

DRAFT STAGE

5.0 Public Recreation, Access and Information



Figure 11. “Meet the Vet” and the Good Dog campaign event day July 2002.

5.1 Description

Over 1,000,000 people use the Hills and Commons each year (AONB visitor Survey 2000). There is no up to date survey information about visitor satisfaction but less than 0.1 % of people using the Hills voice any concerns they have about their experience on the Malvern Hills every year.

The recreational activities that take place on the Malvern Hills are incredibly diverse and are enjoyed by many different social groups within the local community and from outside the local area.

Recreational Activities on the Malvern Hills:

Informal

General Walking
Dog Walking
Horse Riding
Individual Mountain Biking
Kite Flying
Mountain Boarding

Formal

Organised/Sponsored Walks
Mountain Bike Clubs
Exercising Hounds
Orienteering
Hang/Para Gliding
Climbing
Model Aircraft
Sub Aqua Diving
Canoeing

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Rising right out of the town of Great Malvern and within easy reach of major transport links the Hills and Commons provide an almost unique resource to local people, day-trippers from nearby towns and tourists visiting the area. It is unusual for an open, rural area to be so close and accessible to an urban environment. Not only does it provide an area for many types of recreation but also has a major positive impact on the prosperity of the area.

The level of use and its importance to the local economy mean that these activities inevitably put pressure on other features of interest or users of the Hills. Conflicts between different user groups and between users of the Hills and the conservation management that takes place are occasionally reported but are not commonplace. The limit of acceptable recreational pressure (both in terms of its impact on other recreational users and its impact on environmental and historic features) has not yet been estimated. The incidences of these conflicts seem to be increasing with the rising use of the Hills.

Some areas of land do show erosion from footfall, bicycles and horses but this is in limited areas and mainly affects the ridge of the Hills and other places where users are concentrated.

The highest levels of use are on the Northern and Central Hills accessed from the town of Malvern and the surrounding villages. Considering its area British Camp has arguably the highest visitor pressure of all the Hills, mainly due to the large car park at its base situated on the main road between Hereford/Ledbury and Malvern/Worcester. South of British Camp the Hills are less frequently used as they are in a more rural location. They are mainly used by nearby residents, those wanting to avoid the crowds and walkers following specific trails or attempting the 9 mile length of the Hills.

Most of the Access to the Hills is from the Malvern Hills Conservators' car parks. This means that the majority of the access is via car and this can cause its own problems. At busy times the roads around the car parks can become congested to the disadvantage of local residents. The Hills Hopper bus service (set up in Partnership with the Malvern Hills AONB) that runs around the Hills from the Town goes some way to reducing this impact.

Once on the Hills most people stay on the ridge or the higher contour paths. The obvious attraction of views from the ridge aside, it is felt that people are discouraged from exploring lower down the Hills due to the scrub and secondary woodland that has encroached, concealing the views and reducing one's sense of direction. It is also felt that this discourages people from accessing the Hills from the town, as it is not obvious to the visitor that there are access points here. However, the reasons for the distribution patterns of visitors to the Hills are not fully known.

Castlemorton Common lies below the Southern part of the Malvern Hills and is used consistently by people who live around the Common all year, while a high visitor pressure is felt mainly in the summer months. This is also the area that has the most problems with antisocial behaviour, especially in the Gullet Quarry area where the Common meets the Hills. Through the Castlemorton Common Plan there will soon be a monitoring process to record any incidents.

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There is a policy of access for all on the Malvern Hills Conservators' land and, where possible, provision is made for people with mobility difficulties. Obviously the nature of the Hills makes access difficult for some but there are several areas suitable for "easy access" already and two more trails have been created to increase provision.

Public rights of way are kept open and all 100 miles of paths are repaired when damaged by heavy use, severe weather and general wear and tear.

Three Wardens deal with breaches of the Malvern Hills Conservators' 49 byelaws. The Wardens use education and encouragement rather than direct enforcement as this is found to be more effective in managing inappropriate behaviour. Enforcement is used only as a last resort and this leads to greater feeling of inclusion and welcome on Malvern Hills Conservators' land.

Information Boards are placed in nearly all parking areas around the Hills and Commons and also placed on all gates around the electric fenced compartments on the Northern and Central Hills. They are restricted to these more "planned" areas to preserve the open, rural nature of the Hills and Commons.

A regularly updated Internet Web site, leaflets, regular articles in local papers, appearances on local radio, national television and local events (including the Three Counties Show) disseminate information about the work of the Malvern Hills Conservators. Generally all Conservators Board and Committee meetings are open to the public.

To summarise, the site is one of, if not *the* major rural recreation destination in the West Midlands and offers a fantastic resource to the people who use it.



Figure 12. Opening of the Easy Access trail at Black Hill in 2001.

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5.2 Objective for Public Recreation, Access and Information

There will be recreational activities taking place across the Hills and Commons with participants from all sectors of the community made to feel welcome in the area.

Formally organised activities will be encouraged to take place away from where high levels of informal activities occur and where possible the pressure of recreation will be spread across the Hills. Particularly sensitive features will not be promoted for increased access but robust areas with a current low user rate will. This will take some of the pressure from the highest use areas and improve the overall visitor experience.

There will be a sustainable level of recreation on the Hills without excessive pressure felt between the different users. Any impacts on the environmental features will be at an acceptable and sustainable level. In fact a small level of disturbance will have a positive impact on some habitats and species.

This sustainable level of use will be known through various surveys of visitor satisfaction when pressure on the Hills is high. It will also be possible to determine the impact of recreational pressure on environmental features due to the monitoring programme that will be in place.

Areas that already have “easy access” will have improved facilities for people with other disabilities such as blindness and hearing impairment. All existing interpretation and information boards will be improved to incorporate new technologies so that they can be updated easily and user friendly for people with impaired hearing and/or vision. Information will continue to be regularly disseminated through the local and national media and the Internet website will be regularly updated and modernised to include information for people whose disabilities affect their ability to access this information.

Paths will continue to be maintained and enhanced and sustainable surfaces will have been experimented with to find a long-term sustainable solution to path maintenance. Similar solutions will have been found for car park surfaces.

The enforcement of byelaws will continue to be in a more educational/encouragement vein. All incidents will be fully recorded and this will allow assessments to be made on any control measures or solutions to these breaches.

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There will be no further provision of car parking around the Hills and there will be more people accessing the Hills from the surrounding town and villages. There will be more views from the lower contour paths around the towns and villages and this will lead to a greater amount of access from these areas and a reduction of pressure on the ridge of the Hills.

Existing toilet facilities will be improved and maintained across Malvern Hills Conservators' land.

Overall visitors will be pleased with their experience of the Malvern Hills and will not feel pressured by other users of the Hills.

5.3 Factors

- Visitor Pressure. (Upper and Lower limits for each area).
- Antisocial behaviour/Breeches of Byelaws. (Upper limits for each area)
- Local/Visitor Opinion.
- Legal. (Malvern Hills Acts, SSSI, & Commoners rights).

5.4 Attributes

- Visitor Pressure. (Upper and Lower limits for each area).
- Provision of access for people with disabilities. (Upper and lower limits).
- Local/Visitor opinion.
- Levels of diversity of recreational user groups. (Upper and lower limits).

5.5 Management Actions

- Maintain/enhance good relations with recreational user groups.
- Enhance Interpretation/information dissemination.
- Clear views from lower contour paths, where appropriate.
- Continue to inform and encourage people to follow the byelaws.
- Maintain paths with sustainable materials.

5.6 Recording and Monitoring Actions

- All attributes.
- Antisocial behaviour/Breeches of Byelaws. (Upper limits for each area).
- Local/Visitor Opinion.
- Define all limits.