

2nd Seminar on Protected Natural Areas and Mountain Sports
2nd Technical Symposium “Rambling in Protected Natural Areas”

Introduction

Prior to the rambling symposium, certain terms relating to the subject have been agreed upon within the framework of this seminar. These are as follows:

Rambling

A sports and recreational activity that involves walking along preferably traditional routes that may or may not be signposted.

Waymarked trails

Trails marked with conventional symbols, signs, paint, milestones, marks, etc., and indications designed to facilitate their use on rambling paths.

Approved trails

Marked trails that have been officially approved by the regional mountaineering federations as meeting precise demands regarding route and signposting.

The Spanish network of trails already incorporates over 40,000 kilometres of waymarked and officially approved trails including protected spaces and mountain areas. Like other networks, this network is one of the basic infrastructures supporting the wide range of sporting activities conducted in the natural environment, and falls within the scope of competence corresponding to FEDME, in accordance with the Statutes of the federation.

The set of international trademarks for the GR, PR and SL routes have been registered by FEDME at the Spanish Patent and Trademark Office, with their administration being entrusted to the regional federations operating in each autonomous community using official approval channels. Thus, signposting will be standardised throughout the entire state, coinciding with the system used by neighbouring countries, and therefore recognised by European ramblers and endorsed by the European Ramblers Association.

The object of the approval package is to ensure safety and quality along the trails. Every regional federation works on the procedure using their “Trail Experts” to apply the provisions set out in the “Ramblers Handbook” and existing sectoral regulation. At present only three autonomous regions (The Basque Country, La Rioja and Asturias) have passed a decree of specific regulation for walking trails. It is expected that other autonomous regions will enact similar legislation in the near future.

During the 19th and 20th Century, Spain went through a process of urban development much like the rest of Europe, which led to people from rural communities moving to the city. Most city dwellers lack the capacity to understand the natural environment and are unable to cope with living there. At the same time, there is evidence of greater awareness of nature conservation amongst the general public.

Throughout the 20th Century, a system to protect the natural environment has been put in place in parts of Spain. This has been articulated in a number of different ways. The process initiated almost one hundred years ago with the declaration of the first national parks has gained new impetus within the framework of the new territorial organisation of the state into autonomous regions.

Protected Natural Areas have been created in regions of high environmental and scenic value, which sometimes experience negative population growth. However, they have kept the network of trails used to carry out traditional activities, which form part of a historical and cultural heritage that must not be lost. Nowadays this heritage can play an important role in the understanding and enjoyment of Protected Natural Areas through rambling.

General principles

1. From the 1960's onwards there has been a demand amongst city dwellers for new leisure and free time activities. The practice of rambling, firmly rooted in tradition, has gained in importance as a way of meeting the human need for contact with nature.
2. Waymarked trails, which are preferably developed in the natural environment along traditional routes, have come to the aid of this sector of the population. The marks placed along the routes act as an element of safety and guidance. In the case of Protected Natural Areas, the fact that there is a call effect and specific regulation means that the governing authorities and the various mountaineering federations must give special consideration to the aspect of safety.
3. In general terms, rambling is an activity that is respectful of the natural environment. Waymarking trails in accordance with planning and administrative criteria for Protected Natural Areas provides a useful tool for managing their public use and enjoyment.
4. Waymarked trails enable the flow of visitors to be regulated in particularly fragile areas, given the fact that when the visitor comes across a good, well-marked path they tend to stick to it.
5. Restoring old trails enables an important part of our cultural heritage (cattle routes, roads, historical paths... etc.) to be recovered and put to new use. It is important that these paths are preserved using traditional techniques that allow for seamless integration in the environment.

Conclusions

1. The design of the basic network of public trails through Protected Natural Areas will be defined by the instruments used in their planning. In order to achieve the maximum possible consensus, the mechanisms anticipated to encourage participation will be made more robust. It is essential that the regional mountaineering federations take on the role of valuable interlocutor for such purposes. Once the network has been defined, it is advisable to incorporate it in the officially approved system.
2. Restrictions in the use of the trails should be justified on technical or scientific grounds. The disappearance of the cause of the restriction will lead to its cancellation.
3. When an officially approved trail passes through the grounds of a Protected Natural Area, its waymarking should incorporate the area's corporate identity and the international rambling regulations. It may also include other information of an interpretative or educational nature. In this way, the waymarking procedure will contribute to the aims of nature conservation, safety and knowledge.
4. Approved trails in Protected Natural Areas will be incorporated in national and international networks.
5. Topographic guides and other publications, panels or interpretation boards are ideal and highly efficient tools for furthering environmental education.
6. Care should be taken to avoid a profusion of signposts sprouting up along the trails and to ensure that the ones displayed are in keeping with the surroundings and with the rest of the signs displayed in the Protected Natural Area.
7. The confluence of interests leads to the need to foster agreements and other joint operating mechanisms between the regional mountaineering federations and the managers of Protected Natural Areas.
8. Those present at the Jaca meeting recommend forming a working group that includes representatives from the Protected Natural Areas and the mountaineering federations to delve deeper into the subjects looked at during the Seminar, along with other related topics, to contribute towards making conservation of these areas compatible with the practice of mountain sports.

In Jaca, on 18th October 2003.

*Coordination for the 2nd Technical Symposium and drafting of the text:
Nicolás González Sánchez, Regional Park of Sierra de Gredos
Modesto Pascau Canales, Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports
Agustín Santori López, National Park of Picos de Europa*