

Hampshire Countryside Access Forum is the Local Access Forum for Hampshire (excluding the New Forest), Portsmouth and Southampton. In Spring 2007, the Forum formed a sub-group to consider the impact of the expected cut-off date of 2026 for unrecorded rights of way relying on historical evidence rather than recent use. A member of New Forest Access Forum was included in this group, so that the outcomes could apply across the whole county.

The sub-group agreed that the national Discovering Lost Ways project was unlikely to be of assistance in the short-term, if at all, and therefore that a co-ordinated volunteer-led approach to research and claims submission should be developed. Two further meetings refined this concept, looking at potential sources of volunteers, principles and process.

The task group agreed to offer volunteers training and mentoring, and to co-ordinate effort to avoid duplication. Hampshire County Council's Definitive Map Team welcomed this co-ordinated approach, and offered training for volunteer researchers.

Importantly, rather than trying to find any 'lost ways', volunteers were asked to find evidence for routes already identified as needed by the Countryside Access Plan (ROWIP) – this pragmatic, sensible approach gained support from the whole Forum. **The project therefore aims to use the definitive map modification process as a mechanism for establishing routes for which there is a modern demand, using historic evidence.**

A short article in 'Hampshire Now' (the Council's magazine delivered free to all residents) attracted sixty potential volunteers, who then attended an introductory session in February 2008 to gauge interest; nearly all remained keen to take part. Most were frequent users of countryside access, but were not necessarily members of any groups or experienced in such research. Further training at the Records Office followed to introduce important historic sources - tithe, enclosure, early series OS and Highways handover maps – and volunteers signed up to search for lost ways for around half of Hampshire's parishes.

During research for the Countryside Access Plan, maps were sent to parish councils, user representatives and other interested parties. They were asked to mark up the routes/network they wanted in place for the future - this could be new routes, or upgrades to existing routes – the results were digitised to form a computerised mapping layer showing desired network developments for the whole of Hampshire, together with data showing which group requested it and why.

The volunteers were given maps showing the current definitive network, claims pending and additions/upgrades requested through the Countryside Access Plan. 45 parishes were researched and the volunteers returned forms relating to 200 routes. The 5 which showed the strongest historical evidence for rights were passed to the Definitive Map Team for investigation, and at the time of writing two have been the subject of orders to add them to the Definitive Map.

The feasibility of such an approach has been proven and the group are keen to extend the project to cover the rest of the county. However, considerable time was given voluntarily by Forum members for the pilot and it would not be realistic for them to continue this role for a project five times as large. The sub-group are therefore preparing an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding to run a full-scale project for the whole county, including a paid volunteer co-ordinator.

**Cath Hart (Forum Officer, Hampshire County Council)**  
**October 2009**