

Recreational Paths Discussion Paper

The North Yorkshire Local Access Forum was asked to review Waymarking policy and practice by the NYCC Countryside Access Service to help guide them on future prioritisation. In that review “official” Recreational Paths as shown on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps came out as the second highest priority after National Trails.

Recreational Paths are routes separately named and shown on the reverse of all the OS Explorer Maps. So, for example on the Ripon and Boroughbridge OS Map 299 there are four Recreational Paths named with routes outlined: Foss Walk; Knaresborough Round; Nidderdale Way; and Ripon Rowel Walk. Anyone who lives in this area, and tourists who visit the area, and buy and use the OS Explorer Map are likely to be attracted to try out and use the Recreational Paths shown, one step down from National Trails. There are likely to be separate guidebooks on sale in local shops and local Tourist Information Centres, or if out of print an Online version that can be used and followed. It seems sensible with their separate promotion and high profile that these Recreational Paths should be treated as the next priority after National Trails to waymark to a high standard. They are the “shop window” for both local people and visitors to the area, and the old adage, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression” is appropriate. It is proposed that these routes should be waymarked to a high and consistent standard. (A member of the group who has walked both the Ripon Rowel Walk and the Foss Walk over the last few years reports that their waymarking is currently rather variable, and this should be a priority to address to bring up to an acceptable high standard.)

In other areas some Recreational Paths have been created by the County Council Countryside or Rights of Way Team, for instance in Northamptonshire the Nene Way, Grafton Way and Knightley Way. In our area some routes including the Foss Walk and Ripon Rowel Walk have been established many years ago by an individual or voluntary group, with a separate printed Walk Guide produced and published. This will originally have been in collaboration and agreement with NYCC Countryside Access Services. It would make sense for CAS to support volunteers to bring waymarking on such paths back up to a high standard, where it has lapsed into poor condition over the intervening years. CAS could also suggest that the original out of print guides are reviewed and updated as there have been various changes over the last 25 years plus to the landscape with features such as new wind turbines and solar panels being created together with new housing and other development added to the landscape. Conversely other features such as large landmark trees that may have been referred to may have disappeared. Important services originally listed in these walk guides may have been reduced or completely disappeared. For example public transport bus routes and operators may have changed, sometimes no longer being available or significantly reduced. Local services like village shops, post offices and pubs may also have closed or operate on reduced days and so no longer be available to walkers.

Where Recreational Paths are 20 plus years old, the original guidebook information will be dated, there may have been official diversions to parts of the route, and development, essential services and available facilities may have changed the landscape and functionality of walking the original route.

Recommendation : Where Recreational Paths as shown on Ordnance Survey Maps are 10 years or more old since original publication and promotion both the supporting literature, typically a

Guidebook, perhaps with a supporting separate map leaflet, should be reviewed and updated, with the mapped route on the ground being amended and reported back to Ordnance Survey, to keep it functional and current, to be useful and relevant to future walkers choosing to follow the route. The signposting and waymarking should be reviewed on the ground and be improved if necessary to maintain a high standard throughout. Typically distinctive unique branded waymarks should be used along the route, to make it easy to follow and stand out from any other rights of way that may cross it.

If the original author or voluntary group are still available, willing and able, they should be asked to carry out a comprehensive update. From experience elsewhere, this maybe a significant task that will take up time, effort and resources but be a worthwhile undertaking. If the originators are no longer available to carry out such a review, other relevant interest groups should be approached, such as Walkers are Welcome or the Ramblers Association or local Rights of Way Volunteer groups.

There are recent good practice examples elsewhere of updating such routes. For example, the “Todmorden Walkers are Welcome” group reviewed the 20 year plus Todmorden Centenary Way. This included revising the text and the route on the ground where necessary, working closely with support from the local Todmorden Town Council, Community Rights of Way Service (CROWS) and the Calderdale Council Countryside Service. Over a three year period a splendidly updated series of weatherproof maps and overarching Todmorden Centenary Way booklet were produced and launched, revitalising this Recreational Path, making it fit for purpose again.

Recommendation: If a previously listed and promoted Recreational Path shown on Ordnance Survey Maps becomes badly out of date, lacking good waymarking and signposting on the ground, if no group can be found to review and update it, then it should be removed from future Ordnance Survey Maps as no longer being available or suitable for promotion.

Appendix Extract from Ordnance Survey website on recreational Routes

Recreational route



These are routes created by local authorities, Government agencies or volunteer organisations. They mainly follow existing rights of way and are signposted typically by whichever organisation created the route. If the route is also an existing right of way, it will be maintained by a local authority. Any sections that are not part of existing rights of way may be maintained by the

corresponding organisation. Local authorities give us permission to show these routes, but they may not actively promote the routes or give them priority over other rights of way.

Recreational routes are shown on both OS map series with diamonds (green on 1:25000, pink on 1:50000). Note 1:50000 only shows those that are over 40km in length.