Path Watcher's Scheme
Exmoor National Park Authority

Interview with: ENPA Rights Of Way Support Officer

Name of the project: Path Watcher Scheme

Location: Within Exmoor National Park

By who: Exmoor National Park Authority Rangers

How: funded through the Rights of Way maintenance budget and through in-house volunteer training by the Rangers. The Get Involved Scheme has funded some of the meetings.

Aims: To maintain the high standard of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in Exmoor National Park.

How long has the project been running for and has it changed over time?
The project has been running since 2008. The popularity of the scheme has grown over the years and we have a fantastic group of twelve dedicated volunteers.

Mains considerations:
- It is important that the Path Watcher volunteers can decide which issues should be reported to the Ranger service e.g. reporting a broken gate on a PRoW
- Ranger service can respond to the actions arising from volunteer path reports within a timely manner e.g. responding to a report of a broken gate.

Running of the project:
- Providing volunteer contact, support and feedback
- Providing volunteering training and updates
- Sending volunteer path reports to the Area Ranger

Those involved, partnership and sources of advice:
Rights of Way Support Officer, Rangers and Field Services Team; Volunteers.

Constraints and limitations:
The Rangers and Field Service Team will prioritise to issues that require attention i.e. broken gate, missing signpost.

How was it undertaken?

- When volunteers are recruited to become a Path Watcher – all volunteers are invited on a training day which involves learning how to survey paths and report faults.
- Volunteers are supplied with path surveying kit including a map depicting all the PRoW for surveying, OS map, tape measure (for recording all the gates on the PRoW) and pruning saw (for trimming back vegetation that may grow over signposts.
- Volunteers survey all PRoW in their parish throughout the year.
- If they notice any issues: take a photo, report it; this report is sent to ENPA Rangers who investigate or talk to the landowner; practical work is forwarded onto the Field Services Team.
- The Rights of Way Support Officer organises four volunteer meetings a year. The meetings are an opportunity to discuss any issues that need clarification, e.g. when to report a tree on a PRoW.
- The meetings also provide a social occasion for all volunteers to meet and an opportunity to chat with the PRoW team.
- Rights of Way Support Officer provides support to volunteers via phone or email.
- The Rights of Way Support Officer collates volunteer hours each month.
- Volunteer development: Volunteers have the opportunity to complete in-house waymark training (i.e. yellow paint marks to denote Public Footpath). Through this training, volunteers can re-paint the waymarks along the PRoW within their chosen Parish. This ensures people using the PRoW have a guide to follow.

Outcomes and recommendations:

Path Watcher reports ensure we maintain a high standard of PRoW on Exmoor for all to enjoy.

Key considerations when managing volunteers:

- The staff capacity to manage and be able to respond to volunteers via email, phone and face to face.
- We look for dedicated volunteers who will be an asset to our team and the volunteers will also get something positive from the volunteering experience such as learning about rights of way and map reading skills.
- Volunteer recruitment is extremely important, selecting volunteers that meet our Path Watcher criteria through the 'Get Involved' website page.

Example of something you're pleased:

The scheme is really successful, we have a fantastic group of dedicated volunteers who provide our Ranger Team with accurate reports of any rights of way issues - "more boots on the ground".

To get involved with this event or to find out more about it, please visit: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved

> **A case study on a volunteer's perspective, with volunteer testimonials, is also available on this project.**