



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

News Release

Testing time for new section of Three Peaks route

Grassington, April 22, 2013.

Hundreds of fell runners will be trying out a new section of the iconic Three Peaks route in the Yorkshire Dales National Park later this month.

An alternative path from Pen-y-ghent to Ribblesdale has been created that avoids the badly-eroded Horton Moor and Black Dubb Moss area and it has already received positive reviews from individuals who have walked it.

But the new route, which takes walkers further along the Pennine Way National Trail before turning off and heading over Whitber Hill and Sell Gill Hill, will be put to the test on Saturday (April 27) when the 59th annual Three Peaks Race gets underway.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Three Peaks Area Ranger Steve Hastie, who is also the Three Peaks Project Manager, said: "This will be the first big event to be staged since we opened the Whitber section and we are hoping it will be a hit with the runners.

"The advantage of this new route is that it's far easier to navigate and it's a lot drier than the old route over Black Dubb Moss – and there are fewer stiles and gates to slow things down."

The race will see around 1000 runners gather at Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle, for the start of the 23-mile route, which has 5,279ft of ascent over the summits of Pen-y-ghent, Wharfedale and Ingleborough. The runners come from as far away as Australia, Spain and the Czech Republic, with the top competitors hoping to beat the race record for the current route of 2hrs 46mins 3secs.

Race Director Paul Dennison said: "The route over Whitber avoids Black Dubb Moss, a notoriously boggy area between the descent from Pen-y-ghent and the drinks station at High Birkwith. The consensus is that the revised route should make it easier and quicker for runners, but we will have to see.

"Given the weather conditions over the last few months, it is unlikely that we will see a new race record, which has remained unbroken since it was set by Andy Peace of Bingley Harriers in 1996. As always, the race will be a tough challenge."

Each year the Race Association gives £1 from every entry towards the Three Peaks Project, which was set-up in 2009 to generate sustainable income for long-term management of the area. It followed a report by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology in 1986 which claimed that the Three Peaks' rights of way network was the most eroded in the UK. This year the Three Peaks Project will receive more than £960 from the race.

The opening of the route last November created the first sustainable circuit for people wanting to do the famous Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge. It also opens up a shorter route for families wanting to stretch their legs by walking from Horton in Ribblesdale along Bracken Bottom, up Pen-y-ghent and then down the new route and back to the start point.

In 2011, members of the public and readers of Trail magazine and Country Walking magazine were asked to select 10 winners from 66 international nominations to share a pot of cash being offered by the European Outdoor Conservation Association (EOCA) – a group of businesses in the European outdoor industry that raises funds to put directly into conservation projects worldwide.

And the Whitber bid, which was submitted by local charity the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust after discussions with the National Park Authority, proved to be a winner, netting a €30,000 grant.

National Park Rangers and Dales Volunteers used 650 tonnes of materials to link up two existing stone tracks that are both part of the Pennine Way National Trail to create the alternative route, which includes three sections of stepped stone flags and a small footbridge across Sell Gill Beck.

The Authority's conservation experts hope that the diversion onto the Whitber section will give sensitive peatland habitats and the damaged vegetation on Black Dubb Moss time to recover.

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Background

In 1986 the Institute for Terrestrial Ecology carried out a study of the condition of the path network in the Three Peaks area and concluded that the region had the sad distinction of possessing the most severely eroded network in the UK.

The following year, the first Three Peaks Project was established by the YDNPA with a staff of 13. Its remit included trialling new path-engineering and re-vegetating techniques to provide sustainable routes and to allow damaged surrounding land to recover. The mid-90s and early 2000s saw a number of externally-funded projects completed, each with one or two extra staff appointed.

However, since 2004, the management and maintenance of the Three Peaks network has reverted back to the YDNPA's Rangers – a team of just two officers covering the whole of the wider Ribblesdale area.

The latest project aims to create a sustainable source of both practical and financial support that will help protect and enhance the area and the rights of way network into the future. Since its launch, many of the charities that regularly use the Three Peaks for sponsored events have volunteered to donate money towards the upkeep of the area.

And the YDNPA has produced merchandise to celebrate walking one, two or all of the peaks and has launched the Friends of the Three Peaks, a group being set up to help support the Authority's work

Friends of the Three Peaks

The Friends of the Three Peaks are a group of individuals and organisations who want to protect and enhance the special qualities of the distinctive and inspirational landscapes of the Three Peaks.

The Friends was launched in 2009 as an off-shoot of the Three Peaks Project which aims to raise enough money each year to fund an extra ranger. The main job of the Three Peaks Ranger is to be out in the Three Peaks keeping paths in good order.

Anyone can join the Friends of the Three Peaks (including individuals and organisations). Individual membership is just £10 each year.

Benefits of being a member can be found on the website link below, but most of all, joining is a way of demonstrating long-term commitment and support for the Three Peaks. Without your support the footpaths, we all love, will fall into disrepair and the surrounding landscape will be damaged.

£1 from every Three Peaks Race entry fee is donated to the Friends.

For more information please contact Kate Hilditch: kate.hilditch@yorkshiredales.org.uk or visit the website: <http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/threepeaks>

1. All Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority media releases can be viewed on-line by visiting www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

2. The Yorkshire Dales National Park is one of 14 National Parks in the UK. It is administered by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the purposes of which are "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage" and "to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park". In carrying out these purposes, the Authority has a duty "to seek to foster the economic and social well being of local communities". The National Park is administered by an Authority of 22 members, made up of county and district councillors and members appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to represent parishes or in recognition of their specialist skills or knowledge.