locations which were sufficiently far away from the Coast Path to ensure that their use was not attributed in part to the Coast Path. The counter locations were chosen to represent a sample of the varied landscape that can be accessed by public rights of way, giving a cross-section of the type of paths managed by the National Park Authority. Some counters have remained in their original locations as controls, while others have been moved around the network to record the usage of paths that have been improved or recently made available for use.

The counters take the form of body heat sensors or pressure pads which are concealed in the ground or in access furniture. This technology has been tried and tested on the Coast Path and provides a reliable indication of the level of use on country paths. The counters are supplied, installed and serviced by an experienced contractor who also collects the data and provides three reports a year.

Trends & Comparisons

- Control counters; the total annual returns from the four control counters are shown in the table below. Most of the counters show a gradual increase over the years, however, there is a marked decline in 2012 at all locations showing a total of 27% below the count for 2011, which officers believe is attributed to the sustained wet weather (2012 was one of the wettest years on record with rainfall above known records for April-June – Met.Office). This decrease corresponds to other survey results relating to visitor numbers in Pembrokeshire. In terms of percentage share of users, January-April accounted for 28%; May-August 49% and September-December 23%.

Location	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	<i>Annual average</i>
Minwear	7337	6139	6160	5675	6422	4240	5996
Nevern	4661	4622	4949	5205	5663	4393	4916
Gwaun	2881	2930	2792	3008	3346	2261	2870
Garn Fechan	-	-	2213	2727	3259	2752	2738
Total	17230	16191	16114	16615	18690	13646	

- Pembrokeshire Coast Path; there are also seven counters on the Coast Path of which the four control counters showed a decline of 6.5% on 2011 totals. Generally Coast Path counters record three/four times as many walkers each year when compared to the totals for the inland paths.
- Community Paths; the results in 2010/11 for Llangwm typically recorded an average of 9,000 users and demonstrated the high levels of regular use that public rights of way can experience in proximity to settlements. The public footpath the counter was located on is part of a stile free circuit walk from the village and is promoted on the “web-walks” section of the Park Authority’s website. These figures are impressive and comparative to some of the returns from counters on the Coast Path and demonstrate the significance of countryside access opportunities for local communities.
- New access opportunities; the Rosebush counter was relocated from Roch and installed in mid June 2012 to record the usage of the forestry tracks at Pantmaenog. The National Park Authority entered into a Management Agreement with the owner of the forestry in 2011 to introduce public access to the network of forestry tracks. Even if the total of 7,256 for the six months from July to December is reduced by 50% to account for return traffic, it still records a significant amount of use for what is essentially a new facility which is served by a number of access points. The counter confirms the popularity of the forestry as a destination for walking, riding and cycling and a worthwhile investment of staff and resources in its establishment and on-going management. A similar arrangement to introduce public access to Toch Wood near Canaston Bridge was also concluded in 2012 and a counter has recently been relocated here.
- Remote paths; comparatively remote public rights of way, not part of a promoted route have been monitored as well and a counter on a short path near St Davids recorded 1,925 users in 2012.
- In terms of the monthly and daily variations, use remains highest in August when the visitor population is greatest and the daylight and weather is conducive to walking in the countryside. Paths generally experienced use on a daily basis with peaks in use observed at weekends at the more remote locations. Counters near communities exhibited a steady pattern of use during day light hours, peaking between 17:00-18:00 hours, with other counters in more remote, scenic destinations experiencing most use between 11.00-18:00 hours. Some occasionally high daily totals can be accounted for by groups of walkers and we are able to confirm this by checking totals against days on which guided walks were known to have taken place.
- These figures provide a reliable indication of the scale of recreational activity accounted for by the wider network of public rights of way. In order to estimate the scale of usage across the entire network in any year, the number of individual circuit walks (65) promoted on the website can be multiplied by the six year annual average of the control counters (4,130) which would provide a total of 268,450. This compares favourably to estimates of user numbers on the Coast Path (287,325) and estimates of visitor numbers to the National Park.

Options

Visitor counters represent one form of monitoring to provide information on the volume of usage of public rights of way. Other data and performance measures are obtained from:

- Performance Indicators and National Park Authority Surveys to provide information on the accessibility and condition of the public rights of way network;
- Website hits record the downloading of the walking opportunities promoted on the Authority's website.
- Pembrokeshire Citizens' Panel provide qualitative data on usage and opinions of public rights of way from residents' questionnaires.
- Pembrokeshire Visitor Survey Interviews provide information on use of public rights of way.

Financial considerations

The annual cost for the on-going servicing, collection of data and production of reports by external contractor is £1,662.00. An allocation of funds to monitoring is a necessary expenditure in order to gather data to measure performance. The current arrangement is considered to be a reasonable investment and an efficient use of funding in terms of the data that is produced.

Compliance

The management of public rights of way by the National Park Authority contributes significantly to the delivery of a number of outcomes in the Corporate Strategy, namely Outcome 2 and to a lesser extent, Outcomes 1, 3 & 5 as public rights of way provide opportunities for healthy exercise, recreation and a sustainable mode of transport.

Human Rights/Equality issues

No issues.

Welsh Language statement

No issues.

Conclusion

The network of public rights of way is the prime means by which people can explore and enjoy the coast and countryside of the National Park. The National Park Authority's long standing commitment to the management and promotion of public rights of way has contributed significantly to the implementation of its second statutory purpose to provide opportunities for enjoyment as well as its duty to foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. In addition to the Coast Path, the counters on the wider network of public rights of way show comparatively high and sustained levels of use. These results are very encouraging and demonstrate that the network of public rights of way must collectively account for a significant level of recreational activity, which is distributed across the National Park and helps to justify the National Park Authority's continued involvement in the management of public rights of way.

Recommendation

Members are requested to NOTE the Report

Background Documents: Visitor Counter Reports 2007-2012

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