Access Team

Newsletter - May 2026

Hampshire County Council

Countryside

Welcome to the Access Team May Newsletter

May has arrived, bringing with it the sights and sounds of nature at its best. Lighter evenings, warmer weather and a real sense of renewal. Trees are in leaf, wildflowers are beginning to show, and birdsong fills the longer days.

With nature in full swing and summer just around the corner, this month brings new opportunities, renewed motivation and plenty of reasons to get involved.

So step outside and explore the RoW network, while also getting out and about in the community.

Happy reading

Drum roll please! Last month, the number of hours logged by Access team volunteers was...

611!

Thank you so much to all volunteers who help us keep the Rights of Way network open and accessible - we couldn't do it without you!

5 Ways Better than Before

Over the past few years, contractors, rangers and volunteers have improved the popular “5 ways” BOAT network in East Meon.

A phased programme of resurfacing works, which started in 2019, has strengthened all five routes and reduced the need for winter restrictions.

The network is now open year-round! providing safer, more resilient off-road access between East Meon, Ramsdean and the surrounding area.

READ MORE ON PAGE 14 !

Access Team Highlights
North West
Ecchinswell Footpath 15A Ditch crossing

This task was carried out over two productive days, with fantastic support from our volunteers throughout. On Monday, a small but dedicated team of five volunteers came together to carry in all the materials needed for the new ditch crossing. Despite the physical effort involved, spirits were high as the materials were successfully transported to the site, setting everything up perfectly for the main installation later in the week.

On Wednesday, the work continued with four of our regular volunteers returning to site to complete the project. Together, we installed a beautiful new ditch crossing on Ecchinswell Footpath 15a. The team worked efficiently and with great teamwork, even finding themselves under the watchful eye of a friendly bumblebee who seemed keen to supervise our progress!

The work was not without its challenges. Stubborn tree roots put up a strong fight, but thanks to the determination, skill and good humour of the volunteers, they were soon overcome. After a well-earned lunch break, the team returned refreshed and ready to finish the job.

Access Team Highlights

North West

Ecchinswell Footpath 15A Ditch Crossing Continued

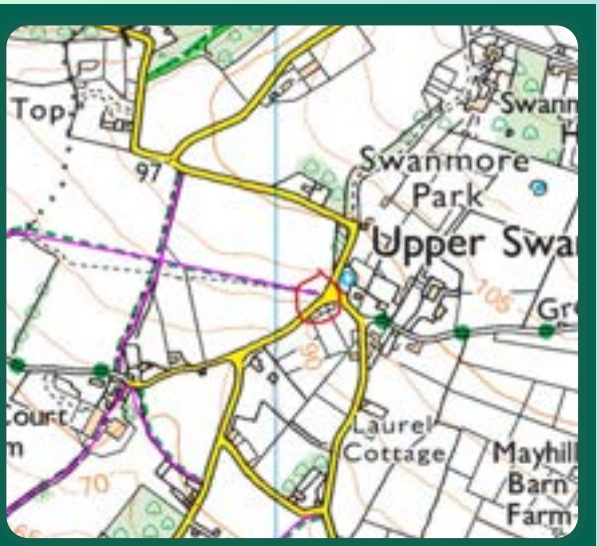
To complete the final stages, help was called in to deal with the old sleepers from the previous crossing. These were extremely heavy and clearly not ready to give up easily. With the trusty reciprocating saw brought along, the sleepers were cut in half and safely removed, allowing the area to be finished off properly.

The end result is a robust, attractive new ditch crossing that will greatly improve access along the footpath.

A huge thank you goes out to everyone involved for their hard work, perseverance and positive attitude. Another great example of what can be achieved through teamwork and community effort.

Access Team Highlights
South West

Swanmore and Beyond



In early April CER Kate was joined by trusty volunteer Trevor to repair some steps in Swanmore.

These steps had been a bit of a head scratcher for a while, due to their proximity to the road and the “interesting” stile that had been repaired at the top of the steps.

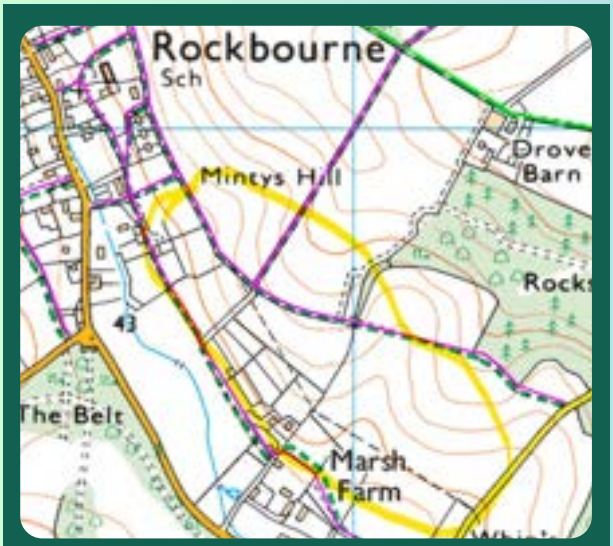
However, between them Kate and Trevor worked out a solution and went prepared with traffic cones, work signs and a couple of trugs of aggregate to solve the problem. Traffic is light along this stretch, we saw more cyclists that we did cars, but we were cautious as it’s a narrow road and car drivers wouldn’t be looking out for people digging steps on the roadside!

We replaced one missing step and removed and replaced another to even out the step up and compacted the area with aggregate so people using the stile had less of a drop to the first step. Having finished fairly quickly we headed off to look at fallen trees, replaced a finger on a finger post, installed a waymarker post and resurrected another finger post on a grassy verge.

A successful day all in all and lots of compliments from those using the paths, especially the steps!

Access Team Highlights
South West

Access improvements in Rockbourne



Nestled in the village of Rockbourne, Ladybird Farm is made up of grassy paddocks alongside the farms market garden.

Last year the owner of Ladybird Farm Hannah got in touch with us for some advice about removing stiles to improve access to the site.We were more than happy to help, and when Kate visited the farm in March this year, all the stiles had been replaced with gates.

Ladybird Farm hosts a pop-up campsite in the summer months and is in the process of setting up its market garden so they can provide locals with veg boxes and flowers. The access improvements will not only improve things for farm staff, visitors and campers, but the network of paths across the farm are all Public Rights of Way and I'm told there is a popular pub enroute!

The farm hosts several habitats including a wildflower meadow, orchard, hedgerows and copses as well as chalk downland. There were lambs bouncing around the grazing fields when I visited, it's such a beautiful area and lovely to see this patch being managed with consideration for its surroundings and potential benefits for conservation.

Access Team Highlights
South East

Non-Stop Improvements in Hawkley!

Over the last few months, the footpath network in Hawkley has received multiple improvements thanks to the hard work of The Hampshire Monday Group (HMG), task day volunteers and the Access team.

On the map below you'll see a pink line, showing where HMG replaced two ditch crossings with new wider and safer structures in February – both on the same day!

The green dot indicates where we had an industrious South East Access team day. We replaced two stiles and a rotten ditch crossing with kissing gates and a wider crossing. It was a long day but a great exercise in working together!

Finally, the red dot shows the new kissing gate volunteers installed as part of a task day to replace a stile last month. A special thanks is needed for these volunteers due to their incredible patience and problem-solving skills! As a reward, they also had the best weather for the day

All these works were funded through a South Downs National Park improvement programme and couldn't have been completed without everyone's enthusiasm and hard work. The landowner was also an integral part of the works, as they helped with parking, access and transporting materials to site on multiple occasions. What a team effort!

Access Team Highlights
South East
Footpath Haircut on Hayling Island

We had some new faces out on a vegetation cut back task day last month! Out of the 4 volunteers who signed up, only 1 had ever come out on a South East task day before. It was wonderful to meet some new faces and show people how rewarding and fun our group volunteer days are
.

Footpath 81a on Hayling Island needed a good trim before the summer growth made it completely impassable. We divided to conquer either end of the footpath: at the eastern end was brambles and dried out cover crop, the western end was an obstacle course avoiding bluebells while tackling the overgrown woody vegetation from neighbouring hedges.

As you can see from the pictures, we made neat work of the obstructions! The route is now much more inviting for walkers to use as a connection from Northney to the Billy Trail. We were spoilt with views across the harbour for lunch, and a food truck too! What a treat!

Access Team Highlights
North East

The Reign of Repairing Ramblers In Rotherwick

This month, CER Andy saw first-hand the sheer power and devout passion the North East Hants Ramblers have for protecting and maintaining their Rights of Way network.

As our eyes on the ground, ramblers' groups are an immense asset to the team here at Hampshire County Council. They regularly spot and report issues, often long before these develop into safety concerns.

But their efforts do not stop there.

In the parish of Rotherwick, along Footpath 16, Andy joined the North East Hants Ramblers to complete not one, but two jobs they had raised,both in a single day.

The first task involved removing a rotting ditch crossing and replacing it with a new, larger structure. The second was the installation of additional steps leading up to a separate bridge along Footpath 31.

The day was a huge success. Everyone was kept busy, working collaboratively and listening to one another to overcome the installation challenges that the ground conditions continually presented.

Finishing with plenty of time to spare, it was a real pleasure to work with the North East Hants "Rambo" Ramblers.

Access Team Highlights
North East

The Buddleia Bushcutter Trial

I'm a Volunteer GET ME OUT OF HERE! Starting this bird nesting season with the first bushcutter trial located in the parish of Micheldever on footpath 23a.

Taking a gentle, wildlife-friendly approach, armed only with hand tools, the north east volunteers joined CER Andy on this wildly overgrown task.

Consisting mostly of Buddleia, an incredibly fast-growing shrub that can add up to 1 inch or more in height per day, the team cut their way through this hellish half km of hay fever.

With the work site hemmed in by a sheer drop to a busy railway line on one side and an active HCC asphalt depot on the other, not to mention the heat and high pollen count, the team made determined and impressive progress throughout the day.

After a very dusty shift, we finally reached the end of the vegetation and were rewarded with a well-deserved cup of tea and some Tesco's finest biscuits.

A huge pat on the back (and a long shower!) goes to the six volunteers who took part in this bushcutter trial.

Thank You!

Other News From Across the County

Alton Walking Festival

Alton Walking Festival, now in its 14th year, is a truly friendly walking event, ideal for enthusiastic walkers, relaxed wanderers and curious explorers of all ages.

The festival is the ideal opportunity for the local community and visitors from further afield to meet like-minded people, explore the town and its surrounding villages and discover the superb Hampshire countryside with its abundance of wildlife and rich cultural heritage. You'll be spoilt for choice!

NEW FOR 2026

ACCESSIBLE WALKS

One of the highlights this year is a strong focus on accessible walking. The programme includes:

- Shorter, slower-paced walks.
- Family friendly routes.
- Routes suitable for wheelchair users, mobility scooters and those with limited mobility.

These walks are designed to ensure everyone can experience the beauty of Alton and its surroundings, making the festival truly inclusive.

FAMILY WALKS - HALF TERM

A five-day programme of family walks taking place during the May half term. Designed to bring fun and adventure to younger walkers, these events will include a free train trip, lively storytelling sessions with Pumpkin Pantos, a family-friendly ghost walk, and hands-on crafty activities with Alton Arts Festival. It's a great chance for families to enjoy time outdoors together while discovering local stories and hidden gems.

GRADE

Please check the grade of the walk (Slow, Moderate or Brisk) to make sure that the speed of the walk is suitable for you before booking:

- SLOW WALKS 2 miles per hour or less
- MODERATE 2.5 to 3 miles per hour
- BRISK 3+ miles per hour

Walk Alton have partnered with local independent businesses to offer Festival walkers discounts at local shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs

If you'd like to know more about The Alton Walk Festival please use this link:
Walk Alton Festival

or check out their other walks which are added monthly!
Walking Routes

Other News From Across the County

5 Ways Better Than Before

Over the last few years, contractors, rangers and volunteers have all played an important role in carrying out a wide range of improvement and maintenance works across a network of BOATs in East Meon, known locally as “5-ways”. These routes form a well-used and valued part of the local rights of way network, providing important off-road links and contributing to wider countryside access in the area.

The five routes together make up more than 3.5 km of countryside access and see regular use throughout the year. As is often the case with popular routes, this level of use can lead to quicker deterioration of the surface, particularly during wetter winter months. In the past, this meant that short-term seasonal restrictions were sometimes necessary to prevent further damage and allow the routes time to recover.

Thanks to a phased programme supported by capital funding, we have been able to deliver sustainable improvements across the network. Back in 2019, resurfacing works were completed on East Meon 46/1 and East Meon 48/1, marking the start of longer-term investment in the network. This was followed in 2023 by improvement works on East Meon 47/1 and the nearby East Meon 49/1, helping to strengthen key sections of the routes and improve resilience during wet conditions.

Most recently, and completing the programme, surfacing works have been finished on East Meon 45/1 and 46/2. These final improvements mean that the whole 5-ways network is now open and usable year-round, reducing the need for future winter restrictions and providing a safer and more accessible experience for users.

With all works complete, the network now offers high-quality off-road routes for people travelling between Ramsdean, East Meon and the surrounding area, while helping to protect the condition of the routes for years to come. The contribution of volunteers carrying out surveys and vegetation clearance, alongside rangers and contractors undertaking surfacing and drainage works, has been vital in delivering improvements that help keep the network in good condition.

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Thank you for your continued support