

THE Meresman

& Exploring East Sussex

Public Footpath Framfield 9

High Court Finds in Favour of East Sussex County Council

The long running problems on the above path, widely referred to as the Van Hoostraten path, have taken one more step towards resolution. Following an application by Kate Ashbrook, of the Ramblers' Association and Open Spaces Society, to the High Court for a Judicial Review seeking to have the Council's decision to accept the diversion application overturned, a hearing was held at the Royal Courts of Justice on 11th March, and on 27th March the judgement was delivered.

Mr Justice Grigson found in favour of the County Council, saying that there was no sustainable argument that the County Council's decision to consider the diversion, to make the diversion order or to submit the order to the Secretary of State for confirmation was taken contrary to policy or in ignorance of material facts.

Unless there is an appeal, a date for a public inquiry into the diversion, which has been postponed once as a result of Ms Ashbrook's High Court application, will now be set by the Secretary of State and the matter will be able to be decided once and for all.

It is regrettable that the national Ramblers' Association have chosen to act as they have, as a matter which could have been decided, one way or the other, relatively quickly and at little cost to the public has now become drawn out and costly. The Council's costs in defending the High Court action and responding to the orchestrated objections both before and during a public inquiry will be in the region of £40,000, money that has had to come from the Council's rights of way budget, directly affecting the amount of work carried out on the ground. This monetary cost is in addition to the hundreds of hours of officer time that has been taken away from dealing with other issues on the County's network of over 2000 miles of public rights of way.

David Munn

Comments in on Open Access Land in East Sussex

Public consultation on the draft maps of open country and registered common land finished on February 11th in the South East area and comments are now being considered by the Countryside Agency. An assessment report will be produced by the Agency in June, together with the provisional maps, on which only those with a legal interest in the land can appeal. Nearly two hundred sites were commented on by the Sussex Downs

Conservation Board who found that they did not show open country correctly within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The majority of these comments related to areas of chalk grassland that should qualify as open country but were not shown on the map. Other comments related to areas of improved grassland or woodland that were incorrectly shown as open country. Many small areas of open country had been left off the map, possibly because they were seen to serve no useful purpose to the public. The Board decided

that unless the area was particularly small or isolated then the area should appear on the map due to the close proximity of the Downs to urban areas and the potential for future agri-environment schemes to provide access incentives to landowners that could compliment land made accessible under the CROW Act. It was also evident that the boundaries had not always been mapped correctly, and it was often the case that a break of slope had been used as a boundary for downland, where a fence-line, a few metres away, would have been the preferred boundary. The Board suggested that a break of slope should only be used as a boundary if there was no viable alternative. East Sussex County Council has also submitted numerous comments on the mapping of Registered Common Land, a process which was made more difficult by the lack of a Common's Register (it was destroyed by fire several years ago). The Sussex Area of the Rambler's Association have sent in 67 criticisms of the draft maps for Sussex, some of which overlap with the comments made by East Sussex County Council and the Board. The mapping process is continuing throughout the rest of England. The next draft maps to be published will be those for the South in June. For information about the mapping process visit the Agency's website at www.countryside.gov.uk/access or call the Access Mapping Helpline on 0870 120 6466.



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The Meresman & Exploring East Sussex

Welcome to Issue 13 of the Meresman, the magazine of the East Sussex County Council Rights of Way and Countryside Management.

For the benefit of any of our newer readers I thought I would take this opportunity to explain the name of the publication. According to the 'Dictionary of Sussex Dialect' by Helena Hall, the name *Meresman*, mainly used in central Sussex, refers to a parish officer who attended to roads, bridges and watercourses. It was chosen as an appropriate name for this publication as rights of way are highways often close to, or crossing watercourses via, bridges.

This edition, as always, contains articles on a variety of subjects, including the Countryside and Rights of Way Act which is currently being implemented in various ways, one of our most popular sites – Ditching Common, updates on our bridge replacement programme, an interesting comment from Michael Fordham of the National Farmers Union, and of course our usual contributions from the Rye Bay Countryside Office and our Parish and Volunteer Liaison Officer.

We are always pleased to hear from members of the public or representatives of different user groups. If you have any rights of way or countryside management issues you would like to discuss with us please contact us on the relevant number on the back page.

Meanwhile I hope that you enjoy this edition of the Meresman and I wish you a happy summer season of enjoyment of our countryside sites and rights of way.

Marion Hamilton, Editor

marion.hamilton@eastsussexcc.gov.uk

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 Marion Hamilton on 01273 481654.

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

A Common Problem!

Ditchling Common Country Park covers 188 acres (about 75 hectares) and is owned and managed by East Sussex County Council. The landscape, a relict of common grazing land, includes habitats ranging from open grassland to mature woodland. The site supports a wide diversity of wildlife, including locally rare flora and fauna, leading to its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

There are tens of thousands of visits to the Park every year, for a variety of activities including walking, horse riding, fishing, orienteering, picnicking, dog walking and general enjoyment of the countryside. The Rangers organise a programme of events throughout the year including guided walks and cycle rides, children's earth walks and the occasional slide show.

Although the Park has an open access policy, the public do usually favour particular trails and definitive rights of way. Most visitors do not venture much further than the car park, large pond and main field, therefore most of the main improvements are concentrated here. We now have two stone surfaced easy access paths, one around the pond and a new one through scrub and a wooded area

north of the car park (along which we have installed several new picnic benches). The two larger ponds on the Common are suitable for fishing for which seasonal permits are sold. The smaller ponds support a variety of invertebrates and are used for pond dipping during the summer events for kids.

The usual problems found on sites near urban areas are concentrated in the area around the car park, including litter, fly tipping, burnt out cars and dog mess. We have regular spring cleans and recently we had a 'Clean Up The Common' day, organised by Dan Hill, one of our trainee rangers. Inspired by a group of Brownies writing to us about their trip to the Country Park, we erected laminated signs, picked up 21 bin liners full of litter and handed out nappy bags to dog walkers to encourage them to clean up after their dog. We were pleasantly surprised by the amount of people that do carry their own bags and actually use the dog bins, and we will soon be installing larger bins.

The Country Park is managed to maintain the diverse range of habitats present, including open water, grassland, scrub and woodland, using grazing with cattle and ponies, mowing and scrub clearance. Ecological succession was clearly demonstrated in the Country Park last year when a combination of lack of mowing due to heavy rain and lack of grazing due to Foot and Mouth disease meant that the field became covered in gorse and bramble scrub with scattered hawthorn and oak saplings. This year, thanks to clearance of the main field, it will again be carpeted in a swathe of bluebells come the Spring. These, together with wood anemones, are a relic of the Common's woodland past and are provided with cover during summer months by a bracken canopy. For further details about the work and activities happening on the Common contact the Ranger on 01273 482670.

Ken Macmanamon, Ranger



Rangers on 'Clean up the Common' day



Parts of the Common become a carpet of bluebells in the spring

COMMENT – Open Access

It is unfortunate that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, relating to open access, is known as the CROW Act, because farmers regard crows as pests! However, this has not prevented them from participating in the consultation process, which aims to map 'right to roam' areas.

For farmers, because of foot and mouth disease (FMD), this consultation came at the end of a very difficult year. Some are worried that open access could increase the risk of spreading disease, and for some, anybody walking in the countryside, even on footpaths, is a nuisance. This was illustrated last year, when because of the disease problems, ESCC co-ordinated meetings between all interested parties to discuss how to deal with the closure of the countryside. Some landowners clearly wanted paths kept closed for longer, even though no livestock were present. Livestock farmers felt frustrated that although animals were subject to strict movement restrictions, people were not! However, despite this, as the NFU representative, I felt that the right balance was struck between the needs of all interested groups regarding the time to re-open footpaths.

Working with ESCC on the FMD issue has given me a better understanding of the issues involved in maintaining the existing footpath network. I would like to think that liaison could continue, especially where conflict between farmer/landowner and public access is occurring. With open access, some rules

and regulations need to be carefully explained to all users, e.g. if legitimate farm work is occurring, then the farmer may need to restrict access and people who ignore explanatory notices may endanger themselves or delay the work. If the Police have to be called, further disruption may result. The farmer might employ stewards to keep people out and this too may cause friction. This would do nothing to improve relations between farmer and countryside users. However, I only suggest this as a potential problem and my advice to any farmer would be only to do such work in an area that was not frequently visited.

I regularly visit the Downs and Ashdown Forest for a good, brisk walk and I think that most people will continue to walk in areas that are easily accessed. More adventurous walkers and ramblers groups may want to walk in new areas and I see a good opportunity for some PR on both sides to improve understanding of the issues involved. It is important to remember that the countryside is a living workplace and that animals, crops and natural habitats need to exist without too much disruption. Finally, respect for the new regulations from all users, including farmers and landowners, whether on foot, horse, bike or 4x4, will only help to make being in the countryside a pleasurable experience.

Michael Fordham, Chairman, East Sussex National Farmers Union

LARA act on the CROW Act

Two major changes to the recording of paths on Definitive Maps introduced by the CROW Act has led the motor sports and recreation group LARA to stage a series of workshops across the country to help their members cope with the CROW Act.

One such workshop was held at Uckfield in November where, amongst others, the meeting was addressed by LARA officers Alan Kind and the formidable Tim Stevens. They dissected the CROW Act and interpreted its implications for vehicle users in the countryside.

Firstly the CROW Act deals with the persistent problem over the last 30 years or so of the reclassification of RUPPs (roads used as public paths) by abolishing the term 'RUPP' and replacing it with 'restricted byway'.

Secondly a 'cut-off' date for claims made with the local highway authority for adding previously unrecorded rights of way (based on historical evidence) to the Definitive Map has been set as 1 January 2026.

Restricted Byways

The problem of RUPP reclassification has dogged those involved with rights of way for many years. In becoming 'restricted

byways' former RUPPs will carry a clearly established public right of way on foot, on horseback (or leading a horse), and by vehicle other than by mechanically propelled vehicle (eg. horse drawn carriage).

The CROW Act also amended the Road Traffic Act 1988 to make it an offence to drive a motor vehicle along a restricted byway without lawful authority. However, this does not necessarily mean that a restricted byway does not carry unproven full vehicular rights. The public can still claim full vehicular rights (up to the 'cut-off' date of 1 January 2026) along what is currently a RUPP (or will become a restricted byway), as they can with any route where it can be proved those full vehicular rights exist.

"LARA is trying to ensure that the Secretary of State is aware of the likely effects of the amendment to the Road Traffic Act on the co-operative management of continued recreational vehicle use of rights of way," says Tony Kempster, the representative of LARA in East Sussex. "The public will assume that the change in name (to restricted byway) incorporates a restriction of some sort and will incline many to believe that motor vehicles are not allowed on

restricted byways." "However," Tony added, "as far as vehicle users are concerned, there will not be any excuse for assuming that restricted byways automatically carry vehicular rights". The result of this change in classification is that it relieves highway authorities of the burden of reclassifying RUPPs as either footpath, bridleway or byway open to all traffic. However, until the restricted byway designation is brought into being, RUPPs still exist and highway authorities should continue with their reclassification procedure.

There are currently over fifty RUPPs in East Sussex. If the provisions of the Act are implemented, as expected, in the near future, it is likely that all of these RUPPs will become restricted byways. This will present some problems. Many of these paths certainly have no recent history of use by non-motorised vehicles; some have had no greater use than on foot. Structures such as gates stiles and bridges may need replacing or adapting in the coming years as well as these paths being properly signposted. All this is on top of the County Council's requirement to maintain paths in a fit state for public use. The burden on the Rights of Way budget is only likely to increase.

Continued on page 5...

RYE BAY NEWS

News from the Rye Bay Countryside Office

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

CAMBER

Once again this year, Rye Bay Countryside Office (RBCO), in partnership with Rother District Council, co-ordinated the collection and carried out the work of digging in over 250 recycled Christmas trees at Camber Sands, a Site of Special Scientific Interest owned and managed by ESCC. The old trees are used to help the dune ridge repair itself – trees are half-buried where damage has occurred to the dunes and they then act



to trap wind-blown sand, thereby stabilizing that particular area, allowing the natural vegetation to regenerate, and enabling the dune to 're-grow'. We would like to thank members of the public who donated trees, those who helped dig them in, and a special thank-you to the owners of Tanhouse Furniture in Peasmarsh for the use of their premises as a collection point.

Once again this year the RBCO will be holding an event at Camber Sands for South East Marine Week 3rd – 11th August. This is to be a 'Sand Dunes Detective' event on Wednesday 7th August 10am-12.00 noon, at the main Camber car park. This event will test children's sleuthing skills and help raise awareness about our marine environment. The event is one of many being jointly promoted by the Wildlife Trust. For more information visit the Marine Week website on www.southeastmarine.org.uk

Although much work is carried on at Camber throughout the year, it is during the quiet winter months that major work is undertaken. RBCO, Rother District Council and the Environment Agency are all working in partnership to carry out vital work such as footpath re-profiling, sand dune stabilization, erection of new fencing, improvements to the Rights of Way and access network and updating interpretation.

Red Barn Nature Field

Several interesting and rewarding pieces of work have been completed at the Red Barn Nature Field behind the Village Hall in Sedlescombe. A kissing gate was installed at the top of the field, which allows access for all. In an attempt to improve the species biodiversity, half of the pond was manually cleared and a large amount of float grass was removed. To allow better light penetration to the pond, a small oak tree was also felled.

Winter is an ideal time to carry out such pond renovation work, as disturbance to wildlife is kept to a minimum. We are keen to hear from other Parishes who may have a pond that requires small-scale attention.

The Rye Bay team is also involved in the educational aspect of conservation and countryside management. During one visit, the team spent a few hours at Sedlescombe Primary School involving the children in environmental games intended to highlight the adaptations of nocturnal wildlife.



Matthew, Gary and Rachel

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FAIRLIGHT

A routine inspection of one of the Maritime Heritage Trails revealed that one of the bridges in Knowle Wood required some rather serious attention. We had inspected the bridges and made essential running repairs, but it was evident that one bridge needed complete replacement. Rather than construct one from a bridge kit, it was decided to use timber from the wood itself, reducing the need for heavy long-distance carrying and making use of a local sustainable material. The finished product proved to be a far less expensive option, and will serve its purpose for many years.

UDIMORE and IDEN

Work has been carried out in both Parishes recently helping to control willow growth in and around two moats – both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. If these moats were not annually managed then the habitats would be lost to natural succession. In order to prevent the loss of these important historical and wildlife sites, we have been clearing willow trees from the moat edge. Once cleared, light annual trimming will be required to keep any new growth down. It is also hoped that annual management of these ponds will help create better diversity of flora and fauna.

We would like to thank Cllr John Wilson for his help in carrying out the Udimore work and for sharing interesting information about this historic site with the Rye team.



Udimore moat 1909

If you would like to know more about ponds then why not assist the team by taking part in the Pond Warden Scheme run by Southern Water and BTCV. The scheme aims to train local people to create, survey and manage new and existing ponds and provide information about ponds to local residents in their parish. The course is free and more information can be obtained by contacting BTCV on 01424 446395.

Enquiries For further information about the work we do in the Rye Bay area, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

Rye Bay Countryside Office, 111b High Street, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7JF tel. 01797 226488 or fax 01797 223753 or e-mail rangers@ryebay.demon.co.uk or visit our website www.ryebay.demon.co.uk

RYE BAY NEWS ...continued OTHER NEWS

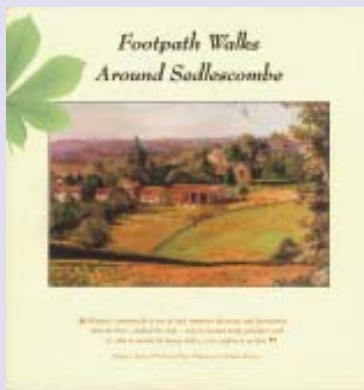
Since the last edition of Meresman, the Rye team is up to full strength. Gary Pascoe, a product of the Trainee Ranger scheme, has been appointed as Rye Bay & Eastern High Weald Ranger. Our two present Trainee Rangers, Matthew and Rachel, are now half way through their time with us, busy learning the skills that will ensure that they both end up eminently employable. The Trainee Ranger scheme has a success rate of over 80% of trainees going on to find employment in the conservation field. If you think you would be interested in becoming a Trainee Ranger with the RBCO then please feel free to contact us on the number below. We will be looking to recruit new trainees in mid July so please contact us for more information before this date.

A new leaflet, entitled 'Short Walks in the Rye Countryside' has been produced detailing 6 walks of no more than 3 miles. These walks take in some of the diverse and beautiful countryside in the Rye area and are aimed at visitors staying in the area as well as local people. The leaflet was funded by INTERREG II (European funding) and was a partnership between the RBCO, the 'Two Bays One Environment' project, Rother District Council and the Rye and District Hotel & Caterers Association. An events leaflet will also be produced soon detailing all guided walks, cycle rides and environmental events to be held between May and September in the Rye Bay area. This leaflet includes events by local organisations and is aimed at getting visitors and local people back into the countryside this summer.



Rural Tourism Initiative

The RBCO has been working in partnership with the Countryside Agency, High Weald Unit, 1066 Country, South East England Tourist Board and Sedlescombe Parish Council to develop rural tourism projects in the Parish of Sedlescombe. The initiative aims to promote local businesses, facilities and clubs by providing information about the parish to visitors and new residents to the village. Projects which were undertaken



include a village directory, a history leaflet, a village map/interpretation board, a walks leaflet containing four short walks in the parish and a way-marked link from the 1066 Country Walk to encourage people to visit the village when walking this popular route. The initiative, funded by the Countryside Agency, proved to be very successful and also included similar

projects in Rotherfield. Our thanks goes out to the local residents who took a major lead in deciding what projects they would like see completed in the parish.

The two leaflets pictured are available from local businesses in Sedlescombe and Battle Tourist Information Centre.



LARA act on the CROW Act ...continued

'Cut-Off' Date for Historical Claims

This part of the Act is a little more complex. The implications of the 1st January 2026 'cut-off' date are most severe for those wishing to use motor vehicles on rights of way as no more BOATs (byways open to all traffic) can be added to the map after this date. This means that despite 2026 seeming a long way away, motor vehicle users who believe they have a legitimate claim of BOAT need to start researching evidence and making claims now. On this point Tony Kempster is quite clear, "LARA members across the country are being encouraged to submit claims to change RUPPs to BOAT status before they are redesignated restricted byways."

The 'cut-off' date mainly concerns rights of way that existed in law on 1 January 1949 and remain rights of way on 1 January 2026 but at that date are not recorded on the Definitive Map. In this case then, at the 'cut-off' date these rights of way will be extinguished.

It is possible that the 2026 date will have no effect in East Sussex. There are currently just under forty outstanding claims with the County Council, none of which rely on pre-1949 historical evidence. However, Tony believes that while walkers now need to check all the historical records to discover routes that are completely missing from the Definitive Map, LARA members will be checking the same maps to see what might be under-recorded (as footpath or bridleway), he suggests that horseriders need to do both. Tony goes on, "the amount of work needed to rectify all the errors and omissions is massive, and the Countryside Agency are consulting interested parties, including LARA, to see how they might set up some sort of scheme to assist or promote this process". *Andrew Whitnall*

Staff Changes

A new Rye Bay Ranger joined us in September in the shape of **Gary Pascoe**. Gary trained as a ranger with the Rye Bay team and he and Simon now have a new team of their very own to keep them busy. **Chris Tweed** has now been appointed as the new Definitive Map Officer. Chris joined

us in October and comes to us from the Environmental Strategy team of Southern Water in Worthing.

Simon McHugh left us in November to return to the Sussex Downs Conservation Board at Seven Sisters. His post of Ranger for Chailey and Markstakes Commons has been filled by **Jessie Leamy** who started in January. Jessie was previously working for Lewes District Council and is a product of our very successful trainee ranger scheme, which she finished two years ago.

After many months of hard work we have now managed to employ a Rights of Way maintenance team directly as Rights of Way Rangers. Two of the team of four who join us have been working for us as contractors for a long time – **Andy Davidson** and **Tony Bolt**. **Chris Brown** has been working with our team as a voluntary trainee for almost six months. The fourth member of the new team is **Tim Norris** who has years of experience as a landscape gardener.

The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman...The Volunteer Meresman Outdoor Recreation for All – News Update!

Rights of Way and Countryside Management continue to work on improving access on the rights of way network and country parks in East Sussex. The more improvements made, the greater number of people that are able to freely enjoy outdoor recreation.

Rights of Way Volunteers 'Walks for All 2002 – A Jubilee Celebration'



Walk, Relax
and Enjoy
Nature

Volunteer groups and parish councils have been working very hard with the County Council and landowners to make major improvements to the rights of way network. Their contribution has largely gone unrecognised. To remedy this, we are launching the 'Walks for All 2002' Jubilee Celebration.

Wishing to draw on the expertise of local groups and parishes, we are asking for ideas and routes that can be included in 'Walks for All – 2002'. This is a community project to provide locally designed and improved routes where in

one way or another the groups and parishes have either undertaken the improvement works or helped with the route surveys and publication preparation. All works and leaflet production must be complete by the end of July 2002.

'Walks for All – 2002' will

- Produce simple, clear and readily produced guides for distribution to local shops and businesses
- Encourage people unfamiliar with walking to want to explore the countryside in their locality
- Illustrate the character of an area or village
- Increase the level of access to suit a greater number of people countywide
- Provide opportunities for visitors to explore new areas of the county
- Provide a local resource for rural businesses

- Allow a greater number of people to experience the benefits of outdoor recreation for improved health and well being
- Extend the working relationship between Groups, parishes, landowners and County Council
- Promote the work of the groups and parishes.

Each project will be unique to the group or parish. The range of walks will represent access for mobility vehicles, short easy access walks and routes that tax the endurance of the most experienced walkers.

If you have not heard from us by the time you read this article and have any ideas you would like to put forward or find out more about the project please call Mary Moulton, Parish & Volunteer Liaison Officer at Rights of Way. 'Walks for All – 2002' will be formally launched in the Autumn.

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John Wren and Tim Swaine

We were saddened to learn of the deaths of John Wren, Founder and Chairman of Northiam Parish Footpath Group and Tim Swaine, Chairman of Lewes Footpaths Group. Tim died in November and John in late December last year. Both John and Tim shared a love of walking and worked alongside the County Council for many years.



John loved walking the Sussex and Kent countryside; this was clearly reflected in his enthusiasm and keenness to share his experiences. His understanding of the needs of others was a driving force in forming the basis of projects to open the path network to many more people, especially those with mobility problems.

It is heartening to know that the Northiam Footpath Group will continue John's work and a scheme to put in place several easy access routes in and around Northiam village is continuing. This is one of a number of trial projects that will form the basis of many similar schemes in the future. I know that John would have been happy to see such projects succeed throughout the county and I can think of no better memorial to his name.

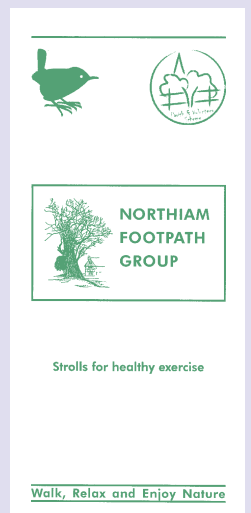


Tim was a member of the Lewes Footpaths Group for twenty years and Chairman for two years until his illness meant that he had to retire. Tim was fully involved with the Lewes Footpaths Group and was committed to the group. For the last ten years he took a leading role in organising and carrying out their path maintenance programme.

As a committee member, Tim helped publish the up to date edition of the Groups' footpaths walks books. As a group member and experienced map-reader he regularly organised and led walks and in recent years arranged several walking holidays in Britain with his wife Jeannette.

Both John and Tim will be sadly missed.

*Nigel Kitchener,
Rights of Way & Countryside Manager.*



NEW LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT!

When I started working with the Rights of Way volunteers in 1999 I was amazed at how enthusiastic and dedicated everybody was about the rights of way network. During the last three years I feel that I have made many friends and have found people who share a love of the countryside. As time goes by, I continue to be astonished at how much time people are prepared to put aside for the work that we all do.

There should have been no surprise to find, therefore, that there has been a phenomenal increase in the level of work completed this financial year. In the five month period between July and the end of November there was a 147% increase of work completed over the eleven month period between April 2000 and the end of March 2002. December, January, February and March have yet to be accounted for.



Left: Finding a lost path in Dallington, a member of a team from BTCV's Environmental Task Force helps to survey the correct route of the path. This path has been unusable for at least twenty years. The group worked under extreme conditions, enduring gales, heavy rain and boggy ground to clear 220 metres of thick gorse and trees. At least four bridges were installed before the path was waymarked. A vital link, this path is now open for use!

A great deal of work is in hand or being planned. The programme of work includes everything from light clearance, stile and gate installation to bridge replacement. We are looking forward to another good year.

NEW VOLUNTEERS

The number of volunteers has grown yet again with more parishes taking part in the scheme and new groups forming. The Cowden & District Bridleways and Access Group got together formally at the end of last year and have successfully completed a couple of major clearances in the last few months. More work is planned for March and April. Sam and Sue from the group have successfully persuaded 24 people in the Cowden, Hartfield and Forest Row area to get out and help with problems on rights of way. Well done!

Mary Moul,
Parish & Volunteer Liaison Officer

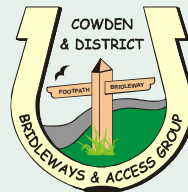


A well deserved rest from path maintenance. The Lewes Footpath Group relaxing on a group walk.

Cowden & District Bridleways & Access Group

This is a relatively new Volunteer Group (formed in October 2001) dedicated to maintaining and improving Rights of Way for horse riders, cyclists, walkers and the disabled. With over two dozen members already, the Group spans three counties – from Dormansland to Peshurst and Marsh Green to Hartfield. It has been a steep learning curve for all involved, and has necessitated that East Sussex, Kent and Surrey County Council liaise, discuss and compare different working practices – surprisingly for the first time, but certainly with beneficial results. The Group was formed due to the increasing frustration of local horse riders with the deteriorating condition of their routes and the seeming lack of information and resources from the three County Councils. A few enthusiastic riders discussed the possibility of starting up a Bridleways Action Group and it was decided to hold a meeting to measure the response of local riders. Amazingly over 50 people turned up! It seemed that the idea was long overdue and that riders wanted a means by which to make their voices heard.

It was also discovered that ramblers were experiencing similar problems with the local footpaths and thus, although primarily concerned with bridleways, the Group was expanded to include footpaths as well. It is now affiliated to both the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers as well as the British Horse Society. In a very short space of time, the Group has very successfully completed clearance work in all three counties – in total five



Old for new – a new stile being installed by the Hailsham & Polegate Ramblers. If you walking in the parishes of Hellingly, Hailsham or Arlington, look out for the 'Hailsham & Polegate Ramblers' plaques on stiles and bridges constructed by the group.

paths have already been cleared (two in East Sussex, one in Kent and two in Surrey.) Not content with just clearance work on paths, there are also ambitious plans afoot to create new, safe off-road links between existing routes in order to keep bridleway users off dangerous main roads. Funding, as always, remains the biggest obstacle to overcome with projects such as these.

The Group also provided local riders with a 'voice' at a recent Public Enquiry relating to a Diversion Order in respect of three Public Footpaths and one Public Bridleway – the result of which is anticipated to be received soon. Members of the Group, including disabled, range in age from early twenties to eighty years old, proving you're never too old to make a difference! The response and enthusiasm of members of Cowden & District Bridleways & Access Group has been phenomenal and proves that human nature is not as self-centred as we are sometimes led to believe.

If you would like to find out more about the Group's work, would like to become a member, or think you might be able to help with fund-raising, then please write to: The Secretary, Cowden & District Bridleways & Access Group, Oast Cottage, Cullinghurst, Hartfield Road, Cowden, Kent TN8 7DZ. Membership costs just £5, for which you receive regular newsletters and invitations to social and fund-raising events. The Group can also offer free training in courses such as First Aid and Map Reading etc. Commitment to clearance work is not a pre-requisite, although of course many hands make light work.