



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

Report on the Taster Days Operated in conjunction with Walking for Health

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has long recognised that the vast majority of its visitors are from a very narrow spectrum – over-whelmingly white and in the 45 – 65 age range. Considering the diverse communities in the surrounding area it is clear that there are many people missing out on the chance to visit this wonderful area, and that local businesses are missing out on attracting new customers.

To try and address this issue the Target team initiated a series of taster days to bring new groups to the Yorkshire Dales. A partnership was formed with 'Walking for Health', a project working with different communities in the area and promoting walking as a way to become healthier. The communities they work with tend to come from disadvantaged and socially excluded backgrounds and include a significant number of ethnically diverse groups. The initial contact was with two co-ordinators working in Bradford City Centre area and Keighley, but the network has now expanded so that we are actively engaged with 5 Walking for Health groups from West Yorkshire.

The 'Walking for Health' co-ordinators were already working in their communities and regarded the opportunity to bring groups out to the Dales as a way of continuing to motivate people, including their voluntary walk leaders. They publicised the possibilities to local groups, helped with organisation, and Target funded them to come on public transport to the Dales where they were met by a volunteer who guided them on a suitable walk.

These days really took off with groups coming from a wide variety of communities during the Spring months of 2003. Two parties, from the Active for Life group and the Kashmiri Elders Association in Leeds, took a total of 78 visitors to Bolton Abbey. A group of 15 senior gentlemen from Bradford made up a party visiting Ingleton waterfalls under the auspices of the British Council for Mosques and a group of 12 members of the Keighley Walking for Health 'Walking Women Group' made a visit to Grassington. The West Bowling Walking group took 30 white and Asian mothers and children on the Settle to Carlisle line from Shipley to Ribbleshead.

Visits continued through the summer months with visits from a group of 70 from West Bowling coming by train to Settle, Frizinghall Walkers, the Kashmiri Elders Association Womens Walking Group and the Sangat Centre amongst others. To date nearly 600 people have participated in the organised taster trips and more are planned for the future.

Anecdotal evidence from the Volunteer Rangers suggests that the visits are proving successful, with many of the visitor's expressing a wish to visit again. One member of the group of Asian gentlemen visiting Ingleton waterfalls commented that he had lived in Bradford for 40 years but had not known that the Yorkshire Dales existed. Looking up the Doe valley towards Ingleborough he commented on how beautiful it was and how it reminded him of his country of birth.

This group has since been returning on their own and bringing others to visit the falls on several occasions. A volunteer was also approached whilst running a public

transport promotion day in Bradford by two young people who had been on a taster day, and wanting to know how they could go to Bolton Abbey. This kind of anecdotal evidence suggests that the visits are achieving a higher awareness of the opportunities that the Park offers, and opening up access to previously excluded groups.

The YDNPA's Social Inclusion Officer is currently working with a series of focus groups taken to look at attitudes to the countryside, how they might be affected by the taster days, what would encourage people to return, and how the Park should be trying to engage local communities. The Authority is aware that we are at the start of a long process that will need continued effort if we are to attract new audiences to the Park and develop in them an attachment and respect for the area.

The main lessons that have been learnt over the months of facilitating the taster familiarisation trips are:

1. Through working with established projects and groups (walking for health), it has been easier to tap into their contacts and work on developing confidence in the park than attempting to do this on our own. The confidence that people had in walking for health has been passed on to the park through the success of these trips. This is an area to be worked on through the Park's Social inclusion officer as the walking for health project are a finite resource.
2. In the early stages it is important to 'hand hold' the groups all the way, providing timetable information, organising activities for the day and providing National Park walk leaders. Many of the participants had never visited the countryside and were initially apprehensive. Also, the trips tended to attract large groups rather than smaller groups, this facilitated a feeling of confidence in numbers.
3. The funding of the trips was essential as they would not have taken place if this was not available. Additional to point 2 above, the fact that the trips were free to the participants was seen as a good-will gesture from the park and a way of welcoming new visitors.
4. It is not necessary to translate everything into ethnic minority languages, most speak and read English. However, small efforts go a long way, such as translating "welcome" signs.
5. Following the initial success, a mechanism needed to be found to organise the trips internally within the park, as they were proving to be too successful and it was proving difficult to organise National Park Walk leaders.