

The Meresman

Issue 21 Spring 2006

Extra funds help to bridge the gap

There are around 2100 miles (3360 km) of rights of way in East Sussex which the County Council has a duty to protect and maintain; this includes a large number of bridges, which can come in all shapes and sizes. The County Council's own maintenance team has the task of looking after them, amongst other duties.

Following the approval of a new 'capital bridge programme', the Rights of Way team has been using the much needed funding to replace a large number of bridges around the County that would otherwise prove difficult to do with the regular maintenance budget. £90,000 of capital money was awarded from the Local Transport Plan for the financial year commencing April 2005, and this money has been used to great effect.

The bridges covered by the programme are all in excess of 10-metre span and have all been identified as particularly dangerous to the public if not replaced or closed soon.

Among the bridges already completed is one on Forest Row bridleway 24 (pictured, right).

It is a 15 metre, well-used bridleway bridge that links the Forest Way Country Park to local shops for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and disabled users. Its construction



Anthony Hart and Dave Tonge putting wooden cladding onto the steel frame at Forest Row

required a wide range of skills including carpentry, fencing, surfacing and welding. The bridge is built on steel beams, which help to strengthen the structure and ensure the longevity of the bridge.

Rights of Way Maintenance Manager Alan Hart anticipates that the County Council's own maintenance team will build most of the bridges with support from the area rights of way officers and civil engineering contractors. The maintenance team has employed two extra rangers to manage the increased workload.

Another bridge recently completed was on Warbleton footpath 15 (pictured, left). This is a 15-metre footbridge also built on steel beams. The previous bridge was in an unsafe condition and the foundations had become badly undermined. The construction of this bridge is all the more impressive considering the height difference on either bank that meant incorporating a staircase into the design. The remote location also made access very difficult.

It is hoped that the capital programme will continue for a further two years, and will go a long way towards replacing many of the larger structures across the network.



New footbridge on Warbleton footpath 15

Anthony Hart
Rights of Way Ranger

Editorial

Welcome to the tenth anniversary edition of the Meresman. To celebrate, we are offering our readers the chance to win a Harvey's hamper, full of wine, chutney, fudge, beer and other delicious goodies.

Well, this isn't exactly the whole case, the truth of it is we feel that we can improve our publications; the Meresman and Exploring East Sussex and we want your views to help us do this. Attached to the back page of Exploring East Sussex is a short questionnaire which shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes to fill out, asking your views about things such as the design, the content and the usefulness of the publications, which incidentally I hope that you will enjoy reading this spring and summer.

Please take the time to let us know what you think!

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.

Wonderful time

It is a real honour for me to have been given the job of heading up the Rights of Way and Countryside Management group. This is a very competent team, with a huge amount of expertise, experience and dedication. There is a strong team spirit and a great deal of loyalty and humour. We also have an important role, which the staff take very seriously: acting as stewards for several important countryside sites and for managing and maintaining around 2100 miles (3360 kilometres) of rights of way.

I've come to this job with a background in land management, access and community participation. I recently moved back home to Lewes where I grew up and have just spent a year in Social Services promoting good relations with the voluntary and community sector for the County Council.

There are several key pieces of work for me to concentrate on with the team in the coming year. These include drawing up and consulting on a Rights of Way Priority Statement, which will enable the staff to prioritise their work in a transparent way.

We will need to look to the future and work out a strategy for the Countryside Management Service and also for the Rights of Way service.



Steve Diserens (Countryside Access Officer) talking to the Bme elders at the start of the walk near Barcombe

We have already run a very successful guided walk with Sompriti in October 2005 for 33 Bme older people aged from 50 to 85 years old. They have been living in East Sussex from between 4 months to 45 years. 22 of them had never walked in the East Sussex countryside before.

Some of their quotes from the day were:

"My heart is very happy. I am not grumpy like my usual days."

"It has been a happy day and very different from my daily life."

"Wonderful Time"

"I sing and dance all the time during the walk."

"Marvellous, I have not had a walk for a long time."

I'm well aware from all the correspondence that I've seen in the last few months that not everyone is having a wonderful time in the countryside. There is a lot of work for us to do. However, I'm looking forward to meeting and working with many of the individuals and groups in East Sussex who are concerned with the countryside and rights of way, and working with you to improve them for us all.



From left to right: Vicky Lawrence with Neil Thurgate, Anthony Hart, Karl Woolmer, Wayne Miller-Hudson and Matthew du Chemin (Rights of Way Rangers) at the Forest Row bridge

We work with individuals and groups in a variety of ways. I will be working with those who support volunteers to ensure that we give consistent support across the group. Additionally, there is a potential joint project with Sompriti, the East Sussex Black and minority ethnic (Bme) support agency, to encourage Bme people to access the countryside.

We have already run a very successful guided walk with Sompriti in October 2005 for 33 Bme older people aged from 50 to 85 years old. They have been living in East Sussex from between 4 months to 45 years. 22 of them had never walked in the East Sussex countryside before.

Vicky Lawrence

Head of Rights of Way and Countryside Management

New Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer

The Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer for East Sussex County Council has changed. I have taken on this role whilst Mary Moulton is working on the 'New Horizons' project aimed at enabling people with disabilities and special needs to access the countryside.

For the past three years I have been part of the team working on the Paths to Prosperity project (see page 4). In addition to this, since October, I have also been acting as the Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer for one day per week. As the Paths to Prosperity project comes to an end, I will be dedicating three days per week to working with volunteers, from the beginning of April.

I will be working with all the Volunteer and Parish groups that carry out work on the rights of way network, outside



The Hartfield Footpath group at work

of the work being done by volunteers working on Mary's new project. I will be concentrating on organising materials, arranging any training that is required, and offering full support to enable volunteers to carry out and enjoy, the work that they do.

I am really looking forward to working with all the volunteers, and to meeting as many as possible over the coming months.

The Heathfield and Waldron Ramblers working group set down their tools

The group, based in Heathfield, have one of the longest histories of working with East Sussex County Council. Working in all the parishes around Heathfield, they have carried out a very long list of works, repairing stiles, clearing paths and building bridges.

Ross Urquhart, the main contact for the group says 'we are no longer able to carry out works and if there is anyone else in the Heathfield area interested in taking up the challenge of helping to keep the path network in good order in, we are happy to hand over the tools'.

Their contribution of maintenance on the rights of way network will be greatly missed, so if you can help to continue this excellent work please contact me on 01435 866408 or email me at chris.tweed@eastsussex.gov.uk

Rights of Way and Countryside Management extend their thanks to Ross and his team.

Chris Tweed
Parish & Volunteer Liaison Officer

Help shape the future of access to the East Sussex countryside

East Sussex County Council is seeking new members to sit on the East Sussex Local Access Forum who have an interest in access to the countryside. The Local Access Forum has been up and running for three years and the membership is now up for renewal.

The Forum usually meets four times a year. It is helping to shape the County Council's approach to managing the rights of way network in East Sussex to improve everyone's access to the countryside for recreation, whilst protecting wildlife and the landscape. The main focus for the new Forum over the next year or so will be to continue to contribute to the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Potential members should have a good background in countryside interests, and an ability to recognise the

validity of the views of others and to seek consensus is vital, as is independence from the views of any particular organisation (membership of organisations is useful but the people we are looking for will feel able to give their own opinions).

Members will be appointed for a three year period from May 2006 and applications are invited by 28 April. Members are volunteers but can claim child care and travel expenses. For more information or an application pack please contact Andrew Whitnall by email at: andrew.whitnall@eastsussex.gov.uk or by telephone on 01273 481627 or 01273 481654.

East Sussex Local Access Forum Annual General Meeting

7 June 2006 at Ditchling Village Hall

Meetings are open to the public.

For more information call 01273 481627 or visit eastsussex.gov.uk/localaccessforum

End of the Paths to Prosperity Project

The three year project to improve and promote the rights of way network, as well as support and publicise rural business - Paths to Prosperity - is now being completed. The main target, of an 8% increase in users on the routes, was reached with months to spare, but it has achieved much more than just that.

Most of the routes have now had the required work completed to make access as clear and as easy as possible. This has involved nearly 1500 individual improvements such as replacing worn out bridges, clearing paths of vegetation and installing fingerposts. In many cases we have taken the opportunity to replace stiles with gates, or have removed them altogether. This can ultimately encourage a greater range of people into our countryside.

Most of the leaflets have now been created and we hope to have the final few finished and printed soon. Each one contains a detailed map and description of the route, as well as listing businesses in the vicinity. Included are many local



Sam Cordery at an unusual stile in Hadlow Down

pubs, tea-rooms, farm shops and more. The leaflets are free from many local information points and although some of the more popular are running out fast, they are all available to download and print from the County Council's website.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the County Council staff, businesses, landowners, walkers, horse riders and everybody else who has been involved in this project, for their contributions and support.

Having worked on the majority of routes, I would personally recommend any of them for a great day out. I believe East Sussex has some of the most beautiful countryside and more people should enjoy it. It has been an extremely rewarding project, and I

hope that the work we have all done benefits people for many years to come.

Samuel Cordery
Paths to Prosperity Maintenance Supervisor

Paths to Prosperity Business Success



A networking session for rural business staff at Wellshurst Golf Club near Horam.

As part of the Paths to Prosperity project, rural businesses on each walk route were contacted with the aim of helping them to improve their sustainability and ability to be successful. Each walk leaflet advertises the rural businesses near to the route of the walk and provides contact details.

The project supported these businesses in accessing the following four benefits:

1. Improve and/or start Enterprise Agency relationships and encouraging the business to complete a business needs audit (a report produced looking at all aspects of running a business)

2. Improve attendance of rural businesses on training courses run by Sussex Downs College, Plumpton College, 1066 Enterprise and EDEAL (Eastbourne & District Enterprise Agency).
3. Improve the electronic abilities of rural businesses by supporting them in:
 - Buying computers
 - Creation of new websites
 - Upgrades on existing websites
 - Upgrade the internet connections to broadband
4. Help to improve the application processes and the number of farm diversifications occurring in East Sussex.

The achievements made by 340 rural businesses in East Sussex within the last three years (March 2003 – March 2006) are:

- 70% of the businesses have completed a business needs audit
- 31 businesses have bought new computers
- 8 businesses have created new websites
- 5 businesses have upgraded their existing websites
- 120 members of staff from these rural businesses have completed a 1-day training course

If any further information is required please contact Vikki Cussons (01273) 482205 or email vikki.cussons@eastsussex.gov.uk

Vikki Cussons
Paths to Prosperity Coordinator

New Horizons

New horizons is a project part funded by the European Union that aims to 'improve access to the countryside'

'Easy' access has always been considered an important part of the work of the Rights of Way and Countryside Management Group, but with the team always working at full stretch there has been little time available to focus on this area.

In previous years much of the work associated with countryside access for people with disabilities was being carried out in conjunction with the volunteers who worked with the Parish & Volunteer Scheme (see page 3). With a cash grant from Interreg 111a (an EU funding programme) and contributions from East Sussex County Council, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), other organisations in the County and volunteers, we are able to take the work forward.

Interreg IIIa is a European initiative that funds projects on both sides of the Channel to promote technical and cultural exchanges. Working on our key targets we are identifying existing easy access routes and working on practical improvements to nine routes in East Sussex.



Bridge and ramp near Forest Row (see front cover) is tested by Vernon one of the volunteers

We are also

- Enabling volunteers with disabilities to carry out path surveys and take part in all aspects of the project independently.
- Publishing walks leaflets and material which enable a wider range of the community to visit the countryside (including a walks pack for the nine routes mentioned above)
- Helping a member of the Disabled Ramblers to produce an accessible walks booklet for the Eastbourne area. 'Miles without Stiles' is being designed with the wheelchair and electric mobility user in mind.
- Producing a set of guidelines for the Rights of Way and Countryside Management group on promoting countryside access, and a more inclusive approach to path maintenance and improvement.

- Arranging technical and cultural exchange visits with our French partners.

At every stage of the process, there are opportunities for the exchange of views and experiences from the individuals involved.

Neil is typical of someone who has a visual impairment and who has not spent much time in the countryside. Since Neil joined the team two years ago (as a volunteer) he has spent a good deal of his time checking the accessibility of routes.

When asked 'Which walks did you like best?' he replied 'All of them, because they are all different. I like to feel the wind on my face, be by the sea and hear the grass rustle as I walk through it.'

His enthusiasm for the work of the project is representative of that of all the volunteers.

Up to date details about the project will be added to the County Council's website at www.eastsussex.gov.uk. Also keep a look out for the 'Volunteers Progress' newsletter that will chart the work towards the targets and introduce the people working on the project.

If you are interested in taking part in the project by testing routes, identifying problems and creating solutions, please contact us.

Mary Moulton
Parish and Volunteer Officer (Interreg)

Miles Without Stiles

'Miles Without Stiles', 10 barrier-free routes in the Eastbourne area" is the name of a booklet I am compiling as part of the 'New Horizons' project. The routes will be listed in ascending order of difficulty, starting with an "easy" route from Eastbourne Shopmobility (in the Arndale shopping centre) along the seafront to Holywell, and finishing with a "challenging" route up on the Downs. All routes are circular and they all start and finish at car parks with disabled toilets nearby.

I am on the lookout for some help with testing the routes, mainly from people with different types of impairment, but also from able-bodied helpers. Your feedback will be a very important contribution to the booklet. If you are interested please ring 01323 483310 or contact: suse333@hotmail.com

Sue Watson
Disabled Ramblers Regional Representative



Sue leading the group on an eight mile barrier free ramble on the Downs

What's it to you?

Whilst out working on the Forest Way the other day I encountered many people enjoying the site. Chatting with some of them it dawned on me that they all had very different views about it.

It was interesting to hear that to the cyclists it was the 'Forest Way Cycle Track', the walkers called it the 'Forest Way Walk', the horse riders thought of it as the 'Forest Way Ride' and a small child whizzing past with his family simply called it the 'Forest Waaaaay!'.

In actual fact it is the 'Forest Way Country Park', but what does this mean? Well, it means that it is all of the above: a route shared by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, families, school groups, and the less able. It's a place to walk the dog, an outdoor classroom for school groups or somewhere to quietly contemplate the natural environment. Yes it's all this and much, much more. Let's not forget that the Forest Way is an important wildlife corridor. Stretching for 10 miles through woodland, farmland and villages, it provides a crucial safe haven for a multitude of wildlife. With habitats ranging from woodland and grassland to ponds and water courses, the site supports a wide variety of plants and animals.

So, next time you're out enjoying one of the many facilities that the 'Forest Way Country Park' has to offer, try not to get 'stressed out' by or upset other people using the site. If we all respect each other and try to see the site through others' eyes, we can ensure that we all get what we want from the site. The last word from the dog walking, horse riding Ranger who occasionally takes children out for environmental activities, leads guided walks and has even been known to ride the odd bicycle is – don't forget the wildlife!

Sandy Williamson, Countryside Sites Officer and Forest Way Ranger



What do you do?

"What is a Rights of Way Ranger?" and "What do you do?" are two questions I'm frequently asked.

The short answer is "I protect and maintain the Rights of Way Network". However, the role is much more interesting than just this.

There are around 2100 miles (3360 kilometres) of rights of way in East Sussex, consisting of footpaths, bridleways and by-ways. It is our statutory duty to ensure the upkeep and accessibility of these public rights of way. Sometimes this includes contact with the public and liaising with land owners regarding future work. An average day may consist of jobs such as clearing vegetation and re-surfacing footpaths. We also install signposts, stiles, gates and bridges which vary in size and design. There is a wide selection of jobs to carry out and with new work coming in every day, we are always kept busy.

In the three years I have been a Rights of Way Ranger, there have been many changes. As time progressed, we have taken on more complex projects, such as constructing two 15 metre steel bridges, one for Vines Cross, near Horam and another at Forest Row. Previously, these jobs would have been contracted out, but with a



New gate and waymark post

dedicated team of eight Rights of Way Rangers (with more skills and trades between them than I can mention), it was thought that we had enough expertise to complete the projects in-house. Therefore, we were given the opportunity to construct both bridges.

With a wide and varied range of duties throughout East Sussex, you may not see us - "but we are out there".

Patrick Gilmartin
Rights of Way Ranger

News from the Rye Bay Countryside Office

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

The Rye Bay Countryside Office provides a Countryside Management Service to the Rye Bay and Eastern High Weald area of the County. Working with trainees and the local community, the office carries out small scale conservation and access projects and provides information to people wanting to enjoy this beautiful part of the County. Below are some of the projects the team has been involved in over the last six months

We have had another successful appeal for old Christmas trees to be recycled to help with sand stabilisation on the Camber dunes. In January local people donated over three hundred trees, many having heard a short interview on BBC Southern Counties radio promoting the scheme. With help from students from Plumpton College, the old trees were laid in shallow trenches on the dunes and back filled with sand to hold them in place. Over the next couple of months the exposed branches of the trees trap loose windblown sand until they become totally covered. Vegetation is then able to take a hold to help stabilise the dunes and provide cover for wildlife.

In partnership with Rother Environmental Group a clean up day on a section of the River Rother was undertaken in September. Volunteers helped remove washed up rubbish at low tide from an area which is overlooked by the historic town of Rye. The collected rubbish was sorted into piles which could then be taken to local recycling points.



Interpretation panel at the Royal Military Canal

To help improve the Royal Military Canal Path the team has been working in partnership with the Romney Marsh Countryside Project to install interpretation panels along its 28 mile length. The panels highlight points of historical interest and wildlife. The canal was completed in 1809 and is the third longest defensive structure in Britain (behind Hadrian's Wall and Offa's Dyke). For more information visit – www.royalmilitarycanal.com

To help promote wildlife and the Rye Bay area, the team had a stand at the Weald WoodFair. Housing ourselves in a Yurt located in the woods, we spent three full days informing people about the work of the Office



A hand made Yurt at WoodFair 2005

and making apple bird feeders with visitors for them to take home. Over three hundred bird feeders, using local windblown apples from ancient orchards in Iden, were made, and proved very popular with children and adults. We would like to thank Matthew Carey, a previous trainee ranger at Rye, for allowing us to use his hand-made Yurt. If you would like to find out more visit www.sustainablestructures.co.uk

This year the team has been joined by Steve Watt, who is our new trainee ranger. Steve has quickly been developing new skills such as hedge laying, sand dune management and waymarking. As well as gaining practical qualifications, such as chainsaw use, Steve is studying towards an NVQ 2 in Environmental Conservation at Plumpton College.



Hedgelaying

The second annual **Wildlife Weekend** takes place in the Rye area between **5-7th May**, with a full programme of free wildlife activities to join in with. So make a date in your diary and consider a short break to discover this very special corner of East Sussex.

The programme can be downloaded from www.RXwildlife.org.uk or obtained by sending an A4 sae envelope to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, Rye, East Sussex TN36 4LU.

Simon Fathers
Rye Bay Countryside Officer

Contacts...

Vicky Lawrence (Head of Rights of Way & Countryside Management)	01273 482699
Matthew Harper (Rights of Way Officer: Rother)	01273 482324
Sophie Homewood (Rights of Way Officer: Lewes)	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
Mary Moulton (Parish & Volunteer Officer (Interreg Project))	01435 869252
Rachel Solomons (Research Assistant (Interreg))	01435 869252
Polly Rice (Administration Assistant (Interreg))	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
Rights of Way Rangers: Anthony Hart, David Tonge, Matthew Du Chemin, Wayne Miller-Hudson, Patrick Gillmartin, Karl Woolmer, Andrew Davidson, Sam Cordery and Chris Morns.	
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 & Forest Way Ranger)	01273 482670
Ken McManamon (Ranger: Ditchling Common & Weir Wood)	01273 482670
Jo Heading (Ranger: West Park, Uckfield & Park Wood, Hellingly)	01273 482670
Heli Gittins (Ranger: Chailey & Markstakes Commons)	01273 482670
Jessie Leamy (Ranger: Shinewater, Eastbourne and Riverside Park, Newhaven)	01273 482670
Moray O'Riordan (Assistant Forest Way Ranger)	
Cathy Cordery (Countryside Team Co-ordinator)	01273 482670
Simon Fathers (Rye Bay Countryside Officer)	01797 226488
Darryl Major (Ranger: Camber & Rye Bay)	01797 226488

Main address	Rights of Way and Countryside Management East Sussex County Council Transport and Environment County Hall, St Annes Crescent Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE
Fax number	01273 479536
Website	www.eastsussex.gov.uk

New Horizons Rights of Way and Countryside Management, "New Horizons", Heathfield Depot Burwash Road, Heathfield TN21 8RA

Telephone 01435 869252

Rye Bay Office The Rye Bay Countryside Office, 111B High Street, Rye TN31 7JF

Telephone 01797 226488

simon.fathers@eastsussex.gov.uk

Welcome to...

Wayne Miller-Hudson is the new Rights of Way West Area Project Supervisor for one year under the Capital Bridge Programme. Wayne was previously a Rights of Way Ranger.

Rachel Solomons is now working on the New Horizons Interreg project as a research assistant with Mary Moulton and Polly Rice. Rachel was a Trainee Ranger at the Rye Bay Countryside Office.

Moray O'Riordan is now assisting Sandy Williamson on the Forest Way. He was previously on the Trainee Ranger scheme and was also the temporary Chailey Ranger.

Forthcoming County Council events

Rye Wildlife Festival – Friday 5 to Sunday 7 May

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

Cycle Season – A programme of guided rides and cycle related events throughout the County, starting on **17 June** and continuing until **10 September**.

Weald WoodFair - Friday 15 to Sunday 17 September

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

Back issues

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