

Working for Walkers

Volume 1, Edition 1

August 2006

Welcome

Welcome to the maiden edition of *Working for Walkers*, produced by the Ramblers' Association (RA). Written exclusively with Rights of Way Officers in mind, we hope you will find this newsletter both informative and inspiring.

Available quarterly, *Working for Walkers* will be packed with information about our current campaigns and policies, while also focusing on our priorities and aims for the future. We hope that this newsletter will soon become a valuable resource to help in your work to promote, protect and register one of our most prized and treasured national assets – our paths.

Who are the Ramblers?



The Ramblers' Association is Britain's biggest walking charity. We have been working tirelessly for over 70 years to encourage and improve walking for everyone. By working closely together the

RA and Rights of Way Officers have both protected and secured many improvements to the network, making it even more enjoyable to use the paths we all value so much.

Use Your Paths Challenge

The RA has launched a new and exciting campaign called the Use Your Paths Challenge, the biggest-ever walking project in the UK!

We are challenging all walkers, both members and non-members, to help us walk the entire length of the rights of way network in England and Wales before September 2007. **It's never been done before!**

The aim of the challenge is to raise the profile and stress the importance of the path network we all work so hard to protect, while also getting people to use their local paths and report any problems they encounter along the way. We hope that the challenge will demonstrate to the walking public

how essential rights of way are, not only for their health and wellbeing but also for the economy and as vital links for the community.

To make it easier we have broken the Challenge up so participants simply pick a 1km x 1km square of the national grid, as found on OS maps, identified by two letters and four figures (e.g. TQ1952). They then walk all the rights of way in that grid square and report any problems they come across. The final step is to let us know what grid squares they have walked via our specially designed microsite (www.useyourpaths.info) or hotline (020 7339 8554).



Since its launch in March the Challenge has met with much praise and excitement, with over 6000 grid squares already claimed by walkers all over England and Wales. From lone walkers to groups, families out on a stroll and Scouts out on a hike, they're all taking part, so why not join in?

Footpath Guardian

All walkers do their bit to protect footpaths – by walking them from time to time and reporting any problems they find. The RA's new Footpath Guardian project aims to take this philosophy one step further. Launched in October 2005 the objective of the scheme is to encourage more people to take a keener interest in the rights of way network.



The idea behind the role of Footpath Guardian is a very simple one, the volunteer simply commits to reporting any path problems they come across while out and about, to the Highway Authority for that area.

A Footpath Guardian does not have any 'official' RA status and no set territory the way an RA Area Footpath Secretary does, for example. Instead

the scheme is designed to empower, inform and support local walkers so that, as individuals, they can help to protect the paths they love to walk regularly.

To date nearly 300 people have signed up to be Footpath Guardians, with over 450 path problems already reported to Highway Authorities across England and Wales. We hope that the success of the project will continue to grow and more walkers will volunteer to become guardians of the paths they regularly walk. For further information please contact Adrian Morris, Head of Footpath Campaigns (020 7339 8500).

Bird Flu and its possible impact on rights of way

Back in the spring of this year the nation waited anxiously to see if Britain would also be hit with the H5N1 virus, or 'Bird Flu'. With memories of the foot and mouth outbreak still fresh in many people's minds, the walking public were eager for previous mistakes not to be repeated.

Thankfully only one case of the H5N1 virus was discovered, but the threat this posed prompted many walkers to contact RA central office in London to ask about our "Bird Flu Policy". The advice we gave to these callers is outlined below.

The Ramblers' Association believes that the discovery of Bird Flu must not disrupt access to the countryside. We accept that following individual risk assessments, closing footpaths and public access may be necessary in some cases to reduce the risk of infection spreading. However, we do not support closures on the scale of the last animal disease outbreak, which had catastrophic consequences for the rural economy.

Over 500 million walking trips to the English countryside are made each year, with walkers spending over £6 billion. This has a huge impact on the rural job market, with an estimated 185,000 to 254,000 full-time jobs supported by walking. Walking is a draw for overseas visitors too. They make over 1 million trips to walk in the English countryside yearly, boosting the rural economy by £355 million.

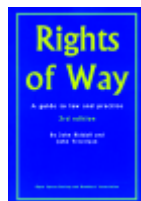


There is no evidence to suggest that ordinary walkers are at special risk of spreading or contracting Bird Flu when visiting rural areas, it's clear therefore that a blanket closure of the countryside is not necessary.

Overall it is vitally important that everyone works together to keep the countryside 'open for business' as much as possible during such difficult times so that people can continue to access the countryside they love while also supporting rural businesses.

Footpath Worker, an invaluable resource for all RoW Officers

Does your authority subscribe to *Footpath Worker*? If not, why not start now? This authoritative bulletin on rights of way law and related matters costs only £12 for four issues.



Featuring summaries of path order decisions, court cases, changes in the law, book reviews, etc, subscribers also receive regular updates to the Blue Book (*Rights of way: a guide to law and practice*), an invaluable resource for any RoW Officer.

Send a cheque for £12, made payable to the Ramblers Association, to Mrs Gwen Campbell (address as given below) with a request to start your subscription now!

What would you like to see in the next edition?

We would really like to hear from you about your thoughts on *Working for Walkers*, what did you like, what could be improved and what should be added? Are there topics or subjects that you would like to see discussed, or areas of RA work which as a Rights of Way Officer you would like to know more about?

If you have a comment or suggestion then we would love to hear it:



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Please also let us know if you would like to receive the next copy of *Working for Walkers* via email – not only will you get the new edition quicker; you will also be helping to save paper.

If you have colleagues or contacts who would also like to receive *Working for Walkers* please let us know and we will ensure they are added to the mailing list.