



## **DEVON COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2010/2011**

#### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2010/ 11**



In April 2010 I took over the chairmanship of the Forum from Terry Faull who had led it very skilfully during his tenure of office.

During the past year we have continued to carry out our main duty of providing, to local and central government, balanced and independent advice on improving public access to the countryside. In spite of our anxiety about the economic situation we have been gratified to see that steady progress on access is being made. In 2010 another section of the magnificent Exe Estuary Route was opened and the "Ride the Ruby Country" initiative was launched to benefit horse riders in North Devon. As well as these schemes the County Public Rights of Way team works hard throughout Devon to maintain and improve the local rights of way networks in every parish.

An important feature of the Forum and its advice is that it is fairly balanced between all those who are involved in the countryside, including riders and ramblers, land managers and owners. The relevance of our work and the weight of our advice depend crucially on this. During the past year there has been a relative lack of representation of landowners and after discussion, which included our selection process, we have taken steps to correct this. As a result I look forward to a year during which we will be well able to encourage and facilitate recreation and enjoyment in Devon's glorious countryside. We will do our best to mitigate any threats posed by economic stringency and support the Public Rights of Way team whose dedication and enthusiasm are infectious.

It is heartening to report that this enthusiastic attitude is shared by members of the Forum as evidenced not only by attendance at our regular meetings but also on working groups, site visits and training days. Although we are all individuals from very different backgrounds we are united in our appreciation of Devon's countryside and of its importance to the public who derive so many benefits from it. Benefits that I believe become more important as our brave new digital world

becomes more dominated by computer screens and smart phones, and reality becomes increasingly virtual.

In conclusion I'd like to record my thanks to all present members of the Forum and those who have retired during the year, to the DCC PRow team and especially to our Forum Officer who organizes us so expertly.

Justin Robbins

Chairman, March 2011

## The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF)



The Forum is an independent statutory body under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Its remit is to advise on ways of improving public access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment. Members of the Forum are appointed by Devon County Council for a three year term, with the option to re-apply.

The legislation requires the Forum to give advice to the following organisations which must have regard to any relevant recommendations and provide feedback:

- *Devon County Council*
- *District and borough councils*
- *The Secretary of State for any Government department*
- *Natural England*
- *The Forestry Commission*
- *English Heritage*
- *Sport England*
- *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Boards*
- *Parish and town councils*

The Forum aims to influence the policy decision-making processes of those organisations, having taken into account the broad range and balance of local and wider interests. Usually the Forum is providing strategic advice but may occasionally get involved in local access issues where these are seen to have wider implications or could inform the development of good practice.

### **Membership of the DCAF**

The Forum has a membership of fifteen, representing those who use land for recreation, land managers and other interests such as health and tourism. Members are volunteers, receiving standard travel expenses. See the appendix for a list of members.

In April 2010, Devon County Council reappointed Sarah Slade and John Skinner for a further three-year term and Terry Faulk for a one-year term. Rosemary Kimbell was appointed as a new member to represent 'other interests', particularly health. Dr Justin Robbins was elected Chairman and Robin Head Vice Chairman. During the autumn John Hunt resigned and was thanked for his input.

### **Achievements in 2010/11**

#### **Consultations**

The Forum has responded to a large number of consultations during the year. It has made use of a position statement on local development framework (LDF) documents, developed in 2007, to respond to some LDF consultations emanating from district councils and, in particular, Teignbridge District Council and Exeter City Council.


The most significant responses have been made to the following consultations. Some responses were discussed at working group meetings and then put on the agenda for formal approval at the next public meeting.

#### **National**

- **Consultation on regulations on procedures for making representations and objections to coastal access proposals made in a report by Natural England (Defra)**  
*This was a very technical and legal consultation. Forum members made a number of comments on the process including the time allowed to make representations on a coastal access report and who should be able to attend site meetings. In some instances there was not full agreement between members and these differences were expressed in the submission.*
- **Waterways for Everyone (Defra)**  
*The Forum stressed the importance of waterway paths for cycling, walking and horse riding, emphasising their suitability particularly for the elderly*

*and the less mobile. It recommended making surface and width improvements; creating links to nearby green space and public rights of way; sensitive vegetation management and installation of bench seats or perches. Encouraging people to use these paths could be improved through better information, local involvement and well-designed codes of conduct where routes were shared between different users.*



- **The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and structures (gate, gaps & stiles) on rights of way (Defra)**  
*The DCAF welcomed the idea of a local policy on path furniture to accompany the existing British Standard. It advised on the use of web based information on path structures to benefit potential access users and advised that a system of nationally agreed symbols for gradients and structures would be beneficial.*
- **Review of the England Access Forum (Natural England)**  
*The England Access Forum is a non statutory group with two representatives from each local access forum region. The Forum expressed reservations about the role of the EAF whilst supporting continued regional networking.*
- **Invitation to shape the Nature of England (Defra)**  
*The key recommendation made by the Forum was that the policy document should include a greater emphasis on health and well-being. Public rights of way, cycle and multi-use routes and green space would all make a valuable contribution to this agenda. Additional comments were made on the need to reduce bureaucracy and insurance liability, whilst not compromising on safety, to encourage civil society to play a greater part in managing the natural environment.*
- **Countryside Code (Natural England)**  
*A proposed revised Countryside Code was examined by Forum members. The Forum advised that the short version of the Code should provide key messages to encourage responsible use of the countryside.*

## Devon

- **Draft Rural Health and Well-being Strategy (Devon Primary Care Trust)**

*The Forum made a number of points related to omissions in the document, namely the benefits of active lifestyles and the need to include public rights of way, green infrastructure and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The submission highlighted costs to the NHS of lack of exercise.*

- **Thorne Moor (Natural England)**

*Although a site specific case, the Forum thought it useful to have a site meeting as proposals to fence access land for biodiversity reasons are being made across Devon. The recommendations sought to balance the needs of graziers and biodiversity against landscape and access considerations. Recommendations were made for minimal fencing on certain areas, suitable gates and improved car parking, signing and information.*

- **Gittisham Hill (Natural England)**



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*For the first time the DCAF was statutorily consulted on a proposed dog exclusion order on access land on the grounds of public safety. Due to the presence of cattle with suckler calves it was proposed that dogs should be excluded from Gittisham Hill - from May to the end of September for a six year period. An extraordinary meeting and site visit was held on a chilly December day. Although there was agreement on site, landowners on the Forum were unable to be present on the day. Subsequently, a range of opinions were exchanged and two points of view were expressed in the final recommendations to Natural England. Agreement was, however, reached on the following points:*

- The Devon Countryside Access Forum does agree that signage on the site should give clear and unequivocal advice on when access is permitted, when dogs are allowed and whether leads are necessary and when shooting is taking place. A revised version of the current month-by-month chart should suffice. It would be preferable if non-shooting days were clearly indicated with days and dates.
- The DCAF does agree that if suckler cows and calves are not present for prolonged periods, possibly for a month, during the full five months then access information should be updated so the public is fully aware of this fact.
- The DCAF advises Natural England to discuss with the landowner whether alternative stocking or management regimes could be identified which might permit a higher level of access than at present, without placing an undue financial burden on the landowner.

*Natural England subsequently decided not to permit the dog exclusion.*

- **Fire Beacon Hill and East Devon Pebblebed Heaths**  
*A position statement agreed on the fencing of common land was submitted, with the option to comment in further detail when proposals are sent to the Planning Inspectorate.*
- **‘Tough Choices’ (Devon County Council)**  
*In the light of budget cuts, the Chairman wrote to the Leader of the Council to emphasise the importance of public rights of way to health and the rural economy.*
- **Local Transport Plan 3 (Devon County Council)**  
*Achieving greater integration with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was a key recommendation as many of the RoWIP projects would produce public rights of way benefits which would satisfy the five key goals of the Local Transport Plan, namely reducing carbon emissions; supporting economic growth; promoting equality of opportunity; contributing to better safety, security and health and improving quality of life and a healthy natural environment.*
- **Multi-use (Devon County Council)**  
*Recommendations on improving multi-use policy in the County have continued to be made, in respect of the cycle network and other recreational trails. Making routes available for horse riders and those with disabilities is a key aspiration and a Rights of Way Improvement Plan policy. The Forum has advised on the policy process and will continue to be involved in route design.*

## Public Meetings

During 2010/11 the Forum held three public meetings, an extraordinary meeting and a number of working groups. Due to consultation deadlines, some responses to consultations were agreed for ratification at the next public meeting.

## Training



On a glorious sunny day in June, members of the DCAF visited the village of Morchard Bishop to view parts of its excellent rights of way network and to hear about the Definitive Map Review process. DCAF member Julie Rudge, Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Officer for the parish, had been actively involved in the process.

Tania Weeks, Definitive Map Review Officer, described the process of the definitive map review and the evidence required to support claims for new routes. Sam Jeffcoat, Warden, accompanied members round the village to illustrate new paths and the work that was being done to bring them into use.

During the afternoon members visited a farm with educational access under Higher Level Stewardship, owned by Mr and Mrs Vere; an excellent scheme to engage children (and other groups) with the countryside.





The October meeting was preceded by a walk along the newly opened stretch of the Exe Estuary trail from Lypstone towards Exton, led by Peter Grainger, Sustrans Manager and DCAF member. The planning and design processes were discussed.

## Presentations at meetings

### April 2010

**James Maben, Countryside Mobility SW Project Manager**, described the mobility project, hosted by Living Options, to provide tramper buggies and wheely boats in the SW. A £423,000 grant, over two years, had been received from Natural England through its Access to Nature Fund. The project target is to improve access to 30 countryside sites by developing partnerships with organisations across the region who would host buggies and boats.

**Joy Ede, Historic Environment Specialist, Natural England**, outlined the work done by Natural England in protecting historic sites in the County through active conservation, enhancement and interpretation. Many sites receive grants through agri-environment schemes. Allowing access to historic sites, particularly where these are on access land, is part of Natural England's work.

### October 2010

**Andrew Watson, Principal Access and Ranger Officer, Dartmoor National Park Authority** sought the Forum's views on the Dartmoor National Park Authority's draft Recreation and Access Strategy. Key themes for the strategy focussed on sustainability and climate change, widening participation and improving accessibility, improving understanding and enjoyment and increasing active lifestyles. Forum members made particular points regarding horse riding opportunities; signage, particularly where public rights of way meet main roads; and green infrastructure planning.

### January 2010

**Devon County Council – Public Rights of Way update.** At all meetings the Public Rights of Way Officers give a public rights of way update. At this meeting members were given fuller detail on the 2010/11 Action Plan; areas particularly highlighted were current projects and expenditure cuts, new warden responsibilities to deal with unclassified, unsurfaced county roads and work of

the Definitive Map Review team and Parish Paths Partnership. The Public Rights of Way section was commended for its excellent work.

### Liaison and networking

- The Chairman attended meetings of SW Local Access Forum Chairmen
- Members supported the Public Rights of Way team at local agricultural shows
- Members attended Parish Paths Partnership (P3) workshops
- The Forum was represented at:
  - The 'Ride the Ruby Country' launch
  - Multi-use group meetings, convened by DCC
  - Local Development Framework meetings
  - The 'Stopline Way' exhibition
  - 'Shooting in the Firing Line', a Country Land and Business Association event

During the year no meetings of the England Access Forum were held. The England Access Forum is a non-statutory group with representatives from each local access forum region. In March 2011 a decision was taken by Natural England not to renew funding of the EAF.

The Forum attempts to measure its effectiveness, a challenging task as outcomes from submissions to consultations may not be known for a long time.

*DCAF agenda papers, minutes and responses to consultations can be viewed on [www.devon.gov.uk/devon\\_countryside\\_access\\_forum](http://www.devon.gov.uk/devon_countryside_access_forum).*

*Please contact the Forum Officer if you require paper copies or information in a different language or format.*

*Members of the public are welcomed at DCAF meetings and may send in questions, provided these reach the Forum Officer three days before a meeting.*

#### Contact details

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The DCAF is funded by Devon County Council and operates within a yearly budget of £5,150 plus a part-time officer. Devon County Council receives funding for this from the annual central government block grant. In the light of budget cuts the yearly budget will be reduced in 2011/12.



## APPENDIX

### DEVON COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM MEMBERS 2010/11

**Chairman – Dr Justin Robbins**  
**Vice Chairman – Robin Head**

**Alison Clish-Green (Other interests. Re-appointed 2009 - 2012)**

Alison has lived in West Devon for thirty years and combines the roles of supply teaching and Borough Councillor. She is particularly interested in ensuring all user groups have access to the countryside. She is currently a member of the Rural Commission of the Local Government Association, which she chaired from 1997-1999, and has extensive experience of local government. For many years she also chaired the Environment and Health Committee of West Devon Borough Council and was instrumental in establishing Junior Life Skills courses for all year 6 primary school children in the area. She enjoys walking and is a member of a number of environmental bodies including the Dartmoor Preservation Association and the National Trust. In March 2007 she was appointed to REPAC, the Environment Agency's Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee.

**Terry Faulk (Other interests. Re-appointed 2010 - 2011)**

Terry has a particular interest in landscape history, is a member of the British Agricultural History Society and, as well as writing and lecturing on the subject, regularly leads field trips exploring aspects of the countryside in Devon and Cornwall. He is a member of a number of environmental and wildlife organisations and also of the Cornwall Countryside Access Forum. He jointly owns a small woodland nature reserve in Cornwall which has public access.

**Tim Felton (Other interests. Re-appointed 2008 - 2011)**

Tim lectures in law at the University of the West of England and is a barrister in Exeter. He has an academic and practical interest in public rights of way and access issues. He has had farming interests and his leisure pursuits include riding, running and walking. He is a member of the CLA, Tiverton Harriers Athletic Club, Silverton Foxhounds, the Agricultural Law Association and The Academy for Higher Education.

**Peter Grainger (Access user. Re-appointed 2008 - 2011)**

Peter has considerable expertise in cycling and is Devon & Torbay Area Manager for Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, and chairman of the Exeter Cycle Forum. He is involved in the National Cycle Network development in all parts of Devon. As the Sustrans expert on walking routes he has also helped develop the Exeter Green Circle and circular walks in Exmouth. His interests incorporate health, disabled access and low carbon travel.

**Patrick Healy (Other interests. Re-appointed 2009 - 2012)**

Patrick has lived in Devon for over twenty five years and has a particular interest in promoting the needs of people with disabilities. As a wheelchair user for more than thirty years he understands the difficulties all disabled people encounter in gaining access to the built and natural environment. He has experience of working with disabled people, planners, designers and other key people to ensure that the needs of people with mobility problems are given due consideration. He is a founder member of South Hams Access Group and is also a member of the Spinal Injuries Association. He enjoys exploring coastal paths and other routes, where these have been made wheelchair accessible. He believes that his experience will be valuable to the overall aims of the DCAF in making the Devon countryside accessible to a wide range of users.

**Robin Head, Vice-Chairman (Landowner. Re-appointed 2009 - 2012)**

Robin has lived in the area for 29 years and has a small mixed farm, mainly sheep. He provides bed and breakfast with the additional facilities of a farm trail and 'helping' on the farm. He is keen to ensure tourists have a good experience when cycling, walking or riding in Devon and is on the Devon Farms Accommodation Committee as a project officer/PR officer. He also represents Farm Tourism/Farm Stay UK on the SW Chamber of Rural Enterprise and is on the board of the newly formed Devon Destination Management Organisation, Destination Devon. He is a member of the NFU and CLA and has wide knowledge of the farming community and its activities

**Tom Holway (Access user. 2008 - 2011)**

Tom is a recently retired chartered management accountant. He was brought up in Mid Devon and has lived in the South Hams since 1983. He is Chairman of Ugborough Parish Council, has been a parish paths coordinator (P3 co-ordinator) since 1998, and has designed and installed 'dog gates' to most of the stiles in the parish to improve access for dog walkers while maintaining the security of farm animals. He leads a monthly informal walking group using parish paths, an activity enjoyed by a wide age range of local residents and visitors. As well as walking, he enjoys local history, sailing, motor sport and being an active member of a vibrant village community.

**Christine Ingram (Access user. Re-appointed 2008 - 2011)**

A former teacher, Christine is actively involved with the South West Riders and formerly with Crediton & District Bridleways Association. She frequently uses local bridleways and footpaths and has a holiday cottage, let to those who enjoy rural activities. Key interests are raising the profile of equestrians and, in particular, provision of off-road riding opportunities and road safety issues related to public recreational access. Other interests are the development of long-distance bridleways and multi-use of access facilities.

**Rosemary Kimbell (Other interests. 2010 – 2013)**

Rosemary has spent her working life with the NHS and private research organisations as a biochemist, working particularly on cancer treatment, and also as an editor and proof-reader. She previously held the position of chair of the Taunton and Musgrove Patient and Public Involvement Forum, and the London Borough of Sutton's Lay Visitors Scheme, which assessed treatment of people in police custody. She recently obtained a Masters degree in human nutrition and from this perspective is very aware of the need for healthy and active lifestyles. Rosemary is interested in the protection of urban green space and is working with local residents to register a village green. She is a keen walker and cyclist and is a footpath officer and group researcher for the Ramblers and a member of Sustrans and the Open Spaces Society.

**Dr Justin Robbins, Chairman (Access user. 2008 - 2011)**

Justin previously worked as a GP in south Devon and has a professional interest in the relationship between outdoor recreation and health. He is a walker, canoeist and cyclist and pursues these interests actively through work as a Sustrans Ranger and on the Footpaths Subcommittee of his Parish Council. He previously did some work for TROT (Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust). He is a member of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, the Open Spaces Society, Ramblers' Association, British Canoe Union, the Camping and Caravanning Club, Sustrans, CPRE, the Two Moors Way Association and the Yealm Estuary Trail Action Group

**Julie Rudge (Access user. Re-appointed 2009 - 2012)**

Julie is an artist with extensive experience of rights of way and access. She has been P3 (parish paths) coordinator of her local parish since 1992 and also carries out research for the Definitive Map Review. At County level she is Secretary of the Devon Green Lanes Group and Secretary for CPRE (Mid Devon). She is a former representative of the Byways and Bridleways Trust. She enjoys a number of leisure pursuits including walking, cycling, riding and swimming.

**John Skinner (Access user. Re-appointed 2010 - 2013)**

John is an experienced ramble and cyclist and is currently Access Officer for the Devon Area of the Ramblers. For the Ramblers he had extensive involvement with the preparatory work and mapping of access land for the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) in Devon in 2005. He now monitors closure of land under the CRoW Act, and any matters affecting public rights of way. He expects to provide input to the current proposals for the introduction of a coastal corridor and improvements to the coastline. He is Chairman of Dartmoor Rambling Club and a member of the Ramblers, Dartmoor Preservation Association, the Open Spaces Society, the National Trust and the YHA. He has been retired for several years but spent his career with HM Land Registry

**Sarah Slade (Landowner. Re-appointed 2010 - 2013)**

Sarah is a farmer in mid Devon and National Access Adviser for the Country Land and Business Association. She has contact with a variety of rural businesses in a professional capacity and sits on a number of Forums, including the Rights of Way Review Committee and Natural England's Stakeholder Group on Public Rights of Way. She walks and rides and, in managing her own farm unit, balances the needs for land management, agricultural production, wildlife conservation and rights of access.

**County Councillor**

**Councillor Philip Sanders, Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee**

Philip is a County Councillor and Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee. He was born into a Devon farming family and did an agriculture degree at Nottingham. After some time in hotel management he joined the NHS, becoming Trust Board Director, before running his own health care consultancy business

He is a Town Councillor on Tavistock Town Council and a West Devon Borough Councillor, in which capacity he chairs the Planning and Licensing Committee. He was a Secretary of State appointee to Dartmoor National Park from 1998 - 2004 and rejoined the Park as a County Council representative in 2009. He is Chairman of the Dartmoor Trust, a Governor of Tavistock College, and as a voluntary warden with Dartmoor National Park he regularly walks and maintains many paths.

Philip is involved with young people as an assessor for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. He was previously involved with the Dartmoor Rescue Group as a team member, search coordinator and controller and Chairman.

He enjoys the outdoors and recreational activities and has walked, cycled, climbed and caved quite extensively throughout the UK, including walking many long distance paths, and has done a lot of walking in Northern Europe. He is Vice President of Tavistock Rugby Club.