

# Public Rights of Way

## Dartmoor Factsheet



The second purpose of National Parks as stated in the *Environment Act 1995* is 'to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Parks by the public'. One of the many ways that the public can enjoy the National Parks is by the use of the access land and the extensive Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network.

Each PRoW is recorded on the Definitive Map which is maintained by Devon County Council. A copy is held at the National Park's Authority's main offices. This map is available to the general public to view along with a written description of each route. Each PRoW is recorded by parish and type and each given a unique number, e.g. Buckland Monachorum FP21.

The Dartmoor National Park Authority (NPA) has negotiated with the Highway Authority of Devon County Council (DCC), to take on the responsibility for the maintenance of most of the PRoW network that is within the National Park. As from 1 April 2006 the County Council gives £50,000 p.a. to help offset PRoW maintenance costs.

The PRoW network is managed and maintained by the Ranger Service. This work involves surveying, signing, construction and repair of furniture (e.g. gates, stiles and bridges), erosion repair, vegetation control, and negotiation with landowners about changes to the network.

There are three types of PRoW that are managed by the National Park. They are all highways in law and anyone may use a right of way at any time just as they would on any other highway:-

- ◆ if the highway is a **footpath** it may be used only for walking
- ◆ if the highway is a **bridleway** it may be used for riding or leading a horse, as well as for walking.



Walkers using the bridleway at South Hessary Tor

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Cycling is permitted providing cyclists give way to riders and walkers.

- ◆ a **Byway Open to all Traffic (BOAT)** is a highway that is used by the public mainly for walking, riding horses or cycling, but over which there is also a right to use any kind of wheeled vehicle.

There are also **permissive paths**. A landowner may permit the public to use other paths or tracks over his/ her land with the intention that it should not become a PRoW. Often there will be a notice at either end of the route explaining the conditions the landowner has set. You may find that the owner closes the path at certain times or restricts use to daylight hours or insists that dogs must be on a lead.

The different kinds of PRoW can be traced on the most up-to-date Ordnance Survey maps especially the 1:50,000 and the 1:25,000 scales.

Management of the PRoW network takes up a large proportion of the National Park Ranger Service's time and resources.

On average, each Ranger may spend up to half of his/her time on PRow management. There is an annual budget of approximately £87,000 (2005-2006) to spend on materials (e.g. wood, iron work, bridge kits), contractors and signs. The Ranger Service also uses a large number of volunteers (from schools, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, military and the Dartmoor National Park Authority Voluntary Warden Scheme) in the practical management of the PRow network.

A computerised Geographical Information System (GIS) is used to help manage the PRow network. This has involved the detailed surveying of all the routes, recording the location of all the field furniture, land ownership and path surface type and condition. This information is updated each year, along with records of complaints and maintenance work that has been undertaken.

The Ranger Service has to decide the most effective way of solving any given problem on a PRow with the resources available. It therefore uses different sources of labour which have varying skill levels to suit the task:-

- ◆ **Rangers and Volunteers:**  
clear vegetation; construct and maintain field furniture; survey and carry out minor surface repairs.
- ◆ **The Conservation Works Team:**  
installs stepping stones; carries out major surface repairs and repair works in archaeologically and ecologically sensitive areas.
- ◆ **Contractors:**  
contract large bridges and carry out major surface erosion repairs and vegetation clearance.

## Facts and Figures (2005-2006)

There are 753 PRow within the Dartmoor National Park. This figure does not include permissive routes.

Type	Length km	No. of paths
Footpath (FP)	354.2	467
Bridleway (BW)	354.3	271
Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)	18.9	28
<b>Totals</b>	<b>727.4</b>	<b>766</b>

## Funding (2005-2006)

### Dartmoor National Park Authority:

Gross Expenditure: £5,643,000  
Public Rights of Way Expenditure: £87,000  
(This does not include travel and salaries)

Structure (2005-2006)	No.
Stiles	788
Gates	1,389
Signs	1,821
Stepping Stones (sets)	31
Bridges	257

## Open Access

In areas where there is open access, generally you do not have to stay on footpaths, bridleways or other rights of way. The public has legal open access to about 47,400 hectares of Dartmoor. Of this total, public access on foot (and horseback) to the Dartmoor commons, extending for some 35,200 hectares, was secured under the *Dartmoor Commons Act 1985*. A further 5,200 hectares is access on foot made by agreement between the National Park Authority and a number of landowners/occupiers. New walking rights on Dartmoor specifically arising from the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, as from 28 August 2005, extend to approximately 7,000 hectares.

There are other areas in the National Park where the public has permitted open access, for example Forestry Commission woodlands and some National Trust land. Local on the ground information is usually provided to help people identify and explore such areas.

# Case Study One

**Dartmoor Forest BW 18 (Postbridge)**  
**Grid Ref: SX 648 787**

The photographs show the bridleway before and after work was carried out. As you can see there has been a great deal of damage done to the path. The gully that has appeared has made the path dangerous to use, especially on horseback. Initially the vegetation (mainly grass) was torn by horses hooves and people's boots. Before it could recover, by natural growth, more damage has occurred. This happens very easily if the ground is wet. Once the fragile peaty soil was exposed the high rainfall of the area flowed down the path's steep gradient and washed away the vegetation and soil. The water then began to carve a gully through the crumbling rock below. Over a short period of time the combination of rain and continuous use by people will speed up the erosion process and create larger gullies.

The area Ranger kept an eye on the state of the path and reported that it was in need of attention. National Park Authority staff devised a scheme to create a path that is easy to use but will remain stable and not be too conspicuous. They had to secure some funding for the work which was then put out to contract. The officer in charge of the Conservation Works Team was responsible for overseeing the contractors' work. The materials used were railway sleepers and quarry sub-base (a mixture of stone from 40mm to dust) for the path. Open, grass lined, ditches were dug to divert the rainwater away from the path. This works better than allowing the water to drain away into the subsoil. The path is now in regular use and holding up well.



*Before works*

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*After works*

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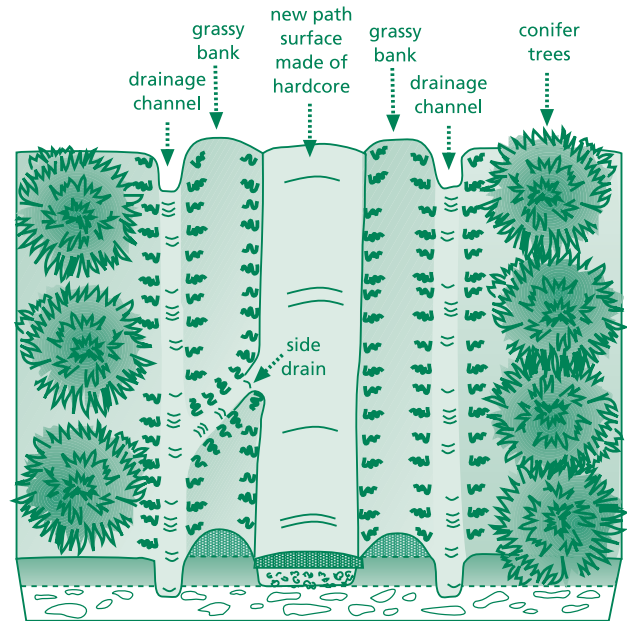
## Case Study Two

### Dartmoor Forest BW8 (The Lich Way) Grid Ref: SX 639 774

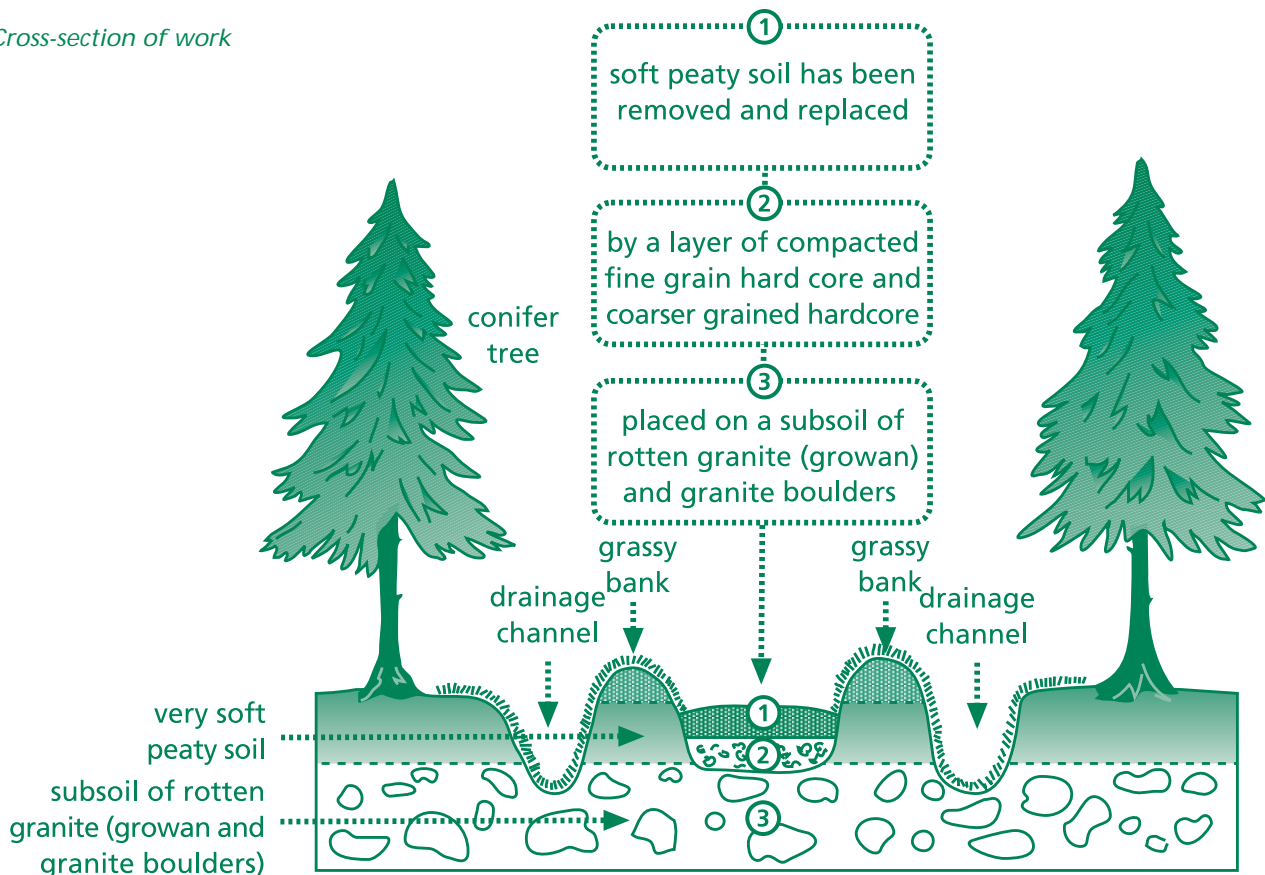
This path was unusable along quite a large section of its length due to the fact that the legal line, as marked on the Definitive Map, went right through a mire. It was not until the Moor Care Programme began in 1996 that funding for a major diversion could be secured. The Moor Care Programme gave access to European funds that enabled the legal process to begin on diverting the path and the construction of a new route through Bellever Plantation. This new section of path involved the clearing of fallen trees and brushwood, the construction of new drainage channels and the importation of many tonnes of hardcore and surfacing material, as well as new signing of the route. Many years before, the Ranger Service had discovered a raised causeway through the mire, further along the valley. This was considered to be the historical line of the path. The route was easy to use and needed little work, other than two small board walks placed over wet areas.

Before work could start on the ground a long process of consultation was entered into with the parish council, user groups, Forest Enterprise, the landowners, and other interested parties.

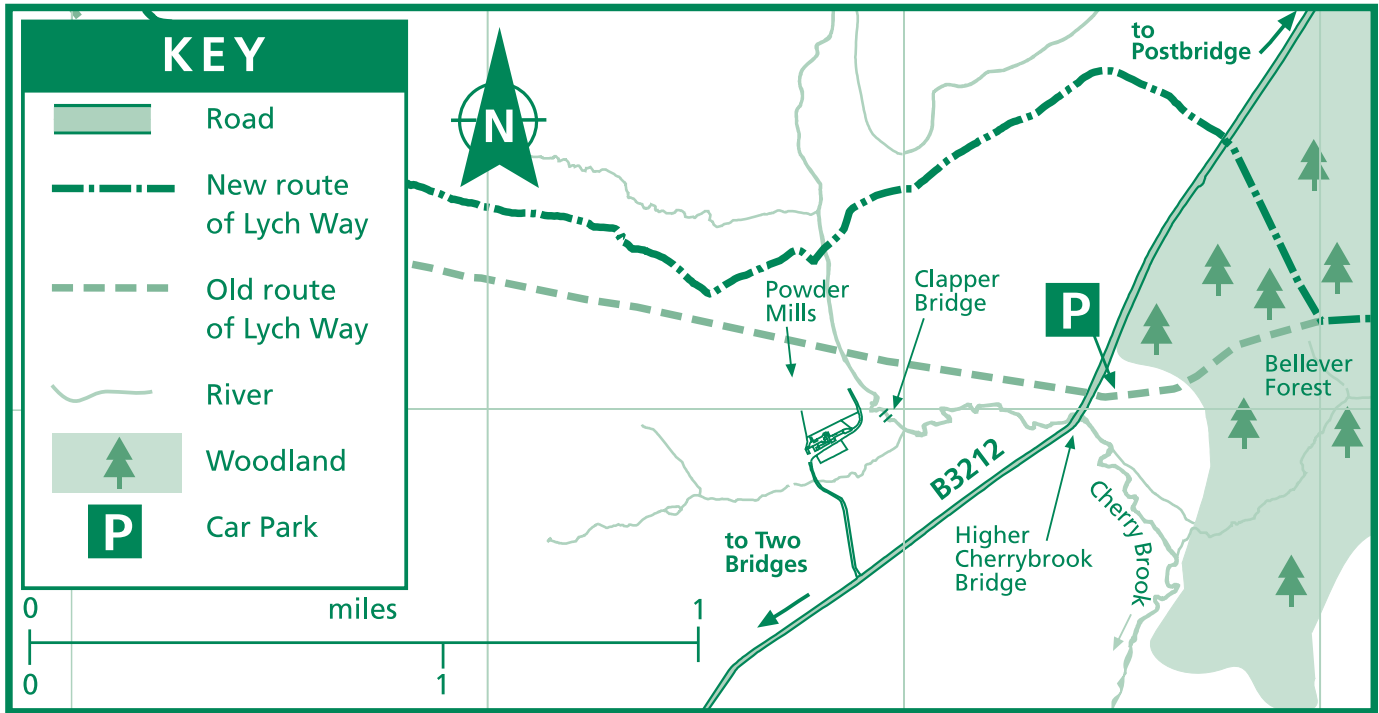
Maps were drawn up and site meetings held, and eventually agreement was reached enabling the addition of the new route to the Definitive Map. Though the old bridleway was deleted, walkers may still use the old route where it crosses Forest Enterprise land. Contractors were engaged and the physical works started on the new path which was finally opened to the public in April 2000 (see map on next page).



*Cross-section of work*



This map shows the old and new routes of the Lych Way



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Other methods of path repair used by Dartmoor National Park Authority:-

- Using naturally flat moor stone (from field clearance) as paving for steps.  
Example: Path from Grimspound to Hookney Tor – GR SX 700 810
- Compacted growan (decomposed granite) together with Terram membrane used on top of peat soil.  
Example: South Hessary Tor path – GR SX 595 725
- Board walk (raised wooden walkway) over mires.  
Example: Fernworthy Reservoir – GR SX 661 843
- Removal of soft topsoil (peat) to expose hard subsoil and provide sufficient drainage across and adjacent to path.  
Example: Two Moors Way between Bennett's Cross and Birch Tor – GR SX 684 818



Cycling on a Public Right of Way

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Walking on a Public Right of Way



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Horse riding on a Public Right of Way

## Awareness and Education

Public awareness and education are important parts of PROW management. By making the public aware of the PROW network the Dartmoor National Park Authority can encourage people to use alternative routes for their activity. This helps to spread the load around the National Park, as well as enabling people to explore areas which they may not be able to see from the road. Many of Dartmoor's PROW provide good alternatives during poor weather to the high moor (on moorland the soil and vegetation is fragile and easily damaged when water logged).

The Dartmoor National Park Authority Moor Care campaign has utilised European Union funding to repair erosion damage and to educate the public in the sensitive use of PROW and access land.

The following Moor Care guidelines have relevance to access on PROW:-

- ◆ If you are **following** the line of a **path, stick to it**. If you are on an eroded path, avoid widening it by going in single file if necessary. *The creation of wide and multiple paths not only damages vegetation but also looks ugly in the landscape.*
- ◆ Where possible, **stick to hard surfaced tracks during wet weather**. *By doing this and/or using the fringe areas of the National Park you can avoid damaging waterlogged moorland paths.* Plan your route according to weather and ground conditions.
- ◆ **Always use gates and stiles** to cross boundaries. By doing this you will **avoid climbing** over stone walls, which are not only important in the landscape, but also provide security and shelter for the ponies, sheep and cattle of Dartmoor.

*Climbing over walls often causes damage ... help to conserve these special features of Dartmoor.*

- ◆ **Do not disturb stones and rocks**. You may be damaging part of any one of the 18,500 **archaeological features** on Dartmoor or disturbing valuable **habitats**. *Help keep our cultural and ecological heritage intact.*
- ◆ **Follow signs** in areas where **restoration works are taking place**. Restoration and repair work is increasingly commonplace on Dartmoor. Please be prepared to follow any specific advice where repair work is taking place. *Remember that you can help to **limit the number of restoration projects needed in the future**, freeing resources for more positive conservation projects.*

The Dartmoor National Park Authority publishes guides for specific user groups. These provide guidance to minimise recreational impact on the landscape and ways to reduce conflict between users. Recreational activity guides include walking (which incorporates dog walking), climbing, letterboxing, and camping and backpacking. These are available on our web site.

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Further information available from our web site  
[www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)  
Visit the A-Z to access resources listed.

- Other related factsheets:
- Erosion
  - Dartmoor Commons
  - Ponies
- Other publications:
- *Dartmoor Commons Act, 1985*
  - *Dartmoor Commons Byelaws*
  - *Dartmoor Commons' Council Regulations*
  - *Walking on Dartmoor*
  - Countryside Agency Publications
  - A Guide to Definitive Map Procedures
  - Out in the Country

For further information, and a list of other Fact Sheets available, contact the:  
Education Service,  
Dartmoor National Park Authority,  
Parke, Bovey Tracey, Newton Abbot,  
Devon TQ13 9JQ  
Tel: (01626) 832093  
E-mail: [education@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](mailto:education@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)  
Web site: [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)  
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