

Hampshire Ramblers' Fight to Preserve our Paths

Intro: Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

Julie: 1st of January 2026, an important date, but do you know why? In this week's episode on Hampshire HistBites, I am joined by Peter and Paul. Peter will tell us a bit about the Hampshire Ramblers while Paul will tell us about his work on their project, *Don't Lose Your Way*.

Peter, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got involved with the Hampshire Ramblers and the project we are going to talk about today?

Peter: My name is Peter. I am the publicity officer for the Hampshire Ramblers, which means I am in charge of all the kind of media that goes out and the advertising that we do. I'm also on the committee of the Hampshire 20s and 30s Ramblers, where I am in charge of doing the events. So that's the walks, the socials and the trips away.

A lot of people get involved where they moved to a new area or they have a change in life. And they're looking for like-minded people to do things with, and one thing I enjoyed is walking. So walking, it was perfect for me and really get to know people and it gave me that kind of social outlet, but also I love the environment and it really lets you connect with nature.

Julie: Can you tell us who are the Hampshire Ramblers and what do you do?

Peter: So the Hampshire Ramblers are the kind of area for Hampshire, Ramblers, as it says in the tin, but really the main kind of charitable work we do is the path maintenance. So, when you go on a walk, you might see some stiles or kissing gates, we generally look after them or we build them or replace them if they need replacing, but also, just making sure the paths are cut back. A lot of our volunteers do a lot of work just maintaining those paths and allowing people to actually enjoy the paths and go walking, and obviously we lead walks. That is our main thing. We're a walking charity and we put on these amazing walks, for those different age ranges and those different areas and let people on these experts led walks, from anywhere from 4 miles to 20 miles.

Julie: Can you tell me a little bit about the background for *Don't Lose Your Way* and how the Ramblers got involved with the project?

Peter: So, a bit of background history, 21 years ago now, in 2000, the government passed what they call the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, which basically created a right to roam, if it's an established path, you have a right to walk on it. It also set the ambitious target of doing a Definitive Map so that every single path, road, bridleway, would be mapped on the Definitive Maps, by 2026. And anything after that date that wasn't on that Map, didn't count.

In 1949, the same law that created the first National Parks, which were created to allow people to enjoy the countryside, after the kind of 1931 Kinder Scout protest which led to the creation of the Ramblers, also created what is called the Definitive Maps, so we would know where we were allowed to walk. The problem is that, as a country, England and Wales have been walked for centuries and the process was near impossible, and it was left up to the local councils to try and sort this out. So there's been paths that have not been mapped or probably documented for years.

Basically, the government did look into this and in 2004 they set up a government project, named Discovering Lost Ways, and was given 50 million pounds to solve the problem, to make sure that all these paths would be mapped. It ended 4 years later, completely overwhelmed. They just couldn't do it. Even with the funding they couldn't do it. So the Ramblers being the walking charity, we took it upon ourselves to do this and we founded Don't Lose Your Way.

Julie: Why do you think walking is so important?

Peter: I think it allows us to, you know, reconnect with nature and especially during the pandemic, it was really clear how much the outside and nature and actually being outside is good for our mental health. There's myriad of benefits. You have the fresh air, the health aspect, we have the social aspect. I love walking in Hampshire because there's so many historical ways we have as well that really ties into a history. For example, we have up in Chawton, there's quite a lot of nice walks around where Jane Austen used to live. You can just kind of imagine her strolling around these fields. As well, we got the Monarch's Way. so King Charles II fled from the Roundheads, during the Civil War, after his father got beheaded. And the Monarch's Way passes for a lot through Hampshire.

So you have, this real like connection to history and it is walking in the footsteps of ancestors, which just really kind of brings it alive. It's that physical connection to the past, which I think is really important.

Julie: Why are these paths important?

Peter: These paths are important because they're part of our history. These paths have been walked for centuries by the people before us, the Normans walked them, the Romans before that, they are etched in our history. And if we don't record them by 2026 we could lose them, they're gone forever and no legal right to walk them any more unless they're on the Map.

Julie: How do you identify them?

Peter: So you would look at documented evidence from historical records, obtained online, in archives. You work with local footpaths secretaries. So within the charity, we have people to check the situations on the ground, So it's just, looking at them and ensuring that we're not chasing after a dead end, which is literal, in some cases, there are a lot of dead ends with these lost paths. You've got strong legal evidence: enclosure records, legal orders, tithe maps, boundary and mark books, fine arts maps, good handover maps, railway deposits and temporary stopping up orders. And then you've got travellers' maps, OS maps, and sales plans.

All these kind of documents basically have to be used together and it's a really fascinating work, which our volunteers such as Paul has spent a lot of his time doing and actually, a lot of that kind of discovering work has already been done. We've already searched 96,000 square miles in England and Wales, 3,200 plus people joined in the search. So volunteers were doing that search and discovering these lost ways. And 49,138 miles of lost paths were found in England and Wales.

We're kind of in the next phase of the project now, which is all about prioritizing those paths, which ones are worth saving, and which ones we can save before the deadline. You can't save every single path, but there may be a path that actually is being walked all the time, it's just not in the Map. It's actually just taking it by case-by-case basis, looking into the details and using common sense - does this add value to the walking footpath network? Sometimes the answer is no. And a lot of the time the answer's yes. Rural areas are really under-represented in footpaths and actually you find historically they have so much better network, it's that we need to go out and find them and re-map them.

Julie: That's a lot of paths, wow. Some people might be worried if they find a potential path in their garden or on their land, should they be worried and could this cause any problems? How do you go about these types of situations? If you have actually encountered them.

Peter: We're not looking to claim Rights of Way or lost ways that go through buildings, including people's houses. We asked the volunteers to mark up the paths which appeared on historical maps. And we recognize that some areas have seen really significant development the last 120 years, we want to add paths to the map, so it should improve the network for all. It's not just about saving every path for the sake of it. Identifying is only the start with the process. It's not the end of the process. Identify is the first bit, the second bit comes to actually applying to put it on the Map.

After that comes further research and consultation is required before the local authority would confirm it as a Right of Way. It's not just, it was once a Right of Way, it will be a Right of Way again. We want to be reasonable and that's the kind of thing we definitely want to work with people. And a lot of the time it's possible and appropriate to get diverted. So maybe actually there's a new road or alleyway or path that we can just go around. Let's use the example of a housing estate that it went straight through and it goes through people's living rooms. Well then if there's a path that been built into the housing estate, it goes around it, it makes sense that we just divert it around.

Julie: Yeah, and that's a really good point. So how can people get involved with this project and find more information, either about the project or about the Hampshire Ramblers?

Peter: So to find out more information about Don't Lose Your Way, go to our website, which is dontloseyourway.ramblers.org.uk. there's loads of information on there, like I say, we've already done the discovery programme, now the part is the prioritizing, deciding which ones are worth saving and doing that admin and leg work to get them put on the Map before 2026. If you want to find more about the Hampshire Ramblers. It is at www.ramblers.org.uk/hampshire. If you're in your twenties and thirties, you can look at our website and what walks we have on and that's www.hantswalk.org.uk.

Julie: Do you think the work will be completed by January 2026?

Peter: Frankly, no. I think it's an impossible task. It's not going to happen. And it's the Ramblers position that we really want the Government to extend this deadline, because despite all the information coming out on the difficulties - the Government's project couldn't handle it - the deadline hasn't changed and especially with the law potentially changed to make trespass a criminal offence, it's really important that we do save these paths, 'cause they're our history. It's a real risk that we're going to lose them just because we do not have time. We only have less than five years. So, sadly the answer to question is no.

Julie: So over to you, Paul. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got involved with the Hampshire Ramblers?

Paul: Well, for a start, I've been walking all my life really. And one of the things that really strikes me is the contrast between my walking experience as a teenager, which is some 40 or so years ago, and my walking experience today, where so much of the countryside is littered with 'keep out' signs. Whereas as a child, I was able to wander much more freely across the countryside. So that kind of instilled within me the sense that something had to be done about the access to the countryside. And that's why I joined the Ramblers association in the mid-nineties.

Julie: Can you tell us how you got involved with this project, Don't Lose Your Way, and why it is important from your perspective?

Paul: I first got involved when I read an article in the newspaper, and it was all about recovering these footpaths and bridleways and byways that had not been added to the Definitive Map but should have been. This was in around about 2016. And I thought that that was pretty important that we get these paths registered given that 2026 is the deadline by which it all has to be done. So I decided to get involved and I spoke to our area secretary about doing that. And he was able to give me a lot of

guidance. I really knew nothing about this at the very beginning. And the first thing I did was I got a book called *Rights of Way: Restoring the Record* by Sarah Bucks and Phil Wadey, which is the Bible of this work. And I realized that it was just full of so much interesting stuff.

It was really just an ideal project for me because I was so interested in walking anyway. And this project enabled me to do something that would recover these lost ways. And at the same time, be so interesting as well.

Julie: Yeah, absolutely. So, Peter has talked about identifying paths already, but through your work, how did you go about finding and registering these lost paths? Is it difficult? Are people helpful when it comes to this process?

Paul: At the beginning it's, to a large extent, something you just do by yourself. By comparing old maps with new maps and seeing where the gaps are. That way you very quickly identify those routes that are not on the current map and that maybe should be. But at this point you only have a very tentative idea that those routes are missing. And then having identified all these apparently missing routes of which I found around about 600, I then went about looking in more detail at the specific routes. Some of the routes I put to the side immediately because they no longer had any public utility. For example, they might be cut in half by a motorway, or in areas that were very heavily built up. But any of them looked promising, I then looked at some maps that would provide fairly robust evidence that they should be put onto the Definitive Map. Maps that have some kind of legal importance, such as enclosure records, tithe maps and some of the early Ordinance Survey maps that were connected with other things than just mapping the country. That gives quite a good legal indication that the routes should be on the Definitive Map. Unless, of course they'd been officially extinguished, and there are legal processes to do that. There are two sides to this coin, on the one hand finding routes that look as if they should be on the map, and on the other hand, checking they haven't been extinguished by a formal legal process, which happens from time to time.

Julie: Yeah. It sounds like identifying them and actually crosschecking maps and records, it's quite a long process. And then having that deadline of 2026, it sounds quite short thinking of it now.

Paul: Yes. I've talked about the beginning part of the process, you asked me about the complete process. Having identified routes that seem to have a legal basis for being added to the Definitive Map, I then gather all the evidence and detail and write a document which explains and interprets the evidence. It may sound a bit daunting, but those documents are typically about 40 or 50 pages long, but most of the pages are filled with maps rather than words. And so there's only about 10,000 words explaining why a particular map shows that the route in question was in all probability a Right of Way. That word probability is really important because we're not producing evidence at a sort of criminal court level of robustness, it's more a civil case level of robustness. So it's on the balance of probability. The balance of probability test means what you're trying to do is collect sufficient individual pieces of evidence, which collectively show that the Right of Way should be added to the Definitive Map. And it may go to appeal, so you have to be able to convince more than one inspector in some cases. So you have to be pretty robust about it. There are some quite sort of subtle things. For example, if you've got a footpath that goes onto your Right of Way, that you're trying to recover, the fact that the footpath might terminate on your Right of Way is a clear indication that your Right of Way should be a Right of Way, because the footpath won't end at a dead end, which would be the case if it was a private road. Once I've produced the application, which has all this information, I then fill in a variety of forms that the council require. I let the landowners, over which the application route passes, know that I've made an application and I send them a special form that has that and it has the map and explains the process to them. And then I wait for several years while the Council go through their backlog of 60 or 70 applications, and finally get around to dealing with my application. So it can be quite long process.

Julie: Yeah, it sounds like it. So if you submit an application before January 1st, 2026, but it hasn't been processed yet, will it be added to the Definitive Map after 2026, if the application came in before 2026?

Paul: The 2026 deadline is for the application to go to the County Council. They will be processing applications for, I would guess, at least 50 years after that deadline, because there's so many of them. And in fact, they've recruited more people in order to process all the applications that are coming in as a consequence of the 2026 deadline. I have to say, in Hampshire, probably the majority of which were mine. The nice thing about it is that once a route is added to the Definitive Map it's there forever.

Once a Right of Way, always Right of Way is the legal maxim. I might not personally benefit from some of the routes that I've applied for, my children might not benefit, but my grandchildren probably will and my grandchildren's children probably will. And that's something to really think about and to realize, quite aside from the fact that as you flick through the maps, starting say around about 1650 to the present day, you see the English countryside unfolding in front of you. You start off with these very dispersed settlements with lots and lots of rural industries, such as brick works, chalk pits and flint works. And gradually over time, you see these industries, and these settlements, gradually agglomerating. So the brick works disappears into a big brick work factory based in the local town and the small hamlets disappear and become big villages nearby. It's a really fascinating picture of the changing landscape, which in itself is very rewarding because then when you're walking through that landscape, you realize that you're not just walking through what you can see, you're walking through an awful lot of stuff that you can't see. That clump of trees over there might be an old settlement of four or five people who probably worked in the clay pit on the opposite side of the road. It brings a whole new dimension to walking in the countryside.

Julie: Absolutely. It brings more story or more personal connection to the environment around you. You've mentioned types of evidence that you need to support an application. Is there anything else that you need?

Paul: It's not just a map. Many of these maps are derived from legal processes. So a map that many people will have heard of are the tithe maps. In the 17th and 18th century, payment to the church was made by actually giving produce to the church. Some of which was redistributed to the poor, much of which was kept by the church itself. One of the reasons why the church became very rich, because they took 10% of all the produce of the land. Which when you think about it, it's an absolutely phenomenal tax. So tithe maps were then drawn up to enable the process to be far more efficient. Instead of you taking your turnips to the great big tithe barn every year, you could now simply pay the church a set amount. And in order to do that, they had to map your particular farm and determine what its tithable value would be on the basis of what they thought it would produce, enabling the tithe commissioners as they were called to determine how much each landowner should pay to the church. And the tithe maps themselves also show things like roads and in some cases, footpaths, and some tithe maps are very poorly made and they're quite difficult to interpret, but other tithe maps are beautifully made, they're works of art in themselves, and they show when a road is a public road, for example, quite often.

Each plot of land, called an apportionment, has a number and that number can be checked in the list of apportionments, from that, you can see whether a road is perhaps an occupation road, in which case it's owned by the land owner as simply a means of getting to and from his property or might be a private road in which case it would be listed under roads and waste and up-kept by the local authority, which in those days would have been either the Parish Council or the District Council. So we can learn a lot from tithe maps. You also learn that so much of England was actually owned by big aristocratic landowners. Around here, we have Lord Bolton and Lord Portsmouth, to name but two. So it gives you some quite interesting insights.

Going on, the other pieces of evidence: In 1910 there was a Finance Act and this was designed to enable the government to tax land. And in order to do that, they had to map all the land. The 1910 Act

produced a map of England that plotted the landholdings throughout the country. It included actually not only maps, but also detailed records called doomsday books, because it's like a modern doomsday. Unfortunately the doomsday books for Hampshire were destroyed in the war because they were kept in Southampton and the Inland Revenue Offices in Southampton were bombed, but the maps survived and where a map shows a highway to be excluded from the owners, they're called hereditaments in this particular case, that is a clear sign that the road would be public because public bodies were not taxed. And so if the road was omitted from the hereditaments, that's a clear indication that it was indeed a public road and should be on the Definitive Map.

Then in 1929, there were some changes to local authority responsibilities. So the District Councils, up to that point, had been responsible for maintaining roads and footpaths, but in 1929, that responsibility passed to the County Council. In order to transfer that responsibility, maps were produced by the district councillors that enabled the County Councils to then take on that responsibility. Hampshire in some ways is blessed because in Hampshire, they were very rigorous in nearly all the Districts, and they actually put all the footpaths and roads on these maps, whereas in some counties they only put the roads on. So we're very lucky in that regard. Many of the footpaths and roads that were on those maps didn't make it onto the Definitive Map. Sometimes it was just an omission, sometimes it was County Council's thinking that the route was no longer important enough to actually add to the map.

Moving on, we have the great explosion of British railway building and each new railway required an Act of Parliament to enable the railway company to purchase land for their railway. With that Act came a map that showed all the Rights of Way that were crossing the proposed line of the railway. Many of these Acts for railways didn't actually come into being in terms of railway because the railway company decided that actually it wasn't going to be a profitable affair, but nevertheless, the maps provide, again, very very good evidence of a public Right of Way.

Then we come on to World War II. In the south of England, lots of land holdings were requisitioned by the RAF to make aerodromes. So all the rights of way that went across those land holdings had to be extinguished, but they were extinguished on a temporary basis. These were temporary stopping up orders as we call them. But here's the thing, in the 1950s, quite a lot of these stopping up orders weren't reversed as they should have been. So they weren't in fact temporary. And so what I've found is a number of these routes that should have been recovered after the war, in fact, weren't recovered. And if you've got a document that shows the temporary stopping up order, which will show exactly where the path began and where it ended, that's really good evidence that that path should be on the Definitive Map. And of course, because it was happening in the 1950s, it was happening at exactly the same time as the Definitive Map itself was being created. And so there was enormous room for a bit of a muddle to occur at this point and for paths and roads that should have been placed back on the Definitive Map to be missed off.

Earlier, I mentioned enclosure records, these occurred over quite a long period of time from the late 1700s up to the late 1800s. Enclosure records are records that show a collective group of landowners that wanted to make their land more efficient. In the early 1800s, land was often separated into lots of strips and a landowner might own lots of strips that were separated all over the place. And so what he wanted to do is to bring them all together into one plot, but to do that, he had to negotiate with the other land owners so that they could combine all their bits. And so there were these so-called enclosure acts. They were official legal acts of parliament that enabled land owners to enclose their land. People did become excluded in some cases. It was quite a controversial process, but it produced a lot of maps and those maps didn't only identify the plots of land and how they were going to be re-jigged in order to produce bigger plots of land, but they also showed all the Rights of Way and who would be responsible for maintaining them. As legal records, these are absolutely definitive records of public Rights of Way.

You've got Ordnance Survey maps, which are very well surveyed. So they're very accurate maps, both telling you where a road is and how wide it is. The first edition Ordnance Survey maps produced in the 1870s actually had a reference number and the acreage of the particular plot of land that it was

mapping, including roads. The reference number goes back to what's called an Area Book. Each parish had an Area Book and the Area Books identify whether a road was an occupation road or it would identify it as a public road. It's important to understand that when the first edition Ordnance Survey maps were being made, and these were very large maps, these were 25 inches to the mile maps, they were made with teams of 12 people with a horse and cart laden with great big, heavy Victorian surveying equipment.

When they went on to a landowner's land, they wouldn't sneak on and sneak off without the landowner knowing. This is a process that's going to involve, if not the landowner, then certainly his managers. And so the point being that the Ordnance Survey had plenty of opportunity to discuss with the landowners whether or not a footpath was indeed a footpath. If you look at ancient routes on the ground, you very often see evidence that this route was quite a substantive route. You often see, particularly around north Hampshire, very wide hedges, which when you look at them closely are actually double hedges. And at one time they used to have a road going down the middle, but that road has since disappeared when the footpath or road disappeared.

Finally, there's a thing called LIDAR, which is a sort of radar, but it's produced using laser. LIDAR are very accurate maps of the undulations of the land and they are fantastic. They will not only show up the undulations that you get from aerial photographs, but they will show up where people, have at one time or other, mined flint or chalk or whatever, to a far greater extent than you will ever see on some of the more detailed Ordnance Survey maps.

Julie: So I want to finish with one question. Do you think the work, or least applications will be completed by January 2026?

Paul: When we're doing this work, we're absolutely prioritizing those routes that provide maximum benefits to the community. And of course, routes that have got sufficient evidence to make them likely to succeed. Of the 600 or so that I've identified, probably 400 fit into that category of which I've already applied for 190.

I'm not going to finish the 400. I might get close if I get lots of willing volunteers to help. And I already have quite a few, but it's definitely going to be about limiting our work to those routes that are going to be of greatest benefit to everybody.

The other thing just to mention is that each route is typically about half mile long. So, if you look at 190 routes that I've already applied for, that's probably equivalent to round about 80 miles worth of footpaths that otherwise would have been missing.

Julie: Thank you for listening to this week's episode. If you want to know more about the Hampshire Ramblers, their project Don't Lose Your Way, and how to get involved, links and resources are available through our website.

Outro: We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, www.winchesterheritageopendays.org, click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.
Thank you.