

# FOOTPATH GUARDIAN



THE CHARITY  
WORKING FOR  
WALKERS

*The Ramblers*

[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)





All walkers can do their bit to protect footpaths – by walking them from time to time and reporting any problems they find to the relevant council. That simple act is a great help.

**BUT WE ARE ASKING FOOTPATH GUARDIANS TO TAKE AN EVEN GREATER INTEREST IN THE PATHS THAT THEY WALK, AND TO ENSURE THAT PROBLEMS ARE PROPERLY RESOLVED.**

By that, we mean not simply reporting the problems, but returning at a later date to see if the council has followed up with any action – and if not, chasing up your report with the relevant staff. Don't give up!

We are also asking you to keep records of all the problems you report and send copies to us. Every 3–4 months we will ask for an update on all your reports, including any subsequent action that has been taken by the highway authority that you know of. By doing this, you will help the Ramblers' Association to compile the first-ever national record of local authority performance on reported path problems.

To make the project a real success we ask that all Footpath Guardians commit to reporting at least 10 path problems per year, although we are sure you'll report more!

## WHY PATH PROBLEMS ARE SO IMPORTANT

The most important reason for reporting path problems is, of course, to get them resolved. Few highway authorities have the resources to carry out proactive surveys of the state of the path network, so they rely on path users telling them when something has gone wrong.

Without path problem reports (and their subsequent resolution) use of the problem paths would fall, with the result that they would become even more difficult to use.

If an authority doesn't know about a problem they can't put it right.

There are plenty of other good reasons for reporting path problems, including:

- proving that a particular route is being used
- drawing attention to problems encountered by some people (e.g. those with limited mobility) which may not pose a problem to others
- raising the profile of a particular type of problem at a particular time of the year (e.g. ploughing and cropping)



## WHAT IS A PATH PROBLEM?

Basically, a path problem is anything that spoils your enjoyment of a walk. Of course, this comment needs some qualification – we would not advise writing to the highway authority to complain about the weather, or that you chose the wrong footwear! Seriously though, the highway authority is responsible for 'protecting and asserting' your rights to use footpaths and other rights of way. It is therefore right that any complaint should start with them.

Within the wide definition above there are many types of footpath problem. We could not possibly hope to list them all here, but the selection on the right should give you a good idea of the type of problem that should be reported. If you are ever in any doubt, don't forget that staff are on hand to help Footpath Guardians – our contact details can be found on your welcome letter.

## TYPES OF FOOTPATH PROBLEM

### NATURAL VEGETATION:

- undergrowth
- overgrowth
- hedgerow encroachment
- overhanging branches
- fallen trees, etc.

### PATH 'FURNITURE':

- missing or broken stiles
- bridges
- gates
- signposts
- waymarks, etc.

### AGRICULTURE-RELATED:

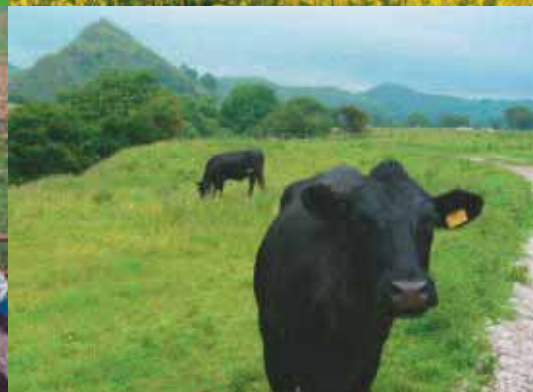
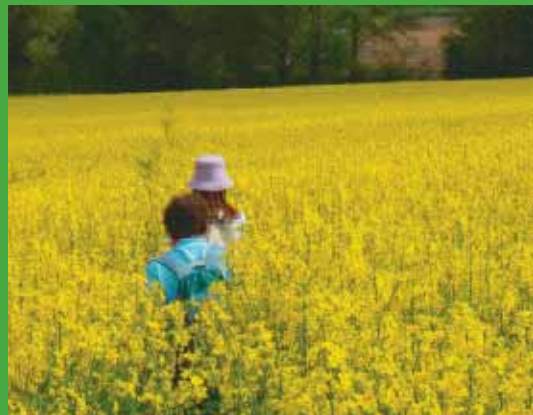
- ploughing
- cropping
- manure
- slurry, etc.

### MAN-MADE PROBLEMS:

- barbed wire
- buildings
- fences
- walls
- rubbish
- rubble, etc.

### MISCELLANEOUS:

- misleading notices
- dangerous animals
- surface problems, etc.



## HOW FOOTPATH GUARDIANS WILL HELP:

When you come across a path problem on one of your walks simply follow these steps:

- 1.** Fill out one of the path problem report forms, entering a unique 'identifier code' in the relevant box. The identifier should be formed of your footpath guardian number (e.g. FG24) and a sequential number for your reports (e.g. where this is your sixth report the identifier will be FG24/6). If you are reporting a large number of path problems, or the problems are on different paths, please use separate forms.
- 2.** Make 2 copies of the report. A number of outlets now offer low-cost photocopying, and all computer scanners can be used to send an image to your printer. Alternatively good old-fashioned carbon paper works just as well.
- 3.** Send your original form to the relevant highway authority for the area in which you encountered the problem, keep one copy for your records and send the other copy to RA central office in one of the envelopes provided.
- 4.** Once you receive a response from the highway authority you should keep this with the original report. If possible, we would encourage you to go out and check on any promised action and satisfy yourself that the problem has been resolved. Record any action on your copy of the original report form.
- 5.** If the problem has not been resolved within three months, please write again to the highway authority, requesting action. A standard letter template is provided for this purpose. Again, please keep any replies.

Approximately every 3-4 months we will contact all Footpath Guardians to ask about the response to their reports and any subsequent action from the highway authority. We will do this using a standard form, which, using your stored correspondence, will take little time to fill in and return. By doing this, you will help the Ramblers' Association to compile the first-ever national record of local authority performance on reported path problems.



## HIGHWAY AUTHORITIES EXPLAINED

Highway authorities are the county, unitary, metropolitan, or London borough council for the area in question (i.e. they are not district\*, town, parish, or community councils) and are listed in this pack. This council is responsible for ensuring that all paths are open and useable for the public, and is therefore the right place to send path problem reports. Although councils vary widely in their internal organisation and staffing structures, path problem reports should be sent to the 'Public Rights of Way Officer' at the address listed.

*\* Some district councils (and also national parks) carry out rights of way functions on behalf of the highway authority. In most cases this is indicated on the enclosed list.*

## USING PATH NUMBERS AND GRID REFERENCES

All highway authorities use 'path numbers' to distinguish between different rights of way, in the same way that roads are numbered. Path numbers, however, are not to be found on OS maps. In most parts of the country, path numbers can only be found on the relevant 'definitive map' of public rights of way. Authorities must provide a copy of the definitive map to anyone with 'an interest' in the area. However, they may charge for this. While the use of path numbers in your reports will assist the highway authority, you should certainly not feel that you have to use them.

Grid references, on the other hand, are extremely useful in pinpointing path problems (and providing the location of the path itself where a path number is not used). All Footpath Guardians should aim to use grid references in their reports where possible. A quick tutorial sheet is included in this pack.

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Don't forget that Footpath Guardians are never alone! The Footpath Campaigns Team at RA central office is available to help with any queries you may have, whether it's deciding which highway authority to send a problem to, or thinking of the next step to take in dealing with a path problem.

Our contact details can be found on your Footpath Guardian welcome letter.



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