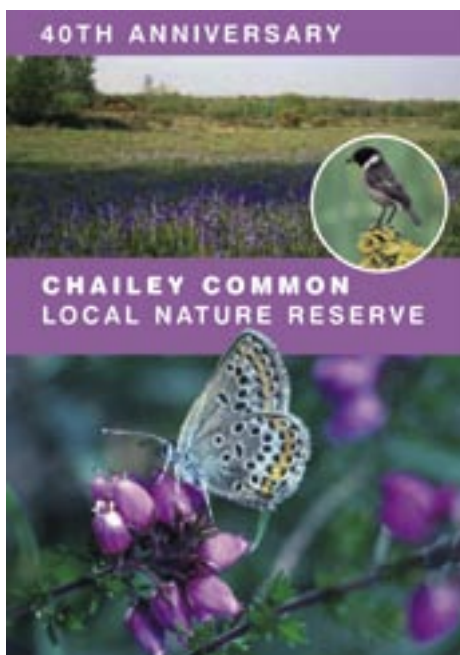


# M The Meresman

Issue 22 Autumn/Winter 2006/2007

## News from Chailey Common

As Autumn creeps in, the last pinks and purples of the heather give way to the browns of the bracken and the turning of the trees on the commons. The birds that have not left already are preparing to leave. The churring Nightjars will have been one of the first to begin their long journey, followed by the Willow Warblers and perhaps the Hobby. The time is ripe to start looking for fungi, the bright red and white Fly Agaric being the easiest to spot.



We have a lovely new leaflet that came out over the summer, with lots of photographs and an orientation map. This has kindly been put together and funded by Lewes District Council, and will give you more information about what you can find at Chailey Common.



Photo: Neil Irvine

Bracken control at Chailey Common

Working in partnership with local people and user groups, we hope to re-introduce extensive grazing on the reserve. This will really enhance the wildlife value, by controlling the invasive birch seedlings and trampling the bracken, creating more areas for heathers and a whole host of rare plants and animals that depend on heathland to survive.

The programme of controlling the bracken began early in the summer, and this year for the first time, we welcomed the Working Horse Trust from Eridge to help us out. They worked on the heath during July using our new Bracken Bruiser, that crushes the stems and weakens the underground rhizomes. We celebrated with an open day on Red House Common that commemorated 40 years of Chailey Common as a Local Nature Reserve.

Heli Gittins  
Chailey Ranger

## Editorial

Welcome to the 22nd edition of The Meresman. This issue contains many articles on recent developments, including information about a site newly managed by the Countryside Management Service, the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, and an article on the progress of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

The responses from the recent survey of the readership of this publication and Exploring East Sussex have been collected, and we are currently collating and analysing the data. It is likely that there will be some changes made to the Meresman and Exploring East Sussex in the future. In the meantime, if you have any further comments or suggestions about either publication please do not hesitate to contact me at the address or phone number below. Enjoy this issue!

Vicky Pannell, editor

East Sussex County Council publishes The Meresman & Exploring East Sussex twice a year, in April (Spring edition) and September (Autumn edition). If you have any articles or letters that you wish to be considered for publication please submit them to the address on the back page at least two months prior to the month of publication. For further information please contact Vicky Pannell on 01273 481654.



Any views or opinions expressed in The Meresman are not necessarily those of East Sussex County Council.

## Thank you from the Director of Transport and Environment

I would like to express my thanks to all rights of way volunteers for the work that they carry out on the rights of way network. Whilst I know that for some groups the changes brought about by the review that we have been undertaking have been viewed as a period of change and upheaval, I hope that most will now appreciate that the work we have been doing will ensure that volunteers working on rights of way in East Sussex will be fully supported and protected in the future.

I would like to reassure all those involved that the important contribution that they make is very much appreciated by all those in the County Council.

Bob Wilkins, Director of Transport and Environment

## Parish and volunteer scheme review

In the last issue of the Meresman, I introduced myself as the new Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer. My main task since fully taking over this role, has been to carry out a review of the scheme.

Having contacted active volunteer groups and asked the leaders to complete a questionnaire, it became apparent that there were a number of differences in the way in which groups operate. We have therefore drawn up new procedures and made improvements to Health and Safety arrangements, so that we are in a better position to fully support the valuable work that is carried out by volunteers.

As part of this process, a training day was held on Saturday 1st July. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) kindly ran an 'Introduction to Site and Tool Safety' course, which was well attended by representatives from six volunteer groups. The course acted as new training for those that have not yet actively participated in rights of way volunteer work, and as a refresher for the more experienced volunteers, some of whom have spent many years helping maintain the rights of way in their local areas.

More courses of this type will be run in the near future to ensure that all volunteer groups are given the chance to attend, and update their knowledge and skills.

Chris Tweed, Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer



Group activity during Introduction to Site and Tool Safety course

## An average day in the life of a trainee ranger

6.30am, jump into the car for the long drive to work, another dreary day ahead. I spend the day sitting behind a desk, with an occasional trip to the coffee machine, just to help me stay awake.

That's how my day used to start, nowadays I still get up at 6.30am but the rest of my day is very different. Every day as a trainee ranger holds a diverse array of tasks and challenges.

Each day we're out and about, helping the rangers to manage their sites, including SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), nature reserves, woods, ponds, and sand dunes (Camber Sands). Our tasks range from moving livestock, wildlife surveying, and public relations to tree felling, stile replacement, and path clearance, with much more in between.

The team spirit is great, the rangers are an easy going bunch who enjoy making light of heavy work, and they are always happy to help if you have a problem!

I have had many wonderful moments on the course, for example helping people from the Searchlight Centre (a home for people with learning disabilities) and constructing Shelduck boxes to be used at the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve.

Getting the landrover stuck in the mud at Weir Wood, now that was a day to remember, six o'clock in the evening, covered from head to toe in mud, and still smiles on everyone's faces (well almost everyone!).

Chainsaw use, off road driving and first aid training, are just some of the skills I have gained while on the course. Not to mention the months of relevant on-the-job experience that is so valuable.

So when I'm asked 'what is an average day in the life of a trainee ranger', I'd have to say, there's no such thing!

Tim Smith, Trainee Ranger

## Joiners and leavers

The Countryside Management Service of ESCC has been running a very successful Trainee Ranger Scheme for about 20 years. The year-long course aims to train people in all aspects of countryside management, whilst also providing the Service with a team of very enthusiastic, highly committed volunteers to help with our site maintenance.

A number of our ex-trainees have recently found paid employment – James Hitchen is now a Countryside Ranger for Fareham Borough Council, and Alistair Wallis has joined our Rights of Way team to help with clearance and access work. We also have some new trainees to welcome to the team – Ben Divitaris and Philip Sloots.



My friend and fellow trainee Phil Slack, and his unique twist on countryside management!

## New Volunteer Handbook

A new Handbook, covering all aspects of volunteering with the Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group has recently been produced. The main focus of the booklet is Health and Safety, and it will arm volunteers with all the information that they need to keep themselves safe whilst working out on site with us.

The handbook includes sections on the types of volunteering available within the Group, general health information, manual handling, the weather, plants and animals and diseases. Also included are sections about tool use, and safe working practice guidelines.

A second handbook, focusing on Guided Walks and Rides is also being produced, and will be published within the next few months. It is hoped that the handbooks strike the right balance of interesting and informative

A copy of the relevant handbook will be sent out to all our existing volunteers and will form the basis of the welcome pack for new members. The information in these handbooks will also be available on our website [www.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk) If you would like a copy of either publication, please feel free to contact either Cathy Cordery, Chris Tweed or Vicky Pannell.

Cathy Cordery  
Countryside Team Co-ordinator

## Planning the future of countryside access

A plan for the future improvement of the public's access to the East Sussex countryside is being developed and will soon require your input.

The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 charged highway authorities, such as East Sussex County Council, with producing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. In drawing up the Plan the Council must assess:

- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment of the authority's area;
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

In making its assessment of the needs of the public, the Council has engaged various rights of way users in a series of discussion groups. These, as well as input from the members of the East Sussex Local Access Forum and South Downs Access Forum, have helped the Council form its aims and objectives for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. An assessment has also been made of every public path in the county through a methodical

examination of the Definitive Map of public rights of way.

The plan, which is currently in its drafting stage, is expected to be available for public consultation from December 2006 until March 2007. If you're interested in being included in the consultation please contact Andrew Whitnall on 01273 481627 or at [andrew.whitnall@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.whitnall@eastsussex.gov.uk). Alternatively, check the County Council's website at [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism) nearer the time.

The full plan is due to be adopted by the County Council during the autumn of 2007.

Andrew Whitnall  
Access Development & Forum  
Officer



## A Question of Priorities

The Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group has recently produced a draft 'Priority Statement' for work on rights of way.

### What is it ?

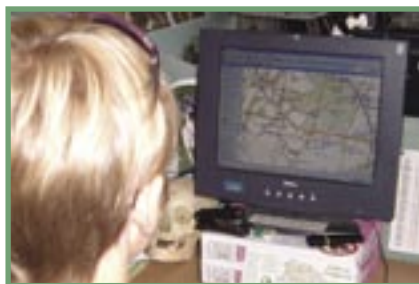
The priority statement is admittedly a rather grandiose name for a scoring system to be applied to all problems reported on the network relative to a series of factors.

### What are those factors ?

Danger to the public is clearly the primary factor in determining how urgently a problem must be dealt with, but there are less obvious reasons to distinguish priority such as whether a problem renders a path unusable or merely inconvenient.

For example, if a path has been partially obstructed or narrowed by the encroachment of a boundary fence the problem may be given a lower priority score than a path that has been completely obstructed by a fence with no stile.

The location and level of use made of a path is also an important consideration. As well as looking after over 2000 miles of rural paths and twittens, the Group is responsible for a great many urban paths and twittens. Problems on these routes can often generate a large number of complaints because they receive high levels of use. Again this is a



factor in determining a problem's priority score.

First and foremost the statement is intended to ensure that officer time and resources are focussed where they are most urgently needed.

As Rights of Way Officers, we are of course required to prioritise matters on a daily basis, but it can be difficult to

make those judgements and the standardised system will help.

Equally important is that we are able to keep the public who report problems informed of where their problem lies within the wider picture, and when it is likely to be resolved. It is just one way in which we are looking to improve systems for both reporting and providing feedback on problems.

Better feedback should also help prevent multiple reports of the same problem, which can obviously create unnecessary correspondence for the public and officers.

The statement has not been published yet and is out for consultation. It is important that individuals and groups have a chance to comment on it as a draft.

For more information on the priority statement or any other information relating to public rights of way, please contact us via the details on the back page.

## The Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve

Why don't you visit the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve between Seaford and Newhaven? It was created through the Ouse Estuary Project to provide flood storage, wildlife and landscape compensation for a new business park and road.

In spite of this summer's drought, the reserve is home to a wide variety of birds, insects, plants and amphibians, including the internationally protected Great Crested Newt. There have been over 100 different species of bird recorded on site and over the winter impressive numbers of wetland birds can be seen in the pastures and shallows.

The site can be explored on a network of footpaths and cycle tracks designed with mounds and tree planting to reduce disturbance to wildlife. All are suitable for wheelchair access with the exception of one.

At present a circular walk within the reserve does not exist, but with the completion of the road and development, an additional cycle track will complete the loop.

The reserve is accessible by public transport from Newhaven, Seaford and Denton Corner. There is also a car park 400 metres south of the Reserve on the A259 between Seaford and Newhaven. The car park is also convenient for the Tide Mills ruins and the beach.



Oxeye daisies at the Ouse Estuary

You can contact the Ranger by telephone on 01273 482670, or by email at: [OENR@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:OENR@eastsussex.gov.uk)

For more information about National Cycle routes: [www.sustrans.org](http://www.sustrans.org)

If you would like to help conserve this valuable habitat why not enrol as a voluntary ranger?

Jessie Leamy, Ranger

## Disabled access project

On 1 September 2005 the County Council started a two year Anglo-French project, within the EU Interreg programme, improving recreational access for people with disabilities and special needs. A year on, work adapting nine routes for disabled access is progressing well.

In May we had our first group exchange event with our French partners, involving people with learning disabilities and others from disadvantaged backgrounds.



The group enjoying the sights of Camber Castle

The day was spent on the Camber Castle Walk, one of the first routes to be adapted by the project. With the help of Rye Bay Nature Reserve staff, we spent the day visiting Camber Castle and birdwatching with our guides Chris Bentley and Robin Gray.



Birdwatching from a hide

For the majority of the group this was their first experience of travelling abroad and being involved in a rural based activity.

If you would like to know more about the project and would like to get involved please contact: [Rachel.solomons@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.solomons@eastsussex.gov.uk)

Rachel Solomons



Project part-financed by the European Union

## News from Rye Harbour



Wader pool

### Have you visited the Nature Reserve at Rye Harbour yet?

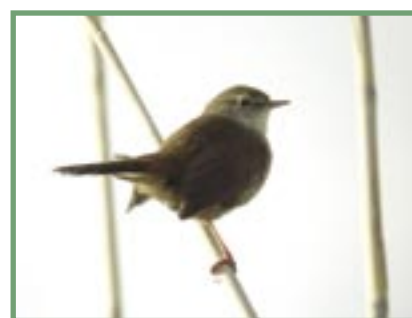
If not, you should do soon, because it's a great place to experience some of the best coastal and wetland wildlife in Britain. Through the summer the shingle beach has been a colourful display of flowers, such as the Sea Pea, Yellow-horned Poppy, Biting Stonecrop and Viper's Bugloss. This year the highlight for birdwatchers was the large number of breeding seabirds with 500 pairs of Sandwich Terns, 169 pairs of Common Tern, 21 pairs of Little Terns and 75 pairs of the Mediterranean Gull, plus breeding waders like 24 pairs of Oystercatcher, 35 pairs of Ringed Plover, 16 pairs of Redshank and 9 pairs of Avocet. Where else can you see all this at close range?



Mediterranean Gull and chick

And it is so accessible. The new train service to Rye means a quicker, direct journey, then a longish walk or a bus gets you to Rye Harbour where there is also a large free car park and a shop and two pubs for refreshment. Our four birdwatching hides are all accessible to some wheelchairs (please contact the reserve for details) and there are many seats along the miles of footpaths to rest and watch the wildlife. We also organise many guided walks to help introduce you to the area and its wealth of wildlife.

It has interesting wildlife at all seasons and there is always a surprise just waiting to be discovered. Come in winter and watch Bittern and Smew at Castle Water and listen for a warbler that stays all year – the Cetti's Warbler.



Cetti's Warbler

Rye Harbour is also a place where you can discover interesting history, with Henry VIII's Camber Castle, or Martello Towers or Blockhouses. Or, you can just come and enjoy a quiet coastal walk.

Once you discover this special place you may want to get more involved. You could join the Friends for £5 a year to get newsletters and details of many walks and special events. Or, you could become a volunteer at our Information Centre or help with practical management on our regular work parties.

The Nature Reserve is a partnership of many organisations, including East Sussex County Council, Environment Agency, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve (with more than 1600 members).

For more details see our website [www.wildRye.info](http://www.wildRye.info) and for daily wildlife information look at [www.RXwildlife.org.uk](http://www.RXwildlife.org.uk), or send for a free colour booklet by sending a SAE to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, East Sussex. TN36 4LU.



Viper's Bugloss and Biting Stonecrop

Dr Barry Yates  
Manager, Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

# News from the Rye Bay Countryside Office

A satellite office of the Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group

The Rye Bay Countryside Office (RBCO) has recently been working on improving access to Guestling Wood, in partnership with the Woodland Trust. This is an ancient woodland which plays host to a number of rare species including (unusually for a woodland) the much-loved Water Vole.

The Rye Rangers improved access into the wood on the 1066 Hasting Link by installing kissing gates (right). This now allows users of the wood easy access whilst deterring damaging activities such as motorcycling.

The second Rye Bay Wildlife Weekend was held on the 5th – 7th May this year and proved once again to be a success. Rye Rangers led guided walks and bike rides during the weekend along with manning an information stand and undertaking a River Rother litter pick with local volunteers. The litter pick proved successful, with one skip completely full and nine bin bags full of materials that could be recycled. A big thank you to all the volunteers involved.

As part of the Rye Town Management Project funded by SEEDA Market Towns Fund, the RBCO was commissioned to make new signage for Gibbitts Marsh car park to help steer visitors towards the town and the tourist information centre. Rye Bay Ranger, Darryl Major, created finger posts out of local oak and stained the wood. The posts were then installed with help from our regular volunteer Yestin Watkins, ready for the busy summer season.



New kissing gate on the 1066 Hastings Link at Guestling Wood

## Camber

Camber beach and dunes continue to be one of the most popular rural attractions in the South East during the summer months. Visitor numbers continue to increase, along with the pressures on wildlife. In 1929 Mr S.P.B. Mais described Camber as ‘a golden stretch of sand dunes and beach where one can dream away the sunny hours without the slightest fear of interruption’. However, this soon changed, with vehicles parking on the beach regularly on hot summer days in the 1930s.

Today, Camber regularly has daily visitor numbers of around 25,000 on hot summer weekends, along with rising numbers during the winter months. To help manage this increased visitor pressure, the RBCO is working in partnership with other organisations such as Tourism South East, Camber Parish Council and Rother District Council to develop visitor management projects. Another area of work is the development of the ‘Camber Environmental Strategy’, which is planning landscape and recreational improvements throughout the village. This includes looking at how to improve the traffic management, developing planting schemes on verges and upgrading recreational facilities such as play areas. It is hoped that these improvements will be of benefit to residents as well as visitors and local businesses.

Even with all this visitor pressure, we are pleased to see that the conservation work, which has included Sea Buckthorn clearance on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) section of the dunes, has contributed to the recorded status of the area changing from ‘declining’ to ‘improving’ on the English Nature records.

Simon Fathers  
Rye Bay Countryside Officer



New Tourist Information Centre fingerpost in Rye

## Contacts...

Vicky Lawrence (Head of Rights of Way & Countryside Management)	01273 482699
Matthew Harper (Senior Rights of Way Officer: Rother)	01273 482324
Sophie Homewood (Rights of Way Officer: Lewes District)	01273 482250
Andy Le Gresley (Rights of Way Officer: North Wealden)	01273 482354
Fay Pattinson (Rights of Way Officer: South Wealden)	01273 482354
Sanaan Ornsby (Definitive Map Officer)	01273 482250
Chris Tweed (Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer)	01435 866408
Rachel Solomons ("NOSI" Project Officer)	01435 869252
Alan Hart (Senior Maintenance Manager)	01273 482324
Michael Diprose (Project Supervisor: East Area)	01435 866408
Wayne Miller-Hudson (Project Supervisor: West Area)	01273 482324
<b>Rights of Way Rangers:</b> Anthony Hart, David Tonge, Matthew Du Chemin, Patrick Gillmartin, Karl Woolmer, Andrew Davidson, Sam Cordery, Chris Morns, Tracy McMahon and Alistair Wallis.	
Steve Diserens (Countryside Access Officer)	01273 481654
Vicky Pannell (Walks and Rides Co-ordinator)	01273 481654
Andy Mitchell (Cuckoo Trail Ranger)	01273 481637
Andrew Whitnall (Access Development & Forum Officer)	01273 481627
Sandra Williamson (Countryside Sites Officer)	01273 482670
Ken McManamon (Ranger: Ditchling Common and Weir Wood)	01273 482670
Jo Heading (Ranger: West Park, Uckfield and Park Wood, Hellingly)	01273 482670
Heli Gittins (Ranger: Chailey & Markstakes Commons)	01273 482670
Jessie Leamy (Ranger: Shinewater, Eastbourne; Riverside Park and Ouse Estuary, Newhaven)	01273 482670
Moray O'Riordan (Forest Way Ranger)	01273 482670
Cathy Cordery (Countryside Team Co-ordinator)	01273 482670
Simon Fathers (Rye Bay Countryside Officer)	01797 226488
Darryl Major (Ranger: Camber & Rye Bay)	01797 226488

<b>Main address</b>	Rights of Way and Countryside Management East Sussex County Council Transport and Environment County Hall, St Annes Crescent Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE
<b>Fax number</b>	01273 479536
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk">www.eastsussex.gov.uk</a>
<b>"NOSI"</b> (Disabled access project)	Rights of Way and Countryside Management, "NOSI", Heathfield Depot Burwash Road, Heathfield TN21 8RA
<b>Telephone</b>	01435 869252
<b>Rye Bay Office</b>	The Rye Bay Countryside Office, 111B High Street, Rye TN31 7JF
<b>Telephone</b>	01797 226488

## Welcome to...

Tracy McMahon and Alistair Wallis – who are currently working as temporary rangers in the rights of way team, both Tracy and Al are former trainee rangers.

Moray O' Riordan is now the part-time ranger of Forest Way Country Park.

## Good luck to...

After nearly 3 years working on Rights of Way, Polly Rice is leaving for pastures new. We would like to thank her for all her hard work and wish her the best of luck for the future.

## Forthcoming events

### Weald WoodFair 2006

#### Friday 15 to Sunday 17 September

The leading woodland, wood-use and woodcraft event in the South East.

### Rye Wildlife Festival

#### Friday 25 to Monday 28 May 2007

A weekend of exciting family and beginners' activities to find out more about nature along the coast from Rye to Eastbourne.

## Back issues

Issues 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of The Meresman are still available. If you would like copies please send a large (A4) stamped addressed envelope to the above address.