

Path Watcher's Scheme

A Volunteer's Perspective

Interview with: Path Watcher volunteer

Name of project: Path Watcher Scheme

Location: Each volunteer takes on 1 or more (in my case 3) parishes which they then check. We are provided with large scale maps to enable us to check the line of the public rights of way (PROW) and to record those which have been checked.

By who: Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) Rangers

Aims: The aim is to check the condition, signage etc. of PROW within the National Park; to identify issues and report these, via the National Park's Rights of Way Support Officer, to the relevant ranger. The volunteers are also provided with marking paint to refresh waymarks and simple tools to trim back small amounts of vegetation.

How and why did you get involved in the project?

I had reported a problem with a PROW which Adam (an ENPA Ranger) responded to. While chatting with him I asked what volunteer roles there were within the park working on the PROW network. Initially, Adam provided routes to check but this soon evolved into the scheme described above.

Why? Putting something back; visiting areas that are not usually walked that often; safeguarding our inheritance – sounds presumptuous but I believe our PROW network is something special and it deserves protection.

How much time is involved?

I've been involved for about 3 years now and spend anything between 12 and 30 hours a month on it – more in winter surprisingly as there is less to do on our own plot then.

Benefits to you?

Getting out, meeting visitors/users/landowners; putting something back; exercise; being useful in retirement.

Downsides?

None I can think of.

A typical day in action:

My involvement in the project has also led to my working on the Local Access Forum and in doing some of the BVPI checks for ENPA; as always one thing leads to another.

As a volunteer what are the most important things for organisers to be aware of?

Our hours and our competence especially when way-marking – marking the wrong line could be troublesome.

Any advice for others looking to become involved in a project?

Make sure you're a really good map reader and can produce simple reports, some basic IT skills are useful there.

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Volunteer Testimonials

“The paths I have walked enable me to get out and about and walk in areas that I would not perhaps otherwise have gone to. So it's a great excuse for getting to know other parts of the area that we have recently moved to and an incentive to explore whilst at the same time feeling that I may be doing something worthwhile! - An excuse for cake!!”

Gail

“We arrived at Exmoor House shortly after retiring, we had walked and ridden over the moors all of our lives, but volunteering helped us to learn about the places and things which we had taken for granted. Path Watching has encouraged us to get off the beaten track and discover those little gems which otherwise even we would never have seen. On the way we have met a new group of friends to share our interest.”

Brian and Caroline

“The path watchers scheme:

- Motivates me to go for a walk when otherwise I might not.
- I walk paths that I might not normally do because they perhaps don't seem to go anywhere special. Often these turn out to be the most interesting.
- I look at footpaths in a different way and find myself thinking about why a footpath is where it is, who in the past might have used it, and how this has changed over the years.
- Most importantly - I get to spend more time enjoying beautiful Exmoor”

Elaine

