

Welcome to the e-Meresman aimed at informing you about the recent work of East Sussex County Council's Rights of Way and Countryside Management Service. The service is responsible for maintaining and improving rights of way within East Sussex, managing a variety of countryside sites and Local Nature Reserves and coordinating the work of volunteers.

Exploring East Sussex, our programme of guided walks and environmental events is still available in printed form from East Sussex libraries and Tourist Information Centres, as well as on the internet.

Interreg IVa application

The Rights of Way and Countryside Management Service is currently working towards submitting an application to the European Interreg IVa fund to help support our work. The application is for a three year project called 'Accessing the Countryside'. It will be a joint project with our Flemish partners, the Province of West Flanders, and will be submitted in October 2008. If the application is successful the project would secure £770,000 of external funding, start in April 2009 and finish in September 2012.

The project will contribute to a broad range of 'core' work on rights of way and at countryside sites and will assist in achieving our Council Plan targets.

The three main areas the project will work towards are:

- To contribute to making the rights of way network and our countryside sites more accessible for all users. This will involve staff and volunteers undertaking easy access audits and will be linked to the basic network survey we are currently undertaking. From the additional information gained, we hope to make physical improvements to 29 countryside sites and highlighted rights of way routes over the period of the project.

- To enhance community ownership and inclusion by increasing opportunities for local people to become more involved in rights of way and countryside volunteering activities. This will also include further developing and underpinning our very successful Trainee Ranger Scheme
- To create a new database holding key information about our countryside sites and rights of way network (including new data on biodiversity) to help steer future strategy and management plans.

We will find out if the application is successful in early 2009, so watch this space.

[Simon Fathers, Eastern Area Manager](#)

East Sussex County Council publishes the **e-Meresman** and **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 **Henning Weich** on 01273 481654 or email WalksandRides@eastsussex.gov.uk.

I will walk 500 miles...

The Rights of Way network survey, detailed in the last issue of the Meresman, is now due to start in September this year. We have recently recruited four experienced inspectors who will each be walking over 500 miles of public rights of way during the next six months.

The Team are also pleased to announce that we have secured additional funding to begin the modernisation and digitisation of the Definitive Map – a vital legal document which shows all of the recorded public rights of way across the County. This project is currently at an early stage and is likely to start in full next year. Watch this space for more information.

More enforcement please

We will shortly be recruiting an extra Officer whose main focus will be the resolution of Rights of Way enforcement issues. This will further increase our enforcement capacity and will enable us to start resolving some of the more longstanding issues on the network.

Harvest time

Summer is the growing season and, since June this year, the Rights of Way Team has received around 50 separate reports of crops obstructing footpaths and bridleways. It is a landowner's duty to keep any public paths that cross their land clear of crops and, so far this season, our Team have succeeded in getting around half of the reported routes cleared and reopened.

Unfortunately, asking a landowner to clear a cropped path is not often a straightforward process. In the majority of cases we do not initially know who the landowner is. This means we usually have to carry out a Land Registry search - by which time the crop may have already been harvested. If the land is not registered, we will make inquiries with the local Parish Council or neighbouring farms to try to find out who is responsible for the crops in question.

This means it can be a challenge to deal with each cropping issue as quickly as we would like to. Therefore, priority is currently given to routes

where there is no easy way round the crop or where a persistent offence is being committed. We are pleased with our progress so far this year, and to help us work more proactively next season, we are currently building up a detailed record of landowners and specific problem areas.

Brambles and nettles

We are working to refine our seasonal vegetation clearance lists which are made up of paths that become significantly overgrown each year. Where possible, these routes are then proactively cleared by our Ranger Teams between June and September.

This is the second year that we have used a seasonal clearance programme. In its first year, our four two-person Ranger Teams cleared an impressive 60 miles of vegetation across the County.



Local Access Forum Working Group

The East Sussex Local Access has set up a working group to look at prioritising and implementing some of the objectives of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The group meet for the first time this month and an update will be provided in a future edition of the Meresman.

Andy Le Gresley – Rights of Way Manager

Rights of Way Area Officer update

As part of a regular new feature in the Meresman, I have asked each Area Officer to provide an update on some of the work that they have been carrying out on the Rights of Way network.

Rother – Historic Battle path re-opened

The Rother area team have recently re-opened an important section of footpath that had been closed for several years due to river bank erosion. The footpath is part of the Malfosse Way, a route which follows the possible sites of the 'Malfosse Incident', in which it is believed the Norman army suffered losses when pursuing the retreating Saxons during the 1066 Battle. Apparently, some of the victorious Norman army fell into a ravine (known to the French as Malfosse or 'evil ditch') where they were slaughtered by the Saxons. The Malfosse Way provides a route on foot between several sites where this 'Incident' may have occurred. Battle Footpath 20 runs close to one of these sites, west of the London Road, where the steep topography resembles the description of the 'evil ditch.'

Despite previous revetment work, Footpath 20 had become increasingly dangerous due to an adjacent stream eroding the path and its banks.

Following our approach, the neighbouring landowner agreed to allow the footpath to be moved inland. The Maintenance Team are currently constructing several small boardwalks where the surface of the new path is uneven along the bank. Once this work is complete, the footpath will again form part of the walk celebrating this important sub-story to the great Battle.

[Matthew Harper, Rights of Way Officer, Rother](#)

Lewes – Circular walk improved

The Lewes Team have recently carried out work to improve a circular walk in Isfield. We had received a number of complaints about poor stiles, a hazardous bridge and overgrown vegetation in the area. Upon further investigation, it became apparent that the complaints were related to a popular dog walking route (also with a pub en route!) With

this in mind, and through liaison with the various landowners, we improved the route by installing kissing gates throughout. These improvements have been well received locally and we are now planning to improve more circular 'dog walking' routes.

[Sophie Homewood, Rights of Way Officer, Lewes.](#)



Footpath Hamsey number 8 (just outside Lewes)

South Wealden – Parish by Parish working trial

Since October 2007, the South Wealden Team have been trialing a parish-by-parish approach to maintenance and enforcement work. This has now been running very successfully for six months and we are aiming to cover the entire South Wealden Area in approximately 18 months.

This approach allows us to tackle many lower priority issues and it ensures that all of the parishes within the South Wealden Area get equal attention. Through combining maintenance and enforcement in this way we have already opened up a number of paths that have been unavailable or obstructed for many years.

Depending on the success of this trial, parish-by-parish working may then be applied to other areas of the County.

[Jo Spenceley, Rights of Way Officer, South Wealden](#)

Rights of Way Area Officer update continued

North Wealden – New Officer in post

At the time of writing this I have been the Rights of Way Officer for North Wealden for a total of six weeks. My first few weeks have been taken up ploughing through the inevitable backlog of reports which built up while there was no-one in post. This has meant poring over maps trying to locate such places as Brackles Lane, the Cinder Path and Wet Wood (which, it turns out, lives up to it's name). I am now in the process of trying to inspect the various problem spots which means I get to explore some really beautiful countryside. I would strongly recommend anyone to visit this most lovely part of the world that I am now discovering.

In the meantime, the Rights of Way Ranger Team have been valiantly slashing and slicing through their annual clearance schedule. By the time this work has come to an end I will have a long list ready for them of signs to install, previously neglected paths to open up, bridges to fix...I think we are going to be kept busy for the foreseeable future but hopefully that means it will be easier for people to enjoy the very picturesque North Wealden countryside.

Tim Squire,
Rights of Way Officer, North Wealden

We say goodbye to Vicky Lawrence

Vicky replaced Nigel Kitchener in autumn 2005 as manager of the Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group. With characteristic energy, she soon set about restructuring the Group, helping her staff to work more efficiently and improving our service to the public.

Vicky was instrumental in securing extra resources to allow the Rights of Way Team to carry out vital bridge, surfacing and survey work. She also led on a major review of our Countryside sites – enabling more effective strategic management and helping to increase their general profile.

The Group was able to attract a larger number of volunteers than ever before through Vicky's keen support. She was also instrumental in improving

the Group's approach to access for all across the network and our countryside sites.

Vicky will be missed by the Group and we wish her the very best of luck in her future career.



Walk on Ashdown Forest before cream tea with Vicky Lawrence

Western Area update

The Lewes area rights of way team have been busy over the spring and summer, clocking up 18km of vegetation clearance and installing eight bridges, 24 signposts, 10 stiles and 14 gates so far.

At Isfield, the team have been undertaking improvements to make a well-used circular route more accessible to the public. Seven stiles have been replaced by gates for users of footpaths 9, 20 and 21 which go from the Lavender Line in Isfield, to the Halfway House pub and then back along a different route.

In Barcombe, the team have recently replaced an old concrete bridge that had become badly undermined and was generally unsafe. The new 11 metre bridge on footpath 45 will do well to outlast the old one, which was reportedly installed during the war!

The area team are currently working with Brighton conservation volunteers at Hamsey to provide better access on and to the Ouse valley way with the installation of self-closing and kissing gates and general maintenance on the surrounding paths.

Forthcoming projects include re-decking the white bridge in Isfield and improvements on more circular walks throughout the area.

Anthony Hart
RoW Ranger, Western area

Update on walks and rides

More events than ever before were scheduled to take place around East Sussex during last summer. As summer failed to shine, many of the planned 200 plus guided walks and nearly 50 guided cycle rides fell foul to the weather. However, events that took place had good turn outs and overall attendance figures appear to be on a par with last years. As ever, the success of the events is due to the commitment of volunteers, who lead many of the walks and rides.

Kids activities during the summer holidays, organised by the Countryside Rangers and Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, were generally well attended – no matter what the weather was like. It gave the children the opportunity to learn and to gain supervised hands-on experience in a variety of environmental subjects on nature trails, around ponds, in woods, on the beach, in sand dunes and on heathland sites across the county.

Since Vicky Pannell left for her maternity leave in late April, I have been covering for her as Walks and Rides Volunteer Officer. I have overseen the planning of the winter walks and events schedule, which can be found in the winter 2008 – 2009 edition of Exploring East Sussex. This is obtainable from local outlets across East Sussex or online at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/walks/exploringeastsussex.htm.

Henning Weich – Volunteer Officer

Back issues

Back issues of 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the printed Meresman are still available. If you would like copies, please send a large (A4) stamped addressed envelope to the above address. Alternatively you can download certain issues at

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/countryside/walks/meresman.htm



Shovel holder? Shove holer? Shuvholer?

If someone had asked me two months ago what a shoveholer was, I might have guessed that it was something to do with a pub game involving large pennies. This is because until 2 months ago my day job consisted of counselling troubled children and families, and hole digging was definitely not part of the job description.

After 10 years with the NHS, I decided I needed a break, and took some unpaid leave to do something completely different. So here I am volunteering with the Countryside Management and Rights of Way Team learning about the art of shoveholing. And therein lies the problem. No two rangers can agree what this ingenious tool is really called. 'Shove holder' says one confidently. 'No, it's shuvholer,' says another, and so on. My dictionary does not help and 'Google' offers as many spellings as there are Rangers. So I remain in the dark for the time being.

Meanwhile I am learning many new skills: from how to build self-closing gates (Rights of Way team) to how to make a fire without matches (Bushcraft Training Day). My biggest surprise? The huge range of ages and backgrounds that the volunteers come from. Best bit of volunteering? Being outside all day and being around people who genuinely seem to love their

work. Worst part? The volunteer days are so popular that I only get to go out once a week.

Trish Joscelyne, Volunteer



Andy Goulden (Trainee Ranger) with shuv-holer

Volunteer with us!

The Rights of Way and Countryside Management Service have several volunteering opportunities available.

If wading around knee-deep in ponds and streams, constructing stiles or gates or leading guided walks or cycle rides appeals to you, then why not get involved?

Whatever your preference, volunteering with us can give you new skills, whilst working in some of the most beautiful countryside in East Sussex. It is also a great way to meet new people.

For more information, contact:

Countryside Volunteers Phil Slack 01273 482670

Rights of Way Volunteers Rachel Solomons 01435 866408

Guided walks and cycle rides Henning Weich 01273 481654

RoW volunteers update

There have been some recent changes of staff with Chris Tweed changing posts to manage a rights of way network survey of the County. I have now taken Chris' place as the Rights of Way Volunteer Officer and have been in post since late July.

In early August I met members from each group when they attended training in the use of the C.A.T cable avoidance tool. This was a very useful day and the tool will further support the groups' safety whilst hole digging to install structures on the Rights of Way network.

Some new groups have recently been established in Iden and Westfield. In May the Westfield Group had their first day undertaking installation work replacing a stile with a kissing gate (right). The Iden Group meanwhile, have been hard at work on a circular route in the village and recently had a successful event to launch the walk.

Rachel Solomons
Rights of Way Volunteer Officer



A new way through to Rights of Way



The Highways and Byways Contact Centre for East Sussex handles calls on all issues relating to the maintenance and operations of the roads in the county and has been taking calls for the Rights of Way department since October 2007. We provide a contact point for the Rights of Way Team while they are out on site and have access to the County Council mapping system

which means that, in many cases, we are able to provide a direct answer to queries from the public.

Where we cannot provide a direct response, we ensure that the RoW officers receive detailed information regarding enquiries from the public so they can take the relevant action. To help provide a better service to the public, all of the Contact Centre team have been out on site visits with the Rights of Way staff to get a clearer picture of the work that they do.

Our service helps the Rights Of Way team spend more time working 'in the field' while we deal with the public's enquiries, providing a friendly and informative service. In turn the Rights of Way staff are always in communications with us so that we know what action they are going to take and can pass this information onto the public.

Peter Walker, Business Support Assistant
Highways Contact Centre

Kingston Depot

Kingston Depot is the base for the rangers who look after the rights of way and countryside sites in the west and north of the county. People who have been around for a few years might know it as rather crumbling and less than salubrious. However, the depot has been completely transformed, with huge changes including a new workshop, improved storage areas, a warm dry office, recycling facilities, a changing room with personal lockers, decent toilet facilities and better computers.

Improving the office, workshop and storage areas has not only resulted in better access for everyone to our materials and equipment (machines, tools, timber and fuel etc.), it has also helped to make the depot a much safer and more efficient and enjoyable place to work. But having created an improved work base, we're also trying to integrate this with our broader environmental objectives by encouraging more wildlife into the depot!

We've already met with some success here with a variety of wildlife now making the depot its home. There are lots of sparrows living on site now (largely thanks to the bird feeders funded and topped up out of hours by Matt),

together with some blue tits nesting in the wood alongside thrushes, starlings and pigeons, of course – all kept on their toes by a visiting sparrow hawk.

The brush piles have also attracted small mammals (replacing the rats which used to live in a pile of old waders). In spring, our attention was drawn to a tuneful chirping noise under the wood stack that, to our surprise, turned out to be a couple of shrews up to monkey business. The log stacks are now home to a family of common lizards with their cousin, the slow worm, cosying up nearby under some corrugated iron.

Then there are the rabbits, which are a pest with their constant burrowing. But nature does have a way of balancing itself and, unlucky for some, a member of the stoat family has also moved in to help keep them in check. Other rarely seen local residents include a family of badgers living round the back of the rangers' shed.

While one or two people may comment on the slightly 'unkempt' look of the yard these days, there certainly is an element of not wanting to go round with a strimmer once a week. Instead, we're aiming to create more of a balance by letting nature alone, save for the odd bit of coaxing. So now we have oats, barley, wheat

and and maize growing in clumps. Alongside these are thistles, dandelions, poppies, field bind weed and all kind of grasses making good cover for all sorts of insects. We have also planted the boundaries with hawthorn and blackthorn which we hope to lay in a couple of years. Combined with the brambles around the back, this will avoid the need for any fencing.

So next time you're down Kingston way, do keep your eyes peeled - there's a lot more than that 'family' of friendly rangers living down here!



Kingston in view

Taking on Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve

After finishing my year on the Trainee Ranger course run by our Countryside Management Team, I was lucky enough to get the job of looking after Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve whilst Heli Gittens (the permanent ranger) is away for a year on sabbatical.

Although I was very excited at the prospect, the thought of having 450 acres of heathland to look after all by myself was fairly daunting. The next few months were, it is fair to say, a pretty steep learning curve. All of a sudden, I went from being a carefree trainee to having contractors to manage, volunteers to take out and look after, articles to write, meetings to go to, and local residents and users to engage with. It was all a bit of a shock to the system.

Having said that, I love the site; it is a beautiful place and has some wonderful examples of some quite rare wildlife. My favourite days were often those when I had to go out by myself.

Whilst on patrol or checking a problem, I could also listen out for stonechats, hunt for the illusive silver studded blue butterflies and look out for adders (still haven't seen one yet!!). I also had a great support team behind me; everyone in the team gave me great advice and answered my endless questions with outstanding patience.

I feel honoured to have had the chance to help a little bit with the conservation of this precious place and will definitely miss it when I'm gone. Chailey Common is certainly worth a visit so if you haven't been there, go and have a wander around.

[Dave Darroch, Chailey Common Ranger](#)

Editor's note: Heli Gittens has extended her sabbatical and Adam Buzuk, another of our former Trainee Rangers, is now acting Ranger until March 2009.



Spring on Romany Ridge

Green Flag

The Green Flag Award Scheme was set up to encourage the provision of good quality public parks that are managed in an environmentally sustainable way. It has been used to help once no go area parks into thriving community meeting places.

It is the intention of the Countryside management service to win a Green Flag Award for some of our sites starting with Ditchling Common Country Park. In order to find out how the system works and to find the best way to prepare a site for gaining an award, I applied and was accepted as a green flag judge.

The next step was to attend training at Victoria Embankment Gardens.

I was then given 2 very local sites to judge Stoneham park and Hove Park. I was lucky considering I put the limit of travel as 150 miles. I was also lucky to be given a co-judge/mentor Peter Mead of Hastings Borough Council who was a great help in explaining how the systems work and standardising some of my more wild estimated scores.

The judging is done in 2 parts following the "raising the standard" manual. The first is a desk assessment of the management plan.



Green flag for bluebells?

The second is a site visit where the judge/s are shown around the site by the site manager/ Friends of Group. Scores are given under a range of headings:

- 1 A welcoming place
- 2 Healthy, safe and secure
- 3 Well maintained and clean
- 4 Sustainability
- 5 Conservation and Heritage
- 6 Community involvement
- 7 Marketing
- 8 Management

Green Flag status needs to be re applied for annually in order to make sure standards are maintained. Both sites we judged had previously held a green flag and were re awarded a green flag after our assessment.

Criticising the way other organisations manage their sites helps in seeing common problems faced, how our working practices can be improved, and where our methods fall short.

In order to apply for a Green Flag at Ditchling Common I will be rewriting the site management plan with a section for green flag standards. The site will then need new signs, new inspection systems, new dog bins and some access work on the more remote parts.

The site will be judged during May so there are some busy times ahead. I hope to update you on the results of our application in the Meresman this time next year.

Ken McManamon,
Countryside Ranger

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Welcome to . . .

Paul Treadgold – Head of Environmental Operations
Clair Drew – Definitive Map Assistant
Phil Slack – Volunteer Officer - Countryside Team (maternity cover for Cathy Cordery)
Henning Weich – Volunteer Officer - Walks and Rides (maternity cover for Vicky Pannell)
Tim Squire – Rights of Way Officer
Adam Buzuk – Chailey Ranger
Crispin Kirkpatrick – Countryside Ranger
Simon Irvine – Rights of Way Ranger
Dave Lister – Rights of Way Ranger
Trainee Rangers – Veronica Donno, Nick Flack, William Furze, Gerard Lee

Good luck to . . .

Dave Darroch has returned to his roots, up north, after a couple of years with East Sussex County Council; first completing his Trainee Ranger course and then spending a successful year as Chailey Ranger.

Jessie Leamy is going on a sabbatical to travel across South America. Jessie will get involved in various environmental and community projects while she’s visiting the continent.