

Cycle tourism development in the Peak District National Park, United Kingdom

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[a]Introduction

The popularity of cycle tourism has to some extent followed that of the bicycle itself. Right after the development of the safety bicycle¹ at the end of the nineteenth century, leisure cycling spread rapidly with many benefiting from this low-cost form of access to the nearby countryside. Cyclists also became more organised: in the UK the Cycle Tourism Club formed in 1878 and saw cycle tourists traveling further afield, often using the railways, as bicycles could easily be transported in guards' vans (Dickinson and Lumsdon, 2010). In the early part of the twentieth century, the bicycle became a common form of transport for working class men as mass production reduced prices and cycling became more egalitarian (Pooley et al., 2013). The inter-war and immediate post Second World War years were "La Belle Époque" for cycle tourism. During a visit to London in 1934, Lee observed that 'on fine Sunday mornings, while horses rested, Putney High Street filled up with bicycles – buxom girls in white shorts chased by puffing young men, old straw-hatted gents in blazers, whole families on tandems carrying their babies in baskets, and all heading for the open country' (Lee, 1992, p247).

Cycling generally declined in popularity from the middle of the twentieth century, both as a means of transport and a leisure activity, with the increase in private car ownership. By the end of the century, apart from a few notable exceptions, it had become a niche leisure activity (Dickinson and Lumsdon, 2010; Pooley et al., 2013). Yet cycling remains popular in some parts of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands as a transport mode and in some countries, including Austria and France, for holiday purposes (Lumsdon et al., 2012). Over recent decades, for example, Austrian

regional and local authorities have invested in the Danube cycle route (Donauradweg), which is now one of the most popular in Europe (Dickinson and Lumsdon, 2010).

Cycle tourism can be divided into three main categories: cycle touring/cycle holidays, holiday cycling and day cycling. These are defined by the importance of cycling in the trip, the duration of the trip and, to some extent, the cycling proficiency required. The first of these categories is the one most often identified with cycle tourism though it is often the smallest group. It is normally undertaken by more experienced cyclists who like holidays where cycling is the principal activity. The main distinction between cycle touring and cycle holiday is that the former implies travelling from place-to-place, often following long-distance multi-day linear or (more rarely) circular routes, whereas the latter revolves around a single base from where a day's cycling normally begins and ends, sometimes with the support of public transport. The second category typically represents a greater share of cyclists, though this can vary depending on the location and the type of cycle route. Here cycling is one of a number of activities undertaken while on holiday and is therefore not the primary motivation for destination choice. The level of cycling experience required can vary within this group, but people doing holiday cycling are typically less experienced and prefer traffic-free cycle routes. The third category groups less experienced cyclists travelling from home to enjoy an easy day of cycling often in the company of friends and family. This is in almost all circumstances the largest demand segment and, given the generally low level of cycling experience, is drawn to traffic-free routes or quiet roads (Downward and Lumsdon, 2001).

This distinction is important as it impacts strongly on the choice of destination for cycling. Studies suggest that cycle tourists are generally motivated by pleasant surroundings, such as open countryside and wildlife, while enjoying mild exercise (Lumsdon et al., 2012). Converted disused railway-lines are popular as they offer moderate slopes and a variety of vistas from cuttings, embankments and viaducts, and are generally constructed as greenways exclusively for non-motorised users, cyclists, walkers, horse riders, disabled users. Infrastructure is the key factor in encouraging cycle tourism: consistent investment pays long-term dividends. This was very well

understood in Spain, for example, where the Spanish greenways, or Vias Verdes², program was started in 1993 by the Spanish Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Environment, in partnership with the two state railway companies (the former RENFE and FEVE, now integrated in ADIF) and the Ferrocarriles de Vía Estrecha (narrow gauge railways). Together they created the Spanish Railways Foundation (FFE), which would be responsible for the development of the program. An inventory of the disused railway lines, buildings, bridges and viaducts identified over 7,500 kilometres of disused railway lines and almost 1,000 stations. Using the greenway concept developed in the UK and USA as a benchmark, in 20 years the FFE in partnership with local and regional organisations created over 100 greenways, totalling around 2,000 kilometres of traffic-free routes, which are used to promote active tourism and a healthy lifestyle for the local population. Additionally, over 70 railway stations have been refurbished providing accommodation, refreshments, bike rentals and other cultural facilities.

In Switzerland, a national network for non-motorised traffic has been established promoting active forms of travel for leisure and tourism. The Veloland network, which saw 3.3 million users in 1999 (only one year after it was launched), was later renamed SchweizMobil and broadened its target market to include hiking, mountain biking, skating and canoeing in addition to cycling (Lumsdon et al., 2012). One of the main reasons for its success has been the cooperation between stakeholders, including federal departments, cantonal offices, local authorities, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the various non-motorised traffic specialist organisations, such as the Cycling in Switzerland Foundation. The creation of a network of national and regional routes, bicycle rental schemes and accommodation providers as well as the work with public transport companies have also encouraged multi modal travel with bicycles carried on trains, buses and boats.

This chapter explores the benefits of developing cycle tourism in national parks as a strategy for improving access to and mobility within the park while mitigating some of the impacts normally associated with leisure travel, such as traffic congestion, atmospheric pollution and noise (Mundet and Coenders, 2010). In the United Kingdom (UK), the establishment of national parks was

originally driven by the two potentially conflicting objectives of conserving (and enhancing) natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of natural areas. Public access and landscape preservation are not always complementary activities: when conflict does arise, there is a general principle that conservation takes priority. The 1995 Environment Act further added to the duties of national parks, requiring them to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the parks, expanding areas of potential conflict. Among other protected areas, the Peak District National Park (PDNP) has a history of promoting cycling and has recently been successful in obtaining funding to further strengthen its position as a popular cycling destination. This is the context that will be analysed in this chapter.

[a]Study area

The Peak District National Park is located at the geographic centre of England and was the first UK national park to be officially designated in 1951. It covers around 1,438 square kilometres of mostly upland areas and can be divided into three areas: the White Peak, Dark Peak and South West Peak. The White Peak's limestone plateaus and rolling dales are home to the park's main settlements. The area is mainly grassland used for dairy farming, with some broadleaved woodland cover and small chalk stream and rivers. The Dark Peak, which is much less populated than the White Peak, presents grit stone outcrops, upland heath and bogs that are more suited to hill farming, with some grouse shooting occurring on the uplands. The area also forms the southern end of the Pennine Mountains and many of the local valleys have been flooded to create reservoirs supplying water to the surrounding urban areas. The South West Peak, which is also sparsely populated, is a mixture of upland moor and lowland pasture, with mixed stock farming use.

The PDNP lies predominantly within the county of Derbyshire, but also covers parts of Staffordshire, and Cheshire. It is surrounded by a number of industrial towns and cities, including

Manchester, Sheffield, Stoke-on-Trent, Derby and Nottingham and as a result over 16 million people live within 1-hour's drive of the park's edge. It attracts over 10 million visitors annually with 85% arriving by car, creating over 4 million car journeys every year³.

The PDNP has a resident population of around 38,000. Almost 90% of local inhabitants have access to a car and the average car ownership is 1.6 per household, compared to an average of 75% and 1.2 respectively for the rest of the country. Recent years have seen the average age of the park's population rising, which is possibly one of the causes of increased car ownership. The combined impact of private car use by residents and visitors to the park has seen traffic flows almost double over the last 30 years and as a result there is limited capacity for further growth, either in traffic levels or car parking.

The PDNP is crossed east-west by rail lines connecting the west coast and midland main lines, which provide fast access to London: 2 hours from Manchester and 1 hour and 30 minutes from Derby. Many of the cities surrounding the park will have their rail connections improved as part of the 'Northern Hub' development, strengthening access and shortening journey times.

Beside the traditional tourism directed to the honeypot sites, such as the market towns of Ashbourne and Bakewell, there is a long history of developing and promoting active tourism in the park. Recreational walkers constitute the backbone of this, but both cycling and rock climbing are popular in the park. Cycling especially has enjoyed increase in popularity following the recent successes of national teams and individuals in sport cycling.

[a]Cycling in the Peak District: current situation

The PDNP has long recognised the benefits of cycle tourism in achieving its key objectives of conserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage while promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the public. Cycling as an activity and access mode is less intrusive, has a lower environmental impact than most other forms of transport and is more socially inclusive.

Developing cycle tourism can also help the park achieve the more recent obligation to promote the economic and social well-being of local communities within the park.

Over the last thirty-five years, the PDNP has created a number of traffic-free trails by mostly converting decommissioned railways (Table 1). Although these have been somewhat opportunistic developments, they have established, along with the establishment of mountain bike routes, the Peak District as a popular destination for leisure cyclists. Cycle routes around reservoirs and along canal towpaths have also been created, providing further opportunities for family-friendly cycling.

Table 1 *Traffic-free trails in the Peak District National Park.*

Name	Length	Established
The Manifold Trail	14 kilometres	1937
The Tissington Trail	21 kilometres	1971
The High Peak Trail	28 kilometres	1971
The Monsal Trail	14 kilometres	1981
The Transpennine Trail	26 kilometres (within the PDNP)	2001
The Thornhill Trail	2.4 kilometres	

The steady growth in demand for leisure cycling within the park has supported an expansion of the businesses servicing the sector, particularly bike rentals (both publically and privately owned), but also cycle shops and cafés. The bike rentals have been particularly important in encouraging ‘non-cycling’ visitors to try out cycling as an activity during their visit to the park. The availability of traffic-free trails has of course played a key role in this, as safety is an important issue for inexperienced cyclists (Pooley et al., 2013).

Over the past decade, the PDNP has also developed an electric bike network covering much of the southern and central areas of the park to foster cycling among inexperienced visitors. The network provides charging points at a number of popular attractions, such as cafés, as well as in the market towns, which act as hubs. The PDNP also has a wealth of bridleways⁴, green lanes⁵ and quiet lanes suitable for mountain bikers and three challenging road climbs popular with sports or club cyclists, one of which featured in the 2014 Tour de France Grand Départ. These elements provide visitors

with opportunities to leave their cars at home or holiday accommodation and explore the park by bike.

As suggested earlier, the development of the traffic-free trails within the PDNP has been opportunistic as it largely occurred where existing infrastructure had become redundant and when funding was available. While this has delivered a number of popular trails, they are often disconnected, both from each other and from urban areas. The lack of connection between trails has reduced the opportunity to create circular rides, especially for families and less experienced cyclists, and in some cases has encouraged the illicit use of footpaths leading to conflict with other users⁶. Even where the trails are in close proximity to each other, there is a general lack of signposts that thwarts visitors willing to undertake circular rides using quieter public roads.

One of the main disadvantages of utilising disused railway lines for cycle trails is that they can create a 'corridor mentality'. In fact, while segregation was important for safety reasons when in use as an operational railway, it often reduces the economic and social benefits to communities near the cycle trails, as cyclists are either unsure of the facilities available nearby or discouraged from visiting them as they have to leave the trail often using relatively busy public roads. This in turn has had an impact on the awareness of some associated service providers, and has resulted, for example, in relatively few taking up the 'Cyclists Welcome' accreditation within the PDNP, despite its popularity as a cycling destination.

Urban areas in and on the edge of the park could act as hubs encouraging the use of public transport, but the poor connection to these areas encourages the use of private cars to access the park and travel within it, conceivably increasing traffic levels rather than reducing them.

All of the above issues, combined with the poor connection of the park with surrounding urban areas, have created a situation where around 85% of visitors arrive by car. This clearly generates congestion and conflict between cyclists and drivers on some routes at peak hours, especially where trails enter urban areas. Cycling could be a popular activity in the shoulder months, the early and

late parts of the holiday season, but the lack of awareness within the local business community of the cycle tourism market has resulted in a highly peaked season, with low off-season demand.

[a]Cycling in the Peak District: future perspectives

The PDNP was keen to build on its existing cycle tourism product. In 2009, the park received a grant of £2.5 million from Cycling England⁷ and the Department for Transport to fund a project called 'Pedal Peak District'. The project included both hard and soft measures including reopening of four tunnels along the Monsal Trail to create a continuous traffic-free route of 14 kilometres, cycle training and bike maintenance. To ensure that the momentum was maintained, the PDNP began to develop a cycling strategy in early 2013 and held the Peak District Cycle Summit, inviting participants from local authorities (including those in neighbouring areas), national government (Department for Transport), cycling organisations and other third sector groups. This inclusive forum recognised that not only did the authority need to achieve a consensus supporting future plans but that the opportunities for funding were likely to be diverse (e.g. facilities designed primarily for utility cycling could also be used in a leisure context and vice versa). The key objective of the summit was to develop a cycle strategy for the wider PDNP that could link the park to the surrounding areas. Hence, two main tasks were set: to map all the gaps in the network, both within and outside the park, and to develop ideas that would improve cycling within the park, such as road crossings, cycle storage, etc. The delegates were then asked to rank these ideas according to two criteria: deliverability and impact. This process helped prioritise ideas for a new funding application.

The Wider Peak District Cycle Strategy (WPDCS) identified five areas where cycling could benefit the wider Peak District and the park itself:

- Economic: the initial investment in cycling encourages visitors to spend more in the local economy.
- Health and Wellbeing: in addition to the individual physical and mental health benefits from cycling, there are wider health benefits from reduced vehicle emissions and noise pollution.
- Community: additional leisure opportunities, increased travel sustainability and more socially equitable access to employment and other facilities.
- Transport: improved opportunities for both the local communities and visitors to travel on foot and by bike while reducing congestion in some of the busiest areas in the park.
- Personal discovery, fun and development: opportunities to discover the surrounding countryside in safety, particularly areas that would not normally be accessible.

The strategy creates a hierarchy of main, secondary and complementary routes. The main routes will form the backbone of the network connecting to surrounding towns and cities, while the secondary routes will connect market towns, railway stations, residential areas and key attractions to the main network. The complementary routes will support the main and secondary networks with connections to other places. The development of the main and secondary routes will be prioritised, while complementary routes will be realised as opportunities arise.

In particular, the WPDCS sets out four themes in order to achieve the park's ambition:

- Increase the network of routes,
- Support cyclist-friendly infrastructure to stimulate the cycling economy,
- Promote the Peak District cycle experience, and
- Develop sustainable transport packages.

In 2013, the PDNP, together with four local authorities, submitted a bid for £5 million, with £2.5 million match funding, to the Department for Transport's 'Linking Communities – Grants to

support cycling in National Parks' initiative. The 'Pedal Peak Phase II – Moving Up A Gear' is a combination of both hard and soft measures to develop cycling. Four new cycle routes will be created and a Cycle Friendly Places Grant Fund, open to community organisations as well as local businesses, will be established to improve provision for recreational cycling in and around the park. The new routes will begin the process of connecting some of the existing routes, both to each other and to urban areas, providing direct cycle access to Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent on a combination of on-road and traffic-free routes, and direct rail links to Manchester, Sheffield and Derby. These improvements will allow 3.5 million people direct rail or cycle access to the park.

[a]Discussion

The recent cycling success of UK athletes, both in the Olympics and the Tour de France, has stimulated a resurgence of interest in cycling, especially for leisure purposes. Besides that, visitors to parks are getting more aware of the environmental impacts of tourism, this boosting the demand for lower impact activities. The combination of an increased interest in active tourism (driven by a desire to increase personal health and well-being) and the growing interest in the natural environment suggests that it is a good time to be encouraging further development of cycle tourism within the PDNP.

While many of the current trails are at capacity, particularly during peak times, considerable potential exists away from these periods. There are also opportunities to add new trails to the existing offer creating a wider network, including connections to the neighbouring urban areas around Manchester and South Yorkshire. The expansion of the network would not only relieve congestion on the busiest trails, but has the potential to mitigate car traffic by encouraging some visitors to use the bicycle to reach the park. The expanded network would also allow multi modal journeys, with visitors able to travel by train and bike, and would increase economic and social benefits.

However, it is important to maintain a reasonable balance between an increase in demand and the availability of cycling offers, such as new traffic-free trails and cycle-friendly accommodation. The PDNP is already popular with cyclists, but allowing demand to outstrip supply could increase the areas of conflict and have a longer-term detrimental impact on this popularity, the viability of future development plans and eventually the goodwill of local communities.

The development of cycle trails and other forms of countryside access in the UK are often confronted with resistance from other users, particularly landowners. The majority of land in the UK is privately owned and any new access arrangement has often to be negotiated with the owner and others who may have an interest, such as tenant farmers. Some elements of trail development may require planning consent from local authorities. The development could be open to scrutiny from the local population, as some people are resistant to change, particularly if this is likely to impact on their lives (e.g. noise or disturbance during construction, excessive presence of visitors). There are also special interest groups who may need to be consulted, such as wildlife organisations or sport groups (e.g. fishing or shooting clubs). These can all cause additional delays to the planning and development process, and in some cases prevent it from taking place. However, the PDNP has encouraged these groups to engage with the planning process at a relatively early stage, mitigating some of the risk.

Other regions of the UK and national parks have also recognised the potential economic, social and environmental benefits of cycle tourism: the market is already competitive and is likely to be increasingly so. However, the PDNP has a long history of developing cycle routes and has been actively supported by Derbyshire County Council: the local authority in which most of the park lies. Over the last three decades, a good all round cycling offer, both on and off road for all levels of proficiency, has been developed, contributing to make the PDNP a cycling holiday destination. In terms of delivering the aims of the WPDCS, the new Pedal Peak project will help fill the gaps in the existing network. This will reduce congestion at some of the current popular access points, particularly in the urban areas, and will create some extended riding possibilities for those who stay

longer in the park. Nonetheless, the discontinuity of the new traffic-free sections will remain a barrier to the less experienced cyclists who dislike the considerable slopes and traffic levels of the park's roads.

The improved connections should encourage more cyclists to begin and end their journeys in the market towns, as this would raise awareness among the business community about the role of cycle tourism for the local economy. Anyway, the PDNP will need to implement further soft measures, such as encouraging accommodation providers to obtain Cyclists Welcome accreditation, as well as hard measures, such as clear signing to cycle-friendly businesses, to ensure the economic benefits are fully realised.

Increasing the potential for multi modal journeys, particularly train and bike on the newly formed White Peak Loop, should be another priority to help reduce the number of car-based trips.

Nonetheless, at present, this is thwarted by the limited bike load capacity (i.e. two bicycles per train) on some of the older rolling stocks operating into the two market towns that are currently the main access stations for the PDNP. A bus service with the possibility to carry bicycles, such as that operating between the traffic-free sections from Stoke-on-Trent, is also an option, but tourists may have problems accessing this type of service.

[a]Conclusion

The Pedal Peak Phase II project attempts to strike a balance between the often conflicting objectives of the PDNP, namely encouraging public access and preventing the negative environmental impacts of such access. The project also aims to promote the economic and social wellbeing of local communities, and this often means encouraging tourism, as other opportunities for employment are limited. Cycling, along with other forms of active tourism, has a relatively low environmental impact, but can offer significant economic and social benefits if well managed.

The presence around PDNP of large urban conurbations that are home to almost a quarter of the UK's population suggests that access to the park will be an ongoing issue. The initiatives so far must be seen as a work in progress, but useful lessons can already be taken from them. First, long-term investment in traffic-free cycle routes has seen the park develop into a popular cycle tourism destination encouraging economic development beyond the traditional honeypot sites, while reducing some of the environmental issues commonly associated with tourism (e.g. pollution, noise, etc.). Second, by recognising that the park authority is not an isolated entity and involving other stakeholders early in the process, the PDNP has overcome much of the potential resistance to its plans and has in fact been actively supported with significant resource commitments. Finally, by developing a strategy that clearly sets out the current position, the long-term objectives and the benefits that will derive from the strategy, the park has successfully attracted funding to achieve its goals.

Notes

1 Unlike its predecessors the safety bicycle the rider's feet were near to the ground and the pedals drove the back wheel.

2 Literally translates to green route.

3 Based on an average car occupancy of 2 (Department for Transport, 2013)

4 Similar to public footpaths but also permits horse riding and bicycles

5 Unsurfaced roads open to motorised traffic

6 Footpaths are generally reserved for walkers and pedestrians and in some cases fines can be issued for improper use

7 Now abolished, Cycling England was an independent body funded by the Department for Transport to promote cycling in England.

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