

Don't Lose Your Way reveals over 49,000 miles of lost historic paths

In Herefordshire there are 2253 miles of paths that could be lost forever!

1949 November 6 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act

The ground-breaking National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (which paved the way for National Parks and National Trails) requires all local authorities in England and Wales to keep an official record of public rights of way - the definitive map. These maps have proved invaluable in protecting paths from being closed, obstructed and built on.

1950 — 1982 The definitive maps

Completing definitive maps proves difficult. The necessary surveys and procedures involved are complicated and time-consuming. Paths are left off maps and some local authorities are more efficient than others. The last definitive map is not published until 1982.

1998 "Rights of Way in the 21st Century"

The Countryside Commission suggests the Government states its intention of closing definitive maps to further changes based on historical evidence, but only if historic paths are researched to a high standard. It also says the Government must give highway authorities and volunteers enough resources to carry out the research. It recommends exploring the scale and cost of researching and recording missing paths.

1999 The government consults

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions publishes a consultation paper which takes forward many of the Countryside Commission's recommendations, in particular that any claim for a path based solely on historical evidence should be invalid ten years from the start of new legislation.

2000 November The Countryside and Rights of Way Act

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act, known informally as the CRoW Act or "Right to Roam" Act officially introduces the cut-off date for adding historic paths to definitive maps but opposition from the Ramblers and others means the period

before the cut-off date is extended from 10 to 25 years. This means paths (footpaths and bridleways) which existed before 1949 and which aren't recorded on definitive maps on 1 January 2026 will be extinguished.

2001 Discovering Lost Ways

The Countryside Agency sets up the Discovering Lost Ways project to take forward the Government's promise that definitive maps should be completed before the 2026 cut-off. The Ramblers joins the project's steering group. This major project starts with a scoping study and research into the archives of four test counties. Over 200 case files relating to potential 'lost ways' are assembled and applications are made to add four routes to the definitive map in Cheshire.

2007 Collapse of Discovering Lost Ways

Natural England takes over from the Countryside Agency and reviews the Discovering Lost Ways project. It says that fundamental problems with the system for processing claims for historic paths and recording them on definitive maps means completing them by systematic trawling through archives – and as a result the Discovering Lost Ways project as a whole – isn't viable.

2008 The Stakeholder Working Group

The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) agrees the Discovering Lost Ways project should be closed down and that the processes for adding historic paths to definitive maps should be reviewed instead. A group with stakeholders from three key sectors – land owners/managers, rights of way users (including the Ramblers) and local authorities forms the Stakeholder Working Group (SWG). The SWG is asked to come up with reforms to speed up the process for claiming and adding paths to maps and make it less confrontational.

2010 Stepping Forward

After reaching consensus in a controversial area of rights of way law, the SWG presents its report - Stepping Forward. It contains 32 recommendations, fully supported by Natural England which set out ways of capturing or preserving useful routes before or at the 2026 cut-off date and of improving the process of adding paths to definitive maps in the years leading up to the cut-off date.

2013 Deregulation Bill

The Government publishes the draft Deregulation Bill (a drive to remove bureaucracy) which includes the main recommendations of the SWG. The draft Bill is examined by a Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Ramblers submit evidence to the Committee and recommend that the rights of way clauses in the Bill, which we worked hard to achieve consensus on with the members of the SWG, should remain.

2015 The Deregulation Act

The Deregulation Act (which applies to England only) is passed. The rights of way provisions in this Act are designed to make the process for adding historic paths easier for members of the public and local authorities.

2018 Still waiting for change...

Three years after the passing of the Act, the rights of way provisions of the Deregulation Act have still not been brought into effect. The Ramblers continue to push for the implementation of these provisions.

2018 Don't Lose Your Way: The fight continues

Ramblers volunteers and others, continue to identify, research and apply to restore individual lost rights of way - all across the country. Join our fight for historic paths:

To see the map you will need to create a log in at:

<https://dontloseyourway.ramblers.org.uk/map>

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