



## Identifying and recording lost rights of way

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In 2020, thousands of people came together to help the Ramblers map *potential* lost rights of way across England and Wales by comparing two historical maps from around 1900 with the current Ordnance Survey map. The results of this survey can be found [here](#). The incredible response we had from the public to help us search for lost rights of way shows what an important place our path network holds in the hearts of so many of us. It enables millions of us every year to explore our amazing countryside and connect with nature and the Ramblers is dedicated to protecting it

The process of creating the legal record of rights of way (the definitive maps), started in earnest in the 1950s when parish councils, local people and councils were asked to identify the paths used by the public in their areas. Unfortunately, many paths were missed off the map. Over time the definitive maps have been amended, with paths recorded on the map based on recent and historical evidence and legal diversions and extinguishments.

In 2000 the Countryside and Rights of Way Act set a deadline of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 by which time paths based on historical evidence could be applied for to be added to the definitive map in England. This deadline was accompanied by government assurances that all paths which could reasonably be claimed would be claimed and that government would lead, with promised funding, on finding these lost paths. Unfortunately, these assurances were not met and organisations like the Ramblers are now stepping up to ensure that important paths are not lost before the 2026 deadline.

Whilst we have identified over 49,000 miles of potentially lost paths, we are not looking to put every single potential lost path back on the map – we are taking a common sense approach, and identifying the potential lost rights of way is just the start of the process. For paths that we want to save (and that have not been legally extinguished or diverted), we will be supporting volunteers to collect enough evidence to show that they were used by the public in the past - this simply won't be possible for all paths. For any paths being applied to be added to the map, there is a formal process of notification and consultation with landowners and tenants.

With so many unmapped rights of way, we are now focussing on prioritising the paths that are the most useful or important; those that improve the network and make walking easier and more enjoyable for as many people as possible – something that has become more important than ever during the Covid-19 pandemic. This could include paths that resolve dead ends or complete circular walks, creating better connections and providing routes in areas which lack off road walking opportunities.

We want to work, wherever possible, together with farmers and landowners - many of whom do a fantastic job maintaining paths and welcoming walkers on their land. We continue to push for the implementation of the rights of way provisions of the Deregulation Act (2015) which aims to create a simpler and less challenging process for all – applicants, landowners and local authorities.

If you have any questions about our map of potential lost rights of way, please consult our [FAQs](#).