Access Team
newsletter - April 2026

Hampshire County Council
Countryside

Welcome to the Access Team April Newsletter

SPRING! has sprung and as the days have been growing longer blossom is brightening the countryside and the lambs are appearing in the fields. Hopefully the Easter Bunny will also be popping in over the weekend.

This Month's newsletter introduces a new Ramblers Group in Southampton, Alison Perry Project Manager for the King Charles III England Coast Path, shares some of her favourite places along the route which was officially opened by The King this month.

Happy reading!

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

625!

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!

King Charles III England Coast Path Receives Royal Seal of Approval

The King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIIECP) was officially opened by His Majesty The King.

His Majesty visited Seven Sisters Country Park—now also designated a National Nature Reserve—in East Sussex to inaugurate the new National Trail. Here in Hampshire, we hosted the BBC, The Telegraph and the Ramblers for a series of press events, showcasing the fantastic work that has gone into opening the route. There may even be more to come... so watch (and listen) to this space!

At 2,689 miles, the KCIIIECP is now the longest managed coastal walking route in the world. We're proud to have worked closely with Natural England and our local authority partners to open the Hampshire section, which spans 90 miles of beautiful and varied coastline.

Thanks to KCIIIECP funding, several long-standing and complex rights of way issues have been resolved, enabling the creation of accessible new routes along the coast.

King Charles III England Coast Path Cont..

Trail Highlights – Alison's Top Picks

Alison, Project Manager for the KCIIIECP in Hampshire, shares some of her favourite places along the route:

Best Place at High Tide
Southmoor Nature Reserve – at spring tide, the new boardwalks create the sensation of walking on water.

Best Place for Birdwatching
The Oysterbeds on Hayling Island (or Farlington Marshes).

Best Place for a Coffee
Driftwood in Emsworth, or Bronte's at the northern Hayling Billy car park.

Best Place for a Short Walk
Nore Barn Woods, Emsworth.

Best Section for a Longer Walk
Hamble Common (Hamble-le-Rice) to Titchfield Haven – a wonderfully varied stretch featuring beaches, cliffs, rivers and even a ferry ride.

Best Beach
Brownwich Beach – accessible only on foot or by bicycle – or Gunner Point (Hayling Island) at low tide.

Best Place for a Dog Walk
Portchester Castle.

Best Place to Experience the Elements
Sinah Common or Sandy Point on Hayling Island.

Looking Ahead
The New Forest section of the trail is not yet open, but we're hopeful this will be completed later this year.
For updates and further information on the KCIIIECP, please visit:

https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryside/walking/england-coastal-path

Access Team Highlights
North West
Vegetation Cut Monxton BOAT 11

At the end of February - despite some pessimism from the volunteers who advised bringing waterproofs - it turned out to be the hottest day of the year so far for my first solo volunteer task. I had promised sunshine, and thankfully it arrived!

Myself and five volunteers set out to give this BOAT a good haircut before the start of bird-nesting season.

Two volunteers worked along the top of the path using the hedgecutter and brushcutter, while myself and the other three volunteers worked with hand tools. Together, we removed two substantial sections of hedge to really open up the BOAT.

We enjoyed lunch in the sunshine with the sun on our faces and a chocolate biscuit in hand. I've noted for next time that I need to double-check the number of cups I pack - and to remember a rake and a pitchfork!

Access Team Highlights South West

Battling with the brambles on the Itchen Navigation

At the end of February, CER Kate arranged a joint volunteering task with volunteers from The Confraternity of St James (CSJ) and South West access volunteers. A small but mighty group, armed with power tools we made a significant dent in the brambles that were taking over the path south of The Hub at Eastleigh.

This path is part of the St James' Way, a modern-day Camino in the South of England, approximately 68.5 miles in length from Reading to Southampton. The route was devised by members of the CSJ to follow a probable route taken by medieval pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela from Reading Abbey.

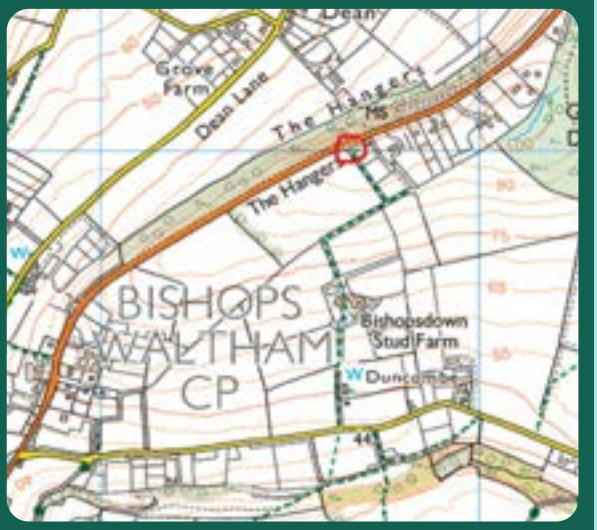
It was a bit of a rush to get this work done before the bird nesting season, and there is still plenty we can cut back so we plan to return in the Autumn. The CSJ volunteers have very kindly offered to try and keep on top of the new growth during the spring and summer which will be a great help,it's a very popular route!

The water was very high when we were on site, meaning we had to be extra careful as parts of the path were waterlogged. As you all know, its been an exceptionally wet winter but hopefully the river will start to subside in the next few months, and the route will be a lot dryer and easier for people to enjoy.

If you'd like more information about the St James Way please take a look at their website: www.csj.org.uk

Access Team Highlights
South West

Step improvement at the Hangers



In early March the volunteers took on a job in Bishops Waltham that CER Kate had suggested was “just a small job, probably take a couple of hours”

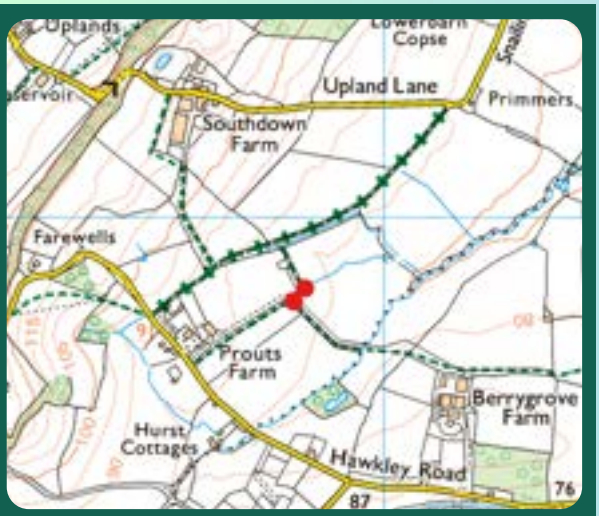
However, the volunteers went above and beyond and what started off as a 3m handrail installation, turned into re setting most of the very heavy concrete steps and installing 2 handrails!

The steps were cleared of vegetation and a new step installed at the bend at the top to level out the slope. The original steps were re set so they no longer sloped themselves, and the hand rails provided the finishing touches making the steps a lot more inviting.

We also made use of our new Volunteers at Work sign for the first time.

Access Team Highlights
South East

Ditch Crossing Success for Independent Groups



You may have noticed that the South East team have ditch crossing replacements coming out of our ears! Thanks to funding from the South Downs National Park Authority, we have been busy making improvements to the footpath network in Selborne, Binsted, Hawkley and Stroud.

As always, we couldn't do this without the help of volunteers – whether that's on task days or as independent groups.

Over the last few weeks, the Hampshire Monday Group (HMG) and Alton Ramblers have been instrumental in our deadline to get 13 ditch crossings replaced before the end of March. Both groups tackled two ditch crossings in one day; HMG on footpath 23 in Hawkley, and Alton Ramblers on footpaths 29 and 41 in Selborne.

Having experienced and proactive groups like these who can help with the team's workload are invaluable – thank you so much to everyone who participated! Another thanks is deserved to the landowners who made everyone's lives easier with access to site. It's definitely a group effort!

Access Team Highlights
South East
Coppicing Day at Crab Wood Nature Reserve

Last month, the South East Access volunteers had the chance to be involved in something a little bit different. Thanks to HCC's Central Sites team, who look after a variety of nature reserves in the county, we were able to visit Crab Wood Local Nature Reserve near Winchester and coppice some hazel from their ancient woodland.

Crab Wood has an extensive management plan, which includes rotational coppicing throughout the woodland to encourage a variety of habitats and the species they support. Coppicing hazel is an important part of that, and it's a big job! It's a shame for the harvested hazel to be wasted, and so the Central Sites team were more than happy for us to use the coppicing to make faggots for an upcoming revetment project.

Thanks to Site's ranger Mike, we worked in a beautiful ancient woodland for the day, were taught how to create the hazel faggots properly and learnt a lot about the overall management of the woodland. Thank you to the volunteers who came along and helped out – we managed to create 12 bundles which are invaluable for our work on the river Itchen soon!

The Sites team will start coppicing again in September, and following on from the success of the volunteer day we will probably organise a few more sessions next winter – keep an eye out if you'd like to join!

Access Team Highlights
North East

Crookham's Crooked Step

This particular section of Footpath 14 in the parish of Crookham Village is well known for becoming extremely muddy, often clinging stubbornly to your boots.

The ground here is so soft that, no matter how many times the step-up approach is repaired, it eventually sinks again, leaving behind a slippery, sloping surface. Hardly ideal footing when stepping off a high bridge.

This month, CER Andy was joined by a team of volunteers to install and improve the approach, creating a safer and more permanent solution to this troublesome slope.

After a day of overcoming several practical challenges, we successfully installed a larger platform supported by much longer stilts, driven far deeper into the ground to provide a more stable base. Unlike the previous step, this new platform is freestanding and detached from the bridge, preventing the fixed end from gradually creating a slope over time.
Fortunately, the weather held out, and the group enjoyed an extremely productive and mentally satisfying day.

A huge thank you to the volunteers who came along and helped construct this much-needed improvement.

Access Team Highlights
North East

Ditch crossing development in Monk Sherborne

The weather this month has been all over the place. The meteorological equivalent of rummaging through a wardrobe of seasons and trying each one on for fun.

Yet, through a sheer stroke of luck, the volunteers joined CER Andy on Footpath 11 in Monk Sherborne on a particularly lovely morning.

The plan was to safely remove and replace a 10-foot ditch crossing before the day decided to change its mind.

Whether it was the Weetabix, good timing, or everyone keeping a very close eye on the approaching weather front, the team of well-seasoned volunteers worked with impressive speed.

By 13:00 they had completely removed the old bridge, installed the new one, and packed the remains neatly onto the trailer.
And just in time, too! as if offended by our efficiency, the famously fickle skies promptly switched to hail, sleet, rain and sunshine, all in quick succession.

Other News From Across the County

Connect and Learn

At the beginning of March CER Kate joined the “Connect and Learn” event at Foxlease in Lyndhurst, New Forest.

The event was hosted by the New Forest National Park Authority and was attended by volunteer providers of both green and blue social prescribing, and NHS professionals.
Simply put, those of us that provide volunteering opportunities out and about in the countryside are green prescribers and those providing volunteering opportunities in the water are blue prescribers

New Forest National Park Authority manage The Green Hub on behalf of organisations and groups, collectively known as the Green Health Network. The hub is a digital directory connecting people to nature-based wellbeing activities in the New Forest.

It was an interesting day, meeting other volunteer providers as well as NHS professionals. The workshops enabled us to share experiences, tips, what works and what doesn’t, and come up with ideas to improve accessibility to the opportunities.

The main focus was to look at how we could work together better, to bridge the gap between the referrer (NHS) and the provider (us) to ensure those who could really benefit from being outdoors don’t miss the opportunities on offer.

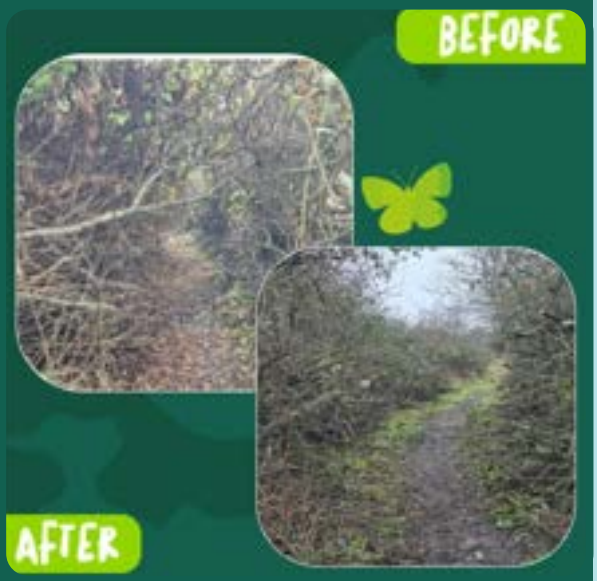
The New Forest NPA’s Partnership Plan 2022-2027 seeks to develop a ‘Natural Health Service’ through partnerships between the health and environmental sectors.
There is lots of evidence of the health benefits of being outdoors, with in turn could ease the pressure on our health services and help to tack health inequalities.

If you’d like to know more about The Green Hub please use this link:
Home - Green Health Hub

www.greenhealthhub.org.uk

Other News From Across the County

Southampton Ramblers Group



The newly formed Southampton Ramblers group has successfully completed their first practical task following their Path Warden training.

During a recent footpath survey, Footpath 8 in Fawley was found to be completely impassable.
Mark already a keen volunteer and Rambler got in touch with Kate for advice on assembling a practical task team. With her guidance, Mark enlisted six Southampton Ramblers to complete Path Warden training before heading out on a dry February day to tackle their first-ever vegetation clearance event.

The group did a fantastic job restoring access to the route—just look at those before and after photos!

Your CER Team

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Thank you for your continued support