



ramblers
at the heart of walking

SUSSEX AREA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE SUSSEX AREA OF THE RAMBLERS- MAY 2010
More information about Sussex Ramblers at www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk

EARL DE LA WARR ESTATE TAKES ON WALKERS... AND LOSES

The Rambler's longest campaign in Sussex looks like it has now come to a happy end.. A footpath across the 11th Earl de la Warr's Buckhurst Estate has been declared a public right of way following a 10 year dispute. This long-used path, which connects Withyham centre to the village Church, has been blocked since 2000 when a barbed wire fence and a 'private' sign were erected over the way. This was a surprise to many people, some of whom had used it since the 1930s.

The obstruction led to villagers complaining to Rambler Malcolm McDonnell, of the parish council Rights of Way Committee, who made a formal application for the route to be recognised as a Right of Way based on a long history of public use. For seven years the application was lodged with East Sussex County Council, who then rejected the evidence. An appeal to the Secretary of State led to a public inquiry in January of this year. The Ramblers represented Mr McDonnell and called several villagers to testify to their use of the path without let or hindrance.



"The views from the path are spectacular," wrote 66-year-old Pamela Morros, who first knew the way 60 years ago, and sent a sworn affidavit all the way from Montreal in Canada. "The walk down from the churchyard is extremely beautiful. I used it as a child and always believed it to be public. But when visiting in 2003 I was shouted at and told to leave. This path is an intrinsic part of Withyham and Withyham life – a vital, beautiful connection naturally flowing from the church to the road. I cannot see a moral reason for taking this away from the people."

At the inquiry the Earl maintained that he had never seen anyone use the path. But the Inspector found otherwise, and ruled that both under common law and through at least 20 years' public use under statute, the public had acquired a right of way over the land.

Ramblers member, Malcolm McDonnell, comments: "The celebration is tinged with sadness, because, following nine years of delays and mal-judgements by East Sussex County Council, at least four villagers who had used the path throughout their lives have not lived to see its re-instatement." Malcolm McDonnell is now the Ramblers Area Footpath Secretary for East Sussex, a position he took to give something back to the Ramblers in return for the help he received throughout the Withyham case.

BILLINGSHURST ADVENTURES

West Sussex countryside secretary George Tribe reports the following excitements from Billingshurst on Billingshurst footpath 1466/2 "This right of way, leading off Bashurst Hill, Itchingfield and passing through Long Copse, was lost to general public use in 1996, being obstructed by 2 different landowners. Local residents regularly urged the council to clear the obstructions but nothing was done until February 2008 when restoration was achieved at the Eastlands end. Shortly afterwards a new footbridge was destroyed and not restored until late 2009 when the whole route was re-opened. Within a week another bridge was destroyed and strenuous efforts were made to secure police involvement to discover who was responsible, all to no avail, The bridge was replaced within a few days and remains intact. Nevertheless negotiations at the highest level are taking place to ensure a rapid police response in the event of further acts of criminal damage. In the meantime the footpath is seeing very heavy use."

WE PLOUGH THE FIELD AND SCATTER THE RAMBLERS FROM THE LAND.

“When April with its showers sweet the drought of March has pierced to the root then landowners long to plough up paths across fields, without reinstating them afterwards as the law requires.” (Chaucer)

Even well used paths are not immune. The Wealdway was ploughed out in April between TQ 516192 (B 2192) and TQ 508195, reports local footpath secretary Godfrey Howard. Do report any ploughed over paths you come across. On our web site we have a list of paths that are regularly ploughed over.

<http://www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk/footpaths.php> We encourage you not only to report problems but also to go and walk out these paths so that others who come after you can find the way. If you are in a group walk in single file so that the route is clearer.



A path ploughed over and planted with maize

SOUTHERN WATER BLOCKS THE PATH

You can walk right along the shore and the cliffs from Hove lagoon, through Brighton and all the way nearly to Newhaven- except at Portobello where the water company has illegally closed the footpath and put up a sign saying that there are no rights of way on its land. For years only one or two people complained, because they all thought it was a legally done deal. It was only the diligence of a member of the South Downs campaign and the Ramblers local footpath secretary that resulted in the discovery that no legal diversion had been made. The resulting outcry has ensured that East Sussex Council have entered into negotiations to resolve the issue. Even now things are being delayed, but local footpath secretary Peter Seed is making sure that the matter does not get dropped



Southern Water have wired over the path.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

If you come across a problem while out on a walk don't leave it to someone else to sort out- report it! Even if you think that the council already know about it, the more people complain, the more likely councils are to take action. According to Ramblers active members about 90% of paths are open and easy to use in West Sussex. This is also true in the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But in the rest of East Sussex things are very different, with only about 50% of paths open and easy to use. Even here there are huge differences between parishes. Visit Ringmer, for example and you will find the footpaths in very good condition, because the parish and local ramblers are vigilant in reporting problems. But in areas like Hellingly, where the parish is dominated by landowners, and there has been no active footpath group for some years, and things get a lot worse! Problems range from minor things like missing signposts, to major obstructions.

Footpath problems can be reported to West Sussex County Council at www.westsussex.gov.uk or by phoning 01243 777620. You can also write to the Rights of Way team, West Sussex County Council, County Hall, West St. Chichester, West Sussex PO19 1RQ.

For East Sussex the web site is www.eastsussex.gov.uk, the phone number 0345 60 80 193 Write to the Rights of Way team, East Sussex County Council, County Hall, Lewes, BN7 1UE

If you know that the problem is inside the South Downs area of outstanding national beauty(AONB) it may be quicker to report the problem to the South Downs Joint Committee. Their web site is at www.southdownsonline.org/protecting/row You can phone 01243 558700 or write too South Downs Joint Committee, Victorian Barn, Victorian Business Centre, Ford Lane, Ford, Nr Arundel, West Sussex BN18 0EF

OUR ACCESSIBLE RAMBLES GUIDE.

Age, illness or disability need not end your rambling career. But if you are not as fit and agile as you would like to be, or you have children in a pram, there was very little information available about where you could go- even though statistics show that the average person will spend 20% of their life with a health condition or disability that significantly affects their life- and many people have children!

The Ramblers guide "Accessible Rambles" sets out to change all that. It sets out to list as many country rambles in Sussex as possible that are accessible and over 4 km long. No rambles have stiles or really rough ground and as much detail as possible is given about surfaces, gates, height gain, toilets and refreshments and how to get there. Rambles in the new South Downs National Park figure prominently. The guide can be found on the web site of Sussex Ramblers at <http://www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk/> Organisations and individuals are encouraged to print off copies to give to individuals who do not have internet access.

Picture- For many people stiles are a problem



COULD YOU BE (MORE) ACTIVE IN THE RAMBLERS?

Throughout Sussex Ramblers volunteers are active, checking paths, reporting problems, lobbying for more access, organising walks and putting out information like this. If you are not yet active could you do something practical? Sussex area is always looking for people to help by checking paths, lobbying for open access, leading walks, helping with publicity, monitoring the press, to name just a few things. Things that we are up to that we have not had space to talk about in Area News include helping making sure the new national park is a success, planning for the new coastal access rights, and monitoring areas of open access. If you are interested contact area secretary Anne Parker on 01243 582578 or at anne_parker@tiscali.co.uk

One possible job you could undertake is being a local footpath secretary, keeping an eye on paths in a local parish. Although East Sussex lost seven Local Footpath Secretaries last year, seven new volunteers have stepped into the breach to instead. However, nineteen parishes in the centre of the county remain vacant, most of which are large, with lots of paths in typical High Weald country. If you are a member living in the more remote parishes, for example Burwash, Heathfield or Mayfield, why don't you give it a try?. Just give East Sussex Area Footpath Secretary Malcolm McDonnell a call on 10892 770606, or email Malcolm@doriscat.waitrose.com for more information. Remember, being a local footpath secretary provides a good excuse to go for a walk.



In West Sussex, Area Footpath Secretary Graham Elvey (pictured left) is looking for volunteers to cover Amberley, Angmering, Ashurst, Ashington, Ashurst wood, Coldwaltham, East Grinstead, East preston, Ebernoe, Harting, Kingston, Kirdford, Poling, Rudgwick, Twineham, Upwaltham, West Grinstead, Westbourne and Yapton. Contact him at candg.elvey@virgin.net or 01403 790996

NEW OFFICERS

At the AGM we elected three new officer.. Malcolm Newman is our new treasurer, Graham Elvey is area footpath secretary for West Sussex and Brian Bailey (pictured right) is the new access officer.



RAMBLERS GENERAL COUNCIL

The Ramblers runs a delegate form of democracy. At the AGM of each area (ours is in January) you elect area officials and decide on any motions you want to put to the national general meeting (general council) which decides Ramblers policy and elects a board of trustees (BoT). Malcolm McDonnell reports on this year's council.

"I and Chris Smith were elected by Sussex Area as delegates at GC 2010, to support a motion put forward by Sussex Area. This was based on two draft motions from a number circulated to all Areas by the Concerned Ramblers group, a body set up last year by members alarmed by the Ramblers' financial crisis last year (*now resolved, at the cost of cuts and redundancies- ed*), and not satisfied with the Board of Trustees & Senior Management Teams' response to it.

Sussex Area's motion was combined with similar ones from two other Areas, and read as follows:

"This General Council believes that to enable the Ramblers to achieve an easy to use Rights of Way network throughout Britain, it will be necessary to carry out an across-the-board review of Rights of Way policy and other relevant factors that affect successful outcomes in Rights of Way work. It therefore calls upon the Board of Trustees to carry out such a review during the next year. This review will be expected to include, inter alia, the effectiveness of section 130A, alley-gating and other problems affecting urban

paths, unmaintained country roads, and lost ways and will include a survey of all local authority rights of way budgets over recent years including the present year and the percentage of each local authority's easy to use paths. In the light of the outcome of such a review the Board should allocate to rights of way and access work appropriate expert staff and financial resources, to facilitate the achievement of a rights of way network where ALL rights of way are easy to use, and access to open access land is enlarged, and access to the coast is achieved, in order to ensure that the protection of rights of way and the improvement of access not only are, but are seen to be, core objectives of the Ramblers." It was passed, along with another that required that the taking of legal action would remain at the forefront of the Ramblers' armoury.

Motion 3 asked the Board to report on how it would ensure it had the necessary skills to avoid repeating the crises of recent years, and allowed delegates to express their strong concerns over recent management of the Association. The motion was defeated by one vote (59 for 60 against). Another motion passed calls upon the Board of Trustees to start campaigning for Access to woodland and waterways.

There were three places to be filled on the Board and members of the Concerned Ramblers steering group – Robert Peel and Keith Wadd – took two of them.

Lastly, outdoors presenter Julia Bradbury has been voted the Ramblers' new President. In all, a very interesting and active GC, with lively debates over motions and the election to the board, General Council sent a clear message to the Board that now is the time for change and that change should be in the direction promoted by Concerned Ramblers." Concerned Ramblers have a web site at <http://concernedramblers.web.officelive.com/default.aspx> There is more about GC at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/Update>

WANT TO WALK WITH THE RAMBLERS?

Most members join the Ramblers to support our work, but for many a chance to walk in company is important too. In Sussex walks are organised by local groups. When you join you are allocated to a local group and you can ask to be sent details of local walks. If you are not getting these and would like them ring head office on 020 7339 8500 for details of your local group. As a member you are entitled to go on any Ramblers walk anywhere in the country. For a diary of what's on visit www.ramblers.org.uk and search for "walks finder".

WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ MORE FROM THE RAMBLERS IN SUSSEX?

We also have an email monthly newsletter called "Now Open". It highlights paths that have recently been-reopened, permissive paths you may not know about, paths that are obstructed and new rights over open access land. To subscribe send your email address to chris.smith@hbhelp.co.uk or fill in the form below.

We would also like to know what you think of this "Area News". We would like to send this out four times a year, with Walk magazine, but at the moment this is not possible. (It is also not currently possible to send some members material by email and others material by post.) So we have been sending out Area News twice a year. This costs about 60p per member per year. We could limit ourselves to only sending out once a year to tell you about the AGM (which we have to do). This would cost us about 30p. Or we could join in with a publication called "South Eastern Walker", a 16 page A3 sized newspaper which is sent out four times a year and would cover issues in the South East as a whole, except Kent and Hampshire. This would cost us about 80p per member per year. The reservation about this is that it has a lot of material about areas north of London, where most of us don't walk. To be emailed a PDF copy of the magazine email the address below.

Send the form below to Chris Smith, PO Box 2660, Lewes, BN7 2RW, or fax it to 01273 486966, or email your replies to chris.smith@hbhelp.co.uk.

(1) I think Area News should be sent out (once a year) (twice yearly) (as part of SE walker) – Please underline your choice

(2) I would like to receive "Now Open" My email address is.....

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