CHAPTER 10. COMMUNICATIONS

Communications, as mapped by the HLC, include roads and railways. There are no canals, either in use or disused, within the Lake District National Park. Roads of all periods were mapped, but only where they continue to be in use as highways open to all traffic. Private tracks, footpaths and bridleways were not mapped. The aim was to record traditional and modern routes that would have helped to shape or alter settlement patterns. Former routes, such as Roman roads, were not mapped unless they have continued in use as modern roads.

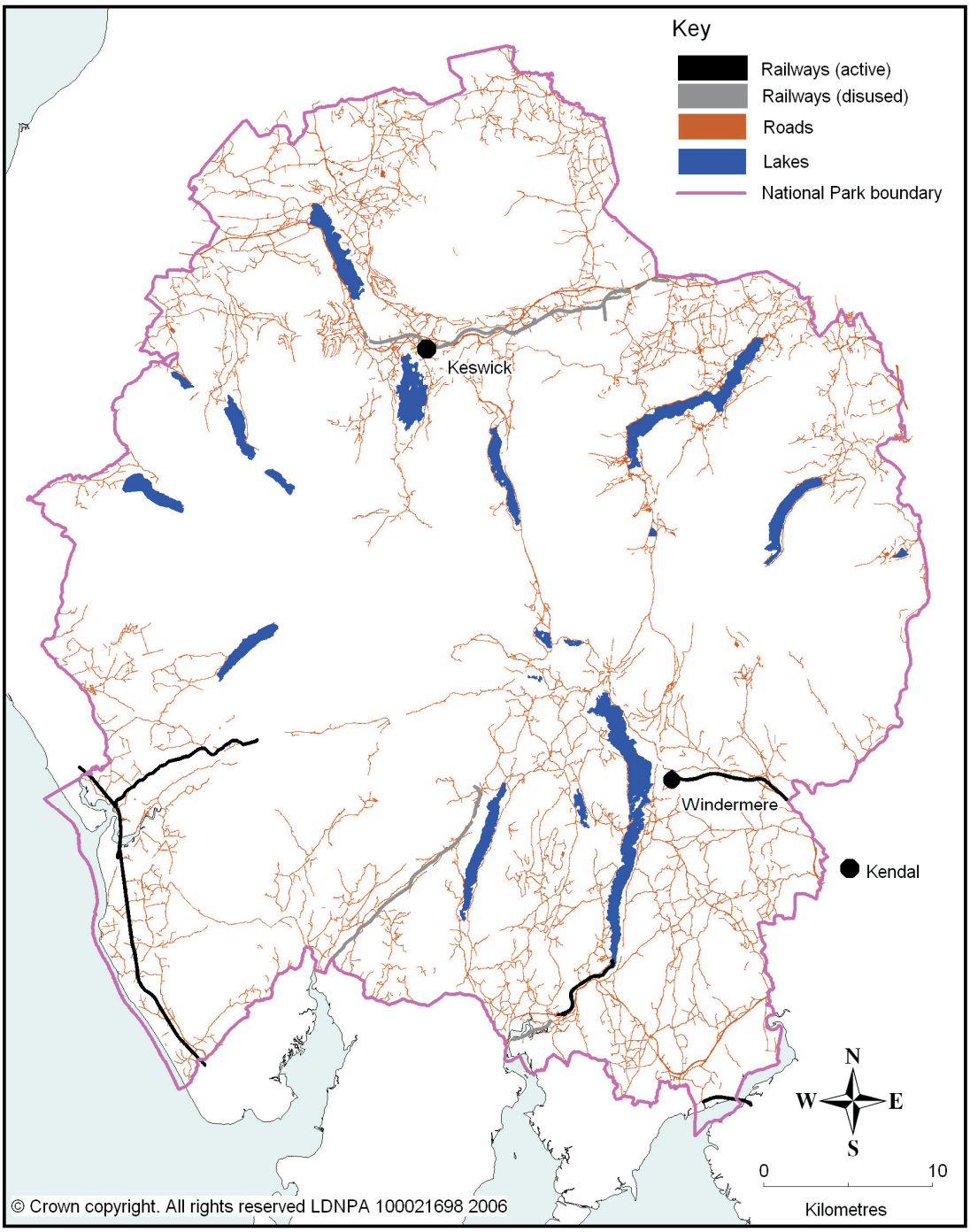

Figure 32: The distribution of public roads and railways in the Lake District National Park

Roads

Early Roads

There is little evidence for the nature and extent of the road system in the Lake District before the medieval period. In the Roman period, parts of the courses taken by a few roads linking forts across the Lake district are known, but in many places the routes are more speculative. The road from *Alauna*, the fort at Watercrook near Kendal, to *Galava*, the Ambleside fort, for example is largely unproven, whilst the route from *Galava* to *Glannaventa*, the fort at Ravenglass, via Hardknott fort is only certain where it is confined by its passage through the Wrynose and Hardknott passes. Likewise, the road from *Galava* to *Brovacum*, at Brougham is confirmed only where it runs over High Street and the spine of high ground to the north.[1] Both these Roman roads are scheduled monuments where their routes are known. The road from *Brovacum*, Brougham, to Moresby, on the west coast, however, is much more speculative, and its course has been confirmed in only a few places.[2] As forts were established across the Lake District, roads would have had to be developed to allow garrisons to access the hinterlands. It is likely, given the limitations to movement imposed by the terrain, that the Romans took advantage of waterways, such as Lake Windermere to move goods to *Galava* at Ambleside, where there was a large *vicus*, or civilian settlement, and storage facilities.[3]

The physical constraints of the high fells, and the large areas of upland moss, continued to be a formidable barrier to communications in the medieval period. Thus the number of major routes would have been very limited, and they would have avoided the high fells wherever possible. The King's highways were the key routes,

Plate 64: The Roman road between the forts at Ambleside and Ravenglass crosses high fells. Here, between the Wrynose and Hardknott passes, its course is followed by a farm track (© Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd)

generally linking the major towns, and their upkeep was the responsibility of each manor through which they passed. With the passing of the 1555 Highways Act, responsibility was transferred to the parishes.[4] Roads did not necessarily follow a fixed route in the medieval period, as they represented the concept of an easement, or right of way, rather than a physical route. Thus travellers could take detours from it if a road proved impassable.[5] Given the difficulty of travelling through an area like the Lake District, therefore, it is likely that many roads may have had alternative routes in places. The earliest source for Cumbria's medieval roads is the Gough Map, dated to the thirteenth century, and probably redrawn around 1360, which depicts a network of roads in England and Wales.[6] In Cumbria, the only road shown is the

[1] Hindle 1984, 13
[2] Allan 1994
[3] Shotter 1996, 52
[4] J Richardson 1986, 169
[5] Hindle 2001, 41
[6] Hindle 2001, 41

north-south route linking Carlisle to Lancaster and the rest of the North West, with two east-west roads running from Penrith and Kendal into Yorkshire. There are no routes shown across the Lake District. Clearly, there were other major routes, at least linking to Keswick and other settlements on the west coast, such as Workington and Egremont. The first depiction of a route across the Lake District was the map of individual roads drawn by John Ogilby in 1675, the earlier county maps of Saxton and Speed did not depict roads. Ogilby mapped the route from Kendal to Cockermouth, via Ambleside and Keswick.[7] It is not until Robert Morden's maps of the Lake counties in the 1690s, however, that roads were depicted on a county scale, though this was based on Saxton's maps of 120 years earlier.[8]

It is only in the eighteenth century that more detailed county maps were surveyed and drawn, as travelling became more popular, and with the building of turnpike roads. The Lake District was becoming an increasingly popular destination, and a number of commercial maps were produced depicting the mountains and routes through them. Not all were reliable, however, and mistakes were perpetuated as they were copied from other maps and travellers' guides.[9] The first reliable depiction of roads was on the county maps for Westmorland in 1770,[10] Cumberland in 1774[11] and Lancashire in 1786,[12] which all show the road network in some detail. It is on these maps that the HLC relied for data on roads pre-dating 1770. It can be assumed that most of these roads have their origins in the medieval period, as they connect settlements to each other, and to the major towns. The maps do not show all roads, however, but they do plot settlement, even individual farms, in great detail. For the purposes of the HLC, it has been assumed that the modern roads linking these settlements to the main routes would have been in existence by 1770, if they are also shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps.

Plate 65: The main roads north from Ambleside, over the Kirkstone Pass to Ullswater, as shown on Jeffrey's map of 1770

Not all medieval and post medieval routes survive as roads, and therefore were not mapped by the HLC. These include many of the mining and quarrying tracks, as well as some of the passes between valleys, such as the Walna Scar from Coniston to Dunnerdale, and the Gatescarth Pass from Longsleddale to the village of Mardale, now lying below Haweswater Reservoir. Some corpse roads, too, continue as rights of way, rather than as roads. In an area of sparse population, parishes were very large, and they provided vital access between the more remote settlements

[7] Hindle 1984, 66
[8] Hindle 1984, 68
[9] Hindle 1984, 83
[10] Jeffreys 1770
[11] Donald 1774
[12] Yates 1786

and the churches for burial. The two most well known run from Wasdale, across Burnmoor to the parish church in Eskdale, and between Mardale, via Wet Sleddale to the parish church in Shap.[13] From the late medieval period, some of the minor roads were also drove ways, used to move cattle over long distances, up until the advent of the railways. The main routes lay to the east of the Lake District, between Scotland and the large cattle fairs in England, but others traversed the Lake District, linking up west Cumbria to the main road system at various points.[14] The main northern route ran from Eskdale to Cockermouth, where it joined the main road east. Its route can be followed along minor roads to Santon Bridge and Nether Wasdale, but it then traversed the lower fells of Stockdale Moor. Here some of its route can be followed by a bridleway, to Scalderskew and Monks Bridge, but parliamentary enclosure and coniferous plantation has completely altered the former moors around the River Bleng. The other route from Eskdale ran eastwards over the Hardknott and Wrynose passes to Ambleside, and from there along what is now a track to Skelghyll, then on to Troutbeck. In order to avoid enclosed land, the route continued to use high ground, running over the Garburn Pass to Kentmere, and from there to Sadgill in Longsleddale, where drovers could either turn north along the Gatescarth Pass towards the main routes to Appleby and Yorkshire, or south towards Kendal.

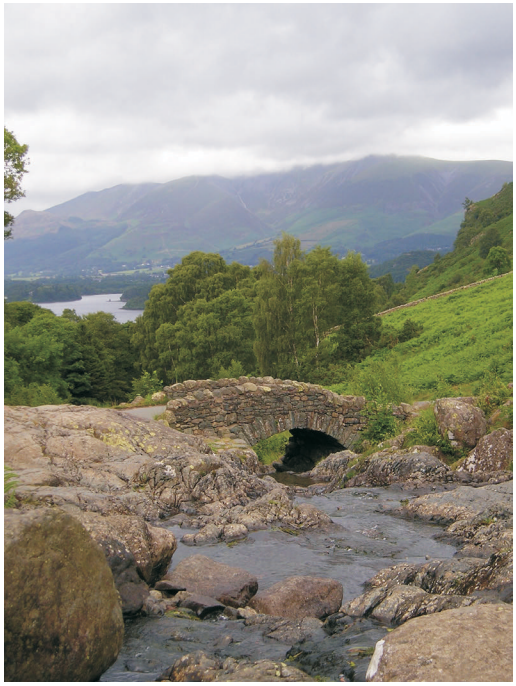

Plate 66: Ashness Bridge, a packhorse bridge overlooking Derwent Water, on the road from Watendlath to Keswick (© Lucy Drummond)

The drove routes would have been well defined and wide, partly to take the large volume of animals but also because of the effects of droving. Other routes, however, would have been packhorse tracks and many if not most would have been unsuitable for wheeled traffic. In 1697, Celia Fiennes described the roads between Kendal and Bowness as narrow lanes,

> "*here can be noe carriages but very narrow ones like little wheel-barrows that with a horse they convey their fewell and all things else; they also use horses on which they have pannyers … that they strew full of hay turff and lime and dung and every thing they would use, and the reason is plaine from the narrowness of the lanes: where is good land they will loose as little as they can and where its hilly and stoney no other carriages can pass*".[15]

Much of the existing road network which was in existence by 1770 would have been similar to this. Surfaces would have been largely unmetalled, and most would have resembled modern bridleways. The through routes which survive as modern roads, are those which were the most accessible and improvable. As with the drove roads, regular packhorse routes often took the shortest way over

[13] Hindle 1984, 56-7
[14] Hindle 1984, 105-9
[15] Morris 1949, 192

the more hilly ground, and they survive only as bridleways or footpaths. In some cases old routes can only be recognised by the survival of a packhorse bridge, essential to allow a heavily laden pack animal to cross streams and rivers. Examples include Monk's Bridge above Calder, Slater's Bridge in Little Langdale and Park Bridge on the path between Shap Abbey and its grange at Thornthwaite.[16] Although this variety of former drove roads, packhorse routes, mining tracks and corpse roads are largely umappable by the HLC, they continue as important and prominent features of the Lakeland fells in their own right, and provide access for both recreation and farmers.

Turnpike Roads

As traffic increased in the post medieval period, there was an imperative to improve the road conditions, particularly the major routes. The burden of road repair and upkeep lay on the parishes, who found it difficult to raise adequate funds and maintain roads in a suitable condition. The concept of raising funds by charging road users with tolls was first put forward in the seventeenth century, and the first turnpike act was passed in 1663 on the Great North Road.[17] Road repair had always been a local responsibility, therefore the turnpike system grew through the establishment of local groups with an interest in improving individual sections of road. The early turnpikes tended to improve existing routes, though later new stretches of roads were sometimes incorporated into road improvements.

The turnpike road network in Cumbria began with the improvement of roads around Whitehaven between 1739 and 1751, and were carried out simply to improve the town's links with its hinterland[18]. In 1753, six turnpike acts were passed for Cumbria, but none for roads in the Lake District. The first turnpike road through the Lake District was not begun until 1762, when an act was passed to improve four roads: Hesket Newmarket to Cockermouth, Cockermouth to Kendal, Kendal to Windermere, and Keswick to Penrith. The road from Cockermouth to Hesket Newmarket involved the construction of a new section south of Setmurthy Common, but otherwise followed existing roads. The road leading from this route down the east side of Bassenthwaite Lake[19] was turnpiked by the end of the eighteenth century. The turnpike between Cockermouth and Kendal followed the existing routes for the most part, via the Whinlatter Pass down to Keswick. This difficult route was bypassed after 1823, when an alternative traditional road along the western shore of Bassenthwaite Lake was turnpiked.[20] From Keswick, the turnpike road continued the line of the old road, now the A591, although it was rebuilt along the shore of Thirlmere following the construction of the reservoir in the late nineteenth century. Between Grasmere and Rydal the route was altered, with the original line preserved as a lane over a spur of higher ground known as White Moss. At Keswick, the turnpike road to Penrith also followed the existing route past Castlerigg stone circle, and at Kendal, ran west via Crook to Bowness.

The next stage in turnpike construction in the Lake District was around the Cartmel and Furness peninsulas in 1863, providing access to wheeled vehicles without having to negotiate the traditional, and dangerous, route across the Morecambe Bay sands. This involved widening, but otherwise not improving, the old packhorse route

[16] Hindle 1984, 111-12
[17] Hindle 2001, 92

[18] The following information on turnpike roads in Cumbria is taken from Hindle 1984, Chapter 6
[19] Now the A591
[20] Williams 1974, 240

from Kendal to Penny Bridge, creating a road with numerous twists and turns and steep inclines. This road, which is now a 'C' class road, runs via Underbarrow, Crosthwaite, Strawberry Bank and Fell Foot down to Newby Bridge, and from there across The Causeway in the Rusland Valley to Bouth and then Penny Bridge. It was not until 1818, however, that another act was passed to construct a new route from Levens Bridge to Greenodd, over half of which was to be a brand new road. The road was taken across the mosses between Levens and Lindale, constructed by 'floating' the road on timber and brush. Short sections of new road were built to straighten the route through High Newton, past Ayside, and to avoid the winding, hilly section at Canny Hill near Newby Bridge. Further new sections were built west of Newby Bridge, to cross the mosses at the bottom of the Rusland Valley.

Generally, the turnpike trust movements did not radically transform the majority of roads through the Lake District. They did make an important contribution to the quality of main roads, easing communications between Kendal and Keswick, and Keswick and Penrith, for example, but most roads would have remained narrow, and difficult to negotiate. The greatest improvement was brought by the construction of the road across the previously impassable mosses at the top end of Morecambe Bay. This removed the need to cross the treacherous sands of the bay, and bypassed most of the difficult, narrow, steep and winding lanes around the low Furness and Cartmel Fells.

Toll Charges on the Keighley-Kendal turnpike at Craven Cross Bar:
Two horse cart *1s. 1 1/2d.*
Two horse coal cart *0s. 3d.*
It was no coincidence perhaps, that the Trustees had mining interests

Modern roads

The next stage of road improvements came with the planned enclosures of the common wastes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly parliamentary enclosure. Within the Lake District, this does not seem to have led to the

Plate 67: Although the A66 bypass around Keswick retained the curvilinear pattern and tree cover of the landscape, the scale of development can be considered unsuitable for a National Park (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd)

Plate 68: The award winning Greta Bridge which carries the A66 bypass around Keswick and passes over the disused railway line which is now a footpath. Such large modern structures contrast sharply with, and dominate, the historic landscape (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd)

creation of a large number of new roads, but the improvement of existing routes which had run across formerly open moor.[21] The road from Lindale to Cartmel Fell, for example, was improved and straightened in places. A minimum width of twelve feet, and the type of road surface was stipulated, but it largely appears to follow its traditional route along the back of Newton Fell.[22] Considerable road improvements were also provided by the Crosthwaite Enclosure Commissioners, completing 15 public highways in 1848.[23] It was in places such as the Lyth Valley where most new roads were built, in order to provide access to the newly drained mosslands which would have been inaccessible previously. A large expense in the improvement of roads through the newly enclosed land was the provision of bridges and culverts, not just for former lowland mosses such as the Lyth Valley, but also in the uplands where there were large expanses of upland moss.[24] Where new roads were built, however, they are starkly different from the old roads, even where they were straightened and improved. This is most clearly seen on the minor road which marks part of the northern boundary of the Lake District National Park between the A66(T) west of Penruddock north to where it crosses the Gilcambon Beck south-east of Hesket Newmarket. The road passes through the extensive planned enclosure of Greystoke Forest, which had small islands of isolated enclosed farms and hamlets. The road cuts across the area, clearly set out by a surveyor, with blocks of fields laid out in relation to it.

Since the nineteenth century, there have been relatively few major changes to the road system within the Lake District National Park. In the second half of the twentieth century, the main improvements have been to two trunk roads; the A590 across the southern Lake District to Greenodd, and the A66 from Penrith to Cockermouth. Improvements to the former has involved widening the early nineteenth century turnpike route, including occasional sections of dual carriageway. At the time of writing, the High and Low Newton bypass is under

[21] Hindle 1984, 164
[22] Whyte 2003, 74
[23] Williams 1974, 86
[24] Whyte 2003, 74-5

construction, and will have a dramatic impact on the historic landscape to the south of the settlements. Improvements to the A66 involved more major alterations. As well as widening and dualling sections, it was entirely rerouted between Penrith and Penruddock, and a bypass was built to the north of Keswick. The A66 was also rerouted partly along the disused railway line west of Keswick and along the western shore of Bassenthwaite Lake, where an extra carriageway was provided.

Railways

The development of a railway network within the Lake District was always going to be limited, because of the restrictions posed by the topography. The first railway to be built in the Lake District was the Windermere branch line from Lancaster to Carlisle railway at Oxenholme in 1846.[25] This railway had stirred up considerable opposition, including from William and Mary Wordsworth, to the disruption to the peace and beauty of the Lakes that they thought the railway would bring.[26] The second railway, opened in 1848, linked the Furness Railway with the Maryport and Carlisle Railway, running parallel with the west coast through Muncaster, Eskmeals and under the slopes of Black Combe, down to Silecroft and Millom.[27] The Furness railway line, completed in 1857, provided access to the southern Lake District for many tourists, and its potential as a mineral line was realised two years later, with the opening of the Coniston branch line in 1859 by the Coniston Railway Company. It was formed largely to transport copper from the mines above Coniston, but its tourism potential was also exploited. Its function as a mineral line ceased after around 1890, but it continued to carry passenger traffic up to its closure in 1957.[28] Between 1862 and 1864 the Penrith to Cockermouth line was built as a mineral line to link

Plate 69: The old railway station at Coniston. First built as a mineral line in 1857, it soon opened to passengers, particularly for tourist traffic (© LDNPA)

[25] Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 187

[26] Joy 1983, 196
[27] Joy 1983, 103
[28] Millward and Robinson 1970, 243-4

Workington in the west to Durham in the east, connecting at Penrith with the cross-Pennine line to the Darlington area. At its western end, it linked to the Cockermouth and Workington Railway at Cockermouth. The line carried only goods traffic at first, but in 1865, it opened to passenger traffic, bringing in growing numbers of tourists.

Only two other railways were built within the Lake District National Park. The first was the Lake Side Branch Railway from the main line run by the Furness Railway from the Plumpton Junction, just east of Ulverston. This was opened in 1869, and its principal purpose was to take tourist traffic to the shore of Windermere, where they could take the lake steamer service. The service was successful until the 1920s, when mounting losses forced the steamer sailings to cease, and in 1938, the branch line stopped its year-round service. Freight traffic, which had served Haverthwaite and Backbarrow, ceased in the 1960s. In 1969, the section south of Haverthwaite was taken for the improvement of the A590 trunk road, but north of Haverthwaite, the line was reopened in 1973 as the Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway, with a steam train passenger service.[29] The last railway to open in the Lake District was the narrow gauge line known as the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway, which opened in 1875 as a mineral line. It brought ore from haematite mines near Boot for the Whitehaven Iron Mines Limited, but by late 1876, it was also running passenger services. It was constantly in financial trouble, and in 1882 the mining company failed, and it eventually closed to all traffic in 1908. From 1915 it was run again as a miniature line, and in the second quarter of the twentieth century, a full-gauge railway ran alongside it, transporting stone from a granite quarry at Beckfoot. The line was put up for sale, and was bought by the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway Preservation Society in 1960, and it is now run as a tourist attraction.[30]

There were a number of proposals to link the Windermere and Penrith-Keswick lines by extending the railway from Windermere over Dumail Raise to Keswick. A growing conservation movement headed by John Ruskin opposed the railway and this, along with poor economic projections meant that plans were eventually shelved.[31] Other plans, for an eight-mile mineral line along the west side of Derwent Water and Borrowdale to Honister Pass, and a mineral line into the Ennerdale Valley, were also opposed successfully, and led to the formation of the Lake District Defence Society.

The Changing Countryside

It is often the enclosing boundary that defines the immediate character of linear communications routes, while associated structures contribute to its wider character. For example a railway line, even when disused, can be defined by the verge or embankment enclosed by hedgerows or walling. If it is to retain its character, it must also retain its boundary. For railway lines, defining character may also include associated structures such as signal boxes, and stations and for roads, character may also be defined by a toll house, milestones, street furniture and signage.

Road and railway verges, as well as being associated with a number of historic structures, are also now home to many grassland species which have become rare because of agricultural improvement in fields. The retention of hedgerows ensures that any spraying carried out in adjacent fields does not contaminate the verges and so wildflowers and rare grasses are able to survive there. These new ‘wastes and commons’ have therefore

[29] Joy 1983, 215-9

[30] Joy 1983, 219-22
[31] Joy 1983, 196-7

acquired importance for their nature conservation value and their maintenance should reflect their value to wildflowers and wildlife as well as their contribution to historic character. This is particularly true of a disused railway line such as that which runs between Keswick and Penrith, and significant lengths of which are now used as a public right of way. Plans to restore this line will provide a sustainable mode of transport for visitors to Keswick and the northern Lake District National Park, but also could be seen as having a negative impact on nature conservation and on the rural landscape.

Modern communications tend to be associated with the destruction of earlier historic landscapes, but they also represent the fast technological changes which the twentieth century brought about. In that respect they are as much a part of our historic landscape as the earlier packhorse routes devised to take minerals from mining sites. The extent of change brought about by these modern communications routes was significantly less within the National Park than elsewhere in the country, and indeed the proposed creation of railway lines bringing in 'stupid herds of modern tourists'[32] eventually led to the birth of the conservation movement.

The creation of new and improved roads often results in stretches of old roads becoming redundant. In some places they are converted to lay-bys and in others, they become absorbed by adjacent fields. Many older roads of medieval origin survive as footpaths, bridleways and byways. Whether or not existing rights of way originated as roads, they are generally of historic merit and should be conserved wherever possible. The sub-regional scale of the Cumbria HLC, however, was not appropriate for

Plate 70: Modern signage and street furniture is in danger of replacing historic metal road signs and finger posts leading to a loss of historic character (© Archaeo-Environment Ltd)

mapping all rights of way. The process of turnpiking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often improved existing road networks, but also left minor roads redundant, while straightening out of turnpike roads would leave the former twists and bends to fall out of use. In order to avoid toll-dodgers, alternative routes to the new turnpike roads could be barred and in some cases such routes can be identified by their 'bar' names. Such roads may now be rights of way but if not registered, may have fallen out of use altogether. In such cases, the ownership and responsibility for maintenance is not always clear, usually resulting in the redundant road being lost to purpresture when it becomes absorbed into an adjacent field or garden. Redundant roads can retain historic field boundaries and associated structures such as quarry pits. Likewise roads which have remained in use for centuries may have fragile archaeological evidence running along side, for example Roman roads such as that which runs

[32] Ruskin 1876, quoted in Edmonds 2004, 209

over Wrynose at Blackhall Farm in Duddon, can run under modern roads, but may diverge from them leaving fragile earthworks to one side. Such adjacent structures can be damaged by modern maintenance works. Roads constructed on mountain sides are less likely to survive a lack of maintenance due to the continual process of soil creep which will lead to former roads becoming buried quite rapidly.[33] This may be the reason that the exact route of many Roman roads in the Lake District has become lost. Sledge ways for transporting turf for fuel are recorded throughout the Lake District and while some of these have become public footpaths, others are not recorded on the Historic Environment Record or HLC and are being lost.

The layout of roads is often a key to their origins. The enclosure awards specified the width of the roads which were drawn out at the same time as the field pattern, usually 60 feet or thereabouts. Earlier roads are usually narrower and more sinuous, with the exception of the ruler straight Roman Road, of course. If a landscape is to retain its character, then the road scale, form and boundary composition must also retain its character. The location of fords, and subsequently bridges are often to key to understanding why a location was chosen for an historic settlement. In order to understand why settlement evolved in particular places, we need to understand how the communications network operated. From the paths which linked medieval shielings together, to the fording point which resulted in a significant town, all are vital pieces of evidence for the origins of settlement. Therefore, future enhancement of the HLC or the Historic Environment Record should seek to include fording points and bridges, as well as redundant routeways.

Shaping the Future: Recommendations

- Buildings and structures associated with communications routes should be included in any impact assessments resulting from proposed changes or maintenance to the route.
- The defining boundaries of the communications route should be retained if historic character and wildlife value is to be protected.
- Future enhancement of HLC should include packhorse routes, drove ways and routes between farms in order to enhance our understanding of earlier landscapes.
- Historic routeways preserved as footpaths, bridleways or byways should be conserved along with their associated features such as pinch stiles.
- Redundant routes, (or parts of routes, such as lay-bys) created by modernisation of roadways should be plotted on HLC in order to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of earlier landscapes.
- Street/highways signage should reflect the historic character of the roadway or settlement and historic sign posts should be retained. Modern signage should not clutter the historic environment.
- Proposals for new improvements to existing highways should include detailed designs for new boundaries and associated structures such as bridges which reflect the existing character of historic field boundaries and buildings. Responsibility for maintenance of new and redundant boundaries arising from these proposals should be clear.

[33] Rackham 1986, 275