

## FORUM FOCUS

### The Newsletter for Local Access Forums in the SW

#### LATEST NEWS

##### Coastal Access

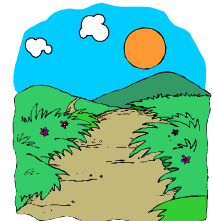
The consultation on coastal access has been delayed to allow Natural England to provide more information to the Minister. It is likely that this will be out for consultation in the early summer.

##### Guidance to Local Access Forums

Defra lawyers are putting the final touches to the revised Guidance and this should be out shortly. This will expand significantly on previous Guidance and will be an essential document to assist in running LAFs.

#### DISCOVERING LOST WAYS

Discovering Lost Ways (DLW) moves into a second county in the South West later in January, with the Archive Research Unit (ARU) beginning their research in the Dorset county records office. This follows earlier research in Wiltshire (and Cheshire) as part of the initial pilot phase.



Research in the county records office will be seeking historic documentary evidence of ways missing from the definitive map. This could be ways lost completely, or under-recorded, and will involve looking at sources such as Inclosure Awards, Tithe Survey Awards, Finance Act records; Railway, Turnpike and Canal Deposited Records; Ordnance Survey Documents, Non-Ordnance Survey Commercial Maps, Estate Records and Quarter Session Records.

Archive research is also continuing in Cheshire and Shropshire who together with Dorset make up the Lead Phase of the project which will test the research method and pilot a claims process.

During this Lead Phase, we are also developing our approach to working with volunteers within the project. We recently held the first workshop with local experts in Dorset which was very valuable in discussing how future events should work to make the best use of local knowledge at an early stage.

We are also working with members of our Advisory Group and the newly formed critical friends group of local authority officers with direct involvement in definitive map work, to explore our developing approaches within this Lead Phase of the project. Local Access Forums also have an important role in contributing to the effectiveness of DLW in its application in each county. Through the expertise of members' input into discussions and formulations of ROWIPs for example, LAFs can influence how the output from DLW will improve the rights of way network and access opportunities within their locality.

Transforming research into routes for the benefit of users aiming to enjoy and appreciate the natural environment and providing greater certainty for landowners and managers about where public rights of way exist, is the ultimate aim of this long-term project.

More detailed updates of progress are provided via a bi-monthly E-Bulletin sent to all local authority rights of way officers which could be forwarded to LAF members who have a particular interest in the project. Further information is available on the DLW WebPages at [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk), or from the information line on 0845 60 50 148.

Email enquiries to dlw [@countryside.gov.uk](mailto:dlw@countryside.gov.uk).

*Ellie Stevenson, Discovering Lost Ways Project, Natural England*

## REFLECTIONS

*Councillor Chris Jackson from the Joint LAF and a Bristol City Councillor offers his thoughts on his time on the forum. Engaging Councillors and securing that all important link between forum and appointing authority is vital for forum success.*

"I am Chairman of the Bristol City Rights of Way and Greens Committee having been elected a Councillor for the first time in May 2006. As part of my remit I am a member of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) which covers Bristol City, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset Councils. I am now keen to learn what the three Rights of Way teams do and to see how they are performing.

I have loved open air pursuits all my life and I still go for local walks with my wife and sons. In the not too distant past I have walked the 3 peaks, the 6 summits, 36 miles in Shropshire, the Mendip way and the Howarth Hobble of 32 miles in Yorkshire. I also take part in many other organised walks with the Fire Service walking section. When I get the time, I fish in the river Avon and occasionally in the sea and I also fish for carp in France. I am a keen cyclist and, indeed, cycled to my first JLAF meeting.

One of my first comments at the end of my first JLAF meeting was to remark that it was a lot friendlier than the political in-fighting in the Bristol City Council! The ROW Officers sit with the JLAF members and freely contribute to the debate. The casual walkers, landowners, rambles, farmers, cyclists and horse riders get on well with each other and chat both before and after the meetings. I suspect that if all council work was this friendly, a lot more would be achieved.

At the first JLAF meeting I asked to be taken to some Access land and I have already walked five sites. One of the Access sites is contentious and is unresolved, one was contentious and is resolved and the other sites have had improvements done by the ROW teams in the last year. In the next few months I will walk the four ROWIP study areas, one of which is in Bristol and the other three are in widely differing country areas.

What are my hopes for the future? I spend a great deal of my time with my constituents who live in an inner city area of Bristol and I want to be able to encourage them to visit the open spaces in the JLAF area. There are good open spaces in Bristol and in my constituency a small but very active "Health Walks" group walk locally. I am sure that they would like to walk the easier routes in the JLAF country areas and I will be doing my best to encourage this."



Chris Jackson

*The Joint LAF covers the three unitary authorities in the Bristol and Bath area. Secretary, Chris Hogg, also fulfils the function of RoWIP Officer for the three authorities, an excellent example of cooperation.*



The Private Member's Bill 'Public Access to Inland Water 2007', presented by Dr Des Turner MP, has gone through to a second reading stage. The Bill outlines proposed legislation for statutory water access, along the lines of the Scottish Land Reform Act 2003.

*In the second Reflection Jeremy Holtom, Chairman of the Exmoor LAF since its inception, discusses the LAF role in the National Park context.*



Many people were attracted by the start of the new format access forum when it arrived in 2002 as part of the CROW Act process; I was fortunate enough to be chosen as a 'Special Interest' forum member being a trustee and, at that time, chairman of the executive management group of The Calvert Trust, Exmoor, a charity that 'challenges disability through outdoor adventure' from its centre at Wistlandpound on the edge of Exmoor. I also wear other hats including as a Chartered Surveyor, managing land within the National Park, and as a resident and enthusiastic consumer of access opportunities; I was keen to help both those benefiting and being burdened by the CROW legislation.

Before our first 'proper' meeting in February 2003, the tone of the forum was set by a team building evening which basically taught members to work together and to set aside their personal interest in order to arrive at practical common ground solutions. This ethos and the particular skills that individual members have brought to the forum over the years have, I think, been its greatest strength.

The early activities of the forum were largely dominated by CROW and the need to inform those affected and likely to benefit of their abilities to challenge the mapping process. Happily CROW proved not to be the 'bogey man' it was perceived to be, mainly because on Exmoor there was a rich history of de facto and dedicated access. With some exceptions, CROW became business as usual but with statutory rights attached.

The access forum post CROW has moved on to tackle Rights of Way Improvement Plans as well as follow up access legislation and aspirations regarding water and coastal access. Our forum has become a 'caravan' travelling to Parishes across the national park to pick up local issues and to involve local people. I believe that this exercise has done much to ensure that the forum can provide worthwhile advice to the National Park Authority and others.

I am constantly reminded, when meeting members and chairmen of other access forums, of how fortunate we are on Exmoor to have a ranger service and a comprehensive and well maintained rights of way network. As a forum we have been able to suggest additions to and amendments of this network for the benefit of all and it is my hope that these benefits can be extended to all the parishes and to ensure seamless links with the networks surrounding Exmoor.

We have had our difficulties and RUPPS, Byways and vehicular use of the rights of way network has probably been the most exercising. The forum will no doubt face challenges in the future, but I believe that our forum has been a success and that forum members, past present and future, can be assured that their contribution has been and will continue to be of value to residents of and visitors to Exmoor alike.

*Jeremy Holtom, Chairman, Exmoor LAF*

*Exmoor LAF members  
on an early site visit*



## SNAPSHOTS

### Access land

The new survey of England Leisure Visits 2005 incorporates visits to open access land for the first time. Although open access land in the SW only opened in 2005 some of the information makes interesting reading nonetheless.

“The total volume of trips to open access land (nationally) is calculated as 21.2 million (including trips from a holiday base). Other headline facts include:

- 0.6% of the population in England had made a trip to open access land in the past week.
- 34% were aware that they had been on open access land.
- Average spend was £10.56 per trip.
- 57% of trips recorded walk/ramble as their main activity”

It will be interesting to see figures for 2006. The findings do present some challenges for LAFs and appointing authorities, particularly with regard to the diversity action plan ‘Outdoors for All’. 61% of open access land trips were taken by those over 45, compared with 54% of all rural trip takers. Males represented 57% of access land trips. 84% had personal access to a car, 89% had no disability and 95% were white.



More details on <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/press/news2007/090107.htm>

**The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act has occupied time on LAF agendas in the last year, particularly on those with RUPPS. Defra has just issued version 4 of The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Part 6: A guide to local authorities, enforcement agencies, rights of way users and practitioners.**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/nerc06.htm>

**This adds further guidance on the key provisions in the Act and how enforcement is affected by them. The new version has been amended to improve its clarity and contains flow charts to work out whether a public right of way for mechanically propelled vehicles is extinguished by the Act. It also includes information on restricted byways. The new guidance will be a ‘living document’, updated by experience.**

[The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Part 6: A guide for local authorities, enforcement agencies, rights of way users and practitioners](#)  (175 KB) [Illustrative flow chart](#) – chart 1 of 3  (71KB)

[Illustrative flow chart](#) – chart 2 of 3  (67KB) [Illustrative flow chart](#) – chart 3 of 3  (69KB)

## STEPPING OUT ON RIGHTS OF WAY

*Congratulations to Devon for achieving 92.8% rights of way ‘easy to use’ under Best Value Performance Indicators, the result of a lot of hard work under a Public Service Agreement which has resulted in a further £500,000 being made available for path improvements between 2006-8. This figure leaves no room for complacency, requiring continued funding and staff time, and dealing with the remaining 8% is a challenge as many are long-standing problems. The average for Counties is 69.2% and Gloucestershire 75.3% and Wiltshire 69.2% were the next two highest performing Counties in the SW. Torbay 86.8%, Bristol 85.6% and Swindon 85.1% performed well amongst unitaries (average unitary 88%).*

More information on <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/issues/public/bv185data.pdf>

Please send items and suggestions for the next issue to Hilary Winter, Regional Coordinator, SW Region LAFs, Lucombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QW. Email: [hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk](mailto:hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk)