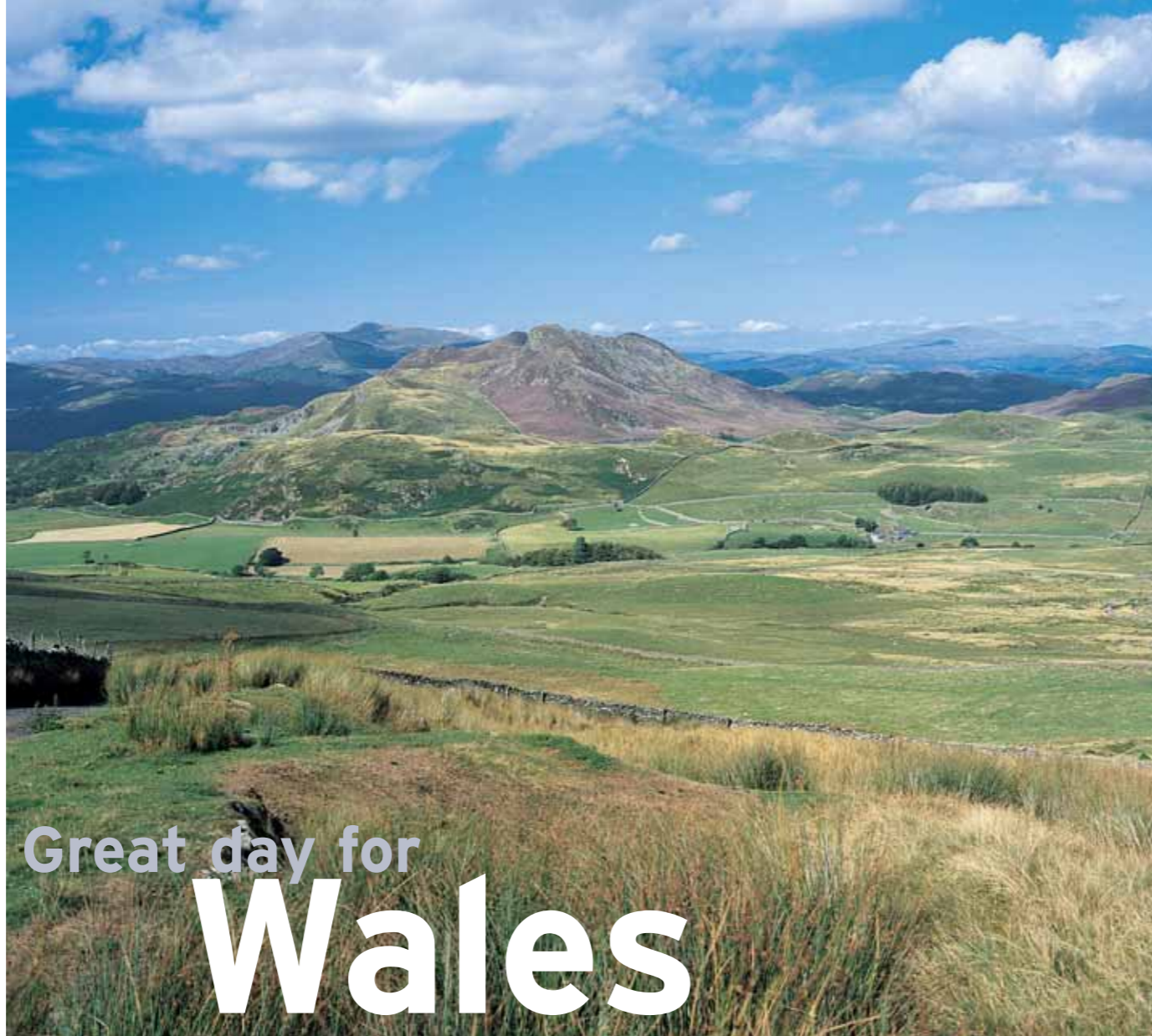


Main pic: View towards Cader Idris, Gwynedd NICK SMYTH

Far right: Carn Ingli, Preseli Hills WALES TOURIST BOARD

Below right: Foel Fenlli, Clwydian range WALES TOURIST BOARD



Great day for Wales

MAY 28 was a huge day for people getting out to enjoy the countryside in England and Wales. A new freedom to walk away from paths in mapped areas of open countryside commenced in Wales and in two regions of England. Here **Richard Granville** explains what it will mean for walkers in Wales and, on the following pages, we look at its implications for two of England's national parks.

OPEN ACCESS has finally come to Wales. Since May 28 walkers have been able to enjoy the freedom to roam on some 450,000 hectares of mountain, moor, heath, down and commons, giving them unprecedented new opportunities to explore the beautiful Welsh countryside.

It's a major achievement for walkers, the Ramblers' Association and the people of Wales, and has been celebrated by the Welsh Assembly government and Ramblers members across the country. Walkers from Aberdare to Anglesey have been taking to the hills and enjoying a series of organised events surrounding the official launch.

And there's plenty to celebrate. In proportion to its size, Wales will have nearly twice as much access land as England. Just over a fifth of all land in

'In proportion to its size, Wales will have nearly twice as much access land as England...just over a fifth of all land in Wales will be open to walkers.'

Wales will be open to walkers - if we include Forestry Commission land being dedicated for access.

We've come through the long years of campaigning and lobbying, the mapping processes and appeals. But it doesn't end there. Now the focus shifts onto what open access means in practice and to maximizing the opportunities it affords for everyone to enjoy healthy outdoor recreation on foot.

Open access is about new opportunities - for experienced walkers to discover new areas and explore familiar ones from a fresh angle; or for people new to walking to find an enjoyable way to explore the beautiful countryside close to their home and improve their health at the same time. The sheer quantity of access land available means that whatever you're looking for, from strenuous mountain trails catering for the most dedicated athlete to gentle coastal

MORE INFORMATION



Information on where you can walk and what you can do on access land in Wales can be found at www.ramblers.org.uk/freedom.

For details of any restrictions or exclusions that may be in place on access land check the new and improved website of the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) at www.ccw.gov.uk or call the CCW enquiry line on 0845 130 6229.

Ordnance Survey Explorer maps (1:25 000 scale) highlighting the location of access land in Wales are now available (www.ramblers.org.uk/info).

Be aware of the Countryside Code - copies of the bilingual version available from Ramblers Wales ☎ 029 2064 4308 or visit www.codcefngwiad.org.uk.



strolls for those seeking relaxation, Wales has something to offer.

SENSE OF HISTORY

But open access reaches deeper, recognising that walking is an expression of culture and history as well as recreation. Open access is about reclaiming a cultural and historical legacy, of reaffirming a public right to be in and feel part of a landscape. Wales' identity is nurtured in its landscape, in its southern coalfield valleys or rugged coastline, but also in its hilly rural heartland and the drama of its northern mountains. Open access encourages people to reconnect with this, helping to foster an increased awareness of environmental issues.

This will be particularly important considering the significant economic benefits that open access is predicted to have. In rural areas access will bring a further direct injection of income into the local economy, infrastructure and services through tourism. Walking is now widely recognised as a major source of revenue, attracting both local and international visitors to Wales and generating growing government investment. The Wales Tourist Board estimates, for example, that walking-related tourism is already worth some £550million per year to the Welsh economy.

Open access, however you look at it, is great news for walkers. And, with the prospect of large swathes of Britain's stunning coastline hopefully soon to be added, there's every reason to be excited. But let's not get carried away. Open access can bring great benefits but will need careful management, management advocating public responsibility and which tackles controversial issues when they arise. It's a great addition to the opportunities open to walkers, but one that has to exist alongside our traditional commitments to maintaining our often neglected rights of way network, protecting the countryside from unwelcome development and advocating walking as part of a healthy lifestyle. Open access is a real achievement and should be celebrated, but we can't walk off into the sunset just yet.

Richard Granville is Access Coordinator for Ramblers Wales

