

Footpath officers report for the 2026 AGM

I have had a reasonably active year including attending two Footpath officer's meetings one in Chudleigh the other at Bovey Tracy where we learn of other groups problems and successes. This year I also had a meeting with one of the Dartmoor National Park rangers. A useful meeting where it was also good to put a face to a name and discuss some local issues within the area of the park that is within the Tavistock patch.

There have been very few path complaint issues passed to me by members this year but thank you, keep them coming. Can I please urge the walk leaders to walk some of the parish paths and not stick to Dartmoor as these tracks and paths are routinely monitored by DNP. Outside of the Park within our Tavistock patch it's up to the 2 DCC paths wardens who simply can't walk all the paths. To keep the footpaths open and have access to the countryside is the principal reason Ramblers. We must walk the parish paths. Our patch includes 30 parishes from Horrabridge to Sourton.

During the year I have been out trying to get around all the footpaths in the Tavistock's Ramblers area of 30 parishes and although I have come across a few problems I am pleased to report that generally I found no serious obstructions or illegal diversions only minor obstructions by vegetation and a few rotten stiles. However there is still an ongoing and serious issue regarding FP3 Peter Tavy on the west side of Cox Tor. Back in February the land owner fenced right across the footpath with barbed wire and damaged the ladder stile. The situation hasn't changed in 9 months but DNP assure me they are on to it. The footpath goes from the road by Headlands to Collaton lane and there is no footpath closed sign at either end.

Not very far away near Youlditch there is another problem with a gate being often locked. This is a definitive map problem and again I am assured DNP and also DCC are on to it.

Last year I reported on progress with FP 2 Bere Ferrers. Since 2022 there has been a permissive path replacing the original footpath that was blocked by a land owner. It was a complicated issue but I can now report that the Planning Inspectorate ruled in favour of Devon County Council and approved the very sensible rerouting of the footpath. I lead a Ramblers walk along the approved new public footpath just 4 days after it had been formally approved.

Every so often I get asked by the planning authority to comment on a footpath that is being affected by a planning application. I have dealt with 3 of these this year objecting to 1 and making no comment on the other 2.

In Milton Abbot FP12 has a particularly difficult hedge crossing that in my 2023 report I said that "I hoped this year it would be bulldozed to create a single gate." I have just been told it has been done and I now need to go and walk the route. DCC have been very good in replacing difficult stiles with gates but there are still far too many that are a challenge for some people. When you are out walking the paths please can you report back to me any stiles that need to be replaced with gates or made easier to get over.

I am pleased to hear that some of the walks leaders have been using the walks on my website walkingwestdevon.co.uk. there are now over 70 walks on the website and all are free for everyone to use.

David Simkins

Footpath Officer