
The Tarka Project — Promoting conservation, recreation and tourism in north Devon

The Tarka Project is a Devon County Council initiative which aims to promote conservation, recreation and tourism in north Devon. The Henry Williamson Society has been involved in discussions about the project since the idea was originally put forward, and have given very encouraging support.

The Tarka Project has already been remarkably successful in generating interest and activity in north Devon. The appointment of Nicola Oliver as Project Officer in January

this year marked an important development. Much of Nicola's time is spent liaising with local people and encouraging initiatives. Direct contact has been made with over 200 individuals and organisations over the last 10 months, and 3,000 newsletters and leaflets have been distributed. The newsletter will be brought out every 6 months and will provide an important communication medium for everyone involved. Many illustrated talks have been given, and a mobile display has been travelling around the area which has attracted a great deal of interest. An Action Programme is now being developed which will help generate funding for a variety of projects identified.

The major initiative to arise from the project is the creation of the Tarka Trail — a long distance footpath route which will give access to the countryside that Henry Williamson so vividly described in *Tarka the Otter*. It is hoped that a ranger will be appointed to develop the trail on the ground, but in the meantime, some progress is being made. Devon County Council have now taken over the stretch of former railway line between Bideford and Meeth, and are in the process of converting this into a footpath. Small works on the drainage, fencing and surface will take place until April 1990 to complete, when the large structures such as tunnels and the Torrington and Landcross viaducts will be tackled. This is the heart of Tarka Country, and when open the path will give superb views of many of the key scenes in *Tarka the Otter*, for example Canal Bridge, where Tarka was born.

The Tarka Project has also been involved in the promotion of the Exeter to Barnstaple railway line, now named the Tarka Line. The Tarka theme is being used to help promote the line, but at the same time, the other aims of the Tarka Project have been taken on board: conservation and recreation. Footpath links from stations are being investigated, the route will be enhanced, and information about the wildlife and surrounding countryside is being produced.

Requests for further information about the Tarka Line or the Tarka Project as a whole, should be directed to Nicola Oliver, Tarka Project Officer, Eric Palmer Centre, Barley Grove, Torrington, Devon EX38 8EZ. Telephone: (0805) 233555.
