

# THE Meresman

## & Exploring East Sussex

### Paths To Prosperity

Work on the Public Service Agreement (PSA), reported in the Spring 2003 issue of The Meresman, is now well and truly underway. Joining David Munn (PSA Project Manager) in delivering the rights of way improvements are: Andy Davidson, who has transferred from the Rights of Way Maintenance Team in order to supervise the maintenance work on the ground; Sam Cordery who has been recruited as a Rights of Way Ranger; and Chris Tweed (former Rights of Way Officer) who has been newly appointed as the PSA Promotion Officer. With the new team in place the improvement works on the first route, a short circular at Clay Hill near Lewes, have already been completed. After a spell of replacing a number of dangerous bridges Andy and Sam have now moved onto an 'Access for All' route based around Camber Castle. For the remainder of the year they will be working on a further seventeen or so routes spread around East Sussex. Routes covered by the project will be identifiable through the installation of a small metal disc incorporated into signposts and stiles, and any leaflets or other promotional material will carry the same logo.

Chris Tweed (Promotion Officer) is starting work on producing literature to support the routes; these route guides are to be available free of charge. Chris is also preparing maps of the routes, which will be placed onto the ESCC website.



Wealdway Bridge

Work on the first stage of the Rotherfield Community Tourism Initiative, also reported in the last issue, is now in hand. Major surface repairs have been programmed for a route around Argos Hill, and it is almost certain that sufficient funds will be available to extend the work onto other routes. The project, which is being part-funded by money from the PSA, is also being supported through the ESCC Rural Regeneration Fund, Wealden District Council, the Local Heritage Initiative and Leader Plus.

Finally, works are being planned for a number of bridleways that make up the Forest Link and the High Weald Bridleway Routes, also several other 'spot' improvements to overcome long-standing problems on otherwise good routes.

### Local Access Forum Gets Underway

The East Sussex Local Access Forum is to hold its second meeting at Uckfield in September, after a very positive first meeting at Lewes in June. This new body has the task of advising East Sussex County Council and the Countryside Agency on how legislation to improve access to the countryside (the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000) can be made to work in the County.

The Forum comprises thirteen people drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds across East Sussex including walkers, cyclists and horse riders as well as farmers and landowners, and involving rural business and nature conservation interests too.

New Chairman, Tim Calcutt, said "Whilst the Forum has been set up by East Sussex County Council, it is independent of the

authority. It will however work closely with the Council and other organisations in taking a wide-ranging and fresh approach to improvements to access our local countryside. This will include the right of access to open country and common land and the development of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Any new access must be carefully planned to ensure it does not have a detrimental effect on the habitat to which access is being granted."

Tim, a land manager from Withyham, was elected chairman of the Forum, with Lesley Cook, a horse rider from Kingston, elected as vice-chairman. This Forum is one of many such bodies that will cover all of England and Wales. A separate 'sub-forum' has been established for the South Downs. Details of the Forum, its role, its membership and agendas and minutes of its meetings will be posted on the County Council's website at: [www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk); or can be obtained by e-mailing: [eslaf@eastsussexcc.gov.uk](mailto:eslaf@eastsussexcc.gov.uk); or by telephoning 01273 481627.

#### East Sussex Local Access Forum

##### NEXT MEETING

24 September 2003 at Uckfield Civic Centre, Bell Farm Lane, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 1AE

##### FUTURE MEETINGS

7 January 2004, 24 March 2004 and 9 June 2004. Venues to be arranged. All meetings are on Wednesdays, start at 2pm and are open to the public.

## INSIDE...

Rye Bay News Update ..... page 3

Volunteer Meresman ..... page 4

What do Rangers do? ..... page 7

# Money Doesn't Grow on Trees – or does it?

The Cuckoo Trail is a 13 mile all-weather path that connects Heathfield and Eastbourne Park along the former railway route known as the Cuckoo Line. The Trail is jointly owned by East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council. It is open to walkers and cyclists and the rural sections are also open to horseriders.



Chloe Bradbrooke, Trainee Ranger – Coppicing

In the days of the railway the embankments were kept clear of vegetation by teams of labourers. Following closure in the 1960s, trees started to regenerate and now the tree canopy along some sections of the Trail is substantial. Recognising that the management of the trees was becoming an issue, we approached the Forestry Commission for advice and were told that we could apply for both Woodland Management and Woodland Improvement Grants as we were providing informal public recreation within a woodland strip. Grants totalling £64,550 have been awarded over a five-year maintenance cycle. The conditions to be met include that all work must be non-statutory (i.e. not on public rights of way); we must match funding from existing budgets (the grant pays up to 50%); and that the work must improve access for the public.

The package of measures is a combination of path improvement works and woodland management, which involves coppicing and thinning of the existing tree cover in selected areas. Path improvements include resurfacing and regrading of ramps at road crossings, in line, where practicable, with disabled access guidelines. A disability audit was carried out by the Fieldfare Trust in 2001 and the recommendations are being used to prioritise major work on the Trail. Work has already begun on coppicing in Heathfield and Horam. Further work will take place over the coming winter in these areas and in subsequent years the work will progress to Hailsham and Polegate.

We hope that the public enjoy the results of the work we are doing!

Andy Mitchell, ESCC Cuckoo Trail Ranger

## Canine Capers on the Forest Way

If you have walked along the Forest Way between Hartfield and Withyham within the last couple of months you may have noticed the recent addition of dog gates to some of the stiles on either side of the main track. These dog gates were constructed and subsequently installed by the East Sussex County Council's Trainee Rangers. Dog gates provide access to all size of dogs but at the same time maintain stock proof fencing at gates and stiles. Obviously not all dogs can jump a stile and cutting the wire to the side or beneath a stile means that it is no longer stock proof, especially in the case of lambs and calves. These dog gates are relatively straightforward to construct and it is hoped that they will become more widespread in future.

Vicky Pannell, ESCC Trainee Ranger



Sandy Williamson (Countryside Sites Officer) and Pleacher demonstrating dog gate.

## Exploring East Sussex Through Conservation Walks and Rides

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has produced an updated register of Conservation Walks and Rides within East Sussex. Defra operate a number of grant schemes aimed at farmers and other landowners for work to enhance and conserve English landscapes, their wildlife and history, and to help people enjoy them. Conservation Walks and Rides are the new access opportunities provided under The Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme.

There is a wide diversity of Conservation Walks and Rides available within East Sussex. They offer the user the opportunity to take a walk or ride in areas of interest for nature, historic or landscape conservation. The register gives you details about each site, its location, the area or length of access, the best time to visit and particular points of interest. If you would like to see a copy of this register then it is available at libraries, Tourist Information Centres, at East Sussex County Council (telephone 01273 481654) or by visiting the Defra website at [www.countrywalks.defra.gov.uk](http://www.countrywalks.defra.gov.uk).

Just one of the users catered for through the grant scheme



Just one of the users catered for through the grant scheme

With thanks to Defra for use of the illustration.

# RYE BAY NEWS

## News from the Rye Bay Countryside Office A satellite office of the Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group

### Camber Sands

With all the fine weather Camber was very busy again this year. With up to 25,000 people visiting the beach and dunes on a hot summer's day, Camber Sands is probably one of the most visited wildlife sites in East Sussex.

To help protect and enhance this important site, which is the only sand dune system in East Sussex, the Rye Bay Rangers work closely with Rother District Council and the Environment Agency to prepare the site for tourists. Work carried out included: post and rail fencing along the paths to encourage visitors to stay on them and not trample the fragile vegetation; cutting back of vegetation, such as sea buckthorn, to help keep the paths clear; and installation of motorbike barriers on the entrance paths from the road behind the dunes. The last has been done to stop quad bikes and horses from accessing the dunes and to help prevent young children from running straight out onto the busy road. The barriers however do not hinder general access for visitors to the dunes and beach.



*New barriers installed at Camber*

A management agreement is currently being negotiated with English Nature to carry out works within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) area that covers part of the dune system. Work undertaken this winter will include clearance of selected areas of sea buckthorn that was planted in the 1970s. This shrub has been very successful at stabilizing the dunes, but has since become too dominant and has shaded out the wild flowers and grasses which make the dunes important to wildlife. It is hoped that over a five-year period the areas of sea buckthorn will be reduced and that new vegetation will colonise the dunes and help stabilize the sand. Funding from English Nature is also likely to produce several wildlife interpretation panels explaining dune management and the wildlife that live in this harsh environment. These panels will be located at different points on the dunes and will help local people and visitors learn about the dune system they are walking on.

*Simon Fathers, Rye Bay Countryside Officer*

**STOP PRESS!** The popular Rye Harbour Nature Reserve has won a top award. It was one of only 19 in the country singled out for recognition from a total of 4,000 Sites of Special Scientific Interest which were considered. English Nature, the Government's wildlife watchdog, awarded one of its prestigious green honours to the manager of the Rye Harbour Reserve, Dr Barry Yates, and his staff.

### Stile counters

As part of the new Public Service Agreement (PSA) the Rye Bay Countryside Office has been assisting with collecting base-line data on how many people are using the promoted routes in the Rye Bay area. This has been done by installing nine counters on stiles along these routes and regularly checking them and recording the figures. Initial readings



*Maggie Cullen installing a stile counter*

have shown that routes in the Rye Bay area are certainly popular, in particular, those which follow long distance routes, such as the 1066 Country Walk. Maintenance will continue to be carried out on these routes to try and encourage more people to visit the area. The team have also been assisting Matt Harper, the Rother area Rights of Way Officer, with bridge building and path clearance in and around Rye. This has included path clearance and bridge building at Westfield and bridleway clearance at Staplecross.

### Trainee News

The two Rye Bay trainee rangers, Maggie Cullen and Simon Rowledge, have both recently finished their National Vocational Qualification in Environmental Conservation at Ivylands Farm (part of Plumpton College). Having been with the team for over 8 months they are both now looking to gain employment within the environmental field. Sam Watson, a previous trainee, has recently gained employment as an Assistant Ecologist for a company in Oxford and we wish him every success in the future.

### Walks & Rides

This summer's events have been very successful with attendance numbers being higher than in previous years. People enjoyed the chance to explore the Rye Bay area by foot or bike and to learn about what makes this place so special. If you are interested in finding out about walks in the Rye Bay area then make sure you look out for us in the winter edition of Exploring East Sussex. We will once again be collecting old Christmas trees to use on the sand dunes at Camber to try and reduce the erosion caused over the summer. Full details of where you can drop off your tree can be found in Exploring East Sussex. The scheme has proven to be very popular and is a great way to recycle and improve your local environment.



*Recycled Christmas trees*

# The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman

## A Time for Reflection

Thoughts from Mary Moul, Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer

We are now four years into the Parish & Volunteer Scheme and things have changed tremendously. I anticipated that the work would cover basic path maintenance work, making sure that everyone had sufficient materials to do the work and some parish projects. Not only have the numbers and type of volunteers grown, the variety and nature of the projects taking place is also far greater than I could have predicted. Basic path maintenance will always be the most important aspect of the Parish & Volunteer Scheme. Coming up in the outside lane, very fast, is the work to improve access to the path network for many more people. Queries regarding 'Access for All' are regularly received from members of the public, as well as a range of East Sussex organisations working on promoting health and well-being for the people of the county. People want to know where decent length walks can be found, and more importantly, if they actually exist and what the County Council is doing to improve matters.

## Volunteer Scheme – What has Changed?

The number of volunteers remains constant, with some changes in the type of work that some of the groups are undertaking. Over the last few months the volunteers have been very busy and several groups are about to embark on bridge building programmes in Withyham, Danehill, and Barcombe.



Sue Watson on her red Trumper, Rosie Norris on her yellow Trumper & her husband John, Mike Smith and Dave Pearce of Eastbourne Borough Council checking out a safe road crossing between Warren Hill Car Park and Beachy Head.

Progress on this years set of new 'Wren Walks' is well underway. The routes put forward by the High Weald Walkers, The Ashdown Rambling Club, The Lewes Footpaths Group, The Disabled Ramblers and The Barcombe Footpaths Society will hopefully, be complete by the

## A Job to be Proud of!

I reported in the last issue of The Meresman that two missing bridges on the River Dudwell had been replaced. The two bridges, along with a third that was replaced at the same time, are located on three parallel paths that run north to south between Burwash Weald and Punnetts Town. The paths provide a vital link at the centre of the county and the work to replace the bridges and improve the condition of the structures and waymarking represents the good working relationship between the users groups and the County Council.

As part of an annual programme of walks, the Ramblers' Association (RA) organised a walk to take in the three paths. The Chairman of the County Council, Councillor Roger Thomas, gave a warm welcome to Brian Reader, (Chairman of the RA), Malcolm McDonnell (East Sussex Footpaths Secretary for the RA) and RA members from East and West Sussex. It was an opportunity for us to demonstrate to



Roger Thomas (Chairman of East Sussex County Council), Brian Reader (Chairman of RA), Malcolm McDonnell (East Sussex Footpaths Secretary RA), a member of the Rights of Way Team and RA members at the start of a walk in the sunshine.

people, who normally walk in other areas, the work that we do and to introduce them to our beautiful countryside.

Thank you to Ross Urquhart and the Heathfield & District RA working party and the County Council's Work Team for the work to re-instate the paths.

end of September 2003 and leaflets will be produced. The six groups, Janette Wren (Northiam Footpath Group) and the Danehill Millenium Footpath Group



Sue Watson and members of the Lewes Footpaths Group on her other buggy looking at poor access points on the proposed 'Lewes Town Circular' 'Wren Walk'

have also had a major input into the entire process for all stages of the works. The new walks are two fully accessible to wheelchair routes at Camber Castle and around an historic part of Lewes; more difficult circular routes on the edge of the Ashdown Forest and north of Crowborough; and easy access walks around Barcombe Mills and Isfield.

The only major difference is the change of emphasis from just looking at the path network for able-bodied people, to

addressing the problems faced by people with mobility problems who wish to use rights of way. A great deal of my time this year has been working with the Disabled Ramblers group and Sue Watson, a member of the Disabled



The Ashdown Rambling Club busy with a stile

Ramblers and a rights of way volunteer.

We have looked at land near Camber Castle and the open downland near Eastbourne. Mike Smith, The Downland, Trees and Woodland Manager and Dave Pearce, the Downland Ranger of Eastbourne Borough Council are continuing the work alongside the Disabled Ramblers and Harry Comber of the Beachy Head Ramblers. Plans are also being made to make further forays into other areas including the paths around Bewl Water Reservoir.

# The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman

## Access for All – why now? What has the County Council done so far?

### The Last Four Years

As part of the preparation that I (Mary Moulton) do before I start writing or collecting articles for *The Meresman*, I read back issues to check to see what we have covered and what should be the next main item for publication. The issue of 'Access for All' is clearly ranking as something that has become a greater part of our work than ever before. This interest and the associated work that has taken place were raised by groups who were keen to see major improvements to the path network. From the original research that took place three years ago, the number of access groups taking part in the Parish & Volunteer Scheme has grown, as has the level of direct contact that we now have with organisations promoting walking and countryside recreation for health and well-being.

The majority of people I meet on a day-to-day basis are aware that legislation exists to promote improved access to all services. They have not, however, had close experience of the large number of different problems that people come across when they want to exercise their desire to spend time out in the countryside on their own or in a group.

### People and their Problems using the Rights of Way Network

Everyone at sometime has come across problems when using rights of way. The current condition of the rights of way network, whilst denying access to some people, will not pose a problem to others. Poor gates that do not close properly, various types of natural terrain, cultivated fields, muddy tracks, poor waymarking, lack of information and the fact that a stile has been installed on the path can at times be barriers to accessing the countryside.

The team at the County Council are working hard to resolve problems and improve the level of access on the paths. The dilemma is that with limited resources we are continually juggling issues of allocating the budget to resolving urgent problems rather than addressing those that we know would provide best value for the county as a whole.

The people in the photographs represent members of the public and the diverse nature of the user groups we now work with, all of whom enjoy using the rights of way network.

Rights of Way & Countryside Management have encompassed the primary concerns of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. The work of volunteers is greatly appreciated and is proving invaluable in highlighting the problems relating to 'Access for All'. We are now in a far better position to draw up criteria to enable the 'Access for All' issue to move forward.

There are already several user-friendly routes including the Forest Way, the Cuckoo Trail and some of the country parks managed by the county in East Sussex. Wherever improvements need to be made, and wherever possible, gates are always considered a first option, especially where legal changes are being made to the path network via diversions. Under the Parish & Volunteer Scheme and the new PSA project, improved access is a major consideration.



With the aid of our legal team, we are looking at the legislation and its interpretation. Several sections of the regulations are currently being finalised and we are awaiting new guidance from the Countryside Agency on dealing with providing 'Access for All.' Gemma Walker (Walks & Rides Co-ordinator) and myself (Mary Moulton) have been given the task of putting together a policy for the Countryside & Rights of Way Group to work to. With that in mind we will be holding consultation workshops with all the user groups in the late autumn to find out your views. This will be followed by a similar exercise with the Rights of Way & Countryside Management staff. A draft and then final policy will follow.



Our overall aim is to continue to work with all user groups with a view to making as many improvements as we can in the shortest time possible. Given that Howard Brunger travelled up to the top of Snowdon on a Tramper (a motorised buggy), it is highly likely that there are many places that an electric buggy might get to in East Sussex. If you have never seen a 'Tramper' or buggy being driven over different terrain and are interested in finding out more about the subject you might like to look at the following websites: [www.tramper.co.uk](http://www.tramper.co.uk), [www.iglidenow.com.uk](http://www.iglidenow.com.uk), [www.pdqmobility.com](http://www.pdqmobility.com), <http://website.lineone.net/~disabledramblers>.



**Access for All – continued**

**Best Way Forward**

We will be working with organisations such as East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA), several Primary Health Care Trusts, Wealden and Lewes District Councils and the British Heart Foundation to gain an increased understanding of what we can do in the future. The commitment to work with all relevant organisations in the future will continue.

The development of new ‘full access’ routes under the ‘Wren Walks’ is well underway and volunteers are investigating the path network with a view to seeking out interesting routes that already exist or ones that can be easily modified. These will have to be tried and tested before any information as to their whereabouts is published. Our research clearly shows that there are many places in the county that are suitable for improved access projects. Until such time as the legislative questions are resolved and our policy is in place, we will consider that our best option is to make our way forward and to maximise the resources we have.

**Final Note**

Since working with Sue, Rosie, John, Paul and Marion, representatives of the Disabled Ramblers over the last few months, I have had the opportunity to see for myself what the new mobility vehicles can do when travelling over rough ground and how far they can go. The message, not surprisingly, is that the issue of access to the countryside should be one of choice. I asked Sue Watson to sum up her experience of trying to use the path network. She replied ‘when I compare my experience of being an able-bodied walker 15 years ago with my experience in the countryside today it is very different, and I am acutely aware of the difficulties presented to disabled people by unnecessary barriers. I use an off road buggy called a Trampler, which can handle most types of terrain including deep mud, ruts, 1:4 slopes and 6" steps; it has even been driven up Welsh mountains. Recently I completed a largely unaccompanied 85-mile trip on this machine taking in part of the South Downs Way, yet there are beautiful places much more local to me (I live in Polegate) where I would love to go but which are inaccessible. This is mainly because of obstacles like stiles, or gates, which are impossible for me to use e.g. kissing gates and gates, which are overgrown, very hard to open, in need of repair etc. Given that the technology exists to send people to the moon, is it really acceptable that disabled people are excluded from so many of our public rights of way!’

*Mary Moul, Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer*



*A couple of the problems – locked gates and overgrown stiles*

**COMMENT**

Over the past 20 years there has been a growing emphasis on improving the accessibility of existing buildings and on the design and construction of new ones. More recently the Disability Discrimination Act has, to some extent, brought this to the fore. However, to date this work has concentrated on the built environment and often neglected the countryside to which the public have general access. There are very few footpaths that have good access that would enable disabled people to visit and enjoy the natural environment. Access to the countryside is an important recreational and social activity and often disabled people find access difficult or impossible.

Some work has been done in East Sussex – most notably at Abbot’s Wood, Seven Sisters Country Park and Hastings Country Park. Those who run the latter two parks have, together with local groups of disabled people, established accessible paths around parts of their sites. They have also worked to ensure information at visitors centres and around the parks is

**Nick Tapp, the Deputy Chief Executive of the East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA) gives his views of where he feels we are with ‘Access for All’.**

accessible too. Hastings Country Park’s staff are in discussion with the Hastings & Rother Disability Forum about stage two of their accessible trail. East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA) would like to see disabled people’s

access to the countryside extended beyond that afforded by country parks. Therefore in this, the European Year of the Disabled People, ESDA has set up a small group to look at a campaign to raise awareness and initiate change.



*A group ramble in Friston Forest*

# What do Rangers do?

Like everyone else I am often asked what I do for a living. When I answer, "I'm a Countryside Ranger," I usually get one of three responses; "Not the Lone Ranger!", "Where's Tonto?" and "Wow! That sounds exciting". Ignoring the first two (which aren't quite so amusing after the hundredth time!), yes it can be an exciting job.

Working outdoors in the beautiful East Sussex Countryside is a real privilege. From day-to-day you never know what you're going to come across. Fallen trees, close encounters with deer, burnt out cars, snapper turtles, naked hikers, swarms of bees,



*Environmental education comes in many different guises*

sparrowhawks catching pigeons; Mother Nature and the Human Race are full of surprises. Hold on though! Before you all swap your suits for wellies and go for a career change let me enlighten you as to some of the issues a ranger may be called upon to resolve.

The main issue (and the real crux of the job) is trying to balance conservation and recreation. After all, what is the point of having a countryside full of wildlife if people cannot get out there to enjoy it? The Countryside Management Service manages a whole host of sites such as Ditchling Common and the Forest Way Country Parks, The Cuckoo Trail, Weir Wood, West Park and Chailey Commons Local Nature Reserves and we are constantly battling to find a balance. You can guarantee that if you spend a boiling hot summers day path clearing people will ask you why you're not controlling the birch and bracken, however if you birch and bracken clear all day you're asked why you're not path clearing. Whatever you do you just have to accept that you cannot keep everybody happy all of the time.

Of course if you want to manage land for conservation and wildlife you need to know what's out there. So, when you see us undertaking surveys we are not just taking it easy we are actually carrying out a crucial task. Once we've established what is present we can adopt an appropriate management



*Habitat creation – building a pond*



*Keeping the traditional management techniques alive – hedge laying*

regime. This is why volunteers and community groups are so important. It's all well and good having a management programme, but as with most countryside management services, demand often outstrips resources. So, to whom do we turn to for that vital help and enthusiasm? Yep, you guessed it! Of course the bonus of working with volunteers and community groups is that people are helping because they want to be involved. It's much better to get local people in contact with, and taking 'ownership' of, their local environments; and I must say that we work with some lovely people with seemingly boundless energy! Do remember though that all this work has to be organised – i.e. work planned, transport and tools arranged, risk assessments completed and all the other red



*Helping out otters – building an otter holt*

tape adhered to (and let me tell you it's very sticky stuff indeed!). So bear this in mind when you turn up to do your bit and things don't always run as smoothly as you'd like! Considering these aspects of the job and others such as liaising with management committees, Parish Councils, landowners and members of the public; working with and organising contractors; dealing with complaints, encroachments, litter and fly tipping; undertaking training and environmental education; management and general admin and of course, dealing with the odd wildlife emergency, it's a pretty intense and sometimes stressful job. All in all (despite the fact that I may sound like a misery) if you're looking for a really rewarding career that gets you out into the great green yonder, gives you days when you can't quite believe you're getting paid to do something so enjoyable (counter balanced by days when quite frankly you're just not getting paid enough!) and you don't have aspirations to become a millionaire then this is the job for you. So, why not join our volunteer rangers or, if I've managed not to put you off completely, apply for a position on the trainee ranger team. You won't regret it – I certainly don't! So when you see us out and about do say hello, and hopefully you'll have a bit more of an idea about what rangers do.

*Sandy Williamson, Countryside Sites Officer*