

RESTORING THE RECORD or “FINDING THE MISSING LINKS”

On 1st January 2026, it will no longer be possible to use historic map and documentary evidence to claim 'lost ways'. Any path, track, alleyway, bridleway, cut-through etc. not registered on the Definitive Map – or submitted for registration - could well be in danger of being lost. Even old and still well-used, but officially unrecorded, routes may be at risk.

What does this actually mean to those who walk, cycle or horse ride along our public foot-paths and bridleways? The basic message is stark – we take our access to the countryside for granted; we use routes for recreation and as a means of linking places together without thinking but, if we don't check what we already have or what has been used in the past and that it is legally recorded, we could lose them forever. The ancient maxim on which many claimants have relied, in the past: “*once a highway always a highway*” will be history.

Simply put, a small strip of land between a highway and the start of a definitive path might be unregistered. After 2026, a landowner could put a gate or fence across it and restrict all entry to the public – quite legally – thus permanently hindering access to the countryside because we have assumed, but not checked, that the Definitive Map is up-to-date and accurate. It will not be just our generation which will suffer but those who follow after us and is that the legacy we wish to leave them? It is worth the risk?

The 'Restoring the Records' project is two-pronged with something for everyone; volunteers are needed to check maps, walk paths to ensure the correct signs are in place, do research, interview local people about their memories and get new links approved - to list just a few activities and it is local knowledge that will be the key.

The plan is to recruit a volunteer [s] in every Buckinghamshire Parish and Town Council to spread the load and speed up the exercise – 10 years passes far quicker than you might think! No previous knowledge or training is needed; the Project Team is preparing a simple step-by-step guide which will answer most of the more common questions and will supply a map of your local area showing the rights of way.

If you are interested in becoming involved in this fascinating and very important treasure hunt, please contact Ross Osborn, the Project's Volunteer Co-ordinator, on rossosborn41@gmail.com who will be happy to answer any questions and arrange for all necessary information and maps to be sent to you.