

Restoring the Record



On 1st January 2026 – not 10 years away – it will no longer be possible to use documentary evidence to claim ‘lost ways’. Any path, track, alleyway, bridleway, cut-through, etc. not registered on the definitive map could be in danger of being lost forever. Even old and still well-used, but officially *unrecorded*, paths and tracks may at risk. The ancient maxim on which many past claimants have relied: ‘*once a highways always a highway*’ will be history.

What does that actually mean to those of us who walk, cycle or horse ride along our local public footpaths and bridleways? Simply...if it isn’t registered, an owner could put a gate or fence across it and prohibit all entry to the public – quite legally – and think how that could hinder our access to the countryside. Here are just a few questions worth considering.

Just in your parish:

- Are there old lanes not currently used, but could potentially be useful in the future;
- Do you remember a route you walked as a child that is not currently accessible;
- Why does that footpath or bridleway suddenly end at the parish or county boundary or why does that bridleway suddenly end and become a footpath;
- Are all public footpaths and bridleways accurately mapped by the Ordnance Survey;
- Do routes you use join the metalled highway or is there a strip of gravel not marked as a footpath or bridleway on the map;
- Is that track or hollow way you use through your local wood actually a definitive path?

After 2026 historic map and documentary evidence will be inadmissible to claim ‘lost’ or existing routes not on the definitive map (though it will be possible to claim paths on the basis of 20 years, unopposed, use).

The basic message is starkly simple – the risk is that we take our access to the countryside for granted; we use routes for recreation and as a means of linking places together; but if we don't check what we already have, or what has been used in the past, we could lose it. If we don't research what we use now and have done in the past, we may never get another chance to register it in future.

Do you have any old maps, letters, books or photos which show that paths once existed? They could be very important – verbal memories also often provide worthwhile clues!

Fortunately, the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum, Open Spaces Society, the Ramblers and British Horse Society, among others, and our parish council are taking an initiative to do what they can for the benefit of local parishes and our neighbours to secure unrecorded paths for future generations to enjoy. Will you help us, please?

We may need people to check maps, walk paths, do research and get new links approved – this is both a countywide and countrywide initiative.

If you are interested and are prepared to help, contact Ross Osborn (rossosborn41@gmail.com) who can either put you in contact with your local volunteer, or will send you all the information you need to know to start out on this potentially fascinating detective hunt.