

# MASTILES MLANE :

Aggravation, or  
Agriculture . . . ?

## Contents —

1. The Physical Evidence
2. Local 4WD Vehicles
3. Recent User
4. Maintenance Status
5. Comments
6. The Complaints
7. Reply
8. Conclusions
9. Recommendations
10. Ruts in Profile
11. Maps

REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF MASTILES LANE, CRAVEN, N.YORKS  
FROM STREET GATE (905656) to MASTILES GATE (944662)  
By TIM STEVENS, ACCESS OFFICER, BMF. 27 JUNE 1988.

I have today ridden this length of carriageway to examine its condition with particular reference to ruts, in response to recent reports by B G Thompson Esq (Letter of 10.6.88 as TRF ROW Officer, to Yorkshire Dales National Park, widely copied, and "News from Brian Thompson" of 11.6.88, marked "Limited circ." but used in Trials and Moto Cross News).

1. The physical evidence (see map 1)

Section I (A - B)

Some ruts typical of four wheel traffic but nowhere more than 10cm deep. The road is only enclosed on the south, so diversion around rutted ground is easy. The eastern part of this section is macadamed and shows no significant damage.

Section II (B - C)

Two routes east from the ford exist, both partially macadamed, running roughly parallel for about 500m. The northern route shows no damage, the southern has ruts similar to section I. Further east, the track has a pair of significant recent ruts about 30m long on level ground 600m from B. The profile 1 was taken at the deepest section of this portion. It is not possible for any popular 4 x 4 car to use these ruts even now due to insufficient axle clearance. However it is easy to bypass this section both to the north and south sides. Just before the gate C much disturbed ground is apparent, with ruts leading off in several directions, but none were longer than a few metres, and could have been made by wheeled traffic or cattle fanning out from the gateway. Grassed over ruts also exist from previous winters.

Section III (C - D)

Although enclosed on both sides, this section is metalled with limestone macadam and the carriageway shows no recent damage.

Section IV (D - E)

The ford at D has a stony bottom (and is now dry) but shortly afterwards considerable disturbed ground is present across the whole width of the track. To the north of the track for about 100m the dry stone wall has been removed recently, and it is not possible to distinguish between damage due to recreational traffic, farming vehicles, cattle, or wall removal operations. However some of the ruts show clear marks of spade lug tyres of the type and size used on agricultural tractors. From a gate on the north side of the track, vehicle ruts can be seen fanning out into the pasture, and these were measured for reference. No right of way exists in this field, so the tracks could reasonably be expected to be typical of local farm vehicles, and of course any vehicle leaving tracks in the field must have used Mastiles Lane to get there and back. There was a total of 8 sets of recent ruts in the field. (Profiles 2 - 5). Just before the gate at E, similar profiles were found on the lane - Profile 5 was repeated alongside the macadamed carriageways, (Profile 6) and Profiles 2 - 4 were identical to profile 7, taken where a

vehicle had passed over the remains of the wall to the south of the lane 20m west of a gateway in the same wall. No ROW follows this route; only a footpath goes through the gateway, leading directly to Bordely Green Farm. This "Short cut" could have become necessary during the winter while lying snow made the gateway itself impassable for farm vehicles taking fodder to stock.

#### Section V (E - F)

From E the road is only walled on its north side, and only shows damage at 939659 where a boggy patch makes the ground soft. Profile 8 shows the only clear profile - many of the ruts show a confused pattern as users tried to find a route through. The last part of this section of track is macadamed, and no recent damage to the carriageway is apparent. However, before entering this lane two areas of vehicle damage in the adjacent open field were examined. A: Sink Hole at 938658. A pair of ruts pass into and out of this depression (profile 9). This is not part of any highway, and could not reasonably have been caused by any agricultural use. It was obvious that it is not only motor vehicle drivers who enjoy swooping in and out of hollows, as between the ruts was a recent strip of mountain bike tyre marks. A piece of car sized perspex number plate was also found here, marked EDDY'S (of Leeds?)  
B: Soft ground at 939659. Map 2 shows this area of ground which in wet weather retains water (as shown by the growth of rushes in what is otherwise limestone grassland). Two pairs of ruts through the deepest part of this depression point to the deliberate use of soft ground by motor vehicles. Profile 10 and 11 show similarity and may indicate that only one vehicle was involved. The ground is now (June) hard enough scarcely to show a footprint, and the sides of the ruts are beginning to crumble away, showing that the route is not in summer use.

#### 2. Local Vehicles:

While carrying out my examination, 3 vehicles were seen nearby which were in use by the farming community, and which may have been used on the track:

- a. Case International 4WD agricultural tractor (Model 1255XL)
- b. Long wheelbase Landrover
- c. Toyota 4WD pick-up truck equipped with a wooden cage suitable for carrying sheep.

#### 3. Recent User:

There were also many traces of very recent use by walkers, bicyclists, not all of them using mountain type machines or tyres, and motorcyclists, one at least of whom had ordinary tyres not normally used on all-terrain motorcycles. No evidence of horses or horsedrawn vehicle use was seen.

#### 4. Current maintenance status:

From A to D is Unclassified Road 119G, maintainable at public expense by NYCC. From D to F is a Ratione Tenurae road, i.e. a public carriageway maintainable by the Landowner.

#### 5. Comments from other users:

Jack Osborne of Leyland, Lancs, who spends much of his time using green lanes in the Dales with his Ariel sidecar outfit, and has been unobtrusively

repairing holes, clearing ditches, and so on, on his own initiative for the last 3 years:

"Mastiles and Cam Fell are the lanes which are really bad - I would say it's probably 50 - 50 Landrovers and Tractors on Mastiles. Most of the Landrovers are all right - they stay below about 15 mph on the soft stuff and that's usually no problem, it's the ones who try to go fast, even using two-wheel drive, who do most damage. Yes, Landrovers and all those new Japanese things. I saw a group of 4 in the spring led by a red one, driving straight off the road and up the fell on Cam Road - they have no right and there was no reason for it. It took me four hours to put the turf back after they had gone. I have also spent half a day at a time filling in holes in the track. There is one bloke who runs Northern Safaris - he does seem to organise winching out to entertain his paying guests."

N.B. Mr Osborne seems to be the only person devoting time on a regular basis to repair of damage. It would be particularly unfortunate if a TRO prohibiting all but 2 wheeled traffic were imposed - and doubly so if it were at the instigation of an organisation devoted to keeping green roads open for all motorcycles.

Bill Jones, of Northern Safaris, Rawtenstall, Lancs, who has advertised and run commercial 4WD outings in the Yorkshire Dales, and whose operations have been criticized at the recent LARA conference and elsewhere:

"I have run about 1 Safari a month until recently, including using Mastiles Lane in the winter. It is certainly damaged, in fact I would say it's the worst case of damage I know of in the lanes that can be used by Landrover. In the middle of last winter we met a 4WD tractor on the lane. The driver was most abusive, and used offensive language in front of the ladies in our party. We had been following his ruts - we always try to follow any existing ruts to avoid doing damage - but as they got deeper we could go no further. There's only 8 inches under our diffs you know, so we had to drive alongside the track for some distance. I know we have a right to do this, but it really annoys me when we have to do it as it makes even more mess and we can get the blame. Of course with a long lane like Mastiles you have covered some distance before you come to the rutted bit (from the east), so you don't want to turn round - and to go round by tarmac road means a long detour along narrow roads. While we are talking of damage, do you know about the problem on Salter Fell [Lancashire]? We have been getting some stick for damage there, but I know for a fact that the Army have been manoeuvring up there over the past year, and I have also had reports of oil exploration vehicles on it. I have been advising people only to use Salter Fell travelling NW, and then only in dry or frozen conditions.

"Four wheel drivers have also been blamed for damaging Cam Fell - but it has always had a soft patch not far from the Cam Houses turning. It's worse than it has been, but some of us have been helping to fill in the deeper ruts. Last time we were up there though there was grass in the ruts, and that's hardly a sign of overuse, is it? And don't forget the work that Landrover owners did with their winches last winter - moving boulders to protect the footbridge abutments and stop the ford banks being eroded at the Gearstones end.

"Please let your committee know that we try to use the countryside in an unobtrusive and sensible manner - and our Safaris are aimed at educating new owners in the same way of thinking. They certainly don't make a profit, by the way - I am several thousand pounds out of pocket already. And incidentally, no

one has approached me regarding any problems, not from the Rover Clubs, or the RAC, or LARA."

#### 6. The complaints in detail:

B G Thompson made several claims in his reports:

- a) Damage.... lasts for at least 2 miles
- b) Dug out craters caused by 4WHD cars
- c) Unfit for anyone to use
- d) 2 ft deep ruts
- e) A permanent example of ....criminal damage
- f) Cost of repair ....I estimate £100,000
- g) Utterly destroyed by 4WHD hooligans
- h) Generations to come will never enjoy Mastiles Lane as it was.

#### 7. My findings in reply:

- a) The total length of the track surveyed is two miles, and only a small proportion of this is damaged enough to involve deliberate route picking. More than half the distance comprises typical macadamed or grassy green lane with no significant carriageway damage.
- b) No evidence of digging or winching operations is visible on the ground. The deeper ruts are all much wider than the average Landrover tyre, and some showed tractor type marks.
- c) The road is now fit for use by anyone adventurous enough to want to try. I would have no hesitation in using the road on ANY road legal motorcycle in summer conditions.
- d) The deepest rut found was 34 cm (= 13.4 inches). It is not possible for most recreational 4WD vehicles to leave a rut deeper than around 20 cm because of lack of clearance under the axles.
- e) The damage is not permanent, it is already beginning to crumble away - in fact further summer use by vehicles may be of great benefit in rolling out the damaged sections. Criminality can only be decided by the courts.
- f) I am not qualified as a highway engineer, but I know that at £20 an hour for a tractor and driver it would not take 5000 hours or anything like it to turn the damaged sections into something you could play croquet on.
- g) Undoubtedly some highway users on two and four wheels have deviated from the track causing damage which could be called hooliganism. This is illegal and could be punished, clearly so in the case of motor vehicles. There was no evidence that damage to the carriageway had been caused by recreational vehicles, and some evidence that damage may have been caused by farm traffic.
- h) It is inconceivable that the present rather rutted state of parts of the track bears any resemblance to its state when used by drovers for large herds of cattle. (All evidence of which has now disappeared naturally). Given a small amount of attention there is no reason to presume that the track could not be ready for further enjoyment by the most fastidious of users within a week or so.

## 8. Conclusions:

Although there are some signs of abuse of the countryside with vehicles, there is no evidence that Mastiles Lane has been permanently damaged by the recreational use of any type of vehicle. What evidence there is points to agricultural causes for much of the damage, use which has been exacerbated by a wet autumn, followed by a warm (relatively frost free) winter, and a wet spring. Modern farm vehicles now make it more sensible where possible to take fodder to stock, not stock to fodder, and when there is no frost considerable environmental impact may be caused by modern 4WD tractors and all terrain vehicles used for this purpose.

It has been suggested that damage to old roads may be encouraged or condoned by landowners or tenants who find the duty of maintenance onerous. They could, it is claimed, thereby encourage or at least facilitate moves towards downgrading, extinguishment, or TROs, so that they are relieved of their duty, along with the damage and loss that follow from careless use of rights of way. I have no evidence that this is the case here, but the possibility must not be ignored.

## 9. Recommendations:

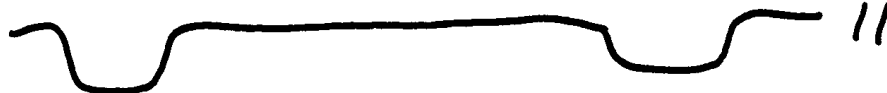
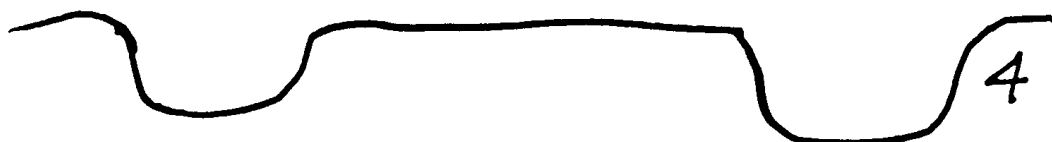
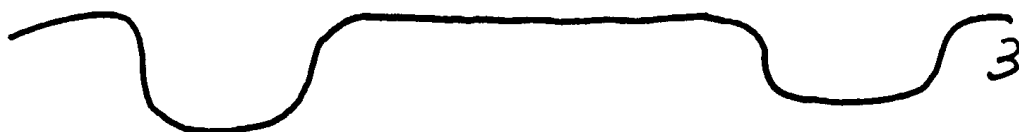
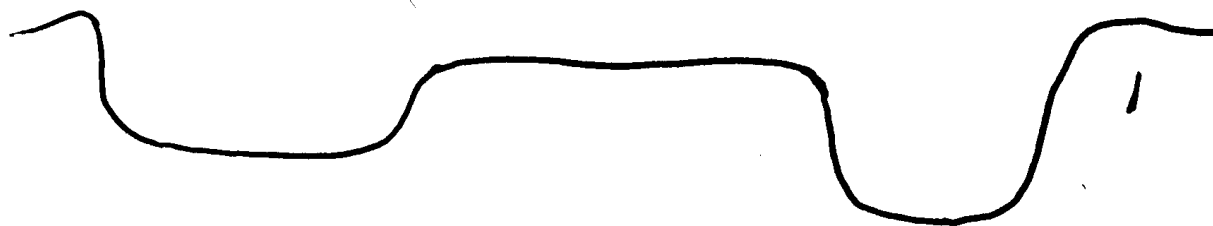
Rather than putting the blame for all damage on users of one type of vehicle, it may be more helpful to initiate cooperation between those whose certain duty it is to maintain the highway, and all those who contribute in one way or other to its present condition. All users, including those who work rather than play on the highway, should be educated to appreciate the fragile nature of our heritage, (and those who are in positions of responsibility for our sport should be reminded that those who go off at half-cock often shoot themselves in the foot). Perhaps the most useful action to start with would be to call a meeting in the late summer in Malham, or very close to it, at which all interested parties can see that there is a problem and consider what they can do to improve things (rather than making any attempt to point fingers of blame). The meeting would only succeed if attended not just by user groups, but also by the Highway Authority, National Park, Landowners, Tenant Farmers, and those who run local Venture Centres, Bunk Barns etc. It should also be backed in advance by major bodies such as Sports Council, Countryside Commission, and NFU or CLA in combination to convince everyone that the meeting would not be biased towards any group in particular.

I also recommend that LARA and all its members endorse a formal letter to NYCC asking them to ignore any requests for TROs in the Dales in response to this problem - at least until we have all had opportunity to solve it by cooperation.

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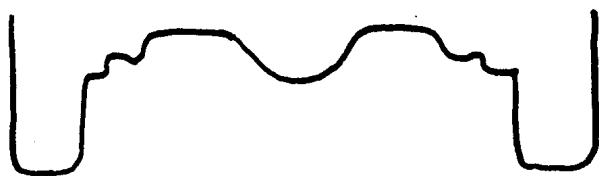
# RUT PROFILES

1 METRE  
1:20 SCALE



# 4WD VEHICLE PROFILES

1 METRE  
1:20 SCALE



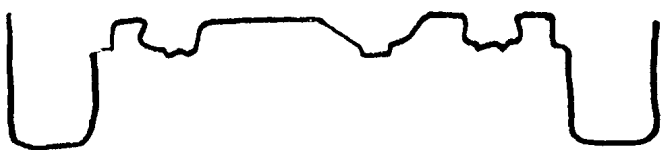
SUZUKI



TOYOTA  
PICK-UP



LADA  
NIVA



LANDROVER



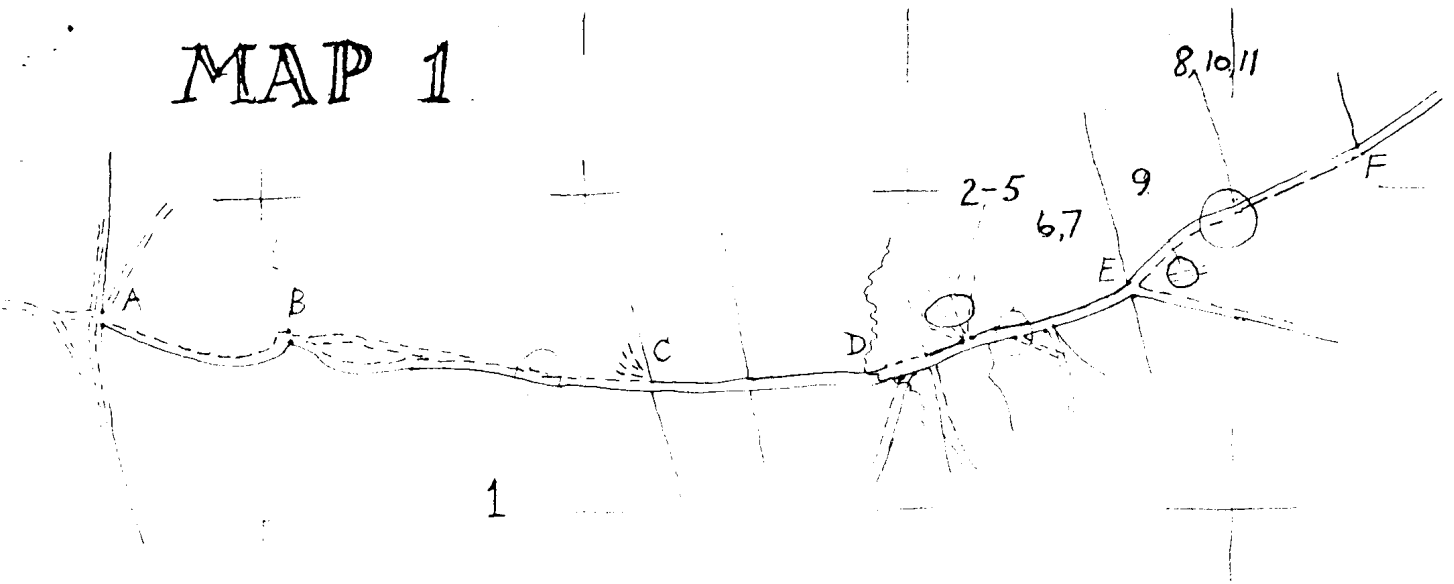
RANGEROVER



DAIHATSU



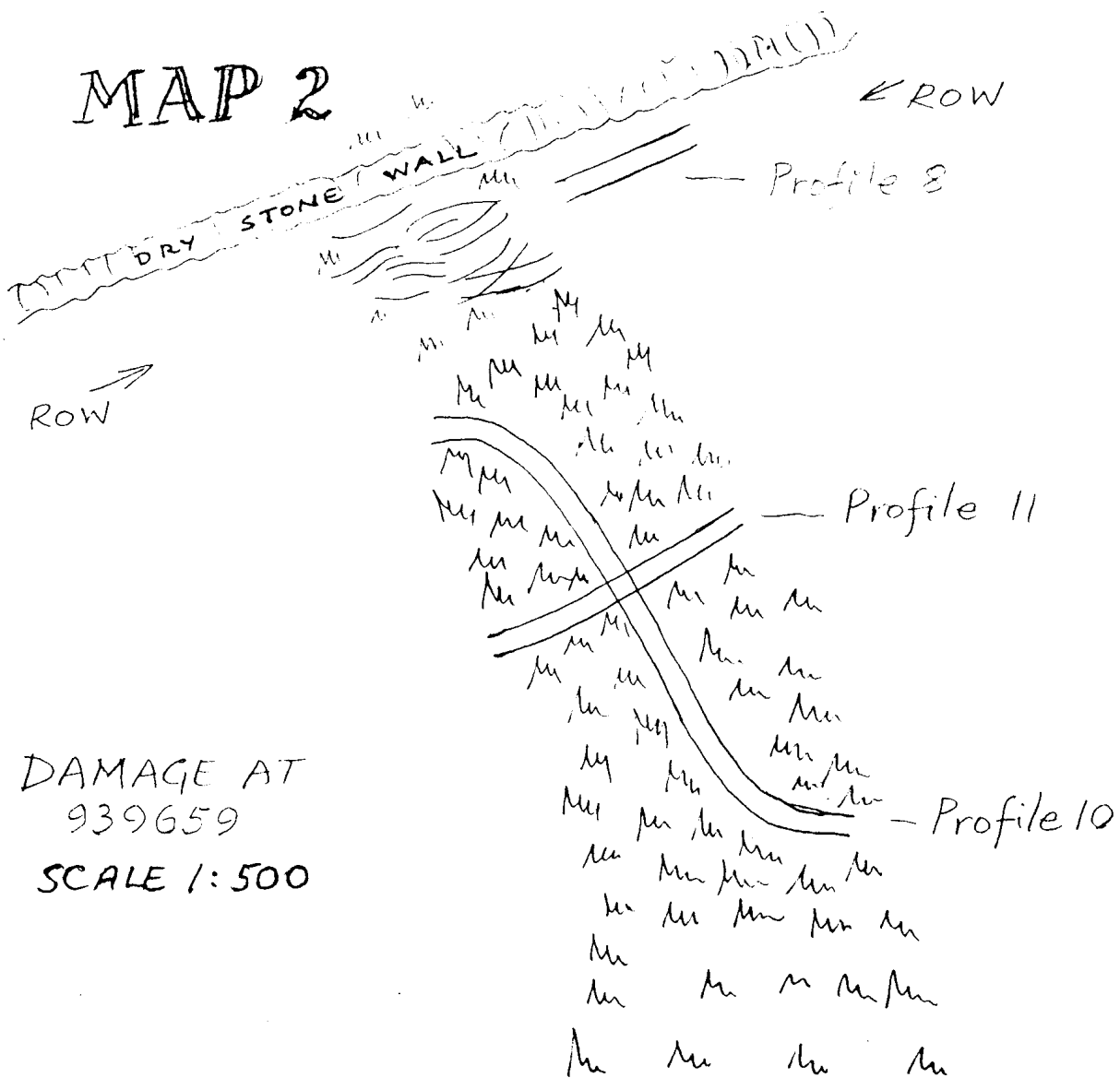
# MAP 1



MASTILES LANE - Street Gate to Mastiles Gate

MAP-SCALE 1:25000

# MAP 2



DAMAGE AT  
939659  
SCALE 1:500