

REDSPEARLANDS FOOTPATH GROUP

Dalston Rights of Way Survey 2005 General Observations and Recommendations

Access

Observations

Access to and/or egress from BW114036 was found to be completely impossible. This bridleway commences/ends at Roewath Bridge (NY389447) on the unclassified road from Stockdalewath to High Bridge. Access for the rider involves descending a river bank, fording the river (Roe) and ascending the opposite bank. The construction of an equestrian ramp via the roadside verge on the eastern side of the Roe was costed and approved following the 1994 Parish Paths Partnership (PPP) survey. Seemingly the work was not implemented before or during the 1998 phased improvement programme on account of an objection by a local resident disputing the authenticity of the BW line as depicted on the DM. The resident subsequently applied to Cumbria C.C. for a modification order routing the BW over a private bridge at Roewath, claiming this to be the authentic RoW. The application was rejected.

Recommendations

Riders and walkers have been denied access to the attractive network of bridleways and footpaths west of the Roe for far too long. Pressure for access to the BW has been applied to Cumbria C.C. by Cumbria BHS, RFG and others, all to no effect. A Rights of Way Suggestion for Action (ROWIP) application has now been made for- 1: The provision of proper access to the RoW. 2: The erection of a direction sign at Roewath Bridge on the unclassified road. 3: Selective positioning of BW waymarks along the route. (The existing waymarks are of the Yellow (footpath) pattern).

Dead End

Observations

That there are any dead ends at all suggests that something very odd went on when the original Definitive Map was drawn up by the Parish Council in 1952-53. Two ROWIP applications have been made in respect of those Dead Ends inspected during the RoW survey.

Recommendations

1: That FP114032 from Rose Bridge (NY375459) to the rear of Haythwaite House (NY305454) is extended to Haythwaite Lane, an unclassified road. 2: That FP114030, at present starting beyond Hudbeck Farm (NY372435) and finishing short of Birks Hill (NY375431) is extended at both ends as far as the unclassified roads. FP114039 runs north-easterly from the junction with BW114035 and FP114038 (NY381445), then across fields to meet an occupation lonning (NY385446) coming from Stockdale-wath (Wythmoor Farm) via a free-range egg facility and fields. This farming operation has need of strict bio-security measures therefore a ROWIP application for an extension along the occupation lonning would be inappropriate. (But see Redundant RoW below)

Definitive Map, The

Observations

Extremely out of date and inaccurate for the purposes of property searches, investigation, planning or surveying.

Recommendations

Thoroughly revise and update the Definitive Map (DM) to include changes implemented under the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. To issue printed or CD reference copies to all public libraries, parish

councils and public record offices. Make DM accessible online, with a PDF option available by subscription. Update online DM as changes occur and issue CD and print updates at regular intervals.

Field gate, The Observations

RoW invariably have gates and farmers as well as walkers and riders have to use them. Farmers, one assumes, would prefer gates that are convenient to use. Not so! Farmers appear to prefer gates that are fastened with baler twine - the so-called 'Cumberland hinge' - requiring the knotsmanship of a deck-hand to undo. Occasionally an entire gate will be held together with baler twine, resembling a collapsible fence rather than a gate. Troublesome as this is for the farmer it is worse for the horse-rider. Immobile or seized gates are the reason why no bridleway within the Parish can be ridden from end to end.

Recommendations

Various designs for rider-friendly field gate latches have been produced. This involves adapting the gate's spring-assisted latch bolt so it connects to a vertical arm. The mounted rider grasps the handle and pulls it back, so drawing the bolt from its location and allowing the gate to swing open. This type of gate latch is in use on the permissive bridleways at Blackhall Wood (NY394512) where they are popular with riders and trouble-free for the landowner. Our recommendation is for all field gates across Dalston's bridleways to be progressively modified with this type of latch. Alternatively, for an appropriate authority to request farmers to ensure that gates across bridleways are fit for purpose and, when closed, are capable of trouble-free operation by a dismounted rider of either sex and average strength.

Furniture

Observations

ECCP is responsible for installing and maintaining gates (wicket and kissing), stiles (ladder and step-over), bridges (sleeper and single-span), direction signs (fingerposts) and waymarks across the RoW network. Their installation and maintenance work is of a very high standard. ECCP have been advised of damaged furniture observed during the course of the survey.

Recommendation

Keep them happy; ECCP is an invaluable resource!

Mud

Observations

Far from being the 'glorious' object of the song, most RoW users would agree that mud is the curse of the countryside. But all of us make mud; walkers, riders of horses and pedal cycles, cattle and farm equipment alike, produce this product which at times can make a public path resemble a WW1 battlefield

Observations

And just as battlefield commanders had to find a way of overcoming mud, so too must those who maintain the RoW network. Unfortunately, the only recommendation we can make at this stage is to research the problem. Our colleagues at Ivegill Footpath Group have a landowner member (must be a first!) who has laid duckboards across a particularly bad muddy stretch on his land, and we have heard of a product made of recycled tyres which farmers can put down where cows are channelled into single file. We and ECCP will attempt to find out more and, if funds can be found, carry out some trials.

Obstruction

Observations

Serious obstructions were few and mainly caused by after-storm tree debris. Two instances of what appeared to be deliberate or wilful obstruction by lengths of tree trunk have been passed to East Cumbria Countryside Project (ECCP) for investigation and removal. 1: FP114043. The worst case of obstruction encountered. A section of the RoW lying between the sawmill at Rose Bank (NY367463) and Rose Castle Farm (NY370464) where an estimated 50m stretch of the track is obstructed by dense over- and undergrowth. It is presumed the cessation of agricultural use caused the track to be abandoned to nature. The remainder of the track ascending towards the sawmill is clear of undergrowth. Two crossways fences with stiles and waymarks are in good condition. 2: BW114036. Considerable flood debris on the west bank of the River Roe opposite Roewath Bridge (NY388447) will affect this RoW once the equestrian access ramp becomes active.

Recommendation

FP114043. Suggest ECCP inspect the obstruction and discuss the matter of clearance with Smiths Gore, Rose Castle's Land Agent. BW114036. ECCP to inspect and make note of the flood debris obstruction.

Redundant RoW, The

Observations

Three potentially redundant paths were noted in the survey. 1: FP114048 running from the Carlisle road (NY373510) across a field to the railway (NY374511), a 90m length of now pointless RoW. 2: FP114053 running from Low Brow Nelson (NY387524) to the Dalston/Cummersdale parish boundary (NY386522). This path cannot be reached from the Dalston-Carlisle road, neither can it be accessed from the Cummersdale end (FP111005) as a householder has planted a garden over the path (and been allowed to get away with it!!) 3: FP114039 noted earlier in the Dead Ends section. This path is potentially redundant unless a ROWIP application is made to extend it to Stockdalewath via a path (shown as a black pecked line on the Explorer OL5 map) running north-easterly from the occupation lonning (NY385446) across fields to an access lonning (NY387448) servicing a cluster of houses.

Recommendations

1: For FPs 114048 and 1140053/111039 to be considered for extinguishment, possibly using these as trade-ins for upgrades or new paths elsewhere in the parish. 2: FP114039. Rather than offering this path for extinguishment, for the Parish Council to consider filing a ROWIP Suggestion for Action for an extension to Stockdalewath, as above.

Reinstatement

Observations

No land with a RoW covered by the survey complied with the following regulations: "If a public path runs along the edge of a field, it must not be ploughed or otherwise disturbed; a public path across a field can be ploughed or disturbed to cultivate a crop, but the surface must be quickly restored and the line of the path made apparent on the ground." Note: 'Crop' does not apply to grass crops of the type grown for haymaking or silage. The minimum width of a cross-field footpath is 1m; a field edge path, 1.5m. The minimum width of a cross-field bridleway is 2.0m; a field edge one, 3.0m.

Recommendation

Whereas localities with significant walker or rider throughput are generally careful to comply with these regulations, Dalston's farmers are not (so far) exposed to the same amount of leisure traffic. At a time of increasing public appreciation of the value of RoW, there is clearly a requirement for an authority (ECCP? Highways?) to contact occupiers of land with RoW to remind them of their compliance obligations.

Signposting

Observations

RoW signposting around the Parish is generally good. Wooden fingerposts blending harmoniously with the natural surroundings were found to be accurate and informative. Some are obscured by overgrowth which requires clearing. The other type of sign employed consists of a metal direction post and arm, with destination and distance information applied in white adhesive characters on a green background. In most instances these signs have corroded posts and peeling or missing characters giving little or no information and making an altogether shoddy and third-rate impression.

Recommendations

Replace all sub-standard direction posts with wooden fingerposts, or renovate them to the specified standard. RFG to clear away overgrowth where noted by the survey. Erect fingerposts at known locations where signing is required.

Vandalism

Observations

Thankfully rare but unfortunately likely to increase with the improvement of RoW close to population centres. Most of what was encountered consisted of prised off waymarks, broken in half in the process. We observed no instances of finger or direction posts being tampered with, although it is possible that RoW without a post at one or other end may have had it deliberately pulled down.

Recommendations

Hertfordshire Countryside Management has thwarted the vandal by routing out their waymark posts so the waymark disc is a tight fit, flush with the surface of the post. Not recommended is Hampshire's use of Philips screws as this doesn't prevent the vandal's jemmy from digging in behind the waymark, snapping it in two by leverage.

Waymarking

Observations

Whilst agreeing that visual clutter needs to be kept to a minimum, users of RoW, particularly first-timers, need to be assured that they are on the right track. Problems arise if the next waymark is across a wide pasture or meadow and cannot be identified from a distance. Sometimes the presence of a field gate will give a clue to the route, but this can equally mislead. Stiles or other furniture clues are often invisible due to shade or under- and overgrowth.

Recommendations

Experiment with 'sighting poles' for long-distance waymarking. These need not be intrusive if made from lengths of larch tipped with a high-visibility yellow patch. Use large waymarks where lesser distances cause navigation problems.