

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

## HCAF news 2010

**HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM** is an advisory body working to improve your enjoyment of Hampshire's countryside whilst safe-guarding its future. The Forum is independent of any council or interest group – it comprises local members of the public with a wealth of experience in aspects of countryside recreation and rights of way, balanced between those who use paths (e.g. walkers, horse-riders, cyclists, vehicle users) and those who provide access (e.g. farmers, land agents, parish councils, trusts).

*Read on to find out about the work of the Forum this year.*

### From the Chair

Alan Marlow - Chair of the Forum

A glance at the items inside this newsletter will tell you that over the last year the Forum has continued to go from strength to strength. In addition to these items a look through the agendas and minutes from the four full Forum meetings held this year shows that we have again addressed a wide spectrum of topics. These range from responding to consultation documents about various aspects of the coastal access scheme to be introduced by Natural England, to holding two workshop sessions to help HCC refine the prioritisation guidelines used by the Countryside Service to manage the work of maintaining the rights of way network across the county.

As might have been predicted, some of the topics that the Forum has addressed have proved controversial, and very difficult to progress. For instance attempts to develop some guidance for those wishing to access the countryside by canoe on inland waterways has so far proved impossible to achieve and further work is needed.

A number of key projects have carried forward from last year, these are reflected in the reports elsewhere in this newsletter, and several new avenues are beckoning for the future. The establishment of the new South Downs National Park on our doorstep, encompassing a substantial part of Hampshire, will bring a number of new challenges to the work of the Forum in the coming months. Inevitably in the current financial climate there are also going to be challenges as a result of budget cuts. The Forum is well placed to provide advice about how some of these challenges are to be faced.

As I reach the end of my term as Chairman I would like to thank Forum members and the officers of the appointing authorities for their very positive support, and I wish the next Chair every success.



## 'Discovering Hampshire's Lost Ways' evolves into 'Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage' (PATHH)

Sue Coles - Forum member representing cyclists

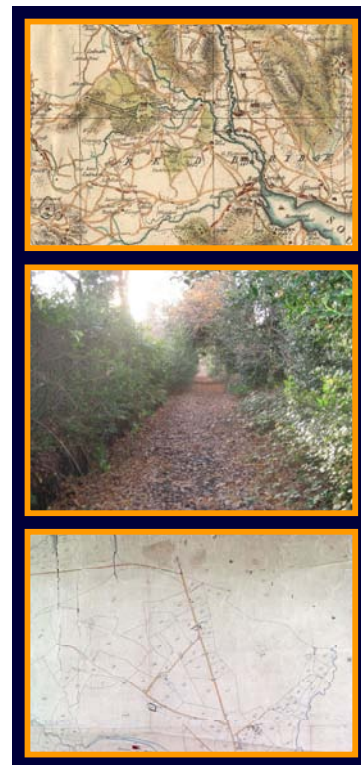
In 2008 Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF) ran a project in which volunteers looked at documents at Hampshire Record Office for evidence of unrecorded paths, or paths for which a higher status could be justified. It focussed on paths for which a modern need existed, as identified in Hampshire's Countryside Access Plans. Several paths were subsequently added to the legal record for rights of way, therefore safeguarding them for the future.

Following this success, HCAF decided to extend the project across Hampshire, but recognised the need for more professional management and so it applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund. It has now been awarded £46,600 for the project, which has been renamed PATHH – Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage. The new name reflects the expanded scope of the project, which will also include an educational element and involve local schools and communities. PATHH will recruit about 100 volunteers, who will be trained to investigate the paths and history of their local area using original maps and documents.

Many of the previous volunteers have already signed up to PATHH but more will be needed. PATHH, with support from Hampshire County Council, the New Forest National Park Authority and the New Forest Access Forum (NFAF), has appointed a project manager from the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology to run the project. The Trust has considerable experience in research and education and is well placed to complement the existing expertise within HCAF, NFAF and our local authority partners. The Project started in earnest in September 2010.

PATHH is a really exciting project and just one of the ways in which HCAF is seeking to help Hampshire County Council implement its Countryside Access Plans and improve access.

For more information or to volunteer please contact Sue Coles at [pathh.sc@googlemail.com](mailto:pathh.sc@googlemail.com)



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## Small Grants Scheme COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Amanda Hull - Forum Officer, Hampshire County Council

In 2005 the Forum assisted the County Council in the set up of the Small Grants Scheme COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS. It continues to support the scheme, and along with members of the New Forest Access Forum and the Chief Executive of Hampshire Association of Local Councils, four members of the Forum sit on a panel to provide recommendations to the County Council about each application.

The scheme continues to be in great demand from local councils and landowners keen to improve access to rights of way and open areas. In 2009/10 a total of 30 projects were funded, and this financial year the panel has already considered 23 applications.

An increasing number of projects are using volunteers to carry out practical work, last year 21 of the 31 projects funded through the Small Grants Scheme involved volunteers, amounting to 1,519 volunteer hours.

Worthy Conservation Volunteers recognised improvements needed in their local area and working with the Parish Council applied to the Small Grants Scheme to cover the cost of materials and equipment to resurface a 40m section of the Nuns Walk in Headbourne Worthy. The path is much used by walkers and runners but after prolonged and excessive wet weather, typically becomes waterlogged and muddy.

In October 2009, 18 volunteers contributed to a weekend spent raising the path by about 10cm. The hedgerow was pruned, gravel boards fitted and eight tonnes of scalping laid and compacted. In February 2010, 7 volunteers returned to replace the two sleeper bridges.

*'I'd like to thank all volunteers for their hard labour and enthusiasm. All must be pleased and proud that the job was successful – it was a really good team effort. The sleeper-bridges and raised path look fantastic, and hopefully will now keep its users feet dry, at least over this stretch that is!' Bruce Graham, Worthy Conservation Volunteers*



For more information about the Small Grants Scheme COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS, visit the website [www.hants.gov.uk/sgs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/sgs) or email [amanda.hull@hants.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.hull@hants.gov.uk) or [justin.harvey@hants.gov.uk](mailto:justin.harvey@hants.gov.uk)

## South Downs (Hampshire) Countryside Access Plan Working Group

Sue Montila - Forum member representing equestrians

The seven Countryside Access Plans (CAPs) for Hampshire are now complete and Action Groups for each area are in the process of being set up. The groups are led by HCC Countryside Access Managers, and consist of members of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum, along with other user and landowner/manager representatives. The South Downs group have met on three occasions and after workshop sessions are currently weighting the many suggested improvements, both from the original mapping exercise carried out some 3 years ago and suggestions which have been made since. This is an ongoing exercise being carried out on a parish by parish basis, with suggestions for improvements being scored against desirability, feasibility and user benefit.

It is the intention of Hampshire County Council and the Access Forum to implement some improvements despite budgetary restraints with the help of volunteers, goodwill of landowners and perhaps Parish Councils. It is hoped that minor improvements can be put in place fairly quickly however those which attract more than minimal cost may well take longer to achieve.

The Improvement Maps are live documents and we welcome further suggestions for improved access, particularly for horse riders and cyclists. For further information please call 01962 847165.

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In February the Forum welcomed David Livermore and Linda Rivers from a new group 'Hampshire RoamAbility', who described their enjoyment of the countryside using mobility scooters. Linda has since joined the CAP working group for the South Downs (Hampshire) and on 27<sup>th</sup> July, the group organised a sponsored South Downs Ramble event from Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

### Hampshire RoamAbility

David Livermore - Chairman of Hampshire RoamAbility

Senior Officers from Hampshire County Council Countryside Service together with Councillor Ellis joined members of Hampshire RoamAbility on a ramble at Queen Elizabeth Country Park in July. It was an opportunity to exchange ideas on countryside access using mobility scooters and for the Officers to try out a Trampler mobility scooter for the first time. The more powerful scooters started at the visitors centre and went up Butser Hill, while some started from the top before going to the Sustainability Centre at East Meon.

There was a lively discussion about access to the countryside and particularly about the need to make gates and gaps large enough to accommodate the largest scooters, such as the Trampler, which are most able to cope with the uneven surfaces and hills. Surfaces smooth enough to enable access to manual wheelchairs and very small scooters are not always possible or economic in the countryside. However, relatively small adjustments to replace stiles and tight kissing gates with accessible gates, and repair short stretches of badly eroded path, can open up miles to disabled people, including those using fairly modest scooters and electric wheelchairs. The rangers did just that at Queen Elizabeth Country Park by repairing a half mile stretch which made a 9 mile circular route accessible. The Disability Discrimination Act was not really aimed at improving access to the countryside, limiting work to the minimum standards set out in the DDA therefore means large numbers of disabled people would be denied access because new technology (such as Trampers) provides so many new opportunities since the Act was originally conceived.

It was a very enjoyable, informative and productive day for everyone involved and several new contacts were made. Many thanks to everyone who came and to Tim Speller, Manager of Queen Elizabeth Country Park, for jointly organising this very successful event.

Hampshire RoamAbility is a rambling and social networking group which organises rambles and other activities in Hampshire and neighbouring counties. Membership is open to anyone over 18 and we welcome non-disabled people to walk with us to enjoy this slightly different, although no less interesting and exciting, perspective on rambling. Walkers can be helpful in finding new routes which may be accessible or can be made accessible with a little effort. Sometimes there are miles of accessible land beyond the first stile which scooter users cannot get to. They will need to walk with us though to learn what the capabilities of the scooters and their users are so as not to dismiss paths that seem too difficult to the untrained eye.



To find out more about Hampshire RoamAbility see our website [www.hampshireroamability.co.uk](http://www.hampshireroamability.co.uk)



## Focus for the coming year

David Ashcroft - Vice Chair of the Forum

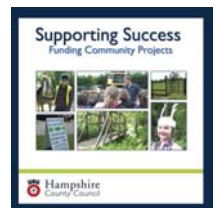
What a subject, and a daunting one to start! However while walking my four flat-coats in the strong breeze a few thoughts occurred to me. We all enjoy and cherish our countryside, most of us respect both it and those who work and play in it, so what is the problem? Some users and owners don't understand the others' view. Could communication give understanding, leading to respect and less conflict? All users have different needs but some that are the same. All land managers have similar problems in managing the users' aspirations while producing our food and creating wildlife habits. All wildlife wish they could be left alone in peace and quiet. In Hampshire we are very fortunate to have a County Council that understands the pressures from those different positions, and an Access Forum that is representative of the many users and land managers, and whose members discuss the issues calmly and try to find solutions.

April 2011 will see the South Downs National Park come into operation and with it the call and desire for improving rights of way in the county. Money is tight and will become even tighter so more imaginative ways of getting what we all want is called for. More use of the Small Grant Scheme, as well as volunteers, could go some way to achieving less conflict and better understanding of our countryside. By improving communication to all parties a lot can be achieved, along with showing the rest of the country how it's done. Involvement of schools, youth groups, senior members, user organisations and land managers in all aspects of the network at a local level will be the aim.

## Supporting Success Funding Community Projects

Amanda Hull - Forum Officer, Hampshire County Council

A film, *Supporting Success Funding Community Projects*, has recently been produced to celebrate the success of the Small Grants Scheme in the 5 years since its launch. The film shows how communities have worked together and used their funding to make real improvements to countryside access, whether it be physical improvements to rights of way or the production of a mapboard or leaflet. The film can be viewed at [www.hants.gov.uk/sgs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/sgs) or a copy of the DVD requested by emailing [amanda.hull@hants.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.hull@hants.gov.uk)



## Find out more

Legally, HCAF is the statutory Local Access Forum which each county council, unitary council and national park authority must establish and support; HCAF is the joint Forum for Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth. The New Forest is covered by our neighbouring Forum, the New Forest Access Forum.

Do you want to find out more about the work of the Forum, or perhaps there is an issue you would like them to consider? If so visit the website or contact the Forum Officer (details below). The Forum meet four times a year and the public are welcome to attend meetings, questions can be submitted or representations made provided notice of at least two weeks is given to the Forum Officer.

## Contact Us

### Hampshire Countryside Access Forum

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**TO REPORT PROBLEMS ON RIGHTS OF WAY TEL: 0845 6035636\***

\*Calls will cost up to 4p per minute for BT customers. Calls made using other service providers or mobiles may cost more. Alternatively call 01329 225398 - standard and local call rates apply to this number

