

KONG MINI MOUNTAIN MARATHON 2017 NETHER WASDALE EVENT ECOLOGICAL BRIEFING NOTE

Kong Mini Mountain Marathon events are located in Britain's greatest upland areas that often contain features of outstanding biodiversity value and importance. Occasionally, the features that provide this interest can be vulnerable to the wear and tear that may result from the passage of event competitors. The risk of ecological damage is carefully assessed during early stages in the planning process for each event, when every effort is made to avoid sensitive ecological interest areas that could be disturbed by the event.

We are keen to encourage personal route selection choices by competitors on our events to further avoid the risk of local ecological disturbance. This Ecological Briefing Note has been prepared for the 2017 Kong Mini Mountain Marathon Nether Wasdale event to identify key ecological interest features that contribute to the special character of the event area, with route selection comments to help minimise the risk of localised ecological disturbance.

The 2017 Nether Wasdale event area is located within an area of upland landscape between Ennerdale and Wastwater in the central fells region of the Lake District, comprising the rugged landscape of the Upper Borrowdale volcanic rocks. The varied geology, glaciated landforms and generally upland character of the area has produced a diverse assemblage of nature conservation interest sites. Those within the event area recognised by statutory designations comprise two areas of international nature conservation importance, and three sites of national nature conservation importance. The majority of the event area lies outside these designated nature conservation sites, but despite the area has a distinctive upland character that includes more localised places of nature conservation interest.

Much of the event area comprises dry acid grassland and dry heath that are relatively robust vegetation types in terms of resisting potential disturbance from trampling effects of passage by Kong event competitors. More localised features are present that could be more sensitive to the risk of disturbance by the passage of hill runners. These include patches of blanket peat, wet heath, rock outcrop ledges, boulder-field and scree habitats of upland ridges and plateau.

Existing hill paths and tracks are available for use by Kong Nether Wasdale competitors to navigate between many of the controls within the 2017 event area. Use of existing paths and tracks is encouraged to help competitors bypass locations of special ecological interest that are potentially sensitive to trampling disturbance. For situations where competitors may need to traverse sections of the event area not crossed by paths these ecological briefing notes aim to raise awareness of ecological sensitivity issues and encourage personal route selection choices that will avoid disturbance of ecological interest features. The briefing notes also help to communicate the special upland environmental interest of the event area to enrich the experience of participating in the Kong Mini Mountain Marathon 2017 Nether Wasdale event.

- **Dry acid grassland** is a widespread vegetation type within the event area, where centuries of livestock grazing has converted heather moorland to open grassland. These areas provide a relatively robust vegetation type that can generally withstand the trampling effects of fell running.
- Extensive areas of dry acid grassland can include **mosaics of other upland vegetation** types such as patches of blanket bog, heather-dominated heath vegetation and wet acid grassland creating areas of local vulnerability to disturbance from a concentration of trampling by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors.
- **Blanket bog** is a localised but important feature at locations within the event area. Some of these areas comprise degraded blanket bog where bog vegetation has been lost and peat erosion gulleys (peat hags) have formed where and the underlying peat is being eroded.
- Disturbance of **blanket bog** by runners churning through peat hags has the potential to trigger further peat erosion by de-stabilising the peat surface. Wherever possible, route choices in these areas should try

to link strips and patches of surviving moorland vegetation between the peat hags. These are often quite well-drained, providing areas of relatively robust vegetation and resistant to the trampling effects of running.

- In contrast to areas of degraded **blanket bog**, some locations within the event area contain patches of high quality blanket bog with an intact vegetation surface that lack eroding peat hags. These are typified by areas of wet heath vegetation interspersed with shallow pools, often associated with *Sphagnum* mosses. These areas often comprise a mosaic of vegetation types that will include slightly **raised areas of better drained peat with drier heather moorland vegetation**. These will be far less vulnerable to disturbance through vegetation damage by trampling and should ideally be selected when making route choices for running through these intact blanket bog areas.
- Areas of **wet acid grassland** will be encountered on courses where impeded drainage occurs within relatively level hill grassland areas or where groundwater emerges at the surface as seepages across more steeply sloping ground. Wet acid grassland can be of special nature conservation interest, in particular where groundwater seepages provide conditions for communities of specialised mosses, liverworts and other specialised plants. These vegetation types can be vulnerable to persistent disturbance effects of trampling and should ideally be avoided wherever possible by selecting routes that keep to dry acid grassland to by-pass wet grassland patches.
- **Wet acid grassland** at groundwater seepages on steep ground can be difficult to avoid where they cross valuable contouring lines. Avoidance of these areas could involve a significant route change and deviation from the desired contour level. Despite this, it would be ideal if damage to seepage zone vegetation could be minimised, often located within shallow gulleys, re-entrant features or associated with ground level rock outcrops that cross steep slopes.
- On hillsides, soil movements within **dry and wet acid grassland** areas can develop well-defined micro-terrace systems, often referred to as sheep walks or trods. These typically follow contours and can provide extremely useful running lines. Grassland vegetation at the edge of these micro-terraces is often friable and easily broken off. Care should be taken when using these features for contouring to avoid running on the edge of these terraces to minimise grassland damage.
- A variety of **boulder field and scree habitats** are present within the event area that are potentially vulnerable to disturbance. Ice-shattered boulder fields on the highest summits often support fragments of montane grass-heath plant communities of high nature conservation value. Wherever possible existing paths through these areas should be used to minimise disturbance of these communities. Blocky scree often supports specialised plant communities that utilise the microclimate of sheltered spaces within the scree. Existing paths should be used through these areas where possible and should always minimise disturbance of scree blocks.
- Specialised **rock ledge plant communities** are present at locations within the event area. If Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors need to negotiate low rock outcrops great care should be taken to minimise disturbance of ledge vegetation.
- The event area contains a complex network of **streams and rivers**, some of which are potentially vulnerable to ecological disturbance from repeated crossing by runners. Some of the rivers within and surrounding the event area are covered by very high level nature conservation designations, including watercourses that could support internationally and nationally threatened animal species such as **otter** and **water vole**. In many cases, the nature conservation interest of these rivers and streams concerns use of the banksides by these animals. As a consequence, great care should be taken by Kong Mini Mountain Marathon competitors at stream crossings, minimising bank disturbance when entering and climbing out of stream channels.