But I'm afraid we've tried Allemannsrett in Britain [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Sunday 24 March 2013

George Kirby had a suggestion here on this blog last week. That we ought to copy the practise of Allemannsrett in Britain [3]. This Nordic idea that access to the land is for all and that as long as you're just walking through you should be able to go anywhere you please. And I agree that there are attractions to such an idea. However, the real problem is that we've tried this in this country and it doesn't work here. The hint is in this that George says:

> A final objection is the claim that it would be pointless to introduce the Allemannsrett in Britain as it is in Scandinavia, since here we have a much higher population density. But the vast majority of the British population lives in urban areas, and the country has many places of natural beauty and sparse population where greater rights of access could allow much greater appreciation of them.

You see, we did in fact try this. There was the Mass Trespass movement and they went off and demanded that the urban proletariat must be allowed to walk the moors. Instead of the Duke's grouse having exclusive rights to those areas of great natural beauty. The end result of which was, in the words of the National Trust [4]:

> ?Kinder Scout is one of the most iconic landscapes in the Peak District because of its vast open moorland, the wildlife that it is home to and because it was the setting for the Mass Trespass. However, it is also one of the most damaged areas of moorland in the UK and its future is in jeopardy as a result of catastrophic wildlfires, a long history of overgrazing, air pollution and the routes that thousands of visitors have taken. We?ve decided to take action with our partners to save Kinder for future generations.? Mike Innerdale ? General Manager for the National Trust in the Peak District

I'm afraid we're back to the basic point that Garrett Hardin made about the Tragedy of the Commons. No, it isn't and never was that assets held in common cannot be preserved. It's that when demand for a resource is greater than the regenerative capacity of that resource then access must be limited. In some manner. It could be, as with the Grand Canyon, the Park Rangers only allowing so many people down there at one time. Or it could be private property. But there does have to be some method of limiting access. Elinor Ostrom went on to show that communal restriction of access, just people working it out among themselves, can also work. But this breaks down when we've more than a couple of thousand people doing the communalling.

In most parts of the Nordic nations there are perhaps three people and a dog named Colin (Haakon is that in the local lingo?) who want to go tramping over the outside scenery. Here in the UK it's rather different. In fact, there's some 25 million Nordics looking to roam over 470,000 square miles and the UK has 63 million on 94,000 square miles. Now quite where Hardin's limit is I'm not sure but I would imagine it's something to do with the UK having 2.5 times the population on one fifth of the land.

Which brings us back to there having to be a limit. We could have the entire countryside limited by men with clipboards, counting us in and out of the meadows and moors. Or we can have our current system of

private property. And even if only on the grounds of the crime rate I think that the second of those two is preferable. For I'd hate to have to calculate the murder rate, as those clipboard wielders swung from the trees, as they tried to stop people going for a walk in the woods on the grounds that 5 other people had already done so that day. "Get Orff Moi Land!" is preferable to that.

blog comments powered by Disqus [6]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/energy-environment/but-im-afraid-weve-tried-allemannsrett-in-britain

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/energy-environment/but-im-afraid-weve-tried-allemannsrett-in-britain
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778
[3] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/planning-transport/allemannsrett-in-britain
[4] http://www.kinder-scout.co.uk/
[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[6] http://disqus.com