I beg you to go to Switzerland, which sets a world class standard in rural tourism. It is so easy to go there as a tourist and do outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, etc. Yes, they are a rich country. BUT they have done simple things to make outdoor access really really easy. They have ONE single system of signage throughout the entire country. Walking signs are yellow, more mountainous hiking signs are red and white, and serious alpine treks are in blue and white. There are signs absolutely everywhere, just as with road signs. Each sign gives the name of the destination place, with the time it would take the average person to walk there. (Or cycle, if it is a cycling sign). There are signs outside every single train station, no matter how small. There are signs which join up paths between almost every hamlet, village and town. It is almost impossible to get lost.

In the UK we have a whole host of different types of signage. Rarely are there signs with the name of a destination written on them. More frequently, if there is a sign, it’ll be a tiny yellow arrow. We are left to use a map and work out the way. Of course, for those of us who read maps, this is fine. However, the majority of the population are not map readers, and increasingly are unable to do so or to use apps to navigate safely. Signpost in the Swiss style make it so easy to walk, and they take the stress out of being outdoors. Also the fact that they give walking times rather than distances is much better, as people are not good at working out how long it will take them to walk 3 miles, for example.

My point is that the easier we make it for people to get out and walk, or cycle, the more they are likely to do so. You know the phrase “if we build it, they will come”. Look at the few places that do have an infrastructure that makes it easy and safe for people in the UK, such as the Monsal Trail in Derbyshire. They are absolutely packed with people. And there are several cafes there that make a good living as a result.

We want to have a healthier population. Let’s make it easy for people. Ok, we don’t have much money to spend on rural tourism infrastructure, but how about we think long term. Instead of itty bitty schemes, instead of an enormous jumble of different types of signage all over the country, let’s adopt a Swiss style method, and slowly but surely put it into place over a couple of decades. Long term, we’d be so much better off. Otherwise, we’ll keep pumping money into separate schemes and locations, and we make outdoor access ever more complicated.

One last point. When we drive a car, we take for granted that we have road signs, indicating place names, indicating destinations, e.g. “Birmingham 10 miles”. Every time we come to a junction, we see a sign. Now imagine that every time we came to a junction, we always see a sign, but each time it simply has the word ‘Road’, and an arrow. How useful would this be? Now think of the poor walker and cyclist. This is normal. We come to a junction, and there’s a sign saying ‘Cycle Path’ or ‘Footpath’.
This is not useful. Please, think of pedestrians and cyclists as needing the same type of signage as car drivers, and make it easy for us.

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